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Oral Tradition seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral literature and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. As well as essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, a Symposium section (in which scholars may reply at some length to prior essays), review articles, occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts, a digest of work in progress, and a regular column for notices of conferences and other matters of interest. In addition, occasional issues will include an ongoing annotated bibliography of relevant research and the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition. *OT* welcomes contributions on all oral literatures, on all literatures directly influenced by oral traditions, and on non-literary oral traditions. Submissions must follow the list-of-reference format (style sheet available on request) and must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return or for mailing of proofs; all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. Authors should submit two copies of all manuscripts. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one member of the editorial board before a final decision is reached. Review essays, announcements, and contributions to the Symposium section will be evaluated by the editor in consultation with the board.

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Editor's Column

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer a cornucopia of items: a thematic cluster, eight essays, a prize announcement, and news about an upcoming collection of unusual significance.

The first three essays exemplify *OT*'s commitment to diversity in the field, with Betsy Bowden's reading of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* as a proverb collection, Vladimir Guerrero's investigation of medieval Spanish oral-derived works as what he calls "aurature," and Margaret Beissinger's comparison of Romanian epic and the New Testament in terms of oral storytelling techniques. Then, following on his first group of articles sketching linkages between studies in oral tradition and contemporary criticism in *OT* 17.1, special editor Mark Amodio presents five quite disparate entries on the same theme. Proverb use and Chaucer is again represented in Nancy Mason Bradbury's theoretically oriented contribution, while Jonathan Watson analyzes the interaction of scribal practice and oral tradition in the medieval alliterative tradition. John Hill's description of oral recitation and composition in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* leads to a challenging and nuanced discussion of secondary orality and hypertextuality by Michael Joyce, and finally to Samantha Zacher's study of Cynewulf as an Old English poet operating at the orality-literacy interface. In characteristic fashion, this issue tackles both theory and real-world complexity, from the ancient and medieval worlds to the present day.

Uniquely, we also have the honor to announce the inauguration of The Aeolian Prize, which has been created in order to inspire research and scholarship on the oral traditions of the Aeolian Islands north of Sicily. The Aeolian Prize of \$1000 and publication in *Oral Tradition* will be awarded to the best manuscript received by September 30, 2004 (see the guidelines at the back of this issue). Professional and non-professional scholars and writers from all disciplines are welcome to participate.

Finally, with the next number of *OT* (18.1) we will begin a year-long special issue on the state of the art in our heterogeneous and interdisciplinary field. For these two issues approximately 80 authors from a broad spectrum of individual specialties have contributed thumbnail responses to the following two questions: (1) What does oral tradition mean in your particular discipline? and (2) What are the most exciting developments in your area? Authors were allowed only 500 words and 5-10 citations to answer questions that could have elicited volumes, but the idea is rather to "take the pulse" of the collective field in 2003, the eighteenth year of *OT*'s history, and thereby to offer to nonspecialists some perspectives that may

prove useful at the level of analogy. If the project works, it will open a few windows and make some suggestions—as well as serve as a benchmark for the state of our comparative field three years after the millennium.

As always, we welcome your observations, admonitions, and submissions.

John Miles Foley, Editor

Center for Studies in Oral Tradition
21 Parker Hall
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211 USA
Telephone: 573-882-9720
Fax: 573-446-2585
e-mail: oraltradition@missouri.edu

Ubiquitous Format? What Ubiquitous Format? Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* as a Proverb Collection

Betsy Bowden

Ut librum aperirem, apertum legerem, lectum memorie commendarem. . . .
quia lecta memorie commendata discipulum perficiunt, et perfectus ad
magistratus cathedram exaltatur.¹

In a sample letter for university students contemplating the job market, John of Garland articulates the formerly obvious idea that an aspiring professor would open and read a book in order to commit it to memory. According to many authorities besides this Englishman in thirteenth-century Paris, literacy represents a pragmatic step in the lifelong process of developing one's memory. A Chaucerian narrator makes a similar point: "yf that olde bokes were aweye, / Yloren [lost] were of remembraunce the key."² Books as external visual artifacts, as keys to remembrance, could help a pre-modern reader to stock and later to unlock his internal storehouse of knowledge and indeed wisdom.³

Not even the Clerk reads from a book on horseback, though, within the imagined scenario of the *Canterbury Tales*. Instead, using his listeners' vernacular language, this university student conveys to the less learned pilgrims a portion of the non-vernacular verbal art lodged within his memory: Petrarch's Latin tale, transformed orally into Middle English.

Geoffrey Chaucer's major unfinished work, in which the Host of the Tabard Inn urges a tale-telling contest upon "nyne and twenty . . . sondry

¹ "For me to open the book, to read what I opened to, to commit what I read to memory. . . . because committing his reading to memory perfects a student, and the perfected man is promoted to a master's chair" (John of Garland 1974:62-63).

² Chaucer 1987:589 for lines F25-26 of the *Legend of Good Women*.

³ I use masculine for the gender-indeterminate pronoun because the documents refer to males. On medieval memory systems, see Carruthers 1990 and 1998, Ja. Coleman 1992, and Yates 1966.

folk” en route to Canterbury, continues to offer vital evidence concerning the interaction between oral tradition and an individual’s creative writing process, five centuries prior to the invention of electronic sound recording. Folklorists and others have begun to demonstrate the extent to which careful analysis of such a performance event, albeit fictional, can add diachronic depth to investigations of orality enabled by the tape recorder.⁴

This article will analyze late fourteenth-century oral/written interfaces in England. It employs information and methodologies from a range of academic disciplines in addition to folklore: from the history of education, in reference to students bilingual in French and Middle English while learning the pan-European Latin language; and also from psycholinguistics, neuropsychology, translation studies, philology, and paremiology (to allow the study of proverbs its own domain name). These approaches intertwine toward an immediate goal that sounds quite familiar within the standard field of literary studies. The analysis will contribute toward a fuller understanding of everybody’s favorite Canterbury pilgrim, the Wife of Bath.

While raising broader issues, that is, this article’s primary purpose is to document one neglected literary source for the fictional character Alisoun of Bath. That source has, however, been right there all along. It is the second tale told by Chaucer-the-pilgrim (i.e., told by the first-person narrator created by Chaucer-the-author) after his cliché-ridden, sing-songy *Tale of Sir Thopas* has been silenced by the Host’s literary criticism, “Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!”⁵

Chaucer-the-pilgrim’s second tale, the *Tale of Melibee*, imitates one of the educational media that used to transmit Latin learning to speakers of Middle English. It does so even more pointedly than the *Clerk’s Tale*, which that tale-teller announces as an on-the-spot translation from Latin. Although the prose *Tale of Melibee* has been neglected, maligned, and interpreted from a range of twentieth-century critical viewpoints, no previous study has investigated the tale as a vernacular collection of proverbial sentences.

From such a vernacular collection, I will suggest, each item was meant to summon to a properly educated mind its equivalent proverb in

⁴ Major studies on medieval oral/written interaction include Lindahl 1987, Richter 1994, and Jo. Coleman 1996; the latter two contain bibliographies documenting the field.

⁵ Chaucer 1987:216, l. 930 of the link between *Tale of Sir Thopas* and *Tale of Melibee*. Unless specified otherwise, subsequent Chaucer quotations in this article come from Chaucer 1987:212-41, encompassing the *Tale of Melibee* and its context, cited as CT VII (i.e., fragment VII of the *Canterbury Tales*) with line numbers. From elsewhere in Chaucer 1987, works are cited by full titles and line numbers only.

Latin, the language of learning.⁶ Medieval schoolboys used to recite in unison long lists of Latin proverbs, sight unseen. Jacqueline Hamesse (1990) has demonstrated that adults continued to memorize Latin proverb collections entire. Those medieval scholars' mnemonic techniques presumably included the familiar, reliable, efficient one of repeated vocalization.

Affixed in a learned man's memory, each individual proverb could afterward be called into mind as a discrete unit. Each one could thereupon open mnemonic pathways toward other verbal contexts in which that scholar had encountered the same proverbial sentence. He would thus be able to recollect and to communicate intertextuality, that is, the diachronic resonances among authoritative texts that he had heard, had probably vocalized, and had perhaps even seen. To conclude this article, I will propose processes by which orally memorized proverbs used to facilitate a trained thinker's information retrieval from his own brain. I will suggest that such intracranial procedures functioned, metaphorically of course, somewhat like searches on today's internet.⁷

In the course of exploring the relationship between pedagogical proverb collections and the *Tale of Melibee*, I will align the tale's three Middle English labels for authoritative statements—"sentence," "sawe," and "proverbe"—with the French terms directly replaced and the Latin ones in the tale's ultimate source. This intentionally limited philological quest will, however, never venture far afield from literary issues. The trilingual terminological distinctions will enhance analysis of Chaucer-the-author's creative interaction with oral tradition that six centuries ago somehow produced "the characters which compose all ages and nations. . . . the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps."⁸

⁶ For surveys with bibliographies of scholarship on the *Tale of Melibee*, see DeLong 1987, Ferster 1996, and Patterson 1989:135-60. On medieval proverb collections see Habenicht 1963:1-28, Hamesse 1990, Louis 1993 and 1997, Rouse and Rouse 1976, Schulze-Busacker 2000, A. Taylor 1985:43-52, B. Taylor 1992, and Whiting 1932.

⁷ On the validity of metaphor in scholarly writing, see Kintgen 1996:198, 232n. For an analogous point concerning oral tradition and the internet, see Foley 1998 and 2002:219-25.

⁸ Blake 1982:532-33, describing his painting "Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the nine and twenty Pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury" (1809). On Blake and his verbal and visual precedents, see studies documented in Bowden 2001, espec. Bowden 1987.

The *Tale of Melibee* is a close translation from French of a household debate on peace versus revenge, in which female soundly trumps male. Nine prose lines of action open the narrative: while Melibee is away from home, enemies ravish his wife Prudence and his daughter. For the rest of the tale's 900+ prose lines, Prudence and other authority figures cite proverbial wisdom to persuade Melibee, a magistrate by profession, that reasoned conflict resolution is preferable to warfare.

I will show that Chaucer-the-author, even while translating closely, has nonetheless adjusted the proverb-related terminology found in his source text. The resulting effect is that Prudence in Middle English sounds even more justly victorious than in French, and her husband sounds even more wrong. Compared to his French predecessor, Chaucer's Melibee more foolishly agrees with the vengeful "sentence" urged by hot-headed youngsters; he more blatantly misinterprets the "sentence" beneath wise men's words of advice; and he more rashly proposes acrimonious judicial "sentences" for his enemies, until chastened yet again by Prudence, who succeeds at last in using "proverbs" to educate her man.

Prudence, that is, cheers from the sidelines while her soul-sister Alisoun clobbers those three old, rich husbands of Bath with their own misogynistic proverbs, all proven wrong, wrong, wrong. The wife of Melibee influenced the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* in ways that range from the largest overall theme, that of confronting male verbal authority, down to details. Early on, for example, Prudence's French husband posits five reasons to ignore female advice. Chaucer's version trims the list to three reasons, supported by merely two authorities opposed to women's mastery.⁹ Then his Middle English Prudence profusely disproves all five reasons, stated or no, by citing contrary words and deeds from dozens of authorities, including Jesus Christ. In addition, she explicates for her man the sense intended when, for example, "men seyn that thre thynges dryven a man out of his hous— . . . smoke, droppynge of reyn, and wikked wyves." This proverb refers to women who are wicked, Prudence points out, "and sire, by youre leve, that am nat I." In reference to virginal perfection, the Wife of Bath delivers that same conclusive rebuttal, which Chaucer transmuted from a Frenchwoman's meek "you know well that you have not found me such a woman."¹⁰

⁹ CT VII 1055-63, rendering lines 155-73 of Renaud 1958:573-74, hereafter cited as "Renaud" with line numbers.

¹⁰ CT VII 1086-88, rendering Renaud ll. 217-21, and anticipating the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* ll. 278-80, 112.

The *Tale of Melibee* and its analogues, because of their debate framework, stand conspicuous among the collections of proverbial sentences that saw long-term education-related employment under multitudinous names, later including “florilegium” and “commonplace book.” Aristotle, having compiled proverb collections now lost, articulated intellectual relevance for the already well established practice, which remained basic to Hellenistic Greek and to Roman education. Christian educators retained the format and many of the same proverbial sentences, adding ones from Christian authorities. Attention to proverbs continued well into this past century via schoolrooms and, for example, descendants of Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*.

Many decades have come and gone, however, since schoolchildren regularly recited unseen lists of proverbs.¹¹ Likewise, it was an earlier generation of literary scholars who documented proverbs in Shakespeare’s plays and other vernacular literature, on the model developed by Erasmus for Greco-Roman literature.¹² Thus current researchers have to discover anew the significance for Chaucer’s audience of the educational mainstay represented by the *Tale of Melibee*.

A note on terminology. Although folklorists now reserve “proverb” for anonymous statements expressing unofficial culture, consistent appellation does not predate the twentieth century. Chaucer uses “proverbes” as a cover term for all of the items in the *Tale of Melibee*.¹³ I therefore use that generic label instead of either alternative in *Melibee*, “sentence” or “sawe,” and instead of other words that entered the language then or in subsequent centuries, such as adage, admonition, aphorism, apothegm, axiom, balet, byword, commonplace, dict, dictum, epigram, example, gnome, lesson, maxim, old text, old thing, parable, paroemia, platitude, precept,

¹¹ Traces of the practice continue in some Latin and Greek courses. For modern languages see Rowland 1926-27 and Florio 1953, the latter discussed by Simonini 1952 and Yates 1968.

¹² Twentieth-century Anglo-American results include three editions of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (Wilson 1970) and specialized indexes including Dent 1981 and 1984, Smith 1963, Tilley 1950, and Whiting 1958. Erasmus’s first work to be printed, *Adagiorum Collectanea* (1500), was expanded as *Adagiorum Chiliades* to provide commentary and literary references for 4151 proverbs. See Appelt 1942, Bowden 1995:316, Erasmus 1982-92, Kintgen 1996:20-46, and Phillips 1964.

¹³ CT VII 956. See Abrahams 1972 for a folkloristic overview on proverbs. Ongoing research can be found in the journal *Proverbium* (1984-) and in numerous bibliographies and anthologies by Wolfgang Mieder (for example, Mieder 1982).

saying, sententious remark, theme, topic, truism, word, or words of wisdom. In languages besides English as well, these and many other terms all label the kind of item under scrutiny here: those succinct, authoritative verbal units that are considered worth memorizing, “sententias philosophicas ut quecumque . . . memoria digne videbantur.”¹⁴

Within Chaucer’s sociohistorical context, a proverb collection could function as a vehicle to convey basic literacy, religious instruction, courtly manners, political allegory, political advice, patristic exegesis, and other concepts according to which scholars have analyzed the *Tale of Melibee*.¹⁵ Only one category among those proposed by Chaucerians must be eliminated. *Melibee* is not a parody of boring literature. Indeed, the frame story’s hints of characterization and colloquial dialogue place *Melibee* high among the very liveliest, on paper, of any extant proverb collection ever. The format appears boring because an untrained twentieth-century mind can but stare blankly at its bleak surface, baffled as to access, wondering how our forebears could have remained entranced for so many millennia by all those dull grey screens with static icons.

Studies underway in diverse fields, from medical science through a range of humanistic disciplines, all point toward the educational context here ascribed to *Melibee*. First and foremost, Mary Carruthers and Janet Coleman have demonstrated the prominence of memorization techniques in times and places including late fourteenth-century England. In addition, historians of education have documented both proverb collections in extant curricula and the long-standard classroom methodology of rote recitation in unison.¹⁶ Translation studies demonstrate the diachronic, worldwide extent

¹⁴ See Hamesse 1990:226n, quoting Wilhelm von Doncaster.

¹⁵ For surveys of scholarship see note 6 above.

¹⁶ For orientation see Riché 1985. On proverb collections and/or memorization by recitation, see also Bonner 1977:172-77; Bowen 1972-81:ii, 68-72, 163-65; Comparetti 1966:53-55; Courtenay 1987:15-20; Curtius 1953:57-61; Davies 1974:73-80; Gehl 1993:93-96; Hamesse 1990; W. Harris 1989:30-36; Jaeger 1994:21-23; Kintgen 1996:18-57; Leclercq 1982:168-70; MacKinnon 1969; Marrou 1956:150-54, 165-66; Minnis 1988:9-12; Orme 1973:59-141 and 1989:82-85, 221-42; Pfeiffer 1968:83-84; Reynolds 1996:7-16, 137-44; Riché 1976:458-76; Sebastian 1970:207-9; and B. Taylor 1992. Also, two direct descriptions of late-medieval classroom practices are indirectly relevant. In *De ordine docendi et studendi* (1459) Battista Guarino describes memorization by recitation in classrooms postdating Chaucer (Woodward 1964:161-78), and in *De recuperatione Terre Sancte* (1306) Pierre Dubois describes the same for ideal schooling, presumably related to actual fourteenth-century practice (Dubois 1956:125-39).

to which education has precisely meant second-language acquisition.¹⁷ Medievalists observe that this tale and its analogues often appear in pedagogically oriented manuscript anthologies; one such *Tale of Melibee*, uncredited, is entitled *Prouerbis*.¹⁸ Another literary approach shows that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers continued to value the whole of Chaucer's writings as a repository of proverbs.¹⁹ Philologists explore such fundamental concepts as *sententia*, *lectura*, *compilatio*, and *auctoritas*.²⁰ Psycholinguists experiment with comprehension and retention of longer or shorter verbal units, noting distinctions for input that is only oral, only visual, or combined oral and visual.

More specifically, neuropsychologists have discovered that the human brain, in sending sensory data to appropriate cells for interpretation, incorporates outside stimuli at intervals of three seconds. In a related clinical test, proving why poetry is easier to memorize than prose, researchers read verse aloud in many ancient and modern languages. They found that whatever sound pattern demarcates a poetic line, be it meter or rhyme or pitch shifts or puns, that pattern always recurs at an interval of two to four seconds, often exactly three seconds.²¹ Folklorists' research shows that, in every documented language and culture, proverbs likewise occur in temporal units close to the three-second size that is most efficient for brain processing and thereby for verbatim memorization. Finally, an overview finds proverb collections among the earliest records of every world culture

¹⁷ See Bassnett-McGuire 1980 for an overview. For representative case studies in this expanding field, see Beer 1989 and 1997, Beer and Lloyd-Jones 1995, Copeland 1991, Machan 1985, Morse 1991, Workman 1972, and the journal *Translation and Literature* (1993-).

¹⁸ See Astell 1996:188-90, Ferster 1996, K. Harris 1998, Lerer 1993, Patterson 1989, Scanlon 1994, and Silvia 1974.

¹⁹ Bowden 1995; also see Bowden 1992 on eighteenth-century attention to Chaucer's proverbs.

²⁰ "Sentence," "reading," "compilation," and "authority." See Hunt 1991, Maieru 1994:16-25, Parkes 1976, and Weijers 1987, 1990, 1991, and 1992.

²¹ Turner and Pöppel 1983. To a surprising extent, scientists investigating memory continue to cite the pioneering research of Bartlett 1932 and Vygotsky 1986 (orig. 1934). Ongoing psycholinguistic and neuropsychological studies may be exemplified by Baddeley 1990, Begg 1971, Conrad 1972, Fillenbaum 1973, Honeck 1997, Nickerson 1981, and Scribner and Cole 1981. On different literary issues that also involve cognitive psychology, see Pasnau 1997 and Spolsky 1993.

that had acquired literacy by 1200 CE: Egyptian, Sumerian, Chinese, Indian, and so on.²²

In Chaucer's day, two millennia after literacy had emerged in Europe, prototypes for his Canterbury-bound Clerk were still relying upon their ears and their voices to "gladly . . . lerne and gladly teche." (So do we all.) Likewise, before and after the late fourteenth century, across the former Roman Empire and beyond, most pedagogy was intended to expand a student's vocal/aural memory for Latin. Even sight-reading, a parallel skill, used to be taught with far more mnemonic emphasis than is usual nowadays.²³

Controlled psycholinguistic experiments relating voice to ear imply a hierarchy of mnemonic effectiveness. One memorizes unseen words most readily by singing them in unison with other voices, then (in approximately descending order) by speaking poetry in unison, by speaking prose in unison, by solo singing, by individual recitation of poetry and then of prose, by hearing words sung, by hearing metrical words spoken, and by hearing prose.²⁴

Experience, not psycholinguistic authority, had established standard curricular steps in medieval European classrooms. The youngest children learning Latin would sing the Psalms in unison, and would recite the two-part *Distichs of Cato*: the prose *Parvus Cato*, a randomly ordered list of two- to five-word imperative sentences; and the metrical *Magnus Cato*, a randomly ordered list of self-contained distichs (two-line verse units). From *Parvus Cato* preadolescents progressed to longer lists of discrete prose sentences; a widely used one was credited to Seneca, or later to Publilius Syrus. From *Magnus Cato* students progressed to short then to longer continuous works in distichs, such as the fables of Avianus and Ovid's

²² See Bowden 1996. On folkloristic attention to proverbs, see note 13 above.

²³ *General Prologue*, l. 308. As a humanist lacking the wherewithal to conduct scientific experiments, I can but remark on the apparent coincidence by which the abrupt abandonment of unison recitation in elementary education—on the supposition that required memorization might hamper "creativity"—has occurred simultaneously in time and in place (that is, U.S. public schools) with the abrupt skyrocketing of "attention deficit disorder," "hyperactivity," "obsessive-compulsive syndrome," and other conditions now being covered up—never cured—by feeding psychotropic drugs to little children.

²⁴ See Serafine 1989; Rubin 1995:65-89, 287-90; and works cited in note 21 above.

amatory poetry.²⁵ By reciting aloud in unison, schoolboys also internalized grammatical rules to be applied orally to those works in distichs and thereafter in harder-to-memorize continuous hexameters.

Exercise builds brain cells, just as it does muscle cells. The more one memorizes, especially in youth, the easier it becomes to memorize more. An intelligent, conscientious medieval European adolescent was able to keep on expanding his ability to memorize verse—that is, his ability based in *Magnus Cato*—until he was able to recite the *Aeneid* and other epic-length narrative hexameter poems. In parallel classroom activities, he would expand his ability based in *Parvus Cato* to memorize larger and larger collections of proverbial sentences, often but not always in the imperative voice, each one comparable in length to a poetic line but metrical only by chance.

No medieval text recommends rote memorization of proverbs on the grounds that neurological data enter human brain synapses at three-second intervals. However, pre-modern writers commonly note that two characteristics of the proverb, its brevity and its memorability, make it effective for educational purposes. Quintilian, the major classical source for medieval pedagogy, recommends “quod vulgo sententias vocamus” because “feriunt animum et uno ictu frequenter impellunt et ipsa brevitare magis haerent” (“what we commonly call *sententias*. . . . strike the mind and often produce a decisive effect by one single blow, while their very brevity makes them cling to the memory”). Isidore of Seville and other medieval authorities reiterate Quintilian’s point about the usefulness of proverbs.²⁶

²⁵ Texts and translations of the works attributed to Cato, Publilius Syrus, and Avianus, along with other schooltexts, are published by Loeb Classical Library in Duff and Duff 1935. For translations (only) and background on several, see Thomson and Perraud 1990. Erasmus helped transfer attribution from Seneca to Publilius Syrus, according to Duff and Duff 1935:3-9. On Avianus see also Wheatley 2000. On Cato see also Bowden 2000a and 2000b. For bibliography and the implications of schoolboys’ memorization of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*, see Bowden 1997.

²⁶ Quintilian 1920-22:iv, 476-77 (book 12, chapter 10, line 48), second clause trans. by H. E. Butler, who footnotes the impossibility of translating the “ever-recurring technical term” *sententia*. Although Poggio Bracciolini dramatically announced his discovery in 1415 of a complete text at St. Gall, Quintilian’s ideas were known throughout the Middle Ages in fragmentary manuscripts, in related treatises such as *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (misattributed to Cicero), and in oral (that is, classroom) tradition. References to proverbs’ functions by Isidore of Seville, Matthew of Vendôme, and others are documented in B. Taylor 1992:19-22; references by Othlonus of Saint-Emmeram and others in Schulze-Busacker 2000. Besides Erasmus (see note 12 above), potentially applicable post-Chaucerian educators include Vittorino da Feltre and others in

Mnemonic utility is implied also by comments on proverbs in sermon materials (e.g., *Fasciculus morum*) and in rhetorical treatises (e.g., those by John of Garland and Ramon Llull), and by descriptive accounts of recollection (e.g., those by Augustine of Hippo and Hugh of Saint-Victor).²⁷

Most directly, brevity and memorability are often specified in the prologues to and commentary upon the late medieval Latin proverb collections studied by Jacqueline Hamesse. She concludes that key terms such as *memoria* (“memory”), *utilitas* (“utility”), and *brevis* (“brief”) recur in patterns indicating that scholars normally memorized the collections full-length, so that they could employ the contents at any time in their classes, sermons, or writings.

Hamesse’s philological evidence enriches a reconsideration of the fictional storytelling event that features Chaucer-the-pilgrim. As usual in tale links, the Host takes center stage in the prologues and epilogues to the tales of Sir Thopas and Melibee. Harry Bailly likes to draw attention to the pilgrims’ respective levels of education. Elsewhere he uses medical jargon to address the Physician, for example, and legalese for the Man of Law. At this point in the tale-telling event, the *Prioress’s Tale* has left listeners too “sobre” for Harry Bailly’s taste. Hoping for “a tale of myrthe,” he calls upon a shy, chubby, pleasant-faced fellow of unascertained educational accomplishments. Soon, insulted, the Host interrupts Chaucer-the-pilgrim’s *Tale of Sir Thopas* in order to decry its “rym dogerel” that represents “verray lewednesse,” that is, its metrically simplistic verse suitable for very young children or for uneducated adults less discriminating than himself. Begging his pardon, Chaucer-the-pilgrim presents instead the *Tale of Melibee*. At its conclusion the Host, bursting with delight, displays his ability to derive instruction from the proverb-collection format associated with Latin schooling. He is even able to articulate his own perception of the tale’s

Woodward 1964; and Agricola 1992, discussed by Crane 1993:17-25. On analogous educational practices outside of European tradition, representative studies include Eickelman 1978 and Gutas 1981.

²⁷ On sermon materials see Wenzel 1978 and 1986, both indexes s.v. “proverbs,” and Bland 1997. Representative rhetorical treatises are John of Garland 1974, index s.v. “proverb,” and Llull 1994:27-31. The wide-ranging pedagogical writings by Augustine of Hippo and Hugh of Saint-Victor are documented and discussed throughout Carruthers 1990. Also see McMahon 1963 and Stock 1996:212-26, 261-73.

overall moral, which he thereupon applies to the belligerence of his own big-armed wife.²⁸

By placing the childish, versified *Tale of Sir Thopas* alongside a framed proverb collection, Chaucer-the-author has set up a vernacular mirror to the structure of the Latin *Distichs of Cato*. Manuscript order implies that schoolchildren learned to recite the brief prose items of *Parvus Cato* prior to the two-line verses of *Magnus Cato*. (In actual schoolrooms, learning processes overlapped; younger boys repeatedly listened to more advanced recitations before vocalizing them.) Although the Host does not realize it, the two sections of the most basic Latin schooltext are being reversed and readjusted to suit his level of education and his self-esteem. Chaucer-the-pilgrim's initial offering inflicts upon the ears a verseform with phonemic and stress patterns so repetitive that *Tale of Sir Thopas*, like nursery rhymes, almost compels memorization.²⁹ Apologetic then, for having misestimated his Host's capabilities, the narrator turns from that undersophisticated evocation of the metrical *Magnus Cato* to an elaborated rendition in the format of *Parvus Cato*. Chaucer-the-pilgrim's second affable attempt to please and to teach, *dulcere et docere*, hits right on the proverbial target.

Further implications of the two tales' juxtaposition will soon be clarified by research in progress on the marginal glosses and markings in manuscripts of *Canterbury Tales*. The pioneering variorum editors John M. Manly and Edith Rickert (1940) copied only those glosses that "seem[ed] important" for the purpose of establishing textual evolution, and therefore few from copies of *Melibee*. The same manuscripts' marginalia, now being documented by scholars including Stephen Partridge and Joel Fredell, will illuminate to what extent near-contemporary scribes shared later readers' avid attention to Chaucer's proverbs. How typical is John Lydgate's praise of his colleague's "many prouerbe diuers and vnkouth," or William Caxton's appreciation for the "short quyck and hye sentences" in the *Canterbury Tales*?³⁰ In the samples provided by Manly and Rickert, margins often

²⁸ *CT* VII 691-711, 919-35, 1889-1923; also *Physician's Tale* ll. 304-17 and *Man of Law's Tale* ll. 33-38.

²⁹ See Gaylord 1979 on the verse form of *Thopas*. See Quinn and Hall 1982 on mnemonics for Middle English verse forms resembling it. See Burling 1970:137-46 on similar verse forms in nursery rhymes and also in children's poems in Chinese and Sumatran vernaculars, with broader implications.

³⁰ Manly and Rickert 1940:iii, 483, 524-25; iv, 148-215; Lydgate, prologue to the *Siege of Thebes* (c. 1422), and Caxton, preface to the *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1483), both here quoted from Spurgeon 1960:i, 28, 62.

contain Latin equivalents of the Middle English text's proverbs. Frequent also are phrases like "nota prouerbium" or "a prouerbe," and graphic marks including hands—the prototypes for all those disembodied hands that point to proverbs from the margins of seventeenth-century Chaucer folios, as requested by late sixteenth-century readers.³¹

Pending further studies on manuscript and readership contexts, re-examination of the Middle English text itself can bring us one step closer to re-establishing late fourteenth-century perception of the *Tale of Melibee* and, through it, the irrepressible Wife of Bath. The remainder of this article will document the tale's three labeling terms for memorable statements—"sentence," "sawe," and "proverbe"—with reference to the expressions at parallel positions in Chaucer-the-author's direct French source, the *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence* by Renaud of Louens (1958), and in Renaud's Latin source, the *Liber consolationis et consilii* by Albertanus of Brescia ("Book of Consolation and Advice," 1873).

That Latin ancestor of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* clarifies its relationship to educational media. Albertanus of Brescia, for his three adult sons, compiled three proverb collections with three different organizational schemata. For his son Vincentius in 1238 he compiled *De amore . . . et de forma vite* ("About love . . . and about the form of life"). This collection resembles many others, including theological ones, that assemble proverbs according to topic: a group entitled "De fortuna" ("About fortune"), a group "De timore" ("About fear"), and so on.³² For his son Stephanus in 1245 Albertanus compiled *De doctrina dicendi et tacendi* ("About the knowledge of speaking and remaining silent"). Adapting the "type A" *accessus* formula or its rhetorical prototype, he arranged proverbs into six subdivided chapters demonstrating *quis, quid, cui, cur, quomodo*, and *quando*.³³

³¹ Manly and Rickert 1940:iii, 483-527. On Thomas Speght's insertion of pointing hands into the margins of his second edition (1602), in response to requests concerning his first edition (1598), see Bowden 1995:314-15, 320-21. On the convention itself see Hunter 1951. An analogous phenomenon is noted by Wenzel 1978:87-90: for sermon auditors, various Middle English proverbs might replace a given Latin proverb.

³² Albertanus 1980. On the context and contents (but not the format) of Albertanus's works, see Powell 1992. The author's name appears also as Albertano da Brescia and, due to library data-entry clerks oblivious to Latin inflections, Albertani Brixiensis (sometimes as if part of a work's title).

³³ Albertanus 1884, using the title preferred by Powell 1992. On types of *accessus*, see Minnis and Scott 1988:12-15.

For his youngest son Joannes one year later, Albertanus experimented with even more innovative organization. The *Liber consolationis et consilii* embeds its list of proverbs in a gender-specific debate. The format echoes the verbal triumph of a female Judeo-Christian Alithia (Truth) over a male Greco-Roman Pseustis (Deceit) that takes place in a widely used medieval schooltext modeled on Virgil's eclogues, the *Eclogue of Theodulus*. In Albertanus's *Liber consolationis et consilii* the male disputant's name Melibeus has associations with Virgil's first *Eclogue*. The female vanquisher's name, Prudentia, is one of the four cardinal virtues that Christian teachers applied to the four books of the pre-Christian *Distichs of Cato*.³⁴

Albertanus's debate between Melibeus and Prudentia is divided into fifty-one chapters of uneven length. Each has a summarizing or topical title: "De necessitate" ("About necessity"), "De improperio mulierum" ("About women's improper behavior"), "De excusatione mulierum" ("In defense of women"), "De bona fama" ("About good fame"), and so on. Nearly every chapter provides more proverbs on its stated topic, including variants of some, than does the equivalent section left untitled in French or Middle English. Thus, like the two treatises for Joannes's older brothers, the *Liber consolationis et consilii* exemplifies a thoughtfully ordered collection of proverbs. Just as in other such collections, it provides mnemonic links to the items' occurrence in authoritative sources such as the Bible, Ovid, Cicero, Seneca, and anonymous oral tradition.

Did the frame story of Albertanus's third proverb collection enhance its educational effectiveness? Do proverbs exchanged in a husband-wife debate adhere faster to a thinker's mind than do proverbs listed in the two usual ways, by topic or at random, or listed in alphabetical order like those of Publilius Syrus? This issue could be investigated possibly by psycholinguistic experiments, but assuredly by more medievalists' primary research into the pragmatics of pre-modern education. It is known that the innovative format well outlasted its counterparts. Although Albertanus's other writings soon faded, "as the author of the Tale of Melibeus . . . he would continue to exercise influence well into the sixteenth century" in

³⁴ Albertanus 1873. On the *Eclogue of Theodulus* see Thomson and Perraud 1990:110-26. Concerning Melibeus's name, Powell 1992:78-79 posits as intermediary Godfrey of Winchester. Concerning Prudentia, see Bowden 2000b and Hazelton 1957:167n.

printed editions and in translation into Italian, German, Dutch, Spanish, Czech, French, and thereupon Middle English.³⁵

Some of those vernacular translations today remain in manuscript, and the *Liber consolationis et consilii* itself deserves re-editing. We must not leap to philological conclusions about access to Latin learning by speakers of other medieval vernaculars merely on the grounds that the *Tale of Melibee* employs the Middle English cognate to the Latin term *sententia* both for specific words quoted and also for an expandable set of authoritative interpretations of those words, whereas the Middle English cognate to *proverbium* is used only to label the succinct, memorable words themselves, whether as separate quotations or as a cover term. Other languages' cognates may or may not make like distinctions. It is even possible that an exhaustive search through Middle English would show Chaucer's usage in this one tale to be idiosyncratic. Another open-ended issue looms insofar as Chaucer's other writings employ "byword," "precept," "word," and other terms besides the three to be investigated within the *Tale of Melibee*. Within this article, therefore, carefully limited philological data will serve but as humble handmaidens to the creative genius of The Parent of English Literature.

Among the three terms, "sawe" early entered Middle English from Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon; it appears, for example, in Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1200). Both "proverbe" and "sentence" came to Middle English from Latin via French, resounding with authoritative echoes from the biblical book of Proverbs (and similar non-canonical collections) and from the *Four Books of Sentences* wherewith Peter Lombard crystallized for university use the tradition of compiling proverbial sentences from Christian sources.³⁶

Within the *Tale of Melibee*, it is essential to note, by far the majority of statements quoted are labeled as neither "sawe" nor "proverbe" nor "sentence." Many are said by generic authorities: by men or by laws; by a philosopher or a versifier; by the law, the book, the poet, the prophet, the apostle, the wise man. Most statements overall, however, are introduced by

³⁵ Powell 1992:121-27 (quoted from 125).

³⁶ Davis 1979 and Kurath 1956-, in both s.v. *byword, precept, proverb, saw, sentence, and word*; also see Louis 1997 on *proverb*. On the two religious contexts see, respectively, Fontaine 1982 and Colish 1994:i, 42-43, 77-90.

the reliable mnemonic device of direct attribution, accurate or no, to a named authority figure.³⁷

Occasionally, one of the three labeling terms plus an authority's proper name together introduce a quotation. Within the tale, "sentence" appears in a range of usages to be described. One of its occurrences refers to a statement also being attributed to a named authority: the "sentence of Ovide" in Prudence's opening comments. In *Melibee* the term "sawe" occurs three times. Twice it accompanies a named attribution to Christian scriptures—quoting David and Paul respectively, and thus the Old and New Testaments. The other instance is instead an anonymous "comune sawe."³⁸

By contrast, of the seven occurrences of "proverbe" labeling eight statements, none is conjoined with an authority's proper name in the *Tale of Melibee*. Anonymous origins are likewise implied by the noun's attributive adjectives, which modify it thrice as a "commune" and once as an "old" proverb. Philological complications arise in that the prologue to *Melibee* uses "proverbe" not just for the eight items so labeled but also as cover term for all statements to follow: this "litel tretys" comprehends "somwhat moore / Of proverbes than ye han herd bifoore."³⁹ The current folkloristic definition, therefore, may be adapted to apply to earlier contexts. A Middle English "proverbe" did tilt philologically toward indeterminacy of origin—as wise words transmitted in "commune," "old" oral tradition, indeed, but also as a generic term for authoritative statements from named and anonymous sources alike, including the biblical book of Proverbs.

Compared to "sawe," which likewise could be "commune," "proverbe" entered Middle English closer to Chaucer's time. So did "sentence," bearing a host of meanings related to *sententia* (and not yet including the grammatical unit with subject and predicate, first recorded in 1447).⁴⁰ In classical Latin *sententia* meant an opinion or a way of thinking, especially one backed by judicial or legislative authority. By extension, it could also mean both a thought succinctly expressed in words and also the

³⁷ William of Wheteley, for example, notes that "statements of 'authentic' men are more diligently and firmly inscribed in the mind of the hearer" (trans. by Sebastian 1970:300).

³⁸ CT VII 976, 1735, 1840, 1481.

³⁹ CT VII 955-57. See below, notes 60-65, for the term's seven occurrences within the tale.

⁴⁰ Simpson and Weiner 1989, s.v. *sentence*.

implications behind a given set of literal words. For Great Britain, late medieval Latin documents add a usage associated with university degrees in theology, and make more specific the application of *sententia* to a judge's courtroom decision.⁴¹ On the Continent as well as in England, late medieval scholars continued also to employ *sententia* in classically based, overlapping uses involving truth and/or authority and/or exact words and/or some deeper meaning beneath a specified set of words.⁴²

Some well-documented medieval meanings of *sententia* may even appear mutually exclusive: most obviously, the quoted words themselves versus an allegorical interpretation of such words. As will be noted further, this anomaly signals an issue in pre-modern education that has lately been relegated to "Folklore" as an artificially separated academic discipline: the issue of variants created, intentionally or no, during the oral transmission of a given item of verbal art.⁴³ Several *sententiae* differently worded, that is, may express much the same underlying *sententia*. Conversely, an exactly quoted *sententia* may be assigned somewhat different *sententiae* by several equally authoritative interpreters. In short, what is truth? How do we recognize truth in, or in spite of, variable human language? And for that matter (pun intended) who knows?

The Middle English term "sentence" bore interlocking meanings quite as complex as those of its Latin cognate. Within the *Tale of Melibee* Chaucer-the-author employs an entire spectrum of usage for "sentence." Moreover, he leads into the tale by placing both extremes close together. As mentioned, the "sentence of Ovide" quotes the exact words of a pre-

⁴¹ See under *sententia* and its derivatives in Du Cange 1954, Latham 1965, Lewis and Short 1966, and Souter 1949. Although university curricula changed across time, one advanced degree was the "baccalaureus sententiarius," which seems to have proven a holder's ability to lecture spontaneously upon any assigned *sententia* among those collected by Peter Lombard. See Colish 1994 and Maieru 1994.

⁴² See Weijers 1991:87-88 and Woods 1992. The range of usage may be exemplified by the translations that *sententia* necessitates in an anthology of medieval commentaries. In excerpts provided, an introduction to *Eclogue of Theodulus* uses *sententia* in the sense "profound saying"; Conrad of Hirsau uses it as "idea," Peter Abelard as "opinion," Hugh of Saint-Victor as the "deeper meaning" beneath the two layers of letter and sense in a text, William of Conches as the "profound meaning" beneath the text's letter (that is, just one layer down) but elsewhere as a "fully expressed thought," and so on. See Minnis and Scott 1988:18, 55, 95, 83, 83n., 131.

⁴³ See Bowden 1995:310-11 concerning the mid-1950s split of Folklore and English into separate academic disciplines.

Christian authority. Just thirty lines earlier, in striking contrast, Chaucer's verse prologue states three times that a true, unified "sentence" underlies the four Evangelists' divergent verbal accounts of the Crucifixion.⁴⁴ Sacred versus secular connotations reinforce the dichotomy established between the Bible's deeper meaning, diversely worded, and Ovid's literal words, exactly quoted. In between these two contrasting usages, Chaucer further shifts the kaleidoscopic term in order to describe his own work as a humble human wordsmith. Don't blame me for translating sense for sense rather than word for word, he urges, because my own "sentence" preserves the "sentence" of the treatise that is my source text (*CT* VII 961-64):

Blameth me nat; for, as in my sentence,
Shul ye nowher fynden difference
Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte [little]
After the which this murye tale I write.

The humility topos helps to convey the author's teasing wordplay on a term that may refer to truth and/or authority and/or exact words and/or some deeper meaning beneath a given set of words, whether sacred or secular. Furthermore, "in my sentence" does refer to the meaning of the narrator's impending tale. At the enjambed line's end, however, the phrase momentarily implies a formal judicial ruling, like the courtroom "sentence and judgement" to be delivered by the magistrate Melibee only after he acquiesces to his wife's better judgment.⁴⁵

Following the verse prologue to the *Tale of Melibee*, mutations of the term "sentence" may be traced via comparison to Chaucer's source text, the mid-fourteenth-century *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence*. Through 1179 lines of French prose, condensed by about one-third from the Latin of Albertanus of Brescia, Renaud of Louens uses "sentence" less frequently than does Chaucer, and in only three senses: secular quotation, human advice, and formal judicial ruling.

Concerning the respective word choices by Chaucer and Renaud, a point of contrast appears soon after the tale's brief but action-packed opening scene. Within the first seventy-five lines, besides quoting Ovid, Chaucer uses "sentence" to label three instances of advice: twice for valid advice from calm, experienced counselors, and a third time for the revenge-

⁴⁴ *CT* VII 976, 943-52; Davis 1979 and Kurath 1956-, in both s.v. *sentence*.

⁴⁵ See above, note 17, regarding translation terminology such as "source text" and the distinction "sense-for-sense" versus "word-for-word."

happy youngsters' shouts of "Werre! Werre!" that temporarily convince Melibee. At parallel positions Albertanus of Brescia has "consilium," then the verb "consulimus," then again "consilium." Renaud renders the first two instances with "conseil" and "conseillons," applying "sentence" to the bad advice only.⁴⁶ Chaucer's use of "sentence" all three times, for good and bad advice alike, implies that contradictory "sentences" may sound equally authoritative on the surface, and that an educated person ought to make interpretive decisions more thoughtfully than Melibee does.

The next five times that "sentence" occurs in the *Tale of Melibee*, Chaucer has added it to the French text. The word's meaning continues to fluctuate in significant ways. First, responding to Prudence's dismay, Chaucer's Melibee agrees not to wreak the immediate revenge urged by young rowdies. He quotes a "proverbe," to be discussed, that justifies changing his mind. To Melibee's "sentence" thus expressed—that is, to his stated judgment based on that proverb and on her many citations of named authority—Prudence responds with joy. No labels at all occur for the equivalent statements in French or Latin.⁴⁷

Next, the French wife asks how ("comment" with no noun) her husband understands the physicians' "proposicion" ("qualiter intelligas verbum dubium" in Latin). Chaucer's Prudence terms the physicians' oral advice a "text," then inquires about her husband's "sentence," that is, his interpretation of the deeper meaning beneath the literal words spoken by knowledgeable physicians.⁴⁸

Melibee says what he thinks. Prudence disproves his explication with reference to eleven statements by secular and religious authorities. In the process, as the third occurrence of Middle English "sentence" with no parallel French (or Latin) noun, she states the general truth that Christ's counsel is best. "To this sentence," she continues, "accordeth the prophete David, that seith, 'If God ne kepe. . .'" Here "sentence" refers not to the subsequent quotation but rather to a major religious belief that is stated in certain words by "David" but also in other words by other authorities. This usage echoes the one reiterated in the prologue, of the unified sacred "sentence" described four ways in four Gospels.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ CT VII 1002, 1026, 1050; Renaud ll. 64, 100, 148; Albertanus 1873:6.10 (page 6, line 10), 8.13, 11.12, hereafter cited as "Albertanus" with page and line numbers.

⁴⁷ CT VII 1264-65, Renaud line [hereafter understood] 475, Albertanus 66.13.

⁴⁸ CT VII 1278, Renaud 487-89, Albertanus 67.18.

⁴⁹ CT VII 1303-4, Renaud 515, Albertanus 69.14; cf. CT VII 943-52.

Melibee cowers, perhaps, while Prudence briskly proceeds to her “seconde point” concerning household security measures. She wants to “knowe how that ye understonde thilke wordes [by other counselors] and what is youre sentence.” Except that the physicians’ “text” is replaced by these counselors’ “wordes,” the two passages are parallel. Having evoked a major Christian truth thirty lines earlier, that is, “sentence” reverts to label Melibee’s interpretive judgment, which again will prove downright injudicious. The French and Latin wives use no nouns to ask how, “comment” and “quomodo,” their respective husbands understand the counsellors’ advice.⁵⁰

Three lines later, Melibee’s overwrought fortification plan is termed an ill-considered “sentence,” yet another misguided interpretation, which Prudence again proceeds to demolish with full assistance from an array of named authority figures. Again the French and Latin wives just reply, accompanied by no nouns.⁵¹

In summary, within four hundred lines Chaucer uses “sentence” ten times—five in the prologue, five in the tale—where Renaud has no equivalent term at all. At two additional points, Chaucer changes good counsel in Renaud’s text to good “sentence.” He and Renaud both use “sentence” for the bad advice from belligerent young people, and both use it for the first Ovidian citation (“verbo Ovidii” in Latin).⁵² Through the rest of his *Tale of Melibee*, Chaucer follows Renaud. The term thereafter applies only to judicial “sentences” thrice proposed by the same Melibee whose interpretative “sentences” have been decisively overruled as such by only the Middle English Prudence, not by her French and Latin foremothers.

Among these three references to Judge Melibee’s professional sentencing responsibilities, the final one would seem to record female vocal tones that differ across the three languages. In Latin, using a singular noun for this one instance of bad judgment still open to remedy, Albertanus’s Prudentia informs her husband that he ought to “ab hoc malo praecepto desistas.” In contrast, the Frenchwoman employs a mellifluous verb and a culturally laden adverb to beg sweetly that her man “sentencier plus courtoisement.” Chaucer first translates word-for-word, “ye moste deemen moore curteisly”; after “this is to seyn,” he reiterates using plural nouns.

⁵⁰ *CT* VII 1331-32, Renaud 550, Albertanus 72.9.

⁵¹ *CT* VII 1335, Renaud 556, Albertanus 72.15.

⁵² *CT* VII 976, Renaud 22, Albertanus 2.17. For the other occurrences see notes 44-51 above.

Thus a thoughtful schoolmarm urges that, as a general principle, Melibee “yeven moore esy sentences and juggementz.”⁵³ Presumably as happenstance, not as jocular irony, here in its final appearance the multi-faceted, labyrinthian word “sentence” is termed “esy.”

Of the other two labels for memorable statements in the *Tale of Melibee*, “sawe” hints at a range of meanings resembling that of “sentence,” whereas “proverbe” does not. The Germanic-based “sawe” replaces three verb phrases, not nouns, in Renaud’s work: “ce que dit” two biblical authorities, and “que l’on dit communément.” Chaucer uses “comune sawe” for the latter phrase, retaining its anonymity. Up north, Chaucer and Renaud heard commonly said a statement attributed elsewhere to Seneca. Albertanus of Brescia introduces the same with “scriptum est,” though giving no writer’s name.⁵⁴ Possibly the idea here expressed—that it is foolish to fight anyone at all, regardless of physique—retained a sense of authorship longer in Seneca’s homeland.

Albertanus does not, however, elsewhere make attributions more precise than those of his subsequent translators. In another instance behind a Middle English “sawe,” Albertanus surely knew the textual source for a statement that he introduces with a doubly passive verb phrase. Avarice “consuevit ‘radix omnium malorum’ nuncupari,” “is customarily called the ‘root of all evils’ in public.” Renaud names the biblical source: “selon ce que dit l’apostre.” Chaucer replaces Renaud’s phrase with three prepositional phrases: “for after the sawe of the word of the Apostle, ‘Coveitise is roote of alle harmes’.” Resembling one occurrence of “sentence” within the *Tale of Melibee*, here “sawe” refers to an authoritative meaning beneath the set of literal words being quoted.⁵⁵

Regarding this usage and others, “proverbe” differs from both “sentence” and “sawe.” In the *Tale of Melibee* “proverbe” always refers to literal words themselves, never to any underlying meanings. Also, as noted, “proverbe” never occurs along with a proper name; and in the prologue

⁵³ *CT* VII 1855-56, Renaud 1155-56, Albertanus 122.27-28. For the other two occurrences of judicial sentences, see *CT* VII 1830, Renaud 1128, Albertanus 118.24-25; and *CT* VII 1836, Renaud 1135, Albertanus 119.22-23.

⁵⁴ *CT* VII 1481, Renaud 740, Albertanus 92.27. For Seneca and other sources, see DeLong 1987.

⁵⁵ *CT* VII 1840, Renaud 1139, Albertanus 120.2-3; cf. *CT* VII 1303-4. Albertanus credits and explicates the biblical sentence elsewhere, e.g., in his chapter “De cupiditate seu voluptate vitanda in consiliis,” 35.4-39.4. The third occurrence of “sawe” is *CT* VII 1735, Renaud 1034, Albertanus 113.26.

“proverbes” serves as cover term for all of the memorable statements to follow, conveying authority both named and unnamed.

Furthermore, an intriguing dimension of the word’s usage would require research well beyond the scope of this article. Is it by chance that every “proverbe” so labeled in *Melibee*, save one, has a counterpart documented across time and recognizable today? During six centuries each proverb’s exact words have changed at the same rate as has the English language, while the underlying sense has remained stable. Unfortunately, despite the Pearl-maiden’s remark “the mo the myryer,” few present-day literary scholars are doing primary research on the diachronic tenacity of traditional, authoritative, succinct oral statements worthy of remembrance.⁵⁶

Four of the eight “proverbes” in the *Tale of Melibee* are variants of one that, less diversified nowadays, survives as “haste makes waste.”⁵⁷ Instead of four variants at the equivalent four places, Renaud’s treatise has a duplicate placed twice, and elsewhere nothing. Usually, that is, Chaucer follows his source text closely. Here, instead, he has inserted a passage as vehicle for two additional alternative wordings of “haste makes waste.”

