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Wonder and Scepticism in the Long Twelfth Century

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Introduction

This dissertation proposes that wonder is an initial emotional reaction to a novel phenomenon, and that scepticism, a form of cognition, necessarily follows when the phenomenon is sufficiently bizarre, or out of coherence with one's prior experience. One may then mitigate one's doubts by either checking facts or suspending disbelief for a variety of reasons: didacticism, apathy, entertainment value, or acknowledgement of an inability to determine truth or falsehood either at the individual, event-specific level or more broadly as a sort of epistemic defeatism.¹ Wonder therefore demands thought, and is merely an epistemological starting point. This process is embedded in the texts that record medieval responses to marvels, as shown throughout this dissertation. Following the suspension of disbelief or the checking of facts, medieval audiences had the option to communicate the story or not, and the tendency for medieval writers to only record those stories they believed were true (as will be shown) permits the hypothesis that there were a great many other marvels stories that existed in the oral domain that never made it to the written.

Although medievalists have long recognised the existence of evidentiary tropes in tales of marvels, miracles, and the supernatural, the present dissertation is original in a number of ways. First, it distinguishes wonder as the emotional starting point to a cognitive process that ultimately results in a judgment about truth or falsehood, a judgment which is termed here subjective learning (learning that the individual believes to be true, but is not

¹ Robert Pasnau, "Snatching Hope from the Jaws of Epistemic Defeat", *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 1 (2015), pp. 257-75.

necessarily objectively true).² Second, it contributes to scholarship by taxonomising the sorts of evidence regarded well or poorly in the long twelfth century. Third, it argues that this sceptical epistemological process could create anxiety because it was fundamentally at odds with the idea of faith, thereby contributing to an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with Christian explanations of the world, of which medievalists are increasingly aware.³ Fourth, it adapts approaches from modern physical and social sciences, and historical emotionology, to inform its analysis of the Middle Ages. Most of the texts under examination here have been known to scholars specialising in medieval marvels for some time, but this dissertation uses a unique analytical framework, and proffers a novel taxonomy for the epistemological process initiated by wonder, while also exploring its effects on key aspects of medieval mentalities.

This dissertation also proposes that, after wonder initiates doubts, perceptions of the quality of evidence play a key role in one's ultimate judgment about the wonder's truth or falsehood. The vast majority of wonder stories were transmitted with evidentiary support lest they be immediately dismissed as old wives' tales (*aniles fabulas*), a term used then as now to

² Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History* (Manchester, 2012), especially ch. 4; Christopher Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), pp. 1-20; Claude Brémont, Jacques le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'Exemplum* (Turnhout, 1982).

³ Carl Watkins, "Providence, Experience and Doubt in Medieval England", in Jan-Melissa Schramm, Subha Mukherji and Yota Batsaki (eds), *Fictions of Knowledge: Fact, Evidence, Doubt* (New York, 2012), pp. 40-60; Watkins, "Religion and Belief", in Elisabeth van Houts and Julia Crick (eds.), *A Social History of England: 900-1200* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 265-289; John H. Arnold, "The Materiality of Unbelief in Late Medieval England", in Sophie Page (ed.), *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 65-95; Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: 2007), pp. 217-31; R.N Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 329-335; Dorothea Weltecke, "The Medieval Period", in Stephen Bullivant (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 164-178; Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005); Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout, 2009); Arnold, "Doomed or Disinterested? Did All Medieval People Believe in God?", *BBC History Magazine* (London, January 2009), pp. 38-43; Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?", *Representations*, vol. 103 (2008), pp. 1-29; M. van Uytanghe, "Scepticisme doctrinal au seuil du moyen âge? Les objections du diacre Pierre dans les *Dialogues* de Grégoire le Grand", in Jacques Fontaine, Robert Gillet and Stan Pellistrandi (eds), *Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 1986), pp. 315-26.

dismiss stories that possessed a veneer of frivolity.⁴ If the story lacked evidentiary support in its initial telling, responders could actively seek evidence to assist in overcoming doubts, by interviewing locals or participants, travelling to the story's place of origin, or performing textual research. Wonder therefore provokes an epistemological chain of events ultimately leading to a judgment about truth or falsehood, and a decision about whether to communicate the story, which, for twelfth-century writers, meant a decision about whether or not to record them. The epistemological process proposed here is presented diagrammatically in **Figure 1**:

⁴ In one instance, for example, Ralph of Diceto declared an event to be an old wives' tale, because it was reported without either a date or the name of the king whose reign it had taken place in: Ralph of Diceto, *De mirabilibus Britanniae*, in his *Abbreviationes chronicorum*, William Stubbs (ed.), *Opera Historica* (London, RS, 1876), vol. 1, p. 15: "Res gestae quae nulla regum ac temporum certitudine commendantur non pro hystoria recipiuntur; sed inter aniles fabulas deputantur".

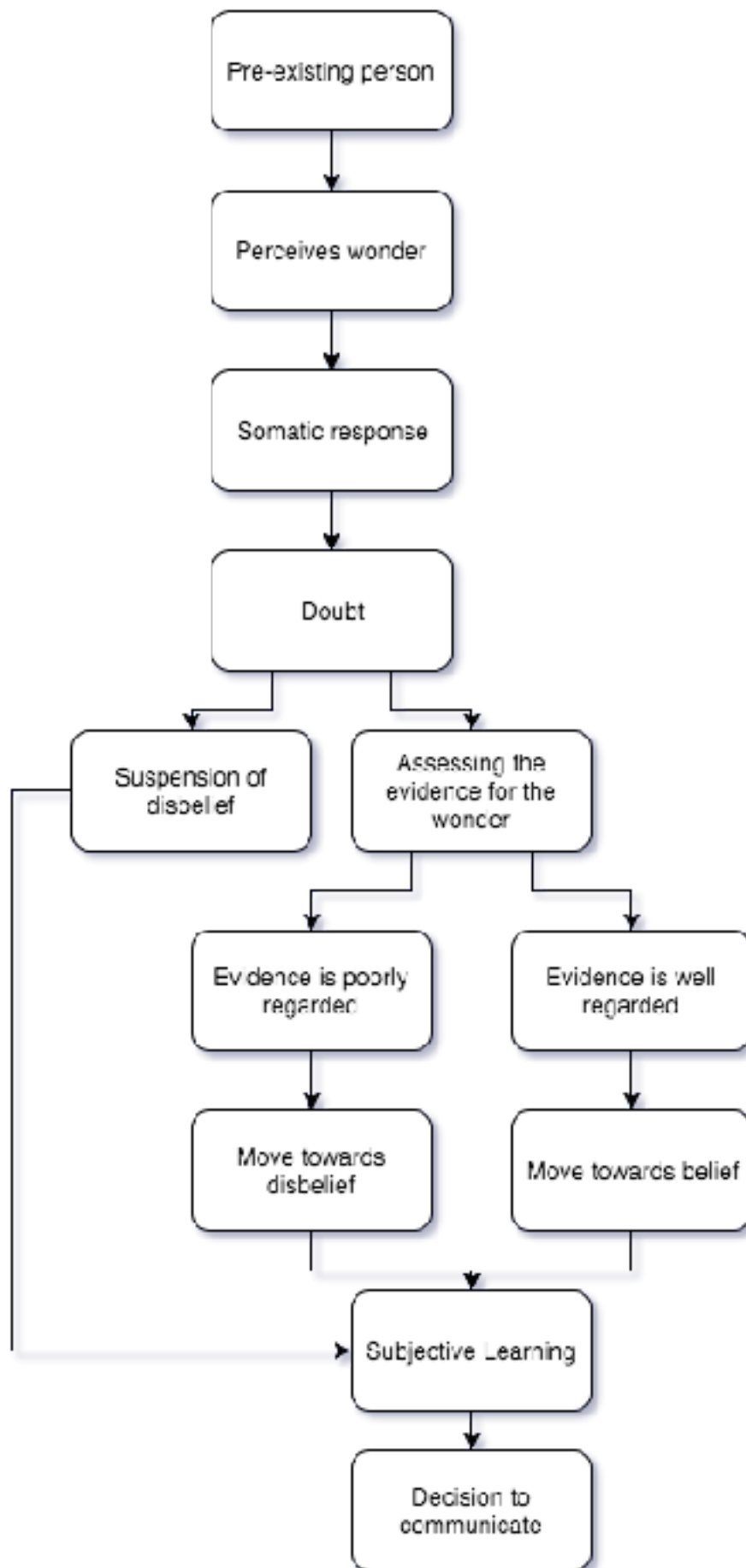


Figure 1: The Epistemology of Wonders

1. PRE-EXISTING PERSON

A person exists with a set of individual characteristics, based on their upbringing within a certain cultural milieu. This person lacks experience of a certain phenomenon (the wondrous object), or lacks explanation for it.

2. PERCEIVES WONDER

This person sees, hears, hears of, reads about, hears read, or feels the wondrous object.

3. SOMATIC RESPONSE

The brain rapidly checks the memory before triggering the somatic response for wonder if the object is sufficiently divorced from the individual's prior experience. The somatic response may include arresting of breath, increased sensory perception (particularly a widened field of vision), increased heart rate in preparation for the fight or flight response, raised arms, opened palms, raised eyebrows, open mouth, pointing to initiate emotional contagion, or any of a number of related microexpressions.

4. DOUBT

The individual may doubt the truth of the story, especially if the wondrous object is heard second-hand in story form, rather than seen personally. These doubts may prompt inquiry and a quest for evidence. The doubts may concern a detail of the wonder or its entirety.

5. SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

The individual may consciously opt out of assessing the truth of the object for a variety of reasons: apathy about its truth, acknowledgment of its entertainment or didactic value

(which ostensibly lowers its need for verisimilitude), or acknowledgement of the individual's fallibility in assessing its truth, which may lead to epistemic defeatism on an individual level or more broadly. This epistemic dissatisfaction is a view that may have had more currency in the Middle Ages due to the pragmatic difficulties associated with factual research. The individual may also acknowledge a temporary inability to determine the wonder's truth, and choose to assess the evidence later. The suspension of disbelief may take place either before or after the presentation of evidence.

6. ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE

Evidence may be presented with the wonder. This evidence is assessed by the individual or group, and acts to increase or decrease the wonder's verisimilitude. Responses to evidence may be individual, group-based, or both.

7. SUBJECTIVE LEARNING

The individual makes a judgment, either consciously or subconsciously, about the probability of the wonder being true based on the evidence provided. Their judgment is subjectively correct because it is supported by their individual assessment of the evidence, but it may not be objectively correct.

8. DECISION TO COMMUNICATE

The individual may then tell others about the wonder, either orally or in writing. As will be shown, the evidence examined in this dissertation suggests that medieval people were generally more likely to communicate wonders they thought were true, because of the potential damage to reputation that could be had if one communicated, either orally or in writing, stories that were seen to be 'lying' or 'spreading error'. The general association

between truth and the written word is one emanation of the widespread culture of *auctoritas*.⁵

This dissertation will assert the existence of the epistemological process described above, which is both emotional and cognitive, by examining medieval responses to wondrous phenomena.

Humans' epistemologies may be affected by a variety of tiers of influence which must be carefully balanced. The universal aspects of human biology — eyes, ears, brains — influence the reception of information in that they are the primary routes to experiencing the external world regardless of cultural and individual differences. Because of this upper tier, some historians remain sceptical about historical emotionology as a framework for understanding the past. In 2014, Sybil Jack argued that emotions are universal because of biology, and therefore “historians should be wary of attempting the impossible”, that is, investigating the emotions of past peoples as distinct from our own.⁶ However, culture has an important influence in diversifying responses to novel phenomena based on individuals' upbringings, vocations, life experiences, and *a priori* beliefs, which are established in particular cultural

⁵ Jan Ziolkowski, “Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century”, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 108, no. 4 (2009), pp. 421-448.

⁶ Sybil Jack, “Notes on the Laughter of the Lesser Lynx”, *ISAA Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2014), pp. 55-67, here p. 55.

milieux. These have been collectively termed by Pierre Bourdieu a person's "habitus", that is, the habits and mental frameworks established at particular times and places.⁷

Individual characteristics may vary the universal aspects of biology further by permitting different temperaments, personalities, and genetic variations within the upper biological and cultural patterns: myopic eyes, brains with particular skill sets, sharper hearing, altered neurochemistry, or an individual tendency towards credulity or incredulity.⁸ This dissertation argues that the epistemological process used by medieval writers in recording marvels is transhistorical in its existence, based on eyes, ears, and brains, but at the same time bound inextricably to the particular twelfth-century European cultural milieu; as Barbara Rosenwein notes: "A history [of the emotions] must not deny the biological substratum of emotions... [but] even bodies and brains are shaped by culture".⁹ Each author, text, and marvel will therefore be contextualised in discussion of this transhistorical process.

The recognition that emotions and cognition intersect has a long history. In *The Republic*, Plato divided the non-rational 'soul' into two components: the appetitive (*epithumetikon*) and spirited (*thumoeides*) parts. In his schema, the appetitive component governs cravings and pleasures, and is based on attraction, whereas the spirited component governs anger, shame, fear, and revulsion, which are based on repulsion. According to Plato, these 'emotional' components (or 'passions') must be governed by reason in order for the soul to achieve its purpose of enlightenment (*eudaimonia*). Emotions therefore arouse cognition, and rational contemplation is key to the good life.¹⁰

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus, code, et codification", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 64 (1986), pp. 40-44.

⁸ Gary J. Lewis and Timothy C. Bates, "Common Genetic Influences Underpin Religiosity, Community Integration, and Existential Uncertainty", *Journal of Research in Personality*, vol. 47 (2013), pp. 398-405.

⁹ Barbara Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", p. 10; see also Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill, 2006), pp. 26-7.

¹⁰ Susan Sauvé Meyer and Adrienne M. Martin, "Emotion and the Emotions", in Roger Crisp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 638-71.

Plato's pupil, Aristotle, followed his teacher in describing virtue as when the emotional part of the human 'soul' is tempered by the rational part, and therefore temperance is a key step on the road to *eudaimonia*.¹¹ To Aristotle, intellectual growth is the actualisation of human potential, since the nature of humanity, as distinct from animals, is to rationalise.¹² One particular example hinted at by Aristotle was that wonder prompts philosophising and ultimately the creation of knowledge: "[the philosophers] wondered originally at the obvious difficulties [of astronomy], then advanced little by little".¹³

A number of early modern philosophers reiterated Aristotle's views of wonder. René Descartes wrote doxographically that "wonder is the first of all the passions", and that it was beneficial "because it disposes us to the acquisition of sciences", but afterwards "we must attempt to deliver ourselves from it as much as possible... [by] acquiring knowledge of many things", that is, through the acquisition of subjective learning.¹⁴ Thomas Hobbes argued for the confluence of wonder (admiration) and curiosity, asserting that "whatsoever happeneth new to a man giveth him hope of knowing something that he knew not before".¹⁵ Adam Smith likewise described wonder as "the first principle which prompts mankind to the study of philosophy".¹⁶ These philosophers each noted the link between wonder and learning as united forms of emotion and cognition.

¹¹ Meyer and Martin, "Emotion and the Emotions". See also Antoine Côté, "Intellection and Divine Causation in Aristotle", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2005), pp. 25-39.

¹² Joseph W. Koterski, *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford, 2009), p. 159.

¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book 1, part 2, in W.D. Ross (trans.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle: Revised Oxford Translation*, Jonathan Barnes (ed.) (Princeton, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1554. Translation by Ross.

¹⁴ René Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme* (Paris, 1649), part 2, §53, pp. 82-3: "l'admiration est la première de toutes les passions"; part 2, §76, pp. 102-3: "parce que cela nous dispose à l'acquisition des sciences... nous devons toutefois tâcher par après de nous délivrer le plus qu'il est possible... [par] d'acquérir la connaissance de plusieurs choses". Throughout this dissertation, all translations are my own unless specifically stated.

¹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policy*, William Molesworth (ed.), *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, vol. 4 (London, 1840), ch. 9, §18, p. 50.

¹⁶ Adam Smith, "History of Astronomy", in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, W.P.D. Wightman J.C. Bryce, and I.S. Ross (eds) (Oxford, 1980), Section 3, §3, p. 51.

Contemporary neuropsychologists and behavioural therapists have further investigated the link between emotion and cognition. A variety of psychological treatment movements, including cognitive behaviour therapy and mindfulness, have used cognitive strategies to assist patients in controlling disorders of the emotions such as excessive anger or depression.¹⁷ Neuroimaging studies have confirmed the usefulness of these therapies.¹⁸ The dominant twentieth-century view in neurology that different brain areas possessed different functions (known as functionalism) has gradually been replaced by a more integrated view of the brain that sees both emotions and cognition mapping to networks of areas rather than single sites.¹⁹ Recent studies have therefore abandoned pure functionalism, leading Elizabeth Phelps to argue that “the classic division between the study of emotion and cognition may be unrealistic”, because the two work together.²⁰ The term ‘hub’ is now generally used to refer to brain sites that are central to communication with other brain sites, and these ‘hubs’, like the amygdala, are seen as important to both emotion and cognition not because they govern both, but because they are communications centres for neuronal activity across the entire brain.²¹

¹⁷ Paul Grossman, Ludger Niemann, Stefan Schmidt, and Harald Walach, “Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-analysis”, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2004), pp. 25-43; Donald Meichenbaum, “Cognitive Behaviour Modification”, *Scandinavian Journal of Behaviour Therapy*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1977), pp. 185-92; Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and Emotional Disorders* (New York, 1976).

¹⁸ Jason T. Buhle et al., “Cognitive Reappraisal of Emotion: A Meta-Analysis of Human Neuroimaging Studies”, *Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 24, no. 11 (2014), pp. 2981-90.

¹⁹ Rolf Kötter, “The Limbic System: A Review of its Empirical Foundation”, *Behavioural Brain Research*, vol. 52, no. 2 (1992), pp. 105-27; William M. Reddy, “Neuroscience and the Fallacies of Functionalism”, *History and Theory*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2010), pp. 412-25.

²⁰ Richard S. Lazarus, “Thoughts on the Relations Between Emotion and Cognition”, *American Psychologist*, vol. 37, no. 9 (1982), pp. 1019-24; Jeffrey A. Gray, “Brain Systems that Mediate Both Emotion and Cognition”, *Emotion and Cognition*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1990), pp. 269-88; Elizabeth A. Phelps, “Emotion and Cognition: Insights from Studies of the Human Amygdala”, *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 57 (2006), pp. 27-53. Quote is from Phelps, p. 27.

²¹ Luis Pessoa, “On the relationship between emotion and cognition”, *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, vol. 9 (2008), pp. 148-58.

Recently, some psychologists and neuroanatomists have reasserted the role of cognition as a key component of emotional processing, as for example Nico Frijda, who argues that cognitive appraisal of an object precedes action tendencies, rather than vice versa in non-cognitive models of the emotions.²² To provide a concrete example: one sees a snake with one's eyes, the sensory signal transfers rapidly to the brain (which Frijda asserts is a cognitive step) which parses the memory before the brain sends signals to create bodily readiness or action tendencies.²³ This gives strength to the present dissertation's proposition that the emotion of wonder has cognitive ramifications both in the checking of memory before any somatic response, but also subsequently in spurring doubt, fact checking, and ultimately a subjective judgment about truth or falsehood. In asserting this one particular example of the interface between emotion and cognition, this dissertation steps back from the long-held view in Western philosophy and semantics that emotions and cognition are mutually antagonistic, and that emotions are involuntary, bodily, and irrational.²⁴

²² Nico H. Frijda, "The Psychologists' Point of View", in Michael Lewis, Jeanette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett (eds), *Handbook of Emotions* (New York, 2008), pp. 68-87.

²³ Frijda, "The Psychologists' Point of View".

²⁴ Thomas Dixon, "From Passions to Emotions", in Monica Greco and Paul Stenner (eds), *Emotions: A Social Science Reader* (Abingdon, 2008), pp. 29-33; Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge, 2003).

This dissertation has been influenced by a number of historiographical traditions: doubt scholarship (exemplified by Carl Watkins, John Arnold, and Sabina Flanagan),²⁵ the history of the emotions (exemplified by Rosenwein, Peter Stearns, William Reddy, Monique Scheer, and Thomas Dixon),²⁶ the *mentalités* school (exemplified by Jacques le Goff),²⁷ and reception studies (exemplified by art and literature historians including Geert Lernout and Madeline Harrison Caviness).²⁸ The majority of the primary source materials used here are well known to readers of Watkins' scholarly corpus, but this dissertation extends his analysis into the domain of historical emotionology and epistemology, and is novel in its adaptation of contemporary hard and soft sciences as analytical lenses for medieval texts. The primary

²⁵ Watkins, "Providence, Experience and Doubt"; Watkins, "Religion and Belief"; Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*; Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety in Medieval Wonder Stories", in Page (ed.), *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain*, pp. 45-64; Arnold, "The Materiality of Unbelief"; Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*; Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*.

²⁶ Barbara Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History", *American Historical Review*, vol. 107, no. 3 (2002), pp. 821-845; Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 1-31; Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", *Passions in Context*, vol. 1 (2010), pp. 1-32; Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York, 1994); Stearns, "Emotions History in the United States: Goals, Methods, and Promise", in J.C.E. Gienow-Hecht (ed.), *Emotions in American History* (New York, 2010), pp. 15-27; Benno Gammerl, "Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges", *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2012), pp. 161-75; William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 63-111, 315-334; Jam Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns", *History and Theory*, vol. 49 (2010), pp. 237-265; Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have A History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion", *History and Theory*, vol. 51 (2012), pp. 193-220; Thomas Dixon, "'Emotion': The History of a Keyword in Crisis", *Emotion Review*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2012), pp. 338-44.

²⁷ On the *mentalités* school, see Philippe Poirier, *Les enjeux de l'histoire culturelle* (Paris, 2004), pp. 50-60; Peter Burke, "Strengths and Weaknesses in the History of Mentalities", *History of European Ideas*, vol. 7 (1986), pp. 439-51; Jacques le Goff, "Mentalities: A History of Ambiguities", in Jacques le Goff and P. Nora (eds), *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 166-80.

²⁸ Geert Lernout, "Reception Theory", in Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth and Imre Szeman (eds), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore, 2nd ed. 2005), pp. 797-99; Madeline Harrison Caviness, "Reception of Images by Medieval Viewers", in Conrad Rudolph (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe* (Malden, 2006), pp. 65-85. Reception theory was originally called *Rezeptionsästhetik*: Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Timothy Bahti (trans.) (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. vii-xxix. It is also known as reader-response criticism: Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, 1990), pp. 153-9; Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism* (Baltimore, 1980). For a fascinating neuroscientific approach to reception, see Mikkel Wallentin et al., "Amygdala and Heart Rate Variability Responses from Listening to Emotionally Intense Parts of a Story", *NeuroImage*, vol. 58, no. 3 (2011), pp. 963-973.

contention of the relatively new history of the emotions movement is that emotional responses are not universal, but are at least partially dependent on culture, and therefore studying emotions in historical societies can assist contemporary understandings of the past and, by comparison, the present.

This dissertation will focus on detailed first-person testimony, so-called ‘ego documents’, because these allow for closer inspection of emotions, scepticism, and epistemological patterns, as opposed to, say, encyclopedias, although they too may carry evidence of the transhistorical process under examination here to a lesser degree.²⁹ This dissertation focuses on audience reception of marvels stories, rather than stories that seem composed, like any exempla invented purely for their didactic message, although any such distinction will ultimately be a matter of opinion on the reader’s part as to whether each story ‘feels’ or does not ‘feel’ composed solely for didacticism.

Both doubt and wonder have been treated before. In their seminal articles on wonder, Joan Onians and Caroline Walker Bynum insisted that historians look for wonder in more than just the marvels of the east and the monsters of encyclopedic traditions, which had been established areas of interest for orientalist historians from at least the nineteenth century.³⁰ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park traced wonder’s role in naturalist and scientific thought from the Middle Ages to the modern period.³¹ Watkins has been influential in discussions of both wonder and doubt. Michael Goodich has contributed to discussions of wonder, disbelief, and the lay experience of saints, particularly in the

²⁹ Tomáš Záhora, “The Tropological Universe: Alexander Neckam’s Encyclopedias and the Natures of Things” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 2007).

³⁰ Joan Onians, “I Wonder: A Short History of Amazement”, in Joan Onians (ed.), *Sight and Insight: Essays in Art and Culture in Honour of E.H. Gombrich at 85* (London, 1994), pp. 11-33; Caroline Walker-Bynum, “Wonder”, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 1 (1997), pp. 1-26.

³¹ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonder and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York, 1998).

thirteenth century.³² Scott Lightsey has described the wonder evoked by machinery.³³ Many have studied wonder and marvels in literature.³⁴ Others have pointed out that studying the past is in itself a process of wonder, involving the subconscious Saidian exoticising of a historical period.³⁵ The present dissertation differs from previous work in that it argues, uniquely, that wonder and scepticism are inextricably linked as forms of emotion and cognition, and that the wonder response is merely the initial step in an epistemological chain described in detail here for the first time. These processes are revealed by a close analysis of marvels texts, as will take place in subsequent chapters, and the hope is that this dissertation will contribute to debates within medieval history, historical emotionology more broadly, as well as the history and philosophy of science and, in particular, affective studies.

This dissertation will be limited to the European Middle Ages in the long twelfth-century, with a *terminus post quem* of 1095, the commencement of the first crusade, and a *terminus ante quem* of 1224, the probable completion date of Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*. This is a time of profound paradigm shifts: the growth of schools and

³² Michael Goodich, "Miracles and Disbelief in the Late Middle Ages", *Mediaevistik*, vol. 1 (1990), pp. 23-38; Goodich, "A Chapter in the History of the Christian Theology of Miracle: Engelbert of Admont's (ca. 1250-1331) *Expositio super Psalmum 118 and De miraculis Christi*", in Michael Goodich, Sophia Menache and Sylvia Schein (eds), *Cross-Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period: Essays in Presented to Aryeh Grabois on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (New York, 1996), pp. 89-110; Goodich, "Die wundersame Gefangenenbefreiung im mittelalterlichen Kanonisationsdocumente", in Klaus Herbers and Dieter Bauer (eds), *Hagiographie im Kontext*, (Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 69-84; Goodich, "Innocent III and the Miracle as a Weapon against Disbelief", in Andrea Sommerlechner et al. (eds), *Innocent III. Urbs et Orbis* (Rome, 2003), pp. 456-70; Goodich, "Reason or Revelation? The Criteria for the Proof and Credibility of Miracles in Canonization Processes", in Gabor Klaniczay (ed.), *Medieval Canonisation Trials: Religious and Legal Aspects* (Budapest, 2002), pp. 181-97; Goodich, "*Mirabile dictu!* Wonder and Surprise in the Medieval Miracle", in Gerhard Jaritz (ed.), *Material Culture and Emotions in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Krems, 2003), pp. 123-32; Goodich, "*Mirabilis Deus in Sanctis suis*' (Ps. 67.36): Social History and Medieval Miracles", in Kate Cooper (ed.), *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 135-56.

³³ Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture* (New York, 2007).

³⁴ Daniel Poirion, *Le merveilleux dans la littérature française du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1982); Lucienne Carasso-Bulow, *The merveilleux in Chrétien de Troyes' romances* (Geneva, 1976); Claude Lecouteux, *Les monstres dans la littérature allemande du Moyen Âge* (Göppingen, 1982).

³⁵ Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, "Introduction: A Return to Wonder", in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 25-47.

universities in centres like Paris, Chartres, and Bologna, demographic boom, the Crusades and the establishment and dissolution of the Latin East, the translation movement, and the gradual resurgence of Aristotelian naturalism, which gathered strength c.1200.³⁶ It is also a time of burgeoning interest in naturalistic observation and ethnography, although the twelfth century should only be considered a nascent beginning to the culture of observational naturalism.³⁷ The dissertation will attempt to navigate these contextual changes while discussing the transhistorical epistemological process of wonder and scepticism that is its focus. This leaves room for future research examining this transhistorical process in other time periods within or beyond the Middle Ages.

Close examination of epistemology in medieval history is polemically revisionist in that it aims to rework simplistic notions of a believing Middle Ages juxtaposing a sceptical modernity. Evidence of change or continuity within the epistemological process established here could provide data to inform larger historiographical debates, such as helping to support or challenge the continuity thesis of James Franklin, Robert Pasnau, and others. This view asserts that there is no radical disconnection between the intellectual developments of the medieval and early modern periods, or, in Pasnau's words: "modernity came in the late twelfth century" primarily due to the resurgence of Aristotle, with Pasnau singling out Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle as a particular watershed.³⁸ Max Weber famously

³⁶ John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy* (Milton Park, 2007), p. 131. For a precise breakdown of the dates of Aristotelian texts and their translations, see Robert Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 793-832. On the twelfth century generally, see Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927).

³⁷ M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*, J. Taylor and L.K. Little (trans.) (Chicago, 1968); Tullio Gregory, "L'Idée de Nature nella Filosofia Medievale prime dell'Ingresso della Fisica di Aristotele - Secolo XII", *La Filosofia della Natura nel Medioevo* (Milan, 1966); R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970); Peter Brown, "Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change", *Daedalus*, vol.104 (1975), pp. 133-151; Nadja Germann, "Natural Philosophy in Earlier Latin Thought", in Robert Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 219-31.

³⁸ James Franklin, "The Renaissance Myth", *Quadrant*, vol. 26, no. 11 (1982), pp. 51-60; Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability before Pascal* (Baltimore, 2001). Quote is from Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1671* (Oxford, 2011), p. 1.

claimed that the transition from medieval to modern was a process of *Entzauberung* (“disenchantment” or “demystification”); if wonder leads to subjective learning, then the epistemological process established here may go hand-in-hand with the more traditionally recognised burgeoning of scientific thinking from the thirteenth century onwards.³⁹

Wonder is generally considered a form of positive affect, though some affective neuroscientists, including Jeffrey Burgdorff and Jaak Panksepp, have argued that the concepts of positive and negative affect are redundant because they do not reflect a legitimate biological bipolarity, and that views of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions are merely an unfortunate hangover from Cartesian mind-body dualism.⁴⁰ Furthermore, wonder has ‘negative affect’ cousins in fear, dread, and horror, as well as perhaps more subjectively ‘neutral’ awe and reverence, suggesting that it defies strict categorisation as an apparently positive feeling.⁴¹ For this reason, wonder is treated here as something that arrests attention commensurate to its degree of disjunction from a person’s prior experience, whether it feel subjectively ‘positive’ or ‘negative’.

³⁹ Richard Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment, and Re-Enchantment”, *Max Weber Studies*, vol. 1 (2000), pp. 11-32.

⁴⁰ James A. Russell and James M. Carroll, “On the Bipolarity of Positive and Negative Affect”, *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 125, no. 1 (1999), pp. 3-30; Eshkol Rafaeli and William Revelle, “A premature consensus: are happiness and sadness truly opposite effects?”, *Motivation and Emotion*, vol. 30 (2006), pp. 1-12; Jeffrey Burgdorff and Jaak Panksepp, “The neurobiology of positive emotions”, *Neuroscience and Behavioural Reviews*, vol. 30 (2006), pp. 173-187.

⁴¹ Bynum, “Wonder”, p. 15. On the biological relationship between fear and wonder, see Arne Öhman, “Human Fear Conditioning and the Amygdala”, in Paul J. Whalen and Elizabeth A. Phelps (eds), *The Human Amygdala* (New York, 2009), pp. 118-154; see also in the same volume: Phelps, “The Human Amygdala and the Control of Fear”, pp. 204-219; Stephen Hamann, “The Human Amygdala and Memory”, pp. 177-203.

Ancient and medieval scholars largely repeated a standard definition of wonder with very little variation over the centuries. This definition purports that wonder: 1) stems from an encounter with a novel object, 2) causes excitement, 3) is of unexplained objects, 4) creates a desire to understand the object, and 5) is dulled by experience with the object. Bert Hansen showed that those who repeated this definition had no knowledge of previous writers' similar definitions, which supports the view that that wonder's existence is transhistorical.⁴² However, because wonder is perspectival, there is scope for inter- and intra-cultural variation because of its relation to the novel, the unexpected, and the unknown, be that for an individual or a larger cultural group.

Contemporary affective neuroscientists like Timothy Ketelaar tend to explain emotions, feelings, and instincts from a consequentialist point of view; that is, their effects determine their purposes: the effect of lust is procreation, the effect of hunger is eating, the effect of fear is to avoid threats, and so on.⁴³ If wonder prompts sceptical questions, which are answered through fact checking, then its function is the acquisition of new knowledge, as noted above by Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, and Smith. For this reason, Philip Fisher described wonder as the destruction of imagined images of the world, a movement from lack of knowledge, or an imagined view of an object, to sensory encounter, and ultimately learning. He argues that this is a process pivotal to scientific ways of thinking, and education more generally; as such, it may also be a key differentiating feature between children and adults.⁴⁴ Onians claims that learning about our environment was an important component

⁴² Nicole Oresme, *De Causis Mirabilibus*, Bert Hansen (ed.) (Toronto, 1985), pp. 64-5.

⁴³ Timothy Ketelaar, "Evolutionary Psychology and Emotion: A Brief History", in Virgil Zeigler-Hill, Lisa L.M. Welling, Todd K. Shackelford (eds), *Evolutionary Perspectives on Social Psychology* (Heidelberg, 2015), pp. 51-68; Laith al-Shawaf, Daniel Conroy-Beam, Kelly Asao, David M. Buss, "Human Emotions: An Evolutionary Psychology Perspective", *Emotion Review* (2015), pp. 1-14; John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "The Evolutionary Psychology of the Emotions and their Relationship to Internal Regulatory Variables", in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Barrett (eds), *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 114-137.

⁴⁴ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), pp. 57-86.

of humanity's evolutionary history, as it is what allowed humans in the remote past to grasp tool-making, distinguish food from poison, or predator from prey.⁴⁵ Jonathan Haidt and Dacher Keltner describe how these primordial forms of emotion may be elaborated into experiences “based more on ideation than perceptual qualities”, and then provide the example of primordial disgust evolving into a social response towards the impure deeds of people.⁴⁶

Contemporary neuroscientists also tend to affirm Paul Ekman's theory, stemming from Charles Darwin's 1872 *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, that facial expressions are universal representations of emotions regardless of cultural background, that an African tribesman's smile equates to a Tokyo businesswoman's smile, and that both are, when smiling, broadly experiencing similar neurophysiological conditions that may be described using the English word 'happy'.⁴⁷ The universality of emotions on faces, however, has received criticism from Rosenwein, who rhetorically asks: “If emotions are, as many scientists think, biological entities, universal within all human populations, do they – indeed can they – have much of a history at all?”⁴⁸

But biological determinism and cultural determinism need not be diametrically opposed. Emotions may be expressed universally on faces, but nevertheless vary between cultural groups in other ways, particularly in stimuli and expression, as well as cultural normativity about emotional regulation, or unspoken social rules about which emotions to express or suppress in specific situations. It seems acceptable to presume that wonder had

⁴⁵ Onians, “I Wonder”, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁶ Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, “Approaching Awe: A Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic Emotion”, *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2003), pp. 297-314, here pp. 206-7.

⁴⁷ David Matsumoto et al., “Facial Expressions of Emotion”, in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Barrett (eds), *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 211-234; various articles in Paul Ekman, Joseph J. Campos, Richard J. Davidson and Frans de Waal (eds), *Emotions Inside Out: 130 Years of Darwin's 'The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals'* (New York, 2003).

⁴⁸ Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of the Emotions”, *Passions in Context*, vol. 1 (2010), pp. 1-32, here p. 1.

the same somatic expression in medieval people that it does today, including, as Onians notes, an immediate physical paralysis, baited breath with open mouth, and an increase in sensory perception faculties (particularly a widened visual field). These are all processes rapidly effected through the amygdala, which governs responses to phenomena that are immediately attention-grabbing through a neuropsychological process known as the amygdala hijack.⁴⁹ Neuroimaging studies have shown that the brain and thoracic areas are increasingly activated when subjects report they are feeling surprise or fear, emotions that arrest attention, like wonder.⁵⁰ Further, Onians proposes that there is evidence for wonder's arresting physiological response in etymology: (1) English 'astonish' from French *étonner* from Latin *attonare* (to be stunned/amazed, literally to be thundered at), referring to the impact of thunder on a human hearer; (2) English 'stupefy', from Latin *stupefactus*, based on Indo-European *stupē* (log; compare Latin *stipes*), with *stupefactus* meaning something like 'made into a log'; (3) Latin *miror/admiror* (to stare in amazement at), whence *admiratio* (wonder).⁵¹

Neuroanatomists have attempted to determine the evolutionary history of the human brain's various components through comparison with other animals.⁵² Joseph LeDoux claimed that the emotion of fear can proceed through two neurological systems, both involving the thalamus and amygdala: one older, shorter, and faster system (the amygdala hijack), and the other more recently evolved, and slower. The older system transfers sensory

⁴⁹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York, 1996), pp. 13-32; Joseph Paton et al., "The primate amygdala represents the positive and negative value of visual stimuli during learning", *Nature*, vol. 439 (2005), pp. 865-70; Hamann, "The Human Amygdala and Memory", in Whalen and Phelps (eds), *The Human Amygdala*, pp. 177-203.

⁵⁰ Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Glerean, Riitta Hari, and Jari K. Hietanen, "Bodily Maps of Emotions", *PNAS*, vol. 111, no. 2 (2014), pp. 646-51. See particularly Figure 2 on p. 647.

⁵¹ Joan Onians, "I Wonder: A Short History of Amazement", in Joan Onians (ed.), *Sight and Insight: Essays on Art and Culture in Honour of E.H. Gombrich at 85* (London, 1994), pp. 11-33, here pp. 11-12.

⁵² Fernando Martinez-Garcia et al., "Adaptive Function and Brain Evolution", *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, vol. 6 (2012), pp. 6-7.

information quickly from the thalamus to the amygdala, where it effects the autonomic and motor responses that might be described subjectively using the English word ‘fear’. The younger system transfers sensory information from the thalamus to the relevant cortical areas, where cognitive appraisal occurs. These areas communicate with the amygdala and, in light of appraisal, may increase or decrease the amygdala’s fear response. LeDoux hypothesises that the ongoing existence of the dual system is because feeling fear towards something innocuous is of little consequence, but a lack of fear response when something is legitimately dangerous could be fatal.⁵³ To what extent this fear response correlates with wonder as conceived here remains to be shown, and further neurological research could increase understanding of this.⁵⁴

Wonder may be both a social and individual emotion. When others observe a nearby individual stopped in their tracks and appearing amazed, afraid, surprised, or bewildered, then the emotion’s effects may spread through groups via a process called emotional contagion.⁵⁵ For this reason, Haidt categorises wonder as a so-called “moral emotion” responsible for serving group interests, and juxtaposes this with self-serving emotions like fear (to protect the self from threat) or lust (to propagate one’s genes).⁵⁶ Both the somatic

⁵³ Joseph LeDoux, “The Emotional Brain”, in Jennifer M. Jenkins, Keith Oatley, and Nancy L. Stein (eds), *Human Emotions: A Reader* (Malden, 1998), pp. 98-111; LeDoux, “Emotion Theory and Research: Highlight, Unanswered Questions, and Emerging Issues”, *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 60, no. 1 (1996), pp. 1-25; LeDoux and Elizabeth A. Phelps, “Emotional Networks in the Brain”, in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Barrett (eds), *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 159-79.

⁵⁴ Keltner and Haidt, “Approaching Awe”, pp. 297-314.

⁵⁵ Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 147-171, with onward references. On emotional contagion’s evolutionary function, see Jennifer R. Spoor, “The Evolutionary Significance of Affect in Groups: Communication and Group Bonding”, *Group Processes, Intergroup Relations*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2004), pp. 398-412. On individual differences, see R. William Doherty, “The Emotional Contagion Scale: A Measure of Individual Differences”, *Journal of Nonverbal Behaviour*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1997), pp. 131-154. Facebook engaged in a controversial experiment on its users which confirmed that emotional contagion takes place even in online communities: Adam D.I. Kramer, Jamie E. Guillory and Jeffrey T. Hancock, “Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks”, *PNAS*, vol. 111, no. 24 (2014), pp. 8788-8790.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Haidt, “The Moral Emotions” in Richard J. Davidson, Klaus Scherer and H. Hill Goldsmith (eds), *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (New York, 2003), pp. 852-70.



Figure 2: Expressions of Wonder at Halley's Comet, from the Bayeux Tapestry. The caption reads "These men marvel at a star" (*Isti mirant stella*).

effects and the sociality of wonder are shown in **Figure 2**, an excerpt from the Bayeux Tapestry in which a group of men "marvel at a star", that is, the 1066 iteration of Halley's Comet, with the facial and bodily reactions that Darwin, Ekman, and Onians propose for wonder (open mouth, shrinking back, and pointing as a way to initiate emotional contagion).⁵⁷ The sociality of medieval wonders is also shown in the large groups of people who flocked en masse to see beached whales, conjoined twins, and green children, or to interrogate adolescent girls who claimed to possess the ability to interlocate with the deceased. Many such examples of wonder's sociality are described throughout this dissertation.

⁵⁷ Darwin, *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London, 1872), ch. 12, pp. 278-309; Ekman, "Facial Expression", in Aron Siegman and Stanley Feldstein (eds), *Nonverbal Behaviour and Communication*, 2nd edition (Hillsdale, 1987), pp. 109-110; Onians, "I Wonder", pp. 13-15.

In the twentieth century, affective psychologists tended to debate lists of ‘basic’ emotions, with wonder missing from many such lists. Lists varied widely from theorist to theorist; to provide just one example of hundreds, Carroll Izard and Sandra Buechler listed the ten ‘fundamental’ emotions as interest, joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame/shyness, and guilt.⁵⁸ Critics like Anna Wierzbicka have had significant misgivings about these lists, and ask whether emotions are in biological fact discrete, unique, separate entities, or whether they exist in spectra based on combinations of neurochemicals like dopamine, epinephrine, cortisol, or serotonin.⁵⁹ Frijda argued firmly for the latter, positing that the emotions blend from one to the next in the same way that colours blend, in a manner that smacks of Galenic humoral theory.⁶⁰ Many have adopted this colour analogy as a way to summarily dismiss the complexities of emotional states without consideration of what neurochemicals underpin them, whether they ‘blend’, and, if so, how.⁶¹

If emotions blend like colours, there is no good reason to suspect that English emotion terms necessarily correspond to the so-called ‘primary’ emotions, if such a category

⁵⁸ Carroll Izard and Sandra Buechler, “Aspects of Consciousness and Personality in Terms of Differential Emotions Theory”, in Robert Plutchik and Henry Kellerman (eds), *Emotion: Theory, Research, and Experience, Vol.1: Theories of Emotion* (New York, 1980), pp. 165-187, here pp. 168-9. Interestingly, only Descartes seems to count aesthetic emotions like wonder or amazement amongst the ‘basic’ emotions: Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill, 2006), pp. 9-10; a good summary of pre-1990 proponents of basic emotions can be found in Andrew Ortony and Terence J. Turner, “What’s Basic About Basic Emotions?”, *Psychological Review*, vol. 97, no. 3 (1990), pp. 315-331.

⁵⁹ Anna Wierzbicka, “Human Emotions: Universal or Culture-Specific?”, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 88, no. 3 (1986), pp. 584-94.

⁶⁰ Nico H. Frijda, “The Psychologists’ Point of View”, p. 75; Robert Plutchik, *Emotion: A Psychoevolutionary Synthesis* (New York, 1980), pp. 153-4, 164-5.

⁶¹ Jon Elster, “Rationality and the Emotions”, *The Economic Journal*, vol. 106, no. 438 (1996), pp. 1386-1397, here p. 1389; John Sabini and Maury Silver, “Ekman’s Basic Emotions: Why not Love and Jealousy?”, *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2005), pp. 693-712; James A. Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions”, *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 110, no. 3 (1991), pp. 426-450; Laura K. Guerrero, Peter A. Andersen and Melanie R. Trost, “Communication and Emotion: Basic Concepts and Approaches”, in Peter A. Anderson and Laura K. Guerrero (eds), *Handbook of Communication and Emotion* (Orlando, 1998), pp. 1-29, here p. 16; Timothy R. Nuske, *The Map of the Psyche* (Bloomington, 2013), p. 32; C.E. Izard, “Emotions and Facial Expressions: A Perspective from Differential Emotions Theory”, James A. Russell and José Miguel Fernández-Dols (eds), *The Psychology of Facial Expression* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 57-77, here p. 68.

has any ontological legitimacy at all.⁶² In colour, there is no such thing objectively as blue or red, and different languages and cultures have different reference points for describing an object's colour.⁶³ The same would seem to apply to the emotions; therefore, there may be no good reason why English terms should be the benchmark for discussing them, just as blue should not be a formal scientific metric.

Lexicologists led by Wierzbicka have convincingly shown the extent to which the scientific establishment's discussion of emotions has been coloured by the methodological flaw of lexical bias inherent in the English language, and Wierzbicka's work has initiated a paradigm shift in emotionology in both scientific and humanities circles.⁶⁴ To take the emotion words from one's own language and say they represent the 'true' emotions and to ignore the emotion words of other languages may amount to a form of cultural imperialism.⁶⁵ Emotionologists must therefore beware the philosophical trap of Cartesian mind-body dualism, and recognise the disconnection between emotion words and the things they denote on a biological level. For historical emotionologists, this places importance on the careful parsing of historical emotion terms to establish their differences with contemporary terms, as recommended by Rosenwein.⁶⁶

Around 1214, Gervase of Tilbury followed the normative definition of wonder noted by Hansen in describing *admiratio* as resulting from an encounter with a novel object; he then divided novelty into four types: originality ("creation"), recentness ("eventu"), rarity

⁶² Nico H. Frijda, "The Psychologists' Point of View", p. 76.

⁶³ Anna Wierzbicka, "Why there are no 'colour universals' in language and thought", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2008), pp. 407-425.

⁶⁴ Klaus Scherer, "On the Nature and Function of Emotion: A Component Process Approach", in Klaus Scherer and Paul Ekman (eds), *Approaches to Emotion* (New York, 2009), pp. 293-318, here pp. 293-5.

⁶⁵ Shweder, Haidt, Horton, and Joseph, "The Cultural Psychology of the Emotions", p. 411.

⁶⁶ Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", *Passions in Context*, vol. 1 (2010), pp. 1-32.

(“raritate”), and strangeness (“inauditu”).⁶⁷ Gervase also adheres to what Hansen has identified as the usual definition of wonder in his claim that wonder decreases with experience: “Things that have only just happened cause wonder, less if they happen often, more if they are rare”.⁶⁸ Gervase also notes wonder results “partly from our ignorance of the cause” with responders “not understanding (*cognitione*) the reason why”, which implies that wonder diminishes after cognition takes place, and that wonder therefore commences a process resulting in movement from less knowledge to more knowledge.⁶⁹ Gervase then argues that the *admiratio* response can be effected by both *miracula* and *mirabilia*, and defines *miracula* as “those things which, being preternatural, we ascribe to divine power, as when a virgin gives birth”, and *mirabilia* as “things which are beyond our comprehension even though they are natural”.⁷⁰

One instance is known of a much rarer usage of the term *admiratio* to describe the pleasant feeling aroused by consistent devotion of attention to an object of aesthetic beauty, rather than one’s initial encounter with it.⁷¹ In his *Topographia Hibernica*, Gerald of Wales describes how he encountered a manuscript in Kildare (possibly the Book of Kells, or something in a similar style) which so enthralled him that he hypothesised an angelic provenance for the book. Even a year or two after his initial description of it, Gerald was so inspired by its beauty that he was able to write: “Indeed, as I inspect [its illustrations] more

⁶⁷ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (eds and trans.) (Oxford, 2002), book 3, preface, pp. 558-9.

⁶⁸ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, preface, pp. 558-9: “Que nuper eueniunt, si frequentia minus, si rara plus habent admirationis”. I have altered Banks and Binns’ translation.

⁶⁹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, preface, pp. 558-9: “...tum ex ignorancia cause... sine cognitione iudicii”. I have altered Banks and Binns’ translation.

⁷⁰ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, preface, pp. 558-9: “Porro miracula dicimus usitatius que preter naturam divine virtuti ascribimus, ut cum virgo parit... Mirabilia vero dicimus que nostre cognicioni non subiacent, etiam cum sunt naturalia”.

⁷¹ On wonder as a response to objects of aesthetic beauty, see Kentner and Haidt, “Approaching Awe”, pp. 300-301.

frequently and more closely, I am always stunned as though they were new to me; each time I see it, it is more and more worthy of being wondered at (*admiranda*)”.⁷²

This use of *admiranda* contradicts the definition seen in Gervase’s *Otia*. Gerald’s usage ought to be considered rhetorical, indicating his feeling of wonder was ongoing as a way to hyperbolise the manuscript’s beauty, rather than as a concerted challenge to the more normative definition of *admiratio* as stemming from initial exposure and declining with ongoing exposure. In the same work, Gerald affirms the normative definition, declaring that:

Human nature is so fashioned that only that which is unusual or rare is considered precious or worthy of wonder. Because we see it every day, we completely neglect to wonder at the rising and setting of the sun, although nothing is more beautiful in the [whole] world, nothing more worthy of amazement. However, the whole world is struck dumb at an eclipse of the sun, because it happens only rarely.⁷³

For Gerald, then, wonder was worthy of being encouraged because it led to an appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of the everyday aspects of God’s creation, but his hyperbolic tone indicates his apparent frustration (“*totus orbis obtupescit*”) that others seemed to find creation wonderless.

Marvels, although secular in name, were often glossed with religious moralisations and explanations, and often described as subservient to nature, of which God was the architect. On this issue, twelfth-century philosophers like John of Salisbury united Plato’s conception of sub- and super-lunary realms with the Christian division between the divine

⁷² Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, James F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, Rolls Series, 1867), *distinctio* 2, ch. 39, vol. 5, p. 124: “Haec equidem quanto frequentius et diligentius intueor, semper quasi novis obstuereo, semper magis ac magis admiranda conspicio”. This common stems from the second version of the text, which Amelia Sargent establishes as written a year or two after the first version, which already mentioned his having sighted the manuscript: Amelia Sargent, *Visions and Revisions: Gerald of Wales, Authorship, and the Construction of Political, Religious, and Legal Geographies in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Britain* (University of California Berkeley, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2011), pp. 85-6, 237.

⁷³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, *distinctio* 1, ch. 15, p. 49: “Sic enim composita est humana natura, ut nihil praeter inusitatum, et raro contingens, vel pretiosum ducat vel admirandum. Solis ortum et occasum, quo nihil in mundo pulchrius, nihil stupore dignius, quia quotidie videmus, sine omni admiratione praeterimus. Eclipsim vero solis, quia raro accidit, totus orbis obtupescit”.

and the worldly to articulate that marvels were divine actions beyond the domain of 'nature'.⁷⁴ The normative position established by Augustine with regard to nature was that in the past God created the world in a certain static form (its 'nature'), and that marvels were God's present acts beyond this unchanging natural framework to remind Christians of his enduring presence by activating some sort of latent quality he left in the world at the time of creation.⁷⁵ But this position is logically problematic; in the words of Daston and Park: "there was no inherent way to distinguish between apparently commonplace and apparently marvelous phenomena, since all depended directly on divine will", and for this reason Augustine claimed that "all God's works are marvels", a position which irretrievably blurs the terminological boundaries between 'nature' and 'preternatural', or indeed between *mirabilium*, *miraculum*, *portentum*, *ostensum*, and the everyday, between wonder and the mundane.⁷⁶

Gerald's depiction of eclipses suffers from this terminological blurring: the rising and setting of the sun, he says, should be held in equal veneration to eclipses; the common should be as wondrous as the rare because both stem from the divine. This dissertation will argue that this Christian attitude to wonder distorted the emotion's evolutionary purpose as a prompt for learning. From c.1200 onwards, the revival of Aristotelian naturalism, particularly Aristotle's view of an unmoved prime mover who is apathetic about the present, created further debate among Latin philosophers about the precise division of divine and natural domains, a debate which was increasingly seen to be threatening Catholic unity and

⁷⁴ John Marenbon, "Twelfth-Century Platonism: Old Paths and New Directions", T. Kobusch and B. Mojsishch (eds), A. Snell and O. Summerell (trans.), *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte: neue Forschungen zum Platonismus* (Darmstadt, 1997), pp. 101-119.

⁷⁵ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, pp. 39-40.

⁷⁶ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, p. 40; Augustine, *Soliloquiorum*, in *PL*, vol. 32, col. 707: "nam omnia Dei opera mirabilia [sunt]".

orthodoxy, especially as the thirteenth century wore on.⁷⁷ Aristotle's view of causes therefore denied God the ability to perform present preternatural actions, threatening to demolish the Augustinian view of marvel that was pervasive throughout the long twelfth century, which is the focus of this dissertation.⁷⁸

Despite the apparent definition of marvel as something purely 'natural', as opposed to miracles, the Latin terminology of marvels (*mirabilia* and its various cognates) was frequently applied to religious wonders as well.⁷⁹ If wonder is of the novel, then it is subjective, relating to the viewer's prior exposure to an object, rather than any characteristic of the object itself; this necessitates a reception studies approach for the present study.⁸⁰ The miracle, not the focus here, was broadly considered a preternatural act of God working through a saint, but the mutability of the term *miraculum* and its cognates meant that it was sometimes applied to natural phenomena as well; wonder at saints' miracles has been explored by Goodich and others.⁸¹ Magic, also not the focus here, was a further category of wondrous event often associated with demonic forces, based chiefly on the biblical precedent of the pharaoh's magicians in Exodus; it has been explored by Richard Kieckhefer and

⁷⁷ John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy* (Milton Park, 2007), pp. 205-70; Enzo Maccagnolo, "David of Dinant and the Beginnings of Aristotelianism in Paris", Jonathan Hunt (trans.), in Peter Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 429-42.

⁷⁸ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, pp. 39-40, 109-134.

⁷⁹ See Goodich's works above at n. 32.

⁸⁰ Bynum, "Wonder", pp. 13-14.

⁸¹ For Goodich, see above at n. 32. Other noteworthy works include: Axel R uth, "Representing Wonder in Medieval Miracle Narratives", *MLN*, vol. 126, no. 4 (2011), pp. 89-114; Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2011); Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?", *Representations*, vol. 103 (2008), pp. 1-29.

others.⁸² Despite this generalisation of magic as demonic, twelfth-century churchmen sometimes engaged the services of magicians for entertainment or prognostication.⁸³

This dissertation therefore treats wonder (*admiratio*) as an emotion stemming from one's initial encounter with wondrous phenomena (*mira*), of which miracles (*miracula*), marvels (*mirabilia*), and magic (*magia*) are problematically overlapping subcategories:

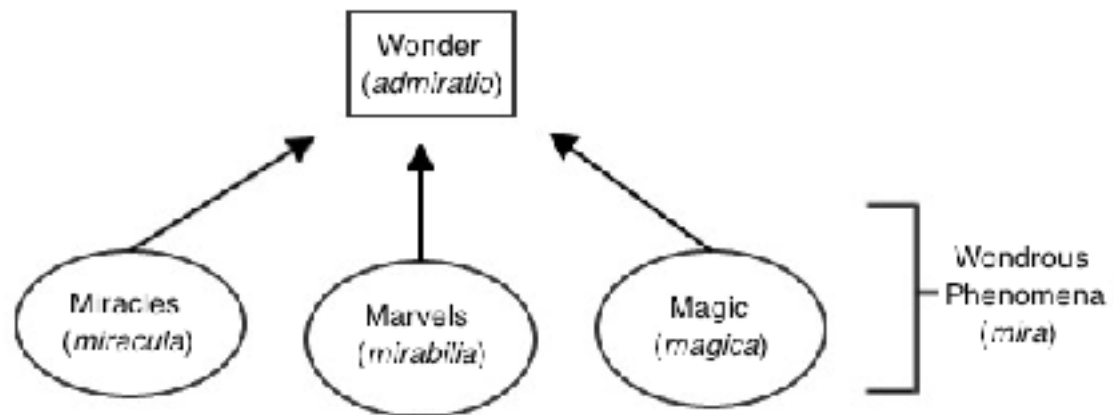


Figure 3: Terminological Relationships Between Wonder Terms

In this dissertation, scepticism is taken in the common parlance sense of ‘tending towards disbelief’.⁸⁴ The primary focus is not on global scepticism, roughly the belief that no truths are knowable, but on the transitory epistemic defeatism that could be aroused if the epistemological process initiated by wonder was frustrated at the evidentiary stage. The aim is not to explore this as a formal contribution to the history of philosophical scepticism in the rarified world of the schools and universities, but rather as a quondam reaction of epistemic defeatism in the case of specific marvels stories, a reaction that could be had

⁸² Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 33; Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas, *Magic and Medieval Society* (Abingdon, 2014).

⁸³ Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, pp. 18-22; Lawrence-Mathers and Escobar-Vargas, *Magic in Medieval Society*, pp. 13-26; Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 1977), p. 133.

⁸⁴ This has also been termed “ambiguity attitude”: Paolo Ghirardato, “Defining Ambiguity and Ambiguity Attitude”, in Itzhak Gilboa (ed.), *Uncertainty in Economic Theory* (Jerusalem, 2004), pp. 36-45.

equally by educated and illiterate, rich and poor, ecclesiastics and laymen. This dissertation also claims that this epistemic frustration increased the viability of belief in a divine being who acts in the present.

The terms ‘composer’ and ‘responder’ are borrowed from literature studies for use here; they denote the creator of a text or story (composer) and the audience of a text or story (responder). These are not mutually exclusive categories: the authors cited here were at first responders (receiving a story), then composers (writing the story down); the terminological distinction permits more specificity in discussing the different steps of reception and composition. The term ‘wondrous object’ is used to represent the thing encountered; it does not necessarily denote an object in the physical sense. The term ‘truth modality’ is used to refer to the variable truth strength of claims; for example, the phrase “I will work hard” has a stronger truth strength in the mind of the speaker (called high truth modality), than the phrase “I might work hard”, which is an example of low truth modality.

Although objective truths should be considered in black and white terms, a breadth of possibilities exist between outright belief and disbelief in those truths. This is best expressed diagrammatically:

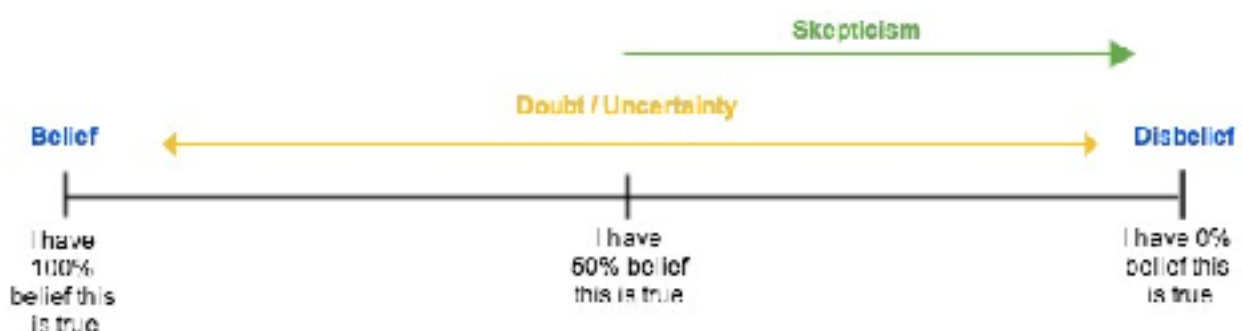


Figure 4: The Belief-Doubt Continuum

The idea of a belief-doubt continuum is a borrowing from Bayesian probability, a mathematical-philosophical school which purports that all probabilities are subjective, that the statement — “the probability of x being true is 80%” — is not a measure of an objective truth, but of the belief of the person making the statement, with all their inherent strengths and weaknesses as a reporter. On the belief-unbelief scale, f is used to denote a thing’s truth value between 0 (completely false) and 1 (completely true). If f has a probability of 0.2, this does not mean that it is 20% true, but that the person making the claim has a 20% certitude that it is true; f is therefore a measure of a person’s knowledge or ignorance, not of truth or falsehood. Taking the definition of scepticism to mean ‘tending towards the right of the belief-doubt continuum’, **Chapter 1** proposes that when evidence for a story is well regarded by the responder, they approach belief, but when evidence is regarded by the responder as faulty in some respect, they approach disbelief. This same process informs the historical method.⁸⁵

Furthermore, individuals are expected to begin at different locations on the continuum for certain beliefs based on a variety of factors. Religiosity, for example, has been proposed to increase the likelihood of belief in supernatural interventions in the natural order.⁸⁶ Higher intelligence and education level (with the latter described as positively influencing the former) have been proposed to increase the likelihood that responders will

⁸⁵ Louis Gottshalk, *Understanding History* (New York, 1950), pp. 139-171.

