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'Identity through their talk':

Personal Narrative and Social Practice in Anglo-Saxon Literature

PhD

2012

Stephen Graham

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Methodology

This study is an analysis of a selection of first-person literary narratives written in pre-Conquest England. Primary texts have been chosen from the corpus of Old English poetry and Anglo-Latin colloquy tradition, with secondary, supporting texts drawn from Old English prose and Old Norse literature. Texts have been arranged by genre and in a series of separate discussions several groups have been examined for evidence of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the issue of personal identity. The theoretical background for this study arises from several different disciplines: literary criticism, autobiographical theory, narrative psychology, social constructionism, ethnography, social anthropology.

Major findings

The prominence of first-person narratives within the literary tradition suggests that Anglo-Saxons were keenly interested in the issue of identity. It was an interest in a process that might be called 'identification', which would be best understood as a specific type of meaning that arises through different forms of interaction. The examples of first-person narratives that survive demonstrate that Anglo-Saxon writers were concerned with the ways in which narrative creates the identity of a speaker and how narrative could be used to explore other methods of constructing identity. Anglo-Saxon interest in identity reflected a broader cultural interest in the potential for change within the individual, as well as an abiding concern for the welfare of the social group.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction – Personal Identity and Anglo-Saxon literature

In reading early medieval poetry we do so from within a literary culture shaped by later traditions that have associated certain modes of expression with particular poetic forms. The Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for instance, has arguably established a specific set of relations between the first-person narrative and the lyric. The Romantic Movement has been described as 'the triumph of...emotional self-expression',[1] characterized by 'a tendency to exalt the individual', or more negatively as the 'irruption of subjectivism'.[2] In reading similar narratives from an earlier period, we do so conscious that our approach to them is to some extent conditioned by more recent attitudes toward the expression of personal feeling.

Michael Alexander, in accounting for the attraction of some Old English lyrics, notes the influence of these later traditions when he explains that these poems 'appeal because they read like dramatic soliloquies of a kind familiar from Romantic literature, in which the reader can identify with the self-expression of the speaker.'[3] A variety of poems do indeed support readings that are relatively close to the intense concern for the individual that distinguishes the Romantic period, and Anglo-Saxonists have been willing to approach these poems from this perspective. Fiona and Richard Gameson, for instance, in an essay that we shall return to later, have written on the 'very self-aware individual utterances'[4] that occur in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*, two poems from the Anglo-Saxon elegy tradition that appear to demonstrate a concern with personal experience and feeling apparently for its own sake.

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[1] Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer, eds., *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), s.v. 'Romanticism'.

[2] J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), s.v. 'romanticism'.

[3] Michael Alexander, *A History of English Literature*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 32.

[4] Fiona Gameson and Richard Gameson, '*Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and the Discovery of the Individual in Old English Verse', in *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely': Papers in Honour of E.G. Stanley* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 457-74 (p. 465).

In reading Old English first-person poetic narratives, however, we are also aware that this interest in the individual is often a qualified interest. These narratives could be used as teaching tools, and narrators could be employed primarily to make a common experience accessible to a particular audience, to be the 'poetic "I" [who acts as] a representative of mankind'.[5] The basis for this function is, as Rubenstein notes, the belief that an individual's account of their experiences becomes meaningful as it illuminates a set of ideas:

> A life gains meaning not just from the actions which occur within it, but also from the ways in which it conforms to, illustrates, or helps to refine a theory about society, about psychology or about any other subject worthy of speculation.[6]

The use of first-person narrative in this way is not unique to any period or tradition, even if the ideas themselves often are. For the Anglo-Saxon poets who composed the religious elegies, for example, the ideas being elucidated were doctrinal, and the poets were adopting a technique that would also be later employed by Dante in his *Comedia*:

> For the story that Dante had to tell, both aspects of his composite 'I' were necessary: on the one hand, he must transcend the limitations of individuality in order to gain an experience of universal experience; on the other, an individual eye is necessary to perceive and to fix the matter of experience.[7]

Thus Marie Nelson, in her analysis of the Old English *Resignation*, notes that 'the ethopoeic 'I' of the elegies is an inclusive first-person'[8] and that the speaker has constructed a narrative around the use of this pronoun to make one individual's experience relevant to a larger audience. Similarly Margaret Goldsmith, in her reading of the *The Riming Poem*, interprets that narrator as an 'ethopoeic subject,'[9] an Everyman whose experience of a particular set of circumstances makes a general theological point accessible

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[5] Leo Spitzer, 'Note on the Poetic and the Empirical "I" in Medieval Authors', *Traditio*, 4 (1946), 414-22 (pp. 415-6).
[6] Jay Rubenstein, 'Biography and Autobiography in the Middle Ages', in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. by Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 22-41 (pp. 34-5).
[7] Spitzer, 'Poetic and the Empirical "I"', p. 416.
[8] Marie Nelson, 'On Resignation', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), pp. 133-47 (p. 144).
[9] Margaret E. Goldsmith, 'Corroding Treasure: A Note on the Old English *Rhyming Poem* Lines 45-50', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 14 (1967), 45-50 (p. 169).

to the reader. His story is important only insofar as it is typical, original only to the limited extent that exempla can be.

The first-person narratives of the pre-Conquest English poetic tradition were not, of course, restricted to any one genre. As well as in lyric, they also occur in heroic poetry, and make up the bulk of the vernacular riddle tradition. Nevertheless, where they do appear they confront the reader with the problem of cultural inheritance and how it affects the way we read this poetry. The present-day language of first-person narratives is replete with the problematic and nebulous terms used to describe the Romantic Movement: 'self', 'individual' 'subject'. For the reader of contemporary poetry, these terms would be a challenge to define, although in discussing works from the last two centuries there is perhaps no real urgency to do so. In discussing Old English poetry, it is necessary to acknowledge that our critical lexicon includes terms either not in use in the period (e.g. 'subject', 'individual') or in use but which did not carry the range of connotations that they do today ('self'). This is a problem that is not simply one of terminology. It is impossible to use terms like these without making implicit claims about the relevance of the concepts to which they refer. The alternatives in this situation are either to avoid these terms and concepts as much as possible, using them sparingly and in the broadest sense when necessary, or attempt to define them for ourselves in a way that both acknowledges their modernity and justifies their inclusion in a discussion of early medieval poetry.

The following study addresses this problem for one particular term ubiquitous in discussions of first-person narrative: 'identity'. It asks how best to understand what 'identity' means as it relates to first-person narratives that were produced in pre-Conquest England. The focus of the discussion will be upon examples from Old English poetry and other literatures in which individuals speak about their own lives, about things that happened to them in the past or things they intend to make happen in the future.

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This introduction establishes a broad critical background for the chapters that follow by providing a general definition of the term 'identity' appropriate for the Anglo-Saxon period, but which also concedes the fact that it is the product of a contemporary critical environment.[10] In arriving at this definition it is first necessary to examine the shortcomings of the critical debates that have taken place so far and which have used the terms mentioned above. Of particular interest here is the way in which 'self' has been understood in relation to medieval literature, which has in some cases been discussed through other terms like 'individual' and 'subject'. The limitations of this debate will demonstrate that there is need for new definitions, and a more general move away from a critical environment that has, as we shall see, been dominated by an interest in psychological development.

The Anglo-Saxon 'self'

Although several critics have written explicitly upon the 'self' as it appears in a variety of Anglo-Saxon texts[11] the term is usually discussed indirectly, often in conjunction with related concepts. Two distinct debates have taken place. One has focused upon possible evidence for an understanding of the concepts 'individual' and 'subject' in early medieval literature, an investigation that has invoked and is often reduced to a more general discussion of 'self'. The other has focused on references to the mind and soul in prose and poetry as evidence that the Anglo-Saxons had their own conception of the notion of 'self.'

The history of the 'individual' or 'subject'

The first, more general approach to the Anglo-Saxon self has grown out of the critical debate surrounding the appearance of the 'individual' or 'subject' in literature. In this

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[10] For an account of the difficulties associated with trying to establish a meaningful definition of this term for the medieval period see Douglas Gray, 'Finding Identity in the Middle Ages', in *Sixteenth-century Identities*, ed. by A. J. Piesse (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 9-33.

[11] See for example Antonina Harbus, 'The Medieval Concept of the Self in Anglo-Saxon England', *Self and Identity*, 1 (2002), 77-97; Ronald J. Ganze, 'The Medieval Sense of Self', in *Misconceptions About the Middle Ages*, ed. by Stephen J. Harris and Byron L. Grigsby (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 102-16.

particular context, the specific meaning of these terms is relatively unimportant; they are generally used to refer to characters that in their behaviour reveal a certain level of psychological sophistication and in so doing reflect an underlying cultural interest in various issues related to personal autonomy. More important is the structure of the debate itself, which rests upon the assertion that there is a precise moment in history when texts containing this kind of characterisation begin to appear and that their appearance represents a major shift in attitudes toward the self in the culture that produces them. Two distinct periods have been put forward for when this change occurs.[12] Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Belsey have argued that it takes place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries;[13] Colin Morris and Caroline Walker Bynum have argued for the twelfth century.[14]

The definition of the individual that comes into being at these moments differs for different critics, though theories generally agree on the importance of personal identity as being an autonomous creation, in some sense self-generated. Thus Greenblatt argues, 'in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.'[15] Colin Morris, speaking about the literature of the twelfth century, likewise notes an awakened interested in 'self-expression, a respect for human reason, and a delight in the varieties of the individual'.[16] In literature prior to this period he believes there is no evidence for an 'obvious confidence in man or in the individual' with the descriptions of literary characters and situations seemingly 'dictated purely by convention.'[17] Caroline Walker Bynam, while agreeing the

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[12] Gray, 'Finding Identity', p. 14.

[13] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985).

[14] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050 -1200* (London: SPCK, 1972); Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 31 (1980), 1-17.

[15] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, p. 2.

[16] Morris, *Discovery of the Individual*, p. 36.

[17] p. 8.

twelfth century was a turning point, emphasises the unprecedented interest in 'the inner landscape and the self'[18] which she believed arose with the 'discovery of the group and the "outer man"', suggesting that the period marked the beginning of a process of differentiation that recognised a disjuncture between a private and a public self.

Some Anglo-Saxonists have responded to finding themselves on the wrong side of this debate, producing what they believe to be convincing evidence for the individual in works written prior to these dates, most often by focusing upon elegies and other texts that contain speakers displaying originality or a high degree of self-awareness. The essay by Fiona and Richard Gameson has already been mentioned. In it they discuss 'emotional characterisation'[19] in two poems that they believe to be 'remarkably personal and self-aware literary expressions'.[20] Peter Lucas has similarly highlighted emotional characterisation as typical of the individual in Old English poetry, discussing it alongside descriptions of 'mental and spiritual development' and accounts of the 'solitary individual' as evidence for psychological development.[21] Ronald Ganze has recently cited the extensive emendations made by Alfred to Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* that highlight a similar interest in spiritual progress as personal development.[22]

Unfortunately this debate is characterised by vagueness and subjectivity both in the criteria laid out for recognising the individual and in the response of critics who, for the most part, have entered the debate conceding the general argument and simply asking that the date at which the individual appears be pushed back to include their own area of interest. Ganze has questioned the entire project of looking back to find a medieval self, arguing that 'there is no *single* medieval sense of self with which to refute these

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[18] Bynum, 'Twelfth Century', p. 3.
[19] Gameson and Gameson, '*Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament*', p. 457.
[20] pp. 468-9.
[21] Peter J. Lucas, 'The Language of the Loner: From Splendid Isolation to "Individual" in Early English Poetry', in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature Presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer*, ed. by Helen Conrad O'Briain, Anne Marie D'Arcy, and John Scattergood (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 102-18 (p. 105).
[22] Ganze, 'Medieval Sense of Self', pp. 108-11.

misconceptions.'[23] He also accuses proponents of this idea of being selective in their reading of texts written before the point at which they believe the individual appears, citing in particular Greenblatt's reading of Augustine, in which Ganze believes Greenblatt chose statements that supported his case and simply ignored others. Indeed, it is difficult to ignore Greenblatt's entirely reductive attitude to pre-renaissance psychology. Speaking, for example, about attitudes toward to fashioning identity, Greenblatt disposes of fifteen hundred years of human history in a couple of sentences:

> Such self-consciousness had been widespread among the elite in the classical
> world, but Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man's power to shape
> identity: 'Hands off yourself,' Augustine declared. 'Try to build up yourself, and
> you build a ruin.' This view was not the only one available in succeeding
> centuries, but it was influential, and a powerful alternative began to be fully
> articulated only in the early modern period. When in 1589 Spenser writes...[24]

Greenblatt is not an isolated case. Speaking about 'a great deal of lyric and epic poetry, especially in the Germanic languages' Morris also uses a couple of broad strokes to write off several hundred years of literature:

> Much of it may be highly relevant to the discovery of the individual, and it is
> conceivable that the troubadours received some of their most characteristic
> attitudes from predecessors unknown to us. One must surely concede that there is
> a serious gap in the evidence, and in an area where all is hypothesis it is useless
> to venture deeply.[25]

It is difficult to know what 'gap' Morris is talking about here. There exists a substantial amount of vernacular (and Latin) poetry written prior to the twelfth century that others have found extremely useful in approaching early medieval psychology.

As Nancy Partner has noted, the basic assumption underlying this debate is that 'the pre-modern era of history was populated with pre-individuals'[26] and such an assumption requires a particular historical model of mankind:

> If someone wants to tell a linear story about the development of the 'subject'...it
> will seem necessary to begin with a transition from the 'other' the totally alien or

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[23] Ganze, 'Medieval Sense of Self', p. 102.

[24] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, p. 2.

[25] Morris, *Discovery of the Individual*, p. 33.

[26] Nancy Partner, 'The Hidden Self: Psychoanalysis and the Textual Unconscious', in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. by Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 42-64 (p. 42).

> different in which this entity did not exist, indeed against which the entity in question can be defined. [27]

Thus, Catherine Belsey, on the basis of a number of morality plays, can argue that 'in the fifteenth century, the representative human being has no unifying essence' or very simply that 'he is not a subject.'[28] While this is exactly the dumb counterweight the evolved subject requires, Belsey like other proponents of this theory reveals the basic problem Anglo-Saxonists and all early medievalists face who choose to enter this debate. The only self that can exist is one that exhibits a certain level of psychological development; for there to be this level of development there must also be literary evidence for a time when it was absent. Critics working on early literature are, therefore, placed in a position of always having to defend the psychological development of characters that appear in works from their period of interest. As Ganze rightly concludes, the narcissistic logic of this approach actually precludes a satisfactory sense of the medieval self ever being found: 'we are looking to find our own sense of self reflected back at us from the texts we study, and when we don't find this, we conclude that the period lacked a sense of self.'[29]

Discussing the self through mod/mens and sawul/anima

Another very different discussion that has also dealt indirectly with the concept of self, has been an examination of Anglo-Saxon writers' many references to aspects of *homo interior* such as the mind (*mod/mens*) and the soul (*sawul/anima*). The most serious treatment of these concepts is to be found in prose works by Alcuin and Ælfric who engage patristic and classical theories of the interior man put forward by Plato and Augustine. Harbus argues that Anglo-Saxons often referred to the mind and soul 'in contexts which seemed to imply a connotation of 'self''[30] and critics such as Peter Clemoes and Malcolm Godden have

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[27] David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the "History of the Subject"', in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 177-202 (p. 196).
[28] Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, p. 18.
[29] Ganze, 'Medieval Sense of Self', p. 105.
[30] Harbus, 'Medieval Concept of the Self', p. 84.

discussed this usage and argued that the Anglo-Saxons recognised what Godden calls a 'unitary concept of the inner self.' [31] Godden has investigated both Latin and Old English texts while Clemoes has used Alcuin's *De animae ratione* to interpret the imagery of *The Seafarer*.[32] Clemoes' work highlights the importance of these terms in poetic texts, where they occur alongside references to the Old English word *self,* although, as Harbus notes, this word did not mean '"individual identity" or ego until much later'[33] and its semantic field was far more restricted than it is now.

Unlike the discussion of the individual, the investigation of particular terms makes no attempt to argue for the modernity of the Anglo-Saxons, that their psychology was in any way similar to ours. Instead it attempts to make sense of the soul and mind as they might have been understood by Anglo-Saxons, employing the modern notion of self largely to make the argument accessible to the modern reader. A useful example of this approach is to be found at the end of Godden's essay on Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the mind when he attempts to explain the status of *mod* in the elegies in Freudian terms as a 'kind of mixture of id and ego in opposition to a super-ego.'[34] He is not suggesting that Anglo-Saxons understood themselves in proto-Freudian terms but rather that, translated into our modern notions of the self, the interaction of various aspects of the Anglo-Saxon mind and soul might be understood this way.

Although this emphasis upon language is far more helpful than the general discussion of when particular concepts 'appeared' in literature, it is beset by a number of difficulties. In his article Godden casually mentions the problem of carelessness a number of times. On one occasion, while discussing Ælfric's attitude to the mind and soul, he

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[31] Malcolm Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 271-98 (p. 271).

[32] Peter Clemoes, '*Mens Absentia Cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*', in *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G.N. Garmonsway*, ed. by D.A. Pearsell and R.A. Waldron (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), pp. 62-77.

[33] Harbus, 'Medieval Concept of the Self', p. 97.

[34] Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', p. 295.

argues that Ælfric uses these terms for specific aspects of the self but adds the caveat 'when he is being careful.'[35] Elsewhere, in discussing how Anglo-Saxons might have understood an inner self (described using terms such as *mod, hyge, ferð, sefa*) and an 'outer, conscious self' in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer,* Godden admits the possibility that the poet might have 'used the "mind"-words rather casually for both levels of consciousness.'[36] He does not develop either of these points into a general critique but he casts doubt about the reliability of specific terms in providing an accurate guide to Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the concepts that underlie them.

The particular context of terms, whether they are used in poetry or prose, is also relevant. Lois Bragg has argued that Old English prose 'is a product of lettered culture',[37] while poetry has a basis in oral culture, thus suggesting a different approach to concepts which might be regarded as abstract like the mind or soul: 'only when a well-developed literacy obviates the need for memorability can subjects of discourse be abstract concepts rather than agents.' Whether or not we accept Bragg's argument, we can note with Godden that, outside of the classical and patristic traditions to which Anglo-Saxon authors were responding 'views on the mind and soul are not developed in any detail or rigour.'[38] Indeed, the use of *mod* in particular tends to fluctuate in meaning depending upon whether it appears in prose texts, where it usually refers to some aspect of the mind, or poetry where it carries the sense of emotion, volition, or courage.[39] While this movement is itself evidence for a varied understanding of the term, it is not clear why there should be this variation, and what it signifies.

Finally, in poetry, metrical considerations are also relevant. It is not possible to be sure whether a particular term was chosen because the poet was trying to represent a

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[35] Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', p. 285.
[36] p. 294.
[37] Lois Bragg, *Lyric Speakers of Old English Poetry* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), p. 26.
[38] Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', p. 286.
[39] p. 295.

particular concept, or whether the term was simply being used to meet the alliterative requirements of a poetic line.

Self and Narrative

The most fundamental difficulty presented by these two approaches, and perhaps the reason for the problems that they pose, is their essentialism. In nearly all cases, the phenomena under discussion are treated as existing outside, or having been understood to exist outside, the texts that are taken to provide evidence for their existence. Each is regarded as something that has a certain set of characteristics and writing reveals the 'essence that preexisted our effort to describe it.'[40] In these circumstances, literary texts are simply ways of leading the reader to something that would exist as an ontological fact irrespective of whether a particular author wrote about it. It holds as true, for instance, the proposition that a certain understanding of self or individual would have existed in the sixteenth century regardless of whether the texts written at the time that provide evidence for it were now lost.

The inherent contradiction of the essentialist approach, however, is that the particular concepts under discussion are only meaningful to the extent that they refer to some theoretical or linguistic system outside of themselves. In the discussion of the individual and subject, for example, phrases and images extracted from various literary works are examined to establish whether they meet an (often poorly defined) external standard of psychological development. The 'essential' qualities of these concepts make sense only insofar as they invoke an entire system of ideas and suppositions about personal psychology that lie outside the text. Similarly, the problems that beset the approach adopted by Godden and Clemoes also demonstrate how much the understanding of a particular term relies upon our understanding of conventions associated with writing and literature, which again often extend far beyond the work under discussion.

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[40] Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 99.

An entirely different and more useful approach to how self might be understood arises out of the structuralist tradition and Ferdinand de Saussure's basic understanding of language 'as a sign system or structure whose individual components can be understood only in relation to each other and to the system as a whole rather than to an external "reality".'[41] Through the discipline of semiology that this basic theoretical idea inspired all social phenomena come to be understood as arising through one form of interaction or another:

> Elementary cultural phenomena, like the elements of language in Saussure's expositions, are not objective facts identifiable by their inherent properties, but purely 'relational' entities; that is, their identity as signs is given to them by their relationships of differences from, and binary oppositions to, other elements within the cultural system.[42]

Within this tradition individuals 'are seen as the product of relationships, rather than as the authors of social realities.'[43] This, in turn, leads to conceptions of the self that are distinguished by the importance placed upon others and their formative role in constructing and maintaining an individual's sense of who they are:

> The self is…altogether individual *and* intrinsically interactional. It arises and is maintained within the internal-external dialectic of identification. It draws upon the environment of people and things for its content. Even though it is the most individualized of identities - we might call it customized - selfhood is absolutely interactional. It depends for its ongoing security upon the validation of others, in its initial emergence and in the dialectic of continuing identification.[44]

As this definition suggests, while this approach to the concept of self emphasises the group, it is not a complete rejection of the idea that there is a core nucleus to the human being. As Bruner notes, we can have it both ways: 'the Self, then, like any other aspect of human nature, stands both as a guardian of permanence and as a barometer responding to the local cultural weather.'[45] In embracing this kind of the definition we are not entirely dismissing the essentialist position, but instead are recognising and moving our attention

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[41] Cuddon, *Literary Terms*, s.v. 'structuralism'.

[42] M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th edn (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), s.v. 'structuralist criticism'.

[43] John Scott and Gordon Marshall, eds., *A Dictionary of Sociology*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v. 'structuralism'.

[44] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3rd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 71.

[45] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. 110.

onto the role that others play in allowing individuals to understand themselves and their behaviour.

In his discussion of the genealogy of ideas about the self, Bruner returns repeatedly to the term 'distributed'[46] to describe the self that arises from this tradition, one that is engaged and which cannot be understood apart from social interaction. He identifies personal narrative as providing a way of accounting for the cumulative effects of such interaction when he recollects an incident in which he describes what it sounded like listening to someone relate their past experiences: 'very soon we discovered that we were listening to people in the act of *constructing* a longitudinal version of Self'.[47] The appropriateness of first-person narrative for capturing this conception of self is a point also stressed by Ganze, who sees in this type of narrative a way of discussing the self that caters to this emphasis upon others, and which thus has the potential to move beyond the limiting concern with psychological development characteristic of some of the approaches described above:

> The narrative self would appear to answer the concerns of social constructionists, as few would argue that an individual can create his or her own narrative from the whole cloth; the narrative self is always 'composed' in conjunction with others. The narrative self also serves to counter objections raised by those who would deny a sense of self to any period.[48]

As Ganze's remarks indicate, the very general emphasis upon interaction and the self that is created through such interaction has also found its way into modern studies of narrative. Theorists of autobiography have argued, again contrary to an earlier essentialist tradition, that the self is not something that is simply revealed in a text. In their discussion of first-person narratives, Sidone Smith and Julian Watson, for example, have argued that when an individual speaks about the past 'the storytelling and the self constituted by it are

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[46] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, pp. 106-38. Bruner's use of this term becomes the basis for a discussion of this construal of identity in Margaret Wetherell and Janet Maybin, 'The Distributed Self: A Social Constructionist Perspective', in *Understanding the Self*, ed. by Richard Stevens (London: Sage, 1976), pp. 219-79.
[47] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. 120.
[48] Ganze, 'Medieval Sense of Self', p. 113.

narrative constructions of identity.'[49] These accounts are not revelatory but performative; rather than giving an account of the narrator's self, each 'enacts the "self" it claims has given rise to the "I"'. Daniel Dennett has similarly spoken about how the process of telling stories about oneself can be understood to create that self:

> Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source...strings or streams of narrative issue forth *as if* from a single source...their effect on any audience is to encourage them to (try to) posit a unified agent whose words they are, about whom they are: in short, to posit a *centre of narrative gravity.*[50]

This type of self, this 'centre of narrative gravity', is one which is 'discursively produced...by the use of the first-person pronoun,'[51] created out of what might be called 'a narratively structured life.'[52] It is not something that is uncovered within a text but rather something that is a product of it.

As can be seen, structuralism provides an approach to the concept of self that draws together different instances of the phenomena in a very similar way. The same theoretical framework provides sociologists and narratologists with a way of looking at the issue from a shared perspective that regards the self as arising out of some form of interaction, whether that is between elements of a narrative, or social interaction between individuals. For a study of literature this approach is particularly useful because it places the literary text at the centre of the process. Instead of seeing first-person narrative as an incidental feature that just happens to be the route to discovering the self that underlies the text, narrative is instrumental in the way that the self comes into being.

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[49] Sidone Smith and Julian Watson, 'The Trouble with Autobiography: Cautionary Notes for Narrative Theorists', in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 356-71 (p. 357).
[50] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 418.
[51] Rom Harre and Grant Gillett, *The Discursive Mind* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 108.
[52] Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 107.

Identity

Thus far we have examined critical discussions of self and demonstrated some their shortcomings. As we have seen, approaching this concept as relational both addresses the problems posed by the essentialist methods, and provides a uniform basis for discussing it as it operates both in the real world and in literature. In order to develop and broaden the implications of this argument, we turn to the term that will be the focus both of the rest of the introduction and the study itself.

Unlike 'self', 'identity' was not a term used by the Anglo-Saxons. It is a term that came into popular usage during the last century[53] and is generally characterised as 'always involv[ing] both sameness and difference'.[54] The term is arguably so broad, and is often used so loosely, that it can become the lowest common denominator in discussions of personal experience. Like the concept of self, the notion of identity is one that can also be viewed in terms of psychological development, with critics willing to see it as an issue that would not have been of interest for people at an earlier time. This is the basis of Stephen Greenblatt's argument about the Renaissance, and it is an idea that is also found among modern sociologists:

> 'Identity' is a keyword of contemporary society and a central focus of social psychological theorizing and research. At earlier historical moments, identity was not so much an issue; when societies were more stable, identity was to a great extent assigned, rather than selected or adopted. In current times, however, the concept of identity carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is, together with an often overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social contexts - changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities are embedded and in the societal structures and practices in which those networks are themselves embedded.[55]

There is no evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period of writers drawing together incidents in literature according to how those incidents comment upon an abstract theoretical category called 'identity'. The term was never the subject of explicit critical discourse. However, in

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[53] Scott and Marshall, eds., *A Dictionary of Sociology*, s.v. 'identity'.
[54] Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Brian S. Turner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th edn (London: Penguin, 2006), s.v. 'identity'.
[55] Judith A. Howard, 'Social Psychology of Identities', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 26 (2000), 367-93 (pp. 367-8).

all its variety, the literature of the Anglo-Saxons contains so many different images of groups, social structures, and practices, that it is difficult to argue that Anglo-Saxon writers and audiences were not in some way dealing the thematic problem of 'who one is'. As we have said, for the purposes of this study, 'who one is' is not an essentialist question; it is not concerned with unveiling some hidden truth about an individual, but rather with understanding how individuals are constituted by various types of interaction.

Identity and Self

What then is the relationship between the self that arises from narrative and identity? There are many qualifiers that can be attached to the term identity – personal identity, narrative identity, social identity, ethnic identity, and group identity. Some of these qualifiers can also be used to preface the term self, though most cannot because they are either redundant (personal self) or inappropriate (ethnic self, group self). This difference is testament to the extent that self is more narrowly associated with the individual. As noted above, Jenkins speaks about the self as 'the most individualized of identities' and 'selfhood as a primary identity'[56] to be distinguished from other identities that might arise from membership of a group, or gender, or various other factors. For the purposes of this study, there is little difference to how the term identity is applied to the individual. The difference, for example, between the 'narrative construction of self' and the 'narrative construction of [personal] identity' is largely one of perspective. 'Self' is something that arises for the individual; 'identity' is something that is perceived by an external observer.

Identity is preferred here because not only can it be used to discuss the individual, but it can also be usefully applied to the group. If we take a hypothetical example of a written first-person narrative in which a narrator recalls a set of events that have occurred in the past, we will see that there are several ways in which a narrative can be said to produce 'identity':

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[56] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 70.

a) Narrative selfhood or narrative identity is something that arises for the narrator through the act of narration itself, as the narrator considers and identifies with those experiences.

b) The reader of the narrative discovers the identity of the narrator in a different way, through an assessment of the various statements made by the narrator, not only their content, but also the way in which the narrator speaks about them. As Bruner notes, 'a narrative, after all, is not just a plot, a *fabula*, but a way of telling, a *sjuzet*.'[57]

c) Finally, as we have already noted, personal narratives will generally include a record of different relationships that may exist between the narrator and other individuals or objects. As such they will often include descriptions of social practices or activities that may in themselves be considered as identity-constituting, both for the group and the individual. In such cases we are justified in speaking not only of narrative identity, but also personal and group identity.

In terms of the approaches to narrative that will be taken in this study, the above examples may be taken as the three main areas of concern. As with the definition of self our interest here is less with a state of being than a process of interaction. Jenkins emphasises the importance of seeing identity in such a way by repeatedly using the term 'identification' to stress that identity is not something that is or is not, but rather something that happens:

> Much writing about identity treats it as some*thing* that simply *is*. Careless reification of this kind pays insufficient attention to how identification works or is done, to process and reflexivity, to the social construction of identity in interaction and institutionally. Identity can only be understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming'[58]

Thus, in our examination of first-person narratives we are treating them as the means by which identity arises, or identification happens, either through the interaction of narrative

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[57] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. 123.
[58] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 17.

elements, through the interaction of narrator and reader, or through accounts of various social practices contained within the narrative itself.

Individual and Group

In defining self and identity as terms with a strong social aspect this study argues for the importance of society to Anglo-Saxons in their conception of themselves, their lives, and behaviour. The surviving Old English poetic tradition exhibits a complex attitude toward the relationship between individual and group. The corpus is dominated by two genres that, superficially at least, demonstrate very different attitudes toward this relationship. The elegies, for instance, are characterised by deep anxiety for the individual who is separated from others. In his discussion of the fate of the exiled characters that appear in this genre, Edward Irving uses the images of broken walls and fallen masonry found in both *The Wanderer* and *The Ruin* to create an analogy that neatly characterises the devastating sense of loss experienced by those set apart from their society:

> It is natural to see the individual who has been stripped of these relationships,
> who no longer has a social role, as something like a single stone fallen from a
> wall...No longer locked into a meaningful place in the intricate pattern of
> relationships, the exile wanders halfway between life and death, surrounded by
> cold and darkness, in lonely places like ships and fens and caves and islands.[59]

This despair at being apart from others is very different from certain thematic elements of heroic poetry, which celebrated individuals who were in some sense different, or separate, from the rest of group. To be a hero was to be isolated from the everyday world of the average man, and in *Beowulf*, for example, the hero is repeatedly described using terms that stress his separateness from those around him. The poet refers to him as the best of men (*secg betsta*, ll. 947, 1759),[60] using a mode of description that is part of a

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[59] Edward B. Irving Jr., 'Image and Meaning in the Elegies', in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. by Robert P. Creed (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967), pp. 153-66 (p. 157).
[60] R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this study are my own. Where necessary, MSS abbreviations have been silently expanded and editorial brackets marking reconstructed MSS sections have been removed.

larger 'culture of the superlative' that dominates the entire poem.[61] The individuals or objects that populate the poem are all described as exemplary of their particular kind: Heorot is the best of halls (*husa selest*, ll.146, 285, 658, 935; *reced selesta*, l. 412); Beowulf's sword is the 'choicest of irons' (*irena cyst*, l. 673); his corselet is the 'best of war-garments' (*beaduscruda betst*, l. 453). These descriptions are less a comment on the individuals or the objects themselves than a way of isolating them from their environment, and throwing them into relief. Thus the hall built by Beowulf in Geatland is, like Hrothgar's hall, described as being the 'best of halls' (*bolda selest*, l. 2326); the giant sword that Beowulf recovers from Grendel's mother's lair is, like his original sword, described as the 'choicest of irons' (*irena cyst*, l. 1697).

This use of superlatives in this way demonstrates the degree to which the heroic world of Beowulf is one that has 'incorporate[d] the hyperbolic into its frame of normality'.[62] In describing a person or thing as 'surpassing all others of the class'[63] the poet uses the superlative primarily as a rhetorical device to stress the degree of difference between something and all other examples of its kind, its 'separateness'[64] from the group. Thus while in one genre being set apart from the rest of the community is considered the greatest misfortune, in the other it is incorporated into the most basic descriptions of individuals and the world they inhabit; separateness is synonymous with excellence.

The above examples do not reflect the only attitudes to the relationship between individual and group in Anglo-Saxon literature, or indeed even within the genres themselves. There was no consistent attitude toward the relationship between individuals and the communities of which they were part – at times the warm anonymity of the group represented an important source of comfort; at other times it was necessary for the

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[61] For a review of the use of the superlative in *Beowulf* see A. Leslie Harris, 'Litotes and Superlative in *Beowulf*', *English Studies*, 69 (1988), 1-11 (pp. 8-11).

[62] p. 9.

[63] OED, s.v. 'superlative', B.2 (*OED Online* <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 22 October 2011]).

[64] Harris, 'Litotes and Superlative', p. 1.

individual to stand apart. A central concern throughout this study will be how first-person narratives and the issue of identity make sense of and comment upon this relationship, how talking about oneself could be both concerned with establishing the identity of the individual and at the same time have a have a wider social purpose.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to understand how Anglo-Saxons approached the issue of identity through an examination of the first-person narratives that appear in Anglo-Saxon literature. By focusing upon the process by which identity 'happens' this study will uncouple this issue from critical associations that have hitherto required a culture that displays any interest in the issues of identity or self to be also concerned with issues related to the autonomy of the individual. As we have defined the term, it is possible to usefully discuss identity without becoming pre-occupied with a kind of psychological relativism that regards the question in purely developmental terms, even if comparisons between 'then and now' cannot wholly be avoided. This study will suggest that Anglo-Saxons were interested in how identification occurs, in how, as Howard says, speakers 'actively produce identity through their talk'.[65] As will be demonstrated, Anglo-Saxons understood the importance of interaction, the provisional nature of narratives and social intercourse, the way in which both could make and remake not only the identity of the individual but also the identity of the group. It will be shown that Anglo-Saxons had a practical, living knowledge of the generative potential of social and linguistic structures.

In each of the chapters that follow, we examine texts that provide evidence of these interests. The study consists of four individual chapters. The first three examine a range of poetic texts and genres, while the fourth examines the developmental importance of talking about oneself in the Anglo-Saxon classroom. The texts that have been chosen are all first-person narratives. In each group of texts, identity is produced through the type of

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[65] Howard, 'Social Psychology of Identities', p. 372.

interaction discussed above and each not only demonstrates the role of the community in the construction of identity, but also the ways in which first-person narratives could fulfil a number of socially useful functions.

The first chapter establishes the basic role of the first-person narrative in creating identity by examining a selection of Exeter Book Riddles. It looks in detail at the techniques used by the authors of the first-person riddles to produce fictional speakers who talked about their past. It examines how identity is fashioned in these texts and how Anglo-Saxon authors used the process of identification both as a way of entertaining readers and compelling them to think more generally about how their assumptions conditioned their perception of the world around them.

The second chapter considers the social nature of autobiographical narratives in more detail, exploring how the identity that arises through the process of narration can also contain and accommodate other ways of construing identity that appear to be more inclusive and action-oriented. This will be undertaken using a selection of texts from the elegy tradition, a genre that has historically been the most common site for discussions of identity in Anglo-Saxon literature. Instead of focusing upon the modernity of the speakers who appear in these poems, this chapter will examine the importance these texts place upon social interaction, how it was believed to define personal identity, and how it could also be a cause for concern.

The third chapter examines a genre of Old English literature concerned with celebrating the individual and which can often appear to confirm the apparent insularity and self-interest that can be associated with first-person narratives. The discussion focuses upon boast-speeches that appear in heroic literature, particularly those that appear in *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*, though analogous texts will be also considered from the Old Norse tradition, a tradition which includes a far greater number, and far more detailed examples of this kind of speech. In Old English, boast-speeches tended to be prefaced with

elaborate accounts of past achievements. Such speeches, while they valorise the individual and celebrate their previous successes, do so for reasons that are less concerned with the individual than the welfare of the community.

The final chapter moves away from the discussion of poetic narratives to consider the role played by first-person narratives in the lives of those who kept and copied the manuscripts in which Old English poems appear. It considers the use of these narratives as pedagogical aids in teaching Latin to monastic oblates in the late Anglo-Saxon classroom through an examination of the Anglo-Latin colloquies of Ælfric of Eynsham and his pupil Ælfric Bata. It returns to a theme initially dealt with in the discussion of the first-person riddles, examining how personal narratives were used not only to convey linguistic information but also to invite students to consider their attitudes to society, in particular to other social groups and the collective ideals upon which the monastic vocation was based.

Chapter 1 - The Exeter Book Riddles: Identity and First-Person Narratives

As it relates to first-person narratives, the term 'identity' can have several meanings depending upon whether it is discussed with reference to the internal structure of narrative or with the performance of that narrative through an oral or written text. For the narrator, remembering is experienced as an interior, private act, and a sense of personal identity arises through the relationship between the narrator who recalls the past and the narrator who existed in it. The relationship is one of correspondence and difference.

According to one definition of the term, identity can mean 'the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances.'[1] As it relates to the personal psychology of the narrator, this sense of identity is located in consciousness, as John Locke notes:

> As far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that *Person*; it is the same *self* now it was then; and 'tis by the same *self* with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done.[2]

Identity is thus experienced as a continuity of consciousness that ranges over a succession of temporal states and allows a narrator to look back over their past and view it as their own. This identification with what took place at other times arguably provides the ground of first-person narratives and allows a narrator to say about a set of experiences 'they are mine'.

At the same time, however, for the narrator to speak about those experiences requires some separation between the consciousness that extends into the past and the consciousness that is the site of the narrative process. The construction of a self-narrative requires a basic division within the narrator's consciousness 'between self and nonself'.[3]

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[1] OED, s.v. 'identity', 2.a.
[2] Peter H. Nidditch, ed., *John Locke: An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 335.
[3] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, p. 114.

As William James put it, out of the 'stream of consciousness' there must be a 'certain portion of the stream abstracted from the rest'.[4]

This is a sense of exclusivity that is apparent in another part of the same OED definition of identity: 'the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else.' This statement construes identity as a person's or object's capacity to be distinguished from its environment, for it to be observed (or to observe) empirically. It can be regarded as referring both to an external and, in the case of consciousness, an internal state. In psychological terms it refers to the ability to adopt a 'reflexive stance'[5] and to regard oneself as separate from the world and the earlier events of one's life. As it relates to narrative, 'identity' must, therefore, also refer solely to the individual who speaks, apart from and in contradistinction to the earlier events or incarnations of the self that are the subject of the narrative.

For the narrator, then, identity is located both in the continuity of consciousness extended beyond the present and at the same time the narrator at the moment of recollection who exists solely in the 'now' and who regards himself as disconnected from what he describes. It is a contradictory model of identity whose incongruous nature has been concisely described by Francis Hart:

> Effective access to a recollected self or its 'versions' begins in a discontinuity of
> identity or being which permits past selves to be seen as distinct realities. Yet
> only a continuity of identity or being makes the autobiographical act or purpose
> meaningful.[6]

To the extent that narratives are performed before others, either through written accounts or oral performance, the identity of a narrator is also something that arises in the mind of the audience. In these circumstances the construction of identity is a social

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[4] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols (New York: Dover Publications, 1890; repr. 1950), I, p. 297.
[5] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 130.
[6] Francis R. Hart, 'Note for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography', *New Literary History*, 1 (1970), 485-511 (p. 500); see also Lawrence Rothfield, 'Autobiography and Perspective in The *Confessions* of St. Augustine', *Comparative Literature*, 33 (1981), 209-23 (p. 211-2).

production between narrator and the person who reads or listens to the narrative, a process in which the events being recalled are but one element.

The use of narrative to recount past experiences necessarily entails 'the conversion of a unique lived experience into the symbolic, shared order of a language.' [7] Through this conversion the narrator attributes meaning to those experiences: 'the very attempt to present human life in the form of a narrative will necessarily transform it. The storyteller will inevitably impose an order on the life events they did not possess while they were lived.'[8] Guiding this transformation are the conventions and attitudes that govern the form of first-person narratives in a particular society. These are 'cultural rules for self-accounting'[9] that are shared by communities and determine the ways in which 'a flow of activity' can be given a 'socially intelligible and legitimate formulation.'[10] As Gergen notes, 'whatever the past might have been, its present rendering must be poured into the mold set by the cultural rules of narrative.'[11]

Narratives are generally organised around an end-point that has some significance for the culture within which the narrative is produced and which gives the narrative 'its direction and implies its termination.' It is the choice of this endpoint that determines which events are recalled and the way in which they are represented. Ronald Ganze, for example, speaking of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, notes that the content of Augustine's narrative is chosen to convey the ultimate purpose of that narrative:

> As Augustine searches through his memory for himself, he deliberately chooses
> from what he finds there those incidents that best reveal the working of God's
> providence within his life – those incidents that help him construct the narrative

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[7] John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 24-5.

[8] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, p. 112.

[9] Kenneth J. Gergen, 'Mind, Text, and Society: Self-memory in Social Context', in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, ed. by Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 78-104 (p. 90).

[10] John Shotter, 'The Social Construction of Remembering and Forgetting', in *Collective Remembering*, ed. by David Middleton and Derek Edwards (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 120-38 (p. 132).

[11] Gergen, 'Mind, Text, and Society', p. 91.

that ends in the 'minor' *telos* of his conversion to Orthodox Christianity and the
'major' *telos* that will be his reunion with God in eternity.[12]

A narrative that is written around a culturally significant endpoint privileges certain details over others and thus 'creates gaps, distortions, contradictions and other incoherences'[13] in the life of the teller. As it does so it 'arranges new orders and creates new coherences' and creates a specific, culturally significant impression of the narrator based upon 'implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be – and, of course, shouldn't be.'[14]

Due to this selectivity, the reader experiences the narrator not as an individual but as a 'character' who is 'known only through textual descriptions or inferences based on those descriptions.'[15] In a practical sense, when reading a first-person narrative, the identity of this narrator-as-character arises as the reader makes sense of these 'textual descriptions', both their internal content and the relationships between them. These statements are organised around instances of the first-person pronoun, which, as Emile Benveniste notes, are self-referential but only insofar as they refer to the narrative as a whole:

> What does *I* refer to? To something very peculiar which is exclusively linguistic:
> *I* refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it
> designates the speaker.[16]

The reader makes sense of the narrator's identity through the cumulative effect of each of the instances of the first-person pronoun that occur within a particular narrative. All terms and phrases that appear in a narrator's self-referential statements ultimately take their meaning from their relationship to the first-person pronoun, which act as Dennett's 'centre[s] of narrative gravity', organising and indexing the matter of the narrative. Many

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[12] Ganze, 'Medieval Sense of Self', p. 107.
[13] Jens Brockmeier, 'Remembering and Forgetting: Narrative as Cultural Memory', *Culture & Psychology*, 8 (2002), 15-43 (p. 22).
[14] Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 65.
[15] Uri Margolin, 'Character', in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. by David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 66-79 (p. 68).
[16] Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 226.

of these statements will include references to activities and behaviours that are not unique to the narrator but are common or universal within particular societies, exhibiting a narrator's 'immersion in cultural practices'[17] which further attests to the role of society in construction of the narrator's identity.

When speaking of identity as it relates to first-person narrative, therefore, it can be argued that the narrator's identity lies not only in the relationship between the narrator's present and his past, but also in the relationship between the narrator, his audience, and the cultural attitudes and practices that both share. Although the narrator's own perception of their identity arises from an identification with the person who took part in events that occurred in the past, in reading a first-person narrative, the reader's perception of a narrator's identity derives principally from the aggregation of the various instances of the first-person pronoun within the narrative. As Harré and Gillett put it: 'each individual's structure of consciousness...will appear in the way we converse...in the way 'I' indexes what is said with the various positions and locations of the speaker.'[18] Furthermore, this assembling of various bits of information by the reader about the activities and behaviours in which the narrator has engaged is restricted by a particular culture's conventions regarding what is and what is not a fit subject for narrative. In this sense, the creation of a narrator's identity within a literary text can be seen as a collaborative effort to which both narrator and reader contribute. Not only do such narratives include accounts of cultural practices, insofar as it requires the participation of the reader, it can also be said that this type of 'autobiographical remembering is a cultural practice.'[19]

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[17] Gergen, 'Mind, Text, and Society', p. 89.
[18] Harre and Gillett, *Discursive Mind*, p. 108.
[19] Qi Wang and Jens Brockmeier, 'Autobiographical Remembering as Cultural Practice: Understanding the Interplay between Memory, Self and Culture', *Culture & Psychology,* 8 (2002), 45-64 (p. 47).

Identity and First-Person Riddles

It might be argued that when reading most literary texts, the reader's contribution to the creation of the narrator's identity is largely an unconscious process. The reader is not usually aware they are engaged in a joint venture with the narrator in assigning identity to the latter. However, there are certain genres which require the reader to be mindful of their participation in this process. Riddles, for example, particularly those that take the form of first-person narratives, make the issue of the narrator's identity the subject of the narrative, and compel the reader to think about the relationship between the two aspects of identity discussed above, between the narrator's own relationship to the events he speaks about and the act of narration through which the narrator's recollections are communicated to the reader. In first-person riddles the reader is usually given an account of experiences by a narrator that is often an inanimate object. The reader is then asked to discover in what way those experiences relate to that narrator. The 'play' of the riddle consists of arranging those experiences in such a way that they only obliquely point to the narrator's identity. In attempting to discover their significance, the reader is forced to resort to their own knowledge of the attitudes and assumptions that underlie both their own society and human experience in general, and which they share with the narrator. In effect, the first-person riddle is a transactional game in which the speaker tells the reader that they will reveal their identity only when the reader reveals what they know about their own world.

The following discussion examines that relationship as it operates in the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book, using a selection of first-person riddles. It is structured as an examination of the reader's experience as they attempt to interpret the information provided by the narrator and discover the narrator's identity. As will be shown, the vernacular riddle tradition demonstrates that Anglo-Saxon attitudes to narrative identity reflect a deep understanding of the complexities involved in generating identity through the use of narrative. Indeed, if we were to judge cultural understanding of this issue based

solely on the evidence of the riddle genre it would seem that the poet or poets responsible for the riddles of the Exeter Book had a more developed sense of how narrative can give rise to personal identity than earlier writers who composed riddles in Anglo-Latin and who often provided inspiration for the vernacular tradition. As we shall see, writers working in Old English produced narrators of greater psychological depth who more credibly imitated human narrators surveying their past life and deriving a sense of identity from it. Their improvements on the Latin tradition further suggest that vernacular poets were not simply mimicking exemplars but both actively understood and were interested in the ways in which narrative can give rise to personal identity. Significantly, their understanding of identity was of something that arises out of a cooperative process, of something that is both exclusive and, paradoxically, that is agreed with others.

