

“LONGING IN VAIN TO CLIMB INTO THE DUCAL BED”:
GOSSIP AND RUMOR IN ORDERIC VITALIS’ ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

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Dedicated to my beloveds. Thanks for the gossip. It was all school-related, I promise.

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Introduction

During the twelfth century a typical Benedictine monk like the Anglo-French historian Orderic Vitalis was engaged in constant warfare. He was “armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience”¹ against the forces of Satan and his evil spirits. God himself waited for the monk to “translate into action . . . his holy teachings.”² The sixth-century St. Benedict of Nursia produced an influential series of regulations for monastic communities, to assist them in their holy warfare and help them “run on the path of God’s commandments.”³ This series of regulations became known as the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and it was a guide and compass for generations of monks who sought to win spiritual battles and achieve the victory of heaven.

In this lifelong battle, one of the most important weapons, tools, and traps was talk. One of the first Biblical verses that Benedict used was Psalms 33: 14-15.⁴ “If you desire true and eternal life,” wrote Benedict, then quoted, “keep your tongue free from vicious talk and your lips from all deceit; turn away from evil and do good.”⁵ Benedict also wrote against bearing false witness, an insincere greeting of peace, grumbling, speaking poorly about others, and quarreling.⁶ In addition, the monks were explicitly warned to be moderate in speech, “and speak no foolish chatter, nothing just to provoke laughter.”⁷ Speech was more of a master’s privilege than a disciple’s, and Benedict wrote that “so important is silence that permission to speak should seldom be granted even to mature disciples, no matter how holy or constructive their talk”

¹ Timothy Fry, OSB. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ The Bible verse cited here is in the source’s translation, other verses are cited from the New King James Version for consistency unless otherwise noted.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

because, as he quoted Proverbs 10:19, “In a flood of words you will not avoid sin.”⁸ And of course “We absolutely condemn in all places any vulgarity and gossip and talk leading to laughter, and we do not permit a disciple to engage in words of that kind.”⁹ Although monasteries were also popular resting-places or way-points for travelers, monks were not supposed to speak to guests.¹⁰ Monks on a journey were to lie prostrate on the floor of the oratory upon their return in case they might have heard some “idle talk” on their journey.¹¹

But Benedict’s *Rule* acknowledges the power of select words and speech for good. For example, while disciples were not supposed to speak very much, Benedict’s fifth step of humility was for a monk to confess “any sinful thoughts entering his heart” and “any wrongs committed in secret”¹² to his abbot. He was also supposed to admit faults/mistakes in his work in front of the abbot and community as a whole (while sins of conscience were supposed to only be shared with the abbot).¹³ Moreover, Benedict’s seventh step of humility required that a monk “not only admit with his tongue” but also believes in his heart that he is inferior to everyone else and “truly a worm.”¹⁴ Benedict’s guidelines for performing the monastic offices included many times and places where the monks praised God in word, song, and reading.¹⁵ When rising in the extremely early hours of the morning, the brothers were supposed to “quietly encourage each other” for the “Work of God.”¹⁶ And while they were not supposed to speak or whisper during meals, it was because one of the monks was reading and singing throughout the meal. The monks took turns

⁸ Ibid., 31

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² Ibid., 36.

¹³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁴ Ibid., 36-7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 39-47.

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

being the reader for the week, while the abbot might “offer a few words of instruction.”¹⁷ And, while grumbling was prohibited, Benedict encouraged abbots to regulate meals, in particular allowing noon lunches during difficult work-times, to avoid “justifiable grumbling.”¹⁸ Visiting monks might also make “reasonable criticisms or observations” of the monastery.¹⁹ Indeed, the monks were to show a fervent zeal in supporting one another with respect and love.²⁰

Benedict’s *Rule* reflected throughout a belief in the power of talk. Talk was so powerful that it had to be carefully regulated. Wild, raucous laughter was uncontrolled and grumbling or muttering could foment rebellion. Unregulated talk also had an element of idleness: frivolity, gossip, purposeless talking, all of it a distraction from the essential role of monks as Christian warriors. However, the inescapable conclusion from the *Rule* is that some well-chosen and holy words were necessary, while words of praise and song were *required* to be said many times throughout the day. Another aspect of talk in the *Rule* was the need for talk to determine or fix a person’s reputation. Benedict wrote that the deans of the monastery were meant to be men “of good repute.”²¹ This requirement acknowledged the necessity for a communally constructed talk to determine fitness for higher office. Abbots also were to be chosen “unanimously” for their piety and goodness of life or by a few wise brothers with “sounder judgment.”²² Therefore, a careful investigation and discussion of the reputations of potential high-ranking administrators was necessary to ensure good management of the monastery. Because Benedict saw talk as such

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 87.

a powerful tool, and his set of regulations were of overwhelming importance to monastic communities for many centuries, monastic talk is an intriguing subject for historical examination.

The work of the twelfth-century English-French monk Orderic Vitalis corroborated St. Benedict's belief in talk as a powerful tool. Orderic was a man who spent most of his life at the St.-Évroul monastery in Normandy. He had a passion for following God's commandments, fighting boldly in holy warfare, and achieving the victory of eternal life. In fact, Orderic "had certainly learned [the *Rule*] by heart."²³ One of Orderic's primary roles in the army of God was that of chronicler and historian, and he was unswerving in his desire to fulfill God's will through historical research and writing. Talk suffused his thirteen volumes of history that reached all the way from the time of Christ to the twelfth century's Anglo-Norman civil war between King Stephen and his cousin Matilda. In his role as a historian, Orderic grappled with how to approach and handle talk. He sometimes referenced his oral sources confidently, describing their qualifications and trustworthiness, and other times expressed distrust of his own oral sources, calling their information common stories, or listing popular common talk and stories as the source itself. Orderic viewed talk as a powerful tool, sometimes used to sow discord, treason, and rebellion, but other times to bring peace. But his history went beyond moralizing prohibitions on the dangers of unregulated talk. Orderic had a more pragmatic approach. His historical research showed him that free, unregulated, almost uncontrollable talk was an inescapable part of life. Therefore, a sensible person, particularly a person whose duties required the maintenance of a good reputation, learned to effectively manage the information available. Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* (hereafter *EH*) shows many in-depth examples of how medieval

²³ Marjorie Chibnall, Ed./Trans. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (Six volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 48.

people performed information management, both successfully and unsuccessfully. There are at least two levels of information management in the text. The first is what can be seen of the information management actually executed effectively or ineffectively by the historical figures Orderic depicts. The second level is Orderic's involvement in the process of information management. These two levels can be difficult to extricate from each other. It can be difficult to tell exactly where the information management of the historical figures begins and Orderic's information management ends. Each example can be unpacked on a case-by-case basis, but there is enough evidence to show that both the historical figures themselves and Orderic the historian took pains to manage their public reputations.

The discussion of medieval information management in the *EH* will begin with a review of the relevant literature in the field of talk studies in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the talk studies field, which is not a wholly unified field, but includes the contributions of a group of scholars in such disparate disciplines as anthropology, sociology, psychology, evolutionary biology, literary studies, and history discussing the kinds of talk that culturally have a bad reputation, such as gossip, rumor, and scandal. While the tradition of moral disapproval of gossip and idle talk is powerful, talk studies scholars try to understand the purpose of and roles of talk without expressing moral disapproval of it. Before the 1960s, few academic works of any discipline treated gossip or rumor as a serious subject of study. Anthropologist Max Gluckman's 1963 article "Gossip and Scandal" was one of the first systematic treatments of the subject, and led to increased attention to it. He summarized the anthropological work that mentioned gossip to date, and concluded that because a person only gossips about another person he or she is socially connected to, it is "good manners to gossip and scandalize about your

dearest friends with those who belong [to the same social group].”²⁴ Gluckman emphasized the beneficial social function of gossip and included many examples he said showed that gossip worked to define and unify social groups. His thesis was later challenged by Robert Paine, who argued that this structuralist interpretation was insufficient to account for the individual motives for gossiping, which were selfish and destructive, rather than beneficial.²⁵ He said that, instead of looking at the community, we should look at the individual, and that gossipers gossip “to forward and protect their individual interests.”²⁶ He thought that the best explanation for gossip was to be found in a process termed information management. There are many other issues and disagreements in the talk studies field, including what the definitions of gossip, rumor, and other forms of talk are, who gossips most or benefits the most from gossip, and how gossip functions in different times, places, and cultures. Today the field is still fragmented, but there is also awareness among academics of the breadth of scholarship on the subject.

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of Orderic’s life, his geographical and social contexts, his sources, and his methodology. He took on the task of writing a history of Saint-Évroul, and providing a record of its gifts that eventually grew in scope and measure until it became what is known today as the *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. Chapter 2 examines four of his most influential sources (Old and New Testament writings, Gregory the Great, Eusebius, and Bede) to see whether they show methodological models for Orderic and also examines the role of talk in these works. Orderic summarized and editorialized on the existent written sources for his history, and included the stories he was confident of the

²⁴ Max Gluckman. “Gossip and Scandal.” *Current Anthropology*, 4, no. 3 (June 1963), 313. His conclusions about gossip applied, he believed, to humans of all social groups and cultures.

²⁵ Robert Paine. “What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis.” *Man*, New Series, 2, no. 2 (June 1967), 278-285.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

trustworthiness of (and sometimes the stories he was not so sure of). Orderic, like his historical predecessors, worked to reconcile the didactic tradition about unregulated talk with the necessity for a historian to construct an accurate history that was appropriately bolstered by moral and religious lessons. In many ways his methodology reflects that of his predecessors, as was his goal.

Chapter 3 discusses different issues in using talk studies theories to analyze the *EH*. When analyzing talk in Orderic Vitalis' work, the definitions, structure, and meaning of rumor and gossip are all important factors to consider what the *EH* can show us about the validity of using talk studies theories in the field of medieval history. Using simple dictionary definitions of gossip is problematic, because Orderic used a range of words and descriptions to refer to gossip, rumor, and scandal. However, a structural analysis of the instances of gossip is more productive. While anthropologists generally are able to observe gossip happening in real-time, and have the ability to record and transcribe the conversations, medieval historians do not. So it is not possible to know exactly who and how many people Orderic gossiped with. Although he reports some of the people who were in his social network and the people it is likely he heard certain stories from, there aren't transcripts. So it seems sensible when analyzing his gossip to talk particularly about stories where the parties probably had a certain expectation of "privacy," or at least the desire that this information not be made completely public. Nevertheless, the definition synthesized in this study: "evaluative talk about third part(ies), particularly their 'private' deeds," is a workable gossip definition to use when studying Orderic. It is as close as possible to a generally accepted summation of gossip researchers, yet it is accepting of the fact that one is looking at written documents of Orderic's. He also seemed to have a distinct understanding of when to use the term "*rumor*." He frequently used it for news that spread quickly during times of

war/fighting, for news that was widespread, and often for news that was ambiguous or uncertain. Applying influential rumor theories to examples of rumor in the *EH* is surprisingly useful, and supports the universality of some equations predicting the power of an individual rumor. The application of Max Gluckman's approach is also beneficial, and there is much that can be done demonstrating how examples of gossip in medieval documents reflect medieval social and religious mores. In conclusion, using examples from the *EH* to see how accurate talk studies theories are shows the limitations of some theories and the benefits of others,

Chapter 4 discusses the performance and maintenance of *fama* (a Latin word that encompasses the concepts of reputation, fame, public opinion, and news) in the pursuit of information management. The events involving King Henry I and his brother Robert Curthose in Normandy in 1104-5 are of particular interest for students of information management. Henry had an impressive ability to disseminate a persuasive view of his own *fama* as a good, just ruler and his brother Robert had an apparently less effective ability to maintain a more positive image of his own *fama* beyond that of a lazy and inept ruler. These events demonstrate the importance of *fama* in medieval society and how *fama* could be used as justification for political/military actions, as Henry did for his invasion of Normandy. Having good *fama* was an essential aspect of living in medieval society, and having bad *fama* could be harmful and negatively affect a person's options and choices in society. The events in Normandy also show medieval concern with reputation maintenance and management. Ultimately, Henry's power came, not just from his military victories or his administrative skill, but from his own ability (and the ability of his connections) to manage his *fama* effectively. The need for information management is seen over and over again in the *EH*. Generally, those people Orderic portrayed as successful—those who

effectively gained or kept money, land, status, and power—were those people who had effectively managed *fama*.

Chapter 5 engages scholarship in medieval gender studies and analyses of the question of gender and talk in the *EH*. Talk studies scholars are not in agreement about the roles of gender in gossip, rumor, and scandal. Some argue that the stereotypical view of women as gossips is invalid, while others say that gossip is a characteristically female form of speech, and that more women than men do/did engage in it, such as Mary Ellen Brown's feminist take on gossip as a space to resist the dominant male culture. Some talk studies scholars believe that gossip is used by disempowered or marginalized groups (like women) as a form of resistance against those in power. However, some anthropological approaches (such as Gluckman and Paine's) argue that gossip is a natural part of belonging to a social group for men and women. A biological approach to gossip argues that it is just a beneficial evolutionary behavior developed from the grooming habits of primates. Analyzing a few prominent categories of women's ritualized speech in the *EH* demonstrates that there were socially appropriate avenues for women to express powerful, convincing words that could disagree with or challenge the views of their husbands or other men. In the *EH*, women were not more likely than men to gossip, spread rumors, or slander but there are still certain differences in how he portrays their speech, particularly the highly ritualized speech genres of intercession, exhortation, and prophecy, that are worthy of future analysis, such as a greater number of examples of a strongly emotional component to women's ritualized speeches, and the role of sexual inducements.

In conclusion, Chapter 1 provides the scholarly background and review of talk studies theories, Chapter 2 introduces Orderic's life, time, sources, and methodology, Chapter 3 applies talk studies theories to different instances of rumor, gossip, and talk in the *EH*, Chapter 4 argues

for the importance of viewing rumor and theory through the lenses of performative information management, and Chapter 5 raises some questions about the possible roles of gender in talk in the *EH*. The chapters demonstrate the rich potential of using different theoretical frameworks to understand rumor and gossip in the *EH* and conclude that studying the information management techniques of medieval people can reveal insights into their beliefs and strategies for gaining and maintaining power.

Chapter One: Historiography

The field of talk studies is of fairly recent origin. Since the 1960s, academic scholars in different fields, particularly anthropology, sociology, and psychology, have increasingly begun to discuss the kinds of talk that traditionally have a bad reputation, such as gossip, rumor, and scandal. The marginalization of certain forms of talk in the western world has a long and well-documented history. Many passages from the different books in one of the most formative collections of documents in the western world, the Bible, discuss the dangers and attractions of unregulated talk, including such passages as, “the words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body” (Proverbs 18: 8, Proverbs 26:22).²⁷ In the New Testament, the pastoral letters, in particular, continued to stress the dangers of unregulated talk in the communities of new Christians. A deacon in the church had to be reverent, with a pure conscience, but not overly fond of wine, greedy, or “double-tongued.” He also had a responsibility for his wife’s talk, “Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers” (I Timothy 3: 11).²⁸ The Bible warned against inappropriate kinds of talk, and counseled peace, discretion, and the guarding of the tongue. Talk was powerful and dangerous, and should be controlled. It also revealed the true nature of someone’s character. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for

²⁷ “*Verba bilinguis quasi simplicia, et ipsa perveniunt usque ad interiora ventris. Pigrum dejicit timor; animae autem effeminatorum esurient.*” (Proverbs 18:8) “*Verba susurronis quasi simplicia, et ipsa perveniunt ad intima ventris.*” (Proverbs 26:22)

²⁸ “*Mulieres similiter pudicas, non detrahentes, sobrias, fideles in omnibus.*”

every idle word men may speak they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12: 34-37).²⁹

Medieval penitential literature also demonstrated an engagement with talk and condemned certain kinds of talk. By the Carolingian period (780-900 C.E.), it was a “minimum demand” that Christians received communion three times a year, probably at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas.³⁰ Since there was a “close connection between receiving communion and confessing your sins” medieval people might typically confess their sins at least three times a year.³¹ The amount of penitential medieval literature demonstrates the large role of penance and confession in religious life.³² The seventh to ninth century *Penitential of Cummean*³³ categorized many different types of talk as needing penance, including murmuring (half loaf of bread and water), defaming out of envy or listening to defamation (the penalty was fasting for four days on bread and water), and informing on someone and being informed on (bread and water for two days of each week and two days at the end of the month for a year). Other penalties were for people who were “diligently garrulous” and injured someone’s good name (silence for one or two days), retelling “evil tales” unless it was done for the welfare of those hearing, to blame evil and confirm good, or out of pity (sing thirty psalms), being silent about the serious sin of your brother (bread and water for as long as there was inappropriate silence), and accusing (to

²⁹ “*Progenies viperarum, quomodo potestis bona loqui, cum sitis mali? ex abundantia enim cordis os loquitur. Bonus homo de bono thesauro profert bona: et malus homo de malo thesauro profert mala. Dico autem vobis quoniam omne verbum otiosum, quod locuti fuerint homines, reddent rationem de eo in die iudicii. Ex verbis enim tuis justificaberis et ex verbis tuis condemnaberis.*”

³⁰ Rob Meens. “Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance” in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (York: University of York, 1998), 38.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 54.

³³ This penitential was attributed to a seventh century Irish abbot and circulated in the Frankish empire by the ninth century. John T. McNeil and Helena M. Gamer, Eds. *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A translation of the principal libri poenitentiales and selections from related documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938, 1990).

someone else) a brother of a “shameful sin” (satisfaction with the brother and penance for three days).³⁴ In the *Regula Coenobialis* of sixth-century missionary Columban “He who tells idle tales to another” was punished with a beating and an extended period of silence and 50 strokes if he was not regretful.³⁵ The *Regula Coenobialis* also required that someone who didn’t report another’s wrongful speech when necessary would also be punished, and murmurers received fasts.³⁶ Someone who defamed or listened to a defamer without attempting to correct him received three fasts as a punishment.³⁷ Columban also wrote that “the talkative person is to be sentenced to silence.”³⁸ Penitentials indicate culturally bound medieval definitions of gossip. Sharing personal/sexual information you heard about someone was not in itself gossip, according to the penitentials, as long as you were doing it out of concern for others’ welfare or to identify and distinguish between evil and good. However, the penitentials required punishment for retelling personal/sexual information for idle or malicious reasons.

In addition to Scriptural and penitential references to talk and gossip, patristic writers such as St. Augustine (354-430 CE) influenced medieval thought on the issue. His many salacious deeds, which he referred to as “my past wickedness and the carnal corruptions of my soul,” were committed to writing, according to him, not because he loved them, but because he loved God.³⁹ He described his desire to master eloquence and rhetoric as “damnable vaingloriousness and for the satisfaction of human vanity.”⁴⁰ He also criticized the Manicheans (once so persuasive to him) as “wordy men” whose mouths contained “the snares of the devil.”⁴¹

³⁴ Ibid., 108-111.

³⁵ Ibid., 261.

³⁶ Ibid., 263.

³⁷ Indicating a medieval understanding of the reciprocal nature of a gossip exchange? Ibid, 262.

³⁸ Ibid., 265.

³⁹ St. Augustine. *Confessions Books I-VIII* (Chicago: The Great Books Foundation, 1942, 1955).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

He also lists out different sins against God, particularly those with an intent to harm others, which included defamation.⁴² He praised his mother for her pious tongue and because she did not go to church to “listen to idle tales and the gossip of the women.”⁴³ Augustine wrote that working as a rhetorician increased his stumbling and slipping away from truth.⁴⁴ Augustine’s work affirmed a concern with the dangers of the tongue.

These ancient and medieval examples are representative of works that have informed western cultural attitudes towards gossip and rumor for over a thousand years, and many books today still treat gossip didactically, and the religious or pastoral ones still view it as a temptation from Satan that needs to be overcome. This demonstrates a certain continuity in Christian religious beliefs about gossip in the thousands of years since the books of the Bible were written. There are many books and pamphlets of recent publication that preach against the evils of gossip, including Matthew Mitchell’s *Resisting Gossip: Winning the War of the Wagging Tongue* (2013), Timothy Williams’ *Gossip and the Gospel* (2008), and Deborah Smith Pegues’ *30 Days to Taming Your Tongue: What You Say (and Don’t Say) Can Improve Your Relationships* (2005). What these books all have in common is an unremittingly negative view of gossip as a poison that tears down and harms people. Michael D. Sedler’s book *Stop the Runaway Conversation: Take Control over Gossip and Criticism* in 2001 is a typical example of the modern didactic Christian approach. In it he defines gossip as a “rebellious . . . conscious decision to violate the ways of God” and gives a list of “underlying motivations for giving an evil report”: anger, bitterness, mocking, deceit, envy, self-seeking, guilt, offenses, rebellion, and pride.⁴⁵ Sedler also

⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁵ Michael D. Sedler. *Stop the Runaway Conversation: Take Control over Gossip and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2001), 46-58.

identifies seven types of people who engage in bad reports: the backbiter, the busybody, the complainer, the murmurer, the slanderer, the talebearer, and the whisperer.⁴⁶ Sedler explains that both men and women are capable of idle talk, and he reflects the continued religious tradition of disapproval of gossip and fear of unregulated and idle speech.

So the practice of gossip and rumor has long been criticized as wrong, dangerous, and un-Christian. While this tradition of moral disapproval of gossip and idle talk still remains powerful, talk studies scholars try to understand the purpose and function of gossip and similar forms of talk without necessarily expressing moral disapproval of it. To understand the talk studies field and analyze relevant historical examples of “unregulated talk,” it is important to understand what gossip and rumor are. There is no one accepted definition of gossip, but most definitions center on the concept of evaluative, informal talk about personal/private matters between two people about absent third parties. A few scholars argue that the term gossip should only be used to denote malicious talk about absent parties, but the majority of scholars understand that most gossip is not malicious. Rumor is systematically different than gossip. Rumor is unsubstantiated news about an important event. Some scholars approach rumor as untrue or false news about an important event, while others focus on the idea of rumor as information gathered in uncertain times to make sense of events. There are several differences between gossip and rumor. Gossip requires a well-defined social network for its transmission, while rumor does not. Gossip is generally only interesting to a particular social group, while rumor, by virtue of its being about an important event, is interesting to a large number of people.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 80-86.

There are many hotly-debated issues in the talk studies field besides appropriate definitions for gossip and rumor. Firstly, there is no consensus on the meaning or purpose of gossip in social groups and what functions it fulfills. Some believe that the use of gossip is constructive and defines and maintains a social group's values, acting as the glue that holds a society together. Others believe that the use of gossip is destructive to a social group, and that those gossiping do it for personal reasons such as ambition. Also, there is no consensus on what social group gets the most use out of gossip. Some believe that gossip is used by those in a hierarchy to maintain social stratification and consolidate power in the hands of the elite. Others believe that gossip is used by marginalized groups (like women) as a form of resistance against hierarchy. The issue of gender is also not a settled one. Some scholars argue that the stereotypical view of women as gossips is invalid, while others say that gossip is a characteristically female form of speech, and that more women than men do/did engage in it. From the 1960s onward, the talk studies "field" was not a field at all, but rather consisted of contributions from scholars in different disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, evolutionary psychology/biology, literature, law, and history, who wrote independently about gossip and rumor. Since the 1990s, though, some academics have gradually begun to incorporate the findings and research of other fields into their own and slowly begun to develop a common language to refer to the subject, although today the field is still characterized by fragmentation of different disciplines.

Pre-1960s

Before the 1960s, few academic works in any discipline treated gossip or rumor as a serious subject of study. Many anthropological works, of course, touched on the existence of gossip in the cultures under study, but not in any systematic way. Other academic works

continued to marginalize gossip and rumor as harmful forms of speech or tried to think up ways to stop it. Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman's *The Psychology of Rumor*, published in 1947, is a representative example of an early "scientific" treatment of rumor that analyzed it in order to squash it. This book is one of the first systematic treatments of rumor as a social phenomenon, and was inspired by how rumors became "a problem of grave national concern" in the later years of World War II.⁴⁷ A rumor was a report with no "secure standards of evidence . . . present"⁴⁸ and, Allport and Postman believed, rumors were a "major problem" and bad for morale, national safety, and endangered "loyal subgroups."⁴⁹ Rumors primarily functioned to "assuage immediate emotional tension."⁵⁰ There were three kinds of rumors: bogeys, pipe dreams, and wedge drivers. According to the authors, two thirds of rumors collected were "hostile" in nature.⁵¹ Allport and Postman's treatment of the subject also postulated a formula for determining "the amount of rumor in circulation," which was $(R \sim \text{importance} \times \text{ambiguity})$.⁵² In addition, the two authors performed many "rumor experiments" on subjects, such as showing a person a detail-filled photograph, and then having them repeat what they saw to another person, and that person to another, and so forth and so on. They concluded that rumors get "shorter, more concise, more easily grasped and told"⁵³ as they progress. Moreover, rumors get "leveled, sharpened, and assimilated," which demonstrates the desire of the rumormongers for meaning.⁵⁴ At the end of the book, Allport and Postman included official recommendations for agencies working on

⁴⁷ Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman. *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1947), 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vii, viii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 33-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 134, 137.

preventing and controlling rumors during wartime. Throughout the book, their goal was to understand rumors so they could prevent them harming the war effort.

A representative example (because it comes from a prominent and influential anthropological team) of a pre-1960s anthropological take on gossip is the work of Melville J. Herskovits and Frances J. Herskovits, entitled *Trinidad Village*, originally published in 1947. In a book on the settlement of Toco on the island of Trinidad, very little space is devoted to the subject of gossip. Gossip, the authors say, is a “reflection of popular attitude and point of view,” and the villagers use such talk as explanation for events like why a particular religious group is banned.⁵⁵ Gossip is also discussed under the section on recreation in Toco, along with dancing, games, socials, and festivals. As the authors say, “Old and young delight in telling, and hearing told, all the little incidents that go on in the village. To the outsider the speed with which news spread never ceased to be a source of amazement. . . No story was too trivial to stir an active response from the community . . . Repudiating the meagerness of his everyday world, the Tocoan draws on tradition and wit to fill a canvas with more than life-size figures.”⁵⁶ While this account of gossip is not completely negative, it is a paternalistic and condescending assessment of the role of gossip among the Trinidadians. Melville and Frances Herskovits minimize the content of the talk by calling it only the “little incidents” of the village and some of the stories “trivial.” They also draw a line between the talk of the villagers and the “outsiders” by writing that the outsiders (such as themselves) were amazed at how gossip traveled. Moreover, gossip is seen as a way to fill the dull life of the Tocoan with something vibrant and interesting. Thus, in this work

⁵⁵ Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits. *Trinidad Village* (New York: Octagon Books, 1947, 1976), 185.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

gossip is almost seen as a peculiarity more familiar to certain cultures, and something for outsiders to be amazed at and study as a foreign encounter.

In response to the marginalization of certain kinds of talk, anthropologists and other scholars began to re-examine the idea of idle talk and the role that gossip and rumor played in cultural groups. Although Max Gluckman's 1963 article entitled "Gossip and Scandal" is generally acknowledged to be the first scholarly treatment of the topic, he used the work of Elizabeth Colson, and her 1953 book, *The Makah Indians: A Study of An Indian Tribe in Modern American Society*, for many of the specific examples he used in his article. Colson wrote about the Makah, a group of Indians who lived on a reservation in the northwestern tip of the state of Washington. They lived, worked, and socialized with non-Makah on a daily basis, yet the Makah were not distinguished physically or "by the possession of a common language or a common culture."⁵⁷ However, Colson argued, the Makah were still perfectly aware of who was a Makah and who was not a Makah. Only the Makah were able to fully participate in the intense and complex network of gossip because the Makah "criticize others in terms of a set of values which operate within the group" and gossip continually reasserts those values.⁵⁸ Without gossip, Colson theorized, the Makah as a distinct social group would cease to exist. Colson recognized, without speaking systematically or analyzing the phenomenon structurally, that gossip could play positive roles and fulfill needs of a community.

The 1960s

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Colson. *The Makah Indians: A Study of an Indian Tribe in Modern American Society* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1953), 61.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

In 1963, Gluckman used Colson's work to support his idea about the beneficial function gossip has in social groups.⁵⁹ He summarized the anthropological work on the subject to date, and noted that many anthropologists acknowledged the important role that gossip played in "primitive" and other human groups. Gluckman concluded that because a person only gossips about another person he or she is socially connected to, it is "good manners to gossip and scandalize about your dearest friends with those who belong [to the same social group]."⁶⁰ Gluckman emphasized the beneficial social function of gossip and included many examples he said showed that gossip worked to define and unify social groups. However, Gluckman responded to an expected objection that anthropologists just approve of everything by saying that while he thinks gossip is "socially virtuous," he does not necessarily approve of it.⁶¹ He humorously noted that he felt virtuous when he engages in gossip, but not so much when he heard somebody else gossiping about him. Gluckman did not use gender as a category of analysis, and his examples indicate his belief that both men and women engage equally in gossip and scandal.

In 1967, Robert Paine challenged Gluckman's view that gossip has a beneficial effect on social groups by defining and tying them together. Paine argued that this structuralist interpretation was insufficient to account for the individual motives for gossiping, which were selfish and destructive, rather than beneficial.⁶² He said that, instead of looking at the community, we should look at the individual, and that gossipers gossip "to forward and protect

⁵⁹ Gluckman has a long list of other publications, including a much earlier book on Africa, which shows his first thoughts on gossip: "The conflicts in wider ranges compensate one another to produce social cohesion." Max Gluckman. *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 48.

⁶⁰ Max Gluckman. "Gossip and Scandal," 313.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁶² Robert Paine. "What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis," 278-285.

their individual interests.”⁶³ He thought that the best explanation for gossip was to be found in a process termed information management. He sets the idea of the function of gossip aside, saying “it may well [be]” as Gluckman argues, but that gossipers, as focused as they are on their own aspirations, “only indirectly [gossip about] the values of the community.”⁶⁴ This is where the idea of information management comes in. According to Paine, the way gossip works is that a gossip distributes information in order to have other people possess it, and when a gossip wants to possess other information, he offers a good selection of information in return.⁶⁵ Paine calls gossip a “powerful social instrument for any person who learns to manage it,” but says it neither innately brings people together nor pushes them apart.⁶⁶

The 1970s

In 1970, Bruce A. Cox wrote an article entitled, “What is Hopi Gossip About: Information Management and Hopi Factions,” for the journal *Man*, and argues that gossip between the two Hopi political factions of the “Traditionalists” and “Councilmen” shows “little contribution to tribal unity.”⁶⁷ According to his examples, members of opposing political factions circulated certain information (like rumors about religious rituals using human sacrifice) according to their own group’s interest.

In 1971, F.G. Bailey edited a compilation called *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation* that examined what Bailey calls “people competing to remain equal”⁶⁸ in twentieth-

⁶³ Ibid., 280.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 280-1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 283.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Bruce A. Cox. “What is Hopi Gossip About? Information Management and Hopi Factions.” *Man* 5, no. 1 (March 1970), 95.

⁶⁸ F.G. Bailey, Ed. *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 19.

century poor former peasant communities of Southern Europe. Bailey argues that all social exchanges contain combinations of opposing factors like co-operation and altruism versus competition and self-interest.⁶⁹ Bailey defines rumor as talk about a “matter of importance” and said a subject will often disassociate himself from the source/content of the rumor, but pass it along indiscriminately.⁷⁰ Gossip, on the other hand, is talk about “persons and their conduct,” with an evaluation of the conduct, and only passed to certain persons.⁷¹ The authors of this book showed that gossip is an important, but still marginalized, way that a moral community determines the reputation of its members. This compilation also emphasized the skill needed for information management and reputation maintenance.⁷² A few authors considered gender as a category of analysis because in some of these peasant communities women in particular went to great lengths to avoid being seen gossiping or doing activities associated with gossip. In Valois, a French village, the housewives “avoid being seen talking to one another” out of fear of being labeled a gossip.⁷³ Men, on the other hand, could be seen gossiping because it was assumed their gossip was “good-natured.”⁷⁴

Ralph Rosnow and Gary Fine’s 1976 book *Rumor and Gossip: the Social Psychology of Hearsay* defines the form and function of the two forms of “hearsay” as separate, but they are connected by Rosnow and Fine’s belief that managing and controlling these two kinds of talk is necessary. According to the authors, rumor is “information, neither substantiated nor refuted,” while gossip is “small talk with or without a known basis in fact.”⁷⁵ The function of rumor is to

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 288.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 283.

