

Communities in Translation:
History and Identity in Medieval England

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ABSTRACT

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“Communities in Translation: History and Identity in Medieval England” argues that moments of identity formation in translated texts of the Middle Ages are best understood if translation is viewed as a process. Expanding on Brian Stock’s idea that texts organize and define real historical communities, I argue that medieval translations—broadly considered as textual artifacts which relate received narratives—create communities within their narratives based on religious, ethnic, and proto-nationalist identities. In my first chapter, I assert that the Old English *Orosius*—a translation of a fifth-century Latin history—creates an audience that is forced to assume a hybrid Roman-English identity that juxtaposes a past Rome with a present Anglo-Saxon England. In chapter two, I argue that the inclusion of English saints among traditional Latin ones in Ælfric of Eynsham’s *Lives of the Saints* stakes a claim not only for the holiness of English Christians but for the holiness of the land itself, thus including England in a trans-temporal community of Christians that depended on English practice and belief for its continued success. In my third chapter, I turn to Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, and read it alongside its historical source by Nicholas Trevet in order to demonstrate Chaucer’s investment in a multicultural English Christianity. These arguments inform my reading of *Beowulf*, a poem which, while not itself a translation, thematizes the issues of community raised by my first three chapters through its engagement with the problematic relationship between communities and narrative. When *Beowulf*’s characters and narrator present an inherited narrative meant to bolster community, they more often reveal the connections to outside forces and longer histories that render its textual communities exceedingly fragile. Where previous studies of translation focus on

the links of vernacular writings to their source texts and their Latin past, I suggest that these narratives envision alternative presents and futures for the communities that they create.

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Ten years ago, I decided that I would become a medievalist. At the age of nineteen, I had little idea of what that path would entail. Long hours in the library. Reading. Writing. Maybe a bit of teaching. I didn't quite understand, at nineteen, that dissertations—and the Ph.D. candidates who write them—are never only a finished product. At the age of twenty-nine, I've found that graduate school is a process that, thankfully, doesn't end when the dissertation is distributed, defended, or deposited. And like any process, graduate school cannot be undertaken in isolation. This dissertation would not have been possible without teachers, colleagues, friends, and family.

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for my parents

Introduction

*We have treated languages first, and then nations, because nations arose from languages, and not languages from nations.*¹

This dissertation begins with the premise that the term textual community refers not only to the communities to which a text is addressed, but also to the communities a text creates within itself.² The study of medieval translation, I argue, offers a unique opportunity for the exploration of this latter kind of community, because translations are cultural objects worthy of critical consideration for their artistry and literary merit. Through a comparison with source texts, translations also reveal traces of the cultural processes by which they were created. As Michelle Warren reorients medieval scholars of translation:

Indeed, what might happen to the literary tradition if translated texts constituted an aesthetic grouping independent from authorial and generic categories? And if this grouping were granted the same critical value as the most prestigious authors and genres? Perhaps more importantly, how might our understanding of seemingly monolingual compositions change if we locate them in a cultural environment saturated with translating activities?³

Warren proposes several options for studying these translated texts, all of which encourage a new approach to Middle English translations and their study. By suggesting an “aesthetic grouping independent from authorial and generic categories,” Warren opens the possibility of evaluating and understanding translations as cultural objects in their own right and as valuable resources for understanding the ways in which medieval cultures imagined their worlds. If translations are

¹ Barney, Stephen A., et al. *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 192.

² For a more traditional definition of textual community, to be further discussed below, see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) and Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

³ Michelle Warren, “Translation” in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 51.

accorded “the same critical value” as texts in other genres, Warren argues, their study can reveal heretofore undervalued dimensions of the ways these texts interact with, are shaped by, and respond to the world in which they were written. Moreover, by understanding translations as the “monolingual product of a multilingual process,”⁴ Warren begins to reframe our understanding of translation as a written object that transmits a narrative and as a remnant of a process that created, for its practitioners, “an opportunity to redefine audiences, social relations, historical inheritance, and ethnic identities.”⁵ Any translation, therefore, reveals a negotiation between its contemporary culture and the past culture that created its source text.

Defining what translation is therefore remains a critical task. Following Robert Stanton, one method by which translation might be better defined is to make a distinction: that while “all translation is transformation,” not all transformations necessarily entail translation.⁶ For my purposes, a text can be considered a translation if it represents—by direct reference or by implication—an act of narrative transmission traceable to another source. Translations, in other words, tell stories that have been heard before in one form or another. Because my study in this dissertation is limited to translations that treat historical narratives in the Middle Ages (a term used more broadly then than it is now), three of the four texts that I consider include a source text. The Old English *Orosius* is paired with its Latin source text, Paulus Orosius’ *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri Septi*. Ælfric’s *Life of Oswald* reworks the story of the Northumbrian King Oswald found in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, Chaucer draws on the Anglo-Norman *Chronicle* of Nicholas Trevet to retell Trevet’s “Life of Constance.” While neither a translation nor a form of

⁴ Warren, “Translation,” 52.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ See particularly George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*.

historiography, *Beowulf* serves as a useful counterpoint to these three works in that it thematizes many of the problems of communities raised therein. In its transposition of the story of a Danish hero, reinterpreted for an Anglo-Saxon audience, *Beowulf* dramatizes the transferability of narrative and historical memory—a central concern of translation. Rather than focusing on the models of translation that these texts employ, my study will contextualize translations in and about Anglo-Saxon England by examining the particular kinds of cultural work translation, considered as an independent category, enables.

Examining translation as an independent category within the study of medieval literature has several implications. The traditional source text/target text analysis common to many studies of translation shifts away from evaluative comparison, or what Ivana Djordjevic calls analysis of the “practice of translation in terms of very general binary oppositions in which one of the terms is more or less explicitly privileged.”⁷ Rather than regard divergences between source and target either as evidence of the superior authority of the source text or as evidence of the technical and artistic virtuosity of the translation, I utilize a comparative method in order to underscore the moments in which a transformative process also signals a shift of audience, historical milieu, or cultural values. These moments occur with some frequency when the texts themselves provide internal cues or references to an act of narrative transmission—points at which the translation emphasizes its own act of re-telling a story. These moments of narrative transmission often coincide with the representation of history within these texts. Their presence emphasizes the dramatic shift in historical events’ significance when they are transposed to a new cultural and historical moment.

Translation becomes a useful category of analysis for Warren when one of three conditions applies: first, at the lexical level, when “English words modeled on Latin forms alter the

⁷ Djordjevic, “Mapping Medieval Translation,” in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Weiss, Fellows, and Dickson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000) 8.

hermeneutical significance of the monolingual text by creating multiple layers of linguistic and cultural signification”⁸; second, when literary narratives “rhetorically assert their linguistic identity as English,”⁹; and finally, when monolingual texts “intertextually thematize the cultural significance of translation itself” by reference to other acts of translation—literal or figurative—within themselves.¹⁰ Although she focuses on Middle English, Warren’s approach to translation is instructive for our understanding of translation in other periods: the distinction she draws between the monolingual text and the process that creates it lies at the core of more recent understandings of translation as what Stanton calls a “culturally productive” enterprise.¹¹ Translations are themselves the products of a particular cultural moment or identity, but the literary work of translated texts also produces such identities both within and without the text.

While fundamentally interpretive, translation is also dynamically linked to the expression of both source text and translation. A process-oriented model of translation suggests a close interaction between translations and source texts that is best understood by engaging with the semantic valences of the word “translation” itself. In one sense, translation refers to the finished product of translation—a text which can be compared to its sources but is written chronologically later than those sources. However, translation can also refer to the *act* of translating a work from its source to a target language. The act of translating, that is, requires a dynamic and multilingual engagement with texts in order to produce *a* singular translation. This distinction between product and process is particularly evident when considering a body of translated work, as Djordjevic explores with regard

⁸ Warren, “Translation,” 58.

⁹ Warren, “Translation,” 59.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Ivana Djordjevic, “Mapping Medieval Translation,” in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Weiss, Fellows, and Dickson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000).

to Middle English translations of Anglo-Norman *lais*.¹² It is my assertion that this process of translation is traceable within the text produced.

Each of the texts I examine re-imagines a narrative that is ostensibly about the past in order to make it relevant to the translation's contemporary moment. A key component of this transposition is a focus on the kinds of communities imagined within the translation. My definition of community draws on Brian Stock's use of the term "textual community," which posits the formation of communities around authoritative texts in the Middle Ages.¹³ These textual communities formed in relation to a set of authoritative texts or individuals who have mastered them, and the texts around which they formed became fundamental to the creation of "communal identity, affecting even the non-literate through [their] dissemination and acceptance by the members of the community."¹⁴ Translation, I argue, demonstrates a particular aspect of textual communities, not only in regard to the historical motives for the use of translation but also in regard to the communities translations imagine within themselves. The ethnic, religious, and geographical communities created within translation become clearer when translation is considered as a process through which such identities are in constant negotiation, in part because it reveals the ways in which translation creates, alters, and extends the imagined communities within the narrative it transmits.¹⁵

¹² Djordjevic, "Mapping Medieval Translation," 7-24.

¹³ See Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*.

¹⁴ C. Annette Gris , "The Textual Community of Syon Abbey," *Florilegium* 19 (2002) 1.

¹⁵ I borrow the idea of an "imagined community" from Benedict Anderson's work in *Imagined Communities*. However, I transpose his use of this term from a historical and cultural to a literary milieu. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

TRANSLATION STUDIES AND OLD ENGLISH

The formation of complex textual communities by means of translation has only recently become the ground for scholarly considerations of Old English translations. Two authors in particular shape my understanding of translation as not only a question of source study and transmission but also as a productive cultural practice that creates, alters, and sustains communities: Kathleen Davis and Robert Stanton. In “National Writing in the Ninth Century,” Davis argues persuasively for understanding the *Preface to the Pastoral Care*—and the Alfredian translations more broadly—as not only part of “medieval hegemonic processes—such as the delineation of a national language and race, deployment of an imagined national past, and the articulation of culture in terms of geographical space,” but also as a textual space through which “Old English studies can both engage and contest the political position already occupied by its subject in contemporary events.”¹⁶ Davis argues that the “predominance of translation in a vernacular literature indicates the strong emergence of—not the lack of—a national identity,” partially because it allows “the production of a universally recognizable canon of texts and genres that is, simultaneously, a national canon attesting the nation’s own historical existence and its own literary and cultural tradition.”¹⁷ Davis demonstrates that the *Preface* assumes a past identity as “ideal,” and creates out of that ideal past a people—the *Angelcynn*, or English people—who are defined not least by the territory of *Angelcynn* that they inhabit. The people and the land become lexically intertwined.

The very nature of translation in Anglo-Saxon England, then, as Robert Stanton rightly observes, is “in fact a relational concept: it regarded, confronted, and participated in an established,

¹⁶ Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28.3 (Fall 1998) 614.

¹⁷ Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century,” 615-616.

old, prestigious, and authoritative body of religious doctrine, academic method, and literature both sacred and secular.”¹⁸ Its participation in these structures led to what Stanton argues forms “both an academic culture and a habit of mind: Anglo-Saxon literary culture, both before and after the introduction of English as a literary language, was characterized by self-consciousness about language as a reflective, applied, interpretive tool.”¹⁹ The interpretive mentality translations themselves present, therefore, is also a mechanism which forms textual communities. As in Davis’ account of the *Preface to the Pastoral Care*, the very fact of an audience for translation authorizes the existence of that unified body, even if only within the confines of the text. As an interpretive frame, translation is crucial to the emergence of Anglo-Saxon literary culture.

One way in which the translation functions as a tool for the formation of group identities has to do with the negotiation of cultural authority. In many medieval translations, the works themselves trade on the legitimacy afforded them by their relationship to source texts. These texts’ Latin sources grant them what Nicole Discenza identifies as a kind of cultural currency that increases the status of the translation.²⁰ In her study of the Old English *Boethius*, she argues that “by retaining and glossing so many proper nouns [from his Latin source text], Alfred increased both the prestige of his text (and therefore his own symbolic capital) and the cultural capital of his people. Alfred legitimated his language and his text by drawing clearly and overtly on the one legitimate language available, although he did not write in that language.”²¹ Latin—a prestige language

¹⁸ Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, 4.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King’s English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). Discenza draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital to make this assertion.

²¹ Discenza, *The King’s English*, 17.

throughout the Middle Ages—creates a cultural background for the Old English texts that draw on it, and moreover, instills in the translations a sense of the added weight of cultural authority.

The relationship between source text and translation is, of course, one of the fundamental concerns of translation theory, and Davis' scholarship in particular draws on work regarding the existence (or lack thereof) of a coherent translation theory in the work of Anglo-Saxon translators. This theory, as Christine Thijs reminds us, arises out of the practice itself: "As far as we know, neither Alfred nor his contemporaries explicitly theorized about their translation techniques, apart from (in Alfred's case) a few extremely brief remarks in prefatory materials."²² The insistence of Alfred's prefaces on a "word by word" or "sense by sense" version of the text he translates highlights an implied difference between original text and translation that increases the legitimacy accorded to the Latin source. This impulse to impose hierarchy renders what Davis suggests is a "recollection of a national history in the form of an appeal to an ideal past" which "not only posits the nation as a pre-existing, homogeneous entity, but also authorizes the contemporary nation in terms of *apparently* intrinsic, timeless characteristics, such as the composition of its people, its geographical boundaries, its laws, values, and political structure."²³ That is, rather than looking at acts of translation as constitutive of identity, a focus on translation practice tends to appeal to a monolithic structure in which identities are already fixed before the translation is ever made necessary.

Janet Bately's assertion that Alfred's translation program consists of the transformation of "the Latin into what may be called independent Old English prose," emphasizes the virtuosity of the translations—which she notes "discard[ed] literal translation," further strengthening her appeal to

²² Christine Thijs, "Translation: Practice Before Theory?" *Neophilologus* 91.1 (January 2007) 153.

²³ Kathleen Davis, "National Writing in the Ninth Century," 622.

the importance of these texts as cultural artifacts as well as archives of transmitted sources.²⁴ The questions which such analysis produces are often about the translator—the cultural context of the translator and the ways in which the mode of the translated text differs from its source. The issue ignored in these considerations is how the translation or indeed, the historical situation of the translation, forms itself as a discrete entity which encompasses the source text's perspective but is not reducible to it. Understanding translation as a dynamic process, in the same vein as the processes of nation building and interpretation considered by Davis and Stanton respectively, allows the study of translation to become a study of the process by which translations create identities, and allows for a more coherent understanding of the textual communities to which they refer.

TRANSLATION AND COMMUNITY IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

The root sense of the word translation is to carry across—across language and culture, certainly, but also across time. My own observations about translation and community in the present study seek to bring together the trans-temporal observations about the *Preface to the Pastoral Care* made by Davis—the combination of a monolithic, authorizing history of identity with the mobile creation of a foundation that never really existed—and the interpretive impulse that Stanton observes as fundamental to the literary culture created in the Anglo-Saxon period. I do so through a rubric that understands translation as a comparative endeavor that exceeds its own comparative impulse. My definition of translation is more expansive than that of most scholars; however, by understanding translations according to their central impulse of transmitting narratives, I reveal both the communal identities that translations enable and the contingency of those same identities.

²⁴ Janet Bately, “The Literary Prose of King Alfred’s Reign: Translation or Transformation?” in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul Szarmach (New York: Garland, 2000) 21.

My consideration of the Old English *Orosius* examines the temporal extension of the audience of a narrative enacted by translation. The Old English *Orosius* is the most traditional of the translations I treat in this study in that it has a Latin source text it purports to translate directly. A “paraphrase” of the fifth-century Latin *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septi*, the *Orosius* was also an integral part of the Alfredian translation program, although it was not translated by the king himself.²⁵ Previous studies of the translation have attempted to recoup its originality or its artistry in transforming the *Historiae*.²⁶ These studies have largely ignored, however, the subtle addition of a new narrative voice to the history.²⁷ In so doing the translation also introduces a new character into its historical narrative. By the addition of the phrase *cwæð Orosius*, “Orosius said,” the Old English text creates an *Orosius*-narrator, a figure who serves as *compiler*, authority, and judge of the historical events he describes.²⁸ The addition of the *cwæð Orosius* highlights not only the questions of authority that are necessarily raised by any consideration of the Alfredian translations, but also the temporal remove at which the text operates with regard to its source. The *cwæð* construction highlights the ways in which the propagation of translation under Alfred did not simply preserve culture but initiates a point of origin: authority is transferred from the original text and author to the translation

²⁵ See Malcolm Godden, “Did King Alfred write anything?” *Medium Aevum* 76, no. 1 (2007), 1-23.

²⁶ For example, Janet Bately’s understanding of the translation of Latin texts under the auspices of the Alfredian program classes translation as an ultimately insufficient term for the work of a text such as the *Orosius*. Rather, utilizing “sense by sense” style and the free addition of explanatory references, in addition to amalgamating different classical works within it, the *Orosius* “transformed the Latin into what may be called independent English prose.” Janet Bately, “The Literary Prose of King Alfred’s Reign,” 21.

²⁷ Notable exceptions include Stephen Harris and Malcolm Godden, both of whom mention the strangeness of the *cwæð Orosius*, if only obliquely. See Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Godden, “Did King Alfred write anything?” *Medium Aevum* 76, no. 1 (2007), 1-23.

²⁸ As Martin Irvine points out, compilation transfers “textual power from the hand of a former holder to that of the present compiler. To compile is to rewrite and to perpetuate authority.” Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: ‘Grammatica’ and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994) 242. In this context, Irvine refers to Isidore’s *Etymologiae*; however, the same relationship between compilation and authority can be applied to the *Orosius*.

itself.²⁹ The presence of the *cnæð Orosius*, however, also raises basic questions about the translation's audience and its temporality.

Medieval translation in general and the Old English *Orosius* in particular can help illuminate the implications of the relationship between a source text and translation, especially the way in which the source text is often positioned as the text “to which” the translation must be faithful or unfaithful. Dismantling this hierarchy allows the repositioning of the relationship between original and translation: the translation becomes an authority in its own right. In this sense, the *Orosius* helps to make clear the privilege accorded to chronological time as an organizational construct. By rejecting this understanding of translation—i.e., that the source text, because it occurs earlier chronologically than the translated text, is the text to which the translation ought defer—an understanding of the *Orosius* emerges which reworks the relationship of the source text to the translated text. This more fluid relationship affects the kinds of communities reflected by the text. In the case of the *Orosius*, the identity in question is hybrid—it partakes of attributes of both fifth-century Rome and ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England. The *Orosius* creates communal identity not on the basis of temporal, linguistic, or historical difference, but rather on the building of a network of times, narratives, and authorities that lay the groundwork for an Anglo-Saxon collective identity best observed through the interface of a translated text.³⁰

This building of networks through which communal identity is imagined within translations is further expanded by Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*. By translating a series of Late Antique saints' lives,

²⁹ As Robert Stanton observes, this has the added effect of transferring authority to “to Alfred's recreation of them as a royal teacher, and in a fundamentally English milieu.” Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*, 99-100.

³⁰ I use the term network in Bruno Latour's sense of the term, meaning a collective noun which limits the groups it governs not only to humans but to the objects, and texts, which facilitate connections between human. My use of this term allows analysis of the multiple kinds of entities which participate in what are often perceived as groupings formed solely of humans. Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

and by interpolating Anglo-Saxon saints into a larger Christian community through the point of view of the institutional Church, Ælfric makes a careful claim for the importance of Anglo-Saxon Christians among the Christian community as a whole. While the *Orosius* only explicitly treats temporal difference between source and translation, the *Lives of the Saints* treats the problem of geographical distance across which the Christian community exists. Ælfric, from his monastic home at Winchester, produced in the *Lives of the Saints* a series of texts designed to connect Christians in England with a larger group of religious followers that convened around the cults of the Late Antique saints. The *Lives of the Saints* exposes the contingency that plagues such communities—they must be continually reaffirmed through right belief and right practice in order to survive. The individual believer or the individual community can therefore only exist if it is continually reconstituted by the acts of faith and right practice that reaffirm the binds that tie together the community as a whole. In the *Lives of the Saints*, community—similarly to translation—is both a cultural object and an amalgamation of the processes by which community is produced.

The holy relics of King Oswald of Northumbria are one vector through which such reaffirmation of community can take place. In the *Life of Oswald*, Ælfric inscribes a specific Anglo-Saxon saint into the community of Late Antique saints and uses a narrative inherited from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* to do so. My reading of this text highlights a set of intersecting arguments that the relationship between Ælfric and Bede makes clear: first, that the Anglo-Saxon community of Christian believers is integral to the community of Christians as a whole; and second, that the community of Anglo-Saxon Christians must be upheld by the practice of its individual members. The audience that Ælfric intends for his exposition of the *Life of Oswald* is larger than the monastic community that already creates and sustains its community by the practice of the holy offices. Rather, the community Ælfric's *Life of Oswald* imagines is one that would readily identify itself with the holy king. The ability of Oswald to make the places he interacts with holy and for the soil he

sanctifies by his life and death to be distributed across England emphasizes the constitutive power of his relics—and the translated narrative Ælfric presents of them—over the communities that venerate him. These communities are united by the religious faith, which is made manifest in the shared language, history, and geographical space emphasized in the story of Oswald.

In the *Lives of the Saints*, Christianity forms a supra-national and trans-temporal structure in which the individual, or the individual community, plays a constitutive role. Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* considers similar problems of historical representation by recontextualizing an iconic moment of Anglo-Saxon historiography. By resetting and radically altering the narrative of the conversion of Northumbria, the *Man of Law's Tale* demonstrates the problematic intersection of ethnic and religious identities in the creation of an origin story. When Chaucer's narrative is considered in comparison with its most direct source, the Anglo-Norman *Chronicle* of Nicholas Trevet, it reveals a particular difference of emphasis relating to the communities each text represents. The *Man of Law's Tale* expands its imagined English community to connect the conversion of Northumbria to the presence of both Roman and Briton Christian influence. In so doing, however, it marginalizes the Saxons, and so creates a community that can only be sustained by reference to someone else's past.

The *Man of Law's Tale* emphasizes the centrality of an enduring problem for communities that extend across time—the necessity of forgetting a shared past to fabricate an alternative present, the “minus in the origin” that Davis identifies as the act of forgetting that makes a text a piece of national writing.³¹ By employing a systematic focus on the Briton and Roman connections of English Christianity, rather than the presence and the impact of the Saxons which is made vivid in Trevet, the *Man of Law's Tale* creates a history for English Christianity that revises the one inherited from Bede (that the Britons lost power because they did not proselytize effectively), and changes the

³¹ Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century.”

character of the community Chaucer does invoke. This sense of community—the gradual creation of “Engelonde” out of the pagan “Northumberlond” that begins the story—reveals another way in which translations suggest both process and product: where Trevet emphasizes the agency of the converting Saxon characters in the “Life of Constance,” Chaucer focuses on the mediating roles played both by Briton and Roman Christianity. The *Man of Law’s Tale* not only revises but radically reinterprets the central message of the “Life of Constance,” making it less about the travels and travails of a holy woman, and more about the emergence of a recognizable England out of a fragmented Saxon past.

Where each of the texts thus far outlined creates an expansion of community—either in time, space, or ethnic identity—*Beowulf* has a different relationship to both narrative transmission and community. Although it is not a translation, *Beowulf* thematizes the issues raised by translation in two intersecting ways. First, the text itself is framed as a narrative that is being retold; and second, the narrative transposes a story that is not Anglo-Saxon in origin—*Beowulf*, as mentioned previously, is a Scandinavian story—and locates it within the cultural framework of Anglo-Saxon poetry, language, culture. Even within the main narrative, *Beowulf* includes a series of digressions—narratives within the larger story of *Beowulf* that themselves retell already-known narratives for both the characters within the text and/or its projected audience. These digressions, along with the main narrative of the poem, give us insight into the ways that, even in the absence of a source text, translation both creates community and fails to sustain it.

Within its digressions, *Beowulf* creates and explicates the connections that both constitute human communities and threaten their dissolution. Human communities cannot exist in isolation—a fact taken for granted by the first three chapters of my dissertation. Rather, community is always formed not only in and around other competing human structures but also through the connections that link human communities to the natural world. Human communities, that is, are also engulfed in

and superceded by the formation of collectivities. By orienting my study of *Beowulf* around the networks into which the poem's human actors fall, the complexity of human connections to dragons, gold, treasure, and even corpses undermines the possibility of stable community in the text. These configurations become clear through the digressions, which tell a longer history than the poem's central narrative does. The digressions, therefore, illuminate a past the poem's characters cannot know. By retelling that past, the poem emphasizes the fragility of human communities that results from the multiple temporalities and connections to "outside" forces which frame their formation.

These wide-ranging examples reveal the multiplicity of identities made possible for human groups through the tool of translation. Each text in *Communities in Translation* responds to a different model of textual transmission, and these models of translation change the expressions of community-formation within them. By examining the various kinds of community that translation both produces and is produced for, a better understanding emerges of the process through which translations imagine community. These visions of alternative pasts, presents, and futures in turn allow for a clearer exposition of the processes by which translations transpose meaning and identities from the past by retelling stories, and in so doing, transform these identities in order to make them useful to the present and future of their translators.

*Alfredian Temporalities:
Time and Translation in the Old English Orosius*

If we were to translate into English the traditional formula Traddutore, traditore as “the translator is a betrayer,” we would deprive the Italian rhyming epigram of all its paronomastic value. Hence a cognitive attitude would compel us to change this aphorism into a more explicit statement and to answer the questions: translator of what messages? betrayer of what values?

~Roman Jakobson “On Some Linguistic Aspects of Translation”¹

As one of the Alfredian translations, the Old English *Orosius* holds a place among the other books that the preface to the *Pastoral Care* deems “nidbeðyrfesta sien eallum monnum to witanne” (most needful for all men to know).² The text is an Anglo-Saxon “paraphrase” of the *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem*, a Christian universal history written by fifth-century Roman historian Paulus Orosius. Meant to counter concerns that the sack of Rome in 410 C.E. was a result of the empire’s conversion to Christianity, the text “presents a systematic catalogue of human misery from the Creation to the early fifth century, and repeatedly emphasizes the relative superficiality of contemporary suffering in comparison with the catastrophes of the past.”³ This agenda in the

¹ Roman Jakobson, “Some Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Schulte and Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 151.

² *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of the Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, 2 vols., EETS, o.s. 45 (London: Early English Texts Society, repr. 1958) 6.

³ A.H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005) 39-40.

Historiae—the promotion of Christianity through the comparison of times—makes the Old English translation of the text a particularly interesting case study for the function of time in translations.

In his study of time in Chaucerian texts, Paul Strohm rightly argues that “no text fails to bear within itself a range of alien temporalities, imported into its bounds as unavoidable part and parcel of the words and images of which it is made.”⁴ Therefore, each text “harbours different notions of time.”⁵ In this view of textual representation and production, the text becomes a collection not merely of words, stories, or characters, but of times as well: the narrative present is always “held hostage to the past and future.”⁶ As a translation, the Old English *Orosius* contains two distinct times that co-habit the text: the fifth-century world of Paulus Orosius, and the ninth-century Old English-speaking world for whom his work was “needful to know.”⁷ The text anticipates this audience and responds to it actively; moreover, there is a motion backwards in time that re-writes the identity and message of Paulus Orosius and the *Historiae* for the Anglo-Saxon future into which the *Orosius*-narrator speaks.

The most striking textual feature of the Old English *Orosius* is the method by which it calls attention to itself as a translation: the recurrence of the phrase *cwæð Orosius*, “Orosius said.”⁸ The *cwæð* construction often introduces material that is significantly altered from the Latin. Additionally,

⁴ Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Univ. of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1996) 80-1. The chapter I have cited here, “Chaucer’s *Troilus* as Temporal Archive,” is particularly useful for understanding how medieval texts might be considered as temporal “archives,” or collections of times that are not limited to their immediate social context.

⁵ Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text*, 80-1.

⁶ Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text*, 81.

⁷ *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of the Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet, 6.

⁸ All Old English text is from *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, EETS, s.s. 6 (London: Early English Texts Society, 1979). All translations from the Old English are my own. Citations refer to the book number in the *Orosius*, with the page and line numbers in Bately’s edition.

it serves two further functions. First, the *cwæð Orosius* creates an author-figure that I will refer to as the “*Orosius*-narrator.” The author-figure is an effect produced by the text and should be distinguished from the historical figure Paulus Orosius, however much the text wishes to fuse them together.⁹ Second, the *cwæð Orosius* constructs an audience for the text by assuming the historical and linguistic traits implicit in said audience. Both of these functions call a community into being through the text—the community to whom, in some senses, it is addressed—and this community is simultaneously located in Paulus Orosius’s fifth-century Rome and ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England. While this community resembles Brian Stock’s idea of a “textual community,” the key difference between the community established in the *Orosius* and the communities that Stock examines is historical reality. Whereas Stock referred to specific localizable communities who used the texts he examined, no such certainty exists for the *Orosius*.¹⁰ The textual communities formed in the Old English *Orosius* are “virtual”—that is, they are formed by an anticipated readership within the text rather than an existing one outside of it.¹¹ My analysis of the *Orosius* thus offers a possible departure point for future studies of temporality, translation, and the Alfredian program as a whole

⁹ For clarity’s sake, I refer to the Latin text as the *Historiae* and its author as Paulus Orosius. The Old English text is referred to as the *Orosius*, and the author-figure therein is referred to as the *Orosius*-narrator.

¹⁰ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), 522-530. Stock describes such communities as “groups of people whose social activities are centered around texts, or more precisely, around a literate interpreter of them” (522).

¹¹ My understanding of the “virtuality” of the textual communities formed by the Old English *Orosius* is particularly indebted to the work of Martin Foys. See Martin K. Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon: Old Media, New Media, and Early Medieval Studies in the Late Age of Print* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2010). In his consideration of the Cotton Map, Foys argues that in relation to the Orosian geography it attempts to represent, “the plotting of narrative lines on geographic lines (and vice versa) calls attention to how the narratives of written histories and geographies construct a reality at least one plane removed from the ‘primary world’” (Foys, 127). The reality thus constructed “dissolves temporal distinctions, [. . .] expands the reality of its Anglo-Saxon counterpart, and attempts to open up its future” (146).

by analyzing the way that translation can create a multi-layered temporality within the text that changes the communities imagined within it.¹²

“CWÆÐ OROSIUS”

At the behest of Saint Augustine, Paulus Orosius wrote the *Historiae* in part to address—and rebuke—the discontents of some citizens of the Roman Empire. These citizens purportedly attributed the sack of Rome by Alaric the Goth in 410 C.E. to the empire’s recent conversion to Christianity. Written as a companion-piece to Saint Augustine’s *City of God*, the *Historiae* includes an introductory preface addressed to Orosius’ mentor, explicating both the difficulty of the work as he undertook it and his findings in doing so:

For I found the days of the past not only equally oppressive as these, but also the more wretched the more distant they are from the solace of true religion, so that it has properly become clear that an avaricious bloody death prevailed, as long as the religion which forbade bloodshed was unknown; that while the new dawned, the old grew faint; that the old comes to an end as the new already prevails; that the old will no longer be when the new shall reign alone.¹³

From the beginning of the *Historiae*, Orosius argues that the only “proper” reading of history is in light of Christianity and, moreover, that such a reading will show that the past was, in a sense, destitute. For Orosius, understanding and insight into the meaning of historical events cannot exist without the acknowledgment of Christ as both a historical and hermeneutic figure. Orosius reveals the evils of the past to be all the more heinous when seen from a Christian viewpoint. He avers that

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2006).

¹³ “nanctus sum enim praeteritos dies non solum aequae ut hos graues, uerum etiam tanto atrocius miseros quanto longius a remedio uerae religionis alienos: ut merito hac scrutatione claruerit regnasse mortem auidam sanguinis, dum ignoratur religio quae prohiberet a sanguine; ista inlucescente, illam constupuisse; illam concludi, cum ista iam praeualet; illam penitus nullam futuram, cum haec sola regnabit.” Zangemeister 2.14-3.3; Deferrari 4. This preface was either omitted or lost from the Anglo-Saxon text. All Latin text from the *Historiae* is from Pauli Orosii, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri Septem*, ed. Karl Zangemeister (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1889). English translations are from Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* ed. and trans. Roy Deferrari, *The Fathers of the Church* Vol. 50 (Washington: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1964).

the pre-Christian world did not know how to read history: “they do not inquire into the future, and either forget or do not know the past.”¹⁴ His implicit argument is that his contemporary non-Christians also cannot participate in the correct interpretation of the past because they cannot appreciate the inevitability of a future that is destined by the divine.¹⁵

In the Latin *Historiae*, all times and peoples—from Semiramis and figures of the Old Testament to the sack of Rome in 410 C.E.—are measured in terms of their temporal distance from a central event: the building of Rome. This structure is a defining feature of the text, as each entry in the history begins with one of two phrases, a trait carried over to the Old English *Orosius*. In the Old English text, each chapter begins with either “Ær ðam þe Romeburh getimbred wæs” (Before the city of Rome was built) or “Æfter ðam þe Romeburh getimbred wæs” (After the city of Rome was built), followed by a given number of years.¹⁶ As Nicholas Howe argues, the references to Rome function “[to evoke] that city’s centrality in western Christendom.”¹⁷ The dating of each event in the

¹⁴ “[q]ui cum futura non quaerant, praeterita autem aut obliuiscantur aut nesciant,” Zangemeister 2.9-13; Deferrari, 4.

¹⁵ Orosius clearly saw himself in the same tradition as Augustine in terms of his understanding of the relation of human history to divine providence; however, Orosius’ conception of *historia* differs significantly from his mentor’s, which makes it clear why Augustine was so disdainful of his work. On this point see David Rohrbacker, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002). Rohrbacker cites a number of scholars who identify the tone of Augustine’s second book of the *City of God* as arguing against Orosius’ less philosophically sophisticated version of a world history (146). On the key differences between Augustine’s conception of History and that of Orosius, see Rudiger Bittner, “Augustine’s Philosophy of History,” in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999), 345-360. In Augustine, the work of God in the world is always implicit, but can rarely be seen: “we can only be confident in general that all history is in God’s hands, but we cannot watch his hand at work” (Bittner, 355).

¹⁶ For both Paulus Orosius and the Old English translator, the entirety of history is structured around the building of Rome rather than Christ’s birth. Although the nativity is given significant attention in the Latin text, the Old English translation drastically reduces its presence as an event to no more than a passing mention.

¹⁷ Nicholas Howe, “Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England,” *JMEMS* 34.1 (Winter 2004), 158. For Howe, the translation of so many prominent Latin works into the vernacular under Alfred constitutes a “forced program of modernization that sought to reconnect the badly educated and peripheral Anglo-Saxons to the center of Christian belief and culture” (158). In Howe’s words, “it remained as the source of instruction by which the English Church was strengthened and reformed, starting with all of the letters of pastoral advice

Orosius in terms of the founding of Rome suggests continuity between the Roman Empire and the Anglo-Saxons, who were partial inheritors of the Roman tradition of historiography.

Even more important than the connection of Anglo-Saxon England to Rome is the disconnection from the pre-Roman world that preceded it. Because the Roman world fell into decay between the writing of the *Historiae* and the writing of the Old English *Orosius*, the translation preserves what M.R. Godden terms a “monument to the fallen Roman world, a snapshot of a moment when the empire tottered on the brink of dissolution and yet contemporaries could insist that all was well.”¹⁸ In one of the few specific scholarly considerations of the phrase *cwæð Orosius*, Godden argues that the construction’s presence suggests that the Old English translator was very aware of the vast difference between his historical moment and Paulus Orosius’ in the fifth century.¹⁹ The use of the phrase *cwæð Orosius* creates what Godden terms a “distancing effect” in the translation. He argues that the presence of the phrase *cwæð Orosius* does not indicate that the material that follows is “taken from the Latin originals; it is often sheer invention by the translator.”²⁰ What Godden terms “sheer invention” is, I argue, the moment where the text draws the most attention to itself as a translation. It does so by invoking the author-figure to claim words Paulus Orosius could

sent by Gregory to Augustine in the late 590s,” and this pathway of epistolary communication served to bridge the geographical distance to Rome (167).

¹⁸ M.R. Godden, “The Anglo-Saxons and the Goths,” 61. The translation can thus preserve the irony of the Latin context while simultaneously adding to it the knowledge, in non-verbal apposition, of what Orosius could not have known or predicted—that Rome would indeed fall, and that Alaric’s conquest was not simply a gentle admonishment from God—because it does not follow the logic of the world view he presents. See also Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (South Bend: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2001) 176. Howe speaks of an “appositive geography in which one term is explicit (the pagan north) and the other is implicit (Christian England),” a distinction I have maintained in this chapter in order to think about the view of the Latin *Historiae* from the vantage point of five hundred years later (176).

¹⁹ For a consideration of a similar phrase’s translation work in the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica*, see Sharon Rowley, “‘Ic Beda’...‘Cwæð Beda’: Reinscribing Bede in the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*,” in *Palimpsests and the Literary Imagination of Medieval England: Collected Essays*, ed. Leo Carruthers, Raeleen Chai-Elsholz, and Tatjana Silec (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 95-113.

²⁰ Godden, “Did King Alfred Write Anything?” *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 7.

never have said. The *cwæð Orosius* thus allows the text to stage the intermingling of two times: Orosius' Rome, which had not yet fallen, and Alfred's England. The result is a composite conception of Anglo-Saxon identity within the translated text.

Studies of translation in Anglo-Saxon England have only recently begun to consider the ramifications of the firm distinction between the translation of texts and their consequent transformation. Janet Bately's understanding of the translation of Latin texts under the auspices of the Alfredian program considers translation an ultimately insufficient term for the work of the *Orosius*. Rather, utilizing "sense by sense" style and the free addition of explanatory references, in addition to amalgamating different classical works within it, the *Orosius* "transformed the Latin into what may be called independent English prose."²¹ In this sense, the *Orosius*-narrator might be characterized as a *compiler*: "one who selects material from a larger cultural library and whose resulting compilation is an interpretive arrangement of the discursive traditions in which the writer intervenes."²² As Martin Irvine points out, compilation transfers "textual power from the hand of a former holder to that of the present compiler. To compile is to rewrite and to perpetuate authority."²³

²¹ Janet Bately, "The Literary Prose of King Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation," in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings* ed. Paul Szarmach (New York: Garland Press, 2000), 21.

²² Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 241. See also Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 196. Copeland argues that the role of the *compiler* was to gather "together the opinions of others rather than setting forth his own" (196). In this sense, the *Orosius*-narrator's work as *compiler* draws indirectly on the same tradition of compilation as Isidore's *Etymologiae* and Jerome's *Liber quaestionum hebricarum in Genesim*. See *Isidori Hispanensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. *Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1911). For a translation see *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen Barney, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006). Hieronymus, *Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos*, ed. P. de Lagarde et al., *CCSL* 72 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1959). For a translation see *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, trans. C.T.R. Hayward, *Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).

²³ Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, 242. In this context, Irvine refers to Isidore's *Etymologiae*; however, the same relationship between compilation and authority can be applied to the *Orosius*.

This perpetuation and transfer of authority also characterizes the act of translation. For example, Robert Stanton brings to bear the insights of modern translation theory on what he terms the Old English “culture of translation,” asserting that the Alfredian translations both drew on and amplified the centrality of interpretation to Anglo-Saxon culture.²⁴ He argues that “translation is a productive cultural practice in that it defines an attitude toward received authority, and sets the terms under which authority can be reproduced and shifted from one institution or social group to another.”²⁵ The propagation of translation under Alfred thus did not simply preserve culture, but initiated a point of origin: authority was transferred from the original texts and authors “to Alfred’s recreation of them as a royal teacher, and in a fundamentally English milieu.”²⁶

Nicole Guenther Discenza argues that it is the *prefaces* to Old English translations in particular that authorize the transfer of authorial power in such texts—whether or not the preface is original to the Old English or a translation of the Latin preface.²⁷ The absence of any preface to the Old English *Orosius*, however, necessitates the location of authority in another form, that of a narrator-figure who is constructed in such a way as to support the authority of the translator. The *Orosius*-narrator and his authority over the translation is largely constructed by the phrase *cwæð* *Orosius*, which reveals the narrator as an author-figure with specific tasks to perform in relation to the history he writes. These tasks exist in addition to and in excess of the simple report of events. Because what follows the *cwæð* never belongs to the “original” fifth-century Latin text, its use

²⁴ Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

²⁵ Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*, 1.

²⁶ Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*, 99-100.

²⁷ Nicole Guenther Discenza, “The Old English *Bede* and the construction of Anglo-Saxon authority” *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002), 69-80.

indicates not only the presence of a narrator but also another authoritative voice present in the text that is not entirely coterminous with the narrator: the Old English translator who refers to him.

The functions performed by the *cnæð Orosius* in order to construct the author-figure can be broadly broken down into three categories. The first two of these are closely related. Firstly, the *cnæð* portrays the *Orosius*-narrator as a purveyor of knowledge, and therefore a figure who carries narrative authority. Secondly, it depicts the *Orosius*-narrator not only as a narrative authority but also as the *compiler* of his work: he decides how the history he writes will and, moreover, *ought* to be written.²⁸ As a composer, the *Orosius*-narrator performs two crucial tasks that are associated with narrative boundaries. He decides when and where to begin and end both individual narratives and the books in which he records them. Similarly, he delimits the boundaries of what should and should not be included in history.

These first two functions of the *cnæð* construction create a volitional role for the *Orosius*-narrator and so allow the final function of the *cnæð Orosius*: the creation of an authorial voice that renders judgment. The third use of the *cnæð Orosius* characterizes the historian as a judge who is privy to a longer view of history than an ordinary man would generally have. The *Orosius*-narrator stands as the arbiter not only of what is worthy of record in history and what ought be left out, but also as the arbiter between Christian and non-Christian worldviews. These three narrative effects—portraying the *Orosius*-narrator as a master of knowledge, a shaper of historical writings, and the arbiter of good and evil—are often all at work in each occurrence of the *cnæð* construction. These uses of the phrase *cnæð Orosius* signal moments of cultural interpretation that alter our critical perception of the *Orosius* to better account for the multi-temporal valences of translation.

²⁸ Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, 242.

When collated, these moments allow for a modern reading of the text that reaches beyond the historiographical narrative to enable an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the *Historiae*.²⁹ The Old English text positions the *Orosius*-narrator as a voice that both narrates and comments upon the history of the world. This characterization portrays the *Orosius*-narrator as part of a tradition of historical commentary but simultaneously changes the manner in which the text is received in its future. Alterations to the text modify the Anglo-Saxon cultural awareness of Roman history and serve to change the implied Anglo-Saxon audience members' self-perception as inheritors of a "Roman" tradition.³⁰

AUTHORITY AND FACTUAL TRANSMISSION

The varieties of speech indicated by the *cwæð Orosius* which construct a narrator can be broadly broken down into three categories. First, the *cwæð* construction portrays the *Orosius*-narrator as a purveyor of knowledge and a figure who carries narrative authority. Second, the *Orosius*-narrator serves not only as a narrative authority but also as the compositor of his work: he decides how the history he writes will—and moreover, ought to—be written. As a writer, the *Orosius*-narrator performs two crucial tasks that are associated with narrative boundaries. He decides when and where

²⁹ Here I draw on particularly useful work done in Elizabeth Tyler and Ross Balzaretti, "Introduction," *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Tyler and Balzaretti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). In their volume, each author "uses an awareness of narrative to step out of the textuality of history, that is, to gain perspective on the texts which allows them to consider the real people in real circumstances who produced them and thus to gain insight into the past, rather than being subsumed by the perspectives offered by the texts" (3). This interpretation suggests "that conventions were maintained, not by abstract diplomatic, poetic or hagiographic traditions but by people who found the conventions useful in shaping lived experience" (8).

³⁰ For a particularly fruitful discussion of the function of the narrator in Anglo-Saxon poetry see Ward Parks, "I Heard' formulas in Old English Poetry," *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987) 45-66. In this article, Parks argues for the presence of the character of the narrator in Anglo-Saxon poetic verse and the temporal implications of the phrases "ic hierde" and "ic gefrignan" in Old English poetry. Another source for consideration of orality in the Old English *Orosius* is Deborah VanderBilt, in her article "Translation and Orality in the Old English *Orosius*," *Oral Tradition* 13.2 (1998), 377-397. VanderBilt argues that theories of oral formulaism can be as fruitfully applied to Old English prose works as they have been to poetic texts and uses this to analyze the performance of translation in the *Orosius*.

to begin and end both individual narratives and the books in which he records them and he delimits the boundaries of what should and should not be included in history. Third, the *cwæð Orosius* serves to characterize the historian as a judge, and as such, as a figure who is privy to a longer view of history than an ordinary man would generally have. The *Orosius*-narrator stands not only as the arbiter of what is worthy of record in history and what ought be left out, but also as the arbiter between Christian and non-Christian worldviews. Each of these three narrative effects often works simultaneously with one or both of the others in the same occurrence of the *cwæð* construction.

By far the most commonplace of the roles taken on by the *Orosius*-narrator is as a narrative authority or a purveyor of knowledge. The knowledge in question is of historical detail, geographical nomenclature or even religious doctrine, but in each case, the information being conveyed is factual. That is, the figure of the *Orosius*-narrator is invoked not to proclaim an opinion but to record a truth. In the opening lines of the text, the *Orosius*-narrator gives an authoritative geographical demarcation. The narrator outlines the generally accepted view of the world's geography: "our ancestors divided into three parts all of Middle Earth, said Orosius, around which Oceanus – which is called *garsecg* – lies outside" (Ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes, cwæþ Orosius, swa swa Oceanus utan ymbligeþ, þone <man> garsæcg hateð, on þreo todældon, I.8.11). Here, the *cwæð* construction purveys a simple message of fact: it gives a Latin name and its equivalent in the Old English vernacular. *Oceanus* surrounds the earth, which is commonly divided into three separate parts by other authorities.³¹ More importantly, this figure foregrounds a translation, in which the Latin *Oceanus* is explicitly used as an equivalent term for the Old English *garsecg*.

³¹ Other occurrences are similar: the *cwæð* construction occurs at Book III.58.29 in the context of the doors of Janus and what they stood for; Book IV.112.7 with regard to the size and description of the city of Cartaina; and at VI.155.13 to bring the history of the ancients into the present day of Orosius' 5th century Roman Empire.