By adding variants in this one case, Chaucer is reamplifying a feature of Albertanus’s work that Renaud had condensed. At positions parallel to two of Chaucer’s four variant proverbs, Renaud exactly repeats “qui tost juge tost se repent,” introduced at both points with “[l’]on dit comunément.” At both of these places, plus many others that expand the Latin treatise’s size and complexity, Albertanus was providing his son Joannes with numerous proverbs on each topic (here on over-hasty judgment), including variant wordings that all convey basically the same underlying sense. At one place, for example, Renaud has substituted a

⁵⁶ Andrew and Waldron 1979:94, for *Pearl* line 850. As mentioned above (note 13), Wolfgang Mieder keeps documenting essentially all proverb scholarship in all major European languages and many others.

⁵⁷ See Bowden 1995:317-20 on diachronic classification of proverbs and identification of variants. Methods of classification vary. Walther 1963-69 depends on key words that may, however, fluctuate. Wilson 1970 provides useful cross-references among key words, but no codes. The code system developed by Tilley 1950, and adopted by Dent 1981 and 1984, unfortunately is not aligned with the one developed by Whiting 1958, who covers late medieval writings, including Chaucer’s. For example, “Haste makes waste” is code H189 in Tilley 1950 but H162 in Whiting 1958, which also separates H171 (“He hastes well that wisely can abide”) from H166 (“In wicked haste is no profit [speed]”) with reference to line 1054 of the *Tale of Melibee*. Here I document each proverb as both “Tilley” and “Whiting” with their respective codes, on the understanding that Tilley’s system has prevailed overall.

single vernacular proverb for the seven Latin ones that constitute Albertanus's entire chapter "De festinantia vitanda in consiliis."⁵⁸

Albertanus's *Liber consolationis et consilii*, that is, normally groups many differing *sententiae* "literal words quoted," each of which conveys much the same *sententia* "underlying meaning." Educated readers of or listeners to a vernacular proverb collection—Renaud's, Chaucer's, or another translator's—were able to use each vernacular statement to search their brains for a range of Latin equivalents, including but not limited to those listed by Albertanus.

Pedagogical practices had further trained users to recall and (if need be) to reconstruct aloud the relevant sections of the Latin texts that contained each proverb recalled. In addition, a thinker might wish to recollect various vernacular texts and oral contexts for each translingual proverb. In a classroom or another situation, he thus might relate his and his students' everyday unofficial culture to the broader human history and geography represented by Latin *auctoritates*.⁵⁹ I hope that future research—philological, folkloristic, literary, sociolinguistic, sociohistorical—will come to clarify these and other means by which a Middle English "proverbe" both could refer to traditional wisdom of anonymous masses and also could function as a generic term encompassing the highest secular and religious authorities.

Meanwhile, the *Tale of Melibee* can demonstrate to what extent Chaucer-the-author's attention to "proverbes" has reinforced the verbal triumph of a Christian-named woman over a Greco-Roman-named man (as in the *Eclogue of Theodulus*). While translating Rouen's work, Chaucer has introduced a narrative progression such that proverbial wisdom passes from local male authorities to Prudence. It passes thereafter to her husband, but only after he concedes the superiority of her argument.

To create this effect, whereby a proto-Alisounian Prudence uses proverbs to educate Melibee, Chaucer has added to his source four of the seven occurrences of "proverbe" (referring to eight items). At parallel places Renaud has either no introduction or else the verb phrase "[l']on dit comunément," rendering Albertanus's "dici consuevit" or "semper audivi

⁵⁸ Renaud 106-7, Albertanus 8.20-9.1; Renaud 286-87, Albertanus 39.5-25.

⁵⁹ See Blonquist 1987 for a valuable, neglected document: a thirteenth-century French translation of and commentary upon Ovid's mock-didactic *Ars amatoria*. Apparently preserving information provided by a schoolmaster, whether typical or atypical, this work explicates Ovid's text by quoting 84 French proverbs, 14 Latin proverbs, and excerpts from 68 French folksongs each carefully distinguished (with but one exception) as either a men's song or a women's song.

dici.” As will be noted, Albertanus does apply *proverbium* to one of the eight items.

Only in Middle English, however, is a “commune proverbe” first quoted by a respectable lawyer advising calm deliberation. Soon thereafter a wise old man, having been likewise shouted down by war-mongering youths, offers a different “commune proverbe” to prove his point that “good conseil wanteth whan it is moost nede.” The old man’s “proverbe” is the only one, among eight so labeled in the *Tale of Melibee*, that has not survived in oral tradition.⁶⁰

The lawyer’s “commune proverbe,” however, is diachronically linked to “haste makes waste.” It reinforces a major point in his oral report on the legalistic deliberations so far. He and his colleagues advise Melibee to take defensive measures. They still need more time to consider evidence for and against declaration of war, he says, because “he that soone deemeth, soone shal repente.” A hundred lines further along, then, Prudence has wrung from Melibee a concession to her “grete sapience,” and has begun to instruct him “how ye shul governe yourself in chesyng of youre conseilours.” Seek God’s counsel first, she advises. Seek your own counsel next, after driving out of your heart wrath, and covetousness, and haste. “As ye herde her biforn,” she says, referring to the lawyers’ consultation, you ought to apply to your own internal emotions “the commune proverbe . . . ‘he that soone deemeth, soone repenteth’.”⁶¹

Moreover, in between these two slightly different wordings applied with equal wisdom toward two quite different situations, Chaucer’s Prudence also supplies the additional variants of “haste makes waste.” “The proverbe seith,” says she, “‘He hasteth wel that wisely kan abyde,’ and ‘in wikked haste is no profit’.” Her comment is one of very few supplements anywhere at all to Renaud’s text, which goes directly from the French Prudence’s quotation of Petrus Alphonsus to the first of Melibee’s five reasons to reject female advice. As noted, Chaucer truncates the five French reasons to three, then expands Prudence’s refutation of all five. To similar effect, the two additional variants intensify the Middle English wife’s debating skill. Seeing “how that hir housbonde shoop hym for [intended] to

⁶⁰ *CT* VII 1048, Renaud 142 (as “proverbe commun”), Albertanus 11.3-4; Whiting C458, citing only this occurrence. No equivalent appears in Dent 1981 and 1984, Tilley 1950, or Wilson 1970 for this item from the collection attributed to Publilius Syrus (Duff and Duff 1935:100, line 653).

⁶¹ *CT* VII 1030, 1114-15, 1135; Tilley J97; Whiting J78. See above, note 58, for parallels in Renaud and Albertanus.

. . . bigynne werre,” she not only quotes “Piers Alphonc” but also reinforces that authority figure’s stance with two independent wordings of the anonymous advice lately declared by a male neighbor with law school credentials.⁶²

After Melibee concedes “I wol governe me by thy conseil in alle thyng,” as described, Prudence brandishes the same “commune proverbe” as did the local lawyer. Her next proverbial lesson coincides with the only instance of trilingual terminological alignment among the three treatises. Here “the proverbe seith” directly renders Renaud’s “l’on dit un proverbe,” which directly renders Albertanus’s “in proverbio dicitur.” Prudence’s statement so introduced occurs today as, usually, “don’t bite off more than you can chew”: “he that to mucche embraceth, distreyneth litel.”⁶³

Thereafter Melibee not only concedes his wife’s point but also admits outright, “I have erred.” Upon agreeing to change his counselors to suit her specifications, he himself now becomes able to quote a “proverbe”: “to do synne is mannyssh, but certes for to persevere longe in synne is werk of the devel.” This tripartite proverb sometimes lacks the second clause, as here, and sometimes lacks the third, as in line 525 of Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Criticism*: “To Err is *Human*; to Forgive, *Divine*.” Its initial clause alone remains in oral tradition. “To err is human” would nowadays accompany some interpretive gesture such as an embarrassed grimace, apologetic burial of face in hands, or nonchalant shrug of shoulders.

The treatises by Renaud and Albertanus both blend this long-enduring proverbial thought into the compliant husband’s speech, using no introductory phrase. By labeling it a “proverbe,” Chaucer implies that Melibee now qualifies to pass on traditional words of wisdom. He qualifies right along with his wife, and straight-talking lawyers, and wise old men, and (by the term’s wider implications) the Bible in Latin, common speakers of the vernacular, and a range of sacred and secular authorities both named and anonymous.⁶⁴

At the word’s final occurrence in the *Tale of Melibee*, proverb power reverts to Prudence. Melibee agrees not only to refrain from war but also to

⁶² CT VII 1051-54, Renaud 146-54, Albertanus 11.8-12.3; Tilley H189; Whiting H171, H166.

⁶³ CT VII 1114, 1135; CT VII 1215, Renaud 405, Albertanus 59.1-2; Tilley M1295; Whiting M774.

⁶⁴ CT VII 1261; CT VII 1264, Renaud 472-74, Albertanus 66.11-12; Tilley E179; Whiting S346.

forgive his enemies, and thereby to “accorde with hire [his wife’s] wille and hire entencioun.” She expresses heartfelt gladness with an “old proverbe,” one now six centuries older but readily recognizable as “don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today”: “the goodnesse that thou mayst do this day, do it, and abide nat ne delaye it nat til tomorwe.”⁶⁵

Besides seven of the eight labeled instances, at least one other statement in *Melibee* and its predecessors might well exemplify a proverb that has long survived across time and languages. Rudely shouted by reckless “yonge folk,” it occurs in all three languages as the exact same metaphor, “strike while the iron is hot.” Nowhere, however, is it termed a proverb or anything else.⁶⁶ In a different narrative situation, where these same words instead were to offer valid advice, might the statement qualify for an honorific label?

Wherever and whenever specific terms prove appropriate, pending further research, it is certain that proverbs do overleap language barriers and do outlast millennia. We still learn proverbs verbatim without trying, without even noticing. However, we and our students no longer memorize long lists of proverbs aloud on purpose, in order to retrieve data from our brain synapses. Perhaps we should. Perhaps they should. It is not the case that the human brain functions like a computer, nor that human recollection resembles a search on the World Wide Web. Fortunately, indeed blessedly, it is instead the case that computers are modeled upon the human brain.

As a closing metaphor, I propose that proverb collections once functioned as tools for information retrieval. Each proverbial sentence, lasting about three seconds when spoken aloud, could readily be memorized as a neuropsychological unit. Spoken aloud, or whispered if appropriate, each proverb used to open a sort of website within the internet of a properly trained human brain. An educated thinker could “click on” a proverb memorized verbatim, in order to reconnect his brain synapses with various verbal contexts in which he had encountered its equivalent statement in Latin and in vernacular languages including his own. He then could ransack his memory’s storehouse to re-open and refurnish one or more of that proverb’s contexts, reconstructing each one sense for sense more likely than word for word.

In classrooms today, we launch a haphazard approximation of such a search any time that a student’s question or another circumstance elicits oral

⁶⁵ CT VII 1792-95, Renaud 1098-99 (as “proverbe”), Albertanus 117.6-8; Tilley T378; Whiting T348.

⁶⁶ CT VII 1035-36, Renaud 120, Albertanus 9.24-25; Tilley I94; Whiting I60.

information other than immediate class preparation. The longer one has been teaching, the faster and clearer and wider and deeper those mental websites open. Indeed, we might repeat ourselves verbatim and, experiencing a “senior faculty moment,” we might well ask, “Wait, wasn’t I just telling you people this? Or was that some other class?”

All information in the world always has been out there somewhere, awaiting access, transformable into knowledge and ultimately into wisdom within human minds. The computer can prove useful as a metaphor, however, in order to encourage scholars’ primary research into pre-modern educational practices in general and into the role of proverb collections in particular. Such research will allow new insights into aspects of the Middle Ages that still appear blurry: Chaucer-the-author’s mental processes while creating one of the most intimidating women in literary history, for example, or his assignment of the tales of Sir Thopas and Melibee to Chaucer-the-pilgrim, riding along among good fellows now and forever en route to Canterbury.

Rutgers University, Camden

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Written on the Wind: An Introduction to Auralture

Vladimir Guerrero

“Literature” and “Auralture”

Visual arts such as painting or sculpture are inseparable from the media in which they are created because they cannot exist outside their form; a painting does not exist without a surface nor a sculpture without material. Verbal art, on the other hand, can exist in two different forms, an oral and a written one. The oral form can be independent and recognizable even when, before recording came into use, its existence was ephemeral. The written form may have originally been the means of giving audible art permanence, but since the birth of writing the oral form has suffered from the handicap of its transient nature. The permanence of the written word, in contrast with the spoken word, resulted in a more tightly defined art form than the ephemeral oral narratives. This disparity led to the perception that narrative evolved from an oral form to a predominantly written art.

In the performance of a play it is easy to separate the text from the presentation, as these two forms of art are very different. But the Spanish medieval oral art form of *cantares de gesta*, before they became manuscripts, included the unwritten text as part of the presentation, making it difficult to separate the oral rendition from the manuscript version that eventually followed. Modern scholars, being unable to listen to a twelfth-century *juglar* sing the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and having access only to a fourteenth-century manuscript, have considered the written form as the work itself. But there existed an oral form of the same narrative, changing from day to day and from *juglar* to *juglar*, which, in spite of its fluid and ephemeral nature, was a form of verbal art in its own right. While similar in many ways to its written counterpart, this type of art form is characterized by a continuous re-creation of itself in constantly changing variants. Whether the one manuscript version is considered to be the work or we assign the idea of the work to the elusive collection of oral narrative variants depends on our definition of “literature.” Unlike painting or sculpture, each fixed in its medium, verbal art can exist in two inherently different forms.

For over a century scholars of medieval literature have argued, sometimes acrimoniously, whether the romance epic is the creation of an individual or the product of an oral tradition. The “individualist” group was championed by Joseph Bédier, while Ramón Menéndez Pidal was the main proponent of the “neo-traditionalist” theory. A necessary condition to the still unresolved argument was that the subject of discussion is a single work of “literature.” It is the object of this paper to propose that because verbal art can exist in two inherently different forms, in the case of the romance epic we are dealing not with one but with two different works of art: the manuscript work given permanence by an individual “author” and the oral work continuously recreated in changing variants by a legion of “authors.” From this perspective one would be a work of literature, the other a work of “auralture.”

The concept of dividing what has generally been considered a single art does not apply to all oral traditions. But as I hope to demonstrate in the Spanish epic, it is a way of interpreting this verbal art form with greater distance from its written versions than has been the case to date. The parallel streams of Spanish literature and historiography, originating in the twelfth century, from where episodes have survived as ballads or *romances* to the present day, will show that it is possible to do so. If the principle of two verbal art forms can be accepted, it would cast an entirely new light on the individualist versus neo-traditionalist controversy.

The Case of Spanish Epic Narrative

Medieval Spanish narrative poetry is customarily divided into two irreconcilable categories, epic songs and the written poetry of the clerics.¹ According to A. D. Deyermond, this is “one of the firmly entrenched doctrines of Spanish literary history” (1965:111). The former is associated with popular, heroic, bellicose, and blood-drenched narratives; the latter with learned, hagiographic, and adventure stories. Because the epic songs were studied through manuscripts, this doctrine propagated the belief that the differences stemmed from the popular versus the learned character of the texts. Such a perception failed to recognize that the most significant difference stemmed from the aural nature of the epics and how their ephemeral existence differed from that of the written word. The manuscript versions taken to represent the Spanish epic reflect only one of a myriad

¹ The two types are known in Spanish as the craft of the minstrels, *mester de juglaría*, and the craft of the clerics, *mester de clerecía*.

number of unwritten versions, and therefore only a part of the whole. As written works, it is correct to label them “epic poetry” in the framework of literature, but they differ from the aural epic just as the corpus of variants of a traditional ballad differs from a single printed version of the same.

It is the purpose of this paper to show that the epic narratives are an oral-aural art form independent of, but closely related to, the written epic poems. Although the term “literature” is customarily used to denote the totality of artistic creation with words, the different characteristics of orality and writing sometimes make it necessary to speak of the one separately from the other. Distinguishing the aural works from the written should limit the meaning of the term “literature”—as its etymology implies—to artistic creations in writing. It would then be necessary to provide a new term to designate the oral-aural works in their unwritten environment. Recognizing the dual aural and written nature of these poems enables us to see that to consider the written versions to be *the* Spanish epic is to trivialize the existence of the oral-aural component. Since the poems existed before the spoken dialect had developed a stable written form, it is evident that orality was their primary habitat and that the extant manuscripts should be considered only a manifestation of this phenomenon rather than the work itself.

Before there was writing there was storytelling. In the words of A. B. Lord, “The art of narrative song was perfected, and I use the word advisedly, long before the advent of writing. It had no need of stylus or brush to become a complete artistic and literary medium” (1960:124). Eventually, when human beings learned to give narratives permanence through writing it became possible to store and retrieve them more reliably, but the gain in stability changed the nature of the art. The written word became the basis for the parameters of literature, and the properties of writing, fixity and delimitation, became the basic criteria for the concept of literature. When aural narratives came to be studied through manuscripts, these criteria were applied to works that had been created and had matured orally. The invisible aural precedent, an unknown number of unwritten variants, was mostly ignored.

Modern scholarship discovered the origins of oral narrative in Spain through manuscripts.² The exploration of these texts should have been the

² Discovery of the manuscripts dates from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The manuscript of the *Poema de Mio Cid* was first edited by Tomás Antonio Sánchez in 1779. The *Mocedades de Rodrigo* was recognized as an epic poem by Eugenio de Ochoa in 1844, while cataloguing the Spanish manuscripts in the Royal

archeology that led to the unwritten forms. But the narratives, discovered in writing, were studied as literary texts, and the concepts of stability and permanence, alien to the oral-aural works, were applied to them. The aural units in their written form were seen to have well defined boundaries. Thus the oral-aural narrative was interpreted in terms of the manuscript versions and explained using concepts and vocabulary from written literature.

Current scholarship has learned much about oral-aural literature.³ We know that, originally, it existed in a latent state between manifestations, even though scholarship has emphasized its articulation (oral) over its existence (aural). We know that, in aural form, the content is fluid, adapting to the singer as a liquid adapts to its container, the story changing with the performer in content as well as in the number of episodes.⁴ Each

Library in Paris. In 1917, the *Roncesvalles* fragment was brought to the attention of Menéndez Pidal, who edited and studied it (Menéndez Pidal 1917).

³ It is important to distinguish here between two different but related areas of knowledge, one having to do with oral composition of long epic songs by a single individual and the other having to do with the continuous process of re-creation of a ballad or *romance* by a sequence of separate individuals. For the first case, *The Singer of Tales* by A. B. Lord in 1960 presented irrefutable evidence to demonstrate one mechanism of artistic creation capable of producing long “aural” works without the use of writing. Although the Castilian epic does not conform to the same pattern as Lord’s heroic songs, the plausibility of oral-aural creation and existence, for very long narratives, has been established. For the second case, the current state of knowledge regarding the Spanish ballad tradition, or *Romancero*, is constantly reaffirming its aural existence. The following statements from recent articles are typical of the current position: “From the Middle Ages up to today, *romances* continue to be poems that are stored in the memory of custodians of traditional culture and are transmitted by word of mouth . . . from one generation to another without any need to resort to writing” (Catalán 1987:400); and “La poesía oral constituye un proceso en constante devenir; cambia sin parar; ajusta y varía interminablemente sus fronteras; se asocia y desasocia incansablemente con otros y diversos temas narrativos; en fin, no conoce en absoluto la fijeza del texto escrito. Y no hay texto en el sentido que se entiende desde la perspectiva de una literatura escrita” (Armistead 1992:12).

⁴ An excellent illustration of the fluid nature of a given *romance* is Paul Bénichou’s study of *La muerte del príncipe Don Juan* (1968). Bénichou examines the content of forty-six versions of one *romance* and establishes geographical groupings where important features of the story coincide and, at the same time, contrast with the other groups. The principal variations are: (a) the identity of the central character, a young man on his deathbed who usually, but not always, is identified as the prince, Don Juan; (b) his relationship to a woman visitor—in some versions his wife, in others his lover; and (c) the identity of his other visitors—whether his father, his mother, or both. From the historical story of Don Juan on his deathbed, leaving his young and pregnant

manifestation of an aural work is unique to the singer and the circumstances. Yet to this day we lack the vocabulary to express these facts concisely and unequivocally. The concept of a given “version” is tainted, like our entire vocabulary, with the rigidity and the fixed boundaries associated with the written word. The dozens of written versions of a Spanish ballad (*romance*) may represent hundreds of oral variants and yet be only one aural work.

Both by its discovery in manuscripts and by the use of writing to capture its ephemeral nature, aural literature cannot be studied without the written word, but to keep in mind the real nature of this phenomenon it is appropriate to use a term that does not refer to the root *littera*. “Aural literature,” literature written on the wind, may be designated as *aurature*: a verbal art form that began before the advent of writing and existed without it. It existed as epic songs, and as *romances* it still exists in a latent state, manifesting itself in ephemeral performances occasionally captured in writing.⁵ The term “aurature” differs from “oral literature” in that when

wife in the care of his parents the Catholic Monarchs, the plot becomes, at the other extreme, that of an unidentified young man making arrangements with his mother for the assistance of his mistress after his death.

⁵ The concept of a latent state was first used by Menéndez Pidal in reference to the evolution of certain linguistic phenomena. Subsequently he found the concept useful also to explain the origins of Romance literatures and, in another context, the invisible existence of the *Romancero*. The following quotations illustrate the first two of these uses: “Pero esto es lo mismo que sería el querer explicar el origen de las lenguas románicas tomando como base el bajo latín medieval, prescindiendo del latín vulgar por ser hipotético, y, sin embargo, cuantos estudian esos orígenes de las lenguas neolatinas reconstruyen eruditamente el latín vulgar sobre sólidos fundamentos, sin poseer de él ninguna obra escrita. [. . .] Ese latín vulgar vivió en estado latente, sin que nadie pensara en escribir la lengua que todos hablaban” (Menéndez Pidal 1991:426). And, under the section entitled “Latencia de la literatura primitiva,” Menéndez Pidal adds: “Partiendo, pues, de que un pueblo de la Romania no pudo interrumpir el solaz de la canción, imperativo permanente, es suposición indispensable que, al lado de la poesía latina escrita por los clérigos en la alta edad media, hubo una poesía popular, propia para los recreos de todo el público iletrado que no hablaba sino el latín vulgar, o la naciente lengua románica, poesía vulgar que en los primeros siglos nadie pensaba escribir” (*ibid.*:429). In either case, the idea of a latent state is tantamount to an unwritten existence, which Menéndez Pidal applies to the collective whole of a linguistic phenomenon or literary genre. As far as I have been able to establish, he does not apply the concept to individual works, preferring, in this case, always to speak of lost *cantares* without specifying whether he means the loss of a manuscript or of an unwritten work. In the present study I have extended the use of latent state to cover the unwritten existence of any individual aural work, as conceived, for example, by Lord’s oral-formulaic theory. See also Menéndez Pidal 1950 and 1963.

applied to the romance epic by individualist scholars, “oral literature” suggests an art transmitted orally but existing in writing, whereas “auralture” emphasizes that retention and transmission are both independent of writing. From this it follows that each oral manifestation is a new version of the work. While in literature a version may differ somewhat from the original—since both have written texts it is possible to study the relationship between them—in auralture it is impossible to relate a version to its “original,” because the oral version has a fluid and ephemeral existence and the “original” exists without fixed content or boundaries.⁶ In their natural habitat neither the audible “version” nor the aural “original” exists in a form that permits comparison. To study auralture as literature, it is necessary to capture both the performance and the “original” in written form, an oxymoronic endeavor. The written versions of aural works are snapshots—a visual record of an oral process—whereas the audible “original” remains inherently invisible.

To illustrate these ideas let us consider the *Cantar de Mio Cid* as a work of auralture. It existed in aural form(s) during the centuries when the Spanish epic was a living genre.⁷ During the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries it was presented innumerable times to different audiences under changing circumstances. Each performance was a flexible, individual oral version of which no record remains. We have no way of knowing the form or number of such manifestations. Yet on one occasion a scribe prepared a written version, perhaps by transcribing a performance or by recreating it from recollections. The result was a poem that appears to have a reasonable resemblance to an oral presentation. A copy of this version has come down to us as the *Poema de Mio Cid* (hereafter *PMC*), a work of literature. In accordance with our definitions, this poem is a different entity from the narrative song of the oral tradition, the aural *Cantar de Mio Cid*, (hereafter *CMC*). The poem, however, is the principal route by which we can approach the aural work. The *Poema* is a work of literature, the *Cantar* a work of auralture.

Another important work of auralture, the *Cantar de Fernán González* (hereafter *CFG*), probably coexisted for centuries with the *CMC* but has not survived in epic form. The extant *Poema de Fernán González* (hereafter

⁶ It should be noted that the process described is not the same as the performance of a written text. Different productions of a play do not alter the play itself.

⁷ While an aural work is inherently amorphous, having a protean content and boundaries, and we can think of it in the singular, each manifestation is a different version and, therefore, we must think of them in the plural.

PFG), written in the four-verse isosyllabic and monorhymed stanzas of the clerics, does not resemble an oral performance at all. For this reason it is considered, and correctly so, a work of literature. In either case, the latent work has become visible through a “literary” manifestation: in the *CMC*, through what could be considered as the written record of an oral performance, and in the *CFG*, through an entirely different verse form. That these two works also existed in other oral versions as aurature has been corroborated through study of the chronicles.

Spanish epic narrative thus exists both as aurature and as literature. This is true whether the literary form is different from the aural, as in the *Fernán González*, or whether it is very similar, as in the *Mio Cid*. The polished nature of the *PFG* makes it easy to distinguish from an aural *cantar*, but Hispanists have usually considered the *PMC* and the *CMC* to be the same work.⁸ This has led to a great amount of argument regarding the authorship, date, and origin of the work, without sufficient attention given to whether the object of discussion is the *Cantar* or the *Poema*. Prior to the concept of aurature introduced in this paper, no distinction was made between the aural and the manuscript versions of these works. Even though it was generally accepted that the Spanish epic was an oral genre, the works were associated only with “literature.” In the case of the *Cid*, the titles *Poema de Mio Cid* and *Cantar de Mio Cid* were in fact used interchangeably. The known manuscript was considered *the* work, if not necessarily the “original.” Furthermore, the essence of an oral genre was not clearly defined and therefore the relationship between the oral epic and the written poems was not uniformly understood. While some critics perceived the written manuscript as the work itself, others saw it only as a manifestation of the work. Those who believed the written work originated in oral tradition identified themselves as “neo-traditionalists” and tended to use *Cantar* in the title, while the “individualists,” who emphasized individual authorship, leaned towards the use of *Poema* in the title.⁹

⁸ The *Fernán González* is “polished” by virtue of its rigid versification, equal number of syllables, four verse stanzas, and consonant rhyme, whereas the versification of the *Mio Cid* has a variable syllable count, no stanzas, and assonant rhyme.

⁹ The originator of the “neo-traditionalist” theory is, of course, Don Ramón Menéndez Pidal. Diego Catalán and Samuel G. Armistead consider themselves neo-traditionalists. Colin Smith and Alan Deyermond, are considered, by others more than by themselves, to be “individualists.”

Literary Texts, Pseudo-historical Chronicles, and the *Romancero*

The Spanish epic, in addition to being an oral genre, is also and primarily an aural genre. When designated as “oral” the emphasis is on the act of presentation, disregarding the creation and retention of the work. When coupled with the term “literature” the concept is inevitably connected with the written word. The implication follows that oral literature, while transmitted orally, survives through written storage. By changing the emphasis from oral (from the verb *orare*, “to speak”) to aural (associated with the nouns *auris*, “ear,” and *aura*, “air”), we emphasize the total life-cycle of the genre rather than its presentation. Auralture, then, is verbal art that exists in and is transmitted through air, and relies on hearing rather than reading for its reception. Because it is inherently unwritten we must rely on other documentation to prove its existence. There are three categories of written texts that serve as a record for auralture: (a) purely literary texts, such as the poems just discussed; (b) pseudo-historical chronicles; and (c) the Spanish ballad tradition, or *romancero*, in written and aural existence.

Literary Texts

Besides the *PMC* and the *PFM*, there exists one other complete work, the *Mocedades de Rodrigo*, as well as a brief fragment of a fourth poem, the *Roncesvalles*. Some scholars estimate that there might have been as many as forty to sixty epic poems of this type.¹⁰ The uncertainty is due in part to the lack of precision in the implied definition of *cantar*. What are the boundaries of a *cantar*? Where exactly does it begin or end? How many episodes does it include? It is precisely this vagueness that led to the interchangeable use of *poema* and *cantar* and caused the latter term, removed from its fluid oral-aural context, to assume the characteristics of a written poem. Based on scattered verses and literary references, some scholars have assumed that a written poem, rather than an aural work, had existed, and have even proposed boundaries and numbers of versions for these lost poems. But since the Spanish epic was an oral-aural genre and its

¹⁰ In his 1995 work *La literatura perdida de la Edad Media castellana*, Deyermond lists twenty-nine traditional epics as lost works. However, he later states (1996:30): “This list of some forty lost epic poems put forward by scholars, with varying degrees of firmness and plausibility, at one time or another during the past hundred years rises to over sixty if we include the additional versions listed by Armistead (‘Neo-Individualist Theory’, 321-27).”

circulation the trade of professional singers, the assumption of lost poems appears to me unnecessary. It has never been established exactly to what extent these singers relied on writing and/or memory to learn, retain, and present their narratives, but it is probable that they worked from a repertoire of episodes and did not require a written poem for their purposes. Yet the estimate of lost epics based on the premises of literature attempts merely to quantify “lost” poems, instead of to identify a cycle of episodes as works of auralature that were seldom, if ever, written out in full.¹¹

Since aural works do not have fixed boundaries, it appears unreasonable to estimate a given number of them, since this would imply that the collection of related episodes, the Immanent Whole, has been uniquely parceled.¹² In the case of the *Cid* this can be justified because the *Mocedades* and the *PMC* are both written works. These poems, dated two centuries apart, cover different periods of the hero’s life and each consists of a series of episodes corresponding to that period. The *PMC* in particular has the sequential causality of a well structured and cohesive series of events.

¹¹ As has been postulated above, the principal attribute of auralature is its existence in a latent state. The concept of boundaries, as understood in a literary environment, is alien and unnecessary here. Therefore it is unreasonable to insist that the boundaries of literature must also apply in auralature and that its works must always correspond to written poems. Time and again we have seen hundreds of versions that correspond to a single aural *romance*. Because these versions have been transcribed from oral performance, their diversity has been understood and the lack of correspondence between the written version and aural “original” has been accepted. The transcription of *cantares* in the distant past must have been much more imperfect, both because of the lack of recording devices, and because of their greater length. Why must we believe that these aural works were once perfectly transcribed and subsequently disappeared? The fact that the *PMC* could well be an almost perfect transcription of an aural work may just as well be considered the exception rather than the rule.

On the subject of quality and completeness of text in a literary work, the thirteenth-century poem *Elena y María*, found in a deplorable manuscript of the fourteenth century, is probably more representative than the *PMC*. See Menéndez Pidal 1914. On the subject of variable boundaries of heroic narratives as perceived in different texts, see Armistead and Silverman 1971:42, n. 8; and when dealing with the problem of ballad boundaries resulting from the fragmentation of epic poems, see Armistead 1992.

¹² The concept of the Immanent Whole, applied throughout this study, is adapted here from Clover (1986), who states: “African scholars such as Okpewho and Biebuyck have developed what we might call an idea of ‘immanent’ epic—the idea, that is, that there can exist a ‘whole’ epic in the minds of performers and audiences alike even though it never be performed as such” (23-24). See also the concepts of “immanent art” and “traditional referentiality” in Foley 1991.

This is not the case with the *Mocedades*, where the episodes are loosely connected and do not always reflect a chronological sequence. In either case, however, the works of auralture reflected by the *Mocedades* and the *PMC* are known primarily through these poems. Why are we justified in applying the boundaries of these particular versions to the aural and fluid works?¹³ Conventional literary theory does not pose this question because it assumes that a *cantar* has the same boundaries as the poem, that they are one and the same since the characteristics of the written word are retrofitted to the aural environment. But because the epic narrative existed prior to the written Spanish language, it is obvious that such reasoning is illogical. Indeed, the *PMC* is the first important literary manifestation of that nascent language.

To sum up, the existing epic poems are only a partial reflection of the aural works. Identifying the aural work as a specific poem is a carry-over from literature, one that is neither necessary nor justified. The two poems discussed, the *Mocedades* and the *PMC*, are part of a cycle of narratives concerning Rodrigo Díaz de Bivar. These literary texts have traditionally been considered “the Spanish epic,” as well as the main source of our knowledge on the subject.

Pseudo-historical Chronicles

From the early twelfth to the fifteenth century a number of chronicles were written in Latin and in Romance dialects recording the history of Castile. Because most Spanish epic songs had a factual origin, many of the aural works were considered historical in spite of the poetic license taken and, as such, were incorporated into the chronicles. This textual evidence does not relate directly to a singer’s performance, because it has been transcribed into prose and often includes only partial versions. Their form differs from the oral-aural versions as much as the *PFG* differs from the *PMC*. Because of the number, variety, and multiplicity of extant manuscripts, however, the importance of the chronicles as testimony for the existence of auralture exceeds that of the literary texts. By making possible the recognition and identification of numerous narratives, the chronicles help

¹³ The problem implied by these questions is the nature of the boundaries that establish the textual content of a work in auralture and in literature. The problem has been specifically addressed through the *romance* entitled *La jura de Santa Gadea*, which may link the *Cantar del cerco de Zamora*, a work of auralture, with the *CMC* and the *PMC*. See Menéndez Pidal 1973:89-106 and Armistead 1984.

us to assess, very approximately, the corpus of this genre. What they do not permit is to establish boundaries so that the narratives can be correlated with a specific number of lost poems.

While Spanish historiography had Latin ancestry, in the changing circumstances of the twelfth century it was also the offspring of epic. The chronicles assumed part of the informational and historiographic role that the epic songs were no longer serving as the latter evolved into romances of chivalry. Although unrelated, these changes were concurrent and complementary. At the same time, because of the prestige and permanence of the written word, the chronicles served to forge a national Spanish identity. While the oral-aural epic had fulfilled this role in earlier times—the *CFG* being a characteristic example—the cultural renaissance of the twelfth century made it more natural for the written word to assume that function. The trend towards the official use of Spanish rather than Latin and the shift from an aural to a written environment were simultaneous with the increased standardization of the Romance languages.¹⁴ It is no coincidence that this process began in the twelfth century and reached maturity towards the end of the fourteenth. Early in this period Spanish chronicles were written in Latin; the *Historia Silense* and the *Crónica Najerense* in the first half of the twelfth century, as well as the *Chronicon Mundi* and *De Rebus Hispaniae* in the first half of the thirteenth, are important examples. From the end of the thirteenth century, however, Alfonso X began to write history in Castilian Spanish. The first Alphonsine chronicle is followed in the fourteenth century by a profusion of texts that borrow and conflate material from each other. The *Crónica de Castilla*, *Crónica de Veinte Reyes*, and *Crónica de 1344*, all from the first half of the fourteenth century, represent the most prolific period and the apogee of the epic's presence in the genre.

The use of aural epic as historical material, however, is evident even in the Latin chronicles. The *Najerense*, from 1160, retells part of the *Fernán González* narrative and also includes a portion of the *Cid's* epic cycle dealing with the siege of Zamora. Menéndez Pidal (1980:xlii) recognizes traces of six legends in this chronicle that, due to their circulation and relevance, the compiler considered indispensable and used without specifying their source. In the *Primera Crónica General*, the first Spanish

¹⁴ The creation of a standardized written language is of course an important part of forging a national identity and, in this respect, the contribution of Alfonso el Sabio was monumental. The *Estoria de España*, usually referred to as the *Primera Crónica General*, served these social and national objectives, both through its historical content and through its groundbreaking use of the Castilian language.

chronicle, there is extensive use of epic material, and it is possible to recognize sequences of assonant rhyme carried over from the songs into the prose. It was precisely through the identification of such passages that Menéndez Pidal (1971) was able to reconstruct a large portion of *Los siete infantes de Lara*, using material from several chronicles. The quantity and quality of the prose narratives suggest that the compilers may have been in possession of written versions of certain narratives. How extensive they were and to what extent the compilers modified them remains, of course, impossible to determine. But there is no reason to assume that they had before them complete manuscript poems.

The Romancero

The third group of texts that serves the study of auralture is the printed corpus of traditional Spanish ballads known collectively as the *romancero*. These texts are particularly important because the versions of a given ballad sporadically written over the years represent a living oral tradition and enable us to witness the evolution of auralture. Even though the *romancero* was in its original latent state a purely oral-aural genre, with the advent of print it took on a hybrid oral-written existence that has continued to this day. When versions of *romances* were published in the sixteenth century, the oral-aural *romancero* acquired a parallel existence in print. Since then it has been possible to perceive the dual nature of the phenomenon, that is, a literary *romancero* of frozen versions and the latent *romancero* manifesting itself through oral performance. A literary *romance* may be known in hundreds of versions and yet be only a single aural romance.¹⁵ Every *romance* ever sung is an ephemeral manifestation that may result in a written version. Once written and fixed in permanent form, as was the case in the sixteenth century, the ballads became specific versions frozen in time. But some of those aural “originals,” the latent ballads from which they came, may still be heard today in protean versions through the living voices that carry on the tradition.

¹⁵ In the case of *Muerte del príncipe don Juan*, discussed above, Paul Bénichou (1968) states that more than a hundred versions have been collected, although his work was based on only forty-six of them. Subsequent to Bénichou’s pathbreaking study many hundreds of additional versions have been collected and classified. For an idea of the vast number of versions of this ballad collected and studied, see Catalán 1982-88:iii, 367-433, no. 70; Catalán 1997-98:ii, 35-107; and Catalán et al. 1998:i, 627-719.

Epic, Ballad, and Problems of Perception

Having reviewed the types of texts that serve as a link to aurature, I will now consider Spanish epic and ballad literature in light of the new concept to illustrate how the reference frame of the written word dominates the perception of the works, even when most scholars are cognizant of their aural nature.

The Spanish epic genre consists of three manuscripts and a number of postulated “lost” poems documented in chronicles and ballads. It is usually assumed that the lost works had once been complete poems and had existed in a form similar to that of the extant manuscripts. Even Menéndez Pidal, the first scholar to expound the traditional aural nature of the epic, appears in many of his writings to emphasize the physical or poetic form rather than the latent state of the missing works.¹⁶

While discussing epic narratives as part of the lost corpus of Spanish literature, Robert B. Tate is even more assertive in equating the existence of epic narratives with the existence of a literary text written in “narrative verse form” (1988:442-45, emphases added):

The existence of lost epic narratives is more easily attested, if only because we have the direct evidence of 5,000 lines of extant texts, none complete. Supporters of the neotraditionalist theory argue for the existence of a chain of epics composed by secular *juglares* from Visigothic times to the appearance of surviving texts. Much of the support derives from the *supposed* presence in medieval chronicles of material deriving from nonhistorical sources, stretching from ninth-century Latin

¹⁶ The discussion of this subject in Menéndez Pidal’s *Reliquias de la poesía épica* (1980:xvi-xvii) is entitled “*Negación de los textos perdidos. Enorme destrucción de libros.*” In it, Menéndez Pidal draws a comparison with the losses, at a later date, of dramatic works of Lope de Vega (69%), Alejandro Hardy in France (95%), and Thomas Heywood in England (90%). He cites examples of practices in monastic libraries where many volumes were destroyed in order to re-use the parchment or even the paper. He also cites reasons such as the change from Visigothic to Carolingian script for discarding volumes, and the accidental destruction by moisture, fire, or bookworms. In every case, his emphasis is on the destruction of books. The enormous proportion of book losses is projected against the small initial number of copies of *cantares* actually written in the Middle Ages due to the high cost of parchment. The emphasis in this discussion is not so much on the existence of a particular epic, but rather on the existence of a written version of it.

histories to the thirteenth-century Castilian *Estoria de España*, in which acknowledgment is made to “*cantares*” and “*fablas de gesta*.” Such references do not carry equal weight, and if one demands *explicit evidence of the presence of compositions in narrative verse form* and not legend or folktale or prose accounts in Latin or the vernacular, then the case for most of the supposed works listed by Menéndez Pidal in his *Reliquias de la poesía épica española* is decidedly weak.

Here again, Tate’s argument implies that the *cantares* had to have been written in order to leave us “explicit evidence . . . in narrative verse form,” and therefore qualify to be considered lost epics. Without tangible evidence, as opposed to paraphrased retellings in prose, he considers aural works to be “legend or folktale or prose accounts.” Even if Tate is not specifically denying the existence of a Spanish epic, nor challenging the generally accepted fact that it is an oral genre, he still insists on written evidence in a specific verse form. This carry-over from literary tradition is so strong that it overrides the logic that should question why an aural genre would need a written form at all in order to exist.¹⁷ Tate’s posture derives from a school that considers a manuscript such as that of the *PMC* as *the* work, rather than recognizing an unwritten predecessor in the *CMC*. Alternately, the neo-traditionalists believe that the *CMC* is an aural work that, in this exceptional case, has a written parallel version in the *PMC*. The fact that the manuscript version exists has no bearing on the *Cantar*’s prior aural existence. Had the *PMC* been consumed in fire or by bookworms, the *Poema* would be lost, but the *Cantar* would still have existed. Various ballads and chronicle accounts bear ample testimony that the *CMC* once lived in the public domain. Although epic *cantares* are no longer sung on village squares, their earlier existence is a historical fact and the ballads are an undeniable link to them.

Alan Deyermond has proposed eleven independent criteria to assess the probable existence of a lost epic (1996:30-31). Although he consistently uses the term “epic poem” when speaking of lost epics, Deyermond does not restrict the term to a written narrative verse form, but leaves it open to include aural epic poems that may never have been written. This perception is evident from his commentary on the criteria. Deyermond considers “a surviving verse fragment” (assumed to have survived in written epic form) criterion A for the existence of an epic. But, at the same time, he accepts

¹⁷ After the introduction of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory as a mechanism supplementing memory and the publication of A. B. Lord’s *The Singer of Tales* in 1960, it seems incongruous to find, three decades later, such an absolute requirement of written evidence in narrative verse form as a criterion for recognizing the existence of an aural work.

that the simultaneous presence in the chronicles of several other criteria, such as reconstructable verse lines (criterion C), existence of an extensive plot with generally epic character (criterion E), and the presence of formulas and formulaic phrases (criterion J), are “almost irresistible” in establishing the existence of an epic poem. Adding the existence of independent traditional ballads that carry the same story (criterion G) makes the case, in Deyermond’s words, “wholly irresistible.”

In terms of our concept, Deyermond, in contrast to Tate, has asserted that in spite of the total absence of a “surviving verse fragment” (his criterion A) it is impossible to deny the existence of certain epic poems, now unknown to us, in narrative verse form—poems that, I may add, might never have been written at all. That is to say, he has described the phenomenon of auralature without labeling it, but, in recognizing the possible existence of works in latent state, he has granted them an autonomous status comparable and parallel to literature. An even stronger case for the unwritten is evident in the approaches taken by Diego Catalán and Samuel G. Armistead. The conceptualization of written and aural texts as separate but related entities, as proposed, seems to echo the thinking of Catalán in explaining the essence of the *romancero* (Catalán 1983:451, emphases added):

La necesidad de *considerar el <texto> como una representación circunstancial del poema (y no como el poema mismo)* es de rigor siempre que un <lector> examina una transcripción de uno cualquiera de los múltiples actos de exteriorización (una versión) *de un poema archivado en la memoria de la colectividad* y cuya forma habitual de transmitirse es de *homo loquens en homo loquens* a través de actos orales; esa transcripción, por fiel que sea al acto emisor, no recoge sino una <actualización> entre las innumerables y variadas manifestaciones sucesivas y simultáneas del poema.

Working with both Spanish ballads and epic, Armistead has for many years argued that the traditional oral nature of these intimately related genres precludes having a unique and well-defined text representing a given work (1978:316):

Unfortunately, forms of folk literature—ballad, folktale, and, yes, epic—which are or were sung or narrated over centuries and over vast geographic areas by innumerable individuals have a messy and uncomfortable way of just not conforming to the monolithic textual univalence which twentieth-century print-oriented critics tend to project upon them.

If the known manuscript of the *Mocedades* is not *the Mocedades* but a recasting of it, then, as in the case of the *Poema* and the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, we can postulate the existence of an earlier (aural or written) *Cantar de las mocedades de Rodrigo*. This does not prove that another manuscript, a *Poema de las mocedades de Rodrigo*, must have once existed, but it does establish that an earlier narrative had a place “in the collective memory of society,” to use Diego Catalán’s expression cited above. Whether or not other recastings were ever written before the extant one is independent of the latent existence of the aural work.¹⁸

These examples have illustrated the following points: as late as the 1950s, Menéndez Pidal, the foremost authority on the Spanish oral tradition, who had applied the concept of latent state to the *romancero*, still felt it necessary to argue that the lack of epic texts was not due to the aural existence of the genre but resulted from the extensive destruction of books. Robert Tate’s position, three decades later, showed that the concept of latent state applied to the epic was not universally accepted, in spite of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory of composition.¹⁹ Deyermond, on the other hand, in elaborating his criteria for establishing the existence of epics, implicitly accepted that *cantares* could have existed even when no written fragments have survived. And Catalán and Armistead, dealing separately with the *romancero* and with the *Mocedades de Rodrigo*, emphasized the difference between the written texts of these aural works (“una representación circunstancial”) and the written text of any ordinary literary work. Through these approaches we can see that four of these five scholars, to a greater or lesser degree, recognize an unwritten verbal art whose latent existence is not in question. The perception of the written evidence through which that “aural literature” is approached, however, varies from critic to critic. The

¹⁸ Speaking of the *Romancero*, Armistead has used the terms oral and written poetry in the following sense: “La crítica neopositivista, por lo visto, sigue pensando en la poesía oral como si fuera igualita que la poesía escrita; como si consistiera en textos fijos—o relativamente fijos—como cualquier soneto de Garcilaso. Pero los hechos no son así. Son muy otros. La poesía oral constituye un proceso en constante devenir; se asocia y desasocia incansablemente con otros y diversos temas narrativos; en fin, no conoce en absoluto la fijeza del texto escrito. Y no hay “texto” en el sentido que se entiende desde la perspectiva de una literatura escrita” (1992:12, n. 14).

¹⁹ According to the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory of composition, the singer creates the narrative during the act of presentation by drawing from a stock of standardized episodes and formulas retained in memory. Menéndez Pidal’s concept of latent state as applied to the epic implies the retention in memory of a stock of related episodes that can be drawn upon to re-create a narrative.

dissenting scholar, Tate, appears to be saying, strictly in accordance with the etymology of the term, that without a written text there can be no epic *literature*.

The term “epic” has been used since Aristotle to refer to a long narrative poem of heroic character and proportions that deals with an important theme or major action and often has tribal or national significance. The narrative, centered on a hero possessed of exceptional or semi-divine attributes, forms part of a nation’s mythology of self-definition. Although it has always been accepted that the early epic is oral, such poems are always defined by their written form. Prototypical are the works of Homer, the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Poema de Mio Cid*, and the *Fernán González*, among others. Over the centuries the concept of epic has expanded to include long narrative poems of a certain grandeur in content and style, even when they lack semi-divine heroes or tribal mythology. It is unwritten epic songs of this type that constitute the bulk of Spanish auralature. But what is this latent corpus? What are these unwritten works? How can we recognize and individually identify them? Or were they, as many have assumed, once written and subsequently lost? It is this type of question that must be addressed to develop credibility in auralature.

In spite of the early epic being an oral phenomenon, the inability to address these questions until recently made them purely rhetorical. Oral literature is still generally perceived in some quarters as orally transmitted literature. Prior to the Parry-Lord theory it was believed that orality could only be the transmission vehicle for works that were otherwise inevitably connected to the written word. On the other hand, auralature, as defined herein, exists in a latent state and is transmitted by oral-aural means, from mouth to ears. Therefore evidence of its existence should not require proof that the work has been written, which contradicts its very nature, but rather that the work has been heard. Because there are numerous chronicle references to *cantares*, epic songs, that do not exist as textual poems, it is possible to assume that they were once written. But this is unnecessary, because what is important is that they were known: they had been heard and heard of. Otherwise, how could they have been mentioned? And that is enough evidence to prove that they existed in the collective mind of society. But having references to or fragments of a *cantar* is one thing; establishing its identity as an epic is another. What must be shown is not the existence of a legend or narrative, but rather whether these were of a sufficient stature and a cohesive nature to be considered *cantares*, rather than the “legend or folktale or prose accounts” that Tate (1988) suggests.

As Tate’s statement implied, part of the carry-over from the concept of literature is that the epic must have a written verse form, but this

condition is not inherent to the genre. While the epic was sung in verse, there is no proof that the work required writing in order to exist. It must be remembered that the early Spanish epic dates from a time when the Castilian dialect did not have a written form. It was precisely because the rhyme and rhythm of verse served to facilitate retention that it was used in the absence of writing. The fact that some aural epics were subsequently put into writing is in no way a precondition for their existence.

Through the study of Spanish historiography during the nineteenth century, it became evident that the chronicles of the Middle Ages contained a good deal of traditional material. The exploits of the Cid, known through the *PMC*, were also found in chronicles, thus making it possible to compare the verse and prose versions. A similar comparison became possible between the historical Fernán González and the clerical *PFG*. Because of these surviving pairs, Menéndez Pidal assumed that other chronicle narratives were also derived from poems or songs. Even though he considered the *cantares* an oral tradition, he believed that the singers occasionally used written texts to help memorize them.²⁰ But recognizing the songs in the chronicles was not enough to consider them epics, even when the compilers often introduced these as *cantares* and credited them to singers. For Menéndez Pidal, as well as for many other Spanish medievalists, the narratives identified were assumed to have been lost literary texts. Even though the precursors were acknowledged to have been *cantares*, which, if written at all, “se escribían de cualquier manera para ayudar al aprendizaje de memoria,” scholars continued to refer to them as lost epic poems, recalling the “enorme destrucción de libros” and associating lost songs with lost manuscripts. This link between *cantares* and lost poems

²⁰ Under “La poesía épica tradicional: Origen godo” in *Poesía juglaresca y juglares* Menéndez Pidal states: “Existía otra poesía juglaresca tradicional, productora de relatos épicos algo extensos, que no sólo se transmitían oralmente, sino a veces ayudándose de la escritura” (1991:439). This dual oral-written nature is elaborated upon in Menéndez Pidal 1980:xix: “Por otra parte, esas producciones literarias, de que nadie quiere ocuparse, podían en aquellos tiempos carecer de forma escrita conveniente, lo cual las hacía desestimables para el erudito. Toda la literatura en lengua vulgar se propagaba más por el oído que por la vista, pero, sobre todo, la literatura juglaresca. [. . .] ¡Cuánto no ahorrarían la escritura los juglares mismos para cosas de su oficio, aguzando la memoria, sobre todo en los siglos más remotos en que el pergamino era extremadamente caro! En tiempos de general analfabetismo, la memoria substituye corrientemente a la escritura, y se desarrolla en términos que hoy no podemos imaginarnos, reteniendo enormes cantidades de verso o de prosa, a veces mediante sólo dos o tres audiciones. [. . .] Pero, además, cuando se escribía para los juglares, solía escribirse ocasionalmente, de cualquier manera, para ayudar al aprendizaje de memoria y desechar después lo escrito como cosa inútil.”

perpetuated the misunderstanding of aurature by reinforcing its perception in terms of written texts.