⁷³ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ralph Rosnow and Gary Fine. *Rumor and Gossip: the Social Psychology of Hearsay* (New York: Elsevier, 1976), 4.

fulfill a “desire for meaning . . . clarification. . . closure,” while gossip functions to fulfill “ego and status needs.”⁷⁶ Rumor, they say, is about important issues and events, while gossip is about the “personal affairs of individuals.”⁷⁷ Rosnow and Fine conclude that rumor and gossip are both forms of social exchange. Rumormongering, they argue, can best be understood as a transaction where a rumor is exchanged for “information, status, power, control, money [or something else].”⁷⁸ Gossip, which they refer to as “rumor writ small,” and describe both men and women as partaking in, is “small talk” about “nonessential” things.⁷⁹ Gossip can also be analyzed using the model of social exchange, as another transaction with the exchange of a piece of news for a “desired resource.”⁸⁰ The consumption of gossip and rumor is like the consumption of goods, and everyone engages in it, as gossip and rumor serve various psychological/social functions.⁸¹ After analyzing how rumor works, Rosnow and Fine argue that harmful forms of speech like malicious rumors should be regulated: the rule of law should “protect individual dignity and social stability” while allowing the need for free speech.⁸²

As anthropologists began to study gossip as a subject more frequently, John Beard Haviland’s 1977 book *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan* was published. It was one of the first book-length treatments of the subject. In it, Haviland makes a “plea” for studying gossip in anthropology, so it is clear that despite Gluckman’s treatment of the subject, Haviland thought the subject was insufficiently investigated.⁸³ Haviland considers gossip a “powerful tool”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁸¹ Ibid., 131.

⁸² Ibid., 129.

⁸³ John Beard Haviland. *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977), 5.

for understanding native cultures.⁸⁴ Haviland contributes to the Gluckman-Paine dispute by saying that in his study of the Zinacantan, gossip is often used in “furthering factional ends.”⁸⁵ Haviland later affirmed Gluckman’s suggestion that ability to gossip showed cultural competency, noting that it was difficult to personally gossip with the Zinacantecos even though he had extensively studied their language.

In 1978, a few years after Max Gluckman’s death, a book was published affirming his continual importance to the study of anthropology, entitled *Cross-Examinations: Essays in Memory of Max Gluckman*. Interestingly, this compilation is not very concerned with Gluckman’s work on gossip, but his work on law. Only one chapter, by Barbara Yngvesson, entitled, “The Reasonable Man and the Unreasonable Gossip,” contributes to the talk studies field. She supports Gluckman’s idea that gossip is used when social rules are ambiguous.⁸⁶ But she clarifies that legal procedures like litigants presenting a case in court are both reasonable and irrational.⁸⁷ Gossip is an “extension of formal dispute management processes,” and different only in format and amount of publicity.⁸⁸ This compilation of essays shows that Gluckman’s work on gossip may not have been as relevant to the anthropological field in the 1970s as his other work.

The 1980s

The Gluckman-Paine dispute continued into the 1980s, and remained one of the most enduring questions in talk studies. Sally Merry, in a chapter published in a 1984 book entitled *Toward a General Theory of Social Control*, asked whether Gluckman’s gossip theory could

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁶ Barbara Yngvesson, “The Reasonable Man and the Unreasonable Gossip” in *Cross-Examinations: Essays in Memory of Max Gluckman*, ed. P.H. Gulliver (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 153.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

work equally well in an urban (as opposed to a rural) setting. She argued that gossip was more powerful in smaller, “ethnically homogenous subgroups,” but that gossip’s role in society did not “differ sharply between small-scale and complex societies.”⁸⁹ She also theorized that those most immune from gossip were the very wealthy and the very poor, while those in the middle of society were most concerned with it.⁹⁰ She argues that Gluckman and Paine’s analyses of gossip are not “mutually exclusive but complementary,” because Gluckman looks at the functions of gossip in social groups as a whole, while Paine looks at the functions of gossip for individuals.⁹¹ Merry continued the anthropological trend of discussing gossip without using gender as a category of analysis, and without any differentiation in how gossip might function for men and for women. She agrees with the clearly prevailing wisdom in anthropology that both men and women engage in gossip, and both men and women receive similar benefits from it as part of a social group.

Gossip, by Patricia Spacks, published in 1985, takes a much different approach to gossip. This work analyzed gossip as performing certain functions for groups of women, and provided an analysis of gossip in eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature. She distinguished among different types of gossip, and said these types lie along a “continuum” from the relatively rare malicious gossip to the gossip that expresses intimacy among women.⁹² Spacks believes that gossip “provides a resource for the subordinated” and a “form of solidarity” between, primarily, women.⁹³ It also “impels plots,”⁹⁴ and “provides a model for many operations of the novel.”⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Sally Engle Merry, “Rethinking Gossip and Scandal,” in *Toward a General Theory of Social Control, Vol I: Fundamentals*, ed. Donald Black (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), 271, 295.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁹² Patricia Spacks. *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1985), 7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

She also analyzed how authors and readers react to literature with a need to know.⁹⁶ For example, she says that reading biographies is pleasurable, and satisfies our desires to know the intimate details of others' lives, but the biographer has first to justify his right to tell the story to the curious readers. Spacks concluded that gossip is ambiguous, and the motives of its purveyors mixed.⁹⁷ But, as gossip is about the private sphere and women have been "long relegated" to that sphere, women "have laid claim to it."⁹⁸ However, the use of gossip in literature makes it "acceptable as . . . observation. . . condemnation. . . educative discourse,"⁹⁹ as we can with less guilt read about the forbidden pastime. This work represents a gendered literary approach to gossip, and the idea that gossip is a form of talk characteristically female, or that represents characteristically female concerns.

Another book published in 1985 examined the legal history of defamation in the later medieval and early modern period. R.H. Helmholz' *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600* was about gossip, slander, and reputation, but did not draw on previous anthropological or sociological work on the subject of talk. Rather, it can be best characterized as an introduction to the legal category of defamation, with selected cases to illustrate the ecclesiastic, local, and royal courts. Helmholz explains the elements of a typical defamation case: persons must have been of good *fama* before they were accused of a crime, and there had to have been a crime imputed to them, falsely, maliciously, and spread among good people in a way that was detrimental to their reputation.¹⁰⁰ This work, although very much concerned with gossip and slander, including accusations of leprosy, heresy, whoremongering, and being a "whoreson priest," does not

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁰⁰ R.H. Helmholz. *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600* (London: Selden Society, 1985), xxi, xxvi, xxx, xxxii, xxxv.

interact with talk studies theory, showing that at this point, talk studies was not the multidisciplinary field it would later become.

The fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology, however, had developed a common language and common bibliography when writing about talk studies. In 1987, Jorg R. Bergmann wrote *Discreet Indiscretions: The Social Organization of Gossip*, in which he sought to identify what kind of talk gossip was. He noted the discrepancy between denouncing gossip in public and practicing it in private,¹⁰¹ and wondered how the two ideas could be reconciled. He decided that the best explanation was that gossip is the social form of discreet indiscretion. This explanation, Bergmann said, explained the contradictory opinions about gossip: anyone who “has information about the personal affairs of a friend” is obligated to be discreet.¹⁰² So a friend, out of loyalty, does not spread this information indiscreetly to the general public, but keeps it for those other friends to whom this is “information in which they are interested.”¹⁰³ Bergmann interacts with previous talk theory scholarship, doubting the idea that gossip functions as a means of social control because this idea is only effective if people believe that gossip can actually damage a person’s reputation.¹⁰⁴ He also acknowledged that Gluckman was right to see a connection between gossip and the maintenance of social groups, but that the functionalist approach has certain limitations, such as that gossipers are already transgressing social norms merely in the act of gossiping itself.¹⁰⁵ However, Bergmann criticized Paine’s individualistic

¹⁰¹ Jorg R. Bergmann. *Discreet Indiscretions: The Social Organization of Gossip*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987, 1993), 21.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

approach because it is too narrow—according to him, Paine “isolates” a social element and “universalizes it as the sole function of gossip.”¹⁰⁶

In 1988, Jennifer Coates and Deborah Cameron edited a compilation entitled *Women in Their Speech Communities*, which approached the actual oral practice of gossip from a sociolinguistic perspective. Jennifer Coates, in a chapter entitled, “Gossip revisited: language in all-female groups,” used empirical data to examine the talk theories of Deborah Jones. Coates affirms Jones’ theories with her research, finding that women’s talk *can* be described as developing progressively, including minimal responses, simultaneous speech, epistemic modality [use of evaluative words like might/perhaps/possibly/maybe], and co-operativeness. Coates approaches gossip quite differently from most anthropologists in that she uses gender as a category, and analyzes gossip as a characteristically female mode of speech. She also notes that these features of women’s speech, such as epistemic modality, which some scholars say shows “lack of confidence” in speech, are not negative qualities at all, but are said “in order to protect both [the speaker’s] own and addressees’ face.”¹⁰⁷ She did not address historical examples of gossip, or speculate on whether gossip as a characteristically female mode of speech is culturally-bound or timeless.¹⁰⁸

The 1990s

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 149.

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer Coates. “Gossip revisited: language in all-female groups,” in *Women in Their Speech Communities: New Perspectives on Language and Sex*, ed. Jennifer Coates and Deborah Cameron (London: Longman, 1988), 94-122, 113-4.

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, in 1988 the journalist Denis Boyles published *African Lives: White Lies, Tropical Truth, Darkest Gossip, and Rumblings of Rumor—from Chinese Gordon to Beryl Markham and Beyond*, which he called a blend of “casual history, anecdotal anthropology[,] and personal journalism” (ix), which is a pastiche of stories about the lives of some prominent white men and women in Africa. Boyles calls gossip the “currency of information in most parts of Africa” (5). Describing his own work as full of gossip and rumors seems to be a way to titillate the reader, play on the idea of gossip as naughty, and free him from traditional journalistic constraints.

During the 1990s, the talk studies field grew to include contributions from more disciplines, including biology and philosophy. Historians began to examine gossip more seriously. Also, gendered analyses of talk became more popular, and the idea that gossip was a characteristically female form of discourse remained influential, particularly now among historians and literary scholars. A representative example of 1990s scholarship is the compilation *Good Gossip*, published in 1994, which is an interdisciplinary effort to identify gossip's virtues.¹⁰⁹ The different authors in this compilation suggest many different positive aspects of gossip, including that it is “basically harmless and enjoyable,”¹¹⁰ it exposes secrets and hypocrisy, which benefits society,¹¹¹ it can be done without maliciousness,¹¹² it is concerned with the parts of people's lives that can be morally evaluated,¹¹³ it leads to self-understanding,¹¹⁴ and it is a means for women to get power.¹¹⁵ The authors have different approaches, but the compilation itself tends towards an interpretation of gossip as a tool of the dispossessed. As Robert F. Goodman writes in the introduction, “People gossip about the powerful, rich, and famous in order to ‘cut them down to size’” and says gossip is a form of “passive resistance” or subversion against power, and more often used by women.¹¹⁶ Sylvia Schein, in her chapter on gossip in medieval society, argued that women gossiped more than men, and says this is because women had limited opportunities, and were prohibited from exerting political influence, so they “tried to procure a share of the power” with tools like “intrigue, deceit, and gossip.”¹¹⁷ She analyzed collections of *exempla*, courtesy books, and medieval romances. Ultimately, for Schein,

¹⁰⁹ Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, Eds. *Good Gossip* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150-1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150-1.

gossip was a way for the conventionally powerless to gain power. This approach is notable because it was and has remained very influential in gendered analyses of medieval gossip.

Mary Ellen Brown, in her 1994 book *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasures of Resistance*, also analyzed gossip as characteristic of women's talk. Like Coates, Brown worked from oral transcripts of women's conversations. She argues that watching and talking about soap operas creates a resistive space for women to discuss a marginalized genre scorned by the dominant male culture.¹¹⁸ Gossiping about the characters on soap operas, in a playful, joking way, also fosters strong relationships among women. Brown's work is representative of the continuing interest in researching what is unique or different about women's talk, and rests on the assumption that there is something qualitatively or quantitatively different about women's talk. Brown is also representative of the interpretation that women's gossip is a tool of a subordinated group that can be used against the dominant group. The relationships between women established by watching the soaps "may operate as a threat to dominant ideological systems" because gossip "defies boundaries having to do with what can be said and how it can be said."¹¹⁹

In the 1990s, historians began to take more of an interest in gossip and women's talk. In a trend that would continue, much of the work done in the area of talk studies and history examines the early modern period. In 1996, Laura Gowing's book *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London*, was published. Gowing examines the "language of sexual insult" to look at broader themes of sex, gender, and honor.¹²⁰ She argues that the sexual

¹¹⁸ "It can be said that soap operas in some ways give women their voice." Mary Ellen Brown. *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁰ Laura Gowing. *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 8.

insults presented can expose the “understandings of gender and its ramifications.”¹²¹ The sexual insult “whore” was one of the most popular and enduring, although it rarely referred to the actual act of prostitution.¹²² Other commonly used insults were queans, bawds, and cuckolds, and these insults reveal differences in Early Modern understanding of women’s and men’s sexual roles. Gower also argues that it was women, not men, who “hunted out whores and called for their punishment,”¹²³ perhaps indicating that women were empowered by their roles as domestic moral guardians. Although Gower is using legal transcripts, her approach is somewhat similar to other sociolinguistic ones, in that it examines what is different or unique about women’s talk. Gower believes that “the language of slander” was primarily used by women, and it gave women particular power.¹²⁴ She sees women calling other women whores and other words of sexual insult or slander as descriptive of women’s power over the community policing of sexual morals. Therefore, while she would agree that some kinds of speech are characteristic of women during certain historical periods, she would not agree that gossip/slander was a cooperative vehicle for women to resist the dominant power of the male hierarchy.

Robin H. Dunbar’s *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*, published in 1996, analyzed gossip from an evolutionary psychological perspective. Dunbar explains that humans are social beings who have an “intense interest” in each other’s doings, and this intense interest is mirrored in the social lives of monkeys and apes.¹²⁵ Monkeys and apes maintain alliances by grooming, which is an expression of friendship and loyalty.¹²⁶ Dunbar argues that

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 59.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹²⁵ Robin Dunbar. *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

gossip evolved as a kind of vocal grooming so that apes could bond with larger groups than were possible with physical grooming.¹²⁷ Dunbar also does some experiments, and determines that only 5% of conversations are criticisms or negative gossip.¹²⁸ Dunbar does not really interact with the talk studies field in his work, but he clearly believes that gossip is not morally wrong or harmful, because it is a natural outgrowth of grooming. He also echoes Gluckman by arguing that gossip preserves alliances in social groups, instead of destroying them.¹²⁹

Edwin D. Craun's *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker*, published in 1997, contributed to the discussion on who gossips, and who objects to gossip. Craun examined the medieval pastoral texts that, he says, provided the "basic norms, injunctions, prohibitions, and stories for constructing deviant speech and its types."¹³⁰ In these texts, unregulated speech was confirmed as a sin against God, and therefore, it was a pastoral responsibility to convict the laity of the evils of the Sins of the Tongue, first through preaching, and then after their conviction, in auricular confession.¹³¹ Some of the many Sins of the Tongue were: blasphemy, murmuring, excusing sin, lying, flattery, cursing, insulting, quarreling, rumor, idle words, loquacity, and mocking good people.¹³² Craun shows how four Middle English poets—Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, William Langland, and the author of *Patience*—interact with this pastoral discourse. In establishing the pastoral rhetoric,

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹²⁹ Other work on the subject: Dunbar, R. I. M. (2004). Gossip in an evolutionary perspective. *Review of General Psychology* 8, 100-110.

¹³⁰ Edwin D. Craun. *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 16.

Craun is establishing gossip and other unregulated talk as a form of speech qualitatively different from that practiced in pastoral care.

In 1998 at least three historians published articles or books in the field of talk studies but two did not substantively interact with previous theoretical scholarship in the field. Barbara Hanawalt's *'Of Good and Ill Repute': Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*, is a book about constructing reputations, which she acknowledges was done largely orally, but it is not a book that systematically discusses talk in medieval society.¹³³ She does not interact with previous works on talk studies, and has only a few brief references to gossip itself.¹³⁴ Major themes in the book include the different expectations medieval society placed on the genders and the results of a bad reputation, not the process of defining a reputation itself. Another book published in 1998 is by Gail Collins, entitled *Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity, and American Politics*. Collins' book is about American political gossip. She says that gossip can affirm the social order or be subversive. Gossip is also used as a political weapon against opponents, but the kind that endures and becomes a part of the national discourse says something "real" about national anxiety. She also does not interact with the talk studies field.

Chris Wickham also published an article entitled "Gossip and Resistance Among the Medieval Peasantry" in 1998, and he argued for the necessity of studying gossip in medieval history. His focus was on how public *fama* was used in court cases to sway gossip networks from one side of a case to the other. According to Wickham, in twelfth-century Tuscany, medieval peasants tried to influence gossip as a strategy of resistance. Wickham explained how

¹³³ Barbara Hanawalt. *'Of Good and Ill Repute': Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), ix.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

marginalized or less powerful groups like the peasants tried to use gossip to their advantage. He also argued that the actual occurrences of gossip are not gendered, although the cultural image of gossip is.

Also in 1998, Hans-Joachim Neubauer published *Fama: Eine Geschichte des Geruches*, which was translated into English and appeared the following year as *The Rumor: A Cultural History*. Neubauer distinguished between rumor and gossip, saying that rumor is not just mature gossip, and that gossip usually requires closer social networks than rumor.¹³⁵ Rumors can be passed from person to person far from the proximity of the original story. Neubauer describes the rumor chronologically, from the war-time rumors of the ancient world, when the Greeks saw rumors as messengers of the gods, to the Renaissance, when people needed good reputations to be remembered in history, and the main meaning of *fama* shifted from rumor to reputation.¹³⁶ Ultimately, Neubauer says that rumors work to “construct symbolic realities.”¹³⁷ Neubauer analyzed the typical questions those in the social sciences ask about rumors, such as how a witness reports or changes what he sees, and how each subsequent rumormonger also reports or changes the story, and says that this approach misses the point that rumors are self-referential.¹³⁸

Karma Lochrie’s 1999 book *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* studied the “how, where, and why the Middle Ages kept secrets” and the “power relations that surround and give meaning to [secrets].”¹³⁹ Her particular focus is on how the technology of secrets reveals the gender ideology of the medieval period, and she argues that “secrecy supports

¹³⁵ Hans-Joachim Neubauer. *The Rumor: A Cultural History*, trans. Christian Braun (London: Free Association Books, 1999), 3.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14, 58, 59-60.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹³⁹ Karma Lochrie. *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999), 4.

masculine regimes of knowledge, discourse, and power.”¹⁴⁰ Lochrie discussed the dangers of confession, including that parishioners would get ideas for new sins, and that the priests would take pleasure in listening to the thorough cataloguing of sins required.¹⁴¹ Gossip and confession were actually two related forms of talk, with confession always threatening to “devolve” into gossip.¹⁴² Lochrie’s analysis of the Wife of Bath finds gossip as a threat against husbands and clerics alike.¹⁴³ She views gossip as a form of discourse characteristic to women, and a source of “masculine anxiety,” because it represented a way women could “[appropriate] and [proliferate] [men’s] secrets,” while enjoying the pleasures of speech.¹⁴⁴ Lochrie’s gendered analysis of gossip, while not comprising the majority of her book, is valuable to the talk studies field, as it revealed the porous boundary between appropriate (confession) and inappropriate (gossip) kinds of talk, and also applied a theoretical approach to studying examples of gossip in medieval literature. She affirms gossip as a transgressive form of speech by women that was feared by the masculine hierarchy.

The 2000s

In 2003, Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail edited a compilation entitled *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation*. This book represents one of the first efforts by historians to work within the talk studies field, even though it is not a book-length study of any particular topic. The authors cover mostly legal aspects of *fama* in the later medieval period. Some of the overall themes of the compilation are that *fama* was a process of constructing reputation, not a fixed state and that talk was a way that medieval people managed their own reputations and

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-5.

investigated those of their neighbors. Good *fama* was necessary economically, politically, and socially, while bad *fama* was harmful economically, politically, and socially. This compilation is notable for being wholly about *fama* and talk. It included a talk studies historiography of previous scholarship. However, the compilation also distinguishes itself from anthropologists and other talk studies scholars by criticizing the use of the word “gossip” and even the process of defining the words gossip and rumor. The editors prefer to refer to “talk” rather than “gossip,” ostensibly in protest of the negative connotations of the word gossip, so in part, the scholars who edited the compilation tried to distance themselves somewhat from a field that has concerned itself with unregulated or marginalized talk.

In 2004, Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern published *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip*, an anthropological work that represented a scholarly approach to gossip different from that of Gluckman because it sometimes analyzed gossip and rumors with gendered categories. The book also represented an attempt to bring together the talk studies field with anthropological studies of witchcraft and sorcery. Stewart and Strathern do not agree with Gluckman’s thesis that gossip unifies groups; rather, they believe his examples show competition, not solidarity.¹⁴⁵ They believe gossip can be used both for and against the more powerful members of the group. The authors use research examples from New Guinea to show how rumors and accusations of witchcraft were gendered. Most of these accusations relied on a community consensus built up months beforehand, and those accused of witchcraft were mostly women, indicating that “aggression was directed largely at females.”¹⁴⁶ Stewart and Strathern conclude overall that “rumors and gossip are used as crucial tools in the gathering of information

¹⁴⁵ Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern. *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 31.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

against people and the development of a consensus about who is responsible for deaths, illnesses, [etc.]”¹⁴⁷ They also argue that because gossip and rumor are a part of larger social processes, they should not be isolated in analysis; therefore, the talk studies field should refrain from specialization, and operate within the larger context of other fields.¹⁴⁸

Susan Phillips’ 2007 book, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England*, represents an expansion of the talk studies field. She argued that gossip was not just women’s talk, and that it was the “obstacle and the tool of priests and pastoral writers,” who were authority figures in medieval England.¹⁴⁹ Priests found it impossible to fully separate idle talk and pastoral rhetoric in places like penitential manuals, confessions, and sermons.¹⁵⁰ The *exempla* used in pastoral sermons encouraged the parishioners’ “desire for illicit specificity,”¹⁵¹ while the structure of the confession encouraged parishioners to gossip.¹⁵² During the later medieval period, parishioners were increasingly expected to come to confession with a prepared “penitential narrative” and, to tell a complete narrative, parishioners had to “incorporate the transgressions of others” in their own stories.¹⁵³ Thus, Phillips argues against the idea that gossip is a specialized form of communication for either women or marginalized groups in general. She says that gossip should not be considered marginalized at all, but a “discourse of the authoritative center.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 195.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 203.

¹⁴⁹ Susan Phillips. *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁵² Ibid., 43.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 57-8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 207.

In Marianne Kartznow's *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*, published in 2009, Kartznow focuses on how the pastoral epistles of Paul employed the idea that gossip is gendered speech.¹⁵⁵ The pastoral epistles reflect the discourse on gossip that was present in other works in the ancient world. She concludes that the ancient discourse on gossip and idle talk, including representations such as the bitch, the silly woman, slave/matron relationships, busybodies, the disturbance of marital harmony, old female slaves, and the fear of blurring the private/public boundaries with leakage, is reflected in the pastoral epistles. Kartznow's book represents the expansion of the talk studies field into new time periods (she covers Biblical works in addition to other ancient ones), but she also reflects the continuing interest in gendered approaches to gossip. Here, she shows how the pastoral epistles gendered gossip and other unregulated talk.

In the 2009 book *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumor and Early Modern Masculinity*, Keith M. Botelho discusses the interplay between the performance of masculinity and unregulated talk. According to Botelho, earwitnessing is the "sifting and distilling of information that comes to the ear" and he argues it was a particularly masculine concern because "claims to knowing truth are intimately connected to male authority in Renaissance society."¹⁵⁶ Botelho says that a lot of scholarly attention has been paid to the "real and perceived threats of the female tongue," but on the early modern theater stage there were rumormongering men as well as gossiping women.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, on the stage, men who were unable to practice appropriate

¹⁵⁵ Marianne Bjelland Kartznow. *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1.

¹⁵⁶ Keith M. Botelho. *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumor and Early Modern Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

earwitnessing (and instead talked like women) “threaten[ed] their own masculine authority.”¹⁵⁸ Botelho argues that “anxieties regarding female talk are actually anxieties about male speech.”¹⁵⁹ On the stage, rumormongering tongues were contrasted with “the discerning ear,” and ultimately, according to dramatists Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Cary, “men emerge as the greater threats to masculine authority because of their investment in rumor and. . . failures of earwitnessing.”¹⁶⁰

The 2013 compilation *Rumor and Communication in Asia in the Internet Age*, edited by Greg Dalziel, is an example of scholarship that recognized a wide divergence in the studies of rumor and gossip. In it, Dalziel concludes that rumors are generally a problem for those “within the state or other large organizations,” and that most research into rumor has been conceived with a goal of finding out why they occur “so that rumors may be properly ameliorated.”¹⁶¹ However, his compilation argues that rumors are not necessarily negative, although they are “contentious.”¹⁶² Dalziel also says that rumors flourish in an atmosphere of secrecy, and often reveal problems with “consequential structural conditions or environmental factors” that will not be fixed with an emphasis on trying to eliminate the rumors.¹⁶³ The chapter in the compilation that has to do with gossip, A. Gelfert’s “Rumor, gossip, and conspiracy theories,” takes a more repressive approach to the subject, merely distancing gossip from rumors, and saying it “also has a potentially oppressive aspect” because “it provides an effective tool for disciplining those who challenge, or violate, the existing social order.”¹⁶⁴ Gelfert focuses on gossip as a tool of the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Greg Dalziel, Ed. *Rumor and Communication in Asia in the Internet Age* (London: Routledge, 2013), 168.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 29.

dominant class in society, emphasizing the existence of shame cultures as evidence that gossip harms and marginalizes.

The talk studies field has changed from its gradual creation in the 1960s, following decades where gossip and rumor were covered, if at all, sporadically and unsystematically, to a multidisciplinary field involving anthropology, sociology, psychology, sociolinguistics, literature, history, biology, and others, with its own specialized vocabulary and scholarly approach. Before the 1960s, even academic scholarship sometimes reflected the culturally accepted interpretation of gossip and rumor as destructive or wicked. After the 1960s, more scholars began to realize that gossip and rumor might have positive functions in social groups. When the first systematic anthropological treatments of talk began to come out in the 1960s and 1970s, most of them did not consider gender as a category of analysis or say that there was anything exceptional or unique about gossip or rumor that could be defined as “women’s speech.” However, later, particularly in the 1980s, some sociolinguistic and literary scholars argued that gossip was a characteristically female form of communication, and affirmed the old adage that women gossiped more than men. Other scholars since the 1960s have taken different positions on whether gossip is a form of social control used by those with power or whether it is a more characteristic form of speech of the powerless. Most of the work done by historians working with previous talk studies scholarship has continued to be gendered, and focus on gossip as women’s talk, while anthropologists continue to see both men and women as inveterate gossips, and to focus on gossip’s structural role in communities. However, there are an increasing number of scholars in disparate fields referencing each other’s work and considering the past arguments in the field.

Consulting theoretical works gives a breadth and depth of understanding when analyzing the use of gossip and rumor in medieval sources. Although the leading anthropologists who most contributed to the development of talk studies were able to use recording devices or able to study gossip as it occurred, their works and theories are nonetheless a useful approach to consider when studying medieval sources. Although there are many medieval sources that could benefit by an application of theory, a source from the Anglo-Norman period (1066-1215 CE) is a particularly interesting one. The Normans believed the writing of history to be an effective method of consolidating their power and legitimizing their rule. For example, Orderic Vitalis, a monk at the St.-Évroul monastery, wrote a sprawling, brilliant, fascinating, pious thirteen volume history that spanned from the life of Christ to the twelfth-century English civil war between the crowned King Stephen and his cousin Matilda. He narrated the Norman migrations to such countries as Sicily, Italy, and England and emphasized the unity of the Norman people beyond the borders of Normandy,¹⁶⁵ which worked to consolidate Norman power, right, and prestige. He was a master of the technique of information management, which is a social process that uses gossip, rumor, and other kinds of talk to construct reputations. Orderic is an excellent candidate for studying gossip and rumor in medieval texts.

¹⁶⁵ Amanda Jane Hingst. *The Written World: Past and Present in the Work of Orderic Vitalis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2009), 35.

Chapter Two: Orderic Vitalis and Historical Background to the *Ecclesiastical History*

To fully understand the function and meaning of talk in Orderic Vitalis' work, first a brief examination of Orderic Vitalis himself, his world, and his sources is in order. Orderic was born in 1075, child of a French father and an English mother. His father was named Odelerius, and he arrived in Shropshire as a clerk in the household of Roger of Montgomery, one of William the Conqueror's primary magnates.¹⁶⁶ Odelerius was given land and a church in Shropshire, and, since clerks could marry in England, he took an English wife.¹⁶⁷ His son was baptized at Atcham, by the river Severn, by his godfather, the priest Orderic, whose name he was given.¹⁶⁸ At the age of five he went to school in Shrewsbury. At the age of ten, Orderic's father Odelerius, weeping, sent the boy Orderic across the Channel to the monastery of Saint-Évroul in Normandy.¹⁶⁹ Orderic did not know the language and was given a new name, Vitalis, after one of St. Maurice the martyr's companions, because the name Orderic sounded "harsh" to the Normans.¹⁷⁰ Orderic said he was "loved and honored by all my fellow monks and companions far more than I deserved."¹⁷¹ Orderic's understanding of himself as an Englishman was an element of his own identity throughout his life, and he had a "lifelong sympathy for the losses [the English] had suffered through the invasion of their land by his father's people."¹⁷² At first, he was an oblate monk, then shortly afterwards he was tonsured as a clerk, ordained at 16 as a subdeacon, ordained at 18 as a deacon, and became a priest at the age of 33. He also had

¹⁶⁶ Marjorie Chibnall. *The World of Orderic Vitalis: Norman Monks and Norman Knights* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984), 8.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* We know almost nothing about Orderic Vitalis' mother, except that she was English. Chibnall speculates that perhaps Orderic was embarrassed that his father, a clerk, had married at all.

¹⁶⁸ Biographical information from OV, *Book XIII*, 552-7.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 553.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 555.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 11.

extensive duties in the *scriptorium*, the place where monks translated, edited, and copied manuscripts. In addition to these duties he took on the task of writing a history of Saint-Évroul, and a record of its gifts, that eventually grew in scope and measure until it became what is known today as the *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. The books were not all written chronologically—Orderic wrote Book I and II after Book VIII, for example. Book I was written by 1136 and is a *Life of Christ* and history of the early Church, Book II was finished “not later than 1137” and is the lives of the apostles, early evangelists, and popes, Book III was the first book to be commissioned and written (c. 1114-1123/4) and is the early history of Saint-Évroul and the Norman Conquest, Book IV was written around 1125, and has some English and Norman history from 1067-1075, Book V was written around 1127 and contains many records of gifts to the monastery, Book VI was probably written between 1130-1141, and has the history of St. Évroul (patron saint of the Saint-Évroul monastery), including his monastic foundations, translation of relics, and miracles, Book VII “has not survived in full” but its material, including William the Conqueror’s death-bed speech, was written around 1130-1133, Book VIII was written 1133-1135 and is about the new monastic orders, Book IX was written around 1136/7 and is partly a summarization of Baudry of Bourgueil’s history of the First Crusade, Book X was written in 1135 and brought the history of England and Normandy up to 1101, Book XI and Book XII were written between 1135-7 and contain more history of the crusaders’ states, and Book XIII was done by 1141 and has history of England and Normandy after 1130, as well as twelfth-century history of the Iberian peninsula.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Chronological information all from Marjorie Chibnall. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Vol I. (Oxford: Clarendon Press,, 1980), 45-8. The Crusades were much in Orderic’s mind, which included a pious hope in the success of the Christian forces fighting on the Iberian peninsula.

