

Hermits, Hagiography, and Popular Culture: A Comparative Study of Durham Cathedral Priory's Hermits in the Twelfth Century.

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**Hermits, Hagiography, and Popular Culture:
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Priory's Hermits in the Twelfth Century.**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the social and religious roles of two twelfth-century hermits connected to Durham Cathedral Priory, Godric of Finchale and Bartholomew of Farne, within the general context of twelfth-century western European eremiticism. Chapter One is a general discussion of the historiography of eleventh and twelfth-century hermits, and introduces the main hagiographic materials to be discussed. Chapter Two discusses the context of monasticism and eremiticism in northern England, and analyses the *Vitae* of Godric and Bartholomew, particularly in terms of the problem of authority and asceticism. Chapter Three begins the discussion of the miracle cults at Farne and Finchale, raising the problem of popular interest in hermits and holy sites. Chapter Four continues this discussion by considering the large group of animal miracles at Farne and Finchale. Through comparison with the hagiographic tradition of such stories from their inception in Late Antiquity to the twelfth century, the chapter considers the relationship between popular and educated clerical elements in the Durham stories. Chapter Five considers the hagiographic theme of the eremitical diet, and the hermit in the wilderness, mainly through a comparison of Godric with a hermit, Aibert of Crespin, from the Cambrai. Chapter Six discusses the theme of eremitical clothing, and the social status of the hermit, comparing Godric to an English hermit, Wulfric of Haslebury. Chapter Seven considers the problem of hermits and women, and holy men and holy women. Godric's relation to holy women, and the misogyny of Durham's cult of Saint Cuthbert is considered through comparison with the *Life* of Christina of Markyate. Chapter Eight concludes with a final comparative discussion, of hermits and crowds, and discusses the social function of twelfth-century hermits.

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Dedication

To David G. Alexander (1939-1980). In the hope that he would
have approved

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Abbreviations

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> , (Brussels, Antwerp, Paris, 1643-).
AND	<i>Anglo-Norman Durham 1093-1193</i> , ed. David Rollason, Margaret Harvey and Michael Prestwich, (Woodbridge 1994).
Annal Anchin	<i>Sigeberti Auctarium Aquicinenses</i> , <i>MGH Scriptores</i> , vol. 6, pp. 392-398.
Arch. Ael.	<i>Archaeologica Aeliana</i> .
CCC	<i>St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community To A. D. 1200</i> , ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe, (Woodbridge 1989).
Christina	<i>The Life of Christina of Markyate</i> , ed. and trans. Charles H. Talbot, (Oxford, 1959).
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i> .
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores in folio</i> (Hanover 1826-) <i>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i> (Hanover 1884-).
PL	<i>Patrologia latina</i> , ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris 1841-64).
Reg. Libellus	<i>Reginaldi Monachi Dunelmensis Libellus de Admirandis Beati Cuthberti Virtutibus quae novellis patratae sunt temporibus</i> , ed. James Raine, SS 1, (1835).
Rollason, Symeon	<i>Symeon of Durham, Historian of Durham and the North</i> , ed. David Rollason, (Stamford 1998).
RS	<i>Rolls Series (Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores or Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britian and Ireland during the Middle Ages)</i> .

- SCH* *Studies in Church History.*
- SS* *Surtees Society.*
- Symeon, *LDE* *Symeon, Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius hoc est Dunelmensis ecclesie, in Symeon Opera.*
- Symeon Opera* *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, ed. Thomas Arnold, 2 vols., RS 75 (1885).*
- Vita Aiberti,* *Robert of Ostrevant, Vita Sancti Aiberti Presbyteri, AASS 7 April, pp. 672-82.*
- Vita Antonii,* *Athanasius, Vita Beati Antoni Abbatis, PL 73, cols. 125-70.*
- Vita Bart.* *Vita Bartholomaei Farnensis, in Symeon Opera, ed. Thomas Arnold, RS 75, vol. 1 (1885), pp. 295-325.*
- Vita Bernardi Tiron.* *Gaufridus Grossus, Vita B. Bernardi Tironiensis, PL 172, cols. 1362-1446.*
- Vita Cuthberti* *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda, in Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, (Cambridge 1940), pp. 141-307.*
- Vita Cuthberti Anon.* *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo, in Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, (Cambridge 1940), pp. 59-139.*
- Vita Godrici* *Libellus de Vita et Miraculis Sancti Godrici, Heremitae de Finchale, Auctore Reginaldo Monacho Dunelmensi, ed. Joseph Stephenson, SS 20 (1847).*
- Vita Godrici Gal.* *Vita Sancti Godrici Eremitae, Auctore Galfrido, AASS, 5 May, pp. 68-85.*
- Vita Wulfrici* *Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretae; Wulfric of Haselbury, by John, Abbot of Ford, ed. Dom Maurice Bell, Somerset Record Society, vol. 47, (1933).*

Chapter I: Introduction

'I thought my hermit was a perfect symbol.

An idiot in the landscape.'

Hannah from Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*

'If mankind chooses to think hermits and wanderers holy, it is because mankind must explain away the person who wishes to have nothing to do with his own species, for good or bad.'

Gog, a novel by Andrew Sinclair

i) The Historiography of Hermits

The solitary has always been a figure of fascination, disgust or respect to those living conventional lives, and the hermit can become paradoxically the reflection of a society's self-understanding. Medieval western hermits, defined by the precedent of the late antique Egyptian fathers of the desert, and by the institutions of Catholic Christianity, were provided with a stable intellectual context, and so they could be worked into conceptions of an ordered human society. However, not all periods or societies have been equally interested in writing about solitaries; interest in solitaries reflects a society concerned with its own nature. The eleventh and twelfth centuries are known as a time of considerable eremitical activity, and interest in such holy men and women. Within twelfth-century England, Durham cathedral priory produced by far the largest concentration of hagiographic material concerning holy men, focused largely on two hermits, Godric of Finchale and Bartholomew of Farne. By placing these two hermits within their local context, and also by comparing them with a range of more or less distant, but contemporary, hermits, some insight may be gained into the fascination twelfth-century society, in general, harboured for such figures.

It is only relatively recently that historians have begun to see hermits as part of the distinctive social and religious changes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is easy to assume that hermits

themselves are not subject to historical change, and cannot be analysed in such a way. Indeed, the first English historian to treat the subject ordered the material typologically rather than temporally.¹ In her still very valuable study, Clay revealed in an anecdotal fashion the immense variety of hermits' conditions and activities and classified hermits under such categories as 'island', 'cave', 'highway and bridge' and 'lighthouse' hermits.² The underlying theme of Clay's discussion is the extent to which individual hermits, regardless of period, were separated from the world, thus 'while hermits of the island, the forest, or the cave, chose their haunts chiefly with a view to solitude, there were others who took up their abode with more regard to the direct service of their fellow men.'³

In different ways, other historians from the first half of this century took hermits and recluses to be a stable aspect of medieval history, for whom particular contexts mattered less than the overall nature of eremitical life. Louis Gougaud's contribution placed hermits and recluses within the context of Catholic spirituality and the institutions of monasticism, particularly regarding the tradition of recluses within ancient Benedictine monasteries. Gougaud implicitly argued against the impression of hermits and recluses as curiosities of the Middle Ages, suitable only for antiquarian research. He wished to show the central importance of hermits in the context of general medieval culture, and as such seems to have been the first historian of hermits to note their common presence within romance literature.⁴ As if in opposition, an English historian, F. D. Darwin, seems to have been concerned to show how the never changing life of the recluse was a sign of a barbarous culture, awaiting the arrival of the Protestants.⁵ Darwin considered a wide range of mostly English evidence, but builds his picture of the medieval recluse through uncritical comparisons of *Rules* and episcopal legislation across time and region. The medieval recluse is a static creature; what is said in a ninth-century *Rule*, (that attributed to one Grimlaic), for recluses can

¹ Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, (London 1914).

² The term 'bridge hermit' was in fact used in episcopal records in the latter Middle Ages; see Roberta Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: the Other Monasticism*, (London, 1995), pp. 161-2.

³ Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, p. 49.

⁴ Louis Gougaud, *Ermites et Reclus*, (Liguge 1929), pp. 36-9.

⁵ Francis D. S. Darwin, *The English Medieval Recluse*, (London 1944), esp. pp. 62-5.

be combined with the thirteenth-century English *Ancrene Wisse*, to typify recluse life; 'Anchoresses find themselves reduced to a position resembling rather too closely that of praying automata mechanically performing certain ritualistic acts.'⁶ Darwin discussed a number of the late medieval scandals concerning recluses, and on one commented: 'Here we have the case of an anchorage sunk. . .to a level little better than that of a house of ill fame. . . a typical product of a continuous and unvarying routine of prayer and work'.⁷

Despite the reified perspectives of these historians, what emerges most clearly is in fact the sheer variety contained in the eremitical life across the centuries, and the consequent difficulty of defining what exactly a hermit is or was. Even the various terms 'hermit', 'recluse', and 'anchorite' have not been entirely stable in their meaning, either within the Middle Ages or among modern historians. For western monasticism, the defining text is, of course, the *Rule* of Saint Benedict. Unlike some modern historians, Benedict saw no inherent difference between the terms 'hermit' and 'anchorite': 'Second, there are the anchorites [*anachoritae*] or hermits [*eremitae*], who have come through the test of living in a monastery for a long time, and have passed beyond the first fervour of monastic life.'⁸ Benedict's division of religious into four types, the two good kinds above, and the two bad kinds, *gyrovagi* and *sarabaitae*, actually echoes Jerome's division of religious into coenobites, anchorites and *Remoboth*, the inferior type.⁹ What both Fathers were concerned with in these divisions was not typology as such, but questions of the moral worth of the religious life; all three kinds of inferior religious are marked by a lack of integration into structures of authority. It is difficult to assign empirical definitions to terms whose meaning was not empirical but moral. Despite this problem, for one historian of medieval England there is good evidence to see an empirical distinction; an anchorite was an enclosed one, or a recluse, while a hermit had more freedom.¹⁰

⁶ *ibid.* pp. 15-25.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 29.

⁸ *Regula Sancti Benedicti*, ed. and trans. Timothy Fry et. al. (Minnesota 1981), see ch. 1, pp. 168-71.

⁹ Jerome, *Ad Eustochium, e p. 22, PL 22*, vol. I, cols. 394-425; ch. 34, col. 419.

¹⁰ Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, (Berkeley 1985), particularly p. 210.

The terms for solitaries clearly could undergo evolution as they passed across time and region.¹¹ Saint Jerome was among the first writers to use the term 'desert' [*eremus*] as a metaphor for any kind of contemplative solitude. But Rufinus developed a gradation among the kinds of monks; some who lived near towns, some who lived further out in the countryside, and some who lived in the desert. Only those who lived in the deepest, most isolated desert were awarded the title *anachoreta*.¹² Cassian was the first patristic writer to make a firm distinction between *coenobium* and *eremus*, while the term 'hermit' was increasingly synonymous with 'anchorite'.¹³ And so Saint Benedict's definition finally emerged, and remained stable until the eleventh century, when the term began to be used in broader senses. That Peter the Venerable could talk of the *eremus Cluniacensis* shows how far the notion of eremitical withdrawal could be a monastic literary metaphor, rather than a precise description of what we think of as a 'hermit'.¹⁴ The Cistercian use of the concept of *eremus* pushed it furthest towards metaphor, making the desert a symbol of internal spiritual withdrawal rather than a description of external physical circumstances.¹⁵ Nevertheless the nouns *eremita* and *anachoreta* themselves remained synonymous, at least on the continent.

Leclercq presented only one example of a distinction made between anchorite and hermit, from the anonymous twelfth-century writer of Bec, for whom hermits went into the desert and anchorites were recluses.¹⁶ This one continental exception is joined however by English vernacular usage, where *ancre* or anchorite was the term used for recluses from at least the thirteenth century.¹⁷ It can be argued that Latin usage in twelfth-century England also restricted the term 'anchorite' to those who were recluses; John of Ford repeatedly describes Wulfric of Haselbury and his fellow (male)

¹¹ The classic study of this problem is Jean Leclercq, '*Eremus et Eremita* : Pour l'Histoire du Vocabulaire de la Vie Solitaire', *Collectanea Ordinis Cistercensium Reformatorem* 25 (1963), pp. 8-30. See also Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, (Cambridge 1996), pp. 7-11.

¹² Leclercq, '*Eremus* ', pp. 14-16.

¹³ *ibid.* pp. 17-19.

¹⁴ *ibid.* pp. 22-3.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 29.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 25

¹⁷ Warren, *Anchorites*, pp. 7-8, and p. 50.

recluses as anchorites.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is not clear that John of Ford, and contemporary writers, meant 'anchorite' to exclude 'hermit' when the former term was applied to recluses. Indeed, Bartholomew of Farne's hagiographer refers to him as an *anachoreta* also, and Bartholomew was not enclosed.¹⁹ It is most likely that Wulfric's and Bartholomew's hagiographers were using the term 'anchorite' to cover all those who retreated into some form of practical and spiritual solitude.²⁰ The confusing status of these terms in twelfth-century England may be resolved if we assume a vernacular definition at odds with that of those well educated in the Latin Christian tradition. Thus even at the level of terminology it seems that different forces in twelfth-century society had enough interest in solitaries to emerge with divergent definitions.

The importance of hermits in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the new difficulty in distinguishing eremitical life from monasticism in general, can be seen in the development of research on what is now viewed as the twelfth-century Reformation.²¹ The hermits of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were seen as reacting to a corrupted monastic order; in searching for a better religious life as hermits, they inadvertently founded a host of new monastic orders. One attempt to redefine this 'slide towards coenobiticism', argued that the intention of these new hermits was to found new monastic orders in the first place. Leyser's category of hermits were those wanderers, like Robert of Arbrissel or Bernard of

¹⁸ See Ann K. Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress: England, 1100-1500', in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian T. Shank (Kalamazoo 1984), pp. 197-212, esp. pp. 198-9. Warren notes that John of Ford calls female recluses *inclusa* rather than *anachoreta*.

¹⁹ *Vita Bartholomaei Farnensis*, in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 2 vols. RS 75 (London 1885), I, pp. 295-325; esp. ch. 9, p. 301.

²⁰ Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 23, notes in a similar vein that Roger of Markyate was called 'hermit' by one Latin source and 'anchorite' by another, possibly indicating the interchangeable nature of the terms.

²¹ For the development of this debate see for example, Dom Morin, 'Rainaud l'Ermite et Ives de Chartres: Un Episode de la Crise du Cenobitisme aux XI-XII Siecles', *Revue Bénédictine* 40 (1928), pp. 99-115; Norman F. Cantor, 'The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050-1130', *American Historical Review* 66 (1960-1), pp. 47-67; Jean Leclercq, 'The Monastic Crisis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in *Cluniac Monasticism in The Central Middle Ages* (Glasgow 1971), ed. Noreen Hunt, pp. 217-37; and J. Van Engen, 'The Crisis of Monasticism Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050-1150', *Speculum* 61 (1986), pp. 269-304.

Tiron, who sometimes preached to the people and found, intentionally or not, monastic communities growing up around them.²² For Leyser those with the intention of forming coenobitic communities in the first place, are the paradigm for the religious enthusiasm of the period. Other hermits are dismissed as part of a 'traditional' eremiticism; abbots who retreat from their administrative duties, recluses who reject coenobitic life altogether, and those who, tested by communal life, subsequently go out into the desert.²³ Although Leyser's category of new hermits clearly existed, perhaps beginning in northern Italy around the turn of the tenth century with Saint Romuald and his hagiographer, Saint Peter Damian, there remains a bewildering variety of holy men and women, and by no means all of them can be seen as simply deliberate renovators of the monastic tradition. As a twelfth-century writer remarked about hermits, 'Let no one be disturbed if a certain diversity should appear in this Order and each arranges his life differently, with some living alone, some with two or three living a life that is easier for some and harder for others'.²⁴

From the perspective of ecclesiastical institutions, two issues should be distinguished. Firstly there is the question of living as a solitary, or in groups of varying sizes and cohesion. Secondly there is the question of attitude towards ecclesiastical authority, and the imposition of *Rules*. One group of hermits in the Touraine, illustrate this distinction very well. The hermits of Fontaine-Gehard in the forest of Mayenne seem to have refused to have any kind of Rule imposed upon them, although they were meant to have been under the authority of the abbot of Marmoutier.²⁵ They are known mainly through episcopal denunciations of their supposed degeneracy, sent periodically to Marmoutier, to demand that some kind of order was imposed upon this obscure group. Hermits seem to have lived around Fontaine-Gehard for well over a century, c.1080-1210, for much of

²² Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and The New Monasticism* (London 1984), pp. 18-28. For a discussion of the 'new' quality of figures such as Robert of Arbrissel, and contemporary awareness of the change in nature of such holy men, see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 24-6.

²³ Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 19

²⁴ *Libellus de diversis ordinibus et professionibus qui sunt in aecclesia*, ed. and trans. Giles Constable and B. Smith, (Oxford 1972), p. 15.

²⁵ See Guy M. Oury, 'Les Survivants des Ermites du Bas-Maine; Le Groupment de Fontaine-Gehard', *Revue Mabillon* 61 (1986-8), pp. 355-72, esp. pp. 362-4.

that time in some kind of loose grouping, until the nominal authority of Marmoutier apparently caught up with them.²⁶ It seems that these quasi-coenobitic hermits really were resisting a slide towards regulated monasticism. This 'slide' has much to do with the desire of ecclesiastical authorities for good order. The recurring importance of questions of authority and order in connection with the eremitical life serves to remind us that hermits, ironically, cannot be considered through purely 'spiritual' considerations. In England a surely crucial development was the growth of episcopal regulation of the reclusive life in the course of the twelfth century.²⁷

In recent decades it has become increasingly clear that the eremitical enthusiasm of the eleventh and twelfth centuries has to be understood within the wider social and economic changes of the time; new religious movements were consciously reacting to the growth in importance of money, for example.²⁸ Little provided a socio-religious explanation for the sudden return of interest in the eremitical life and the attempt to re-invent the life of the Egyptian fathers of Late Antiquity. The new money economy clashed with perceived boundaries between the sacred and the profane. The strict principles of the reformers and the new 'eremitical' monasteries, against lay possession of tithes and churches, against monastic possessions integrated within the secular economy, against clerical concubinage, and towards monastic self-support through labour, was thus an expression of social anxieties, a reaction to the 'profit economy'.

If religious reform reflected social change, perhaps more surprising is the idea that a solitary holy man could actually play an active role in defusing social conflict. It was in Peter Brown's classic article on holy men in late antique Syria that this idea was first explored.²⁹ Brown argued that holy men were perceived by the laity as being trustworthy mediators in worldly conflicts because they were separated from the conflicting interests of society, economically and socially independent. Additionally, their spiritual power gave them the miraculous ability to enforce their decisions when

²⁶ *ibid.* pp. 367-9.

²⁷ Warren, *Anchorites*, pp. 55-63.

²⁸ This problem was first fully stated in Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and The Profit Economy* (London 1978), see esp. pp. 29-41 and pp. 64-83.

²⁹ Peter Brown, 'Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80-101.

mediating conflicts. Thus the anchorite could act as a patron for local communities, who had lost their secular patrons to the political changes affecting their society. The picture Brown presents is of a society with fractured lines of authority, where many people turned to holy men for help. The very respect accorded to a holy man enabled him to act as a patron, influencing powerful men, and solving quarrels.

However, due to the nature of hagiographic evidence, successful mediations are invisible to the historian, as they do not result in a miracle. Where the mediation fails, the hermit brought his spiritual power to bear, and a vengeance miracle occurred, which could be recorded in hagiography. While this is not the place to discuss late antique Syria, it must be noted that this argument effectively ignores hagiography as a contemporary tool for 'creating' history. Brown was assuming that miracle stories reflected a social reality, which in itself does seem likely, but without questioning the motives of hagiographers in recording or creating the stories. Those motives must be known for the value of miraculous evidence to be clear. Brown's argument is particularly important here as it has been adapted in an argument concerning the hermits and recluses of twelfth-century England. Economic change was causing social disruption for this society also, and so people turned to holy men once again.³⁰ Mayr-Harting, concentrating mainly on the recluse Wulfric of Haslebury, described the practical benefits a recluse could provide for a local community, which included acting as a source of poor relief and as a safe place to keep money.³¹ However, like the antique holy men, Wulfric played a role as a 'hinge-man' in his relationship to the lord and the parish priest of the locality. The recluse was able to act as an effective mediator within the locality and between the locality and outside forces, religious and worldly.³²

Again, this relationship must be sought largely within the hagiographic record of the miraculous, which is increasingly analysed with the conceptual tools developed by anthropologists. For the wonder-working abilities of hermits in twelfth-century England,

³⁰ Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth Century Recluse', *History* 60 (1975), pp. 337-52, esp. pp. 340-4.

³¹ *ibid.* pp. 342-3.

³² *ibid.* pp. 340-1 and pp. 345-7.

Christopher Holdsworth turned to Victor Turner's concept of liminality.³³ The thaumaturgic power of the hermits manifested itself through curses, healing miracles and prophecies. These miracles could be perceived as much through the belief of other people in the hermit's spiritual connections, as through the subtle force of a successful hermit's own personality. It was the hermit's deliberate self-alienation from family and society in general, and consequent residence on the threshold of the civilised and the wild, or between the mortal and metaphysical worlds, that gave access to thaumaturgic power. Through prayer and asceticism, and combat with the devil, the power of the saints was open to the use of the hermit.³⁴ The hermit was thus a potentially terrifying figure, capable of persuading influential people to alter their behaviour and accept a hermit's mediating decisions. Yet, while the concept of 'liminality' is a useful place to begin when discussing how miracles came to be expected and then believed, the immediate social context of miracle stories is not thereby explained. It is necessary to determine in particular cases how far a miracle may be in part a social creation and how far it is in part also a literary creation. In other words, as far as it is possible, it is necessary to determine the possibly complex social origins of miracle stories.

Holdsworth, in particular, also raises the suggestion that English interest in hermits was partly the result of the fractured lines of authority caused by the Norman Conquest. Lords and their inferiors were separated firstly by language, if not also by the Norman lord's interests far away from the locality.³⁵ As in Brown's argument, the hermit's mediating activity filled a yawning gap in the functioning of society. One example that may support Holdsworth's suggestion is the story of Wulfric's curing of a dumb man, who proceeded to speak in both French and English. Wulfric was brought to task by his friend the parish priest, Brictric, who protested that Wulfric should have given him the ability to speak French as well.³⁶ Language was clearly

³³ Christopher Holdsworth, 'Hermits and the Power of the Frontier' in *Saints and Saints' Lives*, ed. Keith Bate et al., *Reading Medieval Studies* 16 (1990), pp. 55-76. See also Christopher Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', in *Medieval Women, Studies in Church History: subsidia 1*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford 1978), pp. 185-204; and Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London 1974).

³⁴ See Holdsworth, 'Frontier', pp. 62-9, 'Christina', p. 203.

³⁵ Holdsworth, 'Frontier', p. 70.

³⁶ First noted in Mayr-Harting, 'Functions', p. 344.

a vital issue, and an English hermit who could also speak the language of the new elite, would have been of great value to the local community. However, on the whole the hagiography of the period does not seem to offer much other evidence to show a particular concern with social divisions understood in terms of 'ethnic' division. Nevertheless, one story does show the extent to which hermits could become bound up with sensitive areas of history and local identity. It seems a hermit of Chester was 'discovered', in the late twelfth-century, to be King Harold II, who had survived Hastings, and lived as a wandering hermit, finally anonymously settling at Chester at the end of his life. The story seems to have enjoyed some popularity, clearly travelling beyond its origins in Chester, and being cited by some early thirteenth-century sources.³⁷

Despite all these suggestions for the general interest in hermits, the question of motive for the writing of eremitical hagiography still remains. For Mayr-Harting this was not a problem; he described John of Ford's motive for writing on Wulfric as being purely academic and moral, while the Benedictine hagiographers of Godric of Finchale and Christina of Markyate were motivated by the desire to associate their houses with a powerful saint.³⁸ It is part of the purpose of this thesis to investigate the nature of hagiographers' interest in their subjects, concentrating on the relationship between Durham cathedral priory and its two most important hermits, Godric of Finchale and Bartholomew of Farne, whose *Vitae* were written by two monks of Durham, Reginald and Geoffrey respectively. In general I wish to investigate the social context of eremitical asceticism and notions of the hermit's social function, to determine how indeed the solitary, with mind fixed upon the contemplation of the eternal, can be fitted into the history of social change.

³⁷ See Alan Thacker, 'King Harold at Chester', in *The Middle Ages in The North-West*, ed. Pat Starkey and Tom Scott (Oxford 1995), pp. 155-76, esp. pp. 155-62.

³⁸ Mayr-Harting, 'Functions', pp. 338-9.

ii) Hermits and Hagiography in the Twelfth Century

Twelfth-century Durham was not poor in its literary output, which itself rested upon a considerable educated tradition surrounding the cult of the monk, hermit and bishop, Saint Cuthbert.¹ The hagiographers Reginald and Geoffrey were thus writing on Godric of Finchale and Bartholomew of Farne with an eye upon their own immediate literary and monastic tradition, as much as upon the contemporary reputations of those two holy men. Of course, this is merely a specific example of a general problem in the use of hagiography as an historical source. Hagiography can owe as much to the tradition of its past as a literary form as it owed to the actual life of its subjects. However, the hagiographic tradition of Durham cathedral priory is particularly clear and well researched, so that the historicity of its late twelfth-century hagiography can be seen clearly. Thus the 'deep tradition' of the cult of Saint Cuthbert in Durham is an essential context in any analysis of Godric's and Bartholomew's *Vitae*. Bede's attitudes towards asceticism and other saintly issues can be taken as a major cornerstone in both Reginald's and Geoffrey's conceptions of hagiography.² The two late hagiographers can also be placed within the context of Durham's writings since the restoration of monasticism there in 1083. Symeon's history of the church of Durham was the major work of the new monastic era, and would have been familiar to Reginald and Geoffrey.³

Despite the context of the cult of Saint Cuthbert, the appearance of eremitical hagiography at Durham in the late twelfth century

¹ For work on Durham, there are now three essential collections; *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to A. D. 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe, (Woodbridge 1989), cited hereafter as 'CCC'; *Anglo-Norman Durham 1093-1193*, ed. David Rollason, Margaret Harvey and Michael Prestwich, (Woodbridge 1994), cited hereafter as 'AND'; *Symeon of Durham, Historian of Durham and the North*, ed. David Rollason, (Stamford 1998), cited hereafter as 'Rollason, Symeon'.

² All references to *Vita Cuthberti* are to the prose *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda* in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, (Cambridge 1940), pp. 141-307. Where it is the earlier anonymous prose life to which is referred, it is distinguished as *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* in *ibid.* pp. 59-139.

³ Symeon, *Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius hoc est Dunelmensis ecclesie*, in *Symeonis Opera*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 2 vols., RS 75 (London 1882-5); I, pp. 3-169, cited hereafter as *LDE*.

needs also to be seen within its own terms. Perhaps it might seem simply natural that the life of a holy man, who attracted a remarkable cult after his death, should be recorded. Indeed, Pope Alexander III wrote a brief letter addressed to Godric, praising his holy asceticism, of which the pope had heard.⁴ Nevertheless, it must be suspected that the monks of Durham themselves made significant efforts to bring Godric to the pope's attention, and to secure this letter for their own purposes. Such papal attention cannot be taken as any more inevitable or natural than the writing of a *vita*. Nevertheless, there does seem to have been independent interest in Godric; Aelred of Rievaulx is the source of many of the stories concerning Godric, and is described by Reginald as having visited the old hermit many times.⁵ Indeed outside interest in Godric might be the context of Durham priory's clearly determined campaign to secure control of Finchale. The monks went to the trouble of making a very obviously forged charter showing Bishop Ranulph Flambard giving the priory control of Finchale, well before Godric had any relationship with Durham, on Reginald's own evidence in the *Vita*.⁶

Even more impressive evidence for Durham's concern to control the memory of Godric is the sheer quantity of hagiographic material produced in the three decades after his death. First there is

⁴ *Papsturkunden in England*, ed. Walther Holtzmann, 3 vols. (Berlin 1930-52); vol. 3, no. 163, p. 303. The letter must have been written in the last decade of Godric's life, as Alexander III's pontificate began in 1159, and Godric died in 1170.

⁵ *Libellus de vita et miraculis Sancti Godrici, heremitaie de Finchale, auctore Reginaldo monacho Dunelmensi*, ed. Joseph Stephenson, *SS* 20 (1847), see particularly ch. 77, nos. 166-7, (pp. 175-7).

⁶ See H. S. Offler, *Durham Episcopal Charters 1071-1152*, *SS* 179 (1968), charter no. 10, p. 68, and his discussion pp. 68-72. Offler considers this forgery to have been made after Bishop Hugh de Puiset's (d. 1195) grant of Finchale specifically to the two monks of Durham, Reginald and Henry, who lived there. For this first grant by the bishop see *The Priory of Finchale*, ed. James Raine, *SS* 6, (1837), no. 20, pp. 21-2. Although Bishop Hugh did at the last grant Finchale unreservedly to Durham, see Offler, *Durham Charters*, p. 71, there does not seem to be any direct indication that the forgery post-dated the bishop's first grant. Indeed it might seem more likely that the forgery preceded any action on the bishop's part, and was part of a bargaining process between the priory and their bishop between Godric's death in 1170 and Hugh's complete capitulation towards the end of his life. Certainly, as Offler points out, Pope Alexander III had confirmed the priory's possession of Finchale between 1171 and 1181; see *Papsturkunden in England*, vol. 2, no. 211, p. 406. This document, and the other papal letter associated with Godric, would seem to suggest that the monks were campaigning hard even before the hermit's death, to ensure their full control over him and his hermitage.

Reginald's gigantic *Vita*, reaching three hundred and thirty two pages in the printed edition, even without the great appendix of miracles.⁷ Reginald's work was dedicated to Bishop Hugh de Puiset, which places it certainly before 1195, although since Reginald was compiling material while Godric was still alive, it is reasonable to assume it was completed in the 1170s. However, whatever the motive for such a large *Vita*, it was evidently felt too large for some purposes, as a substantial abridgment was written, which relied very closely upon Reginald's own words.⁸ This abridgment was itself soon superseded by one made by Geoffrey which incorporated some material on Godric attributed to the deceased Prior Germanus (d. 1188).⁹ The content of these abridgments is not as interesting as the mere fact of their existence. Reginald's *Vita* was evidently meant as a substantial and definitive statement, and presented to the bishop of Durham perhaps partly in order to ensure that he recognised the monks' right to control Finchale and the body of Godric. However Reginald's *Vita* was used, it was certainly not likely to be copied far from Durham due to its sheer size. The abridgments must have been made in order to publicise more widely Durham's involvement with this new saint. Certainly it is Geoffrey's version which spread beyond

⁷ *Vita Godrici* ; the printed edition is based mainly on Bodleian Laud Misc. 413, a twelfth-century Durham manuscript. A partly shortened and imperfect sixteenth-century manuscript provides an additional chapter, (ch. 2, no. 11, pp. 24-5), that was clearly part of the original *Vita*, but had been lost from the Bodleian MS.

⁸ This is printed in footnotes to the *Vita Godrici* in Stephenson's edition. It is now attributed to one Walter; see Richard Sharpe, *A Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland Before 1540*, (Brepols 1997), p. 707. It survives in two manuscripts, one is anonymous but twelfth-century, and the other is fourteenth-century and contains the attribution. The abridgement is clearly not Reginald's first draft as suggested by Stephenson, *Vita Godrici*, pp. ix-x. It confirms that the chapter omitted from the Bodleian MS was in the original version of the *Vita*, as the abridgement contains a summary of that chapter, as it does of all others.

⁹ *Vita Sancti Godrici Eremitae, Auctore Galfrido*, AASS, 5 May, pp. 68-85. This will be distinguished from Reginald's *Vita Godrici*, by the abbreviation *Vita Godrici Gal*. The prologue is dedicated to the monk Thomas, who was prior of Finchale, and died in 1196; see Stephenson, *Vita Godrici*, p. viii. Sharpe, *A Handlist of Latin Writers*, p. 133, states that the summary was written after 1196. The difference in these dates is not important for my purposes. Arnold in *Symeon Opera*, pp. xxxix-xl, saw this summary as being written before Geoffrey's *Vita* of Bartholomew, itself clearly written soon after the hermit's death in 1193. It is perhaps plausible that Geoffrey should be given the task of the abridgement before being ordered to write a *vita* from scratch.

England; the Bollandists used a copy held at Citeaux for their entry on Godric in the *Acta Sanctorum*.¹⁰

One way or another, the monks seem to have achieved some of their purpose in publicising Godric's life and sanctity, as William of Newburgh's chronicle included a substantial passage on Godric.¹¹ It is impossible to show whether William based his report on any particular written *vita* of Godric, although it is in itself notable that his account bears no obvious debt to the written sources.¹²

Conversations with his fellow *literati* may have been the sole basis of his report, and certainly he does give an emphasis which would surely have pleased Reginald. William was as fascinated as Reginald by Godric being a 'rustic and an idiot'. William described how that 'holy college' of Durham undertook the 'instruction of the simple rustic', while also giving him the mass. As will be shown in chapter two, the integration of the independent rustic holy man into the institutional structure of the Church, is one of Reginald's major themes. This theme itself highlights the extraordinary character of the hagiographic effort on Godric; it was sustained over some three decades, and dedicated to a man, however holy, who was regarded by educated churchmen as a rustic idiot. Godric's status as a holy man was not being challenged by anyone and his history was not central to the identity of the community of Durham. Perhaps the community hoped that his posthumous cult would expand out of its very local area, to become a lucrative asset, but it seems unlikely either that the monks would have wished Saint Cuthbert's shrine to be so overshadowed, or that the rich and powerful priory at Durham would have felt the need for such a cult.

Among all these accounts of Godric, written by literate monks and clerics, it must be remembered that Godric had his own voice, one that was recognised and celebrated by his hagiographer. For Reginald it was perhaps part of the hermit's miraculous spirit that an illiterate such as Godric should have been able to compose lyrics in

¹⁰ *Vita Godrici Gal.* p. 68.

¹¹ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett, 4 vols., RS 82 (London 1884-9); I, Bk. 2, ch. 20, pp. 149-50.

¹² This is in contrast to another, longer, chronicle entry demonstrably based on Reginald's work; see Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. Henry G. Hewlett, 3 vols., RS 84, (London 1886-9); I, pp. 65-78.

praise of the Virgin Mary. The lyrics, in English, with a score, are an integral part of the manuscript of the *Vita Godrici*.¹³ In a different manner, Bartholomew of Farne was also recognised by the monks of Durham as making his own contribution to the words of religion and worship, through his tales of Cuthbert's miraculous powers evidenced on Farne. Like Godric, Bartholomew's cultural contribution only survives thanks to the literate monks.

Durham was not content with the considerable bulk of material concerning Godric, producing also a range of material relating to Bartholomew (d. 1193), including a *vita*.¹⁴ Geoffrey wrote this soon after his *Vita* of Godric, if not at about the same time.¹⁵ Bartholomew's *Vita* must have been written before 1212, as it was dedicated to Prior Bertram of Durham. However, it seems likely that it was written in the 1190s, given that Geoffrey's preface presents the hermit's death as a recent event. The community's grief at the passing of a holy man is presented as a fresh and almost present emotion. The opening line reads; 'After the passing of the venerated Father Bartholomew, I have no doubt that your souls have been agitated'.¹⁶ This certainly differs from Geoffrey's tone when writing

¹³ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 152, no. 273, (pp. 288-9).

¹⁴ In contrast to the literary effort spent on Godric and Bartholomew is the evidence of the ninth-century section of the *Liber Vitae Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, ed. Joseph Stephenson, SS 3 (1841). Here there is a list of anchorites, apparently considered to be high status, as the list occurs third in line after the lists of kings and queens. The first two hermits named appear to be Cuthbert's successors on Farne, see *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 46, pp. 300-7. Otherwise nothing is known concerning these high status individuals. Godric and Bartholomew were clearly men of much lower status, and yet received vast literary tribute. This contrast cannot be explained simply by the growth of literate culture and the consequently greater recording of history and contemporary events.

¹⁵ *Vita Bartholomaei Farnensis*, in *Symeon Opera* I, pp. 295-325; cited as *Vita Bart.* hereafter. Arnold relied mainly on a fourteenth-century Durham manuscript for his edition, see *Symeon Opera*, p. xvi and p. xix, but corrected it from a sixteenth-century Durham manuscript, Harlian 4843. The Bollandist edition, *De S. Bartholomaeo Eremita*, AASS 24 June, pp. 832-41, used a manuscript held at Citeaux, which was lost before the full text was printed, see *Symeon Opera*, p. xxxix. The *Acta Sanctorum* edition differs in trivial ways at many points from Arnold's edition, indicating perhaps that the *Vita* had been circulating on the continent relatively widely. However, the Bollandist edition confirms that the passages missing from the Fairfax manuscript, but present in the Harlian, are a genuine part of the *Vita*. Two other thirteenth-century manuscripts are listed in Sharpe, *Handlist of Latin Authors*, pp. 122-3.

¹⁶ *Vita Bart.* ch. 2, p. 295; Sharpe, *Handlist*, states that the *Vita* was written in the first decade of the thirteenth century, which seems to me somewhat too late, however the issue is not vital to any argument of this thesis.

on Godric; Geoffrey notes that he had seen the hermit as an old man when Geoffrey himself was very young.¹⁷ This introduces a sense of distance in time between Godric's death and the composition, appropriate to a gap of nearly twenty years.

Then, around 1200, an anonymous monk of Durham composed a small collection of Cuthbertine miracles relating to Farne, allegedly stories told by Bartholomew himself.¹⁸ However, well before his death, the hermit's stories seem to have been valued enough by the community for Reginald, in his *Libellus de admirandis beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, to record nineteen miracles related to Farne, and mostly related to Bartholomew.¹⁹ The motive for this work is in one sense perfectly obvious: to praise the 'glory of blessed Cuthbert'. However, Reginald extends this explanation in an unexpected direction after elegantly deploring his lack of literary ability; 'indeed these untutored speeches can confer and produce remedies of some use to rude and rustic people.' As if to confirm that he is not merely playing with words in this passage, Reginald continues more forcefully; 'We do not presume to teach the taught, but to instruct the poor; we assign [these speeches] to inform imbeciles towards good growth.'²⁰ However Reginald's collection can be imagined as reaching the ears of the illiterate, his description of the purpose of his work should be taken seriously. At least it can be said that the monks of Durham were concerned with the cultic loyalties and religious feelings of the mass of people within their sphere of influence.

It is perhaps in the context of Reginald's remarks that the material on both Godric and Bartholomew should be considered.

¹⁷ *Vita Godrici Gal.* ch. 1, p. 70.

¹⁸ H. H. Craster (ed.), 'The Miracles of St. Cuthbert at Farne', *Analecta Bollandiana* 70, (1952), pp. 5-19; translation in H. H. Craster, 'The Miracles of Farne', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 29 (1951), pp. 93-107. Internal evidence dates the collection to after 1199; see *ibid.* in *Anal. Bol.* p. 6. Again it seems that Bartholomew's memory is still seen as current, thus the work should probably date from the first decade of the thirteenth century.

¹⁹ *Reginaldi monachi Dunelmensis libellus de admirandis beati Cuthberti virtutibus quae novellis patratae sunt temporibus*, ed. James Raine, *SS* 1, (1835); hereafter cited as '*Reg. Libellus*'. It appears that the collection was originally written in the 1160s, before Ailred of Rievaulx's death in 1167, a letter to whom prefaces the collection. However, later it was extended by the inclusion of material from the 1170s; see Victoria Tudor, 'The Cult of St. Cuthbert in the Twelfth Century: The Evidence of Reginald of Durham', in *CCC*, pp. 447-67, esp. 448-9.

²⁰ *Reg. Libellus*; ch. 1, pp. 3-4.

Certainly, Reginald's collection is a coherent part of this corpus of material, all concerned with miracles and holy men, far from Durham's historical and intellectual interests. On its own, the material on Bartholomew himself needs some explanation; the hermit was a thoroughly marginal and local figure who received no notice outside of Durham's corpus. Despite the special nature of Farne itself, Bartholomew may have been more representative of the ordinary hermits who escape historical notice altogether, than a revered holy man like Godric. Bartholomew, who arrived on Farne in 1150, was not the first hermit on the island in the twelfth century.²¹ Reginald records three stories relating to an Aelric of Farne who preceded Bartholomew on the island, although it is likely that the later hermit was the source of at least one of these stories.²² It might seem natural for the monks of Durham to be interested in the island once inhabited by Saint Cuthbert, and marked by his miracles, but this interest is only demonstrated in the late twelfth century, and it does not explain why Bartholomew received the attention of a *vita*.

Durham was not alone in recording the life of an obscure local holy man. The Benedictine priory of Tynemouth held the island of Coquet, off the coast of Northumberland, and is thus the obvious candidate to have written the *Vita* of the hermit, Henry of Coquet, who died in 1120. Unfortunately, the *Vita* only survives as a fourteenth-century summary by John of Tynemouth.²³ A monk of Tynemouth produced a *vita* for the house's major relic, the body of Saint Oswin, and a collection of local miracles from their shrine, sometime in the early twelfth century.²⁴ It is likely that Henry's *Vita* was written at this time, perhaps by the same writer. Tynemouth may have hoped with this *Vita* to strengthen further its own identity, and its independence from both Durham and St Albans, both

²¹ Geoffrey states that Bartholomew had been a hermit on Farne for forty-two years, six months and nineteen days; *Vita Bart.* ch. 33, p. 322. As Bartholomew died on the 24 June, 1193, he must have come to Farne in 1150.

²² *Reg. Libellus*; chs. 27, 28 and 78.

²³ John of Tynemouth's compendium of *Lives* is printed in *Nova Legenda Angliae*, ed. Carl Horstmann, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1901); *De Sancto Henrico Heremita*, II, pp. 22-26, hereafter cited as '*Vita Henrici*'.

²⁴ *Vita Oswini Regis Deiorum*, in *Miscellanea Biographica*, ed. James Raine, SS 8 (1838), pp. 1-59. The miracle collection continues into the reign of Stephen, but the *Vita* itself may have been written somewhat earlier, after 1111; *ibid.* pp. vii-viii.

of which claimed the little priory.²⁵ As far as generating a cult of Henry is concerned, the monks of Tynemouth may have made a mistake in removing the body of Henry from the island to the priory. The local people attempted to stop the monks from stealing the remains of their holy man, and only a miracle enabled the monks to escape with the body.²⁶ Clearly the monks' agenda concerning Coquet differed from that of the local people.

In some ways, Coquet is a lesser reflection of Farne. Bede noted that Coquet was 'famous for its companies of monks', and it was there that Cuthbert predicted, to Aelfflaed, abbess of Whitby, the death of King Egfrid.²⁷ Henry may not have been the first hermit to live there in the later period; there was a monk who 'had the cure of the island' when he arrived.²⁸ Henry certainly wasn't the last; a fragment of a St Albans chronicle mentions a hermit Martin, in a story dating from the first decade of the thirteenth century.²⁹ Finally there is a document preserved with Matthew Paris' *Chronica Maiora*, which records that 'in a small island called Koket, one monk lives, who is held to be a hermit, and the place is held as a hermitage'.³⁰ This meagre assembly of information pales in the face of Durham's traditions of Farne, but serves to indicate that Farne was not unique as a holy place. There may have been many such locations, which attracted hermits, and perhaps local veneration.

The deaths of other more famous twelfth-century English hermits provoked confrontations over the holy corpse similar to that on Coquet. Wulfric of Haselbury's body was fought over by the monks of the Cluniac Abbey of Montacute and the local people of

²⁵ Northumberland County History Committee, *History of Northumberland*, 15 vols. (1893-1940); VIII, pp. 45-7 and pp. 57-8. A royal writ of 1121 put the priory under royal protection and forbade interference from either St Albans or Durham.

²⁶ *Vita Henrici*, p. 25. A mist enabled the monks to escape with the body, which they buried near Saint Oswin.

²⁷ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 24, pp. 234-5.

²⁸ *Vita Henrici*, p. 22; Coquet was evidently a large enough island to support some kind of small community in the twelfth century. The *Vita* seems to imply that lay people lived on the island.

²⁹ William Rishanger, *Chronica et Annales, Fragmentum II*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, *RS 28* (London 1865), pp. 473-8; p. 477.

³⁰ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, ed. Henry Richards Luard, 7 vols., *RS 57* (London 1872-83); VI, p. 247.

Haselbury.³¹ The Cistercian hagiographer of Wulfric, John of Ford, took some pleasure in detailing the humiliation of the monks. The body of Robert of Knaresborough, who died in 1218, was also fought over by the local people and the Cistercian monks of Fountains who came to claim his body.³² Thus out of the six hermits of twelfth-century England, whose lives were recorded, three were important enough to their local communities for the people violently to defend possession of the bodies. No known attempt was made to remove the bodies of the other three, Godric, Bartholomew and Christina of Markyate. Also out of these six hermits, three are known from sources independent of their hagiographies. Godric is known through the papal letters, and perhaps through William of Newburgh's chronicle entry, if the latter is indeed independent of the *Vitae*. Information concerning the posthumous miracle cult of Robert of Knaresborough, not given in his *Vitae*, is also known through three brief notes in Matthew Paris.³³

Wulfric of Haselbury's miraculous ability to remove rings from a *lorica*, his ascetic chainmail, was recounted while he was still alive. Henry of Huntingdon states that this miracle achieved great fame

³¹ *Wulfric of Haselbury, by John, Abbot of Ford*, ed. Dom Maurice Bell, *Somerset Record Society* 47, (1933); cited hereafter as '*Vita Wulfrici*'. For the battle over the body, see ch. 101, pp. 127-9. On John of Ford, see pp. x-xiv. The *Vita* was begun between 1180 and 1184, and was completed well before 1191: pp. xvi-xviii. As Wulfric died in 1154, it was written much longer after its subject's death than were the Durham *vitae*. This contrast is another indication of Durham's unusual interest in its hermits.

³² '*Vitae S. Roberti Knaresburgensis, Vita Recentior*', ed. Paul Grosjean, *Analecta Bollandiana* 57, (1939), pp. 375-400; ch. 24, p. 397-8. While in Wulfric's case it is the local community in general which is represented as being in a rather farcical fight with the monks, in Robert's case, the local lord sends soldiers from the castle to prevent the monks taking the body. Although this story is presented in the probably mid-thirteenth-century second *Vita*, it was doubtlessly based on an account in the earlier thirteenth-century *Vita*; '*Vitae S. Roberti Knaresburgensis, Vita Antiquioris Fragmenta*,' ed. Grosjean, *Analecta Bollandiana* 57, (1939), pp. 365-74. This earlier *Vita* was probably written by the Cistercians themselves. It is possible that the earlier account was deliberately presenting the conflict as one between secular authority and religion. In this manner, the Cistercian monks may have been attempting to put the event in a light more flattering to themselves. As the complete *Vita* is so much later than those considered in this thesis, it does not provide immediately useful comparison with the Durham hermits. However, on Robert see Brian Golding, 'The Hermit and the Hunter', in *The Cloister, The World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford 1996), pp. 95-117.

³³ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, vol 3, p. 521 for 1238; vol. 4, p. 378 for 1244, and vol. 5, p. 195 for 1250.

and was spread across all parts of the kingdom. Gervase of Canterbury, writing about the same time as John of Ford, repeats Henry's version of the story, but adds an interesting legend that the hermit personally prophesied to the future Henry II, concerning his eventual accession to the throne.³⁴ Wulfric's fame as a holy man predated John of Ford, and rumours of his miraculous powers developed independently of the hagiographer. Eremitical holy men clearly were culturally important in this period, both for local people and national chroniclers. Nevertheless, while hagiography is not the only evidence for the popularity of these figures, it remains the only substantial source which can explore that popularity.

The only extended source for an eremitical holy woman of this period is the mysterious *Vita* of Christina of Markyate.³⁵ Although above I tacitly included her with Henry of Coquet and Bartholomew of Farne as a figure not known other than through her *Vita*, she is referred to in a contemporary record; William of Malmesbury's story of her mentor hermit Roger.³⁶ Roger is shown demonstrating his prophetic powers, while protecting a 'virgin' who can only be Christina. This story implies that the events recorded in Christina's *Vita* were notorious. However, the existence of this story concerning

³⁴ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. Thomas Arnold, RS 74 (London 1879), pp. xxix-xxx, and Gervase of Canterbury, *Opera Historica*, ed. William Stubbs, 2 vols., RS 73 (London 1879-80); I, pp. 130-1. See Bell's comments on these sources in *Vita Wulfrici*, pp. lxix-lxx.

³⁵ *De S. Theodora, Virgine, Quae et Christina Dicitur; The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. and trans. Charles H. Talbot, (Oxford, 1959); hereafter cited as *Christina*. Neither the date of death of Christina, nor the date of the *Vita* are known for sure. Talbot places Christina's death at 1155-66, and the composition of the *Vita* in the same period. On the assumption that Abbot Robert (1151-66) commissioned the *Vita*, Christina must have died by 1166; see *ibid.* pp. 5-10. Talbot argues that Christina was alive in 1155, partly on the basis that she sent three mitres and a pair of sandals with Abbot Robert of St Albans on his visit to the Pope in 1155; see *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. Henry T. Riley, 3 vols. RS 28 (London 1867-9); I, pp. 127, hereafter cited as *Gesta Abbatum*. However as Thompson points out, *Women Religious*, pp. 16-19, the chronicle merely states that a Prioress Christina of Markyate made the items, not that she was alive when they were sent to the pope. Other evidence for Christina being alive in 1155 is similarly disputed by Thompson. However, Thompson and Talbot agree that the *Vita* must have been begun during Christina's lifetime. While Talbot sees the work as unfinished, missing the last fourteen years of Christina's life, Thompson persuasively argues that the *Vita* can be viewed as nearly complete, or at least not missing a substantial period of her later life. At the point the narrative breaks off, Abbot Geoffrey (1119-46) is still alive.

³⁶ William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, 2 vols., RS 52 (London 1870), I, p. 314.

Roger makes it all the more remarkable that St Albans did not attempt to make any record of Roger's life until the fourteenth century, when Christina's *Vita* was adapted into a section on both Roger and Christina.³⁷ This provides a negative contrast to Durham; while the latter assiduously recorded its hermits' activities, the great number of hermits associated with St Albans are effectively known only through Christina's *Vita*. Even if that *Vita* is considered as associated with St Albans, its tenuous survival in one English manuscript is testament to the monastery's relative neglect of the memory of its holy men and women.³⁸ The activities of eremitical holy men and women could be important at the time, but without a hagiographic record, they become almost invisible to the historian. The case of Roger of Markyate serves to remind that it was by no means inevitable that a formidable and well known holy man would receive the kind of literary tribute that historians can exploit. Lack of information does not mean that Roger's importance in his own time was any less than that of Wulfric of Haselbury or Godric of Finchale.

The problems associated with the popularity of eremitical holy men and women were not unique to England in this period, and hagiography was an international literary form. Both the patterns of hagiographic rhetoric and the 'politics' of eremitical sanctity in Durham find reflections in the region of Cambrai and the holy man Aibert of Crespin. Even more than for the hermits of Durham, there seems no obvious reason for Aibert's hagiographer, archdeacon Robert of Ostrevant, or for Bishop Alvis of Arras, to whom the *Vita* is dedicated, to wish to record the life of this holy man. Although Aibert lived the latter part of his life just within the diocese of Arras, he was a monk of the monastery of Crespin, just over the diocesan border in Cambrai. As Bishop Alvis died in 1148, it has generally been thought that the *Vita* was written before then and after 1140, the date always quoted for Aibert's death, based on calculations from information in the *Vita*.³⁹ However, a few stories concerning Aibert

³⁷ *Gesta Abbatum*, pp. 97-105.

³⁸ For the manuscript see Talbot, *Christina*, pp. 1-4. Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 17-20, suggests that the *Vita* originated outside the monastery proper, among the community of recluses themselves, thus accounting for the detached tone with which Abbot Geoffrey is treated.

³⁹ Emile Trelcat, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Crespin* (Paris 1923), pp. 63-7 for Aibert; Charles Dereine, 'Ermites, Reclus et Recluses dans L'Ancien Diocèse de Cambrai entre Scarpe et Haine (1075-1125)', *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987), pp.

are also recorded in the mid-twelfth-century annal of the abbey of Anchin, Bishop Alvis' old house. In this annal, which gives information independent of the *Vita*, the date of Aibert's death is given as 1135.⁴⁰ Both the dates of 1135 and 1140 match the day date for Aibert's death, given in the *Vita*.⁴¹ The choice of 1140 appears to have been governed by the hagiographer's statement that Aibert was a monk in Crespin for twenty-five years, and a recluse for the same duration. Aibert went on pilgrimage in 1089, became a monk of Crespin immediately after this journey, and was a hermit by 1116. Thus the dates do seem to add up to 1140 for his death.⁴² However, rejecting 1135 as a date of death is dependent upon accepting the suspiciously symmetrical span of years given for Aibert's periods as a monk and a recluse. If these spans are more rhetorically accurate than exact, then it does not seem difficult to accept 1135 as the date of death. Why would the Anchin annal be wrong? Robert of Ostrevant writes nothing which pinpoints the exact year in which Aibert became a recluse, and does not, after all give the year of his death. If Aibert became a recluse anywhere between 1110 and 1115, and died in 1135, then this would give his two religious periods a rough symmetry, each only a couple of years less than twenty five years. Aibert's early period as a recluse may have been obscure, and certainly Robert of Ostrevant is not revealing on the circumstances of his leaving Crespin. A certain temporal

289-313, p. 301-5 for Aibert. Constable, *Reformation*, modernises the recluses' name to Aybert of Crépin.

⁴⁰ *Sigeberti Auctarium Aquicinenses*, *MGH Scriptores*, vol. 6, pp. 392-8, at p. 394; hereafter cited as '*Annal Anchin*'. Dereine, 'Ermites, Reclus', p. 302, note 60, acknowledges the discrepancy but simply dismisses the annal as inaccurate, giving no reason why it should be.

⁴¹ Robert of Ostrevant, *Vita Sancti Aiberti Presbyteri*, AASS 7 April, pp. 672-82, hereafter cited as '*Vita Aiberti*'; ch. 23, pp. 679-80, 7 April, Easter.

⁴² *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 7, p. 675, for his pilgrimage with the Abbot of Crespin to Rome at the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Urban II. For Bishop Burchard's consecration of Aibert as a priest in 1116 see Dereine, 'Ermites, Reclus', p. 303. However, while this shows that Aibert must have left Crespin by this time, it only gives an upper dating limit, not a lower one. Indeed, Aibert could have been a recluse for some years before the ecclesiastical authorities gave him the status of a priest, and the power to absolve penitents, which he received from Pope Pascal II (d. 1119). If Aibert was a recluse some years before his consecration as a priest then he was not prepared by his superiors for the role of popular holy man; rather his superiors hastened to catch up on the situation, by giving him the formal authority to carry out the role that perhaps was popularly demanded of him.

vagueness is therefore not surprising. It seems then, that Aibert did die in 1135.

The importance of the later point is not so much in the question of the date of Aibert's death as in the reliability of the Anchin annal. The annal was clearly working on information drawn independently of the *Vita*, as it includes a story of the dedication of Aibert's chapel in 1134, which is not included by Robert of Ostrevant's *Vita*. Moreover, as will be seen, while Robert is insistent on the importance of Aibert's ascetic diet, the annal also includes the story that for twenty years the recluse abstained entirely from bread, and from 'all drink' for all except two of those years.⁴³ Robert of Ostrevant refers repeatedly to this great abstinence, being less than clear concerning its exact nature, but also states that the number of years of this feat was twenty-two years.⁴⁴ If the annal was relying directly upon the *Vita*, this is not a discrepancy that would have occurred. Rather this seems to be a classic symptom of oral transmission; somehow some aspect of Aibert's life was transformed into a legendary story, and that story spread and became important enough to be recorded separately and differently by two different educated monks.

Aibert's twenty odd year fast exemplifies a basic problem with the use of hagiographic material. Given that such a diet, literally interpreted, is highly unlikely or even impossible, how is it that contemporaries of Aibert could ascribe such a story to him? It could easily be assumed that hagiographers simply made up such stories for their symbolic value in resonating with events in the Bible or in the hagiographical tradition. That hagiographers shaped their work around *topoi* is not in doubt. The question is rather to what extent were they manipulating existing stories and genuine events into *topoi*, and to what extent did they have entirely free rein. The answer to this question will be different for different times and places.⁴⁵ Equally, the answer will be different in the case of a long

⁴³ *Annal Anchin*, p. 394, for the year 1130. The annal also states that Aibert was a recluse for twenty-five years before his death, and would thus give the year 1110 for the beginning of his later eremitical life. This might be thought too early, though it is not absurdly so. The reliability of the annal for the date of Aibert's death is a different matter from its reliability in the matter of the chronology of legendary ascetic feats.

⁴⁴ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 11, p. 676.

⁴⁵ For an analysis of the role of *topoi* and rhetoric in 'making' saints concerning whom little was known, see Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the*

dead saint, for whom little or no material survived, than in the case of a well known contemporary figure.

A certain kind of scepticism was a robust presence in the twelfth century at least; not a scepticism that miracles could and had occurred, but a need for reliable evidence that events had happened as stated in a particular case. Hence the need for a hagiographer to supply witnesses for his stories. This was a practice familiar to all western hagiographers from the time of Gregory the Great if not earlier, but the cultural climate of the twelfth century gave a new urgency to the justification of miracles through witnesses.⁴⁶ The truth of religion needed to be separated from possibly dangerous rumour. There was a potentially wide constituency for stories of holy men, which is consciously referred to by twelfth-century writers; a late twelfth-century Anchin source noted that a contemporary of Aibert's, an abbot of Anchin called Gelduin, retired to be a recluse in England in 1109, and was known in the Cambrai by '*vulgans fama*' as well as by the 'relation of faithful men'.⁴⁷ The fame and attraction of the hermit is a *topos*. Yet, however Gelduin's reputation is judged, this reference is another indication that monastic writers were insistent upon a distinction between the reports of those they trusted, and the rumours of the crowd concerning holy men. Both sources had to be acknowledged, but witnesses among the 'trustworthy' were much preferred.

For some twelfth-century saints, such as Aelred of Rievaulx, the material for a *vita* seems to have been gathered almost entirely from within the monastery. It is the monks themselves who collectively, over the years, might inflate the memory of Aelred's

Cult of the Saints: The Diocese of Orleans, 800-1200, (Cambridge 1990), esp. pp. 109-18.

⁴⁶ Brian Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, (Princeton 1983), especially pp. 64-71 on Bernard of Angers' eleventh-century *Miracula* on the cult of Saint Faith. Bernard was concerned to investigate oral traditions of the saint's miracles. In doing so he was rescuing the material from the status of '*inanis fabule commenta*' to miracles authenticated through a literate, clerical narrative. For Stock, Bernard of Angers is concerned to draw a clear distinction between the low culture of the illiterate crowd of rustics and the culture of the literate clerics. See also *ibid.* pp. 99-100; Stock points out that 'when literacy emerges as an issue, popular religion also surfaces, just as illiteracy is the invariable consequence of literacy itself.'

⁴⁷ *Historia Monasterii Aquicintini, MGH Scriptores*, vol. 14, pp. 578-92; for Gelduin see p. 586. The *Anchin Annal*, p. 394, notes Gelduin's career as a recluse somewhat differently, under the years 1090 and 1109.

personal concern for his monks into the various healing miracles.⁴⁸ Famously in this case, the hagiographer, Walter Daniel, faced criticism for his portrayal of Aelred, forcing him to protest the authenticity and reliability of his work, particularly in naming witnesses for the miracles.⁴⁹ In considering the origins of Aelred's miracles, it is hard to distinguish the line between the writer's own expectation of the miraculous, that of his fellow monks, and the creation of a miracle through hagiographic rhetoric. Nevertheless, the miraculous was in this case the product of the culture of the monastery itself. For other miracle stories, such as Aibert's incredible fast or Wulfric's miraculous *lorica*, the picture must be more complex. In these two cases, miraculous stories concerning the holy men seem to have circulated independently of a single religious institution or of a single hagiographer. The context of 'vulgar fame' has to be considered in the creation of the legends surrounding contemporary holy men.

For all human societies, at every level of social existence, stories or narratives, in one form or another, are indispensable to the working out of existence. A human group which did not create and tell stories would not be human. It would thus be hard to imagine the 'rustic idiots' around Finchale being able to think themselves beneficiaries of Godric's posthumous healing powers, without them creating some sort of 'folklore' concerning the hermit. Good things and bad things in life both need explanation, discussion and confirmation, and stories fulfil those functions. Nevertheless, the villagers of Finchale or Haselbury-Plunknett did not exist in a cultural vacuum. It is only possible to ask questions concerning twelfth-century popular beliefs and culture, because that society was no more wholly 'oral' than it was 'literate'. There was, of course, no rigid division between an elite, literate culture and a popular, oral one. Indeed, there is considerable scepticism now concerning the capabilities of orality in producing particularly the complex epic narratives once thought the literature natural to an oral society.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx* by Walter Daniel, ed. and trans. F. M. Powicke, (London 1950); for some examples of the miracles see ch. 21, pp. 29-30, ch. 23, p. 32, and ch. 36, pp. 43-4, and see Powicke's comments on pp. lxxvii-lxxxii.

⁴⁹ See the *Epistola Ad Mauricium*, in *ibid.* pp. 66-81, esp. pp. 66-9.

⁵⁰ See Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Oral and the Literate*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 78-109.

However, twelfth-century western European society was not an oral society, but one in which 'popular culture' or 'popular religion' interrelated with the culture of the literate elite.⁵¹

Culture is a dynamic or dialectical process, rather than a static thing. Thus it is important to consider the various possible effects elite literacy may have upon such a society as twelfth-century England. The memory of an oral society is thought to be limited to three generations. Thus oral tradition and laws can always be subject to swift change.⁵² However, it has been observed that a society with a literate elite, where the vernacular is not widely used for writing, may inadvertently encourage the formulation of oral, popular stories.⁵³ The literate presence within a society may thus paradoxically strengthen 'oral culture'. In considering the possible popular influences upon the miracle stories recorded by hagiographers, it is also important to note the elements that are most constant in the long narratives made in oral societies. Among the west African LoDagaa, Jack Goody found that what is constant is not, by any means, the exact words of a passage, or any 'deep' symbolic structure. Rather, the constant element is the particular narratives of events, such as the story of a fruit bat who quarrels with his mate.⁵⁴ There is surely some similarity, on a formal level, between such short narratives, and many twelfth-century miracle stories.

Whatever the status of the stories of the rustics, the hagiography of twelfth-century hermits was nevertheless ultimately the product of literate monks, who wrote with their own agendas. In order to make sense of the legends of Godric and Bartholomew, it is necessary first to understand the agendas of the hagiographers, Reginald and Geoffrey. Thus Chapter Two will concern the place of asceticism within the monastic tradition of Durham priory, and the relation of Durham's hagiographic accounts of eremitical asceticism to some equivalent contemporary hagiography. Some aspects of the relationships of the two hermits to Durham priory will be made clear in this analysis. On this basis, it will be possible to turn towards an analysis of the miracle cult on Farne, and some of the stories

⁵¹ A similar view is taken by Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints*, p. 3.

⁵² Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society*, (Cambridge 1986), pp. 4-8.

⁵³ Goody, *Interface*, p. 93.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 172-3.

surrounding Godric. Chapter Three will largely concern Farne, and the relationship between popular cultic enthusiasm, the story-telling hermit Bartholomew, and the monastic descriptions of the holy island. As so many stories surrounding the two hermits concern animal miracles, Chapter Four will analyse the place of those stories within the hagiographic tradition, both past and contemporary to Farne and Finchale. Here, the extent of the influence of popular culture will be explored. Chapter Five will return to the problem of eremitical asceticism, comparing Aibert of Crespian to Godric, and taking up the problem of the interface of elite and popular religion from the angle of legends of the eremitical diet. From the hermit as wilderness figure, Chapter Six will bring the discussion of the symbolism of asceticism into the realm of the social, as the hermit's ascetic clothing is shown to reflect general anxieties concerning social status, wealth and poverty. The final aspect of asceticism to be considered involves the role of women as ascetics and their relationships to male ascetics, within the context of independent and unregulated figures such as Godric and Christina of Markyate. Concluding the argument is a discussion of the relationship of the hermit to the crowd, and the place of these ascetics and their *vitae* within the twelfth century.

Chapter II: In Cold and Hunger: Authority, Eremiticism and Durham Priory

i) Introduction: Ascetic Tensions on Farne

Asceticism was a fraught subject in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the worthiness of monastic houses and orders judged, at least in part, according to their reputation for austerity. Individual hermits were frequently criticised, particularly for the unregulated and voluntary form of their lives.¹ As a refounded house of the late eleventh century, Durham cathedral priory was a part of the monastic reform movement of the period, and in the later twelfth century appears to have had a number of hermits under its authority.² This in itself is not necessarily remarkable for a Benedictine house; Marmoutier appears also to have had a number of associated hermits.³ But while those at Marmoutier left no extensive record, those of late twelfth-century Durham were the subject of a remarkable literary corpus. It may be assumed that Durham produced the *Vitae* of Bartholomew and Godric simply in order to promote ascetic holy men associated with the priory. However, given the controversial nature of both asceticism and eremiticism in the period as a whole, it is as well to ask whether signs of controversy appear in the material associated with the two hermits.

Certainly, Bartholomew of Farne would appear at first sight to be a safe figure for the priory. He had been a member of the community, and pursued his eremitical life on an island controlled by the monks, and within reach of the cell at Lindisfarne. However, Bartholomew spent only a year as a monk of the priory before gaining permission to live as a hermit on Farne.⁴ One year of

¹ For some examples see Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 78-80, and also Derek Baker, 'The Surest Road to Heaven': Ascetic Spiritualities in English Post-Conquest Religious Life', *SCH* 10 (1973), pp. 45-57, esp. p. 50 for Alexander of Kirkstall's argument to a group of independent northern English hermits. The Cistercian warned them that their salvation was in peril when they were 'disciples without a master, laymen without a priest'.

² For the brief notices of those hermits, outside the works of Reginald and Geoffrey, who could have been associated with Durham Priory in some way, see Victoria Tudor, 'Durham Cathedral Priory and its Hermits in the Twelfth Century' in *AND*, pp. 67-78; esp. p. 70, and pp. 73-4.

³ See G.-M. Oury, 'L'Eremitisme à Marmoutier' in *Bulletin (Trimestriel) de la Société Archéologique de la Touraine* 33 (1963), pp. 319-34.

⁴ *Vita Bart.* ch. 8, p. 300.

monastic experience is a remarkably short period in which to gain the experience necessary for the 'solitary life', within a Benedictine context. The period of time Bartholomew's predecessors, Aelric and Aelwin, spent within Durham priory is not known, nor is known the standard practice at Durham regarding those who wished to become hermits. In any case the accounts of Bartholomew's interactions with his fellow hermits do reveal conflict over ascetic practices. Geoffrey's account of Aelwin and Bartholomew presents a picture of instant animosity. Aelwin took the role of the diabolic persecutor of the holy man, against whose persecutions Bartholomew can only endure like Job.⁵ Geoffrey does not admit that Aelwin was a monk of Durham, and that he returned to the priory after this conflict with Bartholomew.⁶

In Reginald's *Libellus* Aelwin and Bartholomew are found on Farne together as 'monks of Durham, there suffering the continual sacrifice of His ministry for the Confessor [Cuthbert]'.⁷ Neither hermits are named, one being styled simply 'that brother of ours', however Aelwin is the only character in Bartholomew's life to whom this story could apply. Reginald describes him as a layman, who one night was wearied by their psalm singing and went to sleep. The other brother, described as a priest and who is therefore presumably Bartholomew, stays awake to witness Cuthbert and an angelic host performing the mass in the chapel on Farne.⁸ Bartholomew tells the other the whole vision, and they cry together, Bartholomew pitying the other that he did not deserve to see that heavenly vision. It is

⁵ *ibid.* ch. 8, p. 300.

⁶ Aelwin is known also from Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 58, pp. 116-7. The stories involving Aelwin must date from the 1150's, before the arrival of Prior Thomas on Farne.

⁷ *ibid.* ch. 58, p. 116.

⁸ Bartholomew's vision is repeated by Geoffrey, but without mentioning the presence of any other monk of Durham. Geoffrey's account also gives Bartholomew a much more exalted role in the event. He does not merely witness Cuthbert's presence, but is invited to participate in the offices; *Vita Bart.* ch. 26, pp. 316-17. Mentioning Aelwin at this point would have disrupted Geoffrey's intended impression that Aelwin left swiftly after Bartholomew's arrival. However, Geoffrey does therefore sacrifice a witness to the miracle, replacing Aelwin with Bartholomew's attendant in old age, William. These differences between the accounts of Reginald and Geoffrey may indicate that the subject of Aelwin and Bartholomew was still controversial in the priory, after Bartholomew's death. Geoffrey avoids mentioning the issue, except to cast Aelwin as a demonic figure at the start of the account, thus rewriting the community's memory of events.