Here an important grammatical note raises the question of temporality in the text vis à vis the construction of authority. The *cwæð Orosius* (literally “said Orosius”) occurs in the past tense here as elsewhere in the text. Immediately following the *cwæð* construction, however, we are informed by way of clarification that men *garsecg hatedð* (call [these waters] *garsecg*). At the very moment in which the text highlights a question of authority by invoking the proper name of Paulus Orosius, and the idea of what “Orosius said,” the text also dislodges the identification of this knowledge of the past by translating *Oceanus* with an Anglo-Saxon term Paulus Orosius could never have used. The *Orosius*-narrator said, in the past, the very Anglo-Saxon name for *Oceanus*. The use of *garsecg* places the Anglo-Saxon language in a Roman past in which it did not really exist.

A less commonplace use of the factual *cwæð* does even more to suggest the contested temporal status of translation, in that it serves to highlight the Roman and the Anglo-Saxon contexts of the *Orosius* simultaneously. As mentioned previously, the beginning of each entry in the world history begins with one of two phrases: “Ær þæm þe Romeburg getimbred wæs” or “<Æfter> þæm þe Romeburg getimbred wæs” (Before Rome was built / After Rome was built, VI.155.13). This particular entry in the world history can be dated to one thousand, one hundred and forty nine years after the founding of Rome—in that reckoning, to around 395 CE. The entry continues: “Arcadius took over rule in the eastern part [of the empire] and he had it for twelve years; & Honorius [took over rule] in the western part [of the empire], and he now yet has it, said Orosius” (feng Archadius to anwalde, to þæm eastdæle, & hine hæfde XII ger; & Onorius to þæm westdæle, & nugiet hæfð, cwæð Orosius, VI.155.13). In Anglo-Saxon England, of course, this time is long past, and Honorius clearly cannot still have “the western part” of the empire. The “now” of the text—here located specifically in the fourth century—can be considered an anachronism in Anglo-Saxon.

As Malcolm Godden argues, it is precisely this insistence on a fifth-century point of view—already contradicted by both the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* and the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica*—

that makes the *Orosius* so temporally complicated.³² Although Godden describes the text as a “snapshot” of the past, the fact of its Old English re-incarnation of a Latin historian (who addresses “Romans” about a “now” set firmly in the fifth century) suggests that the voice of the *Orosius*-narrator in the text is more of an anachronism than might initially be thought. The inclusion of the passage above in the *Orosius*, with its assertion that Honorius “yet has” power in the western part of the empire suggests that the point of view of a contemporary of the Roman Empire is still somehow present in the Old English text in spite of the time that has passed. The reception of such a statement in Anglo-Saxon England brings the Latin past into contact with an Old English present that is exhorted to learn from the past the text records. It also highlights the latent anachronism of the text’s purported quotation of Orosius in an Anglo-Saxon he could never have spoken. The result is an *Orosius*-narrator with the full authorial weight of a Latin historian, the narrative authority of whom is represented as vitally important to Anglo-Saxon England. Readers of the Old English text are meant to learn the lessons of history as recorded by Orosius. The contradictions presented are thus not as relevant to the text’s reception as the broad interpretation of those events.

These claims of truth are further evident when the text presents the *Orosius*-narrator as a second-hand witness to the information in question. The verb *hyran* denotes the status of the *Orosius*-narrator as just such a witness in two specific examples of the *cwæð* construction, and positions him as someone who has heard of the event he reports. The conjunction of the *cwæð* construction and *hyran* occurs twice in the text, at III.75.15 and VI.150.18, with a similar effect in each case. The first of these examples appears when the *Orosius*-narrator describes a particularly war-torn era in the pre-Christian Roman Empire (approximately 298 BCE), and the Old English direct citation of his words is marked off by the *cwæð* construction. The use of the first-person pronoun, *ic*, in tandem with both

³² Godden, “The Anglo-Saxons and Goths,” 61.

hyran and *cwæð Orosius* gives a weighted value to this example of the *cwæð* construction, which is significant precisely because it does not fit the form of the phrase commonly found in the *Orosius*:

Eac ic hierde to soþum secgan, cwæð Orosius, þæt hit na nære on ðæm dagum mid Romanum buton gewinne, oþþe wið oþra folc, oþþe on him selfum mid monigfealdum wolum & moncwealmum

Also I have heard of a truth said, said Orosius, that it was not only in those days among the Romans that there were wars with other folk, but also that amid themselves there were manifold evils and manslaughters (III.58.29)

The significance of this assertion has less to do with factual reporting than it does with the interpretation of what transpired. A kind of transmission history is suggested through the use of *ic hierde*, which marks an utterance in which the *Orosius*-narrator reports “a truth” that he has heard from another source. The Latin text uses a version of this technique as well: Paulus Orosius often cites his sources when he draws on Livy or Augustine, for example. The Anglo-Saxon translation of this reception references not only the Latin literary tradition (however much it might draw on that tradition, here and elsewhere) but also the more familiar orality of the Anglo-Saxon period. In short, it represents the textual portrayal of the oral tradition, in which *ic hierde* suggests a reliance upon a longer, non-written tradition.

This example of the *cwæð* construction mimics a common form of narrative authority, familiar from such Anglo-Saxon poems as *Beowulf*, *Daniel* and *Exodus*.³³ In his analysis of the *ic hierde* construction in Anglo-Saxon poetic works, Ward Parks argues for the importance of distinguishing between the passive construction and the active construction of this form. When a narrator speaks in the active voice, he speaks as a direct hearer and transmitter of the story he tells. In the passive

³³ Cf. *Beowulf* 1, *Daniel* 1, and *Exodus* 1. *Klaeber's Beowulf, Fourth Edition*. ed. Bjork, Fulk and Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). *The Junius Manuscript*, ASPR ed. Dobbie (New York: Columbia University, 1931). *The Exeter Book*, ASPR ed. Krapp and Dobbie (New York: Columbia University, 1960).

voice, he tells a story that has been heard, but plays no part in the chain of transmission thereof.³⁴

This movement from first-person active to third-person passive is one way in which the Latin text and the Old English text are significantly different, despite the similarity of the concrete information conveyed. The use of the active voice in the Old English presents Orosius as an active player in the passing on of the narrative. Despite the past tense of the *cwæð*, the lingering effects of the Latin historian continue to shape the *Orosius* text.

In the Latin *Historiae*, however, the equivalent section of the text uses the passive voice: “But as it has often been said that the domestic peace of the Romans was always interrupted” (*Sed - ut saepe dictum est semper Romanorum aut domesticam quietem extraneis bellis interpellatam*).³⁵ The passive construction (*saepe dictum est*) in the Latin suggests the transmission of received knowledge on the part of the historian. The difference between the two usages lies in the way in which authority, and thus the character of the narrator, is constructed. *Dictum est* is both passive and impersonal, suggesting that, although other sources (including Livy) have been cited mere lines before in the text, this “truth” is generally accepted by all. The *sed* suggests a turn from the authorities that have been cited previously: Orosius draws on Livy for battle results, including the information that “excluding the Etruscans and the Umbrians whom the Romans by trickery diverted from the war, the losses of the Gauls and the Samnites were one hundred forty thousand three

³⁴ The “chain of transmission,” examined by Parks in his article on orality in the Old English and the “ic hierde” structure in OE Poetry, begins from a single point of departure: in a culture where orality is primary, “poems and stories are perceived not as objects but as events that occur in time. Transmission can take place both within these events (synchronically) and between them (diachronically). Within individual events, transmission involves two aspects, expression (the saying or telling), and reception (the hearing). The diachronic transmission of narrative traces a pathway through a succession of telling and hearings.” Ward Parks, “‘I Heard’ formulas in Old English Poetry,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987) 52.

³⁵ “*Sed - ut saepe dictum est semper Romanorum aut domesticam quietem extraneis bellis interpellatam aut externos prouentus morbis interioribus adgrauatos, tantum ut omnimodis ingentes animi undecumque premerentur - hanc cruentam tristemque uictoriam pestilentia ciuitatis oneravit et triumphales pompas obuia mortuorum exsequiae polluerunt. nec erat cui de triumpho gaudium suaderetur, cum tota ciuitas aut aegris suspiraret aut mortuis.*” Zangemeister 90.3-11; Deferrari 109-110.

hundred cavalry, and that one thousand chariots in armor opposed the Roman battle line.”³⁶ Orosius tells another story in the *Historiae*, one in which there is no joy in this great victory, where “funeral corteges of the dead met and polluted the triumphal processions” as a result of a pestilence that ravages the Imperial City.³⁷ The important stylistic point here is the passive voice in which Paulus Orosius relays the story: he notes only that this version is common knowledge. He does not play an active role in passing it on.³⁸

The same victory and the same pestilence are both described in the Old English *Orosius*. Although the phrase *cnæð Orosius* is not present here, a similar principle governs the relation of this received wisdom. The Orosius-narrator is directly cited, and he reports that he “heard of a truth said” (*hierde to soþum seggan*). The use of the pronoun *ic* establishes an immediate relationship between this figure and the knowledge he conveys. The difference between the two passages lies not in the character of the information related but in the situation of the narrator in the text. In the *Historiae*, Paulus Orosius relies on other *auctors* for his mandates and his judgments; in the Old English, the *Orosius*-narrator acts as an *auctor* himself. In invoking the poetic construction *ic hierde*, the Old English text is “summoning [the] recollection [of things said] into [its] own telling.”³⁹ The *Orosius*, then, figures its narrator as part of the textual representation of an oral tradition—a tradition that is, if not entirely foreign to the literate culture in which the *Historiae* was written, certainly temporally and geographically quite distant from it. When combined with the presence of the *cnæð* construction, the

³⁶ “Fuisse autem absque Etruscis et Umbris, quos astu Romani bello auocauerunt, Gallorum et Samnitium peditum CXL milia CCCXXX, equitum uero XLVII milia Liuius refert, et carpentarios mille in armis contra aciem stetisse Romanam.” Zangemeister, 89.35-90.2 ; Deferarri, 109.

³⁷ See n. 35 above for the Latin citation.

³⁸ See Ward Parks, who argues that the passive hearing of a story – i.e., as simply another action in the chain of events, rather than a moment in which a narrative is received and remembered for future transmission – is particularly cogent on this point. Parks, “‘I Heard’ formulas,” 53-54.

³⁹ Parks, “‘I Heard’ formulas,” 53.

first person *ic hierde* of the *Orosius*-narrator claims the authority of a writer who is antiquated in his own right in Anglo-Saxon England, at a proximity as distant from it as the fifth-century Paulus Orosius himself was to his Classical sources. In short, the voice that the Old English *Orosius* represents as that of Paulus Orosius is out of its proper time, and the active role it plays in shaping the history to be passed on can be understood as both Latinate and Anglo-Saxon in origin. Both the Latin historian and his Anglo-Saxon translator are implicated in the same vision of history.

A final point on this usage of the *cwæð* construction is worth noting in relationship to the construction of a narrator figure who conveys factual knowledge. At only one point in the Old English text is the *cwæð Orosius* used to convey factual information concerning the one thing on which an anti-pagan polemicist would be expected to convey absolute authority: on a point of faith. In Book II.35.28, the following statement about the basic tenets of the Christian faith appears: “I believe, said Orosius, that there is no wise man, unless he knows clearly enough that God shaped the first man just and good, and all mankind with him” (Ic wene, cwæð Orosius, þæt nan wis mon ne sie, buton he genoh geare wite þætte God þone ærestan monn ryhtne & godne gesceop, & eal monncynn mid him). Much abridged from its far more detailed counterpart in the Latin *Historiae*, the section prefaces a number of other statements that can be associated with the Christian faith more generally. The culmination of these points of faith is in the interaction of Divine power with earthly power:

Nu we witon þæt ealle onwealdas from him sindon; we witon eac þæt ealle ricu sint from him, for þon ealle onwealdas of rice sindon. Nu he þara læssena rica reccend is, hu micle swiþor wene we þæt he ofer þa maran sie, þe on swa unmetlican onwealdum ricседon (II.36.7-11)

Now we know that all powers are from him; we also know that all kingdoms are from him, because all power is of kingdoms. Now because he [God] is the governor of the lesser, how much greater then do we believe his power over the greater, those who ruled with such unmeasured power.

In an elegant syllogism, the text makes clear the relationship of power and authority as they are connected to the shaping of the world. Because power is granted by God, and power is granted to kingdoms, then all kingdoms must hold power from God. The subtext is that this truth holds regardless of whether the kingdom acknowledges Him. Again, we see a truth that might not be recognized by non-Christian actors in history recognized and made clear by the *Orosius*-narrator. The implication is that certain conditions of history are applicable regardless of the temporal moment, and the knowledge possible within it. Furthermore, the interpretation offered here suggests that the historian's knowledge is applicable across time—he states a truth that is as Roman as it is Anglo-Saxon.

AUTHORITY AND THE SHAPE OF HISTORY

The *Orosius*-narrator's knowledge of fact is broadly related to the way in which history is shaped by the author. The second prominent usage of the *cwæð Orosius* indicates authorial control exerted over the text by the *Orosius*-narrator. Most often, this usage relates to the question of how the books are arranged and with what materials. The greater significance of these particular moments in the text is that they establish the collective authority to judge the powers, peoples and events in question. Such authority is almost without exception associated with the proper name of the *Orosius*-narrator.

An example of particular interest in Book II marks the transition from one subject matter to another. The historian relates the story of the Laecadaemonians in their opposition to Persia. At this point, however, the scope of the text is reined in with the invocation of Orosius' name: "Now we shall again, said Orosius, turn nearer to Rome, where we before left it off (Nu we sculon eft, cwæð Orosius, hwierfan near Roma, þær we hit ær forleton, II.49.10).⁴⁰ Orosius' judgment is left to a later

⁴⁰ The authority of the proper name is in this case extended also to the community formed around the reading of the text—"we shall turn again, said Orosius" suggests a particular kind of journey travelled by a

section of the same chapter, when the *Orosius*-narrator suggests that his turn to Rome is necessary for two reasons. First, he is unable to relate the number of evil deeds that were performed in this period of history.⁴¹ Second, he emphasizes that he lacks the knowledge to speak authoritatively about all matters in history. The *Orosius*-narrator is unable to continue because “I also of all of this middle earth do not understand the greater part, except for what happened in two empires, in the first and in the most recent: those being the Assyrians and the Romans” (ic eac ealles þises middangeardes na maran dæles ne angite buton ðætte on twam onwealdum gewearð, on þæm ærestan & on ðæm siþemestan: þæt sint Asirie & Romane, II.49.10). This admitted limit to the historian’s knowledge is not present in the *Historiae*: in fact, in the Latin text, only the overwhelming number of evils stops Paulus Orosius from cataloging further events, and we are left with the impression that he moves on only because he needs to represent each part of the world equally in each time period.⁴² The difference between the Old English and the Latin text is that the Old English limits what the *Orosius*-narrator knows of the world’s empires. This limitation suggests that the *Orosius*-narrator is aware of both geographic and temporal distance, rather than simply the story of history as portrayed by Paulus Orosius.

What does the translation accomplish by placing this limit on its narrator’s knowledge? After all, without the preface (which, as mentioned previously, was either lost or omitted), there is no

group of readers—an example of how texts facilitate and participate in the connections made between humans.

⁴¹ “For þon ic ne mæg eal þa monigfealdan yfel emdenes areccean” (II.49.11)

⁴² “At Romae - ut ad id tempus redeam unde digressus sum: neque enim interuallo miseriarum ad alios transire compellor, sed, sicuti se quondam efferuescentia ubique mala. ipsis actibus conligarunt, ita etiam permixta referuntur: nobis quippe conferre inter se tempora orbis, non cuiusquam partis eius laboribus insultare propositum est.” (But at Rome—to return to that time whence I have digressed, for I am not compelled by any surcease of miseries to go over to other peoples, but just as in former times evils which raged everywhere brought themselves together by their very acts, so too a, they are also reported in mingled fashion; for it has been my purpose to compare the periods of world history with one another, not to revile any part of it for its troubles.) Zangemeister, 49.22-28; Deferarri, 61.

appeal to Saint Augustine, nor does the *Orosius*-translator profess his doubt in the adequacy of his abilities, as Paulus Orosius does in the preface to the Latin *Historiae*. Another use of the *cwæð* construction sheds light on this matter, revealing that the *cwæð Orosius* can indicate the control of textual material exerted in the name of Paulus Orosius through the invocation of the *Orosius*-narrator. Consequently, it marks authorial choice as to the boundaries of the text's subject material and judgment. Although such moments are numerous, another example from Book II will serve well to illustrate how this figure performs a textual marking of boundaries and makes clear the way in which the figure of the *cwæð Orosius* muddles distinctions between Anglo-Saxon England and Rome.

Near the end of Book II, the *cwæð* construction arises in the context of where and why the *Orosius*-narrator chooses to end the book in question: "I do not believe, said Orosius, now that I have to tell a long story, that I may end it in this book; so I shall begin another one" (Ne wene ic, cwæð Orosius, nu ic longe spell hæbbe to secgenne, þæt ic hie on þisse bec geendian mæge; ac ic opere anginnan sceal, II.53.4). That the historian has reached the limits of what he can finish in a single book is also signaled in the Latin, where Paulus Orosius states that "since material for discussion is rich, which by no means can be confined to this book, let this be the end of the present volume, so that we may pursue the remaining matters in subsequent books."⁴³ The Latin text here reads "et quoniam uber dicendi materia est," which I would translate more literally than Deferrari does: "and because the materials to be discussed are [so] rich." As in the example given earlier of the "truth" that "was said," the authority in the Latin text is passive. The materials themselves are rich, and one of their properties is that they cannot be confined to the current book. This difference makes the first person assertion of the Old English text even more striking, because the *Orosius*-narrator makes a choice where the author of the *Historiae* faces a necessity. The amount of space

⁴³ "Et quoniam uber dicendi materia est, quae nequaquam hoc concludi libro potest, hic praesentis uoluminis finis sit, ut in subsequentibus cetera persequamur." Zangemeister 62.7-9; Deferrari, 76.

given to the recitation of the history of each kingdom in the Old English *Orosius* is not a result of the material of the history. Rather, the *Orosius*-narrator actively chooses the moment at which he moves to a new book, and so shapes the materials of the history he writes while simultaneously invoking the name of the Latin historian to do so.

The use of first person authority and Orosius' proper name in marking authorial choice in the arrangement of the text's different sections is, perhaps, more significant than one might initially suspect. In fact, the use of the *cwæð* construction extends not only to the length and division of different sections of the text, but to the material included in those sections. At I.32.1, the *Orosius*-narrator suggests that he omits certain materials because a "further reading" list is readily available: "Who is it that may count how many of men were lost on both sides, as Homer the *scop* has most clearly said. For that reason, it is not needful for me, said Orosius, to say, because it is long, and all among men know [of it]" (Hwa is þæt ær ariman mæge hwæt þær moncynnes forwearð on ægðere hand, þæt Omarus se scop sweotelicost sægde. For þon nis me þæs þearf, cwæð Orosius, to secgenne, for þon hit longsum is, & eac monegum cuð, I.32.1). The first part of this statement suggests the narrator's basic awareness of the contents of song and story that have gone before him. He even assimilates Homer to the Anglo-Saxon *scop* tradition as a singer of songs.⁴⁴ These stories have already been told; consequently, the *Orosius*-narrator does not need to repeat them. The implication is that history has already been recorded. What is crucial for the *Orosius*-narrator, then, is the interpretation of those texts (or songs) that have been handed down.

⁴⁴ An initial inquiry suggests that, while in Ælfric's *Grammar* and the glosses attributed to him *scop* or *sceop* is used interchangeably for the Latin *poeta* (which is the word used in the *Historiae* to describe Homer) other glossing traditions use *scop* or *sceop* to equate the Latin *satiricus* or *tragicus*. An initial comparison of the Old English *Orosius* and the Latin *Historiae* suggests that the term *scop* is used, though not in all cases, for Latin *poeta*. Interestingly, this initial usage analysis suggests that there may be a difference between the idea of the *scop* equated with *satiricus* or *tragicus* (which suggests a type of dramatic, performed poetry) and the *scop* equated with *poeta*, which in the *Orosius* suggests a historical interest of the authority in question.

The mandate the *Orosius*-narrator gives to his audience is to look up the books themselves if they wish to know more. By making this request, he also creates the community which is best equipped to receive his exhortation: “Nevertheless, whichever man wishes to know it, he may read in his books of what evils and what destruction there was in that fighting, either in manslaughters, or in hunger, or in shipwrecks, or in various evil deeds, as men in stories have said” (Ƣeah swa hwelcne mon swa lyste Ƣæt witan, ræde on his bocum hwelce ungetina & hwelce tibernessa <hie><dreogende><wæron> ægðer ge on monslitum ge on hungre ge on scipgebroce ge on mislicre forscapunge, swa mon on spellum sægð, I.11.32-35). The textual community in question here is one which might engage in an active inquiry into history and its spiritual ramifications, regardless of the temporal distance of the events and atrocities studied. Such an assertion by the *Orosius*-narrator, however, raises the question of whether or not Anglo-Saxons *could* have had access to the stories in question. Although Isidore’s *Etymologies* and other sources were available there is virtually no possibility that Anglo-Saxons had access to these mythological figures in their full versions.⁴⁵ Here we can discern the voice of a Latin historian breaking through the Anglo-Saxon prose. Although the *Orosius*-narrator asks his audience to learn of these mythological stories on their own, there is no source from which they could. The expectation that the audience might learn these apparently well known mythological stories for themselves is an expectation quite literally from another time, from a fifth-century Roman point of view in which such texts were readily available. The use of the *cwæð* construction marks a moment where the voice of the past, and the Latin

⁴⁵ For specific information concerning what was in circulation in Anglo-Saxon England and where, see Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

historian to whom it belongs, is again actively invoked as part of the community facilitated by the text. In short, the same kinds of stories could impart the same lessons, regardless of their origins.⁴⁶

Because of the omission or loss of any translation of the preface to the Latin *Historiae* in the Old English text, these moments which suggest an authorial presence (however narratively constructed) give modern scholars our only glimpse of the Anglo-Saxon translator's perception of the Latin *Historiae*'s goals in writing the history of the world. In several moments the text speaks against those pagans who would attribute the fall of Rome in 410 to the acceptance of Christianity on the part of the Roman populace, which suggests the re-interpretive aspect of the project. A far more explicit instance of authorial invocation occurs with the statement of Orosius' purported goals in writing in Book III. Here, the *cwæð* construction suggests that there is, in fact, a remarkably clear vision of what the text is meant to be doing: "Therefore, I wish to say and mark in writings, said Orosius, how the war of the Greeks began, which was first raised from the city of Lacedemonia" (For þon ic wolde gesecgan, cwæð Orosius, hu Creca gewinn <angan>, þe of Lacedemonia ðære byrg ærest onsteled wæs, & mid spellcwidum gemearcian, II.55.28). The words which are most important in this particular instance of the construction are those which mark precisely what the translator of the *Orosius* sees himself doing: the verb phrases *wolde gesecgan* (wish to say) and, even more importantly, *mid spellcwidum gemearcian*, literally "mark with history-sayings." The Old English translator invokes the proper name of Orosius precisely at the moment in the translation where his own work in shaping the text is most apparent.

The phrase *mid spellcwidum gemearcian* is crucial to understanding the project of the Old English translation of the *Historiae*. The Old English translation, by virtue of its phrasing, suggests a

⁴⁶ Importantly the possibility that stories of bloodshed omitted from the history as it was translated into Old English might have as a substitute stories of local origin – Anglo-Saxon historical sources, for example. This possibility further complicates the inter-relationship of the two times and cultures in question.

specific interpretation and recording of the events in question. *Gemearcian* is a relatively common word in the corpus, occurring over four hundred times, and having two separate but related meanings—“to mark down, to design” and “to fix the bounds of a limit or a place.”⁴⁷ Crucially, both meanings suggest the agency of the subject who performs them. The verb *gemearcian* suggests a kind of shaping that is integral to the definition of its object. *Spellcwide*, on the other hand, is a hapax legomenon in the Old English corpus, defined in Bosworth-Toller as “historical narrative.”⁴⁸ *Cwide* might well be interpreted with a certain homiletic or didactic quality, which suggests the work done by the text is a kind of judgment of the past in specifically Christian terms. *Mid spellcwidum gemearcian*, then, might best be interpreted as “with historical interpretations/judgments mark the boundaries of” each of the societies and peoples in question. The result of this re-translation of the hapax *spellcwidum* is the understanding that the project of the Old English *Orosius* is to write out *and* evaluate the stories of peoples present in the world history it translates. This understanding of the role of the *Orosius*-narrator is complicated by the temporal heterogeneity of the translation and the critical role it plays in the judgment of the past.

⁴⁷ Cf. T. Northcote Toller and Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 414.

⁴⁸ Cf. T. Northcote Toller and Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth : Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921). This definition is telling – both *spell* and *cwide* have overtones of the idea of the modern “story,” but a tracing of their semantic range suggests a far more meaningful interpretation in the context of the Old English world history. *Spell* is mostly used in the context of narratives or stories more generally, whether they are true or false. It has another meaning, however, that occurs in overtly Christian contexts as a “message” or “announcement” with the intention that such news be spread – one such example, well known even in modern English, is *Godspell*, the “good news” or modern Gospel. *Cwide* is similarly endowed with ideas of story-telling, but with a slightly different overtone: “I. the expression of a thought, a sentence, period; sententia ... II. a saying, proverb, speech, discourse, sermon, will; dictum, dictio, sermo, homilia, testamentum... III. a legal enactment, decree; edictum, decretum.”

AUTHORITY AND THE WORTH OF THE PAST

As a marker of judgment, the *cwæð Orosius* suggests three final functions of the construction of narrative authority in the Old English *Orosius*. First, the *Orosius*-narrator functions as a judge of good and evil, or more broadly, Christian and non-Christian times. Second, the *Orosius*-narrator stands as judge of what is shameful. Finally, the *Orosius*-narrator is the arbiter of what should and should not be preserved in the writing of history's decrees. By judging not simply the morality of the past but its very right to be remembered, the *Orosius*-narrator alters the past by writing it. He changes the past (textually) by amending the translation. It is this final function which connects most clearly to the idea of the historian, and the *Orosius*-narrator who invoked him, as he who marks the past with historical narratives. Textual authority becomes moral authority, the ability to deliver not a true and accurate recording of events but the message those events signify through the lens of Christian doctrine.

In his judgment of the past, the key distinction Orosius makes is between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present and future. His agenda is to contrast the two, arguing that the world has distinctly improved since the Incarnation. Furthermore, in writing a Christian universal history, the *Orosius*-narrator claims authority over the interpretation of the past. In the Old English text, this claim is marked by the use of Orosius' proper name through the *cwæð* construction, which does not occur in the *Historiae*. The Old English translation claims authority over the past by using Orosius' name. In Book IV, for example, the *Orosius*-narrator speaks directly to the false interpretation of history, and moreover, against the false juxtaposition of the past and present which would cast the pre-Christian past favorably in comparison. The *cwæð* construction frames the interpretation of the years which the Romans wish to set against the catastrophes of Orosius' time: "Truly, said Orosius, now we are come to those good times with which the Romans reproach us, and to the plenty with which they always boast before us, that ours are not like theirs" (Wiotodlice, *cwæð Orosius*, nu we

sindon cumen to þæm godan tidun þe us Romane oþwitað, & to ðære genihtsumnisse þe hie us ealneg fore gielpað þæt ure ne sien ðæm gelican, IV.97.21). This assertion comes in the narration of the peace that was accorded during the Punic Wars. In claiming these as good times, the detractors overlook an obvious inconsistency. The wars had gone on for four hundred and fifty years, according to Orosius, and peace lasted only a single year. Clearly, then, the “good times” of the Romans are not *really* good times at all—war is still dominant and the favored status of the Christian empire has not yet been established.⁴⁹ Their interpretation of history only proves that the Romans’ view is simply not long enough. It does not take into account a long history of warfare, violence, and evil.⁵⁰

The Old English *Orosius* invokes Orosius’ name again to present the division of Christian and pre-Christian times in a narrative moment which clearly distinguishes between historical knowledge and the insight needed to interpret it. The invocation of the proper name makes a fundamental distinction between the point of view of the historian and the point of view of history’s actors. Put succinctly, like Paulus Orosius before him, the *Orosius*-narrator has learned from the past. At another point in the narrative of the Punic Wars, a series of rainstorms prevents Hannibal from engaging the Romans in battle, allowing Rome to avoid a decisive defeat. On the third return of the storm, the Old English relates the interpretation of the rain by the Carthaginian general: “then Hannibal understood, and said to himself, that though he was desiring and hoping for power over the Romans, that God did not suffer/permit it” (Þa angeat Hannibal, & him self sæde, ðeh ðe he

⁴⁹ For an analysis of the idea of *crisendom* as an interpretive paradigm in the Old English *Orosius* and other Alfredian translations, see Stephen J. Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*. See in particular his third chapter, “King Alfred’s *Crisendom*,” 83-106.

⁵⁰ Although the Latin selection for this part of this history is far longer in its lamentation of the short memory of the Roman historians, it makes a similar point to the Old English, and in fact strengthens it, with this assertion of Paulus Orosius (in the first person, a far more frequent occurrence in the Latin): “ei mihi, cognouisse haec et denudasse quam etiam me pudet!” (Alas! How ashamed I am to have learned these things and laid them bare!). Zangemeister 120:2-3; Deferrari, 145.

wilniende wære & wenende Romana anwealdes, þæt hit God ne geþafode, IV.103.30). Hannibal recognizes in the event the proper interpretation of history, and the *Orosius*-narrator returns in the following paragraph to make this interpretation perfectly clear.

Given that the non-Christian Hannibal was able to understand the meaning of the storms, the *Orosius*-narrator asks the “Romans” to account for their lack of insight, and suggests that the Romans’ Christian future preserved them in their non-Christian past:

Gesecgað me nu Romane, cwæð Orosius, hwonne þæt gewurde oþþe hwara, ær ðam cristendome, <þæt> oþþe ge, oþþe oðere æt ænegum godum mehten ren abiddan, swa mon siþþan mehte, siþþan se cristendom wæs, & nugiet magon monege gode æt urum Hælendum Criste, þonne him þearf bið. Hit wæs þeh swiþe sweotol þæt se ilca Crist se þe hie eft to cristendome onwende, þæt se him þone ren to gescildnisse onsende, þeh hie þæs wyrþe næron, to þon þæt hie selfe, & eac monege oþere þurh <hie>, to ðam cristendome & to ðam soþan geleafan become. (IV.103.30)

Tell me now, Romans, said Orosius, when or where was it that it happened, before Christendom, that any you or any others could have rain by praying to the gods, as you now might, now that Christendom exists, and may now have so many good things from your Saviour, Christ, when there is need of him. It was, however, clearly evident that the same Christ, he who after turned [the Romans] to Christianity, sent to them that rain as a shield, though they were not worthy of it, so that they themselves and also many others through them, might come to Christianity and to the true belief.

The implications of the reading proffered by “Orosius” in the Old English do not stem from any difference with the Latin, although there is a marked abridgement in the text. The suggestion, rather, is that the *Orosius*-narrator is aware of a basic truth of Christian historical interpretation that the Romans against whom he argues are not: the narrator has, in fact, learned from history. The Romans can be written into a version of events which interprets historical events from a hermeneutical position which reads all things as having a divine “message” encoded within them.⁵¹ The Romans were not saved for past merits: they were saved at that time so that the city of Rome might one day

⁵¹This idea of all world events being mapped out according to the divine message encoded within them is one of the many points on which Orosius and his mentor differed: Augustine argues, in his *City of God*, that not all events in history are meant to have a deeper divine message, or more precisely, a deeper divine message that is interpretable by human intellect.

be Christian and so that other peoples might be converted through them. The past and the future are not separate in such a construction, because its view of time is not strictly linear. The past cannot be fully understood without the understanding of the future toward which it moves forward in time. The *Orosius*-narrator takes a point of view which is greater than that of men—it interprets history in the non-linear terms of God’s providence. The future always conditions (and touches) the past because for God, time is not chronological but exists in an eternal present. For Him, past and future are meaningless except in terms of human interpretation, which is limited to the historical unfolding of events and therefore cannot account for the way in which each sequence of events demonstrates the truth of God’s power.

The *Orosius*-narrator also stands as the judge of that which is shameful in historical narratives, and ultimately chooses what “counts,” in a sense, as proper history. The relationship between that which is *scandlice*, or shameful, and that which ought not be written into history is direct, and has numerous implications for the relationship between the future in which the translation of the *Historiae* is written and the Latin world in which the text originated. One of the very first examples, that of the Amazons, makes a firm statement not that the Amazons themselves are shameful, but that the writing of their history is shameful: “It is scandalous, said Orosius, to speak about what such [things] then were” (Hit is scondlic, cwæð Orosius, ymb swelc to sprecanne hwelc hit þa wæs, I.30.24). The use of the infinitive suggests that it is the *act* of speaking about this history that the *Orosius*-narrator finds shame-inducing.⁵² Deeds done are in fact done: written of by other historians in other texts, those who wish to learn of the misdeeds of the past may easily do so elsewhere. In the *Orosius*-narrator’s view, however, passing on the stories through historical writing is itself an offensive act and speaking of them in his history is improper.

⁵² It bears mentioning that his view of the Amazons (described as *sma earme wif & sma eldeodge*, such miserable women, and so foreign) is not particularly glowing either

The *Orosius*-narrator stands as arbiter and judge of the worthiness of those who are part of a Roman conception of history and those who are—and ought to be—left out.⁵³ Intrinsic to these judgments is a sense of the power the past can hold over the future. In bringing the Latin text into the Old English language, the authority of the *Orosius*-narrator's proper name marks the moment where this influence might be felt most profoundly, at the very moment he gives his reasons for abridgement. What becomes clear in analysis of these moments in the texts is that the *desire* to silence these stories and the judgement this silencing renders suggests that the *cwæð Orosius* construction distances the Old English translator from this desire to silence by the invocation of the *Orosius*-narrator. Moreover, it assures an immediacy in its attribution of these desires to the Latin historian. The association of the *Orosius*-narrator with these desires becomes even more pronounced when read in tandem with the passages which precede them in the text, in which the evils done by men are impossible for the beleaguered historian to record. Both usages of the *cwæð* construction serve to situate the perspective of the historian as arbiter of history. The text is temporally and physically situated vis à vis the establishment of Rome by the repetition of the number of years before and after the founding of that city, which suggests the centrality of a particular time and place to the *Orosius*' consideration of history. The distancing effect of the *cwæð Orosius*, on the other hand, establishes a distinction between the Old English translator and the authority of the Latin historian. The text cites "Paulus Orosius" and so creates the *Orosius*-narrator in the Old English. The *Orosius*-narrator clearly speaks, but only indirectly, using reported speech to speak to Anglo-Saxon England from Roman times.

⁵³ Cf. Patrick Geary, *Myth of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 171: "the very process of writing a history that included [non-Christian] peoples meant an attempt to incorporate them into "history"; that is, universal history, which for [medieval historians] could only mean the history of Rome."

In both the Latin and the Old English texts, the narrator describes the task of writing about the evils of the past as profoundly difficult. The two texts give different reasons for this difficulty, however. In the Latin, the abridgement is necessary not only because of the length of the survey of evils but also because of an obligation to the work Paulus Orosius has yet to do:

But now I am forced to confess that for the purpose of anticipating the end of my book, I am passing over many details concerning the circumstances of the numerous evils of the age and am abbreviating everything. For in no way could I have at any time passed through so dense a forest of evils unless I were able at times to hasten my progress by frequent leaps.⁵⁴

Paulus Orosius' inability to pass through the dense "forest of evils" conditions his approach to the history he records. He decides to abridge the stories because they ultimately serve no purpose: "what end will be achieved if we try to recall them by enumerating them to say nothing of describing them?"⁵⁵ Furthermore, the "anticipation" (*prospiciendi*) of Orosius' later materials reveals a certain debt to these very stories. His reasoning is conditioned by the need to pass on to the more recent past, "since the deeds of the Greeks must not be passed over and those of the Romans especially must be conveyed."⁵⁶ The interests of the future—and particularly the Christian present to whom Orosius writes, as well as its immediate predecessors—condition the pace at which he must move through the more distant, mythological past.

The Old English text, on the other hand, gives a much more polemical analysis of the reasoning behind the abridgement of the text. The *Orosius*-narrator observes a need to edit out material promptly moves on to explain, quite simply, that there was too much to cover in one text.

⁵⁴ "At ego nunc cogor fateri, me prospiciendi finis commodo de tanta malorum saeculi circumstantia praeterire plurima, cuncta breuiare. nequaquam enim tam densam aliquando siluam praetergredi possem, nisi etiam crebris interdum saltibus subuolarem." Zangemeister 25.25-29; Deferrari 33.

⁵⁵ "quis finis reperietur, si ea commemorare numerando, ut non dicam describendo, conemur?" Zangemeister 25.33-35; Deferrari 33.

⁵⁶ "praesertim cum et Graecorum praetereunda non sunt et Romanorum uel maxime recensenda sint." Zangemeister 25.35-37; Deferrari 33.

Although the emphasis of the history is on the evils that were committed in the past, the ability of not just this teller of history, but of all those who might try to engage the story of former times is questioned: “Who is there that could tell or narrate all of the evil that they did?” (Hwa is þæt þe eall ða yfel þe hi donde wæron asecgean mæge oððe areccean?) These stories seem to defy the narrative ability of the historian. That they are singled out for doing so suggests that once again, the human present and past must always be judged by their ending point in God. The use of both *asecgean* and *areccean* to describe the impossible tasks of which the *Orosius*-narrator speaks, however, indicates that the writing of these texts—and the telling of these stories—is somehow beyond the ability of the historian. Moreover, the two words seem somewhat equivalent: to speak is in fact to tell, and the narrative the *Orosius*-narrator wishes to tell is not that of man’s evil but of the implications of the past for future generations who might learn from it.

The abilities of the narrator are confounded in the narration of events from the distant past. The Old English translation emphasizes the role of desire in that narration, as well. The construction *wille geswigian* is employed two times in less than three hundred words in this part of the *Orosius*. Crucially, this phrase is unique not only to the *Orosius* but to this section of it. This desire inscribed in the first person in the Old English translation suggests, once again, an intrusion of the Latin historian’s voice into the time of the Old English text, creating a further layering of times within the Old English translation as a function of the desire and volition inherent in the translating voice.

The volitional aspect of the rendering into Old English states that which the Latin text does not. The *Orosius*-narrator’s desire plays a role in the way in which history gets passed down, or more precisely, it plays a role in what does not get passed down. The use of *scondlicest* (defined in Bosworth-Toller as “most shameful, vile, dishonourable”) to classify such stories as those of Tantalus and Pelops establishes a categorization for the stories the narrator *wille geswigian*. Although this desire to silence shameful narratives is present in the *Historiae*, the Latin text does not exhibit the

same intensity characterized by the Old English *wille geswigian*, which suggests these stories are too vile for preservation. Interestingly, the cosmological world itself is affected by the moral status of these evil men and their stories. In the Latin text, the sentence which closes this section's consideration of the evils of former times focuses on the survival of humanity in spite of its own destructive tendencies and evil ways: "It is to be wondered at how men endure what even the stars are said to have fled."⁵⁷ Whatever else may be said about this moment in the text, it is clear that the stars take on an active—if fugitive—role in indicating the evil of actions in the past, and in the judgment thereof. The Old English translation, in contrast, adds a layer of narrative to the general statement of the Latin text: "In those days there was such un-measured/unmeasurable evil that men said (themselves) that the stars of the heavens flew from their evil" (On þæm dagum wæron swa <ungemetlica> yfel þæt þa men sylf sædon þæt hefonas tungul hiora yfel flugon.) If the reasoning behind the *Historiae* is to relate the former wickedness of men in order to downplay more current calamities, the Old English alteration to this line is significant: it posits an awareness *in the past* that these evils were present. Men said themselves (*men sylf sædon*) that the stories are true. History, then, and the historians who write it, make the same choice as the stars do—they leave, in the sense of leaving out, the awful events of history by choosing not to preserve them.

The work of the historian involves volition and the choice to leave out that which is not worthy of record by virtue of its evil nature. In the Old English text, these moments are attributed to the *Orosius*-narrator. The desire to silence these stories and the judgment this silencing renders suggests that the *cwæð* *Orosius* construction distances the Old English translator from the desire to silence history, which is accomplished by invoking the figure of the *Orosius*-narrator. The moments where the *cwæð* construction suggests that the narrating voice makes both a distinction and a

⁵⁷ "Conici datur, qualiter homines sustinuerint, quod etiam astra fugisse dicuntur." Zangemeister 26.25-26 ; Deferrari 26.

judgment between a Christian and a non-Christian world are also the points in the narrative at which the Old English *Orosius* makes a specific claim as to the authority of the historian over his work.

WRITING AN AUDIENCE

The *cwæð* construction often marks a relationship of the author to his text, but the heterogeneous temporalities of fifth-century Rome and Anglo-Saxon England as they are invoked in the *Orosius* become clearest in the consideration of its implied audience. The invocation of Orosius' proper name functions as a calling-together of an assumed audience by addressing that audience directly. In other words, the Old English *Orosius* explicitly creates an audience for itself, endowing it with specific characteristics both in terms of a national identity as well as the responsibilities expected of it. In essence, what might appear to be questions asked for rhetorical emphasis (e.g. *Gesecegað me nu, cwæð Orosius*, "Say unto me now, said Orosius") become an entirely different entity when placed in the context of the *cwæð* construction. In this section, I will establish the method by which the audience is constructed in the Old English *Orosius* by use of the *cwæð* construction, and then interpret their consequences for the contested temporalities within the text using the theoretical paradigms offered by Mikhail Bakhtin.

Crucially, there are far fewer moments of direct address by the narrator to the audience in the Old English *Orosius* than in the Latin *Historiae*. The presence of these phrases in the Old English, however, unsettles the historical placement of the *Orosius* as an Anglo-Saxon text. Although the materials and the approach, as Discenza and Godden both argue, are altered for the new historical period, the Roman context persists almost contentiously in these moments of address. Although the translation is meant for an Anglo-Saxon audience, it does not address that audience on or in its own terms, those of tenth-century England. Rather, the *Orosius*-narrator often retains a sense that his address is meant for a Latinate culture, the Romans who provoked Paulus Orosius' text in the first place.

The coincidence of the *cwæð Orosius* phrase with the request for a response on the part of those who would disagree occurs eight times in the text: in each instance, a presumptive community is formed from Orosius' contentious questioning, anticipating a response from those who might disagree or question his authority of interpretation over the events in question. This disagreement was a significant factor in the writing of the Latin *Historiae*, because, as Paulus Orosius explains in the preface of the Latin text, the sack of Rome by the Visigoths was widely reported to provoke doubts as to Christianity's protective efficacy among converted Romans. In the Old English text, the *Orosius*-narrator uses the *cwæð* construction to speak directly to those who might blame Christianity for the world's woes, challenging them to account for the view of history he presents in the *Orosius*.

In Book II of the Old English *Orosius*, the *Orosius*-narrator speaks specifically to those who would defile (*leabtriað*) the name of Christianity, and asks them "How does it seem to you *now*, said Orosius" (II.52.15). Another example can be found in Book I.8, in the already heated consideration of the pagan past of the Greek myths of such figures as Tantalos, Pelops and Medea:

Ic wolde nu, cwæð Orosius, þæt me ða geandwyrðan þa þe secgað þæt þeos world sy nu wyrse on ðysan cristendome þonne hio ær on þæm hæþenscype wære, þonne hi swylc geblot & swylc morð donde wæron swylc her ær beforan sæde. Hwær is nu on ænigan cristendome betuh him sylfum þæt mon him þurfe swilc ondrædan, þæt hine mon ænigum godum blote? Oððe hwær syndon ure godas þe swylcra mana gynnen swilce hiora wæron?

(I would now, says Orosius, that (they) would answer me, those that say that this world is now worse, in this Christendom, than it was before in its heathen-ness, when they did such sacrifices and such murders, as I have said above. Where is there now, in any of Christendom, among themselves that men need to have such dread, that anyone would sacrifice them to gods? Or where are our gods who such atrocities desire as those were?)

Although the Old English greatly abridges the often polemical series of questions posed by Orosius in the Latin text, the number of times these questions occur in the text and their proximity to the *cwæð* construction suggest that they are not simply rhetorical. They resemble a kind of speech act, calling into being the audience to whom the *Orosius*-narrator speaks. This audience, however, is located across time—in both Anglo-Saxon England and fifth-century Rome. The reiteration of *nu*

(“now”) in the passage quoted above highlights the temporally heterogeneous status of the Old English text, and suggests that the audience’s “now” is rendered specific to this particular text, and has attributes of both Anglo-Saxon England and fifth century Rome. In addition to being a form of reported speech, that is, translation also performs a linking of times that interpellates the past into the present by assuming an audience’s attributes both implicitly (in its assumption of linguistic comprehension) but also explicitly, by stating some of these assumptions of religious attributes and faltering convictions outright. In the Old English *Orosius*, the temporal distance between the Anglo-Saxon audience and its Latin predecessor is most evident in the texts’ address to the *Romane*.

The *Romane* are invoked a total of eight times in conjunction with the presence of the *cnæð* construction in the context of Orosius speaking directly to them, either rhetorically or otherwise. Only one of these literally asks the Romans for a response. In the narration of the second Punic War, as discussed previously, Orosius relates how when fighting Hannibal and the Carthaginians, a great rain prevented the fighting. He asserts that Hannibal interprets the rain as a sign which means he will not have dominion over the Romans because God did not will it. In direct report, Orosius addresses his audience as specifically Roman:

Tell me now, Romans!, said Orosius, when or where it came to pass that, before Christianity, either you or others could have rain by praying to any gods, as they could afterwards, since Christianity came, and may now have much good from our Saviour, Christ, when they have need. It was however very evident that the same Christ, who afterwards turned them to Christianity, sent them that rain as a guard, though they were not worthy of it, to the end that they themselves, and many others through them, might come to Christianity and to true belief. (IV.103.30)⁵⁸

This particular invocation of the Romans serves a dual purpose beyond its request for interpretation from its original audience. First, the *Orosius*-narrator offers a historical event for interpretation. Second, the *Orosius*-narrator performs the interpretation it has requested of its audience. The reading

⁵⁸ For the Old English text, see page 42 above.

