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ENVISIONED ENVIRONMENTS AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY
IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Interactions of Mind, Culture, and Narrative, 700–1400 AD

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Abstract

This diachronic analysis of narrative in Old and Middle English texts from the eighth to fifteenth centuries builds upon recent cognitive explorations in both medieval literature and narratology to identify and contrast certain enduring themes in OE and ME visionary texts. In attending to the evolution of conceptions of the self, and each conception's embeddedness in the social imaginary of a place and time, multi-layered new readings emerge of the Old English poems *The Dream of the Rood*, and *Guðlac A* and *Guðlac B* (in addition to the prose *Life of St Guðlac*); and the Middle English poems *St Erkenwald*; *Pearl*; and *Piers Plowman*. While previous studies have noted the importance of society to the role of the fourteenth-century 'public poet', this analysis proposes a much earlier, enduring link between medieval narratives of dream, visions, and marvels; the thinking, speaking self; and the larger social imaginary. The application of extended cognition to envisioned people, objects, and environments in poetic English narrative moves critical discussion beyond the formation of the dream-vision genre, toward an awareness that medieval authors could treat any environment as more or less imagined and sense-bearing. As the worked examples demonstrate, destabilisation of social structures is reflected in the disorganisation of these envisioned environments. Individual focalisation both 'personalises' these stresses and attempts to articulate a new, stable environment through reorganisation of elements of the social imaginary.

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Statement of Copyright

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents—to my late father, who told me to write another book, and to my mother, born in London 90 years ago, who must have awakened my American curiosity about the English language.

Introduction

Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries in Europe and England, a great profusion of what has become known as dream-vision literature emerged that has never ceased to attract the attention of scholars and readers. Amid all that distances us from medieval life, musing over the visceral yet veiled import of a dream or vision seems a timeless preoccupation. Much of the book-length scholarship on medieval dream-vision has remained focussed on this ‘flowering’ of the genre: Constance B. Hieatt’s *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (1967), though its scholarship has since been surpassed, nonetheless covers much the same ground as succeeding studies. Discussion of medieval dream theory and interpretation, with reference to classical sources such as Galen and Macrobius, provides context for literary works by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Alain de Lille, the *Pearl* poet, William Langland, and Geoffrey Chaucer. Similarly, A. C. Spearing’s *Medieval Dream Poetry* (1976) adds to classical theory Christian dream interpretation (and subordinate frames such as spiritual adventure and envisioned place), then traverses the Continental-Insular divide to visit Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Chaucer, the English alliterative poets, and Chaucer’s followers. Kathryn L. Lynch’s *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (1988), using Boethius’s *De consolazione philosophiae* as a classical touchstone, contrasts works from Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Dante, and John Gower.¹ Adjacent to these more catholic assemblies is J. Stephen Russell’s *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (1988), which despite its title, joins the dream theory of Augustine and Macrobius and a discussion of *Roman de la Rose* with analysis of Chaucer and the *Pearl* poet’s work.² More recent research studies have sought to resituate the dream-vision narratives of this era, to reconsider them in terms of Boethian influence, their relationship to material arts, or in connection to health and medicine.³ The magisterial

¹ Constance B. Hieatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (Paris: Mouton, 1967); Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976).

² J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988).

³ Respectively, Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1987), Claire Barbetti, *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions: A New Discussion in Interarts Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Tanya S. Lenz, *Dreams, Medicine, and Literary Practice: Exploring the Western Literary Tradition Through Chaucer* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

literary-historical work *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (1992) decentres the dreams represented in literary works by considering them within the broader context of dreams from autobiographical, philosophical, legal, and theological sources.⁴

Given the weight of accumulated scholarship that outlines so clearly the post-Norman Conquest ‘dream-vision’ phenomenon, it might be surprising that English literature possesses antecedent examples. The Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, for instance, has long been seen as ‘an early manifestation’ of the Middle English dream-vision genre, although ‘there seem as many differences as similarities in the comparisons offered’.⁵ Perhaps scholars have found it challenging to say, based on more limited evidence, in what senses the OE dream-vision genre might be considered an antecedent of the ME flourishing; relatively speaking, evidence for textual influences in the later Middle Ages abounds. Nonetheless, it seems a substantial gap in the study of English literature that so few scholars have inquired at length into the interworkings, over centuries, of language, narrative structure, and envisioned environment that afforded something like the great flowering. This thesis’s strategy, then, is to shift the ground of the discussion away from something as solidified as ‘dream-vision genre’ and toward narrative sense-making through envisioned *topoi* figured as dreams, visions, and marvels. While these *topoi* could appear in dream-visions, they would not need to; it is their work of conceptualisation that links them to one another in this study. (Essays such as Bernadette Baker’s ‘The Apophasis of Limits: Genius, Madness, and Learning Disability’, relating the *topos* of lameness in medieval literature to that of disability in contemporary works, demonstrates the ‘intercultural’ richness of this kind of diachronic approach, in letting eras speak to each other.⁶) While this thesis admits the kinds of textual influences so well documented elsewhere, it insists as well on an underlying, socially-dependent process upon which narrative meaning-making rests, and through which *topoi* can themselves participate in shaping a social imaginary. It might be a pleasing visual symmetry, for instance, to open this thesis with the rood-tree and close with a Tree of Charity, but it

⁴ Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

⁵ Andy Orchard, “‘The Dream of the Rood’” Cross-references’, in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. by Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 225–53, 233.

⁶ Bernadette Baker, ‘The Apophasis of Limits: Genius, Madness, and Learning Disability’, *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 11/1 (2007), 1–33.

also illustrates that a narrator thinking through tree imagery is an extraordinarily persistent reflex in English literature.

What becomes apparent in examining this sense-making through interaction with envisioned objects and places was that even a hermit's religious visions could express societal concerns. (This is not to say all dreams had broad import—medieval dream treatises were sceptical about dreaming in general, and quick to discount anything that could be traced back to the previous evening's meal.) In literature, recounted dreams, waking visions, or witnessed marvels make a specific kind of claim on a public's attention, often written into the narrative itself. This thesis means to show that where a narrative incorporates a glimpse of the divine or marvellous, it is more crucially performing an intersectional, cutaway view of spiritual reality, the witnessing of personal consciousness, and the pressures of social articulation; and that this function operates, within an evolving social matrix, in both OE and ME literature.

'*Cedmon* [sic], *sing me hwaethwugu*' ('sing me something'), is the importunate greeting of a dream-visitor to the Whitby Abbey stables (as related by the Venerable Bede).⁷ There the lay brother Cædmon is at nightly rest, minding the animals, and to Cædmon's astonishment he begins to sing in response to the stranger's request. Song after song in praise of God pours forth. But joined to this marvel is the tale of how it becomes known: in the morning, Cædmon tells his dream to the reeve, his superior, who leads him to the Abbess Hild, who in turn calls together '*ealle þa gelæredestan men ond þa leorneras*' ('all the most learned people and their students'), and asks Cædmon to relate his dream once again. To comprehend this nexus of dream and seventh-century Northumbrian society necessitates some background information: the renowned Abbess Hild was the great-niece of Edwin, the sainted king of Deira and Bernicia; and the founder of the double monastery Streanaeshalch, home to monks and nuns. She is herself an imposing figure, but she calls together a council of the monastery's most learned members (*men* can simply be the plural of 'person') to help in adjudicating the case.

⁷ 4.24, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, in Thomas Miller, ed. and trans., *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 2 (London: EETS/Trübner, 1890), 342.

It is not surprising to find, then, that in narrating Cædmon's dream of his song about Creation, Bede is also narrating the genesis of English sacred song. Bede is careful to have noted the presence of other kinds of songs in Old English—popular, entertaining, we gather, but quite probably pagan—that Cædmon's musical gift responds to and surpasses. In Bede's capable hands, Cædmon's dream narrative blends its reporting of Cædmon's personal experience with a figuring of the interjection of sacred song into the vernacular. Cædmon is in a sense a vehicle for a dialogue that his culture is having with itself—practically invisible in the story is the young English Christian church's anxiety at the conservatism of Anglo-Saxon culture, heightening the difficulty inherent in proselytization drawn from Latin texts. (The effect of wider cultural stressors on a local community are not always visible, of course, even to the people who sense them, but at this late date it may be particularly difficult to spot Bede's contextualising of this marvel as countercultural.)

With its trenchant parallels, Bede's account illustrates how the sense-making of narrative (a cultural enterprise in any era) is perturbed by the alternative setting afforded by a mental environment, and perhaps permanently altered. The dream-vision in Bede's narrative does not rely for its alterity on Cædmon having had, in fact, this dreamed experience: the alterity is in the unwonted crisis of intelligibility. That is, a conventional narrative might have told of Cædmon's struggle to negotiate his private love of singing, stage fright, and call to worship, so that the sacred song emerges as a plausible conclusion. Bede's account decentres Cædmon's agency, and instead insists on the involuntary, surprising revelation of the hybrid form. No less important is the narrative recapitulation of an important dream's concomitant demand, that it be retold and shared: the speaking tree in *The Dream of the Rood* literally insists on this. Though Cædmon is recognised for having been the person to whom the apparition came and for his evident song-crafting skill, Bede stages a communal reception of the dream narrative in which the community's head, Abbess Hild, pronounces her judgement in favour of Cædmon's work. That is, Bede's narrative knows that while it might be necessary for an individual to perceive this kind of vision, its significance is communal; its destination, its society. In a sense, Cædmon's dream is of divine origin only once it is validated socially.

A critical approach that proposes such a socially oriented narrative structure is inevitably critical as well of any monolithic 'dream-vision' genre, since it is the contingent social imaginary that

fixes the revelation's form and meaning. (I borrow the term 'social imaginary' from the social sciences. It is pertinent here because it shifts the level of analysis to the societal plane, as well as acknowledging that its subject is derived from mental activities whose properties and effects are not apparent. The social imaginary has been defined as 'shared cognitive schemas' and the 'largely pre-reflexive parameters within which people imagine their social existence'.⁸ The political and social science philosopher Charles Taylor has defined the term, broadly, as 'the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations'.⁹) In this reading, any notion of a pan-medieval flourishing of dream-narrative being unlocked with the 'key' of classical dream theory (and that theory's analytic regulation of the populist plurality of dream) seems incomplete. Classical dream theory was itself diverse and contradictory at points, and its importation into medieval literature only complicated the question of which interpretation to take seriously. One can see in this modern attempt at critical amalgamation an uneasiness with the interminable analysis that mind offers. This insecurity has led to genre identification being applied in a prescriptive rather than descriptive manner, as if Dante, Chaucer, and Langland had been engaged in a singular 'medieval dream-vision narrative'.

But there is, of course, a descriptive alternative: simply to follow the evolution of narrative perspective and envisioned environment within language and society. The relatively circumscribed geography of England makes it a useful location from which to begin, while the literary epoch that includes Old and Middle English is both vast and relatively less-explored. In this longer view, deep structures voiced by language—the social imaginary's coherence, conflicts, and compromises—should come into clearer sight through the social and linguistic disruption of the Norman Conquest. Though he did not use the term 'social imaginary', Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin did propose that social forces underpinned *langue*: in Simon Dentith's summarising of Bakhtin's thought, 'the

⁸ Claudia Strauss, 'The Imaginary', *Anthropological Theory* 6/3 (2006), 322–44, 331; and Manfred B. Steger and Paul James, 'Levels of Subjective Globalization: Ideologies, Imaginaries, Ontologies', *PGDT* 12 (2013) 17–40, 23, respectively.

⁹ Taylor further clarifies: 'I speak of "imaginary" (i) because I'm talking about the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, *etc.* But it is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.' Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

underlying continuity of genre—its *langue* if you will—is not constituted in the abstract but depends upon the material persistence of forms of social life which enable it'.¹⁰ This makes the examination of narrative and envisioned environment, in English as a 'whole', an interrogation equally of social life: its extent and boundaries, its coherence and adaptations.

In literary criticism, A. C. Spearing's *Medieval Dream Poetry*, with its contrasting chapters on Chaucer, his followers, and the alliterative poets, remains a seminal publication. It represented an enormous breadth of study over many years but, even so, Spearing modestly maintained his book was more an essay 'outlining an approach'.¹¹ It did not pretend to be comprehensive of English dream poetry or to construct a formal literary genre, and many of the questions it raised point still to productive avenues of inquiry. Noting that much of medieval literature was deeply concerned with 'the world of the mind'—thinking of chivalric codes and romance marvels, the use of authority and debate, and the conceptual fleshing-out of personification and allegory—Spearing asked what, if anything, the dream-vision frame offered medieval poets that was not otherwise possible. His first thought, that narrating a dreamed experience freed the teller from 'the constraints of everyday possibility', surely requires a reminder of the capaciousness of 'everyday possibility'.¹² In the late thirteenth century, the *Chronicle of Lanercost* reports (in this translation by Herbert Maxwell), a man who habitually failed to attend mass in order to tend to his animals one Sunday 'penetrated to a remote spot full of the powers of the air, who were all of small stature like dwarfs, with hideous faces'. After suffering a sound beating, 'He beheld these seducing spirits rising bodily as if about to fly away [and] seemed to feel a force compelling him to fly away with them as they departed'.¹³ Then, as now, audiences could be more or less credulous (and religious authorities less sceptical of material that advanced moral instruction), but what we might read as violations of mundane expectation are a consistent feature of chronicles, romances, and saints' lives, with no necessity of dream-vision framing.

¹⁰ Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 48.

¹¹ A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), vii.

¹² Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, 2.

¹³ In the Latin, '*impegit in locum remotum aereis potestatibus plenum, qui omnes parvi erant quantitate ut nani, effigie deformes*'; '*Videns insuper spiritus illos seductorios, quasi corpore elevatos, velle avolare, vim sibi pati videbatur nisi cum abeuntibus ipse abiret*'. *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Co., 1839), 127–28; English version *Chronicle of Lanercost*, Kindle edn., trans. by Herbert Maxwell (Glasgow: J. Maclehose, 1913), loc. 1467–83.

Now, if those with a rationalist bias may smile at the seemingly incorrigible naïveté of medieval people regarding marvels and wonders, they might equally muse on what future scholars will make of the contemporary ubiquity of homicide dramas, often boasting weekly fatality rates that would shatter their tightly-knit communities. If an audience is immersed in the internal logic of a narrative, then the genre can render discrepancies with an actuarial reality superfluous. The homicide procedural's forensic professionalism, signalled by barked jargon and white lab coats, argues by association for the plausibility of its extraordinary events. This fascination with violent ends is not new, of course. *CSI*-style investigations of serial killers intersect with medieval mystery plays featuring Cain and Abel, and the original homicide. It is the contemporary appetite for the crime's narration that is comparable to the medieval reflex to uncover divine operations in daily life, and which appears just as unreasonable to those for whom these narratives hold no salience.

Spearing also highlighted the sense of a 'hidden meaning' that accompanies dreams.¹⁴ This gets closer to the decentred nexus of envisioned environments: dream and vision are considered vehicles of numinous revelation, visitations which, perhaps maddeningly, demand interpretation. The classical world had long decided that not all dreams carried reliable revelation, and an even greater number bore no discernible relevance. But at the time this study begins, in England around the eighth century, it is not clear how current classical dream theory would have been, certainly in comparison to the better-attested influence of Pope Gregory the Great's writings, particularly his *Moralia* and *Dialogues*.¹⁵ Gregory's typology was understandably morally structured: the six kinds of dreams were due to humanity itself (the quantity of food eaten before sleeping), an evil being's illusion, mistaken thought based on illusion, divinely-sent revelation, and meditation on revelation.¹⁶ If the majority of kinds of dreams were understood to deliver either unimportant or illusory messages, the possibility of direct revelation from God was still extraordinarily significant. Dream-vision narratives appropriate this status of 'privileged communication' but also, of course, the anxieties and vexations of communicating a message accurately that require hermeneutical exposition. To respond to Spearing's

¹⁴ Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, 2.

¹⁵ Andrew Galloway, 'Dream-Theory in *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Wanderer*', *The Review of English Studies* 45/180 (1994), 475–85, 475.

¹⁶ Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, IV.48, in P. Autin and A. de Vogüé, eds, *Sources chrétiennes*, 260 (Paris, 1978–80), 172.

earlier thought, the possibility of dream-vision is itself the marvel, not simply the frame for marvellous occurrences. But this was the crucial factor, that the narrative would indeed convey the marvellous, not simply assert it.

The nexus of narrative and mental environment is remarkable for its hidden interpretative demands: the deceptively simple scene, a teller making sense of their personal ‘visitation’ for an audience, cuts against the grain of thematic narratological analysis. The Greimasian focus on a narrative’s *structural* roles (such as sender, hero, helper, opposition, and the quest’s object) is ordered by a sequence that begins with the hero being sent on the quest for an object. (None of these structural roles are strictly identical with the characters in a given story—a usually helpful character can mistakenly introduce an obstacle, for instance.) In a visionary narrative, the desired ‘object’, the vision, may arrive first and the challenge subsequently is typically one of intelligibility, as a precursor to the prospect of action. The quest may be recast as a *via negativa*, in which the hermit-hero remains in one place, refraining from action and attachment until death. Or, a Bakhtinian dialogic, heteroglossic discourse *about* events may dominate, with few actually taking narrative place. Critical language often reproduces the sense that these narratives are defective: works are dismissed as uneventful or unstructured. More positively, they may be discussed in terms of their countercultural, perhaps even subversive, ‘failures’ to execute the expected formal sequence.

In contrast, reading with the grain of medieval narrative, we must ask in what context these dreams and visions are also marvels—and what are the affordances of the marvellous for the narrative? Secondly, what process of discernment is offered to justify the retelling? The interrogation of these experiences for their ‘truth’ often provides (or provokes) the changes in mental state that these accounts narrate as events. And finally, where does this combination of discernment and dream interpretation lead? A remarkably stable feature of these narratives is the extent to which they seem to circumambulate their object, giving successive perspectives on their interactions with the revealed environment. Reading these stories recapitulates the cognitive process that they narrate, the pilgrimage toward comprehension. Their processes of discernment are mirrored by the practices of contemporary readers who must test the reality of these storyworlds against the marvels they relate. This journey can lead readers deeper into the thought-world of these texts, through cultural

interchanges centuries apart, and far away from the apparent solidity of contemporary habits of thought. But this is not to say that these answers come easily. In the history of critical commentary on these anonymous (or nearly anonymous) medieval English texts, the prevailing impression is often one of the struggle with the opacity of these works. Who is speaking, and to whom? What knowledge or experience is common to all, apparent, normal; and what is private, obscure, extraordinary?

Often these questions cannot be permanently settled—the reconstructions of medieval life and lives upon which we base our readings are provisional. But if a closer inspection is not always possible, a longer view may allow narrative patterns to emerge. Monika Fludernik called, in 2003, for diachronic study of narrative, a ‘history of narrative forms and functions’ that she saw occurring in research into the origins of the novel, but only sporadically elsewhere.¹⁷ At nearly the same moment, Irene J. F. de Jong was editing a series on ancient Greek narrative that so far has treated the evolving use, over centuries, of a lengthy list of narratological forms and functions.¹⁸ Inspired by these precedents, these chapters offer a diachronic view of the visionary environment in England, to focus on the development of these narratives within the confines of a delimited geographic area over a substantial time. One absence must be noted at the outset: Chaucer’s use of dream vision was so constant as to have inspired several editions of his poetry on this topic in addition to the critical collections dedicated to this sub-genre. The specifically Chaucerian dream frame bulks so largely in the literature, in fact, that this work will sidestep Chaucer to permit the comparison of more disparate works: the Old English (OE) poem *The Dream of the Rood* and two OE poems about St Guðlac (given context by the prose *Life*); and the Middle English poems *St Erkenwald*, *The Pearl*, and *Piers Plowman*.¹⁹ Ranging from the eighth to fourteenth centuries, spanning Old and Middle English (ME), the following chapters attempt to reconstruct the temporally- and geographically-situated styles of

¹⁷ Monika Fludernik, ‘The Diachonization of Narratology’, *Narrative* 11 (2003), 331–48.

¹⁸ Paragraph 7, Irene J. F. de Jong, ‘Diachronic Narratology (The Example of Ancient Greek Narrative)’, in *the living handbook of narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn, et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University. 2013) <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de>>.

¹⁹ The size of the existing critical Chaucerian footprint is a contributing factor to the decision for this work to leave Chaucer’s work in the able hands of others. Not only is there significant existing scholarship, but to include Chaucer’s treatment of dream vision in a way that fairly represents Chaucer’s range of texts would have devoted undue attention to a single author. For editions, see Helen Phillips and Nick Havely, eds, *Chaucer’s Dream Poetry* (London: Longman, 1997) and William A. Quinn, ed., *Chaucer’s Dream Visions and Shorter Poems* (New York: Garland, 1999).

‘sense-making’ at work, with the aid of cognitive theories from both medieval and contemporary thinkers.

This diachronic approach to cognitive criticism, as well, means to address an often overlooked, implicit bias—one that attributes superior knowledge to ‘modern’ understanding—while emphasising the historical contingency of cognition. Whatever is meant by ‘understanding’ and whatever by the ‘self’ at any given moment, the two are entangled. This has significant import for narrative and its structure. Narrative’s sense-making is always inflected by thinking about what in fact is a ‘thinking self’, raising the question of whether the mentalities of medieval and contemporary people either are or are not comparable on this basis. But cognitive criticism can instead opt to observe the shape of this interlacing by contrasting views of thinking and the self over time. The popular American historian Barbara Tuchman once memorably described the medieval era as a ‘distant mirror’—it is an apt description of the doubling made more visible at the scale of millennia.²⁰ Medieval English narrative, when its alterity is recognised and appreciated, affords readers glimpses of their own cognitive processes, and the effect of habitual patterns of thought—conceptual frameworks embedded in culture—that aid or hinder them in making sense out of narratives from other times and places.

If still it seems anachronistic to some readers to apply a cognitive lens to medieval texts, it is worth specifying at the outset the use to which such a lens will be put. As mentioned above, contemporary cognitive theory is rooted in its own time, and so its direct application in the following pages will be primarily in reference to the operations of a contemporary reader in contact with these texts. Developing a framework for contemporary reception will allow comparisons with medieval perspectives, while making explicit the habits of mind, the interpretative scripts, that we unthinkingly reach for in hermeneutically scaffolding a text. (It is perhaps underappreciated still that the medieval period had its own cognitive researchers and literary theorists, whose work can seem at times strikingly prescient and yet strangely untethered from the kind of empirical ‘grounds’ we might take for granted.) While it can be difficult to navigate gaps in the literary record, the sense-making processes on view in OE and ME narrative can also be cast into relief by cultural and temporal

²⁰ ‘The interval of 600 years permits what is significant in human character to stand out’, proposed Barbara Tuchman of the fourteenth century in her foreword to *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), xiv.

discontinuities. Literary works, in this light, can provide unique insight into substantially different cognitive structures and conceptual *schemata*. More than thirty years ago, Malcolm Godden's 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', with its exploratory examination of how Anglo-Saxons and their neighbours conceived of perception, cognition, memory, emotion, and other mental states and processes, heralded a cognitive turn in Old English.²¹ More recently, researchers have pushed forward on several fronts. To point to just three instances, Leslie Lockett's welcome study of the plurality of vernacular Anglo-Saxon psychologies has foregrounded a phenomenology of mental experience free of Cartesian duality; nonetheless, though deeply embodied, these conceptions of self also admit as experiential phenomena such marvels as soul-flight.²² Antonina Harbus has specifically noted the need for intercultural, diachronic analyses of 'mind schemas' in OE texts, so that we can better situate any literary expression of self within its likely temporal and cultural contexts.²³ With regard to the Anglo-Saxon fascination with mental interiority and subjective experience, Britt Mize has proposed a larger project: the narrative fashioning of a network of subjectivities, and their relationships with each other.²⁴

This sort of study offers rich correspondences with, for instance, research into embodied cognition. For example, the Centre for Medical Humanities in Durham is the home of an extensive, active interdisciplinary project called 'Hearing the Voice', which enriches the neuroscientific understanding of verbal auditory hallucination with the phenomenon's varied interpretation within social, cultural, and historical contexts. Recuperating the dynamism and potency of this strikingly persistent, influential means of communication—much of which is lost when derogated by the term 'hallucination'—has significant relevance for contemporary medical care and its practitioners. Situating these voices on a spectrum that includes self-talk, it becomes apparent that in addition to negative experiences, hearing voices can offer companionship, advice, and deliberative dialogue. In this view, 'hearing voices' is less in need of medical intervention than the underlying emotional upset,

²¹ Malcolm Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 271–85.

²² Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

²³ Antonina Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), 16.

²⁴ Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

anxiety, and fear they may convey. Literary and other means of testimony are critical to this discussion because of course they and their influence exist whether or not researchers and practitioners choose to take them into account. Contemporary voice-hearers search out medieval responses to voice-hearing which are not reflexively framed by diagnosis of pathology or delusion, offer strategies for coping, or even identify beneficial or valorising aspects of the experience.

Similarly, medieval dreams and visions, understood as narrative about the communication of the marvellous, decentres much of what we might consider central to dream: the brain's role, post-Freudian associations with unconscious problem-solving, even the notion that a dream is a production of the person dreaming. The medieval dream-vision worthy of being recounted is typically conceived of as a divine message; a visitation; proof of another, superior reality. Even if the dream provokes a fearful awe, it remains an affirmation for the person who views it to have been chosen as the mouthpiece for God's message. (Because of the peril of this concomitant self-esteem inflation, leading to the sin of pride, monks were often discouraged from paying much attention to dreams; the practice of discernment, often guided by a superior, encompassed the vetting of dreams, which were just another way the devil could entrap unwary monks through their senses.) Trained to pay close attention to the personal disclosures of first-person narrative, contemporary readers may not recognise the extent to which medieval dream-vision narrative is a form of public address, with ineluctable social impact. This necessitates a reorganisation of narrative expectation: in expressing a *social* crisis felt and voiced by an individual, these narratives may provide the biography of a fictive, exemplary 'social body' with a first-person voice. As is often seen with saints' lives, personal biography may mingle with textual and oral material—not simply to fill in a paint-by-numbers portrait of saintliness, as is often imagined in the former case, but to respond to the needs and expectations of the surrounding community. Speaking of the Ricardian era's 'public poetry', Anne Middleton has argued that 'it is poetry defined by a constant relation of speaker to audience within an ideally conceived worldly community, a relation which has become the poetic subject'.²⁵ If visionary narrative in particular is an attempt to articulate this social imaginary, its communal affect and emotion (just as

²⁵ Anne Middleton, 'The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II', *Speculum* 53/1 (1978), 94–114, 95.

Middleton has argued of public poetry), this narrative recourse to the marvels of dream and vision must also be a way of picturing a set of desired relationships.

The eponymous visionary presence of *The Dream of the Rood*, for instance, speaks from out of a Saxon past, not simply commemorating but restaging the conversion of a ‘battle-tree’ (in the Old English kenning for ‘warrior’) invited to Christ’s war band. This is the divine promise that the envelope’s narrator, a monk, meditates on concerning the impending second coming of Christ, adding that many of his friends have left this world already. Perhaps his isolation is a consequence of outbreaks of the plague or Viking attack, both of which decimated monastery communities and were taken as signs of Doomsday. Read on the social plane, with the monk speaking for his brothers, the poem connects the small company left after Christ’s crucifixion, awaiting the resurrection, with a diminished but vital monastic presence in his own time. The St Guðlac poems seem to speak to later monastic audiences as well, offering a series of visionary experiences, many disturbing, on the theme of the founding anchorite’s isolation, perseverance, and deliverance. Where in Guðlac’s *Life*, the demons who haunt the air around the fens are ancient, disobedient angels cast down from heaven, in the poem ‘Guðlac A’ their antagonism is represented as seated in the land, the forests and groves, and their attacks mirror those of hostile bands. ‘Guðlac B’, in contrast, dealing with the saint’s final days, figures the trauma of exile from homeland through the saint’s soul preparing to leave the body—about to return to its true home in heaven. What is envisioned by the poem, through its evocation of an antique style, is a reversal of the fatalism of the lordless retainer, and of a cultural narrative of dispossession.

From these three OE poems, a spectrum of envisioned environments emerges, from the singular dream-vision, to visionary experiences embedded in the waking world, to lived experience narratively glossed as visionary. It seems important to retain the inclusiveness of the Anglo-Saxon thought-world with regard to cognitive experiences that contemporary readers are much more apt to psychologise, not least because this tendency toward a perceptual equivalency will persist: the notion that there is an interpretable reality, even truth, to visionary experience underlies later ME narrative experiments. While *St Erkenwald* does not explicitly invoke the dream-vision frame, like ‘Guðlac A’ it is nonetheless a visionary production, featuring a time-hopping London and the marvel of the righteous

pagan's tomb discovered beneath the floor of St Paul's Cathedral. Its riddling relationship to the social imaginary of its day has only recently begun to be explored. The *Pearl* poem's desired relationship would appear to be evident—after all, the poet recounts a dreamed reunion with someone they seem to have been parted from in life. But that central relationship is resituated within its varied visionary landscapes, the protagonist's interactions there portraying distinct levels of human understanding. The sprawling interests of *Piers Plowman* permit no concise summary, but certainly one elusive relationship, the narrator's with Piers himself, reappears throughout. The imagined renewal of an English church is seen through the eyes of a clerically-minded serial visionary, and once again efforts to address the stresses and fractures in the social order take shape in the envisioned landscapes.

To inspect more closely the workings of these narratives, especially with regard to the construction of the mental space for the marvellous and visionary, the following chapters make use of a few theoretical concepts from cognitive narratology. 'Cognitive' here is used in a broad sense to refer to the mind's interactions with narrative, and 'how a culture's narrative practices are geared on to humans' always-situated mental states, capacities, and proclivities', as David Herman has written.²⁶ Another way to describe cognitive narratology is as the study of sense-making: that is, how narrative helps organise information about events in ways that aid the communication of that information. This is but one step, if that, removed from medieval authors' hermeneutic approach to dreams—which is always also about the circumstances of a dream, how it happens, as well as its veiled content. Before plunging into the texts, it may be helpful to rehearse a few of these narratological concepts so that they will be familiar later. There are two caveats worth mentioning first: inasmuch as medieval poetry expresses its own ages' understanding of narrative form and structure, and *that* is the subject of interest, there can be no question of overwriting these texts with 'the newest thinking'. But because cognitive narratology permits scholars to delimit the area of inquiry to cognition, and to ask more precise questions about the function of narrative operations, it is an especially germane field when we ask what is going on when we are reading an envisioned narrative. Additionally, this methodological

²⁶ 3.1, paragraph 6, David Herman, 'Cognitive Narratology' rev. version; uploaded 22 September 2013, in *the living handbook of narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn, *et al.* (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2013) <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de>>.

framework can at least act as a stable mediating structure for contemporary readers as they move between texts produced centuries apart, and in different states of English.

A crucial concept, then, for discussing the sometimes counterfactual, or chimerical, relationships found in envisioned environments specifically is the blending of mental spaces. Our mental operations are profoundly relational and yet our resources are limited: everything we can think of is embedded in a network of relationships of varying saliency. Our minds profit from various strategies that reduce the workload on working memory.²⁷ Gilles Fauconnier has proposed that our minds build and keep cognitive models ‘backstage’, out of conscious awareness, but which allow us to quickly import relevant contextual information as we navigate different spaces.²⁸ In texts, these models can be triggered by linguistic cues; ‘space builders’, frequently in the form of brief prepositional phrases, act as prompts. ‘Into the restaurant’ generates a host of conceptual associations and likely patterns of behaviour that are quite different from ‘out of the plane’. In the first instance, there is no need to slow the narrative to explain the presence of a fork, a waiter, or a wobbly table. The specificity of these mental spaces helps us characterise an environment speedily from a particular perspective, if not necessarily fully. But they can also be blended, as happens often in poetry.

In the simplest formulation, there is a base or reference space, a contrasting belief or target space, and a connector that sets forth some element of identity between the two. So, in *The Dream of the Rood*, as is described in the first chapter, an Anglo-Saxon cultural viewpoint is repeatedly fused with Christian eschatology, through the connective figure of the rood-tree. A singular property of a blended mental space is its productive hybridity: it is structured by a conceptual ambivalence that persistently solicits alternate readings. When the gallows-tree is blended with the salvific Christian cross, for example, the gallows is not effaced and replaced. It retains its grimly bloodstained, earthly shadow, and this aspect provokes the dreamer’s terror at the rood’s appearance. A mental space can

²⁷ It has long been remarked that simply walking through a doorway affects memory. The ‘event horizon model’ proposes that changes of place prompt the mind to ‘end’ an event’s sequence, an effect observed in virtual and imagined environments as well. See Gabriel A. Radvansky, ‘Across the Event Horizon’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 21/4 (2012), 269–72.

²⁸ This process is laid out at length in Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994, 1998), and in Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic, 2002). For a briefer, more recent discussion, see Fauconnier, ‘Mental Spaces, Language Modalities, and Conceptual Integration’, in *The New Psychology of Language: Cognitive and Functional Approaches to Language Structure*, Classic edn, 1, ed. Michael Tomasello (NY: Psychology Press, 2014), 230–57.

also, through repeated encounters, be consolidated in long-term memory, and act as a frame in which subsidiary mental spaces function. Medieval narratives may take a greater or lesser interest in jousting, for instance, but it is evident that these tournaments are so widely and well understood that attention can instead be directed to judging the performance of one or two participants, and their adherence to jousting's internal 'scripts'.

One of the most fascinating negotiations in literature is an author's judgement of a reader's participation in constituting the text. Monastic writers, especially when writing for other monks, make constant implicit references to the 'frames' provided by guiding, authoritative figures and texts as an aid in locating their subject. Chrétien de Troyes, writing in the late twelfth century, is remarkable for interjecting his thoughts on this topic into his tales, cutting a description short because surely everyone has heard enough of this sort of thing before. (At this late date, the reader must check a lively resentment because scenes of medieval life do not populate themselves for us from personal experience.) On the other hand, the travelogue genre is stuffed with explanatory, contextual material—admittedly, much of it invented—because the assumption is that these experiences are unfamiliar and require interpretation. Finally, as Fauconnier suggests, there is another wrinkle: mental spaces, as the work of cognitive processes not apparent to consciousness, are like the ocean (allegedly) to fish, all around yet hard to see. In the absence of explicit connections, literary criticism also must make these kinds of judgements, arguing not only that the author or readers knew a framing biblical parable or that a *topos* was current in a community or culture, but that there might be sociocultural habits of thought, present in levels from textual collocations to discourse, that structure narrative as well.

If we cannot supply an 'Anglo-Saxon mind'—and it is worth remembering that there were many other minds about, not just those of Angles and Saxons—to make sense of these narratives, we can still look for ways of reading them that leave space for such minds: methods that identify different cognitive styles, test hermeneutic shortcuts, and expose any 'presentist' biases. Cognitive narratology is deeply indebted to research into what is known as enactivist cognition, which situates cognitive functions as skilful, coordinated interactions between an organism and its environment. Enactivism is linked with embedded, embodied, and extended cognition (known more colloquially as the 'four

Es').²⁹ All decentre, in some way, a model in which the brain is the location, source, and core of cognition. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch in *The Embodied Mind* (1993) sought to refocus attention on cognition as 'skilful', or adaptive, interactions between a purposive, embodied being and its environment—building upon earlier work by James Gibson in the area of ecological psychology and exploring the phenomenological aspect of such a 'world'. Just as the philosopher Merleau-Ponty once described vision as 'palpation with the look', a contemporary theorist in enactive cognition, Alva Noë, has likened perception to a blind person tapping their way through the world, to emphasize that some kind of activity underpins 'passive' perception, and that it is through a succession of sensory explorations that we perceive with the richness we are conscious of.³⁰ These explorations provide perspective shifts that can stitch together the front and back of an object for us, or be imperceptibly minute: Andy Clark has discussed the way that eye saccades (the eye's tiny 'hops') piece together seemingly unitary information such as colour and that colour's location.³¹

While enactivism focuses on the role of pattern- or structure-driven *acts* of cognition, rather than mentally represented information, embedded cognition examines the reciprocal, dependent couplings between the body and the world in which bodies live. Embodied cognition, with its interest in biology beyond neurons, pushes back against the caricature of the body as simply life support for the brain. Extended cognition considers the body and its environments (physical, cultural, societal) as a cognitive system; not only can information can be understood to reside 'outside the head' but environmental features can play (in part) a role 'driving cognitive processes'.³² Mark Rowlands has observed that as a general rule the 'four Es' tend to increase the role of action in cognition while diminishing the role of mimetic representation.³³ A key insight is this recognition that certain cognitive processes do not produce, maintain, or require a 'free-standing' representational model of the world built from sensory input. The stability and coherence of our visual perceptions, for instance, is not introduced after their capture on the film of the retina, then projected to the cinema of the

²⁹ Mark Rowlands, *The New Science of the Mind*, Kindle edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), loc. 51.

³⁰ Ch. VI: 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm' in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 134; Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 1.

³¹ Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, Kindle edn. (Oxford: OUP, 2008), loc. 563.

³² Andy Clark and David Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* 58 (1998), 10–23, 12.

³³ Rowlands, *New Science*, loc. 475.

‘mind’s eye’; sight borrows the structural patterns already embedded in what Gibson called, to point out its continuously pre-organised state, the ‘ambient optic array’³⁴. Size, distance, the relation between objects: all these cognitive permutations depend upon the viewer’s position and movement within the array, and indeed are discovered by the comparison of viewpoints rather than modelled computation. Thus, it is cognitively ‘cheaper’ to engage with the environment than to represent it—and often easier, consequently, to think ‘through’ a given environment about one that is not present to the senses (‘So, this salt shaker is my office. You want to turn left at the pat of butter’).

In terms of literary criticism, this research upends what might have seemed common-sense formulations of the power of mimesis to immerse the reader in a story. Immersion becomes a function of participatory acts of perception, rather than an exhaustive cataloguing of available percepts. This invites us to revisit the ludic contest of Old English riddling, and rethink the effects on a reader’s or listener’s engagement of withholding and defamiliarizing information. If environment and instrumentality are linked, then analysis of settings can reveal non-obvious affordances of the text—as will be seen in Chapter 2’s contrasting of the readings of the fens of *Beowulf* and the *Guðlac A* poem. Conversely, tools can be environmental features: for example, medieval texts can be ‘persons’ and ‘places’ in this sense, locations of and for cognitive acts. This has implications for attempts to ‘read’ classical personification and allegory in the Old and Middle English worked examples that follow.

For the purposes of this discussion, referencing the ‘four Es’ programme also offers this benefit: it forces little to no ‘updating’ or bracketing of medieval psychology. Rather, it permits a sustained, dialogic engagement with it. The enactivist presumption of purposeful, active perception (for example, Noë defines ‘flatness’ as primarily an assessment of the possibilities for easy movement) has correspondences with the Anglo-Saxon bias for action and instrumentalization, and how these impulses are directed through affordances of the narrative.³⁵ At the same time, as a phenomenological inquiry into experience it can accommodate disparate models of the self and modes of cognition. Rather than importing unneeded assumptions about these models’ ‘rightness’ or accuracy, the four Es model asks us to attend to the embodied experience of an environment, and to

³⁴ See Ch. 5 ‘The Ambient Optic Array’ in James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 2015/1979), 58–84.

³⁵ Noë, *Action*, 105.

observe how these experiences are organised to aid understanding. Finally, the enactivist conception of environment as that with which a being can interact and know is capacious enough to include social, spiritual, and physical instances, and this too has its analogue in the interactive, layered reality formed by medieval syncretism.

A summary of the succeeding chapters will briefly preview the interaction of the study of envisioned objects and environments and a cognitive diachronic analysis, to demonstrate the way that this analysis conforms to the texts and is directed by their structure. The first chapter's discussion of *The Dream of the Rood* pivots on its central notion of conceptual blending to explore the lived trauma of Christian conversion: lingering conflicts with previous cultural practices and beliefs heightened anxiety, with Christ's return anticipated in people's lifetimes (*circa* 800 and then 1000 were considered likely candidates for Doomsday). This is the context for the dramatic rood-Christ relationship which recapitulates the retainer-and-lord dyad of Anglo-Saxon hierarchical social structure. It is not simply that the arrangement was near at hand, but that it responds to the need for salvation on the impending Judgement Day with an appeal to the most visceral emotional bond evident in OE literature. The rood's obedience is absolute, and because of the mutual dependency that underwrites the relationship, Christ is obligated to reward this with an invitation to his hall.

Joined to this narrative of dream-vision revelation is a form of discourse particularly suited to blended concepts: 'ludic' or riddling discourse is a form of verbal play built on the conceptual affordances of language. Riddles display an awareness not only of language as a web of overlapping signs and symbols, but of the conceptual frames that give words particular meaning. In narrative, ludic discourse both elicits and frustrates hermeneutical strategies, calling attention to the process of narration itself: the gap between the speaker's position and the listener's, and the activity that means to bridge it. Writing on *Beowulf*, David Herman described that narrative as a kind of 'instrument of mind', which captures the sense of a complex mechanism driven by the tension in its tightly-linked operations. Herman is thinking both of the narrative 'chunking' of units of experience into explicit, inexorable chains of cause-effect relationships³⁶ and the narrator's own questioning of this fateful pre-

³⁶ David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*, Kindle edn. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), loc. 2934–40.

Christian landscape, its social and ethical definitions and norms.³⁷ Similarly, the interplay between ludic and homiletic discourse in *The Dream of the Rood* introduces complications that mark out moments in a blend of pagan and salvation history—reframing pagan understanding as having arisen within God’s creation, and thus containing its own discernible truth.

Two related themes arise in this chapter and persist throughout the subsequent investigations: the first, the present’s ongoing contest with the cultural past, will take clearer shape in the recuperative efforts of the ‘righteous pagan’ motif but it emerges here in the (up-)rootedness of the rood. As personification, the rood famously speaks for itself in a way that the biblical Cross nowhere else does, and, while it is clothed, it is difficult to consider it representing a specific abstraction. The rood embodies, more than anything, a natural process: the grafting that creates this new hybrid is performed in Christ’s mounting of the English rood. The second theme concerns the narration of a fundamental asymmetry between two kinds of mental spaces—that is, an extradiegetic, comprehensively referential mental space (the divine or God’s-eye perspective) and its intradiegetic intrusion into a local, discrete mental space. Visionary narrative does not seek to imitate but rather to *intimate* the existence of that superordinate, unitary space with its hermeneutic process—open-ended, iterative, association-accumulating. Thus, a momentary vision of the ordered universe in *The Dream of the Rood* is twice glossed with categorically compartmented, temporally ‘chunked’ perceptions, the rood describing the crucifixion and its import on one level, while the narrator describes the rood and its story’s import on another.

Readers of St Guðlac’s life tend to focus more on his vision of hell than his settling in the fens of East Anglia. But the second chapter takes a closer look at the embedding of Guðlac’s visions in his environment—unlike the singular revelation of *The Dream of the Rood*, the hagiographic tradition permits the narration of several of Guðlac’s spiritual encounters *in situ*. Whether each of the Guðlac texts establish (or do not) a conceptual link between the saint and the fens where his visions take place, their envisioned environments play distinct roles in framing and channelling the narrative. Thinking through this environment—the *Life of St Guðlac*’s local boatmen and obstreperous spirits, island hillocks and reeds, expanses of inky water—is a way of thinking through its local saint, his

³⁷ Herman, *Storytelling*, loc. 3135.

privations and torments, but also the claims of the texts to the place. A local saint's *vita* is an act of foundation—the monks of Crowland Abbey would rely upon the OE *Life of St Guðlac* as spiritual guide, history, and deed to their land. Yet, though there are multiple Guðlacs—the *Life*, and the 'A' and 'B' Guðlac poems all offer different perspectives on the saint—scholarship often seems to assert a consistent identity based on 'the' historical saint's existence. Perhaps this reading is influenced as well by hagiographic convergence on the model of Christ's life; citing Pliny on grammar, Gregory of Tours once wrote that it was more accurate to speak of a singular 'Life of the Fathers' as there was categorically only one kind of bodily life.³⁸ While acknowledging this interpretative stance, an enactivist reading shifts attention to the ways that the Guðlac texts do or do not diverge from it in their depictions of holiness in the world. Local saints' cults, after all, were not stocked with classical grammarians and theologians, but with people for whom a saint's coincidence with locale mattered deeply.

Because the monk Felix who wrote the *Vita sancti Guðlaci* followed Evagrius's *Vita Antonii* closely as a model, his moments of divergence are notable, none more so than the replacement of Anthony's desert by Anglian fens. In the *Life*, Guðlac's acts of perception, his ability to recognise and withstand demonic assault in that place, are celebrated, just as any battle and its location were memorialised. But surprisingly, the poem known as *Guðlac A* dispenses with the fens in favour of a hill overlooking a green plain. In *Guðlac B*, the contested site becomes the saint's body during a final, fatal illness. In each instance, interwoven with reports on physical settings are cultural understandings: from the status of the fens and groves as refuge for heathen 'spirits' to the bodily suffering tended to by a faithful servant, whose ministrations could recall that of Wiglaf for Beowulf in his last days, or that of an oblate for his monastic mentor. Though the Guðlac texts generally share the preoccupation of *The Dream of the Rood* with an impending judgement, absent is any concern with a 'righteous pagan'. Instead, the battle is often a dispelling of a kind of spiritual atavism, or recidivism. As will be discussed, Guðlac's adoption by the monks of Crowland as their abbey's spiritual founder and protector had legal ramifications; Crowland Abbey had (as not a few

³⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Lives and Miracles*, ed. and trans. by Giselle de Nie, *Dumbarton Oaks* 39 (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2015), 2/3.

monasteries did) contentious relations with the people of their surrounding communities. Guðlac's *Life* provided both a testament to the gift of the land upon which the abbey stood, and a model for religious resistance to what was perceived as antagonistic persecution.

The employment of memory in the medieval era, Mary Carruthers has proposed, was 'not to provide an accurate trace of things past, but to provide materials for creative thinking'.³⁹ This artisanal approach to memory's fabrication is illustrated in the third chapter, on the Middle English poem about the patron saint of London, St Erkenwald. Notably, the poem reverses the hagiographic practice discussed above, in which the author of a saint's *Life* might fill any biographical holes with saintly doings from elsewhere: this Erkenwald story recounts a marvellous event that all other biographical sources leave unmentioned. The thrill of *St Erkenwald* is this intrusion of the marvellous into workaday fourteenth-century London without the narrative trappings of dream-vision. When the bishop prays for a sign, for a clarifying revelation, instead of a dream he is presented with a revived pagan's corpse visible as well to the clamouring public. The poem knowingly alternates elements and motifs of legend, 'crafty cronecles', and hagiographic narratives in a fashion that recalls Gilles Fauconnier's blending of 'mental spaces'.⁴⁰ For one critic, it is an 'intentional hybrid, an *inventio* which describes the discovery, incorruptibility, and honouring not of a Christian martyr or confessor, but of a pagan judge'.⁴¹ The pagan judge, whose existence would seem to owe much to the legend of the emperor Trajan's posthumous salvation by Gregory the Great, would have had another, more proximate association: the controversial theologian John Wyclif. Without naming Wyclif, the narrative stages, with the aid of a dialogue between the prototypic figures of St Erkenwald and the pagan but upright judge, an interrogation of English heresy and the role of secular power.

This blending of genres is augmented by a sometimes-bewildering accretion of temporal spaces within a geographic centre, St Paul's Cathedral. The *Erkenwald* poem's remarkable shuttling about in time reflects its era's lively interest in time as a measurement (of movement or physical change). For polymaths such as Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1170–1253), John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308), and

³⁹ Mary Carruthers and Yadin Dudai, 'The Janus face of Mnemosyne', *Nature*, 434 (2005), 567.

⁴⁰ See Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces*, and Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*.

⁴¹ T. McAlindon, 'Hagiography into Art: A Study of "St. Erkenwald"', *Studies in Philology* 67/4 (1970), 472–94, 475.

Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1290–1349), time’s physical operations could be related to biblical prophecy, free will, and predestination. Bradwardine in particular inveighed against ‘modern’ Pelagians in a way that mirrors the *St Erkenwald* poem’s performance of history’s persistence in the current day. The *St Erkenwald* poet’s spatial organisation of time provides an architecture that is violated by his prototypic ‘persons’; St Erkenwald did not rebuild St Paul’s and has no biographical place in the anachronistically ‘modern’ London of the poem. The ancient rood also had a pre-Christian biography and a history (as the Cross) of ‘discovery’, a conceptual fusion that can be seen in the pagan judge. But while *The Dream of the Rood* deploys a dream-vision frame to explain its temporal violation, in *St Erkenwald*’s envisioned environment history is influentially underfoot.

Innovative approaches to personification, departing from the figures of classical rhetoric, are a feature of alliterative Middle English poetry, as will be seen as well in *Pearl* and in *Piers Plowman*. If we revisit Carruthers’ notion of mnemonic craft, we can see this Erkenwald as a made-to-fit exemplar. Of the saints and bishops and shrines associated with London, Erkenwald is the most salient specific figure, while as bishop he can categorically replace Gregory, bishop of Rome, from the Trajan tale. As a contemporary analogue for this kind of substitution, it may be useful to think of prototype theory’s ‘basic-level’ categories. George Lakoff illustrates this by comparing ‘chair’ and ‘furniture’, pointing out that ‘chair’ occupies a middle ground between abstraction and lived human experience.⁴² ‘Furniture’ summons no visual expression, no set of movements. So, just as any given chair can point iconically to the superordinate category of furniture, this personification of St Erkenwald can pivot between the papacy and ‘bishop of London’, a timeless spiritual category that comprehends the historical Erkenwald. The poem’s Erkenwald is perfectly ‘placed’ then to respond to its era’s dissensions—the figure recruits papal authority but in local dress to quash a heresy that is portrayed as having its roots in pagan English soil.

With the chapter on the *Pearl* and its multiple, dreamed settings, the question of an instigating trauma seems obvious: the narrator mourns the ‘loss’ of his pearl in a way that suggests death has claimed someone beloved. Yet the poem’s concerns, aired in dialogue between the pearl maiden and the dreamer, centre on such topics as obedience to God’s will, the divine economy, and heavenly

⁴² George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987/1990), 51.

status. While criticism remains fascinated with the role and provenance of the maiden, this chapter ponders the relevance of the three settings—garden, earthly paradise, celestial city—to what is being discussed in them. Building on previous scholarship that has noted links to herbals and lapidaries, the argument developed is that these specialised texts, specifically the information they contain, structure the virtual settings. (William Schofield pointed out the poem’s opening lines’ similarity to a lapidary entry in 1904.) These reified domains of knowledge, figured as environments the narrator can pass through and interact with, are given further texture by the narrator’s naïve focalisation of them. For those who know herbals, lapidaries, and apocalyptic lapidaries, the dreamer’s perpetual wrong-footedness in conversation is mirrored by his blindness, beyond the literal sense, to the signification of his surroundings. The world at every level is structured by, built upon, divine knowledge.

In fairness to the dreamer, his is an unstable frame of mind, a portrayal drawn out in embodied detail by the poet. His emotional distress is unfailingly located in the body and expressed through bodily sensation: ‘A deuely dele in my hert denned’ (51)—all of which he presents as signs of a spiritual crisis: ‘Þa3 kynde of Kryst me comfort kened | My wreched wille in wo ay wra3te’ (55–56). It is particularly fascinating, in an alliterative poem, to see the persistence of the Anglo-Saxon ‘hydraulic model’ of the feeling self: what Leslie Lockett describes as ‘dynamic changes of pressure and temperature in the chest cavity’.⁴³ Of course, by the time of the poem, this knowledge base also included classical humoral theory and Arabic medical research, though the physicality of feeling remained: ‘Emotions were understood’, writes Corinne Saunders, ‘as occurring through the movements of the vital spirit and natural heat, produced in the heart and travelling through the arteries.’⁴⁴ This embodied stance, when recognised, intensifies the narrator’s distress as not purely (in a contemporary sense) mental upset. This may, as well, be evidence of an aristocratic claim to an overall, heightened sensitivity.

‘From the time of its first appearance in print,’ writes Lynn Staley, ‘the Middle English *Pearl* has been seen as a kind of elaborately worked riddle that at once displays its own artistry and

⁴³ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 5.

⁴⁴ Corinne Saunders, ‘Mind, Body, and Affect in Arthurian Romance’, in *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington, and Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015), 31–46, 33–34.

conceals—to us at least—the object of its praise and scrutiny.’⁴⁵ Just as the identity of the ‘prototypical’ pagan judge of the *St Erkenwald* poem is unsolvable in a biographical sense—instead, the judge becomes an assembly of members of an ‘upright pagan’ category—the *Pearl* maiden’s display of multiplicity (pearl, child, bride, queen, psychopomp) is about tracing those associations. The aim of this kind of puzzle, as with the OE riddle’s living objects, is not necessarily to elicit a definitive solution but to let play out in language the mutability of experience, the transformations worked upon the word ‘pearl’ reflecting the path walked by the dreamer’s mind. Present in the poem’s formal structure, too, is this apparent repetition; closing and opening lines of stanzas seem to echo each other, but in the way of two clasps of a hinge joining distinct portraits.

The final chapter, as with Spearing’s addressing of medieval dream poetry, can only be an essay, an attempt to sketch out the impact, in Langland’s hands, of visionary narrative presented as a thought process. The world of *Piers Plowman*, spanning much of the fourteenth century, is obtrusively focalised by a dream-addled but contentious narrator on a pilgrimage to find where Truth resides. The result is a poem that contains a ‘searching investigation of received epistemologies, whether authoritative, merely banal, or outright complacent; a sustained attack on institutionalised formulations and reifications; an inquiry into the seemingly coherent “imaginary” of social and religious experience’.⁴⁶ Like the *St Erkenwald* and *Pearl* poems, *Piers Plowman* participates in a sustained conversation with its cultural moment, a conversation which, following the twelfth-century arrival of the philosophy and science of Greek and Arab thinkers, is markedly interested in not just what can be known, but how it can be known. Langland traverses scales and registers, from Will’s modelling of confessional introspection through interactions with his mental faculties, to his movements within Langland’s personification-laden social imaginary, where the figure of Piers Plowman tearing his ‘pardon’ is given individual, social, and intercultural ramification. The persistence of the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary introduced in *The Dream of the Rood* is evidenced in

⁴⁵ In footnotes, Staley traces currents in *Pearl* criticism, from Sir Israel Gollancz’s elegy-centred 1891 collection *Pearl: An English Poem of the XIVth Century*, to allegorical readings such as W. H. Shofield’s ‘The Nature and Fabric of the *Pearl*’, *PMLA* 19 (1904), 154–215; and to essays by Elizabeth Salter, A. C. Spearing, and Derek Pearsall on the poem considered as part of the alliterative revival—Lynn Staley, ‘*Pearl* and the Contingencies of Love and Piety’, in *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. by David Aers (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 83–114, 83.

⁴⁶ Nicolette Zeeman, ‘Piers Plowman in theory’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 214–29.

Langland's great, alliterative refashioning of it, featuring the warrior Christ become knight, a living tree as an object of meditation, and a Harrowing in which the Redeemer rescues not only pagan forefathers, but 'Saracens' as well.

Recognised in at least three (the A, B, and C) recensions produced over the course of decades, *Piers Plowman* substantially complicates any critical quest to resituate the poem in its social matrix—not least because the poem has itself been used as evidence of its society's composition. Nonetheless, responding to the poem's evolving concerns and shifting narrative strategies yields new insights into under-examined scenes while also revealing even more of the richness to its iterative, associative structure. Offering several perspectives on a crisis of intelligibility, the poem is remarkable for nominating literal 'Truth' as its object, and staging sequentially, as social interactions, the evaluation of the dreamer's revelations. 'Truth' for Langland, of course, would have been a far more capacious term—opposed to the false, certainly, but also comprising integrity and mutual obligation, with undertones of a God-promised ontological surety. In drawing attention to a population decimated by famine and plague, a permissive king and his court's predatory behaviour, the poem risks much. Silence on that one topic and chatter on others is the more frequent post-traumatic response, but for Langland as for Anglo-Saxon poets the apocalyptic means to communicate, to diagnose, to prompt correction. It is in this febrile, squabbling atmosphere that *Piers Plowman* first appears, hoping to forestall Truth's corrosion by a return to natural order.

Capitalism, to use a term not at-hand for Langland, has however begun to destabilise the mutual obligation of the three estates—and thus the entire social imaginary's set of norms and expectations, in which morality, social organisation, and economics cooperated. The contentiousness of rising wages for the depleted workforce—almost certainly reflected in the *Pearl* poem's elaboration of the divine economy—appears also in Piers' remorsefully accepting Hunger's aid in whipping his half-acre's tenants into shape. The clergy as well are indicted for their grasping ways, to a controversial degree, at several instances. Counterpoised to this mercenary attitude is Will's vision of the Tree of Charity, a vision of natural order augmented rhetorically by breezes and blossoms, and braces for fruit-heavy branches. In Langland's view, the world is not suffering simply from a lack of charity, but from the failure to achieve a world-spanning Christendom in which such charity would be valorised;

the tree's branching thus activates an argument for the need for conversion of the Jewish and Muslim 'branches' of belief in God. If the Tree of Charity is Langland's most interpretable figure, inviting readings even of the seasons of its fruit, Langland's personifications Abraham and 'Spes' are only recently acquiring a similarly deserved complexity. Perhaps because they appear to be biblical figures, and exegetical readings seem to promote a collapsing identification, their relevance to Langland's 'present-day' social imaginary has been under-investigated, obscuring Langland's call throughout the text not for a military crusade but for a crusade of conversion.

Summing up Langland, C. S. Lewis once praised his achievement as rendering 'imaginable what was before only intelligible'.⁴⁷ As the bookend to envisioned environmental narrative in English literature since 700, however, Langland can be seen participating in a larger discourse, which was precisely to offer an imagined, riddling response to social crises of intelligibility. It is striking to observe the socially-configured interests of this kind of narrative (by contrast with the novel's elaborations of individual consciousness, for instance): if the narratorial 'I' appears, its individual aspect is distinctly less biographical and more purely a focalisation of perception. Yet a figured act of perception can possess agency, often more agency than the nominal protagonist. Perhaps most intriguingly, the more marvellous an act of perception, the more overtly it points to the social imaginary, rendering visible a form of group-level sense-making.

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: OUP, 1936), 159–61.

1. *The Anglo-Saxon Mind in The Dream of the Rood*

The Old English corpus, our gateway to the Anglo-Saxon thought-world, survives as a treasury of narrative divergence and difference. Containing King Hroðgar and the great hall Heorot, riddles sacred and eye-wateringly profane, and chanted medicinal charms, it affords unsettling perspectives on what we think we know about mind, narrative, and society. Dream-vision narrative in particular acts as a vehicle for insight into the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, performing in *The Dream of the Rood* that society's recasting of Christian proselytization within a monastic discourse. This chapter's primary focus is the intersection of dream-vision and ludic (*i.e.*, 'riddling') narrative in the vernacular, and the gap that the poem opens between dream-vision and riddle in Latin texts. But it also conducts a dialogue with past criticism on what *The Dream of the Rood* means to us. A cognitive approach to literature is inevitably concerned with questions of reception: with what people made then—and what people make now—of narratives. It seeks out the diversity that exists in sense-making styles. The enduring element in any reader's struggles with medieval literature—and in that rewarding sensation of time travel—is owed to their cognitive processes, their conceptual *schemata*, their ways of making sense out of narrative within their contemporary culture. Medieval texts, often by frustrating modern expectations, expose that otherwise invisible coordination between mind and society.

Literary study since mid-last-century increasingly has made use of hyphenated theoretic lenses to help bring particular dynamics into focus: a Lacanian-feminist critique comes together in Kristeva's recoveries of marginalised and abject bodies, a Lacanian-Marxist critique in Žižek's readings of the 'perverse' in culture and media, and an Africana-phenomenologist critique in Frantz Fanon's 'literature of combat'. For this study, cognitive literary criticism is joined with what might look like a historicist turn, but which is not quite. The term 'social imaginary' has grown popular in the social sciences, replacing more general references to 'culture' with a specific emphasis on embodied, yet group-level, sense-making. Cultural anthropologist Claudia Strauss thinks of the social imaginary as 'shared cognitive schemas'¹; philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of 'the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between

¹ Strauss, 'The Imaginary', 331.

them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations'.² This cognitive approach to the social imaginary engages strikingly with cognitive literary approaches, and their inspection of the ways a text acts as a series of prompts for the reader's mental processes. As mentioned in the introduction, the 'four Es' of cognition push back against the notion of the brain as a 'black box'; the mind's relation to the environment postulated by extended cognition appears congruent at points with the relationship between mind and the social imaginary's virtual environment.