Saint-Évroul was located in Normandy in the Pays d’Ouche region. It was founded around 1050 on the site of the sixth-century hermit-saint Évroul/Ebrulf’s former monastery. In 1050 this Pays d’Ouche was a “turbulent region” on the frontier of Normandy. The abbey had initially been founded and endowed by the Giroie and Grandmesnil families.¹⁷⁴ But the 1050s was a difficult decade for the monastery. In 1057 the Grandmesnil involvement in rebellion “almost brought ruin on the abbey.”¹⁷⁵ The exigencies of “frontier feuds” also left the abbey of Saint-Évroul “unusually dependent on other neighbours.”¹⁷⁶ The privations and uncertainties of frontier warfare, feuding nobles, and power struggles that not only made the surrounding area unsettled, but sometimes directly threatened the monastery, led to Saint-Évroul’s heavy reliance on the ability of the dukes of Normandy to maintain peace and protect the abbey.¹⁷⁷ When Orderic arrived in 1085 Saint-Évroul was “large and thriving” and the area was relatively peaceful.¹⁷⁸ During the time of Abbot Mainer (who first admitted Orderic), ninety new monks came to Saint-Évroul and the abbot oversaw the completion of a new abbey church, and the rebuilding of such offices as the cloister, chapter-house, dormitory, refectory, kitchen, and even store rooms.¹⁷⁹ This work was financed by such luminaries as Archbishop Lanfranc and the Conqueror’s queen, Matilda of Flanders, showing that Saint-Évroul had a good reputation and powerful and wealthy friends. Odelarius had visited Saint-Évroul, “probably in the course of a pilgrimage to Rome in 1082.”¹⁸⁰ At the time, it was “at the height of its fame as a centre of religion and learning.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 21.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-23.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Chibnall, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

The monastery of Saint-Évroul was Benedictine. The sixth-century Italian abbot Benedict described in his *Rule* a “fully cenobitical society,” living together under an abbot elected by his fellow monks.¹⁸² After a year in the novitiate, the *Rule* says, “they totally renounce all personal property, and take vows binding them to observe the rules of the monastic life and to remain in the community until death.”¹⁸³ The two major virtues to be cultivated under the *Rule* were “obedience and humility.”¹⁸⁴ Benedict gave detailed instructions for everyday life in the monastery: two or three singings of Matins, Lauds at dawn, offices sung at the first, third, sixth, and ninth hours, Vespers, and then Compline. The other parts of the day were occupied by work and study. The schedule varied depending on the season. There was one meal in the winter and two in the summer (both supposed to be taken in silence), with 6-8 hours of sleep.¹⁸⁵ The degree to which Benedict’s *Rule* was followed in practice is outside the scope of this study, but it is sufficient to understand that this was an important ideal throughout the medieval period.¹⁸⁶ Even, as R.W. Southern wrote, when the Benedictine ideal became “out-of-date, and even moribund,” it still was an “authoritative standard of normal religious life, more ancient, more dignified, and more stable than any other.”¹⁸⁷ John Van Engen, however, argued that the contemplative life, particularly the Benedictine order, was seen as “the exemplar toward which all should strive . . . well into the twelfth century and beyond.”¹⁸⁸ Certainly when Orderic arrived at Saint-Évroul and throughout his time there, the Benedictine Order was an immensely powerful and dominant presence amongst the elites of Normandy. Monasteries were not founded just for the spiritual

¹⁸² C.H. Lawrence. *Medieval Monasticism*, Third Ed (Longman: Harlow, 2001), 21.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Schedule on 30-32.

¹⁸⁶ Also outside the scope of this study is the degree to which St. Benedict drew from other sources as he composed his *Rule* and the textual history of the *Rule*.

¹⁸⁷ R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1970, 1990), 217.

¹⁸⁸ John Van Engen. “The Crisis of Cenobitism Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050-1150.” *Speculum* 61, no. 2 (April 1986), 269.

benefit of the monks—magnates donated large sums of money because the monks fought as spiritual warriors on their behalf, and the magnates’ own “temporal and eternal welfare equally depended on the warfare of the monks.”¹⁸⁹ Monks also had a penitential function—if a magnate incurred a required penance, such as “fasting on bread, salt, and water for three periods of forty days in each year,”¹⁹⁰ a monk could perform it for him. There were many duties required of the monks at a monastery; a well-stocked monastery might have one hundred monks, with schools, workshops and libraries.¹⁹¹

Orderic never worked in monastic administration, “all his energies went into work at the monastic school and library, and his share in the common liturgical service of the abbey.”¹⁹² Chibnall says he was most likely in charge of the scriptorium, as we see evidence of him copying entire manuscripts himself and editing/correcting manuscripts copied by other monks.¹⁹³ In particular, he entered his own copy of Bede’s *History of the English People* in the Saint-Évroul library catalogue, and copied many lives of saints, including two from England, St. Guthlac and St. Ethelwold.¹⁹⁴ In *Les Bibliothèques Médiévales Des Abbayes Benedictines de Normandie* by Genevieve Nortier, she discussed the development and contents of the library of Saint-Évroul from 1050-1100, during the time of Orderic Vitalis (first half of the twelfth century), and after the middle of the twelfth century to the end of the Middle Ages. In the first half of the twelfth century the library continued to develop.¹⁹⁵ However, the catalogue gives few details about its

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 225.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 226.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 229.

¹⁹² Chibnall, 33.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹⁵ “*Voit se continuer l’essor de la bibliothèque de l’abbaye de St. Évroul.*” Genevieve Nortier. *Les Bibliothèques Médiévales Des Abbayes Bénédictines de Normandie* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1971), 103.

rapid increase in the number of manuscripts.¹⁹⁶ Orderic himself says nothing about it.¹⁹⁷ Most of the increase was due to work from St.-Évroul's own *scriptorium*.¹⁹⁸ These manuscripts from the Saint-Évroul's scriptorium were of good quality ("*gracieuses lettrines*").¹⁹⁹

There were several different kinds of manuscripts copied in the Saint-Évroul scriptorium. The first category is works of particular importance to Saint-Évroul—the writings of monks of Saint-Évroul. This included Orderic, of course, and the writings of abbots, priors, and monks. Other copied works include those of Robert of Torigni (a fellow Norman monk and chronicler, at Bec) and the *vita* of Saint Anselm.²⁰⁰ Another category in the catalogue was historical manuscripts, particularly chronicles. Orderic searched avidly for these.²⁰¹ There are no records specifying where all of the manuscripts that the monks of Saint-Évroul copied came from. St. Gildas' *History of the Britons*, for example, was probably borrowed from Bec, and Orderic cultivated his English contacts for manuscripts, visiting Worcester and Crowland.²⁰² We have a record of the library catalogue during the time of Orderic, composed of 153 titles.²⁰³ However, it is impossible to date this catalogue with precision, but eight or nine hands working on it appear to be from the twelfth century.²⁰⁴ The catalogue was organized into different categories: the books of the Bible, liturgical manuscripts, works of Sts. Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Isidore, and finally saints' lives. It is not certain that Orderic guided the choice of new

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ "*La plupart des nouveaux manuscrits qui vinrent enrichir la bibliothèque sont, à notre connaissance, l'oeuvre du scriptorium de St-Évroul,*" *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁰¹ "*rechercha le plus avidement,*" *ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Nortier also describes the possible limitations of this catalogue, 106.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

manuscripts during his time at St-Evroul, but the monastery was enriched by around seventy new manuscripts.²⁰⁵

A brief survey of some of Orderic's most influential sources could illuminate what he might have understood as the ideal or appropriate role of talk (and the negative consequences of talk). It will also be useful to briefly discuss the historical methodology of a few of these sources to potentially learn how Orderic might have envisioned his own methodology. According to Marjorie Chibnall in her introduction to the *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic "used, cited, or mentioned over a hundred sources" in his history, in addition to charters and canons of councils. Chibnall also said, "In the forefront of the sources of fundamental importance" to Orderic were books of the Bible, particularly the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Old Testament histories and some of the prophets, and Psalms.²⁰⁶ In addition, Orderic read commentaries on the Bible, including those by Bede, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great.²⁰⁷ He had the *Rule* of Saint Benedict memorized.²⁰⁸ He read Gregory the Great and Bede's homilies on the Gospels.²⁰⁹ For his history of the early church, he read Acts, Bede, many *vitae* and *passiones* of the saints and martyrs, in addition to works like Pseudo-Clement, Pseudo-Marcellus, and Pseudo-Linus.²¹⁰ Bede's work also "constantly provided a model for the form and content" of different parts of Orderic's own work.²¹¹ Another important model of general history was the *Chronicle* of Eusebius.²¹² The *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers was a major source for the Norman

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 108.

²⁰⁶ Chibnall, *Vol I*, 48.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 48-9.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 48.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Chibnall refers to Orderic as "floundering in a bog of apocryphal writings" in his historical research on the early church, which seems to obscure the variety of sources he found for the period and the important historical role of the "pseudo" sources, 54.

²¹¹ Ibid., 56.

²¹² Ibid., 58.

invasion of England, with Orderic cutting out “most of the classical allusions and comparisons” and adding “various moral comments.”²¹³ The *Gesta Guillelmi* might have been a borrowed book, as it is not mentioned in the Saint-Évroul library catalogue.²¹⁴ Orderic also had access to many *vitae* and probably collections of *exempla*.²¹⁵ Orderic’s use of foundation charters is complex,²¹⁶ but he considered the inclusion of charters and records of donations essential in maintaining Saint-Évroul’s hold on them. He also used calendars, mortuary rolls, epitaphs, and records of church councils.²¹⁷

An examination of four of Orderic’s arguably most influential sources (Old and New Testament writings, Gregory the Great, Eusebius, and Bede) may reflect the importance of his historical models and their views of the role of talk in their own writings, to see how Orderic might have been inspired to use talk in his own historical process. First, naturally, are the Scriptural sources. The Old Testament histories “provided him with parallels to the events of his own day, and [were] part of his permanent mental furniture.”²¹⁸ There are a lot of exhortations to beneficial talk and prohibitions against harmful talk in the Old Testament. Proverbs, in particular, counseled against scolding, tale-telling, lying, scoffing, and talebearing: “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets” (Proverbs 20:19).²¹⁹ The author of Proverbs acknowledged the attraction of idle talk, “The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body” (Proverbs 26: 22).²²⁰ There are many proverbs that counsel

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 59.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-3.

²¹⁶ See Chibnall, *Vol. I*, 63-75.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹⁹ “*Et qui revelat mysteria et ambulat fraudulenter, et dilatat labia sua, ne commiscearis,*” Latin Vulgate Online. <http://www.drbo.org/lvb/>. Accessed 27 October 2016.

²²⁰ “*Verba susurronis quasi simplicia, et ipsa perveniunt ad intima ventris.*”

against what sounds like gossip: “A talebearer reveals secrets/ But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Proverbs 11:13).²²¹ “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people/ nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:16).²²² Overall, Biblical proverbs warn against inappropriate kinds of talk, and counsel peace, discretion, and the guarding of the tongue. It was a “natural” (sinful) human inclination to listen to or engaged in tale-bearing and gossip but it was still a moral duty to instead “incline your ear and hear the words of the wise” (Proverbs 22:17).²²³²²⁴

There were also prohibitions against unregulated or unruly talk in the New Testament, and “Orderic’s familiarity with the Gospels coloured his whole moral outlook.”²²⁵ In the New Testament, many of the pastoral letters stressed the dangers of unregulated talk in the communities of new Christians. Widows were a particular group of Christians who needed careful regulation. A widow had to be a “true” widow, pious parent, constantly prayerful, avoid living for pleasure, the wife of only one husband, and over sixty years old. The problem with young widows was that they “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (I Timothy 5:13).²²⁶ Deacons also had to guard not only their own tongues, but also their wives’. A deacon

²²¹ *“Qui ambulat fraudulenter, revelat arcana; qui autem fidelis est animi, celat amici commissum.”*

²²² *“Non eris criminator, nec susurro in populo. Non stabis contra sanguinem proximi tui. Ego Dominus.”*

²²³ *“Inclina aurem tuam, et audi verba sapientium, appone autem cor ad doctrinam meam.”*

²²⁴ There is a gendered component to some of the Proverbs and some specifically admonish women in particular, as with this advice against scolds, “Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Proverbs 20:9, NKJV). Other proverbs make a connection between the unregulated talk of women and their immorality as in, “The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit; He who is abhorred by the Lord will fall there” (Proverbs 22: 14). However, male unregulated talk is also seen as wrong: “charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife” (Proverbs 26: 21). Other proverbs are translated with the generic term “he” and seem to be applicable to both genders.

²²⁵ Chibnall, *Vol. 1*, 53.

²²⁶ *“simul autem et otiosae discutunt circuire domos: non solum otiosae, sed et verbosae, et curiosae, loquentes quae non oportet.”* The word *verbosae* is the one translated as gossip and Whitaker also defines it as “verbose” and “copious.”

had to be reverent, with a pure conscience, but not overly fond of wine, greedy, or “double-tongued.” He also had a responsibility for his wife’s talk: “Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers” (I Timothy 3: 11).²²⁷ The New Testament echoes the Old in fear of unregulated speech, distaste for idle gossip, and conviction that speech is either good or bad: “No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God” (James 3: 8-10).^{228,229}

Another of Orderic’s sources, who provided an influential historical model, influenced his thinking on talk, and gossip and rumor specifically. Eusebius, (c. 260-339 C.E.) was a bishop of Caesarea and a prolific writer, best known for his ten-book *History of the Church*.²³⁰ This work covered the early years of the Church: the time of persecutions and martyrs, Constantine’s victories, and the triumph of the Church.²³¹ Eusebius’ *Chronicle*, an earlier work, gave “a model for universal history and a format which located contemporary times firmly within the perspective of God’s plan for mankind.”²³² Chibnall said that the “historical works which were constant in [Orderic’s] mind and at the tip of his pen were [among others]” Eusebius’ *Chronicle* and his ecclesiastical history.²³³ Eusebius was a source for dates and information on the decline of early empires and Orderic knew it so well he “sometimes cited it from memory, sometimes

²²⁷ “*Mulieres similiter pudicas, non detrahentes, sobrias, fideles in omnibus.*” The word “detrahentes,” which is translated as “slanderers” has definitions of tearing/detracting/lessening/disparaging in Whitaker.

²²⁸ “*linguam autem nullus hominum domare potest: inquietum malum, plena veneno mortifero, In ipsa benedicimus Deum et Patrem: et in ipsa maledicimus homines, qui ad similitudinem Dei facti sunt. Ex ipso ore procedit benedictio et maledictio. Non oportet, fratres mei haec ita fieri.*”

²²⁹ Other references include II Timothy 2:16, Romans 1:29, and II Corinthians 12:20.

²³⁰ Eusebius’ most famous work can be translated as either *Ecclesiastical History* or *History of the Church*.

²³¹ Eusebius. *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G.A. Williamson, ed. Andrew Louth. (London: Penguin, 1989), xviii.

²³² Brian Coke. “The Originality of Eusebius’ Chronicle.” *The American Journal of Philology*. 103, no. 2 (Summer 1982), p 195.

²³³ Chibnall, *Vol. 1*, 57.

quoted extensively . . . and [it] gave him one model of a general history of the whole Church.”²³⁴

According to Robert Grant, this work was written in “defense of [Eusebius] and his friends and their outlook toward the nascent church establishment under God’s messenger Constantine.”²³⁵

As one of Orderic’s most influential sources, Eusebius’ treatment of gossip and rumor (what he *said* about gossip/rumor, what examples of gossip/rumor he included as they occur[ed], and what parts of his text are structurally gossip/rumor) sheds light on Orderic’s own treatment, and whether Orderic imitated it or not. In one example in his ecclesiastical history, Eusebius explained why he included a particular story by Clement entitled “The Rich Man Who Finds Salvation.” First, he introduced the story about the Apostle John by saying that evidence for John’s long life was provided by “two witnesses who could hardly be doubted [Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria].”²³⁶ After the story, which is about how an attractive young male disciple of John’s is led into a life of wickedness and bloodthirsty banditry²³⁷ and eventually rescued by John, Eusebius explained that this story, “I have included both for its historical interest and for the benefit of future readers.”²³⁸ This is a titillating story and Eusebius was concerned enough about its effect on his audience to firmly frame it with the respectability of its tellers and his belief in its didacticism. This anxiety about balancing the content of a tale or the way in which the historian received it with the tale’s use as a teaching tool was also a concern that Orderic voiced in his own writing.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

²³⁵ Grant also provides excellent background for any future studies of the factional politics and information management in Eusebius’ *Chronicle*. Robert M. Grant. “Early Alexandrian Christianity.” *Church History* 40, no. 2 (June 1971), 133.

²³⁶ Eusebius, *EH*, 83.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

Eusebius also narrated a story that had gossip/rumor as a dramatic narrative element of the story. This story demonstrates Eusebius' own opinion toward talk. In the story, the third-century theologian, Origen of Alexandria, read a verse in the Bible about some who make themselves eunuchs, which Eusebius says Origen "took in an absurdly literal sense."²³⁹ Although Origen tried to "do it unnoticed by the bulk of his pupils . . . he could not possibly conceal such an act" and soon Demetrius, the head of the diocese, found out.²⁴⁰ Eusebius' commentary of the fruitlessness of Origen's attempts to keep it secret shows his belief in the prevalence of gossip, and the difficulty of keeping private matters secret. But while Demetrius was understanding of Origen's actions as a young man, he was not so generous when Origen became "prosperous, great, eminent, and universally esteemed."²⁴¹ Instead, he "yielded to human weakness and wrote to the bishops throughout the world," as Origen's career blossomed and he was appointed presbyter.²⁴² According to Eusebius, Demetrius "slandered [Origen] viciously" to make him "appear outrageous."²⁴³ Eusebius' views on gossip are interesting to note here. This is a classic structural case of gossip. Origen's dramatic act of pious castration was meant (according to Eusebius) to be private, but he was unable to conceal it, and gossip about the state of his genitals reached Demetrius, his diocesan head. Armed with this information, Demetrius was later able to spread the gossip to other important people in an effort to manage and change Origen's reputation after it had spread so that "everyone everywhere esteemed him highly."²⁴⁴ Eusebius believed gossip to be natural or inevitable, but he did not approve of these actions on Demetrius' part, and his evaluative information sharing is translated as "slander," because it seemed to

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Eusebius the essential aspect of the information sharing was Demetrius' attitude and motives. Because he was motivated by jealousy of Origen's fame, it did not matter that the information he shared was (apparently) factual and correct. It was the maliciousness ("slandered him viciously"²⁴⁵) that made the act so objectionable. This seems to indicate that Eusebius believed that to some degree talk should be judged by the motive of the speaker (or storyteller), not just the content of the talk itself.²⁴⁶

The sixth-century Pope Gregory, another popular patristic medieval author, was a prolific writer and Orderic knew his work well. *The Book of Pastoral Rule* was a "pastoral manual, setting forth his views on the qualifications needed for and the burdens of pastoral care."²⁴⁷ Gregory's *Dialogues* provides useful information on potential historical modeling and one method of including talk that helps us understand Orderic's world view. Indeed, Gregory practically begins his work with a defense for including stories he heard secondhand: "I shall not hesitate to narrate what I have learned from worthy men. In this I am only following the consecrated practice of the Scriptures, where it is perfectly clear that Mark and Luke composed their Gospels, not as eyewitnesses, but on the word of others. Nevertheless, to remove any grounds for doubt on the part of my readers, I am going to indicate on whose authority each account is based . . . in some instances I retain only the substance of the original narrative; in others, the words as well."²⁴⁸ This defense betrays an anxiety over the sources for his writing,

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Grant's article on Eusebius is another example of how more historians could benefit from using an information management framework to understand events in history. On Origen, he says Eusebius' account is "apologetic" and says it is "extremely precarious" for a historian to use what Eusebius says about Origen (134). An understanding of the use of gossip and rumor in information management would shed more light on the subject.

²⁴⁷ Clare McGrath-Merkle. "Gregory the Great's Metaphor of the Physician of the Heart as a Model for Pastoral Identity." *Journal of Religion and Health* 50, no. 2 (June 2011), 375.

²⁴⁸ He goes on to say, "For if I had always kept to the exact wording, the crude language used by some would have been ill suited to my style of writing." Saint Gregory the Great. *Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 6.

particularly that his writing not be seen as less authoritative because it is based in part on things he himself has not seen. Gregory also included didactic sentiments about gossip/rumor. In one story, he referred to a one of Senator Venantius' tenant's sons as a boy who, as he advanced in virtue, "curbed his tongue from idle talk."²⁴⁹ In another section he cautions that, "To take part in the talk of worldly men without defiling our own heart is all but impossible. If we permit ourselves to discuss their affairs with them, we grow accustomed to a manner of speech unbecoming to us . . . and we end clinging to it with pleasure."²⁵⁰ These sentiments are important because they indicate the multiple reasons this talk was wrong: it concerned worldly, not heavenly affairs, it could hurt your public reputation, and it was too pleasurable.

There are also examples of rumors/gossip "as they occur," as in the case of Albinus, the Bishop of Rieti, who, according to Gregory, was a humble, zealous preacher for God. But the "rumors of his reputation" reached Rome, and the clergy began to report to the Pope that Albinus was a rustic who dared to "usurp a right [to preach] reserved for you alone, our apostolic Lord."²⁵¹ As a result of these rumors, Albinus was summoned to Rome to answer for his preaching. Interestingly, Gregory has his acolyte Peter ask a question about indiscreet speech that betrayed a certain ambiguity about the subject of gossip. Peter asks, "why the two blind men who had their sight restored by Christ went out and 'talked of him in all the country round' after they had been expressly commanded to tell no one."²⁵² Gregory responds, "The purpose of this was to show His disciples that, in following the example of His teaching, they should have the will to remain hidden in their great deeds, but that their holy deeds should be made public against

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

their will, for the benefit of others. . . . Our Lord, then, did not will anything that He was powerless to fulfill; rather . . . He showed his disciples by example what they should be willing to do and what should be done in their regard even against their will.”²⁵³ This answer is remarkable in that it demonstrates Gregory’s belief in the power of talk: even “[Jesus] could not stop them from spreading the fame of it”²⁵⁴ and his conscientious historian’s justification for writing in his works about the hidden deeds of others, *even against their will*, because the telling and retelling of these hidden deeds could be of great profit to others.²⁵⁵ St. Benedict, sixth century Abbot of Campania and hermit, was also known for baring the secret deeds of others: “Benedict began to manifest the spirit of prophecy . . . describing to those who were with him what they had done in his absence.”²⁵⁶ For example, Benedict knew that other monks had, contrary to the custom of the house, stopped to eat at the home of a “devout woman they knew in the neighborhood.”²⁵⁷ In another instance, Benedict rebuked a monk who had only silently complained about having to hold a lamp for his abbot while his abbot ate. Benedict explained how he had “silently murmured against the man of God.”²⁵⁸ In another case, despite the reputation of a certain monk for sanctity and fasting, he later admitted he would eat food secretly.²⁵⁹ Learning the truth, and understanding the monk’s punishment in a dragon’s clutches, Gregory said, was “clearly for the benefit of the bystanders.”²⁶⁰ These stories served didactic purposes for Gregory. One lesson was that reputation was not always accurate. Also, secrets could justifiably be told if they served a purpose in the telling.

²⁵³ Ibid., 36-7.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 77.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 87.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 247.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Gregory could also be defensive about including, as he called it, “a very popular account,”²⁶¹ into his writing. He began, “As the story goes,” and told of Sabinus, the Bishop of Canosa, who performed marvelous deeds of sight although he was blind, including identifying a glass of wine his archdeacon was planning to poison him with.²⁶² Gregory explained that the story was testified to by “some saintly men well known.”²⁶³ Although, contrariwise, sometimes Gregory cited the very popularity of a story as proof of its veracity, as when he told of a man named Menas in the province of Samnium. Gregory wrote, “He was known to many of our people. . . I am not going to name any particular person as the source of my story, because the witnesses for it are nearly as numerous as the people familiar with the province.”²⁶⁴ At other times, the source for a story was a group of unnamed people, as in the case of the saintly Galla, daughter of Symmachus. Gregory described the story as “Another story not to be passed over [that] was told me by serious-minded and saintly people.”²⁶⁵ Sometimes, however, he named his informants, as when he said, “John, a man of high rank, served as Prefect of Rome and was well known for his honesty and sincerity. He is my witness for the following incident.”²⁶⁶ In another extraordinary passage, Gregory even traces his thread of gossip to its source: “My witnesses for the story of an incident that took place in Genoa are the saintly Venantius, at present Bishop of Luni, and Liberius, a man of high rank and honest character. They know the circumstances of this incident from their servants who were present when it happened.”²⁶⁷ His anxiety here seems to indicate a desire that his information be seen as trustworthy and historically scrupulous.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 118-119.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 264.

Gregory was not an eyewitness to the event, and this is third-hand information, but he is anxious to forestall any suggestion that this information is suspect or untrustworthy by convincing his readers of this impressive social status of his informants.

Another of Orderic's historical models was the seventh-and-eighth-century English monk and chronicler, the Venerable Bede. Bede has been called "the greatest historian in the West between the later Roman Empire and the twelfth century."²⁶⁸ Bede "was the historian most frequently in Orderic's mind as he wrote."²⁶⁹ There is a copy of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* in Orderic's handwriting, and, Chibnall claimed, Orderic saw parallels between his own life story and that of Bede.²⁷⁰ Orderic also used Bede's work as a model of "form and content of different parts" of his own *EH*, and as a frequent source and reference.²⁷¹ Bede's attitude towards talk was that it was a powerful tool. His *EH* does not reflect the idea that silence was intrinsically better or more pious than speech; in fact, he frequently praised the idea of talk as the way the fame and reputation of good Christian examples were spread. Also, Bede affirmed the necessity of talk for missionary work.

Bede also provided some explanation for his historical methods, and his use of both written and oral sources. "For if history," wrote Bede in the preface to the *EH*, "relates good things of good men, the attentive hearer is excited to imitate that which is good; or if it recounts evil things of wicked persons, none the less the conscientious and devout hearer or reader, shunning that which is hurtful and wrong, is the more earnestly fired to perform those things

²⁶⁸ Joel T. Rosenthal. "Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the Material Conditions of Anglo-Saxon Life." *Journal of British Studies* 19, no. 1 (Autumn 1979), 1.

²⁶⁹ Chibnall, Vol I, 56.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 56-7.

which he knows to be good, and worthy of the service of God.”²⁷² According to Bede, one of the primary purposes for history is to provide instructive examples of both good and bad deeds, and both types of examples will lead the hearer or reader of the history to more pious behavior. These purposes for writing history were Bede’s justification for including scandals, murder, human sacrifices, the misdeeds of monks, sex, and other deeds the participants might wish to keep secret, in his work.

Bede defended the use of his oral sources in two primary ways: the good character of his informants and the number of his informants. He was less concerned about defending his written sources, and spends much more time on his oral sources. For example, he wrote that his “principal authority and aid” in writing the book was the “most learned and reverend Abbot Albinus,” who was educated at the Church of Canterbury by “those venerable and learned men” Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian, who told the priest Nothelm, who told Bede “all that he thought worthy of memory.”²⁷³ Nothelm related a lot of information, and it was important to Bede that he establish the good character and background of the men who had sent Nothelm. Bede also described his sources for the episcopal succession in Lindsey as letters from the prelate Cynibert, “or by word of mouth from other persons of good credit.”²⁷⁴ For Northumbria, however, Bede “received not on the authority of any one man, but by the faithful testimony of innumerable witnesses, who might know or remember the same; besides what I had of my own knowledge.”²⁷⁵ Bede used written documents about Bishop Cuthbert from the Church of Lindisfarne “without reserve,” but also added the “testimony of trustworthy informants.”²⁷⁶

²⁷² Bede, 1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Bede's care to describe some of his primary informants indicates these are some of the people in his news network, and he prefaces his history with the respectable titles and goodness of those with whom he has conversed. To Bede what he was doing could never be "gossip" if it was passing on reliable and useful information from men who were trustworthy. Also, the content of the information did not determine whether it was gossip, but rather the character of the person who told it to him and his own motives for passing on the stories. Where one trustworthy informant would suffice for a story, "innumerable" informants were even better. He also accepted the usefulness of the "common report" in the writing of history, as he wrote, "as the true rule of history requires, withholding nothing, I have labored to commit to writing such things as I could gather from common report, for the instruction of posterity."²⁷⁷

Bede reported many positive examples of how talk and the construction of a good reputation were beneficial. Fame was also, according to Bede, beneficial for missionary work, such as reporting what you had seen and heard to many people, even if asked not to. When the bishops Germanus and Lupus came to Britain to preach against Pelagianism, they "speedily filled the island. . . with the fame of their preaching and miracles."²⁷⁸ When again, "news was brought" that "certain persons" were again teaching the Pelagian heresy, Germanus was again moved to go and combat it.²⁷⁹ The miracles that occurred where King Oswald was killed were "reported abroad," which attracted many people to the spot where his blood was spilled, and those pilgrims "received the blessing of health for themselves and their friends."²⁸⁰ Abbess Hild's example of piety not only benefited those who lived under her rule, but "afforded

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

occasional of amendment and salvation to many who lived at a distance, to whom the blessed fame was brought of her industry and virtue.”²⁸¹ Bede’s history has a remarkable number of positive mentions of fame, and the benefits of fame if it was of a pious Christian life. Telling stories about the “industry and virtue” of a holy abbess or warning of preachers who were spreading unauthorized versions of Christianity was a sanctified form of talk, because its goals of spreading Christian virtue and truth were noble.

Some incidents Bede presented with disclaimers, and we can assume that they were those that he found in some way less likely or less trustworthy than others. For example, he wrote, “Nor must we pass by . . . the story of the blessed Gregory, handed down to us by the tradition of our ancestors.”²⁸² He began, “It is said that,”²⁸³ which signals the beginning for a legendary tale or a tale without reputable antecedents or a tale he could not find a trustworthy source for. The story is that Pope Gregory went to the market place in Rome, and saw some young male slaves for sale, and their gorgeousness made him sad that they were so steeped in pagan ways, so he later sent out preachers to convert the British to Christianity. Bede’s reason for why he included a story he might have believed to be fantastic was that it “explains his earnest care for the salvation of our nation” and thus, is “fit to insert in our ecclesiastical history.”²⁸⁴

There were many other times when Bede described his historical methodology for including different events that he was not an eyewitness to. For example, he included the story of a youth named Imma, who was one of King Aelfwine’s men, as common knowledge: “In the aforesaid battle . . . a memorable incident is known to have happened,”²⁸⁵ he began. In the story,

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

Inna is left on the battlefield among the dead, and is captured by the opposing king's men, but he keeps breaking free of the bonds they use on him, and finally they learn he is not the peasant he claimed to be, but a noble. He was sold to a Frisian, but his bonds still kept being loosed at the times his brother was celebrating Mass for him, and he was eventually able to ransom himself. Bede explained, "This story was also told me by some of those who had heard it related by the man himself to whom it happened; therefore, since I had a clear understanding of it, I have not hesitated to insert it in my ecclesiastical history."²⁸⁶ Bede acknowledged his distance from the story, but affirmed his guiding principle of including what he thought was most beneficial. In a particularly gossipy passage Bede related the life of "a brother. . . whose name I could mention if it were of any avail, dwelling in a famous monastery, but himself living infamously."²⁸⁷ This proud and drunken brother had a vision of Hell before dying, and Bede helpfully explained that this was "in the province of the Bernicians" and it had already been "noised abroad far and near."²⁸⁸ However, the story was all right to include because it had already encouraged many people to do penance for their sins.

Bede did not specifically mention individual concepts like "gossip" or "rumor." He included stories about the private lives and sins of others in his chronicle, but their inclusion is excused because of Bede's higher purpose in writing his chronicle. If a story could be used as an instructive example, it was appropriate to include it. That does not mean that Bede was not worried about accuracy, on the contrary, he wrote, "like an impartial historian, unreservedly relating what was done by or through him, and commending such things as are praiseworthy in

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 336.

his actions, and [I] preserv[ed] the memory thereof for the benefit of the readers.”²⁸⁹ There are examples when Bede introduced a story while expressing hesitation, apparently because the antecedents of the story were murky or he doubted the veracity of the story, but included it anyway because it made a great illustration for a particular moral lesson.