The discussion begins with a brief introduction of the main texts that will be examined, before looking at the way in which the poet establishes the terms of the riddle-game. The Exeter-poet created sympathetic, credible narrators who invited the reader to engage with the situations described in their narratives; in doing so, readers got to view their world from the vantage point of a physical object, an unfamiliar perspective from which they could see everyday situations and social relationships in an entirely new way. The Exeter-poet developed that credibility by the use of rhetorical devices which provided the basis for strange and often shocking narrative detail, intriguing descriptions that needed to be resolved to recover the identity of the disguised narrator. Through this process the reader was compelled to consider their own expectations about physical and social reality. The discussion concludes with an examination of the role of cultural knowledge in the solution of riddles, how a concern for what was shared demonstrates the degree to which Anglo-Saxons could see personal identity as something that arises collaboratively. To begin, however, we look at the genre of the first-person riddle.

The first-person riddle is a common poetic form within the pre-Conquest English riddle tradition. For poets writing in Anglo-Latin it was an almost universal feature of the genre. The collective *enigmata* of Aldhelm, Tatwine, Boniface, and Eusebius, comprise two hundred and ten texts.[20] Of these, only one includes a speaker who is not also the subject of the riddle.[21] First-person riddles are less common in vernacular poetry, although they still make up a majority of the riddle-texts found in the Exeter Book. Of the ninety-two riddles that are legible,[22] forty-nine are in the first-person. [23] Even among the forty-three riddles that describe a subject in the third-person, a narrator is present; twenty-nine use a framing device in which a speaker claims to have seen, heard about, or know about the subject.[24] In only fourteen is there no discernible presence of a narrator.[25]

Not all first-person riddles include references to the narrator's past. Twenty-three riddles include some mention of previous events. Nine contain a brief allusion to them,[26] while fourteen offer a more detailed account of the development of the narrator from another, earlier state.[27] The three riddles that will be the focus of this discussion contain examples from both groups of riddle-texts that reference the past. The narrators of these riddles are all physical objects that recall past events, events that are significant in the narrator's understanding of their own identity. Each narrator demonstrates that continuity of consciousness which, as has been suggested, forms the ground of first-person narratives. As physical objects, the events that are recalled are often social activities or practices,

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[20] These texts appear in Maria de Marco, ed., *Tatuini Opera Omnia*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 133 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1968); see also Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier, eds., *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985).

[21] Tatwine, XXX *Sword and Sheath*.

[22] There are ninety-six riddles in all, according to numbering system used in George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936). Four of these are heavily damaged (78, 82, 89, 94); every line is either wholly or partially illegible. Although some critics have attempted to provide solutions for these texts, they will not be discussed further.

[23] 1-12, 14-8, 20-1, 23-7, 30a, 35, 40, 30b, 60-3, 65-6, 71-4, 77, 79-81, 83, 85, 88, 91-3, 95

[24] 13, 19, 29, 31-2, 34, 36-8, 42-3, 45, 47-9, 51-3, 55-6, 58-9, 64, 67-8, 75-6, 87, 90

[25] 22, 28, 33, 39, 41, 44, 46, 50, 54, 57, 69-70, 84, 86.

[26] 5-6, 14, 18, 23, 27, 65, 71, 85

[27] 9, 10, 26, 35, 40, 60, 72-4, 77, 83, 88, 92-3

which are not necessarily unique to the narrator but which are distinct in their arrangement, and it is the record of these social practices that comprises the series of textual descriptions that understood together make it possible for the reader to configure the narrator's identity.

Exeter Riddles 26 (Book), 14 (Horn), 5 (Shield)

The first of the riddles to be discussed is Exeter Riddle 26, which is solved as either a 'book' or 'bible'.[28] This riddle is the account of the book making process that takes the form of a personal narrative in which a book speaks about its past. The first half of the narrative is largely linear: each stage of it is a different stage in the book making process. The book recounts one experience after another, until it reaches its current state and describes how beneficial it can be to those who use it:

> Mec feonda sum   feore besnyþede,
> woruldstrenga binom,   wætte siþþan,
> dyfde on wætre,   dyde eft þonan,
> sette on sunnan,   þær ic swiþe beleas
> herum þam þe ic hæfde.   Heard mec siþþan
> snað seaxses ecg,   sindrum begrunden;
> fingras feoldan,   ond mec fugles wyn
> geond speddropum   spyrede geneahhe,
> ofer brunne brerd,   beamtelge swealg,
> streames dæle,   stop eft on mec,
> siþade sweartlast.   Mec siþþan wrah
> hæleð hleobordum,   hyde beþenede,
> gierede mec mid golde;   forþon me gliwedon
> wrætlic weorc smiþa,   wire bifongen.
> Nu þa gereno   ond se reada telg
> ond þa wuldorgesteald   wide mære
> dryhtfolca helm,   nales dol wite.
> Gif min bearn wera   brucan willað,
> hy beoð þy gesundran   ond þy sigefæstran,
> heortum þy hwætran   ond þy hygebliþran,
> ferþe þy frodran,   habbaþ freonda þy ma,
> swæsra ond gesibbra,   soþra ond godra,
> tilra ond getreowra,   þa hyra tyr ond ead
> estum ycað   ond hy arstafum
> lissum bilecgað   ond hi lufan fæþmum
> fæste clyppað.   Frige hwæt ic hatte,
> niþum to nytte.   Nama min is mære,
> hæleþum gifre   ond halig sylf.[29]

> A certain enemy deprived me of life, took my worldly strength, afterward dipped
> me in water, then removed me again set me in sun where I completely lost the

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[28] For a comprehensive discussion of the various solutions that have been proposed for each of the Exeter Book riddles see Craig Williamson, ed., *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 124-402.

[29] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 193-4.

hair that I had. Afterwards a sharp sword edge cut me, ground out my impurities; fingers folded me and the bird's joy sprinkled useful drops, made a track often over the bright border, it absorbed wood ink, a portion of liquid, stopped again on me, travelled its black path. Afterward a man covered me with boards, stretched a hide over me adorned me with gold, thus I am ornamented with the artistic work of the smiths, enveloped in filigree. Now the ornaments and the red dye and the glorious possessions are celebrated widely as the Protector of the people and the punishment of the folly no less. If the sons of men will use me they will be healthier and more sure of victory; their hearts will be bolder, and happier in their thoughts, wiser in mind; they will have more friends, dear ones and relatives - true and good, kind and faithful - who will bountifully increase their honour and good fortune, and will helpfully envelop them with joy and clasp them fast in the embrace of love. Ask what I am, useful to men. My name is famous, beneficial to men and holy myself.

In this riddle the animal skin becomes a book through human activity, and gains a function that improves the lives of others. Like human narrators recounting the effects of past events upon their current sense of self, this book is literally a product of the experiences that have shaped it. This narrative, although ostensibly about a single object, is also in a very general sense about relationships, about how the work of craftsmen affects the lives of the people who use the objects they create.

Discovering the identity of a riddle-subject by understanding its social function is also a feature of first-person riddles where narrators outline how they have operated and continue to operate in a variety of social environments. Riddle 14, for instance, is usually solved as an 'aurochs horn'. The horn's account of itself focuses on the many functions it has for various members of society, though like the book it begins its narrative by explaining its origins, how it came to be decorated with precious metals and how it originally served a far more brutal purpose:

Ic wæs wæpenwiga.   Nu mec wlonc þeceð
geong hagostealdmon   golde ond sylfore,
woum wirbogum.   Hwilum weras cyssað,
hwilum ic to hilde   hleoþre bonne
wilgehleþan,   hwilum wycg byreþ
mec ofer mearce,   hwilum merehengest
fereð ofer flodas   frætwum beorhtne,
hwilum mægða sum   minne gefylleð
bosm beaghroden;   hwilum ic bordum sceal,
heard, heafodleas,   behlyþed licgan,
hwilum hongige   hyrstum frætwed,
wlitig on wage,   þær weras drincað,
freolic fyrdsceorp.   Hwilum folcwigan
on wicge wegað,   þonne ic winde sceal
sincfag swelgan   of sumes bosme;

32

> hwilum ic gereordum   rincas laðige
> wlonce to wine;   hwilum wraþum sceal
> stefne minre   forstolen hreddan,
> flyman feondsceaþan.   Frige hwæt ic hatte.[30]

> I was a warrior's weapon. Now a proud young bachelor covers me with gold and
> silver, with twisted wirework. Sometimes men kiss me, sometimes I noisily
> summon intimate companions to battle; sometimes a horse carries me over the
> land; sometimes a sea horse bears me, bright with treasure, over the sea;
> sometimes a ring adorned woman fills my bosom; sometimes I must lie on
> boards, hard, headless, deprived of my coverings; sometimes I hang adorned
> with treasure, splendid on the wall where men drink, a beautiful war ornament;
> sometimes warriors carry me on a horse, then I must absorb the breath from
> someone's bosom sometimes with my voice I must summon proud men to wine;
> sometimes with my voice I protect treasures from being stolen, put thieves to
> flight. Ask what I am.

Unlike the book, the horn in this riddle provides most of the information required to solve the riddle by discussing events that while they began in the past continue to take place in the present. Whereas the book describes a series of practices that occur in sequence, the horn describes a variety of events and practices related to each other only because the narrator is present in all of them. Although the arrangement is different the identity that the reader is trying to discover is still one that connects various social practices and situations that initially appear unrelated but are actually connected in various ways.

Finally, there is a type of first-person riddle that creates a metaphorical link between certain types of individuals and physical objects.[31] One example of this kind of riddle is Exeter Riddle 5, in which a shield[32] talks about its experiences as though it were an old warrior, weary from a life of battle:

> Ic eom anhaga   iserne wund,
> bille gebennad,   beadoweorca sæd,
> ecgum werig.   Oft ic wig seo,
> frecne feohtan.   Frofre ne wene,
> þæt me geoc cyme   guðgewinnes,
> ær ic mid ældum   eal forwurðe,
> ac mec hnossiað   homera lafe,
> heardecg heoroscearp,   hondweorc smiþa,
> bitað in burgum;   ic abidan sceal

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[30] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, p. 187.

[31] An example of what Williamson calls the 'anthropomorphic group' of riddles. For other examples see Craig Williamson, (trans.), *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs* (London: Scolar Press, 1983), p. 20.

[32] Jennifer Neville has recently suggested 'chopping board' as an alternative solution to this riddle. See Jennifer Neville, 'Joyous Play and Bitter Tears: the *Riddles* and the Elegies', in *Beowulf & Other Stories: A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, ed. by Richard North and Joe Allard (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), pp. 130-59 (pp. 131-3).

laþran gemotes.   Næfre læcecynn
on folcstede   findan meahte,
þara þe mid wyrtum   wunde gehælde,
ac me ecga dolg   eacen weorðað
þurh deaðslege   dagum ond nihtum.[33]

I am solitary, wounded by iron, injured by swords, sated with battle, weary of
(sword-) edges. Often I see battle, fierce conflict. I do not expect comfort, that I
might get help in battle, before I perish completely among men, but the remnant
of hammers strikes me, the hard-edge, battle-sharp, handiwork of smiths bites in
the strongholds; I must await a more hateful encounter. I never found in the
people's dwellings one of the race of physicians who could heal my wounds with
herbs, but for me the wounds of swords increase day and night through death-
stroke.

In the book and horn riddle, the identity of the narrator is the product of a single set of
experiences. In this riddle, by contrast, there are two sets of experiences: those of the
physical shield, and those of the metaphorical warrior, which are similar in many, though
not all respects. Although the shield and the warrior are both wounded by iron, often see
battle, and are 'bitten' by swords, only the shield cannot be healed by physicians. As in the
book and horn riddle, the correspondences between the object and the metaphor in this
riddle are once again social activities, in this case warfare, weapon-making, and healing.

Object and Human

The metaphorical connection evident in the shield riddle between human and object is
more generally true of all first-person riddles. The narrators in these three riddles are both
physical objects and, because each speaks, they are also human. The narrators of first-
person riddles have been described as 'illusions of subjectivity'[34] or as 'material object[s]
in a world of men' with which readers 'imaginatively' associate.[35] Yet, as Lois Bragg notes
of the inanimate speaker in Anglo-Saxon poetry, speech is an exclusively human trait:

The Anglo-Saxon poets often used the expression *reordberend* 'speech-bearer'
for 'human being', demonstrating that they, like we, posited speech to be the

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[33] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 183-4.
[34] John Tanke, 'The Bachelor-Warrior of Exeter Book Riddle 20', *Philological Quarterly*, 79 (2000), 409-27
(p. 410).
[35] Peter Orton, 'The Technique of Object-Personification in "The Dream of the Rood" and a Comparison
with the Old English Riddles', *Leeds Studies in English*, XI (1980), 1-10 (p. 9).

> distinguishing feature of our kind. All speakers are therefore by definition not
> only animate, but human.[36]

Bragg further notes that some speakers are so developed that they evoke our emotions as readers, and that this humanisation is an important factor in uncovering their identity: 'personification leads to identification with the speaker and hence to the solution.'[37] She draws particular attention to the shield riddle:

> I do not ordinarily have any sympathy for shields, but I do sympathize with this
> one. Initially (mis-?)taking him for human, I empathized with his weariness of
> war and his wounded condition. By the time I discovered that he is only a shield,
> it was too late to recant: I had shared his self-pity as being worse off than a
> human warrior.

In one important sense, therefore, these narrators are human. However, in another equally important sense, they are not. Although the shield riddle demonstrates that there can be many similarities between humans and physical objects, first-person riddles are premised more fundamentally on there being some discrepancy between the social position normally occupied by a 'speech-bearer' and the physical object that is the focus of the riddle. In each of these three riddles, the narrators have been either manufactured (book, shield) or decorated (horn) by humans. All are subsequently used in a variety of social settings, and their relationship to the human beings who pick them up and set them down is a passive one. Their position with respect to many of the scenarios, people, and other objects depicted in the riddles is largely, though as the shield riddle demonstrates not entirely, different to our own: humans sit at a table, a horn is laid on a table; humans breathe, they do not receive another's breath; doctors heal humans, they do not heal shields.

It is arguably this double-status of the narrator as both human and physical object that provide the first person riddles with their social value. Through the identification with and sympathy for a human narrator the reader can inhabit the social position of these

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[36] Bragg, *Lyric Speakers*, p. 43. *Reordberend* is an exclusively poetic term that appears in *Andreas* (l. 419); *The Dream of the Rood* (ll. 3, 89); *Elene* (l.1282); *Daniel* (l. 123); *Christ* (ll. 278, 381, 1024, 1368).
[37] p. 49.

objects, placing themselves at the centre of a set of relationships between objects, activities, and people, which may initially appear strange but which must be understood if the riddle is to be solved. In adopting this position the reader can view their own society from an entirely novel perspective, and see what they perhaps already know in a completely new way. It is a process Viktor Shklovsky calls 'defamiliarisation.'

Defamiliarisation

In his essay 'Art as Technique' Shklovsky argues that through our interaction with the world around us objects become so familiar that we cease to notice them: 'the object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it.'[38] Art, he says, 'removes objects from the automatism of perception':

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.*[39]

Shlovsky calls this process of making objects strange 'defamiliarisation', and it can be employed consciously by poets to produce striking images of society. In Craig Raine's 1979 poem 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home', for example, everyday objects and phenomena are described from a unique, 'alien' perspective:

> Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
> and some are treasured for their markings--
>
> they cause the eyes to melt
> or the body to shriek without pain.
>
> I have never seen one fly, but
> sometimes they perch on the hand.
>
> Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
> and rests its soft machine on ground:
>
> then the world is dim and bookish
> like engravings under tissue paper.
>
> Rain is when the earth is television.
> It has the property of making colours darker.

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[38] Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3-24 (p. 13).
[39] p. 12.

Model T is a room with the lock inside --
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.[40]

The Martian in Raine's poem offers a perspective that is, as far as possible, shorn of the habitual attitudes and assumptions that condition a reader's perception of everyday objects or phenomena. The frame of reference is supposedly not a human one, although it clearly must be for these descriptions to be intelligible. Raine's narrator describes these things from a position from which they would not normally be viewed, and as they might appear to someone who has not accumulated the cultural associations that gather over time in a person's mind regarding the objects they encounter in their everyday lives. Thus inanimate objects such as books are described using the language and characteristics normally attributed to birds, objects that are only used outside, such as cars, are described with reference to the indoors. In this poem 'alien' becomes a synonym for 'unfamiliar'.

Structurally, Raine's poem is similar to the riddles of the Anglo-Latin tradition which unlike the vernacular tradition include a title which provides the reader with the solution of the riddle. Instead of trying to discover the identity of the riddle-subject, the reader, who is already aware of that identity, simply experiences what it feels like to perceive what is familiar from a vantage point that 'increase[s] the difficulty and length of perception' of the subject. Raine's technique is slightly more cryptic; he occasionally uses metonymic terms such as 'Caxton' or 'Model T', but these are thinly disguised and the reader has an idea of the subject before each of the elaborate similes he uses to describe it.

In his discussion of defamiliarisation, Shklovsky explicitly mentions the riddle genre, although he focuses on the use of euphemisms in erotic riddles to describe sexual intercourse (archery, a game of rings and marlinespikes, writing use a pen and inkwell).[41] As he notes, however, defamiliarisation 'is not only the technique of the erotic riddle...it is

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[40] Craig Raine, *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 1-2
[41] Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p. 19.

also the basis and point of all riddles'. He does not elaborate further, but like Raine's poem the poets responsible for the Old English riddles made their subjects appear strange and unfamiliar. In some case narratives were visually arresting and shocking. The book's account of its past, for instance, is of a violent personal history. Without knowing the narrator's identity the reader is faced with a narrative in which someone has been killed by 'a certain enemy' (*feonda sum*), 'cut with a sharp sword edge' (*heard... snað seaxses ecg*), been doused in water (*dyfde on wætre*), left in the sun (*sette on sunnan*) until it completely lost its hair (*swiþe beleas herum*), been covered 'with boards' (*hleobordum*), before finally becoming an eager servant of mankind (*gif min bearn wera brucan willað*).

The horn riddle, on first reading, also appears to be a narrative about a servant of mankind, who recounts not so much a violent history, as a disorientating one. As intriguing as the details of the narrative are, more interesting is its structure. The narrator makes a single, brief reference to its distant past when it was a warrior's weapon (*ic wæs wæpenwiga*) and when it had a single function. This is then followed by a long series of different functions that continue into the present and which appear as many different moments of awareness strung together as though part of a cinematic narrative in which an individual lapses in and out of consciousness: sometimes it is kissed by men (*weras cyssað*), sometimes it 'saves plunder' (*forstolen hreddan*); sometimes it summons men to battle or to wine (*to hilde...to wine*), sometimes it is carried, either 'on a horse' (*on wicge*) or on a 'sea-horse' (*merehengest*), sometimes it must 'hang splendid on a wall' (*hongige...wlitig on wage*). Unlike the book which appears on initial reading to have been brutalised, the narrator in this riddle appears to have simply been bewildered.

The shield's narrative is not so much shocking as inappropriate. Even though it is violent, the first sentence creates the impression of a narrator who could easily be an old warrior. For a society that viewed warriors through the lens of heroic poetry, it might perhaps have been unusual to hear a warrior complain as much as this one does, about

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being 'sated with battle' (*beadoweorca sæd*) and how it does not expect comfort (*frofre ne wene*) in the future or help in battle (*geoc...guðgewinnes*). Although speakers in various Old English poems lament their fate, the corpus contains no warriors who appear so helpless. Accustomed to the conventions of poetic genres that did not usually permit this type of speech, this may or may not have signalled to an Anglo-Saxon audience that this warrior was not all that he seemed. However, more generally the subject of this riddle is made unfamiliar not so much by striking detail of its narrative but simply by being presented as a warrior in the first place when it is in reality an inanimate object.

Coherence

Thus the reader's initial contact with the first-person riddles under discussion is with a series of often lurid and puzzling textual descriptions that present physical objects from an unusual point of view and which make everyday phenomena appear unfamiliar. For these descriptions to be taken as credibly referring to a single identity depends upon their coherence, upon the way in which they appear to lead to a single narrator, however strange the detail or structure of the narrative. As Marya Schechtman notes, for any first-person narrative to be considered as identity-defining there must be a strong connection between individual elements of the narrative:

> In order for a narrative to be identity-constituting it must have a high degree of coherence...the more a particular action, experience, or characteristic coheres with the rest of a person's narrative...the greater the degree to which it contributes to the overall intelligibility of that narrative.[42]

A credible narrator is, therefore, a coherent one. In the riddles under discussion that coherence is provided in a number of different ways. The primary way of organising the various self-referential statements made by the narrator is by the human metaphor itself:

> The nature of the vehicle of the metaphor is a human one, and the humanity of the subject is communicated not just because or even primarily because the

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[42] Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 98.

> rhetorical device of prosopopoeia is used, but because the metaphor…gives structure to the whole poem as it is expanded.[43]

As we have noted this can be the general metaphor of a human speaking about their past, as it is in the book and the horn riddle, or it can be restricted and concerned with a specific type of human being as it is in the shield riddle. Where the metaphor is a general one, the poets responsible for the vernacular tradition employed additional rhetorical techniques to create the impression of coherence. In doing so, they demonstrated an understanding of how narrative produces a sense of personal identity that appears far more nuanced than writers producing similar themed riddles in Anglo-Latin.

The Book Riddle

In her essay on time in the Old English riddle tradition, Marie Nelson notes that 'one of the features which distinguishes the Exeter Book riddles from their Latin counterparts is the presence in the former of a greater consciousness of time.'[44] Nelson mentions the extensive use of what she calls 'time markers' among these riddles, noting in particular the use of *nu* ('now') and *þonne* (then), *ær* ('before') and *siþþan* ('after'), and *sona* ('immediately'). If we look at the book riddle alongside a comparable riddle from the Anglo-Latin tradition, it will be clear that the Exeter poet's use of these terms is indeed far more precise; coupled with other differences in poetic technique, this precision enables the reader to perceive a more credible riddle-subject.

In the book riddle, the manufacture of the book is punctuated with a number of temporal adverbs that segment the process into various different stages (*siþþan*, ll. 2, 5, 11; *eft*, ll. 3, 10; *þonan*, l.3). If we turn to Tatwine's *De Membrano* (parchment) riddle, which is one of several Anglo-Latin analogues[45] to the book riddle, we find a shorter text that also

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[43] Marie Nelson, 'The Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles', *Speculum,* 49 (1974), 421-40 (p. 427).
[44] Marie Nelson, 'Time in the Exeter Book Riddles', *Philological Quarterly,* 54 (1975), 511-18 (p. 11).
[45] See Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, p. 335.

uses time markers, but which also leaves the reader with the impression of a less developed

speaker:

> Efferus exuuiis populator me spoliauit,
> Vitalis pariter flatus spiramina dempsit;
> In planum me iterum campum sed uerterat auctor.
> Frugiferos cultor sulcos mox irrigat undis;
> Omnigenam nardi messem mea prata rependunt,
> Qua sanis uictum et lesis prestabo medelam.[46]

> A fierce robber stripped me of my covering and likewise took away the air-holes
> (through which flows) the breath of life; the artisan in turn beat me into a level
> field; the cultivator soon irrigates the fertile furrows with water. My meadows
> yield a manifold harvest of balsam, whereby I will provide sustenance for the
> healthy and a remedy for the sick.

There are four stages in Tatwine's poem: the original death, the manufacture, the use, and

the benefit – virtually identical to the Exeter Book poem, though missing the actual

binding process that turns the parchment into a book. However, just to take one of these

stages, whereas Tatwine renders the manufacturing stage as a single sentence, the Exeter

poet, even if we take only the first half of that stage, treats it almost as a chapter heading to

be unpacked and described. Through this more detailed and segmented account we are

presented with a deeper, more diverse record of the speaker's development, something

which in turn gives greater texture to the speaker's identity.

The different impression left by these two poems can be partly accounted for by the

fact that Tatwine's riddle is considerably shorter than the Old English poem. More

significant, perhaps, the Anglo-Latin riddle is less successful in establishing what Felson

calls a clear 'orienting point,'[47] a narrative source to which the reader can relate. In the

Exeter riddle, the book's fuller account of its early life is provided in the past tense until

the use of *forþon* (l. 13) which marks the transition to the description of its current state,

and is in turn succeeded by statements in the present and future tenses inaugurated by the

use of *nu* (l. 15). Complementing this idea that the present is a natural evolution of the past

is the fact that there is no obvious change in the metaphor itself. In the Anglo-Latin riddle,

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[46] de Marco, ed., *Tatuini Opera Omnia*, p. 172.
[47] Nancy Felson, 'Vicarious Transport: Fictive Deixis in Pindar's *Pythian* Four', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 99 (1999), 1-31 (p. 3).

by contrast, the poet also employs temporal adverbs but the progression of time seems less realistic and convincing. This seems in part to be due to the fact that the poet dilutes the impact of the human metaphor by overlaying it with another in which the parchment refers to itself as a field. Although this is an appropriate metaphor for the subject of the riddle, it is not a metaphor that a human speaker would use reflexively to refer to themselves. The use of it makes the speaker appear less credible as a human narrator. As Craig Williamson says of another riddle from the Anglo-Latin tradition, 'nothing in this riddle breathes *I am.*'[48]

The Horn Riddle

In poems where the reader perceives little or no sense of development in the riddle-subject's account of themselves, narratives can be made to appear coherent through the Exeter poet's rhetorical use of other temporal adverbs such as *hwilum*. Anaphoric sequences that use this term occur in a small number of Exeter riddles,[49] and where they occur these sequences have several functions: they draw the reader's attention to the diversity of detail contained in a speaker's statements; they provide a sense of continuity as the speaker passes from one statement to another; and they make the reader conscious of the act of utterance itself. The horn riddle provides a good example of this type of sequence. In that poem the behaviours listed are very different. The subject is both passive and active, and its identity, even though briefly sketched, is comprised of a number of different modes of interaction with its environment. The repeated use of *hwilum* links these experiences, providing a sense of continuity between them.

This linking function that is present in the horn riddle is attested elsewhere among the riddles that use these sequences. Another, more condensed example of a *hwilum*-sequence occurs in Exeter Riddle 24, generally solved as 'magpie':

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[48] Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures*, p. 10.
[49] *Hwilum* sequences occur in Riddles 12, 14, 24; the term is also used more sparingly in Riddles 2 and 3.

Ic eom wunderlicu wiht,   wræsne mine stefne,
hwilum beorce swa hund,   hwilum blæte swa gat,
hwilum græde swa gos,   hwilum gielle swa hafoc,
hwilum ic onhyrge   þone haswan earn
guðfugles hleoþor,   hwilum glidan reorde
muþe gemæne,   hwilum mæwes song,
þær ic glado sitte.

                                  (ll.1-7)

I am a wondrous creature, altering my voice – sometimes I bark like a dog,
sometimes bleat like a goat, sometimes call like a goose, sometimes yell like the
hawk; sometimes I imitate the grey eagle, the call of the war-bird, sometimes the
cry of the kite I utter with my mouth, sometimes the gull's song, where I sit
joyous.

The uniqueness of the magpie's identity lies, paradoxically, in its ability to assume many others. Even more so than the horn riddle, the repetition of *hwilum* here creates the impression of a coherent narrator whose identity remains the same even as it speaks about its ability to disguise that identity by mimicking other creatures.

The *hwilum*-sequences in both riddles function the same way, by establishing a contrast between the matter of the narrative and the experience of reading the poem. The content of statements made by both narrators varies greatly, and covers a great number of disparate moments and behaviours. However in working through each narrator's account, the reader repeats the same phonemes again and again (*hwil-um, hwil-um*), which has the effect of emphasising sameness and continuity through great change. The reader is left with an impression of the riddle-subject's identity similar to that discussed by Dan Zahavi:

> We are faced with a number of different experiences, but they also have
> something in common; they all have the same subject, they are all lived through
> by one and the same self...Whereas the experiences arise and perish in the stream
> of consciousness, the self remains as one and the same through time. More
> specifically, the self is taken to be a distinct *principle of identity* that stands apart
> from and above the stream of changing experiences and which, for that very
> reason, is able to structure it and give it unity and coherence.[50]

Unlike the magpie riddle, the repeated use of *hwilum* in the horn riddle feels almost oppressive, and as well as conveying a sense of continuity it also suggests disorientation and unease. The term is used in a manner similar to several other sequences in this part of the Exeter Book which also use indefinite terms. As with the use of *sum,* for instance, in

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[50] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, p. 104.

the *Fortunes of Men* (ll. 10-92)[51] or *The Wanderer* (ll. 80-4)[52] there is a similar feeling here that the horn is painfully aware of being subject to forces more powerful than itself. However, it might be argued that this sense of disorientation is only possible because *hwilum*-sequences can provide a powerful sense of coherence and thus give the reader a strong impression of the narrator as possessing a single identity that undergoes a bewildering number of different experiences.

Credible and Incredible

If careful attention to rhetorical technique can be said to create a credible narrator it does so only in a qualified sense. The physical object that has assumed the guise of a human speaker relating a set of experiences may be believable as a speech-bearer talking about their life, but as we have seen the matter of riddle-narratives is usually strange and often shocking. The book might sound very generally like someone talking about how they have been shaped by past events but the detail of the narrative immediately disrupts any possibility of the speaker being an ordinary human being. In the first line the narrator tells the reader that they were killed long ago. Similarly, in the horn riddle, the narrator speaks, among other things, about being carried on a ship, then immediately complains that it must lie 'headless' (*heafodleas*) on a table. These abrupt transitions between the credible and the incredible, between what the reader believes could be true of a narrator and what a reader would not think possible, demonstrates to what extent these riddles ask the reader to confront their own notions of plausibility. It is this property of the riddles that makes them a valuable tool in allowing members of society to question the attitudes and assumptions that inform their perception of the world and which they normally take for granted.

For the reader to discover the identity of the narrator they must make familiar again that which has been defamiliarised by the author of the riddle, navigating the often strange

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[51] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 154-6.
[52] pp. 134-7.

and at times incomprehensible descriptions provided by the narrator and attempting to find a way of relating them to the narrator that makes them appear less incredible than they appear on first glance. This is a process which Jonathan Culler, in a more general discussion of reading, calls 'naturalisation' or 'vraisemblisation', and it involves bringing the statements made by the narrator 'within the modes of order which culture makes available.' [53] It is a process which Culler claims must occur for a reader to successfully negotiate any text and it pre-supposes an existing body of knowledge, often unconscious, which conditions the ways in which a reader can interpret a text. For any new information to become meaningful, it must be first brought into a relationship with this 'discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural or legible.'[54] For the reader of a first-person riddle, this 'discourse or model' represents the conventions, ideas, and assumptions that are shared by the narrator and the reader, and which decide what statements will appear incredible and which will not. Culler distinguishes five kinds of such discourses, which he calls 'levels of vraisemblance'.[55] Several are relevant to this discussion. The first Culler calls 'the socially given text, which is taken as the "real world"'; the second he calls the 'general cultural text: shared knowledge which would be recognized by participants as part of culture and hence subject to correction or modification but which none the less serves as a kind of "nature"'.

Due to the unusual perspective of the narrator, riddles confront the reader with these discourses because they simultaneously confirm and subvert them, providing some information that seems entirely credible and other information that is not and which must, therefore, be naturalised to understand how it relates to the identity of the narrator. In

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[53] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*, rev. ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 161.

[54] p. 162.

[55] p. 164. The other kinds are as follows: 3) 'texts or conventions of a genre, a specifically literary and artificial *vraisemblance*'; 4) 'natural attitude to the artificial, where the text explicitly cites and exposes *vraisemblance* of the third kind so as to reinforce its own authority'; 5) 'complex *vraisemblance* of specific intertextualities, where one work takes another as its basis or point of departure and must be assimilated in relation to it.'

doing so, riddles force the reader 'to play the ontological game of venturing with various ideas of order'. [56] As the reader attempts to discover the identity of the narrator some of what he reads appears to conform what he believes to be either natural or appropriate to his understanding of the world and his culture. Other statements purposefully challenge his assumptions about them, effectively asking him to (re-)consider what he actually knows about his environment. As we shall see, this forces the reader to re-examine his 'perceptual categories'[57] and engage in a process of 'expanding and experimenting with semantic boundaries and relationships.'[58]

'What do you know about the natural world?'

Narrators who are dead, or who at one time have lain headless on a table, confront readers with their own preconceptions regarding some very general truths about the natural world. They reveal to the reader the existence of the first discourse mentioned by Culler, one 'which requires no justification because it seems to derive directly from the structure of the world.' [59] This discourse is made up of ideas that we hold to be universally true. In the case of the book and horn riddle, this is an acceptance of the fact that people who speak cannot have been dead or without a head. Texts like the book and horn riddle that breach this level of *vraisemblance* contain statements that make sense linguistically but which call into question our most basic assumptions about the world. Culler explains it using the following example:

> 'John cut out his thought and fastened it to his tibia' gains a certain
> *vraisemblance* from its expression as a grammatical sentence, and we are lead to
> try to invent a context or to relate it to a text which would make it intelligible,
> but it is not *vraisemble* in the way 'John is sad' would be, since it does not form

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[56] Elli Köngäs-Maranda, 'Theory and Practice of Riddle Analysis', *Journal of American Folklore,* 84 (1971), 51-61 (p. 53).
[57] Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures*, p. 38.
[58] Billie Jean Isbell and Fredy Amilcar Roncalla Fernandez, 'The Ontogenesis of Metaphor: Riddles Games Among Quechua Speakers Seen as Congnitive Discovery Procedures', *Journal of Latin American Lore,* 3 (1977), 19-49 (p. 44).
[59] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 164-5.

part of the text of the natural attitude, whose items are justified by the simple observation, 'but Xs are like that.'[60]

The book riddle, and to a lesser extent the horn riddle, are part of a group of Exeter riddles in which narrators highlight an aspect of their past that would be difficult to associate with a genuinely human narrator. Along with several other riddles, they exhibit what Marie Nelson has called a 'transformation-after-death-to-useful-object theme.'[61] Riddle 73, generally solved as 'spear' is another example of this group:

> Ic on wonge aweox,   wunode þær mec feddon
> hruse ond heofonwolcn,   oþþæt me onhwyrfdon
> gearum frodne,   þa me grome wurdon,
> of þære gecynde   þe ic ær cwic beheold,
> onwendan mine wisan,   wegedon mec of earde,
> gedydon þæt ic sceolde   wiþ gesceape minum
> on bonan willan   bugan hwilum.
>
> (ll. 1-7)

> I grew up in a field, remained there fed by the earth and clouds in the sky, until old in years, grim ones took me from that condition which I living had held before, changed my ways, carried me from my home, brought it about that against my nature I must bow at times to a slayer's will.

In this riddle, the narrator, like the narrators of the horn and the book riddle, begins in a natural environment, before changing to a new existence in which it serves human beings.

The ability of this group of riddles to question what is in a very general sense characteristic of human experience lies in the fact that, as we have said, in presenting incredible experiences they do so in entirely credible ways, confirming some conventions as they subvert others. Not only do narrators identify with past experiences, they also express an attitude toward their changed conditions of existence. The book, for example, appears to rejoice in its new form, and conveys that sense of joy through a sequence of comparatives (ll.18-26) that stresses how much better a person's life will be if they use the book. The reactions of the spear and the horn appear to be more negative and are conveyed through the use of *sculan*. The spear says that 'contrary to its nature' it 'must bow to a slayer's will'. The horn says that it must lie headless on a table, that it must absorb

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[60] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 165.
[61] Nelson, 'Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles', p. 438, n.33.

someone's breath, and that it must summon men to wine (ll. 9, 14, 17), statements which suggest that, like the spear, it is conscious that it is being compelled to behave in the ways that it does. As has already been noted, the narrator of the shield riddle, though not part of this group, appears slightly overwhelmed by the events of his life when he complains of being 'sated with battle, weary of (sword) edges' (*beadoweorca sæd, ecgum werig*).

As modern theorists have noted, expressing feelings toward change is a necessary component of creating a credible, natural, narrative. In his tripartite definition of narrative David Herman notes that the initial component of narrative should be a 'structured time-course of particularized events.'[62] However, he goes on to add two further conditions, first that there should also be some sort of 'disruption or disequilibrium' introduced into the storyteller's 'mental model of the world,' and second that the 'qualia' or 'felt, subjective awareness' of this disruption should be communicated to the reader.[63] For texts that employ omniscient narrators the consciousness that registers such a disruption is likely to be that of individual characters. In the case of first-person narratives the change occurs in the consciousness of the narrator, and it is, therefore, the narrator who must communicate the experience of that change to the reader. In the book, horn, and spear riddles, the narrator serves all these functions, relating a set of events which have introduced some disruption into how they view the world, and then expressing their feeling towards that change. These riddles in particular, therefore, confirm for the reader what might be considered natural and true as regards the way narrators identify with and talk about their past, but they do so only as they destroy other assumptions a reader might have about the nature of the experiences being recounted. In working through the text and experiencing both parts of the narrative that seem plausible and those that do not, the reader outlines for himself the boundaries of what he regards as 'typical' of human experience.

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[62] David Herman, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. by David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 3-21 (p. 9).
[63] p. 11.

Another, perhaps clearer, example of the way riddles call attention to general truths about the natural world occurs in what might be called the physical riddles, where the description of the subject's physical appearance becomes instrumental in discovering the riddle-subject's identity. These texts contain first and third-person riddles from both the vernacular and the Anglo-Latin riddle traditions, and ask readers to consider their general assumptions about physical form, in particular the characteristics of human and animal bodies. Exeter Riddle 32, generally solved as 'ship', is typical of this type of riddle:

> Siþum sellic   ic seah searo hweorfan,
> grindan wið greote,   giellende faran.
> Næfde sellicu wiht   syne ne folme,
> exle ne earmas;   sceal on anum fet
> searoceap swifan,   swiþe feran,
> faran ofer feldas.   Hæfde fela ribba;
> muð wæs on middan.

(ll.3-9)

I saw a wondrous, cunningly wrought thing move, grind against the sand, go shrieking. That strange creature had no sight or hands, shoulders nor arms; the skilfully made thing had to move on one foot, go quickly, travel over the plains. It had many ribs; its mouth was in the middle.

The innocuous framing device (*ic seah...*) that begins many third-person riddles serves in this poem to establish a plausible initial scenario in which one creature watches an object move noisily over a beach. Taken by itself, it is possible for a reader to conjure a set of circumstances that would make sense of this image. However, once the narrator begins to talk in more detail about a creature with the physical attributes that are subsequently described, it becomes less and less possible for the reader to make sense of the image.

In this type of physical riddle, the identity of the subject arises largely out of departures from the reader's expectations about the nature of corporeal form, from what they consider to be physically 'vraisemblable'. As Clemoes notes, 'riddling offered the possibility of exempting the principles of active being from the restraints of normal physical manifestation.'[64] The uniqueness of the subject is expressed through its unusual arrangement of features, in this case, its lack of limbs, its many ribs, and the position of its

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[64] Peter Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 186.

mouth. The reader recognises them and knows that there should be a fixed relationship between them. He does not, for example, expect the mouth to be in the middle of the body, but rather towards the top; he does not expect a creature to go on one leg, but rather two or four. In the same way, the lyre of Exeter Riddle 70 has 'two shoulders' (*eaxle tua*, l. 3), which the reader does expect, but it also sings through its side (*singeð þurh sidan*, l.2), which he does not. In Riddle 18 a jug says that it has a mouth (*ic muþ hæbbe*, l. 2) but also that it cannot speak words (*ne mæg word sprecan*, l. 1). The identity behind the 'One-eyed Seller of Garlic' in Riddle 86 is based solely on two departures, one minor and one major, from a quite ordinary depiction of the human form:

> Wiht cwom gongan   þær weras sæton
> monige on mæðle,   mode snottre;
> hæfde an eage   ond earan twa,
> ond *II* fet,   *XII* hund heafda,
> hrycg ond wombe   ond honda twa,
> earmas ond eaxle,   anne sweoran
> ond sidan twa.   Saga hwæt ic hatte.

(ll. 1-6)

> A creature came walking to where many men sat in assembly, wise in mind; he had one eye, and two ears, and two feet, and twelve hundred heads, a neck and stomach and two hands, arms and shoulders, one neck and two sides. Say what I am called.

Once again this riddle begins with an unremarkable situation in which the narrator observes a subject entering a hall. The statements that follow are for the most part credible descriptions, apart from one that would jolt the reader into an awareness that the subject was physically impossible.

This technique of focusing upon departures from what might be considered typical is not an invention of the Anglo-Saxon vernacular tradition. As the speaker of Aldhelm's *Colosus* riddle demonstrates, identity as deviation from a given form, in this case the human form, is also a common feature of the Anglo-Latin tradition:

> Omnia membra mihi plasmavit corporis auctor,
> Nec tamen ex isdem membrorum munia sumpsi.
> Pergere nec plantis oculis nec cernere possum,
> Quamquam nunc patulae constent sub fronte fenestrae
> Nullus anhelanti procedit viscere flatus
> Spicula nec geminis nitor torquere lacertis.

Heu! frustra factor confinxit corpus inorme,
Totis membrorum dum frauder sensibus intus.[65]

The maker of my body formed all my limbs for me; nevertheless, I have not
derived functions from those same members: I cannot walk on my feet nor see
distinctly with my eyes, although there are now open windows beneath my
forehead. No breath proceeds from gasping inwards, nor do I labour to wield
darts with both arms. Alas, my maker fashioned this enormous body for nothing,
since within I am devoid of all feeling in my limbs

Thus, the physical riddles of both the vernacular and Latin traditions create riddle-subjects

that force the reader to examine what they consider to be physically normative. The

specific nature of the Colossus, or the ship, or garlic seller, as described by the riddle-poet,

is conceived in terms of the degree to which their features both correspond to and differ

from collective assumptions regarding the nature of animal and human bodies. Like first-

person riddles that both confirm and subvert conventions about talking about personal

experience, these riddles make access to the subject's identity dependent upon a reader

thinking about what they believe to be true regarding different aspects of the natural world.

'What do you know about your society?'

Many of the textual descriptions contained in the riddles under discussion do not call into

question these very general assumptions about universal traits. Most require the reader to

consider cultural knowledge, ideas that they may have about their society, particularly how

that society is structured.

As Dan Ben-Amos argues, even the simplest riddles are generated on the basis of

'social and cultural presuppositions'.[66] He provides the following short riddle as an

example:

What belongs to yourself, yet is used by everybody more than yourself? – Your
name

A riddle like this, Ben-Amos argues, 'depends upon a set of assumptions relating to the

association between possession and use. In a hypothetical culture where there is no private

ownership, such a description would not constitute a riddle.' In the Old English riddle

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[65] de Marco, ed., *Tatuini Opera Omnia*, pp. 480-1.
[66] Dan Ben-Amos, 'Solutions to Riddles', *Journal of American Folklore,* 89 (1976), 249-54 (p. 251).

tradition, much of the information shared by narrators with the reader is culture-specific and based upon many associations that would not necessarily be shared by other cultures. Not all societies, for instance, used animal horns as drinking vessels. Horns being hung on the wall of mead-halls, or carried into a hall by bejewelled ladies evoke images that are characteristic of a particular society, or a particular group of societies; they are not features of universal human experience. Similarly, books are not used or made by all cultures; apart from people who consciously investigate cultural history, the various practices by which animal skins are turned into books are only a meaningful sequence of practices to someone from a society in which books are made in the way described in the book riddle. Some societies constructed shields from metal instead of wood, a fact which may have affected how the narrator's reference to being 'bitten' with swords may have been interpreted by a reader.

In this sense, many riddles are based upon associations which are true only 'locally', within particular societies, and not necessarily true for others. Culler refers to these associations as 'a range of cultural stereotypes or accepted knowledge'[67] and discusses their character using the following example from Honoré De Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*:

> When Balzac writes that the Count of Lanty was 'petit, laid et grêlé, sombre comme un Espagnol, ennuyeux comme un banquier' (small, ugly and pock-marked, as gloomy as a Spaniard and as boring as a banker), he is using two different types of *vraisemblance*. The adjectives are intelligible as qualities which it is quite natural and possible for someone to possess (whereas 'he was small, green and demographic' would violate this first-order *vraisemblance* and require us to construct a very curious world indeed). The two comparisons, however, involve cultural references and stereotypes which are accepted as *vraisemblable* with the culture ('as gloomy as an Italian' and 'as boring as a painter' would be *invraisemblable* in these terms) but which are still open to question: a banker need not be boring, and we accept that possibility along with the stereotype.[68]

Although useful, Culler's example here is somewhat restricted. A banker is itself a cultural construction and is premised upon the existence of money and the practice of money-

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[67] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 165.
[68] pp. 165-6.

lending within a particular society, which is by no means universal. To consider how the riddles under discussion require the reader to assess their knowledge of society, this type of cultural discourse would be better understood as referring to a community's collective understanding of the relationships that exist between different phenomena, concepts, or objects, and which are perceived to stand in fixed relationships to each other.

The Shield, the Horn, and Cultural Categories

In the case of the shield riddle, it is the use of the narrow metaphor that casts a physical object as a specific type of human that allows the reader to examine the relationship between different aspects of their society. As Green and Pepicello note, metaphor involves the 'conscious juxtaposition of underlying cultural categories.'[69] The shield is an inanimate object, but through the use of metaphor the shield is presented as an aging warrior, an obviously animate being and therefore from a different category. In describing his life the narrator effectively catalogues the similarities that exist between two phenomena which, although from the same heroic world of battles and warfare, are also from opposed cultural categories (animate/inanimate).[70] In attempting to identify the narrator the reader is compelled to consider that there are objects from these categories that, when viewed in a certain way, can be seen to share a number of similarities: some animate and inanimate objects take part in battle, and are 'bitten' by swords, and can expect to take a beating on the battlefield:

> Two or more categories that are thought to be different from one point of view
> are alike from another point of view. Whether two categories are contrastive or
> equivalent may depend on which of the properties people choose to address…
> Riddles provide a concrete demonstration of the many ways in which the things
> of the phenomenal world are related to one another. [71]

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[69] Thomas A. Green and W.J. Pepicello, 'The Riddle Process', *Journal of American Folklore,* 97 (1984), 189-203 (p. 200).
[70] See Köngäs-Maranda, 'Theory and Practice', p. 57.
[71] Michael D. Lieber, 'Riddles, Cultural Categories, and World View', *Journal of American Folklore,* 89 (1976), 255-65 (p. 262).

As well as demonstrating correspondence between cultural categories the shield riddle hinges upon the introduction of what Williamson calls a 'gap',[72] a characteristic which the shield and the warrior do not share, and which reminds the reader that for all their similarities animate and inanimate objects are indeed very different. When the shield complains that it cannot be healed, in the way that a human theoretically could be, it is establishing a point of separation between the animate and the inanimate that allows for the solution of the riddle.

For Ian Hamnett, the social value of riddles like this is that through the defamiliarisation of the riddle-subject, the reader is forced to consciously consider the way in which they categorise aspects of their everyday lives and by doing so to retain a healthy fluidity in the divisions they impose upon the world:

> Classification is a pre-requisite of the intelligible order of experience, but if conceptual categories are reified, they become obstacles rather than means to a proper understanding and control of both physical and social reality. The ability to construct categories and also to transcend them is central to adaptive learning, and riddles can be seen as a very simple paradigm of how this ability is attained.[73]

Unlike in the shield riddle, the human metaphor used in the horn and the book riddle, although carefully constructed, is a general one and not sufficiently narrow for a reader to perceive any correspondence between the riddle-subject and the metaphor used to describe it. These riddles do, however, investigate the relationship between cultural categories, although they do so in a different way. Instead of finding a large number of connections between two phenomena, they use a riddle-subject that inhabits a variety of different semantic domains and which therefore draws together many different cultural categories.