The social imaginary is relevant directly to our understanding of Old English as a production of members of Anglo-Saxon society. The blessings and burdens of the surrounding community are shared experiences; even exile, though fewer live it, is not the unique experience it might appear. Old English texts privilege the commonly known and celebrate in a proverbial literature what Seamus Heaney calls 'earned wisdom', while mostly avoiding esotericism.³ Criticism that is conspicuously attuned to the first-person reports of an individual consciousness will fail to appreciate the extent to which first-person focalisation reports instead on the social whole. The realisation that any individual Anglo-Saxon's life was embedded in a collective set of social relationships calls for culturally-specific, diachronic analyses of 'mind schemas' in OE texts, as Antonina Harbus has remarked.⁴ At the same time as the OE corpus expresses its society's valorisation of purposeful cohesion (and anxiety at the prospect of dissension), it also conducts a probing inquiry into how its members act in society: perception, cognition, memory, and emotion are topics of persistent interest, as Malcolm Godden's essay 'Anglo-Saxons on the mind' illustrates. On the other hand, OE cognition is embodied, phenomenologically, in terms that maintain a mainly literary presence now, conflicting as they do with post-Freudian and neurobiological frames. It takes sustained effort, as demonstrated in Leslie Lockett's study of vernacular Anglo-Saxon psychologies, to reconnect hearts boiling over with the systemic operations of the self.⁵

² Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

³ From the 'Introduction', Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, Kindle edn, (New York: Norton, 2000/2001), loc. 347.

⁴ Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 16.

⁵ Lockett's emphasis on contrasting vernacular and Latin concepts corrects any impression from Godden's essay that all Anglo-Saxons were debating the merits of two major currents of classical psychology, cf. *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*.

One of the most intriguing intersections of literary cultures is signalled by the meeting of Anglo-Saxon discourse (praise poetry celebrating deeds, riddling) with Christian monastic discourse (didactic, homiletic, also riddling) in various of pre-Conquest texts. This fusion of genres derives, on a more basic level, from the interaction of the conceptual *schemata* structuring the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary with those organising patristic Christian thought. To use Gilles Fauconnier's terminology, this bottom-up blending of genres is a consequence of the blending of mental spaces—'backstage' cognitive models, triggered by linguistic cues, that enable a person's working memory to move easily between perspectives and focal points. In contrast to studies of literary transmission, we can think of Anglo-Saxon conceptual models as the base or reference space, and patristic texts as providing the contrasting beliefs or target spaces, with a connector between these two that proposes a new basis of identity. To provide examples for all this, 'in the Newcastle of 1965', 'in my dream', or even 'in theory', are explicit space-builders. Note that 'In my dream I saw a tree' does not seek to define that dream-space *per se*—instead, it activates a reader's conceptual *schemata* regarding dreams. What is being asserted is the intratextual identity of the dreaming-I with the narrator-I via a shared capacity for sight. 'In my dream, I heard a tree talk' furthers this by presenting a blended space where trees and the human capacity for speech overlap.⁶ Quite literally, this is the function of the eponymous figure from *The Dream of the Rood*—what is even more remarkable is the extent to which the poem demonstrates an awareness of the human capacity for conceptual hybridity, and proposes the rood very much as a catalytic linking element.

As Fauconnier mentions, these mental spaces, as the product of cognitive processes not transparent to consciousness, usually go unremarked. For one thing, mental spaces can, through use, become consolidated in long-term memory, and act as frames in which subsidiary mental spaces function. But a signal can be the use of 'space builders', frequently, brief prepositional phrases, which act as prompts for a new mental space. The riddles of Anglo-Saxon ludic discourse display an unusual awareness of how language can trigger this kind of blending. While they solicit a play of linguistic contexts and perspectives, more complex interactions between blended spaces emerge from the

⁶ For an extensive treatment, see Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces*; and Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*. For a briefer, more recent discussion, see Fauconnier, 'Mental Spaces, Language Modalities, and Conceptual Integration', 230–57.

Anglo-Saxon ‘gamification’ of narrative. While the heroic warrior-Christ of OE literature has attracted substantial critical attention, less study has been given to the experimental narrative strategies with which such a figure was deployed. Another remarkable figure, the talking rood, has been examined as evidence for or against the transmission of talking objects (*prosopopoeia*) from Latin riddles, with comparatively less attention paid to the poem’s narrative structure: the contest between reader and riddling text that frames its drama, or the way its first-person focalisation of blended mental spaces invokes an Anglo-Saxon social imaginary. An exemplary exception is Michael Bintley’s ‘*Brungen of Bearwe: Ploughing Common Furrows in Exeter Book Riddle 21, The Dream of the Rood, and the Æcerbot Charm*’, which anticipates this study’s interest in both ludic narratives and in conceptual blending.⁷ Bintley points to suggestions of agrarian practice and ritual across these texts to propose that they each preserve ‘elements of religious beliefs pre-dating the Anglo-Saxon conversion that subsequently became inculturated into the Latin liturgy underpinning later Old English poetry’.⁸ But it is Bintley’s notice of a shared ideology, a kind of symbolic vocabulary, that overlaps with the social imaginary mentioned above: manufactured wooden tools are put in the service of sustenance and regeneration, considered on earthly and spiritual levels.

To recognise the role of ludic discourse in blending mental spaces is by no means to assign all OE poetry the status of more or less elaborate riddles. OE literature features both ‘narrative games foregrounding *ludus*’ (the more precise term for structured entertainment employing narrative, such as riddles) and ‘playful narratives foregrounding *ludus*’ (entertaining stories marked by structural patterning and rules), to draw on Marie-Laure Ryan’s distinction.⁹ When biblical narrative made its striking entry into Old English, it was at times in the form of this latter ‘ludic narrative’. After all, the setting for Christianity lay either in eschatological time or in a biblical landscape—remote in geographic, historical, and sociocultural senses from Anglo-Saxon audiences. Michael Drout has suggested taking a ‘Darwinian’ approach to analysis of the migrations of narratives between

⁷ Michael Bintley’s ‘*Brungen of Bearwe: Ploughing Common Furrows in Exeter Book Riddle 21, The Dream of the Rood, and the Æcerbot Charm*’, in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 144–57.

⁸ Bintley, ‘*Brungen of Bearwe*’, 144.

⁹ Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Narrative, Games and Play’, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2005), 354–56.

languages and cultures. Of particular interest is Drout's notion that when cultures share ideas, a new adaptive landscape is formed, filled with 'empty' niches that encourage diversification.¹⁰ Within homiletic discourse, this clash of social imaginaries is often depicted often as the sweeping away of false beliefs by Christianity's truth; John Blair quotes the seventh-century abbot Aldhelm's rejoicing 'to see fine churches going up where previously the "crude pillars (*ermula cruda*) of the [...] foul snake and stag were worshiped with coarse stupidity in profane shrines"'.¹¹ Yet evidence of a parallel discourse from OE texts such as *The Dream of the Rood* (and its companion Vercelli Book poems) suggests a more pragmatic *modus vivendi* with the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, one that sought to enlist its conceptual structures in the communicative tasks of conversion and religious instruction. Thus, the conceptual blending in *The Dream of the Rood*, according to Mark Turner, maps Christ to the rood (taking significant doctrinal liberties in so doing), while the dramatic rood-Christ relationship is framed by the Anglo-Saxon hierarchical social structure of retainer-lord.¹² (On the question of orthodoxy, Elaine Treharne writes that the Vercelli Book itself 'has been associated with Ælfric's derogation of the '*mycel gedwyld*' [great heresy] that circulated in Anglo-Saxon England before the spiritual remedy provided by his own *Catholic Homilies*'.)¹³ Christ's suffering becomes a backdrop to the rood's conflicted account of its struggle to obey its leader—not to fight its lord's enemies, an expectation of the social imaginary, but to let the crucifixion occur as planned, or even assist with it, in an imitative example of Christ's submission to God's will.¹⁴ In this instance, the dramatic power of the idealised, invented relationship between Christ and the rood, the conflict expressed, is an affordance of the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary. Rather than clearing away the 'crude pillars' of belief, the narrative appeals to the listener to magnify and elevate these elements within their previous conceptual *schemata*. In the poem's culmination, the obedient rood announces that just as Mary was elevated above all other women, '*Hwæt, me þa geweorþode wuldres ealdor | ofer holmwudu*' ('So,

¹⁰ Michael D. C. Drout, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 131.

¹¹ John Blair, 'Holy Beams: Anglo-Saxon Cult Sites and the Place-Name Element *Beam*' in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 190.

¹² Mark Turner, 'Double-scope Stories', in *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. David Herman (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2003), 117–42, esp. 130–31.

¹³ Treharne points interested readers to *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Kathryn Powell and Donald Scragg (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003); Treharne, 'The Form and Function of the Vercelli Book', in *Text, Image, Interpretation*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 258–59.

¹⁴ See Anne L. Klinck, 'Christ as Soldier and Servant in *The Dream of the Rood*', *Florilegium* 4 (1982), 109–116.

the prince of glory then raised me over all sea-wood' [the rood's shape suggesting a ship's mast], l. 90–91a).¹⁵ Correspondingly the 'joys of the mead hall', an Anglo-Saxon topos, are translated to God's heavenly kingdom, where the feast is eternal.

The transmission of this esoteric biblical knowledge was not a task that Anglo-Saxon scholars shrank from. They took up the work eagerly, Samantha Zacher argues, seeing themselves as participants in *translatio studii*, the transfer of knowledge as power, which would be reified in the great monasteries and scriptoria themselves.¹⁶ What is staggering is the extent of their hermeneutical enterprise, which would seek to fuse their social imaginary's history, and all its embedded social practices, with these biblical models, so that heroic saints would be recognised for their mental combat with despair, temptation, and death. When John D. Niles writes, of OE riddles in particular, that '[w]e are challenged to draw on all the resources of our imagination to resolve the problem posed by this alterity so as to enter the thought-world of the speaker,' he captures the way, in OE texts in general, mental spaces are structured by cognitive contest.¹⁷ Although OE riddles often took near-at-hand objects as their apparent subject, the format worked consistently to defamiliarize the ordinary, to find the 'miraculous in the mundane', as Patrick Murphy has said.¹⁸ This defamiliarization extends throughout the OE corpus: genre instability promotes a variety of hermeneutical strategies, competing conceptual *schemata* are activated, and an ambivalent language is deployed that joins disparate semantic fields.¹⁹

A scholarly consensus unusual for medieval literature has formed on this point—that the OE riddles are less about their solutions than in the mental gymnastics need to arrive there. One of the signal ways the Exeter Book's OE riddles differ from earlier Anglo-Latin *enigmata* is the Exeter collection's absence of solutions, which often feature as titles in the Latin texts. Craig Williamson has posited of riddle narratives that they 'force the riddle-solver to restructure his perceptual blocks in

¹⁵ This and all succeeding quotations from *The Dream of the Rood*, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by George Krapp, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 61–65. Modern English translations are my own unless otherwise noted. For more on the translation of 'holmwudu' in line 91a, see following discussion this chapter.

¹⁶ Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 87.

¹⁷ John D. Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 25.

¹⁸ Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 7.

¹⁹ Tiffany Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 27.

order to gain entry to a metaphorical truth'; so too do OE narratives of conversion and revelation.²⁰ But these metaphorical insights are often, paradoxically, arrived at through contemplation of the specific, everyday object, animal, or person. This doubled perspective is present even in the earlier Anglo-Latin *enigmata* of the abbot and bishop Aldhelm of Malmesbury, whose project, in Michael Lapidge's words, was 'to reveal the hidden links between all creation—animate and inanimate—and by means of an intricate web of interlocking themes and metaphors to lead the reader to contemplate God's Creation afresh'.²¹ While Aldhelm admired the late antique Latin riddles of Symphosius, when it came to the animals that would populate the Aldhelmian world, the abbot seems to have been determined to go his own way:

In Aldhelm's menagerie, we now find the leech, the silkworm, the water spider or pond-skater (as if to complement Symphosius's bookworm and spider); the crab, the ant-lion, and the locust (not the equally voracious weevil); the midge, the hornet, and the bee (Symphosius has only the fly); the mussel, the cuttlefish, and the sea fish (not the freshwater fish); the salamander and the devilish serpent (instead of the frog and viper); and the cock, the peacock, and the stork (cf. Symphosius's chicken and crane). In addition, Aldhelm includes the dove, the owl, the nightingale, the raven, the swallow, the ostrich, and the eagle (to Symphosius's crow), the sow (to the hog), the young ox (to the bull), the ram (to the goat), the beaver, the dog, the cat, and the weasel, as well as the camel, the elephant, and the lion (to the tigress); and since Symphosius had already included the centaur from Greek mythology and the legendary phoenix, Aldhelm took the Minotaur and the unicorn.²²

It would be understandably easy when faced with this encyclopaedic profusion to lose sight of 'hidden links between all creation' and to insist instead on the specificity of detail, but, especially with later OE riddles, those details can evoke a frame that resituates any solution within metaphor. Patrick Murphy calls it a metaphoric 'focus', and it seems reflexive in Anglo-Saxon thinking. Thus, Murphy suggests, Riddle 85's quiet speaker in a loud hall can literally be solved as a fish in a river, but it is hard to dispel the impression that, on another level, the 'body and soul' are implicated as well.²³ An analogous conceptualisation occurs in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (2.13, discussed more fully in the chapter on *St Erkenwald*) when a sparrow's flight in a hall is compared to the life of men. Due to the limited number of extant texts, the lacunæ within them, and our distance from their social imaginary, OE literature can seem less ludic than anarchic, a vast landscape of battling, unstable referents. Yet as Richard Payne reminds us, 'the very terseness of description that causes the modern

²⁰ Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1977), 25.

²¹ Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature: 600–899*, 1 (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 9.

²² Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book & the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series, Kindle edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) loc. 506.

²³ Murphy, *Unriddling* (19–21).

reader to regard the passages as strange and wonderful is in fact an allusiveness which testifies to their conventionality'.²⁴ The abruptness of changes of state that typify OE riddles persists as well in OE ludic narrative, frustrating those readers who are unused to such object impermanence; in the *Rune Poem*, an oak is an acorn for a line and a half, then a ship (possibly a ship's mast), and finally tested for a 'noble faith'.²⁵ This mode of assembly, based on an undisclosed unity, takes place in *The Dream of the Rood* as well, with its pillars of light, beams of wood, and kinds of crosses.

Ludic restructuring of 'perceptual blocks' draws attention to narrative's role in what has come to be called 'extended cognition'—as discussed in the introduction, this is a network model of cognition that attempts to take into account the mind's thinking in coordination with the world around it. Several strands of research unite in this field. The ethnographic cognitive scientist Edwin Hutchins studied what he called 'distributed cognition': formidably described as 'computation realized through the creation, transformation, and propagation of representational states', but which happily has a more vernacular history.²⁶ (One of Hutchins' more famous examples of distributed cognition at work is the ancient science of celestial navigation, which relies on the seafarer to contrast, mentally, points of view from different locations.) James Gibson's ecological approach to cognition decentres the human perspective—considered as an adaptive organism, the answer to the human being (its cognition and its perceptions) can be found in its evolutionary environment, in particular what Gibson calls the 'ambient optic array'.²⁷ The already-present environmental information carried by light has shaped human perception so that we 'unthinkingly' grasp relative distances, size, shapes. Meanwhile, philosophers such as Mark Rowland, Andy Clark, David Chalmers, and Alva Noë have pressed on as well, theorizing about the ramifications of extended cognition with regard to other 'environments'.²⁸ Extended cognition now includes a multiplicity of environments (physical, societal, cultural); again, not only does information exist 'outside the head' but these environments can provide the impetus for

²⁴ Richard C. Payne, 'Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of "The Dream of the Rood"', *Modern Philology* 73/4 (1976), 329–41, 330.

²⁵ Murphy, *Unriddling*, 13–16.

²⁶ Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 49.

²⁷ See 'The Ambient Optic Array' in Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 58–84.

²⁸ See Rowlands, *New Science*; Clark and Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', 10–23; Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*; Noë, *Action*.

‘driving cognitive processes’.²⁹ Texts, of course, are the most literal example of this relationship of mind with external sources of information.

Fauconnier has also pointed to the congruency of his mental-spaces theorising with Hutchins’ distributed cognition, remarking ‘how conceptual blending can use material anchors to produce situated behaviour, such as navigation of ships and planes’.³⁰ So, a tree could be a material anchor, but also a waypoint, gathering place, and icon for the levels of reality; this conceptual cluster could then inform a poem about a tree that becomes the Cross. But it is narrative structure that permits these conceptual links to take place sequentially and temporally, in a manner that encourages apprehension, that ‘makes sense’. Narrative theorist David Herman has discussed OE narrative’s ‘chunking’ of units of experience, where the sequence of actions is organised by cause-effect algorithms, thus allowing the information (‘intelligence’ or ‘ways of knowing’, as Herman has it), to be distributed through the storyworld’s space-time.³¹ So too has Antonina Harbus discussed the ways in which OE narrative helpfully sequences information as an aid for memory, tags events with emotional saliency, and models a way to contain the cognitive dissonance of disparate perspectives.³²

This chapter brings the above elements together to explore the thought-world of *The Dream of the Rood*, especially how a ludic discourse informed by the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary interacts with a more frequently discussed homiletic discourse. This riddling is a response to the dream-vision frame for the narrative; following the vision’s assembly of a new figure in the social imaginary, the poem invites the reader to activate its links between potent but disparate cultural concepts. By drawing upon conceptual *schemata* already structuring Anglo-Saxon society and its discourses for the opening dream-vision, the narrative achieves a remarkable cognitive efficiency in establishing its storyworld before its transition to homiletic discourse.³³ As Herman noted of *Beowulf* as well, *The Dream of the Rood* interrogates the typologies and classifications that structure its social and ethical

²⁹ Clark and Chalmers, ‘The Extended Mind’, 12.

³⁰ Fauconnier, ‘Mental Spaces, Language Modalities’, 254.

³¹ In his discussion of *Beowulf*, David Herman, *Storytelling*, loc. 2934–40.

³² Antonina Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 17.

³³ The term ‘conceptual *schemata*’ is used in various disciplines in which it has differing denotations. I employ ‘*schemata*’ here in the broad sense of a non-conscious cognitive heuristic; the emphasis is less on the properties of particular conceptual instantiations than on their embeddedness within a self-organising set.

norms.³⁴ We will see how the ludic qualities in OE poetic narrative allow a particularly sophisticated use of distributed cognition, in rearranging and recontextualizing material anchors within the social imaginary to propose new norms. *The Dream of the Rood* also marks a fusion of chronotope that will be revisited and reworked in OE and ME literature; the legendary praise poem is set in a past structured by the deeds it recounts, while Christian salvific history takes place in a linear temporal progression. In the poem, the rood itself traverses these incommensurate timelines, but this strategy would not always be available within the limits of Christian orthodoxy.

Historical and Critical Contexts

The 156 lines of the poem *The Dream of the Rood* are found in the Vercelli Book (Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII), which Donald Scragg once simply described as ‘a collection of pious reading’.³⁵ Thought to have been compiled sometime in the second half of the tenth century, the manuscript is thus, in broad terms, contemporaneous with the Junius Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11) and Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral Library, MS 3501). Joining the *Rood* are five other poems (notably in this context, Cynewulf’s *Elene*, telling of Constantine’s dream of the Cross and St Helena’s mission to recover it), along with twenty-three works of prose classed as sermons or homilies. Elaine Treharne joins Scragg in proposing that the Vercelli Book was made at St Augustine’s in the diocese of Canterbury, and Treharne further argues that it ‘represents the compiler’s attempts to meet the pastoral or devotional needs of the monks in the earliest years of the Reform period’.³⁶ The Vercelli Book’s production during the age of the monastic reform that supported the famed scriptoria of Wearmouth-Jarrow, Canterbury, and Winchester is unsurprising.

But the poem, or a central excerpt of it, seems to have an older provenance: very similar verses are inscribed in runes on the Ruthwell monument, which Éamonn Ó Carragáin dates to the first half of the eighth century.³⁷ Because the sixteen runic lines in Northumbrian dialect correspond only to the

³⁴ Herman, *Storytelling*, loc. 3135.

³⁵ Donald Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), xix.

³⁶ Treharne, ‘Form and Function’, 255–56.

³⁷ Besides the runic inscriptions, Ó Carragáin notes that the sculpted panels on the monument evoke the Roman liturgical ceremonies of catechism, baptism, and eucharist, in Éamonn Ó Carragáin, ‘The Periphery Rethinks the Centre: Inculturation,

Vercelli rood's narration of events from Christ's approach to his removal from the cross (lines 39 to 64), it is not possible to date the entirety of the Vercelli Book poem to this earlier era. This cultural context suggests that the text could be animated in part by an Anglo-Saxon evangelical poetics—a willingness to speak to the unconverted using beliefs and concepts with which they were familiar, and with a proven formula. Christian conversion in Northumbria, the region where the Ruthwell monument was located, had begun around 625, and despite relapses, the area became so Christianised that it was exporting evangelists back to Saxony from the late seventh and throughout the eighth century. Michael Swanton describes the flowering of the Northumbrian cross cult—due to 'eastern veneration of the cross' arriving in England—as itself a graft on a tradition begun in 633 when Oswald of Northumbria is reported to have secured his later victory over Cadwallon by erecting a huge wooden cross at Heavenfield.³⁸ Standing stone crosses, whether funerary, memorial, or, as with the Ruthwell monument, instructive in nature ('preaching' crosses), were enormously popular in Northumbria. Besides acting as literal and pictorial texts outside churches, they may have also served as site markers (for boundaries, routes, summits, and crossroads).³⁹ In this way, of course, they participated in existing, pre-Christian cultural practices, as detailed at length in Sarah Semple's *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England*.⁴⁰ The more lengthy version of the *The Dream of the Rood* we know may be an elaboration of the text inscribed on Ruthwell monument—perhaps an extended praise poem commemorating Pope Marinus making King Alfred a gift of fragments of the true cross.⁴¹ These fragments would likely have been kept in a reliquary cross such as the eleventh-century Brussels Cross, which also bears an inscription that seems to participate in the text of the Ruthwell monument and *The Dream of the Rood*. The Brussels Cross inscription begins '*Rod is min nama*'—but it is the shared phrase '*blode bestemed*' ('drenched with blood'), appearing in line 48b in the Vercelli Book poem and on the Ruthwell monument as well that argues most strongly for some form of shared text. It is certainly tempting to consider *The Dream of the Rood* as offering an

'Roman' Liturgy, and the Ruthwell Cross', in *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas, c. 500–1400*, ed. by Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick, and John Osborne (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 63–83, 68.

³⁸ Michael Swanton, ed. and trans., *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester: MUP, 1970), 45.

³⁹ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 478–80.

⁴⁰ Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

⁴¹ See Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, eds, *The Dream of the Rood*, 4th edn (London, 1934/1963), 19.

Alfredian or Benedictine Reform-era response to a ‘founding’ text; the notion of an inscription coming to personified life in a text can, as will be shown, perform a sense of historical distance. The rood’s utterance could well be a Northumbrian kernel enveloped by a tenth-century monastic reinterpretation, the more literal warrior-Christ figure from a warring conversion era being renarrated as contemplative inspiration for more purely spiritual warriors. As yet, the textual evidence permits only gestures at this possibility, but it would provide a literary motivation for the rood’s speech beyond that of rhetorical imitation.

In 1940, Margaret Schlauch focused attention on the *prosopopoeia* in *The Dream of the Rood*, relating it to the popularity of the device in OE riddles, in which objects can have the power of speech. Some directly challenge the reader to guess their identity. Other riddles, meanwhile, are proposed by a narrator who introduces them with a formulaic ‘*Ic seah...*’ (‘I saw...’) in describing aspects of the object.⁴² (This ludic literary sensibility was by no means restricted to riddles: as John D. Niles notes, ‘it has been observed that even *Christ II*, a poem that no one is likely to call “playful”, includes language that is “strongly and appropriately reminiscent of riddling diction”’.⁴³) Schlauch argued that the poem’s author would have drawn from a long line of classical examples that included Latin riddles (*e.g.*, Eusebius’s Riddle 17) and the speeches of wooden idols in Latin poems (*e.g.*, Horace’s Priapus).⁴⁴ Fascinatingly in this context, Schlauch was noting that there were more temporally proximate models than Albert Cook’s references to Greek epigrams inscribed on statuary so as to let them speak.⁴⁵ For neither critic did the possibility exist, seemingly, that a literature’s rhetorical figures could arise independently of classical models. Some decades later, Marie Nelson, offering a corrective to Schlauch’s somewhat one-sided study of literary influences, observed that Old English had its own roots, and that ‘learned men living in a time of the fusion of two cultures, could choose what they wished to use of two literary traditions’.⁴⁶

⁴² Niles has found twelve instances of this riddling introduction in the Exeter Book, *Enigmatic Poems*, 63.

⁴³ Niles is quoting David F. Johnson in the latter part of this sentence, *Enigmatic Poems*, 4–5.

⁴⁴ Margaret Schlauch, ‘The Dream of the Rood as Prosopopoeia’, in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York: NYU Press, 1940), 23–34.

⁴⁵ Schlauch cites Cook’s introduction to *The Dream of the Rood: An old English poem attributed to Cynewulf* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), xliii; ‘Prosopopoeia’, 24.

⁴⁶ Marie Nelson, ‘The Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles’, *Speculum* 49/3 (1974), 421–40, 424–25.

Yet as Schlauch knew, having herself translated *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the peoples bordering the North Sea had their own stories about wooden idols, even talking ones. A brief detour from the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary to Scandinavian variants can provide an illustration of conceptual fusions possible. It is worth recalling that the subsequent establishment of the Danelaw, following an influx of non-Christian Norse settlers, overlaps with the period in which *The Dream of the Rood* is thought to have been written down. The main period of settlement lasted from 865 until the end of the century, with the region gaining an outline in 886's Treaty of Wedmore, and the term 'Danelaw' first appearing at the beginning of the eleventh century. If the poem does represent a tenth-century elaboration on an existing text, its ambivalent readings need not be considered underwritten solely by a retrospective interest in Anglo-Saxon conversion, but as constellated in part by Scandinavian settlers holding views similar to those of seventh-century Anglo-Saxons. The persistence of the conceptual models underlying those beliefs can be seen in alliterative Old Norse verse collections, such as *Hávamál* and *Völuspá*, with elements dated to the tenth century, if not earlier. In the latter's strophes 17 and 18, gods grant the originary couple Ask (ash tree) and Embla (vine) soul, sentience, and human appearance. This notion of divine animation of a wooden figure, and the ritual reproduction of it, appears again in *Hávamál*'s strophe 49 when Óðinn says 'Váðir mínir / gaf ek velli at / tveim trémönnum' ('I gave my garments to two tree-men in the field').⁴⁷ The narrative sense-making afforded by this conception of 'living' wood is present centuries later, but in ways that reframe the marvel in a post-conversion context as devilry. In *Ögmundar þáttur dytts ok Gunnars helmings*, an Icelandic tale written down in the fourteenth century, the protagonist Gunnarr, while travelling in Sweden, is physically assaulted by a wooden idol the god Freyr is meant to inhabit.⁴⁸ In chapter seven of *Þorleifs þáttur jarlsskálds*, Hákon jarl has an assassin *trémaðr* ('tree-man') carved out of driftwood and sent to kill Þorleifr.⁴⁹ The *Ragnars saga* episode in question (extant in a single manuscript from about 1400, the 1824b text) concludes with three *lausavísur*, poetic fragments written in the older *fornyrðislag* metre; Rory McTurk thinks the last two may be of 'considerable antiquity', possibly

⁴⁷ *Hávamál*, ed. by David A. H. Evans (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1986), 49.

⁴⁸ *Ögmundar þáttur dytts ok Gunnars helmings*, in *Two Tales of Icelanders*, ed. by Ian Wyatt and Jessie Cook (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1993), 1-9, at 7-8.

⁴⁹ *Þorleifs þáttur jarlsskálds*, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1956), 213-29, at 225-27.

dating from before 1100.⁵⁰ (Pertinently, the first strophe can be found, with minor differences, in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, when it is spoken out of a burial mound.⁵¹)

These concluding verses are prefaced in prose by Ögmundr the Dane's pulling up his ships at the island of Sámsey. When his crew go to the forest to collect firewood, they discover 'einn trémann fornan, ok var fertugr at hæð ok mosavaxinn' ('an olden-times tree-man, and he was forty [ells] in height and overgrown with moss'.)⁵² When they begin debating over who worshipped (or sacrificed to) such a great god, the *trémaðr* himself responds that long ago, with the arrival of the Hæklings, he became the village's governor.⁵³ (It is worth remarking, here, that the *trémaðr* responds with an epigrammatic brevity that Cook might have recognized as suitable for inscription.) Notably, as in *Ögmundar þáttur dytts*, these tales are often looking back at 'paganism' from a post-conversion era; Gunnar not only fights off a demon that lives in the Freyr idol, but succeeds in having Freyr's priestess (now his wife) baptized in Norway by King Óláfr Tryggvason. Much more discussion of the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, specifically, is to come, but these conceptual models from adjacent social imaginaries demonstrate the close association of wooden figures, spiritual presence, and ancestral memory. Thematically, *The Dream of the Rood* can be grouped with the later 'North Sea tales' mentioned above as post-conversion stories, responding in various ways to the alterity of pre-Christian worldviews.

In the critical account, a significant distinction between literary modes of analysis emerges, which is that for Cook and Schlauch, it was possible to separate their 'discovery' of classical rhetorical models from language and form, *e.g.*, the composition of alliterative half-lines in the vernacular. That is, to put entirely to one side a consideration of the Anglo-Saxon audience and their thought-world, in favour of 'identifying' devices of Greek and Latin rhetoric. On this point, Marie Nelson has inquired whether what she calls 'native tradition' does not seriously complicate the

⁵⁰ Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Oxford: Medium Ævum, 1991), 18.

⁵¹ *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, in *Fornaldur sögur norðurlanda 2*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), 93-134, at 96-97.

⁵² My English translation. Chapter XX, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* in *Fornaldar sögur norðurlanda 1*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), 219-85, at 285.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 285. Note incidentally that Cleasby-Vigfusson gives: 'RÁÐ, n., [...] B. COMPDS: ráðs-andi, a, m. the spirit, of wisdom, Rb 80', in Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn with supp. by Sir William A. Craigie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 485.

blanket application of classical rhetoric to a language with its own rhetorical figures and techniques.⁵⁴ Thinking along similar lines, James Earl has asked if the ‘technique’ of *prosopopoeia*, considered as personification, is not much more widespread than the classical tradition. (In his *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian describes *prosopopoeia* as the ability ‘to bring down the gods from heaven, and evoke the dead; and cities and states are gifted with voices’.⁵⁵) Earl asks if it might be more profitably considered as a mode of thought that corresponds with animism, or even as ‘a rhetorical term for the mental phenomenon we call “hearing voices”’.⁵⁶ These are questions that invoke the social imaginary. The rood’s performance depends not simply upon a literary device, but upon a thought-world in which trees and time-out-of-mind are conceptually linked, as well as a thought-world in which a speaking tree elicits a ludic frame. But while the voice of the *trémaðr* in *Ragnars saga* evokes a partly-effaced commemorative inscription on carved sculpture, naming the now-forgotten people who set it up, the rood poses an involved, and involving, homiletic riddle that recuperates the place of trees in the social imaginary. As the eighth-century cleric-scholar Alcuin kenningly tells his pupil Sigewulf, ‘*Pæt lifes treow is se leofa Hælend Crist*’ (‘The tree of life is the beloved Saviour Christ’, l. 295).⁵⁷

Reconstructing this Anglo-Saxon ludic discourse reveals sophisticated, densely textured works, interwoven at multiple scales. In speaking of the distinction between Old English and Anglo-Latin literatures, it is important not to confuse accessibility with status; as Anne Savage notes, OE verse was a prestige language for Anglo-Saxon elites.⁵⁸ To give some indication of the craftsmanship involved, critical analysis has mapped out poetic repetition on five levels of discourse: sounds and words, formulaic phrases, sentences, themes and paragraphs, and even larger units of composition.⁵⁹ To see the contrast with the OE verse of *The Dream of the Rood*, compare with a more prosaic cross’s

⁵⁴ Marie Nelson, ‘The Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles’, *Speculum* 49/3 (1974), 421–40, 425.

⁵⁵ 9.2.31, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*: ‘*Quin deducere deos in hoc genere dicendi et inferos excitare concessum est; urbes etiam populique vocem accipiunt*’, in *The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, 3, ed. by T. E. Page (Cambridge: HUP, 1959), 390; English translation from *Quintilian’s Institutes of Oratory*, 2, trans. Rev. John Selby Watson (London: G. Bell, 1876), 161.

⁵⁶ James W. Earl, ‘Trinitarian Language: Augustine, *The Dream of the Rood*, and Ælfric’, in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, Thomas N. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 63–79, 64.

⁵⁷ G. E. MacLean, ed., ‘Ælfric’s Version of *Alcuini interrogationes Sigewulfi in Genesin*’, *Anglia* 7 (1884), 1–59, 43.

⁵⁸ Anne Savage, ‘Old and Middle English, Poetry and Prose’ in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001), 503–11.

⁵⁹ Beechy also quotes Roman Jakobson on the poetic ‘palpability of signs’ (25); emblematic of this palpability in OE poetry is the ‘envelope pattern’, which features an almost ornamental repetition of a word, phrase, or idea at the outset and end of a unit of verse. Orchard as referenced by Tiffany Beechy, *Poetics of Old English*, 43.

apparition from the ninth century, in Æthelwulf's *De abbatibus*. (Underlining of the English translation by Alastair Campbell indicates temporal indicators; boldface, visual perceptions of the radiance and colour of crucial objects.)

*Tempus erat noctis, lucem cum predicate ales,
algida post ymnos laxassem membra quieti
furtiuus adueniens somnus subrepsit ocellis.
[...]
crux ueneranda nitens precelso stipite surget
uertice de mense nimium candente smaragdo
aurea cum gemmis flammescit lammina fuluis.*

(It was the hour of the night, when the cock announces the approach of dawn, and after I had relaxed my chill limbs in rest after the singing of hymns, a lurking dream came and stole before my eyes. [...] A holy cross rose up **shining** upon a very long stem from the top of the table, and (upon it) **emeralds shone** full **bright**. Gold plating **blazed** there (set) with **dark-hued gems**.)⁶⁰

It might seem that the *De abbatibus* narrator is keen to locate the vision in time, but thinking of Fauconnier's space-builders, one can observe the blending of ordinary into monastic time as well. From the initial 'night' one might infer a visual darkness, in which there is the sound of rooster crowing. This is an ordinary enough temporal tag, in that any hearer would be expected to understand the reference. The next sequence of events is more specifically monastic, 'after hymns'; it would seem to be between second matins ('midnight') and third matins, or just after third matins. The chorus of monks singing is evoked only to let it fade into bodily stillness. A layered continuum of light (or its absence) and sound, and of nature and monastic organisation, emerges, so that the rooster sings to announce the dawn and the monks to proclaim Christ's coming, followed by the arrival of the vision. The monk's emphasis on visual spectacle, his appreciation of gold and gems strictly in terms of radiance and hue, is consistent with the language employed by *The Dream of the Rood*'s narrator, but the optic opulence here is not miraculous in itself. The magnification of the properties of gold and gems corresponds to a change of plane, which in this case permits a true marvel: his vision of his revered teachers Eadfrith and Hyglac. This kind of 'differentiation by magnification', as Evelyn Birge Vitz has put it, is a persistent medieval reflex, mapping the amount or intensity of any given quality onto a vertical axis that points toward the sacred.⁶¹ The vision seems to exist in a 'marvellous' space of spiritual time that is only briefly visible to human eyes. The distinction between corporal and

⁶⁰ Latin and English trans. from Abbot Aedivulfus, *De abbatibus*, ed. and trans. by A. Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 54–60.

⁶¹ Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology* (New York: NYU Press, 1989), 15.

spiritual existence for Anglo-Saxons is often indicated by visibility and invisibility, but invisibility does not equate to absence.⁶² Anglo-Saxons might imagine themselves surrounded by unseen agencies. So conversely, one can imagine that the emphasis on the time of the vision's arrival is not to mark that the vision flickers out, but that this accords with Gregory the Great's correlation of dreams with a quieted mind. It is only at and for this moment that the narrator has glimpsed life without end—the temporal setting reflects a shift in mental state.

Wholly absent in this account, in comparison with *The Dream of the Rood*, is the ludic space in which an object, the rood, enjoying an unusual personhood, proffers itself as a solution to the riddle of the crucifixion. *Elene*, the other Vercelli Book poem featuring a vision of the Cross, offers striking textual parallels with *The Dream of the Rood*, especially in the descriptive lexical field for the 'wuldres treo' ('tree of glory', l. 14b) as Andy Orchard notes—but foregoes any speech by the Cross.⁶³ I have added boldface to my translation of this excerpt from *Elene* to mark visual perceptions of radiance and colour.

Geseah he frætwum beorht
 wliiti wuldres treo ofer wolcna hrof
 golde geglenged, (gimmas lixtan); (90)
 wæs se blaca beam bocstafum awriten,
 beorhte ond leohte⁶⁴

(He saw, **bright** with **ornaments**,
 the resplendent tree of glory on the roof of the heavens,
gold-adorned, **gems glinting**;
 the **shining beam** was inscribed with letters
brightly and **clearly**)

This description supports Nigel Barley's observation that '[t]he main stress of the Old English system falls firstly, not upon hue, but upon brightness'.⁶⁵ Barley also notes the Anglo-Saxon conceptual clusters 'brightness—joy—good' and 'darkness—sadness—evil'; Æthelwulf's 'dark-hued' gems may be meant to call to mind Christ's wounds, or blood. Again, the cross in *Elene* differs narratively from the rood: whereas in *Elene* the vision of the Cross is announced by a heavenly messenger, in *The Dream*

⁶² Helen Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 75.

⁶³ Andy Orchard, 'Cross-references', 233.

⁶⁴ *Elene*, in the *Vercelli Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 66–102.

⁶⁵ Nigel F. Barley, 'Old English colour classification: where do matters stand?', *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974), 15–28, 17.

of *the Rood*, the rood itself is the angel of the Lord, permitting a narrative synchrony between the discourse of biblical revelation and that of Anglo-Saxon riddle.

One area of intertextual concordance is in the gallows that exists in Tatwine's Cross riddle and *The Dream of the Rood*. Tatwine's Cross is a speaking, multi-coloured, salvific signifier, but there is an emphatic reversal whereby its status as a public spectacle of punishment for criminals is transformed into a spectacle of veneration for all. (The English translation here is reproduced from Maria de Marco's edition of *Tatuini opera omnia*.)

*Versicolor cernor nunc, nunc mihi forma nitescit.
Lege fui quondam cunctis iam larbula seruis;
sed modo me gaudens orbis ueneratur et ornat.
Quique meum gustat fructum iam sanus habetur,
nam mihi concessum est insanis ferre salutem.
Propterea sapiens optat me in fronte tenere.*

(Clad in many hues now gleams my form;
law once had made me the terror of slaves,
but now mankind gladly reveres and adorns me.
He who eats of my fruit will be healed at once,
for I was given the power to bring salvation.
Hence the pious like to bear me on their forehead.)⁶⁶

Andy Orchard writes that 'it is notable that Tatwine (who died in 735, and who drew heavily on Aldhelm's *Enigmata* in composing his own) should describe the Cross of Christ in terms that seem also to echo certain aspects of *The Dream of the Rood* in his Enigma 9 (*de cruce Christi* ['On the Cross of Christ'])'.⁶⁷ One of those aspects is the Cross's rise in status as its function is reversed, from death-dealing to life-saving. An almost obsessive concern with 'moments of reversal' structures Anglo-Saxon verse; T. A. Shippey argues that this is mirrored in the a-and-b line construction, and triggered by words such as *sipþan* (next, later, afterward), *gif* (if) and *opðæt* (until).⁶⁸ Frequently mental contents are contrasted in this way: what someone thought or intended at a certain point in time versus what they thought or intended afterward. Tatwine's Cross does just this in contrasting mankind's former terror with current veneration, and so does the rood in *The Dream of the Rood*: its reference to its rank as the '*wita heardost*' ('harshest of tortures, l. 87b) and '*leodum laðost*' ('most hateful to peoples', l. 88a), is not presented in absolute terms, but as an assessment of changing

⁶⁶ Latin and accompanying English trans. from Tatwine, *Aenigmata IX*, in *Tatuini opera omnia*, 1, ed. by Maria de Marco (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), 176.

⁶⁷ Orchard, 'Cross-references', 244.

⁶⁸ T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), 38.

attitudes and beliefs. We will return to the gallows of the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary shortly, but by now it should be clear from these comparisons that a primary function of the dreamed environment in *The Dream of the Rood* is to associatively enrich the assembly of its figure.

Writing an Anglo-Saxon Rood

Early on, the narrator of *The Dream of the Rood* qualifies his vision of the ‘*sylicre treow*’ (‘more marvellous tree’, l. 4b) by introducing it with a framing phrase: ‘*Puhte me þæt ic gesawe*’ (‘It seemed to me that I saw’, l. 4a). The subjunctive mood of the verb used here could express uncertainty or indeterminacy, but Antonina Harbus, in her cognitive study of OE literature, flags this phrase as priming for conceptual blending.⁶⁹ The ‘seemed to me’, in her view, licenses associative thinking, and activates for the audience a wider field of mental phenomena, whether oral, literary, or experienced first-hand. This indeterminacy, in conjunction with the intermittent riddling diction, promotes ‘fuzzy categorization’, in that the listener or reader cannot adopt a fixed conceptual frame, such as genre, in which narrative details can be assigned stable significations. Such textual strategies hinder habitual, cognitively economical attempts to pre-structure narrative, forcing a more intensive interrogation of not simply the narrative but also of interpretative strategies.⁷⁰ For instance, Michael Swanton and others note that *The Dream of the Rood*’s vision ‘*on lyft lædan*’ (‘raised aloft’, l. 5a) corresponds in general to the vision in the sky reported by Emperor Constantine, allegedly used as his battle standard in his victorious battle. *The Dream of the Rood*’s vision-cross is wreathed in light, an image seemingly evaluated by the following line, ‘*beama beorhtost*’ (‘brightest of beams’, 6a). But because the polysemous *beama* can mean, besides tree, a pillar of light or beacon, the text also evokes the kind of scene portrayed in the Northumbrian *Life of Gregory* (Ch. 7), when the saint hides in a forest to escape nomination as pope and has his location given away by a kind of celestial torch-beam.⁷¹

Another model for the accompanying numinous pyrotechnics may be Benedict’s vision, as recounted

⁶⁹ Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 63.

⁷⁰ Ellen Spolsky, *Gaps in Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 8.

⁷¹ Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge: CUP, 1968/1985), 86/87.

in the popular *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, of an intensely bright light before matins.⁷² Further, a cross held aloft that glints with gold and gems could bring to mind a literal object: a reliquary or processional cross. It is also worth remembering the poem's connection to the more-than-five-metre-tall Ruthwell monument, which may have been itself colourfully painted. (Éammon Ó'Carragáin presumes that the Ruthwell monument was painted, though as he admits, no paint has been detected. A 'cleaning' with wire brushes in the late nineteenth century would seem to have removed any gesso undercoat. He quotes Richard Bailey saying that 'originally these sculptures were garishly coloured'.)⁷³ The ornamental stone crosses of eighth-century Northumbria were 'decked with foliage or jewels and hung with garments like pagan trees. Some crosses were even soaked in blood', says Della Hooke.⁷⁴

These transformations can be thought of as a way of 'walking through' the meanings of the Cross before these associations had attached to the word for it. The inherent conservatism of the social imaginary can be seen in the lack of haste to adopt the Latin term for 'cross':

The fact that the old English words for 'cross' are *rōd*, *treow* and *bēam*, rather than some loan-word from *crux*, may suggest that the first crosses were perceived as of like kind to the sacred landmarks which they replaced. At Rudstone (*rōd-stān*, 'cross-stone') in east Yorkshire, a great prehistoric menhir still stands beside the church.⁷⁵

One of the earliest uses of '*cruce*' is in the OE version of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (4.30), when Cuthbert prays while outstretched in the form of the cross, but it is rarely translated out of Latin phrases in which it more normally appears.⁷⁶ Ælfric's glossary tersely states '*haec crux* þeos rod'.⁷⁷ By the late eleventh century, when the visions of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, were written down, however, *rod*, *treow*, and *cruce* are used interchangeably of the same cross standing on the floor of St

⁷² Gregory noted that Benedict's vision of heaven and earth stemmed from the divine light enlarging 'the capacity of the inward soul', as opposed to creation having shrunk to fit within his room. Benedict was 'at that time, out of the world', with God, and seeing with God's light. Edmund G. Gardner, ed. and trans., *Dialogues of Saint Gregory the Great* (London: Warner, 1911), 98.

⁷³ Ó'Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 27.

⁷⁴ Della Hooke, 'Christianity and the "Sacred Tree"', in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 228–50, 239.

⁷⁵ Blair, *The Church*, 226–27.

⁷⁶ Miller, *Old English Version*, 372.

⁷⁷ Ch. LXVII, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, Sammlung Englischer Denkmäler 1, ed. Julius Zupitza (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880), 72.

Clement's Church.⁷⁸ To sum up, rather than make a specific allusion, the narrative seems to solicit, in a riddling way, as many disparate associations as can be brought to bear on the rood before its metaphoric unity is revealed: 'It seemed to me' permits iterative, episodic description, and the result is overpoweringly syncretic.

While it is difficult to overstate the miraculous significance of the Cross for medieval Christians, it is overwhelmingly figured as a mute, if numinous, object—it is only within the poem's dream-vision and ludic frames that it finds its voice. According to Ó'Carragáin, this is the only medieval account of the crucifixion from the cross's perspective.⁷⁹ *The Dream of the Rood* combines both the ludic 'I saw' formulation and the narration of a speaking object. The original narrator and the rood repeat the 'I saw' phrase: the narrator in lines 4, 14, and 21; and the rood, speaking for itself, in lines 33 and 51. (There is an important distinction, though: the narrator sees the rood-tree, whereas the rood sees Christ, preserving a spiritual hierarchy.) An object's narration of its transition from its natural state is not uncommon in OE riddles, though the rood's initial commentary on its mental action of remembrance—'*Pæt wæs geara iu, (ic þæt gyta geman)*' ('It was many years ago—I remember it yet', l. 28) is unusual. By the logic of medieval psychology, to be able to recount a memory is to have an identity—not simply to be wood, or a tree of the forest, but one tree in particular. The rood's biography, its awareness of its transformation, echoes an Anglo-Saxon configuration of Zacher's *translatio studii*, where instead of the transfer of imperium, a powerful knowledge was handed over and put to use.⁸⁰ In the rhetorical project of evangelisation, this was visualised as the Anglo-Saxons inheriting the mantle of the 'elect' from the biblical Israelites. The OE translation of Exodus inscribes a lexical doubling into the story of the crossing of the Red Sea and exile, so that the story recapitulates the forced migration of a people displaced by flood.⁸¹ Granted, the

⁷⁸ See a newly edited and translated version in Peter Stokes, 'The Vision of Leofric: Manuscript Text and Context', *Review of English Studies* 63 (2012), 529–50. Much earlier, there is A. S. Napier, 'VI. An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia', *TPhS* 26/2 (1908), 180–88.

⁷⁹ Ó'Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 3–7.

⁸⁰ Zacher, *Rewriting*, 87.

⁸¹ I follow Zacher in placing more emphasis on the use of biblical models for application to current Anglo-Saxon concerns. For reading the migration in Exodus, 72–107; Howe also notes that the model for Anglo-Saxons' relationship to their pre-Christian ancestors was that of the 'lost tribes of Israel', 108–42, in Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Yale University Press, 1989).

appearance of ‘*flodegsa*’ (‘flood-fear’) is not unusual in the context of the drowning of the pharaoh’s army, but the persistent use of maritime terms as the Israelites cross the desert raises eyebrows:

Dægsceades hleo
wand ofer wolcnum; hæfde witig god (80)
sunnan siðfæt swegle ofertolden,
swa þa mæstrapas men ne cuðon,
ne ða seglrode geseon meahton,
eorðbuende ealle cræfte,
*hu afæstnod wæs feldhusa mæst*⁸² (85)

A shelter from the day-shield [sun’s disc]
 wound across the heavens; wise God had
 raised a sail over the sun’s path
 though the mast-ropes people did not perceive
 nor could a mast be seen
 no earthdweller with all his skill could see
 how the field-house pole was fastened.⁸³

The sail is a protective canopy but also a sign for Anglo-Saxon listeners that as ‘new’ Israelites, their forefathers (later in the text literally called ‘seamen’) were sailing under God’s provident direction. If read strictly as a literary metaphor, this nautical terminology seems woefully miscast; it is in context of the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary and its own narrative of long-ago emigration that the emotional valences come into view. Similarly, Anglo-Saxons found correspondences between the status of sacred trees in their history with biblical report; Michael Bintley notes their elaboration of the ‘descent of the cross from the sacred rods, posts, and trees of the Judaic tradition’.⁸⁴ The earliest complete witness to the biblical rood-tree tradition happens to be in Old English, found in a collection of homilies from the twelfth century (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343): here, the story of the wood of the Cross opens with Moses and three wooden rods and concludes with the discovery of the Cross by Helena.⁸⁵ However, *The Dream of the Rood* makes no such biblical claims for the rood’s arboreal ancestry, supporting the placing of its composition before the arrival of the rood-tree legend.⁸⁶ Such a distinguished lineage would, in any event, undermine the poem’s argument for the

⁸² *Exodus*, in *The Junius Manuscript, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 1, ed. by George Philip Krapp (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 89–108.

⁸³ My translation glances at Damian Love, ‘The Old English Exodus: A Verse Translation’, *Neophilologus* 86, 621–39, 624.

⁸⁴ Michael Bintley, ‘Recasting the Role of Sacred Trees in Anglo-Saxon Spiritual History’, in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 211–27, 213.

⁸⁵ Arthur Napier proposed that the extant OE text was a copy of an eleventh-century West Saxon original, likely translated from a Latin source (due to the appearance of untranslated Latin terms), lviii–lix, in Napier, ed., *History of the Holy Rood-Tree*, EETS 103 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.: 1894).

⁸⁶ For a suggestion that the rood and Genesis tree of knowledge of good and evil are conceptually, but not literally, linked in the poem, see Susan Irvine, ‘Adam or Christ? A Pronominal Pun in The Dream of the Rood’, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 48/192 (1997), 433–47.

rood's elevation, from its humble beginning, to literal gallows, to Cross. More pertinently with regard to the poetics of *The Dream of the Rood*, the OE *Genesis* promotes a conceptually ordered opposition in which one tree possesses light and joy, while its counterpart harbours dim, grim death:

lifes beam ('the tree of life' GenB 468) is described as *swa wynlic, wlitig and scene, liðe and lofsum* ('so very joyous, beautiful and radiant, lithe and praiseworthy', GenB 467–8), whilst *se oðer* ('the other') was *eallenga sweart, dim and þystre; þæt wæs deaðes beam, se bær bitres fela* ('entirely black, veiled and dark; that was the tree of death, that bore much bitterness', GenB 477–9).⁸⁷

The complementarity of the trees' descriptors with those of Christ and the Enemy supports Alcuin's instruction that '*Þæt lifes treow is se leofa Hælend Crist*' ('The tree of life is the beloved Saviour Christ', l. 295).⁸⁸

The emphasis on status structures the whole of the poem spatially, where the vertical axis measures degrees of power and sanctity, and the horizontal axis delineates distance from a social centre. As the narrator reports on first seeing the Cross, his rapt gaze is joined by that of angels, holy spirits, mankind, and all creation. It is not otherwise easy to reconcile this sequence with the medieval notion of *ductus*, the meaningful route along which a viewer was meant to travel when taking in the elements of an image, as there are no evident deictic pointers. Jennifer Neville has argued that the 'natural world' the Anglo-Saxons represented in poetry 'does not conform to any scheme that they might have inherited from Christian patristic writers or classical models'.⁸⁹ In place of spatial ordering and reference to visual shape is an ordering of creation by generative hierarchy, beginning with God's divine will. This reflex is found in *The Dream of the Rood* in the order of presentation: the rood, angels, holy ones, mankind, the rest of creation—that they are ordered in ranks around the centre, a throne or high seat, would have been taken as given by an Anglo-Saxon audience.

A monastic Anglo-Saxon *schemata*, foregrounding religious status and agency, can be discerned throughout the poem. As in *De abbatibus*, the dream's arrival is accompanied by space-builders. First, it is said to come '*to midre nihte | syðþan reordberend reste wunedon!*' ('at midnight after voice-bearers were at rest', ll. 2b–3). That dreams generally appear at night, and that people are asleep then may sound like commonplaces. But in fact the poem is already establishing its

⁸⁷ Bintley, 'Sacred Trees', 215.

⁸⁸ G. E. MacLean, ed., 'Ælfric's Version of Alcuini interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesin', *Anglia* 7 (1884), 1–59, 43.

⁸⁹ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 17.

ludic frame, hinting at Christ's return surprising the unwary.⁹⁰ Where *reordberend* could mean simply 'humankind', rather than the more literal 'voice-bearers' or 'speech-bearers', it seems also an instance of ludic wordplay. First, the human-specific category established by the kenning 'voice-bearers' is about to be violated by the riddle of a talking rood. Secondly, speech-bearers is a category that permits gradations of performance—everyday speech can be true or false, while the best use of speech is to praise God. Other uses of *reordberend* occur in the OE Daniel (l. 120, where it is also applied generally to people sleeping, and not speaking), the poem *Andreas* (l. 415, referring to those Christ has instructed, the crowds who heard him, his apostles, or both), the poem *Elene* (l. 1281, all those to be judged by God, soon divided into thirds of blessed, sinful, and accursed), and the *Christ* poems (ll. 275, 378, 1021, 1365; those who praise the Virgin Mary, those who praise the Trinity, and, twice, those who will be judged by God, respectively).⁹¹ The compound's semantic field is strongly bifurcated, then, so that the term can either refer eschatologically to humans in relation to God's judgement, and more specifically those properly engaged in the act of praising God. Just as Christ's disciples fell asleep in advance of the crucifixion, so his fellow 'voice-bearers' are asleep when the narrator hears the story of the crucifixion from the rood and learns that the judgement day is coming. Speech as an apostolic gift (Acts 2:1–13 recounts how the apostles, given the gift of tongues by the Holy Spirit, then set out to share the news about Christ) will have ramifications throughout this poem dealing with the crucifixion and proselytization. Certainly, how one reads *reordberend* here depends on how one conceptualises the poem's reception, but if one looks ahead to the narrator's monastic resolution to meditate more intensely upon the cross, this lexical choice affords a double reading: in one, people everywhere are spiritually asleep and unaware of God's impending judgement, while in the other, the sleep of those who should be praising God is specifically indicted. In the latter case, it is possible to see the rhetoric of the Benedictine Reform that swept through England in the tenth century.

⁹⁰ Richard C. Payne agrees with John V. Fleming's suggestion that midnight, '*midre nihte*', is most meaningful as the time 'traditionally associated with the Second Coming, as in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:6), the parable of the householder (Matt. 24:42 ff.), and numerous other scriptural passages', in 'Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of "The Dream of the Rood"', *Modern Philology*, 73/4 (1976), 329–41, 333.

⁹¹ *Reordberend* may be an example of the clerical appropriation of generic warriorhood, in its relation to the kenning '*æschberend*' ('ash-bearer', or ash-spear-carrier); instances found by searching the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, comp. by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009).

In addition, *gemætte*, though often translated as ‘dreamed’, is impersonal; the narrator is describing something that appeared *to* him. This kind of visitation is an election. Britt Mize explains the ramifications:

From the outset, *The Dream of the Rood*’s scenario and structure as a dream vision place the enlightenment brought by the *visio* of the Rood within the dreamer’s mental container as a privately possessed thing to which society at large would not automatically have access, its beneficial message confined to his own mind. Anglo-Saxon poets often conceptualize a dream as a metaphysical object—in Antonina Harbus’s phrases, a ‘discrete’ and ‘external entity’—that enters the individual mind and leaves some image or simulacrum of itself, the memory of the dream, when it departs.⁹²

This scenario produces another discourse interlacing: just as the rood is about to intrude on and change the concept of *reordberend*, the dreamed experience is about to intrude into the dreamer’s mind, and leave it fired with new enthusiasm. Once this dream-memory is resident in the narrator, as Mize notes, there is a tension between the public and private spheres. The narrator contrasts the Cross’s marvellous nature with his sinful state. In returning his gaze to the Cross, the narrator now somehow perceives, beneath the gold and jewels, ‘*earmra ærgewin*’ (‘the earlier battle of the wretched’, l. 19a), and sees that it has begun to sweat or bleed on ‘*þa swiðran healf*’ (literally, ‘the stronger half’, assuming normative Anglo-Saxon right-handedness, l. 20a), a sight which fills him with a visceral sorrow and fear, so that he trembles. This may appear to be a simple physiological report—but such an involuntary physical reaction within the Anglo-Saxon perspective can indicate spiritual distress or crisis. Antonina Harbus says it is ‘the uneasy incongruity of honour and shame—in the same stretch of meaning-making—that is the source of emotion in this textual encounter’.⁹³ It is not typical of OE narrative to volunteer ‘interior’ emotional perspective; this report testifies, rather, to the vision’s authenticity as an encounter with the divine, so it can be admitted. Nor is it coincidental that, as the narrator is ‘*hreowcearig*’ (sorrowful, l. 25a) when the rood begins to speak, giving voice to the circumstances that generated this emotion. In his introduction to the *Christ* poem, Albert Cook notes that in its third part, a vision of the rood is a sign of the impending judgement day, creating intense soul-searching in everyone who sees it.⁹⁴

⁹² Britt Mize, ‘The Mental Container and the Cross of Christ: Revelation and Community in *The Dream of the Rood*’, *Studies in Philology*, 107/2 (2010), 131–78, 139. Harbus quoted from ‘Nebuchadnezzar’s Dreams in the Old English *Daniel*’, *English Studies* 75 (1994): 489–508, at 502 and 493, respectively.

⁹³ Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 68.

⁹⁴ From the ‘Introduction’, Albert S. Cook, ed., *The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts, the Advent, the Ascension and the Judgment* (Boston: Ginn, 1900), xlv.

The Dream of the Rood also explores several contexts in which to situate the cross as a rood-tree and then rank it. Old English allows the narrator to describe it initially as ‘*sylicre*’ tree (‘more wonderful’ or ‘more marvellous’, l. 4b). Later the rood will contrast its status as ‘*wita heardost*’ (‘harshest of tortures’, l. 87b) and ‘*leodum laðost*’ (‘most loathsome to peoples’, l. 88a) with being honoured by God ‘*ofer holmwudu*’ (‘above all other sea-wood’, l. 91a). In this context, it is noteworthy that the manuscript’s *holmwudu*, which literally reads ‘sea-wood’, a kenning-like compound indicating ‘ship’, has often been emended to *holtwudu* (forest-wood, or tree) or simply translated *holm* in its Old Saxon sense of ‘hill’. As Carl Berkhout and others have argued, it is not unusual in patristic writings for the cross to signify the ship itself with which one traverses the ‘sea’ of life toward salvation.⁹⁵ In a reading that privileges ludic wordplay, this debate over a univocal interpretation would turn instead on the possibilities afforded by ‘sea-wood’ within a blended space structured by Anglo-Saxon kenning and patristic allegory. The attempt to emend the word as it is written in the manuscript, however, and concomitant debate over whether *holt*’s denotation of ‘forest’ justifies not translating *holm* as ‘hill’, demonstrates one of the limits of distributed cognition—outside the Anglo-Saxon or monastic social imaginary the use of uncontextualised nautical analogies can seem baffling, as if a code is being used. But the compound for ‘ship’ cooperates with the allegory, and with a heroic mode in which the crucifixion is journey.