Orosius gives—that the rain was sent to save non-Christian Rome so it could become Christian—offers an explicit rendering of how the future of a people might condition its past.

The Romans Orosius addresses here are the people for whom the non-Christian Romans were saved: the audience is written into the text, and moreover is expected to share Orosius' longer view of events. The work done by Orosius' understanding of providence can literally rewrite history to make Hannibal's knowledge of God's will not only circumstantial but entirely consistent with subsequent events and their interpretation. The community to whom Orosius speaks is called together as a distinctly Roman audience that should already know the truth of the *Orosius*-narrator's reading of history. It is all the more ironic, then, that Orosius' fifth-century Rome cannot interpret the signs correctly and cannot see past its own condition *within time* to the saving grace that operates outside human temporality that would allow its citizens to write an interpretation of events which takes Christianity into account.

In order to understand the temporalities at work in the text, however, we must interrogate the position of the *cwæð Orosius* as it is presented in the Old English. The opening of the line is “gesæcgað me *nu* cwæð Orosius.” Orosius asks for an answer “now” in the Old English text, suggesting that the text anticipates such questions on the part of an Anglo-Saxon audience who might identify with a Roman past in order to interpret these events. The “now” is a re-statement or repetition of Orosius' question, written into the time of Anglo-Saxon England in the tenth century.

The result is the creation of a textual space wherein fifth-century Rome and ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England coexist. Both times are required to read of and learn from the history presented. Asked in Old English, the contentious questions of the *Orosius* create an audience that is not fixed in time. In fact, the very assumption of the translatability of the text suggests that Orosius speaks to the Anglo-Saxons in their own time, mingling the temporalities of discrete periods in history. This text is needful for *all* men to know—textually at least, the Old English *Orosius* brings

together a community in its audience which must not only hear and understand but be changed by the past in order to preserve its Christian character.

CONCLUSION: “A CONSTANT CREATION OF
ALTERNATIVE WORLDS”⁵⁹

In this chapter I have outlined the way in which the Old English *Orosius*, through the use of the *cnæð* construction, creates both a narrator and an audience for itself that are not necessarily easily limited to either fifth-century Rome or tenth-century England. The result is a view of the *Orosius* as a tradition rather than as a specific text, and it encompasses the Latin *Historiae Adversum Paganos* as much as it does the Old English *Orosius*. The question I have sought to raise is what consequences this understanding of the *Orosius* has for our understanding of the text as Anglo-Saxonists. The answer engages with what Brian Stock termed a textual community.

In his book *Listening for the Text*, Brian Stock explains in detail his idea of textual communities. These textual communities involve the creation of human community through the facilitation of certain authoritative texts that produce a kind of presence of an authority, by virtue of their very pastness, and their acceptance as part of a tradition. Connection, then, is offered through the medium of the text or a learned interpreter thereof: “the possibility is thereby opened for the consideration of an ontology of the text itself, describing the nature of the reality it represents and the sort of meaning it alone conveys.”⁶⁰ Stock’s idea is a powerful one, but it privileges the very human texture of the communities in question: the past becomes a vocal but static entity. There is little room for the heterogeneity of time in his model, only for the multitude of instants which create specific uses for texts.

⁵⁹ Steiner, *After Babel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 246.

⁶⁰ Brian Stock. *Listening for the Text*, 45.

Mikhail Bakhtin's exploration of the dialogic suggests another way to understand this aspect of the Old English text, for in his theory of dialogic form "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word it anticipates."⁶¹ This directionality of the word—toward the answer it will encounter, but has not yet encountered—is part of its heterogeneous temporality; even at its inception a future *reception* is always already implicated. Drawing on the past yet already conditioned by what it will encounter in its reception,⁶² a model of translation as a "living word" allows an understanding of texts wherein any given narrative already anticipates a future reception and response.⁶³ In anticipating this response, the *Orosius* orients itself to dissuade those who do and who will argue that the fall of Rome is occasioned by the conversion of the Empire to Christianity. In short, the text responds to what has been articulated in Paulus Orosius' time, but also to what has not yet been articulated. As a result, the Old English *Orosius* is in some sense shaped by the future. It is for this future that the *Orosius* attempts to interpret the whole of history through divine providence.

When the *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem* was translated into Old English, a future audience became the addressee of its message of Christian interpretation of the past. An audience of Anglo-Saxons was asked to respond to the same questions that Paulus Orosius asked his fifth-century audience in the Latin text—why was the non-Christian past more evil than the Christian present? The assumption made in the *Orosius* is the continuing need for a defense of Christianity. The *Orosius*-narrator, then, asks his audience to imagine themselves as unhappy Romans—to identify with elements of the past that are no longer applicable to their society, and some which are even

⁶¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 280.

⁶² It is important to keep in mind that the ultimate reception of the text can be neither forecast nor pre-ordained.

⁶³ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 276.

anachronistic. These include the “now” that refers to a period four hundred years earlier, as well as a “Roman” identity articulated in a language of the British isles. Using the *nu* and the *Romane* the *Orosius*-narrator creates a “now” that is not limited to either fifth-century Rome or ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England but encompasses and exceeds both times.

The textual community that a translation brings together is fundamentally different from those formed around other texts. If we understand the *cwæð* construction in the *Orosius*, as well as the author-figure and audience it serves to create, a new vision of the Alfredian project of translation and its associated texts may come to light. Aimed at galvanizing communities that were presumably already extant, if failing, the imagined communities within these translations create more than an Anglo-Saxon identity. These translations create a conception of time that is both forward-looking and retroactive; they hope to render their authors, their audiences, and their communities immortal.

*Sanctity and Soil: Making England Holy in
Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*

In his preface to the *Lives of the Saints*, Ælfric of Eynsham lays out a vision of the relationship between secular kings and their thanes: “An earthly king has many thanes and various ministers. He cannot be a worthy king unless he has the worship that pertains to him and such thanesmen that pay him their obedience” (An woruld-cynincg hæfð fela þegna and mislice wicneras he ne mæg beon wurðful cynincg buton he hæbbe þa geþincðe þe him gebyriað and swylce þening-men þe þeawfæstnysse him gebeodon, 59-61).¹ As Ælfric explains, a king is not worthy of his position unless he has the obedience of loyal men and the honor that is due to a king. The worthiness of a king is therefore tied, to a certain extent, to the obedience accorded him by his thanes. Ælfric applies the same principle when discussing sacred power in the following line, arguing that “so it is also with the Almighty God that shaped all things, it befits him that he has holy thanes who fulfill his will” (swa is eac þam ælmihtigan gode þe ealle þincg gesceop him ogerisð þæt he hæbbe halige þenas þe his willan gefyllað, 61-65). Just as a king must be granted the obedience of loyal thanes in order to be a worthy king, God’s holiness is made manifest to believing Christians through the holy thanes—the saints—that work miracles in his name.²

By comparing a king’s thanes to God’s saints, Ælfric claims a similarity between the relationships of secular authorities and religious ones. By writing the *Lives of the Saints*, Ælfric encourages his readers to acknowledge the transcendent holiness of God through the holiness of the

¹ Old English text from W. W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*, Vol. 1 and 2 (EETS: London, 1881). All translations from the Old English are my own.

² W. W. Skeat’s translation of this section of the text makes the relationship slightly more clear: “An earthly king hath many servants and divers stewards; he cannot be an honoured king unless he have the state which befitteth him, and as it were serving-men, to offer him their obedience. So likewise is it with Almighty God who created all things; it befitteth him that He should have holy servants who may fulfil His will” (ibid., 7).

men and women who serve him on earth. The English saints' material presence and the foundations and cults dedicated to them provide a territorial or geographic dimension to community that contributes to making their authority similar to the authority of a (secular) lord, who controls territory only if his thanes remain obedient to the authority he wields. Ælfric wrote his work for Æthelweard and Æthelmær, who were ealdormen in the court of Æthelræd in from 990 to 1005. Æthelweard himself was a noted writer, responsible for several important historical works as well as being Ælfric's patron.³ The interests of his patrons, two of the "most senior of all the earthly king's thegns," make Ælfric's exposition of the relationship between earthly and heavenly powers particularly important.⁴ "King and country were central to Æthelweard's identity," as Catherine Cubitt writes of the preface to the ealdorman's *Chronicon*, and so Ælfric writes of the role of saints in a vibrant Christian community in terms that this leader of men would understand.⁵

In this chapter, I situate Ælfric's *Life of Oswald* as part of a larger project in the *Lives of the Saints* that links the holiness of particular saints with the holiness of the places from which they originate in order to make the case for the holiness of England more generally. In the case of Late Antique saints included in the collection, the holiness of saints is manifest through the stories and miracles associated either with the living saints or with their relics. By contrast, the *Life of Oswald* foregrounds the holiness of the places that Oswald creates through his saintly actions. Oswald's ability to sanctify English land—to make the soil of England itself holy—also emphasizes the

³ Catherine Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Swan and Magennis (Leiden: Brill, 2009)164-165.

⁴ *ibid.*, 165. Cubitt also notes that "this statement must have had weighty resonances for Ælfric himself, since his own career and livelihood depended upon the favour that the two men gained from the king for that service" (165). Ælfric's understanding of sainthood in Anglo-Saxon society was marked by his dependence on that very hierarchy for his continued patronage, a position made clear in Ælfric's careful underscoring of similarity between the King of Heaven and the Anglo-Saxon king on earth.

⁵ *ibid.*, 167.

holiness of England as a nation because of his status as both martyr and king. During his life and after his saintly death, Oswald creates holy places that heal the faithful. A key feature of these holy places is Oswald's ability to transfer his holiness to the soil. The soil that Oswald touches is then distributed across England and produces miracles in lieu of Oswald's actual relics. The resulting hagiography thus makes a place for England alongside traditional holy places like Rome and Jerusalem, while simultaneously creating a distinct sense of English holiness. My reading first establishes the ways in which Ælfric engages local and political investments in the lives of Late Antique and Anglo-Saxon saints. Turning to the *Life of Oswald*, I compare the version of Oswald's life in the *Lives of the Saints* to that of its main source, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in order to understand how Ælfric creates an English nation that is identifiable through its Christianity. Finally, by examining Ælfric's use of the trope of Oswald's holy soil, I explore how the creation of holy places in England establish both the king's sanctity and the worthiness of the Christian community. Ælfric's *Lives* are aimed for a wider audience than a solely monastic one. This audience is defined by shared Christianity, language, history, and geographical space.

ÆLFRIC'S LIVES OF THE SAINTS: IDENTITY AND HOLINESS

Hagiography as a genre has important ramifications for understanding community formation. Patrick Geary highlights the propagandistic nature of saints' lives during the Middle Ages in his examination of the European relic trade.⁶ He argues that because hagiography could function as propaganda for an existing regime or culture, the values reflected in the text "mirrored, as a reality

⁶ Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). See also Andrea Rossi-Reder, "Embodying Christ, Embodying Nation: Ælfric's Accounts of Saints Agatha and Lucy," *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* Vol. 277 (2005): 183-202; Mechtild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of the Saints in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). In *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, Geary makes the argument that "literary scholars cannot ignore the propagandistic nature of the literature. Hagiography has an essential political dimension that escapes the intertextuality of the literary dimension. Formalists thus must be historians" (*ibid.*, 13).

or as an ideal, the consensus of the community in which and for which the text was written.”⁷ In addition, “their public liturgical nature demanded that they reflect values and attitudes espoused by their audiences, if they were to be effective” in unifying a community around a common figure.⁸

Ælfric’s *Lives of the Saints* takes a special interest in the formation of a Christian community in England and the role saints play in that community. The text displays this interest through its inclusion of specifically English exempla and saints alongside more traditional Latin saints.⁹

Peter Brown argues that the creation of a community through the re-telling of saints’ lives creates a kin-group dependent not on blood-lines but on shared religious belief. Such a group does not form naturally but is constantly re-enacted and re-invented for the places in which saints’ lives were written and used. These communities, as Brown points out, are dependent not solely on the efficacy of the saint in question. Rather, the inter-relation of beliefs and practices also rests partially with the community, which must believe rightly in order for the saints’ work to be done. The identification of saints with particular places—and with contingent communities, lay or monastic—is a culturally constructed phenomenon that began in Late Antique Christianity. In the lay community, the saint took the place of kinsmen in that the church formed a kind of kin group—a community with its own “sense of solidarity, of the loyalties, and of the obligations” that before Christianity had been directed to the immediate family.¹⁰ The role played by the saints was also mapped on to secular

⁷ Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 9.

⁸ Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 9.

⁹ By Ælfric’s time, religious communities no longer associated Late Antique saints like Sebastian or Maur with specific cultural or geographical locales. These saints were more strongly identified by their spiritual affiliation with the Christian community, eschewing nation-specific distinctions. Not all saints, however, were divorced of their political contexts. See Andrea Rossi-Reder, “Embodying Christ, Embodying Nation,” on the latent nationalism of the violated female saints’ bodies.

¹⁰ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1981) 31.

relationships, such as the Late Antique relationship between the patron and the client: “The saint was the good *patronus*: he was the *patronus* whose intercessions were successful, whose wealth was at the disposal of all, whose *potentia* was exercised without violence and to whom loyalty could be shown without constraint.”¹¹ As Brown argues, the saint’s presence in the community was of vital importance to the saint’s ongoing cult: “if healing and mercy did not happen in his own days who would believe that they had ever happened or ever would happen again?”¹² That is, the efficacy of the association of a particular community with a particular saint was utterly contingent on the manufacture and retelling of contemporary miraculous interventions. Saints and the relics associated with them had to be endowed with some kind of proof—healing and miracles—to maintain their ties to a specific place.¹³

Moreover, the individuals in those places associated with saints had to take seriously their place in the religious community. The relationship, that is, works both ways. The manufacture and retelling of present-day saintly intervention made the efficacy of the saint local. The community for which the saint functioned as *patronus*, however, must also create (and recreate) the role of the client for the saint to be effective. Individuals had to show loyalty to the saint, and active practice was central to such a relationship. As Clare Lees suggests, the very repetition of homilies and tenets of faith indicates that they rely on common practice to sustain them. Repetition, she argues, “indicates that belief can never be taken for granted: it is evidence that belief is essentially performative and

¹¹ Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 41.

¹² Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 82.

¹³ See Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 6: “a reliquary with an inscription or iconographic representation of the saint, a document attesting to its authenticity, or a tradition, oral or written, which identified this particular object with a specific individual or at least a specific type of individual (a saint).”

constructed by means of a process of continual reiteration.”¹⁴ The cult of the saint is therefore as dependent on the people asking for intercession as it is on the stories of miracles that made such intercession manifest.

Ælfric crafts his *Lives of the Saints* collection to resemble what Rachel Anderson calls “legendaries in International circles in that it includes mostly saints of universal veneration.”¹⁵ The inclusion of Anglo-Saxon saints among those of more universal veneration makes a claim for the similar status of the community of Anglo-Saxon Christianity in relation to Late Antique Christianity. The inclusion of the lives of Anglo-Saxon saints demonstrates saintly action “close to home”—the efficacy and power of saints in England.¹⁶ In the *Life of Saint Edmund*, for example, Ælfric stresses not only the presence of saints in England but also the specific locations to which these saints are connected:

Nis angelcynn bedæled drihtnes halgena
 þone on engla-landa licgaþ swilce halgan
 swylce þæs halga cyning is and cupberht se eadiga
 and sancte æþeldryð on elig and eac hire swustor
 ansunde on lichaman geleafan to trymminge
 Synde eac fela oðre on angel-cynne halgan
 þe fela wundra wyrcað swa swa hit wide is cuð
 þam ælmihtigan to lofe þe hi on gelyfdon.

(Nor are the English bereft of the Lord’s saints, because in England there are such saints as the holy king [Edmund] is, and Cuthbert the blessed, and Saint Ætheldryð in Ely, and also her sister, entire in body to strengthen faith. And also there are many other holy people among the English, who work many wonders as it is widely known, so that they [the English] may believe in the Almighty, 32.259-266)

¹⁴ Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) ix.

¹⁵ Rachel S. Anderson, “Saints’ Legends” in *A History of Old English Literature*, ed. Cain and Fulk (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 95.

¹⁶ For the concept of “Pro Patria Mori” in the Middle Ages, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, “Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought,” *The American Historical Review* 56.3 (April 1951): 472-492. Kantorowicz discusses the classical and medieval provenance of the idea of dying “for one’s fatherland.” He does not, however, treat the case of saints and their martyrdoms as part of the political construction of an ethnic or cultural identity.

In this passage, Ælfric stresses that these holy saints are present among the “English”¹⁷ and present in “the land of the Angles,” or “England.” The dual emphasis of his words—on the people as well as the land that defines them—suggests a particular focus on England’s holiness, in addition to the holiness of specific English saints.¹⁸ Ælfric’s catalog of evidence for English holiness includes the English saints about whom he has written. “This holy king” refers quite clearly to Edmund, in whose *Life* this catalog occurs. “Cuthbert the blessed” refers to the bishop Cuthbert, about whom Ælfric wrote in his *Life of Saint Cuthbert*. “Holy Ætheldryð” appears in the same collection of saints’ lives as Edmund. Moreover, she is clearly identified as an English saint with the epithet “Saint Ætheldryð from Ely.” These lines point to the Christian holiness present in the history of England through the existence of English saints, but the saintly exempla are not the only narratives Ælfric highlights to demonstrate the centrality of community.¹⁹

Ælfric’s catalogue of figures from English Christianity also highlights negative English exempla in sermons, chastising those English Christians who do not keep God’s laws and are reprimanded for it. Ælfric’s understanding of these “bad” Christians suggests that their lack of participation in central practices—the reiteration that Lees marks as central to the continuity of Christian communities more generally—has serious consequences for their communities. For example, in his sermon for Ash Wednesday (*In Caput Ieiunii*), Ælfric outlines the protocol surrounding the Lenten Fast and the spiritual requirements for laymen and monks. His outline of

¹⁷ See Sarah Foot, “The Making of *Anglecynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 25-49.

¹⁸ Alan Thacker, “*Membra Disjecta*: the Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult,” in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Cambridge and Stancliffe (London: Paul Watkins, 1995): 97-127. Thacker addresses the identity of the heathen in question in Oswald’s lives found in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* (ibid., 97).

¹⁹ See Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 611-37; Stephen J. Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Sarah Foot, “The Making of *Anglecynn*.”

the consequences of disregarding the Lenten fast emphasizes singular acts within the communities in which they take place. The communities that Ælfric uses for his examples are English.²⁰ In each of the exempla, he notes the sinners' relationship to specific English bishops under whom they serve. In the first, Ælfric points to both an English bishop and English bishopric: "some foolish man was with Bishop Ælfstan in Wiltshire, in his household" (sum ungeræd mann wæs mid ælfstane bisceope on wiltun-scire on hirede, 12.41-42). The second exemplum follows on the precedent of the first. It is set in Ælfstan's household and stems from the same time period: "in that same week came a buffoon to the bishop's household, who had no regard for the Lenten Fast" (on þære ylcan wucan com sum truð to þæs bisceopes hirede, se ne gymde nanes lenctenes fæstenes, 12.59-60). The resulting portrait of the Wiltshire bishopric is far from flattering. Moreover, it suggests that the actions of single members of the community affect the quality of the community as a whole—that in fact, the community as a whole might cease to be a community at all due to the members who act inappropriately.

Ælfric uses the examples of the Wiltshire bishopric to make a local point about Lenten rituals and the consequences of disregarding them. In the first case, the foolish man refuses to take the ashes:

þa bædon his geferan
 þæt he eode to þam mæssepreoste
 and under fæncge þa gerynu þe hi underfengon
 He cwæð ic nelle.

(then his companions begged that he go to the mass-priest and undertake the mysteries that they had undertaken; he said, "I will not," 12.44-47).

²⁰ See Thomas N. Hall, "Ælfric as Pedagogue" in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Magennis and Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 193-216. Hall discusses the use of "home-grown" examples in Ælfric's other works, which offers a good analogue to the examples from the *Lives of the Saints* above.

Rather than attending the mass, the man decides to “enjoy his wife” during the forbidden time (“he wolde his wifes brucan,” 12.49). The punishment for his sin is quite harsh: he is chased by dogs, and is impaled upon his own spear—a highly evocative fate for a man who indulged in carnal sins on a holy day. The second man’s punishment is slightly lighter because he does not lose his life. This man “would heed no Lenten fasts” (ge ne gymde nanes lenctenes fæstenes, 12.60) and steals food from the monastery kitchen while the priest says mass. Although he suffers for his sin, he is not killed. Rather, “he fell there at the earliest meal, backwards swooning, and spat blood, but he held onto life with difficulty” (he feoll þa æt ðære forman snæde / under-beoc geswogan and spaw blod / ac him gebyrede swa ðeah þæt feorh earfoðlice, 12.62-64). These anecdotes cast some doubt on Bishop Ælfstan’s holiness and his ability to run his house.²¹ Ælfric highlights these local exempla to make a universal point about the consequences of disregarding Christian precepts. The community that exists in Wiltshire is undermined by the bad practice of its members, suggesting that each member must fully participate in the reiteration of communal beliefs for the group itself to endure. These Christians who do not keep the Lenten fast must be excised or corrected so that the community as a whole can continue. Ælfric demonstrates the interconnection of the local group with the larger Christian fellowship and underscores the importance of adhering to the rules of the larger community in order to continue existing on a local level. The inclusion of such problematic community members stresses the way that these groups consist of both religious members who practice according to prescribed Christian doctrine and members whose inability to conform to Christian doctrine makes their presence in the community problematic. The individual plays a crucial role—for better or worse—in the life and continuation of the group.

²¹ Moreover, because these sins take place in Wiltshire, Ælfric might have heard these stories from the beleaguered Bishop Ælfstan himself.

Ælfric's use of English exempla also incorporates the figures of the English church that were important in Ælfric's time. The inclusion of such figures suggests a tradition of drawing on local exempla to authorize the writing of a homiletic text. By including references to Æthelwold in the third and final negative exemplum from the Ash Wednesday sermon, Ælfric connects his own community of readers to the larger Christian community in England and the holy men who govern it.²² In addition to naming the English bishop with whom the sinner —Ælfheah—worked, Ælfric notes Æthelwold's own stature as a holy man and describes him as one who “now works wonders through God” (nu wyrcoð wundra ðurh god, 12.66). The degree of specificity Ælfric deploys in both naming the bishop in question and referring to Æthelwold draw on local lore to make the universal Christian precepts of Lenten ritual clear. The man in question indulges in drinking—the third act of incontinence Ælfric describes. Because the bishop does not bless his cup, Ælfric argues that the man “bought dearly the untimely drink” (gebohte swa ðone untiman drenc, 12.74). The man meets his fate when a boar kills him the next day. In this instance, Ælfric uses an English Christian as his negative exemplum, and also connects the story that he tells to an important contemporary figure in the English church, Athelwold.²³ This exemplum, in addition to those that precede it in the homily, demonstrates the ways that individual Christians can either reinforce or undermine the stability of Christian community.

The opening of each *vita* in Ælfric's *Lives* points to these stories' investments in geographical, historical, and societal terms. By referring to the specific geographical and temporal locations of the saints, Ælfric demonstrates what Geary calls the “political dimension” essential to

²² Michael Lapidge, “Ælfric's Schooldays” in *Early Medieval English Text and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002). Lapidge cites an unpublished argument by Mechtild Gretsch regarding Æthelwold's status as Ælfric's teacher.

²³ See Thomas N. Hall, “Ælfric as Pedagogue,” 198. Hall suggests that the inclusion of English examples in Ælfric's *Grammar* was meant to “strike a note of familiarity with his students,” (ibid., 198).

hagiography.²⁴ This political dimension in Ælfric’s hagiography takes the form of an ongoing focus on the particulars of the community to which a saint belonged. His method of identifying the saints at the outset of their lives varies widely across the collection. Yet from these variations a pattern emerges. The English saints are distinguished by the detail and certitude with which Ælfric identifies their locations and times, whereas the Late Antique saints tend to be less definitively described. Put another way, Ælfric is less specifically interested in the places from which the Late Antique saints hail. For example, in the *Life of Saint Cecilia*, Ælfric begins with a succinct description of Cecilia’s time period:

Iu on ealdum dagum wæs sum æðele mæden
 Cecilia gehaten, fram cildhade cristen,
 on romana rice þa þa seo reðe ehtnys stod
 on þæra casera dagum þe Cristes ne gymdon

(Long ago in old days there was a noble maiden called Cecilia, who was Christian from childhood, in the kingdom of the Romans when the just stood persecuted in the days of Caesar who did not care for Christ, 34.1-5).

Ælfric outlines key points about Cecilia: she is noble, a Christian from her childhood, and born in Rome during a time when Christians were persecuted. He does not, however, go into great detail about Cecilia’s origins. The general reference to a Caesar “who did not care for Christ” and a location—in Rome—does not make Cecilia’s origin as a noble woman any more precise. Similarly, in the *Life of Saint Basil*, Ælfric opens with a summation of Basil’s identity that is not detailed beyond his lifetime’s worth of holiness:

Basilus wes gehaten sum halig bisceop
 se wæs fram cyldhade swiðe gehealdsum,
 þeah þe he to langum fyrste ungefullod wære

(A certain holy bishop was called Basil, and was from childhood very continent, even though he was unbaptized for a long time, 3.1-2).

²⁴ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 13.

The main points conveyed about Basil are quite simple—he is a holy bishop whose holiness was evident even in childhood despite the fact that he had not yet been baptized. Similar openings are found in many of the *Lives of the Saints*, including Eugenia, Julian and Basilissa, Sebastian, Agatha, Lucy, Forty Soldiers, Mark, Alban, Seven Sleepers, Mary of Egypt, Abdon and Sennes, Maccabees, Saint Maurice, Saint Eustace, Saint Euphrosyne, Chrysanthus and Daria, and Vincentius. Some include a persecutor (such as Valerian or Diocletian) to establish the time period of the story in question. In this respect, Ælfric is typical of his era with regard to establishing saints in terms of their place and time or origin.

In the *Lives* of several other saints in his collection, however, Ælfric gives a different kind of information about the saints by providing their connection to other holy men and women—and constructing a tradition of holiness in which these saints participate.²⁵ These connections form a textual community that links the writers and readers of the saints' lives with the communities that venerated them, as well as the saints themselves. Thus the local community that uses the *Lives of the Saints* is connected to the Christian community of which the saints form an integral part by the writing of hagiography. The *Lives* for which Ælfric includes this narrative tradition include Maur, Agnes, Apollinaria, Martin, and Thomas. In the *Life of Saint Agnes*, Ælfric takes care to connect his version of the story of Agnes to Ambrosius, which both establishes a precedent for the narrative and gives the story a saintly provenance:

Ambrosius bisceop binnan Mediolana afunde on ealdum bocum be ðære eadigan Agne, hu heo on Rome byrig reðe ehtnyse acom, and on mægðhade martyrdom ðrowode. Ða awrat Ambrosius be þam mædene ðus.

²⁵ See Peter Brown, “The Very Special Dead,” in *The Cult of the Saints*, 69-85.

(Ambrosius the bishop, in Sicily, found [out] in old books about the blessed Agnes, how in the city of Rome came persecutions, and how the maiden suffered martyrdom. Then Ambrosius wrote of the maiden thus, 8.1-3)

The opening of the *Life* establishes its narrative tradition: Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, finds Agnes' *Life* in old books and becomes her first hagiographer. Ælfric creates a precedent by framing his own writing as a transmission of Ambrose's version of the *Life of Agnes*.

A similar moment in which Ælfric displays self-conscious positioning in his role as a translator and disseminator of the holy *Lives* takes place in the *Life of Saint Thomas*. In this case, Ælfric's interest in his own narrative tradition stems from a putative concern about authenticity. Written in Latin rather than Old English, the introductory lines of the *Life of Saint Thomas* implicitly claim a type of authority. This authority legitimates Ælfric's inclusion of the *Life* in his collection, as it outlines his concerns as to whether or not it should be passed down. It also outlines the reasons that ultimately persuade Ælfric to include it. Ælfric claims to doubt whether he should "translate into English the passion of Saint Thomas the apostle" (dubitabam div transferre anglice passionem sancti thome apostoli, 36.1-2). His concern stems from the earlier doubts of Augustine, who also found parts of the narrative to be suspect. By connecting his own concerns to those of Augustine, Ælfric places himself in a community of writers who must judge the fitness of stories for the edification and instruction of Christians. In addition, Ælfric notes that he will include the story but only because he has been asked to do so by Æthelweard: "Therefore I wish to pass over [the offending materials] and translate the other materials in the passion just as the venerable lord Æthelweard has persistently asked of us" (et ideo volo hoc pretermittere et cetera interpretari que iu eius passione habentur sicut æþelweardus venerabilis dux obnixè nos præcatus est, 36.10-12) The preface connects Ælfric's version of the story with both Augustine of Hippo as well as Æthelweard—the Anglo-Saxon ealdorman for whom Ælfric wrote the *Lives of the Saints*. Ælfric positions himself both as a learned Christian who doubts the work—like Augustine—but also as a writer with a learned Christian

patron who wishes for the text to be included. Ælfric's preface to the *Life of Saint Thomas* suggests that community formation is, in part, dependent on practice—a choice to act as a Christian that leads to connections with traditional knowledge as well as existing local communities.

Ælfric's narration of the Anglo-Saxon saints' lives often follows the same format he employs in the Late Antique lives. Because they hail from Anglo-Saxon England, the Anglo-Saxon saints contain local English references. That is, the traditions in which Ælfric claims to participate are both Christian and Anglo-Saxon traditions. They implicitly suggest a parallel between Anglo-Saxon England and the Late Antique locales that gave rise to the other saints in the collection. Such parallels suggest that the Anglo-Saxon communities about which Ælfric wrote also contain exemplary holy men and women. In the opening lines of the *Life of Saint Edmund*, Ælfric includes the traditional provenance of the story that he is about to tell, connecting the narrative of Edmund's *Life* to other holy men who have written various versions of it. By including this tradition of the story of Edmund, Ælfric also establishes a direct link between King Edmund himself and the writers and readers of his holy life. The result is a saint—and a *Life*—connected to a number of crucial Anglo-Saxon nobles and holy men, including the archbishop Dunstan and King Æthelstan. The inclusion of Abbo of Fleury, the French Benedictine Abbot, as one of the other authorities on whom Ælfric relies for the story of Edmund situates the narrative at a particular time and place in England. Additionally, it implies that English holiness and English saints participate in a larger trans-national Christian community, signified by the inclusion of the French Abbo's writing of the English Edmund's hagiography. This association of the English holy king with the French abbot from "Saint Benedict's Place" (*sancte Benedictes stowe*, 32.1) puts the holy English king on par with continental

saints while it concomitantly suggests that continental authorities can and do learn about holiness from England.²⁶

The figures to whom Ælfric refers in the *Life of Saint Edmund* emphasize the narrative's ties to both earthly and spiritual hierarchies. The story Ælfric relates outlines the connections among such hierarchies that lead to the story being passed down:

com supan ofer sæ fram sancte Benedictes stowe on Æþelredes cynincges dæge to Dunstane ærcebisceope, þrim gearum ær he forðferde; and se munuc hatte Abbo. Þa wurdon hi æt spræce oppæt Dunstan rehte be sancte Eadmunde, swa swa Eadmundes swurdbora hit rehte Æþelstane cynincge þa þa Dunstan iung man wæs, and se swurdbora wæs forealdod man. Þa gesette se munuc ealle þa gerecednysse on anre bec, and eft ða þa seo boc com to us binnan feawum gearum þa awende we hit on Englisc, swa swa hit heræfter stent. Se munuc þa Abbo binnan twam gearum gewende ham to his mynstre and wearð sona to abbode geset on þam ylcan mynstre.

(A certain very learned monk came from the south over the sea from Saint Benedict's place, in the days of King Æthelrede, to the archbishop Dunstan, three years before he fared forth [died]; and the monk was called Abbo. Then they conversed until Dunstan told him the story of Saint Edmund, just as Edmund's sword-bearer had told it to King Æthelstan, when Dunstan was a young man and the sword bearer was a very old man. Then the monk set all of the story he was told in a book, and after, when the book had come to us, within a few years we turned it to English, as it is stands hereafter. The monk Abbo went home after two years to his own minster, and was soon set as abbot of that same mynster, 32.1-12)

The narrative identifies Dunstan—a major figure of the Benedictine reform movement and the teacher of Ælfric's own teacher, Æthelwold²⁷—as the provenance of the story of Edmund. The English Dunstan relates a received narrative to the French Abbo who writes it down. Completing the traditional provenance of Edmund's story, Ælfric carefully notes the original source of the story Dunstan tells as King Æthelstan, who had received the narrative from Edmund's sword-bearer.

These associations emphasize the interconnection of the earthly and spiritual realms in the text. The seat of spiritual power is represented by monastic authorities: Dunstan, Abbo, and by extension,

²⁶ This trope of English learning being exported to the Continent would be rehearsed somewhat after the fact in Alfred's *Preface to the Pastoral Care*.

²⁷ See Tom Hall, "Ælfric as Pedagogue."

Ælfric himself. Earthly power is represented by King Æthelstan, the sword-bearer, and Saint Edmund, the King. This alliance of earthly and spiritual authority strengthens the claims that Ælfric makes both for the existence and the efficacy of the king and martyr. The transmission of Edmund's story directly connects Ælfric to the saint. The miracle of Edmund's martyrdom appeared in—or rather near—Ælfric's own days.²⁸ The result is the creation of a community of authorities who are connected to the text. This authoritative community grants weight to the story the homily relates as it demonstrates the power of God demonstrated in the life of a pious king.

The *Life of Saint Edmund, King and Martyr* also offers a perspective on both the connection of a king to his land and the extrapolation Ælfric performs in making the holiness of one kingdom's ruler—in Edmund's case, East Anglia—an asset to all England through the unifying power of Christianity. When the Danish invaders Hingwar and Hubba land in East Anglia, Edmund sends a message to Hingwar that clearly places Christianity at the center of his kingship:

Far nu swiþe hraðe and sege þinum reþan hlaforde
 ne abihð næfre eadmund hingware on life
 hæþenum heretogan buton he to halende criste
 æreste mid geleafan on þysum lande gebuge.

(Go now, very quickly, and say to your cruel lord that Edmund will never bow to Hingwar in life, to the heathen army-leader, unless [Hingwar] first bows to the Saviour Christ with faith, in this land, 320.90-93)

Unless the Danish leader first bows to the true faith in the land of East Anglia, Edmund refuses to pay him fealty. Essentially, Edmund ties the lordship over the land to Hingwar's decision as to whether or not he will take the faith of the land he wishes to conquer. Edmund's closeness to the land he rules is later solidified by the relationship he creates, post-mortem, with the wolf that guards his head:

Pa læg se græga wulf þe bewiste þæt heafod

²⁸ See Geary, *Living with the Dead*; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

and mid his twam fotum hæfde þæt heafod
 beclypped, grædig and hungrig, and for gode ne dorste
 þæs heafdes abyrian [ac] heold hit wið deor.
 Þa wurdon hi ofwundrode þæs wulfes hyrd-rædenne.

(There lay the grey wolf watching over the head, and with his two feet had it clasped,
 [though] greedy and hungry, and because of God did not dare to taste [it], but held it against
 wild animals. Then they were in wonder at the wolf's guardianship, 324.154-158).

The guardianship of the wolf over Edmund's head is a moment where the interconnection of the king and land is particularly clear. As Edmund guards the land of the English against heathen invaders, the wolf guards the holy king's remains.

Edmund's life also serves as a moment in which the text reflects particularly clearly on the relationship of the part of England—the kingdoms of East Anglia, Northumbria, Wessex, etc—and its Christian whole. Just before Ælfric claims the worthiness of the English saints amongst saints from other places and times, he states: “Worthy is the place because of the glorious saint that men should venerate and lodge it well, with the pure servants of God, to Christ's service” (Wyrðe is seo stow for þam wurðfullan halgan / þæt hi man wurþige and wel gelogige / mid clænum godes þeowum to cristes þeow-dome, 332.255-7). In these lines, Ælfric avers that the place is made worthy by the worthiness of the saints, suggesting that despite the fractured nature of the English kingdoms in Saint Edmund's own day, the holiness of the place after his death could be extended across England.

That the traditions Ælfric draws on expand to include the earthly power of Anglo-Saxon kings is unsurprising. Given that Saint Edmund was himself a king, the holiness of Anglo-Saxon monarchs was, in certain cases at least, beyond question—even if their explicit sanctity as martyrs *and* kings can be disputed.²⁹ Ælfric's interest in a specifically English holiness, however, also extends

²⁹ See Victoria Gunn, “Bede and the Maryrdom of St. Oswald,” *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Blackwell Publishers: London, 1993): 57-66.

to the bishops and ecclesiastical hierarchy of the embryonic nation. The *Life of Saint Swiðun*, for example, offers some evidence that can point to Ælfric's underlying nationalistic tone. In the opening lines of the *Life*, Ælfric employs the same strategy of a reliance on tradition that I have outlined above to make the case for Saint Swiðun's holiness. The marked similarity between the opening lines of the *Life of Swiðun* and the *Life of Edmund* create a telling comparison. Ælfric uses the opening of the *Life of Edmund* to establish Edmund's exemplarity and his identification with the Christian community in England, signaled by the kings, learned monks, and soldiers he mentions. In the *Life of Saint Swiðun*, a similar lineage of holy men and powerful kings clarifies Swiðun's time period and pinpoints the English location where he lived. As in the case of Edmund, where the relationship between Edmund's story and Ælfric's writing is established through Ælfric's links to Dunstan, Ælfric manufactures a direct line between his own time at Winchester and the time of Swiðun's *inventio*. He begins with the invocation of a king:

On eadgares dagum ðæs æðelan cynincges
 þaða se cristendom wæs wel ðeonde
 þurh god on angelcynne

(In the days of Edgar, the noble King, when Christendom was well thriving among the Anglecynn because of God, 21.1-3).

King Edgar was widely known to be a good Christian king and a holy man. During this time, "God clearly [revealed] Saint Swiðun, through many miracles, revealing that he is great" (þa geswutelode god þone sanct swyðun mid manegum wundrum þæt he mære is, 3-5). Swiðun is revealed as all saints are—through miracles—but his place of origin is closer to home. His miracles and his holy life are both located at Winchester, Ælfric's home monastery.

Because Swiðun comes from Winchester, his lineage is particularly important for Ælfric. When Ælfric explains that lineage in detail—describing where Swiðun falls in the order of bishops—

he provides this specificity only partially because Swiðun was, before his *inventio*, completely unknown:

ðæs swyðun wæs bisceop on winceastre
 swa þeah ofer hamtun-scire gesælig godes þeow
 and eahta bisceopes wæron betwux him and sancte aðelwolde

(This Swiðun was bishop of Winchester, and also over Hamptonshire, a happy servant of God, and there were eight bishops between him and Saint Athelwold, 12.14-16)

Swiðun’s position in the community of the saints is somewhat different than the “holy thanes” of the preface to the work. Ælfric’s use of the term *þeow* to describe Swiðun adds a stronger valence to the aspect of servitude and obedience that being a thane—of God or the King—requires. His geographical location as a saint of Winchester also emphasizes his ties to the local community, a community to which Ælfric also belongs. The opening of the *Life* connects Swiðun with Æthelwold over a space of eight separate episcopacies.³⁰ Ælfric notes that “his deeds were unknown before God himself made them known” (his dæda næron cuðe ærðan hi god sylf cydde, 6) and “we do not find anything in books about how this bishop lived” (ne we ne fundon on bocum hu se bisceop leofode, 7).³¹ Because of this lack of recorded knowledge, Swiðun’s record stands slightly apart from those of other saints. His works are confined to the miracles that took place through his power long after his death, in contrast to the miracles other saints perform while still alive. These miracles take place, Ælfric reaffirms, in the monastic community at Winchester.

³⁰ For background on Bishop Æthelwold, see Barbara Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1997).

³¹ See Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of Saint Swithun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). It’s important to note, as Lapidge does in his study, that although Lantfred, author of the *Vita Sancti Swiduni*, portrayed him as “exceedingly humble; and that as a reflex of that humility he asked to be buried outside the church in an inconspicuous burial place.” This last conjecture is “utterly implausible” because he was buried in a rather large grave right near the church. (*Cult of Saint Swidun*, 7). Despite its inauthenticity, however, the story of the *inventio* gives him a more powerful presence as a saint “newly revealed.” Extant evidence of his reign is limited to knowledge of the time of his episcopacy (852-63), an episcopal profession of faith written in extremely erudite Latin and a land charter (*Cult of Saint Swidun*, 4-6).

In addition to the interlude in the *Life of Edmund* in which Ælfric argues that England is not bereft of holy saints, the opening of the *Life of Saint Ætheldryð* also refers to a kind of holiness that exists in a specifically English community. Ælfric develops the concept of “*Engliscan*” (English)³² as a modifier to describe Æthelthryð. This modifier indicates cultural provenance and a common language associated with a specific place, but it also creates a subtle alliance between being *Engliscan* and being holy:

We wyllað nu awritan þeah ðe hit wundorlic sy be ðære halgan sancte Æðeldryðe þam Engliscan mædene, þe wæs mid twam werum and swaðeah wunode mæden, swa swa þa wundra geswuteliað þe heo wyrçð gelome. Anna hatta hyre fæder East Engla cynincg, swyðe Cristen man swa swa he cydde mid weorcum, and eall his team wearð gewurðod þurh God.

(We now wish to write, because it is wonderful, of the holy saint Ætheldryð, the *English* maiden, who was with two men and nevertheless remained a virgin, just as the miracles that she has worked show. Her father was called Anna, King of the East Angles, a very Christian man as he showed with his works, and all his family honored God, 20.1-7, emphasis mine).

This amalgamation of culture, language, religion, and place creates a sense of shared identity in a time before nations as such existed.³³ Ælfric’s choice of words represents a distinct break with his earlier interests in pinpointing a saint’s local origins with the name of an English region or the people over whom a given king ruled. Here, Ælfric identifies Ætheldryð by her time period and location and also by her family. Ætheldryð comes from a noble Christian family: her father is Anna, King of the East Angles. By identifying Ætheldryð as both an East Anglian princess and one of

³²The term *Engla-londe* is used in a number of different moments in the *Lives*: at Alban lines 1, 16 and 133; Swiðun 193 and 564; Oswald 1, Edmund 259, and Thomas 93. (cf. the number of times he translates with the phrase “þæt is on englisc”)

³³ See Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century.” Hastings argues that England in the Anglo-Saxon period offers a prototype of the modern nation-state. Hastings suggests that we should “start our pursuit of national identity no later than the age of Bede, even though England in his time was neither a single state nor, except in the eye of Bede himself, at once historian and national prophet, as yet a nation” (ibid., 36). Davis argues that although the medieval nation is not the “same as the modern nation,” the possibility of “imagining national identity is not restricted to one set of historically specific conditions such as print culture, democracy, capitalism, and secularization” (ibid., 613).

Christian lineage, Ælfric makes her holiness something that her family shares. Her father's Christianity is known by the works he performed in life. The performance of such works honor God, but these works take place in a community of Christians: his family.

The term English here appears to designate a quality that pertains to Ætheldryð herself, rather than the language she speaks. The slippage of this term for Ælfric creates an amalgamation of land, identity, and community that suggests that Ætheldryð's "Englishness" is as important a quality as her holiness. Moreover, Ælfric's use of *Engliscan madene* (an English maiden) to describe Ætheldryð is an anomalous usage of the term "English" in the *Lives of the Saints*. Ælfric is actually quite reticent in his use of the *Englisc*, *Engla-land*, and *Engliscan*. In fact, in the whole of the *Lives of the Saints* collection, this usage marks the only time "English" occurs as an adjective describing a person.³⁴ As a place name, *Engla-lande* is mentioned with some frequency, and six of its eight usages occur in English saints' lives (Alban, Swiðun, Oswald, and Edmund). The remaining uses of *Englisc* are entirely confined to the realm of language often as references to the act of translation. For example, *Englisc* occurs in the context of the homily on Peter's Chair, in which Ælfric remarks that "*Cathedra* is written 'bishop-seat' in English" (*Cathedra* is gereht bishop-stol on Englisc, 11.4). The importance of his use of *Englisc* to describe Ætheldryð is connected to her status as an exemplary holy woman in England. When he identifies her as an English maiden, Ælfric implicitly claims Ætheldryð as one of the "holy ones" he mentions in the *Life of Edmund*. By associating Ætheldryð with the term *Englisc*, Ælfric explicitly creates the kin group of saints that his list in Edmund's *Life*

³⁴ Usages of the term "English" in Anglo-Saxon texts usually with regard to background or place of origin, as this entry from the DOE demonstrates: "A.1. English, of or belonging to England or its inhabitants. / A1.1. 'English, of England,' referring to the people of England without any explicit distinction drawn among Angles, Saxons and Jutes; often, as distinguished from other nations: the French, Scandinavians, Welsh, etc; also of Englishmen of Anglo-Saxon origin as opposed to Celtic, Scandinavian or Norman descent; *englisc mann* 'an Englishman; a member of the English nation.'"

implicitly claims. Moreover, he creates a kin group that shares a geographical, cultural, and religious identity through shared Christian practice.

THE HOLINESS OF ENGLISH LAND:
ÆLFRIC'S LIFE OF OSWALD

The *Life of Oswald* presents a different kind of saintly status and also a different kind of Christian community. Oswald's dual status as both king and saint creates a link between the hierarchy of Anglo-Saxon rulers and the Christian community of which such rulers were a part. Moreover, his sanctification of the soil links his holiness directly to the land itself and raises the possibility of a Christian community that is partially defined by its distinct geographical location. Ælfric draws primarily on Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* for his version of Oswald's life, and the text's status as a historical source for Ælfric's hagiography draws the differences between a holy king and a martyr-king into sharp relief.³⁵ The majority of critical attention to Oswald focuses on the redaction in Bede,³⁶ and moreover, takes a historical rather than a literary perspective on the cult of Oswald in England and on the continent.³⁷ That is to say, scholarly treatments generally examine either the character of the cult that surrounded Oswald and his relics or the genesis of that cult, from both

³⁵ Although Ælfric does not explicitly cite Bede as the source of his version of Oswald's *Life*, the story of Oswald has only three redactions in Old English literature. The first occurs in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the second in Alcuin's "Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York," and the third in the *Lives of the Saints*. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is commonly considered as the primary source of Ælfric's version of the text. See Hare, "Heroes, Saints and Martyrs: Holy Kingship from Bede to Ælfric" in *The Heroic Age: A Journal of Early Medieval Northwestern Europe* 9 (Oct 2006): 23 paragraphs. See also Daniel Donoghue, *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004) 81; James Riggins Hurt, "Ælfric and the English Saints" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1965).

