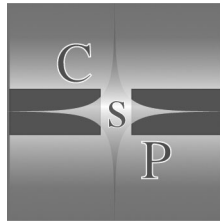


Text and Transmission in Medieval Europe

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Edited by

Chris Bishop



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: TEXT AND TRANSMISSION IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

CHRIS BISHOP, WALTER KUDRYCZ, JOHN MARTYN,
BRONWEN NEIL AND DIANE SPEED

The majority of the chapters in this work started life as papers presented at a conference at the Australian National University in September of 2005. The theme of that conference was *Text and Transmission in Early Medieval Europe* and the title of this book ultimately derives from that theme.

Scholars of the early Middle Ages are familiar with the notion of text as an inscribed document, whether that inscription occurs upon stone, metal, vellum or textiles, but the concept of inscription and, therefore, of text, can be extended to cover a range of evidence. Thus, one might speak of archaeological remains, land use patterns, traditional stories, remnant practices and revenant beliefs as constituting texts in their own right. Broadly defined then, text is the means by which we engage with the historical subject.

The medievalist, however, faces particular constraints in interpreting these texts through the agencies of their transmission. Questions such as who authored these texts, when and why, intersect with problems of transcription, translation and redaction to inform a complex discourse.

In order to illustrate this fact, plenary speakers at the conference were presented with framed leaves from a hand-written copy of *همان‌دش* [the *Shahnameh* or *Epic of the Kings*]. Completed by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around 390 AH (1000 CE), the poem recounts the mythical and historical past of Persia from the creation of the world until the Islamic conquest. Written by a Persian, in the Persian tongue, at a time when Persian independence had been compromised and when Arabic had gained ascendancy, the work was, and is, of enormous significance to the Persian people. The leaves presented to the plenary speakers were taken from a nineteenth-century copy of the epic, the production of which was brought

about by a rising tide of nationalism in Persia following in the wake of Ottoman decline and European interference. This concept—a nineteenth-century resurrection of a tenth-century resurgence—lay at the heart of the conference.

The papers presented at the conference were subsequently expanded upon and have become chapters in this book. Although the subjects they deal with range in geography from the Western shores of Hibernia through to the glittering towers of Constantinople, and cover almost a millennium of European history, they are united in their effort to prise from their subjects some truths about texts, transmission and the critical literacies needed to interpret both.

Bridgette Slavin's scholarship on Suibhne Geilt places him as a direct descendant of the Wild Man tradition, a motif that has been utilised by a great many cultures. More importantly though, Suibhne is more directly related to the Celtic variation of this tradition, which includes figures such as Myrddin of Middle Welsh poetry, the Scottish Lailoken who appears in *The Life of St. Kentigern*, and Merlin in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, all of whom have been traced to the British Kingdom of Strathclyde.

There are, however, a few distinctive characteristics that separate Suibhne from his Celtic counterparts. For one, he represents the only Irishman among the group, and secondly he alone has the ability to fly or leap. A good deal of scholarship has been devoted to Suibhne Geilt, and particularly to his depiction in the *Buile Suibhne*, yet little has been offered with regard to the mad hero's bird-like qualities.

In 'The Irish Birdman: Kingship and Liminality in *Buile Suibhne*', Slavin examines the avian characteristics of Suibhne Geilt as portrayed in the 12th century *Buile Suibhne*, to demonstrate that these attributes are indeed unique to the transmission of the Unholy Wild Man motif to Ireland. Birds were highly symbolic to the Celts as representations of prophecy and transformation, and this chapter substantiates that the use of bird imagery in the *Buile Suibhne* illustrated to its audience the supernatural characteristics of Suibhne Geilt and the connection between him and his biblical predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar.

From Ireland our focus shifts across to Italy as John Martyn illuminates the life of one of the most extraordinary characters of the sixth century. For most of his life, Narses served as a Court eunuch in Constantinople, but in his eighties emerged as a remarkably shrewd and most successful general, eventually becoming governor of Italy. Starting in about 480 CE as an Armenian captive, and castrated like many for Court employment, Narses became keeper of the Emperor's privy-purse, and played a major

role in crushing the circus factions who were out to destroy Justinian and Theodora. He soon became very rich, but used his wealth to build monasteries and other religious institutions.

His real success, however, came in the war against the Goths, where a middle-aged Narses held his own and finally replaced his rival, the brilliant general Belisarius. Disaster in Milan temporarily led to the recall of Narses, but when he cleverly trapped a pretender to the throne, he was soon afterwards sent back out to Italy with more troops and money than Belisarius, who was subsequently withdrawn after failure at Tarentum. On the way, Narses cleverly won over the Heruli and with them defeated a large force of Sclavenians who had been enslaving Roman settlers. In Italy he faced the unbeatable Totila, who had captured his supply ships with his Gothic fleet, 300 ships according to Procopius.