The versions the chroniclers summarized or paraphrased could well have been unwritten songs rather than manuscript poems. One may speculate on the possibility that singers may have actually performed in the presence of chroniclers, who—like the *memorillos* of Golden Age theatre—would subsequently write down their rendition, although it may also have been the case that a transcription of the songs was prepared as an intermediate step to the chronistic prosification. Be that as it may, it is certain that the sources of the chronicle narratives were ultimately aural songs. In several chronicles, Menéndez Pidal identified the story of a tragic family quarrel that included insult, retaliation, treason, and revenge. The passions involved and their bloody consequences were indeed epic in their proportion. Through the regular appearance of assonant rhyme in the prose, verses could actually be recognized, and from these Menéndez Pidal reconstructed 560 lines of verse as a fragment of the *Cantar de los infantes de Lara* (1980:199-239). While we may question the logic of “re-creating” an epic poem that may never have been written, the main point is that the content of the chronicle narratives was so comprehensive as to make a reconstruction possible.

But what are the implications of this reconstruction? Does this prove that a corpus of some forty to sixty written epic poems comparable to the *PMC* and the *Mocedades* once existed? I do not believe so. Does this prove that at least a minstrel’s manuscript resembling that of *Elena y María* must have existed?²¹ Probably not. Or could it be, as I have speculated, that a written copy was specially prepared for the compiler? Menéndez Pidal believes that the compilers were using written texts as source material at least for the *Primera Crónica General* (1955a:xli): “Sin duda Alfonso X, al mismo tiempo que en 1270 se procuraba en los centros clericales el *Paulo Orosio*, el *Catálogo de los reyes Godos* y demás fuentes latinas, se procuraba en las escuelas juglarescas los más famosos y divulgados cantares épicos que entonces circulaban.” Collecting the aural and latent *cantares*, however, was surely a more difficult proposition than borrowing Latin manuscripts from monasteries and, knowing his traditionalist perspective,

²¹ “Conocemos un único librito de juglar ambulante, de hacia 1300, el curiosísimo ejemplar del poemita *Elena y María*, hecho con desperdicios de papel, pequeños e irregulares, formando 25 hojitas de unos 6 x 5 centímetros, donde se copian 400 versos a renglón seguido en forma de prosa. No puede darse apuntación más tosca y descuidada. ¿Cómo una obra, publicada así, podía guardarse en los estantes de una biblioteca ni podía ser citada por ningún erudito que estimase el decoro de su pluma?” (Menéndez Pidal 1980:xix). Concerning the literacy of minstrels, see Southworth 1989:96-97; 166, n. 8.

his use of “*escuelas juglarescas*” must be interpreted figuratively. But to what extent were the aural *cantares* transcribed into working copies for the chroniclers? This Menéndez Pidal does not answer, and in fact Alfonso’s draft epic material has not survived. Perhaps his compilers were dealing with a form of lecture notes combining fragments of verse and prose passages of little value after serving their purpose. In a recent article, Joseph J. Duggan presents evidence of the use, prior to the advent of paper, of wax-covered wood tablets for learning to write and as a vehicle for temporary records (1997:4-6, n.10-16). It could well be that the transition between the aural *cantares* and the written chronicles was facilitated by the use of writing on such wax-covered tablets.

While it is undeniable that the epic narratives in the chronicles are derived from aural songs, there is no evidence that they were once complete manuscript poems. And if we accept the concept of auralture as implying unwritten existence there is no reason to look for such evidence. Since it has never been disputed that the epic was an oral phenomenon, it is easier to reconcile auralture with the facts than to postulate the creation and loss of manuscripts. Rather than considering the *PMC* and the *Mocedades* as the norm and the rest as lost literature, I would emphasize that in the nature of a latent genre the *PMC* and the *Mocedades* are the exceptions to that norm.

Fixity and Fluidity

Relevant to the idea of lost literature is the problem of the fixed textual content of a written text as compared to the fluid content of the aural work.²² Regardless of whether songs are orally composed, carefully memorized, or the result of a combination of these skills, each presentation is a unique performance. It is therefore evident that aural works live in constant evolution. The changes in performances as a function of time reveal a pattern of evolution akin to that of an organism. Because we cannot witness a medieval presentation we have been forced to study written

²² This does not mean that a written work cannot evolve through a series of modified texts. Multiple copies of medieval manuscripts attest to the fact that each copy is often a new version that coexists with, but does not replace, the preceding one. As Menéndez Pidal has shown (1955b), the chronicle manuscripts display a traditionality in their evolution similar in nature to that of aural works. However, the difference in magnitude between the aural and written phenomena, the speed of propagation of the changes, and the fact that the aural works do not normally leave a complete record of the preceding versions mean that, for the purposes of this discussion, written texts can be considered static in comparison to the fluidity of aural works.

remnants of songs, but these are neither the work itself nor necessarily complete versions. They are fragmentary and frozen snapshots, reflections perceived through the scattered fragments of a broken mirror. In the case of the *PMC* and the *Mocedades*, the broken mirror is still in place and only a few pieces are missing, so an almost complete aural work can be perceived. In other cases, through fragments of chronicles and ballads the mirrors reveal episodes, parts of one or another song, and sometimes a complete narrative or a climactic episode.²³ The aural form is by nature fluid, and when a narrative or fragments of the same have been identified through epic or a ballad they are seldom identical.²⁴ The case of the *Mocedades* will serve to illustrate this point. As before, I identify the poem as the *Mocedades* and the aural work as the *Cantar de las mocedades de Rodrigo (CMR)*. The former is understood as only one version out of several that may have existed.

In *Romancero Hispánico*, Menéndez Pidal attributes the origin of three ballads to aural versions of the *CMR* different from the *Mocedades* (1953:i, 220, emphasis added):

Ambos romances *derivan* igualmente *de una versión del Rodrigo distinta* de la conservada y *distinta* de la prosificada en la Crónica de 1344 y en la Particular del Cid (capítulos 2, 3 y 4). La versión conservada, aunque no es fuente de los romances, sino colateral de ellos, pues anda fuera de la línea directa de la tradición, contiene (ya lo hemos visto) muchos versos tradicionales y por ellos pareció a Milá ser fuente de los romances.²⁵

²³ Menéndez Pidal (1971:81-117) identifies more than thirty *romances* related to *La leyenda de los Infantes de Lara*. Some—relatively few—derive from aural versions of the *cantar* and some are composed by learned poets. Vaquero 1990 studies the presence of aural narratives in late medieval chronicles.

²⁴ Although written specifically with regard to *romances*, the following words are equally applicable to *cantares*: “Con esas pequeñas variantes, temblor expresivo que refleja la emoción del momento sobre la superficie del poema recitado, cada cantor varía en poco o en mucho las palabras aprendidas, de manera que la forma de un poema tradicional es algo cambiante, algo flúido que se adapta a la sensibilidad y gusto de cada recitante, al modo que un líquido toma la forma del vaso en que se echa” (Menéndez Pidal 1953:41).

²⁵ It is not possible to tell whether each of the three *romances* to which Menéndez Pidal refers derives from one, two, or three written versions of the *cantar*. But why should this matter? In my opinion, the emphasis should be not on postulating theoretical *cantares* but rather on accepting the *romances* as manifestations of the aural work in their own right.

He also recognizes, as we can see from the above, that the version in the two chronicles must have been different from the one (or the ones) that gave rise to the known ballads. For Menéndez Pidal there is evidence of at least three distinct versions of the *CMR* (1953:i, 219) that, he implies, reflect three written works. In the context of auralture, however, it would be more appropriate to refer to these as aural variants, since they are distinct from the version in the manuscript. Even though it is undeniable that the ballads and the chronicles give evidence of other variants, that certainty does not establish that these ever had written versions.

For Deyermond, the *Mocedades* tradition also consists of several versions that he refers to as “intermediate texts,” suggesting the possibility that there might have been two or more. From the fact that orality is not discussed, it is implied that these intermediate texts must have been written. In *Epic Poetry and the Clergy*, he describes the situation as follows (1969:15): “Thus from the original *Gesta* derived an intermediate text, exaggerating some characteristics; from this intermediate text, by stages that are not entirely clear, there descended the ballads, the versions known to García de Salazar and the anonymous editor of Rodríguez de Almela, and—still more exaggerated—*MR*.” In his catalogue of lost works (1995), Deyermond considers the *Mocedades* to have had at least two lost versions, and perhaps as many as four (identified as Aa15.1 to Aa15.4). Referring to these potential versions, surmised from chronicles and *romances*, he observes that “el problema, como siempre, es el de saber cuándo una variante procede de una refundición épica, y cuándo se debe a la iniciativa de un cronista o de un poeta de romances” (1995:102). The subject of written or aural existence is, unfortunately, not specifically taken up, since Deyermond uses the term “literature”—as it is normally used—to cover both written and oral works without distinction. His objective is merely to catalogue those lost works for whose existence there is substantial evidence. The reference to four potential versions does not imply that they were once written, nor even, as we can see from the disclaimer quoted, that the source, from which we heard of their existence, is completely reliable.

For Armistead the evidence, both written and aural, leads him to establish with certainty the existence of at least seven versions of the *Mocedades*, some of which, it is implied, may never have been written. Throughout his work, Armistead has consistently stressed the aural nature of traditional literature.²⁶ Therefore it is evident that some of the versions,

²⁶ The following statements are indicative of his approach to aurality: “Individualist criticism tends to imply that traditionalism is somehow fuzzyheaded and unscientific in arguing for the necessity of lost texts, that such things are chimeric, a

particularly those giving rise to ballads, listed in the appendix to “The *Mocedades de Rodrigo* and Neo-individualist Theory” (1978), could well have had only an aural-oral existence. The wording throughout that article gives ample evidence of the conscious duality between “the epic’s natural mode of existence as a traditional, oral form” and its literary manifestations. The poem contained in MS Espagnol 138 in Paris is not *the Mocedades* but only one version of it. In the words of Albert Lord, it “has no need of stylus or pen in order to exist” (1960:124). The *CMR* is an aural work that we know through several and diverse written versions and some oral fragments. The evidence through which we know it includes an epic poem, several prose histories, six ballads printed in the sixteenth century, and one ballad from the Sephardic oral tradition.²⁷

product of outdated Romantic imaginings, and that the positivist, in insisting on a text that he can see, touch, read, is the only one who is ‘realistic,’ who stands on firm theoretical ground and is endowed with impeccable scientific rigor. But the real chimaera is what beckons the individualist in his fruitless search for a fixed text, a learned prototype, and leads him, too, to negate the necessity and the very existence of intermediate versions, of variants and *refundiciones*. Such things are part and parcel of any traditional genre. *Remaniement*, constant variation is the norm, not the exception, and it is absolutely indispensable to a viable study of such forms of literature. [. . .] The concept of a ‘fixed text’ originates with modern literacy. It is an individualist, literate critic’s fantasy. It is just as phantasmagoric, as chimeric, as unreal as any Romantic’s singing through—if not more so. For today we know that, in a sense, the Romantics were right: *Das Volk dichtet*, not, of course, as a group, by spontaneously bursting into song and thus somehow (impossibly) generating poetry, but rather as an infinite series of individuals, each of whom modifies and recreates the poem as it develops through time in oral tradition” (1987:342-43, n. 9). Furthermore, he states: “Ante la necesidad de reunir un enjambre de libros y artículos, a veces antiguos, exóticos y de bastante difícil obtención, suficientes como para poder formarse una idea cabal o por lo menos satisfactoria de la vida oral múltiple y dinámica de cualquier romance, resulta mucho más fácil dejarlo todo y seguir pensando en el género como si fuera igual que cualquier tipo de poesía escrita—estable y unívoca en su existencia textual—. Pero quien no entiende—o no quiere entender—esta dinámica textualidad no solamente no va a entender lo que es el Romancero, sino tampoco va a entender, en una perspectiva más amplia, lo que es la literatura medieval, tanto oral como escrita. El “texto,” en un contexto medieval (o en una sociedad oral), hay que entenderlo como algo esencialmente—radicalmente—diferente de lo que es un texto en cualquier sociedad moderna” (1992:14, n. 15).

²⁷ A full description of these versions and fragments can be found in the Appendix to Armistead 1978.

The opinions of Menéndez Pidal, Deyermond, and Armistead indicate that these scholars all have a clear understanding of the dual aural and written nature of folk literature. Whereas Deyermond has emphasized the study of the epic genre as literature without making a specific distinction between aural and written works, Menéndez Pidal and Armistead choose to emphasize that the essence of folk literature is in its latent rather than manuscript form, in the word heard rather than in the word seen. Therefore they perceive the literary versions as related to but distinct from the aural form, which is the essence of the work. For this reason they consider that the approach to the aural song must make use of all three channels: the chronicles and ballads in addition to the epic manuscripts.

The *Romancero*

The study of the *romancero*, with its multi-secular corpus of aural and written ballads, provides a living example of the interaction between these environments. Spanish ballads have for five centuries coexisted with the printed word and continue to exist in both forms to the present day. Therefore it has been possible to transcribe in some cases hundreds of versions of the same ballad from the entire geographic spread of the Hispanic and Sephardic tradition.²⁸ The ability to study the *romancero* in oral and printed forms has provided us with a unique laboratory for understanding the nature of an aural phenomenon.

An important consequence of the genre's aural and written duality is that ballads are as much song as they are poetry. Therefore, when moving from a fluid to a fixed medium, when read rather than heard, two distortions are introduced; *rigor mortis* sets in, and the tune is lost. Even if the printed words can stand alone as poetry, they are only a part of the ballad, as Diego Catalán has pointed out. Indeed, like the epic, the essential ballad exists in a latent, fluid, and unwritten state. As in the case of the *PMC*, the number of ballads that have found their way into print is a small fraction of the total,

²⁸ As an example, consider the *romance* entitled *La muerte del príncipe Don Juan*, mentioned above. While Bénichou (1968) worked with forty-six versions of this ballad, Menéndez Pidal (1953:ii, 406) recognizes more than one hundred transcriptions collected in Spain, Portugal, and the Sephardic communities in the Balkans and the Middle East. Note also the vast documentation upon which Menéndez Pidal, Catalán, and Galmés (1954) based their geographic studies of *Gerineldo* and *El conde Sol*.

and an atypical and exceptional fraction.²⁹ Unlike the epic, however, and because of their relatively short length, ballads can be retained in memory by many listeners. As such, the genre is truly a living form, belonging to the people, “popular” in an etymological sense and popular also across the spectrum of society. But as Menéndez Pidal has pointed out, the term “popular” can be misleading.³⁰ The essence of the *romancero* is not just that it is widely sung by many across the entire spectrum of society, but rather that, in being sung, *romances* are reworked by each singer and continuously change in form while maintaining a recognizable core. Being inherently aural, the *romancero* does not need to coexist with the written word. When transferred from its aural medium, deprived of voice and tune, and cast into visual script, the *romancero* is transubstantiated into literature. But the written form manifest in any one version is only lying in state, bearing a lifeless resemblance to its real self, as an inanimate snapshot can reflect an instant of life. The *romance*, being aural, cannot be restricted to one version in preference to another. A written version is “lifeless” because it is a snapshot of one link of the continuum, whereas the *romance*, in its aural environment, is the sum total of the collection of variants. It is, to use Menéndez Pidal’s words, “poesía que vive en variantes” (“poetry that lives in variants”). And, associated with the written word, the term “poetry” (comparable to poem versus song in the epic) is particularly well chosen. When written down, ballads are indeed poetry. As literature, then, the

²⁹ “Y sin embargo, lo típico respecto a los pliegos sueltos y cancioneros del siglo XVI, es encontrarnos con una sola versión—al parecer estática y unívoca—que una vez recogida por la imprenta, se imprime y se vuelve a imprimir, esencialmente en la misma forma y sin variar, de un pliego suelto en otro, de un cancionero en otro. Por lo tanto, el estudio del romancero viejo nos produce una impresión falsa, ilusoria, de un repertorio textual fijo e invariable. Pero no hay tal. Resulta bien claro que, al lado de las pocas que recogen los impresores antiguos, habían de existir otras muchas, muchísimas lecturas alternativas no recogidas, no consignadas a la imprenta y, por lo tanto, no conservadas para nosotros” (Armistead 1994: xii).

³⁰ “Estos dos grados tan diversos,” he says, speaking of *popular* and *tradicional*, “se confunden comúnmente bajo el único nombre de canción o romance ‘popular’, término sumamente equívoco, causa de continuas confusiones y yerros, que equiparando lo popular simplemente vulgarizado, o hasta lo callejero del momento, con lo tradicional, se presta a muy falsas deducciones. Por eso en unos estudios sobre *Poesía popular y Romancero*, 1914-1916, abogué por el nombre de *poesía tradicional*, entendiendo que la tradición no es simple transmisión como la etimología dice, no es mera ‘aceptación’ de un canto por el público (popularidad), sino que lleva implícita la ‘asimilación’ del mismo por el pueblo, esto es, la acción continuada e ininterrumpida de las variantes (tradicionalidad)” (Menéndez Pidal 1953:45).

written form exists frozen in print, in different versions. In their aural environment, however, their living medium, all individual singings are different variants. As auralture, they will take on hundreds of different shades in an ephemeral existence written on the wind.

Michigan State University

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Rites of Passage and Oral Storytelling in Romanian Epic and the New Testament

Margaret H. Beissinger

The exploration of traditional narratives that circulated in the pre-modern age through the comparative study of contemporary genres has a rich precedent in the groundbreaking work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord. Starting in the 1930s, Parry and Lord sought to gain insight into the compositional style of the Homeric epics by observing and analyzing Yugoslav oral epic poets and their poetry. Their findings and conclusions were seminal. In 1960, Lord posited that traditional singers compose long sung poetry in isometric verses in performance through their reliance on groups of words that are regularly used—as parts of lines, entire lines, and groups of lines—to represent ideas in the poetry.¹ This became known as the theory of oral-formulaic composition and has had profound implications in the study of epic and other traditional genres from ancient to modern times.² Oral epic is no longer performed in today's former Yugoslavia. But there are still traces of traditional narrative poetry elsewhere in the Balkans, namely in southern Romania, where I have done much fieldwork among epic singers and at epic performances.

Though greatly inspired by the work of Parry and Lord, my goals in this article, of course, are far humbler. I examine narrative patterns in a Romanian epic song cycle in order to offer possible models for the further study of oral storytelling in the New Testament. My exploration centers on epics of initiation and the nature of the initiatory hero. I consider how the young hero is represented in epics from the so-called Novac cycle; I also discuss how the stories are constructed and how oral composition is reflected in them. The initiatory hero of the Novac cycle, Gruia, is a complex figure

¹ See Lord 1960.

² See Foley 1985 (updated version at <http://www.oraltradition.org>), 1988, and 2002.

who embodies a paradoxical combination of characteristics: he is both semi-divine and mortal; he longs to come of age and get married but cannot meet the challenges set in order to win a bride; he has great courage and potential yet flees from danger; and he repeatedly needs to be rescued or aided in situations he cannot handle himself though he has every intention of doing so. Gruia is at once conventionally heroic and yet anti-heroic—juvenile, naive, impulsive, and buffoonish in his behavior. I argue that he is enigmatic because he stands at the threshold and mediates between youth and manhood and thus inherently embodies ambiguity. This ambiguity characterizes the universal transition from childhood to adulthood. Furthermore, the Romanian initiation epics and their heroes articulate a variety of concerns relating to the traditional family and the succession of generations. I explore how they mirror not only the tensions that mark the passage from childhood to adulthood, but also intergenerational dynamics and the cycle of continuity within the sequence of the generations.

My interest in treating narrative patterns that center on a specific protagonist in the Romanian epic stems from the fact that the New Testament is also comprised of stories that tell of the deeds and circumstances surrounding the life of a spiritual hero, Jesus, including life-cycle events. Moreover, like the oral epics in Romania and elsewhere in the Balkans, the narratives of the New Testament were circulated and perpetuated in ancient times, to some extent, through oral tradition.³ The New Testament and Romanian epic are vastly different on many levels, to be sure. For one, the stories of the Gospels pertain to the sacred realm, while Romanian epic is a thoroughly secular genre. Moreover, the phenomenon of multiple stories circulating around a single figure, though found in both the Gospels and Romanian epic, is realized on a considerably different scale in each tradition. After all, the power of the Gospels lies in the uniqueness of Jesus as a protagonist, while Romanian epic heroes generally represent one strand of larger, collective heroic personae found throughout the Balkans. Nonetheless, both narrative traditions flourished in worlds characterized by a primarily oral culture,⁴ and in both there are “heroes” who represent or advocate ideals of profound cultural significance. My observations implicitly serve, then, to juxtapose Jesus, the central figure in the narratives of the Gospels, many of which are also expressed in multiform, with the initiatory hero of Romanian epic, found in numerous tales in the tradition.

³ See Kelber 1983.

⁴ See Ong 1982.

In the pages ahead, I offer first a few introductory remarks about Romanian oral epic as a genre. I then examine select epic songs from the Novac cycle with a focus on the initiatory hero and his narratives. Altogether I discuss nine epic song texts: five songs, plus four additional variants of three of them. They were all collected from different epic singers in southern Romania at various times during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵ Throughout, I also consider the role of the Romanian initiation epics within the larger Balkan epic framework. Ultimately, I hope that my approach to Romanian epic, which combines a close reading of the poetry and insights gained from extensive fieldwork with a comparative perspective—especially within the Balkan context—will prove useful to others outside my immediate field.

Romanian Oral Epic

Romanian epic songs are called *cântece bătrânești* (“old songs”). The genre is typically performed for ethnic Romanians by traditional professional male singers and instrumentalists—*lăutari* (sg. *lăutar*)—who are Romani (Gypsy).⁶ Traditional music and song, including epic, are performed at weddings, baptisms, and other family celebrations in Romania. Epic singers are accompanied by small ensembles of musicians who play traditional instruments such as the violin, hammer dulcimer, and accordion. The epic performance begins with an instrumental introduction played by the whole ensemble; it is followed by vocal sections performed by one singer and subsequent instrumental interludes. An instrumental finale concludes the performance. Romanian epic songs are usually only several hundred lines long. The generally trochaic verse—corresponding to the melodic line—normally has seven or eight syllables. The poetry reflects a considerable degree of formulaic composition, as singers rely on repeated

⁵ I have selected texts from Amzulescu 1956, 1964, 1974, and 1981. All of the translations, which are simply literal, are mine (I make no claims to “poetic” interpretations).

⁶ Music-making among Romani musicians is learned and transmitted within the family, along the male kin line. For a fuller treatment of Romanian Romani (Gypsy) epic singers and Romanian epic, see Beissinger 1991:chs. 1-3; on identity (occupational and ethnic) among Romani musicians, see Beissinger 2001.

syntactic and lexical patterns that are employed according to the narrative context.⁷

While epic in Romania has flourished for centuries, it is performed at the present time only in a few villages in south-central regions of the country. Romanian oral epic, like the South Slavic genre, mirrors distinctly Balkan historical and cultural circumstances. It is attested from at least the fourteenth century and reflects the Ottoman presence in the Balkans. Many of the epic songs are heroic narratives. Indeed, the core of Romanian heroic narrative deals with conflicts between the native Orthodox Christians and the Turks. The Romanians share many tales and heroes with the South Slavic epic tradition. These stories portray a distinctly patriarchal world where heroic deeds are related in ordeals of capture and rescue as well as in conflict and resolution. Romanian oral epic includes a number of cycles surrounding the exploits of specific heroes. The Novac cycle⁸ tells of the deeds of Novac and Gruia, fabled heroes found in South Slavic epic as well.⁹ Novac, often called “bătrînul” or “Baba” Novac (“old” or “Old Man” Novac), is a mature and seasoned hero and warrior who is invariably triumphant in his exploits. His son (or nephew) Gruia, by contrast, is presented as youthful—either as a boy or young man—and in this role undergoes multiple initiations in various epic songs. Gruia is frequently called “Gruia lui Novac” (“Gruia, Son of Novac”) or “Gruia” (“Little Gruia”). He occasionally merges with “Ioviță,” also presented as Novac’s son or nephew.

Heroes in traditional narrative are often depicted as undergoing various stages of the life cycle. This is a widespread phenomenon¹⁰ and is

⁷ For a discussion of formulaic composition in Romanian epic, see Beissinger 1991:chs. 4-5; on text and music, see ch. 6.

⁸ The narratives of the Novac cycle reflect the Ottoman world, containing Turkish officials, Islamic institutions, “Țarigrad” (Istanbul), and a conspicuous Turkish lexicon, as well as narratives that include mythological and fantastic elements (such as fairies and dragons). The epics in this cycle were at one time widespread in southern and southwestern Romania, though they no longer circulate in oral tradition.

⁹ In Serbo-Croatian epic, they are called “Starina Novak” (“Old Man Novak”) and “Novaković Grujo” (“Grujo, Son of Novak”); see, e.g., *ER* 1720 and Karadžić 1846. In the Bulgarian epic tradition, the two heroes are Stari Novak and Novakov Grujo (also “Old Man Novak” and “Grujo, Son of Novak”); see *BJE* 1971.

¹⁰ E.g., Oedipus, Heracles, and many more; see Raglan 1965.

also found in the life of Jesus,¹¹ whose birth and death (and resurrection), in particular, are key to the Christian narrative. The Nativity of Jesus, including his miraculous conception and birth as a semi-divine Savior, is rendered in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Gruia, the initiatory hero of the Novac cycle, is himself part-human and part-supernatural, as revealed in an epic collected in the late nineteenth century.¹² This song relates how the hero Novac, herding pigs in the mountains, falls in love with Magdalina, a woodland fairy (*zână*) who is bathing in a “lake of sweet milk.” In order to wed her, Novac steals her “fairy” clothes, replacing them with “Romanian” (mortal) clothes. Once Magdalina dons the Romanian attire, she and Novac are married. The singer continues (ll. 96-99):

Iar când anul se-mplinea	And when a year had passed,
D-un fiuț că-și căpăta;	They acquired a little son.
Ce nume că-i punea?	What name did they give him?
“Gruia lui Novac.”	“Gruia, Son of Novac.”

At Gruia’s baptism, his mother Magdalina manages to retrieve her fairy clothes and then deserts him, ceding her care of him to his father Novac. Elsewhere in Balkan epic, heroes also have partly other-worldly parentage through contact with fairies. In a story that closely resembles that of Gruia’s birth, Marko Kraljević, the legendary Balkan hero represented in a large cycle of South Slavic epic, is the offspring of a mortal father (King Vukašin) and Mandalina, a *vila* (fairy).¹³ Such semi-divine, or semi-supernatural, parentage confers a special status on the hero.

Death as the final rite of passage likewise plays into the life story of many heroes. The narrative of Jesus’s death (and resurrection)—a cornerstone of the Christian faith—is related in all four Gospels. By contrast, Gruia’s death is not narrated in the Romanian epic tradition,

¹¹ See Dundes 1976.

¹² “Novac porcărașu” (“Novac the Swineherd”), sung by Pavel Monea in Banat. Collected by D. Vulpian (1886); reprinted in Amzulescu 1981:269-70.

¹³ See “Vukašin Kralj i Vila Mandalina” (“King Vukašin and Mandalina the Fairy”): *HNP* 1896-1942:i, no. 51; see also “Rodjenje Marka Kraljevića” (“The Birth of Marko Kraljević”), which renders a similar story: *HNP* 1896-1942:ii, no. 1. In the Bulgarian tradition, Krali Marko is suckled by a *vila*, giving him supernatural strength; see *BJE* 1971:no. 143.

perhaps because he is represented as an eternally youthful hero who never really grows up.¹⁴

Initiation in a traditional male sense articulates the passage from childhood to adulthood and is often linked directly to marriage. The New Testament contains few references to the boyhood or youth of Jesus. The only narrative that refers to his early years is found in Luke 2:40-52. Here, having returned to Nazareth, “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40).¹⁵ This account continues with the well-known episode of the visit of the twelve-year-old Jesus to the temple, where his parents, after searching for him, finally find him “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers” (2:46-47). When Mary asks Jesus, with, one senses, some amount of frustration, “‘Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously’” (2:48), he answers, also, perhaps, with a tinge of impatience, “‘How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’” (2:49). Jesus here is represented as a spiritually precocious child, wise and enlightened far beyond his years—a characterization that is accorded to other child heroes.¹⁶ This brief incident is a telling event. Jesus is twelve—the approximate age at which boys in traditional society become initiated.¹⁷ He is a boy moving away from his childhood, and there are tensions expressed just below the surface; Jesus clearly feels a growing separation from his parents. But it is a spiritual coming of age, not a sexual one. Except for this episode, there are no stories in the Gospels that treat Jesus’s initiation. This situation may be explained by the fact that because Jesus did not marry, he did not undergo a traditional initiation. After all, initiation is closely associated with sexual awakening and marriage.

¹⁴ Marko Kraljević’s death, however, is; see “Smrt Marka Kraljevića” (“The Death of Marko Kraljević”): Karadžić 1845:no. 73. Unlike Gruia, Marko is typically portrayed as an adult hero.

¹⁵ All citations from the New Testament are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV 1959).

¹⁶ E.g., Heracles; see Apollodorus 1976:175, 177.

¹⁷ See van Gennep 1960:espec. ch. 6 on initiation rites.

The Initiatory Hero

Turning to Romanian and other Balkan epic, the most common narrated rite of passage is initiation.¹⁸ The songs of Gruia's initiation contain a relatively stable configuration or pattern of narrative ideas.¹⁹ In each of them, young Gruia anxiously longs to come of age, specifically to get married. He considers himself ready for his first quest, which, in all but one of the texts, involves his intended acquisition of a bride. Novac—the wise and experienced hero—often attempts to dissuade Gruia from his initiation journey, claiming he is too young, but later offers him advice. Gruia sets off, either despite his father's dissent or without heeding his counsel, becomes embroiled in difficulties, and—more often than not—ends up being rescued or assisted by Novac. Gruia is depicted time and again in these narratives as a precocious, willful youth who is insistent about his own readiness for initiation (marriage) and who stubbornly determines to achieve

¹⁸ Childhood deeds of Balkan heroes are also not uncommon. Consider Meho in “Ženidba Smailagina Sina” (“The Wedding of Smailagić Meho”) (Bynum 1974; English translation, Lord 1974). See also Krali Marko's early deeds in “Marko i tri narechnici” (“Marko and the Three Soothsayers”): *BNT* 1961:116-23.

¹⁹ I have broken down the initiation songs from the Novac cycle into fifteen basic narrative ideas that make up a general structural pattern. I will be referring to them by number as I discuss them in the pages ahead. I am aware of but refrain from using the term “theme,” originally employed by Parry and adopted by Lord (see Lord 1960:68-98), and instead prefer “narrative idea.” Not every song includes all of the following narrative ideas, nor are they always in exactly the same order, but all of the songs include some combination of the following:

1. Banquet at Novac's residence
2. Gruia is restless and withdrawn
3. Novac questions Gruia
4. Gruia responds, expressing desire to get married or go on a first quest
5. Novac ridicules Gruia and sometimes challenges him
6. Novac provides advice for the journey
7. Gruia disregards or violates Novac's advice
8. Gruia prepares himself and selects a horse for the journey
9. Gruia departs
10. Gruia captures and brings his bride home
11. Gruia is pursued by her father but needs help or fails in his quest
12. Novac jeers at Gruia after his journey
13. Gruia is humiliated
14. Novac pacifies his daughter-in-law's father or rectifies Gruia's failed quest
15. Wedding

it but is ultimately less than heroic in its culmination. Also constant in these tales is Novac, a father who attempts to establish dominance over his son's coming of age as he admonishes, advises, and even mocks him in his quest to grow up. There is in these roles intense, unmasked conflict relating to the boy's maturation and socialization and his father's uneasy recognition of these transitions.

Most of the initiation epics in the Novac cycle begin with an assembly or banquet, typically a rollicking feast at Novac's residence, where he and his cronies are eating, drinking, and making merry (1). Only Gruia, depicted deep in malaise, refuses to join in the revelry (2). In "The Wedding of Gruia and the Sultan's Daughter,"²⁰ Gruia's discontent as he idly sits among Novac's feasting guests is described (ll. 20-26):

Toț' boieri bea și mânca,	All of the boyars were drinking and eating.
Frumoșel că petrecea,	They were having a great time.
Numai Gruia să uita,	Only Gruia was watching.
Nici nu bea, nici nu mânca,	He was not drinking, nor was he eating.
Numa' cu ochii privea,	He was just looking around with his eyes.
Coate albe să scotea,	He pulled up his white elbows
Pe masă le răzima.	And leaned them on the table. ²¹

²⁰ "Însurătoarea lui Gruia cu Fata Împăratului," sung by N. Zlătaru in Runcu-Gorj. Collected by Constantin Brăiloiu in 1930 and published in Brăiloiu 1932; reprinted in Amzulescu 1981:344-48.

²¹ Other renditions of (2) include (from "Gruia the Child" [Amzulescu 1964:i, 363-68; ll. 25-27]):

Numai Gruia lui Novac	Only Gruia the son of Novac
Nici nu bea, nici nu mânca,	Wasn't drinking, nor was he eating,
Nici voie bună n-avea.	Nor was he having a good time.

In "Gruia, Son of Novac" (Amzulescu 1964:ii, 7-17; ll. 9-12), it is:

Dar Gruia, Novăciță,	But little Gruia, Novac's little son,
Nici nu bea, nici nu mânca	Was neither drinking nor eating,
Nici voie bună n-avea,	Nor was he having a good time.
Ci sta gata de-a pleca.	Instead, he was all ready to depart.

In "The Wedding of Ioviță" (Amzulescu 1964:ii, 28-34; ll. 23-27), the singer tells us:

Numai Ioviță nici nu bea,	Only Ioviță wasn't drinking,
Nici nu mânca,	Nor was he eating,
Numai cu ochii privea.	He was just looking around with his eyes,
Că ședea de zid răzmat,	As he was sitting, leaning against the wall,
Făr' de igealcă în cap. . .	Without a fez on his head.

Novac then invariably asks Gruia why he is so troubled (3). In “Gruia the Child,”²² the scene is depicted thus (ll. 28-32):

Novac din gură-mi grăia: “Gruio, Gruio, puiul meu, Măi copile, dragul meu, De ce șezi tu supărat, Nebăut și nemîncat?”	Novac said to him: “O Gruia, Gruia, my chick, Hey, my child, my dear one, Why are you sitting there so angry, Neither drinking nor eating?” ²³
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²² “Gruia copilul,” sung by an anonymous singer in Crîjma-Caransebeș-Banat. Collected by Gheorghe Cătană and published in Cătană 1895; reprinted in Amzulescu 1964:i, 363-68.

²³ Narrative idea (3) is highly formulaic; in “Gruia, Son of Novac,” we find (ll. 16-19):

“Măi Gruio, fiul meu, Să-ți ajute Dumnezeu! De ce șezi tu supărat, Nebăut și nemîncat? . . .”	“Hey, little Gruia, my son, May God help you! Why do you sit there so angry, Neither drinking nor eating?”
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In “The Wedding of Gruia and the Sultan’s Daughter” (Amzulescu 1981:344-48; ll. 28-30), we hear:

“Gruio, Gruio, fiul taichii, Nici nu bei, nici nu mănînci, Numai cu ochii te uiț’,	“Gruia, Gruia, Daddy’s boy, You aren’t drinking, nor are you eating. You’re just looking around with your eyes.”
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In a device termed negative parallelism, Novac asks Gruia a series of questions in “The Wedding of Ioviță” (ll. 32-39):

“. . . Ce nu bei, ce nu mănînci, Numai cu ochii te uiți? Ori bucatele nu-ți plac, Mă rog, și-altele să-ți fac? Ori gălbenăși mi-ai sfîrșit, Sau mai mulți c-ai dobîndit? Sau, frate, ți s-a făcut, Neică, de căsătorit?! . . .”	“. . . Why aren’t you drinking or eating, But just looking around with your eyes? Perhaps you don’t like the food here? Well, should I make something else for you? Or has your gold run out? Or have you received more gold? Or, brother, have you realized That you’re ready to get married?!”
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The same device is employed in “The Cadi’s Daughter,” when Novac asks his dejected nephew, who has just walked in the door (Amzulescu 1981:339-44; ll. 52-58):

“. . . Ce vîi, taică, năcăjît, Cu ogarii ciumpăviț’, Cu șoimeii veștejîți’, Or’ dechelciug c-ai sfîrșit, Sau țoale c-ai ponosît,	“. . . Why do you come here, man [Daddy*], all upset, With your hounds all tired out, With your falcons all drooping? Perhaps you’ve spent all your riches? Or your clothes are all worn out?
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Gruia typically answers by conveying his desire to get married (4). In the same song, he impatiently points out that, unlike his peers, he is not yet wed (ll. 33-37):

Gruia din gură-mi grăia: “D-oi tu, tăicuță Novace, Voie bună cum mi-oi face, Că văd vrîstniceii mei Că sînt toți însurăței.”	Gruia said to him: “Hey you, Daddy Novac! How can I have a good time, When I see that my age-mates Are all already married?”
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His change from boyhood to manhood is then metaphorically represented in a reference to his moustache and beard, which have begun to appear on his face, indicating, he implies, that he is becoming a man and deserves to have a bride (ll. 39-41):

“Însoară-mă, taică-nsoară, Că barba că mă-mpresoară, Și mustața îmi strică fața;”	“Let me get married, Daddy, let me get married! Because my beard is growing fast, And my moustache is all over my face.” ²⁴
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Sau cineva te-a bătut, Sau fetele nu te-a vrut?!”	Or someone beat you up? Or the girls didn't want you?!”
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*“Taică” (“Daddy”) is an affectionate term of address, even to a younger man or one's own son.

²⁴ See a similar moustache metaphor in narrative idea (4) in “The Wedding of Gruia and the Wild Girl” when Gruia tells Novac (Amzulescu 1981:274-75; ll. 12-15):

“Însoară-mă, taichii-nsoară Că mustața-m' strică fața, Mi-i mustața-n vârvăric, Cum stă bine la voinic!”	“Let me get married, Daddy, let me get married Because my moustache is all over my face, My moustache is long and all curled up, The way heroes have theirs!”
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Another example of (4) comes from “The Cadi's Daughter,” where Gruia responds to Novac's questions (ll. 60-69):

“Niminea nu m-a bătut', Nij' de chelciug n-a 'firșît, Dar io, taică, m-am plimbat P'in tîrgu Odriului, La fata Cadiului, La Rada, fata frumoasă,	“No one has beaten me up, Nor have I spent all my money, But, Daddy, I took a walk Over to the Odriu marketplace, To the daughter of the Cadi, To Rada the beautiful girl,
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Gruia presents a portrait of the brooding, anxious youth who yearns to come of age. Parallels to this figure are found throughout Balkan epic.²⁵ One of the most well-developed is the initiatory hero Meho in the Serbo-Croatian Muslim epic “The Wedding of Smailagić Meho,”²⁶ who, like Gruia, sits inert and withdrawn in an assembly attended by elders and nobles who, also like Novac’s peers, are drinking and conversing. In imagery strikingly similar to that in the Romanian epic, the dejected and unhappy Meho refuses to drink but soon explains his gloom: he has not accomplished anything heroic yet since he has not yet been given the chance by his elders. Likewise, Gruia needs Novac’s approval to get married, a fact that enrages him, as reflected in his furious threats against his father in “Gruia the Child” (ll. 42-48):

“Iar de nu mi-i însura,
Vei păți-o tu așa,
Eu hoț mă voi face
Și nu ți-oi da pace,
Acas-oi veni,
Pe tine te-oi omorî,
Pe mamă oi văduvi!”

“Because if you don’t let me get married,
This is what I will do:
I will become a thief,
And I won’t give you any peace.
I’ll come home
And I will kill you.
I’ll make my mother a widow!”

O’i negri de curvă-aleasă;
Di-un cântecel mi-a cântat,
Mi-a căzu’ mie cu drag,
La inimă m-a săcat!”

With dark eyes like a choice hussy.
She sang me a little song,
I truly fell in love with her,
My heart was taken!”

In a truncated version of (4), Gruia naively shouts out his wish to get married in “The Wedding of Gruia” (Amzulescu 1981:270-71, ll. 1-5):

Strigă, Doamne, cine strigă?
Strigă Gruia lui Novac:
“Eu sînt, taică, de-nsurat
C-o fată m-a sărutat
Și m-o spus că-s de-nsurat!”

Someone was yelling, Lord, who was yelling?
Gruia the son of Novac was yelling:
“I’m ready, Daddy, to get married!
Because a girl kissed me
And told me that I’m ready to get married!”

²⁵ One obvious parallel is found in the Serbo-Croatian “Ženidba Grujice Novakovića” (“The Wedding of Grujo Novaković”), in which Old Novak, while feasting with his peers, notices that Grujo, his son, is downcast. He learns from Grujo that he wishes to get married (Karadžić 1846:no. 6).

²⁶ See Bynum 1974 (Serbo-Croatian), Lord 1974 (English translation).

Meho also threatens to assault the assembly and all of Bosnia if his situation is not rectified. His grievance—that he has not been recognized by the elders and allowed to prove his manhood—is akin to that expressed by other young heroes in various Serbo-Croatian epics of initiation.²⁷ The situation is resolved by the elders' acknowledgment of Meho's authority, however temporary, which necessitates a journey to Budapest, where he also finds a bride. In other words, Meho's initiatory journey also ultimately includes a marriage. Gruia's only explicit concern, by contrast, is his gaining of a bride. He does not desire political recognition of his manhood, as does Meho. In many ways, Gruia's anxiety about marriage gets right to the heart of the question of generational continuity. Gruia knows that he too will participate in the ongoing process of family-making, just as his father did (and—in some songs—as he sees his peers doing), and he is impatient to begin. Moreover, in wishing to get married, Gruia effectively wishes to become just like his father (who is a married man); he feels a strong affinity with his hero-father. At the initial banquet in "The Wedding of Gruia and the Sultan's Daughter," when Novac asks Gruia why he is so despondent, Gruia answers, overtly expressing this affinity (ll. 36-43):

“Taică, tăicuța mea,	“O Daddy, my little daddy!
Nici haine n-am ponosît,	I haven't worn out my clothes,
Nici de chelciug n-am sfîrșit,	Nor have I spent all my money,
Dară timpul mi-a venit	But the time has come for me,
Taică, de căsătorit,	Daddy, to get married,
Fie una lîngă mine	For there to be someone next to me
Cum 'i maica lîngă tine,	Like mother is next to you.
Bine mi-ar părea mie!”	I would really like that!”

Gruia's relationship with his father finds an ancient precedent in Odysseus and Telemachus in the *Odyssey*. Like Gruia, Meho, and many others, Telemachus is anxious to embark on his initiation journey. Accordingly, he is introduced in the *Odyssey*, as are his modern counterparts in their epics, as brooding and eager to separate himself from his childhood. Telemachus in Ithaca, like Meho, is denied the political authority that manhood would confer on him. And, like Gruia, he wishes to become just like his father—a theme echoed over and over in the *Odyssey*, especially in in Books I through IV and then again when the son joins his father later in the epic and proceeds to aid him in defeating his mother's suitors.

²⁷ See Bynum 1968 for a discussion of this and eight other Serbo-Croatian epics of initiation, which all by and large follow the same general narrative pattern.

It is not only sons who are anxious in matters relating to generational transitions, however, but fathers as well. As Novac sees Gruia begin to pursue greater authority, he attempts to direct and even control his son's activities. Following Gruia's appeal to get married, Novac often admonishes him, telling him that he is too young (5). In "Gruia the Child," Novac argues (ll. 58-62):

<p>“Gruia, copil de rînd Și cu capu cam bolînd, Tu nu ești de însurat, Toate fetele te bat Și nici un război n-ai spart. . .”</p>	<p>“O little Gruia, you simple child With your ailing mind! You're not ready to get married yet. The girls all still beat you up And you haven't even fought a battle yet.”²⁸</p>
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Novac goes on to boast about the exploits of his own youth, explaining that by the time he got married he had already fought in seven wars. He challenges Gruia to prove whether he is worthy of a bride (5); in "Gruia the Child," Gruia is to defeat a monstrous creature called "fata sălbatică" (the wild girl), discussed below.

Novac's advice for Gruia's journey (6) is frequently disregarded or violated by Gruia as he implicitly declares his rebellion (7). At the opening banquet in "Gruia, Son of Novac," when young Gruia declares his wish to set off to Țarigrad (Istanbul), Novac shakes his head and warns him that if he is intent on this voyage, he should be sure to not drink wine there, as it could be poisoned. The singer comments (ll. 40-51):

<p>Gruia, copil zburdat, De mic la rele-nvățat, El în seamă nu băga</p>	<p>Little Gruia, capricious child, Who had learned bad ways since he was small, He didn't listen</p>
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²⁸ In another example of (5), Novac tells Gruia in "The Wedding of Gruia, Son of Novac" to grow up first before he can get married (Amzulescu 1964:ii, 40-43; ll. 4-6):

<p>“Nu ești, neică, de-nsurat Pînă fetele te bat Și nevestele te luptă!”</p>	<p>“You aren't ready to get married, boy, As long as the girls beat you up And the wives fight with you!”</p>
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And in "The Wedding of Gruia" (ll. 6-10):

<p>“Nu ești, taică, de-nsurat Că zău, fetele te bat, Fetele cu furcile, Babele cu drugile, Neveste, cu prislite!”</p>	<p>“You aren't ready to get married, man, Because, really, the girls still beat you up: The girls with their pitchforks, The old women with their bars, The wives with their distaffs!”</p>
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Ce tatăl său îi spunea	To what his father told him.
Ci-și încingea armele	Instead, he girded himself with his weapons
Și-și gătea podoabele;	And got his accoutrements ready;
Apoi murgul și-l scotea,	Then he brought out his dark bay horse.
Slugile i-l țesăla,	The servants curry-combed him.
Cu șeaua mi-l înșela,	They put the saddle on him.
Cu frîne mi-l înfrina.	They bridled him.
Gruia pe el se suia,	Gruia mounted him
Rămas bun că mi-și lua.	And bid farewell to everyone.

Gruia insists on the journey; the verses describing his horse, weapons, and preparations (8) underscore the importance of his departure (9). And, once in Țarigrad, dismissing Novac's warning, he finds the "sultan's inn" and proceeds to drink glass after glass of wine for three days and three nights. But he also refuses to offer payment to the barmaid, who finally, in desperation, runs to the sultan for help. Gruia is subsequently imprisoned by the Turks and remains a captive for seven and a half years. He is finally rescued by Novac, who cannot resist scolding his son once again upon seeing him (12) (ll. 397-400):

"Gruito, copilul meu,	"O little Gruia, my child,
Tu faci tot de capul tău	You always do everything according to your own will
Și n-ascuți cuvântul meu,	And never listen to my advice.
Rău te bătu Dumnezeu!"	God punished you badly this time!"

This song includes contradictory imagery—on the one hand, of a young boy hardly ready to leave home by himself, and on the other, once in Țarigrad, of a ferocious and powerful drinker who is fearful enough to be thrown into prison by the Turks. Home (where Gruia was a boy) and Țarigrad (where he is a man) symbolically reinforce stages within his initiation.

Novac's pre-journey advice to Gruia pertains mostly to women and horses. In "Gruia, Son of Novac,"²⁹ Novac dispatches his son to Buda to find a bride (6). Once there, Gruia locates the maiden, artfully abducts her, and rides off in a classic bride capture (10). At the end of the song, the heroic Gruia's craving for recognition by Novac is revealed when he arrives home with his bride and tells him (ll. 69-70):

²⁹ "Gruia lui Novac," sung by an anonymous singer. Published in *Gazeta poporului*, Timișoara, 1886. Reprinted in Amzulescu 1981:350-51.

“Ce tu, tată, ai gândit	“Wouldn’t you know it, Dad,
Eu toate le-am isprăvit!”	I did it all!”

In “The Cadi’s Daughter,”³⁰ Novac wishes to dictate which horse should accompany Gruia on his bridal quest (6). He sends Gruia to the stable and tells him (ll. 76-84):

“. . . Să faci cum te-oi învăța:	“. . . Do now what I tell you to:
Tu la grajd să mi te duci	Go out to the stable.
Și tu cai să nu ne-alegi:	Don’t you pick from the horses;
Să nu iei pe Neguriță,	Don’t take Neguriță,
C-ala ie bun de suliț;	Because she is like a spear.
Și să iei pe Șargu cea zlabu,	But do take Șargu, the lean horse,
Care fuge cu anu	Who runs like crazy
Și răsuflă cu ceasu,	And breathes like a clock.
C-ala ți-o scăpa capu!”	With her you’ll escape with your head!”

Gruia does not take the horse Novac has identified but rather the one that he himself prefers, which is the forbidden horse Neguriță (7). With Neguriță, he goes straightaway to the bride he wishes to marry. In a variant of this song, “The Wedding of Ioviță,”³¹ Novac sends his nephew (called Ioviță) to the stable with advice about which horse to choose (6). Ioviță is dissatisfied with all of them, however, until he glimpses a special horse off to the side, Albu, which he selects. Novac cautions him to not ride Albu, since he is a rambunctious horse and will “ruin him.” Ioviță senses, however, that this is a special horse (ll. 84-87):

Știi, ca para focului,	You know, red-hot like fire,
Luceafărul cerului,	Like the morning star in the sky,
D-inșelat și d-înfrînat,	Great for saddling and bridling,
Cum e bun de-ncălecat;	Just as he is great for mounting.

Ioviță defies Novac (7), mounts Albu, and rides off, arriving at the Turkish mosque where he spies the daughter of the Cadi, with whom he has fallen in love. In these songs, Gruia has an intuitive knowledge about which horse best matches him as a hero, despite what his father suggests. This special

³⁰ “Fata Cadiului,” sung by Ștefan Neagu in Sadova-Dolj. Collected by Amzulescu in 1961 and published in Amzulescu 1974:159-66.

³¹ “Însurătoarea lui Ioviță,” sung by Dumitru Burcea in Merenii-de-Sus-Videle-București. Collected by Amzulescu in 1951 and published in Amzulescu 1956:67-72.

knowledge again serves as an expression of rebellion as Gruia seeks to grow up and rely on his own instincts, not his father's.