³⁶ Cf. Marianne Malo Chenard, "King Oswald's Holy Hands: Metonymy and the Making of a Saint in Bede's Ecclesiastical History" in *Exemplaria* 17.1 (Spring 2005): 33-56.

³⁷ See, for example, Catherine Cubitt, "Sites and Sanctity: revisiting the cult of murdered and martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saints" in *Early Medieval Europe* 9.1 (2000): 53-83; Kent G. Hare, "Heroes, Saints and Martyrs: Holy Kingship from Bede to Ælfric."

Christian and non-Christian sources and perspectives.³⁸ Although a number of scholars note the emphasis on the holy soil that is created by Oswald's intercession and death, literary perspectives on the *Life* usually focus on the power of the saint's relics: the hand and head of the warrior-king. Edward Christie, for example, argues that the ideal of the martyred monarch is one in which submission to the will of God is more important than victory.³⁹ Christie's assertion that throughout the *Life of Oswald* "the saint's body is the locus of the construction of his holiness *and* his masculinity"⁴⁰ does not, however, address the peculiarities that surround both Oswald's holy life and his holy death. The confinement of the saint's holiness to his body and his physical remains cannot by itself explain the significance of Oswald's pre- and post-mortem sanctification of English soil both in and around Northumbria, nor does it account for the specificity of the Christian community in which Ælfric is interested.

My argument concerning Saint Oswald examines the differences between Bede's narrative of Oswald's life in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Ælfric's version in the *Lives of the Saints*. The contrast

³⁸ Cf. Cubitt, "Universal and Local Saints" in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Thacker and Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 423-453; J.D. Niles, "Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Godden and Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 126-141.

³⁹ Edward Christie, "Self Mastery and Submission: Holiness and Masculinity in the Lives of the Anglo-Saxon Martyr-Kings" in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* ed. Cullum and Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ Christie, *ibid.*, 153. See also John M. Hill, "The Sacrificial Synecdoche of Hands, Heads, and Arms in the Anglo-Saxon Heroic Story," in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Wilcox and Withers (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003): 116-137; also John E. Damon, "Desecto Capito Perfido: Reciprocal Violence in Anglo-Saxon England," *Exemplaria* 13.2 (2001): 399-432. While Hill's argument focuses for the most part on hands, heads, and arms in both *Beowulf* and the Norse tradition, he does pause to note that in the *Life of Oswald*, "the right hand is both royal power and a doorway to eternal life, to God's kingdom" (Hill, *ibid.*, 128). Damon argues that the taking of Oswald's hands and head was part of an act of reciprocal violence by which feud was not perpetuated but resolved in the context of competing religious structures. He describes this structure in his analysis of the *Life of Edmund* in the context of beheadings in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture: "The king's enemies would try to carry off the head, presumably to display it as an offering to Odin; the king's supporters would attempt to locate the head and enshrine it as part of a relic cult in the Christian tradition" (Damon, *ibid.*, 414).

between Bede and Ælfric brings the *Life* into sharper relief as a narrative about a Northumbrian King who attempts to unite English Christianity. Using the divergences between Ælfric and Bede to explore the intersection of national identity and saintly exemplarity, I will discuss the method by which Ælfric alters the *Life of Oswald* in his translation. Ælfric's version of the text creates a vision of Christian community that downplays the difficulty of uniting separate kingdoms in Anglo-Saxon England. Where Ælfric creates an idea of England that is not complicated by inter-ethnic conflict, Bede's text emphasizes the distinctions between English kingdoms. Moreover, the association of Saint Oswald with specific holy places in the *Life* creates a propagandistic effect in the narrative of the martyr-king. Saint Oswald's connection to the soil he both ruled and sanctified highlights how Oswald's function as an English martyr-king grants an exceptional status for both the saint and the land with which he is associated—land Ælfric consistently identifies as *English* because of Oswald's various battles to protect it from invaders. Oswald's status as one of the holy thanes of God manifests itself through the miracles he performs, and ties the holiness of the land to the holiness of the people who live on it and receive miracles from it. In the *Life of Oswald*, Ælfric's idea of England is tied directly to both geography and religious practice.

OSWALD, WARRIOR KING

The *Life of Oswald, King and Martyr* follows the life and career of King Oswald of Northumbria. The story centers on three events: the battle at Heavenfield, the works of Bishop Aidan, and a final battle at Maserfeld. Ælfric begins with Oswald's childhood, relating that Oswald is converted to Christianity during his exile in Scotland. Upon his return to England, Oswald wins a battle against the forces of the heathen king Cadwalla, who killed Oswald's holy uncle, King Edwin of Northumbria. The battle at Heavenfield occasions the erection of a cross that promotes healing among those who either visit it or receive the moss that grows upon it. As king, Oswald turns his energy to converting his people, inviting the bishop Aidan from Scotland to help in this matter.

Finally, Ælfric relates the story of Oswald's defeat at Maserfeld against Penda, a Mercian king who had been allied with Cadwalla in the Heavenfield battle. Throughout, the *Life* focuses on the miracles that surround Oswald and the sites of his battles, including a number of instances of miracles taking place as a result of soil that becomes holy by his intervention.

The *Life of Oswald* marks another intersection of Ælfric's interests in the formation of Christian community and the formation of English community. Ælfric's nationalistic thinking is not confined to his work in the *Lives of the Saints* collection. Kathy Lavezzo argues that Ælfric's tendency towards using saints' lives for nationalistic purposes is exemplified by his *Life of Saint Gregory*, and her analysis is useful for the contemplation of Ælfric's approach to a properly English saint. Ælfric, according to Lavezzo, writes the first version of the *Life of Gregory* to "tease out the national uses of the Gregory tale."⁴¹ Using the familiar story of Gregory's linguistic punning on the names of the origins of the Northumbrian slave boys he encounters (that leads, traditionally, to the mission of Augustine to convert the English), Ælfric attempts to make concrete the "*fantasy* (if not the reality) of a united Christian *þeod* or people [. . .] though the realization of such an ideal was threatened from both within and without the island."⁴² As Clare Lees observes, Ælfric's version of the *Life of Saint Gregory* uses "English" and "England" to stand in for more nuanced divisions of the isle. In the *Life*, Lees argues, "the nation of the English—as people, land, and language—has [. . .] retrospectively co-opted a country—Britain—and a small northern kingdom that had little symbolic and even less literal meaning by the late tenth century."⁴³ Ælfric's reading totalizes his view of Northumbria.

⁴¹ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28. Lavezzo argues persuasively that his rendering of the tale makes clear an ideal of "Christian election" that is imprinted in the purity of the slave boys' whiteness, a physical feature that contrasts with the error of their non-Christian ways.

⁴³ Clare Lees, "In Ælfric's Words: Vigilance and Nation in the *Life of Saint Gregory*," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Swan and Magennis (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 285.

Northumbria stands in for England, just as Deira is itself interchangeable with Northumbria.

Gregory saves not the Deirans, but the English. Although the *Life of Gregory* does not appear in the *Lives of the Saints* collection, the presence of nationalistic thinking in Ælfric's other hagiographic works allows a more thorough understanding of how it might be manifest in the *Lives of the Saints*.⁴⁴ The conflation of English and Northumbrian Christianity in particular illuminates the use of King Oswald to create a sense of national identity that is intertwined with religious identity.

The act of translation itself also betrays choices of nationalistic thinking.⁴⁵ In her reading of the preface to the *Lives of the Saints*, Rossi-Reder affirms Ælfric's nationalism: "Ælfric's unwillingness to mention more than one emperor relates to his religious and nationalistic attitudes. In the same way he believes in one God, so Ælfric believes in one king ordained by God."⁴⁶ In this analysis, Rossi-Reder relates a choice in translation—Ælfric's decision to alter references to multiple emperors—to a nationalistic mode of thought. Rossi-Reder argues that because Ælfric does not believe in the legitimacy of having more than one king, he uses his position as translator to dispose of the references to more than one king. In so doing, Ælfric implicitly claims a status for an English understanding of what constitutes proper rule that delegitimizes that of his sources. This valuation of political systems is the secular analogue to the claims Ælfric makes for English holiness.

⁴⁴ For more on Bede's understanding of Gregory and the punning scene through a reading of queer theory, see Allen J. Frantzen, "Bede and Bawdy Bale," in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* ed. Frantzen and Niles (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997) 17-39. See also Frantzen, "Alla, Angli, and Angels in America?" in *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 264-292.

⁴⁵ See Davis, "National Writing in the Ninth Century."

⁴⁶ Rossi-Reder, "Embodying Christ, Embodying Nation," 197.

Highlighting the political oppression faced by two of the female saints in Ælfric's collection, Rossi-Reder points to the multiple associations borne by those female saints in their suffering.⁴⁷ In short, Rossi-Reder argues that although Agatha and Lucy are Sicilian in origin and national affiliation, they are also Christians, and so their torment and death makes them part of a larger grouping that defies mere national bonds. When Ælfric inscribes their stories into the *Lives of the Saints*, he transfers their holy lives to an Anglo-Saxon audience and suggests that the trials they faced are relevant to an Anglo-Saxon readership. When the saint's life in question is a specifically Anglo-Saxon saint, however, that local and specific bond becomes attached to English Christianity and English power.

Ælfric's re-telling of the story of Oswald, already known from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in itself suggests the nationalistic thinking that is latent in the project. In her discussion of Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*, Mechtild Gretsch shows how, in a newly emergent "Kingdom of the English,"⁴⁸ Æthelstan and his followers sought to identify what she terms a "pan-English" saint.⁴⁹ This impulse emerged as part of a need "to form what in modern jargon would be called a 'corporate identity.'"⁵⁰ Cuthbert, she claims, made a better choice than Edmund or Oswald, "both of whom were firmly rooted in the history of their respective peoples."⁵¹ Gretsch's argument is temporally bound. By Ælfric's period Oswald's *Life* fulfilled a need that was not present in Bede's time: the need for a pan-English saint

⁴⁷ See Rossi-Reder, *ibid.*, 201. "Nationhood," she writes, "also means belonging to the City of God: the Anglo-Saxon people would have thought of Agatha and Lucy as intercessors who help to open the doors to God's kingdom."

⁴⁸ Of course this isn't entirely accurate as a moniker but it was used for the first time under Æthelstan. See *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*.

⁴⁹ Mechtild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of the Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 96.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*

who could galvanize a people against invading forces. As a king who fought non-Christian invaders, Oswald's hagiography creates possibilities for not only the protection of English land, but also for its sanctification.

Such protection was a key concern at the time Ælfric wrote *The Life of Oswald*, during the second Viking invasion. John E. Damon observes that "it is not surprising to find that one major concern of a book written by a leader of the Church during this period would be the proper Christian attitude to warfare, the legitimate use of force against illegitimate violence . . . [and] *Lives of the Saints* is a book about the relationship between warfare and sanctity."⁵² Oswald's status as a king falls into this contested zone, but his relationship to the protection of English land takes on a non-violent valence. His relics convey their sanctity and protective power to the soil they touch and so continue to defend England's people even after Oswald himself is killed.

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* contains the first recorded life of Oswald.⁵³ Scholars of holy kingship in Anglo-Saxon England have often returned to Bede to stress the developments and changes that occur in thought about kingship during the period.⁵⁴ Scholars must exercise caution in attempting to detect the idea of a "Northumbrian identity" in the text: such a view is clearly that of Bede, and not that of his subject, for whom an idea of Northumbria as a whole was still splintered into Deira and Bernicia.⁵⁵ Rather than constructing a simple and linear account of Oswald's

⁵² John E. Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Ashgate: Burlington, 2003) 195.

⁵³ See Clare Stancliffe, "Oswald, 'Most Holy and Victorious King of the Northumbrians,'" in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Stancliffe and Cambridge (Paul Watkins: Stamford, 1996): 46, where she writes: "Oswald is Bede's most convincing example of a Christian king who took his Christianity seriously, but at the same time remained a king, and indeed a successful king."

⁵⁴ Hare, "Heroes, Saints, Martyrs."

⁵⁵ Clare Stancliffe, "Oswald, 'Most Holy and Victorious King of the Northumbrians,'" in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Stancliffe and Cambridge (Paul Watkins: Stamford, 1996): 36-37.

kingship, Clare Stancliffe suggests that Bede's "portrayal of Oswald is a deliberate construct, put together to record those aspects of Oswald's achievements and character which Bede most wished to bring to the notice of his own contemporaries and future generations—not least, kings."⁵⁶ The construction of kingship in Bede's narrative contrasts with the presentation in Ælfric, who "has composed a formal *vita* on a subject which Bede's age never commemorated in that way."⁵⁷ While Bede accepts Oswald as part of history and worthy of record, Ælfric invests his *Life* more fully in the holiness of the king and less in the historical particulars of his reign.

The difference between Ælfric and Bede on this count is so marked that some critics suggest that Bede does not regard his subject as a martyr. Although critics are fond of analyzing Oswald as the archetypal "Martyr-King," the narrative Bede writes presents much evidence to the contrary.⁵⁸ Gunn's analysis of Bede's Oswald reveals that "Bede's reference centers on what Oswald achieved during his life and then the power he had following his death."⁵⁹ Ælfric might not have seen Oswald as a martyr, either. A comparison between Bede, Ælfric, and Alcuin reveals that because "these writers had been influenced by their reading of Bede's work, from which they did not find reason to conclude that Oswald was a martyr."⁶⁰ Kent Hare in particular has explored the development of the *Life* of Oswald from Bede to Ælfric. Bede struggled "to dissociate *Saint* Oswald from *King* Oswald's wars," a position reversed by Ælfric's later "account of Oswald that skillfully reorganized Bede's

⁵⁶ Ibid., 46

⁵⁷ Colin Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of *Beowulf*" in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981) 163.

⁵⁸ Gunn, "Bede and the Martyrdom of Saint Oswald," 57: Gunn defines the "Martyr-King" as "an individual whose sanctity was attained through dying for the Christian faith," a criterion that Oswald does not fulfill (ibid). She cites Robert Folz, Susan Ridyard, and the text's editor B. Colgrave as making this possibly false assumption.

⁵⁹ Gunn, *ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 65.

material to reassert elements of the heroic tradition present in the saintly king's life and death."⁶¹

Although Hare notes the parallels and divergences in the text that surround Ælfric's treatment of the heroic king, the extent to which the divergences from Bede stem from a different idea of what the English nation might mean is generally overlooked.

Gillian Overing and Clare Lees point out that the *Historia Ecclesiastica's* place in the study of early England's formation of a nation is partially due to a problem of memory: "its recall—indeed creation—of one important trajectory for England and the 'English,' and its concurrent forgetting of what might have composed Britain and the 'British.'"⁶² Patrick Wormald also argues that Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is crucial to the development of the idea of an English nation, but locates his subject slightly differently: it is not Bede's historical interests that are most important in his consideration, but his religious interests.⁶³ In drawing on Bede's story of Oswald, then, Ælfric invokes the beginning of a tradition that makes such saints "more than focuses of local sentiment. They were a heritage all 'Angelcynn' shared."⁶⁴

In the intervening centuries, of course, the historical situation of England had changed dramatically. The development of a "Kingdom of the English" necessitated a "pan-English saint" during the reign of Æthelstan, as Gretsch reminds us.⁶⁵ The factionalism that might have been inspired by a choice like Oswald under Æthelstan had faded by Ælfric's period, however: the Viking

⁶¹ Hare, "Heroes, Saints, Martyrs," para 22. See also Colin Chase "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of *Beowulf*" 161-171. Stancliffe, by contrast, thinks that Bede's portrayal of Oswald is actually quite successful in intermingling the two. See Stancliffe, "Most Holy and Victorious King."

⁶² Clare A. Lees and Gillian Overing, "Signifying Gender and Empire," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.1 (Winter 2004) 5.

⁶³ Patrick Wormald, "Engla Londe: The Making of an Allegiance," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7.1 (March 1994) 1-24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁵ Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of the Saints*, 96.

incursions necessitated a pan-English saint who was not a monk like Cuthbert but a warrior. In the wake of Æthelstan's "self-styled reign as King of all England,"⁶⁶ Ælfric could recoup the legacy of a martyr-king who might have splintered English loyalties by simply eschewing the factionalism that marks Bede's account of the same king.

An analysis of the two major battles in the *Life of Oswald*, Heavenfield and Maserfeld, reveals that the differences between Bede and Ælfric point to a line of nationalistic thinking distinguishing one narrative from the other. This difference comes to the fore through Ælfric's emphasis on the possibility of blood-feud in the narrative. Chase argues that Bede, through a rather circular treatment of Oswald's death, "effectively masks the possibility that Maserfelth was the continuation of an old blood feud,"⁶⁷ in part because it obscures connections between Oswald, Penda, and Edwin. Penda was a Mercian king allied with Cadwalla at the time of Edwin's death. In his *Life of Oswald*, Ælfric highlights the relationship between the British Cadwalla and the Mercian Penda:

hit gewearð swa be þam þæt him wann on penda
 myrcena cyning þe æt his mæges slege ær
 eadwines cyninges cedwallan fylste
 and se penda ne cuðe be criste nan þincg
 and eall myrcena folc wæs ungefullod þa git

(It happened then to him [Oswald, was killed] because Penda, King of the Mercians, made war upon him, who before had helped Cadwalla slay his kinsman, Edwin. And this Penda did not believe in Christ at all, and all of the Mercian people were not yet baptized, 26.150-154)

The text's exposition of the association between Penda, Cadwalla and Edwin is similar to that in Bede: "at the end of this period, Oswald was killed in a great battle, by the same heathen people and

⁶⁶ David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Oxford: Boydell Press, 1994).

⁶⁷ Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of Beowulf," 165. See also Rosemary Cramp, "The Making of Oswald's Northumbria" in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* ed. Cambridge and Stancliffe (Paul Watkins: Stamford, 1996): 21-22. Cramp also writes about the blood feud component to the antagonism between Cadwalla and Penda with both Edwin and Oswald.

the same heathen Mercian king as his predecessor Edwin in a place called in English *Maserfelth*, on 5 August in the thirty-eighth year of his reign.”⁶⁸ Bede’s rendition of the story of Oswald’s death focuses on the Mercian king and his pagan people. In relating the death of Edwin, on the other hand, Bede focuses almost exclusively on the role Cadwalla plays in Edwin’s death.⁶⁹ He does so in part by arguing that however bad Penda was, Cadwalla was worse. The difference between Bede and Ælfric on this point is instructive: the association of Penda with Cadwalla associates non-Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon pagans with the British pagans who were responsible for the death of another holy king. Bede apologizes for Penda’s actions and downplays their significance. Ælfric correlates the two and makes it extremely clear that Northumbrian Christianity is meant to be the ascendant force of Christianity in England in the *Life of Oswald*. For Ælfric, this does not mean that the faithful Christians among later Mercians ought to be denigrated. Christianity figures as a force that sanctifies kingship and creates a holy land that transcends inter-ethnic Anglo-Saxon conflicts.

Oswald’s role as the king of Northumbria creates links between the monarch and his uncle, Edwin, beyond the manner in which and by whom they were slain. The effect is the obfuscation of a fissure in the Christian community in Northumbria that allows Ælfric to posit more continuity in Christian belief than Bede does. Like Oswald, Edwin was a Northumbrian king linked to conversion, albeit a conversion that does not last. Edwin’s story is perhaps most familiar from Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, where the king’s careful deliberation of whether or not to accept the

⁶⁸ Quo completo annorum curriculo occisus est, commisso graui proelio, ab eadem pagana gente paganoque rege Merciorum, a quo et prodecessor eius Eduini peremetus fuerat, in loco qui lingua Anglorum nuncupatur Maserfelth, anno aetatissuae XXXVIII, die quinto mensis Augusti” (ibid., III.9.241-243). Latin text and translation throughout is from *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁶⁹ *HE* II.20.202.

Christian faith culminates first in his own conversion and then with the conversion of his people.⁷⁰ Oswald's holiness, by contrast, becomes clearest on the battlefield, where he triumphs in war through his faith. The link between Edwin and Oswald is, in the *Life of Oswald*, one defined by both literal and spiritual lineages. The association is strengthened early in the *Life of Oswald*. In fact, the text narrates Edwin's death in the same lines as Oswald's conversion in Scotland:

se ferde on his iugoð fram freondum and magum
 to scot-land on sæ and þær sona wearð gefullod
 and his geferan samod þe mid him siþedon.
 Betwux þam wearð ofslagen eadwine his eam
 norðymbra cuningc on crist gelyfed
 fram brytta cyninge ceadwalla geciged.

(They sent him in his youth from his friends and kinsmen to Scotland by sea, and there he soon became baptized, and his companions who traveled with him. In the meanwhile, Edwin his uncle was slain, the King of the Northumbrians who believed in Christ, by the British king named Cadwalla, 26.4-9)

Edwin is designated as both the king of the Northumbrians—a title Oswald would share—and as a king “who believed in Christ.” His death precipitates not miracles but a return to non-Christian darkness. It marks a moment where Christianity in England is lost, and so his belief is still worthy of remark. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede makes a distinction between earthly allegiances and heavenly ones. In his description of the kings between Edwin's reign and Oswald's, Bede states that “no sooner had these two kings gained the sceptres of their earthly kingdom than they abjured and betrayed the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom to which they had been admitted and reverted to the filth of their former idolatry, thereby to be polluted and destroyed.”⁷¹ The Christian community

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid*, II.12.175-II.13.-187 esp. See also James Riggins Hurt, “Ælfric and the English Saints” (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1965) 96: “In none of Ælfric's saints' lives, however, is the evidence of his work of adaptation more pervasive. To an even greater extent than in the life of Cuthbert, Ælfric has taken Bede's work apart and reassembled it in his own way, producing a new version, rather than merely a simple translation or adaptation.”

⁷¹ “Qui uterque rex, ut terreni regni infulus sortitus est, sacramenta regnicælestis, quibus initiatus erat, anathematizando prodidit, ac se priscis idolatriæ sordibus polluendum perdendumque restituit” (Colgrave and Mynors, III.1.212-213). Similarly, the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* outlines the fates

that Edwin sought to establish by his conversion amounts to nothing for Bede. The intervening kings pollute themselves and their kingdom by their return to idolatry. As a result, Edwin's line—and by extension, his kingdom—is broken.

Ælfric's *Life of Oswald* makes a different choice. Rather than relate the story of these kings and their apostasy, Ælfric merely mentions that they came to their deaths in battle with Cadwalla, and this observation provides a starting point for the discussion of Oswald's holy victory at Heavenfield. Bede makes a far more contentious claim regarding these kings: "all those who compute the dates of kings have decided to abolish the memory of those perfidious kings and to assign this year to their successor Oswald, a man beloved of God."⁷² Ælfric does not refer to any such accord amongst historians. In fact, the *Life of Oswald* makes no mention of these kings other than to note that, after Edwin's death, Cadwalla killed "two of his successors in two years" (twegen his æftergengan binnan twam gearum, 26.10). Ælfric effectively fulfills Bede's hope that these evil men would be forever eradicated from history, but he also creates an artificial continuity in the Northumbrian Christian community.

Ælfric closes the gap in time between Edwin and Oswald—two holy kings for whom early cults were formed in Anglo-Saxon England. He mirrors this narrative choice by lessening the narrative distance between Oswald's decision to convert his people to Christianity and their actual conversion. Aidan's involvement in the story of Oswald is a key component of the martyrdom and

of these kings who became traitors to the heavenly kingdom: "Ono hwæt æghwæper þara cyninga, syðþan hi rice hæfdon, forletan þa geryno þæs heofonlican rices mid þam hi gehalgede wæron, 7 eft hwurfan to þam ealdan unsyfernessum deofolgylda. 7 hi sylfe þurh þæt forluran." (and each of those kings, as soon as they had the kingdom, left the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom with which they were made holy, and turned again to the old devil-worship. And through that they damned themselves, 17-20).

⁷² See *HE*, 111. In the Old English, this section reads "Forðon þæt þa eallam gemænlice licade, þe ðara cyninga tiide teledon, þæt heo onweg adyde þa gemynd þara treowleasra cyninga; ond þæt ilce ger to þæs æfter fylgendan cyninges rice teledon, þæt is, God þæs leofan weres Oswaldes" (Because of that all together of those who count the time of kings, that they will abolish the memory of the faithless kings, and that year they give to the following king's reign, that is, the beloved of God man Oswald, 9-13).

of the way Oswald's physical remains dominate discussions of his relics. Aidan's blessing of Oswald's right hand renders that limb incorruptible. The re-conversion of Northumbria has its roots in the very beginning of the *Life of Oswald*. Because Oswald was converted and baptized in Scotland during his youth, when he comes to power he "begins to inquire about the will of God" (ongann embe godes willan to smeagenne, 26.45) and sends away for a bishop to help convert his people.⁷³ The monks send Aidan. Although Aidan is not able "to change his speech to the Northumbrian language quickly enough yet" (gebigan his spræce to norðhybriscum gereorde swa hraþa þa git, 26.68-9), Oswald can already speak Scottish (*scyttise*) fluently and so acts as interpreter. Oswald himself becomes an intermediary between his people and the Christian faith. This trope of the king as conduit of faith is an early intimation of a theme that will recur after Oswald's martyrdom sanctifies the soil on which he dies. Oswald creates, in some sense, the community of Christians that later venerates him and benefits from his miraculous interventions.

A comparison with the source text in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* demonstrates the drastically reduced narrative distance between non-Christian and Christian Northumbria in Ælfric's *Life*. The change in Ælfric's text suggests both the increased power inherent in Oswald's desire to convert his people to Christianity as well as his ability to bring about their conversion. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the conversion of Oswald's kingdom is delayed by the ineffective preaching of an Irish monk:

⁷³ See Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*: "se ferde on his iugoðe fram freondum and magum / to scot-lande on sæ and þær sona wearð gefullod, / and his geferan samod þe mid him siþedon" (He went in his youth from his friends and kinsmens to Scotland over the sea and there soon became baptized, and his companions who traveled with him as well, 4-6); Cf. also Colgrave and Mynors: "Siquidem tempore toto quo regnauit Eduini, filii praefati regis Aedilfridi, qui ante illum regnauerat, cum magna nobilium iuuentute apud Scottos siue Pictos exulabant, ibique ad doctrinam Scottorum cathecizati et baptismatis sunt gratia recreati" (During the whole of Edwin's reign the sons of King Æthelfrith his predecessor, together with many young nobles, were living in exile among the Irish or the Picts where they were instructed in the faith as the Irish taught it and were regenerated by the grace of baptism, III.1.212-213.) As this section makes clear, there is some confusion as to whether Oswald was sent to live among the Scots or the Irish—for ease of understanding, I maintain the reading "Scots" throughout my analysis. It is important to note, however, that the historical king Oswald maintained close ties with the Irish monastery at Iona, and thus the reading of "Scots" in Ælfric's life is incorrect.

The story goes that when King Oswald asked the Irish for a bishop to minister the word of faith to him and his people, another man of harsher disposition was first sent. But he preached to the English for some time unsuccessfully and seeing that the people were unwilling to listen to him, he returned to his own land. At a meeting of the elders he reported that he had made no headway in the instruction of the people to whom he had been sent, because they were intractable, obstinate, and uncivilized.⁷⁴

This anecdote appears only after Bede relates that Aidan was sent to the court of Oswald.⁷⁵ The effect of the extension of time during which Oswald's people remained non-Christians in Bede's narrative implies a distancing between Oswald's wish to convert his people and his ability to bring about that conversion. Although Oswald wishes "that the whole race under his rule should be filled with the grace of the Christian faith," his first attempt to secure that grace for his people fails. Because of Aidan's insight into the nature of this failure, he is sent to Northumbria as a second attempt at conversion.⁷⁶ The gap in time between Edwin's conversion of his people and Oswald's re-conversion of them, however, remains.

Ælfric omits the failed attempt at conversion, and so closes the historical distance between non-Christian and Christian Northumbria. No sooner does Oswald inquire about the will of God than he calls for a bishop to be sent to him from the Irish monastery. No sooner does he send for a

⁷⁴ Ferunt autem quia, cum de prouincia Scottorum / rex Osuald postulasset antistitem, qui sibi suaeque genti uerbum fidei ministraret, missus fuerit primo alius austerioris animi uir, qui, cum aliquandiu genti Anglorum praedicans nihil proficeret nec libenter a populo audiretur, redierit patriam atque in conuentu seniorum rettulerit, quia nihil prodesse docendo genti, ad quam missus erat, potuisset, eo quod essent homines indomabiles et durae ac barbatae mentis, III.5.228-229

⁷⁵ Cf. Colgrave and Mynors, where the story appears some ten pages earlier: "They sent him Bishop Aidan, a man of outstanding gentleness, devotion, and moderation, who had a zeal for God though not entirely according to knowledge" (accepit namque pontificem Aidanum summae mansuetudinis et pietatis ac moderaminis uirum habentemque zelum Dei, quamuis non plene secundum scientiam, III.3. 218-219).

⁷⁶ Aidan's understanding of the problems encountered by his fellow monk in converting the English is clear as to why the harsher monk fails to convert the Northumbrians: "you did not first offer them the milk of simpler teaching, as the apostle recommends, until little by little, as they grew strong on the food of God's word, they were capable of receiving more elaborate instruction and of carrying out the more transcendent commandments of God." Tum ait Aidan (nam et ipse concilio intererat) ad eum de quo agebatur sacerdotem: 'Videtur mihi, frater, quia durior iusto indoctis auditoribus fuisisti, et non eis iuxta apostolicam disciplinam primo lac doctrinae mollioris porrexisti, donec paulatim enutriti uerbo Dei, ad capienda perfectiora et ad facienda sublimiora Dei praecepta sufficerent, (ibid.).

bishop to teach his people than Aidan is chosen for the mission: “they sent then very soon a worthy bishop called Aidan to the holy king,” (hi sendon þa sona þam gesæligan cyninge sumne arwurðne bisceop aidan gehaten, 26.52-53). The space between Oswald’s decision to convert the English and his ability(through Aidan) to bring about that conversion is closed just as the narrative distance between non-Christian and Christian Northumbria is closed. For Ælfric, Oswald’s desire to convert his people to belief in Christ translates directly to the act of their conversion. This transformation takes place without the delays that occur in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The result in the *Life of Oswald* is a continuity of Christian community that is conspicuously absent from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This continuity strengthens the association of Northumbria with the Christianity brought to it through its holy kings.

The omission of narrative breaks lessens the amount of time within the *Life* that Northumbria remains non-Christian. Some of the differences in Ælfric’s *Life* are oriented toward removing the traces of inter-kingdom conflict, as with the earlier example with regard to his description of Penda.⁷⁷ In Ælfric as in Bede, the monks at Bardney monastery refuse the bones of Oswald when the relics are first brought there by Oswald’s niece. The single difference between the two versions of the story highlights a latent nationalistic agenda in Ælfric’s *Life*.

ac þa mynstermenn noldon for menniscum gedwylde
þone sanct underfon. ac man sloh an geteld
ofer þam halgan ban binnan þære licreste.

(But the monks would not receive the saint, for human error. But they pitched a tent over the holy bones that were in the tomb, 26.179-181.)

The only reason given by Ælfric as to the refusal of Oswald’s bones is human error. Within the context of Ælfric’s *Life* the moment in question seems innocuous enough. By comparing the narration to that of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, however, this simple change can be understood a

⁷⁷ See above, page 85.

distinctly nationalistic one. Bede explains the relationship between the Queen of Mercia and the kingly martyr, but pauses to remark on the monks' hesitation to accept the relics:

The carriage on which the bones were borne reached the monastery toward evening. But the inmates did not receive them gladly. They knew that Oswald was a saint but, nevertheless, because he belonged to another kingdom and had once conquered them, they pursued him even when dead with their former hatred.⁷⁸

Bede's story directly addresses the problematic relationship between Oswald's kingdom and the kingdom of the Mercians, marking the difficulty created for rival groups when a warrior king becomes a saint. In Bede's narrative, secular allegiance is not always trumped by Christian brotherhood.

Before he narrates Oswald's death, Ælfric notes that Penda, king of the Mercians, was responsible for it. This information makes the omission of the reason behind the monks' resentment seem somewhat odd. He has already affirmed that Penda—nominally the “enemy”—was not Christian. Nor were the Mercian people at the time of Edwin's death. This moment in Ælfric's text draws attention to a single phrase in the earlier segment that describes the relationship between Penda, Oswald, and Edwin: *þa git* (yet). The Mercians are described in a single line: “and eall myrcena folc wæs ungefullod þa git” (and all of the Mercian people had not yet been baptized, 26.154). The inclusion of the phrase *þa git* in this earlier description suggests a continuity granted by Christianity. Although the Mercians had not yet been baptized, they were still possible subjects of Christianity's healing grace. Thus when Ælfric reduces the monks' refusal of the bones to simple “human error,” he changes the character of their response to the queen's request. Where Bede figures a Mercian response to a former adversary, Ælfric glosses over the monks' secular allegiance

⁷⁸ Cumque uenisset carrum, in quo eadem ossa ducebantur, incumbente uespera in monasterium praefatum, noluerunt ea, qui erant in monasterio, libenter excipere, quia, etsi sanctum eum nouerant, tamen quia de alia prouincia ortus fuerat et super eos regnum acceperat, ueteranis eum odiis etiam mortuum insequabantur (III.11.246).

to a kingdom in order to emphasize the more important allegiance all men owe to God, and by extension, to his chosen saints.⁷⁹ The Mercians had not yet been baptized when Penda kills Oswald; when the monks refuse the holy relics, Ælfric's smoothing over of their Mercian sentiments fulfills the promise of what was "yet" to come: just as they would eventually come to belief in Christ after Penda kills Oswald, the monks would also redeem their rejection of the bones by later accepting them. Ælfric's omission of their secular allegiance emphasizes the power of the Christian faith to unite peoples, in contrast to the secular allegiances that divide them.

The scenes that follow the monks' refusal to house the holy bones also mark a textual divergence between Ælfric and Bede, a difference that further highlights Ælfric's ideological commitment to English exceptionalism. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, God's revelation to the Mercian monks follows the manifestation of a miracle meant to garner the relics' acceptance: "But a sign from heaven revealed to them how reverently the relics should have been received by all the faithful. All through the night, a column of light stretched from the carriage right up to heaven and was visible in almost every part of the kingdom of Lindsey."⁸⁰ The monks see the error of their ways writ in the healing light and recant their position, taking the bones to be housed in their monastery. The monks and people of Lindsey are not the only ones who see the healing light. Several chapters after its first appearance, the light returns: "Not only did the fame of this renowned king spread through all parts of Britain but the beams of his healing light also spread across the ocean and reached the

⁷⁹ Although the implication is still clear in Ælfric that the Mercians would have not welcomed a conquering king's bones, no matter how sacred, the important aspect is his glossing of that smaller allegiance in favor of his dominant theme of a Christian, English, kingdom.

⁸⁰ Sed miraculi caelestis ostensio, quam reuerenter eae suscipiendae a cunctis fidelibus essent, patefecit. Nam tota nocte columna lucis a carro illo ad caelum usque porrecta omnibus pene eiusdem Lindissae prouinciae locis conspicua stabat (III.11.246).

realms of Germany and Ireland.”⁸¹ In itself, this mention of the light is probably metaphorical: “the beams of his healing light” need not be the same beams that were present at the Lindsey monastery when the monks see the error of their ways. Their presence as a metaphor, however, is significant. The use of the Latinate “Britain” suggests a more capacious attitude toward what constitutes England—including, perhaps, Scotland and Wales as part of the geographical reference. This capacity of the light to spread beyond Bardney is borne out by its presence in both Germany and Ireland. What matters to Bede is English Christianity in its wider context of European Christianity. The spread of Oswald’s cult to the continent is historical fact. By contrast, the miracles from his “healing light” are, in Ælfric, confined to England.⁸²

Examined with reference to the “beams of healing light” in Bede, the narrative of the same scene in the *Life of Oswald* becomes another moment of Ælfric’s clear interest in a specifically English Christianity:

Hwæt þa god geswutelode þæt he halig sanct was
 swa þæt heofonlic leoht ofer þæt geteld astreht
 stod up to heofonum swilce healic sunnbeam
 ofer ealle þa niht. and þa leoda beheoldon
 geond ealle þa scire swiðe wundrigende.

(Lo, then God made clear that [Oswald] was a holy saint, so that a heavenly light stood straight up over the tent like a high sun beam throughout all the night, and the people all around that shire beheld it with great wondering, 182-186)

The specificity of Ælfric’s description of the light leaves little to no room for misinterpretation. The beams are a “heavenly light” sent by God in order to make Oswald’s sanctity clear. The light is confined to the province in which Bardney is located. When the spread of Oswald’s cult becomes a

⁸¹ Nec solum inclyti fama uiri Britanniae fine lustrauit uniuersos, sed etiam trans oceanum longe radios salutiferae lucis spargena Germaniae simul et Hiberniae partes attingit (III.13.252).

⁸² Peter Clemons, “The Cult of Saint Oswald on the Continent,” *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures 1958-1993*, ed. Michael Lapidge (London: Aldershot, 1994): 587-610.

focus some seventy lines later, the light is conspicuously absent: “Then his fame sprang throughout this land widely, and also even to Ireland, and also south to Frankland” (*Ɔa asprang his hlisa geond Ɔa land wide / and eac swilce to irland and eac sup to franclande*, 239-240).⁸³ People from Ireland and Frankland are healed through his holy relics, but the text confines the “glory of the light” by which Oswald is known to England. This narrative choice suggests a special place for the king as a sign of English holiness. Like the soil that Oswald makes holy through his life and death, the glorious light from heaven suggests a specifically English holiness and emphasizes the Christian community in England as having priority over the Christian community on the Continent.

Finally, the differing treatments of Oswald’s death in Bede and Ælfric suggest another instance of Ælfric’s overarching interest in a specifically English Christian community. Bede describes the death of Oswald succinctly in Book III, chapter nine: “Oswald was killed in a great battle by the same heathen people and the same heathen Mercian king as his predecessor Edwin in a place called in the English tongue *Maserfelth*, on 5 August in the thirty eighth year of his age.”⁸⁴ Three chapters intervene before the next mention of his death, filled with stories of the miracles wrought at Maserfeld and by the soil from the battlefield. Bede places narrative distance between Oswald’s death in the battle of Maserfeld and the words he speaks as he dies there.

It is also a tradition which has become proverbial, that he died with a prayer on his lips. When he was beset by the weapons of his enemies and saw that he was about to perish he prayed for the souls of his army. So the proverb runs, ‘May God have mercy on their souls, as Oswald said when he fell to the earth.’⁸⁵

⁸³ See T. Northcote Toller and Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) 544. The definition given in Bosworth-Toller for *hlisa* is “sound, rumor, report, reputation, renown, fame, glory”—clearly not the beams of healing light referenced in Bede (*ibid.*).

⁸⁴ Quo completo annorum curriculo occisus est, commisso graui proelio, ab eadem pagana gente paganoque rege Merciorum, a quo et prodecessor eius Eduini peremtus fuerat, in loco qui lingua Anglorum nuncupatur Maserfelth, anno aetatis suae XXXVIII, die quinto mensis Augusti (III.9.242).

⁸⁵ Vulgatum est autem, et in consuetudinum prouerbiū uersum, quod etiam inter uerba orationis uitam finierit; namque cum armis et hostibus circumseptus iamiamque uideret se esse perimendum, orauit pro animabus

The chapters between Oswald's death and the purported institutionalization of his last words as proverbial knowledge are filled with miracles. These miracles take place through both Oswald's presence (in relic form) and the places with which he is associated. His final words become proverbial in part because of the holy works he performs after death. Bede's interpretation of these events—that it makes sense that Oswald cares for his people in death because he did so in life⁸⁶—is made clear through the final words of the saintly king. By placing miracles between Oswald's death and his dying words, Bede's narrative reflects a tradition of holiness that marks Oswald's death as a martyr and his role in the community as the provider of saintly wisdom.

In contrast, Ælfric's narrative places these two moments—Oswald's death and his proverbial final words—far closer together, relating them in the same passage of the *Life*. This narrative proximity allows Ælfric to claim sainthood for Oswald and then prove it, whereas Bede uses the miracle stories to create the aura of sanctity first, and only then claims Oswald's power to care for his kingdom even after death. These differences are in part due to Ælfric's project of hagiography. Rather than the somewhat messy narrative of putatively historical events, Ælfric attempts to mold divine truth out of a holy life, simplifying the events of that life as necessary.⁸⁷ Ælfric relates the following:

Hi comon þa to gefeohte to maserfelda begen
and fengon to gædere oð þæt þær feollon þa cristenan
and þa hæðenan genealæhton to þam halgan oswolde.

exercitus sui. Unde dicunt in prouerbio: 'Deus miserrere animabus, dixit Osuald cadens in terram' (III.12.250).

⁸⁶ "It is not to be wondered at that the prayers of this king who is now reigning with the Lord should greatly prevail, for while he was ruling over his temporal kingdom, he was always accustomed to work and pray most diligently for the kingdom which is eternal" (Nec mirandum preces regis illius iam cum Domino regnantis multum ualere apud eum, qui temporalis regni quondam gubernacula tenens magis pro aeterno regno semper laborare ac deprecari solebat, III.12.250).

⁸⁷ See Chase, "Royal Lives and Saints Lives."

Ʒa geseah he genealecan his lifes geendunge
 and gebæd for his folc þe þær feallende sweolte
 and betæhte heora sawla and hine sylfne gode
 and þus clypode on his fylle, God gemiltsa urum sawlum.

(Then they both came to fight at Maserfeld, and fought together until the Christians fell there, and the heathens grew near to the holy Oswald. Then he saw approaching his life's ending, and prayed for his people that were falling dead there, and committed their souls and his own to God and thus cried out as he fell, "God have mercy on their souls!" 153-161)

Ælfric's narrative follows the linear trajectory of Oswald's life, as is often the case in the text. The victory at Heavenfield is followed by the miracles that occur with Heavenfield as facilitator. The same is true for the miracles that take place through Maserfeld that follow the relation of Oswald's death and his final words. Ælfric shows the king's care for his people in death, rather than simply claiming (as Bede does) that this holy influence exists.

The juxtaposition of Bede's and Ælfric's respective versions of the *Life of Oswald* highlights the ways in which the two authors treat their translated subject. Bede's conception of England was as a nation united by shared faith: "a kingdom not just of bodies, but of souls."⁸⁸ Ælfric's alterations to his source text, by contrast, demarcate the uses to which a holy king and his legacy might be put. Ælfric makes King Oswald a pan-English saint by ignoring—forgetting—the factionalism that marked Bede's rendition of the story. As I shall argue, the result of this "forgetting" is the production of a saint whose holiness extends to the very soil of the English kingdom he represents.

HOLY SOIL, HOLY KINGDOM

Oswald's place as an English saint is secured through Ælfric's re-envisioning of the *Life* originally written by Bede. Further solidifying Ælfric's nationalistic thinking in the text, Oswald's sanctification of the land changes the tenor of this status and invites the extrapolation of Oswald's personal sanctity to England itself. This holy soil participates in a complex process that symbolically

⁸⁸ Wormald, "Engla Londe," 15.

converts the landscape itself, claiming it for Christianity. In the introductory essay of *A Place to Believe In*, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing draw on the interrelation of relics and the particularity that they grant to communities of belief. They argue that the “emplaced relic” can reveal much about the “identity and the *locus* of Northumbria and about literal as well as sacred topography.”⁸⁹ Lees and Overing draw on the work of John Howe to explore the possibility of places *being* Christian, rather than simply being the locale of Christian belief.⁹⁰ Howe argues that sacred Christian geographies “converted” previously pagan sites, and in so doing, he draws attention to the methods by which non-Christian places were literally and symbolically Christianized. The geographical references in texts about saints can provide “a series of snapshots witnessing cultic developments over time.”⁹¹ Places, once Christianized, could be put to use for traditional gatherings or to mark out a territory as belonging to a Christian people. Crosses in particular hold a marked role in this process because such structures “proclaimed Christian territory.”⁹² Additionally, while crosses proclaim Christian territory they also proclaim the identity of the peoples or rulers associated with such territories: they claim the community for Christianity as well as the land. In the *Life of Oswald*, both the Heavenfield cross and Oswald’s physical body create relics that have a life beyond that body. One such relic is the soil itself. The land is literally converted from mere dirt to holy dust. The particularity of this emplaced relic raises a number of questions, the most important of which is what kind of identity

⁸⁹ Clare Lees and Gillian Overing, “Anglo-Saxon Horizons: Places of the Mind in the Northumbrian Landscape,” in *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006) 21.

⁹⁰ John Howe, “The Conversion of the Physical World: The Creation of a Christian Landscape,” in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997): 63-78.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 71.

formation takes place when the land itself is made holy by saintly intervention? Moreover, to what uses is such holy soil put?

The victory at Heavenfield and the related miracles that occur through it bring to light a pattern of sanctification that occurs in the soil and is associated with Oswald and his death as a martyr. The distribution of that sanctifying power becomes a key component of Oswald's cult as Ælfric describes it. This pattern extends through the battle at Maserfeld where Oswald's death marks him out as a martyr for the Christian faith in England, but his ongoing concern for his kingdom lasts even beyond the grave. The miracles that take place through Maserfeld originate in the soil but are not completely contained there. Rather, like the relics of the saint and the story of his life, Oswald's holy power is transferable from believer to believer. The dust is portable. Its movement from both the battlefield and the monastery to various locations around Northumbria and England emphasizes the nationalistic thinking latent in the text. For Ælfric, the power of the Christian faith—defended by a holy king—becomes a property of the soil that that king died to protect from both invaders and infidels. It becomes a relic in its own right.