The universally adored Cross ‘*ne wæs ðær huru fracodes gealga*’ (‘was certainly not a gallows for a criminal there’, l. 10b), the narrator asserts. But this phrase also introduces a conflict, since the understatement admits the gallows’ usual function. The rood itself says its enemies ‘*heton me heora wergas hebban*’ (‘ordered me to lift up their outlaws’, l. 31b). This possibility is inherent in the

⁹⁵ Berkhout notes *holtwudu* is accepted by J. M. Kemble, Albert S. Cook, Bruce Dickins and Alan Ross, and John C. Pope; Michael Swanton and Bernard F. Huppé have preferred to translate *holm* as ‘hill’. Berkhout mentions two instances, in a commentary and sermon, where Augustine refers specifically to the cross as a vessel, in Carl Berkhout, ‘The Problem of OE *holmwudu*’, in *Mediaeval Studies* 36 (1974), 429–433. Sandra McEntire points also to the patristic concept of *navis crucis* (the Church, prefigured by Noah’s Ark, carries the elect to spiritual salvation with its metonymic cross as mast), which has iconographic form in the illumination of an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript and perhaps an exegetical prototype in Cassiodorus’s mid-sixth-century commentary on the Psalms. For Psalm 107:23 (‘They go down to the sea in ships’), Cassiodorus explains that this refers to churches, rowed by apostles, piloted by Christ, which ‘navigate’ (‘*enavigant*’), worldly tempests by means of the wood of the cross; in Sandra McEntire, ‘The Devotional Context of the Cross Before A.D. 1000’, in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza, (New Haven: YUP, 2002), 430–41, 435. The eighth-century Durham Cathedral MS B.II.30, epitomised, remains the earliest witness to the *Expositio Psalmorum*, though R.N. Bailey has argued that Bede must have possessed a complete version, in R. N. Bailey, ‘Bede’s Text of Cassiodorus’ Commentary on the Psalms’, in *J Theol Studies* (1983), 189–93, 193. Finally, in a letter to Leander, bishop of Spain, Pope Gregory the Great unfurled a nautical allegory that included sailing with a following breeze, tempests, mental ‘shipwreck’, and the assisting plank of Leander’s intercession, in *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, trans. John R. C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 697.

gospel account, of course, where Christ is flanked by two crucified criminals. But the construction *ne wæs* crops up often in riddles (see the Exeter Book's Riddles 9, 13, 36, 47), as a denial of a pre-emptive solution. In this case, a pre-empted solution could as well be Oðinn (Woden), known as *galga-farmr*, *galga-gramr*, *galga-valdr*, *hanga-dróttinn*, *hanga-tyr*, and *hanga-guð*, 'all denoting "lord" or "god of the gallows"', as H. M. Chadwick noted long ago.⁹⁶ David Wilson, in his study of Anglo-Saxon religious belief, mentions that no fewer than seven Christian kings nonetheless claimed to be descended from a euhemerised Oðinn, adding that Oðinn, 'the Scandinavian equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon Woden, was specifically associated with human sacrifice, especially by hanging, and in a mid-tenth century poem is called *gálga valdr*, "lord of the gallows"'.⁹⁷ Even Bede, who wrote his *Historia ecclesiastica* largely without reference to local customs and practices, admitted that 'the royal families of many kingdoms' claimed distant relation to Woden.⁹⁸ The collocation of Woden and the gallows survived well after Christianisation in the social imaginary—it is possible to see the perpetuation, by landmark and geography, of this social memory when reading boundary records such as this one, from 957, which includes the direction 'then on to the felon's gallows on Woden's dyke'.⁹⁹ Indeed, as Sarah Semple observes, this collocation stands in relation to the growing predominance of churchyard burials; ancient burial sites, Woden, and the gallows were joined in the social imaginary so that the previous use of ancient monuments and burials as places of assembly were limited to the execution and the burial of social outsiders.¹⁰⁰

What the rood *is* becomes clear in a speech embedded within the narrator's story. Autodiegetic in form, the embedded narrative permits the numinous rood an autobiography. '*Pæt wæs geara iu ic pæt gyta geman*' ('It was many years ago—I remember it yet', l. 28), the rood begins. Though much has been made of the rood's capacity for speech, its remarkable hybridity is most evident in its

⁹⁶ H. M. Chadwick, *The Cult of Othin: An Essay in the Ancient Religion of the North* (Cambridge: CUP, 1899, 2013), 19.

⁹⁷ David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992), kings' ancestry, 69; *gálga valdr*, 168.

⁹⁸ 1.15, '*...cujus pater Voden, de cujus stirpe multarum provinciarum regum genus originem duxit*': Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson (London: English Historical Society, 1838), 35; English translation from *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: OUP, 1994, 2008), 27.

⁹⁹ As can be seen in its seven appearances in the appendix, 'felon's gallows' was a common phrasing: besides *gealga* the gallows could be signified by rood (*rod*) or tree (*tree*). Appendix 4, no. 99, in Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 279.

¹⁰⁰ Semple, *Perceptions*, 16.

memory.¹⁰¹ As mentioned, an object's narration of its transition from its natural state is not uncommon in riddle discourse; the Exeter Book's riddles 12 and 26 are both narrated by the animal that supplied its skin for use. The opening line of 26 in particular—'*Mec feonda sum feore besnyþede*' ('Some enemy deprived me of life')—is similar to the rood's own formulation.¹⁰² Michael Bintley flags up Riddle 21's '*har holtes feond*' and '*brungen of bearwe*' ('grey enemy of the forest', and 'brought from a grove', his translation) as similarly participating in a discourse in which part of the natural world is brought to enslavement, made to act with violence on or against another, perhaps even against the natural order.¹⁰³ The manufacture or use of the instrument or tool is often described as a death or torture: the plough (it seems likely) of Riddle 21 complains that '*Me þurh hrycg wrecen hongap under | an orþoncpil, oþer on heafde | fæst ond forðweard*' ('One ingenious point, driven through my spine, hangs beneath; another on my head is made fast and forward-facing').¹⁰⁴ The rood says '*Þurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan næglum*' ('They pierced me with dark nails', l. 46a), an image so much a part of the crucifixion drama that few have thought about its potential relationship to either the rood's fashioning or function. As with the OE *Exodus* parallels with North Sea migrations, the author is not looking back as a disinterested biblical historian, but is thinking about present times and places through the past. During the earthquake that marks Christ's death, the rood suggests it might have bent or broken and somehow killed Christ's enemies—possibly in this moment it is also a central pole, or support beam, whose collapse would bring down a roof on those gathered.

The rood explicitly comments on its mental action of remembrance, though, which is not a signal of riddle discourse, but rather conforms to the logic of Anglo-Saxon psychology: to be able to recount a memory is to have an identity—not simply to be wood, or a tree of the forest, but a *beam* in particular. To delineate this identity, there is a constant emphasis on social location. On the horizontal

¹⁰¹ As mentioned earlier, '*Þæt wæs geara iu*' is remarkably similar to the first words of the tree-man ('*Þæt var fyr löngu*') who is discovered on an island in *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar* (best preserved in a manuscript written about 1400), and who then explains that he was a spirit sacrificed to in pre-Christian days. The contrast, though, between that idol's epigrammatic utterances and the rood's extended soliloquy is striking. Richard North also details the incident in *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 94.

¹⁰² Riddle 26 in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Krapp & Elliott Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 193.

¹⁰³ Bintley, 'Ploughing', 146.

¹⁰⁴ Riddle 21, *Exeter Book*, *ASPR*, 191.

scale, this emphasis often accords with an interaction between ingroup and outgroup, and with the rood's relative position in those groups. The tree that will become the rood is first located as being at '*holtes on ende*' ('the edge of a wood', l. 29b)—it belongs to a collective, but dwelling at the margins is prey to the '*strange feondas*' ('strong enemies', l. 30b) who arrive and cut it down. Considered on a vertical scale, the rood's history charts a series of ascents and descents that mirrors those of Christ's life. From its initial abasement, being felled by the men, it is hoisted aloft on their own shoulders, taken to a hill, and stood on this promontory. The rood narrates these events in the preterite tense, referring almost as a memoirist to an earlier chapter of life. How much time passes? One possible reading of '*gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge*' (l. 33a) is 'Enemies enough fastened me there', but as they ('*hie*') have already placed the rood on the hill in the previous verse, one could also read '*feondas genoge*' in the accusative, '*me*' in the dative: 'fastened to me there enemies enough'—that is, the rood is being used repeatedly as a cross-gallows. How one construes the line depends on what one thinks the rood is thinking: the men who cut it down are *feondas*, so while it is perhaps redundant for them both to have *asetton* and *gefæstnodon* the rood, *feondas* would refer to the same group. The similarity in Bede's account of Oswald's raising of the cross at Heavenfield reveals the scripting of distributed cognition that accompanies a group activity:

...þæt he þæt Cristæs mael hraðe weorce geworhte 7 seað adulfe, in þæm hit stondan scolde. Ond he se cyning seolf wæs wallende in his geleafan; 7 þæt Cristes mæl genom 7 in þone seað sette 7 mid his hondum bæm hit heold 7 hæfde, oð þæt his þegnas mid moldan hit bestryðed hæfdon 7 gefæstnadan.

(...that the crucifix was of hasty workmanship, and that he dug a pit in which it should stand. The king himself was fervent in faith, and taking the crucifix set it in the pit, and with his two hands held and supported it, till his followers had piled up clay about it and made it fast.)¹⁰⁵

Whether it is the wooden poles at Yeavinger or Oswald's cross, the physical 'raising' relies on a learned set of skills and behaviours that promotes a sense of common identity. The rood's only other reference to its intended function as judicial punishment is reported speech: '*heton me heora wergas hebban*' ('ordered me to lift up their outlaws', l. 31b). *Wergas* is not its word, and in fact, in its account of the crucifixion, the rood conspicuously refrains from any mention of the criminals on Christ's right and left. From the rood's perspective, it is possible the people it encounters could all be considered foes, whether they are punishing or being punished. Pursuing this alternate reading, one

¹⁰⁵ 3.2 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, in *Old English Version*, 154/155. Trans. by Miller.

can see the poet writing in a parallel recuperation: just as in the biblical account Christ transforms the Roman cross's earlier signification, Christ here transforms the meaning of the Anglo-Saxon *rod*. Without the rood's brief account of its life in deeds experienced—and without the poem's insistence on *rod*, *treow*, and *beam* in place of the Latin import *cruc* or even the OE *cros*—this transformation would fail.

Then, the rood says '*Geseah ic þa Frean mancynnes | efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on gestigan*' ('Then I saw the Lord of mankind hurry with great eagerness because he wished to ascend me', l. 33b–34b). Occasionally, when it is providing counterfactual instances, the cross evaluates the past from its present vantage point: three times it speaks of what it dared not do (variations of '*ne dorste ic*', ll. 35a, 42b, 45b)—break itself, fall to the ground, or even, improbably if one thinks only of it as a cross, strike everyone down. This is a significant reimagining of Christ's falling three times while carrying the cross; the rood demonstrates a new ideal of obedience, submitting without question to its Lord's will even in the extreme circumstance where it will be the vehicle of the Lord's death. Its final sight, '*Geseah ic weruda God*' ('I saw the God of multitudes', l. 51b) is of that death scene and its aftermath, when Christ is taken down from the cross by his followers and it can at last bend down to assist them.

Many scholars have observed that the role the rood plays in the poem, in taking on Christ's suffering, permits Christ to remain a more suitably heroic figure—wounded as if in battle, but certainly not captured and tortured to death. The rood's description of Christ climbing it is echoed outside of *The Dream of the Rood* in *Christ II* (putatively by Cynewulf).¹⁰⁶ Between lines 720 and 740, the poem details Christ's six leaps: for the third leap, '*he on rode astag*' ('he climbed up on the rood', l. 727b).¹⁰⁷ What did 'leap' mean in this context? There is documented provenance for Cynewulf's usage: Gregory the Great, thinking of Christ's ascension and the stotting gazelle in the Song of Songs (2:8), speaks of Christ's leaps (*saltus*) from heaven to womb, from womb to manger,

¹⁰⁶ See James W. Marchand, 'The Leaps of Christ and *The Dream of the Rood*', in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, and Thomas N. Hall, TOES 16 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 80–89.

¹⁰⁷ *Christ II*, *Exeter Book*, ASPR 3, 23.

from manger to cross, from cross to sepulchre, and from sepulchre to heaven again.¹⁰⁸ Cynewulf elaborates slightly on the context for each leap, and adds one, making the fifth leap the Harrowing of Hell. While the patristic sources for ‘*hlyp*’ are incontestable, commentators have proved less curious about the effect of reducing Christ’s life to a series of heroic deeds, a point the homilist presses home here:

*Pus her on grundum godes ece bearn
ofer heahhleopu hlypum stylde,
modig æfter muntum. Swa we men sculon
heortan gehygdum hlypum styllan
of mægne in mægen, mærpum tilgan
þæt we to þam hyhstan hrofe gestigan* (ll. 744–49)¹⁰⁹

(Thus here on earth the eternal son of God
over the high hills leaped in bounds
bold before mountains. So must we people
in our heart’s intentions leap in bounds
from strength to strength, go for glorious feats
so that we to the highest heaven ascend.)

Thinking of these ‘leaps’ within the Anglo-Saxon imaginary, cast as heroic achievements, yields other associations that, as we have seen, the poem is aware of enough to deny. One does not need to know much about Odinnic cults to have heard of the World Tree that the All-Father hangs upon—through kenning the tree is a horse that he rides, which makes it available to contrast with another kenning for gallows, where the gallows is a horse (*riða* can mean ‘ride’ or ‘swing’).¹¹⁰ As others have noted, *Christ II* confuses its protagonist with the two other holy persons to refer as well to a father crucified: ‘*Wæs se þrida hlyp / rodorcyninges ræs þa he on rode astag / fæder, frofre gæst*’ (‘The third leap was the jump of the heavens-king when he, father, spirit of comfort, climbed up on the rood’ (l. 726b–28a)).¹¹¹ *The Dream of the Rood*, in contrast, attempts no palimpsestic rewriting of fathers, having addressed and dismissed this prospect earlier; its youthful hero both leaps toward his ascension and embarks on his ‘ship’. Nonetheless, it is worth underlining the poem’s participation in this wider

¹⁰⁸ See notes to ll. 712–43 in Cook, *Christ of Cynewulf*, 143. Gregory’s homily xxix can be found in *Homiliae XL in Evangelia*.

¹⁰⁹ *Christ, Exeter Book*, ASPR 3, 23–24.

¹¹⁰ Kimberley Christine Patton, *Religion of the Gods* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 228; John Lindow remarks upon the same association in *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 277. See also ‘What is a world tree, and should we expect to find one growing in Anglo-Saxon England?’, in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Michael Bintley and Michael Shapland (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 177–85.

¹¹¹ *Christ, Exeter Book*, ASPR 3, 23. See also R. K. Gordon, trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent/Dutton, 1954), 146; Cook, *Christ of Cynewulf*, 28.

discourse because that discourse's narrative effects persist for several centuries.¹¹² The Harrowing of Hell, as Christ's most celebrated deed, comes to have significant impact on vernacular theology, while the OE first *hlyp* of Christ is mirrored by the fourteenth-century's *Piers Plowman*, in Ymaginatif's view of the incarnation: 'For þe heiȝe Holy Ghost heuene shal tocleue, | And loue shal lepe out after into þis lowe erþe' (B.XIV.140–41, and similarly at C.XIV.84–85). Just as the OE *hlyp* pivots on the definitions of 'bound', as leap and limit or boundary, Cristina Maria Cervone has found Middle English poets making use of Christ's 'leap' as spring, to suggest an association with seasonal rebirth.¹¹³

On the level of narrative, the rood's role in the poem is remarkable as well; its replacement of the narrator as the central speaking figure literally shapes the narrative into an envelope pattern. When the rood speaks, the audience joins the narrator in being addressed (and being commanded to share what they have learned). This shift in diegetic levels embeds the rood's revelation within the rood's narrative, not in the narrator's. This bifurcation of diegetic levels can also be seen, with similar effects, in the Blickling homilies; as Eugene Green puts it, God exhorts (in quotation), while the priest, in a succeeding homiletic interpretation, adjusts the discourse's intensity for his audiences. Green's analysis of homiletic grammar is quite nuanced, but to provide an example, God might be quoted using the imperative 'should', while the priest is more likely to say 'let us', which diffuses the imperative of the instruction within the community of 'us'.¹¹⁴ This sensitivity no doubt had something to do with the social position of priests with regard to the Anglo-Saxon elite who were addressed with these homilies, but these levels of discourse persist outside of homilies. Thus, a literary figure such as the rood gains a higher status compared with the narrator. This narrative hierarchy encourages a form of identification grounded in social status, rather than by individual character traits. Its *thegn*-like faithful obedience is the theme of the rood's reminiscence, but its ethical quandary is posed to those who hold the role of *comitatus* member in the social imaginary. When the rood bids the narrator tell its story to all, it addresses '*hæleð min se leofa*' ('my dear man', l. 95b) with lordly but respectful

¹¹² Other instances of this 'leaps' discourse include a twelfth-century homily on the Ascension in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.14.52 (=MS 355), and a thirteenth/fourteenth-century Irish penitential poem '*Aithrige sun Dhe*' by Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh: see Andrew Breeze, 'Varia VI. The "Leaps" that Christ Made', *Ériu* 40 (1989), 190–93.

¹¹³ Cristina Maria Cervone, 'Langland and the Truelove Tradition', *YLS* 22 (2008), 27–56, esp. 44–46.

¹¹⁴ Eugene Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences* (New York: P. Lang, 2001), 50–55.

affection—an address that is performatively applied as well to anyone listening to the story. It is ‘only a story’, but the rood’s command is subtly embedded in social expectation. The role of the ludic narrative element in eliciting the social imaginary’s suasion—by activating a dizzying range of conceptual *schemata*, proffering false leads, and hybridising a new, numinous resolution—is all the more evident as the poem arrives at its conclusion.

The poem’s ‘stylistic disjunctions’, as Carol Braun Pasternack has it, have not always been received favourably. Pasternack notes Bruce Dickens and Alan S. C. Ross deemed everything after line 78 ‘definitely inferior’, deciding it might well be a later addition by a less-skilled poet, a notion that has not entirely been abandoned.¹¹⁵ Pasternack, though, argues that the poem employs a variety of poetic strategies in communicating facets of the rood’s conceptual *schemata*; this includes ‘the dreamer’s vision, the cross’s narrative, the cross’s sermon, the dreamer’s personal response, and the final magnification of Christ’, all threaded together by ‘verbal echoes’, if not fully united by them.¹¹⁶ When the narrating monk takes over after the rood’s speech, for instance, he mentions his exultation at the honour in having been chosen to see the vision. After the revelation, his heart and spirit joyful and inspired, he was filled with great zeal, ‘*elne mycle*’ (l. 123a)—just as used to describe Christ when approaching the cross (l. 34a) and echoed by the rood upon fulfilling its mission (l. 60a). The narrator’s initial eagerness to attain heaven has been tempered by not being yet called (most of his friends have died), but he has turned prayer into a contest, aiming to commune with the cross ‘*ana oftor þonne ealle men*’ (‘alone more often than all other people’, l. 128). He describes his expectation of joining an eternal heavenly *comitatus*, once the rood ‘*gefetige*’ and ‘*gebringe*’ (‘fetches’ and ‘carries’, ll. 138b–39a) him there, returning once again to its role as a vessel. The gallows tree, *gealgtreowe*, also reappears, but only briefly; in the final contrasting flourish, this poem about the crucifixion’s suffering concludes with Christ the King triumphantly reclaiming his realm, in the company of all those angels and saints the narrator saw in the initial vision.

Andy Orchard has observed that while *The Dream of the Rood* has been generally accepted as ‘an early manifestation of the genre of poetic dream-vision that was to prove so popular in later

¹¹⁵ Carol Braun Pasternack, ‘Stylistic Disjunctions in “The Dream of the Rood”’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 167–86, 167–68, citing Dickens and Ross’s edition, 18–19.

¹¹⁶ Pasternack, ‘Stylistic Disjunctions’, 170.

medieval texts', 'there seem as many differences as similarities in the comparisons offered'.¹¹⁷ Yet this depends on the critical perspective. It is possible to see in *The Dream of the Rood* the introduction of a particular kind of visionary narrative, one that interacts with the social imaginary over the course of succeeding centuries, almost always a vehicle for thinking through theological concerns with regard to socially situated human understanding. Theology is so foundational to these texts that it is perhaps more useful to think of these as epistemic, structural concerns, rather than as matters of particular belief. *The Dream of the Rood* is in this sense a poem about how things used to mean, and how they mean 'now', in light of an impending judgement day. To think of the rood simply as the Cross is to miss, then, half the narrative—the way the rood is assembled from a more expansive social imaginary and assigned a new salvific context. Again and again the poem elicits and reframes conceptual associations: the rood is not *that* kind of gallows, and perhaps, in the synecdoche of the mast, a ship. Nor does this reframing proceed in only one direction: the test of the crucifixion, in which the young warrior's shame and suffering is explicitly shared by the rood, is followed by the narrator's inclusion of the Harrowing of Hell, in which evil is fettered and the righteous freed:

*Hiht wæs geniwad
mid bledum and mid blisse þam þe þær bryne þolodan.
Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þam siðfate,
mihtig and spedig (ll. 148b–51a)*

(Hope was renewed
with blessings and with bliss for those who endured the burning there.
The son was triumphant on that journey,
mighty and prosperous)

If this collection of souls being led to an eternal feast through divine favour is reminiscent of the fate of Odinnic heroes, the greater significance is in the reversal: that it is Christ who has reclaimed them from the hell of pagan belief. This rhetorical move is related to the half-line structure, and inscribes an existing formal balance, or a newly assessed rebalancing. Here the poem makes a theological argument in a way that could be problematic with respect to Christian doctrine, but which accords with its preference for presenting timeless dynamics in terms of constituent oppositions: because the logic of victorious contest rewards Christ with the spoils, it is not clear that he returns to heaven with only Christian souls or, more broadly, all the souls that he wished to bring.

¹¹⁷ Orchard, 'Cross-references', 233.

Further, because Old English privileges a connection between deed and role, or office (in a sense, the deeds attributed to any particular king more properly belong to the notion of the ‘*god cyning*’), this generates an affordance in which a rood can come into textual being as a local member—and yet exemplar—of a class. To literalise the rood as Cross is to obscure its visionary import, its relational existence in the social imaginary. Its meaning is in a deed, the conversion of the non-Christian tree into one of the heavenly elect. The poem reorders the social sphere so that the highest duty is adoration of the Cross, *i.e.*, its obedience to and service of the Lord. Perhaps most importantly for this discourse, the poem’s ludic frame is invitational, rather than didactic: it is left to the reader or listener to pursue its avenues of possibility, and in so doing, to conceive of new conceptual parallels and linkages. Drawing upon conceptual *schemata* from the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, and perhaps from that of Norse neighbours as well, the poem builds out a dreamed, syncretic storyworld, invoking a series of material anchors (for instance, the battle standards, crosses, obelisks, poles, and gallows that it unites under the name ‘rood’) before offering a guiding, homiletic interpretation. What is needed, argues the poem, is not the old, named warriors of legend, but the new: the monastic recruits of the current moment who themselves will ascend to greater status and renown, whose deeds will be celebrated as the rood is. It is intriguing, given the extant text’s appearance during the Benedictine Reform period, to reconsider its central vision as a report of a textually-based interaction—a narrative strategy deployed in *Piers Plowman* by Langland some three centuries later.¹¹⁸ Just as the rood is ‘*bewunden*’ (‘enveloped’) in the visionary’s account, the presumably earlier rood poem can be seen to be enveloped by a Reform-inspired ‘re-visitation’ of this textual site of Christianity’s integration into the social imaginary.

¹¹⁸ This is a contextualisation also suggested by Patrick W. Conner, who takes this thought a step further, arguing that the rood poem inscribed on the Ruthwell monument is itself a much later addition; in Conner, ‘The Ruthwell Monument Runic Poem in a Tenth-Century Context’, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 59/238 (2008), 25–51.

II. *St Guðlac: Enacting Anglo-Saxon Hagiographic Spaces*

Understandably, summaries of St Guðlac's *Life* turn quickly to the sensational aspects of his vision of hell, transported by the demons of marshy East Anglia. While this is clearly a visionary experience, it is not presented as a singular dream-vision but a kind of marvel, an irruption from an underlying reality which the saint is regularly privy to. This chapter means to inspect more closely the contexts of interactions within these spiritually infused environments as focalised by the saint. Scholarly literary criticism of hagiography sometimes offers up an apologetics for the genre's perceived shortcomings as narrative, particularly its recycling of saintly *topoi*. What is known about a saint's 'real' biography is kept distinct from genre operations; discrepancies in accounts are explained as authorial borrowings to 'fill out' the *vita*. We can certainly read St Guðlac in this way, but it is also possible to contrast the arenas of the social imaginary in which his contests occur, to explore more fully the thought-world of this East Anglian hermit. In particular, this chapter explores how hagiographic mental spaces are joined and activated by narrative, affording the narrative's audience—in moving through events in the saint's life—specific environmental, social, and psychological interactions. In fact, as will be seen in the subsequent discussion of three texts—the OE *Life of St Guðlac* and poems *Guðlac A* and *Guðlac B*—there are multiple perspectives offered to us on Guðlac and his place in history, and on those who used Guðlac as a means of thinking about sainthood and place in their time. Fascinatingly, distinctions are made between reality as experienced and conceptualised by a saint, by a less holy representative, and by the saint's antagonists—outlining a continuum of perception. Part of the monastic programme was to impart the mental training necessary to resist the perceptual errors of the unholy. Through time and perseverance, perhaps one might even share momentarily in divine cognition.

That the breadth of literature calls for theories—not simply a theory—of cognition is borne out by our experience of these disparate texts and their interactions with mental experience. How are these cognitive landscapes conceived of, how represented, and for what communicative ends? Especially with hagiography, generic notions of 'saintliness' can swamp a narrative's progress, via a series of nuanced perceptual shifts, toward its particular goal. One desired outcome of cognitive

criticism is to raise and retain an awareness of the historical contingency to ‘understanding’, and the person who tries to gain understanding. Rather than postulate that the mental operations of medieval and contemporary people either are or are not fundamentally comparable, cognitive criticism can instead opt to contrast perspectives on thinking and the self over time. In this way, the contingency of cognition comes back into view—reminding us that narrative, as an attempt at sense-making, is always something ‘in progress’.

To return contingency to Anglo-Saxon hagiographic narratives is no small task. While on the one hand, mundane life was proverbially fleeting—nothing but contingency—the intersection of self and divine space evoked by hagiography stands apart from time’s passage. These narratives discover, through passing away and relinquishment, what endures; and this model of an enduring self, exposed by inaction and attrition, is at odds at crucial moments with literary approaches that presume a cumulative, developmental self. Nor did this *vita* model differ solely from later conceptions of the self. Malcolm Godden, and more recently scholars such as Leslie Lockett, Antonina Harbus, Britt Mize, and others, have inquired into the psychological worldview of Anglo-Saxons, and the extent to which this inflected, or was inflected by, classical thought on the subject (itself bound up with Christian theology) that arrived from the Continent.¹ The differences between these understandings of self were not simply terminological, but structural (though this is, of course, true to an even greater extent of any post-Freudian, brain-centric psychological models a reader today might use to interpret minds and moods in OE texts). If OE poetry, with its dynamic appositions and oppositions of *a* and *b* verse, is so structured by status, affiliation, and contest that a *beam* could be pressed into spiritual combat, then it is not surprising to see the same dynamics in a saint’s life. Conversely, and perhaps counterintuitively, Guðlac’s narrative self is outlined by his oppositions, given detail by his battles, and rooted by place—his life not a story of serene, contemplative solitude, but of the struggle for it, even at the gates of hell. The saint figured as a place of spiritual contest was not simply exemplary; in the narrative frame of providential history these saints’ lives are imbricated in a sequence that

¹ Cf. Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind’; Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*; Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*; Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*.

illustrates the steady unfolding of God's will. Each local saint's *vita* is a foundational text—often literally, as in the relationship between Guðlac and the monks of Crowland.

Yet it remains necessary to be critical of the ways texts organised by Christian ideology and teleology consolidate Christianity's position, diminish contingency, and marginalise alterity. Scholars of Old English still struggle to find terms other than those missionaries preferred to refer to those practising in other ways, the non-specific 'pagan' and 'heathen'. But the presence of non-Christian believers (in other faiths or practices) is often precisely what is at issue in hagiographic narratives. It is not always visible to the modern eye what, factually and historically, these narratives do and do not know—whether they speak with confidence in the security of Christianity's foothold, whether they voice a real anticipation of the world's end. Today, mention of Guðlac's 'sainthood' has a borrowed bureaucratic patina at odds with his uncanonised status—his posthumous Latin *vita* was first a document that argued for his recognition, rather than confirmed it. Yet his celebration in OE literature seems to recognise his established place in the ranks of saints. Should we assume these textual 'aspects' of the historical Guðlac are meant to think or act within the same cultural context?

Historical and Critical Contexts

In abstract, to a contemporary reader's eyes, a medieval Anglo-Latin account of an Anglo-Saxon saint's life would seem not to have required much labour to translate into Old English. When monastic scribes began translating hagiographies into the vernacular in the tenth century, they had a surfeit of models of the form available to them; stories of the apostles and other saints of the Church had arrived centuries earlier with Roman evangelists (the widely read *Dialogues*, written by the prolific Pope Gregory the Great, was in part an attempt to describe the spiritual lives of more 'contemporary' sixth-century holy men). Much closer to home, Bede's *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, from the early eighth century, would have been an exemplar. (Near the end of the tenth century, Ælfric turned as well to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* for his homiletic compendium *Lives of Saints*.) Yet, while it was possible that more circumspect translators might follow their Latin sources word for word, others might borrow scenes from one saint's life to add to another's—to meet the requirements

of such an established form. On the Continent, the sixth-century historian-bishop Gregory of Tours suggested there was in truth a singular ‘life’ of the saints; Kathleen Ashley explains that Gregory meant ‘the lives and deaths of all holy people conformed fundamentally to the pattern of a single life, that of Christ’.² Gregory justified his conclusion with a citation of grammatical authority, and proposed that saints are united in a shared experience of embodiment:

And someone might ask me whether we should speak of the ‘life’ or of the ‘lives’ of the saints. Aulus Gellius and a number of other philosophers wished to speak of ‘lives’. But Pliny, in the third book of his *The Art of Grammar*, says: ‘The ancients spoke of the “lives” of each of us; but the grammarians did not think that the word “life” has a plural’. Therefore it is clearly better to speak of the ‘life’ of the fathers rather than of their ‘lives’, for although their merits and powerful deeds are diverse, in this world all are nourished by one and the same life of the body.³

The multiple bodies on view here, that of Christ, of holiness, of flesh, are characteristically synthesized in the person of the saint: the individual is merely the fleshly vehicle; the exemplar of perfection is the spiritual culmination of the journey. Thus, in a Northumbrian *Life of Saint Gregory*, the author justified the attribution to Gregory the Great of miracles of more dubious provenance on the grounds that all saints share in this miraculous heritage, as members of the same body of holiness—a miracle one saint could work through the power of God, all saints could have done.⁴ But this justification might have sounded differently to English ears; as Antonia Gransden notes, the Northumbrian-period biographies of saints and church leaders, of which Bede’s *Cuthbert* is a part, are remarkable within hagiography for their interest in the saint’s historical life and for their relative uninterest in miracle.⁵

Because every saint’s life can have, in an ultimate sense, only one destination, it is not surprising that the narrative structure employed would also converge. Many hagiographies propose a sequence including a portentous birth, signs from youth, a momentous conversion (usually in adolescence), trials in maturity, and the saint’s death.⁶ Given the undeniable popularity of the form,

² Kathleen Ashley, ‘Accounts of Lives’, in *A Companion to Medieval English Language and Culture c. 1350–c. 1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), 437–53, 439.

³ Prologue: ‘*Et quaeritur a quibusdam utrum “vitam” sanctorum, an “vitas” dicere debeamus. Agellius autem et complures alii philosophorum “vitas” dicere voluerunt. Nam Plinius auctor in tertio artis grammaticae librai ait: “Vitas antiquae cuiuscumque nostrum dixerunt; sed grammatici pluralem non putaverunt habere vitam”. Unde manifestum est melius dici vitam partum quam vitas; quia cum sit diversitas meritorum virtutumque, una tamen omnes vita corporis alit in mundo*’, Gregory of Tours, *Lives and Miracles*, 2/3.

⁴ Colgrave, *Earliest Life*, 128–35.

⁵ Antonia Gransden, *Legends, Tradition and History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), 55.

⁶ For a list of hagiographic topoi, Charles Jones, *Saints’ Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1968), 82.

attempts to explain its fall from favour have first to provide a reason for its appeal. In *The Persistence of Medievalism*, Angela Jane Weisl summarises some of the hypotheses for saintly charisma: the perverse strength of desire for an invented object (the object being imaginary, it unites both a superhuman appeal and the absence of the possibility of any fulfilment of that desire), the longing for connection to an elevated reality, the saint's extremist affirmation of shared values, and the value of the 'community of saints' as an idealised kinship group.⁷ Weisl's overview points again and again to the participation of hagiographies in a larger cultural movement—visible in the tenth- and eleventh-century flowering of saints' cults—that these texts could not contain: reflected, for example, in the trade in relics and the translation of local saints to more rarefied surroundings as their popularity grew.

This larger social context for hagiography argues against the following statement: 'The saint provides a spectacle for the audience, an exterior without psychological interiority and this scenario corresponds to, and is constituted by, a spectator's point of view'.⁸ While Fludernik's consideration of a kind of text-based iconography points in productive directions, the assertion that saints in particular were portrayed 'without psychological interiority' seems rooted in a binary not yet constructed in the medieval period. More pertinent is Fludernik's proposition that 'All experience is [...] stored as emotionally charged remembrance, and it is reproduced in narrative form because it was memorable, funny, scary, or exciting'.⁹ If medieval authors did not have access to the workings of an 'interior' consciousness, where then is the emotional charge? The crucial distinction here is between an inner/outer dynamic and an instance of it. Just as the Anglo-Saxon mind is not located in the brain, the socially-oriented medieval psyche does not commonly make use of exterior and interior division within a person when the model of exile, of ingroup and outgroup, is more readily at hand. A frequent element in hagiography is the saint's severing of social and family ties, and this can come to seem generic; but the emotional disruption occasioned by rejection of what was only somewhat

⁷ Weisl also suggests that it is not the saint's life that fell from favour so much as those type of 'saints'—noting that even in a secular age, there is a substantial moralism to biographies of sports stars. She points to the homerun rivalry of Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa that 'saved' baseball from a slump in popularity, and the saga of Wade Boggs: his superstitions, 'legendary' drinking ability, and the extramarital affair that tarnished his image; in *The Persistence of Medievalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Susan Stewart on desire, 15; John R. Shinnors on elevated reality, 35, Richard Kieckhefer on shared values, 57; Peter Brown on community of saints, 38.

⁸ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 98.

⁹ Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology*, 24.

hyperbolically called ‘the world’ must have been extreme, and as Anne B. Thompson points out was thought of as a kind of martyrdom.¹⁰ If, as with medieval hagiography, a representation of self is such that it *seems* to have no insides, we must ask ourselves how this self is structured—whether its insides are outside. Though a lonely hermit’s setting can seem iconographic, the landscape may also convey information about the hermit’s emotional, embodied experience at that location. It might be tempting to say social deprivation is mirrored in the physical austerity of the hermitage setting, but in fact the remote, difficult life of an anchorite insisted on the literal scarcity of both food and companionship. An enactivist reading directs our attention to the link between an environment as perceived and the perceiving consciousness—to see, for instance, in tales of a saint’s amicable relationship with animals the human loneliness that is met by ‘socialising’ with nearby animals.

Finally, an enactivist reading asks us to consider any particular text as embedded in a cultural moment or moments, in conversation with a social imaginary. Literary study of transmission tends to employ a genealogical frame that measures ‘distances’ from origin: an Anglo-Latin copy of a Latin translation of a desert-dwelling monk’s *Life* in Greek might be situated, then, in the context of the survival of its source text (extant or hypothesised) and its cultural referents, with annotation of any orthographic permutations, along with more substantial additions and elisions. An OE copy of the Anglo-Latin copy would exist as a kind of oddity, though useful for purposes of comparison. Answering the question of what an Anglo-Saxon translator and audience might have made of such a story—*i.e.*, how they might have consciously and unconsciously familiarised this ‘exotic’ narrative—means putting to one side the notion of an original, singular manuscript, and focussing instead on the testimony of ‘witnesses’—not simply the OE versions of a text, but OE texts that give us insight on how they were read. These texts, as artefacts informed by Anglo-Saxon culture, can also illuminate the social imaginary’s concerns, mores, and structures that ‘re-linguaged’ a story about desert fathers. The received sense even of apparently generic hagiographic elements must be investigated with an Anglo-Saxon audience in mind.

¹⁰ Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 102.

When we speak of a concept or conceptual frame, we are really referring to a network of meaning structured by associations and relations, of which words' denotative intersections form only one part. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Cross-rod in *The Dream of the Rood* interacts with the conceptual frames of sacred tree and of gallows, not simply in terms of Old Saxon and Old Norse associations, but with expectations and understandings about belief, behaviour, and social structure. Similarly, the 'warrior Christ' of OE poetry only partly expresses the capaciousness of the OE noun *hæleð*, which carries the meanings 'man', 'hero', and 'warrior'. The meaning of a *hæleð* Christ is embedded in Anglo-Saxon culture, in its concern for status, its regulation of masculine behaviour, and its social dynamics. Because it is also a normative statement about a young man's place in that society, *hæleð* Christ can never simply be 'warrior Christ': it organises all of heaven. And just as the obedient but conflicted rood was embraced by Christ the young *hæleð*, Anglo-Saxon texts habitually reframed the passive suffering of saints in hagiographies as a result of their unstinting obedience to the Lord's command. The Christian hagiographic model could be inflected with wisdom literature and elegy with little difficulty, as these discourses generally valorised mental discernment and emotional fortitude, but more striking is the heroic narrative structure to spiritual 'combats'. The Anglo-Saxon social imaginary would transform an anchorite's retreat from the world into a continuation of his territorial skirmishes, but on a spiritual plane. Correspondingly, these territorial battles needed a location in which they could take place, and through which they could be memorialised. The familiar collocation of 'battle of' and a site name (Maldon, Brunanburh) illustrates this fixing of deeds in place. Similarly, our anchorite fixed himself in place, his body standing in for the site of the battle.

St Guðlac (d. 714), enjoys, posthumously, a unique status: of the saints born in England, he alone is celebrated twice, at length, in the corpus of OE poetry. The catalogue of OE texts substantively concerning St Guðlac consists of a prose translation of Felix's *Vita sancti Guðlaci* (in the eleventh-century manuscript Cotton Vespasian, D.xxi, fols 18–40^v, at the British Library), Vercelli Homily XXIII (Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII), and the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral Library, MS 3501) poems known as *Guðlac A* (fols 32^v–44^v) and *Guðlac B* (fols 44^v–52^v), with both

the Vercelli and Exeter collections dating from the latter half of the tenth century.¹¹ Dating of the Latin *Vita* relies on the monk Felix's explanation within it that he has written it at the request of Ælfwald, the king who ruled East Anglia from 713 to 749; Alaric Hall narrows this range to 'probably between about 730 and 749' and the subsequent translation 'probably by the early tenth century'.¹² Felix's account served not only as the source for the OE translation, but also for parts of *Guðlac B*, while the OE translation itself has been identified as the basis for the Vercelli homily.¹³ Depending upon the evidence used, *Guðlac A* has been dated to between the eighth and mid-tenth centuries: Jane Robert's lexical and metrical analysis found commonalities with the OE *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Daniel*, and *Beowulf*, while Patrick Conner and Christopher Jones separately have made cases for the poem's responsiveness to tenth-century monastic reform, an argument supported by the subsequent 'lexomic' analysis of Downey, Drout, Kahn, and LeBlanc.¹⁴ Edward Palumbo has conjectured that 'many more poems about English saints were composed and some were even written down as part of the Church's reaction against heroic poetry, celebrating pagan heroes'—but adds that this number may have been whittled almost completely away during the Danish and Norman invasions, and by the sixteenth-century dissolution of monasteries.¹⁵ Evidence for a greater insular participation in religious sainthood exists in liturgical calendars in which the feast days of 'a great many local saints are entered'.¹⁶ Yet, as will be discussed later, it may be productive to regard this poetry less as a 'reaction against' and more of an 'innovation on' the heroic poetic narrative exemplified by *Beowulf*, adapted to a new cultural context with the rise of an institutional monasticism: Alcuin's admonition that heroic tales from the heathen past were inappropriate at ecclesiastical banquets was penned in 797, and it is

¹¹ Jane Roberts lists thirteen extant manuscripts in various languages that reference *Guðlac* of Crowland in 'An Inventory of Early *Guðlac* Materials', *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970), 193-233, 193-94.

¹² Alaric Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and St *Guðlac*', in *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. Debra Higgs Strickland, *Visualising the Middle Ages*, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 207-35, 207.

¹³ Edward M. Palumbo notes 'there can be no doubt that [*Guðlac B*] is based on [the Latin *Vita*]'s chapter L', noting agreement between Schaar, Kurtz, and Krapp & Dobbie on this relationship, in *The Literary Use of Formulas in Guðlac II and Their Relation to Felix's Vita Sancti Guðlaci* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1977), 20-21. Bertram Colgrave, editor and translator of the standard edition of Felix's *Vita*, argued there that the author of *Guðlac A* was familiar as well with at least elements of Felix's account, in *Felix's Life of Saint Guðlac* (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), 20.

¹⁴ Jane Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford: OUP, 1979), esp. 70-71; Patrick W. Conner, 'Source Studies, the Old English *Guthlac A* and the English Benedictine Reformation', *Revue Benedictine* 103 (1993), 380-413; Christopher A. Jones, 'Envisioning the *Cenobium* in the Old English *Guthlac A*', *Mediaeval Studies* 57 (1995), 259-91; Sarah Downey, Michael D. C. Drout, Michael J. Kahn, and Mark D. LeBlanc, "'Books Tell Us": Lexomic and Traditional Evidence for the Sources of *Guthlac A*', *Modern Philology* 110/2 (2012), 153-81.

¹⁵ Palumbo, *Literary Use*, 19.

¹⁶ Roberts, 'Inventory', 216. Roberts points to the collections edited by F. Wormald, *English Kalendars Before 1100 A.D.* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1934) and *English Kalendars After 1100 A.D.* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1939).

possible that the appearance of both Guðlac poems was subsequent to this. That there was indeed an asymmetric winnowing process, disadvantaging OE texts, is indicated by the single extant copy of the complete OE translation of the *Vita sancti Guðlaci*, while twelve manuscripts of Felix's Latin *Vita* survive. This manuscript tradition bespeaks, nonetheless, a significant readership for Guðlac's life; indeed, his death in 714 is the sole entry for that year in most of the extant versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

An enactivist consideration of the Guðlac texts must necessarily contend with the presence of thought-worlds conditioned by disparate social imaginaries, beginning with their borrowing of the exemplar of the Egyptian ascetic St Antony, whose mid-fourth-century biography in Greek, putatively by Athanasius, was translated into Latin by Evagrius (345–99) sometime in the next few decades. Colgrave says that the monk Felix, when working on his biography of Guðlac, was clearly familiar with Evagrius's translation of *Vita Antonii*, along with Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, and Gregory the Great's *Life of St Benedict*.¹⁷ Evagrius, like Jerome, promoted an approach that privileged audience reception in a time when even word order could be considered divinely inspired and thus immutable—in fact, Jerome would later quote from Evagrius's prologue to *Vita Antonii* in explaining that, 'A literal translation from one language obscures the sense'.¹⁸ In her comparison of Evagrius's translation with Athanasius's original, Lois Gandt notes how Evagrius discreetly 'tailored' the *Vita* for his urban, educated audience by addition and emphasis: he gives detail of Antony's noble birth into a leading Christian family and repeatedly describes Antony's conflicts with demons in victorious military terms:

He later describes Antony as having destroyed the whole army of Satan on his knees, using prayer as his weapons ('*et flexis genibus, armisque orationum omnem Satanae prosternebat exercitum*'), in contrast to Athanasius' statement that he knelt and prayed while alone in the desert.¹⁹

Evagrius was not the first to import these military terms; Paul's letter to the Ephesians (6:11–17) advertises the allegorical protection that the armour of God, breastplate of justice, and shield of faith

¹⁷ Bertram Colgrave, *Felix's Life*, 16–17.

¹⁸ Jerome, Epistle 57.6: '*ex alia in aliam linguam ad verbum expressa translatio sensus operit et veluti laeto gramine sata strangulat*', *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae, Pars I: Epistulae I–LXX*, ed. by Isidore Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 511; English translation from Fremantle, W. H., trans., *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, NPNF series 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995/Orig. publ. Christian Literature, 1893).

¹⁹ Lois Gandt, *A Philological and Theological Analysis of the Ancient Latin Translations of the Vita Antonii* (NY: Fordham University, 2008), 211.

provide against the fiery darts of Satan. But in Evagrius's hands, the literal seems to predominate. Where Antony's Greek *vita* mentions his vision of his ascension into heaven, Evagrius reports that Antony was seen ascending into heaven.²⁰

The prologue to Felix's *Life*, reproduced in the OE translation, makes no mention of these antecedents and begins by quoting from Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*. Though it was customary to apologise for one's inadequacies as an author at the outset of such a work, Felix's prologue also admonishes any disparagers who, like the blind, will stand in the light (of the saint's story) and persist in behaving as if they cannot see.²¹ Though this is sometimes interpreted as a form of anxious throat-clearing, from the outset Felix has situated his conflict with a censuring social group in a way that mirrors the central struggle of Guðlac's story, his battles with negative, intrusive voices—and also gives an indication of the sophisticated structure his *Life* will employ. The shared preface in the Latin and OE texts marks the first point of divergence for *Guðlac A*. Where its preface begins in the Exeter Book, precisely, is itself contested, though Jane Roberts follows Israel Gollancz's 1895 edition in claiming 29 lines that have been alternatively taken as concluding the poem *Christ*, which appears before *Guðlac A* in the book.²² Edited this way, an angel's greeting of the happy soul of a good man at his death presages the Guðlac story—and indeed this preface concludes with a discussion of the devil's harassment of 'anbuendra' ('hermits', lit. 'solitary dwellers') who are protected by angels. *Guðlac A* would then seem to highlight the specifically psychological impact of voluntary social isolation. The description is at least partly congruent with patristic literature's *psychomachia* model. Evagrius, for instance, identified eight demons of thought that the ascetic strove with: gluttony, lust, covetousness, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride.²³ These are demons known by their affect, rather than by their appearance, and it is their influence that is minutely observed. Acedia, for

²⁰ Gandt, *Vita Antonii*, 217.

²¹ This and all further quotations from the OE *Life*, unless otherwise noted, are from Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St Guðlac, Hermit of Crowland* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015/Orig. publ. London: J. R. Smith, 1848), 5. For a more modern edition, see Jane Crawford, 'Guthlac: An Edition of the Old English Prose Life, Together with the Poems in the Exeter Book', Ph.D thesis, English Department, Oxford University (1967). My modern English translation unless otherwise noted.

²² Roberts, *Guðlac Poems*, 18–19.

²³ For more on Evagrius's mental taxonomy, see Paolo Azzone, *Depression as a Psychoanalytic Problem* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013), 25–28. In more present-day terms, Donald Hebb's studies of sensory reduction in the 1950s launched a wave of further studies, in which two findings were common: that complex hallucinations would ensue, and that the subject's suggestibility increased. See Raymond M. Klein, 'D. O. Hebb: An Appreciation', in *The Nature of Thought: Essays in Honor of D. O. Hebb*, ed. by Peter W. Jusczyk and Raymond M. Klein (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), 1–18, esp. 11–12.

instance, in which time's slow passage agitated the monk until he sought companionship, was particularly found to intrude between the fourth and eighth hours of the daytime.

Evagrius's editorial bias in favour of power and wealth finds correspondence in Felix's *Life*, and thus in the OE *Life*: Guðlac is introduced as the son of Penwald, a Mercian noble: '*He wæs þæs yldestan and þæs æpelstan cynnes þe Iclingas wæron genemne*' ('He was of the oldest and the noblest family, who were named the Iclings', p. 8). A wealthy man, he marries the fairest and noblest maiden, called Tette. Guðlac's birth is marked by the descent of a red hand from the heavens, holding a golden rood, which it inclines at the baby's door. His childhood is a model one, marked with the '*scima gastlicre beorhtnysse*' ('the splendour of spiritual brightness', p. 12) that all can see. But in what would be his teenage years, when Guðlac is drawn to tales of monsters and heroes, it is as if he awakes from a pacific sleep:

and he gesomnode miccle scole and wered his gepoftena and hys efenheafdinglas, and him sylf to wæpnum feng. Ða wreac he his æfpancas on his feondum, and heora burh bærnde and heora tunas oferhergode; and he wide geond eorþan menigfeald wæl felde and sloh and of mannum hearo æhta nam. (p. 13)

(and he assembled a large band and host of his comrades and his equals, and took up weapons himself. Then he wreaked his offences on his enemies, and burned their city, and ravaged their towns, and widely through the country he brought down numerous slaughters and slew and took from people their possessions.

Guðlac spends nine years leading this raiding, presumably on the people whom the Mercians were driving back into Wales—the text will later explain that he has learned to understand '*bryttisc*' ('British') because he was formerly in exile among them, presumably sometime during this same period (p. 42). In any event, he is a warrior in actual deed before a spiritual awakening leads him to reflect on kings of old forsaking the world in the face of their deaths. At 24, he enters a monastery, and in just a few years feels drawn to the more solitary life of an anchorite. In this, Guðlac is seemingly following the directions found in Chapter One of the sixth-century Rule of St Benedict: 'after long probation in a monastery, having learnt in association with many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well-armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert'.²⁴ The Rule states that the only real merit in the monastery is due to good works and humility,

²⁴1:3–6, Rule of St Benedict: '*Deinde secundum genus est anachoritarum, id est heremitarum, horum qui non conuersationis feruore nouicio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, qui didicerunt contra diabolum multorum solacio iam docti pugnare, et bene extructi fraterna ex acie ad singularem pugnam heremi, securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu uel brachio contra uitia carnis uel cogitationum deo auxiliante pugnare sufficiunt*', in *Benedicti Regula*, ed. by Rudolph Hanslik, CSEL 75 (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1960), 17; English translation from *The Rule of St Benedict*, ed. and trans. by Abbot Justin McCann (London: Burns & Oates, 1969/1952), 15.

and Guðlac in particular is praised for his abstinence (initially his new brothers are put off by his refusal to drink alcohol) and for his memorisation of psalms, canticles, hymns, and prayers. Guðlac's sudden prior decision to return a third part of his winnings from raids echoes the instruction of the Master's Rule regarding the disposition of an oblate's inheritance: one option is to divide it into thirds, with one-third going to the poor, one-third to the family, and one-third to the monastery.²⁵ In both these accounts of Guðlac's struggles with the accursed spirits, a monkish audience seems first in mind; Felix does not provide much descriptive detail of this part of Guðlac's life, as if he assumes his audience is familiar with its outlines already.

Writing Anglo-Saxon Settings

Perhaps the most obvious departure from the story of St Antony is the setting for Guðlac's hermitage in the Latin and OE *Life*: instead of a mountain fort (and then later at the foot of an 'inner desert' mountain)²⁶, Guðlac settles at a spot called Crowland (also Croyland), deep in a 'fen of immense size', that seems to have acted as a natural boundary between the kingdoms of Mercia and East Anglia:

Þær synd unsmæte moras, hwilon sweart wæter-steal, and hwilon fule ea-riþas yrnende, and swylce eac manige ealand and hreod and beorhgas and treow-gewrido, and hit mid menigfealdan bignyssum widgille and lang þurhwunað on norð-sæ. (p.21)

(There are enormous marshes, sometimes black stagnant water, and sometimes foul streams running, and also many islands and reeds and mounds and thickets, and with numerous bowings broad and long it [the fen] continues to the North Sea.)

Kelley Wickham-Crowley has proposed that an Anglo-Saxon 'habit of perception or vision' organised mutable intersections of land and water, seeing the affordances for water-borne travel in conjunction with the parcels of habitable land defined by the water's reach.²⁷ She employs the intersection of literature and archaeology to discuss the impact of the rise of sea levels coupled with land subsidence on Anglo-Saxon forebears; archaeological research points to coastal flooding on the Continent as a

²⁵ Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 30.

²⁶ Ch. 49, from H. Ellershaw's trans. of the 'Life of Antony', *Select Writings of Athanasius, Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II.4 (New York: PUB, 1924/57), 195–221, 209.

²⁷ Kelley Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the Ecg: The Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts' in *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. by Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2006), 85–110, 85.

trigger both for resettlement of dwellings atop constructed mounds and for forced migration.²⁸ (With respect to the historical flooding of the East Anglian fens, Durham University's Sea Level Research Unit has developed a map that reconstructs past sea levels, while also indicating a similar dynamic is in play today, with the south east of England 'sinking' at the same time as sea level rises).²⁹ Tidal waters, as an encroaching element, would have an ambivalent nature for people whose ancestors they evicted but for whom water was also a means of transport and communication. Water-hemmed land could be isolated and remote, but amenable to habitation even without much space for agrarian productivity, thanks to surrounding aquatic life. For those familiar with even rudimentary drainage and dike-building practices, the useful mutability of the water/land boundary would have been even more evident. Wickham-Crowley points as well to Sam Lucy's suggestion that the early Anglo-Saxon habit of reclaiming worship sites like barrows and hills created a new link in a chain of habitation—perhaps authorising the new ownership through custom even while newly consecrating the ground.³⁰ Christopher Cannon offers a fascinating later view of such a legal-topographic nexus when he writes 'What Lazamon thought he knew was that the law was really the *land*'s idea, a form of thought which took shape according to the structure of that thing from which it emerged'.³¹ Perhaps because of the transience of governments both within and without the kingdoms, Cannon hypothesises, Lazamon seeks to embed law into land, to provide law with the stability of landscape.³² But what if the landscape itself were unstable?

One habit of mind to mitigate geographic mutability was to create verbal maps where cartographic means were unavailable: 'in written charters, the place-names and features listed are a sequence', writes Wickham-Crowley, often a narrative of the interaction of a person on foot with the landscape.³³ This may help contextualise the chronicler's terse description of the territory; the

²⁸ For this last point specifically, Wickham-Crowley references Otto S. Knottnerus, 'The Wadden Sea Region' in *LANCEWAD: Landscape and Cultural Heritage in the Wadden Sea Region—Project Report, Wadden Sea Ecosystem*, 12, ed. by Manfred Vollmer, Mette Guldborg, Matthias Maluck, Dré van Marrewijk, and Gregor Schlicksbier (Wilhelmshaven: Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, 2001), 12–70, 12.

²⁹ See Ian Shennan, *et al.*, 'Late Holocene relative land- and sea-level changes: Providing information for stakeholders' in *GSA Today* 19/9 (2009), 52–53 <<http://www.geosociety.org>>.

³⁰ Wickham-Crowley, 'Ecg', 98–99. See also Sam Lucy, 'The Significance of Mortuary Ritual in the Political Manipulation of the Landscape', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* II (1992), 93–105.

³¹ Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 55.

³² Cannon, *Grounds*, 61.

³³ Wickham-Crowley, 'Ecg', 89.

immensity of the fens is decomposed into encounters (the iterative *hwilon*, ‘sometimes’, maintains the sense of a traveller’s movement through the fens) with pools and streams, then hills and islands with thickets and groves, coming in succession as one makes one’s way toward the North Sea.

Syntactically, the term ‘fen’ comprehends all these moments, so it is also possible to read this portion of text as offering the fen’s perspective on its physical existence. The word *þurhwunað* carries a durational emphasis; the fen ‘continues’ or ‘lasts’ at each of these moments. In Blickling Homily 65/16, God’s kingdom *þurhwunað* in eternity; here, the fen’s persistence in bending and bowing perhaps contrasts unfavourably with Guðlac’s journeying by the ‘*rihtestan wege*’ (‘straightest way’, p. 20), a biblical echo, a few lines later. That the East Anglian fens are envisaged as a complex system of resources and habitats, crucially joined to the North Sea, is perhaps surprising but the timing of the development of large-scale coastal barriers lends support to this view. ‘By the tenth century’, archaeologist Robert Van de Noort notes, ‘the embankment of the East Anglian Fenland was complete’—creating definition where before there was flux and flow.³⁴

The enactivist viewpoint, that landscape is in one sense an assembly of affordances (for movement, shelter, sustenance), encourages a closer interrogation of this textual environment in which ‘black’ or ‘foul’ water may indicate wind-driven turbidity from peat sediment; reeds and thickets, demarcations between wetland and drier vegetation; and islands and hillocks, vital landmarks and refuges in an otherwise fluid environment. This corresponds with research that indicates that Anglo-Saxons paid close attention to these kinds of attributes: ‘Water and water places, perhaps especially places where the waters had significant qualities, for example, intertidal zones, places with seasonal surges, or water sources with a high mineral content or unusual colouration are all suggested to have provoked the interest and, in some cases, veneration of watery places’.³⁵ Speaking of another text (*Ancrene Wisse*) but on a related subject, Liz Herbert McAvoy makes the point that ‘the author is at the same time both demarcating and mapping out a physical territory of occupation which is inevitably productive of a “geography of mind”, that is to say a navigable, spiritual mind-set based on

³⁴ Robert Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 118.

³⁵ Sample, *Perceptions*, 67.

what he presents as tangible and physically immediate phenomena'.³⁶ That navigability is indeed at issue is signalled by the appearance in the OE *Life* of Tatwine, who will become Guðlac's guide. While Tatwine will take Guðlac to his new island home by boat, his knowledge is not limited to watery byways; he also informs his passenger that no one has succeeded in living there because of the 'menigfealdum brogum and egsum' ('numerous terrors and fears') and the 'annysse þæs widgillan westenes' ('loneliness of the vast wilderness'), later going on to mention the 'awerigedra gasta' ('damned spirits') living there (p. 20–22). Wickham-Crowley has remarked upon how this passage points back to the *Life of St Cuthbert*—Farne Island is also the home of spirits irked by a saint's arrival, and both the anonymous account and Bede's prose version agree that no one had managed to live there alone (or undisturbed, adds Bede) before this.³⁷ This confluence of religious settlement with edgelands and water elicits the psychology of social exile to destabilize it—if the hermitage is terrestrially isolated, it is accessible by boat; if it is infected by psychosocial instability, it is still 'peopled'; if it is placed amid the wilderness, it yet stands on the border of two kingdoms. That this particular landscape scene bears repeating has less to do with the availability of Bede's exemplar than with its situating of 'heroic' anchorites in an age of monasticism. The hostile, heretical, or hapless spirits Guðlac does personal battle with on a spiritual plane are, in a different register, the kinds of residents any rural cleric might be called to convert or minister to.

Yet these fens do not replace the desert with the bogs of *Beowulf*. They are described in terms of the emotional reactions they provoke, and, it will transpire, are pointedly not wandered by wordless, bestial manslayers but by beings who engage in verbal arguments, produce deceptive visions, and are forbidden from harming Guðlac severely. J. R. R. Tolkien located Grendel's monstrosity at a moment in time when the *Beowulf* 'author' was, as he wrote:

still dealing with the great temporal tragedy, and not yet writing an allegorical homily in verse. Grendel inhabits the visible world and eats the flesh and blood of men; he enters their houses by the doors. [...] Beowulf's byrne was made by Weland, and the iron shield he bore against the serpent by his own smiths; it was not yet the breastplate of righteousness, nor the shield of faith for the quenching of all the fiery darts of the wicked.³⁸

³⁶ Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2011), 154.

³⁷ Wickham-Crowley, 'Ecg', 94.

³⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1936), 23–24.

Scholars who have wanted to point to the development of an heroic Christianity have nonetheless set forth correspondences, born of the fens, between the stories of Beowulf and Guðlac; for Whitelock, it was significant that Beowulf's monsters and Guðlac's accursed spirits had their genesis in Cain, that the texts shared the motif of spiritual armour worn against the devil's arrows, and that Guðlac's mound and the dragon's barrow were both disturbed by treasure-seekers—even if these 'points of contact' were only accidentally similar, they might still be evidence of a 'similarity of outlook'.³⁹

(More tenuously, Mayr-Harting also noted a preference for attack during the night.⁴⁰)

Conversely, it must also be significant, then, that the OE *Life of Guðlac* replaces Felix's Latin 'semen Cain' ('seed of Cain') with 'forwyrde tudder' ('offspring of destruction', p. 38). Not only has an explicit reference to Cain in the Latin been left untranslated but, per Bosworth-Toller notes, *túdor* (or *tuddor*) designates 'that which grows from another', giving 'offspring' or 'fruit' sooner than 'seed'.⁴¹

Oddly, with regard to the audience of *Beowulf* and its presumed familiarity with the Bible story, Michael Swanton notes that 'even the careful first scribe of the *Beowulf*-manuscript was apparently unfamiliar with so straightforward a name as that of Cain; in line 107 he had written first *comes*, crossing that out and then writing *caines*—and then in line 1261 wrote just *camp*—and left it at that, although the context demands the name Cain'.⁴² One reason for this editorial change may be that, narratively, the role of the monstrous has been usurped by the general principle of the world being destined for ruin—what Guðlac wrestles with throughout the story is his unshakeable conviction that the world's—and his own—doom is nigh. Sam Newton, who has argued that *Beowulf* could be an homage to distant Danish ancestors of East Anglian nobility, is particularly puzzled to find that the 'reference to fiends as descendants of Cain does not appear in any of the later Old English poetic versions of *Vita sancti Guðlaci* and yet exactly the same monstrous pedigree is attributed to Grendel

³⁹ Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (London: Clarendon Press, 1970), 80–81.

⁴⁰ Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991/1977), 231–37.

⁴¹ When 'tuddres' appears in the Blickling Homilies it has positive associations: 'ðæs godcundan tuddres' when the angel announces to Mary she will bear God's son; and 'tuddres æpelles', or 'splendid progeny' as Rev. Morris translated it. 'Túdor', in Joseph Bosworth, 'An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online', ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller, *et al.*; comp. by Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2010) <<http://www.bosworthtoller.com>>.