⁸⁶ Richard Beck and Jonathan P. Miller, “Erosion of Belief and Disbelief: Effects of Religiosity and Negative Affect on Beliefs in the Paranormal and Supernatural”, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 141, no. 2 (2001), pp. 277-287.

have more doubts towards perceived truths.⁸⁷ People of moderate self-esteem have been described as tending to be more susceptible to influence than those with lower self-esteem (who show difficulty receiving messages), and those of higher self-esteem (who show difficulty yielding to them).⁸⁸ Rurality has been suggested as negatively correlating with intelligence, and therefore increasing belief, through the mediating factors of illiteracy, lack of access to education, and poverty.⁸⁹ Individual differences in religiosity and irreligiosity have been described as having a partially genetic basis.⁹⁰

In the 1960s, Jack Goody and Ian Watt suggested that, historically, individuals from societies organised around oral transmission of knowledge, as opposed to written, were generally more persuadable, making scepticism rarer in oral societies than written societies. Aaron Gurevich described the twelfth-century book culture as “an oasis among oral communications”, suggesting that the twelfth century may correlate more with Goody and Watt’s oral category.⁹¹ Walter Ong extended Goody and Watt’s thesis to also include the Middle Ages within the oral category, and argued that oral societies tend to avoid

⁸⁷ Nancy Rhodes and Wendy Wood, “Self-Esteem and Intelligence Affect Influencability: The Mediating Role of Message Reception”, *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 111, no. 1 (1992), pp. 156-171; Regan Clark, “Religiousness, Spirituality, and IQ: Are They Linked?”, *Explorations*, vol. 7 (2004), pp. 35-46; Julie Sickles, Alisa Huskey, Kathryn Schrantz, and Caleb W. Lack, “The Relationship between Intelligence and Religiosity: A Critical Review of the Literature”, *Journal of Scientific Psychology* (May, 2015), pp. 1-10. But Walker et al. warn that education is not a sufficient condition for scepticism: Richard W. Walker et al., “Science Education is No Guarantee of Skepticism”, *Skeptic*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2002), pp. 24-27; cf. Matthew D. Smith, Christa L. Foster and Gordon Stovin, “Intelligence and Paranormal Belief: Examining the Role of Context”, *The Journal of Parapsychology*, vol. 62, no. 1 (1998), pp. 65-77; Wendy Wood and Brian Stagner, “Why are some people easier to influence than others?”, in Sharon Shavitt and Timothy C. Brock (eds), *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives* (Needham Heights, 1994), pp. 149-74.

⁸⁸ Nancy Rhodes and Wendy Wood, “Self-Esteem and Intelligence Affect Influencability”; Carl I. Hovland, Janis L. Irving and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change* (New Haven, 1953).

⁸⁹ Nigel Barber, “Educational and Ecological Correlates of IQ: A Cross-National Investigation”, *Intelligence*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2005), pp. 273-284.

⁹⁰ Gary J. Lewis and Timothy C. Bates, “Common Genetic Influences Underpin Religiosity, Community Integration, and Existential Uncertainty”, *Journal of Research in Personality*, vol. 47 (2013), pp. 398-405.

⁹¹ Aaron J. Gurevich, “Oral and Written Culture of the Middle Ages: Two ‘Peasant Visions’ of the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Century”, *New Literary History*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1984), pp. 51-66, here p. 51.

exploration of new ideas, or frame new ideas within long-established, traditional group-based formulae, thereby slowing change and reducing cultural dynamism.⁹² This may add credence to the idea of the educated written subculture as more sceptical and individualistic in its determination of truths, as opposed to a homogenous oral *populus* as more group-based and participatory in its determination of truths.⁹³ This may add credence to the view that later medieval advances in demographics, education, and technology such as the printing press, were important watersheds allowing for increases in scepticism and individualism, which are possibly linked phenomena. A tendency for individuals to align their beliefs and doubts with those of their immediate social group (termed social desirability bias) has also been described.⁹⁴ Critics have asserted that Goody's, Watt's, and Ong's views represent a form of Western cultural imperialism, or, in Alaric Hall's words: "a perpetuation of modernist ideas about primitivity and modernity".⁹⁵ The primary material examined in this dissertation would appear to support the views of Goody, Watt, and Ong.

The possible link between education and scepticism, however, is a vexed question. On the one hand, the omnipresence of doubt, combined with the fact that the sources examined here are written by educated clergymen, would seem to support a correlation between

⁹² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologising of the Word* (London, 2002, 2nd edition), p. 42.

⁹³ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 45-6.

⁹⁴ Dan M. Kahan et al., "The Polarizing Impact of Science Literacy and Numeracy on Perceived Climate Change Risks", *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 2 (2012), pp. 732-5; Mrugank V. Thakor and Karine Goneau-Lessard, "Development of a Scale to Measure Skepticism of Social Advertising among Adolescents", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 62, no. 12 (2009), pp. 1342-9; Toshio Yamagishi, Masako Kikuchi and Motoko Kosugi, "Trust, Gullibility, and Social Intelligence", *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 2 (1999), pp. 145-161.

⁹⁵ Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1963), pp. 304-345, here pp. 344-5; Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 15-16, 27, 37-38. For the criticisms, see John Halverston, "Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis", *Man*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1992), pp. 301-317; Ama Mazama, "The Eurocentric Discourse on Writing", *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1998), pp. 3-15; James Collins and Richard K. Blot, *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power and Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 9-33. Quote is from Alaric Hall, "The Orality of a Silent Age: The Place of Orality in Medieval Studies", in Marko Lamberg, Jesse Keskiäho, Elina Räsänen and Olga Timofeeva (eds), *Methods and the Medievalist: Current Approaches in Medieval Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2008), pp. 270-90, here p. 271.

education and scepticism. However, this raises methodological concerns because the vast majority of evidence for lay beliefs is filtered through the ecclesiastical lens.⁹⁶ Moreover, the self-esteem, mood, inner mental workings, and social surroundings of historical individuals are overwhelmingly hidden to historians who work with the scant details provided by extant texts.

It has been suggested that all people tend towards one or the other end of the belief-doubt continuum in preference to remaining in doubt because of a phenomenon termed ‘ambiguity avoidance’, which has been reported to be stronger in women than in men.⁹⁷ Geert Hofstede has described this individual-level concept (‘ambiguity avoidance’) at a societal level (‘uncertainty avoidance’) by categorising national groups into high uncertainty avoidance and low uncertainty avoidance based on his 1983 analysis of 116,000 questionnaires about social interactions in the workplace.⁹⁸ Although based on a variety of national cultures, these views can be usefully transferred to historical cultures. Hofstede’s views are summarised thus:

⁹⁶ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1993), pp. 27-38.

⁹⁷ Larry G. Epstein, “A Definition of Uncertainty Aversion”, *The Review of Economic Studies*, vol. 66, no. 3 (1999), p. 579; Lex Borghans et al., “Gender Differences in Risk Aversion and Ambiguity Aversion”, *IZA Discussion Papers*, no. 3985 (2009), pp. 2-17, published online, accessed 19 September 2014, <<http://ftp.iza.org/dp3985.pdf>>; Rachel Croson and Uri Gneezy, “Gender Differences in Preferences”, *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2009), pp. 1-27; Craig R. Fox and Amos Tversky, “Ambiguity Aversion and Comparative Ignorance”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 110, no. 3 (1995), pp. 585-603.

⁹⁸ Geert Hofstede, “National Cultures in Four Dimensions: A Research-Based Theory of Cultural Differences among Nations”, *International Studies of Management and Organisation*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1983), pp. 46-74; Hofstede, *Culture’s consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organisations across nations* (Thousand Oaks, 2nd ed. 2001). The table that follows is based on a summary by Charles H. Tidwell Jr., *Andrews University Website*, accessed 18 September 2014, <<http://www.andrews.edu/~tidwell/bsad560/HofstedeUncertaintyAvoidance.html>>.

	High Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
social norms	conservatism, law and order, xenophobic, express emotions	openness to change, innovation tolerance of diversity suppress emotions
politics/legal system	weak interest in politics, citizen protest repressed, more and specific laws and regulations	high interest in politics citizen protest accepted fewer and general laws and regulations
religion	Catholic, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, aggressively fundamentalist ritualised / ceremonial	Protestant, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism little persecution for beliefs avoid ritualisation and ceremony
school	teachers have all the answers structured learning	teachers may say 'I don't know' open-ended learning
family	traditional gender roles children taught world is hostile	fewer specified gender roles children taught world is benevolent

Hofstede's schema may be useful in determining macro-level similarities and differences between cultures, and providing a set of expected trends to be considered. In this schema, the European Middle Ages would seem to align with the high avoidance category for a number of reasons. Flanagan noted a trend of lower-ranked ecclesiastics deferring to higher-ranked ecclesiastics for truth in doubts about spiritual matters; instances of deferring to local churchmen for assistance in determining truths about marvels or correct beliefs or courses of action are also noted in this dissertation.⁹⁹ Citizen protest towards religious hierarchies, in the forms of heresy and apostasy, was occasionally repressed through social ostracism, excommunication, censure, threats, and sometimes violence.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, pp. 57-65.

¹⁰⁰ Arnold, "Repression and Power", in Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 4: Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100-c.1500* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 353-71.

Moreover, both learning and religious ritual tended to be highly structured, and the medieval tendency towards cultural xenophobia has been examined by Suzanne Conklin Akbari and others.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, as argued here, some medieval commentators on marvels were keen to resolve their uncertainties by deferring to divine omnipotence as indicating that anything was within the realm of possibility, suggesting a strong desire to avoid uncertainty. Archbishop of Canterbury Baldwin of Forde (c.1125-1190) argued that uncertainty in any matter was to be avoided because Jesus declared that “he who is not for me is against me”, which exemplifies the anxiety that doubts may raise.¹⁰² Hofstede’s classification scheme therefore has much resonance with medieval trends, and supports the view that the epistemological process discussed here could create anxiety for the Christian faith, which is further discussed in **Chapter 5**.

The following terms and their English equivalents have been used to guide the present research:

Latin	English
<i>admiratio</i>	wonder at a thing, but also admiration of a person
<i>stupor</i>	shock, surprise, numbness (sometimes implying stupidity)
<i>mira</i>	amazing things, things causing wonder

¹⁰¹ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca, 2009); various articles in David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (eds), *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (New York, 1999); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (Abingdon, 2005).

¹⁰² Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, p. 98; Matthew 12:30.

<i>mirari</i>	to wonder at, to be amazed/astonished
<i>mirabile</i>	a marvel, marvelous (but strongly overlapping in usage with <i>miraculum</i>), generally seen in the plural <i>mirabilia</i>
<i>miraculum</i>	a miracle (but strongly overlapping in usage with <i>mirabilis</i>)
<i>magia, magica</i>	magic, magical
<i>mirabile dictu!</i>	an idiomatic outburst indicating wonder, literally meaning “marvelous to relate!”, but more akin to English “how amazing!” or, in common parlance, “wow!”
<i>dubitare</i>	to doubt, to be uncertain, to deliberate
<i>haesitare</i>	to hesitate (often in the sense of to hesitate to believe in the truth of something)
<i>credulus</i>	a believer, sometimes with connotations of gullibility
<i>incredulus</i>	an unbeliever (either in a given thing, or in faith generally, but often used as a pejorative attack)
<i>fides</i>	faith, but also sometimes belief
<i>infideles</i>	unfaithful, unbelieving, often with harsh negative connotations (as in English ‘infidel’)
<i>academicus</i>	a term, usually pejorative, applied to academics, and often used by authors critical of academic practices of religious disputation, which implied disbelief; sometimes also refers to global sceptics, as in the case of Augustine’s <i>Contra Academicos</i>
<i>ambiguitas</i>	uncertainty, ambiguity
<i>consternare</i>	to be shocked, surprised, with connotations of anxiety
<i>falsitas</i>	falsehood, untruth, deceit
<i>mendacium</i> (n.) <i>mendax</i> (adj.)	a liar, lying
<i>scrupulosus</i> (n. or adj.)	A scrupulous, pedantic person, but with harsh negative connotations not present in the modern English “scrupulous”.
<i>timor, terror,</i> <i>pavor, metus</i>	fear, horror, dread, awe (with <i>timor</i> especially in the sense of fear of God)
<i>index</i>	reporter, the teller of a tale

The succeeding chapters continue discussion of the epistemological process described in **Figure 1**, but with different foci. These foci are thematic rather than chronological.

Chapter 1 presents an original taxonomy for the types of evidence that appear to have been regarded well or poorly in marvels stories. **Chapter 2** focuses on the widespread desire to

personally experience marvels through the senses before affirming or denying them.

Chapter 3 focuses on marvels as a form of entertainment, which could ostensibly diminish the need for factuality. **Chapter 4** focuses on didactic tales, and argues that the didactic mentality is linked with inductive reasoning as both are predicated on lack of sensory experience. **Chapter 5** focuses on the religious anxieties created by the epistemological process under discussion here, and particularly the tension between the evidentiary process and the idea of faith as ‘belief without evidence’.

Chapter 1 —

The Forms of Evidence in Marvels Stories

Introduction

This chapter asserts that a number of secondary types of evidence could increase a marvel's claim to truth if the primary form of evidence (one's own personal sensory experience) was unavailable, as was the case for the vast majority of recorded marvels. The types of evidence discussed here are: the moral credibility of reporters, their gestures and personal manner, breadth of reporting, similarity to other events, the viewing of post-factum physical evidence, deference to written authority, and the divine omnipotence argument. Carl Watkins briefly examined William of Malmesbury's use of corroborative historical detail in his account of the witch ("mulier malefica") of Berkeley as a strategy aimed at protecting William from reduction in reputation.¹ Christopher Given-Wilson divided the concept of truth in medieval historical writing into factual truth and universal truth, with the latter equating to a story's didactic value or proof for pre-existing Christian beliefs. Given-Wilson also argued that forms of evidence were used as rhetorical strategies to "persuade readers of the [authors'] authenticity".² Matthew Kempshall's *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*

¹ Carl Watkins, "Fascination and Anxiety in Medieval Wonder Stories", in Sophie Page (ed.), *Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (Manchester, 2010), p. 46.

² Christopher Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), pp. 2-3.

examined the use and abuse of such rhetorical strategies as a central part of the medieval historian's craft, focussing on the later Middle Ages.³ This chapter differs from previous discussions in that it considers authors primarily as audiences, rather than composers, since those who recorded marvels tales had to assess their factuality before recording them and attempting to convince others. This was especially the case if the chosen form of writing had high truth standards, as was the case for histories and chronicles, as shown by Hans Robert Jauss, Joachim Knape, and Peter von Moos, among others.⁴ Furthermore, some of the types of evidence presented here are new to scholars' discussions of marvels, particularly gesture and manner, the similarity of events, and the divine omnipotence argument.

The stories under discussion here stem from works written by William of Newburgh, William of Malmesbury, Peter the Venerable, Gervase of Tilbury, Ralph of Coggeshall, Gerald of Wales, John of Salisbury, and Orderic Vitalis. The story of John, Patriarch of the Indians, and his 1122 visit to the papal curia will also be used. This particular case is new to discussions of wonder and doubt. The stories presented here bear unity in that each betrays an epistemological factor that appears to have increased the marvel's claim to truth in the eyes of the authors who came to record them.

This dissertation proposes that medieval people required evidence before accepting stories that seemed extraordinary according to the individual's prior experience. The evidence presented with a story could shift a person towards belief if regarded favourably, or towards disbelief if regarded unfavourably. This assessment of evidence was a key component of the emotional-cognitive experience of wonder. This chapter will also contextualise the forms of evidence, with particular regard for the influence of the Augustinian view of marvels, Plato's

³ Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400-1500* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 350-427.

⁴ Hans Robert Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature", *New Literary History*, vol. 10 (1979), pp. 181-229; Joachim Knape, *'Historie' im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Baden-Baden, 1984); Peter von Moos, "Poeta und historicus im Mittelalter", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, vol. 98 (1976), pp. 93-130.

division between the worldly and the divine, the tension between orality and literacy, the tension between traditionalism and discovery, and the slow rise of naturalistic observation taking place over the course of the long twelfth century, as observed by Marie-Dominique Chenu and R.W. Southern, among others.⁵

1.1 — Credibility of the Reporter

The high social status or perceived moral reliability of a reporter could increase the verisimilitude of the marvels they told. The authors under discussion here demonstrate a general preference for the testimony of ecclesiastics and elders, and a negative bias towards the poor and the young. This will be shown through William of Newburgh's discussion of the revenant of Buckingham, William of Malmesbury's description of the witch of Berkeley, Peter the Venerable's discussion of the vision of the abbot of Charlieu's son, and Gervase of Tilbury's description of both the spirit of Beaucaire and phantasms more generally.

The Yorkshire-based Augustinian canon William of Newburgh completed his *Historia rerum Anglicarum* around 1198. William's history provides valuable discussions of historical events, particularly for the reign of King Stephen (r.1135-54). It also contains descriptions of supernatural marvels amongst its accounts of historical events, which demonstrates William's fascination with the oral stories circulating in twelfth-century Europe, which he hints were abundant: "Indeed, other similar marvels and prodigies took

⁵ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*, J. Taylor and L.K. Little (trans.) (Chicago, 1968), pp. 1-48; R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970).

place in our times, from which I will record only a few”.⁶ According to available evidence from his *Historia*, William appears to have travelled little throughout his career, rather remaining resident at the humble, rural Yorkshire priory of Newburgh. Despite its relative isolation compared to the abbeys of Rielvaux and Byland, Richard Howlett established that Newburgh Priory was nevertheless a frequent halting-place for travellers on the north-south route.⁷ If William travelled little, he must therefore have relied on travellers for his stories of contemporary marvels. William defended himself from the accusation of paying homage to such stories, which he admitted may “seem ridiculous”, by arguing that “We are telling [marvels] of this sort not so much because of their rarity, but because they have a hidden explanation”.⁸ This need to justify his inclusion of marvels suggests that William expected his audiences would regard them as an inappropriate subject for a formal history. Moreover, the fact that the stories’ explanations were hidden is what led William to initially wonder at them, illustrating that the starting point for the emotional-cognitive experience of wonder is a lack of knowledge of a particular phenomenon. His expectation that his audiences would doubt the truth of the stories is also predicated on an assumption that they too would not have had experience of them.

According to William’s Augustinian inheritance, the hidden explanation for marvels was both a force of nature that could be understood through rationalisation, and God, nature’s architect. But for William, although God was the ultimate cause, this did not reduce the need to consider the proximate cause in nature and its patterns established at creation. One such example was his deduction that a group of clerics who died suddenly at the

⁶ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Richard Howlett (ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* (London, RS, 1884), book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, p. 84: “Alia quoque aequae mira et prodigiosa nostris temporibus contigerunt, ex quibus pauca retexam”.

⁷ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, vol. 1, pp. xvi-ii.

⁸ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, pp. 84-5: “Mira vero hujusmodi dicimus, non tantum propter raritatem, sed etiam quia occultam habent rationem”.

monastery of Malton in 1197 were likely to have been killed by noxious gases from the monastery's kiln.⁹ Howlett scorned William's supernatural tales as "half-conscious exaggerations" improper to a formal history, but Nancy Partner argued that William's reliance on inferential reasoning established him as a priest-cum-scientist: "His studies deserve the name of science because he was consciously searching for rational connections between unique events [that is, wonders] and the permanent structure of the universe".¹⁰ William's attitude therefore demonstrates the conceptual shift towards considering marvels as natural rather than preternatural that was gradually taking place over the course of the twelfth century. This shift was taking place even before the complete infusion of Aristotle's views of nature within Latin scholarly discourse, which William seems to have been insulated from by his rurality in north Yorkshire. Furthermore, William's open-minded engagement with wonders demonstrates that wonder's ultimate effect is the creation of learning through discovery and exploration both physical and abstract.

William's discussion of the revenant of Buckingham reveals the role of ecclesiastical status in increasing a marvel's claim to truth. William described the revenant as haunting the area of Buckingham on 29 May 1196, whereupon the townspeople sought advice from Stephen, their local archdeacon. Stephen, unsure what to do, sent a letter requesting advice to Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, whose higher ecclesiastical status came with an expectation of greater knowledge of supernatural matters. The bishop replied that revenants were a common problem in England, and that the usual remedy, which "gave comfort to the people", was to dig up the body of the revenant and cremate it, a strategy also used in other

⁹ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 5, ch. 33, vol. 2, pp. 497-9.

¹⁰ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, vol. 1, p. xxii; Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments: the Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 62-6.

revenant stories in William's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*.¹¹ Perhaps Hugh's suggestion that the body be cremated ought not to stand as evidence he believed in revenants, but merely wished to assuage the community's fears, a key part of the mandate of Christian priests. If so, this may support the modern sociological claim that education increases scepticism, but the problem with this view is the assumption that education is secular, whereas medieval ecclesiastical education entailed further exploration into supernatural forces, rather than retreat from them. Further, to doubt the existence of revenants may have been seen to limit the veracity of biblical claims about the resurrection of Lazarus and, more controversially, Christ. Ostensibly, Christian belief made scepticism towards revenants subversive.

As a preface to the story of the Buckingham revenant, William wrote that he "first learnt of this from people from that area, and then more fully from Stephen, the venerable archdeacon of that province", who played a central role in the story.¹² William's claim that he heard it from others then from the "venerable" Stephen seems to imply that the latter's testimony was more valuable because of his respectability as an ecclesiastic. This evidence increased the story's verisimilitude for William as audience, and William then appended them to his written report presumably to increase its verisimilitude for his own readers/hearers. Three instances of deference to personal authority are present in the story: 1) the townspeople's request for assistance from their deacon, 2) the deacon's referral of the matter to archbishop Hugh of Lincoln, and 3) William's deference to Stephen, whose status as both an ecclesiastic and a person involved in the events ostensibly increased his trustworthiness. This deference to individuals with higher ecclesiastical status in marvels tales parallels a

¹¹ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 5, ch. 22, vol. 2, p. 475: "quietem populo dari". Other accounts of burning revenants' bodies are noted on pp. 476-82, and these stories appear to be arranged based on their similarity.

¹² William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 5, ch. 22, vol. 2, p. 474: "His diebus in pago Bukingamensi prodigiosa res accidit quam prius a quibusdam ex parte, postea vero a venerabili archidiacono illius provinciae Setphano plenius didici".

tendency for lower-ranked ecclesiastics to question higher-ranked ecclesiastics to assuage doubts about faith, as explored by Sabina Flanagan.¹³

By comparison, peasants who lacked the credibility that came with status could be disregarded. William of Newburgh described a certain Ketellus from the hamlet of Farnham (North Yorkshire) to whom God had allegedly given the power to converse with devils and scare them off, a power which allowed Ketellus to curry favour with local churchmen. William wrote that Ketellus “was indeed a peasant, *but* he possessed a certain unique grace from God in the quality of his integrity and candour”.¹⁴ The word “but” seems to indicate an inverse correlation between class and trustworthiness in William’s reckoning. A reporter’s higher status, particularly within the church hierarchy, could therefore increase the perceived quality of the information they reported, but peasants could earn respect by paying heed to the moral standards required of them by the Church.

Like William of Newburgh, William of Malmesbury referred to the moral reliability of his reporter as increasing the verisimilitude of a wondrous tale. William completed his *Gesta regum Anglorum* in 1125, a work he modelled on Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. Like Bede, William peppered his historical narrative with contemporary marvels that were based on trustworthy testimony both oral and written. As Rodney M. Thompson has shown, this has established a polarisation of William’s reputation in the historiographical traditions; on the one hand, some scholars praised William’s apparently proto-modern methodology, while others accused him of credulity, carelessness, and wilful mishandling of evidence.¹⁵

¹³ Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 57-66.

¹⁴ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 2, ch. 21, vol. 1, p. 151: “Homo quidem rusticanus, sed innocentiae et simplicitatis merito singularem quandam a Domino gratiam consecutus”.

¹⁵ Rodney M. Thompson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 1987, revised 2003), pp. 14-39.

One example of a potentially polarising marvel was William's discussion of the witch of Berkeley (Gloucestershire). The story goes that a young woman voraciously enjoyed the sins of the flesh, then, when older, recognised that she would be punished and sent to hell for her earlier transgressions. She therefore requested her son and daughter, a monk and a nun, to wrap her in a deer skin, lock her in a stone sarcophagus sealed with lead and iron, and bind the sarcophagus with iron chains. She further requested that her sarcophagus be laid in the centre of the local church, and the doors barred. She also asked that holy men chant psalms and perform mass daily to protect her. Although these wishes were all performed, a host of demons ripped off the church door, stormed in, broke through the sarcophagus's barriers, and took the woman kicking and screaming to hell, with her screams being heard over four miles away according to William.

In justifying this account, William noted the reporter's high moral quality, which thereby improved the story's truth claim, but provided no further detail about the reporter's name, status, or origins:

Around that time [the middle of the eleventh century], an event similar to [the posthumous miracles of Pope Gregory VI] took place in England, not a heavenly miracle but a hellish illusion. Once I have described this, faith in the story will not falter even if the minds of [my] hearers might be unbelieving. I myself heard this from so excellent a man, who swore he saw these things himself, that I would be ashamed not to believe him.¹⁶

William here betrays his expectation that audiences might disbelieve, which adds credence to the view that the emotion of wonder is necessarily followed by cognitive doubts. William combatted these doubts by emphasising the high moral quality of his source, which aimed to increase the verisimilitude of the tale for William's readers/hearers, as it seems to have done

¹⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, William Stubbs (ed.) (London, RS, 1887), book 2, §204, vol. 1, p. 253: "Hisdem diebus simile huic in Anglia contigit, non superno miraculo, sed inferno praestigio; quod cum retulero, non vacillabit fides historiae etsi mentes auditorum sint incredulae. Ego illud a tali viro audivi, qui se vidisse juraret, cui erubescerem non credere".

first for William himself. This also allowed William to avoid the potential offense and social discomfort caused by scepticism towards his informant, which shows that belief and doubt may be at least partly influenced by a tension between conformity and individualism, and a desire for group cohesion.

Peter the Venerable reacted sceptically towards tales of visions reported by young people. This is in concert with Walter Ong's view that the rise in literacy from the medieval period to the modern period involved a paradigm shift in mentalities away from traditionalism and respect for elders, and towards discovery and respect for the young.¹⁷ Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, completed his collection of visions, the *De miraculis*, in the 1130s-40s in southern France at the height of the confrontation between the Cistercian and Cluniac monastic foundations, a conflict in which Peter himself was embroiled.

Dyonisia Bouthillier has described Peter's work as faithful to the events it narrates because of his reliance on trustworthy reporters. Bouthillier also argued that despite the text's didactic purpose, the underlying events were not invented purely for the sake of didactic instruction, but rather the didactic elements were superimposed upon a veneer of factual, local stories.¹⁸ Conversely, Benedicta Ward described Peter's *De miraculis* as aiming to present stories of monastic triumph over supernatural adversity so as to restore the confidence of the Cluniac monks within his care after their confrontation with the Cistercians.¹⁹

Ward's argument would seem to reduce any claims of reporters' reliability to a mere authorial strategy. Here may be seen the historiographical tendency to consider authors purely from a compositional point of view, which neglects the role of epistemological

¹⁷ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York, 1982), pp. 41-6.

¹⁸ Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis*, Denise Bouthillier (ed.), in *CCCM*, vol. 83 (Turnhout 1988), introduction, p. 26*.

¹⁹ Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Aldershot, 1982), p. 193.

evidence on authors before they penned their tales. Ultimately, it may be impossible to determine whether a claim like the reliability of a reporter legitimately convinced an author, or was used as a rhetorical strategy to convince their own audiences. Indeed, these are not mutually exclusive positions, and it may be the case that both are true. However, the tendency to assume such claims were solely rhetorical would seem to deny the existence of an epistemology specific to the twelfth century. Further, the correlation between the perceived moral quality of a reporter and the perceived truth of their report seems to make sense in the context of twelfth-century Europe. If marvels tales were frequently consumed at a distance after being orally retold from distant lands, then they were outside the sensory experience of their ultimate audiences, forcing these audiences to use secondary forms of evidence to assess each story's truth. Assessing the reporter's moral quality was one such method, and it makes all the more sense in a society of majority illiteracy.

Peter described hearing the wide report about a little boy ("puerulus"), the son of an abbot of Charlieu in central France, who one night could not sleep, and experienced a vision of the recently deceased local lord prior, William, whom the boy had never met in life. Peter noted the similarity between the boy's vision and a dream he himself had involving William, and described how he had first heard the story "from others", then "from the boy himself". Peter described the locals as not knowing whether to trust the boy, and so they had him questioned about the particulars of William's life, a questioning that failed to convince Peter: "I am unable to believe it, and have judged [the vision] to be mistaken".

However, Peter defended himself from potential accusation of frivolity for recording false stories by suggesting that his record "might be a benefit or caution to my readers not to lose control of reason". In other words, Peter wished to discourage belief in supernatural

stories told by children without proper evidentiary proof.²⁰ This exemplifies the role of didacticism as a possible way to side-step the evidentiary process, as discussed further in **Chapter 4**. Furthermore, it demonstrates that even writers of didactic texts were sometimes concerned about physical truth as well as moral truth. More importantly, Peter's account also demonstrates that the testimony of the young could be received with close scrutiny.

Gervase of Tilbury also felt it necessary to prove the trustworthiness of the young. Around 1214, Gervase completed his three-book encyclopedia, the *Otia Imperialia* (Recreation for an Emperor). The work was originally intended for the entertainment of Henry the Young King (†1183), but later sent to Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV (r. 1209-1215), and its third book is entirely dedicated to marvels tales. Gervase's reputation has been the subject of derision by some commentators, most notably the seventeenth-century rationalist philosopher and mathematician Gottfried von Leibniz, who, as S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns noted, "doubted [Gervase's] sanity".²¹ Banks and Binns, however, described Gervase as a "notable contribution" to "early movements towards empiricism" as an author who mentally collected wonders before the advent of the physical *Wunderkammern*.²²

Banks and Binns also noted the wide variety of geographical origins for Gervase's wonders, and argued that he collected stories throughout the course of his career which ranged from England to Sicily to Provence. There is some possibility that Gervase had been resident in Germany too, since there has been debate about whether the Gervase of Ebstorf who is listed as the creator of the thirteenth-century Ebstorf mappa mundi may be Gervase of Tilbury. Armin Wolf compared the geographical information presented in the first book

²⁰ Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis*, book 2, ch. 31, p. 161, ll. 79-82: "Hanc uisionem quia auditam prius ab aliis, et postea ab ipso puero fallere nesciente fide dignam iudicaui, ad legentium utilitatem uel cautelam, sicut et precedentia, ne mente exciderent, scribere uolui".

²¹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (eds) (Oxford, 2002), p. lxii.

²² Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, p. lviii.

of the *Otia Imperialia* with that displayed on the Ebstorf map, and concluded it was likely that Gervase of Ebstorf and Gervase of Tilbury were one and the same.²³ Banks and Binns also noted that Gervase's tales were based on a mixture of personal observation, oral report, and written authority. They also argued that "many of the marvels seem to have been written down by Gervase much as he would have heard them", which raises the possibility that some of the evidentiary strategies that are reported with his marvels stories were present in their oral forms.²⁴

Like Peter the Venerable, Gervase felt it necessary to prove the trustworthiness of the young who, he argued, were fickle in their rapid acceptance of untrue stories and could easily be led into error.²⁵ His account of an eleven-year-old girl communicating with the spirit of her deceased cousin in Beaucaire in July 1211 is the longest chapter in the *Otia Imperialia* by a significant margin, which demonstrates his fascination with the spirit world. Gervase was not alone in this, as shown by both the widespread popularity of the *Visiones* genre of texts in their manuscript traditions, and by the sociality of the Beaucaire story itself, which Gervase described: "Within the space of a few days, the news spread throughout the vicinity, and people from round about, moved by wonder and the strangeness of the report, came to see the girl".²⁶ Gervase noted that the girl's family were "honest and prosperous citizens,

²³ Armin Wolf, "The Ebstorf Mappa Mundi and Gervase of Tilbury: A Problem Revisited", *Imago Mundi*, vol. 64, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1-27.

²⁴ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, p. lviii-ix.

²⁵ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 640-41.

²⁶ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 764-5: "Iam elabente aliquot dierum spatio, fama viciniam tangit, et moti confines admiracione ac novitate virginem visitant". Banks and Binns' translation. On the popularity of the *Visiones* genre, see for example the c.1149 *Visio Tnugdali*, which survives in at least 170 Latin manuscripts, with translations made into various vernaculars from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, the c.1182 *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, which survives in at least 150 manuscripts, and the c.1196 *Visio Monachi de Eynsham*, which survives in 44 manuscripts: Marie Therese Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 12; Adam of Eynsham, *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*, Robert Easting (ed.) (Oxford, 2002), p. xx; Carol G. Zaleski, "St. Patrick's Purgatory: Pilgrimage Motifs in a Medieval Otherworld Vision", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1985), pp. 467-85.

who were loyal to the Church, and hard-working”, which seems to reduce the possibility that the girl was lying.²⁷

Further adding to her verisimilitude was the fact that a variety of Gervase’s respectable acquaintances had personally questioned the adolescent girl. Gervase described a priest “of advanced learning, upright, pious, and God-fearing”, a “very esteemed and dear friend of ours”, who “set little store by the things that were being said”.²⁸ The priest’s initial scepticism was overturned when he asked the girl if he could directly speak to the deceased, which apparently took place, though in what manner was left undescribed. Gervase wrote that the priest then became convinced of her veracity, and afterwards transmitted the story to Gervase himself: “I have written the account which follows here based on this man’s testimony”.²⁹ Other friends of Gervase’s questioned the girl too, including a knight from St Gilles who travelled the thirty kilometres from St Gilles to Beaucaire “for the purpose of testing the validity of all that had been done and heard”.³⁰ The prior of Tarascon also journeyed there expressly “to test the truth of what he heard”.³¹ The actions of these many truth-seekers in journeying to Beaucaire shows that the audiences of marvels tales required evidence to overcome their natural doubts about the supernatural. They therefore possessed an innate desire to approach the epistemological source of each wonder by either seeing the thing for themselves or interrogating the original viewer’s sensory experience. This desire for

²⁷ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 760-61: “civibus orta probis et copiosis, fidelibus et industriis”. Banks and Binns’ translation.

²⁸ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 770-71: “Erat sacerdos, vir equidem peritus in litteratura, bonus, religiosus, ac timens Deum. Hic inter inicia visionis istius que dicebantur frivola reputans... nobis plurimum exstitit commendatus et familiaris”. Banks and Binns’ translation.

²⁹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 770-71: “ex cuius ore... obtestacione scripsi que dictito”. Banks and Binns’ translation.

³⁰ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 764-5: “ad gestorum auditorumque probacionem... locum accedit”. I have altered Banks and Binns’ translation.

³¹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 764-5: “ut audita rerum veritate probaret”. Banks and Binns’ translation.

sensory experience of wonders will be further explored in **Chapter 2**. Gervase seems only to have penned the story as a result of the testimony of these many truth-seekers, but he also added further verisimilitude to the story by deferring to the apocalyptic written testimony of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, which claimed that "the nearer this world comes to its end, the more the world to come makes itself felt".³² The young girl's claim was therefore initially viewed with a scepticism that was overturned because of her family's moral trustworthiness, close interrogation by Gervase's trustworthy acquaintances, and the story's alignment with the claims of a respected patristic authority.

Wonders are necessarily a part of the frontiers of human thought because of wonder's relation to the novel and the unknown. Each wonder may raise a number of possibilities, which are then assessed based on available evidence, leading to subjective decisions about its truth or falsehood and about grander aspects of human experience and the world. This is shown in the polemical nature of visions and phantasms, which received both natural and supernatural explanations in the long twelfth century, as examined by Jean-Claude Schmitt.³³ One example exists in Gervase's *Otia Imperialia*:

Some people maintain that an anxious and melancholic temperament can make people think they are seeing phantasms of this kind; the same thing often happens with people who are delirious and suffering a violent attack of fever. And they claim that others see hallucinations like these in their dreams with such vividness that they believe they are awake. Augustine, in his book *The City of God*, reports that some people admitted that this had happened to them.³⁴

³² Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 770-71: "Quantum seculum presens propinquat ad finem, tango futurum seculum ipsa iam propinquitate tangitur". Banks and Binns' translation. Quote is from Gregory, *Dialogi*, IV.43, cf. PL, vol. 77, col. 397.

³³ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, Teresa Lavender Fagan (trans.) (Chicago, 1998, originally in French in 1994), pp. 11-34.

³⁴ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 93, pp. 742-3: "Sunt qui dicant huiusmodi fantasias ex animi timiditate et melancolia hominibus apparere videri, sicut in freneticis et laborantibus maioribus emitriteis solet evenire. Alios asserunt tales ymaginationes videre in sompniis tam expresse quod sibi ipsis vigilare videntur, ut quibusdam id confessis contigisse Augustinus in libro De civitate Dei refert". Banks and Binns' translation.

Gervase ultimately rejected the view that phantasms were somatic because “there are other opinions which I cannot dismiss, since I know women, neighbours of ours, well-advanced in years, who used to tell me that they had seen [phantasms]”.³⁵

Gervase then aligned his views with another patristic authority: “If Ambrose had not believed that these things happened, it would have been pointless for him to write in his hymns: ‘May dreams and nightly phantasms / Keep far away from us’”.³⁶ Gervase implied that paying heed to the naturalist view would be disrespectful to his elderly (therefore trustworthy) neighbours, and, perhaps more subversively, the written authority of Ambrose. This adds further credence to the notion that scepticism breaks unspoken social bonds, whereas belief is more amenable to the establishment and perpetuation of group unanimity. If the majority held the supernatural view, and a minority supported the somatic view, then Gervase may have been drawn to the majority view by pure force of numbers. Ong claimed that collective reasoning was more common before the rise of majority literacy in the later Middle Ages because literacy increased individualism, a view which seems to carry weight in light of these sorts of examples.³⁷ Later, in the fourteenth century, Nicole Oresme firmly condemned phantasms as imaginary repercussions of somatic issues, but Gervase’s earlier acknowledgment of a multiplicity of opinions is in its own way groundbreaking, giving voice to the heterodox naturalist view, if only then to dismiss it.³⁸ Gervase’s subjective assessment of the evidence for phantasms was thus ultimately swayed by his elderly, respect-worthy

³⁵ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 93, pp. 742-3: “Sed contra hec movet me quod mulieres agnosco, vicinas nostras, que processerant in diebus suis, que mihi proponebant se de nocte vidisse [phantasmas]”. Banks and Binns’ translation.

³⁶ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 93, pp. 744-5: “Si hec ita non esse crederet Ambrosius, frustra in ymnis notasset: ‘Procul recedant sompnia / Et noctium fantasmata’”. Banks and Binns’ translation. Banks and Binns note this line’s origins in the Pseudo-Ambrosian hymn *Te lucis ante terminum*: PL, vol. 17, col. 1185.

³⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp.41-6.

³⁸ Andrew M. Fogleman, “Marvel Not: Doubting Religious Visionaries in Fourteenth-Century France”, (University of Southern California, Ph.D. Thesis, 2011).

neighbours, the widespread report of phantasms in oral folklore, and their alignment with the written authority of Ambrose.

1.2 — Gestures and Manner

As well as social status, perceived morality, or respectability as an elder, the gestures and spoken manner of a reporter could increase a marvel's verisimilitude. This could include a calm and convincing response to interrogation, or truth gestures such as oath-taking. This is shown in Peter the Venerable's questioning of the elderly Pedro d'Engelbert, and the arrival of John, Patriarch of the Indians, in Rome in 1122, which is described in an anonymous text and a letter by Odo, Bishop of Rheims (r.1118-1151).

Peter the Venerable tells the story of one Pedro d'Engelbert, a wealthy burgess of Estella (Navarre) who later entered the nearby Cluniac monastery of Nájera as an old man. Peter recorded that Pedro received a vision of his deceased servant, Sancho, who appeared naked save for a loincloth, and narrated that he was stuck in limbo because he had sacked a church in his past life as a soldier. Peter wrote that he had initially heard this story "without knowing its origin" and, upon arrival in Nájera, had been told that Pedro was the one who originally received the vision, which led Peter to "eagerly inquire where the narrator of such a great report was to be found".³⁹ Upon being told that Pedro lived in a nearby hermitage, Peter journeyed there with the express purpose of assessing the man's trustworthiness.

³⁹ Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis*, book 1, ch. 28, p. 88, ll. 14-17: "audivi eum memorandam visionem narasse, cuius quidem fama ad nos ante pervenerat, set quis esset eius relator non dixerat. Hoc cum accepissem, ubi esset tante visionis relator sollicitus inquisivi".

Despite the fact that Pedro's seniority ought to have inspired belief, which Peter made explicit, Pedro was made to relate his tale of a marvelous vision before men of ecclesiastical authority, which demonstrates that the initial reaction towards his tale was one of scepticism:

I met a man [Pedro] whose maturity of age, gravity of manners, snow-white hair, as well as the [positive] testimony of many, firmly urged us to have complete faith in him. However, wishing to rule out every ounce of doubt from my own heart as much as the hearts of everybody else, before the bishops of Ourense and Osma, who deserve respect, and before our associates, persons of strong religion and knowledge, and certain others who went to meet him, we reminded [him] that the truth destroys those who speak lies [Psalm 5:7], adding many similar things to deter him from lying. So that what he narrated about the vision would be known to be true, we not only admonished him [thus], but also commanded him [to speak the truth] by strength of the obedience that he owed to me as a monk subservient to an abbot.⁴⁰

Despite Pedro's seniority and gravitas of demeanour, which improved his credibility, Peter was nevertheless sufficiently sceptical to warrant questioning him before a group of respected authorities in order to prove that his vision was "known to be true". Also embedded in Peter's account is both textual authority, in the use of biblical verses promising punishment for dishonesty, and personal authority, in Peter's command as a man of superior ecclesiastical status. These were actively used to discourage Pedro from lying and to assuage the doubts of both infra- and extra-textual audiences. The reporter defended himself from this sceptical response by swearing that he had seen the vision with his own eyes, a gesture that satisfied Peter and the assembled audience. In concluding the tale, Peter described the

⁴⁰ Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis*, book 1, ch. 28, p. 88, ll. 20-31: "uidi hominem cui et etatis maturitas, et morum grauitas, et cunctorum attestatio, ipsaque niuea canicies, fidem integram constanter prebere suadebant. Omnem tamen dubietatis scrupulum tam a corde meo quam a cordibus omnium excludere uolens, coram uenerandis episcopis, Olorensi, et Oximensi, coram sotiis nostris multe religionis et scientie personis, ac quibusdam aliis eum conueni, et quod ueritas perdat omnes qui locuntur mendatium ostendens [Psalm 5:7], multaue similia ad eum ne mentiretur deterrendum adiungens, ut quod certum de uisione illa sciebat narraret, non solum admonui, set etiam in uirtute obedientie quam michi ut monachus abbati subditus erat, iniunxi".

man as “not a reporter of another’s words, but a most trustworthy inspector of the thing itself”, which shows Peter’s transformation from scepticism to belief as a result of Pedro’s convincing manner.⁴¹ This also suggests that the perceived quality of the report increased because of Pedro’s direct sensory involvement in the vision, thus suggesting that the purpose of interrogation was to approach the sensory epistemological origin, a trend further explored in **Chapter 2**.

If the personal manner of a reporter was insufficient to create belief, the reporter could use truth gestures like the swearing of an oath on sacred scripture. In 1122, for example, a man named John appeared in the papal curia in Rome claiming to have come from the Indias, which in medieval geographical discourse were considered lands of marvels and riches, a perception based primarily on the written inheritance of Pliny, Isidore, Solinus, and the pseudepigraphical letters of Alexander, Aristotle, and the Bragmanni. John’s arrival influenced the genesis of the Prester John legend, but his actual origins remain a perennial subject for speculation given the scanty details provided by the extant evidence.⁴² Two sources independently record the event: an anonymous *De adventu patriarchae Indorum* and a letter by Odo of Rheims, who claimed to have been present in the papal curia when John arrived. The *De adventu* survives in eighteen known manuscripts and two chronicles.⁴³

According to this text, John narrated the marvels of the Indias at length before Pope Calixtus II. Hulna, the Indias’ capital city, had the largest walls in the world. No one lived there but the most faithful Christians; all non-Christians who entered were either converted or died instantly. One of the four rivers of paradise flowed through the city’s centre, depositing gold and gemstones by which the people were made extremely rich. A church

⁴¹ Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis*, book 1, ch. 28, pp. 88-9, ll. 34-5: “non alienorum uerborum relatores, set rei ipsius certissimum inspectorem”.

⁴² Keagan Brewer, *Prester John: the Legend and its Sources* (Aldershot, 2015), pp. 1-13.

⁴³ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 5.

outside the city housed the body of St Thomas, the apostle who evangelised the Indies according to Christian tradition. Every year, the red-haired corpse of St Thomas awoke to bestow blessings upon the faithful. At the end of the narration, the anonymous author of the *De adventu* claimed that the pope and the entire curia responded by “calmly glorifying Christ, with their hands raised to heaven” without any hint of scepticism. The text concludes in the form of a prayer, that “the father and the holy spirit live forever and ever, amen”, which suggests an attempt to conform to the archetype of the miracle text, which may have reduced the need for evidentiary proof for the story by identifying it as a miracle one ought to take on faith.⁴⁴

In contrast, the letter of Odo, abbot of Saint-Remi in Rheims, depicted Pope Calixtus II as reacting with scepticism which was subsequently overturned because John took an oath on the gospel. This letter was edited by Friedrich Zarncke in the 1870s on the basis of a seventeenth-century printing, and its manuscript traditions are presently unknown.⁴⁵ Although medieval letters could blur the boundaries between public and private, Odo's letter seems to have been intended for the private consumption of its addressee, a Count Thomas of unspecified location. The letter opens by claiming that Thomas had reminded Odo about his own interest in John's wondrous visit to Rome: “I [Odo] learnt through the reminder of your request that you were eager to learn of these things that I saw and heard in the Roman curia”.⁴⁶ This indicates that Thomas had previously asked Odo about the event either in person or in writing, and that Odo had not yet described it to Thomas's full satisfaction. Odo saw Thomas's spirit of inquiry as admirable, because “it is

⁴⁴ *De adventu patriarchae Indorum*, in Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 33: “in coelum manibus Christum aequanimiter glorificaverunt... cum patre et almo spiritu vivens per infinita saecula saeculorum. Amen”.

⁴⁵ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 273.

⁴⁶ Odo of Rheims, *Epistola*, in Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 39: “Te avidum super hoc cognoverim, iuxta petitionis tuae ammonitionem, quae in curia Romana vidi et audivi”.

useful for all worshippers of the Christian name to always inquire after and hear what has taken place, and to learn through the relation of faithful men how wondrous the Lord is in his saints”.⁴⁷ Odo’s letter differs from the *De adventu* in a number of ways. The *De adventu* presented John as a patriarch, while Odo’s letter called him an archbishop. Both presented different instigating factors for John’s journey, and they do not display any similarities of phrasing. This seems to suggest that Odo’s letter and the *De adventu* are not textually related, and that an enigmatic visitor did appear in Rome in 1122 narrating Eastern wonders.⁴⁸

If this is the case, there seems little reason to dispute Odo’s assertion that he was present at the papal curia as a witness to the events described. Odo ended his letter with the claim that John’s report was initially doubted, then later believed after John had taken an oath on the Gospel:

And when such things had been heard in the ears of the lord pope through the relation of certain men, he ordered the bishop [of the Indians] to be present, and lest he sow greater falsehoods in the palace, he wanted to restrain him under excommunication. For indeed, what had been said about the apostle [Thomas] seemed to be contrary to the truth. But in the presence of everyone, the [Indian] bishop asserted that he was but truthful, and he proved to be thus through the taking of an oath on the sacrosanct Gospel, with the lord pope approving it. In the end, the lord pope believed, and all the court believed as well, and they shouted out in the presence of divine omnipotence that the apostle was able to achieve great things.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Odo of Rheims, *Epistola*, in Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 39: “Salutare est omnibus christiani nominis cultoribus semper quaerere et audire aliquid aedificativum et, quantum sit dominus in sanctis suis mirabilis, cognoscere relatione fidelium”.

⁴⁸ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁹ Odo of Rheims, *Epistola*, in Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 40: “Cumque talia relatione quorundam in auribus domini papae sonuissent, adesse iussit episcopum, et ne amplius in palatio falsa seminaret, sub anathemate prohibere voluit. Veritati enim contrarium esse videbatur, quod de apostolo divulgasset. Episcopus autem coram omnibus nil esse verius affirmabat, et assensu domini papae sacrosancti evangelii iuramento ita esse comprobavit. Credidit tandem dominus papa, credidit et omnis curia et apud omnipotentiam divinam apostolum maiora impetrare posse acclamabant”.

Even if this were a scenario invented by Odo as part of some unknown scheme, his depiction of an oath overturning disbelief would suggest a role for such truth gestures in increasing a wonder's verisimilitude in twelfth-century society more generally. Moreover, respect towards oaths makes sense given that they were the foundation upon which many medieval institutions rested. Indeed, respect for oaths coalesces with the religious milieu of the twelfth century, given the supernatural punishment that attends perjury.

1.3 — Wide Reporting of a Single Event

The wide reporting of a single marvelous event was another factor that could increase a marvel's verisimilitude. This makes sense given the commonality of oral tales in the medieval context. Principles of group psychology could also be in action here: it may be difficult to remain sceptical towards something that many others believe is true because of a person's subconscious desire to remain a part of the group. This is best shown in William of Newburgh's discussion of the green children of Woolpit and Ralph of Coggeshall's discussion of the wild man of Suffolk.

The story of the green children of Woolpit is reported in William of Newburgh's c. 1196 *Historia rerum Anglicarum* and Ralph of Coggeshall's c.1224 *Chronicon Anglicanum*. The two accounts differ in that William provides personal commentary about the truth or falsehood of the story, whereas Ralph does not.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 27, vol. 1, pp. 82-4; Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.) (London, RS, 1875), pp. 118-20.

William of Newburgh's personal commentary about the green children demonstrates the value of widespread report in improving a marvel's verisimilitude. According to the story, a green brother and sister appeared in Suffolk during the reign of King Stephen (r.1135-54) at harvest time wearing strange garments. After being led back to the closest town (Woolpit), many people gathered to see this "spectacle of such novelty".⁵¹ Here can be seen wonder's capacity for attraction, which spreads to large groups through emotional contagion. In Woolpit, the children saw piles of beans being gathered for the harvest, and were extremely hungry, but sought the beans in the stalks of the plant, not the pods. For some months, the children ate only beans while slowly transitioning to bread, changing colour, and learning to speak English. The young boy perished, but his sister became healthy, restored her skin colour until she was "not at all different from our own women", and eventually married.⁵²

Derek Brewer proposed that the children were green as a result of a disease of malnutrition common within pre-modern societies known as hypochromic anaemia, which in the past received the moniker of green sickness.⁵³ If this is the case, then the cause of the children's viridity was a world invisible to medieval men and women: not the neo-Platonic supersensory world, but the subsensory world of bacteria. This raises an interesting question for future research: To what extent were medieval supernatural beliefs appropriate prototypical inferences about disease and genetics?

⁵¹ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 27, vol. 1, p. 83: "multisque confluentibus ad tantae novitatis spectaculum".

⁵² William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 27, vol. 1, p. 83: "et nec in modico a nostri generis feminis discrepante".

⁵³ Derek Brewer, "The Colour Green", in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (eds), *A Companion to the Gawain Poet* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 181-90. An excellent analysis of the green children may also be found in John Clark's self-published article "The Green Children of Woolpit" (2016), URL = <https://www.academia.edu/10089626/The_Green_Children_of_Woolpit>.

More importantly for our purposes here, William of Newburgh reveals that he rethought his initial doubts about the green children as a result of the widespread testimony of reliable witnesses:

And it does not seem neglectful to mention a prodigy unheard of throughout the ages, which is known to have taken place at the time of King Stephen in England. And indeed, although this was being discussed for a long time and by many people, I however hesitated to believe it. It seemed to me ridiculous to accept on faith a thing of either no rationality, or of hidden rationality, until I was overwhelmed by the weight of so many and such great witnesses that I was forced to believe and to wonder at a thing that I could not comprehend or deduce by any powers of intellect.⁵⁴

The suggestion that the prodigy was “unheard of throughout the ages” implicitly supports the definition of wonder as prompted by novelty. Because of the story’s novelty, William noted that its inclusion in his history might seem “neglectful” by paying heed to marvelous stories that seemed untrue, and he therefore deliberately included the evidence of wide reporting to move his audience towards belief, just as the wide reporting had encouraged him to believe.

In concluding the story, William revealed his expectation that his own audiences could react with scepticism, and proposed that they assess the story’s truth or falsehood for themselves: “Anybody may say what they like and rationalise about this as much as possible, but it does not aggravate me to reveal this prodigious and marvelous event”.⁵⁵ William also noted that he could not determine the story’s cause “by any powers of intellect”, which

⁵⁴ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 27, vol. 1, p. 82: “Nec praetereundum videtur inauditum a seculis prodigium, quod sub rege Stephano in Anglia noscitur evenisse. Et quidem diu super hoc, cum tamen a multis praedicaretur, haesitavi; remque vel nullius vel abditissimae rationis in fidem recipere ridiculum mihi videbatur: donec tantorum et talium pondere testium ita sum obrutus, ut cogerer credere et mirari, quod nullis animi viribus possum attingere vel rimari”. Compare Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis*, book 1, ch. 27, p. 87, l. 3: “de re simili contigisse ibidem constitute audiimus, praetereundum non est”.

⁵⁵ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicanum*, book 1, ch. 27, vol. 1, p. 84: “Dicat quisque quod voluerit, et ratiocinetur de his ut poterit; me autem prodigiosum mirabilemque eventum exposuisse non piget”.

“forced him to believe and wonder”, which articulates that the ultimate result of wonder is learning, and that when learning does not take place, the wonder endures at its emotional stages. However, when one does not ascertain an explanation for the phenomenon, this may create discomfort, as shown by the conflict running through William’s testimony between the glory of the wonder and its perceived rational ridiculousness. Moreover, the fact that William memorialised this event allegedly from the time of King Stephen in a chronicle written in the 1190s shows the endurance of the green children as a sticking point in his personal and historical memory. Indeed, in Ralph of Coggeshall’s treatment of the green children, he wrote that he “frequently heard” details about the girl’s adult life “from the said knight and his family”, which shows that the story endured orally at least into the early thirteenth century.⁵⁶

Like William of Newburgh, Ralph, abbot of Coggeshall (Essex) was informed of contemporary events primarily by travellers passing through his native Cistercian monastic house.⁵⁷ Elizabeth Freeman noted that twentieth-century historians tended to dismiss Ralph’s six sequential marvels tales as “random insertions”, and John Clark noted two historiographical camps: those who argued that Ralph’s marvels were based on true events, perhaps loosely, and those who argued that they functioned as folk tales carrying moral lessons or allegorical significance.⁵⁸ These camps need not be so diametrically opposed: a story may have its origins in a true event, but then become much more than that through memetic oral transmission, or the deliberate addition of moral meaning by an author.

⁵⁶ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, p. 119: “sicut ab eodem milite et ejus familia frequenter audivimus”.

⁵⁷ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, p. xii-iii.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Freeman, “Wonders, Prodigies, and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall’s *Chronicon Anglicanum*”, *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2000), pp. 127-43; John Clark, “Small Vulnerable ETs’: the Green Children of Woolpit”, *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2006), pp. 209-29.

Freeman argued that Ralph's six sequential wonder stories allegorically encapsulated a perceived disintegration of Christendom from within and without at the hands of heresy and Islam. For this reason, many of his tales concerned monstrous bodies, which Freeman asserted were metaphors for the monstrosity of the Christian ecclesia given the fracturing effects of a variety of heretical movements, most notably the Albigensians, Cathars, and Publicani.⁵⁹ Although this may or may not have been Ralph's moral purpose in penning his marvels, it seems that the chronicler's role as a reporter of truths would mean that any tale's moral purpose would be relegated to a secondary concern after the establishment of truth or falsehood using the epistemological frameworks examined here. As a general statement, Freeman's argument would therefore seem to limit Ralph's reception of the story and assessment of its factuality.

Ralph of Coggeshall's initial scepticism about wild men ("homines silvestres") was challenged by the wide report of an incident where one was taken into captivity by fishermen as a wonder ("prae admiratione") near Orford Castle in Suffolk by Bartholomew of Glanville, sheriff of Suffolk. Ralph related that the wild man did not recognise Christian symbols in church and that he slept from sunset to sunrise, which was wondrous following the medieval custom of sleeping for a few hours at a time multiple times per day. Ralph also wrote that the wild man would not talk, even when he was "often hung up from the feet and tortured most horribly".⁶⁰ The wild man later escaped into the sea.

Ralph was initially sceptical about all this, but later conflicted, because the breadth of the report improved its verisimilitude: "It cannot easily be rationalised, especially because so

⁵⁹ Freeman, "Wonders, Prodigies, and Marvels".

⁶⁰ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, p. 117: "etiam per pedes suspensus et saepe dirissime tortus [est]".

many wondrous things are described about events of this type by so many people”.⁶¹ Two forms of evidence worked in tandem here: widespread reporting and the similarity of events “of this type”, which could mean either events involving wild men, or bizarre contemporary marvels more generally. Ralph suggested that the wild man of Suffolk bore similarities with another wild man described in a *Vita Audoeni* (that is, seventh-century Frankish St Audoin), which shows the role of written marvels adding verisimilitude to oral marvels. This offers the possibility that ecclesiastics were more likely to affirm supernatural marvels than the *populus*, who could not read the supernatural stories reported in texts. In Ralph’s account, one may also discern the propensity for wonder to prompt inquiry, as when he asked if the wild man was “a mortal man, a fish pretending to have human form, or an evil spirit that was submerged while enjoying the human form”.⁶² The widespread orality of the story therefore added verisimilitude to the account, which interrupted Ralph’s sceptical response, allowing him to ask questions about grander truths such as human–animal transformations and human–demon transformations.

1.4 — Similarity to Other Events

The similarity of one marvel to another could increase the verisimilitude of both. These marvels could be known through oral or written report. Twelfth-century Europe was a world characterised by frequent and widespread stories, as shown by the consistent reference to

⁶¹ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, p. 118: “non facile diffiniri potest, maxime quia tam multa miranda a tam multis de hujusmodi eventibus narrentur”.