Oswald's death at Maserfeld literally sanctifies the soil of England, but the soil at Heavenfield has already been metaphorically claimed for Christ by Oswald's cross. Before his victory in battle over Cadwalla, Oswald raises a cross in order to honor God: "Oswald there quickly reared up a cross, to give worship to God before the coming battle"(Oswold þa arærde ane rode sona / gode to wurðmynte ær þan þe he to ðam gewinne com, 26.17-18). He and his companions (*geferum*, 19) pray for victory at the cross ("they all fell down with Oswald in prayer" [Hi feollon þa ealle mid oswolde on gebedum, 26.24]) and thereafter win the battle (*gewunnon þær sige*, 26.26) against Cadwalla. Afterward, the cross becomes a site of healing:

an wurdon fela gehælde
 untrumra manna an eac swilce nytena
 þurh ða ylcan rode swa swa us rehte beda

(and many were healed, un-well men and each and every unclean man through that same cross, as Bede has told us, 26.31-33).

Heavenfield becomes a site of pilgrimage, where people come to find healing through the holy king and martyr. Oswald erects the Heavenfield cross, and its holiness becomes apparent in the narrative almost immediately. Despite the fact that Oswald has not yet died for his faith, his saintly potential is already central to the action at Heavenfield. From the point of view of the narrative, a collapsing of time takes place through this elision. Oswald has not yet become a true martyr-king, but his ability to create a holy and meaningful place through his intercession and prayer is clearly manifest. His incipient sainthood infects the story as much as his holiness infects the land. Ælfric narrates the holiness of Oswald's creation, the Heavenfield cross, almost in the same moment it is erected.

The Heavenfield cross marks the first suggestion that the holiness of Oswald has the potential to disperse its sanctifying power far away from the battle site. The cross works miracles at a distance because its holiness infects the vegetation that grows upon it:

Sum man feollon ise þæt his earm tobærst
 an læg þa on bedde gebrocod forðearte
 oðþæt man him fette of ðære forsæden rode
 sumne dæl þæs messes þe heo mid beweaxen wæs
 and se adliga sona on slæpe wearð gehæled
 on ðære ylcan nihte þurh oswoldes gearnungun

(a man fell on ice so that his arm was broken, and he lay then in bed very much injured until a man fetched for him from that fore-mentioned cross a part of the moss that on it was growing, and the *adliga* soon became healed in his sleep on that very night through Oswald's worthiness, 43-49).

The narrative emphasizes the traversal of a physical space, a pervasive theme in the *Life of Oswald* and most hagiography. In this case, however, the traversal of a physical space takes place not through contact with relics but through a secondary site created by the saint himself. The place of Heavenfield, or rather its holiness, is made present in the material of the moss. The moss can be “fetched” and transported to anywhere it is needed. The transmission of the holiness from the cross

to the moss begins a process that is repeated with the soil at Maserfeld, which produces miracles in diverse locations in and around Northumbria. The holiness of the king leads to the holiness of the land and the portability of the moss means that Oswald's holiness can be effective far from his physical presence. The result is a community of English Christians associated with the soil that Oswald sanctifies.

Even Heavenfield's naming marks a moment in which Oswald's exceptionality—and in turn the exceptionality of his people—is demonstrated. Ælfric alters Bede's version of the provenance of Heavenfield's name, claiming that it was only called "Heavenfield" after the battle:

seo stow is gehaten heofon-feld on englisc,
 wið þone langan weall þaþa romaniscan worhtan
 þær þær oswold oferwann þon wælhreowan cyning

(The place is called Heavenfield in English, against the long wall which the Romans wrought, there where Oswald overcame the cruel king, 26.40-3).

Ælfric's interest in the material holiness of the cross at Heavenfield is mirrored by his interest in the means through which the site becomes holy. The process by which Heavenfield gains its name is further evidence of Oswald's ability to create a holy space. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, by contrast, the identity of Heavenfield is sealed into the place through its naming, which took place long before Oswald's miraculous battle:

This place is called in English Heavenfield, and in Latin *Caelestis campus*, a name which it certainly received in days of old as an omen of future happenings; it signified that a heavenly sign was to be erected there, a heavenly victory won, and that heavenly miracles were to take place there continuing to this day. The place, on its north side, is close to the wall with which the Romans once girded the whole of Britain from sea to sea, to keep off the attacks of the barbarians as already described.⁹³

⁹³ Vocatus locus ille lingua Anglorum hefenfeld, quod dici potest latine Caelestis Campus, quod certo utique praesagio futuorum antiquitus nomen accepit; significans nimirum quod ibidem caeleste erigendum propeum, caelestis inchoanda uictoria, caelestia usque hodie forent miracula celebranda. Est autem locus iuxta murum illum ad aquilonem, quo Romani quondam ob arcendos barbarorum impetus totam a mari ad mare praecinxere Britanniam, ut supra docimus, (III.2.216).

Bede suggests that the name of Heavenfield is an inheritance rather than an innovation. He avers that the very name—*Caelestis campus*—is a sign of the holiness of the place, bestowed (we can assume) in the time of the Romans. They too sought to keep a barbarous people from attacking their lands; one need only substitute “pagan” for “barbarian” in the passage above to make clear the similarity. Just as the wall kept out a force that threatened to undermine the Roman Empire, the cross at Heavenfield offers testament to the power of that sign to unite and bolster Christians against the forces that threaten them.⁹⁴ Moreover, it points to the eventual coming of Christianity and remaking of the place through its Christianization—a narrative, Bede suggests, destined to be fulfilled. Although Ælfric does not posit the naming of Heavenfield as a result of Oswald’s actions, the occurrence of the naming after the miracles suggests that the place’s holiness becomes known because of his victory through Christ. Oswald, that is, puts Heavenfield on the map.

Despite the specificity of the saintly intervention that creates a holy place at Heavenfield, Ælfric’s argument for the sanctity of English land is most striking at the moments in which he

⁹⁴ For more on the absence or presence of Christianity and Christian paraphernalia in and around Oswald’s time, see Cramp, “The Making of Oswald’s Northumbria.” Bede also notes—incorrectly—that Oswald’s act was the first act of such holiness in Britain, and thus retains some sense that Oswald’s holiness contributes to, if it is not constitutive of, the holiness of Heavenfield: “To this place the brethren of the church at Hexham, not far away, have long made it their custom to come every year, on the day before that on which King Oswald was killed, to keep vigil there for the benefit of his soul, to sing many psalms of praise, and, next morning, to offer up the holy sacrifice and oblation on his behalf. And since that good custom has spread, a church has lately been built there so that the place has become still more sacred and worthy of honour in the eyes of all. And rightly so: for, as far as we know, no symbol of the Christian faith, no church, and no altar had been erected in the whole of Bernicia before that new leader of the host, inspired by his devotion to the faith, set up the standard of the holy cross when he was about to fight his most savage enemy” (In quo uidelicet loco consuetudinem multo iam tempore fecerant fratres Hugustaldensis ecclesiae, quae non longe abest, aduenientes omni anno pridie quam postea idem rex Osuald occisus est, uigilias pro salute animae eius facere, plurimamaque psalmorum laude celebrata, uictimam pro eo mane sacrae oblationis offerre. Qui/ etiam crescente bona consuetudine, nuper ibidem ecclesia constructa, sacratioem et cunctis honorabiliorem omnibus locum fecere. nec inmerito, quia nullum, ut conperimus, fidei christianae signum, nulla ecclesia, nullum altare in tota Berniciorum gente erectum est, priusquam hoc sacre crucis uexillum nouus militiae dux, dictante fidei deuotione, contra hostem inmanissimum pugnaturus statueret, III.2.216). The church, as Bede describes it, becomes the fulfillment of the promise of place. Where a holy victory is won through a holy sign, a church is set up to forever commemorate it. Even so, we can still see the distancing posited by Hare at work: it is the King who is prayed for at Heavenfield, and not the saint. Furthermore, offerings are made on his behalf, not through his intercession.

chooses not to give precise information about holy locations. His lack of precision seems to indicate an impulse to make Oswald a more generally English saint, rather than confining the community his sanctity affects to a specific locale. In the relation of the miracle stories that take place at Heavenfield and at Maserfeld, Ælfric shows a characteristic avoidance of details that identify either the recipients of the healing or the precise knowledge of the location's significance on their part. In the case of Heavenfield, the exclusion is quite simple: where Bede avers that the man who experiences healing from his broken arm is a monk at Hexham, Ælfric makes no claim whatsoever for his identity.⁹⁵ Rather, the man is simply referred to as "a man": "A man fell on ice so that his arm was broken" (Sum man feollon ise þæt his earm tobærst, 26.43). Were this the only such omission, the simplification could be explained as a function of genre and the lack of a need for more specific and local references in the *Life*. Ælfric is, however, almost systematic in his exclusion of details that Bede includes. The bulk of these exclusions make Oswald's holiness a general one, capable of spreading throughout his kingdom and to believers in his sanctity beyond Northumbrian soil. Oswald's holiness unites a Christian community.

In the case of Maserfeld, the different degrees of specificity in locating the holy place mark the final way in which Ælfric's alteration of Bede suggests nationalistic thinking within the *Life of Oswald*. The introduction of Maserfeld in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* reveals a higher degree of specificity in Bede's location of the site, as well as in the reproducibility of the miracles that take place through the soil. After noting that many animals and men are healed by the holy soil, Bede makes an implicit claim for the ease of locating the spot. In Bede's time at least, it is marked by a gaping hole: removing earth from the place "became very popular and gradually so much earth was removed that

⁹⁵ *HE* III.2.112-113.

a hole was made, as deep as a man's height."⁹⁶ In contrast, the first healing that takes place there is by accident. After his horse is cured of "agonizing pain" by touching the spot where Oswald died, a rider realizes "that there must be some special sanctity associated with the place in which the horse was cured. He put up a sign to mark the site."⁹⁷ Initially, the rider does not know that this place is holy because of Oswald, but he still marks it with a sign, presumably so that others might return to it. The narrative distance implied by the man's lack of knowledge—the reader knows that he is in a holy place from the beginning but the man does not—serves to make the site itself specific. That is, both the horse that is healed and the woman who is brought there afterward to be healed of paralysis must be in a specific place to experience the healing. The owner of the horse must mark the place by putting up a sign, making sure that he and others could find it again.

Ælfric, by contrast, omits the rider's sense of place, noting that his horse is cured when "it came before long to the place where the king Oswald fell in the fight, as we said before" (*becom hit embe lang þær se cynincg oswold / on þam gefeohte feoll swa swa we ær forsædon*, 26.208-209), but not implying that the rider knows what power healed his horse. Moreover, the rider does not erect any sign to mark the place, and Ælfric states that he simply "went forth afterwards on his way" (*se ridda þa ferde forð on his weg*, 26.212). Nothing marks the site where Oswald died. In the Maserfeld miracle at least, there is no sense that the people Ælfric describes know why the ground is holy, though the reader is consistently reminded of its sanctity and the reasons for it. Furthermore, no sign is erected to point out the holy place.

⁹⁶ Namque in loco ubi pro patria dimicans a paganis interfectus est, usque hodie sanitates infirmorum et hominum et pecorum celebrari non desinunt. Une contigit ut puluerem ipsum, ubi corpus eius in terram conruit, multi auferentes et in aquam mittentes suis per haec infirmis multum commodi adferrent. Qui uidelicet mos adeo increbruit, ut paulatim ablata exinde terra fossam ad mensuram statuaræ uirilī altam rediderit, (*HE III.9.242*).

⁹⁷ Quo illo uiso, ut uir sagacis ingenii, intellexit aliquid mirae sanctitatis huic loco, quo equus etst curatus, inesse, et posito ibi signo non multo post ascendit equum atque ad hospitium, quo proposuerat, accessit (*HE III.9.242*).

Even the natural world conspires to make Oswald's holiness known in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In contrast to the man-made testament of the hole mentioned previously, the vegetation of the ground itself is qualitatively altered by Oswald's holiness:

The story is told that about this time another man, a Briton, was travelling near that place where the battle had been fought, when he noticed that a certain patch of ground was greener and more beautiful than the rest of the field. He very wisely conjectured that the only cause for the unusual greenness of that part must be that some man holier than the rest of the army had perished there.⁹⁸

Again, a certain degree of knowledge is attributed to the man in question. The Briton notes the beauty of the place where Oswald died, and takes that to be a sign of the special power inherent in the spot. Later, after the soil saves a single post (on which the soil was hung) from a building destroyed by fire in a raucous party, the source is revealed: "after careful inquiries they discovered that the soil had been taken from that very place where Oswald's blood had been spilt."⁹⁹ Moreover, the text identifies the man in the story, if only by an ethnic characterization: he is "de natione Brettonum," of the race of the Britons.¹⁰⁰

Ælfric, on the other hand, glosses over the ways in which the place of Oswald's death is marked out by human and natural means:

Eft siððan ferde eac sum ærendefæst ridde
 be þære ylcan stowe and geband on anum claþe
 of þan halgan duste þære deorwurðan stowe

⁹⁸ Eodem tempore uenit alius quidam de natione Brettonum, ut feruent, inter faciens iuxta ipsum locum, in / quo praefata erat pugna completa; et uidit unius loci spatium cetero campo uiridius ac uenustus, coepitque sagaci snimo conicere, quod nulla esset alia causa insolitae illo in loco uiriditatis, nisi quia ibidem sanctorum cetero exercitu uir aliquis fuisset interfectus (III.10.244).

⁹⁹ Qua uisa uirtute mirati sunt ualde, et perquirentes subtilius inuenerunt, quia de illo loco adsumtus erat puluis, ubi regis Osualdi sanguis fuerat effusus, (HE III.10.244).

¹⁰⁰ On Bede and the idea of the nation, see Foot, Making of Angelcynn; Tugène, *L'idée de la nation anglaise* and *l'idée de nation chez Bède le Venerable*; Pohl, Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique; Diane Speed, Parergon 10.2 (1992)

(And again, a horseman [was] bound on an errand by that same place, and [he] bound up some of the holy dust from that precious place in a cloth, 221-223)

Ælfric's man is simply a messenger bound on an errand. The omission of Bede's detail—that he is a *British* man sent on an errand—marks another moment where Ælfric leaves out a cultural signifier that extends beyond a properly Northumbrian and English saint. By leaving out that the man is British, Ælfric implicitly reclaims Oswald's sanctity for English people, in distinction from Bede's larger vision of the Christians of the British Isles. There is no marker for the field, nor does the man perceive anything out of the ordinary about the place: rather, he simply takes the dust from the “precious place,” as though the knowledge of its holy provenance has already disseminated enough for the man to know, without asking, that the place in question is holy.

CONCLUSION

Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints* as a whole makes a significant claim about the implication of individual belief and practice in the life of the larger Christian community. By extending his hagiographical interpretation of the interpolation of individual and group to Anglo-Saxon saints, Ælfric implies the interconnection of English holiness with the Christian community at large, making it not only important but central to the continuity of Christendom. Moreover, he extends this continuity to a lineage that connects the lives of Late Antique and Roman saints to the saints native to Anglo-Saxon England. This process is brought to fruition in his *Life of Saint Oswald* and its proto-nationalist overtones that intertwine the holiness of a king with his geographical kingdom. In a comparison with Bede's version of the narrative in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Ælfric's *Life of Oswald* makes alterations that change the kind of community imagined by the text. Where Bede's narrative emphasizes a Christian community that can be splintered by the ethnic divisions that permeate northern England and the British Isles, Ælfric's choices in translation remedy this problematic relationship between faith and nation. By omitting key details that have to do with national origin

and simplifying the narrative of Oswald's transition from Christian king to Christian martyr, Ælfric creates a Christian confraternity that trumps questions of ethnic conflict and historical rivalry. In so doing, he creates a saint whose ethnic origins become the basis of his ability, pre- and post-mortem, to unite a Christian community by creating holy places.

As Overing and Lees suggest, the distribution of Oswald's relics becomes a key feature in the evolution of both his cult and Northumbrian Christianity.¹⁰¹ We must, however, note that the process of sanctifying the land begins, in the *Life of Oswald*, with the victory at Heavenfield. The cross there begins the process of Christianizing a landscape that had once been pagan—and then Christian, and then pagan once more. When Oswald raises his cross at Heavenfield, he claims a mantle of Christian kingship that would sanctify the very land itself. The moss and the soil that convey Oswald's sanctity to Christians around the Northumbrian kingdom and beyond stress the ability of a landscape—of a particular holy place—to unite a people in belief. By putting Heavenfield and Maserfeld “on the map,” Ælfric's *Life of Oswald* makes a claim for the sanctity of both the Northumbrian people and the land they inhabit.

¹⁰¹ See Lees and Overing, “Anglo-Saxon Horizons,” 21.

Becoming England in the Man of Law's Tale

In the opening of the Northumbrian section of the *Man of Law's Tale*, the waters that border the province are given a prominent position: Custance arrives “in oure occian” (505) and “oure wilde see” (506) before the specific location of action is revealed as “Northumberlond” (508). This choice of terminology has two main effects. First, the use of the first person plural “oure” creates a sense of identification between the speaker and his audience—the pilgrims to whom the Man of Law speaks, certainly, but also the English-speaking audience to whom Chaucer addresses his larger text. The generality of the geographical markers, however—an “occian” and a “wilde see”—contrasts sharply with the specificity of the “oure” that modifies the body of water in question. Despite the identification invited by the pronoun “oure,” the land that these waters surround is temporally distant from the present of the Man of Law and the other pilgrims. The designation might, as Kathleen Davis suggests, produce “the sense of political borders,” but it is also in the past: in Chaucer’s time, Northumbria is no longer its own political territory under sovereign rule.¹ The story that follows traces the path of Northumbria from a heathen kingdom to a nation that becomes more familiar as it becomes Christian. Only at the end of this story of conversion does the term “Engelonde” name the location in which the narrative takes place. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, becoming Christian is a vital part of becoming English for both the island nation Constance converts and the Saxons who inhabit it.

For the purposes of this chapter, the concept of “English nation” will be defined in two distinct but inter-related ways. Susan Reynolds argues that “in medieval terms, it was the fact of being a kingdom (or some lesser, but effective, unit of government) and of sharing a single law and

¹ Kathleen Davis, “Time Behind the Veil: The Media, the Middle Ages, and Orientalism Now,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 116-117.

government which promoted a sense of solidarity among its subjects and made them describe themselves as a people.”² This status of “a people” exists, Reynolds suggests, without a discernible relationship between that people in the Middle Ages and the existence of a modern nation-state.³ That is, as Kenneth Hodges observes, such peoples are not “predefined,” in that medieval groups do not necessarily map onto modern ones. According to Hodges, “asking when the English developed nationalism does not make much sense until one knows who the English were and which of the English king’s subjects were actually something else (e.g., Welsh, French, Cornish, or Manx).”⁴ Importantly, such formulations are both forward-looking—that is, aligned toward a continuation of community—and retroactive. Such a retroactive move requires, as Susan Nakley and Kathleen Davis both suggest, an invention of a shared past that is, in some cases, also anachronistic because of the need to construct a religious and cultural “other”—in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, the anachronistic sixth-century Islamic Syria.⁵ As Davis argues, in this story “Europe *becomes* Europe over and against an Islamic East because it is Christian,” allowing for England to enter a European center from its previous position on the margins of medieval history.⁶

² Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 253. See also Kenneth Hodges, “Why Malory’s Launcelot is not French: Region, Nation, and Political Identity” *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 556-71.

³ Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 253.

⁴ Hodges, “Malory’s Launcelot,” 558.

⁵ Kathleen Davis, “Time Behind the Veil: The Media, The Middle Ages, and Orientalism Now,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001): 105-122. See also Susan Nakley, “Sovereignty Matters: Anachronism, Chaucer’s Britain, and England’s Future’s Past,” *Chaucer Review* 44.4 (2010): 368-396.

⁶ Davis, “Time Behind the Veil,” 116. See also Kathy Lavezzo, “Beyond Rome: Mapping Gender and Justice in the *Man of Law’s Tale*” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 24 (2002): 149-80. Lavezzo argues that England gains juridical sovereignty from Rome whilst maintaining its own separate nationhood through the mediation of Constance.

Regardless of its temporal status, however, any conception of a “nation” in writing requires that some group be identifying with and performing a set of shared traits. While Benedict Anderson argues that the supra-national structures of the Roman Church impeded the development of “true” nations before the Enlightenment, Adrian Hastings suggests that the idea of a shared religious affiliation forms an integral part of the development of the idea of a nation in the Age of Bede.⁷ Hastings notes three levels of identification that are integral to the development of a proto-national identity: territorial, ecclesiastical, and linguistic. For Bede, and to a lesser extent for Chaucer, these ideas are aspirational rather than actual: what is at stake in such a formulation are the qualities that allow for an imagined community to be imagined. For Chaucer, then, England was both a political territory and a fictional construct: the two categories overlap, but the nation in the *Man of Law’s Tale* emerges through a gradual definition of boundaries and interdependencies. The idea of the nation in the *Man of Law’s Tale* creates, in a fictionalized Northumbrian kingdom, the qualities of territorial, linguistic, and ecclesiastical affinity that solidify Chaucer’s definition of his contemporary England.⁸

In the recent proliferation of post-colonial, feminist, queer, and historical criticism about the *Man of Law’s Tale*, much of the focus has been on the East and the role that Syria plays in the opening of the story.⁹ These readings have included considerations of orientalism, gender, and

⁷ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸ Davis, “Time Behind the Veil”; Nakley, “Sovereignty Matters.”

⁹ For recent examples of criticism on the *Man of Law’s Tale* see especially Carolyn Dinshaw “New approaches to Chaucer,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 270-290 and “Pale Faces: Race, Religion, and Affect in Chaucer’s Texts and Their Readers,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 19-41; Susan Schibanoff, “Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Exemplaria* 8.1 (Spring 1996); Sheila Delany, “Womanliness in *The Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 9 (1974-5): 63-72; Elizabeth Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance: Christian Feminism in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 143-180; Steven F. Kruger, “Conversion and Medieval Sexual, Religious, and Racial Categories” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 158-179; Kathleen Davis, “Time Behind the Veil: The

temporality, among other themes. The scholarship about Syria also addresses the interconnection between the creation of an idea of the nation and the importance of a fantasy of Syrian sovereignty.¹⁰ Allen Frantzen's consideration of the *Man of Law's Tale* offers another point of departure for this approach to the two texts. His analysis rests on two relatively contentious claims. First, he claims that "Rome, not Northumbria, is the center of *The Man of Law's Tale*."¹¹ Second, he eschews the exploration of the heteronormative sexuality into which Custance is inscribed in the *Tale*, focusing instead on the latent possibility of a queer relation between Hermengyld and Custance.¹² By focusing his account of the *Man of Law's Tale* on the primacy of Rome, Frantzen draws attention away from the relationship between Rome and Saxon England—a relationship founded on conversion and religious power. In contrast to both Frantzen and the scholars who focus on the Syrian portion of the *Tale*, my focus in this chapter will center on Northumbria. I argue that the relationship between

Media, the Middle Ages, and Orientalism Now," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York, 2000): 105-122.

¹⁰ Davis, "Time Behind the Veil"; Nakley, "Sovereignty Matters."

¹¹ Allen Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 264. In making this move, he distances himself from analyses like those of Schibanoff and Dinshaw, who claim that the orientation of the *Tale* is very much centered on the difference between East and West. See also Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," Dinshaw, "Pale Faces," and Kathy Cawsey, "Disorienting Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval Manuscripts," *Exemplaria* 21.4 (Winter, 2009): 380-397. Cawsey in particular is concerned with religious and cultural difference rather than sexual difference, arguing that "Both Gower and Chaucer's versions of the story of Constance continue the literary tradition of paralleling Northern pagans with Muslim Saracens" (Cawsey, "Disorienting Orientalism," 387). Frantzen is not the only critic who sees Rome as central to the *Man of Law's Tale*, however. See Sarah Stanbury, "The *Man of Law's Tale* and Rome" *Exemplaria* 22.2 (Summer 2010): 119-37. In her consideration of Rome's centrality to the *Tale*, Stanbury argues that Rome is "a place of deracination and trauma more than of comfort," and moreover that the city "situates a complex commentary on material and spiritual commerce, and does so in a story that seems, once we leave Rome, to have little to do with material objects at all" (*ibid.*, 2-3).

¹² Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 259-263. He argues that before the knight kills Hermengyld, the story of the *Man of Law's Tale* still retains a radical capacity for change: "in this moment of love and friendship, a prelude to tragedy, a better ending is still possible as the women, surrounded by the same-sex shadow of their love, sleep." (Frantzen, *ibid.*, 263). For other considerations of gender in the tale, see Robertson, "Christian Feminism;" Delany, "Womanliness." For analyses of the "calumniated queen" motif in the *Tale*, see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: Gordian Press, 1968).

Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and its main sources underscores the different interpretation of the idea of the nation in each of their works.¹³

The *Man of Law's Tale* is based upon a narrative—the Constance Legend—that appears in several texts.¹⁴ The most important of these for a consideration of the *Man of Law's Tale*, however, are Chaucer's sources: Nicholas Trevet's Anglo-Norman *Chronicle* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Although these three texts differ markedly, the basic narrative remains the same.

Constance, the daughter of the Emperor of Rome, is promised in marriage to the heathen sultan of Syria, who in return promises to convert to Christianity. Upon Constance's arrival, the sultan's mother plots to kill her son and Constance's escorts because of her anger at the proposed conversion. She sends Constance to sea in a rudderless boat. Guided by God, Constance arrives in Saxon Northumbria. Constance rebuffs the sexual advances of a knight, who then frames her for murder. God's miraculous testimony at her trial saves Constance and converts the Saxon king and his people. Constance marries the king, but her mother-in-law hates the Roman for taking her son from the heathen gods. When the king is away fighting a war, she replaces a letter announcing the birth of his son with one announcing the birth of a monster. The king's response shows compassion, and so the mother-in-law steals that letter as well, replacing it with one exiling Constance. Constance eventually returns to Rome and years later, the king is reunited with his wife and their son. While

¹³ The question of narrative voice has been a particular issue in studies of the *The Canterbury Tales*. In my analysis of the *Man of Law's Tale*, I follow A.C. Spearing and Derek Pearsall, who have argued that the identification of the narrative with the Man of Law as a pilgrim is not necessarily justified, and the narrative should be taken as an independent poem. Regardless of whether the voice of Chaucer-as-author is also the narratorial voice of the *Man of Law's Tale*, however, I argue that this text is best understood as a translation, and the various differences between the "Life of Constance" and the *Man of Law's Tale* are indicative of certain cultural assumptions on the part of the person performing that translation – called, for the sake of tradition, Chaucer. See A.C. Spearing, "Narrative Voice: The Case of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*" *New Literary History* 32.3 (Summer 2001): 715-746.

¹⁴ For a list of examples, including *The King of Tars*, *Emaré*, and the story of Chrosoes, see Robert M. Correale, "The Man of Law's Prologue and Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales* Vol. II, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005).

Chaucer's story shares these basic elements with the other two, the modifications in his text highlight his concern with questions of nation and history.

Chaucer's relationship with these other versions of the Constance Legend has long concerned critics of the Constance story. Edward Block's 1953 comparison between Trevet and Chaucer underlies many understandings of the relationship between Chaucer and his source texts. In short, Block proposes that we can better understand Chaucer by quantifiable comparison with Trevet's text.¹⁵ Understanding how the text functions becomes a question of what does and does not follow Trevet. Block focuses primarily on the ways in which Chaucer's revisions operate in terms of narrative. Not all critics, of course, agree that Chaucer's primary source for the *Man of Law's Tale* is Trevet. Rather, some identify Chaucer's immediate source as John Gower, who includes the Constance story in his *Confessio Amantis*. The similarity between Gower's and Chaucer's respective versions of the tale leads Peter Nicholson to argue that Gower's role as one of Chaucer's sources cannot be understated.¹⁶ Nicholson suggests Gower should be considered Chaucer's primary source for the story. My consideration of the relationship between the three works, however, suggests that

¹⁵ Edward A. Block, "Originality, Controlling Purpose, and Craftsmanship in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *PMLA* 68.3 (June 1953). See particularly page 574, where he argues "To begin with, the *Man of Law's Tale* is, contrary to an impression that has long persisted, somewhat longer than the French original: 7,851 words as against 7,532 words in Trivet. Moreover, of the 1,029 lines which constitute the tale, 695 represent Chaucer's additions; of the remaining 334 lines, 126 represent condensations, 24 are lines which reflect miscellaneous changes, while only 184 represent lines where Chaucer followed Trivet, either more or less closely. Or, to put it another way, approximately two-thirds of the *Man of Law's Tale* consists of Chaucer's additions; of the remaining one third, somewhat less than a half represents condensations and miscellaneous changes, while somewhat more than a half, or 18 per cent of the whole tale, represents passages where he followed Trivet." This quantitative comparison makes Chaucer's innovation about the amount he changed from his source, rather than the types of changes he made.

¹⁶ See Peter Nicholson, "The 'Man of Law's Tale': What Chaucer Really Owed to Gower," *The Chaucer Review* 26.2 (Fall 1991): 154-174. Nicholson argues that "a fairer consideration of the three texts side by side not only restores to Gower some of the importance he deserves, but also yields a very different picture of how Chaucer set about composing the *Man of Law's Tale*" (ibid., 154).

the more meaningful divergences are ultimately between Chaucer and Trevet rather than Chaucer and Gower.

Although my examination of the *Man of Law's Tale* is very much indebted to the methods of source study performed by Block and Nicholson, in this chapter I propose a slightly different approach to the comparison, focusing on qualitative differences rather than quantitative ones.¹⁷ By offering a sustained treatment of the similarities and differences between Trevet's and Chaucer's respective versions of the story of Constance, I will show how the two texts draw on different traditions of the conversion of Northumbria to create differing portraits of a proto-national England. The major differences between Trevet and Chaucer—and to a lesser extent, between Gower and Chaucer—have to do with their treatment of the conversion of Northumbria. Both the *Man of Law's Tale* and Trevet's "Life of Constance" are stories about this conversion. In Trevet's account, the primary investment of the text is in the conversion of a people: the Saxons. The *Man of Law's Tale*, however, presents the story of Constance as the story of a nation coming into being *by becoming Christian*. As his only known discussion of the Anglo-Saxons, the *Man of Law's Tale* offers what might be our only insight into how Chaucer viewed his predecessors in what he considered to be England.¹⁸

¹⁷ As do many considerations of the *Man of Law's Tale* that compare Chaucer's work with his sources.

¹⁸ Whereas Trevet's "Life of Constance" creates a status for the Anglo-Saxons that could potentially trouble the Norman hierarchy whose ancestors conquered them, the *Man of Law's Tale* "masterfully synthesizes the indigenous Anglo-Saxon tradition with the English dimension of *translatio imperii* [. . .] in a way that removes the disruptive potentiality that the Anglo-Saxon past represented to late medieval, Anglo-Norman historiographers." Don-John Dugas, "The Legitimization of Royal Power in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale,'" *Modern Philology* 95.1 (August 1997) 38. With the sole exception of this sentence, I use the term "Saxon" throughout my analysis of the text to highlight a crucial difference between Chaucer and Trevet's respective terminology and our own. In cases of medieval attribution, I use Chaucer and Trevet's "Saxon," and to refer to a modern conception of the group of people and territory that preceded the Conquest, I use Anglo-Saxon. See Susan Reynolds, "What do we mean by 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Anglo-Saxons?'" *Journal of British Studies* 24.4 (October 1985): 395-414.

By exploring the differing emphases of the *Man of Law's Tale* and Trevet's *Chronicle*, I first refocus the discussion of the relationship between these texts to illuminate the *Man of Law's Tale's* depiction of a Christian heritage in England. Second, I turn to the questions about gender raised by the representation of Donegild in the *Man of Law's Tale*, exploring the way in which alterations to her character reframe her “mannysh” nature as it relates to her focus on the continuation of traditional—“incorrect,” in Chaucer’s portrayal—religion in Northumbria. Finally, I consider the representation of Christian monarchy in the *Man of Law's Tale* through the character of Alla. Collectively, the differences between Trevet’s “Life of Constance” and Chaucer’s *Man of Law's Tale* strengthen the possibility that Chaucer’s vision of England is one that emerges through the conversion process in the text. Faith, that is, allows questions of territory and ethnic identity to coalesce into an emergent England.

TWO STORIES OF ENGLAND

In the Anglo-Norman *Chronicle*, Trevet opens his text with a reference to the putative source of his narrative: his story takes place “in the time of the Emperor Tiberius (or Constantine), as the Saxon chronicles relate” (En le temps cist emperour Tyberie [Constantin] come dient les auciens croniques des Sessouns, 297.1-2). Scholars have long disputed the plausibility of the existence of such a “Saxon chronicle” upon which Trevet could have drawn, but the symbolic value of the gesture still alters our reading of the text.¹⁹ Trevet claims to rely on the ancient chronicles of the Saxons. He suggests a locus of authority that competes with that of Rome. Trevet relies not solely on Roman sources and histories, but on Saxon chronicles.

¹⁹ It seems deeply unlikely that there is an actual version of the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* in use at this juncture of Trevet’s story. As Correale notes, “He claims as his source “old Saxon chronicles” (“les aucien croniques des Sessouns”), but the story does not appear in any known Anglo-Saxon chronicle and his source, if he used a single source, remains unknown.” (Correale, “The Man of Law’s Prologue and Tale,” 279). As a result, our understanding of this reference to the Saxon *Chronicle* must focus on its symbolic use, rather than its actual influence.

Chaucer, by contrast, opens the *Man of Law's Tale* far from his eventual Northumbrian subject matter: "In Surrye whilom dwelte a compaignye / of chapmen riche" (MLT 134-5). The *Man of Law's Tale* establishes an "Eastern focus" quite early.²⁰ Moreover, the *Man of Law's Tale* goes on to establish the third geographical setting for the narrative immediately after its mention of Surrye, when these merchants travel to Rome, which in Trevet had been the setting at the outset of the narrative: "Now fil it that the maistres of that sort / han shapen to Rome for to wende" (141-2). The only narrative provenance that is relayed comes from the Man of Law himself in the introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale*, where he claims that his story comes from a merchant who "goon is many a yeere / me taughte a tale" (132-3). This assertion obscures the provenance of the *Man of Law's Tale*, but one conclusion may be drawn: Chaucer does not claim in any form that this story came from a Saxon source. The locus of narrative authority in the *Man of Law's Tale* suggests a widely circulated story, while in the "Life of Constance" the story comes directly from a (fictitious) Saxon source that Trevet claims to consult.

The "Life of Constance" and the *Man of Law's Tale* also differ with respect to the portrayal of language in each narrative, and such comparisons further highlight the differing interpretations each text offers of England's past. Upon her arrival in Northumbria in the *Man of Law's Tale*, Custance communicates with the constable in a language described as "a maner Latyn corrupt" (II.519). Her interlocutors understand her, but it seems that this Latin is only barely understood: "But algates therby was she understonde" (519-520).²¹ By contrast, Trevet's description of Constance's linguistic

²⁰ See Dinshaw, "Pale Faces," Shibanoff, "Worlds Apart," Nakley, "Sovereignty Matters."

²¹ Christine Cooper has taken this moment in the *Man of Law's Tale* to suggest another miracle in Custance's story in Chaucer that is not present in Trevet's version. She argues that Custance is granted the ability of *xenoglossia* so that she may be understood by the Saxons. Cooper also notes that the reading of Custance's translation is ambiguous. Its significance varies based on which genre the tale is assigned to—hagiography, chronicle, or Romance. Critical to my point here, Cooper argues that "moments of actual, difficult, or miraculous translation in the tale draw our attention to those places where translation is not mentioned at all, or to those places where translation is purposefully ambiguous" (Cooper, *ibid.*, 36-37). As a result, the

abilities suggests the incorporation of a long lineage of English historical narrative that is muted in the *Man of Law's Tale*. Trevet's Constance is fluent in Saxon and "skilled in various languages" (apprise en diverses langages, 303.129-130). That is, in addition to teaching her the seven secular sciences and Christian doctrine, Constance's emperor father thought that proficiency in languages—and in particular, Saxon—was an important skill for a Roman princess to have. By putting Saxon on the same linguistic plane as other languages, Trevet creates a particular space for the Saxon language alongside others languages the Emperor deems important enough to have taught to his daughter. The *Man of Law's Tale's* asserts that Custance spoke some form of Latin on the edge of the empire so that she could communicate with the constable, rather than the Saxon language Constance utilizes in Trevet. Trevet's "Life of Constance" may therefore imply an alignment of the Saxon language with the dominant language of learning in the Middle Ages.

Olda—Trevet's name for the constable—exhibits surprise in reaction to Constance's linguistic prowess in the "Life of Constance," and his surprise relates both to her command of the Saxon language to the riches found with her on the rudderless boat. Olda mistakes Constance, through linguistic and material marks of identity, for a Saxon princess:

And when Olda heard her speak his language so competently and found such great treasure with her, he supposed she was the daughter of some king of the Saxons beyond the sea, as of Germany, or Saxony, or Sweden, or Denmark, and with great joy he received her courteously and honorably into his castle.

Et puis qe Olda l'avoit si renablement parler sa lunge, et trova ove lui si grant tresour, esperoit qe ele estoit fille de ascun roi des Sessouns outre mere, come d'Alemayne, oue de Sessoine, ou de Suece, oue de Denemarche. Et a grant [joye], courteisement et honurablement, la resceut en son chastel. (304-5.137-41)

ambiguity of Chaucer's relationship to his sources must be constantly renegotiated and reconsidered. See Christine F. Cooper, "But algates therby was she understonde:" Translating Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36.1 (2006): 27-38.

Olda's assumption of Constance's identity is based on her linguistic ability and the treasure with which she is found. He assigns her the identity of a Saxon princess, but Olda's association of Constance with a Saxon hierarchy broadens to include a Saxon ruling elite found "beyond the sea." Furthermore, Olda broadly associates this Saxon identity with a larger Germanic culture from which the idea of Saxon heritage hails, citing both western Germanic countries (Germany and Saxony) as well as northern Germanic countries (Sweden and Denmark) as possible homelands for the presumed princess. Trevelyan's description of Olda's reaction reveals the depth of cultural knowledge behind the scene in question. Unaware of her training in diverse languages, Olda interprets Constance's skill in speaking Saxon in a way that is limited by his own knowledge of his people's cultural and linguistic heritage. In fact, Olda's assumptions about his visitor's origins bear some similarity to broader themes in Anglo-Saxon literature—taken, of course, from the perspective of an Anglo-Norman hierarchy that displaced it.

Although it references personal history rather than cultural memory, Olda's understanding of Constance as part of a Saxon hierarchy "beyond the sea" suggests that from his point of view, the language and the kingdom are one. If Constance speaks Saxon, she must be from a Saxon kingdom. Olda's first assumption is the possibility that their shared language comes from another kingdom related to his own through a linguistic inheritance. He imagines a linguistic community that exceeds the bounds of the Northumbrian community to which he belongs.²² His reaction also participates in a larger cultural mode of interpretation in Anglo-Saxon England that Nicholas Howe terms the "Migration Myth." In short, this term refers to the belief in and representation of the migration of

²² A common vernacular is one aspect of what Hastings sees as a requirement for proto-national structures. Interestingly, this particular instance would suggest a more dispersed sense of identity in which the Saxon kingdoms "beyond the sea" participate in some kind of linguistic community not limited to Alla's kingdom but still somehow connected to it.

the Anglo-Saxons in England from the continental homelands of Germanic tribes.²³ Howe argues that “despite frequent political rivalries, religious disputes, and some degree of dialect variation, [the Anglo-Saxons] could gather a sense of unity from their continental origins as these were memorialized in the central works of their culture.”²⁴ The migration from “Germania” became an important myth of origin in Anglo-Saxon England.²⁵

Fabienne Michelet reminds us that “narrative . . . constituted a powerful weapon in the struggle for the appropriation of space.”²⁶ The narrative Olda constructs in the “Life of Constance” does, to some extent, appropriate a relationship to a foreign space through narrative. As Domild will later do with her false letters,²⁷ the more significant appropriative gesture Olda makes is over Constance. By imaginatively assigning a role to Constance that positions her as part of an imagined Germanic past, Olda simultaneously claims her for a Saxon, Northumbrian tradition. Trevet’s use of the migration myth centers the “Life of Constance” as a story, at least in part, about the conversion of the Saxons. By emphasizing the “Latyn corrupt” that Custance speaks, Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* instead focuses on the conversion of Northumbria from a linguistically Roman perspective.²⁸

²³ Germania referred both to the locale from which the Anglo-Saxons migrated and to the Germanic tribes who were still located in continental Europe and Scandinavia.

²⁴ Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 6.

²⁵ It is important to note that the idea of a nation having its roots in a collective identity is very much under debate. Susan Reynolds, for example, argues persuasively that such identities emerged out of sovereign rule, contrasting the possibility that these collective identities lead to the need for sovereign rule in the Middle Ages. See also Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Community*, and Hodges, “Malory’s Launcelot.”

²⁶ Fabienne Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 11.

²⁷ See Correale, “The *Man of Law’s Prologue and Tale*,” 311.280-315.335.

²⁸ Gower’s version completely omits any reference to language or the provenance of Constance in her rudderless ship.

Language gains more prominence in Trevet's "Life of Constance" than it does in the *Man of Law's Tale* in large part because of Olda's association of Constance with a Saxon hierarchy "beyond the sea," but the Saxon language is given additional importance throughout the narrative. When Hermegild cures the blind man, for example, the Saxon language merits special mention: "And Hermegild, in front of Olda and in the presence of those who followed him, in good and firm faith made the sign of the cross over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him in her Saxon language" ("Et Hermegild, devaunt Olda et sa meine qe lui sui, de bone foi et ferme fist sus les eux de lui enveuglé la seinte croiz et lui dit en sa langage Sessoine," 307.183-5). This scene in the "Life" serves as a reminder that Hermegild speaks Saxon at the very moment where she performs the miracle that will convert her husband.²⁹ The "Life of Constance" focuses its narrative attention not just on the conversion of Saxon characters but on the fact that they *are Saxon* through a focus on the language that they speak. This emphasis accords a measure of importance to their language as a marker of identity.

Chaucer, by contrast, removes all mention of the Saxon language from this part of the narrative. When the "blinde Britoun" asks Hermengyld to "yif me my sighte agayn," (*Man of Law's Tale*, 562), we are only privy to her fear that such an act will provoke her husband to kill her: "this lady weex affrayed of the soun / Les hir husbounde, shortly for to sayn, wolde hire / for Jhesu Cristes love han her slayn," (563-65). We hear neither her words nor the language in which she speaks them. The explanation of the miracle does not come from Hermengyld, who performed it, but from Custance. After Custance "made hire boolde," the very next narrative point is the constable's demand for an explanation. Custance gives the explanation he seeks. As Christine Cooper observes of the scene, "it is not important that Custance herself hears and understands;

²⁹ In Trevet, Olda is referred to as a Saxon, whereas Hermegild is referred to only as his wife. Still, her linguistic identity is firmly in the Saxon category.

what matters is that she preaches persuasively and her language is ingested.”³⁰ Hermengyld’s words—spoken, one can assume, in her native Saxon—are transformed and made effective by “the maner Latyn corrupt” of the Roman Custance. Her position is literally one of linguistic mediation, a role that presages her later status as a “mediacioun” between God and Alla.

Chaucer’s omission of the Saxon language is even more striking when compared to the same scene in the *Confessio Amantis*. Gower, whose version of the story is in the aggregate more similar to Chaucer’s than Trevet’s, nevertheless largely follows the *Chronicle* version when recounting this specific scene:

Upon his word hire herte afflihte
Thenkende what was best to done,
Bot natheles sche herde his bone
And seide “In trust of Cristes lawe,
Which don was on the crois and slawe,
Thou bysne man, behold and se.” (*Confessio Amantis*, 766-771)

Hermengyld’s words, although they are not clearly in Saxon, are still spoken by Hermengyld herself in Gower’s Constance narrative. Chaucer not only omits any reference to the Saxon language spoken by Hermengyld, but also reassigns and re-appropriates her words to Custance. The resulting power of her words transposes the ability to convert Northumbria from the Saxon Hermengyld to the Roman Custance.

The relationship between the pagan Saxons and the British Christians they displace is another point on which the “Life of Constance” and the *Man of Law’s Tale* differ markedly. In this case, Trevet’s narrative highlights a lack of religious continuity that leads to the loss of rule for the Britons. The *Man of Law’s Tale*, however, notes the potentially disruptive—and transformative—role that the Britons who remain on the island play in the destiny of Northumbria. Trevet’s narrative of Saxon England in the “Life of Constance” begins with Constance’s encounter with Olda. This scene

³⁰ Cooper, “Translating Custance,” 35.

is prefaced by a brief parenthetical statement wherein Trevet explains that “the Britons had already lost control of the island, as is related above in the end of the story of the Emperor Justinian the Great” (qar les Brutons avoient ja perdue la seignurie de l’ysle, come avant est counté en la fin de l’estoire l’emperour Justinian le Grant, 303.125-126). By itself, this comment might be easily passed over as an aside regarding historical fact, but a similar comment later in the narrative suggests that the Britons’ loss leads directly to the Saxons’ gain. When Constance is taken into the house of Olda and his wife Hermegild, Trevet’s comment about the Saxon couple contains another reference to an exchange of power between Briton and Saxon: “For Hermegild and Olda and the other Saxons who had control over the island were still pagans” (Qar Hermegild et Olda et les autres Sessons q’avoient donc la seignurie de la terre estoient encore paens, 305.159-60). The same term used in the first aside to describe the earlier loss of British rule—*seignurie*—appears here as something that now applies to the Saxons. *Seignurie* becomes a key term in Trevet’s story of the Northumbrian conversion.

Trevet inherits his understanding of the idea of a *seignurie* that the Britons possessed at one point, and which was transferred to the Saxons, from earlier historical works. Allen Frantzen notes that “although Trivet did not clarify the nature of his sources, they included Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman texts.”³¹ Moreover, he “seems to have known Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, and derived the name of one of his major characters, Alla, for the Northumbrian king Bede calls Ælle.”³² Bede’s own line of thinking on the subject is clearly established in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He argues that the Britons lost lordship over the island of Britain in part because they did not convert the invading Saxons.³³ Trevet does not make such a clear statement as to the reasons behind the Britons’ loss of

³¹ Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 259.

³² Ibid.

³³ See Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, I.22.68. Bede claims that “To other unspeakable crimes, which Gildas their own historian describes in doleful words, was added this crime, that they never preached

power, but the emergence of *seignurie* in the lines cited above make an implicit claim for the relationship between the Saxon migration to the island and the Britons' exile from its center. In other words, if the Britons had already lost control or power over the island in the "Life of Constance," then it is clearly the Saxons who took it from them.