The horn, for example, lists a number of different experiences which have already been described: it was initially a warrior's weapon; a 'proud young bachelor' covered it

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[72] Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures*, p. 27.

[73] Ian Hamnett, 'Ambiguity, Classification and Change: The Function of Riddles', *Man,* n.s. 2 (1967), 379-92 (p. 387).

with gold; it is sometimes carried both on a horse and on a ship; it hangs adorned with treasure in a drinking-hall; a woman, also adorned with gold, fills it; it summons men to battle and to wine; it warns against thieves; it sometimes must lie on a table deprived of its coverings. In attempting to make sense of these details, the reader is forced to consider what connections there might be between scenarios, objects, and people that seem to be very different. What, for example, is the connection between the world of ships and horses, and the interior of a hall? How is a lady in the hall related to men on their way to battle? In working through the associations the reader comes again upon new connections between various cultural categories, some of which would usually be opposed: the hall (indoors)/battlefield (outdoors); men/women; decoration/bareness; conflict/rejoicing; land/sea.

The basis for making these associations requires the reader to ask the question 'what can be predicated of x?' What are the characteristics of the hall? What objects are associated with the process of decoration? What occurs prior to battle? This continual emphasis upon asking whether a particular phenomenon is typical of an individual, or of an animal, or a place, or an activity, is a concern with 'predicative reasoning' that is not unique to the riddle genre, but which appears elsewhere in the Old English corpus. The Cotton Maxims (*Maxims II*), for instance, seem to be structured entirely upon the relationship between an object, person, or phenomena and that which can be predicated of it:

                    Gim sceal on hringe
    standan steap and geap.   Stream sceal on yðum
    mencgan mereflode.   Mæst sceal on ceole,
    segelgyrd seomian.   Sweord sceal on bearme,
    drihtlic isern.   Draca sceal on hlæwe,
    frod, frætwum wlanc.   Fisc sceal on wætere
    cynren cennan.   Cyning sceal on healle
    beagas dælan.   Bera sceal on hæðe,
    eald and egesfull.   Ea of dune sceal
    flodgræg feran.   Fyrd sceal ætsomne,
    tirfæstra getrum.   Treow sceal on eorle,
    wisdom on were.   Wudu sceal on foldan
    blædum blowan.   Beorh sceal on eorþan
    grene standan.   God sceal on heofenum,

<pre>
dæda demend.   Duru sceal on healle,
rum recedes muð.   Rand sceal on scylde,
fæst fingra gebeorh.   Fugel uppe sceal
lacan on lyfte.   Leax sceal on wæle
mid sceote scriðan.   Scur sceal on heofenum,
winde geblanden,   in þas woruld cuman.
</pre>

<div align="right">(ll. 22-41)[74]</div>

The gem must be in the ring, stand high and broad. The stream must be in the waves, mingle with the sea-flood. The mast must be on the ship, hang as a sailyard. The sword must on the lap, a noble iron. The dragon must be in the barrow, wise, proud among its treasures. The fish must be in the water, spawn its species. The king must be in the hall, distribute rings. The bear must be on the heath, old and terrible. The water-grey river must flow from the hill. The army must be together, a troop of glory-fast men. There must be loyalty in the nobleman, wisdom in the man. The tree must be in the soil, blossom with leaves. The barrow must be on the earth, stand green. God must be in the heavens, the judge of deeds. The door must be on the hall, wide mouth of the hall. The rim must be on the shield, the fingers' secure protection. The bird must be above, soar on the air. The salmon must be in the pool, move rapidly. The storm must come into this world from the heavens, churned by the wind.

Where the riddles ask us to consider what properties might be predicated of a particular subject, the maxims provide us with one or more of those predicates. The riddles ask us to think about whether a certain quality, or action, is characteristic of a particular subject. Maxims invert that relationship, and tell us that a certain quality is and must be characteristic of that subject.

On the basis of the above, the first-person riddles can, therefore, be said to offer a way of investigating social knowledge. By creating 'new structural relationships between semantic domains'[75] riddles encourage the reader to become conscious of how they have arranged their mental model of their environment. The uniqueness of the riddle-subject's identity represents a unique configuration of the relationships between these domains, a point of intersection between different social categories which are not normally perceived as contingent. In attempting to identify that uniqueness the reader becomes aware of how their division of knowledge affects, and even determines, their understanding of the world around them. At the same time as it does this, however, the apparent coherence of the riddle-subject's identity also reminds the reader that their experience of society as being

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[74] Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1942), pp. 55-7.
[75] Isbell and Fernandez, 'Ontogenesis of Metaphor', p. 45.

comprised of many different elements that appear separate and unrelated disguises a more fundamental unity:

> One metamessage of riddling concerns the integrity of the speaker's universe: it is the integration of the various categories of the universe in metaphors that is pointed out in the play of the riddle. Perhaps the riddle is the example par excellence of unity in diversity...[76]

Conclusion

In Culler's discussion of the various discourses which he asserts are negotiated by a reader in making sense of literary texts, he argues that after the discourses mentioned above - the general one that encompasses general truths about the natural world, and the narrower one which focuses on things that are true for a particular society - there are other discourses which concern things which are true for a particular genre of writing, literary conventions which effectively condition a reader to have certain expectations from particular types of texts. These, he claims, are 'a set of literary norms to which texts may be related and by virtue of which they become meaningful and coherent'[77] and he notes that in certain types of writing there are also other discourses by which texts may signal their departure from such norms.[78] The movement between these, he further argues, is one of progressive refinement, from general, universal, discourses to more particular ones related first to society and then to literature.

As we have seen, however, if it were necessary to make an inventory of the conventions that govern the Old English riddle genre, perhaps the most obvious would be an interest in convention itself. Riddles take as their subject a reader's assumptions about the world and society, attitudes which may have become so familiar that they have long ceased to be a topic of conscious reflection. Entirely credible narrators are created who view the world from an unusual vantage point, from where it appears strange and from where it can be critiqued. Unconventional riddle-subjects present themselves in entirely

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[76] Lieber, 'Riddles, Cultural Categories', p. 262.
[77] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 169.
[78] pp. 173-86.

conventional ways, adopting ways of speaking that appear so disarmingly obvious to the reader that they pass as unremarkable. One such convention involves the idea that personal identity arises from a narrator's identification with the past, from a continuity of consciousness that links the narrator who recalls the past with the narrator who existed in it. The narrators of the horn, book, and shield riddles, when they recollect events that happened in the past, enact this model of personal identity, and by doing so appear to the reader as human narrators who are sympathetic but who also inhabit a striking and at times surreal social environment. That a poet might enlist this narrative convention demonstrates not only did Anglo-Saxons understand this construal of identity, but poets could use it for dramatic effect. That it became the basis for an entire genre of poetry which foregrounded the relationship between poet and reader, further emphasises the degree to which an Anglo-Saxon poet could regard the identity of a narrator as being dependent upon the performance of a narrative, particularly upon the way in which the reader will respond to cues provided by the narrator, accepting what is presented as normal and working to normalise what appears to be strange. This in turn demonstrates that the issue of personal identity, as it pertains to the riddles, is not just about the identity of the narrator, but through the collaboration between narrator and reader, it also comes to be about the reader's identity, and the reader coming to understand the assumptions and pre-conceptions that they rely upon to understand the world around them.

Chapter 2 - Contextual Identity and the Old English Elegy

As a group of poems, the Old English riddles illustrate how in first-person narratives identity was understood to be a production of various forms of interaction, arising both through the interplay of narrative elements and through the relationship between narrator and reader. In this chapter we turn to another collection of first-person narratives and another, very different example of how this mode of writing was understood to produce identity. Although the elegies were very much concerned with individuals existing apart from their community or loved ones, they nevertheless relied upon some basic assumptions about the nature of social relationships in Anglo-Saxon society, assumptions that found expression in many diverse forms of writing.

In his homily on Creation, for instance, Ælfric of Eynsham provides an insight into Anglo-Saxon social structure when he interprets the tree in the Garden of Eden as an opportunity for Adam to understand himself through understanding his relationship to God:

> God þa hine gebrohte on neorxnawange. and hine þær gelogode. and him to
> cwæð; Ealra þæra þinga þe on neorxnawange syndon þu most brucan. and ealle
> hi beoð þe betæhte buton anum treowe þe stent onmiddan neorxnawange ne
> hrepa þu þæs treowes wæstm. for ðon þe ðu byst deadlic gif þu ðæs treowes
> wæstm geetst; hwi wolde god swa lytles þinges him forwyrnan. þe him swa
> micle oðre þincg betæhte; gyse. hu mihte adam tocnawan hwæt he wære. buton
> he wære gehyrsum on sumum þincge his hlaforde; swilce god cwæde to him;
> Nast ðu þæt ic eom þin hlaford and þæt ðu eart min þeowa buton ðu do þæt ic
> hate. And forgang þæt ic ðe forbeode
>
> (*De Initio Creaturae*, ll. 69-76)[1]

> God then brought him to Paradise and placed him there and said to him: 'You
> can enjoy all the things that are in Paradise and they will all be committed to you
> apart from one tree which stands in the middle of Paradise. Do not touch the fruit
> of that tree, because you will be mortal if you eat the fruit of that tree.' Why
> would God forbid him such a little thing when he had entrusted him with so
> many other things? Yet how could Adam know what he was unless he was
> obedient to his Lord in something? (It was) as if God said to him: 'You do not
> know that I am your lord or that you are my servant unless you do what I
> command and forego what I forbid you.'

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[1] Peter Clemoes, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series: Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 178-89.

In this scene God and Adam are cast as lord and retainer, joined by their sense of reciprocal obligation. God gives to Adam all of Paradise as long as Adam does what his Lord commands. The scene is an act of divine gift-giving, the equivalent of many similar scenes to be found in Old English heroic poetry. While this scene has its source in Augustine,[2] one of Ælfric's innovations is to change the motivation for the gift-giving from God's desire to teach Adam the difference between virtue and vice, to a concern with teaching Adam 'what he is'. Ælfric thus introduces the idea that having knowledge about his identity as a human being is something that would be of interest to Adam, and that such knowledge can only be acquired through an awareness of his duties to his creator.

This intertwining of obligation and self-understanding depicts Adam as a figure whose identity arises both corporately, from his relationship to God, but also through his own understanding of that relationship; his sense of self 'proceeds from the outside in as well as from the inside out.'[3] This is a construal of identity common in Old English poems that depict relationships between lords and retainers. The various speeches that make up the latter half of *The Battle of Maldon*, for instance, all focus upon the speakers' consciousness of their duties to their dead lord Byrhtnoth. Although the poet introduces each of them with references to their lineage or background, they ultimately define themselves by their relationship to Byrhtnoth and how their understanding of that relationship informs their actions. The connection between lord and retainer in this and other poems is based upon the system of 'the pledge and the gift';[4] 'heroic loyalty is the counterpart of heroic munificence'[5] and Byrhtnoth's retainers are rewarded with 'favours'

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[2] For a discussion of the sources of this passage see Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 9-10.
[3] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. 108.
[4] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 77.
[5] Charles Donahue, 'Potlatch and Charity in *Beowulf*', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation For John C. Galliard*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Freese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 23-40 (p. 24).

(*geearnunga*, l.196) and 'many a horse' (*mænigne oft mearh*, l.188). [6] This is a relationship substantiated through physical activity, through the exchange of gifts and combat, which arguably assigns a sense of identity to both parties, establishing what might be called a 'relational nucleus'[7] through which they understand themselves and their behaviour. The motivation for a retainer to fulfil his promise, like the burden upon Adam in Ælfric's homily, is to obey the injunction in *Maxims I*: *lean sceal, gif we leogan nellað, þam þe us þas lisse geteode* ('if we do not want to deceive we must repay him who granted us these favours, l. 70).[8] So, for example, although in *The Battle of Maldon* the poet tells us that Offa is 'Gad's kinsman' (*Gaddes mæg*, l. 287), in death his background becomes less important in establishing who he is than the fact that in fighting to the end 'he had... accomplished what he had promised his lord' (*he hæfde...geforþod þæt he his frean gehet*, l. 289) and in doing so 'lay like a thane close to his lord' (*he læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende*, l. 294).

The type of identity that arises from this form of interaction has been called 'contextual' or 'interdependent'.[9] Although it is a universal feature of human society, it is especially obvious within societies like those depicted in Anglo-Saxon literature that appear to be founded upon 'an entire system of reciprocal relationships between equals and unequals'.[10] In the following discussion we look in more detail at this model of identity and the implications of a scenario where social relationships are pivotal in assigning identity to the individual. Although the elegies depict individuals who are no longer part of

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[6] Dobbie, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 7-16. The only reference in the poem to gifts are those given to 'Godwine and Godwig' (l.192) who fled the battle; however, Offa refers to Byrhtnoth as his *beahgifan* ('ring-giver', l.290) so it is assumed Byrhtnoth gave gifts to all his retainers.

[7] Kenneth J. Gergen, 'Social Understanding and the Inscription of the Self', in *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*, ed. by James W. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder, and Gilbert Herdt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 569-606 (p. 584).

[8] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 156-63.

[9] Wetherell and Maybin, 'The Distributed Self', p. 229. This construal of the self has also been called 'relational', 'sociocentric', 'holistic', 'collective', 'allocentric', 'ensembled', 'constitutive', 'connected' and 'distributive'; see Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 98 (1991), 224-53 (p. 227); Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, pp. 99-138.

[10] John M. Hill, 'Beowulf and the Danish Succession: Gift Giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 11 (1982), 177-97 (p. 178).

social relationships, and perhaps precisely because they do, these poems provide the strongest evidence for the importance of this model of personal identity in pre-Conquest England. Even in circumstances where others are no longer present, and where personal narrative about the past becomes the only access to personal identity, individuals in these poems continue to guide and make sense of their experience in ways that constantly reference and invoke absent social relationships.

The second part of this chapter looks at the didactic function of this model of identity, evident in the religious elegies.[11] That these elegies recount the experience of individuals living apart from the community testifies to an underlying cultural concern with the transitoriness of social relationships. These relationships were, however, also the basis for images of existence beyond this life. Depictions of Heaven, both in the elegies and elsewhere in the poetic corpus, are of a place inhabited by individuals engaging in communal, physical activities such as feasts. In a certain sense, therefore, Heaven provided an imperishable social context, which was structured like earthly society and which confirmed the importance of social interaction in providing an individual with a sense of belonging. This complex and at times ambivalent attitude to the importance of social relationships is complicated still further when viewed against the background of homiletic and patristic texts that were being written and translated during the Anglo-Saxon period, texts which suggest a fundamental mistrust, evident in both *Resignation* and *The Wanderer,* of the intense engagement between the individual and society that this construal of identity requires.

Contexts of Practice

Perhaps the most salient feature of the contextual model of identity is its emphasis upon physical activity. The general theoretical assumption it makes is that participants are mutually defined in relation to each other, and this occurs through physical action:

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[11] *The Seafarer, The Wanderer, Resignation, The Riming Poem*

'contexts are always *contexts of practice*.'[12] In a discussion of ethnography Kenneth Gergen demonstrates the basic relationship between identity and context using a very simple example in which he asks the reader to imagine themselves with their arm in the air. He argues that that it would be impossible for someone else to understand the reader's motivation in such circumstances without some knowledge of what is going on around the reader. The arm in the air is, he says, 'merely a spatiotemporal configuration'; he goes on:

> In contrast, if another person is before you, crouching and grimacing, suddenly it becomes possible to speak of you as aggressive, oppressive, or ruthless. If the other is a child standing on tiptoes, arms outstretched, his ball lodged in a tree above your head, it becomes possible to characterize you as helpful or nurturant... Note that your movement is similar in each case, yet, it is impossible to characterize you as an individual – until the relational context is articulated. Similarly, the other person's movements have little bearing on our description until they are seen with the context of your conduct. In effect, what we treat as individualized characteristics – aggressiveness, playfulness, altruism, and the like – are primarily products of joint configurations.[13]

Gergen's concern here is with external observers, and how they create the actors in the scene. It is not clear from his remarks how context affects the way in which the participants view themselves, the degree to which their experiences constitute or re-constitute them as individuals. However, the passage makes two basic points: first, to the observer the identities of the participants are interdependent; their actions contribute to a scene that must be understood as a whole before the meaning of those actions, and the character of the actors, can be understood; second, and following on from this, their identities are emergent insofar as they 'emerge in the interaction - in the "in between space"' between the participants.[14]

This type of collaborative identity, because it arises out of social contact, is most apparent in cultural rituals that formalise such contact. The Japanese tea ceremony, for instance, has like Gergen's example, been discussed by Wetherall and Maybin as a form of 'joint action [which] simultaneously positions' the individuals who take part: 'one can only

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[12] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. 118.
[13] Gergen, 'Social understanding', p. 593.
[14] Wetherell and Maybin, 'The Distributed Self', p. 225.

define oneself as a certain kind of participant, a certain kind of person, because of the other person's contribution to, and definition within, the situation.' The Anglo-Saxons obviously did not have tea ceremonies, but they did have formal drinking rituals, and in the representation of one such ritual it is possible to see how individual identities arise out of communal social activity. The ritual occurs toward the end of the first banquet in *Beowulf*, when Wealhtheow moves through Heorot carrying one (or a number) of mead cups. The early part of the scene has been the subject of a study by Michael Enright[15] and it provides a formal and stylised example of the generation of contextual identities; it begins shortly after Beowulf finishes his account of his swimming match with Breca:

> Ðær wæs hæleþa hleahtor,   hlyn swynsode,
> word wæron wynsume.   Eode Wealhþeo forð,
> cwen Hroðgares,   cynna gemyndig,
> grette goldhroden   guman on healle,
> ond þa freolic wif   ful gesealde
> ærest East-Dena   eþelwearde,
> bæd hine bliðne   æt þære beorþege,
> leodum leofne;   he on lust geþeah
> symbel ond seleful,   sigerof kyning.
> Ymbeode þa   ides Helminga
> duguþe ond geogoþe   dæl æghwylcne,
> sincfato sealde,   oþ þæt sæl alamp
> þæt hio Beowulfe,   beaghroden cwen
> mode geþungen,   medoful ætbær;
>
>   (ll. 611-24)[16]

There was laughter of warriors, a cheerful sound was made, words were pleasant. Wealhtheow went forth, Hrothgar's queen, mindful of courtesy, adorned with gold, she greeted the men in the hall and the noble woman gave the cup first to the guardian of the East Danes' homeland, dear to his people, bade him be happy at the beer-taking; gladly he partook of the feast and hall-cup, victorious king. Then the lady of the Helmings went around the older and younger warriors, gave out the precious cups, until the moment that she, virtuous minded, ring adorned queen, carried the mead-cup to Beowulf.

In his analysis of this scene Michael Enright has stressed the importance of 'primacy and precedence'[17] in the movements of Wealtheow. As he and others have noted, in moving to Hrothgar first the queen follows the prescription in *Maxims I* that at the 'dealing out of mead' (*meodoraedenne*, l.87) the queen should 'quickly present the first cup to her lord's

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[15] Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Téne to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

[16] References to the poem are taken from Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*.

[17] Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, p. 10.

hand' (*forman fulle to frean hond/ ricene geræcan*, ll.90-1).[18] Having established her lord's primacy Wealhtheow then moves to the members of his *comitatus*, first the senior retainers, then the younger, less experienced warriors. In Enright's view the acceptance of a drink after Hrothgar is a way for the retainers to 'acknowledge and assent to the ruler's precedence.'[19]

This ritual is an example of physical processes being used to actualise the relationship between the lord and retainer. The giving and taking of drink is symbolic, but it also takes place in time and space. The gesture is more complex than simple acts of gift-giving, because not only does it position retainers with respect to their lord but it also positions retainers with respect to each other: 'by serving the followers in strict order of procedure [the queen] sanctifies the status of each warrior in relation to his companions.'[20] Whether or not we agree that Wealhtheow 'sanctifies' the position of individuals, it is a process through which participants come to understand their relative status within the group by acting (taking/offering a drink), and observing the context of those actions (i.e. who precedes or follows them, who offers/takes the drink). For her part, the queen establishes the conditions by which the drinkers can re-define the group and their place within it. In so doing she defines her own position as mediator.

Like Gergen's example, underlying this ritual is the idea that 'meaning is... *public and shared*.'[21] Individuals do not assign meaning directly to their own actions but instead jointly create a scene that generates meaning for the group, and then interpret their actions in terms of this totality. The ritual occurs on this occasion because of the arrival of

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[18] Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, p. 7; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. 155; Michael Swanton, ed., *Beowulf*, revised edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 192.

[19] Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, p. 10. Editors disagree as to whether Wealhtheow is carrying a single or several cups at this point. Apart from Enright a single cup is also mentioned by Swanton, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 63; S.A.J. Bradley, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Everyman, 1982), p. 428. Klaeber (p.155-6) notes that *sincfato* is accusative plural, as does George Jack, ed., *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 65. The image of a single cup being passed among a group of warriors is potent, however it seems as though the queen is passing a number of cups to the warriors to drink from.

[20] Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, p. 22.

[21] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, pp. 12-3.

Beowulf, a moment of change for Danish society, which as we shall see in the next chapter was precisely the moment when this kind of social ritual assumed great importance in maintaining a sense of social continuity and providing the means through which the 'hierarchical order within the *comitatus* was established and renewed.'[22] However, even if its purpose is to re-assert existing social structures, the process itself is egalitarian, placing a similar value on individuals of different rank, where the participation of the lowliest thane is required to contextualise the actions of a lord and vice versa. More generally the ritual demonstrates that where identities are interdependent or contextual 'others...participate actively and continuously in the definition' of the individual.[23]

Identity and Social Context in the Elegies

The exiles who lament their separation in the Old English elegies clearly do not take part in group rituals. Rather than describing existing social contexts, the speakers in several of these poems recall past images of hall-life. In doing so, they too emphasise the degree to which individual identity is the product of particular social contexts. In some cases the association between identity and context is a very general one. In *Deor,* for example, the poet provides a brief account of his time among the Heodenings, and indicates how identity can appear literally inseparable from social context:

> Þæt ic bi me sylfum   secgan wille,
> æt ic hwile wæs   Heodeninga scop,
> dryhtne dyre.   Me wæs Deor noma.
> Ahte ic fela wintra   folgað tilne,
> holdne hlaford,   oþþæt Heorrenda nu,
> leoðcræftig monn   londryht geþah,
> þæt me eorla hleo   ær gesealde.
>
> (ll. 35-41)[24]

I want to say about myself that for a time I was a poet of the Heodenings, dear to my lord. My name was Deor. For many years I had a good position, a loyal lord, until now Heorrenda, a man skilled in the craft of poetry has received the land-rights that the protector of warriors once gave to me.

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[22] Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, pp. 6-7.
[23] Markus and Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self', p. 227.
[24] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 178-9.

The name *Deor* has been the subject of much critical discussion. Niles calls it a 'playful fancy', a 'transparent pseudonym meaning 'The Fierce One' or even 'The Animal', with a probable play on 'The Dear or Beloved One.'[25] Lawrence suggested it was honorific title conferred upon the poet by the Heodenings.[26] The use of the past tense implies that the name, like the land-rights the poet receives, has been given to him, but that he regards it as no longer 'his'. [27] The poet mentions his name as part of his account of his experiences and, as Anne Klinck argues, whatever the name means it 'reflects the speaker's respected status at the court of the Heodenings – a status which he no longer enjoys.'[28] In one sense, therefore, the identity of *Deor,* as he communicates it to us, is culturally dependent. He seems to have acquired a name and an identity among the Heodenings; yet because of his removal from that social context, that identity no longer defines him.

In other poems, the speaker recalls important social rituals that provided them with a sense of personal identity, and does so in a way that generates a sense of poignant irony. In *The Wanderer*, for example, the dreamer attempts to re-enact the type of communal physical activity discussed above, and which for the participants may have been identity-defining:

> Forþon wat se þe sceal   his winedryhtnes
> leofes larcwidum   longe forþolian,
> ðonne sorg ond slæp   somod ætgædre
> earmne anhogan   oft gebindað.
> Þinceð him on mode   þæt he his mondryhten
> clyppe ond cysse,   ond on cneo lecge
> honda ond heafod,   swa he hwilum ær
> in geardagum   giefstolas breac.
> Ðonne onwæcneð eft   wineleas guma,
> gesihð him biforan   fealwe wegas,
> baþian brimfuglas,   brædan feþra,

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[25] John D. Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems and the Social Life of Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 171; see also Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 167-8.
[26] See W.W. Lawrence, 'The Song of Deor', *Modern Philology,* 9 (1921), 23-45 (pp. 40-2).
[27] Bragg, *Lyric Speakers*, p. 98. Malone has argued that the manner of the description is innocuous and 'means only that [the poet's] narrative is cast in the historical form'(Kemp Malone, ed., *Deor* (London: Methuen, 1933), pp. 16-17.) This discounts the reflexivity of the remark. Malone similarly disregards the differences governing first- and third-person narratives when he makes favourable mention of a critical comparison between this line and *Beowulf* l. 1457, where the narrator describes the sword 'Hrunting': *wæs þæm hæftmece Hrunting nama* ('that hilted sword was named Hrunting').
[28] Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 168.

hreosan hrim ond snaw,　　　hagle gemenged.

(ll.37-48)

> Therefore, he who must go without his dear lord's counsel for a long time knows
> (this), when sorrow and sleep often together bind the wretched solitary man. It
> seems to him in his mind that he kisses and embraces his lord and lays his hand
> and head on his knee, just as he sometimes before in former days made use of the
> gift-stool. Then the friendless man awakes again, sees before him grey waves,
> sea-birds bathing, spreading their feathers, frost and snow falling, mingled with
> hail.

There are two gestures here, the first is the close physical embrace, the second the gift-giving. The embrace has been described in various ways. Larson believed it to be an English analogue to an initiation ceremony found in Old Norse literature, in which a *hirð-maðr* or 'king's man' is inducted into the *comitatus.* He described the process as follows:

> The king was in his high-seat with his guard grouped about him; across his knees
> lay a sword, his right hand grasping the hilt. The candidate approached, knelt,
> touched the sword-hilt and kissed the royal hand. He then arose and took the oath
> of fealty. Kneeling once more he placed his folded hands between those of the
> king and kissed his new lord.[29]

This ceremony accounts for the kiss, the placing of the hand, and the kneeling (implied). However, as editors have noted[30] the gift-giving, which seems to have occurred repeatedly (*hwilum*), suggests that the retainer's gesture may have been a 'ceremonial demonstration of loyalty and affection' in 'response to his lord's generosity.'[31] As Mitchell argues, the 'ceremony of homage and gift-giving' should perhaps be looked at as one composite act.[32] Even though this interpretation seems more likely, Larson's example nevertheless illustrates the importance of physical action in defining the exile's relationship to his lord. The exile clearly understands that relationship in physical terms: his humility and obeisance are expressed in his position relative to his lord, who sits or stands above him. The lord also appears to be stationary, the stable centre to which the retainer is drawn. As with Gergen's example and the drinking ritual from *Beowulf,* there is a sense here that the

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[29] Laurence M. Larson, 'The Household of the Norwegian Kings in the Thirteenth Century', *The American Historical Review,* 13 (1908), 459-759 (p. 461).

[30] T.P. Dunning and A.J. Bliss, eds., *The Wanderer* (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 112-13; Roy F. Leslie, ed., *The Wanderer*, revised edition (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1985), pp. 78-9.

[31] Leslie, ed., *The Wanderer*, p. 78.

[32] Bruce Mitchell, 'Some Syntactical Problems in *The Wanderer*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 69 (1968), 172-98 (p. 184).

actions are being understood as part of a larger whole and it is the exile's place in this scene that gives him a sense of who he is. Indeed, Markus and Katayama's statement on the general importance of relationships to the interdependent construal of self is particularly relevant here: 'the sense of belongingness to a social relation may become so strong that it makes better sense to think of the *relationship* as the functional unit of conscious reflection.'[33] In the above passage the dreamer certainly appears to be thinking primarily of the relationship by focusing upon the ways in which it is realised through physical action.

More common, particularly amongst the religious elegies, are depictions of individuals who continue to make sense of their experience according to attitudes that have been acquired in the society from which they are now separated. Both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* depict how 'the solitary individual detached from any social interaction... habitualize[s] his activity in accordance with biographical experience of a world of social institutions preceding his solitude.'[34] In these poems, speakers who have been socialised within a particular context, continue to display behaviours and attitudes that reflect that context even in its absence. In doing so, both poems demonstrate the existence of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, which he defines as 'an acquired system of generative schemes' that 'engender[s]...thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions.'[35] The *habitus* represents the internalisation of social structure, an 'embodied disposition'[36] to behave in specific culturally-determined ways that are meaningful within the context of the social environment that produced them. It is in the persistence of this *habitus* outside of that context where we discover a trace of the departed society which remains present in the interaction between the individual and their new environment. Thus, although physically

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[33] Markus and Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self', p. 226.

[34] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 72.

[35] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 95.

[36] Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 92.

separate from their society, through the *habitus,* the exile remains psychologically attached to it. The ambiguity of this situation is particularly evident in the depiction of social customs relating to the expression of emotion in *The Wanderer*.

Managing Emotion in *The Wanderer*

In definitions of the elegy genre critics are often keen to emphasise the exile's experience of a particular feeling: grief, melancholy, longing, or simply the frustration of desire. [37] As Timmer once asserted 'an elegy that does not lament is not an elegy at all.'[38] This concern with feeling generally ignores the fact that 'self and identity are immediately involved'[39] in the experience of emotion. Theorists of grief, for example, argue that to undergo great loss often affects an individual's sense of who they are, and can 'challenge one's self-identity.'[40] This is especially true for individuals coming from the type of culture depicted above, where self-understanding derives from our connection to others, and where 'the self becomes most meaningful and complete when it is cast in the appropriate social relationship.'[41] Exile from such a society causes not only emotional suffering but would also conceivably affect an individual's ability to make sense of who they are: if there is no other, then there is no context from which I can understand myself. Others are so important that, as Magennis notes, 'in many poems it appears that the life of the individual has no meaning away from community.'[42]

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[37] For definitions of the elegy genre see B.J. Timmer, 'The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry', *English Studies,* 24 (1942), 33-44; Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, pp. 245-6; T.A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), pp. 53-6; Alvin A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 125-8; C.L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London: Harap, 1967), pp. 139-41; see also Joseph Harris, 'Elegy in Old English and Old Norse: A Problem in Literary History', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), pp. 46-56.

[38] Timmer, 'Elegiac Mood', p. 41.

[39] Michelle Z. Rosaldo, 'Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling', in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. by Richard A. Schweder and Robert A. LeVine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 137-57 (p. 141).

[40] Fiona Maccallum and Richard A. Bryant, 'Self-defining Memories and Complicated Grief', *Behaviour Research and Therapy,* 46 (2008), 1311-15 (p. 1312).

[41] Markus and Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self', p. 227.

[42] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 32.

It was noted in the introduction that critics like the Gamesons have argued it is the full unexpurgated expression of feeling that is the indicator of individuality, a position which arguably pre-supposes a modern, post-Romantic construal of selfhood. For an Anglo-Saxon the opposite may have been true, and what would have been considered a manifestation of personal autonomy would not have been giving full voice to emotions but rather attempting to manage them. In societies based upon an interdependent construal of self, the expression of feeling tends to be inseparable 'from cultural and collective interpretations of appropriate behaviour'[43] and in the elegies there is evidence that the articulation of feeling is balanced, and in some cases appears to be shaped, by the exile's consciousness of social customs emphasising restraint. Thus, in *The Wanderer*, gnomic statements stress the importance of patience (*Wita sceal gebyldig*, 'A man must be patient' l. 65) and the avoidance of emotional extremes such as anger (*hatheort*, l. 66) and fear (*forht*, l.68). In *The Wife's Lament* the speaker recognises that outward appearance will not necessarily always reflect an underlying emotional state and that 'a young man must always have a cheerful countenance besides grief of the heart' (*a...geong mon..../habban sceal blipe gebæro, eac pon breostceare*, l.42, 44).[44]

Attitudes to self-restraint seem so important that sometimes these attitudes can appear to govern a poem's form, a point which seems particularly evident in the structure of *The Wanderer*. In the first narrative section of the poem (ll. 8-29) the *eardstapa* mixes an account of his exile with comments about speaking. He says that each morning he must speak his cares alone (*uhtna gehwylce/ mine ceare cwipan*, ll. 8-9), that he has no-one to whom he dares to openly reveal his heart (*pe ic him modsefan minne durre /sweotule asecgan*, ll. 10-11) , and that because of this he has often had to bind his heart with fetters (*modsefan minne sceolde/...feterum sælan*, ll. 19,21). However, the fact that he has been

[43] Wetherell and Maybin, 'The Distributed Self', p. 238.
[44] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 210-11.

forced by circumstances to remain silent also reminds him that to keep his feelings to himself is a virtue:

> Ic to soþe wat
> þæt biþ in eorle   indryhten þeaw,
> þæt he his ferðlocan   fæste binde,
> healde his hordcofan,   hycge swa he wille.

<div align="right">(ll.11-14)</div>

> I know it as a truth that it will be a noble custom in a warrior that he binds fast
> his breast, hold his treasure-chest, think what he will.

Shortly after this discussion of speech the poet moves from a first- to third-person narrative and introduces the first of two 'hypothetical mouthpieces'[45] who he refers to as *se þe cunnað* ('he who knows', l. 29) the exile's experience. Notably, although they are in the third person, it is these passages that include the poem's most intense expressions of feeling. The first passage will be discussed more fully below; the second passage is introduced as being spoken by *se þonne þisne wealsteal wise geþohte* ('he who on this foundation has wisely thought', l. 88), and famously explores what the exile has lost:

> Frod in ferðe,   feor oft gemon
> wælsleahta worn,   ond þas word acwið:
> Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago?   Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?
> Hwær cwom symbla gesetu?   Hwær sindon seledreamas?
> Eala beorht bune!   Eala byrnwiga!
> Eala þeodnes þrym!   Hu seo þrag gewat,
> genap under nihthelm,   swa heo no wære.

<div align="right">(ll. 90-96)</div>

> Wise in mind, he far off remembers many battle-slaughters, and utters these
> words: Where is the horse gone? Where is the kinsman gone? Where is the
> treasure-giver gone? Where is the seat of feasting gone? Where are the joys of
> the hall? Alas bright goblet! Alas mailed warrior! Alas the glory of the prince!
> How that time has departed, darkened under the helm of night, as though it never
> was.

Even though there is still debate about the structure of this poem, the poem can be read as dramatic monologue between 1.8 and 1.110.[46] If it is, then the use of these hypothetical mouthpieces can be understood as a manifestation of cultural attitudes regarding the expression of emotion laid out by the *eardstapa* in the early part of the poem. Through the

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[45] Stanley B. Greenfield, *Hero and Exile: The Art of Old English Poetry*, ed. by Geroge H. Brown (London: Hambledon, 1989), p. 143.
[46] Dunning and Bliss, eds., *The Wanderer*, pp. 79-80. Dunning and Bliss see the poet intervening only at lines 6-7, 88-91, and 111.

use of what are essentially proxies, the poet observes the customs of his society, distancing himself from the direct expression of feeling, yet at the same time elaborating on the difficulty of his own experiences.

The management of personal emotion might thus be taken as an illustration of how the exile, although physically separated from society, continues to understand and define his or her behaviour using the conventions of that society, as though that society continued to be present. To say simply, therefore, that exiles lament for a state that is gone misrepresents the ambiguities of their position: the community to which they belong may be absent, but its customs are invoked each time they talk about their state. To use a deconstructionist phrase, that culture is present, if only under erasure; it is legible in the *habitus* that conditions the speaker's behaviour, though it is at the same time crossed out.

Types of Community and Psychological Disorganisation

Traces of the departed culture also remain present in the way that the exile approaches his new environment. *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* both generate dramatic irony from images of individuals attempting to respond to the natural world in a manner appropriate to human society, as though the exile's mental outlook was so rigid that it was unable to adapt to the new circumstances, and was continually attempting to reconstitute what has been lost. In both poems, individuals move from a presumably comfortable existence within a human society that provided them with some sense of personal identity to a harsh, solitary existence in the natural world. The poets create irony by presenting both environments as different types of 'community' that are both understood in structuralist terms as 'a whole having many parts, which are thus comprehended as mutually determining': [47]

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[47] Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), pp. 3-4. This discussion of 'community' refers ultimately to Immanuel Kant's abstract use of the term to describe categories of

> Any given element in...a community, say one of several distinguishable objects in a landscape, is comprehended as such by its existing relationships with the others: as a differential or positional value, conditioned by the presence of the others.

Thus, for instance, in *The Wanderer* shortly after the dream sequence, the exile again mentions sea-birds, but this time draws a direct comparison between them and his kinsmen:

> Þonne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
> sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwad,
> þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð;
> greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
> secga geseldan. Swimmað eft on weg!
> Fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
> cuðra cwidegiedda.
>
>   (ll.49-55)
>
> Then the heart's wounds are heavier, painful in pursuit of the beloved. Sorrow is renewed when the memory of kinsmen goes through every part of the mind; he greets them joyfully, eagerly examines the companions of men. They swim away again. The spirit of the floating ones does not bring there many familiar utterances.

Here the physical world intrudes upon the exile's recollection of his old society, with the sea-birds in a sense 'occupying the benches' that might have once been occupied by the exile's kin. The repeated use of *geond* in this passage suggests reciprocity; the memories of kinsmen inundate the exile's mind, overwhelming him with images of his old life; he moves eagerly toward them. His memory is however, unable to maintain his connection to them, and they drift away.

This scene appears premised on a structural equivalence between two environments, between the human community of individuals and the natural community of animals and physical objects, both of which are inhabited by the exile at different times, and from which he derives a sense of meaning. As was noted in the introduction, in his discussion of the exile's fate Edward Irving visualises the state of the exile as a stone fallen from a wall, as though society was a matrix of fixed social positions that are inhabited by particular individuals. While this may seem a rather systematic approach to the exile's

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perception. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen M. Wood (Cambridge: Cambride University Press, 1998), pp. 215-6 (B111-2).

condition, the image of being fixed in place by the various different social relationships accurately describes societies where 'the uniqueness of [the] self derives from the specific configuration of relationships that each person has developed.'[48] However, although physically the exile can be thought of as a stone that has fallen from the wall, psychologically it would be more useful to think of him as the one who remains in place and who finds that the spaces that were once occupied by the 'stones' that surrounded him, and which represent individuals such as lords or kinsmen, are now empty. In his new environment these are instead filled with creatures and other natural phenomena.

This emphasis upon different types of the community is perhaps more apparent in *The Seafarer*. Unlike *The Wanderer*, in this poem it is not clear from whom the speaker has been exiled. Indeed, of the eight poems generally considered elegies and which contain elements of first-person narrative,[49] *The Seafarer* provides the least credible example of a speaker who exists or has existed in an actual relationship with others. The speaker twice mentions being exiled from kinsmen, first in qualifying his description of how he has spent a winter 'on the paths on the exile, deprived of kinsmen' (*wræccan lastum,/ winemægum bidroren*, ll.15-6)[50] and secondly as part of a brief gnomic comment on that exile: *ne ænig hleomæga/ feasceaftig ferð frefran meahte* ('no protective kinsman could comfort the desolate spirit', ll. 25-6). Yet these references appear generic, necessary to a description of what exile is rather than as an example of a set of historical circumstances. The rest of the elegies, by contrast, concern the absence of a 'significant other', either an individual, or a particular, identifiable, group to which the speaker has some emotional attachment. In some elegies the departure of this other has caused the speaker's exile (*The Wanderer, The Wife's Lament*); in others the whereabouts of this other occupies the thoughts of the speaker (*Wulf and Eadwacer*, also true of *The Wife's Lament*); in two poems the speaker

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[48] Markus and Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self', p. 227.
[49] *The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Riming Poem, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament, Deor, The Husband's Message, Resignation.*
[50] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 143-7.

has left a society in which they held an important, esteemed position (*Deor, The Riming Poem*); finally, there are elegies that if they do not contain any historical references to others nevertheless generate a sense of personal closeness by taking the form of a direct address to another (*The Husband's Message, Resignation*).

The Seafarer does, however, provide a poignant example of an individual thinking about his experience apart from society in terms of the different relationships upon which such a society is based. The poet exploits the equivalence of hall and natural world to ironically demonstrate how an individual can still be regarded as the 'intersection of a range of relational units'[51] between different elements of his environment without those relationships necessarily knitting together to create a society:

> Þær ic ne gehyrde   butan hlimman sæ,
> iscaldne wæg.   Hwilum ylfete song
> dyde ic me to gomene,   ganetes hleoþor
> ond huilpan sweg   fore hleahtor wera,
> mæw singende   fore medodrince.
> Stormas þær stanclifu beotan,   þær him stearn oncwæð
> isigfeþera;   ful oft þæt earn bigeal,
> urigfeþra;   ne ænig hleomæga
> feasceaftig ferð   frefran meahte.
>
>   (ll. 18-26)
>
> I heard nothing there except the roar of the sea, the ice-cold wave. Sometimes I had swan's song for my entertainment, the gannet's cry and the noise of the curlew for the laughter of men, the crying seagull for mead-drinking. Storms beat the rocky-cliff, where the icy-feathered tern answered them. Very often the wet-feathered eagle yelled. No protecting kinsman could comfort the desolate spirit.

This type of image has been described as the 'anti-hall.'[52] The seafarer seems to suggest that at some point he responded to his surroundings as he would the hall, knowing that it was populated by creatures that could never replace the social context that he had lost.

It has been argued that 'concrete scenes' like this are 'little more than a description of a mood,'[53] and that in this particular scene 'the greyness of the mood of nature

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[51] Gergen, 'Social understanding', p. 602.
[52] Kathryn Hume, 'The "Ruin Motif" in Old English Poetry', *Anglia*, 94 (1976), 339-60 (p. 70).
[53] Eric Stanley, 'Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer, The Seafarer,* and *The Penitent's Prayer*', *Anglia*, 73 (1955), 413-66 (p. 452).

match[es] the greyness within.'[54] However, the equivalence between hall and natural world invites us to think of this scene as the expression of a sense of psychological disorganisation. Simple descriptions of the speaker's current environment are presented as comparisons with his former one, and the shortcomings of the latter lie in its lack of order and predictability. Rather than being constant companions, for example, the sea-birds punctuate the seafarer's isolation (*hwilum/ful oft*) with their arresting cries; they seem to come as abruptly as they go; the randomness of their appearance and departure offers nothing from which the seafarer might draw comfort or allow him to make sense of his situation. In both *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* adverbs like *oft* are used repeatedly to stress this underlying sense of uncertainty. In *The Seafarer*, apart from the reference mentioned above, the exile also complains that 'he often suffered times of hardship' (*earfoðhwile oft þrowade*, l. 3), 'often kept an oppressive night-watch' (*oft bigeat/ nearo nihtwaco*), ll.6-7) aboard ship, and that he 'often had to remain on the ocean-path' (*oft/ in brimlade bidan sceolde*, ll. 29-30). In *The Wanderer*, the poet says that the solitary one *oft...are gebideð* ('often experiences grace', l.1); the wanderer complains that in the early morning he *oft...sceolde...ceare cwiðan* ('often must speak [his] cares', l.8), and that he is *oft earmcearig* ('often troubled, l. 20); he also says that the one eager for glory *oft/...bindað fæste* ('often binds fast', ll.17-8) unhappiness in his heart.

If descriptions of the external world do in fact reflect an internal state, as Stanley and Smithers suggest, they are as much reflections of internal psychological order (or disorder) as they are reflections of mood. Although terms like *oft* catalogue a succession of similar occurrences these references give the impression of human experience as being fragmented, a series of individual moments distributed along a time-line that is coherent and ordered only as a memory. If in the type of contextual identities we have been discussing 'social structure and the unity of the self are closely related processes', and the

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[54] G.V. Smithers, 'The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* (continued)', *Medium Ævum,* 28 (1959), 1-22 (p. 6).

unity of the self is tied to the 'complex pattern of social relations in which any given individual is implicated',[55] then the exile's description of his experiences, particularly of their disjointedness, implies a similarly disordered underlying psychological state.

In *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer,* therefore, it can be argued that images of the natural world act as a commentary upon the exile's mental condition and his continuing connection to the society he has left. His attachment to that society is demonstrated in that he still thinks of himself as being at the centre of a hub of relationships. He has carried this social structure into exile in the form of the *habitus*, and his suffering comes from the incompatibility of this outlook with his new environment. The absence of order in the natural world, which is unpredictable and unstructured, leads to an accompanying lack of order in the exile's mind.

The Didactic Function of Contextual Identity

From the examples discussed so far, it seems clear Anglo-Saxon poets were comfortable depicting the relationship between the individual and society as that of a participant within a larger social structure. Through various physical practices undertaken jointly with other members of the community, individuals are represented remaking important social relationships and through this process deriving a sense of personal identity. Evidence from the elegies further suggests that Anglo-Saxon audiences were receptive to images of the individual existing apart from society but continuing to act in ways that demonstrated a persistent self-conception of being at the centre of a network of relationships, even when those relationships were no longer present.

In the religious elegies such depictions had an instructional purpose. As Timmer notes, the religious elegies would be better understood as 'didactic lyrics'[56] which 'used elegiac features as a starting-point' for the propagation of Christian doctrine. *The Seafarer*

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[55] Filipe Carreira da Silva, *G.H. Mead: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 47.
[56] Timmer, 'Elegiac Mood', p. 38.

and *The Wanderer* not only reveal Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the role of social context in providing the individual with a sense of identity, but also how the depiction of an individual suffering outside society can be used to make a more general comment about the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. It is generally accepted, for example, that both poems stress the transience of human relationships. However, in suggesting alternatives to those relationships, Anglo-Saxon poets often retained the social structure upon which they were based.

According to Milton McC. Gatch the images of Heaven found in Old English poetry were, in one sense, a projection of the important social relationships on which Anglo-Saxon society were based:

> [A] mark of the theological atmosphere of the early Middle Ages is what has been characterized as the heroic outlook. In this remarkably unsettled period of history high value was placed on personal ties of loyalty and on the ability of the strong lord to provide his retainers with security and the necessities of life in return for their own service and loyalty. So, by analogy, Christ was regarded as the lord and hero par excellence, unremitting in his demand of obedience, who overcame Satan's power and his claims over the loyal Christian retainer. He had triumphed over death and one day would preside, as did the earthly lord in his hall, over the eternal and blissful banquet of his chosen and faithful followers.[57]

Social context is an important part of this conception of the afterlife. In many Old English poems Heaven literally is other people. It is, for example, a place that we journey to with others. *The Riming Poem* ends with the poet exhorting his audience 'to hurry like the saints/ separated from sin' (*halgum gelice/ scyldum biscyrede, scyndan,* 1.83-4) to where they can 'see the true God and rejoice forever in peace' (*soðne god geseon, ond aa in sibbe gefean,* 1. 87).[58] In *The Dream of the Rood,* using imagery that combines the 'associations of the feast in secular literature with those of the Christian-Latin *convivium*'[59] the dreamer hopes that the Cross will bring him to the heavenly banquet,

þær is blis mycel,

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[57] Milton McC. Gatch, 'Some Theological Reflections on Death from the Early Church through the Reformation', in *Eschatology and Christian Nurture: Themes in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Religious Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2000), pp. 99-136 (p. 114).
[58] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 166-9.
[59] Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 33.