⁴² Michael Swanton, from his 'Introduction' to *Beowulf* (Manchester: MUP, 1978), 4. On this confusion, see also the note for ll. 106–08 in *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th edn, ed. by Fulk, *et al.* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008), 123.

and his kind in *Beowulf*.⁴³ Grendel and his cannibalism, and Cain and fratricide, are constellated by life before conversion; a monk of Guðlac's era would have been urged to 'fear the Day of Judgement. To dread hell. To desire eternal life with all spiritual longing. To keep death daily before one's eyes.'⁴⁴ The preface to *Guðlac A* also introduces the motif of decline common in Old English: '*Ealdað eorþan blæd æþela gehwylcre / ond of wlite wendað wæstma gecyndu; / bið seo sipre tid sæda gehwylces / mætræ in mægne*' ('The blossom of earth grows old in every one of its excellences, and kinds of fruits decay from beauty; the later time of every seed is poorer in strength', ll. 43a–46a).⁴⁵ It is also possible that, given climatic changes in the era, harvests were indeed poor, and this was not purely a rhetorical device.

More recently, Michael Bintley has argued that the active correspondence between the two stories of *Beowulf* and *Guðlac* is not a function of the kinds of monsters present, but the environment itself. Bintley, using Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, links remoteness and inaccessibility with the tendency for newly converted Christian communities to fall back on pagan customs: thus, 'Bede's celebration of individuals devoted to maintaining Christianity among the geographically marginalised elements of English society is entirely understandable'.⁴⁶ Geographic marginalisation is at play in *Beowulf*, too, of course: Grendel is '*mære mearcstapa, se þe moras heold, | fen ond fæsten*' ('an infamous borderland-walker, who held the moors, fen and fastness', l. 103–4a).⁴⁷ It is there, the text says, away from humankind that the rest of monster-kind lives: elves, orcs, and giants, following the example of the exiled Cain. This association with Cain and the '*westen*' ('wilderness') is repeated in the introduction to Grendel's mother (l. 1261). Hroðgar's description, which follows, recounts what he has heard from witnesses: that two large creatures prowl the borderlands—one seems a woman, one a man, though far larger than a human being. (I borrow Michael Swanton's evocative translation in this instance):

*Hie dygel lond
warigeað, wulfhleopu, windige næssas,*

⁴³ Sam Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1993), 143.

⁴⁴ Ch. 4, McCann, *Rule*, 29.

⁴⁵ This and all following quotations from *Guðlac A*, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3, 49–72.

⁴⁶ Michael Bintley, 'Where the Wild Things are in Old English Poetry', in *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Williams, Thomas J. T. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 205–28, 208.

⁴⁷ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 6.

frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream
 under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
 flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
 mile gemearces, þæt se mere standeð;
 ofer þæm hongiac hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wyrtrum fæst wæter oferhelmað. (ll. 1358a–64b)⁴⁸

(They occupy a secret land, wolf-haunted slopes, windswept crags, dangerous swamp tracks where the mountain stream passes downwards under the darkness of the crags, water under the earth. It is not far from here, measured in miles, that the lake stands; over it hang frost-covered groves, trees held fast by their roots overshadow the water.)⁴⁹

On the way to the lake, Beowulf and his retinue ascend steep, rocky slopes by narrow trails, and many of these crags are said to be ‘*nicorhusa fela*’ (‘the home of many water-monsters’, l. 1411).⁵⁰ All this environmental menace contrasts strongly with, in Guðlac’s *Life*, the fen’s more prosaic ‘enormous marshes’, ‘black stagnant water’, ‘foul streams’, and many ‘islands and reeds and mounds and thickets’. As described, Guðlac’s new home is suited to the austere, penitential life he has in mind—unpleasant enough that he will have the solitude he seeks—but it also rejects legendary associations. If there is a continuity to Guðlac’s settling beside the ransacked ‘*hlaw mycel*’ (‘big barrow’, p. 26) on the island and the despoiled barrow in *Beowulf*, the *Life* is equally clear that the only real treasure is in heaven. Guðlac will wear skins instead of the linens of nobility and subsist on barley loaves and water. *Guðlac A*, with its evocation of an heroic praise poem, does make reference to a non-specific ‘*westen*’ (‘wilderness’) but there are no fens at all in the text: Guðlac finds a ‘*beorgsepel*’ (‘mountain-dwelling’, l. 102a) located in the ‘*mearcclond*’ (‘borderlands’, l. 174a) and we hear ‘*him leofedan londes wynne | bold on beorhge*’ (‘the pleasures of the land delighted him, his home on the hill’, l. 139a–140a).⁵¹ Jane Roberts is not persuaded that Guðlac’s ‘*beorg on bearwe*’ (l. 148a) is synonymous with his ‘*hlaw*’ (p. 26) in the OE *Life*. Besides the absence of the fens, the *Guðlac A* poet makes no mention of the burial mound’s disruption by treasure-hunters. After Guðlac has erected a cross, he then blesses the ‘*wong*’ (‘plain’, l. 178a) below the ‘*grene beorgas*’ (‘green hills’, l. 232b). If this reclaiming of the land looks like the performance of an Anglo-Saxon saint-king like Oswald, it is also closer in correspondence (than the OE *Life*) to the *Vita Antonii*, and its use of physical elevation to signify spiritual ascent. Whether mound or hill, what remains at issue is the relationship of *beorg* and

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁹ Swanton, *Beowulf*, 99.

⁵⁰ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 49.

⁵¹ This and all further quotations from *Guðlac A*, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Exeter Book*, ASPR, 52–54.

wong in the social imaginary; Guðlac's lordly blessing and protection of the plain beneath him is an affordance of the adjacencies of the physical setting.

In discarding the literal East Anglian setting of Crowland—which would have barely boasted field enough to be called a 'plain', let alone anything like green mountains—*Guðlac A* transforms its saint into a guardian of the marches. In this, the poem anticipates the way the topography of *Ancrene Wisse*, the thirteenth-century 'guide for anchoresses', seems to refer to the Welsh marches. Guðlac's pioneering foray into his mountains is clearly presented in terms of his relationship to the plain below, where the society of which he is an exemplary member would live. Cannon explains that in the Welsh marches, drawing a 650-foot contour line would have separated most English and Welsh settlements, the English habitually staking out upland dales and lower elevations, and the Welsh the higher elevations.⁵² Herbert McAvoy reframes an apparently solitary, cut-off existence by noting that the anchoresses 'dotted as they are along these volatile borderlands, could therefore play a vital role in literally *anchoring* civilized, Christian values'.⁵³ *Guðlac A*, with its bellicose mountain spirits threatening attack by infantry and cavalry, recruits not the monsters of *Beowulfian* marches, but the outraged spirits of indigenous people. '[O]n westenne beorgas bræce' (ll. 208b–09a) can certainly be read, given the context, as Guðlac breaching barrows, whether monuments or burial mounds. For Sarah Semple, this act participates in a broader, evolving relationship with such once-revered sites, now considered the home of 'angry, neglected pagan ancestors'.⁵⁴ Guðlac, while refusing violence, nonetheless insists on his claim to the land:

No ic eow sweord ongean
mid gebolgne hond oðberan þence,
worulde wæpen, ne sceal þes wong gode
þurh blodgyte gebuen weorðan,
ac ic minum Criste cweman þence
leofran lace. (ll. 303b–307a)

(I do not think to bear a sword, a worldly weapon, with anger-swollen hand against you, nor will this plain be consecrated to God by bloodshed, but I mean to satisfy my Christ with a more agreeable gift.)

There is an echo here of Ælfric's *Life* of St Martin of Tours: when Emperor Julian offers his soldiers gifts, in preparation for sending his troops to battle against invaders, Martin responds '*ic eom godes*

⁵² Cannon, *Grounds*, 148–49.

⁵³ McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, 153.

⁵⁴ Semple, *Perceptions*, on Guðlac, 151–52; quotation, 170.

cempa ne mot ic na feohtan ('I am God's champion; I must not fight', l. 108:).⁵⁵ Like Martin, Guðlac did not so much leave the soldier's life, as the text presents it, as ascend in warriorhood to spiritual battles.

The potential reference to monastic settlement of the Welsh marches may have support from the OE *Life*, which mentions that when Cenred was king of Mercia the Welsh harassed the Angles with frequent raids and battles. This statement prefaces an account in which Guðlac hears '*mycel werod þara awyrgedra gasta on bryttisc sprecende*' ('a large band of the damned spirits speaking in British'), and the text explains that he recognised their speech because '*hwilom mid him wæs on wrace*' ('at one time he was in exile among them [British-speakers]', p. 42). But *Guðlac A* offers no such clarification. The voluble demons of *Guðlac A* are not said to speak in any particular language, and while Guðlac's misspent youth reappears as the temptation to resume a life of raiding and banditry with other '*wræcmæcgas*' ('wretches', with the implication of evil-doers, ll. 127–32), there is nothing more specific said of his current region than '*mearclond*'. Either it was so obviously the Welsh marches that it was not worth mentioning, or it was not relevant. The almost iconographic descriptors—mound, grove, mountain, plain—would seem to argue for these marches' location within an ideological, rather than geographic, context: Guðlac's place is an interstitial one, given meaning primarily by his efforts to resist its atavism and to sanctify the land.

The OE *Life of Saint Guðlac* and *Guðlac A* do not simply familiarise the desert setting of Antony's spiritual combats, but consistently violate Anglo-Saxon expectations of heroic conflict as physical and earthly. Guðlac's heroism is spiritual, and these contests are often in and of the air. Ælfric is clear that evil is best understood as the impulse to violate God's laws; even the devil is not evil of origin, but is rather one of God's angels who himself succumbed to arrogance.⁵⁶ The *Guðlac A* poet is similarly explicit about the provenance of the demons: '*and þær ær fela | setla gesæton. Þonan sið tugon | wide waðe, wuldre bescyrede, | lyftlacende*' ('and previously had established many seats there. From that place they were forced on a journey, on extensive wandering, deprived of glory, flying in the air', ll. 143b–146a). The timescale in which took place is given more context later in the

⁵⁵ Ch. XXXI, W. W. Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* (London: N. Trübner for EETS, 1881), 226/227.

⁵⁶ See no. 47 in Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon version of *Alcuini Interrogationes Sigeuulfi Presbyteri in Genesin*, as mentioned in Helen Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 101.

poem, when Guðlac denounces the demons in language reminiscent of the fall of the angels from the OE *Genesis*:

*ge þa fægran gesceaft in fyrndagum,
 gæstlicne goddream, gearo forsegon
 þa ge wiðhogdun halgum dryhtne.
 Ne mostun ge a wunian in wyndagum
 ac mid scome scyldum scofene wurdon
 fore oferhygdum in ece fyr,
 ðær ge sceolon dreogan deað and þystro
 wop to widan ealdre (ll. 629–636b)*

(In days of yore you quickly forsook this fair creation and spiritual heavenly joy when you connived against the holy Lord; you could not dwell forever in days of joy, but with shame and guilt were driven for arrogance into eternal fire, where you must suffer death and darkness, weeping for long ages.)

When these aerial demons are vanquished by Guðlac in the OE *Life*, they are repeatedly dispersed like a kind of airborne pollution: the *Life* says ‘*se awyrigedra gast efne swa smic beforan his ansyne aidlode*’ (‘the damned spirit vanished before his face just like smoke’, p. 34), while later, ‘*hi gewiton ða awyrgedan gastas efne swa smic fram his ansyne*’ (‘the damned spirits departed just like smoke before his face’, p. 42), as do the host of ‘British’-speaking spirits: ‘*ða gewiton hi swa swa smic fram his ansyne*’ (‘they departed just like smoke before his face’, p. 44). At times the devils take no discernible shape at all. As the narrator of the *Life* reports, when Guðlac encounters two ‘*deoflu*’ (‘devils’), they ‘*of þære lyfte slidan*’ (‘slid down from the air’, p. 30) where they seem to live, suspended, just as they do in the *Vita Antonii*. Afterward, they are represented only as voices that ‘*cuðlice spræcon*’ (‘spoke plainly’, or in an agreeable manner, p. 30), as they attempt to persuade Guðlac to greater feats of ascetic fasting. Rejected, they ‘*mid wependre stefne sorhgodon*’ (‘lamented with keening voice’, p. 34). No description of their appearance is proffered. In the main, the *Life*’s phenomenological observations of demonic activity present these incidents as distractions and hindrances to Guðlac’s monastic work, insisting upon the instability and incoherence of their substance when confronted by the power of God.

This does not mean, however, that the demons are always easy for Guðlac to see through or vanquish; one remarkable aspect of Guðlac’s major visions is the extent to which their primary import is their ineluctable, perturbing appearance. Unusually, there is no helpful interpretation of their appearance’s meaning. One visitation, during the night while Guðlac is trying to pray, brings a horde of grotesque spirits:

Hi wæron on ansyne egalice and hig hæfdon mycele heafda, and langne sweoran, and mægere ansyne: hi wæron fullice and orfyrme on heora beardum; and hi hæfdon ruge earan, and woh nebb and reðelice eagan, and fule muðas; and heora toþas wæron gelice horses twuxan; and him wæron þa protan mid lege gefylde, and hi wæron on gristlice on stefne: hi hæfdon woge sceancan, and mycele cneowu and hindan greate, and misscencen tan, and has hrymedon on stefnum. (p. 34/36)

(They had frightful faces and they had huge heads and a long neck and a starved look: they were filthy and unclean in their beards; and they had hairy ears and crooked noses and fierce eyes and foul mouths; and their teeth were like a horse's grinders; and their throats were filled with flame and they were dreadful in voice: they had crooked shanks and big knees and huge behinds, and misshapen toes, and they cried out in hoarse voices.)

These demons, described from head to toe, do seem to have at least temporarily a corporal presence, a visual representation of negative intrusive voices. A later visitation in Chapter VIII (p. 46/48), updated with animals familiar to an insular audience from Evagrius's account of a similar incident, features specifically the visages, 'ansyne', of a lion, bull, and bear, along with vipers, but accompanied by the *sounds* of hogs, wolves, ravens, and other birds. No overt interpretation is made of these sights, which is true of the *Vita Antonii* as well; for comparison the *Ancrene Wisse* author cautions 'Gað, þah, ful warliche, for i þis wilderness beoð uuele beastes monie: liun of prude, neddre of attri onde, unicorne of wreaððe, beore of dead slawðe, vox of ʒisceunge, suhe of ʒivernesse, scorpiun wið þe teil of stinginde leccherie—þet is, galnesse.'⁵⁷ Again, the habit of mind that would associate the sight of these animals with pride, envy, wrath, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, and lechery, respectively, may simply have been presumed, but the *Life*'s narrative privileges the frightfulness of Guðlac's experience of the apparitions over their possible import.

Before moving on to how the demons of the OE *Life of Saint Guðlac* and *Guðlac A* differ, it is worth briefly comparing Felix's *vita*, given its eighth century production and the visible activity of its demonic presences, with Irish hagiographic portrayals. As mentioned previously, there were many other minds, and cultural *schemata* in operation, besides those of Anglo-Saxons in Anglo-Saxon England. The Irish monk Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, written in the late seventh century, shows the influence of both Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini* and Evagrius's *Vita Antonii*. Adomnán, as abbot of Iona, Lindisfarne's motherhouse, had ties with the north of England, and is known to have visited Northumbria at least twice. His portrait of Columba carefully lays out its proofs of the saint's divine power, divided into sections on '*profecticis reuelationibus*' (prophecies), '*uirtutum miraculis*'

⁵⁷ 4.17, ll. 199–203, in *Ancrene wisse: Guide for anchoresses: a corrected edition of the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with variants from other manuscripts*, 1, ed. by Bella Millett (Oxford: OUP for EETS, 2005), 74–75.

(miraculous powers), and ‘*angelicis uisionibus*’ (heavenly visions).⁵⁸ These visions are themselves notable for representing skies as the location where scenes of spiritual conflict play out: Columba sees angels fighting demons for the soul of someone recently departed; drives off a foul, black army of demons that goes on to infect other monasteries with disease; and reports on a wife’s soul descending from heaven to help her husband’s soul ascend at death (3.6–3.10). The implication is that Columba is interpreting visible meteorological disturbances, as is explained in the Irish pseudo-Isidore’s *De ordine creaturarum*, one of the sources for Bede’s *De natura rerum*.⁵⁹ In chapter 25, pseudo-Isidore maps the spiritual plane to the meteorological, writing that these ‘aerial powers’ live in the lower air and ‘assume bodily shape with moist vapours,’ appearing to people with bodies resembling their ‘just deserts’.⁶⁰ By comparison, Anglo-Saxon texts tended to downplay the spiritual significance of meteorological portents, as evidenced by Bede’s cautious use of pseudo-Isidore. In this context, it is noteworthy to see that the OE *Life* edits Felix’s *vita* in its most portentous mode: the OE version’s vision of hell is absent language suggestive of apocalyptic biblical prophecy: instead of ‘*plaga fuscis*’ (lit. ‘a dark plague’—Colgrave translates this somewhat loosely as ‘gloomy mists’), there is only a darkness like black clouds.

If *Guðlac A* remembers these demons are from the original angelic uprising, the poem is much less interested in prophecy than in implicating its present. If there were fens in *Guðlac A*, there might have been confusion about water monsters dispelled from their marshy haunts into the air. But lacking that, the demonic ‘seats’—especially given the location of a hill in a grove—seem to point to former places of residence or worship/sacrifice. With characteristic ambivalence, the poem leaves open the question of whether these demons are being figured as forest-dwelling pagans, or whether the previous residents of the forested heights are being painted as demons. For the purposes of *Guðlac*’s occupation both things can be true. In its project of geographic sanctification, *Guðlac A* intersects with the OE *Life of Saint Guðlac* and its despoiled mound. How this project is to be accomplished—through the holiness of the saint becoming immanent in the world—is delineated in the *Life*. Early on,

⁵⁸ See Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, eds. and trans., *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*, 2nd edn (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

⁵⁹ Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, trans., *Bede: ‘On the Nature of Things’ and ‘On Times’* (Liverpool: LUP, 2010), 12.

⁶⁰ Kendall and Wallis, *Bede*, 89.

Guðlac is wounded by the arrow of despair. Constantly ruminating over his previous sins, he doubts his whole enterprise of atonement. Turning to prayer, he is granted a vision of St Bartholomew and is ‘*mid gastlicre blisse gefylled*’ (‘filled with spiritual bliss’, p. 30). The saint as conduit of heavenly joy will permeate the area over time, producing miracles and creating of the fens an Edenic wildlife preserve where Guðlac and animals cohabit mostly agreeably.

An exception to the harmony is provided by a mischief-making raven, which steals a sheet of paper later recovered, it is suggested, miraculously. The text then mentions that a greedy *pair* of ravens, ‘*twegen hrefnas*’ (p. 50), used to try to steal everything they could, but that Guðlac put up with this to demonstrate a saintly patience. Subsequently, a raven (or ravens) makes off with a pair of gloves and is chastised by Guðlac. Now, ravens do not feature in the *Vita Antonii*, but one does appear in Jerome’s account of Antony’s meeting with Paul in the desert (an encounter pictured on the Ruthwell monument).⁶¹ To their surprise, a raven drops off a whole loaf of bread; Paul explains that his usual daily ration is half a loaf, and that God must be providing for his guest. This helpful corvid behaviour is not the kind of portrayed in the OE *Life*, however, which paints the ravens as thieves. It is possible the poem is playing upon ravens’ associations with Woden/Oðinn (who of course was served by a pair of ravens named Huginn and Muninn, *i.e.*, thought and memory/mind) to situate Guðlac as his island’s true ruler, while the ravens’ actions cast them in a poor light. (As noted previously, Woden had been euhemerised into a distant progenitor of ruling houses, the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary retaining the conceptual *schemata* linking Woden with kingship.) As hagiographic detail is almost always exemplary, Guðlac’s benevolent attitude toward the ravens’ mischief seems a possible comment on Crowland’s local inhabitants—whether actual followers of Woden, or by conceptual association, thieves—who might test a saint’s patience. One can contrast Guðlac’s *laissez-faire* approach with that of Paulinus, first bishop of York. When a crow cawed at King Edwin’s entourage from an ‘unpropitious quarter of the sky’, Paulinus had an archer dispatch the bird to prove it could not see its own future, at least.⁶²

⁶¹ Cf. Jerome, *Vita Pauli heremitae*: the Latin version can be found in Jacques-Paul Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, 23; an English trans. by Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (New York: Vintage, 1998/Orig. publ. London: Constable 1936).

⁶² Ch. 15, Colgrave, *Earliest Life*, 96–99.

Despite the OE *Life*'s insistence on the ultimate insubstantiality of the demons, the *Life* and *Guðlac A* agree that their attacks could, at least occasionally, be disturbingly physical. One night, in the *Life*, demons enter Guðlac's dwelling, bind him, and drag him out into the dark, muddy waters of the fen before pulling him through brambles. Though briars feature often in saints' lives, they are more frequently related to the thorny passions of the flesh; St Benedict is said to have voluntarily plunged himself into briars to mortify his flesh, and those desires. Guðlac's demons, by contrast, are more often animated by an animosity toward the saint's presence, rather than a moral failing on his part; while the demons who encourage him to indulge in prideful asceticism by excessive fasting are quickly dispensed with, when the saint refuses to obey the demons' demand to leave the wilderness, they scourge Guðlac with iron whips, and bear him aloft on ominously creaking wings. Joined by an army of demons, they take Guðlac to the door of hell and threaten that because of his past behaviour they have the power to torment him there eternally, unaware that this sight provokes in fact a salutary dread. Guðlac, in his penitential, self-imposed exile, is acting out something similar to St Benedict's instruction for the temporarily excommunicated monk: 'Let him work alone at the task enjoined him and abide in penitential sorrow, pondering that terrible sentence of the apostle: "Such a one is delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord"''.⁶³ Guðlac protests to the demons that he is in the Lord's service, ready to do His will, but they still act as if they will push him into the hell-mouth until suddenly St Bartholomew appears, and orders them to return Guðlac home. They do so, and when Guðlac, during prayer that morning hears two demons weeping, they explain they have been defeated—their corporality fades and they too depart '*efne swa smic fram his ansyne*' ('just like smoke before his face', p. 42).

Demonic flights understood as phenomenological report, rather than allegory, persist for far longer than saints' lives of even the tenth and eleventh centuries. The *Chronicle of Lanercost* contains this story from the late thirteenth century, concerning one John Francis, who was in the habit of tending to his animals instead of attending Sunday mass. This day, Francis '*impegit in locum remotum aereis potestatibus plenum, qui omnes parvi erant quantitate ut nani, effigie deformes*' ('penetrated to

⁶³ The verse is 1 Corinthians 5. 25:3–5, Rule of St Benedict, '*Solus sit ad opus sibi iniunctum, persistens in paenitentiae luctu, sciens illam terribilem apostoli sententiam dicentis traditum eiusmodi hominem in interitum carnis, ut spiritus saluus sit in die Domini*', *Benedicti Regula*, 80; English translation from McCann, *Rule*, 75.

a remote spot full of the powers of the air, who were all of small stature like dwarfs, with hideous faces', in Herbert Maxwell's translation). After they beat him by way of a blessing, the chronicle says: '*Videns insuper spiritusillos seductorios, quasi corpore elevatos, velle avolare, vim sibi pati videbatur nisi cum abeuntibus ipse abiret*' ('He beheld these seducing spirits rising bodily as if about to fly away [and] seemed to feel a force compelling him to fly away with them as they departed'). Calling to mind Christ's passion, '*adhæsit terræ; et, cespiti arrepto, humi pronus decumbens fidem suam confortavit quousque spiritus nequitiae omnes recederent*' ('he clung to the earth, and grasping the turf and lying prone on the ground, strengthened his faith until the spirits of iniquity had all departed'). That said, the spirits continued to appear to him over the course of eight days, and each time he felt pulled aloft—the sensation did not abate until he made a confession.⁶⁴ The correspondences with Guðlac's adventure—disfigured aerial spirits, their physical assault, the crisis of faith associated with demonic transport—suggest this mode means to disturb perceptual invariances, on a spectrum from the merely unusual (height of a human being), to the disordered (seeing a lion's face and hearing wolves howl), to the impossible (human flight).

In *Guðlac A*, markedly less attention is paid to Guðlac's ability to resist temptation. Overwhelmingly, the saint's achievement is figured as a confrontation with spirits who want him elsewhere. Jane Roberts remarks, 'This Guthlac does not endure passively the persecutions which come upon him, but fights to continue in his chosen dwelling-place as a champion of God'.⁶⁵ Though the demons can exist in the air, this existence was understood as a kind of exhausting labour, the struggle to hover ending only when the demon could find a suitable host: a tree, an animal, an unbaptised or sinful person. Guðlac's work of sanctification prevents a whole horde from returning to these 'seats', and so the saint is confronted by a crowd of foes surrounding his hillside dwelling, threatening to burn it and him for invading their secret space. When they attempt to threaten Guðlac, they tell him that they will not need to touch him or use weapons, but that he may be trampled to death when: '*folc in ðriceð / meara preatum ond monfarum*' ('an army presses in with troops of horses and moving bands of men', ll. 285b–286b). Guðlac stands firm but the text is oddly silent on

⁶⁴ *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Co., 1839), 127–28; English version *Chronicle of Lanercost*, Kindle edn., trans. by Herbert Maxwell (Glasgow: J. Maclehose, 1913), loc. 1467–83.

⁶⁵ Jane Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, 27.

who these *‘folc’* are; their most salient feature is their impersonal militaristic quality, as if Guðlac’s dwelling in the marches is threatened simply by being in the way of troop movements. A distinctly different demonic flight as well takes place in *Guðlac A*: the devils carry him up into the air, but instead of hell, they show him *‘under haligra hyrda gewældum / in mynsterum monna gebæru’* ‘the behaviour of men in monasteries, under the rule of holy shepherds’, ll. 415a–416b), who nonetheless enjoy pleasure, possessions, and pomp. The demons mean to frighten Guðlac with this show of their strength, but the narrative reverses this to note that the saint’s vantage point placed him above all mankind. This criticism of pleasure, possessions, and pomp, of course would fit with the poem having been written during the period of Benedictine Reform, a possibility mentioned earlier, but Guðlac’s response is surprisingly counter-reformatory. Unperturbed, he defends himself against his tolerance for loose monastic rules by arguing that it is the nature of young men to behave thoughtlessly until maturity arrives. Later the demons bring him (in an unspecified manner), terrified, to hell’s door, *‘in þæt atule hus / niþer under næssas neole grundas’* (‘to that terrible dwelling, the abysmal depths down under the headlands’, ll. 562b–563b), claiming that his past actions permit them to throw him into hell. Guðlac does not deny his faults, but insists that Christ alone will judge him, and that he will submit to Christ’s judgement. Rounding on the devils, he accuses them of being arrogant *‘wær-logan’* (‘traitors’)—they are destined for hell, he claims, and he for heaven.

The appearance of St Bartholomew once again signals Guðlac’s rescue, and he is borne home, carried along gently. Upon his return, Guðlac is greeted by the paradisiacal sight of birds flying to him—though the poet undercuts this somewhat by explaining that they are greedy and voracious, and that Guðlac often fed them.⁶⁶ But the saint’s successful sanctification of the wilderness is clearly what is intended by this effusion:

*Smolt wæs se sigewong ond sele niwe,
fæger fugla reord, folde geblowen;
geacas gear budon. Guðlac moste
eadig ond onmod eardes brucan.
Stod se grena wong in godes wære* (ll. 742–46)

(Bright was the victory-plain and the new dwelling; pleasant the song of birds; the earth had blossomed;

⁶⁶ Interestingly, this particular detail appears also in *Guðlac B*, which reads: *‘Hwilum him to honda hungre gebreatad / fleag fugla cyn, þære hy feorhnere / witude fundon’* (‘Sometimes, impelled by hunger, | a species of birds flew to his hands, where they found | assured nourishment’, l. 916–918a); in Robert E. Bjork, ed. and trans., *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2013), 40/41.

cuckoos announced the year. Blessed and resolute, Guðlac was able to enjoy the land. The green plain stood under God's protection.)

Given this beauty, it is almost anticlimactic to learn that upon his death, Guðlac's soul was led to heaven for his eternal reward. Indeed, the narrative digresses to attest:

*Hwæt, we þissa wundra gewitan sindon!
Eall þas geeodon in ussera
tida timan. Forþon þæs tweogan ne þearf
ænig ofer eorðan ælda cynnes* (ll. 752–55)

(So, we are witnesses of these wonders! All this happened in our lifetimes. Therefore no one of the race of men on earth need doubt this.)

This sort of attestation is why *Guðlac A*, or even a postulated oral precursor, has previously been taken to be of the eighth century, contemporaneous with Guðlac. But firstly, this is a limited sense of how one might 'witness' the wonders recounted, given the OE conceptual *schemata* in which interaction with a text is figured as a vision. Secondly, as the wonders worked by Guðlac are directed toward ownership of the green plain, the landscape afterward becomes evidence of his achievement. Recall that *Guðlac A* is prefaced with that motif of decline: '*Ealdað eorþan blæd æpela gehwylcre / ond of wlite wendað wæstma gecyndu; / bið seo sibpre tid sæda gehwylces / mætræ in mægne*' ('The blossom of earth grows old in every one of its excellences, and kinds of fruits decay from beauty; the later time of every seed is poorer in strength', ll. 43a–46a). There is a tension in this sort of declinism, depending on whether the earth's failure presages the coming of Judgement Day or indicates instead a disruption of the natural order, likely a result of human wickedness. Pre-millennium OE texts can display a greater anxiety around the suddenness of Christ's coming, while texts interacting with the ideology of the Benedictine Reform period respond to the latter conditions—for the monasteries that reshaped the entire East Anglian fens over the succeeding centuries, the reclamation of inhospitable land was a spiritual reclamation as well. Wherever the marches of *Guðlac A* are meant to be, God's champion has worked a reversal of this declinism on earth, creating an Edenic setting which will persist after he himself ascends to heaven.

In *Guðlac B*, which focusses on the saint's last days, the natural features of the landscape are much attenuated in contrast to the OE *Life* and *Guðlac A*.⁶⁷ The introduction figures Eden as the '*eðle*' ('homeland', ll. 844a, 852a) and constructs an idealised if tiny society on it, with Adam and Eve

⁶⁷ This and all following quotations from *Guðlac B* are, unless otherwise noted, from *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3, 72–88.

enjoying the joys and favours of the ‘*cyning ælmihtig*’ (‘almighty king’, l. 822b). The loss of this homeland is magnified in terms of a foregone inheritance; Adam as father ‘*purh deofles searo*’ (‘through the contrivance of the devil’, l. 850a) has lost the ‘*eardwica cyst*’ (‘choicest of dwellings’, l. 853b) for his children and their offspring, who instead ‘*scofene wurdon | on gewinworulde*’ ‘have been driven into a world of strife’, l. 856b–57a). Thus, too, explains the text, was this ‘*sigetudre*’ (‘victorious race’, l. 866a) condemned to the experience of death, ‘*gæstgedal*’ (‘spirit-separation’, l. 862b). Eve is first described as offering Adam the ‘*wæstm biweredne*’ (‘forbidden fruit’, l. 848a), but this becomes in the space of two lines a ‘*deaðberende gyfl*’ (‘death-bearing gift’, l. 850b), while Eve is later figured as a cup-bearer offering Adam ‘*þone bitran drync*’ (‘the bitter [poisonous] drink’, l. 868b). This figure, drawn from the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, is the negative image of the king’s wife, an embodiment of wider kinship ties, circulating with the mead cup, a dispenser of social cohesion and harmony in the great hall. Male ecclesiastics, as Stephanie Hollis observes, often betrayed a competitive antagonism toward this aristocratic, feminine ‘celebrant’ of secular feasts.⁶⁸

This description is nominally biblical, but it also constellates the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary’s compulsive return to the disruption and dispossession of immigration and the severed ties of patrimony. This more proximate trauma is juxtaposed with Guðlac’s death struggle; the saint’s body and soul will recapitulate the wrenching temporal separation from the land of one’s birth—if only to return, this time, to the true kingdom. That Anglo-Saxons took up the stories of Genesis and Exodus as exemplary, meaning-making narratives relevant to their current cultural moment has been under-appreciated critically. Samantha Zacher argues:

In this sense, the Anglo-Saxon Exodus can be read as [a] manifesto that has perlocutionary force, and thus a performative aspect to it: it functions as an invocation to join in the ranks of the chosen who keep the covenant, as well as a directive to orient oneself in body and spirit toward God, just as the Israelites of the Biblical Exodus had.⁶⁹

Pursuing this notion of an adopted narrative, Zacher distinguishes a previous historiographic model for political power transfer, *translatio imperii*, from this form, which she calls ‘*translatio electionis*’

⁶⁸ Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), esp. discussion of peaceweaver, 159–162.

⁶⁹ Zacher, *Rewriting*, 79.

(entwined in turn with her term ‘*translatio studii*’).⁷⁰ Rome’s failure could be understood as a divinely inspired redistribution of the imperial mantle; flows of classical and biblical knowledge were evidence of the transmission of that power, albeit different from imperial force. The notion of election, of assembling a chosen elite, would seem to have been a model congenial to Anglo-Saxon culture, which saw in its nobility and *comitatus* an image of Christ and his apostles. For instance, Sam Newton has proposed the possibility that St Bartholomew’s intercession on behalf of Guðlac is linked with Æþelbald’s status as Mercian overlord of East Anglia’s Ælfwald.⁷¹ This medieval policy of winning ‘hearts and minds’ for the supreme, divine ruler rested upon the knowledge transmission possible via texts, but Anglo-Saxons respected equally the instrumental agency of these texts: ‘*Us secgað bec*’ (‘books tell us’, l. 878b). To receive this knowledge was, in a sense, to be chosen by it and visionary narratives often play upon this ambivalence.

In *Guðlac B*, the admission of angelic ‘revelation’ is itself the crowning revelation confirming the saint’s status. Guðlac’s final speech (ll. 1226–69) is reported seemingly verbatim in which he affirms that an angelic spirit has visited him twice daily, morning and evening, since his second year at the hermitage. The information imparted was for Guðlac alone: ‘*þe me alyfed nis | to gecyþenne cwicra ængum*’ (‘it is not allowed me to proclaim to any of the living’, ll. 1248b–49). The saint admits the existence of the angel only to reassure his faithful servant. Previously he had kept this a secret, concerned that people would have ‘*wundredan*’ (‘marveled’) at it ‘*ond on geað gutan, gieddum mænden | bi me lifgendum*’ (‘and gushed in ridicule, told tales about me while I was living’, l. 1232–33a). Nor did he want to be guilty of boasting about this sign of the Lord’s favour. Even now, he confides to his servant not the message but the significance of the messenger—that while his soul is destined for Heaven, he will always keep their ‘*sibbe*’ (‘friendship’, l. 1262b). *Sibb* refers more broadly, though, to the existence of a relationship, rather than its kind; what is being promised is that this relationship will persist. The word used to characterise the bond is, in fact, *geferscype*, membership in a *comitatus*. It is a question of nuance, but in this monastic context the ‘brotherhood’ of the war-band is almost certainly being evoked from the social imaginary—concerns with

⁷⁰ Zacher, *Rewriting*, 112.

⁷¹ Newton, *Origins of Beowulf*, 81.

configurations of social relationship, reciprocity, and obligation are more at issue than raiding, *per se*. Just as *Beowulf*'s fear of fratricidal social disintegration, embodied by Grendel, is found transposed in the OE *Life* to that of the hellish exile awaiting sinners on the Judgement Day, so too bonds of the *comitatus* have been supplanted by the monastic social structure and practices. Michael Lapidge notes that in Alcuin's preface to St Willibrord's *vita*, Alcuin distinguished between the uses of prose and verse *vita*, saying that prose was more amenable to being read aloud to the community, while verse rewarded sustained private meditation.⁷² This context seems especially pertinent to the *Guðlac B* poem, and the unusual intimacy of the relationships portrayed in it.

To a surprising extent, in comparison to the corpus of extant OE poetry, *Guðlac B* foregrounds, in the embodied responses of its characters, the dynamic of their emotional states. (*The Wanderer*, to which *Guðlac B* has been compared, portrays the aftermath of the disruption of the retainer-and-lord relationship; the account in *Guðlac B* is remarkable in that it reports on both members of the dyad engaged in this dynamic.) This should not obscure the fact that embodiment remains the ground of these experiences; the body, the structuring landscape. The servant's grief appears side-by-side with reports of Guðlac's physical symptoms; indeed, Guðlac's symptoms are themselves open to interpretation as intimations of his mortality: 'Wæs þam bancofan | æfter nihtglome neah geþrunge, | breosthord onboren' ('The bone-chamber was in the night-darkness closely pressed upon, the breast-hoard was weakened', ll. 942b–44a). The author's treatment of Guðlac's experience is, though given concise shape by the formulas of OE poetry, also highly structured: 'Wæs se bancofa | adle onæled, | inbendum fæst, | lichord onlocen' ('The bone-chamber was consumed by disease, the body-hoard, fastened by inner bonds, was unlocked', ll. 954a–57a). These lines contrast taut, biting sensations internally with loss of bodily cohesion and control. Observable autonomic responses (breath regulation, body temperature) are joined with subjective report: 'Hreþer innan weol, | born banloca' ('His breast seethed within; his bone-locker burned', l. 979b – 980a). This could be either observed or felt. At seeing his master exhausted by sickness, the loyal servant feels in succession 'hefig æt heortan' ('heavy at heart', l. 1009a), then anxious and grief-stricken, but he must still turn to

⁷² Michael Lapidge, 'The saintly life in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 251–72, 267.

Guðlac for comfort. The text notes that there is a pause while the saint tries to catch his breath, and then he announces that his death will come on the eighth day of this illness. At this, the servant lets ‘tearas geotan, | weallan wægdroman’ (‘the tears pour out, the water drops well up’, ll. 1056–57a). Perceiving this, Guðlac attempts to raise his servant’s spirits; he calls the servant his ‘beorn’ (‘child’) repeatedly. Guðlac revives somewhat to preach for Easter, but on the seventh day, his struggle ends: ‘þæs þe him in gesonc, | hat, heortan neah, hildescurum | flacor flanþracu, feorhhord onleac’ (‘because into him near the heart sank war-showers, hot; the flickering arrow’s force unlocked the life-hoard’, ll. 1142–44). It may not be obvious that a contest is taking place, but as Helen Foxhall-Forbes stresses, in the Anglo-Saxon conceptual *schemata* spiritual presences and corporal presences are distinguished mainly by the temporarily visible form of the spiritual agent—whether or not they can be seen, spiritual adversaries can have the same effect as physical ones.⁷³ Despite its differences from the *Life* and *Guðlac A*, *Guðlac B* can also help remind us how to read elements of those two texts. Those arrows sinking into Guðlac, above, are both a series of stabbing pains and evidence of a literal assault. Alaric Hall has argued that the OE medical lexicon is purposefully polysemic, so that terms referring to projectile injury such as *scoten* and *gescoten* also denote ‘internal pains, and are used to facilitate the text’s construction of an ailment as the product of a conflict with supernatural beings. Specifically, it re-narrates the sufferer’s experience in martial and heroic terms’.⁷⁴ Thus, when in the *Life* Guðlac is struck by the ‘geaettredan streale’ (‘poisoned arrow’, p. 28) it is not simply a motif, the arrow of despair, but a piercing, wounded sensation that also enacts an unseen, unrepresented battle. In the poem, the final surges of pain leave Guðlac leaning against the wall for support; he cannot breathe or speak, though when his servant asks him for his last instruction, he makes the effort to arrange his burial.

The complexity of the relationship between the saint and his servant in *Guðlac B* has no real counterpart in either of the other two texts, though the poem in outline corresponds to the chapter on Guðlac’s death in Felix’s *vita*. It is fascinating to contrast the poetics of the lord-retainer bond as depicted in *Beowulf*, between the dying king and Wiglaf, with that of the relationship between a child

⁷³ Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 75.

⁷⁴ Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 112.

oblate and a senior monk. Though we know Guðlac was not himself an oblate, in literature child oblates are often handed over into the care of a saint, which may be the affective model for Guðlac's relationship with his unnamed youthful servant (Beccel, in the Latin *vita* and OE *Life*). Without this context, it is clear that St Benedict would have frowned upon this Guðlac's address of his servant as 'leofe bearn' ('dear child', l. 1076b): 'Let a senior call his junior "Brother", and a junior call his senior "Nonnus"'.⁷⁵ Evidence of the practice of child oblation in the West extends from the fourth century to the twelfth; Mayke de Jong has studied the 'lasting emotional ties that were forged' in the writings of figures such as Alcuin and Willibrord.⁷⁶ She notes that 'the oblate is called a "son"'.⁷⁷ *Guðlac B* deploys this relationship in a highly affective meditation, one that grounds disparate conceptual *schemata* in the intimacy of the father-son relationship. The preface's evocation of Adam, the first father, and the loss of his patrimony constellates the post-immigration wounds located in the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, which hybrid *schemata* finds expression in the sympathetic coordination of the bodies in *Guðlac B*. Guðlac, as an Anglo-Saxon saint, will through his death prove that Anglo-Saxons can trust in God's promise of an eternal homeland. One can imagine how repeated meditation on Guðlac's suffering and joy, mediated through the perspective of an unnamed, non-specific monk, might yield an intense emotional undercurrent from which this proposition would seem to emerge.

To conclude, then, considering the settings of these three texts as enactivist environments, and the ways in which these narratives think 'through' place, offers sometimes surprising shifts of perspective on hagiography and the intertextual coherence of St Guðlac. Once again, the presence of visions signals the presence of apocalyptic anxiety, as well as the suggestion of stresses in the social imaginary. But the settings for these visions generate distinct thought-worlds, not simply variations of setting in which more or less the same pious action takes place. Thus, in the *Life*, Guðlac's navigation of the East Anglian fens and its disorienting demons situates the saint at a series of intersections: water and land, hell and heaven, East Anglia and Mercia, atavism and ascendancy. The narrative

⁷⁵ 63.12, Rule of St Benedict, '*priores iuniores suos fratrum nomine, iuniores autem priores suos nonnos uocent*', *Benedicti Regula*, 147; English translation from McCann, *Rule*, 143.

⁷⁶ De Jong, *Child Oblation*, 54–55.

⁷⁷ De Jong, *Child Oblation*, 27–28.

treats Guðlac's acts of perception in these layered locations as sanctifying actions in his progress toward sainthood. *Guðlac A* meanwhile explores a more instrumental approach to sainthood—instituting and then bridging the vertical discontinuity of the plain and the hill, as an analogue for the saint's relationship to the people. While Guðlac's hermitage creates a geographic separation, it enables the saint to oversee the safety and productivity of the plain, the physical affordance of height being mapped onto spiritual protection. *Guðlac A* engages with the social imaginary in intriguing ways: Guðlac's vision of monasteries, in conjunction with the poem's erasure of the fens, would seem an attempt to relitigate the claim for monastic retreat in the face of worldly incursions. By adopting the discourse of conflict in the marches, the poem stages a dramatic opposition of spiritual belief and unbelief, with outcomes grounded, literally, in the gaining of land and its improvement. In *Guðlac B*, the narrative rewrites the threat of death: it is the saint's bodily decomposition that unlocks the revelation of his elite status, someone promised eternal life. Here the saint's paternal status, explored in his relationship with his faithful, grieving servant, is prefaced by reference to the Genesis account of another father and his disobedient 'son': God and Adam—with the saint demonstrating the force of the Anglo-Saxon election. Each of these instances lends support to the hypothesis that it is less taxing cognitively to engage with an environment than to represent it—and easier as well to use the environment at hand to think about one that is not present to the senses. While these textual environments may appear to be impoverished mimetic representations, they privilege instead a way of thinking about borderlands, transience, and deferred desire that make visible something of the long-ago monastic environment in which they were read.

III. The Meeting of Old and Middle English

Though the Norman Conquest in 1066 brought a concomitant linguistic upheaval, with Anglo-Norman French replacing Old English as the language written predominantly by and for an elite, politically-connected class, one also finds evidence of a lively multilingual reading culture. For clerics, of course, Latin retained its primacy—though the number of manuscripts adorned with interlinear glosses in Anglo-Norman French or Old English evidences the practice of thinking between languages. Often this glossing is characterised as an aid for young students of Latin, but in fact turning to the assistance of the vernacular was not so circumscribed. Collections of psalms known as psalters are of particular interest because of their widespread use by monks, nuns, and the laity—a ‘best-selling’ status reflected in the number of surviving texts:

Of the twenty-nine complete extant psalters written or owned in England up to the twelfth century, about half (fourteen) are glossed wholly or in part in Old English. One, the twelfth-century Canterbury Psalter, has glosses in Old English and Norman French as well as Latin. These ancient books are the precious survivors of what was once in Kenneth Sisam’s estimation hundreds of similarly glossed psalters.¹

Eadwine’s Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, R.17.1) preserves continuous interlinear glosses in Anglo-Norman French and a vernacular ‘more Old English in character than Middle English’.² Elaine Treharne points to another twelfth-century text, a homiliary (Cambridge, University Library, Ii.1.33) that not only retains the late West Saxon of the tenth-century abbot Ælfric, but in the margin, introduced without comment, an Anglo-Norman quatrain that the scribe seems to have felt apposite, bespeaking a familiarity with both languages.³ If post-Conquest the writing of new work in Old English was rare, the existing storehouse was being transformed into a living library, one that challenges the notion of a complete rupture. Not only were OE texts frequently copied but they could be annotated as well, to eliminate archaic or unfamiliar usage or to adapt them for different audiences. Scholars note that by the twelfth-century these scribal works display an uncertain grasp of archaic

¹ George H. Brown, ‘The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning’ in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Nancy Elizabeth Van Deusen (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 1–24, 5. For the number of psalters, Brown uses Helmut Gneuss’s listing in ‘Liturgical Books in Anglo-Saxon England and Their Old English Terminology’, in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 114–16. Sisam’s estimate extrapolates from the proportion of Anglo-Saxon-era psalters and glosses prior the tenth and eleventh centuries.

² Margaret Laing and Roger Lass, ‘Early Middle English Dialectology: Problems and Prospects’, 17.2.1.2, in *The Handbook of the History of English*, ed. by Ans van Kemenade and Bettelou Los (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) <<http://www.blackwellreference.com>>.

³ Elaine Treharne, ‘The vernaculars of medieval England, 1170–1350’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. by Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 217–36, esp. 217–19.

forms—but as the dialects and registers of various centuries mingled in copied compilations, this is surely to be expected. When the Benedictine monk Orderic Vitalis visited Crowland around the early twelfth century, he found even a work as popular as Felix’s *Vita sancti Guðlaci* written in a style he declared ‘*prolixus et aliquantulum obscurus*’; Colgrave noted that Felix was the source of fifty *hapax legomenon*, a rate of lexical invention he thought due to the influence of Aldhelm.⁴ If the written OE dialects of the Anglo-Saxon era had grown less intelligible to readers, their importance in relationship to the spoken vernacular seems to have continued to underwrite their reproduction nonetheless.⁵ There is no reason, after all, to think that popular conversation in English dialects halted with West Saxon’s replacement as the standard written language after the Norman Conquest. (Incidentally, R. M. Wilson notes that twelfth-century historians Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury both credit oral sources: Henry of Huntingdon at the outset of Book VII, when he speaks of accounts ‘gathered from common report’, and William of Malmesbury in *Gesta Regum*, confessing that in some cases his sources were more often ‘old songs’ than written documents.⁶) Mark Faulkner’s study of an annotated copy of Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies*, with the interventions of a ‘Late Hand’ dated to the second half of the twelfth century, demonstrates that modernisation of the text was only one, limited concern of this editorial programme, which included orthographic variations, stylistic preferences, and judgements on the usefulness of textual allusion.⁷ This indicates to Faulkner that the homilies’ relatively archaic language posed less of a challenge to comprehension than an interest in preaching to ‘a broader audience than Ælfric initially imagined’.⁸ The erudition of Faulkner’s ‘Late Hand’ lends balance, then, to Thomas Hahn’s contention that the ‘entire career of the Tremulous Hand establishes that by 1200 even the most sympathetic and resourceful of eME [early Middle English] readers could make sense of OE only through extraordinary exertions’.⁹

⁴ Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, 17–18.

⁵ Treharne responds to Thomas Hahn and others on the notion of the unintelligibility of Old English in ‘Post-Conquest Old English’, in Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne, eds, *Blackwell Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), 401–14, 404.

⁶ R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1952/1970), 24.

⁷ Mark Faulkner, ‘Archaism, Belatedness and Modernisation: “Old” English in the Twelfth Century’, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 63/259 (2011), 179–203.

⁸ Faulkner, ‘Archaism’, 202.

⁹ Thomas Hahn, ‘Early Middle English’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 61–91, 74.

Alongside this substantial engagement with OE texts, however, there remains the parallel and perennially obscured development of early Middle English. ‘Indeed, if a line must be drawn between Old English and Middle English,’ suggested R. W. Chambers in 1932, ‘it would, I think, have to come between the man who wrote the Peterborough annal for 1131, and the man who wrote (perhaps about 1155) the Peterborough annal for 1132’. The latter scribe’s work presents developments in orthography and word order, in addition to French loan words, that look toward Middle English. But in the twelfth-century as well appear the Middle English *Ancrene Riwe* (and its later adaptation *Ancrene Wisse*) and the Katherine Group texts, in which the author speaks directly to women who had become anchoresses (and perhaps others) who seem to have lacked instruction in Latin.¹⁰ These works seem already to have made a decisive break with the past: ‘One particular difficulty’, observes Mark Faulkner, quoting Christopher Cannon, ‘is why early Middle English works like the *Ormulum* and Katherine Group do not show a more substantial debt to Old English prose, and why these texts appear, or choose to appear “profound[ly] isolat[ed] from immediate vernacular models and examples, from any local precedent for the writing of English”’.¹¹ The years just after 1200 brought Lazamon’s *Brut*, with its neither-fish-nor-fowl versification that alliterates only sometimes, preserves the OE half-line structure only sometimes, varies in metrical length, and also employs rhyme and assonance, over its 16,095 lines. Between the mid-thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth came the romances *King Horn*, *Havelock the Dane*, and *Bevis of Hampton* (the latter two with clear Anglo-Norman antecedents). By this point OE manuscripts display much less evidence of their former use as resources, suggesting the archaic script and language had indeed become unintelligible to many readers.¹²

In the fourteenth century, that more sporadic appearance was replaced by a steady influx of new works in Middle English, as support for their authors, and readership, grew. Though much has been made of the occasional introductory apology for the use of, or translation into, Middle English, this defence of the vernacular was not limited to English: Denis Piramus explained the translation to

¹⁰ R. W. Chambers, *The Continuity of English Prose* (London: OUP for EETS, 1932), xcii.

¹¹ Faulkner, ‘Archaism’, 182, quoting Cannon, *Grounds*, 2.

¹² Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New language, Old English, and teaching the tradition* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 36.

French from Old English of his late-twelfth-century *Vie de Seint Edmund le Rei* by writing that ‘*en franceis le poent entendre | Li grant, li mien, e li mendre*’.¹³ It is less an excuse than a straightforward rationale that acknowledges the wider accessibility of the vernacular, and the growing interest of wider classes of readership. Unlike the Latin and French acquired for reasons of class or profession, with their intercultural benefits, the English vernacular would always have had the advantages of early childhood acquisition, and could be taken in and understood by the larger English population in more forms and contexts.¹⁴ But it would have also profited from its usefulness for analysing, composing, and expressing the specific intra-cultural concerns that distinguish medieval English literature before and after the Norman Conquest. If Middle English is considered a matrix for the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary and its conflicted marriage with its Anglo-Norman counterpart, it suggests a dynamic in which Middle English, as it gained literary prestige, could re-incorporate mental spaces that informed sense-making in Old English, the previous prestige vernacular. Given structure by folk psychological models, marked by an inclination toward epistemological riddling, and distinguished by the adept deployment of mental environments, these mental spaces continued to propagate, adapt, and evolve in coordination with Middle English’s growth and with the influence of the cross-Channel flow of texts, classical and contemporary.

The notion of a fourteenth-century poetic ‘Alliterative Revival’ has been challenged over the past half-century by the question of what, precisely, was being revived in this diverse flourishing of poetic styles—or even in the less-remarked-upon use of alliteration in prose.¹⁵ This brief discussion is not the place to enter into an argument complicated enormously by its fracturing into various perspectives and interests, involving scholars of oral delivery and transmission, literary theorists, champions of an heroic Anglo-Saxon tradition, and those favouring the influence of patristic exegesis. The alliterative poems of the fourteenth century intersect lexically, metrically, formally, even thematically, with OE verse, and yet with enough discrepancy and degree of variation that it remains

¹³ Chambers, *Continuity*, lxxxix. William Rothwell collects a number of similar arguments produced on behalf of French translations (usually from Latin), in ‘The role of French in thirteenth-century England’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 58 (1976), 455–66. He reads Piramus’s nod to the ‘great and small’ as a stock formulation meaning a ‘broader spectrum’, 453.

¹⁴ For more on the pre- and post-Conquest status of English, see Treharne, ‘The authority of English, 900–1150’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 544–78.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Salter, ‘Alliterative Modes and Affiliations in the Fourteenth Century’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79/1 (1978), 25–35.

difficult to say how this intersection occurred or why. This study's cognitive analysis, while it can add little to the historicist debate, can reframe the (re)emergence of alliterative poetry. Rather than an imitative, nostalgic project, alliterative poetry is understood as a nexus of vernacular affordances, conceptual *schemata*, and habitual patterns of sense-making—all in proportion to the multiglossic intellectual ferment of the era. Just as 'translation' in OE alliterative verse in fact recast biblical narratives, recategorising their elements according to the familiar conceptual outlines of heroic and wisdom literature and resituating them as timelessly apposite to contemporary concerns, so ME alliterative verse aided in comprehension and assessment of literatures, whether in Anglo-Norman French, medieval Latin, or other Continental vernaculars. Though it has been argued recently that, in strictly metrical terms, 'alliteration appears as an ornament, standing in approximately the same relation to alliterative meter as rhyme to pentameter', it too offers a 'way of thinking'.¹⁶ The conceptual binding of alliteration produces collocations so durable they come to seem welded together, joins *a* and *b* half-lines into a parsable whole, and cumulatively yields a sense of a poem's sturdiness or structural tension.¹⁷ This binding is conceptualised as the skilful application of force, so that alliterative technique corresponds to more or less expertise and control. The frequency of alliteration—outside of metrical concerns—is also a measure of the past's availability, in the form of 'tried and true' formulas and phrases, weighed against new needs of articulation.¹⁸ This is true as well of mental spaces and their scripts, as seen in the way *The Dream of the Rood* recruits expectations of human sacrifice and the gallows only to reverse the outcome with eternal life.

One argument against a sense of unbroken continuity in medieval English is a new mental space in the fourteenth-century social imaginary: that of 'OE texts' themselves. Even if they were unintelligible (or perhaps because they were), they were figured as ancient history, repositories of ancestral wisdom and glory. The Latin *Historia Croylandensis*, a multi-author compilation containing history, hearsay, invention, and lavishly forged records, provided Crowland Abbey with a meticulous

¹⁶ Eric Weiskott, 'Early English meter as a way of thinking', *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 4/1 (2017), 41–65, 45.

¹⁷ For an analysis of collocation's persistence and evolution, see Ch. 2, 'The Collocation of Words for Treasure in Old English Verse', in Elizabeth Tyler, *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press/Boydell, 2006), 38–100; R. J. Pascual dismisses Weiskott's claim that alliteration is not an organising metrical principle on this point (among others): that listeners require alliteration to keep track of *a* and *b* line unity, in 'Oral Tradition and the History of English Alliterative Verse', *Studia Neophilologica* (2017).

¹⁸ See Old French borrowings into ME alliteration, in Merle Fiffeld, 'Thirteenth-Century Lyrics and the Alliterative Tradition', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 62/1 (1963), 111–18, 113.

provenance, beginning with its traditional foundation by Æthelbald in honour of St Guðlac. In so doing, it also illustrates the social imaginary's evolving relationship with OE texts. Purportedly begun in the eleventh century by Crowland's first Norman-appointed abbot, Ingulph, it struggles to unite the abbey's Anglo-Saxon patrimony with post-Norman administration. As pseudo-Ingulph relates, most of the abbey's documents perished in a raging fire:

Our charters, of extreme beauty, written in capital letters, adorned with golden crosses and paintings of the greatest beauty, and formed of materials of matchless value, which had there been deposited were all destroyed. The privileges, also, granted by the kings of the Mercians, documents of extreme antiquity, and of the greatest value, which were likewise most exquisitely adorned with pictures in gold, but written in Saxon characters, were all burnt. [...] A few years before however, I had, of my own accord, taken from our muniment-room several charters written in Saxon characters, and as we had duplicates of them, and in some instances triplicates, I had put them in the hands of our chauntor, the lord Fulmar, to be kept in the cloisters in order to instruct the juniors in a knowledge of the Saxon characters; as this kind of writing had for a long time, on account of the Normans, been utterly neglected, and was now understood by only a few of the more aged men.¹⁹

As the fire is meant to take place around 1091, pseudo-Ingulph's reference to the length of Norman rule is already suspect. It is difficult to reconcile the significance of Ingulph's chronicle, and its precise knowledge of Anglo-Saxon charters, with the lack of reference to either, for centuries, in sources that mention Crowland, including Crowland's own.²⁰ To try to narrow the date of the history's 'compilation', Felix Liebermann assembled an exhaustive of evidence, both internal and external; and though it is possible that the inventors were working from lost materials, it remains the case that Crowland Abbey did not publicly begin to rely on Ingulph's testimony until the late fourteenth century.²¹ The *Historia*'s statement that 'this kind of writing had for a long time, on account of the Normans, been utterly neglected, and was now understood by only a few of the more aged men' is very credible in the mid-1300s, as is Crowland's now-lost 'Golden Charter' being what Alfred Hiatt describes as a 'contemporary re-interpretation of the idea, the genre, of the pre-Conquest charter', a pastiche which is 'more spectacular, more dramatic, and incomparably richer in terms of information about the monastery's lands and its members than any genuine survival'.²² Given the potential overlap

¹⁹ Ingulph's *Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland with the Continuations* by Peter of Blois and Anonymous Writers, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: George Bell, 1908), 201.

²⁰ Alfred Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries: False Documents in Fifteenth-century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), see the chapter 'Monastic Forgery: Crowland Abbey', esp. 36–69.

²¹ 'An äusseren Gründen für die späte Entstehung der Fälschung sei das Stillschweigen aller Quellen vor dem 13. Jh. über die angebliche Bedeutung Crowland's angeführt. Auch beruft sich Crowland in den Processen bis 1327 auf die Fälschungen nicht; erst ein Inspeimus von 1393 erwähnt sie', 43, in F. Liebermann, 'Über Ostenglische Geschichtsquellen des 12, 13, 14 Jahrhunderts, besonders den falschen Ingulph', *Neues Archiv* 18 (1893), 225–67, esp. 255–57.

²² Hiatt, *Medieval Forgeries*, 45.

in time of creation, it is striking how apt Hiatt's pastiche description is as well for the *St Erkenwald* poem, discussed in the following chapter, and its pre-Christian judge's tomb, embellished with rune-like 'bryȝt gold lettres' (l. 51).²³ It is intriguing, also, to note pseudo-Ingulph's account contains not only an apology for his esteem for the OE vernacular (couched purely as an aesthetic appreciation for these artworks), but also a rationale for the continued instruction of Old English in the monastery.

A brief illustration of the strange, evolving perdurability of the social imaginary—owed in part to its links, through extended cognition, to material culture and the physical environment—is provided by one of the many legal suits that Crowland Abbey brought against its neighbours involved the alleged destruction of a boundary marker for the Abbey's lands. In 1394, men of Deeping were said to have destroyed the eponymous stone cross at Kenulfston ('Kenulf's stone', after Crowland's first abbot, according to Crowland's *Historia*). Abbot Thomas journeyed to London, and with the political assistance of the powerful Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, a grand assize was held in which the Abbey was triumphant. In just a few lines, a stone cross monument, here with religious associations secondary to its ancient function as a boundary marker, is joined to a confrontation with local inhabitants very familiar to readers of *Guðlac A*, a confrontation resulting in legal proceedings set in a London reminiscent of the one in the poem *St Erkenwald*. In the Latin prose of the Crowland *Historia*, of course, these associations remain unexcavated; the ME poetry of *St Erkenwald*, however, actively revives them. As Christine Chism writes, 'These alliterative romances enact an association with past traditions, histories, and languages. They harness a highly sophisticated historic consciousness to a spectacular imagination. They dramatize the uses and dangers of confronting the past while remaining alert to the interests and anxieties of contemporary audiences'.²⁴ Visionary environments and their capacity to encompass both the marvellous (as spectacle) and the social imaginary (as morally inflected social expectations) remain crucial spaces in which these encounters can be enacted, but with an added complexity born of Middle English's new standing with regard to Old English, and thus with its narrative sense-making.

²³ Clifford Peterson, ed., *Saint Erkenwald* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977).

²⁴ Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 2.