Orderic was a thorough and conscientious historian, and his methodology shows a particular care taken to ensure that his own writings were in accordance with the strategies employed by some of his predecessors. Even secrets and private doings could be open to the historian’s analytical pen. Orderic wrote that “abundant material for writing many books lay to the hand of those learned and eloquent men who through long years dwelt in King William’s court, witnessed his deeds and all the great doings there, [and] knew his deepest and most secret counsels.”²⁹⁰ Orderic explained his typical writing process at the end of Book IX when he wrote, “In many parts of my work I have copied the very words of this learned man [Baudry], just as he wrote them, not daring to promulgate his work in any other way, since I did not believe I could improve on them. But I have abbreviated some passages . . . and I have added a few things not mentioned by him, for the benefit of posterity, truthfully, just as I learnt them from men who took part in these toils and dangers.”²⁹¹ Summarizing and editorializing on his written sources and including the oral sources he was confident of the trustworthiness of (and sometimes the sources he was not so sure of) was Orderic’s structural process for writing his history. Although his explanation seems to put his written sources on a superior level over his oral ones, in reality

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 170. Grammar adjusted for clarity.

²⁹⁰ *EH*, Book IV, 190-1, “*Copiosam faciendi plures libros materiam eloquentes sophistae habuerunt, qui regis Guillelmi curiae diutius interfuerunt et gesta eius ac uarios et praeclaros euentus ac intima et profunda consilia nouerunt.*”

²⁹¹ *EH*, Book IX, 188-9, “*Multis in locis operi nostro inserui eadem uerba sophistae, sicut depromserat ipse non ausus aliter eius dicta proपालare, quae non credebam me posse emendare. Quaedam tamen ne prolixitas taxationis nostrae fastidio legentes oneraret adbrueuando recidi, nonnulla uero posteritati notificanda quae tacuerat ueraciter adieci, prout ab his qui laboribus et periculis interfuerunt edidici.*”

Orderic's oral sources were just as much of a backbone for his writing. Orderic saw what he was doing as not just a passive acquisition of information, but an active "investigation" into truth and meaning. His overall purpose was to "give a true account of the different events, both prosperous and adverse . . . and [I] will record them simply, for the benefit of future generations . . . For I believe there will be some men after me like myself, who will eagerly peruse the events and transitory acts of this generation in the pages of chroniclers, so that they may unfold the past fortunes of the changing world for the edification or delight of their contemporaries."²⁹²

There is an incredible amount of talk in Orderic's *EH*. The whole narrative itself can be viewed as an example of talk, while Orderic also reported or summarized the contents of many conversations. Many times he also reported/constructed longer examples of dialogue. These are more extensive, specific examples of talk. According to Chibnall, historians were expected to "write rhetorically" and "imagined speeches was a popular device."²⁹³ It could be used to "enhance without falsifying."²⁹⁴ Chibnall argued that Orderic's use of speeches had different purposes, including to explain the motives of individuals, to show different sides of an issue, or to explain backstory.²⁹⁵ Orderic used this rhetorical device occasionally, and often the talk revealed different levels of character development. For example, Orderic explicitly referred to one of his constructed speeches of Robert Curthose's flatterers, including such lines as "If however he persists in his obstinacy and, giving way to avarice, denies you the honor which is rightly yours, then put on the courage of a lion, thrust aside these worthless servants, and rely on

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁹³ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 197.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

the counsel and support of your friends.”²⁹⁶ Orderic then described/constructed in detail a conversation between Robert and his father, William I, over the control of Normandy. Both of these conversations are personal and intimate. The conversation between Robert and the young knights who encouraged him to confront his father over Normandy is richly detailed and woven with gossip, from the negative characterizations of those in William’s circle to the complaints about William himself. The conversation between Robert and his father is also woven with gossip, including William’s insulting characterizations of Robert’s friends. In part, these longer and more involved speeches are examples of Orderic’s superb storytelling ability but they also highlighted moral lessons and standards of behavior. Like many other places in the *EH*, Orderic treated gossip and information management as a natural and inextricable part of talk.

Like his predecessors, Orderic often emphasized the trustworthiness of his sources. Orderic’s hagiography of St. Judoc included many references to sources. For example, Orderic referred to William of Merlerault’s “authentic and vivid account” of the translation of his body and the many miracles and healings performed through the saint’s power.²⁹⁷ Also, Aldhelm and the monk Richer, described by Orderic as “both trustworthy men,” told of the healing of the maiden Bersenda’s hip pain at the monastery of St. Riquier.²⁹⁸ Orderic often felt the need to introduce his stories about miracles by listing the good reputations of his sources. Another time he was praising Abbot Thierry, and told of a time when Thierry found a beautiful white cloak on the altar as he was about to perform the Mass. He wore this cloak to lead out in Mass, knowing it was a gift from angels. Orderic recorded that this, “happened in the church of Jumièges when he

²⁹⁶ *“Si uero in sua pertinacia perstiterit, et suadente sua cupidine debitum tibi honorem denegauerit leoniam animositatem arripe, indecentem clientelam abice tuorumque amicorum consiliis suffragiisque fruere,”* *EH*, Book V, 98-9.

²⁹⁷ *EH*, Book III, 166-7, “*ueraciter et luculenter.*”

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 160-1, “*ueracibus.*”

was a cloister monk there, and I learned of it from fellow monks of his whose word can be trusted.”²⁹⁹ Another time, when writing about battles in the Holy Lands,³⁰⁰ Orderic said “according to the reports of trustworthy pilgrims there were five hundred thousand Christians there, and they were most violently attacked, unless I am misinformed, by a million pagans.”³⁰¹ Many of the sources, either written or oral, that he praised as trustworthy were fellow monks or other religious men. He sometimes seemed well-informed on events in the lives of women, but rarely, if ever, listed women as his direct sources. He occasionally listed non-religious sources, both magnates and peasants, but rarely, if ever, extended to them any praise for being trustworthy.

At times Orderic was also meticulous in acknowledging the gaps in his story. For example, when Henry I of England and his brother Robert Curthose met to settle a dispute, Orderic did not include any details of their brotherly reconciliation because, he said, he was not present and he had only “learnt by hearsay” what had happened.³⁰² It is not certain why he did not include this information or gossip in his history. Orderic included many stories that he did not witness, there was clearly something about the nature of the information that reached him in this case that he deemed less trustworthy or unworthy of inclusion. It is possible he viewed the news he heard as unlikely to be true or the source as suspect or it did not accord with his previously-held views of Robert and Henry.³⁰³ Although Saint-Évroul extended hospitality to many pilgrims who Orderic judged to be trustworthy, he still acknowledged the limitations of his

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 18-9, “*Hoc ita gestum fuisse in Gemmeticensi aeclesia dum adhuc claustralis esset monachus a monachis ueracibus qui tunc in supradicto monasterio morabantur audiuius.*”

³⁰⁰ Chibnall wrote that Orderic “telescopes more than one encounter with the enemy forces,” 335.

³⁰¹ *EH*, Book X, 336-7, “*Ibi ut ueraces peregrine ferunt, quingenta milia Christianorum fuerunt, ipsosque ni fallor mille milia paganorum terribiliter impetierunt.*”

³⁰² *EH*, Book X, 319. “*Verba quidem huius colloquii nequeo hic inserere quia non interfui, sed opus quod de tantorum consilio fratrum processit auditu didici.*”

³⁰³ As will be seen later, rumors in particular are more likely to “stick” if they accord with previously-held beliefs.

sources and the potential for confusion. In the aftermath of a battle in the Holy Lands, Orderic wrote that “I cannot here record the number of the slain for certain, since I was not there. Those who were there were too much occupied with killing to count, and went back only to take the spoils of the dead.”³⁰⁴ He was more explicit about his editorial choices and limitations when he was dealing with historical events closer to his own time or in his own time. He had other tools at his disposal when writing his contemporary history: an ability to talk to his sources and to analyze their stories and compare them with others’.

As we have seen, Orderic, a monk to whom the work of the scriptorium was his life-long ministry, had access to a variety of ancient and medieval texts that discussed the issue of talk or contained examples of talk. He read how other historians had dealt with the issue of talk, particularly informal, everyday forms of talk like gossip and rumor. He read how these historians treated material that was secret or scandalous. Orderic, like his historical predecessors, worked to reconcile the didactic tradition about unregulated talk that informed his daily life and personal piety, and the necessity for a historian to create an accurate narrative that was appropriately bolstered by moral and religious lessons. In many ways his methodology reflects that of his predecessors. But his history sought its own place as a continuation of the great traditions of those historians who had worked to tell the story of Jesus and his church in earlier periods.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 350-1, “*Interfactorum certum numerum cartae nescio tradere quia non interfui. Illi uero qui interfuerunt, non numerare sed trucidare curauerunt et repedantes occisis spolia detraxerunt.*”

Chapter Three: Issues in Medieval Applications of Talk Studies Theory

When analyzing talk in Orderic Vitalis' *Ecclesiastical History*, the definitions, structure, and meaning of rumor and gossip are all important factors to consider to see what the *EH* can show us about the validity of using talk studies theory in the field of medieval history. Although sometimes "rumor" and "gossip" are grouped together as similar forms of indiscreet talk, most talk studies researchers have long observed the differences in structure and content between the two and argued for separate categories of analysis. While gossip is evaluative talk about the private matters of others, and can define group boundaries and mores, rumor, as speculative talk about an important event or person, is intelligible to a wider group of people than gossip usually is. Gossip usually spreads through tight-knit social networks, while rumors can be spread by acquaintances. Because rumor is theoretically a less intimate form of talk, I will consider it first, followed by gossip.

Orderic Vitalis included a succinct description of rumor when he wrote: "Rumour, than which nothing on earth travels faster, spread news of this event far and wide, and it soon came to the ears of the king, who was always alert to the needs of the realm."³⁰⁵ In one summation, Orderic set forth his definition of rumor: a particular, identifiable kind of talk with unknown original sources, swift-moving, wide-ranging, and potentially powerful enough to deserve the notice of the king himself. In another instance, after a miracle performed by St. Benedict, Orderic wrote that, "Meanwhile, the [*rumor*] sped swifter than a bird all through the city of London and came to the ears of almost all the citizens."³⁰⁶ Again Orderic's vision of a particular

³⁰⁵ *EH*, Book XII, 206-7, "*Quod fama qua nil in terra uelocius mouetur longe lateque diulgauit, et protinus ad aures solliciti regis de regni curis peruenit.*"

³⁰⁶ *EH*, Book VI, 356-7, "*Interim rumor ille ocior qualibet uolucres totam urbem Lundoniae peruolans, aures omnium pene ciuium attingit.*"

kind of talk is repeated: it comes from no one and everyone, it penetrates thoroughly to large groups of people, and it is almost unstoppable. When Bohemond, a prominent magnate in the First Crusade (1095-9 C.E.), negotiated with the Turkish emir Firuz Datianus over the city of Antioch, Orderic wrote “A little later rumour the forerunner of evil flew through the camp [quoting the Aeneid].”³⁰⁷ This quotation is very interesting, as it indicates that Orderic was aware of classical disapproval or fear of rumors. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, *Fama* was a “demonic creature [who] bursts in on the narrative of the human actors to broadcast a tendentious account of the union of Dido and Aeneas. . . [and] contain[s] in her expansive person distortions and refractions of other aspects of ‘what is said.’”³⁰⁸ In the story Orderic inserted the classical reference into, he seemed to see the fallout from acting on the rumor (which led to the Christians occupying Antioch after a massacre) as partly a result of God’s compassion and partly as a result of ill fortune.³⁰⁹ But he does not describe all the crusaders who listened to it as foolish (Bohemond, in particular, is described as “*prudens*”³¹⁰). While rumors could be dangerous, they were also unavoidable.

Orderic the historian was very aware of the power and importance of rumors. He discussed their amazing speed, participated in their spread, used them to construct his history, and accepted that they could be an unpredictable but essential tool to obtain and maintain power. For example, Orderic described William I’s (d. 1087) presence in Normandy, and his concern for the area: establishing peace, giving laws, judging between disputes, appointing judges and

³⁰⁷ *EH*, Book IX, 88-9, “*Paulo post fama presaga mali percrebruit in castris.*”

³⁰⁸ Philip Hardie. *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

³⁰⁹ *EH*, Book IX, 93, 95.

³¹⁰ *EH*, Book IX, 88-9. Although Chibnall translates *prudens* as wily (which has a connotation of sneakiness/trickery), William Whitaker has a range of more positive translations, including aware, skilled, sensible, and prudent.

issuing charters to monasteries.³¹¹ But, according to Orderic, “During this time various rumours from across the Channel were passing from mouth to mouth and causing alarm to the king, for they contained evil reports as well as good and hinted that the Normans were to be massacred by the hostile English, supported by the Danes and other barbarous peoples.”³¹² Here Orderic affirmed the existence of the category of a rumor (as distinct from other categories of speech), the medium of rumor (mouth to mouth), and the effects of rumor, either good or bad, but in this case powerful enough to alarm the king and create an impetus for action. According to Orderic, William I was often forced to respond to rumors and to create military strategy based on the information he received from them. For example, whenever Geoffrey of Mayenne and other Maine nobles rebelled against William, hearing rumors (*rumoribus*) of the “slaughter of his men,” he became very angry, and quickly planned to punish the rebels.³¹³ Indeed, as soon as William heard the rumors he assembled his army and hurried to Maine to besiege the castles of the rebels. Rumors were not something to be ignored or dismissed as fanciful tales. Even though the original source of the information in rumors was unknown or distant, they were a source of information that, particularly when widespread, were taken seriously. As Orderic reported, successful kings depended upon an information network with high rumor awareness.

One of the most important questions in using recent talk studies definitions to understand the *EH* and medieval history is whether medieval people, and Orderic specifically, would have defined “rumor” in the same way as modern scholars do. There are a few modern academic definitions to consider. One of the most significant and influential definitions is that of Allport

³¹¹ *EH*, Book III, 209.

³¹² *Ibid.*, “*Rumores interim de transmarinis partibus diuersi aduolitabant, et optatis. . . permiscentes regem inquietabant et ex maliuolentia Anglorum cum nisu Danorum aliarumque barbararum gentium magnam cladem Normannis orituram intimabant.*”

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 306-7, “*trucidatione suorum.*”

and Postman, in *The Psychology of Rumor* (1948): “a rumor . . . is a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present.”³¹⁴ According to Rosnow and Fine in *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* (1976), rumor is commonly “synonymous with hearsay” and “information, neither substantiated nor refuted.”³¹⁵ Tamotsu Shibutani, in his book *Improvised News: a sociological study of rumor* asserted that rumor was “communication through which men caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources.”³¹⁶ Bordia and DiFonzo, in their article “Problem Solving in Social Interactions on the Internet: Rumor as Social Cognition,” say “Rumors can be differentiated from news in that the latter are verified, while the former are unsubstantiated.”³¹⁷ Bordia and DiFonzo also go on to say that rumor occurs when “credible explanations are not available from traditional sources such as the [massmedia], government agencies, or corporate management.”³¹⁸

But what do these definitions have in common with the medieval period? For example, can Allport and Postman’s definition be useful? Word of mouth was typical for almost all forms of communication in the twelfth century, although the written word was growing in importance. While the “socio-political functions of the higher as well as the lower nobility increasingly required such access to the written transmission of knowledge from the ninth century onward,” the spread of literacy “accelerating with the latter half of the twelfth century, made the required

³¹⁴ Allport & Postman, ix.

³¹⁵ Rosnow & Fine, 4.

³¹⁶ Tamotsu Shibutani. *Improvised News: a sociological study of rumor* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), 17.

³¹⁷ Prashant Bordia and Nicholas DiFonzo. “Problem Solving in Social Interactions on the Internet: Rumor as Social Cognition.” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2004), 33.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33-4.

access even easier.”³¹⁹ The years from 1066 to 1307 were a formative period in the development of literacy.³²⁰ During this period “trust in writing . . . developed from growing familiarity with documents.”³²¹ However, “traditional oral procedures” persisted in popularity throughout the medieval period and beyond.³²² But by 1307 “literate modes were familiar even to serfs.”³²³ If Allport and Postman’s definition were to be applied quite literally to talk in the eleventh and twelfth centuries much of speech would be considered rumor. Moreover, what were “secure standards of evidence” in the eleventh and twelfth centuries? Allport and Postman refer to written sources like newspapers, magazines and airwaves as less likely to spread rumor. But what parallels would there be to the predominantly oral twelfth century society? Would a secure standard of evidence really be only the comparatively few written documents, like religious, hagiographical, or historical books and official documents, like royal charters and other administrative writing? According to Orderic, secure standards of evidence for oral sources would be the character and reputation of a source. Trustworthy and reputable sources to Orderic included personal friends and fellow workers, some magnates and men of high religious rank, and pious people. So Allport and Postman’s definition, after applying it to the time covered by the *EH*, is revealed to be limited and not universally applicable.

The *EH* shows that the definition of “secure standards of evidence” should be expanded to include what defined secure standards of evidence in a society more reliant on oral forms of speech. It is important not to automatically assume similarities in the treatment of oral witness.

³¹⁹ Franz H. Bauml. “Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy.” *Speculum* 55, no. 2 (April 1980), 244.

³²⁰ M.T. Clanchy. *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, Third Edition (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 21.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Ibid.*

For example, the oaths of witnesses in legal proceedings were “radically different from the sworn testimony” in today’s courts.³²⁴ In general, in the high Middle Ages no one could be “compelled, or even suffered, to testify to a fact, unless when that fact happened he was solemnly ‘taken to witness.’”³²⁵ A case could be decided by one of the two parties proving their claim, either through battle, ordeal, or “by an oath with oath-helpers, or by the oaths of witnesses.”³²⁶ However, the character and duties of jurors and witnesses developed to a point where each juror and/or witness had to “profess a first-hand knowledge of the facts about which he spoke,” according to their understanding of hearsay as “untrustworthy.”³²⁷

In the preface to their book, Rosnow and Fine include certain dictionary and legal definitions for rumor that are relevant; in the legal definition, rumor is described as a “current story passing from one person to another without any known authority for the truth of it . . . [a] general public report of certain things, without any certainty as to their truth.”³²⁸ The legal definition is fairly specific, and has aspects to it that could be of use in studying Orderic. In the *EH*, rumor itself is frequently described as the author of information, instead of a named source. Bookending particular stories with the story’s vague antecedents could help clearly identify the story as rumor or gossip. Sometimes Orderic even specifically editorialized that the story he is about to share has no known original source, but is a popular or common story. According to Rosnow and Fine’s definition, these indicators could lead us to label the story as a rumor.

³²⁴ Sir Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland. *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*. Vol II. Second Edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1968), 631.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ In time, the interchangeability of the medieval juror and witness changed to where jurors became “judges of fact,” 652.

³²⁸ Rosnow and Fine, *vix.*

Shibutani's definition considers the aspect of the meaning of rumor, which will be discussed later, but as for the first half of the definition, what would be an "ambiguous situation" in the eleventh and twelfth centuries? By modern standards, almost every situation outside of one's own sphere would be an ambiguous one, because there were no television reporters, radio announcers, or newspaper journalists to be able to "set the story straight" on any ambiguous situation or rumor. Many studies, such as Allport and Postman's, have focused on war as a particularly ambiguous situation, which is also true in the *EH*, as Orderic relates most of his rumors about war or during war-time. The ambiguity of an event also depended, to Orderic, on his view of the trustworthiness of his source or the eyewitness.

Shibutani also described two different types of rumor construction: one, when the demand for news is only low or moderate, and the excitement is low or moderate, that leads to a more critical approach to information gathering, and the other when the demand for news is very high, and the excitement is very high, that leads to more uncritical and hasty information gathering. The second type of rumor construction is primarily applicable to situations that can easily be identified as of high excitement, such as the succession of kings, deaths, and real or threatened invasions or attacks. These are situations in which Orderic describes more rumors being present.

Another point of importance to note is the impact of Marjorie Chibnall's modern translation. In places, of course, she must make judgment calls as to what Orderic meant by the Latin words *fama* and *rumor*, and similar words (like *murmur*) that most closely translate to our words "gossip" and "rumor."³²⁹ For example, she must decide whether what is being conveyed is

³²⁹ Philip Hardie discussed the range of meanings of the word *fama* and the range of words used to describe rumor or gossip, including the Latin *rumor* and *sermones*, 3.

something more along the lines of “gossip”/ “rumor” or “news.” The words “gossip”/ “rumor” often have a pejorative connotation today (particularly connotations of malice or inaccuracies), so these connotations may have affected her translation decisions. For example, when Orderic related the tragic White Ship disaster when many young men, including King Henry’s son William, died, he wrote, “*Lugubris rumor per ora uulgi cito uolitans in maritimis littoribus perstrepat,*” which Chibnall translated as “The sad news spread swiftly from mouth to mouth through the crowds along the sea coast,”³³⁰ despite the fact that “news” is not the primary dictionary definition for the Latin word *rumor* and the fact that many other places she had translated “rumor” as “rumor.” Also, the fact that Orderic mentioned the swiftness of the news recalls Orderic’s classical allusions to the monstrous *Fama* in the Aeneid, with her quick and devastating talk. Why did Chibnall translate *rumor* as “news,” instead of the primary definition of *rumor* (rumor)? A few possibilities spring to mind; one is that since the information seems to have been mostly “true,” and accepted by Count Theobald and those who heard it as accurate, she believed the word “news” was more precise since, perhaps, to Chibnall, the word “rumor” had a negative connotation or at least a connotation of inaccurate information.

In another translation example, in Book IX Orderic narrated some of the history of the Crusades and the history of the Holy Lands. But Chibnall did not identify what Orderic wrote as *rumores* as “rumors.” After the Christian forces captured Antioch, Orderic recorded that “*Auditibus rumoribus de capta ciuitate.*”³³¹ Chibnall translated this as, “As reports of the capture of the city spread.”³³² Again, it seems that because there is no indication that these stories are “false” that Chibnall translated it as “reports” instead of “rumor.” However, Orderic seems to be in

³³⁰ *EH*, Book XII, 300-1.

³³¹ *EH*, Book IX, 94-5.

³³² *Ibid.*

agreement here with modern rumor studies theory that in certain situations (ones of great importance, ones of great ambiguity) rumors are likely to flourish, and expected to flourish. But an even more confusing translation occurs when the company of Christians is at a low point, despite the capture of Antioch. As the Christians were besieged in Antioch (because the opposing force still controlled the citadel within the city), Stephen, count of Chartres, “who claimed to be suffering from some slight illness”³³³) recovering in Alexandretta, climbed a nearby mountain and saw the many Turkish tents surrounding the smaller Christian force. He fled the scene, and discouraged Emperor Alexius and those others who were coming to relieve the force inside Antioch from helping because Stephen deemed the situation hopeless. Orderic wrote, “*Diris rumoribus rumigeruli comitis sparsis obstrepsit in populo Dei mestitudo inestimabilis.*”³³⁴ But instead of calling him a “rumor-monger,” and the stories Stephen told “rumors,” Chibnall translated the passage as “As the terrifying stories were spread abroad by the credulous count the people of God were filled with indescribable sorrow.”³³⁵ This is an oblique translation, as Count Stephen’s words were, according to Orderic, inaccurate, and did damage to the morale of the Christians. It took the miraculous discovery of the lance to encourage the Christians to triumph over the “Turkish” forces. Chibnall’s translation also makes Stephen a more passive figure in the incident, as if he could not help spreading the untrue story because of his gullibility, rather than calling him a rumor-monger, which would imply a more active agency in spreading untruth.

Actually, it seems from the *EH* that rumors abounded about the fighting in the Holy Lands, which rumor scholars would say is not surprising. In another place, Bohemond engaged

³³³ *EH*, Book IX, 106-7, “*infirmirate ut dicebat detentus aliquantula.*”

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

in battle with what Orderic referred to as “Arabs whose swarms could not be counted.”³³⁶ He “quickly sent word to his allies, who were rather far behind so that they could hurry to help his men in their great need.”³³⁷ But these messengers (“*legatis*”) were not completely convincing to Bohemond’s allies. His allies “could scarcely credit that a battle was really taking place.”³³⁸ In fact, the messengers from Bohemond did not convince Duke Godfrey, Count Stephen, Hugh the Great, and the other magnates; it was only after “*rumor*” (Chibnall translates this as “news”) “spread through the whole army and other messengers followed the first”³³⁹ that the magnates hastened to assist Bohemond. Despite Chibnall translating this as “news,” this story is very interesting to rumor scholars. First, Orderic draws a distinction between two kinds of communication: the official form (the messengers) and the unofficial form (*rumor*). Instead of believing the “official” messengers and trusting in the official sources, it was not until *rumors* (unverified, and coming from “unofficial” sources) of the fighting had spread so fully that they were now common knowledge that the magnates believed them to be true. This situation is the opposite of the way Knapp, Allport and Postman, and others who work from a Rumor Control Center mindset, see news being verified. Knapp and others believe that official confirmation or denial of a popular story is one of the best ways to stamp out rumors and determine the truthfulness of a story. The opposite happens here. The magnates found the official news unlikely or uncertain, and the *popularity* of the story was the deciding factor in determining if it was true or not. These examples could indicate the importance military commanders placed on common knowledge when deciding on military strategy. If enough people were talking about the

³³⁶ *EH*, Book IX, 60-1, “*Arabes quorum concursus indeterminatus fuit.*”

³³⁷ *Ibid*, “*celeriter mandat sociis qui ab eo longiuscule recesserant ut ad eos iuuandos in grandi necessitate properent.*”

³³⁸ *Ibid*, “*de belli certitudine ambigebat.*”

³³⁹ *Ibid*, “*iste per totum exercitum percebuit et legatis legati superadditi sunt.*”

rumors, they were probably true, seemed to be one of the working policies of the military commanders. The example of the ineffectiveness of Bohemond's messengers might also indicate that the ideas of modern rumor theory about "secure standards of evidence" being necessary to confirm or deny the veracity of the rumor is actually sometimes backwards, when applied to the Middle Ages. Common knowledge was sometimes necessary to confirm or deny the veracity of the word of the official source, instead of the other way around.

Orderic seemed to have a distinct understanding of when to use the term "*rumor*." He frequently used it for news that spreads quickly during times of war/fighting, for news that was widespread, and often for news that was ambiguous or uncertain. For example, in one instance Saracens attacked a small group of Christians who were on their way back from St. Symeon, and many of them were killed. Orderic said, "The news of the Christian defeat was a heavy blow to those who were left behind, all the more because there was no certain report of the numbers dead or surviving."³⁴⁰ According to Shibutani, this would be a possible high demand rumor scenario, and shows awareness of the inaccuracy of rumors, particularly when the rumors were not in coherent agreement.

While Marjorie Chibnall's translation is a magisterial accomplishment, in places it might obscure the impact that talk such as rumor had on Orderic's information-gathering and writing process, and the important role it played in medieval life. Another point to note is that Orderic does not exclusively use the Latin word "*rumor*" to refer to what we would probably see as rumors. For example, after the death of King William Rufus in 1100, Orderic recorded that magnates William of Evreux and Ralph of Conches took/stole "considerable booty" from Robert

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 82-3, "*Rumor de Christianis superatis eos qui remanserant ualde contristauit, eo maxime quod certum numerum uiuorum seu peremptorum non retulit.*"

of Meulan out of revenge for him telling Rufus “false allegations” that led to the two nobles falling out of favor.³⁴¹ The words Orderic used are “*fradulenta consilia*,” but it sounds like we would consider them as (at least, according to William of Evreux and Ralph of Conches) spreading rumors or slander. So another way that Orderic can inform talk studies theory is reiterating the importance of analyzing unregulated talk structurally. More fruitful cross-cultural (and cross-generational) conclusions about rumor come from a structural analysis of the function of rumor in each particular society.

Now that Orderic’s vocabulary to describe rumor has been discussed, let us turn to ways to understand the rumor structurally. One of the most deceptively simple and interesting attempts to understand rumors is Allport and Postman’s classic rumor formula³⁴²: the idea that the power of a rumor will be determined by \sim importance \times ambiguity.³⁴³ According to Allport and Postman, ambiguity “may be induced by the absence or sketchiness of news, by the conflicting nature of the news, by distrust of the news, or by some emotional tensions that make the individual unable or unwilling to accept the facts as set forth in the news.”³⁴⁴ Of course, Allport and Postman see rumors as essentially of little practical use in taking action and basically untrustworthy: “in rumor there is often some residual particle of news . . . but in the course of transmission it has become so overlaid with fanciful elaboration that it is no longer separable or detectable.”³⁴⁵ This, as we have seen, does not reflect Orderic’s own views on the subject. An analysis of the times he used the word “*rumor*” to describe information or stories shows that the

³⁴¹ *EH*, Book XI, 300-1, “*ingentem predam*.”

³⁴² Allport & Postman’s groundbreaking systematic study on rumors is still used, debated and frequently cited in the talk studies field, including many mentions in the 2013 Greg Dalziel edited compilation *Rumor and Communication in Asia in the Internet Age*.

³⁴³ Allport & Postman, 33.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

issue of rumor was a complex one, but it is clear in his account that rumors were often taken very seriously by those who heard them. Many times Orderic described magnates and important men taking decisive military action after hearing what Orderic referred to as a rumor. Moreover, the content of rumors themselves could be either trustworthy or not trustworthy; although Orderic was well aware that they could not all be “trusted,” he also knew that you could also learn important information from rumors.

Allport and Postman’s use of the formula was not specifically quantitative; it was enough to determine if an event was ambiguous or not or important or not. A representative example from the *EH* is when Helias “heard the welcome news”³⁴⁶ in 1100 that King William Rufus was dead. Orderic had already described that news of the death of the king led to the “the passion of the unruly Normans [breaking] out in civil war.”³⁴⁷ Helias responded by taking charge of the city of Le Mans and besieging its citadel.³⁴⁸ According to the rumor formula, the sudden death of the king would be an important event (leading to the unexpected and speedy coronation of his brother, King Henry, and to attempts by other magnates to take advantage and seize power) and an ambiguous one (rumors would persist about whether William Rufus’ death in the middle of a forest was an accident or not), so it should be expected, according to Allport and Postman’s formula, that rumors of his death would be powerful. Orderic described this news as spreading rapidly and having a powerful effect on those who heard it. The situation was all the more tenuous as William Rufus left no male heir, which meant possible violence between William’s two brothers and their friends and vassals. As Orderic wrote, after William was shot while hunting, “many were thrown into great confusion, and terrible shouts that the king was dead rang

³⁴⁶ *EH*, Book X, 302-3, “*ut rumores quos optauerat audiuit.*”

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 300-1, “*turgentium furor Normannorum in sua uiscera excitatus est.*”

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

through the wood.”³⁴⁹ Notably, “The moment the king was dead many nobles made off from the wood to their estates, and prepared to resist the disorders they anticipated.”³⁵⁰ And indeed, the news and speculation spread so quickly that the king’s former friends and various lechers and harlots anxiously searched for the man who had fired the arrow that had killed William Rufus but he, anticipating the spread of rumors, had prudently fled to France. So there are examples in the *EH* that affirm the veracity of Allport and Postman’s formula, and affirm it has potential to tell us something about rumor transmission.

Orderic might also affirm the potential use of the formula that the power of a rumor will be determined by ~ importance x ambiguity in Book XII when he describes the build-up of hostilities and eventually open fighting between King Louis of France and Henry I in 1119. According to Orderic, the events were of great importance. King Louis visited Normandy with many knights and Henry, not knowing the king was in the vicinity, started out on campaign.³⁵¹ King Louis was anxious to meet Henry in open warfare, and in the ensuing battle at Brémule, nine hundred knights fought and the French were so soundly defeated that Louis was forced to flee the battle field. The events of the battle were of stunning importance, as Orderic wrote, “News of the disaster which the French had suffered in Normandy was spread far and wide and told in all the countries north of the Alps with sighs or smiles. . . different men told different lies to explain away their disgrace.”³⁵² The outcome of this battle was critical for Louis and Henry, and led to a spiral in Louis’ fortunes, for, as Orderic wrote, “So France, when the pride of her

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 290-1, “*horribilisque de nece principis clamor perstrepit in silua.*”

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 292-3, “*mortuo rege plures optimatum ad lares suos de saltu manicauerunt, et contra futuras motiones quas timebant res suas ordinauerunt.*”

³⁵¹ *EH*, Book XII, 234-5.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 242-3, “*Infortunium quod Gallis in Normannia contigerat longe lateque diulgatum est et per omnes prouincias cisalpes a lugentibus siue subsannantibus passim diffusum est. . . et diuersa diuersi ad excusationem sui dedecoris mendacia proferebant.*”

sons was dashed, sadly lamented as she pondered on the reverses she had recently suffered in Normandy, which were to prove harmful and to be deprecated by the generations to come.”³⁵³ So this is an important event. But how ambiguous was it? According to Orderic it was very ambiguous. King Louis complained about his inability to get reliable and accurate information to be able to meet Henry in open battle, and “not knowing how near the king was, he hurried towards Noyon with the flower of his chivalry, because he hoped to take the castle that same day by treason which had been planned.”³⁵⁴ So what was the result of the importance of the event x its ambiguity? “Then, as messengers ran to and fro and rumour-mongers spread reports everywhere, it became openly known that both kings had advanced with their forces and could join in battle immediately if they so wished.”³⁵⁵ So the importance of the event x its ambiguity led to some very powerful rumors, just as Allport and Postman’s formula predicts. These rumors were so powerful and widespread that they dictated the military strategy for a pivotal battle between Louis and Henry, and led the two kings inexorably toward each other.