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dream on heofonum,      þær is dryhtnes folc
geseted to symle,       þær is singal blis,
ond me þonne asette     þær ic syþþan mot
wunian on wuldre,       well mid þam halgum
dreames brucan
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<div align="right">(ll. 139-44)[60]</div>

where there is great happiness, joy in Heaven, where the lord's people are seated
at a feast, where there is everlasting happiness and then set me where I might
afterwards dwell in glory with the saints, partake of joys.

Depictions of individuals exiled from their communities allowed religious elegists
to argue for a commitment to God in terms that appealed to their audiences' social nature:
firstly, audiences were reminded that individuals are dependent on society to make sense of
themselves and give meaning to their lives; secondly, they were told that hall society is not
permanent and a day will come when the individual will no longer be part of it; finally, the
poet offered them an alternative in the society of Heaven, which is eternal. In a sense,
Heaven was an imperishable social context and the poets responsible for both *The Seafarer*
and *The Wanderer* encouraged their audience to consider this other society. In *The
Wanderer,* the poet reminds his audience that 'all security resides' (*eal seo fæstnung
stondeð*, l. 115) in Heaven; in *The Seafarer,* Heaven is 'where we have a home' (*hwær we
ham agen'*, l. 117).

Dividedness and Sinfulness

At the same time, however, as Anglo-Saxon poets 'recycled' images of human society to
represent the afterlife there was also a tendency to mistrust the social relationships that
provided the basis for these images, not just for their transience but also for their inherent
fragmentariness. As an examination of *The Wanderer*, *Resignation,* and the broader
intellectual tradition that produced these poems will show, there is an underlying mistrust
of the possibility of social union between members of the community. There is a sense that
the individual is, like the exile surrounded by creatures and the natural world, always
outside the group. The reason for this fragmentariness is the fallen nature of mankind. In

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[60] George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 61-5.

Resignation the solution to this dilemma is union with God after death. *The Wanderer,* by contrast, although it too looks to Heaven, finds other ways to counsel independence from a divided world.

The most explicit expressions of the fragmentariness of human society are found in various images of ruined walls and broken masonry that are referred to in Irving's analogy discussed above, and which occur in poems like *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*:

> Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle   hu gæstlic bið,
> þonne ealre þisse worulde wela   weste stondeð,
> swa nu missenlice   geond þisne middangeard
> winde biwaune   weallas stondaþ,
> hrime bihrorene,   hryðge þa ederas.
>
> *(The Wanderer*, ll.73-77)
>
> The clear-sighted warrior must see how terrifying it will be when the wealth of all this world stands desolate, just as now in various places throughout the world walls stand blown upon by the wind, covered in frost, the buildings swept with snow.

Here the products of human workmanship are found at different points on the earth, overcome by the elements. Like other references to ruins in the elegies this image is a *memento mori* that reminds the audience that they too will be overcome. Individual walls and buildings, like the individuals that made and used them, all share in the world's transience irrespective of their earlier state. The use of *missenlice*, however, moves the image beyond an account of general decay to an image of disconnectedness between various different sites once inhabited by humans, suggesting not only temporal but geographical disjunction, and, more generally, that disunity is a defining characteristic of human society.

As Lee notes, behind the elegies is an awareness that 'the whole human race from the time of the Fall is in a condition of dismemberment and division, of Babylonian confusion.'[61] Human society is divided because mankind is sinful. In his commentary upon the Book of Genesis, Bede discusses the spiritual implications of the Babel story, making a

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[61] Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden*, p. 132.

distinction between the oneness of God and diversity and multiplicity which he attributes

to that sinfulness:

> Sed unus Dominus, una fides, unum baptisma, unus Deus, in quo electorum salus
> est; multi autem Domini reproborum, diuersi anfractus perfidiae, diuersa
> pollutionum uolutabra, diuersi sunt dii gentium quibus ad unum damnationis
> interitum omnes miseri pertrahuntur.
>
> (*In Genesim,* III, xi, ll. 8-9)[62]

> The Lord is one, faith is one, baptism is one, and God is one, in whom is the
> salvation of the elect; but there are many lords of the wicked, diverse windings
> of faithlessness, diverse wallowing-places of defilements, diverse are the gods of
> the heathens, through whom all the miserable are pulled to the one destruction of
> damnation.

Conversely, the impossibility of unity is linked in some texts with the impossibility

of goodness or happiness. In King Alfred's version of Boethius's *De Consolatione*

Philosophiae, for example, Wisdom, summarising a discussion of what constitutes the

'highest good' (*hehste good*), states that 'this present life' (*þis andwearde lif*) cannot be the

highest good because it is so 'varied and so manifoldly divided, that no man may have it all

so that there isn't in him a lack of something' (*mislic and on swa manigfeald todæled, þæt*

hit nan mon ne mæg eall habban þæt him ne sie sumes þinges wana).[63] Individuals 'err'

(*dwoliað*) when 'they believe that they can have full good and full happiness in these

present goods' (*hi wenað ðæt hi mægen habban full god ond fulla gesælða on þisum*

andweardum godum, p.88)

Thus the intellectual tradition that produced the religious elegies was one that both

accepted the role of interpersonal relationships in producing the identity of individuals but

which also regarded that process as one that arises out of a morally problematic state of

division arising from the fallen nature of mankind. That state of division is not just an

external one. In the same way a lack of order in the environment of the individual exiled

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[62] Charles W. Jones, ed., *Bedae Venerabilis Opera: Pars II Opera Exegetica: 1 Libri Quatuor In Principum Genesis Usque Ad Nativitatem Isaac et Eiectionem Ismahelis Adnotationum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), pp. 157-8.

[63] Walter John Sedgefield, ed., *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1899), p. 90.

from society appears to lead to a similarly chaotic psychological state, external division also has an internal component that is associated with sinfulness and moral disorder.

Internal Division

In both *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* we noted the repeated use of *oft* to suggest the chaotic and random character of the exile's existence away from society. In *Resignation*,[64] another of the religious elegies, the penitent similarly uses modifying terms to suggest internal division in a way that associates it with sinfulness. One example is his use of *fela* to describe his many shortcomings and his experiences both within and apart from his society. He asks, for example, to be forgiven his *firendæda fela* ('many wicked deeds', l.25), his *mana fela* ('many sins' l.51) and thanks God for his *fela...arna* ('many mercies', l.64), and the great amount that God has given him (*fela...forgeafe*, l. 36). These references depict the speaker as being, like the exiles in both *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer,* deeply conscious of the particulate nature of his own existence. The speaker is aware experiences occur over time, and a record of them accumulates in the memory, but as a group they are coherent only insofar as they comprise a series of similar events.

Another, perhaps more significant term is the speaker's use of *manigfeald* in the opening section of the poem, which he uses twice, firstly to refer to God's creation and secondly to refer to himself:

> Age mec se ælmihta god,
> helpe min se halga dryhten!   þu gesceope heofon ond eorþan
> ond wundor eall,   min wundorcyning,
> þe þær on sindon,   ece dryhten,
> micel ond manigfeald. Ic þe, mære god,
> mine sawle bebeode   ond mines sylfes lic,
> ond min word ond min weorc,   witig dryhten,
> ond eal min leoþo,   leohtes hyrde,
> ond þa manigfealdan   mine geþohtas.

(ll. 5-9)

> Deliver me Almighty God, help me holy Lord! You created heaven and earth and all the wonders, my king of glory, eternal Lord, which are there, great and manifold. I commend my soul, illustrious God, and my own body, and my words

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[64] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 215-8.

and my works, wise Lord, and all my limbs, Guardian of Light, and my manifold
thoughts.

There seem to be two attitudes to manifoldness or diversity in Old English poetry
depending on whether the concept is being applied to God or to humanity. The first
mention of the term in this passage is positive and concerned very generally with God's
creation. The tone here is similar to that found at the beginning of Exeter Riddles 31 and
32: *Is þes middangeard missenlicum/ wisum gewlitegad, wrættum gefrætwad* ('this earth is
beautified in various ways, adorned with jewels', ll.1-2). These poems share with
Resignation a sense of God's responsibility for all that is created, either naturally or by
man. The many wonders of God's creation testify to His majesty and munificence and the
use of *manigfeald* thus evokes the image of abundant diversity. In *The Order of the World,*
God is further responsible for drawing together these manifold elements into a coherent
whole that he maintains through His power:

> Forþon swa teofenede,   se þe teala cuþe,
> dæg wiþ nihte,   deop wið hean,
> lyft wið lagustream,   lond wiþ wæge,
> flod wið flode,   fisc wið yþum.
> Ne waciað þas geweorc,   ac he hi wel healdeð;
> stondað stiðlice   bestryþed fæste
> miclum meahtlocum   in þam mægenþrymme
> mid þam sy ahefed   heofon ond eorþe.
>
>   (ll. 82-9)[65]

> Therefore, he thus joined, he who rightly knew, day with night, deep with high,
> the sky with the ocean, land with wave, sea with sea, fish with waves. These
> works do not weaken, but he holds them completely; they stand firmly, erected
> fast with great powerful bands in that power with which heaven and earth are
> raised.

Initially at least, the second reference to *manigfeald* in *Resignation* also appears to be
positive. Here the speaker commends his various thoughts along with his body, soul,
words, and works, to God. The short list of the various aspects of the penitent's being
conveys a sense of his utter commitment to God, and his willingness to put everything into
God's hands. In *Resignation* this catalogue is limited, but it evokes the larger 'enumerative

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[65] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 163-6.

tradition'[66] of confessional prayer that could include far more extensive and elaborate

offerings made by the penitent seeking forgiveness:

> In naman þære halgan þrynesse þæt is fæder and sunu and se halga gast god
> ælmihtig þam ic eom andetta ecne ælmihtigne god a wesendne and a wuniendne
> to widan feore þam ic bibiode minre sawle gehealdnesse and mines lichoman
> min word and weorc and mine geþohtas, mine heortan and minne hyge, min
> leomu and mine lioðu, min fell and flæsc, min blod and ban, min mod and
> gemynd and min gewit eall and æghwæt þæs þe me lichomlices oþþe gastlices sy
> mid rihte mæge cyrranne, and þurh drihtnes þone halgan lichoman and þurh
> drihtnes þa halgan rode, and þurh sancta Marie mægþhad, and þurh Cristes
> acennednesse, and þurh his þæt halige fulwiht, and þurh his halige festen, and
> þurh his þrowunga, and þurh his æriste, and þurh his upastigenesse on heofonas,
> and þurh þone halgan gast and þone hean dom þe nu toweard is eallan
> mancynne, and þurh his þæt halige godspell and eal þa wundor þe þær on syn
> þurh þa ic me bebiode minum drihtne ðam ælmihtigum Gode; and eac ic hine
> bidde þurh ealle þas ðe ic nu arimde þæt he me forgife ealle mine synna milde.

(A Prayer of Confession in Old English begging Forgiveness and Protection)[67]

> In the name of the holy Trinity that is the Father and Sun and the Holy Spirit,
> God almighty, who I acknowledge as the eternal almighty God existing forever
> and abiding forever, to whom I commend the keeping of my soul and my body,
> my words and works, and my thoughts, my heart and my mind, my limbs and my
> members, my skin and my flesh, my blood and bone, my spirit and mind, and all
> my wit and everything which can properly proceed from my spirit and body, and
> through the holy body of the lord and the holy cross of the Lord, and through the
> virginity of St. Mary, and through Christ's birth, and through his holy baptism,
> and through his holy fast, and through his Passion, and through his resurrection,
> and through his ascent to Heaven, and through the Holy Spirit and the high
> judgement which now faces all mankind, and through his holy Gospel, and all
> the wonders which are therein, through them, I commend to myself to my Lord
> God Almighty; and I also pray to him through all this which I have now
> enumerated that he mercifully forgives me all my sins.

In the first part of this prayer the different elements of the speaker's being are arranged

largely into alliterative pairs, and the comprehensiveness of the list suggests that, just as in

Resignation, the catalogue of different elements is a measure of the trust the penitent is

willing to place in God. The speaker explicitly asks that his enumeration (*ariman*) of these

various elements be taken into consideration by God when considering his prayer.

In both texts, the basis for this offering is the recognition that the penitent is

constituted by various different elements. In the Anglo-Saxon homiletic tradition this state

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[66] Phillip Pulsiano, 'Prayers, Glosses and Glossaries', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 209-30 (p. 212).
[67] Bernard James Muir, ed., *A Pre-Conquest English Prayer-Book (BL MSS Cotton Galba A.xiv and Nero A.ii (ff. 3-13)* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1988), p. 136.

is explicitly associated with sinfulness. According to the Blickling homilist it is through a mixture of the individual's thoughts, words, works, and the will, that the Christian sins:

> Ure lichoma wæs gesceapen of feower gesceaftum, of eorþan, ond of fyre, ond of wætere, ond of lyfte; swa we eac agyltaþ þurh feower þing, þurh geþoht, ond þurh word, ond þurh weorc, and þurh willan.
> (*Dominica Prima in Quadragesima*)[68]

> Our body was created from four elements, from earth, and from fire, and from water, and from air; likewise we sin through four things, through thoughts, and through words, and through works, and through the will.

The analogy used here suggests that although *manigfeald* in *Resignation* refers to thoughts, manifoldness or internal division is a defining characteristic of the sinner's internal state. Manifold thoughts are just one expression of that state and they arise either through actively embracing the physical world or simply through contact with it. The Blickling homilist also speaks of individuals who succumb to *þa flæslican willan & þa ungereclican uncysta* ('carnal desire and unrestrained lusts', *Dominica Prima in Quinquagesima*)[69] and says of their mental state: *hie beoþ on heora mode mid mislicum geþohtum onstyrede, þæt seo stemn þære heortan bið swiþe gedrefed on þæm gebede* (they are in their minds disturbed by various thoughts so that the voice of their heart is greatly vexed in their prayer). Here manifoldness of thought is a form of confusion brought about by a lack of self-restraint.

Manifold thoughts are also a risk more generally associated with interacting with a world that is itself divided. In the Old English version of *Admonitio Ad Filium Spiritualem* Basil argues for the importance of the peaceful mind, likening the mind of the sinner to that which blows or is blown in all directions:

> Se man ðe sibbe lufað. he sylf gearcað Criste wununge on his mode. forðam ðe Crist syle is sibb. and he on sibbe wyle wunian untwylice...Se niðfulla wer bið gelic ðam scipe ðe ða yða drifað ut on sæ swa hu swa se wind blæwð buton ælcum steoran. and se gesibsuma wer hæfð him orsorhnysse.[70]

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[68] Richard Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies, with a translation and index of words together with The Blickling Glosses* (London: Oxford University Press, 1874-80; repr. 1997), pp. 26-39, (p. 35).

[69] pp. 14-25, (p.19).

[70] Henry W. Norman, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Hexameron of St. Basil, or Be Godes Six Daga Weorcum, and the Anglo-Saxon Remains of St. Basil's Admonitio Ad Filium Spiritualem*, 2nd edn (London: John Russell Smith, 1859), p. 46.

> The man who loves peace, he himself prepares a dwelling for Christ in his mind, because Christ himself is peace, and he will undoubtedly dwell in peace...The malicious man is like the ship which the waves drive out to sea, just as the wind blows without any steering, and the peaceful man has security for himself.

Conscious perhaps of the mind's tendency to be drawn in different directions, Basil also warns: *beo ðe an foresceawung. gif ðu God anum ðeowian gewilnast. Ne abysga ðu ðin mod on mislicum ðingum* ('let there be one providence in you, if you wish to serve God alone. Do not busy your mind with diverse things', p. 38). Basil's fear here seems to be that the mind can be pre-occupied with a variety of different matters, all of which distract the individual from the simplicity necessary for the spiritual life. It is not so much the objects themselves that are problematic; rather, it is the continual movement from one to the other that makes it impossible to develop a sense of equanimity. A similar sentiment is expressed in King Alfred's version of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* during a discussion of the disruptiveness of a teacher's duties:

> Swiðe oft gedrefð ða heortan sio monigfalde giemen ðæs underfangnan lareowdomes, & þonne ðæt mod bið on monig todæled, hit bið on anes hwæm þe unfæstre, & eac ðy unnyttre. Be ðæm cwæð Salomon se snottra: Sunu min, ne todæl ðu on to fela ðin mod, & ðin weorc endemes. Forðon oft ðonne mon forlet ðone ege & ða fæstrædnesse þe he mid ryhte on him innan habban secolde, hine spænð his mod to swiðe mongeum unnyttum weorce.[71]

> Very often the heart is troubled by the manifold cares of the teaching that has been undertaken, and when the mind is divided among many things it is in each of them less steady and also less useful. About this Solomon the wise says: My son, do not divide your mind among too many things and your works likewise. For often when a man abandons the fear and constancy which he must rightly have within him, he draws his mind into very many useless works.

The mention of the penitent's 'manifold thoughts' in *Resignation* can, therefore, be interpreted as referring to a disorganised mental state that results from the mind's engagement with the external world. It can refer to a situation in which the chaotic nature of bodily desires and impulses have impressed themselves on the individual's consciousness, or simply a state that results from an individual being pre-occupied with worldly affairs.

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[71] Henry Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, Parts I and II (London: Oxford University Press, 1871), p. 36.

This conclusion invites us to reconsider how the images of psychological disorder depicted in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* might be interpreted. Neither poem explicitly condemns the relationship of the individual to society but to the extent that the individual derives a sense of identity by physically participating in practices that make and remake important social relationships, the individual must engage with various different elements of a divided world, a process that inevitably leads to a similar internal state of division. At best this is injurious to the individual's spiritual health; at worst it is sinful.

Overcoming division

The solution sought by the penitent in *Resignation* is what Lee calls the 'restoration of a primal unity',[72] a state of 'complete absorption'[73] in which the individual is united with God, and where there is no longer pain associated with a relationship to another:

> Eala dryhten min,
> meahtig mundbora!   þæt ic eom mode seoc,
> bittre abolgen,   is seo bot æt þe
> gelong æfter life. Ic on leohte ne mæg
> butan earfoþum   ænge þinga
> feasceaft hæle   foldan gewunian;
> þonne ic me to fremþum   freode hæfde,
> cyðþu gecweme   me wæs a cearu symle
> lufena to leane,   swa ic alifde nu.
>
>   (ll. 108-116)[74]

Oh my Lord, mighty protector! In that I am sick in mind, distressed with bitterness, the remedy is with you, after this life. I, a destitute man, can in no way dwell in the light on this earth without hardships; when I had good-will toward strangers, a pleasant relationship, continual care was always the reward for my affection, as I granted just now.

A similar sentiment is expressed in Alfred's Boethius. According to Wisdom, 'unity and goodness is one thing' (*sio annes ond sio goodnes an ðing sie*)[75] and 'that which is entirely good is that which is together entirely undivided' (*is þæt fulle good þæt eall ætgædre is untodæled*). God, claims Wisdom, 'is that full and perfect good' (*þæt fulle god and þæt fullfremed*, p. 83) and He represents 'the highest good and best happiness' (*se hehsta good*

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[72] Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden*, p. 136.
[73] p. 135.
[74] MS re-construction according to Krapp and Dobbie, p.355
[75] Sedgefield, ed., *Old English Version of Boethius*, p. 90.

and þa selestan gesælða, p. 84). Man believes that he is whole, but he is in fact risking

dissolution if he does not seek that good which lasts forever:

> Hwæþer þu þonne ongite þæt ælc þara wuhta þe him beon þencð, þæt hit þencð
> ætgædere bion, gehal, untodæled? forðæm gif hit todæled bið, þonne ne bið hit
> no hal. Ða cwæð ic: þæt is soð. Ða cwæð he: þæt is, eall þing habbaþ þeah ænne
> willian, ðæt is ðæt hi woldon a bion; þurh þone ænne willan hi wilniað ðæs anes
> goodes þe a bið, þæt is God. Ða cwæð ic: Swa hit is swa ðu sægst. Ða cwæð he:
> Hwæt, þu miht openlice ongitan þæt ðæt is forinlice good þing þe ealra wuhta
> ond ealle gescafta wilniað to habbanne. Ða cwæð ic: Ne mæg nan mon soðre
> secgan, forðæm ic ongite þæt ealla gesceafta toflowen swa swa wæter, and nanne
> sibbe ne nane endebyrdnesse ne holden, ac swiðe ungereclice toslupen ond to
> nauhte wurden, swa swa we lange ær sædon on ðisse ilcan bec, gif hi næfdon
> ænne God þe him eallum stiorde ond racode ond rædde.
>
> <div align="right">(pp. 93-4)</div>

> Do you then understand that everyone of the creatures that thinks that it exists,
> thinks itself to be together, whole, undivided? For if it is divided, then it is not
> whole. Then I said: that is true. Then he said: it is the case though that all things
> have one will, that is that they want to exist forever; through that one will they
> desire that one good which remains forever, that is God. Then I said: So it is just
> as you say. Then he said: Listen, you may plainly see that it is an exceedingly
> good thing which all creatures and things desire to have. Then I said: No one can
> say more truly, because I recognise that all creatures would flow away like
> water, and not retain any peace or order but very confusedly dissolve and
> become nothing, just as we said before in this same book, if they did not have
> one God that guided and rule and governed them all.

In the same way that *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* address the problem of the

transience of human relationships by directing the reader to their supernal equivalent,

Resignation attempts to overcome the fragmentariness inherent in human society by

replacing the necessarily imperfect relationship between two human beings with a perfect

union between man and God. It is one approach to dealing with the problem of division

raised in the religious elegies. Another approach, it might be argued, occurs in *The*

Wanderer, where through the use of rhetorical figures the poet attempts to remove the

speaker from the manifoldness and division associated with human experience.

In the chapter on the riddles we discussed the use of repetition or anaphoric series

to suggest ontological continuity in circumstances where the subject of the riddle recounted

the variety of its experiences. In religious literature this type of continuity through change

is most often associated with the divine nature. In references to the Incarnation in

particular we find an association between constancy and divinity alongside another more

worldly association between human nature and a constant state of change. It is a distinction

made by the Blickling homilist, for example, in one brief mention of the Incarnation:

> Seo mennisce gecynd biþ a færende, and seo godcunde meht a staþolfæstlice
> stonde. Hwæt hæfde seo godcunde þurh þa menniscan nemne buton þæt heo
> mihte beon acenned, and wacian, and arisan and faran of stowe to oþerre
> (*Dominica Prima in Quinquagesima*)[76]

> Human nature is always on-going and divine power always stands firmly. What
> did the divine nature obtain through the human except that it might be born, and
> awake, and arise, and go from one place to another.

Thus, when Wulfstan provides his account of the Incarnation his depiction of Christ's

youth is very much an image of an individual undergoing a series of the kind of disparate

experiences that, as was noted in the religious elegies, is typical of human existence:

> Ða he cild wæs, eall hine man fedde swa man oðre cild fedeð. He læg on cradole
> bewunden ealswa oðre cild doð; hine bær oð sylf gan mihte. Ðurh ælc þing seo
> menniscnes adreah þæt hyre to gebryrede. Hine þyrste hwylum and hwilum
> hingrode. He æt and dranc, and ægðer he þolode ge cyle ge hætan. Eall seo
> menniscnes þolode þæt menn to gebyrede, forðam þe he wæs soð mann þurh his
> medgrengecynd.
> (VI, *An Outline of History*, ll.164-71)[77]

> When he was a child, he was fed just as other children are fed. He lay in a cradle,
> swaddled as other children are swaddled; he was carried until he could walk by
> himself. Through everything his humanity endured that which pertained to it. He
> thirsted sometimes and sometimes he hungered. He ate and drank, and he
> endured both cold and heat. His humanity endured that which pertained to men,
> because he was a true man through his mother's nature.

Here Wulfstan conjures an image of Christ as a passive subject. The repetition of *hwilum*

in this passage conveys a sense of the variability of human experience. As with the use of

oft in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* or *fela* in *Resignation,* this term foregrounds the

temporal nature of that experience as the occurrence of specific events that recur over time,

but which are not regular.

The distinction between inconstancy and worldliness on the one hand, and

constancy and unworldliness on the other, is worth noting when reading *The Wanderer*.

The narrative voice changes over the course of the poem. Significantly, the poem contains

five anaphoric series that all occur in the second half of the poem (ll.65-9, *ne*; ll.80-4, *sum*;

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[76] Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, p.14-25, (p.19).
[77] Dorothy Bethurum, ed., *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), pp. 142-56.

ll.92-3, *hwær cwom*; ll. 94-5, *eala*; ll. 108-9, *her bið...læne*). What critics regard as the broadening of the speaker's perspective, his movement beyond his own problems 'to a universal, eschatological vision bespeaking an absolute hope'[78] is also the stiffening of the narrative voice through repetition. Terms which can be used to stress the manifoldness of individual experience, by contrast, such as the instances of *oft* discussed above, occur largely in the first half of the poem (ll. 1, 8, 17, 20, 40, 90). The move toward wisdom, therefore, can be interpreted as a move away from a narrative voice that emphasises the diversity of human experience to one that stresses continuity through change.

Ne-catalogues and Unworldliness

The anaphoric series that inaugurates this change in *The Wanderer* is a *ne*-catalogue. It is structured as a series of gnomic statements that sets out to establish guidelines for prudent behaviour:

> Swa þes middangeard
> ealra dogra gehwam   dreoseð ond fealleþ,
> forþon ne mæg weorþan wis   wer, ær he age
> wintra dæl in woruldrice.   Wita sceal geþyldig,
> ne sceal no to hatheort   ne to hrædwyrde,
> ne to wac wiga   ne to wanhydig,
> ne to forht ne to fægen,   ne to feohgifre
> ne næfre gielpes to georn,   ær he geare cunne.
> Beorn sceal gebidan,   þonne he beot spriceð,
> oþþæt collenferð   cunne gearwe
> hwider hreþra gehygd   hweorfan wille.
>
> (ll. 62-73)

Thus this world each and every day declines and falls, consequently a man
cannot become wise, before he has a deal of winters in the kingdom in the world.
A man must be patient; he must not be too hot-hearted, nor too hasty of speech,
nor too weak a warrior, nor too foolhardy, nor too timid, nor too servile,
nor too greedy, nor too boastful, before he fully knows. A man must wait when
he speaks his boast until, stout-hearted, he readily knows where the thoughts of
his heart will tend.

The formal structure of the passage depicts wisdom as a state in which the individual exists at a remove from a list of different, undesirable behaviours. Leslie has suggested that the

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[78] Robert E. Bjork, 'Sundor Æt Rune: The Voluntary Exile of the Wanderer', *Neophilologus*, 63 (1989), 119-29 (p. 119).

poet is interested in counselling moderation in this passage;[79] Diekstra believes that the poet is arguing here that the 'affects or perturbations of the mind have to be tempered and guided'.[80] To the extent that moderation or self-governance contribute to a state of constancy these readings seem appropriate.

The use of *ne*-catalogues in Anglo-Saxon literature is particularly common in both secular and religious works, and in the latter group of texts they are used mostly to suggest continuity and stability, everything in fact that is not characteristic of human experience. As Carol Braun Pasternak notes:

> The syntax of the list and its repetition of *ne* indicate the total absence of some group of qualities or situations and therefore a pure state. This absoluteness contrasts with the state of the world, which is always a mixed state and changeable.[81]

In *Maxims I,* for example, a short *ne*-catalogue is used to describe God and contrast him with the diversity of his creation:

> Meotud sceal in wuldre,   mon sceal on eorþan
> geong ealdian.   God us ece biþ,
> ne wendað hine wyrda   ne hine wiht dreceþ,
> adl ne yldo   ælmihtigne;
> ne gomelað he in gæste,   ac he is gen swa he wæs,
> þeoden geþyldig.   He us geþonc syleð,
> missenlicu mod,   monge reorde.
> Feorhcynna fela   fæþmeþ wide
> eglond monig.   Eardas rume
> meotud arærde   for moncynne,
> ælmihtig god,   efenfela bega
> þeoda ond þeawa.

(ll.7-18)

> The Creator must be in glory, the young man on the earth must grow old. God is with us forever, the Almighty; events do not change him, nor does sickness or age trouble him at all; nor does he age in spirit, but he is now just as he was, a patient ruler. He gives us thoughts, various minds, many languages. Many islands widely embrace many kinds of life. The Creator, Almighty God, established spacious dwellings for mankind, an equal multitude of peoples and customs.

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[79] Leslie, ed., *The Wanderer*, p. 13.
[80] F.N.M. Diekstra, '*The Wanderer* 65b-72: The Passions of the Mind and the Cardinal Virtues', *Neophilologous,* 55 (1971), 73-88 (p. 74). For other interpretations of this passage see Mitchell, 'Syntactical Problems', pp. 191-98; Dunning and Bliss, eds., *The Wanderer*, pp. 117-8.
[81] Carol Braun Pasternak, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 77.

Ne-catalogues also describe places which lack the variation characteristic of human life. *Judgement Day II* contains a passage where Heaven is described as the absence of many of the states that trouble mankind:

> Þær niht ne genimð   næfre þeostrum
> þæs heofenlican   leohtes sciman;
> ne cymð þær sorh ne sar   ne geswenced yld,
> ne þær ænig geswinc   æfre gelimpeð,
> oððe hunger oþþe þurst   oððe heanlic slæp,
> ne bið þær fefur ne adl   ne færlic cwyld,
> nanes liges gebrasl   ne se laðlica cyle.
> Nis þær unrotnes   ne þær æmelnys,
> ne hryre ne caru   ne hreoh tintrega,
> ne bið þær liget   ne laðlic storm,
> winter ne þunerrad   ne wiht cealdes,
> ne þær hagulscuras   hearde mid snawe,
> ne bið þær wædl ne lyre   ne deaðes gryre
> ne yrmð ne agnes   ne ænigu gnornung
>
> (ll. 254-67) [82]

There night, with its darkness, never snatches the splendour of the heavenly light; neither sorrow nor pain nor troubled age comes there, nor does any hardship occur there, or hunger, or thirst, or abject sleep, nor is there fever nor sickness nor sudden pestilence, no crackling flame nor hateful cold. There isn't sadness there, nor is there weariness, nor decay, nor care, nor rough punishment, nor is there lightning, nor hateful storm, winter, nor thunder, nor any cold at all, nor are there hail-showers, hard with snow, nor is there poverty nor loss, nor the terror of death, nor trouble nor misery, nor any sadness.

The Phoenix uses a number of rhetorical techniques to describe Paradise. One technique is the repetition of *ne*, which similar to the above examples describes it as lacking many of the disagreeable extremes of human life:

> Ne forstes fnæst,   ne fyres blæst,
> ne hægles hryre,   ne hrimes dryre,
> ne sunnan hætu,   ne sincaldu,
> ne wearm weder,   ne winterscur
> wihte gewyrdan,   ac se wong seomað
> eadig ond onsund.
>
> (ll. 14-20) [83]

Neither rain nor snow, nor the breath of frost, nor the blast of fire, nor the fall of hail, nor the fall of rime, nor the heat of the sun, nor perpetual cold, nor warm weather, nor winter showers, spoils it in any way, but the place remains perfect and whole

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[82] Dobbie, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 58-67. For a survey of the use of *ne*-catalogues and other rhetorical figures to describe Heaven see Hildegard L.C. Tristram, 'Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 79 (1978), 102-13.

[83] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 94-113.This is one of several *ne*-catalogues in the poem; see also ll. 50-59, 134-9. On the originality of this passage see Jackson J. Campbell, 'Learned Rhetoric in Old English Poetry', *Modern Philology,* 63 (1966), 189-201 (p. 197).

Finally, a homily by Ælfric demonstrates the sinlessness of mankind prior to the Fall through the characterisation of Adam, who, while he obeys God, is not subject to the vicissitudes of human life:

> Him ne derode nan fyr, þeah þe he mid fotum on stope,
> ne nan wæter ne mihte þone mannan adrencan,
> þeah þe he yðum urne færlice.
> Ne nan wildeor ne mihte, ne nan wurmcymm ne dorste
> derian þam menn mid hys muðes slite.
> Ne hungor ne þurst, ne hefigtyme cyle,
> ne nan swiðlic hæte, ne seocnyss ne mihton
> Adam geswencan on þam earde,
> þa hwile þe he þæt lytle bebod mid geleafan geheold.
> *(De Falsis Diis*, ll. 36-44)[84]

> No fire hurt him, even if he stepped on it with his feet, nor did any water drown the man, although he moved quickly through the waves. Nor could any wild animal, or any dragon dare hurt him with the bite of its mouth. Nor could any hunger or thirst, or severe cold, or intense heat, or sickness trouble Adam in that dwelling, while he faithfully held that little command.

God, Heaven, Paradise, and mankind before the Fall, are all beings or places that are not only free of the various, disagreeable aspects of life in the world, in a certain sense they can be said to be free of variety itself. Instead, they are presented as continuous states that endure apart from the diversity associated with the experience of mortal life.

Ne-catalogues are also used to describe human states, in each case carrying the associations described above between constancy and removal from a divided world. In *Beowulf*, for example, Hrothgar uses a short *ne*-catalogue to describe the experience of the individual to whom God grants happiness. It makes the literal connection found in Alfred's Boethius between contentment and lack of division:

> Wunað he on wiste;   no hine wiht dweleð
> adl ne yldo,   ne him inwitsorh
> on sefan sweorceð,   ne gesacu ohwær
> ecghete eoweð,   ac him eal worold
> wendeð on willan
>
>   (ll. 1735-9)

> He continues in happiness; neither sickness or age hinder him at all, nor does evil care darken his heart, nor does enmity, sword-hatred reveal itself anywhere, but the whole world goes according to his will.

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[84] John C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), II, pp. 667-724.

Ne functions in this passage to separate the individual from what in *The Seafarer* are the three things (*adl oþþe yldo oþþe ecghete*, l.70) that threaten to 'take the life' (*feorh oðþringeð*, l. 71) of the individual in the world. These represent the unpredictability of the world and it is from this that the individual favoured by God is protected. The repetition of *ne* provides a sense of stability through these various threats which re-enforces the notion of continuity contained in the use of *wunian*. The individual favoured by God is literally protected from the diversity of the world through the repetition of similar sounds and, consequently, remains in a state of uninterrupted happiness.

Ne-catalogues also occur in *The Seafarer,* where they have several uses. In one instance they demonstrate how in death the individual no longer experiences the various negative and positive sensations that accompany human experience:

> Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma,   þonne him þæt feorg losað,
> ne swete forswelgan   ne sar gefelan,
> ne hond onhreran   ne mid hyge þencan.
>
> (ll. 94-6)

> Then when he loses his life his body will not taste sweetness, or feel pain, or
> move its hand or think with its mind.

Earlier in the poem, another, longer, and more complex *ne*-catalogue is used. The first part is negative (or doubly negative) and emphasises that there is no single good that can ensure that the seafarer does not experience continual anxiety regarding his sea-voyage:

> Forþon nis þæs modwlonc   mon ofer eorþan,
> ne his gifena þæs god,   ne in geoguþe to þæs hwæt,
> ne in his dædum to þæs deor,   ne him his dryhten to þæs hold,
> þæt he a his sæfore   sorge næbbe,
> to hwon hine dryhten   gedon wille.
>
> (ll. 39-43)

> For there isn't any man so spirited over the earth, nor so generous in his gifts,
> nor so brave in his youth, nor so bold in his deeds, nor his lord so loyal to him
> that he does not have always anxiety about his sea-journey, as to what his Lord
> will send him.

The second part of the catalogue describes how the seafarer's anxiety about his impending sea-voyage forces him to withdraw from enjoying various worldly pleasures:

> Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge   ne to hringþege,

> ne to wife wyn   ne to worulde hyht,
> ne ymbe owiht elles,   nefne ymb yða gewealc,
> ac a hafað longunge   se þe on lagu fundað.

<div align="right">(ll. 44-47)</div>

> His thought is not on the harp, nor on the receiving of rings, nor on the pleasure
> of a woman, or joy in the world, nor about anything else, except about the rolling
> of waves, but he will always have anxiety he who sets out on the sea.

In summary, therefore, *ne*-catalogues are often used in Anglo-Saxon literature to describe continuous states that range from depictions of the undivided divine nature to states of happiness or pre-occupation that are similar insofar as each appears in some way to lack the diversity and change characteristic of ordinary human life.

Repetition and authority

It might be argued that to read the *ne*-catalogue in *The Wanderer* is not only to read a rejection of various disagreeable aspects of human nature, it is also a rejection of the division of that nature. In aural terms, reading the catalogue involves encountering a single sound repeatedly, a process that is itself repeated several more times before the end of the poem. The same voice that has spoken of suffering through a variety of different events with this catalogue begins to convey an impression of its own continuity, of its own ability to endure and to speak authoritatively about the multifarious nature of human experience, and even to manage and structure the variation that experience entails.

The establishing of spiritual authority through repetition is not unique to the poet responsible for *The Wanderer*. In a homily on baptism by Wulfstan that is often discussed[85] as an analogue for the *ne*-catalogue from *The Wanderer*, several *ne*-catalogues are used to warn against the manifoldness of the sinful life:

> Leofan men, beorgað eow georne wið deofles lara. Ne beon ge naðor ne to
> swicole ne to ficole, ne lease ne luðerfulle ne fule ne fracode, ne on ænige wisan
> to lehterfulle... And ne gyman ge galdra ne idelra hwata, ne wigelunga ne
> wiccecræfta; ond ne weorðian ge wyllas ne ænige wudutreowu, forðam
> æghwylce idele syndon deofles gedwimeru. Ne beon ge ofermode ne to
> weamode ne to niðfulle ne to feohgeorne ne to felawyrde ne ealles to hlagole ne
> eft to asolcene ne to unrote. And ne beon ge to rance ne to gylpgeorne ne færinga
> to fægene ne eft to ormode, and ne beon ge to slapole ne ealles to sleace, ac
> scyldað eow georne wið deofles dare.

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[85] For an outline of this critical discussion see Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, pp. 119-21.

Dear men, protect yourselves thoroughly against the devil's teaching. Do not be either too deceitful nor too fickle, or false, or evil, or corrupt, or wicked, nor in any way to vicious...And pay no heed either to magicians or worthless augurs, or to soothsaying or to witchcraft; and do not worship or any springs or forest trees, because every idleness is an illusion of the devil. Do not be too proud nor too angry, nor too quarrelsome, nor too greedy, nor too talkative, nor too wholly given to laughter, nor moreover too sluggish or dejected. And do not be too overbearing nor too boastful nor be too quick to be joyful, nor again too despairing, and do not be too lethargic nor entirely too sluggish, but shield yourself thoroughly against the devil's damage.

This homily recalls the associations present in Bede's commentary on the Tower of Babel story in Genesis regarding the relationship between diversity and sinfulness. The repetition of *ne* throughout this passage is an exercise of control by Wulfstan over his subject, demonstrating an ability to recount all sorts of morally problematic behaviours in a stylistically compelling way that appears to place him in absolute authority over them.

Another instance of this technique from the homiletic tradition shows how Christian teachers could not only use rhetorical technique to dissociate themselves from the diversity of the fallen world but could also use anaphora to associate themselves positively with the oneness of the divine nature. The following is an excerpt from the *Spel Be Petrus and Paulus* in the Blickling Homilies, which is one of two Old English translations of the *Passio sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli*. In this scene St. Paul is being questioned by Nero:

Þonne be þære lare mines lareowes þe þu me befrune, ne magan þær nænige oþre onfon, buton þa ane þe mid clænum geleafan hie to þæm gegearwiaþ. Ic lærde simle sibbe and Godes lufan ymb þa burh Hierusalem and manige þeoda; ærest ic lærde þæt men lufodan hie him betweonan, and ælc on oþrum arwyrþnesse wiste; ic lærde wlance men & heahgeþungene þæt hie ne astigan on ofermedu, ne upgendra welena to wel ne trudowdon, ah þæt hie on God ænne heora hyht gesetton. Ic lærde eac þa medstrangan men þæt hie wæron on heora biwiste and on medmyclum hrægle gehealdene; and þearfan ic lærde þæt hie heora wædle gefean hæfdon and Gode þancodon. Fæderas ic lærde þæt hie heora bearnum þone þeodscipe lærdon Drihtnes egsan; and suna ic lærde þæt hie hyrdon heora yldrum and heora magum; and landagende men ic lærde þæt hie heora gafol mid gehygdum aguldon; and wif ic lærde þæt hie heora weras lufedan and him ege towiston; and ic lærde weras þæt hie be him anum getreowlice hie heoldan, swa hie willan þæt him man do, and forþon þe God gewrecþ on þæm were gif he unrihthæmed fremeþ wiþ oþer wif, and swa se wer hit wreceþ gif his wif hie forhealdeþ. Forþon þe God is Scyppend and Reccend ealra his gesceafta, and hlafordas ic lærde þæt hie getreowlice Gode hyrdon swa heora hlafordum, and

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[86] Bethurum, ed., *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, pp. 175-84.

þeowdon Godes ciricum: and ic lærde ealle men þæt hie beeodan anne
Ælmihtigne God unbegripendlicne and ungesynelice God. and þeos lar me wæs
seald næs na for mannum ac þurh God sylfne.[87]

Then about the learning of my teacher, which you question me about, no-one
else may receive it there, except those alone who prepare themselves for it with
pure belief. I always taught peace and God's love around the city of Jerusalem
and many nations; first I taught that men love each other, and that each treat the
other honourably; I taught proud and high-ranking men that they do not become
puffed up with pride, nor to trust too much in transitory riches, but that they
should set their hope on God alone. I also taught middle-ranking men to be
moderate in their food and restrained in their dress; and the needful I taught that
they have joy in their poverty and to thank God. I taught fathers that they should
teach their children of the law of the Lord's fear; and sons I taught that they obey
their elders and their kinsmen; and I taught land-owning men that they pay their
taxes with care; I taught women that they love their husbands and regard them
with fear; and I taught men that they should remain faithful to them alone, as
they would want done to them, because God takes vengeance on that man who
commits adultery with another woman, and just as the man takes vengeance if
the woman pollutes herself. For God is the Creator and Ruler of all his creatures,
and I taught lords that they serve God as truly as their lords, that they serve
God's churches; and I taught all men that they worship one almighty,
incomprehensible, and unseen God. And this teaching was given to me not by
men but by God himself.

Here Paul explains the nature of his ministry, beginning and ending with a reference to the

source of his teaching, which is not his own, but comes from God. The passage itself

includes the various groups taught by Paul and its rhetorical style contrasts the variety of

ranks, genders, and ages of those who receive his teaching with the fact that this teaching

comes from a single source that exists beyond the diversity of human society. This is

achieved through the repetition of *ic lærde* which draws together the different sections of

society and the lessons that pertain to them, but which also emphasises the consistency and

coherence of these ideas. All are related because all ultimately emanate from the same

source. Paul aligns himself with that single source through the repetition of the same

phrase over and over again.

As the above suggests, it is possible to argue that what is regarded as a thematic

change in The *Wanderer* away from individual concerns to a more sober, and perhaps

hopeful, assessment of the human condition is achieved partially through aural means. The

narrative voice of *The Wanderer* changes over the course of the poem, becoming

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[87] Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, pp. 170-93, (p. 85).

progressively more authoritative the more it employs verbal repetition. The process is inaugurated through the use of a *ne*-catalogue, which for an Anglo-Saxon reader acquainted with the rhetorical devices of the Old English poetic tradition would have suggested independence from the fragmentariness of human experience. This catalogue was complemented by several others in the latter half of the poem, and their use enacts a process of managing the structure of the narrative in a way that suggests mastery of the material it contains.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset of this chapter, a variety of Old English texts provide support for the idea that Anglo-Saxons regarded social interaction as an important source of personal identity. Communal activities, such as gift-giving ceremonies and drinking rituals, allowed participants to position themselves with respect to each other, and from these practices individuals derived a sense of their place within important social relationships and the wider community. Examples from the elegies further suggest that even in exile a trace of that society remained in the customs and attitudes that continued to guide the individual's behaviour.

As we have also seen, among the religious elegies contextual identity had a didactic function. It was the basis for images of Heaven which appealed to the social nature of the Anglo-Saxons. The emphasis upon the interaction between individuals as a source of personal identity also called attention to the fragmentariness of human society, which for a literate Anglo-Saxon audience might have reminded them of their fallen nature, and the fact that real human community is not possible in this world. It made the point that an individual who is part of the world is always in some sense divided. Overcoming that division in some poems occurs through union with God. In other poems, poets used rhetorical devices to suggest the advisability of being independent from such a world.

Before leaving the elegies, it is worth noting that poems like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* represent perhaps the best examples of the myriad ways in which Anglo-Saxon first-person narratives establish personal identity. In the early part of the poem, for example, as the speaker describes his past experiences he is enacting that model of identity discussed in the last chapter, where an individual recounts a set of historical events and appears to identify with them. As readers we establish his identity both through the various textual descriptions offered by the speaker, but also in his attitude to what he describes, which as we have seen in the religious elegies is often laced with bitter irony as he compares the different environments in which he finds himself. Some of the experiences described refer to rituals and practices that allow the individual to make sense of who they are and thus invoke ways of defining identity that exist outside the confines of the narrative and which require participation of the wider community. Finally, to take the situation in *The Wanderer*, where the narrative turns to the repetition of aural forms, the narrator appears to reject the importance of interaction and seems to want to establish an almost entirely self-referential construal of identity.

Chapter 3 - Functions of the Boast-Speech in Old English Heroic Literature

Both chapters thus far have demonstrated that first-person narratives in Anglo-Saxon poetry could be used to encourage readers to consider their relationship to society. The poet responsible for the Exeter riddles compelled readers to consider how their understanding of the world around them was based upon a variety of assumptions, many of them peculiar to their society, which conditioned how they made sense of their environment. In the last chapter we saw how the poets responsible for the religious elegies emphasised the importance of communal activity in allowing an individual understand their place within society, although they did so often to warn of the potential for spiritual harm in circumstances where an individual's identity is too heavily invested in the fragmentary social structures of a divided world. In both discussions it was evident, in different ways, that poets understood identity to be a product of various forms of interaction, whether that is the interaction between poet and reader, the interaction among members of social groups, or the interaction of different narrative elements within the confines of a personal history. In each case identity was something that happened, arising through the process of interaction rather than being revealed. In this chapter we discuss another type of speech where individuals talk about their own lives and which once again deals with the issue of how identity is produced both through words and physical deeds.

The Anglo-Saxon boast-speech occurs in several Old English heroic poems, particularly *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*. It generally consists of two parts. The second and main part is what J.L. Austin has called the 'commissive speech act'[1], which is an illocutionary act that commits the speaker to undertake a particular course of action and refers to all statements that in modern English would be understood as a promise, oath, vow, or boast about something that the speaker intends to do in the future. The first part of

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[1] J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 157-60.

the boast-speech, where it did occur, was often some form of past-personal narrative in which an individual provides an account of their past accomplishments. Terms for boasting in Old English include the substantives *beot, gilp*,[2] compounds of these terms *beotword, gilpword, gilpcwide*, etc.,[3] associated verbal forms *gielpan, beotian*,[4] and other terms such as *(ge)hatan*[5] which are used to refer to promises that, depending upon the circumstances in which they are made, can possess the solemnity more properly associated with Modern English 'vow'.[6] Although several studies have reached different conclusions as to the exact meaning of these terms individually and their relationship to each other, they are all generally used in situations where individuals recount past achievements and/or formally outline their intention to behave in certain ways in the future. [7]

Previous critical discussions of the boast-speech in Old English poetry suggest that it can have a range of different connotations; it has been interpreted as both an egocentric and as a sociocentric act. In Christian poetry in particular, boasting is associated with a very negative form of individualism. As Nolan and Bloomfield note, boasts could have 'a pejorative sense, referring to self-aggrandizing, prideful' ways of speaking about what an individual intends to do. [8] In *Genesis*, for example, the rebel Angels are described prior to their rebellion as having 'made a great boast that they could share with God His glorious dwelling' (*hæfdon gielp micel/ þæt hie wið drihtne dælan meahton/ wuldorfæstan wic,*

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[2] Bosworth and Toller (BT) gives the following range of definitions for these terms, only some of which are relevant to this discussion: s.v. 'beot' - I: a threatening, threat, command, menace, II: peril, III: a boasting, boasting promise; s.v. 'gilp' - glory, ostentation, pride, boasting, arrogance, vain-glory, haughtiness (Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898)).