“The Wedding of Gruia and the Sultan's Daughter” presents a graphic depiction of father-to-son role transferral when Gruia prompts Novac to pass his horse and weapons on to him, saying (ll. 55-59):

“ . . . Dă-m' murgu din bătrînețe	“ . . . Give me the dark bay horse from your old age
Și arme din tinerețe;	And the weapons from your youth:
Săbioara cea mischie,	The little pale-gray sword,
Mi-a fost dăruită mie	Which has been promised to me
Din mică copilărie!”	Since I was a small child!”

Novac then leads Gruia to the stable and opens the door to find the magnificent horse Roșu, who terrifies the whole world when he neighs and must be restrained by twelve people and saddled by seven—a fitting metaphor for a spirited young hero. In the scene that follows (8), Gruia undergoes a symbolic initiatory rite of passage, including separation, transition, and incorporation.³² First “Gruia” (“Little Gruia”) exits from the stable in what is clearly a separation. Then he enters “a little room” (a transitional space) where he changes his attire and obtains the sword. In his incorporation, Gruia then returns to the stable as if reborn a hero, equipped with his new sword and a change of clothes. Gruia is now truly ready to come of age: he easily mounts the fierce Roșu and takes off to Țarigrad, where Novac has advised him to find a bride. Gruia's new-found symbols of manhood, their significance augmented since they come directly from his hero-father, are conspicuous: horse, weapons, and dress. The extraordinary horses in these epics are so unruly that no one but an exceptional hero—Gruia—can ride them. They are reminiscent of other special horses in Balkan epic that can fly and sometimes talk; they are also devoted companions to their hero-masters.³³ Indeed, the novice hero throughout

³² See the three-stage paradigm for life-cycle rites of passage in van Gennep 1960.

³³ Marko Kraljević's horse, Šarac, talks and flies (in the Bulgarian tradition, Marko's horse is called “Sharko”). Other parallels are found in Serbo-Croatian Muslim epic, where the hero Mujo Hrnjičić has a white winged horse who also speaks, while Djerdjelez Alija has a chestnut winged steed. On horses and horse culture in Balkan epic, see Lord 1991.

Balkan epic is typically outfitted for his initiatory quests with special accoutrements—clothing and arms, in addition to his steed.³⁴

On quests to prove his manhood, Gruia is not always “man enough” to accomplish what he sets out to do, such as capturing brides or slaying dragons. It is often Novac who finishes off heroic tasks such as acquiring Gruia’s bride for him or dealing the final blows to Gruia’s opponent. It is in these moments, perhaps more than anywhere else in the initiatory epics, that the paradox of what Gruia wants and what he is able to do is portrayed most poignantly. In “The Wedding of Gruia,”³⁵ Novac suggests that Gruia find a fairy to be his bride (6). Gruia goes to the mountains and comes upon her asleep. He leans over to kiss her, but she wakes up and strikes him. Gruia, frightened, runs back to Novac, who reminds him (12) (ll. 32-34):

“Nu ți-am spus, tăichiță, spus,	“Didn’t I tell you, man, didn’t I,
Nu ești taichii de-nsurat	That you’re not ready to get married, man,
Că și fete mici te bat. . . .”	Because even little girls still beat you
	up.” ³⁶

Novac then sets off, captures the fairy himself, and brings her home to Gruia (14), who marries her (15). But the fairy is not meant to live with mortals; she deserts Gruia after the wedding and returns to her own world.

In “Gruia the Child,” Gruia responds to his father’s challenge to conquer the hideous “wild girl” in order to prove his readiness for marriage. The confrontation between Gruia and the terrifying creature, whom he finds asleep, is full of comic hyperbole. Gruia kicks her, at which she wakes up

³⁴ E.g., Meho’s horse, attire, and weapons are elaborately described before he sets off for Budapest in “The Wedding of Smailagić Meho”; see Lord 1974:99-108.

³⁵ “Însuratul lui Gruia,” sung by an anonymous singer in Serbian Banat. Collected by I. G. Bibicescu and published in Bibicescu 1893; reprinted in Amzulescu 1981:270-71.

³⁶ In a variant of (12) from “The Wedding of Gruia and the Wild Girl,” Novac meets Gruia after his defeat by the wild girl and says (ll. 59-64):

“Nu ți-am spus, taichii, ți-am spus	“Didn’t I tell you, man, didn’t I,
Ca io, taichii,-am așteptat	That I expected you, man,
Să vii cântînd și fluierînd	To come back singing and whistling
Și pă drumuri pușcărînd,	And firing your rifle all the way home.
Da’ nu isci, taichii, dă-nsurat,	But, you aren’t ready, man, to get married,
Că toate fecili ce bat; . . .”	Because all the girls still beat you up. . . .”

and seizes him, squeezing him so hard that three of his ribs break.³⁷ In an inversion of the motif in which a hero hurls his sword up into the clouds, waiting seemingly forever for it to return, the wild girl tosses Gruia into the sky so high that it takes three days for him to come back down, whereupon he lies nearly lifeless for three more. Finally, several days later, Gruia revives (13) (ll. 126-29):

Dar pe loc el nu mai sta,	But he didn't stay there any longer
Ci la cal mi să ducea,	But went over to his horse
Tot plîngînd și suspinînd	All weeping and sobbing
Și pe fată blăstămînd.	And cursing the girl. ³⁸

When Gruia returns home, the humiliation is not over, as Novac caustically asks him (12) (ll. 139-42):

“Ce atît-ai zăbovit,	“What took you so long?
Ori cu fata te-ai iubit?	Did you and the girl make love?
Eu te-aștept să vini rîzînd,	I expected you to return laughing,
Iară tu îmi vini plîngînd!”	But instead you've come back crying!”

Novac then departs to find the monster and decapitate her (14). Gruia is depicted yet again as an anti-hero, as the final verses relate his horror at the sight of the girl's head, which Novac has brought home.

Finally, “The Cadi's Daughter” tells how Ioviță (the hero's name in this variant) abducts a bride (usually in Țarigrad) through disguise and deceit³⁹ and then flees with her, angrily pursued by her father, the Cadi (10). As Ioviță and his bride gallop back home, they see an “enormous rain cloud” following them but soon realize that it is the Cadi chasing them. Ioviță is terrified (11) (ll. 175-79):

³⁷ In a variant of the same song, when Gruia sees what the wild girl is like when she wakes up (l. 36), the singer tells us that “Friguri dă moarce-l pringea” (“Death-like shivers gripped him”): narrative idea (11).

³⁸ In the same variant, the narrative idea “Gruia is humiliated” captures Gruia's failure to conquer the wild girl (ll. 54-55):

Așa trist și necăjit,	He was so sad and upset
Ca dă Dumnezeu bătut.	As if God had defeated him.

³⁹ One could argue that Gruia's skills in deception augment his heroic persona. Odysseus's competence in deception, for example, is often interpreted as a heroic trait.

De-aşa frică ce-i erea,	He was so filled with fear
Paloj din teacă trăgea,	That he pulled his sword out of its sheath.
Cu el de-azvîrlita da,	He hurled it into the air.
Drept în grindă să-nfigea,	It landed right on the veranda,
Vezi, în grinda lui Novac,	Look, on Novac's veranda.

This passage embodies the paradox of Gruia as both anti-hero and hero. As an anti-hero, he is so frightened by the Cadi that he calls on Novac to rescue him and his bride. But the means by which he signals to Novac his need for help reveals incredible heroism: he flings his sword into the distance with such precise marksmanship that it lands exactly on the veranda where Novac is sitting. Novac immediately understands his son's cry for help and sets off, meets the Cadi, and manages to make peace with him (14) (ll. 203-7):

Cu Cadia să-ntîlnea,	He met up with the Cadi.
De departe că striga:	He called out from a distance:
“Dura, dura, cuscre, dura,	“Wait, wait, father-in-law, ⁴⁰ wait,
Copiii fac vrăjbile,	Children feud,
Noi bătrînii—pacile!”	But we old people make peace!”

The song ends with contented heroes, horses, and a festive wedding.⁴¹ In another variant, “The Wedding of Ioviță,” the action proceeds in similar fashion. Near the end of the tale, however, as the chase is on, Novac confronts the irate Cadi and tries to reason with him, but this Cadi is intent on beheading Novac.⁴² Novac then deals the Cadi a death blow, takes his horse, and returns home where Ioviță and his bride have already arrived. Soon after, the wedding takes place and the festivities begin (15). This

⁴⁰ *Cuscru* is a kinship term meaning the father of one's son- or daughter-in-law (in the vocative case in the excerpt).

⁴¹ Another variant of this song, “The Wedding of Gruia,” also ends with a peaceful reconciliation between the Cadi and Novac (14), thanks again to his diplomacy. Both fathers agree to leave “the children” alone.

⁴² In “The Wedding of Ioviță” (in narrative idea 14), Novac tells the Cadi (ll. 216-22):

“Dur, dur, dur, cuscre Cadio,	“Wait, wait, wait, father-in-law Cadi,
Nu glumi cu copiii	Don't fool around with the children,
Glumește cu bătrînii.	But do fool around with the old people.
Copiii că-ngîlcevesc	Because children quarrel,
Bătrînii că-mpăciuiesc.	But old people make up.
Copiii fac vrăjbur'le,	Children feud,
Iară bătrînii păciur'le!”	While old people make peace!”

narrative pattern—bride capture and pursuit—is typical in Balkan traditional narrative and is even still found, at times, in real life.⁴³

Conclusion

The initiatory hero in the Romanian oral epic tradition—Gruia, of the Novac cycle—mediates between two universal life-cycle stages: childhood and adulthood. He occupies an ambiguous and often paradoxical position as he expressively articulates the passage from boy to young man. As both hero and anti-hero, Gruia brings diverse meanings—passion, strength, joy, humor, anger, obstinacy, weakness, and failure—to his role in the epics of initiation.⁴⁴ I have charted how Gruia and his father (or uncle) Novac represent concerns that pertain to the traditional patriarchal family and its successive generations. Gruia and Novac are constantly in conflict—an apt reflection of generational dynamics. I have also demonstrated how oral tradition—the structure of the stories in multiform and the ways in which singers turn to similar narrative patterns and repeated verbal forms—characterizes the genre. Indeed, Gruia’s meaning within Romanian oral narrative gains depth in the context of other novice heroes. These heroes—Telemachus, Meho Smailagić, and numerous others from Balkan oral tradition—also undergo meaningful initiations as they pass from childhood to adulthood.

I have attempted in this article to suggest a number of connections between the narratives of Jesus and the epics of the Balkan world. Rites of passage play a crucial role in the narratives that surround Jesus in the Gospels. While initiation for Jesus is not central to his story, birth and death take on marked, symbolic meanings in the New Testament. Moreover, most

⁴³ E.g., the Bulgarian “Marko otvlichia nevestata” (“Marko Abducts the Bride”), Miladinov and Miladinov 1861:no. 147. See also the Russian *byliny* (oral epics) about the hero Solovei Budimirovich, who often figures in stories of bride capture (Bailey and Ivanova 1998). Bride capture is still occasionally practiced in some communities in the Balkans. During recent fieldwork in a southern Romanian village, a young Romani man (a musician with whom I have worked) had recently “abducted” and eloped with his bride, having taken her to another village where they stayed with her aunt for several days. His family then recognized them as married. See also Bringa 1995, espec. ch. 4 on marriage procedures and elopement.

⁴⁴ Although I have collected Romanian epic extensively, I have never encountered a performance of a song from the Novac cycle. This is unfortunate, since I have a great fondness for these narratives and the richness of their expression, especially for Gruia, who is such an imperfect yet thoroughly sympathetic “hero” that it is almost impossible not to identify with and love him.

of the narratives and episodes in the Gospels were orally transmitted, at least at one time, and were told in multiform, though many were eventually preserved in written form. Finally, I have also proposed that Jesus is a hero whose life-story can be fruitfully viewed in a broad comparative framework. His life-story illuminates other traditional heroic life-stories, just as other narratives of birth, initiation, and death can enlighten his.

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Oral Tradition and Contemporary Critical Theory. II

Mark C. Amodio, Guest Editor

This is the second of two clusters of essays whose shared project is to put oral theory into dialogue, directly or indirectly, with other schools of contemporary critical thought. In many ways, oral theory is uniquely positioned to serve as a *terminus ad quem* for critical conversations that cut across temporal, generic, linguistic, stylistic, and theoretical boundaries in that it has been fundamentally interdisciplinary from its modern inception in the work of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, and it continues to be so down to the present day. Oral theory's openness to a wide variety of critical perspectives and practices is both one of its defining characteristics and something that has long distinguished it from other, more rigidly conceived schools of theoretical inquiry. Filtering their investigations through anthropological, historical, linguistic, or literary methodologies, to name but a few of very many possibilities, is something that oralists do as a matter of routine, whether they focus on works of verbal art produced by living tradition bearers witnessed firsthand and captured on audio- or video-tape, or whether they concentrate on traditional verbal art that survives only in mute, entexted witnesses.

Taken as a whole, what the essays in this and the preceding cluster hope to demonstrate is that oral theory is an ecology—to draw upon a recent and important formulation of John Miles Foley's (2002:ch. 8)—that functions as natural ecologies do and whose permeable borders permit, or rather encourage its practitioners to foray into other fields. Just as traditional lexical collocations cross generic borders without metrical or rhetorical impedance (and without any loss of their specialized metonymic referentiality) within a given tradition, and just as traditional thematics and even larger traditional narrative units are shared between and across discrete traditions and the space of many years,¹ so, too, do the methods and practices of oral theory draw upon and speak directly to those of other schools of thought. Oral theorists have become increasingly aware of oral theory's interconnectedness with other schools of contemporary theoretical thought and more and more of them are engaging issues that traverse the permeable, increasingly difficult-to-define borders of the field, but many of our colleagues working in other theoretical schools have yet fully to realize that oral theory can and often does speak directly and productively to many

¹ Cf. Amodio forthcoming:espec. chs. 4 and 5.

of their fields' central questions and, further, that its borders are as hospitable to ingress as they are to egress. It is our hope that the conversation initiated in these clusters will be continued by colleagues working in and among the very many networked fields of discourse that comprise contemporary critical theory.

Vassar College

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Transforming Experience into Tradition: Two Theories of Proverb Use and Chaucer's Practice

Nancy Mason Bradbury

Let us lay, at the foundation, the image of the women who carry full,
heavy vessels on their heads without the aid of their hands.

The rhythm with which they do this is what the proverb teaches.

From the proverb speaks a *noli me tangere* of experience.

With this, it proclaims its ability to transform experience into tradition.

Benjamin 1999:582

Toward a Transdisciplinary Theory of Proverb Performance

Beginning in 1994, the interdisciplinary journal *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* hosted a lively, even heated, debate over two rival theories of proverb use. One theory was jointly authored by a linguist, George Lakoff, and a literary critic, Mark Turner; it treats the proverb as a species of metaphor. A group of experimental psycholinguists, Richard P. Honeck and collaborators, developed the other, an analogy-based problem-solving model.¹ Honeck and Jon Temple initiated the discussion by comparing the two theories and finding Honeck's own theory superior from the standpoint of empirical support. Three psychologists led by Raymond Gibbs then took up the banner for the metaphor theory, arguing that disciplinary differences led Honeck and Temple to misunderstand key terms in the theory and to subject it to an inappropriate standard of proof (Gibbs et al. 1996a:207-8). Honeck and Temple retorted that "evaluation of the theories via an artificial, unproductive, and misleading disciplinary distinction fails to do justice to either theory" (1996:230). The seemingly troublesome disciplinary differences argued out in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* shrink to tiny proportions, however—a mere family quarrel—when measured against the gap between cognitive theories on the one hand and, on the other, the

¹ The theory forwarded by Honeck and collaborators appeared first (Honeck et al. 1980), but it has since been elaborated and modified to take account of work by Lakoff and Turner (1989) and others (see Honeck and Temple 1994 and 1996, Honeck 1997). Hence I take up Honeck's theory second.

anthropological, folkloric, and performance-based studies carried out by those whom, for brevity's sake, I will call ethnographers of the proverb.²

I attempt here to draw up some preliminary plans for a bridge spanning the gulf between cognitive and ethnographic proverb study. My argument rests on two basic assumptions: that proverb use is both mental *and* social and that the most holistic and integrative approach will be the most useful.³ This essay appraises the two theories, both of considerable interest for what they include and what they omit, and then measures the fruits of this theorizing against Chaucer's richly elaborated and far-reaching conception of proverb use in Fragment I of *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's great narrative poem has much to tell us about the power of performed genres embedded in written texts, and the reader will hardly be surprised that I find Chaucer's poetic practice more complete, subtle, and searching than even the most explanatory of theories. Extending from The General Prologue through the Knight's, Miller's, Reeve's, and truncated Cook's Tales, Fragment I best suits my present purposes because in this opening segment Chaucer teaches his audience how to read his highly experimental new work, a program of instruction that includes tacit lessons in his subtle art of proverb use.⁴

² The bibliography of ethnographic approaches to the proverb is enormous; for a good sampling of classic articles, see the reprinted ethnographic pieces in Mieder and Dundes 1981 and Mieder 1994. Arewa and Dundes 1964 is another foundational study. Mieder 2001 supplies recent bibliography on ethnographic and other approaches as do the periodically updated bibliographies in the journal *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*.

³ The value of inquiry conducted outside disciplinary boundaries is still contested on methodological and philosophical grounds. See, for example, Stanley Fish's argument (1989) that disciplinary boundaries are insurmountable because our disciplines constitute our knowledge, and thus there is no vantage point from outside traditional disciplines from which interdisciplinary inquiry can be conducted. Bauman avoids the term "interdisciplinary" for almost the opposite reason: "to seek an 'interdisciplinary' solution is to concede the legitimacy of disciplinary differentiation to begin with, whereas I have preferred to align myself with the integrative vision of language, literature and culture in which folklore was itself first conceived" (1986:114; cf. Bauman 1996). A considerably bolder, but compatible, attempt at the discipline bridging I attempt here is Bowden 1996.

⁴ The use of literary texts for ethnographic study remains controversial, but it is hard to deny that written sources have enriched our knowledge of proverb practice. Influential precedents include Peter Seitel's study of Ibo proverbs (1981), which combines fieldwork with evidence from the novels of Chinua Achebe; the work of Fontaine (1994) and Perry (1993) with the Hebrew Bible; and a stimulating essay by Daniel Boyarin (1993) that makes ethnographic use of ancient Hebrew and medieval

The Importance of “Cultural Specifics”

Richard Honeck's *A Proverb in Mind* affirms that cultural contexts enrich the study of proverbs, but argues nevertheless that for theoretical purposes proverbs can be “abstracted away from their cultural specifics” because “the mental structures and processes of *Homo sapiens* are explainable on the basis of the same theoretical principles” (1997:37). Thus Honeck summarizes ethnographic work but does not substantially alter his theory in light of it. Yet even insofar as proverb use involves mental (as opposed to social) performance, one can hardly discount such culturally determined factors as the size and familiarity of the proverbial repertoire, the amount of proverb practice provided, and the value placed on skillful use. A holistic theory must accommodate both universalizing cognitive factors and highly specific cultural determinants.

Proverb use arises from a context of “cultural specifics” from which it cannot be “abstracted” without serious distortion. In Western Europe intense interest in proverbs prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and peaked in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁵ The literature of late medieval and early modern England abounds in proverbial wisdom, as the indices drawn from the works of this period testify.⁶ We can judge the pervasiveness of proverb use in Chaucer's period by the wealth of proverbs embedded in his and other literary texts, the contemporary practice of compiling large proverb collections, and the custom of drawing attention to proverbs in written texts by means of pointing hands and other devices. Perhaps even more telling is the exuberant spillover of proverbs into visual art such as wall painting, painted glass, tapestries, and misericord carvings, as well as into what Obelkevich calls “improbable media”—tables, plates, pots, knife blades, and sundials.⁷ Many of these visual representations depend on the viewer's ability to match them with familiar proverbs held in memory.

Christian literary sources. Precedents from Anglo-Saxon studies include Niles 1999; from Chaucer studies, Lindahl 1987 and Winick 1994.

⁵ Davis 1975 and Obelkevich 1994 provide concise overviews.

⁶ See Whiting 1968 to the year 1500, and Tilley 1950 for 1500-1700.

⁷ For medieval proverb collections see B. Taylor 1992. For proverbs in medieval and early modern visual arts, see Obelkevich 1994:229, Jones 1989a and 1989b, and Block 1991.

Unlike most proverb users in our society, Chaucer and his audiences were “strong tradition-bearers.”⁸ Pupils in medieval England routinely memorized proverbs, and they honed their linguistic skills by translating them in and out of Latin. By the mid-fourteenth century, translation of proverbs and other sayings in and out of the vernacular was standard educational practice (Orme 1989:76). A number of pedagogically oriented proverb collections survive, including one compiled by John Cornwall, a schoolmaster at Oxford in the 1340s who sets out *sententiae* in Latin to be translated into English.⁹ Until the early fifteenth century, students usually wrote their translations on waxed tablets and few survive. But from the 1420s on, translation workbooks give intriguing glimpses into the centrality of proverbs in the late medieval classroom. The Latin sentences set for translation were called *latinities*, or “latins”; the English sentences were *vulgaria* or “englishes.” Among the set sentences in one workbook is the lament: “a hard latin to make, my face waxeth black” (Orme 1989:76-77). Schoolmasters varied the austere moral *sententiae* of their basic text, the *Distichs of Cato*, with racier vernacular proverbs that resemble the lively expressions preserved in Chaucer’s verse: “Bornt hand fyr dreydis”; “Far fro the ee, far fro the hart”; “Betwyx two stolys [stools] fals the ars down.”¹⁰

As Chaucer takes pains to demonstrate in *The Canterbury Tales*, one need not have been to school to value proverbs. A fourteenth-century

⁸ John Niles uses this term to refer to those exceptional storytelling practitioners who “stand out for their large repertory and authoritative style” (1999:174). I assume that strong bearers of proverb tradition will be much more common than strong bearers of story because the proverb is so much shorter and simpler. In emphasizing the very prominent role played by proverbs in medieval and early modern culture, I do not mean to discount their visibility in contemporary American and European life. The modern proverbial materials collected in Whiting 1989 extend to over 5000 entries; Mieder 1993 offers a book-length demonstration of the proverb’s continued relevance.

⁹ Orme 1989:76-85. B. J. Whiting tried to distinguish between Chaucer’s *proverbs*, “sayings which are, or appear to be, popular in origin, or which have become thoroughly popular in use” and his *sententiae* or *sententious remarks*, which “show clearly their learned origin” (1934:viii). Over thirty years later, in his monumental compilation of proverbs before 1500, Whiting added a distinction easier to sustain: “a sentence is a piece of wisdom which has not crystallized into specific current form and which anyone feels free to rephrase to suit himself.” He adds that sentences tend to be more abstract than proverbs and are less likely to have figurative meanings (1968:xiv).

¹⁰ From the “Lincoln Sentences of c. 1425-50 in Beinecke Library MS 3 (34),” nos. 7, 11, 12 (Orme 1989:83).

German legal document recommends to pleaders before juries, "Wherever you can attach a proverb, do so, for the peasants like to judge according to proverbs."¹¹ Sermons reached most members of medieval society, and preaching was an important agent for the wide dissemination of proverbial wisdom (Wenzel 1986:205-7). From the thirteenth century onward, manuals for preaching are bound up with collections of quotations from learned authors such as Seneca, Augustine, and Bernard, as well as with lists of the same kind of homely vernacular proverbs found in the school texts (B. Taylor 1992:33-35). With these skeletally outlined "cultural specifics" in mind, I first examine the two universalizing theories of proverb use introduced earlier, and then relate them to Chaucer's proverb practice, with the aim of using theory to illuminate practice and practice to reveal gaps in theory.

Two Cognitive Theories of Proverb Use

The rival theories that caused a stir in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* seek to explain what a human mind does when confronted by a proverb. Both treat only metaphorical proverbs ("As the twig is bent, so grows the tree"); neither deals with non-imagistic expressions such as "practice makes perfect" or "haste makes waste." For those of us accustomed to thinking of proverbs as linguistic rather than cognitive phenomena, it may be helpful to reflect briefly upon the kind of thought they require. Proverbs posit miniature theories, under which seemingly unrelated experiences illuminate one another and are therefore transformed. A famous psychology experiment dating from 1945 demonstrates the potential power of the analogical reasoning required in proverb use. Called the "radiation problem," the experiment requires that subjects think of a way to destroy a tumor inside a patient, when rays of the strength required to kill the tumor would also destroy healthy tissue and kill the patient. Few of those tested arrive at a solution without further prompting. In a version of the experiment from the 1980s (Holyoak and Thagard 1989), psychologists first presented subjects with a problem in which a general must find a way for his army to capture a fortress when it cannot make a full frontal attack. A solution is to split the army and attack from many different directions, converging on the fortress. Only about ten percent of the student subjects came up with a solution to the radiation problem without prompting. Yet

¹¹ A. Taylor 1931:87; see Davis 1975:340-41, n. 31 and n. 40, on lists of proverbs compiled or owned by early modern lawyers.

given the fortress analogy and a hint that it might be relevant, 75 percent were able to propose that the tumor be attacked from different directions by rays of low intensity that would pass harmlessly through the healthy tissue and converge to destroy the tumor.

Significantly, the hint about the relevance of the fortress problem to the radiation problem turns out to be almost as important as the analogy itself. In the absence of the hint, only 20 percent of the subjects saw that in the fortress problem lay a potential solution to the radiation problem. As the researchers point out, “This finding emphasizes the difficulty of the initial retrieval step for analogies when there is little surface similarity between the source and target domains” (Holyoak and Thagard 1989:252). The source domain is the given, in this case the fortress problem; the target domain is the desired application, the radiation problem. Although one uses the model of metaphor and the other of analogy, both of the cognitive theories to which we will turn shortly assume that proverb comprehension rests upon mapping the similarities between two widely divergent domains of knowledge, one familiar and experiential, the other more remote and abstract. Thus it follows that immersion in proverb use hones the particular intellectual skill called for in this experiment, “the initial retrieval step,” or the perception of the relevance of the two domains. Given the words, “Charcoal / writes everybody’s name black” and a situation involving a habitual slanderer, what many listeners or readers need is a hint that one can be fruitfully related to the other, even though the correspondence is metaphorical, not literal. The “hint” in the experiment is a regular feature of proverb performance, a set of cues alerting users that proverbs differ from ordinary speech and hence require a special kind of reception.¹²

Extending Lakoff’s influential earlier work, *Metaphors We Live By* (with Mark Johnson, 1980), Lakoff and Turner posit that our thinking is conditioned at a very deep level by a series of extended metaphors, such as “argument is war” or “life is a journey.”¹³ More than simply figures of

¹² Ethnographic theories generally regard the proverb as a performed genre; this “hint” that a special type of reception is required corresponds to the “perception of proverbiality” in Arora 1994 and to “keying performance” in Bauman 1977 and 1986, Hymes 1981, and Foley 1995. Foley 1995 provides full bibliography and synthesizes earlier work in this vein. The “charcoal” expression derives from Merwin 1973, discussed later in this article.

¹³ Its authors wrote *More than Cool Reason* “to analyze the role of metaphor in poetry” in language accessible to students (Lakoff and Turner 1989:xii); one chapter is devoted to investigating “basic mechanisms of poetry which appear in high relief in proverbs but which suffuse all our poetry” (*ibid.*:160). Thus it is unlikely that they set

speech, which are linguistic phenomena, these metaphors are concepts, part of our minds. So deeply ingrained are they in our language and thought that we do not necessarily notice, for example, the underlying metaphor that leads us to refer to a baby's "arrival" or to refer to someone who has died as "departed." The core idea informing the Lakoff-Turner proverb theory is that, like other metaphors, proverbs require that their recipients apprehend a "source domain" schema, provided by the proverb. Recipients then map the source domain onto a "target domain," which may be specified by the context or it may be unspecified. For the proverb "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree," the source domain is the trainability of saplings and a possible target domain is the adult criminality of a child raised by thieves. Proverb users frequently possess detailed experiential knowledge of the source domain, relative to the abstract nature of the target domain, which might treat of life, death, time, ironies of fate, or the vanity of human wishes. Thus the cognitive work performed by these basic metaphors can be very powerful. Proverbs reveal the relationship between seemingly disparate situations and offer strategies for action or coping (see Burke 1967).

According to the Lakoff-Turner theory, four cognitive tools or principles help the recipient to map certain aspects of the proverb's source domain over to the corresponding aspects of the target domain. First, at a higher level of abstraction than metaphors such as "life is a journey," Lakoff and Turner posit a set of "generic-level metaphors." One of these, "the generic is specific," plays a role in proverb comprehension. To use an example to which we will return, at the more concrete level, the proverb "One bad apple spoils the whole barrel" makes use of the metaphor "a group of people in close proximity is a barrel of apples." At a higher level of abstraction, the same proverb makes use of the metaphor "the generic [the group] is [a] specific [the barrel of apples]." Thus the proverb uses a concrete and observable effect involving a particular fruit, in a particular container, under prescribed conditions (the specific) to enable the user to understand a wide variety of group interactions (the generic). Once the two domains are analogically related, confident knowledge of the specific enables more creative and nuanced reasoning about the generic. Lakoff and Turner number "the generic is specific" among the metaphors that we "live by" (or think by) and thus need not consciously evoke.

out to formulate a theory of the proverb *per se*, though their hypothesis is stimulating and has clearly contributed to the refinement of the theory developed by Honeck and collaborators. Lakoff and Turner did not themselves take part in the discussion of their theory in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*.

Aiding and abetting the proverb interpreter's grasp of the "generic is specific" metaphor, according to Lakoff and Turner, are three other cognitive tools. One is the set of beliefs we inherit from the old notion of a Great Chain of Being. These ideas survive "as a contemporary unconscious cultural model indispensable to our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our language" (Lakoff and Turner 1989:167). When we interpret proverbs, ideas inherited from the Great Chain combine with a second piece of cognitive equipment, a body of practical knowledge about "the nature of things," which we use to form a common sense theory of how the world works. The Great Chain metaphor ranks entities hierarchically, on the principle that each entity on the chain possesses all the salient characteristics of those below it, plus some higher order properties that justify its superior spot on the chain. Placed at the top of the hierarchy of earthly entities, human beings possess the highest-order attributes shared by minerals, plants, and animals. In addition, humans possess their own distinguishing properties, such as reason and speech. As a final piece of cognitive apparatus, Lakoff and Turner stipulate a principle of verbal economy. Their version of the linguistic "Maxim of Quantity" holds that when a speaker refers to an entity on the Great Chain, in the absence of contrary information we assume that he or she is referring to the highest-order properties that characterize the entity, the same properties that determine its hierarchical position on the Chain. These four conceptual tools—the "generic is specific" metaphor, the Great Chain metaphor, the "nature of things" principle, and the Maxim of Quantity—allow the proverb interpreter to match up elements of the source domain (specified by the proverb and familiar to the interpreter) with their counterparts in the less easily apprehended target domain. Thus the reader or hearer grasps the proverb's meaning.

To relate in compressed form just one of their examples (1989:205), Lakoff and Turner interpret the text "Ants on a millstone / whichever way they walk / they go around with it."¹⁴ The source domain is the concrete image of the ants crawling on the millstone; the target domain is unspecified and the recipient must determine it. In this case, the lingering assumptions left by the Great Chain metaphor indicate that we are interested in these ants for what they can tell us about human beings. The Maxim of Quantity helps us to single out the salient properties and to screen out irrelevant particulars about ants or millstones. Practical knowledge of "the nature of things" prompts us to recognize that the ants are tiny relative to the millstone and that their relatively minute movement is insignificant compared to the

¹⁴ I discuss the source of this expression in Merwin 1973 shortly.

millstone's rotation, which the ants cannot control or even comprehend. Lakoff and Turner give a much more detailed analysis of this example with many more theoretical intricacies, but once again, the essential conceptual activity is the mapping of the relevant parallels between the source domain, ants and millstones, and the target domain, human life. In their reading, the metaphor of ants on a millstone reminds us that as human beings we lack a perspective from which to evaluate the magnitude of our purposeful efforts as weighed against cosmic forces.

Richard Honeck's rival theory proceeds from the idea that proverbs are problems that require solutions, rather than poems that require interpretations. He refers to it as the "conceptual base" theory after the abstract mental medium in which this problem solving takes place.¹⁵ Unlike Lakoff and Turner, who treat proverbs as literary texts, Honeck tends to posit speakers in face-to-face situations. His theory stipulates two different cognitive environments for proverb use, which he terms "irrelevant" and "relevant context" situations. In the first, one encounters proverbs "out of the blue." A stranger steps into an elevator and says, "A net with a hole in it won't catch any fish" (Honeck and Temple 1996:86) or a stranger walks up to someone on the street and says, "Not every oyster contains a pearl" (Honeck 1997:128). According to Honeck, the listener first tries unsuccessfully to interpret the phrase literally.¹⁶ Even if the listener has never heard the saying "Not every oyster contains a pearl," she recognizes that the statement has "no immediate referent" (no oysters in sight or under discussion). She further notes that the stranger's observation is stated "in a gnomic, nonpast tense way" (Honeck 1997:129), and must therefore be treated as a special kind of utterance.

Next, the addressee proceeds in accordance with a pragmatic linguistic principle: a listener assumes that something is meant by what is said and seeks a workable meaning. When the statement fails to make sense as a literal observation about oysters, the recipient moves to the "figurative meaning phase." She uses what she knows about oysters and pearls to construe a meaning that can be applied to a vast number of new situations: "not everything that makes valuable things does it all of the time"

¹⁵ Except where noted, my account of Honeck's theory derives from his single-authored book-length work, addressed to a non-specialist audience (1997:ix).

¹⁶ In the belief that it has caused great confusion, Lakoff and Turner avoid the word "literal." They argue at length against the "literal meaning theory" both in linguistics and as a common-sense view of language (1989:110-39, 217-18). They suggest that "literal" is best used as "a handy, nontechnical term" for the source domain of a metaphor (1989:119), which is how I use it here.

(*ibid.*:130). A special quality of the proverb is its potential for self-instantiation; that is, the same utterance can have a referent or it can simply be a piece of freestanding philosophy about the way of the world. In the absence of any discernible immediate referent, the addressee might recognize the statement as proverbial and answer, “You got that right,” if she too has had bitter experience of too many pearl-less oysters. As we will see, nearly all of Lakoff and Turner’s examples are of “irrelevant context” situations. Like Honeck’s innocent bystanders accosted by total strangers who utter proverbs “out of the blue,” Lakoff and Turner are free either to propose their own referents for the cryptic utterances they use as examples or to interpret them as freestanding bits of practical philosophy.

In Honeck’s “irrelevant context” model, then, the hearer is given only the source domain of the metaphor and must discover or invent the target domain. That oysters are sometimes pearl-less is the given, and she must discover what the speaker means by it.¹⁷ If the speaker has in mind a particular application for his utterance (a particular target domain), he will have to provide further clues. In the “relevant context” instance, both domains are indicated and the intellectual task is to relate them meaningfully. For example, the speaker of the proverb “Not every oyster contains a pearl” might shrug and brandish a scratched and worthless lottery ticket. The addressee must think at the highest level of abstraction that will produce a satisfying conceptual match between utterance and visual prompt. Honeck holds that this matching takes place in “a totally abstract medium,” non-imagistic and non-linguistic, which he terms the “conceptual base” (*ibid.*:131-32). In either case, context-irrelevant or context-relevant, the proverb functions as a miniature theory: it is generative, it can be applied to an infinite number of new situations, and, once applied, it transforms the situation (Honeck et al. 1980:156-57).

Lakoff and Turner do not define *proverb* except to say that proverbs can be treated as poems (1989:160). Honeck gives a formal definition that follows from his theory (1997:18): “A proverb can be regarded as a discourse deviant, relatively concrete, present (nonpast) tense statement that uses characteristic linguistic markers to arouse cognitive ideals that serve to categorize topics in order to make a pragmatic point about them.” The proverb is “discourse deviant” because it does not follow the usual rules (it

¹⁷ For ease in exposition, I continue to use Lakoff and Turner’s terms, “source domain” (specified in the proverb) and “target domain” (often to be supplied by the listener) to describe the two domains of knowledge related by a proverb. Honeck’s preferred terms, “vehicle” (explicit in the proverb) and “topic” (the proverb’s usually unstated referent), seem to me harder to remember because in ordinary language either the source domain or the target domain could logically be termed the proverb’s “topic.”

can talk about oysters when it means lottery tickets). The “topics” are the proverb’s referents (*ibid.*:131) or, in the terminology favored by Lakoff and Turner, its “target domain.” “Cognitive ideals” are a later refinement added to Honeck’s theory to explain the apparent binary or “black and white” nature of so many proverbs. Ideally, all oysters would contain pearls; like many others, the sample proverb highlights the contrast between the ideal and the imperfect reality.

The formalism of both theories shows up immediately in their relative lack of concern about the origins of the utterances they refer to as proverbs. From their disciplinary perspective at the intersection of linguistics and literary criticism, Lakoff and Turner treat proverbs not as the products of tradition but as individual literary texts. Given their declaration that proverbs may be thought of as poems, it follows that they refer to their interpretations as “readings,”¹⁸ which is what they are—skillful close readings. The examples with which they expound their theory are particularly easy to treat as poems: they are drawn from what could easily be called a book of poetry, W. S. Merwin’s *Asian Figures*. Merwin prefaces his volume of aphoristic expressions with the explanation that a Mrs. Crown of the Asia Society in New York gave him some lists of Asian proverbs both in the original East Asian languages and in English translation. He writes that he does not know the original languages and that his “adaptations” of the translations provided “were not undertaken with a view to being—necessarily—literal” (1973:iii). Writing as a poet rather than as a philologist or ethnographer, he does not report how or when his raw materials were collected or who translated them with what degree of fidelity. The “Asian figures” in Merwin’s volume flow in intriguing thematic drifts with no context to provide clues to their intended referents. “Most beautiful / just before,” is followed by “Autumn rides down / on one leaf,” then “Autumn / the deer’s / own color,” followed by “Ice comes from water / but can teach it / about cold” (1973:35).

Merwin’s translated figures are wise and beautiful, and Lakoff and Turner’s close readings quite brilliant, but are these “Asian figures” proverbs? Ethnographers almost invariably use the word “traditional” in their definitions of this tiny but hard to define genre, or they stipulate some

¹⁸ Lakoff and Turner speak of “possible readings” of proverbs (1989:186) and acknowledge that “proverbs can have an enormous range of readings, depending on the framings one brings to them” (189). Their treatment of the expression “jelly / in a vise” (186-89) suggests that conflicting readings arise from the slipperiness of language combined with the subjectivity involved in applying each of their conceptual principles.

kind of “currency” or “circulation.”¹⁹ Many of the cryptic little poems in Merwin’s volume—“Blind / blames the ditch”; “Can’t crawl / and tries to jump”—very likely do derive ultimately from a living or once-living tradition of proverb use,²⁰ but obviously do not circulate in the verbal form Merwin gives them. The Lakoff-Turner theory will also rouse the resistance of ethnographic researchers who believe that proverbs must be studied in the context of the cultural practices of the group that uses them. We do not know whether the Asian figures Lakoff and Turner cite come from an ancient written source or whether they were collected from active bearers shortly before Mrs. Crown passed them along to Merwin. The authors almost never attempt to relate these expressions to “Asian” culture. In a rare exception, Lakoff and Turner’s interpretation of “Any weather / chicken’s / pants are rolled up” entails the explanation that “In Asia, it is common for barefoot peasants working in the fields to roll up their pants when it rains so that they don’t get their pants wet when they step into puddles” (1989:201). How the putative “Asian” users of these proverbs have internalized the Great Chain of Being metaphor (usually understood as a piece of Western intellectual history) detains Lakoff and Turner for the length of only one sentence: “It is extremely widespread and occurs not only in Western culture but throughout a wide range of the world’s cultures” (*ibid.*:167).

The thinness of the cultural analysis in the Lakoff-Turner theory indicates that the authors’ interests lie elsewhere. Yet, surprisingly enough from the ethnographer’s perspective, Honeck’s survey of approaches to proverb study places the Lakoff-Turner theory in the category of “cultural views” of the proverb (1997:31-36). Among the “serious and fundamental differences” Honeck enumerates between his theory and that of Lakoff and Turner, “the most important” is that Lakoff and Turner’s theory “derives from the cultural view” (*ibid.*:152). This category also includes, for example,

¹⁹ Dundes defines the proverb as “a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment” (1981:60). Seitel provisionally defines proverbs in English as “short, traditional, ‘out-of-context’ statements used to further some social end” and observes: “That proverbs are short and traditional is a generally accepted feature of definition” (1981:124). Arora makes a similar point: “Probably the most consistently accepted generalization concerning proverbs, in virtually any language, is that they are ‘traditional’” (1994:4). Mieder calls traditionality “the central ingredient that must be part of any proverb definition” and holds that “any text to qualify as a proverb must have (or have had) some currency for a period of time” (1993:6, 41).

²⁰ Many of Merwin’s figures have recognizable counterparts in European vernaculars: “The crying baby / is the one that gets fed,” “The rats decide / the cat ought to be belled,” “Listen / even to a baby” (1973:5, 9, 10).

the work of anthropologist Charles L. Briggs, who conducted field research on proverb use in a community of 700 inhabitants in the mountains of northern New Mexico between 1972 and 1984. Briggs's culturally specific fieldwork makes a strange bedfellow for Lakoff and Turner's formalism.²¹ Yet, in the course of the debate in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, Honeck rejects what he sees as Lakoff and Turner's unnecessary emphasis on the cultural origin of proverbs (Honeck and Temple 1996:218): "Although culture- and context-specific phenomena occur, the fact remains that cultures do not do cognitive work, individual minds do, and there is good reason to assume that minds operate by universal principles." Thus, for Honeck (*idem*), "Rather than viewing proverbs as irredeemably culturally situated and incapable of being extricated from situations, the cognitive view requires that proverbs be seen as *abstract entities* that can only be understood by a set of very general theoretical principles." So biological and empirical is Honeck's orientation that what ethnographers would consider insufficient attention to cultural context is from his disciplinary perspective an unnecessary emphasis on it. The defenders of the Lakoff-Turner theory in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, Gibbs and his fellow psychologists, also regard Lakoff and Turner's theory as culturally based. For ethnographers, it is startling to read that Gibbs and company judge the Lakoff-Turner theory "the most comprehensive view" to date of how people make sense of proverbs (1996a:215).

Just as Lakoff and Turner do not inquire into the context that produced their "Asian figures," Honeck shows little concern about the sources of his examples. Some of them he and his collaborators have simply made up.²² Honeck and Temple write, "the fact that proverbs can be created anew is important theoretically because it makes it clear that individual proverbs do not have to be part of the linguistic heritage of a culture" (1994:99). In criticism of the Lakoff-Turner theory, they emphasize that "any theory of proverbs must be consistent with and draw on empirically derived data and principles of processing as these have developed in cognitive science" (*ibid.*:111). Yet bibliographies of proverb research abound with ethnographic studies that do not draw upon empirical data from

²¹ Like virtually all scholars with backgrounds in anthropology, folklore, or oral-traditional studies, Briggs concludes that proverb performance stands with one foot in a living tradition and the other "in the minute details of everyday life in a given community" (1994:344).

²² Honeck and Temple list six proverbs they have made up (1994:99). One, "A net with a hole in it won't catch any fish," is used prominently in the explication of Honeck's theory.

cognitive science and thus do not meet the criteria Honeck and Temple set down for “any theory of proverbs.” Conversely, some of the more blunt among the ethnographically oriented investigators might respond tartly that “any theory of proverbs” must be about proverbs, that is, from their perspective, about a class of traditional utterances recognized as such by a particular culture and in circulation among its members. Many ethnographers would resist the idea that Honeck and collaborators can discover anything useful to them as long as they treat proverbs as lists of verbal items randomly gathered or made up by the researchers themselves, and as long as their theories seem to treat proverb users as processing units.

Both cognitive theories limit their investigation to the point at which a reader or hearer encounters a proverb; they diverge in their description of the particular mental activities that take the proverb interpreter from the source domain to the target domain, be it specified or open. Wide as the gap between his own work and that of Lakoff and Turner seems to Honeck, I have suggested that the real gulf lies between the two cognitive theories on the one side, and the work of proverb scholars committed to ethnographic, performance-based, and oral-traditional approaches on the other. For those who work with orally transmitted proverbs, Honeck’s theory has the advantage of treating proverb use as a kind of face-to-face encounter rather than an instance of close reading. But both theories treat “proverb use” as virtually synonymous with proverb comprehension, a view that is much too limited, as we will see. Neither theory gives more than brief attention to whether the recipient has heard the proverb in question applied in a consistent way all his life or whether he is encountering it for the first time. Both theories posit weak tradition-bearers, people to whom proverbs usually come “out of the blue” and require either the kind of close reading given to difficult literary texts (Lakoff and Turner) or elaborate strategies of paraphrase and analogy-building (Honeck). When we turn to evidence from the Middle Ages (or if we were to examine an existing society where proverb use is culturally central), we meet strong tradition-bearers, those who hold a repertoire of proverbs in memory and use them in ways not accounted for by either theory.

A bridge from cognitive to ethnographic approaches may at this point seem like an attempt to span the Pacific. At issue is the very identity of the phenomenon under study—the proverb—and what standards of proof apply. Current research on interdisciplinary inquiry provides many examples of the same definitional and evidentiary gap: analysts consistently cite terminological slippage and the lack of a common truth standard as leading obstacles to successful work across disciplinary boundaries (see Kaplan and Levine 1997; Moran 2002). To scholars working at the farthest edges of

established disciplines, these boundaries resemble other kinds of frontiers: lonely, windswept, and full of uncharted risks.²³ If all significant aspects of “proverb use” took place in the mind, in what Honeck describes as a non-imagistic, non-linguistic, wholly abstract mental medium, then centuries of ethnographic research would have little to contribute. Those committed to an integrative approach will, I hope, agree that an ethnographer benefits by asking what the human mind does with proverbs, just as a cognitive scientist builds a better theory by asking what cultural work proverbs do. As a starting point toward an integrated theory, researchers on each side of the disciplinary gap can offer an account of what the other side has left out. Lakoff-Turner and Honeck give stimulating accounts of what ethnographic theories will leave out if they ignore research into proverb cognition. The cognitive theories, in turn, need from ethnographers a livelier sense of the proverb as a performed genre situated in human social life.

Chaucer's Practice

Fragment I of *The Canterbury Tales* takes the modern Western reader into a culture where proverb use is active and ubiquitous. Chaucer's practice immediately reveals that in confining itself to proverb comprehension, cognitive theory addresses only half the mental work involved in proverb use. Both Lakoff-Turner and Honeck understand proverb use as a process of reception; they ask what happens when someone encounters a “proverb” without asking where the utterance came from and how it got there. Chaucer too is keenly interested in reception. But *The Canterbury Tales* also presents us with a fictional world of active, purposeful, even scheming proverb speakers who produce apposite utterances and apply them skillfully. For Chaucer as for other practiced wielders of rich stores of traditional materials, proverb use involves production as well as reception. Both cognitive theories focus their attention almost exclusively on the intellectual gymnastics of innocent bystanders accosted by proverbs. But familiarity with the living traditions studied by ethnographers or the once-living tradition depicted in Chaucer's fiction compels us to ask also about the mental activity involved in proverb production. Who are these people in Honeck's theory who pop into elevators and utter proverbs? How do they come up with their proverbs? Why do they use them? How do they signal

²³ See Klein 1996 on the relative security of working within established academic departments, where the traditional reward structure operates most strongly (espec. 29-30), and on the challenges facing disciplinary “migrants” and “pioneers” (espec. 42-46).

that they have uttered a special kind of statement that their addressees will have to process in a particular way?

Although ethnographers are justified in asking for more attention to what constitutes a proverb than cognitive theory yet affords, in fact Chaucer's understanding of the proverb is as open and eclectic as that of Lakoff and Turner, who draw upon Merwin's translations, and that of Honeck, who invents proverbs. Chaucer draws proverbs from a wealth of written and oral sources, and, though it cannot be proved, it seems very likely that when the need arose, he too made them up. A possible example from Fragment I occurs in a speech Chaucer gives to the student John in *The Reeve's Tale* (in a caricatured Northern dialect): "Hym boes serve hymself that has na swayn, /Or elles he is a fool, as clerkes sayn" ("He must serve himself who has no servant, or else he is a fool, as learned men say," *CT* I.4027-28).²⁴ "As clerkes sayn" is one of Chaucer's formulas for marking proverbial utterances, but in the absence of other evidence, we cannot know whether the saying was in circulation or invented by Chaucer, who is consistently playful about the origins of his raw materials.²⁵ Chaucer marks some proverbs as orally circulating speech: "Men seyn thus" (*CT* I.3598), "I have herd seyde" (I.4129). But he also has his Wife of Bath cite as a "proverbe" a quotation from Ptolemy's "*Almageste*" (III.325-27), a work whose textual status she has just taken pains to emphasize: "The same wordes writeth Ptholomee; / Rede in his *Almageste*, and take it there" (III.182-83). The word *proverb* applies equally to quotations from learned texts and anonymously circulating traditional expressions.²⁶ In the pilgrim narrator's *Tale of Melibee*, indications of learned origin such as "Seneca seith" (VII.1147 etc.), "Caton seith," (VII.1181 etc.), "Salomon seith" (VII.1003 etc.), and "the book seith" (VII.1144, 1164, etc.) alternate freely with "the proverbe seith" (VII.1054, 1215, 1264) and "men seyn" (VII.1153, 1466).

²⁴ The works of Chaucer are cited from *The Riverside Chaucer* (Benson et al. 1987). I cite *The Canterbury Tales* (*CT*) by fragment (a Roman numeral) and line number.

²⁵ Whiting 1968 cites only this one instance of the saying, but one of Whiting's collection principles held that "if Chaucer takes pains to emphasize the fact that he is quoting an old proverb, we may, perhaps, choose to believe him" (1931:50). Thus he indexes this unique expression as one of Chaucer's proverbs (1934:87, 1968:S919).

²⁶ Louis 1997 offers a more extensive survey of the meanings of *proverb*, drawing upon other Middle English sources as well as Chaucer.