⁶² Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, p. 118: “Si autem hic mortalis homo exstiterit, sive aliquis piscis humanam praetendens speciem, sive aliquis malignus spiritus fuerit in aliquo corpore submersi hominis latitans”.

chains of oral reporters, townspeople flocking to see wonders, and authors opting to record only a small selection of the marvels they heard. This abundance of tales suggested to medieval audiences that many extraordinary things were potentially true, which devalued the sceptical response. This was even more the case when the events were closely similar, and therefore mutually supportive. This is shown in Gerald of Wales' series of stories about sinners becoming stuck to physical objects, Gervase of Tilbury's stories of phantom knights near Cambridge, an inextinguishable lamp, and a disappearing spring in Provence, and William of Newburgh's story of the revenant dog-priest ("Hundeprest") of Melrose Abbey.

Gerald of Wales deliberately arranged some of the marvels in his *Itinerarium Kambriae* by similarity expressly because this increased the value of each one's truth claims. Four stories are told sequentially about individuals who preternaturally adhered to a variety of objects. The first concerns a boy who became stuck to a stone of the building of the church of St David's (Wales), which Gerald says was "perhaps" ("forte") as a punishment from St David for attempting to steal a pigeon's nest. The boy remained stuck for three days praying for his safety, at which the saint showed mercy and released him. For Gerald, what made this story credible was that he had seen the boy, now an elder worthy of respect, declare the truth of the story before David II, Bishop of St David's. Gerald had also seen the stone in question, which the church displayed as a relic, and which possessed "the marks of the fingerprints as though they were impressed in wax".⁶³ Here, Gerald's personal observation of post-factum physical evidence seems to have increased the story's verisimilitude.

However, the subsequent narration of three comparable stories allocates an evidentiary role to similarity too. The second story, "not at all dissimilar to the first",

⁶³ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, James F. Dimock (ed.), in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. 6 (London, 1868), book 1, ch. 2, p. 24: "Lapis vero in ecclesia praedicta quasi pro reliquiis usque in hodiernum reservatur, digitorum vestigiis tanquam in cera pressorum in silice comparentibus".

concerned a poor woman at St Edmundsbury Cathedral who was accustomed to stealing silver and gold relics by pretending to kiss them but actually putting them in her mouth and walking away.⁶⁴ During one such theft, the divine realm took notice (“divinitus deprehensa”), and the perpetrator’s tongue and lips became stuck to the altar. Gerald did not attempt to explain why the divine did not seem to notice the woman’s previous thefts. Gerald then declared: “For the greater part of the day, she remained there stuck and motionless, and many people flocked there to wonder at her, both Jews and Christians, so that the true tenor [of the event] would shine forth stronger, and no doubt would be entertained”.⁶⁵ The apparent willingness of Jews to enter the church to see the motionless woman acted as a way to hyperbolise the wonder’s power of attraction. Gerald also implied that personal sight was the best way to expunge doubts and prove the story’s “true tenor”, which was desired by large groups of people who “flocked there”. The desire for sensory experience of wonders is further explored in **Chapter 2**.

Gerald’s third story of miraculous sticking to objects concerned a mistress (“concupina”) of the rector of Howden who sat on the tomb of St Osana and became stuck to it, with obvious undertones of sexual immorality. The fourth story concerned an underbutler who engaged in sexual relations with a nun on the grounds of the Abbey of Winchcombe, and the following day, during a relic procession ceremony, carried a psalter, to which his hands became stuck as punishment for his depravity.⁶⁶ Each of these four stories had clear didactic undertones, but Gerald’s depiction of them sequentially ought to be considered a deliberate strategy to increase their verisimilitude for his audiences, as it had

⁶⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, book 1, ch. 2, p. 24: “haud longe dissimile his”.

⁶⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, book 1, ch. 2, p. 24: “Accurrentibus quoque multis et admirantibus, tam Judaeis quam Christianis, majori diei parte, ut amplior virtus elucesceret et nulli dubium foret, ibi immota remansit et inconvulsa”.

⁶⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, book 1, ch. 2, pp. 24-5.

likely done for Gerald himself. Indeed, if the stories were to have value as moral instructions, then the moral lesson had to be predicated on the belief that becoming stuck to things was physically possible.

Gervase of Tilbury made this authorial strategy of increasing verisimilitude through sequential narration of similar stories perhaps more clear: “To lend credibility to the matter [of phantom knights near Cambridge], I am going to describe an exploit well known to many people, which I had the local inhabitants recount to me [of another phantom knight]”.⁶⁷ Three types of evidence are embedded here: widespread report, local reporters, and sequential narration of similar stories. In some cases, the marvels Gervase heard reported in his own time were similar to those described in ancient writings, thereby increasing the verisimilitude of both:

A marvelous and unheard-of thing [a lamp which does not extinguish when blasted with strong winds] lends credence to the inextinguishable lamp that, according to Augustine, stood in the shrine of Venus. It is a novelty in so far as it has not been heard of, but it is also time-honoured because its caretakers have seen it daily since ancient times.⁶⁸

Gervase’s attitude towards Augustine was generally positive; in fact, he borrowed Augustine’s definition of wonder and example of quicklime almost verbatim.⁶⁹ But this did not disavow Gervase’s natural scepticism towards Augustine’s more marvelous claims. This suggests that the quintessentially medieval proof by authority was not infallible in cases of marvels that seemed bizarre and illogical according to the individual’s prior experience.

⁶⁷ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 59, pp. 670-1: “Ad huius rei fidem, rem gestam et multis uulgo cognitam subiungo, quam ab incolis et indigenis auditui meo subieci”.

⁶⁸ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 9, pp. 572-3: “Accedit ad argumentum lucerne inextinguibilis quam in fano Veneris extitisse dicit Augustinus inaudita et miranda rei nouitas, quo non audita nouitas est, et ab antiquo cotidiana conspectione probantibus antiquitas est”. I have altered Banks and Binns’ translation.

⁶⁹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, prologue, pp. 560-3.

Gervase's preference for an Augustinian inheritance of marvels even as late as c.1214 shows the patchwork influence of Aristotelian naturalism in the early years of the thirteenth century. Banks and Binns noted that there is no evidence that Gervase had knowledge of Aristotle's *libri naturales*, and that he instead preferred the traditional inheritance of encyclopedists such as Isidore, Honorius Augustodunensis, Pliny, and Solinus.⁷⁰ This suggests either that Aristotle's challenging ideas had not yet reached Gervase writing in rural Provence, or that he had declined to incorporate them into his worldview. Further, Gervase's claim that the lamp was both "a novelty" but also "time-honoured" exemplifies the tension between discovery and tradition, between inheritance and innovation, as Ong argued was characteristic of societies with low literacy rates.⁷¹ If wonder relates to the novel, but traditional wisdom is perceived as authoritative, then the emotion of wonder may be intellectually uncomfortable, which leads to an attenuation in the advancement of knowledge. This problem will be further discussed in **Chapter 5**.

In another example of similarity supporting belief, Gervase described a contemporary spring that he heard appeared and disappeared sporadically in the Provençal village of Camps. He then noted this spring's similarity with a lost utopic island described in Isidore's *Etymologiae* called the Island of the Blessed ("insula fortunatorum").⁷² For Gervase, because the island was once real (according to the written tradition of Isidore), but was not discussed orally by Gervase's contemporaries, this suggested it had the ability to appear and disappear; so too did the spring in Camps. Gervase's logic here adds further credence to the view that widespread oral discussion of a wonder could increase its verisimilitude, since the inverse is true in Gervase's reckoning. For Gervase, the lack of widespread present discussion of the

⁷⁰ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. lxii-lxiii.

⁷¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 41-6.

⁷² Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 127, p. 823, looking back to book 2, ch. 11, pp. 324-5; for other marvelous springs, see pp. 125-6, 128-30, 733, 820-5. Banks and Binns refer to Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIV, 6-8.

island meant that it must no longer have existed; absence of evidence was seen as evidence of absence. Therefore, widespread oral discussion would have supported its continued existence.

In addition, the example of the Island of the Blessed differs from that of Augustine's lamp: the island was a historical example used as evidence for a present marvel, whereas the lamp was a present example supporting a historical marvel. Gervase also used historical examples to affirm scriptural marvels: "It is not surprising or unbelievable that for the passing of the children of Israel the sea parted, for Josephus says that when Alexander was pursuing Darius, the Sea of Pamphylia parted for his army by the will of the Lord".⁷³ Here, Gervase subversively gave voice to scepticism towards a biblical marvel by raising the possibility it might be "surprising or unbelievable". The use of Josephus as evidence for Moses' parting of the Red Sea, rather than vice versa, would seem to suggest that Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* was more credible than the Bible. But despite the potentially subversive phrasing of the passage, it seems clear that Gervase saw both events as mutually supportive, especially because they were both effected "by the will of the Lord", following the Augustinian view of marvels as present divine actions beyond the natural order.

William of Newburgh likewise couched his description of the revenant dog-priest ("Hundeprest") of Melrose Abbey in the claim that such revivifications happened often, which once again demonstrates the evidentiary value of similarity. For William, the lack of evidence for revenants in ancient writings prompted him to be sceptical that revenants existed in his own time. There was in fact a large body of ancient stories of revenants of which medieval authors were unaware due to their preservation in Greek, but this is beside

⁷³ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 118, pp. 810-11: "Non est mirandum aut incredibile quod in transitu filiorum Israel mare se diuiserit... cum Iosephus dicat, Alexandro Darium prosequente, mare Pamfilicum exercitui fuisse diuisum Domino uolente".

the point.⁷⁴ More important is the fact that the wide report of similar contemporary stories created an subconscious pressure that William ought to believe:

It is not common sense that the bodies of the dead emerge from their graves, by the [power of] I do not know what spirit, either to terrify or curse the living, and freely return to their uncovered graves. This would not easily be accepted on faith unless examples from our own time also supported it and accounts were abundant. It would certainly be amazing if such things took place in the past, since nothing of the sort is described in the old books, whose study was so vast as to commit any memorable events to writing. Indeed, since they in no way neglected to record even the smallest of details, how would they have been able to suppress something so amazing and, at the same time, horrific, if it did in fact occur at that time? Now, if I wished to write down all the things I have heard happened in our own times, it would be both extremely onerous and tedious.⁷⁵

As Howlett noted, the chroniclers of Melrose Abbey failed to record the Hundeprest story, which may indicate they believed it was not true.⁷⁶ However, for William, the wide nature of contemporary report superseded the respected authority of ancient writings. While the latter's lack of revenants encouraged scepticism, the weight of similar contemporary reports encouraged belief. Also, an implied question runs beneath the passage — why do revenants exist now, if they did not exist in the past? — which demonstrates wonder's capacity to arouse intellectual inquiry.

⁷⁴ Guido Schepens and Kris Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography: Origin, Evolution, Production, and Reception", in Oronzo Pecere and Antonio Stramaglia (eds), *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino: Atti del convegno internazionale, Cassino, 14-17 Settembre 1994* (Rome, 1996), pp. 373-460.

⁷⁵ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 5, ch. 24, vol. 2, p. 477: "Sane quod mortuorum cadavera de sepulchris egredientia nescio quo spiritu ad viventium vel terrorem vel perniciem circumferantur, et ad eadem sepulchra sponte se illis aperientia revertantur, non facile in fidem reciperetur nisi et crebra nostri temporis exempla suppetent et testimonia abundant. Mirum plane si talia olim contingere, cum nihil tale in libris veterum reperiatur, quibus utique ingens studium fuit memorabilia quaeque literis mandare. Cum enim quaedam etiam modica conscribere nequaquam neglexerint, quomodo rem tanti stuporis simul et horroris, si forte illo seculo contigit, suppressere potuere? Porro si velim omnia hujusmodi scribere quae nostris contigisse temporibus comperi, nimis operosum simul et onerosum erit".

⁷⁶ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, book 5, ch. 24, vol. 2, p. 478, n. 1.

1.5 — The Post-Factum Viewing of Physical Evidence

The viewing of physical evidence for a marvel was another factor that could increase its verisimilitude. If a marvel took place in the past, and was not experienced with one's own senses at that time, then the primary means of assessing the truth of the wonder included speaking with participants or the post-factum viewing of physical evidence. The value of physical evidence will be shown using Gerald of Wales' story of a stone that allegedly spoke, and Orderic Vitalis' story of a priest named Walchelin, who had a vision of Harlequin's hunt.

Gerald of Wales exemplified the evidentiary value of post-factum physical evidence when he described a fissure on a stone that was supposed to be able to speak. According to Gerald's *Itinerarium Kambriae*, King Henry II returned from his 1172 conquest of Ireland via St David's in Wales, where a large stone known as Lechlevar allowed walkers to cross the River Alun. Gerald indicated that he had heard that in the past this stone erupted in speech whenever a deceased person's body was carried across it to be interred in the church cemetery. Gerald doubted this story, and wished to see the stone speak in order to assess the story's truth: "To this day it preserves a fissure through the middle, but despite this [fissure] and the barbaric superstition of the past, the bodies of the dead do not today cause such effects".⁷⁷

Gerald does not indicate whether he himself had seen the stone in question or whether he had heard from others that it no longer spoke, but given Gerald's close

⁷⁷ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, book 2, ch. 1, p. 108: "Erat enim de lapide hoc ab antiquo vulgata relatio, quod cum hominis cadaver super illum aliquando deferretur, eadem hora in sermonem erumpens ipso conatu crepuit medius, fissuram adhuc per medium praetendens. Unde et de barbarica superstitione illi antiquitus exhibita, usque in hodiernum quoque per ipsum mortuorum corpora non efferuntur".

connection to St David's throughout the early years of his career, it seems likely that he had seen it personally. Moreover, Gerald hints that a post-factum viewing of physical evidence, in the form of the fissure, ought to have improved the wonder's verisimilitude, however this was less valuable as evidence than Gerald's own experience of the stone in the present, where it did not perform its marvelous effect. This suggests that for Gerald, individual sensory experience was more valuable than both widespread report and post-factum physical evidence.

Orderic Vitalis' discussion of a priest named Walchelin further demonstrates the role of post-factum physical evidence. Orderic (c.1075-1142), one of the twelfth-century's key monastic historians, composed his *Historia Ecclesiastica* over the course of roughly thirty years from c.1110-c.1141 while based in the duchy of St Évrroul in Normandy. Its aim was to record the key events of its time for posterity, but also to give pleasure ("placere") and to "explain truthfully and straightforwardly", as befitted a written document.⁷⁸ Orderic based his knowledge on a wide reading of historical texts and *vitae*, and, for more recent events, the oral testimony of his contemporaries, and particularly fellow monks.⁷⁹

One story garnered orally from a contemporary was the tale of Walchelin's vision of Harlequin's hunt. Orderic reported that Walchelin personally told the story of this vision to Bishop Gilbert of Lisieux, and later to Orderic himself: "I heard from his own mouth all that I have written and much more which I have now forgotten".⁸⁰ Orderic dated this occurrence to 1 January 1091, more than forty years before c.1134 when he penned the eighth book of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, whence the Walchelin tale comes. This suggests that

⁷⁸ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Margaret Chibnall (ed. and trans.) (Oxford, 1968-80), book 1, preface, vol. 1, pp. 130-3: "simpliciter et veraciter enucleare".

⁷⁹ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 1, pp. 75-85.

⁸⁰ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 8, ch. 17, vol. 4, pp. 248-9: "haec quae scripto tradidi aliaque plurima quae oblivione abolita sunt ab ore ipsius audivi".

the event was sufficiently wondrous as to become an enduring fixture in Orderic's memory, although his memory may have played a role in amplifying or reducing certain elements of the story, as he readily admitted.

In the story, Walchelin, a priest from Lisieux, visited a sick man, became ill himself, and experienced a vision while gravely ill in bed. Once again, illness and the supernatural are seen together. In the vision, Walchelin saw an army of undead knights (the fabled Harlquin's hunt) passing him on black horses. Walchelin attempted to take hold of the horses' reins in order to take them back to the world of the living as evidence for the truth of his vision, but he was scalded as though the reins were heated with an icy fire, and one of the knights paused to slash him in the face for the transgression. In Orderic's account, Walchelin was made to say:

I have heard many who claimed to have seen [the undead hunters], but have ridiculed the tale-tellers and not believed them, because I never saw any solid proof of such things. Now I do indeed see the shades of the dead with my own eyes, but nobody will believe me when I describe my vision unless I can show some sure token to living men.⁸¹

The suggestion that Walchelin was initially sceptical but later believed as a result of his own personal experience aligns with this dissertation's central assertion that wonder instigates an epistemological process centred around doubt and the assessment of evidence. Walchelin's expectation that others would disbelieve, and that physical evidence would help convince them, also supports this view. Moreover, physical evidence seems to have been a part of what convinced Orderic of the story's truth, since he noted that "I saw the scar on [Walchelin's]

⁸¹ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 8, ch. 17, vol. 4, pp. 242-3: "A multis eam olim uisam audiui, sed incredulus relatores derisi; quia certa indicia nunquam de talibus uidi. Nunc uero manes mortuorum ueraciter uideo; sed nemo michi credet cum uisa retulero, nisi certum specimen terrigenis exhibuero".

face caused by the touch of the terrible knight”, thereby transforming Orderic from a sceptic to an apologist for the story’s truth.⁸²

1.6 — Deference to Written Authority

Jan Ziolkowski argued that deference to authority was a quintessential feature of twelfth-century scholastic methodology.⁸³ While written authority was sometimes used to improve the verisimilitude of marvels, as shown in this section, caution must be had in avoiding reductive generalisations. The twelfth century was not simply a time of believing all things written in books; as this chapter has shown thus far, oral and sensory proofs were also widely used. This is especially important given that the evidence of the senses was sometimes used to interrogate the claims of a written authority, especially in the latter half of the twelfth century with the rise of naturalistic observation, as exemplified by Gerald of Wales’ *Topographia Hibernica*.⁸⁴ As shown in **Chapter 2**, this rise in reliance on the senses was taking place even before Aristotle’s naturalist texts had fully entered into Latin scholastic discourse. However, those who recorded marvels could defer to other marvels in written authorities as a form of proof when direct sensory experience was unavailable, or when the author’s own sensory experience was under question in light of a contradictory claim in a written work. The evidentiary value of written marvels will be shown using Gerald of Wales’

⁸² Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 8, ch. 17, vol. 4, pp. 248-9: “faciem eius horrendi militis tactu lesam perspexi”.

⁸³ Jan Ziolkowski, “Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century”, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 108, no. 4 (2009), pp. 421-448.

⁸⁴ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 103-53.

use of biblical authority to support his depiction of a series of human-animal hybrids and transformations, William of Newburgh's discussion of an inebriated rustic's supernatural encounter, and Gervase of Tilbury's use of werewolves as evidence for Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into an ox in the book of Daniel.

While touring Wales in the late 1180s, Gerald of Wales noted that the marvels he reported were "collected from the ancient and authentic writings of those parts", thereby adding verisimilitude because the stories were local, written, and antique.⁸⁵ In the introduction to his *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Gerald rebuffed a critic who had accused him of credulity on account of the marvels in his earlier *Topographia Hibernica*. According to Gerald, the critic's objections centred on claims of hybridity and human-animal transformations: a wolf talking with a priest, an ox-man, a bearded woman, a goat that had sex with women, and a lion that did the same.

Some of these marvels, such as the ox-man, were based on Gerald's own sight, while others, such as the wolf talking with a priest, were based on spoken report. Gerald defended himself from accusations of credulity by referring to Balaam's ass, which spoke to Balaam in the Book of Numbers, and a variety of similar marvels found in Jerome's various works, Ambrose's *Hexameron*, Gregory's *Dialogi*, Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, Isidore's *Etymologiae*, and the marvel-laden works of Valerius Maximus, Trogus, Pompeius, Pliny, Solinus, and unspecified saints' *vitae*. Gerald then rhetorically declared: "Let him read these [books], I say, and let him condemn the whole works of those noble authors because of the certain prodigies they inserted!"⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, book 1, ch. 2, p. 28: "ex antiquis et authenticis partium istarum scriptis colligitur".

⁸⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 209: "Legat haec, inquam, et propter prodigiosa quaedam inserta, nobilium auctorum opera universa condemnet".

Thomas Forester and Thomas Wright, in translating the *Expugnatio*, assumed that the critic was real and had written an entire book critiquing Gerald: “[the critic’s book] appears to be lost, and even the author’s name is unknown”.⁸⁷ Sabina Flanagan, however, argued that Gerald invented and rebuffed this critic to pre-emptively quash his audiences’ doubts.⁸⁸ Neither view is provable beyond reasonable doubt given the current state of the evidence, but both are predicated on the belief that Gerald’s audiences were, or could be, sceptical of his marvelous claims. Moreover, even if the critic were fictional, Gerald’s calling upon written authority to assuage doubts would reveal his belief that written authority actually had this effect. Indeed, Forester and Wright’s view should not be immediately dismissed, since there exists other evidence for a negative reception of Gerald’s *Topographia Hibernica* within its defensive redactions, as will be discussed in **Chapter 2**.

Reference to written authorities to support belief in marvels is an epistemological trend that goes beyond Gerald of Wales’ writings. The story of Pharaoh’s demonic magicians in the Book of Exodus seemed to suggest to William of Newburgh that a variety of marvels were possible. William described a Yorkshire rustic who visited a friend in a nearby town, and “left late at night less sober” than when he arrived, with William thereby hinting at a possible mundane explanation for the marvel.⁸⁹ Making his way home, the man stumbled across a supernatural banquet taking place beneath a local tumulus, which William says he “often saw”, as if his own status as a local somehow added authority to the rustic’s story.⁹⁰

Like Walchelin, or the young boy from Gerald’s *homunculi* story, the rustic is described as taking back a physical object from his supernatural encounter, in this case an

⁸⁷ Gerald of Wales, *The Conquest of Ireland*, Thomas Forester (trans.), revised by Thomas Wright, (Cambridge, Ontario, 2001), p. 1, n. 1.

⁸⁸ Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, p. 11, n. 32.

⁸⁹ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, pp. 85-6: “multa jam nocte minus sobrius remeabat”.

⁹⁰ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, p. 86: “saepius vidi”.

ornate goblet. The rustic later gifted this goblet to Henry I, who gave it to David, King of the Scots, and which Henry II later asked to be transferred back to England, all of which “we know from true report”.⁹¹ Two things must be noted here. First, William indicated that the story had its origins in the time of Henry I (r.1100-1135), which is a remove of at least six decades from William’s penning of his *Historia rerum Anglicarum*. This once again raises memory and memetic oral transmission as key elements beneath the surfaces of recorded marvels tales. Second, if it is true that this object was passed from king to king, this would indicate a fascination with the supernatural at the highest echelons of medieval society, though there remains the possibility that the kings valued the goblet for purely aesthetic or economic reasons, assuming that what William described took place at all.

William noted the value of witnesses in overturning his initial scepticism: “This and such like things would seem unbelievable were they not proven by worthy witnesses to have truly happened”.⁹² But William also hypothesised that all things were potentially true, because of the existence of biblical marvels like the magi from the book of Exodus:

But if the magi had the power, as is written, through their arcane and Egyptian incantations, more correctly by the working of evil angels, to change rods into dragons, and water into blood, to produce new frogs... If, I say, evil angels, with God’s permission, are able to do these things, it is no marvel if those things about which we now inquire are done through the working of an angelic power, if they are permitted by the superior power [that is, God], sometimes by delusion

⁹¹ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, p. 86: “sicut veraci relacione cognovimus”.

⁹² William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, p. 86: “Haec et hujusmodi incredibilia viderentur, nisi a dignis fide testibus contigisse probarentur”.

and imagination, such as the night banquet in the tumulus, and sometimes in truth, such as the dogs or that toad with the golden chain.⁹³

There is a seeming contradiction in William's description of the story as "proven by worthy witnesses" but also taking place "by the delusion and imagination" of an inebriated rustic. However, this contradiction is resolved by William's belief that supernatural agents work by setting up images, rather than true physical objects, a perception he derived from Augustine's demonology.⁹⁴ This seems to create a hierarchy of truth for William wherein physical objects carried greater truth-value than the images created by supernatural beings, which are connoted negatively with the terms "praestigialiter" and "fantastice".

But more importantly, the written inheritance of the Exodus magi reduced his emotional wonder towards a variety of stories, including the discovery of two dogs living inside a rock, who were each allegedly the same size as the rock itself, and the story of a toad with a golden chain around its neck also living within a rock, with these two marvels evidently slotted in William's memory by similarity.⁹⁵ These events might have been emotionally wondrous at first, but William's wonder was reduced by his cognitive consideration of marvels from his written inheritance, which reaffirmed his view that God had the potential to effect any present action. Here too can be seen the intersection between formal Christian theory and William's pragmatic interpretation of marvelous events.

But one problem with the Bible, then as now, was the tension between literalist and figurative interpretations. Gervase of Tilbury noted "those things which are... confirmed by

⁹³ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, pp. 86-7: "Si autem potuerunt Magi per incantationes, ut scriptum est, Aegyptiacas et arcana quaedam, operatione utique malorum angelorum, virgas convertere in dracones, et aquam in sanguinem, novas quoque ranas producere... si, inquam, mali angeli per Magos, Deo permittente, ea potuere, non est mirum si et illa, de quibus nunc quaeritur, quadam angelicae naturae potentia, si a superiori potestate permittantur, partim praestigialiter et fantastice, ut illud in tumulo nocturnum convivium, partim etiam in veritate, ut vel illos canes, vel bufonem illum cum cathenula aurea".

⁹⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, book 3, ch. 8.

⁹⁵ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, book 1, ch. 28, vol. 1, pp. 84-5.

the authority of scripture” as one of the three categories of marvels that he felt had sufficient evidentiary support to include in his *Otia*.⁹⁶ He used the Bible as an authority for many of his marvels, even though he elsewhere questioned the factuality of some aspects of scripture, noting for example that the numerical values in the Bible should be approached with scepticism.⁹⁷ In one case, tension between literal and figurative readings of Psalm 103(104):4 — “[God] makes his angels spirits and his ministers a burning fire” — led Gervase to wonder whether demons were literally made of fire, or whether it was simply a metaphor (“mistic”).⁹⁸

Gervase best exemplifies this tension between the literal and the figurative in his discussion of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation into an ox in the book of Daniel:

The question is often raised among the learned as to whether Nebuchadnezzar was really changed into an ox by divine power for the period of penitence imposed on him: for it is surely easier to make a creature by transformation than to create one out of nothing. Many writers think that he adopted the lifestyle of a beast, feeding like an ox that eats hay, but without adopting its nature.⁹⁹

Gervase sided with the literalists in this case, arguing that other occasions of mutation were well reported, as for example men who turned into wolves on the full moon, which “I know to be a daily occurrence among the people of our country”.¹⁰⁰ Oral folklore and biblical mythology were therefore mutually supportive because of their similarity. Moreover,

⁹⁶ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, prologue, pp. 558-9: “aut scripturarum firmavit auctoritas”.

⁹⁷ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 106, pp. 792-3.

⁹⁸ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 86, pp. 728-9. Compare Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Bernard Dombart and Alfons Kalb (eds), in *CCSL*, vols. 47-8 (Turnhout, 1955), book 21, ch. 2, vol. 2, p. 759.

⁹⁹ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 120, pp. 812-3: “Sepe apud doctos questio mouetur si Nabugodonosor per iniunctum tempus penitentie in bouem uerum sit diuina uirtute mutatus, cum facilius sit creaturam transmutando formare quam de nichilo creare. Scribunt plerique ipsum uitam bestialem in conuictu bouis comedentis fenum sumpsisse, non naturam”.

¹⁰⁰ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 120, pp. 812-13: “scio apud nostrates cotidianum esse”.

Gervase's description of this as a "question often raised among the learned" may add credence to the view that scepticism increased with education, since the educated had greater access to the conflicting views presented in scholarly texts. However, there is the possibility that discussion of such a question amongst the learned may indicate greater conceptual consideration about supernatural phenomena amongst ecclesiastics compared to non-ecclesiastics. However, it is clear that the wonder of human-animal transformation prompted questioning, leading Gervase to the formation of subjective knowledge on the basis of his individual assessment of the available evidence both oral and written.

1.7 — Deference to God's Omnipotence

If two similar marvels are mutually supportive, then belief displays a compounding effect: believing in the first may make believing in the second easier. Extending this may lead to the view that all things are possible, which some twelfth-century authors articulated in the form of the divine omnipotence argument. The idea of divine omnipotence had biblical and patristic support, and was a cornerstone of medieval Catholic doctrine. It was also a natural extension of the Augustinian view of marvels as present divine actions, which brought all events into the realm of possibility. Its effect in marvels tales was to imply that audiences would be advised to err on the side of belief than disbelief, and that scepticism could be viewed as subversive because it implied a limitation on God's power. This will be shown through discussion of Gerald of Wales' story of Welsh little people ("homunculi"), Gervase of Tilbury's discussion of sprites and lamias, and John of Salisbury's philosophical argument that all marvels were possible.

While on a preaching tour of Wales in 1188 to rouse support for the Third Crusade, Gerald of Wales encountered an elderly priest named Elidyr, who narrated a detailed story from his childhood about his discovery of a kingdom of little people, who had the stature of Plinian pygmies. After narrating the story, Gerald wrote at some length about the similarities between the language of the *homunculi* as described by Elidyr and the Greek and Welsh languages. Gerald stated that the *homunculi* were wont to call out “ydor” when requesting water, and that “ydor” was Greek for water; they referred to salt as “halgein”, where “hal” was Greek for salt.

Here, Gerald borrowed a form of proof used extensively in Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, where the etymologies of words were used to prove truths about the physical world, which John Henderson termed the *verba to res* proof.¹⁰¹ But Gerald appears to have been sceptical that this method could actually arrive at the truth, since he finished the homunculi story thus:

But if a pedantic inquirer should ask what I might think about the truth of the story inserted above, I respond with Augustine that divine miracles are to be wondered at, not struck down in debate. I neither place a limit on divine power by negating it, nor, by affirming it, insolently extend that which cannot be extended. But I always call to mind Jerome: “You will find”, he says, “many things are unbelievable and seem untrue, but are nevertheless true. Indeed, nothing in nature prevails against the Lord of nature”. These things, then, and similar, if they come to pass, I locate them, following Augustine’s judgment, amongst those things which I have resolved neither to affirm greatly nor to deny.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ John Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville: Truth from Words* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 6-8.

¹⁰² Gerald, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, book 1, ch. 8, p. 78: “Sin autem interpositae relationis de veritate quid sentiam scrupulosus investigator inquiras, cum Augustino respondeo, admiranda fore divina miracula, non disputatione discutienda: nec ego negando divinae potentiae terminos pono, nec affirmando eam quae extendi non potest insolenter extendo. Sed illud Ieronymi semper in talibus ad animum revoco: “Multa”, inquit, “incredibilia reperies, nec verisimilia, quae nihilominus tamen vera sunt. Nihil enim contra naturae Dominum praevallet natura. Haec igitur, et his similia, si quae contigerint, juxta Augustini sententiam inter illa locaverim, quae nec affirmanda plurimum, neque neganda decreverim”.

Gerald's reproof that wonders ought not be "struck down in debate" supports the view that wonder prompts doubts, inquiry, and the evidentiary process. However, in Gerald's view, this was reprobate because it insolently placed a limit on God's potentiality, which demonstrates the religious anxieties that could arise from wonder, a topic which will be further explored in **Chapter 5**.

Some years earlier, in discussion of whether werewolves were human or animal, Gerald's epistemic frustration led him to the same quote from Augustine: "Divine miracles are to be wondered at, not struck down in debate".¹⁰³ This argument allowed Gerald to consciously opt out of the evidentiary process by arguing that divine omnipotence makes all things within the realm of possibility. In some sense, this is a sceptical argument because it is predicated on the belief that werewolves and homunculi require proof, hence the need for extended discussions of their truth or falsehood. For Gerald, his use of the divine omnipotence argument was merely a result of his epistemic frustration after the failure of the evidence to convince him, both that provided by Elidyr and his own attempt at the Isidorean *verba to res* proof. It also acted rhetorically to prevent reduction in reputation that could take place if audiences perceived Gerald as credulous.

Some thirty years later, Gervase of Tilbury used the divine omnipotence argument in discussion of a variety of marvels. Gervase admitted to not knowing why sprites haunted men: "I do not know what these things mean, and to those who ask [such] questions, I respond only that the judgments of God are a great deep [Psalm 35:7]".¹⁰⁴ Here, Gervase

¹⁰³ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, James F. Dimock (ed.), in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. 5 (London, RS, 1867), distinctio 2, ch. 19, p. 105: "Sed miracula divina sunt admiranda, non in rationem disputationis trahenda". The present author has been unable to identify this quote in the collected works of Augustine, which suggests either that Gerald borrowed it from a pseudo-Augustinian source, or that his manuscript copies of Augustine varied in some detail from contemporary editions. Editions and translations of the *Topographia* also do not note its origins. There is also the possibility that Gerald invented the phrase.

¹⁰⁴ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 86, pp. 730-1: "Quid sibi hec uelint nescio, et querentibus id solum respondeo 'Iuditia Dei abissus multa'".

demonstrates that the divine omnipotence argument may quash the questioning that naturally accompanies wonder. In another case, Gervase distinguished between popular, folkloric interpretations of lamias and physicians' views, which established a dichotomy between the literati and a homogenised "populus" in terms of their supernatural beliefs: "Physicians maintain that lamias... are simply nocturnal hallucinations... But to gratify popular belief and my listeners' ears, let us allow that it is the wretched lot of some men and women to cover great distances in swift nocturnal flight".¹⁰⁵

As Gervase readily admitted, he was willing to abandon his concern for truth for the sake of entertainment, a trend which will be further explored in **Chapter 3**. After all, the purpose of the *Otia Imperialia* (Recreation for an Emperor) was the entertainment of its royal dedicatees (Henry the Young King, then, after Henry's death, Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV).¹⁰⁶ Based on the tone of the passage, it would appear that Gervase sided with the physicians' interpretation here, despite his disagreement elsewhere with their view that phantoms were merely hallucinations stemming from physical illnesses. Perhaps Gervase's interest in somatic explanations for supernatural phenomena is a reflection of his status as a member of the intellectual elite, having worked as canon lawyer and priest in a variety of scholarly centres including Sicily, Bologna, Rheims, Venice, Naples, and perhaps also the nearby centres of medical learning in Salerno and Montpellier.

After discussing these lamias and their various manifestations, including how they caused nightmares, drank the blood of sleeping people, and moved sleeping infants from place to place, Gervase concluded: "If anyone asks the meaning of these wonders of which one so often hears, I reply with Augustine, that most blessed investigator of all questions; he

¹⁰⁵ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 86, pp. 722-3: "Lamias, quas vulgo mascas aut in Gallica lingua strias nominant, fisici dicunt nocturnas esse ymaginationes, que ex grossitie humorum animas dormientium turbant et pondus faciunt". Banks and Binns' translation.

¹⁰⁶ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, preface, pp. 558-9.

says that the whole matter should be referred to the mysteries of divine justice”.¹⁰⁷ Like Gerald above, Gervase was epistemically defeatist because of conflicting evidence, and so he deferred to Augustine to suggest that all marvels were within the realm of possibility, and that human beings ought to have humility in light of this. On the one hand, his own education may have increased his scepticism, but the widespread report of the lamias and their tricks increased their verisimilitude. In such situations of conflicting evidence, the divine omnipotence argument could reduce the discomfort inherent in uncertainty for Gervase and his audiences. But the divine omnipotence argument could also mitigate the reduction in reputation that could have occurred had audiences thought Gervase’s stories were frivolous, or introduced solely for entertainment without any concern for truth.

Likewise, John of Salisbury used his Platonic inheritance to declare that all phenomena in nature could be true. After describing a series of scriptural marvels including the eclipse at Christ’s crucifixion, John declared: “If we agree with Plato, who asserts that nature is the will of God, it follows that none of these [aforementioned wondrous] occurrences happen contrary to nature, since he [God] does everything however he wishes”.¹⁰⁸ Here, John reveals that the divine omnipotence argument is a natural extension of the Augustinian view of marvels. If God may act in any present capacity he wishes, then all marvels are potentially true. This stems from John’s combination of the doctrine of divine causation with elements of Platonism established in the available sections of the *Timaeus*,

¹⁰⁷ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 86, pp. 724-5: “Si quieritur quid sibi velint hec audita sepissime ac miranda, respondeo quod ait beatissimus omnium questionum investigator Augustinus, id totum divini iudicii secretis attribuendum”. Banks and Binns’ translation. Gervase is quoting Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, book 15, ch. 23.

¹⁰⁸ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (ed.), in *CCCM*, vol. 118 (Turnholt, 1993), book 2, ch. 12, p. 91, ll. 3-5: “Si uero Platonem sequimur qui asserit naturam esse Dei uoluntatem, profecto nichil istorum euenit contra naturam, cum ille omnia quaecumque uoluit fecerit”. The *CCCM* edition of the *Policraticus* is being published in two stages, and only the first half is currently available. This has therefore been supplemented using the edition in *PL*, vol. 199, and the following partial translation: Cary Nederman (trans.), *Policraticus: of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1990). All subsequent references will specify which version of the text is being used.

specifically the division between the physical realm of nature and an eternal realm that medieval Christian philosophers co-opted as the Abrahamic God.

According to John Marenbon, John of Salisbury's c.1159 *Policraticus* as a whole examines the mutual acceptability of Platonic ideas and Christianity.¹⁰⁹ John wrote at a time when the twelfth-century translation movement had not yet allowed for Aristotle's naturalist texts (the *Physica*, *De caelo*, *De animo*, and so on) to fully enter public debate and challenge the doctrine of divine causation, whereas his logical texts of the *ars vetus* (the *Categories* and *De interpretatione*) had been influential to Latin dialectical methodologies since at least the ninth century.¹¹⁰ Cary Nederman established that John had access to the full corpus of Aristotle's *Organon* and was probably the first Latin scholar to do so.¹¹¹ But John had a complex relationship with the ancient philosophers, on the one hand allowing their views to influence his own, and at the same time attacking their rational investigation of the world as a Babel-esque affront to God: "as if conveyed by the might of giants and strengthened by a prowess no longer human, they puffed up and proclaimed war against the grace of God by means of the vigour of their reason and reliance on free will".¹¹²

John acknowledged that wonder commences from the position of a lack of knowledge: "[marvels are] marvelous not because they have no causes but because these causes are most hidden", that is, known only to God.¹¹³ This claim established a disjunction between the divine, who knows everything, and humans, who are rationally fallible.

¹⁰⁹ John Marenbon, "Twelfth-Century Platonism: Old Paths and New Directions", T. Kobusch and B. Mojsishch (eds), A. Snell and O. Summerell (trans.), *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte: neue Forschungen zum Platonismus* (Darmstadt, 1997), pp. 101-119.

¹¹⁰ John Marenbon, "Anselm and the Early Medieval Aristotle", in John Marenbon (ed.), *Aristotle in Britain during the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 1996), pp. 1-19.

¹¹¹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Nederman (trans.), p. xx.

¹¹² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Nederman (trans.), book 7, ch. 1, p. 148.

¹¹³ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (CCCM), book 2, ch. 12, p. 91, ll. 18-19: "mirabiles, non quod nullas sed quod occultissimas habeant rationes".

According to John's schema, humans are fallible in determining truths because they are a part of Plato's physical realm (nature), whereas God and his angels are capable of knowing everything because they are part of the eternal superlunary realm. In contrast to this, John argued that it was a sin to doubt anything that was founded upon strong evidence:

There are some things that are made persuasive either by the sense of reason or the authority of religion. Doubting these things bears the stamp of weakness, error, or criminality. Indeed, to ask whether the sun is bright, snow white, or fire hot is a mark of one lacking in sense... In fact, he who questions whether God exists and whether he is powerful, wise, and good is not only irreligious, but also treacherous, and he ought to be taught better with an instructive punishment.¹¹⁴

Although it was desirable to recognise that humans were fallible determiners of truths and that only God could have true knowledge, it was also anathema to neglect truths that were affirmed by common sense or the Christian faith. Also, John's phrasing gave voice to the quasi-atheistic undercurrent within twelfth-century society in suggesting that some people questioned God's existence, a trend which will be explored in **Chapter 5**. In John's reckoning, it was admirable to recognise human fallibility and therefore be sceptical, but excessive scepticism could degenerate into apostasy, which was worthy of an ominously unspecified form of punishment.

Here, John borrowed indirectly from Aristotle's concept of the Golden Mean, the view that personality traits orbit a desirable middle between two extremes (the vices of excess and deficiency). In short, one could have too little scepticism or too much, or perhaps more correctly: one could have scepticism towards appropriate objects or inappropriate objects. Aristotle's Golden Mean cannot have been known to John directly from the

¹¹⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (PL), book 7, ch. 7, vol. 199, col. 649: "Sunt enim nonnulla, quae sensus rationis, aut religionis persuadet auctoritas. Horum dubitatio infirmitatis, erroris notam habet, aut criminis. Quaerere enim an sol splendeat, albeat nix, ignis caleat, hominis est sensus indigentis... Qui vero an Deus sit deducit in quaestionem, et an idem potens, sapiens sit, an bonus, non modo irreligiosus, sed perfidus est, et poena docente dignus est instrui".

Nichomachean and *Eudimian Ethics*, as these texts appear to have come into circulation in Latin around the turn of the thirteenth century, roughly forty years after John penned his *Policraticus*.¹¹⁵ Cary Nederman proposed that John received Aristotle's doctrine of the mean through an intermediary, probably Cicero or Boethius.¹¹⁶

On the other hand, there may be some possibility that Aristotle's collective *Ethics* were known to John directly. According to Danielle Jacquart, there exists an early copy of Aristotle's *libri naturales* in Latin translation which was glossed around 1160 by Richard Bishop, a former teacher of John's, and John quotes from James of Venice's translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* in his *Metalogicon*, which was written roughly contemporaneously with his *Policraticus*.¹¹⁷ As historians of medieval philosophy recognise, the complicated textual transmission of Aristotle's many works from c.1150-c.1250 requires meticulous study before claims of influence can be fully substantiated, though one must agree too with Georg Wieland's warning that "the mere availability of texts does not of itself account for their influence".¹¹⁸

The divine omnipotence argument was therefore used in an attempt to limit scepticism towards marvels. It seems, though, that this view was only available to an educated subculture exemplified here by John of Salisbury, Gerald of Wales, and Gervase of Tilbury. These authors each had access to Plato's division between the divine and the worldly, which supported the view that only God could know truths, and that human logic was flawed if God was able to create any extraordinary things he wished. However, the

¹¹⁵ Robert Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 793-832.

¹¹⁶ Cary J. Nederman, "The Aristotelian Doctrine of the Mean and John of Salisbury's Concept of Liberty", *Vivarium*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1986), pp. 128-42.

¹¹⁷ Danielle Jacquart, "Aristotelian Thought in Salerno", Jean Stewart (trans.), in Peter Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 407-28, here p. 408.

¹¹⁸ Georg Wieland, "Plato or Aristotle — A real Alternative in Medieval Philosophy?", in John F. Wippel (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Philosophy* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 63-84, here p. 66.

problem with this view is that lay beliefs remain extant chiefly in texts written by ecclesiastics who possessed a tendency to homogenise lay beliefs, which adds analytical complexity for historians wishing to separate the various strands of thought. Whatever the case, the divine omnipotence argument allowed authors and audiences to avoid committing themselves to a marvel's truth or falsehood, and thereby sidestepping the need to assess evidence. This was usually as a result of the failure of the available evidence to firmly convince an audience about the truth or falsehood of a marvel.

Conclusion

A variety of secondary forms of evidence were used to support marvelous stories. These secondary forms of evidence included the credibility of the reporter, their gestures and manner, the wide reporting of a single event, the similarity of other events past and present, the post-factum viewing of physical evidence, deference to written authority, and the divine omnipotence argument. These could be used to reduce the epistemic frustration that arose when the primary form of evidence (one's own sensory experience of the marvel) was not available. The audiences of marvels tales could respond positively or negatively to these secondary forms of evidence on the basis of a variety of factors, including individual temperament and group pressures. These types of evidence seem to have convinced the authors of the truth of their marvels stories before they were recorded, or else were used by authors to mitigate the reduction in reputation that could take place if audiences disbelieved the marvels, a strategy predicated on the belief that audiences would be sceptical. Ultimately, the assessment of evidence had three possible results: accept the evidence and move towards

belief, reject the evidence and move towards disbelief, or acknowledge one's inability to uncover the story's truth or falsehood. This chapter has asserted that this was an essential cognitive component to the experience of wonder in the long twelfth century.

Chapter 2 —

The Role of the Senses in the Experience of Wonder

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the role of a number of forms of evidence in increasing or decreasing the verisimilitude of wonders. It also argued that this was an cognitive step inherent to the epistemological process commenced by wonder. The present chapter argues that the senses, and particularly sight, were widely regarded as the ultimate form of proof for the truth of a marvel. This is reflected in three research strategies used by medieval people: 1) journeying to a marvel's place of origin; 2) interrogating witnesses; and 3) performing physical experiments. Each of these strategies is predicated on the attitude, whether conscious or subconscious, that sensory experience is the optimal form of proof for a phenomenon. These strategies were available when a marvel's origin was close to one's own residence; marvels from distant lands and times required secondary proofs like those discussed in **Chapter 1**.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first examines the rarified intellectual controversy between the Victorine theologians and the proto-empiricists of Chartres over the place of the corporeal senses in relation to the mind's eye (*oculus mentis*). The second section argues that the senses were relied upon in marvels tales in the realm of

everyday experience despite this scholastic polemic. The second section focuses on the three aforementioned evidentiary strategies. The third section examines how authors of travel texts faced a key problem in communicating their own sensory experiences to others who lacked that sensory experience, and how this could lead to negative receptions of travel texts. This section will focus on the reception of Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*.

The senses is a burgeoning research focus in medieval studies. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht charted historiographical debates about the role of the senses in the medieval world, and concluded that two interpretations had emerged, one of high sensory intensity and one of sensory starvation, both of which “obviously rely on problematic totalisations”.¹ Cynthia Hahn and Madeline Harrison Caviness described the importance of sight in the reception of medieval art, relics, and architecture as wonders.² Simo Knuuttilla summarised the influence of Aristotle's views of the senses on the burgeoning of empiricism from the thirteenth century into the later medieval period.³

Gumbrecht also discussed the polemic between what he termed the “Platonic scorn” and “Aristotelian embrace” of the senses as routes to knowledge, two views he described as neatly oppositional in theory, but not in medieval practice.⁴ The uncertain relationship between medieval theory and practice with regard to the senses is borne out by this chapter, which shows that despite debates in the schools about the relative roles of the corporeal senses in relation to the *oculus mentis*, personal sensory access to marvels was widely desired in the realm of everyday experience.

¹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Erudite Fascinations and Cultural Energies”, in Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kablitz, and Alison Calhoun (eds), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore, 2008), pp. 1-10, quoting p. 2.

² Cynthia Hahn, “Vision”, pp. 44-64, and Madeline Harrison Caviness, “Reception of Images by Medieval Viewers”, pp. 65-85, both in Conrad Rudolph (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Art* (Chichester, 2010).

³ Simo Knuuttilla, “Aristotle's Theory of Perception and Medieval Aristotelianism”, in Simo Knuuttilla and Pekka Kärkkäinen (eds), *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy* (New York, 2008), pp. 1-22.

⁴ Gumbrecht, “Erudite Fascinations”, pp. 2-3.

R.W. Southern argued that the twelfth century saw a rise in humanism, a term that has been used to mean both the close study of ancient texts and a movement away from supernatural explanations for observed phenomena.⁵ It has yet to be shown whether these two definitions have any causative relationship. The term humanism has also been used to describe the view that Jesus was human, further blurring the term's definitional boundaries.⁶ Others, including Marie-Dominique Chenu and Robert Bartlett, have used the term naturalism to describe the increase in observation of nature rather than deference to authoritative texts for information about the natural world.⁷ This chapter will use the term empiricism because it gives pride of place to the senses.

This chapter is original in that it argues that twelfth-century people sought sensory evidence for wonders because the emotional-cognitive experience of wonder prompted a desire for knowledge. This chapter also argues that knowledge gained through sensory experience was considered the optimal form, whether consciously or subconsciously. Empiricism as a formalised philosophy may never have been fully articulated before the advent of Aristotle's naturalist texts to the Latin West (particularly his *De sensu*, translated into Latin around the end of the twelfth century). However, audiences' desire for sensory access was a key element of responses to marvels even before any formal codification of empiricism. Humans were evolving before Charles Darwin, and relied on the senses before Francis Bacon, John Locke, or David Hume. This chapter therefore supports the continuity thesis of James Franklin, Robert Pasnau, and others by placing audiences of marvels tales in their rightful place as early upholders of a pragmatic, prototypical form of empiricism. This

⁵ R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 29-31.

⁶ Tom Drake-Brockman, *Christian Humanism* (Sydney, 2012).

⁷ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Man, Nature, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on Theological Perspectives*, Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (trans.) (Chicago, 1983 reprint of 1968 original); Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2008); Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales* (New York, 1982).

desire for direct sensory involvement with marvels was predicated on wonder's propensity to spur questioning and a quest for evidence.

2.1 — The Theological Backlash Against Sensory Epistemology

This section will briefly review the philosophical conflict between the corporeal senses and the inner *oculus mentis*, which Marie-Dominique Chenu characterised as a confrontation between the traditionalist theological school of St Victor and the proto-empiricist school of Chartres.⁸ Although this polemic is well known to specialists, this section is a necessary precursor to this chapter's later discussion of the role of the senses in marvels tales, because it shows that sensory experience of marvels was desired in the realm of everyday experience despite the rarified philosophical debates of the schoolmen. This section will briefly review Augustine's concept of the *oculus mentis*, a variety of twelfth-century theologians who supported it, and the views of William of Conches and Adelard of Bath, who repudiated the *oculus mentis* in preference for the corporeal senses.

Augustine's discussion of the senses was an influential locus around which twelfth-century discussions orbited, especially for the many theologians who by and large rejected the empirical injection from the twelfth-century translations of Arabic and Greek scientific works.⁹ Augustine married his biblical and Platonic inheritances to articulate two sensory tiers: five body-based senses and one soul-based *oculus mentis*. Augustine proposed that the

⁸ Chenu, *Man, Nature and Society*, pp. 1-47.

⁹ For Augustine's views on the senses, see Eugene Vance, "Seeing God: Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye", in Nichols, Kablitz, and Calhoun (eds), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses*, pp. 13-29; Matthew R. Lootens, "Augustine", in Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (eds), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 56-70.

information received from the bodily senses was interpreted within the soul because, after death, bodies can no longer see, and therefore the bodily senses were physical, corrupt, and pollutive. He also argued that sight was the best of the corporeal senses: it was most closely associated with the soul because of its interaction with the Godly force of light.

However, in Augustine's reckoning, these bodily senses were inferior to the sixth sense, the *oculus mentis*, which governed the others because it was made of the same substance as the soul. The aim of the *oculus mentis* was comprehension of the eternal divine, in accordance with Augustine's adoption of the Platonic separation between base physical matter and the perfect divine.¹⁰ Augustine's demonology added a source of paranoia to the bodily senses in that angels and demons could deliberately trick the senses, or else inhabit the human soul to further confuse the body's sensory interaction with the world.¹¹ To Augustine, all objects that exist in the world "truly exist", and it therefore follows that "falsity is not in things, but in the senses".¹² Within these frameworks, paying excessive heed to the bodily senses could lead to a dismissal of the more important *oculus mentis*. Moreover, Augustine wrote that things unperceivable to humanity's senses "can nevertheless be apparent to the airy (*aerius*) and ethery (*aetherius*) spirits, whose perception (*sensus*) is so keen that ours does not deserve the name of perception in comparison with it".¹³ If humans possessed fallible senses, this added further weight to Augustine's scorn for the bodily senses in preference to the *oculus mentis*, which was more closely linked to God. One form of evil was therefore the subversion of the soul's superiority over the body that takes place when the

¹⁰ Vance, "Seeing God".

¹¹ Vance, "Seeing God", pp. 20-21.

¹² Augustine, *Soliloquia*, Gerard Watson (trans.), *Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul* (Westminster, 1986), book 2, ch. 3, §3.

¹³ Augustine, *Letters*, Wilfrid Parsons (trans.) (New York, 1951), vol. 1, letter 9, to Nebridius, p. 389.

soul pays excessive heed to material objects over spiritual objects, or the bodily senses over the *oculus mentis*.

Michel Foucault argued that the “liberation of the senses” was one of the self-entitling claims formulated by the discourse of the Enlightenment in opposition to a senseless Middle Ages, as part of a Weberian desacralisation of the world.¹⁴ But there exists a wealth of evidence for a widespread, deep-seated scepticism towards the corporeal senses permeating twelfth-century religious polemic. The more interesting question to ask is to what extent this anti-empiricist *oculus mentis* theology had bearing on the everyday experience of medieval people.

One particular manifestation of the *oculus mentis* theory was the view that paying heed to the senses diminished the divine mysteries, which ought to have been approached solely by the *oculus mentis*. This tension may have its roots in the epistemological process of wonder presented in this dissertation. Ultimately, sensory experience may provide evidence that rejects the divine mysteries, making those mysteries no longer wondrous or valuable for affirming Christian doctrines. In essence, the more natural phenomena one understands, and the more one has access to information about physical truths, the less valuable are arguments like divine omnipotence as an explanation for all things, a problem discussed in **Chapter 5**. However, as Jacques le Goff argued, “mentalities change slower than anything else”, and the twelfth-century naturalist movements that paid heed to the bodily senses can mark only the beginning of Western society’s very gradual acceptance of empiricism, which is arguably an ongoing project.¹⁵

¹⁴ Gumbrecht, “Erudite Fascinations”, p. 10. On the Enlightenment reaction against the Middle Ages generally, see Joseph Richardson, “Enlightenment historians and the problem of the medieval”, in Michael Brown and Stephen H. Harrison (eds), *The Medieval World and the Modern Mind* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 77-100.

¹⁵ Jacques le Goff, “Mentalities: A History of Ambiguities”, David Denby (trans.), in Jacques le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds), *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (Cambridge, 1985; originally in French in 1974), pp. 166-80, quoting p. 170.

For the most part, twelfth-century theologians readily adopted Augustine's concept of the *oculus mentis* within a broad range of contexts. In his *De sacramento altaris*, Baldwin of Forde, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1185-1190, argued that the miracle of the loaves and fishes was "marvelous in our eyes, but in the eyes of the heart, not the eyes of the body".¹⁶ This affirms the role of the *oculus mentis* in the contemplation of divine miracles, which are unseen, and unseeable, to the corporeal eyes. In his commentary on the psalms, Gerhoh, provost of Reichersberg, one of twelfth-century's most influential theologians, wrote that Jesus' birth from a virgin was "marvelous in our eyes... but not in the eyes of faith, because all things are possible to those who believe". This equates the *oculus mentis* (here "oculus fidei") with what modern logicians term confirmation bias, that is, proof for pre-existing beliefs. Moreover, Gerhoh's claim extends the divine omnipotence argument as proof for wonders of infinite variety by suggesting that all things are possible with a believing frame of mind.¹⁷

In his monumental pre-Thomist work of systematic theology, the *Sententiae*, Peter Lombard used doubting Thomas's transformation from believing the bodily senses, which suggested Jesus was dead, to believing the soul's senses, which affirmed Jesus had risen, to articulate the superiority of the *oculus mentis* over the *oculi corporis*.¹⁸ Peter then used this same example to demonstrate the reprehensibility of the aphorism "used in common parlance" that "we believe what we see".¹⁹ Here, Peter shows that the views of theologians on the senses were to some extent at odds with the pragmatism of everyday experience, a

¹⁶ Baldwin of Forde, *De sacramento altaris*, in *PL*, vol. 204, col. 655: "[miraculum de quinque panis est] mirabile in oculis nostris [Ps.117:23] sed in oculis cordis, non in oculis carnis".

¹⁷ Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *Commentarius aureus in psalmos et cantica ferialia*, in *PL*, vol. 193, col. 642: "Et hoc [Jesi natus de virgine] est mirabile in oculis nostris, quod eadem res est caro et spiritus; sed non est mirabile in oculis fidei, quia omnia [sunt] possibilia credenti".

¹⁸ On doubting Thomas generally, see Alexander Murray, *Doubting Thomas in Medieval Exegesis and Art* (Rome, 2006); Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

¹⁹ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, Ignatius C. Brady (ed.) (Rome, 1981), book 3, distinctio 24, ch. 1 (83), vol. 2, p. 149: "dicimus usitata locutione nos ea credere quae videmus".

contest between the “believing is seeing” encouraged by theologians and the “seeing is believing” used in everyday interactions with the world. Marie-Dominique Chenu proposed that the *oculus mentis* argument was seen as a point of orthodoxy particularly amongst the powerful Victorine theologians.²⁰ Hugh of St Victor, one of the twelfth century’s foremost theologians, argued that the *oculus mentis* was the vehicle through which God revealed spiritual truths, which could be amplified by withdrawing from the worldly senses through physical retreat from society and meditation on scripture.²¹ These views implied that there was significant danger to one’s salvation if excessive heed was paid to the corporeal senses.

Importantly, the *oculus mentis* argument was also used as a polemical platform from which to attack the “new philosophy” (read: bad philosophy), as mystical theologian William of St-Thierry termed it, of empirical observation of nature.²² As Beryl Smalley has shown, ecclesiastical attitudes to novelty were generally negative and the word new (*nova*) was sometimes used as a pejorative.²³ In the case of William of Conches, his “new philosophy” stemmed at least partly from the translation movements of the twelfth-century, although Bartlett wrote that it did not appear sufficient to claim that the translation movement was the sole cause for the burgeoning of naturalism in the late twelfth century.²⁴

William of Conches’s *Dragmaticon Philosophiae* and *De philosophia mundi*, written in the 1140s, explore physics, astronomy, geography, meteorology, and medicine. They also offer watersheds for historians studying the history of empiricism. However, William of St-Thierry accused him of arguing that Adam came not from God, but from nature. In a letter

²⁰ Chenu, *Man, Nature, and Society*, p. 9.

²¹ Hugh of St Victor, *De arca noe morali*, in *PL*, vol. 176, col. 642. On the Victorines’ views towards the *oculus mentis*, see also Csaba Németh, *Contemplation and the Cognition of God: Victorine Theological Anthropology and its Decline* (Ph.D. Thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2013), pp. 70-88.

²² Chenu, *Man, Nature, and Society*, p. 16

²³ Beryl Smalley, “Ecclesiastical Attitudes to Novelty c.1100-c.1250”, in Beryl Smalley (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Thought and Learning* (London, 1981), pp. 97-116.

²⁴ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 6.

written by William of St-Thierry to Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Thierry further argued that William of Conches

stupidly and pridefully holds the authority of sacred history in contempt... by interpreting that history from the point of view of physical science, he arrogantly prefers the ideas he invents to the truth the history contains, and in so doing he makes light of a great mystery.²⁵

According to William of St-Thierry, the problem with excessive reliance on the corporeal senses was that they reduced the wonder inherent in divine mysteries, and led to a devaluation of the *oculus mentis*, as well as a devaluation of the received wisdom of ancient texts.