In the *Man of Law's Tale*, by contrast, the exile of the Britons is set in an entirely different—and far more religiously-oriented—tone:

In al that lond no Cristen dorste route:
 Alle Cristen folk been fled fro that contree
 Thurgh payen, that conquereden al aboute
 The plages of the north, by land and see
 To Walys fledde the Cristyanytee
 Of olde Britons dwellynge in this ile;
 There was hir refut for the meene while. (541-6)

The *Man of Law's Tale* positions the Britons' loss of power not in terms of *seignurie*, but in terms of religion. "No Cristen dorste route" in Alla's kingdom because when the "payen, that conquereden al aboute / the plages of the north, by land and see," these Christians were forced to escape to Wales. The religious overtones in this passage reveal a very different vision of English identity.³⁴ The religious population of "olde Britons" flee to the borderlands of the island. In a certain sense, although the "payen" tribes conquer the north, they do not defeat the religion itself—they only dislodge its practitioners. Chaucer's version thus leaves open a space for the "Cristyanytee" to one

the faith to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain with them. Nevertheless God in His goodness did not reject the people whom He foreknew, but He had appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith" (Qui inter alia inenarrabilium sclerum facta, quae historicus eorum Gildas flebili sermone describit, et hoc addebant, ut nemquam genti Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Britanniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando committerent. Sed non tamen diuina pietas plebem suam, quam praesciuit, deseruit; quin multo digniores genti memoratae praecones ueritatis, per quos crederet, destinauit).

³⁴ Gower's version of the same moment does not really invest itself either in the status of religion or in the status of those who practice it. Describing Constance's arrival, it states simply that "sche no maner joie made, / bot sorweth sore of that sche fond / No Cristendom in thilke lond"(333.744-46).

day return from its marginal dwelling place.³⁵ Moreover, the Christian population of Britons is not exiled in perpetuity. Rather, the relocation is only temporary: it is “for the meene while.” In this section of the *Man of Law’s Tale*, a teleology begins to come into finer resolution. The key phrase of the *Man of Law’s Tale’s* description of the Britons’ exile, “for the meene while,” suggests that the return of Christian Britons to prominence in Northumbria is imminent.

Not all of the Christians had fled to Wales after the pagan conquest, however. Strengthening the sense that their exile is only temporary, several Christians remain in close proximity to the constable’s dwelling:

But yet nere Cristene Britons so exiled
That ther nere somme that in hir privetee
Honoured Crist and hethen folk bigiled
And ny the castel swiche ther dwelten three. (547-550)

It would seem that, despite the “official” exile of the Christians to the Welsh borderlands, not all “Cristene Britons” were so marginalized. Rather, “the Christyanytee” has been hiding in plain sight. There are still practicing Christian Britons who honor Christ “in hir privetee” and manage to keep the “hethen folk bigiled.” Providentially, three such secret Christian Britons live near the castle where Custance is first taken. Read in concert with the early comments about Christianity’s remote dwelling in Wales, these lines allow the reader to intuit that the three Christians dwelling near the castle were waiting—taking refuge “for the meene while” but always alert to the possibility that they would one day be able to propagate their faith once again. These Christians have a special role in England’s religious history: their presence allows Hermengyld to perform the miracle of restoring

³⁵ In the “Life of Constance,” Trevet notes that Constance, Hermegild, and Olda send the “Christien Bruton” that Hermegild has cured to Wales, where “most of the Britons had fled” (ou estoient le plus de Brutons fuit, 307.193-4), to retrieve a bishop who can formally baptize Olda’s household. Trevet locates the Britons as dwelling at the margins of the island, just as the *Man of Law’s Tale* does. He frames their marginality as it relates to their loss of power—*seigneurie*.

sight to the blind man. This miraculous cure is central to the *Man of Law's Tale* because it sets into motion the events that will eventually convert the king himself.

The presence of the phrase “for the meene while” in the *Man of Law's Tale* highlights an interstitial space, a gap that must be traversed in order for God's will of a Christian England to come to pass. Furthermore, the “meene while” pertains specifically to the Britons and their role as the source of English Christianity in the text. It recurs some lines later, at 668, when a book is brought forth for the knight to swear upon in the course of his trial:

A Britoun book, written with Evaungiles
Was fet, and on this book he swoor anon
She gilte was, and in the meene whiles
An hand hym smoot upon the nekke-boon,
That doun he fil atones as a stoon,
And bothe his eyen broste out of his face
In sighte of every body in this place.

The repetition of the phrase “in the meene whiles”—critically similar to the earlier “for the meene while”—in this case highlights proximity rather than distance. The knight testifies falsely against Custance, and *in the meene whiles* God destroys him. Once again, this phrase implies the inevitability of what it refers to—in this case, divine retribution. The use of “the meene while” directly refers to the short period of time between the knight's perjury and the divine retribution that punishes it. It highlights the proximity of that time to what follows—a period that is both short and traversable.³⁶ The second use of the phrase strengthens the intensity of the first. What was an interstitial absence becomes a token of the imminence of Christianity's return and the divine Providence that makes such a return possible.

³⁶ The immanence of divine justice and retribution in the *Tale* has been taken up by Helen Cooney, who argues that Chaucer's version of the trial contrasts sharply with Trevet's in terms of how Divine justice signifies: “Where Trevet was content to gloss God's intervention on Constance's behalf as *mirabilis vindicta*, the Man of Law has deliberately created a bond of wonder between audience and heroine, so that the fatal blow to the steward, when it comes [. . .] is all the more emphatic proof of providence and divine judgment.” Helen Cooney, “Wonder and Immanent Justice in the “Man of Law's Tale,” *The Chaucer Review* 33.3 (1999) 270.

The “Britoun book” itself is the clearest manifestation of the interstitial and fleeting status of the “meene while.” Andrew Breeze argues that the “Britoun book written with Evaungiles” is best understood as a Gospel book “in Latin, written and illuminated in the Celtic manner.”³⁷ The presence of this Latin book can signify not only justice and a means of conversion, but also learning that is transmitted by the Britons. Don-John Dugas identifies the Britoun book as a moment of *translatio imperii* within the *Man of Law’s Tale*. He also observes that the book “functions as a symbol of both past and future.”³⁸ As a result, the book itself signifies the “meene while”—the time during which Christian Britons were absent from the scene but destined to return.

The “Britoun book” is the locus through which God works vengeance on the false knight, but its significance is greater than the divine intervention its use brings about. The book that appears in Chaucer’s account derives from Trevet’s version of the story, which notes that the knight “took in his hands the book of the aforesaid Bishop Lucius, which was a book of the gospels that the holy women Hermegild and Constance had beside them every night for devotion” (en hast prist entre ses mains le livre l’evesque Lucius, avantnomé, q’estoit livre des Evangeils, quel les seint femmes Hermegild et Constaunce, chescune nuyt par devocion avoient en costé eles, 309.241-44). Although Bishop Lucius is the priest brought back to Olda and Hermegild to baptize them and he is described earlier as a “British bishop” (un evesque Bruton, 307.195), Trevet distances the book from its British origins and does not designate the book *itself* as British.³⁹ The miraculous testimony from on high referred to in Trevet’s version of the story reflects different sentiments, and occurs in a different

³⁷ Andrew Breeze, “The Celtic Gospels in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 32.4 (1998) 335-338. Cf. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899-1900), 5: 336.

³⁸ Don-John Dugas, “The Legitimization of Royal Power in Chaucer’s ‘Man of Law’s Tale,’” *Modern Philology* 95.1 (August 1997) 35.

³⁹ Gower’s version of the story, interestingly, completely omits the origin of the book, referring to it simply as “a book” (335.868).

language: “You were placing a stumbling block against the daughter of mother Church; this you have done and I have not remained silent” (*Adversus filiam matris ecclesie ponebas scandalum; hoc fecisti et non tacui*, 251-252). The words of God gloss the action of his vengeance explicitly.

Both Chaucer’s “Britoun book” and Trevet’s “book of the Bishop Lucius” figure in the same punishment of the false knight, but the context and background for the book changes the way it might be read in terms of nationalistic thinking in the *Man of Law’s Tale*. It does so in part because the interpretation of the book is central to Alla’s conversion. In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, the miracle occasioned by the knight’s false oath converts the king:

And for this miracle in conclusioun,
and by Custances mediacioun,
The kyng – and many another in that place –
converted was, thanked be Cristes grace!

Alla’s conversion takes place because of the miracle, but the miracle itself—and God’s divine judgment—is mediated through the “Britoun book.” The book itself marks conversion as a byproduct of the continued presence of Christian Britons who had remained in England “for the meene while.” Even Custance’s “mediacioun” in the conversion seems to be particularly passive. In the *Chronicle*, by contrast, Ælle is not converted until somewhat later in the text. This lack of immediacy removes the question of the role that the holy book plays, focusing instead on Constance and Alla’s love for her first, and only then on God’s miracles.⁴⁰ Chaucer’s alterations here suggest that we can understand Custance as mediating not only between God and the Saxons, but also between the Britons and the Saxons. Custance provides the necessary provocation for both the blind Briton’s cure and the “Britoun” book’s mediation of vengeance. The role of the Saxons in this conversion becomes secondary to the mediating function of the Britons and Custance. As a result,

⁴⁰ Trevet’s version of the scene reads as follows: “Then because of the great love he had for the maiden and because fo the miracles shown by God, King Alla had himself baptized” (*Puis le roi, pur le grant amour q’il avoit a la pucele, et pur les miracles par Dieux moustrez, le roi Alla lui fist baptizer*, 310.255-57)

the idea of England that emerges in the text does so as a multicultural construction. Both Roman and Briton influences are necessary for England to be made possible by the Christianity that links the two through a shared faith.

A “MANNYSH” MOTHER-IN-LAW

Custance’s *mediacioun* in the *Man of Law’s Tale* plays a vital role in the process by which England becomes a Christian nation. Custance, as Robert Hanning observes, circulates “as Christian ‘luxury goods’” within a tale that “alludes, through its fiction of the beleaguered heroine, to the complex system of international commerce and its interaction with the analogously mediated structure and theology of the institutional church.”⁴¹ This status as a trade good—moved, like her story, by merchants and mothers-in-law—positions Custance as the connection that ultimately brings England (through Alla) to Rome, in order to obtain the fulfillment of its status as a Christian kingdom. Her role as an example of mediation between God and his chosen people, however, is ultimately passive. It is shown “not by what she does but by what she suffers.”⁴² Custance’s position as a passive object of action models one way in which the *Man of Law’s Tale* explores the effects of gender on conversion. What happens to Donegild, the unrepentant and ultimately unredeemed pagan mother-in-law? The alterations to Alla’s mother in the *Man of Law’s Tale* suggests another way in which Christianity itself plays a vital part in the process of becoming “Engelond.” This centrality takes the form of the relationship between Christianity and gender. Donegild’s pagan, un-natural, and backward-looking “mannysh”-ness must be obliterated in order for Alla to regain his wife and emerge as Christian monarch.

⁴¹Robert W. Hanning, “Custance and Ciappelletto in the Middle of It All: Problems of Mediation in *The Man of Law’s Tale* and *Decameron* 1.1,” in *The Decameron and the Canterbury Tales: New Essays on an Old Question*, ed. Koff and Schildgen (London: Associated University Presses, 2000) 199; 198.

⁴² *ibid.*, 194.

The role of Donegild in the *Man of Law's Tale* contrasts sharply with her role in the "Life of Constance." The descriptions of Donegild in the *Man of Law's Tale* are usually interpreted as a sign of the masculinity of the character.⁴³ Examined in concert with her counterpart in *Trevet*, however, the narrative becomes slightly more complicated. The *Man of Law's Tale* portrays Donegild as both "mannysh" and evil while also avoiding the possible muddling of that view by details that occur in the "Life of Constance." From her first introduction, Donegild's problematic role in the Northumbrian hierarchy is made quite clear:

But who was woful, if I shal nat lye,
 Of this weddyng but Donegild, and namo,
 The kynges mooder, ful of tirannye?
 Hir thoughte hir cursed herte brast atwo.
 She wolde noght hir sone had do so;
 Hir thoughte a despit that he sholde take
 So strange a creature unto his make. (694-700)

The description of Donegild in the *Man of Law's Tale* emphasizes her "tirannye," which the *Middle English Dictionary* defines as "the oppressively cruel exercise of power by a despot"—a vice commonly attributed to men.⁴⁴ The use of this term implies an almost treasonous act on the part of the king's mother. Donegild seems to usurp her son's role as ruler.⁴⁵

By contrast, the final line is as close to an explanation of Donegild's actions as appears in the *Man of Law's Tale*. Donegild thinks of Alla's choice to marry Custance as a "despit," a word that has a rather wide semantic range in Middle English. "Despit" can mean "a feeling or attitude of

⁴³ See Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*.

⁴⁴ "Tirranye," *Middle English Dictionary Online*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED45956>. Angela Florshuetz, "A Mooder he hath, but Fader Hath he noon:" Construction of Genealogy in the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Man of Law's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 44.1 (2009): 25-60.

⁴⁵ See Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 197.

contempt, disdain, or haughtiness; also, ill will, malice, hostility . . . spite, defiance, disobedience . . . an act designed to humiliate, insult, or harm someone.”⁴⁶ As Angela Florschuetz observes, Donegild objects to her son’s choice of spouse because of Custance’s “status as a stranger without a past. As an apparent amnesiac victim of a shipwreck, Custance offers no clues as to her true identity or history. No trace of her class or lineage remains, and her national origin is likewise effaced, as her language, ‘a maner Latyn corrupt’ (519), offers intelligibility in terms of speech, but little in terms of identification.”⁴⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw observes that Donegild’s “despit” identifies her with the sexually violent, “angry ‘despit’ (591) of the young knight whose sexual desire—‘foul affecciou’—for Constance is rejected.”⁴⁸ The use of this word, for Dinshaw, becomes a motive for Donegild’s hatred of her daughter-in-law: “incestuous desire of mother for son.”⁴⁹ The term “despit” might thus be interpreted in one of two ways—either that Donegild felt “despit” toward her son for his choice of bride, as Dinshaw avers, or that she found her son’s choice of a foreign bride insulting, a “despit” to her.

From the outset, then, Donegild occupies an indeterminate space that threatens the established order of the kingdom as well as the eventual conversion of Northumbria. Her “mannysh” characteristic of “tyrranie” marks her as a possible political traitor, and her possibly incestuous desire for her own child suggests a latently monstrous misuse of what female attributes she might have. These contradictory but threatening traits function in concert with her actions. Donegild’s first forged letter falsely tells Alla that his child is born a monster. When Donegild forges

⁴⁶ “Despit,” *Middle English Dictionary Online*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED11361>.

⁴⁷ Florschuetz, “Construction of Genealogy,” 49.

⁴⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 104.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 105.

a second letter—the one that falsely tells the followers of the king to send both mother and child away—the narrator of the tale makes two brief excoriating asides. These asides intensify the characterization of Donegild as a powerful and threatening figure in the text. In addressing Donegild, the narrator avers that he has “noon English digne / unto thy malice and thy tirannye” (778-9). The narrator identifies her act as “traitorie” (781), and characterizes her as both “mannysh” (782) and a “feedlych spirit” (783). The resulting view of Donegild emphasizes her masculine qualities and the unsettling malice of these qualities.

As Sarah Stanbury observes, Donegild’s letter-writing is the most convincing argument for her power and, ultimately, her threat to the kingdom. When she writes her letters, Donegild is not named—rather, the “letters are repeatedly stolen and counterfeited in the passive.”⁵⁰ Stanbury argues that this increases her efficacy in the story as “a figure of enormous but concealed strategic power to shape her domestic affairs, a hand of god inserting a sourceless message.”⁵¹ This illusion of power is even stronger in the “Life of Constance,” but so too is the possibility that Donegild is not necessarily gendered as “mannysh:”

At that time King Alla’s mother was still alive, a fair lady and proud of heart who very mortally hated Queen Constance, for she was extremely angry that King Alla, for the love of a foreign woman whose lineage was unknown to him, had abandoned his former religion which all his ancestors had loyally and earnestly kept.

Unqorre a cel temps estoit la miere le roi Alla en vie, bele dam et fere de corage, et qe trop mortuement hey la reyne Constance; qar grant engain avoit qe le roi Alla avoit, pur l’amour une femme estrange et qui linage lui n’estoit pas conusa primer le guerpi, quele touz ses auncestres avoient leaument et entierement gardez. (310.266-70)

Two reasons are suggested for Domild’s anger at her son. First, she is concerned for the kingdom her son is meant to protect and defend. This concern is for a bloodline and ultimately the

⁵⁰ Sarah Stanbury, “Women’s Letters and Privacy in Chaucer,” *Exemplaria* 6.2 (1994): 284.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

inheritance of the kingdom. Moreover, Domild expresses fear for a religious community “whose continuity is disrupted with the king’s conversion to Constance’s religion.”⁵² Geraldine Heng observes that “Domild’s response is thus explicitly represented, first and foremost, as a nationalist (or xenophobic) reaction.”⁵³ At this juncture we must remember, as Susan Nakley argues, that Constance’s earlier use of the term *nacioun* in reference to the “Barbre nacioun” of Surrye “reminds readers that that which sounds barbarous to one may be another’s national language; indeed, what strikes some as barbarity strikes others as nationalism.”⁵⁴ The exclusion of such specific reasons for Donegild’s actions in the *Man of Law’s Tale* removes the possibility that Donegild is misinterpreting her situation due to her still-pagan status. Her actions are merely obstructing (or attempting to obstruct) what God has pre-ordained.

Moreover, in the “Life of Constance,” Domild is not angry solely because of her daughter-in-law’s foreign identity and religion. Her initial reaction “is also inevitably naturalized to a conventional, gendered accusation of the older woman’s ‘envy’ toward a younger, more popular, and more admired female rival.”⁵⁵ Domild, that is, envies the praise that Constance receives for her “goodness and holiness and marvelous beauty” (de bounté et de seinteté et de merveillouse beauté, 311.272). In short, her transgression does not masculinize her. To the contrary, it feminizes her by virtue of its relation to the envy she feels toward Constance, because the stranger’s praise is sung “without comparison to her or any other lady in the land” (sanz comparison de lui ou de nule de la terre, 311.271).

⁵² Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 394n.22.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Susan Nakley, “Sovereignty Matters: Anachronism, Chaucer’s Britain, and England’s Future’s Past,” *Chaucer Review* 44.4 (2010) 383.

⁵⁵ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 394n.22.

Ultimately, the *Man of Law's Tale's* characterization of Donegild as un-natural, as usurping, and therefore as masculine, creates the distinction that Dinshaw argues motivates the narrative: the one “between all women and all men, or, more precisely, all not-men and all men.”⁵⁶ By reading Donegild in tandem with Domild, however, another possibility reveals itself. Heng argues that the actions of both Donegild and Domild might be interpreted in one of two ways, as the “usurpation of the king’s function, from one point of view, or a ruler-like defense of the *domicile* and the regnal *domus*, from another.”⁵⁷ I suggest that Donegild (and Domild as well) might be read slightly differently still. Donegild is ultimately un-natural not because she is masculine but because she is pagan. Put another way, her “mannysh” gender that marks her as masculine but not-male is an expression of her continued attachment to the pagan past—a past destined to be superceded and to remain unredeemed. By leaving out the very specific reasons that Domild has for her hatred of Constance, the *Man of Law's Tale* suggests that Donegild’s hatred is one of the pagan attributes that must be overcome in order to allow a Christian nation to come into being. Her status as the literal progenitor of the kin group to which Alla belongs implies that this relationship to a non-Christian familial past must be overcome and replaced with a Christian family in order to make the future possible.

CHRISTIAN MONARCH, CHRISTIAN NATION

Donegild’s death ultimately comes at the hands of the son she betrays. Alla, too, offers an understanding of the gradual cohering of a nation in the *Man of Law's Tale* by his role as the exemplary Christian monarch. It is the actions of this pagan king turned Christian monarch that ultimately bring the *Man of Law's Tale* to its conclusion and the Northumbrian kingdom to its

⁵⁶ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 110.

⁵⁷ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 197.

fulfillment as an English nation. Alla's war against the Scots, his role in the trial of Constance's false accuser, and finally his journey to Rome signify his status as a monarch destined to convert his people. The actions of this king, mediated by Custance, are ultimately actions performed both by and for the God he eventually chooses to worship. Alla becomes a paragon of Christian kingship, making it possible for the non-Christian "Northumberlond" to become Christian "Engelonde."

The opening description of Alla emphasizes his status and virtues as a king: he is "ful wys, and worthy of his hond / agayn the Scottes" (II.579-80). Alla's evolution proceeds in tandem with the evolution of his kingdom. In this segment of the *Man of Law's Tale*, he is described only as the "kyng of al Northumbrelond" (578). He has not yet reached the full stature he will receive later in the narrative as a Christian monarch, but Alla already shows some promise. He "possesses wisdom and prowess necessary to good kingship."⁵⁸ His fight with the Scots is further validated when he returns to war after his conversion. Leaving his wife in the custody of the constable and "a bisshop" (716) he "is gon /To Scotlond-ward, his foomen for to seke" (717-718). Yet, the *Man of Law's Tale* omits the reasoning behind his successive journeys, relegating the Scots to a position as a kind of eternal enemy.

In the "Life of Constance," by contrast, Trevet notes in detail the reason Ælle seeks out the Scots:

Then after half a year passed, news came to the king that the people of Albany, who are the Scots, had passed their boundaries and made war on the king's land. Then by common council the king assembled his army to repulse his enemies.

Puis a un demy an passé, vient novele al roi qe les gentz de Albanie, qe sont les Escoz, furent passé leur boundes et guerreient les terres le roi. Dont par comune conseil le roi assembla son host de roboter ses enemis. (311.659-661)

⁵⁸ R. James Goldstein, "'To Scotland-ward his foomen for to seke': Chaucer, the Scots, and the *Man of Law's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 33.1 (1998) 34.

By making Alla's reasoning in pursuing the Scotsman clear, Trevet's Constance narrative fills in a gap that the Chaucerian version leaves open. In the "Life of Constance," "the Scots are the aggressors and the Northumbrian king fights a just war in defense of the realm."⁵⁹ The *Man of Law's Tale* does not address the earthly reasons for Alla's war. By framing the scenes of conversion in the narrative with the two wars in Scotland that take Alla far from his home, the *Man of Law's Tale* implies that Alla's "wisdom and prowess" remain undiminished by his conversion to Christianity. Moreover, as Goldstein points out, Chaucer may have gained from Trevet a sense of ahistorical Anglo-Scottish antagonism that pervades the *Chronicle* and is situated in a pagan Scottish past: in Chaucer's time, the English throne had ill-founded but heartily pursued claims to the throne of the region that were partially centered on religious difference.⁶⁰ Alla thus pursues a claim against another group of "payens," bolstered by his own newly-claimed Christianity.

The trial that intervenes between Alla's two wars in Scotland presents the actual conversion of the king; however, it does not yet mark the fulfillment of his role as the ideal Christian monarch. The *Man of Law's Tale* is the only version of the story in which Alla is present throughout the trial. In both the *Confessio Amantis* and the *Chronicle*, Alla arrives after the divine testimony has already been rendered. In Gower, he arrives "for the second day a morwe"(336.890). In fact, even if he had arrived in time for the trial, the sequence of events in the *Confessio Amantis* results in the death of the witness after confessing his crimes. The voice asks the man to "beknow the sothe er that thou dye" (335.883). The knight, forced to tell the truth through miraculous means, "told out his felonie, /and starf forth with his tale anon" (336.884-85). In this setting of the knight's slander and death, Gower largely follows the version of the same events in the "Life of Constance," although the sequence of

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁰ See Goldstein, 36-7.

these events is altered slightly. In the “Life of Constance,” Olda explicitly defers to the king’s authority over judgment: “Because the arrival of the king was near, Olda would not render judgment on the treason until his coming, and put the felon into prison. Then within a few days the king sentenced him to death” (Et pur ceo qe la venue le roi fu pres, pur ceo ne voleit Olda jugement doner sur la treson jusqe a sa venue, et mist le feloun en prison. Puis deinz poi de jours par le roi fu le jugement doné de sa mort, 311.253-55). In addition to providing more time to accomodate Ælle’s eventual arrival, Olda’s actions create a conceptual space into which the king can bring his royal authority.

Alla’s role in the trial invoked in the scene with the Britoun book can be read in one of several ways. Nakley argues that Alla “sits as a judge who is unsure of whom to trust: Custance, exemplar of justice, or one of his own knights.”⁶¹ His position seems nearly un-necessary: because the unimpeachable witness has already been called and God has declared his judgment “in sighte of every body in that place” (II.672), “Alla’s judgment appears redundant.”⁶² This interpretation is made possible in part by Alla’s presence at the trial in the *Man of Law’s Tale*. Because Alla is present at the trial, his role as a converted monarch is made explicit in this narrative, contrasting his belated arrival in both the *Confessio Amantis* and the “Life of Constance.” Alla becomes a key player in the fulfillment of the destiny of England as a Christian nation because the *Man of Law’s Tale* places him as a witness to the miraculous intersection of past, present, and future of England at the trial.

As noted previously, the absence of Alla in the *Man of Law’s Tale* while he fights the Scots is one indication that even before his conversion, he possessed some of the qualities that would later serve him as a Christian monarch. Even more striking in this regard are the differences between the

⁶¹ Nakley, “Sovereignty Matters,” 391.

⁶² *ibid.*

“Life of Constance” and the *Man of Law’s Tale* in terms of how the king meets Custance. In the “Life,” Olda brings Constance to the attention of King Ælle quite early in the story. After he converts to Christianity, Olda decides “by great deliberation and private counsel with himself” (par grant avisement et privé conseil de lui mesmes, 307.203) to tell the King about the maiden. Intrigued by Olda’s description of Constance, Ælle was “greatly desirous to see and speak with the maid” (mult fu desirous de la pucele veer et parler, 307.207-8) and he “promised Olda that he would come in secret to visit her” (promist a Olda q’il privément la vindroit visiter, 307.208-209). Constance is marked out as important to Ælle simply by virtue of having been described to him: another instance of her ability to inspire devotion through narratives told about her.

In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, by contrast, Alla does not make secret plans to meet his future wife. There is nothing secret about their meeting at all. Rather, when the constable returns home after the false knight has killed Hermengyld, Alla seems to follow him to the scene of the crime: “Soone after cometh this constable home agayn / And eek Alla, that kyn was of that lond” (II.603-4). In fact, although he later appears to be uncertain of whose word to trust in the trial, Alla’s first reaction to Custance is one of pure compassion. Hearing the story of how she came to Northumbria, “The kynges herte of pittee gan agryse, / whan he saugh so benigne a creature / fall in disease and in mysaventure” (II.614-16). By omitting the secret meeting of Ælle and Custance that appears in the “Life of Constance,” the *Man of Law’s Tale* creates a meeting that is fit for the future Christian king of England.

Alla’s final act in the process of becoming a true Christian monarch of a Christian nation is his pilgrimage to Rome. In this instance, the alterations to the “Life of Constance” made in the *Man of Law’s Tale* make it clear that to be reunited with his wife and son, Alla must first receive forgiveness for the murder of his meddling and “mannysh” mother. To lead a Christian nation, that is, Alla must be free of sin:

To Rome he comth to receyven his penance,
 And putte hym in the Popes ordinance
 In heigh and logh, and Jhesu Crist bisoghte
 Foryeve his wikked werkes that he wroghte. (II.991-4)

Such submission, Steven Kruger argues, is imperative “before he can be reunited with Constance and his son Maurice, and before he can return to England as a true Christian monarch.”⁶³ Moreover, Alla’s motivation in making this submission comes from within himself. In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, “Kyng Alla, which had his mooder slayn, / Upon a day fil in swich repentance” (988-9) and undertakes a pilgrimage to obtain forgiveness. By choosing to go to Rome to receive absolution—and to submit himself to the Pope rather than to the Roman empire—Alla proves himself fit to rule the Christian nation that England is in the process of becoming.

The “Life of Constance” records a more detailed account of Ælle’s decision, reducing the visibility of the king’s repentance and transferring the impetus for his journey from Ælle himself to his Christian advisors. As Constance dwells in the house of Arsenius, “Ælle, the king of England, by advice of Lucius, bishop of Bangor, and Olda his constable, went with his men to make a pilgrimage to Rome, and to have absolution from the Pope for the murder of his mother” (Alle, le roi de Engleterre, par le conseil Lucius, evesque de Bangor, et Olda, son conestable, ala ove gentz pur faire le pilrinage a Rome et de avoir absolucion del pape de l’occision sa mere, 323.484-486). Ælle does not choose repentance because he feels the need for forgiveness, as Alla does in the *Man of Law’s Tale*. Rather, his advisors urge him to go to the Pope—one assumes because their own consciences are pained by the guilt of their converted monarch. The difference is slight, but the ramifications for the rest of the narrative change the focus of the text.

Moreover, in the “Life of Constance,” Ælle is reunited with his wife and son *before* he goes to see the Pope and ask forgiveness. Ælle not only finds his wife and son before he seeks the pope’s

⁶³ Kruger, “Becoming Christian, Becoming Male,” 30

absolution, but also relates the story of their trials to the Pope: “when he had told Pope Pelagius, before named, all the events, the Pope gave thanks to God” (et puis q’il avoit counté al pape Pelagie, avant nomé totes les aventures, le pape rendi graces a Dieu, 325.541-543). The Pope’s response—giving thanks to God—offers a moment in which one of the characters within the “Life of Constance” seems to comment on the way the narrative has progressed. Upon hearing the story of what Ælle and Constance have gone through, the Pope takes an action that might be interpreted in two ways. The first—perhaps more suitable—interpretation is that the Pope gives thanks to God that Constance and Ælle are reunited and that Ælle has reaffirmed his Christian faith. The subtle possibility remains, however, that the Pope’s “praise to God” lends affirmation to Ælle’s action in killing his treacherous mother.

The alterations that the *Man of Law’s Tale* makes to its source texts with regard to the Northumbrian king culminate in the final actions that Alla takes. He returns “with his Custance, his hooly wyf so sweete / to Englonde” (1129-30). This marks the only time in the *Man of Law’s Tale* that the territory in question is thus named. Its use here in counterpoint to the other terms used for Northumbria in the *Man of Law’s Tale* indicates an important change. Even Custance’s presence does not trouble the narrative of English sovereignty after Alla’s death: “not the vanguard of some long-term foreign occupation, she simply goes back where she came from.”⁶⁴ Her relationship to England enables the nation’s own future fulfillment. The past of its Christian Briton inhabitants, the present of the Saxons, and the (still future) time in which Chaucer’s pilgrim tells his story are brought

⁶⁴ John M. Bowers, “Colonialism, Latinity, and Resistance” in *Chaucer: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Fein and Raybin (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010) 127.

together through the tale. Because its people are now Christian, the island's past and present are made consonant—Britons and Saxons are united in faith, and England emerges as a nation.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

John Bowers argues that Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* is an explicit "rejection of Bede's authoritative Latin version" of the conversion of the English. Although there is no concrete evidence that Chaucer knew Bede's version of the story of Saint Gregory and the angelic Angles in the Roman slave market, his major source—Trevet—not only knew but expanded upon the traditional versions of the story that the chronicler himself might have drawn upon. In Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the historian of the English makes a distinct break with the past as he considers the unfolding inheritance of Christianity. The Britons fail in their major mission as Christians because they do not convert the pagan Angles and Saxons:

To other unspeakable crimes, which Gildas their own historian describes in doleful words, was added this crime, that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain with them. Nevertheless God in His goodness did not reject the people whom He foreknew, but He had appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith.

Qui inter alia inenarrabilium sclerum facta, quae historicus eorum Gildas flebili sermone describit, et hoc addebant, ut nemquam genti Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Britanniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando committerent. Sed non tamen diuina pietas plebem suam, quam praesciuit, deseruit; quin multo digniores genti memoratae praecones ueritatis, per quos crederet, destinauit. (I.22.68)⁶⁶

The worthier heralds are, for Bede, the conquering Saxons. Because they are chosen by God to replace the Britons and spread Christianity in a way that Bede claims the Britons did not, they have a

⁶⁵ Nakeley notes that "Even though the English need Custance to reach religious and juridical sovereignty, the Man of Law's telling of her story effectively obtains the Romanized authority for England without incurring the usual obligations" (ibid., "Sovereignty Matters," 390).

⁶⁶ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

similarly prestigious patron: Saint Gregory the Great. Although Bede is careful to note that “he sent other preachers” (*alios quidem praedicatores mittens*, II.1.134), he avers that Gregory “himself helped their preaching to bear fruit by his encouragement and prayers” (*sed ipse praedicationem ut fructificaret suis exhortationibus ac precibus adiuuans*, II.1.134). Bede’s alignment of the Saxons with both God’s will and the will of Pope Saint Gregory the Great suggests a lofty inheritance for English Christianity that comes to pass as a result of the supersession of its British past.

This idea of the Britons having lost their sovereignty over the island as a part of their failure as Christians is central to Trevet’s version of the story of Gregory, as well as the “Life of Constance. As Robert Correale observes, however, “whatever other sources Trevet used in fashioning his story of Constance, he was influenced to a larger extent than [previous critics] have realized by people and events recorded elsewhere in his own chronicle.”⁶⁷ Correale comments specifically on Trevet’s use and re-use of vocabulary and description. The statement applies equally well to the content of the work—the events that Trevet deemed worthy of record and comment. That is, Trevet often returns to certain themes elsewhere in his *Chronicle* that are persistently present in the “Life of Constance.” The most important of these has to do with the history of Northumbria and the role the Saxons play in the eventual conversion of England: a byproduct of the idea that the Britons’ failure as Christians had to do with their failure as rulers. A brief account of these ideas brings the differences between the *Man of Law’s Tale* and the “Life of Constance” into even sharper relief.

The *Chronicle* displays a sustained interest in Anglo-Saxon Christianity. It does so by incorporating Old Testament materials into regnal lists and by relating narratives from Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Trevet uses regnal lists in the *Chronicle* to create a myth of English origin that blends Old Testament traditions with Germanic mythology. For example, the genealogical lists that

⁶⁷ Correale, “The Man of Law’s *Prologue* and *Tale*,” 284.

Trevet includes in his account of the Kingdom of Wessex participate in a long-established Anglo-Saxon tradition that traces the descent of the royal houses of England back to the Norse god

Woden:

In the second year of the the emperor Justinian, the Kingdom of Westsex (the principle Kingdom of England) began, and the first king was called Cerdyk, the son of Elesa, who was the son of Elsa, who was the son of Gemmus, who was the son of Wyg, who was the son of Ffrewyn, who was the son of Ffredegar, who was the song of Broand, who was the son of Beldeg, who was the son of Woden, father of many kings, who was of the lineage of Shem, the son of Noah, as it is written in the story of Shem that is in the Book of Genesis.

Le secound an de cist emperour Justinian comensa le regne de Westsex, le principal regne d'Engleterre, et estoit le primer roi apelé Cerdyk, le fitz Elesa, qe fu le fitz Elsa, qe fu le fitz Gemmus, qe fu le fitz Wyg, qe fu le fitz Ffrewyn, qe fu le fitz Ffredegar, qe fu le fitz Broand, qe fu le fitz Beldeg, qe fu le fitz Woden, pere de plusours rois, qe estoit del linage Sem le fitz Noe, si come est escript en l'estoire de Sem q'est en le livre de Genesis.⁶⁸

As David Dumville has suggested, a genealogy can “announce belief in the existence of a racial grouping.”⁶⁹ In the case of Anglo-Saxon kings in particular, it often suggests “political ideology and invention rather than blood.”⁷⁰ In the genealogy reported by Trevet, Woden is related directly to Noah. This regnal list participates in a longer tradition of Anglo-Saxon genealogical listings, in which “all Angles and Saxons . . . were thus presented as related through both Adam and Scef (Scyf)—through both Christian and Germanic lines.”⁷¹ Although Trevet substitutes the biblical son of Noah named Shem for Scef (who was also considered a son of Noah in some Anglo-Saxon genealogical

⁶⁸ Rutherford, 189.24-190.1.

⁶⁹ See David N. Dumville, “Kingship, genealogies, and regnal lists,” in *Early Medieval Kingship* ed. P.H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1979) 72-104.

⁷⁰ Robin Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 3. Moreover, as Nicholas Brooks observes in his examination of the Hengist myth, the origin of Anglo-Saxon royal houses in the lineage of Oðin held a remarkable tenacity across the period. The genealogies of the royal houses of “Bernician, Kentish, East Anglian, Mercian and Deiran dynasties all trace their descent from the Germanic god, Woden.” See Nicholas P. Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400-1066* (London: Hambledon Press, 2000) 86.

⁷¹ Stephen Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 87.

listings), the way in which his genealogy blends Germanic and Christian implies “the existence of an order of identity that understands a common religious past and a common ethnic past.”⁷² This order of identity informs Trevet’s understanding of the history of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England.

Trevet’s representation of the conversion process in the “Life of Constance” is also partially influenced by his earlier portrayal of the events that surround the conversion of Northumbria. At the behest of Saint Gregory, Augustine of Canterbury was sent to England in the sixth century to convert the Anglo-Saxons. As examined in my second chapter, Gregory makes this decision, according to legend, because of an encounter he has with some Anglo-Saxon slaves in a market in Rome. Made famous by Bede’s inclusion of it in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the story creates a spiritual lineage for England dating back to the Romans. Gregory’s puns linguistically convert the Anglo-Saxons before they are formally converted by Augustine’s mission. Trevet’s rendition of the story is for the most part quite similar to the story familiar from Bede, but he adds a significant pun that is not present in the *Historia*:

In the time of Bishop Benedict, as has been said, and of Gregory, named before, children were brought to Rome from Greater Brittany to be sold to the sons of the Saxons, and among others who came to buy the children came Saint Gregory, who was already the archdeacon at the court of Rome, and he asked who the children were, and a man replied that they were English. And he asked from which province of the land, and a man said from Deira, which is a country in Northumbria, and that their king was Alla. The Saint Gregory said that it was right that the English be associated with angels, and that their land be called England [Engelond]; and for that reason from then on the land of Britain would be called England, and that the Deira should be delivered from the wrath [of God], and that the name of Alla suggested it was mean to be “to sing Alleluia,” and he was surprised by the beauty of the children that he called angels.

En le temps cist evesqe Benoit, ore avant dit, et cist Gregoire, ja nome, estoient enfauntz amenéz a Rome de la Greindre Bretagne pur vendre a les fitz de Sessouns, et entre autres qe viendrent pur achater les enfauntz vient Seint Gregoire, qi ja estoit archidiakne de la court de Rome, et demaunda qi ceux enfauntz estoient, et homme lui respoundi q’il estoient Engleis. Et il demaunda de quele province de la terre, et hom lui dist de Deyra, q’est un pais de Northumbreland, et qe lour roi estoit Alla. Lors dit Seint Gregoire qe droit serroit qe Anglay

⁷² Harris, *ibid.*

fuissent associétz as aungels, et qe lour terre estoit ja nomé Engleterre et pur cel encheson estoit la terre de Brutaigne desormé apelé Engleterre, et qe ceux de Deyra fuissent deliveréz de yre, et qe les suggéz le roi Alle fuissent apris chaunter Alleluia, et maintenant surpris de la beaute dez enfauntz q'il appela aungeles.⁷³

Despite his writing in Anglo-Norman rather than Bede's Latin, Trevet carefully retains the linguistic games that make this section of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* so remarkable. These English angels must be saved from the wrath of God, with the Latin *de ire* converting the kingdom of the Deirans.

Gregory states that they ought be made to sing "Alleluia" in accordance with the name of their king, Ælle. All of these puns appear in the *Historia* as well, but Trevet includes an additional one, unique to the *Chronicle*.⁷⁴ This metaphorical conversion takes place between the term "Brutaigne" and "Engleterre" in its final lines. The change in this terminology moves English Christianity away from its British roots. Britain becomes England: the land of the angels/Angles. The resulting understanding of the idea of England in Trevet thus differs slightly from that provided by the *Man of Law's Tale*.

Trevet extends Gregory's linguistic conversions from the name of a people and their king to the name of the country from which they hail.⁷⁵ In so doing, Trevet also makes a claim for a different kind of inheritance: the association of land, religion, and linguistic identity that Adrian Hastings argues are the hallmarks of a proto-nation.⁷⁶ The conversion of "Brutaigne" to

⁷³ Rutherford, 199.16-30.

⁷⁴ See *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, II.1.134. Although Bede includes the puns on *Angli*, *Deiri*, and *Ælle*, he does not include any mention of the conversion between "Brutaigne" and Engleterre.

⁷⁵ For an analysis of how this appropriative gesture works in the *Life of Gregory* by Ælfric, see Clare Lees, "In Ælfric's Words: Vigilance and Nation in the *Life of Saint Gregory*," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Swan and Magennis (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 285. Lees argues that "the nation of the English—as people, land, and language—has [. . .] retrospectively co-opted a country—Britain—and a small northern kingdom that had little symbolic and even less literal meaning by the late tenth century."

⁷⁶ See Adrian Hastings, "England as Prototype" in *The Construction of Nationhood*, 35-65. In his exploration of how nationhood is made concrete in discourse and practice, Hastings argues that scholars must "start our pursuit of national identity [in England] no later than the age of Bede" (ibid., 36). He avers that the unity

“Engleterre” marks a characteristic moment of Trevet’s understanding of how Christianity in England is established and sustained in the “Life of Constance.” Although the *Man of Law’s Tale* presents a story of the conversion of the English set largely in Anglo-Saxon times, the rest of the *The Canterbury Tales* does not address the Saxons at all. On the one hand, Trevet’s treatment of Anglo-Saxon history and the development of “Engleterre” from “Brutaigne” emphasizes the rupture in Christian faith which allows Rome to convert the Saxons directly and transfer ultimate religious authority to them. Chaucer, on the other hand, includes the Britons that Trevet’s understanding of the story leaves out and so connects the eventual emergence of “Engelonde” in the *Man of Law’s Tale* with a Christian past that begins and lingers in the geographical boundaries of the island.

The version of the story in the *Man of Law’s Tale* suggests a more complicated lineage for the spiritual journey of England than that in the “Life of Constance.” By emphasizing the lapse of Christianity in Northumbria as a traversable space—a departure from destiny only “for the meene while”—the *Man of Law’s Tale* focuses not on the breaks in the narrative of Northumbria’s eventual conversion but on what still remains there. Custance’s role of “mediacioun,” the Britons who take refuge in Wales “for the meene while,” and the facilitation of the Britoun book create links between the past of Northumbria and its future. Donegild must be disposed of because she cannot let go of her immediate past, and Alla’s journey to Rome symbolically elevates England to its proper place as a Christian kingdom, making its destiny achievable. The *Man of Law’s Tale*, by its insistence on the intersections between past, present, and future Christianity in the narrative, redeems the lapse of evangelical zeal that Bede argues led to the Britons’ loss of power without ever needing to reference it. Ultimately, the Christian Britons bring England’s destiny to pass, and the story of Custance becomes a story not only of a holy woman, but of a holy nation.

Bede “wonderfully presumes” in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* exists on three discrete levels: territorial, ecclesiastical or religious, and the idea of a people—the *gens Anglorum*—who represent a linguistic grouping.

Beowulf's Collectivities

*Awareness of historical change, of the pastness of a past that itself
has depth, is not instinctive to man; there is nothing natural
about a sense of history.*

~Roberta Frank¹

Hwæt! We Gardena on geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
feascaft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan. þæt was god cyning!

(Hwæt! We have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes, the kings of the people, in days of yore—how the princes performed deeds of courage! Often Scyld Scefing seized mead-benches from enemy troops, from many a clan, he terrified warriors, even though first he was found bereft, helpless. For that he had comfort, and he grew under skies, prospered in honors until every last one of the bordering nations beyond the whale-road had to obey him, pay him tribute. He was a good king! 1-11)

The opening lines of *Beowulf* introduce the concerns that dominate the remainder of the poem: kingship, narrative, time, and group formation. The groups of people mentioned in the poem's first ten lines—the Spear-Danes, the bordering nations, the terrified warriors, and the “we” who have heard of them all—come from disparate places and times. Despite this division, the beginning of *Beowulf* highlights not the separation of these groups but their interrelations.

In addition to the sets of people defined by their relationship to Scyld—the earls and outlying peoples who pay him tribute—the initial lines of *Beowulf* identify two other factions that rely on one another in order to be remembered. The Spear-Danes, described as kings of the people,

¹ Roberta Frank, “The Beowulf Poet’s Sense of History,” in *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* ed. Daniel Donoghue (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002) 167.

include Scyld as one of their number. He is, perhaps, the most famous, or at least one of their most successful kings. The Old English for Spear-Danes (*Gardene*) appears as a genitive plural and so is governed by its relationship to what “we have heard” (*we gefrunon*). Within the poem, the recollection of the existence of the Spear-Danes is dependent, to some degree, on the “we” who hear (or have heard) the story of their glories. The “we” hypothesized by the text is, however, quite fragile.

Beowulf characterizes this “we” by implying that it has been the audience of the stories in question. The stories are comprised of narratives about Spear-Danes, Scyld, and deeds of glory performed in the past, but the “we” has yet to be shaped by the main story of *Beowulf* itself. *Beowulf*, the story of the hero, commences after this introduction. “We” have not heard of Beowulf, or at least have not heard of him yet. The “we” who have heard these stories depends on a conflation of the time of the poem’s narration and the time during which these stories are set. Extended through the iterations of multiple performances, this “we” is always subject to the end of the performance—either of the poem or of its reading—and the dispersal of the audience(s) or reader(s). The poem establishes that the “we” in question is temporally remote from the earlier narrative of Scyld Scefing and the stories told about him.²

The opening lines of *Beowulf* frame the text as a narrative with an audience that has heard or read other related stories. To a modern reader, of course, the frame that includes the reader as part of this “we” is fictive. We have not necessarily heard of the glories of the Spear-Danes, and though we know analogues for the story of Beowulf himself, there is no extant direct source.³ Even at the

² See J.R.R. Tolkien, “The Monsters and the Critics,” in *The Monsters and the Critics* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), and his avowal of a view of *Beowulf* that tells of the distant past even in the present of its composition.