For Chaucer, a proverb seems to have been a saying, of any origin, worth repeating because it serves as a guide to action, deliberation, or understanding. In his usage, *proverbe* does not specify the origins of the utterance, its social positioning, or the means by which it was habitually transmitted. Chaucer's practice of marking proverbs as quoted sayings corresponds to Richard Honeck's observation that a proverb uses "characteristic linguistic markers" to arouse a certain response in its hearers or readers (1997:18). Earlier, I suggested that these verbal signals correspond to the "hint" that affected so strongly the cognitive ability of experimental subjects to apply the solution of the "fortress problem" to that of the "radiation problem." From the ethnographic side, Shirley L. Arora argues on the basis of her fieldwork with Spanish-speaking residents of Los Angeles that the "perception of proverbiality" is far more important in practice than the history of the expression, if its history can even be known. Arora writes, "The utterance in question—'truly proverbial,' i.e., traditional, or not—will function as a proverb, with all the accompanying weight of authority or community acceptance that the concept implies, as the direct result of the listener's perception, right or wrong, of its 'proverbiality'" (1994:6). To illustrate Chaucer's practice, I have chosen expressions whose "proverbiality" would have been apparent to his audiences, either because he marks them explicitly or because evidence exists that the expression was in circulation and thus recognizable as originating outside Chaucer's work. My selection principle thus conforms to the widely accepted ethnographic practice of employing generic categories recognizable to the tradition-bearers themselves. At the same time, it conforms closely enough to Honeck's definition of the proverb (quoted earlier) to allow me to measure the explanatory power of cognitive theory against Chaucer's practice.

I begin with an instance of proverb use well described by the theories with which we began: the "figure" that the Parson is said to live by. Its form, a rhetorical question, suggests the learned end of the proverb spectrum, and indeed its traceable background is in biblical and patristic sources.²⁷ The Parson's portrait states that he has taken certain advice from the gospels (I.499-504; my emphasis):

²⁷ Scattergood 1987 notes that Chaucer associates the term "figure" with "proverb" in his short poem "Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton" when he describes the poem as "this lytel writ, proverbes, or figure." The poem can apparently be thought of as a piece of writing, a miniature proverb collection, and a metaphorical statement ("figure"). Whiting 1968:G304 indexes this passage from the General Prologue but supplies no supporting examples; Benson et al. 1987 cites possible precedent in the biblical passage Lamentations 4:1-2 and in Latin scriptural commentary.

And this *figure* he added eek therto,
 That *if gold ruste, what shal iren do?*
 For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
 No wonder is a lewed man to ruste;
 And shame it is, if a prest take keep,
 A shiten shepherde and a clene sheep.
 Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive,
 By his clenness, how that his sheep sholde lyve.

Chaucer devotes the first quoted line to alerting the reader that the second contains a verbal form in need of special interpretive treatment. At this early point in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer demonstrates for his audience how to map the qualities of the familiar source domain onto those of the less familiar target domain. The observable contrast in the durability of gold and iron provides a way to reason about what can be expected of a cleric relative to his parishioners. Chaucer intertwines the “parson as gold versus people as iron” metaphor with a second image familiar enough to medieval audiences to qualify as a “metaphor they lived by”: the pastor as shepherd and the people as his flock. Gold and iron are hierarchically ordered, with more expected of the former than the latter; the same is true of shepherd and sheep—each metaphor reinforces the other. In an ideal world, both shepherd and sheep would be clean and both metals would remain without tarnish, but the two analogies point to the same *a fortiori* argument: if the gold / shepherd / priest is corrupted, how much more corrupt will the iron / sheep / parishioner be?

Even if the reader of the General Prologue has not encountered the gold and iron “figure” before, Chaucer’s labeling alerts us that the Parson *quotes* it, rather than just speaking it, and that the quoted utterance will mean more than it says. As both cognitive theories posit, the idealized metaphorical relation between clerical gold and lay iron functions as a miniature theory under which many instances may be subsumed. The gold that glints from the Prioress’s shining brooch (*CT* I.160) and the Monk’s intricately wrought “love-knotte” (I.179) subtly underscores the argument. If the clergy live by worldly values (if their gold is literal and ornamental rather than figurative and moral), what values will guide the “lewed man”? Whether one finds more useful the particular set of mental tools hypothesized by Lakoff and Turner or by Honeck, this example is one of the few in Fragment I for which either theory offers a reasonably complete model.

The Parson’s gold and iron figure may have been new to many members of Chaucer’s audience, and it seems to call for the kind of detailed decoding familiar from literary analysis. As an example of the problems that

familiar utterances pose for the two cognitive theories, let us look at what appears to be a traditional proverb in the Knight's Tale. Palamon breaks out of prison and finds himself in the same grove of trees as his cousin and rival, Arcite, who is loudly singing a courtly love song. Palamon has no idea who the singer is, while Arcite has no idea that he is being overheard (*CT* I.1521-27):

But sooth is seyde, go sithen many yeres,	
That 'feeld hath eyen and the wode hath eres.'	
It is ful fair a man to <i>bere hym evene</i> ,	<i>keep his composure</i>
For al day meeteth men at <i>unset stevene</i> .	<i>appointments they have not made</i>
<i>Ful litel woot Arcite of his felawe</i> ,	<i>little does Arcite know</i>
That was so <i>ny</i> to herken al his <i>sawe</i> ,	<i>near, speech</i>
For in the bussh he sitteth now ful stille.	

Chaucer creates "the perception of proverbiality" by marking the saying "The field has eyes and the wood has ears" as true and old. It appears in almost identical wording in a collection of proverbial materials made around 1300, preserved in MS Trinity College Cambridge 1149 (0.2.45), from Cerne Abbey in Dorset.²⁸ As the modern editor's punctuation indicates, Chaucer is quoting, not in this instance from a written source such as Boethius or the Bible, but from the oral and written *mélange* that constitutes medieval English proverb tradition.

According to the theories reviewed here, a commonsense knowledge of fields and woods should prompt the reader or hearer to recognize that, without one's knowledge, one can easily be spied upon from a distance when in a field and overheard by a concealed listener when in the woods. Whether one calls it "isolating the generic-level schema contained in the specific-level schema evoked" (Lakoff and Turner 1989:166) or "reconfigur[ing] the literal meaning model and the proverb topic so that they are conceptual matches" (Honeck 1997:132), in theory a listener must take the statement to a level abstract enough to subsume all applications of the proverb. Lakoff and Turner would make explicit the concealed metaphors, "spies are eyes" and "eavesdroppers are ears." Honeck would offer a paraphrase, such as, "One must stay constantly alert to the possibility of

²⁸ The collection in which it appears consists of a list of Latin expressions, with spaces left for translations, which, where filled in, are in English or French, written in red ink (Louis 1993:2964-65). Under the Latin expression *Campus habet lumen et habet nemus auris acumen* is an English version almost identical to Chaucer's: "veld haved hege, and wude haved heare." For the English proverb, see Whiting 1968:F127; the Latin proverb is no. 2272 in Walther's collection (1963-69) of medieval Latin proverbs.

surveillance or eavesdropping.” Taken in isolation, as it appears, for example, in the proverb collection in MS Trinity College 1149, the proverb’s target domain could be an unfriendly world in which spies and eavesdroppers are everywhere. In its narrative context in *The Knight’s Tale*, the warning about surveillance and eavesdropping applies best to Arcite, whose incautious song threatens to reveal his concealed identity to his listening rival, Palamon, hidden in the same bush.

Encountered for the first time, “The field has eyes and the wood has ears” is a strange assertion. In working through the passage in question many times with students, I have observed that those who recognize Chaucer’s proverb as an outdoor version of the modern expression, “The walls have ears,” understand its meaning instantly. Those who have never heard the modern equivalent often have great difficulty grasping the import of Chaucer’s proverb, even after it is paraphrased for them. Their attempts at making literal sense of the statement—“Do the eyes belong to mice and squirrels? Do the ears belong to woodland creatures?”—bear out Honeck’s experimentally based conclusion that hearers of unfamiliar proverbs try first to make sense of the utterance with reference to the source domain alone. Although systematic research is needed, this bit of anecdotal evidence suggests that even among relatively weak tradition-bearers such as many American college students, processing a proverb encountered for the first time differs in important ways from processing a familiar one.

Instead of starting from scratch in connecting the source to the target domain, an addressee faced with a familiar proverb seems to activate a set of associations based on past applications of the same proverb.²⁹ The initial step, the cueing of proverb performance or “perception of proverbiality,” functions in the same way whether the proverb is highly familiar or made up on the spot. The hearer grasps that she has read or heard a proverb and looks for a target domain. But to understand the reception of widely circulating proverbs, especially by strong bearers, we might invoke what John Miles Foley has called the “enabling referent of tradition” (Foley 1995:5; cf. Foley 1994 and 2002). That is, we need to recognize that with familiar proverbs, recipients may rely not only upon the familiarity of the expression itself, but also on their experience with prior *applications*. Some familiar proverbs mean in nearly the same way each time. For example, “One bad apple spoils

²⁹ Honeck 1997 acknowledges that familiar proverbs are comprehended more quickly and reliably, but does not incorporate the implications of this difference into his single theory of proverb comprehension meant to encompass familiar and unfamiliar expressions alike.

the whole barrel” is applied so consistently to a troublemaker who demoralizes a peer group that it might seem harsh and confusing if applied to an earnest young ballerina whose lack of technique detracts from a group performance. An expression with which a hearer has had ample and consistent experience may call for cognitive processing that is not just faster, but different, from the processing of fresh expressions. Lakoff and Turner give more attention than Honeck to the accessing of pre-existing mental pathways. However, both theories seem best suited to first time encounters with conundrums such as, “Any weather / chicken’s / pants are rolled up” or “Cows run with the wind / horses against it” (Lakoff and Turner 1989:161) and less prepared to address meanings that accumulate over the course of many applications.

Theories that undervalue the “supply end” of proverb practice and the presence of proverbs in individual memory will lack the power to explain another fascinating aspect of proverb use by strong tradition-bearers: dueling proverbs. Countering proverbs with proverbs is an ancient activity, perhaps as old as the form itself, and well documented in those oral cultures that have survived into the modern world.³⁰ In the first eight chapters of the biblical Book of Proverbs, an authoritative voice pronounces solemn precepts that urge self-restraint and right action upon a listener addressed as “my son.” In chapter nine, the contrasting voice of a foreign woman counters with a single proverb drawn from an entirely different value system: “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (9:17). In the *Dialogue of Salomon and Marcolphus*, an *agôn* in proverbs that circulated widely from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, Solomon speaks in the same righteous voice of aphoristic authority found in Biblical wisdom literature. Marcolphus (or Marcolf), a “short,” “thykke” peasant figure suggestive of Chaucer’s Miller, answers with proverbs as “chorlysh and rude” as his clothing (Beecher 1995:151):

Solomon: Woe to that man that hath a double heart and in both ways will wander.

Marcolphus: He that will two ways go must either his arse or his breeches tear.

These “dueling proverbs” operate upon the same dynamic principle of *quiting* (matching, rivaling, repaying in kind) that animates *The Canterbury Tales* (Cooper 1997:202-3). They also underscore the ethnographer’s belief that “it is not the meaning of the proverb per se that need be our central

³⁰ See, for example, Arewa and Dundes 1964 and Seitel 1981.

concern but the meaning of proverb performances” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1981:119).

Usually Chaucer’s *quiting* juxtaposes whole tales, such as those of Knight and Miller or Miller and Reeve, but in the prologue to The Cook’s Tale, Chaucer depicts a brief example of dueling proverbs. The Host casts aspersions on the food sold in the Cook’s shop, then urges him to tell his tale, without being angered by jesting (“be nat wroth for game,” I.4354). The Host further defends his remarks about the Cook’s shop with the proverb, “A man may seye ful sooth in game and pley” (I.4355). On one narrative plane, the proverb seeks to justify the Host’s insults to the Cook; on another, it adds to the playful but extensive justification with which Chaucer surrounds his own choice to narrate two *fabliaux*. Like the woman in Proverbs and like Marcolphus, the Cook responds with an equal and opposite proverb, “‘Sooth pley, quaad pley,’ as the Flemyng seith”—a true jest is a poor jest.³¹ The fictional “proverb use” in this verbal duel between Host and Cook amounts to considerably more than mapping the source domain of a received proverb to a target domain. The respondent must grasp the import of the first proverb, then pull from memory another that will match, rival, or pay back the one he has just heard, just as the storytellers of Fragment I use their larger verbal units to *quite* one another. To supplement the cognitive activities hypothesized by Lakoff-Turner and Honeck, it would be intriguing to have a theoretical account of the mentation involved in this highly social and deeply traditional use of the proverb.

To conclude this sampling of proverb activity in Fragment I of *The Canterbury Tales*, I turn to The Cook’s Tale, which most but not all Chaucerians consider incomplete.³² The tale’s central figure, Perkyn Revelour, is a victualer’s apprentice with no particular interest in learning his trade but great relish for singing, dancing, flirting, gambling, raiding his master’s cash box, and viewing London’s passing street parade. His master is slow to take action, but eventually reaches a point of decision (I.4403-13):

³¹ See Wallace 1997:167 on possible implications of the Cook’s use of a Flemish proverb. Lindahl relates *The Canterbury Tales* to a number of contemporary activities involving oral performance (1987:44-61) and notes that a large portion of its proverbs relate either to social standing or occupational status (104).

³² Scholars have argued that Chaucer intentionally left The Cook’s Tale incomplete, that the ending is lost, and even that the tale is in fact complete as it stands. See Benson et al. 1987:853 for a brief account of the controversy prior to 1987. Partridge 2000 supplies current bibliography and a fresh look at the manuscript evidence.

But atte laste his maister hym bithoughte,
 Upon a day, whan he his papir soghte,
 Of a proverbe that seith this same word:
 "Wel bet is roten appul out of hoord
 Than that it rotie al the remenaunt."
 So fareth it by a riotous servaunt;
 It is ful lasse harm to lete hym pace,
 Than he *shende* alle the servantz in the place. *ruin*
 Therefore his maister *yaf* hym *acquittance*, *released him*
 And bad hym go, with sorwe and with meschance!
 And thus this joly prentys hadde his leve.

The mental work of the master victualer that Chaucer fictionalizes in this passage may represent the most common form of "proverb use" in a society of strong bearers, and we receive little guidance from cognitive theory until we reach Chaucer's explicit application, "So fareth it by a riotous servaunt." Only at this point do we find ourselves on familiar turf, as Chaucer demonstrates how to map relevant features from source domain to target domain, bad apples to bad apprentices. But the most interesting part is the cogitation that led the master "atte laste" to his proverb. Chaucer represents the master as stalled, until he finds in his mental reservoir a proverbial formula for his action. Once the proverb is found, the action follows easily and swiftly. In such a case, would Lakoff-Turner and Honeck offer mirror images of their respective theories, in which the proverb speaker has the target domain (a bad influence among the apprentices) and looks for a matching source domain (a bad apple in a barrel of otherwise sound fruit)?³³ While the subtle factors that affect human interaction never cease to surprise, the threat of spoiling food was part of pre-modern daily life. If we were to reverse the cognitive theories with which we began, the proverb user would reason about the less knowable situation by contemplating the all too familiar one.

Where would the fictional master have found his proverb? A master victualer in late fourteenth-century London could be expected to have some elementary schooling (Barron 1996) and thus have memorized many proverbs in the course of learning to read and write (Orme 1989, Bowden 1996). To this acquired stock, more would have been added by ear.

³³ Whether proverb comprehension should be thought of as unidirectional (source to target domain only) or bidirectional is one of the issues at stake in the exchanges in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* (Gibbs et al. 1996b:234). Gibbs and company also suggest that Honeck has overlooked the potential significance of "permanent memory structures" in proverb comprehension (*idem*). Honeck 1997 acknowledges these issues as relevant but has not yet incorporated them into his cognitive base theory.

Chaucer lays considerable emphasis on the “proverbiality” of the saying the master recalls, and it seems safe to assume that this expression was in oral circulation by Chaucer’s day. A version had already appeared in the written record by about 1340: “A roted eppel among the holen: maketh rotie the yzounde yef he is longe ther among” (Whiting 1968:A167). It appears in two fifteenth-century collections, and of course it still circulates in varying versions among English-speakers today. Chaucer’s formulation, “bet is . . . than,” is an ancient proverb structure, an example of the binary or quadripartite form that many theorists consider basic to proverbial wisdom (Dundes 1981, Perry 1993). Why does the master act so confidently once he finds the right proverb? Walter Benjamin stresses the proverb’s uncanny power to “transform experience into tradition” (1999:582): “It is scarcely within the powers of the individual to purify the lessons of his life completely by purging them of his particular experience. But the proverb can do this by taking possession of them.” From our earliest records of proverb use, these expressions have existed to be retrieved from memory, applied, and acted upon, in just the way that Chaucer has his master victualer apply one. Traditional sayings codify strategies “for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye, for purification, propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions” (Burke 1967:304).

As I observed at the beginning of this exploratory foray, it is no surprise that proverb practice in a society of strong bearers far outstrips even the most promising and productive of theories. On the basis of some aspects of Chaucer’s practice, I have attempted to identify some ways in which the available theories illuminate proverb practice and some places where practice shows up the limitations of theory. I began with the metaphor of building a bridge between the work of ethnographers and that of cognitive scientists. It may be easier to outline work for others to do than to do it, but a bridge begins with the recognition that a gap needs to be spanned. Perhaps, when there is a bridge for them to come to, ethnographers and cognitive scientists will begin to cross it.

Smith College

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The Minim-istic Imagination: Scribal Invention and the Word in the Early English Alliterative Tradition

Jonathan Watson

Few medievalists today would invoke the Great Divide between the oral and the literate, for one of the more convincing arguments of the past quarter-century has been the mixed nature of medieval textuality: how oral-derived rhetoric persists well into the “literate” era. Influenced by the work of Alain Renour, Walter Ong, John Miles Foley, Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, and others, oral theorists now prefer to speak of an oral-literate continuum, a continuum featuring a complex weave of oral and literate signification. In the English alliterative tradition, for instance, we might envision a stretch of textuality from the pre-Conquest *Beowulf*, through Lawman’s *Brut*, all the way to the fifteenth-century *Siege of Jerusalem*, a system of texts that deploy, at various removes, a traditional native register. Hence, even though a late text like *The Siege of Jerusalem* is well within the “literate” era, its word and phrasal stock is nevertheless aligned with traditional contexts, and thus retains a certain connotative potential. Yet with this model of the oral-literate continuum before us, it is easy to conceive of a gradual decay, a process in which orality slowly becomes displaced, unproductive, and ultimately vestigial.

I would like, however, to demonstrate in this essay—by looking specifically at the English alliterative tradition—that, in fact, the tension between oral and literate signification remains alive far into the so-called “literate” era. I will suggest that some vestiges of oral-derived rhetoric do not merely decay in the Middle English period; rather they become subject to the complex processes of amalgamation, transformation, and even reinvention. A close reading of the scribal variants in *The Siege of Jerusalem* can illustrate this process. *Siege* yields at least two remarkable points for our understanding of a waning orality: that ambiguous word-minim clusters associated with oral tradition could catalyze new or syncretic images; and that scribes, as late as the fifteenth century, could seek to infuse a “literate” text with oral-derived “word-power.”¹

¹ The term “word-power” is John Miles Foley’s. See espec. Foley 1995:1-98.

What drives the processes of amalgamation, transformation, and reinvention, witnessed in *Siege* and other Early English alliterative works, is “scribal reperformance”—a phenomenon that has received much attention of late. Katharine O’Brien O’Keeffe and A. N. Doane, for example, have demonstrated that in Anglo-Saxon England scribes participated in a fluid textuality: in their act of reception, in the instant between reading and writing, scribes would often recompose—or “reperform”—the manuscript “text” according to the principles of oral composition, with little regard for textual fixity. Doane argues that “the scribe re-creates the transmitted message through his own performance in the tradition” (1994:421-22) and that his “performance is therefore considered not as a faithful duplication, but as the exercise of his own ‘communicative competence’ within the tradition that normally resides in speaking and traditional memory” (*ibid.*:423). Doane envisages the actual scribal process as follows, “the script [*i.e.*, *manuscript*] would be a kind of prompt or cue in two registers—presenting fixed words in one register that would suggest and promote words in another. The performing scribe thus produces a palimpsestic text in which the old text largely predetermines the new but is authoritatively overridden by the words of the new oral/written text” (*ibid.*:432, clarification and italics mine). This malleable verbal art, in which scribes reprocess a “text” through their own particular formulaic conditioning, in which the scribal and poetic acts conflate, as it were, continues beyond the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. As I have demonstrated elsewhere by comparing the two scribes of Lazamon’s *Brut*, even in Middle English texts scribes could independently reperform traditional scenes, such as battle descriptions or sea journeys.² When scribes encounter such type-scenes, they often leave off their script for their own formulaic rendering, not from any idiosyncratic desire but from a compositional license inherent in the tradition of performance. This phenomenon of scribal reperformance says much about textual authority: when scribes transpose traditional type-scenes, any sense of single authorship yields to a more immanent textuality in which the scribe has, in a sense, equal authority with the poet. Like the poets, scribes could access the deep structure of alliterative verse, because the verse depended largely on tradition (on a “continuum of production and reception”), not on innovation.

I would now like to consider a single passage from *The Siege of Jerusalem* to illustrate a dialogical turf war of sorts. I wish to demonstrate how oral-derived and literate registers—or metonymic and semantic

² See Watson 1998b.

discourse³—compete in the various scribal versions of the *Siege*. Because the work survives in seven manuscripts from the early to mid-fifteenth century and because it has a penchant for the traditional type-scenes of alliterative verse—storms, sea journeys, the arming of heroes, and battle—we are able to see a range of scribal tensions at work, a range of scribal readings and reperformances. In the “text” of *Siege*, we occasionally encounter a half dozen scribal “readings” or “reception strategies,” which derive from the various *Siege* manuscripts.⁴ Accordingly, the composite picture is rich, as it affords a glimpse of several scribes at work, each one capable of decoding and encoding formulaic idioms with varying degrees of competence in the tradition: some will supplant unfamiliar readings with equivalent formulaicisms, while others will refashion decaying oral-derived structures by blending them with literate amplification.

The passage to be considered is a description of nightfall set between waves of the Siege—between the Romans’ first and second attack on the Jewish forces. The onset of twilight is intended, so one would think, as a dramatic pause between the two battle sequences. Yet the scribes get swept apart on their reading of this passage. One school views the passage as a simple portrait of night falling, but the other school construes the nightscape as an ominous prelude to the second battle: as night darkens, the sky resounds and birds shake out their feathers—details that are the traditional cues of imminent battle in the alliterative tradition.

The passage under consideration reads as follows (725-30):⁵

³ John Miles Foley makes this distinction between “metonymic” and “semantic” discourse; see especially Foley 1991:1-60 and 1995:1-98. See also Watson 1998b and Watson forthcoming.

⁴ The versions of the poem are dated as follows: L (Bodleian 1059), early fifteenth century; A (Brit. Libr. Add. 31042), mid-fifteenth century; V (Brit. Libr. Cotton Vesp. E xvi), fifteenth century; C (Brit. Libr. Cotton Caligula. A ii.), mid-fifteenth century; U (Camb. Univ. Mm. 5.14), fifteenth century; D (Lambeth Palace 491), first half of the fifteenth century; E (Ashburnham 130), fifteenth century. For a more detailed account of the manuscript histories, see Kölbing 1932:espec. Introduction. See also Bonnie Millar’s important and updated discussion of the manuscript contexts of *Siege* (2000:espec. 15-75).

⁵ All excerpts of *Siege* are from Kölbing’s 1932 edition. Translations throughout are mine unless otherwise noted. For purposes of clarity, bold type is used in excerpted passages and translations to highlight the individual words, phrases, and lines under direct discussion.

By þat was þe day don, dym[m]ed þe skyes,
 merked [þe] montayns & mores a-bout,
foules fallen to fote & her feþres r[y]s[t]en,
 þe nyȝt-wacche to þe walle & waytes to blowe;
 bryȝt fures a-boute betyn a-brode in þe oste
 þe kyng & his consail carpen to-gedr.

With that the day was over, the skies dimmed,
 the mountains and surrounding moors grew murky.
Birds fell to foot, and shook their feathers.
 The night-watch came to the wall, and sounded their
 trumpets. Bright fires were kindled about, as the king
 and his counsel spoke together among the host.

In the past, this passage has been understood as a literary borrowing, pure and simple, with its source in a corresponding depiction of night from the late fourteenth-century poem *The Destruction of Troy* (7348-54):⁶

When the day ouer drogh, & the derk entrid,
 the sternes full stithly starond o lofte;
 all merknet the mountens & mores aboute;
the ffowles þere fethers foldyn to gedur.
 Nightwacce for to wake, waites to blow;
 tore fyres in the tenttes, tendlis olofte;
 all the gret of the grekes gedrit hom somyn.

When the day drew to a close and darkness set in,
 the stars shone brightly in the sky. The mountains and
 the moors grew murky all around. **The birds folded their
 feathers together.** The nightwatch woke, and sounded their
 trumpets. Tremendous fires were kindled aloft in the tents,
 as all the great ones among the Greeks gathered together.

Although we have neatly corresponding ideas and echoic phrasing in these comparable passages—the darkening day, the murky mountains and moors, the sentries on guard, the campfires—to understand the passage as a mere “literary borrowing” does not do justice to the complex poetics at work. In *Troy*, the force of the passage is clear: night falls, birds sleep, folding feathers together; it is an image of tranquility, of calm before the storm. But *Siege* offers a more equivocal image: instead of the phrase in *Troy*, “the derk entrid” (“the dark entered”), the *Siege* phrase is a traditional alliterative

⁶ The text is Panton and Donaldson 1874; the translation is mine. On the “borrowings” of *Siege* from *Troy*, see the introduction to Kölbing 1932:espec. xxvii-xxx.

formula, “dym[m]yd þe skyes” (“the skies dimmed”); and instead of the *Troy*-phrase “þere fethers foldyn to gedur” (“their feathers folded together”), the *Siege* phrase is “her feþres r[y]s[t]en” (“their feathers shook”). These images of the *Siege* text have been preferred by Kölbing at the expense of the other scribal variants. When we acknowledge the full spectrum of variants, the tensions in the passage increase considerably:

dym[m]ed þe skyes: dymmed (DUC); dynnede (A); dymned (L)

her feþres r[y]s[t]en: to reste (DUC); rysten (A); rusken (L)

Both of these textual moments—“dym[m]ed the skyes” and “her feþres r[y]s[t]en”—are images caught in flux: they preserve the competing rhetoric of oral-derived and written systems. If we attend to the scribal forms, then the image of the sky is at once “dimming” and “dinning,” and the feathers, with the scribal forms *rysten* “shook” (cf. ON *hrista* “to shake”; ME *rusian* “to shake”) and *rusken* “to shake vigorously” (cf. ON *ryskja* “to shake violently”), both at rest and aflutter. What can account for these equivocating images and this scribal rift?

The rival imagery among the *Siege* scribes has its source, I would propose, in the act of reception. The point of divergence depends on how the scribes choose to “read” this twilight scene—either as a tranquil respite or an ominous prelude to battle, as punctuation to the preceding battle or as a harbinger of the battle to follow shortly.⁷ As a consequence, certain scribes (DUC) adhere to the *Troy* reading—those who have a “dimming” (darkening) field and perfectly restful birds—while the others (AL) evoke a “dinning” field and an animated, feather-shaking bird. These latter two responses (AL) are an attempt to reinscribe oral-derived rhetoric upon a “literate” context, an effort to invest the passage with a connotative potential. The scribal performance seeks to imbue this battle prelude with a resonant native idiom, which I have identified elsewhere as “Óðinn’s Storm.”⁸

For our purposes here, “Óðinn’s Storm” can be understood as a stylized but protean compositional unit that is a feature of early Germanic verse. Its presence is marked by a flexible field of stock images

⁷ In fewer than fifteen lines after this evening portrait, skylarks and trumpets will rouse Waspasian’s troops for battle (738-39): “Leuerockes vpon lofte lyften her steuenes / Burnes busken hem out of bed with_bemes loude” (“Larks raised their voices on high. Men hastened themselves out of bed with trumpets loud”).

⁸ See Watson 1998a, 1998b, 2002, and forthcoming.

underpinned by a core of lexical cues. Among the common generative features of the Óðinn's Storm site are a "dinning" item (e.g., earth, shields, feathers); a "shaking" item (e.g., spears, birds, wolves, mailcoats); a "dew- or hail-covered" item (e.g., birds, wolves, spears); and a "yelling or crying" item (e.g., birds, spears, mailcoats). The phrasal stock is quite stable, with a decided preference for such lexemes as *rusien* "to shake" (OE *hryssan*; ON *hrista*); *dunien* "to resound" (OE *dynnan*; ON *dynja*); OE *scacan* "to shake" (ON *skaka*); OE *gyllan* "to yell"; OE *deawig* "dewy," *hrim* "frost," or OE *hagl* "hail"; and OE *feþeres* "feathers." When occurring in combination, these lexical cues would likely have elicited an extratextual resonance, or what Foley has called "word-power"; once they may have also been mythologically effective, serving to invoke the specific presence of Óðinn and his valkyries.⁹ For instance, take that famous Old English moment when the Wanderer's tender image of his liege dissolves into a wintry sea of bathing gulls (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:ll. 45-48):

Ðonne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma,
 gesihð him beforan fealwe wegas,
 baþian brimfuglas, **brædan feþra**,
 hreosan **hrim** ond snaw, **hagle** gemenged.

Then the friendless man awakens,
 sees before himself the tawny waves,
 the sea-birds bathing, **their feathers spreading**,
rime and snow falling, mingled with **hail**.

We easily apprehend the Wanderer's grief; but the language is also tinged with the cues of Óðinn's Storm—the spreading feathers, the rime, and hail—and the tenor of this battle idiom in this context would make his reaction, his heavier spirit, all the more poignant. The tableau of hail-strewn birds spreading feathers might summon flickerings of battle, memories of or longings for combat in the company of his king and companions.

To understand the presence of Óðinn's Storm in the *Siege* passage, we can trace the selected features of the broader stylization, specifically its usage of the "dinning-earth" and "shaking"-item motifs. I will argue that the "dimming" sky of the *Siege*-passage represents a scribal refashioning—by way of minim-cluster confusion—of the "dinning-earth" motif so often found in the Óðinn's Storm site, and that its companion image of "feather-shaking" birds is an attempt to reanimate the birds-at-rest with the more kinetic model and resonant "word-power" of Óðinn's Storm.

⁹ See, for instance, Watson 1998a.

Dimming Sky, Dinning Earth

By the early Middle English era, the “dinning-earth” motif was a time-honored expression in the Germanic alliterative tradition, but its poetic force was becoming dissipated. In its various Middle English forms (attested to in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries [*MED*: *dinen* v.(1)])—*dined*, *dinned*, *dynet*, *dened*, *dunede*, *dunnede*—the verb *dunien* would have often presented scribes with an ambiguous cluster of ligating minims, e.g., *dſſſſede*. Along the continuum of reperformance, such ambiguity brings forth a scribal invention: *dunede* coalesces and eventually produces the *dimedede* variant. This formulaic “evolution” is readily seen when we survey the “dinning-earth” motif in Old Norse and Old English and then follow its course in the Middle English era.

Among the earliest examples of the “dinning-earth” motif are those found in Old Norse verse, where the stylized feature is typically linked with hero-journeys into mythological landscapes: Óðinn crossing to Hel; Loki to Ásgarh; Gunnar’s men passing through the unknown Mirkwood. As we would expect, the “dinning-earth” motif is flexible, but it is underpinned by those stock linguistic markers that likely keyed the theme. Among these frequent markers are ON *dynja*/OE *dynnan* “to resound” and OE *hryssan*/ON *hrista* “to shake or tremble,” as the following examples can demonstrate. In *Baldrs draumar* the earth resounds as Óðinn approaches the fortress of Hel (*Bdr.* 3.3):¹⁰

Fram reið Óðinn, **foldvegr dunði**,
hann kom at hávo Heliar ranni.

Óðinn rode on, **the earth dinned**;
he came to the tall hall of Hel.

The account of Gunnar’s horse-troop riding to Atli’s court in *Atlakviða* illustrates a kindred stylization of the “dinning-earth” motif, one that prefers the verb *hrista* “to shake” to *dynja* (13.1-4):

Fetom léto fræcnir um fiöll atþyria
marina mélgreyþo, Myrcvið inn ókunna;
hristiz öll Húnmörk, þar er harðmóðgir fóro,
ráco þeir vannstygga völlo allgræna.

The brave ones put to pace their bit-champing steeds

¹⁰ All references to the Poetic *Edda* are from Kuhn 1983; poem, stanza, and line are given.

along the mountain-path, the unknown Mirkwood.
All Hunmark shook, where the grim-spirited ones went.
 They coursed their horses over vales all-green.

So, too, when Loki flies to Ásgarh, the home of the Giants, we find a variation on the “dinning-earth” theme: it is stated twice, in stanzas five and nine of *Þrymskviða*, that his *fjaðarhamr* “feather-coat” resounds (*Þrk* 5.1, 9.1):

Fló þa Loki, **fjaðarhamr dunði**

Loki flew then, **his feather-coat dinned**.

The Old Norse examples place the feature in a stylized and mythological world that has a cognate representation in Old English verse, in heroic poems such as *Beowulf* and *Finnsburh*. The representations, however, are less specifically tied to a hero’s journeying; yet, like the Norse examples, they can lend a certain textual vibrato that either precedes imminent conflict or signals the tumult of high battle. The verb *dynnan* occurs three times in *Beowulf*, and once in the *Finnsburh* fragment.

When the dragon first spews fire from its cave, the dinning-earth motif accompanies the action (2556b-58):¹¹

From ærest cwōm
 oruð āglæcean ūt of stāne,
 hāt hildeswāt; **hrūse dynede.**

The monster’s breath came first out of the stone(-barrow),
 hot battle-sweat; **the earth resounded**.

The other occurrences feature a hall-for-earth substitution, but the essential quality—as denoted in the verb—remains. Thus, when Beowulf and Grendel grapple, it is said that Heorot clamors (767a):

Dryhtsele **dynede**.

The hall **resounded**.

And when Beowulf strides across the floor to greet an inconsolable Hrothgar (who has lost his loyal thane Æschere to Grendel’s mother) the rattling floors signal his heroic stature (1317b):

¹¹ All references to *Beowulf* and *Finnsburh* are taken from Klaeber 1950.

Healwudu **dynede**.

The hall-wood **dinned**.

The *Finnsburh* invocation of the “dinning-earth” motif occurs in the high-battle section of the poem, a scene that, as I have argued recently (2002), is explicitly linked to Óðinn and the valkyries (28 and 30b):¹²

Ða wæs on healle wælslihta gehlyn:
 . . . Buruh-ðelu **dynede**.

Then was the clatter of slaughter in the hall
 . . . the hall-floor **dinned**.

By the early Middle English era there is evidence that the “dinning earth” motif was becoming a less effective formula. *Lazamon*, for instance, can summon the motif in phrases reminiscent of the Norse horse-journeys cited above (10593, 13658):¹³

His hors he lette irnan **þat þa eorðe dune(de)**.

He let his horse run, **so that the earth dinned**.

Steden lepen **sturede þa eorðe**.

The steeds leap, **the earth resounded**.

But he struggles with what I will call “literalization,” a growing need to justify the image in denotative (or literal) terms rather than in connotative terms. For example, what takes a single dragon in *Beowulf* takes sixty thousand trumpeting men in *Brut*; and this difference reflects a growing self-consciousness of the inherited idiom, an increased sense of having to account for its presence, as may be seen in the following excerpt (13696-702):

Ða gon þat folc sturien þa eo[r]ðen gon to dunien
 bemen þer bleowen bonneden ferden

¹² The *Finnsburh* passages presented in this essay are based on Donald Fry’s 1974 edition, but incorporate the recent editorial recommendations of Watson’s “The *Finnsburh* Skald.” On this passage, see Watson 2002:506.

¹³ All *Brut* quotations come from Brook and Leslie 1977.

hornes þer aqueðen mid hæhzere stefnen
 sixti þusende bleowen to-somne
 ma þer aqueðen of Arðures iueren
 þene sixti þusende segges mid horne
þa wolcne gon to dunien þa eo[r]ðe gon to biuien.

Then the folk began to stir, the earth to din.

Trumpets were blown, armies arrayed: sixty thousand
 horns were sounded together. More of Arthur's
 companions rang out there than the sixty thousand men
 with horns. **The sky began to din, the earth to shake!**

There is other evidence here that the traditional referentiality of the phrase is weakening. Lazamon must use a more insistent style, repeating the feature three times in this passage in varied forms: “þa eo[r]ðen gon to dunien” (13696); “þa wolcne gon to dunien” (13702); and “þa eo[r]ðe gon to biuien” (13702). Thus the feature has required not only a more “literal” element—a true army (60,000 men) to shake the earth—but also a more heavy-handed presence: Lazamon *wants* to inject this feature into his narrative, but to do so he must be more emphatic, more persistent. It is also significant here that Lazamon includes the sky as part of the formulaic fabric of the “dinning-earth” motif (“þa wolcne gon to dunien”). Such usage, along with minim confusion, will encourage the transformation of this image by later reperforming scribes.

If in Lazamon's *Brut* the idiom is becoming depleted, in later texts it becomes increasingly unfamiliar and unproductive. As this formulaic theme develops along the oral-literate continuum, it grows increasingly remote to scribal culture, resulting in a transformation catalyzed by minim-cluster confusion. In reading and processing their script, some scribes appear to confuse the intended graphemes of the word *dunnede*—its minim cluster—and produce *dimmede/dymmede*. As a consequence, the formula gets repackaged as the “dimming-earth or dimming-sky motif”; in short, the image evolves. The A and D manuscripts of the *Wars of Alexander* preserve the evolving image in a stylized rendering of Alexander's first battle, a pageant of men and horses “stamping” and “stirring” (A:781-82; D:781-82):¹⁴

A:
 Quat of stamping of stedis & stering of bernes,
all dymed þe dale & þe dust ryses.

¹⁴ Skeat 1886 is the source for all quotations from *The Wars of Alexander*.

From the stamping of the steeds and stirring of men,
all dimmed the dale, the dust rising.

D:
 What of stampyng of stedes & strippyng of baners,
all demmyd þe dale & þe dust risez.

From the stamping of steeds and unfurling of banners,
all dimmed the dale, the dust rising.

Lazamon's "dinning-earth" diction in his invocation of galloping horses and the "stirring" of men (cf. above, "þa gon þat folc sturien þa eo[r]ðen gon to dunien") can suggest continuity with the *Alexander*-poet's phrasing. Yet the traditional material has been repackaged with new, or less conventional, details, such as the rising dust (and unfurling of banners in D).

Though it may be a purposeful addition, the unfurling banners ("stripping of baners") reads more as an exchangeable image, a formulaic variation, especially with its sonic and syllabic agreement with Scribe-A's phrase "stering of bernas." Its presence suggests that there is a tension here between oral and literate significations, as is evident in the balance of essential and exchangeable ideas. On the one hand, we have a shifting field of denotative images (men stirring and banners unfurling), suggesting that what remains productive is the resonant phrase of antiquity: the presence of dinning/dimming fields invokes a traditionally charged affective context, while the denotative images—the steeds, warriors, and banners—are flexible, or exchangeable, a phenomenon that is typical of the oral-derived style. As we have seen in the Lawman's *Brut* example of the "dinning-earth" motif, the stamping of steeds and stirring of warriors produces a vibrating earth and sky. Yet the new image of the "dimming field" seems to present problems for scribes. Why is the field darkening? The added detail of rising dust, which does not appear part of the traditional package, may be a response to the "dimming" dale image: an example of scribal invention. Confronted with this new image (which has been generated in part by minor confusion) the scribes proceed to embellish the image so as to justify the darkening dale—a justification demanded by their and their audiences' increasingly literate interpretive strategies. This increased sense of "literalization," this movement toward denotative precision, is consistent with a literary reflex, as well as with a movement away from a connotative, traditionally deployed register.

The revised image of the "dimming dale" (e.g., "all dymed þe dale") can also support the case for syncretism between "dimming" and "dinning." While the *Siege* passage under consideration prefers "dym[m]ed þe skyes"

to “dymed þe dale,” a related occurrence of “dymedyn” in an earlier *Siege* passage brings forth the underlying tensions between the like verbs and their phrases (531-32):

Doust drof vpon lofte, dymedyn **alle aboute**,
as þonder & þicke rayn, þrowolande in skyes.

A: **the dale**

Dust drove on high, dimming **all things about**,
as thunder and thick rain, jostling in the skies.

Interestingly, the scribal tension falls not on “dymeden” here but on the variable phrase “alle aboute” and “the dale.” A passage from the late fourteenth-century *The Destruction of Troy* suggests the fused rhetoric between the “dimming sky” and “dinning-earth” motifs—their patterns of interference (1197-98):

All dynnet þe dyn the dales Aboute
when helmes and hard stele hurlet to-gedur.

All dinned the din throughout the dales
when the helmets and hard steel crashed together.

The *Troy* expression not only highlights the formulaic proximity of “dales” and “aboute,” justifying the variation in *Siege*, but also raises the prospect of “dymedyn” (with its final “dyn” component) as a smoothed and minim-istically produced form of “dynnet þe dyn.” Whatever we decide here, the images that accrue about the “dimming sky and dale,” particularly that of the rising dust, seem to be non-traditional details—added to make sense of the strangely “dimming” field for a more literal-minded audience.

The confusion of minim-clusters would seem to be a catalyst, then, for the evolution of new images. In the transmission of texts, scribes combine ambiguous minim-clusters in unintended ways and then may elaborate in order to justify the new formation. Though it is difficult to say precisely what is elaboration, we can see further “minim-istic” tension in at least one other moment in the Jerusalem siege. In a striking image, shields either “shiver” (i.e., split) or “shimmer” according to how each scribe interprets the minim package (547-48):

For schyueryng of she[l]des & schynyng of helmes
hit ferde, as alle þe firmament vp-on a fur wer.

EDU: schymeryng “shimmering”

A: schemerynge “shimmering”

From the splitting of shields and shining of helmets,
it was as if all the firmament were afire.

Though the orthography above varies from my reconstruction below, a minim-cluster could have, at some point, spawned the confusion that underlies these two forms and motifs:

shfjfffering

In context the “shivering” helmets appear misplaced, as “shimmering” ones would contribute more readily to the fiery firmament. Remarkably, the *Siege* phrasing and alliterative patterning is reminiscent of lines 35b-36 of the *Finnsburh* fragment (“Swurdlēoma stōd, / swylce eal Finnsburuh fȳrenu wære”; “Sword-gleam shone, as if all Finnsburh were aflame”), providing further evidence of the conservative and resilient nature of these traditional native idioms.¹⁵ A closer look at the phrasing bears out a surprising parallel:

Siege: Hit ferde, as alle þe firmament vp-on a fur wer.

Finn.: swylce eal Finnsburuh fȳrenu wære.

Despite the more than five hundred years separating these utterances, the syntactical and metrical correspondences are spot on: “as alle” and “swylce eal”; the three-syllable lilt of “firmament” and “Finnsburuh”; the syntactical (post-object verb) match of “vp-on a fur wer” and “fyrenu wære.” Indeed, in the *Siege* line, one can still hear the music of the Old English meter.

The Birds of Battle

To understand the *Siege* battle-birds caught in flux—at once resting and at the same time shaking—one needs to acknowledge the flexible contexts in which the dinning/dimming earth idiom participates, the broader patterns of Óðinn’s Storm. As suggested above by Loki’s “dinning feathercoat” (“fiaðarhamr dunði”), the essential ideas of a dinning-item and

¹⁵ On *Finnsburh* 35b-36, see Watson 2000:516.

feather-shaking seem to participate in a shared substitutional field—a common formulaic locus. A brief survey of related occurrences lets us extend our understanding of this formulaic collocation and its associative field. A passage from the Old English poem *Judith* features a collocation of *dynedan* and the lexeme *feþera*, as part of the compound *urigfeþera* “dewy-feathered” (Dobbie 1953, *Jud.*:204b-16a):

Dynedan scildas,

hlude hlummon. Þæs se hlanca gefeah
wulf in wald, ond se **wanna** hrefn,
wælgifre fugel. Wistan begen
þæt him þa þeodguman þohton tilian
fyllen on fægum; ac him fleah on last
earn ætes georn, **urigfeþera**,
salowigpada sang hildeleoð,
hyrnednebbas. Stopon heaðorincas,
beornas to beadowe, bordum beðeahte,
hwelfum lindum, þa ðe hwile ær
elþeodigra edwit þoledon,
hæðenra hosp.

Shields dinned, resounded loudly. Of this the
lean wolf in the wood rejoiced, and the **wan** raven,
the slaughter-eager bird. Both knew that the warriors
intended to provide them with a feast of fallen ones.
But the eagle, greedy for food, flew behind, **dewy-feathered**
and dark-coated, singing a war-cry—the horny-beaked one!
The warriors advanced, soldiers to battle, carrying shields,
curved linden wood, those who had previously suffered the
shame of foreigners, the reproach of the heathen.

Though typically read as a “Beasts of Battle” motif, the passage might more productively be seen as participating in the broader narrative locus of Óðinn’s Storm, of which dewy-feathered or shaking beasts can be a crucial part. The passage serves as a battle preamble, and it encodes its threatening environment through a lexemic pool rather than a stock imagistic one. Hence, we find in Óðinn’s Storm passages in which the images are exchangeable: the earth might din, shields might din; birds, horses, or wolves might shake or be covered with dew; ravens or the sky might be wan. What seems more crucial is the presence of clustered lexemes: *dyneden*, *deawig*, *feðera*, and *wan*. These words taste of context. It is for this reason that the “Beasts of Battle” motif does not really fit as a label, because the beasts themselves are ultimately expendable.

For instance, we find these typical “Beasts” passages in the following Old English passages:¹⁶

Hreopan herefugolas, hilde grædig,
deawigfeðere ofer drihtneum,
wonn wælceasega. (*Exodus* 162-65a)

The war-birds shrieked, greedy for battle,
dewy feathered over the warriors,
the **dusky** valkyries.

Sang se **wanna** fugel
under deoreð**sceaftum,** **deawigfeðera,**
hræs on wenan. (*Genesis A* 1983b-85a)

The **dusky** bird sang,
under the darted **spears,** **dewy-feathered,**
in expectation of slaughter.

Ðær wearð hream ahafen, hremmas **wundon,**
earn æses georn; wæs **on eorþan cyrm.** (*Maldon* 106-7)

There a scream rose up, ravens **circled,**
the eagle was eager for food; **clamor** was **on the land.**

The stylized diction of these “beasts” passages leaves us with a potential word-core of lexemes for keying the “Beasts” theme, which might include *wan*, *deawigfeðera*, *wundon*, *ofer drihtneum*, and *scaft*. Yet in the following passage from *Exodus*, no beast is found within two hundred lines (342-44):

þridde þeodmægen (þufas **wundon**
ofer garfare) guðcyste onþrang
deawig sceaftum.

The third army—battle standards **twisted**
over the spear-company—pressed on in a select band
with **dewy spearshafts.**

¹⁶ The *Exodus* and *Genesis* passages are taken from Krapp 1931. *Maldon* is excerpted from Dobbie 1942.

Instead of ravens, standards wind over head; instead of dew-covered birds, dew-covered spears accompany the soldiers. Has the “Beasts” motif been invoked? It has not if we insist on Francis P. Magoun’s famous standard: “the mention of a wolf, eagle, and/or raven as beasts attendant on a scene of carnage.”¹⁷ But the *Exodus* passage, I would propose, does key the ominous battle-preamble Óðinn’s Storm, of which the beasts are often—but not necessarily—a part. The beasts are close by in the *Exodus* dewy-spear passage; however, they linger in the deep structure, in the lexemes’ traditional referentiality—not in the surface articulation.

The question of the “Beasts” is important for the *Siege*-birds at hand. Indeed, it is tempting to align the feather-shaking *Siege*-birds with the Old English “Birds of Battle” prototype; yet, in doing so, we should be cautious, acknowledging that the bird-“beasts” participate in a larger, flexible formulaic system, a system that is more clearly articulated in the *Siege*-passage. I think we do better to locate the birds in a continuum of text, in the stylized action and network of poetic diction in which they are implicated. A further sampling of shaking-animal passages can deepen this sense of continuum, action, and diction. In Eddic verse, for instance, valkyries perch on the edge of battle as their horses shake (*hristuz*) dew and hail from their manes; in skaldic verse, an eagle is said to shake his bloody feathers in the fury of battle:

Marir **hristuz**, stóð af mönom þeira
dögg í díúpa dali
 hagl í háva víþo. (Kuhn 1983:HHj. 28.3-5)

Horses **shook**, from their manes
 there came **dew** in deep dales,
hail in tall woods.

Valgamr **skók** í vápna rimmu
 viðr Helganes blóðugt **fiðri**. (Kock 1946-50:I, 157; 15.5-6)

The slaughter-vulture [eagle] **shook** in the weapon fray
 near Helganes its bloody **feathers**.

This time-honored battle-shake, which typically features horses, birds, or wolves, finds its course into Middle English verse. An example from *King Horn* places the resilient stylization in the mid-thirteenth century, when it

¹⁷ Magoun 1955:83. For important recent discussions of the “Beasts of Battle” typescene see Griffith 1993 and Foley 1991:224-31.

collocates with the “dinning-earth” motif. As Horn prepares for battle, arming himself and fetching his steed, the poet invokes in swift terms the metonymically charged feature (Hall 1901:34, 605-6):

His fole **shock** his brenye
þat al þe court gan **denye**.

His horse **shook** his corselet
so that all the court began **to din**.

The “shaking” and “dinning” collocation preferred by the two *Siege*-scribes, then, taps into this school of oral-derived rhetoric. But the *Siege*-passage also has a “literary” history, to which the other scribes who favor a “resting bird” adhere—a literary indebtedness to *Troy* and ultimately Guido de Colonne’s *Historia Troiana*.

The source of the *Troy*-passage, Guido de Colonne’s *Historia Troiana*, tells of Agamemnon gathering with his council in his tent on a star-lit night—there is no mention of birds. If this is the invention of the *Troy*-poet, then, the original image is of birds coming to rest, folding their feathers in the still and starry evening. The scene is clearly intended as a restful one. Confronted with such an image, the *Siege*-scribes (AL) who offer the “dinning” sky and the feather-shaking bird must have reprocessed and reperformed the “literate” text: the two scribes superimpose an oral-derived feature on the borrowed section of text, reanimating the birds with their war-like rustle. As stated above, their language points toward their sphere of influence: the verb *rysten* (Scribe A) is the descendent of ON *hrista*/OE *rusien*, and, as demonstrated, would encode a specialized, affective usage. Its variant *rusken* (Scribe L) is akin to Swedish *ruska* “to shake,” Old Danish *ruske* “to rattle,” and (Middle) Danish *ruske* “to shake” (the *MED* reads the phrase as “to ruffle [its feathers]”). Though not cited in the *MED*, Old Norse *ryskja* “to shake vigorously” might well be its Scandinavian source.