However, William of Conches defended himself by arguing that it was ridiculous to blindly ascribe things to God without properly investigating natural causes first:

What is more foolish than to assume that something exists simply because the creator is able to make it?... Whoever says that God makes anything contrary to nature should either see that it is so with his own eyes, or show the reason for its being so, or demonstrate the advantage of its being so.²⁶

William here dismissed the idea that divine omnipotence makes all things possible, a view that he saw as limiting proper intellectual exploration. Further, William proposed that nature could be a legitimate source of moral truths, but that there ought to be a clear division between moral truths (“utilitas”) and physical truths established by sensory experience (“oculis videat”).

William’s emphasis on the senses contravened the tradition of deference to patristic authorities, and was therefore viewed by incumbent theologians as an arrogant departure

²⁵ William of St Thierry, *De erroribus Gulielmi de Conchis*, in *PL*, vol. 180, col. 339-40: “quam stulte quam superbe irridet historiam divinae auctoritatis... et physico illud sensu interpretans, nimis arroganter veritati historiae suum praefert inventum, parvipendens magnum illud sacramentum”.

²⁶ William of Conches, *Dragmaticon Philosophiae*, Italo Ronca (ed.), in *CCCM*, vol. 155 (Turnholt, 1997), book 3, ch. 2, §8, p. 60, ll. 72-9: “Quid est stultius quam affirmare aliquid esse, quia creator potest illud facere?... Qui igitur Deum aliquid contra naturam facere dicit, uel sic esse oculis uideat, uel rationem quare hoc sit ostendat, uel utilitatem ad quam hoc sit praetendat”.

from tradition. William again defended himself by arguing that his disagreement with Bede on matters of physics did not mean he disregarded Bede's authority of matters of faith or morality.²⁷ Where others saw empiricism and faith as mutually antagonistic, William established two separate discursive domains: one of rational investigation into nature using sensory experience modulated by logical reasoning, and the other by contemplation on textual authorities in the realm of morality, faith, and the supernatural.

Adelard of Bath, one of the key translators of the twelfth-century renaissance, penned his *De eodem et diverso* in the 1110s or 1120s. Taking influence from Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, Adelard constructed his text as a dialogue between Philocosmia, who advocated worldly pleasures, and Philosophia, who defended an empiricist scholarship based on ancient scientific models. In response to a question about the senses, Philosophia argues that they are fallible, and must be modulated by logic, but that complete scepticism towards them would be ridiculous:

For [the schoolmen] say that the senses provide no proof, and one should believe neither the eyes nor the ears, nor the other senses... Would that they were all made blind and deaf! And deservedly! For they follow (they say) reason as a leader, than which nothing is more blind, since they tell the lie that they see that which is in reality non-existent. And these people put their trust in that!²⁸

Adelard's rhetorical flourishes are replete with pro-sensory undertones in his c.1137

Quaestiones Naturales too.

²⁷ William of Conches, *Dragmaticon Philosophiae*, book 3, ch. 2, §3-4, p. 58, ll. 22-37. For similar examples of empiricists defending their views, see Hansen's introduction to Nicole Oresme, *De causis mirabilium* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 54-61.

²⁸ Adelard of Bath, *De eodem et diverso*, Charles Burnett (ed. and trans.), *Adelard of Bath: Conversations with his Nephew* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 10-11: "Aiunt enim nullam esse certificationem sensuum, nec oculis nec auribus ceterisque credendum esse... Utinamque omnes ceci surdique efficiantur! Ac merito. Sequuntur enim, ut dicunt, rationem ducem, qua nichil cecius est, cum id quod nichil in actu rerum est se videre menciantur, hiique ei fidem habent".

Like the *De eodem et diverso*, his *Quaestiones naturales* are constructed as a dialogue, this time between a traditionalist nephew, who valued *auctoritas*, and the author himself, who defended the new philosophy against the nephew's attacks. In the *Quaestiones*, Adelard rejected the Augustinian *oculus mentis*, and argued that philosophers ought to direct the corporeal senses towards nature, and modulate their observations using reason:

For the common person measures (*metitur*), or I should say is deceived by (*mentitur*), all things according to what the lying senses suggest on the terrestrial level, and... judges the moon, the sun, and the other planets to be of the same size and no larger than it seems to his bleary eyes, although they are larger than the circumference of the earth, in the light of true reason. But those who, rather, use the incorporeal eye of the mind (*oculo animi*) in matters of this kind... [are] both ignorant of the effects and wonder at that which is not wondrous.²⁹

Here, Adelard dismissed the *oculus mentis* as a form of anti-empirical naivety, and argued that those who relied on it became stuck at the beginning of the epistemological chain of wonder, and therefore never progressed to learning. At the same time, the senses had to be modulated by reason, or else people could easily fall into rudimentary errors, such as believing the Sun or Moon to be the same size as the Earth. Here can be seen the relationship between wonder and information asymmetry: those who understand an object are less likely to wonder, while those who do not understand are more likely to wonder. This suggests that expertise and wonder are inversely correlated. Another possible type of wonder is therefore wonder at specialisation, which occurs when an expert in one subject matter or skill is amazed at a person who has expertise in another subject matter or skill.

²⁹ Adelard, *Quaestiones Naturales*, in Burnett, *Adelard of Bath*, pp. 146-7: "Metitur enim, immo ut verius dicam mentitur, omnia secundum hoc quod iuxta terram sibi fallaces promittunt sensus, estimatque celi ambitum terre undique versum insidere, tanteque nec maioris quantitatis quam lippientibus oculis eius videtur formas Lune et Solis ceterorumque potest iudicare, cum ipsa vera ratione terre ambitum excedant Illos vero qui magis in huiusmodi rebus incorporeo animi oculo ratione duce utuntur... simul et effectus nescire et ammirari non mirum est".

Adelard's views seem to stem from his context. Charles Burnett showed that there is no evidence for Adelard ever having held an ecclesiastical post, and speculated that Adelard worked as a tutor and court philosopher while translating Arabic scientific works in Spain, Sicily, and elsewhere. Burnett also described Adelard as having probable links to Chartres as a centre of scientific learning, perhaps even studying under William of Conches.³⁰ It seems likely that Adelard's unusual career path, divorced from the orthodox teachings of leading theological schools like St Victor, was both cause and effect for his heterodox views towards the senses.

2.2 — Sensory Experience in Marvels Tales

It may be impossible to firmly establish the precise degree of interconnection between the rarified philosophical debates about the senses and the realm of everyday experience with marvels. However, this section's analysis of marvels tales reveals that audiences reacted pragmatically to marvels, and by and large desired sensory access to them. Three trends support this argument: audiences traveling to a marvel's place of origin to check the truth of a tale, audiences actively questioning participants in a marvel either orally or in writing, and audiences performing physical experiments to test a marvel's truth claims.

The epistemological strategy used depended on the marvel itself. If a marvelous event happened nearby, then one could visit the marvel's place of origin to see it for oneself; this will be shown using Orderic Vitalis' journey to see a horse killed by lightning and Wace's journey to see for himself the wondrous forest of Brocéliande. On the other hand, visions

³⁰ Burnett, *Adelard of Bath*, p. xvii.

were individual experiences that could not be accessed by audiences using their own senses, and therefore interrogation of the vision's recipient was the best strategy available; this will be shown using the monks of Clairvaux and their interrogation of the vision of Serlo of Winton. Alternately, physical objects that aroused wonder could be the subject of experiments; this will be shown using Gervase of Tilbury's experiments on an occult book of spells, the upside-down bean, and the refectory of Barjols that was rumoured to have a quasi-magical ability to repel flies. These strategies are each predicated on the belief that personal sensory experience was the optimal form of proof for wonders, a belief that stems from wonder's capacity to spur doubt, inquiry, and a desire for evidence. These strategies were in use even in an intellectual milieu that argued against paying excessive heed to the corporeal senses, which shows that Christian ethics in this case may have been in conflict with an intrinsic drive for sensory experience, which stems from wonder's bio-evolutionary purpose.

1

I — Journeys to See Marvels

Marvels that took place within close proximity to one's place of residence could inspire audiences to journey to see post-factum physical evidence for the marvel in order to affirm it as true. This is demonstrated in Orderic Vitalis' journey to see a horse and cart struck by lightning, which he initially doubted was possible. Throughout Orderic's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, weather events provided a particular locus of fear and wonder, and he narrated a

series of heat waves, floods, and snow storms that caused widespread panic in northern France because people thought the weather events were signs of an impending apocalypse.³¹

Orderic described an intense storm that took place in August 1134 “in the region around us [that is, Normandy], of which I am well informed”.³² Orderic then recounts a story involving a young man (“iuvenes”) named William Blanchard who lived in the village of Planches on the border between the bishoprics of Lisieux and Séez. During the torrential rains, William was leading his horse and cart from fields that were in flood to his mother’s cottage, while his sister was sitting in the cart with the sheaves of oats that they had harvested. When driving home, a lightning bolt struck the horse leading William’s cart, but William “escaped unscathed, by God’s mercy, although he was thrown to the ground in utter terror”.³³ Despite the heavy rain, the flames “consumed the wagon and sheaves”, and burnt William’s sister to death. Orderic reveals that he heard this story on the following day at his residence in Le Merlerault, around seven kilometres away, and initially doubted it. He then walked to Planches with the express purpose of seeing physical evidence: “I saw the ashes the next day and the corpse of the dead girl on a bier, for I was staying at the time at Le Merlerault and hurried to the spot in order to be certain of the facts before recording for posterity how the blow fell from heaven”.³⁴ Orderic’s phrasing suggests a close link between truth and the written word, and implies that he may not have recorded the tale had he not had reliable evidence for it.

³¹ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Margaret Chibnall (ed. and trans.) (Oxford, 1968-80), book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 436-7.

³² Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 436-7: “In nostro quippe uicino unde rumores ad nos facile peruolarunt”.

³³ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 438-9.

³⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 438-9: “Quarum fauillas et extinctae cadauer in feretro in crastinum uidi; quia Merulae consistens illuc perrexi, ut diuinam posteris relaturus percussione[m], indubitanter scirem rei certitudinem”.

To add further credence to the story, Orderic then described a separate girl from Guêprei, some thirty kilometres from Le Merlerault, who was struck by lightning while crossing a field. These two cases show that marvels could be transmitted along local lines of communication. Margaret Chibnall points out that the fields in Guêprei were owned by Orderic's patron monastery of St Évrout, which suggests that marvels could be transmitted on institutional lines of communication.³⁵ Orderic then proposed that "many similar happenings occurred at the same time, which I learnt afterwards from reliable sources, but I cannot record them all individually".³⁶ Here, Orderic's own personal sight of the physical remains of the lightning victims confirmed the many stories that he had previously heard about people struck by lightning. This shows that, although similarity between events improved a marvel's verisimilitude, one's own personal sight provided a more convincing form of proof, leading audiences further along the belief-doubt continuum towards belief.

In this story, one may also see wonder's capacity to arouse questions, as Orderic noted that "the female sex alone in both human beings and brute beasts bore the weight of the portentous scourge [that is, the storm]".³⁷ Orderic humbly related that he was unable to explain why this seemed to be the case, because only God could know the true causes of things:

I am not able to unravel the divine plan by which all things are made and cannot explain the hidden causes of things; I am merely engaged in writing historical annals at the request of my

³⁵ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 6, p. 438, n. 2.

³⁶ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 438-9: "Multa quoque similia eadem hora contingere, quae postmodum edidici ueracium relatione, sed nequeo singillatim omnia litteris assignare".

³⁷ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 436-7: "Nullum uero marem animaduersione illa interisse audiui; sed femineus tantum sexus in hominibus et brutis animalibus pertulit pondus imminentis flagelli".

fellow monks. Who can penetrate the inscrutable?... Let each person interpret according to the inspiration he receives from heaven.³⁸

After establishing the truth of the story using his own personal sight, Orderic then had recourse to hypothesising about grander truths, which reaffirms wonder's role in promoting growth in knowledge through inquiry.

However, establishing the physical truth of an event must precede consideration of its causes in nature, or God's justifications for enacting it. In the case of marvels that were horrific in nature, wonder could give rise to uncomfortable theodical debates, but Orderic declined to delve into these perhaps for fear of creating controversy, and rather deferred to audiences to create their own hypotheses. On another note, lightning striking a horse may not seem particularly marvelous to contemporary readers, but wonders are subjective, relating to one's own personal experience rather than possessing universal, objective qualities. To Orderic, lightning striking a horse may have been as wondrous as Plinian monsters, African elephants, or Harlequin's hunt, because these phenomena all occupied the same discursive category of things heard or read, but not seen.

While Orderic used personal sight to confirm a marvel, personal sensory experience could also disconfirm marvels by demolishing preconceived images. This shows wonder's role in replacing imagined ideas with facts. This is best shown in Wace's disappointment following his visit to the forest of Brocéliande, which his preconceptions dictated as a forest replete with magic and the supernatural. It is widely recognised that King Henry II (r. 1154-1189) and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine were patrons of the arts. To this end, Henry seems to have commissioned Wace to translate Geoffrey of Monmouth's controversial

³⁸ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 13, ch. 16, vol. 6, pp. 436-7: "Diuinum examen quo cuncta fiunt discutere nescio, latentes rerum causas propalare nequeo; sed rogatus a sociis annalem historiam simpliciter actito. Inscrutabilia quis perscrutari potest?... Consideret quisque prout sibi diuinitus inspiratum fuerit".

Historia regum Britanniae into Anglo-Norman in the 1160s.³⁹ Very little is known about Wace himself outside the cursory details garnered from his own writings, which reveal that he was born in Jersey to aristocratic stock around 1110, and received an ecclesiastical education in Normandy, where he seems to have lived for most of his life.⁴⁰

After learning about Brocéliande from the same stock of Breton folklore that inspired Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace claims to have journeyed there to see the forest for himself, only to return bitterly disappointed:

People used to see fairies there, if the accounts of the Bretons are true, and many other marvels. There used to be hawks' nests there and a huge quantity of stags, but the peasants have destroyed everything. I went there in search of marvels; I saw the forest and the land and looked for marvels, but found none. I came back as a fool and went as a fool. I went as a fool and came back as a fool. I sought foolishness and considered myself a fool.⁴¹

Wace's alleged visit to Brocéliande could have acted as a rhetorical critique of Geoffrey of Monmouth's widely criticised *Historia* by suggesting that its folkloric background bore little relation to the real world, but this seems unlikely. Glyn Burgess points out that this passage bears similarities with another in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*: "Einsi alai, einsi reving, / Au revenir por fol me ting".⁴² This bears resemblance to Wace's original Anglo Norman: "Merveilles quis, mais nes trovai, / Fol m'en revinc, fol i alai; / Fol i alai, fol m'en revinc, / Folie quis, por fol me tinc".⁴³

³⁹ On Henry's patronage of Arthurian literature, which is often difficult to prove directly, see Martin Aurell, "Henry II and Arthurian Legend", in Harper-Brill and Vincent (eds), *Henry II* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 362-94.

⁴⁰ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, Glyn Burgess (ed.) (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. i-xvi.

⁴¹ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, Glyn S. Burgess (trans.), *The History of the Norman People* (Woodbridge, 2004), part 3, p. 162.

⁴² Wace, *Roman de Rou*, Burgess (trans.), p. 236, n. 242.

⁴³ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, Burgess (ed.), p. 236, ll. 6395-8.

However, there seems little reason to doubt Wace's claim that he personally visited a forest in Normandy or Brittany that he thought was Brocéliande, for he lived for a time in the region of Caen and Bayeux, and may well have travelled westwards with the armies of Henry II when they invaded Brittany in 1166-7, shortly before the *Roman de Rou* is thought to have been written.⁴⁴ Moreover, the passage appears to fit the present dissertation's schema: Wace read about a marvel, doubted it, sought evidence in the form of his own sight, saw nothing subjectively amazing, thereby assessed the marvel as false, and finally transmitted this to audiences through his own writing. Moreover, Wace reveals that he doubted the folkloric oral tales told by the Bretons about Brocéliande's fairies, because they too did not align with his own sensory experience. Personal sight could therefore prove or disprove a marvel, allowing a more certain, but nevertheless subjective, assessment of a wonder's truth or falsehood than the various secondary forms of evidence.

II — Interrogation

For Orderic and Wace, direct sensory access was available which could prove or disprove marvels that had been reported orally and in writing. However, certain species of marvels, including visions, were not accessible by audiences through their own sensory experience. In such situations, interrogation of the vision's recipient was the best means available by which audiences could approach the marvel's origin with their own senses and assess its truth for themselves. This will be demonstrated using the monks of Clairvaux's attempt to interrogate Serlo of Winton about his vision.

⁴⁴ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, Burgess (trans.), pp. xiii-xvi.

The *Collectaneum visionum et exemplorum Claravallense* is a collection of monastic exempla compiled collaboratively by the monks of Clairvaux in the 1170s under the direction of their prior John. The text presents a series of visions and exempla aimed at the moral edification of its monastic audience. The text was edited by Olivier Legendre from its sole surviving manuscript, which contains a wealth of marginal annotations and revisions in the original hands.⁴⁵ As a kind of scrapbook pre-publication document, the *Collectaneum* therefore provides close insight into the monks' authorial approach to miraculous stories and visions. A key element of their process was, when opportunity arose, to investigate a story's truth before recording it.

One such case was the vision of Serlo of Winton, a teacher at Oxford, in which he saw demons that came "not from hell or those facing infernal punishments but from the new texts which he was writing, which were directed by the hellish Plato, Aristotle, and others".⁴⁶ As a result of this vision, Serlo relinquished his post at Oxford and entered the Cistercian order.⁴⁷ The singling out of Plato and Aristotle as demonic forces in this monastic exemplum shows the monks' desire to defend their ideological ground against the influx of ancient philosophical ideas which they saw as detracting from the Christian faith. But despite this, a marginal comment in the manuscript reveals that the Clairvaux monks were also concerned about the truth of the vision, and not just its didactic potential. The comment indicates that the monks had initially read Serlo's story in a text written by an unnamed monk who had spoken with Serlo directly, but the Clairvaux monks were not convinced about its truth: "Although this vision had been heard from lord abbot Serlo as certain, as a

⁴⁵ *Collectaneum exemplorum et visionum Clarevallense*, Olivier Legendre (ed.), in *CCCM*, vol. 208 (Turnhout, 2005), pp. xxi-xxxiv.

⁴⁶ *Collectaneum*, book 4, ch. 43, pp. 340: "Magister hec audiens, non de gehenna uel pena damnati, sed de sententia quam fecerat noua, utrum illis infernalibus Platoni, Aristotili, ceterisque aliis eam dirigeret, cepit cogitare".

⁴⁷ *Collectaneum*, book 4, ch. 43, pp. 340-41.

certain monk wrote, however we afterwards held it to be uncertain, and not undeservedly”.⁴⁸ This comment does not make clear exactly what the monks doubted. Perhaps they believed Serlo was a fraud, inventing visions as part of his own ambition for advancement within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or perhaps they doubted only some specific part of the tale.

Some years later, after Serlo had advanced to abbot of the Cistercian house of l’Aumône (near Orléans), the monks of Clairvaux sought to resolve their doubts by questioning him about the truth or falsehood of his vision before a group of respected, but unnamed, Cistercian authorities. Serlo answered that he could neither confirm nor deny the story, because he had not seen what the Clairvaux monks had written about it, nor did he want to, which “left us uncertain” as to its truth or falsehood.⁴⁹ For the monks, this confirmed that their initial suspicions towards Serlo and his tale were “not undeserved”.⁵⁰

Despite this, the Clairvaux monks decided to include the story for its didactic message of “renouncing the carnal and turning towards the true philosophy” of Christ, and not the false philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.⁵¹ As Brian Patrick McGuire has observed, Serlo’s vision became widely known in the thirteenth century due to being recorded in the popular *Legenda Aurea* which allowed for its widespread transmission in the written record.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Collectaneum*, book 4, ch. 43, pp. 339, ll. 3-5: “Licet hanc uisionem ut scribitur quidam monacus a domno abbate Serlone pro certo accespisset, tamen postea eam incertam, nec inmerito, tenemus”.

⁴⁹ *Collectaneum*, book 4, ch. 43, p. 339, l. 8: “sed incertos nos reliquit”

⁵⁰ *Collectaneum*, book 4, ch. 43, p. 339, l. 5: “nec inmerito”.

⁵¹ *Collectaneum*, book 4, ch. 43, p. 341, ll. 78-9: “seculoque renunciare fecit et ad philosophiam ueram perduxit”.

⁵² Brian Patrick McGuire, “A Lost Clairvaux Exemplum Collection Found: The Liber visionum et miraculorum Compiled Under Prior John of Clairvaux (1171-79)”, *Analecta Cisterciana*, vol. 39 (1983), pp. 26-62, here p. 35; reprinted in McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100-1250* (Aldershot, 2002). See also McGuire, “Les mentalités des Cisterciens dans les exempla du XII^e siècle: une nouvelle lecture du Liber visionum et miraculorum de Clairvaux”, in Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (eds), *Les exempla médiévaux: Nouvelles perspectives* (Paris, 1998), pp. 107-146.

This story demonstrates a number of key trends. First, the truth or falsehood of a marvel could be disregarded if it carried value as a moral instruction, an idea that will be further explored in **Chapter 4**. However, in this case, the monks actively sought to assess the story's truth or falsehood before imbuing it with didactic meaning, which shows that in some cases didacticism did not immediately lead to a complete abandonment of concerns about truth and evidence. Second, the monks' attempt to question Serlo about his vision is an emanation from the desire for sensory experience of the marvel, as interrogation was the best means of approaching the vision's epistemological origin, unless one was to accept it on faith. The story also shows that marvels could be transmitted along institutional lines of communication, as Serlo's vision appears to have been told and retold within Cistercian circles from Oxford to Clairvaux.

III — Experiments

Unlike visions, physical objects that aroused wonder could be the subject of physical experiments. Such experiments are rare in the written record of the long twelfth century. This is necessarily the case since this period marks only the early beginnings of Europe's gradual acceptance of experimental science, which burgeoned in the later Middle Ages at least partly as a result of translations of Arabic and Greek scientific works, and in particular Aristotle's *libri naturales*. The view that experimentation was a way to elucidate truth was founded on the epistemological principle that sensory experience was of greater value than report from others (with Latin *experimentum* denoting sensory experience more than experiment in the modern sense, although modern experiments do filter through the

senses).⁵³ This section will review Gervase of Tilbury's experiments on a magic book of spells, the upside-down bean, and the refectory of Barjols, which was known for its quasi-magical ability to repel flies.

Augustine himself had experimented to determine the truth or falsehood of marvels. In his *De civitate Dei*, he declared his belief in eternal flames, magnets, and the incorruptibility of peacock meat because, although initially sceptical, he had seen these things himself. He even conducted an experiment to prove that peacock meat did not decay, which caused him to glorify God.⁵⁴ His actions in experimenting went against his own blanket condemnation of curiosity as a kind of "lust of the eyes", with lust the root of all sin, suggesting that his curiosity about the world was in this instance stronger than his Christian ethics.⁵⁵ Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* presented Augustine's experiment on peacock flesh as a wonder, without any direct comment on its truth or falsehood.⁵⁶

It may have been Augustine's experiment that inspired Gervase to also use experiments to prove or disprove marvels when the opportunity arose. There are some indications that Gervase respected sensory experience as a form of proof, as when he dismissed *mappae mundi* on the basis that their creators had not seen the places in question, and that they were therefore mendacious.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Gervase recognised the

⁵³ Jacqueline Hamesse, "Experientia/experimentum dans les lexiques médiévaux et dans les textes philosophiques antérieurs au 14^e siècle", in Marco Veneziani (ed.), *Experientia* (Firenze, 2002), pp. 77-90.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Bernard Dombart and Alfons Kalb (eds), in *CCSL*, vol. 47-8 (Turnhout, 1955), book 21, ch. 4, vol. 2, pp. 761-2. This eternal flame is the one Gervase of Tilbury affirmed because of a similar one in France: *Otia Imperialia*, S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (eds) (Oxford, 2002), book 3, ch. 9, pp. 572-3.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Confessiones*, Lucas Verheijen (ed.) in *CCSL*, vol. 27 (Turnholt, 1981), book 10, ch. 35, §54, p. 184: "concupiscentia oculorum".

⁵⁶ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, prologue, pp. 560-61.

⁵⁷ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 2, pp. 526-7.

difficulty of travelling to distant lands, as when he noted that Scythia is rarely reached by travellers “because of the enormous griffins there”.⁵⁸

Physical objects and places within one’s immediate vicinity, however, could be subjected to experiment. Gervase asserts that he performed three experiments: one with a book of magic spells, another to test the rumoured properties of the upside-down bean, and another to test a refectory’s marvelous ability to repel flies. Only the latter is described in close detail, leaving readers to either imagine the finer details of the first two experiments or dismiss them as textual invention.

The first experiment concerns a book of occult spells thought to have belonged to Virgil. Gervase described how an English astronomer journeyed to Sicily to request Roger II’s permission to dig up Virgil’s bones, which were believed to be hidden somewhere in Naples. Roger granted permission, thinking that the project would not bear fruit, and the astronomer then journeyed to Naples with Roger’s royal warrant. The Neapolitans initially welcomed the astronomer and encouraged his project, but when he uncovered Virgil’s sarcophagus in the centre of a nearby mountain, they became afraid that disturbing Virgil’s tomb would lead to the destruction of Naples itself, because folklore dictated that Virgil was the city’s patron and protector.

For this reason, the Neapolitan military commander, aided by the people, denied the astronomer access to Virgil’s body, instead reintering it in a nearby castle on the sea called the Castel del’ Uovo. The astronomer, however, was permitted to keep an occult book of spells that was found within Virgil’s sarcophagus. Following the folkloric belief of Virgil as a magician, the astronomer anticipated that the book would contain the hidden secrets of the magic arts. In concluding this tale, Gervase remarks: “We saw some excerpts from that very

⁵⁸ Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, book 1, pp. 190-92: “propter grifforum imminantatem accessus hominum illuc rarus est”.

book, thanks to the venerable cardinal, John of Naples, in the time of Pope Alexander [r. 1159-81], and we put them to the test by infallible experimental proof”.⁵⁹ What this experimental proof entailed is left to the imagination, but it seems to coalesce with a broader phenomenon of the early thirteenth century: the rise of natural magic as a source of fascination and paranoia.⁶⁰

Gervase also claims to have climbed Mt Somma, attached to Mt Vesuvius, to confirm the marvel of the upside-down bean. Gervase reveals that he had heard rumours that if one genuflected and recited the Lord’s Prayer three times while picking the bean, it made the person who ate it mimic the experiences of the person who picked it: “If you make yourself laugh while you gather it, whoever tastes it will laugh uninterruptedly until sunset; if you simulate weeping, he will weep... if you imitate... the gesture of vomiting, the same will befall whoever eats it”.⁶¹ This may hint at some sort of psychotropic properties of the plant.

Gervase was initially sceptical about the bean’s bizarre properties, so he climbed the mountain to find the plant, and have it tested:

I should not have attached credence to this if I had not tested it myself; but with great toil I made for the heights of that mountain, and found the plant in a mountain cave, below the castle which the locals called the Height, a most strongly fortified castle belonging to the king.⁶²

⁵⁹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 112, pp. 804-5: “Et ipso libro, per uenerabilem Iohannem Neapolitanum cardinalem, tempore pape Alexandri, excerpta uidimus, et probari uerissima rerum experientia fecimus”.

⁶⁰ Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas, *Magic in Medieval Society* (New York, 2014), pp. 1-26.

⁶¹ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 14, pp. 584-5: “Si colligendo risus exasperas, gustans usque ad solis occasum ridebit sine intermissione; si fletus simulas, flebit... si... egerendi gestum exprimis, id idem continget comedenti”. On the other hand, Gervase claims of other mountain-top visions that whenever anyone climbs the mountains to see them, they disappear: Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 41, pp. 638-41; book 3, ch. 58, pp. 668-9.

⁶² Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 14, pp. 584-5: “Nec hiis fidem dedissem si non ipse probassem, cum summo labore ardua montis illius petens, herbamque repperi in cauerna montis, sub castro quod indigene Summam nominant, quod regis speciale est, munitione firmissimum”.

As with Virgil's book, Gervase did not provide close detail about what his experiment entailed. If it is true that he scaled Mt Somma to pick upside-down beans, this would demonstrate significant physical effort to attain sensory proof for the story; at present, the peak stands at 1132m above sea-level, but in the early thirteenth century, it could have stood somewhat higher, since major eruptions, around one every ten years, are recorded for Vesuvius during an active phase from 1631 to 1944.⁶³

The only case of experimentation that provides close detail about the experiment itself is Gervase's story of the refectory of Barjols. This experiment aimed to disprove a story Gervase had heard about how the refectory was immune to flies, but when the experiment proved the marvel to be true, this increased Gervase's awe:

Let me describe something proven. In the kingdom of Arles, in the province of Aix, there is a small town called Barjols, in which there is a notable collegiate foundation, of venerable age; it is honourably endowed with estates, and excites the envy of neighbouring churches by its lavish hospitality. It has a refectory, built long ago, in which no fly can be made to stay. I had learned of this strange matter by oral report, and wanted to test it by experience (*experimentum*). So I came as an eager investigator to see if flies would settle, as they usually do, on platters with a smearing of honey or some other sticky substance on them. I discovered that the matter was, in truth, more than a rumour. Deciding to adopt violent measures in support of my ingenious ruse, a product of human thinking that had so far failed, I turned into a hunter of flies, and strewed my prey over honey, milk, and fat in the refectory. Then my amazement increased when I observed that the

⁶³ V. Bonasia et al., "Eruptive History, Seismic Activity, and Ground Deformations at Mt Vesuvius, Italy", *Annales Geophysicae*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1985), pp. 395-406.

mental energy and physical force that I had invested were in vain. And so I came to believe what I had heard, and my amazement intensified.⁶⁴

This story emblematises the process of wonder and doubt under examination in this dissertation. Gervase's initial response to hearing the story was scepticism, which prompted a search for evidence, in this case an experiment which brought the rumour into Gervase's own sensory experience. Once proven to be true, the story could then be convincingly communicated in writing.

On other occasions, Gervase's sensory experience led him to grand scientific claims about the world, which demonstrates wonder's place at the forefront of the creation of scientific knowledge. Gervase describes a body of salt water near the city of Arles (presumably the seaside wetland area known as the Camargue) that freezes over in winter and is evaporated in summer due to the sun's heat, leaving only solid salt. Gervase then provides a hypothesis to explain why the ocean could not be circumnavigated by sailors: "For on the one hand it becomes impenetrable to the north because it is hardened by the cold, while on the other it is rendered impassable to travellers to the south-east and the south because it condenses under the extreme fieriness of the sun".⁶⁵

A number of other examples of salt water drying to form solid salt are presented as marvels, as are wells whose waters may be boiled down to form solid salt.⁶⁶ Furthermore, J.W Banks and S.E. Binns point out that similar hypotheses about why the equator and

⁶⁴ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 10, pp. 574-5: "Rem expertam loquar. Est in regno Arelatensi, prouincia Aquensi, uicus Bariolis nomine, in quo canonica singularis fundata est, antiquitate ueneranda, possessionibus honorifice fundata, hospitalitate uicinis ecclesiis inuidiosa. In hac est refectorium, ab antiquo edificatum, in quo nulla musca detineri potest. Huius rei nouitatem mihi per auditum cognitam ad probationem per experimentum ducturus, accessi sedulus explorator si quo mellis uel cuiusuis pinguedinis linimento scutellis musce, ut assolent, insiderent. Profecto rem rumore comperiens uerierem, uolens fallaciam ingeniosam cogitationis humane frustratam quadam uiolentia adiuuare, muscarum uenator effectus, predam in refectorio melli, lacti, ac pinguedini supersterno. Tunc maior excreuit admiratio, cum uim animi et uiolentiam corporis a me temptatam perpendo cassari; sicque cum fide facta de auditis stupor est augmentatus".

⁶⁵ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 40, pp. 638-9: "Hinc enim frigore congelatum sub septemtrione fit inuium, illinc nimio solis ardore pissatum transeuntibus efficitur ad euroaustrum et miridiem immeabile".

⁶⁶ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 2, pp. 564-7.

poles were impassable were proposed by Pliny, Solinus, Martianus Cappella, Adam of Bremen, Adelard of Bath, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Alexander Neckham.⁶⁷ To contemporary readers, the idea that the equator was a physical barrier of solid salt may seem risible, but in Gervase's context, lacking an opportunity to personally experience the equatorial regions, he retreated justifiably to inferential logic in order to marry his own sensory experience with his textual inheritance. Gervase could have confirmed or disconfirmed his hypothesis by traveling to the equatorial regions to see them for himself.

2.3 — Travel and the Senses

Compared to remaining sedentary, travel offers a greater opportunity to experience a wide range of novel phenomena using the senses, and to thereby instigate more wonder and create more subjective learning. Travel also offers the opportunity to speak to larger numbers of people with divergent cultural backgrounds and sets of experiences, and to therefore encounter more wonders. If wonder relates to novelty and is dulled by experience, then one's homeland will provide fewer opportunities for wonder than foreign lands. It therefore follows that many of the marvels tales recorded in twelfth-century texts had their origins in faraway places, as is particularly the case for the *mirabilia Orientis* traditions. Caroline Walker Bynum and Kim Phillips argued that medieval travel texts possessed the primary functions of entertainment and didacticism.⁶⁸ Jana Voltrová argued that the travel reports of

⁶⁷ Gervase, *Otia*, pp. 638-9, n. 2.

⁶⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 1 (1997), pp. 1-26, here pp. 12-14; Kim Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245-1510* (Philadelphia, 2014), pp. 28-49.

the later Middle Ages commenced a slow transition in perceptions of Asia from the “cognitive Other” (an “unknown, never encountered Other which can only be imagined”) of encyclopedic traditions, to a “normative Other” (“an Other which is directly encountered and gradually explored”).⁶⁹

In a sense, this is the mental process governing all encounters with the exotic: imagined images of foreign places are first established within one’s home culture, then affirmed or challenged through the individual’s sensory experience while traveling. From here, they may be communicated back to the ideological centre, where audiences use the epistemological process of wonder to make their own judgments about the traveller’s marvelous claims. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park argued that writers of travel texts could refer to their own personal sight as a rhetorical strategy aimed at convincing audiences of the truth of their reports, and noted the commonality of deference to sight within travel reports.⁷⁰ While this is a salient argument, assessing authors purely from a compositional viewpoint neglects the role of the senses in the author’s own assessment of a phenomenon’s truth or falsehood. Moreover, a key problem faced by authors of travel texts was that their own sensory experiences garnered during the travel experience were for the most part not shared by their texts’ ultimate audiences at home. This could lead audiences to be sceptical of an author’s marvelous claims about foreign lands. This is best exemplified by the partly negative reception that Gerald of Wales’ *Topographia Hibernica* appears to have received in England, which is the key focus of this section.

Recent scholarship by a number of doctoral students has paved the way for a close re-examination of Gerald’s *Topographia* from the point of view of reception. In 2005, Catherine

⁶⁹ Jana Voltrová, “Beyond the Horizons of Legends: Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia”, *Numen*, vol. 57, no. 2 (2010), pp. 154-185, quoting p. 154.

⁷⁰ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York, 1998), pp. 27-38.

Rooney published a wide-ranging re-examination of the manuscripts of Gerald of Wales' various works.⁷¹ In 2009, Sumithra J. David compared the reception of the *Topographia* to that of William of Rubruck's c.1253 *Itinerarium ad partes Orientales* up to 1500.⁷² Her work highlighted that both texts were used in a variety of subsequent political situations and were consistently re-written in a variety of different late medieval political and ideological contexts. In 2011, Amelia Sargent examined Gerald's own revisions to the *Topographia* with close regard for the alteration of political and geographical passages in line with shifting political ideologies across Gerald's lifetime.⁷³

These studies have opened the possibility for a new critical edition and translation of the *Topographia*, which the present author is currently preparing for the editors of the Oxford Medieval Texts Series. In addition, the present author has discovered a number of previously unknown manuscripts of the *Topographia*, bringing the total manuscript count to fifty-three, whereas the edition in use today, the 1867 edition of James F. Dimock in the Rolls Series, made use of only sixteen manuscripts. Rooney and Sargent delineated five textual variants of the *Topographia*, and argued that these were all made under Gerald's own direction at various stages of his career in a variety of scriptoria.⁷⁴ This complex textual history allows historians to unpack the process of repeated revision and alteration made by Gerald, providing access to some tentative conclusions about the work's reception.

⁷¹ Catherine Rooney, *The Manuscripts of the Works of Gerald of Wales* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Cambridge, 2005).

⁷² Sumithra J. David, *Looking East and West: The Reception and Dissemination of the Topographia Hibernica and Itinerarium ad partes Orientales in England [1185-c.1500]* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of St Andrews, 2009).

⁷³ Amelia Sargent, *Visions and Revisions: Gerald of Wales, Authorship, and the Construction of Political, Religious, and Legal Geographies in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Britain* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 2011).

⁷⁴ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 11-31. The claims made in this section are predicated on the view that Gerald himself made the alterations. Rooney and Sargent's justification for this, based on close readings of the manuscripts, cannot be explored here for reasons of space.

Gerald's *Topographia* contains a variety of references to marvels he claimed to have seen personally. One example was the barnacle goose, which was thought to be spontaneously produced in shells attached to water-borne logs: "I have seen many times with my own eyes more than a thousand minute embryos of birds of this type on the seashore, hanging from one piece of timber, closed up in shells and already formed".⁷⁵ Gerald claims to have seen, around the neck of a mendicant in Wales, the horn of St Patrick, which "according to vulgar belief" St Patrick had used to expel venomous creatures from Ireland, although Gerald reports that none dared sound it now out of respect and fear of the saint.⁷⁶ Gerald described a well in Munster which turned black hair grey, and claimed to have seen a man whose beard was half-grey and half-black because it had been dipped in water from this well.⁷⁷ Gerald described the way ospreys hover on sea breezes to hunt fish as "wonderful, and I have often seen it myself".⁷⁸

Other claims of sighting marvels use the passive voice ("have been seen", "was seen", and so on), which makes it difficult to determine whether Gerald himself saw them, or was accepting them on the basis of spoken report. This includes a hermaphrodite "seen" in Connaught, and the ability of badgers to work together and use tools to construct warrens "not without wonder for those looking on".⁷⁹ In other cases, Gerald makes the sources of his marvels clear. One such case is the story, which "I heard from merchants", that toads found in ships' hulls immediately died when thrown onto Irish soil, again "to the astonishment of

⁷⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, distinctio 1, ch. 15, p. 48: "Vidi multoties oculis meis plusquam mille minuta hujusmodi avium corpuscula in litore maris ab uno ligno dependentia, testis inclusa, et jam formata".

⁷⁶ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 3, ch. 34, p. 180: "vulgari opinione".

⁷⁷ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 7, p. 84.

⁷⁸ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 16, p. 50: "Mirum de avibus istis, quod et oculis plerumque conspexi".

⁷⁹ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 20, p. 107: "visa est"; distinctio 1, ch. 26, p. 58: "non absque intuentium admiratione".

many who witnessed it”.⁸⁰ This seems to have been a physical experiment by the merchants to test Ireland’s reputation for immunity from poisonous creatures, a reputation which Gerald himself garnered from reading Bede and saints’ *vitae*: “It is read in the antique writings of the saints of that land... [and] Bede also writes about this”.⁸¹

But Gerald also used his sensory experience to dismiss claims made by textual authorities. Gerald wrote that Solinus, Isidore, and Bede claimed that Ireland possessed many vineyards, many goats, and no bees, but Gerald’s sensory experience suggested that each of these claims was false. Gerald explained this discrepancy by arguing that Ireland may have changed since the times of Solinus, Isidore, and Bede; this claim perceptively avoids the anachronism that frequently influenced medieval understandings of their own past. Gerald then proclaimed that “any statement rests on a certain foundation of truth when the person who makes it has been an eyewitness to what he affirms”, which is in essence an affirmation of empiricism.

He also argued that these authors might have erred because they themselves did not have sensory experience of Ireland, but relied instead upon oral report at a distance: “It does not seem amazing if these men sometimes deviated from the path of truth, since they knew nothing from eyeing belief (*oculata fide*), but only through reporters and from a great distance away”.⁸² On this basis, Gerald requested that his own audiences excuse him should they find anything doubtful in the *Topographia*, and claimed that humans were fallible, and that only God could know true truths.⁸³ Here may be seen the tendency for authors to defer

⁸⁰ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 29, p. 63: “scrutatores tamen oceani mercatores asserentes audivimus... videntibus et admirantibus multis”.

⁸¹ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 29, pp. 62-3: “Legitur namque in antiquis terrae istius sanctorum scriptis... De his autem Beda scribit...”. Gervase of Tilbury also acknowledges these legendary views about Ireland: Gervase, *Otia Imperialia*, pp. 308-11.

⁸² Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 6, p. 29: “nec mirum tamen si a tramite veritatis interdum deviarint, cum nihil oculata fide, nihil nisi per indicem et a remotis agnoverint”.

⁸³ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 6, p. 29.

to the divine omnipotence argument out of frustration with the difficulties associated with accruing sensory experiences, which supports the view that faith is an all-encompassing epistemological strategy that mitigates an individual's lack of sensory experience.

Like Gervase of Tilbury, Gerald describes a number of experiments to test marvelous claims. Gerald described one experiment to test the marvel that adult weasels restore their dying young to life using a yellow flower, "as those who saw it said, and they killed a pup for the sake of testing this".⁸⁴ Gerald says that the test proved the marvel to be true, but does not provide details about what exactly happened.

Although this experiment was, for Gerald, based on spoken report, Gerald claims that he himself witnessed another experiment to test a marvel of nature. Gerald's written inheritance suggested Ireland was able to repel venomous animals, particularly snakes and toads. Gerald hypothesised that the Irish soil was the key to this, and wrote that items made of Irish leather destroy venomous animals at a touch, because the leather comes from cows who have eaten the grass that grows from Irish soils. Gerald wrote:

I have seen with my own eyes one of these leather straps (*corrigiam*) drawn tight in a circle around a toad for the sake of the experiment. Coming to the strap, and trying to cross over it, the animal fell backwards as though it were stunned. It then tried the opposite side of the circle, but meeting with the strap all round, it shrunk from it as if it were pestiferous. At last, digging a hole in the mud with its feet in the centre of the circle, it crept into it in the presence of many persons.⁸⁵

Here, Gerald once again reveals the role of sight in affirming marvelous claims both oral and written. In claiming that this took place before his own eyes but also "in the presence of

⁸⁴ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 27, p. 60: "Ut enim perhibent qui viderunt, et catellos periculi istius causa morti dederunt".

⁸⁵ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 1, ch. 31, p. 64: "Vidi oculis meis corrigiam hujusmodi, strictam et arctam, bufoni circulariter periculi causa circumpositam. Ad quam perveniens et transire volens, statim tanquam capite percussus retro cecidit: partesque ad oppositas se transferens, et corrigiam undique inventam tanquam pestem fugiens, in medio tandem circuli spatio terram fimosam subito pedibus effossam multis intuentibus subintravit".

many persons”, Gerald seems to betray awareness that the senses of a group of people are more reliable than the senses of a single individual, which is also a central tenet of empiricism.

However, fantasies may be perpetuated even in the face of exploration and sensory experience with a marvel. Following Voltrová’s views about exotic places as a “cognitive Other”, sensory experience of a foreign place interacts with preconceived images made in one’s home culture, which stem from the imagination, and may be influenced by culture-specific views transmitted both orally and in cultural products (books, art, sculptures, and so on). In Gerald’s case, this was Ireland’s poison-free reputation. The imagination may act as a behavioural factor as courses of action are laid out according to preconceived images, and these persistent illusions may distort later findings because of the traveller’s possible psychological tendency towards confirmation bias. This is Gerald’s experiment on Irish leather’s effect on toads. These sometimes erroneous insights may then be transmitted back to the ideological centre as truths, leading subsequent audiences to go through their own assessments of their truth and falsehood. This is the recording of the toad experiment in the *Topographia*.

When the traveller claims something is true in line with the audience’s preconceptions and sensory experience, this may be little cause for conflict. However, when the traveller claims something is true which is not in line with audience preconceptions and sensory experience, this commences the epistemological chain of wonder, and audiences ultimately face a conflict between trusting the traveller as authoritative or trusting their own sensory experience and preconceptions. Neither of these positions is logically defensible given the audiences’ own lack of sensory experience of the foreign place. Given that the widespread oral and textual lore of the twelfth century seemed to suggest that many marvels

were possible, this would suggest that the most contentious claims that could be made by returning travellers were ones that suggested marvelous phenomena were not true.

Sargent established that Gerald began writing Version I of the *Topographia* while in Ireland with Prince John in 1185, and that it was completed before 1188, when Gerald toured Wales to rouse support for the Third Crusade along with Baldwin of Forde, Archbishop of Canterbury.⁸⁶ Version II, most likely written before 1188/9, significantly expands upon the material in Version I. Between Versions II and III exists a transitional manuscript (Cambridge, Corpus Christi 400). This manuscript preserves a copy of Version II with marginal additions and commentary likely to be from Gerald's scriptorium; these marginal additions later became subsumed into the body text of Version III. Such transitional manuscripts exist between Versions II and III (Cambridge, Corpus Christi 400), III and IV (London, British Library Royal 13.B.viii), and IV and V (Dublin, NLI 700). Seven of the ten extant manuscripts of Version III append a letter to William de Vere, Bishop of Hereford from 1186-99, which suggests Version III was completed before 1199, but based on manuscript evidence Sargent makes the case that Version III was written c. 1189-1193/4.⁸⁷ Sargent dated Version IV to c.1197, during Gerald's first retirement to Lincoln, and Version V to c.1208 because it is dedicated to King John seemingly before his journey to Ireland.⁸⁸

Sargent's dates for the various versions may be summarised thus:

⁸⁶ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 13-17.

⁸⁷ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 21-3.

⁸⁸ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 30-38.

Date	
Version I	c.1185-8
Version II	Before 1188/9
Version III	c.1189-93
Version IV	c.1197
Version V	c.1208

The substance of the additions varied at each stage. Gerald rarely subtracted information, and so the versions became progressively larger from I to V. The transition from Version I to II represents a significant enlarging of the text. Where Version I appears rudimentary and unfinished, Version II added prefaces, explanatory notes, additional stories and examples, and significant personal commentary. The transition from Version II to III added less volume than the transition from I to II, but the tenor of the alterations is generally defensive, adding additional proofs or claims from authorities to support the truth of Gerald's marvels. The transitions from Versions III to IV and IV to V are smaller in volume. From Version III to IV, maps of Europe and Ireland were added to the manuscripts, and the text was changed only in terms of expanding lists, adding quotes, altering wording, and adding similar stories to a small number of marvels. The changes from Version IV to V are broadly similar to those between Versions III and IV; for example, the Version I story of a hermaphrodite in Ireland is bolstered in Version V with the story of the hermaphrodite "seen" in Connaught.⁸⁹

In his c.1191 *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Gerald indicated that he had presented a copy of the *Topographia* to Baldwin of Forde in 1188 while both were touring Wales. In the third redaction of the *Itinerarium* made c.1214, around twenty-six years later, Gerald added that Baldwin "accepted the book thankfully, and either carefully read it or heard it read every day

⁸⁹ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 234.

on the way [to Wales], and, while on the way back to England, he completed the book along with the journey”.⁹⁰ Gerald made a similar claim in his c.1205 *De rebus a se gestis*.⁹¹ John Gillingham argued that Gerald’s works betray many examples of authorial invention; in line with this, the late dates of the above passages raise the possibility that Gerald’s claims of positive reception could represent little more than a post-factum project of self-aggrandisement.⁹²

Gerald wrote that he gave a three-day reading of his *Topographia Hibernica* in Oxford in 1188/9 after returning from Wales. This is recorded in his *De rebus a se gestis*, written c. 1205, around sixteen years after the events it describes. Gerald reports that the version of the *Topographia* he read out at Oxford was “complete and correct”, and Sargent takes this as evidence that it was Version II that was read aloud.⁹³ Gerald claims that each *distinctio* was given over three days respectively to the poor townspeople, scholars of various faculties, and then the students, knights, and remaining townspeople of Oxford.⁹⁴ In his c.1218 letter to the Hereford cathedral chapter regarding his *Topographia*, Gerald claimed that Walter Map, archdeacon of Oxford, and Robert de Beaufrey, canon of Salisbury, were present at the Oxford reading in 1188/9.⁹⁵ If Version II was read aloud at Oxford, then it seems possible

⁹⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, James F. Dimock (ed.), in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, RS, 1868), vol. 6, *distinctio* 1, ch. 2, p. 20: “Quod ipse [archiepiscopus] gratanter accipiens, singulisque diebus obiter inde vel legens vel audiens attente, tandem in Angliam reversus, lectionem una cum legatione complevit”. Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 258.

⁹¹ Gerald of Wales, *De rebus a se gestis*, J.S. Brewer (ed.), in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, RS, 1861), book 2, ch. 20, vol. 1, p. 80.

⁹² John Gillingham, “The Cultivation of History, Legend, and Courtesy at the Court of Henry II”, in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (eds), *Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays* (New York, 2006), pp. 25-52.

⁹³ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 20. Gerald, *De rebus a se gestis*, book 2, ch. 16, pp. 72-3: “opere completo et correcto”.

⁹⁴ Gerald, *De rebus a se gestis*, book 2, ch. 16, pp. 72-3.

⁹⁵ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 54; Lewis Thorpe, “Gerald of Wales: A Public Reading in Oxford in 1188 or 1189”, *Neophilologus*, vol. 62, no. 3 (1978), pp. 455-8.

that a negative reception in this forum influenced Gerald's defensive alterations between Versions II and III.

If this is the case, then it provides a rare glimpse at audience reception of marvels tales. The defensive tenor of these changes seems to align with Gerald's claim in his *Expugnatio Hibernica* that his *Topographia Hibernica* had received a critical reception, as discussed in **Chapter 1**. In Version I, the second *distinctio* of Gerald's *Topographia Hibernica* commences with an overarching declaration of truthfulness as a result of personal inspection:

I know and am certain that these things I will write [here] will seem to the reader either absolutely impossible or ridiculous. But they fulfill in me the love of God, and I will therefore discuss in this little book nothing whose truth I have not ascertained with the highest diligence either through eyeing belief (*oculata fide*) or by the testimony of most proven and scrutinised men from the places in question.⁹⁶

In Version II, Gerald added here: "And spite ought not cover me in a cloud of false accusations, for I in person witnessed the following things with my own eyes". He also added two further claims: that God had the power to create any effect and therefore marvels ought to be expected, and that the world's peripheries were places more full of marvels than its centre (that is, England). In Version III, Gerald added a quote from Horace, that "things should not be disbelieved just because they are new and unheard of".⁹⁷ These reactionary additions suggest that Gerald's audiences responded with scepticism towards the things he claimed to have seen but they had not seen themselves. At the very least, these additions suggest that Gerald expected his audiences could have reacted sceptically.

⁹⁶ Gerald, *Topographia*, *distinctio* 2, *praefatio*, pp. 74-5: "Scio tamen et certus sum, me nonnulla scripturum quae lectori vel impossibilia prorsus vel etiam ridiculosa videbuntur. Sed ita me Dii amabilem praestent, ut nihil in libello apposuerim, cujus veritatem vel oculata fide, vel probatissimorum et authenticorum comprovincialium virorum testimonio, cum summa diligencia non elicuerim".

⁹⁷ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 228-9.

Further reactionary additions are sprinkled throughout the text. In Version I, Gerald introduces his story of the ox-man, who “was seen” (“visus fuit”) near Wicklow around 1175, though whether he was seen by Gerald himself or others is not clear given the passive verb form.⁹⁸ In Version III, Gerald added a lengthy rhetorical flourish: “Could a killer of such an animal be called a murderer? Monstrous creature! Irrational creature! Thoroughly lacking in all reason and speech! Who will associate it with the flock of the rational?”⁹⁹ The abject horror felt by Gerald as a result of the creature’s perceived hybridity led to questions about the legality of killing it. Here once again may be seen the confluence between supernatural beliefs and what one might presume to be a misunderstanding of genetic diversity. But more importantly, Gerald asked that his audiences forgive him because “digressions of this sort must be excused; rather, nature’s vengeance must be feared, not struck down in debate”.¹⁰⁰ This appears in Version III, which suggests that this particular story may have aroused debate about the ox-man’s physical truth or moral significance amongst Gerald’s audiences in Oxford.¹⁰¹

In his revisions, Gerald added “so it was said” to a variety of stories, which transferred responsibility for the truth of the tales from Gerald to his informants.¹⁰² In Version I, Gerald presented the story of a lion “we saw in Paris” who frequently broke free from its cage in a spirit of rage, but was calmed after having sex with a woman named Johanna,

⁹⁸ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, distinctio 2, ch. 21, p. 108.

⁹⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, distinctio 2, ch. 21, p. 109: “Sed et hujus animalis interemptor nunquid homicida dicitur? Animal monstruosum, animal irrationale, omni penitus tam ratione quam oratione carens, rationalium gregi quis associabit?”

¹⁰⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, distinctio 2, ch. 21, p. 109: “Sed excursus hujusmodi sunt excusandi: potiusque timenda est naturae vindicta, quam disputatione discutienda”. Elsewhere, Gerald uses this phrase “non disputatione discutienda”, and claims it is a borrowing from Augustine, but I have been unable to identify it in Augustine’s writings: Gerald, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, book 1, ch. 8, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 234.

¹⁰² Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 231-2.

whom the French court allegedly called upon for this purpose whenever the lion escaped.¹⁰³ What Gerald refuses to acknowledge is that seeing the lion does not constitute proof of its sexual relationship with a human woman, unless he observed it in the act of inter-species coitus, which seems unlikely given the passage. However, in Version II, Gerald added that the Greek myth of Pasiphaë, who was cursed by Poseidon to mate with a bull, “is not a fable, as per the opinion of many, but is actually fact”, which ostensibly bolstered the verisimilitude of the lion story.¹⁰⁴ Here, Gerald reveals that his literal interpretation of folklore was at odds with “the opinion of many”, which shows that he may have been more trusting than many of his contemporaries.

In Version I, Gerald claimed that not long after the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland, they found a fifty-pound fish made of gold, which had three golden teeth. In Version III, Gerald altered the wording so that the passage no longer mentioned the large weight of the fish, and that the fish had “an outward appearance of gold” instead of being made of solid gold.¹⁰⁵ In Version IV, Gerald improved the verisimilitude of the fish tale by adding another story about a dog with golden teeth, which had been captured near Dunholme (Lincolnshire).¹⁰⁶ In Version I, Gerald told the story of Bartholomew, son of the biblical Japheth, and his arrival in Ireland. In Version II, Gerald added that Ruanus, one of Bartholomew’s sons, lived to 1500 years old. In Version IV, Gerald claimed this “seems very much incredible and is open to objection”, and some manuscripts simply replace the claim that Ruanus was “1500 years old” with “many years old”.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, disbelieving that

¹⁰³ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 24, p. 111.

¹⁰⁴ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 24, p. 111; Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 234.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, distinctio 2, ch. 10, p. 93: “aureos quidem exteriore quadam similitudine”. Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 231-2.

¹⁰⁶ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 231-2.

¹⁰⁷ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 3, ch. 2, pp. 140-42; Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 240.

people could live to such ages would seem to limit the veracity of the claims in Genesis that Adam, Seth, Methuselah, Noah, and others lived beyond nine hundred years of age.

In Gerald's rebuttal of his critic in the *Expugnatio*, the critic's objections orbited particular stories from Gerald's *Topographia*: the wolf who talked with the priest, the ox-man, the bearded woman, the goat that had sex with women, and the lion that did the same. It seems telling that these particular stories are the ones that received significant reactionary revisions throughout the textual history of the *Topographia*. In fact, only one chapter of the *Topographia* was revised at every stage from Version I to V: the tale of the wolf talking with the priest.¹⁰⁸

In Version I, Gerald describes the unnamed priest who was approached by a wolf in the forest between Ulster and Meath. The wolf spoke human language and requested the priest provide the last rites to the wolf's wife, also a wolf, as she lay dying. The priest wished to withhold communion, but "in order to absolve all doubt", the male wolf used his "foot-cum-hand" to "retract the whole she-wolf's skin from the head to the navel" as visual proof to show the priest, who saw she was truly human, and so provided the viaticum. The wolf thanked the priest and led him back to the road. The priest then allegedly journeyed to Rome to seek advice at a papal synod about the wolf-man; Gerald was not present, but was consulted, and sent a letter offering suggestions.¹⁰⁹

In Version II, minor changes were made to the wording of the text. However, Version III appends a significant excursus regarding the human or animal status of the creature, and a series of similar stories from folklore and literature, which aimed to bolster the truth of the wolf-man. Gerald introduces Augustine's discussion of the cynocephali and other monsters, and Gerald concluded that these monsters "ought to be considered human... and so too for

¹⁰⁸ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, pp. 101-6; Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁹ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, pp. 102-3: "Et ut omnem abstergeret dubietatem, pedo quasi pro manu fungens, pellem totam a capite lupae retrahens usque ad umbilicum".

monstrous births of humans, which we have often seen”.¹¹⁰ The personal sighting of monstrous births was used as evidence for the existence of the monstrous races in both Gerald’s *Topographia* and Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, suggesting a role for sight, presumably of genetic malformations like hypertrichosis (sometimes termed werewolf syndrome), in affirming the existence of the monstrous races.

Version III added further evidence to the wolf story by referring to the human-animal transformations in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass* and the folkloric stories of the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish, in which humans are turned into pigs and witches transform into hares, all of which “we have indeed seen in our own times”.¹¹¹ Version III also refers to Jesus’ changing of water into wine and the story of Lot’s wife turning to salt in Genesis, and thereby hypothesises that demons only alter their appearances, and not their physical natures, because only God can change physical natures.¹¹² Version III asserts that this “is most powerful, as shines forth in the above examples, and ought to be believed as the undoubted truth”.¹¹³ Finally, Version III adds that transsubstantiation involves a physical change in the material of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and not just a metaphorical change.¹¹⁴

Version IV added further proof to the story of the wolf-man by asserting that God transformed into a human for the salvation of mankind. This divine transformation meant that the wolf story “ought not to be disbelieved, but rather embraced with most certain

¹¹⁰ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, p. 105: “homines dicendi sint... quod et de monstruosis hominum partubus, quos fieri persaepe videmus”.

¹¹¹ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, p. 106: “nostris quoque temporibus quosdam vidimus”.

¹¹² Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, pp. 106-7.

¹¹³ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, p. 106: “sicut in propositis patet exemplis potentissimum esse et indubitata veritate credendum”.

¹¹⁴ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, p. 107.

belief”.¹¹⁵ In the Version I story, the priest asked the wolf whether the Anglo-Normans would remain in Ireland over a long period of time, and the wolf replied that they would not, because of the sins of the Anglo-Normans. Here, Version V added a description of God’s punishment of the sinful Israelites in Leviticus, which added credence to the wolf’s prophecy by introducing a precedent for God punishing sinful peoples on a cataclysmic scale. Because of the similarities between biblical and folkloric stories, both were used as forms of evidence to increase the verisimilitude of the wolf story. But by using the Bible as evidence, Gerald implied that scepticism towards the wolf’s transformation could have been an affront to those marvels inherent in Christian doctrine that involved physical transformations. For this reason, it may have been less subversive to err on the side of belief than disbelief.