Perhaps the most important aspect of rumor that talk studies scholars seek to understand is the meaning of rumors. Early forays into rumor research mainly focused on rumor as a dangerous form of unregulated talk that could do serious harm. Knapp wrote that rumors “impair[ed] public morale and confidence” and were “the deliberate weapon on enemy propaganda.”³⁵⁶ During wartime, he thought, rumors ought to be monitored and understood so that their “deadly uses” could be countered.³⁵⁷ Allport and Postman wrote that rumors naturally

³⁵³ Ibid., 248-9, “*Confracta itaque ceruicositate sobolis suae Gallia satis ingemuit recensitis euentibus damnosis suisque futuris generationibus exprobrandis quos nuper in Neustria pertulerit.*”

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 234-5, “*nesciens quippe regem tam uicinum esse, Nogionem cum insigni militia festinus adiit, quia castrum illud eodem die per prodicionem machinatam adipisci sperauit.*”

³⁵⁵ Ibid., “*Tunc palam auditum est nunciis intercurrentibus, rumigerulis famam passim spargentibus, quod ambo reges egressi essent cum suis coetibus, et si uellent iam ceratate possent comminus.*”

³⁵⁶ Knapp, 22.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 29.

alarmed “government officials and patriotic citizens” because they had the potential for “breeding defeatism, apathy, or internal disruption.”³⁵⁸ Allport and Postman included in an appendix to the *The Psychology of Rumor* standards for agencies who worked on the prevention “and control” of rumors during wartime, which included these “points of attack” on rumors: “rumor is untrustworthy,” rumors may come from the enemy, rumors are unpatriotic, the person who spreads them “is a foolish, malicious, or dangerous person,” and rumors usually blame innocent people.³⁵⁹ However this approach received some pushback by Terry Ann Knopf in “Beating the Rumors: An Evaluation of Rumor Control Centers,” who noted that, despite their popularity, the rumor control centers had an “extremely limited value,” mostly helping white people in America, not black people,³⁶⁰ and “tending to treat rumors not only as an isolated problem but as *the* problem, with rumor control as *the* solution” (emphasis in the original).³⁶¹ Knopf also notes that rumor centers will not be wholly successful because rumors are just “improvised news” that fills an “information gap”³⁶² and that ambiguity is not the only motive, but is complemented by the “hostile beliefs and perceptions.”³⁶³

Talk studies scholars often say that rumors are an effort after meaning, and that they serve to help people make sense of ambiguous situations. Some scholars, like Allport and Postman and Rosnow and Fine, emphasize that rumors meet specific emotional needs. Knapp also proposed that rumors had three basic characteristics: they were spread by word of mouth, they provided “information” of some sort, and that they satisfied the “emotional needs of the

³⁵⁸ Allport and Postman, 14.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 233-239.

³⁶⁰ Knopf posits the reason for this disparity as a result of many blacks identifying rumor control centers as part of the “white power structure,” p. 609. Terry Ann Knopf. “Beating the Rumors: An Evaluation of Rumor Control Centers.” *Policy Analysis* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1975), 559-612.

³⁶¹ Knopf, 607.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 609.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 610.

community.”³⁶⁴ Shibutani emphasized that they were a natural part of group problem-solving, and more ubiquitous than most people think, as “most of the decisions one makes in the course of each day are predicated upon unverified reports.”³⁶⁵ These unverified reports are just stigmatized as rumor, he says, when someone is suspicious of them.³⁶⁶

Allport and Postman further described motivational urges behind rumor production: anxiety was the reason for “macabre and threatening tales,” while hope was behind pipe-dream rumors, and hate was behind accusations and slander.³⁶⁷ As Allport and Postman saw it, rumors work to relieve “a primary emotional urge,” then to justify these feelings, and finally to explain why one feels this way.³⁶⁸ In essence, someone who spreads a rumor does not know he is “reflecting himself in the stories he spreads.”³⁶⁹ These categories were derived from the work of Robert H. Knapp, who was in charge of rumor control for the Massachusetts Committee of Public Safety, and published during WWII.³⁷⁰ Knapp described three types of rumors: pipe-dream or wish rumors, bogies or fear rumors, and wedge-driving rumors. The pipe-dream rumor expresses the wishes/hopes of those spreading it, while the bogie rumor reflects fear/anxiety, and wedge-driving rumors come from a place of aggression/hatred.³⁷¹ Knapp gathered many examples of rumors from September 1942, and did a quantitative analysis on the different types of rumors that were existent. He found that the majority (65.9%) were wedge-driving rumors,

³⁶⁴ Knapp, 23.

³⁶⁵ Shibutani, 94.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Allport & Postman, 36.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

³⁷⁰ Knapp, of course, approached the study of rumor as one who wished to extinguish it completely, writing at the end of his article, “If we are to survive the rumor virus, we will have to learn fast, even faster than we have. . . The danger of rumor will not be over when the shooting stops. . . Can we control the ravages of rumor? I think we can try,” 37.

³⁷¹ Knapp, 24.

ranging from anti-Semitic, anti-British, anti-Administration, “Anti-Negro,” anti-Army, anti-Red Cross, anti-Labor, and anti-Business.³⁷² Nicholas DiFonzo, in his book *The Watercooler Effect: A Psychologist Explores the Extraordinary Power of Rumors*, says that “in study after study, dread rumors outnumber wish rumors,” because “People are more likely to lose a sense of control and feel anxious when unable to alter the course of negative—as compared to positive—events that will affect them.”³⁷³

Bogies or fear rumors are the most common kind of rumors in the *EH*. In Book IV, Swein, the King of Denmark (d. 1074/6), in response to requests for help from some English magnates and a desire to fight for what he promoted as his right of inheritance in England³⁷⁴ sent a force of men to England, who were met and joined by English magnates desirous of rebellion against William I. Initially, William’s men suffered heavy losses, and the men of one garrison were all killed or captured. “News of their fate reached the king who had thought himself secure, and rumour exaggerated the fearful numbers of the enemy, who were said to be confidently awaiting battle with the king himself.”³⁷⁵ Orderic makes it clear what reached King William was both news and rumor. It was true that the garrison had been captured or killed, but the reports had not accurately described the size of the rebellious army. William hastily organized his forces to respond, but when he arrived most of the army had escaped. According to Allport and Postman, “everyone knows that rumors exaggerate” and the reason for this comes down to the

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁷³ Nicholas DiFonzo. *The Watercooler Effect: A Psychologist Explores the Extraordinary Power of Rumors* (New York: Avery, 2008), 90.

³⁷⁴ According to Orderic, Swein claimed his rights of inheritance through his uncle, King Edward the Confessor, and as the son of Hardacnut, but Chibnall notes that this is incorrect, and Swein’s claim to the throne derived solely from Cnut, not Edward. Book IV, 226-7.

³⁷⁵ *EH*, Book IV, 228-9, “*Securo regi casus suorum nunciatur, terribilitas hominum maior quam sit amplificante fama refertur et quod cum ipso dimicaturi confidenter praestolentur.*”

concept of “sharpening.”³⁷⁶ Sharpening is the idea that when a story is retold the tellers will bring out the “essence of a story” through “accentuation.”³⁷⁷ And “a common form of exaggeration is magnification of numbers,” therefore we should see this rumor as the expected outcome of an important, ambiguous event that produced uncertainty and terror in those who feared dangerous fighting and destruction of their property.³⁷⁸

Knapp proposed that “many rumors which on the superficial level exhibit wish or aggression, do seem motivated more deeply by fear” and that “Such rumors seem to be a *defense* against anxiety.”³⁷⁹ It is not hard to see that anxiety lay behind many of the rumors Orderic described. And, of course, the appearance of hostile armies would be a recurring fear during many of the years Orderic wrote about. When William I fought against the Danish/English alliance that sought to overthrow him, Orderic wrote, “In all these battles much blood had flowed on both sides, and combatants and non-combatants alike had been reduced to great wretchedness by the disturbances. Everywhere the law of God was broken . . . Masses of wretched people increased.”³⁸⁰ King William left after the bulk of the fighting, and left Robert, count of Mortain, and Robert count of Eu, to keep an eye on the Danes, who were hiding in the marshes. But when the Danes felt safe they came out to share the “feasts of the country people,” after which King

³⁷⁶ Allport and Postman, 149.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ In Allport and Postman’s experiments, they showed subjects detailed pictures, and asked the subjects to reproduce or describe the pictures. In one of the pictures, that of a group on a train, there appeared one African-American man. According to Allport and Postman, this one man was sometimes reported as “four” men (or the seven people on the subway as a large crowd of people), which Allport and Postman say was due to the African-American man’s “size and unusual appearance” (!). Although this is an artificial/unnatural laboratory experiment that does not observe rumors organically, if the hypothesis is correct, one could apply the principle to this incident in the *EH*, and say that because this Danish/English army was large and unusual, it is to be expected that its numbers were exaggerated. Allport and Postman, 91, 152.

³⁷⁹ Knapp, 31.

³⁸⁰ *EH*, Book IV, 228-230, “*In tot certaminibus sanguis utrinque multus effunditur et tam inermis quam armata plebs diuresis infortuniis hinc inde miserabiliter concutitur. Lex Dei passim uiolatur . . . Cedet miserorum multiplicatur.*”

William's two men attacked them at the tables and cut them down as the Danes attempted to return to their ships.³⁸¹ Naturally, these events that Orderic described reflect uncertainty in the population over whether or not the Danes would return and the fighting begin again. Orderic said, "*diuulgatur*"³⁸² that they would return to York for Christmas. People were fearful of the continuance of Danish invasions and other disruptions so it is not surprising that this was a time of panic and rumors, as people speculated about when the Danes would appear again and where. Once again, William responded decisively to the rumors of the Danes' whereabouts and he "hurried" from Nottingham and "he rejected all advice to turn back."³⁸³ In the subsequent hunt for the Danes, William "harried the land" and "burned homes to ashes."³⁸⁴ He also destroyed crops, animals, and other goods, terrifying the entire region and leaving its people suffering from severe famine.³⁸⁵ Orderic's narrative affirms the idea that many rumors are a product of underlying anxiety and fear.

There are also "wedge-driving" rumors in *EH*, which is the third category of rumors Knapp identified. For example, in Syria in 1100 the Turkish emir captured the Christian magnate Bohemond. When the Greek Emperor Alexius learned this he was "jubilant" and urged the emir to accept gifts and a large ransom in exchange for the Emperor taking charge of Bohemond's imprisonment.³⁸⁶ According to Orderic, keeping him imprisoned would be in revenge for Bohemond taking Antioch (although Orderic editorialized that the Turks had taken Antioch before). There had been significant disagreements between the Greeks and the Western

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 230-1, "*conuiuuiis prouincialium.*"

³⁸² Which Chibnall translates as "It was rumored abroad," 231.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, "*properans. . . . reditum suadentibus non adquiescit.*"

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, "*terras deustat . . . domos cum rebus omnibus concremat.*"

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁸⁶ *EH*, Book X, 354-5, "*gaudens.*"

Christians. The Bishop of Antioch, who was a Greek who “had refused to adapt himself to the victorious Normans,” which meant that he had resisted Norman attempts to change services to the Latin rites.³⁸⁷ According to Orderic, after Bohemond was captured a rumor (*murmur*) “spread among the people,” that the bishop was preparing to betray Antioch to the Emperor. When he learned that such a report was current against him he was furious.”³⁸⁸ Orderic speculated on the motives behind the Bishop’s anger and subsequent abandonment of his see and retreat to a monastery, saying that “whether outraged because of the purity of his clear conscience, or pricked by fear and the accusation of serious guilt I cannot say.”³⁸⁹ This damaging popular report about the bishop can be easily identified as a wedge-driving rumor. This rumor apparently ignited the already heated tension between the Greeks and the Latins and further worsened relations between the two groups. In addition, the rumor was powerful enough to cause the Bishop to flee, possibly out of fear that this rumor would be accepted as true by a competing group. The result of this rumor was positive for the Christians, as they were able to appoint a Norman bishop to the vacant see who would put in the place the changes to the rites that were desired.

Although some scholars, including Knapp, seem to see two functions of rumor as either a reflection of anxiety or a search for meaning, the two functions are not contradictory. Knapp wrote, “Behind most rumors lies an unstructured area which has been made conspicuous by the occurrence of some striking event.”³⁹⁰ Prashant Bordia and Nicholas DiFonzo analyzed examples of rumors on various Internet discussion board sites (such as that Michael Jordan was returning

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 356-7, “*qui uictoribus Normannis intractabilis erat.*”

³⁸⁸ Ibid, “*ortum est in populo quod ipse presul pararet urbem Antiochenam prodere augusto. Cumque idem comperisset de se tale murmur esse, iratus est ualde.*”

³⁸⁹ Ibid, “*nescio an puritate simplicis conscientiae indignatur, an nefarii reatus accusatione et metu stimulatus.*”

³⁹⁰ Knapp, 33.

to professional basketball).³⁹¹ This they called the Rumor Analysis Interaction System (RIAS). They claimed that of the 14 categories studied, “sensemaking statements accounted for the highest percentage of units” (with over 29% of the total).³⁹² DiFonzo also asserted in his book *The Watercooler Effect* that people use rumors to “try to regain a *feeling* of control” [emphasis in the original].³⁹³

Bordia and DiFonzo also noted the prevalence of what they called “prudent statements,” which were statements used to qualify the information presented in the spreading of rumors. Bordia and DiFonzo observed these statements as hesitant/tentative, and thought they could be viewed as “guarded attempts at avoiding responsibility for what is being said.”³⁹⁴ Bordia and DiFonzo also thought these prudent statements were an attempt to preserve one’s reputation, but as the rumor gained in strength/belief, the need for prudent statements decreased (but people expressed more prudent statements when relaying “dread” rumors rather than “wish” ones).³⁹⁵ The researchers concluded that their study showed the importance of rumors as instances of “problem-solving attempts.”³⁹⁶

Bordia and DiFonzo observed that “rumor transmission is not a passive retelling of a narrative. Instead, it is a rich conversation.”³⁹⁷ According to this theory, there would be no possibility of Orderic being a passive/disinterested observer of the events or rumor transmissions. At times Chibnall seems to argue for Orderic as taking this “observer” role. She uses words such as “was never as rigorously selective” or his role in “selection and

³⁹¹ Bordia and DiFonzo, 38.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹³ DiFonzo, 90.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁹⁷ Bordia and DiFonzo, 47.

interpretation.”³⁹⁸ He was also “credulous,” and “readily accepted the reports of men.”³⁹⁹ However, according to Bordia and DiFonzo, the idea that Orderic was a dispassionate contemporary observer of rumors is impossible, and Orderic was really a part of the entire process of sensemaking as he participated in rumor transmission by including rumors in his history.

And, of course, to Shibutani the notion of being simply a “recorder of rumor” would be ridiculous. Because rumor is “collective problem-solving,” Orderic’s participation in it only emphasizes the fact that he was trying to make sense of his world, and the often confusing and contradictory aspects of it. Orderic says as much when he wrote, “For such notable events should not be passed over in silence.”⁴⁰⁰ It was his job as a historian, with God’s help, to attempt as best he could to understand and make sense of important and ambiguous events. To Orderic, life was unpredictable and chaotic, and rumors were a part of the common need for clarity. He said in Book IV, that, “Just as the sea is never wholly still and safe . . . so this present age is continually troubled by changes and fluctuates ceaselessly through all the changing moods of joy or sorrow. . . . And when everyone strives to raise himself and become better than all his equals, he forgets justice and defies the law of God The old history books are full of stories that prove this, and in our own day it is shown by the many rumours that pass through towns and villages, bringing to some momentary joy, to others weeping and mourning.”⁴⁰¹ Again, although humans sought to understand life, it was unpredictable and changeable. The stories and rumors were part of the

³⁹⁸ *EH*, Vol. I, 90-1.

³⁹⁹ *EH*, Vol. 1, 91.

⁴⁰⁰ *EH*, Book IX, 118-9, “*Non enim sileri debet tanta res.*”

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 303-5, “*Sicut mare nunquam tutum certa soliditate quiescit . . . sic praesens saeculum uolubilitate sua iugiter uexatur, innumerisque modis tristibus seu laetis euidenter uariatur. . . . Et dum quisque superior esse emulumque suum proterere nititur, aequitatis immemor legem Dei transgreditur Hoc historicorum antiqui codices copiose referunt hoc moderni rumores per uicos et plateas indesinenter asserunt, unde quidam ad praesens laetantur alii nichilominus flent et contristantur.*”

fabric of life, expressing the joy and sorrow of the human condition, and affirming the troubles of the world and the all-encompassing necessity for God.

So interaction between talk studies theories about rumors and medieval sources, considering definitions, structure, and meanings, can be fruitful. However, using talk studies theories has its difficulties. Although Orderic uses variations of the word *rumor* in over fifty places, at times it is difficult to distinguish between what should be considered “rumor” and what should be considered “news.” However, doing a preliminary and partial quantitative analysis of the *EH* can help illuminate the subject. Orderic refers to rumors by name seven times in Volume II (Books III and IV). 3-4 of the 7 rumors reported Orderic saw as “true” or containing accurate information. Only 2 of the 7 rumors seem to have been reported as exaggerated, but with a base of truth. For the other 1 of 7 rumors it is not apparent if Orderic intended it to be seen as accurate or inaccurate. So the accuracy of the rumor is not enough to distinguish it from news. However, there are two characteristics seen frequently in the 7 rumors. The first is that each rumor has no specific name or originator attached to the story. There are no eyewitnesses reported. Rumors themselves are the source. Also, Orderic reported that 6 of the 7 rumors spread a good distance, to a wider geographic location. These characteristics are more striking if you compare the instances of rumor in Volume II with the two instances of *nuncium* (message or news). In both examples the informer or messenger is specifically named. Although this is preliminary data, it seems that Orderic saw stories spreading far and wide with no named or specific eyewitness or reporter as more like “rumors,” while he saw stories told by a named or specific eyewitness or reporter more like “news.”⁴⁰²

⁴⁰² Instances of *rumor* in Vol II: 144-5, 208-9, 304-5, 306-7, 322-3, 338-9, 348-9. Instances of *nuncium* in Vol II: 62-3, 218-9.

Before exploring the structure and meanings of gossip in the *EH*, it is necessary to define what gossip is, both semantically and structurally. First, there is the dictionary definition of the English word “gossip.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes how the word first referred to a sponsor or godparent. The *OED* cites a 1014 quotation from Wulfstan’s *Sermo ad Anglos*, “Godsibbas and godbearn to fela man, [etc].”⁴⁰³ According to the *OED*, it was not until centuries after Orderic (the first reference cited in *OED* is 1390) that the word began to be used mostly to refer to a woman, and then even later to a woman who “delights in idle talk” (1580 is an early quote) and later still to the actual conversation of a gossip, defined as “idle talk; trifling or groundless rumour; tittle-tattle. . . Easy, unrestrained talk.”⁴⁰⁴ To understand what a general audience today would probably see as gossip, there is the Wikipedia definition, which is: “idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others.”⁴⁰⁵

Orderic was Anglo-French, with an English mother and a French father and he spent his earliest years in England. However, he wrote his *EH* in Latin, so it is to Latin we must turn to understand any relevant vocabulary. Naturally, Orderic did not use the English word “gossip” in his *EH*. Instead, he used many different Latin words to refer to many different kinds of talk. The Latin word *Murmur* is used multiple times in the versions of the Bible Orderic would have read (Exodus 15:24, Exodus 16:2, Numbers 14:2, Numbers 14:36). In its Biblical contexts, it is usually used for the common talk of a group of people (the group as a whole is usually murmuring, with no indication of who was the original murmurer, although in Numbers 14:36 we know who started the murmuring), with connotations of complaining, insubordination, and

⁴⁰³ “gossip, n.” Oxford English Dictionary Online. Accessed December 31, 2014.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Wikipedia contributors, “Gossip.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gossip> (Accessed September 26, 2016).

slander. God called those who murmured an “evil congregation” (Numbers 14:27) but sometimes God acquiesced to the murmurs and gave the children of Israel what they asked for (Exodus 16:8). Murmuring is something usually done by those in opposition to God’s will, indicating that it is a kind of unregulated talk that is impermissible. In the New Testament, there are also many examples of murmuring as rumor and murmurs as *fama* construction. Some people murmured about Jesus that he was a good man, and others said he was a deceiver (John 7:12), and murmurs spread just like rumors, with the Pharisees, who “heard that the people murmured such things concerning [Jesus]” (John 7:32). The word translated as murmur encompasses both the concepts of rumor and gossip, so it is best to analyze the examples structurally, but it was a kind of unregulated, loose talk that people ought not to engage in.

Another word, one that Marjorie Chibnall translated as “talkative” or “garrulous,” (*loquax*) had negative connotations in Roman sources, in the vein of someone who is “prating, chattering.”⁴⁰⁶ Robert Curthose was described as *loquax*, in Orderic’s assessment of his character: “He was talkative and extravagant, reckless, very courageous in battle, a powerful and sure archer with a clear, cheerful voice and a fluent tongue. Round-faced, short and stout, he was commonly nicknamed ‘fat-legs’ and ‘curt-hose.’”⁴⁰⁷ In Orderic’s assessment of his character everything is a little out of control and wild: legs, courage, tongue. Mabel of Belleme (a powerful threat to Saint-Évroul) is described as “a forceful and worldly woman, cunning, garrulous, and extremely cruel.”⁴⁰⁸ Being *loquax* was not a positive trait because it was talking

⁴⁰⁶ Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1879.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dloquax> Accessed 10 February 2015.

⁴⁰⁷ *EH*, Book IV, 356-7, “*loquax et prodigus, audax et in armis probissimus, fortis certusque sagittarius, uoce clara et libera, lingua diserta, facie obesa, corpore pingui breuique statura.*”

⁴⁰⁸ *EH*, Book III, 48-9, “*potens et saecularis, callida et loquax nimiumque crudelis.*”

for its own sake, not the same thing, as Orderic amply described, as delivering pious words of reproof or inculcating moral lessons, or any of the other positive aspects of appropriate talk Orderic referred to. Moreover, both people who only said flattering, positive things (*asseclas*),⁴⁰⁹ like Robert Curthose's entourage, and people who said untrue, malicious things were sharply criticized by Orderic.

So there are insurmountable problems with using just the dictionary definitions for gossip, instead of structural ones, when analyzing Orderic's work. Although the word gossip today refers to both the action and the person, in Orderic's day the English word would have referred primarily to the person. Also, the person referred to was a godparent, and not necessarily even one concerned with "gossip" (as in, talk about the personal or private lives of others) in the twelfth century. So looking for Orderic to identify as a gossip or any of his writings as gossip would not make sense. Another problem is that when you talk about gossip today, the meaning of the word is bound up with connotations of idleness, pettiness, and unimportance. As Orderic was writing a serious work that he considered to be deeply important, only looking at the dictionary definition for gossip would obscure its role in his text. And of course, now that the dictionary definition has evolved to connote women and a kind of talk primarily engaged in by women, the idea that a serious male monk would have engaged in it is jarring to modern sensibilities. However, that is why it is so important to look at the structural definitions of gossip when analyzing Orderic's work, because these lead to much more satisfying and meaningful conclusions.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 359.

The 1971 collection *Gifts and Poison* underscores the inability of dictionary definitions to lead to a full understanding of gossip. In the French village of Valloire, there were⁴¹⁰ two different phrases used for men's and women's talk. When men sit around talking, it was called "*bavarder*," "a friendly, sociable, light-hearted, good-natured, altruistic exchange of news," but when women talk they were expected to be engaging in "*mauvaise langue*," that is to say, "gossip, malice, 'character assassination.'"⁴¹¹ So only going by the dictionary definitions (and what the subjects themselves believe they are doing) would lead to an incomplete understanding of the role of a certain kind of talk in their village, whereas if what both the men and women are doing is analyzed structurally, it is clear that they are both engaging in what we would term gossip and further analysis can be performed concerning why the two kinds of talk are so structurally similar yet have such different cultural connotations.

After discussing the inability of dictionary definitions to lead to a complete understanding of gossip, the next step is to consider the structure of gossip and structural definitions. These definitions have primarily been put forth by anthropologists and sociologists, with later assists and contributions from literary scholars, philosophers, and historians. While there is not perfect agreement on structural definitions of gossip in the talk studies field, there is limited agreement, and this agreement leads to a definition that is concrete, yet flexible enough to accommodate the same kind of talk that appears in all cultures, despite time, place, and language.

The anthropologist Gluckman (1963) wrote that gossip was "not idle," and it was a kind of talk "enjoyed by people about others with whom they are in a close social relationship."⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Maybe "are."

⁴¹¹ Bailey, 1

⁴¹² Gluckman. "Gossip and Scandal," p. 312-3.

The anthropologist Paine (1967) defined gossip as “1. talk of personalities *and* their involvement in events in the community, and 2. talk that draws out other persons to talk in this way.”⁴¹³ The literary scholar Spacks (1985) defined gossip as “talk about one or more absent figures; always such talk occurs in a relatively small group”; she also sees gossip as residing on a spectrum, with intimate on one end and malicious on the other.⁴¹⁴ The sociologist Bergmann (1993) argued that gossip is contextual, and that calling “news about the personal affairs of another” gossip depended on the context of the news and the “relational configuration of those who disseminate it, perceive it, and are affected by it.”⁴¹⁵ The philosopher Aaron Ben-Ze’ev (1994) called gossip an “idle, relaxing activity whose value lies in the activity itself and not the achievement of external ends,” is not “highly sophisticated, profound, and serious issues,” and generally not harmful, malicious, or false.⁴¹⁶ Taylor (1994) defined gossip as a form of talk “between two or more people about the private life of another, behind her back.”⁴¹⁷ The anthropologist Besnier (2009) identified it as “the negatively evaluative and morally laden verbal exchange concerning the conduct of absent third parties, involving a bounded group of persons in a private setting.”⁴¹⁸ Kartzow (2009) argued that “many scholars agree” that “gossip is evaluative talk about third parties who are known but not present.”⁴¹⁹

There are certain similarities in most of these definitions. The first is that gossip is about *people*. It is between and among people and it is about people who are not present. Secondly, it is

⁴¹³ Paine, “What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis,” p. 283.

⁴¹⁴ Spacks, 4.

⁴¹⁵ Bergmann, 45, 48. The example given is of neighbors and friends talking about an affair (which he considers gossip) versus a wronged husband talking about the affair of his wife with his lawyer (which he does not consider gossip).

⁴¹⁶ Ben-Ze-’ev. “The Vindication of Gossip,” *Good Gossip*, 11-24.

⁴¹⁷ Taylor. “Gossip as Moral Talk,” *Good Gossip*, 34-46.

⁴¹⁸ Besnier, 13.

⁴¹⁹ Kartzow, 41.

about something somewhat personal or private, as otherwise the gossipers could talk about the subject in front of the gossiped-about. The third similarity is that there is an element of evaluation in the conversation, otherwise it would fall under the structural heading of news. Other aspects of definitions involve a more subjective analysis on the part of the scholar, and thus are not as universally applicable. For example, to call gossip “idle” belies its anthropological function in social groups and condescends to the content of conversations.⁴²⁰ In other words, what the anthropologist may see as “idle” may not be what the participants view as “idle.” The same is true for the “sophisticated” and “profound” parts of definitions, which are both patronizing and subjective methods of determining the importance of a particular kind of talk. Therefore, what remains from different definitions of gossip is that gossip is evaluative talk amongst two or more people about commonly-known persons who are not present.

Although Kartzow’s definition is understandable, and flexible enough to be applied cross-culturally, it is necessary to have a slightly modified understanding when analyzing Orderic Vitalis. For example, while anthropologists generally are able to observe gossip happening in real-time, and have the ability to record and transcribe the conversations, medieval historians do not. So we cannot see exactly who and how many people Orderic is gossiping with. Although we know some of the people who were in his social network and the people it is likely he heard certain stories from, we obviously do not have transcripts. So it seems sensible to talk particularly about stories where the parties probably had a certain expectation of “privacy,” or at least the desire that this information not be made completely public (this would allow the stories

⁴²⁰ It is particularly important to avoid judgment-laden analysis of gossip in light of some of the earliest works that mentioned the phenomenon. For example, Max Gluckman, in “Gossip and Scandal,” quoted Paul Radin’s 1927 *Primitive Man as a Philosopher*, in which Radin wrote, “primitive people are indeed the most persistent and inveterate of gossips.” (qtd in Gluckman, 307).

to fit neatly under Bergmann's "gossip is an indiscreet discretion" idea). Of course, in the process of constructing *fama*, both "public" and "private" actions would have been considered, so there is not a perfect boundary between the kinds of talk that made up *fama*. Nevertheless, my definition: "evaluative talk about third part(ies), particularly their 'private' deeds" is a workable gossip definition to use when studying Orderic. It is as close as possible to a generally accepted summation of gossip researchers, yet it is accepting of the fact that we are looking at written documents of Orderic's. Whether evaluative talk is present in a story or not is easily discernable. Also, from the way Orderic frames the stories (and especially how he sometimes frames them with vague antecedents) it is clear that the examples of gossip are not related by the participants themselves.

After arriving at a working definition and accepting that it can usefully be applied to Orderic's work, the next step is understanding the meaning of gossip and the role that it plays in social groups. Many scholars are divided on the issue of the structural role of gossip. Early examples of scholarly disagreement on this issue are in the works of Max Gluckman and Robert Paine. In 1963, Gluckman used Elizabeth Colson's work on the Makah Indians⁴²¹ to support his idea about the beneficial role gossip plays in social groups.⁴²² Gluckman wrote that, despite popular opinion of gossip and scandal as improper or wrong, the two forms of talk had "important positive virtues."⁴²³ He said, "Clearly they maintain the unity, morals[,] and values of social groups."⁴²⁴ Gossip was also a way for the group to control its own members. Amongst the

⁴²¹ He also used other previous anthropological works that apparently only touched on gossip briefly and not systematically, in addition to selections from Jane Austen's *Emma*.

⁴²² Gluckman has a long list of other publications, including an earlier book on Africa, which shows his first thoughts on gossip: "The conflicts in wider ranges compensate one another to produce social cohesion." Max Gluckman. *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 48.

⁴²³ Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," 308.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

Makah, an Indian group in the Pacific Northwest of America, gossip is a “criticism and assessment of people against the traditional values of Makah society.”⁴²⁵ Only a Makah (not other Indian groups and not white people) can understand the group’s gossip and scandal and respond in kind. Thus gossip unifies a group by asserting its values.⁴²⁶ Gluckman concluded that because a person only gossips about another person he or she is socially connected to, “gossip is a duty of membership [in a group] . . . it is good manners to gossip and scandalize about your dearest friends with those who belong [to the same social group].”⁴²⁷

In 1967, Robert Paine challenged Gluckman’s view that gossip has a unifying effect in social groups. Paine argued that this structuralist interpretation was insufficient to account for the individual motivations for gossiping.⁴²⁸ Paine called the connection between gossip and communication “information management,” and said that gossip was “a device intended to forward and protect individual interests.”⁴²⁹ He was dissatisfied with Gluckman’s structural analysis, because it focused on the community at the expense of the individual.⁴³⁰ Rather, Paine says, what an individual gossips about are “his own and others’ aspirations, and only indirectly the values of the community.”⁴³¹ Paine prefers to analyze the “purposive” aspects of gossip, rather than the unconscious ones. He reminded his readers that every social group has within it its own “interest-based quasi-groups.”⁴³² Gossip is a social process, and can have unifying or dividing effects, depending on the group/person and situation. Paine concluded that “gossip is a

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 311.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 313.