We can conclude that the scribal divergence results from two rival readings of the scene: flanked between the close of one battle and the start of the next, the scene is ambivalent, functioning either as a tranquil pause following the fighting or as a herald of the future battle. The scribes get caught somewhere in between (as reified in *Siege*-Scribe L’s *dymned*), breaking into two camps depending on their understanding of the motif. For those scribes who animate the bird, the scribal process is essentially the *obverse* of the customary oral-to-written configuration: instead of the “literate” of a decaying oral image, we have the “oralization” of a single (presumably written) source. Subtle tensions like *dymned* suggest the

complex turf war between rival registers, and can offer a fascinating picture of the oral-literate continuum in flux—the ebb and flow of literacy and orality.

The *Siege* passage, then, is no mere literary borrowing. Indeed, to understand the passage as such is reductive: it silences the contingent scribal tensions, the resonant voices that both inscribe and depart from the traditional alliterative rhetoric. In the rival portraits of night falling in *Siege*—the dimming night and restful birds or the resounding sky and fluttering birds—we see a dynamic hybrid of the oral-derived and the literate, the fusion of connotative and denotative strategies. But we also see a fracturing “performance matrix,” to borrow John Miles Foley’s term, in which scribes exhibit varying competencies in deploying the traditional rhetoric along the oral-literate continuum. By the fifteenth century, residual orality still persists, yet its eroding architecture—its words, phrases, and type-scenes—has become subject to new combinations through scribal mis-reading of minim clusters and a growing sense of literalization: an increased interest in justifying the presence of the traditional language. Such tensions seem embodied in the L-scribe’s word *dymned*, a fused form caught between a literary evocation and a connotative inscription. Is the sky both resounding and darkening? It would seem to be just one example of how scribes, even as late as the fifteenth century, could harmonize competing voices.¹⁸

Manchester College

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The Social and Dramatic Functions of Oral Recitation and Composition in *Beowulf*

John M. Hill

In *Beowulf*, the first moments of harp-accompanied joy in the hall afflict an ominous outsider (86-90a):¹

Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice
þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,
þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde
hludne in healle; þær wæs hearpan sweg,
swutol sang *scopes*.

Then the bold demon long and torturously
suffered great pain, he who in darkness abided,
that he every day heard joy,
loud in the hall; there was the sound of the harp,
the clear song of the *scop* [singer].

Rightly, we usually think of harp-playing, singing, and recitation—that is, orally performed song or story generally—as an inherent part of life and celebration in the hall. When life and joy die, so does the clear sound of the harp. This elegiac point, to which we will eventually return, is prominent in the final third of the poem. But for now, and throughout this overview of occasions for song, harp-playing, and oral performance among the Danes, we should note the formal, social, and dramatic perspectives afforded by the *Beowulf* poet's use of harp-accompanied song in the hall. We are always in complex, emotionally fraught, and even sometimes ominously suggestive circumstances—no more so than in the very first mention of hall-songs, of repeated joy that aurally and mentally pains a creature of darkness.

The kind of song here apparently sung daily is a creation song, recited by a knower, by someone who knows the origins of things. This singer is

¹ All citations from *Beowulf* are to Friedrich Klaeber's third edition (1950), with macra deleted.

not named, nor is he given a social title such as “þegn.” He simply is someone who knows, who reflects back to the beginnings of men and recites or narrates or unfolds (“reccan,” 91b—a verb Beowulf uses later when retelling events to Hygelac, saying it would take too long to recall the full detail of his requital against Grendel [2093a]).

This singing about origins in Heorot is clearly part of a formal occasion: the triumphant completion and dedication of the great hall, a hall dedicated to the sharing among young and old alike of all that God has given Hrothgar (excluding the lives of men or the open commons or public lands). An account of the Almighty’s creation of the bright earth surrounded by water, of the sun and moon, of flora and fauna of all kinds—this fittingly mirrors the human creation wherein all is good, shared, and joyful. Thus the passage establishes the highest of formal moments, perhaps almost a sacral moment, for song in the hall keyed to a great social event. Yet not all the world is in tune. What we learn here is that hall joys, song and recitation especially, have their atmospheric place in great social moments. They no doubt participate in various levels of formality—indeed some half-line collocations of *scop* and *sang* may register that formality formulaically, signaling a social ritual (cf. 90a, 467b); yet those instrumentally accompanied joys of saying and performance are inherently changeable, dramatic expressions of the social moment. They can have both hoped-for and unlooked-for consequences.

Grendel’s nighttime carnage in Heorot effectively silences the harps and lyres, along with the singing voices of men. But even here sad tales (*gidd*, 151a) of Hrothgar’s dozen miseries—twelve years of Grendel’s criminal, unyielding depredations—circulate widely among men. While the meaning of *gidd* is narratologically amorphous in Anglo-Saxon times, in *Beowulf* a *gidd* could well be a memorized composition.² And in the cases of those tales circulating about Grendel’s bloody crimes in Heorot, *giddu* convey fact, however elaborated here and there from performance to performance. Those tales eventually reach the Geats and Beowulf, who, when he learns of Grendel’s long perpetuated, loathsome doings, immediately commands the building of a good ship and says that he will seek out the Danish king inasmuch as he has need of men (194-201). Beowulf credits absolutely the tales he hears as narratives of a terrible truth.

His unsummoned arrival among the Danes meets several diplomatic challenges: the coast watch, Wulfgar, and then Hrothgar. The king’s

² Anne Klinck (1992:245) thinks of *gidd* as cutting across our ideas of “song and speech, fact and fiction, prose and verse,” and John Niles (1999:208-12) provides references, along with further critical reflections upon Klinck’s overview.

challenge is an invitation to a feast where Beowulf might further speak his mind as matters occur to him. This is not a casual invitation to an especially royal picnic. Rather it supposes a formal moment as Beowulf sits down and a *scop* sings bright-voiced in Heorot in response to this promising warrior's advent from abroad, perhaps for the first time in twelve years: "*Scop* hwilum sang / hador on Heorote" (469b-70a). This social ritual, revived now in Heorot, momentarily at least suggests the solidarity of Danes and Geats in what is still a preliminary movement on Beowulf's part toward the task he would have Hrothgar grant him—the chance to purge Heorot of Grendel.

What happens next further strengthens the case for an "instrumental"—that is, more than decorative and merely celebratory—use of harp and recitation in *Beowulf*. Unferth, son of Ecglaf, unbinds his battle runes and speaks in the most challenging, because insulting, way yet. Although a new *fitt* (manuscript division) begins with notice of Unferth, I see no reason to consider the preceding reference to bright singing and warrior joy as merely terminal atmosphere. Here bright song is both the pleasure it is and the drawing out of an unpleasant, powerful onlooker (shades of Grendel?): Hrothgar's prominent officer, who sits at the king's feet. Two instances do not, of course, make a social disposition, let alone a rule. But I think they argue suggestively that song and recitation serve in most cases as more than just local color marking a scene of celebration—the expected sonic tapestry, as it were—in the poet's dramatization of hall scenes. They do not even have to be in the hall to function in several ways at once.

Consider the Danes on horseback going to the mere's edge and then galloping exultantly back to Heorot after Beowulf's great victory over Grendel. On that occasion the mere, although welling with blood, is no frightening or dispiriting place. For them it is a fit place for the dismembered monster's death—a place, so to speak, where hell can receive her dishonored guest. As they ride away from the mere the Danes apparently praise Beowulf's deed, his glory. Their happy moan, *mænan*, appears later in connection with Hrothgar's *scop* when he speaks of Finn's sons (1067b). Such an utterance is often a complaint, a sorrowful speech in *Beowulf*, perhaps even an elegy near poem's end where the Geats would fashion a *wordgidd* about Beowulf (3172a). But here it is sheer, kinetic joy as the riders race back from the mere and pronounce the consequence of Beowulf's great deed—that surely under the heavens no shield-holder anywhere is more worthy of kingdoms than he is; he has not belied his martial appearance. This exuberant judgment, perhaps simply delivered in excited speech rather than in spontaneously composed exclamations of glory and stature, anticipates a much more formal oral composition. Hrothgar's

þegn (thane) is a man full of great stories, one who remembers many tales, finds words, and binds them skillfully together in speaking of Beowulf's fame (867b-74):

Hwilum cyninges þegn,
 guma gilphlæden, gidða gemyndig,
 se ðe ealfela ealdgesegen
 worn gemunde, word oþer fand
 soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
 sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian,
 ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
 wordum wrixlan.

At times a king's thane,
 a man covered with glory, mindful of songs,
 he who of many ancient tales
 remembered much, one word found another
 truly linked; the warrior again began
 (about) Beowulf's voyage with wisdom to recite,
 and in skillful ways to tell a fitting tale,
 in words varied.

Apparently he extemporizes the story (*spel*) of Beowulf's deed and he joins it to stories (*giddu*) he already knows about Sigemund and Heremod. His performance here is a mixture, then, of oral composition and oral recitation, the whole involving a complex stitching together of an antithetical tryptych. That mixture, I think, is signaled for us by the difference between *spel* and *gidd*. Although almost as generically amorphous as *gidd*, a *spel* need not be a song or an alliterative tale; and more often than not in *Beowulf* it is a grievous tiding. Yet in *Beowulf* it is *always* something *new*: here in the thane's artful construction, later in the sorrowful news of the mother's revenge, and later still in the messenger's speech to the wise Geats awaiting news of Beowulf's combat with the dragon.

Appropriately, oral composition here occurs in an atmosphere of triumph, even of kinetic joy. The king's thane is an especially prominent reciter and composer. Like the singer who knows the story of creation, he knows many ancient narratives (*ealdgesegen*). Probably a warrior-poet, a court poet, he composes a well wrought tale of Beowulf's exploit, where one word finds another truly bound. He also says all he knows about Sigemund's glorious monster-slaying, in later contrast to Heremod, who is in turn contrasted briefly with Beowulf. We have no paraphrase of the *spel* of Beowulf's adventure; yet the focus on how well one word "found" or prevailed upon or is obtained from another (effects implicit in *findan*)

suggests the high oral art of a wise composer devising a new tale. Moreover, he demonstrates architectonic skills in linking Beowulf's adventure to Sigemund's and then contrasting Heremod to Sigemund and Beowulf to Heremod. The result is a three-part account of Beowulf in his new status as a dear friend to all men and a potential ruler.

At the great, celebratory feast in a refurbished Heorot, impressive gifts are given to Beowulf and others to his surviving Geats. After that distribution the poet mentions Grendel's evil, that he would have devoured more Geats had he been able, had not God and man's courage stopped him. Then the poet offers a sententious comment: anyone who long makes use of this world in these days of strife will experience much that is dear and much that is hateful. Following this we return to hall-joy among the Danes, as though something of the poet's tone has flavored the alcohol of Danish memories. We learn that there was (1063-70)

... sang ond sweg samod ætgædere
 fore Healfdenes hildewisan,
 gomenwudu greted, gid oft wrecen,
 ðonne healgamen Hroþgares *scop*
 æfter medobence mænan scolde,
 [be] Finnes eaferum, ða hie se fær begeat,
 hæleð Healf-Dena, Hnæf Scyldinga
 in Freswæle feallan scolde.

Song and music arose both together
 for Hrothgar, the successor lord for Healfdene's warriors.
 The harp was touched, speech [*gid*] often recited;
 Hrothgar's *scop* the hall-joy
 there among the meadbenches was set to speak
 of the disaster that befell Finn's sons,
 (how) the hero of the Half-Danes,
 Hnaef, hero of the Scyldings,
 in Frisian slaughter had to fall.

Here song, music, and oft-told tales lead us into what is known as the Finn episode, the consequences of which, while initially a disaster for Finn and Hildeburh, are a Danish victory (Finn's hall is sacked and Hildeburh, his queen but the Danes' princess, is brought back to her people). Here oral performance in Heorot is hardly background music and recitation generally suited to the occasion. A particular tale of marriage alliance that devolved into sudden violence and feud suggests the portentous possibilities of any moment of song-accompanied hall-joy. Songs and stories are not empty or else stereotypical narratives; they carry with them the values, histories,

hopes, and mixed victories of a social people in a harsh world. Again the formal occasion opens up to sophisticated content and ambiguous implications—to a suggestiveness in this case about which *Beowulf* scholars have long contended. This essay is not the place for a review of those contentions. I will simply refer the reader to my chapter (Hill 2000: 60-67) on in-law feud in *Beowulf* for a summary of recent ways of understanding the Finn digression generally and Hildeburh's role or plight particularly. The bedrock of my view is this: for all the grief and loss it recapitulates, the *gidd* about disaster and Finn finally shapes a Danish victory, being consonant then with the apparently somber hall moment, the celebration, within which Hrothgar's *scop* recites it.

This completes a survey of dramatically emphasized oral performance, whether verbatim recitation or oral composition, in *Beowulf*. Interestingly, there is nothing comparable in the great hall scene of Beowulf's homecoming, his account of the Grendel affair in Heorot, and his rendering up to Hygelac of the splendid gifts Hrothgar gave him. Transactions in Hygelac's hall, while going well and ending in superb amity between nephew and uncle, do not involve celebratory song, perhaps because a great issue preoccupies Hygelac and Beowulf: the nature of Beowulf's possibly changed status and affiliations, now that he has served Hrothgar twice. Moreover, we learn early on in the scene that Beowulf went to help the Danes against Hygelac's wishes. We and Hygelac need new clarity about his continuing relationship to his mother's brother, Hygelac, and to Hygelac's queen, Hygd. Thus the social occasion in Hygelac's hall informs against harp-accompanied joy and celebration, glad though Hygelac is to see Beowulf again (he addresses him initially as beloved Beowulf, "leofa Biowulf," 1987b).

Still, Beowulf does mention that there was story and entertainment in Heorot after Grendel's defeat, as the friendly lord of the Scyldings rewarded him with plated gold and many treasures, once they had set themselves down in the morning to banquet (2105-14):

Ðær was gidd and gleo; gomela Scilding,
 felafricgende feorran rehte;
 hwilum hildedeor heorpan wynne,
 gomenwudu grette, hwilum gyd awræc
 soð ond sarlic, hwilum syllic spell
 rehte æfter rihte rumheort cyning;
 hwilum eft ongan eldo gebunden,
 gomel guðwiga gioguðe cwiðan,
 hildestrengo; hreðer inne weoll,
 þonne he wintrum frod worn gemunde.

There was song and glee; the aged Scilding,
 well informed, from afar back recited;
 meanwhile the brave one (struck) joy from the harp,
 greeted the playful wood; at times he wrought a song
 true and sorrowful; at times a strange tale
 in rightful fashion, the large-hearted king recited;
 at times again began, in age bound down,
 an ancient warrior, to the youths began to speak
 about battle prowess; his spirit inwardly swelled,
 when he, in winters old, much recalled.

This passage more or less completes the banquet scene at this point in Beowulf's retelling of what happened. He moves on to nightfall and the arrival of Grendel's mother. Beowulf's account here of several performers, somewhat confusing in the actual number but involving at least two, one of whom is Hrothgar himself, is the poem's best instance of performance as wallpaper, as background filling the foreground. What Beowulf would do here is render the scene as innocuous as possible, clearly understating the kinds of gifts he received (dynastic) and their purport (Hrothgar's effort both to adopt and recruit Beowulf). Rather he would have Hygelac imagine the scene as largely filled at various times with a touched harp, with sad and true story (*gidd*) recited from memory, and with strange, wondrous story (*spel*) composed on the spot and unfolded according to the right way ("rehte æfter rihte"). Doing that or else adding to the mix, Hrothgar at times spoke about his youth and battle strength; his heart surged when, old in winters, he remembered much.

For the moment, Beowulf has transformed the great banquet scene in Heorot into a moody mix of story, song, and reminiscence. Again, his motive is to underplay the mute force of Hrothgar's splendid gift-giving, the four most splendid being gifts that Beowulf will soon render up to Hygelac in exactly the same order in which Hrothgar gave them to him. Beowulf will announce that Hrothgar gave him these gifts into his own possession to use as he wishes. He gives them to Hygelac in continuing favor and good will. All my kindness, favor, and joy are still in your hands, Beowulf says; they still depend upon you. He adds that he has no chief kinsmen except one, Hygelac. This is precisely what Hygelac needs to hear—that Beowulf is still an absolutely loyal, kindred-kind Geat, committed despite his two-part service to Hrothgar and the Danes and despite the portentous honor of Hrothgar's dynastic gifts (the story of which Beowulf obliquely indicates when presenting Hygelac with the corselet Hrothgar gave him).

After Hygelac's return gesture, beginning with his having Hrethel's gold-adorned heirloom, the best of swords in the Geat treasury, placed in Beowulf's lap and ending with the bestowing of seven thousand hides of land, a hall, and a princely seat, one would expect now some hall celebration. But this great moment has not followed a great victory nor does it celebrate a founding or else inaugural occasion. Rather it has become a marvelous manifestation of retainer-lord and great kin to greater kin amity, the immediate outcome of which is a notable division of royal lands. This is a high political outcome, a happy, public close to the hall scene, but apparently no stimulus to song, harp-playing, or story.

Indeed, the only occasions for either new story (*spel*) or established composition (*gidd*) in the poem's last third are sad ones, beginning with Beowulf's account of the old man who has to live through a young son's riding upon the gallows. He can only mourn, lament: "þonne he gyd wrece, / sarigne sang" ("then he wants to recite a tale, a sorrowful song," 2446b-47a). When he looks upon his son's dwelling some of the conventional content of that lament becomes clear: there is no sound of the harp, no joy or sport in the yard as there once was (2458b-59). All is stillness, a motif keyed in part to the cessation of activity—play, sport, harp-touching—anticipated already in the lament of the last survivor, where among other activities that are no more we find neither harp-joy, nor mirth, nor play of the glee-wood (2262b-63a). The cessation of the harp marks the end of joy and even life. The messenger that Wiglaf sends to the Geats after Beowulf's death tells his listeners that he now anticipates, among other things, no harp music to wake the warriors in the mornings ahead. Rather the raven will awaken them as it tells the wolf how it has stripped human bodies of their flesh.

The messenger's long speech is both a "new *spel*" and finally a "hateful *spel*." In being so it is a true tale and finally hateful, with very little that is false in it. Presumably it is composed on the spot and so is a kind of impromptu performance, despite containing no legendary content, no recall of sad and true stories or strange tales, no origin myths, and no reminiscences about anyone's youth. Rather it combines accounts of past feuds with Merovingians and Swedes in such a way as to prophesy their renewal in the future, once news of Beowulf's death circulates abroad. The messenger's is a kind of vatic performance, albeit rationalized in terms of specific instances of feud and hostility rather than drawn from a deep vision. The vatic possibilities for the poet in Norse tradition do not carry over to the Anglo-Saxons generally or to the *Beowulf* poet (see Bloomfield and Dunn 1989:91-96).

A final reference to composition, again within a scene of lament, may occur at poem's end. There (3171-72a) the Geats want to utter sad songs and speak of Beowulf. But the corruption of the passage is too great for clarity. Still, if they do utter sad songs, these would be praise songs in an elegiac mode, perhaps; they may even be songs that fill out the reported superlatives with which the Geats honor their dead king—that he was, among worldly kings, the most generous and fair-minded of men, to his people the most supportive and kindred-kind, and the most eager for renown.

According to an Anglo-Saxon gnome in *The Maxims*, all men have some longing, although this is less true for the one who knows many songs and can work the harp with his hands (Krapp and Dobbie 1966:162, 169-71):

Longað þonne þy læs þe him con leoþa worn,
 oþþe mid hondum con hearpan gretan;
 hafað him his gliwes giefe, þe him god sealde.

Longs then the less he who knows many songs,
 or else with hands knows how to greet the harp;
 has with him the gift of music, that which to him god gave.

Having this gift is consoling. The *Beowulf* poet apparently agrees, as he removes moments of harp-playing, music, and celebratory story from the increasingly elegiac last third of the poem. Oral performance is still possible, indeed fitting near poem's end in fixed praise of Beowulf (possible in *wordgidd*, 3172b). While here the social context of story is all too reduced to the functioning and consolation of lament, if we think of the final superlatives as themes for their narratives of praise, praise that takes in Beowulf's kingship and bold works, that judges well his deeds, then we can say that even here story and song of some sort contain the deep values of these people, as they have come to condense those values into the superlatives by which they, those hearth companions, speak of their lord. Beyond this, for the Geats prospectively if the messenger anticipates rightly, future mornings, while not bringing clear annihilation, will certainly require movement and spear-held vigilance; the Geats will be cold and embattled; and their morning songs will be those of ravens chillingly announcing the previous day's carrion feast. No more the harp, no more a bright hall—at least not for a long time as, spear-armed, men and maidens move from place to place (3016b-23a):

ne mægð scyne
 habban on healse hringweorðunge,
 ac sceal geomormod, golde bereafod

oft nalles æne eþland tredan,
 nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde,
 gamen ond gleodream. Forðon sceal gar wesan
 monig morgenceald mundum bewunden,
 hæfen on handa.

nor the maid glittering
 have on her neck the worthy ring;
 instead she shall, mournful of mind, deprived of gold,
 often—not only once—tread a foreign country,
 now that the leader of the army has laid aside laughter,
 joy and pleasure. Therefore shall many a spear be
 morning-cold, with hands wound around,
 raised in hands.

For them there will be neither celebration nor consolation through the gift of story, music, and song.

Addendum

While the images of the singer, reciter, and composer we can gather from the poem suggest prominence at court, the poet is never more specific than when calling the performer Hrothgar's thane or Hrothgar's *scop*. The court *scop* may have sat at Hrothgar's knee, although the only figure so noted is Unferth and he is not said to be a *scop*. About the status of the late Germanic court poets or the *scop* we in fact know very little. What evidence we can gather, as Chadwick especially has done in *The Heroic Age* (1926:ch. 5), tells us that certainly the maker of tales celebrating the exploits and victories of great warriors and kings existed in Germanic societies. The *scop* is something more than our high medieval minstrel or our later ballad singer, something more or different from even the well-connected *jongleur* in thirteenth-century northern France (see Baldwin 1997). Nothing of the trivial or licentious entertainer hangs upon him individually or upon him as the conduit of tradition (where, as John Miles Foley [1999:50] has convincingly noted, some modern and classical singers situate themselves, even invoking bardic lineages).

While, as Roberta Frank (1993) has wittily and devastatingly noted, we have no extra-poetical testimony to the character and manner of an actual, Anglo-Saxon singer, still in *Beowulf*, given its depiction of a stratified society with wealthy lords and kings, a bard can be in a king's retinue, might in fact be a warrior, or might be so skilled, so laden with

vaunts and old stories, that he can specialize. As well as fighting, he can make the fashioning of poems his service to the king, who will, if truly noble, famous, and hoping for more, reward him. Ruth Finnegan (1977:170-200) notes similar social functions for oral singers in different times and places—although, globally, the social position of oral singers can vary greatly from society to society and can be multifarious within a given society. Many societies with chiefs or kings have court singers; many do not. Where court singers exist, so might wandering or freelance singers. In some societies singers form a special class and go through and control their own training; in others nearly everyone is expected to show some skill at oral song or narrative. In *Beowulf*, oral narrative and song may be separate performances, but the knowledge involved does seem to be a specialist's (as with the creation singer and the thane who remembers many ancient narratives). Hrothgar is said to recite, perhaps, but no other king does. Rather a *scop* will, or a king's thane, or someone who knows what to recite and how. Special inspiration is not mentioned.

While the king or lord may also know how to recite, as Hrothgar seems to, he can hardly sing his own praises and preserve his nobility (except perhaps in a *flyting*, or verbal contest). The reward he gives the *scop* who composes praise, then, would be for a task he can not assume himself. That reward should be handsome, amounting to worthy gifts of rings, gold, or land. In this respect the *scop* was or could become aristocratic—a hero not of sword and corselet, or not of those alone, but of interlocked words, having a facility for and a storehouse of vaunts, boasts, and ancient narratives.

No doubt the court *scop* or singer, if the Old English poems *Deor* and *Widsith* speak to this at all, could be a praise singer and both rise and fall in favor. Although initially tied to a particular lord or court patron, such as a queen, he might wander from land to land seeking out generous lords, kings, and queens who would have their praises sung and who might like to hear the praises of comparable men and noble women. These latter praises in particular are the ways in which the *scop*, who never actually has to leave his court, can travel vicariously and heroically: through the great stories of those who have won renown for their prowess, their good customs, and their generosity. To narrate is to know; to know many stories is to have power and a kind of honor, an honor one can either confer or else withhold from those who know less yet who desire something about themselves translated into the truth of story. In this sense the *scop*'s *gidd*-hoard is both arsenal and treasury—word-gold given for gifts in return or else withheld in implicit blame and defacto defamation.

Anthropological parallels abound but few seem very close to the sparse evidence we have of the Anglo-Saxon court *scop*. Some singers can acquire inheritance rights (cf. Irvine 1978) and others, at least in now historically remote African societies, may have had no special status socially and no particular power. Still, in some instances bards may have been attached to or been part of the dominant family in the region (cf. Biebuyck 1972:261, 278).

Although operating, again, in a very different culture, a *scop* who has anything like Widsith's range can wield important social power given the fame he can confer on particularly generous lords or kings. A king widely sung and nobly compared to illustrious peers and figures of legend is one to whom many retainers and would-be servants might come. For such a king, a court *scop* is important enough to be an official, a man of rank and status. In an honor society if rank can be achieved, it can always be undermined as well, even lost. For the *scop*, though, one wonders how this happens? By losing to a more skillful competitor? Perhaps the *scop* can take some kind of umbrage and insult his lord in a satiric song, as seems the case at times with Old Norse skaldic poets, most of whom come from notable families, and some of whom sing their way into the service of and an advisory relationship with a powerful chieftain or king (Hollander 1968:6-7). Or a retainer-*scop* might be exiled for not fulfilling his service either at court or with sword and spear, being thereby effectively replaced by others in all of his functions. Certainly other retainers might become preferred for their greater qualities and deeds. They might even receive gifts taken back from the previous singer. Deor thinks this is unjust, especially in the case of a gift of land. How does this happen? Is Deor's successor in his lord's affections someone who came along with a more powerful mode of verse or a better hand on the harp? Is he perhaps just more brilliant and cunning in his praises (punning serially on *cræftig* ["powerful, crafty"] in *leoðcræftig* ["song-powerful, -crafty"]; *Deor* l. 40)?

These open questions, finally unanswerable, do however point to an interesting issue. The court *scop*'s position in Heorot is never said to be insecure; indeed, it seems almost majestic. This, however, is not the case in either *Deor* or *Widsith*, where dependency seems the case as much as not. The social instability sketched by the speaker in those two poems may reflect a psychological instability, in that praise-power and the ability to confer storied honor upon a lord are edgy matters. From the lord's perspective, some measure of one's honor and fame is not in one's hands; rather one looks perhaps uneasily to another, to an inferior in some ways but a superior knower in others. This situation can generate considerable ambivalence on both sides, an ambivalence that might lead to the fate about

which Deor complains.³ Or else that ambivalence might generate enough tension to spring the court poet, as it were, into an itinerant career, into movement from court to court, as seems the case with the Widsith figure. Indeed, in some South African tribes the praise singer can sing only certain kinds of songs—entertainments, usually—in public ceremonies before the king. Other and more intimate, perhaps even touchy, songs are sung *in camera*, as it were, before a select group of family and advisors (Henderson 1990).

We can only with great hazard consider the *Beowulf* poet a court singer like Widsith (Krapp and Dobbie 1966:iii, 149), not knowing whether the poem celebrates any particular lord's illustrious ancestors, mention of the continental Offa notwithstanding. Certainly the poem does not especially praise a given royal house, unless the quasi-Mercian, West Saxon genealogical string that includes Beowulfian names tells us otherwise (as it might: see Earl and Plummer 1965:66). Instead the *Beowulf* poet takes on a cultural role for all Anglo-Saxon and perhaps also Anglo-Danish warriors, lords, and kings who would hear of praise-worthy deeds performed by illustrious ancestors (in the widest, northern sense). This is praise song raised to the level of cultural myth, by means of which the *Beowulf* poet would give word-gold to his Anglo-Saxon present—the gold of an illustrious, noble, pregnant, and conflicted past. What might he receive in turn? Fame, no doubt. *Beowulf* is, although sometimes inscrutable to us, the most meditative and grand of Anglo-Saxon heroic narratives. The poet won something by it simply in and of itself. For us the poem has become an anonymously wrought, sometimes cold but always deeply moving memorial for those who drive their readerly ships across the historical and cultural darkness that surrounds it.

United States Naval Academy

³ That is, being replaced by Heorrenda, the land grant he held in exchange for services going then to his laureate successor. However, Opland (1980:217) rightly observes that we do not explicitly see that transference taking place. Still, any land right in this situation would not have been a personal matter; rather it would have been something held in trust for as long as services were rendered or required.

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No One Tells You This: Secondary Orality and Hypertextuality

Michael Joyce

No one tells you this: virus is a boundary condition, by definition on the threshold between simple microorganism or extremely complex molecule, atomic form or living thing, imminence or existence. The notion of virus itself is viral: in hospitals there are creatures, once one of us, whose very limbs are gnawed by subcontinental viruses, self-devouring anti-selves. Similarly there are forms embedded in e-mail letters (or what once were letters, missives, messages, conversations would beg this question—no one tells you this) poised likewise, likewise autophagous. Wasn't language always this? Isn't it?

What follows is a somewhat autophagous essay on secondary orality in the form of a virus or counter-fugue or a list or a (hypertext) (narrative). You may think of it as overlay, as echolalia.

Let us begin with an orthodoxy, molecule already gone over to organism, this from Doug Brent, one of the more thoughtful rhetoricians engaged with electronic textuality (1997):

Fast modems, cheap(er) connections and (relatively) easy html editors are beginning to do for webtext what Ong claims the phonetic alphabet did for writing: transforming a complex and elitist form into a communication tool that any schoolchild can master. Many, including myself, have argued that this form will revolutionise reading and writing in positive ways congruent with the postmodern view of discourse. But I am not convinced that these sunny predictions about hypertext, including my own, have asked all of the really tough questions that need to be asked . . . in this transformed textual world.

Brent seems here to have in mind the core of Walter Ong's extension of Eric Havelock's thought, that separation of "the knower from the known" wherein "writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before" (1982:105). Yet he and, as will be

seen, the field in general—which is to say rhetoricians, pedagogists, theorists, artists, and other practitioners of electronic literacy—seem caught in a curiously doubled (not to say contradictory, but rather, as befits the field, multiple) argument: the opening of the psyche to articulated introspection is itself a sort of elitism, one that dismantles a more participatory—nay even interactive—communicative structure in favor of particulate, not to say fragmented, isolation.

Gathering haecceity is easy in electronic literacy. Search and select, cut and paste, or drag and drop, any schoolchild is its master, though I am less sure than Brent that the latent democracy of textuality enables an easy mastery of introspectivity to either schoolchild or teacher. Indeed, there is something of a conundrum, an almost mathematical riddle, involved in an argument that the movement from orality to literacy to the digital presents progressively less complex and elitist forms.

I, too, am not yet convinced that the sunny predictions about hypertext, including my own (1995, 2000), have adequately foreseen the nature of the transformation of the textual world. It is clear that the near afterthought of Ong's notion of secondary orality has lingered along the bounds of digital discourse like a virus, without, I think, ever completely taking hold. To inquire into why that is may offer some insight into the current state of electronic (a term I prefer to digital) literature as well as, one hopes, interrogate and indeed affirm the continued usefulness of Ong's thinking as electronic literacy emerges into what I have called elsewhere post-hypertextuality, as well as into whatever maturing literacy may follow the post-dot.com market boom and bust here on the slope of the new millennium.

What I have in mind is something of the kind of homeostatic retrospective genealogies that Ong himself lists among the hallmark psychodynamics of orality, wherein “the part of the past with no immediately discernible relevance to the present had simply fallen away [and] the present imposed its own economy upon past remembrances” (1982:48). Whether such a process can tease out the nature of the present economy is, of course, exactly the method and intent of Foucault's methodology, which so exasperated Father Ong, a fine historian, on account of its concern with “correcting modern views rather than . . . explaining the past on its own terms” (166).

I am neither a historian nor a (new, old, or post-) historicist, but rather a mere artist (worse a post-modern artist; worse still, if not worst, a pre post-hypertextualist). Yet this inquiry of mine (already itself self-referentially poised on the viral cusp between argument and narrative, simple microorganism or extremely complex molecule) to some extent addresses

itself to the call for a renewed literary history that falls among the first of Ong's so-called "theorems" from 1982. His closing chapter in *Orality and Literacy* proposed the theorems as something of a conventional coda hewing closely to the protocol of academic discourse so dear to dissertation directors and university press editors: review of literature, argument, augmentation of prior knowledge, suggestions for further research. It was a research agenda that might be best understood as in the form of a catalogue of ships in Ong's sense of the same in the *Iliad* as "not an objective tally but an operational display" (99).

It was a research agenda that would soon be overtaken by the actual (or, in the oxymoron I am fond of, actual virtual) technologizing of the word that the then quaintly termed "computer revolution" worked in ways Ong could not have imagined.

Indeed, who could? Ten years after *Orality and Literacy* the world wide web sprung born from whatever hydra or godhead spawned it. Seventeen years before its publication, that hydra had been named hypertext by Ted Nelson (then briefly at Vassar during years when Eric Havelock roamed this campus and, according to the published evidence, each of them chatting at times with a then young Dante scholar, now also become a Vassar hypertext creator, John Ahern, whom Ong also cites several times, the world of academic orality and literacy, then and now still a small village, its time "empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced" [Ong 1982:45] even now). Twenty-two years after that baptism and five years after Ong's book I published my own putatively "first" hypertext novel at the actually first-ever ACM international hypertext conference in Chapel Hill, a meeting that saw its own catalogue of however leakily launched firsts, from Hypercard to my novel *afternoon*.

This particular homeostatic genealogy is, of course, meant to suggest that Ong himself was *in media res* of an epic development he both could and could not have seen. Did and did not, in fact.

In some sense Ong, like many of us, saw it coming in the way Coyote sees Roadrunner coming in the cartoon, a speck on the horizon instantly becomes a typhoon and then a dusty cloud you are left run over by and lying in. All you have left are stars in your eyes, footprints on your forehead, and the echo of a beep-beep.

Reading Ong somewhere between 1984 and 1988 (a place that was not of course a place at all but rather an event until the development of print as Ong would remind us) when I met her, the hypertext writer, Carolyn Guyer (truly a reader imbued with what Ong calls "residual orality"—the entire white space at the bottom of the page (77) following Ong's use of the phrase "spatial reductionism" in her copy is filled with a long chirographic

note that begins, “Have you invented this term or is it a standing concept? Either way, I question it . . .”—so much for Plato’s objection to unchallengeable writing in the *Phaedrus*!), wrote another note of marginalia (though clearly not a marginal note in her eyes or mine as I read her copy of the text preparing this essay) next to, and contesting, the following sentence of Ong’s, which she had bracketed (1982:130):

Print eventually reduced the appeal of iconography in the management of knowledge, despite the fact that the early ages of print put iconographic illustrations into circulation as they had never been before.

“We may have interiorized print (text) deeply,” Guyer writes in her note, “but not to the extent that we don’t think visually (iconographically). In ’82 you wouldn’t have known about the Mac” (n.d.) she tells him or herself and now me and you, whoever either of us may be.

Another way to say it is that what overtook Ong’s research agenda was his vision and the uses it was put to. Ong’s thinking situated itself within both a viral rhetoric and a cyclic narrative worthy of the epic rhapsodist that has raged unabated from the dawning horizon of hypertextuality to the twilight of the dot.com gods. Secondary orality takes its place among *loci communes* in the double sense of “analytic and cumulative” commonplaces Ong identifies as “keeping alive the old oral feeling” (111).

It is interesting to track the rise and fall of these commonplaces through the flurry of citations in three successive and vastly influential books by arguably the leading rhetorician and theorist of hypertextuality and new media, Jay David Bolter. In *Turing’s Man: Western Culture in the Computer Age* (1984), an extraordinary survey and vision of the emergence of the computer, there are no indexed instances of citations of Ong, although *Ramus’ Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958) is cited in the bib. There are two indexed references to orality, one citing Vico and the ancients and another, quite tellingly (pun intended) in a sub-section titled “Silent Structures,” which makes the claim that “we have developed steadily away from oral culture” and toward the computer “where symbols are drained of connotations and given meaning solely by initial definition and by syntactic relations with other symbols” (145). It is worth noting in passing that in his justly influential “yellow book” of hypertext, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992), George Landow contests as mistaken Ong’s nearly identical claim that “the sequential processing and spatializing of the word, initiated by writing and raised to a new order of intensity by print, is further intensified by the computer” (Ong

1982:136). Needless to say, none of the three could quite anticipate the complex syntactical intermixtures and flows of moving and still, silent and voiced, fractal and morphed, evanescent and recurrent image and text whose symbolic structures confront us in electronic media.

Obviously one may argue that Bolter's book emerges in the shadow of Ong's, and if not precisely in the same season as it, then at least before its fruit had ripened and its seeds dispersed. Indeed by Bolter's *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (1991), there are six citations of Ong, including both a discussion of "Writing and analysis," (208-10) that extends to a consideration of both Jack Goody and David Olson, as well as the prominent inclusion of Ong in Bolter's own somewhat compressed version of the conventional research agenda *cum* homeostatic genealogy that appears as the coda to *Writing Space* (239):

What is still needed . . . is a text that combines the research of the historians of writing (Sampson, Diringer) with the work on oral theory of Havelock and Ong (as corrected and supplemented by Olson, Finnegan, Goody, and other sociologists and anthropologists) and further with the work of Derrida and other post-modern theorists. The study of information technologies (by Beninger, 1986 and others) must also be included.

Here again, in the midst of this non-historical and non-historicist narrative of history, it is worth looping forward (and back) to (and from) Landow to note his speculation on Ong's claim, following Plato, that "books, unlike their authors, cannot really be challenged" (Landow 1992:83). In suggesting the ability of hypertext to challenge the unchallengeable text, Landow asks, "If hypertext situates text in a field of other texts, can any individual work that has been addressed by another still speak so forcefully?" (*idem*). That is, he argues that instantaneous intertextuality itself is something of a challenge to centrality, especially to the degree that the equal weight given citation and main text on the computer screen levels their appearance and importance.

Thus it is not surprising that linked to the above-cited coda in the hypertext version of Bolter's *Writing Space* (Landow's books have hypertext versions as well)—a text distributed free of charge and separately from the academic publishing of the printed book (and thus doubly outside the economy of scholarly discourse)—he writes (Bolter, Joyce, and Smith 1987:n.p.):

Or do we need such a history? Does not the very notion of a history that combines and reconciles the two streams belong to the technology of print,

which demands a single analytic thread—stability and a unified point of view.

To be sure, there is no one to answer his question in this text, although I am obliged to report that in the particular copy of the hypertext version I consulted for this essay, there *were* anonymous contributions, including commentary and additions from the field of other texts, most likely left there by a student of mine from some past class.

We learn from leavings. My own stack of books flaps a hundred wings like irradiated dragonflies, a hundred (a mythical number, an icon for number) narrow neon post-it notes tabbing my catalogue of Ong citations in various texts and my citations of those texts alike, that is, the container and the contained at once.

(Two parenthetical, paradoxical parables of space and time: At a hypertext conference once I shared, mostly silently, a dormitory suite at a college in Maine with Ted Nelson, the baptizer of hypertext. I could not fail to notice that his daybooks flapped similarly with—literally—hundreds of such tabs. I later learned that he added cross references to these tabs, linking tab to tab and tab to page and page to tab by scribbled annotations on actual note papers. Still later—at another conference, this time a Marriott or Ramada—no one could fail to notice that Nelson videotaped every moment of his exchanges, public and private, with others, doing so in what is called “real time.” In a variation of the Zenonian paradox, a wag wondered how he would know when to stop, “I mean he’ll have to stop at a point where the duration of the tapes equals the time he has left to live in order to be able to watch it all.”)

Two catalogues (non-parenthetical):

[1] The literate mind is analytic; the oral mind is aggregative. The literate mind is objective; the oral mind is traditional and unable to detach itself from its context. . . . The difference that literacy makes, is evident in a culture’s “texts.” Oral cultures produce poems, stories, mythology, lore, and dramatic performances; they do not produce philosophic essays, technical studies, scientific treatises, or textbooks of higher mathematics. Oral cultures do not send out anthropologists to study literate cultures and explain the differences between orality and literacy. (Bolter 1991:208-9).

[2] [M]embers of the Chicago School, notably Robert Park, Earnest Burgess, and Roderick McKenzie, developed a sociological approach to the study of cities and communities, which they referred to as human ecology [which held that] technologies of communication . . . are essential, often defining components of any human environment. One

graduate of the Chicago School who took this lesson to heart was a Canadian named Harold Innis [who] in turn laid the foundation for what is sometimes known as the Toronto School, whose “membership” includes Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Edmund Carpenter. Insofar as “Toronto School” refers to a pattern of influence rather than strict geographical location, membership is also extended to Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and a number of other scholars, many of whom have studied and/or taught in the New York metropolitan area; the list includes Louis Forsdale, Tony Schwartz, Neil Postman, Gary Gumpert, John M. Phelan, Joshua Meyrowitz, and Henry Perkinson. It might in fact be more accurate to talk about a combined Toronto-New York School. Or, given the fact that McLuhan and Carpenter spent a year teaching at Fordham University, that Carpenter also taught at New York University, as did Ong, it might make sense simply to talk about a New York School. (Strate 1996a:n.p.)

These catalogues, of course, are incommensurable. Mere lists. Following the catalogue above Bolter cites Goody (Goody 1977:81, in Bolter 1991:209):

The list relies on discontinuity rather than continuity; it depends on physical placement, on location; it can be read in different directions, both sideways and downwards, up and down, as well as left and right; it has a clear cut beginning and a precise end, that is, a boundary, an edge, like a piece of cloth. Most importantly it encourages the ordering of the items, by number, by initial sound, by category, etc. And the existence of boundaries, external and internal, brings greater visibility to categories, at the same time making them more abstract.

These catalogues, of course, are extensible. More than lists. Kathrine Kveim (1998:n.p.) cites Ong:

Ong said that print commodified the word in that “[t]ypography had made the world into a commodity. The old communal oral world had split up into privately claimed freeholdings.” (Ong 1982:131). As in the commodification of art and cultural products in the culture industries, this clearly is transferred to the new media. The dialectic of the secondary orality is seen in digitalisation’s resistance towards this sort of containment. Paradoxically, or dialectically, literate culture makes linear digital programming possible but also makes the “word” lose its fixity in space and belong to anyone—like the oral world that existed in the realm of sound, uncontainable and evanescent (Ong 1982:5ff).

Certain words emerge from the substratum, cluster, coruscate: boundary and container (the latter evident only to the reader who has paged

forward to the title of the Strate citation). (*Some commodities*: I know for a fact that Bolter attended university in Toronto; I know by their spellings that Brent and Kveim were educated in the commonwealth; I know from the URL and institutional affiliation that Brent is at a Canadian university. This is the experimental part of this text. This is an instance of rhetoric. This is a philosophic apostrophe. At least one of the sentences before this cannot be true.)

More, there is in the first two catalogues above the germ of difference between the largely post-modernist and hypertextual view of orality that Bolter represents and the largely late modernist and phenomenological view that Strate represents. Despite his characteristic scholarly calm and clarity Bolter lists unfixed (aggregative), or at least counterposed, attributes, divorced from any place or time except perhaps Ei(se)nsteinian literary history. Strate's equally calm genealogy continues to recognize discrete places, schools, lines of transmission, tradition, and, of and in course, individual talent. To be sure, both wish to situate Ongian orality vis-à-vis electronic literacy, but the one offers a contextual plane upon which the disappearing voice can be heard, while the other presents an ebb and flow of minds and mind. Kveim's claim (we'll hear it—actually read it—later here made by writers prior to her text cited here) that the unfixing of the commodified and containerized word in digitalized virtual space in fact marks the distance between the two men's lists.

The space marking the distance between is occupied by the virus and the argument alike. The space between is the link that participates in both what was and will be, in imminence and existence (between imminence and existence there is no between), that is, hypertext.

Doug Brent questions “whether hypertext is friendly to rhetoric, for it presupposes an exchange of positions, each of which can be articulated as a position in ways that hypertext may not allow for without denying its own mandate as hypertext” (1997:n.p.). He notes (*idem*) that

The waters are further muddied by confusions of terms. . . . Philosophers sometimes reserve the term “philosophy” for arguments intended to establish a position, and speak of “rhetoric” (often with a tacit “mere” in front of the term) as either discourse without rigorous intellectual engagement, or as the superficial set of forms that the underlying series of positions may take.

Yet in the course of trying to avoid “this largely semantic dispute” and “clarify [his] own use of the terms as a rhetorician rather than as a

philosopher,” Brent promptly walks into the swamp of orality and literacy (*idem*):

Rhetoric is exploration (Oakeshott) or argument (Burke) for an audience. The rhetor must consider how her arguments will work in a particular context—particular readers, particular occasions, particular purposes. . . . By this definition, when philosophers write down their philosophies for others, they are doing rhetoric. Aside from the ironic savour of this point, it is important because it suggests that philosophers-as-rhetoricians (that is, whenever they speak their philosophy) must consider the rhetorical arrangement of their arguments. This is not a trivial point when considering whether hypertext is friendly to rhetoric.

It doesn't seem clear whether Brent is clever or confused in the phrase “whenever they speak their philosophy” or whether in the midst of an earnest attempt to think through a boundary condition (between oral and written argument forms as they determine or are altered by the web) he merely means to wrangle philosophers into the rhetoricians' corral regardless of whether or not they are speaking or writing on the page or for the web or in the public square.

Meanwhile Lester Faigley disputes Ong's (and followers') “characterization of oral language as more paratactic and written language as more hypotactic” as “little more than another folk belief that runs contrary to actual practice,” citing research that suggests that “oral language is typically more grammatically complex than written language” (1992:203).

This would, of course, suggest that a secondary orality—and even more a written language infected by the uncontainable echolalia of the same—might be even more complexly overlaid and layered. That is surely what hypertext writer and theorist J. Yellowlees Douglas must mean in her snappish (and snappy) characterization of secondary orality on the second-to-last, literally penultimate, page of *The End of Books—Or Books without End* (2000:171), when she calls it “a superficial category that ignores the script lurking behind every exchange of words on television or radio.”

It is possible that Douglas may have had in mind my own characterization of the inherent overlay of hypermediated text (1995:110):

At first electronic writing appears to threaten the essential “thisness” of text, yet whole cities are painted in it. . . . [T]he everpleasant teevee, the constant tube—pours forth a shimmer of transcendent text. A newscaster reporting the decline of literacy never considers the transitory nature of the text which headlines that decline in the graphic over her shoulder—a franchised graphic up and downlinked from the network in New York. Nor does she consider the equally transitory nature of what she mouths, a

script which has made its way from terminal to teleprompter to unheeding air without benefit of paper. . . . Later, the videotaped newscast may be summoned within the text of an hypermedia system, and there the original graphic may be frame-captured and optically scanned, and the recorded audio digitally decoded, and broadcast turned back into text. The existence of any atom of literacy—text itself, the word “thisness,” etc.—depends upon our interaction with it.

In any case by the time of the third Bolter book, *Remediation* (Bolter and Grusin 2000), there are no Ong citations, none also for orality. Which might suggest that the word is fully remediated.

(“I’m all eyes,” as the saying goes.)

Indeed it can be argued, in passing, that secondary orality as a figure for electronic textuality was overtaken by the visual. Or, to put it more exactly, the grammatological. Sight trumps sound.

Ong’s own epigram “Sight isolates, sound incorporates” (1982:72) in fact suggests a kind of trumping relationship, where the unfixed and incorporated isolate assumes a higher, albeit solitary, status and power. Ong’s remarks on Derrida in the final theorems of *Orality and Literacy* thus conclude with dismissal of mere play (of signifiers) (1982:170):

L’écriture and orality are both “privileged,” each in its own distinctive way. Without textualism, orality cannot even be identified; without orality, textualism is rather opaque and playing with it can be a form of occultism, elaborate obfuscation—which can be endlessly titillating, even at those times when it is not especially informative.

Putting aside the obvious question of the difference between titillation and information (i.e., if it feels good, know what?), the tonal aspects if not oral dimensions of Derrida’s *différance*, *sous rature*, and borderless if not endless traces that, at this distance, make the grammatological critique of the phonocentric-logocentric episteme itself more porous an edge than the fabric of difference that Goody imagines, more porous and more felt. “Felt” in this case can be understood in the ambiguous sense of both the emotional boundary and the “anti-fabric” Deleuze and Guattari characterize in their famous essay on the smooth and the striated (1983:475):

Felt is a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the block of fibers back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point

with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation).

Distributed, continuous variation evokes a sort of spaceless space (indeed Deleuze and Guattari argue for something very like this in their notion of deterritorialization) and problematizes Ong's fundamental critique of what he imagines to be (not to say mistakes as) the textualists' "illusion that logic is a closed system," an architecture. "Oral cultures," Ong claims (1982:169),

hardly had this kind of illusion, though they had others. They had no sense of language as "structure." They did not conceive of language by analogy with a building or other object in space. Language and thought for the ancient Greeks grew out of memory. Mnemosyne, not Hephaestus, is the mother of the Muses. Architecture had nothing to do with language and thought. For "structuralism" it does, by ineluctable implication.

It is the preacher and poet who sees the structure in structuralism (although it seems a homilist's conceit to fault the holy tinkerer Hephaestus in passing for his lack of maternal qualities, and a literary scholar's—lovely, loving—conceit to echo James Joyce's "ineluctable modality of the visible"[1934:31]).

Jay Bolter and I called our microcomputer hypertext system, begun three years after Ong's book, *Storyspace* (Bolter, Joyce, and Smith 1987). But building language into an object out in (cyber)space was not the accomplishment of hypertext systems such as ours or those several others before or after it that more often than not still saw themselves as children of Mnemosyne. Our *Storyspace* was meant as a *Wunderkammer* or memory palace; its true predecessors were systems with names like Vannavar Bush's "Memex" or Douglas Engelbart's "Augment," suggesting how they were meant to augment memory and intelligence, by either adding back or keeping in place the traces of their making in Nelson's hypertext text's more text than text. Ong is this much right in his mythological attribution. It was instead a Hephaestian tinkerer's system, an alchemist of text, born of physicists (at CERN, an atomic physicist's institute in Switzerland), given (graven) images in the fantasizing gleam of a boy's eyes (Illinois graduate student, Mark Andreesson, who left to found Netscape after devising the way to show images in html, hypertext mark-up language), which turned word to picture through a script lurking behind every exchange.

If the textualists prevailed over the oralists in winning the heart of hypertext, it is not so much that Derrida had a six-year head start in a culture

not likely to credit duration (and in fact more given to that old channel-zapper Hermes than to Mnemosyne); nor entirely that Landow famously (and unfortunately) declared hypertext a testbed for deconstruction (1992:3), but rather that within a decade of Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (the University of Illinois' Mosaic, the first web browser and precursor of Netscape, appears in 1992) the web emerges, viz.

```
<a href= "Pretty as a picture">
  <img src= "Ut pictura, hyperpoesis">
</a>
```

We will probably all feel better at this point if we can count (on) some things. Without indulging too much in what might already seem a parody of a certain kind of quantitative research, it may nonetheless be (pardon the term) illustrative to look at Ong citations in five collections of essays regarding electronic literacy and pedagogy whose publication dates bracket the emergence of the web.