Based on this series of reactionary textual revisions, it seems clear that Gerald had faced criticism from audiences who sought strong assurances about the marvels he wished to report as truths. The vast majority of important alterations happened between Versions II and III, between which stood Gerald’s public reading of the text in Oxford in 1188/9. It is important that this was a spoken-word forum: audiences who are in the immediate presence of a writer, if they have sufficient confidence to voice their concerns, may react in real-time to marvelous claims and provide on-the-spot questions and critiques to which the author must respond convincingly in order to save face. This process of critique and revision is slowed significantly when texts are transmitted in writing, and it may not take place at all if readers are unwilling to put in the effort and cost to send written critiques to authors. The Oxford reading of 1188/9 is the only public reading of the *Topographia* that is substantiated by extant documentary evidence, though others may have taken place.

¹¹⁵ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 2, ch. 19, p. 104: “non itaque discredendum, sed potius fide certissima est amplectendum”.

Available evidence suggests that subsequent versions of the text were transmitted in writing, since many manuscripts append letters to their recipients. A letter addressed to William de Vere, Bishop of Hereford, accompanies seven of the ten Version III manuscripts.¹¹⁶ A letter to King John accompanies some Version V manuscripts. A letter to the Hereford cathedral chapter accompanies other Version V manuscripts.¹¹⁷ Verbatim excerpts from Version IV of the *Topographia* appear in William de Montibus' chronicles, suggesting he probably had access to a physical copy, rather than spoken word.¹¹⁸ The transition from Version II to III is therefore a key moment where Gerald can be placed before spoken audiences, and it seems likely that many of the defensive revisions made to Version III stem from criticisms Gerald received in Oxford, particularly surrounding his more marvelous claims.

William de Montibus provides an interesting case in the reception of Gerald's *Topographia*. As chancellor of Lincoln from c.1191-c.1213, William was a leading English theologian and public intellectual of his time. Both Gerald of Wales and Alexander Neckham attended his lectures at the University of Paris.¹¹⁹ In c.1208-1216, Gerald penned his *Speculum Duorum*, and attached to this is a scathing letter in which Gerald defends the *Topographia* from William's criticism.

Gerald expressed frustration at William's criticisms of the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio Hibernica* particularly because William "used to praise them highly", according to Gerald.¹²⁰ Some scholars have claimed that this comment can be attributed to Gerald's active imagination, but Sargent has shown that William copied sections from Version IV of

¹¹⁶ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 18.

¹¹⁸ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 23-9.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Goering, *William de Montibus* (Toronto, 1992).

¹²⁰ Gerald, *Speculum Duorum*, Yves Lefèvre and R.B.C. Huygens (eds) (Cardiff, 1974), pp. 168-9.

the *Topographia* verbatim into his own *Similitudinarium*.¹²¹ In this text, William borrows Gerald's descriptions of a variety of birds, but William skipped over Gerald's description of barnacle geese, which seems to suggest that he may have been sceptical about them. On the other hand, Gerald's descriptions of the phoenix and silkworm were kept, suggesting he may have believed them to be true.¹²² If Gerald's later complaints about William ring true, then William must have changed his mind about the *Expugnatio* and *Topographia* at some point between his penning of the *Similitudinarium* and Gerald's letter of c.1208-1216, or perhaps William believed only certain parts of the *Topographia* carried verisimilitude, and not others.

In his *De rebus a se gestis*, Gerald claims that Baldwin of Forde was particularly pleased at Gerald's moralisations of the natures of birds:

The archbishop had asked [Gerald] whether he had used any material from the hagiographers and commentators concerning the allegories assigned to the natures of the birds in the first book of the *Topographia*. And when he responded that he hadn't, the archbishop exclaimed that they were certainly inspired by the same spirit that those who had written those things were.¹²³

The fact that William de Montibus inserted Gerald's avian moralisations in his *Similitudinarium* may add credence to Gerald's claim that Baldwin found them praiseworthy; the avian moralisations were in line with the textual tradition of using nature as a source of moral edification by analogising them for Christian teachings, a trend shown most strongly in the bestiary genre. Sargent pointed out that Version I contains descriptions of birds with no moralisations, but that in Version II every bird carries a moralisation, which may show Gerald pandering to audience expectations in revising for Version II.

¹²¹ Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 25.

¹²² Sargent, *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 25-9.

¹²³ Gerald, *De rebus a se gestis*, book 2, ch. 20, p. 80: "Quaesiverat etiam archiepiscopus ab ipso, utrum evidentiam aliquam ab agiographis et expositoribus nostris habuisset, super allegoriis circa avium naturas assignatis in prima Topographiae distinctione. Et cum responderet quod nullam, subjecit archiepiscopus, quia revera spitiru eodem quo et illi scripserunt scripta sunt ista".

However, Gerald's reactionary revisions, particularly between Versions II and III, make it probable that at least some audiences doubted Gerald's more marvelous claims. This conclusion is possible based on close examination of the various stages of redaction in the *Topographia's* complex textual history, and yet much is still left to speculation, and the present conclusions must remain only tentative. What should be borne in mind is that text offers a rare moment for historians to access reception data for a medieval text; many other texts' claims may have received sceptical reactions which are simply not available in the written record of the past.

Another macro-level trend may be in operation. Some authors penned marvels tales for their didactic value or entertainment value, but, in accordance with the written word as carrying truth, many seem to have penned only those tales they thought were likely to be true, which means they may have been leaving other, less believable ones unwritten. The burgeoning of marvels tales in the written record towards the end of the twelfth century may therefore present little more than a relaxation of strict authorial standards surrounding truth and falsehood, particularly for the *historia* and *chronica* text types.

If this is valid as a general trend, then the extant authors of marvels tales would appear to be the more trusting authors of their time, because other less trusting authors would have left marvelous tales unwritten. Hypothetically, if there is a group of a hundred authors, and they each only record tales they think are true, then their works should carry varying percentages of marvels tales based on their individual tendencies to believe or disbelieve, which would suggest that works written by more trusting authors should contain more marvels. If this holds, then writers like Gerald of Wales or Gervase of Tilbury may have been more trusting than the medieval mean, and historians should therefore expect to see evidence for negative receptions of their texts. If this trend possesses credibility, it may also skew perceptions of the Middle Ages as a whole by memorialising marvels texts that

were written by authors more trusting than the medieval mean, whereas texts written by more sober intellectuals are considered bland because of a lack of marvels.

Although this hypothesis may carry interest, what seems clear is that the negative reception of Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica* stems ultimately from the epistemological process of wonder, which drives audiences to seek sensory evidence for a marvelous phenomenon. Gerald claims to have had this sensory evidence himself, or trusted those whom he appears to have believed did have that sensory evidence, although some cases of personal inspection are not without significant logical fallibility, such as the claim of sight of the lion who had sex with a woman. However, Gerald's audiences presumably did not have sensory experience of the marvels he reported, which created tension between author and audience. This suggests that unity between an author and their audience may only take place when the epistemological standards of both parties surrounding truth and falsehood are closely aligned. It also suggests that audiences assessed the truth or falsehood of wonders on the basis of their degree of coherence with their own sensory experience.

Conclusion

Three behavioural strategies were used by twelfth-century people to assess the truth of marvels: journeying to a marvel's place of origin, questioning participants in a marvel, and performing physical experiments. These strategies are predicated on the view, whether conscious or subconscious, that sensory experience with marvels is the optimal form of proof. The examples presented in this chapter indicate that medieval people desired sensory experience with wonders, and that they were therefore, broadly speaking, behaving

empirically in the realm of everyday experience with novel phenomena. The epistemological process commenced by wonder might therefore be seen as a prototypical, uncodified form of probability theory. This proto-empirical behaviour was taking place even despite the rarified philosophical debates about the role of the *oculus mentis* relative to the corporeal senses, which suggests that the realm of philosophy and theology may have had little bearing on the behaviour of medieval men and women in their pragmatic experience with wonders.

Travel raised a further issue with regard to sensory experience. Authors who travelled to exotic lands could view the marvels of those lands for themselves, or else could claim they had seen them as a rhetorical strategy to convince audiences. However, if the travellers' claims were not in coherence with the evidence of their audiences' own sensory experience, then audiences faced the dilemma of whether to trust the traveller or their own intuition based on memories established by their own sensory experience. The emotional-cognitive process of wonder and doubt was used both by authors in exotic locations and their subsequent audiences after returning home. Conflict could therefore be created if authors and audiences differed in their epistemological standards surrounding what does or does not constitute convincing evidence for a marvel.

Chapter 3 —

The Effect of Entertainment on the Perception of Truth

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that wonder creates a desire within audiences for sensory evidence, in order to affirm novel phenomena as true. The present chapter explores how the compositional aim of evoking wonder as a form of entertainment could add complexity to the experience of wonder proposed in this dissertation by creating ambiguity about truth or falsehood. In particular, the claim that a marvel was introduced for entertainment could diminish the need for factuality in the minds of authors, audiences, or both. The entertainment argument therefore allowed individuals to sidestep the assessment of evidence stage that accompanies the epistemology of wonder.

However, depending on individual attitudes towards entertainment, and the expectations placed on particular textual modes, entertainment could have been received as an improper compositional aim, leading audiences to assess the text and its composer negatively. This is reflected in authors' defensive epistemological claims, which are examined in this chapter. The anxiety that entertainment was an improper textual aim arguably stems from the association between writing and truth, or between the scholarly institution and

truth. These general assumptions were polemical and in flux over the course of the twelfth century with the rise of secular courts and the accompanying proliferation of contentious proto-fictional textual modes like romances, forged letters, and marvelous anecdotes. These text types blurred the boundaries between the neat categories of *historia* as *res gestae* and *fabula* as *res fictae*.¹ This made entertainment a potentially divisive textual aim, and wonder a potentially subversive and alluring emotion.

The role of wonder in entertainment has been explored previously, but not in so far as it intersects with truth and belief. Evelyn Birge Vitz divided entertainment into a variety of categories including musical, physical, and literary entertainments; the focus of this chapter is literary entertainment.² The term entertainment is used here to refer to the textual aim of providing pleasure during a person's leisure time. Individual marvels or entire texts could aim to entertain. Much of the work done on entertainment across the twelfth century has focused on romance, lyric, and the stage, as explored by D.H. Green, Peter Dronke, and Donnalee Dox, among others.³

Christopher Page and E.K. Chambers explored the ideological conflict between ecclesiastics as self-perceived upholders of truth, and the proliferation of fictive modes such as courtly romances or vernacular poetry.⁴ Ralph O'Connor explored the epistemological strategies used by authors of medieval Icelandic romance-sagas, and argued that historians

¹ D.H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact or Fiction 1150-1221* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 134-53.

² Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 164-226.

³ Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*; Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric* (3rd ed., Woodbridge, 1996); Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 2007).

⁴ Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100-1300* (London, 1989); E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (London, 1903).

can interpret defensive epistemological claims literally or as humorously tongue-in-cheek, and that neither position is univocally defensible.⁵

Jan Ziolkowski examined the degree of confluence between high medieval fabliaux and the classic nineteenth-century fairy tale collections to argue that medieval acceptance of quasi-fictional modes was more dynamic than is traditionally presumed.⁶ Green proposed that Plato's critique of poets as liars, a view extended in Augustine's writings, played an important role in fuelling medieval ecclesiastical distaste towards poets, actors, and entertainers as vice-driven and sinful. Green also argued that uptake of fiction as an acceptable cultural mode gathered strength after the mid-thirteenth-century dissemination of Aristotle's *De Poetica*, which proposed alternate sets of truth standards for fictional and factual discursive modes.⁷

This chapter offers a novel analytical framework because it asserts that the entertainment claim allowed responders to sidestep the need for fact-checking, and potentially creating audience discomfort if authors were willing to suspend belief and audiences were not. This was the case even in ostensibly factual discursive modes like the marvels tales presented in histories and chronicles. This suggests that the transition from dismissal to acceptance of quasi-fictive modes may not have been so straightforward as a shift from reading Plato to reading Aristotle, and that a conflict between evoking wonder for entertainment and rational deduction of truth was in existence before the advent of Aristotle's *De Poetica* to medieval Europe. This chapter is also original because it argues that marvels tales that aimed to entertain occupied an uncomfortable middle between the *res*

⁵ Ralph O'Connor, "History or Fiction: Truth-Claims and defensive narrators in Icelandic romance-sagas", *Medieval Scandinavia*, vol. 15 (2005), pp. 101-69.

⁶ Jan Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor, 2012).

⁷ Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*, pp. 1-16.

gestae of histories and the *res fictae* of romances, poetry, and fabliaux, thereby making the experience of wonder potentially uncomfortable on purely rational terms.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first examines the use of the entertainment claim in a case drawn from Ekkehard of Aura's *Chronicon Universale*. The second section examines early reactions to the *Prester John Letter* and shows how texts that aimed to entertain could raise discomfoting questions about truth and falsehood. The third section examines epistemological claims within Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* and Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*, and argues that these composers expected their marvels could be disbelieved, or at least doubted, on the basis that they were aimed at entertainment. This section also demonstrates that there were two strands of thought with regard to this problem: those who accepted epistemological uncertainty and were able to enjoy wonders for their inherent emotional value while remaining unconcerned about their physical truth, and those who were unable to accept the uncomfortable middle ground between *res gestae* and *res fictae* that wonders presented.

3.1 — The Entertainment Claim

The claim that particular marvels were introduced solely for entertainment could reduce their need to be true in the minds of authors, audiences, or both. As such, the entertainment claim could lead to a side-stepping of the evidentiary stage of the cognitive component of wonder proposed in this dissertation. This will be shown using Ekkehard of Aura's implicit rejection of the marvels associated with Alexander the Great.

In the long twelfth century, Alexander the Great enjoyed a reputation for wisdom and heroism as a performer of marvelous feats, and was a frequent subject of both positive and negative moralisations as a symbol of heroic daring or overweening pride, ambition, and hubris. Moralists who took the negative view of Alexander frequently used him to reaffirm the Christian doctrine of predetermination by suggesting that Alexander rejected the divine plan.⁸ Medieval knowledge of Alexander was based primarily on texts collectively known as the *Alexander Romance*, or the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle. These texts established a set of standard, but mutable, tropes about Alexander: he descended into the ocean in a glass submarine to uncover the wonders of the sea, he fought off multicephalic serpents and Plinian monsters in India, he wished to become immortal, he sought the terrestrial paradise, he locked the Satanic tribes of Gog and Magog behind a mountain/gate/barrier in the Caucasus, and so on.

The Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle of texts, whose earliest exemplar was made in the third century in Greek, superseded other more factually reliable accounts (especially Arrian of Nicomedia's *Anabasis*), which contemporary historians use as the basis for their knowledge of Alexander's life and exploits. Due to their preservation in Greek, these texts remained unknown to medieval Latin readers, who instead used the more legendary accounts furnished in the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle, which was translated into Latin around the fifth century, and a number of spurious epistles between Alexander, Aristotle, the Bragmani, Dindimus, and Olympia, Alexander's mother. These texts were widely transmitted and enjoyed textual fluidity, influencing writers including, *inter alia*, Solinus, Augustine, and Isidore, authors who influenced twelfth-century polemics about Alexander.

Other texts extended his reputation as a wise hero. The widely copied *Secreta Secretorum*, a collection of astrological and scientific wisdom of uncertain but probably

⁸ George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 163-224.

Arabic origins, claimed to have been a letter from Aristotle to Alexander. Initially translated into Latin in partial form around 1150, the *Secreta* gained popularity throughout the second half of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth century; ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī claimed it was “the most read text of the Middle Ages”.⁹ Around 1165, the anonymous author of the *Prester John Letter* also borrowed from the pseudepigraphical Alexander letters, further extending Alexander’s marvelous reputation into 31 Latin manuscripts in the twelfth century, and a further 182 Latin manuscripts between 1200 and 1500, as well as a variety of translations into European vernaculars.¹⁰

Despite the widespread knowledge of Alexander’s reputation for marvelous exploits, ego-documents providing information about reception are rare. This raises questions about how contemporary historians are to ascertain whether medieval writers, scribes, and audiences judged the Alexander marvels to be true, false, probable, improbable, purely metaphorical or allegorical, entertaining but untrue, exaggerated but generally reliable, or unknowable given the available evidence. A number of factors may have meant that the optimal response was to believe the Alexander marvels to be true: Alexander’s reputation for marvels was widespread; it was provided in texts that were typically respected (like Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*); and the power of similarity could increase verisimilitude, as shown in **Chapter 1**.

Despite this, close examination of truth modality in medieval accounts of Alexander is one means of examining reception which suggests that beliefs about the Alexander marvels were not at all clear-cut. John of Salisbury and Gervase of Tilbury, for example,

⁹ ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *La transmission de la philosophie grecque au monde arabe* (Paris, 2011), p. 11. On the *Secreta secretorum*, see also Stephen J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: the Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, 2003). The corpus of scholarship on Alexander in the Middle Ages is vast; three exemplars only will be given: Richard Stoneman, *Legends of Alexander the Great* (London, 1994); George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*; Z. David Zuwiyya (ed.), *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2011).

¹⁰ Keagan Brewer, *Prester John: the Legend and its Sources* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 299-320.

both used low truth modality in describing Alexander's exploits, which suggests the presence of some degree of doubt: "Gog and Magog are said to have been..."; "it is told how..."; "Nothing is extremely clear about that Alexander, whom public opinion holds to be great..." and so on.¹¹

Ekkehard of Aura's reaction to the pseudepigraphical Alexander letters demonstrates the role of the entertainment claim as a way to sidestep the need for factuality, thereby adding complexity to the usual progression of wonder. The scanty details known about Ekkehard's life all come from his own writings. He was born c.1050 and spent some time at the monasteries of Hirsauge, Bamberg, Aura, and Corvey. He participated in the crusade of 1101, probably travelling with the forces of Welf I, Duke of Bavaria. After returning, Ekkehard became abbot of Aura in Bavaria from 1108 until his death in 1126.¹² Some time during his abbacy of Aura, Ekkehard expanded Frutolf of Michelsberg's *Chronicon Universale*, bringing its *terminus ante quem* from 1098 to 1125. Ekkehard's additions are valued for his descriptions of the first crusade, the massacre of Jews in the Rhineland, and the investiture controversy. Also, Ekkehard's account of the crusade of 1101 is the only account known to have been written by a participant. The text of the *Chronicon* remains available only in the *Patrologia Latina* and *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Its manuscript traditions and subsequent reception are unknown to the present author, and greater attention from scholars could elucidate further detail.

In the *Chronicon Universale*, Ekkehard of Aura claims his primary purpose was to recount the deeds of the past from creation onwards and "put all things in their place with

¹¹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (eds and trans) (Oxford, 2002), pp. 184-5: "Inter quem [montem] et mare Gog et Magog, ferocissime gentes, a Magno Alexandro incluse feruntur". John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, (*PL*), vol. 199, col. 534: "Fertur enim quod cum magnus Alexander..."; col. 570: "Nihil vero praeclarius de Alexandro illo, quem publica opinio magnum asserit, in aliqua historia meo iudicio reperi".

¹² Matthew LaBarge King, *We're on a mission from God: A translation, commentary, and essay concerning the Hierosolymita of Ekkehard of Aura* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Washington, 2011), pp. 12-13.

absolute brevity”.¹³ As part of this program, Ekkehard provides a prosaic description of Alexander’s life and exploits. But this is followed by an excursus based on the pseudepigraphical Alexander letters, and Ekkehard explicitly states that the latter section aimed solely to delight readers using marvels. The chapter heading for this latter section reads “About the marvelous things which Alexander is said to have seen”; the defensive low truth modality of “is said to” reveals that Ekkehard possessed doubts about the truth of the Alexandrine marvels. This is made all the more apparent in the chapter’s opening words:

Therefore, in these itineraries [Alexander] both suffered great things and saw amazing things, and he (so they say) wrote to his mother Olympia and his master Aristotle. From these writings, we have briefly strung together certain things for the sake of the delight of noting marvelous events, however we relinquish the truth of these events to the judgment of our readers.¹⁴

For Ekkehard, the desire to entertain by evoking wonder superseded the need for factuality of an ancient textual tradition whose marvels were, to him, unconvincing. By deferring the decision about their truth or untruth to his audience, he sidestepped potential criticism for having included them in his chronicle, a textual mode that generally presupposed factuality. Implicitly, his use of this claim was a challenge to received textual *auctoritas* which, *prima facie*, promoted Alexander’s marvels as axiomatic truths. But Ekkehard’s authorial process and construction of text hint at a developed capacity for source criticism that belies stereotypes of medieval credulity.

By transitioning from a prosaic description of Alexander to a marvelous one across two separate chapters, Ekkehard shows that, like contemporary historians, he compartmentalised different types of evidence on the basis of their perceived differences in

¹³ Ekkehard of Aura, *Chronicon Universale*, D.G. Waitz (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol.6 (Hannover, 1844), p. 34, l. 48: “universa in suis locis cum summa brevitate ponemus”.

¹⁴ Ekkehard, *Chronicon Universale*, p.70, ll. 28-32: “In his ergo itineribus quae et quanta pertulerit et quam miranda conspexerit, ipse, ut fertur, ad matrem suam Olympiadem et magistrum suum Aristotilem scribit, de quibus aliqua ob delectationem noticia rerum mirabilium breviando perstringimus, ceterum veritatem ipsarum rerum iudicio legentium relinquimus”.

verisimilitude. This process is ultimately based on the degree of difference between Ekkehard's own sensory experience of the world, and those proposed in the pseudepigraphical texts. Unlike twelfth-century historiographical norms that promoted *historia* as a true report of *res gestae*, Ekkehard was willing to abandon his concern for raw factuality in preference for stories that had no factual or didactic value, but only entertainment value predicated on the evocation of wonder. This demonstrates how the entertainment claim could be used by authors as a defensive strategy to reduce audience concerns about factuality, and also shows how aiming to evoke wonder using stories could create rational discomfort about truth and falsehood.

3.2 — Pseudo-fiction

This section will discuss the early reception of the *Prester John Letter*, a text that was copied widely, but never discussed in any extant medieval texts on the basis of its factuality or otherwise. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that marvelous tales of foreign lands could occupy a liminal space between textual forms traditionally perceived as true-seeming, including *historiae*, *chronica*, and *epistolae*, and forms perceived as *facta*, like romances or poetry. Due to this liminality, such tales could be a source of rational uneasiness, especially when they concerned culturally constructed images of foreign lands, given that neither belief nor disbelief could be advanced using sensory experience.

The legend of Prester John, the powerful oriental Christian potentate, commenced in 1122 with the appearance of the mysterious Patriarch John of the Indies in Rome, as discussed in **Chapter 1**. On 9th September 1141, the Battle of Qatwān (north of

Samarkand) resulted in the defeat and rout of the armies of the powerful Seljuk Sultan Sanjār by the armies of Yēlū Dàshí, leader of the nomadic tribe of the Qara-Khitai of the Central Asian steppe. The defeat sent shockwaves throughout the Muslim world due to their dismissive attitude towards the nomadic tribes and their expectation of an easy victory.¹⁵ The Baghdadi chronicler Ibn al-Athīr later wrote that “there was no battle greater than this in the history of Islam”.¹⁶ An account of this battle, altered inevitably by the process of oral transmission, was told to Hugh, Bishop of Jableh, in the crusader Principality of Antioch, who reported it in person to Pope Innocent III in Rome in 1145. Otto of Freising was present at this meeting and recorded Hugh’s semi-mythologised story in his *De duabus civitatibus*.

According to Otto, Hugh claimed that Prester John was “a king and priest” who “lives beyond Persia and Armenia in the furthest east”, and “prepared to move to the aid of the Church in Jerusalem”, but was prevented due to the freezing of the river Tigris. Otto also wrote that Prester John “is said to be of the ancient race of the magi” and “is said to enjoy such great glory and riches that he does not command his people except with an emerald sceptre”.¹⁷ Otto’s use of low truth modality throughout reveals his seeming scepticism towards Hugh of Jableh’s marvelous narrative: “he is said to have... they allege that... it was said that... but enough of this...”.¹⁸ Here can be seen the propensity of wondrous stories to arouse discomfort about truth and falsehood. It seems reasonable to presume that Otto doubted the story in full or in part, but did not have the certainty to dismiss it completely,

¹⁵ René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, Naomi Walford (trans.) (London, 1970), pp. 159-65.

¹⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, D.S. Richards (trans.), *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fī-l Tārīkh* (Aldershot, 2006), vol.1, pp. 359-63.

¹⁷ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 43-5: “qui ultra Persidem et Armeniam in extremo oriente habitans rex et sacerdos... Post hanc victoriam dicebat predictum Iohannem ad auxilium Hierosolimitanae ecclesiae procinctum movisse”.

¹⁸ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 43-5: “dicebat... fertur... dicatur... sed hec hactenus”.

because if he possessed outright disbelief towards Hugh's narrative, the story would not have warranted recording at all. Indeed, as the sole wonder of its ilk in the *De duabus civitatibus*, the Prester John story is something of an anomaly. The positive reception of Otto's historical methodology in a panoply of secondary sources from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century implies that those who were sceptical of marvels were considered more laudable, and that those who recorded marvels tales were considered more worthy of being dismissed.¹⁹

In the early years of the legend, oral transmission was integral to its perpetuation and accrual of mythological elements. When Otto of Freising introduced the name Prester John ("presbyter Johannes"), the first written record of this name, he wrote that it was "as they are accustomed to call him", which shows that Prester John was already being widely discussed in the oral realm before entering the written record.²⁰ The legend commenced in earnest, though, around 1165-70, when an anonymous writer adopted the persona of Prester John and penned the pseudepigraphical *Prester John Letter*, a text that was frequently copied, altered, and translated across subsequent centuries. It is assumed that its author was a Latinate writer based on the *Letter's* philology, its reference to standard Western medieval *mirabilia orientis* tropes, and manuscript evidence that suggests the earliest copies originated in Germany, as established by Bettina Wagner.²¹

Bernard Hamilton claimed the *Letter* was written by a partisan of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa as a form of propaganda in Barbarossa's power struggle with Pope Alexander III. Hamilton's rationale was that the Prester John persona reflects Frederick's caesaropapist ideology by emphasising the need for a single ruler who is both

¹⁹ Michael E. Brooks, *Prester John: A Re-examination and Compendium of the Mythical Figure who helped spark European expansion* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toledo, 2009), pp. 54-5.

²⁰ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 43-5: "sic enim eum nominare solent".

²¹ Bettina Wagner, *Die 'Epistola Presbiteri Johannis'* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 14-131. See also Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 299-320.

king and priest in order for society to function properly.²² This hypothesis helps to explain why the *Letter* depicts Prester John's land as a moral utopia, as argued by István Bejczy, Hilário Franco, and Louise Vasvári.²³ While this argument has helped scholars to explain the genesis of the enigmatic *Letter*, it does not account for its jocular and entertaining qualities, and if Hamilton is correct in identifying the anonymous author's motivations, this does not necessitate that audiences understood the text in the manner intended by its author.

The uninterpolated version of the *Prester John Letter* is written from the point of view of an arrogant, bombastic Prester John. It is addressed to Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenos, and asks, perhaps with implied humour, whether he “holds the right faith like us”.²⁴ The *Letter* provides a lengthy description of the lands of John's kingdom and the monsters, marvels, and miracles contained therein. It subsumes elements that were clearly intended as propaganda, including its derogatory comment that the Byzantines worshipped Manuel as a God, and others that express Christian utopian desires, such as the claim that John's kingdom contained no thieves, liars, or sinners, or that Prester John only had sex four times per year for procreation, and with women who immediately withdrew from his presence following coitus.²⁵ Jeff Rider suggested that romances constructed heterotopias that

²² Bernard Hamilton, “Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne”, in Henry Mayr-Harting and Robert I. Moore (eds), *Studies in Medieval History presented to R.H.C. Davis* (London, 1985), pp. 177-91; reprinted in Bernard Hamilton and Charles Beckingham (eds), *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 171-85.

²³ István Bejczy, “De brief van Pape Jan: legende, fictie en hyperrealiteit in een middeleeuws document”, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, vol. 106 (1993), pp. 483-95; Bejczy, *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean: Une Utopie Médiévale* (Paris, 2001); Hilário Franco, “La construction d'une utopie: l'Empire de Prêtre Jean”, *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1997), pp. 211-25; Louise Vasvári, “The Geography of Escape and Topsy-Turvy Literary Genres”, in Scott Westrem (ed.), *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination* (New York, 1991), pp. 179-93.

²⁴ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 46, 67: “quia scire volumus et desideramus, si nobiscum rectam fidem habes et si per omnia credis in domino nostro Iesu Christo”.

²⁵ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 46-91.

played upon medieval aristocrats' interests, longings, concerns, and values, and the same argument could be made for Prester John's kingdom as presented in the *Letter*.²⁶

Karl F. Helleiner described the *Letter's* vast enumeration of marvels and miracles as an "orgy of unrestrained grandiloquence".²⁷ These marvels include various fountains of youth, a magic mirror that sees anywhere in the world, rivers of gemstones, seas of sand, armies numbering in the millions, the Tower of Babel, the Amazons, the tombs of St Thomas the Apostle and St Daniel, a variety of hybrid monsters under John's control, and magical stones that has the power to make people invisible, or change night to day, or cast forth ice and fire.²⁸ Many of these claims about the East stem from a vast corpus of literature including Isidore, Solinus, Pliny, and the pseudepigraphical Alexander letters; others are new to the *mirabilia orientis*. In some sense, then, the picture that the *Prester John Letter* proposed for the East was scarcely at odds with the thrust of pre-existing attitudes, except perhaps in the figure of Prester John himself as a Christian.²⁹

Some of these marvels inspired James Gunn to envisage the *Letter* as prototypical science fiction; others including Michael Uebel have seen it as a proto-colonial attempt at othering Asia.³⁰ As a unique and dynamic product of medieval literary creativity, the *Prester John Letter* quickly took on a life of its own. In the 1870s, its first editor, Friedrich Zarncke, identified five Latin interpolations, which he labelled A, B, C, D, and E, and a number of translations into various dialects of Old French, all of which were made before the year

²⁶ Jeff Rider, "The Other Worlds of Romance", in Roberta L. Kreuger (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 115-131.

²⁷ Karl F. Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Medieval Utopia", *Phoenix*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1959), pp. 47-57, here p. 48.

²⁸ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 46-91.

²⁹ Malcolm Letts, "Prester John: Sources and Illustrations", *Notes and Queries*, vol. 188 (1945), pp. 178-80, 204-7, 246-8, 266-8, and vol. 189 (1945), pp. 4-7.

³⁰ James Gunn, *The Road to Science Fiction* (Lanham, 2002), p. 23; Michael Uebel, "Imperial Fetishism: Prester John Among the Natives", in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York, 2005), pp. 261-82.

1200, or in the early decades of the thirteenth century. The Latin interpolations generally added material while subtracting little; much of what was added stems from the stock medieval representations of the East.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand how the *Letter* was read and understood by its immediate audiences. Kim Phillips suggested that one manuscript copy of the *Letter* was appreciated for its entertainment value because the manuscript also contained fabliaux, romances, humorous songs in the style of the Goliards, and texts about games and party tricks; another copy surrounded by devotional works was valued for its depiction of a Christian moral utopia, Phillips claimed.³¹ While these may be valuable approaches for individual manuscripts, perhaps revealing how their copyists intended that they might be used, generalising reception of the *Letter* based on surrounding manuscript contents would appear to be misguided because there are so many copies of the text that one may find it next to nearly anything, a factor influenced by the text's brevity as well as its entertaining qualities. The danger of this may be seen in the frequently used argument that the *Letter* was received as a factual document by a naïve Europe hopeful for alliance with the powerful Oriental Christian potentate against a common Muslim enemy. Igor de Rachewiltz wrote: "I cannot help feeling that [the *Letter*] was written with tongue in cheek... If so, the writer's sense of humour was definitely ahead of his times, for it was taken so seriously that Pope Alexander III actually sent an embassy to Prester John... in 1177".³² As will be shown, this view lacks credibility.

Alexander III opened his letter to John, "illustrious and magnificent King of the Indies", with a statement of papal authority. The Pope was the rightful head of Christendom, through his inheritance of the office granted by God to St Peter. Alexander claimed he was

³¹ Kim Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245-1510* (Philadelphia, 2014), p. 47.

³² Igor de Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia* (Canberra, 1972), p. 7.

writing to John to ensure his observance of Christianity did not deviate from proper Catholic practice. John was to be instructed in the correct faith by Master Philip, the Pope's physician and familiar. If he treated Philip well and replied with a letter stamped with his own seal, then Alexander would understand that he had learnt the lessons that he was to be taught, and John would then be understood to be "so much higher and greater... and less inflated by your riches and power".³³ Only then would John's church be admitted into the churches of Sts Peter and Paul.

There are a number of problems with de Rachewiltz's view that Alexander's letter is useful evidence for the reception of the *Prester John Letter*. This argument has pervaded Prester John studies since Zarncke first suggested it in 1879, and recent historians have continued to affirm it, including Michael E. Brooks in 2009, Adam Knobler in 2013, and Christopher Taylor in 2014.³⁴ In 2013, Andrew Kurt was more circumspect when he wrote that "a brief allusion in the pope's letter only hints that it was a response to the fabulous *Letter of Prester John*".³⁵ Kurt is here pointing to Zarncke's basis for this argument, vis-à-vis Alexander's comment that Prester John was "inflated by riches and power", but this appears to be a simplistic basis for claiming that Alexander's letter was a reply to the *Prester John Letter*. This is especially in light of the fact that Prester John's reputation for bombastic largesse is equally attested in the oral traditions, for example in Otto of Freising's account of the story told by Hugh of Jableh to Pope Eugenius III, or in other early chronicle accounts

³³ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 92-6: "quanto sublimior et maior haberis et minus de divitiis et potentia tua videris inflatus".

³⁴ Brooks, *Prester John*, p. 22; Adam Knobler, "The Power of Distance: the Transformation of European Perceptions of Self and Other, 1100-1600", *Medieval Encounters*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2013), pp. 434-80, here pp. 440-41, n. 14; Christopher Taylor, "Global Circulation as Christian Enclosure: Legend, Empire, and the Nomadic Prester John", *Literature Compass*, vol. 11, no. 7 (2014), pp. 445-459, here p. 448.

³⁵ Andrew Kurt, "The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade, and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200-c.1540", *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2013), pp. 297-320, here p. 301.

of Prester John, which affirm his reputation for riches and power without reference to the *Letter*.³⁶

Moreover, if Alexander had read the *Letter*, one might reasonably expect him to quote it, or comment on the tropes it introduces about Prester John's kingdom, but this does not take place. As nominal head of Christendom, one might reasonably expect Alexander to take an interest in the tombs of Sts Thomas and Daniel, which the *Prester John Letter* suggests were in Prester John's kingdom, but this does not take place. Further, Alexander addresses Prester John not as "presbyter Johannes", as early manuscripts of the *Letter* have it, but as "John, illustrious and magnificent King of the Indies", or, in another manuscript variant, as "John, most holy priest".³⁷ Also, Alexander reveals that his source of information about Prester John was his familiar, Master Philip, who allegedly brought news of John to Alexander after having met "certain men of Prester John's kingdom" while journeying "in those parts".³⁸

Alexander's letter to Prester John may be explained in a variety of ways, each of which lacks full credibility on the basis of extant evidence. Master Philip may have encountered a group of foreign people somewhere and presumed they were from Prester John's land. Alexander may have known about the *Prester John Letter* and intended his own letter to be an allegorical reply in kind recognising the almost heretical implications of Barbarossa's caesaropapism. Alexander's letter could have been a post-factum forgery aimed at presenting the Pope as credulous for believing in Prester John as a real geographical figure, as part of some later political polemic. None of these views is supportable beyond reasonable doubt given the current state of the evidence, and no mention is known of Master Philip or his

³⁶ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 43-5, 273-5.

³⁷ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 92: "Iohannes, illustris et magnificus Indorum rex", "Iohannes, sacerdos sanctissimus".

³⁸ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 92: "cum magnis et honorabilibus viris tui regni se in patribus illis verbum habuisse proponit".

apparent embassy beyond Alexander's letter itself. Bernard Hamilton and the present author are presently engaged in a collaborative research project aimed at uncovering further information about the enigmatic Master Philip.

What is clear, though, is that de Rachewiltz's claim that Alexander's letter proves a credulous reception of the *Prester John Letter* is a gross overstatement of the evidence. This discussion exemplifies the methodological difficulties associated with texts presenting heterotopias that blurred the boundaries between truth and imagination, and in a way our own uncertainty at what truly happened mirrors the thought processes medieval audiences had to undergo in cases of marvels that were retold with only partly convincing evidence. Instead, it might be better to conceive of the *Prester John Letter* as a work of early fiction.

Although humour scholars like Herman Braet, Guido Latré and Werner Verbeke warn that what was humorous in medieval societies may be vastly different to what may be humorous now, and that humourous tastes vary between individuals even within broader cultural groups, de Rachewiltz's view that the *Letter* was "ahead of its times" because it was "tongue-in-cheek" seems to deny medieval people the intellectual capacity for humour and satire in any form.³⁹ This is at odds with the text of the *Letter*, which carries a number of examples that appear to use the techniques of humour. The uninterpolated version, which Zarncke claimed as the *Letter's* urtext, depicts Prester John's land as inhabited by humorously paradoxical "white blackbirds" and "silent cicadas".⁴⁰

The uninterpolated version provides a lengthy list of the monsters in Prester John's kingdom, which include "methagallinarii, cametheternis, and thinsiretae".⁴¹ These animals appear to be authorial inventions. They may be hybrid creatures; for example,

³⁹ Herman Braet, Guido Latré, and Werner Verbeke (eds), *Risus Mediaevalis: Laughter in Medieval Literature and Art* (Louvain, 2003).

⁴⁰ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 47: "merulae albae, cicades mutae".

⁴¹ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 46.

“methagallinarii” may be a combination of *metagon* (hunting dog) and *gallinarii* (poultry) to mean something like ‘attack chickens’. It is clear by the number of scribal variations on Latin copies of the *Letter* that the meanings of these animals were as obscure to medieval readers as they are now.⁴² Other evidence for this can be found in the vernacular translations. Rather than translating these terms into Anglo-Norman, Roau d’Arundel, the text’s earliest translator, wrote: “And more than a thousand other beasts / which I do not know how to say in French / for which reason I’ll have to skip them”.⁴³

Interpolation D extends the uninterpolated version’s list of monsters with a number of seemingly humorous hyperboles of the usual Plinian forms, including “men with twelve feet, six arms, twelve hands, four heads, with two mouths and three eyes on each”.⁴⁴

Interpolation E appends a cavern of dragons which is decorated with hyperbolic word play: “It is long and wide, excessively difficult and most severe in severity and difficult, with a deepness in depth that is most deep”.⁴⁵ The depiction of ancient marvels tropes is playfully adorned with borderline farcical imagery, as in the case of the Amazons who ride airborne fish instead of horses or donkeys, and use other fish in place of dogs for hunting: “they are so strong and swift [at swimming through the air] that no bird is able to flee from them”.⁴⁶ These sorts of techniques place the *Prester John Letter* in league with other contemporary forms of satire in the likes of the Goliardic poets.⁴⁷

⁴² Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 69, n. 17.

⁴³ Martin Gosman (ed.), *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean* (Gröningen, 1982), p. 124, ll. 172-4: “E d’autres bestes plus ke mil / K’en rumanz ne sai numer, / Pur çoe me les covient passer”. Translation is my own.

⁴⁴ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 47: “homines habentes XII pedes, VI brachia, XII manus, IIII capita, et in unoquoque habent duo ora et tres oculos”.

⁴⁵ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 51: “Longe lateque nimia difficultate et asperitate asperimus atque difficilis, profundissima profunditate profundissimus est et multum cavernosus seu latebrosus”.

⁴⁶ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 55: “ac ita sunt fortes et veloces in volatu, quod nulla siquidem avis potest fugere ab eis, ut non statim capiatur”.

⁴⁷ Ronald E. Pepin, *Literature of Satire in the Twelfth Century: A Neglected Mediaeval Genre* (Lewiston, 1988).

In other places, enumeration and deliberate expansion of language add further farcical flavour to the text, as in Interpolation C's description of a fountain of youth:

If any starving person tasted of this fountain three times daily for three years, three months, three weeks, three days, and three hours, and on the third hour he tasted it so that he tasted it three times neither before that hour or after it, but in the space which is between the beginning and the end of those three hours, accordingly he would not die before three hundred years, three months, three weeks, three days, and three hours.⁴⁸

Perhaps most telling is what appears to be a humorous use of irony, and possibly a critique of authors' excessive use of truth claims, in the final lines added by Interpolation D: "A certain cardinal, Stephen by name, said under the oath of his faith and pronounced openly to everyone that all the things which were stated above as though they were unbelievable are in fact the highest truth".⁴⁹ At the very least, this comment opens up the possibility that audiences might have perceived Prester John's marvels as "unbelievable"; it may also function as a joke at the expense of a real cardinal named Stephen in some other political context (perhaps English cardinal Stephen Langton, r.1207-1228). It is important that these seemingly humorous claims are additions beyond the urtext. This suggests that the interpolators received the original *Letter* in the same way de Rachewiltz did, as "tongue-in-cheek". By adding material that was similarly playful, this demonstrates that the *Letter* was at least partly received as something that was jovially inane, and did not necessarily offer a true-seeming representation of the far side of the world.

⁴⁸ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 60: "De quo quidem fonte si quis per triennium et trimensium et tres septimanas et per tres dies et per tres horas omni die ter ieiunus gustaverit et in tribus horis ita gustaverit, quod nec ante ipsam horam et post horam, sed in spacio, quod est infram principium et finem uniuscuiusque istarum trium horarum, ter ieiunus gustaverit, ante siquidem trecentos annos et tres menses et tres septimanas et tres dies et tres horas non morietur, et erit semper in aetate etremae iuventutis".

⁴⁹ Brewer, *Prester John*, p. 66: "De confirmacione: omnia quae superius dicta sunt, quasi incredibilia, verissima esse, quidam cardinalis, Stephanus nomine, sub pollicitacione suae fidei dicebat et omnibus patenter pronunciabat".

While no explicit medieval discussions of the *Prester John Letter* survive, Prester John himself was widely known. He appears in a series of late twelfth-century chronicles, but without mention of any of the marvels tropes introduced in the *Letter*: Geoffrey of Breuil's *Chronica*, Roger of Howden's *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi et Ricardi Primi*, the *Annales Colonienses Maximi*, the *Flores Historiarum*, the *Continuatio Admontensis*, and even Gerald of Wales' *De Vita Galfridi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, where John appears as a symbol for excessive pride when one party in an ecclesiastical dispute is described as being arrogant "like Prester John".⁵⁰ The Prester John figure underwent a renaissance after the conquests of Chingis Khan in the 1210s and 1220s, which seemed to add verisimilitude to the concept of a powerful oriental potentate, and he therefore appears in letters and chronicles associated with the fifth crusade. While campaigning in Egypt as part of the fifth crusade in 1217-18, Jacques de Vitry sent letters to Pope Honorius III that reveal that the fifth crusaders delayed action against the Muslims for roughly six months while awaiting the arrival of Prester John (Chingis Khan), which played a part in the failure of the crusade as a whole.⁵¹

Despite widespread mention of and quondam belief in Prester John, there exists no known mention of the *Letter* until the 1230s, when Alberic de Trois-Fontaines penned his *Chronica*, which merely notes that the *Letter* was "full of astonishing things" and then provides brief excerpts. Alberic's *Chronica* is also the earliest written record that acknowledges the possibility that the Mongols might be "neither Christians nor Saracens".⁵² The historical record preserves no substantial discussion of the *Letter* itself until Samuel Purchas' *Pilgrimage* of 1613. The only known additional piece of reception data from the period under discussion is an item of scribal marginalia in a twelfth-century hand on a

⁵⁰ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 273-5.

⁵¹ Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 97-139.

⁵² Brewer, *Prester John*, pp. 142-3: "multa admiracione plenas... dicunt ecim quidam, quod neque Christiani sunt neque Sarraceni".

twelfth-century copy of the *Letter*. It reads: “If you want to believe it, believe it”.⁵³ Although this comment firmly commits neither to belief nor disbelief, its very existence suggests that the scribe at least doubted the *Letter* on factual terms.

This dearth of discussion of the *Letter* despite common knowledge of Prester John raises a number of possibilities. It could affirm the Enlightenment narrative that medieval people were credulous and undiscerning, but this overstates the evidence: lack of evidence ought not to stand as evidence of credulity. A number of other possibilities exist. Medieval readers may have taken the *Letter* primarily as a *tour de force* of wondrous entertainment that lacked verisimilitude, which seems consistent with the internal evidence from the interpolations and the subsequent lack of discussion of it in textual modes that traditionally prescribed high authorial requirements on the verisimilitude of evidence. On this basis, they could have kept or discarded the view that Prester John was real. By way of analogy: contemporary readers of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* ought not doubt the historicity of the original Scottish king because of his depiction in a work of fiction.

Further, the early chroniclers could have heard oral reports about Prester John, and not seen the *Letter*. The passing mentions of Prester John in these chronicles may also speak to a greater willingness to acknowledge and submit to uncertainty than the stereotype of history as *res gestae* would seem to allow. If Europeans were unable to experience Asia using the senses, chroniclers could have been willing to simply gather whatever evidence came to them and permit audiences to make their own conclusions based on audiences’ individual assessments of the available information. This seems a valid authorial aim given the general unavailability of reliable, recent information about distant lands, and the potential for wonders to arouse rational discomfort about truth or falsehood, despite their potential entertainment value. Given the proliferation across the long twelfth century of other proto-

⁵³ Wagner, *Die ‘Epistola Presbiteri Johannis’*, p. 122, quoting MS. 183: “Si uis credere, crede”.

fictional texts that contravened the implied rules of traditionally high verisimilitude textual modes, including letters from heaven and from King Arthur to Henry II, such texts could arouse rational discomfort.⁵⁴ This added a layer of complexity to the emotional-cognitive experience of wonder, which ultimately led audiences to a subjective choice about whether to trust information that was out of coherence with their own sensory experience. The key driving force behind the reception of information may therefore be the individual's own personality.

3.3 — Individual Attitudes to Entertainment

Across the long twelfth century, scholars have observed a rise in texts that claimed to have entertainment as their primary aim.⁵⁵ This section argues that the marvels in these texts may have been viewed with scepticism by audiences simply because of the textual aim of entertainment, and that acceptance or dismissal of the use of wonder for entertainment ultimately came down to individual attitudes. If straining the bounds of credibility was an intrinsic part of marvels tales because of wonder's definitional relationship with novelty, then texts that aimed to evoke wonder as a form of entertainment could be rationally uncomfortable in terms of truth and falsehood. This will be shown through close examination of Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* and Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*.

⁵⁴ Mildred Leake Day, "The Letter from King Arthur to Henry II: Political Use of the Arthurian Legend in Draco Normannicus", in Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (eds), *The Spirit of the Court* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 153-7; Giles Constable, "Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages", *Archiv für Diplomatik*, vol. 29 (1983), pp. 1-41; Giles Constable, "Forged letters in the Middle Ages", *Fälschungen im Mittelalter*, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 11-37.

⁵⁵ Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from before Fairy Tales*, pp. 233-5.

The title of Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* suggests that the text's key aim was royal entertainment. Other passages throughout the text affirm this. Quoting Cato's *Distichs*, Gervase declared that the purpose of the *Otia* was to encourage its dedicatee Otto IV, Holy Roman Emperor, to "interrupt [his] cares with gladness now and then".⁵⁶ Gervase explicitly acknowledged the role of wonder in this purpose: "Then I intend to add the various marvels of each province. Their very existence is remarkable, and to hear of them should afford pleasure to a listener who is not already informed of them and is able to appreciate such things".⁵⁷ The latter addendum concerning those who are "able to appreciate such things" shows that Gervase had some conception that an individual's open-mindedness towards marvels played a part in their reception, both in terms of the strength of the emotion felt and the acceptance or rejection of the marvel as true.

Gervase also dismissed the "lying fictions of players, which are mingled with a small amount of truth", which exemplifies the tendency described by Page and Chambers for ecclesiastics to dismiss proto-fictive forms as morally corrupt for paying heed to the vice of dishonesty.⁵⁸ Gervase may well have picked up this attitude from Augustine's zealous condemnation of the theatre as a debauched form of entertainment rooted in Roman polytheism.⁵⁹ The view that entertainers were vice-driven is also shown in a variety of contemporary statements that tarred entertainers with the same brush as prostitutes, gamblers, criminals, and sometimes even heretics.⁶⁰ Other sources, including a c.1165 anonymous Anglo-Norman commentary on the psalms, claimed that secular entertainment was a dangerous form of hedonistic epicureanism because it transferred wonder from

⁵⁶ Gervase, *Otia*, pp.558-9: "Interpone tuis interdum gaudia curis". Quoting Cato, *Distichs*, book 3, ch. 6, §1.

⁵⁷ Gervase, *Otia*, pp.14-15: "et sic singularia cuiusque prouincie mirabilia subnectere que fuisse mirabile, audisse apud ignorantes deliciosasque aures delectabile foret".

⁵⁸ Gervase, *Otia*, pp.562-3: "omissis mimorum mendaciis que paucitati ueritatis immiscent".

⁵⁹ Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought*, pp. 11-41.

⁶⁰ R.I. Moore, *The War on Heresy* (London, 2014), pp. 177-8.

biblical miracles to the inane and irreligious: “It was a much finer thing that St Peter walked on the sea than that a jongleur [*juggler*] walks on a rope playing an instrument”.⁶¹

However, there may be some validity to Gervase’s dismissal of the “fictions of players” on truth terms. A variety of independent late twelfth-century sources accuse the *populus* of believing the story told by *cantatores* and *fabulatores* that King Arthur was alive and would return from Avalon to retake command of Britain.⁶² But R.W. Hanning also demonstrated that romance writer Chrétien de Troyes himself used the “others write for entertainment, but my work is the truth” line to add credibility to his romances, as did Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose transgression of the lines between *ficta* and *historia*, and its attendant controversy, are well known to medievalists.⁶³ This shows that epistemological truth claims crossed the perceived boundaries between *vera* and *ficta*, and should probably be understood as part of authors’ standard rhetorical arsenal regardless of text type.⁶⁴ Indeed, when one considers the incentive structures for entertainers, which link the evocation of wonder with increases in pecuniary earnings, this may provide a financial rationale behind their apparently greater willingness to abandon strict concerns over truth and falsehood.

But Gervase’s epistemological defences also speak to an authorial paranoia pervasive throughout the long twelfth century that texts that used wonder for entertainment would be dismissed by audiences in terms of factuality, or that entertainment texts written by

⁶¹ Quoted in William Tydeman (ed.), *The Medieval European Stage, 500–1550* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 32.

⁶² Gerald of Wales, *Speculum ecclesiae*, J.S. Brewer (ed.) in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, RS, 1873), book 2, ch. 9, p. 48; Peter of Blois, “Epistola 34”, in *PL*, vol. 207, col. 111–2; Stephen of Rouen, *Draco Normannicus*, in Mildred Leake Day (ed. and trans.), *Latin Arthurian Literature* (Cambridge, 2005), ch. 20, pp. 238–9; Wace, *Roman de Brut*, Judith Weiss (ed. and trans.) (Exeter, 2002), pp. 332–4, ll. 13275–90. See also Virginie Greene, “Qui croit au retour d’Arthur?”, *Cahiers de civilisations médiévale* vol. 45 (2002), pp. 321–40.

⁶³ R.W. Hanning, “The Audience as Co-Creator of the First Chivalric Romances”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 11 (1981), pp. 1–28, here p. 8. On the reception of Geoffrey of Monmouth, see Anne Lawrence-Mathers, “William of Newburgh and the Northumbrian Construction of English History”, *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2007), pp. 339–57.

⁶⁴ Other examples of are furnished in Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, M.R. James (ed. and trans.), revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), pp. xx–xxi.

ecclesiastics would be tarred with the same brush as those made by the *fabulatores*. This makes sense given the significant cultural shift taking place across the long twelfth century in the burgeoning of marvels tales as a form of courtly entertainment, especially in the court of Henry II, King of England.⁶⁵ As Jan Ziolkowski argued:

A culture in which the production of manuscripts required great investment of resources... could not have [had] the equivalent of modern-day 'junk-reading', but the titles of Walter [Map]'s and Gervase's works ('On courtiers' entertainments' and 'Recreations for an emperor') offer testimony of movement in that direction.⁶⁶

As well as the intrinsically contentious nature of wonder itself, the relative novelty of Gervase's textual purpose of entertaining through wondrous stories may have influenced his use of defensive epistemological rhetoric.

Moreover, Gervase's use of epistemological rhetoric seems to have been necessary because of the unusual structure of his work. The first two books adhere closely to the traditionally high-verisimilitude modes of chronicle and encyclopedia, while the third book breaks from this by reporting contemporary marvels that were entertaining, but in many cases possessed less evidentiary support than the first two books, which were based on long-standing textual traditions. It is telling, then, that the vast majority of his epistemological defences come at the opening to Book Three concerning marvels, and not at the opening of the text as a whole. In a culture of respect for the *auctoritas* of age, reporting contemporary marvels was likely to be approached with greater scepticism than marvels retold from ancient authorities.

Despite his dismissal of the "idle tales" of "mere storytellers", which he believed to be aimed solely at entertainment without any concern for truth, Gervase himself periodically

⁶⁵ John Gillingham, "The Cultivation of History, Legend, and Courtesy at the Court of Henry II" in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (eds), *Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays* (New York, 2006), pp. 25-52.

⁶⁶ Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from before Fairy Tales*, p. 234.

reveals his concern that his audiences were enjoying themselves. In between stories about how John, Bishop of Pozzuoli, freed trapped souls from Lake Avernus, and how he poured oil on nearby John's Lake and saw the gates of Hell, Gervase writes: "I shall relate another remarkable tale concerning the same bishop, as long as it does not bore you to hear it".⁶⁷ If wonder relates to novelty and declines with familiarity, then a long series of wonders of a similar nature may evoke boredom and a lack of attention. As will be further explored in **Chapter 4**, audiences' yielding to a moral message is predicated to some extent on their being attentive, which may be achieved by pleasing them with entertaining stories. Also, as described in **Chapter 1**, Gervase was willing to abandon the need for truth in preference for telling stories purely for their entertainment value, as he did in his story about lamias.⁶⁸

Because of this ability to sideline implied textual rules about truth, S.E. Banks J.W. and Binns claimed that Gervase's *Otia* presents "a point of departure for the great European tradition" of writing having to be true.⁶⁹ But Gervase was perhaps only willing to do this because of the nature of his subject matter. If wonder relates to novelty and drives us to seek sensory experiences, ask questions, and gain knowledge through critical thinking about evidence, then texts that report wonders must by definition blur the boundaries between truth and falsehood because they deal with an imagined unknown that audiences then seek to taxonomise within categories of true or false.

This gives all the more reason to defend oneself with the rhetoric of epistemology, such as Gervase's claim at the beginning of a section on the *mirabilia orientis* that he had not seen all the phenomena he described:

⁶⁷ Gervase, *Otia*, pp. 590-91: "Aliud eiusdem episcopi mirabile dictum recensebo, dum modo non tedeat audire".

⁶⁸ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch.86, pp. 722-3.

⁶⁹ Gervase, *Otia*, p. lvii.

If anyone is proposing to explore the extent of the world, let him take note that we have not examined with our own eyes all the things that we have written about, but we have included in our collection some things culled from others' books, and some based on the report of honest men; we owe nothing, however, to the tongues of liars or the falsehoods of players.⁷⁰

Gervase also uses low truth modality to allow for doubts about marvels he had presumably not seen, such as the phoenix: "it is said" the sun favours the phoenix; it sprang from the godhead "so they say"; "it is said" to live forever.⁷¹ Writing about matters within the uncomfortable middle between things told and seen, probable and improbable, entertaining and factual, was therefore an act of daring that opened up authors to potential criticism.

Since there is a general unavailability of reception data for medieval texts, this may perhaps be best demonstrated in modern historians' responses to marvels tales. Elizabeth Freeman has shown that nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians tended to dismiss the marvels components of medieval histories and chronicles as improper subject matter for sober histories.⁷² Because those who recorded marvels were aware of the potential danger to reputation that accompanied the act of recording them, it seems reasonable to assume that those marvels that had more evidentiary backing were more likely to be written down than those that had less evidentiary backing, and therefore that more wonders existed in oral circulation than were ever written down.

The individual attitudes of authors to the viability of entertainment as a textual aim also played a significant part in their use of defensive epistemological claims. This is best

⁷⁰ Gervase, *Otia*, pp. 708-9: "Si quis dimensionem terrarum perscrutari parauerit, attendat non omnia nos corporali uisione probasse que scripsimus, quin immo quedam ex alienis libris transumpta, quedam ex uirorum proborum relatione conguessimus, nihil mendacium linguis aut mimorum fallaciis contribuentes".

⁷¹ Gervase, *Otia*, pp. 706-7: "In hac aue delicie solis esse referuntur... ex sola, ut tradunt, diuinitate processit... semper uiuere predicatur".

⁷² Elizabeth Freeman, "Wonders, Prodigies, and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*", *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2000), pp. 127-43, here p. 131.

seen in Walter Map's acceptance of proto-fictional methods, which contrasts strongly with Gervase's views.

Walter Map was born to aristocratic stock around 1150 on the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, and, due to his intelligence and quick wit, became known in the English court, rising from the service of Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford (1148-63) and London (1163-1187), to the court of King Henry II, where he stayed until Henry's death in 1189. Map was a respected entertainer, poet, and possible romance writer; some contemporary romances cite him as inspiration, or even as author, though many historians have found these claims of authorship unreliable.⁷³ Sebastian Coxon shows how Walter Map carried this reputation for witticism in his own time and subsequent centuries, but asks whether this was a programme instigated by Map himself.⁷⁴ Map was involved with royal diplomatic missions, including in 1179 when he attended the Third Lateran Council on Henry's behalf and debated the Waldensians.⁷⁵

The *De nugis curialium* is Walter's only surviving work; it consists of a series of textual scraps written and compiled haphazardly by either Walter or another person in the 1180s and 1190s. C.N.L. Brooke described it as an "enchanting jumble... the untidy legacy of an untidy mind... full of howlers, a twelfth-century version of *1066 and All That*".⁷⁶ On the other hand, Margaret Ann Sinex celebrated Map's complex command of irony, which she argued did not map neatly to classical models of irony as purely an inversion of the literal and the figurative that aimed to teach.⁷⁷ The *De nugis* is extant only in MS. Bodleian 851;

⁷³ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. xx-xxiii.

⁷⁴ Sebastian Coxon, "Wit, Laughter, and Authority in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* (Courtiers' Trifles)", in Stephen Partridge and Erik Kwakkel (eds), *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice* (Toronto, 2012), pp. 38-55.

⁷⁵ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. xiii-xix.

⁷⁶ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. xiii, xxx, xxxv.

⁷⁷ Margaret Ann Sinex, *Irony in Walter Map's De Nugis Curialium* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1993), pp. 1-41.

the text was probably never made public in Walter's lifetime, and his contemporary fame was presumably based instead on his personal wit and verbal subtlety.⁷⁸ Parts of the *De nugis curialium*, including Map's satire on marriage known as the *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum*, circulated separately.⁷⁹

The relative lack of evidentiary data in Map's *De nugis curialium*, his inclination to use irony and metaphor, and his willingness to play tricks on court audiences to satirise their textual and moral conservatism all speak to an appetite more willing to suspend concerns about truth and falsehood for the sake of entertainment than many of his contemporaries. At the end of the second *distinctio*, Walter used metaphorical language to defer to audiences to make their own judgments about the marvelous anecdotes he reported: "Every reader must cut into shape the rough material that is here served up to him... I am but your huntsman. I bring you the game, it is for you to make dainty dishes out of it".⁸⁰ Like Gervase, Walter claims that his wonders may have a palliative effect in alleviating heavy hearts: "[audiences should] read or listen to the insipid and bloodless follies of this book for recreation and sport... [so as to] lighten with pleasantry the weight of serious thoughts".⁸¹ Elsewhere, he asserts that his stories may "serve either to excite merriment or edify morals".⁸² He also confesses his focus on wondrous stories and his belief that sight is more convincing than hearing: "[I intend to record] anything I have heard that is a more

⁷⁸ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. xxiii.