Aelwin, 'whose testimony we know to be true', who reported the miracle to the priory. As Aelwin left Farne sometime after Bartholomew's arrival, this story can be read as a record of a conflict over ascetic enthusiasm. Bartholomew is the enthusiast, apt to imitate earlier saints by remaining awake all night and having visions. Aelwin evidently could not bear Bartholomew's behaviour, and returned to life as a monk in the priory. Both men still must have been alive when this miracle is recorded, and the anonymity of both may be a sign that Bartholomew's behaviour was in fact controversial within the priory. Aelwin was a witness to a miracle showing Cuthbert's continuous presence in the world on an important site, so his anonymity is striking; Reginald usually lays emphasis upon the identity of witnesses or beneficiaries of the miracles he records. He does not always give such circumstantial authority for his stories, but he does so often enough to render an absence of such authority, when the relevant actors are so obvious, remarkable.

Geoffrey's account suppresses the complications of Aelwin and Bartholomew's relationship. Rather, he concentrates on a rhetorical point, associating Bartholomew with Job, and disposing of Aelwin as quickly as possible. However, Reginald's miracles reveal that Bartholomew and Aelwin must have lived together on Farne for some time. There are two miracles in which Aelwin and Bartholomew are mentioned by name, and a further seven which mention two anonymous brothers.⁹ The simple fact that Reginald more often prefers to leave the hermits anonymous may be an indication that the hermits of Farne were the subject of controversy. One minor story does not add up to a picture of conflict between Bartholomew and the priory, but it does seem to be part of a pattern in the hermit's life. Both Geoffrey and Reginald record the conflict with Aelwin. Equally Geoffrey's account of Bartholomew's conflict with the

⁹ Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 29 and 30, mention both Aelwin and Bartholomew as *fratres* on Farne; chs. 31 to 34, 102, 117, and 118 do not name the *fratres*, so the other brother could have been either Aelwin or Thomas. Ibid. ch. 33 shows the two brothers singing the mass together. Since Aelwin was not a priest, this would imply that the other brother here was Thomas. Thomas does not appear to have spent long on Farne before his death, arriving in 1162 or '63. He is not mentioned by name in any of the Farne stories, *ibid.* ch. 120 being the only other where his presence may be inferred. Thus the greater part of the unattributed stories may be assumed to involve Aelwin.

ex-Prior Thomas may be paralleled in another story in Reginald's *Libellus*.¹⁰

Geoffrey makes much of this conflict, which will be discussed again later. But to introduce the episode, Thomas is described as accusing Bartholomew of hypocrisy in his ascetic enthusiasm.¹¹ Bartholomew withdraws from Farne and has to be convinced to return by the community. Bartholomew removes his hairshirt in order to accommodate Thomas. In this episode, it is Bartholomew's asceticism that is criticised, not the way of life of the ex-prior of Durham. Indeed, Geoffrey uses Bartholomew's *Vita* to include some hagiographical material on Thomas himself.¹² Reginald's story does not mention either Thomas or Bartholomew. However, there are two brothers on the island, one of whom is 'that brother who had lived as a solitary on that island for many years.'¹³ By implication the other is a newcomer, and since each take weekly turns to perform the religious offices, both might be assumed to be equals and therefore priests. Prior Thomas is the obvious candidate for the second anonymous hermit. The story itself is on its own simple enough; Bartholomew is struck down with a cold when informed that it is his turn to perform the offices. Left alone by the other, Bartholomew despairs because he cannot sing with his chest in such a terrible state. Appealing to Saint Cuthbert, he soon throws up a noxious mass outside the chapel, and is able to perform his lonely duties.

It is hard not to see an undercurrent of animosity beneath the surface of this story, so tersely told by Reginald as simply one in a group of Saint Cuthbert's healing miracles on Farne.¹⁴ Again, the

¹⁰ For Prior Thomas see G. V. Scammell, *Hugh De Puiset, Bishop of Durham* (Cambridge 1956), pp. 129-35, for the conflicts between the priory and Bishop Hugh, and pp. 133-4 on Prior Thomas' downfall in one episode of this conflict, which leads him to retreat to Farne.

¹¹ *Vita Bart.* ch. 14, p. 307.

¹² *Vita Bart.* chs. 14-15, pp. 307-8. This includes an account of the miracles at Thomas's death, showing his sanctity. Geoffrey elsewhere attributes some saintly status to the ex-prior; *Liber de Statu Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, pp. 1-31, in *Historiae Dunelmensis Scriptores Tres*, ed. J. Raine, SS 9 (1839), p. 8. The conflicts between the priory and its bishops continue after Bishop Puiset's death in 1195; Scammell, *Puiset*, p. 244. Assuming that Bartholomew's *Vita* was written after 1195, Geoffrey's concern to include material on Thomas in Bartholomew's *Vita* must be explained by the monks' continuing anxiety concerning the perennial conflicts between the bishop and the priory. Thomas was perhaps a symbol of resistance to resented episcopal pressure.

¹³ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 120, pp. 265-6.

¹⁴ Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 117-120.

conflict between two hermits on Farne centres on the performance of religious duties, and thus on the relative virtues of the two hermits involved. Although this is not the theme Reginald works into his narrative, it is the obvious implication of the story itself.

Additionally, one must ask why such an apparently minor story is remembered by the priory community. This is not the record of a dramatic healing miracle during a life threatening illness, and the anonymity of its subject contrasts starkly with the detail of significant persons involved in the accompanying healing miracles. It seems probable that the story was remembered, so that Reginald could record it, for quite different reasons than for its account of Cuthbert's present virtue on Farne. By themselves, these indications of tension in the relationship between Bartholomew and the priory may not appear to add up to anything significant. However, in the context of the history of the priory the conflict does become a central problem for considering the relationship between Durham and its two celebrated holy men.

ii) The Origins of Durham Priory and the Problem of Eremiticism

The relationship of Durham and its hermits has not been considered as problematical in previous accounts of the hermits.¹⁵ The reason for this silence may lie in Durham priory's generally being viewed as the product of an ascetic and monastic revival in the late eleventh-century north of England. This revival has often been seen as even essentially eremitical in character. Knowles implicitly considered revived monasticism and eremiticism as an indivisible phenomenon; 'The traditions of the past, the early years of Aldwin and Reinfrid at Jarrow, Wearmouth and Whitby, the lives of many northern hermits, whether at Finchale, at Farne, or at Knaresborough, the character of the archbishops Thurstan and Henry Murdac, have

¹⁵ Tudor, 'Durham Priory and its Hermits', in *AND*, p. 71, sees the hermits associated with Durham as a product of the convent's own 'spiritual vitality', and Durham's production of solitaries as a consequence of the priory's 'eremitic' origins. However only Bartholomew's two predecessors on Farne, Aelric and Aelwin, can be seen as products of the community itself. Aelric of Wolsingham, Godric's mentor, had some contact with Durham, but preferred an independent life, as did Godric himself. There is in fact little if any evidence that the priory itself produced a 'marked ascetic tendency'. That Bartholomew's relationships with Thomas and Aelwin were marked by conflict over Bartholomew's asceticism should in fact suggest the opposite conclusion.

all something more austere in them than their counterparts in southern England.¹⁶ The departure of the Evesham monks Aldwin, Aelfwig and Reinfrid for the north of England and the consequent refoundation of Durham, Whitby and other houses, has regularly been seen as inspired by eremitical enthusiasm; Aldwin read Bede and thus decided 'to adopt a life of eremitical poverty there', and further 'they had no intention of recreating the life of Evesham in the North: they wished simply *pauperem vitam ducere*.'¹⁷ However, the phrase *pauper vita* is entirely conventional, and it can be used for any number of different understandings of the monastic life. It does not inevitably mean 'eremitical poverty'.¹⁸

Reconstructing the precise spiritual inspirations behind the foundations of monastic houses is a dubious task, owing to the nature of the sources. Knowledge of spiritual inspiration depends on literary

¹⁶ David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, (Cambridge 1940), p. 171; or also, 'the earnest, somewhat stern northern piety. . . was beginning to find an outlet, first in the revived monasticism and its hermitages,' *ibid.* p. 229. See also his comments on the crisis of 1132 at St Mary's, York, and the waning inheritance of the northern revival's 'simplicity', p. 231.

¹⁷ Derek Baker, 'The Desert in the North', *Northern History* 5 (1970), pp. 1-11, esp. p. 5. The Latin comes from Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, ch. 21, p. 108. Baker later made a distinction between 'two spiritualities' in the northern revival, one recognising the need for regular authority and tradition, and the other a more amorphous impulse, perhaps more inclined to unregulated solitude; Baker, 'Ascetic Spiritualities'. Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 36-7, argued that Baker's distinction between the northern revival and continental eremitically inspired monasticism, rested upon reasons which 'would demolish the eremitical movement *in toto*'. It might also be said that Leyser's definition of eremiticism might absorb all reformed monasticism. However, Leyser includes Wearmouth, Whitby and Jarrow in her list of 'Religious Houses with Eremitical Origins'; Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 113-18. For a general perspective on the north which sees eremiticism and the monastic revival as interchangeable see, Janet E. Burton, 'The Eremitical Tradition and the Development of Post-Conquest Religious Life in Northern England', *Trivium* 26 (1991), pp. 18-39; also see Janet E. Burton, 'The Monastic Revival in Yorkshire: Whitby and St Mary's, York', in *AND*, pp. 41-51.

¹⁸ Certainly there were twelfth-century 'eremitical' figures who took terms like *pauper Christi* to mean a literal identification with material poverty; see Constable, *Reformation*, p. 148 and pp. 318-19. On the changing monastic understanding of their own status within the new economic context see Little, *Religious Poverty*, pp. 66-9. However, rhetorical terms like *pauper vita* were highly ambiguous in the period when Symeon wrote. Whether he thought that the 'life of the poor' implied the religious life of the old monks, or the new literal identification with economic poverty, cannot be guessed simply from his use of the phrase. Symeon may in fact have been deliberately ambiguous in order to avoid defining Durham priory's religious roots on one side or another of monastic debates. Whether the phrase then holds any meaningful clues towards Aldwin's religious inspiration, may be considered doubtful at best.

descriptions of a foundation's history. This kind of hagiographical or historical description is generally produced long after the foundation. A monastic community may well have redefined itself in the interim period, and thus the literary evidence describes the mentality of its own time, not the time of the foundation. Historians have responded to this problem, in the case of Durham, by investigating the religious background of the three founders of post-conquest religious life in the north. This was focused, of course, upon the abbey of Evesham. The abbey's own spiritual revival, and the presence there of a few anchorites, has been used to define the mentality of the leaders of the northern revival.¹⁹ Consequently the late eleventh-century revival can be seen as a precursor of, and essentially the same as, the 'second wave of eremiticism in England', which culminated in the foundation of Cistercian houses.²⁰

The context of Evesham does not lend itself to an *a priori* assumption that those involved in the northern revival saw themselves in eremitical terms. Certainly the terms 'eremitical' and 'coenobitic' were not necessarily opposites, particularly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, nevertheless contemporary religious were perfectly capable of recognising the old Benedictine distinction. Descriptions of the mentality of a particular religious house are usually bound up with changing fashions in the rhetoric of religious life; where 'eremitical' terms became fashionable in the course of the twelfth century, those terms could be written into accounts of the religious life of earlier periods. Thus the terms are descriptive of later religious mentalities rather than an original self-consciousness. Religious life at Evesham in the mid-eleventh century certainly should be described as a revival of monasticism and ascetic living, and may well be seen as part of a wider European reform movement.²¹ However, there seems no reason to associate Evesham's monastic revival with any kind of self-conscious eremiticism. The pattern at Evesham appears to be wholly traditional in the case of

¹⁹ See Knowles, *MO*, ch. 9, pp. 159-71; Baker, 'Desert in the North', pp. 1-5.

²⁰ Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 36. A different conceptualisation of the culture and mentality of the northern revival can be found in Anne Dawtry, 'The Benedictine Revival in the North: The Last Bulwark of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism?', *SCH* 18 (1982), pp. 87-99. But the general view is characterised by Constable, *Reformation*, p. 108, (citing Christopher Brooke); 'there were no clear dividing lines between the various forms of religious life'.

²¹ Knowles, *MO*, pp. 74-8.

the three *anachoritae*, Wulsi, Basing and Aelfwin, described in the history of Evesham. They are said to have lived as recluses in various places for seventy years.²² They thus appear as traditional Benedictine solitaries, not as Leyser's 'new hermits'.

One community associated with the history of Evesham, at Malvern, is described by Knowles as a 'band of anchorites' which 'ended by adopting the Rule of Saint Benedict and the customs traditional in the old houses.' Knowles saw this episode as a precursor to the northern revival.²³ The community at Malvern was led by an illiterate monk of Evesham also called Aldwin. However, the reference to this group in the *Vita Wulfstani*, refers to the group in its early, difficult period as a '*congregatio religionis*', in need of Wulfstan's encouragement, not as a group of hermits.²⁴ William of Malmesbury, who translated the *Vita* into Latin, nevertheless gives a different account of this Aldwin in his own *Gesta Pontificum*: Aldwin 'practised the eremitical life with his companion Guido in that most vast forest called Malvern.'²⁵ There is no mention of a Guido in the *Life* of Wulfstan, and the natural interpretation of the term *congregatio* would be that it was a group to which was referred, rather than an isolated pair. Certainly the brief account in Wulfstan's *Vita* implies flagging efforts to construct a community; he was 'deterred after some years in an immensity of labour.'²⁶ Malmesbury must have had some other account or tradition for the figure of Guido, but his characterisation of Aldwin of Malvern as a solitary could be a rhetorical interpolation into the original tradition. Thus the difference between Malmesbury and the *Vita* may reflect a changing fashion in the conceptualisation of religious life, rather than the original situation at Malvern. There is thus nothing in the Evesham background which should lead to an assumption that Aldwin of Winchcombe and company inherited any kind of

²² *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham*, ed. William D. Macray, *RS* 29 (1863), pp. 322-3.

²³ Knowles, *MO*, p. 78 and p. 75.

²⁴ *The Vita Wulfstani of William Malmesbury*, ch. 2, p. 26, ed. Reginald R. Darlington, *Camden Society*, 3d series, vol. 40 (1928). This *Vita* has been accepted as a faithful translation of an original Anglo-Saxon *vita*, see Knowles, *MO*, p. 74n.

²⁵ Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum*, Bk. 4, no. 145, pp. 285-6.

²⁶ *Vita Wulfstani*, p. 26.

specifically 'eremitical' monasticism which they took with them to the north.

The second area where 'eremitical' inspiration may be in evidence in the northern revival lies in the career of Reinfrid at Whitby. The facts of Reinfrid's career certainly appear to be very close to an 'eremitical' monastic model. Reinfrid is an illiterate who strikes out on his own to live in Whitby, where others gather around him.²⁷ It is possible that Symeon was suppressing an 'eremitical' aspect of Reinfrid's career, writing simply that he went to Whitby, 'in which place he received such persons as came to him, and began to frame a habitation for monks.'²⁸ However, the foundation account which opens the cartulary of Whitby also emphasises the strictly monastic background of Reinfrid, explaining how he was 'well instructed in monastic disciplines.'²⁹ Reinfrid comes to Whitby to live a 'regular converted life with his companions in humility, patience, poverty, and charity.'³⁰ These are fine virtues of reformed monasticism, but the emphasis is on regular, ordered monastic life, as in Symeon. This document is by no means close to events, however, dating from the last quarter of the twelfth century. It also has a clear agenda, giving a central role to William de Percy as the benefactor and lay founder of the abbey.³¹

This late account probably contains some distortions, as it describes William's brother, Serlo, assuming the leadership of the house after Reinfrid's death, avoiding mention of the probable earlier abbot, Stephen, who arrived at Whitby within a year of Reinfrid.³² At

²⁷ Symeon, *LDE*, ch. 21, p. 109, and ch. 22, p. 111.

²⁸ *ibid.* ch. 22, p. 111: '*ubi advenientes suscipiens, monachorum habitationem instituere coepit*'; *A History of the Church of Durham*, trans. Joseph Stephenson, (reprint Lampeter 1988), p. 78.

²⁹ *Cartularium Abbatiae de Whiteby*, vol. I, ed. J. C. Atkinson, *SS* 69 (1879), p. 1: '*Deinde apud Evesham. . . monachus factus est, et monasticis disciplinis bene instructus, divino instinctu cum Alwino. . . regressus est in provinciam Northanybrorum ad suscitandam monachicam religionem*'.

³⁰ *ibid.* p. 2: '*ad idem habitandum vel regendum coepit regulariter conversari cum sociis suis, in humilitate, patientia, paupertate, et caritate*'.

³¹ See Burton, 'The Monastic Revival in Yorkshire', p. 42 for the dating of the Whitby memorial. Anne Dawtry, 'Benedictine Monasticism in England, 1066-1135: with particular reference to the Archdiocese of York', Unpublished Phd., Westfield College, University of London, (1985), pp. 33-5, discusses the intimate links between the Percys and Whitby abbey, and suggests that the memorial was written when the Percy family was particularly dominant over Whitby.

³² *Cartularium Whiteby*, p. 2. For Stephen, see Burton, 'Monastic Revival', p. 44.

some point in the early 1080s Stephen and others migrated to York.³³ However, the problems at Whitby in the late eleventh century may have centred simply on lay control of a religious house. It is precisely the separation of the secular and the religious spheres of life which lay at the heart of reformed monasticism. Stephen and his followers ultimately may have left for York because William de Percy imposed one of his own family as Abbot. That William could attempt this may reflect the original situation between Reinfrid and William, where the latter encouraged the former to establish a monastery on his land. Thus, Reinfrid may have been simply the organiser of a group of monks, rather than harbouring any eremitical desires of his own. That his community subsequently left to found another house of black monks in York certainly does not imply an originally eremitical impulse, simply a desire to live in a properly reformed religious context.³⁴

The third account of Whitby's foundation is the narrative of the foundation of St Mary's, York, attributed to Abbot Stephen.³⁵ It is this narrative which imposes an 'eremitical' interpretation upon Reinfrid and his followers. The narrative describes a group under Reinfrid, before 1078, '*heremiticam vitam ducentes*'. Later, it is repeated that Reinfrid came to Whitby 'to lead a solitary life'.³⁶ The Stephen narrative may well contain the most reliable account of the

³³ This is only briefly indicated by Symeon, *LDE*, ch. 22, p. 111. See Burton, 'Monastic Revival', pp. 47-9 for a full discussion of this obscure event and its consequences. Clearly Whitby at this point was not a successful monastic settlement.

³⁴ Burton, 'Monastic Revival', p. 50, and Burton, 'The Eremitical Tradition', pp. 27-30, suggests that because a group of hermitages later belonged to Whitby, 'it seems to have retained some sense of its eremitical origins'. This does not necessarily follow. Firstly, bringing hermits under authority does not imply a nostalgic sense of origins. Secondly, terse references to a hermitage in a charter do not mean that those hermitages were necessarily inhabited by hermits. A *heremitorium*, (*Cartularium Whiteby*, p. 3), could as easily refer to an uninhabited spot as a place already occupied by a hermit. Only one of these places, Goathland, was clearly inhabited by a group; see Burton, 'The Eremitical Tradition', p. 29. The leader Osmund was described as a priest, and the group may be reasonably represented as hermits of a kind.

³⁵ For the state of the debate on this document see Burton, 'Monastic Revival', pp. 42-3. The manuscript of the narrative is dated to later than 1157, but the account itself is sometimes considered as having an earlier origin.

³⁶ An extract from this narrative from a late manuscript is printed in the introduction to *Cartularium Whiteby*, pp. xxxiv-xxxvii; cited quotations p. xxv. These quotations agree with the text in the twelfth-century MS, B. L. ADD MS38816 fols. 29v-34v, used in Dawtry, 'Benedictine Monasticism', p. 34.

early years at Whitby, but it is by no means a neutral account, even if it is considered earlier than the Whitby narrative. The abbey at York is well known for its internal controversies over the religious life, leading to the schism which resulted in the foundation of the Cistercian abbey of Fountains in 1132.³⁷ If the Stephen narrative has any connection with this period, where the production of a foundation narrative might well be considered necessary, then rhetorical rewriting of the past must be suspected. It is even possible that an invented early 'eremital' period is meant to contrast unfavourably with the latter, organised conditions at York, in a rebuke to those who wished to disturb conditions in the present. The status of this document is so ambiguous that this must be a purely speculative point. However, there are many possible reasons for a disingenuous description of Reinfrid's career, and the phrase *heremitica vita* can too easily be interpolated into an existing account in order to support contemporary arguments. Also, as in Malmesbury's account of the settlement at Malvern, eremital vocabulary may have been more a matter of rhetorical fashion, reflecting the prestige of the Cistercians who used such rhetoric. Where there are three accounts, of which only one of the later two mentions an 'eremital' origin to a house, it is not justified to assume the natural accuracy of that account. It is possible that historians are reading too much 'eremiticism' into late eleventh-century monasticism on the basis of twelfth-century accounts in which there are new agendas.³⁸

To interpret the character of the northern revival and the refoundation of Durham, there is one essential account: Symeon's *Libellus de exordio et procursu Dunelmensis ecclesie*, composed in the first decade of the twelfth century.³⁹ Symeon's account was designed to promote stability and prestige of the Benedictine community some twenty years after its foundation. There have been a number of different interpretations of Symeon's history, perhaps

³⁷ See Derek Baker, 'The Foundation of Fountains Abbey', *Northern History* 4 (1969), pp. 29-43, and Denis Bethell, 'The Foundation of Fountains Abbey and the State of St Mary's York in 1132', *JEH* 17 (1966), pp. 11-27.

³⁸ A similar case from the Cambrai will be discussed above, Chapter V, p. 187.

³⁹ See David Rollason, 'Symeon's Contribution to Historical Writing in Northern England', in Rollason, *Symeon*, pp. 1-13, and p. 6 for comment and references to the dating of the work.

the better part of which all contain compatible and convincing explanations of Symeon's intent.⁴⁰ One aspect of Symeon's argument may have been his attempt to find a balance between the issues of reform and continuity of tradition. The balance would have been meant to satisfy potential and actual critics of the new community, and encourage support for the community's control of the cult of Saint Cuthbert.

One important means of maintaining this delicate balance was to emphasise the role of the bishop of Durham in the refoundation of Durham, rather than the southern group of monks. Thus Symeon's chapter, on the exploits of Aldwin and his companions, is inserted into the narrative of the episcopacy of Bishop Walcher in such a way as to emphasise the authority and religious legitimacy of the bishop in reforming the Durham community. The bishop, although a secular cleric, nevertheless 'showed himself to be a truly religious monk by the conversion of a laudable life.' His reform of the clerics made them adhere to the 'usage of clerics in their daily and nightly offices; for until this time they had been wont to imitate monastic customs in these matters, as far as they had learned them, by hereditary tradition from their ancestors, who, as has already been stated, had been trained up and educated amongst the monks.'⁴¹ This passage

⁴⁰ See for example, David Rollason, 'Symeon of Durham and the Community of Durham in the Eleventh Century', in *England in the Eleventh Century*, ed. Carola Hicks (Stamford 1992), pp. 183-98; Alan J. Piper, 'The First Generations of Durham Monks', in *CCC*, pp. 437-46; Meryl Foster, 'Custodians of St Cuthbert: The Durham Monks' Views of their Predecessors, 1083-c.1200', in *AND*, pp. 53-65; David Rollason, 'The Making of the *Libellus de Exordio*: The Evidence of Erasures and Alterations in the Two Earliest Manuscripts', pp. 140-156, in Rollason, *Symeon*; and William M. Aird, 'The Political Context of the *Libellus de Exordio*', in Rollason, *Symeon*, pp. 32-45. The interpretation of Symeon given below simply offers a perspective on Symeon largely, I think, complementary to the work that has already been done. On the matter of the audience of the work however, the argument below implies an eventual audience beyond the Durham community, and beyond the bishop. Piper and Aird consider the context of the writing of the *LDE* to be Durham's troublesome relationship with Bishop Ranulph Flambard, and thus that he himself is the primary audience. Kurt-Ulrich Jaschke, 'Remarks on Datings in the *Libellus*', in Rollason, *Symeon*, pp. 46-60, notes some reasons why the immediate audience should be considered to be the monastic community itself, see pp. 50-3. However, despite the possible immediate audience, it seems reasonable to suppose that Symeon would be writing a work that would validate the community to a large and varied audience in the long term, whatever were the immediate concerns. There would thus be layers of his argument that relate to a general context.

⁴¹ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, ch. 18, p. 106; trans. Stephenson, p. 75.

might appear, and perhaps is, somewhat contradictory from the point of view of Symeon's purpose in emphasising the continuity of the monastic community of Saint Cuthbert. On the eve of the full refoundation of monastic life, and on the order of the bishop who supervised that refoundation, Saint Cuthbert's community took a step backwards from monastic practice into an undefined 'clerical' practice.

Within Symeon's purpose this apparent contradiction does make sense. Having already established the persistence of the traditional monastic form of the community in the bulk of his history, Symeon had a different problem at the stage of refoundation. This problem was the one of authority and proper organisation. Whatever remnants of the monastic tradition that remained among the clerks of Durham, it was more important that they were properly constituted within an official order of the church, under the authority of the bishop. A mishmash of clerical and monastic customs was worse than a retreat to properly authorised clerical order. Yet the monastic tradition maintained its continuity through the personal character of the bishop who showed himself to be a 'truly religious monk'. The untenably contradictory situation between the bishop and the current state of Cuthbert's community could only be resolved through the introduction of a new group of monks. Yet before the refoundation occurred, southern secular power intervened in the shape of William the Conqueror, who was humbled by Saint Cuthbert, and prevented from harming the saint's people.⁴²

Only thereafter did the spiritual incursion of people from the south occur. After an initial settlement at Jarrow, Aldwin left the well-established original group for other places 'that in them he might accomplish works of a similar nature.'⁴³ The important aspect of this incursion is that it was under the control of the bishop. Walcher maintained control over Aldwin by the threat of excommunication, when the latter attempted to build a monastery at Melrose, within the power of the Scottish king. Aldwin was brought back to the sure control of the bishop and settled at Wearmouth. Upon the murder of Bishop Walcher, a new bishop was installed, this

⁴² *ibid.* Bk. 3, chs. 19-20, pp. 106-8; for William I's intervention in Saint Cuthbert's affairs see William M. Aird, *St. Cuthbert and the Normans: The Church of Durham, 1071-1153*, (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 88-90.

⁴³ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, chs. 21-2, pp. 108-11.

one being a monk whose virtuous life and stature among the powerful is praised by Symeon. His first act was to bring in Aldwin's monks to replace the clerics, and thus full continuity was restored.⁴⁴ Symeon's account of this period certainly papers over many contradictions, and begs many questions concerning real events, but does maintain a clear line of authority, in which the Benedictine life is never wholly lost to sight.

Symeon's account does not imply an 'eremitical' or particularly ascetic context as part of the inspiration behind the northern revival.⁴⁵ Aldwin was 'a monk in dress and conduct, who gave the preference to voluntary poverty and disregard to the world over all temporal honours and riches whatsoever.'⁴⁶ Voluntary poverty is not necessarily also 'eremitical'; Symeon was simply distinguishing monastic life from the life of the secular aristocracy. Whatever Aldwin's own plans might have been, Symeon's account emphasises the structures of monastic authority and the accoutrements of monastic life:

'Their abbot would not give them permission to depart, except on the condition that Aldwin should previously assume the rule over them, and should undertake the charge of their souls. So the three monks set out together on foot; taking with them one ass only, which carried the books and priestly vestments which they required for the celebration of the divine mystery.'⁴⁷

For Symeon the key and repeated symbol is that of clothing; Aldwin was introduced as a monk in his *habitus*, his early group were joined by those who '*monachicum ab eis habitum susceperunt*'. The eventual prior of Durham, Turgot, is also introduced in terms of his clothing; 'at that time a cleric as to his dress, but even then a

⁴⁴ *ibid.* Bk. 4, chs. 1-2, pp. 119-21.

⁴⁵ As far as the actual customs of the Durham community are concerned, they may have been at least influenced by Lanfranc's *Constitutiones*, which were in the possession of Durham in the twelfth century, see Aird, 'Political Context of *Libellus de Exordio*', p. 37. The *Constitutiones* themselves were mostly derived from Cluny.

⁴⁶ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, ch. 21, p. 108: '*habitu et actione monachus, vocabulo Alwinus, habitabat, qui voluntariam paupertatum et mundi contemptum cunctis seculi honoribus ac divitis praetulerat*'; trans. Stephenson, p. 76.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p. 109; trans. Stephenson, p. 77.

follower of the monastic life in heart and deed. . . he did not venture to assume the monastic dress before he had made proof of himself by a longer and stricter examination.' Eventually Aldwin 'conferred the monastic habit upon Turgot'.⁴⁸

This emphasis upon respectable monastic clothing may have been a pointed rejection of rhetoric which exhorted the monk to '*nudus nudum christum sequi*'.⁴⁹ Indeed, Symeon's single rhetorical reference to ascetic behaviour maintains, through a marked silence, this insistence on monastic clothing. At Jarrow:

'they erected a little hovel in which they slept, and took their food, and thus they sustained, by the alms of the religious, a life of poverty. There, for the sake of Christ, they took up their abode in the midst of cold, and hunger, and the want of all things.'⁵⁰

This description is a conscious adaptation of Saint Paul's passage in 2 *Corinthians*. Paul wrote of 'journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers. . . in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.'⁵¹ Symeon adopts the same words for cold and hunger as the Vulgate, but other monastic writers are happy to give the quotation in full. A notable example comes from the Cistercian account of the foundation of Clairvaux; in this wilderness, Saint Bernard and his followers 'served God in simplicity, in poverty of spirit, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, and in long night watches.'⁵² Symeon's is a remarkably fastidious adaptation of the

⁴⁸ *ibid.* Bk. 3, ch. 22, pp. 111-12; trans. Stephenson, p. 78.

⁴⁹ This rhetoric was common in the period in general, see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 125-7, and Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 52-3 and on clothing in general, pp. 65-8. It is clear that such rhetoric was associated with the reform movement in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but what has not been established is the prevalence of such rhetoric at different stages in this period. For example, was the exhortation, to 'nakedly follow the naked Christ', a phrase that was equally prevalent through the various generations of the reform movement, or was it more prominent at different times?

⁵⁰ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, ch. 21, p. 109; trans. Stephenson, p. 77.

⁵¹ 2 *Corinthians* :11:26-7: '*in labore et aerumna, in vigiliis multis, in fame et siti, in ieiuniis multis, in frigore et nuditate*'.

⁵² *Vita Prima S. Bernardi Abbatis Clarevallensis, Liber I, auctore Guillelmo*, cols. 225-68, *PL* 185, vol. I; Bk. I, ch. 5, no. 25, (cols. 241-2); trans. Pauline



Corinthians quotation, compared to the Cistercian example, and thus the ascetic implications of the reference is limited. A twelfth-century monastic reader would have been sensitive to the partial quotation and the silence. Symeon's Aldwin lived within the approval of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the monastic habit is a protection against the degrading nakedness Paul suffered. Temporarily, Aldwin and his followers suffered cold and hunger. This was a stage in the reconstruction of a proper religious life, supported by the bishop of Durham, rather than at the mercy of secular powers.⁵³

In contrast to the vocabulary of contemporary writers, Symeon's rendition of Aldwin's virtues is monastic and abbatial, but not markedly ascetic, or eremitical;

'Aldwin was an instructor to them in this religious conversation, for he was one who thoroughly despised the world, most humble in dress and disposition, patient in adversity, modest in prosperity, acute in intellect, provident in counsel. . .⁵⁴

Symeon does not make any claims for Aldwin concerning heroic feats of prayers or vigils, or betray any anxiety on the form or meaning of liturgy and devotions.⁵⁵ Symeon does not describe Aldwin's frequent moves from one place to another in terms of the eremitical *topos* of the holy man who continually withdraws from fame, leaving a trail

Matarasso, *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings in the Twelfth Century*, (London 1993), p. 26. Also see above, Chapter V, p. 193.

⁵³ The events of Aldwin's career, the threatened excommunication by the bishop of Durham and Aldwin's initial avoidance of Durham, are claimed as evidence that Aldwin was drawn towards the eremitical life, in Aird, *Cuthbert and the Normans*, pp. 131-3, but see also his comment on Aldwin and Bishop Walcher on p. 92. There does not seem any reason for Aldwin to wish to visit Durham itself if his intent was simply to establish a reformed house of Benedictine monks, an intent which cannot be assumed to be influenced by eremiticism. While the threat of excommunication, which brought Aldwin back from Melrose, does indicate a troubled relationship with the bishop, again it is not real evidence for an eremitical impulse. Rather, these incidents simply show how politically complex the situation must have been between 1073 and 1083.

⁵⁴ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, ch. 21, p. 110, trans. Stephenson, pp. 77-8.

⁵⁵ The ascetic feats of holy men in this regard, and the emphasis on the inner quality of psalm singing, rather than its outward magnificence, are generally seen as a marker of eleventh and twelfth-century eremitical monasticism; see Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 62-5, and Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 200-8.

of new foundations in his wake. Rather Aldwin is a renewer and restorer of monastic life;

'But when Aldwin, the servant of Christ, had now brought forth some fruit in this place [Jarrow], as we have described, he had a wish to visit other localities, that in them he might accomplish similar works for the Lord.'⁵⁶

In itself, the rebuilding of ruined churches or monasteries is not a characteristic that can be used to distinguish between monastic movements which are or are not 'eremitically' inspired.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, Symeon's one hint of an 'eremitical' inclination in Aldwin occurs in the context of his refoundations. Turgot and Aldwin come to Melrose, which was once a monastery, 'yet at that time was a solitude, and charmed by the seclusion of the spot, they began there to serve Christ'.⁵⁸ The two are driven from this place by their refusal to give *fidelitas* to the Scottish king, a secular authority. The separation of ecclesiastical and secular authority is another central theme in these chapters, and places Symeon's account squarely within the agenda of reformed Benedictinism. Symeon's purpose in mentioning Melrose could well have been political; Durham priory may have wished to expand northwards and to control Melrose, as it was a site associated with Saint Cuthbert. Pointing out the 'solitude' of the place, against its former status, in the context of Aldwin's series of refoundations, is a subtle way of suggesting that the place could do well under the governance of Aldwin's successors at Durham priory. This one isolated reference to 'solitude' cannot be seen as at all comparable to the rhetoric of the desert and spiritual solitude used so frequently by the 'eremitical' monastic groups.⁵⁹ It seems clear that Symeon's perception of the foundation of Durham did not include a sense that the community had its origins in a group of eremitically inspired religious.

⁵⁶ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 3, ch. 22, pp. 110-11, trans. Stephenson, p. 78.

⁵⁷ For some examples, including Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 119-20.

⁵⁸ Symeon, *LDE*, pp. 111-12: '*tunc autem solitudinem, pervenientes, secreta illius loci habitatione delectati, Christo ibidem servientes coeperunt conversari*'.

⁵⁹ For some examples of this kind of rhetoric see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 135-7.

Aldwin himself may, of course, have perceived his career differently, but Symeon was an early member of the priory community.⁶⁰ It is possible that, as in Reinfrid's case, Symeon was suppressing an early eremitical element within the northern revival. However in either case, Symeon's account demonstrates that the Durham community saw itself not in terms of the rediscovery of the desert, and the primacy of ascetic spirituality, but in terms of established Benedictine tradition in general, as well as in the particular tradition of Saint Cuthbert's community. Proper ecclesiastical authority is Symeon's theme, and this should be remembered when considering how the monks of Durham would have reacted to the unregulated, enthusiastic asceticism of a hermit such as Godric of Finchale.

It could be objected to this argument concerning Symeon's history, that it draws up artificial boundaries between the spiritual impulses of a reformed monasticism and Leyser's 'eremitical' monasticism. However, Symeon does not show interest in such practices as inner solitude, silence and manual labour, which are seen as fundamental to the eremitically inspired monasticism of the period.⁶¹ Close attention should be paid to the particular *topoi* used by monastic writers. In the context of eleventh and twelfth-century hagiography and foundation narratives, Symeon's account stands in great contrast to the accounts of monastic founders who were clearly eremitically inspired. Peter Damian put great emphasis on Romuald's solitary spirituality, even when in a communal situation.⁶² Bernard of Tiron is equally seen as a figure drawn towards ascetic and

⁶⁰ Knowles, *MO*, p. 165n.

⁶¹ For the characteristics of this movement, as conceived in a general sense, and conflict with 'unreformed' houses, see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 108-14, and Leyser, *Hermits*, ch. 6, pp. 52-68.

⁶² Peter Damian, *Vita Sancti Romualdo Abbate, Acta Sanctorum*, 7 February, pp. 101-40; see particularly ch. 42, p. 112, where Romuald is presented as remaining solitary even on a journey with his fellow monks. The saintly abbot insisted on remaining some distance apart from the others, barefoot and singing psalms. Damian apparently approved, although this seems far from the spirit of Saint Benedict's understanding of the role of an abbot. It seems that Damian was describing a different, and perhaps new model of monasticism here. For Romuald see also Colin Phipps, 'Romuald, Model Hermit: Eremitical Theory in Saint Peter Damian's *Vita Beati Romualdi*', *SCH* 22 (1985), pp. 65-77. Romuald's authority to reform monastic houses grew directly out of his heroic eremitical asceticism and he is thus certainly a figure who fits within Leyser's paradigm.

eremitical forms of life, even though he was the founder of the monastery which wrote his *Vita*.⁶³

A more direct contrast to Symeon, in terms of genre, can be found in the foundation narrative of Citeaux. In the *Little Exordium*, Citeaux is a *heremum* where men rarely went and 'none but wild things lived, so densely covered was it then with woodland and thorn bush.'⁶⁴ The author of the *Exordium* later describes how the monks stripped away the traditional practices to arrive at the original intention of the Rule of Benedict, thus rejecting all sorts of luxuries, including 'long-sleeved tunics and furs, fine linen shirts, caps and breeches, combs, quilts and coverlets, and a diversity of foods in the refectory, as well as lard and everything which militates against the purity of the Rule.'⁶⁵ Symeon's insistence upon traditional monastic usages and monastic clothing could almost have been written in defence of Durham against such a text as this.⁶⁶ When Symeon was writing, the *Exordium* did not exist in the form in which we know it, however criticism of more traditional houses such as Durham could already have been taking the forms which appear only shortly later in Cistercian literature. Such a context would certainly explain Symeon's repeated insistence upon certain themes. Where Symeon emphasises that monks should not be governed by a secular authority, the early Cistercians have a much more radical agenda:

'Finding no evidence in the Rule or in the life of Benedict that he, their teacher, had possessed churches or altars, offerings or burial dues, other men's tithes, ovens or mills, villages or peasants, and no sign either that women had entered his monastery or that the dead were

⁶³ For the passages in the *Vita* of Bernard of Tiron which particularly demonstrate his ascetic eremiticism within a coenobitic context see *Gaufridus Grossus, Vita B. Bernardi Tironiensis*, PL 172, cols. 1362-1446; ch. 3, nos. 19-22, cols. 1380-2. Explicit mention is made of all such themes as manual labour. The *Vita* was written between 1137 and 1149; Johannes von Walter, 'Die Ersten Wanderprediger Frankreichs', French trans. in *Bulletin de la Commission Historique et Archéologique de la Mayenne*, vol. 24 (1908), pp. 385-410.

⁶⁴ *Exordium Cisterciensis Coenobii*, in *Les Plus Anciens Textes de Citeaux, Commentarii Cistercienses, Studia et Documenta II*, ed. Jean de la C. Bouton and Jean B. Van Damme, (Achel 1974), ch. 3, pp. 59-60; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 5

⁶⁵ *Exordium*, ch. 15, pp. 77-8; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ The *Little Exordium* was written probably between 1112-19, but parts may date back to earlier documents from 1100, see *Les Plus Ancien Textes*, pp. 9-14.

buried there, save only his sister, they renounced all these privileges.'⁶⁷

Durham priory was probably never so removed from secular property and secular churches.⁶⁸

Finally, there is also a clear thread of approval of radical asceticism in the *Little Exordium* in the admission that the 'exceptional and almost unheard-of harshness of their life' repelled possible recruits.⁶⁹ The contrast with Symeon could not be more clear; quite unlike the monks of Durham, the monks of the *Exordium* are those whose descendants would describe themselves as 'a crowd of solitaries'.⁷⁰ The contrast between the complex of *topoi* found in the *Exordium*, and those of Symeon, must at least provide ground for distinguishing Durham priory from self-consciously ascetic and eremitical monastic movements. Durham did not regard itself as primarily an ascetic or eremitical foundation, in the Cistercian sense at least, and perhaps deliberately distinguished itself from such monastic currents. No doubt the monks of Durham considered themselves to be properly ascetic, but their single self-defining text was more concerned that the religious life should be well defined in terms of authority, rather than of heroic asceticism. Again, this understanding of religion would have materially affected Durham's attitude towards popular ascetics like Godric and Bartholomew.

Symeon wrote well before the rise of the prestige and influence of the Cistercians, at least in England. However it could be partly as a response to the prestige of new orders that the extra preface was added to his history of Durham after 1123.⁷¹ The preface sets an

⁶⁷ *Exordium*, ch. 15, pp. 77-8; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ For Durham's church property in the twelfth century see Scammell, *Puisey*, p. 97 and secular property, p. 153.

⁶⁹ *Exordium*, ch. 16, pp. 81-2; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *Vita Prima Bernardi Clarevallensis*, Bk. 1, ch. 7, no. 35, (col. 248).

⁷¹ The preface is printed in *Symeon Opera*, pp. 7-11; trans. Stephenson, pp. 5-8. See Foster, 'Custodians', pp. 61-3, for the dating of the preface, and a discussion of the text within the context of attitudes towards the earlier clerics. An objection to this dating can be found in Bernard Meehan, 'Notes on the Preliminary Texts and Continuations to Symeon of Durham's *Libellus de Exordio*', in *Symeon*, pp. 128-37, particularly pp. 130-2. Although admitting that the manuscript evidence points to a later origin, Meehan argues that the text predates the death of Gregory the Great in 1085, the last date mentioned in the preface. The matter is open to question, but it seems more likely that the text was a much later composition, designed to emphasise the distinction

aggressive distinction between the monks of Durham and the preceding clerics, where Symeon emphasised the continuity of the history of the church. Why should this change of emphasis have occurred? As in Symeon, the preface emphasises the theme of monastic clothing as the key signifier of the Priory's identity, though here the monks are more sharply distinguished from the clerics, who were not even truly clerics 'either by dress or conversation.'⁷² As in Symeon there is the same absence of ascetic or eremitical *topoi*; the virtues associated with Aldwin and his companions are simply 'honesty and piety'.⁷³ There is also a similar emphasis on the role of the bishop of Durham as in Symeon, emphasising that the clerks should 'lead a life in subjection to some rule or other.' The closing statement of the preface seems to be particularly pointed, if set in the context of the Cistercians and the other new foundations: 'And thus it was that he [Bishop William] had not introduced a new order of monastic life, but, by God's help, he restored the old one.'⁷⁴ Durham was contrasting its own way of life against that of newer currents, represented most prominently by the Cistercians, who characterised their lives in terms of asceticism and an interiorised eremiticism.

If the monks of Durham became increasingly sensitive on the issue of eremiticism, then a single line in a mid-twelfth-century poem by Laurence of Durham may be revealing even in its terseness. Laurence praises Cuthbert's life as an example of boyhood to boys and of youth to youths. Cuthbert was the example of a monk to monks and of a cleric to clerics. But there seems to be a special

between the clerks and the monks. It was also clearly written to give the impression of being Symeon's work, beginning *Incipit Prefatio Reverendi Simeonis monachi*. . . In this sense the preface was deliberately composed as a kind of forgery, and its lack of dates post-Gregory does not need an explanation in terms of a pre-Symeon origin. Also the unconvincing historical role attributed to Pope Gregory in the preface, Foster, 'Custodians', p. 61, surely points to a later date.

Foster also suggests the 'growing number of potential rivals' in the new Orders, as a spur to the new preface to Symeon. The specifically Cistercian presence that would plausibly have seemed threatening to Durham priory was the foundations of Fountains (1134/5) and Rievaulx (1131-2). For Augustinian houses in this period see Jane Herbert, 'The Transformation of Hermitages into Augustinian Priors in Twelfth-Century England', *SCH* 22 (1985), pp. 131-45.

⁷² Symeon, *Opera*, p. 8; trans. Stephenson, p. 6.

⁷³ Symeon, *Opera*, p. 10.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* pp. 10-11.

emphasis on his example to hermits: '*Hic eremi cives jus eremita docet*'.⁷⁵ Cuthbert teaches the citizens of the desert the lawful way to be a hermit. It is not simply that Cuthbert was the best hermit among hermits, as he was the best monk among monks; Laurence was implying that there are some very wrong ways to be a hermit.

iii) Bartholomew, Durham Priory and Ascetic Accommodation

Geoffrey recorded the concerns of the community that led to his writing of Bartholomew's *Vita*. In the preface, Geoffrey 'does not doubt that your souls have trembled' about whether Bartholomew had left behind him some sign to the world, since they knew that he deserved to be 'raised up into the praise of the Creator'. Geoffrey makes much of his careful gleaning of knowledge from reliable witnesses rather than leaving 'estimation to doubtful posterity'. Once this has been done and the results approved by 'the judgement of your [the prior's] community', only then is 'the whole pure and whole safe appearance not embarrassed to be proclaimed to the generality of the people.'⁷⁶ Apart from that last sentence, the preface may appear to be largely conventional. However as a whole there are clearly unspoken anxieties concerning the possible results of an uncontrolled remembrance of Bartholomew. It is not simply that Bartholomew might be forgotten, but that 'unsafe' memory might develop outside the control of qualified people, that is the monks. Whatever Geoffrey's statement that the work was to appear '*ad communes hominum*' meant in practice, the act of 'publishing' is clearly the chief concern. The monks of Durham are taking control of the memory of Bartholomew, as if there were competing memories.

After the preface the *Vita* falls into six distinct sections. The first, from chapters three to eight, is a narrative of Bartholomew's early life. The second is a description of his ascetic and spiritual qualities as a hermit on Farne, from chapter nine to chapter thirteen, with a following subsection of two chapters which are a kind of *translatio* of Prior Thomas. Chapters sixteen to nineteen detail

⁷⁵ *Excerpta ex Hypognostico*, in *Laurence of Durham*, ed. James Raine, SS 70 (1880), p. 69.

⁷⁶ *Vita Bart.* ch. 2, pp. 295-6: '*totus purus totusque securus ad communes hominum prodire non erubescat aspectus*'.

Bartholomew's miracles, which show him to be a holy man in the tradition of the fathers. The fifth section is a hagiographic description of Farne island itself. The final section, from chapter twenty six to the end, is diverse. It firstly describes Bartholomew's visions of Cuthbert while on the island, moving to Bartholomew's relations with the monks of Lindisfarne, including some history of Durham's restoration of Farne, narrated by Bartholomew himself. There follows Bartholomew's holy death, where he protects the frightened monks against the devils which still infest the island, apparently, and then the miracles after the hermit's death.

The first section describes Bartholomew's life from his birth, probably in the 1120s, to his arrival on Farne late in 1150. This narrative is a series of transformations and journeys. He was born in the province of Whitby with the given name of Tostig. This name became the subject of ridicule, and his parents changed his name to William; 'on earth the fellowship of a name is a lottery.' In contrast his true name, Bartholomew, 'was imposed by the brothers in a happy prognostication.'⁷⁷ The theme of the ephemeral nature of worldly life and travel is pursued through the account of Bartholomew's adolescence, his travels, and his escape from becoming, or perhaps being, a married priest in Norway. Against these ephemera is set an early vision of Jesus, Mary, Peter and John, in which the Virgin leads him to Christ's feet, to learn of their pity for him. This is stated also as a sign of his 'vocation'.⁷⁸ Only the buffoonery of the devil, tempting him towards travel to Wales, when he had begun to settle down as a priest in Norway, marks Bartholomew's growing distaste for ephemeral movement about the world.⁷⁹ The point of this narrative is to provide a contrast with the monastic virtue of stability which Bartholomew exemplifies in his

⁷⁷ *ibid.* ch. 3, p. 296. There is a lack of precise detail concerning Bartholomew's age and circumstances in this early section. This is probably deliberate on Geoffrey's part; Bartholomew's life before Durham is part of the ephemera of the secular world, and it would run against Geoffrey's argument to be specific. The implications concerning Bartholomew's family are only somewhat clearer; the name Tostig implies an Anglo-Norse family. For Bartholomew to become a priest in Norway could imply that his family had some connections overseas. This may imply some social status, but one not necessarily more than modest on a rural scale.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* ch. 3, p. 297.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* ch. 4, p. 298.

long years on Farne island; in his secular youth, Bartholomew wandered, but as a hermit he remained stable.

The issue of stability was a crucial point to make for a house such as Durham. The virtue was a traditional Benedictine one, and the issue was an element in the criticism of earlier twelfth-century continental hermits by such people as Bishop Ivo of Chartres.⁸⁰ An example of eremitical 'gyrovague' behaviour in England, contemporary with Geoffrey, is provided by Robert of Knaresborough, who could settle neither with black monks nor with Cistercians, eventually founding his own priory.⁸¹ In presenting Bartholomew as an entirely secular person and, nearly or actually, a married priest, Geoffrey shows Durham priory by contrast as a place of true conversion. Bartholomew joins Durham immediately after fleeing Norway and his wife, suffering a sudden 'burning' assault of the Holy Spirit. At Durham stability, of course, means more than simply remaining physically in one place. Bartholomew sees himself as the 'new porter of the Cross' after he had been shaved and tonsured 'just as the custom of the monks of Durham required'.⁸² His first vision since adolescence is granted in the context of obedience to ancient monastic customs.

Bartholomew soon learns other monastic virtues:

'When he was living with the monks, he was zealous to emulate the life and customs of a monk, and in this especially; he cultivated humility and obedience, which things advanced a monk, and also truly make a monk.'⁸³

He was conscientious both in the divine offices and in tending those of the community who were sick. This early emphasis upon Bartholomew's submission to coenobitic authority is crucial, as it is followed immediately by Bartholomew's personal vision of Cuthbert,

⁸⁰ See Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 78-80.

⁸¹ *Vita Roberti Recentior*, ch. 2, p. 378; Robert joins the Cistercian abbey of Newminster for four months before leaving to become a hermit. After some time as a hermit, he is invited to join the priory of Hedly, a dependency of St Mary's, York; *Vita Roberti Antiquioris Fragmenta*, ch. 5, pp. 370-2, and *Vita Recentior*, ch. 5, pp. 380-1. Robert and the monks fall out very quickly and he returns to Knaresborough.

⁸² *Vita Bart.* ch. 6, p. 299.

⁸³ *ibid.* ch. 7, p. 299.

where the saint engages Bartholomew's desire for solitude with a personal tour of Farne island. This personal vision does not, however, give Bartholomew the spiritual authority to rush off to solitude. Prior Laurence, informed of his ambitions, wishes him to stay in the priory, because 'the planting had not yet been of one year, nor was the root of stability; to fasten his soul, he should prune it.'⁸⁴ However, it seems that Bartholomew's determination prevailed, because there is no indication of any delay between the prior's advice and Bartholomew's arrival on Farne.

After this ambiguous beginning to Bartholomew's eremitical life, Geoffrey begins the description of Bartholomew's character as an ascetic.⁸⁵ The chapter is structured upon embedded comparisons between Bartholomew and the saints Anthony and Cuthbert. Given the huge importance of the figure of Anthony in contemporary hagiography, Geoffrey's references to Saint Anthony could be seen as a conventional means of indicating a holy man's virtue.⁸⁶ However, references to Anthony may not always have that simple function, and in the case of Bartholomew's *Vita*, the background of Bede's Cuthbert complicates the picture. There is a range of parallels between Bede's Cuthbert and Athanasius' Anthony, some of which represent deliberate borrowing and some of which are more ambiguous.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Bede does appear to engage in a sustained debate with Athanasius over asceticism and virtue. The crucial chapter in Anthony occurs just after the saint's first victory over the devil and his initial training in the spiritual life.⁸⁸ Athanasius describes, in order, Anthony's habits of vigils and prayer, his fasting, diet and drinking and finally the ascetic bed Anthony

⁸⁴ *ibid.* ch. 8, p. 300: '*Quo ille [Laurence] audito laudabat quidem petentis affectum, sed tamen ab his desistere monuit, eo quod nondum unius anni plantatio fuisset, nec in radicem stabilitatis, ut putabat, animum fixisset*'.

⁸⁵ *Vita Bart.* ch. 9, pp. 300-2.

⁸⁶ On the general influence of Athanasius' *Vita* of Anthony in the West, see Jean Leclercq, 'Saint Antoine dans la Tradition Monastique Medievale', in *Antonius magnus eremita, 356-1956*, ed. Basilius Steidle, (*Studia Anselmiana* 38, 1956), pp. 229-47.

⁸⁷ For the one direct quotation from Anthony to Bede's Cuthbert, see *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 32, p. 258. Colgrave notes other parallels on pp. 350, 351, 355 and 356.

⁸⁸ Athanasius, *Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis*, cols. 125-94, *PL* 73; chs. 5-6, cols. 130-1. On the context of Athanasius' presentation of asceticism in Anthony's *Vita*, see David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, (Oxford 1995), esp. pp. 226-38.

used. Athanasius closes the chapter with an observation on the internal spiritual nature of the saint, thus linking these exterior daily habits to an internal and continuous moral state. This state is the saint's unwavering and rigid stance against the pressures of evil and temptation. Each day is a new one, and virtue has to start from scratch each day, lest grace be lost. In the course of Anthony's life, his ascetic practices are periodically noted, punctuating the narrative of his life, and giving it pattern and framework. Anthony's life is marked by increasingly extreme withdrawal from the human world, until he recreates his own paradise in the inner mountain.⁸⁹

Anthony provided for Bede the model of a development in a saint's life towards an increasingly solitary life.⁹⁰ Yet Bede's understanding of the relationship between Cuthbert's inner grace, his ascetic qualities, and his pastoral interest in the outside world seems to be quite different from Athanasius' view of Anthony.⁹¹ In comparison with Anthony, Cuthbert's experience of food is clearly more positive and sociable; Bede places a number of miracle stories involving Cuthbert's pastoral virtue and the consequent divine provision of food early in the *Vita*.⁹² On joining monastic discipline in Melrose, Cuthbert must learn 'to endure temporal hunger and thirst for the Lord's sake as one who had been invited to the heavenly feasts.' Anthony's literal starvation becomes a metaphorical comparison of inward qualities.⁹³ The next chapter which refers to Anthony's asceticism is the description of Cuthbert's life at

⁸⁹ For an analysis of the structure of Anthony's *Vita* see Etienne T. Bettencourt, 'L'Idéal Religieux de St. Antoine et son Actualité', in *Antonius Magnus Eremita*, pp. 45-65, especially pp. 48-56. Also see Michael J. Marx, 'Incessant Prayer in the *Vita Antonii*', in *ibid.* pp. 108-35, and Monique Alexandre, 'La Construction d'un Modèle de Sainteté dans la Vie d'Antoine', in *Saint Antoine entre Mythe et Légende*, ed. Philippe Walter (Grenoble 1996), pp. 63-93, especially pp. 72-80.

⁹⁰ Clare Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary', in *CCC*, pp. 21-45; pp. 25-6.

⁹¹ For Bede's argument on these issues, see *ibid.* pp. 33-40; the contrast with Athanasius is noted on pp. 36-7, and is developed in terms of the various late antique western traditions to which Bede was heir. My argument here is thus partly a footnote to Stancliffe. Bede highlighted the 'social' or Augustinian practice of Cuthbert's contemplative life with conscious reference to Anthony.

⁹² See *Vita Cuthberti*, chs. 5, 7, and 12.

⁹³ *ibid.* ch. 6, pp. 172-3. The chapter may contain another reference to Anthony in Cuthbert's zeal for a 'stricter discipline' [*artior disciplina*], which may refer to Anthony's 'more austere way of life' [*durior vita*] after having been trained by the old men; *Vita Antonii*, ch. 5, col. 130.

Lindisfarne; here Cuthbert is described as 'so zealous in watchings and prayer that he is believed many times to have spent three or four nights on end in watching'.⁹⁴ This refers directly to Anthony's watches; 'he kept nocturnal vigil with such determination that he often spent the entire night sleepless, and this not only once, but many times.'⁹⁵ Although this is not a quotation, given the context of monastic discipline and description of habits of prayer, it is clearly a reference to Anthony. While Anthony suffers from the devil, still circling around him like a lion, Cuthbert is amidst the less than perfect habits of the other brothers. Yet as Anthony was admired by others for his great asceticism, it was Cuthbert's 'modest virtue and his patience' that converts the brethren in Lindisfarne.

Here is Bede's agenda concerning asceticism. Heroic asceticism is not the point; coenobitic virtues take precedence, even in an ascetic holy man such as Cuthbert. Indeed, Bede emphasises the point when discussing clothing; 'He wore ordinary garments and, keeping the middle path, he was not noteworthy either for their elegance or their slovenliness.'⁹⁶ In the earlier chapter discussing Cuthbert's conduct at Melrose, Bede made the same point of moderation, this time in regard to food; 'he sedulously abstained from all intoxicants; but he could not submit to such abstinence in food, lest he should become unfitted for necessary labour.'⁹⁷ Although that chapter contains no direct allusion to Anthony, Bede's points concerning moderation are a direct criticism of solitary, heroic asceticism. Immediately after the description of Cuthbert's conduct in Lindisfarne comes the description of his eremitical life on Farne. There is again reference to prayer and fasting, and Anthony's retreat following initial victory over the devil is recalled through Cuthbert's

⁹⁴ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 16, pp. 210-11.

⁹⁵ *Vita Antonii*, ch. 6, col. 130; *Life of Saint Anthony*, trans. Robert T. Meyer (London 1950), ch. 7, p. 25. The translation to English from Athanasius' Greek text seems far closer to Bede's formulation than does Evagrius' Latin translation from the Greek. This may indicate that Bede was using the Greek original rather than Evagrius.

⁹⁶ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 16, pp. 212-3. Bede's images of clothing, in particular, relate to another aspect of his argument, concerning Gregory the Great and Benedict's *Rule*; Henry Mayr-Harting, 'The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St. Benedict and Social Class', *Jarrow Lecture 1976*, in *Bede and his World: Volume I, the Jarrow Lectures 1958-1978, Variorum*, (Cambridge 1994), pp. 407- 434, esp. p. 414.

⁹⁷ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 6, pp. 174-5.

defeat of the demons on Farne.⁹⁸ However, in contrast to Anthony's inaccessibility in the inner mountain, Bede closes the chapter by describing the 'larger house' where the brethren could come to visit the saint. Cuthbert pointedly remains accessible to the outer world, and his pastoral duties go on.

The sheer absence in Bede of any description of Cuthbert's ascetic practices as a hermit, is itself a profound and probably deliberate contrast to Athanasius' Anthony. Where the anonymous *Vita* quoted Athanasius relatively frequently, Bede avoids much direct quotation.⁹⁹ Yet the structure of Bede's ascetic passages do recall Anthony. This was surely a deliberate effect; without directly criticising the great saint Anthony, Bede uses the contrast between the two saints to emphasise the importance of Cuthbert's moderation, and his pastoral and coenobitic virtues. Perhaps to balance the argument of distance between Cuthbert and Anthony, Bede adds the story of the birds who ate Cuthbert's crops on Farne.¹⁰⁰ This story is not in the anonymous *Vita*, unlike Bede's following story concerning the ravens who attack Cuthbert's thatched roof.¹⁰¹ Bede uses this new story to make reference to the asses who invaded the garden of the 'most reverend and holy father Anthony'.¹⁰² Thus Bede has his cake and eats it; he makes Cuthbert follow in Anthony's miraculous tradition, but within a way of life pointedly different from Athanasius' model of sanctity.

In the 'ascetic chapter' of Geoffrey's Bartholomew, where allusion and quotation to both Anthony and Cuthbert are rife, Bede's quiet critique of heroic asceticism surely resonated in the description of Bartholomew, particularly for a northern English monastic audience. Given twelfth-century Durham's ambivalent relationship to contemporary ascetic currents, such a resonance may have appeared to be quite marked, particularly given the prominence of reference

⁹⁸ *ibid.* ch. 17, pp. 214-7. Bede deliberately highlights this aspect of the story which is, by comparison, muted by the anonymous writer; *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* Bk. 3, ch. 1, pp. 94-7. Bede's decision to emphasise the demons must have a reason; a wish to remind the reader of Anthony would provide an explanation.

⁹⁹ For the anonymous' quotations of Athanasius, see *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* pp. 62, 74, 104, and 106.

¹⁰⁰ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 19, pp. 220-3.

¹⁰¹ *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* Bk. 3, ch. 5, pp. 100-3; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 20, pp. 222-5.

¹⁰² *Vita Cuthberti*, pp. 222-3; *Vita Antonii*, ch. 25, col. 149.

to Anthony in monastic and hagiographical literature of the period.¹⁰³ The structure of the 'ascetic passage' in Geoffrey's Bartholomew is very clearly modelled on the early ascetic chapter in Anthony. As Anthony achieves his first victory over the devil, so does Bartholomew (as Abel or Job) in forcing Aelwin (as Cain) to withdraw. In Anthony the elements of his asceticism are described in the order of his vigils, then his fasts, his diet of bread and salt, his drinking of water, and fifthly miscellaneous points including his ascetic bed.¹⁰⁴ Geoffrey describes the fifth element, the ascetic bed, first, along with Bartholomew's hairshirt. Bartholomew's vigils and psalm singing are mentioned next, then his diet, which is 'bread and vegetables' in apparent reference to Anthony's 'bread and salt'.¹⁰⁵ Bartholomew's drink is water, like Anthony, but also, 'rarely', milk. The full range of Antonine ascetic qualities covered, Geoffrey returns to Bartholomew's clothing, and finishes with a comment on the relationship between outward asceticism and inward virtue, as does Athanasius' equivalent chapter.

The use of the Antonine model for Bartholomew's asceticism is not merely a reflex hagiographical homage; at each point, Geoffrey is commenting upon asceticism and eremiticism, and emphasising moderation and coenobitic values. In effect Geoffrey follows Bede's agenda. Yet Bartholomew's extraordinary ascetic virtues are clearly central to his status as a holy man. Geoffrey recounts that for the last seven and a half years of his life, Bartholomew was said to have drunk nothing whatsoever; '*O virum permirabilem*'.¹⁰⁶ This is an extraordinary claim of heroic asceticism and contrasts with other more conventional statements. Geoffrey describes Bartholomew in terms that could be found in almost any monastic or eremitical saint's *vita* of the period:

'Whether he wrote or read or sang psalms or prayed more privately, or whether he marched around the island going through the full length of the psalms and vigils, he used to drive away

¹⁰³ See Leclercq, 'St. Antoine dans la Tradition Monastique Medievale', pp. 234-40. Also see the comments in Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 145-6 and pp. 160-1.

¹⁰⁴ *Vita Antonii*, chs. 5-6, col. 130.

¹⁰⁵ *Vita Bart.* ch. 9, p. 301: '*Cibus eius panis et oleris*'; *Vita Antonii*, ch. 6, col. 130: '*Sumebat vero panem et sal*'.

¹⁰⁶ *Vita Bart.* ch. 10, p. 302: '*nihil perhibetur omnino bibesse*'.

idleness of the body from himself in works of whatever he was able, or of labour with his hand.¹⁰⁷

This image of eremiticism is a close echo of Bede's description of Cuthbert as a monk, rather than as a hermit; he 'sang his psalms, he worked with his hands, and so by toil he drove away the heaviness of sleep. . . relieving the tediousness of his psalm singing and his watching by walking about.'¹⁰⁸ Bartholomew's asceticism is here shown to derive from Durham's traditions, and is monastic in character, unlike the story of his seven year drought. This later episode recalls some of the stranger stories of anchorites of the *Vitae Patrum*, who are fed by angels or live naked in the deepest wilderness.¹⁰⁹ However, the dominant strand of Geoffrey's argument is to show Bartholomew's acquisition of Durham's coenobitic virtues through his clothing. Firstly he gives up his hairshirt in deference to the presence of Prior Thomas. Later, Geoffrey writes that, in his black clothing, Bartholomew 'presented the figure of the ancient fathers to observers.'¹¹⁰

Geoffrey was not simply validating Bartholomew as a successor to Saint Cuthbert on Farne and letting that glory reflect back on Durham. Bartholomew's ascetic behaviour is subtly criticised, particularly through one idiosyncratic passage:

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* ch. 9, p. 301: '*Sive enim scribebat, sive legebat, sive psallebat, sive secretius orabat, sive insulam, psalmodiae et vigiliarum longitudinem allevians, circuibat . . .*'

¹⁰⁸ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 16, p. 210, at Lindisfarne; '*Sive enim locis secretioribus solus orationi vacabat, sive inter psallendum operabatur manibus torporemque dormiendi laborando propellebat. . .*' Geoffrey also attributes to Bartholomew the same 'cheerful countenance', that Bede attributes to Cuthbert; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 16, pp. 210-11, *Vita Bart.* ch. 10, p. 302. There are other parts of the description of Bartholomew that may be referring to Bede's Cuthbert although there is no correspondence of vocabulary, for example their mutual asceticism in footwear; *Vita Bart.* ch. 9, p. 302, *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 18, pp. 218-9. One interesting correspondence is Bartholomew's intention to become a formal recluse on Farne, due to the number of visitors, *Vita Bart.* ch. 11, pp. 304-5. It seems clear from the rest of the *Vita*, as well as the other Farne sources, that Bartholomew was not actually ever a recluse. However, Cuthbert was such for some time while on Farne; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 18, pp. 218-21. Geoffrey was clearly intent on making as many references to Cuthbert as possible, even where they were not appropriate in simply factual terms.

¹⁰⁹ These patristic legends will be discussed in Chapter V, p. 204.

¹¹⁰ *Vita Bart.* ch. 9, p. 302; Geoffrey almost constantly pointed out Bartholomew's association with black; even his sweat is blackened from the dye of his clothes; *ibid.* ch. 9, p. 302.

'His food was bread and vegetables, and what was expressed from the fatness of milk. He practised fishing, both for himself and his fellows. In fact, to strengthen the asceticism of this still untried [rudis] anchorite, the Lord assigned a gull to minister to him. Every day in Lent in the first year she brought along a sort of fish, which is commonly called a 'lump-fish', to an appointed place for his sustenance. Sometimes, if she had caught nothing by the usual time, he was driven to fasting until his handmaid brought the usual supplies. After some years he also abstained from fish.'¹¹¹

Geoffrey then goes on to describe Bartholomew's normal ascetic habits regarding liquids, thus sandwiching the pet gull within a conventional reference to Saint Anthony, whose 'food was bread and water'. The pet gull is an idiosyncratic use of the Elijah *topos*, where God sends ravens to feed the prophet in the wilderness with bread and flesh. Here there is a strong hint of the bucolic, where a gull is sent to bring an rustic sort of food to a 'rough' or 'untried' hermit. Both *Vitae* of Cuthbert include more conventional renditions of the Elijah *topos*, and it was otherwise a common story.¹¹² Geoffrey's reference would thus have been clear certainly to other monks, and perhaps to many other people. Literate monks would have seen the reference to Saint Anthony's diet, and thus to the slightly invidious comparison of Bartholomew to the ancient fathers. Geoffrey here is putting some distance between Bartholomew's early eremitical life and his later status as '*vir permirabilis*'.

Geoffrey's description of Bartholomew's asceticism jumps back and forwards in time during Bartholomew's life. Geoffrey does not show a picture of development but a comparison between two states; Bartholomew when he first becomes a hermit and Bartholomew as an experienced hermit. As with Bartholomew's abstinence from water, he is sometimes more ascetic in the latter period. Equally however, some of Bartholomew's experiences temper his early enthusiastic asceticism. Thus when Prior Thomas arrived on Farne, 'he put aside

¹¹¹ *Vita Bart.* ch. 9, pp. 301-2; '*ad approbandum vero sive corroborandum rudis adhuc anachoritae parcimoniam, ad ministrandum ei Dominus mootam deputavit. . .*' Bartholomew's fellows, '*commorantium*', must be the fellow hermits Aelwin and Thomas.

¹¹² For Elijah see *1 Kings* 17:6; this *topos* is discussed in Chapter IV, p. 115.

his hair shirt, lest the sweat and stench that arose from it, would offend his cohabitant.' This is a rare example, for the period, of the hairshirt custom being criticised. Geoffrey emphasised the revolting physicality of the practice to make a crucial point, noting also that Bartholomew abandoned his particularly ascetic bed at the same time as the hairshirt:

'Not in the clothing but in the heart of the monk lives the fulfilment of God's commandments. after this, he did not have the bed in which he had rested. And indeed from the earliest days of his warfare he tempered the course of his life with such great discretion that nothing which he did gave rise to disgust or disdain.'