In Delany and Landow's 1991 collection, *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*, there are five citations of Ong in three different essays. Two—Bolter's citation of Ong's Ramus book in conjunction with his discussion of "spatial arrangement of topics" (108) and John Slatin's inclusion of Ong with Havelock and Lanham as figures pointing to the "point in history . . . when writing itself was a radically innovative technology" (157)—are good, conventional scholarship that nonetheless makes clear that Ong was to be considered in framing good, conventional scholarship. (Again risking a sort of parodistic move, it may be interesting to note that Derrida is cited five times in two essays.) Delany and Landow's introductory essay, however, engages Ong directly, not to say impolitely: "Computers may re-create certain qualities of pre-literate culture more pervasively than even Walter J. Ong has been willing to admit" (1991:12). After citing Ong's notion of secondary orality, they further cite and quarrel with Ong's insistence that "the sequential processing and spatializing of the word . . . is further intensified by the computer, which maximizes commitment of the word to (electronic) local motion, and optimizes analytic sequentiality by making it virtually instantaneous" (136, cited in Delany and Landow 1991:12).

Later hypertextual theorists (see below) will see hypertextual instantaneity and complexity as the spatio-temporal equivalent of Ong's "sounded word," which "exists only when it is going out of existence . . . [and] is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and sensed as evanescent" (1982:32). However, Delany and Landow are at this early stage a little more cautious, merely suggesting that "by inserting every text into a web of relations, hypertext systems promote non-sequential reading and

thinking and hence produce a very different effect” (1991:12). Indeed, in a sly move earlier in their essay, the author-editors had already inserted Ong’s text in an earlier kind of hypertextuality, (textual) local motion, and relational web, by citing him in a numbered footnote, though not in the main text by name, following a sentence on the “stubborn materiality of text” (*ibid.*:4) that in endnotes refers to their suggestion that “in oral cultures, of course, the text had a quite different status in the mind, one that was closer in some respects to the hypertextual model,” and this is followed by a bibliographic citation of *Orality and Literacy*.

In what seems rhetorical wiliness or perhaps paratactic rhetoric, Delany and Landow, like Brent above, wrangle hypertextuality into orality’s corral with an insistently oral diction (*viz.*, the occurrence of “speak,” “comments,” “dialogue,” and “voice” below) (*ibid.*:13):

But if hypertext fosters integration rather than self-containment, always situating texts in a field of other texts, can any individual work that has been addressed by another still speak so forcefully? One can imagine hypertext versions of books in which the reader could call up all the reviews and comments on that book; the “main” text would end up inevitably as part of a complex dialogue. . . . [Hypertext] destroys one of the most basic characteristics of the printed text: its separation and univocal voice . . . [and] forces it to exist as part of a complex dialogue.

As a midway point in Landow’s unindexed 1994 collection, *Hyper/Text/Theory*, still early in the academic publishing cycle for any significant appearance of web citations, I count a half dozen Ong citations in three essays, four of them clustered in a single one.

Hawisher and Selfe’s 1991 collection, *Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition Studies: Questions for the 1990’s*, is something of a high-water mark. Fourteen citations of Ong (versus five of Derrida) in six different essays (versus three) include a handful of good, conventional citations but otherwise the tone is engaged, even critical, in essays from pioneer scholar/teacher/theorists already in the days before the web and before computers were used in a day-to-day sense not just as tools for learning and teaching but as learning environments. Nancy Kaplan (1991:23) cites Richard Ohmann’s critique of what she calls Ong’s “famous claim” for the new ways of thinking the computer offers. “As the computer revolution unfolds,” Kaplan writes, “Ohmann reminds teachers of English that literacy has a history imbricated with technology and that ‘technology . . . is itself a social process, saturated with the power relations around it, continually reshaped according to some people’s intentions’ [Ohmann 1985:681].” In a later essay in this collection Ruth Ray and Ellen Barton

also summon Ohmann among others to critique the “technicist thinking” of Ong and others, which they say “typically leads to the institutional imperative, in which the technology contributes to the authority of the institution by dictating what and how things will be done and how people and things will be evaluated” (1991:282). It should be said that Faigley mounts a similar, even more powerful critique of how “secondary orality is an unsatisfactory way of conceiving of an array of electronic communications technologies. . . [which] have the paradoxical effects of both helping to bring about commonality and at the same time social division” (1992:204).

In another essay in the Hawisher and Selfe collection, hypertext fiction writer and theorist, Stuart Moulthrop, reminds “teachers of writing. . . face-to-screen with the technological future . . . that we have all been here before” (1991:261). In a catalogue of “readers of the postmodern scene” who see both the return of “the fluidity and openness of preliterate culture” (Ong) or even “announce a ‘techno-primitivism’ that embraces the power and dynamism of technology but rejects its cult of rationality (Jean Baudrillard, Arthur Kroker, David Cook),” Moulthrop reminds us of the Frankenstein myth: “Print is ‘dead’ but like assorted poltergeists, ghouls, aliens, and things-that-will-not-die in our horror movies. . . . ‘Gutenberg technology’ always rises again” (262).

Finally, in a careful, brilliantly laid-out, and elegant—as well as witty, viz.: “although there can be no hard evidence for such assertions, one must assume language to be of extreme antiquity” (1991:208)—essay, John McDaid, also a hypertext writer and theorist as well as a media ecologist in the lineage of Strate’s genealogy above, situates then current considerations of secondary orality and mediation within that genealogy, offering a series of tables “representing correlations between media and their social impacts . . . derived from the work of Elizabeth Eisenstein, Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan, Walter J. Ong, and Neil Postman” (208). This son of such a line does not shy away from criticizing Ong the father (209-10):

[T]he Greeks found themselves poorly served by the evanescence of speech, just as we today find ourselves at a juncture where the linguistic conceptions occasioned by day-to-day reality have broken down. Unlike prelinguistic symbols, which were inclusive potentials for meaning, oral language cuts up the world and then exteriorizes it projecting it onto the world as the way things ARE. And language-level decisions about ‘the way things are’ were formed at pretty low levels of sophistication. . . . Conceptions formed in such media environments break down quickly when operated at relativistic velocity or on a submicroscopic scale. Language makes us good at billiards, bad at quantum tunneling . . .

[which] may become a non-trivial issue as we discover which of these skills, in the long run, is more important.

The world wide web is arguably still more like billiards than quantum tunneling, but McDaid nonetheless sets the stage for an examination of secondary orality at warp speed. By the time of the next two collections I consider here, the web is more or less here (wherever that is), and hypertext has more or less become the web (before that point there were dozens of largely local—that is, non-networked, micro-computer, and mostly text-based—systems including our *Storyspace*, Apple's Hypercard, and so on).

Strate, Jacobson, and Gibson's 1996 collection, *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment*, and the however incestuous (one identical editor, one ex-editor a contributor, yours truly also, same press) Gibson and Oviedo 2000 collection, *The Emerging CyberCulture: Literacy, Paradigm, and Paradox*, are very firmly of the media ecology lineage that Strate and McDaid each outline above, the editors and several contributors being former graduate students in Neil Postman's NYU media ecology program. Thus, if only on account of his—root sense—familiarity, Ong wins the citation contest hands-down: twenty-four to three over Derrida in the 1996 author index, ten to four in the subject index (that is, if you count "orality" as "Ong," otherwise he's not an entry in the latter at all). In the 2000 collection it's twenty-three to zero in the author, and fifteen to four in the subject (where "orality" does not appear as an entry).

But something else is happening, a different contest, a differing content: in the 1996 subject index there are five mentions of graphics, three of graphic user interface (GUI), twelve of multimedia, eleven of videogames, twenty-six of virtual reality, six of virtual sex, seven of the world wide web, and thirty-some of the internet. The numbers are similar for the 2000 collection. (By way of comparison there are four total listings for multimedia in the Delaney and Landow and the Hawisher and Selfe collections combined, none for the world wide web or internet)

It may be too much to say that Ong is incorporated into a larger organism but not, I think, to suggest that his ideas seep across the viral bounds, intermixing with other flows that permeate the emergence of a hybridized, and as yet not fully identified, entity, or more properly constantly evolving multiplicity.

In the 1996 Strate, Jacobson, and Gibson collection, Ong is evoked as a vital, if not a viral, boundary figure, a measure of bounds. His thinking is brought to bear on what in his essay John Phelan (1996:42) calls "Secondary Tribalism" (foreshadowed by Moulthrop above). Meanwhile, Moulthrop in

this collection (1996:250) discusses Ong in relation to hypertext on the internet versus hypertext on closed systems including CD ROM; while Strate meditates upon the possibility that a “new consciousness . . . may emerge through a synthesis between our physical selves and the dream selves we generate in cybertime” (1996b:373). In a particularly rich instance, in her essay “Charting the Codes of Cyberspace,” in a section entitled “At the junction of orality and literacy,” Judith Yaross Lee considers how “when interactive digital video merges with e-mail . . . [a]lthough this . . . medium will almost certainly rely on familiar facial and body ‘language,’ users will find themselves in unfamiliar waters as they attempt, anew, to chart its codes” (1996:293). To this new encoding she summons as progenitors (and likewise, one thinks, as wayward children) Ong and Derrida, together (293-94):

Although he agrees with Derrida on almost nothing else, Walter Ong noted . . . that writing by definition is “discourse that has been detached from its author” [1982:78]. Not so for the e-mail writer. The electronic text embodies the author—the virtual speaker who meets the reader, who becomes embodied by a similar process in response. Thus, although e-mail derives from both writing and speech, it does not homogenize traits from each other into a synthetic mixture or blend. Rather, like a child, it has some traits from one parent and some from the other, and the combination has a life of its own.

The Gibson and Oviedo 2000 collection not surprisingly features both as rich a range of situating Ong’s thinking and as earnest and organic a summoning to the kind of dual-lineage hybridity that Lee outlines above. In the editor’s introduction, Stephanie Gibson imagines “a paradigmatic possibility . . . that we may one day be less and less concerned with preserving what we compose . . . [and] live more and more with the constantly mutating text of Ong’s ‘present moment’” (10). As warrant for this claim she offers how “web pages change daily, sometimes even momentarily . . . [leading] to altered relationships between writer, text, and audience” (*idem*). In what increasingly becomes a commonplace among theorists of electronic literacy, Gibson offers the speed of (visual, textual) communication as evidence of its sharing the gene of orality (10-11):

Electronic journals . . . have a much more rapid turn-around time than traditional print journals, and they allow for a closer to real time dialogue about their contents. An article published in an online journal can be debated in a much more lively fashion than one in a print journal—a fashion closer to face-to-face debate.

In a later essay contributor Sue Barnes says it baldly: “This instantaneous characteristic turns the printed word into a more oral medium, the computer replaces the voice as a communication channel. The written word . . . substitutes for the spoken word” (2000:193).

The ghost haunting these speedy arguments for the mutation of space back into time is of course Paul Virilio (another—ghostly double—is Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization noted above/earlier/once). That ghost walks the stage in Lance Strate’s dizzying consideration of “Hypermedia, Space and Dimensionality,” wherein (during which) the two finally are as pressed together—felt—as Deleuze and Guattari’s heterogenous “aggregate of intrication” cited above.

“The point here is that hypertext and hypermedia are part of a much larger phenomenon,” as Strate writes. He continues (2000:277):

Time itself has long been spatialized through the linear metaphor of the time line, the graph metaphor of the calendar page, and the circular metaphor of the traditional clockface. This tendency affects computing, and is, in turn, affected by the computer, in whose memory banks commodified historical information may be deposited or withdrawn. The flowchart, the fundamental diagram of computer programming, is a highly spatialized representation of events unfolding in time, and has become a key image in contemporary culture. . . . It is branching and multidimensional, but it is also spatialized and static in its layout. Hypertextual time can be represented in this spatialized format, so the reader may explore and navigate through a hypertextual network that links representations of different moments or eras. And while the general tendency toward spatialization is a limiting factor, there is still a great deal of readerly freedom that can be provided in this presentation of the temporal dimension.

We will stay with Strate for another (last) long moment as he lays out and explores another, rather abstracted, combined, and combinatorial catalogue and genealogy, however not without first noting that what is most striking in the preceding citation is the (Our) town square it evokes ecphrastically. The image, if not Habermas’s public sphere, complete with bank and clock tower and rails or roads or riverbanks going somewhere, evokes the HO-scale towns of model railway crossroads or—more likely for a grown-up boy of Strate’s generation—the three-quarter-scale town center of Main Street USA, Disneyland. As the work of other equally nostalgic would-be media visionaries like Lucas or Spielberg suggests, such a tiny town is good to have in mind as one sets off into multidimensional narrative universes such as those Strate suggests (*ibid.*:278), where

What is significant . . . is not that they include the higher dimension of time; after all, time is represented in traditional narrative and dramatic forms from oral storytelling to the novel, and in audiovisual media. Time itself, however, tends to be presented as one-dimensional and generally linear in these older forms, while computer software is more open to multidimensional temporal modes. Thus, it becomes feasible to represent and to navigate through parallel time lines . . . or time lines that exist at an angle to each other so that, from a vantage point on either line, events on the other line would appear to be moving at a much faster rate (MacBeath). Two separate time dimensions could also move in opposite directions from each other (Whitrow). A computer mediated narrative can easily present both objective time and a corresponding sense of subjective time held by a human agent, which Herbert Zettl sees as equivalent to the horizontal and vertical dimensions of space. Multiple dimensions of subjective time could then be represented if more than one character is involved. Or we could construct and explore the links between the sacred and profane temporal dimensions imagined by Mircea Eliade.

We are very far from Walter Ong by now. We can hardly hear him over this distance. We are likewise far from the Lionel town, Disney's land, Habermas sphere, or even the village lights along the tracks of the thin, liminal membrane where the virus resides, devouring or becoming us, becoming to us. Inevitably, unerringly, the media ecologist's contextual plane and the postmodernist ebb and flow of minds have not so much merged as disappeared into the pixel-sized vanishing point of virtual parallel lines. It would be easy to have fun with Strate's earnest description of alternate dimensionalities and narratives if I hadn't tried to imagine and write them (for) myself. It is pleasant for now to wonder who is MacBeath, this cross between MacBeth and breath, or to imagine the kind of tweed worn by a man named Herbert Zettl, and to wonder also whether he ever runs into Whitrow (though it is a shock I confess to run into old friend Eliade here in the mi(d)st—as much a father to me as Ong was once during those long-ago years in my Jesuit college). Aside from my fathers, Strate's list of names is unknown to me, uncited below because I prefer for now to leave them so, less unknown than known by the stories the sounds of their names raise: wearing tweed, moving through alleys, calling after Whitrow, looking up at the spherical moon.

As I leave you, dear reader, for the present moment also.

Vassar College

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Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality: The Evidence of the Puns in *Elene*

Samantha Zacher

After the anonymous (and still undated) poet of *Beowulf*, Cynewulf has a good claim to be the most important Anglo-Saxon poet whose vernacular verse has survived. As the accepted author of no fewer than 2,601 lines, such a claim would on its own be uncontested, but recent work has emphasized still further Cynewulf's central importance: his influence on the *Andreas*-poet has been suggested, and it seems that Cynewulf himself may be the author of *Guthlac B*.¹ The existence of a group of so-called "Cynewulfian poems" (such as *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Phoenix*) bears powerful witness to his pre-eminence among Anglo-Saxon poets whose names we know. It is therefore, perhaps, surprising that so little scholarly attention has been focused on the extent to which Cynewulf managed to combine inherited elements of an ultimately oral poetic tradition with aspects of an imported (and ultimately Latin-derived) literate tradition of poetic composition. It is this tension between orality and literacy, and the extent to which Cynewulf can be said to stand at the interface of these two traditions, that this article will seek to explore.

That Cynewulf was a literate poet, writing in response to a literate, Latin-derived tradition seems abundantly clear. Of the four runically signed poems attributed to Cynewulf—namely *Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene* in the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII) and *Christ II* and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501)—Latin sources have been identified for no fewer than three,² and, indeed, wider generic and

¹ The fullest analysis of the influence of Cynewulf on *Andreas* is by Powell (2002:espec. Appendix C); see too Orchard forthcoming a. For the argument that Cynewulf is author of *Guthlac B*, see Orchard forthcoming a and b. I am grateful to Professor Orchard for giving me access to his papers pre-publication.

² *Elene* derives from a version of the *Vita S. Cyriaci*, *Juliana* from a version of the *Vita S. Julianae*, and *Christ II* from Gregory the Great's Homily XXIX. For a general study of Cynewulf's adaptation of Latin sources and rhetoric, see Jehle 1973. For studies on the Latin sources for individual poems, see, for example, Lapidge forthcoming, which

thematic influences have been suggested for all four.³ *Elene*, Cynewulf's longest surviving work, recounts the Invention of the Cross by the mother of the Emperor Constantine and the successive conversions to Christianity of Constantine, Elene, and Judas (the main representative of the Jews). *Elene* is in many ways characteristic of what we know about Cynewulf's use of patristic and legendary sources, in this case a now-lost and presumably Latin version of the so-called *Acta Cyriaci*.⁴

Moreover, a wide variety of Latin influences have been suggested for the poem's epilogue, which notably and skillfully presents a collage of more or less standard topoi ranging from personal reflection on Doomsday events to the inclusion of (seemingly) pseudo-autobiographical material alongside the poet's characteristic request that his audience pray for his soul (different versions are found in all four signed poems).⁵ It is also within this demonstrably erudite epilogue that Cynewulf's runic signature may be found⁶; therefore this portion of the poem has most commonly been cited as evidence both for Cynewulf's composition in writing of his poems and for their primary circulation in the same medium, since it has been argued that

places particular emphasis on the poem's literary inheritance, and Clemoes 1996, which considers in addition to Latinate and vernacular influences Cynewulf's inspiration through the visual arts. I am grateful to Professor Lapidge for granting me access to his paper before publication. For studies on sources in *Elene*, see below. For editions of these and all other poems cited below, see Krapp and Dobbie 1931-35.

³ For the influence of Latin rhetoric on Cynewulf's style, see Wine 1993:29-92; see also a good response to Wine's methodology in Battles 1998:173. For further background, see Steen 2002:132-64 and Clemoes 1995:431-35. See also Orchard forthcoming a for a preliminary examination of this topic, particularly in relation to the works of such Christian-Latin poets as Caelius Sedulius and Arator, and the Anglo-Latin poet Aldhelm. Orchard forthcoming b provides the most in-depth study of these influences to date.

⁴ For a concise source-history of *Elene*, see especially Gradon 1997:15-22. Gradon demonstrates that although recensions of the *Acta Cyriaci* can be found in both Latin and Greek, and indeed throughout medieval Europe, the version(s) preserved in *Elene* are closest to the Latin stem of the tradition. See also Holthausen 1936:xi-xiii, and Dubois 1943:46-50.

⁵ For a list of possible influences, see Gradon 1997:20-22. For commentary on Cynewulf and Alcuin, see Brown 1903.

⁶ Latin parallels containing acrostics, telestichs, and signatures may be found, for example, in poems by Caelius Sedulius, Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Boniface. For further references, see Steen 2002:133. See also Lapidge 1993:60-71.

runes can neither comfortably nor effectively be read aloud.⁷ Those few who have maintained the possibility that the runes may be construed orally and apprehended aurally have critiqued this view,⁸ but their argument has not significantly altered the opinion that Cynewulf's poetic craft is predominantly literate and visual.

Moreover, the two studies that have most seriously considered issues of orality and literacy with respect to Cynewulf's poetry offer widely divergent viewpoints.⁹ The first, put forward by Jeff Opland (1980), strenuously expresses the opinion that Cynewulf was a literate poet who composed in writing and whose craft is wholly distinguishable from that of oral poets.¹⁰ Ursula Schaefer (1991) takes the more flexible view that Cynewulf's poems (like other early medieval poems composed in writing), are not only orally- or traditionally-referential, but that they also at times preserve the pretense of oral presentation through the use of sustained performance cues (such as the "poetic I/ we").¹¹ Though such observations are hardly innovative in the wider field of oral theory,¹² Schaefer's

⁷ For this particular interpretation of the runic signatures in Cynewulf's poetry, see for example Elliott 1996a and 1996b. See also Frese 1996:323 and n. 2 for her discussion of Latin precedents for poetic signatures.

⁸ For the contrasting opinion that that runes may be heard effectively, see Sisam 1967:25–26; Calder 1981:23; and Schaefer 1991:128.

⁹ For an analysis of earlier studies on the subject, see especially Cherniss 1992:41.

¹⁰ Opland's main shortcoming is his search for absolute extremes of orality and literacy. In order to demonstrate this alleged binarism, he contrasts Cynewulf, whom he takes to be a purely literate poet, with the fictional horseback poet in *Beowulf* lines 853–77 and 898–904a, whom he establishes as his sole model of a pre-Christian (and hence pre-literate) oral poet. It must be noted, however, that while a preliminary theoretical model for transitional literacy existed some fifteen years earlier in Ong 1965, Opland was writing at a time when the "Great Divide" between orality and literacy was still very much a standard component of Parry-Lord theory.

¹¹ Schaefer (1991:117–19) adopts the term "vocality" from Paul Zumthor (1987) to demonstrate this more fluid paradigm of orality and literacy. It should be noted, however, that a similar conception of authors "poised between literacy and nonliteracy" was popularized earlier by Eric Havelock (1983:9).

¹² For a comprehensive bibliography of studies in oral theory and oral traditions, see Foley 1985 and the updated electronic version at www.oraltradition.org. Also see Foley (1999:13–36 and 2002:Fifth Word) for a recent treatment of traditional referentiality in written texts. For other relatively recent studies in the field of oral theory

particular contribution is to show that Cynewulf's use of such mixed modalities as "hearing from books," both within his poetic narratives and with apparent reference to his own sources of knowledge,¹³ is self-consciously fictitious and reveals an awareness (and indeed at times an exploitation) of the breakdown between authorial production and audience reception. Schaefer's notion of fictionality provides a new way of looking at some of Cynewulf's arguable "imitations" of traditional conventions, particularly those that appear to derive directly from *Beowulf*.¹⁴

The present study examines precisely this middle ground with respect to Cynewulf's longest poem, *Elene*, as its central polemic between the Jews and the newly converted Christians (represented by Elene herself) concerns itself directly with the reception, perception, and transmission of both oral and written narratives. This emphasis on written and oral testimonies within *Elene* has been well-documented, in terms of both the role of speech-acts in the poem¹⁵ and the relationship of Cynewulf's runic signature to the main narrative.¹⁶ Special attention has also been paid to the importance of "true" perception in relation to these narratives. The religious tensions in the poem exemplify a larger hermeneutical conflict that distinguishes the Jews who are skilled in the "letter" of the law from the Christians who are wise in its "spirit."¹⁷ It will likewise be argued here that the poem presents a kind of

in the context of Old English literature, see Olsen 1986 and 1988 and Orchard 1997; for applications with respect to Old English poetry, see Amodio 1995.

¹³ See Schaefer 1991:130–32.

¹⁴ Schaefer argues that "imitation" implies a condition of fiction. Her comparison of lines 1–3 of *Beowulf* with lines 1–3 of *Fates of the Apostles* is not only convincing, but indeed may be pushed further. Though it is impossible to establish a relative chronology, it is difficult to ignore the seeming play on such *Beowulf*-ian lines as *blæd wide sprang* in Cynewulf's own *lof wide sprang* (in line 6 of *Fates of the Apostles*), and *lead wide sprong* (in line 585 of *Juliana*), to cite just one of the more obvious examples. For further parallels with *Beowulf* see Sarrazin 1886, Orchard forthcoming b, and Powell 2002. For an assessment of other formulas in Cynewulf's poetry, see for example Diamond 1996, Olsen 1984, Cherniss 1992, and Orchard forthcoming a.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive account of the relationship between the speeches and structure of the poem, see especially Bjork 1985:46–62; also Regan 1996 and Doubleday 1975.

¹⁶ See Frese 1996:333–43.

¹⁷ One of the earliest and still indispensable treatments of this subject can be found in Hill 1996; see also Regan 1996:255–57, who traces the polemic through patristic

interface between the semiotic conditions of orality and literacy, particularly through a study of special linguistic features such as rhyme, echo-words, paronomasia, and onomastic puns. Insofar as these devices are generally held to be primarily aural phenomena, it is hoped that such a project will illuminate the rich oral and visual texture of Cynewulf's poetry and call attention to Cynewulf's use of predominantly vernacular aural/oral elements within a narrative conspicuously derived from literate, Latinate sources.

As was mentioned, the runic signatures of Cynewulf may present evidence not only of written composition but also of literate transmission and reception. It is, however, interesting to note the extent to which the so-called "rhyming section" in *Elene* (1236–51), which directly precedes the section containing Cynewulf's signature (and also directly follows a scribal *finit* at line 1235), presents a vexed textual crux, at least insofar as the single extant version contained in the Vercelli Book is concerned. Though rhyme is not uncommon in the poem (as we shall see), what is significant about this particular section is the extent to which the passage (in its current state at least) relies upon extratextual aural effects to convey its design. The difficulty arises from the fact that while the majority of the half-lines in this section contain "true" rhymes (twenty to be precise), eight examples present imperfect rhymes. It was Sievers who first put forward the argument that these four pairs may be emended to produce true rhymes if translated from their current late West-Saxon dialect into an Anglian one.¹⁸ The following lines contain the rhyming section, demarcating "true" rhymes in bold, and "Anglian" rhymes with underlining. The remaining irregular pairs (to be discussed below) are in italics (1236–51):¹⁹

Pus ic frod ond **fus** þurh þæt fæcne **hus**
 wordcræftum *wæf* ond wundrum *læs*,
 þragum **preodude** ond geþanc **reodode**
 nihtes **nearwe**. Nysse ic **gearwe**
 be ðære rode riht ær me rumran geþeaht
 þurh ða mæran miht on modes þeaht

debates. Calder's chapter on *Elene* (1981:104–38) remains the most comprehensive discussion.

¹⁸ Sievers 1884:235, n. 1. See also Rogers 1971:47–52. For more recent evaluations, see Fulk 1992:362–68 and Gradon 1997:13–14, which maintain that the precise dialect is Mercian and not Northumbrian as first put forward by Sievers.

¹⁹ All emphases in subsequent examples from the Old English are mine, and unless otherwise stated, bold is used for "true" rhymes, underlining for other types of acoustic emphases. All translations here and throughout are mine.

wisdom onwreah. Ic wæs weorcum fah
 synnum **asæled**, sorgum **gewæled**,
 bitrum **gebunden**, bisgum **bebrungen**,
 ær me lare **onlag** þurh leohtne **had**
 gamelum to *geoce*, gife *unscynde*
 mægencyning amæt ond on gemynd begeat,
 torht **ontynde**, tidum **gerymde**,
 bancofan **onband**, breostlocan **onwand**,
 leoðucræft **onleac**. þæs ic lustum **breac**,
 willum in worlde.

Thus I, experienced and ready, by means of that fickle carcass [lit. deceitful house] wove in word-crafts and gathered in miracles, for long periods of time pondered and sifted thought in the constraint of the night. I knew not clearly about the true cross before Wisdom, through glorious might, revealed to me in the thought of my mind a more increased understanding. I was stained in deeds, fettered in sins, afflicted with sorrows, bound with bitter things, thronged with afflictions, before the Mighty King bestowed upon me instruction through a light manner, as a help to an old man, he meted out his noble gift and instilled in memory, revealed brightness and at times increased it, unbound my body [lit. bone-coffer], unwound my heart [lit. breast-locker], unlocked the craft of poetry. Thus I enjoyed in yearnings, with desires in the world.

According to Sievers, rhyme may be achieved in accordance with the following emendations: the pairs *onwreah . . . fah* may be changed to *onwrah . . . fah*; *amæt . . . begeat* to either *amæt . . . begæt* or *amet . . . beget*; *riht . . . geþeaht* to either *ræht . . . gepæht* or *reht . . . geþeht*; and *miht . . . þeaht* to either *mæht . . . þæht* or *meht . . . þeht*. If we accept Sievers's dialectal theory, these difficulties are scribal rather than authorial, and apparently call upon the audience's aural intuition (or simple tolerance) to make proper sense of the rhyme. A somewhat different approach is required for the remaining two lines, which appear to contain no rhyme.²⁰ One possible explanation may be found through the repetition of formulas elsewhere in the poem. For example, *gamelum to geoce, gife unscynde* ("as a help to an old man, [he meted out his] noble gift") appears to recall line 1200, which reads: *ofer geofenes stream, gife unscynde* ("over the ocean's stream [she sent] the noble gift"). The poet, or possibly an intervening scribe, may have remembered the earlier b-verse (which is unattested elsewhere in the extant corpus of Old English literature) and its pairing with

²⁰ Commentary on these irregular lines is entirely omitted by both Fulk 1992 and Gradon 1997.

geo- in the a-verse, and inserted a version of this formula into the rhyming section. The reading as it stands creates an aural echo with the earlier passage, even though line 1200 itself does not conform to the surrounding units of rhyme. A bold editor might conjecture *gife unseoce* “uncorrupted gift,” which, although unattested as a negative construction, nevertheless would satisfy the pattern of rhyme.²¹ The other problematic non-rhyming line *wordcræftum wæf ond wundrum læs* is somewhat more difficult to explain. Perhaps one solution is to assert a deliberate visual pun on the words *wæf* and *wæs* (the second of which *would* provide true rhyme, though it is grammatically nonsensical) on the basis that the letters <f> and <s> are visually similar, and have been seen elsewhere (even in Cynewulf’s corpus) to cause scribal confusion.²² Likewise, in this case, recourse to an earlier parallel in *wordcræftes wis ond witgan sunu* (“wise in word-craft and the son of a prophet,” 592), which contains the only other attested use of the compound *wordcræft* in the extant corpus (and also a model for <w> and <s> consonance in the a-verse), is unhelpful, as the half-line containing these features is a syntactically different construction. The suggestion of a visual pun in this particular case presents an alternative to the view that these pairs present a straightforward example of assonance and, as such, near-rhyme.²³

The use of rhyme in the above section is coupled with other predominantly aural features. For example, one may note the use of interlinear rhyme in 1240 and 1241 in the pairs *riht . . . miht* and *geþeaht . . .*

²¹ The proposed emendation (which I owe to Andy Orchard) is supported by the fact that other Cynewulfian poems containing the notion of *momento mori* also demonstrate the adjective “sick” in apposition with abstract nouns. For example, *The Fates of the Apostles* (1–2a) states that *Ic þysne sang siðgeomor fand / on seocum sefan* (“I, mournful of death, discovered this song in [my] sick heart”). *Guthlac B* (1065–67) likewise contains the explanation that *nis me earfeðe / to geþolianne þeodnes willan, / dryhtnes mines, ne ic þæs deaðes hafu / on þas seocnan tid sorge on mode* (“To me it is not a hardship to suffer the will of the Prince, my Lord, nor do I have sorrow in mind concerning death in this sick time”).

²² For example *fela þa* (Beowulf 2305a) is generally emended to *se laþa*; *syrd getrum* (*Exodus* 178a) is generally emended to *fyrðgetrum*; and *ufon* (*Exodus* 556a) to *on*. For an example from Cynewulf, see *Christ II* 491b: *lyste* is usually emended to *lyfte*.

²³ For an analogous reading of pairs that do not rhyme in the so-called Rhyming *Poem*, see Klinck 1988:266–79. See also Stanley 1988:25–27 and 36–38 for approximate rhymes.

peaht.²⁴ The use of non-rhyming consonance in 1244 between *bitrum . . . bisgum*, and assonance in line 1249 between *bancofan . . . breostlocan* is also noteworthy. In addition to the repeated double alliteration, we find examples of “ornamental alliteration,”²⁵ which (for example) back-links *begeat* in 1247b with line 1246 (*gamelum . . . geoce . . . gife*), and also *breac* in 1250b with line 1249 (in *bancofan . . . onband . . . breostlocan*).²⁶ The rich aural texture in these lines stands in this respect in contrast to the visually oriented runic section (lines 1256b–75a), though the latter is by no means without aural effects. Consider, for example, assonance in line 1259 between the rune .ƿ. (*yr*; “horn”) and the verb *gnornode* (“mourned”), and the sound-play in line 1268 between the words *lifwynne . . . geliden . . . swa .ƿ. toglideð* (“life-joy . . . will depart . . . just as the water [*lagu*] will flow away”).²⁷ As in the rhyming-section, these aural features are extratextual, and as such require the ear of the reader or listener to supply these resonances. This type of blurring between devices that have been traditionally labeled “written” or “oral” is, as we shall see, detectable at various levels throughout the poem.

End-rhyme and other predominantly aural features are not confined to the rhyming-section alone. As can be expected, many of these rhymes occur

²⁴ The repetition of the element – *peaht* in such close proximity (in both instances meaning “thought” or “counsel”) may represent an example of eye-skip. The likelihood of such an occurrence in Old English rhyming poetry has been generally seen to be diminished by the fact that, in contrast with Latin verse, all extant Old English verse is written out as consecutive prose. However, in a recent conference paper, Abram (2002) has suggested that the Old English exemplar of the so-called *Rhyming Poem* may have in fact been written out in lines, following the format of surviving Anglo-Latin rhyming octosyllables. Such a theory would account for the high occurrence of apparent examples of eye-skip in the *Rhyming Poem*, and indeed perhaps for the tautologous end-rhyme in *Elene*, 1240b and 1241b.

²⁵ For a table outlining the distribution of double alliteration in a number of Old English poems, see Hutcheson 1995:271. For examples of ornamental alliteration, see Orchard 1995.

²⁶ The use of sustained rhyme in an extended passage may be seen elsewhere in Cynewulf’s poems, as in *Christ II* (586–96).

²⁷ Other aural features may include the repetition of key words, such as variations of the verb *gewitan* (“to depart”) in 1267b, 1271a, and 1277b, and also the element –*nearo*- (“narrow” or “difficult”) in 1260b (in the compound *nearusorge*, “difficult sorrow”) and 1275b (in *nedcleofan nearwe geheadrod*, “confined in a narrow prison”), as these help importantly to emphasize the passing of earthly sorrows as stated above.

in the battle-scene leading up to Constantine's conversion. One of the first rhymes to appear in the poem is the pairing *wordum . . . bordum* ("with words . . . with shields," 24b), emphasizing the clashing of both words and weapons at the very beginning of the battle sequence. The pairing is clearly a favorite in the poem as it occurs with obvious aural variation three additional times at verses 235a (*bordum . . . ordum*; "with shields . . . with spears"), 393a and 394b (*æðelinga ord . . . witgena word*; "the foremost of nobles . . . the word of the prophets"), and 1186a (*bord . . . ord*; "shields . . . spears"). In some cases, these rhymes are part of a larger aural texture, as in the case of the pairing *bordum . . . ordum*, which participates in a pun on *bord* in line 238b, meaning both "shield," "protection," and "side of the ship." This precise collocation with its perfect end-rhyme in fact occurs nowhere else in Cynewulf's signed poems, and seems to have been coined for Elene.²⁸ Another passage in the battle-scene that is particularly laden with rhymes occurs at lines 50–55a:

Ridon ymb rofne, þonne rand **dynede**,
 campwudu **clynede**, cyning þreat for,
 herge to hilde. Hrefen uppe gol,
 wan ond wælfel. Werod wæs on tyhte.
Hleopon hornboran, **hreopan** friccan,
 mearh moldan træd.

They rode about the famous one; then the shield dinned, the battle-targe
 clanged, the king advanced with a troop, a battalion to the battle. The
 raven yelled from above, dark and greedy for carrion. The troop was on
 the march. The horn-bearers ran, the heralds called out, the horse trod the
 earth.

As in the above example, the rhymes here emphasize the din of voices and the crash of weapons. The first pair, *dynede . . . clynade* ("dinned . . . clanged"), occurs with variation and similar effect in other poems containing battle scenes, as in *Judith* verse 24b, and the *Rhyming Poem* line 29, both of

²⁸ Variations of the elements - *word-* ("word"), - *bord-* ("shield"), and - *ord-* ("spear[-point]" or "forefront") occur in close proximity (either as simplexes or compounds) but without end-rhyme in *Christ II* 740 and 741a (*wynnum geworden . . . æþelinga ord*; "become joyous . . . forefront of nobles") and again in 768a and 769b (*attres ord . . . biter bordgelac*; "poison spear . . . bitter shield-play"). Examples of the same rhyming pair in other poems include *Andreas* 1205b (*ordum . . . bordum*, "with spears . . . with shields") and *The Battle of Maldon* 110b (*bord ord [onfeng]*, "shield [caught] spear-point").

which contain the pairing *hlyne*de . . . *dynede*.²⁹ In *Elene*, the rhyme lends the passage a sense of heightened excitement that builds from the beginning of the battle-scene through a number of rhetorical devices,³⁰ most notably the use of what may be termed “incremental repetition”—the repetition of key words, sounds, or phrases at the beginning of consecutive sense-units³¹—in the a-verse of the formula “x to battle,” as seen above in line 52 (*herge to hilde*) and indeed throughout lines 22–68.³²

However, the battle-field in *Elene* is not the only showcase for such essentially aural effects as rhyme and incremental repetition. Cynewulf also uses rhyme to convey heightened emotion outside the heroic context, most commonly in order to portray states of either confusion or dismay.³³ For example, Cynewulf expresses the confusion of the Jews as they receive and discuss the news from Judas concerning the burial and whereabouts of the cross (536–54). He uses the rhyme *sume hyder* . . . *sume pyder* (“some hither . . . some thither,” 548b),³⁴ together with homeoteleuton (which I

²⁹ For a discussion of the extensive verbal parallels between the battle-scenes in *Elene* and *Judith*, see especially Orchard forthcoming b, which pairs the half-line *dynedan scildas* with the near-rhyme *hlude hlummon* (“shields dinned” and “loudly rang,” *Judith* 204b and 205a).

³⁰ Cf. also the subsequent battle scene between the Romans and the Huns and Hugas in lines 105–37, and in particular the cluster of rhymes in 114a and 114b (*borda gebrec* . . . *beorna geprec*, “crashing of spears . . . tumult of warriors”); 115a and 115b (*heard handgeswing* . . . *herga gring*, “hard hand-swing . . . slaughter of armies”); and in 121a and 122b (*stundum wræcon* . . . *bræcon bordhreðan*, “at times they pressed forward . . . they broke the shield coverings”).

³¹ On “incremental repetition,” see, for example, Bartlett 1935:4–61.

³² See *gearwe to guðe* (“ready to battle,” 23a); *hergum to hilde* (“with armies to the battle,” 32a); *abannan to beadwe* (“summon to battle,” 34a); *bannan to beadwe* (“summon to battle,” 45a); *wæpnum to wigge* (“with weapons to battle,” 48a); [*ðeah hie werod læsse*] *hæfdon to hilde* (“[though] they had [few in the army] to battle,” 49a); *cafe to cease* (“swift to battle,” 56a); and *hrora to hilde* (“bold to battle,” 65a).

³³ Other noteworthy examples of rhyme include (but are not limited to): *þone stan nime* . . . *hlafes ne gime* (“that he might pick up the stone . . . not care for the loaf,” 615b and 616b), as well as the internal rhymes *frodra* . . . *godra* (“of the wise . . . of the good,” 637a and b), and *bylde* . . . *fylde* (“encouraged . . . filled,” 1038a and 1040b).

³⁴ This rhyme is predominantly found in prose, occurring nineteen times by my count, and only one other time in extant verse (*The Meters of Boethius* 20.164).

distinguish here from rhyme to signal the same grammatical endings) for the words *þeahdedon* . . . *þrydedon* . . . *þohton* (“contemplated . . . pondered . . . thought”), to express their bewilderment and the flurry of deliberation that results from Judas’s disclosure. Cynewulf uses a similar strategy to convey Judas’s own confusion as he is finally released from his confinement in a hollow pit in order to lead Elene to the burial-place of the True Cross. Judas’s reaction is described as follows (719b–23a):

[O]nd hwæðre geare nyste,
 hungre **gehyned**, hwær sio halige rod,
 þurh feondes searu foldan **getyned**,
 lange legere fæst leodum dyrne
 wunode wælreste

[N]evertheless, he did not know exactly, humiliated with hunger, where the holy Cross through the trickery of fiends was buried in the earth, long set in its resting place, kept secret from the people, dwelled in its bed of slaughter.

The rhyme linking the words *gehyned* (“humiliated”) and *getyned* (“buried”) not only aurally reflects Judas’s mental disorder but also ominously connects Judas’s own confinement in an *engan hofe* (“narrow house,” 712a) with the confinement of the Cross, which is likewise interred in *þam reonian hofe* (“in a dreary house,” 833).³⁵ Cynewulf recycles the rhyme *getynde* . . . *gehyned* to link these burials with the confinement of the devil who, upon his defeat by Judas, claims that he is not only in *þam engan ham oft getynde* (“in that narrow home often enclosed,” 920), but that he is also *nu gehyned* (“now humiliated,” 922b).³⁶ In the devil’s speech (902–33), however, the rhyme is supplemented by a series of aural repetitions, chiefly in the form of echo-words (the close repetition of identical or etymologically related morphemes),³⁷ which appear to imitate the devil’s deadlocked condition.

³⁵ The narrative correlation between Judas and the cross in *Elene* has been noted by Regan 1996:258–59. Regan also notes analogues in this respect between Judas and “the Dreamer” in *The Dream of the Rood*.

³⁶ The element *-hof-* appears four more times in the poem (either as a simplex or complex) at lines 252a, 557b, 763a, and 1303a. The final two instances refer to the future entombment of the damned and are therefore thematically linked to the above three burials instigated by crime.

³⁷ This definition is derived from Battles 1998:168–240. For earlier discussions of the echo-word, see Beaty 1934, Rosier 1964, Kintgen 1974, and Foley 1990.

These include the simplexes *folgab* . . . *folgab* (“retinue . . . follow,” 903b and 929b); *nið-* (“enmity,” 904a and 912a); *æhta* . . . *æhtum* . . . *æhte* (“possession[s],” 904b, 907a, and 915a); and *rihta* . . . *rihte* (“of [my] rights . . . in right,” 909b and 916a), and also pairs that contain one compound element, as in *sacu* . . . *wipsæcest* (“strife . . . contradict,” 905a and 932b); *manfremmende* . . . *gefremede* (“sinful . . . performed,” 906a and 911b); and *cirde* . . . *wiðercyr* (“turned . . . reversal,” 914a and 925b). The repetition of *riht* (“right”) and *æht* (“possession”) highlights the devil’s use of quasi-legal terminology to enforce his claim over wicked souls. Such a reading is supported by an analogous treatment of the devil elsewhere in the same manuscript, in Vercelli Homily X.76–91, where the devil is seen to vie with God for *riht* over the souls he hopes to gather into his *hordcofan* (“hoard-coffer,” Vercelli Homily X.88).³⁸

The extent to which Cynewulf uses echo-words to enrich sound-play in the speech of the devil and to highlight rhetorically his defeat and stasis has already been seen. The extended use of echo-words as a governing rhetorical feature can be found elsewhere in the poem with dramatically different effect. For example, in the passage describing the sea-voyage of Elene and her troops in search of the True Cross (225–55),³⁹ a passage which is wholly without precedent in any of the extant Latin versions of the *vita*, Cynewulf uses this device to communicate movement rather than stasis. The difference is that rather than using *polyptoton* (the same form of a word with different grammatical endings) as the prevailing link, a device which is itself static, in the passage describing the sea-voyage, Cynewulf uses varieties of compounds and derivative forms that demonstrate differing degrees of progression and change. This type of evolutionary sound-play is seen, for example, in the repetition of the elements *fearoð-* (“stream” or “shore”) and *-hengestas* (“horses”), which together form the kenning for “ships” (*fearoðhengestas*, lit. “sea-horses”) in 226b, and appear in the subsequent kennings for “ships” (*wæghengestas*, “wave-horses,” 236b) and “the sea” (*sæfearoðe*, “sea-shore,” 251a). These three kennings alone span nearly the whole of the voyage, marking out its development. A similar progression may be seen in the additional compounds containing the element *-wæg-* (“wave”), particularly in kennings for “ship,” *wæges helm* (lit.

³⁸ Scragg 1992:200–201. The word *riht*, which has been omitted from Vercelli X.78, is supplied from a variant homily contained in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 302, though the overall sense of the passage remains the same without the emendation. For further commentary on this dialogue, see Zacher forthcoming.

³⁹ Cf. Battles 1998:182–88.

“covering of the wave,” 230a) and *wægflotan* (lit. “wave-floater,” 246a), as well as the kenning for “the sea” in *fifelwæg* (lit. “giant wave,” 237a). The list may include aurally similar compounds possessing the element *-weg-* (“way”), as in *bæðweg* (“watery-path,” 244a) and *eastwegas* (“path to the east,” 255a). Two further simplexes that develop into compounds for both “sea” and “ships” are the elements *-sæ-*, which appears no fewer than five times, and also *-brim-*, which occurs three times.⁴⁰

Cynewulf likewise uses repetition of a single element to develop paronomasia (by which I mean the creation of an etymological or pseudo-etymological relationship for the purpose of sound-play between two or more words) on the element *-sið-*, which can mean both “journey”—as in *siðfæt* (“journey,” 229b), *sið* (243b), and *siðes* (247b)—and “time”—as in *siðan* (“afterwards,” 230a) and *sið* (“after,” 240b). A variation on this technique may be seen in the string of (at least partly) etymologically unrelated words containing the sound *-yð-*, as in *yða* (“of the waves,” 239b), *hyðe* (“harbor,” 248a), *yðhofu* (lit. “wave-house,” 252a), and *eðgesyne* (“easily seen,” 256b), which is also attested in the variant spelling *yðgesyne*. The rapidly changing landscape of linked sound-elements creates a snowballing effect that propels the narrative forward at a rapid rate. Though the rhetoric is perhaps no match for the conceit in Cynewulf’s *Christ II*.850–66, which compares transitory life to a sea-voyage (and which shares numerous verbal parallels with the sea-voyage in *Elene*),⁴² the crafty verbal artistry of *Elene*’s journey makes the suspense-building hiatus a welcome one that amply displays Cynewulf’s rhetorical skill.

Cynewulf also uses the same rhetorical technique in passages that may be labeled exegetical or didactic, as in the scene when Eusebius renders advice to *Elene* concerning the nails of the True Cross. According to the

⁴⁰ The element *-sæ-* (“sea”) occurs in *sæmearas* (“ships [lit. sea-mares],” 228a); *Wendelsæ* (“Mediterranean,” 231b); *sæ* (“sea,” 240a); *sæmearh* (as above, 245b); and *sæfearoðe* (“seashore,” 251a). The element *-brim* (“sea”) appears in *brimpisan* (“ship,” 238a); *brimwudu* (“ship [lit. sea-wood],” 244b); and *on brime* (“on the sea,” 253a). See further kennings for “sea” in *mearcpaðu* (“road through border territory,” 233a), *earhgeblond* (“sea [lit. wave-blend],” 239a), *egstreame* (“sea-stream,” 241a) *merestræte* (“sea-road,” 242a), and *lagofæsten* (“water-fastness,” 249a), as well as for “ship” in *hringedstefnan* (“ring-prowed ships,” 248b).

⁴¹ Cf. Roberta Frank’s definition of paronomasia (1972:208, n. 7).

⁴² Cf. the compounds in *Christ II*.: 850b (*laguflode*, “water-flood”), 853a (*flodwudu*, “ship [lit. flood-wood]”), 863a (*yðmearas*, “ships [lit. wave-mares]”), and 852b and 863b (*sundhengestum* and *sundhengestas*, “sea-steed-”).

prophecy in Zacharias 14:20, Eusebius recommends that the nails be placed in the bridle of the horse of a king who will thereby be made unconquerable. The use of echo-words here is a combination of the techniques seen in the above two passages, in that it combines straightforward repetition of an element (either as a simplex or compound) with the type of evolutionary sound-play and simple paronomastic structuring seen in the description of Elene's sea-journey. In this way, Cynewulf (following the Latin versions of the *vita*) uses repetition of key elements not only to explain but also to expand the cryptic prophecy delivered by the prophet that *in die illo erit quod super frenum equi est sanctum Domino et erunt lebetes in domo Domini quasi fialae coram altari* ("in that day that which is upon the bridle of the horse shall be holy to the Lord: and the caldrons in the house of the Lord shall be as the phials before the altar," Zacharias 14:20).

One particularly interesting example of this type of progressive sound-play in *Elene* begins with the compound *sigesped* ("victory-success," 1171), as its two constituent elements repeat elsewhere in the passage as *sige* and *sigor* (1180b and 1182a) and as *wigge sped* ("wealth in battle," 1181b), the latter of which not only rhymes with the original compound but also shape-shifts into a second string of echo-words incorporating the phrases *wæpen at wigge* ("weapon in battle," 1187a) and *wigge weorðod* ("honored in battle," 1195a). The half-line *wigge weorðod* in turn introduces subsidiary sound-effects, such as the potential play on *wig-* ("battle," 1195a) and *wicg* ("horse," 1195b), and also links the verb *weorðod* with the earlier *midlum geweorðod* ("honored by its bit," 1192b). This chain of effects appears to link all the important elements of the prophecy as expressed in Eusebius's speech. Other examples include paronomastic play on *meare* ("mare," 1175a) and *mære* ("famous," 1175b), and also the repetition of compound-elements in the opposites *oferswiðan* ("might overcome," 1177) and *unoferswiðed* ("unvanquished," 1187a), which modify, respectively, both the king who will use the holy bridle in war and the unassailable strength of the bridle itself. Such instances of echoic repetition in the passage are accompanied by larger patterns of structural repetition that link the passage as a whole to other analogous scenes in the poem.⁴³ The clearest such example is the opening summons delivered by Elene to Eusebius (1160–63a):

⁴³ Cf. the summons issued to wise men by Constantine in 153–56a. Also see Elene's sequential summons to the three thousand wise men in 276–81, the thousand men in 323–31, and the five hundred men in 377–84a. The final call to the wise men is made by the officials of the emperor in 555–58a.

Heht ða gefetigean forðsnotterne
 ricene to rune, þone þe rædgeþeaht
 þurh gleawe miht georne cuðe,
 frodne on ferhðe.

She commanded them to fetch the very wise man quickly to counsel, the one tried in spirit, who through wise power might eagerly make known counsel.

The wording recalls several other type-scenes in the poem, the closest being Elene's earlier summons to the same man (1050–53):

Siððan Elene heht Eusebium
 on rædgeþeaht, Rome bisceop,
 gefetian on fultum, forðsnoterne,
 hæleða gerædum to þære halgan byrig.