⁷⁹ Ralph Hanna, "Another Manuscript of Walter Map's 'Dissuasio Valerii'", *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, vol. 24 (2014), pp. 277-83; Mark Yusim, "From the History of Literary Stereotypes: Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum*", *History: Journal of Education and Science*, vol. 3 (2012), pp. 1-20.

⁸⁰ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, M.R. James (ed. and trans.), revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), pp. 208-9: "Singuli lectores appositam ruditatem exculpant, ut eorum industria bona facie prodeat in publicum. Venator uester sum: feras uobis affero, ferula faciatis".

⁸¹ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 210-11: "uoluminis huius innolibiles [sic] et exangues inepcias uel audire uel legere recreationis et ludi gracia... ludicrisque leuare pondera seniorum".

⁸² Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 210-11: "uel iocunditas excitetur uel edificetur ethica".

remarkable miracle... to narrate for people what I know out of what I have seen, and what I believe out of what I have heard".⁸³

But Walter's frequent exhortation that audiences make their own decisions about truth or falsehood shows perhaps greater epistemological maturity than Gervase. In one case, Walter describes a story he heard from returning crusaders about how a Templar in the Holy Land taunted a group of Saracens and claimed that they could not physically kill him because he had divine protection; the Saracens then decapitated him, but the disembodied head remained alive and spoke to them after death, whereupon the Saracens fled in terror.⁸⁴ Walter questions the reliability of the crusaders' stories, but defers belief or disbelief to his audiences: "Perhaps many lie when they tell those stories about the lords Templars. Let us ask them themselves and believe what we hear. How they behave at Jerusalem I do not know; here with us they live harmlessly enough".⁸⁵ This claim adds further credence to the link between perceived morality of a reporter and their trustworthiness as a deliverer of true information, or it may act as a satire on the same. On the other hand, Walter's candid prose reveals his own willingness to report stories despite uncertainty: "Perhaps many lie...", "I do not know".

By describing his own work as a set of "insipid and bloodless follies", Walter reveals his expectation that his text could be dismissed on factual grounds as a form of entertainment lacking gravity and seriousness. This is made more clear in his requests that audiences pardon his marvels: "I hope for pardon from [my detractors], provided they are

⁸³ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 36-7: "quecunque didici conspeccius habere miraculum... sed quecunque scio ex uisu uel credo ex auditu pro uiribus explicare". I have altered James, Brooke, and Mynors highly problematic translation here.

⁸⁴ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 58-9.

⁸⁵ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 68-9: "Similia uero predictis de dominis Templaribus forte menciuntur multi; queramus ab ipsis et quod audieramus credamus. Quid agant Ierosolimis, nescio; nobiscum satis innocenter habitant".

not so over-strict in their judgment”.⁸⁶ Elsewhere, he prefaces his marvels with an almost sardonic tone: “If it is allowable to take note of common happenings, [I will describe...]”.⁸⁷ This phrasing shows that Walter expected his audiences to react from an initial position of scepticism.

In particular, Walter excoriated his contemporaries for scorning anything written recently: “you set it at naught and mock at it”.⁸⁸ Instead, he advocated scrutinising contemporary works in equal measure to ancient authorities: “read and scrutinise every page you see; no one should be used without being perused”.⁸⁹ Walter extended his criticisms to the realm of satire by penning a work under the name of the first-century author of *res memorabiliae*, Valerius Maximus. Unlike the *De nugis*, of which it forms a part, Map’s satire was widely copied as a document unto itself and is now known in 161 Latin manuscripts, with multifaceted traditions of commentary and vernacular translations.⁹⁰ When Walter claimed publically that the work was by himself, some disbelieved him: “Some, however — persons of no position — deny it is by me”.⁹¹ In his defence, Walter argued that it was illogical to dismiss a text seen as authoritative on the basis of the revelation it was written contemporaneously to the reader, and not in the ancient past. He quips: “My only offence is that I am alive; it is however one which I have no intention of correcting — by dying”.⁹²

Walter’s subversive attitudes to textual authority place him in a long tradition of satirical literature. Mark Yusim called Walter a “direct precursor to Renaissance literature” of

⁸⁶ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 210-11: “ueniam spero dum non districte iudicent”.

⁸⁷ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 286-7: “Incidencia uero si notare fas est, incidit”.

⁸⁸ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 406-7: “uilipendis et rides”.

⁸⁹ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 406-7: “Legenda enim tibi est omnis pagina quam uideris et examinanda, nec sit ulla neglecta nisi perfecta”.

⁹⁰ Hanna, “Another Manuscript of Walter Map’s ‘Dissuasio Valerii’”.

⁹¹ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 312-13: “Meam tamen esse quidam, sed de plebe, negant”.

⁹² Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 312-13: “Hoc solum deliqui, quod uiuo; Verumptamen hoc morte mea corrigere consilium non habeo”.

the likes of Giovanni Boccaccio or François Rabelais.⁹³ Although intended as a compliment, Yusim's phrasing implies that medieval people lacked the intellectual capacity for satire in their own right, and that any satire within the Middle Ages is merely a proto-modern glitch in a world of conservatism. This view is repudiated by Ronald Pepin, who has shown that satire was dynamic and popular at least within intellectual circles in the twelfth century, and that satire grows within the advent of the university.⁹⁴

In his own time, Walter was described by a little-known Anglo-Norman/Welsh Goliardic poet and romance writer, one Hugh of Rhuddlan, as a master in "the art of lying". In one of two surviving romance works, titled *Ipomedon*, Hugh claims "I am not the only one who knows the art of lying — Walter Map also knows well his share of it".⁹⁵ The inclusivity of this statement suggests it may have been intended as more of a compliment than a critique, and implicitly unites Hugh's romances and Walter's marvelous anecdotes as bonded forms of *ficta*. This demonstrates that there were various strands of thought regarding the suitability of evoking wonder as a form of entertainment, one broadly conservative and traditionalist, and the other more subversive and liberalist.

Walter clearly aligned himself with the latter. He tells a story that "I have heard from several great men, which is marvelous to tell of, and might not unreasonably be thought incredible".⁹⁶ Once again, the phrasing links wonder to scepticism. The story concerned a beneficent wife who endured the oppression of her tyrannous husband in France. The husband was arrested and sent to the gallows by Louis VII, King of France, for crimes of

⁹³ Yusim, "From the History of Literary Stereotypes: Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum*", p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ronald E. Pepin, *Literature of Satire in the Twelfth Century: A Neglected Mediaeval Genre* (Lewiston, 1988).

⁹⁵ Neil Cartlidge, "Masters in the Art of Lying? The Literary Relationship between Hugh of Rhuddlan and Walter Map", *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 106, no. 1 (2011), pp. 1-16, quoting Cartlidge's translation of Hugh's *Ipomedon* from p. 1: "Sul ne sai pas de mentir l'art / Walter Map reset ben sa part".

⁹⁶ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 442-3: "Contigit, ut a multis et magnis audiuius uiris, quiddam mirabile dictu, quod et incredibile non inmerito uideatur".

theft, violence, and brigandry. When the newly pregnant wife pled with Louis, he agreed to reduce the husband's sentence from execution to the lopping off his right ear. This took place, and after four days the pregnant wife gave birth to a son who also had no right ear. Walter remarks that this "appears a notable prodigy" and that "it would have been less of a portent had he been conceived after the mutilation of his father".⁹⁷ This is another example of medieval wonder resulting from the tricks of the human body. Walter then acknowledges the tension between truth and text type, truth and individual temperament: "These [wondrous] matters are perhaps trifles and unfit for great books, but for my sheets they are suitable enough".⁹⁸ This demonstrates how wonder, when evoked for entertainment, could create rational discomfort about truth or falsehood, and thereby disconnection between author and audience based on differences between each party's views about implied textual rules about truth.

Conclusion

The epistemology of wonder was a potential source of rational conflict for texts that aimed to entertain. With the rise of such texts and the blurring of traditional textual modes, especially at the court of Henry II, authors' and audiences' individual assessments of the worthiness of entertainment as a textual aim became increasingly important. While the accepted norm set up by Augustine was to dismiss entertainment as improper, there was an

⁹⁷ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 444-5: "uidetur notabile prodigium... minus esset portentum si post patris abcisionem fuisset genitus".

⁹⁸ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 454-5: "Hec forte friuola sunt et magnis inepta paginis, sed meis satis apta sunt scedulis".

undercurrent of acceptance of, and even relish in, the opportunities afforded by wonder when used for entertainment. This is exemplified by the interpolators of the *Prester John Letter*, Walter Map, and Ekkehard of Aura, who each in their own manner reduced concerns about truth in preference for recounting or inventing gratifying tales.

More specifically, Ekkehard makes explicit an attitude that may have been implicit to other authors' methodologies: the use of stories as a form of entertainment despite their poor verisimilitude even within textual modes that customarily possessed high truth standards. Ultimately, historians cannot know whether texts read aloud to audiences were verbally glossed during performance with the claim that it was for entertainment, not necessarily truth, but the existence of statements like Ekkehard's may speak to a broader trend. What seems clear is that authors could expect their texts to be dismissed if aimed at entertainment, as is revealed in Gervase of Tilbury's insistent defences that his work was founded on truth. Fundamentally, these conflicts between truth and entertainment, and between authors' and audiences' perceptions of entertainment as a valid authorial aim, stem from wonder's definitional relationship with the unknown, and its instigation of a process of assessment of evidence.

Chapter 4 —

Wonder, Didacticism, and Inductive Reasoning

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that the textual aim of entertainment created complexity for the emotional-cognitive experience of wonder by raising ambiguities about truth or falsehood. The present chapter explores how wonder could be manipulated to teach both pragmatic and ideological lessons. The examples presented here show that there was a propensity to interpret new information through pre-existing lenses, and that confirmation bias was a key component of twelfth-century reactions to wonders. This arguably slowed the acquisition of new knowledge by denying the opportunity for sensory evidence to speak for itself. Also, the variety of individual tendencies to accept or reject new information added complexity for those who wished to use wonders to prove arguments about morality and orthodoxy, since sceptics were more likely to desire convincing evidence for the physical truth of a story before yielding to its moral message.

This chapter borrows a number of concepts from contemporary logical theory. The term confirmation bias is used to refer to the use of new information to support preconceptions, rather than being explored on its own terms. Deductive reasoning refers to movement from general premises to specific conclusions, whereas inductive reasoning refers

to any movement from specific to general. The term didacticism is used in this chapter to refer to the use of wonders as evidence for predetermined moral beliefs. This chapter's key contention is that there is a link between induction and didacticism in that both are tied to situations of reduced knowledge. This low level of knowledge is by definition true with marvels if wonder is instigated by novel phenomena. However, the frequency of medieval recourse to confirmation bias during the experience of wonder ought not to be criticised using contemporary evidentiary standards, where greater knowledge allows for greater recourse to deductive reasoning. Ultimately, one's attitude to history as a field of study will inform one's views of the medieval culture of didacticism: if the purpose of history is to provide moral messages relating to the present, then the culture of medieval didacticism provides a useful reminder about the danger of confirmation bias, however if the purpose of history is to understand the past on its own terms, then empathy will provide greater benefit than condemnation.¹

This chapter also argues that there were a variety of individual propensities to believe or disbelieve wonders. On this basis, didactic use of wonders could affirm pre-existing beliefs for those more willing to believe, but also act as polemical tools aiming to convince those less willing to believe. For this reason, wondrous didactic stories may have been better received by more sceptical sections of the population if the wonders had evidence-based verisimilitude. This predicated the use of epistemological rhetoric and evidence in didactic tales.

Didacticism has been a broad research focus within medieval studies, particularly for late medievalists who possess large collections of sermons and exempla with which to work. Such collections are comparatively lacking for the twelfth century. Jacques le Goff defined

¹ On this conflict within historical method, see Margreta de Grazia, "Anachronism", in Brian Cummings and James Simpson (eds), *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 13-32.

the exemplum, one key form of didactic literature, as “a brief tale given as though true and destined to be inserted into a discourse (generally a sermon) in order to convince a hearer of a salutary lesson”.² As discussed in **Chapter 3**, D.H. Green presented *historia* as *res gestae* (a true relation of true things) and *fabula* as *res fictae* (an untrue relation of untrue things). Within this framework, Green defines the didactic supratextual mode as *argumentum* (a relation of true or untrue things that carry moral exhortations with regard to true things).³ This chapter adopts Green’s views, but extends them by proposing that moral messages were more likely to be embraced by sceptical audiences if there was a greater concern for the story’s physical reality.

Elizabeth Allen examined didacticism as a mode that traversed textual forms and genres. In this chapter, focus is not on sermon exempla, but on the tendency to weave paranaesis around local, orally retold wonder tales.⁴ Writing after Roland Barthes’ “morte de l’auteur”, Allen also proposed that despite the fact that exemplarity involves composers subordinating a general principle to a specific example for their own moral-political programme, the messages taken away, if any, are ultimately audience-derived.⁵ In *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, Juanita Feros Ruys and others broadly examined the various evolutions and continuities within the culture of didacticism throughout the medieval and early modern periods, while asserting

² Jacques le Goff, “L’exemplum médiéval”, in Claude Brémont, Jacques le Goff, Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L’exemplum* (Turnhout, 1982), pp. 37-8: “un récit bref donné comme véridique et destiné à être inséré dans un discours (en général un sermon) pour convaincre un auditoire par un leçon salutaire”. For further debate about definitions of the terms exempla and didacticism, see Claude Brémont and Claude Cazalé-Bérard, “L’exemplum médiéval est-il un genre littéraire?”, in Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (eds), *Les exempla médiévaux: Nouvelles perspectives* (Paris, 1998), pp. 21-42.

³ D.H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 135.

⁴ Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth: Poetics and Reception of Medieval Mode* (New York, 2005), pp. 1-26. Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.) (New York, 1977), pp. 142-8.

⁵ Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth*, pp. 1-26.

the impossibility of ever proving that didactic literature actually altered behaviours.⁶ Larry Scanlon argued that, at least in sermons, didacticism was a means to confirming the institutional authority of the Church through its governance of meanings and its subordination of physical truths to moral messages.⁷

There has been a tendency within secondary literature about didacticism to argue that all or nearly all medieval literature was didactic in one way or another, but this may be a reductive generalisation. Ann Marie Rasmussen and Karin Ueltschi proposed this for medieval literature as a whole; Umberto Eco argued likewise for art, while Paul Zumthor, Thomas Haye, and James H. Morey asserted the same of medieval poetry.⁸ It may be more appropriate to state that all things, whether natural or manufactured, had didactic potential.

Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park argued that “medieval readers and writers shared an approach to truth more complicated and multivalent than the post-seventeenth-century obsession with the literal fact”.⁹ Daston and Park’s tone here implies distaste towards contemporary use of the word ‘truth’ to denote only physical things. I argue that increased specificity of vocabulary is a natural consequence of macro-level shifts towards greater ontological knowledge, and that the term message should be preferred for moral ‘truths’. The present chapter problematises Daston and Park’s claim by arguing that

⁶ Juanita Feros Ruys (ed.), *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods* (Turnhout, 2008).

⁷ Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁸ Ann Marie Rasmussen, “Fathers to Think Back Through: The Middle High German Mother-Daughter and Father-Son Advice Poems Known as *Die Winsbeckin* and *Der Winsbecke*”, in Kathleen Ashley and Robert L.A. Clark (eds) *Medieval Conduct* (Minneapolis, 2001), pp. 106–34, here p. 106; Karin Ueltschi, *La didactique de la chair: Approches et enjeux d’un discours en français au moyen âge* (Geneva, 1993), pp. 15–16; Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Hugh Bredin (trans.) (New Haven, 1986), pp. 52–64; Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, Philip Bennett (trans.) (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 95; Thomas Haye, *Das lateinische Lebrgedicht im Mittelalter: Analyse einer Gattung* (Leiden, 1997), p. 263; James H. Morey, “Middle English Didactic Literature”, in David Johnson and Elaine Trehearne (eds), *Readings in Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 183–197, p. 183.

⁹ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonder and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York, 1998), p. 60.

didacticism does not necessarily lead to a lack of concern for physical truths, and that in the long twelfth century it may be better to view moral message and physical truth as dual forces working in tandem, rather than didacticism overriding all concern for physical truth, or vice versa.

As this chapter will demonstrate, concern for physical truths existed in didactic wonder stories partly because wonder leads to the evidentiary process, and partly because sceptics required more physical evidence before yielding to moral messages. This chapter proposes that imbuing a story with a didactic message reduced the likelihood of sceptics assessing the story as physically true, thereby leading them towards disbelief on the belief-disbelief continuum. This chapter is also a novel contribution to scholarship because it argues that didacticism and induction are linked as both are predicated on reduced knowledge, and both draw novel phenomena back towards existing frames of understanding. Didacticism and confirmation bias therefore resolve the discomfort inherent in any uncertainties raised by wonder. Imbuing uncertain physical truths with didactic messages creates comfort, granting responders a feeling of control over events whose physicalities were possible, but not knowable with certainty, or comprehensible in terms of their physical processes.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first argues that local wonders could be used to provide moral guidance in specific local situations, but that these local morals could nevertheless have broad resonance in distant lands. This will be shown using two stories: Gervase of Tilbury's discussion of the supernatural dangers of Mont Canigou in Catalonia, which some believed to be inhabited by demons, and Gerald of Wales's discussion of a monk in Bayonne (Gascony) who slipped into a beached whale's carcass, which Gerald uses to show the dangers of excessive curiosity. The second section argues that the intersection between didacticism and confirmation bias is a result of how reduced knowledge

necessitates induction rather than deduction. This will be shown using two stories: one from Fulcher of Chartres' *Historia Hierosolymitana* concerning his observation in the Holy Land of animals he understood to be monsters, and two from Guibert of Nogent's *Monodiae*, respectively concerning a monk who died from demonic avarice and a boy's conversion from Judaism to Christianity.

The third section proposes that individuals varied in their tendency to believe and disbelieve wonders, and that didactic stories were therefore most potent when targeted at sceptics. This necessitated the use of epistemological truth claims in the case of didactic texts, because stories that were more convincing had greater likelihood of sceptics yielding to their morals. Part of the reason for this was the propensity for both authors and non-authors to manipulate wonder by using confirmation bias to prove their own pre-existing views to increase personal prestige and political clout, each forms of Bordelian social capital.¹⁰ This will be shown using Hugh of St Victor's taxonomy of audiences into groups based on tendencies to believe or disbelieve new information, Peter Bartholomew's discovery of St James's lance in Antioch during the First Crusade, and the introduction to the *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, which reveals its authors' fear that didactic wonders would be disbelieved by audiences if not first proven to have physical truth.

4.1 — Local Wonders, Global Morals

This section explores how wondrous stories could be used in local situations to teach pragmatic messages about specific local phenomena. Despite this, such local stories could

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Richard Nice (trans.) (Cambridge, 1977).

travel far and wide, and have broader paranaetic resonance using generalised morals developed from narrower events. This will be shown using Gervase of Tilbury's discussion of Mont Canigou and Gerald of Wales's discussion of the danger of curiosity, which he argues on the basis of the story of a monk who fell into a whale's carcass. One aim of this section is to repudiate the view that didacticism was solely a way for the Church to exercise power over its flock by demonstrating that ecclesiastics and laypeople reacted using the same emotional-cognitive chain of wonder. For this reason, using confirmation bias to imbue extraordinary stories with didactic messages could act on an emotional level to reduce the discomfort inherent in uncertainty about novel phenomena or the supernatural. This section therefore implicitly supports Carl Watkins' characterisation of medieval folklore and religious culture as operating on local spheres to which both ecclesiastics and laypeople contributed.¹¹

In Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, mountains act as a locus of fear and wonder. A number of mountains, especially those whose peaks were inaccessible, are discussed as supernaturally dangerous, or possessing unexplained wonders. Such mountains include Mount Somma, where Gervase picked the upside-down beans discussed in **Chapter 2**. Other marvelous mountains include Mont Aiguille, whose peak contained disappearing washer-women, Mount Adans, home of the phoenix, Mount Sinai, where God spoke to Moses and where oil flows uninterruptedly, a cave in the mountains near Peak Castle (Derbyshire), which teleports people to the antipodes, the seaside mountains of Olympus and Smaragdon, which spew forth fire from sunrise until eleven o'clock, and whose seas kill you if you look at them, or the Welsh mountains — “and this is exceedingly wonderful” —

¹¹ Carl Watkins, “Folklore’ and ‘Popular Religion’ in Britain during the Middle Ages”, *Folklore*, vol. 115 (2004), pp. 140-50.

that are formed upon solid rock, but whose peaks float on water.¹² Gervase's collation of these wondrous and fearsome mountains suggests that the optimal strategy with regard to mountains may have been avoidance, a perspicacious moral given the inherent danger of mountains as places of physical exertion, climatic extremes, potential death, and, in Gervase's reckoning, possible supernatural habitation.

Gervase's story of Mont Canigou runs as follows. Peter de Cabinam, a resident of nearby La Junquera, cursed his infant daughter for her incessant crying and instructed her to go to the devil. Invisible demons in the room immediately heeded the instruction and carried her off. Seven years later, a local walking along the foot of Mont Canigou came across a distressed man who claimed to have been enslaved by demons and kept captive on the mountain. Gervase writes: "In order that his hearer should attach credence to such an incredible thing, he added incontrovertible proof" by revealing that Peter de Cabinam's daughter was there too.¹³ Gervase's phrasing here ties wonder to scepticism. The man claimed that the demons had grown tired of raising Peter's daughter and would restore her to Peter if he requested her back at the shores of the lake at Mont Canigou's peak. The local man, "amazed... [at] these incredible things", informed Peter, who heeded the instructions and received his daughter, who was emaciated, "dreadful to behold", and unable to speak, not unlike cases of wild children documented in modern times.¹⁴

After this, Peter de Cabinam reported the story to the bishop of Gerona and requested advice from him. What most concerns us here is the bishop's response. Gervase writes: "The bishop, being a religious man, and eager to instruct the flock entrusted to him

¹² Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (eds and trans) (Oxford, 2002), book 3, ch. 33, 42, 45, 79, 80, 82, pp. 624-7, 640-43, 706-13; quoting pp. 712-13: "quod plurimum mirandum est".

¹³ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 686-7: "Et ut auditor rei tam incredibili fidem adhiberet, argumentum certissimum iunxit".

¹⁴ The best introduction to the complex topic of wild children is Serge Aroles, *L'Enigme des Enfants-loups* (Paris, 2007).

with a salutary warning, set the girl in the sight of all: unfolding the sequence of events, he taught his subjects in a sermon that they should never again tell their own to go to the devil”.¹⁵ Gervase’s depiction of the bishop as “eager to instruct” because he was “a religious man” exemplifies the *mentalité* prevalent within medieval ecclesiastical culture of using wonders as proof for pre-existing ways of thinking. The bishop’s conduct reveals the didactic potential embedded in local wonder stories, but also implies that, by displaying the girl before audiences, the physical truth of the story was thereby proven, and that her presence would stand as physical evidence to support the moral.

The bishop’s moral message is reiterated by Gervase, who prefaces his lengthy recital of the story with the claim that it is “strange and uncommon”, thereby wondrous, but also “full of sound counsel”, thereby showing his manipulation of local wondrous stories for the sake of didacticism.¹⁶ Gervase explains the moral: “We can be taught by these things not to commend anyone in our household to the demons, for they stealthily lie in wait”.¹⁷ Gervase specifies that the story was “a sure means of persuading the thoughtless to be more careful”.¹⁸ This phrasing suggests that Gervase anticipated that the story’s didactic potential would be most strongly felt by those who were not already in agreement, that is, those who were careless, brash, or sceptical of the potential for supernatural beings to interact with the world of the living, or sceptical that sinful actions resulted in supernatural punishments, or perhaps even sceptical of the existence of supernatural beings entirely. Disbelief in God and the supersensory world is explored in **Chapter 5**.

¹⁵ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 688-9: “Episcopus, ut uir religiosus ac exemplo bono commissum sibi gregem informans, puellam in omnium exponit aspectu, reique seriem pandens, predicando docuit subditos ne de cetero sua demonibus commendent”.

¹⁶ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 684-5: “Rem nouam atque insolitam sed salubri consilio plenam agredimur”.

¹⁷ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 688-9: “Et hiis informari possumus ne familiam demonibus commendemus, qui cautius insidiantur”.

¹⁸ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 684-5: “cautelam incautis facile prestantem”.

Despite the clear moral, Gervase, like the bishop, demonstrates a concern for establishing the physical truth of what happened. Gervase provides two pieces of evidence for the physical reality of the tale. The first is the townspeople's interrogation of the man who was living with the girl "in a subterranean cave beside the lake [containing] a spacious palace" inhabited by the demons.¹⁹ To Gervase, the man's claims corroborated the girl's, and were more reliable because he was an adult: "Because when he had been seized he had been of greater, more mature discernment, he was able to give a more reliable and intelligible description of what went on among the demons".²⁰ The second piece of evidence Gervase adduced was a natural phenomenon in support of a supernatural one: "There is a very strong argument for the truth of these sayings in that between the mountains of which I have spoken there rages a constant tempest of winds striving against each other, and tranquility is rarely or never found there".²¹ S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns show that stories of demon-inhabited mountaintops were widespread in European folklore over the centuries, which may have further improved the verisimilitude of the story for Gervase through similarity. However, Gervase's apparent concern for both moral message and physical truth seems predicated on an expectation that sceptical audiences would more likely yield to the moral if the truth of the story were first proven.²²

There exists something of a paradox within didactic uses of wonder, in that tales built upon local phenomena could support broad moral claims that transcended boundaries of time and space. Indeed, local tales could travel great distances through oral networks of

¹⁹ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 688-9: "Asserebat iuxta lacum in subterreano".

²⁰ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 688-9: "Et quia cum raptus erat maioris perfectionisque discretionis extiterat, fidelius ac intelligibilis que apud demones gerebantur exposuit".

²¹ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 688-9: "Estque ualidissimum dictorum argumentum quod inter montes memoratos perpetua uiget uentorum ex opposito sibi concertantium tempestas, et rara illic reperitur aut nulla unquam tranquillitas".

²² Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 66, pp. 688-9, n. 6.

communication. If Gervase heard the story of Peter de Cabinam's daughter while residing in Arles, then it must have been transmitted orally across roughly three hundred kilometres. However, Gerald of Wales' story of a beached whale near Bayonne (Gascony), recorded in his c.1216 *Speculum Ecclesiae*, may have travelled more than twelve hundred kilometres to reach him at Lincoln where he wrote the text. On the other hand, there is the possibility that Gerald heard the story during one of his three visits to Rome between 1199 and 1203, journeys whose precise itineraries are not known on the basis of his corpus of writings. The logistics of communication of stories across time and space deserves further attention from scholars, and may elucidate some interesting findings.

Gerald begins his story of the beached whale by describing its location as "the most remote limits of Gascony", a place where "huge dolphins are frequently captured".²³ In an unspecified year, a whale "of immense size and greatly monstrous weight" washed up on the shore, whereupon the local people "rushed in large numbers from all over [to see] the spectacle and, as is typical, to wonder at it", further demonstrating wonder's power of attraction as something "typical" for large community groups.²⁴

The sole manuscript preserving the *Speculum*, Bodleian Cotton Tiberius B.XIII, was severely damaged in a fire in 1731, and the damage has rendered several lines from the present story illegible.²⁵ There is some possibility that the whale carcass exploded; this can occur when carbon dioxide gases from decomposition build up in the whale's viscera, which are then disturbed by human contact, releasing the gases and viscera in a sudden, violent burst. This seems likely in Gerald's case, because, after the fire-damaged lines, the story

²³ Gerald of Wales, *Speculum ecclesiae*, J.S. Brewer (ed.), in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, RS, 1873), distinctio 2, ch. 7, vol. 4, p. 46: "Item in remotoribus Gasconiae finibus, apud Basdoniae maritimam, ubi frequenter cete grandia capi solent".

²⁴ Gerald, *Speculum ecclesiae*, distinctio 2, ch. 7, vol. 4, p. 46: "ad quam spectandum, ut moris est, et admirandum... cum undique populus catervatim occurrisset".

²⁵ R.W. Hunt, "The Preface to the *Speculum Ecclesiae* of Giraldus Cambrensis", *Viator*, vol. 8 (1977), pp. 189-213.

relates how an unnamed monk approached the carcass to inspect its “portam”; whether this is the whale’s mouth, blowhole, or a wound is open for speculation. The monk approached too close and became covered in blubber, presumably from an effusion of viscera. Gerald claims that the monk, greatly affected by the smell, slipped backwards into the whale’s carcass, whereupon the onlookers rushed to extract him using ropes and poles.²⁶

Gerald’s tone throughout the passage is one of post-hoc condemnation of the monk’s actions. Gerald describes the monk as “dumbstruck and completely obsessed with examining [the whale]” and showing “no respect or shame whatsoever”, which suggests Gerald’s view that the monk should have been more circumspect and fearful towards the novel phenomenon.²⁷ If marvels are God’s works, and *timor Dei* is the optimal attitude towards God, then *timor mirabilium* may have been the optimal response to marvels. Gerald makes clear who the true perpetrator of the monk’s crime was: “It was that ancient and insidious enemy of the Church [that is, Satan] who put into action a lapse so ridiculous and disgraceful”.²⁸

Robert Bartlett claimed that the increasingly sour and condemnatory tone in Gerald’s works as he grew older stems at least partially from his unsuccessful attempt to win the bishopric of St David’s.²⁹ (The *Speculum Ecclesiae* was written c.1216, and assuming a birth date of c.1146 would make Gerald roughly seventy years old at the time of writing). But here, it seems more likely that Gerald’s analysis of the wondrous event was filtered through his pre-existing philosophical lens. Satan’s enduring power to govern earthly people and lead them astray by inspiring them to *vana curiositas* was a pervasive aspect of twelfth-century

²⁶ Gerald, *Speculum ecclesiae*, distinctio 2, ch. 7, vol. 4, p. 46.

²⁷ Gerald, *Speculum ecclesiae*, distinctio 2, ch. 7, vol. 4, p. 46: “inspiciendo et obstupendo saturari non poterat, qui demum nimis appropians, nec verens quicquam aut verecundans”.

²⁸ Gerald, *Speculum ecclesiae*, distinctio 2, ch. 7, vol. 4, p. 46: “Curialis igitur hostis ille et insidiator antiquus fuit, qui lapsum illum tam ridiculosum et tam opprobriosum fieri sic procuravit”.

²⁹ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 144-53.

ecclesiastical philosophy that received support from Augustine, and indeed from Genesis's story of Eve, the snake, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which linked Satan to the pursuit of knowledge.³⁰ This link could also have played a part in limiting conceptual exploration of nature as a divine mystery, and limiting the cognitive exploration that attends the emotion of wonder.

Where Gerald's story differs from Gervase's, though, is in its relative lack of truth claims, and Gerald's seeming preference to work solely with moral concerns, leaving aside questions of the physical truth of events. Fire damage obscures the final lines of the text, which may or may not have carried such truth claims. Nevertheless, these two stories show that writers could imbue local wonders with broader moral relevance that transcended the boundaries of time and space, and that didacticism involves a movement from a specific instance to a general message. The latter story also shows that wonders could be used to prove pre-existing morals, which may diminish the potential of the emotion of wonder as leading to knowledge through consideration of evidence. By comparison, both tales reveal that didacticism could or could not be intertwined with concerns about physical truth, and that ultimately the number and strength of a tale's truth claims stems from authorial attitudes towards the importance of truth in didactic tales.

³⁰ Katherine H. Tachau, "God's Compass and *Vana Curiositas*: Scientific Study in the Old French Bible *Moralisée*", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 80, no. 1 (1998), pp. 7-33.

4.2 — Induction and Confirmation Bias

The present section argues that there is a link between reduced knowledge of the world and the use of new information as proof for pre-existing beliefs both factual and moral. In situations of lesser knowledge, inductive reasoning is necessarily more likely to be used than deductive reasoning. Although, as James Franklin has shown, induction is necessary for the advancement of knowledge, conclusions based on induction are less likely to be objectively true because of the psychological tendency towards confirmation bias.³¹ Since didacticism involves a movement from the specific to the general, moral tales could readily be used to confirm pre-existing ways of thinking, a process that limits the explorative potential of novel phenomena.

The present section will present two examples of this in order to propose that confirmation bias was a key problem in medieval responses to wonders. The two examples explored in this section are: Fulcher of Chartres' interpretation of animals in the Holy Land through the lens of Plinian monstrosity; and Guibert of Nogent's assessment of a sign of the cross made by wax in a baptismal font. In a sense, the wonder tales of the Middle Ages may have their own paranaetic resonance in increasing empathy for those in situations of reduced knowledge and in warning of the danger of confirmation bias as a lens for understanding novel phenomena. This assists in explaining Thomas Kuhn's view of knowledge as progressing not linearly but through paradigm shifts because new ideas are rejected on the

³¹ James Franklin, *What Science Knows and How it Knows it* (New York, 2009), pp. 5-24.

basis of confirmation bias until a critical mass of believers develops, which then pushes knowledge change to an exponential curve rather than a linear curve.³²

At its essence, inductive reasoning involves applying knowledge gained through past experience to a new piece of information, as opposed to deductive reasoning, in which a full data set is known, and observations about the data set as a whole are applied to individual instances within that data set. In this way, conclusions based on deduction are seen to be unquestionably true, whereas conclusions based on induction have only a probability of being true, a distinction proposed by Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat.³³ The difference between deductive and inductive reasoning is best expressed using examples:

- Deductive reasoning: All mammals have lungs [general claim]. Rabbits are mammals [specific claim]. Therefore, all rabbits have lungs [specific claim].
- Inductive reasoning: Every rabbit that has been observed has lungs [specific claim]. Therefore, all rabbits have lungs [general claim].

If the wonder-evidence chain is commenced in response to novel phenomena, then it may be impossible to use deduction at the evidentiary stages of the process, since only a specific is known, that is, the person's first exposure to the new object.

Three further points are worth raising here. First, deductive reasoning requires observation of a full data set, which in terms of real world phenomena is exceedingly rare if not outright impossible, especially in societies where there are deliberate or structural restrictions on knowledge transfer. This led David Hume to assert that, although less

³² Lorraine Daston, "History of Science Without Structure" in Robert J. Richards and Lorraine Daston (eds), *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty Years* (Chicago, 2016), pp. 115-132.

³³ James Hawthorne, "Inductive Logic", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/logic-inductive/>>.

desirable than deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning is a necessary component of human experience.³⁴ Second, conclusions based on deductive reasoning are only incontrovertibly true if their premises are incontrovertibly true. Third, unlike deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning does not lead to incontrovertibly true conclusions. Statisticians and epistemologists including Vincenzo Crupi, Katya Tentori, and Michel Gonzalez argue that there is a mathematically determinable degree of support between observations and conclusions in cases using inductive reasoning.³⁵ This opens induction to probabilistic analysis, which, in contemporary usage, relies primarily on the probability functions provided by eighteenth-century English statistician and philosopher Thomas Bayes.³⁶ The key aim of the present section is to examine how induction intersected with didacticism in medieval responses to wondrous phenomena to create a widespread tendency to use the new as evidence affirming the old in the realms of both physical truth and moral truth.

Fulcher of Chartres' description of new animals in the Near East through the lens of Plinian monsters demonstrates the use of induction and confirmation bias as a means to understanding novel physical truths. Fulcher was born in 1059; his life before he joined the First Crusade is largely unknown. On crusade, Fulcher was a member of the entourage of Stephen of Blois and Robert of Normandy, and he entered the service of Baldwin I of Jerusalem from Baldwin's coronation in 1100 to his death in 1118. Fulcher himself remained resident in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem until his own death in 1128. Edward Peters demonstrated that the three books that form Fulcher's valuable *Historia Hierosolymitana*

³⁴ John Vickers, "The Problem of Induction", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/induction-problem/>>.

³⁵ Vincenzo Crupi, Katya Tentori and Michel Gonzalez, "On Bayesian Measures of Evidential Support: Theoretical and Empirical Issues", *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 74, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 229-252.

³⁶ Hawthorne, "Inductive Logic".

were written respectively in 1100-1106, 1109-1115, and 1118-1127.³⁷ Although the *Historia* functioned primarily as a description of the events of the crusade and the subsequent governance of the nascent crusader states, its third book also describes the existence of monsters in Palestine, including dragons and basilisks, and others observed by Fulcher himself, which are depicted as mixtures of known forms.

Fulcher opens his discussion of the Holy Land with the observation that France, England, Egypt, and India “differ in their birds, fish, and trees”:

In Palestine, I have never seen a whale, nor a lamprey; as to birds [I have seen] neither a magpie nor a crow [in Palestine]. However, this place has wild donkeys, crocodiles, and also hyenas, who dig up the tombs of the dead. In [terms of] trees here, I have not seen a poplar, nor a yew, hazel tree, elder tree, or Butcher’s Broom [a type of shrub], nor any maple tree.³⁸

Fulcher’s description of what was probably a species of ibex was presented using the monster paradigm, combining parts of various animals to create a new form: “All of us recently saw near Nablūs [in Palestine] a certain beast whose name no man knew or has heard of; [it had the] face of a billy-goat, a hairy neck like a donkey, cloven hoofs, a calf’s tail, and [it was] larger than a ram”.³⁹ By assessing the new animal as a combination of known animals’ parts, Fulcher reveals that inductive reasoning predisposes novel phenomena to be processed through received ways of thinking.

Fulcher increases his credibility and diffuses potential criticism by arguing that the animal was seen not only by him, but by “all of us”, a claim that shows implicit awareness

³⁷ Edward Peters, *The First Crusade: the Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and other source materials* (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 23.

³⁸ Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, Heinrich Hagenmeyer (ed.) (Heidelberg, 1913), book 3, ch. 48, p.777: “differunt etiam in volucris, differunt in piscibus atque in arboribus... Nunquam in Palaestina vidi balenam, neque lampredam; nec in volucris picam, sive curucam. Illic autem habentur onagri, cirogrilli, necnon et hiena, quae mortuorum effodit busta. In arboribus illic non vidi populum, neque taxum, neque corillum, aut sambucum, aut ruscum, nec acerem ullam”.

³⁹ Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch.49, p.778: “Nuper vidimus omnes apud Neapolim bestiam quamdam cujus nomen nullus hominum novit, nec audivit; facie qua hircus, collo ut aselli crinito, ungulis bifidis, cauda vitulina, ariete majorem”.

that wonders are more likely to be credible on truth terms if observed by groups rather than individuals. However, contemporary audiences who have knowledge of a wider range of animal forms may use reasoning that is closer to deduction in recognising that the animal described may simply be a “black swan”, that is, an animal form that was outside Fulcher’s prior experience.⁴⁰ In this sense, the term monster could be understood, at least in this context, as a cognitive byproduct of induction that has declining relevance as knowledge of animal forms increases, and reasoning approaches deduction. This may help to explain why monsters are a feature of childhood mythology even into the twenty-first century, but are not frequently discussed by adults.

Fulcher then shifts his verb choice to “dicunt”, which demonstrates a separation between what he himself observed and what others observed: “They say (*dicunt*) that in a certain river at Caesaria Palestina there are animals similar to this quadruped [the crocodile]”.⁴¹ To this, Fulcher appends a discussion of other monsters that differ in that they do not receive claims of “vidi” or “dicunt”, but rather “est/sunt”: “In Babylon there is another beast called the Chimera...”, “The crocodile is a four-footed animal...”, “The dragon is the largest of the serpents...”, “In Scythia, there are gryphons...”, and so on.⁴² The verbal shift from “vidi” to “dicunt” to “est/sunt” suggests an epistemological hierarchy that separates what Fulcher personally observed from what he gathered, as he makes explicit, from Solinus and the Pseudo-Alexander letters. The point here is not that the “est/sunt” animals were less true than the “vidi” or “dicunt” animals in Fulcher’s reckoning. Rather, his verb choice taxonomises the animals into categories based on the origin of the information: those he

⁴⁰ On the black swan problem in the history of philosophy, see Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (London, 2012).

⁴¹ Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch.49, p. 779: “In flumine quodam Caesariensis Palaestinae modo haec quadrupedia similiter habentur dicunt”.

⁴² Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch.49, pp. 779-81: “Est crocodillus animal quadrupes... Draco maximus est omnium serpentium... In Asia Scythica sunt frigriphes”.

saw, those he heard about from oral report, and those he read in texts he deemed authoritative.

With limited experience of the plurality of animal life at a time marking only the very beginning of the grand movements towards observational naturalism, Fulcher's use of novel phenomena to confirm the received views of Solinus and the Alexander letters exemplifies the necessity of induction in situations of reduced knowledge. Fulcher also demonstrates the tension that new information creates for received ways of thinking and, by extension, the authoritative *reverendi* who created them. If the new is seen to disconfirm respected authorities, then it is by its very nature a form of subversion. If situations of reduced knowledge create cultures of *auctoritas*, and cultures of *auctoritas* limit receptivity to new knowledge, then increases in knowledge based on observation may be attenuated, making knowledge shift to an exponential curve on a century-by-century level, rather than following a linear progression.

But what Fulcher's account also reveals is that wonder prompts questioning and inquiry, and that if these questions are unanswerable, this may lead responders to defer to the received authority of texts and orthodox ways of thinking. Some animals drawn from the Solinian corpus are analysed through the lens of the known, including "the elk [*alces*], which is comparable to a mule".⁴³ Fulcher describes Solinus as a "most sharp-minded investigator and most expert authority", and suggests that the Alexander letters are a valuable written record of what Alexander "discovered and saw".⁴⁴ This implies that Fulcher's assessment of these texts as authoritative was based on the presumption that Solinus and Alexander had seen more than he had, and that deferring to them as factual authorities ultimately stemmed from a respect for the authority of the senses as well as the authority of age and the written

⁴³ Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch.49, p. 781: "Est alce, mulis comparanda".

⁴⁴ Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch.49, pp.783-4: "exquisitore sagacissimo et dictatore expertissimo... Sed quod iter Alexander Magnus in India reperit et vidit".

word. If true, this is another hint of proto-empiricism.

Fulcher also defers to the complexity of divine marvels as further suggestion that all things were possible: “But who in this great and broad sea [of life] can either know or inquire about God’s marvelous and multitudinous creation [*tot et tanta magnalia*], in which dwell so many animals and reptiles whose number is uncountable?”⁴⁵ On the basis of these defensive claims, it may be possible that Fulcher expected his audiences to be sceptical about the existence of these new animals, but Fulcher asserts that “God makes all things: these and others, big and small” as a means to limiting scepticism, which implied a limitation on God’s capacity to create.⁴⁶ Fulcher’s recourse to pre-existing truths, both physical and moral, therefore stems ultimately from the fact that induction was a necessity in situations where knowledge from received texts clashes with the individual’s sensory experience. Moreover, the awareness that there was much that was unknown about the world in its varied glory predisposed Fulcher to defer back to received traditions. This suggests that situations of reduced knowledge encourage authoritarian attitudes to truth.

Although Fulcher’s case asserts no clear moral, aside from avoiding the potential subversion offered by scepticism, Guibert of Nogent’s *Monodiae* bears a starkly different tone and context. Guibert’s *Monodiae* provides a plethora of examples where inductive reasoning, confirmation bias, and didacticism are used to resolve tensions about wondrous phenomena that appear to cause fear towards the supernatural, and discomfort about truth and falsehood.

Guibert was born c.1050 in Clermont-en-Beauvaisis in northern France. After studying theology under Anselm of Bec, future Archbishop of Canterbury, Guibert was

⁴⁵ Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch. 49, p. 783: “Sed quis potest in hoc mari magno et spatioso tot et tanta Dei magnalia vel scire, vel exquirere, in quo versantur tot animalia et reptilia quorum non est numerus?”

⁴⁶ Fulcher, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, book 3, ch. 49, p. 783: “Haec et alia, pusilla et magna, Deus creat universa”.

promoted to abbot of the minor abbey of Nogent-sous-Coucy in 1104, a position he held until his death in 1121. His *Monodiae* (also known as *De vita sua*), surviving only in a single manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Baluze 42) and a number of fragments, is valued as one of only a handful of proto-autobiographical documents from the long twelfth century.⁴⁷

Jay Rubenstein claimed Guibert's *Monodiae* reveal his life "with an at times disturbing intimacy", while Paul J. Archambault claimed that Guibert's sexually oriented stories and dreams speak to the presence of a possible castration complex and/or Oedipus complex.⁴⁸ The text's existence in so few copies suggests it may have been intended as a private, reflective pseudo-memoir. Guibert's memorialisation of wonders suggests that they were key to his retrospective analysis of what was important in his own life, and that wonders could therefore have an enduring emotional-cognitive impact. However, the text appears not have been strictly private. It is replete with truth claims: "those things I saw or heard in that monastery", "those who witnessed these events swear", "the lesion in her eye was there to confirm the truth of her vision", "What I have said I have said in God's presence, and as my heart is my witness, I have invented nothing", and so on.⁴⁹ This use of epistemological rhetoric suggests Guibert intended it to be read or heard by others, since there is no reason why one would need to convince oneself about the truth of one's own claims. The text's section transitions support this view: "Let us now hear about..."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ On the complex textual history of the *Monodiae*, see Constant Mews, "Guibert of Nogent's *Monodiae* (III, 17) in an appendage to the *De Haeresibus* of Augustine", *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, vol. 33 (1987), pp. 113-27. On the history of autobiography, see Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* (Frankfurt, 1959).

⁴⁸ Jay Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind* (Routledge, 2002), p.2; ⁴⁸ Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiae*, Paul J. Archambault (trans.), *A Monk's Confession* (University Park, 1996), pp.xx-xxiii.

⁴⁹ Guibert, *Monodiae*, pp. 91, 162, 78, 110.

⁵⁰ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 78.

In *Zeichen und Wunder bei Guibert de Nogent*, Karin Fuchs analysed Guibert's various works, focusing on his perception of miracles. Fuchs argued that Guibert perceived miracles as themselves authoritative, suggesting that labelling an event a miracle was in itself a type of truth claim that was subversive to challenge within the power dynamics of the twelfth century.⁵¹ Nevertheless, many did question miracles. A vein of scepticism towards fraudulent relics and miracles runs through Guibert's *Monodiae* and other writings including his well-known *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus*. In this text, Guibert repudiates those who were willing to fabricate wonders to further their own pecuniary interests, especially in the case of relics, a domain of medieval society in which there was an obvious link between forgery and earnings. In this tract and others, Guibert quips that because two churches held heads of John the Baptist, John must therefore have been bicephalic.⁵² (Gervase of Tilbury noted the multiplicity of Jesus' foreskins, but never attempted a similar jest).⁵³

This shows that greater knowledge provides greater scrutiny of wonders, which supports the hypothesis that scepticism increases with knowledge because increased knowledge allows audiences to approach deduction. As Fuchs shows, Guibert was concerned with creating and upholding evidentiary standards with regard to the interpretation of didactic meaning from wondrous phenomena, but only those whose supernaturality had been convincingly ascertained.⁵⁴ However, Guibert created no criteria by which to ascertain

⁵¹ Karin Fuchs, *Zeichen und Wunder bei Guibert de Nogent: Kommunikation, Deutungen, Funktionalisierungen von Wundererzählungen im 12. Jahrhundert* (München, 2008). pp. 2-15.

⁵² Jay Rubenstein, "Guibert of Nogent, Albert of Aachen, and Fulcher of Chartres: Three Crusade Chronicles Intersect", in Marcus Bull and Damien Kempf (eds), *Writing the Early Crusades: Text, Tradition, and Memory* (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 24-37, here p. 25. Guibert's *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus* is edited by R.B.C. Huygens in *CCCM*, vol. 127 (Turnhout, 1993), pp. 79-109. On Guibert's scepticism towards specific relics, see Colin Morris, "A Critique of Popular Religion: Guibert of Nogent on the Relics of the Saints", in G.J. Cuming and Derek Baker (eds), *Popular Belief and Practice* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 55-60; Godefridus J.C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 353-8, with onward references.

⁵³ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 24, pp. 600-601.

⁵⁴ Fuchs, *Zeichen und Wunder bei Guibert de Nogent*, pp. 2-15.

whether a wonder was supernatural or natural, and instead used confirmation bias to understand novel events by conceiving them as proofs for received ways of thinking and normative moral-emotional behavioural codes.

Guibert uses confirmation bias in a number of cases. When lightning struck his native monastery of St-Germer-de-Fly, he interpreted it as divine punishment for sins.⁵⁵ When a travelling priest reported that a man cuts off his own genitalia at the behest of Satan in disguise, Guibert interpreted it as an instruction to avoid lechery.⁵⁶ A number of cases indicate that confirmation bias had a social component, not merely one that was restricted to Guibert as an individual. This affirms Jeroen Deploige's view that Guibert's social space as a monastic historian informed his emotional responses by creating normative emotional codes of behaviour appropriate to events of specific types.⁵⁷

In one story of monastic avarice, Guibert describes a monk who received two *sous* from a local noblewoman. When the monk later contracted dysentery, he perished suddenly "unconfessed and unanointed, having done nothing about that cursed money".⁵⁸ After death, the monk's body was stripped for anointing, whereupon another monk discovered a purse hidden in the deceased man's armpit; "the monk who discovered it threw the purse to the ground in a rage, clapped his hands, and ran to the monks to regale them with this extraordinary tale".⁵⁹

The repetition of this tale to the other monks shows the social resonance of sudden, unexpected events, which had measurable effects on behaviour according to Guibert: "A

⁵⁵ Guibert, *Monodiae*, pp. 78-84.

⁵⁶ Guibert, *Monodiae*, pp. 202-4.

⁵⁷ Jeroen Deploige, "Meurtre politique, guerre civile et catharsis littéraire au XXI^e siècle: les émotions dans l'œuvre de Guibert de Nogent et de Galbert de Bruges", in Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy (eds), *Politiques des émotions au Moyen Âge* (Firenze, 2010), pp. 225-53.

⁵⁸ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 78.

sudden death such as this one made the others far more circumspect in matters of money”.⁶⁰ However, Guibert creates no clear criteria by which to determine what money is cursed and what is not. It seems embedded within the tale, though, that money kept in close proximity to the body was particularly dangerous. In a way, this is both a moral belief, and a claim about an interrelationship of physical properties: money touching the skin causes disease by transgressing Christian moral codes that condemned greed and worldliness. Gervase’s recourse to didacticism may therefore act within both the space of both moral and physical truths.

As a physical claim, Gervase is clearly influenced by his monastic milieu and comes at a time before knowledge of germ theory. James Franklin divided new knowledge into “known unknowns” and “unknown unknowns”, a distinction that is not at all paradoxical.⁶¹ This allows differentiation between Guibert’s and Fulcher’s wonders, as Fulcher’s concerned observation of something known to exist (unobserved animal forms), whereas Guibert’s concerned something completely unknown within medieval society (germ theory). Despite this distinction, however, both Fulcher’s and Guibert’s reactions can be characterised as forms of confirmation bias. In the realm of physical truths (Fulcher’s case), this relies on induction; in the realm of moral messages (Guibert’s case), this relies on the didactic mentality.

Although wonders clearly had didactic potential, the use of confirmation bias quashed doubt and its concomitant discomfort. This is made all the more clear in Guibert’s description of a Jewish boy who converted to Christianity and entered the Benedictine abbey of St-Germer-de-Fly. Guibert describes a young Jewish boy who was rescued from a crusader pogrom in Rouen by a charitable nobleman, who entrusted the boy to the care of

⁶⁰ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 78.

⁶¹ James Franklin, *What Science Knows and How It Knows It* (), pp. 179-80.

his mother Héliſende, Countess of Eu. Héliſende asked the boy if he would like to become Christian. Out of fear of self-preservation — “thinking, in fact, he would otherwise be murdered just as he had seen his fellow Jews being murdered” — the boy assented and was baptised.⁶² At the baptism, the priest dropped wax into the baptismal font, whereupon “there was... such a perfect sign of the cross that no human hand could ever have managed to trace anything of the kind”.⁶³

Guibert supports the veracity of the marvel with the claim that the countess herself reported it to him, that their relationship was close and that she was known to be trustworthy, that the priest had corroborated the story (whether to Guibert personally is left unsaid), and that they had both engaged in truth gestures, swearing multiple times “in God’s name” that the story was true.⁶⁴ Despite each of these elements outwardly improving the story’s verisimilitude, Guibert remained sceptical: “Myself, I would not have paid much attention to this matter if I had not witnessed this child’s extraordinary progress [in Christian learning]”.⁶⁵ Here, Guibert’s sensory experience (the primary form of evidence described in **Chapter 2**) trumped the secondary forms of evidence described in **Chapter 1**.

Guibert’s initial scepticism was therefore overturned by his own personal experience, amplified by confirmation bias. The boy flourished in his new monastic environment despite repeated attempts by his family to compel him to return to Judaism. Guibert describes the boy as “a deeply intuitive young man, never jealous or cantankerous, and always pleasant”.⁶⁶ As an adolescent, he excelled in his studies and became a valuable member of the monastic community. Guibert describes sending him a copy of his tract against the “heretical,

⁶² Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 112.

⁶³ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 112.

⁶⁴ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 112.

⁶⁵ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 112.

⁶⁶ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 113.

Judaising” Jean I, Count of Soissons, whereupon the boy wrote his own book defending the Christian faith.⁶⁷ Guibert’s personal experience of the boy’s holiness and enthusiasm for Christianity therefore acted as post-hoc affirmation of the prior wonder: “The appearance of the cross at his baptism, then, was not a chance event but was divinely willed. It was a sign of the faith that would develop in this man of Jewish stock, a rare event in our time”.⁶⁸

In a monastic milieu characterised by daily contemplation of Christian precepts and biblical stories, it seems inevitable that the ways of thinking encouraged in biblical texts, specifically the interpretation of prophecies, visions, and signs, would influence the way monks responded to novel phenomena in the real world. As such, Guibert’s recourse to confirmation bias may come as little surprise. This could be all the more so due to the tension inherent in allowing non-religious, non-confirmational explanations of the world to flourish, especially that of chance as a key determinant of events, which contravenes the pervasive view of divine arrangement. This tension surrounding wonders as potentially offering non-religious explanations of the world will be further explored in **Chapter 5**. What is most important here is the observation that didacticism is predicated on confirmation bias, and that it did not immediately lead to a dismissal of concerns about the physical truth or falsehood of events. In some cases, the proposition of a moral message could be predicated on the prior proving of a physical truth.

⁶⁷ Guibert, *Monodiae*, pp. 193-5.

⁶⁸ Guibert, *Monodiae*, p. 113.

4.3 — Didacticism and Scepticism

This section argues that there existed a variety of individual propensities to believe or disbelieve wonders, and that wondrous stories embedded with moral messages confirmed pre-existing views for believers while attempting to convince sceptics to join the orthodox fold. This does not contradict this dissertation's central premise that there exists an emotional-cognitive process used by all people in response to wonders. Rather, the present section claims that different people may move left or right on the belief-disbelief continuum to varying degrees based on the same piece of evidence, and that some people might begin at different locations on the continuum for particular objects or more generally. This may stem from a variety of interpersonal differences including preconceptions, memories, levels of education, and breadth of prior sensory experiences.

In some sense, then, didactic stories had to do greater work when targeted at sceptics. For this reason, stories written with greater respect for the physical truth of the events they described may have been better received by more sceptical sections of the population. This gave a strong incentive for authors of didactic tales to first prove their stories true, as belief in the truth of the story may improve rates of audiences yielding to its moral. This is especially the case for audiences who viewed didactic stories as a form of socio-moral manipulation, or who were more likely to disbelieve information that was told to them and not seen by them.

This chapter will explore four pieces of evidence: Hugh of St Victor's description of the plurality of people in terms of their tendency to believe or disbelieve, the variance between chroniclers who recorded marvels tales in terms of their attitudes to physical truth

and moral message, and the first crusaders' discovery of the lance in Antioch in 1098, which generated both belief and disbelief in different groups. Following this is a discussion of the *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, whose introduction requests its audiences to minimise concerns about truth in preference for capitulating to belief, thereby demonstrating the rational conflict between moral message and physical truth.

A variety of attitudes to truth and evidence existed in the Middle Ages, and this is something of which medieval people were themselves aware. Hugh of St Victor, one of the early twelfth century's leading theological authorities and mystics, penned his *De sacramentis Christianae fidei* around 1134 in the context of the Victorine school founded by William of Champeaux, under whom Hugh studied.⁶⁹ Hugh's *De sacramentis* offers a wide-ranging exploration of his views on the nature of the divine, natural laws, and the place of humankind in the divine order. Michael Gorman described the *De sacramentis* as the "first theological *summa*", prefiguring later *summae* including Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*.⁷⁰

Hugh's role as an influential religious pedagogue inspired his own uptake of interpersonal rhetorical strategies for use in preaching. Hugh's admonition that scholars "learn everything" so as to better be able to teach has important ramifications for his attitudes to homiletics.⁷¹ Hugh proposed that awareness of the variety of individual tendencies to believe or disbelieve was a necessity for preachers and evangelists, who had to use nuanced strategies targeted at particular subcategories of people in order to maintain the

⁶⁹ On Hugh's intellectual context, see Paul Rorem, *Hugh of St Victor* (Oxford, 2009).

⁷⁰ Michael Gorman, "Hugh of St Victor", in J.J.E. Gracia and T.B. Noone (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 320-25.

⁷¹ Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, C.H. Buttmer (ed.) (Washington, 1939), book 6, ch. 3, p. 137: "Omnia disce, videbis postea nihil esse superfluum". On Hugh's pedagogical philosophy more generally, see Brian D. FitzGerald, "Medieval Theories of Education: Hugh of St Victor and John of Salisbury", in Christopher Brooke and Elizabeth Fraser (eds), *Ideas of Education: Philosophy and Politics from Plato to Dewey* (Abingdon, 2013), pp. 52-65.

unity of the Catholic flock against the ever-present danger of doubts and alternative explanations for the universe. Hugh taxonomised his contemporaries into:

- 1) naysayers, who immediately reject in mind what they hear and deny what is said; 2) [doubters], who select one side or the other from what they hear but do not permit an affirmation; 3) considerers, who although they understand that the one is more probable than the other, they nevertheless do not presume to assert whether it is true; 4) believers, who approve of a particular side, such that they turn their approval into an assertion [of its truth, and] 5) knowers, who know more perfectly [because] they comprehend the thing itself in their presence, as it [truly] is.⁷²

While the final category acts as an affirmation of sensory experience as the optimal route to knowledge, the categories of “naysayers”, “doubters”, and “considerers” suggest that the *populus* was not an amorphous, singular body, but a pluralistic group of people who required convincing and teaching using discrete strategies predicated on each person’s particular attitudes to truth and falsehood. Specifically, this implies that Hugh’s “naysayers”, “doubters”, and “considerers” required greater proofs for physical truths in stories before moral messages could be instilled.