Coenobitic virtues take precedence over ascetic practices. Ascetic activity can lead to an excess of the physical, such as Bartholomew's 'excessive sweat' [*nimius sudor*] due to his hairshirt. He had not learnt that following God comes from the interior of the monk, not the clothing of the monk. Bartholomew becomes a *vir permirabilis* only when he is miraculously desiccated, when the physical excesses of asceticism are tempered and controlled. Yet equally, Bartholomew becomes steadily more ascetic in giving up fish, and later all drink. There is only an apparent contradiction in the description of Bartholomew's asceticism; whether he is more or less ascetic when older or younger is not the point at issue. For Geoffrey excessive ascetic sweat and indulgence in fish are just two sides of the same coin. What Bartholomew must learn in order to be holy and desiccated, is interior spirituality and outward discretion. His interior virtues are praised following the ascetic chapter, but discretion, in other words monastic discipline and obedience to authority, comes later.

Following the ascetic chapter are two chapters which describe Bartholomew's psalm singing, and his 'sermons' which censured the rich, comforted the poor, and showed his compassion for sinners.¹¹³ Above all, Bartholomew 'copied the best example of voluntary poverty for monks.'¹¹⁴ This 'example' is described as the simple absence of property: 'Having food and clothing we are content with

¹¹³ *Vita Bart.* ch. 10, pp. 302-3, and ch. 11, pp. 303-5.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* ch. 11, p. 303.

these.' Indeed later in the chapter, Bartholomew's hospitality in providing food, drink and 'sweet narration' to visiting brothers, is shown as a key virtue. This description of voluntary poverty seems to be an explicit defence of Old Benedictine values, and entirely opposed to the ascetic virtues espoused by such religious as the Cistercians. Bartholomew's battles with the devil follow this defence of Durham's customs.¹¹⁵ The first battle is particularly resonant given the issues stirred up by the reform movement of the previous century. Bartholomew is violently attacked by the devil, while praying before his altar to the Virgin, and even when the hermit is performing the mass. During mass however, Bartholomew is able to repel attacks by spraying the devil with holy water. But, Geoffrey asks, where can we flee from the devil if he can intrude even in the mass? The answer is to turn the question on its head; 'the wonder is not that he draws near at the divine offices for the purposes of tempting the hearts of the holy, when he also inhabits perverse priests when they sacrifice.'¹¹⁶ The true wonder is the mass itself and the miracle of transubstantiation, which occurs even when it is a 'perverse priest' that performs the ritual.

This is a surprising point to spend half a chapter explaining; it is as if there were heretics in England who denied the validity of the mass performed by an immoral priest. It is not impossible that there were indeed some currents of scepticism in the north of England at this time. The Gregorian reform movement did indeed ultimately fuel scepticism concerning the mass elsewhere in Europe, and the most conspicuous critics of the lax priests and self-indulgent monks were the wandering hermit preachers of the post-Gregorian period.¹¹⁷ However Geoffrey's defence of the mass may have had a more generalised purpose. Firstly he is arguing that there is no one and nowhere so holy on earth where the devil is not also. This may even be a veiled critique of the great reputation of new monastic currents.¹¹⁸ Secondly, he is associating Durham with a holy priest, as opposed to 'perverse priests', while raising the spectre of heretical

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* chs. 12-13, pp. 305-6.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* ch. 12, pp. 305-6.

¹¹⁷ See Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*, (Oxford 1987), pp. 19-21.

¹¹⁸ The Cistercians were particularly interested in describing their monasteries as Edenic sites, see Chapter IV, p. 140.

scepticism as another 'opposite' to Bartholomew and his way of life. It is easy to imagine this chapter standing alone as a sermon which could disarm critics of Durham and its way of life. In the face of this sermon, to criticise Durham's spiritual integrity would be to associate oneself with heresy. This is a partly speculative interpretation of Geoffrey's intent here, and perhaps such a complex rationale is not necessary. In any case, this chapter stands in contrast to the appearances of the devil at the end of the hermit's life. Early on, Bartholomew has to withstand the devil with the help of his priesthood and his Benedictine way of life. At the end of his life, in a state of physical weakness, Bartholomew is quite untroubled by the devil's appearances and is able to banish him at will.¹¹⁹ Bartholomew has indeed become a *vir permirabilis* by the end of his life.

The crucial event that propels Bartholomew to become a complete holy man lies in his encounter with the former Prior Thomas.¹²⁰ Following this encounter, there is a substantial section describing a vision Thomas had which validates Durham priory itself as a place linked with heaven. Only after this section are Bartholomew's own miracles described in detail. The ambiguities of Bartholomew's asceticism were resolved in the chapter describing the conflict between the two hermits. The conflict leads Bartholomew to violate the virtue of stability when he leaves Farne to return to Durham. Bartholomew is commanded by the priory community, the prior himself, and finally the bishop of Durham to return and learn to live with Thomas. Bartholomew here learns humility, accepting the fault into himself, as Geoffrey says. But more importantly he learns obedience. His personal ascetic way must be tempered in order for him to live with Thomas and obey his ecclesiastical superiors at the same time. It is no accident that Thomas' visionary validation of Durham's monastic life is described immediately after this event.

There is another context to Geoffrey's presentation of Bartholomew's asceticism. This context is that of the popular religious currents which admired ascetic practices for their own sake. Geoffrey's reference in the preface to '*communes hominum*', and the implication of unauthorised remembrances of Bartholomew has been mentioned. There is also the threat of heresy in the description of the

¹¹⁹ *Vita Bart.* ch. 30, p. 321.

¹²⁰ *ibid.* ch. 14, pp. 307-8.

devil's attacks on Bartholomew. Within the ascetic chapter there are some other hints of Geoffrey's unstated anxieties. Geoffrey describes Bartholomew in the gull story as a '*rudis anachorita*', an ambiguous phrase. There were many other less demeaning ways of representing this period of the hermit's life, including seeing it as part of a simple progression of holiness, as in the Antonine model. But Bartholomew is not even described as imperfect, or temporarily sinful; he is a peasant, he is *rudis*. In the same passage there is the bucolic image of Bartholomew fishing for a fish *vulgo* called 'lump'. This is an oddly gratuitous piece of description, unless it is accepted that Geoffrey was deliberately associating Bartholomew with the unsophisticated, and religiously dubious laity.

At this point it is worth recalling the stories of Bartholomew's conflicts with his fellow hermits. The issue in these stories was the relative spiritual virtue of each hermit, and Bartholomew's asceticism was very likely the underlying problem. After all, Thomas, in the *Vita*, accused Bartholomew of hypocrisy; Bartholomew's outward asceticism was not matched by inward spirituality. Clearly both Reginald and Geoffrey accept that Bartholomew was not a spiritual hypocrite, they see him as a holy man, not a heretic. Nonetheless, both Geoffrey and Reginald support a picture of very real, acknowledged friction between Bartholomew and the monks of Durham over the issue of his enthusiastic asceticism.

Despite his hagiographic use of the gull story, Geoffrey himself clearly did not invent it; the hagiographer of a contemporary can manipulate and arrange existing stories, he cannot create them out of his own literary imagination. It was Bartholomew himself who told stories of his pet gull; both Reginald and Geoffrey recorded the story of Cuthbert's vengeance upon the hawk which ate this little servant of God.¹²¹ Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that Geoffrey's '*Elijah topos*' story of the gull was also Bartholomew's original creation. Bartholomew may have told this story about himself to serve a dual purpose. He was both presenting his ascetic habits in a conciliatory fashion by emphasizing his occasional state of need, and still claiming heavenly approval for his enthusiastic asceticism.

It is difficult even to infer Bartholomew's social background from Geoffrey's *Vita*, although that fact in itself suggests modest

¹²¹ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 111; *Vita Bart.* ch. 19.

origins.¹²² Certainly, however, these conflicts with the monks suggest that his understanding of religion was partly formed from the kind of popular religious enthusiasm that fuelled Godric of Finchale's pilgrimages and ascetic withdrawal. Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries there were clearly many who wished to live some kind of religious life outside of interference by ecclesiastical authority or established religious structures. Bartholomew elected to live within established structures, but it seems this decision caused strain, even in his semi-detached status on Farne island. It is perhaps to Durham's credit that the monks managed to accommodate a character such as Bartholomew, rather than drive him outside. In general in the twelfth century, we know very little about those who were more determined in their rejection of established structures of religious authority; only those who opted for formal organisation tended to receive any kind of sympathetic literary tribute. In these terms Reginald's mammoth *Vita* of Godric of Finchale offers a remarkable exception to the rule.

iv) Godric of Finchale and Excessive Asceticism

Reginald gives considerably more detail on Godric's early life than Geoffrey does for Bartholomew. Godric's parents 'lived a life of poverty', and even though they were just lay people, they gave Godric a good example, as 'they led an orthodox, Catholic life by faith in works and conversation'. Through the 'innocence of simplicity', they taught Godric virtue as well. They 'feared and obeyed the Lord before all':

'Hence the dearth of earthly substance was for them the material of works of grace and virtue; and the abundance of wealth, which was not for them substance in things, was in them abundance out of an evident conscience of true humility, a piety of the heart.'¹²³

Reginald praises their marriage, saying it had a 'certain sacramentality', and 'in so far as it was possible for them' it was

¹²² See above, note 77.

¹²³ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 1, no. 8, (pp. 21-2).

'professed of blessedness itself'.¹²⁴ Reginald goes on to describe Godric's early circumstances, where as a baby he was 'wrapped in rags and reclined in a little cradle.' Nevertheless, he and his brother and sister were all baptised.¹²⁵ Reginald's fulsome description of the possibility of finding salvation in a poor, secular life is remarkable. Hagiography, being normally written for a monastic audience, usually concerns itself with salvation within the context of the religious life. Reginald here is providing a defence of the moral status of poor married lay people. Apart from their lack of lust in a marriage marked instead by blessed companionship, their crucial virtues lie in their obedience to the Church's sacraments of marriage and baptism. Thus procreation is not a sin with them, rather it is blessed with a son who is one of the elect.

Reginald is dealing with the life and memories of a man who lived a religious life almost entirely on his own terms, and from an entirely secular background. On the one hand, Reginald has to show the foundation in grace of this *'famulus Dei'*, yet equally Reginald must mould this life into a context of Church authority and individual obedience. Thus, Reginald emphasises Godric's obedience to the natural authority of his parents; when he was an adolescent 'he showed the subjection of servitude to his parents in all things'.¹²⁶ However poor and unimportant it may be, the family is the first unit in the structures of authority. Godric's virtue in these and other matters is a contrast to the world of trade. Godric spent a great part of his life in commerce of one kind or another, and ever since Pirenne has been a favourite example of the twelfth-century northern merchant in economic histories.¹²⁷ Godric gave up commercial travelling for pilgrimages, visiting holy places in England, most importantly Farne island, then Jerusalem and Compostella, and

¹²⁴ *ibid.* ch. 1, no. 9, (p. 22).

¹²⁵ *ibid.* ch 2, no. 10, (pp. 23-4). This may be a comparison between Godric and Christ, also born to poor but pious parents; Godric's life as an *imitatio Christi* is a recurring theme in the *Vita*.

¹²⁶ *ibid.* ch. 3, no. 12, (p. 26). See also ch. 7, no. 22, (p. 37) for an extended discussion of Godric's obedience to parental authority.

¹²⁷ Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities* (Princeton 1925), pp. 119- 24. Among later references, Norman J. G. Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe* (London 1974), p. 353, imagines, oddly, that Godric 'endowed' the Priory of Finchale.

Rome.¹²⁸ Finally, burning with the 'enthusiasm of religion', he decided 'to forsake all his family on behalf of Christ, and in a far away and alien land, to which the Lord had called him, to arrange to set out.'¹²⁹ At this stage Godric learnt the psalms and applied himself to the regular round of monastic prayers each day. However, Godric did this entirely independently of any ecclesiastical authority. Although Reginald does not immediately signal the problem, the lack of any context of obedience has a profound effect upon Reginald's descriptions of Godric's ascetic practices.

Reginald's depiction of Godric's asceticism is at least as ambivalent as Geoffrey's depiction of Bartholomew. Nevertheless, Reginald initially seems to describe Godric's ascetic withdrawal with approval:

'In the woods he lived . . . in the manner of Blessed John the Baptist, he consumed for some time the greenness of herbs, and wild honey. . . supplemented with many wild apples, acorns and bitter nuts. . . he was solitary among wild animals.'¹³⁰

This passage is accompanied by much description of the horror of the wilderness, yet this in itself is not necessarily critical of Godric. But Reginald immediately makes the danger clear; outside human society there are insidious dangers. Godric became 'accustomed [to eating] roots of plants. He was made now not a man but a worm, not rational, but more a brutish beast.'¹³¹ This is an image of the withdrawal of grace; instead of becoming holy, Godric is made less than human by his ascetic withdrawal.

Godric soon leaves his initial desert and becomes the companion of an old hermit, Aelric, in a forest near Wolsingham, to the north of Durham. While 'both were laymen and almost untaught in letters', Aelric at least had been 'in the court of Blessed Cuthbert from earliest adolescence and was educated by the monks.'¹³² Godric

¹²⁸ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 5, no. 17, (p. 31), for Farne; ch. 6, no. 19, (pp. 33-4), for Jerusalem and Compostella; ch. 8, nos. 24-5, (pp. 38-40) for the pilgrimage to Rome with his mother.

¹²⁹ *ibid.* ch. 9, no. 26, (pp. 40-1). The 'alien land' is near Carlisle.

¹³⁰ *ibid.* ch. 10, no. 28, (pp. 42-3).

¹³¹ *ibid.* ch. 10, no. 29, (p. 44); Reginald nevertheless calls him the Lord's elect: '*Dominus electum suum. . . voluit experimento cognoscere*'.

¹³² *ibid.* ch. 11, no. 30, (pp. 45-6).

is tenuously linked to Durham by Aelric, while the two lived in their hermitage, entirely unknown to men and surrounded by such numbers of 'rabid wolves of insatiable gluttony' that no one dared approach it. In all these passages, Reginald gives some words of praise; 'in a conversion of such agony, they exalted each other with pure hands in sanctity'. But again in contrast; 'if any other creeping through the bushes saw them, they would reckon them to be animals and not men.'¹³³ This statement, like the earlier description of Godric as a worm, are references to the Gregorian *topos* of the hermit mistaken for a beast by peasants, who are themselves rather bestial. In Pope Gregory's story Benedict comes forth from his wilderness to preach. Being both laymen, this is exactly what Aelric and Godric are not equipped to do. Unlike conventional references to this *topos*, where the joke is on brutish peasants, Reginald accepts the charge against Godric and Aelric. Despite all their efforts towards a holy life, they have found themselves more bestial than human.¹³⁴

Godric is then emotionally prostrated by Aelric's painful death, his grief partly assuaged by a vision of Aelric's soul apparently ascending to heaven.¹³⁵ Having lost his mentor, Godric does not maintain any contact with the monks of Durham who come to bury Aelric.¹³⁶ Instead he makes a second pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he undergoes a second baptism in the Jordan, and is relieved of all his grief. In the Holy Land he is also taught the eremitical way of life by hermits Reginald calls the 'Cultivators of the Desert'.¹³⁷ Godric then returns to England to return to his life as an anchorite. The next hermitage he chooses is a place near Whitby, which local people considered uninhabitable through the 'horrid squalor of solitude' there.¹³⁸ Godric has to leave here through the hostility of the lord of the place. However, Reginald notes that the experience with this lord does teach Godric something about authority; when

¹³³ *ibid.* ch. 11, no. 31, (p. 46), and ch. 12, no. 32, (p. 47).

¹³⁴ When some shepherds first found Benedict and saw him dressed in skins, they thought he was a beast [*bestia*], but they were soon converted from their own bestial minds to Christianity; Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, ed. and trans. Adalbert De Vogüé, 3 vols, (Paris 1978-80), Bk II, ch. 1, no. 8, (p. 136).

¹³⁵ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 12, nos. 33-6, (pp. 48-51).

¹³⁶ *ibid.* ch. 12, no. 37, (pp. 51-2). The monks are said by Reginald to be ignorant of Aelric's merit.

¹³⁷ *ibid.* ch. 15, nos. 41-3, (pp. 55-8).

¹³⁸ *ibid.* ch. 16, no. 44, (pp. 58-9).

choosing a new hermitage, he asks the bishop of Durham for permission to settle at Finchale. This perhaps represents an improvement from his earlier extreme independence, although he does not appear to have any regular contact with Durham priory at this stage.¹³⁹

From this point, Godric is increasingly presented as a miracle-working holy man. However, he is still radically alienated from human society. Thus his companions were serpents, and Reginald quotes *Job* ; 'I am become the brother of dragons and the companion of ostriches.'¹⁴⁰ Thus, 'the serenity of his pious heart shone not only to the aid of men, but also his prudent help sometimes cared for reptiles and animals of the earth.'¹⁴¹ Once again, it is the description of Godric's diet which indicates Reginald's unease with the hermit's independent asceticism; 'On some days, he sustained his miserable life on roots of herbs, or on leaves of trees or foliage, on the pleasant chewing of fragrant flowers.'¹⁴² He even refuses the coarse bread offered to him by the people of Finchale; 'In those days he preferred to live with wild beasts, than to have the knowledge of fellowship with men'. Godric is still bestial in his habits, eating uncultivated and thus un-human food.

Reginald's rhetoric concerning herbs and the roots of herbs is not, as one might expect, an obvious borrowing from the *Vitae Patrum*. Those holy men more often ate bread, rather than roots alone.¹⁴³ Even for Jerome, there is no opposition between bread as human food and roots as bestial food in Saint Hilarion's diet of dry bread, oil, lentils, rustic herbs and raw roots.¹⁴⁴ Jerome does not

¹³⁹ *ibid.* ch. 20, no. 54, (p. 66). The bishop was Ranulph Flambard. The arrival at Finchale is thus placed between 1099 and 1128, but was perhaps shortly after 1110. For some comments on the chronology of Godric's life, see Tudor, 'Durham Priory and its Hermits', in *AND*, pp. 73-4.

¹⁴⁰ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 21 no. 55, (pp. 67-8); *Job* 30; 29.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* ch. 40, no. 88, (p. 98).

¹⁴² *ibid.* ch. 23, no. 59, (p. 71): '*radicibus herbarum, seu etiam frondibus arborum vel foliorum, jocundis masticationibus florum redolentium, vitam miseram sustentabat*'.

¹⁴³ Even Jerome's hermit Paul ate bread brought by a raven; in the remotest solitude, God ensures that the holy man eats human food; Jerome, *Vita S. Pauli Primi Eremitae*, cols. 18-30, *PL* 23; ch. 10, cols. 25-6.

¹⁴⁴ Jerome, *Vita S. Hilarionis Eremitae*, cols. 29-54, *PL* 23; ch. 11, col. 33: '*herbis agrestibus, et virgultorum quorundam radicibus crudis sustentatus est*'. Note also, ch. 5, col. 32: '*Herbarum ergo succo et paucis caricis. . . animam sustentabat*'.

describe Hilarion as bestial in his ascetic passages. Nevertheless there is a fairly frequent emphasis on food other than bread in the Egyptian fathers. Thus Rufinus writes of holy men who would not eat anything that needed to be cooked.¹⁴⁵ This opposition between cooked and uncooked does recur in certain patristic writings, but not, it seems, in the twelfth-century West. In contrast, the opposition between human food as bread, and bestial food as herbs and roots, is not an opposition made by patristic writers, as it is by Reginald.¹⁴⁶ Reginald's presentation of Godric's ascetic practices lies within a narrative structure which punctuates his ascetic periods with short periods in contact with ecclesiastical authority. But as a hermit he is outside that authority, just as he is outside human society. In fact, when serving as a layman in a church, before the Finchale period, Godric gets some rather pointed praise; as well as learning the Psalter, he was 'mature in everything, modest in the levity of laughter . . . sober in temperament of foods, and diligent in prayers.'¹⁴⁷ Here Reginald may have in mind Bede's descriptions of Saint Cuthbert's sense of ascetic moderation. However, for Godric, this is a short-lived period, as Godric soon goes off to his final hermitage at Finchale and resumes his excessive asceticism.

Reginald reports Godric at Finchale as being aware that the ascetic life did not in itself lead to salvation: 'he did not wish the struggle of his martyrdom to become known to anyone, but to the Lord alone from Whom he could receive the reward of recompense.'¹⁴⁸ Grace is needed as well as ascetic heroism. At Finchale, even as Godric's miraculous powers are waxing, Reginald

¹⁴⁵ Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, cols. 387-462, *PL* 21; ch. 1, col. 395 and ch. 6, col. 410; *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell, intro. Benedicta Ward, (London 1981), p. 54. Ward, p. 24, notes that the food of the desert fathers probably was not greatly different from that of an average Egyptian peasant.

¹⁴⁶ Another interesting contrast to Reginald is in Geoffrey's *Vita* of Godric. Geoffrey largely avoids descriptions of Godric's asceticism, keeping just two passages. The 'pastoral' passage comparing Godric to John the Baptist is actually enhanced in Geoffrey, who leaves out any trace of the corresponding 'hermit as beast' *topos*; *Vita Godrici Gal.* ch. 6, p. 71. At Finchale the eating of herbs and roots, and the subsequent eating of his own rustic bread is compressed into a single passage, where the bread is mentioned first and there is no indication that at any time Godric ate only 'wild' food; *ibid.* ch. 8, p. 72. Thus Geoffrey is deliberately removing the 'excessive' asceticism argument, by reducing the extremity of Godric's asceticism.

¹⁴⁷ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 16(b), no. 46, (p. 61)

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* ch. 37, no. 79, (p. 91); *concertatio* for struggle.

sees him as a decidedly excessive hermit; 'in the time of winter he inflicted excessive [*nimius*] asperity of cold on naked flesh, yet in the heat of summer out of excessive sweat he begat a corruption of worms, of which the copious multitude devastated his flesh most ferociously, as the hairy rusticness of the hairshirt had been accustomed to nourish a full great flock of them.'¹⁴⁹

There are many such descriptions of Godric's asceticism, where Reginald's use of the adjectival epithet *nimius* indicates his sense that somehow the holiness of his subject was 'too much'. This particular adjective is one of Reginald's favourite words, and seems often to mean simply 'very great'.¹⁵⁰ However, in the context of ascetic passages, Reginald's use of *nimius* amounts to a *topos*. Gregory of Tours told the story of one Saint Caluppa. Even within the 'goodness of ecclesiastical rule', he 'kept such an excessive abstinence that he was too weakened by his fasting to accomplish the daily work done by the other brothers.'¹⁵¹ Wulfric of Haselbury took to his life of reclusion without the authority of a bishop, but soon enough he accepted the authority of the bishop of Bath. However, the bishop needed to pull the recluse up short; 'in excessive rivalry of the line of discretion, he was censured, and thus the holy man aspired to the purity of the flesh through the virtue of faith and grace of God rather than from immoderate exertion of the body.'¹⁵² Thus Reginald describes Godric's ascetic behaviour in extreme terms; Godric 'steered his body through a squalor of excessive cold'. Although this suffering is not as great as that in hell, as Godric is reported to have said, Reginald's attitude towards Godric's suffering seems to be ambiguous.¹⁵³ On food and drink, 'his drink was a very little water, and that very rarely, unless it was tasted because of excessive

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* ch. 28, no. 66, (pp. 77-8).

¹⁵⁰ Stephenson says that Reginald does mean only 'great' by '*nimius*'; *Vita Godrici*, p. 37, n.2. However, Reginald's usage is ambiguous, at least.

¹⁵¹ *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, ed. and trans. Edward James (Liverpool 1991), p. 77; Gregory of Tours, *Vitae Patrum*, PL 71, cols. 1009-96; col. 1059, cap. 11: '*Erat enim summae abstinentia, ita ut ab inedia nimium attritus, quotidianum cum reliquis fratribus operam explere nequeret*'.

¹⁵² *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 6, p. 20: '*itaque et aemulatio nimia ad lineam discretionis castigata est. . . quam de immoderata corporis exercitatione. . .*' This is not the only note of criticism of Wulfric by John of Ford, but after this episode Wulfric becomes a miracle worker whose charity and other virtues win the usual approving *topoi*.

¹⁵³ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 33, no. 74, (p. 86).

thirst.¹⁵⁴ Even when he starts making bread for himself, it was 'excessively dry, rough, horrid and tasteless.'¹⁵⁵ Reginald was deliberately invoking the image of a wild, uncivilised and excessive creature in his descriptions of Godric's asceticism, even though these passages are tempered in some ways, particularly by Reginald's approval of Godric's appearance in later life.

Godric is at this point the antithesis of human society, and so the devil attacks him through manifestations of the dark side of each social order; violence, poverty and heresy. The first manifestation seems to be an aristocrat of some kind, violently throwing the sacramental vessel, while Godric is trying to pray. This devil shouts abuse, addressing Godric as 'You decrepit rustic!' and 'You shit-covered rustic'.¹⁵⁶ Godric endures the violence, and gets help to repair the damage to his chapel. The next manifestation is more pathetic; he is abused by a 'very poor man' who circles about his hermitage 'clothed in the ragged coverings of benches'.¹⁵⁷ The third visitor is more insidious, coming to Godric as a fellow hermit, looking like a 'great hero' of the desert, and talking to him of the fathers 'who were accustomed to labour in the desert'. Godric begins to think he can learn the true eremitical way from this man, until he notices that the other does not sweat while they work together. The devil as heretic disappears after being asked to recite his belief in the Trinity and being struck by Godric.¹⁵⁸ These three visions are meant by Reginald as a contrast to the three orders of society, the poor, the rich and the clerics, who would later flock to Godric for his sanctity. Once Godric accepts the authority of Prior Roger of Durham, Reginald no longer describes his asceticism with the adjectival epithet *nimius*. Descriptions of the horror of the desert largely disappear. Instead of Godric's alienation from human society, there is a sudden rush of familiar *topoi* describing the kinds and states of people who came to

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* ch. 32, no. 72, (p. 83).

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* ch. 29, no. 69, (pp. 79-80). Many of these descriptions appear in a much less harsh form in the 'Walter' summary. Walter was perhaps consciously toning it all down, and often omits *nimius* for a more neutral word like *magnus*. For example at an earlier point Walter changes '*nimiae . . . famis*' to '*violenta famis*', thus avoiding the sense of disapproval; *ibid.* ch. 14, no. 40, (pp. 54-5).

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* ch. 38, no. 82, (p. 93); '*O rustice stercorarie*'.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* ch. 44, nos. 95-6, (p. 104).

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* ch. 46, nos. 100-2, (pp. 107-9).

seek his saintly wisdom and help.¹⁵⁹ This is only possible because in a formal sense at least, Godric has finally returned to the virtue of obedience that he originally showed to his parents. At Godric's acceptance of the authority of Durham priory, Reginald comments that Godric had 'learnt a little, taught by others, that all work of religion will have been of very small perfection, which is not begun, cultivated and perfected by the masterly discipline of obedience.'¹⁶⁰

v) Conclusion: Durham Priory and its Hermits

For Reginald, it is submission to proper monastic authority which makes Godric a fully fledged holy man, and entitles him to prophesy in front of monks and even criticise them. Reginald is rarely wholly negative about Godric's asceticism, he is indeed seen as an '*athleta Christi*' even amidst the most lurid descriptions of his excessive asceticism. It is Reginald's purpose to undermine belief in asceticism as wholly admirable in itself, rather than to reject it utterly. However, Godric's actual fame as a holy man probably grew out of his heroic asceticism. Reginald makes extreme statements about Godric's life because he is defending a different view of religion, crucial to the interests, prestige and authority of Durham priory.

The origins of Durham priory have been seen as simply a stage in the continual cycles of ascetic renewal held to be characteristic of eleventh and twelfth-century monasticism. It seems however that at least from Symeon's time, if not before, Durham priory's understanding of monasticism can be firmly distinguished both from the slightly later ascetic monastic movements and, more obviously, from popular ascetic enthusiasm. Certainly, from Symeon onwards,

¹⁵⁹ Godric accepts the authority of Durham in ch. 58, no. 127, (pp. 135-7). See ch. 59, no. 129, (p. 138), and ch. 60, no. 130, (pp. 139-40), for the rush of 'pastoral' *topoi*. Another mention is made of the horrible, hairy hairshirt, but Reginald does not add the *nimius* epithet this time; ch. 64, no. 137, (p. 146). In ch. 66, no. 141, (p. 150), Reginald praises the good monastic rule of Durham.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* ch. 58, no. 127, (p. 135). This analysis does simplify Reginald's argument concerning Godric's acceptance of authority; the picture of 'excessive asceticism' begins to soften from ch. 38, no. 84, when Godric appeals to the prior of Durham for help in repairing his chapel from the assault of the demonic knight. There is a process involved in Godric's integration in structures of authority and obedience, which culminates in ch. 58. And see V. Tudor's comments on these passages in *AND*, p. 74.

the monks of Durham seem concerned to distinguish themselves from other contemporary monastic or ascetic developments, and to defend their particular monastic tradition. Reginald and Geoffrey, writing *vitae* of popular ascetics, showed themselves to be fully part of Durham's twelfth-century monastic discourse, but were also responding to a pressure on Durham that had not been explicitly addressed before. This pressure came from the need to deal with such figures as Godric and Bartholomew.

In writing the *Vitae* of Bartholomew and Godric, Durham priory was not simply in the business of praising holy men, nor in basking in their reflected glory. Rather, they were presenting arguments about religion and sanctity. There were clearly existing religious currents which might be critical of the Durham monks, from organised and respectable Cistercians, to independent eremiticism and popular admiration for ascetics. This context provides one level of explanation for the great corpus of hagiographic material on hermits and contemporary miracles produced by Durham in the closing decades of the twelfth century. Reginald does, after all, write in the preface to the book of Cuthbertine miracles that 'these untutored [*indocta*] speeches can confer supports, and produce remedies of some use to rude and rustic people'. And that, 'we do not presume to teach the tutored; but to instruct the poor, and we assign these speeches to inform imbeciles towards good growth.'¹⁶¹ It is perhaps to Durham priory's credit, and no doubt to its benefit, that it could absorb such holy men as Godric and Bartholomew, rather than recoil from them and the popular religion which created them. This later reaction could have, and very probably did in other twelfth-century regions, turn certain currents of popular religion into outright dissent and even heresy.

¹⁶¹ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 1, p. 3; and see below, Chapter I, p. 23.

Chapter III: 'A Certain Purgatory in the Land': Miracles and the Cult of Saint Cuthbert on Farne

Asceticism may have been controversial, but it was nevertheless through ascetic practices that holy men could be seen to have access to miraculous virtue even during their lifetime. If a hermit was seen as a miracle worker, this was because he lived outside of human society and struggled with the devil.¹ The ecclesiastical hierarchy may have wished to see asceticism controlled and bounded by authority, but the popularity of holy men lay not in their obedience to the Church, but in their suitability as a focus of miracle stories. Despite Reginald's critique of Godric's asceticism, the hagiographer recorded a number of miracles from Godric's 'independent' phase at Finchale.² The miracles from Farne, however, involve not only the twelfth-century hermits of the island, but the holy status of Farne itself and Saint Cuthbert's power there. Reginald in his book of Cuthbertine miracles, the anonymous collection of miracles of Farne, and Geoffrey in Bartholomew's *Vita*, between them provide a complex record of the miracles of Farne.

The complex, even contradictory, picture of the cult of Farne which emerges, makes it hard to see the impetus behind the creation of these miracle stories as emerging primarily from the monastic writers themselves. A miracle story is not necessarily the sole creation of a writer, rather it can be, particularly in this period, a story that is created and remembered by a multiplicity of people. To some extent then, a twelfth-century hagiographer records only those miracles which are generally remembered. The hagiographers of Durham were engaged in recording and adapting the miraculous memories surrounding their subjects. Thus neither the cult at Farne nor the fame of Godric as a miracle worker should be seen as exclusively monastic in character. The two hermits' miracles are a record of the interaction of monks, hermits and many ordinary lay people. While Godric's fame was based upon his person, Bartholomew occupied a more complex position as the custodian of a place which itself had considerable claims to sanctity.

¹ See above, Chapter I, p. 15.

² These miracle chiefly involve animals; see below, Chapter IV, p. 172.

Farne developed an importance suddenly in late twelfth-century writing from Durham, which cannot be seen earlier in the century. Certainly Bede and the anonymous hagiographer of Cuthbert provided material and precedent for a monastic cult of Farne. However, Symeon made no effort to develop that material, only briefly describing Cuthbert's residence on Farne. Symeon's contemporary miraculous material about Cuthbert did not involve the island.³ Even the date of Durham's repossession of the island is unknown. Reginald gives no date for the earliest twelfth-century hermit, Aelric of Farne, who we can only say inhabited the island sometime before 1150. According to a story attributed to Bartholomew, a Lindisfarne monk called Edulf had tried to make the filthy island a fit place for monks, presumably before Aelric's tenure of the island.⁴ Geoffrey has Bartholomew, on his deathbed, stating that 'before my coming' laymen had visited the island and created the unsanctified mess which Edulf had to clean. The story underlines the old hermit's role as the living memory of the Lindisfarne cell, remembering the history of Farne through his miracle stories.⁵ Additionally Bartholomew's narration indicates that lay people had an interest in the island before the monastic presence on Farne. The monks may have seen the unsupervised lay presence as a source of filth, but it is nevertheless likely that many of these lay people had come to the island for religious reasons.

Bartholomew's deathbed history of Farne is not the only evidence of the lay cult of Farne. While still a merchant, Godric visited Farne Island as part of the first of his many pilgrimages. Farne was the locus of his veneration of Saint Cuthbert, and Reginald describes him weeping and praying on the island where 'Cuthbert, that man beloved of God, offered beautiful prayers of tears to Christ'.⁶ Indeed it was praying in this 'solitude' that first made Godric, described as a *colonus*, desire the life of solitude, and to think

³ See Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. I, ch. 7, pp. 27-8 and ch. 10, pp. 33-4 for Cuthbert's residences on Farne. The island makes no other appearance in Symeon.

⁴ *Vita Bart.* ch. 29, p. 319. The earliest evidence for Durham's interest in Lindisfarne dates from the 1120s; see Tudor, 'Durham Priory and its Hermits', p. 72.

⁵ In form, if not at all in content, Bartholomew's deathbed narrations concerning Farne recall Anthony's long sermonising to his disciples; *Vita Antonii*, chs. 15-21, cols. 134-46.

⁶ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 5, nos. 17-18, (p. 32).

of himself as a monk under his secular habit. Among the various regional and international shrines Godric visited, Durham Cathedral does not appear, as surely it would have if Reginald had any choice. Apparently Farne had more significance for Godric than the presence of Saint Cuthbert's incorruptible body at Durham. Yet Godric's pilgrimage to Farne occurred around 1100, long before Durham priory showed any interest in the place. Lay devotion for Farne appears to have developed independently of any monastic encouragement.

Farne as a holy island and hermitage was not unique in twelfth-century Britain, but it is the only such hermitage for which there is such a diverse literary record. By the late twelfth century, the island had attained enough importance for Geoffrey to devote much of the second half of the Bartholomew's *Vita* to a kind of hagiography of Farne itself. Evidence for general lay understandings of the nature of a hermitage is sparse, but worth brief consideration. The word 'hermitage' appears in place names, frequently so in France, where it has been assumed to mean simply a 'wilderness' or an 'uncultivated' place, without necessarily implying any religious habitation.⁷ In one mid-thirteenth-century English record there appears to be an awareness that the popular and ecclesiastical definitions of a hermitage could be at variance. A hermitage 'near Chetwood' in Buckinghamshire, given to an Augustinian priory, was said to be 'popularly' called a hermitage by the 'lay people'. This was due to its 'solitude', as it was said that no hermit had ever lived there.⁸ An uninhabited 'hermitage' may have been just a wilderness, however the use of the term 'hermitage' does imply some special quality not given to all uncultivated land.

Godric's hermitage at Finchale was evidently a place that was once inhabited. Reginald reports that the 'old men' knew of remains of buildings and people there. Furthermore, these remains, evidently from a time beyond local memory, had acquired a legendary explanation, which in turn explained the name 'Finchale'. At one time

⁷ Leclercq, '*Eremus*', pp. 21-3.

⁸ William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols. (London 1817-30); vol. 6, p. 499, no. 2; '*vulgariter autem locus ille a laicis heremitagium nuncupatur, propter solitudinem; non quod heremita aliquis aliquo tempore ibidem solebat conversari*'. Also cited by Hubert Dauphin, 'L'Eremitisme en Angleterre', in *L'Eremitismo in Occidente nei Secoli XIe et XIIe, Miscellanea del Centro di Studi Medioevali* 4 (1965), pp. 271-303; p. 273.

this had been the site of a legendary British King Finc.⁹ Reginald had hagiographic reasons to record this fragment of local folklore; Godric in taking over the place is transforming a kind of 'pre-Christian' site into a holy place. The remains of King Finc could be seen as an echo of the remains of pagan structures which were part of the landscape of the Egyptian fathers; Godric's adoption of Finchale could be seen to have mirrored the patristic practice of inhabiting pagan tombs to show the superiority of the Christian religion over its predecessors. Thus Reginald includes the 'King Finc' story in order, once again, to compare Godric to Saint Anthony.¹⁰ Obviously in Godric's case the site was not 'pagan' in any genuine sense. For Reginald however, Godric's initial 'colonisation' of the place looked forward to Durham's later control of the site, and the replacement of a local, popular legend with the superior and civilised influence of Durham priory.

In contrast to Finchale, Farne possessed the historical figure of Saint Cuthbert, but it was deserted and disregarded by the Church when laymen like Godric visited it. Thus, as at Finchale, there may have been local explanations and stories concerning the island. If it was considered a holy place by visitors like Godric, then it may also have had special local significance. However, while local beliefs may have had some influence in Geoffrey's description of the place, the historical literary record of the island has a more obvious effect upon the text. Geoffrey's description of Saint Cuthbert as 'the first monarch of the place' could raise an echo of the kind of mentality that attributes a handful of remains to the presence of a mythical king.¹¹ Of course this is just a coincidence; Geoffrey was quoting Bede's description of Cuthbert's colonisation of Farne.¹² Nevertheless, those lay people who came to the island to be healed cannot be expected to have had the same understanding of the sanctity of the place as did literate monks.

The literate tradition of Farne begins with Bede, and in the twelfth century remains in orbit around his writing, but not without

⁹ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 22, no. 57, (pp. 69-70). Archeological work done at Finchale has not discovered remains dating before the priory; see C. R. Peers, 'Finchale Priory', *Archeologia Aeliana* 4, (1927), pp. 193-220. As even Godric's original structures have been obscured by the later priory buildings, this is not surprising. There seems no reason to doubt Reginald's report in this matter.

¹⁰ See *Vita Antonii*, ch. 7, col. 131.

¹¹ *Vita Bart.* ch. 21, p. 313.

¹² *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 17, p. 216.

significant deviations. Bede described Cuthbert banishing the devils from Farne, creating the natural spring, and otherwise making the island a saintly outpost of humanity.¹³ The essence of these stories was repeated by Symeon. Before Cuthbert, Farne 'produced no water at all, nor tree, nor corn; and it was unfitted for the residence of mankind, for it was a habitation of evil spirits.' With Cuthbert's miracles however, 'the place became fitted for the abode of man.'¹⁴ There Symeon's interest in Farne ends; in the early twelfth century the island appears to have relatively little significance for the monks of Durham. It is the saint's body at Durham which is the real focus of attention, while Farne is hardly present even in Symeon's summary of Cuthbert's death. This is in contrast to Bede, who says of Cuthbert's resignation of the episcopacy, that he was 'determined to return to the beloved strife of the hermit's life.' Symeon says simply that 'he returned to his island and monastery'.¹⁵ Symeon downgraded the importance of Cuthbert's return to solitude on Farne, while not suppressing the fact itself. Of supreme importance to Symeon is the foundation of the long continuous possession of Cuthbert's body. Although the saint, for practical reasons, thought it better that his body remained on Farne, he gave the brethren the necessary 'permission and advice' to remove it. Thus for 'four hundred and eighteen years', monks have possessed the incorruptible body.

By the end of the twelfth century, Farne had evidently become much more important to the monks of Durham. Geoffrey makes much of Bartholomew's desire to have his body rest on Farne. On his deathbed, with the monks from Lindisfarne and Coldingham gathered about him, the twelfth-century hermit echoes Cuthbert's wish to be buried on Farne:

'He said "I desire to rest my body here, where I hope my spirit will be raised up by its Founder, as I have soldiered a little for the Lord,¹⁶ and I have undergone many tribulations because of this,

¹³ *ibid.* chs. 17-18, pp. 214-20.

¹⁴ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. I, ch. 7, p. 28.

¹⁵ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 36, pp. 266-7; Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. I, ch. 10, pp. 32-6.

¹⁶ This is a partial quotation from *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 37, p. 278; *Vita Bart.* ch. 29, p. 319: '*aliquantulum Domino militavi*'. Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. I, ch. 10, p. 34, quoting the whole passage verbatim from Bede, thus instead writes '*certamen certavi*' for this phrase. Geoffrey seems instead to be using a form more familiar to general hagiographic rhetoric of the twelfth century.

which in heaven is consolation. For truly I fear that if I were buried elsewhere, the books would be carried off, vestments snatched away, the grace of the house of God be vacated and transformed into the horror of its original solitude or turpitude. For this place is holy, which before my coming was not cultivated in the reverence in which it is proper. The celebration of divine offices was done rarely. Certainly, lay people lived in this place and there were many sinners. . . and if any came for grace in praying, they could neither bend their knees because of the filth, nor could they open their mouths because of the stench."¹⁷

The miraculous colonisation of the island by the Saint had been apparently obliterated by the attentions of laymen, and could be again if an institutional monastic presence was not maintained. Cuthbert's own concern, as described by Bede and Symeon, was that the monks of Lindisfarne should not be bothered by disreputable people fleeing to his shrine. If he were buried on Farne, Lindisfarne would be spared this influx. Yet even without Cuthbert's body, Farne had become a place where lay people would come with their sins and prayers.

Bartholomew's concern for the institutional status of Farne reflects Geoffrey's concern to show that, despite the long hiatus in the religious occupation of the island between Bede's time and the twelfth century, he could outline a spiritual continuity in the nature of the place. This spiritual continuity depended upon the institutions of Benedictine monasticism in general and the traditions of Durham in particular. Thus the description of Farne follows Bartholomew's own four miracles which demonstrated his sanctity. Here Geoffrey explicitly showed the hermit to be the spiritual heir of Saints Benedict, Cuthbert and Godric; 'he had their virtues, he was full of them in spirit.'¹⁸ Bartholomew is the model of a Benedictine hermit in following Benedict. He is the model of a hermit of Durham in following Cuthbert. Finally he is the model of a contemporary holy man, in following Godric, whose cult belonged to Durham. As always a miracle is not just a miracle, but is a demonstration of spiritual continuity. Saints Benedict and Cuthbert stand at the centre of

¹⁷ *Vita Bart.* ch. 29, p. 319. Reginald also refers to Cuthbert's wishes concerning his body, quoting from Bede: *Reg. Libellus*, ch. 12, pp. 16-19.

¹⁸ *Vita Bart.* ch. 19, p. 312.

Durham's self-consciousness, and thus a holy man who emerged from Durham must encapsulate that consciousness through his miracles. While Godric obviously does not quite fit the pattern, his inclusion in the list is an indication of Durham's concern to respond to popular spiritual currents.

The references to Godric's sanctity and to lay turpitude in Farne both, in their own way, strain the picture of spiritual continuity which Geoffrey elsewhere pursues in describing Farne:

'For truly this was formerly a castle of demons, now a cloister and school of saints [*claustrum et schola sanctorum*], a certain purgatory in the land, a healthy institution for bodies and souls worthy of being cured. It always has men of virtues, or rather it makes them; because he who is led into its desert by the spirit, must be tempted by the devil, and either cultivates virtue or abandons the place of virtue.'¹⁹

Farne makes the saints, but the saints have made the place, in a continual dialectic. Yet it is not enough to go out into the desert on your own without the benefit of an institution to guide you. Thus Farne is not simply a 'desert' but also a 'cloister'. The transformation from a castle of demons to a school of saints presumably refers to Cuthbert's transformation of the island.²⁰ Geoffrey does however seem to admit that the island had some inherent quality of sanctity, apart from the spurious continuity of monastic institutions, by saying that the 'place of virtue' can itself make a holy man. On the other hand, Geoffrey had Bartholomew worry that the place would fall into turpitude once more if it was left to lay people. There is thus a contradiction in Geoffrey's conceptions of Farne. The idea of the inherent holiness of Farne simply does not fit with his emphasis on the importance of monastic institutions. The latter idea clearly mattered to the monastic community of Durham, for whom a particular place of sanctity was less important than the historical continuity of a group of monks guarding the body of the saint.

¹⁹ *ibid.* ch. 20, p. 312.

²⁰ Geoffrey details Cuthbert's sanctification of the island immediately after this chapter; *ibid.* ch. 21, p. 313.

Perhaps the idea of Farne as inherently holy came from outside the cloister. If Geoffrey were simply adumbrating a patristic conception of the desert as a place of horror and testing, he would not have developed the idea of Farne as a positive place. However, neither does Geoffrey develop the positive view of Farne in the other possible direction of hagiographic rhetoric, describing Farne as a kind of paradise due to Saint Cuthbert's former and continuing presence. Thus, somewhat remarkably, the continuity of saints on an inherently holy island does not make that island a new Eden. Admittedly, a cold inhospitable island such as Farne would be hard to sell as an Eden. However, evil is present, and Farne lies in the world. The positive view depends simply on the fact that Farne is a place in the world where justice is actually served; 'Nothing is committed which goes unpunished there.'²¹ It seems likely that Geoffrey was attempting to reconcile different conceptions of Farne, coming from different kinds of people. The positive view of Farne may thus be a popular influence. Certainly, at other points, Geoffrey develops a more traditional picture of Farne as a place of spiritual warfare.

The island is under constant siege by the demons Cuthbert had expelled from his *metropolim* to the 'suburb' islands. Black cowled demons ride on goats, brandishing lances, and assaulting the monastic fortifications.²² At Bartholomew's death, a group of monks from Lindisfarne are terrified by an apparition of a monstrous dog, among other horrors. The experienced holy man banishes the devil with a few words.²³ Farne is not a place for novices of spiritual warfare. Here Geoffrey gives Bartholomew the allegorical status of an abbot, comforting and defending the young, even when close to death. The geography of Farne also adds to the picture of constant metaphysical struggle. Farne is composed of opposites, for example the sea constantly assaults the land, and the freezing inhabitants are reduced to 'terror and cold'.²⁴ Reginald's stories of Farne do not contain any sustained description of the place as a site of spiritual warfare, but the occasional phrase indicates a similar predisposition

²¹ *ibid.* ch. 23, p. 314.

²² *ibid.* ch. 22, p. 314.

²³ *ibid.* ch. 30, p. 321.

²⁴ *ibid.* ch. 20, p. 312.

to see Farne in terms of metaphysical allegory. For example, the meeting of the overhanging cliffs and the sea made Reginald think of the 'gulfs of Hell'.²⁵

Geoffrey's descriptions of spiritual warfare spring from a familiar biblical quotation:

'The contest there [Farne] is not between citizens concerning boundaries, nor against flesh and blood, but against the princes and the powers of darkness, the mortal struggle over kingship and ruler is perpetual.'²⁶

One prominent use of this quotation occurs in Athanasius' description of Anthony's struggles against demons during the colonisation of his final mountain hermitage.²⁷ In one respect, the use of this quotation simply associates the cult on Farne with the holiness of the desert fathers. However, the solitary struggle of Anthony contrasts with the institutional hermitage that is Farne. Geoffrey had adapted the biblical passage somewhat, echoing his quotation of Bede calling Cuthbert the 'monarch' of Farne. While the *Ephesians* passage could be seen to imply a rejection of secular authority in general, Geoffrey uses it to imagine a battle between two forces over who shall rule this microcosm of the world. The question is whether the monarch shall be a power of darkness, or a good monarch like Saint Cuthbert, and thus his institution, Durham priory. Both the story of the warlike demons, and the metaphysical description of Farne's geography appear as part of a series of allegories spun from the *Ephesians* passage. It was probably not Geoffrey himself who created these stories, but rather the monastic culture of Durham and Lindisfarne as a whole, which encouraged the creation and remembering of such allegories.

²⁵ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 33, p. 75.

²⁶ *Vita Bart.* ch. 20, p. 312; *Ephesians* 6:12; 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' This passage in general talks of the armour of God, the breastplate of righteousness, and other metaphors particularly appropriate for a monk writing about spiritual warfare.

²⁷ *Vita Antonii*, ch. 25, col. 149. It is discussed again in ch. 37, col. 155. Obviously Athanasius was not using the Vulgate, but whatever differences there might be in the Greek, Evagrius must have recognised the quotation and used the Vulgate translation.

Nevertheless, Geoffrey's use of the *Ephesians* quotation and his careful delineation of Farne's spiritual qualities implies a deliberate agenda; Geoffrey may be implicitly contrasting Farne with other contemporary depictions of holy solitude. Another patristic use of the quotation, which was likely to be familiar to many monks, is made by Jerome himself.²⁸ Jerome emphasises the sheer agony of the temptations he encountered in his life of solitude. Thus, possibly in conscious contrast to Jerome, Geoffrey has located the quotation within passages that emphasise the corporate nature of the holy island. The holy solitude is, then, a fortress or City of God. It is a *coenobium*. The use of the *Ephesians* passage may have been meant to highlight a contrast between Durham's Farne and contemporary celebrations of the desert. The Cistercians, in particular, took the notions of solitude and of wilderness as the foundation of their new Cities of God.²⁹ As in Reginald's and Geoffrey's descriptions of eremitical asceticism, the description of metaphysical struggle on Farne may have been a deliberate defence of Durham's traditions against other twelfth-century traditions, which were more normally associated with eremiticism. Equally, the description of Farne may be intended as a warning against embarking upon life as a hermit outside a monastic institution.

Existing alongside the idea of Farne as a place of terror and strife, is the idea of Farne as a place of innocent peace: 'there is no contest between citizens concerning boundaries there'. Neither is there a contest between animals and humans. The monks, we are told by all three writers on Farne, do not allow the eiderducks to be hunted. The ducks themselves have an aura of holy placidity.³⁰ A contrast between an island as a place of horror and of holy peace, is not unprecedented within hagiographic tradition. The original western island hermitage, *Lérins*, was alternately described as a place of trial, and as a paradise.³¹ However, Geoffrey does not

²⁸ Jerome, *Ad Eustochium*, e p. 22, col. 396.

²⁹ See below, Chapter IV, p. 140.

³⁰ See below, Chapter IV, p. 162.

³¹ Jacques Le Goff, 'The Wilderness in The Medieval West' in *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Chicago 1988), pp. 47-59; on *Lérins* see p. 50. However, the picture gained from Hilary of Arles, in his *Vita* of Saint Honoratus, is one of transformation of the dread wilderness into a kind of paradise, not of a constant oscillation between the two states; Hilary of Arles,

describe Farne as a paradise, rather Farne is 'a certain purgatory in the land'.³²

The history of the concepts of purgation and purgatory shows a complex interaction of doctrinal ideas and miraculous or visionary imagery.³³ Purgatory only gradually emerged as a singular place by the thirteenth century. Even the use of *purgatorium* as a singular noun was apparently absent before the 1170s; Bernard of Clairvaux still wrote of *loca purgatoria*, as a plurality of states of spiritual being. Nevertheless, ideas of actual purgatorial places on the earth were clearly current in the twelfth century.³⁴ In this sense, Geoffrey's description of Farne as a place of spiritual purgation for the monks is not unprecedented, though his use of the singular noun 'purgatory' is very early. Yet, it does not appear to have been common to label a particular place as being one of these mysterious *loca purgatoria*.³⁵ Geoffrey seems to be fusing together various old and new conceptions of purgatory, at a time when they were not fully resolved, perhaps in order to make coherent the various strands of the cult on Farne. He does not seem to have been entirely successful in this effort. Farne may have been a place of continual solitary struggle and purgation for monks, but this was probably not the meaning it had for those lay people who so frequently visited the island. Certainly this is clear in Reginald's stories of those sailors who

Sermo de Vita S. Honorati, episcopi Arelatensis, cols. 1249-73, *PL* 50, ch. 3, no. 15, cols. 1256-7.

³² *Vita Bart.* ch. 20, p. 312; 'quoddam in terris purgatorium'.

³³ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London 1984), for example pp. 199, 223 and 259. See pp. 61-85, for Saint Augustine's interpretation of tribulation and purgation, pp. 88-95, for Gregory the Great's handling of *loci poenali*, and pp. 135-52 for some twelfth-century interpretations of purgatory. Another interesting discussion of purgatory, considering the problem of clerical and popular influence in the development of the doctrine is Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. Janos Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth, (Cambridge 1988), pp. 104-152. See especially pp. 148-9, for a discussion of Le Goff's views. Gurevich discusses the many epic descriptions of the other world, some found in Bede's *Historia*, where 'purgatory' does appear to be envisioned as a place, if not so distinct from Hell as it would appear later in Dante.

³⁴ Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 135-46.

³⁵ One major exception is the legend of Saint Patrick's purgatory in Ireland. But this place is distant from the creators of its legends, not a familiar shrine like Farne. For Saint Patrick's purgatory see *ibid.* pp. 193-201.

came to Farne to recount their stories of terror upon the seas.³⁶ For them Farne must have been a peaceful haven, at the least.

For Reginald the main point of these stories is to show the effectiveness of Saint Cuthbert as a miracle worker. The saint is a 'counsellor of tribulations and reliever of sorrows' for whom any of the faithful may call, in 'whatever tribulation of sorrows'.³⁷ There are only six 'sailors' miracles in Reginald's *Libellus*, and four involve laymen coming to Farne to report their experiences to the hermits there.³⁸ Perhaps the high proportion of sailors' tales relating to Farne simply demonstrates that the hermits were a good source of information for Reginald concerning this kind of miracle. Many other sailors may have thought themselves to have been saved by Saint Cuthbert, but their stories did not reach the monks of Durham. However it might have been expected, in such a large miracle collection, that Reginald could have found one story of a sailor giving thanks to Cuthbert at the cathedral. There is no such story, which may be an indication that sailors specifically went to Farne rather than to the cathedral to deliver their thanks to Cuthbert.

The sailors were usually described as natives of the region. In one miracle, a number of the men were 'raised in his [Cuthbert's] land, and had frequently heard of his sanctity and miracles of virtue'.³⁹ During the storm, Cuthbert appears to them, leading the vessel with his 'pastoral staff', and promises that he would not desert them until they were delivered to a 'port of safety'. This sort of vision is certainly evidence of the willingness of sailors to believe in the miraculous powers of their saint, particularly in desperate conditions. In itself this does not prove any particular devotion to Farne as the locus of the Saint's power. It might be that Farne was simply a convenient place on the coast of Northumbria to escape from a storm, and Reginald does indicate that sometimes sailors took

³⁶ Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 23, 30, 32 and 33; chs. 27, 31 and 34 also involve sailors detained at Farne through storms.

³⁷ *ibid.* ch. 23, p. 50. Saint Cuthbert is by no means the only contemporary saint to provide miracles for sailors in danger and Reginald acknowledges that, noting that Cuthbert had followed Saint Nicholas in his mercy towards sailors; *ibid.* ch. 31, p. 72.

³⁸ Of the remaining two, one involves Ailred of Rievaulx himself on a journey to Clairvaux, and the other a knight who was bringing a valuable object to Durham Cathedral; *ibid.* chs. 83 and 75 respectively.

³⁹ *ibid.* ch. 23, p. 52.

refuge from storms on Farne.⁴⁰ However, Reginald tends to give the impression that Cuthbert himself chose the sailors' destination; 'pitying them, he led them to the island'.⁴¹ The destination of Farne Island is thus integral to the miracle stories, and perhaps to the sailors' own perceptions of their experience. Stopping at Farne does not appear to have been an action of convenience or necessity in three out of the four Farne sailors' miracles.⁴² In these cases the crisis had already passed, but the sailors put in at Farne itself. Choosing Farne is thus a deliberate decision, when the sailors could equally have gone straight to the nearby coast, and delivered thanks at the church at Lindisfarne instead. The informants for these stories are never monks of Durham, or more surprisingly monks of Lindisfarne. In stark contrast to Farne, the Lindisfarne cell does not even provide any miracle stories involving ordinary laypeople.⁴³ Thus, Farne must have had some particular attraction to these sailors, independent of the specifically monastic cult of Cuthbert.

In one story, once Saint Cuthbert had led the sailors to the island, they told their story to Bartholomew with a 'sweet inundation of tears poured out in the presence of Blessed Cuthbert'.⁴⁴ In another, the sailors who escaped an attack by pagan Frisians and are sped on their way by Cuthbert's control of the weather, sail to Farne Island. There Bartholomew treats them to a mass, while they give 'offerings', and report their story to the hermit, again amid inundations of tears.⁴⁵ Each of the stories is very different in most details, but certain elements turn up repeatedly, such as the mass and the offerings. The 'offerings' are not specified, and appear to be simply tears and personal devotion to Saint Cuthbert. Some of the repeated elements in these stories may partly be due to Reginald's rhetorical habits, for whom such things as 'inundations of tears' roll pleasantly off the pen. However, it is unlikely that Reginald would have made up a series of rituals specifically for Farne, and such elements as the mass and the 'offerings' to Saint Cuthbert were

⁴⁰ *ibid.* ch. 31, p. 70 and ch. 33, p. 74.

⁴¹ *ibid.* ch. 32, p. 74.

⁴² These are *ibid.* chs. 23, 30 and 32.

⁴³ For a discussion of Lindisfarne's place in Reginald's collection, see Tudor, 'Cult of Cuthbert', pp. 461-2.

⁴⁴ *Reg. Libellus* ch. 23, p. 53.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* ch. 30, pp. 67-9.

details that probably came to Reginald from the hermits. Thus the presence of the hermit appears central to the cult at Farne. Sailors may have given thanks to Cuthbert on Farne before the hermits were present, but there would have been no religious figure to structure the event as a devotional activity for the sailors, and then to remember their story. Thus no miracle could have been recorded, even if there had been a Reginald to record it. The presence of a holy man on the island would certainly have encouraged the cult of Farne to crystallise; the hermit could 'certify' lay people's miraculous experiences. It may be that a hermit was the preferred witness to the sailors' devotion, in contrast to the monks at Lindisfarne for example. The latter, after all, could have given the sailors the same spiritual services. However Farne was chosen as the site of devotion, and overall, it seems likely that the preference for the island was in part a function of the place itself, independent of the person who served Cuthbert there.

Could the sailors have regarded Farne in some way as a 'purgatory' as did Geoffrey? Reginald does present the sailors' stories as allegories of salvation. One story opens with a description of Cuthbert's power to save; 'Blessed Cuthbert plucked up souls into himself when they called to him from the frame of perdition.'⁴⁶ These sailors, who were to fall foul of the pagan Frisians, had themselves 'given the soul in the study of business, and they boiled greedily with the desire of gaining.' In each story, in common with others in the *Libellus*, trade is presented as inherently sinful.⁴⁷ It is better to suffer the 'misery of poverty' acquiring merit for 'the life of glory' rather than engage in trading in precious things which are 'mostly corrupt'.⁴⁸ The experience of maritime violence, and the sailors' suffering, does sometimes appear to be presented by Reginald as a spiritually cleansing experience. One man washed overboard in a storm is drawn underwater three times before being washed back on to the deck by Cuthbert's intervention.⁴⁹ Only

⁴⁶ *ibid.* ch. 30, p. 67.

⁴⁷ See for example *ibid.* ch. 24, pp. 53-6. Here a trader lies, while invoking the name of Saint Cuthbert, in order to sell his merchandise. Thus the saint blinds him but his sight is restored at the cathedral after his contrition.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* ch. 32, pp. 72-3.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* ch. 32, pp. 73-4.

through the protection of Saint Cuthbert was it that 'the sea could not swallow the small vessels of avarice or sink the sinning souls'.⁵⁰

Through such miracles ordinary sinners are given a chance to repent, suffer and find a chance of salvation; 'the grace of protection in the rampart of favour preserves the souls of the feeble from desperation.'⁵¹ Although their trading activities are inherently sinful, Reginald does not seem to expect the individuals concerned to give up such activities. The stories end simply with the sailors' devotions on Farne. Evidently they resumed their normal lives thereafter, simply grateful for Cuthbert's protection against natural forces. It is likely that Reginald himself put the 'purgatorial' spin on these narratives. It is nevertheless possible that a hermit like Bartholomew may have encouraged the sailors to see their experiences in terms of personal repentance and salvation. In either case, Reginald was certainly encouraging a 'purgatorial' view of secular life, in which suffering in this world can lead to salvation. The condemnations of trade probably were not meant as advice to traders to cease trading. On the contrary, Reginald's dramatic renditions, and extreme language, served to point out that even in a sinful life it is possible to ask for forgiveness and receive the protection and mercy of Saint Cuthbert. Salvation, he implies, is even possible for greedy merchants. Such a view of salvation would certainly have appealed to the 'imbeciles' for whom Reginald claimed to be writing. Purgatorial imagery might well have appealed to the popular imagination, reducing the stark opposites of salvation and damnation to something more realistically obtainable in an ordinary life.

A general need for reassurance concerning eventual salvation accounts for hermits' visions of the salvation of others. Such visions were not a new phenomenon in sanctity. Among others, Anthony saw the soul of a monk being taken to heaven and Cuthbert saw Saint Aidan's soul being brought to heaven.⁵² These early visions differ from those of the twelfth century in the much higher status of the souls being saved. In other cases in the early period such visions are simply absent, as in the case of Jerome's Saint Hilarion, whose miraculous services to the poor and to women are otherwise

⁵⁰ *ibid.* ch. 23, p. 52.

⁵¹ *ibid.* ch. 32, p. 72.

⁵² *Vita Antonii*, ch. 32, cols. 153-4; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 4, pp. 164-7.

comparable to a saint such as Godric. In contrast, Godric of Finchale seemed to have regular visions of the fate of apparently ordinary lay souls; at one time having a vision of a man going to heaven.⁵³ His visionary powers operated more powerfully for his own family; as a result of his prayers, he sees his mother's soul released from the 'places of punishment'.⁵⁴ In the same way, his brother, who had drowned, is released from the *poenae* of death.⁵⁵ These places of punishment seem to be 'purgatory' in the older sense; they are not a unified place in the Other World. Nevertheless, one of Robert of Knaresborough's hagiographers, writing in the mid-thirteenth century when a fully developed purgatory might be expected to appear, gives no hint of 'purgatory' as a specific spiritual place. Robert's mother is saved from 'penances' of death, punishment for her practice of usury in life, by Robert's prayers.⁵⁶ Whether these accounts really indicate the development of the idea of purgatory or not, they are witness to the expansion of the community of salvation in the twelfth century.

The importance of lay salvation is also reflected in Farne's healing miracles. As in Reginald's sailors' miracles, these are written as allegories of salvation and damnation. Even men of good works or good life depend ultimately on Saint Cuthbert's clemency to heal their bodies. The miracle of healing comes about through their faith in Cuthbert's power, and the grace Cuthbert thus offers them.⁵⁷ One Northumbrian man 'very rich in might and power' became ill, and then suffered from the 'solicitous industry of doctors'. However, with healthier advice, he went to Farne, made an offering and 'offered pious devotion of tears to the Lord'. Thus, without great fuss, he was

⁵³ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 95, no. 195, (p. 205)

⁵⁴ *ibid.* ch. 54, nos. 117-8, (pp. 125-7).

⁵⁵ *ibid.* ch. 64, nos. 137-8, (pp. 145-7).

⁵⁶ *Vita Recentior Roberti*, ch. 7, pp. 381-2: *penis pregravibus*. This episode does not appear in the fragmentary first *Vita*. The second *Vita* follows the first in events, often simply simplifying the language of the first. The section of the second *Vita* from which this miracle is taken lies well within the extant limits of the first. Thus the 'purgatorial' miracle appears to have been added to the second *Vita*, as if this kind of miracle had become expected of a hermit.

⁵⁷ See particularly Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 102 and 103, concerning a rich man of great charity, and a monk of Durham respectively.

cured.⁵⁸ For this same man's wife, however, purgatorial imagery is employed to describe the progress of her cure. Reginald describes her physical suffering in terms of alternating agonies of internal heat and cold. Eventually her entrails were so inflamed that nothing could cool her. Even 'with her whole body denuded' apart from underwear, nothing could reduce the 'asperity of burning cold.'⁵⁹ Finally taken to Farne, she gave some towels to cover the altar, and as she waited outside the chapel, she found herself cured as her gifts were laid on the altar. The sufferings this noblewoman felt might well be read as metaphor for the alternate heat and cold of purgatory, which cleanses the soul.

In the anonymous 'Miracles of Farne' collection, there is a similar healing miracle involving the local noblewoman, Emma de Grenville. Like Reginald's noblewoman, she suffered torments of heat and cold:

'In extremity of cold and of heat she laboured in the fourth degree, and while she was alive she had a foretaste of the alternate tortures of Hell. For we read of how the spirits of some, who are condemned to tortures among the shades, are carried from hot to cold and from cold to hot because of their changefulness and inconstancy.'⁶⁰

This story is thus once again written as an allegory of salvation, and purgatorial suffering. Again, the noblewoman is reduced to humiliating nakedness, which nevertheless does not alleviate her suffering. Moreover 'humbled under the yoke, she went about bowed, leaning on two sticks which supported her'.⁶¹ Perhaps the writer meant all this humiliation to be seen as a significant spiritual

⁵⁸ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 118, pp. 263-4; the editor notes that a marginal annotation in the manuscript identifies the man as a historically attested sheriff of Northumberland in 1163 and 1170.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* ch. 119, pp. 264-5.

⁶⁰ *Miracles of Farne*, ch. 4, pp. 12-13; trans. Craster, *Arch. Ael.* 29 (1951), p. 99.

⁶¹ This anonymous miracle is very similar to Reginald's in certain details, such as the woman's supporting sticks, which are given to Bartholomew after her cure. It is possible that the two miracles describe the same woman and are thus the same story, recorded twice. Equally the anonymous writer could have been simply borrowing details from Reginald. However, it is possible that as with the sailors' miracles, certain rituals had developed for pilgrims to Farne in search of a cure.

advance for a noblewoman. Certainly the theme is in keeping with the rhetoric of Cuthbert's mortification of the body, announced in the writer's preface.⁶²

It says something for the misogyny of Durham monks that it was two noblewomen, rather than two noblemen, who were chosen as the subject of miracles dealing with the humiliation of secular bodies. Unlike the poor sailors and traders, whose sin is external to their bodies, the two noblewomen suffer such torments apparently through the inherent sinfulness of their physical nature. Whereas rich or powerful men have access to Cuthbert's forgiving clemency, purgatorial suffering in this world seems to be reserved to woman and men of low status. Nevertheless, the salvation of those people of lesser status seems to be the issue which prompts Durham's writers to search for purgatorial imagery. In this context, Geoffrey's unusual description of Farne as a 'purgatory', rather than a hell transformed by a saint into a paradise, may reflect the monks' response to lay enthusiasm for Farne. Those lay people who came to Farne simply hoped for ease and help in a cruel world. The monks responded with sermons on the possibilities of salvation within the suffering of lay life. Although most monks themselves may have expected purgatory to be their own fate, in this context the idea of purgatory functioned as a middle ground between monastic religion and lay devotion, while Farne and its hermits provided the context for the two to mingle.

Both Reginald and the anonymous writer of 'The Miracles of Farne' recorded miracles according to their didactic purposes. The miracles recorded cannot be taken as a fair reflection of the proportions of people who sought one thing or another on this holy island, as the social status of a person could be highly relevant to the writer's purpose. Indeed, the wildly differing proportions of social groups who received cures in each collection are an indication of the subjective criteria with which each writer chose which miracle stories to record. In Reginald's collection there are seven healing

⁶² *Miracles of Farne*, pp. 9-10. The rhetoric of extremes of heat and cold in these stories may also be a borrowing from hagiographic tradition, where such suffering often occurs in visionary contexts. A conspicuous example comes from Bede's account of the vision of Drythelm; *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, (Oxford 1969), Bk. 5, ch. 12, pp. 488-99, esp. pp. 488-91.

miracles relating to Farne, and none of the recipients of Cuthbert's clemency are ordinary lay people. Bartholomew himself, a monk and a monastic servant all receive cures.⁶³ There is a rich merchant and a regional nobleman.⁶⁴ The two women are both wives of nobles. One husband is a local knight, living in Embleton.⁶⁵ This exclusive concentration upon people of high status is actually untypical of Reginald's healing miracles as a whole, and the cathedral itself attracted the poor and rich alike, even if Reginald probably had a bias in favour of high status recipients of cures.⁶⁶ This could be taken as evidence that, despite the sailors' miracles, Farne was not popular with local people. However, the bias is clearly Reginald's. The anonymous miracles of Farne collection shows the opposite spectrum of society, with only one clearly high status cure, that of Emma de Grenville, among ten healing miracles. Three miracles come from one peasant family who lived opposite Farne.⁶⁷ Other Farne miracles in Reginald and the anonymous collection involve poor lay people from the adjacent coast, which seems to indicate a strong local interest in Farne as a holy place. As none of the various named villages adjacent to Farne appear in lists of Durham's properties, these poor lay people and their cult on Farne appears to have been wholly independent of Durham priory.⁶⁸

Apart from the monastic rhetoric of salvation, local people must have had their own reasons to believe in the possibility of healing miracles on Farne Island, as opposed to any other place. A saint's *virtus* was not necessarily restricted to any one place, as the sailors' miracles show, but Farne was one place where people came hoping for a miracle. For the monastic writers, Farne was a place

⁶³ Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 120, 117 and 103 respectively.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* chs. 102 and 118.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* chs. 62 and 119.