IV. Erkenwald Hears a Heathen: Composing Arguments in Time

The alliterative Middle English poem *St Erkenwald* has long been remarked upon because of features that, as will be argued here, it shares with overtly visionary narratives. Were it not a public occurrence, its central marvel, the debate between St Erkenwald and the uncorrupted corpse of an Anglo-Saxon judge, would fit easily into a visionary frame. And the debate itself has occasioned the kind of diversity of commentary encouraged by the associative structure of envisioned environments. For E. Gordon Whatley, the ‘entire episode [...] is a consequence of the historical activity and triumphant progress of the visible Christian church’, while Frank Grady has argued that the poem’s work is to render the pagan judge ‘intelligible’ within the strictures of fourteenth-century Christian eschatology.¹ William Quinn has contextualised the poem’s psychology with Thomist theology as a guide, while for Jennifer Sisk the poem’s heterodoxy can be understood in part through bishop of London Robert Braybrooke’s responses to Wyclif’s followers.² Ruth Nissé’s conclusion, that ‘St Erkenwald’s historical “baptism” purifies a flawed Trojan origin and a chronicle marked by an endless series of wars and betrayals among the dynastic “fathers” of Britain’, narrows the poet’s range of concerns considerably, when other scholars have been at pains to expand its hagiographic expression.³

In contrast, this chapter’s exploration of the poem’s narrative strategies pays particular attention to how temporal spaces are blended, creating composite ‘persons’ who seem to argue and debate across time. The interaction of ME alliterative verse with temporal theorizing in the fourteenth century, given context here by the work of Thomas Bradwardine (a dean of St Paul’s and subsequent archbishop of Canterbury) is part of the poem’s fabrication of its sempiternal entities: the bishop of London (architect of consecration and conversion), cathedral and worshippers (both in need of sanctification), and city itself (a ‘London’ everlastingly divided and threatened from without). George Lakoff’s analysis of the relationship between cognitive models and prototype effects aids in a

¹ E. Gordon Whatley, ‘Heathens and Saints: St. Erkenwald in Its Legendary Context’, *Speculum* 61/2 (1986), 330–63, 337; Frank Grady, ‘Piers Plowman, St. Erkenwald, and the Rule of Exceptional Salvations’, *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992), 63–88.

² William A. Quinn, ‘The Psychology of “Saint Erkenwald”’, *Medium Ævum*, 53/2 (1984), 180–93; and Jennifer L. Sisk, ‘The Uneasy Orthodoxy of “St. Erkenwald”’, *ELH* 74/1 (2007), 89–115.

³ Ruth Nissé, ‘“A Coroun Ful Riche”: The Rule of History in St. Erkenwald’, *ELH* 65/2 (1998), 277–95, 288.

discussion of the reader's construction of the prototypic figure of St Erkenwald; subsuming all bishops of London, the Erkenwald composite also references contemporaneous holders of the office, such as William Courtenay and his successor Robert Braybrooke, while his counterpart, a pagan judge, represents an interrogation of 'Lollardy' as an expression of Pelagian heresy, its exponent John Wyclif allied too dangerously with secular power.

This amounts to a reversal, then, of attempts to analyse the influence of the Trajan legend on the poem, and instead consider how a late-fourteenth-century saint's cult conceived of the saint's presence. While religious belief and practices were topics of intense interest throughout the medieval era, the *St Erkenwald* poem is far from a sober theological treatise; Saint Erkenwald and his pagan interlocutor prove to be revelatory fictions, embodied exemplars keen for intellectual contest. Just as the speaking tree in the OE poem *The Dream of the Rood* asserts its heroic autobiography, the pagan judge will unveil an illustrious *vita* that rivals that of Erkenwald. The poem blends mental spaces from legend and 'crafty cronecles' (l. 44), and saintly narratives (whether *vita* or *inventio*).⁴ Linguistic cues summon 'backstage' cognitive models, so that working memory can shift between perspectives and focal points, calling upon extra-textual scripts from the social imaginary to perform hermeneutics appropriate to the context (*e.g.*, the lengthy sequence of events meant by 'got a burger at the drive-thru'). 'Space builders', often brief prepositional phrases, signal a change of mental space; thus when the second line of the *St Erkenwald* poem identifies the period as 'after Christ suffered on the cross' ('Sythen Crist suffride on crosse', l. 2), and the seventh establishes the time as 'in the days of Hengist' ('in Hengyst dawes', l. 7), there is a corresponding alternation between Christian and pre-Christian thought-worlds—in the former, a city coalesces around the bishop; in the latter, savage warfare displaces a people. By the fourteenth century, of course, these two mental spaces, organised by the Anglo-Saxon bias toward the antagonistic binary, have consolidated into frames in which subsidiary mental spaces function. The pagan judge, though faced with a 'false-hearted and fierce' ('felonse and fals', l. 231) population congruent with Christian writers' evaluation of heathen existence, is himself an upright man of the law, and he, with his honesty and industry, unites the city.

⁴ This and all following quotations from the poem are from Peterson's edition, unless otherwise noted: Clifford Peterson, ed., *Saint Erkenwald* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977).

The tension inherent in this pagan figure who infringes on the bishop's role results in the same gesture the narrative ascribes to St Augustine: rather than clearing away this 'crude pillar' of the community, the narrative resituates the pagan judge as an inferior instance of a prototype: St Erkenwald. It is now more common to note, as Kathy Lavezzo does, that 'the account in *Erkenwald* of England's impious past resonates with the religious divisions of the poet's own fourteenth-century milieu, when followers of the revolutionary theologian John Wyclif formed the English heretical sect called alternatively Lollards or Wycliffites'.⁵ As in previous OE verse examples, the habits of thought which structure the poem form an environment in which the conflicts of past and present stand in dynamic relation to one another, lending each other context.

Historical and Critical Contexts

The poem bearing variations of the running title '*De Sancto Erkenwaldo*' is bound up in British Library MS Harley 2250 (1477) with *Memoriale Credencium*, a manual of theology for lay people; *Speculum Christiani*'s commentary on church doctrine; John Mirk's 'Festial', a collection of homilies for feast days; and 'The Stanzaic Life of Christ', a very lengthy poem that links events in the life of Christ to the liturgical calendar's feast days. According to Clifford Peterson, 87 of the manuscript's extant 88 folios were copied in the same hand (including the *St Erkenwald* poem); this thematic compilation suggests that the poem's sensationally staged theological concerns were thought germane to the instruction of the laity, even in the later fifteenth century.⁶ Critical response to the poem has pushed forward on two main fronts of inquiry: the nature of its relationship to the widespread 'righteous heathen' legend (in which Pope Gregory the Great's intercession redeems Emperor Trajan from hell), and the question of whether its author might have been the 'Gawain poet'.⁷ In the preface to his 1922 edition of the poem, Israel Gollancz explained that Trajan's redemption was not simply

⁵ Kathy Lavezzo, 'Nation', in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 363–78, 368.

⁶ Peterson, *Saint Erkenwald*, 2. Other editions of the poem are, chronologically, in Carl Horstmann, ed., *Altenglische Legenden: Neue Folge* (Heilbronn, Gebr. Henninger, 1881), 265–74; Israel Gollancz, ed., *Select Early English Poems: St Erkenwald* (London: OUP, 1922); Henry L. Savage, ed., *St. Erkenwald, a Middle English Poem* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1926), and Ruth Morse, ed., *St. Erkenwald* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975).

⁷ For an example of an early source analysis of the Trajan legend, see James Root Hulbert, 'The Sources of "St. Erkenwald"' and "The Trental of Gregory", *Modern Philology* 16/9 (1919), 485–93; more recently, see E. Gordon Whatley, 'Heathens and Saints: St. Erkenwald in Its Legendary Context', *Speculum* 61/2 (1986), 330–63. On authorship: Larry D. Benson, 'The Authorship of "St. Erkenwald"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64/3 (1965), 393–405.

evidence of the Pope's intercessory powers but 'almost a test case among mediaeval theologians, on the much debated question whether an infidel could, by any chance, escape from the eternal punishment of hell'⁸. To account for the *St Erkenwald* poem's significant differences from the earlier legend, Gordon Whatley has proposed that its author may have known Jacopo della Lana's commentary *circa* 1330 on Dante's *Commedia*, which tells of how, 'in the time of St Gregory some workmen at a construction site found a coffin, evidently very old, which contained some bones and a skull with a living tongue inside'—in resolving the mystery, the pope prays to resuscitate the corpse, baptizes it, and Trajan's soul is saved.⁹ Just as Gollancz saw only a 'general embellishment' of the legend, due to a 'love of decorative description', he rated the poem itself as 'the work of a hand that was losing its cunning. It is such as the author of "Cleanness" and "Patience" might well have written when his powers were faltering.'¹⁰ He hypothesized that the poem's composition was most likely related to commemorations in 1386 of Erkenwald as London's first saint.¹¹ Clifford Peterson, in his edition of 1977, subsequently argued that practically speaking, there are any number of other occasions celebrating Erkenwald one could pick: the institution of an annual procession, updatings of the shrine, the dates of bequests in support of the shrine—and concluded: 'It might be safe to say the poem was probably written sometime between 1380 and 1420, and later in that period rather than earlier.'¹²

Though the *St Erkenwald* poem has been called a verse 'saint's life', it has very little in common with any accounts of St Erkenwald's life, neither in biographical detail nor narrative events. This is not to say that people would not have been familiar with the saint's *vita*, just that the narrative does not much point toward or rely upon specifics of this kind. While it was common practice that a tale of a medieval exemplar's saintliness could incorporate saintly events from other *vitae*, it is less common to find a saint celebrated, as Erkenwald is here, for a single event that all other sources of his life ignore. Sandra Cairns calls this a 'glaring paradox': everywhere the poet makes reference to

⁸ Israel Gollancz, ed., *Select Early English Poems: St Erkenwald* (London: OUP, 1922), xliii.

⁹ Whatley, 'Heathens', 365.

¹⁰ Gollancz added: 'If not the work of the poet of "Patience" and "Cleanness", "Erkenwald" must be due to some disciple who very cleverly caught the style of his master', lvii. Gollancz, *St Erkenwald*, li, lx.

¹¹ Gollancz, *St Erkenwald*, lvi.

¹² Peterson, *Saint Erkenwald*, 15.

written history but unapologetically offers up an account no one will have heard of. That this is the poet's intent, Cairns argues, can be seen in how he writes all listeners and readers into the text at the moment the Londoners fruitlessly research all their records for a clue to the pagan corpse's mystery.¹³ T. McAlindon, working along similar lines, observes another paradox: the hagiographic poem is an 'intentional hybrid, an *inventio* which describes the discovery, incorruption, and honoring not of a Christian martyr or confessor, but of a pagan judge'.¹⁴ McAlindon argues that the poet was employing the hagiographic genre for artistic ends—using its conventions to mislead, frustrate, and finally reveal—and makes a fiercely argued rejoinder to Gollancz's 'lack of cunning'.

This notion of an 'intentional hybrid', however, can be applied to the judge's interlocutor as well; this Erkenwald is, rather than a 'local hero' filling in for Gregory, a metonym for the abstract conceptual category of 'bishop of London'. The use of an artificially constructed figure as a didactic guide was a familiar mnemonic practice throughout the medieval era; as Mary Carruthers' investigations have shown, medieval mnemotechny had classical roots. Aristotle can be found proposing the 'deliberative' use of imagination to compose whatever the situation called for: 'the construction out of images of things existent, new composite images of things non-existent, or the breaking up of images existent into images of things non-existent'.¹⁵ Carruthers paraphrases Cicero's instructions in *De oratore* that 'Many things and events are of such a nature that we either have not seen or cannot see what we wish to remember. In these cases, we should make them visible by marking them with a sort of image or figure.'¹⁶ These figures often made use of heightened saliency: 'Because the memory retains distinctly only what is extraordinary, wonderful, and intensely charged with emotion, the images should be of extremes—of ugliness or beauty, ridicule or nobility, of laughter or weeping, or worthiness or salaciousness.'¹⁷ Finally, these constructed images were given life, Carruthers explains:

¹³ Sandra Cairns, 'Fact and Fiction in the Middle English "De Erkenwaldo"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 83/4 (1982), 430–38, 437.

¹⁴ McAlindon, 'Hagiography', 475.

¹⁵ H. A. Wolfson, 'The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophic Texts', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 28/2 (1935), 92, as quoted by Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 65.

¹⁶ Cicero, *De oratore*, 2.87.357, as paraphrased by Carruthers, *Memory*, 26.

¹⁷ Carruthers, *Memory*, 166.

Memory-images must speak, they must not be silent. They sing, they play music, they lament, they groan in pain. They also often give off odor, whether sweet or rotten. And they can also have taste or tactile qualities.¹⁸

The function of memory, Carruthers writes, was ‘not to provide an accurate trace of things past, but to provide materials for creative thinking’.¹⁹ As the quotation of Cicero’s *De oratore* might suggest, the congruence of message and memorability was prized for purposes other than the recall of past events. It is the genius of *St Erkenwald* that its reasoning makes its appeals in a similar way, by counterpoising characters that seem to embody the opposing currents of their time.

Cognitive theorists would recognise this bottom-up approach to sculpting the image of an exemplar with its perceivers’ minds in mind.²⁰ George Lakoff, in discussing Eleanor Rosch’s findings in prototype theory, has proposed that some graded prototype effects (the factors that produce the sense that ‘some category members are better examples of the category than others’), arise from a basic level of categorization dependent on psychological embodiment: ‘the ability to form a mental image’, for example, or ‘ease of learning, remembering, and use’.²¹ Lakoff observes that ‘the best way of thinking about basic-level categories is that they are “human-sized”’—his example is the difference between the categories of ‘chair’ and ‘furniture’.²² ‘Chair’ can be filled with variations on a generic form, associated with a sitting motor action; ‘furniture’ cannot be visualised, even generically, in a single form, and nor is there a single motor action associated with its use. Likewise, *St Erkenwald* avoids superordinate category: it is not ‘cathedral’ but St Paul’s and its lived associations, not ‘bishop of London’, but St Erkenwald, with his iconography, posthumous miracles, and shrines. Equally relevant here is Lakoff’s notice of how goals and cognitive models combine in Barsalou’s ‘*ad hoc* categories’ to produce prototype structure.²³ (*Ad hoc* categories, to the extent that they are uncommon, not to say unique, and prompted by circumstance, nonetheless display the prototypic structure of common categories with well-instantiated conceptual associations). This dynamic further specifies the

¹⁸ Carruthers, *Memory*, 97.

¹⁹ Mary Carruthers and Yadin Dudai, ‘The Janus face of Mnemosyne’, *Nature*, 434 (2005), 567.

²⁰ This is the medieval use of ‘exemplar’ to refer to a divine truth that can be intuited by perception of its image in creation, whether by the faculty of grace alone or by limited human cognition. There exists as well exemplar theory, which, like prototype theory, deals with categorization. However, broadly speaking, where prototype theory studies the ‘fitness’ of an imagined typical member, exemplar theory studies the comparison of specific members of categories. As the argument here pertains to the construction of an imagined ‘Erkenwald’, I refer to prototype theory.

²¹ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987/1990), 56.

²² Lakoff, *WFD*, 51.

²³ Lakoff, *WFD*, 45. See Lawrence W. Barsalou, ‘Ad hoc categories’, *Memory and Cognition* 11 (1983), 211–27.

choice of Erkenwald rather than another bishop of London: the poem's argument generates a prototypical Erkenwald because he fits the *ad hoc* category: 'incorruptible bishops of London who "exist" in the seventh and fourteenth centuries'. The application of this kind of creative thinking is evident in *St Erkenwald*'s recruitment of the saint's contemporaneous celebrity and shrine for a festival-length 'performance' of sanctity—as a major saint, Erkenwald's feast, celebrated at three London churches, took place over eight days, a liturgical octave, encompassing the feast of the Invention of the Cross in early May.²⁴ Coincidentally or not, the poem's action culminates on the eighth day with the bishop's celebration of the mass and supernatural dialogue with the corpse of a heathen judge, unearthed a week earlier. The hagiographic model of '*inventio*' is deployed, as Monika Otter argues, to 'introduce "meta"-levels that allow for further dramatization and discussion of continuity and discontinuity, distance and recuperation.'²⁵ This is a very self-aware use of *inventio*, which traditionally marked a recovery and recognition of the divine power of the past in the monastic present, to permit a 'face-to-face encounter of the "present" and the "past"', as Otter puts it, in a London setting.²⁶

In the context of an incorruptible judge and Erkenwald's own permanence, it is not simply interesting historical detail to note that the intersection of human and divine time was highly contested ground throughout the fourteenth century. Thanks to the translation and commentary of Averroes, the twelfth-century Muslim philosopher, Aristotle's analysis of time as a measurement of movement or physical change had been carried forward by English thinkers of the era, such as Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1170–1253), John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308), and Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1290–1349). It was Grosseteste and Bradwardine, in particular, who began to define time's objective properties using mathematic and geometric reasoning, respectively, and use this to visualise what an atemporal perspective might be. 'Because God is free from the temporal limits of succession,' as Edith Wilks

²⁴ See E. Gordon Whatley, 'The Middle English "St Erkenwald" and Its Liturgical Context', *Mediaevalia* 8 (1982), 278–306.

²⁵ *Miraculum* is yet another hagiographic genre but as the miraculous here stems from discovery, *inventio* is more apposite. Monika Otter, "'New Werke": *St. Erkenwald*, St. Albans, and the medieval sense of the past', *JMRS* 24 (1994), 387–414, 390.

²⁶ Otter, "'New Werke'", 391.

Dolnikowski summarises Bradwardine, ‘he does not have to regard past and future as different’.²⁷

These theoretical explorations could have explosive impact with regard to theological debate on topics such as prophecy, free will, and predestination—Bradwardine’s notorious *De causa Dei*, a thundering broadside against ‘modern Pelagians’ offered an almost heretically strong version of predestination and salvation through grace. In part, this was because Bradwardine reasoned that time was a function of created matter alone, and thus God would exist completely apart from it.

The *St Erkenwald* poem, too, actively resists purely linear conceptions of a temporal continuum, although it employs a different kind of rigour with regard to its numbers. (Gollancz, under ‘Chronological Problems’ in his preface, expended several pages attempting to harmonise the poem’s dating with Geoffrey of Monmouth and Bede, among other sources.²⁸) The pagan judge’s circumlocutory dating has not ceased to occasion debate: ‘þat Brutus þis burghe buggid on fyrste | Noȝt bot fife hundred ȝere þer aghtene wonted | Before þat kynned ȝour Criste by Cristen acounte | A þousande ȝere and þritty mo and yet þrenen aȝht’ (ll. 207–10). The characteristic alternation of reference points this time switches between the pagan-classical (Brutus’s founding of London) and Christian (Christ’s nativity), before locating the judge’s own time in the reign of the ‘bolde Breton Sir Belyn’ (l. 213), with its echoes of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s chronicles. That is, the pagan judge is not primarily defined as pre-Saxon but post-Troy, and is thus potentially implicated in Rome’s imperium. (Only ‘implicates’ because, as Sylvia Federico says, Rome and its imperial conquests had an all-too-real counterpart in the Holy Roman Empire; the safer fantasy was of Troy, the walled city-state.²⁹) The dates he gives resemble Latin numerals ‘read out’, tagged with a numerological emphasis on ‘eight’. (One reason not to press harder for the historicity of the dating is the presence of numerology in *St Erkenwald*: eight, ‘associated with transformation and renewal, became known as the baptismal number’.³⁰) The poet’s interest in numerology (a fascination clearly shared by the *Gawain* poet) seems to link portentous dates on either side of the timeline centred on Christ’s birth. Thus, since the reign of

²⁷ Edith Wilks Dolnikowski, *A View of Time and a Vision of Eternity in Fourteenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 184.

²⁸ Gollancz, *St Erkenwald*, xxx–xxxiv.

²⁹ Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xv.

³⁰ Cf. Russell Peck, ‘Number Structure in *St. Erkenwald*’, *Annuaire Mediaevale* 14 (1973), 9–21; Cindy L. Vitto, ‘The Virtuous Pagan in Middle English Literature’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 79/5 (1989), 1–100, 52.

Belinus and Brennius is supposed to have begun around BC 399, the judge's pagan life roughly mirrors the *anno domini* life of Pelagius (ca. 354–ca. 418), the putatively English monk who travelled to Rome, preaching about Christian free will, equality of justice under God's law, and redistribution of wealth.³¹ Also, if it was believed that Brutus founded London sometime in the BC 1100s, the poet's use of 'communnates' is 'very suggestive', as Gollancz noted, of the Commune of London, established in 1191. (As mentioned above, Gollancz speculated that 'Troynovant' seemed to point toward Nicholas Brembre's London of the latter-part of the fourteenth century, but his analysis focused on the judge as a secular figure.³²) The *St Erkenwald* poet makes his judge's pre-Pelagian history 'rhyme' numerologically with that of Pelagius, and Wyclif and the London Lollards, to collectively refute their theology: for instance, the corpse will speak not from free will, but when it is compelled to by Erkenwald's call upon the power of Christ: 'I may not bot boghe to þi bone for bothe myn eghen' (l. 194), it responds.

In selecting Erkenwald as the 'primal' bishop of London (he was the fourth, in fact), St Paul's as the centre of a process of sanctification, and London as an eternally fractious, factional city, the poem superposes religious office, edifice, and city over the passage of time, thus continually framing and constraining its operations. Though St Paul's will 'take place', as Christianity emerges to elevate the religious practices in a pagan temple on that spot, an English cleric-poet would have been familiar with an even earlier blending of divine and human time; and time contained, or organised, by a built structure. Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* is the acknowledged source for the poem's description of the pagan corpse's incorruptibility. In the same work, in Bede's famous account of King Edwin's conversion, one of the king's advisors says:

'Talis,' inquit, 'mihi videtur, rex, vita hominum præsens in terris ad comparationem ejus, quod nobis incertum est, temporis, quale cum, te residente ad cœnam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio et calido effecto cœnaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluviarum vel nivium, adveniēsq̃ue unus passerum domum citissime pervolaverit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens, mox per aliud exierit. Ipso quidem tempore, quo intus est, hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen parvissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens tuis oculis elabitur. Ita hæc vita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidve præcesserit, prorsus ignoramus'.³³

³¹ Peterson gives a substantive accounting of calculations by Gollancz, *et al.*, in his explanatory notes for ll. 207–10, *Saint Erkenwald*, 105.

³² Gollancz, *St Erkenwald*, xxviii–xxix.

³³ 2.13 in Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson (London: English Historical Society, 1838), 135–36.

(This is how the present life of man on earth, King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall, and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or what went before we know not at all.³⁴)

Bede's story, remarkably, provides an example of time measured as movement—the flight of the sparrow down the length of the hall—as well as an indeterminate, unknowable chaos outside the hall. But the hall as a mental space, as the location of the life of man, its social organisation, is also a fixed place, a natural vantage point from which to notice time's passage. In this sense, Bede's hall has its counterpart in *Beowulf*: 'Sele hlifade | heah ond horngeap; heaðowylma bad, | laðan liges— ne wæs it lenge þa gen | þæt se ecghete aþumsweoran | æfter wælniðe wæcnan scolde' ('The hall towered high and broad-horned [gabled], awaited the war-surge of angry flames; it was not long yet when blade-hatred between sworn in-laws should arise from mortal enmity', ll. 81b–85).³⁵ Just as Hroðgar's Heorot is the location through which time can take place, with the advent of Christianity always in the offing, the wooden-roofed hall of St Paul's exists concurrently in heathen form in 'Hengyst dawes', in the seventh century of Erkenwald when it has been razed and reconstructed, and the St Erkenwald-infused fourteenth of the poem's audience, due to the eternally fixed location of the 'founder' saint. In noting this interweaving of eras—'The poem is concerned with three different periods: the pagan past, the time of St Erkenwald in which the poem is set, and the time in which the poem itself was written'—Marion Turner proposes that what 'is actually being described is a troubled continuity'.³⁶ Human-scaled temporal analysis—breaking time into periods—is deeply ingrained, and yet the poem acts to destabilise the apparent solidity of 'periods', and replace this with a continuity of place-as-viewpoint, in which past, present, and future are made visible. Temporal theory in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was often informed by visual theory, as in the works of Roger Bacon and Robert Grosseteste. Wyclif's own view, expressed in his *De tempore*, is most analogous, says Stephen Lahey, to a film projection:

³⁴ 2.13, Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Judith McClure and Roger Collins, trans. Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: OUP, 1994/2008), 95.

³⁵ Klaeber, *Beowulf*, 6.

³⁶ Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London*, Kindle edn. (New York: OUP, 2007), Kindle loc. 705.

Each frame of the movie is in itself unified, a moment frozen in time. From one frame to the next, the subject portrayed seems to move, but in fact there is no movement distinct from the time in which it occurs, or the succession of frames. On this analogy, God is the great director, viewing all created being through the medium of time...³⁷

This understanding of God as extratemporal led Wyclif (just as it did Bradwardine in *De causa Dei* earlier) to strongly reject any notion of human free will that presumed to inhibit divine will, or predestination; the sense that human lives unfold through chance and circumstance is purely a human perception.

Writing a Christian-Saxon Debate

Erkenwald was appointed bishop of London in either 675 or 676, so the poem was asking its fourteenth-century audience to think back over a gulf of some 700 years in alleging (falsely) that its story of an unidentifiable, uncorrupted corpse found in a tomb beneath St Paul's is mentioned in 'crafty cronecles' (l. 54). Yet for God's chroniclers, the poem implies, there is no gulf. In the first stanza alone, the poem dizzyingly shifts in time between London at the time of Christ's crucifixion and the establishment of Christendom, and the last quarter of the seventh century. As the poem opens, in Erkenwald's time, 'þe temple alder-grattyst | Was drawen down, þat one dole, to dedifie new' (l. 5–6). The rededication of the temple is explicitly framed by the missionary Augustine's work of conversion almost a century earlier; Gregory the Great's instructions to Augustine were that, rather than raze heathen places of worship entirely, it would be more practical to sanctify them and put them to God's purpose. The poem places Erkenwald in proper apostolic succession (l. 33: 'of þis Augustynes art is Erkenwolde bischop'), having already established that Augustine's mission was born of the pope. Rome is elided with regard to the pope, and again when London's temples are said to have been dedicated to Greco-Roman gods—Apollo, Jupiter, and Juno are listed. As the poem reminds us, London, founded by Aeneas's descendant Brutus, was called 'New Troie' (l. 25). Within a secular frame, this illustrates very well the bracketing and revisionism Sylvia Federico describes, as the authority of classical sources is at once claimed, while an alternate history is read.³⁸

³⁷ Stephen Lahey, *John Wyclif*, Great Medieval Thinkers series, ed. Brian Davies, Kindle edn. (New York: OUP, 2009), loc. 1732.

³⁸ Cf. Federico on Chaucer's 'House of Fame', *New Troy*, 46–64.

Similarly, the poem's author acknowledges heathen Saxon influence, but does not name their gods—it is difficult to imagine that, in the late fourteenth century, this is Christian diffidence at naming pagan names. Perhaps this poet of 'New Troy' is employing the shortcut of '*interpretatio romana*', as in Tacitus's research on Germanic tribes when the historian interpolates Mercury for principal deity Woden?³⁹ But some references suggest more recent contact. While a few critics have assigned to the demands of alliteration the curious combination that is the 'synagoge of þe Sonne' (l. 21), others have argued that just as a single 'Mahoun' (l. 20) glancingly consigns Islam to paganism, so too can a single 'synagoge' expel Judaism. 'Historically, late medieval anti-Judaism reflects upheavals within Christendom and the church, the crusades, and the increasing interest in and familiarity with Arabic and Hebrew scholarship', Christine Chism writes—it would have been just a century since Edward I's edict sent Jewish citizens abroad, or underground.⁴⁰ Unmoored from time and anchored only in place, the poem's movement through conceptual frames licenses all pagan associations, so that the 'bryȝt gold lettres' in 'roynyshe' rows (ll. 51–52) in the judge's sepulchre can refer to the inscrutability of Anglo-Saxon runes, but also Hebrew, Arabic, and the impossibility of translation.

However, the poem also refuses to veer wholly into fantasy: the mid-twentieth-century discovery of London's temple of the sun, in use from the second to fourth centuries and situated less than ten minutes' walk from today's St Paul's, is a reminder of the startling juxtapositions through the centuries in polyglot London, and how certain scenes seem almost to repeat, as this 2013 story from the *Londonist* city site illustrates:

The Temple of Mithras was dedicated to the Mithraic cult, which spread across the Roman Empire between the 1st and 4th centuries AD. The temple was a low, cave-like building and was in use for about 100 years. It was later rebuilt and dedicated to the god Bacchus. The temple was rediscovered by chance in 1952 by the archaeologist WF Grimes, and caused something of a stir at the time, with crowds of Londoners queuing up to see the dig.⁴¹

³⁹ If one can reason in reverse from the example of the previous names alliterated, the absent god's name (or its first stressed syllable) should start with a P: for instance, Poseidon or Pluto. K. B. Townshend, trans., *The Agricola and Germania of Tacitus* (London: Methuen, 1894), 61–62. For an insightful inquiry into the practice of *interpretatio*, see Clifford Ando, 'Interpretatio Romana', *Classical Philology* 100/1 (2005), 41–51.

⁴⁰ Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 161.

⁴¹ Jon Yeomans, 'Temple Of Mithras Stays Boxed As City's Big Dig Continues', *Londonist*, 6 February 2013 <<http://londonist.com>>.

If the precise meanings of these earlier sites of worship remain open to debate, the prologue's bias toward a providential history is clear. It chronicles God's will enacted over centuries in the space of just a few lines: God eternally claims all places of worship, whatever their antecedent associations, for Christianity, and purifies and sanctifies them—down to and including their heathen foundations.

When the minster was rebuilt as good as new, the poem says, it was called the 'New Work' ('New Werke hit hatte', l. 38). This has frequently bemused critics, since the 'New Work' is an appellation from nearer the poet's time, applied to the improvements and enlargements that took place between the mid-thirteenth century and 1314. This dressing of the past in the costume of the present is seen again with the description of the Londoners who are drawn to the unknown tomb uncovered by cathedral workmen, who include burgesses and beadles ('Burgeys boghit þereto, bedels and othir', l. 59), and again in the stately apparel of the corpse, discussed later. John Clark provides a typical reading of this—that historicity was simply unimportant to the poet:

[I]like the other contemporary writers on historical themes the author made little attempt to avoid anachronisms. His mayor, his mace-bearers and his beadles have no place in 7th-century London; he calls the building work on St. Paul's the New Work, a title actually applied consistently to the project to extend the Norman cathedral which was begun in the 1250s and continued well into the 14th century. The poem provides in fact a lively picture of 14th-century London, and of the reaction of a 14th-century crowd to a strange discovery.⁴²

Other literary scholars have sensed that the poet, far from avoiding it, meant to invite anachronism. As mentioned previously, Gollancz found the presence of 'New Troy' gratuitous, except for its association with Nicholas Brembre, while the pagan judge's lengthy résumé he thought oddly like that of a Mayor of London, 'only he is the deputy of a duke'.⁴³ Gollancz was likely thinking of how Lord Mayor Brembre 'had thought to destroy the name of Londoners by renaming the city "Little Troy" and [...] further had thought to style himself duke of London'.⁴⁴ Yet the association does not seem to lead anywhere in the debate between Erkenwald and the judge. It is striking how condescending, in some quarters, critical reception has been of this writing of the present into the past, especially given earlier evidence of the Anglo-Saxon thought-world written into the OE *Genesis* and *Exodus*. Just as the OE texts' paralleling of the Hebrew Exodus with Anglo-Saxon immigration was long ignored as a

⁴² John Clark, 'Saint Erkenwald: Bishop and London Archaeologist', *London Archaeologist* 4/1 (1980), 3–7.

⁴³ began his period of service to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in late 1372. Gollancz, *St Erkenwald*, xxix.

⁴⁴ Federico, *New Troy*, 1.

quirk of translation, the *St Erkenwald* poet's gestures to fourteenth-century London were more often admitted only to be discounted. Closer inspection of the poem's atemporal dynamics, however, uncovers a sustained engagement with fourteenth-century politics. Ruth Nissé has called the poet's work a '*translatio* with a difference', seeing in the figure of the bishop an attempt to 'wrench the saint's cult, and by extension London itself, away from Richard II's appropriation'.⁴⁵ For Nissé, the poem's argument centres around reign by divine right, and for contrast she points to the Carmelite friar Richard Maidstone's poem '*De Concordia Inter Regem Richard II et Civitatem London*', which also names London 'New Troy' and describes Richard II's entry procession signalling his reconciliation with the city of London in 1392:

The primate and the city's bishop met them there; (345)
A cleric of that church came out to greet them too.
These three, in bishop's robes, escort the king and queen
Together, to the holy tomb of Erkenwald.⁴⁶

This point of contact between the poems is literally singular, however: only Maidstone gives Erkenwald in any of the accounts of the 1392 procession. Walsingham says it was the shrine of Edward the Confessor—historically much more likely given Richard's sustained efforts to have Edward canonised. (Even so, Maidstone's alteration would nonetheless illustrate the way saints' shrines could be used to communicate affinities.) If Nissé's reading illuminates interactions of the poem with its time, it also reveals how inhospitable the poem is to attempts to focus it solely in this way. The poem will simply not reduce to anything like a *vita á clef* because, and quite unusually, its blending of mental spaces renders ambivalent time's 'flow'. It consistently pluralises conceptual frames in ways that prohibit a singular, linear temporal perspective; in *St Erkenwald*, it is precisely the persistence of patterns of thought, arising from and shaped by place, that is outlined.

The tomb of the pagan judge, a 'throghe of thykke ston' (l. 47), found beneath the floor of St Paul's, fits in both in *St Erkenwald*'s time, as ancient crypt and in the fourteenth century, as a memorial for high-status personages. The language both describes an ornate stone mausoleum (a 'spelunke' is a sepulchre) containing a coffin, and echoes biblically—Joseph laying the body of Jesus

⁴⁵ Ruth Nissé, "'A Coroun Ful Riche'", 281.

⁴⁶ '*O[c]currunt pariter primas et episcopus urbis; | Obviat et clerus illius ecclesie. | Concomitantur eos, in cultu pontificali, | Ad Erkenwaldi sancta sepulcra simul*' (345–48), in Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*, ed. David C. Carlson and trans. A. G. Rigg (TEAMS, 2003).

in a ‘pruh of stone’ is a common collocation of medieval texts. It is a funerary continuum, each line of the poem piling one kind of grave on another. The contemporaneous descriptors and ‘blurriness’ of burial terminology would have cued the hearer to compare this ‘throghe’ with the Erkenwald shrine as it then stood:

Behind the high altar—what Dean Milman justly calls ‘the pride, glory, and fountain of wealth’ to St Paul’s—was the body of St Erkenwald, covered with a shrine which three London goldsmiths had spent a whole year in chiselling; and this shrine was covered with a grate of tinned iron. The very dust of the chapel floor, mingled with water, was said to work instantaneous cures.⁴⁷

Arcoid, the canon at St Paul’s responsible for the twelfth-century *Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi* that describes Erkenwald’s posthumous vengeance on tradesmen who work on holy days, peculiarly celebrates the survival of Erkenwald’s shrine, body, and relics in the fire of 1087 as ‘an event that is virtually impossible to narrate’ (IV, 2–4).⁴⁸ Erkenwald’s bones were stored in a crypt as the new minster was built; the 1140 translation was made after their attempted theft, with the 1148 translation occurring within the church to the new silver shrine.⁴⁹ Arcoid further explains placing Erkenwald’s bones in a lead coffin and this inside a stone housing: ‘someone who shines forth so gloriously in the heavens should surely not be buried in such a foul garment as the earth’ (IV, 20–21).⁵⁰ Depending upon the poem’s date of composition, the burial of Robert Braybrooke, the bishop of London who died in 1404, in St Paul’s may have also come to mind. (His predecessor in the bishopric, William Courtenay, died in 1396 but was buried at Canterbury Cathedral.) It was Braybrooke, a judge who had studied civil law at Oxford before taking holy orders, who in 1386 attempted to revive the pomp proper to Erkenwald’s feast days in April and in November (this last in honour of the translations of the saint’s body in 1140, 1148, and 1326).

Braybrooke’s courting of the patron saint’s favour may have reflected a personal, fervent desire for divine aid. On the one hand, the Chapter of St Paul’s had been heatedly and publicly rebuked earlier by Edward III for abuses including prostitution in the cathedral precincts and the illicit sale of religious vessels and ornaments. On the other, London itself was restive in almost every way, from

⁴⁷ Walter Thornbury, ‘St Paul’s: To the Great Fire’, in *Old and New London*, 1 (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878), 234–248. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>>.

⁴⁸ E. Gordon Whatley, *The Saint of London* (Binghampton: MRTS, 1989), 51.

⁴⁹ Derek Keene, Arthur Burns, and Andrew Saint, eds, *St Paul’s: The Cathedral Church of London, 604–2004* (New Haven: YUP, 2004), 116.

⁵⁰ Whatley, *Saint of London*, 55.

disputes over Lollardy to the king's purse (after honouring repeated requests, the city cut off loans to Richard II after 1388).⁵¹ Braybrooke had to navigate the turmoil, mediating between the city and King, the King and his canons, and between the cathedral and the people in it. All the while, the cathedral's nave aisle, known as 'Paul's walk', was threatening to become a permanent marketplace. A year earlier Braybrooke had threatened to excommunicate the merchants, children playing ball, and pigeon-hunters who refused to observe the cathedral's proper use on Sundays and holy days and carried on as usual. This call for greater observance must not have been immediately successful, because in 1391 he penned this mandate, complaining in particular of scriveners and barbers who:

...continue to set about their craft and hold open shop with everyone attending on the said [feast] days just as on other days which are not holidays, by collecting their fees for their craft and service to the great danger of their own souls, as a wicked example to other crafts of the said City, and in open contempt of the life-giving mother church.⁵²

In his *Annals of St Paul's Cathedral*, Henry Milman suggests the 1392 accord brokered between city and Crown solidified the public esteem that led to Braybrooke being buried before the altar at St Paul's.⁵³ This kind of contemporaneous association with the poem's bishop (and his shrine in St Paul's) provokes a search for associations for Erkenwald's counterpart, who is almost blasphemously preserved.

This greater marvel appears once the stone sarcophagus's lid is pried off with crowbars: inside lies a 'blissfull body [...] araide in riche wise in riall wedes' (ll. 76–77), clad in all the signifiers of wealth and leadership of the fourteenth century: pearls, gown hemmed with gold, golden girdle, fur-trimmed camel-hair mantle, with a crown over a legal hood and a sceptre put in his hands. But not only is clothing unmarked by age, damp, or dirt, their colours bright, but the skin visible of the face, ears, and hands is 'red as the rose'. His lips are red as if he is simply sleeping. It is significant that the confusion of the Londoners here, in mistaking the corpse for a king and so beginning their fruitless search of the chronicles for record, mirrors the Londoners of ancient days taking the dead judge for a king (l. 254: 'Þai coronyd me þe kidde kynge of kene iustises'). Given the identification of the judge's

⁵¹ Caroline M. Barron, 'Richard II and London' in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, ed. by Anthony Goodman and James L. Gillespie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 136.

⁵² 'The Common Paper: Mandate of Robert Braybrooke, 28 June 1391', in *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357-1628 With A Continuation To 1678*, ed. Francis W Steer (London, 1968), 4–5. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>>.

⁵³ Henry Milman, *Annals of St Paul's Cathedral*, 80.

‘New Troy’ with fourteenth-century London, the poem presents Londoners fooling themselves about the judge’s status across time. The *inventio* of this corpse also participates somewhat, as many have noted, in Bede’s account of the discovery of Cuthbert’s incorruptible body:

They did so, and opening the grave they found the body intact and whole, as if it were still alive, the joints of the limbs flexible and much more like a sleeping than a dead man. Moreover all his garments in which his limbs had been clothed were not only undefiled but seemed to be perfectly new and wonderfully bright. When the brothers saw this, they were struck with great fear and hastened to tell the bishop what they had found.⁵⁴

But the most proximate example of incorruptibility for the poem’s audience would have been Erkenwald himself—his miraculous preservation(s) in flesh and shrine were celebrated. As is not unusual in hagiography, the miracle of a body preserved from decay necessitated the creation of a posthumous life story. Despite the poem’s citation of ‘crafty cronecles’, these mention Erkenwald sparingly. He is one of three clerics mentioned by name as having assisted the Christian West Saxon king Ine in preparing his law codes, and he and the Northumbrian bishop Wilfrid are also found signing a charter. Bede mentions him briefly, noting his appointment as bishop of London, his founding of two abbeys, and that his horse litter continued to produce miracles after his death.⁵⁵ It is difficult to assess fourteenth-century knowledge of the bishop’s historical role, as a judicial figure or otherwise, but the poem does not leave the legal element to chance, and instructs that Erkenwald ‘the laghe teches’ (l. 34) from his bishop’s throne in St Paul’s. The body found in St Paul’s will betray no signs of life until after the return of Erkenwald from visiting an abbey in Essex. Presumably this is Barking Abbey, which Erkenwald founded for his sister Æthelburh—one of the few points of contact the poem makes with other biographical sources of the saint’s life. There is no evidence, for instance, to support the implication that Erkenwald rebuilt St Paul’s—this association is made possible by his prototypical status as bishop of London.

Clearly Erkenwald’s status and incorruptibility are meant to contrast with those of the judge, a contrast which those critics who employed an interpretative frame derived from the Gregory/Trajan legend tended to pass over. In the legend, after all, Trajan is an exemplar of righteous worldly

⁵⁴ 4.30, ‘*Fecerunt autem ita, et aperientes sepulcrum invenerunt corpus totum quasi adhuc viveret integrum, et flexilibus artuum compagibus multo dormiente quam mortuo similis; sed et vestimenta omnia, quibus indutum erat, non solum intemerata, verum etiam prisca novitate et claritudine miranda parebant. Quod ubi videre fratres, nimio mox timore perculsi, festina verunt referre antistiti quae invenerant [...]*’ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 327; English translation from *Ecclesiastical History*, 229.

⁵⁵ 4.6, Bede, *HE*.

leadership, but the emperor's representation does not traffic in the signifiers of saintliness, a comparison that *St Erkenwald* makes central to its debate. Gradually, scholarship has inspected the hybridisation of the judge's preserved appearance more closely, finding in it the framing of a contemporaneous debate. In the introduction to her 1974 edition of the poem, Ruth Morse brought up the shared conceptual association in the poem with Bradwardine's attack on Pelagian 'moderni', with Bradwardine rhetorically situating his broadside with St Augustine's attack on the heretic Pelagius. (Her reading of the poem, however, that the judge is saved by merit, is hardly tenable given the judge's predicament at the outset.) Gordon Whatley has connected the poem's reworking of the Gregory/Trajan story to Wyclif and his theological arguments:

Radical theology and angry disillusionment with the established church were prevalent in late-fourteenth-century England, and it is not surprising that extravagant interpretations of the Gregory/Trajan legend, presented in contexts critical of or hostile to the ecclesiastical establishment, should have been written by Englishmen during this period of crisis for the church. Small wonder also that such a conservative interpretation as that of *St. Erkenwald* should have been composed in England at this time, very possibly in response to the radicalism of Langland and Wyclif.⁵⁶

The conceptual role that the figure of Wyclif plays comes into focus most clearly if one knows, as Whatley does, that Wyclif had weighed in on the Gregory/Trajan debate in his *De ecclesia*, where 'he argues that Trajan attained to explicit faith before he died, through a divine revelation granted to him as one of God's predestined elect'.⁵⁷ As critics have oriented around the looming presence of John Wyclif (and Lollardy) more points of contact have emerged, though the correspondence of the Gregory and Trajan legend to the conflict between Wyclif and Courtenay, Bishop of London, is less-travelled territory. Specifically, in February 1377, John Wyclif was called before a convocation at St Paul's by then-Bishop William Courtenay to respond to charges of heresy. Wyclif, long a protégé of the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, arrived with a retinue including the duke and Henry Percy, then Lord Marshal.⁵⁸ (Coincidentally, a 'marcialle' will greet the pagan judge's soul upon its arrival in heaven.) Witnesses report that Percy and the duke sparred verbally with the bishop from the moment of their entrance, and finally, when the bishop refused to have a chair brought for Wyclif, John of Gaunt offered *sotto voce* to throw the bishop out of the cathedral rather than put up with more of his

⁵⁶ Whatley, 'Heathens', 345.

⁵⁷ Whatley, 'Heathens', 345.

⁵⁸ A lively account of the convocation, from which some of this summary is drawn, is given in *Writings of the Reverend and Learned John Wickliff, D. D.* (London: William Clowes/Religious Tract Society, 1831), 18–20. Also see Stephen Lahey, *John Wyclif*, Great Medieval Thinkers series, ed. Brian Davies, Kindle edn. (New York: OUP, 2009).

impertinence. The convocation then broke up, it is said, due to Londoners threatening to attack the duke. Despite papal bulls pronouncing Wyclif's heresy, it would not be until 1382 that Courtenay, now Archbishop of Canterbury, would succeed in having him expelled from his post at Oxford.

The tension of this historic confrontation likely informs the poem's staging of Erkenwald's weeping and groaning night of prayer as he ponders the mystery of the corpse, and his request of God for a legal defence 'confirmynge þi Cristen faithe' (l. 124). The first 'goste' in the poem is the 'Holy Goste' which in some way answers Erkenwald. In the morning, before visiting the body in its crypt, Erkenwald begins mass with the chant of '*Spiritus domini*', which some critics believe suggests he is celebrating Pentecost—and certainly the Holy Spirit's knowledge of all languages is suggested by the lyrics. Only then does Erkenwald make his way to the tomb, open the eyes of the corpse, and order it to answer, which it does through 'sum lant goste lyf' (l. 192)—a line that has been reordered and emended by Clifford Peterson to allow 'goste' to become 'Holy Ghost' but which could also mean 'a portion of loaned ghost-life'. In that case, while Erkenwald has the Holy Ghost on his side, the judge has merely a scrap of life. 'Goste' in Middle English has any number of meanings, including the one we might think of first: the soul of a dead person. But here, next to 'lyf', one can read it as the life principle, which is physically evidenced by the breath needed to produce a voice. The poet dwells disquietingly on the response, saying the corpse jerks a little, and labours to speak, making a mournful noise (l. 191: 'drery dreme'). If the poet intended to indict Wyclif in particular, the corpse's state of suspended animation is eerily mirrored by what is known about Wyclif's personal health after his first stroke in 1382, and which would deteriorate. The second recorded stroke left Wyclif 'paralyzed and speechless', says Lahey, for three days before his death in 1384, but it is thought that the first stroke left him visibly incapacitated as well.⁵⁹

As if aware of the conversation concerning its provenance, the body explains that it is not that of a king or even a knight, but a man of the law who had been promoted to become a high court justice in New Troy. As the deputy of a duke, he travelled the area applying the prince's law so fairly and uprightly, that at his death 'all Troye' (l. 246) mourned him, the great and small. Though Wyclif was a secular theologian, he represented John of Gaunt in arguing for the Crown's fiscal interests

⁵⁹ Lahey, *Wyclif*, loc. 460.

against the Church. Wyclif's argument that temporal authorities (when moved by God) could potentially administer religious wealth was so incendiary that Gaunt discovered him to be a liability.⁶⁰ While one can imagine the poet taking inspiration from, and aim at, Wyclif, the poem nonetheless frustrates attempts to find in the historical man a key to its judge—it ranges too widely across time, busy building its overarching mental edifice in which Wyclif-like rationales are another instance of the correctable Pelagian error. The marvel of the judge's bodily state is integral to the poem's argument because the incorruptibility is divine, not an illusion. A dubious Erkenwald guesses at first that embalming is why the judge's body is not a profusion of worms—the choice of 'rank' ('ronke') means the poet is playing on the image of a corpse teeming with maggots, not just earthworms. But when the saint asks how it is that the judge's clothes have not rotted away but retained their colours, the body replies that this is the work of the 'riche kyng of reson' (l. 267), who loves all laws that aspire to the truth, and most esteems people for keeping their minds on justice. While this seemingly points again to Wyclif, whose first major work was *De logica*, who believed in the grace-inspired intelligibility of scripture, and who as noted argued for a stronger link between divine and temporal authority, it also connects with Pelagian thought: 'The ideal Christian of Pelagian literature was a *prudens*, carefully reared in conformity to the divine law, to be different from "the ignorant crowd"', says Peter Brown.⁶¹ Pelagius's accusers believed he preached that, for salvation, one must only obey the Christian law using free will—that 'sin can be avoided without continuous divine assistance'.⁶² Even the Roman regard for law came under suspicion if it seemed imperial. As previously seen in visionary environments, the marvel, by virtue of its relationship to the divine, makes an ontological claim, making visible a (re)organisation of the social imaginary. The proper use of reason alone is commendable but not sufficient for salvation. His corpse can participate in the honour of earthly incorruptibility, but, as the judge tells the bishop, as an unbaptised heathen, his soul remains in limbo. Christ's Harrowing of Hell brought forth damned sinners but not him. His soul sighs forever in a dim obscurity, hungering for a feast it will never eat. Again, though Wyclif's theology is implicated—his

⁶⁰ Lahey, *Wyclif*, loc. 303.

⁶¹ Peter Brown, 'Pelagius and his Supporters: Aims and Environment', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19/1 (1968), 93–114, 97.

⁶² J. Patout Burns, 'Augustine's Role in the Imperial Action Against Pelagius', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 30/1 (1979), 67–83, 76.

denial of the transubstantiation implicit in the Last Supper was among his most heretical—the poet joins this vision to the promise made to the Anglo-Saxons in Bede’s hall: that there exists a perpetual feast, and despair is not to be invited. McAlindon surely is correct to be ‘reminded in these concise but haunting lines of the Anglo-Saxon imagination; of Deor and Wanderer exiled in chill and dreary wastes from the companionship and warmth of the festal hall.’⁶³ Erkenwald closes his eyes and weeps, along with everyone else, at this prospect, before composing himself and announcing that he knows that God has allowed the corpse its ‘goste lyf’ for the time it will take him to get water and say the words of baptism. If after that, Erkenwald says, the body ‘droppyd down dede hit daungerde me lasse’ (l. 320). This betrays some anxiety about the act—the use of ‘daungerde’, with its associations with the power and responsibility of authority, points to both temporal and divine sources. Clearly the corpse, with its associations to dukes and kings, and its fascinated public, exercises some posthumous power around which Erkenwald must tread carefully. But Erkenwald is an authority himself, made responsible by God for the salvation of souls through efficacious grace. It does not matter from *when* the heathen arises, just that as bishop, Erkenwald must take this opportunity to baptise him. In a twist, a single tear falls on the corpse’s face just as Erkenwald has finished pronouncing the words, and the judge joyfully reports that instantaneously his soul has been transported to heaven. With this good news transmitted, his body blackens to ash, ‘as roten as þe rottok þat rises in powder’ (l. 344).

The *St Erkenwald* poet is ‘expert in the specifically narrative art of exciting expectations which are fulfilled in a wholly unexpected manner’, as McAlindon says.⁶⁴ Put another way, the poet is extraordinarily attuned to the possibility of literature as a conceptual landscape. The poet’s prototypic figure of St Erkenwald assembles an imaginary bishop of London, one who exists throughout time and typology: as icon, as shrine, as half-remembered *vita*, as the animating spirit of contemporary figures William Courtenay and Robert Braybrooke. Erkenwald is even, effectively, the animating spirit of his counterpart, the pagan judge, who in turn brings associations of John Wyclif, Lollardy, Pelagius, Pelagianism, and John of Gaunt and the role of secular power. Fundamental to this project is the use of blended temporal spaces as simply another kind of mental space—this allows for the final

⁶³ McAlindon, ‘Hagiography’, 493.

⁶⁴ McAlindon, ‘Hagiography’, 475.

transformation of the poem: the poet writes the experience of the poem into the poem, so that a text about an *inventio* becomes an *inventio*. As a final thought, it is worth considering for whom the poet staged this performance. There was after all a bustling Erkenwald cult at St Paul's—a guild in honour of St Erkenwald was established at St Paul's in 1378, and religious guilds were pleased to sponsor processions and pageants.⁶⁵ It is possible that the poem knowingly performs its *inventio* as a marvel generated by their fervour. In her study of monastic use of the past, Karine Uge says that providential *inventiones* 'were often composed to justify the foundation or refoundation of a monastic community', and we can imagine that the St Paul's guild might have wanted to celebrate its establishment as a response to what it saw as heresy.⁶⁶ (Literally bound up with *St Erkenwald*, John Mirk's *Festial* contains not one but two denunciations of Lollardy by name, in his sermons for the feasts of the Trinity and Corpus Christi. Alan Fletcher further notes Mirk's 'equation of Lollard behaviour with that of heretics of olden times', just as the *St Erkenwald* poet does, underlining the poem's participation in a wider discourse about ancient heresy.⁶⁷) In a traditional dream-vision frame, Erkenwald might have been presented with a dream during his long night of prayer. The genius of the poet is to have turned that narrative inside-out, so that the text itself becomes the vision that the bishop's plea summoned. It is intriguing to consider the poem's vibrant representation of London's public in the context of a public reading, possibly on the guild's feast day.

⁶⁵ Tom Hoffman, *Bibliography on The Guilds* (2011), Pt 1, 10; online Birkbeck Library <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk>>.

⁶⁶ Karine Uge, *Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders* (Woodbridge: Yorke Medieval Press, 2005), 73.

⁶⁷ Alan Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', *Medium Ævum* 56/2 (1987), 217–24, 220.

V. 'My goste is gon': Devising Settings for the Pearl Poem

The alliterative Middle English poem known as *Pearl* centres on the memory of an extended dream vision: it opens with an unnamed narrator, a self-described 'joylez juelere' (l. 252), praising a beautiful pearl that he had previously lost in a garden.¹ Upon one of his returns to the spot, he recounts, he was overcome with emotion and stricken unconscious. His 'spyryt' (l. 61) travelled to a place unknown to him, an earthly paradise made of gem stones.² As his dream-self took in the splendid and radiant cliffs, forest, and river, he was filled with bliss. Then, at the foot of a cliff, the dreamer saw a girl wearing clothing and crown decorated with pearls, and he asked whether she was the pearl he lost. She engaged him in a lengthy theological dialogue, culminating with the dreamer being shown a glimpse of the New Jerusalem. Just as he was emboldened to ford the river there to join the maiden (against her wishes), the narrator says, he was thrust back into consciousness in the garden, rueful at rejoining mundane reality, but with a new awareness of the necessity of submission to God's will in all things.

While the significance of these three settings—garden, earthly paradise, celestial city—within disparate medieval conceptual frameworks has attracted substantial critical commentary (as has the relationship of the narrator to the young woman) an analysis of how the author coordinated these environments with theological inquiry reveals an innovative reversal of the flow of information—as if specialised texts are being reconstituted in the form of their source domains. For instance, one can imagine the poem's garden as structured in part by the knowledge contained in an '*herballe*', the earthly paradise by a lapidary, the celestial city on the biblical authority of St John's Apocalypse (this last instance is explicit, with multiple citations of 'þe apostel John' and his 'Apocalyppez', though a subset of lapidaries is also concerned with the stones mentioned in Apocalyptic literature). This reifying gesture is distinct from either the explicit naming of a classical or patristic textual source, or the knowing quotation of such an *auctor*, because these domains of knowledge, figured as meaningful environments that co-constitute the narrative, are represented explicitly through the narrator's imperfect focalisation of them. This representation of kinds of knowledge helps the poet interrogate

¹ This and all following quotations from *Pearl*, unless otherwise noted, are from Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds and trans., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011/2007), 53–110.

² 'Spyryt' seems to be used interchangeably with 'goste' (63) in the text.

what can be known, how it can be known, and by whom. As will be seen, the dreamer's interactions in each setting mirror an uneasy, halting progression toward spiritual enlightenment—a gift, the narrator acknowledges retrospectively, that is awarded only to those obedient and humble enough to restrain a vainglorious urge to claim it.

Historical and Critical Contexts

From the poem's opening lines: 'Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye | to clanly clos in golde so clere' (ll. 1–2), its allegorizing is commonly read as derived from the biblical parable of the 'pearl of great price' (Matt. 13:45–46), in which a merchant seeking to trade in pearls instead sells everything to purchase a single, immensely valuable pearl. Thus Patricia Kean and other critics have claimed that the 'contrast of earthly and heavenly riches' is a significant theme.³ But another, earlier biblical reference to pearls is active as well; Matthew 7:6 emphasizes that the value of holy teachings depends upon discernment, instructing the listener 'nether caste ye youre pearles before swyne', as Wyclif's late-fourteenth-century translation has it.⁴ As his 'pearl of great price' also comes to accord with spiritual illumination and salvation, the poet will destabilize a literal reading of the introductory lines over the course of the poem—but in addition, introduce esoteric symbolism, as described below, to frustrate traditional interpretative models. The literal will persist: gems and spices remain items of value, love is rare, and so too knowledge of these things is a kind of wealth. The poet does not mean to sever 'earthly' from 'heavenly' but to emphasize ontological, and concomitantly epistemological, relationships. Things of the world may pass away—'For vch gresse mot grow of graynez dede' (l. 31)—but the world's organization through divine will does not. When at last the poem's narrator reports on a New Jerusalem that is visually identical to the one described by John, the focalization by the dreamer enacts spatially the distance between self- and divinely-willed knowledge, and also the incommensurate existences of the living and the eternal. The dreamer's feverish attempt to ford the intervening river will result in ejection from the vision before more mysteries can be revealed.

³ Note 6, P. M. Kean, *The Pearl: An Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1967), 4.

⁴ Rev. Joseph Bosworth, ed., *The Gothic and Anglo-Saxon Gospels in Parallel Columns with the Versions of Wycliffe and Tyndale*, 3rd edn (London: Beeves & Turner, 1888), 29.

The spotting of the ‘higher learning’ of lapidaries in *Pearl* has an even longer history than reference to herbals, with William Schofield having remarked on the opening lines’ similarity to a lapidary entry’s formula in 1904. The entry for sapphire in the late-fifteenth-century Peterborough Lapidary (MS Peterborough Cathedral 33) would fit well alongside ‘Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye’: ‘Saphyr is a ston ryȝt comly one a ryng vpone a kyngis fynger’.⁵ Schofield went on to note lapidary interest in the stones mentioned in John’s Apocalypse, and that *Cleanness* (ll. 1110–32) contains a disquisition on the white pearl as a purified soul as well.⁶ Less discussed than their allegorical associations, however, are gemstones’ therapeutic effects listed in Anglo-Norman lapidaries, and thus their close association with herbals. John Riddle observes, ‘Some eighteen manuscripts of Marbode of Rennes’ (1035–1123) *De lapidibus* were found conjoined with Macer’s *De herbis*.’⁷ While one of the most common kinds of lapidary was what is known as the ‘Christian symbolic lapidary’, with particular focus on the gems and stones mentioned in St John’s Apocalypse, ‘[l]apidary texts are frequently found in manuscript codices along with other medical treatises, all written in the same hand’.⁸

This correspondence has not, to date, provoked much scholarly inquiry with regard to *Pearl*, though a few critics have chosen to confront the spice garden’s peculiar collection of plants. In the mid-twentieth century, Edwin Wintermute published ‘*The Pearl*’s Author as Herbalist’. Later, Patricia Kean argued briefly for the association of spices with ‘ideas of medicine and unction’ (but used biblical precedents).⁹ More recently, Elizabeth Petroff, in ‘Landscape in *Pearl*’, has inspected the spice garden more closely but while mentioning the plants’ healing properties, spends more time on their suggestions of mortality.¹⁰ Specific textual presences mediated in this way must remain hypothetical so long as the identity of the poem’s author is unknown, and we can find no direct borrowings. But the poet’s decision to draw on two fields of esoteric knowledge resonates compellingly with the narrator’s attraction to the mysteries of the New Jerusalem, while demystifying

⁵ 108. ‘Saphyr’, the Peterborough Lapidary in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, ed. by Evans and Serjeantson, 100–103.

⁶ William Henry Schofield, ‘The Nature and Fabric of *The Pearl*’, *PMLA* 19/1 (1904), 154–215, 163–65.

⁷ John M. Riddle, ‘LITHOTHERAPY in the Middle Ages...: Lapidaries Considered as Medical Texts’, *Pharmacy in History* 12/2 (1970), 42.

⁸ Riddle, ‘LITHOTHERAPY’, 42.

⁹ Kean, *Interpretation*, 75.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Petroff, ‘Landscape in *Pearl*: The Transformation of Nature’, *The Chaucer Review* 16/2 (1981), 181–93, 184.

(for critics, at least) the poem's tropological 'failures'. Because these domains are necessarily confounded with their subject, their appearance in the narrative yields hall-of-mirrors effects: the spice-garden-as-*herballe* can also suggest biblical (the Song of Songs) or Romance models (*Le Roman de la rose*), or even naturalistic depiction, without conforming closely to any of these.