The variety of individual approaches to truth and falsehood can be further seen in the writings of authors, whose texts stand as the best extant record of audience responses to wonders. As Nancy Partner has shown, William of Newburgh bore a consistent concern for the “ratio” underpinning wondrous events, with this “ratio” being either subjectively natural

⁷² Hugh of St Victor, *De sacramentis*, in *PL*, vol.176, col.330: “Sunt enim quidam qui audita statim animo repellunt et contradicunt his quae dicuntur: et hii sunt negantes. Alii in iis quae audiunt alteram quaecunque partem eligunt ad existimationem, sed non approbant affirmationem. Quamvis enim unum est duobus magis probabile intelligunt, utrum tamen adhuc idipsum verum sit asserere non praesumunt: hii sunt estimantes. Alii sic alteram partem approbant, ut ejus approbationem etiam in assertionem assumant: hii sunt credentes. Post illa genera cognitionis illud profectius sequitur cum rem non ex audito solo, sed per suam praesentiam notificatur. Perfectius enim agnoscunt qui ipsam rem ut est in sua praesentia comprehendunt: hii sunt scientes. Primi ergo sunt negantes, secundi dubitantes, tertii estimantes, quarti credentes, quinti scientes”. To the best of my knowledge, there remains no critical edition of this text, and so the *PL* version has been used.

or preternatural.⁷³ On the other hand, Gervase of Tilbury appears to have been content to record whatever stories possessed a high degree of wondrous attraction, whether for entertainment, morality, or both.

In **Chapter 3**, Gervase's *Otia* was described as pursuing entertain as its primary goal, but entertainment and didacticism are not mutually exclusive aims. Since attention is necessary before a moral can be communicated, let alone yielded to, there is some sense that these two aims are intertwined. At the opening to a story about a fowler who possessed the ability to kill birds with words alone, “[which] we ourselves witnessed”, Gervase claims:

When we relate these things and others like them to Your Highness, most serene Prince, all we are doing is lightening the burden of care which you have on your mind by means of a pause for relaxation. They may be dismissed as idle chatter, but they ought to be given a hearing, because they can provide no trifling instruction or warning with regard to many things.⁷⁴

Here, Gervase reveals that he expected audiences to potentially dismiss the truth of the stories as “idle chatter”. However, the salutary moral message made the story important regardless of its truth or falsehood, or emotively powerful in a way that had no relation to its verisimilitude.

Here can be seen one possibility with regard to didacticism: the idea that imbuing a story with a moral can lead audiences to side-step the evidentiary process. Gervase fails to explain, though, what salutary message this particular case was supposed to provide, but the claim that it could have had a message shows the extent to which medieval responders to wonder tales could readily approach novel phenomena with didacticism in mind. This chapter contends that this didactic mentality was a byproduct of the difficulties associated

⁷³ Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments: the Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 62-6.

⁷⁴ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, book 3, ch. 84, pp. 716-17: “Cum hec et hiis similia tue celsitudini, princeps serenissime, memoramus, nichil aliud agimus nisi quod tue sollicitudinis seria ociorum parentesi temperamus, que licet uanitati linguose possint ascribi, sustinenda tamen sunt ex eo quod non modicam ad multa prestare possunt doctrinam aut cautelam”.

with ascertaining the physical truth or untruth of wondrous events given the information scarcity of medieval society.

Unlike Gervase, some chroniclers wrote with little concern for the didactic potential of wonders, or ascertaining their links to the divine, as appears to have been the case for Ralph of Coggeshall. In his *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Ralph narrates six wonder tales sequentially: the wild man of Suffolk; the green children of Woolpit; the discovery of giants' teeth on the seashore in Essex; the story of the demon Malekin who appears to a knight's family; the story about how a young Gervase of Tilbury condemned a girl to death as a member of the Publicani after refusing his sexual advances; and the vision of peasant girl Alpais of Cudot, who healed her own sickness by fasting and then allegedly fasted afterwards for several decades.⁷⁵ Each of these tales ends devoid of thorough first-person commentary on truth, moral message, or preternaturality, which shows Ralph's adoption of the traditional objectivity of medieval chronicle writing.

Elizabeth Freeman proposed that these sequentially narrated stories, each concerning a corrupted 'body' (a semi-aquatic wild man, green-skinned children, giants, and so on), as a whole represented Ralph's moral message that the 'body' of the unified Christian ecclesia was under attack from contemporary heretical movements like the Publicani.⁷⁶ This would appear to take the evidence beyond its face value. Had Ralph wished to imbue these stories with the paranaetic moral that the Church ought to stand up as a unified 'body' against dangerous heretical incursions, he could simply have made this explicit, but this does not take place. Here may be seen the potential danger of universalising claims that medieval people had no concern for physical truths, or that all things written in the Middle Ages were aimed at didactic instruction. This would appear not to be the case on the basis of

⁷⁵ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.) (London, RS, 1875), pp. 117-28.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Freeman, "Wonders, Prodigies, and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*", *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2000), pp. 127-43.

chroniclers like Ralph who record seemingly non-didactic wonders, but do display a concern for the truth or falsehood of their stories by grounding them in the typical medieval evidentiary frameworks described in **Chapter 1**.

The divisibility of audiences on the basis of their tendency to believe or disbelieve is further evidenced in the First Crusade participants' dichotomous reactions to the apparent discovery in Antioch in June 1098 of the lance that pierced Jesus' side at his crucifixion. A variety of primary sources describe this event, including the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitarum*, which is generally considered an eyewitness account of the First Crusade, Fulcher of Chartres' *Historia Hierosolymitana*, and the *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem* of Provençal cleric Raymond of Aguilers, who claims to have been a witness to the discovery of the lance.⁷⁷ These sources each note the decline in morale of the crusader armies during the protracted siege that aimed to compel the surrender of Antioch's Muslim governor Yaghi Siyan and his forces.⁷⁸

At this time, a Provençal cleric, Stephen of Valence, had a vision in which Christ appeared and announced that the crusaders would be granted divine aid in five days if they maintained prayer and proper Christian behaviour. The crusade's nominal leader, the apostolic legate Adhémar of Le Puy, was sceptical of this claim, and compelled Stephen to swear an oath he was being truthful. Around the same time, another Provençal, the serving-man Peter Bartholomew, declared that he had received five visions in which St Andrew revealed the location of the holy lance.

⁷⁷ The primary sources on which the following discussion is made are described in detail in Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 1986), pp. 95-8.

⁷⁸ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 241-5; Christopher Tyerman, *God's War* (London, 2006), pp. 143-5; Elizabeth Lapina, *Warfare and the Miraculous in the First Crusade* (University Park, 2015), especially ch. 2. On the *Gesta Francorum* as an eye-witness account, see Yuval Noah Harari, "Eyewitnessing in Accounts of the First Crusade: the *Gesta Francorum* and Other Contemporary Narratives", *Crusades*, vol. 3 (2004), pp. 77-99.

There is a possibility that hunger played a part in creating the visions; Stephen Runciman suggested that Peter's periodic blindness from February 1098 was directly related to the widespread famine within crusader armies.⁷⁹ While many were sceptical, including Adhémar, the advocacy of the leader of the southern French contingent (Raymond of Toulouse) protected both Stephen and Peter. In the presence of chronicler Raymond of Aguilers, the crusaders dug at the location nominated by Peter Bartholomew and on 14 June found the lance, and Raymond of Aguilers reports that he kissed the lance upon its exhumation.

While the discovery improved the army's mood, there were some, particularly, it seems, among the Sicilians, who thought the event was a Provençal fraud aimed at increasing their political prestige at the expense of other factions in the supranational crusader forces. There was a potentially blatant ulterior motive, in that the crusaders showered oblations on Raymond of St Gilles, into whose custody the lance was transferred. Some crusade leaders openly accused Peter Bartholomew of simply bringing a piece of iron with him to the location of the excavation, including both secular and ecclesiastical leaders such as Arnulf of Chocques, the unnamed bishop of Apt, Robert of Normandy, Robert of Flanders, and the Italo-Norman leaders Tancred and Bohemund. Others pointed to the fact that there was a second holy lance in Constantinople. While the battle for Antioch soon proceeded, with the lance serving as a symbol through which the crusaders' courage was roused, scepticism faded into the background in a situation where disbelief could have had starkly negative consequences for the crusader military operation.

The crusaders' eventual victory at Antioch led directly to the lance's accretion of mythological claims; even sceptics like Bohemund and Robert of Flanders later reported personally to Pope Paschal II that the lance had played a part in their victory. After the

⁷⁹ Stephen Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 1, pp. 241-6.

death of Adhémar of Le Puy at Antioch on 1 August 1098, during the siege of Jerusalem, Peter Bartholomew and other visionaries reported seeing Adhémar's ghost, who revealed that the lance was genuine and that he had been punished by God for his disbelief, a claim that suggested scepticism was a divinely punishable sin. Despite this supernatural anti-sceptical polemic, suspicion about Peter Bartholomew's truthfulness was protracted. Almost a year later, on 8 April 1099, Peter, frustrated by ongoing and widespread scepticism towards his visions, offered to prove his honesty by undergoing a trial by fire. This he survived, although he perished from residual injuries twelve days later, leaving the question of his possible duplicity unresolved according to the standards of guilt or innocence upon which trial by fire is founded.⁸⁰ Afterwards, Raymond of St Gilles sent men to assassinate Arnulf of Chocques, who was seen as the ringleader of the sceptics.⁸¹

This episode shows the potential for newly discovered phenomena to be analysed using confirmation bias. Receiving *a* lance as *the* holy lance of biblical tradition showcases this subordination of the general to the specific that is an essential component of the didactic mentality. Further, the lance confirmed the crusaders' perception of divine support for their holy mission, a further example of confirmation bias.⁸² This episode also shows the potential abuse of wonder as a form of politicking between groups of people with competing claims, something of which more sceptical crusaders appear to have been aware. Given the widespread abundance of orally retold wonders, and the prevalence of prophecies and visions as key features of Christian ways of thinking, it may have been supremely subversive to react with scepticism towards visions and prophecies, even those that appeared to resemble political corruption and social manipulation.

⁸⁰ Tyerman, *God's War*, pp.143-5.

⁸¹ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, pp. 95-8.

⁸² Penny J. Cole, "O God, the heathen have come into your inheritance (Ps. 78.1): The Theme of Religious Pollution in Crusader Documents, 1095-1188", in Maya Schatzmiller (ed.), *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria* (Leiden, 1993), pp. 84-111.

Despite this, the morale increase supplied by the discovery of the lance within the crusader armies implies, once again, a diversity of responses to wonders within medieval audiences. Those who were sceptical of what appears to have been a Provençal manipulation of wonder may have been less likely to feel the effects of increased morale that belief in the truth of the vision and the lance conferred. Those who were more believing, having seen the lance and subjectively affirmed it as the holy lance, were more likely to have felt the emotive force of wonder. This shows that individual variation within reactions to wonders could have significant impact on behavioural outcomes, and could have consequences for those who discovered or invented the wonder if it was seen to be of dubious factuality.

The tension between moral message and physical truth is further exemplified in the opening of the *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, written in the 1170s, which requests that its audiences suspend concerns about truth or falsehood and simply believe what they are told. Because the stories within the *Collectaneum* acted as confirmation of Christian precepts and beliefs, their salutary benefits were expected to override audiences' expected concern for evidence. Given the monastic authorship and intended audience, it seems clear that this concern for evidence existed within monastic communities as much as other branches of the medieval social structure.

The authors of the *Collectaneum* open with the possibility that their readers will “immediately hold this book in contempt” if “anything less acceptable has been found in the work”.⁸³ This demonstrates the authors' concern that the *Collectaneum's* cautionary tales may be dismissed on truth terms. However, the alleged origin of the stories as from “the sayings of holy fathers or stories of faithful men” and “not the frivolities or the inventions of fabulists” exemplifies the authors' hierarchy of truth on the basis of social class. As shown in

⁸³ *Collectaneum exemplorum et visionum Clarevallense*, Olivier Legendre (ed.), in *CCCM*, vol.208 (Turnhout, 2005), prologue, p. 5: “Si quid forte minus gratum in hoc opere repertum fuerit, lecturos monemus, ne statim librum contemptui habeant”.

Chapter 3, the late twelfth century was a time in which the ecclesiastical establishment was attempting to defend its ground as the official determiner of accepted truths in a world in which traditional boundaries between *historia* and *ficta* were being challenged. Moreover, the *Collectaneum*'s claim that "nothing here is frivolous or false, nothing is considered fabulous" supports Green's view that didactic texts, as *argumentum*, occupied a liminal space between *vera* and *ficta*, as something either true or untrue but with moral resonance in relation to true things.⁸⁴ This therefore exemplifies the tension between authors' didactic intentions and audiences' desire for evidence for the physical truth of wonders.

The *Collectaneum* attempts to combat scepticism through deference to the divine origin of wondrous events, following the Augustinian view of marvels as divinely originated aberrations in the natural order established in a stable form at creation. As a response to wonders, scepticism was therefore dangerous as a potential limit to salvation: "Not all the things written [here] should be judged the works of men, but just as God's marvels must be taken up and revered, it is therefore reckless to dispute things of this sort and to hesitate to believe even a single one".⁸⁵ The authors of the *Collectaneum* claim their stories "require faith, not reason; assent, not argument; a simple mind, not a pedantic one; devotion, not cunning; friendship, not deceit; belief, not doubt; flexibility, not obstinacy".⁸⁶

In essence, this claim acts as a form of authorial leverage that, if accepted by audiences, permits authors an all-encompassing ascendancy over both the truth of information and its moral interpretation. But the authors imply that audiences are unlikely

⁸⁴ Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*, p. 135; *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, p. 5: "nichil hic frivolum aut falsum, nichil habetur fabulosum".

⁸⁵ *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, pp. 5-6: "Non enim que inscribuntur ut hominum opera sunt estimanda, sed sicut Dei mirabilia accipiende et reverenda et iccirco temerarium est huiusmodi facta discutere et ad singula quoque herere".

⁸⁶ *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, p. 6: "Fidem exigunt non rationem; assensum, non argumentum; simplicem animum, non scrupulosum; devotum, non versutum; amicum, non insidiosum; credulum, non dubium; flexibilem, non obstinatum".

to assent to this in reality, since they admit that “what is collected [here] is to be believed, albeit not everything”.⁸⁷ In reality, what the authors appear to have hoped is that their audiences would suspend concerns about the truth or falsehood of the stories in preference for accepting their salutary didactic messages: “There are some things that, although they do not have the testimony of certitude, readers are however supplied the ointment of devotion [from them]”.⁸⁸ This shows that imbuing a story with a moral message could absolve concerns about truth, leading audiences to side-step the evidentiary process, or at least that authors could hope that this was a possibility.

Buried within the introduction to the *Collectaneum* is therefore a profound picture of the potential anxiety authors of didactic texts could experience as a result of the tension between moral message and physical truth. The anonymous authors possessed a clear apprehension about the potential scepticism of their audiences, who could dismiss the moral if the physical truth of a wonder was not sufficiently proven using real-world evidence.

The authors also possessed a nuanced understanding of the subjectivity of knowledge, and the role of evidence in leading individuals along a scale from belief to disbelief in facts that were either objectively true or not, as when they claim that audiences’ doubts are not proof of falsehood:

Certainly, because [our stories] are not affirmed as true, they are not therefore proven false.

Things that do not attain the title of a true statement do not [automatically] become the mole of falsity. Just as everything that is false has no foundation of certainty, thus many things that are uncertain stand to some extent on the basis of truth.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, p. 6: “Quicquid... etsi non omne cogitur credi”.

⁸⁸ *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, p. 6: “Sunt namque quedam... que quamvis non habeant certitudinis testimonium, lectori tamen ministrant devotionis unguentum”.

⁸⁹ *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, p. 6: “Quamvis denique que in hoc continentur volumine non omnia affirmantur esse vera, tamen ex industria ponuntur nulla falsa. Verum non ideo falsa probantur, quia vera non asseruntur. Non omnia neuum contrahunt falsitatis, que non pretendunt titulum assertionis. Sicut falsa queque nullum habent fundamentum certitudinis, sic multa incerta, aliqua subsistunt soliditate veritatis”.

On the one hand, the *Collectaneum* characterises its readers as potentially sceptical in a manner subversive to Augustinian views of marvels as present emanations of the ongoing power of the divine.

As has been shown in **Chapter 2**, the authors of the *Collectaneum* were concerned with establishing the physical truth of their stories. However, due to the pragmatic difficulties associated with research as a result of limitations on communication, the authors were forced to retreat to the didactic mentality as a means to resolving these tensions about truth or falsehood. In a world in which physical truths were exceedingly difficult to fathom, it may have been better to simply consider events in terms of their possible moral resonance.

While the authors appear to have believed that objective physical truths were real, there is a strong sense running through the *Collectaneum*'s introduction that such objective truths were frustratingly unattainable. While audiences were expected therefore to be sceptical, to deny the possibility of any truth within the stories whatsoever and “hesitate to believe even a single one” despite their authors’ best efforts, the monks themselves were compelled to instruct readers not to concern themselves too much about whether or not the stories were true. This was either because all of them were true, even though they had not been indubitably verified, or that the truth of the stories did not matter because they were morally useful (“supplying the ointment of devotion”). Anything could have been potentially true because of divine omnipotence — “God does whatever he wants” — but what was true or false was not within man’s power to ascertain: “Uncertain things and those confirmed by less authority we entrust to God, he to whom nothing is impossible, he who makes whatever he wishes and precisely as he wishes”.⁹⁰ Here can be seen once again the use of the divine omnipotence argument to resolve tensions about truth and falsehood, and the reference to

⁹⁰ *Collectaneum Clarevallense*, p. 6: “Incerta et auctoritate minus astipulata committamus Deo, cui nichil est impossibile, qui facit quicquid uult et quicquid uult ita fit ut uult”.

providence as a comfort to uncertainty. At the same time, the *Collectaneum* exemplifies how situations of reduced knowledge can lead to a reliance on wonders as proof for pre-existing moral messages and give further credence to divine omnipotence as an explanation for all things. **Chapter 5** will further examine the relationship between Christianity and wonder.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that there were a variety of responses to wonders, through which historians may access the plurality of belief and disbelief within medieval audiences. This created complexity for those recording didactic tales in that more sceptical audience groups may have wished to receive convincing evidence for the physical truth of a story before yielding to its moral message. Given that wonders could be used and abused as a form of socio-political manipulation and power-brokering, this added importance to proving a wonder's physical truth before submitting to its paranaetic message.

As with wonder tales generally, the optimal physical proof for a story may have been personal observation, as in cases such as the Bishop of Gerona's setting of the young girl allegedly kidnapped by demons before his townspeople. In this case, the physical truth of the event, established by seeing the girl so damaged by a perceived demonic kidnapping, may have been the ideal strategy predicating audiences' acceptance of the moral message and its consequent alteration of behaviour. However, this did not preclude the possibility of social manipulation, as in the case of the Antioch lance, in which some audience groups viewed the discovery as fraudulent even after presentation of the physical evidence in the form of the lance itself.

Permeating authors' use of wonders is a tendency towards confirmation bias, especially in respect to Christian moral teachings, and there is some sense that this cognitive bias was key to creating the socio-moral normativity and moral unity of the Church, a primary ecclesiastical desideratum. However, the tendency towards confirmation bias stems from a comparative lack of ontological knowledge, which predisposes the new to be used as evidence for the old, and encourages cultures of *auctoritas*. Even within the celebrated movements towards observational naturalism taking place across the twelfth century, it was initially nature's profundity as a source for proof of Christian teachings that was widely celebrated, as when Baldwin of Canterbury complimented Gerald of Wales' moralisations of birds, or in the growing popularity of the bestiary traditions, which subordinated observed fact to moral teaching. This suggests there may be a link between reduced knowledge of physical processes and increased prevalence of didacticism, a problem that may be ameliorated by broad-ranging sensory experience and frequent communication with experts with similarly broad-ranging sensory experience. **Chapter 5** will claim that this intellectual climate also increased the verisimilitude of the divine omnipotence claim, but that there was nevertheless a significant undercurrent within medieval society of dissatisfaction towards supernatural beliefs that did not accord with the evidence of the senses.

Chapter 5 —

Wonder, Knowledge, and Christianity

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that a didactic mentality and inductive reasoning influenced the progression of the evidentiary chain commenced by wonder. The present chapter explores how the incentive structures built within medieval society may have been broadly anti-sceptical, but that religious truths were nevertheless questioned because wonder leads to a desire for evidence. This chapter also argues that the widespread desire for certainty in marvels lent strength to the claim of divine omnipotence as an explanation for all things. In this way, religious explanations for the world limited the potential of wonder as a process leading to conceptual exploration and ontological knowledge. Some religious figures therefore deliberately aimed to keep audiences at the initial, emotional stage of wonder, without progressing to its later, cognitive stages, or else aimed to direct wonder solely towards present marvels that affirmed biblical marvels.

The Christian worldview offered a trade-off between the advancement of ontological knowledge and a feeling of existential comfort born of providence. Despite this, many medieval ecclesiastics were curious about the marvelous possibilities embedded in creation, and doubtful about truths that did not cohere with their sensory experience altered to align

with scriptural truths. In some sense, then, the evolutionary-biological mechanisms that increase knowledge (for example curiosity and wonder) were at odds with the polemic of those scholars of the long twelfth century who sought to maintain the privacy of the divine ‘secrets’ embedded in nature.

In her exploration of medieval ecclesiastical culture, Sabina Flanagan has demonstrated that the Middle Ages was as much an age of doubt as an age of faith.¹ This chapter will explore the possibility of disbelief in God in the long twelfth century, and show how wonders could be used to deny the tenability of the non-believer’s worldview, and thereby re-affirm Christian beliefs. But, on rare occasions, wonders could also have non-Christian worldviews embedded within them, as Carl Watkins has shown.

Watkins analysed William of Canterbury’s claim that the death of William II (Rufus), King of England, from an arrow wound sustained while hunting was a result of his spiritual bankruptcy, and not chance, to which contemporary chroniclers accused William Rufus of paying excessive heed. William of Canterbury writes: “To admit to the power of chance (*casus*) in the physical world is to detract from the power of the creator”.² This shows the danger of ascribing observed phenomena to chance, which is supremely subversive in any context of dogmatic attachment to divine causation.

There are strong reasons for accepting Watkins’ assessment of chance as subversive and fracturing, despite its infrequent appearance in the historical record. Where this chapter deviates from Watkins’ views, though, is in its reflection on how medieval religious culture interacted with the wonder-evidence chain at the macro-level, and how the inherent desire

¹ Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout, 2008).

² Carl Watkins, “Providence, Experience, and Doubt in Medieval England”, in Jan-Melissa Schramm, Subha Mikerji and Yota Batsaki (eds), *Fictions of Knowledge* (New York, 2012), pp.40-60, here pp.45-7. Quoting William of Canterbury, *Miraculorum Gloriosi Martyris Thomae Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi*, in James Craigie Robertson (ed.), *Materials for the History of Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, RS, 1875), vol. 1, pp. 282-3.

for certainty was a prop for religious worldviews that paradoxically lowered certainties about physical processes by limiting conceptual exploration. Indeed, the dogmatic certainty embedded in religious thinking acted a barrier to abstract thinking about ontological truths. Thinking about the supernatural world takes up time that could be otherwise spent thinking about the physical world. Moreover, this was more than just an opportunity cost, because thinking about the physical world was also actively discouraged. This chapter also contributes in its adoption of concepts from communications theory, psychology, and religious studies. These concepts from outside the traditional ken of medievalism offer fresh ways of considering medieval culture, and facilitate novel avenues of thought with regard to texts. Specifically, they allow insight into how novelty appears dangerous in cultures with high normativity, which discourage ontological exploration.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first considers the intersection between wonder and knowledge, and offers a taxonomy for different types of knowledge. The second proposes that non-believers are likely to have existed in the Middle Ages, at least in part because wonder commences a process of evidence whose optimum form is sensory experience, which may devalue the Christian metanarrative. This section proposes that ecclesiastics be conceptualised as intra-religious evangelists working to quash doubt and incipient disbelief, which were widespread in medieval society as a consequence of the incongruity between sensory experience and Christian miracle stories. The third section explores certainty and faith. It proposes that Christian thinkers aimed to keep wonder at its emotional stages, or else to permit it to progress to its cognitive stages only if the wonder confirmed a Christian precept. The final section argues that this was a distortion of wonder's bio-evolutionary purpose.

5.1 — Wonder and Knowledge

This section explores the incentives embedded in medieval society with regard to belief or disbelief in wonders, and how these incentives intersected with knowledge. If wonder's cognitive stages create new knowledge, then by definition wonder commences with less knowledge. When considering the definition of wonder to be a reaction to novel phenomena, this means an individual's potential to experience wonder is inversely correlated with their level of ontological knowledge. The same may be said for cultural groups. However, what constitutes desirable knowledge is clearly determined in particular cultural milieux. This section will explore Augustine's view of wonder as inversely correlated with knowledge, and will offer the view that this distinction helps explain Max Weber's concept of the desacralisation of Western society between the medieval and modern periods.

Augustine argued that wonder is inversely correlated with knowledge, and that it therefore declines as individuals and groups mature:

Although many are amazed at them, these [wonders] are understood by those who inquire into this world, and through the progress of the generations they become less wonderful, as they are repeated more often and known by more people. Such things include the eclipses of the sun and moon, some kinds of stars that appear only rarely, earthquakes, monstrous births of living things, and other such things. None of these occur without the will of God, but this is not apparent to most people.³

³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, W.J. Mountain (ed.), in *CCSL*, vol. 50 (Turnhout, 1968), book 3, ch. 2, §7, p. 132, ll. 9-15: "Quae licet multi stupeant ab inquisitoribus huius saeculi comprehensa sunt et progressu generationum quo saepius repetita et a pluribus cognita eo minus mira sunt, sicuti sunt defectus luminarium et raro existentes quaedam species siderum et terrae motus et monstrosi partus animantium et quaeque similia, quorum nihil fit nisi dei uoluntate sed plerisque non apparet".

Embedded within Augustine's view is the perception that wonder is inversely correlated with knowledge, a claim that supports the view that wonder and cognition are intimately intertwined. One implication of this is that medieval adults would have had greater opportunity to experience wonder than modern adults, because of increases in ontological knowledge over the course of the modern period due to scientific advances, the introduction of mandatory schooling, and increases in literacy. Augustine's view therefore suggests that wonder is key to the Weberian *Entzauberung* ("demystification" or "disenchantment") of Western society from medieval to modern. This coalesces with Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park's claim in *Wonder and the Order of Nature* that wonder was being pushed to the boundaries across the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries.⁴ Examples of movements towards greater ontological knowledge between medieval and modern periods include the transition from Galenic medicine to modern medicine, astrology to astronomy, alchemy to chemistry, and superstition to science.

A second implication of Augustine's view is that information asymmetry creates wonder asymmetry: those who have knowledge of a thing do not feel wonder at it, while those who do not have knowledge do feel wonder. However, Augustine also bemoans that "most people" do not view the natural as evidence for the supernatural, as commanded by Paul in Romans 1:20: "Through everything God made, people can clearly see his invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — so they have no excuse for not knowing God". In Augustine's reckoning, widespread sensory experience therefore correlates with religious disbelief, or at least complacency towards the wondrous potential embedded within creation, of which he was aware due to his close engagement with Christian scripture in a world of religious pluralism: the Mediterranean in the early fifth century.

⁴ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonder and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (New York, 1998).

Augustine argued that this complacency had to be overcome by deliberately viewing all created things as wondrous evidence for the divine, and that a consistent self-instigated feeling of wonder was admirable. To worship the world was to worship God. To what extent this idea influenced the practice of wonder in the twelfth century is open to question. Moreover, to worship the world in its entirety may be an aberration of the purpose of wonder as leading to assessments of evidence about specific phenomena.

Questions about knowledge in the Middle Ages raise potentially thorny definitional concerns, which gives importance to close consideration of knowledge types. Thomas Sowell, a communications theorist, divided knowledge into two types: mundane knowledge and special knowledge (or expertise). The former describes everyday knowledge based on an individual's sensory experiences within local spaces, while the latter refers to knowledge developed from the study of rarified intellectual theory that is to varying degrees divorced from quotidian lived experience.⁵

Gillian Rosemary Evans has identified a similar conceptual division within medieval discourse about their own world, based on the perceived distinction between ecclesiastics and the *populus*, where ecclesiastics possessed formal expertise, while the *populus* possessed quotidian knowledge and craftsmanship.⁶ One may further divide special knowledge into the categories of abstract and ontological. These dichotomies allow for greater scrutiny of the relationship between wonder, knowledge, and sensory experience. Indeed, the distinction between ontological and abstract knowledge underpins Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park's observation that wonder and science are antithetical, that one may enter a scientific field out of wonder, but that the emotion of wonder must be dismissed through the acquisition of knowledge in order to be a successful scholar.⁷

⁵ Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York, 1980), pp. 3-20.

⁶ Gillian Rosemary Evans, *Getting it Wrong: the Medieval Epistemology of Error* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 121-50.

⁷ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonder and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York, 1998), p. 367.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht explored the growing historiographical debate surrounding the Middle Ages as a time of either extremely low or extremely high sensory interaction with the world, but Sowell's distinction between mundane and special knowledge adds clarity.⁸ On the one hand, the vibrant intellectual culture of the medieval schools and universities centred primarily on exploration and clarification of Christian precepts, leading, in any pro-Enlightenment historical narrative, to an attenuation in development of ontological special knowledge in preference for abstract knowledge developed through religious dialectic. On the other hand, in any pro-Romantic historical narrative that glorifies the Middle Ages as a golden age, quotidian interaction with rural and natural spaces entailed a superior grasp of mundane knowledge in the Middle Ages, or at least mundane knowledge relevant to traditional crafts.⁹ This supports the view that scepticism, at least within medieval intellectual culture, may have been rare in the twelfth century because of variations in respect for different knowledge types.

This is exacerbated by cultures of normativity and *auctoritas*. In such contexts, there is a greater propensity for special knowledge to be perceived as esoteric and mysterious, which grants a perception of quasi-magical power to those who possess the special knowledge. This perception of mysterious knowledge acts as a form of power play that reduces the tenability of new ideas on psychological principles, while those who challenge the authority of received ideas may face greater potential risk to personal standing.

Scepticism towards the new is especially subversive in any society that has high requirements on orthodoxy, since orthodoxy adds force to the rejection of innovation. In such a context, describing an oral wonder as affirmed by large groups of people is therefore

⁸ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Erudite Fascinations and Cultural Energies", in Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kablitz, and Alison Calhoun (eds), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (Baltimore, 2008), pp. 1-10, quoting p. 2.

⁹ Susan Reynolds "Social mentalities and the cases for medieval scepticism", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 1 (1991), pp. 21-41.

potent in shifting an idea from its initial stages to broader acceptance. This incentivised the use of the ‘breadth of report’ and ‘similarity’ claims in marvels stories, which were discussed in **Chapter 1**. Steve Bruce argued the shift towards lower demand for orthodoxy in Western society is due to progressive increases in egalitarianism and multiculturalism, which encourage truth relativism, whereas monocultures like the European Middle Ages generate more authoritarian, monolithic, and unquestionable truths.¹⁰ This suggests that those who reported marvels faced potential criticism, rather than reward, because of the high social requirement of orthodoxy.

In the context of twelfth-century Europe, those who reported marvels faced high risk and carried arguably lower social capital due to the potential conflict between new and pre-existing ways of thinking.¹¹ It is therefore unsurprising that those who are now celebrated for their proto-empirical ways of thinking, including Adelard of Bath and William of Conches, faced criticism in their own times. Everett Rogers and Dilip K. Bhowmik, two communications theorists, distinguished between homophily (“the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes, such as beliefs, education, social status, and the like”) and heterophily, its opposite.¹² This assists in explaining writers’ self-criticism when reporting marvels, as there was some awareness that marvels were contentious, because they were heterophilous, especially when the target audience of a text was other Christians, and the marvel concerned something that contravened Christian belief. This may assist in explaining why some marvels reporters faced negative reception, as for example appears to have been the case of Gerald of Wales’ *Topographia Hibernica*, as discussed in **Chapter 2**.

¹⁰ Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford, 1999), p. 29.

¹¹ Bruce, *Choice and Religion*, p. 157.

¹² Everett Rogers and Dilip K. Bhowmik, “Homophily-Heterophily: Relational Concepts for Communications Research”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1970), pp. 523-38.

The divine omnipotence claim therefore had greater credibility in the Middle Ages, as a situation in which knowledge of physical processes was reduced, and where heuristic thinking was deliberately discouraged. Orthodoxy, monoculturalism, and the *auctoritas* culture disincentivised scepticism and led medieval people back to revealed religious truths in their sensory interaction with their world. Augustine's claim that wonder declines as individuals and societies progress to greater knowledge also helps explain the Weberian *Entzauberung*; because wonder creates knowledge, it allows a movement from inductive to deductive reasoning over the course of centuries, presuming that knowledge is maintained and respected over time.

5.2 — Disbelief and the Senses

This section proposes that there was some dissatisfaction towards supernatural explanations of the world, and that this stems partly from wonder's initiation of a desire for sensory evidence. As shown here, some ecclesiastical commentators were afraid that this could lead to a dismissal of God's existence on the whole. In an environment of belief dominance, disbelievers were a minority 'Other' whose views were approached with hostility, at least by ecclesiastics, as something requiring rectification. This required persuasion using both pro-Christian wonders and a dismissal of the senses. Despite the dominance of ecclesiastical culture, there existed a pluralism of spirituality denied by the traditional 'age of faith' narrative.

Research by the Pew Research Centre, an American think tank, suggests that religious worldviews are difficult to neatly place into terminological categories. In a 2014 survey of

Americans, 9% of respondents claimed they did not believe in a God or Gods, while 3% of respondents described themselves as atheists. Approximately 6% therefore describe themselves as religious adherents who do not believe in a God or Gods.¹³ Questions about the precise nature and implications of belief and disbelief are contentious in the present, but all the more so in historical periods for which there is no census data, and whose individuals cannot be closely questioned about the precise details of their beliefs and disbeliefs.

In this section, focus is on disbelief in the supersensory realm in part or as a whole, and the paranoia among some ecclesiastics that this could be a slippery slope to disbelief in God. In common parlance, 'atheism' denotes a firm and enduring declaration of disbelief. Because of this narrow definition, 'disbelief in God' is preferred here, because it may encompass transitory states of mind in otherwise orthodox Christians, or more complex belief patterns, such as disbelieving in God but still believing in other supernatural beings. The term 'disbelief in God' also encompasses agnosticism (a declared inability to know whether God exists) and apatheism (a lack of care about whether God exists).

Evidence for disbelief in God is rare in the medieval written record, but this may be primarily because of the ecclesiastical monopoly on writing. This section builds upon the work of Carl Watkins and John H. Arnold; where it differs, though, is in its suggestion that wonder created a paradox in medieval society. On the one hand, ecclesiastics co-opted it as a tool to combat disbelief by directing attention towards wonders that confirmed the Christian metanarrative. On the other hand, wonder's cognitive components had the potential to undermine the Christian metanarrative by encouraging people to seek sensory

¹³ Michael Lipka, "10 Facts about Atheists", *Pew Research Centre Website*, Published 1 June 2016, Accessed 25 June 2016, URL: <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/10-facts-about-atheists/>>.

experiences to prove ontological truths, which devalued the Augustinian conception of marvels as present divine actions.¹⁴

This may be seen in the wonder stories and exempla presented in this chapter, which stem principally from Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*, Peter of Cornwall's *Liber revelationum*, Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia*, and Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*. As Arnold notes, "the medieval *mentalité* was unable to conceptualise 'unbelief' as scepticism or atheism, and saw (and hence experienced it) only as a kind of lack of adherence — *infidelitas*, or unfaithfulness".¹⁵ This begs the question of to what extent historians can analyse disbelief in God in a society whose emphasis is on belief and collectivism, and whose written record preserves all things through an ecclesiastical lens, which creates an insurmountable reporting bias.

Broadly speaking, the tales explored in this chapter can be placed into two categories: conversion narratives (disbelievers become believers through engagement with a wonder) and deconversion narratives (believers become disbelievers and are divinely punished). The latter aimed to maintain orthodoxy through fear, a process psychologists term operant conditioning.¹⁶ In contemporary usage, the term 'conversion' typically denotes a shift from one religion to another (that is, proselytisation). However, historians should also consider intra-religious conversion, that is, the persuasion of a doubtful or sceptical person to acceptance of Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, this ought to be considered one subcategory of

¹⁴ Carl Watkins, "Providence, Experience, and Doubt", pp. 40-60; John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005); Arnold, "The Materiality of Unbelief in Late Medieval England", in Sophie Page (ed.), *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 65-95.

¹⁵ Arnold, "The Materiality of Unbelief", p. 3.

¹⁶ Daniel L. Schacter, Daniel T. Gilbert, and Daniel M. Wegner, *Psychology: Second Edition* (New York, 2011), pp. 278-88.

Caesarius of Heisterbach's general definition of *conversio* as "the turning of the heart from bad to good, from good to better, or from better to best".¹⁷

Because both conversion and deconversion narratives had pro-Christian rhetorical agendas, neither constitutes infallibly convincing evidence for the existence of disbelievers. However, this insurmountable problem stems from the structure of medieval society as a whole, and should not deny our belief in the reality of disbelief. Watkins presents the sixteenth-century French etymological origin of the English term 'atheism' to suggest that atheism itself could not have existed before the sixteenth century.¹⁸ On the one hand, things may exist before words are developed to indicate them; on the other hand, there is something to be said for identity constructs being self-selected through language. Moreover, given the Church's hegemony and monopoly on literacy, it is understandable that any firmly self-declared atheists would be conceptualised and othered as *infideles* or *increduli* who required rectification, as is the trend in extant texts.

Given ecclesiastics' dominance over writing and implicit anti-agnostic worldview, it was inevitable that discussions of anti-religious sentiment would be written with a view to upholding Catholic doctrines and maintaining orthodoxy and unity, or else attempting to achieve orthodoxy and unity in a situation where it did not exist as a totality. The methodological problem is exacerbated by the fact that *infidelitas* and *incredulitas* could be labels applied polemically to one's intellectual opponents to tarnish their reputation. One particular emanation of this was the accusation of having written, read, or respected the *Liber de tribus impostoribus*, a quasi-atheist book about three 'impostors' Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Georges Minois asserts that this book never actually existed before the creation of an eighteenth-century fabrication of it, but there are obvious reasons why any

¹⁷ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Joseph Strange (ed.) (Cologne, 1851), book 1, ch. 2, vol. 1, p. 8: "Conversio est cordis verso, vel de malo in bonum, vel de bono in melius, vel de meliori in optimum".

¹⁸ Watkins, "Providence, Experience, and Doubt", pp. 43, 54.

such book, if it existed in the high Middle Ages, would have had a lower chance of survival than other works.¹⁹

Minois traces the use of the accusation of disbelief as what he calls “the prototypical blasphemy”.²⁰ Implicit within this accusation is the view that scepticism was prohibitive to salvation. Minois also asserts that the academic culture of disputation added voice to the disbelief narrative. This is seen in the case of Simon of Tournai, a late twelfth-century professor of theology at the University of Paris, who was accused of *infidelitas* by his contemporary, Thomas of Cantimpré, for arguing the devil’s advocate case a little too vociferously in response to a *quaestio* about the truth of the Abrahamic religions.²¹ Similarly, Guibert of Nogent accused Jean I, Count of Soissons, of only attending church so as to gaze lustfully at beautiful women, and quotes Jean as saying that Christian beliefs are “all piss and wind”. Jean’s particular gripe about Christianity appears to have been its requirement of monogamy; Guibert had Jean say on his deathbed that “all women should be in common”, and Jean refused to donate money to the “arse-licking priests” that constituted the Church.²²

An interesting psychological trend may be in operation here. Given the charge of blasphemy, those who are less attached to their sceptical beliefs will return to the fold, whereas only the most determined of outliers will remain sufficiently confident to endure the psycho-social punishments that attend scepticism in the context of majority belief. This may explain why sceptics, when evidence of them exists, appear as radicals who care little for social norms, as is the case for the likes of Simon of Tournai or Jean of Soissons. If this is the case, it may further disincentivise scepticism for less radical people, because it creates the

¹⁹ Georges Minois, *The Atheist’s Bible: the Most Dangerous Book that Never Existed*, Lys Ann Weiss (trans.) (Chicago, 2012), pp. 30–33.

²⁰ Minois, *The Atheist’s Bible*, p. 31.

²¹ Minois, *The Atheist’s Bible*, p. 31.

²² Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiae*, Archambault (trans.), *A Monk’s Confession* (University Park, 1996), book 3, ch. 16, pp. 193–5.

perception of scepticism as headstrong, fiendish, and arrogant. This may explain why so-called militant atheists in the present, such as Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens, are sometimes viewed as arrogant in subscribing to their own beliefs so strongly.²³

However, the problem with accusations of scepticism is that they could be grounded in truth, or simply a way to tarnish the reputation of an intellectual or political opponent. This methodological problem may be insurmountable, but the culture of accusation meant that any long-term atheists, agnostics, or apatheists, if they existed, would have been forced to internalise their beliefs, or face criticism, ostracism, and perhaps excommunication or death. It seems noteworthy that the growth in evidence for disbelief in God in the thirteenth century, as Minois has shown, parallels the demographic rise of cities, and particularly universities, as communications centres for both orthodoxy and unorthodoxy.²⁴ As R.I. Moore demonstrated, accusations of heresy increase throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, suggesting a possible link between scepticism, heresy, and larger social changes taking place across the period.²⁵ It is noteworthy that the bibulous and sometimes blasphemous Goliards hailed from Europe's universities.²⁶ This complex relationship between demography and ideas deserves further exploration.

Interest in the possibility of disbelief in God in the Middle Ages has grown over recent years. This is probably due to increasing rates of atheism and agnosticism amongst Western intellectuals over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, where historical research correlates with contemporary interests based on the selection bias that comes naturally to historians' choice of research focus, which C. Behan McCulloch called

²³ Andrew Fiala, "Militant Atheism, Pragmatism, and the God-Shaped Hole", *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 65, no. 139 (2009), pp. 139-51.

²⁴ Minois, *The Atheist's Bible*, pp. 35-70.

²⁵ R.I. Moore, *The War on Heresy* (London, 2012).

²⁶ Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition* (London, 1997), pp. 200-212.

“bias in a weak sense”.²⁷ In religious studies, the argument that religion is an intrinsic part of human ways of thinking has been entrenched since at least the nineteenth century. Recently, Tim Whitmarsh proposed an inversion. Taking influence from Paul Veyne’s landmark study that claimed that there was broad-based scepticism towards polytheistic religious stories in ancient Greece (which post-medieval Westerners pejoratively term ‘mythology’), Whitmarsh proposed that atheism is as much ‘hard wired’ into human thinking as is religious thinking.²⁸ However, Whitmarsh still presumes that this ancient age of atheism ended because the polytheistic societies that generally tolerated it were replaced by an imperialistic monotheism that demanded an acceptance of one, ‘true’ God.²⁹ It would be all too easy to claim that these debates about religious belief or disbelief being inherent within human psychology are liable to citation bias, but this obscures careful, objective debate.³⁰ More recently, Armin W. Geertz and Guðmundur Ingi Markússon added clarity by claiming that the ‘religion is natural’ hypothesis is not deterministic but probabilistic and thus leaves room for atheism.³¹

Dorothea Weltecke explored the evidence for medieval atheism, but neglected the role of wonder stories and exempla as polemical tools potentially aimed at maintaining (or achieving) orthodoxy.³² In her study of doubt in medieval ecclesiastical culture, Sabina Flanagan proposed that the widespread evidence for doubt adds credence to the view that

²⁷ C. Behan McCullagh, “Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation”, *History and Theory*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2000), pp. 39-66, here pp. 46-7. On comparative rates of atheism amongst Western intellectuals, see Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, “Religion Among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics”, *Social Problems*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2007), pp. 289-307.

²⁸ Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods* (Cambridge, 2016).

²⁹ Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods*, pp. 241-2.

³⁰ Paul Bloom, “Religion is Natural”, *Developmental Science*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2007), pp. 147-51; Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (Oxford, 2011).

³¹ Armin W. Geertz and Guðmundur Ingi Markússon, “Religion is natural, atheism is not: On why everyone is both right and wrong”, *Religion*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2010), pp. 152-65.

³² Dorothea Weltecke, “The Medieval Period”, in Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 164-78, here p. 165.

atheists existed: “the idea that atheism was somehow unthinkable in the Middle Ages does not stand up in the light of such examples”.³³ Further evidence for disbelief in God may be uncovered by tracking the use of the term “Epicurean” as a pejorative label for reprobate disbelief. Dante places Epicurus and his followers — “those who believe the soul dies with the body” — in the sixth circle of hell, which houses heretics.³⁴ This is another example of the accusation of disbelief as a form of power play. Studies on the use of the term “Epicurean” have been done for the later Middle Ages, but no research is known to the present author which considers this for the twelfth century.³⁵ The contribution of this section is to explore the evidence for disbelief in God, and to suggest that sensory experience was a significant antagonist to the Christian metanarrative.

The claim that disbelief in God existed in the twelfth century does not necessarily aim to disprove the secularisation thesis in religious studies, which purports that secularisation in the West is increasing as time progresses, a view supported by recent surveys and censuses.³⁶ A variety of scholars observed declines in religious thinking from as early as the eighteenth century, including J.G. Frazer, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim.³⁷ Steve Bruce has more recently re-affirmed the ‘age of faith’

³³ Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, p.89; see also Watkins, “Providence, Experience and Doubt”, pp.42-3; Carol Straw, “Purity and Death” in John C. Cavadini (ed.), *Gregory the Great: A Symposium* (London, 1995), pp.16-37, here p.18; M. van Uytanghe, “Scepticisme doctrinal au seuil du moyen âge? Les objections du diacre Pierre dans les *Dialogues* de Grégoire le Grand”, in Jacques Fontaine, Robert Gillet and Stan Pellistrandi (eds), *Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 1986), pp.315-26.

³⁴ Dante, *Inferno*, Giorgio Petrocchi (ed.) (Rome, 1966), canto 10, ll. 14-15, vol. 1, p. 38: “con Epicuro tutti suoi seguaci, che l'anima col corpo morta fanno”.

³⁵ Alexander Murray, “The Epicureans”, in Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (eds), *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth Century Europe* (Tübingen, 1986), pp. 138-163; Friedrich Niewöhner, “Epikureer sing Atheisten. Zur Geschichte des Wortes apikuros in der jüdischen Philosophie”, in Niewöhner and Olaf Pluta (eds), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Wiesbaden, 1999), pp. 11-22.

³⁶ Robin Gill, C. Kirk Hadaway, and Penny Long Marler, “Is Religion Declining in Britain?”, *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 37, no. 3 (1998), pp. 507-16 [their answer to the title question is ‘yes’]; Darren Sherkat, “Beyond Belief: Atheism, Agnosticism, and Theistic Certainty in the United States”, *Sociological Spectrum*, vol. 28, no. 5 (2008), pp. 438-59.

³⁷ Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (London, 1995), pp. 169-86.

narrative, arguing that the medieval church was “authoritarian and exclusive in its attitude to knowledge”.³⁸ But Bruce’s view is predicated on the medieval church having achieved its desire for *unitas*. In my view, the frequency of anti-sceptical rhetoric in wonder tales shows that *unitas* was merely a desire, not something that was necessarily achieved.

Embedded within the secularisation thesis is the view that the Middle Ages was total in its acceptance of Christian belief. This view is essentialist and reductive, denying the Middle Ages its potential for a plurality of attitudes that may be hidden simply because of the ecclesiastical nature of the written record. Rodney Stark and Peter Berger, two sociologists who studied secularisation, argued for the secularisation thesis, but then recanted their views, not because they see religious observance increasing in the contemporary West, although some have argued this, but because they were unconvinced that it was ever total in the Middle Ages.³⁹ Probabilistic thinking ought to be applied here. Low rates of atheism could have increased from their low point to a slightly higher point across the course of the Middle Ages. Of course, the written record does not permit any numerical estimations that are not without significant methodological concerns, however probabilistic thinking allows the ‘age of faith’ narrative to avoid direct conflict with the secularisation thesis.

Sensory experience was arguably the key factor underpinning distaste towards Christian explanations of the world. But not all sensory experiences devalued Christian precepts; the ‘believing is seeing’ mentality born of religious thinking ensured that sensory experiences aligned with Christian beliefs as much as was possible. However, wonder and its

³⁸ Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, 2002), p. 29.

³⁹ Lucian Hölscher, “Europe in the Age of Secularisation”, in Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (eds), *Secularisation in the Christian World* (London, 2016), pp. 197-204. For the view that religious adherence is increasing in the contemporary West, see Eric Kaufmann, Anne Goujon, and Vegard Skirbekk, “The End of Secularisation in Europe?: A Socio-Demographic Perspective”, *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 73, no. 1 (2012), pp. 69-91.

consequent drive for sensory evidence was a source of conflict that underpinned medieval Christian lived experience, and added complexity for the ecclesiastical aim of monolithic orthodoxy. This conflict can be seen in two stories from Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*.

Caesarius of Heisterbach, abbot of Heisterbach, penned his *Dialogus Miraculorum* in the 1220s. This work was widely distributed and became a popular text throughout monastic libraries in subsequent centuries.⁴⁰ Many of Caesarius' 746 miracle narratives concern doubters and disbelievers, and Brian Patrick McGuire notes that Caesarius identifies oral sources for 450 out of the 746 stories; other monks make up the vast majority of his oral sources.⁴¹ As its title suggests, the *Dialogus* is structured as a Socratic dialogue between a wise monk and his novice pupil.

The first of the two stories discussed here was told to Caesarius, so he claims, by the abbot of Brumbach.⁴² This story concerns a beautiful young lady of rich parentage who refused to marry, and dedicated herself to the service of Christ in solitude. This claim suggests she was not, at least initially, a disbeliever, although there is the possibility she was a firm disbeliever, and was using the Church merely as a way to avoid a patriarchal arranged marriage. After some time in ascetic seclusion, the girl became "poisoned with melancholy" by the devil, and was "attacked by weakness of heart, wasting of the body, sluggishness in speech, and grief from her isolation".⁴³ The Cistercian abbot of Brumbach approached her,

⁴⁰ Victoria Smirnova, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, and Jacques Berlioz (eds), *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages: Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles and its Reception* (Leiden, 2015).

⁴¹ Brian Patrick McGuire, "Friends and Tales in the Cloister: Oral Sources in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*", *Analecta Cisterciensia*, vol. 36 (1980), pp. 167-247, here p. 167; also reprinted in McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100-1250* (Aldershot, 2002).

⁴² Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Joseph Strange (ed.) (Cologne, 1851), book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, pp. 206-8.

⁴³ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 207: "veneno tristitiae innocuum... Invasit eam et defectus cordis, tabitudo corporis, torpor in oratione, dolor de reclusionem".

and the girl protested: “I cannot understand why or for whom I am secluded here”.⁴⁴ When the abbot reminded her she was praying for God, the girl exclaimed: “Who knows if there be a God, or any angels with him, or any souls, or any kingdom of heaven? Who has seen such things, who has ever come back to tell us what he has seen?”.⁴⁵ In this case, sensory experience appears to have been the key antagonist to the young lady’s belief in God.

The abbot, shocked, asked that the girl cross herself, but she refused: “I say what seems to me [to be true]. Unless I can see these things, I will not believe”.⁴⁶ The abbot, asserting the girl had been possessed by the devil, demanded she remain locked in solitary confinement for “at least a week”.⁴⁷ It seems likely that the monk’s response is predicated on his diagnosis of the girl’s illness as *acedia*. R.W. Daly examined the evidence for *acedia* from the fourth to fifteenth centuries, and asserted that it bore some similarity to contemporary depression, but was viewed as more active, in that it was considered a vice that constituted a self-selected state of spiritual non-compliance. Daly also proposes that *acedia* was considered distinct from *melancolia* in that the former was active and the latter was passive.⁴⁸ However, Caesarius describes the girl using neither *acedia* or *melancolia*, instead preferring the more general *tristitia*, which ascribes neither an active or passive role. However, on a more psychological level, the indefiniteness of the monk’s punishment (“at least a week”) indicates a form of power play that demanded compliance.

When the monk revisited her a week later, the girl recanted her previous obstinacy, and claimed she had received a vision: “I have seen with my own eyes those whose existence

⁴⁴ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 207: “Quare vel propter quem hic reclusa sim prorsus ignoro”.

⁴⁵ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 207: “Quis scit, si Deus sit, si sint cum illo angeli, animae, vel regnum coelorum? Quis ista vidit? Quis inde rediens visa nobis manifestavit?”.

⁴⁶ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 207: “Ego loquor sicut mihi videtur. Nisi videam ista, non credam”.

⁴⁷ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 207: “saltem septem diebus”.

⁴⁸ R.W. Daly, “Before Depression: the Medieval Vice of Acedia”, *Psychiatry*, vol. 70, no. 1 (2007), pp. 30-51.

I doubted”.⁴⁹ The vision comprised a soul, whose “form was spherical, something like the globe of the moon; it could see from every direction”.⁵⁰ The notion of an all-seeing form from the supersensory world suggests that widespread sensory experience was something utopic, something Other, to the girl who so desired her own sensory experience of God before affirming his existence. In Caesarius’s dialogic construction, the novice responds to the wise monk’s story by pointing out the description of the soul as similar to that in another story previously narrated within the *Dialogus*. The novice then claims: “It fills me with terror to think that the Lord allowed so holy, so pure, so virginal a soul to be harassed with these foul and awful temptations”.⁵¹

There are a number of factors at play here. First, the story links scepticism to demonic possession, and Caesarius’s crafting of the novice’s response suggests that fear was the desired reception of the story on emotional terms. Second, if the story is to be accepted as based on fact, the girl’s poor health (“wasting of the body”) and physical-emotional isolation would seem to have had a role in generating her *tristitia*. Caesarius does not detail the girl’s diet, but there remains the possibility that an ascetic diet was partly causative to her ill health, bitter mood, and perhaps even her alleged vision. Malcolm Cameron proposed that the visions of Sts Anthony of Egypt and Guthlac of Crowland resulted from the consumption of bread infected by the *Claviceps* fungus (also known as ergot), a distillation of which is used to create the psychotropic drug LSD. Cameron hypothesised that ascetic eremitical diets consisting primarily of bread and water could lead to deficiency in Vitamin

⁴⁹ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 208: “Pater, oculis meis vidi de quibus dubitavi”.

⁵⁰ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 208: “Anima substantia spiritualis est, et in sui natura sphaerica, ad similitudinem globi lunaris. Ex omni parte videt”.

⁵¹ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 39, vol. 1, p. 208: “Satis me terret, quod dominus mentem tam sanctam, tam mundam et virginalem, tam immundis et tam nefandis tentationibus vexari permisit”.

A, which could further exacerbate the hallucinatory properties of ergot.⁵² Jerome Krall and Bernard Bachrach asked whether those who received visions in the Middle Ages bore any similarity with schizophrenics, and compared schizophrenics' hallucinations with medieval visions to test this proposition, concluding that "none of the medieval visionaries was identified as mentally ill" according to 1982 criteria for mental illness.⁵³

Unfortunately, the story may raise more questions than it answers, and although historians may ask questions of historical texts, they may not ask questions of historical people. In this case, it may be possible that the girl's capitulation was merely an acceptance of the abbot's power play, and that she was using the internal logic of Christian religious belief as a means to self-preservation. It may be that she was playing Pascal's wager over four hundred years before Blaise Pascal, or she may have been legitimately converted to the path of righteousness. What is clear, though, is that unless we are to charge Caesarius (or the abbot of Brumbach) with complete mendacity, the girl was, at least for a short time, a person who disbelieved the existence of God and the supersensory realm as a whole. Even in the short term, her disbelief led to psycho-social punishments and a denial of the emotional and mental health benefits that come with a feeling of belonging. These were strong incentives to conform.

While the rebellious impetus of adolescence may have had a role in the previous story, the same cannot be said for Caesarius' sequentially narrated tale of an elderly nun who was "troubled by the vice of melancholy (*tristitia*), and so much harassed by the spirit of blasphemy, doubt, and distrust, that she fell into despair".⁵⁴ This second story makes

⁵² Malcolm L. Cameron, "The Visions of Saints Anthony and Guthlac", in Shiela Campbell, Bert Hall, and David Klausner (eds), *Health, Disease, and Healing in Medieval Culture* (Toronto, 1992), pp. 152-8.

⁵³ Jerome Krall and Bernard Bachrach, "Medieval Visions and Contemporary Hallucinations", *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1982), pp. 709-21.

⁵⁴ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 40, vol. 1, p. 209: "a vitio tristitiae, in tantum est turbata, a spiritu blasphemiae, dubietatis et diffidentiae adeo vexata, ut caderet in desperationem".

Caesarius' understanding of the term *tristitia* as a vice more clear. According to Caesarius, the nun's descent into disbelief was all the more reprobate because her vocation as a nun meant that "she was obliged to accept all those [articles of faith] she had learned from childhood".⁵⁵ By implication, this may suggest that Caesarius considered doubt and disbelief among laypeople to be more frequent and perhaps even more acceptable. If conceptualising the ecclesiastical class as concerned primarily with intra-religious conversion, then it was all the more necessary for ecclesiastics to have firm belief in their own project, lest they themselves encourage the vice of disbelief by 'spreading around error'. In such a system, internal mechanisms of punishment against doubting ecclesiastics were all the more important for the creation of monolithic orthodoxy.

Upon learning of the elderly nun's depressed mood, the local prior warned her that she could not be buried on consecrated ground if she continued along the path of disbelief, which Caesarius suggests affected her: "she remained silent, but remembered well his words".⁵⁶ The nun then attempted suicide in a nearby river because "that lord there (pointing at the prior) threatened me, and told me I would have to be buried in a field. I, however, thought it would be better to descend into the abyss by drowning than to be buried in an open field like a beast".⁵⁷ The nun's words may imply her belief in an afterlife, since burial on sanctified ground was considered necessary to ascend to heaven.

However, emotional principles may be at play, in that burial outside of church ground acted as a form of public shaming even for those who disbelieved the existence of the supersensory world. In either case, her *tristitia* led to a lack of concern for the potential

⁵⁵ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 40, vol. 1, p. 209: "De his quae ab infantia credidit et credere debuit, omnino dubitare coepit".

⁵⁶ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 40, vol. 1, p. 209: "Quo verba illa audito tunc tacuit, sed verbum bene retinuit".

⁵⁷ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 40, vol. 1, p. 209: "Dominus iste, digito Priorem ostendens, minatus est mihi, quia me mortuam sepelire debet in campo. Unde magis elegi gurgitem hunc supernatando descendere, quam bestialiter in campo sepeliri".

supernatural punishments that attended her actions. In finishing the story, Caesarius opines, using confirmation bias, that “I cannot but believe that [God]...who so mercifully rescued her from the river... will not suffer her to perish at the last”, that is, at the apocalypse, because her prior good deeds outweighed her transient attack of scepticism.⁵⁸ Caesarius then refers to God’s punishment of Lot’s wife for her disobedience as “a warning to the wicked, and a stimulus to the well-doer”.⁵⁹ This allusion to Lot’s wife suggests that patriarchal power play is another issue worthy of consideration in these two cases.

These stories suggest that scepticism could be associated with mental health as possible cause and/or effect. Scepticism may be partly causative to poor mental health in religious contexts as it leads to social isolation and rejection. It is clear that Caesarius feared for the salvation of both women, which shows the tremendous danger that denying the existence of a supersensory world posed in the context of majority belief in an afterlife. What these stories also show is that the desire for sight was a key antagonist to the Christian metanarrative.