[3] BT s.v. 'beotword' - I a word of threatening, threats, II: a word of boasting; s.v. 'gilpword' - a boastful word, a boast, vaunt; s.v. 'gilpcwide' - a boastful speech.

[4] BT s.v. 'gielpan' - to glory, boast, vaunt; s.v. 'beotian' - I: to threaten, II: to boast, vow, promise

[5] BT s.v. 'ge-hatan' - I: to call, name, II: to call, command, promise, vow, threaten

[6] OED s.v. 'vow' (n. 1,2, 3,5) is defined as a 'solemn' promise, engagement, affirmation.

[7] Marie Nelson, '*Beowulf*'s Boast Words', *Neophilologus,* 89 (2005), 299-310; Stefan Einarsson, 'Old English *Beot* and Old Icelandic *Heitstrenging*', *PMLA,* 49 (1935), 975-93; Barbara Nolan and Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Beotword, Gilpcwidas, and the Gilphlæden Scop of *Beowulf*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 79 (1980), 499-516; Michael Murphy, 'Vows, Boasts, and Taunts, and the Role of Women in Some Medieval Literature', *English Studies,* 66 (1985), 105-12; Levin L Schücking, 'Heldenstolz und Würde im Angelsächsischen mit einem Anhang: zur Charakterisierungstechnik im Beowulfepos', *Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Klasse,* 42 (1933), 1-44 (pp. 5-11).

[8] Nolan and Bloomfield, 'Gilphlæden Scop', p. 499.

ll.25-7).[9] The poet responsible for *Vainglory* similarly sees boasting in terms of social disharmony, as an expression of sinfulness, self-division, and excessive pre-occupation with the self:

> Þonne monige beoð mæþelhegendra,
> wlonce wigsmiþas winburgum in,
> sittaþ æt symble, soðgied wrecað,
> wordum wrixlað, witan fundiaþ
> hwylc æscstede inne in ræcede
> mid werum wunige, þonne win hweteð
> beornes breostsefan. Breahtem stigeð,
> cirm on corþre, cwide scralletaþ
> missenlice. Swa beoþ modsefan
> dalum gedæled, sindon dryhtguman
> ungelice. Sum on oferhygdo
> þrymme þringeð, þrinteð him in innan
> ungemedemad mod; sindan to monige þæt!
> Bið þæt æfþonca eal gefylled
> feondes fligepilum, facensearwum;
> breodað he ond bælceð, boð his sylfes
> swiþor micle þonne se sella mon.
>
>   (ll. 13-29)[10]

There are many men in conversation, proud war-smiths who sit at the feast in the festive cities; they utter true tales, exchange words, strive to know each place of conflict among men that might remain inside the hall, when wine whets the hearts of men. Noise rises up, an outcry among the multitude, words sound loudly, variously. Thus their spirits are separated into portions, are unalike. One in pride rushes on in force; there swells within him an unrestrained mind; there are too many like that! He is filled with the enemy's flying darts, with treachery; he cries and calls out, he boasts about himself much more than the better man.

Here the *Vainglory*-poet touches upon several themes that were discussed in the last chapter. Initially, he appears to be depicting a lively social environment with a large group of individuals apparently enjoying themselves. His description turns negative, though, when he says that the spirits of those in the hall are 'separated into portions' (*dalum gedæled*). It is not entirely clear what he means here. Interpreting the phrase according to the discussion of internal psychological division in the last chapter, the reference to divided spirits could be taken to imply a lack of social unity, and that the apparent conviviality of the revellers conceals real divisions between them. This reading is supported with the

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[9] George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 3- 87.
[10] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, pp. 147-9.

description of the boast-speech itself, which appears to arise out of a lack of restraint that the poet believes is all too common in the society he describes.

Even in secular poems like *Beowulf* critics such as Tolkien and Goldsmith have seen boasts as a manifestation of pride,[11] although in heroic poetry the boast can also be interpreted more positively. For individuals about to engage in combat, such speeches allowed them 'to build and buttress a sense of self' as it bound them to a particular course of action.[12] Indeed, Conquergood goes so far as to argue that in such circumstances the boast-speech is 'a form of discourse in which the constitution of the self is the primary function.'[13]

When considered from the perspective of the social context in which it was made, the boast-speech has generally been regarded as having some useful functions. The boast-has been discussed as a kind of public ritual that was necessary for the group. Nolan and Bloomfield describe it is a 'form of public address which the community required of its heroes.'[14] Public declarations that committed the speaker to undertake dangerous feats of courage could also be interpreted as 'promot[ing] and perpetuat[ing] the heroic code which was the foundation of the social order'.[15]

The boast has the potential, therefore, to be significant both for our understanding of the individual and the group in Old English heroic poetry. The following discussion explores what it tells us about both. It is not an examination of whether the boast-speech is concerned primarily with either the individual or the group, but rather with understanding

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[11] See Dwight Conquergood, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England', *Literature in Performance,* 1 (1981), 24-35 (p. 25). Although he was an ethnographer, Conquergood's writings on the boast in Old English literature provide the most authoritative discussion of the practice to date. His research concentrated on the boast-speech itself, and while he perhaps underestimated the cultural importance of the connection between the making of such speeches and their fulfilment, his work is crucial to understanding the function of boast-speeches in the societies depicted in Anglo-Saxon literature.

[12] Dwight Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast: Structure and Function' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1977), p. 43; see also Nolan and Bloomfield, 'Gilphlæden Scop', p. 502.

[13] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', p. 38.

[14] Nolan and Bloomfield, 'Gilphlæden Scop', p. 502.

[15] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', p. 53.

how an interest in the individual can be understood as being beneficial to the group. The structure of the discussion broadly follows the structure of the boast-speech itself and is very much a development of the theoretical ideas that have been the basis for the chapters on both the riddles and elegies. This first part of the discussion focuses upon the past-personal narrative that makes up the initial part of the boast-speech, examining how it defines the identity of the speaker, and how it is related to other types of narrative in Old English heroic poetry with a similar function. This definition of identity through narrative is based largely on an understanding of the relationship between the speaker who narrates their past and the speaker who is the matter of the narrative. It recalls, therefore, a number of the themes and ideas that arose in the discussion of the first-person riddles.

The second part of the chapter is a discussion of the commissive speech act, in particular the social circumstances in which the individual makes their commitment to undertake a course of action in the future. There are several kinds of boast-speech that occur in Old English and related Germanic literatures. The division between them is based upon the degree of involvement of the group. In some cases the community simply watched as a single individual made a boast-speech; in other cases a series of individuals made speeches, one after another. There were thus a number of different ways in which the group could be involved, different modes of interaction that operated in much the same way as the joint activities discussed in the chapter on the elegies. The main critical concern throughout this chapter will be establishing the nature of the reciprocal relationship between individual and community, how an evident preoccupation with individual identity, expressed through elaborate past-personal narratives, can be understood in terms of the welfare of the group. The discussion begins with a return to the scene from *Beowulf* discussed in the elegies chapter, to the drinking ritual that takes place during the banquet that takes place shortly after Beowulf's arrival.

I: The Boast and the Individual

As was noted in the last chapter, the drinking ritual that occurs in this scene has an important function in defining the identity of individuals who take part. As it progresses, however, this ritual, which has emphasised the collective identity of the group, gives way to another which emphasises Beowulf's separateness from those around him. According to the poet, Wealhtheow served Hrothgar's men 'until the time came' (*oþ þæt sæl alamp*) that she moved finally to Beowulf and offered him the cup. Unlike the other recipients, as he takes the cup, Beowulf speaks, and commits himself to face Grendel in battle:

> grette Geata leod,   gode þancode
> wisfæst wordum   þæs ðe hire se willa gelamp
> þæt heo on ænigne   eorl gelyfde
> fyrena frofre.   He þæt ful geþeah,
> wælreow wiga,   æt Wealhþeon,
> ond þa gyddode   guþe gefysed.
> Beowulf maþelode,   bearn Ecgþeowes:
> 'Ic þæt hogode,   þa ic on holm gestah,
> sæbat gesæt   mid minra secga gedriht,
> þæt ic anunga   eowra leoda
> willan geworhte   oþðe on wæl crunge,
> feondgrapum fæst.   Ic gefremman sceal
> eorlic ellen,   oþðe endedæg
> on þisse meoduhealle   minne gebidan.'
> Ðam wife þa word   wel licodon,
> gilpcwide Geates;   eode goldhroden
> freolicu folccwen   to hire frean sittan.
> Þa wæs eft swa ær   inne on healle
> þryðword sprecen,   ðeod on sælum,
> sigefolca sweg

(ll. 625-44)

She greeted the prince of the Geats, and, with wise words, thanked God that her wish was realised, that she could count on some warrior for comfort against wicked deeds. He, warrior fierce in battle, took that cup from Wealhtheow, and then ready for battle, made a speech. Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow: 'I resolved that, when I set out on the ocean, sat in the sea-boat with my company of men that I would entirely carry out the wish of your people or fall in slaughter, fast in the enemy's grip. I shall achieve heroic deed of courage, or I will experience my final day in this mead-hall.' The woman was well pleased with these words, the vaunting speech of the Geat; gold-adorned, the noble queen of the people went to sit by her lord. Then it was again as it once had been inside the hall, brave words were spoken, a nation in happiness, the sound of a victorious people

In the later feast that follows his defeat of Grendel, Beowulf is seated next to Hrothgar and Wealtheow's sons Hrethric and Hrothmund (ll.1190-1). On that occasion he is served immediately after the king. Here, by contrast, Beowulf is served last. Enright claims that

this is because of Beowulf's youth and for this reason he sits among the younger retainers of the Danish *geoguðe*.[16] However, there is no evidence for this in the poem. The last mention of seating is at l.492 when Hrothgar tells Beowulf to sit down and the narrator adds that a bench was cleared (*benc gerymed*) for the Geats. It seems more likely that Beowulf is served last because he is an outsider and not part of Hrothgar's court.

If Beowulf is physically and socially apart from others in this scene, he reinforces this separateness when he takes the cup from Wealhtheow and gives the act a significance that differs from those who have taken the cup before him. The queen's offer of a drink to the Danes was politically conservative, a ritualistic renewal of existing relationships. When Beowulf takes the cup, by contrast, he 'accepts...the identity' of the 'purger of evil in Heorot',[17] an identity that is his alone. He uses the moment to make a formal commitment to confront Grendel, re-iterating a statement of intent he has already made several times since his arrival (ll. 422-6, 438-40, 601-603). As he does so he mentions that he resolved to take on Grendel during his sea-voyage to Denmark surrounded by his 'company of men' (*secga gedriht*).

The sense of social isolation here and Beowulf's reference to his past are two characteristics that are typical of the boast-speech in heroic poetry, which distinguishes the individual from his environment both by the act of speech-making itself and the fact that the speech includes references to a past history unique to the speaker. The majority of boasts that are made in *Beowulf* are part of longer speeches which the hero gives prior to each of the three battles he undertakes in the course of the poem (Grendel, ll. 407-55, 530-606, 632-8, 677-87; Grendel's mother, ll. 1384-96, 1474-91; the dragon, ll. 2426-2509, 2511-5, 2518-37). Several are prefaced with accounts of Beowulf's earlier achievements,

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[16] Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, p. 4.
[17] Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 56.

and these are provided for a very specific purpose. One occurs immediately before

Beowulf faces the dragon, where he makes the following commitment:

> Ic geneðde fela
> guða on geogoðe;   gyt ic wylle,
> frod folces weard,   fæhðe secan,
> mærðu fremman,   gif mec se mansceaða
> of eorðsele   ut geseceð.

(ll. 2511-15)

I ventured upon many battles in my youth; yet I will, old guardian of the people,
seek the conflict, accomplish a glorious deed if the wicked ravager will come out
to me from his earthen-hall.

This short speech comes at the end of a far longer one (ll. 2426-2509) in which Beowulf

recalls, among other things, some of the 'many battles' in which he was involved in during

his youth. He talks about the wars between the Geats and the Swedes after the death of

King Hrethel, his long service to Hygelac, and finally his defeat of Dæghrefn, the 'warrior

of the Hugas' (*Huga cempan*, l.2502) during his lord's expedition against the Franks. He

ends his speech by comparing what was necessary in that endeavour to what will be

required in his upcoming conflict with the dragon:

> ac in campe gecrong   cumbles hyrde,
> æþeling on elne;   ne wæs ecg bona,
> ac him hilde grap   heortan wylmas,
> banhus gebræc.   Nu sceall billes ecg,
> hond ond heard sweord,   ymb hord wigan.   (ll. 2505-9)

But the guardian of the banner (i.e. Dæghrefn) fell in battle, an atheling with
courage; the sword's edge was not his slayer, but the battle-grip broke his body,
the surgings of his heart. Now the sword's edge, hand and hard sword, must fight
for the hoard.

When Beowulf commits himself to face the dragon he does so by situating that

action within the context of his own personal history, understanding what must be done in

terms of the things he has already done. It is an approach which he has adopted

continuously since the start of his career. In his first speech to Hrothgar, for instance,

shortly after arriving at the Danish court, Beowulf's earlier accomplishments and

background form the preamble to his commitment to confront Grendel:

> Wæs þu, Hroðgar, hal!   Ic eom Higelaces
> mæg ond magoðegn;   hæbbe ic mærða fela
> ongunnen on geogoþe.   Me wearð Grendles þing

> on minre eþeltyrf   undyrne cuð;
> secgað sæliðend   þæt þæs sele stande,
> reced selesta,   rinca gehwylcum
> idel ond unnyt,   siððan æfenleoht
> under heofenes haðor   beholen weorþeð.
> Þa me þæt gelærdon   leode mine
> þa selestan,   snotere ceorlas,
> þeoden Hroðgar,   þæt ic þe sohte,
> forþan hie mægenes cræft   minne cuþon;
> selfe ofersawon,   ða ic of searwum cwom,
> fah from feondum,   þær ic fife geband,
> yðde eotena cyn   ond on yðum slog
> niceras nihtes,   nearoþearfe dreah,
> wræc Wedera nið   -wean ahsodon-
> forgrand gramum;   ond nu wið Grendel sceal,
> wið þam aglæcan,   ana gehegan
> ðing wið þyrse.   (ll.407- 26)

Hail to you, Hrothgar! I am Higelac's kinsman and young retainer; I have undertaken many glorious deeds in my youth. This affair with Grendel became openly known to me in native land; seafarers say, that this hall, the best of halls, stands idle and useless to every warrior, once the evening light is hidden under the confinement of heaven. Then my people advised me, the best, wisest men, that I seek you out, prince Hrothgar, because they knew the power of my strength; they themselves looked on, when I came from battle stained with the blood of enemies, where I bound five, destroyed a race of giants, and slew among the waves water-monsters by night, suffered dire distress, avenged the Weders' persecution, crushed the hostile ones - they sought that trouble; and now alone I must settle the matter with that monster, that giant Grendel.

Beowulf's speech here is self-justificatory. Once he has explained who he is and why he has come, he makes clear why he, in particular, considers himself a worthy candidate to deal with Grendel. He does so by mentioning the circumstances in which he has been successful against similarly dangerous opponents. The judgement that these accomplishments fit him to face Grendel he leaves to other, wiser men.

In varying degrees, these examples demonstrate a basic feature of the boast in Old English poetry. When an individual commits himself to future-action such a commitment is usually 'anchored in the boaster's past'.[18] As Conquergood says 'the Anglo-Saxon warrior musters forth past exploits as a ground upon which to stand, to face the forthcoming moment of truth'.[19] In his self-introduction to Hrothgar, Beowulf's past achievements are a warrant that he provides the Danish king that attests to his suitability to face Grendel. Before he faces the dragon, his speech to his 'hearth-companions'

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[18] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', pp. 21-2.
[19] p. 22.

(*heorðgeneatum*, l.2418) is another explanation, this time perhaps as much to himself, outlining why he must be the one to face the monster.

In both cases, accounts of past accomplishments are used as evidence in an argument which attempts to establish the speaker's 'credentials'[20] for the task at hand. These narratives say, very simply, 'this is who I am' and thus represent a 'narrative assertion of identity as a pledge to future action'.[21] In the case of Beowulf, he has already proven himself to be the type of individual who can deal successfully with fierce and difficult opponents. He has already shown himself to be courageous and capable. It is appropriate, therefore, that someone with his character and abilities should confront Grendel and the dragon. [22]

Like more formal examples of the autobiographical genre, the use of past-personal narratives to preface commissive speech acts can be seen as a speaker's attempt to use his personal history to 'elucidate his present, not his past.'[23] The desire is to call attention to what the speaker feels is a necessary similarity between that present and the recounted past and thus to project an image of coherence:

> The boast is rooted in self-exploration, self-definition. The self is given a unity
> and persistence - an identity - through the narrative 'I was, I am, I will'. Through
> the ordering of one's existence a continuity is established, avowed, which
> imparts a sense of confidence and direction.[24]

However, this method of self-definition is inherently problematic; the 'conversion of a unique lived experience into the symbolic, shared order of a language'[25] opens those experiences to challenge. Speaking of Beowulf's past, Susan Kim notes that it 'is not simply his as he lived it. The past he requires to justify his promised future is a narrative,

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[20] Murphy, 'Vows, Boasts, and Taunts', p. 105.
[21] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', p. 19.
[22] Conquergood calls this an 'argument from definition', 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', pp. 26-27.
[23] Louis A. Renza, 'The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography', *New Literary History*, 9 (1977), 1-26 (p. 3).
[24] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', pp. 19-20.
[25] Sturrock, *Language of Autobiography*, pp. 24-5.

and a public one, and thus is not stable, concrete, indisputable, or inalienable.'[26] Since, within the context of these speeches, Beowulf's identity depends so much on an account of his past actions, others can also use narratives about those experiences to make important statements about who Beowulf is.

The Swimming Match with Breca

The fear of being defined in this negative way is a major theme underlying the early part of *Beowulf*. Both the vulnerability and authority of past-personal narratives in characterising the speaker is brought out in the discussion of the swimming match with Breca that takes place between Beowulf and Unferth, a *þyle* ('orator', ll. 1165, 1456)[27] at Hrothgar's court. This episode has been discussed as an example of the medieval practice of 'flyting',[28] and to the extent that it is concerned with 'the establishment of heroic identity'[29] it represents an important challenge to Beowulf's attempt to present himself as uniquely suited to face Grendel. More generally, it demonstrates the similarities and differences between past-personal narratives and other types of narrative in Old English heroic poetry.

The conflict begins when Unferth asks Beowulf whether he is the same Beowulf who engaged in a swimming match with a Bronding youth called Breca: *'Eart þu se Beowulf, se þe wið Brecan wunne/ on sidne sæ...?'* ('Are you *that* Beowulf, who contended against Breca, on the broad sea...?', ll. 506-7). Unferth then proceeds to give an account of what he says occurred during the contest, which involved the defeat of Beowulf:

Þær git eagorstream   earmum þehton,
mæton merestræta,   mundum brugdon,
glidon ofer garsecg;   geofon yþum weol,
wintrys wylmum.   Git on wæteres æht
seofonniht swuncon;   he þe æt sunde oferflat,
hæfde mare mægen.

[26] Susan M. Kim, '"As I Once Did with Grendel": Boasting and Nostalgia in *Beowulf*', *Modern Philology*, 103 (2005), 4-27 (p. 13).
[27] Klaeber's translation of this term is used here, though its exact meaning has been the subject of much critical discussion; see Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. 149-51.
[28] Ward Parks, 'Flyting and Fighting: Pathways in the Realization of the Epic Contest', *Neophilologus,* 70 (1986), 292-36; Ward Parks, 'The Flyting Speech in Traditional Heroic Narrative', *Neophilologus,* 71 (1987), 285-95.
[29] Parks, 'The Flyting Speech', p. 286.

> There you both covered the sea-stream with your arms, traversed the sea-way,
> quickly moved your arms, glided over the ocean; the sea waves welled up, the
> surgings of winter. You both toiled in the possession of the water for seven
> nights; he overcame you at sea, had the greater strength.

It has been argued that Unferth's accusation highlights the 'inevitable alienability' of

Beowulf's past and the 'impossible instability of the identity he constructs by boasting.'[30]

This argument has merit. In circumstances where individuals attempt the 'integration of

their past lives and present selves'[31] they also draw attention to a basic feature of first-

person narratives that was discussed in the chapter on the riddles. While there must be

some continuity of identity between the narrator who now speaks and the narrator who

acted in the past there is also necessarily a separation. As Roland Barthes bluntly puts it

'the subject of the speech-act can never be the same as the one who acted yesterday.'[32]

That there is this distance between the Beowulf who speaks and the Beowulf who acted in

the past, provides Unferth with an opportunity to shape that past and by doing so to alter

how Beowulf is perceived by those around him. Unferth attempts to do this, ending his tale

by concluding from the events he has just described how he thinks Beowulf would fare in a

fight with Grendel:

> Ðonne wene ic to þe   wyrsan geþingea,
> ðeah þu heaðoræsa   gehwær dohte,
> grimre guðe,   gif þu Grendles dearst
> nihtlongne fyrst   nean bidan.

> Then I expect worse things from you, although you've done well on every
> occasion in the rush of battle, in fierce combat, if you dare to wait nearby for
> Grendel for the space of an entire night.

In linking what has occurred to what he thinks will occur, Unferth is mirroring the

convention that Beowulf has used before and will use again, of prefacing commissive

speech acts with past-personal narratives in order to define his fitness to undertake a

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[30] Kim, '"As I Once Did with Grendel"', p. 15.

[31] Sturrock, *Language of Autobiography*, p. 4.

[32] Roland Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 11-21 (p. 17).

particular task. Where Beowulf says 'I did, therefore I can', Unferth says 'you didn't, therefore you cannot'.

Unferth's false history draws an immediate response from Beowulf, who, in attempting to correct the record, supplies his own narrative of what occurred, an account that constitutes the longest and most elaborate of Beowulf's past-personal narratives. He initially accuses Unferth of being 'drunk with beer' (*beore druncen*, l. 531), and then begins his account with an explicit claim to its truthfulness: *Soð ic talige,/ þæt ic merestrengo maran ahte,/ eafeþo on yþum, ðonne ænig oþer man* ('I say it as a fact, that I had more strength in the water, power among the waves, than any other man', ll.532-4). Beowulf's narrative resembles Unferth's in that both mention that the swimming match lasted several days (ll. 516-7, 544-5). Both also mention the winner being carried to land; Unferth says Breca was washed up on the coast of the *Heaþo-Ræmes* (l. 519), Beowulf says that the sea brought him to *Finna land* (l. 580). Each also says that the match was the result of a boast; Unferth says it was the result of a foolish boast (*for dolgilpe*, l. 509); Beowulf says that they both 'boasted' (*gebeotedon*, l.536) that they would risk their lives on the sea out of youthful exuberance (ll.535-8).

The major difference between the two narratives, apart from the outcome itself, is Beowulf's focus upon the sea-creatures that he says attacked him after his separation from Breca, something that Unferth either does not know about or fails to mention. Carol J. Clover has argued that Beowulf's 'additions to the story are minor, more by way of clarification'.[33] This is not true. Beowulf's contribution is substantial, and given its prominence in his narrative, this aspect of the story is of far greater concern to him. Beowulf says that he killed 'nine sea-monsters' (*niceras nigene*, l. 575), describing one fight in detail, an encounter that foreshadows the later battle against Grendel's mother:

> Me to grunde teah
> fah feondscaða,   fæste hæfde

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[33] Carol J. Clover, 'The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode', *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 444-68 (p. 462).

grim on grape;   hwæþre me gyfeþe wearð
þæt ic aglæcan   orde geræhte,
hilde bille;   heaþoræs fornam
mihtig meredeor   þurh mine hand.

(ll. 553-8)

The hostile, dire foe, dragged me to the ground, the grim creature held me fast in
its grip; however it was granted by fate that I struck the monster with the point of
my battle-sword; the onslaught of battle seized the mighty sea-creature through
my hand.

In a striking series of images (ll. 565-72) Beowulf finishes his account by describing the

sea creatures lying dead along the shore, as the sun rises from the east, allowing him to see

the land. He tells Unferth that he hasn't heard of anyone who has escaped 'a harder fight

under the vault of heaven' (*under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan*, l. 576) and remarks

sharply that he hasn't heard anything similar said about him or Breca (ll. 581-5). Beowulf

accuses Unferth of fratricide (ll. 587-9), before turning finally to the topic of Grendel,

finding fault first with Unferth and then with the Danes for providing no serious opposition

to him (ll. 590-601). Significantly, Beowulf ends by making a commitment to face Grendel

and deal with him once and for all:

Ac ic him Geata sceal
eafoð ond ellen   ungeara nu,
guþe gebeodan.   Gæþ eft se þe mot
to medo modig,   siþþan morgenleoht
ofer ylda bearn   oþres dogores,
sunne sweglwered   suþan scineð.

(ll.601-6)

But soon now in battle I shall show him the power and courage of the Geats. He
who may will go brave afterward to the mead-drinking, once the morning-light
of another day, the sun clothed with radiance, shines from the south over the
sons of men.

The change of subject here is not abrupt if understood as following Beowulf's practice of

prefacing commissive speech acts with past-personal narratives. The repetition of the dawn

imagery seems purposefully to recall the end of the swimming match. Beowulf seems to be

inviting his audience to make the connection between the new day that comes at the end of

his battle at sea and the new dawn that will await the winner of the fight at Heorot.

Consequences of the Narrative Definition of Identity

The 'contest of narratives'[34] between Unferth and Beowulf may seem like a minor struggle compared to Beowulf's later fights. As an indication of his abilities in dealing with a difficult opponent, however, this episode shows Beowulf to be 'no less decisive'[35] in verbal combat than in the physical battles that follow. In his response to Unferth, Beowulf has been provoked into giving an elaborate account of an incident that skilfully elicits from the events themselves a particular narrative relevant to his current purpose, which can again be used to isolate him as being the only fit candidate to face Grendel.[36]

The forcefulness of Beowulf's response is, perhaps, an indication of just what is at stake here. Beowulf is not someone who cares about his own life. Before each of his three fights he calmly considers the prospect of his death as a possible outcome (ll. 442-51, 1480-3, 2535-7), and in the fights with Grendel and Grendel's mother in particular he asks Hrothgar to return his possessions to Hygelac and look after his men if he does not survive (ll. 452-5, 1474-9). For Beowulf, then, a fight to the death is not necessarily more unwelcome than one where he risks being seen to be defeated. As Wiglaf tells the oath-breakers: *Deað bið sella/ eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!* (For every warrior, death is better than a life of disgrace, ll. 2890-1). This statement would resonate with Beowulf also, who, if he allows Unferth's account of the swimming match to go unchallenged, is risking the integrity of his own history. In a society where, as we have seen, past-personal narratives effectively make authoritative statements about the individual's present, it is necessary that the original heroic narrative be impeccable. Beowulf's entire history must be one of success.

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[34] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. 148.
[35] p. 152.
[36] See A. P. Church, 'Beowulf's "*ane ben*" and the Rhetorical Context of the "Hunferþ Episode"', *Rhetorica*, 18 (2000), 49-78 (p. 75); Parks, 'Flyting and Fighting', p. 295; Kemp Malone, '*Beowulf*', in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 137-54 (p. 145).

Underlying Beowulf's response is perhaps a deeper cultural understanding that these narratives define the individual to the extent that they can often affect an individual's subsequent social interaction and his scope for future action. Within the world of the poem there is evidence that narratives about the individual are so persuasive that in certain circumstances it is to this narrative identity that others respond. At the beginning of *Beowulf*, for example, when the hero arrives at the Danish court, Wulfgar, Hrothgar's 'messenger and officer' (*ar ond ombiht*, l. 336), announces the arrival of Beowulf and his men to the king. Hrothgar responds in the following way:

> Ic hine cuðe   cnihtwesende;
> wæs his ealdfæder   Ecgþeo haten,
> ðæm to ham forgeaf   Hreþel Geata
> angan dohtor;   is his eafora nu
> heard her cumen,   sohte holdne wine.
> Ðonne sægdon þæt   sæliþende,
> þa ðe gifsceattas   Geata fyredon
> þyder to þance,   þæt he þritiges
> manna mægencræft   on his mundgripe
> heaþorof hæbbe.   Hine halig god
> for arstafum   us onsende,
> to West-Denum,   þæs ic wen hæbbe,
> wið Grendles gryre.   Ic þæm godan sceal
> for his modþræce   madmas beodan.

<div style="text-align: right">(ll.372-85)</div>

I knew him as a child. His father was named Ecgþeow, to whom Hreþel of the Geats gave his only daughter; his son, a hard man, has now come here to seek out a true friend. Moreover, seafarers, those who bring gifts for the Geats in thanks, say that he, brave in battle, has the strength of thirty men in his hand-grip. Holy God, in his generosity, has sent him to us, the West-Danes - this I believe - against the terror of Grendel. I will offer him treasures for his daring.

That others have already brought news of Beowulf demonstrates that stories about him and his physical prowess are already spreading abroad. In wanting to offer Beowulf treasure for dealing with Grendel, Hrothgar seems to want to make a contract with the Beowulf he has heard about, the Beowulf who exists in the stories of seafarers, who has the strength of thirty men. Being defined, therefore, in the narratives of others, has actual consequences for the way in which individuals react towards Beowulf.

Celebratory Narratives

The irony of Beowulf's vitriolic response toward Unferth, and perhaps the reason for it, is that he not only understands just how authoritative these accounts can be, but also that to be defined as a particular type of person through the narratives of others is also one of his deepest and most abiding ambitions. The last word in *Beowulf* is also the last word on Beowulf's character: *lofgeornost* ('most eager for praise', l. 3120), a term that 'appropriately memorialize[s]' the hero's 'desire for glory and his pursuit of it.'[37] In the world of the poem, the highest honour that can be bestowed on an individual is for others to be given an account of his past achievements. The natural end of every heroic action is the public commemoration of that action and 'the medium for such lasting praise...is heroic verse'.[38] So, in *Beowulf*, immediately after the hero's defeat of Grendel, Beowulf's 'glorious deed was spoken of' (*mærðo mæned*, l. 857) by Hrothgar's poet:

> Hwilum cyninges þegn,
> guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
> se ðe eal fela eald gesegena
> worn gemunde, word oþerfand
> soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
> sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
> ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
> wordum wrixlan.

<div align="right">(ll. 867-73)</div>

> Sometimes a king's thane, a man supplied with glorious words, with a memory for tales, he who recalled a great many of all the old traditions, devised a new poem, truly bound; again the man began to skilfully recite Beowulf's exploit and successfully utter an apt tale, to vary his words.

In the life of a figure like Beowulf, this would be but one of many instances where a poet's words look back to deeds to evoke the heroism of Beowulf's character. At his death all his deeds are celebrated, when the Geatish nobles that mourn him talk about what he did during his life. As they circle the grave mound, they recount Beowulf's achievements and proclaim the type of person he was:

> þa ymbe hlæw riodan hildediore,

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[37] Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Heroic Values and Christian Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 107-25 (p. 108).
[38] p. 109.

æþelinga bearn,   ealra twelfe,
woldon ceare cwiðan   ond cyning mænan,
wordgyd wrecan   ond ymb wer sprecan;
eahtodan eorlscipe   ond his ellenweorc
duguðum demdon -   swa hit gedefe bið
þæt mon his winedryhten   wordum herge,
ferhðum freoge,   þonne he forð scile
of lichaman   læded weorðan.
Swa begnornodon   Geata leode
hlafordes hryre,   heorðgeneatas;
cwædon þæt he wære   wyruldcyninga
manna mildust   ond monðwærust,
leodum liðost   ond lofgeornost.

<div align="right">(ll. 3169-82)</div>

Then the athelings' sons, dear in battle, rode around the mound, all twelve; they
wanted to voice their sorrow, and lament their king, to recite a lay, to speak
about the man; they praised his heroism; they paid tribute to the glory of his
courageous deeds - just as it is fitting that a man should honour his lord with
words, love him in spirit, when he must be led forth from his body. Thus the
people of the Geats, hearth-companions, mourned the fall of their lord; they said
that of the kings of the world he was the mildest and kindest of men, most
gracious to his people, and most eager for praise.

Here Beowulf is defined by his mourners in the same way that Unferth attempts to define
him during his account of the swimming match with Breca. These final words about
Beowulf are the culmination of the culture of the superlative discussed in the introduction.
His character is entirely defined by these terms and they represent the degree to which he
stands apart from all others.

In his discussion of Beowulf's funeral and the celebration of Beowulf's defeat of
Grendel, above, Jeff Opland has argued that both are essentially eulogistic in character, and
that the outcome is solely to establish the identity of the individual being praised: 'the
eulogy offers a definition of the subject; in a sense, it *is* the subject'.[39] Beowulf's interest in
being defined through narrative is based upon his understanding of the relationship
between this life and the afterlife, in particular the idea that 'a lasting reputation is a
warrior's only hope for immortality.'[40] It is a philosophy that has guided his behaviour
throughout his life, even in his youth. After the death of Æschere, Hrothgar's counsellor
and friend, Beowulf tells the Danish king that excessive mourning is pointless, and it

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[39] Jeff Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions* (New Haven and London: Yale
University Press, 1980), p. 260.
[40] O'Keefe, 'Heroic Values', p. 108.

would be better to seek vengeance, and through heroic action achieve some sort of existence beyond death in the praise of others:

>   Wyrce se þe mote
> domes ær deaþe;   þæt bið drihtguman
> unlifgendum   æfter selest.

<div align="right">(ll.1387-9)</div>

> Let he who is able endeavour to win glory before death; afterward, when lifeless,
> that will be best for a warrior.

That narratives about the individual can provide a sort of immortality is a commonplace both inside and outside the poem. Even in a poem like *The Seafarer,* which as we have seen contains a good deal of Christian imagery of the afterlife, it is 'the praise of the living' that is still regarded as the best memorial:

> Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam   æftercweþendra
> lof lifgendra   lastworda betst,
> þæt he gewyrce,   ær he on weg scyle,
> fremum on foldan   wið feonda niþ,
> deorum dædum   deofle togeanes,

<div align="right">(ll. 72-6)</div>

> For every man therefore, the praise of the living, of those who speak afterward,
> will be the best memorial, which he may earn before he must depart, by good
> actions on the earth against the malice of enemies, opposing the devil with brave
> deeds

Famously, the same idea is found in the Old Norse *Hávamál* (stanza 77*),* where, among descriptions of all the things that die and pass away, the one thing we are told 'that never dies' (*at aldri deyr*) is the 'reputation of each dead man' (*dómr um dauðan hvern*).[41]

From the above discussion it can be argued that both celebratory narratives and accounts of past achievements betray a similar concern with the individual, particularly in calling attention to those traits that distinguish the individual from those around him. Beowulf's past-personal narrative is an attempt to establish his qualifications to undertake a task for which he is uniquely suited. Poetic narratives that celebrate what he has achieved, both during his life and at his death, also commemorate Beowulf's uniqueness. Both types of narrative are premised upon Beowulf's 'difference', upon what separates

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[41] Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern,* rev. Hans Kuhn, 5th edn (Heidelberg, 1962), I: Text, pp. 17-34, (p. 29).

him from others, whether that is from the Danish warriors who have previously failed to defeat Grendel or simply from all other men.

II: The Boast and the Group

If we move away from discussing the structure of boast-speeches and consider the circumstances in which they occur, it is possible to take a very different view of the practice. Making boasts can be seen as a socially inclusive process, one which requires the participation of the wider community. The type of commissive speech act discussed so far in *Beowulf* is one in which a single individual commits themselves to a course of action at some point in the future and does so in the presence of others. In such circumstances, the community acts as witness, and its presence places a 'seal upon the boast which cannot be broken without the most disastrous consequences' to the speaker's reputation.[42] Although this is an essentially passive role, it nevertheless requires some cooperation between the speaker and the audience since in circumstances where formal, ritualised statements are made by individuals before the group 'meaning is dependent on the shared beliefs and values of the speech community'.[43] The boast is only valid if there is tacit agreement that the individual is making a boast, and this depends on a shared understanding of the nature of commissive speech acts in Anglo-Saxon society.

In the case of past-personal narratives in particular, the group also functions more actively as an arbitrator that broadly determines the range and type of experiences that can be discussed by the speaker, in the sense that 'the boaster could display himself at the center of the cultural stage only so long as he reflected audience ideals.'[44] In effect, a contract is established between the individual and the group which limits what can and cannot be said:

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[42] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', p. 45.
[43] Muriel Saville-Troike, *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 47.
[44] Conquergood, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 30.

> The most important contractual rule tacitly agreed upon is that while the boaster selects the particular episodes, the community supplies the general plot of the narrative which remains the same from boast to boast...The boaster is free to choose only from within a narrow channel of experiences which the community agrees to celebrate [45]

It is certainly true that in the world of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry the community would not accede to an individual boasting about past indecision or leaving a battlefield or any other act that would run counter to the ideals of the group. In this sense the community circumscribes the contents of an individual's boast-speech by requiring it to contain forms of behaviour that enshrine values important to the community. Even though a speaker chooses incidents that testify to their ability to undertake a specific task, the selection and presentation of these incidents will generally be guided by a shared set of assumptions between the speaker and the group as to what might be considered a fit subject to be recounted before an audience.

As Parks notes of the debate between Beowulf and Unferth over the swimming match, even in situations where the relationship between individuals is not obviously cooperative there still must be some underlying agreement on certain fundamental issues:

> Even as they quarrel, the two warriors are defining a ground of concord in their presupposition that battle will indeed take place and that its outcome will prove, one way or the other, just how great a hero Beowulf really is. In short they are contracting for a test - a trial of arms - that will provide a definite judgement on their dispute.[46]

It might thus be argued that the conflict between Beowulf and Unferth is only possible because the two men share similar attitudes to the importance of physical combat in establishing Beowulf's credentials as a hero, worthy of celebration. As we have also seen, the two men also agree on the centrality of past-personal narratives in making sense of the likely present and future conduct of the individual. Both men provide accounts of Beowulf's past behaviour that vary greatly in their description of what he did, but are

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[45] Conquergood, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 29.
[46] Parks, 'Flyting and Fighting', p. 295.

largely similar in their understanding of the way in which an account of what someone has done can be taken as an authoritative guide to what they will do in the future.

If it can be argued that the speaker who engages in a commissive speech act shares a system of attitudes or values with the audience who witness that speech act, and that these common attitudes condition what can be said before that audience, then it must also be accepted that the sense of personal identity that arises out of such a process is not the speaker's alone, but is a joint creation of the individual and the group. It is a form of contextual identity, more subtle perhaps than those discussed in the last chapter, and based not on conscious practice but rather on largely unconscious agreements about the ideas and values upon which a society is based. It is above all a form of interaction that demonstrates, once again, that the group is intimately involved in the construction of individual identity.

Types of Boast-speech and their Function

The type of boast-speech discussed so far in this chapter is not the only kind to be found either in *Beowulf* or elsewhere in Old English and other medieval literatures. In *Beowulf* and in *The Battle of Maldon,* for instance, there are references to commissive speech acts that are undertaken by a series of individuals, one after another, about what each intends to do in the future. These collective boast-speeches have parallels in Old Norse literature and rely heavily upon the symbolic function of food and particularly drink in Germanic society. Both types of boast-speech differ according to the relationship they establish between the individual and group, and both provide evidence to suggest that boast-speeches not only required the participation of the community to become meaningful but they also had an important social function.

To discuss that function in more detail, it is first necessary to examine the state of particular groups when boast-speeches are made, and here there is a distinction to be drawn

between boasts-speeches that are made in the present and those that are reported to have

been made in the past. The majority of boasts made by Beowulf, for example, take place in

the present moment in circumstances where a society is under threat of destruction, and

where the attacks of an adversary have compromised, or are in the process of

compromising, the unity of the group. The assaults of both Grendel in Denmark and the

dragon in Geatland are marked by creatures having either destroyed or made useless the

hall, the centre of communal life. In both cases it is an event which leads to the unravelling

of those communities as individuals are forced to confront their commitment to the values

upon which their societies are based.

Thus, the *Beowulf*-poet describes Grendel as having 'often perpetrated severe

humiliations' (*oft gefremede /heardra hynða*, ll. 165-6) on the Danish people. *Hynðu* is a

term also used by Hrothgar to convey his own sense of personal injury when speaking to

Beowulf (ll.474-5). One source of that humiliation is the straightforward physical defeat of

Danish warriors protecting Heorot, and the fact that over the twelve years (l.147) in which

Grendel has attacked the hall this has led to the gradual diminishment of his warrior-band

(*wigheap gewanod*, l. 477). Perhaps more troubling and a far greater humiliation to

Hrothgar and his people is the gradual collapse of Danish morale, as over time warriors

start to abandon the hall and choose their own personal safety over the safety of the

symbolic centre of Danish society:

> Þa wæs eaðfynde   þe him elles hwær
> gerumlicor   ræste sohte,
> bed æfter burum,   ða him gebeacnod wæs,
> gesægd soðlice   sweotolan tacne
> healðegnes hete;   heold hyne syðþan
> fyr ond fæstor   se þæm feonde ætwand.
> Swa rixode   ond wið rihte wan,
> ana wið eallum,   oðþæt idel stod
> husa selest.   (ll. 138-46)

> Then it was easy to find the one who sought a resting-place, a bed elsewhere,
> further away among the dwellings, when the hall-thane's hate was shown to him,
> truly manifested by clear evidence; afterwards, he who escaped the fiend held
> himself further away and more secure. Thus he ruled, one against all, and
> contended against right, until the best of houses stood idle.

Not only has Grendel killed many men, he has also planted doubt among the Danes regarding their collective ability to deal with the threat he poses. His attacks have been not only physically damaging, over time they have created, or perhaps revealed, a lack of social unity, which can only be confirmed by the arrival of the foreigner Beowulf, who when he boasts about taking on Grendel does so in front of a largely broken society.

The destruction of the hall is also a feature of the dragon's attack on the Geats, which is described as an attack on Beowulf's 'own home, the best of halls…, the gift-stool of the Geats' (*his sylfes ham/ bolda selest…/gifstol Geata*, ll. 2325-7). Like the attacks of Grendel, the *Beowulf*-poet again stresses how the dragon humiliates his victims: *se guðsceaða Geata leode/ hatode ond hynde* ('the destroyer persecuted and humiliated the people of the Geats', ll. 2318-9). The dragon's humiliation again leads to a perhaps greater humiliation as some Geats refuse to assist Beowulf in tackling the dragon. The poet notes, for example, that as he fought the dragon Beowulf did not have a 'group of close-companions' (*heape handgesteallan*, l. 2596) to protect him. Instead they 'fled to the forest to protect their lives' (*hy on holt bugon,/ ealdre burgan*, ll. 2598-9), leaving only one warrior, Wiglaf, whose 'heart welled with sorrow' (*weoll/ sefa wið sorgum,* ll. 2599-600) at the prospect of Beowulf fighting alone.

On this evidence, it might be argued that the circumstances in which Beowulf makes his boast-speeches are ones in which the group has been or is being fractured in some way. The physical attacks by monsters are perhaps less serious than the psychological consequences of those attacks upon the community. The challenge posed by them quickly becomes an internal threat as members of the group, under the pressure of that challenge, cease to behave according to the shared system of values that hold their society together. The attacks of Grendel and the dragon thus not only test the physical capacity of various groups to deal with the threats they pose, the mental burden that these

enemies place on individuals establishes points of weakness within the group and discovers

its potential for disintegration.

The Collective Boast

This movement away from a sense of social cohesion is also a movement away from

particular types of boast that were intended to reinforce the collective identity of the group.

The chapter on the elegies examined the practical function of the drinking ritual in

assigning identity to individuals. That ritual and the symbolism attached to it are also

important features of what might be called 'collective boasts', where a group of individuals

commit themselves to undertake a course of action, and which were often performed over

alcohol. Unlike the boasts made by Beowulf that have been discussed above, in the Old

English tradition collective boasts are usually only referenced as having occurred in the

past, and this is because they represent a particular social state that no longer exists.

Examples of this type of boast in Anglo-Saxon poetry are limited, and the only mentions

are reports given by characters in *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* about occasions when

this type of ritual occurred. Hrothgar mentions one in his long complaint to Beowulf about

the failure of the Danes to deal with Grendel:

> Ful oft gebeotedon   beore druncne
> ofer ealowæge   oretmecgas
> þæt hie in beorsele   bidan woldon
> Grendles guþe   mid gryrum ecga.
> Ðonne wæs þeos medoheal   on morgentid,
> drihtsele dreorfah,   þonne dæg lixte,
> eal bencþelu   blode bestymed,
> heall heorudreore;   ahte ic holdra þy læs,
> deorre duguðe,   þe þa dead fornam.
>
> (ll. 480-88)
>
> Very often warriors drunk with beer boasted over the ale-cup that they would
> await Grendel's onslaught in the beer-hall with terrible sword-edges. Then in the
> morning when the day shone, this mead-hall, this noble hall was covered in gore,
> all the bench-planks were drenched with blood, the hall wet with the blood of
> battle; I had fewer faithful men, dear retainers, since death had taken them.

Hrothgar refers here to a time before the full effects of Grendel's onslaught became

apparent, when there was still a strong social bond between individual members of the

comitatus, and when they agreed to face external threats together. That sense of lost social unity is also evident in the two other references to the collective boast-speech, which both arise in similar circumstances, where a loyal retainer is urging his companions to action, either to support or to avenge their lord. The first takes place in *Beowulf*, when the young warrior Wiglaf attempts to persuade his recalcitrant companions to assist Beowulf by reminding them of promises they made to him in return for gifts of treasure and weapons:

> Wiglaf maðelode,   wordrihta fela
> sægde gesiðum -   him wæs sefa geomor:
> Ic ðæt mæl geman,   þær we medu þegun,
> þonne we geheton   ussum hlaforde
> in biorsele,   ðe us ðas beagas geaf,
> þæt we him ða guðgetawa   gyldan woldon
> gif him þyslicu   þearf gelumpe,
> helmas ond heard sweord...
>   Nu is se dæg cumen
> þæt ure mandryhten   mægenes behofað,
> godra guðrinca;   wutun gongan to,
> helpan hildfruman,   þenden hyt sy,
> gledegesa grim.

<div align="right">(ll.2631-8, 2644-50)</div>

Wiglaf spoke, he said many appropriate words to his companions (he was mournful in spirit): 'I remember the time we drank mead, when we promised our lord in the beer-hall, he who gave us rings, that we would repay him for the war-gear, the helmets and hard swords, if any such need as this befell him...Now the day is come that our lord has need of the strength of good warriors; let us go to him, help our war-leader, while the fierce, terrible heat lasts.

A reference to collective boasts made over mead also occurs in *The Battle of Maldon*, where, after Byrhtnoth's death, the young warrior Ælfwine similarly urges his companions to avenge their lord's death by reminding them of earlier boasts about how they intended to behave in battle:

> Swa hi bylde forð   bearn Ælfrices,
> wiga wintrum geong,   wordum mælde,
> ælfwine þa cwæð,   he on ellen spræc:
> 'Gemunan þa mæla   þe we oft æt meodo spræcon,
> þonne we on bence   beot ahofon,
> hæleð on healle,   ymbe heard gewinn;
> nu mæg cunnian   hwa cene sy.'