⁶⁶ For the numbers involved generally in the *Libellus*, see Tudor, 'Cult of St. Cuthbert', p. 465.

⁶⁷ *Miracles of Farne*, chs. 6-8, pp. 14-17. For the two high status people who appear in the collection, Emma de Grenville and Nicholas de Stuteville, see trans. Craster, *Arch. Ael.* 29 (1951), pp. 95-6.

⁶⁸ See for example the detailed confirmation of Durham properties offered by King John in 1204; *Victoria History of the County of Durham*, ed. William Page, 3 vols. (London 1893-1940), vol. 2, pp. 91-2. The lands directly opposite Farne, in Bamburgh, Embleton, and Ellingham, appear to be owned by secular lords; see Northumberland County History Committee, *History of Northumberland*, vol. 2, pp. 10-14 and pp. 224-32.

where metaphysical realities were tangible, but did ordinary lay people see the island in similar terms? The physically sanctified qualities of the island certainly appear to be crucial in a number of healing miracles. The household servant of the family of a monk was cured by drinking water poured over stones from the island.⁶⁹ A wealthy layman apparently suffering from something like migraine discusses his affliction with 'the brothers' on Farne, and places his head in a window of the guest house where Saint Cuthbert himself used to lay his head. The saint personally appears to advise the man to do this, and so he was healed.⁷⁰ Reginald understood this miracle in terms of the incorruptible flesh of Saint Cuthbert, which itself echoes the cedar of Lebanon, which 'does not putrefy naturally'. Because Cuthbert had acquired all his virtue on Farne it 'had not lost its virtue of curing'. The anonymous author saw the origin of healing miracles in exactly the same terms as Reginald. The prologue explains the miracles in terms of Cuthbert's virtue, his mortifying of the flesh, and his consequent incorruptible flesh; 'it has come to pass that the good things which he did in the life of the flesh are testified afterwards by works of power'.⁷¹

A general explanation of healing miracles, in terms of medieval knowledge of disease and expectations of the miraculous, has been offered by Ronald Finucane.⁷² Finucane also posited the image of 'holy radioactivity' to explain the role of physical objects in such miracles. In the 'popular' medieval imagination anything in close contact with a physical object associated with a saint, acquired the same power by association. Thus relics themselves could be duplicated; the power would flow through the one and permanently influence the other. For Finucane this provides an explanation for why even after the translation of a saint, the original burial place would retain its power to heal.⁷³ This may be descriptive of the process, yet it would be patronising to imagine that medieval peasants did not have 'intellectual' explanations for the power of

⁶⁹ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 117, pp. 262-3.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* ch. 102, pp. 226-9.

⁷¹ *Miracles of Farne*, ch. 1, p. 10; trans. Craster, *Arch. Ael.* 29 (1951), p. 97.

⁷² See Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, (London 1977), *passim* and particularly pp. 100-12, for a general discussion of the types of healing miracles.

⁷³ *ibid.* pp. 25-30.

holy places. Perhaps explanations along the lines of Reginald's above, in terms of Cuthbert's saintly body, had some explanatory power at the time. Nevertheless Reginald's explanation of Farne seems as much a rationalisation of the cult at Farne as does an application of Finucane's notion of 'holy radioactivity' to the place.

Farne was not simply an anomalous local holy site, but became known beyond Northumbria. A Flemish woman comes to Farne but is outraged by the local misogyny which forbids women to enter the oratory.⁷⁴ A miracle of Saint Cuthbert which occurred in Flanders is recorded in the anonymous collection of Bartholomew's stories.⁷⁵ Farne was a centre to which people came on pilgrimage, and brought the hermit of Farne news of Cuthbert's miracles from far away. Perhaps this indicates that Farne had a convenient location within North Sea trade routes, but it remains remarkable. Farne had a local following, a regional following of all social groups, and due to the sea perhaps, even some international fame. In one sense Farne does partly resemble Saint Patrick's Purgatory; it was an obscure local sacred place that had unaccountably drawn wider fame. It was this fame that probably encouraged the Durham writers to record the stories of the place, when they had not shown such interest earlier in the century.

Apart from the three healing miracles which conclude the Bartholomew's *Vita*, the hermits of Farne were not themselves the source of such virtue.⁷⁶ This is in great contrast to Godric of Finchale, from whom healing miracles from his 'rustic belt', his bread and even a hair of his beard, were prominent even before his death.⁷⁷ The hermits of Farne were simply overshadowed by the presence of Saint Cuthbert on the island. In one respect however, Bartholomew was

⁷⁴ *Vita Bart.* ch. 16, p. 309.

⁷⁵ *Miracles of Farne*, ch. 12, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁶ *Vita Bart.* chs. 34-6; one unidentified man was cured of a year long fever, a woman was cured of madness, and a brother of Lindisfarne was cured of a swelling of the neck. The monks were clearly initially keen to promote a cult of Bartholomew on the island. Given that the anonymous collection makes no mention of the hermit's virtue in this respect, the nascent cult would seem to have fizzled out very quickly. The three miracles might have been attributed to Cuthbert, were it not necessary to provide a holy man with posthumous miracles, particularly if a *vita* was being written.

⁷⁷ See above, Chapter VI, p. 223; for an analysis of the posthumous cult of Godric see Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, pp. 126-7, pp. 142-3, and pp. 166-7, and B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (London 1982), pp. 80-2.

able to fulfil the same role as Godric did at Finchale. Just as healing miracles arose naturally from wishful thinking, so also, visions could be created by the appropriate social context. Holy men could have a powerful comforting influence, encouraging 'spiritual' events of great personal importance, as when Godric cured a Cistercian monk of temptations.⁷⁸ Even Reginald reports that he wept when Godric told him of a vision in which the old hermit sang with Saint Nicholas and the angels.⁷⁹ There was a certain predisposition to believe in the reality of such things, and Reginald weeps that the heaviness of his sins prevented him from seeing the same things as Godric. However, Reginald is later rewarded with a vision, whose content had been predicted by Godric.⁸⁰

Bartholomew had his visions too, and helped visiting monks through their visions of demons and angels.⁸¹ However, lay people too were evidently capable of seeing visions. One group, composed of men and women, was marooned on Farne during bad weather, and was clearly in a state of some anxiety concerning provisions. Some of the group saw Cuthbert marching around the island, and gesturing to them to reassure them of his protection. Some went to the hermit to report this, while others were adamant that they had not seen the saint at all. Bartholomew came and made the whole group pray all night, until the morning, when the storm abated, and all present agreed upon the saint's miraculous gift to them.⁸² There is a prosaic undercurrent to this story, which perhaps says more concerning the social production of spiritual visions than many such stories. As some of a group of people were initially enthusiastic to see a vision, Bartholomew as a holy man could convince the group as a whole to accept the miraculous. The hermit here appears to be fostering the cult of Cuthbert through using and understanding lay people's own religious enthusiasm.

⁷⁸ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 141, no. 256, (pp. 270-1).

⁷⁹ *ibid.* ch. 93, no. 192, (pp. 202-3).

⁸⁰ *ibid.* ch. 107, no. 211-2, (pp. 223-4).

⁸¹ Geoffrey also makes note of the holy lights that appear on Farne which appear to Bartholomew and William. The latter was the hermit's attendant in old age: *Vita Bart.* chs. 26 and 27, pp. 316-18.

⁸² *Reg. Libellus*, ch. 31, pp. 70-2. This is a misogynist story as well. At first it is a man who sees Cuthbert; the doubters are some of the women, while other women, out of greater 'conscience of private chastity' manage to see the saint; p. 71.

Bartholomew was not just an organiser of lay people's hallucinations, he was a story teller, and his stories may have done much to foster the cult there. Bartholomew's predecessor on Farne, Aelric, seems to have been a foil for Bartholomew's narrative creativity. Aelric appears in three miracles in Reginald's collection and was remembered independently by the Durham community; Reginald reports that his nephew was a sacrist of the cathedral.⁸³ However, one of Aelric's Cuthbertine miracles, involving some wax stolen by a raven, was told in modified terms by Geoffrey as one of Bartholomew's miracles. Geoffrey writes that Bartholomew had told the story under Aelric's name out of humility, while the miracle truly happened through his own virtue.⁸⁴ Reginald gives no witness for this story of the raven and the wax, which occurs on its own in the collection. The other two Aelric stories appear earlier and together in the collection, and Reginald gives Aelric and his servant Leving as witnesses to the first of these. It does thus appear plausible that the wax and raven story was indeed Bartholomew's own creation, consciously adding to the miraculous memory of his predecessor. The two other miracles involving Aelric concern eiderducks and sailors, two dominant strands in the miraculous tradition of Farne in Bartholomew's own period. Bartholomew was not the creator of the miraculous traditions of Farne, but was a keen custodian of existing local traditions.

Bartholomew appears as a mediator of conflicts and a mediator of culture. As a mediator of conflicts, his qualities are discussed in general terms by Geoffrey; Bartholomew censures the rich, 'the rumour of whose savagery had reached him'.⁸⁵ The rich were terrified when they came to see him, and were brought to rid themselves of '*munus illicitum*', to stop their injury of the poor, and to give alms. For the poor 'he brought forth pious bowls of compassion', and told them to be patient. Perhaps these general qualities may not represent much more than Geoffrey's rhetoric, although they are more trenchant than strictly necessary for such passages. However, Bartholomew's sympathies are probably best revealed by the miracle stories which are distinctive enough to be

⁸³ *ibid.* ch. 27, p. 61. The three Aelric miracles are chs. 27, 28 and 78.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* ch. 78, pp. 162-3; *Vita Bart.* ch. 17, pp. 309-10.

⁸⁵ *Vita Bart.* ch. 10, p. 303.

most clearly his own creations. The extra story the hermit created for Aelric involves a poor local couple, who come to Saint Cuthbert for help. Aelric received a gift of a small piece of wax from the poor couple, but through a misunderstanding this gift is left on a rock outside the hermit's cell. The hermit and the poor man emerge from the cell only to see a raven making off with the precious offering. Forthwith the hermit falls to his knees, imploring saintly intervention: 'Holy Cuthbert, where now are your merits of virtue and power?' The hermit demands 'the patronage of his piety' and tells the raven to return with the 'booty of his robbery'. Of course the raven does, so the mediation of the hermit, and Cuthbert's care for the least of his faithful, is vindicated.

The point of this story cannot be so much to encourage tiny gifts to the monastery, as to assure the very poor that their devotion is recognized and appreciated by the saint. The poor probably felt a need to give a gift in return for spiritual services. Reginald presents the poor couple not as rustic *imbecilles*, as he calls their kind in his preface, but as dignified poor '*de multitudine*'.⁸⁶ Geoffrey attributed a very different meaning to the story from Reginald, and changed the details significantly. The givers of the gift are indicated simply as 'sailors' and have no other role. The miracle is achieved simply because otherwise the little gift would be lost to the use of the church. Geoffrey reduces the story to a demonstration of Bartholomew's *virtus* in his saintly control of the raven. It seems likely that Reginald's version of the story was closer in intent at least to the story originally told by Bartholomew. The original context of Bartholomew's story can only be imagined, and Reginald's purpose in recording the story would have differed from Bartholomew's purpose in telling it. Nevertheless, it is significant that this story, which out of all the Farne stories is most clearly the hermit's own, was concerned with the poor neighbours of Farne. In the original context of Bartholomew's stories, details and message would have had to appeal to and convince local people. Thus Bartholomew must have been at ease with the stories and beliefs of the local rural population, as equally he could talk to literate monks in their own cultural idiom. This is not to say that there was a cultural iron curtain between the

⁸⁶ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 78, p. 163.

two groups, simply that their respective stories and beliefs would have differed considerably, as much as they overlapped.

In these terms another distinctive Farne story may hint at aspects of the local beliefs concerning Farne. A young labourer, Richard of Sunderland, was bonded to a *paterfamilias* in Ellingham, both places being near to Farne.⁸⁷ Richard was sent on an errand by his master, and on the road is kidnapped by three young men dressed in green 'beautiful of stature and of countenance', on green clothed horses; 'and they came to a valley which opened to them of its own accord. So Richard was led into the desert [*in desertum*] by a spirit of fantasy, that he might be tempted.' Here he finds a 'diabolical convent', whose members seem rather like fairies. They finally force him to drink a kind of ale from a green horn. But 'he remembered the sermons he had heard while he was among men, and what popular opinion [*vulgaris opinio*] handed down about things of this kind'. Protected by his simple faith, he is returned to the world, albeit dumb. Alongside his family, living opposite Farne, he gazes longingly towards the island, and is finally cured there, after Bartholomew gives him holy water. There are two hermitages in this story; the evil desert of the fairies and the holy island of Farne. The comparison of Farne and the fairy desert may have been a conceit of the author, but equally the comparison could have been made by Bartholomew in his telling of the story for a popular audience. The hermitage, whether evil or holy, was associated with the terrors and wonders of the spirit world. Perhaps both the complexities and conflicts of human communities and their wish for harmony, are given expression in the opposites associated with the holy hermitage and the evil wilderness. Also it is possible that such a contradiction encouraged the notion of Farne as a local 'purgatory'.

It is likely that demonic abduction was a general 'popular' explanation for some other event, related to disease, or violence perhaps. There is a similar abduction story in Reginald, of a child kidnapped by 'evil spirits', taken to 'foreign kingdoms', and losing his

⁸⁷ *Miracles of Farne*, ch. 6, pp. 14-16; Richard is described as being '*humili genere progenitus, cuidam de Ellingham marcennarii servicio fuerat mancipatus*'. Perhaps Richard is a serf of some kind, but it is probably unwise to draw any precise legalistic conclusions from the story concerning the relative status of Richard and his master.

sense of reason. Eventually he is cured in Durham Cathedral.⁸⁸ The famous 'green children' in William of Newburgh are another case where a 'fairy' story may be hiding violence against the young, or some other social disruption which was covered up by a wonder story.⁸⁹ William reports this story as an attested event for his own reasons, but again the story would have had a different meaning in its local context. Gerald of Wales tells a lighthearted story of a child who runs away to little fairies because he had been too often beaten by his teacher.⁹⁰ All these stories are very different from each other, but as a result they point to the mythology of fairies being a living part of popular culture, rather than being a stable *topos* of literate monks. One aspect which does connect the stories is the detail of violence against the young. It is thus possible to speculate about the original function of Bartholomew's story. When the young man disappears his master goes to look for him at his parents' home, whose distress is given long treatment. Richard, when he reappears, is evidently allowed to remain at home, and the master abruptly ceases to be a part of the story. The young man cannot speak until he is taken to Farne where he tells the hermit his story. Note that the refusal to speak can be a form of protest. If 'fairy stories' were connected with violence against the young, perhaps the telling of such stories was a recognised form of social shaming directed against the perpetrator. In this case the story would also have a socio-economic dimension of conflict between poor and rich peasants. Thus it would be possible in this story to see Bartholomew's practice of 'censuring the rich'.

It is unusual for the 'green' men in this story to be so richly described; it is likely that such mythological creatures were usually reduced to nondescript demons. This process is demonstrable in the various versions of Godric's *Life*. Reginald records one story in which a naked, hairy and dumb creature approaches Finchale.⁹¹ The

⁸⁸ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 122, pp. 268-9.

⁸⁹ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, vol. I, Bk. I, ch. 27, *De viridibus pueris*, pp. 82-4.

⁹⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, RS 21, vol. 6, ed. James F. Dimock (London 1868); Bk I, ch. 8, pp. 72-8; the fairy tale is from p. 75.

⁹¹ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 135, no. 248, (pp. 261-2); Reginald may have been embarrassed by this story, giving a clerical witness who only appears in one other story; ch. 138. Reginald does not normally give a witness to a story experienced by Godric alone.

creature is clearly a typical wild man.⁹² The very same story appears in Geoffrey's summary of Godric, but the creature is simply a nondescript devil.⁹³ The appearance of such mythological creatures as wild men is part of Reginald's presentation of Godric. This hermit is a purveyor of stories of all the weird and wonderful mythological 'hairy' creatures which infest the wilderness.⁹⁴ For Reginald there is a contradiction between Godric's rusticness and his paradoxical and therefore miraculous sophistication. Godric believes in all these marvellous creatures and is yet able to speak French and understand Latin.⁹⁵ Thus it is no accident that Reginald should embark upon a long description of monopods, hairy little demons, and large hairy demons; they are needed for his characterisation of Godric. The appearance of elves in one of Bartholomew's stories may thus indicate a similar disjunction in culture between the hermit of Farne and the sophisticated hagiographers of Durham. Bartholomew probably had a foot in both worlds. On the one hand, he was enough part of a literate culture to create his self-deprecating joke concerning his pet gull and the Elijah *topos*.⁹⁶ On the other hand, he was enough a part of rural lay culture to create or connive in a story of elvish abduction.

Durham's literary interest in its hermits was partly motivated by a wish to mould the beliefs and religious loyalty of the 'multitude'. As part of that interest, some elements of popular culture appear in the miracle stories of Farne and Finchale. The hermits themselves seem to have occupied an intermediate position between the mentality of the literate monks and Reginald's *imbecilles* and *idiotae*. Although it is dangerous to make any rigid distinction in culture and beliefs between the rural poor and the literate elite,

⁹² For a discussion on the image of the wild man see Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology* (Cambridge, Mass. 1952), pp. 1-20.

⁹³ *Vita Godrici Gal.* ch. 5, no. 58, (pp. 81-2). The narrative of the story, which appears curiously incomplete in Reginald, is given a standard 'temptation' spin in Geoffrey.

⁹⁴ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 90, nos. 187-8, (pp. 196-8).

⁹⁵ For Godric's miraculous sophistication or his facility with educated languages see *ibid.* ch. 79, no. 170, (pp. 179-80), where he understands Latin. Also ch. 94, nos. 193-4, (pp. 203-4) and ch. 96, no. 196, (pp. 206-7), where he understands French. Considering Godric's years of travel it should not have surprised Reginald that Godric could have picked up French and a good deal of Latin.

⁹⁶ See below, Chapter II, p. 69.

Reginald for one clearly perceived a gulf of difference in mind and in culture. The hermits, as men separate from and adaptable to both sides of this medieval social divide, were just the figures likely to appeal to many different social groups, and to be able to talk to them in the language that appealed to each group. The recurrent question in this chapter has been the relative importance of 'popular' and monastic influence on the stories recorded for Farne. A case has been made for the existence of 'popular' stories of the local holy place, beginning with the evidence of local lay reverence for Farne, independent of the monks. There was a succession of hermits, the best known of whom, Bartholomew, appears to be a figure who could develop and transmit 'popular' stories. He was not entirely a product of monastic culture, and probably had more sympathy with 'folklore' than did a hagiographer like Reginald. Nevertheless, the key question remains the extent to which the extant stories showed literate or popular preoccupations; the stories, as they exist, are the product of relationships between the two cultural poles. The interaction of the monastic and the popular in miracle stories can be disentangled through the stories of saints and animals. This kind of story has a long and vigorous history in hagiography, and is abundant in the stories recorded of both Farne and Finchale.

Chapter IV: Animals and Saints From The *Vitae Patrum* To Farne and Finchale

i) Introduction

The animal and saint stories of Farne and Finchale are crucial to the social context of Durham's twelfth-century hermits, yet such stories have a long and complex history within the hagiographic tradition.¹ Twelfth century writers remained deeply indebted to that tradition, which makes the task of relating the twelfth-century stories to their contemporary culture very difficult. Thus, before the discussion can return to Farne and Finchale, a detailed account of animal and saint stories in hagiography, from its origins to the twelfth century, needs to be established. Also, modern historians have increasingly invested such stories with significance for the development of medieval views of 'nature', with the twelfth century often being seen as a crucial period of change.² Treating animal and saint stories in the context of a complete critique of a society's conceptions of nature and culture becomes, however, an impossibly open ended pursuit. In this chapter I will concentrate as closely as possible on the structure of such stories, with little reference to other kinds of record which may be of interest to a general debate on the understanding of 'Nature' or 'Creation' in medieval culture and thought.

Nevertheless, historians have consistently regarded animal and saint stories in the context of attitudes to nature. Though perhaps only in England would a noted historian write a pamphlet for an animal rights interest group noting; 'the early saints repeatedly laid stress on the fact that animals have their own rights, which should be respected'.³ Beneath the light-hearted charm with which historians have often approached the subject, opinion seems, perhaps

¹ The subject has also always fascinated historians. One nineteenth-century example is Charles F. R. Count de Montalembert, *The Monks of The West; From St. Benedict to St. Bernard*, 6 vols. (London 1896), II, pp. 185-237.

² Two ambitious books on the history of the interaction of 'culture' and 'nature', which both give some attention to the subject of saints and animals are Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on The Rhodian Shore; Nature and Culture in Western Thought From Ancient Times to The End of The Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley 1967), pp. 213-15 and pp. 288-318, and Francis Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought* (London 1971), pp. 344-350.

³ Rosalind Hill, *Both Small and Great Beasts* (London 1953), p. 6.

unsurprisingly, divided on whether the hagiographic tradition shows a delightful oneness with nature or a brutal western Christian attitude of domination. Rosalind Hill expresses one point of view that still can be heard; 'One of the most striking features of medieval hagiography is indeed the frequency with which saints are described as having a special care for or understanding of beasts and birds. This trait of sanctity, commonly but erroneously supposed to have originated with Saint Francis, is in reality very much older.'⁴ Probably few would now give Saint Francis the honour of being the one saint whose own genius led him to discover an entirely new Christian sympathy for non-human creation and its creatures.⁵ Indeed for some the 'love of birds and beasts, so evident in the bestiaries, despite their cumbrous didactic and allegorical form, also marks other strictly religious works of the Later Middle Ages.'⁶ Thus many historians seem to have fallen into the trap of trying to determine to what degree particular saints actually liked 'nature' or animals, on the basis of the saint's encounters with animals.

A much more nuanced view of these problems lies in Joyce Salisbury's work on medieval social or cultural perceptions of animals, and the boundaries between the human and the beastly.⁷ Salisbury's contention is that the twelfth century saw a growing ambiguity between the human and the animal, where for the

⁴ *ibid.* p. 5. Also, Jan Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry* (Philadelphia 1993), notes the 'happy consequences' of anthropomorphic understandings of animals in saints' *Vitae*, pp. 32-4.

⁵ The idea that Saint Francis stood outside Christian tradition in regard to animals was once axiomatic. Rosalind Hill's objection to this position may be regarded with some sympathy. One old textbook, Alan C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion* (New York 1941), p. 39, states: 'To Hebrews man is the Lord of creation, ordained to have dominion over non-human organic life, and in this respect the Franciscan attitude- "our sisters the birds"- is not Hebraic. The gospels are perhaps neutral in this matter, and Saint Francis doubtless derives his friendliness towards animals and birds from eastern mysticism'. The discussion on Saint Francis has been developed much more systematically since this book, but even recently a sense of Saint Francis' separateness from hagiographic tradition has remained; see Roger D. Sorrell, *Saint Francis and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes to The Environment* (Oxford 1988). Sorrell puts the legends of Francis much more carefully into the context of hagiographic tradition and of medieval culture than do earlier historians, but does argue that Francis represented a new sympathy and connection with nature and animals than earlier Christian tradition. Sorrell allows that Francis may not have been alone in this position during his period.

⁶ Glacken, *Rhodian Shore*, p. 343.

⁷ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in The Middle Ages* (London 1994), on saints see particularly pp. 168-76.

previous centuries there had been firm and stable boundaries. One interesting indication of increased anxiety concerning the interaction of human and animal is in the increasing penalties in penitential legislation for the sin of bestiality.⁸ However, Salisbury's arguments lead her to posit a dramatic change around the twelfth century in saintly attitudes to animals. She writes that 'in the early medieval saints' *Lives*, the prevailing miraculous interaction between saints and animals was that saints frequently demonstrated the power to suspend the bestial nature of animals in their presence.⁹ But in the twelfth century when animals were no longer seen to be so profoundly different from humans, saints' behaviour changed towards animals; there was now an 'inclination of saints to save animals' lives. This does not appear in the early *Lives*, and it would have been virtually inconceivable. . . to save the life of an animal without expecting a human return for it assumes that the animal's life has some intrinsic value beyond its service for humanity.¹⁰

Salisbury's summary of the patristic tradition in this respect does include some central themes, such as obedience and the reversal of wild instincts. However, it is not as easy as all that to distinguish the early saints from twelfth-century and later saints. Saint Martin, not a saint particularly noted for his interactions with animals, is said nevertheless to have saved a hare exhausted by its long run from huntsmen's dogs:

'The blessed man through his pious judgement took compassion on it in its danger and ordered the dogs to leave off following it and let the fugitive get away. They pulled up at once, at the first words of the order. . . And so, with its pursuers pinned down, the little hare got safely away.'¹¹

There is no reversal of bestial nature here, or any service rendered by the hare to the saint. Equally there is the story of Saint Columba

⁸ *ibid.* pp. 89-94, and on bestiality in general, pp. 84-101.

⁹ *ibid.* p. 172.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 174

¹¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, PL 20, cols. 183-222; Dialogue II, ch. 9, col. 208, trans. F. R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers* (London 1954), p. 115. Otherwise Saint Martin's interactions with nature do indeed show him to be 'exercising power over nature, not sympathy with it'; Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer* (Oxford 1983), p. 156.

in which he ordered a monk to tend to a tired crane, who was a 'pilgrim' from the 'land of our fathers'. The crane is tended for three days, to no reward to the humans. The question of its wildness or otherwise is not mentioned, and eventually it flies off back to Ireland, unmarked by saintly kindness.¹² The latter is a particularly atypical story, and the miracle in it concerns Columba's power of prophecy rather than his control of animals. It must be admitted that, despite these two examples, it is far easier to find examples of early saints behaving in a fashion which would support Salisbury's argument.

Turning towards later saints, it is easy to be misled by the surface appearance of a story if the hagiographic tradition is not taken into account. One of Salisbury's examples of the new twelfth-century saintly concern for animals is Gerald of Wales' famous story of the Irish Saint Kevin and the blackbird. Kevin was a 'great confessor of the faith, and abbot.' However, during Lent the abbot had a habit of fleeing 'the society of men', and was by himself in a sort of hermitage;

'He was giving his attention to contemplation and was reading and praying. According to his custom he put out his hand, in raising it to heaven out through the window, when behold, a blackbird happened to settle on it, and using it as a nest, laid its eggs there. The saint was moved with such pity and was so patient with it that he neither closed nor withdrew his hand, but held it out in a suitable position without tiring until the young were completely hatched out.'¹³

¹² *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. Alan O. and Marjorie O. Anderson (London 1961), Bk. 1, ch. 48, pp. 312-15. As in the story of Martin quoted above this story is atypical of Columba's relations with animals; as Adomnan says 'with Christ's help, he checked the raging fury of wild beasts, by killing some and strongly repelling others', pp. 195-4. Adomnan groups together three other stories on animals explicitly as a minor category of miracle. In succession, Columba commands a hunted boar to die, (it does so, of course), perhaps demonstrating the superiority of saintly as opposed to secular power. He then frightens away a predaceous sea creature, impressing a group of pagan barbarians, and finally makes the snakes of Iona unable to harm the monks there; *ibid.* Bk. 2, chs. 26-8, pp. 384-91.

¹³ Gerald of Wales, *Historia Topographica Hiberniensis*, ed. James F. Dimock, *RS* 21, vol. 5 (1867), part 2, ch. 61, (pp. 113-6), blackbird, p. 116; trans. John O'Meara, *Gerald of Wales: The History and Topography of Ireland* (London 1951), pp. 77-8.

This story may well be felt to demonstrate a wonder for nature and a sense of the value of the animal life. However, this is a very modern reaction to the story, which does not take into account the possibility of allegory and hagiographic rhetoric. It might be objected that Gerald of Wales was writing here as a chronicler, rather than as a hagiographer, and that the story could be a folktale. Certainly, Gerald himself claimed that none of the material in the first two sections was derived from written sources.¹⁴ If we accept Gerald's word for this, there is still no reason to suppose that the story was not a piece of hagiographical literature in oral form, told to Gerald by monks or clerics. There is no question that Gerald would have understood the rhetorical and spiritual devices in the story, and been able to record it much as it was told to him. In terms of the hagiographic form the story is very effective in summarising key virtues of patience and pity, essential in an abbot dealing with all the irritating monks in his care. The story could thus even be seen as an allegory of the heroic qualities needed for an abbot.¹⁵

If we consider Saint Kevin as a heroic ascetic and hermit then there is further allegorical resonance. Firstly the story itself concerns the saint's heroic ascetic endurance not his wonder for nature as such. The saint was so engrossed in contemplation and love of God, that he was oblivious to the carnal world about him, and could thereafter endure the torment inflicted upon him by the carnal world. Of course, the torment of the carnal world is so lyrically described, that this allegory does not exclude a sense of wonder for nature being part of the sensibility of the story. Secondly, however, the story should be seen in terms of the great depth of hagiographic symbolism. Earlier animal stories provide some clues to the allegorical significance of the blackbird nesting in the praying hermit's outstretched hands; animals can be indications of a saint's own state of sin or grace. Thus one of the patristic Egyptian hermits attempted to get himself eaten by a lion, because of his remorse for an earlier sin. The lion 'as if endowed by reason' leapt over the

¹⁴ O'Meara, *Topography of Ireland*, p. 17.

¹⁵ There is no reason to suppose that the *Rule of Benedict* was a direct source for these admired qualities, but nevertheless note, ch. 4, 'The Tools for Good Works', admonition 30, 'Do not injure anyone, but bear injuries patiently', and 14-19 on compassion for those in distress.

prostrate holy man, without even hurting him, thus showing the hermit that God, who controls animals, had forgiven him his sin.¹⁶

That story alone may not appear on the surface to have much to do with Saint Kevin. However another story from the corpus of legend bequeathed to the twelfth century by Late Antiquity, highlights the mental landscape which informed the story of Saint Kevin. An Egyptian hermit lost grace in lusting after the daughter of a pagan priest. This loss was represented physically by a dove flying out of his mouth. In remorse for his sin the holy man redoubled his ascetic efforts, and after three weeks of continuous prayer and fasting, was rewarded while at prayer by the return of grace. The bird landed first on his head, then perched in his hand, and finally flew back into the monk's mouth.¹⁷ The symbolism of the Saint Kevin story seems clear in comparison with the patristic tale; both are allegories of the reception of grace of a heroic ascetic. The meaning of Gerald's twelfth-century story lies in monastic rhetoric and allegory, and is by no means a clear example of a 'new attitude' of twelfth-century saints towards animals. If at some level there is still a sense of wonder for nature in the vivid picture of Saint Kevin and the bird, then the same sense of wonder cannot be denied to the patristic story. The wonder is itself part of the rhetoric which validates an allegorical tale. In fact it should hardly surprise the historian that examples can be found from any period of some sort of sympathetic, appreciative regard towards wild animals. However, if changes in a society's attitude towards nature are to be found through the deeds of saints, then closer attention must be paid to the literary traditions of hagiography and the spiritual and rhetorical depth of these stories. Animal stories were not written to charm modern historians.

In order to understand the significance of twelfth-century animal and saint miracles, each story must be seen within the monastic culture which saw fit to record it. A miracle story is more likely to be recorded if it follows the pattern of the literate tradition, yet a story may also be actively adapted to that tradition, if it had its

¹⁶ John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, PL 74, cols. 123-240, *Vita Pardi Monachi Romani*, ch. 101, cols. 169-170.

¹⁷ *Verba Seniorum*, PL 73, cols. 855-1062; ch. 38, cols. 884-5. It might be objected that this is a rather obscure story from the *Vitae Patrum*, but it was in fact known and used at least once in England in the eleventh century; see Constance L. Rosenthal, *The Vitae Patrum in Old and Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia 1936), p. 62.

origin in a somewhat different mentality. However, finding that a story is related to *topoi* of the past does not invalidate its importance to its contemporary culture. There are many *topoi* available in the hagiographic tradition, and the relative use of each in itself may hint at changing concerns and attitudes in the twelfth century. With these problems in mind, it is necessary to provide an overview of the traditions that would likely have influenced twelfth-century English hagiographers.¹⁸ The *Vitae Patrum* in various forms would have been a standard influence on western European monks in the twelfth century and within this material there is a wide range of legends. A crocodile acted as a ferry for Abbot Helenus, and then obediently died on the saint's orders, apparently for its own sake; it would not then 'suffer the penalty for the slaughter of souls'.¹⁹ A monk of Sapsas fed a lion by hand in his cell.²⁰ A contrasting story is of the holy man who lay down in front of a lion in the hope it would eat him. The lion carefully jumped over him, thus showing the man that God had forgiven his sins.²¹ A whole host of different attitudes towards animals and different spiritual themes could be drawn from these above stories, but there are underlying themes which link these disparate stories into a coherent early hagiographic mentality. This discussion cannot be a full treatment of animal stories within early hagiography in its own terms, rather early hagiography is viewed from the perspective of its influence on later centuries. Thus the material of the *Vitae Patrum* is arranged in terms of common themes within the animal miracle type, rather than in terms of all the possible influences of late antique writers upon

¹⁸ Thus while the stories in Irish and Breton *vitae* might, at many points, be considered relevant to the twelfth-century material considered here, I have excluded them from discussion as it is unlikely that many of them were known to Northumbrian twelfth-century hagiographers.

¹⁹ Paladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, PL 73, cols. 1085-1218, ch. 59, cols. 1167-8; trans. Helen Waddell, *Beasts and Saints* (London 1934), pp. 20-1. While in one sense this story fits neatly within hagiographic patterns, taken literally, it also is very peculiar, as it seems to imply that Helenus was assuming the crocodile had a soul that could suffer a 'penalty'. It is otherwise hard to see what worse penalty the creature could suffer, than being killed. It is perhaps meant to be understood as an allegory, in which case the crocodile is really a man.

²⁰ John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, ch. 2, col. 123. Although the *Pratum Spirituale* is an early seventh-century work, from the point of view of twelfth-century writers who may have read it, it can be fairly classified with the earlier patristic writings.

²¹ *ibid.* ch. 101, cols. 169-70.

each other. Each theme will be followed through to the twelfth century, where convenient, to show the various contexts in which it was used over the centuries.

Firstly it must be admitted that stories of miraculous associations of animals and heroes do not begin with Christianity. classical legend certainly contributed to the stock of Christian legends, whether through general cultural continuity or specific literary borrowing. The hero Pancrates swam with crocodiles, who fawned on him and wagged their tails, thus proving to the author that he was a holy man.²² This story is reminiscent of Pachomius and Helenus and their adventures with crocodiles, among other stories.²³ But in the *Vitae Patrum*, the crocodiles' obedience to Pachomius, who was in need of ferrying across a river, is evidence of the monk's exemplary faith, and Pachomius thus prays to God to teach him to do His will. Whatever kind of continuity there may be between the Classical and Christian stories, it is clear that considerable adaptation takes place within the context of Christian writing. Thus literary continuity is important, but does not tell us how a story was used in its own context; with these kind of legends, similar wondrous 'events' can have quite different moral or social meanings.

ii) An Early *Topos* : Elijah and the Ravens

As a direct contributor to the stock of 'saints and animals' stories, the Old Testament is relatively weak. Only one episode stands out; while Elijah was hiding outside Jordan, 'the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening'.²⁴ The motif of the saint fed by animals, as agents of God, even symbolic angels, was to appeal consistently to medieval writers. Jerome had Paul of Thebes fed by a raven, which brought him half a

²² From Lucian's *Philopseudes*, cited in Stancliffe, *St. Martin*, pp. 197-8.

Another discussion of Classical influence upon Christian stories of saints and animals is Maureen A. Tillery, 'Martyrs, Monks, Insects and Animals', in *The Medieval World of Nature*, ed. Joyce Salisbury (London 1993), pp. 93-108; pp. 94-96.

²³ For Helenus, see above n. 19; for Pachomius see, *Vita S. Pachomii*, PL 73, cols. 229-72; ch. 19, col. 241.

²⁴ *1 Kings 17:6* ; for one analysis of the Old Testament's influence on medieval literature see Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, pp. 33-4.

loaf every day for sixty years.²⁵ The hairy anchorite Paul in the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, who has many similarities to Jerome's Paul, is brought a fish every third day for thirty years by an otter, a more appropriate animal for the sea, perhaps.²⁶ While on a preaching mission, Saint Cuthbert and a companion are brought food by an eagle, acting as a *ministra*.²⁷ Cuthbert is unusual in leaving some of the food for the eagle; such stories do not usually contain any degree of reciprocity. In another story involving the miraculous provision of food, Bede has Cuthbert refer directly to the Elijah story; 'and from that day he became readier than ever to fast, because indeed he understood clearly that this food had been provided for him in a solitary place, by the gift of Him who once for many days fed Elijah in solitude, with food of the same kind, through the ministrations of birds, there being no man there to minister to him.'²⁸

From twelfth-century Wales, there is a very pure version of the Elijah *topos* in the *Vita* of the island hermit Elgar who 'had nothing for food, except the supplies for him, through the will of God, of the protection of the divine creator, that is from the sea, and the eagles, or, as we may say, angels.'²⁹ When the eagles did not bring

²⁵ Jerome, *Vita Pauli Eremitae*, ch. 10, cols. 25-6. Anchorites in the *Vitae Patrum* are more normally fed by actual angels, rather than animals masquerading as angels.

²⁶ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, ed. Carl Selmer, (University of Notre Dame 1959), ch. 26, pp. 74-5, trans. John O'Meara, *The Voyage of St. Brendan*, (Gerrards Cross 1976), p. 64.

²⁷ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 12, pp. 194-7; the same story is told in the *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* as Bk. 2, ch. 5, pp. 84-7.

²⁸ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 5, pp. 168-71.

²⁹ *Liber Landavensis*, ed. and trans. W. J. Rees (Llandoverly 1840), p. 5. Elgar's 'Vita' appears as the prologue of the work, a combination of hagiography and charter material, pp. 3-7. While Elgar presumably did exist, there is no indication of when he lived given in the little *Vita*. The story given of his life relates that he was born in Devon, taken prisoner by pirates and made a slave in Ireland. After his first master's death, he was forced to become an executioner, but gained his liberty and became a sailor. Thus he was shipwrecked on this Welsh island, the site of the bodies of 'twenty thousand holy confessors and martyrs', and free from snakes, frogs, and untimely death. The story shows a curious mix of idiosyncratic, and thus relatively convincing detail, and legend of a patristic flavour. This mix suggests that Elgar was quite real, and relatively fresh in oral memory. The motif of extreme eremitical withdrawal, after a life of terrible sin, has some precedent in the *Vitae Patrum*. Yet the story is also very disjointed and superficially contradictory, as if little was known about the hermit. Much of the oddity of the *Vita* could be explained if the details of his life had been held in oral memory for a long time. There are references to people like the teacher Caradog, who was still remembered at the time of writing, though no other references to such a person remain.

him fish, by divine command, he found a dead stag, which oddly enough God commanded him to eat, even though it was not his custom.³⁰ Even though all these examples have their own eccentricities, their relation to the Biblical story is fairly clear, even more so when it is noted that the common theme is very marked. Trust in providence and obedience to God's will, by the perfect anchorite, is the common moral or exemplary point.

The animals in the 'Elijah *topos*' stories are purely ciphers for God's providence, with the partial exception of Cuthbert's eagle, whose animal needs are recognised and satisfied. Indeed, Cuthbert uses the incident for a sermon on this theme to his companion; 'Learn, my dear son, always to have faith and trust in the Lord; for he who serves God faithfully never perishes of hunger'.³¹ This episode in Bede's Cuthbert is particularly suggestive of monastic literate culture. Even as an event occurs, the monk would seize upon literary precedents and thus reveal its spiritual significance, automatically making 'reality' into a *topos*. Of course, it is Bede who recorded the miracle, and Cuthbert's sermons in Bede and the anonymous *Vita* are very different in form, if not particularly so in their fundamental meaning. Nevertheless, while Bede was writing in the style of a Gregorian dialogue, it is reasonable to suppose that he was reflecting the mentality of the monks of his time. Two monks might, in a less formal, and certainly less miraculous, fashion, have the same sort of experience and discussion as did Cuthbert and his companion. Thus the *topos* operates as a means by which monks make sense of their own experiences, and give spiritual meaning to the myriad accidents of life.

That the Elijah *topos* was then part of a living language of monastic culture is clear by the clutch of miracles in the two *Vitae* of

Given the nature of oral memory, with its three generation standard of reliability, and given how the *Vita* accords with a relatively fresh, but already deteriorating precise knowledge, the writer could have been in the third generation after the living witness to events. Given that the work seems to have been early twelfth-century, this would, speculatively, place Elgar in the early eleventh century. At first sight it is unclear why this hermit's life can function as a preface to the compendium. Elgar seems to have been the only saint in the collection who could be said to exist within living memory. Thus the memory of Elgar functioned as a link to the memory of the older saints, who were more central to the compendium's purpose.

³⁰ *ibid.* pp. 6-7.

³¹ *Vita Cuthberti.*, pp. 196-7.

Cuthbert which all relate to that *topos* ; the miracle of the eagle, the miracle of the dolphin's flesh, and the miracle of Cuthbert's fasting and provision of food in the wild.³² Specific reference to Elijah is made by the anonymous writer and by Bede at different points. Bede refers to Elijah in the chapter on Cuthbert's dedication to fasting. The anonymous author refers to Elijah in the chapter involving the three pieces of dolphin flesh, found while stranded among the Picts;

'And he glorified God because He then bestowed flesh upon the man of God with the same mercy as He had once bestowed it in the desert upon Elijah, and because, inspired by the same Spirit, Cuthbert foresaw the tempest and the calm, just as the Apostle Paul did in the Acts of the Apostles when he prophesied to the voyagers.'³³

Each had his own reasons to invoke Elijah for different miracles, and stages in Cuthbert's life. The anonymous writer was concerned, in this case, simply to link Cuthbert's power of prophecy to Biblical precedent. Bede, however, referred to Elijah in reference to Cuthbert's 'stricter course of life' and was clearly comparing the saint's activity to eremitical withdrawal, even as the saint is on a preaching mission. Elijah bridged the gap between Cuthbert's solitary ascetic tendency and his pastoral duties at this stage in his life. Neither hagiographer needs to refer to Elijah in the context of the eagle story; referring directly to Elijah is to draw attention to a formal argument concerning the life of the holy man.

The twelfth-century Welsh legend of the hermit Elgar is a different case. While the legend stays very close to the theme of the anchorite heroically obeying God's will, such an extreme story of the anchorite who 'led his life, present to the Lord, and unknown to man', is unusual for the twelfth century. Against that, it may be objected that there is plenty of precedent within the *Vitae Patrum* for such a story. Nevertheless, a few elements of the Elgar story are suggestive of an origin outside a literate hagiographic culture. Firstly, as Elgar is so absolutely alone, he prepares his own grave in his oratory, and dies in it. Yet 'while the body was still warm, some sailors came to

³² In *Vita Cuthberti*, chs. 12, 11, and 5 respectively; in *Vita Cuthberti anon.* Bk. 2, ch. 5; Bk. 2, ch. 4; Bk. 1, ch. 6 respectively.

³³ *Vita Cuthberti anon.* Bk. 2, ch. 4, pp. 84-5.

the little church, and what they found there prepared for burial, they buried.³⁴ Laymen, not fellow religious, are the ones who find and honour the holy man; this kind of event does not occur in the *Vitae Patrum*, where an Anthony would find a Paul at his death.

At the very end of Elgar's *Vita*, the anonymous author reports that in 1120, the relics of the many holy men of the island were translated by the Bishop to the church of Llandaff, to 'the applause of all the clergy and people'. The prominent role of ordinary secular people in Elgar's death and cult, may indicate that his story was in origin a popular legend, rather than a monastic discourse. Secondly, there is Elgar's provision by God of a 'great fish'. This detail is interesting because it parallels an incident in the early life of Saint Godric, before he had left secular activity to become a hermit. By providence, he found a dead 'dolphin' on a beach where he was scavenging. God provided this meat for him to feed his very poor parents and siblings. Reginald feels the need to give an extended explanation of the morality of taking this food, finally having Godric remember that Christ himself ate fish.³⁵

The scavenging of dolphin meat in the story of Elgar may be a popular explanation of this legend of anchoritic withdrawal. What makes the dolphin meat incident look very much like a popular motif is the very strange accompanying detail in the *Vita* where the hermit Elgar eats the meat of a stag, provided by God. The eating of meat seems to be a particularly peculiar, if not unique, way for a hermit to demonstrate his obedience to God. In contrast, there are no contradictions within Bede's equivalent stories of Cuthbert; those stories are clearly by monks for monks, and move from detail to spiritual meaning in a way that the Elgar legend does not. The Elijah *topos* within the story of Elgar could not be described as anything but a similarly educated, clerical story, were it not for the traces of assumptions and motifs at variance with traditional literary *topoi*. By the twelfth century it seems, the Elijah *topos* had become part of general culture. The point to be drawn from this discussion lies in the

³⁴ *Liber Landavensis*, p. 7.

³⁵ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 3, no. 12, (pp. 26-7). Of course Saint Cuthbert also finds three pieces of dolphin meat, while stranded among the Picts, and Bede has Cuthbert refer to the desert experience of the Israelites, *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 11, pp. 192-5. For Reginald, however, the dolphin meat itself is less important than Godric's moral qualms; the point of the story is to demonstrate Godric's early attempts to imitate the actions of Christ even within a wholly secular life.

relationship between a *topos* and contemporary versions of an old story; the most apparently straightforward *topos* can harbour elements quite outside the hagiographic tradition. The Elgar story is thus the methodological antithesis of the story of Saint Kevin and the blackbird. In the latter a story apparently indicative of the culture of a particular time and region, can be shown to have more meaning within a relatively stable elite monastic discourse. Elgar's Elijah moment, more apparently traditional, hints at a miraculous discourse outside the monastic and literate elite.

If Bede's story of Cuthbert and the eagle is firmly within a monastic context, there is an element which legitimately gives pause for thought. This is Cuthbert's reciprocity to the eagle. This detail is not part of the *topos*, nor is it lyrical embellishment, as in the nesting of the blackbird on Saint Kevin's hand. Reciprocity with animals does not have a place within the Elijah *topos*, and nor is it part of Bede's general attitude towards animal stories; this element may suggest the existence of a particular view of animals in seventh or eighth-century Northumbria, compared to other times and regions, but on its own it cannot demonstrate anything. Instead Bede's very orthodox understanding of such stories is dominant in his *Vita* of Cuthbert. Bede commented on Cuthbert's animal miracles that 'if a man faithfully and whole-heartedly serves the maker of all created things, it is no wonder that all creation should minister to his commands and wishes.'³⁶ This was the moral of any animal-saint story for Bede, and it clearly reflects the meaning, for monks, of the Elijah *topos*, among other such stories. Bede's theological, as opposed to hagiographic, work, certainly shows the same attitude. His commentary on *Genesis* described how before the Fall there were no poisonous plants, no dangerous and predatory wolves or snakes, and all animals lived harmoniously on vegetation. In Eden everything was under man's dominion.³⁷ Within this theological context, Bede's statement concerning Cuthbert's control of animals exemplifies his belief that in the person of the saint, who is utterly obedient to God, the conditions of Eden are restored. This is the central meaning and motivation of nearly all the patristic stories of saints and animals,

³⁶ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 21, p. 224-5.

³⁷ See Glacken, *Rhodian Shore*, pp. 205-6 for Bede, and pp. 183-213 for the general patristic influence on views of nature in the Middle Ages.

and is a dominant theme in the whole genre, irrespective of time and region.

iii) The Primary Theme: Animal Obedience to Saints

The theme of the animal's obedience to the saint, which is essentially prelapsarian in character, can be richly demonstrated from patristic and later hagiography. The snake as an animal has, of course, an unfortunate symbolism within the prelapsarian model. Thus, in a legend of Paul of Thebes, the saint 'used to take various kinds of snakes in his hands and cut them through the middle. The brethren made prostration before him, saying, "Tell us what you have done to receive this grace." He said, "Forgive me, Fathers, but if someone has obtained purity, everything is in submission to him, as it was to Adam, when he was in Paradise before he transgressed the commandment."³⁸ John Moschus states the same theme concerning Abbot Gerasimus. The astonishing obedience of the lion, and its death from grief after the death of Gerasimus, should not be considered to show that the lion had a rational soul, but rather to glorify God and to 'show how animals were submissive to the first man before he transgressed God's commandment and was driven from the paradise of delights'.³⁹ Pachomius learned to place his faith in God such that 'many a time he trod on snakes and scorpions, and passed unhurt through all'.⁴⁰ Thus also crocodiles obediently acted as a ferry for Pachomius. The centrality of power over the most disturbing of creatures, snakes and other fearsome predators, appears early in the western hagiographic tradition. Sulpicius Severus writes; 'You have given instances of wild beasts with their ferocity subdued, obedient to the anchorites, but it was a very ordinary thing for Martin to vanquish the fury of beasts or the venom of serpents'.⁴¹ The island of Lérins was uninhabited 'because of its utter desolation and unvisited for fear of its venomous snakes', but when Saint Honoratus came to the island, 'the terrors of the solitude were put to flight; the

³⁸ Benedicta Ward, *Sayings of the Fathers*, (London 1975), p. 171. Anthony also causes the 'creeping things', snakes, to flee from his mountain solitude, *Vita Antonii*, ch. 11, col. 133.

³⁹ John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale, Vita Abbatis Gerasimi*, cols. 172-4; ch. 107, col. 174.

⁴⁰ *Vita Sancti Pachomii*, ch. 19, col. 241.

⁴¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Dialogue I, ch. 25, col. 199, trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, p. 97.

army of serpents fell back.' In the general scramble of early western hagiographers to mark out their saint as special, particularly in comparison to the Egyptian hermits, Hilary manages to write: 'It is a fact, and one unheard of, and to be reckoned (I think) among the miracles to his credit, that not once was he ever in danger or even startled by an encounter with a snake, although encounters are so frequent in those arid wastes (as I can bear witness), especially when provoked by heavy seas.'⁴²

The 'snake theme' also appears in twelfth-century Britain. Elgar's holy island 'was completely free from serpents and frogs'.⁴³ Godric, when he first came to Finchale, found it inhabited by snakes, and his first dwelling was infested with them. Some of the snakes were friendly, though others were aggressive. Reginald states that for some time Godric and the snakes were companions, but that when the aggressive snakes became too troublesome, the hermit expelled the lot of them from his hermitage, apparently the friendly along with the unfriendly.⁴⁴ Godric's relationship with his snakes is an unusual one; different snakes have different tempers, and do not appear to be filling in as symbols for sin and demons in a one dimensional manner as in other stories. It appears possible that the *topos* has altered to allow for a slightly different balance in the relationship between animal and saint, all the more remarkable as snakes are the animals in question. This is not simply a case of a *topos* being embellished with lyrical rhetoric, as in the case of Saint Kevin and the blackbird. The snakes are potentially hostile or friendly, and the saint attempts to live with them on their own

⁴² Hilary of Arles, *Vita Honorati*, ch. 3, no. 15, (col. 1257), trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, p. 260. The hagiographer, Hilary also finds two apposite biblical references for this miracle, *Psalm* 91:13 and *Luke* 10:19. The psalm says 'you shall walk upon the asp and the basilisk; you shall trample on the lion and the dragon.' *Luke* has Christ state 'Behold I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions' and is also quoted by Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, ch. 8, col. 420. The two quotations neatly encapsulate a host of patristic stories.

⁴³ *Liber Landaviensis*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 21, nos. 55-6, (pp. 67-9). When Godric finally banishes the snakes they rolled about his feet as if asking for forgiveness, and Reginald supplies the standard hagiographic moral; 'Nor is it surprising if the elect of God, who mortify the flesh in His honour, taming the spirit, that brute beasts should obey them.' Elsewhere Reginald quotes *Psalm* 90; *ibid.* ch. 10, no. 28, (pp. 43-4). Here Godric convinces predatory and poisonous beasts to depart from him gently. This is close to the traditional *topos*, but much less forceful.

terms. Godric only resorts to the aggressive use of his *virtus* when the snakes make it impossible for him to live in the place otherwise. Nevertheless for Reginald, the climax of the story of Godric and the snakes is Godric's first demonstration of his thaumaturgical power in expelling the saints, thereby making Finchale a holy place like Elgar's Bardsy, and Honoratus' Lérins. Obedience, submission to the saint appears to be, again, the primary meaning.

To return to the hagiography of the Egyptian Fathers, when such stories extend beyond the mistreatment of snakes, other morals can be attached to the central theme. One such moral is the redemptive power of Christ for the world, symbolised by the saint's miraculous control of, for example, the greatest snakes of all, the dragons. A dragon was terrorising a countryside, and rather than turn to a hero with a sword, the people turned to one with a more powerful weapon. On bent knees, Saint Ammon deals with the troublesome creature with the words 'may Christ the Son of God slay thee, even as He shall slay the Great Whale.'⁴⁵ Thus the superiority of spiritual to temporal heroes is proved. Perhaps in a fit of Origenist optimism over redemption, the hagiographer of Simeon Stylites has this most demonic of animals, the dragon with a branch stuck in its eye, curl up around the saint's pillar. The branch falls out as the dragon becomes truly penitent, and presumably vegetarian, as it never harms anyone thereafter.⁴⁶ This is one of the earliest examples of a saint healing an animal, but it is also wholly symbolic. The branch is the beam in the eye which makes the sinner persecute his fellows. The predator in the land ceases to be a predator when that blindness is cured by the presence of a saint, who is free of any mote in his eye, and acts as the conduit of grace for ordinary sinners.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, ch. 8, col. 421.

⁴⁶ *Vita Sancti Simeonis Stylitae*, PL 73, cols. 325-34, ch. 10, col. 330.

⁴⁷ *Matthew* 7:3-4; *Luke* 6:41-42; the Latin translation of the Simeon story does not appear to contain any direct biblical quotations, and uses '*lignum*' for the stick rather than the Vulgate's '*irabes*', but the image is surely too close not to be conscious. Peter Brown, 'Rise and Function of the Holy Man', does not discuss animal stories in the *vitae* of the Syrian saints, but this kind of symbolism in the Simeon story would seem to accord with his argument. If these saints were mediating figures between powerful men and local communities, then the biblical admonition would carry great resonance as a rebuke of powerful men 'laying waste' the countryside. This story would then be an equivalent miracle to those legends of the hermit's curse in the context of a failed mediation, and the dragon would be the symbol of those powerful men berated by Brown's holy men.

Other animals do not carry the same allegorical resonance as dragons and snakes, but crocodiles and lions are the sort of predators that nevertheless illustrate conditions after the Fall. Accordingly the control of such animals, or the reversal of their predatory natures is an inevitable theme in hagiography.⁴⁸ Thus Abbot Gerasimus' lion, when it came to serve him, was fed on bread and pulses, demonstrating the reversal of its predatory nature in the presence of the saint.⁴⁹ Some lions appear to be able to remain mostly wild, but are still helpful; the hermit Paemen did not notice the extreme cold of one night, to the astonishment of another monk. When pressed for an explanation, Paemen said that during the night a lion had slept beside him and kept him warm.⁵⁰ Another lion growled and roared at an old monk coming into his cave, but it was the lion who left, not the saint.⁵¹

Sulpicius Severus carried this form of story into the western tradition with two stories of ferocious predators having their wild natures tamed. In one a hermit approached a palm tree, where a lion waited:

'the wild beast, in obedience to a divine command (as you could see), discreetly drew back a little and stood motionless while our host picked some fruit within reach on the lower branches. Then, when he held out his hand full of dates, the beast ran up and took them as naturally as any domestic animal could have done and when it had eaten them it went away.'⁵²

In the second story, the domestication theme is essentially similar, but the animal has become a wolf rather than a lion. A wolf always stood near a certain holy man as he ate, and would eat the bread he offered her. One day she stole a loaf of bread, and suffered guilt over the theft. Eventually due to the hermit's prayers, the wolf came back

⁴⁸ The animal does not have to be a predator, of course. A hippopotamus was laying waste the countryside, until a holy man, at the behest of the local farmers, commanded it to go; Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum, De Beno*, ch. 4, col. 408.

⁴⁹ Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale, Vita Abbatis Gerasimus*, ch. 107, col. 173.

⁵⁰ *ibid. Vita et Mors Abbatis Paemensis Solitarii*, ch. 167, col. 203.

⁵¹ *Verba Seniorum, libellus secundus*, ch. 15, col. 1003.

⁵² Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Dialogue I, ch. 13, cols. 191-2; trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, pp. 83-4.

and showed its penitence and was forgiven. Sulpicius' comments on this story are wholly predictable:

'Now I ask you to consider the power that Christ manifested even in a case like this. In his service the brute creation displays intelligence and the savage beast grows meek. A wolf observes due ceremony, a wolf knows that theft is a crime.'⁵³

The interesting element of this story is that the ubiquitous lion is replaced by a wolf, a predator that would have had much more reality for a western audience. It might be speculated that Sulpicius intentionally introduced a wolf, in order to give the story some verisimilitude for those who were sceptical about the wonders effected by Eastern ascetics. Postumianus and his journey to the East may both be fictions, but there is nothing in the stories themselves, except perhaps the wolf, that does not accord with the sort of events in the 'authentic' *Vitae Patrum* of the East. Thus these could easily have been stories in circulation about the Egyptian hermits, which Sulpicius heard and recorded for his own purposes. Whatever the significance of Sulpicius' wolf, it is largely bears or wolves which feature as tamed predators in the western hagiographic tradition.⁵⁴ A suitable twelfth-century example is the wolf in the Bernard of Tiron's *Vita*. As Bernard is establishing his monastery, a wolf brings a lost calf back to the monastery, as if it were tame.⁵⁵ The predator's natural instincts are reversed in the presence of the *virtus* of the saint. As the monks construct their Eden in the wilderness, so animals naturally come to serve, as they did before the Fall.

Another twelfth-century example of saintly power over wolves is that of Godric of Finchale. Here the wolf is described as being the devil but is curiously unable to disturb the hermit. The wolf departs submissively and humbly from Godric, who made the sign of the cross over it.⁵⁶ Another story from Godric's *Vita*, can be compared to

⁵³ *ibid.* Dialogue I, ch. 14, cols. 192-3; trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, pp. 84-5.

⁵⁴ Gregory the Great favoured bears as the submissive predator, see *Dialogi*, Bk. 3, ch. 11, nos. 1-2, (pp. 292-6); ch. 15, nos. 3-9, (pp. 316-20); ch. 26, no. 3, (p. 366).

⁵⁵ *Vita Bernardi Tironiensis*, ch. 8, no. 73, cols. 1410-11.

⁵⁶ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 18, no. 51, (pp. 63-4). There are plenty of instances of effective demonic molestation of the hermit in the *Vita*, but this is one of only a few where the devil is utterly unable to disturb Godric. The description of the

these patristic stories. A cow shows its wild nature, tossing Godric's boy servant upon its horns, but by the command of the hermit, does not actually harm the boy. Rather, the little incident was a punishment for the boy's cruelty. Thus the cow, a domestic animal, indulges in some violent wildness, while at the same time being obedient to God's will and the hermit's commands.⁵⁷ The old themes of obedience of the animal to the saint are certainly present in this story, but many elements seem to be turned on their head; most strikingly, while the hagiographic tradition would dictate that a dangerous wild animal becomes tame, here a domestic animal is aggressive. Even where one of the Egyptian fathers has dealings with non-predatory beasts, the theme is the miraculous submission of its wild nature. Thus Abbot Helenus calls to a herd of wild asses: ' "In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, let one out of you come here and take my pack." And one out of the whole herd made its way to him, in all gentleness.'⁵⁸ In Godric's story, the power of the saint and of God over nature are not in question, but the behaviour of the animal within that structure almost contradicts the Edenic model of the gentle submission and domestication of beasts. The story of Godric's cow can be seen in the light of hagiographic tradition, but seems to be obeying a different kind of logic. Remembering the oddities of the story of Godric and the snakes, it seems that Godric's relations with animals were not wholly in line with hagiographic tradition.

Returning to patristic miracles, there is one moral consistently drawn by early hagiographers. This is the contrast between the faith of the saint and the fear of the followers in the face of dangerous animals. When Helenus trod on the back of the pliant crocodile, a priest who was with him was 'truly stricken with alarm when he had seen the monster.'⁵⁹ Visitors to the desert monks are alarmed when they are required to follow the tracks of a dragon; even when reassured by the brothers, 'the frailty of our lack of faith made us more and more afraid.'⁶⁰ Sulpicius Severus picks up the same theme

wolf as the devil looks peculiar in the context of the story, as if Reginald added that detail on top of an existing story, where the wolf was just a wolf.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* ch. 51, no. 113, and ch. 52, no. 114, (pp. 120-2). Reginald notes that the animal feared to inflict any wound on the hermit's boy, but admitted that the punishment was deserved.

⁵⁸ Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum, De Heleno*, ch. 11, cols. 429-32; col. 430.

⁵⁹ Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, ch. 59, col. 1168.

⁶⁰ Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, ch. 8, col. 420.

in the *Postumianus* dialogue. While visiting the hermit with the tame lion, 'my guide and I shook with fear at the sight of it but the holy man went up to it without pausing for a moment and, alarmed though we were, we followed him.' Of course, the narrator had nothing to fear: 'We who were watching all this, still shaking with fear, had no difficulty in realising how strong was the faith of the hermit and how weak was ours.'⁶¹ Jerome's Anthony was made of sterner stuff. As he was waiting with the body of Paul the hermit two lions came bounding up to dig the legendary hermit's grave, and 'at sight of them he was at first in dread, then turning his mind to God, he waited undismayed, as though he looked on doves.'⁶² The moral shows part of the purpose of these stories; they are fables to encourage the faith and obedience of those in the religious life. If the narrators of these stories can endure the terrors they describe, or are shamed by their lack of faith, those of lesser stature can surely endure more mundane terrors, and if such creatures can show such devotion or obedience to a holy father, then surely monks can show such obedience to their abbot.⁶³

However, there is another side to some of these stories, which is more deeply pessimistic, and which does not have a practical relation to coenobitic ideals. Thieves frequently stole the bread of the holy man Ammon, till one day he set out into the desert, and brought two dragons with him to guard the door of the monastery. When the thieves next came, they fainted in terror. The holy man revived them, saying; 'See how much harder you are than these beasts: indeed, they are obedient to us through God, yet you are not afraid of God, nor do you blush to disturb the life of the servants of God.'⁶⁴ Sulpicius Severus writes in the same vein. Saint Martin and friends are sitting pleasantly on a bank, when a snake starts swimming across to them. He orders the snake away; 'immediately, at the saint's

⁶¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Dialogue I, ch. 13, col. 192, Hoare, *Western Fathers*, p. 84.

⁶² Jerome, *Vita Pauli Eremitae*, ch. 16, col. 28.

⁶³ It is likely that many of the stories of animal obedience to the saint are also related to the more general problem of authority and obedience within the loosely organised early eremitical groups in Egypt. Obedience and authority are frequent themes even within the layers of the *Vitae Patrum* usually judged to be earliest; see Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church* (Oxford 1978), pp. 49-55.

⁶⁴ Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, ch. 8, col. 421.

words, the evil beast turned around and, as we watched it, swam across to the opposite bank.' A miracle to be sure, but not a cause for rejoicing; 'Martin sighed deeply. "Snakes", he said, "listen to me, and men refuse to listen."⁶⁵ Saint Anthony, in search of Paul, meets a satyr in the desert who asks the holy man to put in a kind word to God on behalf of his tribe. Anthony in wonder declares :

'Woe to thee Alexandria. . . who worships monsters instead of God. Woe to thee harlot city, in whom the demons of all the earth have flowed together. What have you now to say? The beasts speak of Christ and you worship monsters instead of God.⁶⁶

Dragons and snakes, those most demonic of animals, show more obedience to saints and thus to God than do human beings.

This *topos* represents a deadly criticism of human virtue indeed, and it is also a symbolic core of the anchoritic motive. It is the melancholy of the anchorite who has risen to a prelapsarian state. The anchorite is so much closer to God than his fellow humans, that he is no longer the companion of human beings, but a companion of beasts, with their innate obedience to God's purpose. Thus there are such stories as of the holy man Theon of Oxyrinchus:

'They said of him that at night he would go out to the desert, and a great troop of the beasts of the desert would go with him. And he would draw water from his well and offer them cups of it, in return for their kindness in attending him. One evidence of this was plain to see, for the tracks of gazelle and goat and the wild ass were thick about his cell.⁶⁷

Theon was a recluse who lived near enough to people for them to flock to him for healing miracles. However there is a contrast between his contact with humans and with animals. With humans he would only reach a hand out of the window of his cell to touch the

⁶⁵ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Dialogue III, ch. 9, cols. 216-7, trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, p. 132.

⁶⁶ Jerome, *Vita Pauli Eremitae*, ch. 8, col. 24, trans. Helen Waddell, *Lives of the Fathers*, (London 1936), p. 33.

⁶⁷ Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum, De Theone*, ch. 6, cols. 409-10, quotation col. 410.

heads of the sick. Among humans, the saint is imprisoned, and has only the most tenuous physical contact with his fellows. At night, with the animals, he is free, and can engage, without fear of sin, in affectionate, sociable activities such as giving drink to his animal friends. Theon with his animals is a companionable if melancholy image of the spiritual isolation of the saint, but the *topos* for this aspect of the desert experience is more familiar from Jerome's description of his own experience of the desert. Jerome was a 'companion of scorpions and wild beasts'.⁶⁸ For Jerome the desert was a place of horror and hallucinogenic temptations. The difference between Jerome and Theon is partly that Jerome was writing about himself, and must preserve the appearance at least of humility. Thus, even if he were inclined to do so, he could not describe such 'companionship' with animals in the same Edenic terms as a legend could. Nevertheless, the two sides of the *topos* illustrate the heroically unbearable conditions in which anchorites must live, in order to be pure enough for Edenic status.

The *topos* of the saint's control over animals was thus at an early stage linked to the *topos* of the companionship between the two, where a saint could thus be affectionate or helpful towards his animal companions. This affection nevertheless remains firmly within the Edenic model where the holiness of the saint reverses normal hierarchies and boundaries, restoring the state of divine nature that fallen humans have lost. The 'companionship of animals' *topos* was created at a time when orthodox Christianity was still competing with other belief systems. The cry of Jerome's Anthony against Alexandria has to be put in the context of the conversion of the Late Roman world to Christianity.⁶⁹ If to later western monastic writers, the world remained in a state of deep corruption, the 'animal companionship' legends of a Saint Francis or a Godric of Finchale do not include Jerome's explicit reference to paganism.

⁶⁸ Jerome, *Ad Eustochium*, ep. 22, cols. 394-5. For Jerome's experience of the desert see John N. D. Kelly, *Jerome, His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London 1975), pp. 46-57.

⁶⁹ These stories could also represent a reaction by ascetics to their troubles with the Church itself. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority*, p. 68, notes the development of bitter divisions between the monks and the bishops in Egypt at the end of the fourth century. Saint Martin's melancholy comparison of the obedience of humans and beasts could also have a context in the political troubles of ascetic circles in the West at the time of Martin and Sulpicius.