The Lombards joined Narses' troops and he pressed Totila over a peace settlement, but in vain. In 552 he met the Gothic army at Taginae and, despite repeated cavalry charges, stood firm, wearing the Goths down until the over-confident Totila was killed, along with most of his army. After securing his rear, Narses set out to free Rome, where this 'puny little man used to a soft life' used speed, ladders and flags to enter through an unguarded area, and tactfully sent the city's keys to his Emperor. As Totila's son, Teias, was active in Campania, Narses then led his army there, attacked the Goths and killed Teias. In the subsequent chaos, Narses wisely allowed over 1,000 Goths to return home across the river Po, but peace was still illusive.

A new threat came from the Frankish army, whose leaders, Leuthar and Butilin, boasted that they would soon be masters of Italy. Narses led his troops to capture the fortress of Cumae, where the Goths' treasure was stored. Teias' brother, Aligern, was guarding the city with plenty of troops, but Narses used a grotto to undermine the wall, and almost broke in. He then pretended to cut off the heads of his Gothic hostages, promising to restore them to life if the citizens promised to let Narses in, which they did. Although the citizens of Cumae refused to honour their promise, Narses sent back their hostages anyway, unharmed, and a settlement was agreed to. Aligern joined Narses' army and, with the Heruli still on-side, Narses prepared to battle over 2,000 Franks who were pillaging North Italy. The elderly Narses rode out to meet the Franks leading about 300 cavalry, and when the far greater Frankish army closed ranks and charged, he pretended to gallop away in terror, but soon 900 of the enemy troops had been killed, and Narses and his men had ridden unscathed to safety.

The final test came in the following year, when another force of Franks and Alamans were on their way South. Luckily Leuther soon had loads of booty and decided to return home with it, but an army of Romans and Huns met and killed many of them, and a plague finished off the rest. Butilin was not faring much better, as Narses had stripped the fields but left the vineyards full of sour young grapes, which proved fatal for hungry soldiers who ate too many. Meanwhile Narses had collected ample food for his army, and had rigorously drilled his infantry and cavalry, ready for a showdown with Butilin's far larger force. Near Capua, Narses used brilliant tactics to win a memorable victory. The troops were inspired by his oratory and by his cleverness.

As prefect of Italy, Narses did all he could, often with his own riches, and in twelve years revived morale, agriculture and trade in the region, but taxes had to be raised, and this made him unpopular. By the time he was recalled by the Empress Sophia, he was worn out and in his late eighties. He died in Rome aged 93, and was buried in a monastery he had built in Bithynia.

Three centuries later, Anastasius Bibliothecarius was a key figure in transmitting texts in translation in late ninth-century Rome. As one of the few in the papal court with sufficient Greek to undertake this task, Anastasius sought with his translations to influence the political relationships of various popes with their counterparts in Francia and Constantinople. Bronwen Neil has chosen to analyse six texts, all dealing with saints of eastern origin: the *Life of John the Almsgiver*; the *Passion and Miracles of Cyrus and John*; the *Translation of Stephen the protomartyr*; the *Sermon on Bartholomew, apostle and martyr*; the *Passion of Demetrius of Thessaloniki*; and the *Passion of Dionysius, bishop of Paris*.

The first two of these works, the *Life of John the Almsgiver*, and the *Passion and Miracles of Cyrus and John*—two separate but related texts by the same Greek author—bear witness to Anastasius's concern to define orthodoxy as the faith professed and protected by the bishop of Rome. Rather than stemming from any deep theological convictions, this concern sprang from Anastasius's desire to promote Roman primacy over its main rival, the church of Constantinople. The *Life of John the Almsgiver* praised the 'orthodox' (i.e. Chalcedonian) patriarch of the see of Alexandria which was largely non-Chalcedonian by the early seventh century. Both these texts had connections with Sophronius of Jerusalem: he was joint author of another version of John's *Life*, and was sole author of the *Passion and Miracles of Cyrus and John*.

The transmission history of the miracle collection of saints Cyrus and John in three languages also shows how hagiography could be used for political as well as devotional ends. Saints Cyrus and John, who were either both Alexandrians (according to the Arabic version) or an Alexandrian and an Edessan (in the Greek and Latin versions), were co-opted first into the fifth century struggle led by Theophilus and Cyril against paganism, and then into the resistance to monoenergism led by Sophronius in the 630s. The *Passion of Cyrus and John* may have been intended by Sophronius as a gift to gain favour with Pope Honorius, and to discredit the Alexandrian patriarch who had signed the *Pact of Union* at Constantinople's bidding. Two centuries later, Anastasius Bibliothecarius sought in a similar way to discredit Constantinople with his Latin translation, and to lend prestige and orthodoxy to the papacy. He did this by using the circumstances of Sophronius's opposition to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople to counter that city's claims of authority over the universal church.

The third and fourth texts deal with the first-century figures, Stephen the first martyr, and the apostle Bartholomew. Both texts are dedicated to important bishops in Lombardy. The *Translation of Stephen* was dedicated to Landulf, bishop of Capua in the Lombard south; the *Sermon on Bartholomew* to Aio, bishop of Benevento and brother of the Lombard duke Adelchis of Benevento. The author of the *Sermon* was Theodore the Stoudite, an important figure in East-West relations in eighth century Constantinople. The challenge of channelling the energies of rival Lombard dukes into a united front against the Saracens greatly occupied Pope John VIII at the time that these translations were made. Anastasius's translations can be seen as part of a bid to establish papal authority over the Lombard territories.