<div align="right">(ll. 209-15)</div>

Thus he encouraged them forth, the son of Ælfric, a warrior young in winters, uttered with words, Ælfwine then spoke, declared in courage: 'Let us remember those times when often we spoke at the mead-drinking, when we raised up boasts on the bench, warriors in the hall, about hard battle; now it will be found out who is brave.'

The lack of unity that occurs because of the cowardice of Wiglaf's companions has already been discussed. In *The Battle of Maldon,* Ælfwine's speech follows the flight of Odda's sons from the battlefield (ll. 185-97), who like the *treowlogan* ('oath-breakers', l. 2847) in *Beowulf,* make for the woods:

> Hi bugon þa fram beaduwe   þe þær beon noldon.
> Þær wearð Oddan bearn   ærest on fleame,
> Godric fram guþe,   and þone godan forlet
> þe him mænigne oft   mear gesealde;
> he gehleop þone eoh   þe ahte his hlaford,
> on þam gerædum   þe hit riht ne wæs,
> and his broðru mid him   begen ærndon,
> Godwine and Godwig,   guþe ne gymdon,
> ac wendon fram þam wige   and þone wudu sohton,
> flugon on þæt fæsten   and hyra feore burgon,
> and manna ma   þonne hit ænig mæð wære,
> gyf hi þa geearnunga   ealle gemundon
> þe he him to duguþe   gedon hæfde.
>
>   (ll. 185-97)

> Those who did not want to be there fled from battle. Odda's sons were the first to flee; Godric abandoned the good man who had given him many a horse; he leapt onto the horse which his lord owned, and onto those trappings which was not right, and his brothers with him; they both ran away, Godwine and Godwig; they didn't care for battle but turned from the fight and sought the wood, fled to that place of safety and saved their lives, and many more than was in any way fitting if they remembered all the favours which he had done for them for their benefit.

The betrayal of Odda's sons is also a more general betrayal of the *fyrd* itself. Godric and his brothers not only demonstrate disloyalty toward Byrhtnoth, their theft of his horse leads others to believe that Byrhtnoth is leaving the battle which in turn destroys the shield wall that the *fyrd* has established between themselves and the Vikings:

>   Us Godric hæfð,
> earh Oddan bearn,   ealle beswicene.
> Wende þæs formoni man,   þa he on meare rad,
> on wlancan þam wicge,   þæt wære hit ure hlaford;
> forþan wearð her on felda   folc totwæmed,
> scyldburh tobrocen.
>
>   (ll.237-242)

> Godric, wretched Odda's son, has betrayed us all. Too many men believed when he rode off on the horse proud from war, that it was our lord. Therefore the people were divided here in the field, the shield-wall broken.

The shield-wall was an ad-hoc physical structure created on the battlefield by the overlapping of shields by the front rank of warriors. It created a protective space and, significantly, required cooperation between members of the group for it to be effective.

Like the halls in *Beowulf,* it thus physically embodied the sense of unity that is compromised by the cowardice of Odda's sons and those that followed them.

The Collective Boast in Old Norse Literature

Although the various examples of collective boasts that occur in *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* arise in slightly different circumstances, they are generally similar in the way in which they associate collective boasting with collective unity, and also in their references to the role alcohol in creating that sense of unity. This is an association that is also evident in Old Norse literature. Unlike Old English poetry, the Old Norse corpus contains numerous examples of collective boasts, and thus provides valuable information on the practice and its function in Germanic society. For that reason, it is worth looking in detail at some instances to see whether the association made here between collective boast and collective unity is justified.

In Old Norse, the phrase that describes the making of vows is *strengja heit* (lit. 'to fasten a promise/vow'). Perhaps the most famous collective boast in Old Norse literature is made by the Jomsvikings, a legendary warrior-community from Wendland (modern Pomerania) who are summoned to a funeral feast given by Swein Forkbeard for his father Harald. This particular version of the story comes from *Ólaf's Saga Tryggvasonar,*[47] though there are several others:[48]

> Sveinn konungr gerði mannboð ríkt ok stefndi til sín ǫllum hǫfðingjum, þeim er váru í ríki hans; hann skyldi erfa Harald, fǫður sinn. Þá hafði ok andazk litlu áðr Strút-Haraldr á Skáni ok Véseti í Borgundarhólmi, faðir þeira Búa digra. Sendi konungr þá orð þeim Jómsvíkingum, at Sigvaldi jarl ok Búi ok brœðr þeira skyldu þar koma ok erfa feðr sína at þeiri veizlu, er konungr gerði. Jómsvíkingar fóru til veizlunnar með ǫllu liði sínu, því er frœknast var; þeir hǫfðu xl. skipa af Vindlandi, en xx. skip af Skáni; þar kom saman allmikit fjǫlmenni. Fyrsta dag at veizlunni, áðr Sveinn konungr stigi í hásæti fǫður síns, þá drakk hann minni hans ok strengði heit, áðr iii. vetr væri liðnir, at hann skyldi kominn með her sinn til Englandz ok drepa Aðalráð konung eða reka hann or landi. Þat minni skyldu allir drekka, þeir er at erfinu váru. Þá var skenkt hǫfðingjum Jómsvíkinga in stœrstu horn af inum sterkasta drykk, er þar var. En er þat minni var af drukkit, þá skyldi drekka Krists minni allir men, ok var Jómsvíkingum borit æ fullast ok sterkastr

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[47] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: Nóregs Konunga Sǫgur*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads, 1911), pp. 105 - 81.
[48] Einarsson, '*Heitstrenging*', pp. 983-4.

drykkr. It iii. var Mikjáls minni, ok drukku þat allir. En eptir þat drakk Sigvaldi jarl minni fǫður síns ok strengði heit síðan, at áðr iii. vetr væri liðnir, skyldi hann vera kominn í Nóreg ok drepa Hákon jarl eða reka hann ór landi. Síðan strengði heit Þorkell hávi, bróðir hans, at hann skyldi fylgja Sigvalda til Nóregs ok flýja eigi ór orrostu, svá at Sigvaldi berðisk þá eptir. Þá strengði heit Búi digri, at hann myndi fara til Nóregs með þeim ok flýja eigi ór orrostu fyrir Hákoni jarli. Þá strengði heit Sigurðr, bróðir hans, at hann myndi fara til Nóregs, ok flýja eigi, meðan meiri hlutr Jómsvíkinga berðisk. Þá strengði heit Vagn Ákason, at hann skyldi fara með þeim til Nóregs ok koma eigi aptr, fyrr en hann hefði drepit Þorkel leiru ok gengit í rekkju hjá Ingibjǫrgu, dóttur hans. Margir hǫfðingjar aðrir strengðu heit ýmissa hluta. Drukku menn þann dag erfit, en eptir um morguninn, þá er Jómsvíkingar váru ódruknir, þóttusk þeir hafa fullmælt, ok hafa málstefnur sínar ok ráða ráðum, hvernug þeir skulu til stilla um ferðina; ráða þat af, at búask þá sem skyndiligast; búa þá skip sín ok herlið; varð þat allfrægt víða um lǫnd.

(35)

King Swein prepared a great feast and summoned all his chiefs to him, those who were in the kingdom; he was to commemorate his father Harald with a funeral feast. A little before that time Strut-Harald had also died in Scania, and Veseti in Bornholm, the father of Bui the Thick (and Sigurd). Then the king sent a message to the Jomsvikings that Jarl Sigvaldi and Bui and their brothers should come there and commemorate their fathers at the feast which the king was preparing. The Jomsvikings journeyed to the feast with all their men, those who were most valiant; they had forty ships from Wendland and twenty ships from Scania; they came together in a very great force. On the first day of the feast, before King Swein ascended into his father's high-seat, he drank his memorial cup, and made a vow, that before three years had passed he would go with his army to England and kill King Ethelred or drive him from the land. All the men who were at the feast had to drink the memorial cup. Drink was served to the leaders of the Jomsvikings in the largest horn, from the strongest drink that there was. And when that memorial cup was drunk, then all men had to drink a memorial cup to Christ, and the fullest and strongest drink was always carried to the Jomsvikings. The third memorial cup was to St. Michael, and they all drank that. After that Jarl Sigvaldi drank a memorial cup to his farther and made a vow after, that before three years had passed, he would have gone to Norway and killed Jarl Hakon or driven him from the land. Afterwards his brother Thorkell the Tall made a vow that he would follow Sigvaldi to Norway and not flee from battle, while Sigvaldi remained fighting. Then Bui the Thick made a vow that he would travel to Norway with them and not flee from battle in the face of Jarl Hakon. Then Sigurd, his brother, made a vow that he would go to Norway, and not flee while the greater part of the Jomvikings still fought. Then Vagn Akason made a vow that he would travel with them to Norway and not come back, before he had killed Thorkell Leira and got into bed beside Ingebjorg, his daughter. Many other leaders made vows about various things. The men drank the funeral feast that day, but the morning after when the Jomsvikings sobered up, they thought they had said enough and held a conference and consulted about how they should make arrangements about the journey; they resolved that they should prepare as quickly as possible; they prepared their ships and army; that was spoken of widely across the lands.

The Jomsvikings who appear in saga literature were likely to have been the result of the 'pseudo-heroic…embroidery of a later age'[49] which presented twelfth and thirteenth century readers with an ideal warrior community who were 'bound by iron laws to keep peace among themselves and avenge each other's death'. The above passage portrays them

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[49] Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 127.

as a group of individuals deeply committed to each other, with the boasts of particular individuals taking as their subject the same event and focusing particularly on the maintenance of interpersonal relationships whatever the circumstances. Thus both in form and content, the Jomsvikings use the boast-speech to emphasise the bonds between speakers.

The Symbolism of Alcohol

The sense of cohesion evident both here and recalled in the Old English examples seems to have arisen partly from the role of alcohol in Germanic society. In Exeter Riddle 27, Mead says of itself: *ic eom bindere/ ond swingere* ('I am a binder and a scourger, ll.6-7).[50] Within the tradition of communal boasting, alcohol seems to have had this binding function, and as Magennis notes, was 'expressive of reciprocity and trust within warrior society.'[51] In his study of the etymology of Old Norse terms for drinking and feasts, Maurice Cahen argues that it was used originally in pre-Christian sacrificial rites as a substitute for animal meat:

> La libation a la valeur d'un sacrifice et le sens d'un rite communiel. Elle se développe et elle agit comme le sacrifice animal. L'officiant introduit dans le breuvage qu'il consacre une force religieuse qui se communique successivement à tous les sacrifiants. La bière consacrée a la même vertu que la chair et le sang de la victime: elle élève le monde profane au contact immédiat du monde divin. La corne qui passe de main en main, de bouche à bouche lie les mains, unit les cœurs: elle réchauffe l'âme du groupe, elle crée la solidarité.[52]

> The libation has the value of a sacrifice and the meaning of a communal rite. It develops and acts like the animal sacrifice. The officiant introduces into the beverage which he consecrates a religious force which is communicated successively to all who sacrifice. The consecrated beer has the same power as the flesh and the blood of the victim: it elevates the profane world into direct contact with the divine world. The horn which passes from hand to hand, mouth to mouth, link the hands, unites the hearts: it warms the soul of the group, it creates solidarity.

Here, the sense of a collective identity among the members of the group derives both from the physical act of passing the drinking vessel between individuals but also from the

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[50] Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, p. 194.
[51] Hugh Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and their Consumption in Old English and Related Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 21.
[52] Maurice Cahen, *Études Sur Le Vocabulaire Religieux Du Vieux-Scandinave: La Libation* (Paris: Champion, 1921), p. 7-8.

symbolism associated with the ingestion of the same substance. Alcohol replaces meat, but through the consumption of both the individual literally shares in a sense of community.

In Old Norse literature, the cup over which boasts were made was usually called the *braga(r)full* (lit. cup of the 'best' or 'foremost'), for which there is no recorded Old English equivalent.[53] As the description of the Jomsvikings demonstrates it was a ceremonial toast that occurred alongside others, such as the *minni* or remembrance cup. In accounts of the pagan origins of *heitstrenging at bragafulli* the practice of boasting over alcohol is embedded in far more elaborate ritual practices. In another *Heimskringla* text, *Saga Hákonar Góða*,[54] Snorri Sturluson provides an account of the possible pagan origins of boasts made over the *bragafull*. In his discussion of King Hakon's attempt to Christianise Norway, Snorri notes that Hakon arrived in the country at a time when 'the land was entirely heathen and there was a lot of sacrificing' (*var land alt heiðit ok blótskapr mikill*, 13). He then provides an account of the sacrificial rituals carried out by Jarl Sigurd of Lade who is described as 'the greatest sacrificer' (*inn mesti blótmaðr*, 14):

> Þat var forn siðr, þá er blót skyldi vera, at allir bœndr skyldu þar koma, sem hof var ok flytja þannug fǫng sín, þau er þeir skyldu hafa, meðan veizlan stóð. At veizlu þeirri skyldu allir menn ǫl eiga; þar var ok drepinn allz konar smali ok svá hross, en blóð þat alt, er þar kom af, þá var þat kallat hlaut, ok hlautbollar þat, en blóð þat stóð í, ok hlautteinar, þat var svá gǫrt sem stǫklar, með því skyldi rjóða stallana ǫllu saman, ok svá veggi hofsins útan ok innan, ok svá støkkva á mennina, en slátr skyldi sjóða til mannfagnaðar; eldar skyldu vera á miðju gólfi í hofinu ok þar katlar yfir; ok skyldi full um eld bera, en sá er gerði veizluna ok hǫfðingi var, þá skyldi hann signa fullit ok allan blótmatinn, skyldi fyrst Óðins full - skyldi þat drekka til sigrs ok ríkis konungi sínum, en síðan Njarðar full ok Freys full til árs ok friðar. Þá var mǫrgum mǫnnum títt at drekka þar næst Braga full, menn drukku ok full frænda sinna, þeirra er heygðir hǫfðu verit, ok váru þat minni kǫlluð.

> It was an old custom, when there was to be a sacrifice that all farmers should come to where the temple was, and carry with them the provisions they needed while the feast lasted. At the feast all men were to have drink; all kinds of small cattle, and horses too, were killed, and all the blood which came from them was called the *hlaut* ('blood of sacrifice'); the containers which the blood stood in were called the *hlautbollar* ('sacrificial bowls'), and the *hlauteinar* ('sacrificial twigs'), which were made like sprinklers, were used to redden all the stalls, and likewise the walls of the temple outside and in, and the men were sprinkled in a similar way; but the meat was cooked for the banquet fare. There were fires in the middle of the temple floor, and pots over them; and cups were brought to the fire, and he who was chief and arranged the feast, would then dedicate the cup

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[53] For a full discussion of the possible etymology of *bragafull* see Cahen pp. 174-5.
[54] Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, p. 70-92.

and all the sacrificial food, but he should first dedicate Odin's cup – that was to be drunk to victory and to the power of his king, and afterwards, Njord's cup and Freyja's cup for abundance and peace. It was customary for many men to drink the *bragafull* next; men also drank a cup to their kinsmen, ones who had been buried, and those were called the *minni* ('cup of remembrance')

It is notable here that when Snorri is describing pre-Christian rituals the subjects of the toasts are the pagan Gods rather than the Christian God and saints who are the subject of the toasts in the account of the Jomsvikings. If this account is to be believed the practice of *heitstrenging* at the *bragafull* is old, and presumably, by the time of the texts in which drinking rituals appear, these practices have long since disappeared, evolved, or been obscured by the raucousness often associated with the feast in Germanic tradition. As Cahen notes, perhaps 'the solemnity of the sacrificial meal was lost in the noise of celebrations' (*la solennité du repas sacrificel s'est perdue dans le bruit des réjouissances*).[55]

What was not lost, however, was the idea that the unity and identity of the group is materially invested in a substance which is subsequently incorporated into the body of each individual. This is an idea that continues and is found also in French literature in the medieval French poem *Les Vœux du Paon* ('The Vows of the Peacock'), in which several knights make vows over a peacock.[56] The highly prized bird is passed between the knights. Each of them makes an oath upon it, and it is then carved by the bravest knight and everybody receives a share. Thus each of the knights imbues the bird with his promise to undertake a particular course of action. Each then symbolically consumes not only his own vow, but the vows of the entire community, absorbing the collective commitment of the group.

Although there are no scenes of communal boasts taking place over alcohol in Old English literature, there is enough in the scant references that appear in the speeches of Hrothgar, Wiglaf, and Ælfwine, to suggest that such a practice had an important social

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[55] Cahen, *La Libation*, p. 15.
[56] Einarsson, '*Heitstrenging*', p. 992.

function and like the more basic drinking ritual that takes place in *Beowulf* was very much about individual and collective identity. It was a form of social interaction that both reinforced the collective identity of the group and also the identity of the individual as part of that group. That the practice occurred in both *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* at a time when there was some sense of social unity appears therefore to be appropriate and to agree with depictions of the practice from Old Norse.

Further Functions of the Boast in Old Norse Literature

The obvious difference between the boast made over alcohol and the drinking ritual discussed in the last chapter is that although both are concerned with the future welfare of the group, in one that concern is explicit. As individuals recommit themselves to each other they are also committing themselves to a pattern of conduct at a time yet to come. Before returning to look at the possible social functions of Beowulf's boast-speeches it will be useful to stay with the Old Norse tradition a while longer and ask how, apart from reinforcing the unity of a social group, boast-speeches in Old Norse relate this concern for the welfare of the group with an individual's future behaviour.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the boast-speech in Old Norse is that it often seems to take place at moments of great change for the community. Some of the speeches that occur at these times are collective, some are not, but the vast majority take place during important feasts marking occasions of social transformation, either symbolic or real. They occur, for example, during annual festivals such as Yule-tide, which began as a pagan mid-Winter festival that marked the end of the year[57] and included a fertility sacrifice intended to ensure a good crop in the season to come.[58] The practice of making

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[57] Andy Orchard, *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (London: Cassell, 1997), s.v. 'yule'.
[58] Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), s.v. 'Yule'.

boasts over alcohol at this time of year is regarded as customary in *Saga Heiðriks Konungs*

Ins Vitra: [59]

> Þat var tíðenda eitthvert sinn jólaaptan, at menn skyldu heit strengja at
> bragarfulli, sem siðr er til; þá stengðu heit Arngríms synir. Hjǫrvarðr strengði
> þess heit, at hann skyldi eiga dóttur Ingjalds Svíakonungs, þa mey, er fræg var
> um ǫll lǫnd at fegrð ok at atgǫrvi, eða enga konu ella
>
> (2)

> It happened on a certain Yule-eve, that men should make solemn vows at the
> *bragarfull*, as the custom is; at that time the sons of Arngrim made their vows.
> Hjorvard made a solemn promise, that he would marry the daughter of Ingald,
> the King of the Swedes, the girl who was famed throughout all the lands for her
> beauty and accomplishments, or no woman else.

Heitstrenging at bragafulli during Yule-tide also appears in the Poetic Edda. In

Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar, [60] the practice occurs alongside animal sacrifice:

> Heðinn fór einn saman heim ór skógi jólaaptan ok fann trollkonu. Sú reið vargi
> ok hafði orma at taumum ok bauð fylgð sína Heðni. 'Nei', sagði hann. Hon
> sagði: 'Þess skaltu gjalda at bragarfulli.' Um kveldit óru heitstrengingar. Var
> fram leiddr sónargǫltr. Lǫgðu menn þar á hendr sínar ok strengðu menn þá heit
> at bragarfulli. Heðinn strengði heit til Sváfu Eylima dóttur, unnustu Helga bróður
> síns, ok iðraðisk svá mjǫk, at hann gekk á braut villistígu suðr á lǫnd ok fann
> Helga bróður sinn
>
> (6)

> Hedin journeyed home alone from the forest one Yule-eve and met a troll-
> woman. She rode a wolf and had serpents as reins and invited Hedin to follow
> her. 'No' he said. She said: 'You shall pay for this at the *bragarfull*'. In the
> evening vows were made. The sacrificial boar was led out. Men laid their hands
> on it and made a solemn promise with the *bragarfull*. Hedin vowed to have
> Svafa, the daughter of Eylimi, the sweetheart of his brother Helgi, and he
> repented so much about it, that he went away on a wild path south from the land
> and met his brother Helgi

There are several other examples of this practice,[61] one of which shows that

boasting was depicted as a contemporary practice in the late thirteenth century, when ON

jól described Christmas rather than a pagan mid-Winter festival. In all instances, the

practice of *heitstrenging* at Yule-tide appears to carry some of the connotations associated

with the making of New Year resolutions. At the end of one year, the individual makes a

commitment to undertake a course of action in the year that follows.

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[59] Christopher Tolkien, ed., *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960).
Several manuscripts of this saga survive. Other versions of the text contain similar references to the practice
of *heitstrenging* at Yule-tide; see Einarsson, '*Heitstrenging*', p. 986.

[60] Finnur Jónsson, ed., *De Gamle Eddadigte* (Copenhagan: G.E.C. Gads, 1932), pp. 195-206.

[61] Einarsson, pp. 989-90. The examples he provides are from *Harðar Saga ok Hólmverja* and *Sturlunga Saga.*

As the passage describing the vows made by the Jomsvikings demonstrates, *heitstrenging* was also a feature of accession rituals which ensured the orderly succession of one ruler by another. The source-passage for Snorri's account of the vows of the Jomsvikings, the twelfth-century *Fagrskinna*, [62] is prefaced by an explanation of what was necessary when an heir sought to claim his inheritance:

> En þá er erfin váru gǫr eptir fornum sið, þá skyldi þat skylt at gøra þau á því ári, er sá hafði andazk, er erfit var eptir gǫrt. En sá er gøra léti erfit, skyldi eigi fyrr setjask í þess manns sæti, er hann erfði, en men drykki erfit. Et fyrsta kveld, er men kómu til erfis, skyldi skenkja upp mǫrg full með þeima hætti sem nú eru minni, ok eignuðu þau full enum ríkustu frændum sínum eða Þór eða ǫðrum guðum sínum, þá er heiðni var, en síðast skyldi upp skenkja bragafull ok þá skyldi sá, er erfit gørði, strengja heit at bragafulli ok svá allir þeir er at erfinu væri, ok stíga þá í sæti þess, er erfðr var, ok skyldi þá fullkominn vera til arfs ok virðingar eptir enn dauða, en eigi fyrr
>
> (XX)
>
> And when funeral feasts were held in according to the practices of ancient times, then it was necessary that they were prepared in the year that the person who was being honoured died. And he who arranged the feast, was not to sit in the seat of the man whom he honoured, before men had drunk the memorial toast. The first evening, when men came to the feast, he was to fill many cups in the same way that memorial cups are now, and dedicate those cups to most powerful of his kinsmen or Thor or the other gods – it was then the heathen age – and finally he was to fill the *bragafull* and he had to, he who prepared the feast, make a solemn vow at the *bragafull* and likewise all those who were at the feast; he should then ascend to the seat of the one being honoured, and should then fully come into his inheritance and honour after the dead man, and not before.

Although Snorri did not use this explanation in his description of the funeral feast given by King Swein for his father, he seems to have re-used it in the *Ynglinga Saga*[63] as part of his account of the accession of Ingjald, a legendary king of Sweden:

> Þat var siðvenja í þann tíma, þar er erfi skyldi gera eptir konunga eða jarla, þá skyldi sá er gerði erfit, ok til arfs skyldi leiða, sitja á skǫrinni fyrir hásætinu, alt þar til er inn væri borit full, þat er kallat var Bragafull; skyldi sá þá standa upp í móti bragafulli ok strengja heit, drekka af fullit síðan; síðan skyldi hann leiða í hásæti, þat sem átti faðir hans; var hann þá kominn til arfs allz eptir hann. Nú var svá hér gǫrt, at þá er Bragafull kom inn, stóð upp Ingjaldr konungr ok tók við einu miklu dýrshorni; strengði hann þá heit, at hann skyldi auka ríki sitt hálfu í hverja hǫfuðátt, eða deyja ella; drakk af síðan af horninu
>
> (36)
>
> It was a practice at that time, when a funeral feast was prepared for kings or jarls, that the one who prepared the feast, and who was to come into the inheritance, should sit on the step before the high-seat, until the cup was brought in, which was called the *bragafull*; he should then stand up to receive the *bragafull* and make a solemn vow, and after that empty the cup; he should then be led to the

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[62] Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga Sǫgum: Fagrskinna – Nóregs Konunga Tal* (Rekjavik: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1984).

[63] Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, pp. 4-35.

> high-seat, that which his father had had; he then came into his inheritance after him [i.e. his father]. Now it was so done, that when the *bragafull* came in, King Ingaldr stood up and took a great ox-horn; he made a solemn vow that he would increase his kingdom by half in every direction, or else die; then he emptied the horn.

Finally, Einarsson also notes incidences of *heitstrenging* in the accounts of marriage feasts that appear in the *Íslendinga sǫgur*.[64] In the examples he cites, individuals commit themselves either to prove that a particular person is an outlaw (*Hœnsa-Þóris saga*) or that he is a coward (*Svarfdœla saga*) within a specified period of time. Like rituals that mark the interstices between reigns or the symbolic change from one year to the next, domestic celebrations such as marriage-feasts also mark a moment of transformation, specifically the point at which boundaries between different kin groups are redrawn.

In each of these rituals, it can be argued that the practice of making boast-speeches at such times may have functioned, at least originally, as an attempt to provisionally give shape to a future state during a period of social change. Through an assertion of intent, an individual claims that they will make at least a portion of this new unknown state known through the force of their own will. This commitment to action thus provides at least some direction for the group, and in so doing it functions in the very general way that rituals function in guiding society as it enters the unknown:

> Ritual creates a meaningful event out of a new and potentially incomprehensible situation, namely, by bringing traditional structures to bear on it. If done effectively, the ritual action enables those structures to embrace and subdue the new situation, rendering the situation meaningful and enabling the structures themselves to continue to thrive as legitimate, appropriate, and relatively unaltered.[65]

The seeming absence of obvious Anglo-Saxon parallels to the heavily ritualised practice of making boast-speeches in Old Norse, and the fact that the Old Norse texts were written later than their English counterparts, leads Einarsson to conclude that the examples from Old English literature are of a practice 'in its original form, devoid as yet of any

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[64] Einarsson, '*Heitstrenging*', p. 989.
[65] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Dimensions and Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 77. In this passage Bell is broadly summarising Marshall Sahlins' approach to ritual.

ceremony.'[66] Old Norse examples, he argues, are 'also perhaps in a primitive stage, but forms of it occur in which it is strengthened with all sorts of ceremony.' As we have seen, however, the boasts made by Beowulf are made in situations where the cohesion that has held various social groups together has either collapsed or is in the process of collapsing. Both the Danes and the Geats are, to varying degrees, not only moving through a period of change, they are heading toward social disintegration. This concept of change is obviously very different and rather more urgent than the one that appears in Old Norse literature, but it is possible to argue that both Old Norse and Old English share a sense of the importance of boast-speeches being made at times when the group, not the individual, find themselves transitioning to a new, uncertain state. On this point, however, the evidence from Old English literature suggests that this positive social effect is only really tangible when boasts are actually fulfilled.

Boast Fulfilment and Cultural Renewal

According to Conquergood one of the primary functions of the boast was 'to reinforce and perpetuate community values in a rhetorically compelling manner',[67] and that making boasts 'promoted and perpetuated the heroic code which was the foundation of social order.'[68] Many of the statements that appear in boast-speeches do indeed share in and reflect collective definitions of heroism and other virtues prized by the Anglo-Saxons, but it is not clear how these speeches, taken by themselves, positively affect them. As Tom Shippey puts it bluntly: 'words without subsequent deeds are useless.'[69] They are also culturally valueless to a society whose entire concept of heroism was premised upon the correspondence of word and deed.

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[66] Einarsson, '*Heitstrenging*', p. 993.
[67] Conquergood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Boast', p. 36.
[68] p. 53.
[69] Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 121.

The retainers mentioned above, for example, Wiglaf and Ælfwine, both fulfil their promises. Wiglaf rushes into the barrow and helps Beowulf defeat the dragon; Ælfwine advances immediately after he speaks, killing a Viking, before turning again to encourage his companions (ll. 225-9). Indeed, Ælfwine's speech begins a succession of nine speeches made by individuals after the death of Byrhtnoth in *The Battle of Maldon* and in all but one the poet explicitly describes the speaker finishing their speech then moving forward to fight.[70]

Some of the speeches are reported by the poet, some given directly by the characters. Most are speeches of encouragement, which emphasise the need for reciprocal support between individuals, a sentiment particularly evident in Offa's comment that *us is eallum þearf þæt ure æghwylc/ oþerne bylde* ('it is necessary for us all that each one of us encourages the other', ll. 233-4). Offa dies avenging Byrhtnoth (ll.283-95); Dunnere makes his speech then advances as part of a group each praying that they will be allowed to take vengeance (l. 260-4); the brothers Oswold and Eadwold are described as using their weapons 'resolutely' (*unwaclice*, l. 308) as they encourage those around them; Godric, Æthelgar's son, encourages others until he too falls (l. 324).

In the three speeches that have an explicit commissive aspect to them, two warriors are described as matching word and deed, while the third, even though his death is not described, would certainly have fought to the death. The first, most elaborate of the three boast-speeches is given by Leofsunu:

> Leofsunu gemælde   and his linde ahof,
> bord to gebeorge;   he þam beorne oncwæð:
> 'Ic þæt gehate,   þæt ic heonon nelle
> fleon fotes trym,   ac wille furðor gan,
> wrecan on gewinne   minne winedrihten.
> Ne þurfon me embe Sturmere   stedefæste hælæð
> wordum ætwitan,   nu min wine gecranc,
> þæt ic hlafordleas   ham siðie,
> wende fram wige,   ac me sceal wæpen niman,

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[70] Ælfwine ll. 209-29, Offa ll. 230-43, Leofsunu ll. 244-54, Dunnere ll. 255-9, Edweard se langa ll. 273-9, Oswold and Eadwold ll. 304-8, Byrthwold ll. 309-19, Godric ll. 320-5.

ord and iren.'   He ful yrre wod,
feaht fæstlice,   fleam he forhogode.

<p align="right">(ll. 244-54)</p>

Leofsunu spoke, and raised his shield, his buckler as protection, he said to those
men: 'I promise that I will not flee a foot's space, but will go on, avenge my
dear lord in battle. The steadfast warriors around Sturmer will not have need to
reproach me with words, now that my friend has fallen, so that I journey home
lordless, turn from battle, but a weapon shall take me, spear and sword.' He
advanced very angry, fought resolutely, he scorned flight.

The second boast-speech is made by *Eadweard se Langa* and reported by the poet

who says that he 'spoke boast words that he would not flee the space of a foot, turn back,

when his better lay dead' (*gylpwordum spræc/ þæt he nolde fleogan fotmæl landes,/ ofer*

bæc bugan, þa his betera leg, ll. 274-6). He is then described as breaking through the

shield-wall and fighting until he died. The final statement of intent is made by Byrhtwold

at the end of his famous speech on what is required by all of them in the circumstances in

which they find themselves, when he says that 'I will not flee, but I intend to lie by the side

of my lord, by so dear a man (*fram ic ne wille,/ ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,/ be swa*

leofan men, licgan þence, ll. 317-9). Ironically, although he is not described as advancing,

of all the warriors who remain on the battlefield, there can be little doubt that he did.

In behaving this way, Byrhtnoth's retainers follow their courageous talk with

courageous action, heeding the warning contained in one of the Durham proverbs: *Gyf þu*

well sprece wyrc æfter swa ('if you speak well, act accordingly', 20).[71] To argue, therefore,

that speech in general, and boast-speeches in particular, have the capacity to influence the

value system of a particular culture, is only possible if those words are considered in

conjunction with the actions that may or may not follow them. The first step in making

such an argument would be to accept that the fights undertaken by a figure like Beowulf

are not simply physical endeavours; they are also arguments. As Sahlins notes, 'all *praxis*

is theoretical. It begins always in the concepts of the actors...the cultural segmentations

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[71] Translating *bene loquere sic bene facias*. Olof Arngart, 'The Durham Proverbs', *Speculum,* 56 (1981), 288-
300 (p. 292).

and values of an *a priori* system.'[72] Beowulf's deeds make sense only as they invoke a value-system. Each fight is an 'event' and must be considered as something that looks beyond the physical to the ideas that underlie the world of the poem:

> An event is not simply a phenomenal happening...An event becomes such as it is interpreted. Only as it is appropriated in and through the cultural scheme does it acquire an historical *significance*...The event is a *relation* between a happening and a structure (or structures): an encompassment of the phenomenon-in-itself as a meaningful value, from which follows its specific historical efficacy.[73]

Culture, it might be argued, 'is historically altered in action';[74] 'it is dissolved and reformulated in material practice'.[75] Important cultural ideas are submitted to the 'empirical risk'[76] of action and derive a 'particular empirical inflection of meaning'[77] from their operation in the real world. Through such a process concepts are legitimised and renewed. Commissive speech acts have a function as rituals that identify these ideas and create a frame that makes sense of the entire process. The boast-speeches made by Beowulf, in particular, provide an example of how culture can be explicitly brought to bear on some future event through reference to important shared ideas within the context of the boast-speech. Prior to his fight with Grendel, for instance, he makes several boasts, two of which end in a similar way:

> Ac ic mid grape sceal
> fon wið feonde   ond ymb feorh sacan,
> lað wið laþum;   ðær gelyfan sceal
> dryhtnes dome   se þe hine dead nimeð.

(ll. 438-41)

But I with my grip will grapple with the enemy, and fight for life, foe against foe; he whom death takes there must trust to the judgement of the Lord.

> Ac wit on niht sculon
> secge ofersittan,   gif he gesecean dear
> wig ofer wæpen,   ond siþðan witig god
> on swa hwæþere hond,   halig dryhten,
> mærðo deme,   swa him gemet þince.

(ll. 683-7)

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[72] Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 154.
[73] p. xiv.
[74] p. vii.
[75] Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, p. 7.
[76] Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. ix.
[77] p. 152.

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But in the night we shall forego swords, if he dares to seek battle without weapons, and afterwards let the wise God, the Holy Lord, assign glory to whoever He sees fit.

These passages both occur at the end of speeches by Beowulf in which he discusses fighting in general and the use of weapons in particular. Both also introduce us to Beowulf's own ideas about divine providence and how he understands that it might operate in the battle ahead. After he defeats Grendel, Beowulf makes another speech, which ends in a similar manner (italicised) to those outlined above, and which also interweaves his account of the fight with references to how he believes God influenced the outcome:

> Ic hine hrædlice   heardan clammum
> on wælbedde   wriþan þohte,
> þæt he for mundgripe   minum scolde
> licgean lifbysig,   butan his lic swice;
> ic hine ne mihte,   þa metod nolde,
> ganges getwæman,   no ic him þæs georne ætfealh,
> feorhgeniðlan;   wæs to foremihtig
> feond on feþe.   Hwæþere he his folme forlet
> to lifwraþe   last weardian,
> earm ond eaxle.   No þær ænige swa þeah
> feasceaft guma   frofre gebohte:
> no þy leng leofað   laðgeteona,
> synnum geswenced,   ac hyne sar hafað
> in nydgripe   nearwe befongen,
> balwon bendum;   ðær abidan sceal
> maga mane fah   miclan domes,
> hu him scir metod   scrifan wille.

(ll. 963-79)

I thought to bind him swiftly on his death-bed with hard clutches, so that he would lie struggling for his life because of my hand-grip, unless his body escaped me; I couldn't prevent his going, when the Creator did not wish it, nor did I grasp him, deadly foe, firmly enough for that; the enemy was too strong in his movement for that. However, to save his life, he left his hand, his arm and shoulder, to remain behind. Nevertheless, the wretched creature didn't gain any comfort by that; the hateful ravager, afflicted by sins, will live no longer, *but pain has him tightly in its inexorable grip, with deadly bonds; there, stained by crimes, the creature must await the great Judgement, whatever the resplendent Creator will decree.*

This speech provides an account of his fight with Grendel in a way that explains what has occurred in terms of the operation of divine providence. The fight validates what Beowulf has already said about this idea because the fight itself provides an example of how it actually works in practice. After his fight with Grendel's mother Beowulf gives another account of the battle which again discusses God's role in the physical realities of the contest:

> Ic þæt unsofte   ealdre gedigde
> wigge under wætere,   weorc geneþde
> earfoðlice;   ætrihte wæs
> guð getwæfed,   nymðe mec god scylde.
> Ne meahte ic æt hilde   mid Hruntinge
> wiht gewyrcan,   þeah þæt wæpen duge;
> ac me geuðe   ylda waldend
> þæt ic on wage geseah   wlitig hangian
> eald sweord eacen;   oftost wisode
> winigea leasum,   þæt ic ðy wæpne gebræd.

<div align="right">(ll. 1655-64)</div>

> I barely survived with my life that conflict under water, ventured upon that work
> with difficulty; that battle would have ended immediately except that God
> protected me. I could not achieve anything in combat with Hrunting, although
> the weapon may be good; but the Ruler of Men granted me that I saw hanging
> handsome on the wall an enormous ancient sword; He often guides the friendless
> one, so that I drew the weapon.

In the language of Marshall Sahlins, this process might be called 'the functional revaluation of signs' and it can be reduced to the following axiom: 'every implementation of cultural concepts in an actual world submits the concepts to some determination by the situation.'[78] In the above examples and elsewhere,[79] Beowulf conspicuously 'submits' the notion of divine providence to such an evaluation, which legitimises it and renews it as an important cultural idea.

Boasts made by *Leofsunu*, *Byrthwold*, and *Edweard se langa* in *The Battle of Maldon* can also be understood in this way. Although their speeches do not employ important social concepts as obviously as Beowulf's, it is clear that they are attempting to reinvigorate ideas concerning loyalty to one's lord. Unlike Beowulf, the characters in *The Battle of Maldon* do not have an opportunity to recount their part in the battle, although through their correspondence of word and deed they make an argument for the 'adherence to principles that are more important than survival.'[80]

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter it was noted that in *Vainglory* boast-speeches are associated with individualism, pride, and social disharmony. It is certainly true that boast-

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[78] Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. 149.
[79] The dragon fight: see ll. 2524-28, 2535-7, 2794-801
[80] Conquergood, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 34.

speeches are concerned with the individual, and particularly with establishing the identity of the speaker. The first-person narratives that often preface the boast-speeches create this identity in the same way that the first-person riddle creates the identity of a narrator, through the selection of pertinent details that creates a particular impression of the speaker in an audience's mind. The competing accounts of the swimming match with Breca, for example, are rival narratives that construct very different identities for Beowulf. Both narratives attempt to create a sense of who Beowulf is at the present moment through establishing a connection to what he has or has not done in the past. This construal of identity through past-personal narrative is part of a much larger narrative tradition in heroic poetry that partakes of a 'culture of the superlative' that constructs identity by trying to establish the separateness of an individual or object from everything else in its class.

As the above discussion shows, however, the boast-speech was also deeply concerned with the welfare and ideals of the group. However we interpret the ambiguity and sense of loss that accompanies the ending of poems like *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*, both poems are unequivocal in their valorisation of the individual who makes and performs his boast at a difficult time. The emphasis they place upon commissive speech acts, and their concern for displays of cowardice, forcefully conveys to their respective audiences the moral lesson that the fate of the group is inseparable from that of the individual, that one is dependent upon the other.

Understood this way boast-speeches cannot be considered entirely individualistic and independent of the wider community. They not only required the participation of the group to become meaningful, they had an instrumental role in creating a sense of solidarity among members of the group, and more generally providing direction for societies as they entered situations that were new or unknown. They participated in the most cherished cultural ideals and strengthened them by offering a means for making sense of physical

action and identifying important social ideas that could be reinforced and invigorated through such action.

To the extent, therefore, that the boast-speech is concerned with the unique identity of a particular individual it is so only insofar as the behaviour of that individual promotes the value-system upon which the group or society is based:

> The convention of boasting, which provides opportunity for individuals to stand out momentarily at the center of the group's attention and thus receive the recognition and visibility necessary for individual identity, simultaneously assures the dominance and continuance of group identity.[81]

Although Conquergood incorrectly ascribes the survival of a community's value system to the boast rather than to the action that follows the boast, and which actualises it in the real world, his belief that individual identity is connected to that of the group recognises the existence of an important reciprocity between the two. It might be argued that the hero in a poem like *Beowulf* is a local agent of cultural renewal. He is highly regarded not only because he reflects communal ideals but also because through his actions he remakes those ideals in a process that sustains the value system which underlies heroic society. The individual is the means by which the cultural life of the group continues, and in celebrating the achievements of the hero, a community or a writer re-affirms and celebrates the persistence of those ideals.

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[81] Conquergood, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 30.

Chapter 4 - Monastic Identity and Language: The Anglo-Latin Colloquy Tradition

The preceding chapters have examined fictional first-person narratives and the various ways in which talking about personal experience could be seen both to construct the identity of the speaker and to have a broader social function, either in bringing readers to an awareness of the nature and structure of their society, or in showing how an individual can move society forward through the things that they say. In this chapter we move away from poetry and turn to look at first-person narratives in the lives of people who kept and copied the manuscripts that contained the poems we have been discussing thus far.

Talking about oneself had an important function in monastic education. Like many language teachers from the classical period to the present day, Anglo-Saxon *magistri* used the conversational form as a pedagogical aid in the monastic classroom to introduce oblates to the Latin language as a 'living speech.'[1] Individuals were encouraged either to talk about their daily lives or to create fictional lives as a way of applying to realistic situations the information contained in other curricular texts such as grammars and glossaries:

> Students took the conscious knowledge of syntax and morphology acquired
> through grammar study and by enacting the role play of the conversational texts
> learned to produce something like the unconscious, effortless flow of speech in
> the first language.[2]

Through the use of these colloquies young monks developed a confidence with the Latin language that would allow them to do everything from ask for food to tackle the Vulgate, read the church fathers, or 'conduct the liturgy and promote Christian doctrine.'[3]

Many of the colloquies written in pre-Conquest England are anonymous. Two colloquies, however, written around the beginning of the eleventh century have named

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[1] G.N. Garmonsway, 'The Development of the Colloquy', in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. by Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959), pp. 248-61 (p. 250.).

[2] Scott Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: The Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, trans. and with an introduction by David Porter (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), p. 34.

[3] Anna A. Grotans, *Reading in Medieval St. Gall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 23.

authors. The first is by Ælfric of Eynsham[4] and it takes the form of a series of exchanges between a *magister* and a number of students. The text is written in simple Latin and begins as a discussion of various occupations, with students assuming the role of workers who talk about their daily lives.[5] After a comparison of the various occupations, the colloquy then moves onto a conversation in which a single student answers questions about daily routine inside the monastery, as well as about the process of language learning.

The other colloquy by a known author belongs to Ælfric Bata. Bata was a pupil of Ælfric's and is associated with two of the manuscripts that contain Ælfric's colloquy. His name (*Eluricus Bate*) appears twice in one manuscript,[6] once at the head of the original title page, which suggests to Gneuss Bata's ownership of that manuscript and the texts it contained.[7] The other manuscript contains a copy of Ælfric's colloquy alongside Bata's own, and in this manuscript Bata not only claims to have revised Ælfric's text but also states the relationship between the two men:

> Hanc sententiam Latini sermonis olim Ælfricus abbas composuit qui meus fuit magister sed tamen ego Ælfric Bata multas postea huic addidi appendices.[8]

> These passages of Latin speech were originally composed by Abbot Ælfric, who was my *magister*. I, Ælfric Bata, added a large amount of supplementary material afterwards.

In terms of structure, Bata's colloquy is similar to Ælfric's insofar as it too is comprised of two parts, although in Bata's colloquy there is an explicit division between the sections. Unlike Ælfric's colloquy, Bata's text is almost entirely concerned with life inside the monastery. The participants in his conversations are once again monks, both oblates and more senior *magistri*, and the form of their discussions imitates the types of exchanges that

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[4] G.N. Garmonsway, ed., *Ælfric's Colloquy* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1978).

[5] The structure of the Ælfric's Colloquy is as follows: ll. 1-10, introduction; ll. 11-243, discussion of the occupations; ll. 244-307, discussion of speech and life inside the monastery; ll. 308-15, conclusion.

[6] Cotton Tiberius A.iii. Helmut Gneuss, 'Origin and Provenance of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: the Case of Cotton Tiberius A.III', in *On the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers: Essays Presented to M.B. Parkes*, ed. by P.R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 13-48 (p. 23).

[7] p. 24.

[8] Oxford, St. John's College, MS. 154, fol. 204r, in Oxford Digital Library, 'Early Manuscripts at Oxford University: St. John's College MS. 154' <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=stj&manuscript=ms154> [Accessed 29th October 2007].

might have occurred within an Anglo-Saxon monastery. Topics discussed range from everyday concerns such as the need for personal hygiene, arguments over books, to more abstruse discussions of wisdom and the soul. The conversations take place in a number of locations, including dormitories, classrooms, dining halls; one takes place outside a chapel shortly before a service.

While Ælfric's colloquy is written in consistently simple Latin, the two parts of Bata's colloquy differ in both length and difficulty. The first text, bearing the title *Ælfrici Batae Colloquia,* is the longer of the two and its Latin is more basic. The second text, the *Colloquia Difficiliora* is written in a more complex style known as 'hermeneutic' or 'hisperic'[9] Latin which was in common use in England during the tenth and eleventh century and which is characterised by the 'ostentatious parade of unusual, often very arcane and apparently learned vocabulary.'[10] The preface to the first text indicates the intended audience and explains why the colloquies were composed:

> Denique composuit pueris hoc stilum rite diuersum, qui uocatur Bata Ælricus monachus breuissimus, qualiter scolastici ualeant resumere fandi aliquod initium latinitatis sibi.[11]
>
> In short, a very small monk called Ælric Bata wrote this fittingly varied composition, so that students might be able to take up some introduction to speaking Latin.

An *explicit* statement marks the division between the texts, and here Bata also notes the distinction between the groups of colloquies: *Adhuc ego Bata difficiliorem sententiam addo* ('Now I Bata add more difficult speech,' p.178).

The Colloquies and Monastic Identity

Along with the first-person riddles, colloquies like those of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata represent perhaps the only examples of intellectual exercises in the pre-Conquest English

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[9] Lapidge argues against the use of this term. See Michael Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 4, ed. by Peter Clemoes and others (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1975), pp. 67-111 (p. 68).
[10] p. 67.
[11] Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, p. 80. I have followed Porter's punctuation of the manuscript, and, where necessary, been guided by his translation of the more obscure expressions used by Bata.

tradition where individuals play at being somebody (or in the case of the riddles something) else and tell stories about their lives. Unlike the riddles, which are puzzles, albeit with an important social function, talking about oneself in in the Anglo-Saxon classroom had a practical purpose beyond the purely linguistic.

As one modern theorist of language-learning has noted, 'language use is indissociable from the creation and transmission of culture'.[12] The relationship between language and culture is such that language learning is often a means through which students also come to understand important cultural concepts. In gaining an understanding of one, they also learn about the other: 'language and culture are not separable, but are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other.' [13] In the Anglo-Saxon classroom, students not only learned the rudiments of the Latin language but also absorbed ideas about monastic life.