The poem's mingling of natural history, medicine, and symbol drawn from herbal and lapidary, combined with the insistent attention paid by the narrator to the dreamer's perspective, perhaps explains the poem's critical reception as personal elegy, religious allegory, or dream symbolism. Provocatively, Howard Hendrix has argued that the poem's frustration of the interpretative urge is by design, that *Pearl* elicits interpretative frames to subvert them. It is a form, Hendrix proposes, of what Stanley Fish named a 'self-consuming work', one which is 'antidiscursive and ultimately anti-rational, resolving/dissolving the lines between places and things and causing all distinctions to fade in the light of an overarching and underlying unitive principle.'¹¹ Further evidence for the failure of human knowledge in the light of the divine comes from the poem's own lacunæ; the narrator interrupts himself at various points to emphasize that human cognition is too limited to fully describe his experience. Ann Chalmers has contextualised this muteness as a *topos* of loss, but while grief and its articulation is surely at issue, the distinction Chalmers makes between the kinds of speechlessness points to a wide range of emotion:

Only four instances of inexpressibility occur in *Pearl*, and the dreamer says each of the four. Two brief ones bound the dream at beginning and end: the first, about thirty lines into the dream when the dreamer says no one can describe such a landscape (sec. 2, lines 99–100), and the second, about thirty lines before the end where the Innocents' delight in the Lamb is too much 'of for to melle' (sec. 19, line 1118). Two longer inexpressibilities come early in the dream when the dreamer hopes to cross the water (sec. 3, lines 133–36) and when he fastens his eyes on the maiden's pearl (sec. 4, lines 223–26).¹²

In two instances, language fails because of incompleteness—not having the right words for splendour of the woods or the worth of the pearl pendant. But in two instances, human cognition fails because it is displaced by feeling, the dreamer's gladness and the Innocents' delight. Hendrix suggests the 'self-consuming work signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points away from itself to forms it can't capture'¹³; in this reading, the fault in the human conception of earthly riches is not simply one

¹¹ Howard V. Hendrix, 'Reasonable Failure: *Pearl* Considered as a Self-Consuming Artifact of "Gostly Porpose"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86/4 (1985), 458–66, 459.

¹² Ann Chalmers Watts, '*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss', *PMLA* 99/1 (1984), 26–40, 26.

¹³ Hendrix, 'Reasonable Failure', 460.

of mismatched magnitude, but of the incapacity to joyfully comprehend, to perceive that bliss is a form of understanding.

Situating the ‘failures’ of the poem is complicated by the anonymous nature of *Pearl*. A single manuscript (BL Cotton Nero A.x.) contains the sole instances of the poems *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Gawain and the Green Knight*, apparently copied to form a collection in the late fourteenth century. As Andrew and Waldron mention in the introduction to their edition, the scholarly consensus has long been that, absent contravening evidence, the principle of Occam’s razor should be applied and West Midlands poets should not be multiplied needlessly.¹⁴ The following analysis, however, does not insist on single authorship, but refers to the poems accompanying *Pearl* for context when their interests converge. Various means of dating agree on the date for the manuscript’s creation: if, as is frequently argued, Gawain’s girdle references the founding of the Order of the Garter, then *Gawain and the Green Knight* would not have been composed earlier than the mid-fourteenth century. Similarly, there is *Cleanness*’s use of *Mandeville’s Travels*, which was written mid-fourteenth century. In the main, its companion poems employ the traditional alliterative long line (the bob-and-wheels of *Gawain and the Green Knight* excepted), but *Pearl* takes a different form; written in iambic tetrameter, its lines combine both alliteration and end-rhyme (*ababababbcbc*), and are assembled in 12-line stanzas.¹⁵ There are 101 of these (a total it shares with *Gawain and the Green Knight*, which some scholars believe is another argument for shared authorship) and they are linked by the technique of *concatenatio*, in which the last line of a stanza contains a word or phrase that is contained in the first line of the succeeding stanza.

The poem’s formal construction, its lapidary enthusiasms, and its obvious delight in the aesthetics of material objects, raise questions about the function of these linkages—whether the poem describes a singular object or facets of it, or whether the very assembly of these disparate perspectives forms the poem’s object. ‘From the time of its first appearance in print,’ writes Lynn Staley, ‘the Middle English *Pearl* has been seen as a kind of elaborately worked riddle that at once displays its

¹⁴ Andrew and Waldron, *Pearl Manuscript*, 5.

¹⁵ Andrew and Waldron, *Pearl Manuscript*, 5–6.

own artistry and conceals—to us at least—the object of its praise and scrutiny.¹⁶ In this sense, the pearl maiden bears a resemblance to the ‘prototypical’ pagan judge of the *St Erkenwald* poem, a figure who riddlingly *unites* identities as members of its class or category. The point of this kind of riddle, as in the OE tradition, is not to supply an immediate or even definitive answer but to demonstrate the capacity to respond to life’s mutability and language’s multivalence. The ‘solution’ foregrounds the iterative or recursive strategies we use when navigating uncertainly: following a rule, or following every branching path to its end. While Staley cannot resist proffering her own identification of the *Pearl* maiden, more instructive is her interrogation of the assumptive heuristics that readers have employed: the poem’s earliest editors Richard Morris (1864) and Israel Gollancz (1891) both read the poem as an elegy commissioned for a child’s literal death.¹⁷ Alternatively, Sister Madeleva long ago proposed that the ‘age’ of the pearl was dated from the narrator’s entrance into religious life.¹⁸ (The first association for ‘bride of Christ’ in the medieval era would likely have been a woman taking vows, rather than having literally died.) There was after all a ‘death to the world’, Staley notes, celebrated upon entrance to religious orders¹⁹—one that took on performative literalism when an anchoress heard the Office of the Dead before she was bricked into her cell.²⁰ Accepting the poem’s evocation of a gravesite, but following a different heuristic—a different conceptual frame for ‘death’—leads to radically different readings in which a two-year-old child never appears. Accepting a father-daughter frame, alternatively, conflicts with the inarguable influence of courtly love poetry in the poem subsequently; it was certainly not unusual for religious or romantic poetry to borrow from the converse—in a hybridisation of the concept of adoration—but courtly love poetry did not as a rule address a child beloved, and never a recently deceased two-year-old. Yet the interpretative frame

¹⁶ In footnotes, Staley traces currents in *Pearl* criticism, from Sir Israel Gollancz’s elegy-centered 1891 collection *Pearl: An English Poem of the XIVth Century*, to allegorical readings such as W. H. Shofield’s ‘The Nature and Fabric of the *Pearl*’, *PMLA* 19 (1904), 154–215; and to essays by Elizabeth Salter, A. C. Spearing, and Derek Pearsall on the poem considered as part of the alliterative revival. Staley, ‘Contingencies’, 83.

¹⁷ Cf. Richard Morris, ed., *Early English Alliterative Poems from MS Cotton Nero A.x.*, Orig. series 1 (EETS, 1864); Sir Israel Gollancz, ed. and trans., *Pearl* (London: Nutt, 1891).

¹⁸ Sr. M. Madeleva, *Pearl: A Study of Spiritual Dryness* (New York: D. Appleton, 1925)158.

¹⁹ Staley, ‘Contingencies’, 84.

²⁰ Hasenfratz, *Ancrene Wisse*, 6.

provided by courtly love poetry is so pervasive that in 1997 Jane Gilbert proposed in her article ‘Gender and Sexual Transgression’ that an incestual interest is implicit in the text.²¹

Though a longed-for embrace may structure the entire narrative journey, it remains unclear if the interpretative frames—whether elegy or *consolatio*, allegory or symbol—elicited by the poem are meant to persist throughout it. The poem’s physical settings provide disjunctions that support this notion of hermeneutical leaps. Deep epistemological concerns are dramatized in these disparate settings: the dreamer’s attempts to engage with each altered reality are involuntary, and reflect his habits of thought, while the descriptions provided often represent the ‘awakened’ narrator’s attempts to make sense of those settings. (In this discussion, I follow Spearing, Kean, Luttrell and others in maintaining the narrative distance between the narrator’s past and present selves by referring to the narrator, who is reflecting on and summarising past experience, and the dreamer, who is experiencing it.) Again, the dialectic of OE riddles, with their interrogation of substance, form, and identity, could serve to reframe the search for certainty. The ‘impossibly literal-minded’ dreamer in the *Pearl* poem (as Spearing puts it), continually disrupts the easy institution of his new settings in allegorical terms by treating them as real places, striding about happily because no bank is too high or steep, drawing back fearfully because of a bejewelled river’s depth.²² While the dreamer sees ‘stonez stepe | As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt’ (ll. 113–14), the narrator reframes this view of stones gleaming in a riverbed: ‘As stremande sterneȝ, quen stroȝe-men slepe, | Staren in welkyn in wynter nyȝt’ (ll. 115–16). This transition to the night sky prepares the reader for the revelation that this glassy ‘river’ which lies between time and eternity is beyond the sphere of the mutable moon.²³ This referential equipoise is typical of the poet’s linkages, which draw attention to the dreamer’s role as a perspectival hinge between symbolic orders. As John Finlayson has argued, ‘these three *loci* of *Pearl*, in so far as they are products of the narrator’s eyes and senses, are not simply *where* things happen, not simple

²¹ Jane Gilbert, ‘Gender and Sexual Transgression’, in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and Jonathon Gibson (Rochester: Brewer, 1997), 53–70.

²² A. C. Spearing’s description of the narrator in ‘Symbolic and Dramatic Development in “Pearl”’, *Modern Philology*, 60/1 (1962), 1–12, 8.

²³ For more on the river barrier in this context, see Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), 148–50.

“objective correlatives” of emotion; they are, rather, emotional-physical states and stages of knowing or understanding *what* has happened’.²⁴

From the outset, the narrator’s perspective joins events and landscapes with embodied introspection. Within the collection of poems, *Pearl* is remarkable for the persistence of the first-person pronoun: in the first twelve-line stanza alone, ‘I’ appears six times. *Cleanness* most often employs first-person when vocalising the speech of characters in its embedded biblical retellings; in *Patience* and *Gawain and the Green Knight*, it is much more frequently a performative ‘I’: ‘I herde on a halyday’ (l. 9) says the narrator of *Patience*, while the *Gawain* narrator asks: ‘If 3e wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile, | I schal telle hit astit, as I in toun herde’ (ll. 30–31).²⁵ The narrator of *Pearl* by contrast enters with personal opinions and experiences: ‘Oute of oryent, I hardly saye, | Ne proued I neuer her precios pere’ (ll. 3–4). Already, the narrator’s announcements signal a persistent ambivalence in the choice of terms that leaves the poem open to strikingly divergent readings. In an Anglo-Norman context, ‘pere’ (Modern French ‘pierre’) is simply the word for ‘stone’, but is ‘pere’ also to suggest ‘peer’ or ‘father’ (literally, or as an allusion to religious office)?

Less remarked upon, perhaps, is the ambivalence about pearl’s provenance: was there never another an Eastern pearl of such quality, or did never an Eastern pearl match up to this one? Anglo-Norman lapidaries are quite clear that pearls are found in both ‘Inde [...] et en Britaine’.²⁶ Pearls had, besides biblical, aristocratic associations as well: Edward II’s collection of jewelled crowns contained at least one decorated with ‘perles d’Escoce’—these ‘Scottish pearls’ were so-called as they were found primarily in Scottish rivers, but also Wales, Ireland, and the northwest of England (Cumberland).²⁷ Richard II possessed a crown decorated with 132 pearls (along with 33 diamonds; 33 ‘balas rubies’, actually rose-tinted spinel; and eleven sapphires), though the pearls’ origin is left unstated.²⁸ Early *Pearl* criticism especially refused to consider the possibility that the English poet

²⁴ John Finlayson, ‘*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision’, *Studies in Philology* 71/3 (1974), 314–43, 316.

²⁵ Andrew and Waldron, *Pearl Manuscript: Patience*, 185; *Gawain*, 208.

²⁶ L. 871, ‘L. Margarita’, in the ‘First French Version of Marbode’s Lapidary’, in *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, ed. by Paul Studer and Joan Evans (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1924), 64.

²⁷ Urban T. Holmes, ‘Mediaeval Gem Stones’, *Speculum* 9/2 (1934), 195–204, 198, referring to Sir Francis Palgrave’s *The Antient Kalendars and Inventories of the Treasury of His Majesty’s Exchequer* (London, 1836), III.

²⁸ Uncredited trans. from French of Richard II treasury roll, TNA: PRO, E 101/411/9, m. 1 (Kew, National Archives) <<https://www.history.ac.uk/richardII/crowns.html>>.

wished to celebrate a remarkable pearl because ‘home-grown’: Sister Mary Vincent Hillman reminded readers in 1945 that ‘the jeweler’s pearl was not of the inferior type found in British waters, but a peerless jewel imported from the Orient’, and supported this with Osgood and Gollancz’s earlier emphasis of ‘the fact that the best pearls came from the Orient’.²⁹ The late-fifteenth-century Peterborough Lapidary (MS Peterborough Cathedral 33) disagrees, however, stating that ‘Ðe best & most [n]oblyst margarites comen owt of ynd & of old brytayne’.³⁰ An insistence on a univocal reading elides the poet’s interest in saying multiple things in unison, through the use of lines that plainly present alternate readings (in this very instance, Hillman went on to argue that line 483, ‘Þou lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede’, did not poetically evoke what Gollancz suggested, the death of a two-year-old child, but the ‘life’ of an imported pearl before its loss).³¹ Part of the saliency of the pearl as an object of thought, then, is that it participates in social geographies in this way, inhabiting many spaces at once.

The Embodied Dreamer

The focus of much of lapidary and herbal knowledge was the health and well-being of the human person, and it is crucial to inspect the poem’s strong association between somatic and emotional report in this light. James Earl has previously concluded that Patricia Kean’s work amassing ‘the considerable amount of medicinal lore associated with the pearl would seem (after some consideration) quite irrelevant’.³² As a rule, Earl proposed that ‘only those associations which the poet openly and unambiguously establishes with the pearl’ should be admitted when beginning to interpret the poem.³³ By now, it is perhaps evident that writing ‘openly and unambiguously’ was not the programme of the *Pearl* poet, but one can certainly honour the wish for justification for the choice of an interpretative framework. While the narrator’s preoccupation with his physical and mental states may lack diagnostic specificity for contemporary readers, his language is richly descriptive, if also

²⁹ For the reference to Osgood (1906 edn) and Gollancz (1921 edn), see note 9 in Sister Mary Vincent Hillman, ‘Debatable Words in *Pearl*’, in *The Middle English Pearl*, ed. by John Conley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 9–17, 15.

³⁰ 114. ‘Margarita’, the Peterborough Lapidary in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, 107–08.

³¹ Hillman, ‘Debatable Words’, 15.

³² James W. Earl, ‘Saint Margaret and the Pearl Maiden’, *Modern Philology* 70/1 (1972), 1–8, 2.

³³ Earl, ‘Saint Margaret’, 2.

open to ambivalence. Moreover, this reading is licensed by the OE literary tradition that these alliterative poems drew upon, as will be discussed. The narrator's spiritual crisis, with its biological symptoms, can then be seen to be precipitated by the pearl's loss, rather than wholly caused by it; his worsening condition functions in narratological terms as the act of an unseen *destinateur*, prompting the narrator-protagonist on his quest to regain the pearl.

After establishing the pearl's pre-eminence in the proem, the narrator admits that he lost it in a garden when it fell 'þurȝ gresse to grounde' (l. 9); the 'grass' here likely plays on 'gres', *i.e.*, 'grease', as well, to evoke the jeweller's slippery fingers. The conceit of a woman as pearl is supported by the language of courtly love ('So round, so reken [...] | So smal, so smoþe', ll. 5–6), but the circumstances of the loss echo a popular homily.³⁴ Now he 'dewyne' ('languishes'), 'fordolked by luf daungere' (l. 10)—this is an early instance of the narrator maintaining his superior knowledge while the reader struggles to parse the meaning. But while the phrase 'luf-daungere' presents the narrator in thrall to his love (or Love) but unable to approach, as in a tale of *fin'amor*, in the succeeding stanza the wounds of love are described with details as potentially medical as metaphoric. The loss of this superlative pearl 'þat dotz bot þrych my hert þrange, | My breste in bale bot bolne and bele' (ll. 17–18). This phenomenological description, focusing on the sensation of upset, remains congruent with more succinct OE compounds such as '*hat-heort*' (literally, 'hot-heart', meaning anger or upset); as Leslie Lockett has noted, Anglo-Saxons typically associated psychological disturbances 'with dynamic changes of pressure and temperature in the chest cavity'.³⁵ With this in mind, 'þrych' carries a physical import that is still partly visible in modern English 'oppresses' or 'presses upon'; so too when 'bolne' ('swell') is joined to 'bele' ('burn'), specifically linking heat with an increasing pressure, a tightness, in the chest. Under a hydraulic model (*pace* Andrew and Waldron's translation), this heat and pressure can paratactically describe 'bale', rather than cause it. In exploring the narration of distress in Old English poetry, Simon Nicholson has entertained the notion of whether a 'cnyssan'

³⁴ One of John Mirk's collected homilies for the feast of Corpus Christi recounts the story of an Axbridge vicar summoned in urgency to the bedside of a dying woman. On his way, while rushing across a meadow, the vicar unknowingly dropped the viaticum, kept in an ivory box, which 'fel down on þe erþe'. The box opened and 'þe ost trondelut on þe grene'. Thanks to a pillar of fire pointing to it, the vicar later finds the host encircled by adoring beasts and one demon in the shape of a black horse. See Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*, (London: Trübner/EETS, 1905), 174.

³⁵ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 5.

(‘clash’) of thoughts in the chest, for instance, might be a poetic reference to heart palpitations. While he concludes that it is ‘difficult to locate unequivocal evidence of the somatic accompaniments of distress’, this is unsurprising, surely: poetry is generated by the equivocal and ambivalent line, and the *Pearl* poet seems fond of this camouflage.³⁶ When placed together in a line—‘My breste in bale bot bolne and bele’ (l. 18)—the specified location and excess of alliteration might suggest an excited, thumping heart (similarly, Theodore Bogdanos suggests the ‘explosive, bellowing alliteration’ provokes a ‘heaving chest’, though repetition of an aspirated consonant would more likely suggest effortful breathing).³⁷

The heart’s action, in turn, would have been located within the medieval understanding of Galen’s theory of the production of humours: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. While widespread, humoral theory was subject to local interpretation over the centuries; as Leslie Lockett mentions, for Anglo-Saxons, the category of humoral phlegm included nasal mucus and cerebral fluid.³⁸ By the end of the thirteenth century, as Corinne Saunders recounts, humoral theory was being integrated with an Arabic analysis that had identified natural, vital, and animal spirits:

The natural spirit was produced in the liver and sent through the veins: it enabled generation, nutrition, and physical growth. The vital spirit was produced in the heart and moved through the arteries to give life to the body. In the brain, the vital spirit was transformed into the animal spirit, which controlled sensation and movement, but also imagination, cogitation, and memory. [...] Emotions were understood as occurring through the movements of the vital spirit and natural heat, produced in the heart and travelling through the arteries.³⁹

As Saunders mentions, this emotional traffic was distinguished by its emergence from, or return to, the heart. The red-faced person’s heart was expressing vital spirits out of anger, excitement, or shame, while a pallor indicated vital spirits retreating to the heart from perhaps grief or fear. In extreme cases, lack of circulating vital spirit could result in a swoon.⁴⁰ These embodied emotional states were necessarily implicated with physical and spiritual health; it is hinted that the loss of the pearl has

³⁶ Nicholson was looking for somatised expressions of distress without a differentiated psychological component for linguistic reasons; his study, though, refers to Latin ‘equivalents’ for Old English terms in ways that raise questions about the basis for that equivalency. Simon Nicholson, ‘The expression of emotional distress in Old English prose and verse’, *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 19/327 (1995), 327–338, esp. 330–333.

³⁷ Theodore Bogdanos, *Pearl: Image of the Ineffable* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1983), 21.

³⁸ Leslie Lockett, ‘The Limited Role of the Brain in Mental and Emotional Activity According to Anglo-Saxon Medical Learning’ in *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 35–52, 47.

³⁹ Saunders, ‘Mind, Body, and Affect’, 33–34.

⁴⁰ Saunders, ‘Mind, Body, and Affect’, 33–34.

exacerbated a pre-existing, perhaps even chronic, condition. The narrator mentions that the pearl had had a salutary effect on his moral being, health, and fortune: ‘That wont was whyle devoyde my wrange | And heven my happe and al my hele’ (ll. 15–16). The *Pearl* narrator’s report, for example, displays lexical overlap with a diagnosis of asthma in a medieval leechbook: ‘the men who have oppression on their chests, which the Greeks call [*asthmaticos*]: that is, tightness, and a man thus sick may scarcely draw and fetch out his breath, and his breast hath heat, and within is afflicted with much narrowness or oppression...’⁴¹

As the narrator will later lose consciousness suddenly, these ambiguously somatic expressions of distress could be seen as precursor symptoms. If we accept line 18—‘My breste in bale bot bolne and bele’—as a report of some kind of unusual cardiocentric activity, it is instructive that the Peterborough Lapidary offers of pearls that:

somme seyne þat þey comforten lymes & membris, for it clenseþ him of superfluite of humours & fasten þe lymes, & helpen aȝen þe cordiacle passioun & aȝens swonyng of hert, & aȝens febilnes of Flux by cause of medecyne, & Also aȝens rennyng of blod, & aȝens þe flyx of þe wombe, as plato seȝþ.⁴²

For contemporary readers, it may be unsurprising that intense grief, especially in a poetic context, is said to provoke heart-related ‘passioun’ and ‘swonyng’, but for symptom-based medieval medicine these disturbances would have been concerning and worthy of treatment. That the era’s ‘medecine’ itself existed on a continuum of the spiritual and physical is indicated by the three lines following line 18: ‘Ȝet þoȝt me neuer so swete a sange | As styлле stounde let to me stele. | Forsope þer fleten to me fele’ (ll. 19–21). If a spiritual crisis, ‘sange’ might likely refer to the singing of an appropriate psalm—as discussed previously, the psalter was essential reading, and the religiously inclined would have had their favourites, if not all, of the psalms memorised. Alice Jorgensen notes that believers were ‘encouraged to approach each psalm as a way of both interpreting and performing their own emotions’, and points to Alcuin’s identification of psalms that accorded to what we might call one’s ‘mood’, or uplifted sinking spirits.⁴³ But ‘sange’ can recruit broader associations, not only the chants

⁴¹ ‘Þisne læcedom do þan manne þa hym beoð on hyra brosten nearuþe, þat greccas hæteð asmaticos, þat ys nearunyss, and uneape mæg þane snæst to do, and ut abringan, and hæfð hæte breost byð innen mid micle nearnyssse.’ [NB: I have silently smoothed the Reverend’s orthography and expanded abbreviations.] Rev. Oswald Cockayne (ed.), *Leechdoms, wortcunning, and starcraft of early England* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green; 1864–66), 117.

⁴² 114. ‘Margarita’, the Peterborough Lapidary in *Mediaeval English Lapidaries*, 107–08.

⁴³ Alice Jorgensen, ‘Learning about Emotion from the Old English Psalms of the Paris Psalter’, in *Anglo-Saxon Emotions*, ed. by Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 127–142, 133.

of monks, but also the charms of leechdom. More controversially, ‘style stounde’, rather than simply a peaceful moment, may refer to a moment of transient aphasia, such as migraine sufferers experience, or brief absence seizures (‘staring blankly’). While usage indicates the phrase could refer to a period of silent meditation, the succeeding description of frequency, in a passive formulation: ‘Forsope þer fleten to me fele’ (l. 21), yields an unwilling but passing muteness.⁴⁴ In *Cleanness*, ‘stond’ is used as the handwriting on the wall appears:

When þat bolde Baltasar blusched to þat neue,
Such a dasande drede dusched to his hert
þat al falewed his face and fayled þe chere;
þe stronge strok of the stond strayned his joyntes (ll. 1537–40)

The ‘strok of the stond’ carries the shock of a stroke, in the modern sense. The ‘style stounde’ in *Pearl* shows some similarity in terms of the emotional upset that precedes it, but the contrast with sweet song portrays a more peaceful, if abrupt, absence. Critics, especially those who have interpreted the poem allegorically, have tended not to engage with the persistently embodied representation of self in the text prior to or after the dream vision, as Mother Angela Carson has noted.⁴⁵ But this line of inquiry offers readings that reposition the narrator as someone who, far from summoning a dispassionate elegiac mood, is seeking, if blindly, to break out of an all-too impassioned state. He feels physical manifestations—‘A deuely dele in my hert denned’ (l. 51)—that he understands as evidence of a spiritual crisis: ‘þaȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned | My wreched wille in wo ay wraȝte’ (ll. 55–56).

If the poem’s somatic language displays the persistence of the phenomenological inclination evident in Old English, that it so expressly conjures masculine emotions distinguishes this alliterative poem from the more regulated thought-world of the Anglo-Saxons; we might be tempted to argue whether the *Pearl* narrator’s performance is a glimpse of emotional interiority or simply affective report, but it is perhaps more significant that the narrator speaks as a person of status who is comfortable revealing these literally heart-felt experiences in public. This is consonant with the Ricardian-era belief that courtly emotions were worthy of display, and that their extremity signalled a

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ancrene Riwe*, l. 113: ‘Wordles song is þe herte michele blisse þe heo haueð of heuenliche ðinge and ne mai þeroffe be stille ne mid worde hem atellen.’ MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 402, in quotations cited for ‘stille’, MED: <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu>>.

⁴⁵ In the same essay, Carson argued persuasively against reading the poem as an elegy for the poet’s two-year-old daughter; Angela Carson, ‘Aspects of Elegy in the Middle English *Pearl*’, *Studies in Philology* 62/1 (1965), 17–27, 17.

noble sensitivity. 'These profound feelings of loss would have befitted a man only in the higher ranks of society,' conjectures Bowers, 'the higher the status, the more dramatic his gestures of mourning'.⁴⁶ David Aers (as Bowers notes) has looked quite closely at the performance of masculine identity in courtly society, with special attention to public mourning as the obverse of masculine desire.⁴⁷ In *Pearl*, this linkage is openly displayed.

The Earthly Garden

The initial hints that the narrator is seeking earthly treatment for a spiritual malady are carried forward as he says he entered an 'erber grene' (l. 38) and halted before the hill or mound, the 'huyle', where his pearl 'trendeled down' (l. 41).⁴⁸ 'Huyle' (it is also 'hulle' at line 1173 and 'hyul' at 1205) is translated variously, often in relation to what is known of garden landscaping, and how heavily the translator wishes to impress the imagery of a gravebed upon the reader: it might mean a raised garden bed, a turf-covered bench, or a small rise, whether natural or artificial.⁴⁹ It is shaded by plants which grow to a height of three feet, and the narrator says that while asleep his head rested upon it, while presumably the rest of him was laid out on a 'floury flagt' (l. 57), or piece of turf. The hill is shaded by an unusual collection of plants growing around it: 'gilofre', 'gyngure', 'gromylyoun', and 'powdered', scattered, among them, 'peonys' (l. 43–44). These are not the plants found, typically, in a pleasure garden, where roses and lilies might predominate. Complains C. A. Luttrell of the timing: 'The peony should not, in August, cause odour to float from it, its month being May.'⁵⁰ In her essay on the poem's landscape, Elizabeth Petroff addresses the many other anomalous elements of this scene, compared to pleasure gardens: the season, narrator's mood, and lack of water, among others. It is not spring, when gardens are in bloom, signifying fertility, but August with its keen scythes; the narrator

⁴⁶ John M. Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), 165.

⁴⁷ Cf. David Aers, 'Masculine Identity in the Courtly Community: The Self Loving in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, 117–52; and 'The Self Mourning: Reflections on Pearl', *Speculum* 68 (1993), 54–73.

⁴⁸ Andrew and Waldron call the hill a 'gravemound', which prematurely interprets the scene.

⁴⁹ For more on the meaning, see C. A. Luttrell, 'Pearl: Symbolism in a Garden Setting', *Neophilologus* 49 (1965), 160–76, 164.

⁵⁰ Luttrell, 'Garden Setting', 170.

is not joyfully lovestruck but suffering; the plants are all ‘useful’ (edible and medicinal); and there is no mention of flowing water or fountain.⁵¹

Several scholars have noted the few plants assembled in *Pearl* are not wholly incongruous with those mentioned in both Guillaume de Lorris’s *Roman de la rose* and Chaucer’s *Romaunt of the Rose*; de Lorris describes ‘*mainte bonne épice*’ (1387), which includes ‘*Clou de girofle et doux reglisse*’, ‘*Graine de paradis nouvelle*’, and ‘*Citoal, anis ou canelle*’ (1388–92), while Chaucer’s ‘many a spice’ (1367) includes ‘clowe-gelofre and lycorice, | Gyngevre and greyn de parys, | Canell and setewale of prys’ (1368–70).⁵² Yet the contexts are substantially different: this listing of plants in de Lorris (and subsequently Chaucer) is part of the narrator’s exploration of a large, square garden that also contains olive and fruit and shade trees, extensively listed, with irrigation. The plants grow throughout this space (Guillaume de Lorris says they must be searched out carefully). While there is a nod to herbal science—both sources prescribe the ‘spices’ to be eaten after a meal, to stimulate digestion being left unsaid—the comparison to the *Pearl* poem’s garden, with its few plants around a ‘huyle’ and its ‘floury flaȝt’, seems forced. Luttrell recognised that this telegraphic description is suggestive of different modes of meaning being imported to the text, not all of which are easily grasped today:

For a modern reader the impression which a medieval garden made is lost chiefly with respect to the perfume, which, right up to much later times, is repeatedly said to comfort and revive the spirits. The location of a mental conflict there, one gathers, suggests that there will be a cure.⁵³

This use of aromatherapy, applying the medicinal effects of scent, is illustrated perfectly in the poem: ‘I felle vpon þat floury flaȝt, | Suche odour to my hernez schot; | I slode vpon a slepyng-slaȝte’ (ll. 57–59). The narrator provides the reason given for aromatherapy’s success, which is that the odours travelled directly to the brain. The richness of these plants (punningly, as they were expensive as well, in line 26) had an immediate effect. The ‘slepyng-slaȝte’, as perhaps with ‘style stounde’, carries the sense of an abrupt loss of consciousness, though here for a longer time. Yet of course there is ambivalence here, too; the narrator has already described the scent, ‘A fayr reflowr yet fro hit flot’,

⁵¹ Elizabeth Petroff, ‘Landscape in *Pearl*: The Transformation of Nature’, *The Chaucer Review* 16/2 (1981), 181–93, 184.

⁵² Marteau, Pierre, ed., *Le Roman de la rose par Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung* 1–5, (Paris: Orleans, 1878–80), 1, 90–91; Chaucer, Geoffrey, ‘The Romaunt of the Rose’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: OUP, 2008/1987), 685–767, 701.

⁵³ Luttrell, ‘Garden Setting’, 169.

and taking him at his word and his association of this spot with the pearl, there is an image of ghostly perfume.

Luttrell wondered as well if the plants' arrangement was owed to heraldry: '*powdered* was a heraldic term'.⁵⁴ Also, the heraldic term '*issuant*' referred to plants rooted on a mound or hummock.⁵⁵ This is a possibility, given the narrator's attention to this singular spot within the garden; but it is also possible that his lexical choices are conditioned by his social status, given his later comparisons to the splendour of tapestries (ll. 70–72) and himself as 'hende as hawk in halle' (l. 184). As for the plants, *Gilofre* could refer to either garlic or more probably the gillyflower, also known as the clove pink, *Dianthus caryophyllus*; ginger would seem to be straightforward enough, except that as a tropical plant it was more traded in than grown in England; *gromlyoun* has been identified as gromwell, *Lithospermum officinale*, also known as gray millet or *herbe aux perles*; and *peonys* remain peonies. As Luttrell again noted, this unusual grouping also appears in an anonymous thirteenth-century lyric in praise of unnamed lady (l. 29: 'In an note is hire nome. Nempneth hit non?') who is compared to a number of gemstones, including a pearl ('The myht of the margarite haveth this mai mere', l. 9) and whose healing grace places her with a list of potent plants:

Ase gromyl in greve, grene is the grone,
Ase quibibe ant comyn, cud is in crone,
Cud comyn in court, canel in cofre,
With gyngyure ant sedewale, ant the gylofre.⁵⁶

In the above instance, however, the sheer pleasure of listing things is joined with magnification by elaboration; just as all these things are precious, powerful, or uncommon, so too is the lady, many times over. But the *Pearl* poem only activates this kind of ranking with regard to the pearl itself; its much shorter list of plants precludes magnification by elaboration. Edwin Wintermute has argued that the poem's author simply selected plants with a herbalist's care.⁵⁷ Milton Stern proposes that they were chosen for their 'generative and cleansing powers': 'The gilliflower was considered an aromatic and *healing* clove; the ginger an aromatic and *energizing anti-irritant*', while the gromwell's nutlets

⁵⁴ Luttrell, 'Garden Setting', 170.

⁵⁵ Vida Carmen Kenk, 'The Importance of Plants in Heraldry', *Economic Botany* 17/3 (1963), 169–79, 169.

⁵⁶ 'As gromwell in grove, whose seed is green, | As peppercorn and cumin, prized for its crown, | Court-prized cumin, cinnamon in chest, | With ginger and setwall, and the clove.' Susanna Greer Fein, ed. and trans., 'Art. 28, Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht', in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript 2* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014) <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu>>.

⁵⁷ Wintermute, 'Herbalist', 83–84.

resemble pearls and the peony is legendarily associated with a physician to the Greek gods.⁵⁸ Perhaps the plants are a kind of infirmary garden ‘riddle’, one that responds to ill health: the clove pink was used in ‘disguises for the unpleasant taste of bitter potions’, says Teresa McLean, while all parts of the peony were used in infusions, or added to hot wine to ward against nightmares. Alexander Neckham (d. 1217), abbot of Cirencester, recommended dried peony roots for epilepsy.⁵⁹ John Gerard’s *Herbal* suggests, for the heart’s ease, a clove pink cordial, noting that it also prevailed ‘hot peftilentiall feuers’, while the roots of gillyflowers known simply as ‘pinks’ were efficacious against the plague, stones, and ‘the falling sickneffe’ (epilepsy).⁶⁰ The great gromwell has a ‘gray fonic feed fomewhat fhining’ and when pounded to a powder and drunk in white wine, would drive out stones, especially bladder stones.⁶¹ Dried roots of peonies were advertised for ‘torments of the belly’, kidney and bladder pain, stones, and night terrors, while peony flowers and root extract could be used in a syrup to treat epilepsy.⁶² If this garden exists to communicate the virtues of these plants, then they may hint either at how the ‘pearl’ was carried off, or reflect the medical regimen of the narrator himself. It is striking that so many of the plants, and pearl itself, are recommended for treating epilepsy when epilepsy is so strongly correlated with visionary experiences. The European peony and ginger are both employed to this day in alternative treatments of epilepsy.⁶³

The Earthly Paradise

In the poem’s brief second section, the dreamer, disoriented but newly blissful, has been ‘keste’, ‘thrown’ (l. 66), to an unfamiliar place: ‘I ne wyste in this worlde quere þat hit wace’ (l. 65). His surroundings were not only unfamiliar, but defamiliarised. The dreamer saw cliffs of clear crystal

⁵⁸ Milton Stern, ‘An Approach to *The Pearl*’, in *The Middle English Pearl*, ed. by John Conley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 73–85, 76.

⁵⁹ Teresa McLean, *Medieval English Gardens* (London: William Collins, 1981), 150–56.

⁶⁰ Gerard’s is a seventeenth-century herbal, not fourteenth, but its later date argues for the continued significance and stability of herbal medicine—many of its entries share information with Henry of Huntingdon’s twelfth-century verse herbal, *Anglicanus ortus*. ‘Of Gloue Gillofloures’ and ‘Of Pinks, or wilde Gillofloures’, Bk 2, Chs. 185 and 183, in John Gerard, *The Herbal or General History of Plants*, 1633 edn rev. by Thomas Johnson (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 590, 597.

⁶¹ ‘Of Gromell’, Bk 2, Ch. 191, Gerard, *Herbal*, 610.

⁶² ‘Of Peionie’, Bk 2, Ch. 380, Gerard, *Herbal*, 984.

⁶³ Daniel J. Luciano and Marcello Spinella, ‘Herbal Treatment of Epilepsy: Phytotherapy’, in *Complementary and Alternative Therapies for Epilepsy*, ed. by Orrin Devinsky, Steven Schachter, and Steven Pacia (New York: Demos, 2005), 143–56, 145.

‘cleuven’ (l. 66), ‘ryche’ rocks gleaming (l. 68), trees with blue trunks and leaves like ‘bornyst sylver’ (l. 77) which synaesthetically shimmered as they rustled against each other. ‘Cleuven’, ‘cleaved’, imports the growth process of crystals, the sharp lattice orientation that yields multiple cleavages, but magnified to incredible size. Pearls—these specified as indeed from the ‘Orient’—have been strewn about like gravel, and grind underfoot. Here again the nourishing action of scent is reported: ‘So frech flavores of frytes were | As fode hit con me fayre refete’ (ll. 87–88). Frequently the description of the unnamed place participates in the aesthetics of decorative textiles—at the outset the narrator compares the scenery to that of a tapestry: ‘never webbes that wyyes weven | Of half so dere adubbemente’ (ll. 71–72), and later refers to the ‘fyldor fyn’ (l. 106), fine gold thread, delineating the river banks. Bogdanos sees in ‘blwe as ble of Ynde’ (l. 76) a nod, perhaps, to the ink of a psalter’s illumination.⁶⁴ Later, the maiden will remark on her surroundings, ‘þis gardyn gracios gaye’ (l. 260), as similar to the pearl within ‘a cofer so comly clente’ (l. 259), recreating the nested sets of associations of garden-grave, jewel casket-coffin, and lady-court. But perhaps forefront in the poet’s mind is to penetrate the décor of a reliquary casket, poetically to enter the land of the dead—recall his earlier claim his ‘perle þat þer watz penned, | With fyrce skyllez þat faste faȝt’ (l. 53). Ekphrasis would not be nearly enough; the dreamer’s movement within the landscape, his participation in it, is critical. The narrator says he savoured everything about his new surroundings:

The fyrre in the fryth, the feier con ryse
 The playn, the plonttes, the spyse, the peres;
 And rawes and randes and rych reveres (ll. 103–5)

Coupled with his enjoyment of the visual spectacle and olfactory refreshment are the harmonies of birdsong (though this too is contrasted with courtly entertainments of ‘sytole-stryng and gyternere’, 91). While this first-person narration of the dreamer’s way through a landscape marked by artifice recalls the courtly dreamer of Guillaume de Lorris’s *Roman de la rose* and Chaucer’s *Romaunt of the Rose* much more strongly than the earlier herb garden, the *Pearl* poet here refrains from any lengthy listing of plants and trees which the narrators in Guillaume de Lorris and Chaucer indulge in. After identifying ‘elmes’, ‘maples’, ‘assh’, ‘ok’, ‘asp’, ‘planes’, ‘ew’, ‘poplar’, and ‘lyndes’, Chaucer’s narrator breaks off to expostulate: ‘What shulde I tel you more of it? | There were so many trees yit, |

⁶⁴ Bogdanos, *Ineffable*, 48.

That I shulde al encombred be | Er I had rekened every tree' (ll. 1383–90). The *Pearl* poet foregoes any of this cataloguing, instead returning again and again to the intersection of 'adubbenmente', the link-word used for this section's *concatenatio*, with luminescent light effects.

The nominal use of 'adubbenmente' (ll. 72, 84, 85, 96, 108, 120) and 'dubbement' (ll. 109, 121) is most frequent, and possibly the poet's coinage. Though 'adubbenmente' is translated by Andrew and Waldon as 'adornment' (the definition given by the *MED* as well), the semantic field also contains the conferring of knighthood, 'dubbing'; and by extension, dressing in the noble raiment and knightly armour that corresponded to the station.⁶⁵ A contemporaneous sermon says Christ 'dubbed him wit our liknes', playing on the confusion of rank with appearance, but the lapidary figuring of spiritual nobility exists much earlier of course in Old English: *The Dream of the Rood*'s vision of the Cross presents it adorned with an excellent, shining clothing; girded with gold; and covered splendidly with gems (ll. 15a–17a).⁶⁶ Usage over the fifteenth century indicates that 'dubben' could later refer to the decorating of any aristocratic goods, and its use here seems to invoke this but on a vast scale. That the landscape itself has been decorated to noble tastes presumes a being capable of such a feat, though the dreamer treats these surroundings 'as if' their material substance can be accidental.

The gemstones mentioned by name are beryl, emerald, and sapphire; the beryl marking river banks, with the emeralds and sapphires in the riverbed lending their colours to the water. Milton Stern has remarked on these as 'gemstones of virtue', with beryl signifying 'the entrance into heaven of the sum of all virtue'; emerald, faith and chastity; and sapphire, hope and 'the saving of a good man by Jesus'.⁶⁷ But this seems to look ahead to the overt gem symbolism on which New Jerusalem is founded. If the narrator's healing, begun in the herb garden, is only minutes old, the more immediate connection is 'medicinal', though of course, this exists on a spiritual continuum. Beryl, which was associated with St John the Baptist, was thought to purify the water around it, and these waters could be applied to 'sore eyen' or ingested. The stone was also said to nourish the love between a man and

⁶⁵ 'Dubben, v.', 'dubbement, n.', in electronic *MED*, based on *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956-2001) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu>>.

⁶⁶ 'Northern Homily Cycle' in J. Small, ed., *English Metrical Homilies*, (Edinburgh: Paterson, 1862), 12; *The Dream of the Rood, Vercelli Book*, 61.

⁶⁷ Stern, 'An Approach', 81.

woman.⁶⁸ Looking on an emerald improved eyesight, and carrying one increased wealth, warded off fits of spiritual turmoil, and diminished lust.⁶⁹ As mentioned earlier, a formula quite similar to ‘Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye’ accompanies the entry for sapphire in the Peterborough Lapidary: ‘Saphyr is a ston ryȝt comly one a ryng vpone a kyngis fynger’.⁷⁰ Because it is the colour of heaven, regarding a sapphire elevated one’s thoughts. Hildegard von Bingen noted the sapphire symbolised a love of wisdom, and she prescribed its use in the case of the foolish person who wished to better understand.⁷¹

Given the landscape, the dreamer can hardly help but look on these stones and absorb their magnified, restorative qualities, and indeed the narrator reports that as he gazed at the hillsides’ splendour, ‘my goste al greffe forȝete’ (l. 86). The dreamer walked on in a blessed state, ‘wely wyse’ (l. 101), the sight of the gem-encrusted scenery working significant changes in him: ‘Bylde in me blys, abated my balez, | Fordidden my stresse, dystried my paynez’ (ll. 123–24). ‘I bowed in blys’, the narrator repeats, not only locating this sensation in his head (l. 126: ‘bredful my braynez’) but apparently using the metonymy of ‘brains’ for skull to conceptualize the cranium as a ‘brimful’ container. Though reported as bliss and joy, the longer the sensations persist and intensify, the more they too exact a toll: ‘my herte straynez’ (l. 128) from joy because ‘vrpely herte myȝt not suffyse | To þe tenþe dole of þo gladnez glade’ (ll. 135–36)—his mortal body cannot sustain this intensity of bliss. In a Boethian aside, the narrator explains that whichever Fortune directs someone’s way, she sends a surfeit of pain or comfort to test them. Reasoning directly from his somatic experience (l. 137: ‘Forþy I þoȝt’), the dreamer imagines the joy and bliss must emanate from Paradise, and it must be nearby—he is seized by a fervent longing to see it.

This then is the context for the appearance of the maiden at the foot of a crystal cliff, and her subsequent dialogue with the dreamer, in which she deals with several of his misapprehensions—not least of which is the dreamer’s questionable ‘recognition’ of the maiden herself. The narrator’s complaints regarding his earlier physical and emotional state, corresponding, generally, with the

⁶⁸ 25. ‘Berillus’, the Peterborough Lapidary in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, 72–73.

⁶⁹ 68. ‘Esmeraude’, the Peterborough Lapidary in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, 85–86.

⁷⁰ 108. ‘Saphyr’, the Peterborough Lapidary in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, 100–103.

⁷¹ Hildegard von Bingen also suggests emeralds for heart and stomach ailments, and beryl to restore tranquillity to the disputatious. See entries on beryl, emerald, sapphire in Priscilla Throop, *Hildegard von Bingen’s Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing*, Kindle edn. (Rochester: Healing Arts Press, 1998), loc. 2727–830.

beneficial and healing qualities of the herbs and gems mentioned, betray an unsettled nature that has affected his perceptual abilities, and his trust in them. Without contradicting those critics who have identified voyeurism in these distance-collapsing visual inspections, there is the sense that the dreamer's perceptions are linked to the acquisition of knowledge. 'I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere' (l. 165), the narrator claims, but also: 'On lenghe I loked to hyr þere; | Þe lenger, I knew hyr more and more' (ll. 168–69). Twice, then, the narrator links 'knowing' and 'seeing', although it is necessary to emphasize that 'to know' in Middle English bespeaks not just knowledge of, or familiarity with, but 'To perceive (sth.) with the senses; see, hear, etc.'⁷² The pun on 'knew' relies on an understanding of the literal tautologies of 'knew/sen' and 'loked/knew', because in the first instance the narrator says he recognised someone he had seen before; in the second, he is making a claim about a different kind of emotional knowledge gained from observation over time. Readers who have a father-daughter dynamic in mind have discussed the dreamer's confusion at seeing 'a faunt, | A mayden of menske, ful debonere' (ll. 161–62) when his daughter is supposed to have been two years old at her death.⁷³ But the narrator has not made his opaque reference to age yet (if that is what it is), or referenced any surprise at seeing an older child. What the narrator says is that he recognised the maiden, that he had seen her before, and that he kept observing her because the sight of her, like the scenery, lifted his spirits and produced a 'gladande glory' (l. 171). Curiously, the narrator adds that while he felt an urge to call out to her, 'baysment gef myn hert a brunt' (l. 174). Though Andrew and Waldron gloss 'baysment' as 'confusion', it would seem to be more directly related to the French 'abaissement', which is not out of place in so courtly a poem, or precisely here, when speaking of a 'debonere' 'faunt'.⁷⁴ The maiden's 'appearance is so obviously superior as to make him shy', says Cecilia Hatt, but in fairness it must also be considered that we do not know the status of the narrator, and distinctions could be minutely observed.⁷⁵ (Bowers has suggested line 233, 'Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece', refers to courtly circumscription of space, demarking a proximity reserved for

⁷² 'Knouen, v.', *MED* <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu>>.

⁷³ Again, this is based on the statement 'Þou lyfed not two 3er in oure þede' (l. 483), a problematic reading in that 'þede' is nowhere else in ME employed in this 'land of the living' sense. The literal reading, of someone having lived not more than two years in a certain place, is the most probable.

⁷⁴ 'Baysment, n.', from glossary of Andrew and Waldron, *Pearl Manuscript*, 304. 'Abasement, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017) <<http://www.oed.com>>.

⁷⁵ Cecilia A. Hatt, *God and the Gawain-Poet: Theology and Genre in Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 38.

family.)⁷⁶ Given the dreamer's later protestations about the maiden's rank, it is possible that at this moment he believed himself of superior status.

His second statement also locates an effect on his heart—seeing the maiden in so ‘strange a place’, the poet playing once again with the metaphor of a jewel in a setting, was a ‘burre’ that could ‘make myn herte blunt’ (ll. 175–76). ‘Strange’ suggests ‘foreign’, recalling that the dreamer does not know where in the world he is, while the combination of ‘burre’ and ‘blunt’ raises a different network of associations. ‘Burre’ has often been glossed as ‘blow or shock’, but it also named the common burdock, and its hooking burrs,⁷⁷ while ‘blunt’ meant dull. The metaphorical extension that afforded sharp and dull wits was already present; a blunt heart suggests a spiritual dimness. (Given the poet's lapidary interest, it may be worth mentioning that there is further evidence for ‘burre’ as a stone, possibly meaning uncut or unpolished and thus offering as properties only obscurity or dimness.⁷⁸) Sin as a prickly, clinging distraction is a biblical motif embedded in an agricultural frame: thorns and thistles appear in Genesis 3:18 as the land is cursed to become fruitful only by the work of cultivation. Hebrews 6:8 advises that land that produces thorns and thistles should be burned, and in his commentary on the chapter Aquinas made explicit the analogy between cultivation of the land and of the soul, noting that after baptism, continued sinning will result in a spiritual fire.⁷⁹ In *Cleanness*, the speaker alludes to Matthew 5:8, and exhorts his listeners therefore to be clean of heart: ‘For he þat flemus vch fylþe fro his hert | May not byde þat burre, þat hit his body neþe’ (ll. 31–32; line 33 also refers to torn or ragged clothing).⁸⁰ *Cleanness* returns to burdock burrs in line 1692: ‘þer mony clyuy as clyde hit clyþt togeder’; describing Nebuchadnezzar's wild, unkempt state, the poem says that burrs clung together on him so thickly it was like a plaster.⁸¹

Though burdock itself has beneficial properties, according to medieval herbals which claim it ‘purifies’ the blood and is effective topically for skin ailments, the *Pearl* poet does not here align the

⁷⁶ Physical proximity is literally at issue in the poem; the narrator is describing the approach of the maiden ‘doun þe schore’ to the ‘brymme’ (ll. 230–31). Bowers, *Politics of Pearl*, 153.

⁷⁷ ‘Burre, n., 1’, *MED* <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu>>.

⁷⁸ ‘Burre, n., 2’, *MED* <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu>>.

⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Chrysostom Baer (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ ‘Blessed are the pure in herte, for they shall se God’, Matthew 5:8, from Bosworth, *Gothic and Anglo-Saxon Gospels*, 17; see *Cleanness* in Andrew and Waldron, *Pearl Manuscript*, 112–13.

⁸¹ *Cleanness* in Andrew and Waldron, *Pearl Manuscript*, 180.

burrs with somatic report. The sight of the maiden yields a shifting in register from the monologue of bodily sensation(s) toward theological dialogue. The narrator says:

With y3en open and mouth ful clos
I stod as hende as hawk in halle.
I hoped þat gostly watz þat porpose; (ll. 183–85)

The wordplay of ‘porpose’ unites a spiritual goal for the dreamer and a quarry for the hawk; Andrew and Waldron note that the poet continues this hawking metaphor over the next few lines, with the narrator hoping that the maiden will not escape before he can bring her to bay. Following his detailed description of the maiden’s ‘araye ryalle’ (l. 191)—admiring her fine linen open at the sides, hanging sleeves, and gown all decorated with pearls; and crown similarly adorned with pearls—the narrator saves for last the sight of ‘a wonder perle withouten wemme’ (l. 221)) set in the center of her breast. Human judgement would be baffled by the worth of it, he says, the mind would melt down (‘malte’, in line 224, appears again at line 1154 when the sight of New Jerusalem’s joys drives the dreamer’s ‘mynde to maddyng malte’); no tongue could have the capacity to savour the sight (‘I hope no tong mo3t endure | No sauerly saghe say of þat sy3t’, ll. 225–26).

Though the tenor of the poem is shifting toward the spiritual, the poet unobtrusively sustains a medical frame: for the surgeon John of Arderne, who practiced in the mid- to late-fourteenth century, a remedy could be suitably ‘ennobled’ for his courtly clientele by employing certain temperamentally-balanced (according to humour theory) ingredients. Pearls were one such ‘noble medicine’.⁸² Edward I was administered pearl and coral when ill and staying at Lanercost Priory in 1306–07.⁸³ Perhaps surprisingly for a surgeon, Arderne several times in his *Liber Medicinalium* prescribes the wearing of an herbal amulet, freely admitting that he cannot supply a good reason for any curative effect.⁸⁴ Thus, having already established his pearl’s contribution to his health and well-being and linking it with a ‘noble’ infirmary garden, the narrator in effect describes the pearl-bedecked maiden, with her ‘coroun of perle orient’ (l. 255), wearing a pearl as a healing amulet. In this context, the failure of man’s mind in the face of the jewel recalls its role in restoring senses; the reference to a tongue’s ability to savour

⁸² Peter Murray Jones, ‘Herbs and the Medieval Surgeon’, in *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, ed. by Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 162–79, 168.

⁸³ R. A. Donkin, *Beyond Price—Pearls and Pearl-Fishing: Origins to the Age of Discoveries* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998), 260.

⁸⁴ Donkin, *Beyond Price*, 174.

it blending a metaphorical statement with the esoteric suggestion of crushed pearls in an electuary. Correspondingly, during his dialogue with the maiden, the dreamer is given speech with which to express his growing awareness of the spiritual nature of his vision. From this point onward, the poet's knowledge of material things, as derived from herbals and lapidaries, centres on the revelation of their spiritual significance to the worldly dreamer. The poet counterpoises, for instance, the dreamer's sinful burrs with the maiden's discussion of heavenly vineyards—perhaps thinking of Matthew 7:16, in which passage Jesus asks if people pick grapes from briars, or figs from thistles. Subsequently, the maiden brings up Adam's forfeiture of 'paradys greuve' (l. 320) and in sections IX and X she deals specifically with the parable of the vineyard and its cultivation in the gospel of Matthew.

In section XVII, the narrator recounts how the maiden guided the dreamer to a hill from which he could see the New Jerusalem. The *concatenatio* in this group of stanzas insists upon the authority of St John's revelations for the dreamer's vision. Though John's description of the city wall's foundation is a simple list, the *Pearl* poet occasionally elaborates on the colour and quality of the stones adorning the foundation's twelve courses:

Jasper hyȝt þe fyrste gemme
 Ðat I on þe fyrst basse con wale.
 He glente grene in þe lowest hemme;
 Saffer helde þe secounde stale.
 Þe calsydoyne þenne wythouten wemme,
 In þe þryd table con purly pale.
 Þe emerade, þe furþe, so grene of scale;
 Þe sardonysse, þe fyfþe ston,
 Þe sexte, þe rybé [...]
 [...]
 Þe seuenþe gemme in fundament;
 Þe aȝtþe, þe beryl cler and quyȝt,
 Þe topasye twynne-hew, þe nente endent.
 Þe crysopase, þe tenþe is tyȝt,
 Þe jacyngȝ, þe enleuenþe gent.
 Þe twelfþe, þe tryeste in uch a plyȝt,
 Þe amatyst, purple wyȝ ynde blente. (ll. 999–1016)

In this way, the poet can point explicitly to St John's Apocalypse while those familiar with lapidary formulas will recognise a secondary claim to esoteric knowledge: of gemstones' hues, grades, virtues. The value of this knowledge is indicated in part by the age of an Old English text on the subject; according to Evans and Serjeantson, the Old English Lapidary (MS Cotton Tiberius A III) preceded by a century any Latin-to-French translation of Marbode (presumably written in the first half of the twelfth century). 'A notable feature', Evans and Serjeantson add, is the lapidary's disinterest in the

magical powers of precious stones.⁸⁵ Indeed, the twelve biblical stones were described only in terms of their appearances, their colour and ‘fire’. Stern summarises the Christian associations that medieval lapidaries generally give: jasper, faith; sapphire, hope; chalcydon, good works; emerald, chastity; sardonyx, repentance; ruby, Jesus; chrysolite, Christ’s miracles, the holy gift, and the Holy Ghost; beryl, the Resurrection; topaz, nine orders of angels; chrysoprase, travail; jacinth, safety abroad; and amethyst, Christ’s robe.⁸⁶

The Anglo-Norman Apocalyptic Lapidary, which ‘probably dates from the early part of the twelfth century’, is more forthcoming with its lists: Jasper preserves chastity, protects against any ‘fantesme’ and deceptive speech, and strengthens faith and the subjection of the flesh, among other things.⁸⁷ A ‘secular virtue’ it possesses is to prevent conception in women.⁸⁸ Jasper and sapphire avert a lord’s wrath from their bearers—in this context, one can presume the Lord’s wrath, as well. Chalcedony increases one’s faith, humility, and charity, but also maintains the love between a husband and wife and prevents anyone from bearing false witness against the wearer. Emerald brings faith, love, and joy, and guards against treason and poison, while sardonyx aids in overcoming enemies. Ruby’s colour improves the mood and increases honesty; chrysolite grants a love of wisdom and truth-speaking, along with faith and humility; and beryl makes its bearer a good servant of God’s will, chaste, humble, and honoured. Topaz, in addition to the usual virtues, can cool a fever, while chrysoprase averts fever, passion, and sudden death. Jacinth aids in obedience to the law and guards against being accused of a crime, while amethyst promotes a peaceful sleep, untroubled by bad dreams or nightmares, and guards against sorcery, among other things.⁸⁹ Many of the stones’ religious benefits overlap, especially with regard to the seven virtues. Perhaps the most significant contrast with Stern’s list is the way the Apocalyptic Lapidary reflects the aspirations and concerns of the court: for increase in wealth and public esteem, to secure a ‘happy’ marriage, to ward off treason and poison. In this respect, the lapidary seems far more congruent with the narrator-jeweller’s more persistently earthly perspective—his New Jerusalem is founded on the place courtly values shade into the divine.

⁸⁵ Evans and Serjeantson, *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, 13–16.

⁸⁶ Stern, ‘An Approach’, 84.

⁸⁷ Studer & Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, 260, 266.

⁸⁸ Studer & Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, 266.

⁸⁹ Studer & Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, 265–75.

As with the paradisaal landscape, this treasure-chest imagery is magnified to immense size (that said, the *Pearl* poem's New Jerusalem is said to be 12 furlongs, or about 1.5 miles, square, while John's is 12,000 furlongs square). The dreamer cannot enter, but only observe from his side of the 'river'. Yet the dreamer's attention to the maiden's place here, and to the procession, conceals a last revelation that the narrator leaves without exegesis: his earthly reflection of the Lamb. The passages below echo previous self-description:

Be Lombe byfore con proudly passe
 Wyth hornez seuen of red golde cler.
 As prayzed perlez His wedez wasse. (ll. 1110–12)
 [...]
 Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse
 Anende Hys hert þurȝ hyde torente.
 Of His quyte syde his blod outsprent.
 Alas, þoȝt I, who did þat spyt?
 Ani breste for bale aȝt haf forbrent
 Er he þerto hade had delyt. (ll. 1135–40)

The magnification of the Lamb is evident in the multitude of pearls in his raiment, where the narrator had but one. While the seven 'hornes' of the Lamb as well are suggestive of a gold crown, through wordplay they form a connection with the narrator's own mind: 'Suche odour to my hernez schot' (l. 18). The narrator implicates the dreamer with the line 'Ani breste for bale aȝt haf forbrent' (l. 1139)—reminding the reader that at the outset the narrator's 'breste in bale bot bolne and bele' (l. 18)—and the dreamer's sight of a wide wound near Christ's heart, spurting blood, reinforce the relationship between the heart and disturbances of the mind. Despite the unhealing wound, the Lamb gives no sign that he is hurt: 'Þaȝ He were hurt and wounde hade, | In His sembelaunt watz neuer sene, | So wern His glentez glorious glade' (ll. 1141–43). A bleeding Christ is a constant feature of medieval iconography, but a cheerful one less so. Images that dwell upon the extent of Christ's five injuries—not simply his side—are usually also given the context of the crucifixion, so this gloriously bleeding Christ in royal regalia offers a Ricardian emphasis on the conceptual hybrid of the wounded king. Christ's pearly apparel might recall the lapidary prescription of a pearl as proof 'aȝens rennyng of blod' though the pearls here would seem ineffective.⁹⁰ Instead, the blood and the regalia co-constitute this figure of Christ, just as the bloody rood-tree is gloriously adorned—though rather than an apocalyptic terror, this figure radiates beneficence. This imagery comports with traditional

⁹⁰ 114. 'Margarita', the Peterborough Lapidary in *Mediaeval English Lapidaries*, 107–08.

religious belief that Christ's blood is cleansing, and thus spiritually life-giving. But Christ's cheerfulness despite his open wound provides a visual illustration of the narrator's much earlier admission that the nature (that is, the human aspect) of Christ should console him: 'Ða3 kynde of Kryst me comfort kened' (l. 54). Meditation on Christ's suffering was considered beneficial for several reasons, but one was to train the chronically unwell to withstand their illness through comparison to the infinite suffering of Christ. Given the poem's consistent association of physical and spiritual well-being (or the lack thereof), the suggestion of a chronic, unhealing ailment is brought back in just as the dreamer succumbs once more to a 'maddyng malte' (l. 1154) that leads to his ejection from the vision.

Recasting the poem's settings, then, in light of herbal and lapidary knowledge works a profound transformation on *Pearl*, uniting these apparently disparate mental spaces within a continuum organised by the intersection of 'health' and 'holiness'. This is a poet for whom courtly love and religious feeling are a tightly bound pair, derived from a courtly New Jerusalem. His marriage of herbal and lapidary knowledge similarly interacts with a divine ontology. These domains of knowledge subtend the imagery brought to consciousness through the narrator's imperfect and continually revised focalisation of his surroundings. The knowledge of plants and gemstones on display is grounded in its relationship to human health and happiness. The poem consistently foregrounds the conceptual metaphor that seeing is understanding: the dreamer's imaginings of terrestrial imagery overlay, and obscure, a truly divine comprehension, itself linked to a felt sense of spiritual elevation. This interrogation of the narrator's perspective on reality is marked, though, by a refusal to point to, to spatially centre, even a postponed moment of true comprehension. The poem's staged failure, the abortive fording of the river, is predestined because it is a human attempt—if the dreamer's 'delyt' in seeing these reifications intimates divine understanding, it is also clear that the human mind is not equipped for it. Finally, though the poem in its evasion of identifiable detail offers an exemplary lesson, it is in its erudition far from an 'everyman' parable. Its visionary environments are distant from the broadly urban social imaginary of a poem such as *St Erkenwald*. Instead, the particular, personal riddle of the narrator's spiritual crisis, written as a kind of medical history, betrays an unusual, rarefied isolation in which society is discussed, rather than experienced.