⁴²⁷ Gluckman. “Gossip and Scandal,” 313.

⁴²⁸ Paine. “What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis,” 278-285.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 278.

⁴³⁰ Paine does Gluckman’s argument a disservice, though, by presenting it as though Gluckman thinks individuals are *consciously* promoting group unity, when this is not Gluckman’s major argument at all.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 281. Of course, gossiping about one’s own aspirations and that of others will naturally reflect the values of the community, even if it is “unconscious.”

⁴³² Ibid., 282.

powerful social instrument for any person who learns to manage it and can thereby direct or canalise its catalytic effect.”⁴³³ The debate raged on, with Gluckman later taking Paine to task for asserting that the “individual” and not “the community” gossips, saying, “we see a number of individuals (two or more) involved in certain groups or networks of social relationships who gossip—not one individual.”⁴³⁴

The first approach to use with the *EH* is Gluckman’s interpretation of gossip. Gluckman’s interpretation is useful as a way to understand what social mores Orderic Vitalis (and twelfth century Anglo-Norman monks, and monks of Saint-Évroul, etc.) would have been guided by. In Book IV, Orderic recorded many deeds of William and the Normans, as they conquered England and as they engaged in the long process of subduing the land. Orderic related (summarizing, in part, earlier annals) the moral problems that had plagued the English since the time of the Danish invasions. If, he wrote, “rulers with power to enforce law are removed appalling acts and shocking desecrations are committed.”⁴³⁵ The Danish invasions had “inclined both sexes to every kind of lust.”⁴³⁶ The English became a people of “shallowness and flabbiness” and there was not much difference in behavior between the clergy and laity.⁴³⁷ Monks of the period did not take their vows, eschew private property, or wear a habit.⁴³⁸ This gossip demonstrates Orderic’s opinion of proper monastic behavior and his enthusiasm for the kind of strong leadership that could prevent a country from sinking into degeneracy. According to Orderic, by “the governance of King William this order was brought back to a regular way of life and salubrious customs, so

⁴³³ Ibid., 283.

⁴³⁴ Max Gluckman. “Psychological, Sociological and Anthropological Explanations of Witchcraft and Gossip: A Clarification.” *Man* 3, no. 1 (March 1968), 29.

⁴³⁵ *EH*, Book IV, 246-7, “*subtractis rectoribus cum uirga disciplinae per infandos actus abominabilia facta sunt.*”

⁴³⁶ Ibid, “*utrunque sexum ad omnem lasciuam inclinauerat.*”

⁴³⁷ Ibid, “*leuitas et mollicies gentis.*”

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 248-9.

that it once again deserved respect.⁴³⁹ This view of events was also a way for Orderic to manage his beliefs about the Norman Conquest. Instead of it being an unremitting tragedy, it was assimilated into his worldview as a meaningful event that led to a return to the religious and spiritual propriety that was more pleasing to God. The gossip about the shallow, lustful, gluttonous English actually worked to connect Orderic closer to his fellow French monks of Saint-Évroul and the reigning kings and the lineage of William the Conqueror. The idea of English decadence could maintain the support of the monastic orders for the righteousness of the Norman Conquest. The gossip Orderic knew about Hugh of Avranches, a fighter for William I, also reflected societal norms of behavior. Hugh was a very fat man who was “given over to carnal lusts,” and had many children with his concubines.⁴⁴⁰ The fatness indicated his sloth (a vice Orderic was particularly zealous against) and gluttony, and his inability to control his urges with food or sex. Hugh transgressed the societal norms against this kind of behavior, as the gossip about him shows.

Thus, using talk studies theories to understand the definitions and structure of gossip in medieval documents is useful. Gluckman’s approach is also beneficial and fruitful. Showing how examples of gossip in medieval documents reflect medieval social and religious mores is an important area of consideration. However, for a more actor-oriented approach to medieval sources, Robert Paine’s ideas of information management are able to clearly and effectively show the individual use medieval people made of rumor and gossip and the intimate workings of *fama*.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, “*His itaque ordo Guillelmi regis instinctu ad instituta regularia corrigebatur, ad ac consuetudines beatificas perductus ulade honorabatur.*”

⁴⁴⁰ EH, Book IV, “*Carnalibus lenociniis immoderate inherebat,*” 262-3.

Chapter Four: Orderic, *Fama*, and Reputation Management in the Ecclesiastical History

While the functionalist explanation for gossip propounded by Gluckman and others is illuminating, as Paine wrote, to focus on the “purposive behaviour”⁴⁴¹ and active engagement of historical actors in gossip (and rumor) is to focus on the use of gossip and rumor as information management. Paine hypothesized that gossipers “gossip, and also regulate their gossip, to forward and protect their individual interests.”⁴⁴² Gossip, he said, is a “powerful social instrument for any person who learns to manage it and can thereby direct or canalise its catalytic effect.”⁴⁴³ The process of information management can be seen clearly in the medieval preoccupation with *fama* and its maintenance. While everyone in the medieval period was concerned about managing *fama*, Orderic Vitalis was particularly masterful at the creation and manipulation of *fama*. Many examples from the *EH* demonstrate the overwhelming conclusion that a person’s success and power in medieval society was a direct result of the effectiveness of his or her information management. Because using gossip and rumor in information management was so necessary, there are many different ways to categorize different examples of it, but three major areas of information management in the *EH* are management of the *fama* of secular figures, of religious men and women, of Saint-Évroul, and of God.

Fama is a word that refers to a complex, essential, and ever-present medieval social reality. The Lewis and Short’s dictionary of medieval Latin defines *fama* first as “the talk of the multitude, like rumor,” and “that which people say . . . the common talk” and second as “public

⁴⁴¹ Paine, 282.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 283.

opinion. . .the fame, character, reputation which a man has.”⁴⁴⁴ The concept of *fama* is bigger than the concept of gossip, particularly because to academics rumor is considered structurally separate from gossip. However, it is clear that gossip was one element in the construction of *fama*. During the medieval period, people were very conscious of the importance of *fama*. *Fama* was not a fixed state, but a continual process of communal construction of reputation. Hearing, understanding, and sharing gossip was the way that medieval people managed their own reputations and investigated those of their neighbors. Good *fama* was necessary economically, politically, and socially, while bad *fama* was harmful.

Fama in its medieval contexts, as explained by Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail in their 2003 edited collection of articles entitled *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, was used frequently in “recorded proceedings of medieval Roman-canon law courts.”⁴⁴⁵ Witnesses were asked “*Quid est fama?*” (“What is *fama*”?) to determine if they understood the word's meaning. The witness would respond something like, “It's the things people say” or it's “when good or ill is commonly said among people about any person.”⁴⁴⁶ Witnesses were also asked who made *fama*, and how many people it took to make *fama*. They did not believe that only one person could make *fama*, and the number it took to construct reputations ranged in the given answers from a few people to three or four, to thirty or forty or more.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, talk among people outside the courts made up or contributed to the *fama* that was used in courts.⁴⁴⁸ Medieval people were “intensely aware of public scrutiny,” and they

⁴⁴⁴ Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879).
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dfama> Accessed 26 January 2015.

⁴⁴⁵ Fenster, Thelma and Daniel Lord Smail, Eds. *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

understood that managing a good reputation meant “careful attention to speech, behavior, demeanor, and action.”⁴⁴⁹ Medieval people understood that all their actions would be continually “discussed and evaluated” and that was what led to a public understanding of their *fama*.⁴⁵⁰

The first category of information and reputation management is the *fama* of secular figures. When, in 1077/8 (and Book V of the *EH*), Countess Mabel was killed by Hugh de Ialgeio, William of Pantulf came under suspicion for her death and his rivals charged him with treason. Orderic wrote, “a suspicion arose that she had perished by his scheming” because of the “bitter animosity” between them over the stronghold of Peray, which Mabel had seized.⁴⁵¹ After this charge of treason, Earl Roger, William’s lord, seized William’s lands and called for his death. But William and his family took refuge at Saint-Évroul and pled their innocence. Although there was no “certain proof of his guilt,” his enemies ignored his claims of innocence and desire to purge himself according to the law.⁴⁵² Finally, after a decree from the king’s court (argued, no doubt, by William’s friends or associates) William took the ordeal of the hot iron “in front of the clergy.”⁴⁵³ It was successful. As Orderic wrote, “by the will of God [his hand] remained unscorched.”⁴⁵⁴ While the clergy and “*tota plebe*”⁴⁵⁵ praised God for this unambiguous adjudication of the dispute, William’s enemies were disappointed, as they, “eager for his blood, stood looking on ready armed, so that if the accused were found guilty by the ordeal of fire they might forthwith punish him by cutting off his guilty head.”⁴⁵⁶ And so the accusation failed to

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *EH*, Book V, 160-1, “*vnde suspicabatur quod predicti militis consilio perierit. . . pertinax maliuolentia.*”

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, “*certis indiciis.*”

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, “*in presential cleri.*”

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 163, “*Deique nutu [manu] non adustus apparuit.*”

⁴⁵⁵ The distinction that the clergy AND the common people both praised God for William Pantulf’s innocence isn’t clear in Chibnall’s translation.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, “*armati aderant ad spectaculum, ut si reus deprehenderetur per ignis iudicium, continuo reatus amputato rei capite puniretur per gladium.*”

bring down William Pantulf. Although William Pantulf was a particular friend of Saint-Évroul, giving them altar frontals, relics, and the tithes of villages around Drayton, England, the competing attempts at information management can be seen in this story. William of Pantulf's enemies were eager to capitalize on Mabel's death by spreading the story that William had hired or conspired with Hugh to kill her, and anxious to prevent any legal proceedings that would prove William's innocence. This attempt at information management was nearly successful, as without the intervention of the king William's lands would probably have been unrecoverable and his person in danger. However, William's information management was more effective. He succeeded in getting special permission to take the iron and his alliance with Saint-Évroul provided him with powerful friends.⁴⁵⁷ A rumor about a secret act (the conspiracy to commit murder) was rebutted by the very public act of taking the iron. The idea of the necessity for public action to counteract or clarify gossip or rumors in a community about a private action was an information management technique seen frequently in the *EH*.

In Book XI, as Orderic recorded the history of St. Évroul and its neighbors in Normandy, Orderic transcribed the epitaph of Walter Giffard, earl of Buckingham, whose body was brought back to Longueville, in Normandy. About his widow Agnes, Orderic wrote, "This lady, burning with a woman's lust, fell in love with Duke Robert and bound him to herself in the artful snares of illicit passion. She promised that both she and her powerful kinsfolk would give him strong support against all his enemies, and in this way soon persuaded the poor fool to agree that when his wife died he would marry her and hand over the whole of Normandy to her control. Not long

⁴⁵⁷ St.-Evroul gave William "all the help they could both spiritually and in the conduct of his case" (ibid). Did the monks of St.-Evroul help administer the ordeal of the hot iron? The help provided in ensuring that William's outcome was successful may be one reason he later showered them with gifts. Of course, naturally the comfort the monks provided during the harried and fearsome time of his flight would have probably led to a lifetime of affection towards the monastery.

afterwards poison was administered to the countess Sibyl,⁴⁵⁸ who took to her bed and died during Lent amidst general mourning.⁴⁵⁹ After the commission of this deed, wars broke out in Normandy. Duke Robert was thus too busy on campaign to marry Agnes, and she was left “longing in vain to climb into the ducal bed.”⁴⁶⁰ This scandalous and titillating story, recorded without explicitly naming his informants, was one piece of Orderic’s characterization of Robert Curthose. Orderic’s information management emphasized the good deeds of Agnes’ former husband Walter Giffard (as described on his epitaph) and Sibyl’s beauty, generosity of spirit, and chastity. Agnes was subject to the alleged innate weakness of women, and Orderic’s account reflected on Robert that he not only committed adultery and became ensnared by this woman, but invited (whether consciously or not) the death of his own wife by his foolish promises to his lover. This picture of Robert that emerges is that of a weak ruler who is enfeebled by the wrong sort of woman. Also, the epitaphs performed as a concrete, relatively durable sort of information management. Epitaphs were carefully written to emphasize the appropriate virtues, and solidify the *fama* of those who had passed on.

In Book XII, Orderic wrote that the townspeople of the town of Alençon rebelled against Henry I in 1118. According to Orderic, Henry’s nephew, Stephen, count of Mortain, did not respect or “love” the town burgesses and, believing them to be disloyal to himself and to King Henry, he “oppressed them with burdens and unaccustomed exactions.”⁴⁶¹ Eventually Stephen forced the burgesses to give him hostages to ensure their loyalty. But Stephen “did not treat them

⁴⁵⁸ William of Malmesbury wrote that Sibyl died of an infection, 38.

⁴⁵⁹ *EH*, Book XI, 38-9. “*Haec feminea cupiditate nimis accensa Rodbertum ducem adamavit, ipsumque insidiosis retibus amoris illicite sibimet illexit. Multa ei per se et per potentes cognatos suos contra omnes inimicos adiumenta promisit, quibus cito socordem ad consensum pertraxit, ut dum sua coniunx obiret prefatam mulierem sibi copularet, totamque Normanniam ad regendum ei committeret. Non multo post Sibilla comitissa ueneno infecta in lectum decidit et quadragesimali tempore multis eam plangentibus obit.*”

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-1, “*uidua permanens frustra concupiuit principalem thorum ascendere.*”

⁴⁶¹ *EH*, Book XII, 206-7, “*iniuriis eos et insulitis exactionibus opprimebat.*”

honourably” and put the noble-born wife of one of the burgesses in a tower “in the hands of debauched guards.”⁴⁶² Enraged, the woman’s husband and other wronged husbands conspired together with Robert of Belleme’s brother, Arnulf of Montgomery, to ask Count Fulk of Anjou to take possession of the town. So Count Fulk came to Alençon to take possession of the castle, and besieged those loyal to Stephen and King Henry. Although Henry brought “great forces” to try to rescue his besieged vassals, Fulk’s forces thoroughly routed them and broke the siege by tunneling underground and cutting through the pipes, which destroyed their water supply. Alençon surrendered to Fulk shortly thereafter. Orderic employed multiple, often overlapping, attempts at information management in his account here. The first element is the deployment of intimate, personal information by the “rebel” conspirators. The story of the sexual assaults of the wives of the burgesses was used in order to justify the actions of the conspirators and their decision to deal with Fulk of Anjou. Although Henry was often extremely effective at information management, Orderic does not include any successful rebuttals of the conspirators’ version of events. However, Henry’s reception of the news of the rebellion shows his thirst for rumors and news, and the role of “rumor certifier” every ruler was required to fill.⁴⁶³ Orderic wrote, “Rumour, than which nothing on earth travels faster, spread news of this event far and wide, and it soon came to the ears of the king, who was always alert to the needs of the realm.”⁴⁶⁴ Orderic supported Henry, primarily Henry’s role as keeper of the peace and promoter of order, but he struggled at managing the events of the rebellion. He blamed Henry’s nephew, Stephen, instead of Henry himself, for the treatment of the burgesses and their wives, while other

⁴⁶² Ibid. “*honorifice non tractavit. . . in turrim custodiendam posuit, quae lenonibus. . . ibidem commissa uehementer ingemuit.*” Whitaker translates *lenonibus* as “brothel-keeper” or “pimp.”

⁴⁶³ Ibid, “*certos rumores agnuit.*”

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, “*Quod fama qua nil in terra uelocius mouetur longe lateque diulgauit, et protinus ad aures solliciti regis de regni curis peruenit.*”

medieval sources, like the *Gesta consulum andegavorum* blamed Henry directly. Orderic was revolted by the actions of Stephen's men, and did not hide his information about the sexual assaults on the women, but he was also worried about the outbreaks of violence that followed Henry's defeat on the battlefield. His version of the account indicated his concern that the stability of Henry's strong rule prevail, but he also reported the events without excusing the violations against the women.

An example of information management of the *fama* of secular people that is largely "behind the scenes" and oblique is in Book III. In 1064 Walter, count of Pontoise and William of Normandy both claimed Maine. Walter, as a nephew of Edward the Confessor, was a potential claimant to the English throne.⁴⁶⁵ Walter and William were engaged in a back-and-forth battle for Maine, with neither gaining the upper hand, until, as Orderic reported, "Count Walter and his wife Biota both died at the same time poisoned—so the rumor goes—by the evil machinations of their enemies."⁴⁶⁶ These deaths improved William I's fortunes, allowing him military efficiency and leading to the submission of Le Mans.⁴⁶⁷ It was after this event that Geoffrey of Mayenne began to plot against William I. Orderic's weaponization of an unsubstantiated rumor to accuse Walter's "enemies" of murder shows his interest in active *fama* construction. At the time of its initial dispersal, the rumor of poisoning might have functioned against William I (or potentially, other, less powerful, of Walter's enemies). Or perhaps factions against William I might have used an ambiguous event to try to discredit him. Either way, Orderic's use of a rumor to explain

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁶⁶ *EH*, Book III, 118-9, "*praedictus comes Walterius et Biota coniunx eius per inimicorum machinamenta simul ut ferunt, letali ueneno fraudulenter infecti obierunt.*"

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the events of history indicated the depth of his ability to create *fama* that benefited his friends and patrons at the expense of their/his political opponents.

The second category of information management examined in the *EH* is that of religious men/women. In Book V, Orderic shared some well-informed gossip about Bishop Gilbert of Lisieux, whose *fama* Orderic was very familiar with because Gilbert had ordained him as a sub-deacon. According to Orderic, in a description of the bishop's character, Gilbert was a man who "enjoyed an abundance of wealth and luxuries, but was a slave to his own desires and to bodily ease. He was a great lover of leisure and repose, and continually indulged in every kind of dice game. Casual and negligent in his worship, he was a tireless devotee of hunting and hawking."⁴⁶⁸ This is a good example of reputation management that showed Orderic's concern with the proper department of the religious hierarchy and his concern with the importance of the *EH* as a teaching tool. Orderic wanted a correct and fair summary of Bishop Gilbert's *fama*, so he also included Gilbert's generosity, hospitality, and wisdom. However, the information about Gilbert was managed to clearly display Orderic's views on the impropriety of Gilbert's secular behavior and general lack of interest in deeper spiritual matters. Orderic wrote obliquely, "I could say more about his habits; but I restrain my pen, for I cannot forget that it was he who ordained me sub-deacon, together with (as far as I recall) rather more than three hundred others."⁴⁶⁹ A

⁴⁶⁸ *EH*, Book V, 20-1, "*propriae uoluptati et carnis curae nimis seruiebat. Ocio et quieti affatim studebat ludisque alearum et tesserarum plerunque indulgebat. In cultu aecclesiastico erat piger et negligens sed ad uenatum auiumque capturam promptus et nimis feruens.*"

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, "*Plura de actibus eius scribere possum sed reprimo calamum, quia ab ipso ad subdiaconatus gradum cum aliis ut opinor plus quam trecentis promotes sum.*"

⁴⁷⁰ Why doesn't Orderic go into more details about the "habits" of Gilbert? There are a couple of possible reasons. The assurance of the writer that there is even *more* information that there is no space to tell was a common rhetorical device in the period, but that is not Orderic's stated reason for refraining. According to him, it is out of respect of their connection that he doesn't divulge any more details. This would accord very well with Bergmann's theory of gossip as a discreet indiscretion, making these habits of Gilbert's an indiscretion Orderic felt it was unnecessary to describe further, considering the nature of their relationship and the lesser degree of intimacy he presumably had with the monastic (or other) audience for the *EH*.

consummate master of the techniques of information management! Bishop Gilbert's deportment both shocks us with the potential for even more degraded behavior and shows Orderic as someone who is prudent enough not to share all the intimate, personal misdeeds that he knows. Orderic managed information about Bishop Gilbert by telling the audience he was even worse than the previous complaints, and affirms that Orderic is a reliable source for this information by establishing his *bona fides* as a discreet man.

Another aspect of information management was selected gossip as evidence of supernatural prophetic abilities. This function is closely tied to the spread of gossip as a tool for reproof and correction. Orderic once traveled to Crowland Abbey (located in Lincolnshire, England) and composed a *vita* of their patron Waltheof (executed by William I for treason) and summarized a *vita* of the eighth-century hermit St. Guthlac.⁴⁷¹ Guthlac was gifted with the ability to know the secret deeds of others, even their secret desires. For example, one time he asked the clerk who was shaving him why he planned to kill him. Another time, Guthlac told an abbot who was visiting for some "holy discourse" of "all the details of the behaviour of two clerks, who had gone to a widow's house for a drinking bout before the third hour."⁴⁷² This was not just the briefest mention of private improprieties but "all the details" of this behavior. Is there any suggestion in Orderic's text that this gossip is anything like the kind of talk (murmurs, slander) that Orderic spoke strongly against in other passages? No, and for the same reasons we have seen repeatedly 1.) Guthlac was a holy man⁴⁷³ 2.) what he said was true and 3.) the talk demonstrated Guthlac's prophetic gifts and gave the abbot a tool for correcting the wayward clerks. Who was

⁴⁷¹ Orderic politely refers to the original author's book as "lengthy" and "somewhat obscure in style," Book IV, 323.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 330-1, "*piae locutionis. . . de duobus clericis qui ad casam uiduae ante horam terciam pro appetenda ebrietate diuertissent, cuncta per ordinem intimat.*"

⁴⁷³ According to Orderic, in his own day Guthlac had "*magnae famae,*" 340.

Guthlac's initial gossip partner? According to the revered hermit, it was from an angel who visited him every morning and evening to "converse with me for my consolation and reveal mysteries that no man may tell."⁴⁷⁴ Guthlac managed his own *fama* by selectively choosing which pieces of gossip to reveal and how to reveal it, and to Orderic, sharing this particular gossip was a primary method of emphasizing Guthlac's attention to the proper reproof and care for souls that befitted a saint.

The third category of information management in the *EH* is the reputation of Orderic's home, Saint-Évroul. Saint-Évroul was home and workplace to Orderic, and he loved it very much. But even a respected institution like Saint-Évroul needed careful attention to information management to keep its good reputation. Orderic wrote in his concern that his home keep the properties she considered her own, "So it came about⁴⁷⁵ that as the monastery of Saint-Évroul was rising as a shining example of good works in the sight of God and men, certain infamous men began to find various pretexts to attack it."⁴⁷⁶ These attacks needed effective information management as a defense and counterattack. In Book III, Mabel, wife of Roger of Montgomery and mother of Robert of Belleme, hated the family of Giroie (founders of Saint-Évroul) so much that she "devised nefarious ways of injuring the monks."⁴⁷⁷ One of her strategies was to come and visit the monastery with a huge number of knights (one hundred at one time), expecting lavish hospitality, "in this way she brought the monks, who were struggling to wring a living from the barren soil, to the verge of ruin."⁴⁷⁸ So Abbot Thierry took her to task for the burden of

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 334-5, "*michi misteria quae non licet homini narrare monstrabat.*"

⁴⁷⁵ Possibly referring to events taking place in 1057-1065, *EH* Book III, 55.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 52-3, "*Sic quidam infandi homines dum Vticensis aecclesia consurgeret, et in bonis operibus aucta coram Deo et hominibus effulgeret, coeperunt uarias simultatum causas contra ipsam colligere.*"

⁴⁷⁷ *EH*, Book III, 54-5, "*plures molestias nequiter excogitatas eidem loco inferebat.*"

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., "*sicque monachos qui paupertate in sterili rure affligebantur grauabat.*"

hospitality she put on the monastery and warned her to “restrain her vanity.”⁴⁷⁹ Mabel angrily refused and threatened to come with even more knights, to which the abbot warned her that she had better stop or she would be sorry. And indeed “For the very next night she fell sick and suffered great agony.”⁴⁸⁰ She at once fled the monastery, and she stopped at the home of a certain townsman and “compelled his infant child” to suck her nipple⁴⁸¹ on the side where she was in the most pain. The unfortunate infant died, but Mabel lived and avoided the monks in future. This is some triumphant information management for the Saint-Évroul monks! The threats and potential financial ruin of the powerful Mabel were countered effectively by the hand of God and the warnings of the servant of God, Abbot Thierry.⁴⁸² Again, there are multiple aspects of reputation management at work here. Orderic hoped to instill or further a belief in the hearers that Saint-Évroul was “a shining example of good works in the sight of God and men.”⁴⁸³ Those who tried to attack this monastery would face retribution from the “*flagello Dei*.”⁴⁸⁴ This story worked to manage the information available with a goal of presenting the *fama* of Saint-Évroul as beloved of God. The strategic deployment of the gossip about Mabel breastfeeding a peasant baby was likely another way to emphasize her bad character; since medieval people believed that infants took on the characteristics of those from whom they breastfed, the death of

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, “*stulticia se coherceret.*”

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, “*At illa mox inde sese iussit efferi.*”

⁴⁸¹ Chibnall wrote in a footnote that she found G.H. White’s suggestion that Abbot Thierry had tried to poison Mabel “incredible,” but does not give an alternate explanation. She believes the story is so “distorted by wishful thinking” it is difficult to know what to believe about it. But the story has a definite biological/medical explanation. This incident occurred before 1057, and Mabel was married 3-7 years before. In her lifetime she had 10 children. It sounds like mastitis to me, both in regards to the specific area of the ailment and what treatment worked to relieve it.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 52-3, “*et in bonis operibus aucta coram Deo et hominibus effulgeret.*”

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 55. Chibnall translates this more gently as “hand of God,” but its primary meanings are whip, lash, and scourge.

the infant after imbibing of Mabel indicated that her wicked, hostile, cruel nature manifested itself in her poisonous fluids.

In Book III, Orderic recorded another incident that happened in the monastery under Abbot Thierry. At one time a “*presbyter Anseredus nomine*” became very ill and he asked those in Saint-Évroul to make him a monk of St. Benedict.⁴⁸⁵ However, after recovering, he “returned as far as possible to the lax habits of his life as a secular priest.”⁴⁸⁶ Abbot Thierry knew that Ansered hated life under the monastic rule at Saint-Évroul (Ansered had even asked his parents to rescue him from Saint-Évroul) and so Thierry gave permission to Ansered to leave the monastery. “Ansered, heaping sin on sin, kept company with a common woman, and not content with her made love to another called [Pomula], with whom he agreed to go to the shrine of St. Gilles. In this way he hoped to keep his passion for her from his family and friends.”⁴⁸⁷ But his traveling plans were waylaid when [Pomula], on the road with a group of pilgrims, “unknown to him, broke her word and consorted with another clerk.”⁴⁸⁸ When [Pomula] failed to make the assignation, Ansered lied to his companions and went looking for her. And there found Pomula and her lover in bed together. “She at once gave warning of his coming to her lover, and he, snatching up an axe, struck Ansered on the head and laid him dead on the floor.”⁴⁸⁹ This man then put Ansered in a sack and buried him in the ground where he stayed until wild animals dug him up and the “*foetor*” led to his discovery.

⁴⁸⁵ *EH*, Book III, 44-5.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, “*illam leuitatem quam in saeculari conuersatione agitauerat in quantum poterat resumebat.*”

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, “*Qui peccatis suis peccata accumulans, cuidam mulierculae seipsum copulauit. Sed cum illa non ei sufficeret alteram uocabulo Pomula in amorem sui ascuit, pactumque ut secum ad sanctum Egidium ilam deduceret cum ea fecit. Volebat enim parentibus et amicis suis incognitum esse, quod eam diligeret.*”

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, “*At illa ipso ignorante ab hac pactione resiluit, et alteri cleric se sociauit.*”

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, “*At illa statim dilectori suo aduentum illius intimaui. Qui secure manu arrepta in capite illum percussit, et exanimem reddidit.*”

This incident shows that one story can affect the information management of multiple entities: Saint-Évroul, Abbot Thierry and God. Orderic was ever-concerned with the *fama* of Saint-Évroul, and wrote many times how news of the monastery spread far beyond its own boundaries. The sordid and sensational end of Ansered had the potential to damage Saint-Évroul's reputation in the community, which could affect the amount of donations, gifts, and acolytes the monastery received. But a careful presentation of the facts, Orderic believed, would show that Saint-Évroul was blameless in this incident. Orderic anticipated some dissent in his information management, perhaps an objection to the dead Ansered being characterized as a "Benedictine monk of Saint-Évroul." Orderic made it clear that Ansered had no true commitment to following the Rule and was only at Saint-Évroul for fear of his illness. Abbot Thierry, several lines earlier, was described as a leader who "fervently upheld religious discipline."⁴⁹⁰ He saw the danger that Ansered posed to the monastic community, and let him leave. The following sordid events proved that Abbot Thierry was right to regard Ansered as a tare among the wheat. Abbot Thierry's *fama* was quite contested (some monks "slander[ed]" him as unfit to rule),⁴⁹¹ so there was a specific and pressing need for management of his reputation. Also, according to Orderic the event burnished God's reputation. Not only was he the harvester who took care of the tare, but Ansered's death showed the worthlessness of a life lived outside the will of God. This man "who chose rather to return to worldly vanity than to seek the way to heaven among the servants of God!"⁴⁹² had an end that was the natural result of succumbing to sin. Instead of Abbot Thierry being criticized for harboring a priest of vile habits, Orderic made it clear that Thierry made a decision to allow him to leave based on sound Biblical and monastic principles. He does not

⁴⁹⁰ *EH*, Book III, 42-3, "*monasticae religioni feruenter insistebat.*"

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 52-3, "*Haec itaque et his similia quidam superbi dicebant, et seruo Dei plures iniurias inferebant.*"

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 46-7, "*quam inter seruos Dei uitam ducere, per quam ad coeleste regnum posset conscendere.*"

seem “self-conscious” or embarrassed about the titillating details of this story, because the story is instrumental in modeling proper moral behavior and the dangers of immoral behavior. If it was necessary, as Orderic wrote, for “*Sicut bonis ualde displicet uita malorum,*”⁴⁹³ then sometimes their deeds must be told accurately to be condemned. Orderic’s characterization of the story was a careful attempt to manage the information about Ansered’s life and death in such a way that Saint-Évroul was not blamed, and that the wisdom of Thierry and the justice of God were emphasized instead.

Finally, the fourth category of information management in the *EH* is that of God. Of course, while Orderic had a deep and abiding concern for the maintenance and management of the *fama* of Saint-Évroul and all its monks, he is even more concerned for the maintenance and management of the *fama* of God. As mentioned previously, one major reason Orderic included the contents of gossip in his *EH* was because he knew that common knowledge and stories about people was one way that their *fama* was debated and decided. Orderic was aware that reputation management was a continual process, which is why he takes such care to work his craft. Orderic could also be aware that the contents of some of the stories he told could fall within the categories of scurrilous talk or improper talk, which is why he sometimes refrained from telling particular details or distances himself from the story or underscores the fact that he does not know (or is unwilling to tell) the source of the story. However, Orderic believed that as a historian telling the truth, no matter if it was messy or unpleasant, was important. It was part of his duty as a historian. Also, he thought that he had a responsibility to posterity, in particular, future young novice monks who were one of his frequently envisioned audiences for his books. These listeners, he thought, would benefit from the moral lessons that could be learned from the

⁴⁹³ *EH*, Book III, 53.

many stories, even though their contents often described immoral or personal deeds. What was important was what these stories taught. This brings the conversation back to God's *fama*.

Although, while naturally the stories of Saint-Évroul and the recording of the gifts, patrons, and lands of Saint-Évroul might have been the initial impetus for writing, according to Orderic his primary purpose was to demonstrate the power and glory of God. At the end of Book VI, Orderic said that he wrote to prevent people spreading bad *fama* (blasphemy) about God: "For the human race is continually instructed by the putting down of the proud and the exaltation of the lowly, the damnation of sinners and the salvation of the just, so that it may not be made blasphemous by the terrible enemy of God, but may always fear the judgment and love the rule of God."⁴⁹⁴ To prevent the spread of bad *fama*, Orderic explained, in this *EH* he told of both the bad and the good in the world, and how the proud are put down and the lowly exalted, which should have expressed to the hearer (or reader) that the "Omnipotent Creator, who first made the world, likewise wonderfully guides its course."⁴⁹⁵ Looking at the *EH* with this in mind, it is clear that Orderic saw the *fama* of God as still a contested issue, and that it was necessary for a pious historian to support it beyond reproach. There were many dangers to the good *fama* of God: the spread of Islam, pagans, and wicked and impious people. There were still those, according to Orderic, who might be influenced by these dangers to God's *fama*, and it was this incorrect view he worked against.