Some of the messages that passed from teacher to students were explicit injunctions to behave or to refrain from behaving in certain ways. Other messages were less explicit. Like any language teacher educated within a particular culture, Ælfric and Ælfric Bata could not help but transmit the attitudes and ideas that they themselves had acquired as students from their own teachers:

> [Teachers] enact the traditional culture of the instructional setting in which they were trained; they echo the native culture of the society in which they were socialized...their discourse and that of their students are full of invisible quotes, borrowed consciously, or unconsciously from those who taught them... In fact, language teachers are so much teachers of culture that culture has often become invisible to them.[14]

The following discussion examines the part played by first-person narratives and the conversational form in this transmission of culture, beginning with a look at the representation of social relationships in Ælfric's colloquy, which uniquely among the colloquies of the English tradition contains fictional narratives by individuals from non-

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[12] Claire Kramsch, *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 9.
[13] Rosamond Mitchell and Florence Myles, *Second Language Learning Theories*, 2nd edn (London: Hodder Arnold, 2004), p. 235.
[14] Kramsch, *Context and Culture*, p. 48.

religious orders of Anglo-Saxon society. Critics have seen this text as providing a source of information on the relationship between monasteries and the rest of society. Students played at being craftsman, and while some parts of the text stress the correspondence between the different elements of English society, other parts of the text stress the separateness of religious life. By considering this text in conjunction with other texts written around the same time it will be argued that Ælfric's Colloquy expressed the complexities of late Anglo-Saxon monastic identity, recognising both the importance of maintaining a separation from the world outside the monastery, and at the same time accepting the need for social engagement that their pastoral duties required.[15]

As has been noted, the emphasis upon society is less important in Bata's colloquies, which, along with the second part of Ælfric's colloquy and other texts from the colloquy tradition, focus upon life within the monastery. In these texts the conversational form offered a means of teaching oblates about the rules and customs of the monastery, although in some of the scenes created by Bata students learned as much about flouting those regulations as they did about adhering to them. The structure of Bata's colloquies in particular further suggests that young monks were also being encouraged to think about the relationship between speech and morality, and in particular how attention to language use afforded opportunities for spiritual growth.

In the discussion of Ælfric's and Bata's colloquies we will return repeatedly to the importance attached by these authors to the notion of 'application', of setting oneself to do something and persisting with it until some desirable end is achieved. In Ælfric's colloquy a lack of application is regarded as a failing common to all orders of English society and learning to apply oneself is a lesson that can be learned from the laity. In Bata's colloquy application is required to master learning and control speech, an important aspect of

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[15] On the nature of the historical relationship between monastic houses and wider Anglo-Saxon society see Sarah Foot, *Monastic LIfe in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 283-336; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 135-81.

reaching the ideal of monastic perfection. To begin this discussion, we turn first to the depiction of craftsmen in Ælfric's colloquy and look at how depth of characterisation allowed students to identify with the individuals described.

I: Outside the Monastery: Group Identity and Ælfric's Colloquy

In the chapter on the riddles we discussed the importance of defamiliarisation as a way of encouraging readers to confront their own assumptions about the structure of society. The discussion of the occupations in Ælfric's colloquy required oblates to engage in a similar process, in which they imaginatively adopt the position of someone else and view the world from a perspective that would probably be unfamiliar to them. The craftsmen who appear in the colloquy come from a large number of professions,[16] and students seem to have had opportunities to play a range of different characters. In the following passage, for example, an oblate plays at being a ploughman:

> Quid dicis tu, arator? Quomodo exerces opus tuum?
> O, mi domine, nimium laboro. Exeo diluculo minando boues ad campum, et
> iungo eos ad aratrum: non est tam aspera hiems ut audeam latere domi pro
> timore domini mei, sed iunctis bobus, et confirmato vomere et cultro aratro,
> omni die debeo arare integrum agrum aut plus.
> Habes aliquem socium?
> Habeo quendam puerum minantem boues cum stimulo, qui etiam modo raucus
> est pre frigore et clamatione.
> Quid amplius facis in die?
> Certe adhuc plus facio. Debeo implere presepia boum feno, et adaquare
> eos, et fimum eorum portare foras. O! O! magnus labor est. Etiam, magnus
> labor est, quia non sum liber.
>
> (ll. 22-36)

> What do you say, ploughman? How do you perform your work?
> O, my master, I work too much. I go out early driving the oxen to the field, and
> yoke them to a plough; there isn't a winter so severe that I dare skulk at home for
> fear of my lord, but with the oxen yoked, and with the share and the coulter
> fastened to the plough, every day I must plough an entire field or more.

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[16] The discussion of the occupations begins with an unnamed voice, addressing a monk (*monachus/ monuc*, ll. 11-21), who then introduces the other workers. Each provides an account of their daily activities: ll. 22-35, the ploughman (*arator/ yrþling*); ll. 36-42, the shepherd (*opilio/ scephyrde*); ll. 43-9, the oxherd (*bubulcus/ oxanhyrde*); ll. 50-85, the hunter (*venator/ hunta*); ll. 86-122, the fisherman (*piscator/ fiscere*); ll. 123-48, the fowler (*auceps/ fugelere*); ll. 149-166, the merchant (*mercator/ mancgere*); ll. 167-74, the shoemaker (*sutor/ sceowwyrhta*); ll. 175-84, the salter (*salinator/ sealtere*); ll. 185-191, the baker (*pistor/ bæcere*); ll. 192-202, the cook (*cocus*). The *magister* then asks the monk whether he has any other companions (ll. 203-10) or whether the group has a counsellor (*consiliarius/ geþeahtend*). The counsellor attempts to decide which of the occupations is most important (ll.211-9, 224-8), and elicits testimony from the smith (*ferrarius/ (gol)smið*, ll. 220-3, 231-2), and the carpenter (*lignarius/ treowwyrhta*, ll. 229-30) who argue for the importance of their skills. The discussion ends with a peroration by the counsellor who urges all workers to apply themselves to their crafts (ll. 234-43).

Do you have a companion?
I have a boy driving the oxen with a goad, who is also hoarse from the cold and
shouting.
What more do you do in the day?
Certainly I do more besides. I must fill the oxen's stalls with hay, and water
them, and carry out their dung. O! O! It is a great labour. Also, it is a great
labour, because I am not free.

The linguistic value of this scene is that it allows a young monk to practice the Latin words

associated with the various behaviours, objects, and creatures that characterise the

occupation of the farmer, with the scene providing a way of understanding the real-world

relationships between each of the separate terms. In doing so, Ælfric's colloquy, like the

riddles, asked a monastic audience to consider what can be predicated of a particular

individual or social setting, to consider the relationships between practices and behaviours

that make up an occupation.

As we also noted in the riddles chapter, the credibility of narrators depends not only

upon the details of the narrative, but also in the narrator adopting some attitude toward the

events that they describe. In the example of the ploughman, apart from the repeated use of

interjections, which gives a liveliness to the narrative, the speaker uses modals, which

suggest his mood and create some distance between the narrating voice and the matter of

the narrative. Initially he uses *audeo* to suggest a sense of conflict between what he must

do and what he'd like to do on some winter mornings, and then uses *debeo* several times to

suggest compulsion in the same way that the narrators of the horn and the spear riddles

complained that they were forced to behave in certain ways. As with those characters, the

inclusion of this detail evokes the image of an individual with a will of his own, which is

being thwarted in some way.

This same attention to the speaker's emotional state is a feature of several of the

longer characterisations that occur in Ælfric's text. There is further extensive use of modals

and other verbs that express volition, which apart from their immediate linguistic value

once again provide individual characters with a sense of psychological realism. In the

exchange between the *magister* and the hunter, for example, the question of emotion is introduced by the *magister* when he asks about details of the hunt; he is met with a firm statement by the hunter about how hunters ought to behave when faced with dangerous animals:

> -Quomodo fuisti ausus iugulare aprum?
> -Canes perduxerunt eum ad me, et ego econtra stans, subito iugulavi eum.
> -Ualde audax fuisti tunc.
> -Non debet venator formidolosus esse, quia variae bestise morantur in sylvis.
> (ll. 74-79)

> -How were you brave enough to slay the boar?
> - Dogs drove him toward me, and I was standing against him, I immediately slew him.
> -You were very brave on that occasion
> -A hunter should not be fearful, because many wild animals live in the woods.

Again there is a sense of distance here between the narrator and what is being narrated, with the statement of principle suggesting a link between this particular incident and others that are not spoken about but where this statement has been or would be relevant in guiding the hunter's behaviour.

A feature of these longer portraits is the references to someone else with whom the speaker is connected and who therefore grounds the character in the world outside the colloquy. The hunter mentions that he works for the king and gives up his catch to him in exchange for a livelihood (ll. 81-5). The ploughman, as we have seen, works for a lord whom he fears. In the characters of the merchant and the fisherman we also find references to others, along with the use of modals and/or verbs that express volition (*volo/nolo*). In the case of the merchant the others are the merchant's family, whom he mentions when he explains why he needs to make a profit from his goods:

> -Uis vendere res tuas hic sicut emisti illic?
> -Nolo. Quid tunc mihi proficit labor meus? Sed uolo uendere hic carius
> quam emi illic, ut aliquod lucrum mihi adquiram, unde me pascam et uxorem et
> filios.
> (ll. 162-66)

> -Will you sell your things here for the same as you bought them there?
> - I will not. How would I then benefit from my labour? I will sell them here more
> dearly than I bought them for there, so that I can get some money, from which I
> can sustain my wife, my sons and myself.

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The portrait of the fisherman is of someone who, like the ploughman, behaves as he does because he is fearful of behaving otherwise. In his explanation of why he will not hunt whales, he conjures up images of the many other individuals who share his profession and with whom he seems to have fished in the past:

> -Uis capere aliquem cetum?
> -Nolo.
> -Quare?
> -Quia periculosa res est capere cetum. Tutius est mihi ire ad amnem cum
> hamo meo, quam ire cum multis nauibus in uenationem ballene.
> -Cur sic?
> -Quia carius est mihi capere piscem quem possum occidere, quam illum, qui
> non solum me sed etiam meos socios uno ictu potest mergere aut mortificare.
> -Et tamen multi capiunt cetos, et euadunt pericula, et magnum pretium inde
> adquirunt.
> -Uerum dicis, sed ego non audeo propter mentis meae ignauiam.
>
> <div align="right">(ll. 109-22)</div>

> -Will you catch a whale?
> - I will not
> -Why?
> -Because it's a dangerous thing to catch a whale. It's safer for me to go on a river
> with my fishing hook, than go with many ships on a whale hunt.
> -Why so?
> -Because I'd prefer to catch a fish that I can kill, than one which could drown or
> kill not only me but also my companions with one stroke of his tail.
> -And yet many catch whales, and escape danger, and get a great reward from it.
> -You speak the truth, but I don't dare because of my cowardice of mind.

These four characters are examples of Ælfric creating credible workmen by providing a background for them that takes both the performer and the listeners out of the classroom to other individuals and groups outside the performance.

The emphasis upon realism in these characterisations suggests that Ælfric was interested in having his students inhabit these characters, and perhaps even identifying with them in some way. Criticism of this text has, however, emphasised a desire on Ælfric's part to create an image of monastic life as existing apart from the everyday world that these workers represent. Anderson, for example, has argued that the various occupations that appear in the colloquy may have been depictions of the trades and crafts practiced in and around the monastery. Grounding his argument on Garmonsway's contention that the crafts mentioned may have been based on the children's 'own observation of the manifold

activities of a monastic house',[17] Anderson argues that the Colloquy is actually a representation of life in a late Anglo-Saxon monastery:

> If we accept Gamonsway's position, it is possible for us to see the unifying theme of the *Colloquy* as an expression of the Benedictine monastic ideal, derived from the Rule, of an orderly and well-regulated life within the confines of an economically self-sufficient community devoted to the service of God – a community separate from the world but at the same time a microcosmic image of it, in which each monastic craftsman contributes in his way to the general welfare.[18]

The narratives provided by several of the workmen make this analysis seem implausible. As has been noted, one character is married with children, another appears to have spent time at sea; both the ploughman and the hunter are in the service of secular lords. The sense of community must, therefore, extend beyond the monastery walls.

Anderson's interpretation of the text as promoting the self-containment of monastic life is echoed by John Ruffing, who in a very different way argues that Ælfric uses this text to draw a distinction between religious and non-religious and attempts to justify a social structure in which the requirements of one group are met by a number of others. He calls attention, for instance, to the beginning of the colloquy, where a monk is asked to introduce his companions:

> -Professus sum monachus, et psallam omni die septem sinaxes cum fratribus, et occupatus sum lectionibus et cantu, sed tamen vellem interim discere sermocinari latina lingua.
> -Quid sciunt isti tui socii?
> -Alii sunt aratores, alii opiliones, quidam bubulci, quidam etiam venatores, alii piscatores, alii aucupes, quidam mercatores, quidam sutores, quidam salinatores, quidam pistores, coci.
>
> (ll.13-21)

> -I am a professed monk, and I sing the seven hours each day with the brothers and I am occupied with readings and songs, but nevertheless in between I would like to learn to speak the Latin language.
> - What do your companions know who to do?
> -Some are ploughmen, others shepherds, some are oxherds, some also are hunters, others fishermen, others, fowlers, some are merchants, some are shoemakers, some salters, some are bakers, cooks.

In one sense the monk is being depicted here at the centre of a group of companions. Ruffing argues, however, that it is the monk 'alone [who] names the workers which will

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[17] Garmonsway, ed., *Ælfric's Colloquy*, p. 14.
[18] Earl R. Anderson, 'Social Idealism in Ælfric's *Colloquy*', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3, ed. by Peter Clemoes and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 153-62 (p. 159).

follow', an act, which he claims, establishes the rest of the group as the 'collective other'.[19]

He also calls attention to the discussion between the craftsmen over which trade should be

considered to be most important. Although many of the craftsmen must explain how their

particular skill is useful to the group (e.g. ll. 167, 175, 185-6, 192-3, 209-210, 220-

223,229-30), the discussion is actually attempting to decide which of the secular

occupations hold second place, since the counsellor has already decided which of them

holds the title outright:

> -Quid dicis tu, sapiens? Quae ars tibi videtur inter istas prior esse?
> -Dico tibi, mihi videtur servitium Dei inter istas artes primatum tenere, sicut
> legitur in evangelio: 'Primum quaerite regnum Dei et iustitiam eius, et haec
> omnia adicientur vobis.'
>
> <div align="right">(ll. 212-16)</div>
>
> -What do you say, wise one? Which craft seems to you to first among these?
> -I say to you, that to me it seems that servants of God hold the first place among
> these crafts, as can be read in the Gospel: 'First seek the kingdom of God and
> His justice, and these things will be added to you'.

Ruffing further argues that quotation from Matthew's Gospel is used here 'to claim

primacy for religious life', as it references an authority over which monks were 'sole

proprietors'.[20] Indeed, the *magister* appears careful to make an explicit distinction between

those who seek God and those who practice secular crafts. Oblates thus learn that they are

part of a group that is separate from the other groups, which are united by their

worldliness.

In their analyses, both Ruffing, and to a certain extent Anderson, downplay the

desire for social inclusion that is evident within Ælfric's text, and which provides a

counterpoint to the emphasis upon the evident differences between various social groups.

Perhaps the strongest statement of this desire is the final peroration given by the counsellor

as he attempts to convince the others that more important than any specific craft is the way

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[19] John Ruffing, 'The Labor Structure of Ælfric's Colloquy', in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994), pp. 55-70 (p. 59).
[20] p. 66.

in which an individual pursues their craft, and in this each of them can be equal irrespective of their skills:

> Consiliarius dicit: O, socii et boni operarii, dissolvamus citius has contentiones, et sit pax et concordia inter vos, et prosit unusquisque alteri arte sua...Et hoc consilium do omnibus operariis, ut unusquisque artem suam diligenter exerceat, quia qui artem suam dimiserit, ipse dimittatur ab arte. Sive sis sacerdos, sive monachus, seu laicus, seu miles, exerce temet ipsum in hoc, et esto quod es; quia magnum dampnum et verecundiaest homini nolle esse quod est et quod esse debet.
>
> (ll. 233-43)

> The Counsellor says: O, companions, and good workers, let us quickly dissolve these tensions and let there be peace and agreement between you, and let everyone advance the other in his craft...And this advice I give to all workers, that each one should work diligently at his craft, because whoever abandons his craft, will be abandoned by his craft. Whether you are a priest, or monk, or layman, or soldier, exert yourself in this, and be what you are; because it is a great loss and shame for a man to not want to be what he is and what he should be.

This passage attempts to highlight points of correspondence between anyone who practices a craft. Coupled with the psychologically developed portraits of individual workmen, it suggests that Ælfric wanted in some way for his students to think about and become invested in the lives of those who lived at a remove from the monastery.

On the above evidence, it might be argued that Ælfric's colloquy is characterised by a tension between a desire for social inclusion and the recognition of the separateness of those in religious life. Students using this colloquy to learn Latin were being provided with a complex set of attitudes on how monastics as a group might be expected to interact with other orders of Anglo-Saxon society. Indeed, if we examine other texts from the period it can further be argued that the division made not only by Ælfric within the text, but also by critics like Ruffing, between religious on one side and laity on the other is not as simple as either makes out. Viewed from a certain perspective, the greatest division or tension within the list of occupations that the counsellor mentions here is not between religious and laity, as Ruffing suggests, between monk and priest on one side and layman and soldier on the

other, but rather between religious orders of different kinds. [21] Indeed, considered from the standpoint of language, the final peroration given by the counsellor had as much to teach students about how they should interact with other religious groups as it had to teach them about their relationship to the laity.

The Role of Language in Defining Monastic Identity

One very general assumption of modern language theorists has been that there is a direct link between language and identity. As Kramsch notes, 'it is widely believed that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group's identity.'[22] The use of a particular language is a marker that identifies an individual as belonging to a particular group, and through the use of language the identity of that group is preserved. 'Part of the identity function of language'[23] can be to create and reinforce divisions between groups: 'linguistic boundaries…serve both to unify speakers as members of one language community, and to exclude outsiders from insider communication.' Not only is this a trait of 'passive' language use, language can also be used consciously as a means of achieving such a separation:

> Language communities may also reinforce their boundaries by discouraging
> prospective…learners, by holding and conveying that their language is too
> difficult – or inappropriate – for others to use.

Language can, therefore, not only be thought of as a means of distinguishing one group from another; it also has the capacity to become 'a totem of a cultural group',[24] to become an important part of actively maintaining a group's self-image.

Ælfric's colloquy was one of several late Anglo-Saxon prose texts, many of them written by Ælfric himself, which saw the relationship between different elements of English society through the prism of language, specifically proficiency in Latin, which was

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[21] In his explicit reference to both monks and priests, I take Ælfric to be drawing a distinction between monks and those who were in priest's orders but who were not also monks (like himself).

[22] Claire Kramsch, *Language and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 65.

[23] Muriel Saville-Troike, *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 122.

[24] Kramsch, *Language and Culture*, p. 75.

the language of an elite minority. In his preface to Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, King Alfred had a century earlier divided his literacy programme between the many that could be taught to read in English and the few who could be taught in Latin. The king was concerned to produce translations of books which he felt 'are most needful for men to know' (*niedbeðyrfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne*)[25] as a means of bringing 'all the youth of free men now in England' (*eall sio gioguð þe nu is on Angel kynne friora monna*) to the level at which 'they know well how to read English writing' (*hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan*). The teaching of Latin, however, was to be reserved only for those who could be brought into religious life: *lære mon siððan furður on Lædengeðeode þa þe mon furðor læran wille & to hierran hade don wille* ('afterwards let those be taught further in the Latin language whom one wishes to teach further, and to promote to holy orders').

Although monastics were by far the most educated and literate[26] of Anglo-Saxon social groups they would not have constituted a single, coherent, uniformly capable language community. Several factors had the potential to internally stratify Latin-speaking groups. Competency may have varied among individuals. Gwara has suggested that most monks may not necessarily have been accomplished linguists, and that our perception of their skill has been distorted by the quality of the manuscripts that have survived:

> To my mind, Latin was probably acquired during the pre-conquest period with prodigious labor and spoken at marginal competence, aided by a census of memorized centos and formulae. Ironically, the high calibre of native Anglo-Latin compositions has led us to exaggerate the knowledge of Latin during the Benedictine *renovatio*, and perhaps throughout the pre-conquest period.[27]

Whether or not we agree with Gwara, his suggestion calls attention to the fact that there is likely to have been a range of competencies. Some could speak the language better than others.

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[25] Sweet, ed., *West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, p. 6.

[26] For a brief summary of the 'restricted evidence' for the literacy of other social groups see Michael Lapidge and others, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), s.v. 'literacy'.

[27] Scott Gwara, 'Second Language Acquisition and Anglo-Saxon Bilingualism: Negative Transfers and Avoidance in Ælfric Bata's Latin *Colloquia*, ca. A.D. 1000', *Viator,* 29 (1998), 1-24 (pp. 8-9).

The issue of competency may have been further compounded by the fact that different Latin styles in use during the late Anglo-Saxon period differed in the way that they catered to the potentially different competencies within monastic society. Ælfric, the most prolific of late Anglo-Saxon writers, used a relatively straightforward Latin style. Whatever the reason for it, his style would have been more accessible to a greater number of readers.[28] Most other monastic writers of the time favoured the more elaborate 'hermeneutic' Latin which, as has been noted, required access to a more obscure vocabulary and which had, therefore, the potential to separate those who could understand such a vocabulary from those who could not.

It is conceivable, therefore, that monastics could differentiate amongst themselves. However, the writings of the period that have survived suggest that when looking outward to other social groups the attitude was relatively consistent, and that the nature of their interaction was conditioned by the perceived linguistic skill of the particular group in question. Conscientious writers like Ælfric saw the relationship with the laity as one of dependence, in which those literate in Latin were responsible for the spiritual welfare of those who were not. In several of his prefaces, Ælfric explains that he has translated homilies and hagiographies into 'everyday English speech' (*usitatem anglicam sermocinationem*)[29] or the 'plain and clear words of this people's language' (*puris et apertis uerbis linguae huius gentis*),[30] suggesting elsewhere that the simplicity and ordinariness of the language is intended to match the capacity of his audience whom he believes also to be simple and ordinary:

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[28] For a discussion of Ælfric's style and the possible explanations for it see Christopher A. Jones, '*Meatim Sed et Rustica*: Ælfric of Eynsham as a Medieval Latin Author', *Journal of Medieval Latin,* 8 (1998), 1-57; Rebecca Stephenson, 'Ælfric of Eynsham and Hermeneutic Latin: *Meatim Sed et Rustica* Reconsidered', *Journal of Medieval Latin,* 16 (2006), 111-41; see also various remarks by Jones and others in Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, eds., *A Companion to Ælfric* (Boston: Brill, 2009).

[29] Walter Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being A Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, 2 vols (London: N. Trübner, 1881), I, p. 1.

[30] Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series: Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 1.

Transtulimus hunc codicem ex libris Latinorum. Scilicet Sanctae Scripturae in nostram consuetam sermocinationem, ob ędificationem simplicium, qui hanc norunt tantummodo locutionem. Siue legendo. siue audiendo. Ideoque nec obscura posuimus uerba. sed simplicem Anglicam, quo facilius possit ad cor pervenire legentium. uel audientium, ad utilitatem animarum suarum. quia alia lingua nesciunt erudiri, quam in qua nati sunt.[31]

We have translated this book from Latin books, namely the Holy Scripture, into our usual speech, for the edification of simple people, who only understand this way of speaking, either by reading it or hearing it; and for that we reason we haven't used obscure words, but simple English, by which it is able to more easily reach the heart of the readers or listeners to the benefit of their souls, because they cannot be instructed in another language than the one to which they were born.

On this evidence, then, it can be argued that the relationship between monastics and the laity was based upon compassion, a sense of pastoral duty, and the recognition of human limitations. The relationship between monastics and the secular clergy, by contrast, was altogether more fractious. It was based not on a distinction between those who could read Latin and those who could not, but rather those who could read Latin poorly, and those who could read it well. Significantly, it is in texts that discuss the behaviour of priests that we see monastic writers defining themselves most vigorously against another social group.

As Blair notes, the late Anglo-Saxon period saw the rise of priests who were no longer attached to minsters, and who instead were 'based at small manorial households and local churches'.[32] In the writings of Ælfric and other late Anglo-Saxon teachers there is a lack of confidence in the capacity of the secular clergy to learn Latin, or in cases where a priest had acquired the language, the capacity to fully understand the meaning of those texts to which an understanding of Latin gave access. Unlike the laity who could be led astray, priests held positions of social authority - as Ælfric says in his *Preface to Genesis*, 'priests are set as teachers to the laity' (*preostas sindon gesette to lareowum þam lǽwedum folce,* p. 117)[33] – they had, therefore, the capacity to lead people astray. Ælfric's greatest fear seems to have been the partially-educated priest, someone who had gained a sufficient

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[31] Clemoes, ed., *Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, p. 173.
[32] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 491.
[33] Jonathan Wilcox, ed., *Ælfric's Prefaces* (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994), p. 116-9.

competency in Latin to misinterpret scripture and to do so with all the authority of someone quoting from the Latin text:

> Hwilon ic wiste þæt sum mæssepreost, se þe min magister wæs on þam timan, hæfde þa boc Genesis, & he cuðe be dæle Lyden understandan: þa cwæþ he be þam heahfædere Iacobe, þæt he hæfde feower wif, twa geswustra & heora twa þinena. Ful soð he sæde, ac he nyste, ne ic þa git, hu micel todal ys betweohx þære ealdan æ & þære niwan...
> Ða ungelæredan preostas, gif hi hwæt litles understandað of þam Lydenbocum, þonne þingð him sona þæt hi magon mære lareowas beon, ac hi ne cunnon swa þeah þæt gastlice andgit þærto

(p.116-7)

> I once knew a certain mass-priest, who was my master at the time, who had the book of Genesis, and he could understand Latin to a certain degree: then he spoke about the patriarch Jacob, that he had four wives, two sisters and their two maid-servants. He spoke the full truth, but he didn't know - nor did I yet - how a great a separation there is between the old and the new law...
> The uneducated priests, if they understand a little of Latin books then they think immediately that they may be great teachers, but they nevertheless do not know the spiritual meaning that pertains to them

The need to recognise and define a boundary between largely uneducated priests and ostensibly well-educated monks had a greater urgency for monastic writers. Perhaps the most biting example of how lines were drawn between both groups occurs in the *Enchiridon* of Byrhtferth of Ramsey. This text is a bilingual commentary on the computus written in Latin and English, and Byrhtferth is aware of and appears to be writing for two audiences. The first audience is monastic and literate in Latin. Byrhtferth addresses the second audience on several occasions and we thus know that he was speaking to the secular clergy (*clerici/preostas*). A noticeable feature of Byrhtferth's style throughout the text is that he adopts two different approaches to his two different audiences.

As a writer conscious of two different audiences Byrhtferth was not unique. Ælfric himself often wrote pairs of prefaces for his works, and in most cases the 'distinction between the implied audience of the Latin and Old English prefaces is reflected in their contents.'[34] Ælfric generally wrote Latin prefaces aware that his Latin-speaking audience would be more interested in non-essential technical details such as the 'details of sources and questions of ...translation technique'. His different audiences were not only indicated

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[34] Wilcox, ed., *Ælfric's Prefaces*, p. 67.

by the content of prefaces, they were also indicated by the manner of address. As Gnuess notes, although the Latin preface to Ælfric's *Grammar* is explicitly addressed to the '*pueruli tenelli* of the monastery, the "tender boys", it is clearly directed at the 'experts', in contrast to the second preface in Old English with its didactic and moralizing tone.'[35]

The different audiences in Byrhtferth's work are, like those of Ælfric, identified as much by the way they are spoken to as to what is said. In the early parts *Enchiridion*, the English passages are generally either a gloss upon the Latin or a translation of it; they either enlarge upon what has already been said or simply repeat it in English. When he switches from Latin to English, Byrhtferth often politely explains to his Latin audience why he is doing so. At the beginning of the first part of the commentary, he ends several introductory paragraphs with a short statement explaining why the paragraphs that follow are written in English: *ðis Englisc ætywð hwæt seo foresette ræding mænð* ('this English reveals what the preceding reading means' I. 1, ll. 35-6).[36] Shortly after, he says again, this time in Latin: 'now let us speak in another way so that clerics may observe what is clearly understood by monks' (*iam alio modo dicamus qualiter sint clericis nota que monachis sint perpicue cognita* I. 1, ll. 115-6).[37]

Byrhtferth's attitude to his second audience is far less diplomatic and he alternately mocks and chides them for being stupid, ill-disciplined, and lazy. He complains, for instance, to his Latin audience about 'some ignorant clerics' (*nonnulli clerici imperiti*, I.3, l.1) who do not keep their phylacteries with them and thus make a mess of computations. The reason for this, he explains, is that 'they do not keep the discipline which they received in the bosom of Mother Church, nor do they persevere in the contemplation of divine teaching' (*ordinem quem susceperunt in gremio matris ecclesie non seruant, nec in doctrina sancte meditationis persistent*, ll.4-5).

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[35] Helmut Gneuss, *Language and History in Early England* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), p. 13.
[36] Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[37] See also I.3, ll.14-16.

For Byrhtferth, clerical ill-discipline arises largely from a disposition to be slothful.

He calls them *desides...clericos* ('idle...clerics', I.4, l.3). Writing about the divisions of

time, Byrhtferth says that he has written them down 'so that the lazy priest will not think it

too great a labour to open his eyes on it', *þæt þam sleacan preoste ne þince to mycel*

geswinc þæt he undo his eagan herto II.3, ll.8-9). When he feels he must use Latin it is an

opportunity for condescension:

> Me ys neod þæt ic menge þæt Lyden amang þissum Englisc. Punctus a pungendo
> dicitur. Forþan ys se prica gecweden forþan he þingð oðð e pricað. Hawa, la
> cleric, hu seo sunne pricmælum stihð on þam dægmæle; þonne miht þu gleawlice
> ascrutnian þas prican þe we ymbe sprecað.
>
> (ll. 21-4)

> It is necessary for me to mix Latin in with this English. *Punctus a pungendo*
> *dicitur.* Thus the point is so-called because it or pricks or pierces. Look, O cleric,
> how the sun moves by points on the sundial; then you might wisely investigate
> these points which we speak about.

This mocking form of address is repeated on several occasions. Elsewhere, talking about

atoms Byrhtferth says: *ic wene, la uplendisca preost, þæt þu nyte hwæt beo atomos, ac ic*

wylle þe þises wordes gescead gecyðan ('I expect, O rustic priest, that you do not know

what an atom is, but I will make clear the meaning of this word', II.3, ll.69-71).

Byrhtferth uses differences in Latin proficiency along with other educational

differences to emphasise and reinforce the boundaries between monks and priests. Even

though he is often careful to repeat what he has just said in English, he also finds it hard to

completely avoid a desire to be obscure. Not only does he believe that priests are incapable

of understanding many of the things he speaks about in the *Enchiridion*, he sometimes

seems not to want them to understand, reminding them instead that the Latin text conceals

great mysteries that are beyond a mind that cannot understand Latin. On one occasion he

states that he will not fully explain a passage in English simply because it would be too

tiresome to do so: *us þingð to langsum þæt we ealne þisne cwide on Englisc clericum*

geswutelion ('it seems too tedious that we make this entire passage clear to clerks in

English, I.1, ll. 214-16). On another occasion he states that he will not quote earlier writers

because he feels that the topics under discussion will already 'seem complex enough for rustic priests and clerics' *þincað clericum and uplendiscum preostum genoh mænigfealde*, II.3, ll. 238-9). Instead, he says, he will turn his speech to 'young monks who have occupied their childhoods with instructive books' (*iungum munecum þe heora cildhad habbað abisgod on cræftigum bocum*, ll. 240-1).

Outreach and a Lesson from the Laity

Young oblates learning Latin were being introduced to a skill that would do more than separate them from most other orders of society. As Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* demonstrates, even as monastic writers sought to cater to the uneducated, proficiency in Latin could still be used to consciously mark the boundaries between social groups. As an instructional text with a message beyond the purely linguistic, Ælfric's colloquy finds a number of ways of redressing that inclination, even as it restates the primacy of religious life. The text's message is one of outreach to other members of society. When the counsellor urges priests, monks, soldiers, and laity, to apply themselves to their respective crafts, it is perhaps no coincidence that priests appear first. Ælfric is in one sense addressing contemporary concerns about the calibre of the secular clergy. Yet it could also be argued that he is trying to persuade his students to overlook those differences, and correct the effects of an intellectual culture that could be overly dismissive of the less educated.

By encouraging his students to inhabit the lives and experiences of members of the laity, Ælfric encouraged students to cross a gap that would inevitably be created by the very skill that the students were acquiring. He then unites different parts of Anglo-Saxon society by emphasising a characteristic that was necessary to all people. As has been noted, one of the charges laid by Byrhtferth against priests was their laziness. However, this vice was not just a failing of the secular clergy. In his letter to the monks of Eynsham, Ælfric

complains about the fact that monks fail to get through all their prescribed readings in the church and must finish them the refectory. The reason for this, he says, is because 'we are indolent and slothful servants' (*quia nos pigri serui sumus et segnes*).[38] Although Ælfric probably required that his monks met a far higher standard of personal behaviour than priests, laziness in all its forms was the most dreaded vice of the monastic movement. As Benedict says in his rule: 'idleness is the enemy of the soul' (*otiositas inimica est animae*).[39]

The idea of application offered a solution to this problem in all its forms. Byrhtferth suggests that the remedy for laziness is self-governance on the part of the cleric: *procurator clericus anime sue fieri debet, et sicut primas subicit pullum subiugalem, animum suum debet seruituti subicere* ('a cleric ought to be the manager of his own soul, and as the nobleman puts a young animal under the yoke, he ought to subject his soul to servitude', I.3, ll.7-9). Even Alfred, in laying out his educational plan for the youth of England, regarded it as something to which young people could apply themselves (*hie ðæm beofeolan mægan*). Thus the need for application, articulated by the counsellor, is one to which everyone can relate. Examples of how to apply oneself are provided by the portraits of the individual workmen, who have fears and concerns, and who face difficult, dangerous, and often exhausting situations in their daily lives but who nevertheless persevere with those tasks. The lesson of application is, therefore, one that the laity, in the form Ælfric's workmen, knows and one which they can teach those in religious orders, both priests and monks. Thus Ælfric's colloquy, as it recognises the importance of the *servitium Dei*, also places a value on the lives of everyday people. In assuming the role of these workmen oblates were thus not only learning a language; in a strange way, they were also learning something about the requirements of monastic life.

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[38] Christopher A. Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 148.
[39] Timothy Fry, ed., *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict: In Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), p. 248.

II: Inside the Monastery: Language and the Individual

If the Latin language had a role in defining monastic identity with respect to other social groups, the use of first-person narratives in Ælfric's colloquy taught students to see beyond those divisions and understand what they had in common with those who were educated poorly or not at all. The connection between language and identity is also present in *The Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, albeit in a different form. In these two groups of colloquies, the conversations enacted by language students became a site for the expression of monastic ideas about language and its role in the process of individual spiritual growth. Instead of emphasising the traits or qualities that a particular group share and that may or may not be shared by other groups, these texts concentrate very much on personal development and the ideal of monastic perfection enshrined in regulatory texts such as the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* and the *Regularis Concordia*. In these colloquies, enacting scenes were a way of understanding what speech meant, and should mean, in the life of the individual monk.

As has been noted, Bata's colloquies are found alongside Ælfric's colloquy in St. John's College MS 154. This manuscript also contains another colloquy, the *Colloquia e Libro De Raris Fabulis Retractata*[40] which is the source of many scenes from Bata's colloquies,[41] and which itself was reworked from yet another Cambro-Latin colloquy, *De Raris Fabulis*,[42] - not contained in the manuscript - perhaps also by a young Bata. It is thus associated with the bulk of the English colloquy tradition.[43] Perhaps the most notable feature of this tradition is that apart from the first section of Ælfric's colloquy, discussed

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[40] Scott Gwara, ed., *Latin Colloquies from Pre-Conquest Britain* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1996), pp. 29-38; W.H. Stevenson, ed., *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, with an introduction by W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), pp. 21-26.

[41] See David W. Porter, 'Anglo-Saxon Colloquies: Ælfric, Ælfric Bata and *De Raris Fabulis Retractata*', *Neophilologus,* 81 (1997), 467-80 (pp. 467-72).

[42] Scott Gwara, ed., *De raris fabulis, 'On Uncommon Tales': a Glossed Latin Colloquy-text from a Tenth-century Cornish Manuscript* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Also edited in Stevenson, ed., *Scholastic Colloquies*, pp. 1-11.

[43] The only other known pre-conquest colloquy is the *Colloquium Hispericum* which is based upon the Irish *Hisperica Famina*, and is a single episode in which a master and a number of students argue over, among other things, what constitutes skilful use of language. Although it has a dramatic quality this colloquy differs in emphasis and is concerned with virtuosity rather than literacy, and assumes an advanced understanding of Latin. See Stevenson, ed., *Scholastic Colloquies*, pp. 12-20; Gwara, ed., *Latin Colloquies*, pp. 100-10.

above, it is largely unconcerned with life outside the monastery. The conversations that appear in Bata's colloquies and his sources are inward looking, focusing on the daily interaction between various students and their teachers. All share a similar structure. Conversations are generally organised as a series of scenes that take place over one, or several days. All begin in the morning with scenes of rising and dressing, before moving on to describe various different everyday activities, often using the order of the daily offices to provide a sense of cohesion. Scenes often resemble each other. Here, for example, are the beginnings of *De Raris fabulis* and the *Retractata,* alongside Bata's own colloquy:

> 1.-Surge, amice, de tuo lectulo. Tempus est tibi, si hodie surgis.
> -Surgam etiam. Da mihi meum uestimentum, et postea surgam.
> -Ostende mihi, ubi est uestimentum tuum.
> -Est hic super pedaneum, qui est ad pædes meos uel iuxta te posui uel iuxta habetur.
> -Da mihi meum colobeum, ut induam circa me. Da mihi ficiones meos, ut sint in ambulatione circa pedes meos. Da mihi baculum meum, quo sustendam in itinere, ut fiat in manu mea.
>> (*De Raris fabulis*, I)

> -Rise, friend, from your bed. It's time for you, if you are to get up today
> - I will indeed get up. Give me my clothes, and then I'll get up.
> -Show me where your clothes are.
> -They're here on the stool which is at my feet or I placed them next to you or they are beside you.
> -Give me my habit, so that I may put it around me. Give me my shoes, so that they may around my feet when I walk. Give me my staff, by which I may be upheld on a journey, so that it may be in my hand.

> 2.-Surge, amice, de tuo lectulo. Tempus est tibi, si hodie surgis.
> -Surgo etiam. Da mihi meum uestimentum, et postea surgam.
> -Ostende mihi, ubi est uestimentum meum.
> -Est hic super pedaneum tuum, qui iuxta te habetur.
> -Da mihi meum colobeum, ut induam circa me, et da mihi ficiones meos, ut sint in ambulatione circa pedes meos. Da mihi baculum meum, quo sustentor in itinere, ut fiat in manu mea.
>> (*Colloquia e Libro De Raris Fabulis Retractata*, 1)

> -Rise, friend, from your bed. It's time for you, if you are to get up today
> - I will indeed get up. Give me my clothes, and then I'll get up.
> -Show me where my clothes are.
> -They're here on the your stool, which is next to you.
> -Give me my habit, so that I may put it around me. Give me my shoes, so that they may around my feet when I walk. Give me my staff, by which I may be upheld on a journey, so that it may be in my hand.

3.-Surge, frater mi, de tuo lectulo, quia tempus est nunc nobis surgendi et manus
nostras lauandi, et post lauationem manuum nostrarum pergere ad ecclesiam et
orationes nostras facere secundum nostrum consuetudinem.
-Da mihi prius uestimenta mea, et ficones meos huc porrige et pudules et ocreas
meas, induam circa me, et postea surgam, et tunc pergamus sic ad latrinam
propter necessitatem corporis nostri, et sic eamus ad lauandum nos.

(Ælfrici Batae Colloquia , I)

Rise, my brother, from your bed, because it's now time for rising and washing
our hands, and after washing our hands to hasten to church and make our prayers
according to our custom.
-Give me my clothes first, my shoes, stockings, and leggings here so I can put
them on. After that I'll get up, and then let's go to the toilet for our need and
afterwards to wash.

The immediate linguistic value for students participating in these scenes is that, unlike

Ælfric's colloquy, here all the material is directly relevant to the everyday life of the

monastery, and in particular the individual life of the student. In these scenes the level of

detail varies between different texts but each observes the conventional early beginning,

creating a scene, and then supplying a vocabulary relevant to it.

Bata's colloquies differ from his source texts in their level of realism. The earlier

texts often contain speeches designed simply to furnish students with exhaustive word lists.

Here, for instance, is a scene taken from the *Retractata* in which a speaker asks another the

whereabouts of the abbot:

-Ubi est abbas huius monasterii, uel senior huius loci?
-Perrexit ad conuiuium uel ad prandium, seu ad cenam, quod preparatum est ei in
domo unius uiri de senioribus loci illius.
-Quot sunt, qui exiebant cum eo?
-Tota pene familia monasterii illius, seniores et sacerdotes, presbiteri et minimi
pueri, excepto uno coco uel pisotore et pastoribus, qui custodiunt greges ouium
et caprarum, suiium et equorum et armentorum.

(6)

-Where is the abbot of this monastery, or the elder of this place?
-He's gone to a feast, or to a meal, or to a banquet, which was prepared for him
in the home of one of the elder men of that place.
-How many people went with him?
-Almost all the monastic community, the elders and priests, the pastors and the
oblates, except one cook or baker and the shepherds who guard the flocks of
sheep and goats, pigs and horses and cattle.

This scene moves along at a steady, if slightly stolid, pace. The parallel groups of nouns,

while they offer alternative terms to describe particular scenarios, erode whatever sense of

realism the scene might otherwise contain. Bata's version of the scene is much more

believable and sacrifices these noun groups to more faithfully imitate an actual conversation:

> -Vbi est noster senior modo, scis tu, frater?
> -Nescio. Perrexit, puto, ad unum conuiuium, quod preparatum est illi in aula unius hominis sui amici.
> -Quot fratres exiebant cum eo?
> -Tres.
> -Quando uult reuerti?
> -In uersperam existimo.
> -Vellem habere licentiam illius equitandi aut nauigandi ad ciuitatem cras.
>
> (p.122)
>
> -Do you know where our senior is now, brother?
> -I don't know. He went, I think, to a feast which was prepared for him in the hall of one of his friends.
> -How many brothers went with him?
> -Three.
> -When will he return?
> -Towards vespers, I think.
> -I'd like to have his leave to ride or sail to town tomorrow.

This brief scene is succinctly drawn. The first person appears to be pre-occupied with something and tries to get help from another who seems to be switched off, who could easily be imagined as shrugging as he answers.

In scenes like these Bata introduces students to the unknown by returning them to the known, in this case the kind of scenarios and realistic language to which they would be accustomed in their everyday lives. Here, for example, is another longer scene in which a senior monk scolds a junior colleague for not eating properly. It is typical of the first half of the simpler colloquy in particular, where exchanges between speakers tend to be short, stichomythic, with a pacing similar to that of real conversation:

> -Sta hic, et manduca super hanc mensam coram me, aut sed hic mecum uel nobiscum interim dum manducas. Bene sit tibi.
> -Non audeo sedere tecum, nec mea humanitas est, sed uolo stare hic ante te et manducare et bibere humiliter et sobrie, et tibi et sociis tuis et fratribus et hospitibus propinare libenter, si mihi precipis.
> -Manduca prius.
> -Faciam.
> -Habes manducatum adhuc?
> -Etiam.
> -Habes bibitum?
> -Non bibi adhuc.
> -Emenda. Accipe et bibi, et postea melius ede, et plus bibe, ut sis saturus. Non debes esse frugi.
> -Plenus sum modo; non esurio omnino neque sitio, Deo gratias.
> -Ego puto tamen, quod uerum non dicis.
> -Verum dico certe, et uerum dixi.

-Sed puto, quod esuritis et sititis uos.
-Non esurimus quippe, pater, neque sitimus. Sed tamen bibere uolumus adhuc
una uice aut bis aut ter siue quater antequam exeamus.
-Hoc est melius et mihi karius.
-Propina cito, et da mihi bibere.
-Volo sic humiliter.

<div align="right">(p.96)</div>

-Stand here, and eat on this table in front of me, or sit here with me or us, while
you eat. Bless you.
-I don't dare sit with you; it's not my way, but I'd like to stand here in front of
you and eat and drink humbly and soberly. and I'll gladly serve you, your
friends, brethren, and guests, if you order me.
-Eat first.
-I will.
-Have you eaten yet?
-Yes.
-Have you drunk?
-I haven't drunk yet.
-Fix that. Take heed and drink, and after that eat better, and drink more, so that
you're full. You oughn't to be sparing.
-I'm full now. I'm in no way hungry or thirsty, thank God.
-Yet I think you don't speak the truth.
-Indeed I do speak the truth, and have spoken the truth.
-But I think that you're hungry and thirsty.
- I certainly am not hungry, father, or thirsty. But I am nevertheless still willing
to drink once or twice or three or four times in sucession before I leave.
-This is better and more pleasing to me.
-Serve me quickly and give me something to drink.
-I will humbly do so.

Although the brief initial use of *aut* establishes the linguistic function for parts of this passage, for the greater portion of it Bata seems keen to capture the rhythms of ordinary conversation. None of the other colloquies mentioned so far produce exchanges so fully developed, and at these moments Bata's text is at its most realistic. The sparseness of language here is similar to the clipped exchanges to be found among modern dramatists where short lines tumble one after another.

Instruction

The set of linguistic considerations that appear to underlie Bata's colloquies are ones which remain unchanged even to the present day. As Claire Kramsch notes in another recent study, this time on the way in which second languages are taught,[44] teachers agree on the importance of familiarity when using the conversational form, of keeping scenes enacted by students as close as possible to their real lives. In her review of several case-

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[44] Kramsch, *Context and Culture*, pp. 70-104.

studies in which teachers set exercises for students, the goals and guiding principles of modern language teachers appear very similar to those that seem to underlie Bata's approach to teaching Latin:

> -Learning a language is best done through conversation on familiar topics in which the learners talk as much as possible
> -The tone of the conversation is casual...[45]
> -The situational context proposed by the teacher is the here-and-now of the students' lives.
> - Scene, participant roles...and norms of interaction are as close as possible to those of the social context outside the classroom.[46]

The consequences of trying to keep as close as possible to real-life situations limit the value of Bata's texts in imparting the kind of cultural knowledge we have been discussing both earlier in this chapter and in the discussion of the Exeter-book riddles. Unlike the first section of Ælfric's colloquy, the oblates performing these conversations were not assuming the roles of individuals from different social groups. They were not adopting a perspective that was unfamiliar to them. Consequently, the extent to which these conversations allowed students to consider broader social relationships was much more limited than the scenes discussed above. Nevertheless, Bata's colloquies did provide instruction for those taking part. The ideas that were being communicated can be interpreted differently depending upon whether they are considered in isolation or in conjunction with the other scenes. As the following discussion will show, there was a difference between what a student might learn from a single episode, and what might be learned from the cumulative 'lesson' of all the colloquies taken together.

Considered in isolation, the scenes Bata created could be used to reinforce specific ideas about personal behaviour. As Scott Gwara has noted there is a tendency in colloquies that describe life inside the monastery to dramatize passages from regulatory texts.[47] The scene, for instance, of monks rising and dressing, mentioned above, enacts an image that appears in the *Regula Sancti Benedicti*. In discussing what should occur in dormitories in

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[45] Kramsch, *Context and Culture*, p. 80.
[46] p. 77.
[47] Gwara, ed., *Latin Colloquies*, p. 4.

the early morning Benedict asserts: *Surgentes uero ad opus dei invicem se [i.e. monachi] moderate cohortentur propter somnolentorum excusationes* ('Upon waking for the Work of God, [monks] should quietly encourage each other, because the sleepy make excuses, 22:8).[48] Thus oblates performing these scenes were being given the opportunity to confirm for themselves, in their own register, important ideas about the way that they should conduct themselves on a day-to-day basis.