VI. Varieties of Figural Debate in Langland's *Piers Plowman*

Some four centuries after the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* was copied into the Vercelli Book, a poet who might have gone by the name of William Langland wrote down an extended visionary narrative—featuring hybrid figures; a dialogic, sometimes riddling discourse; and an enactive environment—to stage his era's crisis of 'Trouthe' from a first-person perspective.¹ His Middle English poem, entitled *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*, and known more frequently simply as *Piers Plowman*, was begun sometime in the latter half of the fourteenth century, with a first version (perhaps an unfinished draft) dated to around 1370. Scholarly consensus is that the poem exists in three distinct recensions (known as the A-, B-, and C-texts), the last of which is supposed to have been written in the years just after the uprising of 1381.² An extraordinarily capacious, ruminative work, containing not one but a series of dream visions, *Piers Plowman* has inspired unceasing critical efforts to uncover a unitary theme; distinguish between its use of biblical typology, allegory, and personification; or even classify its genre. Ironically, Langland's poem, though long admired for the verve with which its social catalogue of medieval 'types' interject themselves into its conversations, resists conventional medieval category. Its dissident narrator confesses to occasional mental instability, its titular personification is an obstreperous, pontifical ploughman, and its discontinuous dream visions stage a series of debates so contentiously argued that many scholars still do not agree on who has won.

When visionary narrative is described comparatively—in terms of its protean resemblance(s) to other narrative forms, its failure to re-establish equilibrium, its iteratively falling short or going astray, and restarting its quest—this viewpoint is prejudiced, perhaps inevitably, by a critical language that communicates insufficiency more than alterity. It is perhaps not coincidental that the critical construction of a monolithic medieval 'dream-vision' genre, based on and biased by classical dream theory, has often replicated a lingering societal uneasiness with the substance of dream itself: is it true

¹ According to the note on authorship in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 212, f90v. Cf. George Kane, *Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship* (London: Athlone, 1965), but more recently, Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds, *Written Work: Langland, Labor and Authorship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

² A Z-text, witnessed by Bodleian Library MS Bodley 851, seems to correspond with the A-text until passus VIII (at which point it was filled out with C-text material) but with such significant discrepancies with A that its exact relationship remains unclear.

or useful? Who sent it? How should it be interpreted, and by whom? This insecurity has led to genre identification being applied in a prescriptive rather than descriptive manner, as if ‘medieval dream-vision narrative’ could encompass both Langland’s idiosyncratic imaginative process and Chaucer’s more archly literary framings. Langland’s dream fragments differ among each other in their genre influences, to the extent that an interpretative strategy for one passus may not yield coherent results in the next. Langland moves among narrative levels as well: the dreaming self may a) primarily observe, with narrative presence dropping away during substantial segments b) be led or accompanied by a guide willing to interpret dream-vision images as they occur, or c) actively participate in the dream’s events. (More typical is the single vision in which the dreamer/narrator encounters a psychopompic figure: in *The Dream of the Rood*, the rood-tree appears first as vision and then takes over narratorial duties to guide the narrator into deeper understanding; St Bartholomew acts as an intercessory figure for Guðlac; the ‘marvel’ of the heathen judge is followed by his illuminating dialogue with Erkenwald; and, more traditionally, the *Pearl* maiden is both supernatural instructor and guide to the narrator’s vision of the heavenly city.) Similarly, Langland deploys a ‘whole spectrum of allegorical modes’, which has been interrogated as evidence for and against Langland’s control of his material.³

Markedly less critical attention has been paid, historically, to Langland’s narrative shifting between such frames and modes to engage with ‘the perplexities of his own mind’.⁴ While Langland’s poem satirically indicts the mentalities of its day, the narrator-dreamer clearly implicates his own mind’s shortcomings: the poem distinguishes between a perfected understanding and the dreamer’s constant contending with his own wilfulness, confusion, mishearing, inattention, and distraction. Here again, as with *Pearl*, it is helpful to maintain a distinction between the dreamer’s visionary experiences and the narrator’s ‘romynge in remembraunce’ (C-text only, V.11). For humankind, the revealed Truth always requires discernment and discrimination: ‘I seygh hym nevere sothly but as myself in a miroure’ (B.XV.161) and ‘fynde hym, but figuratyfly, a ferly me thinketh’ (C.XVI.293) says Will of Christ—and it is this lifelong process that the poem seeks to elaborate.⁵ Salter and

³ From the ‘Introduction’, Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall, eds, *Piers Plowman* (London: Edward Arnold for York Medieval Texts, 1967), 9.

⁴ Rosemary Woolf, ‘Some Non-Medieval Qualities of *Piers Plowman*’, *Essays in Criticism* 12/2 (1962), 111–125, 121.

⁵ Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A. Shepherd, eds, *Piers Plowman* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 248.

Pearsall have proposed that ‘It may be that we should regard Langland’s loose-woven fabric of procedures not so much as a failure to achieve structural tautness, [but] as a way of capturing something of a kaleidoscopic vision of truth’.⁶ ‘Kaleidoscopic’, while nodding toward the poem’s fractured perspectives, is perhaps not the most complete comparison, as it leaves out Langland’s participation, as a ‘maker’, in the creation of said fractures. Previous scholarship, often fascinated by clues to authorship, has tended to overlook Langland’s own discussion of the poet’s role, in favour of relocating Langland’s idiosyncratic dream visions within medieval literary tradition.⁷ (Anne Middleton, notably, has wrestled for some time with the theoretical import of Langland’s writing, and the ways the poem productively rewrites tradition.) Rosemary Woolf’s 1962 article inquiring into ‘some non-medieval qualities’ of *Piers Plowman* is exemplary of this insistence on uniting a procrustean medieval dream-vision form with a favoured medieval mentality, that of a sober, learned clerk. Her study of the psychology of dreaming, as represented in the poem, was carefully marked off from the medieval: ‘The dream-world of the *Pearl*, for instance, is the natural world heightened: colours are more intense, form and sound more perfect, everything more clear and ordered than it can be in the unselectiveness of every-day life. The extraordinary point about Langland’s dreams, however, is that they show the bewildering indifference to time and place which is characteristic of real dreams’.⁸ It is difficult to say which of these pronouncements is more important for our understanding of medieval dream vision: that critical homogenization of mentalities is so extreme as to exclude Langland’s perspective as ‘non-medieval’, or that Langland’s representation of dreams, in contrast to *Pearl*, alone possesses a disjunctive, disorienting ‘realism’. As Ralph Hanna notes, textual survival indicates that *Piers Plowman* was the ‘single most popular verse text disseminated in the fourteenth century’.⁹ What this notion, that the poem could portray ‘non-medieval’ mental experience,

⁶ From the ‘Introduction’, Salter and Pearsall, *Piers Plowman*, 32.

⁷ Attempts to come to terms with Langland’s use of dream vision are many, but Derek Pearsall, *An Annotated Critical Biography of Langland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990) helpfully contains a chapter on publications dealing with ‘Dream vision and the role of the dreamer’, 179–86. The view that Langland’s dream visions serve primarily to solicit identification with a medieval Everyman narrator in his imagined landscape (and are thus unreliable as autobiography) succeeds previous detective-work aimed at exposing the author, and is in turn succeeded by the deconstruction of Everyman narrators: see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) and David Lawton, ‘The Subject of *Piers Plowman*’, *YLS* 1 (1987), 1–30.

⁸ Woolf, ‘Non-Medieval Qualities’, 116.

⁹ Ralph Hanna, ‘Versions and revisions of *Piers Plowman*’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 33–49, 33.

exposes is simply a neurotypical, normative conception of medieval mentalities. Besides, surely any dream-vision narrative's claims on verisimilitude are dependent on that narrative's goals. One may foreground the numinous, emotional impact of a single, sustained and intense sensory experience, while another may focus on the way dream-visions, considered serially, require the ongoing spadework of intellectual discernment and rumination.

Piers Plowman then is an exemplary test of this study's hypothesis that the literary representation of the mental alterity of visionary environments—regardless of whether one imagines that there was 'really' an instigating dream or dreams—is often accompanied by a reorganisation of narrative expectation. We might, in Langlandian fashion, reverse our interest in the individual disclosures of first-person narrative to reveal an alternative 'grammar', a language of *social* crisis felt and voiced by the individual. Consider in this light a critic's noting that sometimes the narrator in *Piers Plowman* is 'prophetic, sometimes clueless; and sometimes learned, sometimes *lewede*; sometimes reasonable, sometimes crazed' (Benson quotes in a similar vein, David Lawton calling attention to the narrator as a 'site of contradictory discourses').¹⁰ This fictive, ranging voice may draw upon a poet's personal biography—and may appropriate, assimilate, and reproduce excerpts of texts and oral material as well, in making something new from these juxtapositions, a poetic 'social body' with its own voice. In her examination of the Ricardian era's 'public poetry', Anne Middleton proposes that the condition of a speaker with a variegated audience becomes its own subject, an at-times uneasy responsibility that unites Gower, Chaucer, and Langland:

The public poetry of the Ricardian period is best understood not as poetry 'about' contemporary events and abuses, whether viewed concretely or at a distance, from the vantage point of a universal scheme of ideal order—it is rarely occasional or topical, and it is indifferent on the whole to comprehensive rational systems of thought or of poetic structure. Rather it is poetry defined by a constant relation of speaker to audience within an ideally conceived worldly community, a relation which has become the poetic subject.¹¹

Each poet could potentially rationalise the value of their work as a sanctioned mediating activity, but Middleton singles out Langland's approach as 'more in the way of a bad dream than an achieved synthesis', pointing out Langland's repeated attempts to justify not simply his work but his way of living:

¹⁰ C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 82; and see David Lawton, 'The Subject of *Piers Plowman*', *YLS* 1 (1987), 1–30.

¹¹ Anne Middleton, 'The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II', *Speculum* 53/1 (1978), 94–114, 95.

He does not speak of his work as a product, a 'book' to leave for posterity, a now-autonomous creature with a life of its own among humankind, but as if 'making' itself were a never-ending process (a view perhaps exemplified in the author's nearly continuous tinkering with his poem), a continuous action rather than a finite production, which as a mode of life must be justified before God and man.¹²

If dream-vision narrative is, often, an attempt to articulate the social body *in extremis*, its communal affect and emotion as felt by a particular someone, as Middleton has argued of public poetry, this narrative is founded on a relational proposition. When Langland's narrator inspects another person, he sees something of himself; when he introspectively searches his heart, he finds failings and aspirations common to all. Langland's narrator's anxiety about the worth of his poetry is bound up with the merit of its 'fair feeld ful of folke'.

This study focuses on the cognitive, sense-making strategies that structure narrative, but a reminder is due that these terms have broader application in a text such as *Piers Plowman*, in contrast to contemporary usage. Langland makes narrative use of tears of compunction for instance, the expression of true contrition that comes when the heart is pricked by compassion. Tears are at once a vibrant emotional outpouring and a demonstration of theological logic arising from the desert fathers. Teachings about *compunctio lacrimarum* would certainly have reached England's monasteries via St Benedict's Rule (see chapters 20 and 49), but also the population at large through Gregory the Great's interest in the topic, given expression through the tale of Emperor Trajan's posthumous salvation, and the wider 'righteous pagan' motif, discussed at length in the earlier analysis of *St Erkenwald*. All of these elements are at play in *Piers Plowman*, with the added complexity of Langland's mirroring of individual and social bodies. Rehearsing the distinctions between feeling, emotion, and affect, as summarised by Eric Shouse, may be appropriate here, as much depends on the question of scale: 'Feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*.'¹³ Definitions of these terms vary in different contexts, but this emphasis on scales is most pertinent to *Piers Plowman* and its mediating narratorial presence. As Shouse explains, someone's feelings are contextualised in terms of their past experiences and associations, while emotions are a social display—whether expressed with facial muscles or through the written word. In this sense, there is a great deal of emotion in *Piers Plowman*, expressed in its moral tone, and given

¹² Anne Middleton, 'Public Poetry', 103.

¹³ 2, Eric Shouse, 'Feeling, Emotion, Affect', *M/C Journal* 8/6 (2005) <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au>>.

urgency by apocalypticism. One way of thinking about affect's prepersonal status is to consider social contagion, or 'herd' instincts, and the way we react to certain environmental triggers in outsized ways while ignoring others. Apocalypticism in literature can be seen as an experiment in accumulating the right triggers to provoke urgency: visual evidence of conflagration or conversely sight obscured by darkness, the joy of being swept up and the concomitant fear of falling, a danger to one's bodily integrity, the reactions of crowds or mobs. Apocalyptic dream vision, in particular, yokes form and content, as *The Dream of the Rood* makes explicit: contained in the revelation is the compulsion to reveal it to others. 'Affect adds intensity, or a sense of urgency to proprioception', writes Shouse—but importantly, its pre-personal nature means that any response is not necessarily felt as 'willed' so much as directed.¹⁴ In *Piers Plowman*, not only is proprioception intensified—think of the minutely observed cloak that Haukyn wears—but of course Will, in his struggle to maintain focus on his quest for Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, dramatizes both the way that distractions and predilections appear to be involuntary, as well as the compulsion to begin again.

Historical and Critical Contexts

Earlier commentators, as Anne Middleton notes in her review of the critical heritage, took grateful direction from the poem's rubrics: *Visio* and *Vita*; and *Dowel*, *Dobet*, and *Dobest*—all thought now to be scribal interpolations.¹⁵ The first two rubrics authorised established interpretative modes, while the 'Three Lives' model justified the poem's digressions as occasions to amplify suitably medieval 'threefold hierarchies'.¹⁶ Here, it is appropriate to recall that the study of the Middle Ages, according to C. S. Lewis, necessarily meant contact with a densely layered, organising structure in which everything had its place. 'At his most characteristic, medieval man was not a dreamer nor a wanderer; he was an organiser, a codifier, a builder of systems,' argued Lewis (using the unhelpfully gendered language of his day) in *The Discarded Image*.¹⁷ 'I hope to persuade the reader not only that this Model of the Universe is a supreme medieval work of art but that it is in a sense the central work,' he added,

¹⁴ 8, Shouse, 'Feeling, Emotion, Affect'.

¹⁵ Anne Middleton, 'Introduction: The Critical Heritage', in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. John A. Alford (Berkeley: UCP, 1988), 1–25, 12–13.

¹⁶ Middleton, 'Critical Heritage', 12–13.

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, Kindle edn. (London: HarperCollins, 2013), loc. 177–78.

“that in which most particular works were embedded, to which they constantly referred, from which they drew a great deal of their strength”.¹⁸ In recognising this interpolative stance, we might reappraise his judgement that Langland ‘is confused and monotonous, and hardly makes his poetry into a poem’, while also concluding that Langland is ‘a very great poet’, who achieves sublimity, embraces a ‘Lucretian largeness’, and renders ‘imaginable what was before only intelligible’.¹⁹ Langland’s narrator is decidedly uncharacteristic as he is both a dreamer and a wanderer. His marginal position in society makes him both subject to its interrogation, and also gives him motive to interrogate its beliefs and structures. Though Lewis puts an intuitive finger on the sense-making strategy of the dream-vision narrative, its phenomenological deconstructions and reconstructions, one gets the sense he wishes it *made* its sense differently. But this is to wish for a different poem. In Langland’s telling the ‘Model of the Universe’ is itself out of joint (B.XV.364–72, and similarly at C.XVII.100–07):

Tilieris þat tiled þe erþe tolden hir maistres,
 By þe seed that þey sewe, what þei selle mighte, (365)
 And what to leue and to lyue by, þe londe was so trewe.
 Now faileþ þe folke of þe flood, and of þe lond boþe,
 Sheperdes and shipmen, and so do þise tilieris.
 Neither þei konneþ ne knoweþ oon cours bfore anoþer.
 Astronomyens also aren at her wittes ende; (370)
 Of þat was calculed of þe clem[a]t, þe contrarie þei fynde.
 Grammer, þe ground of al, bigileþ now children...²⁰

This is a language of crisis, not to know agricultural yields, when flocks can feed, if a small fisherman’s boat could be caught in a storm. Even the perennial complaint that children do not understand the language is a destabilising sign for a believer in the ‘Word’, *i.e.*, Christ. Literal famine and pestilence stalk the pages of *Piers Plowman*, which is also one of two major poems to address the tumultuous 1381 Uprising through the lens of dream vision: John Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* is the other. A brief review of Gower’s work can serve to emphasise some of the differences in Langland’s visionary perspective.

Significantly, while both poems adopt a prophetic pose at times, and both contain material that retrospectively testifies to the intensity of social disturbance, their visions are put to different use.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, loc. 211–13.

¹⁹ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: OUP, 1936), 159–61.

²⁰ Unless otherwise noted, this and all succeeding quotations from *Piers Plowman* are from A. V. C. Schmidt, ed., *William Langland Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, 1, 2nd edn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications/Western Michigan University, 2011).

Though told in heated language, the topsy-turviness reported by Gower in his *Vox Clamantis* is offered as a literarily re-imagined vision. In Book I's Prologue, Gower explains to the reader that the author 'intends to describe how the lowly peasants revolted against the free men and nobles of the realm. And since an event of this kind was as loathsome and horrible as a monster, he reports that in a dream he saw different throngs of the rabble transformed into different kinds of domestic animals': a zoological procession including asses, oxen, boars, dogs and cats, foxes, cocks and ganders, owls, and flies and frogs.²¹ For a pedagogically-minded classicist like Gower, an animal descriptor would not necessarily have been pejorative (though it well could be): it might signify a social role, the drives of a particular group, or the embodiment of a virtue or vice. Thus, the Uprising's participants are called asses whose braying frightens upstanding citizens—their crime is forgetting their place and foolishly attempting to take another's position, rendering them incomprehensible members of a fable. The bulk of *Vox Clamantis*, though, inveighs against failures of governance. According to Gower, 'not the king but his counsel is the cause of our sorrow, for which the land grieves as with a general murmur. If the king were of mature age, he would set right the scale which now is without justice'.²² Gower's diagnosis, an outbreak of misrule, remains focussed on specifically human failings (of specific people), which can only temporarily disturb the viable hierarchy of the three estates.

In contrast, the world of *Piers Plowman* reflects back on much of the fourteenth century, socially, politically, environmentally. Langland's restatements of the problem of cognition with regard to God's will are preceded by the Prologue's macroscopic vision of society ('A fair feeld ful of folke fond I per bitwene', B.Pr.18, similarly in A- and C-texts), reviewing failings of some (not all) members of the three estates, discussing the exercise of kingship, and, in the B- and C-texts, pondering 'þe power þat Peter hadde to kepe— | To bynden and to vnbynden' (B.Pr.100–01, and

²¹ 'In huius opusculi principio intendit compositor describere qualiter seruiles rustici impetuose contra ingenuos et nobiles regni insurrexerunt. Et quia res huiusmodi velut monstrum detestabilis fuit et horribilis, fingit se per sompnium vidisse diuersas vulgi turmas in diuersas species bestiarum domesticarum transmutatas', Prologue to *Vox clamantis* in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4, ed. by G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), 3. English by Eric Stockton, trans., *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The voice of one crying, and The tripartite chronicle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), 49.

²² 'Stat puer immunis culpe, set qui puerile | Instruerent regimen, non sine labe manent: | Sic non rex set consilium sunt causa doloris, | Quo quasi communi murmure plangit humus. | Tempora matura si rex etatis haberet, | Equaret libram que modo iure caret' (Bk. 6, ll. 555–60), *Vox Clamantis* in Macaulay, *Complete Works*, 246. In a later revision, Gower clearly rethought his earlier compassion: 'The king, an undisciplined boy, neglects the moral behaviour by which a man might grow up from a boy'; Stockton, *Gower*, 232. 'Rex, puer indoctus, morales negligit actus, | In quibus a puero crescere possit homo' (Bk. 6, ll. 555–56), Macaulay, *Complete Works*, 246.

similarly at C.Pr.128–29, though in the C-text Langland has preceded this with a forceful warning about the Church allowing error to persist in the worship of ‘maumettes’, Mohammedan idols). Though the personified figure of Lady Meed is more commonly understood to reference the Alice Perrers scandal from late in Edward III’s reign, the poem notes that Meed’s influence brought down the king’s father—‘Youre fader she felled þoruȝ false biheste’ (B.III.127). As Bernard Huppé once ventriloquized: ‘Lady Meed as [Piers] Gaveston ruined your father, now in the guise of Alice Perrers she is about to ruin you, Edward, by making you incapable of exertion for your people.’²³ Similarly, the reign of Edward II coincided with the Great Famine (1315–17), while famine returned to England during the reign of Edward III in 1351 and 1369—this time in conjunction with the plague outbreaks of 1348–49 and 1361–62. Langland’s A-text bears specific traces of these traumas; in passus XII, Will recounts that during his ‘ȝouȝe’ he met Hunger, who fed him bread that made his belly swell (oedematous malnutrition, or kwashiorkor, remains a not-fully-understood hallmark of famine).²⁴ The next visitation is ‘Feuere-on-þe-ferþe-day’, a ‘masager of Deþ’ who travels with ‘Cotidian’ and ‘Tercian’ fevers (a quotidian fever recurs on a 24-hour cycle, while a tertian fever repeats every 48 hours).²⁵ Langland mentions pestilence by name several times, either as a form of dating from the signal event of the Black Death’s arrival or to discuss responses to it (useless ‘cures’ and prayer); Dame Study tells Will that ‘syn þe pestilence tyme’ (B.X.72), friars and clerks have only reinforced their intellectual conceit at the price of faith, so that God no longer listens and ‘preieres haue no power þise pestilences to lette’ (B.X.77, similarly at C.XI.60).

Morton Bloomfield’s 1962 study of apocalyptic influence in *Piers Plowman* foregrounded the role of prophetic admonition in such troubled times; ‘The conjunction of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in 1345 was widely held to have been the cause of the Black Death’, Bloomfield noted, and astronomers were almost unanimous that 1365 was ‘a year to be watched’.²⁶ While Bloomfield thought Langland’s A-text in particular could have been instigated by this portentous atmosphere—and shaped by Biblical

²³ Edward II was deposed in 1327. The C-text insists on personification with: ‘ȝoure fader she afelde, Fals and she togederes’. Bernard F. Huppé, ‘The A-Text of Piers Plowman and the Norman Wars’, *PMLA*, 54/1 (1939), 37–64, 61.

²⁴ See A.XII.59–85. For a brief outline of the condition, see George J. Fuchs, ‘Antioxidants For Children With Kwashiorkor: Oxidative Stress May Not Explain This Deadly Disease’, *British Medical Journal*, 330/7500 (2005), 1095.

²⁵ For types of fevers, see Luke Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine: The Art of Healing, from Head to Toe* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 42–46.

²⁶ Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 94.

and early Christian models—he ultimately decided that *Piers Plowman* (taking into account its fuller B- and C-texts) was more accurately described, for the purposes of literary analysis, as drawing from six genres of its era. The three literary forms incorporated, Bloomfield argued, were ‘the allegorical dream narrative; the dialogue, *consolatio*, or debate; and the encyclopaedic (or Menippean) satire’, and three religious influences were ‘the complaint, the commentary, and the sermon’.²⁷ It remained for scholars to explicate the interaction of so many genres in a single work, how the text might signal its genre-crossing movements, and whether the narratorial voice could maintain stability and coherence across these levels of narrative form.

The application of so many extrinsic interpretative models, however, generated a countervailing concern that Langland’s poem was in danger of being interpreted out of its existence. The first chapter of David Aers’ *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* (1975) took particular aim at the scholarly ‘exegetes’, exemplified by Robertson and Huppé, for whom Langland’s literal wording was merely the shell that enclosed a kernel of orthodox theology.²⁸ Aers also questioned, more broadly, the supposed distinction between the Christian allegorical model’s foundation in historical moment and ‘hellenistic’, atemporal allegory. With regard to Langland’s use of figurative language, he advocated remaining ‘especially alert to the modes with which the poet guides the reader’s approaches’.²⁹ A cohort of scholars began to make efforts to uncover Langland’s ‘literary theory’—looking to *Piers Plowman* to see how it structures its poetics. For this group, the poem was not reproducing more broadly medieval literary and theological contexts, but in Nicolette Zeeman’s words a ‘searching investigation of received epistemologies, whether authoritative, merely banal, or outright complacent; a sustained attack on institutionalised formulations and reifications; an inquiry into the seemingly coherent “imaginary” of social and religious experience’.³⁰ Thus, where critics previously wrestled with Will’s dim-wittedness in the context of a moral *schemata*, Mary Carruthers sought to revisit *Piers Plowman* as ‘an epistemological poem, a poem about the problem of knowing truly’, in which

²⁷ Bloomfield, *Apocalypse*, 10.

²⁸ David Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), particularly 1–14.

²⁹ Aers, *Allegory*, 111.

³⁰ Nicolette Zeeman, ‘Piers Plowman in theory’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 214–29.

moral and social concerns were subordinated to the central problem of cognition.³¹ Any problem of knowing implies a ‘knower’; Anne Middleton subsequently argued in ‘Narration and the Invention of Experience’ that the episodic, iterative experiments which make up the poem produce a ‘fiction of the self as a center of “sense-making”’, an observation of the operations of consciousness in history.³² This cognitive turn—or better said, recognition of the still-ramifying effects of a twelfth-century cognitive turn—has significant import for an analysis of dream vision narrative, inasmuch as it portrays mental experience.

Finally, to conclude this introductory overview of narrative influences in and on the work, there is the figure of the visionary who writes. While for Bloomfield the poem’s status as a literary production precluded substantive comparison to ‘non-literary’ works written in a similar autobiographical mode, more recently Kathryn Kerby-Fulton’s study of reformist apocalypticism has returned *Piers Plowman* to conversation with religious works known to be popular in England, such as *The Apocalypse of Esdras* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and fellow visionaries such as Hildegard of Bingen, Robert of Uzés, and Bridget of Sweden. This range of works displays striking commonalities with *Piers Plowman* with regard to clerical criticism, the admonitory use of apocalyptic vision, and visionary self-representation.³³ As mouthpieces for reform, these medieval visionaries were thus more intent on encouraging present-day corrections than on prediction *per se*. Their apocalyptic future—‘a way of projecting the faults of the present onto a screen large enough for people to realize the implications involved’—was highly provisional and contingent; given a repentant return to God’s will, it would never come to pass.³⁴ As individual recipients of revelation, visionaries have always had to rationalise their function: while the ecclesiastical work of religious instruction was critical to the world’s salvation, a Hildegard or Bridget’s superior knowledge derived from personal revelation might seem to usurp clerical authority, if their reformist criticism did not

³¹ Mary Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 10.

³² Anne Middleton, ‘Narration and the Invention of Experience: Episodic Form in *Piers Plowman*’, in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Honor of Morton Bloomfield*, ed. by Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), 91–122, 120–21.

³³ Readers may want to review Kerby-Fulton’s short list of characteristics of apocalyptic genre (based on *The Apocalypse of Esdras* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*): Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 79.

³⁴ Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 6.

challenge clerical authority directly. Any visionary, therefore, had to negotiate their relationship with revelation—and with its audience—in narrating their experience of it.

Langland's poem is marked by similar concerns, his revisions successively more interspersed with biblical interjections that augment the narrator's visionary authority, with lengthy justifications for any criticism of the clergy. Famously on this topic Morton Bloomfield has written both 'It has been said of Bernard of Clairvaux that he speaks Bible as one might speak French or English. Langland speaks Bible, too; phrases, echoes, and paraphrases crop out everywhere. His whole mind is steeped in the Bible; it is a real language to him', and perhaps less appreciatively, 'It is like reading a commentary on an unknown text'.³⁵ But this biblical perfusion of the poem is complemented by Langland's exposure to other sources. As Emily Steiner notes, the Fourth Lateran Council's extensive concerns—including clarification of Trinitarian theology, promotion of parish priests as regular confessors, and even the generation of interest in a fifth crusade—had substantial impact on vernacular religious writings, and the treatment of these concerns within *Piers Plowman* seems a 'particularly sophisticated outcome'.³⁶ Stephen Shepherd has remarked on *Mandeville's Travels*—bound together with *Piers Plowman* five times—being the poem's 'most common manuscript companion'. Accounting for the perceived congruency, Shepherd quotes Frank Grady's observation that *Mandeville's Travels* is always eager 'to assert the moral successes of the virtuous heathen while containing them within a larger Christian context'.³⁷ C. David Benson has traced a number of connections and correlations between the two texts' form and content, including the use of a fictive narratorial 'I' to organise an episodic style; a vernacular voice raised in the hope of universal salvation; and a concomitant interest in the conversion of Jewish and Muslim populations.³⁸

The widespread allusiveness of *Piers Plowman* is testified to by decades of critical struggle, in which scholars tilted at the poem in hopes of loosening and isolating a manageable strand of it. But Langland's use of dream-vision narrative operates in just the reverse manner: his poem is busy tracing

³⁵ Bloomfield, *Apocalypse*, 37, 32.

³⁶ Emily Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 187.

³⁷ Stephen H. A. Shepherd, 'Langland's Romances', in *William Langland's Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith (London: Routledge, 2001), 69–82, 80. Cf. Frank Grady, 'Machomete and Mandeville's Travels' in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. by John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland, 1996), 271–88, 278.

³⁸ See particularly Benson's chapter on *Piers Plowman*, *John Mandeville*, and Margery Kempe, in his *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 113–56.

(and repetitively reifying) webs of meaningful relations. In so doing, it violates any unity of time, of place, of self, of genre, of category, of concept. ‘*Ex vi transicionis*’ (B-text only, XIII.152) is Langland’s motto, given illocutionary force in his *id est*: thus he does not necessarily seek to establish identity between terms, but instead to mark a movement between them, acutely attuned to a perspective in which a transitive relationship between any two terms acts on both.³⁹ This chapter will illustrate this dynamic at work throughout the poem, at different scales and in diverse registers. This closer reading begins with Will and his mirrored interactions with mental faculties, then observes his reflective movement through Langland’s personified cultural milieu. Similarly, it takes up the figure of Piers Plowman and Langland’s elaborations on the individual, social, and cultural contexts of his ‘pardon’—in particular the growing urgency of conversion. Finally, there is Langland in alliterative conversation with the literary concerns of an earlier, Anglo-Saxon era: the warrior Christ, a living tree, and an enigmatic reconciliation in the great hall.

The Langlandian Self

The cognitive strategies employed by Langland’s dream vision narrative can seem disorienting and confusing in part because the individual dreamer and social ‘body’ are mediated by a narrator called Will—who can be a ‘waking’ self capable of autobiography, but also a personification of the *appetite* for the knowledge necessary for right action (Will frequently is scolded for his over-indulgence, asking questions to gain knowledge that isn’t necessary for his salvation). Little in this thought-world circumspectly denotes a stable referent, while much leads away on forking, ruminative paths, exhibiting a kind of exegetical ‘capture’ in which interpretation is itself subjected to interpretation. But this is the quest: a search for the integrity of Truth, an integrity that resists, specifically, the intellectual appetite, that finally satiates. Langland’s series of visions, with its invitation to narrate its gaps, dis-coordinations, and repetitions, imposes an intense cognitive burden on the reader that must be accepted to proceed—or somehow deferred, in the way the narrator illustrates his own deferments, as insistent but misdirected inquiry, as dialogues cut short, as flights from reason.

³⁹ For more on the grammatical notion of transitivity, and philosophical treatment of it in Langland, see Ben Smith, *Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), esp. 45–48.

The dreamer's interactions with certain personifications (*e.g.*, Conscience, Recklessness, Reason, Anima) provide a fuller picture of the narrator as a place of sometimes cooperative, sometimes competing, faculties and drives. There is a fundamental instability to the narrator from passus to passus, configured as the role is by the visions the narratorial voice recounts. At times the narrator simply reports a visionary perspective; at times he recounts the conversation of others; at times he discusses his own participation in either envisioned or waking life events. Middleton has called this a 'poetics of interposition', acknowledging the radical conceptual jostling in Langland but claiming that the visibility of the sense-making self succeeds as a 'fictive narrative center for the work'.⁴⁰ The breadth of critical discussion argues that this centre may not always hold. For Godden, in contrast, Will remains 'a complex of different identities and voices rather than a single personality' and if there is a narrative centre, it is maintained by the reader fabricating one, (in much the way that C. S. Lewis could interpolate a cosmic model into a given medieval text).⁴¹

Langland offers the presence of a persistent narrative attitude, rather than a coherent, stable self—his achievement is, through Will, to personify an appetite for sense-making in various scenarios. It is not that Will never possesses what we can recognise as a circumscribed, autobiographical self, but that its persistence as such is not always pertinent. What constitutes our recognition of the narrator are certain repeated gestures that reverse an atomistic perspective: riddling and punning wordplay that emphasises the dynamic nature of language and meaning; a preference for dialogic discourse and polyphonic argument rather than monological inquiry; a bricolage approach to figural personification that unites the qualities and attributes of many disparate instances. (Even apparent autobiography opens outward—generating here the paradox that Langland's life, so long used as a portrait of his time, tells us so little about Langland as a historical figure.) Within his dream-vision frame Langland uses personification and figural discourse, particularly, to investigate the entangled dynamics of thought, relying on the hinge-concept of the mirror: hinged, because to see in this mirror is to see a double-image. The transparently ideal image can only be perceived in conjunction with the opacities and obscurities that deform it: 'Ac I seiȝ hym neuere soȝþly but as myself in a mirour' (B.XV.162).

⁴⁰ Middleton, 'Narration', 110–11.

⁴¹ Malcolm Godden, *The Making of Piers Plowman* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), 23.

This model had been current for some time: ‘From the twelfth century on, grammar is frequently analysed as an allegorical mirror, like the mirror of Nature and the mirror of history, a real correspondence to the processes of man’s mind and to man’s relationship with the things around him, including God’.⁴² But in Langland’s hands the original allegory is joined to an insistent emphasis on the observer—to glimpse Charity is not simply like glimpsing oneself in a clouded mirror, but to see Charity ordered in relation to *oneself*, one’s own history, temperament, and habits, to gradually become (morally) self-conscious through witnessing these patterns over time, whether in oneself or in others. Langland deals with this view of the self explicitly in Will’s dialogue with Anima (B-text passus XV):

‘Wipouten help of Piers þe Plowman,’ quod he, ‘his persone sestow neuere.’
 ‘Where clerkes knowen hym,’ quod I, ‘þat kepen Holi Kirke?’
 ‘Clerkes haue no knowyng,’ quod he, ‘but by werkes and by wordes.
 Ac Piers þe Plowman parceyvet moore depper
 That is þe wille, and wherfore þat many wight suffrep: (200)
Et vidit Deus cogitaciones eorum.

Only Piers Plowman can see into the heart and inspect someone’s will, their understanding of right action, or ‘Dowel’, as Langland has it.

Will, with the aid of Piers Plowman in the B-text (and his lieutenant *Liberum Arbitrium* in the C-text), will indeed go on to see Charity as a living entity, in the ‘cognitive synaesthetic apex’ of the poem, in Cole and Galloway’s words.⁴³ But because the cognitive synaesthetic context, the conscious location, for this experience is Will, Langland had to make decisions on how best to represent Will’s *cogitaciones* for the reader. In doing so, he had to confront one of today’s great narratological problems: how exceptional is fiction’s access to another’s consciousness? Langland’s poetry is animated by a difference in perspective, though, as his personifications of Reason and Conscience indicate. If a divine, universal grammar is ‘þe ground of al’ (B.XV.372, C.XVII.107), then his poem does not need to reconstruct and represent this reality in a ‘smaller’ scale (which would be impossible) but enact it. That is, because consciousness is both ineluctable and impersonal for Langland, and thought and language interdependent, Will’s first-person narrative can be more or less

⁴² Carruthers, *St Truth*, 18. On ‘grammar’ specifically, see also Marcia Colish, *Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven: YUP, 1968).

⁴³ Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway, ‘Christian philosophy in Piers Plowman’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 136–59, 149.

autobiographical, his life understood on one level ‘by werkes and by wordes’, while on another ‘Will’ as a cognitive function is enacted. Access to ‘another’ person’s consciousness is only to specify another instance, not another kind. The remarkable ramification of this model, with regard to *Piers Plowman*, is that Will’s introspection is not wholly centred on Will.

Langland enacts Will’s self-reflective gestures by hybridising personifications with biographical ‘accident’. Will’s personal introduction to Reason, just after he is lulled to sleep by the birdsong he hears from a linden tree, dramatises the moment of recognition: ‘A much man, as me þoughte, lik to myseulue, | Cam and called me by my kynde name’ (B.VIII.70–71, and similarly at A.IX.61–62, C.X.68–69). Though Will is clearly an adult in his waking-world quest for salvation, what is signalled here also is a first encounter with Reason: ‘I haue sued þee þis seven yeer’ (B.VIII.75, similarly at A.IX.66, C.X.73) corresponds with the theological notion of the rational soul, which arrived not at birth but with the maturation of the child’s mind, at around seven or eight years of age. The greater significance of this meeting, in a work so concerned with the practice of confession, can be found in canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which decreed that an annual confession was obligatory for all who had reached the age of reason:

All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own (parish) priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist [...].⁴⁴

The personified functions that Will engages with seem to reflect an extended model of the self’s operations—this exploded view of medieval psychology has been noted by Bloomfield, Carruthers, and others—though again the individual is mostly accidental to the operations of the personifications. The narrator’s interactions with socially-oriented personifications exhibit a similar unsettling hybridity, as if historical personages’ photos were blurred away just enough to make them unidentifiable, and all that remained of the caption were their roles. Subsequent to meeting Reason, Will, a model of youthful inquisitiveness, meets with Wit and Dame Study. His encounter with Wit,

⁴⁴ Canon 21, 1215 Concilium Lateranum IIII, ‘*Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit omnia sua solus peccata confiteatur fideliter saltem semel in anno proprio sacerdoti et iniunctam sibi pœnitentiam studeat pro viribus adimplere suscipiens reverenter ad minus in pascha eucharistiæ sacramentum [...]*’. Latin text from ‘*Documenta Catholica Omnia: 1215 Concilium Lateranum IIII*’, based on the 1216 *Compilatio Quarta* of Johannes Teutonico <documenta-catholica.eu>; English trans. from ‘Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215’, online edition based on H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 236–96 <sourcebooks.fordham.edu>.

as with Reason, seems particularly personal; Wit is ‘long and lene, lik to noon ooþer’ (B.VIII.117, and similarly at C.X.116), *i.e.*, long like ‘Longe Wille’ (B.XV.152, an identification not present in the C-text) and ‘like no one else’. After their tutelage, he is sent to see Clergy (whom Dame Study also ‘schooled’) and Scripture. When Scripture tells Will that ‘*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt*’ (‘Many know many [things] and know not themselves’, B.XI.3, C.XI.165), Will succumbs to an adolescent sulk and then grows sleepy, entering a dream-within-a-dream, whose events will bear out Scripture’s pronouncement. Langland may be punning on his own name when he says that Fortune then brought Will ‘into the londe of longynge’ (B.XI.8, C.XI.169)—but to decode the collocation in this way generates a further, literal reading that suggests a return home, or even an inheritance of family property. We see these changing circumstances when Fortune provides Will with a mirror (‘þat hiȝte Middelerþe’, B.XI.9, similarly at C.XI.170) which will show him wonders so that he can learn what he desires.

Langland extends his personification of Fortune by association: she is followed by the damsels *Concupiscencia Carnis* and Coueitise of Eizēs. In staging their entrance, Langland deftly schematises their interaction: the narrator specifies that *Concupiscencia Carnis* is the older of the two—desire being the precursor that leads to dissatisfaction. The two damsels are in turn trailed by the oxymoronic Pride of Parfit Lyuyngē, who asks Will, for the sake of his ‘contenance’, not to pay too much attention to Clergy’s instruction: ‘contenance’ punning on Will’s keeping up the appearances due his station, and his sexual continence, with two young women soon about his neck. It is Fortune’s entourage that permits Langland to most explicitly register the moral hazard that follows from putting oneself in Fortune’s hands, the inclination toward satisfying fleshly desires and turn toward covetousness, which nonetheless provokes a pride in displaying a public rectitude. Elaborating on Fortune’s defects with the aid of these nominal personifications, Langland both creates a web of conceptual linkages that extend beyond the core personification and generates, with the appearance of Rechelesnesse, the impression that Will has fallen in with the wrong crowd. Heedless, the lusty young bachelor succumbs to the influence of ‘Coueitise of Eizēs’, who troubles him throughout forty-five years. Sometime later (but condensing years of waking life, one imagines) Kynde takes Will up a mountain called ‘Myddelerþe’ and from this elevation Will observes all of Creation. Powerfully

impressed by the knowledge embedded in animals' instinctual behaviours, Will imagines that Reason is responsible and thus evokes the personification's appearance.

These Middle Earths both provide reflective opportunities, but one can see that Langland's associative logic is not overlaid on a scene so much as generated by its constituents: Fortune, a lady, holds a mirror, while Kynde is unveiled in a mountainside's sweeping vista. Steven Kruger has drawn attention to the entwined symmetry of these mirrors in relation to the project of self-examination: Fortune's mirror reflects the narcissism and self-interestedness that can trap the unwary, while the mirror of 'Myddelerpe' decentres Will and humanity itself.⁴⁵ It is difficult to escape the impression that, for Langland, these 'mirrors' are meant to clash; after all, he does not present two comparable objects, or even identical functions. Fortune's mirror, with its reflections of a young man's fancy, is not closely congruent with the 'mirroring' of Reason's operations that the sights of 'Myddelerpe' provide—the presence of two such distinct mirrors in the same passus draws attention to what mirrors do and do not do with regard to self-awareness. Again, the crucial element is the relationship of the viewer to these reflections.

Not all of the text's 'mirrors' are so clearly labelled of course. One area of special interest in a cognitive reading is Langland's occasional inclusion of the narrator within the group of 'God's fools', people who, colloquially, 'lack wits' but who to Langland also evidence a kind of divine disinterest in their well-being and comfort. In Langland's view, this mind-set counts as a gift from God, giving them a role in the wider apostolic community, but it is a gift that can also seem an affliction. In this context, it is worth inspecting more closely the narrator's claim in the B-text that his 'witte weex and wanyed til I a fool weere' (XV.3) and 'in þat folye I raued | Til Reson hadde rupe on me and rokked me aslepe' (XV.10–11). The narrator explains his derangement as an inability or unwillingness to recognise social status:

And somme lakkede my lif—allowed it fewe—
 And leten me for a lorel, and looþ to reverencen
 Lordes and ladies or any lif ellis,
 As persones in pellure wiþ pendauntz of syluer;
 To sergauntz ne to swiche seide noȝte ones,
 'God loke yow, lordes,'—ne loutede faire,
 That folke helden me a fool [...] (ll. 4–10)

⁴⁵ Steven F. Kruger, 'Mirrors and the Trajectory of Vision in Piers Plowman', *Speculum* 66/1 (1991), 74–95, 75.

This is an under-read passage, critically, given that it is both ‘autobiographical’ and one that Langland excised from the C-text version. This information asks for a reappraisal of the narrator’s perspective over time, of the framing of Will’s prior interactions, and of the relationship between Reason as a faculty and ‘wite’ as a gradient of capability. Recall that Will’s conversation with Reason in passus XI ends somewhat abruptly, Will being told he is concerned with matters above his station. Will awakens reddened with embarrassment. Ymaginatif, not yet introduced, then tells Will that ‘Pryde now and presumpcion parauenture wol þee appele’ (B.XI.421, and ‘For pruyde and presumpcion of thy parfit lyuyng’, C.XIII.231), and he will be corrected by shame. Will agrees (B.XI.434–35 below, and similarly at C.XIII.243–44): ‘Ther smyt no þyng so smerte, ne smelleþ so foule | As Shame, þere he sheweþ hym—for euery man [shonyeþ] his felaweshipe.’ The key distinction Ymaginatif makes is in the timing of shame; scolding a drunken man while he is drunk has no effect. It is the arrival of shame with sobriety, and its continued application through social shunning (as Will mentions), that brings true repentance.

The text also describes a debilitated, penitential debasement, with physical, mental, and emotional expressions. After his encounter with Ymaginatif, Will awakes ‘witlees nerhande, | And as a freke þat fey were, forþ gan I walke | In manere of a mendynaunt many yer after’ (B.XIII.1–3, similarly at C.XV.1–3). Is this a medieval ‘walk of shame’, or does the shame follow Will’s recovery of his wits? Despite the narrator’s regard for witless ‘postles’, Will’s response to this involuntary mendicancy appears equivocal: in the B-text passus XIII, Christ sends Conscience to comfort him, while in passus XV, Reason has pity on him. It is perhaps significant that Will’s loss of his wits is once occasioned by his vision of a despairing Haukyn’s tears of compunction, as Haukyn feels the weight of remorse for the sins engendered by his ‘active life’. Langland establishes a somatic link between the two men at the end of passus XIV, the narrator reporting that Haukyn ‘cride mercy faste | And wepte and wailed—and þerewiþ I awakede’ (B.XIV.331–32). Conversely, when Langland revised the C-text to remove the narrator’s admission of his ‘folye’, he also deleted the whole of Haukyn’s breaking down into repentant tears (C.XIV.319–32).

It is striking to place the stark admission that this ‘I’ was at one time mentally unstable, raving and unpredictable, beside Morton Bloomfield’s description of the poem as written in the ‘style of a

moderate, clear-headed, but perplexed man'.⁴⁶ These are not, in fact, contradictory statements, but it is telling that scholars have long recognised Langland's efforts in representing, durationally, the workings of his narrator's mentality and yet have shied away from investigating this narration of mental (and concomitant social) instability within a moral framework. Malcolm Godden, for instance, summarises this section ('during which the narrator is scorned by others'), but does not to my knowledge explore this visitation of shame as a goad to repentance.⁴⁷ For Mary Carruthers, this passage represents Will's estrangement from the thought-world of daily waking life, which is indicted as permeated with falseness and unreason, in contrast to truthful revelation.⁴⁸ This observation, while generally true to the nature of the poem's visions, misreads the specifics: other people mistake Will's behaviour as that of a 'lorel', a beggar or vagrant, though he is not one; his lack of reverence for social distinction is because he is in the grip of a 'folye' that renders him unable to make the distinction to begin with. One can imagine that this failure, especially if imputed to wilfulness or spite, could have unpleasant and unsafe ramifications, especially where an officious sergeant was involved. But Langland was no proto-anarchist; his reformist programme meant to return to people an awareness of their social function, what they owed to society (and God) as members of their estate. Will's lack of social grace is not described as a refusal of reverence for *false* 'lordes and ladies'—it can only be derangement, and in fact it is remedied by the return of Reason.

Why did Langland, having located Will twice, if temporarily, within the spectrum of the mentally infirm in the B-text, apparently reconsider for the C-text? There Will remains 'witteles nerhande' (C.XV.1) but Langland expands elsewhere on the link between divine revelation and lunacy, with the narrator evincing a remarkable regard for the mentally infirm:

Ac 3ut ar ther oþere beggares, in hele, as hit semeth, (105)
 Ac hem wanteth wyt, men and women bothe,
 The whiche aren lunatyk lollares and leþares aboute,
 And madden as þe mone sit, more other lasse.
 Careth they for no colde, ne counteth of non hete,
 And aren meuyng e aftur þe mone; moneyeles þey walke, (110)
 With a good will, witteles, mony wyde contreyes,
 Riht a Peter dede and Poul, saue þat þey preche nauht,
 Ne none muracles maken—ac many tymes hem happeth
 To profecye of þe peple, pleyng, as hit were.

⁴⁶ Bloomfield, *Apocalypse*, 41.

⁴⁷ Godden, *Piers Plowman*, 116.

⁴⁸ Carruthers, *St Truth*, 123.

And to oure syhte, as hit semeth, seth god hath þe myhte (115)
 To ȝeue vch a wyht wyt, welthe, and his hele,
 And suffreth suche go so, it semeth, to myn inwyt,
 Hit aren as his postles, suche peple, or as his priué disciples.
 For a sent hem forth seluerles in a somur garnement
 Withoute bagge and bred, as þe Book telleth: (120)
Quando misi vos sine pane et pera ...
 Barfot and bredles, beggeth they of no man.
 And thauh a mete with the mayre ameddes þe street,
 A reuerenseth hym ryht nauht, no rather then another:
Neminem salutaueritis per viam.
 Suche manere men, Matheu vs techeth,
 We sholde haue hem to house and helpe hem when they come: (125)
Et egenos vagosque induc in domum tuam.
 For hit aren merye-mouthed men, munstrals of heuene,
 And Godes boys, bourdyors, as the Book telleth:

In the above passage, critics have often read the lines about lacking wits literally and remarked on the narrator's sympathy for those more unfortunate. But there are significant correspondences of the sort that, in *Piers Plowman*, tend to flag purposeful rumination on a topic, taken up in disparate contexts. Just as Will's wits 'weex and wanyed' in the B-text, these 'lunatyks...madden as þe mone sit, more other lasse'. Where Will 'in a somer seson...shoop me into shroudes', they are sent 'seluerles in a somur garnement'. Will has his visions of a field of folk and prophetic asides, and they 'profecye of þe peple, pleyinge, as hit were'. In the C-text, Will no longer is 'loop to reverencen | Lodes and ladies', as mentioned above, and it is the 'lunatyks' who 'mete with the mayre ameddes þe street, | A reuerenseth hym ryht nauht'. This substantial addition explicitly creates a spectrum of 'apostolic' behaviour that varies according to 'wit' but is nonetheless licensed by God's will. The link between Will's dreams and shame-driven repentance remains: at the outset of C-text passus XX (B-text passus XVIII), Will awakes after an extensive dream sequence—when the Samaritan spurs off in haste, the prick seems to translate to Will. He goes forth 'lik a lorel' in chafing wool and wet shoes, heedless of discomfort and pain, just as those beggars that want wits care 'for no colde, ne counteth of non hete'. The C-text's editing and revision permits the narrator to validate his prophetic self-representation with less recourse to special pleading, while lobbying more vigorously for the hospitable treatment of a marginal class of society—their very being, the passage suggests, is a mirror for Christians of the availability of the apostolic existence.

Personification, Figura, and Time

If Langland's narrative admits historical and biographical references, it never collapses into chronicle or a *vita*. His dream narratives are not structured by time's passage *per se* but by its condensation into personified and figural interactions. From revision to revision, and indeed, passus to passus, it is the nature of these interactions that define the personification and *figura*. Piers Plowman, for instance, stands always in relation to the pardon, the Tree of Charity, the Barn of Unity. The A-text's descriptions of Piers centre on his literal role as a ploughman—in Sr Mary Davlin's words, he first appears 'a simple, unlettered layman, past middle age, a laborer and a leader of men whose whole life is bound up in the love and service of Treuthe'.⁴⁹ He stands as an exemplar of 'kynde' knowing whose understanding of 'Dowel' (and how three-estates society structures its requirements) is innate. It is perhaps easier today to overlook his folk stature, but the medieval era celebrated the plough with ritual and performance, culminating in the English Plough Plays of the late Middle Ages.⁵⁰ Chants and songs served the purpose of both invoking blessings for a successful sowing season and marking time to coordinate the plough's movements about the field. The presumed probity of the ploughman was such, James Morey has discovered, that 'plow sanctuary' laws guarded the lives of those who were actively engaged in tilling.⁵¹

It is in this context that Piers is most active in the poem's second vision, inviting the pilgrims to join him in tending to his half-acre. As John Burrow noted, Langland does not pause, but quite determinedly replaces the pilgrimage with the meditative ploughman's walk: 'Piers calls himself "a pilgrim at plow", apparels himself "in pilgrim's wyse" by putting on "his clothes of alle kyn craftes" and hangs "his hopur on his hales in stede of a scryppe" (C.VIII.56–60)'.⁵² Though Piers says he will accompany the pilgrims just as soon as he has harrowed and sown his field, Langland gradually

⁴⁹ Though she was wrong to say 'unlettered': after Piers' quotes the Gospel of Luke to the priest, in Latin, he states that 'Abstynence þe Abbessse' taught him his ABCs (B.VII.133)—a typically ambivalent Langlandian statement in which literal and metaphorical readings can both be true. Sr Mary Clemente Davlin, '*Petrus, Id Est, Christus*: Piers the Plowman as "The Whole Christ"', *The Chaucer Review* 6/4 (1972), 280–92, 283.

⁵⁰ Cf. Thomas Davidson, 'Plough Rituals in England and Scotland', *The Agricultural History Review* 7/1 (1959), 27–37; and Jerry V. Pickering, 'The English Plough Plays', *Western Folklore* 32/4 (1973), 237–48.

⁵¹ James H. Morey, 'Plows, Laws, and Sanctuary in Medieval England and in the Wakefield "Mactacio Abel"', *Studies in Philology* 95/1 (1998), 41–55.

⁵² Burrow as summarised by John Alford, 'The Design of the Poem', in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by John Alford (London: University of California Press, 1988), 29–66, 41; see also John A. Burrow, 'The Action of Langland's Second Vision', *EIC* 15 (1965), 247–68.

reveals that this is a life's work—harrowing and sowing are never done. 'This were a long lettyng' (B.VI.7, similarly at A.VII.7, C.VIII.5), says a lady in the group, portentously. Again, this sort of gathering-up of time is a function of Langland's dream-vision frame—Burrow has examined Langland's treatment of the concept of the 'fullness of time', '*plenitudo temporis*', with regard to the poem's account of the life of Christ, but this notion of processual maturation points operates at various scales in Langland.⁵³

The story of Piers' half-acre dramatizes the interdependence of the three estates, and their vulnerability to malingerers. Hunger forces the work-shy and sham-injured to their duties, but Piers has pity on them and tries to send Hunger off. (Langland has elsewhere mentioned famine and plague, but perhaps for the sake of his moralising, he avoids mention of the plague here as the reason for the dwindling number of workers to grow so demanding of food and wages.) In the narrator's telling, this swerve to gourmandise appetite is understandable given the experience of famine—everyone sets about trying to appease Hunger to drive him off, feeding him the best produce. But Hunger will only leave when appetite is suppressed. Though society is far from perfected, Piers and his heirs win a pardon from Truth for their contribution as labourers, with absolutions for various members of society specified in great detail. Yet, when a priest reads the pardon, it boils down to two lines: '*Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam | Qui vero mal, in ignem eternum*' (B.VII.111–12, A.VIII.95–96). When the priest contends that this, doing well, is no 'pardon', Piers rips the document in two (in the A- and B-texts, but deleted in the C-text, due perhaps to the 1381 Uprising imitating art). While the precise meaning of the act is much debated, we do know that Piers, making out his will, trusts in the forgiveness promised by this excerpt of the Athanasian creed ('Til I come to hise acountes as my crede telleþ, | To haue a relees and a remission—on þat rental I leue', B.VI.89–90, and similarly at A.VII.81–82, C.VIII.98–99). If indeed Moses' destruction of the commandment tablets (Exodus 32:19) is invoked in Piers' tearing of the pardon from Truth out of 'pure tene' (A.VIII.101, B.VII.115), as Carruthers has suggested, it is clearly to add import to contemporary debates over contract and covenant.⁵⁴ But Langland more frequently primes the audience for a figural reading

⁵³ John A. Burrow, 'God and the Fullness of Time in "Piers Plowman"', *Medium Ævum* 79/2 (2010), 300–05.

⁵⁴ Carruthers, *St Truth*, 70–71.

before stating and restating it—his internalisation of homiletic practice inclines him toward repetition and amplification.

Earlier, when Piers refused the knight's offer of assistance in the fields, it was to shore up the three estates. The knight should perform only knightly duties, while Piers would spend his life in agricultural labour, supporting the church with tithes, until the clergy should support his soul (B.VI.91–95, and similarly at A.VII.83–87, C.VIII.100–04):

‘The kirke shal haue my caroyne, and kepe my bones,
For of my corn and [my] catel he crauide þe tīpe.
I paid it hym prestly, for peril of my soule;
He is holden, I hope, to haue me in his masse
And mengen me in his memorie amonges alle Cristene. (95)

Piers' righteous anger is directed at a priest of Langland's day who disputes the creed's underwriting of the entire social structure—Piers' actions are three times tagged 'by þe peril of my soule' (B.VI.93, 117, 171)—in favour of purchased indulgences. Piers' response to this abrogation of terms *seems* to be to refuse to work: 'I shal cessen of my sowing,' quod Piers, 'and swynke noȝt so harde' (B.VII.119, and similarly at A.VIII.104 but not in the C-text). In fact, he has already declared his decision to turn from farming to pilgrimage: 'For I wol sowe it myself, and siþenes wol I wende | To pilgrymage as palmeres doon, pardon for to haue' (B.VI.63–64, and similarly at C.VIII.62–63). Rather than capitulate to the priest's refusal of his pardon—and the implication that he should buy absolution—Piers recommits to his faith in Dowel, which 'passeþ al þe pardon of Seint Petres cherche' (B.VII.173, and similarly at A.VIII.157), or 'passeþ pardoun and pilgrimages to Rome' (C.IX.323).

The exemplary nature of Piers' conscientious objection is illustrated by the retelling of a similar dynamic but in a more personal register in the B-text's passus XI (an account told differently in C-text passus XII, as described below). The conflict between social forces, embodied by Piers and the priest, is reduced to a dispute between Will and some local friars, though the point of contention is much the same. Like Piers, if imperfectly, Will has been fulfilling his social role, supporting the clerical estate through tithes, but becomes incensed by what he views as a creeping mercantilism. Will's tithing to the friars, Langland implies, was at least in part motivated by their provision of a relatively painless absolution.

‘For whiles Fortune is þi frend freres wol þee louye,
 And fecche þee to hir fraternitee and for þee biseke
 To hir Priour Prouincial a pardon for to haue,
 And preien for þee pol by pol if þow be *pecuniosus*.’
 —*Pena pecuniaria non sufficit pro spiritualibus delictis*. (55)

All goes as promised until poverty strikes. Will would seem to have been making out his will, or revising it, because he finds his friar apprehensive and noncommittal regarding a change to their ‘firste forward’ (B.XI.64). Conscience, Will claims, has told him it is more appropriate for someone to be buried at the church where they were baptised, if possible, so he would rather not be buried in the brothers’ graveyard. This privilege was usually accompanied by a substantial bequest; in return the predeceased were certain of a funeral mass and a burial plot, and could arrange for masses to be said for their souls to shorten their stay in the torment of Purgatory. In the C-text passus XII, this will-and-burial arrangement is not present. Poverty strikes, and Will is refused absolution: his confessor ‘said he myhte me nat assoile but Y suluer hadde | To restitue resonably for al vnrihtfole wynnynge’ (C.XII.16–17). Chafing at his reduced circumstances, Will compares the friar to mountebanks who court widows for their wealth.

These scenarios, however, were carefully regulated—proscribed in the former case—by the Fourth Lateran Council. Along with its emphasis on annual confession, Canon 21 required an arranged dispensation from making confession at one’s parish:

But if anyone for a good reason should wish to confess his sins to another priest, let him first seek and obtain permission from his own (parish) priest, since otherwise he (the other priest) cannot loose or bind him.⁵⁵

While the nakedly transactional nature of the friar’s response to Will in the C-text echoes the dispute between Piers and the priest earlier, as Canon 21 indicates, the whole arrangement may have been on shaky ground from the start. The kind of shopping-for-confessors that Couetyse-of-yes advocates for Will was already officially frowned upon, and there is no indication that Will has sought the required permission. But even more pertinent to the B-text version of events is Canon 56:

Many regular and secular clerics, we understand, when sometimes they lease houses or grant fiefs, make a contract prejudicial to parochial churches, namely, that the administrator or feudal tenants pay the tithes to them and choose burial among them. But, since this is prompted by avarice, we absolutely condemn a

⁵⁵ ‘*Si quis autem alieno sacerdoti voluerit iusta de causa sua confiteri peccata licentiam prius postulet et obtineat a proprio sacerdote cum aliter ille ipsum non possit solvere vel ligare.*’ Canon 21, 1215 Concilium Lateranum IIII, English trans. from ‘Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215’, online edition based on H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 236–96 <sourcebooks.fordham.edu>. Latin text from ‘*Documenta Catholica Omnia: 1215 Concilium Lateranum IIII*’, based on the 1216 *Compilatio Quarta of Johannes Teutonico* <documenta-catholica.eu>.

contract of this kind and declare that whatever has been received by means of such a contract must be returned to the parochial church.⁵⁶

Will's agreement with the friars, as described in the B-text, precisely violates Canon 56, which casts into a guiltier light Will's admission that 'Conscience it tolde | That þere a man [cristned were,] by kynde he sholde be buried' (B.XI.66–67). The narrator does not ascribe 'pure tene' to Will—he is too imperfect for righteousness—but he does justify publishing the episode with a dialogue between Will and Lewtee: 'Pyng þat al þe world woot, wherfore sholdestow spare | To reden it in retorik to arate dedly synne?' (B.XI.101–02, and similarly at C.XII.36–37). This license, underwriting as it does the clerical criticism that makes up so much of the entire poem, contains a great deal of ambivalence however. Whatever matter 'al þe world woot', the discussion is nonetheless being transmitted in the 'privacy' of Will's dream, indicating that Langland's use of dream-vision participates in that protective visionary posture described in more autobiographical accounts, where reformist clerical criticism is carefully staged as impersonal revelation.