Later saints, in a wholly Christian world, nominally and officially, still make recourse to the companionship of animals theme; social mores and conduct remain corrupt and sinful to an almost irredeemable degree. Because these animal legends are essentially moral fables, their themes are ripe to be reused in almost any social context. However, the animal companionship *topos* can only be used in a context desperately pessimistic about the possibility of virtue among people. Indeed its melancholy message could be seen to be in opposition to the coenobitic ideal of monasticism. The latter ideal is as early, in a literary sense at least, as the necessity of solitude in the anchoritic legends. In the coenobitic ideal, the man training himself towards perfection has human companions in the same endeavour. The 'companionship of animals' *topos* implicitly argues against that ideal; there an Edenic relationship with animals only occurs because of the solitary's extraordinary isolation.

iv) Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and the Transmission of Early *Topoi*

Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* is a central text for the transmission of patristic *topoi* to later centuries, and yet his own work was already full of the models of earlier hagiography.⁷⁰ In that sense, the *Dialogues* have a character closer to 'medieval' hagiography than to the pioneering Late Antique works of Athanasius, Jerome or even Sulpicius Severus. The implicit contradiction between anchoritic legends of the companionship of animals and the coenobitic ideal is highly pertinent to the animal stories in Gregory's work. However, before that issue is discussed, there must be some consideration of the nature of Gregory's work. It is not only the effect on his writing of a body of received Christian literature that connects Gregory's writing to medieval hagiography. For both Sulpicius Severus and Gregory, the immediate audience is the small elite of literate, sophisticated Christians. However in

⁷⁰ For the classical, biblical and patristic influences on the book of the *Dialogues* concerning the life of Saint Benedict see Maximilien Mahler, 'Evocations Bibliques et Hagiographiques dans la Vie de St. Benedict', *Revue Bénédictine* 83 (1973), pp. 398-429. One important concept of Gregory's, which he draws from secular classical literature, and becomes influential in medieval hagiography, particularly of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, is discussed in Pierre Courcelle, ' "Habitaré secum" selon Perse et Saint Gregoire le Grand', *Revue des Études Anciennes* 69 (1967), pp. 266-79.

Gregory, the presence of the mass of the uneducated has a palpable effect upon his discussion of miracles; these people must be guided by the Church, which in Gregory's time was becoming the paramount political presence.⁷¹

Gregory's pastoral concerns for the masses are greatly in evidence in the *Dialogues*, particularly in his portrayal of Benedict's sanctity. The result is a visible compromise between the religion of those of 'infirm' mind and that of Gregory and his elite audience. Hence his pupil Peter needs a clarification at one point: 'What is the reason that in the patronage of martyrs we often times find, that they do not afford so great benefits by their bodies, as they do by other relics. And work greater miracles where they themselves are not present?'.⁷² The story was of a woman being cured when she wandered into Saint Benedict's cave, after his death and burial elsewhere. Gregory replies to Peter's question that such things are necessary in order to reassure the weak faith of simple people. Perhaps the people of 'infirm' mind were more interested in local sacred places, than in distant, official relic cults. The interest of this story is that it is recorded at all; healing miracles are among the most common, and Gregory is not making an important theological point about the nature of his subject's sanctity here. Rather, this miracle must have been of a type widely known, and Gregory had to make a special point of explaining it. It is crucial that his interest is not so much in the miracle, as in the place where it occurred. The *Dialogues* are of course a conversation between a master and a pupil, in which the latter is instructed on any number of matters of theology and faith by the master. As much as Gregory is simply influenced by the writers who came before him, their authority may also have been invoked to systematise general beliefs relating to miracles and saints, and bring any orally circulating stories within the literary understanding of elite Christians.⁷³ Thus, the *Dialogues* could be seen

⁷¹ For this latter aspect of Gregory's career, as well as the general context of the time, see Claude Dagens, *Saint Gregoire Le Grand* (Paris 1977) and Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London 1980).

⁷² Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 2, ch. 38, nos. 1-5, (pp. 246-8).

⁷³ In William D. McCready, *Signs of Sanctity: Miracles in the Thought of Gregory the Great* (Toronto 1989), it is argued that Gregory was consciously adapting oral stories at many points, see particularly pp. 128-35. This is the context in which to place Peter's scepticism, see *ibid.* pp. 206-11. A

as a dialogue between miracle legends and Christian intellectual leaders, as much as an educational exercise between Gregory and his real or fictional pupils.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that the miracle legends were, in Gregory's mind, entirely genuine, and thus had to be explained.⁷⁴ At any number of points in the *Dialogues*, after Gregory has told his tale, the pupil asks a question which enables Gregory to systematise a story and mould it into a framework of morals which suits his purpose. After the story is related, Peter or Gregory supplies the biblical quotations to contextualise the story. For example, there is a story of Abbot Equitatus whose rough clothing causes offence but which, miraculously, does not hide his spiritual worth. Gregory, explaining the moral, shows that God alone knows the truth of the heart quoting *Luke 16:15*.⁷⁵ Peter often sounds a sceptical note concerning certain miracles, but Gregory admonishes him to have faith, while providing biblical precedents.⁷⁶ Where Peter is sceptical, as in the healing miracle at Benedict's cave, Gregory's moral seems clear. These may be legends which appeal to the unsophisticated, but God creates them for the benefit of the faith of those 'infirm' ones, not sophisticated men, like himself and Peter. The *Dialogues* were clearly meant in the first instance for an educated clerical or monastic audience, rather than the people in general. But Gregory seems to have perceived a gap between the mentality behind miracle

consequence of the adaptation of orally circulating stories is that 'literary' borrowings within the stories may well pre-date Gregory's versions, see *ibid.* pp. 144-53. Thus also the *Dialogues* represent Gregory's choice of miracles from the oral pool, and he favours those which show biblical precedent, see *ibid.* pp. 241-2.

⁷⁴ As recently as 1976, one historian felt it necessary to argue briefly why Gregory could not have invented the figure of Benedict and the miracles in book two of the *Dialogues*; Adalbert de Vogüé, 'Benoit, Modèle de Vie Spirituelle d'après le Deuxième Livre des *Dialogues* de Saint Grégoire', *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 38, (1976), pp. 147-57, esp. p. 149.

⁷⁵ Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 1, ch. 4, no. 18, (p. 54); for Gregory's exegetical and theological interest in the 'innerness' of the spiritual life see Carole Straw, *Gregory The Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (University of California 1988), particularly pp. 213-35.

⁷⁶ For example, see Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 2, ch. 22, no. 4, (p. 204). Whether the story in question actually was a popular legend is unknowable, but the idea that such a story could be, was clearly not problematic to Gregory.

stories and the intellectual faith of others like himself. That gap is negotiated by the *Dialogues*.⁷⁷

The systemisation of miracles is thus a recurrent theme. After another story, Peter wants to know whether miracles happen by prayer or by direct command of the living saint. Gregory replies that both are possible, and supplies a convenient quotation from Saint John.⁷⁸ This problem, of miracles and the mentality of the simple, was a long term conundrum for intellectually sophisticated hagiographers. Given Gregory's prestige it comes as no surprise when later hagiographers borrow his solutions for their own explanations of the miraculous. Early in the *Dialogues*, Peter wishes to know which holy man effected a resurrection miracle; the one who prayed to the saint or the saint himself. Gregory generously allows that the miracle happened due to the virtues of the deceased saint, the living monk, and the mother of the dead child all together.⁷⁹ Bede has a similar problem in the context of a posthumous miracle of Saint Cuthbert and allows for a similarly triple influence of virtue upon the miracle.⁸⁰ Bede's and Gregory's stories are very different and there is no obvious quotation from Gregory to Bede, but the abstract

⁷⁷ In all the discussion of the *Dialogues*, it seems that relatively little systematic attention has been paid to Gregory's intentions concerning the use of the work, in the context of the pastoral problems of his period. The *Dialogues* certainly contrast with his many other more formal exegetical works. This contrast seems to embarrass even recent scholars: 'Gregory's varied writings reveal a breadth of personality and vocation that has intrigued and, on occasion, baffled historians. His exegetical works. . . possess an intellectual power and spiritual insight that justify his title as a Doctor of the Church. These works. . . were directed largely to monastic audiences. While they enjoyed varying degrees of success, each is a serious and sophisticated effort to marshal the learning of the past. . . In contrast (or so it seems) to these works of elevated ambition, the *Dialogues* and Homilies on the Gospel stand as works of a more popular spirit. . . they teach his audience more effectively than mere instruction and seem to express the side of Gregory known for learned ignorance', Straw, *Gregory The Great*, p. 6. Francis Clark, *The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues*, 2 vols, (Leiden 1987), even sees the contrast between Gregory's work as a reason to question the authenticity of the *Dialogues*. Straw seems to consider the *Dialogues* as somehow a popular work, though she does not discuss the audience any further than in the excerpt quoted above. However, it seems quite clear that the work was meant for a similar audience as his exegetical writing, but with a different purpose; as a resource for pastoral work among the general population. See Dagens, *Saint Gregoire*, pp. 45-55 and pp. 198-201 and McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, pp. 47-57 for discussions of the audience and pastoral intentions of the *Dialogues*.

⁷⁸ Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 2, ch. 30, nos. 2-3, (pp. 220-3).

⁷⁹ *ibid.* Bk. 1, ch. 2, no. 7, (pp. 28-30).

⁸⁰ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 46, pp. 300-7.

structure of the miracles and Bede's answer to the problem are identical. Bede used Gregory to find an authoritative way to explain a story that was circulated enthusiastically, but not explained intellectually. Gregory's *Dialogues* do mark the beginning of specifically medieval patterns in hagiography, and he consciously engages with the problems of the adaptation of general belief to literate theology that recur over and again in ensuing centuries. Thus, the animal stories within the *Dialogues* should be considered not just within the context of the literary tradition Gregory inherits. The other context lies in his own attempts to adapt stories which were already known outside the religious elite.

Thus to return to the stories of animals and saints, of which there are a few in the *Dialogues*, Gregory could report the stories, and yet adapt them to his own hagiographic purpose.⁸¹ Equally, he could choose the stories that suited him, and ignore those that did not. Thirdly, in the context of the 'companionship of animals' theme, a small adaptation of detail can make a large difference between a story of mutual companionship and a story of pure command over animals. There is, however, little sign in most of Gregory's animal stories of a buried 'companionship of animals' theme. Of Bonifacius, the Bishop of Ferenti, it is told that he frustrated a fox who was killing his mother's chickens when the saint was a child. Instead of practical measures against the fox, the holy child prays to God, and immediately the fox returns with the hen in its mouth and falls down dead in front of the boy.⁸² Gregory comments that by praying for small things, the 'holy and simple boy' learned to trust in God when he prayed for greater things.

Another story concerns a bishop cast to a bear to be devoured. However the bear 'suddenly forgetting its wildness, with a bent neck and humbly lowered head, he began to lick the feet of the bishop: visibly to give all to understand that men have bestial hearts

⁸¹ On Gregory's hagiographic argument see A. de Vogüé, 'Benoit, Modèle de Vie Spirituelle d'après le Deuxième Livre des Dialogues de Saint Grégoire', *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 38, (1976), pp. 147-157, and Marc Doucet, 'Pédagogie et Théologie dans le "Vie de Saint Benoît" par Saint Grégoire le Grand', *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 38 (1976), pp. 158-173. In the general context of Gregory's writings and his conception of the *vir dei*, see Straw, *Gregory The Great*, pp. 66-89.

⁸² Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 1, ch. 9, no. 18, (pp. 90-2).

towards the man of God, and the beasts as if hearts of men.⁸³ The moral of this story certainly accords with the melancholic message of the anchoritic legends, but it is also a story of the submission of creation to the saint. In addition, there is a political dimension to the story. This bishop was cast to the bears by a '*rex perfidus*', the Gothic King Totila. In a strictly hagiographic context, this is a story of submission of an animal to a dominant saint, and the shaming of rapacious secular power.⁸⁴ The theme that animals are more obedient to God than humans is present, but not the full theme of the companionship of animals.

That *topos* does clearly appear in another story involving a bear. In this a bear is sent to Florentius, a man of God, '*dum solus habitaret*', who shows no trace of wildness, and who tends the sheep of the 'man of God'. In his great simplicity, Florentius often called the bear his brother.⁸⁵ Monks jealous of the holy man, on behalf of their abbot who had not done such miracles, kill the innocent bear and are struck down with leprosy. Gregory allows the 'companionship of animals' theme to appear, but seems to have turned the story into a parable of the problems of authority and obedience in the *coenobium*. Furthermore, Gregory and Peter's discussion of the miracle focuses on the gravity of Florentius' sin in cursing the jealous monks. The holy man spent the rest of his life atoning, and Gregory refers to Saint Paul's statement that *maledicti* are excluded from the kingdom of heaven.⁸⁶ It seems unlikely that the original story focussed on the 'sin' of Florentius, but was more likely a story of the thaumaturgic power of a hermit, and of his preference for the companionship of animals rather than humans.

If Gregory was ambivalent about the 'companionship of animals' theme, then in the story of Saint Benedict and the crow, there is a possible explanation of Gregory's prejudice against the

⁸³ *ibid.* Bk. 3, ch. 11, nos. 1-2, (pp. 292), on Cerbonius, Bishop of Populonium.

⁸⁴ Totila was, of course, an important political and military figure for a brief period in the mid-sixth century. An account of his career can be found in John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* (London 1988), pp. 234-43, and pp. 248-52. Totila also had an encounter with Saint Benedict probably in AD 542; see Philip J. McCann, *St. Benedict* (London 1937), pp. 206-9. See also P. A. Cusack, 'Some Literary Antecedents of the Totila Encounter in the Second Dialogue of Pope Gregory I', *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975), pp. 87-90.

⁸⁵ Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 3, ch. 15, nos. 3-6, (pp. 316-8).

⁸⁶ *ibid.* ch. 15, nos. 8-10, (p. 320); *1 Corinthians* 6:10.

'companionship' theme.⁸⁷ The explanation relates to the contradiction between the anchoritic animal legends and the coenobitic ideal. Gregory's presentation of Benedict shows him as possessed of the grace ascribed to the anchorites, and yet as a reforming abbot. Indeed, Benedict is the quintessential coenobitic holy man. Benedict's difficulties in reforming the monks are thus set against his control of animals. Benedict's pet crow, which is fed by the saint regularly, disposes of a poisoned loaf at the command of the saint.⁸⁸

From one point of view this should be seen as an interesting reversal of the Elijah *topos* ; the bird is fed by the saint rather than *visa versa*, and removes dangerous food rather than bringing food in a starvation context. Also, of course, there is again the quandary of the saint; animal creation will obey him, because of his purity and grace, yet sinful humanity cannot see this grace and seeks to poison the saint. The poisoned loaf was of course an attempt by an enemy, in this case a priest, to dispose of Benedict himself. Yet the story is strangely terse and lacking in the usual moral reflections, particularly in contrast to the story of Florentius and the bear. The bird is described as a '*silva corvus* ', yet Gregory does not describe a reversal of its wild nature, as he did in other stories. Thus, Gregory pointedly rejects the Edenic theme, whereby wild and predatory animals are domesticated. Perhaps Gregory was working with a famous contemporary legend which he could not avoid. Gregory could however remove the elements which clashed with his own conception of the holy man; he concentrated on the theme of obedience to the exclusion of any other. In comparison with earlier stories of the affectionate relationship between dominant saint and obedient animal, Gregory makes very little of the 'pet' relationship between Benedict and the bird, yet the image is unmistakable. Gregory was presenting a picture of a pastoral holy man and could not therefore allow the pessimistic symbolism of a 'companionship of animals' motif to contradict his picture of Benedict.

⁸⁷ There is another animal related story in the life of Benedict. A small bird creates the temptation of distraction by flying about the saint's head. When banished by a short prayer, it is merely replaced by temptations of the sexual kind. The bird is probably a symbolic demon; Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 2, ch. 2, p. 136, and De Vogüé's note on p. 137.

⁸⁸ Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 2, ch. 8, nos. 3-8, (pp. 162-6).

As has been seen, the anchorites enjoyed their Edenic relations with animals in a permanent isolation from human society. In contrast, Gregory's concern for Benedict and his holy men in general is for their pastoral role; their sanctity shines in the world and helps to reconstruct the shattered polity of their time, through their example of Christian holiness. Consequent upon this conception of the saint is his role in preaching, within a hierarchical and organised church. Gregory is ambivalent about holy men being free from the authority of other men, in contrast to the anchoritic legends of the *Vitae Patrum*.⁸⁹ Gregory's conception of the holy man may actually owe something to Benedict himself, through the latter's *Rule*, where the monk must receive full coenobitical training before embarking on the dangerous life of the hermit.⁹⁰

The relevance of the tradition of animal stories to Gregory's conception of the role of the holy man within the Church should be clear. Motifs of the holy man alone in his own Eden, enjoying the companionship of obedient animals rather than irredeemable humans lie in contradiction with Gregory's ambitions for a Church very much involved in reforming and ordering the world. The anchoritic legends were evidently popular in hagiographic literature, and there is no reason to suppose they did not exist in Gregory's time and region. The affection, or lack of it, that saints have for animals must be seen in the context of hagiographic purpose, which relates to society, not to the relative appreciation of nature by particular Christians. With Gregory's *Dialogues* come some possible indication that there could be competing versions of certain miracle stories, told by those with different views of the role of the Church, or even by different social strata within society. Thus from at least this period onwards in the West, there may well have been all sorts of different kinds of 'animal-saint' legends circulating, which may only appear obliquely in hagiography. But if the social purpose of hagiographic agendas changes, then the kind of legend recorded will change.

⁸⁹ For a discussion of Gregory's conception of the holy man see Straw, *Gregory the Great*, particularly p. 95 and pp. 73-4. Gregory argues that there are few men for whom pure anchoriticism is safe; 'Gregory's achievement in the *Dialogues* lies in placing these servants of God with their real power and divine inspiration firmly within the Church's hierarchy.'

⁹⁰ *Rule of Benedict*, ch. 1. Straw, *Gregory The Great*, notes that Gregory's ambivalence concerning anchoriticism stems from his view that the pure contemplative life is dangerous, pp. 19-20.

The complexity of Gregory's writings notwithstanding, there are certain points to be made in terms of his transmission of patristic *topoi* to the twelfth century. Firstly, Gregory defined saint and animal *topoi* around the notion of control of nature, as did Sulpicius Severus. Secondly, with Benedict's crow for example, Gregory forced the anchoritic legends of a 'companionship of animals' motif into the model of sanctity for the western abbot. That the influence of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* can be found on the animal stories of Bede's Cuthbert should not come as a surprise.⁹¹ However, even Colgrave wrote blandly that 'in every case Cuthbert's attitude towards the animals and birds is uniformly kind and thoughtful.'⁹² One story to which Colgrave directs our attention in this context shows Cuthbert finding food miraculously on a journey.⁹³

In the anonymous writer's version of the story, Cuthbert's horse is incidental to the miracle; its role is simply to pull at the thatch of a house, inadvertently revealing the hidden human food. It is Bede's version of the story in which sentimental *topoi* are employed; Cuthbert refers to the horse as his *comes*, or comrade, and only in Bede does the saint share the bread with his horse. In these two details Bede draws the story he has inherited from the anonymous author into the patristic tradition; the two *topoi* are the companionship of animals, and the second the reversal of animal nature, enabling it to share human food. These two elements do not show a generalised 'kindness' to animals, instead the *topoi* humanise the horse in the presence of the saint. It is of further significance that the horse is a domestic animal; the hierarchical Edenic order is in full view with the obedient horse as a servant in harmony with his kindly but absolutely superior master. These two *topoi* added by Bede to the anonymous version of the story cannot be directly attributed to Gregory's *Dialogues*, but Bede drew the same moral as Gregory did in his equivalent stories. In the two writers, the

⁹¹ For the notable marks of the *Dialogues* on Bede's Cuthbert in general terms see Colgrave's notes, pp. 341, 347, and 350. See also Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede and Gregory the Great', in Paul Meyvaert, *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others* (London 1977), pp. 1-26.

⁹² Colgrave, *Two Lives of Cuthbert*, p. 320.

⁹³ *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* Bk. 1, ch. 6, pp. 70-1; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 5, pp. 168-71. The story has already been mentioned above, in the context of the 'Elijah' *topos*.

companionship of animals story concerns the animals' obedience to the saint, rather than the loneliness of the isolated anchorite.

It is partly the context of the companionship of animals theme in which the famous story of Saint Cuthbert and the otters should be seen.⁹⁴ Cuthbert, at that point a monk of Melrose, steals away from the monastery of Coldingham, which he is visiting, to observe his private ascetic practices away from the dubious atmosphere of that house. The monk who observes the saint sees Cuthbert up to his neck in the sea, 'singing praises'. When the saint emerges from the sea, two otters approach him, warming his feet with their breath and drying him with their fur. The story clearly invokes the Edenic obedience of animals to their true superior, the saint. The obedience animals show to the saint lies in contrast to the sinful monk who 'was stricken with deadly fear and weighed down with such distress, that he could scarcely reach home with faltering footsteps; and in the early morning he approached Cuthbert and, stretching himself on the ground, tearfully entreated his pardon for the guilt of his foolish daring'.⁹⁵ Of course Cuthbert blessed the otters as they left; the good servants had discharged their divine duty to their master, the saint. Cuthbert is also forgiving to the implicitly disobedient monk; the story is thus an allegory of the gentle yoke the saint lays upon those who recognise his spiritual authority. At the core of the story, in terms of animal miracles, is the symbolism of divine hierarchy, rather than any mystic connection to or affectionate regard for animals. Bede's concern, as was Gregory's concerning Benedict, was to show the holiness of the pastor, as opposed to the isolated, individual virtue of the Egyptian hermits.

Indeed, for a saint so often commended for his kindness to animals, Cuthbert in his two *Vitae* shows remarkably little unprompted acknowledgement of animal activity. It is in his phase as a hermit on Farne Island that a series of chapters makes this clear. Two ravens, which had inhabited the island before Cuthbert, tear up the material of the saint's roof for their own use, and are commanded

⁹⁴ *Vita Cuthberti* Anon. Bk. 2, ch. 3, pp. 78-83; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 10, pp. 188-91. For the native context of the story see Colgrave's notes, pp. 319-20. There are no serious differences between the two versions of the story for the present purpose. For a different, but not incompatible, interpretation of the story, see Benedicta Ward, *The Spirituality of Saint Cuthbert* (SLG 1992), pp. 10-11.

⁹⁵ *Vita Cuthberti*, pp. 190-1. Ward calls the man the 'third otter', *Spirituality*, p. 11.

to leave. They return begging forgiveness and each bringing a gift of lard. They are forgiven and allowed to remain in their home.⁹⁶ Bede's spin on the anonymous version is to reprise his Gregorian theme at the beginning of this story; thus 'human pride and contumacy are openly condemned by the obedience and humility of the birds'. Cuthbert, according to Bede, recounted this story 'in order to give mankind an example of correction'. Bede adds a miracle which is not in the anonymous *Vita* to emphasise the theme of creation's obedience to the saint; Cuthbert drives off the birds which are eating his crop of barley, and they 'thenceforward refrained altogether from attacking his crops.'⁹⁷ Of course the model for this story is Saint Anthony's conflict with the wild animals in his own desert plot, as Bede himself says: 'in driving the birds away from the crops, he followed the example of the most reverend and holy father Anthony, who with one exhortation restrained the wild asses from injuring the little garden that he himself had planted.'⁹⁸

v) The Colonisation of Places of Horror: From Anthony to the Cistercians

This story of Saint Anthony introduces the last theme that must be traced from Late Antiquity to the twelfth century. Many of the saint's interactions with animals carry the simple obedience motif. In one story Anthony demonstrates the ability to walk on the backs of crocodiles when needing to cross a river.⁹⁹ However, Athanasius' Anthony is also a coloniser of desert places of horror; 'he came to a deserted fort, through time and solitude, full of poisonous creatures, in which, making himself into a new guest, he lived. Immediately at his coming, the monstrous crowd of serpents, as if suffering persecution, fled.'¹⁰⁰ This story is obviously parallel to the many stories of saints driving away snakes from their chosen hermitages. Nevertheless, the theme is developed beyond the message of the saint's power over individual animals. Here the saint colonises a place, turning it from a place of horror to a place of sanctity. Once Anthony flees to the inner mountain, and there makes

⁹⁶ *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* Bk. 3, ch. 5, pp. 100-3; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 20, pp. 222-5.

⁹⁷ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 19, pp. 220-3 and Colgrave's note, p. 350.

⁹⁸ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 19, pp. 222-3.

⁹⁹ *Vita Antonii*, ch. 14, col. 134.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* ch. 11, col. 133.

his garden that provides him with bread, there is the second miracle which laid the basis for the 'colonisation' *topos*. Anthony embraced his new hermitage, as if it were offered by God, with its 'fountain of sweet water' and its date palms.¹⁰¹ But soon, to avoid dependence upon the brothers who sent bread out to him, he begins to grow crops to make his own bread. The wild animals who try to eat his crops are given a saintly speech similar to Cuthbert's. Both saints ask the animals why they do this damage.¹⁰² Bede, in modelling Saint Cuthbert's period as a hermit on the adventures of Saint Anthony, conflates the latter's two main periods as a hermit. In Anthony's first period, his hermitage is essentially a place of horror, inhabited by the snakes he banishes. In the second, a place he loves immediately, there is a fountain and a date palm, and there he curbs the attentions of the wild animals. Cuthbert drives the demons from Farne, and by a succession of miracles transforms it from a place of horror, to a place which human labour can cultivate.¹⁰³

In the twelfth century the colonising *topos* is expressed as a pervasive mentality by Cistercian writers. In the *Vita Prima* of Bernard of Clairvaux, the colonisation ideal is spelt out: 'Clairvaux. . . had once been a hide-out of robbers and was formerly known as the valley of Wormwood. . . It was in that place of horror and desolation that these righteous men established themselves and turned a den of iniquity into God's temple and a house of prayer.'¹⁰⁴ In a traveller's description of Clairvaux, all of the harmony and obedience of nature

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* ch. 24, col. 148.

¹⁰² *Vita Antonii*, ch. 25, cols. 148-9; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 19, p. 222-3.

¹⁰³ See *Vita Cuthberti*, chs. 17-21, and compare to *Vita Cuthberti Anon.* Bk. 3, chs. 1-5.

¹⁰⁴ *Vita Prima Bernardi Clarevallensis*, Bk. 1, ch. 5, no. 25, (cols. 241-42); trans. Pauline Matarasso *The Cistercian World* (London 1993), p. 26. On the Cistercian's rhetoric of nature see Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (London 1961), pp. 164-5, and Sorrell, *Francis and Nature*, pp. 29-31, for a different interpretation of much the same material. Sorrell sees the Cistercian literary tradition as expressing a mystical love of nature. Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 140-2, puts such 'mysticism' in the context of both Bernard's anti-scholasticism and the Edenic divine order of things. However, Leclercq's emphasis on the prime role of human labour remains central to understanding these Cistercian passages. Monastic labour transforms the landscape into a thing of beauty that can be appreciated. In this, Cistercian writers were staying very close to patristic conceptions, which valued cultivated land, not wild landscape; see David S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Oxford 1968), particularly pp. 87-91.

to human needs and the aesthetic beauty of creation are held up as a proof of the Cistercian's grace and ability to recreate a kind of Eden; the sight of the place 'brings to mind the heavenly bliss to which we all aspire, for the smiling face of the earth with its many hues feasts the eyes and breathes sweet scents into the nostrils'.¹⁰⁵ It is thus unsurprising to find a certain old *topos* within *vitae* written by Cistercians. This is the story of the monastic founder who, while labouring to bring new land under the plough, employs wild animals as if they were domesticated oxen.¹⁰⁶

In the Cistercian Jocelyn of Furness' *Vita* of Saint Kentigern, the saint in 'sowing sand' and bringing forth a crop of wheat, puts a wolf and a stag under one yoke of a plough.¹⁰⁷ Jocelyn combined the motif of the taming of wild animals, with the idea of the transformation of a desert, the sandy soil, into a garden of holy monks. As such this is a very developed expression of the 'colonisation' theme. Among English hermits, there are two related stories involving Robert of Knaresborough. Robert went to the local lord asking for a cow to provide for his needs and the needs of the indigent for whom Robert cultivated his land. The lord has a 'certain most wild cow' in his forest, which he gave to Robert. The hermit dealt with this ungracious gift by placing his arms about the wild animal and leading it away, 'as if it were a most gentle lamb'.¹⁰⁸ This was not the end to Robert's troubles with animals however. Certain wild stags 'invaded' his fields, 'trampling and consuming' his crops. The same lord gives Robert permission to do what he liked with the wild animals. So Robert chased the wild stags, also compared to

¹⁰⁵ *Descriptio: Positionis seu situationis monasterii Clarae-Vallensis*, PL 185, cols. 570-4, quotation cols. 571-2; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 290.

¹⁰⁶ For references to early medieval examples of this *topos*, see Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, vol. 2, part V, pp. 212-27.

¹⁰⁷ *Lives of St. Ninian and St. Kentigern*, ed. and trans. Alexander P. Forbes (Edinburgh 1874), *Vita Kentigerni*, pp. 159-253; ch. 22, pp. 193-5, trans. p. 66. Kentigern was a seventh-century bishop of Strathclyde and Jocelyn's *Vita*, written in the last decades of the twelfth century, was probably based on earlier *vitae*, which are now largely lost. Although Jocelyn was therefore probably adapting an earlier story, his treatment still shows the Cistercian approach to such material.

¹⁰⁸ *Vita Roberti Recentior*, ch. 15, pp. 389-90. Although this *Vita* was not written by the Cistercians, it was based on the original probably Cistercian *Vita*. See above, Chapter I, p. 26.

'gentle lambs' into a barn. Thereafter Robert harnessed the stags and put them to the plough as if they were cows.¹⁰⁹

A rather more original example of this *topos*, again in a Cistercian context, is Caesarius of Heisterbach's story of the obedience of the storks, in his *Dialogue on Miracles*.¹¹⁰ At the house of Citeaux itself 'where is the head of our Order, many storks nest. This is permitted by the brothers of the Order, because by them not only the monastery but all the places around are cleared of foul worms.'¹¹¹ The storks are only permitted at Citeaux because they aid the monks in turning the place from a desert place of horror, full of worms, to a place of Edenic beauty and obedience. The storks emphasise the degree of their obedience to the monks by flying up to the prior at migration time, clearly asking for permission to depart, 'that they might not be thought ungrateful for the hospitality granted them'. The prior gives his permission by blessing the birds. In the master's discussion of this miracle he notes that the obedience of the birds puts men to shame, quoting *Jeremiah*; 'The turtle dove and the swallow and the stork watched for the time of his coming; but my people knoweth not the judgement of the Lord its God.'¹¹² In this one, original, story Caesarius nevertheless seems to be able to bring

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* ch. 16, pp. 390-1.

¹¹⁰ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, 2 vols. (London 1851, reprint 1966), II, Bk. 10, ch. 58, pp. 256-7; *Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. Henry Scott and Charles Bland (London 1929), Bk. 10, ch. 58, pp. 218-19. For a detailed discussion of Caesarius' sources, oral and literary, and his themes and organising principles, see Brian P. McGuire, 'Written Sources and Cistercian Inspiration in Caesarius of Heisterbach', *Analecta Cisterciensia* 35 (1979), pp. 227-82, and 'Friends and Tales in the Cloister: Oral Sources in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*', *Anal. Cisterc.* 36 (1980), pp. 167-247.

¹¹¹ '*immundis vermibus*'; this choice of words contains a notion of spiritual uncleanness. The notion of an Eden, purified of the sin symbolised by the worms, must have been obvious to Caesarius and his audience.

¹¹² *Jeremiah* 8:7. Peculiarly, Sorrell interprets this story as showing 'a general feeling of affinity with the rest of creation', and being indistinguishable from Saint Francis' feeling for nature; Sorrell, *Francis and Nature*, p. 31. In the light of the story's obvious links with *topoi* of domestication, colonisation and obedience of creation, it seems hard to sustain Sorrell's interpretation in any meaningful way. The other animal stories in Caesarius, which surround the story of the storks, give no support to Sorrell's argument; see *Dialogus*, Bk. 10, chs. 57, 59, 62, 64, and also Bk. 1, ch. 15, p. 22, and Bk. 5, ch. 17, p. 337 for animals in various, usually antagonistic relations with humans. McGuire considers some of these stories to be secular folklore rather than monastic stories, 'Friends and Tales', p. 239. The story of the storks is unusual among Caesarius' animal stories in having a 'cloister' context.

together all the elements of the hagiographic tradition of the animal story. No doubt he intended sophisticated readers to understand this story as a demonstration of the Cistercian's complete consummation of the monastic ideal.

Given the overview of the animal and saint tradition above, it would seem incredible that anything new could be found in any individual story of that kind. Certainly, the notion that some cultural change occurred in the twelfth century, leading to a more affectionate or sympathetic relationship between saints and animals, looks hard to sustain. If the discussion is limited to finding signs of sympathy, or 'mystic' connection, then too many examples can be found from the twelfth century of unsympathetic 'obedience' miracles. Equally, too many examples can be found from earlier periods of sympathetic relations between saints and animals. A significant break with hagiographical tradition can only be shown by the demonstration of an identifiably different logic or new *topoi* within the genre, compared to the themes and *topoi* discussed above. Having established, I hope, the significant elements of the hagiographic tradition, it should be easier to detect deviations from it, or indeed stories adapted to that written tradition rather than emerging from it. If a story can be attached to a particular historical context then it would be possible to analyse it in terms of its relationship both to patristic tradition and to its own historical context. Happily, there is a story from twelfth-century England which may serve as a test for such a form of analysis, and may reflect on the animal stories from Farne and Finchale. This is the story of Saint Wereburga and the geese.

vi) Saint Wereburga and the Resurrection of Animals

Wereburga was a seventh-century abbess, of many houses by legend, whose remains were housed in a monastery at Chester by the eleventh century.¹¹³ A late eleventh-century *Vita* is the earliest

¹¹³ For a discussion of the monastery of Chester and the records and legends of Wereburga, see *The Chartulary or Register of the Abbey of St. Wereburga, Chester*, ed. J. Tait, *Chetham Society*, new series, vols. 79 and 82, (1920, 1923). The abbey was reformed in 1092-3, with Benedictine monks replacing the canons. The two earliest accounts of Wereburga, of any length, are the *Vita* and a brief account in Florence of Worcester, *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, vol I, *English Historical Society*, no. 10, (1848-9), p. 32. Tait, *Chartulary of Chester*, I, pp. viii-ix, notes that although there is no fact in

account of this saint of any length, and its attribution to an author or a monastery is not a settled issue. One candidate as author is Goscelin of St Bertin, who would have written the *Vita* probably between 1078 and 1084, and probably for the Abbey of Ely.¹¹⁴ More recently the identification of many similarly obscure *vitae* to Goscelin has been doubted, and another view has the *Vita Wereburgae* written at Chester, on the basis of a putative earlier Anglo-Saxon life written at Hanbury in Staffordshire, where her relics were said to have been for some time.¹¹⁵ There are thus three problems in the historical attribution of the *Vita*: for which monastic house was it made, was it based on an earlier *vita*, and can an author be found.

The first problem is the most important for my purposes. It is natural to assume that the monastery holding the relics of a saint would wish to have a *vita* for its saint. Thus Chester looks like a logical home for the work. However there is no positive evidence that it originated from Chester, and indeed Chester does not produce any other hagiographical material anywhere near this period. As far as the extant *Vita* is concerned, Chester has a remarkably dim presence; the opening line states that Wereburga's relics lie in Chester, but thereafter there is no mention of the city or any cult there. This is a strange silence for a *vita* supposedly written for the

Florence that is not in the *Vita*, there is no reason to suppose the former based his account on the latter, and that both writers may well have been working from the same, apparently sparse sources. Florence does not mention Chester, or any tradition of her miracles, except that her body was uncorrupted until the 'time of the Danes'.

¹¹⁴ Goscelin of St Bertin, or of Canterbury, was a prolific hagiographer, see Charles H. Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius* of Goscelin of St Bertin', *Studia Anselmiana* 37 (Rome 1955), pp. 1-118. See pp. 7-11, for his dating of Goscelin's *vitae*, including the *Vita Wereburgae*. The upper dating limit is supplied by the internal evidence of the *Vita*, but the lower limit is a conjecture from Goscelin's career. The *Vita Wereburgae* is printed in AASS, 3 February, pp. 384-90. A more recent discussion of Goscelin's career is in *Three Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. and trans. Rosalind C. Love (Oxford 1996), pp. xxxix-xlviii. A brief discussion of Goscelin and his presentation of Wereburga, in the context of hagiographical writing, is in Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth Century England* (London 1988), pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁵ This view is stated in David Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: a Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester 1982), pp. 25-6. This interpretation is expanded in Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 1988), pp. 60, 179, 181, 185-6n. Ridyard notes that the *Vita*, if written at Chester, would have been produced after 963. For the context of the translations to Hanbury and Chester see David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford 1989), pp. 117-8, p. 154.

community there.¹¹⁶ The *Vita* is not similarly silent in regard to Ely, making as much as possible of her conversion at Ely. In contrast, another account of Wereburga, that of William of Malmesbury, states that Wereburga took her vows in Chester.¹¹⁷ The former account is more plausible historically, yet the latter account is more plausible as a tradition native to Chester. Certainly it would be reasonable to suppose that at some time Chester produced some written material for their cult, but we need not suppose that it has survived as the extant *Vita*.

There is another element in the *Vita* which looks unlikely to have been the product of Chester tradition. This is the legend of Wereburga's incorruptible body dissolving so that it would not be mishandled by the Vikings.¹¹⁸ It is more likely that the legend would emerge in a place that had no physical remains of the saint, and perhaps no extensive written tradition either, and yet which valued the saint. The legend, and its rhetorical elaboration, minimises the need for the physical presence of the saint. The *Vita* emphasises the hope for eternal rather than corporeal life that is given through God's demonstration of his power to dissolve the body of a saint if necessary. An eminently suitable site for this tradition would be Ely, which had no connection in the present or the past with the body of the saint, and yet for whom Wereburga was one of a host of interrelated Anglo-Saxon royal women saints associated with the monastery.

¹¹⁶ It seems the fourteenth-century summariser of English *vitae*, John of Tynemouth, felt Chester received too little acknowledgment; he ends his version halfway through the translation section and then adds a repetition of Wereburga's connection with Chester; *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. C. Horstman, vol. II, p. 424.

¹¹⁷ *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 3, p. 387; the *Vita* carries on to describe the vague traditions of her career, to ch. 7, p. 388. The account of her translations and the dissolving of her uncorrupt body, chs. 17-18, pp. 389-90, while mentioning her residence at Hanbury, fails to mention Chester at all. William of Malmesbury's main account of Wereburga is in his *De Gestis Pontificum*, Bk. 4, ch. 172, pp. 308-9. His account is clearly based on Chester tradition and opens with Wereburga's conversion at Chester. Malmesbury also mentions Wereburga in his *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ed. William Stubbs, 2 vols., RS 90 (London 1887-9); I, ch. 76, p. 78, and ch. 214, p. 267.

¹¹⁸ *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 18, pp. 389-90. Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, pp. 25-6, notes this and infers from it that the putative source *vita* must therefore have originally been written at Hanbury. However, it would not seem to be a legend any more appropriate to Hanbury than Chester.

If the evidence for the cult of Wereburga at Ely is thin, it is nevertheless more suggestive than for Chester. Ridyard notes that there is no indication that Wereburga was much venerated at Ely before 1100, and suggests that her inclusion in saints' calendars could thus be the result of her promotion by the clerks of Chester.¹¹⁹ Also Wereburga is described as a nun of Ely in the *Vita* but as an abbess in the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*.¹²⁰ In the absence of any positive indication of Chester's promotion of her cult, this evidence could be interpreted in quite another way.¹²¹ Ely was gradually developing its hagiography and cults of other royal Anglo-Saxon women associated with its history. Thus a previously peripheral character like Wereburga began to gain in importance as the saintly pantheon increased in scope and detail. From a minor character, she was gradually given more veneration at Ely, in association with her relatives in the course of the eleventh century. Eventually a minor *vita* was required. After the *Vita* was written, her legend increases in popularity at Ely. As the *Vita* itself states that she was the abbess of many midland monasteries in her time, it becomes reasonable for the account in the *Liber Eliensis* to elevate her status to that of another abbess of Ely.¹²²

This pattern would also make sense of the manuscript evidence for the *Vita*; two of the three twelfth-century recensions appear in collections of hagiographic material of the royal women associated with Ely.¹²³ The evidence to associate the *Vita Wereburgae* with Ely

¹¹⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 185-6n.

¹²⁰ *ibid.* p. 179. The *Liber Eliensis* was written between 1131-1174, *ibid.* p. 51. For its account of Wereburga see *Liber Eliensis*, ed. Ernest O. Blake, *Royal Historical Society* 92, (1962), Bk. I, ch. 15, p. 32; ch. 17, p. 35; ch. 24, p. 42; chs. 36-7, p. 52.

¹²¹ It might be added that if Wereburga was remembered as a minor national saint in calendars, this is again no reason to suppose that Chester had any direct role in that national remembrance. Also, it certainly doesn't provide any positive evidence that the extant *Vita* was written for Chester.

¹²² The *Vita* states that Wereburga took her vows at Ely; *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 3, p. 387, and carries on to describe the vague traditions of her career, to ch. 7, p. 388. The account of her translations and the dissolving of her uncorrupt body, ch. 18, pp. 389-90, mentions her residence at Hanbury. Again, the account fails to mention Chester at all. For Wereburga's legendary role as abbess of Ely see *Liber Eliensis*, Bk. I, chs. 36-7, p. 52. The saint is abbess of Ely after already being abbess of the houses mentioned in the *Vita*; see *Liber Eliensis*, Bk. I, ch. 24, p. 42.

¹²³ Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 60n. See T. D. Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials Relating to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. RS 26 (1862-71): Wereburga, nos. 948-53.

seems far more positive than negative. Finally, there is one detail in the *Vita* which ought to preclude any serious association with Chester, and encourage the association with Ely. The single miracle story recounted, which is discussed below, is said to have taken place in a Northamptonshire village called Wedon. This is clearly a piece of hagiographic fiction included for purposes of verisimilitude. But it seems extraordinary that Chester would wish to record such a detail which only emphasises its lack of historical association with its own saint. Why would monks at Chester wish to hear of a village so far away? The placement of the village is, however, rather more convenient for Ely.¹²⁴

It seems safest to assume that the extant *Vita* has nothing to do with Chester, and much to do with Ely. The old association of the work with Goscelin is a different matter. Nevertheless, his putative authorship would give a context for the *Vita*. Goscelin produced a great number of hagiographies for various monasteries in England, and is known to have travelled the country widely. Thus there is every reason to suppose he may have visited Chester, and gathered the contemporary legends surrounding this saint that may have been circulating there. Be that as it may, the *Vita Wereburgae* is filled with spiritual rhetoric but very little concrete detail. For example, a largely conventional list of saintly virtues, which normally will last a sentence or two in a *vita*, is extended into a full chapter: 'Love and goodness, peace and cheer possessed her wholly. To the indigent she brought generosity, to the afflicted her piety was most compassionate'.¹²⁵ Rhetorical style cannot safely be used to identify an author. Nevertheless, the opening description of Wereburga's spiritual desire to be the loving spouse of Christ, seems characteristic of certain literary currents of the eleventh and twelfth centuries of

¹²⁴ Wedon may in fact have been a genuine cult centre associated with Wereburga, see Alan Thacker, 'The Origins and Diffusion of a Mercian Cult: The Case of St. Werburg', (forthcoming), p. 17. This explains why the place would have been chosen by the hagiographer as the site of the miracle, but does not imply that the original version of the miracle story did so also.

¹²⁵ *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 8, p. 388: '*Totam possederat dilectio, et beninitas, pax et hilaritas. Ad indigentes promptissima illi largitas; ad afflictos compatiensissima erat pietas*'. The *Vita* notably emphasises her virtues as a *magistra* in this chapter which precedes the miracle story, otherwise concentrating on more humble images of the saint.

which Goscelin was a part.¹²⁶ While it cannot be shown that Goscelin was certainly the author, the attribution to Goscelin remains plausible, particularly given the clear late eleventh-century context of the *Vita*. Goscelin's authorship, either way, does not affect my discussion of Wereburga below, but for the sake of convenience I shall call the unknown author 'Goscelin'.

Differing in tone and substance from the rest of the *Vita* is one of Wereburga's two miracles. The same miracle, in somewhat different form, was recounted again by William of Malmesbury in his early twelfth-century *Gesta Pontificum*.¹²⁷ In Goscelin's version, the miracle comes as something in the way of light relief, as well as providing an example of the signs that result from virtue; he writes 'now perhaps we tire of reading while I refrain from miracles'. He reports that 'many miracles were allowed to shine forth for this most worthy Virgin', implying he knew of other miracles from Wereburga's lifetime. Goscelin also indicates the oral transmission of the miracle; 'this playful and celebrated miracle was proclaimed from generation to generation by the whole of her people'.¹²⁸ If Goscelin's reference to other miracles is not dismissed entirely as a *topos*, it suggests that these other miracles could have been contemporary healing miracles from Chester. This is supported by Malmesbury's statement at the end of his version that the saint responds to the prayers of all, but most particularly to those of women and boys.

¹²⁶ *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 1, p. 386. Talbot, 'Liber Confortatorius', saw the style as good evidence for Goscelin's authorship, on the *Vita Wereburgae* specifically, see pp. 16-17. Rhetoric concerning the royal bride of Christ is eminently comparable to other associated *vitae*, see Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 82-92. Admittedly this kind of rhetoric was by no means exclusively Goscelin's own. Nevertheless, there is no stylistic reason, so far as I am aware, that would rule out Wereburga's *Vita* from being Goscelin's. On the matter of a putative 'Hanbury' *vita*, on which the extant *Vita* may be based, there is absolutely no evidence to suppose there was an earlier *vita*. It is true that many of the *vitae* written at this time by Goscelin and others were probably based on earlier materials, but that does not mean that it should be the case for Wereburga. Indeed, the very sparseness of the *Vita* should argue against such a supposition. Talbot, 'Liber Confortatorius', p. 17, notes that Goscelin often indicates that he is relying on written sources. On such a source for his *Vita* of Saint Edith, see Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 40. If Goscelin wrote the *Vita Wereburgae*, it is interesting to note that there is no similar such indication to be found there. Nevertheless, the closing chapter has some details which could indicate an earlier brief *translatio* record.

¹²⁷ Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum*, Bk. 4, ch. 172, pp. 308-9.

¹²⁸ *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 9, p. 388: '. . . *jocundum et celeberrimum a generatione in generationem hoc eius miraculum asseritur ab ipsa plebe tota*'.

As noted, Goscelin's version of the miracle begins at Wedon in Northamptonshire.¹²⁹ In this 'dwelling' there was 'a great number of wild birds, called geese' who were ravaging the fields.¹³⁰ Wereburga's 'rural servant' tells her of the problem, and she orders him to gather the geese and enclose them as if they were domestic herd animals. The servant is astonished by this order, which appeared to be mad or nonsense, as the wild birds would simply fly away at his approach. Wereburga repeats the order; 'Go as soon as possible, and by our order lead all of them into our custody'. Naturally, the birds obey the order, and go before the servant 'like captive sinners', and 'with submissive necks'. The next day they beg pardon and permission to leave from Wereburga. Thus far the miracle seems well within familiar patterns; wild animals are tamed and shamed by the virtue of the saint. Indeed there is a great deal of similarity to the miracle of Saint Cuthbert and the ravens, particularly in the penitential attitude of the birds.¹³¹ The peculiarity of the story is that a peasant servant should deliver the miraculous order, rather than the saint herself.

The second half of the miracle departs entirely from hagiographic tradition, and differs importantly in Malmesbury's and Goscelin's versions. In the former's rendition, the peasant servant, seeing that the birds are so docile, decides to eat one for his supper. Goscelin merely says that the bird was stolen and hidden by one of the saint's servants. In Goscelin, the next day Wereburga gives the birds permission to depart, being 'most benign towards all creatures of God'. The birds refuse to leave, fluttering about the saint, asking 'as if with human voice, "Why when all of us relax in your clemency, is one of us captured? And can this iniquity rest in the house of your sanctity, and foul rapacity fare well under your innocence?" '¹³² A similar confrontation occurs in Malmesbury's version, where the saint soon understands the cause of the birds' distress, and gathering up the remains of the unfortunate goose, restores it to life. In Goscelin's version, Wereburga merely identifies the culprit and restores the captive goose to its confederates. She then forbids the

¹²⁹ *ibid.* ch. 9: '*In Weduna autem regio patrimonio suo, quod est in Hamtuna provincia*'.

¹³⁰ *ibid.* ch. 10, p. 388.

¹³¹ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 20, pp. 222-5.

¹³² *Vita Wereburgae*, ch. 11, pp. 388-9.

birds ever to return to her lands, and they fly off, well satisfied. Goscelin's version, omitting the miraculous restoration, may be less spectacular than Malmesbury's, but its second part remains odd within the context of hagiographic tradition, as the geese have their speech appealing to the saint for their own benefit. However, Goscelin's second part, in lacking the resurrection motif, looks peculiar in the light of Malmesbury's version; it is as if Goscelin deliberately erased the resurrection aspect of the miracle.

Goscelin's emphasis at the end of the story is on the wonder of animal obedience to the Creator. However, it is the astonishing resurrection of the goose, in Malmesbury's version, which demands attention here. The geese actually argue to the saint that they have a right to protection, and to make that right good, Wereburga resurrects a wild animal. In contrast, Goscelin's understanding of the importance of the story is revealed by his reference to another Anglo-Saxon abbess, Saint Milburga, whose *Vita* Goscelin had already written, as he states in the Wereburga miracle.¹³³ Milburga finds great flocks of wild geese eating the corn of her fields. She commands them to leave, and the geese never returned or damaged her crops again. There is no resurrection or restoration motif in the story. For Goscelin the restoration of the goose is not the significant part of Wereburga's miracle; it is the obedience of the animals that makes the two miracles comparable.

If Goscelin was suppressing the resurrection of the goose, it was because that motif was outside his understanding of the patterns of such a miracle. Indeed, the peculiar reference to the Milburga miracle may be an indication of the hagiographer's discomfort with

¹³³ *ibid.* ch. 11, pp. 388-9; '*Tale prorsus miraculum in vita beatissimae Virginis Amelburgae, quam nostro stylus recudimus. . .*'. For the *Vita* of Milburga see Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, vol. II, *De Sancta Milburga Virgine*, pp. 188-92, and for the relevant miracle, see p. 191. For a discussion of the presentation of the miracles of female saints in associated *vitae* see Susan Millinger, 'Humility and Power: Anglo-Saxon Nuns in Anglo-Norman Hagiography', in *Distant Echoes*, ed. Nichols and Shank, pp. 115-129. The most unusual aspect of the Wereburga and Milburga miracles is the fact that the saints are women, who do not usually exhibit power over nature in hagiographic tradition. There is also an objection, on stylistic grounds, to Goscelin's authorship of the *Vita* of Milburga, see Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, p. 25. If this objection is accepted then, assuming the extant *Vita* is the one to which the hagiographer refers, then Goscelin could not be the author of the Wereburga *Vita*. Equally, the subjectivity of stylistic arguments concerning authorship could lead to the opposite argument; that Goscelin must have written the *Vita* of Milburga if he wrote the *Vita* of Wereburga. The matter can only be left open.

the pattern of the Wereburga story.¹³⁴ When Goscelin stated that this is a story handed down by Wereburga's 'people', he may have been telling the literal truth. The story is adaptable to the preconceptions of the literate hagiographic tradition, but underneath Goscelin's version lie substantially different assumptions. This story may thus illuminate the meaning of animal and saint stories within the popular oral culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Before returning to the understanding of the story from the point of view of Wereburga's *plebs*, miracles of the resurrection of animals must be considered. This is a very unusual motif, and does not have any obvious patristic tradition behind it. However, there are some examples of similar kinds of miracle from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Firstly there is Saint Kentigern's resurrection of a pet gull while the saint was a boy. Kentigern's master, Saint Servanus, had a pet gull, which obeyed him in all things, and showed reason by the grace of God. However the old man's disciples were made jealous, which 'convicted them of disobedience'. The monks killed the bird and blamed Kentigern, who then resurrected the bird to prove his innocence to Servanus.¹³⁵ The welfare of the bird is a minor part of the story; its themes are monastic obedience and the persecution of the just holy man. Thus this story, despite the resurrection motif, is, as it stands, a story that serves a didactic purpose well within the patristic tradition.

Also worth comparing to Wereburga's miracle are the *joca* of Saint Faith and Thomas Becket, where the saints save various domesticated animals. Saint Faith resurrects a partly flayed donkey, though whether for the benefit of the animal or its owner it is unclear.¹³⁶ These are all, of course, posthumous miracles included in

¹³⁴ Reference to a similar miracle of an earlier famous saint is itself a *topos*, and it gives authority to the miracle of a recent saint. However, reference to the miracle of a similarly obscure saint does stretch the viability of this hagiographic tactic, and is therefore suspicious.

¹³⁵ *Vita Kentigerni*, ch. 5, pp. 170-1, trans. pp. 42-3. This story is much more closely related to Gregory the Great's story of Florentius and the bear, see above, than to the story of Wereburga and the geese.

¹³⁶ For Becket see William of Canterbury, *Miraculorum Gloriosi Martyris Thomae Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi*, ed. James C. Robertson, *RS* 67, vol I, (London 1875), pp. 173-546; Bk. 6, ch. 147, p. 528; ch. 157, p. 536; ch. 158, p. 537. For Saint Faith see *Liber Miraculorum Sancte Fides*, ed. Luca Robertini (Selestat 1994), pp. 91-2, and *The Book of Sainte Foy*, trans. Pamela Sheingorn (Philadelphia 1995), pp. 56-7.

large miracle collections, and unlike the *Vita Kentigerni*, may therefore represent popular ideas of dead saints' miraculous behaviour. Certainly the author of the Saint Faith miracle collection referred to some of her miracles as 'unheard of and new miracles', the *joca* and *ludi* which had caused the saint to be mocked.¹³⁷ The author of the Becket miracle collection referred to one of the animal miracles as being among '*sua ludicra*'.¹³⁸ There does seem to be a tendency for hagiographers to associate these miracles with a certain lack of seriousness; recall that Goscelin characterised the Wereburga miracle as being '*jocundum et celeberrimum*', and told by '*ipsa plebs tota*'.

If there was any such thing as Wereburga's *plebs* in the twelfth century, they would be the people rather than the monks of Chester. There is every reason to suppose that Goscelin, in his travels, could have learnt of this miracle in Chester, and then transposed the story to another location, to suit his particular monastic audience. William of Malmesbury's version of the Wereburga legend, although written about forty years after Goscelin's *Vita*, seems to be entirely independent of the latter's account. As noted, Malmesbury states that she took her vows in the city of Chester, which is entirely at variance with the earlier accounts by Florence of Worcester and Goscelin.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Malmesbury's account of the miracle is, in general structure, identical to Goscelin's, but there is no sign whatsoever of any quotation from the latter. In Malmesbury, wild geese were destroying the crops in the countryside of Chester, and a peasant man¹⁴⁰ comes to Wereburga¹⁴¹, and asks for help. However, she only

¹³⁷ Sheingorn, *Sainte Foy*, p. 24.

¹³⁸ *Miraculorum Gloriosi Martyris Thomae*, ch. 147, p. 528.

¹³⁹ Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum*, Bk. 4, ch. 172, pp. 308-9: '*Wereburga celibatum professa in illa civitate plurimo temporum curriculo bonis emicuit virtutibus*', p. 308. Malmesbury is in fact known to have quoted from Goscelin's other hagiographies elsewhere in his chronicles, see Talbot, '*Liber Confortatorius*', pp. 11-12. However, there is no reason to suppose therefore that he had read the *Vita Wereburgae*. Indeed his accounts of Wereburga elsewhere would seem to indicate his ignorance of the Ely tradition concerning the saint; see Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regum*, ch. 7, p. 78, and ch. 214, p. 267. In Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum*, ch. 183, p. 323, Wereburga is mentioned in the context of the rule of Ely by her mother Eormenilda, but is not actually herself connected with Ely.

¹⁴⁰ Malmesbury terms him, *villicus*, *agrestis*, and *rusticus*, as opposed to Goscelin's *domesticus ruricola*. There is no real difference in meaning between these terms, but the different terms are a good indication of their separate literary genesis. Interestingly, in contrast with Malmesbury,

needs to tell the man once to lead the geese into a house, whereas Goscelin has Wereburga issue two speeches to the peasant. In Malmesbury the man thinks Wereburga is joking [*putabat ludere*], but finding her serious, does as he is told. There is not the same notion of the saint joking in Goscelin, although the order is thought strange.

Returning to Malmesbury's version, the geese obey the peasant's command in the name of the *domina*, and 'walking with bent necks after their enemy, were shut up under a roof'.¹⁴² After the peasant has eaten the goose, Wereburga comes the next day to scold the rest for damaging other people's property. This detail is more practical and proactive of the saint than in Goscelin, where Wereburga's hymns and prayers are interrupted by the shrill din of the geese. Indeed Goscelin's presentation of Wereburga, throughout the *Vita*, is rather more meekly feminine and religious, than the commanding presence that emerges from Malmesbury's version. Malmesbury's story seems to reflect a clear picture of a noblewoman's actual authority, which might be expected in a popular story. Goscelin, by contrast, had a hagiographic job to do, which may have made him soften Wereburga's appearance as a woman who exercised secular authority.

Goscelin seems very keen to make the peasant unobtrusive by avoiding descriptive references to him.

¹⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, the terms used for Wereburga are similar. Malmesbury uses *domina*, *herilis*, *virgo*. Goscelin refers to Wereburga as *domina*, but his preferred term is *virgo*, though he also once calls her *alma* in this story, in reference to her lands. Despite the same terms, the two writers contrive not to use the same terms at the same points in the story. The only phrase that could point towards a literary dependence, rather than pointing away from such, is the *pietas virginis* to which the geese in both stories appeal. With such a close correspondence of story, it is surprising that there is so little in common in terms of vocabulary between the two accounts. In Goscelin, the word *domina* occurs where the peasant is talking to the saint, whereas *virgo* is used when Goscelin is narrating to his audience. No such distinction could be made for Malmesbury.

¹⁴² The bent necks are the only trace in Malmesbury of Goscelin's penitential rhetoric concerning the geese, Malmesbury writes *collis demissis* rather than *summissis collis* as in Goscelin. The submissive attitude of the geese is thus very likely a part of the oral story told at Chester, which each writer expresses in Latin in different words. The motif would have been familiar enough to both from Bede's description of the penitence of Cuthbert's birds, *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 20, p. 224, '*et summisso ad pedes eius capite*'. Thus no case can be made here for borrowing from Goscelin to Malmesbury. It is more probable that Bede's image had entered the imagination of monks and secular people alike. This would thus be one specific example of a literary *topos* entering general culture.

In any case, in Malmesbury's version, the geese show 'avian sense' and importune Wereburga, until she understands the cause of their distress. In contrast, Goscelin's geese act as if they had human voices.¹⁴³ Thus it seems that the wit of the geese is a part of the oral story, recorded differently by each writer. However, Malmesbury's choice of words is significantly different; he does not imply the patristic miracle of the reversal of wild nature, rather he implies an animal sense of preservation. This is a clear indication that Goscelin was grafting patristic *topoi* onto a popular oral story, and that popular and hagiographic assumptions were significantly different. For Goscelin, the importance of the story lies in its satisfying repetition of hagiographic tradition; that saints perform the same miracles is an indication itself of their sanctity.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, it was perfectly natural in Malmesbury's version of the story for the geese to demand their rights of the saint. Realising at once that the peasant was the 'thief', Wereburga orders him to bring the remains of the goose. This he does, and Wereburga resurrects the goose, from its bones and feathers. All the geese then fly off after giving thanks. There is thus another glaring difference from Goscelin's account of Wereburga; there the geese are commanded never to return to the saint's lands. More realistically, there is no mention of this banishment in Malmesbury, which also means that his version of the story ends on the climax of Wereburga's resurrection of the goose, rather than on the miracle of obedience.

If Malmesbury's version was closer to the original oral story, then the logic of the popular story from Chester differs from hagiographic tradition. For the *plebs* of Chester, the Eden-like

¹⁴³ In Malmesbury the wit of the geese is expressed thus: '*Nec defuit alitibus [ales] sensus*'. In Goscelin the phrase is '*ut quasi hac voce humana*'.

¹⁴⁴ Even Goscelin's version of Wereburga's miracle is far less steeped in patristic tradition than another of his stories. In the *Vita* of Saint Edith, a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon nun of Wilton, he describes her garden enclosure, *Vita Sanctae Edithae Virginis*, ed. Andre Wilmart, *Analecta Bollandiana* 56 (1938), pp. 5-101 and 265-307; ch. 10, pp. 65-8. Here wild animals from doves to wolves and bears, live in docility, fed by hand by the saint. Goscelin pointedly compares this garden 'solitude' to the hermitages of the Desert Fathers, Saint Anthony in particular. Here again, Goscelin emphasises the wonder that all these ferocious creatures submit to the saint. The contrast between this thoroughly traditional story and the Wereburga story show that the oddities of the latter were not the product of an idiosyncratic imagination on Goscelin's part. Also, Edith's miracle is enacted in private, as befits a woman, unlike Wereburga's public miracle, in which economic reality is visible.

condition that surrounds a saint lies not just in her ability to control nature, but also involves a contract with the animals. Animals ought to be protected from their 'enemy', the peasant who stands for all ordinary meat-eating humans. Rather than being penitent or even coming to serve the monks, as in some of the patristic stories, the unchastened wild birds fly off again. Malmesbury tells us that this miracle had been long celebrated by the inhabitants of the area of Chester, and concludes by saying how Wereburga responds to the prayers of all, but most particularly to those of women and boys. This saint is the protector of the weaker in society, and perhaps her protection of small animals is symbolic of this role. The story is good evidence of a genuine popular cult at Chester in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Indeed the story indicates the nature of this popular sense of a shrine; the sanctity of the shrine is shown through this miracle, and the miracle is remembered through the shrine. This is the structure of popular oral memory, which fixes a narration on a place, in this case the site of Wereburga's holy remains.

One objection to this interpretation of the story would remain; why would Malmesbury, in his chronicle, record a faithful account of a popular piece of legend, without embellishing it with *topoi*, with which he would have been as familiar as Goscelin. Partly, Malmesbury did not need to do so; the chronicle framework of the twelfth century allows for the straightforward recording of wonders and prodigies without judgement or interpretation on the writer's part. Whatever the chronicler's larger purpose, some such entertaining asides are acceptable.¹⁴⁵ However, Malmesbury does seem to signal to his audience that he is recording an amusing popular story. He uses derogatory terms for the peasant at every opportunity, whereas Goscelin kept the servant out of the story as much as possible, perhaps to maintain some dignity for the miracle. Malmesbury gives no commonplace moral for the story as does Goscelin, rather he introduces the story with the peasant telling of the problem of the geese to the saint, among other *fabula* of the day. Malmesbury's choice of words here is probably not innocent; he is

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of prodigies and other entertaining stories in contemporary British chroniclers, though concentrating on the more restrained William of Newburgh, see Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth Century England*, (Chicago 1977), pp. 114-140.

signalling to his readers that this an amusing *fabula* featuring a *villicus*. Within these terms, Malmesbury is very likely a good guide to the essence of the popular oral story. Thus in this story of Saint Wereburga, there is a subtle but profound deviation from the patristic tradition of the saint and animal story. There is a different logic underlying the miraculous relationship between the two parties; such a popular story is compatible with Edenic *topoi*, but does not insist on the submission and domestication of animals to a human hierarchy. Rather, in the context of a shrine, or a living saint's power, there is a special and different set of rules governing human and animal relationships. Also this popular logic does not concern the saint's 'affection' for animals, or special closeness with nature. It concerns the special laws of sacred places.

vii) Farne in the Twelfth Century: Popular and Monastic Influences on Shrine Stories

The same 'folkloric logic' that may be seen in the Wereburga miracle is expressed in greater detail in the animal stories of Farne Island and its hermits. Equally however, some of these stories could be seen entirely as the creation of monastic culture. One miracle, recounted by Reginald and Geoffrey both, tells how a raven stole a piece of wax given to the hermit.¹⁴⁶ The hermit commands the bird to bring it back so that the gift is not wasted, and naturally the bird obeys orders. Both writers make the comparison to the miracle of Saint Cuthbert and the ravens who stole the thatch.¹⁴⁷ In terms of the origin of the twelfth-century story, it is interesting to note that the ravens bring a gift of hog's lard to Saint Cuthbert by way of asking for forgiveness. Theft, gifts, ravens, and the theme of animal obedience link Bede's story to the twelfth-century stories. Reginald in particular seems to follow Bede closely in thematic terms. Bede has Cuthbert moralising on the event 'declaring how carefully men should seek after obedience and humility, seeing that even a proud bird hastened to atone for the wrong that it had done to the man of God. . . Let it not seem absurd to anyone to learn a lesson of virtue from birds'. Reginald's story is something of a homily on the humility

¹⁴⁶ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 78, pp. 162-3; *Vita Bart.* ch. 17, pp. 309-10.

¹⁴⁷ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 20, pp. 222-5. Indeed Geoffrey makes this miracle one of the four which link Bartholomew to the fathers, Cuthbert of course in this case; *Vita Bart.* ch. 19, p. 311.

and loyalty to the church, or at least to the hermit, of the poor couple who gave the gift of wax; he begins the story writing, 'whoever faithfully serves God acquires a good position for himself'. Reginald comments at the end that it is 'a wonderful and stupendous thing' that 'whilst brute animals sense the command of the virtue of Blessed Cuthbert, truly rational men of intelligence fear less his power.' Thus there are enough similarities between Reginald's and Bede's story to indicate that Reginald, at least, had Bede in mind while recording the story. However, this does not mean that a purely monastic context produced the story. Indeed, surprisingly, there is no trace in either Geoffrey or Reginald of the familiar *topos*, the bird's show of penitence.

Other stories seem to fit more clearly within the kind of 'folkloric logic' found in the Wereburga story. Saint Cuthbert's Peace has already been touched upon in the context of the miracles surrounding the hermit Bartholomew and the healing cult on Farne.¹⁴⁸ Cuthbert's law caused a ship master to be miraculously punished with death. The man had beat a ship's boy because of the boy's negligence while on Farne, despite Bartholomew's warning against punishment for anything occurring on Farne.¹⁴⁹ The same law operates between wild animals; a hawk who killed and ate Bartholomew's pet gull suffers penance imposed by the hermit.¹⁵⁰ The gull is here described simply as 'a small bird [who] seized food daily from his [the hermit's] meal'. Bartholomew apparently was in the habit of leaving food out in his cell for the bird, and was absent fishing on this occasion. The hawk came, flew into the cell and devoured the gull, but then miraculously found itself unable to fly out of the cell. Exhausted by its attempts at escape, it finally descended to where the 'father', that is Bartholomew, normally sat. Bartholomew returned and saw the scene of the 'murder' or the 'sin of so great a crime'. That the hawk can do penance for its sin is noted as an important element by Geoffrey; 'though not in the dismissal of the sin, he followed the praiseworthy hermit Godric, who taught the browsing hare to leave alone his vegetables.' The hawk's sin and penance is also central to Reginald's account of the story, where it is

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter III, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ *Vita Bart.* ch. 18, pp. 310-11.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.* ch. 19, pp. 311-12.

Cuthbert who exacts a more dramatic and violent penance. Here, the hermit's role is to forgive the hawk and to appeal to Cuthbert for mercy. Saint Cuthbert relents, and the hawk flies off wild and free once more.¹⁵¹ In terms of thematic *topoi*, the impressive control over nature demonstrated by the living hermit or the elemental saint, is roughly in line with literary tradition. However, the sin and forgiveness of a wild animal, the hawk, is not at all. In Geoffrey, there is not even any trace of an insistence on the reversal of wild nature; the hawk is not tamed, but allowed to go on its way after submitting to a penance that was apparently as reasonable for a hawk as for a human.¹⁵²

In Reginald's version of the hawk story the closing line, which is the 'moral' of the miracle, links the story to the taming *topos*. Saint Cuthbert 'thus punished the wild bird, tamed it, and at the invocation of the name itself, absolved it from the chains of its conscious guilt.'¹⁵³ Given that the hawk displays none of the behaviour, familiar from patristic *topoi*, which would show itself to be tamed, this moral should be regarded as an interpolation by Reginald on the oral version. Reginald was adapting the story in much the same way as Goscelin adapted the Wereburga miracle. Reginald also seems to quote from Bede's Cuthbert, describing the hawk, when it settles down in Bartholomew's chapel as 'with abject head, otherwise humble and with a dirty body, as if conscious of its guilt.'¹⁵⁴ However Reginald's two literary interpolations do not affect the core of the story, which is the saint's punishment of a wild animal for the

¹⁵¹ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 111, pp. 247-8; There is no sign of dependence of Geoffrey's version upon Reginald's earlier version. Geoffrey's is the simpler and less dramatic version. Reginald's in contrast is highly miraculous and involves three distinct 'acts'. It seems far more plausible to see this story in terms of its popular oral existence, than imagining how the monks of Durham and Lindisfarne could have produced the two versions. Thus either Reginald embellished the simple version of the story, which then persisted for twenty years, until Geoffrey's rendition, or the story circulated in different versions.

¹⁵² This miracle may reflect a growing popular belief in the ability of animals to sin and be punished from the twelfth century onwards, for which see Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, pp. 36-41.

¹⁵³ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 111, p. 248.