If we adopt the view, however, that Bata used the conversational form in this way as a vehicle to teach students about personal behaviour, many of the scenes he creates, taken by themselves, appear to convey entirely the wrong message for individuals living according to the Benedictine Rule. Several scenes have drawn adverse attention because they include 'depictions of monks and students violating the Rule in letter and spirit.'[49] Drunkenness, the ownership of personal possessions, and most importantly the use of indecorous and at times abusive language are all portrayed and all contradict the precepts laid out by Benedict. In the *Regula Sancti Benedicti,* for example, *scurrilitates...vel verba otiosa* ('coarseness...or idle speech,' 6:8) is expressly forbidden. However Colloquy 25, one of a number of these scenes, entirely ignores these strictures and includes an argument between a student and a *magister* in which the use of abusive and vulgar language is unrestrained. At the point at which the following exchange begins, the *magister* has lost all patience with an unresponsive student:

> -Tu sochors! Tu scibaldum hedi! Tu scibalum ouis! Tu scibalum equi! Tu fimus bouis! Tu stercus porci! Tu hominis stercus! Tu canis scibalum! Tu uulpis scibalum! Tu muricipis stercus! Tu galline stercus! Tu asini scibalum! Tu uulpicule omnium uulpiculorum! Tu uulpis cauda! Tu uulpis barba! Tu nebris uulpiculi! Tu uechors et semichors! Tu scurra! Quid uis habere ad me? Nihil boni, autumo.
> -Ego uellem, ut totus esses caccatus et minctus pro his omnibus uerbis tuis. Habeto stercus in mento tuo. Habe scibalum in barba tua et in ore tuo stercus et scibalum trai et duo, octo et unum, et ego nullum, habeto semper. Modo uera tua uerum manifestant, quod unus mimus et unus sottus es et insipiens et fatuus.

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[48] D.H. Logeman, ed., *The Rule of St. Benet: Latin and Anglo-Saxon Interlinear Version* (London: Early English Text Society, 1888), p. 55. Chapter and Paragraph references follow Fry, ed., *Rule of St. Benedict*, p. 219. For a full discussion of this passage see Ambrose G. Wathen, *Silence: The Meaning of Silence in the Rule of St Benedict, Cistercian Studies Series* (Washington: Cistercian Publications, 1973), p. 197.
[49] Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, p. 12.

Nihil melius scis agere, quam omnes, qui ad te peruenerint, turpiter cum tuis caccere et fedare foetidis uerbis et insensatis...
-Et quare non potes facere tam bene sicut agunt isti nostri alii pueri? Quia tabescis et decrescis et minuis et marcescis. Semper descrescas et non crescas...

(p.138)

You fool! You piece of goat shit! Sheep shit! Horse shit! Cow manure! You piece of pig dung! Human dung! Dog shit! Fox shit! Cat shit! Chicken shit! Donkey shit! You littlest of all little foxes! Fox tail! Fox beard! You skin of a little fox! You fool and halfwit! You joker! What do you want me to have? Nothing good, I say.
-I wish you to be entirely shat and pissed upon for all these words of yours. Have dung on your chin. Always have shit in your beard, and shit and dung in your mouth, thrice and twice, and eight times and once, and I none at all. Now your words manifest the truth, that you are a play-actor and unwise and stupid. You don't know how to do anything better than repulsively shit upon and stink up all those who come to you with your foetid and senseless words...
-Why aren't you able to act as well as those other boys of ours? Because you are decaying and waning and diminishing and withering. May you always wane and never grow...

Similarly, even though Chapter 40 of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* warns that superiors should be careful in deciding on how much alcohol is allowed to individual monks, lest 'drunkenness' (*ebrietas*, 40:5) become commonplace, Bata's colloquy contains not only images of over-consumption but also includes an extended description of a drinking party (Colloquy 9). The centrepiece of this scene is an apparently drunken *fraterculus's* request for a drinking horn (*cornu*):

Cornu bibere uolo. Cornu habere debeo, cornu tenere. Cornu uocor. Cornu est nomen meum. Cum cornu uiuere, cornu quoque iacere uolo et dormire, nauigare, equitare, et ambulare et laborare atque ludere. Omnes propinqui mei et amici cornua habuerunt et ebiberunt, et mori uolo cum cornu. Cornu habeant, qui mihi cornu implent et reddant. Cornu habeo modo. Cornu bibo. Omne bonum habeto, et cornu bibamus lęti omnes.

(p.102)

I want to drink from the horn. I should have the horn, hold the horn. I am called horn. Horn is my name. I want to live with the horn, to lie with the horn and to sleep, sail, ride, walk, to work and play with the horn. My friends and all my relations had horns and drank, and I want to die with the horn. Those who fill the horn and give it back to me should have the horn. Now I have the horn. I drink from the horn. Have every good thing, and let us happy all drink from the horn.

These exchanges are perhaps the most questionable in Bata's work and led W.M. Lindsay to state that 'no plea can save a man capable of pages like' these.[50] David Porter has similarly lamented Bata's 'moral blindness'.[51]

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[50] Stevenson, ed., *Scholastic Colloquies*, p. vii.
[51] Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, p. 15.

It is difficult to explain these passages. It could be argued that in these scenes Bata's concern with language has become dominant to the exclusion of all other concerns. Elsewhere in the drinking party scene, for example, at another stage of the young monk's reverie, he says to the *pater*: *Quicquid tu uis, ero ego. Non curo omino* ('Whatever you want, I'll be! I don't care at all', p.101). This is in a sense a comment on the nature of these scenes. Even though the message of the scene is problematic, the episode appears to have been created largely for linguistic reasons. A drunken monk asks for a drinking horn and accidentally reveals the irregular declension of *cornu*. As a character, he is being what his creator wants or needs to him to be. He and the scene in which he appears have been created with Bata's educational task in mind, and they are providing linguistic information to students in an arresting way that they are likely to remember. It might even be argued that even the scatological insults contain valuable information on the structure of genitive phrases and types of wild and domesticated animals.

Another possible explanation might be that the incongruity between these scenes and the rule under which the monks lived was entirely intentional. It has been suggested, for example, that the raucous scenes in Bata were in fact intended to be humorous, and that these episodes 'ha[d] a pedagogic point as a technique for keeping the attention of young monks'.[52] One way to achieve this would be by establishing the kind of 'incongruity' that Wilcox notes 'is central as a necessary if not sufficient cause' of humour.[53] In this case, it would involve creating a situation where students acted out proscribed behaviours in a social environment that represented the very authority by which those behaviours were

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[52] Jonathan Wilcox, 'Introduction', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 1-10 (p. 3).
[53] p. 4.

discouraged. The purpose of establishing such a situation would be the 'deliberate…creation of a context in which tension…can be built up and then dissipated.'[54]

In his study of another example of apparently inappropriate humour in a monastic context, D.K. Smith explains the function of the double-entendre riddles in the Exeter Book as a means of allowing readers 'controlled and safe access to images and thoughts which would otherwise be repressed by the internalized strictures of…tenth-century polite society.'[55] This Freudian approach to humour sees it in terms of a 'psychic economy' where an individual expends energy repressing feelings and thoughts that the joke-riddle circumvents, thus releasing a huge amount of psychic energy. If such an economy exists within 'polite society', living *secundum regulam* in an Anglo-Saxon monastic house would arguably require a far greater 'deployment of psychic expenditure…in order to maintain a single inhibited vision of the world'.[56] In such circumstances, pretending to engage in disallowed behaviours in the safe arena of the language classroom would theoretically have had huge potential for the release of psychic energy. The scenes that some critics have found objectionable could thus have been created by Bata for precisely this reason, and the humour would arise from the fact that everyone involved, both teacher and pupils, would know just how important the strictures against this behaviour were and that for a brief space of time that they were being cast off.

This explanation seems highly plausible though is perhaps limited by the extent of our knowledge regarding how the colloquies were used. There is nothing in the manuscript to suggest that the abandonment of the norms that occurs in certain scenes was intended to be temporary or that humour was Bata's real intention. Perhaps a more comprehensive approach to understanding their function might be found by examining individual

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[54] John Haldon, 'Humour and the Everyday in Byzantium', in *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 48-71 (p. 48).
[55] D.K. Smith, 'Humor in Hiding: Laughter Between the Sheets in the Exeter Book Riddles', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Jonathon Wilcox (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 79-126 (p. 84).
[56] Jonathan Wilcox, 'Introduction', p. 4.

colloquies in terms of their relationship to each other. Through seeing particular scenes as part of a series it is possible to regard them as part of a conscious educational strategy which seems to have been much more consonant with monastic ideals.

As has been noted, Bata created two groups of colloquies: a longer series of texts written in simple Latin, and a shorter number of more difficult colloquies written in hermeneutic Latin. In terms of judging Bata's approach to his work, perhaps the most significant passage in either group of colloquies occurs in the last of the simpler set of colloquies in which Bata explains what has gone before, both the sense of realism he has tried to achieve and also the content of the scenes themselves:

> O karissimi pueri, tempus modo est nobis loquendi aliquid de utilitate animarum uestrarum, si audire uultis hanc nostram utilem hortationem et doctrinam. Ergo, sicut in hac sententia didicistis, pueri mei, et legistis in multis locis, iocus cum sapientiae loquelis et uerbis inmixtus est et sepe coniunctus. Ideo autem hoc constitui et meatim disposui sermonem hunc uobis iuuenibus, sciens scilicet quosque pueros iugiter suatim loquentes adinuicem ludicra uerba sepius quam honorabilia et sapientiae apta, quia aetas talium semper trahit ad inrationabilem sermonem et ad frequens iocum et ad garrulitatem indecentem illorum.Et carius est illis, si eis licitum erit ludere et iocare cum suis sociis et suis similibus insipienter et in hoc maxime letantur.
>
> (p.170)

> Oh dearest boys, now it is time for us to say something for the benefit of your souls, if you want to hear this, our useful encouragement and instruction. As you've learned, then, in this speech, my boys, and read in many places, jokes are often joined and mixed in with wise speeches and words. For that reason I've set down and arranged these speeches for you young people in my own way, knowing for sure that speaking among themselves all boys continually use playful words rather than honourable or wise, because their age always draws them away to foolish speech, and to frequent joking, and to their kind of improper talkativeness. And they'd much prefer, if they're allowed, to play and joke with their friends and peers, and take the greatest pleasure in this.

As he explains, uppermost in his mind has been a need to write something faithful to his students' way of behaving and their manner of speech. In replicating their garrulousness he has been guided by his understanding of his students' character, which he claims to have recognised and constructed the colloquies to reflect, thus making them more accessible, believing, perhaps rightly, that this would make the lessons more successful.

As the first sentence makes clear, however, that approach has now ended and in the preface to the second, more difficult set of colloquies (*Colloquia Difficiliora*) Bata

distances himself from the type of chatty exchanges he has worked so hard to create, making it clear that this type of frivolous, and at times adversarial, speech alienates the speaker from God:

> Loquamur nunc silenter et sobrie aliquid alacritatis et utilitatis de celesti tripudio.
> Hoc expedit nobis. Omittamus stolidas fabulas et rixosa verba, quę Deus
> execratur.
>
> (p.178)
>
> Let us, quietly and seriously now, say something cheerful and beneficial about
> the joy of heaven; this is useful for us. Let us leave off silly stories and
> contentious words, which God hates.

Thus, however we interpret the content of his problematic scenes, they were not oversights by a language teacher with his mind on other things. Bata not only designed them to be the way they are but more importantly understood the moral implications of their arrangement. It is notable that once the second group of scenes gets underway the sense of freedom and abandonment that accompanied scenes like the drinking party disappears and apart from a few early exceptions (e.g. Colloquies 1 and 3) the tone becomes generally more serious, with Bata registering a greater sense of urgency regarding the use of language:

> O diligibillime scolastice, heri nos lusitauimus ad inuicem latialibus rematibus;
> exerceamus iam nunc hoc ipsum, et imploremus Cunctitonantem, ut allubescat et
> miserescat effectibus nostris.
>
> (p.192)
>
> Most beloved student, yesterday we played together with Latin words. Now let
> us apply ourselves to this alone, and implore the All-Thunderer to favour and
> have mercy on our works.

On the basis of these remarks, it appears that Bata felt that the students of the more difficult text were also more suited to being informed of the possible moral implications of their speech. The final scene of the difficult text ends, perhaps appropriately, with a second peroration, this time to follow Benedict's rule, which includes an injunction against the use of language for frivolous purposes: '*desistamus quantotius cunctas nenias et inlecebras*' ('let us cease as soon as possible all popular songs and enticements, p.196).

Personal Perfection: the Benedictine Approach to Language

Bata's colloquies thus not only include two grades of Latin, they also associate different types of speech and behaviour with each level of grammatical difficulty. The simpler Latin depicts scenes in which students engage in wild, apparently ungoverned forms of speech and behaviour. The later, more complex Latin colloquies are associated with personal restraint and a greater sense of personal responsibility. They represent a developed attitude to language that is explained by Bata in one of his exhortations to good behaviour:

> Est opere pretium uobis inhianter studere sub annis primeuae aetatulae, ut cum maturiores fueritits cati et inbuti et diserti floreatis. Nec legatis sic errabiliter, sed legite distincte et aperte atque uerbatim, set et syllabatim ac sensatim. Confirmate intelligibiliter in pensum uestrum. Legite sollerter atque ęquanimiter Dei uerbula uobis credita usque ad metam (hoc est usque ad calcem). Vos legitis, ut experior, sine affectione, quasi absinthium potetis. Quare sic agatis, magnopere admiror. Felix fugax est, qui sacra remata diuini spermatis furatur...
> (pp.180-182)

> It is necessary for you to study eagerly in your early years so that when you're more mature you may prosper as sagacious, educated, and accomplished men. Do not read so uncertainly; but read distinctly and clearly, word by word and syllable by syllable, attending to the meaning. Establish it intelligibly, as a duty. Read the words entrusted to you by God skilfully and calmly up to the end (this is to the 'heel'.) You read, it seems to me, without feeling, as though you are drinking absinthe. I wonder greatly why you do this. Happy is the fugitive who steals the sacred words of the divine seed...

Thus the complex grammar that characterises Bata's more difficult colloquy also represents a simpler, more focused approach to language accurately captured in the adverbs *sollerter atque ęquanimiter* ('skilfully and calmly'). This way of reading requires both a basic understanding of Latin and a student's more developed sense of his or her responsibility as a Christian reader.

This increasing attention to language use reflects a broader attitude to the developmental importance of speech in monastic culture. If in the first part of this chapter we saw how group identity was connected to the Latin language, regulatory texts like the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* and the *Regularis Concordia* demonstrate that the control of speech was central to the ideal of personal perfection. In these texts speech is generally discussed under the heading of 'Silence' but as Watham has noted silence here 'does not

mean mutism but rather moderation in speaking.'[57] These texts are concerned with the imposition of order upon language and the movement away from a state of spiritual imperfection which is natural but intemperate and is manifest in excessive speech:

> The Rule recognises that man is naturally inclined to talk and enjoys verbal intercourse. The monk is cautioned against playful talk and useless conversation and is warned against excessive laughter and buffoonery. The monk is reminded of the gravity of monastic life, a gravity which should engender a constant restraint with regard to the use of the tongue.[58]

Monastic attitudes to the regulation of speech can be traced back to the general biblical association between excessive speech and sinfulness: the Book of Proverbs states, for example, *in multiloquio peccatum non deerit qui autem moderatur labia sua prudentissimus*. ('sin will not be lacking in many words, but he will be most wise who closes his lips', 10:19). Matthew likewise warns: *Orantes autem nolite multum loqui sicut ethnici putant enim quia in multiloquio suo exaudiantur* ('and when you are praying, don't speak much, like the heathens; for they think that in speaking a lot that they might be heard', 6:7). Benedict's concerns, however, are not just restricted to injunctions against too much speech. Chapter 6 of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* emphasises that at times even 'good words are to be refrained from for the sake of silence' (a *bonis eloquiis...propter taciturnitatem debet taceri*, 6:2),[59] suggesting that a lack of speech is a virtue in itself.

Language use was thus approached from the perspective of a monk's spiritual development and the ways in which it might be retarded. In his discussion of a 'ladder of humility', which will lead the monk eventually 'to exaltation in heaven' (*ad exaltationem...caelestem*, 7:5) several of the twelve 'steps of humility or discipline' (*gradus humilitatis vel disciplinae*, 7:8) relate to the control of speech. The ninth step insists the monk should 'maintain silence' (*taciturnitatem habens*, 7:56); the tenth that he should not be 'easily and quickly given to laughter' (*facilis ac promptus in risu*, 7:59); the eleventh details Benedict's ideal of monastic speech, which should be 'mild and without

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[57] Wathen, *Silence*, p. xiii.
[58] p. 58.
[59] For this translation of 'propter taciturnitatem' see Fry, ed., *Rule of St. Benedict*, p. 190.

laughter, humble with seriousness or with few words, and reasonable... not in a loud voice'
(*lentier et sine risu, humiliter cum gravitate vel pauca verba et rationabilia...non sit clamosus in voce*, 7:60) Controlling and limiting speech is thus essential to the process of spiritual perfection that ironically ends with the most perfect disciples 'who are pure of heart and have been cleansed from sin...[being] rarely given permission to speak.'[60]

At the same time however, other forms of speech are promoted. These are highly controlled, mostly, as in *Regularis Concordia*, the particular phrases to be used during the performance of monastic ritual, though ways of speaking were important also. This text also promoted distinctness in speech: *omnia distincte psallendo modificentur ut mens nostra concordet uoci nostrae* ('all responsories should be chanted distinctly so that our minds are in unison with our voices', Proem, 8).[61] In cases where mistakes were made by students in pronunciation during responsories or readings, these were dealt with harshly, with children being whipped for errors.[62]

Latin Orthopraxis and Quintilian

Where they dealt with the subject of language use, therefore, monastic regulatory texts were primarily concerned with how controlling speech offers opportunities for spiritual growth. Monks were expected to learn to manage their tongue in the same way that Byrhtferth encourages priests to become managers of their souls. This is a process that occurs over time, and it is arguably this process that is reflected in the change that occurs in Bata's colloquies between the apparently careless attitude evident in the first collection of scenes, and the more sober, considered approach to language in the second set of texts. Indeed, it may even be possible to go further, and argue that not only did increasing control of speech have implications for the personal advancement of individual monks, but that the

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[60] Wathen, *Silence*, p. 89.
[61] Thomas Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia: Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 5.
[62] See RB Ch. 45, *De His Qui Falluntur in Oratorio*

study of language itself could be used as one means of acquiring the discipline necessary for that control.

In a recent article, Paul Gehl has argued for the historical importance of this formative aspect of learning Latin. Gehl uses the term 'orthopraxis' by which he means 'a complex of normative practices presented as a traditional method for attaining wisdom or salvation, typically learned by imitation or long repetition':

> When the term orthopraxis is applied to the language arts, it refers to a tendency to assign ethical or spiritual value to the lessons learned in studying grammar, rhetoric, or other aspects of language. The language learner conforms mentally and spiritually to correct and beautiful forms and they become adept at practices that can lead to ethical and spiritual growth.[63]

As Gehl notes, this attitude to the formative study of language first appears in the classical period.[64] If we briefly review some remarks by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria*, ostensibly written to provide an outline of the orator's education, it is clear that historically language teachers have tended to see a moral component to formal language training in young children. Quintilian makes several observations that are relevant to a discussion of Bata, since he notes that a) the character of the speaker will have a strong influence on the speaker's linguistic skill; b) untrained speakers tend to speak excessively; c) the process of language training is actually a process of reduction or distillation of speech.

Quintilian argues that the student who learns more quickly will also be the student with the better character: *nam probus quoque in primis erit ille vere ingeniosus* ('he who is clever will also be first and foremost good, 1.3.2),[65] thus associating personal virtue with skill in language. At the other end of the process, Quintilian similarly argues that the finished orator will not be able to speak well unless he is a good man (*cum bene dicere not possit nisi bonus*, 2.15.34).

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[63] Paul F. Gehl, 'Latin Orthopraxes', in *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice*, ed. by Carol Dana Lanham (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 1-22 (p. 1).
[64] pp. 3-5.
[65] Donald A. Russell, ed., *Quintilian: The Orator's Education*, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

For Quintilian, vice was enervating and made a speaker unable to focus upon the process of becoming an orator. In remarks that recall the discussion of self-division discussed in both the elegies and boast chapters, Quintilian notes that the mind of the wicked man is marked by multiplicity: 'Nothing is so possessed, so multiform, so cut and lacerated by so many different emotions, as an evil mind (*Nihil est enim tam occupatum, tam multiforme, tot ac tam uariis adfectibus concisum atque laceratum quam mala mens*, 12.1.7). Quintilian describes how a mind in such a state is tormented by hopes, cares, labour, racked with anxiety. 'What place', he asks rhetorically, 'is there among all this for literature or any good art' (*Quis inter haec litteris aut ulli bonae arti locus?*). 'No more', he answers, 'than there is for a crop on land occupied by thorns and brambles' (*non…magis quam frugibus in terra sentibus ac rubis occupata*).

For Quintilian, the process of language learning was one of refinement:

> Propter hoc quoque interdum uidentur indocti copiam habere maiorem, quod dicunt omnia, doctis est et electio et modus...Nihilo minus confitendum est etiam detrahere doctrinam aliquid, ut limam rudibus et cotes hebetibus et uino uetustatem, sed uitia detrahit, atque eo solo minus est quod litterae perpolierunt quo melius.
>
> (2.12.6,8)

> Another reason why the untrained appear sometimes to have greater linguistic resources is that they say everything, whereas the trained speaker is selective and measured...Nevertheless, it must be admitted that learning removes something, just as a file removes something from that which is rough, or a whetstone from that which is dull, or age from wine – it removes faults, and that which has been polished by learning is lessened only insofar as it is improved.

Quintilian is arguing here that teaching language is teaching what not to do, and paring speech down to its most basic form. Thus a language teacher should 'correct any faults of speech, so that words are distinct and each letter is pronounced with its own sound' (*vitia si qua sunt oris emendet, ut expressa sint verba, ut suis quaeque litterae sonis enuntientur*, 1.11.4), which is an emphasis upon clarity, that as we have seen, is also found in later writers like Benedict.

Much like the Benedictines, Quintilian also saw the development of correct forms of speech as a process of cultivation which involves the eradication of certain types of speech

and the promotion of others. The goal is consistency, and Quintilian argues that the learning process be regarded as an ordering of the self, removing the individual from immoderateness both in speech and in character, leading to a state where language can be brought to obey the same rules that govern personal behaviour:

> Si consonare sibi in faciendis ac non faciendis uirtutis est (quae pars eius prudentia uocatur), eadem in dicendis ac non dicendis erit.
>
> (2.20, 5-6)
>
> If self-consistency in what is to be done and not done is a virtue (the part of which is called prudence), the same should hold for what is and what is not to be said.

Quintilian seems to regard the speech of those who have formally studied language as language to which the will of the 'good man' has been applied – a sort of chaste language. Linguistic purity, it might be said, does not refer to the avoidance of particular words or a lack of swearing, though this is also important, but rather to the ordering of language through the observance of grammatical rules and conventions of pronunciation. Literacy is treated as a discipline, and through its internalisation the 'neutral and kneadable material'[66] of the student's character finds its proper disposition.

Orthopraxis in Bata and Ælfric

The writings of Bata and Ælfric both emphasise the constitutive function of language studies. In a very general sense the two men saw a connection between study and spiritual welfare, particularly in the ability of language training to provide access to important texts. Bata seems to have closely followed his teacher in believing that the transfer of knowledge in the classroom was a process that improved both the teacher and the student, a point that Ælfric notes in the preface to his *Grammar*:

> Iungum mannum gedafenað, þæt hi leornion sumne wisdom and þam ealdum gedafenað, þæt hi tæcon sum gerad heora iunglingum, forðan ðe ðurh lare byð se geleafa gehealden; and ælc man ðe wisdom lufað byð gesælig, and se ðe naðor nele ne leornian ne tæcan, gif he mæg, þonne acolað his andgyt fram ðære halgan lare, and he gewit swa lytlum and lytlum fram gode.[67]

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[66] Mayke de Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery: Magister Hildemar and his Oblates', *Journal of Medieval History,* 9 (1983), 99-128 (p. 106).

[67] Julius Zupitza, ed., *Ælfric's Grammatik und Glossar* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880), p. 3.

It is fitting for young men to learn some wisdom and for old men that they teach
some to their students, because it is through teaching that the faith is maintained;
and each man who loves wisdom is blessed, and he who will neither learn or
teach (even though he is able), lets his mind cool away from divine knowledge,
and he departs little by little from goodness.

Bata also focuses upon this theme, conveying through the persona of a conscientious oblate

a sense of the formative role of study in the development of the young monk. Although he

is only a student the young speaker is versed in Ælfric's understanding of the relationship

between study and virtue:

O mei socii desiderantissimi, petite libros uestros cito, et in scamnis uestris
sedentes legite, et firmate acceptos uestros, ut properanter reddere ualeatis cras in
prime mane, et deinde plus a discere a nostro instructore, ut quando senes eritis,
tunc memoriter in cunctis libris latinis legere possitis et aliquid intellegere in
illis, ut alios rursum queatis et docere et morigerari...Quomodo ualet in senectute
sapiens quispiam esse, qui in iuuentute sua suo magistro oboedire non uelit, ut
sapientiam spiritalem aut prudentiam corporalem discat? Aut quomodo poterit
sollers aut doctus fieri qui nullam artem bonam uult scire? Cum scriptum sit,
'omnis sapientia a Domino Deo est,' et 'timor Domini initium est omnis
sapientie,' propterea ammonendi et docendi sunt paruuli et iuuenes, ut sint
magistris subditi suis ad sapientiam salutaris doctrine et ad mores pulchros
(pp. 84-86)

My dearest friends, get to your books quickly, and sitting in your seats, read and
memorise your assignments so that early tomorrow you will be able to recite
quickly and then learn more from our instructor, so that when you are old, you
will then be able to read from memory in all Latin books and understand
something in them, so that you can both teach others in return and be well
mannered ... How can someone be wise in old age, who in his youth did not want
to obey his teacher, so that he learned spiritual wisdom and physical discretion?
And how could someone become skilled or learned who does not want to learn
any good art? Since it is written 'All wisdom is from the Lord' and 'The fear of
the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom', for that reason children and young
people are to be admonished and instructed that they are to be subject to their
masters for the wisdom of wholesome teaching and noble habits.

Bata and Ælfric are generally conscious, therefore, that the process of studying had

moral implications for the individual. For both men, the end of learning was a state of

spiritual health. After a brief discussion at the beginning of the second part of Ælfric's

colloquy in which the students complain that the *magister* is speaking 'very deeply' (*ualde*

profunde, l. 245) and where they ask that he speaks so that they can understand him (*ut*

possimus intelligere que loqueris, ll. 246-7), the *magister* in turn asks 'what sort of

wisdom' (*Qua sapienta*? l.254) the students are interested in learning. The *magister* gives

them options:

Uultis esse uersipilles aut milleformes in mendaciis, astuti in loquelis, astuti,
uersuti, bene loquentes et male cogitantes, dulcibus uerbis dediti, dolum intus
alentes, sicut sepulchrum depicto mausoleo, intus plenum fetore?

(ll. 254-258)

Do you want to be cunning or shifty in lying, clever in speech, sly, speaking well
and thinking evil, given to sweet words, nourishing deceit within, as the tomb
with the decorated shrine, completely foetid within?

The students respond by saying that they do not want the sort which is dishonest but 'to be

sincere without deceit' (*esse simplices sine hipochrisi*, l.262), and wise in the sense that

they 'turn from evil and do good' (*declinemus a malo et faciamus bona*, l.263).

Bata goes much further, registering a greater urgency at the prospect of students

being neglectful of their education. On a number of occasions he notes that students are

risking perdition if they are lax in attending to their books. He stresses for example that

essential forms of knowledge are possible only through Latin, such as an understanding of

scripture, or the ability to pray correctly, which if not known would pose a serious danger:

'Each of us will die, as long as we are ignorant – take heed of this, take heed' (*Quique*

moriemur, dum ignoramus. Notate hoc, notate, p.184). Study maintains the spiritual

wellbeing of the individual and makes him more secure against the vicissitudes of mortal

life:

Satagite inbui. O affabilis puer, qui fers coronam Sancti Peteri habitumque
Sancti Benedicti, adtende ad iuuenilem aetatem tuam, ne perdas florem decoris
tui. Disce sollicite, ora frequenter, ambula reuerenter, ama Deum inhianter. Nam
moriunter pueri sicut senes.

(p.186)

Occupy yourself with becoming learned. O affable boy, who carries the crown of
Saint Peter and the habit of Saint Benedict, give heed to your young age; do not
lose the flower of your comeliness. Learn conscientiously, pray often, walk
reverently, love God eagerly. For boys die just as old men do.

For Bata the choice was simple – study and win eternal life or live in ignorance and

die. On one occasion after a long scene in which an oblate is harangued by a *magister*,

Bata makes this very stark distinction between those who study and those who do not:

Ecce, fratres, audistis in hac sententia qualiter qui sapientiam quęrunt et
doctrinam secuntur studere debeant, ut sapienter et recte uiuere ualeant, et
quomodo inspientes, nisi a stultitia sua citius recedant et se ad meliora
prouocent, periendi sunt. Proinde cauete uos, ut sensati sitis et non insensati

(p.154)

> Behold, brothers, you have heard in this speech how those who seek wisdom and
> pursue learning ought to study so they are able to live wisely and properly, and
> how the unwise, unless they quickly give up their stupidity and stir themselves
> toward the better, must perish. Take care, then, that you are sensible and not
> foolish.

Thus when at the end of the *Colloquia Difficiliora*, one student urges another: *exortemur nos inuicem ad cultum uiuificę ędificationis* ('let us encourage each other towards the cultivation of life-giving education', p.196) there is a very real connection between study and the welfare of the soul.

Grammar and Spiritual Welfare

More narrowly, both Bata and Ælfric also saw a relationship between spiritual welfare and grammar itself. It is worth noting, for example, that by the late Anglo-Saxon period, grammar had become so important that it had begun to become relevant even to spiritual matters and offered 'a set of object standards that could elucidate the most difficult [theological] points.' [68] As Contreni notes, during the Carolingian period some 'masters began to assert... that God is one because the noun *Deus* is singular.' An important issue for Anglo-Saxon teachers like Bata and Ælfric was pronunciation[69] which would have required particular attention in a culture where Latin did not exist 'on a continuous spectrum with the native language.'[70] In the preface to his *Grammar,* Ælfric betrays a rigid understanding of the connection between the most basic elements of Latin and reverence for God when he notes that *pater* should be pronounced with a particular vowel length:

> Mihi tamen videtur melius invocare deum patrem honorifice producta sillaba
> quam brittonice corripere quia nec deus arti grammaticae subiciendus est.

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[68] John J. Contreni, *Carolingian Learning, Masters and Manuscripts* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992), II, p. 20.
[69] It is not understood how pronunciation was taught in Anglo-Saxon schools; see Joyce Hill, 'Winchester Pedagogy and the *Colloquy* of Ælfric', *Leeds Studies in English,* 29 (1998), 137-52 (p. 141); see also Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, p. 54. For another example of Ælfric 'on the relationship between grammar and the language of the Scriptures' see Gneuss, *Language and History*, p. 15.
[70] Joyce Hill, 'Learning Latin in Anglo-Saxon England: Traditions, Texts and Techniques', in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. by Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) (pp. 8-9).

> To me it seems better to invoke the name of God the Father honourably with a long syllable rather than with the shorter British pronunciation because God is not to be subjected to the art of grammar.[71]

Here Ælfric makes a complex, if slightly contradictory argument regarding the capacity of language to accommodate transcendent realities. He argues against the pronunciation of *pater* to be found in poetry, which he believes is incorrect, based upon his assumption that there is a fitting vowel length for the word *pater* when it refers to God. This he suggests should be independent of grammatical rules that require vowel lengths to change according to the textual context. Although he does not say it explicitly, Ælfric presumably feels that there is a 'natural' vowel length applicable in such a situation, and perhaps he was further concerned that the immutability of God would not find appropriate expression if the word that referred to God could be changed during use. Thus for him vowel length is both relevant and it is not: the word *pater* should be pronounced in one particular way, and at the same time the rules of grammar that determine such matters are not to be applied in this instance.

Historically, the complexity of this position finds expression in the writings of the church fathers. The general point that the earthly rules of grammar should not confine what was divine was made by Gregory the Great who warned against the message of scripture becoming inappropriately fettered by the grammatical rules: *indignum vehementer existimo, ut verba calestis oraculi restringam sub regulis Donati* ('I think it extremely unworthy to confine the words of the heavenly oracle under the rules of Donatus').[72] In a similar way, Augustine argues in his *De Doctrina Christiana* that the elementary study of the 'letters of the alphabet' (*litterarum figurae*) is obviously necessary but only if such studies 'are not a hindrance to the more important things which they ought to serve to acquire' (*ut majoribus rebus, ad quas adipiscendas servire debent, non sint impedimento,*

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[71] Zupitza, ed., *Grammatik und Glossar*, p. 2. The reference to *brittonice* in this passage is unclear. Wilcox believes that it may refer to Welsh or Breton speakers. See Wilcox, ed., *Prefaces*, p. 152.

[72] "Epistola ad Leandrum"' in Marci Adriaen, ed., *S. Gregorii Magnii: Moralia in Iob, Libri I-X* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1979), p. 7.

2.26.40).[73] On the more narrow point of vowel length, Augustine further saw a concern with pronunciation as being superfluous, and urged Christians to be concerned less with how something is said than why it is said:

> Utrum enim ignoscere producta an correpta tertia syllaba dicatur, non multum curat qui peccatis suis Deum ut ignoscat petit, quolibet modo illud verbum sonare potuerit.
>
> (2.13.19)[74]
>
> Whether the third syllable of *ignoscere* is spoken with a long or short syllable does not matter much to the one who begs God to forgive his sins, whatever way he might have been able to sound the word.

While Bata generally agreed with this position, his remarks on the relationship between pronunciation and the divine are slightly more ambiguous. He echoes Ælfric and Gregory in arguing that the heavenly transcends the rules of grammar, but he also registers a caveat:

> Frater, animaduerte quod sermo diuinus litteris litteratorum (id est grammaticorum) minime seruit, et tamen nullus liber scriptus uel positus recte erit, nisi prius grammaticam artem didicerit, qui illum disponit.
>
> (p.118)
>
> Brother, note that the divine speech by no means serves the letters of scholars (that is grammarians); and yet no book is properly written or set down, unless he who composes it first learns the grammatical art.

Here Bata recognises the necessity for correct grammar, and that it has a constitutive function in communicating the divine speech. Like Ælfric he accepts that there is a correct way of speaking on spiritual matters.

Within a culture like this, the use of language in particular contexts clearly had the potential to become a moral undertaking, and incorrect speech could be perceived as at best doctrinally inaccurate and at worst heretical. Thus Ælfric, in addition to complaining about poorly educated priests, warns in the Old English preface to his second series of *Catholic Homilies* against scribes who 'incorrectly copy' (*leas writ*) manuscripts, who unless they correct their errors risk bringing 'the true teaching into mistaken error' (*þa soðan lare to leasum gedwylde*).[75] As Joyce Hill has noted, Ælfric uses terms such as *leas*

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[73] PL 34.55 (*Patrologia Latina: The Full Text Database* <http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk> [accessed 22 October 2011])

[74] PL 34.44.

[75] Godden, ed., *Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, p. 2.

and *gedwylde* which both evoke departures from orthodoxy,[76] and which therefore suggest spiritual harm. Thus the attention to the rules of language becomes an attention to the spiritual good, and to be neglectful of correct grammar becomes a serious offence.

Conclusion

As the above discussion suggests, when interpreting the message of Bata's colloquies it is necessary to consider them as a group against the intellectual background in which they occur. The attitudes to language that prevailed when Bata wrote these texts assert the spiritual importance of the process of studying in general and studying language in particular. It is possible that the scenes that editors and critics have found controversial are less important than the general structure of the colloquies in understanding their intended effects on students, although this is not to suggest the scenes are entirely unproblematic. Ælfric's colloquy, meanwhile, is an example of a text that teaches Latin and conveys social messages without compromising the various behavioural precepts found elsewhere in monastic literature. Bata obviously took a different approach, creating scenes in which students were increasingly encouraged to consider how they spoke, and what kinds of speech were and were not acceptable to God.

To conclude, it can be generally argued that the first-person narratives and conversational forms that occur in the colloquies of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata not only instructed monks in the use of language they also provided them with a means of learning about different aspects of monastic life. Neither colloquy produced a single image of what it meant to be a monk in late Anglo-Saxon England. The discussion of the occupations in Ælfric's colloquy demonstrated that monks were both part of and separate from the rest of Anglo-Saxon society. Students enacted scenes in which they learned to associate imaginatively with groups whom they would eventually be tasked with caring for. They

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[76] Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric, Authorial Identity and the Changing Text', in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference*, ed. by D.G. Scragg and Paul E. Szarmach (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 177-89 (pp. 180-81).

learned that in spite of very real differences that there were points of correspondence between all ranks of Anglo-Saxon society, and that the laity had lessons to teach monks and others in religious orders. Students participating in Bata's colloquies role-played scenes that differed in both difficulty and in their attitude to the relationship between language and spiritual well-being. Initially, students were allowed the freedom to play roles that both confirmed and challenged the strictures governing personal behaviour in Anglo-Saxon monasteries. Later they were encouraged to move beyond frivolous play and begin to consciously consider how they spoke and the things that they said.

Finally, the emphasis placed in both these colloquies upon the creation of credible speakers has consequences for how we understand Anglo-Saxon literature. These texts tell us that literate Anglo-Saxons were instructed from an early age to associate fictional speakers with the transmission of cultural knowledge. The social group who kept and copied the manuscripts that included the riddles, elegies, and heroic narratives, were, therefore, also a group that had learned to understand their immediate environment by enacting scenes in which individuals talk about their lives and experience. This fact allows us, as modern readers, to read the literary texts that they produced in a way that pays close attention to the use of first-person narratives, and to do so with some confidence that we are approaching them in a way that would have been meaningful for the audience for whom they were written.

Conclusion – 'Relatedness'

The introduction to this study included a general, all-encompassing definition of identity as something that 'always involve[s] both sameness and difference'. As the above discussion has shown, various forms of Anglo-Saxon writing are structured around this basic interest in 'relatedness', in the connections that exist between an individual's present and their past, between the individual and the group, between writers and readers, between social groups. This concern with identity was a concern with the process of identification, which might best be described as a specific form of meaning that arises through different forms of interaction. For the Anglo-Saxons, identity was something that happened, a product of relationships.

First-person narratives

The groups of texts that have been discussed in this study demonstrate that central to this interest in relatedness was a concern with the various ways by which first-person narratives could both establish the identity of a speaker and provide accounts of other methods of constructing identity. The first-person riddles of the Exeter Book provide the most basic examples of how identity is constructed through first-person narratives, how it arises through the interplay of narrative elements. More than any of the other texts in this study, the riddles also emphasize the importance placed by Anglo-Saxon poets on the role of the reader in constructing the identity of the narrator, and how the engagement between narrator and reader can in turn be used to compel the reader to consider how their own relationship with the world around them is a product of the way in which they have arranged their mental model of the environment.

The first-person narratives of the elegies showed that Anglo-Saxon poets were aware that identification was not simply a textual process, a property of narrative, but one that also occurred in social environments. These narratives strongly emphasise the

importance of the group in the life of the individual, although the religious elegists in particular are critical of a situation where an individual derives a sense of meaning and identity from a social context that is both transient and divided.

If the elegies provide evidence for the importance of physical activity as a means of establishing personal identity, the boast-speeches that occur in heroic literature highlight just how interdependent words and deeds can be in constructing that identity. The heroic boast-speech is perhaps the only occasion where identification through personal narrative has been viewed in moral terms, as a selfish process concerned with the reputation of the individual to the exclusion of all else. As we have seen, however, the first-person narratives that preface the commissive speech act are part of a process in which accounts of past achievements attest to an individual's suitability to undertake future tasks. The fulfilment of such tasks not only provides immediate material benefit to the group, it also has the potential to legitimise important cultural concepts announced in the boast-speech itself. The first-person narrative, in this instance, can be said to be part of a process where the establishment of individual identity leads in some cases to the renewal of the identity of the group.

Narrative identity, finally, was also of interest to the communities responsible for the manuscripts that contain the poetry under discussion. As in the riddles, first-person narratives were used as an educational tool that allowed monastic students to adopt the perspective of others from different social groups and by doing so learn not only language but also important lessons about personal behaviour. The colloquy had the potential to provide commentary on larger issues, such as the relationship between different social groups. First-person narratives and the conversational form were more generally used to illustrate ideas regarding the importance of language use to the monks' conception of themselves and their vocation.

Becoming[1]

In accounting for this interest in relatedness, it seems evident that Anglo-Saxon interest in identity reflects a broader interest in change itself. Here we do not mean the concern with the kind of general change that finds expression in images of transience among the elegies, but rather a keen awareness of the potential for change within the individual, the prospect that a person can become tomorrow something different than they are today. At the end of his rule, for example, Benedict makes it clear that his regulations governing how monks should live is only intended to form 'the beginning of monastic life' (*initium conversationis*, 73:1);[2] for those interested in reaching 'the perfection of monastic life' (*ad perfectionem conversationis*, 73:2) his book can only be an initial step to the study of other more important works (73:3-6) that allow for the fuller cultivation of virtue (73:7). This is a reintroduction of the image, ubiquitous in medieval literature, of human life as a journey with which Benedict's Rule begins (Prol. 21). In the context of a monastic environment this journey is an internal one, and based on the recognition that during the course of life inside the monastery the monk has great scope for spiritual improvement.

Yet to entertain this proposition at all, there must also be a more fundamental belief that the individual is continually on their way to becoming something different, that the person who exists today is a still frame in a process of constant movement and change. This conception of the individual is, perhaps unsurprisingly, also apparent in Bata, particularly in the way that he understands the character of his students. His belief that those who are casual and unguarded in their speech can be brought to learn control, is a practical expression of the idea that change is always possible for the individual. This same idea also occurs in the religious elegies, which like Benedict regard human life as a journey, and which in their didactic elements also register the belief that people can be brought to change over time.

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[1] For the relevance of this term to medieval conceptions of identity see Gray, 'Finding Identity', pp. 13-14.
[2] On this translation of 'conversatio' see Fry, ed., *Rule of St. Benedict*, pp. 459-63.

An interest in 'becoming' is also evident in the different groups of secular poems that have been discussed. As has been demonstrated, in the case of some first-person riddles, the speaker's narrative is entirely a record of the transition from one state to another. In the heroic tradition, there is also a very clear understanding of the provisionality of the present moment. The identity of the hero is always something that can be defined and redefined by him or others. Our assessment of him is not fully complete unless we consider what he says today in conjunction with what is to happen in the future.

In each of these cases, Anglo-Saxon writers reveal their own awareness of the fact that there is nothing fixed about the life of the individual. This flatly contradicts a critical assertion noted in the introduction, the belief that during the medieval period identity was of little interest due to the stability of social groups. As it relates to the Anglo-Saxons this association is incorrect. Even if it were true that the Anglo-Saxon period was a time of relatively little social change, which is a questionable assumption, identity was of interest because even in circumstances where the social environment appears to be relatively stable, such as within a monastic house, there still exists an underlying awareness of and interest in the potential for change within the individual.

Society

As we have seen throughout this study, not only is an interest in personal identity not dependent on rapid social change, in most cases an interest in identity also represents a concern with the welfare of the group and the maintenance of important cultural ideas and values. The first-person riddle was a way to discuss complicated and often abstract issues related to the mental constructs individuals use to understand and structure the world around them. Like Ælfric's colloquy, and other fictional genres such as the *Maxims*, the riddles are based upon a kind of predicative reasoning which encourages readers to dissect various cultural phenomena and reduce them to their individual characteristics, to think

about how these are arranged, and how they can be brought together again to remake the riddle-subject. This entire process was one that was intended to maintain the fluidity of the shared classificatory system that managed the complexity of the social environment.

The depiction of society in both the religious elegies and heroic poetry emphasises the degree to which the cohesion of social groups was maintained through a variety of practices connected with establishing personal identity. In the images of heroic society that occur in both these genres, the individual is regarded as part of a larger social structure, and comes to understand his identity through understanding his relationship to others. The boast-speech that appears in heroic literature further suggests that an interest in personal identity could offer other tangible benefits for the group. The same first-person narrative that constructs the identity of the speaker is part of a process that has the potential to shepherd the group as it moves toward or passes through moments of great social change.

The colloquies of both Bata and Ælfric demonstrate that even within apparently insular communities talking about oneself could have general social functions. Ælfric's interest in the first-person narrative was arguably a means of teaching students about the bonds that existed between various groups within Anglo-Saxon society, and perhaps more importantly, teaching students to identify with the daily experiences of other social groups. In Bata's colloquies talking about oneself was a way for the individual to realise collective attitudes to personal perfection and through doing so further their own spiritual growth.

This study began by noting a division between first-person narratives that demonstrated an interest in the individual for their own sake, and those that were used as a means of instruction. As the various chapters in the study have shown, looked at in any detail, it quickly becomes very difficult to maintain any sharp distinction between narratives that are interested in the identity of specific individuals and those that have an obvious social function. The major genres of Old English poetry, as well as evidence from

the monastic culture in which they were written, demonstrates that first-person narratives in Anglo-Saxon literature were usually concerned with both the individual and the group.

Language

Finally, it was noted in the introduction that critical approaches to issues like identity have generally examined texts for the way these phenomena are revealed within texts, rather than seeing texts as being instrumental to the ways in which they are created. As the above discussion has demonstrated, a study that ignores the role of language in establishing personal identity ignores the power Anglo-Saxons attributed to language use and its ability to suggest ontological fact. In several chapters we have dealt, for example, with the use of repetition: in first-person riddles, poets used *hwilum*-sequences to convey an impression of the psychological continuity of the speaking voice as it describes great change; the elegies employed *ne*-catalogues to suggest an individual's independence from the vicissitudes of the world. In both examples rhetorical techniques are used to convince the reader about particular aspects of the speaker's identity. In his colloquy, Ælfric used certain linguistic devices such as a preponderance of modals to establish the autonomy of his fictional workman according to the rules of narrative discussed in the chapter on the riddles, while his pupil Ælfric Bata developed a series of scenes that demonstrated how language use shapes the moral development of the young monk.

Each of these examples shows that within Anglo-Saxon intellectual culture language use was understood as having a constitutive function in creating, either in literature or in the real world, the individual - or at least a certain kind of individual. It is only in heroic literature that words were not seen as having this formative role on their own. In a genre of poetry that focused so heavily upon physical action, words were believed only to frame such action, provisionally establishing the outline of a reality that must be later actualized through an individual's conduct in combat. Although this slightly

complicates the picture, there still remains a strong sense of Anglo-Saxon writers as being conscious that language could be used, either on its own or in conjunction with other activities, to direct readers to certain perceptions about fictional characters, or in the case of individuals in the real world, provide the means by which the character of an individual could be developed or changed.

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