Afterwards, Elene commanded Eusebius, the bishop of Rome, a very wise man, to be fetched in aid into counsel for the advice of men into the holy city.

Parallels to this summons and others like it work at the macrocosmic level (even as the echo-words do at the microcosmic level) to create aural resonances between the numerous calls to counsel and the resultant deliberations that structure the action of so much of the poem.

The extent to which Cynewulf employs paronomasia as a form of aural repetition is clear. Since Cynewulf makes such pervasive and varied use of this particular rhetorical technique, it is worth pausing to attempt to distinguish some sub-categories. While numerous studies have examined instances of paronomastic and onomastic puns in Cynewulf's poetry,⁴⁴ few have attempted to comment comprehensively on Cynewulf's particular use of these features,⁴⁵ and even fewer have attempted to situate these findings within current debates on orality and literacy. Numerous studies of paronomasia in Old English literature have shown the necessity of drawing a distinction between etymologically and nonetymologically based paronomasia and such features as double-entendre, which effects a pun

⁴⁴ For what remains one of the most sensitive treatments of paronomasia in Old English poetry, see Frank 1972.

⁴⁵ See Lampugnani 1993. See also brief discussions of this topic in connection with *Elene* in Bjork 1985:62–64, 78, and 89; and Anderson 1983:74–75 and 103–33.

through play on two meanings within a single word.⁴⁶ These distinctions will be maintained here. This section of the discussion will cover a range of examples, beginning with paronomastic puns that have been dealt with extensively in criticism to date, and which are (generally speaking) abundantly attested within the poetic corpus. In addition to identifying what appear to be either visual or aural puns, I will offer variations on common pun-sequences that appear to be context-specific to *Elene*.

Cynewulf's use of the pun *rod: rodor* ("rood: heaven") has been widely discussed, particularly in relation to *Elene*, as the poem features the story of the Invention of the True Cross.⁴⁷ Roberta Frank, who cites some twelve examples of this pun in *Elene*,⁴⁸ was perhaps the first to show that the effect of the pun lies mainly in the incongruity generated by the juxtaposition of *rod* ("rood"), which is itself mundane (but which becomes heavenly through the passion of Christ), and *rodor* ("heaven"), which is divine. As such, the pun presents what Eric Stanley (quoting Jean Paul Richter) has referred to as "the optical and acoustic deceit of wordplay,"⁴⁹ for although the pun is immediately pleasing to the ear, the opposition between the mundane and heavenly is awkward to the eye until the larger narrative elements are realized. The following two examples demonstrate a variation of this particular irony between "high" and "low" elements as a model for subsequent conversions. The first example explains the role of the Cross in delivering victory to Constantine (144–47):

Da wæs gesyne þæt sige forgeaf
 Constantino cyning ælmihtig
 æt þam dægweorce, domweorðunga,
 rice under roderum, þurh his rode treo

Then it was seen that the Almighty King gave to Constantine in that day's work victory, honor, [and] power under the heavens, through his rood-tree.

⁴⁶ See Frank 1972:207–8 (espec. n. 7), Lampugnani 1993:303–4.

⁴⁷ See Frank 1972:210–11, Lampugnani 1993:308, and Stanley 2001a:349–50.

⁴⁸ Frank 1972:210–11 cites the following lines in *Elene*: 147, 206, 482, 624, 631, 855, 886, 918, 1022, 1066, 1074, 1234. She also cites two occurrences of this pun in *Juliana* 305 and 447, and in *Christ II* 727.

⁴⁹ Stanley 2001a:345 is quoting Richter 1804: "der optische und akustische Betrug des Wortspiels."

As can be seen from the syntax, the irony derives not so much from the disparity between *rod* (“rood”) and *rodor* (“heaven”), as the *rod* is already equated with the symbolic Cross of the vision, but between the earthly *rice* (“power”) and the heavenly *roderum* (“heavens”). It is not until the very end of the poem that we learn the power of the Cross to remedy this disparity (1228b–35):

Sie þara manna gehwam
 behliden helle duru, heofones ontyned,
 ece geopenad engla rice,
 dream unhwilen, ond hira dæl scired
 mid Marian, þe on gemynd nime
 þære deorestan dægweorðunga
rode under roderum, þa se ricesta
 ealles oferwealdend earne beþeahte. Finit.

Let there be for each of men the doors of hell closed, (and) heaven’s unlocked, (and) the kingdom of the angels eternally opened, let there be unending joy and each of their portion assigned with Mary, for the one who holds in memory the festival of the dearest rood beneath the heavens, which the most powerful sovereign-lord of all covered with his arms. *Finit.*

This passage reveals the ability of the Cross to elevate the mundane to the heavenly, even as the cross itself experienced conversion from a secular object to religious symbol. Verbal parallels with the above passage in 144–47 reveal the extended irony: the adjective *ricesta* (“most powerful,” 1234b), which here describes Christ, contrasts with the earthly *rice* (“power,” 147a) of Constantine, just as the *dægweorðunga* (“festival,” 1233b) celebrating the Invention of the Cross contrasts the earlier attribution of *domweorðunga* (“honor,” 146a) for Constantine’s *dægweorce* (“day’s work,” 146b) in battle.

It should be noted, however, that word-play on *rod*: *rodor* need not be limited to these two elements. A series of satellite words,⁵⁰ or words frequently attracted to this pair, also helps to enrich the verbal texture of the poem. For example, on two occasions (at 1017–26 and 1063b–78a), *reord* (“voice”), a (near-)anagram of *rodor*,⁵¹ occurs in close proximity with both

⁵⁰ This term is derived from Battles 1998:33.

⁵¹ The form *roder*, a perfect anagram of *reord*, is attested elsewhere, as can be seen in the on-line corpus of the Dictionary of Old English (<http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>), from which I have derived much of the lexical information cited here. The connection

rod and *rodor*. In the first example (1017–26), the combination of all three elements emphasizes the authority of God’s word (*reord of roderum*, 1022a), as it is according to his instruction that Elene commands a temple to be built at the site where the cross was found (*rode*, 1022b). It also stresses the connection between the cross as secular object and as a sanctified symbol of Christ’s passion. A second satellite-word is *ræd* (“counsel”), the relevance of which requires little explanation, as we have already seen the connection between the various assemblies in the poem and the finding of the Cross. To cite just one example that falls outside of this broader context, one may adduce the extent to which the devil puns on this paronomastic string of words once he has been defeated by Judas. Complaining about the tremendous power of God (916b–19a), the devil states that

Is his rice brad
ofer middangeard. Min is geswiðrod
ræd under roderum. Ic þa rode ne þearf
hleahre herigea.

His kingdom is broad over the middle-earth. My counsel is diminished
under the heavens. I have no need to praise the rood with laughter.

Like the Jews in the poem who attempted to keep the whereabouts of the cross a secret, the devil is here deprived of his ability to persuade.

A second constellation of paronomastic elements that has received substantial critical attention, both with respect to Cynewulf’s poetry and within the larger extant Old English poetic corpus, is the sequence *lif* (“life”), *lof* (“praise”), *leaf* (“dear”), *lufu* (“love”), and *geleafa* (“belief”). Kintgen has shown that the grouping of these elements is especially important in religious poetry, “where life, love and praise are easily and

between the elements *rod-*, *rodor-*, and *reord-* plays a particularly important role in *The Dream of the Rood* (also in the Vercelli Book), as it is the *rod* that speaks to the dreamer and compels him to reform.

⁵² A second passage, in which Elene orders Cyriacus to find the nails of the Cross, establishes a similar connection, though this time with a host of subsidiary sound-effects: the extended pattern *rode . . . rodera . . . reordode . . . rode rodera* (1066a; 1066b; 1072b; 1074a; and 1074b) is punctuated by a series of words containing nonetymological anagrams of the element *-rod-*, as in *wundorwyrð* (“wonderful event,” 1070a), *wuldorgifum* (“glorious gifts,” 1071a), and *word* (“word,” 1071b).

⁵³ This particular sequence is taken from Kintgen 1977.

frequently related to faith.” It is undoubtedly for this reason that examples of this grouping abound in *Elene*. It is likewise interesting to note that the single greatest concentration of disparate elements belonging to this word-group occurs, paradoxically, in Judas’s 116.5-line speech (419b–535). The speech essentially recounts Judas’s conversation with his father, Symon, who passes onto him knowledge about the controversy concerning Christ’s crucifixion, his conviction that Christ is the true savior, and the imperative to reveal the information should wise men seek it. Much of the speech (seventy-seven lines) consists of indirect speech by Symon (441–53; 464–527), and it is in fact only in these lines that these various elements occur. In these speeches, it is clear that Cynewulf uses sequences of the above elements as a rhetorical tool for persuasion. In one speech (511–27), for example, Symon uses these elements to explain to Judas the extent of God’s mercy and the need for belief and reform. The tone of the speech is duly homiletic, and begins with the address (511): *Nu ðu meaht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa* (“Now you might hear, my beloved man”). The element *-leof-* in the address is picked up by a string of paronomastic elements (517–27):

Forðan ic soðlice ond min swæs fæder
 syðan gelyfdon
 þæt geþrowade eallra þrymma god
 lifes lattiow, laðlic wite

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*:311.

⁵⁵ Clusters containing ten lines or fewer between elements include (those within Judas’s speech are in bold): 305a (*lif*), 311b (*lifdon*); 441b (***lifdagum***), 450b (***leofað***), 453b (***lofiað***); 486b (***lifgende***), 491a (***geleafan***), 491b (***lufan***); 511b (***leofa***), 518a (***gelyfdon***), 520a (***lifes***), 523a (***leofesta***), 526b (***lif***); 575a (*life*), 585a (*endelifes*); 606a (*lif*), 606b (*leofre*); 747b (*lof*), 756a (*lifes*); 792b (*lifes*), [795a (*lyftlacende*)], 795b (*gelyfe*); 877a (*life*), 878a (*unlifgende*); 889b (*lof*), 898a (*lifes*), [899a (*lyft*)]; 959a (*geleafful*), 965a (*geleafan*); 1016b (*leofspell*), 1026b (*lifes*); 1035a (*lifweard*, *leof*), 1035b (*geleafa*), 1045b (*lif*), 1047a (*geleafful*), 1047b (*leof*); and 1205a (*leofra*), 1205b (*lufan*), 1208a (*lifes*), [1213b (*lefe*)]. Note too that Judas’s speech contains a lacuna after 438b. Most editions (Krapp 1932, Gradon 1997) resume at line 439b with the word *eaferan*.

⁵⁶ For discussions of homiletic rhetoric in *Elene*, see especially Whatley 1975a and Wright 1990.

⁵⁷ Cf. the verbatim parallel in *The Dream of the Rood* 78 (*Nu ðu miht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa* [“Now you might hear, my beloved man”]) and also 95 (*Nu ic þe hate, hæleð min se leofa* [“Now I implore you, my beloved man”]).

for oferþearfe ilda cynnes.
 Forðan ic þe lære þurh leoðorune,
 hyse leofesta, þæt ðu hospcwide,
 æfst ne eofulsæc æfre ne fremme,
 grimne geagncwide, wið godes bearne.
 þonne ðu geearnast þæt þe bið ece lif,
 selust sigeleana, seald in heofonum.

Therefore I and my dear father afterwards truly believed that the God of all glories, the Leader of life, suffered hateful torture because of the great need of mankind. Therefore I teach you through wise counsel, dearest son, that you might never commit blasphemy, evil attack, or grim retort against the son of God. Then you will earn so that to you will be given eternal life, the best of victory-rewards, in heaven.

In two cases, the paronomastic element is highlighted by “ornamental alliteration”: the word *leofesta* (523a) is linked back to *lære* and *leoðorune* (522), just as *lif* (526b) is linked forward to the sound element of *sigeleana* (527a), and also accompanied by sound-play on *bearne* and *geearnest* (526b and 527a). The use of this particular rhetorical flourish, with its attendant oral/aural effects, not only highlights the presence of homiletic speech, but also links the concepts of belief, life, and dearness as a means of attempting to convince Judas of the importance of meriting reward in heaven.

Thematically speaking, many of Cynewulf’s recurring paronomastic puns in *Elene* appear to play in some way on the notion of sin. One well-documented example of this type of sound-play is on the element *-man-*, which can mean either “man” (*mǎn[n]*) or “sin” (*mān*). The pun occurs in four disparate groupings within the poem as follows: when Elene attempts to extract the whereabouts of the cross from Judas (621–26); in the Devil’s speech to Judas (900–933); in Judas’s response to the devil (939–45a); and in Cynewulf’s epilogue as he explains the portion of the blessed (1312b–19a). Though in each case the wordplay is functional, it is by no means static. For example, in the aforementioned speech of the devil, we find a clever association of *manna* (“of men,” 902a), *manfremmende* (“performing sin,” 906a), and *manþeawum* (“sinful custom,” 929a); each of these is also paired in the b-verse with the first-person possessive pronoun *min-*. This yoking has the effect of stressing the devil’s claim to *riht* (“right”) over the wicked, and also of transferring the blame away from himself. When Judas responds to the devil, he throws his words back at him

⁵⁸ See Frank 1972:221; Stanley 2001a:349.

in typical flyting fashion, calling him a *morðres manfrea* (“sinful ruler of murder”), thereby reasserting his culpability, and also *synna gemyndig* (“mindful of sin”), which echoes Cynewulf’s earlier description of him as an *eatol æclæca, yfela gemyndig* (“accursed wretch, mindful of evil,” 901). Judas likewise inverts the devil’s rhetoric by using the second-person pronoun three times, once with impressive spitfire, as he manages to utter two of the most tongue-twisting lines in Old English verse: *Ne þearft ðu swa swiðe, synna gemyndig / sar niwigan ond sæce ræran* (“You do not have such great need, mindful of sin, to renew sorrow and to rear conflict,” 939-40). If Cynewulf had in mind an oral performance of this speech, he certainly seems to have had a good sense of humor.

It is also worth noting the passage in which Symon reveals to Judas the circumstances of Christ’s crucifixion (464–71a):

Ongit, guma ginga, godes heahmægen,
 nergendes naman. Se is niða gehwam
 unasecgendlic, þone sylf ne mæg
 on moldwege man aspyrigean.
 Næfre ic þa geþeahhte þe þeos þeod ongan
 secan wolde, ac ic symle mec
 asced þara scylda, nales sceame worhte
 gaste minum.

Perceive, young man, the high power of God, the name of the Savior. It is to each man inexpressible, which man himself may not discover on earth. Never did I wish to seek those in counsel that this people began, but I always separated myself from those guilts, not at all caused shame in my soul.

While there is no particular ambiguity surrounding the word *man*, which must in this context mean “man,” the elaborate sound-play on and within words for “man” and “sin” encourages a potential pun—the words *naman* and *unasecgendlic* both contain nonetymological elements meaning “man” (*man* and *secg*), and *niða* can be the genitive plural of both the masculine nouns *nip* (“strife”) and *niðas* (“men”). It is here the cumulative effect of like puns and sound-effects that alert the ear to this potential pattern of double-entendre.

A similar paronomastic pun may be found in the pairing *fyrn: firen* (“ancient: sin”). Fred Robinson has commented on these elements, showing

⁵⁹ This strategy comprises a typical strategy in heroic flyting. Cf. especially *The Battle of Maldon*, 29–41 and 45–61. For the occurrence of this topos in Old English literature, see further Blake 1976, Parks 1990:espec. 67–71, and Orchard 2000:8.

that while *fyrn* has a general association with things “ancient,” very commonly in religious poetry it refers to a specifically pre-Christian age.⁶⁰ It is presumably for this reason that *fyrn-* so often attracts the sense *firen-*, and may at times be interpreted interchangeably, as Robinson has demonstrated on the basis of both scribal and contemporary editorial evidence.⁶¹ In terms of the use of these elements in *Elene*, Robinson points out that *fyrn-*, with the specific sense of “pre-Christian,” occurs no fewer than ten times in the poem, with reference to both pagan and Jewish (also pre-Christian) writings, as well as Jewish and Old Testament prophets and prophesies. However, the pun *fyrn-: firen-* does not comprise the only paronomastic pairing on these elements. It is interesting to note the extent to which the pun attracts satellite elements, adding further specialized nuance. The attraction of *fyr-* (*-fir-*) “fire” has been noted before,⁶² though other connected elements may include *fyrhð-* (*ferhð-*; *firhð-*) “mind, spirit,”⁶³ and *fira(s)-* “men, people,” the latter of which creates yet another pun on “man” and “sin.”⁶⁴ A straightforward example linking “fire” to “sin” occurs at the very end of the poem, in lines 1308b–19a, as Cynewulf compares the fortune of those who separate themselves from sin (*ascyred ond asceaden . . .*

⁶⁰ For the fullest discussion of this paronomastic pun, see Robinson 1999.

⁶¹ It is noteworthy that on one occasion in the already much-discussed speech by the devil (902–10a) Cynewulf distinguishes between *fyrn-* in *fyrngeflit* (“ancient conflict,” 903a) and *firen-* in *firenum* (“sins,” 908a). This, however, does not preclude the possibility of double-entendre here and elsewhere. Rather, in this instance it seems the poet is trying to spell out the connection, highlighting this pun with like-puns in the passage, such as the aforementioned play on *manna* (“of men,” 902a) and *manfremmende* (“sinful,” 906a), and also reinforced by preceding satellite elements in *ferhðsefan* (“mind,” 894b), *feorhnere* (“for the salvation,” 897a) and *fira cynne* (“of mankind,” 897b).

⁶² Frank 1972:219. See above for examples.

⁶³ Examples include *fyrndagum* (“in former days,” 528b) and *fyrhðsefan* (“in mind,” 534b); *fyrhðwerige* (“mind-weary,” 560a) and *fyrngewritu* (“in ancient-records,” 560b); and *fyrhðe* (“in mind,” 641a) and *fyrn* (“long ago,” 641b).

⁶⁴ Note the following examples: *to feorhnere fira cynne* (“for the salvation of mankind,” 897); *nerigend fira. Mec þæra nægla gen. / [on fyrhðsefan fyrwet myngað]* (“savior of men; yet [desire in my mind reminds] me about the nails,” 1077-78); and the nearly parallel *nerigend fira. Ðu ðas næglas hat / [þam æðelestan eorðcyninga / burgagendra on his bridels don]* (“savior of men. Bid [the noblest of earthly kings to wear] these nails [in his bridle],” 1172-74).

gehwylcre . . . firena, 1313–14a) through the fire of Judgment (*þurh þæs domes fyr*, 1314b), to gold that has been purified in fire (*ofnes fyr*, 1311a). The paronomastic pun is highlighted by a string of further words for sin: *synnum* (1309a), *womma* (1310b), *scylda* (1313b), *mana* (1317b), and *synna* (1318a). An analogous pun on *mǎn[n]*: *mān* is stressed through the parallelism of *swa bið þara manna ælc* (“so may it be for each of men,” 1312b) and *þæs ðe hie mana gehwylc* (“for those who each of sins,” 1317b). Cynewulf’s rather transparent rhetoric in this Judgment Day context serves to render more immediate the need for reform.

Cynewulf’s use of this type of pun is not always so obvious. A particularly interesting example of the appearance of *fyrn-* together with its satellite elements occurs as Elene attempts to gain access to information from Judas concerning the whereabouts of the cross (640b–48a). Judas, claiming ignorance, makes the statement that *Ic ne can þæt ic nat, | findan on fyrhðe þæt swa fyrn gewearð* (“I am not able to find that which I know not in my mind, that which is so ancient,” 640b–41). Elene continues Judas’s pun on *fyrhðe . . . fyrn*, pointing out the inconsistency in his logic as she reminds him that the Jews have a perfect memory of the Trojan War, an event that took place even longer ago (643–48a):⁶⁵

Hu is þæt geworden on þysse werþeode
 þæt ge swa monigfeald on gemynd witon,
 alra tacna gehwylc swa Troiana
 þurh gefeoht fremedon? Þæt wæs fyr mycle,
 open ealdgewin, þonne þeos æðele gewyrd,
 geara gongum.

How did it happen in this nation that you so manifold know in memory of each single wonder that the Trojans performed through fighting? That open ancient-struggle was much longer ago than this noble event in the passing of years.

The words *fyr mycle* in the above quotation have been emended from the manuscript reading *fær mycel*: the first element because the construction appears to demand an adverb, and the second because it presents a more recognizable comparative construction in anticipation of *þonne* (“than”) in line 647.⁶⁶ If we accept the emendation to *fyr* (“longer”), we may also allow the inevitable pun on “fire,” as it so fittingly invokes the burning of Troy, despite its awkward syntax. The clumsy grammar is not offensive in this

⁶⁵ For commentary on this passage, see Whatley 1973.

⁶⁶ Gradon 1997:51 has *f[ie]r myc[le]*, which presents a variant spelling of *fyr*.

case, as the aural and formulaic expectation of “fire” is not diminished until reaching the *þonne* clause. However, Pamela Gradon has argued that “*mycel* for *mycele* in a comparative construction has been thought possible; [compare] *Beowulf* 69–70. Such a construction might explain the substitution of *fær* for the necessary comparative” (1997:n. 646b). In such a case, there is the possibility of a second pun on *fær*, which can mean a “sudden attack,” a sense that works in apposition with *gefeohht* (“fighting”) and *ealdgewin* (“ancient struggle”), though again with strain on the syntax. A parallel with Wulfstan’s homily XII, *De falsis dies*, demonstrates the possibility of a pun on both the elements *fyr-* and *fær-* (Wulfstan XII.21–24). The passage is particularly apposite because it describes the “spurious” beliefs held during a pagan period referred to as *gefyrn* (“of old,” Wulfstan XII.3):

Sume men eac sædan be ðam scinendum steorrum þæt hi godas wæron,
[ond] agunnan hy weorðian georne, [ond] sume hy gelyfdon eac on fyr for
his færlicum bryne.

Some men also said about the shining stars that they were gods, and began
to worship them eagerly, and some believed also in fire on account of its
sudden burning.

Wulfstan’s homily demonstrates the extent to which all three elements may be used in the context of a larger piece of word-play.

The pun on “fire” and “sin” above, is echoed thematically in a less frequent pun that yokes together the elements *līg-* (“fire”) and *līg-* (“lie,” “falsehood”). One rhetorically rich passage occurs as Elene threatens the Jews with death by fire should they not end their deceit. Elene’s warning, which is laden with puns, is obviously effective, as it compels them to offer up Judas because he is *giddum gearusnottorne* (“very wise in songs / riddles,” 586a) and *sundorwisne* (“singularly wise,” 588a). Elene states that (574–84a)

Ic eow to soðe secgan wille,
ond þæs in life **lige** ne wyrðeð,
gif ge þissum **lease** leng gefylgað
mid fæcne gefice, þe me fore standað,
þæt eow in beorge bæl fornimeð,
hattost heaðowelma, ond eower hra bryttað,
lacende **lig**, þæt eow sceal þæt **leas**
apundrad weorðan to woruldgedale.

Ne magon ge ða word geseðan þe ge hwile nu on unriht
 wrigon under womma sceatum, ne magon ge þa wyrd bemiðan,
 bedyrnan þa deopan mihte.

I wish to say to you as truth, and concerning that in life will not be a lie, if you follow this falsehood longer with fraudulent deceit, you who stand before me, a fire will seize you, the hottest of heat-surgings, and the leaping fire will separate your corpse, so that for that deceit you shall be weighed in judgement to death. Nor might you prove those words, which you now for a while in unrighteousness hid under garments of sin, nor might you conceal the event, keep secret the profound power.

The elements in bold represent the items linked through paronomasia, while the underlined items represent synonyms for “fire” and “falsehood.” Extra emphasis is created through the repetition of *leas* in 576a and 580b, which is also highlighted through continued “l” alliteration in lines 575–76. In addition, the sound-play on *fæcne* and *gefic* (577a) is emphasized through ornamental alliteration that back-links to *gefylgað* in 576b.⁶⁷ It is also worth noting a possible visual pun on *apundrad* (“weighed in judgment”; 581a), which in the manuscript would have been almost indistinguishable from *awundrad* (“wondered”), on account of the similarity between scribal <p> and <w> (wynn). This secondary reading is highlighted not only by the occurrence of governing <w> alliteration in line 581, but also by the predominant <w> alliteration contained in the two lines following (582–83). The combination of aural and visual play in this case serves to offset the austerity of Elene’s prediction and warning.

While the pun in this passage is explicit, elsewhere it is less direct. When Cynewulf describes the fates on Judgment Day of the three portions of people, he explains that (1298b–1302a)

Bið se þridda dæl,
 awyrgede womsceaðan, in þæs wylmes grund,
leas leodhatan, lige befæsted
 þurh ærgewyrht, arleasra sceolu,
 in gleda gripe.

⁶⁷ Cf. a similar passage (293–309) in which Elene berates the Jews for their spiritual blindness. She maintains that despite Christ’s willingness to save them from *ligcwale* (“death by fire”), nevertheless the Jews continue to mingle *lige wið soðe* (“falsehood with truth”).

There will be the third portion, accursed evil-doers, in the bottom of the surge, false tyrants, secured in the fire through former deeds, a band of lawless ones in the grip of the flames.

The phrase *lige befæsted* most likely represents “secured in the fire.” However, since both *līg* and *lige* are masculine i-stems,⁶⁸ the sense is interchangeable with “secured in falsehood.” This play on words is highlighted further through the play on *lease leodhatan* (“false tyrants”) and *arleasra sceolu* (“a band of lawless ones”), which together depict deceitfulness as a lack of virtue.⁶⁹ The closeness of these elements, both in terms of their sound-quality and orthography, generates a deliberate ambiguity that emphasizes the severity of falsehood and its dire consequences.

It should not be assumed from the above paronomastic puns, particularly those which play on “man” and “sin,” that Cynewulf presents a thoroughly bleak picture of humanity. A converse relationship between man and things virtuous or divine is expressed through a host of other paronomastic sequences, for example: *hæleð* (“man”) together with *halig* (“holy”) and other words containing the root -hal-;⁷⁰ the double use of the masculine noun *þrymm*, which can mean both “multitude” and “glory”;⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Lig* “fire” may also be neuter.

⁶⁹ Cynewulf’s technique in *Elene* may be compared with that in *Juliana* for the reason that here too puns on “fire” and “falsehood” are implicit. In lines 563b–68, for example, we are told that Juliana, who is described as *leahtra lease* (“devoid of sin”), with a clear pun on *leas* (“false”), is cast into a *lig-* (“fire”), which miraculously does not burn her. Cf. also *Juliana* 582–84a, where Juliana is again cast into the fire.

⁷⁰ Frank 1972:221 cites *Elene* 1203; other examples may be found in 670b–71a, 1006–14a (the passage contains five discrete instances), and 1053.

⁷¹ This is a common pun. Most editors account only for the sense of *þrymm* as “glory” in *Elene*. However, there is sufficient ambiguity in at least one instance to merit the suspicion of double-entendre. Note the following example (326-31):

Hio þa on þreate .M. manna
 fundon ferhðgleawra, þa þe fyrngemynd
 mid Iudeum gearwast cuðon.
 Prungon þa on þreate þær on þrymme bad
 in cynestole caseres mæg,
 geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted.

Then they found in a troop a thousand men of wisdom in mind, those who knew the most clearly the memory of former times among the Jews. They thronged in a troop to where

variations on the phonetically similar grouping *we(o)rod* (“troop”) . . . *word* (“word”) . . . *weard* (“guardian”) . . . *wyrd* (“fate”);⁷² the play on *leod* (“people”) and *leoht* (“light”);⁷³ and concerning the state of the world in general, as in the play on *woruld* and *wuldor*, which form perfect anagrams of one another.⁷⁴

Another much neglected sound-element in *Elene* is the abundant onomastic play, through the use of both paronomasia and Hebrew and Greek etymologies.⁷⁵ This critical neglect is surprising, given the fact that there are two name-changes actually highlighted in the poem itself. The first is Saul’s name-change to Paul after he martyrs Stephen, Judas’s brother. Despite Saul’s crime, it is revealed that God chooses to spare him because Stephen both forgives him and prays for his soul. Symon’s description of the event is as follows (491b–500a):

Pa for lufan dryhtnes
Stephanus wæs stanum worpod;
ne geald he yfel yfele, ac his ealdfeondum
þingode þrohtherd, bæd þrymcyning
þæt he him þa weadæd to wræce ne sette,
þæt hie for æfstum unscyldigne,

the kinswoman of the emperor waited in glory on a throne, the magnificent war-queen,
decked in gold.

The phrase *on þrymme* is generally translated as “in glory” (cf. Bradley 1995:173, Gradon 1997:110 [she has no entry for *þrymm* as “troop”]). However, there is nothing to suggest that *Elene* must be alone. The parallelism between *on þreate*, mentioned twice in 326a and 329a, and *on þrymme* in 329b presents enough evidence for a pun. Also cf. *Elene* 744b for another possible double-entendre involving *þrymm*.

⁷² For an excellent assessment of these paronomastic elements, see Frank 1972: 212–15. In *Elene*, the fullest examples include 890–96; 973–79a; and 1281–88 (some of these also containing satellite puns on *wuldor*, *weald*-, [ge]wurd-, and *wundor*).

⁷³ See especially Lampugnani 1993:314, whose examples include *Elene* 162b–63, 1115, and 1122b–26. As Lampugnani also points out, *leoht* participates in other sound-groupings, such as *leoht* and *beorht* (92) and *leoht* and *geleaf*- (1136a).

⁷⁴ Cf. Lampugnani 1993:304 and her example drawn from *Elene* 1149a and 1152a. Also consider the use of these elements in 778a and 781b, and 1046a and 1048a.

⁷⁵ On the topic of onomastic puns in Old English verse, see the four articles devoted to this topic in Robinson 1993:183–236. For examples in *Elene*, see Whatley 1975b and Hill 1996.

synna leasne, Sawles larum
 feore beræddon, swa he þurh feondscipe
 to cwale monige Cristes folces
 demde to deape.

Then for his love of the Lord Stephen was pelted with stones; he did not repay evil with evil, but patient he interceded for his old enemies, bade the King of glory that he might not set retribution for that woeful deed, that they on account of envy, according to the instructions of Saul, deprived of life the innocent and sinless [man], just as he through enmity deemed many of Christ's people to execution and death.

The phrase *Sawles larum* (“according to the instructions of Saul,” 497b) presents a potential pun on the vernacular word for *sawl* (“soul”), the subsidiary meaning of which is strengthened by the proximity of a similar term for “life” in the phrase *feore beræddon* (“deprived of life”).⁷⁶ The element *-sawl-* also appears in a similar grouping of words later in the poem, in lines 876–77, this time just prior to Cyriacus's resurrection of a dead man. We are told that *Elene heht þa asettan sawlleasne, / life belidenes lic on eorðan* (“commanded it to be set soul-less, the body of the one deprived of life on the earth”). Here too the element *sawl-* (“soul”) is paired with the synonymic phrase *life belidenes* (“deprived of life”), and also with the negative component *-leasne* (“without”) and the verbal element *-set-* (“to set”). The vernacular pun on “Saul” and “soul” appears to emphasize that Saul's soul, like Judas's, bears the untapped potential for virtue and faith, qualities that make him worthy of redemption. The use of name-play to demonstrate Saul's transformation presents what seems a poignant foreshadowing of Cynewulf's own spiritual conversion. Though Cynewulf employs runes in his signature, by fixing his name in this manner Cynewulf also paradoxically expresses reversal and change.

There is likewise evident sound-play on the name Stephen, which is highlighted again through the use of repeated sound-elements. In lines 491b–92a above, we are told that *þa for lufan dryhtnes / Stephanus wæs stanum worpod* (“then for his love of the Lord, Stephen was pelted with stones”). The pairing of *Stephanus* and *stan-* is repeated in 509–10, when it is explained that *Saul Stephanus stanum hehte/ abreotan on beorge, broðor*

⁷⁶ The words *sawol* (“soul”) and *feorh* (“life”) occur together as near-synonyms elsewhere in the corpus, for example, in *Riddle 39* (16a): *Ne hafað hio sawle ne feorh* (“she does not have soul or life”); and *Beowulf* (850–52a): *deaðfæge deog, siððan dreama leas / in fenfreoðo feorh alegde, / hæþene sawle* (“death-fated he hid joyless in the fen, his dark stronghold, till he gave up life, his heathen soul”).

pinne (“commanded Stephen, your bother, to be killed with stones on the hill”), and again in 823–24a when Judas’s brother is described as *Stephanus, heold, þeah he stangreopum / worpod wære* (“Stephen, dear, though he was pelted with stone-blows”). The sound-play on *stan* and *Stephanus* (which itself circumscribes the word *stan*) further highlights this repetition. Both of these effects appear to be used in order to associate, if not identify (as has been suggested by some), Judas’s brother, Stephen, with Stephen the Protomartyr, who was also killed by stoning.⁷⁷ The connection is strengthened by the fact that “Stephen” and “stone” are highlighted elsewhere in Latin etymologies, as for example, in Isidore’s *Etymologiae* (VII.xi.4), where it states explicitly that *Stephanus enim corona dicitur; humiliter lapidatus, sed sublimiter coronatus* (“Stephen indeed is called ‘crown’; humbly he was stoned, but with sublimity he was crowned”).⁷⁸ This etymology, with its apparent disparity between earthly demise and transcendent glory, certainly seems appropriate to the description of the death and martyrdom of Judas’s brother.

These various conversions, which take place outside the main narrative, prepare for the name-change of Judas himself, who is given the name Cyriacus by Eusebius upon his conversion to Christianity. The significance of the name Cyriacus, which is glossed in the poem as *æ hælandes* (“law, gospel, or revelation of the Savior”) has been well-noted in the context of the poem, primarily because it contrasts *unriht æ* (“un-right law,” 1041a), described here as pagan custom and worship, and the law of the Old Testament, expressed variously as *Moyses æ* (“Moses’s law,” 283), *Ebreisce æ* (“Hebrew law,” 397), and *dryhtnes æ* (“law of the Lord,” 970).⁷⁹ This perceptible antithesis is heightened further through the use of what appears a spurious etymology: the correct translation of Cyriacus is not

⁷⁷ The technique may be compared to the use of onomastic puns for Daniel in the eponymous Old English poem. As Frank 1972:216 points out, the poet highlights the etymology of the name Daniel, which means “Judgment of God” in Hebrew (דָּנִיֵּאל), by repeatedly pairing the name with words for both “God” (*drihten*) and “Judgment” (*dom*).

⁷⁸ Lindsay 1911:VII.xi.4. See also Thiel 1973:428, who cites additional etymologies by pseudo-Melito and Eucherius of Lyon. In all three cases, a second, Hebrew etymology is cited, as discussed below. Hill 1996:207–20, has proposed a figurative reading of many of the characters in the poem, including possible readings of Stephen as the Protomartyr, Elene as Holy Church, and Judas as a typological figure for the Judas of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, Joseph, Christ, and even Tobias.

⁷⁹ See especially Whatley 1975b and Regan 1996.

“law, gospel, or revelation of the Savior,” as Cynewulf proposes, but rather *dominicus*, or “lordly.” Gordon Whatley has persuasively argued that Cynewulf’s misnomer represents a deliberate liberty on the part of Cynewulf, in that he has apparently attempted to “make the name express more completely the substance of Judas’s conversion and his new identity as Christian and bishop” (1975:120). While convincing, this particular use of word-play does not exclude the possibility of other onomastic puns. In lines 1058b–62a we are told about the circumstances upon which Eusebius gives Judas his new name:

Cyriacus
 þurh snyttro geþeaht syððan nemde
 niwan stefne. Nama wæs gecyrred
 beornes in burgum on þæt betere forð,
 æ hælandes.

Through wise thought he [Eusebius] afterwards named him Cyriacus afresh. His name was henceforth changed in that city to the better one: “law, gospel, or revelation of the Savior.”

The phrase *niwan stefne*, as an idiom meaning “afresh” or “anew,” is well attested in Old English poetry.⁸⁰ While this sense is certainly apposite in the present context, Robert Bjork has proposed a potential pun on the more literal denotation of *niwan stefne* (“new voice”).⁸¹ Bjork’s reading appears to coincide with numerous criticisms devoted to the shifting ontological terms used to mark Judas’s movement from knowledge of the letter of the law (*scientia*) to a spiritual understanding of it (*sapientia*).⁸²

⁸⁰ Examples of the phrase *niwan stefne* (“afresh”) in the poetic corpus include *Genesis A* 1555 and 1886; *Andreas* 123; and *Beowulf* 1789a and 2594a.

⁸¹ Bjork 1985:46–62. The word *stefn* in this case refers to the feminine noun for “voice.” The form *stefne* as an accusative is attested elsewhere in the corpus—for example, Ælfric’s translation of *Genesis* 3:17, 21, and 36.

⁸² See further the copious studies devoted to analysis of the various and shifting ontological terms used to mark Judas’s movement from knowledge of the letter of the law (*scientia*) to a spiritual understanding of it (*sapientia*). Hill 1996:220–21, for example, argues that ontological epithets for Judas change as early as the moment of his discovery of the true cross, while Regan 1996:274–75, has argued that Judas’s reception of *sapientia* takes place upon his renunciation of the devil. While such a change is certainly evident in the text, it should be noted that efforts to locate purist terms that are either pre- or post- Judas’s conversion have generally been unsuccessful. The likely reason is that Cynewulf takes great effort not to disparage knowledge based solely on the Old

In addition, there may be a second pun designed to name Cyriacus a “*niwa stefn*,” or a “new Stephen,” since he is to follow in the footsteps of his brother, Saint Stephen. The repetition of the phrase *niwan stefne* in connection with Cyriacus’s discovery of the nails used in Christ’s crucifixion certainly seems to strengthen this reading, as it confirms Cyriacus’s spiritual transformation (1125–27a):

Ða wæs geblissod se ðe to bote gehwearf
 þurh bearn godes, bisceop þara leoda,
 niwan stefne.

Then he who turned to penitence through the son of God, the bishop of that people [Cyriacus], was made happy afresh.

The notion that Cyriacus is a “New Stephen” is likewise supported by a second (also well-attested) Hebrew etymology that interprets *Stephanus* as *norma* or “standard, norm of behavior”:⁸³

Martyrum primus in Novo Testamento Stephanus fuit, qui Hebraeo sermone interpretatur norma, quod prior fuerit in martyrio ad imitationem fidelium.

Stephen was the first martyr in the New Testament, who is called *standard* in Hebrew speech, because he was first in martyrdom for the imitation of the faithful.

This particular onomastic pun, which uses teleology to foreshadow Cyriacus’s immanent sainthood, is not surprising given the extensive verbal and thematic links connecting the various conversions in the poem.⁸⁴

If the name Stephen is here meant to be symbolic or prototypical, then it is worth investigating possible onomastic play in relation to some of the other names in the poem. Most importantly, the three allegedly Hebrew names mentioned in the text, namely Judas, Symon (his father), and Sachius

Testament, but rather to show its fulfillment in the acceptance of the precepts of the New Testament.

⁸³ This second derivation from Isidore’s *Etymologiae* may be found in Lindsay 1911:VII.xi.4.

⁸⁴ See especially Frese 1996:333–43, who not only maps out connections between the conversions of Constantine, Elene, Judas, and the remainder of the Jews, but also locates other connections with Cynewulf’s own conversion, which is described (pseudo-) autobiographically.

(his grandfather), all appear to contain etymologies that link them in various ways to speech-acts.⁸⁵ The connection is particularly notable given the significance not only of written testimonies in the poem, but also of oral histories, as it is through the latter medium that the history and whereabouts of the cross are finally revealed. The telling of this history originates (at least according to both the Latin and vernacular accounts) with Sachius, whose apparently Syriac name may be glossed by Latin *iustificatus* (“justified”), *iustus* (“just”), or *iustificandus* (“needing to be justified”).⁸⁶ This etymology is wholly appropriate for the role that Sachius plays in the poem, since before dying he not only reveals the whole truth concerning the

⁸⁵ Cynewulf’s use of Hebrew etymologies, presumably by means of such ultimate sources as Jerome, has only recently been brought to light. Studies include Robinson 1993, who has commented variously on the use of biblical and patristic etymologies in relation to biblical verse, and Porter 1988, who has written about loan-words from several languages in the context of both *Elene* and *Andreas*. I note a potentially striking example in *The Fates of the Apostles* (63–67):

Hwæt, we þæt gehyrdon þurg halige bec,
 þæt mid *Sigel*warum soð yppe wearð,
 dryhtlic dom godes. *Dæges* or onwoc,
leohtes geleafan, land wæs gefælsod
 þurh Matheus mære lare.

Alas! We have heard though holy books, that the truth was manifest among the Ethiopians, the lordly judgment of God. The origin of day awoke, of the light of the faith, and the land was cleansed through the glorious teaching of Matthew.

I have translated the word *or* as “origin.” However, there may be a subsidiary pun on the Hebrew word אור (*or*), which means *lumen* or “light,” given the conspicuous clustering of light-giving elements, such as *Sigel-* (“sun”), *dæg-* (“day”), and *leoht-* (“light”). The Hebrew etymology is extremely well-attested—presumably because Or is the name of a biblical mountain at the edge of the land of Edom—in commentaries by Jerome, Isidore, Philo, Origen, and pseudo-Melito (see Thiel 1973:375). It is entirely fitting that such a pun should surface in the description of Ethiopians, or *Sigelwara*, so named because of their apparently dark complexions. The Old English *Sigelwara* (with its compound-element for “sun”) itself seems an ironic twist on the Latin etymology for “Ethiopians” (*Aethiopes*) as *tenebrae* (“darkness”) and *caligo* (“swarthy”), as attested in the etymologies of Isidore (*Aethiopiae*), Apringius and pseudo-Melito (*Aethiopes*), and in etymologies for “Ethiopia” (*Aethiopia*) in Jerome, Eucherius of Lyon, and pseudo-Melito (see Thiel 1973:307). Also compare the use of the word *or* in *Cædmon’s Hymn*, line 4a, which may provide a similar pun in its narrative context of the Creation of the world.

⁸⁶ See Robinson 1993:224, n. 3, and also Thiel 1973:445, who records this etymology in the works of Jerome, Isidore, Eucherius of Lyon, and pseudo-Melito.

role of Christ as true Savior to his son Symon, but he also justifies his action by instructing Symon to make public the same truth. Symon's revelation is so significant because, as he is abundantly aware, it will bring about the eventual demise of Jewish sovereignty (448–50a). It is, of course, the entire point of the poem that while Symon hears the prophesy, he does not make it known except in private to his son Judas. It is therefore noteworthy that Symon's name comes from the Hebrew root *ע.נ.ש* ("to hear, consent"), which is correctly glossed in Latin as both *audiens* and *obediens*.⁸⁷ Judas's name, by contrast, is derived from the Hebrew verb *הגידה* ("announced," the nominal form being *הגידה* ["announcement"]), which is commonly glossed in Latin as *confessio*.⁸⁸ Judas is in fact the one who confesses the truth to Elene and her retinue (first in the form of prayer in 725–801 and then as thanksgiving in 807–26), a speech-act that leads directly to the invention of the cross. Judas's transformation into a *melda* ("informer"), despite his earlier efforts to hide his knowledge (426b–30a), is in keeping with his new title as *æ hælendes* or "revelation of the Savior."⁸⁹ These highly learned and literate puns, which themselves emphasize speaking and hearing, once again set into relief the rich verbal texture of the poem.

⁸⁷ Thiel 1973:422; both etymologies may be found in Isidore, and partial etymologies in pseudo-Jerome (*obediens*) and Jerome (*audiens*). The name Simon has been commented upon in terms of its significance elsewhere in Old English poetry as *obediens*. See for example, Robinson 1993:231, in relation to the poem *Andreas*, and also Irving 1970:74 and 89 (as cited in Robinson 1993:231 n. 18).

⁸⁸ The etymology of Judas is extremely well-attested, for example, in Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Rufinus, Cassiodore, Isidore, and pseudo-Jerome. For a complete list of Latin works containing the etymology, see Thiel 1973:338.

⁸⁹ The word *melda* may also link Judas to the devil in *Juliana*, as the fiend refers to himself three times precisely in this capacity (*Juliana* 463a, 557a, 621b). Likewise, just as Elene is eventually able to extract Judas's confession by holding him *to gisle* "as a captive" (598–603), Juliana is able to effect the devil's confession through a similar imprisonment (*Juliana* 284–88). The verbal and thematic parallels between these confessions are considerable, and reveal what looks like a deliberate pastiche within Cynewulf's own poetry. If the fight between Juliana and the devil in *Juliana* in fact presents an adaptation of the "anchorite in the desert motif" (cf. Robinson 1972), *Elene* adopts what appears to be at once a version and inversion of this topos. The demonization of Judas through this parallel, a problem that is not rectified but rather highlighted by Judas's rejection of his Jewishness, has been noted with reference to other problematic passages in the poem. Indeed, here as elsewhere, Cynewulf seems to be invoking the Pauline divide between the letter and the spirit. See further Calder 1981:113 and Regan 1996:256–57 for particularly sensitive readings of Cynewulf's use of these binary divisions.

A final onomastic pun testifies to a further use of this type of word-play within the vernacular word-hoard.⁹⁰ As can be expected, the name Elene, which is phonetically linked to the Old English noun *ellen* (“valor”), lends itself particularly well to this type of punning. The first of these puns occurs as Judas is let out of his prison. Having decided to reveal the place of the cross, we are told that Judas (724a), *elnes oncyðig* (“mindful of valor”), prayed to God in Hebrew. As Elene has only just subjected him to torture through imprisonment and starvation, it is not unreasonable to read this phrase as a pun indicating that Judas is “mindful of Elene” in his decision. This reading is strengthened by a parallel phrase occurring just before Judas unearths the three crosses in the ground (827–28): *Ongan þa wilfægen æfter þam wuldres treo, / elnes anhydig, eorðan delfan* (“Then joyful and resolute of valor, he began to dig the earth after the tree of glory”). Although Judas is here driven in part by his own will, he is not yet resolute in his own belief, and is still very much influenced by Elene’s desire. The cumulative effect of these phrases is that just as Judas is in many ways a “New Stephen,” he is also shaped and influenced by Elene, a fact which Cynewulf does not allow us to forget.

Cynewulf’s use of onomastic puns, which are in the main derived from learned Latin and otherwise imported etymologies, emphasizes the expected figurative and allegorical levels of the text. They also, however, highlight at the same time the transmission of oral histories and mediating speech-acts, demonstrating precisely the extent to which Cynewulf is at the interface of orality and literacy. The same can be said (as we have seen) throughout the poem with regard to Cynewulf’s use of (for example) rhyme, echo-words, and paronomasia, all rhetorical effects that are often attributed to the influence of an inherited native oral tradition, but which are also manifestly inspired by an imported Latin and literate tradition. It was the demonstration that Cynewulf was as clearly a formulaic poet as the poet of *Beowulf* that first undermined (for some at least) Magoun’s still classic analysis (1953) of the importance of the application of “oral-formulaic” theory to Old English verse.⁹¹ It may be fitting, therefore, that in the poetry

⁹⁰ See also the apparent vernacular onomastic pun in *Elene* 1041b–42: *Him wearð ece rex, / meotud milde, god, mihta wealdend* (“To him was the eternal King, the Creator God, the wielder of powers, gracious”). The inclusion of the Latin word *rex* and the effect created through the insertion of *milde* between *meotud* and *god* encourages a pun on “God” and “good.”

⁹¹ The counter-argument with regard to Cynewulf and other translations from Latin poetry was put forward by Benson 1966.

of Cynewulf we witness the extent to which even a literate and Latinate Anglo-Saxon could choose to compose poetry using elements that can have been most effective only in oral performance.⁹²

Vassar College

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About the Authors

Margaret H. Beissinger is Associate Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Author of *The Art of the Lautar: The Epic Tradition of Romania* (Garland, 1991) and an editor of *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World* (California, 1999), she has written widely on the Balkan epic as well as Romani traditional music and musicians. She is currently working on a monograph, “*Music is our life!*” *Culture and Performance among Romanian Gypsy Musicians*.

Betsy Bowden teaches medieval literature and folklore at Rutgers University. Her books include *Performed Literature: Words and Music by Bob Dylan* (Indiana, 1982; rpt. forthcoming); *Chaucer Aloud: The Varieties of Textual Interpretation* (Pennsylvania, 1987); *Listeners' Guide to Medieval English: A Discography* (Garland, 1988); and *Eighteenth-Century Modernizations from the Canterbury Tales* (Boydell & Brewer, 1991). Her articles have appeared in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, *Translation and Literature*, *Literature in Performance*, *Journal of American Folklore*, and other periodicals.

Vladimir Guerrero has taught at Michigan State University, the University of Oslo, and the University of California, Davis. His field of interest is medieval Spanish literature, specifically oral narrative poetry and its relationship to written manifestations. He is presently working on a theory that explains oral/aural works as distinct phenomena from, although closely related to, written versions. He has published in *Calíope*, *Romansk Forum*, *Revue Romane*, and *Revista de poética medieval*.

Michael Joyce has published numerous hypertext fictions on the web and on disk. His most recent print novel, *Liam's Going*, was published in September 2002. Other books include a collection of short fiction and prose pieces, *Moral Tales and Meditations: Technological Parables and Refractions* (SUNY Press, 2001), *Othermindedness: The Emergence of Network Culture* (Michigan, 2000), and *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics* (Michigan, 1995). He is currently Professor of English at Vassar College.

John M. Hill is a professor of English Language and Literature at the U. S. Naval Academy. Recently he has written *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto, 1995) and *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic* (Florida, 2000). His publications on Chaucer include *Chaucerian Belief: The Poetics of Reverence and Delight* (Yale, 1991). Currently he is working on the question of quality in the aesthetics of Anglo-Saxon art and literature, as well as on a study of friendship, love, and politics in Chaucer and Shakespeare.

Nancy Mason Bradbury is Associate Professor of English Language and Literature at Smith College, where she teaches courses on Chaucer, women writers of the Middle Ages, Arthurian literature, and a seminar on folklore and fakedore. Her book on oral and

textual influences on Middle English romance, *Writing Aloud*, was published in 1998 by the University of Illinois Press; her current project is a study of Chaucer's reception of popular genres in *The Canterbury Tales*.

An assistant professor of English at Manchester College, *Jonathan Watson* writes on oral traditional poetics in Old and Middle English literature. His most recent publication is "The Finnsburh Skald: Kennings and Cruces in the Anglo-Saxon Fragment," which appeared in the October 2002 issue of the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. In 1993-94, he studied as a Fulbright scholar in Iceland, and received his Ph.D. from Indiana University in 1998.

Samantha Zacher is an assistant professor at Vassar College, where she teaches English and medieval literature. Her recent publications include "Sin, Syntax, and Synonyms: Rhetorical Structure and Style in Vercelli Homily X," forthcoming in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Dr. Zacher is also currently co-editor of *New Readings on the Vercelli Book*, and has completed a monograph entitled *The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Homilies*.