¹⁵⁴ See again the raven story in, *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 20, p. 224; '. . . *sparsis lamentabiliter pennis, et summisso ad pedes eius capite*, atque humiliter voce quibus valebat indicium veniam precebat.' Reginald is perhaps writing with the memory of this passage of Bede, producing a similar sentence at a comparable point in the two stories; '. . . *et in angulo secus altare, summisso capite*, ac demissis alis et hispido corpore, quasi conscius sui reatus expavit.'

murder of another animal. The animal victim, if not entirely wild, is not a human possession. That Geoffrey, in the *Vita*, does not add similar *topoi* to the story might be considered very strange. However, Geoffrey was chiefly concerned to demonstrate that 'while Bartholomew was absent in body, he was present in power', and is thus able to prevent the hawk's escape. As Geoffrey was concerned to use this story to link Bartholomew's sanctity to Godric of Finchale's, by comparison with Godric's encounter with the hare, he was perhaps constrained to tell the story in its simplest form, perhaps very closely to the popular renditions underneath the literary versions.¹⁵⁵

The only kind of story from patristic tradition that remotely approaches this story is the variant where a lion, domesticated by a saint, is ordered to protect a donkey, is mistakenly supposed to have eaten it, and patiently endures the saint's wrath until a miracle rewards the animal's obedience.¹⁵⁶ It should be abundantly apparent that this kind of story does not provide the *topoi* to explain the story of the gull and hawk on Farne. While the patristic lion comes close to being an allegorised sinner turned monk, in Geoffrey's version of the Farne miracle there is no indication that either the gull or the hawk are anything but normal animals. It seems more reasonable to interpret this miracle in the same terms as Malmesbury's Wereburga miracle; the story reflects popular conceptions of a sacred shrine. As Reginald states, 'Because it [the hawk] had hurt the peace of Blessed Cuthbert, nowhere was it able to find a place of flight or the quiet of peace.'¹⁵⁷ This statement does not contradict anything in the patristic tradition, but accords more closely with a 'folkloric logic' of the special nature of a shrine. There normal relations between humans and animals are suspended in favour of an equality and peace that must be observed by all parties, human or animal. The saint will

¹⁵⁵ The story very probably originated with the hermit Bartholomew himself, and thus Reginald's earlier version stressing the role of Saint Cuthbert is likely to be close to the story told by the hermit in the first place. Aspects of Geoffrey's version may also have originated with Bartholomew. That the hermit himself was the original creator of these stories does not at all affect the argument that it represents popular conceptions. Bartholomew appears to have been culturally as much, if not more, a product of popular as apart from monastic religion; see Chapters II, p. 56 and III, p. 102-3.

¹⁵⁶ For example, Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, ch. 107, col. 173, or the *Vita S. Eusebii Hieronymi*, PL 22, cols. 5-214; esp. cols. 210-12.

¹⁵⁷ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 111, p. 248.

enforce this peace, on a human attacking a human even more violently than on a wild animal attacking another animal.

Bartholomew's pet gull deserves a discussion to itself; is it a domestic animal, a wild animal or something else? In Geoffrey's version of this miracle, he gives very little indication that the gull is more than loosely domesticated. However earlier in the *Vita*, Geoffrey does mention the bird:

'He practised fishing. . . In fact to strengthen the asceticism of this still untried anchorite, the Lord assigned a gull to minister to him. Every day in Lent in the first year, she brought along a sort of fish, which is commonly called a 'lump-fish', to an appointed place for his sustenance.'¹⁵⁸

This passage has already been discussed, in the context of Bartholomew's asceticism, as a version of the Elijah *topos* ; instead of the Lord sending ravens to bring the anchorite bread, a pet gull brings fish to the anchorite, who must otherwise fast. Bartholomew himself probably told the story both as an exercise in self-depreciation and an attempt to claim some heavenly approval.¹⁵⁹

Reginald treats the gull quite differently, giving his gull-hawk story an introduction describing the bird, and linking the gull's behaviour to the holy nature of the island:

There is a certain island, named Farne. . . which on account of being the ancient habitation of Saint Cuthbert, is greatly overflowing with virtue. In those days Bartholomew the monk inhabited this island . . . this man had a little bird which inhabited the island with him for a long time. She was so intimate and domestic with him and his [servants?], that she would become accustomed to take food from their hands: and always by daily custom. . . she was eager to sit, to play [*jocari*] and to eat, by a habit as if converted to nature. This enriched work in all the time of the year without interruption, and to certain

¹⁵⁸ *Vita Bart.* ch. 9, pp. 301-2.

¹⁵⁹ See above, Chapter II, p. 65 and p. 69.

ones it was in proportion to a miracle and to some it was a humorous spectacle of solace.¹⁶⁰

Here, Reginald is invoking the *topos* of the domesticated wild animal, and the animal is a comic companion to the monks, participating in Durham's important monastic virtue of enjoying lunch. In contrast to Geoffrey, there is no trace here of the Elijah *topos*. In terms of the reception of miracle stories it is interesting to see that some of the monks thought this to be a 'miracle' and others just a 'joke'. Very likely, Reginald was by temperament one of the latter, else he would not have mentioned the division in attitude. Two different mentalities in regard to animals and the miraculous could exist within the same group of monks or monastic servants. One group was inclined to consider animal behaviour in terms of the miraculous, perhaps through the reputation of Farne itself. Given this mentality, mythology can grow around ordinary, real animals.

The eiderducks of Farne are just such creatures. There is no mention of these birds in either of Cuthbert's *Vitae*, and their first appearance directly linked to the sanctity of Cuthbert and Farne is in Reginald's miracle collection. Yet their holiness appears to have been of long duration; the first miracle concerning an eiderduck involves the obscure hermit Aelric of Farne, who lived there sometime before 1150, decades before Reginald was writing.¹⁶¹ Reginald gives a

¹⁶⁰ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 111, pp. 247-8. This passage could be compared to that of the pet bird in Jocelyn of Furness' *Vita Kentigerni*, ch. 5, pp. 170-1, trans. pp. 42-3. The Cistercian hagiographer insists much more on the miraculous domesticity of the bird to Saint Servanus. Jocelyn emphasises the ways in which the bird demonstrated its love for the holy man, the latter's contemplation of this wonder, and the power of God 'to whom the dumb speak, and the irrational things are known to have reason.' Jocelyn's rhetoric is recognisably Cistercian in tone, and also has much more in common with patristic tradition than does Reginald's more matter of fact and wry tone. Reginald was perfectly capable of adding conventional statements about the pervasive power of God and His saints when he choose to, but simply is not interested in doing so in this passage.

¹⁶¹ There are three miracles concerning Aelric in Reginald's *Libellus*. One, where wax was stolen by a bird, ch. 78, was told in modified terms by Geoffrey, who said that Bartholomew had told the story under Aelric's name out of humility, *Vita Bart.* ch. 17. Thus one might question whether the other Aelric stories, chs. 27 and 28 in Reginald, were also creations of Bartholomew's. However while Reginald gives no witness for the story of the raven and the wax, he does say that both Aelric and Leving, his servant, told the eiderduck story to the monks of Durham. The other Aelric story then follows, the two forming a minor group in Reginald's collection. The isolation of the wax and

description of the eiderducks in the Aelric miracle. God placed all creation under the command of his servants, and 'in the island of Farne there are animals of several kinds which, from the times of Saint Cuthbert, are domestic and touchable by the hands of all inhabitants and visitors.'¹⁶² Reginald describes how the eiderducks will make their nests in houses, in beds, on tables, and will happily sit in your lap. To some extent, this description of the eiderducks is comparable to the 'Edenic' *topos* of blissful relations between saints and animals, although Reginald also manages to give the impression of wild fecundity and noise overwhelming human habitation during the nesting season. This description is not comparable to the Cistercian lyricism of well ordered monastic Edens. Nevertheless, Reginald ascribes the eiderducks' behaviour not to 'nature but by grace' as Saint Cuthbert tamed them during his time on Farne; 'Now what their kind received freely in their fathers, is possessed and exhibited in the offspring in heredity of posterity and privilege of dignity.'¹⁶³ It seems, despite Reginald's homily on creation and obedience at the beginning of this story, that the eiderducks did not have to perform any miracle of obedience to receive this grace. They received this grace through the 'piety and pity of Blessed Cuthbert alone'.

Geoffrey's description of eiderduck habits, including their habit of nesting next to the chapel altar, agrees that this 'prerogative is the dignity of this noble island and if the study of the ancients had learnt of it, would have been diffused in the most beautiful praise throughout the world'.¹⁶⁴ Yet Geoffrey also describes the taking of the young birds to the 'native waves' where 'they regain in wisdom the ancient condition with the sea'. Like Wereburga's geese in Malmesbury's account, outside the presence of the saint, they return to their natural wild state. Their wild behaviour and their grace are intertwined, quite unlike the colonised and obedient nature of

raven story in the work may indicate that it had a later origin than the earlier two stories.

¹⁶² Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 27, pp. 60-3. During nesting season the eiderducks today are known to be exceptionally docile, and are easily tamed in general; see the wildlife pamphlet by M. Scott Weightman, *The Farne Islands* (Seahouses 1988), p. 12.

¹⁶³ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 27, p. 61.

¹⁶⁴ *Vita Bart.* ch. 24, p. 315.

Clairvaux. However, Geoffrey is more circumspect about the origin of the eiderducks' grace:

'Long tradition maintains that certain birds anciently inhabit this island, of which both the name and kind survives by a miracle. In the time of nesting they assemble there. And by the sanctity of the place or rather by those who sanctified the place in their conversion, they soon accomplished the grace of such gentleness that they were not averse to human gazes and touches.'¹⁶⁵

Unlike Reginald, Geoffrey seems unwilling to buy the notion that Cuthbert was personally responsible for such grace, attributing it to all the hermits of Farne and obliquely referring to oral memory. The two different interpretations of the hagiographers does seem to indicate that the eiderduck stories are popular legend, rather than a creation of the Durham monks themselves. In this case Reginald was probably accurately reflecting popular belief, while adapting and incorporating it to Durham's Cuthbertine lore. In contrast, Gregory was accepting popular legend, but pruning it of the element he knew was unlikely to be true, given that there is no mention of eiderducks in Bede. Finally, it should be noted that there seems to be no hagiographic precedent for a whole group of animals to be placed in a state of grace for perpetuity, simply by the pious whim of a saint.

The consequence of this state of grace is that the eiderducks may not be harassed or eaten on the Inner Farne itself. Thus all the Farne related material of twelfth-century Durham contains a miracle of Cuthbert's vengeance upon those who break this law. Reginald comments; 'Blessed Cuthbert offered such quiet of peace to them, that hitherto no man presumed safely to violate it.'¹⁶⁶ But the hermit Aelric was forced to go on an errand and leave his servant Leving unsupervised. So the servant was led astray by the devil and his own desire, and he ate an eiderduck. When Aelric returned, miraculous evidence of the servant's crime appeared washed up on the beach. This was clearly Saint Cuthbert's *virtus* in action. Aelric confronted his servant with this evidence, and the poor sinner promptly

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*: 'Hanc vero insulam vetusta longevitas quasdam perhibet aves incolere...'

¹⁶⁶ Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 27, p. 61.

vomited up his earlier meal on the doorstep of the hermit's cell. Aelric was then able both to bring the sinner to contrition and forgiveness, and to prevent a more violent vengeance coming from the saint himself. Geoffrey describes this miracle and other related ones, noting that 'nothing is committed unpunished in this island.'¹⁶⁷

The anonymous collection of Farne miracles details two miracles of vengeance upon men who violated the peace of the 'gulls'.¹⁶⁸ The first was one Roger of Embleton who came to ask Bartholomew for one of the young 'gulls' to eat, Bartholomew replies:

'You know not what you ask. Go rather to the neighbouring islands and take thence what you can. But do not presume to stretch forth your hand against those whom the lodging of this holy place has brought forth. They must enjoy the privilege of that great peace.'¹⁶⁹

But foolish Roger goes and disturbs the birds, raising up a great clamour, and bringing the hermit's warning of punishment if he does not desist. The man dies three days later. But then his nephew William comes to Farne to fish and sneers: 'Do you think Saint Cuthbert cares for gulls?' The young man throws stones at the eiderducks, and subsequently suffers from severe pain in two fingers, but does not die. The writer admits that some may be puzzled at the difference in punishment between the two men, and after some discussion concludes that the second man must have repented in his heart and was thus spared; 'For a just judge does not consider the equality of the crimes, but, in delivering retributive judgement, he assesses the quality of intention.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ *Vita Bart.* ch. 23, pp. 314.

¹⁶⁸ *Miracles of Farne*, chs. 2 and 3, pp. 10-12. A note on bird terminology is required here. Geoffrey does not give a name to the birds he describes, which are assumed to be the eiderducks. Bartholomew's pet 'gull' is described as an *avis parvula* and a *moota* or gull. Reginald refers to the eiderducks as 'the birds of Saint Cuthbert', which are called *lomes* by the English and *eires* by the Flemish; Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 27. He never refers to one as a *moota*. Bartholomew's pet gull he describes as an *avis modica*. The writers thus seem unsure about what Latin terminology should be used for the birds, and the use of *moota* is probably the result of confusion on the anonymous writer's part. Bartholomew's pet is probably a gull, not an eiderduck. If it was the latter, surely Geoffrey or Reginald would have given some indication.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.* ch. 2, p. 10, trans. Craster, *Arch. Ael.* 29 (1951), p. 97.

¹⁷⁰ *Miracles of Farne*, ch. 3, pp. 11-12, trans. *Arch. Ael.* pp. 98-9.

Despite the anonymous writer's heavy use of biblical language, and his insistent sermonising on these miracles, it should be clear how idiosyncratic the stories themselves are in terms of hagiographic tradition. They are a clear case of the adaptation of folklore to a literate hagiographic style. However, it could be objected that the stories are the creation of the hermits, or monks of Durham, for their own ends, perhaps to ensure the monks' own monopoly over such resources as there are on Farne Island. Indeed, Geoffrey does seem to say that eiderduck eggs may be gathered by the monks of the island or by visitors, if given 'licence'.¹⁷¹ This seems to contradict the impression of an absolute ban given in the miracle stories. However, it might reflect the fact that, as Bartholomew states to Roger, it is permissible to gather or hunt birds on the other Farne islands, which are still today abundant in bird and seal life.¹⁷² The ban is specifically on harassing the eiderducks of the Inner Farne; this is a special case relating to the holiness of the island, not to a monastic claim of property rights.¹⁷³ It is perhaps more probable that in recording these stories, the monks of Durham are attempting to adopt and influence an already existing idiosyncratic cult.

A striking element of all three 'vengeance' miracles is their believability as actual events. There is little that is miraculous beyond the bounds of psychological explanation. A culture which interprets day to day life in terms of supernatural causation could cause individuals to react strongly at the perceived threat of the miraculous. Thus the servant of the hermit Aelric vomits his earlier meal under the hermit's harrowing scrutiny.¹⁷⁴ The death of the man

¹⁷¹ *Vita Bart.* ch. 24, p. 315; *licentia*.

¹⁷² The eiderducks nest on the islands Brownsman, Longstone and Staple as well as Inner Farne itself. On the present day wild life of the islands see the following pamphlets, Peter Hawkey, *Birds of the Farne Islands* (Rothbury 1990), Raymond A. Cartwright, *The Holy Island of Lindisfarne and the Farne Islands* (Newton Abbot 1976), and M. Scott Weightman, *The Farne Islands* (Seahouses 1988).

¹⁷³ It might also be relevant, in considering the hermit's relationships to the two men of Embleton that Durham priory does not appear to hold land adjacent to Farne, certainly not in Embelton; see Chapter III, p. 98.

¹⁷⁴ The third Aelric miracle shows a similar pattern. One of a group of sailors steals a small item of 'necessity' though not 'beauty or value' from the hermit, and the sailors refuse to sail with him aboard until the hermit is informed and forgives the act. Indeed the hermit had to convince the sailors that Saint Cuthbert would not punish them further if they had their fellow on board with them. The miracle was the creation of the sailors' social psychology, and had minimal input by the hermit; *Reg. Libellus*, ch. 28, pp. 63-5.

Roger, three days after breaking the prohibition on hunting animals in this particular sacred place is a coincidence, but does not stretch the modern mind too far. Roger's own community very likely interpreted his unexpected death in terms of their belief in supernatural explanations for random events. That the next miracle involves a close family member, his nephew, increases the likelihood of that explanation. William threw rocks at the eiderducks, perhaps as an act of rebellion at his community's judgement on his uncle. It is not said that he had any intention of hunting them. William's scepticism, concerning Cuthbert's care for ducks, is the corollary of his community's belief. It was the hermit Bartholomew who told, and in a sense 'created' these miracles. However, someone had to visit Bartholomew and tell him of events, before he could turn the event into a story. In the second story, it seems to have been the nephew, in a spirit of repentance, who told Bartholomew of Cuthbert's vengeance upon himself.

The hermit's role, in turning the event into a story, is to confirm and strengthen a community's culture, as reflected in its folklore. A saint's vengeance miracles are usually seen, justifiably, as a kind of historical discourse defending the saint's monastery from its oppressors.¹⁷⁵ However, that model cannot work in these stories of the vengeance of Saint Cuthbert upon those who abuse his eiderducks; monastic interests are not at issue. Instead, the hermit acts as a focus of reconciliation between the saint and the local people. Bartholomew frequently appears to encourage popular piety and belief in its own terms, rather than through a monastic agenda. Thus the last eiderduck story, while very likely a creation of Bartholomew alone, may well reflect popular religion in the Farne

¹⁷⁵ It is no news that Saint Cuthbert was a saint who provided many such miracles, see for example in Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 2, ch. 5, pp. 50-4, on the destruction of Lindisfarne; 'Yet this was not unavenged; for God speedily judged them for the injuries which they had inflicted upon Saint Cuthbert', p. 51. This is a classic example of the personal interest a saint takes in the house of his monks, and one of the central functions of a saint; to protect his own or to avenge posthumously his monks if need be. In this example Symeon shows that the continuity of Cuthbert's house remained, despite the violence. The litany of disaster and violence continues the moral of Cuthbert's vengeance in *ibid.* Bk. 2, ch. 6, pp. 54-8. See also *ibid.* Bk. 2, ch. 14, pp. 61-3, for the privileges of the church of Durham; 'No one who has ventured to infringe them, has escaped unpunished'. The vengeance Saint Cuthbert visits on marauders of his church can be seen in somewhat more comical form on Farne too in the 'ravaging' of the Norwegian 'king', Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 29.

area. Certainly, it does not reflect any typical monastic conception of the animal and saint miracle. A mother duck loses one of her chicks as she leads her progeny to the sea; it has fallen into a crevice in the rock. But she 'put on the condition of human reason' and waddled into Bartholomew's cell, roused him from sleep on his bed, and is able to say 'Rise and Follow me'.¹⁷⁶ Bartholomew follows the duck, and rescues her duckling, for which she thanks Bartholomew, just as Wereburga's geese thank her for a more miraculous service. There is a kind of almost blasphemous literary play here; the duck's words obviously echo various of Christ's words in the Vulgate. Such a command is not unknown in contemporary miracle stories, it occurs in one twelfth-century English Cistercian miracle where the Virgin appears to a monk asleep on his bed.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps this should be regarded as a *joca* of Saint Cuthbert. It is as if the writer could not bear to tell this miracle with the usual solemnity, but rather needed to introduce a subtext for the sophisticated audience, which would not be heard by the rustics for whom the story was made.

The idea of animals receiving the gift of reason from a saint begins with patristic writers, but there such grace was in order that the animals could do penance for their crimes against humans. With the stories from Farne and Chester, the ducks and the geese receive that grace purely for their own benefit. These stories are linked by the saint's or hermit's role in protecting animals in the context of a shrine which served local, secular people. If these stories show the influence of popular culture, then it seems a truce between animals and humans in a shrine was a *quid pro quo* for the saint's healing miracles on behalf of humans. The magic of the shrine can heal humans or bestow some sense of reason in animals. Also the need of weaker members of human society for protection from the more powerful also seems paralleled by the animals. While Bartholomew's gull needed protection from the rapacity of the hawk, this hermit was also noted by his hagiographer for condemning the 'savagery' of the rich towards the poor.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *Vita Bart.* ch. 25, pp. 315-6.

¹⁷⁷ Giles Constable, 'The Vision of a Cistercian Novice', in *Petrus Venerabilis: Studia Anselmiana* 44 (Rome, 1956), ed. Giles Constable and James Kritzeck, pp. 95-8; esp. p. 97.

¹⁷⁸ *Vita Bart.* ch. 10, p. 303.

This then is the 'folkloric logic' of the animal and saint relationship, which has been adapted into the hagiographic tradition of certain twelfth-century writers. This logic is not incompatible with the hagiographic tradition, but does noticeably alter the pattern of such stories. Other stories from twelfth-century Britain follow the same pattern in linking saints' shrines to the protection of animals from predators, human or animal. The miraculous enforcement of the privilege of sanctuary is a notable theme among the miracles in Reginald's collection, and animals appear to have the same right of sanctuary as humans.¹⁷⁹ One miracle with no ecclesiastical participation eloquently demonstrates this concept of sanctuary. A group of hunters led by a Scottish knight were chasing a stag which escaped into a churchyard. The hunters gave up pursuit, allowing that the animal could not be hunted in the churchyard. In the following miracle there is a breach in the law of sanctuary for the same stag, while a festival was held in the same churchyard. A boy is incited, by his father, to goad the stag, and is killed by the animal. The stag then escapes only to be killed by the original hunters, who leave the corpse, obviously afraid to become implicated in the breaches of the law of a sacred place. A similar popular conception of the right of animals to sanctuary was thus in operation in Scotland as well as in Northumbria.¹⁸⁰

Traditions remarkably similar to Cuthbert's Farne are to be found also in an anonymous account of Saint Cuthbert's apocryphal birth in Ireland. This late twelfth-century work, greatly diverging

¹⁷⁹ For the human related sanctuary miracles, see Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 60, 61, and 65. One of the animal related stories involves an ox, offered as an 'oblation' by a young cleric, in a 'Pictish' church dedicated to Saint Cuthbert. The young cleric does not survive Cuthbert's wrath, although his nemesis, the bull, escapes; *ibid.* ch. 85. Also note ch. 133 concerning a sparrow caught on an altar.

¹⁸⁰ Reg. *Libellus*, chs. 86, 87; ch. 88 details some of the connections of Ailred of Rievaulx with the Cistercian abbot of Melrose, who was the source for the stories in those three chapters. Ailred was thus the source for Reginald. That the stories had passed through a number of ecclesiastical sources does not make them any the less 'popular'. Contrast these links to the exclusively elite contexts and concerns of some of the stories discussed in McGuire, 'Friends and Tales in the Cloister: Oral Sources in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*'. Ailred and his friends were reporting popular Cuthbertine stories, not the 'spirituality' of their monastic and knightly peers. Also these miracles, among a few others, demonstrate the depth of the cult of Cuthbert in Scotland, and give a contextual argument in favour of the anonymous *Libellus de Ortu*, for which see below, being of Melrose origin; in terms of miracles and legends there was both demand and supply.

from the rest of the twelfth-century Cuthbertine tradition, contains a section said to be drawn from 'vulgar traditions'. A hermitage in Scotland associated with Cuthbert 'is a refuge and protection to all living things'; both animals and humans within its 'enclosure', are protected from the rapacity of robbers and wolves.¹⁸¹ Another odd story comes from the twelfth-century cult of Saint Oswin in Tynemouth. A boy is miraculously punished for killing a small bird which had clearly sought protection within the saint's church. The pattern of this miracle is similar to the eiderduck vengeance stories; the boy dies after the violation of sanctuary, and his earlier deed becomes an explanation of his death. Also like Farne, the church of Saint Oswin was the focus of a local healing cult.¹⁸²

Outside northern Britain there are indications of similar attitudes towards saints and animals. A peculiar story in the *Vita* of Wulfric of Haselbury may have been remembered locally through the 'folkloric logic' outlined here. Wulfric curses a mouse which had been nibbling a cape given to the recluse as a gift. The mouse scuttles across the floor and obediently falls dead at Wulfric's feet. This demonstration of his own power appals the recluse, and he confesses the matter to the local priest, Brictric:

' "If you would only be good enough to dispatch all the local mice in the same way!" said Brictric. "God preserve me" replied the holy man. "Once with one mouse was a very grave fault. And", he added, "if I didn't think it would displease my Lord, I would pray to him to bring this mouse to life again." '183

¹⁸¹ *Libellus de Ortu Sancti Cuthberti*, in *Miscellanea Biographica*, ed. James Raine, SS 8 (1838), pp. 63-87; esp. ch. 28, pp. 84-5, also chs. 24-5, pp. 80-2,. See ch. 19, p. 77, for the reference to vulgar traditions. See also Madeleine H. Dodds, 'The Little Book of the Birth of Cuthbert', *Arch. Ael.* 6 (1929), pp. 52-94. It can be argued, largely on the basis of the surviving thirteenth-century manuscripts, which are of Durham origin, that this work originated in Durham. However, it is hard to imagine why the monks there would endorse a tradition which had Cuthbert being a hermit on a Scottish mountain called Doilweme, *Libellus de Ortu*, ch. 24, p. 80, over which the convent had no control. Melrose, as Dodds and others have argued before, seems much the more likely site for such a tradition.

¹⁸² *Vita Oswini*, ch. 27, pp. 40-1.

¹⁸³ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 30, trans. Matarasso, pp. 247-8.

The expectation of a holy man's power over nature, and protection of creatures within his sphere, in a manner contradictory to normal human practice, explains the origin and the local remembrance of this story. It also contains a muted resurrection motif. Only through local memory could such a peculiar story be available to John of Ford, who was writing many decades later.

Other such stories come from Gerald of Wales. He notes a miracle where a boy is trying to steal young pigeons from a nest within a church of Saint David; 'His hand stuck fast to the stone on which he was leaning, this being no doubt a miraculous punishment inflicted by the saint, who was protecting the birds of his own church.'¹⁸⁴ In Ireland, Gerald describes a local cult with startling resemblance to Farne and its eiderducks. The ducks of one area were associated with Saint Colman, and were tame enough to take food from the hand. Gerald recounts a few stories of the attempts to eat these ducks, which are invariably unsuccessful, and bring supernatural vengeance down upon the perpetrators. Unlike the eiderducks of Farne however, these ducks also protect the saint's church. If the church is harmed in any way the ducks leave the nearby lake, the waters of which then become too dirty to be used by man or beast.¹⁸⁵ Nonetheless, all these examples seem to indicate traditions linking a saint, a shrine and animals, and all are similar to the more developed legends of Farne. The 'folkloric logic' of Farne may be a notably visible aspect of a widespread popular structure of belief.¹⁸⁶

viii) Godric of Finchale: Popular and Monastic Motifs in a Hermit's Cult

Reginald's *Vita* of Godric of Finchale contains a great number of animal miracles, some of which have been compared above to the

¹⁸⁴ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Bk. I, ch. 2, pp. 23-4; *The Journey Through Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe, (London 1978), p. 83.

¹⁸⁵ Gerald of Wales, *Topographica Hibernica*, ch. 29, pp. 117-8; trans. O'Meara, *History and Topography*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁸⁶ Similar miracle traditions might have existed outside of Britain and Ireland. A possible example is an early thirteenth-century story of a Saint Corentin from Brittany, who punished, then forgave a local man for fishing in his sacred pool, which is otherwise the source of healing miracles. It seems even fish can receive the protection of the saint; cited in Julia M. H. Smith, 'Oral and Literate: Saints, Miracles and Relics in Brittany, c.850-1250', *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 309-43; pp. 327-8.

hagiographic tradition, and found to have elements which do not comfortably fit within established models. For example, the behaviour of Godric's cow, while demonstrating the obedience of nature to the saint, was markedly unusual.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps the idiosyncrasies of Finchale would be explained by the influence of popular mentalities upon recorded miracles. While most of Godric's animal stories can be seen largely within the literary hagiographic model, they do contain consistent oddities. If the 'folkloric logic' seen to be operating for Farne was a general phenomena, then it might be expected that traces would appear in the cult surrounding Finchale. Of course it must not be supposed that a story following some of the *topoi* of literary tradition cannot be part of popular legend also. Indeed by the twelfth century it should be expected that much of the corpus of literary hagiography had become part of popular culture. The material on Finchale is far more developed and complex than the other parallels mentioned above, and thus it should not be surprising if there are notable differences to the Farne traditions. Indeed, if local oral folklore is represented in the Farne and Finchale stories, then considerable differences should be expected among the two groups. Oral stories relating to a local shrine are bound to develop in idiosyncratic ways in different localities.

At first sight the animal stories of Finchale seem entirely consistent with hagiographic tradition; Godric's exhibition of thaumaturgical power over the snakes has already been mentioned. Reginald supplies a well-used biblical quotation to explain Godric's cohabitation with the snakes; 'Thus that witness of Scripture accords to him, because in the man of God Job we are often used to extol with praises, He was a brother of dragons and a companion of ostriches.'¹⁸⁸ However, as noted above the 'companionship of animals' theme is usually used as a condemnation of society. The sinfulness of most people is such that the holy man must resort to the companionship of beasts.¹⁸⁹ This is not the context of Godric and

¹⁸⁷ See above, p. 126.

¹⁸⁸ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 21, no. 55, (p. 68); *Job* 30:29.

¹⁸⁹ On the use of the *Job* quotation by Gregory the Great, a use which may have been familiar to Reginald, see Straw, *Gregory the Great*, pp. 4, 11, 184-5. Gregory frequently discussed his own trials and tribulations in relation to Job, who he saw as an 'athlete of Christ' suffering and fighting the devil. Gregory sees the dragons and ostriches as the reprobate amongst whom the righteous must live. The gentleness of many of the snakes towards Godric makes it

the snakes, particularly as otherwise in this part of the *Vita*, Reginald was criticising Godric's isolation and extreme asceticism.¹⁹⁰ Rather, the odd element is the friendliness of the snakes, perhaps not unrelated to the friendliness of wild animals to the hermits of Farne.

Reginald seems to betray the idiosyncratic nature of Finchale in his rhetoric of the wilderness. For the earlier part of Godric's life, the wilderness is a place of horror, even squalor. Even with the companionship of the old hermit Aelric, it is also a place of fear as together they hid in their wilderness hut from 'the rabid madness of wolves gnashing their teeth. . . [who had] . . . an insatiable gluttony.'¹⁹¹ This sort of imagery of the wilderness is continued when Godric reaches Finchale, his final hermitage, which is described as 'both a dreadful grave of a multitude of vipers and of squalid solitude.'¹⁹² Yet shortly before that passage Reginald used a completely different tone, stating that this same environment was a 'valley of woody forest and wild beasts, [where] he lived fruitfully and pleasantly with passing hunters and wild animals'.¹⁹³ After this pastoral imagery, Reginald recounts a story, already discussed above, which shows the wilderness as hostile once more; 'the ancient enemy, the winding serpent' could not bear the saint's peace. Godric is attacked by a wolf which longs to 'wholly tear to pieces or to mangle' Godric. The hermit makes the sign of the cross and invokes the holy Trinity, while stating that under the 'clemency of God' he has been given leave to live in this place in obedience thus 'having been given licence to depart, the beast raising himself three times to him humbled himself by bowing, and with all gentleness, walked to the wood'.¹⁹⁴ Godric has tamed the beast, yet does not seem to be in the process of colonising the wilderness, the emphasis is on peace rather

difficult to see this story entirely within such Gregorian terms, even if Reginald himself, in using this biblical quotation, was attempting to link the Godric story to established patterns. The contradiction between Gregory's use of the quotation and the details of the Godric story may thus be an indication that Reginald was adapting a popular story to literary tradition. Otherwise, references to *Job* as a comparison to Godric are common, see for example *Vita Godrici*, ch. 36, no. 77, (p. 90).

¹⁹⁰ See above Chapter II, Part iv.

¹⁹¹ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 11, no. 31, (pp. 46-7).

¹⁹² *ibid.* ch. 19, no. 52, (p. 65).

¹⁹³ *ibid.* ch. 18, no. 50, (p. 63).

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* ch. 18, no. 51, (pp. 63-4).

than domination. Godric finds a new site for his hermitage immediately afterwards.

Reginald then returns to his rhetoric of the horror of the wilderness and the story of the snakes ensues. No consistent development of a traditional pattern of saintly power over nature or of colonisation of the wilderness can be seen in these chapters, though Reginald is close to such themes at many points. Viewed separately however, the wolf story and the snake story both make sense within the model seen on Farne. The wolf, if seen as a wolf rather than the devil in disguise, threatens the saint, yet is turned away by the saint's appeal to the 'clemency of God'. The wolf accepts this and is not harmed. Equally, the snakes can live in companionship with the holy man until some of them begin to break the peace and bother Godric during prayer. Like the wolf they are then banished. Like the eiderducks of Farne, their animal natures are not overturned or put into the service of the saint. They may remain normal animals, but are forbidden to break the peace of the hermit's holy place.

Once Godric has established his hermitage and garden, the wild beasts came in the summer to consume the fruits of his effort, and like Saint Anthony he drives them off.¹⁹⁵ Apart from the emphasis on Godric's gentleness with the animals, there is nothing here that cannot be reconciled with hagiographic tradition. Equally there is no element that is incompatible with the 'folkloric logic' found at Farne. *Topoi* involving the miraculous protection of crops from animals would have an obvious appeal to ordinary medieval people, and has already been seen in a popular context in the story of Saint Wereburga and the geese. Yet Godric is exceptionally gentle with the marauding beasts; while chasing the beasts away 'those who were weary, embracing with his arms, he drew out by lifting them over the enclosures of his hedge'.¹⁹⁶ Reginald has Godric comment conventionally, that if brute animals can so obey the command of the servants of God, then why do not rational men do the same, but adds that through this example 'he [Godric] kindled the hearts of listeners

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.* ch. 39, nos. 85-7, (pp. 95-8).

¹⁹⁶ Or over his fence; '*sepis sua septa*', *ibid.* p. 97.

through the joy of mirth.¹⁹⁷ This is an odd comment; patristic writers do not end such stories with a reference to their potential for humour. It is perhaps through the unusual element of Godric's assistance of tired animals that Reginald feels compelled to see the story as somewhat lighthearted.

Godric continues in his kind behaviour towards animals; during the winter he would pick up any animal he found suffering from the cold, and warm it in his arms. This solicitude extended even to reptiles and other 'creatures of the earth', which is reminiscent of Wulfric of Haselbury's concern for the life of the mouse. The true context of Godric's kindness towards animals comes in the ensuing passage; none of his servants were able to snare animals in Finchale without Godric's knowledge. The saint immediately freed these animals upon discovery, and thus 'often brute animals would avoid the snares of the woodland hunters, fleeing to the defences of his cell, because he provided certain refuge to them.'¹⁹⁸ Thus as on Farne, an animal may seek refuge in a holy place and be protected from harm. In return for the protection of animals from hunters, the *quid pro quo* in Godric's hermitage is that the animals must not harm humans and their resources either. The overall pattern is remarkably similar to the pattern in the Wereburga story.

The stories of Godric at Finchale demonstrate the complex interweaving of elements of traditional *topoi* and elements of the 'folkloric logic' seen elsewhere. It thus becomes impossible to distinguish how far they are of popular or monastic origin; probably

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 97-8. In driving away the beasts Godric states that this food he meant for men rather than beasts; the men were of course the local poor. This is another element which differs from the classic *topos* of Saint Anthony keeping his garden clear of beasts. Anthony was only growing food for himself. Another story later in Godric's *Vita* shows the same pattern; a hare came to devour the vegetables Godric is said to grow for the poor, and Godric ties some vegetables on its back and commands it never to return, afterwards conventionally comparing the obedience of the hare to the disobedience of men; *ibid.* ch. 65, no. 139, (pp. 148-9). Thus Godric gives the thief a gift. This could be compared to a patristic *topos* where human thieves are given what they sought to steal by the saint, for which see Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 6n. However those stories occurred in a purely monastic context, and the remarkable aspect of this chapter is the overwhelming presence of the needs of the local 'rustics'. Godric is defending their rights against the animal, yet nevertheless treating it with the gentleness that befits saint and animal relations in the shrine operating in terms of the 'folkloric logic' outlined here.

¹⁹⁸ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 40, no. 89, (p. 99).

much of literate hagiographic tradition was an integral part of popular culture by this period. Indeed, the stories of Godric saving hunted animals approach a not uncommon *topos*. One last story of Godric develops the hunter and hermit story to its classic extent. Members of the '*familia*' of Bishop Ranulf Flambard were hunting a stag which made for Godric's hermitage, seeming to call on him for help. Godric hides the animal in his cell, and persuades the hunters to look for it elsewhere. This they do, although they apparently were well aware of the presence of the stag, as 'they often afterwards related what had happened to them.' The stag itself would return to Godric for years afterwards to give him its thanks.¹⁹⁹

The earliest hagiographic encounter between a high status hunter and a hermit seems to be in Gregory of Tours' *Vitae Patrum*. The hermit Saint Aemilianus lived in a 'solitude' in the forest where he cultivated a small field; 'there were no other inhabitants there except the beasts and birds, who gathered around him every day as around a servant of God'.²⁰⁰ A young man named Brachio, in the service of a powerful man, was hunting a boar through the forest. The boar came within the boundary around the saint's cell and the hounds are unable to go further. The boar is allowed to escape into the forest while the saint endeavours to convert the young man, who later becomes an abbot.²⁰¹ The point of this story for Gregory is the conversion effected by a holy man, who thus creates another saintly father in his wake. The role of the animal is simply to effect a meeting between an anchorite and a secular man. Thus this story is unlike the equivalent stories from twelfth-century Britain in that the miracle does not lay much emphasis around the protection of the animal. The *topos* of the hermit and the hunter seems rare before the twelfth century. The story of Saint Martin and the hare seems to

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.* (additional), ch. 21, no. 347, (pp. 365-6). This story seems to have a low status as far as Reginald is concerned. It occurs as part of an 'appendix' of miracles, many of them posthumous, and is thus not an important part of Reginald's conception of the saint. Although the miracle could be considered as relating to similar hagiographic *topoi*, its status as an afterthought should give weight to considering it as a popular story, relatively unmediated by hagiographic concerns. Certainly Reginald is not concerned to give sure witnesses to the story; the only ones mentioned are the rather shadowy servants of the bishop who 'often related' the incident.

²⁰⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Vitae Patrum*, ch. 12, no. 1, col. 1062; trans. James, *Life of the Fathers*, p. 81-2.

²⁰¹ *ibid.* ch. 12, no. 2, trans. James, p. 82.

be the only other story from early hagiography that is worth comparing to the story in Gregory of Tours.²⁰² Stories of this kind do seem to appear in the hagiography of Merovingian saints, but the next pre-twelfth-century rendition of the story which might have been known to the monks of Durham is in the tenth-century *Vita* of Saint Giles.²⁰³ However it is clear that from the eleventh century onwards the hunter and the hermit *topos* multiplies in Britain.

ix) Conclusions

It seems that many of the animal and saint stories of twelfth-century Britain are partly the product of a popular culture of the shrine, whose attitude towards saints and animals was identifiably different from patristic and hagiographic traditions. The extant versions of the stories are the product of the interaction of monastic and popular mentalities and agendas, but before their literary incarnation, many of them probably were created in a popular context. Undoubtedly, educated monks could themselves have been responsible for some of the shrine stories, but nevertheless in a context of interaction with popular beliefs and expectations.

The slight presence of the hermit and hunter *topos* in hagiography, earlier than the twelfth century, suggests a new interpretation of the often perceived twelfth-century change in attitudes towards animals as seen in hagiography. It is not that there was a change in cultural attitude to nature, rather there was a change in the culture and social sources of hagiography. Most, if not an overwhelming majority, of the stories of the *Vitae Patrum* are clearly the product of ascetic culture, and were created by ascetics for ascetics. Similar things could be said in reference to the hagiography of later times and different places, for example Bede's Cuthbert. In the case of recognisably 'medieval' hagiography like Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and Bede's Cuthbert the wider importance and interest in miracles, in a partially Christianised

²⁰² Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Dialogue 2, ch. 9, cols. 207-8, trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, p. 115.

²⁰³ For the two Merovingian examples of the hermit and hunter *topos*, see de Montalembert, *Monks of The West*, pp. 205-9. Saint Marculph and Saint Carileff are both semi-legendary sixth-century saints, whose hagiographic traditions date no earlier than the ninth century. For Saint Giles see AASS, 1 September, pp. 284-304, cited in Golding 'The Hermit and the Hunter', p. 110. For other later examples of the *topos*, see *ibid.* pp. 110-12.

society, does complicate the picture. However, it seems that beginning in the eleventh century, miracle collections and hagiography were increasingly open to the stories generated at even the lowest social levels. This period has sometimes been considered as a watershed in the Christianisation of the general population, and in general the mass of the people become increasingly visible and important. If this view of these centuries is accepted then it would not be unnatural for hagiography to reflect that new importance. As far as animal stories are concerned this social context explains the relatively sudden appearance of a new vein of animal and saint story. Thus the 'hermit and hunter' *topos* becomes far more frequent. The *topos* may have existed at a popular level long before, but only very occasionally surfaced in hagiography. Consequently, the 'folkloric logic' of the shrine in general, could have been present for centuries, in one form or another. Such a way of thinking only becomes visible when the allegiance of the mass of people to shrines and saints becomes an increasingly important issue.²⁰⁴ Thus the twelfth-century change in attitude towards animals was not a change in culture but a change in the nature of documentation.²⁰⁵

One recurring element in the twelfth-century stories seems to indicate the hagiographers' awareness of the story's own social status. Sometimes these animal stories seem to have been seen as less than serious by the hagiographers, who described the miracles as *ludicra*, or as being *jocunda*. Reginald of Durham commented that some monks considered the tameness of Bartholomew's gull a source of wonder, others a source of humour. Perhaps that difference reflects the cultural division between the elite hagiographers and popular lay culture. Prevailing attitudes of the literate elite towards *rustici* and *idiotae* would surely result in a certain sense of discomfort when recording these stories. The appearance of a latent dismissive attitude towards such legends would thus be entirely in

²⁰⁴ This is not to suggest that particular stories persisted in the oral sphere for all this time, simply that the underlying logic of the stories could have persisted, and periodically generated new stories, at different cult sites, which would then fade away, unless recorded in hagiography.

²⁰⁵ Thus Salisbury's perception of ambiguity, in the boundary between the human and the animal in twelfth-century saint's stories, may be nothing to do with the twelfth century as such. That ambiguity may have been present outside the elite long before the twelfth century; see Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, p. 174. In any case such ambiguity can be found in pre-twelfth-century literature of other kinds, see Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, pp. 32-3.

seems no tendency in the patristic tradition to see such stories as humorous rather than wondrous.

This cultural gap invites a speculation in considering the levels of meaning within the stories; the hagiographic versions may be hiding the original symbolism of the stories. Fables were another literary genre that enjoyed a resurgence in the twelfth century, and the animals in those stories often symbolised humans of different orders, or social strata.²⁰⁶ Miracle stories may be a different genre, but the symbolic rules of one genre can easily slip into another.²⁰⁷ Given that the shrine stories stem from popular culture, and given the presence of the elite hunter as the offender in some of the stories, might it not be possible that there is sometimes a social symbolism in the story of a saint protecting a hunted animal? Outside the shrine, the powerful may be dominant, but inside the shrine a saint can ensure a form of divine social justice which, metaphorically or literally, includes all the powerless of Creation.

²⁰⁶ See Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, p. 9 and pp. 153-97.

²⁰⁷ Indeed one twelfth-century Irish story seems to have borrowed from the fable genre in its presentation of the antics of the various animal companions of a Saint Ciaran. This saint's monks are animals, including a fox, a badger and a boar; see Helen Waddell, *Beasts and Saints* (London 1934), pp. 101-6.

**Chapter V: Taming Naked Hermits: Aibert of
Crespin, Godric of Finchale and the Ascetic Diet**

**i) Aibert of Crespin and Independent Eremiticism: a
Parallel to Godric of Finchale**

The hagiography of the hermits of Durham exemplifies an aspect of medieval culture which is particularly counter-intuitive to the modern mind. The medieval experience of society was at once intensely local and remarkably international. Thus the shrine stories were variable and idiosyncratic products of local cultural relationships, even though those stories share an underlying narrative structure, arising from similar social conditions. Nevertheless, hagiography was equally the product of an international literate culture. Monks may have written for an immediate regional audience, but they did so in an international language. Thus, when Reginald described Godric's eremitical diet, he was aware of the celebrations of eremitical sanctity that had been such a marked element of the hagiographic tradition of the last century and a half. The new monastic traditions and the 'new' kinds of sanctity, expressed by the Cistercians among others, form a backdrop to the writing of Reginald and Geoffrey of Durham.

The problems that independent ascetics and hermits posed to the ecclesiastical authorities in Northumbria were not only similar in the Cambrai-Arras region, but were in fact more acute. In this context, it is instructive that the hagiographic rhetoric used by Reginald is closely matched by that used in the *Vita* of a hermit of the Cambrai, Aibert of Crespin. As it is entirely unlikely that Reginald would have been influenced by the *Vita* of Aibert of Crespin, which was written between 1135 and 1148, the example of Aibert and the Cambrai serves to highlight the general social context in which hermits and their asceticism became controversial probably throughout western Europe in the twelfth century.

Aibert began his eremitical life very young, perhaps when he was about twenty, under the tutelage of an ex-monk of Crespin called John. This period was entirely unregulated, equivalent to Godric's long 'wild' period, but much shorter in duration. He was soon brought into the framework of monastic authority, and trained properly. Only after some twenty or so years as a monk of Crespin

did he retreat to 'solitude' once again, this time as an apparently 'authorised' recluse. Aibert's mature period as a hermit was spent within the diocese of Arras, bordering on Cambrai, and he died in 1135 when probably about 70 years old. He had spent some twenty or so years as a recluse in the marsh.¹ Aibert's *Vita* was completed by Archdeacon Robert of Ostrevant, under the order of his bishop, Alvis of Arras, who died in 1148.² Although Aibert's later hermitage was within the diocese of Arras, it was still very close to his monastery, Crespin, which lay within the diocese of Cambrai. There appears however to have been no contribution by Crespin to the *Vita*, at any stage of its production. This may simply indicate that the small house did not have the resources for literary work. The hagiographer is not one who glories in giving a full account of his sources, as Reginald does for Godric. Also, the latter section of the *Vita* is written somewhat in the style of a panegyric, or a string of lessons, rather than being based upon a succession of miracle stories. Nevertheless the absence of details connecting Aibert to his old monastery is marked.

Certainly it was Bishop Burchard of Cambrai who ordained him first as a deacon and then a priest while he was already back in the wilderness. Otherwise, it was said that he refused charity, directing it instead to be given to the monastery of Crespin.³ It was through the abbot of Saint Ghislain, another monastery of Cambrai, that he received the permission from Pope Paschal to reconcile penitents.⁴ The abbot of Crespin only appears among other abbots at Aibert's death.⁵ Crespin is absent when it might be supposed to appear. The one story which plausibly involves Crespin underlines this absence; Aibert was isolated in his marsh by floods, and received neither food nor the mass, both of which presumably would have come from Crespin. Fortunately, divine intervention relieves him on both counts; the Virgin Mary assures him that his whole life has been a mass, and brings him angelic bread to eat.⁶ The existence of this story may imply a strained relationship between Aibert and the monastery,

¹ See above, Chapter I, p. 28. for a discussion of the chronology of Aibert's life.

² Eugene A. Escallier, *L'Abbaye d'Anchin*, (Lille 1852), p. 51.

³ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 14, p. 677.

⁴ *ibid.* ch. 18, p. 678.

⁵ *ibid.* ch. 23, pp. 679-80.

⁶ *ibid.* ch. 12, pp. 676-7.

with the miraculous deliverance story being a coded way of referring to such problems. Indeed a charter of 1122, in which a nobleman gave some land to Aibert, notes that the hermit 'suffered from a grave penury of food.'⁷ However, the hagiographer, Robert, was not interested in detailing tensions and conflicts among churchmen.

The monks of Durham were very much aware of conflicts between different groups of religious, and were concerned to defend the legitimacy of their own way of life, and the prestige of their own house. In the Cambrai also, episcopal and monastic authorities were concerned to defend their own positions. In Cambrai, conflict between ecclesiastical reform and other established religious authorities was sharper than for Durham and was complicated by the more visible problems of popular religious enthusiasm. Nevertheless, just as Durham may have produced the *Vitae* of Bartholomew and Godric in order to argue their position in the face of religious controversies, so Aibert's *Vita* was perhaps intended partly as an oblique response to these problems. However, Aibert's hagiographer may have felt it unwise to draw too clear attention to the controversies surrounding Aibert's career.

Thus the hagiographer's reticence, concerning the details of Aibert's late life as a recluse in Arras, may be related to the history of religious controversy in the region. Specifically, there was tension between the dioceses of Arras and Cambrai. In 1092 Pope Urban II separated Arras and Cambrai, giving the former its own bishop. This occurred in the midst of conflict in Cambrai over religious reforms such as the newly enforced celibacy of the clergy. In Cambrai, the new bishop of Arras was condemned as a hypocrite and a heretic.⁸ Gerard II of Cambrai had already got into trouble with Gregory VII over imperial investiture. Over the next generation, the bishops of Cambrai had a hard time, caught between pope, emperor and the citizens of Cambrai itself.⁹ The authority of the bishops remained at

⁷ The charter is printed in Emile Trelcat, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Crespin*, p. 250.

⁸ Henri Platelle, 'Le Siècle du Grand Changement', in *Histoire des Diocèses de Cambrai et de Lille*, sous la direction de Pierre Pierrard (Paris 1978), pp. 40-51; pp. 43-4. See also Henri Platelle, 'Les Luites Communales et l'Organisation Municipale, (1075- 1313)', in *Histoire de Cambrai*; sous la direction de Louis Trenard (Lille 1982), pp. 43-60; pp. 44-6, for Bishop Gerard II's conflicts with his own clergy over the imposition of Gregorian reforms.

⁹ Platelle, 'Le Siècle du Grand Changement', pp. 42-6.

issue, even in the 1130s, when one chronicle, clearly loyal to the bishops of Cambrai, recounted the Ramihrdus affair. Ramihrdus appears to have been a popular preacher of the Gregorian reform in the 1070s, who was, consequently perhaps, killed by Bishop Gerard II's supporters. While Pope Gregory VII appears to have been outraged by this event, the twelfth-century chronicler nevertheless described Ramihrdus as a heretic challenging the authority of priests, bishops and abbots. The chronicler darkly notes that members of his sect remain in the towns to this day.¹⁰ One can only wonder what effect these and other events had on Aibert's religious conscience; his *Vita* offers no direct comment on these controversies.

Ramihrdus was seen by certain people of Cambrai as a holy man, and it seems he was simply an adherent of the reform movement. Nevertheless Bishop Gerard II saw such religious enthusiasm as a serious challenge to episcopal authority. It can be assumed that Ramihrdus and his followers did not consider themselves as heretics, and indeed probably held no doctrinal beliefs which were heretical. However, to be a heretic was to challenge the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Ramihrdus affair was not the first such conflict between authority and popular religious enthusiasm in the Cambrai. Decades earlier, Bishop Gerard I had condemned a lowly group of religious enthusiasts for heresy, although it appears that they were not doctrinal heretics.¹¹ Again the issues appear to have been episcopal authority and its control of popular religious enthusiasm. With the advent of the Gregorian reform, the tensions between religious authority and lay enthusiasm must have grown even greater.

Alongside the eleventh-century appearance of religious dissent, the Cambrai also experienced successive waves of reforming monasticism, with the widespread influence of Cluniac customs on reformed monasteries and the appearance of holy men of various kinds. The early eleventh-century reform began under Bishop Gerard I, who is presented by an episcopal source as reviving the

¹⁰ *Chronicon S. Andreae Castri Cameracensis*, *MGH Scriptores*, vol. 7, pp. 526-550; Bk. 3, ch. 3, p. 540 for Ramihrdus. The chronicle is dated to 1133, *ibid.* p. 526. The passage is translated, together with the Pope's letter on the affair, in Robert I. Moore, *Birth of Popular Heresy* (Toronto 1995), pp. 24-6. For Ramihrdus also see Robert I. Moore, *Origins of European Dissent* (Oxford 1985), p. 62.

¹¹ Moore, *Origins of European Dissent*, pp. 9-18.

spiritual glories of the Merovingian age and its many local saints, through the transformation of supposedly degenerate houses of women religious or secular clerics into male monastic houses.¹² The reforming process goes on into the late eleventh century when Aibert's house, Crespin, was reformed, much as Durham priory was. Indeed, the implication of the *Gesta Pontificum* is that Crespin should be under the control of the cathedral of Cambrai.¹³ Crespin was reformed in 1080, and an effort to restore its alienated lands was begun, partly by the intervention of Bishop Gerard II.¹⁴ Crespin was the home of the body of Saint Landelin, one of the more considerable Merovingian saints, to whom was attributed the foundation of a number of houses, of which Crespin and Lobbes are the most historically reliable foundations. In a standard eremitical *topos*, Crespin is described as being founded after the saint left Lobbes due to the abundance of monks there.¹⁵

As in contemporary Northumbria, saints of the seventh and eighth centuries were deeply important to the religious sensibilities of eleventh and twelfth-century Cambrai-Arras. However, whilst Saint Cuthbert and the other heroes of Bede's history were dominant figures for Northumbria, Saint Landelin was in comparison not nearly

¹² A major source for this process is the *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium*, *MGH Scriptores*, vol. 7, pp. 402-89; Bk. 2, ch. 41, p. 464 for the reform of Crespin. See chs. 26-7, p. 461, for the reform of the female houses. This chronicle was once thought to have been written by a cathedral canon of Cambrai, called Baldric, who died in 1092, see *Chronique d'Arras et de Cambrai*, ed. Andre J. G. Le Glay, (Paris 1834), pp. xiii-xxi, and the French translation of the same title, ed. Le Glay, trans. M. M. Favertot, (Valenciennes 1836), p. 12. The chronicle as a whole is no longer considered to be Balderic's work; see Pierre Pierrard, *Histoire des Diocèses de Cambrai et de Lille*, p. 334.

¹³ *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium*, Bk. 2, ch. 41, p. 464. The issue of episcopal control over Crespin is interesting in light of the abbot's later journey to Rome to have the monastery's rights confirmed directly by the pope; *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 7, p. 675. Perhaps Crespin was attempting to establish its independence from the bishop. Perhaps also the difficult position of the episcopacy in Cambrai, during the conflicts between pope and emperor, made this journey necessary for Crespin.

¹⁴ Trelcat, *Histoire de Crespin*, vol. I, pp. 34-7. Little survives directly from Crespin, perhaps due to a library fire there in 1477, but some late eleventh- and twelfth-century charters do survive, and are printed in *Actes et Documents Anciens Intéressant la Belgique*, ed. Charles Duvivier, 2 vols. (Brussels 1898); I, pp. 202-20.

¹⁵ For Saint Landelin see Leon J. van der Essen, *Étude Critique et Littéraire sur les Vitae des Saints Merovingiens de l'Ancienne Belgique*, (Paris 1907), pp. 126-32. The extant *Vita* of Saint Landelin may be as late as the early eleventh century. For Lobbes see Joseph Warichez, *L'Abbaye de Lobbes* (Paris 1909).

so prominent in the Cambrai, and indeed lacks a comparatively robust or celebrated literary tradition. Nevertheless, Saint Landelin was clearly important to independent religious enthusiasts such as Aibert. In Aibert's first untrained and unregulated period as a hermit, he and his companion live in a hermitage said to be the site of one of Saint Landelin's companions, the obscure Saint Domitian.¹⁶ Landelin's pilgrimages to Rome were evidently a key part of his cult; the later account of his life invented a third pilgrimage to Rome. During this legendary third pilgrimage, Landelin was accompanied by his two disciples, Domitian and Hadelin.¹⁷ Perhaps with the model of Saint Landelin in mind, the abbot of Crespin in 1089 asked John and Aibert to join him in a journey to Rome, the purpose of which was to secure a confirmation of the monastery's lands.¹⁸ Another contemporary holy man of the region appears to have taken the tradition of multiple pilgrimages to Rome to extremes; the recluse Druon of Sedgebourg went to Rome nine times in the course of his life.¹⁹

It is not possible to know the attitude of dissenters like Ramihrdus to the region's great saints, but they may have regarded such heroes with as much respect as Aibert or Druon did. The great number of holy men in the region in and around Cambrai have been described as all exhibiting the new 'apostolic' spirit of the twelfth century.²⁰ While the historian's hindsight may be able to see such common factors, it seems likely that at the time, religion was experienced as a site of new and complex divisions. Bishop Gerard I of Cambrai saw the three enemies of royal and episcopal power as

¹⁶ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 6, p. 675.

¹⁷ See Van der Essen, *Étude Critique*, p. 132; *Vita S. Landelini Abbatis Lobbiensis et Crispiniensis*, *MGH Scriptores Merovingicarum*, vol. 6, pp. 433-44; ch. 5, p. 441.

¹⁸ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 7, p. 675.

¹⁹ Droun died in 1186, and the earliest extant material on him is fourteenth-century, see P. Lefrancq and R. Legros, 'Saint Droun de Sebourg et la Piété Populaire', in *Actes du 99e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes*, (Paris 1977), pp. 411-23. On the general phenomenon of pilgrimage to Rome see Debra Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge 1988), particularly pp. 150-86. The examples of holy men going to Rome in this period do seem to be largely from the Low Countries.

²⁰ For a discussion of the full range of the holy men connected to the region, Charles Dereine, 'Les Prédicateurs "Apostoliques" dans les Diocèses de Therouanne, Tournai, Cambrai-Arras, 1075-1125', *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 59 (1983), pp. 171-89.

heresy, Peace of God movements, and Cluniac monasticism.²¹ Thus from this early date, new or 'reformed' forms of monastic life had been controversial in the Cambrai. Given the continuing problems of the bishops with the status and effectiveness of their authority, episcopal attitudes towards troublesome and independent-minded holy men may not have been enthusiastic.

One important new monastery founded in Cambrai in 1079, Anchin, later falling within the new diocese of Arras, is now supposed to have been 'eremitically' inspired. It is included in Leyser's general list of 'eremitical' monasteries, and Dereine supposes that there must have been hermits on its site for at least some years prior to its official foundation.²² Like many other reformed or newly founded houses of this region in the late eleventh century, it seems that it soon adopted Cluniac customs.²³ Anchin does seem to have held some admiration for eremiticism; the monastery's annal respectfully described one of its early abbots who retired to become a recluse in England.²⁴ The same annal contains a substantial section on Aibert himself. Such interest in Aibert seems particularly significant since the Bishop Alvis, on whose orders Aibert's *Vita* was written, had been the abbot of Anchin before becoming bishop.²⁵ Anchin also appears to have been a leading force for monastic reform in the region.²⁶ The old and prestigious monastery of Lobbes in the diocese of Liège firmly resisted Cluniac reform. In the late eleventh century the abbot of Anchin sent an intermediary to convince Lobbes to join the Cluniac group, but it was not until 1131 that the monks finally were forced to accept a reforming abbot.²⁷ Lobbes remained a

²¹ For Gerard I, see Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent*, pp. 9-18, pp. 285-9, and Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago 1980), pp. 21-43.

²² Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 113; Dereine, 'Ermites, Reclus', pp. 291-5.

²³ Dereine, 'Ermites, Reclus', p. 295. Dereine nevertheless compares the spirituality of the house to Cîteaux, among other such new orders.

²⁴ *Sigeberti Auctarium Aquicinenses [Annal Anchin]*, *MGH Scriptores*, vol. 6, pp. 392-8; p. 394, entries under 1090 and 1109. See also Dereine, 'Ermites, Reclus', p. 307.

²⁵ Jean Becquet, *Abbayes et Prieures de l'Ancienne France*, vol. 14, *Cambrai, Arras* (Liguge 1975), p. 35.

²⁶ One Bishop Odo of Cambrai, who was exiled in 1113 for refusing to be invested by the Emperor, took refuge in Anchin; Escallier, *Anchin*, p. 55, and Platelle, 'Le Siècle du Grand Changement', p. 45.

²⁷ Warichez, *L'Abbaye de Lobbes*, pp. 85-93. The bishop of Liège, Lobbes' diocese, apparently played no part in the pressure on Lobbes.

powerful abbey until the mid-twelfth century, so for it to be bullied into submission, by a force emanating from a neighbouring diocese, is an indication of the strength of the reforming movement in the region.²⁸ Lobbes soon escaped the grip of reform, and indeed appears to have been stubbornly opposed to the new fashions in religious life. A late twelfth-century Lobbes chronicler complained of the impossibility of following the Rule of Benedict to the letter.²⁹ The conflict between Lobbes and the reformers resulted in Lobbes' appeal to the pope and the bishop of Liège's appeal to imperial privileges on Lobbes' side. The matter of monastic reform had become intensely political.

In this context, some scepticism over the 'eremitical' origins of Anchin should be allowed. If all founders of new houses are to be interpreted as 'eremitical', then the term 'eremitical' becomes synonymous with the monastic life. Indeed, during the twelfth century, particularly under the influence of Cistercian rhetoric, that is exactly what happens to the term. Nevertheless, such a rhetorical shift should not be read back into the self-perception of late eleventh-century religious. The earliest foundation story of Anchin comes in the foundation charter, dated to 1079.³⁰ Two noblemen, Walter and Sicher, decided to give up the 'girdle of worldly warfare' for the '*theoretica vita*', at the instigation of a vision of a legendary local hermit, one Saint Gordan.³¹ The two then built a church on the site where the saint had led an '*heremitica vita*'. Evidently, shortly thereafter, the monastery was formally endowed by the nobility of the region, with the approval of Bishop Gerard II of Cambrai. There is no hint of the prior group of hermits suggested by Dereine, nor of any particularly 'eremitical' inspiration on the part of the founders.

²⁸ For Lobbes' economic decline, see *ibid.* pp. 99-107. Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, pp. 150-1, notes that Lobbes' location did not favour the burg becoming a commercial town. It remained a half-rural market town, and Lobbes did not benefit from the economic expansion of the time, unlike other monasteries in the region.

²⁹ Warichez, *L'Abbaye de Lobbes*, p. 85. Lobbes appears, from a marginal note in a manuscript, to have been at least sympathetic to the Emperor Henry IV's cause against Pope Gregory VII; *ibid.* p. 78.

³⁰ For the foundation charters see Escallier, *Anchin*, pp. 16-20, and Dereine, 'Ermites et Reclus', pp. 293-4.

³¹ Escallier, *Anchin*, pp. 17-18. Beyond this story, nothing is known of Saint Gordan. There is not even any indication of when he lived. He appears to have been a purely local, legendary figure.

Indeed, if anything there is a deliberate contrast between the '*theoretica vita*' which the two noblemen wished to lead, and the '*heremitica vita*' led by the legendary saint. The later idea of Anchin as an 'eremitical' foundation may have been in fact an elaboration on this original story.

Anchin was a house founded with lay religious enthusiasm within the context of the Gregorian reform. Its foundation also acted as a focus of local devotion, linking the bishop and the local noble elite. Perhaps this context does not exclude 'eremiticism', but neither is it a positive reason to impute such a religious consciousness. 'Eremiticism' is not a theme in the two narrative accounts of the foundation which come from sources loyal to the bishops of Cambrai. The continuation of the *Gesta Pontificum* emphasises the role of the bishop in the foundation, and the properties acquired by Anchin.³² The one phrase that could be redolent of an 'eremitical' context is the simple description of the site of Anchin as '*loco horroris et vastae solitudinis*', but the two founders nevertheless 'gave themselves up to the customs of monks'.³³ Crucially the account describes the founders' promise of obedience and subjection to the bishop of Cambrai. A slightly later account, also identified with the episcopacy of Cambrai, repeats the same points made by the earlier account, but leaves out the reference to the '*locus horroris*'.³⁴ However, Anchin's own version of its history is somewhat different. The foundation entry in the Anchin annal, rather than laying emphasis on property received and obedience due, states that the two founders wished to 'lead the eremitical life'.³⁵ The later twelfth-century *Historia* of Anchin took this passage and expanded the eremitical imagery used there, adding similar kinds of imagery in other parts of its account of the monastery's early years. The bishop of Cambrai is not given any

³² *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium, Continuatio, MGH Scriptores*, vol. 7, pp. 489-525; for Anchin see p. 499. The founders are simply '*conversi milites*', filled with the Holy Spirit.

³³ *ibid.* p. 499: '*Tradiderunt ad usus monachorum*'.

³⁴ *Chonicon S. Andreae Castri Cameracensi*, p. 540.

³⁵ *Annal Anchin*, p. 393: '*inibi quondam heremiticam vitam duxisse ferebatur*'. For the dating of this part of the annal from after 1113 and before about 1150, see *ibid.* p. 393.

kind of pivotal importance, certainly in comparison with the other chronicle accounts.³⁶

The existence of such a large number of competing accounts of a monastery's foundation suggests that there was some controversy surrounding the status of the house. Thus Anchin's assumption of eremitical origins is highly suspicious. Eremitical imagery seems to have been a rhetorical part of a political debate concerning the obligations owed by the monastery. Claiming eremitical origins may have been Anchin's argument against the bishops of Cambrai, who thought the house, located in the controversial new diocese of Arras, should owe obedience to themselves. Eremitical holiness may have been claimed in order to emphasise the monastery's separation from secular affairs, and thus as an oblique way of claiming exemption from an unwanted episcopal authority. That the Anchin narratives avoid mention of Bishop Gerard I may be indicative of the monastery's awkward position in this debate. Even if eremitical vocabulary was not intended to have such an overtly political meaning, the Anchin writers may simply have been influenced by Cistercian rhetoric. Indeed, Saint Bernard himself was in friendly contact with the two major twelfth-century abbots of Anchin, Alvis and Gossuin.³⁷

Controversy over eremiticism and the religious life in general form the background to Aibert's *Vita*. Ecclesiastical authorities had been set against each other in Aibert's homeland for the better part of his life, if not throughout it, while popular dissent from all such authority was equally manifest. In this context it is not surprising to find that the proper relationship of holy men to society and authority is a major theme in the *Vita*. Obedience to authority is shown as a necessity which begins in childhood. Aibert's father was a *miles* who lived near Tournai, and both his parents feared and loved God. The 'merit of their goodness' was rewarded with a holy child.³⁸ Soon the boy would remove himself from the sight of men, hiding in the sheepfold and eating a bit of apple when necessary. He knew that if

³⁶ *Fundatio Monasterii Aquicinctini*, *MGH Scriptores* vol. 14, pp. 579-84, esp. p. 585, and earlier p. 581. The *Fundatio* is the preface to the *Historia Monasterii Aquicinctini*, pp. 584-92. For the dating of the *Historia*, see p. 578; it was written between 1166 and 1174.

³⁷ See Escallier, *Anchin*, pp. 58-9 for Alvis, and pp. 72-3 for Gossuin.

³⁸ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 3, p. 674.

his secret asceticism was discovered it would be forbidden. When confronted by his father, the boy admitted his activities and was told to desist.³⁹ This first experience in negotiating his way between ascetic commitment and duty towards authority was, according to his hagiographer, his first advance in the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Thus heroic asceticism could itself lead to sin, if it denies proper authority. Aibert had to employ devious methods in concealing his asceticism without lying to his father. His father would ask him if he had eaten, and the boy, not having had more than a bite of an apple some time before, could reply that he had; 'perhaps he had heard that the mouth which lies kills the soul.' Childhood asceticism only briefly checked, Aibert continued to frequent isolated churches and to despise the world.

The hagiographer's problem with Aibert was that he did not, in his actual life, place obedience to authority over the ascetic life. Aibert was converted to the eremitical life by an 'actor [*mimus*] singing of the life and conversion of Saint Theobald.'⁴⁰ Theobald was a hermit who died in 1066, whose *Vita*, written within a decade of his death, is extant. However, it is impossible to guess what relation the vernacular version of Saint Theobald's story had to that extant *Vita*. Neither is there any discernible influence of Theobald's *Vita* upon Aibert's.⁴¹ Aibert's conversion occurred within the realm of popular religious enthusiasm and was not graced by ecclesiastical authority. His subsequent actions are ambiguous for a hagiographer concerned with authority; a pilgrim called John arrives in his father's *hospitium* and Aibert goes off with John to the desert, to a hermitage said to have once been inhabited by a companion of Saint Landelin. Certainly John was 'an excellent priest of wonderful abstinence', a monk of Crespin who lived in his hermitage with the

³⁹ *ibid.* ch. 4, p. 674.

⁴⁰ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 5, p. 674. Apparently the heretic Waldo was also converted on hearing a troubadour's rendition of the life of Saint Alexis; Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, trans. A. Goldhammer (London 1986), pp. 102-3. These two examples indicate that hagiography could be disseminated in the vernacular, outside the control of the clergy. A version of the *Vita Theobaldi*, based upon the extant Latin versions, was in fact written in two old French dialects of the early thirteenth century; see Raymond T. Hill, *Two Old French Poems on St. Thibaut* (New Haven 1936), pp. 19-41. Perhaps such narratives existed in the oral sphere long before they were recorded.

⁴¹ *Vita S. Theobaldi Eremita*, AASS 30 June, pp. 588-95.

permission of the abbot of Crespin.⁴² The hagiographer's emphasis on this permission, the holiness of John and of the hermitage itself, masks the fact that Aibert began his religious life as a hermit independent of any ecclesiastical authority.