³ Analogues to *Beowulf* occur in texts ranging from Biblical source materials to Latinate Epic to Norse Eddic poetry. See Joseph Harris, “A Nativist Approach to *Beowulf*,” in Aertson and Bremmer, *Companion to Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam, 1994); Richard North, *The Origins of Beowulf*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Roberta Frank, “Germanic Legend in Old English Literature” in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

time of its writing, however, the community designated by “we have heard” was narratively constructed by the references to Scyld Scefing and his childhood, career, and death. The community that “has heard” the stories of Scyld is not the community Scyld himself created; rather, the narrative of his death refers outward to a different set of peoples and times and a community that inherits both the conditions of the past and the narratives told about it.⁴ Although it is written in Old English, *Beowulf* does not relate stories about England or the Anglo-Saxons. As Orchard observes, its tales take place “way back then . . . in a foreign land,” making even the language of recitation dissonant with the Scandinavian subject matter. *Beowulf* relates a cultural history of what Howe has termed the English “Ancestral Homeland,”⁵ but it also creates a new community of listeners through narrative. The ability of narratives to create communities becomes central to the action of the poem.

In previous chapters of this dissertation, I have explored the formation of community through narratives in translation. In the Old English *Orosius* and the *Life of Oswald* I discuss the interrelation of source text and translation. In the *Orosius*, this approach illuminates the temporal heterogeneity within the text and the forces that hybridize its readership to reflect both Anglo-Saxon England and fifth-century Rome. The *Life of Oswald*, on the other hand, has a less direct relationship

For dissenting views, cf. John Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); David Dumville, “*Beowulf* and the Celtic World,” *Traditio*, 37 (1981): 109-60.

⁴ See for example, Roberta Frank, “The *Beowulf* Poet’s Sense of History,” 168. Frank argues that “The *Beowulf* poet’s reconstruction of a northern heroic age is chronologically sophisticated, rich in local color and fitting speeches. The poet avoids obvious anachronisms and presents such an internally consistent picture of Scandinavian society around A.D. 500 that his illusion of historical allusion has been taken for the reality.” Importantly, this accurate representation of sixth-century Scandinavia necessitates the poet’s understanding that the past was in fact past—in Frank’s words reproduced in the epigraph to this chapter, it requires a sense of the “pastness of a past that itself has depth” (*ibid.*, 167).

⁵ See Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 143-180. In the final chapter of his work, Howe argues that *Beowulf* references an “ancestral homeland” best described as pre-conversion Germania. The poet “has no antiquarian curiosity about events before migration; he has a culturally imposed concern with the continuing history of the pagan north because it offers some vision of what the Anglo-Saxons might have become had they not made their exodus” (*ibid.*, 146).

to the source text it translates. It retells a version of the saintly life of King Oswald of Northumbria, based on one found in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. In the *Life of Oswald*, the alterations to the narrative introduced by Ælfric proceeds from a type of early nationalistic thinking and demonstrate Oswald's unique power to unify English Christianity by sanctifying English soil. Chaucer's version of Trevet's "Life of Constance" creates a Christian England by focusing on the Briton and Roman inheritances of the religion in the *Man of Law's Tale*. My focus on *Beowulf* necessitates a slightly different approach.

Beowulf is not a translation. It is an oral poem mediated by a written text.⁶ The poem, as a hybrid product of orality and textuality, tradition and innovation, creates a textual space in which the process of community formation is worked out through the telling of both traditional and innovative narratives. By examining the methods through which *Beowulf* imagines possible communities, I delineate the reasons why such communities repeatedly fail and point to the different group formation this failing illuminates—a formation I term "collectivity."⁷

The poem's concern with the fragility of human community is emphasized by the sheer number of narratives recounted within it of communities that do not endure. These narratives are often contained in segments of the text—traditionally referred to as "digressions"—that do not actively involve the exploits of *Beowulf* in the "narrative present."⁸ In more recent *Beowulf* criticism, the digressions are thought to be intimately related to *Beowulf's* theme and purpose, amplifying and

⁶ For example, see John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); John D. Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁷ I borrow the terms "collective" and "collectivity" from Actor-Network Theory. See, for example, Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁸ See Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf*—Medium Aevum Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

refining the major foci of the poem.⁹ Following this critical trend, I examine several of these episodes in detail and argue that they highlight a latent conflict in the text between human communities and the seemingly outside forces that threaten to disperse them. These entities belong to a long history that exceeds the capacity of human memory or knowledge within the poem. It foregrounds this history in a way that forces the reader to acknowledge that such entities are not really outside at all. Rather, their intrusion into the human communities of *Beowulf* highlights collectivity, and the historical—or in some cases prehistorical—time to which such associations belong. Collectivity includes humans as well as objects and entities with which they interact over long spans of time. By systematically tracing the connections between humans, objects (swords, treasure, the earth), monsters (the dragon and the Grendelkin), and the corpses of the dead, I foreground the thematic fragility of communities in the poem. The narrative digressions become the territory in which the poem explores the construction of human group identities and the affiliations on which such identities rely, whether such affiliations are explicit or covert. Collectivity includes associations which occur over a longer temporal span than the human communities in the poem. Collectivity therefore underlies—and in several cases, undermines—the stability of communities in the poem. Ultimately, these human group identities are as contingent as the “we” without whom their stories would have no listener.

⁹ For examples, see Catherine Karkov and Robert Farrell, “The Gnostic Passages of *Beowulf*,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 91 (1990): 295-310; Ward Parks, “Ring Structure and Narrative Embedding in Homer and *Beowulf*,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89 (1988): 237-251; and Andre Crépin, “L’Espace du texte et l’esprit liturgique dans la civilisation vieil-anglaise,” *Liturgie et espace liturgique* (Paris: Didier-Erudition, 1987): 49-58.

THE LAY OF THE LAST SURVIVOR

The Lay of the Last Survivor¹⁰ marks the movement into the final battle scene of the poem and into the eventual fall and death of both Beowulf and his people. It centers on the aftermath of a catastrophic event. The Lay relates the lament of a lone survivor who mourns the loss of his people while he inter their treasure in a hoard. The poem does not explicitly ally the Last Survivor with any of the previously encountered groups (Scyld Scefing and the Spear-Danes, Beowulf and the Geats, the Danes in Hroðgar's court). He is not part of the communities already outlined by the poem; however, the context of the Lay and the content of its lament mark a key moment in the poem's articulation of community and collectivity. Analyzed in its poetic context as the beginning of the end for Beowulf and the human community he leads, the Lay exposes the relevance of the past for the future of human communities through its outline of the connections forged between humans and objects. Furthermore, the Lay outlines the disastrous consequences that result from ignorance of the ways in which objects connect humans not only to each other but also to outside forces. One such outside force is the dragon, whose occupation of the hoard is interrupted by a human thief.

The disasters that befall human communities in the Lay invite speculation about their causes. From a critical standpoint, these calamities are most often considered in relation to the theme of mourning that dominates the end of *Beowulf*.¹¹ Critical treatments of the Lay have, in short, focused on the speaker's identity, the structure of his words, his relationship with the dragon, and the

¹⁰ This title for the elegiac speech that precedes Beowulf's fight with the dragon is not part of the poem as it exists in manuscript form. It is used here for the sake of clarity, as it is by far the most commonplace way to describe this section of the poem.

¹¹ Robert Bjork and John D. Niles, *A Beowulf Handbook* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) 209. See also Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf*.

digression's consequences (2221-2323) for Beowulf and the Geats.¹² Stephen Glosecki suggests that the shamanistic elements of the Lay imply the presence of a curse or enchantment that is put on the gold, a sort of ward to protect it from any who would plunder it.¹³ Gale Owen Crocker posits the Lay as a funeral, the third to appear in the poem.¹⁴ Orchard interprets its tone of hopelessness in the human condition as part of the poem's narrative strategy, noting that "there is no mistaking the melancholy tone: the Last Survivor speaks to no one, is heard by no one, and answer came there none."¹⁵

Regardless of whether the Lay describes an actual funeral, it is clear that the hoard is some kind of buried treasure or perhaps even grave goods. Martin Carver, in his consideration of the nature of burials in Anglo-Saxon England, observes that in archaeology these burial hoards function metonymically, in a manner similar to poetry:

A grave is not simply a text, but a text with attitude, a text inflated with emotion. It is not the reality behind *Beowulf*, because a burial is itself not reality and is not meant to be; like poetry, it is a palimpsest of allusions, constructed in a certain time and place. But the allusions are so numerous and their interweft so complex, that the time and the place are the last thing we can easily ascertain. It is the allusions themselves which must first be studied.¹⁶

¹² See 2221-2323. See also Ward Parks, "Rings, Structure, and Narrative Embedding in Homer and *Beowulf*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89: 127-51; Constance B. Hieatt, "Modþryðo and Heremod: Intertwined Threads in the *Beowulf*-poet's Web of Words," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 84.4 (1984): 173-182.

¹³ Stephen Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* (New York, 1989) 105. Glosecki argues that in the opening lines of the lay, the "poet actually uses the standard term for a *metrical* charm" (ibid.). He goes on to say that "the initial imperative is key; it is a literal command, identical to the imperatives used" in other, fully articulated charms that do not bear the elegiac qualities of the Lay (ibid.).

¹⁴ Gale Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 61-84.

¹⁵ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 228. See also (per Orchard) Janet Thormann, "The Poetics of Absence: The Lament of the Lone Survivor," in *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir* ed. John Miles Foley (New York: Garland, 1992) 542-550.

¹⁶ Martin Carver, "The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves," in *Treasure in the Medieval West* ed. E.M. Tyler (York: York University Press, 2000) 37.

Although Carver focuses his analysis of treasure in burials on the excavation of Anglo-Saxon grave goods,¹⁷ his assertion also suggests a method for pursuing the analysis of poetry composed about these hoards. Within what Carver describes as the “palimpsest” of interwoven allusions, the allusions themselves must be drawn out and analyzed. The Lay presents both the burial of a treasure hoard and the poetry occasioned by its deposit. A story within the larger story of *Beowulf*, the Lay stages the dissolution of human communities by focusing on material objects and animals that were once part of that community.¹⁸ A larger set of connections emerges in the narrative, connections that function in direct opposition to the human desire for enduring community.

The narrative concerning the hoard and the words used to describe it emphasize the human and monstrous connections formed with treasure as well as the poem’s belief in the legitimacy of both the treasure’s burial and the dragon’s subsequent hoarding. *Beowulf* describes the hoard as very old treasure (*argestreona*, 2232), emphasizing its ancient provenance. This “very old treasure” is not unique; rather, the poem refers to similar hoards, noting “there were many such [hoards] in the halls of the earth” (*Ðær wæs swylcra fela in / in þam eorðse(le)*, 2231-2). The implication is that the burial of treasure is not a rare occurrence. The final lines of the poem describing Beowulf’s burial and

¹⁷ Ibid., 25-48. Carver posits three interlinking uses of burials, dependent upon the context in which they are found and the materials found within them, and uses Sutton Hoo as an example: “as a deposit of bullion, as accoutrement signaling status or ethnicity and as a kind of self-expression in which belief, desire and anxiety fuse in a single creative outburst” (ibid., 25). Carver terms the last of these “burial as poetry” (ibid.).

¹⁸ Borges calls this type of narrative embedding “a fiction within a fiction.” Although this term is not necessarily accurate for the Lay of the Last Survivor, it does serve to highlight the story-telling aspect of the digression. Jorge Luis Borges, “When Fiction Lives in Fiction,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 2000) 160. Borges writes, “the pictorial technique of inserting a painting within a painting corresponds, in the world of letters, to the interpolation of a fiction within another fiction” (ibid.). This technique is one Borges often used himself, and in his description he includes two ways that fiction might live within another fiction. The first firmly delineates the boundaries of the two, and is as “banal as the occurrence, in reality, of someone reading aloud or singing” (ibid.). In a more complicated version, such as that found in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the interpolated fictions bleed into the larger fiction of the story and vice versa when “the king hears his own story from the queen’s lips. He hears the beginning of the story, which includes all the others, and also—monstrously—itself” (ibid., 162).

Wiglaf's decision to re-bury the hoard with the fallen king make this clear.¹⁹ The poem describes the hoard itself as the great leavings (*eormenlafa*, 2234) of a race of princes (*apelan cynnes*, 2234). At line 2245 it is described as *hordnyrdne*, literally hoard-worthy.²⁰ These descriptions strengthen the sense that hoards are a relatively common occurrence in the world of the poem.²¹

The modifier *hordnyrdne* emphasizes the ubiquity of treasure hoards, but it also points to a sense that the treasure in question is worthy of being hoarded.²² The first line of the Lay further strengthens this sense of worthiness: “Hold now, you earth, now that warriors are no longer able to, the treasure of earls” (Heald þu nu, hruse, nu hæleð ne moston / eorle æhte, 2247-8). These lines begin the elegiac passage of the Lay. The Last Survivor apostrophizes the earth as the inheritor of his deposited treasures, but in this case, the earth is not only the inheritor of the treasure—it is also its progenitor. This role is implied in the second line of the lament, with the Last Survivor's assertion that “good men took it from you long before” (hyt ær on ðe gude gegeaton, 2248-49). These lines suggest the completion of a cycle. The Last Survivor gives the treasure back to the earth, which is also where it came from in the beginning.²³

¹⁹ See especially lines 3166-68: “forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan, / golde on greote, þær his nu gen lifað / eldum swa unnyt, swa hit æror wæs” (They let the earth hold the treasure of earls, gold in the ground, where it now still lives, as useless to men as it was before).

²⁰ *Hordnyrdne* is one of four hapax legomena used in *Beowulf*, in the semantic range denoting treasure, along with *hord-wela* (hoarded wealth), *hord-weorþung* (honored with treasure), and *hord-maððum* (treasure hoard).

²¹ See John D. Niles, “Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*,” *PMLA* 94.5 (October 1979): “The poet dwells with evident delight on the splendor of the hoard” (928).

²² See Paul Dean, “Beowulf and the Passing of Time II,” *English Studies* 75.4 (1994), in which he emphasizes that the treasure hoard is not *merely* a treasure hoard, but that, “a treasure hoard has been violated, and not the hoard only but what it represents...the communal experience and memory and history of the people whose last representative put the treasure there” (293). Dean argues that the ultimate opposition for Beowulf is not the dragon or the Grendelkin but rather, a war with “Time”—a war with time's passing and the change this passage brings.

²³ See Robert P. Creed, “Beowulf and the Language of Hoarding,” in *Medieval Archaeology: Papers of the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Charles L. Redman. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 60 (Binghamton, NY: SUNY, Binghamton, 1989) 155-67. Creed argues

In its articulation of this cycle, the lament outlines the connections between objects and the humans who use them as well as between objects and non-human entities. Objects used in human communities are destined to return to the earth from which they purportedly came. They no longer have any use within human communities and therefore, in the context of the lament seem to lose any possibility of a human future. Fittingly, the speaker does not articulate any possibility for each object's future use. These objects are defined only in relation to what they might have done and presumably once did within human communities:

Sceal se hearda helm hyrsted golde
 fætum befeallen; feormynd swefað,
 þa ðe beadogriman bywan sceoldon,
 ge swylce seo herepad, sio æt hilde gebad
 ofer borda gebræc bite irena,
 broснаð æfter beorne. Ne mæg byrnan hring
 æfter wigfruman wide feran,
 hæleðum be healfe.

(The hard helm shall lose its golden plates; the polishers sleep, who should polish the battle-helm. The same shall befall the battle-coat, who abided in battle over the breaking of shields, the bite of iron-swords, decays after its master. Nor may the ring mail fare far, after its battle-warrior: [it stays by] the side of the warriors. 2255-62a)

The poem's poignant exposition of the hoard's contents emphasizes uses that have expired, but does not posit a static existence for these objects. Change occurs even within the hoard, adding emphasis to the possibility that the life of objects continues without their human creators. The coat of mail will rust, unable to protect anyone from the "bite of iron-swords" (*bite irena*) that may have felled its former owner. The decorated helmet will lose its precious plating without the men who are meant to take care of it. Each object the Lay catalogs has a use that human beings have given to it. A human worker must polish the helmet, a human hand must wield the sword, and a human body

that the Lay begins "with what can be best characterized as an apostrophe, perhaps even an incantation – an address to *bruse*, the earth. The Last Survivor commands her ... *bruse* is feminine ... to hold what men can no longer...these lines suggest a circle: hold now what long ago you held...The entire final third of *Beowulf* can be characterized as a circling back to the ritual performed near its beginning by the Last Survivor."

must wear the ring-mail. Without the living men (*feorhcynne*, 2266a), dispatched by death in war that saw these things put to use, the Survivor envisions objects as worthless, bereft—literally without use.

More striking still are the items that the poem deems lost and that cease to exist without a human context:

Næs hearpan wyn,
gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc
geond sæl swingeð, ne se swifta mearh
burhstede beateð. Bealocwealm hafað
fela feorhcynna forð onsended!

(There is no harp joy, the play of the glee-wood, nor does any good hawk swing through the hall, nor does the swift horse stamp in the city-stead. A baleful death has sent forth many living men! 2262b-66)

As a poetic statement of loss, this passage outlines several expected outcomes from the destruction of human community. Men use harps to sing songs, and with their death, the play of the glee-wood (*gomen gleobeames*) must cease. Each of these last three statements posits an object or animal contingent on a human context. The hawk and the horse, however, present a key difference: “Nor does any good hawk swing through the hall, nor does the swift horse stamp in the city-stead” (Ne god hafoc / geond sæl swingeð, ne se swifta mearh / burhstede beateð, 2263-2265). As formulated in the Lay, the meanings of horse and hawk seem inextricable from human perceptions of them, yet neither the horse nor the hawk disappears. The poem only states that there will be no “good hawk” to swing through the hall. The poem predicates the existence of the hawk itself on the existence of a hall it can fly through, and thus on the continued existence of humans. The same is true of the horse. There are no horses that stamp in the city-stead, according to the Lay, and we can infer that the reason is because, like the hall, the city-stead depends on the survival of humans.

The final line of the Lay emphasizes the places integral to human community, such as the hall and the city-stead. This emphasis clarifies the relationship between objects and animals now seen as useless from the limited perspective of communities that once gave them purpose. Death in

battle (*bealocwealm*, 2265b) has brought about the deaths of many living men, and the loss of human lives deprives both objects and animals of their former functions. The hawk and the horse do not fall as easily into the past as the disintegrating helmet and mail. The persistence of these animals in the poem suggests that from the perspective of a collectivity nothing is truly lost: being hoarded is as meaningful a state of being for a sword as participating in battle. The cyclical nature of the relationship between the past of the sword, the mail within the earth, and their futures (to be returned to the earth and to become dust), is not entirely consonant with the description of the hawk and the horse. A more dynamic interpretation of these animals and objects is merited, one that looks critically at why objects outlive the communities they serve.

Examining the metonymic function of kennings in Old English illuminates the properties that allow objects to have an afterlife that exceeds the life of community. Furthermore, it clarifies the differences between the objects and animals cataloged within the Lay. Gillian Overing suggests that certain kennings in *Beowulf*—called incomplete kennings—function metonymically, letting a representative part of the whole come to the fore (such as the *bring-stefn*, the ringed prow, standing in for the boat as a whole).²⁴ The polisher (*feormynd*, 2256), without whom the helmet will vanish, stands in for the community in which the warrior who wore it once lived. The mail coat (*byrnan bring*, 2260) can stand in for the lost warrior, as can helmets and swords. Even in its present state of disuse, the ring mail bears a clear relationship to the men who once wore it. The ring mail cannot move from its resting place (“nor may the ring mail fare far, after its battle-warrior,” [Ne mæg byrnan hring / æfter wigfruman wide feran, 2260-2261]) precisely because it stays by the side of the warrior (*hæledum be healfe*, 2262) it was meant to protect. This association between the dead warrior and the ring mail allows one to stand in for the other, the man’s stillness reflected in the stillness of his protective

²⁴ Gillian Overing, *Language, Gender, Sign in Beowulf* (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 1991) 20.

armor. Even the silence of the harp joy (*hearpan nyn*, 2262b) and the cessation of the glee-wood's games (*gomen gleobeames*, 2263a) can stand in for the men who used the harp to make music. The harp and the glee-wood, like the people who used them, return to dust—or more precisely, to the earth from which they came.²⁵

But what can be made of the hawk and the horse? Jeffrey Cohen has argued persuasively that animals in medieval literature must be read as more than mere figures, “reference and reflection, insubstantial allegories in which we discover ourselves.”²⁶ A purely metonymic approach to the horse and the hawk reflects its human framework—the horse and hawk, like the helmet and mail before them, only represent human loss. Although the human perception of these creatures dominates the lament voiced in the *Lay*, the poem's insistence on a vision of these creatures within human community does not necessarily preclude their existence outside of it.

The Last Survivor's attitude toward treasure is complicated by the lines that occur directly before the *Lay*. Describing the state of mind of the Last Survivor before he voices his lament, the poem asserts that he already knew “that he would enjoy the long-accumulated treasures for a short interval of time” (*þæt he lytel fæc longgestreona / brucan moste*, 2240-1).²⁷ Given that his entire community has been eradicated, it seems likely that the Last Survivor already knows that he will only enjoy these treasures a short time because as in other Old English poems life and its materials are

²⁵ See also John Miles Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). In his consideration of “traditional referentiality,” Foley refers to the concept of metonymy as one method by which the poet can bring “each element in the phraseology or narrative thematics stands not simply for that singular instance but for the plurality and multiformity that are beyond the reach of textualization” (6-7).

²⁶ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 42.

²⁷ The translation of this line as well its interpretation is difficult. I follow the translation of the passage used by the editors of the Fourth edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf*: “he expected that the same [fate as had overtaken his relatives] viz. that he would be permitted to enjoy the ancient treasures only a short time” (239).

ultimately *lane* or *lent*.²⁸ The earth apostrophized by the Last Survivor once held the treasure and will do so again. The good hawk and swift horse do not disappear; rather, like the sparrow in Bede,²⁹ the hawk in the Lay swings through the hall, and its future beyond it is unknown. The hawk and the horse do not decay like treasure that returns to the earth from which it came. Although they will eventually die, their ending is not narrated in the Lay alongside the disintegration of the material objects in the hoard. After the deaths of the humans who used them, the hawk and the horse can continue to exist outside the human structures in the poem. Their status becomes a helpful model for interpreting the dragon's role in the poem.³⁰

The description of the dragon's occupation of the hoard highlights a similar proximity between humans and the natural world. This proximity is brought into being by the objects that link humans and the natural world. The semantic range of *findan* (used at 2270 in the third-person preterite *fond*) includes overtones not only of our modern English usage "to find" but also to invent, imagine, devise, contrive, order, dispose, arrange, or determine. This range of meanings suggests that

²⁸ See, for example, *The Wanderer. Exeter Book: Anglo Saxon Poetic Records Vol. III*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

²⁹ See Book 10 of the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in which one of King Edwin's advisors relates the famed "Sparrow Story": he asks Edwin to imagine that he is sitting in the hall with his men, and "a sparrow comes and quickly flights through the hall, coming in through one door, and going out through another. He in that time he is within is not in the hail of the winter's storm, but that is the sparkling of an eye and that least amount of time, and he soon out of winter into winter again comes. So too is this life of man like that time, and what goes before or follows after, we know not" (cume an spearwa and hrædlice þæt hus þurhfleo, cume þurh oþre duru in, þurh oþre ut gewite. Hwat he on þa tid, þe he inne bið, ne bið hrinen mid þy storme þæs wintres; ac þæt bið an eagan bryhtm and þæt læsste fæc, ac he sona of wintra on þone winter eft cymed. Swa þonne þis monna lif to medmiclum fæce ætweð; hwæt þær foregange, oððe hwæt þær æfterfylige, we ne cunnun, 136-7). *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Thomas Miller (London: Early English Text Society, 1890).

³⁰ See Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Neville examines the portrayal of what she calls "the natural world" in Old English poetry as "one of the Old English poets' traditional techniques for defining human issues" (21). Her argument about the natural world in *Beowulf* – that is, that the "monstrous" is not necessarily distinct from or used in opposition to the "natural" as such, provides an important first step in redefining the category of "what is natural" as opposed to what is not.

there is some kind of volition present on the part of the dragon, an active searching that leads the dragon to find the hoard.³¹ The hoard, on the other hand, takes on the passive characteristics we might expect from an inanimate object. The dragon finds the hoard at a point where it still remains open (*opene standan*, 2271). The verse that narrates the dragon's relationship to the hoard is reminiscent of gnomic or wisdom verse in Old English poetry:

He gesecean sceall
 (hea)r(h on) hrusan, þær he hæðen gold
 warað wintrum frod; ne byð him wihte ðy sel.

(He shall seek out the heathen-temple in the ground, where he the heathen gold guards for many winters. It is for him not a whit the better, 2275-7.)

A similarly structured instance of gnomic verse in *Maxims II* makes an analogous claim: “Draca sceal on hlæwe, frod, frætsum wlañc” (The dragon shall be in funeral mound, wise, proud of his treasures, 26b-27a). These lines suggest that the dragon belongs in his hoard. The gnomic character of this verse and its counterpart in *Beowulf* are further illuminated by reference to its context in

Maxims II:

Sweord sceal on bearme,
 drihtlic isern. Draca sceal on hlæwe,
 frod, frætsum wlañc. Fisc sceal on wætere
 cynren cennan. Cyning sceal on healle
 beagas dælan.

(The sword ought to be in the lap, the lordly iron. The dragon ought to be in the barrow, old and proud of its treasures. A fish ought to bring forth his progeny in the water. The king ought to be giving out rings in the hall, 25b-29a)

The dragon's place and function seem completely natural (as natural, perhaps, as a fish in water) and even obligatory. *Sculan* has a variety of meanings, including senses of debt, obligation or adherence

³¹ See T. Northcote Toller and Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) 287.

to law or custom—it often conveys the same force as “shall” or “ought” in modern English usage.³² The dragon belongs to the barrow and the category of creatures that dwell therein. It “belongs in the barrow, old and proud of its treasures” (sceal on hlæwe, / frod, frætwum wlanc, 26-7). It holds this position as rightfully as a king gives out rings in the hall—a benchmark of Anglo-Saxon society.³³ Regardless of what other attributes the dragon might have, the narrator assumes that its natural place is in the hoard.³⁴

The final line describing the dragon, “it is for him not a whit the better for it” (ne byð him wihte ðy sel, 2277), suggests that the dragon does not gain from his possession of the treasure. This assertion seems at odds with the various dicta of wisdom just discussed, which suggest that the dragon’s proper place is with the hoard.³⁵ This judgment applies a human value to an evaluation of the dragon’s behavior and allows us to infer that there may be a disparity between the dragon as a dragon and the use of the dragon in exemplifying human wisdom. The standard by which the dragon does not profit is a human one; however, a comparison with the “bookworm riddle” of the

³² Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 843-844.

³³ John M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1995), 135-7. In his analysis of the “Psychological World” in *Beowulf*, Hill argues that in describing the dragon the poet “modulates his names for the dragon, deepening their horrible character as the fight [between Beowulf and the dragon] progresses.”

³⁴ For more on this reading of the dragon and his hoard, specifically as it relates to *Maxims I* and *II*, see Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf*; also John D. Niles, “Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*.”

³⁵ See Howell D. Chickering, *Beowulf: A Dual Language Edition* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006) 184, l. 2277. For dissenting views, cf. Edward B. Irving, Jr., *Rereading Beowulf* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) and David Clark, “Relaunching the Hero: the Case of Scyld and Beowulf Reopened,” *Neophilologus* 90 (2006): 621-642. Irving argues that understanding the dragon – asking “why” it does anything – is futile: “He presides over a world we would have to think is infinitely remote from and alien to any world we know, but it is only a few feet or a few seconds away, interlaced with us intimately...the words *hordweard* (2293), *hordweard* (2302)...and *beorges byrde* (2304) massed in close succession stress that what the dragon is doing is the same as what he is being: a guard” (Irving, 101). Clark, on the other hand, argues that the reading of the hoard and the dragon are both complicated by the critique of heroic culture and the ideology of treasure outlined in the poem. See also Paul Beekman Taylor “The Dragon’s treasure in *Beowulf*,” *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 45.3 (1997): 229-240.

Exeter book begins to clarify the nature of this assertion by enforcing the connection between the wisdom such gnomic statements articulate and the expected nature of the relationships they describe.

The “bookworm riddle,” number 47 in the Krapp and Dobbie edition of the Exeter Book, is a first person riddle that describes the work of a bookworm or book moth. This moth notably does not profit from the words it consumes.³⁶ The riddle works in part by describing a moth devouring the material of a parchment page in a codex, which is described succinctly in the line: “a moth ate words” (*moððe word frat*, 1). The section of the riddle most important to my understanding of the dragon is the final lines, which read: “The thievish guest was not a whit the wiser because he swallowed those words” (*Stælgíest ne wæs / wihte þy gleawre þe he þam wordum swealg*, 5b-6). The Old English riddle suggests that, like the dragon in *Beowulf*, the moth takes something that belongs to men—words—and is not made better by it. The moth, that is, does not learn from the knowledge it consumes. The earlier lines of the riddle, which introduce the strange occurrence of a moth eating words, suggest that this phenomenon and its effects are not necessarily something to lament: “to me that seemed a wondrous fate” (*me þæt þuhte wrætlicu wyrd*, 1b-2a). *Wrætlic*, as defined in Bosworth Toller, can mean “wondrous,” or “curious”—but also carries connotations of a state of being, including one of “wondrous excellence” or being “beautiful, noble, excellent, elegant.”³⁷ Most importantly, the fact that the moth does not gain from its action does not imply that this action is unequivocally negative or evil. Rather, the moth’s meal is part of *nyrd*, or fate—it is merely “what happens.”³⁸

³⁶ *The Exeter Book: Anglo Saxon Poetic Records Vol III* ed. Krapp and Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

³⁷ See Bosworth Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 1270.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1287-1288.

The similarity of a moth who is not made wiser by the words it eats to a dragon who is not made richer by the treasure it guards further suggests that we can understand the dragon's role as the hoard's guardian in terms of its nature and its possible neutrality.³⁹ The dragon is not made better by his possession of the treasure, but the poem does not explicitly suggest that this is an improper behavior for dragons. The voice that comments upon the dragon's lack of activity comes from a speaker who expects treasures and rings to be given out in a hall. In short, it is a product of the human expectation of what treasure is and how it should be circulated within a human community. Such a reading is not without its precursors. Patricia Dailey notes that the dragon raises a crucial question with regard to human subjectivity and the proper domain of the human in the poem: "Treasure is guarded by both men and monsters, raising the question, for whom is it proper to guard, to live in peace, to defend and protect kin and belongings? Is it truly a mark of what is proper to man?"⁴⁰ These questions are central to understanding the narrative relationship between the dragon and the hoard, as well as its impact in the narrative present of the poem, in Beowulf's time as King of the Geats.

The dragon's connection to the hoard draws attention to the ways in which an object has different meanings based on who (or what) actor is associated with it. A hoard can mean different things when used, referred to, or affected by different actors—humans, monsters, animals, or even other objects. As a result, the hoard's meaning transforms several times in this section of the poem.

³⁹ See McGalliard, "The Poet's Comment in *Beowulf*" *Studies in Philology* 75.4 (Summer 1978): 243-270.

⁴⁰ Patricia Dailey, "Questions of Dwelling in Anglo-Saxon Poetry and Medieval Mysticism: Inhabiting Landscape, Body, and Mind," *New Medieval Literatures* (2006), 205. Dailey goes on to suggest that the idea of the "in-subjective, an insignificance within the subject that partakes in its life and in its death," is one way to read the seeming lack of a subject in Old English poetry. For Dailey, the "subject in and of poetry is not represented by 'I' but by a nonsubjective element, both within and without the subject." Dailey's argument—that "the insubjective space [...] is the exposure of the inhuman in the human [...] what in the wall is relentlessly exposed to wyrd, or what in a word, exposes a relation to death"—bears some similarity to a theory of collectivity in *Beowulf*. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a reading of the dragon as an entity that dwells in its own barrow-like hall with his hoard, protects its treasure, seeks retribution for loss.

In the Last Survivor's lament, the hoard is the remains of a people who have been destroyed. When the dragon guards it, the hoard becomes a forbidden stockpile of treasure. Finally, when a thief seeking treasure invades the hoard, it becomes the source of the dragon's fury and a symbol of human destruction. The Lay of the Last Survivor exemplifies a human-centered interpretation of events. The speaker of the Lay identifies the devastation that surrounds him as a collapse of community, and does not recognize the ways in which that community is already part of a collectivity. When the thief takes the cup from the hoard, however, collectivity—present only implicitly in the Lay—comes to the fore.

The dragon's connection to the hoard arises in a time that is beyond human understanding, a three hundred year (*þreo hund wintra*, 2278b) span. Daniel Calder argues that this expanse is crucial to the dragon's seeming universality, suggesting that the dragon “does not seem to exist within the limits of human time.”⁴¹ The thief's intrusion into the hoard, and the dragon's subsequent rage, belies this assertion. Human community, as mourned in the Lay, is bound up in the larger frame of collectivity regardless of human ability to understand its presence. When he steals the cup from the hoard, the thief is described as alone (*an*, 2280b). Widely considered to be part of the ring structure of the poem,⁴² the phrase that introduces the thief's action—“until a lone [man] angered it” (*oð ðæt hyne an abealch*, 2280b)—is similar to those used in introducing both Grendel (“until a certain one began to perform evil, a fiend from hell” [*oð ðæt an ongan / fyrene fremman, feond on helle*, 100-1]) and the dragon (“until a certain one, a dragon, began to rule in the dark of the night” [*oð ðæt an*

⁴¹ Daniel G. Calder, “Setting and Ethos: The Pattern of Measure and Limit in *Beowulf*,” *Studies in Philology* 69.1 (January 1972): 21-37.

⁴² See also John D. Niles, “Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*.”

ongan, / deorcum nihtum draca ricsian, 2210-11]).⁴³ Orchard argues that in the case of both the dragon and Grendel, a “singular creature, already present close at hand, turns against” the humans in the poem, and these similarly disastrous situations are presented “in precisely parallel terms.”⁴⁴ Because the thief is also described as alone, the temptation is to see this man as we see Grendel and the dragon. He seems to be singular and unassociated with any group. The thief’s action when he takes the cup from the dragon’s hoard underscores a crucial distinction that must be made in order to understand the narrative function of these episodes within the poem. This distinction is between community and collectivity. The thief’s action in stealing the cup creates a connection between humans and the dragon, and this connection highlights the conflict between community—defined as connections only between humans—and collectivity, which encompasses the connections both between humans and between humans, objects, and monsters.

The action the thief takes in bringing the cup to Beowulf is motivated by a desire for re-entry into human community of the kind that Raymond Williams defines as “the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships.”⁴⁵ In this sense, community is a positive term that describes the

⁴³ The word *an*, meaning alone or one, has an interesting use in relation to humans in *Beowulf*. The uses of the word that refer to humans often designate actors within the poem who are profoundly “alone.” Included among these are Beowulf, who fights Grendel, alone (*ana*, ll. 420, 431); Sigemund, who seeks out a dragon alone (*ana*, l. 888); the Last Survivor, who is both alone (*an*, 2237) and alone after all [the others had died] (“*ana æfter eallum*,” 2268); Hreðel, who is similarly “*ana æfter eallum*” (2461) though after the death of one son at the hands of another; and Wiglaf, who “alone felt shame in his mind” (*anrum weoll sefa*, 2599) and so goes to help fight the dragon with Beowulf, even after the other warriors on the scene have fled. My preliminary analysis indicates that in many, although not all, uses of the word *an* in *Beowulf*, the actor described as *an* models a conflict between community and collectivity. Grendel enters the hall and destroys the peace of the Danes under Hroðgar, and the thief takes a cup from the dragon, which causes not only the disruption of the dragon’s peace, but also brings his wrath upon the Geatish people. See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 64, and his exposition of the singularity of the creatures introduced with this phrase.

⁴⁴ Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 64.

⁴⁵ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 76.

connections between human beings in society. It relies on largely invisible social forces to hold the association in question together. For Williams, the word community “seems never to be used unfavorably,” a feature which distinguishes it from other “terms of social organization.”⁴⁶

Williams’ definition of community is one way to understand the thief’s action. The thief steals the cup from the dragon in order to bring it to his lord (*mandryhtne bær*, 2281). The thief’s action is clearly purposeful. He uses the cup in order to be granted a favor (*bene getiðiad*, 2284). The favor is likely a form of pardon from exile, based on the following clarification that Beowulf granted a favor “for the destitute (or wretched) man” (*feasceatum men*, 2285). The cup is used as a price for entrance into the human community of Beowulf and the Geats; however, the cup bears other associations with it, including one with the hoard, and the dragon that guards it.

The narrative juxtaposition of the thief’s action with the dragon’s rage and the Lay highlights the insufficiency of a purely human vision of association. The disparate events and times by which the hoard, the dragon, the thief, and the Geats are linked bring to light the larger network of associations which includes humans and human communities but is not limited to them.⁴⁷ By suggesting that a broad range of entities—including human, non-human, technical, and textual ones—comprise the social world, the concept of collectivity complicates the narrative of society in *Beowulf*. The poem highlights the human struggle to create community through political alliances, the telling of stories, and the giving of treasure. Closer examination of these actions reveals that these

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive study of collectivity and its relationship to human ideas of community, see the following: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michel Callon, “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay,” in *Power, Action, and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, ed. John Law (New York: Routledge, 1986); John Law, “Notes on the Theory of Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity,” *Systems Practice* 5 (1992): 379-93.

treasures and alliances are part of a larger network that is not primarily or even predominantly based on human associations.

Taking this view broadens our notion of agency by demonstrating how dragons and treasure can affect humans as much—or more—than other humans can. The relative diversity of actors in this network highlights another key distinction between the two configurations: collectivity, unlike community, can help solidify or perpetuate human groups but does not have to function in consonance with human desire. In *Beowulf*, the same object that links communities in one context can later operate in another context in which that community falls apart. The result is the foreboding sense of the future which lingers in the poem, especially in the statements made by its characters. The future invoked through the grouping of a collectivity is always already threatening the dispersal of human groups, precisely because it does not create a stable ground for human identity. Like the “we” that frames the opening of the poem, these identities are contingent on the situation in which they are found and the actors with whom they become associated. The instability of these identities in *Beowulf* becomes a concern at the moment when humans are connected to a larger history to which they have no access, as in the Lay.

In the Lay, treasure constitutes a crucial point of connection between humans and nature, the earth and natural creatures, and is a connection that persists across time. The collectivity, which includes the thief, the stolen treasure, and the dragon that guards it, endures beyond the community that the thief desires and the dragon destroys. *Beowulf* juxtaposes the multiple contexts associated with the treasure and thereby emphasizes the limits of the community into which the thief wishes to return. Elsewhere in the poem, the giving and receiving of treasures form connections between different humans. For example, Wealtheow gives Beowulf the neck ring in return for his slaying of

Grendel, and Beowulf gives gifts in the hall and is thus considered a good king.⁴⁸ The thief's use of the cup, on the other hand, brings the wrath of the dragon back into the hall. He takes the cup for his own reasons. In so doing, he acts in ignorance of (or even disregard for) the larger history of the hoard and the network that includes the dragon. The thief does not bear just the cup to his lord in hope of rejoining a human community; rather, through the cup, he (unintentionally) creates a link between his people, the hoard, and the dragon. The dragon, bereft of a single part of its treasure, turns its anger outward toward the humans connected to the thief who caused the loss. In short, while the dragon appears as a threat from outside of the human world, it is intimately connected to its constitution. It is not merely present close at hand but already implicated in the human world through the various uses to which treasure is put.

Beowulf's understanding of his encounter with the dragon, voiced after the theft of the cup, highlights the ways in which the limited human perception of time leads to an emphasis on community rather than collectivity:

Gewat þa twelfa sum torne gebolgen
 dryhten Geata dracan sceawian
 hæfde þa gefrunen hwanan sio fæhð aras,
 bealonið biorna; him to bearme cwom
 ma(ð)þumfæt mære þurh ðæs meldan hond.
 Se wæs on ðam ðreate þreotteoða secg,
 se ðæs orleges or onstealde,
 hæft hygegiomro, sceolde hean ðonon
 wong wisian. He ofer willan giong
 to ðæs ðe he eorðsele anne wisse,
 hlæw under hrusan holmwylme neh.

(Then, one of twelve, angered in his heart, the lord of the Geats sought out the dragon. He had then learned by asking how the feud began, the evil fires of men; to

⁴⁸ See *Beowulf* lines 1190-1230. In this section, Wealtheow uses the neck ring as a bargaining tool to try to convince Beowulf to be kind to her sons, who are young and not yet grown. See also Patricia Dailey, "Questions of Dwelling." Dailey posits the idea of a gift of "living inheritance"—the interest here is, in part, that the work of the neck ring is established in the poem's present, but is also affected by both past and future uses to which it has been or will be put.

him in his lap came the great treasure cup, through the hand of an informer. He was of the group the thirteenth warrior, who brought about the beginning of the strife, a sad minded captive, who then, abject, had to show the way to the shore. Against his will he went to the earthen hall that he alone knew of, the barrow under the earth near the sea's waves, 2401-11.)

Beowulf learns that the dragon's actions are a direct consequence of the actions of the thief. The great treasure, originally meant as a gift to secure re-entry into community, is offered by an informer who may even be the very person who took the cup from the hoard in the first place.⁴⁹ The informer does not give the cup to Beowulf as a symbol of remorse or a request for a favor, but as an answer to Beowulf's question "how did this rampage of the dragon begin?" The treasure has a history, so when the thief tries to use it to re-enter a human community, he bears with the cup its long association with the dragon and the hoard. The very meaning of the cup changes through this dual association with both men and monsters. The change is signaled in the poem's narration of events as well as in Beowulf's reaction to the man and his gift. At first, the cup signals inclusion and the possibility of re-entering community. The association with the dragon, however, changes the informer's gesture of intended peace-making into a provocation to revenge.

The Lay of the Last Survivor emphasizes the interconnections between humans, dragons, treasure, and in so doing, it highlights the insufficiency of a purely human vision of the significance of treasure. The collectivity that connects the dragon, human communities, and treasure emphasizes the longer sense of history present in the poem, a history that exceeds or precedes human

⁴⁹ Although the identity of the "informer" is somewhat disputed, two main possibilities dominate the criticism. First, that the person in question is the lord of the thief. The second is that *meldon* refers to the thief himself, who gives the cup to Beowulf and thus implicates him in the chain of events that both precedes and follows the presentation of the cup. For the first interpretation, see Earl W. Anderson, "Treasure Trove in *Beowulf*," *Mediaevalia* 3 (1977): 141-164. For the second see Frederick Biggs, "*Beowulf* and some fictions of Geatish succession," *Anglo-Saxon England* (2003): 55-77; also Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague: de Gruyter Mouton, 1972).

understanding of its depth.⁵⁰ By pushing the reader or listener to acknowledge this longer sense of history, and the beings—such as the dragon—that inhabit it, the poem concomitantly encourages the reader to enact the narrative distance that such historical longevity implies. This kind of longevity alludes to the existence of deep time within the poem. Deep time is the modern measure of geological change and refers to period of time “too long to be readily comprehensible to minds used to thinking in terms of days, weeks, years—decades at most.”⁵¹ This deep time is on a scale not immediately perceptible to humans, modern or medieval, and in *Beowulf*, its existence is presented by the beings that inhabit it: by dragons, by gold in the ground, and by the Earth itself. Such a longer view necessitates the readerly understanding that humans are not the central figure in the *longue durée*.⁵² The digressions can therefore be accounted for as a different kind of narrative time, and the connections laid out within them are best understood as connections that arise in deep time. In the Lay of the Last Survivor, the deep time of *Beowulf* reveals a history of the hoard that is not limited to

⁵⁰ On this point, see John Niles, “The Dimension of Time” in *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Roberta Frank, “The Beowulf Poet’s Sense of History,” Hanning, “Beowulf as Heroic History,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 5 (1974): 77-102. In his book, Niles argues that *Beowulf*’s lack of geographical specificity, is “balanced by an intricate, interlocking set of temporal relationships that lose nothing in depth for being left somewhat imprecise” (ibid., 180). Niles lists the kinds of time described in the poem and in which its events are set: “Mythic time (Creation, Cain and Abel, Flood); Legendary past (“timeless heroes, such as Sigemund, Weland), Historical past: Narrative past (Hrethel, Ongentheow, and so on), narrative present (Beowulf’s adventures), narrative future (fate of the Geats, and so on); Present of the poem’s performance (real or imagined); Present of reading the text; Mythic future (Doomsday)” (ibid, 181). He proceeds to analyze mythic time, legendary past, historical past, and mythic future, but notably excludes from his consideration the reading and performance of the poem.

⁵¹ Henry Gee, *In Search of Deep Time* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 2-3. Gee here paraphrases John McPhee’s description of deep time in *Basin and Range* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982). In the geology community, McPhee is largely credited with inventing the term “Deep Time.” For uses of the term “deep time” in literary analysis, see Wai Chi Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). For deep time as it relates to human prehistory and human history’s difficulty in accounting for the very distant past in the post-sacred history period, see Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

⁵² For the concept of the *longue durée* as it applies to historical inquiry, see Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).

human use; rather, humans are simply part of the collectivity that includes the dragon and his keeping of the hoard, as well as the earth and its role in keeping the objects in their elemental state.

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

The Lay of the Last Survivor refers to time in a geological sense and distinguishes between the time of humans and the time of dragons by demonstrating the relationship of both to treasure. In contrast, the creation story sung by the scop at Heorot at the outset of *Beowulf* represents a mythic time characterized by a Judeo-Christian narrative of origins. In a traditional sense, the scop's song relates Genesis' version of the creation of the world.⁵³ Importantly, the section of *Beowulf* following the creation song goes beyond the simple narrative told by the scop to include stories from the later part of Genesis as well, including the origins of monsters in the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. This section of my chapter will account for the longer frame of reference that monsters, in their proximity to and conflict with human communities, come to signify.⁵⁴ The key moment in this part of the text stems from Grendel's nearness to Heorot itself. His continued presence near Heorot places him within hearing distance of both parts of the Creation story. Through a series of narrative juxtapositions, *Beowulf* encourages its reader to understand the story of Genesis not exclusively from the point of view of men, but from the point of view of the monsters they expel.⁵⁵ As Grendel hears

⁵³ The note in Klaeber's *Beowulf* gives the general consensus on this allusion, declaring it "obviously based on Gen.1"(121, n. ll 90-8).