Following these events, Will began 'wiþ myself to dispute | Wheiþer I were chose or noȝt chose' (B.XI.116–117, similarly at C.XII.53), and it is this inquiry into his own spiritual election that animates the rest of the poem's oscillation between conversion and salvation: 'For Crist cleped vs alle, come if we wolde— | Sarȝens and scismatikes, and so he dide þe Iewes' (B.XI.119–20, similarly at C.XII.55–56). Langland's use of personification evolves from the A-text to its successors, as the poet works out the ramifications of Piers' pardon in the world that the poet knows, as comprehending to some extent the members of the two other faiths of Judaism and Islam. But first, the narrator worries over what, in the history of English letters, seems to have been the grain of sand in an oyster's shell: how God as an idealised leader of His *comitatus*, with its bonds of reciprocity, could fairly abandon to hell anyone whose social comportment was blameless. Langland's poetic environments are yet more spaces in which a pillar of the Anglo-Saxon social imaginary, lord-retainer reciprocity, is measured against a pillar of patristic Christian doctrine: hell as punishment for the wicked (comprising as well the non-Christian). The most visible—and vocal—proponent of native lordly

⁵⁶ 'Plerique sicut accepimus regulares et clerici seculares interdum cum vel domos locant vel feuda concedunt in præiudicium parochialium ecclesiarum pactum adiciunt ut conductores et feudatarii decimas eis solvant et apud eosdem eligant sepulturam. Cum autem id de avaritiæ radice procedat pactum huiusmodi penitus reprobamus statuentes ut quicquid fuerit occasione huiusmodi pacti perceptum Ecclesiæ parochiali reddatur.' Canon 56, from 'Documenta Catholica Omnia: 1215 Concilium Lateranum IIII', based on the 1216 *Compilatio Quarta of Johannes Teutonico* <documenta-catholica.eu>.

obligation is the boisterous figure of Trajan, who, in a narratological sleight-of-hand, adduces the reality of his textual ‘presence’ to counter scholarly understanding of Scripture. Will, fresh from his *contretemps* with his friar confessor, inquires in passus XI (C-text XII) as to the basis for his hope for salvation: ‘For Crist cleped vs alle, come if we wolde— | Sarzens and scismatikes, and so he dide þe Iewes: | *O vos omnes sicientes, venite...*’ (B.XI.119–20). But quite quickly Will shifts from an invitation to salvation toward something more ineluctable, arguing by feudal analogy that since Christ has purchased all souls, their disposition is Christ’s alone: ‘For may no cherl chartre make, ne his c[h]atel selle | Withouten leue of his lord—no lawe wol it graunte’ (B.XI.127–28). Even if someone were to ‘recchelessly’ turn their back on Christian practice for most of their life, Will supposes, true contrition must provoke the Lord’s mercy. Just as Scripture is agreeing that in ‘soop’ no sin is beyond the Lord’s mercy, Trajan’s disembodied voice intrudes to insist that even the unbaptised are God’s subjects:

‘Ye, baw for bokes!’ quod oon was broken out of helle,
 Hiȝte Troianus, hadde ben a trewe knyȝt, took witnesse at a pope
 How he was ded and dampned to dwellen in pyne
 For an vncristene creature: ‘Clerkes wite þe soþe—
 That al þe clergie vnder Crist ne myȝte me cracche fro helle,
 But oonliche loue and leautee of my laweful domes.’ (140)

(145)

An extraordinary number of narrative tensions are bound up in this short passage: as mentioned, Langland allows Trajan to shoulder past the narrator, briefly, trailing a compressed *vita*, so that the text performs a series of authorising, intradiegetic movements. Trajan not only gives spoken testimony within this book-laden text-world, but he offers his act of speech as evidence (‘And I saued, as ye may see, wiþouten syngynge of masses’, B.XI.150) while distinguishing this ‘live’ utterance (it is not clear who Trajan is addressing with ‘Lo! ye lordes’, B.XI.153) from other textual evidence bearing on his case (‘That was an vncristene creature, as clerkes fyndeþ in bokes’, B.XI.154; ‘The legende *sanctorum* yow lereþ more largere þan I yow telle’, B.XI.160). Trajan goes on to mention Jacobus Voragine’s *Golden Legend* again, in specifying which ‘bokes’ he has little use for: ‘Panne is is bileue a lele help, aboue logyk or lawe. | Of logyk ne of lawe in Legenda Sanctorum | Is litel alowaunce maad, but if bileue hem helpe’ (B.XI.218–20). In the B-text, the narrator makes reference to Gregory the Great’s intercession at the outset, but the C-text reduces this interruption to ‘quod oen

was broken out of helle' (C.XII.77). Instead, Trajan says, 'I, Troianes, a trewe knyht, Y take witesse of a pope' (C.XII.78), and the tacit admission that this 'performance' is excerpted from *The Golden Legend* is deleted.

While *Piers Plowman* is insistent on Trajan's salvation—seen, again, from a relational analysis in which Trajan's 'leautee' is met with God's 'loue'—a subsequent passus returns to the Trajan story to make a significant clarification. In the conversation between Ymaginatif and Will, Ymaginatif envisions an ordered heaven in which all are saved but some are more saved than others. The thief crucified beside Christ has been brought to heaven, Ymaginatif argues, but not given pride of place:

Ac þouȝ þat þeef hadde heuene, he hadde noon heȝ blisse, (195)
 As Seint Iohan and oþere seintes þat asserued hadde bettre.
 Riȝt as som man yeue me mete and sette me amydde þe floore:
 I haue mete moore þan ynouȝ, ac noȝt so muche worshipe
 As þo þat sitten at þe syde table or wiþ þe souereynes of þe halle,
 But sitte as a beggere bordlees by myself on þe grounde. (200)

While this celestial organisation has provoked comparisons to Dante's *Paradiso*, surely the more proximate model for this mapping of status to hall seating is to be found in Anglo-Saxon culture. The text provides clues to status with its listing of spiritual elite (Saints John, Simon, Jude; virgins; martyrs; confessors, 'mylde' widows) and possibilities for seating (with the hall's sovereign, at a side table, without table, on the floor). Adherence to this hall-heaven analogy suggests that it was perceived, in fact, as an anagogical relationship: the glories of the hall, just as recuperated from heathenism in *St Erkenwald*, mirror the promised bliss of perpetual feast, with despair the lot of the uninvited. If the gloomy torment of the pagan judge could provoke McAlindon to think of 'Deor and Wanderer exiled in chill and dreary wastes from the companionship and warmth of the festal hall', this scene would seem to correspond well with *The Dream of the Rood* and its exposition of the cross, when the narrator's awestruck gazing on the cross widens to include angels, holy spirits, mankind, and all creation, in that order.⁵⁷

While personification in Langland runs the gamut from noun phrases and stock types to conceptual identities both conventional and invented, certain personifications participate in, and point to, Langland's age (roughly, the twelfth through fourteenth centuries) by virtue of figural discourse.

⁵⁷ McAlindon, 'Hagiography', 493.

While inquiry into the poem's allusions to historical event and personages remains an active area of Langlandian research and discussion, the narrative's interpenetration of its present-day by biblical history—from its irrupting 'quotations', to the presence of personages such as Abraham and Christ—has more often been perceived as didactic and homiletic, or simply disjunctive and disorienting, rather than Langland exploring the affordances of a diachronic, salvific narrative. For a contemporary analogue to Langland's thinking on these lines, there is *The Book of John Mandeville*, the extraordinarily popular mid-fourteenth-century pilgrim's guide to the Holy Land (and lands farther east), which exists in several languages and in as many as 300 manuscripts—and which travelled with *Piers Plowman* itself in at least five instances.⁵⁸ In her study of *Mandeville*, Rosemary Tzanaki points to the author's use of history 'as a means of reinforcing the centrality of his work in time as well as space, as a background to biblical events', united with a 'syncretic religious viewpoint, characterised by tolerance and a faith in natural goodness and belief'.⁵⁹ Both of these perspectives were susceptible to misreading by those in search simply of the strange and exotic, on whom *Mandeville*'s ecumenical optimism about the conversion of Muslims would be lost. But this is a spirit that Langland would seem to have shared. In the B- and C-texts, Langland's prophetic visions become increasingly concerned with resolving what he perceives as divisions within the Church due to Jewish failure to recognise Christ as the Messiah, and Muslim misrecognition of Mohammed—culminating in the triumphant (re)appearance of Christ in the narrative.⁶⁰ In this latter case, Langland's operations seem to correspond with Erich Auerbach's analysis of Christianised *figura*: a real, historical event which foreshadows another event, also real and historical, which fulfils the 'announcement' of the first.⁶¹ Auerbach quoted Augustine on this underpinning 'authorial' organisation of time's text:

⁵⁸ C. David Benson lists the five mss containing both works as BL, London, MS Harley 3954; UL, Cambridge, MS Dd.1.17; UL, Cambridge, MS Ff.v.35; Huntington Library, San Marino, MS HM 114; and Princeton UL, MS Taylor 10, in *Public Piers Plowman*, 115.

⁵⁹ Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville 1371–1550* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 21.

⁶⁰ Medieval references to 'Saracens' do not always point to practising Muslims, but can, depending on context, mean simply 'non-Christian'. Here, however, medieval understandings of Muslim belief are precisely what is at issue, so I use the more specific term.

⁶¹ See 'Figura', trans. by Ralph Manheim from German original in *Neue Dantestudien* (Istanbul, 1944), in Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 11–76, esp. 28–38.

For what is foreknowledge but knowledge of the future? But what is the future to God, who transcends all time? If God's knowledge contains all things, they are not future to Him but present; therefore it can be termed not foreknowledge but simply knowledge.⁶²

Langland returns to the human, temporal perspective though—his mode is prophetic, anticipatory, even as it argues a future into pre-determined existence based upon the logic of biblical *figura*.

Thus, some of Langland's personifications are not biblical persons but personifications of *figura* themselves, hoping explicitly to spot their fulfilment in history as the narrator recounts that moment's unfolding. Emily Steiner, for instance, refers to the 'time-traveler' Abraham, who tells of being tested by God to sacrifice Isaac but has also 'herde seyn late' of John the Baptist (B.XVI.249).⁶³ When the narrator encounters Abraham on a 'myd-Lenten Sonday' (B.XVI.172), Abraham/Faith says that 'I seke after a segge þat I seiȝ ones, | A ful bold bachelor—I knew hym by his blasen' (178–79), and goes on to describe the Trinity in first heraldic and then homiletic terms. As Steiner observes, it seems that Faith here describes the *Scutum Fidei* ('shield of faith'), a diagram that explicated the Trinity as known through the Athanasian creed.⁶⁴ The sequence renarrates the reading from Genesis 22, a sermon's exegetical glossing, and the *Scutum Fidei* illustration, all reframed within a numinous, meaning-laden present. In Langlandian terms, Abraham's interest in John the Baptist represents *current* Jewish awareness of and desire for baptism and conversion, given impetus by meditation on, perhaps, a 'crusading' missionary's pedagogical aide. Langland's belief in the power of affective theology diverges from *The Book of Mandeville*, as Steiner notes: there, the Jewish 'lost' tribes are conflated with the apocalyptic appearance of Gog and Magog, so that these hidden Jewish forces are set to be unleashed with the arrival of the Antichrist (2352–83).

Langland foregrounds the hybridity of both these personification-*figurae*: 'Abraham' is interchanged with 'Faith', 'Spes' with 'Hope'. Spes has been often read as Moses, though Spes claims to be *in search of* a 'knyghte | That took me a maundement vpon þe mount of Synay', B.XVII.1–2.

The critical insistence that Spes is identical with Moses, rather than sharing the category 'bearer of

⁶² 'Quid enim est praescientia, nisi scientia futurorum? Quid actem futurum est Deo qui omnia supergreditur tempora? Si enim scientia Dei res ipsas habet, non sunt ei futurae, sed praesentes; ac per hoc non jam praescientia, sed tantum scientia dici potest', *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianus*, 2.2.2, in Auerbach, 'Figura', 43.

⁶³ Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*, 220.

⁶⁴ Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*, 190, points to an illustration in the mid-thirteenth-century copy of William Peraldus's *Summa vitiis* (BL, Harley MS 3244, f.28r); a similar example can also be found in Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 16, f.45v). For more occasions of the 'shield of faith', see Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1987), 194–97.

Mosaic law', is difficult to maintain when one observes Langland's distinctions between these *figura*. Abraham 'highte' himself Abraham and is 'of Abrahames hous', while Spes does not call himself Moses, and is not named Moses in any version. The narrator later says 'How he wiþ Moyses maundement hadde many men yholpe' (B.XVII.61, similarly at C.XIX.62), a peculiar circumlocution if indeed 'he' is Moses to begin with. Finally, the narrator dismisses Spes contemptuously with: "'Go þi gate," quod I to Spes, "so me God helpe, | Tho þat lernen þi lawe wol litel while vsen it!"' (B.XVII.46–47, similarly at C.XIX.46–47). True Mosaic law was in no sense used a 'little while', but the medieval Christian understanding of Mohammedan instruction was often accompanied by the claim that even Muslims believed their 'Mosaic law' would be soon replaced.

While the *figurae* of Abraham and Spes have been read, critically, as doubly allegorising the replacement of Judaic law by the Christian, the replacement is also, in an equally significant sense, of the attachment to earlier patriarchs and prophets. *Mandeville* makes a point of the 'Sarasyn' regard for the two patriarchs, adding that 'they sey that Moyses and Abraham were wel with God, for they speke with Hym' (1284–85), and claims that Muslims are distressed by Jewish failure to adhere to Mosaic law (just as they look askance at lukewarm Christian observance). But Langland daringly figures this Spes in relation to the patriarch known to Muslim belief—the true, biblical Moses is that knight who received the commandments on Sinai. Langland's Spes, who has only 'aspied þe lawe', personifies the distorted transmission of the new law, suggesting an analogy between Muslim reception and the way the biblical Moses returned with the tablets to find his followers, in error, worshipping a golden calf. This distinction between the Mosaic law and its Muslim exponent has been rehearsed earlier, at the close of B-text passus XV/C-text passus XVII. Anima/Liberum Arbitrium's disquisition on the 'reunification' of the Holy Church, so that it encompasses Jewish and Muslim believers, sets forth the claim that both anticipate a redeeming successor: 'Moyses eft or Messie' (B.XV.603), 'Moises oþer Macometh' (C.XVII.312). This collocation of 'Moses and Mohammed' (which Langland employs again at C.XVII.314) is used to emphasise the two religions' common basis on Mosaic law and expectation of a redeemer-to-come, just before Langland re-narrates Christ's arrival in Jerusalem, not as a past event, but in the trappings of the present day. This relationship-by-law is reinforced shortly after Will's meeting with Spes, in the encounter with the Samaritan: 'Hope cam hippyng after, þat

hadde so ybosted | How he wiþ Moyses maundement hadde many men yholpe' (B.XVII.60–61, and similarly at C.XIX.61–62).

A further association between Mohammed and Spes is engendered by the latter's claim that 'For þouȝ I seye it myself, I haue saued with þis charme | Of men and of wommen many score þousandes' (B.XVII.18–19)—God's law is not a 'charme', but as Anima has explained, Mohammed is a bit of a conjurer, pressing a trained dove that he 'enchautede' into service as the Holy Spirit, God's messenger. Nevertheless, Anima admits, 'This Makometh was a Cristene man, and for he moste noȝt ben a pope' (B.XV.398); in the C-text, Mohammed is believed not only to be a Messiah but is given an unusually prominent status, not only a baptised Christian but 'a cardinal of court, a gret clerke withalle, | and pursuede to haue been pope, prince of the Holy Chirche' (C.XVII.166–67). Accounting for this curious assertion demonstrates the extent to which Langland's 'makynges' draw upon textual antecedents with their own syncretic hybridity (often due to the attempt to reconcile varying authoritative sources), which must be carefully distinguished from personification. Here, for example, it is likely that Langland was drawing from a version of the *Golden Legend*—a work cited repeatedly within the poem itself—which inserts its 'biography' of Mohammed within its chapter on Pope Pelagius. Retelling Mohammed's life as a travesty of Christ's, the *Legend* provides Mohammed with a John-the-Baptist precursor, a 'very famous cleric who was angry because he had been unable to obtain the honours he desired in the Roman Curia', who trains the dove to seek out Mohammed as public proof of God's favour.⁶⁵ Stefano Mula, working from Barbara Fleith's examination of some 950 Latin versions of the *Legend*, points to the evident confusion that arose from retitling or glossing the section on Pelagius: in 15 manuscripts the chapter is known variously as '*De Gestis, Cronica, Langobardorum historia*, but also, more interestingly for us, *Machometus*'.⁶⁶ Unwary readers could have been led to see a continuity between Pope, cardinal, and Prophet. It seems that Langland—conflating the high-ranking cleric with Mohammed himself—participated in that confusion. Perhaps

⁶⁵ In Latin, '*Clericus quidam valde famosus, cum in Romana curia honorem, quem cupiebat, assequi non potuisset, indignatus...*' from Jacobi A Voragine, *Legenda Aurea: Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta*, 2nd edn, ed. by Th. Graesse (Leipzig: Impensis Librariae Arnoldianae, 1850), 827. English trans. from 'Ch. 181: Saint Pelagius, Pope / The History of the Lombards', in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993/2012), 753–70, esp. 756.

⁶⁶ Stefano Mula, 'Muhammad and the Saints: The History of the Prophet in the *Golden Legend*', *Modern Philology* 101/2 (2003), 175–88, esp. 186–88.

this was due to a muddled translation, but the ‘evidence’ that Mohammed was originally a Christian happens to serve Langland’s conception of Christian reunification quite well.

Will, narrating his vision, continues: ‘And now comeþ *Spes* and spekeþ, þat haþ aspied þe lawe, | And telleþ noȝt of the Trinite þat took hym hise lettres’ (B.XVII.33–34). This phrasing ‘telleþ noȝt of the Trinite’ identifies a major theological ‘defect’ in *Spes*’s law, and accords strikingly with *Mandeville*’s account of Muslim belief per the Qur’an: ‘Also when men spekith of the Fader, Sone, and Holy Gost, they sey tho beth | 3 persons and noght oo God, for her *Ackaron* spekith noght therof, for he toucheth | noght of the Trinité’ (ll. 1281–83).⁶⁷ So too does *Anima*’s ‘For Sarzens han somewhat semyng to oure beleue’ (B.XV.392) contrast with *The Book of John Mandeville* professing that ‘Sarasyns byleveth so neygh our fay, they beth lightly converted when men telle hem the lawe of Crist’ (ll. 1269–70). The C-text takes this argument further, extending it to a variety of believers (XVII.252–54):

For sethe þat this Sarrasines, scribz, and this Iewes
Haen a lyppe of oure bileue, the lihtlokour, me thynketh
They sholde turne, hoso trauayle wolde of þe Trinite teche hem.

For its account of Muslim faith, *Mandeville* has in turn drawn upon the Latin *Tractatus de statu Saracenorum*, which if not written by the Dominican William of Tripoli, seems based on his *Notitia de Machometo* (1271), but the *Tractatus*’s description of Muslim reception of Trinitarian theology is ambiguous: ‘They are amazed when they hear about the mystery of the divine [...] Trinity, without knowledge of which no one on earth can be acquainted with the true God’.⁶⁸ Less ambiguously, Matthew of Paris writes that ‘Many of the Saracens believe that there is one God, the Creator of all men: they have, however, no belief in the Trinity, which they reject entirely’.⁶⁹ Langland’s figuring of *Spes* as simply ignorant of the Trinity—in the sense that the Trinity has not yet been revealed,

⁶⁷ Tamarah Kohanski and Benson, C. David, eds, *The Book of John Mandeville* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications/TEAMS, 2007), 55.

⁶⁸ ‘LI. *De divina trinitate. Mirantur, quando audiunt divine et deifice trinitatis misterium, sine cuius cognitione non habetur de Deo vero vera scientia*’, from William of Tripoli’s *Tractatus de statu Saracenorum*, in *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge*, ed. Hans Prutz (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1883), 597; English trans. from Iain Macleod Higgins, ed. and trans., *The Book of John Mandeville with Related Texts*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011), 244.

⁶⁹ ‘*De fide Sarracenorum secundum Machomet. Credunt multi Sarraceni unum Deum esse omnium creatorem. De Trinitate autem nihil sentiunt, sed omnino contempnunt*’, from Matthæi Parisiensis, *Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, 3, ed. by Henry Richards Luard (London: Longman, et al., 1876), 352–53; English trans. from *Matthew Paris’s English History*, 1, trans. by J. A. Giles (London: George Bell, 1889), 21.

spiritually, to Spes—allows the narrative to evade the historical Muslim rejection of Trinitarian theology, due to its perceived incompatibility with monotheism.

The narrator's desire for a crusade for conversion is given expression as well in the *topoi* of chivalric romance that resituate Langland's biblical stories within his social imaginary. Langland's young Christ in the B-text's passus XVIII (C-text XX), rides astride an ass, bootless, without spurs or spear, looking like a hopeful squire on his way to be dubbed a knight. Langland's habit of delaying recognition takes the form of the narrator imagining that Jesus looks somewhat like the Samaritan but also Piers Plowman, blending in the one figure biblical and English contexts. Faith heralds his arrival as a son of David, and tells the narrator conspiratorially that, at the forthcoming joust in Jerusalem, Jesus will be wearing Piers' arms, his helmet and armour and tunic. B-text passus XVI (C-text XVIII) has anachronistically summarised Jesus's youth, with Piers Plowman in the role of the avuncular vavasour, teaching 'fightyng kouþe' and 'lechecraft'—Jesus proving such an apt pupil of healing that he is later accused of witchcraft. The ease of Langland's adoption of chivalric romance is an affordance of OE poetry's hybridisation of Christ as spiritual war-band leader, and that figure's evolution in literature. Just as *The Dream of the Rood* poet figured Christ as active in the poem's time, so does Langland view Christ as working in his own, in the appearance of an English knight.

Langland's chivalric Christ has a central part to play in his poem's rhetoric of crusading conversion, both in looking forward and in condensing the past for figural signification. When the Jews accuse the young Jesus of sorcery through the power of 'Mahond' (a medieval slur on the name of Mohammed) and through heresy, 'Jesus' responds by calling them Satan worshippers:

And mysseide þe Iewes manliche, and manaced hem to bete,
And knocked on hem wiþ a corde, and caste adoun hir stalles
That in chirche chaffareden or chaungeden any moneie, (B.XVI.127–29)

Vnkynde and vnkunynge!' quod Crist, and with a roep smoet hem,
And ouerturned in þe temple here tables and here stalles,
And drof hem out alle þat þer bouhte and solde, (C.XVIII.127–29)

To situate this anti-Jewish rhetoric in a context nearer Langland's day, the Fourth Lateran Council's Canon 68 required those of the Jewish or Muslim faith to advertise their religion through their dress, ostensibly to prevent Christians from conducting unknowing business of any kind with them; in England, the 1274 Statute of Jewry established the identification as two joined tablets, signifying

Mosaic law.⁷⁰ Further statutes under Edward I prohibited Jewish loans that charged interest or were deemed ‘usurious’, with the intent of driving Jewish financiers into trades or physical labour; exacted a special tax as if from a population of Jewish serfs; and restricted Jewish membership in guilds—which would often have had stalls in churches. Almost 300 Jewish people were hanged after being convicted of coin-clipping or forgery.⁷¹ Finally, Edward I effectively expropriated all Jewish holdings, before in 1290 expelling Jewish people from England entirely. Just as Langland previously condensed Meed’s influence from the history of the fourteenth century, his language here recalls the turbulence from a century prior. The English persecution of Jews seems to have a historical resonance, for Langland, with the biblical account of Christ and the moneylenders—suggesting to Langland that, in his own day, a ‘joust in Jerusalem’ must be near.

When unmoored from its social imaginary—specifically the contemporaneous anxieties about the three estates, English kingship and the papacy, Crusades and the Holy Land—the poem’s use of genres can fragment into magpie-like borrowings. It is contemporaneous event that orders the poem’s figural language and genre frames: the otherwise idiosyncratic figuring of the Samaritan as Love, and his tending for the half-alive victim (and what we might also proleptically read as Christ caring for his own crucified body), points to the Knights Templar, whose mission initially was to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land from predation by outlaws and highwaymen (Pope Clement V dissolved the wealthy and powerful Templar order in 1312). The Samaritan explains this threat:

For Outlawe is in þe wode and vnder bank lotieþ,
 And may ech man see and good mark take
 Who is bihynde and who bifore and who ben on horse;
 For he halt hym hardier on horse þan he þat is a foote. (B.XVII.103–06, not in C-text)

Just as the Samaritan takes the wounded man to a grange for medical attention and convalescence, Knights Templar might take the seriously wounded to hospices operated by the Knights Hospitaller.⁷²

⁷⁰ Much of the following summarised material is drawn from Paul Brand, ‘Jews and the Law in England, 1275–90’, *English Historical Review* 115/464 (2000), 1138–58.

⁷¹ Langland repeatedly uses coin forgery in a theological context, arguing that if the die from which a coin is struck is correct, it retains some authenticity even though the material of the coin itself is worth less. See Anima’s discussion of the ‘lussheburwes’ at B.XV.346–57, and Liberum Arbitrium’s at C.XVII.78–93. At C.XVII.168, Liberum Arbitrium explains the status of ‘Macometh’ as a ‘cardinal of court’ with ‘Ac for he was lyk a Lossheborw Y leue Oure Lorde hym lette’.

⁷² Tenuously perhaps, but not beyond Langland’s syncretic geography, this Holy Land ‘grange’ may point to the Preceptory of Chippenham, which in 1338 became the Hospitallers main infirmary in England; it is about five present-day miles from Suffolk’s Newmarket, which corresponds with the grange’s oddly precise location ‘Wel sixe mile or seuene beside þe newe market’ (B.XVII.73, and similarly at C.XIX.74).

Langland's language, 'Herberwed hym at an hostrie and þe hostiler called' could be interpreted as something like inn-and-innkeeper but the wounded man's condition argues for a monastery's infirmary-and-its minder of guests.⁷³ Densely intertwined, these conceptual linkages of personifications and biblical personages emerge from historical currents, but are dressed in the visionary apparel of coming-to-be, the numinous not-yet. Chivalric romance, with its might and marvels, best fits this part of Langland's prophetic crusade for the salvation of souls, though Langland's assembly of his poem relies on lived associations as much as literary distinctions. From its championing by Edward III and its pageant-like performances by Richard II, chivalric romance was also the preferred language of those engaged in the notional and nominal crusades of the latter part of the fourteenth century. Langland's distrust of crusading 'holy war', in which souls would certainly be lost to Christ's church, is tempered by his enthusiasm for an evangelical campaign for a united Christendom. In fact, political figures of Langland's era, employing the debased rhetorical currency that Langland so decried,

upgraded otherwise blatantly political or economic ventures to the status of 'crusades'. This was the case of at least two major English expeditions: Bishop Henry Despenser's crusade in Flanders in 1383 and John of Gaunt's crusade in Castille in 1386. The first, duly preached as a crusade with full papal bulls to support it, and with the added novelty of offering plenary crusading indulgences on commission or in exchange for financial aid, met with huge popular support.⁷⁴

As has been remarked upon, the public preaching and confessions described in *passus V* were pre-Crusade activities. In Langland's idealistic version, in which Reason rules, some of the crowd experience true contrition. That the pilgrims decide in favour of staying to work on the half-acre indicts subsequent history. The 'pure tene' of *Piers Plowman*, in response the priest's contention that his lifelong, creed-based belief is no pardon, surely gains a dramatic irony in contrast to the plenary indulgences handed out to the 'crusaders'. Yet the B- and C-text's use of chivalric romance genre does not satirise: the eyewitness quality to the narration of Jesus's procession into Jerusalem is, gloriously but briefly, charged with anticipation. One might think of Richard II's coronation procession in 1377—though Langland's habit is not to isolate such a moment and report on it in a

⁷³ The MED offers for 'hostrie', besides public house, '(c) a hospice for pilgrims or poor travellers; the guest house of a monastery', and for 'hostiler', '1. The guest master or mistress in a religious house'. 'hostrī(e (n.))' in electronic *MED*, based on *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956-2001); also, 'hōstīlēr' (n.) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu>>.

⁷⁴ Marco Nievergelt, 'Conquest, Crusade and Pilgrimage: The Alliterative "Morte Arthure" in its Late Ricardian Crusading Context', *Arthuriana* 20/2 (2010), 89–116, 99.

chronicler's style. In his narrative, it is the contemplation of the temporal alignment between earthly and divine coronation, that transitive movement, that clarifies the will. Langland casts a longer eye on history, so that a chain of persons and circumstances presages his *figura*'s arrival.

Enactive Enigma

Langland's pivoting among the connotative 'guises' of an object's identity will be familiar to anyone who has encountered OE riddles. The decorated book, or Bible, suggested by the fragmentary Riddle 67 (K-D) is a wondrous thing ('*wrætlice wiht*') that has neither mouth nor feet ('*nænne muð hafað | fet ne*') but can teach people throughout in its long life.⁷⁵ The book that appears in passus XVIII (in the B-text, XX in the C-text) is a creature with only two eyes: 'Thanne was þer a wight wiþ two brode eijen | Book highte that beaupeere, a bold man of speche' (ll. 229–30). That Book is described only in terms of its two eyes would seem to have little to do with personification as a conceptual visualisation, and more to do with the polyvalent economy of riddle discourse and its speaking objects: Book is literally an eyewitness to Christ's birth, his walking on water, and the earthquake at the crucifixion, before turning to the Harrowing of Hell, in which 'I, Book, wole be brent, but Iesus rise to lyue' (l. 254).

Similarly, the Trinity takes various forms in *Piers Plowman*; as already discussed it is made diagrammatically visible as Faith describes something like the *Scutum Fidei* ('shield of faith') in the B-text's passus XVI (C-text passus XVIII). Subsequently, the Samaritan tells the dreaming Will about the Trinity as well, first through its conceptual articulation as a hand, the interaction of its fingers and palm; then as a torch or taper. Either explication could be easily renarrated as a riddle: a few of the Exeter Book riddles are understood to deal with specifically religious 'items' such as a chalice or paten (K-D 48), the Bible (K-D 26, 67), even 'Creation' (K-D 40, 66, 94); while clerkly instruments such as pens and inkhorns (K-D 51, 60, 88, 93) seem also well-represented.⁷⁶ But if the Samaritan's treatment of the candle as an object-in-time remains congruent with OE riddling discourse, Langland has reconstituted his narrative to foreground sets of relations: between a singular object and its

⁷⁵ Riddle 67 (K-D), in Bernard J. Muir, ed., *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 1, 2nd edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994/2000), 362.

⁷⁶ From the index of possible solutions in Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 483–84.

makeup, that object and its functions, and the interpretation given to those functions by people. As with the Tree of Charity, the initial view is somewhat schematic (similarly at C.XIX.169–77, line 174 adding that candlelight ‘serueth this swynkares to se by a-nyhtes’):

‘For to a torche or to a tapur þe Trinite is likned—
 As wex and a weke were twyned togideres,
 And þanne a fyre flawmyng forþ oute of bope.
 And as wex and weke and warm fir togideres
 Fostren forþ a flawmbe and a fair leye
 So dooth þe Sire and þe Sone and also *Spiritus Sanctus*
 Fostren forþ amonges folk loue and bileue,
 That alle kynne Cristene clenseþ of synnes. (B.XVII.204–11)

The initial representation decomposes a candle into its constituent wax and wick, with a fire derived from both, then refocuses on the candle’s effects, the attendant warmth and light, which are mapped to love and belief.

But this diagrammatic view of the candle, Trinity, and its importance to a faith community quickens at moments, as when the Samaritan describes its appearance to all unnatural creatures opposed to love and life: as if the candle’s flame is suddenly blown out, and only the wick smoulders, God’s ‘grace wipoute mercy’ (B.XVII.215, similarly at C.XIX.181). A further transformation then occurs, as the smouldering wick suggests coals in a brazier—which in the context of those working (we might imagine writing) on a winter night, ranks well below the usefulness of anything that also provides fire and light as well. The Holy Ghost must likewise glow and blaze if the Trinity is to offer grace and forgiveness—and here the love and faith cast off by the candle is reversed to become the breath that fans it into flame. This spiritualised flame is carried into a new comparison: just as the sun’s heat melts winter icicles into mist and water, the Holy Ghost transforms the Father and Son’s power into mercy. Once again, however, the Samaritan strikes a rhetorical balance: while only the merciful can benefit from God’s grace, being merciful is sufficient to earn grace’s benefit. The image of wax dropping onto a hot coal and starting to burn, to ‘solacen hem þat mowe [noȝt] se, þat sitten in derknesse’ (B.XVII.234, and similarly at C.XIX.200), is contrasted with the sustained flame provided by the wick, *i.e.*, Christ, *i.e.*, Christian faith—making it clear that the former instance is an argument for the ‘righteous pagan’. This assertion that a loving kindness is the essential basis of Christianity affords Langland the opportunity to depreciate once more the value of ‘al þe pardon of Pampilon and

Rome | and indulgences ynowe' (B.XVII.253–54, and similarly at C.XIX.219–20)—not because they are in themselves worthless, but because they cannot operate without true compassion and repentance.

This brief excursus demonstrates, intratextually, what Langland's narrator means by 'kynde wit', the sort that is awakened in Will through his observation of the mirror of Middle Earth. It is noteworthy that this mirroring is not meant to create a maximally abstract model, but instead to preserve an environmental embeddedness. Crucial to Langland's thinking on natural intelligence, this technique refuses the stripping away of 'accidental' attributes to expose a higher reality, as in neo-Platonic models. For Langland, there is something more persuasive in reading the specifics of one's material surroundings in relation to the observer—it is a perspective that cooperates with the divine creation in its particulars. The initial view of the candle appears the most generic, briefly mapping physical and spiritual properties, but Langland goes on to make intensive use of the candle's composition, deconstructing its properties, qualities, and functions in relation to the persons of the Trinity. In Langland's formulation, ambivalent as always, the Trinity, or meditation on the Trinity, is then present in the candle—notably, by night as an aid to a clerk's writing, or even a winter's night, when its light and heat are gratefully received. Conversely, the gloomy room warmed only by a coal brazier that spits flame fitfully makes present to the senses, in dimness and smoke, the limits of human righteousness. That 'something more persuasive' relates in part to enactivist cognition, and the insight that our sense-making does not rely on accessing a perfect scale model of the world 'in' our heads. Visual perceptions, for instance, are not a matter of feeding retinal projection to a neurological broadcast booth; what we see is an affordance of the information pre-organised in the 'ambient optic array', as Gibson has called it.⁷⁷ An envisioned candle's perceived size, its distance from the viewer, the assembly of the object 'candle' against its background: all of these permutations can be plotted within and by virtue of the array, with the comparison of viewpoints taking the place of brute computation. If it is unsurprising that a homilist, for instance, might provide as a '*simile*' (C.XIX.161) a familiar object in a familiar setting, it is clear that Langland's 'like' extends beyond surface appearance, or the embodiment of attribute, to function and affordance: the Samaritan's candle is almost wholly conditioned by contextual relationships: to the Trinity, to other forms of warmth and

⁷⁷ Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 58–84.

light (coals and kex), to people (workers, a faith community, the unsaved). Langland appears to have reached the same conclusion as contemporary enactivist theorists, that engagement with one's environment *qua* an assembly of salient relationships is more effective than attempting to represent its appearance to a fictional disinterested observer. It is not pressing too much, I think, to see the role of 'Imaginatyf' as very much this thinking 'through' an environment already given to a reader's senses. Yet Langland's strategy, to bind conceptual associations rhetorically to the perception of objects and actions, yields another, cumulative effect that C. S. Lewis remarked upon in his appreciation of Langland's moments of sublimity, which Lewis credited to Langland's 'power of rendering imaginable what was before only intelligible' so that it is 'concrete', 'fully incarnate'.⁷⁸ Zeeman describes this kinaesthetic yoking of imagined sensation to idea as an 'immanence':

Langland is rarely explicit about his theoretical reflections: they tend to remain "immanent" in the poem's textual "matter" [...] their presence is signaled by effects of repetition, pattern, contrast, opposition, and negation.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the reader who might easily connect, without study, Langland's poetics of breath of the B-text's passus V and passus XVII—the instances are spoken by Repentaunce (V) and the Samaritan (XVII), with Repentaunce addressing God on the generosity of the sacrifice of his son and the Samaritan, as discussed above, promoting the Trinity. Repentaunce moves swiftly through the crucifixion (Christ and the eclipse are united in the line: 'The sonne for sorwe þerof lees siȝt for a tyme', B.V.492), to convey the sacrifice's effect:

Feddest þo wiþ þi fresshe blood oure forefadres in derknesse:
Populus qui ambulabat in tenebris vidit lucem magnam.
 And þe liȝt þat lepe out of þee, Lucifer it blente,
 And blewe alle þi blessed þennes into þe blisse of Paradys!

(495)

The conceptual associations are differently ordered, but overlap: Christ is the light that 'leaps' from God the Father—a phrasing that suggests Christ's six leaps of the OE poem 'Christ II', the fifth leap being in fact the Harrowing of Hell.⁷⁹ Cristina Maria Cervone connects this leap with Ymaginatif's description of the incarnation at passus XIV: 'For þe heiȝe Holy Ghost heuene shal tocleue, | And loue shal lepe out after into þis lowe erþe' (B.XIV.140–41, and similarly at C.XIV.84–85).⁸⁰ (The often

⁷⁸ Lewis, *Allegory*, 160–61.

⁷⁹ See ll. 720–40 in *Christ II*, in Bjork, *Old English Poems*, 23.

⁸⁰ Cervone, 'Truelove Tradition', 27–56, esp. 44–46.

surprising conceptual avenues available to insular poetry are indicated by her research into poets' manipulation of the synonymous link between 'leap' and 'spring', in order to pivot on further associations of 'spring' with seasonal regeneration.)

Scholars have marvelled over the kinaesthetic power of a light blowing the blessed into bliss (the C-text has the functional but colourless 'brouhte' at VII.235), but we can see that Langland explicates this particular link in passus XVII, where those 'forefadres in derknesse' reappear as those 'þat sitten in derknesse' (B.XVII.234, and similarly at C.XIX.200). Christ is specifically the candle's wick, but still explicitly associated with (candle) light; the Samaritan says 'þat þe Holy Goost glowewþ but as a glede | Til þat lele loue ligge on hym and blowe' (B.XVII.224–25, and 'Til þat loue and bileue lelliche to hym blowe' at C.XIX.191). Love, light, breath, and Christ are linked together; B-text passūs V and XVII are mirror images: light-breath-love and love-breath-flame.

Probably the most visible, and most innovative, demonstration of Langland's conceptual manipulations is the Tree of Charity, which both suggests the literary tradition of *The Dream of the Rood* and yet transforms it. Again, enigmatic transitions are at work that evoke OE riddling discourse, and its proliferations of meaning. The answer to Riddle 53, which opens 'Ic seah on bearwe beam hlifian', has been solved as battering ram, gallows, or cross, depending on how one reads 'beam'.⁸¹ Both this riddle and *The Dream of the Rood* rely on activating disparate areas of connotation for *beam*: as living tree, as gallows, as beam of light, thus forming a three-part conceptual complex. Of the *Rood* poem, Andy Orchard writes that 'it seems likely that the poet is consciously exploiting such *doubles entendres* for artistic effect, blurring boundaries, and inviting his audience to make connection and identifications that deepen an already rich text'.⁸²

Like *The Dream of the Rood*, *Piers Plowman* features a living tree and a martial, high-status Christ, but Langland maintains an apparent distinction between the (non-speaking) Tree of Charity and his Christ-like figure, Piers Plowman. Nonetheless, Piers is, in the B-text passus, closely

⁸¹ F. Dietrich proposed battering ram in 1859, while more recently Jonathan Wilcox has offered 'gallows', and Andy Orchard, 'cross', the latter two thinking intertextually of the use of *beam* in 'The Dream of the Rood'. See Franz Dietrich, 'Die Räthsel des Exeterbuchs: Würdigung, Lösung, und Herstellung', *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum* 11 (1859), 448–90; Jonathan Wilcox, 'New Solutions to Old English Riddles 17 and 53', *Philological Quarterly* 69 (1990), 393–408; Orchard, 'Cross-References', 225–53.

⁸² Orchard, 'Cross-References', 230.

associated with the Tree of Charity. First introduced narratively by Anima, the tree takes diagrammatic shape as an assemblage of qualities and virtues, a singular entity with its roots in the hearts of all people:

‘It is a ful trie tree,’ quod he, ‘trewely to telle.
 Mercy is þe more þerof; þe myddul stock is ruþe;
 The leues ben lele words, þe lawe of Holy Chirche;
 The blosmes beþ buxom speche and benigne lokynge;
 Pacience hatte þe pure tree, and pore simple of herte,
 And so þoruȝ God and goode men groweþ þe fruyt Charite.’
 [...]
 ‘It groweþ in a gardyn,’ quod he, ‘þat God made hymselfe;
 Amyddes mannes body þe more is of þat stoke.
 Herte highte þe herber þat it inne groweþ,
 And *Liberum Arbitrium* haþ þe lond to ferme,
 Vnder Piers þe Plowman to piken it and weden it.’ (B.XVI.4–17)

In the C-text passus XVIII, Anima is an aspect of *Liberum Arbitrium* (free judgment) and rather than ascend in a dream-within-a-dream, Will is brought by *Liberum Arbitrium* to a land called *Cor-hominis*, or ‘the heart of man’, and in the middle of an ‘erber’ Will sees an ‘ympe’, a grafted tree, that the narrator first tells us is called *Ymago-Dei*. *Liberum Arbitrium* then says that the tree is named ‘Treweloue’, was planted by the Trinity, and its fruit is called *Caritas*. Langland’s pointing to the ‘Truelove’ conceptual *schemata*, in which the persons of God and, usually, Mary, are leaves of the ‘Love’ plant is congruent with Will’s earlier instruction by Ymaginatif, observing in the natural world the signs of God’s organisation of reality. However, as Cristina Maria Cervone emphasises, ‘Langland’s use of the Truelove tradition appears firmly Christological’, keeping a focus on Piers-Christ (or, in the C-text, the more precise interaction of God’s gift of free will with choosing Christ).⁸³

In their edition of *Piers Plowman*, Salter and Pearsall note that a tree structure was popular in the medieval era, as it remains today, for presenting relationships, or causal or temporal sequences, or relationships over time; they add that there are ‘also symbolic connections with the tree of Knowledge (and its apples), the tree of Life, and the tree of Christ’s cross, with its three stems, of cedar, cypress, and pine, symbolic of the Trinity.’⁸⁴ Yet there is in Langland’s language a preference for the non-symbolic, the instantiated, graspable truth. Thus, the Tree of Charity is an orchard tree, becoming so laden with fruit that it needs three support poles for its branches. The poles, named as the power of

⁸³ Cervone, ‘Truelove Tradition’, 27–56, esp. 44–46, 49.

⁸⁴ Note to line 7 of passus XIX, Salter and Pearsall, *Piers Plowman*, 144–45.

God the Father, ‘þe passion and þe power’ of Christ, and the grace of the Holy Ghost, are instrumentalised rather than personified. That they are of equal length, *i.e.*, have parity, is important to Langland, who has Abraham describe the Trinity as ‘Thre leodes in oon lyþ, noon lenger þan ooþer, | Of oon muchel and mygth in mesure and in lengþe’ (B.XVI.181–82). Emily Steiner explains that these poles have a migratory background:

Langland’s Tree of Charity episode was likely inspired by the ‘Discovery of the Cross’ / ‘Life of Adam and Eve’ stories mentioned above. In these stories, Adam’s son Seth places three seeds from the forbidden fruit under the tongue of his dying father. The seeds sprout into three trees of remarkably equal height whose sacred wood, centuries later, become the building materials for the Cross. As the history of salvation unfolds, the three trees are continually identified as Trinitarian symbols.⁸⁵

Moses, David, Solomon, and Christ’s crucifiers find them, and then they are found once more by Constantine’s mother, St Helena, as told in the OE poem *Elene*. In the B-text, Will’s curiosity gets the better of him, and he begins questioning Piers about the provenance of the three poles: ‘In what wode þei woxen, and where þat þei grewed, | For alle are þei aliche longe, noon lasse þan ooþer, | And to my mynde, as me þynkeþ, on o more þei grewed; | And of o greetnesse and grene of greyn þei semen’ (XVI.56–59). Piers responds that a second tree has furnished these cuttings, which grows in the ground of goodness, and it signifies the Trinity. Will’s request is not unusual—as discussed, trees could have a distinguished provenance, with roots even in the Garden of Eden—but Piers looks at him sharply (‘egrelich’) and Will refocuses on the fruits on the Tree of Charity.

The elaborative attention to natural detail that concerns itself with the seeds of Adam’s apple is reflected in Langland’s orchardist’s vocabulary, with references to a ‘kaylewey bastard’ (B.XVI.69) and ‘Maidenhode’ (l. 71)—these two are not coincidentally imported pears popular enough in England to have been grafted to grow in monastery and noble gardens. In the late thirteenth century, Edward I purchased both Caillou and Maiden (*pucelle*) grafted pear trees to grow at Berwick.⁸⁶ The pears’ combined heritage, then, of noble and monastic estates make them a physical manifestation of the fruits of an English church, just as embodied in the figure of Piers Plowman as its overseer. In the C-text, Liberum Arbitrium is instead the caretaker of an ‘appul-tree’, and the discussion is not of named varieties but size, sweetness, and quickness to rot, as well as the best placement: ‘Tho that

⁸⁵ Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*, 189.

⁸⁶ Joan Morgan, *The Book of Pears: The Definitive History and Guide to Over 500 Varieties* (London: Ebury Press, 2015), ff. 63–67.

sitten in þe sonne-syde sonnore aren rype, | Swettore and saueroire and also more grettore | Than tho
that selde haen þe sonne and sitten in þe north half' (C.XVIII.64–66). North here is not simply the
shady side but also the location for Hell.

Langland carefully maps correspondences for the poles' support as well: the power of God
helps the human heart to withstand the 'winds' of covetousness that sights of the world inspire; the
passion of Christ subdues the flesh's winds, sensual desires that would lead to rot; and the grace given
by the Holy Ghost prevents the devil from making off with the mature fruit. Langland further has the
tree's maturation correspond to human life: if greed enters the heart early enough, there will be no
place for charity. The winds of sensual desire, Piers explains, arrive 'in flouryng tyme', *i.e.*, sexual
'blossoming'. ('Maidenhode' is linked to the Maiden pear with the comment 'swete wiþouten
swellyng'.) These winds are persistent throughout life, and in addition, the devil shakes the roots and
throws up to the fruits 'vnkynde neighebores, | Bakbiteris brewechest, brawleris and chideris', climbs
a ladder rungged with lies (B.XVI.41–44). This list of terrible neighbours, backbiting troublemakers,
brawlers, and scolds captures something of the scourges of adulthood.

If Langland, with the Tree of Charity, acknowledges its genealogy, this tree's presence effaces
all others, just as the New Law effaces the Old. In contrast to the 'forbidden fruit' of the Garden of
Eden, after B-text Piers and C-text *Liberum Arbitrium* have described the tree's fruit to Will, he asks
for a sample: 'I preide Piers to pulle adoun an appul, and he wolde, | And suffre me to assiaen what
sauour it hadde' (B.XVI.73–74, and in slightly different wording at C.XVIII.103–05). This
unremarkable request is nonetheless the essence of the character's purpose, in its cognitive aspect: to
understand the good and act to attain it. Piers' disturbance of the fruit (in the C-text *Liberum*
Arbitrium sends Elde to shake the branches so the ripe fruit will fall) results in the crop crying out
(matrimony, perhaps comically given the narrator's sometimes rueful commentary, makes a 'foul
noise'). This vision's persistent tagging of sensory modes corresponds strikingly with medieval
mnemonic arts, and knowledge of the effect that associated sense impressions have on memorial
salience and recall:

Memory-images must speak, they must not be silent. They sing, they play music, they lament, they groan in pain. They also often give off odor, whether sweet or rotten. And they can also have taste or tactile qualities.⁸⁷

Langland's dilation on the kinds of fruit, their appearance, taste (sour or sweet), and ripeness—even their outcries—has more than a strictly allegorical aspect. As the critical fascination with this scene evidences, Langland's shaping of the narrative has brought this imagined, yet-rooted-in-experiential-detail illustration to salient life. The 'life' of these now-fallen apples heightens the narrative stakes for Langland's reframing (pre-framing, in fact) of the Harrowing of Hell: as soon as they fall, the devil snatches them up, the narrator emphasising that even the souls of the great Jewish patriarchs—Abraham, Isaiah, Sampson, Samuel, even St John the Baptist—were prey to the devil before Christ's incarnation, and were thus taken to '*Limbo Inferni*' to await Christ's Harrowing: 'To go robbe þat rageman and reue þe fruyt fro hym' (B.XVI.89, and similarly at C.XVIII.122, with 'ransake' for 'robbe' and 'apples' for 'fruyt'). At this point, salvation history begins, though as demonstrated, it has been thoroughly renarrated so that divine history can illuminate Langland's era. Moving across individual, social, and cultural scales through Will, his interlocutors, and their narratives, Langland through visionary environments weaves together chronologies as well: that of biblical history, the English church and state, the tumult of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and divine eschatology.

⁸⁷ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 97.

Conclusion

This exploration of the visionary and marvellous environments in the selected OE and ME texts has foregrounded their complex correspondence with their social imaginary, and discussed their influence on alternative narrative sense-making. While these environments are informed by their social imaginary, they also work to transform the social imaginary within the text, imaginatively rewriting and rechannelling its network of associations—often recursively, through the introduction of a series of envisioned environments. The cognitive frames and operations that visionary and marvellous environments afford are demonstrably the crucial elements in this reimagining. They permit the creation and interaction of unconventional, chimerical images in meaningful settings, suffused with unanchored emotional salience. But visionary and marvellous elements of narrative also recruit something more, which is the reproduction of the need to report unusual and portentous experiences. In this way, the visionary environment is deeply (though not exclusively) implicated with vernacular speech because, as the landscape of its social imaginary, it imagines its reproduction socially. Where *The Dream of the Rood* differs from the biblical account of the crucifixion, it is less to translate than to relocate its narrative—not simply to facilitate an Anglo-Saxon audience’s comprehension, but so that they can see themselves in its thought-world. Thus, apposite habits of mind are coordinated with the expression of social status and connection, temperament and achievements, a weighing-up of their subjects on either side of the fulcrum of conflict. Some elements of a source—notably dreaming as numinous message or portent—might need little contextualisation, while patristic figural readings seem to have been inflected by a fateful Anglo-Saxon *schemata* in which the past weighs on and informs the present. Guðlac fears, for example, that his past actions have determined his end in life, but his sainthood is confirmed by his certitude that God has set his fate for him, which dispels those fears taking place around him.

The rood owes its charged presence to an assembly of heterodox associations: Christ’s crucifixion, yes, but also a thought-world that includes non-redemptive gallows, blood sacrifice, charismatic war band leaders, the dressing of wooden idols. (While sensible of ongoing critical argument over cultural practices, this argument’s emphasis on the social imaginary asks only that

these concepts be generally salient—just as scholars of contemporary fiction need to be able to treat the popularity of vampires without demonstrating a widespread belief in them.) So too, *Guðlac's Life* inserts the solitary saint into a hostile, imaginal environment that depicts the anchorite's fear, loneliness, and temptation by pride in parallel with an animosity aimed specifically at his presence—the latter easily analogised to historical responses by local inhabitants and communities to Christian incursion. While *Guðlac A* enacts its landscape in a higher, sanctified register that performs a divine transfer of title, *Guðlac B* redresses Guðlac's life of self-humiliation with a minutely-observed death scene—befitting a warrior-hero of legend, but also evidence of the evolution of that earlier Anglo-Saxon mental space. Langland's model of transitivity, of the partial identity of coordinated movements between incommensurate scales, is apropos here: Guðlac dies a noble-hermit, cloaked in the accompanying status of that figure, within a social imaginary informed by Anglo-Saxon monasticism.

OE poetry's *a* and *b* half-lines have occasion to sit in elaborating or balancing juxtaposition in ME texts as well. Middle English poets may lose some of the taut compression with which OE poetry could pivot, but their society is often simply larger, more interrelated within its centres of urbanity and yet more divided between urban and agrarian poles. Apposition may expand from the half line to the stanza, but the act of cumulative estimation persists, as does its inverse, a measuring through opposition, for which Middle English was well-suited. If the Bakhtinian carnival of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, with its irredeemable gluttons, drunkards, and larcenous brewers can only be spoken in their language, they also, in atavistically opposing Piers' efforts, magnify them. By the fourteenth century as well, the residue of past social imaginaries has become more visible due to second-hand appearances as ancient texts. *St Erkenwald* is in this sense the moment when hagiographic *inventio* encounters the form of history found in chronicles. The saint can even be overshadowed by the pagan judge's redemption, figured 'merely' as an agent of apotheosis, because the narrative, in recuperating the just man with divine justice, achieves a new balancing of kinds of history. Knowledge is the ground of the *Pearl* poem, and introspective thought that of *Piers Plowman*. Both the *Pearl* narrator and Will are rebuked for their unrestrained appetite for learning, for understanding—but in this they figure a social desire, one being fed by the cultural transmissions instigated by trade, Crusade, and

pilgrimage. The travel to unfamiliar, exotic locations in both poems recapitulates the sensations of dislocation and elevation that arrive with new ways of thinking, the knowledge transfer performed in the pilgrims' befuddled dialogic interactions with overdetermined personifications.

On a structural level, this analysis also reveals that visionary environments, to the degree they are employed iteratively, incline toward homeostasis. The disjunctive effect of marvel—by definition, a violation of norm and expectation—tends to ramify throughout the social imaginary. While this perturbation can be expressed through temporal interactions (*e.g.*, in the back-and-forth of spoken dialogue), these events are not necessarily situated on a singular, supervening timeline. To the extent narrative events tend toward the episodic (*Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*), this creates the impression of a repeating series, with greater emphasis on narrative verticality, *i.e.*, travel between perceptual environments might be mapped to levels of reality. As critics have remarked of both works, their ends seem to open up a return to their beginnings. Yet the overlay of a unitary linear temporal structure (*The Dream of the Rood*, the *Life of St Guðlac* and *Guðlac* poems) can yield the impression of a conventional narrative's progress through chains of cause-effect relations. Of the texts studied, *St Erkenwald*—not coincidentally, a text that does not present an explicit dream-vision frame for its marvel—achieves a remarkable balance between these narrative structures. The poem introduces a cyclical historical plan in which place (St Paul's) constellates recurring patterns of events—only to halt this series, seemingly, with the interjection of Christian eschatology. Yet, because salvation history can be witnessed in its precursors, once *Erkenwald*'s judge is freed from his imprisonment, the poem delivers him to a heaven that strongly evokes the feasting and camaraderie of the Anglo-Saxon mead hall, now envisioned in its Christian fulfilment.

While they may offer radical rethinkings, these narratives' responses to the interdependencies of the social imaginary tend to reorganise meaning-bearing elements, not to anatomise or deconstruct them. Their hybridity, moreover, is not limited to its valorised expressions. Guðlac's fusion of Anglo-Saxon noble and desert father is of a piece with the air-borne demons' testing of monastic life: their appearances as a riotous English bestiary (of the kind that John Gower feared as well) and their claims to ancient seats in wooded groves. *St Erkenwald*'s judge may gesture toward the present dangers of heretical thought and secular leadership but is similarly rooted in place—his union of uprightness and

a non-Christian life cannot be (and is not) denied. Neither can, in a different sense, Langland's Sir Penetrans Damos, whose name blends an English honorific with biblical allusion (to the Latin text of 2 Timothy 3:6), yielding not the typically lecherous, avaricious friar, but a member of a chivalric brotherhood whose actions are devaluing two estates. In each instance, significance accumulates in the novel, at times quite nuanced, relations created by apposition and opposition, strengthening until a bottom-up interpretative frame emerges.

Though it is possible, and certainly useful, to situate these texts in their historical moments, this historicist move should not be confused with an attempt to unpack the social imaginary, whose existence is predicated upon its gestalt form and effects. 'Moderns' like ourselves will always struggle to bracket out what we know from what medieval people knew because our contemporary social imaginary is organised and given meaning by our 'vernacular' understandings of history, psychology, economics, physics, technology and modes of communication, and so on. The resulting hazy coherence of social knowledge, norms, and expectations necessarily informs our readings, even of medieval texts, with a sense of rightness or perplexed confusion. While we may intellectually allow for the substitution of facts, we cannot easily substitute the feeling of their correctness, or their belonging in a larger conceptual system. To know the content of someone's belief is not to know the feeling of that belief. Still, part of what is endlessly fascinating about medieval literature is (arguing about) the persistence and discontinuity in social imaginaries. The herbal and even lapidary interests of the *Pearl* poem do not diverge completely from ours, for instance; it remains socially current to find plants, spices, and stones marketed for their health benefits, though these benefits' connection to Christian theology and eschatology may not figure at all. Some other set of beliefs will facilitate the justification for their effects. But the *Pearl* poem relies upon just that connection in outlining the lineaments of divine knowledge in the earthly plane. Conversely, as discussed in that chapter, Gollancz's reading of *Pearl* offers a particularly Victorian response to what it sees as fatherly grief at the death of a young girl, which is at odds with medieval social norms regarding childhood death and the poem's deployment of courtly love motifs.

The goal of the research presented here was, perhaps counterintuitively, not to amass a base of evidence that could be pruned to a point of certainty but, rather, to press for the cultivation of a kind

of ‘bushiness’ that preserves the contingency, the possibilities, inherent in and vital to visionary environments. To that end, it aimed to compare apples to apples, to demonstrate that even narratives with similar interests diverged in their narrative strategies, that authors were deploying visionary and marvellous models not in simple imitation of classical rhetorical antecedents, but as an appeal to, an entry point for, specific audiences. That said, the works selected were of course pre-selected for consideration owing to a number of factors, not least of which was their recognition as ‘literature’, as narrative, as cultural artefact. While it is fascinating to explore these texts and their intersection with their social imaginaries, by virtue of their (justly celebrated) survival they exhibit an after-the-fact bias: that of works welcomed into the canon. Not unrelatedly, they also cluster around a particular intersection of gender, race, and class. Further study would be enriched by the inclusion of dream-visions responding to other social imaginaries—most immediately, one thinks of the Katherine Group and Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*—but also of dream-visions which were not socially validated.

St Erkenwald, on the other hand, leads away from the dream-vision genre toward the chronicle of legend, though still deeply engaged with envisioning the social imaginary. Though the marvellous remains, it is recontextualised by its existence in an imagined past. Perhaps an earlier text, Laȝamon’s *Brut* (dating from the end of the twelfth century) could cast light on the subsequent appearance of *St Erkenwald*, and its knowing references to chronicles of legends. A reconsideration of Laȝamon’s reworking of Wace’s *Roman de Brut* could elicit similar insights into the Anglo-Norman social imaginary merging with Laȝamon’s language, just as his versification has been remarked to combine Old English’s alliterating half-lines with iambs and end-rhymes. This would mean rethinking characters such as King Arthur and Merlin as figural constructions: Arthur perhaps as incarnated visionary *figura*, like Piers Plowman; and Merlin as literary *inventio*, related to *St Erkenwald*’s pagan judge. The imagined Arthurian environment, just as do Guðlac’s fens, surely has an active role in constructing the narrative, especially in its interactions with the characters, shaping and channelling their expression of social forces.

If a reader were to take a single, life-shaping thought from this excursion through medieval imaginations, I hope it would be a deeper appreciation of the immense reality-defining scope of that

word ‘imagination’—not as a fantasy overlaid on the brute, hard outlines of fact, but a field of possibility from which almost everything we know, including ourselves, emerges. The thought-worlds of medieval literature, in their likenesses and alterities, teach that, while the social imaginary that informs our present seems solid, stable, and enduring, it could be organised differently and still be meaningful. There is space for pagan sacrifice to rise into a lofty cathedral, for a lifeless barrow to become a saint’s shrine; or for travel from an herb garden to the heights of a celestial Jerusalem. There is space for more avenues of self-consciousness, for speaking trees, haunted hermits, and pearls of divine wisdom. In imagination, these spaces offer exciting, even erotic encounters—sometimes tense and fearful meetings—between a past that is still at work and an unfamiliar present, between local sights and visions of the far-away, between shared belief and strange practice. And while medieval English literature is by no means free of moral judgement regarding its mental spaces, it displays a wholesome tendency to hedge its bets. Almost every sentence of judgment has a hinge in the middle, a caesural space where humanity can bend and fold, so that poets can form new links with their phrases of assessment. The day of fixed, permanent judgement is always deferred, not for human hands. Even in thousand-year-old texts, we do not know how it all will turn out.

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