Following Aibert's entry into the eremitical life is a description of his ascetic way of life. Many descriptions of a holy man's ascetic practices are structurally reminiscent of an early passage about asceticism in Athanasius' account of Saint Anthony.⁴³ The main features of Anthony's asceticism, vigils, fasts and his diet of bread and salt, are general features of ascetic life. Thus it is not always possible to be sure whether a hagiographer was deliberately modelling a passage on the *Vita Antonii*. Nevertheless, an early passage in the twelfth-century *Vita* of Robert of Arbrissel, a famous example of the new kind of wandering ascetic preacher, strongly resembles the Anthony passage in structure and in its place within the progress of Robert's life. The use of the Anthony passage in Robert's *Vita* is conventional in contrast to its use in Aibert's *Vita*. Robert has extricated himself from the vain things of the world, thus echoing Anthony's defeat of the devil, and engages in the classic aspects of ascetic life in the desert. Robert's lifelong disdain for jokes and foolishness finally parallel Anthony's constant attention to holiness.⁴⁴ In one respect, Robert's asceticism departs from Anthony's; Robert is described as taking food rarely and then it is described as *vilis*. This word may imply a rustic diet, which ought to have included bread, as did Anthony's. However, Robert is said to have avoided the 'bread, eyes, and favours of men' at this time.

Robert's asceticism is described further in an ensuing passage, which avoids discussing his precise diet, noting only that he avoided 'delicate and fattening food'.⁴⁵ Robert's extensive vigils, which again may be intended to echo the Anthony passage, were considered 'to be impossible and excessive [*nimum*]' by the 'many muddy imbeciles'. Unlike Godric of Finchale, Robert is not actually excessive or bestial, even though he is also described as being the companion of beasts. Rather, Robert is avoiding the diet of the rich, while his

⁴² *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 6, p. 675.

⁴³ *Vita Antonii*, chs. 5-6, cols. 130-1, and see above Chapter II, p. 59.

⁴⁴ Baldric, Bishop of Dol, *Vita B. Roberti de Arbrissello*, AASS 25 February, pp. 603-8; ch. 10, p. 604.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* ch. 11, p. 605.

behaviour is distinguished from the incredulity of stupid peasants. This description of peasant imbecility is probably a reference to the peasants in Gregory's *Dialogues*, who mistake the saint for a monster, but again, Robert is validated by the reference, not stained as is Godric of Finchale.⁴⁶ Thus, Robert's asceticism is clearly considered to be entirely appropriate behaviour for a holy man. The ensuing chapters describe his saintly activism as the crowds converge upon him. Again, unlike Godric, Robert's asceticism leads immediately to the pastoral stage of the saintly career.

The description of Aibert's asceticism also appears to be modelled on the Anthony passage, but the hagiographer appears to be ambivalent, at least, concerning the holiness of anchoritic behaviour. Aibert and his companion John pursue a way of life so austere that 'it is not possible to explain easily the many miseries, calamities and poverty they patiently sustained in hope of eternal life in this place.'⁴⁷ Aibert's desert is thus a place of horror, an equivalent to Anthony's later suffering from the assaults of demons, perhaps. However, while Anthony's food 'was bread and salt; his drink water only', Aibert and John very often failed to even set sight upon bread for long periods. Instead 'they were content with herbs and roots of herbs, of which there was not plenty in those parts.'⁴⁸ Anthony always had a link to society through those who brought him bread even in the inner mountain.⁴⁹ Aibert and John had no such connection and later in the *Vita*, the hagiographer describes the food they ate as the 'food of beasts'.⁵⁰ Their asceticism is nevertheless purposeful as 'out of one part of nudity and out of anguish of cold, God pressed them, out of other penury of corporeal support he straightened them'.⁵¹ While none of this is in itself critical of

⁴⁶ See above, Chapter II, p. 72.

⁴⁷ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 6. The structure of this ascetic passage follows the Antonine pattern of vigils, fasts and diet, with a closing statement on the inner meaning of asceticism. Robert of Ostrevant ends with a reference to the Apostle Paul in the closing discussion of the hermits' humility about their virtue. Athanasius closes his chapter with a structurally analogous discussion; 'forgetting the things that are behind'. But while Athanasius is praising Anthony's inner attitude, Robert emphasises the precariousness of grace; that it is not by works alone that one can be saved.

⁴⁸ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 6: '*contenti erant herbis et radicibus herbarum*'.

⁴⁹ *Vita Antonii*, ch. 25, cols. 148-9.

⁵⁰ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 16, p. 677: '*esca bestiarum*'.

⁵¹ *ibid.* ch. 16: '*ex una enim parte nuditatis et frigoris angustia*'.

asceticism, there is an absence of any fulsome praise in the contrast of the ascetic and worldly ways of life, as is found in the much milder ascetic passage describing Robert of Arbrissel.

An underlying ambiguity remains in the hermits' situation, even in the midst of a quotation from 2 Corinthians; 'they were affected. . . by fasting, vigils, praying, by suffering coldness and nudity, such that they were seen to be altogether dissimilar to men, appearing not to be men.'⁵² Aibert himself told that one day he was seen by 'hairy shepherds' who seeing him so 'basely covered in rags' fled 'thinking him to be a monster'. This is another use of the Gregorian *topos*. When some shepherds first found Benedict and saw him dressed in skins, they thought he was a beast [*bestia*], but they were soon converted from their own bestial minds to Christianity.⁵³ The joke here is clearly on the stupid peasants who cannot see Benedict's inner grace beneath his outward form. The same is not true for Aibert; although the shepherds are seen as perhaps equally contemptible as the hermit, the hagiographer agrees that there was something monstrous about Aibert. Certainly, Aibert does not, like

⁵² The nudity and cold here is a reference to Paul in 2 *Corinthians* 11:26-7: '*in labore et aerumna, in vigiliis multis, in fame et siti, in ieiuniis multis, in frigore et nuditate*', (also see *1 Corinthians* 4: 10-13). This is a common quotation in passages describing asceticism, however, it is often quoted quite differently and is not always simply a validation of ascetic behaviour. See Chapter II, p. 49. for a discussion of the contrasting use of the quotation in Symeon of Durham and the *Vita* of Bernard of Clairvaux. It is usually hedged by a metaphorical context, as in the Bernard quotation. There the Cistercians' ascetic nakedness is contextualised by their fundamentalist approach to the *Rule of Benedict*, stripping it down to its bare foundations. They are naked in front of God, as is Wulfric of Haselbury in another use of the quotation, see Chapter VI, p. 216. While Cistercians often used the 'nakedness' part of the quotation, other sources deliberately seem to have avoided it, as does Symeon or in *Christina*, ch. 39, p. 102, where there is a Corinthians reference in the description of her asceticism: '*O quantas sustinuit illic incommoditates frigoris et estus, famis et sitis, cotidiani ieiunii*'. Saint Landelin was described with the full Corinthians quotation, but his asceticism is a humiliating penance for earlier crimes as a bandit, and his *Vita* predated the twelfth-century controversies over asceticism; *Vita Landelini*, ch. 4, p. 441. Finally, Geoffrey's summary of Reginald's *Vita* of Godric uses the full Corinthians quotation to describe Godric's asceticism, as part of his avoidance of Reginald's argument concerning excessive asceticism; *Vita Godrici Gal.* ch. 8, p. 72. The partial use of the Corinthians quotation to describe Aibert's asceticism is thus not conventional but rather pointed. In conjunction with the Gregorian *topos* of the monstrous hermit, it both emphasises and normalises the degradation and suffering of Aibert in this naked and bestial period.

⁵³ Gregory, *Dialogi*, Bk. 2, ch. 1, no. 8, (p. 136). Base and contemptible clothing turns up a few times among Gregory's saints; see Bk. 1, ch. 4, Equitatus, and ch. 5, Constantius.

Benedict, convert the shepherds. Neither is Aibert distanced from the 'muddy imbeciles' as is Robert of Arbrissel. If Aibert's hagiographer had wished to show approval of Aibert at this point, it would have been simple enough to add some rhetorical statement to that effect. The hagiographer gives no such indication, leaving us with the image of Aibert as a monster.⁵⁴ Moreover the conventionality of the Corinthians quotation is undermined by the repetition of Aibert's state of nakedness; God 'pressed them partly through their nudity and partly through the cold.' Aibert is not in a state of grace in this chapter. Indeed, Robert of Ostrevant ends the description explaining that whatever their works, they could not attain salvation without the grace of God.

Aibert's diet is a crucial element in this ascetic passage; the herbs and roots that he eats are bestial foods, and accepted as such by the hagiographer. As in the Godric of Finchale's *Vita*, this is a deliberately ambiguous portrayal of the hermit's diet.⁵⁵ In both the *Vitae* of Godric and Aibert, the most pointed remarks about asceticism are made through the issue of food, and in Aibert's *Vita*, food is a recurring motif throughout. These two hermits appear to be unusual in this respect. Aibert's eremitical inspiration, Saint Theobald, died in 1066, and soon thereafter a priory near Reims, under the control of Marmoutier, was established for his relics.⁵⁶ The recurrent theme in Theobald's *Vita* is his relinquishment of all the accessories of a nobleman's life. While he was being a pilgrim he was 'reduced to the vile and laborious works of rustics'.⁵⁷ Despite the fact that rustics and beasts were perceived as somewhat similar by most hagiographers of this period, Theobald's *Vita* does not make him a bestial hermit. Rather, the hagiographer emphasises the difference in nature between his saint and actual rustics, calling him a *miles*

⁵⁴ John Block Freidman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art And Thought* (London 1981), pp. 27-31, notes the centrality of diet in defining exotic and monstrous peoples. Also, nakedness was almost always a sign of wildness and beastliness.

⁵⁵ See Chapter II, p. 74. for a discussion of patristic *topoi* concerning the ascetic diet.

⁵⁶ Jackie Lusse, 'Le Monachisme en Champagne des Origins au 13e Siecle', in Académie Nationale De Reims, *La Champagne Bénédictine* (Reims 1981), pp. 24-78; p. 70. The Counts of Champagne favoured Marmoutier, and since Theobald was related to Count Odes of Champagne, this would explain the establishment of the priory; see Hill, *Two Old French Poems on St. Thibaut*, p. 42.

⁵⁷ *Vita Theobaldi*, ch. 4, pp. 593-4.

Christi even during this period.⁵⁸ When Theobald settles in a ruined church, with the permission of the local lords, he at first lives on bread, and then later on 'fruits and herbs, and roots of the same.'⁵⁹ With the exception of fruit, this is the same diet as Aibert's, but again the hagiographer does not flourish the rhetoric of suffering or beastliness, instead we are told that Theobald is living the angelic life and is visited by important ecclesiastical people. The same food can have different symbolic meaning for different hagiographers.

Another view of eremitical food is found in the mid-twelfth-century *Vita* of Bernard of Tiron. Bernard's early period as a hermit, when he encountered other eremitical luminaries such as Robert of Arbrissel, 'was a rich feast [*convivium*], even if bread was wanting'. Among hazel trees, Bernard and companions lived off the fruits of the forest, including many kinds of apples, and a plenitude of honey and honeycomb. These hermits were recreating a prelapsarian society in the wilderness; the imagery of the wilderness here is fruitful, positively companionable, certainly not bestial or inhuman.⁶⁰ Not all the ascetic passages are quite so pastoral, and at another point the 'rigour of abstinence' under the cherished '*propositum anachoreticae*' does involve eating 'herbs and the leaves of trees'. Here the hagiographer notes their life 'in fasting, in thirst, in vigils, in coldness and in exercises of hard labours'.⁶¹ Note that unlike in

⁵⁸ *ibid.* ch. 3, p. 593. See also a later story; ch. 7, p. 594, where the devil manifests himself as the sound of a 'multitude of rustics' cutting down the wood around Theobald's hermitage.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* ch. 5, p. 594: '*fructibus tantum et herbis, earumque radicibus. . . vixit*'.

⁶⁰ *Vita Bernardi Tiron.* col. 1382. See Walter, *Wanderprediger Frankreichs*, p. 401, for this part of the *Vita* being from a hypothetical source B. Walter points out, p. 400, that Bernard is also shown explaining to his monks that strict adherence to harsh rules of asceticism is not necessary for monastic life. This is again from source B, which Walter plausibly supposes to date from a period of less heroic asceticism, compared to the early days, in Tiron's monastic life.

⁶¹ *Vita Bernardi Tiron.* col. 1383: '*inedia, siti, vigiliis, algoribus et laborum duris*'. Food is a recurring theme in the *Vita*, and when entirely divorced from human company, Bernard is denied bread and subsists on raw roots and herbs; ch. 27, col. 1384. This hagiographer thus also sees bread as 'social' food, but he does not invoke images of beastliness or nakedness to describe Bernard. Later, during a famine, the monks of Tiron pray together for relief and obtain a provision miracle, ch. 70, col. 1409. Because of the composite nature of the *Vita*, it is difficult to perceive any structural patterns in the frequent appearances of eremitical food. Nevertheless, while the hagiographer seems to share the opposition of animal food versus human food with Aibert's hagiographer, Bernard of Tiron never seems to be criticised for his ascetic diet, and indeed his diet appears more often associated with good coenobitic life than with anchoritic withdrawal.

Aibert's *Vita, nuditas* is left out of the Corinthians quotation in Bernard of Tiron's *Vita*, perhaps because the hagiographer wished to avoid possibly controversial associations of wildness, and no other pejorative rhetoric of the horror of the wilderness is added. These hermits are living under a notional *Rule*, and therefore symbolically at least under an authority.

By contrast, Aibert's hagiographer leaves a negative impression; he is choosing his *topoi* carefully, as do all hagiographers, and is deliberately producing an ambivalent, if not overtly critical, picture of Aibert's early asceticism. Robert of Ostrevant's purpose in Aibert's *Vita* was to show a progression in the ascetic's life from wild independence to a safe and approved religious life within established ecclesiastical structures. In the context of the strained ecclesiastical politics of Cambrai-Arras, this may have been a self-consciously reformist argument. Robert was showing the importance of the reforming tradition in moulding and controlling popular religious enthusiasm. The relative lack of information concerning Aibert's contact with Crespin in the later reclusive stage of his life may thus reflect a tactical silence on the hagiographer's part. More conservative clergy in Cambrai may have regarded Aibert with great distaste, so leaving the Arras reforming party to write the *Vita*. However, Robert had no wish to reveal this division, preferring silence in order to show ecclesiastical authority as united and effective in taming Aibert.

Thus Robert does not show Aibert staying in his beastly wilderness for very long, quickly introducing Abbot Rainier of Crespin, who took Aibert and John on a pilgrimage to Rome. On the journey, Aibert learns the true monastic way while staying at the abbey of Vallebrosa; these monks are praised for their 'rigour of discipline' and are seen as 'noble above all in their kind of religion'. Indeed they are said to follow the *Rule* of Benedict 'perfectly'.⁶² These monks live a life far different from the previously bestial Aibert, and, unlike him, are acknowledged as 'perfect' and living in 'sanctity'. On his return to the Cambrai, Aibert becomes a dutiful monk of Crespin for a reputed twenty-five years, and the hagiographer writes him another Anthony passage describing his ascetic life as a monk. This passage is clearly meant as a direct

⁶² *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 7, p. 675.

contrast to his earlier period as an anchorite. Here Aibert suffers 'hunger, thirst, cold and affliction of the flesh', while eating bread, fruits and vegetables. However, safe under a *Rule*, he is no longer a naked or monstrous hermit, indeed he wears a hairshirt, not just simple rags. Aibert is now free from the ambiguities of the earlier chapter; he lived in a 'wonderful manner' as an acknowledged *vir sanctus*.⁶³

Then sometime between 1110 and 1116, he once again retires to solitude, but this time he 'received licence from Abbot Lambert to leave the monastery and enter the cell'. In this cell, only a few miles from Crespin but within the marshes of the diocese of Arras, he 'lived as long as he soldiered for the Lord, under the command of the abbot of Crespin'.⁶⁴ To place oneself fully within the authority of ecclesiastical superiors, is to follow the correct path as a hermit. At this point Aibert for the first time becomes a holy man helpful to others; hearing of his sanctity 'the people began to frequent him', and the bishop of Cambrai makes him a priest 'so that he better provided for the people coming to him'.⁶⁵ This was essential as 'he attracted many to confession of their villainies by his goodness and gentleness'.⁶⁶ Indeed, in a nod towards Saint Paul, 'he made himself all things to all those who came to him'.⁶⁷ These people, we are told, are not just 'the crowd of illiterates and idiots' but 'bishops, archdeacons, abbots, hermits, nuns, and all kinds of religious and literate men, noble men and women. . . as if they were a beast of many heads'.⁶⁸ From being a lonely beast, Aibert has become one who serves the great beast of a fractious and divided society.

Robert lays great emphasis on Aibert's usual advice to those who came to him; that they should confess to their bishops what they had confessed to him. If they would not, he would lay insupportable penances on them.⁶⁹ Aibert had apparently achieved a regional importance as a holy man, enough that within a few years of his retreat to the marshes, Pope Paschal II (d.1119) gave him permission

⁶³ *ibid.* ch. 10, p. 676.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* ch. 11, p. 676.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* ch. 14, p. 677; Burchard was Bishop from 1114-1130.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* ch. 16, pp. 677-8.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* ch. 17, p. 678.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* ch. 20, pp. 678-9.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* ch. 18, p. 678.

to reconcile penitents.⁷⁰ Aibert was rapidly promoted to the priesthood, while in the marshes, after decades as a monk. If he did not become a priest before, why now, so late in life? Aibert's superiors were reacting to an unforeseen circumstance; a hermit's popularity among the mass of the people. These facts are a good indication of the attitude of the 'crowd of idiots' towards their established pastors; they preferred an unordained hermit in a marsh to their clergy. Aibert was not prepared by his superiors for the role of popular holy man; rather, Aibert's superiors hastened to catch up on the situation, by giving him the formal authority to carry out the role people demanded of him. Fortunately for the hierarchy, Aibert used his position to encourage respect towards the regional episcopacy. Thus perhaps Aibert's life does reflect upon the events of his time, on the episcopate's bitter experiences since the beginning of the Investiture controversy, and on the reform movement in general. From being an independent hermit, apparently uninterested in established ecclesiastical structures, Aibert had been thoroughly tamed, and died after another twenty five years as an officially sanctioned holy man.

Although none of the miracles usually attributed to hermits are given to Aibert in the *Vita*, it does seem to have been his asceticism which attracted popularity. The Anchin annal, written shortly after the *Vita*, but containing information independent of the *Vita*, records that Aibert was renowned for having abstained from all food and drink for 23 of those 25 later years as a hermit.⁷¹ Aibert's hagiographer too remains obsessed with his hermit's eating habits. Nearly every chapter contains some reference to his dietary asceticism. At first, Aibert, in civilised fashion, eats bread brought to him from Crespin. But then, he is isolated by floods for a time, and is in great need of both bread and the mass. The Virgin Mary then appears to him, and assures him that his way of life is in itself a mass, and She gives him a morsel of bread from her own hand; 'he existed in this manner from this hour . . . neither did he desire bread . . . content with herbs, roots and other base foods which he had been

⁷⁰ Trelcat, *Histoire de Crespin*, p. 66.

⁷¹ *Annal Anchin*, p. 394. The incident in the annal which is not in the *Vita* is the dedication of Aibert's chapel in 1134.

accustomed to eat.⁷² This story is again reminiscent of certain patristic legends, particularly of Jerome's hermit Paul, where the saint is fed the bread of angels in the deepest wilderness.

However, Aibert is apparently returning to the culinary habits of his 'naked' period. While musing on Aibert's connection with confessors and martyrs, Robert of Ostrevant explains his diet as a paradox; 'Who therefore can express the sanctity of this blessed priest exactly? Whilst he shunned the food of men, using the food of beasts, the bestial food was to him the medicine of salvation, indeed it is said that eating the husks of pigs he better merited the bread of Angels. And so the Angelic man chewed the bread of Angels.'⁷³ The implication here is perhaps meant to be a kind of transubstantiation of the basest, earthly food into something much greater in divine reality. Aibert is not being mistaken for a monster this time; having trained under human authority, and now graced by divine approval and divine food, the hermit's corporeal appearance masks a great mystery. How can a man be so evidently holy, and yet eat bestial food? Perhaps Aibert's hagiographer would have preferred Aibert to eat bread, angelic or human, but there was clearly a current legend of his strange diet or lack of one. This current legend had to be explained and contained. Robert's paradox tames the legend of Aibert.

ii) Diet and The Wild Man: Popular Belief in the *Vitae* of Godric and Aibert

The grace of God in Godric's *Vita*, as in Aibert's, is not achieved by asceticism alone, but finally by submission to the authority of the church. The reception of grace and obedience by both hermits is accompanied by their 'taming'; from being bestial figures, they learn the civilised holy life, and reference to their nakedness disappears. The two *Vitae* were written to control the memory and meaning of these popular holy men. Both *Vitae* probably took stories generated around the two men and presented them in a context acceptable to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of their regions. The vast majority of hermit hagiography in this period is of those figures who founded a monastery, and whose monastery therefore needed an account of

⁷² *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 12, pp. 676-7.

⁷³ *ibid.* ch. 16, pp. 677-8.

their founder. A different explanation is needed in the cases of Aibert and Godric. The evident popularity of the two hermits among *imbecilles* and *illiterati* should be taken to imply that those people had their own stories of these holy men, with meanings different and maybe distasteful to *literati* such as Reginald of Durham or Robert of Ostrevent. Some effort must be made to guess at the meaning these two hermits had for the 'imbeciles' and others outside the literate or courtly elites.

The recurring central element in all these twelfth-century *vitae* is the eremitical diet; while miracles involving animals are common but often absent, *topoi* concerning food are nearly always present. One recurring formula is of the hermit eating 'herbs and the roots of herbs'. Below is a list of these formula that have been quoted above.

Hilarion (ch. 5): '*Herbarum ergo succo et paucis caricis . . . animam sustenabat*'

(ch. 11) '*herbis agrestibus, et virgultorum quorundam radicibus crudis sustentatus est*'

Theobald (ch. 5): '*fructibus tantum et herbis, earumque radicibus . . . vixit*'

Bernard of Tiron (ch. 24): '*agrestis herbas conficit in pulmentum*', '*frondibus arboreis vitam sustenabat et herbis*'

Aibert (ch. 6): '*contenti erant herbis et radicibus herbarum*'

Godric (ch. 23, no. 59): '*radicibus herbarum, seu etiam frondibus arborum vel foliorum, jocundis masticationibus florum redolentium, vitam miseram sustentabat*'

The striking aspect of the latter formulae is that they each seem to be closer to their contemporaries in structure than they are similar to Jerome's formula in the *Vita* of Saint Hilarion, which itself appears to be the closest patristic formula to the latter ones.⁷⁴ If the

⁷⁴ Jerome's Hilarion would in any case be an odd choice for eleventh and twelfth-century hagiographers to focus on, when Saint Anthony was so much more prominent in hagiographic rhetoric. Another patristic example that does not seem to fit the case is from Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, ch. 2, col. 405,

twelfth-century writers were developing their individual formulae from Jerome, one would expect each to be more similar to Jerome than to each other, rather than the reverse. Nevertheless, a formula of 'x and y of x' seems to lie behind the twelfth-century writers, each of whom are unlikely to be depending upon the other in this respect. There is another unlikely twelfth-century contribution to this group, almost identical to the Aibert formula, and certainly entirely independent of it. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Life* of Merlin, the hero in his madness was a '*homo silvester*', living on 'herbs and the roots of herbs', while 'hidden like an animal'.⁷⁵ Merlin's diet is expressed in the same formula, structurally, as Aibert's. In the absence of a strong patristic or biblical source, this overall pattern suggests the influence of a widespread formula drawn from eleventh and twelfth-century culture itself. It seems, given that Aibert himself was 'converted' by a lay singer of saints' stories, in a rural context, that there was a kind of popular hagiography current even in the late eleventh century. The content of such narratives is, of course, next to impossible to even guess. But perhaps the anomalous formula of the eremitical diet was drawn from popular vernacular traditions of saint narratives, which in turn influenced the vocabulary of hagiographers.

It is striking that three twelfth-century *vitae*, obsessed with the diet of their holy men, each include a version of the Gregorian *topos* of the hermit mistaken for a beast. While the hagiographers of Godric and Aibert are tempted to agree that their hermits were beastly, Bernard of Tiron's hagiographer, Geoffrey *Grossus*, stays true to the spirit of Pope Gregory's formulation. Bernard and his monks are building the monastery of Tiron, when the 'rude and bestial men' who lived in those parts mistake the monks for 'Saracens', who have

on Abba Or: '*Ipse tamen cum esset in eremo, herbis pascebatur et radicibus quibusdam et haec ei dulcia videbantur*'. One source that might be expected to be behind the formula is the Bible, but in fact the two closest quotations are more distant than Jerome's Hilarion; see *Genesis* 3:18-19, 'Thou shalt eat the herb [*herba*] of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground', and *Exodus* 12:8, 'and they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it'.

⁷⁵ *Vita Merlini*, ed. John Jay Parry in *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* (1925), vol. 10; no. 3, p. 34: '*utitur herbarum radicibus utitur herbis; utitur arboreo fructu...*'

arrived there by digging subterranean tunnels.⁷⁶ It is of course not the monks who are monstrous, but the disgusting rustics who are bestial enough to perceive holy men as monsters. Perhaps however, this is not merely rhetorical derision, but a distorted reflection of the popular perception of holy men.

So apart from tunnelling Saracens, what kind of monster would Aibert and Godric be? While living isolated from society in the forest, they are seen as naked and eating roots and herbs. This is a basic image of the wild man, sometimes a semi-human beast, or sometimes a man, turned wild by madness. The evidence for the wild man in medieval culture is sparse and difficult, with few representations before the fourteenth century.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, if Aibert and Godric were perceived as wild men in some sense, then this would give an additional reason for their hagiographers' discomfort with their anchoritic asceticism. The few twelfth-century representations of the wild man are generally products of high culture. Apart from Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin, there is Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, who eats raw meat while wandering mad and naked in the forest.⁷⁸ Yvain meets another wild man at a different point in the story, who appears as a hideous rustic herdsman. Yvain himself is tamed by a different inhabitant of the forest, the hermit. This is the more usual role of hermits in hagiography too; they are civilising figures, turning a 'vast and terrible solitude' into a place fit for angels, to paraphrase Cistercian rhetoric.⁷⁹ Godric and Aibert are not colonising, civilised

⁷⁶ *Vita Bernardi Tiron.* ch. 71, col. 1410.

⁷⁷ Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, remains the best overview of the subject, although some of his interpretations look dubious today. Nevertheless, Bernheimer is surely right to point out that the Wild Man must have meant something different to peasants than to such people as Chrétien de Troyes' audience, even if it would not be wise to assume with Bernheimer that the peasants' Wild Man was the survival of a pagan deity, pp. 21-6. For the Wild Man in medieval art see Timothy Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York 1980). For a recent discussion see Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor, 1994), particularly pp. 63-125.

⁷⁸ For the various forms of the Wild Man in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, see Jacques Le Goff, 'Levi-Strauss in Broceliande: A Brief Analysis of a Courtly Romance', in *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (1988), pp. 107-131.

⁷⁹ See Le Goff, 'The Wilderness in the Medieval West', p. 56 for the rustic wild man, and Le Goff, 'Levi-Strauss in Broceliande', pp. 108-18, for Yvain and the hermit. On the subject of hermits in Romance in general see also Angus J. Kennedy, 'The Hermit's Role in French Arthurian Romance', *Romania* 95 (1974), pp. 54-83.

figures in their early lives. As wild hermits they are perhaps more akin to a knight like Yvain. Despite their heroic qualities, such heroes have lost grace, and are temporarily wild before regaining their place within society, whether that society is spiritual or secular.

Despite the courtly sources for the twelfth-century wild man, he was nevertheless certainly a figure of twelfth-century popular, or 'rustic' culture. One example of the basic wild man of folklore appears in the *Vita* of Godric itself.⁸⁰ Godric is walking about, collecting apples under the apple trees of Finchale, when a hairy man comes out of the forest, saying 'hermit, oh hermit, give to us some of your apples' and 'for charity, for charity.' Godric, somewhat bemused it seems, hands him an apple, saying 'behold, accept this apple for charity, and give thanks to God.' The creature bursts into immoderate laughter, 'hach, hach, hach', and runs away. At this point it becomes clear that the man is naked but his whole body is covered in hairs like the bristles of a pig. There is no significant moral or miraculous point to this story, it seems to be just a 'marvel' story,⁸¹ and Reginald at other points is fascinated by Godric's tales of all the hairy and curious creatures of the forest that he has seen. Godric's meeting with the wild man is a strangely abrupt story but is not isolated within hagiography of the region and period.

Jocelyn of Furness' version of the *Vita* of Saint Kentigern includes a reference to a '*homo fatuus*' named Laloecen, who disturbed the saint's prayers.⁸² This man is in the keeping of the king and after Kentigern's death is distraught and prophesies the death of the king and one of his lords. A fifteenth-century version of the meeting of Kentigern and Lailoken shows the latter as 'naked and hairy', clearly a kind of wild man. Lailoken is a Christian exiled from society by his own sin and guilt. Like Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin, he takes upon himself the guilt for all those who died in a battle.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 135, no. 248, (pp. 261-2), see above Chapter III, p. 105.

⁸¹ To use the distinction between *miracula* and *mirabilia* made in Jacques Le Goff, 'The Marvellous in the Medieval West', in *The Medieval Imagination*, pp. 27-44, particularly pp. 27-28.

⁸² Jocelyn of Furness, *Vita Kentigerni*, ch. 45, p. 241.

⁸³ H. L. D. Ward, 'Lailoken (or Merlin Silvester)', *Romania* 22 (1896), pp. 504-26; p. 514. This extract is from the fifteenth-century *Scotichronicon*, and is likely to be an abridgement of an earlier existing version of the story. Similar sorts of 'folklore' as that attached to Saint Kentigern appear involving Merlin in the thirteenth century. See A. O. H. Jarmon, 'The Welsh Myrddin Poems', pp. 20-30, pp. 25-6 for Merlin and Lailoken, and Alexandre Micha, 'The Vulgate

While this narrative is recorded very late, it may nevertheless indicate the existence of a twelfth-century version of the story, which Jocelyn largely suppressed in his version of Saint Kentigern.⁸⁴ The story of Godric and the wild man makes much more sense if it is seen as a curtailed version of something similar to the Kentigern and Lailoken story. Thus, if a type of story detailing meetings between saints and wild men was extant in the twelfth century, then the stories of Godric and the wild man, and Kentigern and Lailoken, look as if they were the product of local 'rustic' culture. As such, it is not surprising that Jocelyn and Reginald balked at such 'popular' stories, and recorded them only in truncated or edited form.⁸⁵

Obviously Godric's wild man is a creature of a different order from Godric himself in his wild phase, yet there is also a minor theme in hagiography of the naked or hairy hermit. Sulpicius Severus in the Postumianus dialogue recorded a story of a hermit of Sinai who, through the grace of God, was unaware of his nakedness and his hairy covering. This hermit ran from the sight of men, but was rumoured to talk with angels. Significantly for the western hagiographic tradition, Sulpicius emphasises that the holiness of coenobitic monks is no less than this wild if Edenic figure.⁸⁶ There are a few stories of naked or hairy anchorites in the *Vitae Patrum*, concentrated in the early sections of book six of the *Verba Seniorum*.⁸⁷ The stories themselves are relatively various in detail

Merlin', pp. 319-324, p. 319 for the similar conceptions in stories of Merlin and Kentigern, both in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger S. Loomis (Oxford 1959).

⁸⁴ Such a suppression would fit a pattern in Jocelyn's Kentigern. He certainly disparages a now lost *Vita* of Kentigern which existed in his own time, saying that it opened with something contrary to healthy doctrine; *Vita Kentigerni*, p. 160. Tellingly, when explaining Kentigern's mysterious conception, he goes out of his way to show that the saint's mother could have been impregnated without her knowledge, while being drugged. Thus she would not have known sexuality. Jocelyn says that this long digression was necessary because of the '*populus stultus et insipiens*', who believed that Kentigern was born of a virgin; *ibid.* ch. 1, p. 163.

⁸⁵ See above, Chapter III, p. 105. for Geoffrey's reduction of Reginald's wild man story into a traditional devil story.

⁸⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Dialogue I, ch. 17, cols. 194-5; trans. Hoare, *Western Fathers*, pp. 88-9. Sulpicius provides a few legends of extreme anchorites in this dialogue, see chs. 15-16, cols. 193-4.

⁸⁷ *Verba Seniorum*, cols. 1006-10. There are a few others elsewhere in the same work, see for example the hermit with a 'terrible and hairy appearance' who when asked if he is a 'spirit' answers that he is just a sinning man; *Verba Seniorum, libellus septimus*, ch. 12, col. 894. For a discussion of these stories in

and form, even though all concern the discovery of extreme anchorites by more familiar Egyptian holy men such as Saint Macarius. The essential form of these stories is thus clearly akin to Jerome's story of Saint Anthony finding Paul the Hermit in the deepest desert.

Macarius however, finds two naked men on an island in the middle of an oasis. The two men live among the animals of the desert without fear, and by a dispensation from God, suffer neither from the cold nor the heat, and thus do not need clothes. Macarius states to the other monks that he is not a monk, as these two were more truly monks.⁸⁸ Another wild anchorite exists in a far less Edenic fashion. He is found by a 'solitary', himself dressed only in a linen bag, who had walked for three days in the desert, until standing on a rock, he saw a naked man browsing the grass just like the beasts. This is the wild anchorite, who then fled from the solitary, delivering the moral that if you wish to be saved you must flee from men and be silent. The wild anchorite is about as bestial as can be, yet the story appears to imply that his way is indeed the way to salvation.⁸⁹ A third story tells of a hermit for whom the hair of his head serves as clothing; 'he thus had a terrible appearance'. This too is a bestial and monstrous hermit, but in this case the cause is a sin. The anchorite had been a bishop, but had avoided an opportunity for martyrdom, and was condemned to this way of life to expiate that sin.⁹⁰

These three episodes seem representative of the range of such stories. Salvation is clearly not an easy business in this genre of story, and perhaps part of the function of these stories was to warn against monastic complacency. Nevertheless, it is striking that the extreme anchorites range from being Edenic figures, to sinful, bestial characters. It was probably these kind of legends that Jerome strategically dismissed in the *Vita* of Paul, saying 'Some tattle this and that. . . a man in an underground cavern with hair to his heels.'⁹¹

patristic writing see Charles Allyn Williams, 'Oriental Affinities of the Legend of the Hairy Anchorite' in *University Of Illinois Studies of Language and Literature*, part I, vol. 10 (1925), pp. 9-56, and part II, vol. 11, (1926), pp. 57-119; particularly part II, pp. 72-86.

⁸⁸ *Verba Seniorum, libellus tertius*, ch. 4, cols. 1006-7.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* ch. 10, col. 1008.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* ch. 12, cols. 1010-11.

⁹¹ Jerome, *Vita Pauli Eremitae*, col. 18; trans. Waddell, *Lives of the Fathers*, p. 30.

Thus Jerome was able to use the genre for his story of Saint Paul, paving the way for Gregory the Great to dismiss the notion of the extreme, independent anchorite as a product of peasant idiocy. Such legendary anchorites simply would not sit well within the context of a hierarchical church where salvation is dependent upon obedience to authority. Jerome's Paul concludes a genre of legend by representing it through a single manageable figure, whose authority is passed on to another great hermit, Anthony. Paul the Hermit and Anthony represent a kind of apostolic succession of eremitical sanctity. Anchoritic holiness is thus implicitly handed down through Anthony's disciples. This interpretation may exaggerate Jerome's intentions, but the story could well have been read in such terms by the twelfth-century monks, who so often called on the memory of Anthony to justify modern monasticism.

Nevertheless, this patristic theme returns later in the middle ages. The legend of Saint John Chrysostom as a naked, hairy penitent, walking like a beast when captured and tamed, reached Italy in the fourteenth century and became popular in fifteenth-century Germany, although this and other similar stories evidently existed artistically in the East from about 1100.⁹² The stories of Lailoken and the wild Merlin, grieving for their sins in the wilderness, appear structurally similar to these saint's stories, but are nevertheless clearly developed independently of the hagiographic tradition. Certainly they appear in Britain far earlier than the Greek 'hairy hermit' legends appear in the West at all.⁹³ Despite the general silence of western hagiography in the early medieval period, it seems that stories of heroes as wild men did exist in the West in the twelfth century.

Perhaps in proof of the existence of the hero-wild man element in popular culture, is a 'wild hermit' story in a thirteenth-century poem in the Picard dialect, where the hero saint is called 'Jehan

⁹² Husband, *Wild Man*, pp. 95-8.

⁹³ The exception to the absence of 'hairy hermits' in early medieval western hagiography is the Paul figure in the *Voyage of St. Brendan*. This hermit Paul had lived for thirty years being brought food by an animal, and sixty years without food at all. His body is covered in his own bodily hair, and he is said to be better than a monk, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, ch. 26, p. 72; trans. J. O'Meara, *Voyage*, ch. 26, pp. 60-5.

Paulus'.⁹⁴ This hermit was destined to do such great penance that his great grandmother would be released from hell through his sanctity. Along the way the holy man falls by raping the daughter of the king of Toulouse and throwing her into a crevasse. He then goes off to live like a beast in shame, but is eventually discovered by the King's hunters. The king tames the hermit and the daughter is found in the crevasse, having been entertained by angels and martyrs for all those years. The story ends happily, with the hermit as bishop of Toulouse. The poet says his story is from the *Vita Patrum*, but the story long predates the arrival of the most nearly analogous stories (those of the hairy Chrysostom, Paphnutius or Onuphrius) from the East. The remaining 'naked hermit' stories in the *Vitae Patrum* do not provide much of a basis for the Jehan Paulus story, and the poet's claim in this regard is surely spurious.⁹⁵ Even if the Greek stories had arrived in northern France much earlier than supposed, the Jehan Paulus story is more complex than the later medieval stories of 'hairy hermits'. The Paulus narrative begins for example with an extended 'divine comedy', introducing the saint's great grandmother suffering in Hell. The story of the hairy Chrysostom may not have arrived in literary form in the west for another century or so, but the story could have been passed by other means much earlier. If there were already existing stories of 'hairy hermits' in the west, then the Chrysostom story, or one like it, could have merged with local traditions, eventually to produce a cycle of the epic scale of Jehan Paulus. Although surely very different in content from the popular

⁹⁴ Louis Karl, 'La Legende de Saint Jehan Paulus', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 56 (1913), pp. 425-45. This story, concerning the fall of the holy man, through temptation by a princess, and his taming by a king and his hunters, is in structure very close to the Greek story of Chrysostom, despite dating from some two centuries before the appearance of the Chrysostom story in the West. There are a few similar stories of 'hairy hermits' which are now included in the *Vitae Patrum*, but which appear not to have been added to Latin corpus until the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. For the late appearance of the Paphnutius and Onuphrius and other stories see Williams, 'Oriental Affinities', part II, pp. 74-86. On the general problem of the *Vitae Patrum* texts, many parts of which arrived in the corpus in the later middle ages, see Dom Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, vol. 6 of *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*, ed. J. Armitage Robinson, (1904), pp. 58-77, and pp. 208-10. The three 'naked hermit' stories from the *Vitae Patrum* quoted above, all appear to have been part of the original Latin corpus.

⁹⁵ The poet's claim may reveal more concerning the status of the *Vitae Patrum*, than of his own sources. Perhaps these patristic texts were not that well known, except as an acceptable source for any strange story. Just about any popular story could probably find itself a source within that corpus.

version of the *Vita* of Theobald of Provins, Jehan Paulus could perhaps represent an appearance in written record of a strand of such popular hagiography.

The references to *nuditas* and beastliness in Godric and Aibert should be seen not just as references to *2 Corinthians* but also in the context of popular stories of naked, wild hermits and heroes. There is no consistent pattern in the patristic 'wild hermit' legends that can be seen to be the direct inspiration upon the stories of Aibert and Godric as wild, naked hermits. Indeed, it is the Gregorian *topos*, of the saint mistaken for a beast, rather than the patristic stories which is clearly dominant in the minds of twelfth-century hagiographers. Given that there appears to have been no early medieval hagiographic tradition of the naked hermit, it seems likely that the reappearance of that tradition in the *Vitae* of Aibert and Godric may owe its origin not so much to literary tradition, but to popular notions of the wild man. Aibert's and Godric's hagiographers may have been using the Gregorian *topos* to tame popular stories and conceptions of those holy men, putting the naked hermit firmly in his place. Both *Vitae* argue that extreme, independent asceticism does not lead to salvation, only obedience to authority can make a hermit truly a holy man. This argument may not only be addressing the problem of independent asceticism, but also may be acknowledging a common belief that saw the holy hermit and the wild man in much the same terms.

The wild man was a living concept in the twelfth century, being a crucial element in various complex narratives, as different as Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, Monmouth's Merlin and the Jehan Paulus story. However, as Godric's meeting with the wild man demonstrates, this ambiguous figure existed outside such developed narratives as an expected denizen of the local wilderness. For a hagiographer, the wild man could be interpreted as a demon.⁹⁶ For the 'imbeciles' of Finchale, the wild man probably had a more complex meaning. Certainly his appearance in the developed narratives is, overall, complex and ambiguous. Unfortunately, the only clear indications of the wild man's nature in terms of peasant belief come from the nineteenth century. Bernheimer's study of the wild man includes a summary of nineteenth-century German folklore gathered in the

⁹⁶ See above Chapter III, p. 105.

more remote areas like the Tyrol where the wild man remained a living figure of the imagination. It cannot be assumed, as Bernheimer does, that the traditions of these rural areas are the direct survivals of traditions general throughout Europe in earlier times.

Nevertheless, Bernheimer does note a number of close connections between elements of the later traditions and elements that appear in late medieval art and literature.⁹⁷ Without assuming an unchanging stock of wild man lore, an assumption that bears more relevance to literate traditions than oral ones, it is possible to make some informed speculation on the content of the 'popular' wild man of the twelfth century with the picture drawn from later folklore. One aspect of the later wild man is his closeness with wild animals, whom he both guards and protects. Here the later folklore coincides closely with the image of the wild man as the giant herdsman in Yvain.⁹⁸ Equally it coincides with the many stories of Godric of Finchale's relationship with wild animals, being also one of mastery and care.

The wild man of the nineteenth century could be helpful to the peasants, despite his violent and unpredictable reputation. He is able to give advice on the weather, the harvest and natural medicines, among other things. These stories of the wild man do seem to parallel a surprising number of miracles attributed to Godric. Godric predicts a coming famine, but is also able to save his own crop at another point when it had been trampled upon by a herd of cows. The bread that Godric makes from his plot serves to cure many local people.⁹⁹ Turning from the fruitfulness of the land to the unpredictability of the weather, Godric was said to be able to predict storms arising far away from his hermitage.¹⁰⁰ The nineteenth-century wild man was said to hate the sun, and to love storms. In one story, Godric was found to have been quite oblivious to violent storms and floods which had devastated the region. Even with his buildings destroyed, he had not noticed, being absorbed in prayer.¹⁰¹ While many of these stories of Godric could be paralleled in other hagiography,

⁹⁷ Bernheimer, *Wild men*, pp. 22-8.

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 24 and pp. 27-8.

⁹⁹ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 102, no. 204, (pp. 216-7) and ch. 26, nos. 62-3, (pp. 74-5). For the miracles involving his bread see ch. 80, no. 171, (pp. 180-1) and ch. 84, no. 177, (p. 186).

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* ch. 56, no. 123, (pp. 130-1).

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* ch. 45, nos. 97-9, (pp. 105-6).

particularly perhaps from Ireland, taken all together within Godric's *Vita*, they may be fruitfully seen in the light of the wild man.

Also, again taken individually, each of these miracles can be seen entirely within the orthodox conception of the Edenic status of the holy man. Central to the Edenic model is the knowledge and control of nature, in which all these examples are involved. Nevertheless, that model does not explain the idiosyncratic appearance of the stories. These miracles are not obvious *topoi* within the hagiographic tradition, as much as they can be understood within it. Another explanation is needed for the creation and remembrance of such a diverse complex of stories. Those of Godric's miracles which suggest connection to the wild man concept, all fall within the context of that hermit's relationship with the local rural community. These kinds of miracle stories, revolving around the undramatic life of a hermit, need an imaginative structure, within which they could be developed and remembered. The popularity of hermits and their miracles has been explained in terms of Victor Turner's concept of liminality; the holy man has power because he exists upon the boundary between the human and the spirit world, whether good or evil.¹⁰² However, this argument is an analysis of the nature of ritual; it does not explain the creation and remembrance of stories of an individual in a local context. For 'liminality' to exist in this context, the concept must have a more concrete basis in the medieval imagination.

In other words, medieval people needed a 'liminal' or ambiguous category of person around which to construct these stories. The malleable concept of the wild man may have been a good template within which to understand such curious and complex characters as hermits. If Godric was thought of as a kind of wild man, with the concomitant powers, then this would make the concept of 'liminality' work within an actually existing imaginative structure. Stories of the unpredictably dangerous hermit, such as the devastating curses of Wulfric of Haselbury, may thus be a natural part of the local mythology of the hermit. If the hermit was interpreted as a kind of wild man then he was as potentially

¹⁰² See particularly Holdsworth, 'The Power of The Frontier'. Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 24, also comments on saintly humiliation and liminality in the *Vita* of Pons de Leras.

dangerous as he was helpful.¹⁰³ The story of Bartholomew of Farne's many years of extreme fasting suggests that ideas of extreme anchoriticism and wildness may have developed around that hermit as well.¹⁰⁴ To a lesser or greater degree, the local popularity of hermits may have depended on ideas of the wild man, extended to these more human, if still peculiar, figures in the local landscape.

The concept of the wild man shares enough with the miraculous memory surrounding Godric for the comparison to be intriguing at least. Ultimately perhaps, little enough is known of the wild man for this argument to be more than suggestive. Nevertheless, the similarities between the hagiographic arguments in the *Vitae* of Godric and Aibert surely hint at a general problem of the ecclesiastical elite when faced with the various emanations of popular religious enthusiasm or more general local beliefs. The conceptions of a Reginald of Durham or a Robert of Ostrevant concerning holy men would certainly have been quite different from the conceptions of local people. Perhaps in this respect, Godric and Aibert were indeed all things to all men.

¹⁰³ See Holdsworth, 'Power of the Frontier', pp. 59-60, for a discussion of Wulfric's curses in terms of the concept of liminality. For a hint of Godric as a potentially violent and unpredictable figure see the story of his unwilling resurrection of a local girl; *Vita Godrici*, ch. 57, nos. 124-5, (pp. 132-5).

¹⁰⁴ See above, Chapter II, p. 64.

Chapter VI: Hermits and Hairshirts: Godric of Finchale, Wulfric of Haselbury and the Social Status of a Hermit

At some points, for some people, the hermit may have been perceived as a kind of wild man, reflecting his position outside social structures. However, just as the hermit could be perceived as being the opposite of a socialised person, the hermit could also be a spiritual reflection of worldly social types. Certainly monastic and clerical clothing had always carried symbolic and social meaning.¹ The new monastic movements of the eleventh through to the thirteenth century have all been interpreted as responses to the new urbanised world of money and trade. The motivation of individuals to join the new forms of religious life sprang partly from personal distaste for secular ambition and acquisitiveness.² The white habit of some new orders may have implied a more literal approach to the ideal of poverty than Benedictine black, but in any case the habit itself located the religious person firmly within a distinctive kind of institution. The symbolism of poverty was thus mediated and controlled, however suspicious some in older institutions may have felt about the white habit.

Outside institutions, the clothing of solitary ascetics could also be resonant with social meaning. Bishop Marbod of Rennes famously criticised Robert of Arbrissel for his ascetic appearance; Robert marched 'barefoot through the crowds, having cast off the habit of a regular, his flesh covered with a ragged hairshirt and a torn cloak, offering a new spectacle to the onlookers since only a club was

¹ For late antiquity see Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia 1997), pp. 52-70 on male ascetic and episcopal clothing. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Benedictine black symbolised the rejection of aristocratic life, in a monastic culture which associated poverty with the lack of military trappings, the source of power. Yet the reality of monastic wealth in an expanding economy made this symbolism redundant. Hence, the adoption of white by many reformers; see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 188-91 and Little, *Religious Poverty*, pp. 61-9.

² See Little, *Religious Poverty*, pp. 35-41 and 70-83, and Lester K. Little and Barbara Rosenwein, 'Social Meaning in Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities', *Past and Present* 63 (1974), pp. 4-32, particularly pp. 16-18, pp. 26-7. A complimentary perspective can be seen in Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society* (Oxford 1978); particularly the chapters 'Avarice' and 'Ambition', pp. 59-109. Murray sees the apostolic model, the saint as socially amphibious, as a response to these new social conditions, pp. 382-401. However, holy men may have been more socially problematic than implied by Murray.

missing from the outfit of a lunatic.³ Marbod wondered how Robert could have the authority to preach to the *simplices*, when his dress made the wise suspect madness. The bishop purported to be shocked by Robert's adoption of the clothing of the poor, in order to criticise the wandering preacher's dangerous attitude to ecclesiastical authority. Robert's ascetic clothing is described in terms which place him in direct opposition to religious order and authority. Marbod clearly spells out the consequence of such opposition; the lunatic with a club is an image of the wild man. Yet, there is another layer of symbolism in Robert's ascetic clothing; his clothing is that of the poor, the *simplices* who form his entourage. An essential element of Robert's clothing, here identified with poverty, is the *cilicium*, or hairshirt. In this case, the hermit's hairshirt was both a symptom of social tension and a demonstration of the hermit's sympathy for the poor.

Such ascetic clothing, adopting the clothing of the poor, need not imply any particularly profound relationship between the *pauperes Christi* and the poor themselves, and the hairshirt itself is an ambiguous article of clothing. Nonetheless, it is striking that in a society increasingly concerned with social divisions, not least between the poor and the rich, the two outstanding articles of eremitical clothing were the *lorica*, ascetic chainmail, and the hairshirt. The one showing its wearer as a *miles Christi*, the other showing him as a *pauper Christi*. These articles of ascetic clothing might be regarded simply as a kind of visual rhetoric, with relevance only in a strictly religious context. However, hermits and recluses could live in paradoxically close contact with the secular world, and the symbolism of ascetic clothing may thus have affected local response to holy men. As Wulfric of Haselbury and Godric of Finchale both wore a hairshirt and a *lorica*, Wulfric acts as an ideal comparison to Godric. The recluse Wulfric got used to his hairshirt within days and added his celebrated *lorica* thereafter.⁴ For the Cistercian prior, John of Ford, it is Wulfric's *lorica* which defines the holy man. In the prologue to the *Vita*, John refers to Wulfric as

³ Marbod of Rennes, *Epistola* 6, *PL* 171, cols. 1480-6; esp. col. 1483. Constable, *Reformation*, translates *clava* as 'stick' at p. 26 and 'staff' at p. 192.

⁴ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 5, pp. 18-9.

'loricatus meus'.⁵ In the case of Godric, who somehow 'wore out' three suits of mail in his time as a hermit at Finchale, it is his hairshirt which looms far larger in Reginald's rhetoric.⁶ In both hermits' *Vitae*, spiritual progress is bound up with social metaphors and with these two articles of ascetic clothing.

The Cistercian prior John of Ford begins his account of Wulfric in remarkably prosaic fashion:

'Blessed Wulfric, a man of English stock and mediocre extraction was born and reared in Compton Martin, a village eight miles from Bristol . . . There he lived and there for some years he served as a priest. He was ordained unusually young, and it is thought that his motives for entering the priesthood were more frivolous than spiritual.'⁷

Wulfric as a young man was immersed in the world of monetary ambition and social advancement. So deep in this world was he that the first sign of his eventual grace comes not with a vision of a saint or the Virgin, or in childhood enthusiasm for prayers and abstinence, but rather with an act of fiscal generosity. A poor man asks him for a new coin:

'There had been a new minting in England then, in the days of Henry I, and being so new, the coins were still hard to come by. But when Wulfric replied that he did not know if he had a new coin to hand, the other said: "Look in your purse and you will find tuppence halfpenny." Wulfric looked in astonishment, found the coins, and devoutly offered what had been asked.'⁸

The poor man is of course Christ. Nevertheless, Wulfric goes on to acquire a knightly patron for his priestly career and ate at his lord's table.⁹

⁵ *ibid. prologus*, p. 8.

⁶ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 28, no. 66, (p. 78).

⁷ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 1, p. 13; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 235.

⁸ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 1, pp. 13-14; trans. Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 235.

⁹ John of Ford is at pains to find a distinction between this period and his previous life of 'hunting and hawking'; Wulfric observed the virtue of abstinence, not eating meat, except when custom required that he join in the

Wulfric had become a social success, from modest origins. His subsequent decision to become a recluse was a rejection of ambition and money, two prominent bugbears of twelfth-century spirituality. John of Ford describes Wulfric's spiritual life in terms of two opposing social or moral categories, simplicity and nobility. Wulfric is now one of God's poor, and John takes every opportunity to note Wulfric's 'simplicity', which exists both in complement and contrast to his 'abundance' and 'sweetness' in God. He really is a *simplices* in a sense, addressing God in his '*patria lingua*', not Latin. Nevertheless 'a certain holy and sincere simplicity ennobled, or as it were, enriched the purity of his faith.'¹⁰ Only in holy solitude can the contradictions of simplicity and richness or nobility be reconciled into something positive.¹¹ The emphasis on spiritual simplicity is matched by the spiritualisation of warfare:

'Therefore the blessed Wulfric entered the field of freer soldiering, he began to act boldly. . . he fearlessly awaited, or rather he diligently roused and manfully stretched towards the battle.'¹²

Wulfric is a *miles Christi* indeed. Yet, John of Ford began by describing Wulfric as '*de mediocri*'; that is neither of the rich nor the poor. Thus in his spiritual person, Wulfric had 'the honour of a blooming estate and not a mediocre one.' Every detail in this chapter in particular resonates with social class. Wulfric's food, oat bread and relish, is thus to him in fact a 'delicate' food. Poor is made rich by the spirit, and the social advancement Wulfric had sought in the secular world is matched by metaphors of spiritual advancement. John of Ford stresses over and over again the contrast of nobility and poverty resolved in the person of the holy man, with even the new sort of 'mediocre' people woven into the Cistercian's spiritual argument.¹³

general feasting. Since he ate at his lord's table this may have been abstinence in the breach rather than the observance; *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 1, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ *ibid.* ch. 2, p. 16.

¹¹ Note also how John renders concrete social description into spiritual metaphor, in an almost exegetical style. This representation of 'interiorised' spirituality seems to be a particularly Cistercian habit when applied to hagiography.

¹² *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 3, p. 17.

¹³ On the twelfth-century awareness of 'middling' social groups and social mobility, see Murray, *Reason and Society*, pp. 94-8 and Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge 1995), pp. 342-60.

Wulfric was an enthusiastic ascetic, but he was not a wildly uncontrollable one. The bishop of Bath warns him that his ascetic practices are too harsh and Wulfric duly curtails them, showing the kind of obedience to ecclesiastical authority that Bishop Marbod found so worryingly lacking in Robert of Arbrissel.¹⁴ However, the theme of simplicity and nobility does not reach a climax until John of Ford describes Wulfric's ascetic clothing:

'Thus he was content to live within himself in the simple clothing of a hairshirt [*vestitu simplici cilicio*]. . . having been hardened by custom, within a few days he aspired to a *lorica*.¹⁵

Perhaps Wulfric's early life as a villager gave him his experience of rough clothing, and thus perhaps hairshirts in the twelfth century were less a special ascetic practice, and more a very ordinary kind of clothing. In any case, Wulfric is still the social climber in rhetorical terms. Although at first he is content with his clothing as one of the poor, he wants to advance in his saintly career. His secular patron is sympathetic and donates Wulfric a *lorica*, an action described with a rush of military metaphors.

John of Ford takes a moment here to remind us of the essentials of the holy life, and Wulfric's excellence in them; at night the saint bathed in cold water and sang the psalms, '*in nuditate et frigore*'. This brief reference to 2 *Corinthians* shows that beneath all these ephemeral social distinctions, the saint knows himself to be naked and cold serving God. John is reminding the reader that this internal, hidden reality underlies the social metaphors he is pursuing. Nevertheless, the social metaphors then resume, with a pun on the relative social symbolism inherent in the hairshirts and *lorica*. After his nightly ascetic exertions, Wulfric 'nobly continuing, put on again that hairshirt of his, but altogether more nobly, [put on] his *lorica*.' The hairshirt may be an ascetic necessity, but the true soldier of Christ must aspire to more than poverty. The true patron for whom Wulfric yearns is God, not the secular lord who donated the *lorica*. These early chapters amount almost to a kind of pamphlet against ambition for secular riches. The positions of Wulfric and his

¹⁴ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 4, p. 18.

¹⁵ *ibid.* ch. 5, pp. 18-19.

knightly patron are reversed when Wulfric embarks on the spiritual life. Thereafter Wulfric will be the spiritual patron to the knight; the supplicant becomes the dispenser. All this hagiographic argument hinges on the allusions to social class of the two staples of the eremitical uniform, the hairshirt and the lorica.

Godric of Finchale's clothing never attains this kind of importance in Reginald of Durham's hagiographic argument. However, Reginald is at least as interested in Godric's social origins as John was in Wulfric's. Godric's parents 'lived a life of poverty', and even though they were just lay people, they gave Godric a good example, as 'they led an orthodox, Catholic life by faith in works and conversation'. Through the 'innocence of simplicity':

'. . . the dearth of earthly substance was to them the material of works of grace and virtue; and the abundance of wealth, which was not for them substance in things, was in them abundance out of an evident conscience of true humility, a piety of the heart.'¹⁶

Here, although Reginald plays a similar rhetorical game to John in turning material poverty into spiritual wealth, the context is very different. For Reginald the social order is good in itself, as shown by Godric's parents' obedience to the Church, and their apparent contentment with their social status. Reginald emphasises Godric's obedience to the natural authority of his parents; when he was an adolescent 'he showed the subjection of servitude to his parents in all things'.¹⁷ Godric's virtuousness in these and other matters is a contrast to the world of trade, where he was to find considerable success. Reginald allows that Godric slipped into the world of trade and ambition due to necessity, and never presents him as comfortable within it.

Nevertheless, the stain and sin inherent in social mobility adhere to Godric. The sinfulness of trade is clear in contrast with the stable social world of Godric's innocent childhood.¹⁸ When Godric

¹⁶ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 1, no. 8, (pp. 21-2).

¹⁷ *ibid.* ch. 3, no. 12, (p. 26). See also ch. 7, no. 22, (p. 37), for an extended discussion of Godric's obedience to parental authority.

¹⁸ On Reginald and trade see above Chapter III, p. 93.

becomes the steward of a rich man, he is unknowingly caught up in the sins associated with money and power. He escapes 'naked from the shipwrecks of sin', as he was 'already secured by the ship's tackle of virtue'.¹⁹ This may be a deliberate pun on Godric's nautical career and the familiar images of the armour of virtue; his virtue is not spiritual armour [*armamentarium*] but a sailor's material [*armamenta*]. It is this incident which finally propels him into a life of pilgrimage and devotion, if not yet the holy life. However, this incident marks his journey back towards the innocence of his childhood, and the stable social world in which he is a rustic. As a pilgrim with 'naked footsteps', Godric suffers from the winter cold, his clothes being inadequate.²⁰ Godric is a poor man once again. Spiritual metaphors of social mobility are denied to Godric; unlike John of Ford, Reginald makes no concession to the new social world of the twelfth century.

In Godric's time as an unregulated hermit, clothing is largely irrelevant to Reginald's themes; Godric became 'accustomed [to eating] roots of plants. He was made now not a man but a worm, not rational, but more a brutish beast'.²¹ There is no rhetorical reason to describe Godric's clothing when Reginald is presenting him as a creature entirely alienated from human society. The appropriate form of clothing for this kind of life would, of course, be none. Godric's lack of social niceties is duly noted; 'Wherever night appeared and fell on him, there on the bare ground he would lie down'.²² Godric becomes a social being once again in the context of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, after his first phase of eremitical life is ended by the death of his old mentor hermit, Aelric. Reginald then describes Godric as a typical lay pilgrim; he is dressed in a hairshirt, carries a cross, and with naked feet, nakedly follows Christ.²³ Reginald does not use traditional spiritual metaphors of nakedness during Godric's periods of bestial eremiticism. In contrast, such rhetoric appears natural when Godric's behaviour lies within more

¹⁹ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 6, nos. 20-1, (pp. 35-6); '*vir Dei virtutis armamenta praestruebat*'.

²⁰ *ibid.* ch. 7, no. 23, (p. 38).

²¹ *ibid.* ch. 10, no. 29, (p. 44). Reginald nevertheless still refers to Godric here as the Lord's elect.

²² *ibid.* ch. 10, no. 28, (p. 43).

²³ *ibid.* ch. 15, nos. 41-2, (p. 56).

accepted limits of lay devotion, where nakedness is a way of describing his poverty. As a pilgrim to Jerusalem his behaviour is acceptable, but as an unregulated hermit he is as disturbing as Robert of Arbrissel was to Bishop Marbod.

Thereafter Godric comes to Durham, and receives the permission of Bishop Flambard of Durham to live as a hermit in a wilderness at Finchale. This is still an ambiguous period; Godric is again presented as an extreme anchorite, even though he clearly has relations with the local people. However, Godric has not yet accepted the authority of Durham priory, and his asceticism is thus still described as 'excessive'. Here clothing plays a full part in Godric's gradual acceptance of authority, with his asceticism being associated with nakedness. Godric carried on mortifying the flesh with extended fasts, lasting up to a week, but 'particularly if the devil made apparitions of women appear to him, he would throw his naked body into the thorns and brambles'.²⁴ However, Godric seems to realise that to conquer the devil he must at least symbolically rejoin human society. Thus the long description of his trials by bodily temptation are concluded with the longest description of Godric's sartorial habits in the *Vita*: 'At last he conquered the body with a rough hairshirt, and he was accustomed to put a cruel *lorica* over his naked body.'²⁵ Here Reginald informs the reader that Godric disposed of three *loricae* in his eremitical career.

From this point the hairshirt is firmly identified with Godric's excessive asceticism and with his rusticity:

'in the time of winter he inflicted excessive asperity of cold on naked flesh, yet in the heat of summer out of excessive sweat he begat a corruption of worms, of which the copious multitude devastated his flesh most ferociously, as the hairy rusticity of the hairshirt had been accustomed to nourish a full great flock of them.'

Godric's *lorica* receives very little attention at any point, even though his ascetic clothing is mentioned periodically, and even after his asceticism has been tamed by authority. Thereafter, the hairshirt is no longer identified with extreme asceticism, but is still luridly

²⁴ *ibid.* ch. 27, no. 64, (p. 76).

²⁵ *ibid.* ch. 28, no. 66, (pp. 77-8).

described as 'horrible and hairy', that is to say, rustic.²⁶ Unlike Wulfric, Godric is not ennobled by his *lorica*. Instead Reginald continually refers to the peasant context of the hermit's life, with his 'rustic, tasteless bread' for example.²⁷ When a devil in the form of an aristocrat appears, he abuses Godric shouting at him: 'You decrepit rustic!' and 'You shit-covered rustic'.²⁸ After Godric's submission to authority, the devil continues to abuse the saint for his social class, calling him a 'fat rustic'.²⁹ Godric as a holy man, obedient to authority, is no longer associated with the bestial and extreme, but remains a peasant. Social advancement is a sinful disruption of proper order, and to be holy, Godric must return and stay within the social status of his innocent childhood.³⁰

The hairshirt was used as a symbol of poverty in the *Vitae* of both Godric and Wulfric. It may be that the hairshirt of the twelfth century was as literally identified with the clothing of the rural poor as the *lorica* was an expected part of a nobleman's outfit. The problem is what was meant by a hairshirt in the twelfth century. Although the word *cilicium* was used in patristic hagiography, there is no reason to suppose that twelfth-century writers knew what it had been then.³¹ It is conceivable that a hairshirt sometimes could have been clothing made of animal skins, but hagiography does not appear to provide any evidence for such an identification.³² However, Reginald himself provides a brief description of the making of a hairshirt. When Godric's sister comes to live the 'solitary' life with him, she 'wove together' her own 'rough' hairshirt.³³ This implies that the hairshirt was at least something which peasant women could make, using their ordinary skills. Peasant clothing in

²⁶ *ibid.* ch. 64, no. 137, (p. 146). Other later mentions of his hairshirt are notably lacking in descriptive rhetoric; see *ibid.* ch. 118, no. 228, (p. 241).

²⁷ *ibid.* ch. 29, no. 69, (pp. 79-80).

²⁸ *ibid.* ch. 38, nos. 82-3, (p. 93).

²⁹ *ibid.* ch. 114, no. 220, (p. 234).

³⁰ Reginald certainly does continue to think of Godric as a rustic, despite his miraculous ability to speak French and understand Latin; see above Chapter III, p. 106.

³¹ See for example the terse mention of a hairshirt in Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis*, ch. 10, col. 33.

³² Centuries earlier, Saint Guthlac, who did wear animal skins, is not described as wearing a *cilicium*; *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave, (Cambridge 1956), ch. 28, pp. 92-5.

³³ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 61, no. 131, (p. 140).

this period was probably made of rough, locally produced wool, and may have been in stark contrast to the kind of manufactured cloth available to the rich and noble.³⁴ Conditions probably varied from the Mediterranean to the north, with peasants in Northumbria likely to have had less access to softer cloth than those in more urbanised and commercialised regions. In this context it is interesting to note the great emphasis on the value of clothing in Chrétien De Troyes. In *Erec and Enide*, one lord's magnificence is underlined by the dress of his five hundred knights in 'pail and sendal, cloaks, breeches, and tunics'.³⁵ If a tunic could be one among other marks of social status, then what was worn by those without access to such magnificence? The ascetic's hairshirt may have been something very close indeed to rough peasant clothing.

Nevertheless, there may often have been considerable difference between peasant clothing and an ascetic's hairshirt. Saint Dominic apparently had his hairshirt woven for him by a woman, but in this case the hairshirt is specified as being made of goathair.³⁶ Also, Robert of Arbrissel's hairshirt had been made of pig hairs.³⁷ Such materials probably wouldn't have been used for the clothing of even the poorest. Nevertheless, the very fact that pig hair is mentioned by Robert's hagiographer may indicate that this case is an exception. Such specification in contemporary hagiography seems very rare, perhaps indicating that hairshirts were not usually made of pig or horse hair, at least in the twelfth century. Rather, as peasant clothes became more ordinarily made of manufactured cloth in the thirteenth century, the hairshirt may have become more specially ascetic by necessity. Perhaps through the economic development of rural life, the hairshirt lost its original symbolic connection with the

³⁴ For peasant clothing see Robert Fossier, *Peasant Life in the Medieval West*, trans. Juliet Vale (Oxford 1988), p. 78; Werner Rosener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages*, trans. Alexander Stutzer (Cambridge 1992), pp. 86-91.

³⁵ Jacques Le Goff, 'Vestimentary and Alimentary Codes in *Erec and Enide*' in *Medieval Imagination*, pp. 132-50; for the quotation from Chrétien, see p. 138. The same passage in another translation has the knights dressed in 'costly silks, mantles, and stockings and fitted tunics'; Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London 1991), p. 61.

³⁶ *Acta Canonizationis Sancti Dominici*, ed. A. Walz, *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica* 16 (Rome 1935), pp. 89-194; no. 16, p. 181. Another woman also wove him a hairshirt, but the material is not specified; no. 15, p. 181.

³⁷ Baldric, *Vita Roberti de Arbrissello*, ch. 11, p. 605.

rural poor and became a specially made, and more ostentatious, article of discomfort. Nevertheless, *cilicium* may always have been a word used to cover a multitude of scratchy, hairy garments, and always something both specially ascetic in its materials and identified with the life of the rural poor.

Whatever a hairshirt may have been in fact, for John of Ford, Wulfric's *lorica* defined the nobility of his simplicity, while for Reginald, Godric's hairshirt was part of the rusticity of his simple holiness. However, the difference between the two hermits did not lie simply in the rhetorical arguments of the hagiographers. While Godric and Wulfric both wore a hairshirt and a *lorica*, the miracle stories reveal a different emphasis in the local memory about each hermit. A miracle story is not usually, in this period, the sole creation of a writer, rather it is a story that is created and remembered by a multiplicity of people. Thus to some extent, a hagiographer can only record those miracles which are generally remembered. In such a voluminous *Vita* as Godric's, it is surprising that there is no story relating to Godric's noble ascetic clothing, his chainmail. In contrast, Wulfric's miraculous powers are often associated with his *lorica*, donated by his erstwhile patron, the local lord William FitzWalter. Wulfric found the length of the mail shirt awkward when kneeling to pray, and under his supervision, FitzWalter found it easy to cut off a section with a pair of shears.³⁸ Following this miracle, Wulfric developed the habit of giving people links from the chainmail, which had the power to cure disease.³⁹ Although very many of Wulfric's miracles are associated with his function as a priest, these *lorica* miracles show another side of his saintly status. Wulfric was indeed remembered as a *miles Christi*. This status is reflected in the numerous stories of his association with the local elite; the parish priest Brictric and the lord FitzWalter.⁴⁰ FitzWalter clearly benefited from the recluse's presence. Wulfric, privileged as a holy man, is able to rebuke King Stephen's queen for snubbing his wife.⁴¹

In some respects, Godric's miracles and visions are not superficially different in variety from Wulfric's, even though Godric

³⁸ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 9, pp. 22-3.