Thorough management of the *fama* of God and the *fama* of other people also worked closely with Orderic's desire to tell stories that would provide his hearers with morally relevant

⁴⁹⁴ *EH*, Book VI, 360-1. "Nam deiectione sullimium, et exaltatione humilium, damnatione reproborum, et saluatione iustorum, incessanter eruditer genus humanum ne per execrabilem theomachiam fiat prophanum, sed ut diuinum semper metuat iudicium et diligit imperium."

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, "Cunctipotens creator ut ab inicio cepit sic mire disponit cursus saeculorum."

lessons. For example, in Book XIII, when the Angevins, led by Geoffrey of Anjou, entered Normandy, they “made themselves hated” because of their looting, plundering, burning, and particular atrocities against priests.⁴⁹⁶ Orderic portrayed the Norman response as thoroughly justified; he wrote, “They perpetrated many unspeakable crimes and deservedly suffered the same atrocities in their turn.”⁴⁹⁷ The Angevins had even dared to attack some who were in churches or ringing the church bells. The men that the Angevins had brought to Normandy were inadequately supervised by the magnates, who lacked discipline. The atrocities “sullied” the reputations of the magnates and “by every kind of wickedness” they “appeared loathsome” to God and man.⁴⁹⁸ In this story, God is not a disinterested observer, but almost a participant in the process of reputation construction. If he, like the people who heard the news about the rapacious Angevins, understood enough of their brutality, their *fama* would be deemed “*abominabiles*” to God, too. While on campaign, the Angevins carted away lots of stolen meat from the Normans, which they ate “*crudas*”⁴⁹⁹ (emphasizing their savagery). Eating so much raw meat after “desecrating consecrated buildings” by “God’s just judgment” their armies were devastated by diarrhea as they attempted to “drag” themselves home, leaving “a trail of filth behind.”⁵⁰⁰ Not only did this judgment solidify the righteous justice of God, but it also affirmed the superiority of the Norman people and the care that God took to defend them. The story also taught the moral lesson that people who would seek “earthly joys” and “worldly honor” would be subject to God’s judgment and leave them as “cautionary tales” to others.⁵⁰¹ In this story, Orderic’s moral

⁴⁹⁶ *EH*, Book XIII, 470-1, “*odiumque perenne.*”

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, “*Innumera mala inedicibiliter operati sunt, meritoque nichilominus similia perpassi sunt.*”

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 472-3, “*sordebant. . . per omne nefas. . . apparebant abominabiles. . . Deoque et hominibus.*”

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, “*contaminationem sacrorum eduliis intemperanter usi sunt. . . iusto Dei iudicio. . . foeda uestigia obiter.*”

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 466-7, “*Secularia gaudia. . . Mundanus honor. . . concinnae . . . narrationes.*”

lesson (do not hope for earthly glory, but fix your hearts on heavenly glory)⁵⁰² is supported by his depiction of the wicked Angevins, beleaguered but courageous Normans, and just God. The selection of this story as information management of God's character was a careful one; it was chosen because it clearly emphasized both the care of God for his people and who his people were.

There is no finer extended case study of gossip and *fama* and information management in the *EH* than Henry I's use and construction of his own and his brother Robert Curthose's *fama* before, during, and after Henry's successful seizure of his brother's lands in Normandy between 1100 and 1106. The idea of *fama*, both bad and good, and the talk that constructed it, is suffused throughout these episodes in Normandy. Orderic was able to effectively portray Robert as a weak, lazy, ineffective, and even harmful ruler, and used Robert's *fama* to justify Henry's military actions. Orderic's portrayal of these episodes in his history also demonstrates his opinion that talk was powerful, and a powerful and effective ruler would be aware of and able to manage the talk in his lands (and his own *fama*).

First, a note about how a few previous historians have treated Henry I's concern with his reputation. C. Warren Hollister, in *Monarchy, Magnates and Institutions in the Anglo-Norman World*, devotes a chapter to discussing Henry I's mutilations. According to Hollister, Henry I was anointed as God's regent and as such it was his duty to harshly and justly punish evildoers to "protect the weak."⁵⁰³ Moreover, continued Hollister, everybody else was doing it, including many other magnates and rulers in the medieval period. In 1977 Pakistan reintroduced cutting off

⁵⁰² The idea that everyone will have a heavenly *fama*, as well as an earthly one, is intriguing. While *fama* was important in the earthly life, particularly in a practical sense, it was of paramount importance that your *fama* reflected a primary concern with heavenly matters and a projected heavenly good name.

⁵⁰³ C. Warren Hollister. *Monarchy, Magnates, and Institutions in the Anglo-Norman World* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1986), 293.

hands as a punishment. Hollister also quoted many medieval churchmen who spoke very approvingly of whipping, mutilating, castrating, and killing evildoers. Therefore, concluded Hollister, Henry I's mutilations could reveal nothing about his character, merely that he was a typical medieval ruler. Indeed, "clerical writers accepted without question both the practice of royal mutilations and their necessity."⁵⁰⁴ Hollister even posits that Orderic invented a speech delivered by Henry I in defense of mutilating three captives to "make clear to his readers that Henry's treatment of the three offenders was beyond reproach."⁵⁰⁵ But this argument is not wholly convincing. Hollister does not mention the incident in which Henry I, angered at his son-in-law Eustace of Breteuil's mistreatment of hostages, hands over his own granddaughters to Ralph Harenc who, with the king's explicit permission, blinds them and cuts off part of their noses.⁵⁰⁶ Hollister might say this incident displayed Henry I's fervor for equal treatment, but it can hardly be said to exemplify a king's duty as regent of God to protect the weak. Hollister sees Henry I's behavior as typical of a magnate of that age and not a "morbid dislike of personal affronts,"⁵⁰⁷ but it seems more likely it was part of Henry I's atypically intelligent and successful ability to manage his own reputation. Instead of a "morbid dislike of personal affronts," which insinuates some sort of unusual psychological condition, Henry I had a zealous concern for any personal slights that would negatively affect his *fama*/public reputation. In this concern, Henry was not unusual, he was simply unusually good at translating this zealous concern into an effective public reputation, particularly for a man who began his reign under dubious legality.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁵⁰⁶ Found in *EH*, Book XII, 212-3. Orderic seems to blame the "king's severity" for this mutilation and expressed sadness for the suffering of the children.

⁵⁰⁷ Hollister, 299.

Judith Green's impressive *The Government of England Under Henry I* misses one of the most important elements that made Henry I a good king and ensured effective governance: his gossip network and information management skills. In this introduction, she explains many things that Henry I did to maintain his reputation without describing the process as information management: cutting his hair and the hair of his magnates, his religious patronage,⁵⁰⁸ marriage to Matilda, treatment of his brother Robert Curthose, and military campaigns.⁵⁰⁹ Viewing Henry's actions as motivated at least in part by information management gives a more satisfying and unified understanding of his kingly and administrative strategy. She does refer to his understanding of the "propaganda value" of wearing his crown,⁵¹⁰ which is a step towards understanding his reputation construction but puts an unnecessarily pejorative connotation on the natural human process of information management. C. Warren Hollister's *Henry I* also has a different approach to Henry's information management. Hollister wrote extensively of Henry's interpersonal abilities, referencing his "web of loyalties with the families of western Normandy . . . a friendship network that endured for the remaining forty-seven years of his life."⁵¹¹ He referred to Henry's "barrage of propaganda" and "royal propaganda" that accompanied his military maneuvering against his brother in Normandy.⁵¹² Hollister spoke approvingly of Henry's "skillful diplomacy."⁵¹³ The addition of information management as a framework for understanding Henry's actions leads to a more sophisticated picture of his tactics and strategies. Also, analysis of a "gossip network" instead of a "friendship network" benefits from robust

⁵⁰⁸ Although Henry I was aware of the benefit to his reputation through religious patronage this should not be construed to mean his religious patronage was insincere.

⁵⁰⁹ Judith A. Green. *The Government of England Under Henry I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4-18.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵¹¹ C. Warren Hollister. *Henry I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 57.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

theories that can more sharply identify the mechanisms of Henry's information gathering.

Viewing what Henry did as the kind of information management and reputation management scholars say everyone engages in can eliminate some of the negative connotations derived from considering his strategies as solely propagandistic.

Orderic and St.-Évroul were no friends of Robert Curthose and Orderic reported much gossip that would have contributed to Robert's bad *fama* in Normandy. Orderic preferred a lawful, peaceful, orderly Normandy, led by a duke who was strong enough to keep the peace and generous to monasteries like Saint-Évroul. Orderic had a certain partiality for Henry I, although he was by no means blind to his faults. Orderic wrote that during the reign of Henry "The realm of England lay basking in the glow of peace and the Church of God, enjoying a long period of calm, showed forth the divine law gloriously and, being secure, served God untroubled by the din of battle."⁵¹⁴ He also praised Henry for the increase in the religious orders, beautiful new monasteries, and thoughtful church appointments.⁵¹⁵ In fact, Henry had even visited Saint-Évroul. Orderic recorded that in 1113 Henry came "accompanied by a great number of his magnates, and there celebrated the feast of Candlemas with great affability."⁵¹⁶ After "a thorough examination of their establishment," he "note[d] the regularity of their monastic life" and "humbly asked to be admitted to their fraternity," whereupon he signed a charter of protection for the possessions of Saint-Évroul and left them with gifts of salted hog and wheat.⁵¹⁷ While everything Orderic wrote about Henry was not a paean of praise (he wrote that Henry "gave way

⁵¹⁴ *EH*, Book X, 320-1. "*Totius Albionis regnum tranquillitate pacis tripudians siluit, es aecclesia Dei diuturna quiete uigens diuina lege splenduit, Deoque secura sine praeliorum tumultu militauit.*"

⁵¹⁵ *EH*, Book X, 295-7.

⁵¹⁶ *EH*, Book XI, 174-5, "*procerum multitudine suorum stipatus Vticum uenit, ibique purificationem sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae cum magna hilaritate celebrauit. . . perspecta religionis moderatione illos laudauit. . . societatem eorum humiliter requisit et receipt.*"

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

too easily to the sin of lust; from boyhood to old age he was sinfully enslaved by this vice, and had many sons and daughters by his mistresses”⁵¹⁸) on the whole Orderic believed that as a historian he was uniquely qualified to declare in dactylic verses that “He was, I dare assert, the best of men/As all his noble acts clearly proclaim.”⁵¹⁹ Indeed, Saint-Évroul had a mutually beneficial arrangement with Henry I, but had never maintained a relationship like that with Robert Curthose when he was Duke of Normandy.

Gossip and rumor were used to construct *fama* before, during, and after Henry's seizure of Normandy. Henry visited Normandy in 1104 and met with his brother Robert Curthose, the Duke of Normandy. During this conference, Orderic portrays Henry as attempting to define his brother's *fama* by summarizing what was commonly believed about him. Robert, Henry alleged, had broken a previous treaty between the brothers by making peace with Robert of Belleme and giving him his family lands back.⁵²⁰ Henry alleged that Robert Curthose was “sunk in lethargy” and that in his sloth he had allowed all kinds of “shameless scoundrels” to take charge of Normandy.⁵²¹ Moreover, Robert Curthose did not properly execute his duties as duke, instead abnegating them to the “*parasitis*” he surrounded himself with.⁵²² Perhaps Robert's worst crime, according to Orderic, was his inability or unwillingness to protect the church. Henry's interpretation of Robert's lack of ability as king was so powerful and dangerous that Robert “feared that he might be exposed in a public trial” and made to relinquish Normandy,” so he conceded the lands and dependents of William, count of Evreux, to Henry.⁵²³ According to

⁵¹⁸ *EH*, Book XI, 98-9, “*a puericia usque ad senectutem huic uitio culpabiliter subiacuit et filios ac filias ex pelicibus plures genuit.*”

⁵¹⁹ *EH*, Book XIII, 452-3, “*Vt reor e cunctis fuit is melioribus unus/Hoc attestantur speciales illius actus.*”

⁵²⁰ *EH*, Book XII, 57.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 58-9, “*Metuebant . . . ne manifesto examine deprehenderetur.*”

Orderic's version of events, Robert did not deny his bad *fama*, which probably indicates that Henry's understanding of Robert coincided with what many other powerful people in Normandy were saying. It also shows that Robert was not able to effectively manage his own *fama* and was not able to contradict Henry's version of his character with a rival "common knowledge." Henry had a close social network of magnates in Normandy. When he visited in 1104 "He was honorably received by his magnates and entertained in royal fashion with lavish gifts."⁵²⁴ These magnates in his social network would have been in a position to supply Henry with the gossip, rumor, and common knowledge of Robert's reputation in Normandy.

But this agreement between the brothers did not keep the peace in Normandy. When some of Robert's partisans captured one of Henry's partisans, in 1105 Henry once again journeyed to Normandy. This time, Serlo, bishop of Seez, declared his loyalty to Henry and told Henry and a group of his magnates that Normandy was "without a true ruler."⁵²⁵ He asked Henry to take his sword and "Rise up boldly in the name of God . . . rescue your ancestral land and the people of God from the hands of reprobates."⁵²⁶ The bishop's reason was common knowledge of the harm Robert was doing to the land. Robert, he alleged, was not a proper ruler of Normandy, instead of governing he was "sunk in lethargy" and wasted his money on "trifles and follies" instead of bread.⁵²⁷ The bishop displayed a knowledge of some of the intimate, personal details of Robert's life, information that must have been passed through what we would structurally identify as gossip channels. The bishop reported to Henry that Robert often couldn't attend church or leave his bed. Instead, he lay naked because the jesters and "*meretrices*" (harlots) in

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 56-7, "*A proceribus suis honorifice susceptus est. et copiosis muneribus regio ritu honoratus est.*"

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 62-3, "*rectore caret idoneo.*"

⁵²⁶ Ibid., "*Haud segnīs in nomine Domini exurge, paternam haereditatem iusticiae gladio tibi nanciscere, et de manu pessimorum auitam possessionem populum-que Dei erue.*"

⁵²⁷ Ibid., "*sed segnicie torpet. . . nugis et uanitibus.*"

his company stole his clothes at night while he slept in a drunken stupor.⁵²⁸ Orderic reported that hearing this gossip affected Henry, who said, “*In nomine Domini pro pace ad labortem exurgam.*”⁵²⁹ He “yielded” to the urging of the magnates to take up arms against the “despoilers of the people.”⁵³⁰ Here, the primary public justification for taking military action against Robert, the Duke of Normandy, was the presentation of gossip and common knowledge amongst the magnates about Robert's character. Robert's *fama* was lazy, immoral, and that he was dangerous to the church, and this reputation provided a justification for what might otherwise be characterized as treason. During this meeting Henry demonstrated his own ability to manage his *fama*. The bishop referenced the importance of maintaining one's public *fama*, and he described his opinion of long beards and hair on men, which he said made them look like goats, whose behaviors were imitated by “*fornicarii et catamitae*” (fornicators and sodomites).⁵³¹ Bishop Serlo acidly editorialized that men now kept their beards long to prevent chafing their mistresses and it made them look like Saracens. After this speech an “elated” Henry and his magnates agreed to hair-cuts, as the “*alacer*” bishop (“ready for action”), who knew how to strike when the iron was hot, immediately brought out scissors and cut everyone's hair himself.⁵³² With this action, Henry solidified his alliance with the bishop and continued to build his own good *fama*, as more obedient to episcopal authority than his brother, and the more pious alternative to Robert.

Orderic described Henry's claims in Normandy as a defense against the “heritage of his fathers, which was being trodden underfoot by traitors and brigands and rascals.”⁵³³ Henry

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 64-5, “*deuoratores populi.*”

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid., 66-7.

⁵³³ Ibid., 78-9, “*paternam hereditatem quam periuri et raptores ac nebulones conculcabant uendicare satigit.*”

entered Normandy with a superior force of mounted knights, and ready for siege warfare. When certain “men of religion” tried to make peace between the brothers, Henry defended his military intentions once again using *fama* as a weapon and Robert's bad *fama* as his justification. He sent a message to his brother, saying, “The truth is that you occupy the land like a barren tree, and offer no fruit of justice to our Creator.”⁵³⁴ He went on to say, “You are a duke in name alone, openly mocked by your own servants, incapable of avenging the insult implicit in their scorn.”⁵³⁵ Once again Henry defined Robert as unable to perform the expected roles of a duke and used his gossip network and knowledge of local gossip (knowing what Robert's servants said about him) in the explanation of his intentions. Before demanding that Robert relinquish the castles of Normandy, Robert’s judicial and administrative power over Normandy, and half of the duchy, Henry defined his own *fama* as a counter to Robert's. Henry was motivated by “*bona uoluntate*”⁵³⁶ and, while he himself would work to “lawfully hold in check the brutality of would-be oppressors,” Robert would be allowed to “enjoy feasts and games and all kinds of amusement in comfort.”⁵³⁷ This offer, for Henry to shoulder the burden of administration, while Robert would take a substantial income decrease but be able to live in leisure, was insufficient to avoid open warfare, but it surely would have impressed on Robert and his counselors that genius of Henry’s information management. Robert’s own mismanagement of his own public *fama* had given Henry an opening to give his power grab the legitimacy it needed. Whether or not Henry

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 86-7, “*Tu enim terram ut arbor infructuosa occupas, nullumque iusticiae fructum Creatori nostro sacrificas.*”

⁵³⁵ Ibid, “*Dux quidem nomine tenus uocaris, sed a clientibus tuis palam subsannaris, nec tui contemptus iniurias ulcisceris.*”

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid, “*Dapibus et ludis et cunctis postea seures oblectamentis frui.*”

was really sharing “words of peace,” as he claimed, they were words that showed Robert that Henry was serious about his intentions towards Normandy.⁵³⁸

After Henry and his forces defeated and imprisoned Robert, he blamed his bad *fama* on listening to the wrong sort of talk, saying, “Treacherous Normans deceived me by their lies and persuaded me to reject your counsels, my brother, which would have been my salvation if only I had followed them.”⁵³⁹ So, according to Orderic’s account, listening talk of the wrong sort had caused the rift between the two brothers. Henry’s successful military actions only increased the quality of his reputation with many people. “All pious men were overjoyed when they heard the news of the king’s victory.”⁵⁴⁰ This representation is another clever piece of information management, on the part of Henry and/or Orderic: to portray those who rejoiced to see Henry take his brother’s lands away as the pious ones, while those who might object to a brother seizing the patrimony of his elder brother are lumped in with the “outlaws” and “evil-doers.”⁵⁴¹ Orderic does not even acknowledge that Henry’s good *fama* is contested by Robert’s partisans or those not favorable to Henry. He wrote that the evil-doers “acknowledged his greatness” and escaped into hiding when they heard Henry had defeated Robert.⁵⁴²

Henry, meanwhile, was “welcomed by the citizens” of Rouen (another successful management of his *fama*), and he later held a council in October with the Norman magnates

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 88. Orderic portrayed the speech of Robert’s counselors as “*contumacibus dictis*,” in opposition to Henry’s words, which were “*sermonibus pacis*.” This is another example of how Orderic distinguished between good and bad kinds of speech by the character of those who uttered it and the purpose of the utterance. However, Chibnall translated *contumacibus* as “seditious” (instead of a possible translation as stubborn/obstinate/unyielding), which is a little confusing because seditious usually has the connotations of rebellion against the government, so, really, if anyone’s speech was technically, sedition, it should have been Henry’s, since he was the one gearing up to oust the rightful proprietor of Normandy from his lands.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 90-1, “*Proditores Normanni fraudulentis suis me seduxerunt, et a consiliis tuis frater mi quae uere michi salubria fuissent si sectatus ea fuisset me subtraxerunt.*”

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 92-3, “*Auditur rumoribus de uictoria regis religiosi quique letati sunt.*”

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 92-3.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

there.⁵⁴³ In it, he laid out his plan for administering Normandy, and, according to Orderic, listened to “*sapientum*.”⁵⁴⁴ Again, Henry's ability to manage talk is contrasted with his brother's. While Robert could not distinguish between good and bad counsel, Henry listened to good counsel. Later, Robert of Belleme tried to convince his lord Count Helias to see Henry's *fama* in a more negative light, indicating that, despite what Orderic said, Henry's *fama* was continuing to be constructed and contested. Robert of Belleme asked Count Helias for help, “The world is upside down. A younger brother has rebelled against an elder. . . He has robbed him of his ancestral inheritance and, as a perjured vassal, has taken his lord's rights into his own hand.”⁵⁴⁵ This attempt to portray Henry as a rebellious robber seizing Robert Curthose's lands illegally and without justification, contrasts sharply with Henry's own interpretation of himself as a pious soldier taking over administration of Normandy with the persecution of the church as justification for his actions. This interchange indicates there were divergent presentations of Henry's *fama* and his actions in Normandy. Helias did not encourage Robert of Belleme and his offer of the resources of 34 castles from which to attack Henry. Helias countered with another interpretation of Henry's *fama*, saying, “he is wise, powerful, and wealthy”. . .if he fought against Robert, it was out of “the most urgent necessity” and because of the “prayers of churchmen” who were being “wretchedly oppressed” by evil-doers.⁵⁴⁶ After articulating this alternate version of Henry's *fama*, Helias moved on to contrast it to Robert Curthose's *fama*, which was as bad and scandalous as ever. Robert had “succumbed to sloth and idleness” . . . and ever since his return to

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., “*Quia in mundo nimia rerum preualet confusio . . . Ecce iunior frater in maiorem surrexit. . . Auitam quoque illi hereditatem abstulit, sicque periurus domini sui iura sibimet subiecit.*”

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 97, “*Nam sensu et potentia diuitiisque preditus est. . . maxima necessitas compulit. . . supplicatio religiosorum. . . conculcabantur.*”

Normandy his laziness had allowed the country to be “ravaged by. . . arson and plunder”⁵⁴⁷ This awful pillaging and raping of the land made God very angry and Henry’s victory was an instrument of God’s judgment. Helias refused to intervene in any attempt to get Robert’s lands back for fear of offending God, who was Henry’s protector.”⁵⁴⁸ And so Henry’s management of his own *fama* drove and aided his seizure of Normandy. According to Orderic, Henry’s actions in Normandy were a deliberate attempt at reputation management to justify what would otherwise be a naked power grab with the superiority of his *fama* over that of his brother. And it was successful. Henry could win any number of decisive battles but it was his reputation management skills that ultimately consolidated his power in Normandy.

Orderic was aware of the power of words, and the necessity of distinguishing good words from bad and punishing those whose speech was dangerous. Moreover, Orderic saw knowledge of the gossip, rumor, and news in the kingdom as part of a king's maintenance of his power. When Orderic analyzed Henry, he included Henry's prowess over talk. Henry, Orderic said, was “a diligent investigator, he inquired into everything” . . . he wanted to know everything that was happening with his officials and had an ear constantly to the ground in England and Normandy. . . . “He was thoroughly familiar with all secrets and things done surreptitiously, so that their perpetrators could not imagine how the king could be aware of their most secret plots.”⁵⁴⁹ This interpretation of Henry shows Orderic's understanding of the importance of talk. An effective king, one concerned with his realm, would care about what was happening in his kingdom and what people were saying about it. Henry did not passively wait for news to come to him; rather, he actively “inquired” about information. His ability to get information included, as previously

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, “*torpori et ignaviae nimis subiacuit. . . incendiis et rapinis. . . uexata est.*”

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 1001, “*Curiosus perscrutator omnia inuestigabat . . . Abdita quaeque et quae latenter agebantur penoscebat attonitis eorum auctoribus quomodo rex indaginem archanorum nouerat.*”

stated, a wide-ranging gossip network. Orderic did not condemn this; instead, he saw Henry's mastery over talk as evidence of his abilities as a ruler.

The events involving Henry I and Robert Curthose in Normandy demonstrate the importance of *fama* in medieval society and how *fama* could be used as justification for political/military actions, as Henry did for his invasion of Normandy. Having good *fama* was an essential aspect of living in medieval society, and having bad *fama* could be harmful and negatively affect a person's options and choices in society. The events in Normandy also show medieval concern with reputation maintenance and management. Henry I displayed this concern; he was careful to portray himself as a good, just ruler, and protector of the Church, particularly when he and his men shaved their long hair as a show of piety. His brother was unable to equally manage his own reputation; instead, his *fama* was that he was lazy, immoral, and unable to protect the Church. But despite Henry's military successes in defeating his brother, his *fama* was still under debate in Normandy, which demonstrates that *fama*, even of the “victor,” could be contested and reputation management was an ongoing process. These events are suffused with talk, but, according to Orderic, this should not be surprising, because a king concerned himself with all kinds of talk, including the most secret doings of those in his kingdom.

Ultimately, Henry's power came, not only from his military victories or his administrative skill, but also from his own ability (and the ability of his connections) to manage his *fama* effectively. The need for information management is seen over and over again in the *EH*. It is a major concern of Orderic's, as is evidenced throughout the books of the *EH* as he deftly managed his own *fama*, that of his monastery and friends, and of God. It is also a major concern of the many people in the *EH*. It was such a necessary concept that you can clearly see the information management at work whether Orderic wrote about events occurring centuries

before he was born or events occurring in his own time. Those people who were successful—those who effectively gained or kept money, land, status, and power—were those people who had effectively managed *fama*.

Chapter Five: Issues in Talk and Gender Analysis

It isn't clear how much time Orderic spent with women, but his view of women was not caricatured.⁵⁵⁰ He didn't think women were more prone to sexual vice than men.⁵⁵¹ He censured both women who tempted men to sexual sins and men who succumbed to temptation.⁵⁵² He did not aim sermons particularly at women.⁵⁵³ But his history showed "some at least of the norms of conduct" and "how and within what limitations individual women could and did act."⁵⁵⁴ An area where it is fruitful to apply some theory to the talk in the *Ecclesiastical History* is gender analysis. Some argue that the stereotypical view of women as gossips is invalid, while others say that gossip is a characteristically female form of speech, and that more women than men do/did engage in it. Some talk studies scholars believe that gossip is used by disempowered or marginalized groups (like women) as a form of resistance against those in power. However, some anthropological approaches (such as those written by Gluckman and Paine) argue that gossip is a natural part of being in a social group for men and women. A biological approach to gossip argues that it is just an evolutionarily beneficial outgrowth from the grooming habits of primates.

As previously stated, Jennifer Coates and Deborah Cameron's 1988 compilation entitled *Women in Their Speech Communities* is a representative example of examining what is distinctive and unique in women's speech. This lkkwork approaches the actual oral practice of gossip from a sociolinguistic perspective. Jennifer Coates, in a chapter entitled, "Gossip

⁵⁵⁰ For more information see Marjorie Chibnall. "Women in Orderic Vitalis." *Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History, Vol II*, ed. Robert B. Patterson (London: The Hambleton Press, 1990), 105-121.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

revisited: language in all-female groups,” uses empirical data to examine the talk theories of Deborah Jones. Coates affirms Jones’ theories with her research, finding that women’s talk *can* be described as developing progressively, including minimal responses, simultaneous speech, epistemic modality [use of evaluative words like might/perhaps/possibly/maybe], and co-operativeness. Coates approaches gossip quite differently from most anthropologists in that she uses gender as a category, and analyzes gossip as a characteristically female mode of speech. She also notes that these features of women’s speech, such as epistemic modality, which some scholars say show “lack of confidence” in speech, are not negative qualities at all, but are said “in order to protect both [the speaker’s] own and addressees’ face.”⁵⁵⁵ She did not address historical examples of gossip, or speculate on whether gossip as a characteristically female mode of speech is culturally-bound or timeless.

Pamela Innes’ 2006 article, “The interplay of genres, gender, and language ideology among the Muskogee,” is another that examines distinctive characteristics in women’s speech, and argues that women use different “genres” in “ceremonial public spheres,” including gossip, which is seen by some men as dangerous, but which is used in a positive way in Muskogee society.⁵⁵⁶ To Innes, women’s speech was just as important and powerful as men’s, which was shown when “women utilize certain genres in the context of social interactions.”⁵⁵⁷ What they viewed as “gossip” (“talking about people”) was understood by the Muskogee to be the exclusive provenance of women.⁵⁵⁸ The kinds of talk that the Muskogee understood women to be

⁵⁵⁵ Jennifer Coates. “Gossip revisited: language in all-female groups,” 94-122, 113-4.

⁵⁵⁶ Pamela Innes. “The interplay of genres, gender, and language ideology among the Muskogee.” *Language in Society* 35, no. 2 (April 2006), 231-259.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 233. The words that described gossip were apparently distinguished from categories such as “visiting,” “giving advice,” and “telling stories,” most of which is gossip according to standard anthropological definitions.

participating in in public were, although ritualized, occasionally anxiety-producing to men.⁵⁵⁹ The different genres men and women primarily spoke or performed in functioned to “maintain the gendered division of interest over the private and public spheres espoused in Muskogee gender ideology.”⁵⁶⁰

There are many scholarly studies that see gossip⁵⁶¹ as a kind of talk used more by women than men. A few representative examples will suffice to describe the argument. In Laura Gowing’s 1996 book *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London*, she examines the “language of sexual insult” to look at broader themes of sex, gender, and honor.⁵⁶² She argues that the sexual insults presented can expose the “understandings of gender and its ramifications.”⁵⁶³ Gower also argues that it was women, not men, who “hunted out whores and called for their punishment,”⁵⁶⁴ perhaps indicating that women were empowered by their roles as domestic moral guardians. Although Gower is using legal transcripts, her approach is somewhat similar to other sociolinguistic ones, in that it examines what is different or unique about women’s talk. She sees women calling other women whores and other words of sexual insult or slander as descriptive of women’s power over the community policing of sexual morals. Therefore, while she would agree that some kinds of speech are characteristic to women during certain historical periods, she would not agree that gossip/slander was a cooperative vehicle for women to resist the dominant power of the male hierarchy.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 246.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 251.

⁵⁶¹ These studies do not always distinguish between “gossip,” “rumor,” and “scandal” in their analyses, and often conflate the three into one category, particularly the last two.

⁵⁶² Gowing, 8.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 101.

Some of these modern approaches to categorical gender analysis are beneficial when studying talk in the *EH*. Considering Innes' thesis and analyzing a few prominent categories of women's ritualized speech (as she does with women's speech in ceremonial spheres) in the *EH* demonstrates that there were socially appropriate avenues for women to express powerful, convincing words that could disagree with or challenge the views of their husbands or other men. While Orderic does not indicate in his *EH* that women were categorically more likely than men to gossip, spread rumors, or slander, there are still certain differences in how he portrays their speech, particularly the highly ritualized speech genres of intercession, exhortation, and prophecy, as well as the increased incidents of a strongly emotional component to women's ritualized speeches, and the role of sexual inducements that are worthy of analysis. I do not seek to provide a full analysis of the role of gendered speech in Orderic's work here, but rather will concentrate on a few ways women's speech functions as a narrative device in Orderic's work.

One particular genre of women's speech in the *Ecclesiastical History* is that of intercession. Intercession functioned as a socially appropriate avenue for women to robustly articulate and advance a certain point of view. In the *EH*, female intercession is a powerful, and occasionally dangerous, activity. Biblical models for female intercession were Esther and Mary, the mother of Jesus. One of the Crusaders, Ilger Bigod, found a particular relic in the church of the Holy Sepulchre as Jerusalem was being captured by the Christian army. The relic was a ball of Mary's hair. She had torn it out, rent her garments, and "uttered sad lamentations" at the death of Jesus.⁵⁶⁵ These holy relics of Mary's emotional agony, once taken back to France, cured many

⁵⁶⁵ "Iugubres trenos," *EH*, Book IX, 170-1.

people. The intercessory power of these relics was made possible by Mary's emotional, deeply physically distraught response to her son's death.

Some examples of female intercession were successful and moving. When Ralph, son of Albert of Cravent, attacked the monk Guitmund and stole his horses, and his father failed to help, Ralph's mother Aubree "cried out with a loud voice, as if out of her mind" and "wailed," asking why Ralph had been led astray by poor advice and dragged to damnation.⁵⁶⁶ She also said he deserved to die, and told her husband to restore the stolen horses before a demon entered her son. Orderic called her a "wise mother" ("*prudenti matrona*") and said her intercession with her husband on behalf of the monk to protect him from further serious injury left her husband and his household "deeply moved and terrified."⁵⁶⁷ So Albert gave a mule to the monk to ride, sent him on his way with a guard, and bound his son to restore what he had stolen. Aubree, Orderic wrote, had a "high reputation among her neighbors" for her virtue, which was "appropriate to her station."⁵⁶⁸ Later, Ralph became sick, repented of his evil ways, and vowed to give his possessions to Saint-Évroul. In this case, intercession for the monk had been a way for Aubree to argue for the fair treatment of a man of God, and she had used a display of emotion so extreme to her hearers it seemed as if she was mad that it worked to the advantage of her argument and to demonstrate the seriousness and importance of her point of view.