⁵⁴ See Niles, *Beowulf*, 183: "The Grendel episode is not only accompanied by miracles that recall the Creation, but from the first, it recalls God's destructive power as well. It is presented in terms that identify it as a latter-day resurfacing of a feud that began with Cain's killing of Abel and resumed with the giant's war against God. One therefore knows that Grendel is born to lose, as surely as God sits in heaven, and one knows that whatever violence the hero uses against the Grendel creatures is justified as an act of God's will."

⁵⁵ My argument here follows Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe in "*Beowulf*" Lines 702b-836: Transformations and the Limits of the Human" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 23: 4 (Winter 1981): 484-494. She writes, "Grendel is at his most terrifying not in the marches but in the place of men. When he opens the door of the hall, our horror is a horror of recognition. It is the grotesque parody of the human in Grendel which repels us and draws us forward. In the hall the formulas no longer work when the other-than-human invades the circle of light, and the hero who would counter such a foe must likewise move beyond the formulas" (*ibid.*, 494).

the creation song, its meaning changes from a story of Christian origins to a story of unending enmity between men and monsters. Rather than stabilizing the human community that hears it, the creation song leads to the community's destruction as a result of Grendel's presence at its recital.

While the creation song relates a very specific shared narrative, it also generates narrative ambiguities that result from relationships between men and monsters in a larger temporal scale. The song explains the proper position of humans in the world as part of God's creation, proclaiming that

se ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te)
 wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bugeð
 gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan
 leoman to leohte landbuendum...

(the Almighty made the earth, the brightly-beautiful plain which the waters surround;
 he set victory-creative the sun and the moon, lights to make light for the land-
 dwellers, 92-95.)

As a specifically scriptural reference, the creation song can serve as an indication of the Christian character of Hrothgar's court. Paul Cavill argues that the poem expresses the view of the writer in this section, who allows "the Danish *scop* [to] sing of the creation as the writer really believed it had happened."⁵⁶ A more nuanced reading of the creation song argues that the section performs a glossing function, which serves to highlight the difference in knowledge between the non-Christian characters within the poem and poem's audience outside it. Marijane Osborn, for example, argues that the truths the creation song conveys are not truths that must apply to the poem's characters;⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Paul Cavill, "Christianity and Theology in *Beowulf*," in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Cavill (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004) 25. Cavill claims that the citation and reference to an explicitly Christian story of creation creates a link between writer and audience through shared faith, citing St. Paul's assertion that even those who did not know of a Christian god could still see his effects in the world (and praise them).

⁵⁷ Marijane Osborn, "Scriptural History and Strife in *Beowulf*," *PMLA* Vol. 9 No. 5 (Oct 1978): 974. Osborn remarks that "the explicitly scriptural element is carefully kept separate from the perception of persons in the poem and is presented solely as a gloss for the audience," implying that the function of the song is an extra-poetical one.

rather, the recitation of the song creates a kind of temporal heterogeneity. The poem is meant for a Christian audience, but the characters within it are not meant to be subject to judgment because they are non-Christian.⁵⁸

The difficulty in interpreting the creation song stems in part from its juxtaposition with Grendel's attack on Heorot. Most critical interpretations of the text suggest that the conjunction of song and attack makes the distinction between humans and the Grendelkin firmer, going so far as to situate their mutual enmity in Biblical history.⁵⁹ The event can be read typologically: the hall at Heorot becomes a kind of church, and the attack is similar to the attack of Cain on Abel (also held to be a type for the attack on the church by unholy forces).⁶⁰ These readings make a distinction between Cain's kin, which includes the Grendelkin, and the humans toward whom they bear unending enmity. The narrative juxtaposition of the song of creation and Grendel's attack reaches beyond a reflexive mirroring of the Genesis story, however. It highlights Grendel's problematic proximity to the poem's human protagonists.⁶¹ The disjunctive association of the two is amplified by

⁵⁸ In short, the inclusion of the Creation Song highlights a temporal difference between the poem and its audience and demonstrates its consequences. This reading of the Christian versus the non-Christian elements of the poem makes the strife in *Beowulf* more easily characterized as a conflict between the heroic ideology of the past and the Christian ideology that has supplanted it in a world for which the heroic ethos of individual accomplishment and bravery are no longer entirely sufficient. For more on the supercession of the heroic ethos by a Christian worldview, see Stacy Klein's account of Hildeburh in *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ See Niles, *ibid.*; John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Medieval Studies, 1968); Also see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 10: "The giant builds the home...but the giant destroys the home too." Cohen's observation draws on his explication of the giant as the originary fantasy of cultures, one that must be destroyed and repulsed in order for "society" to find legitimacy. The example of this most often cited, of course, is in the *Brut*, which recounts the foundation of England after the destruction of the giants who first inhabited Albion.

⁶⁰ Helder, William, "The Song of Creation in *Beowulf* and the Interpretation of Heorot," *English Studies in Canada* 13 (1987): 243-255.

⁶¹ For a succinct definition of alterity in terms of modern psychoanalysis, see Amy Hollywood, "Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and her Hagiographer" in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed.

the story of Cain's kin, which directly follows the creation song. The resulting association links men and monsters in order to highlight deep time and the workings of collectivity. Neither men nor monsters are given sole narrative priority in this account.

These two creation narratives—that of men and that of monsters—highlight the importance of a deep time that intrudes into its narrative present.⁶² Whereas the scop's creation song introduces the typical catalog of creation nearly as it appears in Genesis, the counter-creation tells the story of Cain and his exile from humanity. The eternal lord (*Ece drihten*, 108) “avenged the murder...of he who slew Abel” (cwealm gewræc...þæs þe he Abel slog, 107-8). Because Cain kills his favored brother, he is subsequently marked out as a both murderer and fratricide.⁶³ Medieval authors considered this “mark of Cain” to be the origin of monsters, and thus to solidify the difference between the two.⁶⁴ The poem seems to confirm this view, remarking that after the crime and the subsequent exile imposed by the *Scyppende* all kinds of monsters arise:

Ðanon untydras ealle onwocon,
eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas
swylce gi(ga)ntas, þa wið Gode wunnon
lange þrage...

(From that one all kinds of monsters were born, ents and elves and orcs, and also giants, who would long struggle against God, 111-114.)

Catherine Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 78-98. Hollywood describes the mirror stage and the alterity of the subject: “Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage enables him to show that we always come to know ourselves as split and other than ourselves, for we always come to know ourselves through another. Because of this split in subjectivity and because of the subject’s dependence on another, the subject is constituted and its existence threatened in the same moment” (ibid., 93).

⁶² Niles, *Beowulf*, 183. “The mythic past is thus important for its potential ‘presentness’ as well” (ibid.).

⁶³ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 95; Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

⁶⁴ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants*; Asa Simon Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England*.

Grendel is one of these ents, elves, and orcs, although his species of monster is not so easily classified. Appropriately, Grendel dwells at the margins of human society in the moorlands that lie outside of Heorot.⁶⁵ In one sense, there is outright opposition between the world within the hall and the world that Grendel inhabits; as Jennifer Neville argues, the world outside the hall is the place of monsters, darkness, and chaos.⁶⁶ At this juncture, however, we must consider again the point of view on which such qualifications rest. On a purely textual level, the poem posits two groups that stand in outright opposition to one another: men and monsters. Yet even as it juxtaposes the two, the poem also models both the link between monsters and men and the temporal point of view necessary to ascertain it. From the human point of view of community, Grendel represents the chaos that comes from outside the hall to disrupt the life within it, but his connection to the human community he attacks predates the specific situation of Heorot. It is inscribed textually in the story of Cain and the monsters that proceed from him.

The juxtaposition of the creation song with the creation of monsters emphasizes a longer view of history that is not confined to the time of humans and their halls. Grendel's proximity to the hall stems from a view that exceeds the knowledge of the characters in the poem. It encourages the reader to acknowledge not only the close relationship of monsters and men but also the possible iniquities that can come from it. The poem creates this possibility through an ambiguity in the point of view from which the audience "hears" the creation sequence. It is unclear whether the reader "hears" the story with the warriors inside the hall or with Grendel outside of it. The scop's narrative begins at line 90b, with "he said, he who knew" (*sægde, se þe cuðe*). The conjunction of this

⁶⁵ The poem describes him as "he who held the moors, the fens and the swamps; the un-happy man held for a time the yards of monsters" (*se þe moras heold / fen ond fæsten; fifel-cynnes eard / won-sæli wer weardode hwile*, 103b-105).

⁶⁶ See Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*.

phrasing with one that appears ten lines earlier, “he who in darkness dwelled” (se þe in þystrum bad, 80), reveals the possibility that the reader or listener can “hear” the creation song as Grendel does—that is, from the point of view of “he who in darkness dwelled,” and “each of days heard joy, noise in the hall (“dogora gehwam dream gehyrde / hludne in healle,” 88-9).⁶⁷ The earlier line—“he who in darkness dwelled”—conditions the reception of the creation song, in part because the song in question is repeatable. Grendel hears the noise more than once, possibly quite often. The designation “each of days” can thus comprise a dual set of references. First, it refers to the lapse between the first time the noise of the hall was overheard by Grendel and the present in which it provokes his attack. Second, it references the aforementioned iterative nature of the noise in the hall.⁶⁸ Rather than representing an isolated incident, this part of the poem describes a recurring event that builds to the attack on Heorot. The sweet singing and harp-noise (lines 89-90) are framed by the agony that the music causes for Grendel.⁶⁹

By putting the attack on Heorot within the context of Grendel hearing and being provoked by the hall joys of the men therein, the poem pushes its reader to consider the monster’s relationship to its human prey, but moreso, it asks the reader to question the nature of time as a component of that relationship. Grendel’s presence outside the hall changes the reception of the creation song in part because the narrative has a longer history that includes monsters like him. Grendel hears and responds to the human song that excludes him because of the enmity the Danes do not formally

⁶⁷ See Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, “Transformations and the Limits of the Human,” 492. Grendel takes on increasing reality, and thus increasing threat, as he approaches the hall.

⁶⁸ See on this point J.M Hill, “The Social and Dramatic Functions of Oral Recitation and Composition in *Beowulf*,” 310. Hill describes the iterative nature of these hall-songs as “the kind of song here apparently sung daily.”

⁶⁹ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants*. See also Asa Simon Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2002) on identity formation based on monsters and the monstrous.

remember in the scop's song. Grendel's extended presence outside the hall highlights a gap in the knowledge of human communities, a gap through which the monster can make a riotous and disastrous reassertion of its connection to them. The question that remains concerns the consequences of that longer temporality in the poem's present. When Grendel hears and responds violently to the hall joys and song, the past enmity between monsters and men becomes a present concern of the men he attacks.

Through the narrative juxtaposition of creation and creation counter-narrative, the poem shifts the emphasis from the single narrative of creation and destruction to the larger pattern in which the singular act occurs. On first reading the community-forming function of the creation song is clear. By narrating a shared history, the scop reiterates what all members of the community share and therefore what binds them together. These connections are the same ones that doom all attempts to construct meaning in a frame of reference larger than the purely human.⁷⁰

By representing the creation and destruction of Heorot in close proximity, the poem undermines the human attempt to create stable meaning—in this case, in the guise of a building—despite the longer expanse of time that renders such attempts meaningless. Heorot is high and horn-gabled (“heah ond horn-geap,” 82) and the best of halls (*beal-arna mast*, 78). Because Hroðgar gives out rings there (*beagas dælde*, 80), generating and strengthening the bonds that solidify community, it seems as though Heorot has an auspicious beginning. Yet the poem barely completes its description of the hall's construction before it describes its destruction: “war-tides awaited, loathsome flames” (*heaðo-wylma bad / laðan liges*, 82-3). At the moment it is built, Heorot awaits a fiery end. The destruction of the hall is revealed to be the product of an intra-familial feud (“that sword-hate of

⁷⁰ See J.M Hill, “The Social and Dramatic Functions of Oral Recitation and Composition in *Beowulf*,” *Oral Tradition* 17.2 (2002) 310-324. Hill argues that “we are always in complex, emotionally fraught circumstances – no more so than in the very first mention of hall-songs, of repeated joy that aurally and mentally pains a creature of darkness,” (ibid., 310).

sworn oaths,” se ecg-hete apum-swerian, 84), echoing Grendel’s intrusion into the hall from which he and his kin have been exiled. Oath-swearing (*ap-smaring*) and sword-hate (*ecg-hete*) imply the failure of community that will eventually destroy the possibility of a lasting fortress.⁷¹ Moreover, such a failure raises the question of whether words and sworn oaths can ever be severed from sword-hate and the destruction that an attempted peace-weaving marriage provokes.⁷² Although Beowulf is sent to save Heorot and its denizens from destruction by Grendel, the hall will be destroyed. Even if Grendel is “born to lose” in his encounter with Beowulf, the Danes at Heorot are not born to “win” in that they are not necessarily destined to survive in the larger sense, the perspective that constitutes history.⁷³

Heorot’s fiery fate serves to amplify the effects of the creation song and the creation counter-narrative. It also highlights the way collectivity underlies and in this case undermines human communities. The certainty that Heorot will not survive in the long term calls into question the efficacy of Beowulf’s fight against Grendel in the short term. Beowulf arrives in Heorot to save the hall from an outside intruder, but the hall’s destruction will ultimately come from within it—in the intra-familial feud that consigns it to flames. This kind of cyclical violence that permeates the world of *Beowulf* is found as easily inside the hall as outside of it, but the key point in the juxtaposition of Grendel and the destruction of Heorot lies in the human perception that such cycles can be

⁷¹ See Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*. Neville argues for the creation of Heorot as a parallel to the creation of the world by God: “the positive, constructive act involves the establishment of an enclosure within which light, order, value and safety prevail, and without which darkness, chaos and danger rage” (ibid., 57). Neville concludes from this that “in both cases the opposing forces define the constructions designed to withstand them” (ibid.).

⁷² The conjunction of oaths and sword-hate implies feud, which is often the result of a failed kinship alliance in the poem, as the digression concerning Finnsburh lays out. Irving, in *Reading Beowulf*, uses this moment to demonstrate the duality demonstrated by the poem in its “pattern of oppositions.” Orchard, in his *Critical Companion* uses this section to compare with the exposition of the scene by Beowulf in his forecast for the marriage of Freawaru (62).

⁷³ Niles, *Beowulf*, 183.

interrupted. Set opposite the ambiguities of the two creation songs, the certainty of destruction calls the utility of fighting the Grendelkin into question because the effect of both monsters outside the hall and humans inside it is similar. The hall will not survive. Destruction—Grendel—was already part of creation long before human voices sang of it. His presence alludes to a longer history or “deep time” that accounts for his connection to Hroðgar and his men. This connection promises the failure of community before it can ever form and marks the futility of human attempts to interpret their world in any lasting way.

I D E S G N O R N O D E

If the creation song and the Lay of the Last Survivor highlight the relevance of deep time to human communities that do not take such long durations into account, they also highlight the non-human frames of reference that such a scale brings into perspective. Through its allusion to history and pre-history, *Beowulf* forces the reader to see the irony of connections that the characters in their narrative present cannot see and implicitly suggests that the centrality of humans to the world in which humans live is fictive, the product of a purely human viewpoint. Collectivity, however, exists in the poem’s narrative present as well as the *longue durée* of its past. The dragon is associated with Beowulf through treasure. Grendel is connected to the hall by the noisy hall joys that lure him there. In the Finnsburh episode, by contrast, the poem’s sense of the past is not that of a pre-historical time of elemental materials that will one day be treasure, nor is it the time of God’s creation. Rather, the *longue durée* is referred to by the anger of kin feud that repeatedly irrupts into the present of both the digression and the poem as a whole. The corpses of the Finnsburh episode play a specific role in shaping collectivity that attaches them to rings and to humans, undermining the human capacity to stabilize inter-ethnic relationships. As the product of feud-violence, the corpses foreground what Julia Kristeva identifies as the innate revulsion experienced in the presence of a human corpse. Kristeva argues that human subjects experience revulsion when they encounter the corpse, which is

emblematic of the subject-turned-object. As with the sense of loss that permeates the Lay of the Last Survivor, however, the revulsion engendered by a corpse is the product of a human point of view that does not necessarily include a longer history in which such bodies return to the earth and become dust.⁷⁴ The Finnsburh episode demonstrates how the power of corpses to link disparate actors across time serves to enforce the workings of collectivity in a way that underpins human community, precipitating violent results. Criticism on the section focuses predominantly on one of two aspects of violence in the narrative. The first is the feud culture that underlies the story.⁷⁵ The second is the role played in it by Hildeburh, the “sad woman” (*geomuru ides*, 1175) who seems to typify the experience of peace-weavers in *Beowulf*.⁷⁶

An analysis of Hildeburh and her role in the narrative is essential to understand feud culture within the larger frame of reference of a collectivity. After an unprovoked attack in which a group of Frisians (Hildeburh’s family-in-law) attack the Healf-Denes (her family of origin), Hildeburh’s

⁷⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). See especially the first chapter, “Encountering the Abject.” Kristeva describes the corpse: “The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being...If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything” (ibid., 3).

⁷⁵ This tendency is exemplified by Scott Gwara’s reading in *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Also, see John Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf*, 26-7. Hill, in “The Ethnopsychology of In-Law Feud” (*Philology Quarterly* 78.1/2 [Winter 1999] 97-123) argues that such stories are “socially acute meditations on the prospects for settlement, for accomplished and extended community, between groups who bring histories of past strife to their efforts at composing a feud. They are also meditations on the dynamic of group reformation” (1).

⁷⁶ The term “peace-weaver,” *freðunwebbe* in Old English, is a difficult word to define with any degree of precision. It appears only three times in Old English. See Larry Sklute, “*Freðunwebbe* in Old English” and Joyce Hill, “‘Pæt wæs geomuru ides! A Female Stereotype Examined,” in *New Readings on Women in Old English*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessy Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

brother Hnæf is among the dead. Her son has also died, and Hildeburh orders him placed on the pyre beside her brother, consigning them both to the fire as a measure of her grief as well as of her status as queen. After these deaths, Hildeburh's husband Finn, the leader of the Frisians, offers a place at his hall for the fugitive Healf-Denes for the duration of the long winter. He promises:

ond æt feohgyftum Folcwaldan sunu
 dogra gehwylce Dene weorþode,
 Hengestes heap hringum wenede
 efne swa swiðe sincgestreorum
 fættan goldes, swa he Fresena cyn
 on beorsele byldan wolde.

(and at the giving of treasure, each day, the son of Folcwalda would deal rings to Hengest's men even as often, free with his gold plated treasure, as when he encouraged the men of the Frisians in the beer-hall, 1089-1094.)

These rings are meant to bind together a community. Although the poem makes clear that Hengest (the leader of the Healf-Denes after the death of Hildeburh's brother) is already thinking about revenge, we have reason to believe that this network of Frisians and Healf-Denes might still hold together; however, Oslaf and Guðlaf, two of the Healf-Dene retainers, speak of the battle that took the lives of their kin, and as a result, the enmity between the Frisians and the Danes resumes. The story ends with Hildeburh mourning the death of her husband and being returned to her people by Hengest. That Hildeburh herself is accorded object-like status as a woman is hardly a surprising assertion, but her interactions with other entities in this section of the poem indicate that a larger set of relationships are central to the events at Finnsburg. The connection between humans and the other entities associated with a collectivity has a devastating effect on the feeble attempt made to mend a community rent by violence.

Understanding Hildeburh's position as a woman aids in understanding her role in the feud and the ways in which women are presented in Anglo-Saxon texts. In her book *Ruling Women*, Stacy Klein provides a useful means of understanding the ways that women function in Anglo-Saxon

poetry.⁷⁷ She draws on Alexandra Hennessy Olsen's distinctions in "Gender Roles in *Beowulf*," which argues that the roles of women in Old English texts include the hostess, the *fredunwebbe* (peace-weaver), the mourner, the goader (or whetting woman), and the counselor.⁷⁸ Klein argues that "the feminine voices in the poem . . . gesture toward the possibility of a new model of heroism that redefines, and incorporates the energies of, preconversion Germanic heroism so as to bring it more closely in line with the Christian world view of the poem's reader."⁷⁹ Klein takes a special interest in Hildeburh as a queen who through her loss shines a harsh light on the consequences of the heroic ethos of the male characters in the poem.⁸⁰ Both the method through which Hildeburh offers critique of the heroic ethos and the efficacy of both the method and content of her critique are matters of some dispute.

Hildeburh's actions in the poem run the risk of being interpreted as a stereotype of Old English poetic narrative and reinforcing the idea that women are always "potentially, if not actually, the victim."⁸¹ Joyce Hill remedies this mistaken interpretation by arguing that Hildeburh's work as a woman who mourns is vital to her role in the poem. Although this role does not restore her agency in what Hill designates "the viewpoint of 'story,'" it still suggests her importance to the poetic vision through the "sophistication" of the Old English poet's response to marginalizing legendary materials

⁷⁷ Stacy Klein, *Ruling Women*.

⁷⁸ Alexandra Hennessy Olsen, "Gender Roles in *Beowulf*," in *The Beowulf Handbook* ed. Bjork & Niles.

⁷⁹ Stacy Klein, *Ruling Women*, 88-9.

⁸⁰ See Klein, *Ruling Women*, 93: "Perhaps nowhere in *Beowulf* does a queen more sharply call into question the heroic ethos than in the Finnsburg episode." See also Joyce Hill, "'Ðæt wæs geomuru ides!'" who notes that Hildeburh "dominates the Finnsburgh episode in *Beowulf*;" (ibid., 240) a status that is crucial to my understanding of the development of collectivity in this section of the text.

⁸¹ Joyce Hill, "'Ðæt wæs geomuru ides! A Female Stereotype Examined."

and the creation of “a position of ethical and imaginative importance” for Hildeburh.⁸² Helen Bennett furthers this point concerning the role of mourning women in *Beowulf* when she avers that the figure of the female mourner is both “strong and enduring,” an active rather than passive role.⁸³ What Hill and Bennett both usefully propose is that the poem might be read “against the grain.” That is, although women might be portrayed as objects in Old English literature, moments of resistance to this paradigm can and do emerge in the literature.

In fact, Hildeburh’s actions as a mourning queen are central to her role in the community. She places her son and brother on the same funeral pyre. “The only initiatory act attributed to her” and “a powerful but ultimately futile gesture,”⁸⁴ the pyre scene might also be Hildeburh’s method of resistance, her attempt to break free from the domination of the men in her life.⁸⁵ That she alone chooses the pyre for her son asserts her role as a mother and her position as guardian of her child. Klein, by contrast, suggests another reading of this scene and its centrality to the Finnsburh episode. Her analysis rests on the primacy given to the funeral pyre in the first part of the section, and the gruesome details employed in the poem’s description of the scene:

Het ða Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade
 hire selfre sunu sweolode befæstan,
 banfatu bærnan, ond on bæl don
 e[a]me on eaxle. Ides gnornode,
 geomrode giddum; guðrinc astah;
 wand to wolcnum wælfyra mæst,
 hlynode for hlawe. Hafelan multon,
 bengeato burston ðonne blod ætspranc,

⁸² *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸³ Helen Bennett, “The Female Mourner at Beowulf’s Funeral: Filling the Blanks / Hearing the Spaces” *Exemplaria* 4.1 (1992): 35-50.

⁸⁴ Joyce Hill, “Pæt wæs geomuru ides!” 241.

⁸⁵ “Through this action,” Porter suggests, “Hildeburh emphasizes that her son is *hers*, not her husband’s.” See Dorothy Porter, “The Social Centrality of Women in Beowulf: A New Context,” *The Heroic Age: A Journal of Early Medieval Northwestern Europe*, Vol 5 (2001) <http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/5/porter1.html>.

laðbite lices. Lig ealle forswealg,
 gæsta gifrost, þara ðe þær guð fornam
 bega folces; wæs hira blæd scacen.

(Hildeburh then commanded that on Hnæf's funeral pyre her own son should be entrusted to the flames, to burn the bone-vessel, give to the fire, his uncle at his shoulder. The woman mourned, mourned with songs; the battle-warrior arose, flew to the clouds; the greatest of funeral fires roared before the barrow. The heads melted, wound-gates burst, and then blood sprang forth from the hateful-bites of the body. The flame swallowed all up, that greediest of ghosts, all of those ones that battle seized from both of the peoples; the power of life was departed from them, 1114-1124.)

The intensity of the flames and their destructive power signify the most basic lesson the Finnsburh episode imparts: that violence begets violence. In this scene, Klein argues that

The melting heads, so securely trapped within the grasp of the fire and so clearly removed from their possible functions as trophies for signifying a clear battle-figure, emphasize that the winner in blood feud is neither Dane nor Frisian, but the fire itself, symbol of an ethos of insatiable violence that feeds on the destruction of men and their treasures.⁸⁶

The fire, and the ethos of violence it symbolizes, become active participants in the kinship feud. By suggesting that the only “winner” in blood feud is the fire, Klein emphasizes the way in which cyclical violence becomes the condition of humans enmeshed in kinship feud. This ethos of violence works against stabilizing the relationship between the Healf-Denes and the Frisians. Hildeburh and her husband create a blood alliance in the birth of their son, but the fire is the only entity that can bring together both Frisian and Dane with ruthless efficacy. The two lines of descent intermingle in the destruction of the bodies, in which “Heads melt, wound-gates burst, and then blood sprang forth,” (“Hafelan multon, / bengeato burston ðonne blod ætspranc, 1120b-21). Making a distinction between the blood of the Frisians and that of the Danes is as impossible as it would be to separate Hildeburh's grief for her brother from her grief for her son. The two are enmeshed with and by the fire—and the pyre itself highlights Hildeburh's shared loyalty to both Dane and Frisian.

⁸⁶ Klein, *Ruling Women*, 94.

Hildeburh's strength in the episode is deeply compromised by her final actions in the poem, which reveal her object status:

Hie on sælade
drihtlic wif to Denum feredon,
læddon to leodum.

(On the sea they carried the lord-like woman to the Danes, they lead her to [her] people, 1157b-1159a.)

Hildeburh's return to the Danes after the death of her husband is neither remarkable nor unexpected; however, it does mark a shift in meaning for Hildeburh. No longer the agent of her own action, she cannot participate in the life of the community because that community has failed. Put another way, "her meaning as peace-weaver is untranslatable"—quite literally, it cannot be carried over past the violence that destroys her people.⁸⁷ When she looks at the dead bodies that remain "where she before held the greatest of the world's joy" ("þæt he[o] ær mæste heold / worolde wynne, 1179b-1180a), these bodies and her association with them have changed utterly.⁸⁸

The meaning of these corpses is unstable. This instability results from the connections made across

⁸⁷ Gillian Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*, 85.

⁸⁸ Overing argues for an understanding of gender in *Beowulf* in which Hildeburh becomes the object rather than the subject of action in the poem. Hildeburh-as-object is, however, not allowed the same kind of agency and transformation accorded to other objects in the text. In a poem where the exchange and possession of objects is a primary way of recalling histories and cementing group identity, as a peace-weaver, Hildeburh is not readily available for definition, by herself or others: "the sword may recall the boast that may assure the deed...but even the gold adorning the queen will not translate *her*...her meaning as a peace-weaver is *untranslatable*." Overing's invocation of the term "translate" raises an important point. Hildeburh's meaning, her status, and her possibilities are all irretrievable to readers of the poem precisely because her role as a facilitator of peace fails so spectacularly. Rings can promote alliances, and swords can renew revenge, but Hildeburh's work is not as active as these objects. Rather, she is seemingly moved only by the actions of others, and as the poem's audience "we watch her as she is moved across the chessboard, given, and then taken. She has become an object, like the precious swords and cups elsewhere in the poem" (ibid., 85). This reading of the role of the peace-weaver in Finnsburh removes Hildeburh from a position of agency much as her relatives remove her from the Frisian stronghold at the end of the fragment. Hildeburh herself is absent from the work of identity-building in this reading, otherwise her role as peace-weaver would not have failed so utterly, and her binding function would have been fulfilled. Overing moves beyond what we might think of as a negative deconstructionist idea of the *différance* inherent in identity building – the absent, the lost, and the deferred as part and parcel of the split in subjectivity – and towards what she terms a "Peircean" expansion of the web of signification in the text (ibid., 86).

time through the feud and its results. That is, in the midst of the song and noise that are so devastatingly counterpointed with the tragedy of Hildeburh's position, past and possible future collide in the complaints of Oslaf and Guðlaf.

The human vision of a future community is undone by the relentless connection of those same humans, through collectivity, to the past via the objects that tie them to that past. Rings that could bind a group together are fundamentally changed by enduring feud. When the winter forces the Healf-Denes to remain at Finn's court through the frozen weather, Finn attempts to create an ad hoc community through traditional means. In the hall (*beorsele*), he gives rings to the Healf-Denes just as he would to his own people (*swa he Fresena cyn . . . wolde*). These rings are meant to solidify the community in the hall but they do not succeed in doing so. Oslaf and Guðlaf use their complaints—and a narrative of death—to remind the Healf-Denes of what they have lost in the temporary alliance with Finn.

Although Hengest, the leader of the Healf-Denes, already “thought more quickly to revenge than to a sea-journey,” (to *gyrnwraece / swiðor þohte þonne to sælade*, 1138-1139), more than mere thoughts are necessary to spark the burning hatred of the Healf-Denes to violence. Oslaf and Guðlaf provide just the necessary spark because they “complained of their grief after the sea-journey, blamed a measure of their sorrows [on it]” (*æfter sæsiðe sorge mændon / ætwihton weana dæl*, 1148-1150). By blaming their sorrows on the sea voyage that brought them to Finn's court, the narrative of Oslaf and Guðlaf brings the past and the corpses that populate it into a relationship with the present of the Finnsburh court.

The rings meant to buy off the memory of violent death of kinsmen are qualitatively altered by their association with Oslaf and Guðlaf's angry speech. Their speech exposes a connection between humans, rings, and corpses that destroys the community once represented by rings. These corpses attest to what Kristeva terms the “abject,” that which the subject must forget or reject in

order to maintain a coherent identity.⁸⁹ Because it defies seemingly rigid categories, the corpse highlights the capacity of the human body to be both utterly non-human and yet subject to human action, memory, and interpretation. The influence of these corpses subtly modifies entities such as rings that now serve as memorabilia of death rather than facilitators of alliance. Corpses may be rejected or ejected from community but remain associated with humans in collectivity. Their presence, in fact and in memory, marks a past that not only endures but also threatens the possibility of a stable future.

Hildeburh's departure from Frisia after the death of Finn marks the dispersal of community. The rings meant to stabilize the community at Finn's court, when associated with Hengest, Oslaf, and Guðlaf no longer mean what Finn intended—their new meaning does not support the community Finn attempted to form. Hildeburh's order to burn her son and her brother on the same funeral pyre highlights that the corpses are both Dane and Frisian and point to a lingering association that withstands the collapse of human community. Klein's interpretation of the fire as the ultimate victor in the dispute between Dane and Frisian makes a crucial point, one never explicitly made in the poem. Humans are dependent on objects to form communities, but the work done by such objects can be interpreted in multiple ways and so lead to unstable relationships. The corpses (which are only remembered as Danish) and the rings (which come to represent their death) undermine or undo Hildeburh's role in community formation as a peace-weaver. By highlighting these changing meanings and their consequences, the poem encourages the reader to acknowledge human participation in a larger narrative and sets the time of kinship feud in the context of the deep time indicated by collectivity.

⁸⁹ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

CONCLUSION

The juxtaposition of narratives of identity-formation in the opening segments of *Beowulf*, the Lay of the Last Survivor, the Creation song of the scop in Heorot, and the Finnsburh episode highlight the destruction or dispersal of human communities and bring the poem's audience in line with another level of time that is implicitly present in the poem. Bringing this final level of time to bear on the final scenes of *Beowulf* reveals how collectivity emphasizes the temporal dimension of interconnections in the poem and renders the past both effective and destructive in the narrative present of the poem. The final portion of *Beowulf* begins with the treasure hoard of the dragon, discussed earlier in this chapter. Just as the Lay of the Last Survivor suggests a deeper past that intersects with the poem's temporal present, the messenger's speech explores the past that can and does assure the death of Beowulf as well as his people. In addition, the speech reveals the larger context of human communities through its exposition of the connections between humans, corpses, and animals.

Divided into four main foci, the messenger's prophecy performs a complex analysis of the multiple forces at play in the downfall of Beowulf's people and the future that will see these elements come together cataclysmically in the association of the Geats with Beowulf's lifeless corpse. The first part of the messenger's speech involves the speaker surveying the scene after Beowulf's death, describing Wiglaf in his post-battle role as one who sits to preside over the dead man and the dead dragon. Wiglaf "holds weary-minded the [role of the] head-guard of the loved one and the hated one" (healdeð hige-mæðum heafod-wearde, / leofes ond laðes, 2909-2910). The messenger then makes a prediction of what awaits the powerless Geats, noting that "it is now that the people might expect a time of war, since the news of the fall of the king travels far, to the Franks and the Frisians" (Nu is leodum wen / orleg-hwile, syððan underne / Froncum ond Frysum fyll cyniges / wide weorðeð, 2910-2913). The messenger further describes the events that mark the

beginning of the feud between the Swedes and the Geats, as well as the ultimate results of that feud (which include the annihilation of Beowulf's people). Finally, the speech segues to a lament, speaking of what some critics have termed the "beasts of battle" theme, in which ravens and wolves are given the final word over the warriors who have fallen.⁹⁰

Treasure, as discussed earlier, connects Beowulf and his men with the dragon. In the messenger's speech and the aftermath of the final battle with the dragon the treasure undergoes one final shift in meaning. Beowulf intends for the gold to ensure the survival of his people. Wiglaf assigns the hoard a different destiny, stating "nor shall a small treasure melt with that soul, but that treasure hoard, uncounted gold, purchased grimly" (Ne sceal anes hwæt / meltan mid þam modigan, ac þær is maðma hord, / gold unrime, grimme geceapod, 3010-3012). Once again, "the fire shall eat" (*brond fretan*, 3014) the remains of the hope of the Geats, and leave the remaining warriors of the Geatish people to mourn their loss—and their impending fate—"bereft of gold" (*golde bereafod*, 3018). Meant to forge new bonds of loyalty, but placed on the pyre with Beowulf's body, the treasure becomes connected only to the corpse of Beowulf. As a result, any futurity it might have guaranteed for the community is cut off.

By its absence, then, gold defines the community of the Geats. The futurity it could promise is compromised by the foolhardy actions of Beowulf. Although the poem underscores the connection of the gold with the corpse of Beowulf, certain scavengers also play a significant role in the speech and in the ultimate destruction of the Geats. By confronting the actions of the raven and

⁹⁰ The "beasts of battle" is a common Germanic typescene. For more detailed consideration of the form and function of this trope, see: Adrien Bonjour, "Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle," *PMLA* 72.3 (Sept. 1957) 563-573; M.S. Griffith, "Convention and Originality in the Old English 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene," *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993) 179-199; Thomas Honegger, "Form and Function: the Beasts of Battle Revisited" *English Studies* 79.4 (1998) 81-90; Francis P. Magoun, "The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 56 (1955) 81-90.

the wolf in the beasts of battle scene, the poem's audience must also confront the endurance of these creatures beyond their human prey:

ac se wonna hrefn
fus ofer fægum fela reordian,
earne secgan, hu him æt æte speow,
þenden he wið wulf wæl reafode.

(But the black raven, the bird over the fated men, will tell, will say to the eagle, how he succeeded at the meal, when he with the wolf plundered the slaughtered ones, 3024-3027.)

While the hawk and horse both return to their natural origin after the dispersal of human community in the Lay of the Last Survivor, the raven and the wolf remain at the scene of human loss in the messenger's speech. The narrative that the raven (figuratively) relates—that of “how he succeeded at the meal”—demonstrates the intrusion of the non-human into a configuration that initially appeared to be purely human. The “reaving” (*reafian*) of the corpses of the fallen warriors forces the reader to note the use of *reafian* in other contexts and provides a disjunctive echoing of two earlier uses of the same verb. At 1212, the first use of *reafian* describes the actions undertaken by the Frisian warriors after a failed attack by Hygelac: “wyrsan wig-freca wæl reafeden” (worse battle-warriors plundered the slaughtered). *Reafian*, that is, is a human action, undertaken in a human context, and performed upon humans. Frisian warriors plunder Geatish ones. At line 2985, a similar usage occurs in Wulf and Eofor's defeat of Ongenþeow: “Then the warriors plundered the other, took from Ongenþeow his iron byrnie, his hard sword hilt and also his helmet” (Þenden reafode rinc oðerne, nam on Ongenðio iren-byrnan heard swyrd hilted ond his helm somod). Human warriors take the things that matter in a human world by plundering bodies for war-gear. The wolf and the raven, on the other hand, plunder human bodies for what such creatures value, the meal that these bodies provide.

The depiction of the wolf and the raven suggests that human plunder can be equated—at least lexically—with the plundering of carrion eaters. This vision of desolation becomes an

instantiation of collectivity because it sets human death in an animal context and shows the use of human corpses as a meal for the raven and wolf. Of particular importance, however, is that the messenger describes these beasts and their plunder *after* the details of the origins of the Swedish-Geatish feud.⁹¹ The messenger's speech makes it clear that

Ðæt is sio fæhðo ond se feondscipe,
wæl-nið wera, ðæs ða ic [wen] hafo,
þe us seceað to Sweona leoda,
syððan hie gefricgeað frean userne
ealdor-leasne.

(That is the feud, and the enmity, the slaughter-evil of men, that I believe will cause the Swedes to seek us out, as soon as they hear that our lord is lifeless, 2999-3003.)

These lines of the messenger's prophecy further strengthens the sense that warriors and animals are almost interchangeable, because it places the beasts of battle scene within the same set of associations that links the Geats and the Swedes. Beowulf's body signifies differently as a corpse than it did while alive, while Beowulf was himself a warrior and a good king. Foreshadowing his soon-to-be-utterly-defeated men, the corpse of Beowulf links the Geats of the poem's narrative present to a time of feud begun by Hygelac.⁹² To the Swedes, the corpse means victory; to the Geats, death. But in the narrative of the beasts, the corpse signifies another level on which such events might be understood. As with the fire that succeeds in uniting Hildeburh's family-in-law and her family-of-origin, the only real victors in the *longue durée* are the raven and wolf, who succeed in

⁹¹ The poem tells us that for their pride (*for onmedlan*) the Geats originally sought out the Swedes in battle, thus beginning the disastrous series of events that leads to the poem's present. Hygelac is a key player in this action. His arrival on the scene with his war troop precipitates the death of Ongentheow, the king of the Swedes. The Geatish princes Eofor and Wulf are brought into a closer alliance with Hygelac and for that time it seems that the safety of the Geats is secured.

⁹² See lines 2923-3015. This earlier segment of the poem describes a protracted blood feud that connections the Geats to both the Frisians and the Swedes. Hygelac meets his death in a battle against the Frisians. In the section on Hygelac's Swedish mishap, the poem focuses on the relationship between Wulf, Eofor, and the Geatish royal house. In return for killing Ongentheow, the Swedish King, Hygelac gives Eofor his daughter in marriage. As a result, the two peoples are linked, and the Swedes will ultimately take revenge on the Geats.

procuring a meal of human flesh, and the violence that leads men to prey upon one another. In the context of collectivity, humans become one player among many. The possibility of a future for human community is bound to the animals, monsters, and even corpses to which humans are connected.

The opening lines of *Beowulf* stage a scene of narrative transmission in which the audience of the poem—in Anglo-Saxon England as much as today—is implicated in a process of retelling stories that “we have heard” before. By understanding the digressions in *Beowulf* as translations that address inherited narratives to new audiences, we gain a critical vantage point from which to address the sense of the past and the lingering sense of loss within the poem. The stories retold in the digressions amplify the poetic themes of heroism, greatness, feud, and loss. They also outline the connections that lead from heroic achievement to the disaster of feud between men and the unending enmity of monsters. These connections place the poem in longer historical framework that is not always accessible to the characters within it. This emphasis on the *longue durée* provides a different way of thinking about *Beowulf*, one that is more responsive to the poem’s concerns beyond its human subject matter. Reading *Beowulf* for collectivity rather than community creates the possibility of a poem as a meditation on problems larger than heroic deeds and human loss. In such a reading, *Beowulf* becomes a poem about interconnection.

Conclusion

*A text is a machine conceived for eliciting interpretations.
~Umberto Eco, Experiences in Translation, 2*

This dissertation began with the idea of the textual community and asked a straightforward question regarding the application of the term to medieval translation: How might traditional textual communities be altered by their relationship to translation?¹ In my pursuit of an answer to that question, I have examined works that range across genres, historical periods, and even understandings of “translation” as a term. The resulting definition of textual community as an intra-textual expression of group identity has become simultaneously more expansive—temporally and geographically—and more fragile.

In the first three chapters of “Communities in Translation,” the term “translation” itself moves from a very literal concept to one which is much more amorphous while the idea of “community” becomes more expansive. In my consideration of the *Orosius*, for example, the communities that exist within the text experience a widening of temporal and cultural scope: the presence of the *cuad* construction creates a character of the *Orosius*-narrator, but also creates an audience that is dispersed in time and geographical space. As a result, the historical narratives that are re-told in the *Orosius* create a trans-temporal community that is asked to partake of both Anglo-Saxon and Roman identities.

While the religious aspects of the *Orosius* are implicitly aligned with its task of reading the entirety of human history through the lens of Christian revelation, the religious character of

¹ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) and Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

community-expansion through translation takes on a different valence in my consideration of the *Life of Oswald*. Here, translation—taken as a deliberately more transformative operation between the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Ælfric’s *Life of Oswald*—highlights not only the expansion of communities but also their reliance on their members’ proper practice for perpetuation. As part of a compilation explicitly interested in staking a claim for the holiness of England, the *Life of Oswald* portrays the generative power of both martyrs and kings for the communities they live in and facilitate. The community that forms through the miracles at Heavenfield and Maserfeld, however, is complicated by the participation of the saint’s relics: Oswald sanctifies the soil he sheds his blood to protect. The literal sanctification of the soil combines with the story of the king’s martyrdom to connect temporally disparate groups. The contemporaries of the sainted king and those who experience miracles through the power of his relics are united by their connection with, and through, a sanctified landscape.

Where my examination of the *Orosius* and the *Life of Oswald* focus on specifically Anglo-Saxon communities for which texts are translated and repurposed, my study of the *Man of Law’s Tale* turns to the community imagined by a post-Conquest text. Chaucer’s retelling of the conversion of Northumbria enlarges his vision of England by emphasizing the “mediacioun” of Custance. Custance’s role in the conversion connects the past of Northumbria with the Saxon present of Chaucer’s narrative, thereby facilitating the rehabilitation of the British Christians who once inhabited the island. By situating Chaucer’s narrative alongside his two most direct sources—Nicholas Trevet’s Anglo-Norman *Chronicle* and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*—the *Man of Law’s Tale* can be understood as participating in an ongoing textual conversation about the position of the Anglo-Saxon past in relation to the Middle English present. Each of the three narratives I consider in this chapter grapples with the question of linguistic identity and community, positioning

translation not only as an act of interpretation that creates foundational texts but also as a rubric through which communities can be both created and sustained.

Each of my first three chapters focuses on an expansion of community either temporally or geographically. My final chapter's focus on *Beowulf* operates within a slightly different, but related, set of constraints with regard to both translation and community. *Beowulf*'s status as the only non-translated text in my dissertation allows for a keener perspective on the function of narrative within the poem. The shared narratives in *Beowulf* threaten the possibility of community in the poem by closely associating human figures with the very forces that can (and often do) destroy them. My analysis of *Beowulf* shifts the terms of my argument to focus on the participation of non-humans in human groups, a movement presaged by the participation of the soil in the communities I examine in my chapter on the *Life of Oswald*. Non-humans in *Beowulf* are essential components of the communities the poem describes. Whereas in the *Life of Oswald* the soil helps English communities cohere around the relics of the sainted king, in *Beowulf* these non-humans mark an expansion of communities into what might more fruitfully be called collectivities. The collectivities in question include a diverse set of participants: humans, physical objects like treasure, monsters, and the stories which circulate throughout the text to disastrous consequence. In *Beowulf*, the very narratives meant to bolster human communities within the poem actually outline a series of connections between human figures and non-human entities that highlight the inevitable dispersal these human communities face.

Beginning in the Anglo-Saxon period we can see a negotiation of linguistic, religious, ethnic, and proto-national identities in translated texts. The Old English *Orosius*, Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*, Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, and *Beowulf* all retell traditional narratives in order to create new identities for their audiences. While the stories themselves have diverse origins, the texts deploy

these tales to envision new possibilities for textual communities. If translation, as Michelle Warren suggests, opens a space for the negotiation of identity, then one identity that such texts interrogate is the formation of community.² Because translations mediate between real worlds, distanced in both time and geographical space, they create a new kind of community within the text.

In each of the texts I examine in “Communities in Translation,” therefore, community is a central theme. Community cannot exist in isolation, however: each translation I have addressed also imagines its community in relationship with other times or places, with a larger religious community, or even with beings that are not human at all. By highlighting the complex negotiation of identity that translation makes possible, these texts allow their imagined communities to become more clear, expanding the idea of textual community to encompass the communities a text creates within itself.

In his introduction to *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhaba argues that an investigation of the emergence of the nation in narrative must investigate

the nation-space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in media res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly in the act of ‘composing’ its powerful image.³

The uncertainty to which Bhaba refers here is the uncertainty of a preserved moment in a multi-faceted process through which the modern nation-state emerges. This process is portrayed in narrative. What this assertion highlights, however, is that all communities (including national ones) brought into being through narrative necessarily emerge in relationship to both the past and the future even if their examination can only take place in the unfinished present of the text’s composition. Community therefore emerges as part of a negotiation between what comes before the

² Michelle Warren, “Translation” in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ Homi K. Bhaba, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) 3.

text and what comes after it. Medieval translations create communities within themselves that negotiate that space directly. The process in which translations participate both precedes and succeeds their composition. Communities in translation, finally, have meaning only in relationship to an imagined past and a hoped-for future.

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