³⁹ *ibid.* ch. 10, pp. 23-4.

⁴⁰ See, for example, *ibid.* chs. 14, 16 and 17 on Brictric.

⁴¹ *ibid.* ch. 81, pp. 108-9.

was not a priest. However, while people of all social groups come to Godric for aid, Reginald presents no sustained relationships with any members of the local secular elite.⁴² More typical of Godric's activities seem to be miracles involving local peasants, for whom he provided all sorts of services, including the mediation of quarrels between husbands and wives.⁴³ Godric's clothing, like Wulfric's, is also a source of miracles. However, it is not his chainmail which is miraculous, but his 'rustic' belt which accomplishes the healing of illnesses associated with the stomach. Most often, Godric's belt cures women of successive miscarriage and other problems of pregnancy.⁴⁴ Godric's own bread cures a '*matrona fidelis*' of feebleness after childbirth, and his blessings upon his bread and apples aids a man who is ill, or perhaps just starving. Fifteen sick labourers of Finchale are also cured by his bread.⁴⁵ Over and again, it is Godric's rural resources and his rustic person which are the source of his powers as a holy man; he is not seen and remembered as a *miles Christi* but as a *pauper Christi*. If he had been seen as somehow 'noble' in spirit, then there would have been miracles associating his power with the signs of his nobility, not only his poverty. Although both holy men cured 'feebleness' in poor families by sending them bread, in Godric's case it is his own rustic and ascetic bread which accomplishes his series of healing miracles.⁴⁶ Where Wulfric obtained his charitable bread is not clear; as a recluse he would not have had the space to grow food. Thus Wulfric must have prevailed upon the local rich to provide for the local poor. In this sense Wulfric may have appeared as a 'patron' of a kind, and his spiritual nobility may have been central to his memory, which thus crystallised around his *lorica*.

⁴² One 'noble citizen' of Durham did take to visiting Godric; see *Vita Godrici*, ch. 53, no. 115, (pp. 123-4). There is also one knight who is friendly with the holy man in later life; *ibid.* chs. 153 and 162. However, visitors from Durham are as likely to be poor as not. See for example the story of a serf accused of a serious crime; *ibid.* ch. 86, nos. 180-2, (pp. 189-91).

⁴³ *ibid.* ch. 153, no. 275, and ch. 162, no. 290.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* ch. 104, nos. 206-7, and ch. 131, no. 242. A monk of Durham is cured of stomach problems in ch. 142, no. 258, where the belt is labelled *rusticanus*. Godric's belt could be a reflection of Saint Cuthbert's more sumptuous belt, which cured a nun of a headache; *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 23, pp. 230-4, however Reginald makes no obvious reference to Bede in the stories of Godric's belt.

⁴⁵ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 130, no. 241, ch. 80, no. 171, and ch. 84, no. 177, (p. 186) respectively.

⁴⁶ For Wulfric's feeding miracles, which are associated, by John of Ford, with his status as a priest, see *Vita Wulfrici*, chs. 37, 41, 44.

Local people invested their local holy men with miraculous powers, but those powers were expressed through the social symbolism of ascetic clothing: Wulfric's *lorica* and Godric's rustic belt and rural resources. The attitude of these holy men towards authority may have determined which kind of social symbolism prevailed, the hermit as spiritual rustic, or the hermit as spiritual knight. Their hagiographers were clearly aware of the social implications of their subjects' clothing and behaviour, and both therefore embarked upon arguments concerning the place of spirituality within the world of money, ambition, and social classes. John of Ford's Wulfric arrived at some sort of reconciliation between symbols of poverty and power, but the same cannot be said of Reginald's Godric. Reginald saw Godric's sanctity lying in his return to the social status of his birth, rejecting the sins associated with social advancement. It is thus not surprising that Reginald does not allow much significance to Godric's *lorica*. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of stories in Reginald's work makes it difficult to imagine Reginald drastically pruning available stories, and excluding any associating the hermit with symbols of high social status. It may be that in Godric's pattern of miracles, something of Godric's own attitude may be present. An ascetic wearing chainmail does not have to appear as an affirmation of the value of the secular nobility, as in Wulfric's *Vita*, but may also have been seen as a rejection of and challenge to that class. After all, a devil appears as a knight to attack Godric, and frequently insults him as being a 'rustic'. In this context the story of Godric's destruction of three *loricae* may have been more than a story of heroic asceticism, perhaps carrying a challenge from the rustic holy man to the rich and powerful.

**Chapter VII: Bold Women and Secret Cells:
Monastic Misogyny, Godric's Sister and
Christina of Markyate**

i) Godric, Burchwine and Durham's Misogyny

Ascetic practices involving food and clothing were not only denials of the physical in favour of the spiritual, but could also be controversial and carry social meaning with implications beyond ascetic denial in itself. As an ascetic practice, celibacy is more obvious in its social implications and more sharply defined in nature. Nevertheless, celibacy could raise questions concerning the right ordering of relations between men and women in religious contexts.¹ The heroes of the Egyptian desert would sometimes refuse to even allow themselves to see a woman.² For a holy woman things could not be so simple, as she would need contact with a priest at least. The extent of separation of male religious from women could potentially limit women's ability to lead holy lives.³ However, the male hermit as saint had also to deal with the crowds that came to him, and those crowds were not just divided into rich and poor, but into men and women also. The crowds who visited Aibert of Crespian were divided in this manner. Yet when the Virgin Mary appeared in his cell, he is at first horrified to see a woman there, before being abruptly informed that she had come in answer to his prayers.⁴ This story seems to reveal a veiled contradiction in Aibert's conduct concerning women. For Reginald writing on Godric, there is a similar problem in the contrast between the priory's famous exclusion of women from proximity to Saint Cuthbert's shrine, and Godric's own extensive dealings with women of various kinds.

Among the hermits associated with Durham Priory there was one woman, Burchwine, Godric's sister. Burchwine lived the 'solitary

¹ For a study of patristic theory concerning male and female religious and the theological and practical implications of sexual denial see Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London 1991).

² For one example see Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, ch. 1, cols. 391-405, esp. cols. 391-2, on John of Lycopolis.

³ Even the legendary Mary of Egypt, living naked in the desert with the lions, needed a male monk to find her, witness her holiness and bury her; see Salisbury, *Independent Virgins*, pp. 68-73.

⁴ *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 20, pp. 678-9 and ch. 12, pp. 676-7.

life' with Godric for 'many years', although Reginald has very little to say concerning her.⁵ Reginald's account of Burchwine appears within a group of stories devoted to Godric's contact with his family while at Finchale. That group of stories is in turn woven into Reginald's overall argument concerning Godric's sanctity, occurring shortly after his acceptance of the authority of the prior of Durham.⁶ After this crucial chapter, Reginald describes Godric's obedient asceticism and his role in teaching the crowd which flocks to him.⁷ The usual *topos* of the hermit's fame, drawing people from near and remote parts, gains some plausibility from Reginald's statement that it was through this fame that Godric's family found him again after all the years of anchoritic isolation.⁸ Thus he is reunited with his mother, brother and sister, who live near him until their deaths, recounted in the immediately succeeding chapters. A reconciliation with his family is a necessary part of the hermit's rehabilitation, but Reginald equally does not wish these extraneous illiterates to clutter up the rest of the *Vita*.

Burchwine lived at Finchale with Godric in a 'most secret cell' at Finchale, 'fighting for Christ in solitude'.⁹ Thus she is not just a humble member of Godric's lay family, but a holy woman who is allowed a military metaphor for her ascetic life.¹⁰ Godric allowed her to live near him because 'she persisted from the womb of her mother in being always an incorrupt and devout virgin'. Yet there is also a possible note of reservation, for after describing her weaving of her own hairshirt, Reginald states that 'in solemn devotion she dedicated herself to the Lord, with prayers and fasts and excessive afflictions.' It would be possible to interpret Reginald's use of '*nimius*' here to mean simply 'very great', but for two hints of misgivings on Reginald's part. The first is the acknowledgement of independence;

⁵ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 61, no. 131, (pp. 140-1).

⁶ *ibid.* ch. 58, no. 127, (pp. 135-6).

⁷ *ibid.* ch. 59, and ch. 60, no. 130.

⁸ *ibid.* ch. 59, no. 130, (p. 139).

⁹ *ibid.* ch. 61, no. 131, (pp. 140-1): '*solitarie Christo militans*'.

¹⁰ Such vocabulary may have been conventional, and without particular weight. Goscelin of Saint Bertin described Eve of Wilton's spiritual life as a recluse through military imagery; see Elkins, *Holy Women*, pp. 24-5. Nevertheless, Reginald so rarely uses military metaphors to describe Godric's spirituality that the use of the metaphor here is perhaps deliberately evoking an image of the reversal of normal social roles.

she dedicated herself to the Lord, without any hint of other authority. This is an image of independent asceticism, which was criticised in Godric, and yet this is a poor woman, for whom obedience to social authority should have been even more emphasised. Perhaps Godric's natural familial authority over her is meant to be sufficient, as 'he preserved the ways of the Lord by demonstrating them to her.' Nevertheless, there is a scent of danger in this formulation; it is necessary to explain how the ways of the Lord are preserved. There may be danger both to Godric and Burchwine in this association between a holy man and a holy woman. There are elements of danger also in the almost contradictory statement which follows: 'Truly she approached the oratory of her brother rarely, if not in order to hear the Mass, then when some priest came by chance.' Thus she was at once under the tutelage of her brother, and yet never saw him except when there was a proper chaperon present. Reginald seems here to be aware of problems in describing the proper relations between a holy woman and a holy man. Yet, he does not develop these problems into an argument, but leaves them buried in this one, short chapter.

The contradictory situation is resolved by Burchwine's death, and Godric's vision of her being escorted to heaven by two angels.¹¹ Reginald's account of that vision is sandwiched between Godric's visions of his mother's and brother's release from purgatorial torment, achieved through his prayers.¹² While Burchwine does not appear to have been similarly afflicted, it is not clear whether Godric's prayers effected her final salvation, or whether the vision was sent merely to reassure him. Burchwine's status remains ambiguous; she is not simply another member of Godric's family, nor is she a holy woman in her own right. Despite her 'secret cell', it seems unlikely that she could have remained unknown to those who visited Godric, if she was there for many years. It is possible that Reginald was partially suppressing the memory of Burchwine.

Although short, Reginald's account of Burchwine is valuable as one of the few descriptions of a female solitary from twelfth-century England. Despite the paucity of narrative accounts, there were clearly many female recluses, more than the number of men, and even some

¹¹ *ibid.* ch. 63, nos. 134-6, (pp. 143-5).

¹² *ibid.* chs. 62 and 64 respectively.

women who could be called hermits.¹³ Also it seems as though women were often associated with male hermits and recluses. Certainly, Wulfric of Haselbury appears to have been part of a network of recluses, whose other members were women.¹⁴ Equally, Christina of Markyate's network of recluses and hermits included men and women. Like Burchwine, none of these women appears to have had any religious background before becoming a recluse. The hagiographic accounts of contemporary holy women correspond in time to the general expansion of religious houses for women from the 1140s onwards.¹⁵ From the eleventh century reformers had an ambivalent attitude towards the participation of women in religion. Indeed, the reforming of monastic houses was predicated on the removal of women from the lives of secular canons. In the Cambrai, the reform of women's' houses could mean their replacement with male canons. This may have been a widespread western phenomenon.¹⁶ While some of the 'new monks' of the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries did begin the trend towards establishing a place for women within religion, there are prestigious examples of those who maintained the stance of prohibition. Chief among these were of course the Cistercians, who attempted to keep women entirely apart from their Order.¹⁷

The misogyny of the monks of Durham priory must be seen within this general context.¹⁸ Indeed, Gerald of Wales reported, with

¹³ Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 18-23, and see above Chapter I, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Vita Wulfrici*, chs. 56-8, and chs. 60, 65. For a discussion of other fragmentary evidence, apart from Wulfric and Christina, on female religious and associations with male hermits and recluses, see Sally Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 24-37.

¹⁵ See Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 217-31 for the dating of post-Conquest houses for religious women. Only a tiny minority seem to have been founded before the 1140s.

¹⁶ For Cambrai see above, Chapter V, p. 183. For an overview of the problem see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities, 500-1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline', in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett et. al. (Chicago 1989), pp. 208-39, particularly pp. 227- 32.

¹⁷ See Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 65-74.

¹⁸ It is not my intention here to give a complete account of Durham's misogynistic tradition, which has already been provided by previous studies, but simply to add some comments to the debate; see Victoria Tudor, 'The Misogyny of Saint Cuthbert' in *Arch. Ael.* 12 (1984), pp. 157- 67; Meryl Foster, 'Custodians of Cuthbert' in *AND*, pp. 59-64, and Aird, *Cuthbert and the Normans*, pp. 125-6.

approval, a group of Welsh hermits who refused permission for women to visit their island.¹⁹ The exclusion of women from any church associated with Saint Cuthbert, most notoriously from the cathedral, may be particularly extreme for an episcopal chapter, but is not out of character with the late eleventh-century reform movement. It has been usually assumed that the exclusion of women was a tradition invented by the monks of Durham in order to emphasise their distinction from the married clerics.²⁰ Against this view, it has been argued that Symeon makes no attempt to denigrate the clerk's way of life, or emphasise their impurity in regard to women.²¹ Certainly, when Symeon was writing it seemed more important to emphasise the continuity of Durham across the 1083 reform, rather than rupture. However, two decades before, the newly installed monks may have felt differently. Symeon's treatment of the misogynistic tradition betrays his anxiety to emphasise continuity, even though that tradition itself was very probably invented to emphasise discontinuity.

Symeon adapts a story from Bede in proof of the longevity of the misogynistic tradition, highlighting his need to connect the prohibition with the earliest days of the cult of Cuthbert. The story is the burning of the double house at Coldingham, due to the worldliness of the nuns who lived there. From this point, Symeon claims, Cuthbert himself instituted a rigid separation of men and women.²² This concocted history is followed by two apparently recent vengeance miracles, indicating the seriousness of the saint's decree against women entering his church; two women who attempt to violate the ban are struck dead.²³ Symeon placed the stories in the ninth-century section of the history, although he indicates their eleventh-century origin. Nevertheless, he seems to be deliberately vague concerning whether the miracles occurred before or after the reform of Durham in 1083. Since the two stories are not clearly located in the clerical period, which would have suited Symeon's larger purpose of the continuity of tradition, it seems likely that he

¹⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Bk. 2, ch. 7, p. 131.

²⁰ Tudor, 'Misogyny', p. 159.

²¹ Foster, 'Custodians', p. 60.

²² Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 2, ch. 7, pp. 58-60; the story is based upon Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bk. 4, ch. 25, pp. 420-7, c.f. Foster, 'Custodians', pp. 59-60.

²³ Symeon, *LDE*, Bk. 2, chs. 8-9, pp. 60-1.

was deliberately suppressing their context.²⁴ That context could well have been the early reformed period, when it was felt necessary to emphasise the discontinuity between the married clerics and the monks.

Whatever the origins of the ban on women, it clearly remained a living issue when Symeon wrote. The savage violence of these stories is a good indication that the 'tradition' was contested by elements outside the Priory community. The story of the 'honourable and devout' Judith, wife of the Earl Tostig, might hint at the nature of the opposition. Symeon needs to use a powerful figure whom he can praise for her religious devotion, but who is nevertheless placed in the wrong.²⁵ There is also relatively little opprobrium heaped on the other women who suffer Cuthbert's violence; their fault is merely 'boldness' and 'audacity'.²⁶ It is as if Symeon is at pains not to alienate totally those opposed to the ban by identifying them with depravity, sin or sacrilege, as he might so easily have done. Instead the apparently disproportionate violence dealt out to the servant of even the honourable Judith emphasises the gravity of the prohibition. The emphasis in two of the three vengeance stories is on the arrogance of a powerful noblewoman in assuming her power puts her above a church's codes.²⁷ Thus the prohibition is associated with another concern of reformed monasticism; the exclusion of the secular aristocracy from control of monastic houses.

Between 1083 and Symeon's time the reasons for the ban may have shifted away from defence against the memory of the previous community towards the perennial defence of a monastic community against secular pressures. The invented tradition of Cuthbert's misogyny was not necessarily a single phenomenon, adopted and maintained due to a single factor, but a tradition that was continually reinvented for new purposes. Thus its reappearance in the late twelfth century was not merely a perplexing 'tradition', apparently designed to sabotage the popularity of the cult of Cuthbert, but a response, made out of old materials, to new pressures. The sense of embattlement surrounding the ban does seem to have diminished in

²⁴ The third vengeance story, recorded far later in the history, is clearly anchored to the pre-conquest period; *ibid.* Bk. 3, ch. 11, pp. 94-5.

²⁵ *ibid.* Bk. 3, ch. 11, pp. 94.

²⁶ *ibid.* Bk. 2, ch. 8, p. 60: *ausum*; and ch. 9, p. 61: *audacia foeminarum*.

²⁷ *ibid.* Bk. 2, ch. 9 and Bk. 3, ch. 11.

the course of the twelfth century; Cuthbert's vengeance miracles no longer result in abrupt, violent deaths, only in illness.²⁸ However, Reginald does repeatedly mention the ban when reporting miracles involving women.²⁹ It seems it was still necessary to emphasise the existence of the ban, perhaps because the monks felt it necessary to assert the seriousness of their religious life in the face of the proliferation of new monastic orders.

However, the ban extended to the chapel on Farne in Bartholomew's time. Geoffrey records a miracle illustrating the hermit's power of intercession, while also recording the opposition to the ban at this site of popular devotion.³⁰ A woman from Flanders, in a crowd of lay visitors, observes men entering and leaving the chapel, and objects, saying 'why do we not enter, and why, as if having nothing in common with other humans, are we compared to dogs?' Cuthbert's ban is explained to her, but 'she scorned the voice of pious warnings' and she went to enter the church, a 'crime of daring femininity'. With the crowd apparently very excited at her daring, men and women both, the woman of Flanders steps onto the boundary of the chapel, to be knocked down, 'lifeless' by a gust of wind: 'Then what a disorder of women, indeed an assault of men there was'. The boldness of this woman is not the arrogance of a powerful noblewoman as in Symeon's stories, but the disobedience of a foreign pilgrim. The danger highlighted by Geoffrey is the disorder of the crowd when it fails to obey the dictates of ecclesiastical authority, however arbitrary it might appear. Durham is unusual in restricting women's participation in religion at a shrine, and in the late twelfth century local tradition can be undermined by well-travelled pilgrims of lesser social status. Once again the issue becomes one of the authority of monastic institutions in the face of popular religious enthusiasm. The hermit acts as a reconciling force by reviving the woman from apparent death, thus softening Cuthbert's vengeance, but allowing the prohibition to stand.

²⁸ The only such vengeance miracle recorded by Reginald does involve considerable pain and subsequent penance, but is not nearly as summary as Symeon's stories; Reg. *Libellus*, ch. 74, pp. 151-4. In this story the offending woman is Maud, the new wife of King David of Scotland (d.1153).

²⁹ The other instances are *ibid.* chs. 62 and 119, involving Farne, and ch. 100.

³⁰ See *Vita Bart.* ch. 16, p. 309. Women otherwise seem to have been at least as enthusiastic in regard to Farne as men; see above Chapter III, pp. 94-5.

Bartholomew thus appears to mediate between the crowd and the priory's traditions.

In the case of Godric of Finchale and his sister Burchwine, Durham priory's model of religious life is absent. The holy man and holy woman live side by side, and Reginald never suggests that Godric was any more averse to female than male visitors. Nevertheless, in a few stories scattered across the *Vita*, a pattern betraying Reginald's anxieties does emerge. During Godric's 'wild' period, women are presented as dangerous. There are the two women who force him to resurrect a young girl, breaking the hermit's isolation and perhaps endangering his precious humility.³¹ More dangerously, there is the woman who, although a 'devout woman', was 'burning with desire' to see the isolated hermit. The hermit had to call upon divine assistance to rid himself of her gifts.³² Women who appear after Godric's acceptance of Durham's authority, are not described in terms of danger, being called such things as '*matrona fidelis*'.³³ It seems the danger of women has passed once a formal structure of authority has been built around Godric, protecting him. Burchwine is an anomaly within Reginald's understanding of a holy man's relationship with the world, and is thus treated briefly and with some ambiguity. The placement of the story just after Godric's acceptance of the prior's authority gives Burchwine's probably informal status an impression of actually existing within formal structures of authority.

Godric's religious contacts were not only the monks of Durham who visited him, or Aelred of Rievaulx and his Cistercians. There was a layer of lay devotion attracted to the hermit. This layer was composed of men and women of various social ranks, from the 'noble matron' to the 'devout woman' who was evidently a poor villager of Finchale.³⁴ Reginald does not allow a coherent picture to develop of this lay religiosity, but it is clear that Godric was at the centre of a devout lay network; one who is 'a lay man and an idiot' comes to

³¹ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 57, nos. 124-5, (pp. 132-5).

³² *ibid.* ch. 25, no. 16, (p. 73).

³³ *ibid.* ch. 130, no. 241, (p. 255). See also ch. 131, no. 242, (p. 256) for a 'noble and generous matron'. It is noticeable that Reginald avoids describing these women as visiting Godric, although they were clearly known to him personally.

³⁴ *ibid.* ch. 131 and ch. 25 respectively.

Godric for advice about where to set himself up as a hermit.³⁵ Godric convinces the man that he should seek the approval of the bishop of Durham, and is also able to approve the bishop's choice of hermitage for the man. The hermit is thus once again a mediator between ecclesiastical authority and popular devotion, but it is clear that these devout lay people preferred the religious authority of the rustic Godric to established figures. The gulf between popular devotion and the monks of Durham seems particularly stark in the question of women's place in religion. Clearly Godric's practice was not approved by monastic opinion. Reginald gives no coherent picture of women's role in the world of lay devotion around Durham. The picture may, however, be clarified by comparison with a contemporary work, which provides a much more detailed impression of the context of an independent, female ascetic. This is the *Vita* of Christina of Markyate.

ii) Christina of Markyate and Visionary Authority

Christina's *Vita*, written perhaps between 1155 and 1166, was composed by someone connected to St Albans, but because of its unfinished state and the absence of a dedicatory letter, its exact context is unknown.³⁶ It has been plausibly suggested that the author was a monk of St Albans, but living outside the monastery as one of the many hermits and recluses connected in some way to the Abbey.³⁷ Such a context would make sense of the content of the *Vita*. The hagiographer produced what was in effect a programme of legitimated opposition to authority, couched in terms of the personal religious journey of one holy woman.

Early in the *Vita*, Christina begins a rebellion against worldly authority that her hagiographer not only excuses but applauds. The hagiographers of Godric and Aibert presented those hermits' childhoods in terms of the balance between personal holiness and obedience to familial authority. In Christina's childhood almost all

³⁵ *ibid.* ch. 87, no. 183, (pp. 192-3). This story is mirrored by one in which an 'evil spirit' comes to Godric wishing for alms, and sent to Godric by a noble lady; ch. 72, nos. 152-6. In this story also Godric can be seen as part of a lay religious network.

³⁶ See above, Chapter I, p. 27.

³⁷ See Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 16-20.

authority is shown to be absolutely inimical to holiness. Christina at first learns by herself, punishing herself if she thinks she had done wrong: 'But even so the child was still unable to understand why she should love righteousness and hate wickedness.'³⁸ Her first teacher is not a parent, but a canon, Sueno:

'conspicuous for his good life and influential in his teaching . . . Furthermore, as the maiden had decided to preserve her virginity for God, the man of God strove by all means in his power to confirm her in her decision.'³⁹

Even Sueno admitted to having difficulty in preserving chastity, although Christina's staunch attitude strengthened him. Christina soon dedicated herself privately to the religious life, knowing that that God 'destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee.'⁴⁰

These fornicators are not abstract sinners, but all those around Christina. Her family are soon described as 'giving themselves up to drunkenness' while Bishop Ranulf Flambard, prompted by the devil, attempted to rape Christina.⁴¹ Although she escaped from him, Christina's battle with worldly evil had now begun. The Bishop wanted revenge, but the only way he could was 'by depriving Christina of her virginity, either by himself or by someone else, for the preservation of which she did not hesitate to repulse even a Bishop.'⁴² From this point onwards, Christina is constantly required to resist authority, in the form of her parents and the churchmen who help them, all bent on depriving Christina of her virginity.⁴³ Her parents were enthusiastic at Flambard's plan to marry their daughter to a young noble, Burthred, who was clearly a client of the Bishop.⁴⁴

³⁸ *Christina*, ch. 2, pp. 36-7.

³⁹ *ibid.* ch. 3, pp. 36-7.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* ch. 4, pp. 40-1; *Psalm 72: 27*.

⁴¹ On this notorious Bishop of Durham and his political career see J. O. Prestwich, 'The Career of Ranulf Flambard' in *AND*, pp. 299-310.

⁴² *Christina*, ch. 6, pp. 42-3.

⁴³ For an analysis of the narrative of Christina's escape from the secular world in terms of its innovative twelfth-century characteristics, see Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual In Twelfth Century Romance*, (London 1977), pp. 34-50.

⁴⁴ *Christina*, ch. 7, pp. 44-5.

In the campaign against Christina which followed, she resisted the lures not just of bodily lusts, but of worldly authority:

'They bought her gifts and made great promises: she brushed them aside. . . At last they persuaded one of her close friends, named Helisen, to soothe her ears by a continuous stream of flattery, so that it would arouse in her, by its very persistence, a desire to become the mistress of a house.'⁴⁵

Flambard's gifts of silks and ornaments were useless, as were attempts to isolate her from 'religious' men, while bringing her to rich festivals, where drinking would 'prepare her for the act of corruption.'⁴⁶ Naturally, bodily pleasures do not seduce Christina, and she boldly escapes from her parents' plots to have Burthred rape her.⁴⁷ Christina is aided miraculously at various points, even by a fever she contracts on the very day appointed for her wedding. The treatment administered to her highlights the purgatorial trials inflicted upon her: 'In order to drive away the fever, sometimes they thrust her into cold water, at other times they blistered her excessively.'⁴⁸

The world fails Christina utterly at this point. Even her teacher Sueno is convinced by rumour that the holy girl had succumbed, and she in turn hears that he now regretted ever being her counsellor. Christina is devastated that her only friend has abandoned her: 'And behold now while the girl persevered, the man failed, alone amidst her enemies, against hope she was deserted [*derelicta*].'⁴⁹ In this and other passages, the hagiographer seems to have been implying that Christina's 'eremitical' struggles had already begun while she was still in the world. The persecution of the powerful, and the desertion of those who should be her true allies, together form an experience equivalent to suffering in the desert, where the support is Christ. The struggle of a young women to avoid an earthly marriage is a common theme in hagiography. Indeed Christina recounts one such story to

⁴⁵ *ibid.* ch. 7, pp. 44-5.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* chs. 8-9, pp. 46-9; quotation, p. 48.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* chs. 10-12, pp. 50-5.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* ch. 12, pp. 54-5; for the purgatorial connotations of this image see above, Chapter III, p. 95.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* ch. 13, p. 54.

Burthred in an attempt to convince him that he should live in a chaste marriage.⁵⁰ However, Christina's story appears to be almost unique in the degree to which it focuses on the holy women's own determination and wit in escaping the clutches of corrupt worldly life.⁵¹

Christina's determination is not simply a rejection of worldly appetites, as the pressure upon her to conform involves her obstinate refusal to obey the dictates of authorities, either secular or ecclesiastic. The hagiographer's interest in the formal canonical definitions of marriage is now well known.⁵² However, while Christina's position can be justified within canon law, the hagiographer tends to pit Christina directly against the trappings of legality. When Christina resists Flambard's sexual assault, she pretends to give in to his desire. The Bishop, apparently suspicious, 'demanded an oath from her [*exegit ab ea jusiurandum*] that she would not deceive him. . . And she swore to him [*et juravit illi*]'.⁵³ By breaking this oath, Christina escapes. The contrast is stark between her minor violation of proper behaviour, and the Bishop's monstrous violation of proper ecclesiastical behaviour. Nevertheless, the hagiographer chose to present this episode in terms which hint at Christina's rejection of law and authority themselves. The central problem for much of the *Vita* is indeed the legality or otherwise of Christina's enforced marriage to Burthred. It is true that Christina's marriage to Burthred could be seen as invalid, firstly because of her prior vow, and secondly because the marriage was against her will.⁵⁴ However, to concentrate on the legalistic arguments that can be extracted from the *Vita*, is to ignore the hagiographer's narrative argument, which concerns Christina's direct clash with the concept of authority itself.

The church is not shown to best advantage in Christina's story. First the hagiographer makes a special point of mentioning

⁵⁰ *ibid.* ch. 10, pp. 50-1.

⁵¹ For examples of other recluses' trouble avoiding marriage from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, see Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'La Femme à la Fenestrelle du Reclusior', in *La Femme au Moyen Age*, ed. Michel Rouche and Jean Heuclin (Maubeuge 1990), pp. 49-65, esp. pp. 58-60.

⁵² See Thomas Head, 'The Marriages of Christina of Markyate', *Viator* 21 (1990), pp. 75-101.

⁵³ *Christina*, ch. 6, pp. 42-3.

⁵⁴ See Head, 'Marriages', pp. 81-7.

Flambard's mistress, Christina's aunt, with whom he had had children, subsequently marrying her to a citizen of Huntingdon.⁵⁵ Flambard was clearly a patron of a kind to Christina's parents, which explains his attempt to marry her off to Burthred, another of his clients. The hagiographer makes this context perfectly clear, but prefers to emphasise Flambard's personal anger at Christina in his decision; 'Then that wretch, seeing that he had been made a fool of by a young girl, was eaten up with resentment and counted all his power as nothing until he could avenge the insult he had suffered.'⁵⁶ Flambard's iniquity is already clear enough, so in attributing this motive to him, the hagiographer was making the contest between Christina and the bishop into a kind of trial by combat between the virtuous lay woman and the corrupt churchman. The power of a worldly bishop is endangered by the personal virtue of a girl.

Rather than protect the virtue of Christina, churchmen fall into every sin condemned by church reformers. After Sueno's failure of faith, Christina's father takes her in front of one Fredebert, prior of Saint Mary's, Huntingdon, in order to force her to accept the marriage. Despite Christina's cogent arguments, Fredebert takes her father's side.⁵⁷ The prior fails to bend Christina's will, so he refers the case to Bishop Robert Bloet of Lincoln, who at first judges in Christina's favour, but then reverses his decision after having been bribed by Autti.⁵⁸ The bishop is described as 'vicious and greedy', and it is taken for granted that a legal decision depends on giving the bishop money: 'Do you know why the bishop gave that decision the other day', says a cleric to Autti, 'If you had given him money, you would certainly have won your case'.

While one bishop is unchaste, another sails close to being a simoniac. Fredebert is the only churchman not actually personally blameworthy, yet he sides with the corrupt against Christina, the elect from conception.⁵⁹ The hagiographer is not merely picking out particular ecclesiastical figures as corrupt, but is showing the entire structure of ecclesiastical authority as supporting vice rather than virtue. It is in front of Prior Fredebert that the essence of Christina's

⁵⁵ *Christina*, ch. 5, pp. 40-1.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* ch. 6, pp. 42-3.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* chs. 15-18, pp. 58-65.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* chs. 18-19, pp. 64-7.

⁵⁹ For Christina's early signs of holiness see *ibid.* ch. 1, pp. 34-5.

rebellion is delineated in a set piece scene where Christina is directly compared to Christ as a boy astounding the elders. When Christina has finished her speech in her defence, Fredebert is 'astonished at the understanding and answers of Christina.'⁶⁰ At this pivotal point in the *Vita*, it seems the hagiographer is intimating that Christina's virtue will have profound consequences not simply for her own salvation but for the world around her.

Christina's opponents in this scene see the consequences of her stand very clearly. Autti admits to Fredebert that Christina had been forced into the marriage 'yet no matter how she was led into it, if she resists our authority and rejects it, we shall be the laughing-stock of our neighbours, a mockery and derision to those round about.'⁶¹ Indeed, Christina's actions are not just personal, they threaten society itself; 'Why should she bring this dishonour on her father? Her life of poverty will bring the whole of the nobility into disrepute.' Fredebert admonishes Christina that her marriage was valid and echoes Autti in the emphasis on obedience to authority:

'We know that you have been betrothed according to ecclesiastical custom. We know that the sacrament of marriage, which has been sanctioned by divine law, cannot be dissolved, because what God has joined together, no man should put asunder. . . Obey your parents and show them respect. These two commandments, about obedience to your parents and faithfulness in marriage, are great, much commended in the Old and New Testaments.'⁶²

Christina stands accused of undermining secular power in general, as well as disobeying the basic commandments of the Church. Although it is possible to interpret her response to Fredebert in terms of canon law, it is also a challenge to the nature of ecclesiastical authority. The written law is central, yet Christina's personal virtue enables her to oppose it. She says; ' "I am ignorant of the scriptures which you have quoted, Father Prior. But from their

⁶⁰ *ibid.* ch. 17, pp. 62-3: '*Obstupescens Fredebertus super prudentia et responsis Christine*'; c.f. *Luke* 2: 46-7: '*Stupebant autem omnes qui eum audiebant super prudentia et responsis eius*'.

⁶¹ *Christina*, ch. 15, pp. 58-9.

⁶² *ibid.* ch. 15, pp. 60-1.

sense I will give my answers thereto.⁶³ It seems rather unlikely that Christina would be actually ignorant of the commandment of obedience towards her parents; the point being made here is that she is an *illiterata* and does not know the written word. Her justification comes not from existing authority or written arguments but from her personal connection with the divine, a connection only known for sure to herself and God:

'Know that from my infancy I have chosen chastity and have vowed to Christ that I would be made a virgin: this I did before witnesses, but even if they were not present God would be witness to my conscience continuously.'⁶⁴

The real content of Christina's rebellion is revealed here; it does not matter what authority or laws, secular or ecclesiastical, might be opposed to her, her personal connection to the divine and her own virtue are enough justification for her actions.

Christina's personal connection with the divine is demonstrated by the series of visions that accompany the narrative of her life. Christina's first major vision occurs after the bribed bishop's judgement against her. Described, as she is so often, as a *sponsa Christi*, she is led into a beautiful church where a man dressed as a priest is about to perform the mass in front of an 'empress' sitting on a dais near the altar. The angelic priest gives her a branch of beautiful flowers and leaves, instructing her to give it in turn to the 'lady'. The Virgin Mary receives the branch from Christina and hands her a 'little branch' in return, saying ' "Take care of it for me" '⁶⁵ It seems in this vision as if Christina has accepted service in the divine household, having been nearly ejected from her own secular household by her irate father.⁶⁶ The familial affection Christina receives from divine persons mirrors the brutality she suffered at the hands of her own family in the preceding chapter. Thus, unlike the mother intent on her being 'corrupted', no matter by whom, Mary lays her head in Christina's lap and allows her to gaze upon her

⁶³ *ibid.* ch. 16, pp. 60-1.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* ch. 16, pp. 60-3.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* ch. 24, pp. 74-7.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* ch. 23, pp. 72-5.

face as soon as Christina voices her desire to do so.⁶⁷ Periodically, throughout the *Vita*, Christina receives other visions of an intensely personal nature, in which the divine family appear to reassure her concerning her external enemies and needs and to relieve her from corporeal illnesses and temptations.⁶⁸ In this manner, the visions continually emphasise Christina's special status in heaven, and the far superior affective relationships she receives within the divine family.

However after the first major vision, the tide in the material world begins to turn in Christina's favour. One Eadwin, who 'lived a religious life in solitude' came secretly to Christina to help her escape from the clutches of her family. To assist in this, Eadwin contacts another hermit, a relative of his called Roger, who 'by virtue of his holy life [was] considered as equal to the fathers of old. He was a monk of ours [St Albans], but lived in a hermitage, and in here he kept obedience to his abbot.'⁶⁹ This is the first appearance of an approving statement concerning obedience towards authority. However, this is not a moment equivalent to Godric's acceptance of the authority of the prior of Durham; Christina's rebellion prior to this point has not been criticised and the authority she has accepted is that of the divine household itself. Concerning the status of the earthly church, it is also significant that the first good religious to appear since Sueno are hermits. It is Eadwin who then contacts Archbishop Ralph of Canterbury for aid in Christina's cause, thereby introducing the first ecclesiastic of good character.⁷⁰ Later, Archbishop Thurstan of York, who 'was a helpful promoter of such holy vocations' is contacted to aid Christina.⁷¹ Only through the appeals to the archbishops does the hagiographer draw back from the rather extreme position against the ecclesiastical hierarchy that had been taking shape earlier in the *Vita*.

After escaping her family, Christina lived with Alfwen, an anchoress and friend of Roger's, for two years before she moved to a

⁶⁷ *ibid.* ch. 25, pp. 76-7.

⁶⁸ See particularly the appearance of Christ as a baby, whose physical contact cures her permanently of any feelings of lust; *ibid.* ch. 45, pp. 116-19.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* ch. 28, pp. 80-1.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* ch. 30, pp. 84-5.

⁷¹ *ibid.* ch. 43, pp. 110-11.

cell connected with Roger's own.⁷² Christina lived in secret in her tiny cell as 'they feared scandal to their inferiors and the fury of those who were persecuting the handmaid of Christ.' The hagiographer celebrates the spiritual love between Roger and Christina, even as he acknowledges that their physical proximity would have been scandalous.⁷³ As a whole, the group of male and female recluses and hermits, evidently all living very close, sang the psalms together although out of sight of one another.⁷⁴ Evidently, a very different understanding of the possible relationships between male and female religious is being developed here than in Reginald's more regulated presentation of the relationship between Godric and his sister. Nevertheless, for Christina this entry into the religious life begins a long period of testing and ascetic suffering during which she is perfected as a holy woman. Although Roger the hermit was described as being under the obedience of the abbot of St Albans, that monastery does not feature in this period of Christina's life. The hagiographer seems content to allow Roger, Alfwen and their fellows to appear as independent ascetics, and Christina to receive her ascetic training from Roger.

St Albans only becomes significant after Christina is fully tested by the ascetic life, and her status as a holy woman is made clear. One indication of that status is a series of miracles in which Christina's power to heal others is made manifest.⁷⁵ Nevertheless this period is marked by terrible illnesses, which ensure that Christina would trust only in 'divine help'. These illnesses will come to an end only when Christ sends her 'a crown from heaven to signify her

⁷² *ibid.* ch. 39, pp. 102-5.

⁷³ For a comparison of the rhetoric of spiritual love in Christina's *Vita* with contemporaries such as Aelred of Rievaulx, see Ruth M. Karras, 'Love and Friendship in The *Lives* of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints', *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988), pp. 305-20, esp. 313-18. However, Christina's hagiographer was describing with enthusiastic approval a syneisactic relationship, the chaste co-habitation of ascetic men and women. Such a relationship would have been controversial, and together with the unbridled rhetoric of spiritual love, it seems to fly in the face of Saint Jerome's ancient advice. Jerome wrote that 'the undefiled in the way of this world are those, whose fair fame no breath of scandal has ever sullied, and who have earned no reproach at the hands of neighbours'; *Ad Principiam Virginem*, e p. 127, PL 22, cols 1087-95, esp. col. 1088, trans. Joan M. Peterson, *Handmaids of The Lord*, (Kalamazoo 1996), pp. 109-10.

⁷⁴ *Christina*, ch. 38, pp. 98-101.

⁷⁵ See *ibid.* chs. 46-8, pp. 118-25.

virginal integrity.⁷⁶ This crown later comes in a vision she receives the morning before her profession to St Albans and her benediction from the bishop. Divine confirmation of her holiness pre-empts the regularisation of her status.⁷⁷ A group of angels come to crown Christina, saying; 'This has been sent to you by the son of the Most High King. And know that you are one of his own.' The crown of virginity is an image that appears elsewhere, notably in Jerome's letters to religious women, where the crown is usually a reward to be expected in heaven. It is also more than physical virginity itself, but a purity of the spirit.⁷⁸ While Christina's crown certainly comes from her purity of spirit as much as from her physical virginity, the crown she receives on earth carries an implication that would have shocked Jerome. Christina's crown is described as having 'two white fillets, like those of a bishop's mitre.'⁷⁹ Christina has been directly compared to a bishop, claiming an authority for her reserved to men on the basis of her heroic preservation of virginity.⁸⁰ As if to soften the claims made in this passage, it is emphasised that Christina remains on earth and is therefore subject to the attacks of the devil. Immediately after the crowning, Christina is assailed with terrifying apparitions and blasphemies planted in her mind. In reassurance God speaks to Christina; 'Be not afraid of these horrible temptations, for the key of your heart is in my safe keeping.'⁸¹ Never again is Christina directly tormented to any effect; she appears entirely secure in salvation even on earth.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* ch. 48, pp. 122-3.

⁷⁷ *ibid.* chs. 51-2, pp. 126-9. Talbot translates the oddly spelt phrase '*benediccionem sacracionis*' as the 'consecration' of Christina, pp. 126-7.

⁷⁸ For Jerome's use of the image see *Ad Marcellam*, *e.p.* 23, cols. 425-7, esp. col. 426; *Ad Eustochium*, *e.p.* 22, cols. 394-425, esp. col. 397 and col. 403; *Ad Demetriadem*, *e.p.* 130, cols. 1107-24, esp. col. 112.

⁷⁹ *Christina*, ch. 52, pp. 128-9. Jerome emphasised to his female correspondents that even a very learned and holy woman should be careful not to assume male authority: 'she would not seem to inflict any injury upon the male sex and the priests, voicing opinions not as if they were hers but another's', *Ad Principiam*, *e.p.* 127, cols. 1091-2; trans. Peterson, *Handmaids of the Lord*, p. 113.

⁸⁰ Thomas Renna, 'Virginity in the *Life* of Christina of Markyate and Aelred of Rievaulx's *Rule*', *American Benedictine Review* 36 (1983), pp. 79-92, argues that in comparison with the patristic concept of virginity, Christina's is entirely a negative virtue. However, there is indeed a positive content to it within the narrative of the *Vita*. It allows Christina's visionary contact with the divine family, and culminates in her quasi-episcopal authority.

⁸¹ *Christina*, chs. 53-4, pp. 128-33.

From this moment Christina becomes a force of reform in the world, and much of the remainder of the *Vita* is concerned with her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans:

'At the beginning of his prelacy he governed the house committed to him with strictness and kept it flourishing in possessions; but as fortune smiled upon him through the support of noble relatives, he began to grow more haughty than was right and relied more on his own judgement than on that of his monks, over whose religious counsels he presided. This man was quite unknown to the maiden of Christ except by common repute. . . Nevertheless, it was through this man that God decided to provide for her needs and it was through His virgin that He decided to bring about this man's full conversion.⁸²

In this passage, and many others that follow, there is a surprising coolness in the presentation of the abbot of St Albans. He is admired for pointedly secular achievements, and given the earlier criticisms of ecclesiastical figures, it seems that the state of religion in St Albans is being criticised from a more radical perspective. In contrast to Geoffrey, Christina is a true and active guardian of religion, and brings an invigorating spirituality to the religion of the house. Although the *Vita* was clearly written by some one closely connected to the Abbey, and probably dedicated to someone in authority at St Albans, it is certainly not written from a point of view that would be normally associated with the leaders of a great Benedictine house. The argument of Christina's *Vita*, in its challenge to authority and celebration of a personal and unaccountable connection with the divine, forms a perspective that is the opposite to that of Reginald or Geoffrey of Durham when considering their hermits. The content of Christina's *Vita* thus makes very plausible the suggestion that it was written by an ascetic of Christina's circle who nevertheless had been a monk of St Albans.

⁸² *ibid.* ch. 55, pp. 134-5. For other discussions of the relationship between Geoffrey and Christina, see Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women* (London 1995), pp. 199-201, Elkins, *Holy Women*, pp. 35-7. There is not the space here to analyse the relationship in any great detail, but it should be noted that Christina's active and commanding role in converting the abbot lies in great contrast to the rather passive spiritual examples given by such holy women as Mary of Oignies.

Even given an outside authorship, the degree of autonomy and authority given to Christina as a holy woman seems very daring. The *Vita* can equally be read as a polemic against the state of the church from the point of view of a radical reform group, and as such is treading very close to a line which could have been taken as heretical. It seems no surprise that the work languished apparently unread until the late fourteenth century, when it was used as a source for a St Albans historian writing an account of the hermit Roger and Abbot Geoffrey.⁸³ However, the ascetics who advanced these radical arguments could perhaps only do so through Christina rather than Roger. If Roger had been celebrated with the same degree of challenge to authority, then the social implications would have been more dangerous. A woman like Christina was much less likely than Roger to become or to be perceived as a genuine rebel. Hence, Christina can be compared to Christ as a child in her challenge to authority; the weakest must step in where the strongest fail. The liminal reversal of social hierarchy can be accepted, as metaphor at least, if it is so very complete and unlikely a reversal.⁸⁴ The reversal thus becomes a rebuke to the hierarchy, not a direct challenge. Christina's breach with social norms is eventually healed by Abbot Geoffrey's acceptance of her spiritual authority over his own soul. Hierarchy is thus reversed, but at the same time no one has moved. Christina is even described as delighted that 'so small a person' as herself could bring Abbot Geoffrey into more spiritual conduct.⁸⁵

Despite the liminal safety net, the hagiographer did provide a trenchant critique of the worldliness of the church and presented some extraordinary claims for Christina's spiritual authority. If the hagiographer was within or in sympathy with Christina's relatively sophisticated ascetic group, then it is also remarkable that Christina's challenge to Fredebert is presented as one of an illiterate against the

⁸³ This is the *Gesta Abbatum*, see Chapter I, p. 28.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of liminality and its applicability to women religious see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality' in *Anthropology and The Study of Religion*, ed. R. L. Moore and F. E. Reynolds (Chicago 1984), pp. 105-25, particularly pp. 111-13. Bynum argues that women themselves did not perceive liminality in their experience of religion, seeing continuity rather than reversal in their lives.

⁸⁵ *Christina*, ch. 58, p. 138.

claims of the literate elite. This is another liminal reversal.⁸⁶ Thus through the rhetoric of reversal, an educated monk based his critique of the church on the spiritual authority of a holy woman, outside the literate monastic elite.

The hagiographer celebrated close relationships between holy men and women, and made no attempt to hide opposition to Christina and her activities. Among the various grounds on which Christina's enemies attacked her was her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey; 'Others who could think of nothing better to say spread the rumour that she was attracted to the abbot by earthly love.'⁸⁷ Christina's ascetic group may have been particularly cohesive, and unusual among such groups in its high social and educational status. Nevertheless, the religious ideas in Christina's *Vita* may have borne some resemblance to those held by other ascetics like Godric and his sister. Reginald was clearly worried by the proximity of Burchwine to her brother, the holy man. However, it is entirely plausible that those two held an understanding of spiritual love between religious men and women that was closer to Christina and Roger's affective relationship. Christina's claim of spiritual independence, if not authority, arose from her own visionary contact with the divine. This is an experience, and a self-justification, that would occur naturally to any independently minded ascetic. As such, it is not an idea that can be thought to be beyond a well travelled 'rustic' like Godric of Finchale. Reginald's concern to impose ecclesiastical authority over the story of Godric's holiness becomes ever more understandable if Godric's lay supporters felt that the holy man possessed miraculous authority not through the earthly church, but through his own personal contact with the divine.

⁸⁶ Christina was not actually illiterate, and is described reading the psalter at one point, *ibid.* ch. 37, pp. 96-9. The hagiographer's point is however that she is not a fully trained *literata*.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* ch. 76, pp. 172-3.

Chapter VIII: Hermits and Crowds: The Spiritual Hero in Social Context

Independent ascetics like Christina or Godric clearly had a troubled relationship with ecclesiastical authority, and indeed, may have felt that their behaviour did not require any mortal approval. The approval they sought came from an entirely numinous source. On its own, such an attitude would have disturbed a hagiographer like Reginald of Durham, however these hermits and recluses also existed within a context of popular admiration for their lives. The twelfth-century hagiographers of Durham wished to interpret their hermits in terms of the priory's traditions and the clerical cult of Saint Cuthbert. However, the hagiographic material produced about Godric and Bartholomew was heavily influenced by the interest rural lay people took in the two hermits and their holy sites. It is remarkable that the marks of popular culture should be so apparent in the works of literate hagiographers. Yet this influence may indicate the reasons for Durham's sudden interest in its late twelfth-century hermits; Reginald and Geoffrey were concerned that the priory should be able, in its turn, to influence popular conceptions concerning holy men and women. A handful of eccentric ascetics, whatever their opinions and habits, could not on their own have provoked the surge of hagiographic work about hermits in twelfth-century England in general. That phenomenon should be attributed to the need to control independent ascetics and their memory, because of their social context and their sympathetic connection with the crowd.

In one respect, the *topos* of the crowd flocking to the hermit was a conventional means of showing the hermit to be all things to all men and women. It is certainly with this intention that John of Ford described those who came to Wulfric as being of 'both sexes and diverse merit, not only from far but also from near parts'. These people came for Wulfric's miraculous healing powers, out of 'reverence of sanctity', to talk and consult with him, and to hear his prophetic talk.¹ Wulfric's sanctity is able to cater for the different needs of different kinds of people. Another note was struck by Aibert of Crespin's hagiographer. Robert of Ostrevant was at pains to

¹ *Vita Wulfrici*, ch. 11, p. 25.

emphasise that it was not just 'the crowd of illiterates and idiots' that visited the holy man, but significant people also, including members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.² This presentation of the old *topos* betrays an unusual anxiety in a hagiographic context; Aibert as a holy man was more identified with the mass of the poor than with the elites.

At Durham, there was also anxiety concerning the divisions of society. Geoffrey shows the crowd that flocks to Bartholomew on Farne sharply divided between rich and poor. The hermit censures the rich 'the rumour of whose savagery had reached him'.³ The rich were terrified when they came to see him, and were persuaded to rid themselves of '*munus illicitus*', to stop injuring the poor, and to give alms. For the poor 'he brought forth pious bowls of compassion', and told them to be patient. The hermit's very advice to the poor hints at the hagiographer's anxiety that they might not be patient. This treatment of the crowd contrasts with Geoffrey's own major hagiographic model, Bede's Cuthbert. When the crowds come to Cuthbert as a holy abbot, from near and remoter parts, they are the 'sad', the 'afflicted', and the 'tempted'.⁴ These are moral categories, rather than social ones. Social categories hardly appear; Cuthbert as a bishop gave food to the hungry and clothes to the suffering.⁵ Bede shows none of the anxiety concerning social divisions, and the hermit's position within them, that is betrayed by Geoffrey and Robert of Ostrevant.

Reginald directly confronted the problem of the hermit and the crowd when describing Godric's popularity as a holy man. Godric taught 'doctrine and discipline', with 'the erudition of the cleric' to the *populus* who flocked to him 'from neighbouring and remote parts'.⁶ When Reginald invokes the *topos* of people flocking to the hermit, it is not the usual combinations of the rich and poor, clerics and lay people, who visit Godric. Rather it is only the vulgar crowd which is said to visit the rustic hermit for advice and comfort

² *Vita Aiberti*, ch. 20, pp. 678-9.

³ *Vita Bart.* ch. 10, p. 303; see above Chapter III, p. 102.

⁴ *Vita Cuthberti*, ch. 22, pp. 228-9.

⁵ *ibid.* ch. 26, pp. 242-3.

⁶ *Vita Godrici*, ch. 59, no. 129, (p. 138).

concerning their sins.⁷ Although it is clear that Godric's holiness held fascination for monks and richer lay people, Reginald chose to emphasise the role of the poor in Godric's popularity. Reginald made Godric's relationship with the poor safe through the emphasis on his new-found obedience to ecclesiastical authority, which appears just before the crowds do. Indeed 'by the permission of the prior', Godric abstained from the 'communication of men' for four days a week including Sunday, which was spent entirely in prayer.⁸ It is only in this context that an 'idiot and illiterate man' could teach 'doctrine and discipline', without there being dangerous implications. Reginald describes Godric as a medium through which charity flows, not as a point of disruption endangering the stability of social hierarchies. The hermit's 'few and savoury words, spiced with the salt of much wisdom' concern entirely spiritual matters.⁹ Reginald makes no attempt to portray Godric as an arbiter of social harmony in a cruel world, as Geoffrey does for Bartholomew. Given the symbolic implications of Godric's hairshirt and *lorica*, Reginald's picture of Godric and the crowd may have deliberately minimised the element of social protest in the hermit's popularity.

There were obviously divisions of rich and poor in Bede's time as much as in Geoffrey's. Nevertheless, the change in the 'crowd' *topos* between those times highlights the particular problems of twelfth-century society. The hagiographers, as representatives of the elites, saw social dangers that had not been present in Bede's time. However the nature of social and economic change in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is conceived, it is clear that the crowds of the rural and new urban poor disturbed the elites. Equally, the issues of ecclesiastical reform produced complex problems for both ecclesiastical and secular authorities. It is in this context that the holy man could become the focus of essentially political protest, as in the case of Arnold of Brescia in Rome.¹⁰ While an English source could admit that Arnold of Brescia was an ascetic of outwardly

⁷ *ibid.* ch. 60, no. 130, (pp. 139-40). The poor, here described as a *turba*, never go away empty handed from the hermit. Also ch. 69, no. 145, (p. 154) and ch. 65, no. 139, (p. 149), describe the crowd to which Godric ministers.

⁸ *ibid.* ch. 59, no. 128, (pp. 137-8).

⁹ *ibid.* ch. 59, no. 129, (p. 138).

¹⁰ On Arnold of Brescia see Moore, *Origins of European Dissent*, pp. 115-36, and Moore, *Birth of Popular Heresy*, p. 68, for Arnold's ascetic credentials.

admirable life, only the traces of such status survive for a comparable English figure. William Longbeard, or William fitz Osbern, protested in London at the uneven burden of taxation on rich and poor, and appears to have been a holy man of some kind, and even '*mediocriter literatus*'. The accusations that his female companion was a concubine, and that the two had desecrated the church where he had taken sanctuary, could easily have been attempts to discredit Longbeard's standing as a holy man. He and his companion could have seen their relationship in the same terms as Roger and Christina, who faced similar accusations.¹¹ The church where Longbeard was hiding was set on fire and he was executed. This man may seem at best an unconventional holy man, but his speech to the crowd, in particular, calling upon them to drink his 'doctrine of salvation' indicates that he did attempt to fulfil a religious role.¹² This kind of holy man had to be dealt with swiftly.

Although Godric was probably not very much like Longbeard, the rustic ascetic of Finchale also had the potential to be a focus of popular protest. Certainly, the social associations of Godric's ascetic clothing imply a certain circumspect protest. The monks of Durham, as well as the Cistercians who visited him, may well have been interested in courting him partly to ensure that the holy man was managed well enough so that the potential for social protest in his popularity with the crowd was contained. The potential for disruption posed by popular holy men was thus also a motive for the writing of *Vitae* of such figures; these hermits were shown to have been brought within the church, and their holiness explained in terms acceptable to the ecclesiastical authorities. The fact that Reginald allowed Godric's protest against the rich to become visible in his *Vita* could be taken to show Durham priory's happy position amid the powers of its world, able to take on the appearance of being a 'mediating' force in society.

¹¹ William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, chs. 20-21, pp. 463-73; for Longbeard's appearance see p. 466, for his companion see p. 470, and pp. 472-3. The incident is put in European wide context by Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, pp. 81-6. See also Robert Bartlett, *England under The Norman and Angevin Kings*, (Oxford 2000), pp. 344-5. Accusations of a sexual kind are always a common tactic when attacking those on the fringes of religious orthodoxy, see for example Moore, *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, p. 15.

¹² Newburgh, *Historia*, p. 469.

The notable exception in twelfth-century relations between the hermit and the crowd is Christina of Markyate. Christina's group of ascetics was well connected and probably had access to far greater resources than most other independent ascetics. The hagiographer's fierce criticism of the church hierarchy could thus be toned down partly through the access Christina's supporters had to archiepiscopal favour. The hagiographer also signalled to his literate audience that the ascetics had no dangerous supporters. The crowd which usually appears at a certain point within a *vita*, is not at all present in Christina's *Vita*. Indeed, the *vulgus* is insulted as being passively infected by the devil's campaign against the holy woman and her relationship with the Abbot Geoffrey: 'Hence it was that the common folk, who revel in anything unusual, were assailed with rumours'.¹³ Christina's role is not to evangelise the crowd, but to effect change in the hierarchy of the church; those damaging rumours were aimed at neutralising the 'advantage they [Christina and Abbot Geoffrey] would gain from each other and the great usefulness that would accrue through them to the Church of God'.¹⁴

The crowd, or the poor laity, appear to have no role within Christina's career as a holy woman. It is, of course, conceivable that she was not a 'popular' figure, but given the ubiquity of the crowd in the twelfth-century *vitae* of holy men, it is to be expected that holy women such as Christina also had popular appeal. Indeed, the early thirteenth-century guide for ascetic women, the *Ancrene Wisse*, records the aphorism that 'from mill and from market, from smithy and from the ancre house, people bring the news'.¹⁵ The absence of the crowd may have been a by-product of the hagiographer's argument. Christina backed by a crowd, while making her critique of the hierarchy, would have been dangerous. Isolated from such forces, she is dependent upon the male hierarchy to accept her. Thus the

¹³ *Christina*, ch. 76, pp. 172-3.

¹⁴ *ibid.* ch. 76, pp. 174-5.

¹⁵ *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Hugo White, (London, 1993), Part 2, p. 42. In the context of the guide, this is a warning against ascetic women involving themselves in any kind of secular business. Elsewhere, the warnings concerning what a recluse should not do, give a good impression of the daily activities of recluses, in which they clearly made themselves useful to the secular world about them. Recluses, for example kept other people's valuables, including charters, in their cells; *ibid.* Part 8, p. 193.

hagiographer may have omitted Christina's popular context to suit his own purposes.

After Durham priory's writings on hermits appeared in the late twelfth century, hagiographic interest in hermits as popular holy men seems to have disappeared almost entirely.¹⁶ Hermits and recluses themselves certainly remained, although they did not appear to attract the popular attention and the status of spiritual heroes they had in the twelfth century. This may be an artifact of the lack of ecclesiastical interest; perhaps the need for the hagiography of such people disappeared. However, it is hard to see centuries later than the twelfth as significantly less socially divided, or less prone to disruptive religious enthusiasms. Clearly then, something had happened to the connection between hermits and their society which led to the loss of hagiographic interest in such figures.

Godric, Bartholomew and Wulfric had diverse origins, yet each occupied 'middling' social positions when they embarked upon their ascetic careers. They all had some experience of the ways of power and wealth, and yet were at best on the fringes of the elites, ecclesiastical or secular. Godric and Aibert certainly, Wulfric and Bartholomew probably, had considerable experience of rural, illiterate society. They were thus people with an understanding of each end of their divided society. Nevertheless they could not accommodate themselves to the world in any conventional sense, becoming not just religious, but independent ascetics. Thus they remained separate, to some degree, from ecclesiastical as well as secular structures. In an increasingly literate society, none of them were notably literate, though even Godric was more competent than Reginald wished to allow.

One of Bartholomew's successors as a hermit on Farne, in the fourteenth century, was clearly a very different character from the hermit who told tales of holy ducks and fairy abductions. This monk of Durham, perhaps called John Whiterig, appears to have been educated at an Oxford college. During his time on Farne he composed learned monastic meditations on a variety of themes, from the crucifixion and the Virgin Mary to an unfinished section on Saint

¹⁶ Robert of Knaresborough is the exception. However, dying in 1218, he is not very much later than Durham's hermits. Robert was a 'popular' hermit in the sense that he attracted a healing cult after his death, noted by Matthew Paris; see above, Chapter I, p. 26.

Cuthbert.¹⁷ The unfinished material on Cuthbert contains some references to twelfth-century legends of Cuthbert's miracles, but the intended audience of the meditations was clearly a theologically sophisticated one. This is very different from the kind of audience which would appreciate Bartholomew's eiderduck stories, yet that latter audience doubtlessly still existed in the fourteenth century. The later monk of Farne may not have been, relatively speaking, of much greater social origins than Bartholomew, but literate society, through a university education, profoundly altered the social context of his religious impulse. Bartholomew existed in an ambiguous position between the literate and the illiterate, between the elites and the powerless. These ambiguities of social position had perhaps been altered by the fourteenth century. John Whiterig was firmly within a highly educated caste, being university educated, and could expect to speak to a wide literate audience through his meditations.¹⁸ That audience, which was undoubtedly much greater in the fourteenth century than the twelfth, could provide the ascetic with a much greater sense of validation than the earlier equivalent.

Perhaps the fourteenth-century hermit of Farne would have appeared differently had he been treated by a hagiographer. There is some hagiographic material for the fourteenth-century Yorkshire hermit, Richard Rolle, which shows the social world of that hermit to be composed exclusively of those of relatively high status. The lessons composed for him are largely traditional in hagiographic terms, but there is no hint that Rolle was ever perceived as a local holy man in the twelfth-century sense. He performed no healing miracles during his life, and had no charitable or other connection

¹⁷ *Meditaciones cuiusdam Monachi apud Farneland Quondam Solitarii*, ed. David H. Farmer, *Studia Anselmiana* 41 (1957), pp. 158-245; trans. in *The Monk of Farne: The Meditations of a Fourteenth Century Monk*, ed. David H. Farmer (London 1961). For the attribution to John Whiterig see *Meditaciones*, pp. 145-7 and *Monk of Farne*, pp. 2-6. The meditations were written probably between 1363 and 1371. For the fragment of the meditation on Saint Cuthbert see *Meditaciones*, pp. 244-5.

¹⁸ If the sort of men who might have been drawn to the role of the 'holy men' were often university educated, then the common hostility of the rural and urban poor towards university students must have had considerable effect upon the possibility of sympathy between the ascetic and the crowd. On the relations between the academy and the poor see Murray, *Reason and Society*, pp. 237-51.

with the local people.¹⁹ Rolle's social origins are obscure, but while he was certainly not rich, his family probably had some social standing, and he also spent some years at Oxford.²⁰ He began his life as a hermit, without any ecclesiastical approval, donning the torn clothes of his sister to fashion a habit. In relative terms, his family may have been comparable to Bartholomew's, however, Rolle existed in a specialised intellectual milieu that did not exist for Godric and Bartholomew.²¹ As a hermit, Rolle wrote mystical works for a like minded audience, concerned with his consciousness of being called to salvation as part of a spiritual minority.²² Rolle's relationship with ecclesiastical authority may not have been as strained as has sometimes been thought, but he was clearly an independent figure who in practice refused to acknowledge any superior authority.²³ In a sense therefore, Rolle was a similar figure to Godric, an independent hermit whose calling to the holy life was justified by his own individual connection to the divine, without reference to and even in opposition to the structures of ecclesiastical authority. Nevertheless, his appeal was limited to a literate, devout section of society; he was not a socially amphibious figure, and thus did not pose the social dangers of a Godric of Finchale.²⁴ While Rolle may have been an ambiguous figure, his career did not attract any ecclesiastical authority to tame him and mould the memory of his life.

¹⁹ See the translation of this material in Frances M. Comper, *The Life and Lyrics of Richard Rolle* (London 1928), pp. 301-10.

²⁰ Rolle's education at Oxford was paid for by an ecclesiastical patron, and his father was said to be a friend of a certain 'squire' who was his first patron in his eremitical life; see Comper, *Legenda in Life and Lyrics*, pp. 301-3.

²¹ Rolle was a well educated writer. For the intellectual context of his writing see Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, (Cambridge 1991), particularly pp. 9-22.

²² Comper, *Life and Lyrics*, p. xi, suggests that Rolle's audience was composed largely of nuns and recluses.

²³ For the debates on Rolle's position within the Church, and the nature of his eremitical life, see Watson, *Richard Rolle*, pp. 34-53.

²⁴ The Cistercian nuns of Hampole, for whom the hagiographic materials on Rolle were recorded, also recorded twenty-seven posthumous miracles attributed to him. These are summarised in Comper, *Life and Lyrics*, pp. 310-14. The miracles show some local interest in the existence of a local saint, although they appear to date from about thirty years after Richard's death in 1349. This is evidence that the need for supernatural intervention in the lives of the poor still existed in the fourteenth century, which is unsurprising. It does not reveal anything concerning his local status as a holy man while he was alive, except that his memory was preserved by the community of nuns.

The institutions of literacy, creating a sharper division between the privileged and the unprivileged, separated independently minded ascetics from the world of the 'idiotic' rustics. Thus the social connections which created the popular holy man of the twelfth century were broken. Given that Aibert of Crespin's social origins and popularity were broadly similar to those of the English hermits, it is possible that the same phenomenon could be found in the patterns of hagiography and saintly literacy elsewhere. But in England at least, literacy broke the connection between the hermit and the crowd. In the twelfth century, Christina of Markyate's group of ascetics may have foreshadowed the later medieval literate hermits and mystics. Christina herself was of a higher social class than the others discussed here, and probably existed in a much more sophisticated literate environment than Godric or Wulfric. Small groups of the devout lay and committed ascetics existed about Christina, Wulfric and Godric. The devout lay were probably more often among the more privileged of the crowd who flocked to the hermit. Thus Godric of Finchale spoke to two layers of popular religion, the rustic 'idiots' and the urbanised or privileged devout. These two layers of mentality doubtless overlapped significantly. Nevertheless, the religious enthusiasm of the devout and privileged lay people, who admired Godric, probably had something in common with the religious enthusiasm of those who admired Richard Rolle in the fourteenth century.

The mentality of the poor, no longer evidenced in the material concerning English hermits after the twelfth century, was probably often dominated by their concern for sheer survival. In the twelfth century, a holy man or a holy place like Farne offered the local poor the possibility of material supernatural assistance. This assistance did not depend on a mechanistic magical belief, but rather on the certain kinds of miracle stories, where the rationale for supernatural intervention in human affairs was explained and dramatised. Twelfth-century animal and saint stories seem to demonstrate a significant aspect of popular expectations of the miraculous. Peasants did not expect something for nothing; in return for their healing miracles, animals in sacred places were given a special status. Unsophisticated in clerical terms, the popular saint and animal story nevertheless had its own subtle logic, perhaps better understood by

such hermits as Godric and Bartholomew than by their hagiographers. The hermit himself could be seen as a supernatural creature, a kind of wild man, living on the very boundaries of society. Medieval society defined one's humanity by outward cultural behaviour, which was in fact seen as sometimes forming even the physical self; today, by contrast, it is defined by biology or genetics. Where culture defines the human, strange or absent clothing is a visual sign of the monstrous. The monstrous was not necessarily evil. Perhaps for the much despised rustics it offered the hope of knowledge and power beyond or outside the boundaries of the human world. The hermit as wild man could thus have been an antidote to entirely visible evils, which were perpetuated in a society increasingly fractured by new structures of wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness.

Whatever a hermit may have been when at home in his wilderness, popular and independent religious figures were a potential danger to any kind of authority. It has often been noted that England was unusually free from heresy in this period, but it seems likely that it had its own potential and actual dissenters. Although a chasm seems to separate the worlds of Christina of Markyate and Godric of Finchale, each appealed to devout lay people who found independent ascetics more venerable than prince bishops and their systems of clientage. If in later times, the privileged devout became further separated from the social concerns of a wider crowd, in the twelfth century the different strands of religion and social anxiety and protest, could become focused on the figure of a holy man or woman.

Durham priory, among other monastic houses in western Christendom, reacted to these problems by engaging with the legends, memories and controversies of suitable holy figures. Indeed these figures were first drawn into the structure of the church, as much as possible. However, recording the legends of a Godric, Bartholomew or Aibert was also a way of taming dangerous figures and responding to the crowd's concerns by speaking to them indirectly through hagiography. Thus the hagiography of twelfth-century hermits was a response to the problems posed by popular religious enthusiasm. At Durham it provided a means by which the monastic elite could attempt to secure its own position. Loyalty to the

priory could be encouraged by exploiting its connection with hermits and popular traditions, while those traditions themselves were adapted to the priory's own concerns. The hermits themselves may sometimes have fulfilled a social function in mediating the divisions in society. Equally, however, a hermit like Godric could have been seen as a figure of opposition, not compromise. It is rather hagiography itself that occupied the mediating role, attempting to resolve the contradictions of the hermit into a coherent picture acceptable to all.

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