Furthermore, when considering religions as cultural institutions submitting to evolutionary principles of vertical propagation (through inculcation of children) and horizontal proliferation (through proselytisation), the establishment of blasphemy as a vice maintains the existence of monolithic religious truths. If blasphemy has attendant punishments that are physical, emotional, social, and supernatural, then blasphemy itself is an important sociocultural construct that perpetuates the existence of religions by mandating subservience in a hierarchical power play between believers and non-believers. Blasphemy and similar *lèse majesté* laws and behaviours are therefore cognitively limiting through their creation of highly normative cultural environments. Jonathan Andrew

⁵⁸ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 40, vol. 1, p. 210: “Spero tamen quod Deus... qui tam misericorditer de flumine illam liberavit... finaliter perire non sinet”.

⁵⁹ Caesarius, *Dialogus*, book 4, ch. 40, vol. 1, p. 210: “ut sit malis exemplum, bonis condimentum”.

Lanman recently proposed that these forces help explain why contemporary nations with low economic and normative threats produce high levels of atheism; in the Middle Ages, the opposite trends would increase rates of belief.⁶⁰

Peter of Cornwall's *Liber revelationum* further demonstrates the role of the Church in intra-religious conversion. Peter was prior of Holy Trinity in Aldgate, and penned his book of otherworldly visions (the *Liber revelationum*) between 1200 and 1206. This text survives in one known manuscript (Lambeth Palace, MS 51), which remains unedited. It therefore differs from Caesarius' *Dialogus* in the breadth of its transmission and popularity. Peter compiled his visions from a variety of sources, including patristic sources and saints' *vitae*, and supplements these with other visions he knew on the basis of oral report, including a number received from his grandfather Ailsi. Peter explains that his text as a whole aimed to combat disbelief in God:

Since there are still some who believe that there is no God and that the world is ruled by chance, and many who only believe what they see... I, Peter, minister of the Church of the Holy Trinity in London, have collected, out of the lives and acts of the saints, the revelations and visions vouchsafed to them into this book, which I call *Liber revelationum*.⁶¹

Peter's claim that there existed disbelievers and people who believed in chance should not necessarily be taken at face value because this claim could have acted as a way to generate fear of *infidelitas* by setting up disbelievers as 'Other'. However, Peter's subsequent appeals to logical reasoning to combat atheistic propositions would seem to suggest he legitimately believed disbelief was a problem.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Andrew Lanman, *A Secular Mind: Towards a Cognitive Anthropology of Atheism* (Oxford, Ph.D. dissertation, 2010).

⁶¹ Peter of Cornwall, *Liber revelationum*, in Lambeth Palace Library, MS 51, f. 2.

Plato's allegory of the cave describes a group of people who live in a cave and can only make inferences about the outside world based on flashes of light on the cave's walls.⁶² Peter claims that those who disbelieve the existence of angels, heaven, or God, even though they have not seen them, are locked in a situation analogous to Plato's cave:

Our first parents [Adam and Eve] could not doubt, even after their expulsion [from Eden], the existence of angels or the joys of paradise. We who have never seen them are differently placed. Yet it would be foolish for a boy born in a dark prison to disbelieve the existence of light, flowers, birds, and trees, of which his mother had told him.⁶³

This sets up faith (believing without seeing) as the only rational response.

To support this view, Peter asserts that sceptics are themselves living by faith, an argument akin to more recent repudiations of science as, like religion, requiring adherence to its own set of dogmatic truths: "Even unbelievers live by faith. They have no direct knowledge of their own birth or parentage: they cannot see the processes or affections of the mind".⁶⁴ These attempts at persuasion differ from Caesarius's in that Peter appeals to logical reasoning as proof for the fallibility of atheism, whereas Caesarius's stories centre upon psycho-social strategies targeted at Aristotelian *pathos* rather than *logos*. In 1995, Richard Proctor coined the term agnotology to describe the study of cultural creation and perpetuation of ignorance and doubt.⁶⁵ More recently, Liana Chua applied this lens to the study of religious cultures. The present example confirms this chapter's view that religions encourage ontological ignorance, but also confirms Chua's view that, in the context of religious belief, ignorance is constructed as "a lack of knowledge, a gap, an index of flawed or

⁶² Plato, *The Republic*, §514a–520a.

⁶³ Peter of Cornwall, *Liber revelationum*, f. 2.

⁶⁴ Peter of Cornwall, *Liber revelationum*, f. 3.

⁶⁵ Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (eds), *Agnotology: the Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, 2008), pp. 1-35.

incomplete religiosity”.⁶⁶ Within this system, religious cultures use both emotions and logical persuasion as forms of belief control.

Although trope-riddled, Peter of Cornwall’s frustrations suggest that there was dissatisfaction with visions as lacking rational foundation, but also with Christian belief as a whole, because it did not cohere with the evidence of the senses. In some cases, scepticism about one aspect of Christian belief could be a dangerous slippery slope to dismissal of God’s existence on the whole. The early thirteenth-century Provençal poet Gautier de Coincy, for example, complained that “He who does not honour [the Virgin Mary] / And does not truly believe her miracles / Does not believe God exists / Or that God has any present power”.⁶⁷ Indeed, the view that God lacked present power was central to some heresies, and was given strength with the growing penetration of the Aristotelian ‘prime mover’ concept across the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.⁶⁸

Given the variety of visions and dreams that underpin the narratives of both the Old and New Testaments, dismissal of visions could be tantamount to dismissal of the respectability of biblical stories on the whole, and arguably the entirety of the Christian religion. All the more important for our exploration of non-belief is Peter’s claim that “there are still some who believe there is no God”. The word “still” implies a linear progression from pagan lack of faith to total belief, and Peter appears to envision his own rhetoric as part of this broader movement. Moreover, to dedicate an entire book to the combating of such scepticism demonstrates that encouraging orthodoxy was not a simple process of telling people what to think, but a complex challenge of rhetorical persuasion, both logical and emotional, underpinned by the study of homiletics.

⁶⁶ Liana Chua, “Anthropological Perspectives on Ritual and Religious Ignorance”, in Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoey (eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* (London, 2015), pp. 247-55.

⁶⁷ Gautier de Coincy, *Les miracles de la sainte vierge*, M. L’abbé Pocquet (ed.) (Paris, 1857), col. 273, ll. 536-9.

⁶⁸ Richard C. Dales, “The De-Animation of the Heavens in the Middle Ages”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1980), pp. 531-50.

There is widespread evidence for other species of doubt within exempla of the deconversion narrative structure. In the *Collectaneum exemplorum et visionum Clarevallense*, a number of deconversion narratives present disbelievers who are supernaturally punished. One, appropriated from Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, concerns a doctor who did not believe in life after death. Several other stories concern people taking communion while doubting transubstantiation.⁶⁹ In his *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, Gerald of Wales narrates similar stories, one of a man who falsely swore an oath on the crucifix, whereupon the crucifix punished him by hanging perpetually around his neck and preventing him from sleeping.⁷⁰ Another concerns a monk who disputed the idea of a tripartite deity made of one substance, and is punished with aphasia.⁷¹ Another concerns a nun, filled with a Satanic lusty rage ("Sathanae stimulus et libidinis ardor"), who takes an axe to the cross, whereupon it turns to iron, with Gerald moralising this story as meaning that such afflictions of disbelief happened "as much to knights as to nuns".⁷² These various species of disbelief appear to relate to a desire to question the discursive category of 'told' more than that of 'seen'.

The fact that Gerald narrates such stories of disbelief primarily in his *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, and not his other works, suggests that conversion and deconversion narratives were an expected feature of didactic miracle texts. These stories therefore coalesce with those of Peter of Cornwall and Caesarius of Heisterbach in genre terms, and in their aim of intra-religious conversion. What they also demonstrate is that the predominant mechanism for attempting belief control was fear of supernatural punishment. *Timor Dei* can act as a form

⁶⁹ *Collectaneum exemplorum et visionum Clarevallense*, Olivier Legendre (ed.), in *CCCM*, vol. 208 (Turnhout, 2005), book 4, ch. 31, pp. 304-5, book 3, ch. 8, pp. 250-1, book 2, ch. 19, pp. 239-40, book 2, ch. 22, pp. 241-2.

⁷⁰ Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, p. 48.

⁷¹ Gerald of Wales, *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, J.S. Brewer (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, RS, 1862), distinctio 1, vol. 2, p. 148.

⁷² Gerald of Wales, *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, distinctio 1, vol. 2, p. 224: "tam militi scilicet quam moniali".

of behavioural control reminding both lay and ecclesiastic of the potential supernatural punishments that attend heterodoxy.

However, the existence of such stories would also seem to suggest that scepticism was something to be fought because it was both widespread and potentially damaging to the Christian metanarrative. Underpinning this is the same problem of historical interpretation that Ruth Mazo Karras identified for medieval law codes. Do laws prohibiting sexual crimes show those criminal behaviours being committed, or were they prevented because of the threat of punishment? By the same token, does anti-sceptical rhetoric in wonder tales indicate widespread scepticism? Ultimately, one's answer to this difficult question will stem from one's willingness to accept uncertainty. My own view aligns with the "many" described by Mazo Karras: "Many would take as a general principle that if something is prohibited, that means the authorities were concerned about it, meaning that it probably did happen all too frequently".⁷³

While fear was the desired emotional response to such deconversion narratives, marvels stories could also be overlain with anti-sceptical rhetoric. As such, Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* is replete with stories that aim to repudiate scepticism by giving present examples of supernatural phenomena. Augustine's experiment with magnets allows Gervase to point out the illogicality of scepticism towards marvels that have been seen, but not fully understood: "Unbelievers demand an explanation from us which we are not able to give... But then they reckon that much of what we say is untrue, although they are themselves unable to give an explanation even of things which we see every day".⁷⁴ Given that wonder declines with experience and knowledge, this may be illogical if one still does

⁷³ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York, 2005), p. 12.

⁷⁴ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 1, pp. 564-5: "Infideles enim homines... rationem a nobis flagitant quam reddere non sufficimus... Ideoque existimant falsa plerumque esse que dicimus, cum de hiis etiam que cotidiana uidemus ipsi reddere rationem non possint".

not have an explanation for the phenomenon, since sensory experience with a thing does not necessarily entail full understanding of its aetiology. However, it may be that ensuring a wonder is not immediately dangerous to health is more important on evolutionary terms than understanding its ontological causation.

Further objects of scepticism in Gervase's *Otia* include magic stones: "There are some who hold magic spells and the power latent in stones to be merely fabulous. But on the evidence of daily experience and also the authoritative writings of the holy fathers, we charge them with lack of faith (*incredulitas*)."⁷⁵ In various biblical books, magic stones are associated with wicked, occult, pre-Christian religious observance, and in the Book of Acts, such practices are associated with the arch-antagonist, Simon Magus.⁷⁶ However, in a reversal of biblical precedent that was contextually understandable given the growing popularity of magic in the early thirteenth century, Gervase's accusation set up scepticism towards magic stones as a potential threat to salvation.⁷⁷ On the other hand, when viewed through the lens of empiricism, Gervase's claim that the magic power of stones can be accessed by believers, and not sceptics — "a stone's worth shuns an unworthy handler" — is a form of Orwellian doublethink that frustrates any sceptic's attempt to disprove the stones' alleged power.

This fallible logic can be seen in other cases, such as Gerald's depiction of the horn of St Patrick, which had the alleged ability to expel venomous creatures. Gerald claims he saw this horn around a mendicant's neck in Wales, and tells the story of a priest named Bernard who attempted to test its marvelous properties but was instantly paralysed when he placed

⁷⁵ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 28, pp. 610-11: "Sunt qui uirtutem lapidibus ac incantationes magicas pro fabulosis reputant, quorum incredulitatem cotidianis experimentis arguimus necnon autenticis sanctorum patrum scripturis".

⁷⁶ Ezekiel 13:18-21; Exodus 7:10-12; Acts 8:9-13.

⁷⁷ Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas, *Magic and Medieval Society* (Abingdon, 2014).

the horn to his mouth, “which many people saw”.⁷⁸ Gerald claims that his informant “said that no one dares sound the horn out of reverence for the saint”.⁷⁹ These cases suggest that *reverencia* and *timor Dei* were emotions that limited sceptics’ ability to test the alleged supernaturality of specific phenomena. *Timor* therefore disincentivised scepticism by suggesting it was irreverent to powerful supernatural beings, whether a God or a saint, who could potentially punish those who, like doubting Thomas, wished for empirical proof of claims rather than having faith.

There is further evidence in Gervase’s *Otia* for widespread scepticism towards the supernatural. **Chapter 2** presented the case of the Beaucaire revenant and the disbelief of physicians towards phantasms. In presenting the story of the Beaucaire revenant, Gervase reports his aim was “to convince the incredulous and those who... stubbornly maintain the impossibility of returning here after death”. He calls upon his audiences to “let hearts be awed, minds be amazed, and limbs tremble at the wonder of it”, showing the role of wonder and its cousin, fear, as tools for combating scepticism towards the supernatural.⁸⁰

Despite the culture of fascination with visions, particularly those involving the afterlife, Gervase admits that “many people tend, not unreasonably, to be unsure whether visions are to be accounted as empty dreams”.⁸¹ The addendum that this was “not unreasonable” shows an awareness that claims of sensory experience of the supernatural were not strictly reliable on the basis of sensory epistemology. This suggests there was a compartmentalisation of logic, wherein real world truths were considered according to the

⁷⁸ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 3, ch. 34, p. 181: “multis astantibus”.

⁷⁹ Gerald, *Topographia*, distinctio 3, ch. 34, p. 180: “Dicebat autem ob reverentiam sancti illius neminem ausum hoc sonare”.

⁸⁰ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 760-61: “Vt autem incredulis et quasi impossibilitate huc post mortem redeundi excusantibus suam non ignoranciam sed contumaciam satisfaciam, rem nouam et inter nos nuper publicatam edisseram; in cuius nouitate mirentur corda, stupeant animi, membra contrimescant!”.

⁸¹ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 782-3: “Et quia solet a plurimis non inmerito dubitari utrum uisiones pro sompniis uanis sint reputande... audiat lector quit nuper me audience contigerit”.

epistemological tenets described in **Chapters 2 and 3**, but supersensory beliefs were affirmed on the basis of faith.

However, there was problematic overlap between these two domains, particularly in the use of the rhetoric of sensory epistemology to affirm claims about the supersensory. In describing a vision of a talking horse, Gervase complains that “there are some people who do not believe in anything supernatural, and even if they do not know the reason for things, they do not marvel at their existence”.⁸² It may appear fickle to disbelieve talking horses, but if beliefs can compound beliefs, then doubts can compound doubts. For this reason, Gervase bemoans that his flock’s disbelief in supernatural beings added difficulty to his role as preacher. In opening the story of the Beaucaire revenant, Gervase writes:

It is a common experience with us that, when we paint a picture of the torments of hell, many people pour scorn on us; for they regard what we say about the other world as mere nonsense, even claiming that we have made it all up. This shows that they do not believe what is read in the scriptures, unless they have heard it confirmed by someone who has either risen from the dead or who appears to the living after his death. For how, they say, can people know these things, when they have neither seen them nor had experience of them?⁸³

Gervase’s frustrations here add credence to the view that sceptics were dissatisfied with the Christian worldview because of its lack of congruence with sensory experience. In Gervase’s view, such sceptics were “stony-hearted people”, a metaphor of obstinacy and intransigence borrowed from Ezekiel 11:19. This aligned sceptics with heretics, since, as Moore has shown,

⁸² Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 92, pp. 738-9: “Sunt qui fantastica non credunt, et quorum causam nesciunt, materiam non mirantur”.

⁸³ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 103, pp. 758-9: “Multociens et a multis insultatur, cum penas infernales ante oculos ponimus, quod ea que de altero seculo proponimus friuola sunt, adicientes hec adinuenticia esse. Non ergo credunt quod scriptum legitur, nisi audierint ab aliquo qui uel resurrexerit a mortuis uel uiuentibus appareat post mortem: qualiter enim sciunt qui hec nec uiderunt nec probauerunt?”. I have altered Banks and Binns’ translation. Their phrasing “they do not believe what they read in the scriptures” does not take account of the passive verb “legitur”, which provides a completely different meaning: “they do not believe what *is read* in the scriptures”. Gervase’s claim is therefore not a specific attack on the ecclesiastical class.

obstinacy was key to the definition of heresy.⁸⁴ These powerful features of religious ideology greatly disincentivised scepticism towards the supernatural, while telling supernatural stories could be a polemical tool for encouraging faith in the non-physical world.

Unlike Gervase's attack on an amorphous sceptical "they", some stories about sceptics carried specific information, including names, ranks, and details about the individual's conversion from scepticism to orthodoxy. Walter Map recounts the conversion of John Belles-Mains, Archbishop of Lyons, from disbelief to belief through personal experience. Map quotes John as saying "I have sometimes seen illusory things happen when people declared they had seen miracles, and I always saw through the appearance, and never once have I seen a real miracle".⁸⁵ This suggests that John was sceptical about the conceptual category of miracle, and that he was aware of the potential for abuse of miracles to increase a person's social standing. Map describes John as seeing Peter, Archbishop of Tarentaise, heal a sick man using prayer, thus reforming John's previous scepticism towards miracles, which meant he could "know as truth that which is believed in general".⁸⁶ This does not mean that John disbelieved in miracles, but, like many of his contemporaries, was concerned with taxonomising subjectively true miracles from subjectively false miracles. As Michael Goodich and Brenda Bolton have shown, this problem came into increasing focus in the thirteenth century due to broad changes within medieval spirituality.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ R.I. Moore, *The War on Heresy*, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, M.R. James (ed. and trans.), revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), pp. 136-7: "Vidi aliquociens fantasias fieri, ubi predicabant miracula se uidisse, perceptive semper simultatem, nec unquam uerum aliquod uidi miraculum".

⁸⁶ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 136-7: "sed quod fere credebatur uere posset scire".

⁸⁷ Michael Goodich, "Reason or Revelation? The Criteria for the Proof and Credibility of Miracles in Canonization Processes", in Gabor Klaniczay (ed.), *Medieval Canonisation Trials: Religious and Legal Aspects* (Budapest, 2002), pp. 181-97; Brenda Bolton, "Supporting the Faith in Medieval Rome", in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds), *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp.157-78.

A number of things are worth unpacking here. First, the conversion narrative acts as a form of pro-orthodox persuasion. Second, personal sensory experience of a perceived miracle is the source of John's change of heart. Third, the retrospective use of the term "real miracle" implies the existence of faked miracles, showing awareness of the abuse of miracles for politicking. Fourth, if belief in miracles was "believed in general", this may suggest Map believed scepticism to be a minority problem. Fifth, the high status of the sceptic, an archbishop, supports Flanagan's view that doubt was a key component of ecclesiastical culture regardless of a person's particular position within the Church hierarchy.⁸⁸

The paradox here is that faith asks the faithful to believe without evidence, but this story shows that the opposite could also be true. Public ceremonies and displays of marvelous power can increase belief by providing sensory evidence to support biblical wonders. It seems no mistake that many of the miracles performed before audiences in the Middle Ages emulated biblical miracles, such as healing and revivification, as a means to prove biblical marvels post-hoc by providing sensory evidence in the present.

This is further supported in Map's description of a number of failed miracles of Bernard of Clairvaux. Given the rhetorical nature of conversion narratives, there seems little reason to accept them at face value simply because they contain names and dates, but Map's willingness to report unsuccessful miracles ostensibly improves his reliability. In one case, Map discusses the expectation that Bernard of Clairvaux perform healing miracles. Map quotes Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London, as saying that a Burgundian man requested Bernard of Clairvaux to heal his sick son. When Bernard arrived, the boy was already deceased; Bernard lay on the boy in an attempt to revive him, but was unable to do so. Map thereby quips about pederasty in monastic culture: "I have heard before now of a monk throwing himself upon a boy, but always, when the monk got up, the boy promptly got up

⁸⁸ Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*.

too”.⁸⁹ A second failed miracle, “which did not add to [Bernard’s] reputation”, involved Bernard lying on the grave of a deceased friend (Walter, count of Nevers) and calling upon him to return, but the friend “had not the ears of Lazarus, and did not come”.⁹⁰ Such failed miracles deserves further attention from scholars, as they add greater clarity to the manipulation of wonder as a means to increasing personal prestige; they are also a way to show that disillusionment in miracle-doers resulted in a reduction in social capital.

Methodological problems caused by the nature of the medieval written record frustrate any attempt to locate non-believers in the Middle Ages in anything but transient, momentary glimpses. These glimpses may even be unreliable given the clear ideological program behind both conversion and deconversion narrative structures. When examined together, these stories show that there was scepticism towards supernatural explanations of the universe, which Lucien le Febvre called the “collective mentality” or “shared assumption” of medieval European culture.⁹¹ The numerical ratio between *fideles* and *infideles* is, of course, unattainable, but even this would deny the possibility that thoughts shift in relation to life experiences, social contexts, and spiritual moods. What is more certain, though, is that the cognitive process commenced by wonder drove some towards evidence and sensory experience even in the realm of religious dogmas that were inappropriate to question using sensory epistemology. Wonder therefore had the potential to undermine what Bruce calls the authoritarian, non-relativist “single truth” mandated by Christian belief.⁹² Because wonder could unravel the Christian metanarrative, scepticism was associated with eternal

⁸⁹ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, distinctio 1, ch. 24, pp. 80-81: “Monachorum infelicissimus hic fuit. Nunquam enim audiui quod aliquis monachus super puerum incubisset, quin statim post ipsum surexisset puer”.

⁹⁰ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, distinctio 1, ch. 24, pp. 80-81: “famam eius non secundans... Galterus autem, quia non audiuit uocem Iesu, non habuit aures Lazari, et non uenit”.

⁹¹ Peter Burke, *Social History of Knowledge: from Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 3.

⁹² Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, p. 29

damnation. Within the context of Christian belief, it was therefore better to stay at wonder's initial emotional step, without progressing to its subsequent cognitive step.

5.3 — Wonder, Certainty, and Faith

This section proposes that Christianity encouraged progression to the cognitive stages of wonder only if the wonder was seen to support the Christian worldview, while cognitive exploration for its own sake was discouraged. As such, belief in divine omnipotence offered a feeling of certainty in the case of wonders. Claiming that only God could know the truth of wonders therefore resolved epistemological discomfort and also limited the explorative potential of new phenomena. Moreover, this situation aligns with the low opportunity for broad-ranging sensory experience and a consequent reduced level of ontological knowledge, which gave greater strength to the divine omnipotence claim.

In particular, the conceptualisation of *fidelitas* as belief without evidence (and *infidelitas* as lack of belief until evidence is presented) gave strength to belief in marvels. This created a cultural paradox: wonder leads to a desire for evidence, but faith encourages belief without evidence. The presence of these two contradictory pulls typifies medieval experience of wonder. Moreover, the Christian *mentalité* of wondering at everything as evidence for creation prevents wonder from progressing to its cognitive stages. This assists in explaining the correlation noted by contemporary anthropologists between greater intelligence and greater religious disbelief, however, this trend may have been inverted in the Middle Ages

because educational instruction had a significant focus on the supernatural.⁹³ Furthermore, there is some sense that religious belief or disbelief is correlated with one's willingness to accept uncertainty; Rocco Huang showed that contemporary nations with less tolerance of uncertainty have higher self-reported religious observance, but lag behind in information-based industry sectors, with Huang basing his findings on Hofstede's classifications described in the **Introduction**.⁹⁴

The emphasis on humility as a key Christian virtue allowed the Church a theoretical ascendancy over the interpretation of truth and falsehood. This was an attitude that ranged from biblical marvels to non-biblical written marvels to oral marvels. Given that biblical marvels were unavailable to the senses of medieval people, having faith they were true was the only means of assessing an important aspect of Christian belief; faith and *auctoritas* are therefore psychologically related. The division between natural and supernatural realms also affected theological-scientific theory, as in the view that there was a disjunction between humans as fallible truth-seekers, and God as the only being capable of fathoming the truth.

Moreover, if wonder was something that led to sensory evidence and cognition, which could decrease belief in Christian doctrines, then wonder itself was dangerous, and had to be co-opted for Christian ends. As such, religious belief is predicated to some extent on keeping believers at the emotional stage of wonder without progressing to its cognitive stage, or else only allowing progression to the cognitive stages when the sensory experience confirmed a Christian belief. The view that wonders ought to be believed on faith is expressed with some variation by patristic authors, including Augustine and Gregory the Great.

⁹³ Richard Lynn, John Harvey, and Helmuth Nyborg, "Average intelligence predicts atheism rates across 137 Countries", *Intelligence*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2009), pp. 11-15; James Allan Cheyne, "Atheism rising: the connection between intelligence, science, and the decline of belief", *Skeptic*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2009), pp. 33-55.

⁹⁴ Rocco R. Huang, "Tolerance for Uncertainty and the Growth of Informationally Opaque Industries", *Journal of Development Economics*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2008), pp. 333-353.

This section will explore Gervase of Tilbury's depiction of the auspicious patronage of Virgil over Naples, Gregory the Great's view of wonder as dangerous, and Hugh of St Victor's assertion that wonders and contemporary events ought to prompt reflection on the divine through meditation on scripture.

Gervase of Tilbury's story of Virgil's auspicious patronage over Naples shows wonder's propensity to allow for non-Christian ways of thinking, in this case pagan folklore and chance. Upon entering Naples in June 1190/1, Gervase and a friend (Philip of Salisbury) sought a ship to sail to an unspecified location on urgent business. Although they were in a hurry, they first decided to arrange lodgings, and made contact with one of Gervase's friends, a former pupil of his in canon law, John Pignatelli, wealthy archdeacon of Naples. After the long walk from Nola (some 25km), with John's assistance, they managed to arrange their boat and provisions within an hour, in such a short time that Gervase was astounded: "We were amazed and baffled at such great good fortune!"⁹⁵

At this, John asked about how they had entered the city gate, and led the pair back to the gate to explain. At the gate, John pointed out two heads carved above the gateway, one of Virgil smiling, the other of Virgil crying. John explained: If one entered the city by walking on the left, one would be walking beneath the crying Virgil face, and therefore would have bad luck; if one entered to the right, one would be walking beneath the smiling Virgil face, and have good luck. Gervase then recalled that as he and Philip were entering the city, a donkey was blocking the left-hand side of the entrance, so they must have walked in on the right. To Gervase, this explained why they had been able to procure a boat so quickly, because good fortune had blessed them in the form of a smiling Virgil.

⁹⁵ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 12, pp. 580-81: "ignorantibus et stupentibus nobis de tanta felicitate successuum".

Gervase prefaced this story by explaining that his initial scepticism was overturned by the evidence of his personal experience:

There is a [marvel] there [that is, in Naples] of which I had personal experience, though at the time I knew nothing of it; but since, completely by chance, the thing gave me knowledge and proof of itself, I was forced to accept the truth of it, though if I had not previously had experience of it, but had only heard someone else's account of it, I could hardly have made out a case for it.⁹⁶

This supports the view that medieval recorders of marvels typically only recorded those they thought were true, based on evidence and personal experience. But more importantly for our purposes is Gervase's acknowledgment of chance or fortune, and not divine arrangement, as the key determinant of events. Gervase writes: "In writing this it has not been our intention to support the sect of the Sadducees, who claimed that all things were dependent on God and *εἰμασμένην*, that is, on fate and the accidents of fortune".⁹⁷

Further controversy could be found in the fact that Virgil, though a respected figure to many medieval scholars, was a pagan.⁹⁸ Strictly speaking, pre-Christian folkloric belief ought to have been firmly rejected. However, the relationship between folkloric and Christian belief was more complex and nuanced than this, and the details of this relationship have been the subject of significant debate.⁹⁹ What is clear, though, is that marvels could be received as a slippery slope to non-Christian belief, and they were therefore subversive within any strict interpretation of Christian theology. But Gervase's willingness

⁹⁶ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 12, pp. 578-9: "est [mirabile] quod illic expertus sum, tunc quidem ipsius ignarus, sed fortuito casu re ipsa mihi dante scientiam et probationem, coactus sum esse sciens eius quod, si non preuentus essem periculo, uix aliena relatione fieri possem assertor".

⁹⁷ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 12, pp. 582-3: "Non tamen hec scripsimus quasi Saduceorum sectam comprobemus, qui omnia dicebant in Deo et marmone consistere, hoc est in fato et casu fortune". Banks and Binns note that Gervase mistakes the Saducees for the Pharisees here (p. 582, n. 9).

⁹⁸ Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1995),

⁹⁹ Watkins, "'Folklore' and 'Popular Religion' in Britain during the Middle Ages", *Folklore*, vol.115, no.2 (2004), pp.140-50. In the same volume, Peter Burke usefully summarises the complex historiography of folklore: "History and Folklore: A Historiographical Survey", pp. 133-9.

to report this story suggests that there was some relaxation of conservative strictures that existed perhaps more in theory than practice.

Gervase affirms the need for faith in marvels tales, and brings the conflict between the senses and religious dogma to the fore. He discusses the emotive power of a number of images of the Lord, including a shroud imprinted with the Lord's image kept in the Lateran Palace, which Pope Alexander III had to have covered over "because it caused such violent trembling in people who gazed at it too intently that there was a risk of death".¹⁰⁰ Whether this is a hyperbole or a legitimate depiction of the intensity of medieval reception of divine images is open to speculation. For Gervase, though, such images present the opportunity to discuss a variety of potential responses to sensory experience of representations of the divine. Gervase quotes John 20:29: "Blessed are you who have believed in me although you have not seen me", and then adopts the persona of the Lord to state that "Some who are to see me will not believe in me, and others who are not to see me themselves at all will believe in me, that they may be saved".¹⁰¹ This suggests there are a variety of possible responses from complete faith to obstinate scepticism, from believing without seeing to disbelieving despite seeing. Here may be seen once again the implication that scepticism was a limit to salvation. In any community of religious observance, the view that scepticism is blasphemous provides a tremendous incentive to conform, thereby perpetuating religious belief. This force may act even on firm disbelievers, since principles of group psychology have a role in pressuring outliers to return to the ideological centre or internalise their disbelief.

Another emanation of these powerful features of religious ideology is the mandate of humility. Humility is a key component of cultures of *auctoritas*, since obeisance and

¹⁰⁰ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 25, pp. 606-7: "quod attentius intuentibus tremorem cum mortis periculo inferret".

¹⁰¹ Gervase, *Otia*, book 3, ch. 23, pp. 596-7: "Beatus es qui in me credidisti cum ipse me non uideris. Scriptum enim est de me quia hi qui me uisuri sunt, non me credituri non sunt, et qui me minime sunt uisuri ipsi, in me sunt credituri ut salui fiant".

deference to upper levels of social hierarchies is what superiors intend as the governing dynamic behind the behaviour of those on lower rungs. One iteration of this within medieval scientific-theological polemic is the view that human beings are fallible in determining truths since they sit on lower rungs of the chain of being headed by God.¹⁰² Belief in one's own powerlessness to determine ontological truths may have been an attitude that was appropriate to the medieval epistemic situation, as a time of information scarcity. However, another effect of humility is increased viability of the divine omnipotence claim, and a consequent increase in the perception of knowledge as dangerous because of its potential to provide those on lower rungs of the social hierarchy the ability to challenge the orthodox truths prescribed by those on higher rungs.

Like Augustine, Pope Gregory the Great (r.590-604) wrote of the wondrous nature of creation and the Christian miracles, and argued that it was faulty to doubt them just because they were discordant with the evidence of the senses. Gregory's views encourage a self-instigated feeling towards creation, while discouraging ontological examination. Gregory writes in a tone of exasperation at those who do not coalesce with this schema:

Yet we neglect to admire [creation], because these things, which are wondrous and incomprehensible to the investigator, have become worthless through the custom of human eyes. Hence it is the case that if a dead man is revived, everyone leaps up in wonder, and [yet] every day a person is born who did not [previously] exist, and nobody wonders. However, it is plain to all and far from doubt that it is greater to create that which did not exist than to repair that which did exist... Those who saw water turned into wine a single time wondered at such a thing. Every day the earth's moisture is drawn into the root of the vine and changed by the grape into wine, and nobody wonders. Wondrous therefore are all those things that men

¹⁰² Page duBois, *Centaur and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor, 1982).

neglect to wonder at, because, as we said before, they grow numb by habitually considering them.¹⁰³

These wondrous elements of nature were inexplicable, but nevertheless true; by the same token, life after death defied explanation, but was nevertheless true:

The divine miracles should always be considered with devotion and never disputed by the intellect. For often human perception, when it searches for a reason for such things, does not find one, and then it plunges itself into a pit of doubt. Whence it is that some men may reflect upon the bodies of the dead turned to dust, and since they can scarcely deduce the resurrection using reason, they might despair of their own ability to return thence to their former state. Wonders are therefore to be believed on faith, and must not be probed by reason, because if the reason for these things was shown to our eyes, they would not be wondrous... Indeed, after considering the dust of human flesh, the minds of some are shaken up and lose hope for the time when dust turns back into flesh and the body is for a second time put together limb by limb... This can in no way be comprehended by reason, however it can easily be believed by example [*exemplum*]. Indeed, who would believe that a huge tree grows from one single seed, if they did not know it was true through their own experience?¹⁰⁴

Gregory betrays awareness of the danger of sensory experience as something that potentially undermines the Christian mysteries.

¹⁰³ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, Marci Adriaen (ed.) in *CCSL*, vol.143 (Turnholt, 1979), book 6, ch. 15, §18, vol. 1, p. 296, ll. 11-16, 22-6: “Sed tamen mirari neglegimus quia ea quae incomprehensibili indagatione mira sunt, humanis oculis usu uiluerunt. Vnde fit ut si mortuus homo suscitetur, in admirationem omnes exsiliant, et cotidie homo qui non erat nascitur et nemo miratur, dum procul dubio omnibus constet quia plus sit creari quod non erat, quam reparari quod erat... Aquam semel in uinum permutatam uidentes cuncti mirati sunt; cotidie humor terrae in radicem uitis attractus per botrum in uinum uertitur et nemo miratur. Mira itaque sunt omnia quae mirari homines neglegunt, quia ad considerandum, ut praediximus, usu torpescunt”.

¹⁰⁴ Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, book 6, ch. 15, §19, vol. 1, pp. 296-7, ll. 32-41, 44-8, 50-53: “Sed inter haec sciendum est quia diuina miracula et semper debent considerari per studium et numquam discuti per intellectum. Saepe namque humanus sensus dum quarumdam rerum rationem quaerens non inuenit, in dubitationis se uoraginem mergit. Vnde fit ut nonnulli homines mortuorum corpora in puluerem redacta considerent, dumque resurrectionis uim ex ratione colligere non possunt haec ad statum pristinum redire posse desperent. Mira igitur ex fide credenda sunt, perscrutanda per rationem non sunt quia si haec nostris oculis ratio expanderet, mira non essent... Considerato quippe humanae carnis puluere, quorumdam mens concussa desperat, quando puluis ad carnem redeat et rediuuium corpus per membrorum lineamenta componat... Hoc nimirum comprehendi per rationem non potest sed tamen credi facile per exemplum potest. Quis enim ab uno grano seminis, immensam surgere arborem crederet, nisi certum hoc per experimentum teneret?”.

However, Gregory's response is that the divine mysteries must remain inexplicable in order for God to communicate his enduring presence to the Christian faithful. For this reason, Gregory proposes that wonders should be approached with faith, and not scepticism, but this is a view that counteracts wonder's purpose as an evolutionary mechanism leading to greater understanding of one's surroundings. This appropriation of wonder solely for Christian ends typifies the religious *mentalité*, and arguably lowers ontological knowledge by discouraging conceptual exploration of physical things. In one practical example, Gregory notes that exploration of the physical, such as deceased bodies ("the dust of human flesh") had the propensity to "shake up minds" and undermine belief in an afterlife or resurrection.

Although not strictly within the period under consideration in this dissertation, Gregory's view is an important exemplar of Christian thought about wonder, and it bears similarity to some twelfth century views, such as Hugh of St Victor's views of wonder in his *De meditatione*. Hugh's *De meditatione* is a theological tract on the importance of *meditatio* (thinking, contemplation). The text appears to have been widely circulated; in 1969, Roger Baron cited forty-five extant manuscripts.¹⁰⁵ Baron identified a target audience of ecclesiastics.¹⁰⁶

In this text, Hugh offers a taxonomy for wonder and its various possible uses, and provides guidance about how to interpret wondrous events. Hugh asserts that "wonder leads to questions, questions [lead to] investigations, [and] investigations [lead to] discoveries".¹⁰⁷ Hugh therefore understood that wonder had cognitive ramifications that lead ultimately to learning, though whether Hugh is referring to the sensory world or the supersensory world in this case is unclear. Hugh then divides wonder into a series of components: "Wonder

¹⁰⁵ Roger Baron (ed.), *Six Opuscles Spirituels de Hugues de Saint-Victor* (Paris, 1969), pp. 9-11.

¹⁰⁶ Baron, *Six Opuscles Spirituels*, pp. 11-15.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh of St Victor, *De meditatione*, in Baron (ed.), *Six Opuscles*, p. 44: "In primo admiratio quaestionem generat, quaestio investigationem, investigatio inventionem".

concerns arrangement... In heaven, all things are arranged equally, but on earth there is the higher and the lower: for this, there is wonder".¹⁰⁸ The implication here is that wonder itself is derived from the intersection between the natural and the supernatural realms, that it is a force God produces in mankind as a reminder of his enduring presence. Broadly speaking, this is a reiteration of Augustine's view of wonder.

Because wonder stemmed from the supersensory realm, Hugh considered the optimal approach to wondrous events to be the consideration of scripture. This is the lens through which Hugh exhorted his followers to consider all things: "First, reading supplies knowledge of true matters, commences meditation, supports prayer, confers devotion, and exalts contemplation of that thing. Meditation on the scriptures is the correct way to know things".¹⁰⁹ In essence, this stands as a rejection of empiricism, because it encourages consideration of scripture as the correct way to attain knowledge of all things, while sensory experiences are to be realigned to fit spiritual truths, or else ignored.

Hugh's views are tantamount to encouraging confirmation bias. His argument implies that only those wonders that affirmed Christian doctrines were worthy of being known, and that wonders that devalued the Christian metanarrative were subversive and perhaps even heretical. On the other hand, Hugh argued that heaven's *lux inaccessibilis* was ultimately unknowable to mortals, and that reflection on scripture had its upper limits in the production of knowledge.¹¹⁰ Humility was therefore necessary because of the incomprehensibility of divine mysteries, and the ability of God alone to comprehend the existential truth, the reason for the existence of all things. In this sense, Christian belief can

¹⁰⁸ Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. : Admiratio est dispositionis... Dispositio est, in coelo cuncta aequalia, in terra alta et depressa: pro hac admiratio".

¹⁰⁹ Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. 46: "In lectione autem sic considerandum. Primo lectio ad cognoscendam veritatem materiam ministrat, meditatio coaptat, oratio subleuat, operatio componit, contemplatio in ipsa exsultat. In scripturis meditatio est, quomodo scire oporteat"

¹¹⁰ Gillian Rosemary Evans, *Getting it Wrong: the Medieval Epistemology of Error* (Leiden, 1998), pp. ix-x.

be seen to salve discomfoting concerns about physical and existential truths. But at the same time, Hugh's view discourages ontological exploration because it suggests that it is impossible to know any truths with certainty, because of the inscrutability of the divine mysteries.

Hugh further recommends *meditatio* as a way to better understand truths:

“Meditation on a reading is how the things that could be are known to [actually] be”.¹¹¹ In Hugh's view, alignment of physical observations with spiritual precepts therefore shifts the senses, which are conjectural, into knowledge. Hugh then divides *meditatio* into three types: historical, allegorical, and tropological. Historical *meditatio* encompasses identifying real-world causes for events: “when we either strive for the reason for those things that have taken place or wonder at their execution at their particular times and places, and in their corresponding method”.¹¹² This category receives an admonition that we consider things through biblical precedent: “Consideration of this exercises meditation on the divine judgments”.¹¹³ The allegorical *meditatio* concerns “the arrangement of precedents with a view to the signification of future events, touching with marvelous reason and providence, as is appropriate for intelligence and the formation of faith, the corresponding form of the future”.¹¹⁴ Hugh therefore encourages his readers to use present events to prognosticate, a mentality prevalent in prophetic biblical narratives. The tropological *meditatio* concerns the exploration of virtue from Christian precepts.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. 48: “Meditatio in lectione est quomodo sint quae sciuntur quia sunt”.

¹¹² Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. 48: “quando eorum quae facta sunt rationem vel quaerimus, vel admiramur suis temporibus et locis et modo congruo perfectam”.

¹¹³ Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. 48: “In hac consideratio iudiciorum divinorum meditantem exercet”.

¹¹⁴ Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. 48: “operatur in dispositione praecedentium, futurorum significationem attendens mira ratione et providentia coaptatam sicut oportuit ad intelligentiam et fidei formam fabricandam”.

¹¹⁵ Hugh, *De meditatione*, p. 48.

Hugh's advice for wonder shows that he considered it as only partially related to concerns of the physical world. Rather, wonder stemmed from an intersection between the natural and the supernatural, and the optimal use of wonder was as a prompt to reflection on spiritual truths. In this framework, the purpose of investigation was greater understanding of God's will, so as to better please him by following his commands and strictures. Given Hugh's status as a Victorine opinion leader, it may be the case that his views were more influential than the more sceptical or uncertain elements within twelfth-century responses to wonders. If this is the case, then the Christian approach to wonder diminished the potential for scepticism, and reduced ontological exploration.

Considering wonders as evidence for divine precepts lowered the potential to consider them for their own inherent value. This is an opportunity cost: exploration of wonders as evidence for pre-existing Christian ideas reduces exploration of wonders for their own sake. However, twelfth-century religious culture provided more than just an opportunity cost, because of the encouragement of *reverencia* and *timor*, and the discouragement of curiosity as a vice. Throughout this dissertation, however, a wide variety of stories have been presented that show that there was a plethora of responses to marvels, with some interpreting them through biblical lenses, some through empirical lenses, others through the lens of non-biblical texts, and still others who declared their inability to understand them on any level. To what extent Hugh's admonitions, written by an ecclesiastic for other ecclesiastics, had any effect on pragmatic quotidian response to wonders, remains open to speculation.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that medieval Christianity was at odds with wonder's biological-evolutionary drive to seek new information about the physical world. This was because the theoretical Christian approach to wonder was to either halt it at its emotional stages, or else only permit it to proceed to its cognitive stages if the wonder was seen to confirm Christian precepts. In particular, wonder could be dangerous because it led people to seek sensory experiences, and sensory experiences had the potential to devalue the Christian metanarrative. When conceptualising religions as cultural constructs that follow evolutionary principles, it was therefore necessary for the ongoing existence of the Christian worldview that scepticism be quashed, as is achieved in the charge of blasphemy, and the appropriation of wonder solely for Christian teaching. As such, the medieval wonder system centred on an authoritarian approach to truth, in which ecclesiastics admonished that novel phenomena be interpreted through scriptural precedent.

However, the written record of the Middle Ages skews our understanding, and denies access to the plurality of belief. The plethora of hints within ecclesiastical texts that there were sceptics, and perhaps even firm disbelievers, shows that the ecclesiastical desire for unity and orthodoxy was merely a desideratum, and that the twelfth century was not a time of total belief. This calls for a conceptualisation of the ecclesiastical class as primarily concerned with intra-religious conversion. Using present wonders as proof for biblical wonders was a part of this process. This suggests that the Christian appropriation of wonder solely for Christian ends counteracted wonder's evolutionary purpose. However, the wide variety of stories presented in this dissertation have shown that medieval people were

concerned about the physical truth of wonders, as well as their supernatural significance.

This would seem to suggest that there was, to some extent, a disjunction between theological views and everyday behaviour, even for those within the church hierarchy.

Conclusion

Previous scholarship has focused on medieval wonder as determined within particular cultural frameworks. However, epistemological responses to wonders are influenced by a variety of tiers: biological, cultural, and individual. The use of novel analytical lenses borrowed from hard and soft sciences, including psychology, emotionology, and cognitive neuroscience, offers new possibilities for understanding medieval responses to, and uses of, wonder in terms of all three tiers. This dissertation has built upon previous scholarship, particularly that of Carl Watkins, who approached wonder using traditional source criticism. The emergent paradigms explored in this dissertation do not conflict with these traditional methods, but constitute an adjunct offering fresh avenues of thought. Future research may consider how psychology and cognitive science interact with the core elements of medieval culture, such as rituals, miracles, and the enactment and performance of faith. One example of this is the new movement of cognitive narratology, which seeks to analyse narrative texts through the lens of cognitive science.¹ Such a field could have important ramifications on our understanding of a plethora of medieval narrative forms, including wonder stories.

The upper epistemological tier, biology, appears to be transhistorical. This view is supported by recent studies in cognitive emotionology and neuroscience, which have influenced the methodology of historical studies of the emotions.² One key claim of cognitive neuroscience is that information is received through sensory perception regardless

¹ Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, 2006).

² Jason T. Buhle et al., "Cognitive Reappraisal of Emotion: A Meta-Analysis of Human Neuroimaging Studies", *Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 24, no. 11 (2014), pp. 2981-90.

of a person's culture or time period. Within this upper biological tier, evolutionary principles governing the emotions have influence on human behaviours. Analysis of this tier therefore emphasises our common humanity with medieval people in terms of epistemology and some aspects of psychology.

When considered from a consequentialist view, emotions have discrete outcomes that assist survival and procreation. In particular, wonder creates learning through ontological exploration and consideration of evidence. However, cultures vary emotional responses because the individual brain's memories and beliefs are formed in particular times and spaces. Individuality varies these upper patterns further, by providing unique sets of experiences, upbringings, and aptitudes. Future research may consider emotions transtemporally to identify aspects of change and continuity. The wonder stories examined here, for example, bear similarities, in some ways, with wonder stories from societies as distinct as Ancient Egypt and Georgian England.³ Future research on wonder may also consider specific species of wonder, such as wonder's relationship to expertise and specialisation, wonder in the culture of magic, wonder at respected figures like perceived miracle workers, or the effect that a failure to evoke wonder has on reputation.

This dissertation therefore finds itself in a broader movement within medievalism: the increasing use of contemporary scientific theory and method to elucidate new possibilities for the study of medieval history. With the rise of ever more powerful computing technology, future research ought to consider statistical methodologies as an adjunct to traditional source criticism. In the past, such methods have tended to be the province primarily of historians of economics and demographics. Roderick Floud's *Introduction to Quantitative Methods for Historians* focuses on economics so much so that its title might be

³ Toby Wilkinson (trans.), *Writings from Ancient Egypt* (London, 2016), pp. 235-44; Reverend C.C. Clarke, *Wonders of the World* (London, 1820, 8th edition).

amended *for Historians of Economics*.⁴ However, quantitative thinking can be useful for cultural and social history, and the study of texts. A.T. Fomenko's application of statistical models to medieval Russian chronicles has provided novel ways of conceptualising his primary sources, while Martine de Reu used digital methods to consider the various sins in early medieval sermons and determined that the most widely discussed sin was *superbia*.⁵ The hope is that history as a field of study will gradually deconstruct its perceived antithesis to science and mathematics. Calls for such a re-alignment have been in existence since at least the 1970s, but broader technological progression makes statistical methodologies increasingly attractive as the twenty-first century progresses.⁶ Although this dissertation has not used statistical methodologies, it has hopefully exemplified how application of scientific lenses to historical societies can refresh well-trodden scholarly ground with novel possibilities.

In regard to the long twelfth century, this dissertation has shown that medieval people responded to novel phenomena according to biological, cultural, and individual tiers. At the upper level, medieval people responded to bizarre tales by seeing, hearing, communicating, and altering behaviour. Wonder initiated emotional contagion, an evolutionary component of the emotions that results in group knowledge and cohesion. This had two key influences: leading large groups to flock to sites of wonders, but also allowing stories to propagate orally and in writing across both time and space. These trends show the evolutionary function of wonder playing out in the twelfth century, as an emotion leading to

⁴ Roderick Floud, *An Introduction to Quantitative Methods for Historians* (New York, 2010).

⁵ A.T. Fomenko, *Empirico-Statistical Analysis of Narrative Material and its Applications to Historical Dating*, O. Efimov (trans.) (Moscow, 1994); Martine de Reu, "A Statistical Treatment of Sin and Holiness in Sermons from the Early Middle Ages (500-1100)", in Georgiana Donavin, Cary J. Nederman, and Richard Utz (eds), *Speculum Sermonis: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Medieval Sermon* (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 335-361.

⁶ Robert William Fogel, "The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 2 (1975), pp. 329-50; Author not given, "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History", *Journal of American History*, vol. 95, no. 2 (2008), pp. 452-91.

the acquisition of new knowledge through communication, first-hand experience, doubt, and inquiry. One possibility for future research is to consider oral wonder stories from the point of view of logistics. Mapping the oral communication networks of wonder stories across time and space may elucidate new findings about medieval networks of orality.

On the other hand, the upper bio-evolutionary layer had components distinct to the medieval cultural milieu. Despite the fact that epistemological claims have been recognised for some time by specialists, the tendency has been to consider authors as rhetoricians, rather than as audiences, when the optimal approach may be to consider them as audiences before becoming rhetoricians. James Franklin proposed that epistemology is a form of uncodified, intuitive probability, a view supported by this dissertation's analysis of responses to wonders in which evidence is used to increase belief along the belief-doubt continuum.⁷ Those who reported wonders were arguably early upholders of a prototypical form of empiricism that was contentious because of the dominance of Catholic Christianity and its rejection of novelty.

Chapter 1 identified a variety of factors, some new to scholarship, that appear to have improved the verisimilitude of marvels for medieval responders. These included the moral reliability of the reporter, their manner and age, truth gestures like oaths, breadth of report, similarity of one event to another, the viewing of post-factum physical evidence, deference to written authority, and belief in divine omnipotence. Given the widely recognised culture of *auctoritas*, one might expect a high reliance on written testimony to improve the verisimilitude of marvels, but this is infrequent in the sources. Instead, there was more often a reliance on other epistemological factors, particularly those relating to orality and group psychology. Whether these epistemological factors are synchronic or diachronic could be

⁷ James Franklin, *What Science Knows and How it Knows it* (New York, 2009), pp. 161-80.

determined by comparative analysis with marvels texts from other periods, such as early modern supernatural pamphlets.⁸

Individual traits could further vary the upper bio-evolutionary and cultural tiers, by creating variations based on time, location, vocation, personality, education, willingness to accept uncertainty, and so on. Such differences in medieval responses are difficult to access, but may be seen in the variety of responses to wonders from both the authors themselves and the people they describe. Despite the potential for variation between cultures and individuals, this dissertation has argued that one component of the upper bio-evolutionary pattern is that wonder and doubt are indelibly connected. When a novel phenomenon is sufficiently divorced from the individual's prior experience, wonder necessarily leads to doubts and questioning. This is a part of wonder's drive towards cognitive exploration and new knowledge. This conclusion has been made possible only through an alignment of traditional history with contemporary neuroscience and cognitive emotionology.

Once again, however, cultural and individual differences may vary this upper pattern. Cultural groups create normative responses to new phenomena, or beliefs about the admirability of particular types of knowledge. In the twelfth century, there was a culture-level dismissiveness towards novel sensory experiences as something that could devalue the Christian metanarrative by creating ontological knowledge that gave voice to scepticism towards the spiritual and the supersensory. The hegemonic cultural response to wonder was arguably in conflict with the upper bio-evolutionary patterns, which are exemplified in group-based, pragmatic responses to wonders such as exploding whales, people struck by lightning, or green children. This paradox exemplifies the medieval experience of wonder: wonder prompts attraction, but medieval culture encouraged repulsion. As such, the sources

⁸ On the latter, see Marcus Harmes and Victoria Bladen (eds), *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England* (Abingdon, 2016).

under examination here show complex responses encompassing fascination but also fear, magnetism but also horror, automatic rejection but also rational consideration.

Particularly influential to medieval experiences of wonder was the tension between sensory experience and Christian faith. Wonder compels people to seek sensory experiences to advance knowledge, but Christian thinkers sought to only encourage sensory experiences that confirmed Christian precepts. The culture of didacticism is one particular emanation of this, as it allowed ecclesiastics an ascendancy over the interpretation of truths in nature.

Chapter 4 argued that this culture of didacticism is related to inductive reasoning, as both are emanations of reduced ontological knowledge. The view that God could create any bizarre thing in the present is supported in situations of reduced knowledge, because more things are subjectively bizarre, wondrous, and shocking. The medieval dismissal of curiosity as *vana curiositas* added force to this. In some sense, then, wonder's bio-evolutionary purpose was in conflict with the Church's attempted control of truth. However, the wide variety of wonder tales, and the fear and excitement they generated, shows that there was some degree of disconnection between the formal, theoretical strictures of Church morality and the everyday experience of wonder for both laypeople and ecclesiastics, because responses were at least partially influenced by bio-evolutionary principles.

The expectations attached to textual genres and the aims of particular texts further complicate the evidentiary process proposed here. While *historiae* and *chronica* had high truth standards, other text types could reduce audiences' need to consider the material on purely factual terms. In particular, texts that aimed to entertain or instill didactic messages could have a reduced need to prove their stories true. But such a generalisation is also reductive. As **Chapter 4** showed, the authors of didactic texts could possess as much concern for physical truth as moral argument. This is because sceptical sections of the medieval population were more likely to require material proof for a story before capitulating to its

moral. By the same token, as shown in **Chapter 3**, there is much that remains to be understood about the reception of texts that aimed to entertain, and historians are left to speculate about how medieval people understood them on truth terms. It is therefore useful to remember that representational accuracy was not the aim of all marvels stories, particularly given the proliferation of quasi-fictive textual modes taking place across the twelfth century. What seems clear, though, is that wonder stories tread an uncomfortable middle ground between entertainment, truth, and moral message, and that this could make wonder a problematic emotion if physical truths were difficult to determine because of information scarcity.

As a whole, the twelfth century ought to be understood as a time of widespread epistemic frustration. It was often claimed in wonder tales that God alone could know the absolute truth. In this context, having faith in divine wisdom and judgment could palliate the discomfort that arises from uncertainty, while humility, a key Christian value, may further discourage ontological exploration. But, as Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park recognised, having faith in all wonders was logically problematic.⁹ If one believes on faith that wonders are true, then this disavows the cognitive process that encourages taxonomising phenomena into categories of true or false based on evidence. Having faith in all wonders may therefore distort wonder's bio-evolutionary purpose; automatic belief in all things is tantamount to non-cognition.

However, as this dissertation has shown, there were a wide variety of cases where wonder inspired responders to seek sensory evidence to affirm truths. William of Newburgh, for example, could "not easily accept on faith" the existence of revenants like the *Hundepest*,

⁹ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York, 1998), p. 40.

but rather retreated to epistemological factors to justify his belief.¹⁰ This shows that, despite medieval people discussing and respecting faith as an axiomatic position at the core of Christian ideology, their practice sometimes varied in the realm of marvels because of wonder's *raison d'être*. As **Chapter 2** demonstrated, this *raison d'être* drove responders to seek sensory evidence as much as was practicable. Strategies used included visiting a marvel's place of origin, interrogating a witness, or, more rarely, performing an experiment, with the particular strategy dependent on the species of marvel under examination.

Before the advent of the new Aristotle, there were many socio-cultural restrictions on wonder as a stimulus for cognition. As an international monoculture, the Catholic Church enforced specific ways of thinking in an attempt to limit curiosity and co-opt wonder for Christian ends. However, increases in travel, observational naturalism, the rediscovery of Aristotle, and heretical interpretations of the supersensory world gradually undermined the Church's attempted control of wonder and truth. At the same time, *infidelitas* was a veiled and insidious threat to Catholic unity that is hinted at in ecclesiastics' frequent complaints about disbelievers. Wonder's initiation of cognitive exploration through sensory experience appears to have underpinned the various species of disbelief in the supersensory world.

However, perhaps paradoxically, ecclesiastics also co-opted wonder for use as a polemical tool aimed at quashing scepticism. This involved telling conversion and deconversion narratives, which concerned perceived supernatural events and punishment of sceptics. Within this philosophical context, scepticism was greatly disincentivised because it was constructed as a potential barrier to salvation in the next world, while in this world it could lead to punishments that were social, physical, and emotional. Because scepticism was viewed as odious, it was therefore a high-risk position in the context of majority belief.

¹⁰ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Richard Howlett (ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* (London, RS, 1884), book 5, ch. 24, vol. 2, p. 477: "non facile in fidem reciperetur".

While it may have been a slippery slope argument to suggest that disbelief in particular supernatural creatures leads to disbelief in God, this was something about which some medieval ecclesiastics were gravely concerned, as shown in **Chapter 5**. For this reason, wondering at contemporary supernatural marvels was a useful persuasive tool for use in intrareligious conversion.

In the lived experience of wonder, though, there was a tendency, whether conscious or subconscious, to see sensory experience as the optimal form of proof. Even when sensory experience was available, there was a desire for proximity, as in Gerald of Wales' story of the curious monk who approached too close to the exploding whale carcass. Once again, though, there were limiting cultural factors, in this case *reverencia* and *timor Dei*. These fears of the supernatural in some cases limited wonder's potential as a prompt for cognitive exploration by denying sceptics the ability to experimentally test marvelous claims. Within the twelfth century, *reverencia* and *timor* encouraged caution, and the preferencing of personal security and salvation over the uncovering of physical truths, thereby helping to perpetuate the status quo.

Of interest to this discussion is the notion of nature as a divine mystery. If marvels were aspects of creation, then scrutinising them could be interpreted as scrutinising God, and therefore a form of irreverence. This was more pressing if marvels were considered direct interventions from a God who had the capacity for present action, as is a crux of Augustinian theology. In the view of some medieval scholars presented here, it was optimal to maintain nature as an enigma, so that it would evoke wonder at God, but only a wonder that was arrested at its emotional stages without progressing to its cognitive stages. If enacted, this attitude limited ontological knowledge, but arguably decreased the discomfort inherent in uncertainty by providing an overarching, divine explanation for all things. The

question then becomes to what degree this theoretical view intersected with the practice of wonder.

There were therefore a number of trends at play in the Middle Ages that limited wonder as a prompt to ontological knowledge. However, this dissertation has shown that these restrictions did not apply universally, and that there exist examples where wonder led to cognition, rational thinking, and the formation of hypotheses. These hypotheses were frequently considered through the lens of dominant paradigms, which ought to be expected given the pervasive influence of confirmation bias in human psychology generally, but even more so in situations of inductive reasoning and institutional ascendancy over truth, which leads wonders back to pre-existing truths.¹¹ In short, there was a contest between theological ‘believing is seeing’ and quotidian ‘seeing is believing’.

This dissertation has therefore proposed that the emotion of wonder spurs doubts and a process of evidence and fact checking. However, underscoring the twelfth-century experience of wonder was a number of paradoxes. Although curiosity was discouraged, there was a tremendous thirst for knowledge. Despite the desire for certainty, there was an inability to attain it in many cases. There was a broad desire for sensory experiences, but structural limitations on obtaining them, and there was a desire to confirm the supernatural, but the recognition that claims of sensory experience of the supernatural were not strictly reliable. These paradoxes typify the emotion of wonder and its attendant cognitive process in the long twelfth century.

¹¹ Raymond S. Nickerson, “Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises”, *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1998), pp. 175-220.

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