Another example of female intercession was described by Orderic as highly ritualized, but such was its power that it was also very dangerous. When Robert Curthose asked his father William I for Normandy their confrontation had drastic consequences. Robert's view was that his

⁵⁶⁶ "*Alta uoce uelut amens clamabat et cum multis fletibus eiulans dicebat,*" *EH*, Book VI, 242-3.

⁵⁶⁷ "*Albertus cum omni familia sua commotus contremuit,*" *Ibid.*, 244-5.

⁵⁶⁸ "*et inter affines pro modulo suo multa honestate uiguit,*" *Ibid.*, 244-5.

father had already publicly granted him Normandy, while William's view was that he would never give up Normandy until he was dead. Robert then left England and visited his uncles and other of his kinsmen for possible sympathy and support. His mother, the Queen Matilda of Flanders, "feeling a mother's affection for her son," secretly sent Robert large gifts of gold and silver to support him.⁵⁶⁹ When King William learned about it, he tried to intimidate Matilda into stopping. According to Orderic, in his rage he ranted that Matilda was a faithless wife, and he could not believe, even after giving her authority, money, and power, that she would repeatedly support his son and potentially give aid to his enemies. Matilda replied by saying how much she loved Robert, and that she would "shed my life-blood for him."⁵⁷⁰ This further enraged William, and he ordered one of her messengers (probably one he suspected was carrying messages or valuables to Robert) to be arrested and blinded. But once again having a good information network was an essential component of health and safety, as the messenger Samson heard about the king's plan, and escaped to Saint-Évroul. The queen also interceded for him at that monastery, and he was accepted into the community and lived there in safety for 26 years. Matilda's intercession was both brave and effectively protected her son from his father's wrath. Orderic also noted that it illustrated the power and depth of a mother's love. This intercession also emphasized that women interceded out of principle, and bravely, despite the very real threat or possibility that they could be punished or injured by doing so. The words of women's intercession also had the power to deeply affect the men they were spoken to, and in some cases, sent the men spiraling into rages.

⁵⁶⁹ "Mathildis regina filio materna compatiens ex pietate," *EH*, Book V, 102-3.

⁵⁷⁰ "Cruorem meum pro illo effunderem," *Ibid.*, 104-5.

The next ritualized avenue for women to argue, convince, and wield power was the prophecy. And true prophets were not restricted to those of the Christian religion. The mother of Kerbogha, the commander-in-chief of the king of the Persians during the First Crusade, was a prophetess and sorceress. According to Orderic⁵⁷¹ she was a very learned woman who studied the constellations and horoscopes. She “began to criticize him severely for the enterprise he had undertaken, prophesying to him distinctly that he would be defeated by the Christians and would die within the year violently but not in battle.”⁵⁷² However, Kerbogha did not have the wisdom to listen, and he “silenced his tearful mother.”⁵⁷³ He was indeed defeated in battle by the Christians. While she was not successful in preventing Kerbogha’s death (much like the archetypal Cassandra), Orderic describes her as endowed with many virtues, including wisdom and the true gift of prophecy.

The final ritualized avenue for women to argue, convince, and wield power, was the exhortation (which can overlap as a genre with the intercession). During the siege of Jerusalem the Turkish women of the city climbed to the roofs of their homes and began to sing a powerful exhortation for their men: “Valiant Turks,⁵⁷⁴ drive back the Franks from here in battle/Remember the great deeds of your fathers and forefathers/This day your enemies will fly or will perish.”⁵⁷⁵ This speech was very revealing to Conan, one of the Crusaders, and he said “the incitement and encouragement of the women proves the terrible exhaustion of the men.”⁵⁷⁶ He also resented the

⁵⁷¹ For this section of his *EH*, he relied heavily on the work of Archbishop Baudry of Bourgueil’s *Historia Ierosolimitana*.

⁵⁷² “*et de his quae inchoauerat acriter eum redarguere cepit eique quod uicendus esset a Christianis et eodem anno non in bello morte subita moriturus manifeste predixit,*” *EH*, Book IX, 96-7.

⁵⁷³ “*lactabundus heros lugubrem matrem superbis promissionibus compescuit,*” *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ Apparently Baudry and the Crusaders did not know it was actually the Egyptian Fatimids in charge of Jerusalem, not the Turks, 167.

⁵⁷⁵ “*Fortes Turci dimicando Francos hinc repellite/Gesta partum antiquorum preclara recolite/Hostes uestri fugabuntur aut peribunt hodie,*” *EH*, Book IX, 166-7.

⁵⁷⁶ *Feminarum gratulabunda cohortatio, uirorum est formidolosa defectio.*” *Ibid.*, 168-9.

“foolish allegations” in the women’s songs that the Crusaders had come to the Holy Lands to plunder and ravage the land.⁵⁷⁷ The response to this biting song, according to Conan, should be strong. “Let us however be guided by manly, or rather heavenly, counsel.”⁵⁷⁸ Indeed, the resentment of this speech and the hope that the raw power of the exhortation of the women meant the weakness of the men gave fresh strength and courage to the Crusaders, and they pushed into the city of Jerusalem.

Another example of women’s ritualized exhortation was of Adela to her husband, Stephen-Henry of Blois. In 1101, Stephen-Henry, count of Blois, “was an object of contempt to almost everyone, and was continually reproached”⁵⁷⁹ for his cowardly behavior in deserting the siege of Antioch. This confirms again the idea that one’s *fama* was so important in the medieval period, and having bad *fama*, as Stephen did, was a great social handicap. Indeed, Stephen’s bad *fama* was not just a source of shame, but, according to Orderic, it was fear of public opinion and its possible nasty consequences that drove him to go on return to the crusade, as much as the public shaming. Adela frequently exhorted him to go back on crusade (as his wife, Stephen’s diminished social capital and power undoubtedly constricted her own social capital and power). “Between conjugal caresses,” she said, “Far be it from you, my lord, to lower yourself by enduring the scorn of such men as these for long. Remember the courage for which you were famous in your youth, and take up the arms of the glorious crusade for the sake of saving thousands.”⁵⁸⁰ Orderic called her “wise and spirited”⁵⁸¹ but Stephen was initially still reluctant to

⁵⁷⁷ “*friulois allegationibus*,” Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ “*Nos e contra uirili immo coelesti utamur consilio*,” Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ “*pene ab omnibus derogabatur, et indesinenter uerecundabatur, eo quod de obsidione Antiochena turpiter aufugerit*,” Book X, 324-5.

⁵⁸⁰ “*Absit a te domine mi ut tantorum diu digneris hominum opprobria perpeti. Famosam strenuitatem iuuentutis tuae recale, et arma laudabilis militiae ad multorum salutem milium arripe*,” Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ “*Sagax et animosa*,” Ibid.

re-embark on his crusade, although he eventually did rejoin the crusading forces, where he was killed. Although both men and women were depicted giving ritualized exhortation speeches in the *EH*, only women's⁵⁸² exhortations were sometimes buoyed or accompanied by sexual inducements to perform the desired action.

This is one area of difference between women's and men's speech was--it seems women's speech had the potential to be accompanied with sexual inducements in a way men's speech was generally not described in the *EH*. For example, Serlo, bishop of Seez, argued eloquently and persuasively for King Henry and his men to cut their hair and shave their beards to eschew "these utterly depraved fashions."⁵⁸³ He said that sinners did not want to shave their beards "for fear that the short bristles should prick their mistresses when they kiss them."⁵⁸⁴ Therefore, according to this view it was the mistresses and their preference for comfort that kept the men from obeying the official condemnation of long beard in the synods and by religious authorities. In this case, the sexual allure of women had a negative effect. The monastery of Thorney was situated on an island and famous for the performance of its divine offices and removal from the world. Women were not allowed on the island except in short visits to pray, and "by the foresight of the monks women are utterly forbidden to live within nine miles."⁵⁸⁵ This commentary seems to indicate that women have the potential to be a distraction and temptation, even to monks, and that perhaps Thorney's particularly good reputation was a result of this care to keep women away. The example of Adela of Blois, however, shows that conjugal

⁵⁸² According to my primary analysis.

⁵⁸³ "*Multi nimirum tantae prauitatis usum sequuntur,*" Book XI, 66-7.

⁵⁸⁴ "*Barbas suas radere deuitant, ne pili suas in oculis amicas precisi pungant,*" Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ "*Nulla mulier insulam nisi causa orationis ingreditur, nec aliqua ibidem commorari pro qualibet occasione permittitur, sed muliebris habitatio prorsus usque ad nouem miliaria religiosorum studio elongatur,*" 150-1.

caresses or sexual inducements were perhaps a naturally expected aspect of women's speech, and their deployment depended on the end goal of the inducements.

In the *EH* is that there are many more speeches attributed to men than women. Men's speeches in the *EH* are more difficult to categorize in one of only a few different categories. One distinction between men's and women's talk in the *EH* is that proportionally more time was devoted to the wise discernment of good from bad counsel. Also, being able to bestow good counsel was one of the signs of a proper man. Conversely, bad counsel was the sign of a poor excuse for a man. In fact, giving poor counsel and the inability to discern it meant insufficient masculinity, as in the case of Robert Curthose's advisors. The fight for Robert's counsel is bitter and sharply argued. His friends wanted Robert to rely on their counsel, while Henry I calls Robert's counselors "wanton youths,"⁵⁸⁶ and tells Robert to instead rely on the counsels of Archbishops William and Lanfranc and other magnates. The hermit Matilda consulted, who had the gift of prophecy, said that Robert, as the Duke of Normandy would let "catamites and effeminate"⁵⁸⁷ govern, which would lead to an increase of wickedness and instability, including the defilement of monasteries and the destruction of whole towns and villages. The potential connection between Robert's friends' poor counsel and unhelpful and seditious (according to Henry and Orderic) talk and their lack of appropriate masculinity is suggestive. Robert's friends were an impediment to public safety, and when they were allowed to have power it meant the kingdom was run by effeminate men and homosexuals.

The opportunity to give counsel was an opening of tremendous potential for power. Orderic described Robert of Meulan, King William I's primary counsellor, as using this power

⁵⁸⁶ "petulantum," *EH*, Book V, 98-9.

⁵⁸⁷ "catamitae et effeminati" *Ibid.*, 106-7.

cleverly and manipulating William under the guise of his role as counselor. Orderic called him a “wily old man”⁵⁸⁸ after he blocked Count Helias’ reconciliation with William. William was prepared to give Helias back his title and county in return for faithful service in William’s household but Robert feared the power Helias might wield in the royal council and persuaded the king that he was not to be trusted. “The men of Maine are cunning and treacherous and achieve by deceit and double-dealing what they cannot do by strength.”⁵⁸⁹ This advice, which was self-serving, according to Orderic, persuaded the king to change his mind, and Helias left to recover his lands and power on his own. However, despite listening to what Orderic clearly saw as less than ideal advice (Orderic spoke well of Helias, and believed him to be a good man), Orderic did not damn William’s entire court as corrupt and weak, as he did Robert of Curthose’s court. This was not seen as representative of the entire court, as Robert of Meulan was also described as loyal and someone who thoughtfully worked for the safety of the kingdom.⁵⁹⁰ This is because William’s court and administration was not hostile to the church and monks in the way Orderic claimed Robert’s was. Orderic also specifically praised those who listened to wise counsel. Orderic said, “King Henry did not follow the advice of rash young men as Rehoboam did, but prudently took to heart the experience and advice of wise older men.”⁵⁹¹ Orderic attributed his

⁵⁸⁸ *“Callidus enim senex,”* Book X, 248-9.

⁵⁸⁹ *“Cenomanni uersipelles et infidi sunt et quod fortitudine nequeunt dolis et tergiuersatione faciunt,”* Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Book X, 314-5.

⁵⁹¹ *“Henricus rex imprudentum consilia iuuenum sicut Roboam secutus non est sed sapientum argutias monitusque senum sagaciter amplexatus est,”* Book X, 298-9. King Rehoboam (I Kings 12) ignored the counsel of his elders and instead consulted the young men in his entourage when the people of Israel came to him asking to lighten the “yoke” laid upon them by his father. The elder counselors advised him to at least act as a servant to his people and speak reasonably to them. His friends, however, advised that Rehoboam tell the people his little finger was bigger than his father’s loins and he planned to scourge them with scorpions. After delivering this politic advice, Rehoboam’s administrative management broke down, his representatives were stoned, and the kingdom was plunged into rebellion.

humble deference to these wise older counselors as the reason he was able to take command of his father's lands.⁵⁹²

As previous chapters have shown with numerous examples of gossip, rumor, and sedition, Orderic does not categorize women's speech as innately more idle, gossipy, slanderous, or wicked than men's speech (affirming later biological/anthropological theories that gossip is part of being human and transcends gender). Just as it was a requirement for men to use their words carefully, it was also a requirement for women, and Orderic praised those women who showed exemplary wisdom and discernment. He described Countess Helwise, the wife of Count William of Evreux, as "eloquent" ("*facunda*"),⁵⁹³ and Countess Hildegard of Poitou was described as "eloquently stat[ing] her plea" before Pope Calixtus at Rheims.⁵⁹⁴ There are many examples that show men succumbing to the sins of the tongue that affirm the argument that Orderic did not ascribe these sins as ones exclusive to women. Orderic attributed any difficulties or disagreements between King Louis of France and King Henry of England to the "interference of traitors who slandered him."⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, gossip is often thought of as "idle words," and Orderic did not categorize women as more prone to this vice than men. He speaks frequently of the dangers of sloth and idleness, and even the writing of history is a way to combat idleness. Robert Curthose was repeatedly criticized for "succumb[ing] to sloth and idleness."⁵⁹⁶ Men also

⁵⁹² As we saw in the preceding chapter, this is an excellent example of Henry's superb reputation management and excellent interpersonal skills. Indeed, a few months into his reign Henry's narrative was that he did not want to "wallow in lasciviousness like any horse or mule" and married Matilda, who had an impeccable, kingdom-solidifying lineage. Considering his later exploits, it is impressive that this explanation for his marriage was given any credence at all.

⁵⁹³ *EH*, Book XI, 148-9.

⁵⁹⁴ "*Et alta clarque uoce querimoniam suam eloquenter enodauit*," *EH*, Book XII, 258-9.

⁵⁹⁵ "*Per maledicos proditores contra eundem litigauit*," Book XI, 54-55.

⁵⁹⁶ "*Torpori et ignauiae nimis subiacuit*," Book XI, 97-7.

often did something Chibnall translates as “murmuring,” which has connotations of gossip, disrespect, and complaining.⁵⁹⁷

There are a few examples in the *EH* of gendered responses to women’s speech, although they are too few to be able to make any generalizations. For example, Countess Helwise, although also described as giving good advice to her husband Count William of Evreux to build a monastery at Noyon, did not have a successful administration of the county of Evreux. According to Orderic, she ignored the counsel of the barons and “relied on her own judgement,” with her rash actions leading to difficulties.⁵⁹⁸ This in itself is not a gendered complaint from Orderic, as the chronicler castigated many wellborn men for their failure to heed wise counsel or to listen to foolish counsel, and called more than one wellborn man as foolish as Rehoboam. However, “she was heartily disliked for her woman’s presumption,” by Robert of Meulan and other Normans, who “venomously abused her” to King Henry, and succeeded in poisoning her *fama* with him.⁵⁹⁹ From this incident, one might naturally suspect that the actual performance of women’s speech and administration had a gendered component and that Helwise’s peers might have been more likely to distrust and dislike her because she was a woman, but it is also possible that the local dislike of her actions stemmed from her inability to follow the medieval masculine requirement (or requirement of a powerful administrator/leader) of able discernment of good counsel and following that good counsel. There are certain indications in the way Orderic relates the story, from his approval of her good advice to her husband and description of her accusers as venomous and bitter, that show his sympathy to her case. Even if Orderic agreed that Countess

⁵⁹⁷ Chibnall translates different words/phrases as “murmur,” see note on page 91-2 for more information.

⁵⁹⁸ “*Estimationem suam preferebat,*” *EH*, Book XI, 148-9.

⁵⁹⁹ “*Vnde pro feminea procacitate Rodberto comiti de Mellento aliisque Normannis inuidiosa erat, quorum maliuolentia in presentia regis ei detrahebat, ipsumque corrosoriis derogationibus in odium eius concitabat,*” *Ibid.*

Helwise showed inappropriate presumption in administering Evreux for her aged husband (he does not write disapprovingly of other examples of women's administration, such as when Clementia, wife of Robert of Flanders, governed Flanders for/with her underage son), it would not have been her counsel he objected to, but her lack of humble listening, which Orderic believed to be necessary for everyone, including kings and dukes, emperors and empresses.

Orderic does not support Gower's ideas about women using the language of slander more than men. In the *EH*, both men and women were called sexually derogatory terms. Orderic referred to King Magnus' daughter as "wanton" and sent to an unlawful marriage by her father.⁶⁰⁰ Bertrade, the wife of King Philip of France, after her plotting against her stepson Louis, was called (in addition to "depraved" and "shameless") a "cruel adulteress."⁶⁰¹ Although we do not know the original gossip sources for these sexual insights, we cannot use the *EH* to support any argument that women were doing the primary whore-hunting and were the domestic guardians of morality. Men were also called "fornicators" and "sodomites" as sexual insults.⁶⁰² King Henry also characterized his brother's supporters as "perjured lechers."⁶⁰³ Orderic's work cannot be used to support the idea that women specifically or particularly use the language of slander or sexual insult. Orderic's work cannot be used to describe gossip as the specialized work or vehicle of women.

This is not to say that the *EH* did not on occasion reflect certain commonly-held medieval beliefs about women and their characteristics, just that his work contradicts theories that gossip, rumor, and scandal are all uniquely common to women or primarily used by women. When

⁶⁰⁰ "*Petulantem*," Book XI, 50-1.

⁶⁰¹ "*Crudeli adulterae*," *Ibid*.

⁶⁰² "*Fornicarii et catamitae*," Book XI, 64-5.

⁶⁰³ "*Periuris lectoribus*," Book XII, 286-7.

Henry I allowed his own granddaughters to be horrifically mutilated, his daughter Juliana tried to shoot him with a crossbow, which Orderic disapprovingly refers to as a treacherous “woman’s trick.”⁶⁰⁴ He also cited Ecclesiastes 25:19 to explain the situation, writing, “As Solomon says, ‘There is nothing so bad as a bad woman.’”⁶⁰⁵ Orderic discussed the reputations of many women in his *EH* and there were some women whose behavior made them almost scandal-proof, according to him. This description of exemplary behavior reflected medieval societal expectations of women. He wrote of Avice, the wife of Walter of Auffay, that she was beautiful, “well-spoken,” and wise.⁶⁰⁶ She was modest and gentle, lived peaceably with her husband, fertile, and generous to the monks. She was “So chaste and so constant that not the most craven/Dared to breathe one base word against her bright honor.”⁶⁰⁷ Her virtue was so shining that it was scandal-proof.⁶⁰⁸

An examination of representative examples of how Orderic portrays women’s speech and the genres women’s speech are written in shows that women’s speech had power, a power that was sometimes comforting, enraging, or encouraging. The power in women’s speech was at least partially bolstered or strengthened by the expression of emotions that accompanied it. Women’s speeches were ritualized in three major ways: intercessions, exhortations, and prophecies. Orderic seemed to approve of or support the motives behind the majority of the women’s speeches he depicted. The common factor in most of the speeches he approved of was that the women’s words were supporting or affirming the truth or principles of the Christian faith.

⁶⁰⁴ “*Fraudis feminae*,” Book XII, 212-3.

⁶⁰⁵ “Tandem sicut Salomon ait, ‘Non est malicia super maliciam mulieris,’” *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ “*Pulchra fuit ualde, facunda satis sapiensque*,” *EH*, Book VI, 256-7.

⁶⁰⁷ “*Casta fuit tantum quod eam nullus nebulonum/Infamare palam notis praesumeret unquam.*” *Ibid.*, 258-9.

⁶⁰⁸ It is also interesting to note that Orderic’s epitaph to her husband is much shorter and less complimentary, only affirming that Walter had gone to his eternal reward, *ibid.*

In his *EH*, Orderic did not identify one gender over the other as more likely to commit sins of the tongue, which in the Bible included taking the Lord's name in vain, bearing false witness, lying, sowing discord, tale-bearing, and idle words. He did not describe women as innately chattier or more talkative than men.⁶⁰⁹ According to him, both genders were responsible for their tongues, both had the ability to do much good and evil, both could speak with either wisdom and good counsel or wickedness and bad counsel. He did not identify women as a disempowered group more likely to use gossip and rumor to get or maintain power, and one cannot use the *EH* to advance the point of view that women are more likely to use gossip and rumor to get or maintain power. Both men and women are described gossiping and described giving wise or foolish counsel. The main predictor of whether Orderic would approve of the speech of men or women was whether the speech served to glorify or protect God, his church, and his particular workers (the monks). A woman's loyalty to God was the most important consideration in whether her speech and aggressive, powerful words were appropriate.

⁶⁰⁹ Orderic described men as talkative multiple times, including VI 290-1, 292-3.

Conclusion

The *Ecclesiastical History* is a beautiful, complex, sprawling text with an incredible amount of potential for analysis that increases our understanding of the twelfth century. The *EH* is full of news, stories, gossip, and rumor, and Orderic used all these kinds of talk to compose his *EH*. This dissertation has sought to analyze some examples of talk in the *EH*. The idea of using the theoretical approaches of the disciplines of talk studies⁶¹⁰ to understand medieval texts is a relatively new one. This approach, while sometimes challenging and difficult, is also beneficial.

The Introduction to this work demonstrated that for twelfth century Christians and monks talk was an important tool and potential snare. The influential *Rule* of St. Benedict prohibited many forms of unregulated talk, including grumbling, uncontrolled laughter, and gossip. However, the *Rule* also required talk, in the form of regulated praise and singing sessions as part of a monk's daily work. Monks were also supposed to encourage each other and confess their sins and mistakes publicly to each other. Benedict's *Rule* reflected medieval belief in the power of talk. Talk was so powerful that it had to be carefully controlled and regulated. The *Rule* also acknowledged the need for talk to determine or fix a person's reputation. Those who were elected to important administrative positions in the monastery were to be of good repute. This need for talk came with anxiety for the potential of reputation construction to be uncontrolled. Like the author of Benedict's *Rule*, Orderic also viewed talk as a potentially powerful tool. But the *EH* reflected his belief that a sensible person, particularly a person whose duties required the maintenance of a good reputation, learned to effectively manage the information available or encountered by others.

⁶¹⁰ The theoretical work of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, biologists, and others is loosely called for simplification the "talk studies field," although many of the scholars who pioneered these approaches worked decades before the term "talk studies field" was used to apply to those who studied gossip, rumor, and scandal.

Chapter 1 this dissertation surveyed important work in what has come to be referred to as the talk studies field. Work on unregulated talk gained prominence with concern about “loose lips” and rumors damaging to the war effort during World War II. In the 1960s, academic scholars in different fields, particularly anthropology, sociology, and psychology, increasingly began to discuss the kinds of talk that culturally have a bad reputation, such as gossip, rumor, and scandal. Scholars wrestled with constructing effective working definitions for rumor and gossip. They also debated the meaning or purpose of rumor and gossip in social groups and what functions they fulfill. Other issues considered what social group benefits the most from unregulated talk--the marginalized in a community or those with the most socio-economic power? I also discussed the issue of gender, pointing out that some scholars consider gossip as a characteristically female form of discourse and others view it as engaged in equally by both men and women. Since the 1990s, some academics have gradually begun to incorporate the findings and research of other fields into their own and slowly begun to develop a common language to refer to the subject. Today the field is still characterized by fragmentation into different disciplines. But even though an increasing number of scholars in disparate fields use each other’s language and work, there is still ambiguity about the creation of a separate talk studies “field,” and many scholars writing on the subject of rumor and gossip do not consult earlier theoretical work on the subject at all.

In Chapter 2 I discussed Orderic Vitalis himself: his background, the historical approach and attitude of his sources, and his own historical approach and attitude. Orderic was born in England to an English mother, but his French father sent him to the monastery of Saint-Évroul in Normandy as a young boy. Orderic was an oblate monk, then tonsured as a clerk, ordained at 16 as a subdeacon, ordained at 18 as a deacon, and became a priest at the age of 33. He spent much

of his time in the *scriptorium*, where he copied and translated many works. In addition to these duties he took on the task of writing a history of Saint-Évroul, and a record of its gifts, that eventually grew in scope and measure until it became what is known today as the *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. Orderic was a widely-read man who used more than a hundred sources in his work, according to Marjorie Chibnall, and these included Scriptural works, patristic writings, homilies, *exempla, vitae* of the saints, histories of the early church, histories of England and the Normans and the Norman invasion of England, charters, calendars, mortuary rolls, epitaphs, and records of church councils. Four of Orderic's sources--Old and New Testament writings, Gregory the Great, Eusebius, and Bede—were particularly influential and reflect potential models for how Orderic constructed his own history, including how he used oral sources and examples of unregulated talk. Orderic took a particular care to justify and compare his own writings in accordance with the strategies employed by some of his predecessors, such as sometimes emphasizing the trustworthiness of his oral sources and sometimes acknowledging that a source or story was hearsay. Orderic saw his own history as a continuation in the great traditions of those historians who had worked to tell the story of Jesus and his church in earlier periods.

In Chapter 3, I applied earlier theoretical work on talk when reading the *EH*. The theoretical definitions, structure, and meaning of rumor and gossip were considered to show the validity of using talk studies theory in the field of medieval history. Early definitions, such as Allport and Postman's classic 1940s definition of rumor, had limited applicability. Understanding its limitations will encourage the construction of more universal definitions in the talk studies field. However, Allport and Postman's formula that posited that the power of a rumor will be determined by \sim importance x ambiguity can be successfully applied to the *EH*.

The meaning of rumors is a tricky issue, but Shibutani's ideas about problem-solving had merit when applied to the *EH*, as did Knapp's breakdown of the three different types of rumors (pipe-dreams, bogies, and wedge-driving). Max Gluckman's theory that gossip defines a social group by identifying its jointly held social mores is applicable to the *EH*. However, for a more actor-oriented approach to medieval sources, Robert Paine's ideas of information management are ones that really are able to clearly and effectively show the use medieval people made of rumor and gossip and the intimate workings of *fama*.

Chapter 4 analyzed the information management that is a continual concern of Orderic Vitalis and the people in his history. While the functionalist explanation for gossip is convincing, focusing on the "purposive behaviour"⁶¹¹ and active engagement of historical actors in gossip (and rumor) is to focus on the use of gossip and rumor as information management. The theoretical concept of the process of information management can be seen clearly in the medieval preoccupation with *fama* and its maintenance. Furthermore, examples from the *EH* demonstrate the conclusion that a person's success and power in medieval society was a direct result of the effectiveness of his or her information management. Medieval people understood that their actions were evaluated by others, and this led to a public understanding of their *fama*. A certain amount of good *fama* was necessary economically, politically, and socially in the twelfth century. One example of the process of information management was King Henry I's successes in managing his *fama* during Henry's seizure of Normandy from his brother Robert Curthose. Henry's actions in Normandy were a deliberate attempt to justify what would otherwise be a naked power group with the superiority of his *fama* over that of his brother. Henry could win any number of decisive battles but it was his information management skills that ultimately

⁶¹¹ Paine, 282.

consolidated his power in Normandy. Orderic pragmatically saw knowledge of the gossip, rumor, and news in the kingdom as part of a king's maintenance of his power. Orderic acknowledged Henry's prowess over talk as the prerogative and responsibility of a diligent ruler. In the *EH*, those people who were successful—those who effectively gained or kept money, land, status, and power—were those people who had effectively managed *fama*.

Chapter 5 analyzed gender and talk in the *EH*. An analysis of a few prominent categories of women's ritualized speech in the *EH* demonstrates that there were socially appropriate avenues for women to express powerful, convincing words that could disagree with or challenge the views of their husbands or other men. A preliminary study of the *EH* indicates that Orderic did not think that women were categorically more likely than men to gossip, spread rumors, or slander, but there are still certain differences in how he portrayed their speech, particularly the highly ritualized speech genres of intercession, exhortation, and prophecy, that are worthy of future analysis, such as the increased incidences of a strongly emotional component to women's ritualized speeches, and the role of sexual inducements.

There are many limitations to this work. The first and most obvious limitation is that without proper anthropological data it is much more difficult to apply all the potential theoretical structural analysis for rumor and gossip to the *EH*. For example, Coates and Cameron, in their *Women in Their Speech Communities*, analyze the oral progression of instances of gossip: minimal responses, simultaneous speech, epistemic modality, and co-operativeness. It is impossible to analyze whether or when these occurred when Orderic heard a particular gossip story. Also, there are many areas of study touched on here that could use further analysis. More work could be done to compare Orderic's written sources and his own history line-by-line to see exactly where Orderic changes or adds to them. Does he cut out hearsay? Does he add stories he

has heard? Another limitation is that only a tiny portion of Orderic's many stories that are structurally close to rumor and gossip have been analyzed here. Further analysis, such as a breakdown of the different types of rumors in the *EH*, would be interesting.

There are many different directions you could take Orderic Vitalis' remarkable *EH*. For example, evidence from the *EH* is enough to require an important caveat to Benedict Anderson's influential argument in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson argues that the ideas of nation and "nation-ness" were created near the end of the eighteenth century.⁶¹² Anderson defines nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."⁶¹³ He acknowledges that all communities "larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined."⁶¹⁴ The nation, wrote Anderson, "is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."⁶¹⁵ Print-capitalism was the key to understanding the growth of the ideas of nationalism. However, in the *EH* Orderic made many references to the imagined political community of England and the English people. He referred to England as a specific place.⁶¹⁶ England was also seen as a place with limited geographic limits, as when Orderic said William Clito was offered three geographically bound counties in the overall geographically limited country of England.⁶¹⁷ He also referred to England as a community that had similar values, as when he said the canonical order was favored in England.⁶¹⁸ According to Orderic, the English

⁶¹² Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 14.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹⁶ "*Anglia in Normanniam transfretavit.*" *EH*, Book XII, 224-5.

⁶¹⁷ "*Tres etiam comitatus in Anglia optuli ut illis principaretur,*" *Ibid.*, 288-9.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 425.

were also a community distinct from other people groups.⁶¹⁹ Since the publication of *Imagined Communities* other scholars have suggested alternate interpretations or further interpretations of his thesis, such as Michael Saler's assertion that nationalism, although "long thought to be a secular phenomenon" should be "reconsidered in religious terms."⁶²⁰ Issam Aburaiya and other scholars challenged the notion that the secular state was only possible after the decline of religious power. He wrote, "the categories of religion, nationalism, sacred, secular, traditional, and modern are inherently hybrid. . . However, modernist discourse stubbornly attempts to 'purify' and demarcate them."⁶²¹

There are also many potential future projects that could examine medieval information management. One area that deserves further research is to examine a particular person's entire body of work in the information management arena. For example, Henry I's skills as a wielder and deployer of strategic gossip deserve their own article or book. This study would pull together many different sources—all the histories that discuss Henry, his charters, and physical/archaeological evidence. Each of the rulers of the long twelfth century could be analyzed for their information management abilities (or lack thereof) in their own individual articles—William I, William Rufus, Robert Curthose, Henry I, Stephen, Henry II. One might even write an article on information management during the English Civil War, and analyze how effective both Stephen and his cousin Matilda were at it. Or one might take a particular saint, such as Thomas Becket, and examine how that saint's reputation was constructed and how that

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁶²⁰ Michael Saler. "Imagined Communities, Holistic Histories, and Secular Faith." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 92, no. ½ (Spring/Summer 2009), 129.

⁶²¹ Issam Aburaiya. "Islamism, Nationalism, and Western Modernity: The Case for Iran and Palestine." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 1, Special Issue: The Culture of Conflict in Israel and Palestine (March 2009), 50.

saint's information was managed up until canonization. It has been demonstrated in this study that information management was a critical skill in the medieval period, and there is so much more research needed to find out more about this process and how information management increased, maintained, or decreased power.

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