The final two texts, the *Passion of Demetrius* and *Passion of Dionysius* were dedicated to Charles the Bald, soon after his coronation in Rome in 875. They evidence the increasing importance to Rome of good relations with the Carolingian emperors in the face of the Saracen threat to Italy. Both the martyr Demetrius and Dionysius, the first bishop of Paris, were important ideological figures to the emperor and new king of Italy. In particular, the establishment of the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties' links with Dionysius—who was identified simultaneously as the first-century Athenian convert and the sixth-century pseudonymous author of the *Divine Names* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*—was crucial to Charles the Bald's spiritual authority as emperor, abbot of St Denys and continuator of Charlemagne's ecclesiastical reforms.

The occasion for several of these translations was the transfer of relics, or the commemoration of such an event. Relics worked hand in hand with hagiographies in boosting the standing of particular churches, with transfers to Rome and Constantinople being the main focus of Anastasius's literary attention. Roman gifts of relics to the Franks worked in a similar way as gifts of hagiographical texts to enrich the authority of the giver and the prestige of the recipient.

From the analysis of these six texts and their chronological placement in Anastasius's corpus a distinct pattern emerges. Early in his career as papal secretary and *bibliothecarius* under Popes Nicholas I and Hadrian II, Anastasius put great emphasis on doctrinal controversies between the Rome and Constantinople. These included the disputes arising and continuing from the Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople II (553), and the seventh-century monothelite dispute. The translations and dedications from this early period, such as the *Life of John the Almsgiver*, reflect this emphasis. Some of these subjects were western, others like Maximus the Confessor were eastern with Roman sympathies. However, Anastasius's later dedications of hagiographical works in the 870s to the recently crowned king of Italy, Charles the Bald, all draw from the common patristic heritage that Rome shared with the Greeks. This later development demands that we qualify the claim for Roman-Byzantine rivalry as the strongest motivating force behind Anastasius's choice of translations, at least in respect to his later hagiography. The Saracen threat to Italy emerges as a significant reason for John VIII's conciliatory attitudes towards the Byzantines and for Anastasius's dedications both to Lombard bishops and to the Frankish court. Anastasius's translation of Greek hagiographic texts marks a shift in Rome's consciousness of her own role as transmitter of the riches of Byzantine patristic culture to the emergent Frankish church.

While historians have been quick to see the importance of this transmission of cultural imperium from Byzantium to Frankia, the significance of polities located at the periphery of Charlemagne's Empire has not always seemed so apparent. British historians, however, have worked steadily and successfully at magnifying the power and prestige of early medieval England—so successfully, in fact, that the 'maximalist' views of authorities such as James Campbell, Eric Johns and Patrick Wormald would today seem pre-eminent.

It was Paul Hyams, in his 2001 article 'Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England' who first used the term 'maximalist' to describe a model of interpreting Anglo-Saxon history which emphasises the continuity of social institutions in early English history and attenuates the impact upon these institutions of foreign interventions such as the Norman conquest.

This model is evident throughout James Campbell's *The Anglo-Saxon State*, from the title itself through to the chapter headings ['The Late Anglo-Saxon State: A Maximum View' and 'The United Kingdom of England: The Anglo-Saxon Achievement']. It is also a model made explicit in the introduction where Campbell states that 'Late Anglo-Saxon England was a nation state. It was an entity with an effective central authority, uniformly organised institutions, a national language, a national church, defined frontiers... and, above all, a strong sense of national identity.' To support this view, Campbell cites Patrick Wormald who had, he believed, laid 'valuable stress on how the ultimate absorption of the Norman conquerors and the triumph of English and Englishness was an indication of the strength of pre-Conquest national consciousness'.

This 'maximalist' view lies also at the heart of Wormald's *The Making of English Law*. Wormald's ontology, like that of Campbell, reads the extant Anglo-Saxon law codes as a series of consecutive texts, each firmly dateable, each informed by its predecessors, each informing its successors. Moreover, this 'maximalist' view reads these texts as expressions of both monarchical power and national unity. It is a criticism of this model that lies at the heart of Chris Bishop's chapter 'The 'Lost' Literature of England: Text and Transmission in Tenth-Century Wessex'.

When R.M. Wilson first published *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* in 1952, his thesis informed, and was informed by, an understanding of Anglo-Saxon literate practice that envisaged a continuous chain of poetry through the dialectal variations of the surviving manuscripts. Germanic poetry was imported with the tribesmen who crossed the North Sea, rendered into manuscripts upon their conversion to Christianity, and honed to a fine and exacting artform in the mead-halls and monasteries of pre-conquest England. The apparent lack of manuscript evidence for this cycle of composition, inscription and transcription was to be explained by any number of logical calamities—foreign invasion, religious censorship, monastic fire or catastrophic tempest.

There seems, however, little need to reconstruct 'lost' manuscripts in order to adequately explain the records that we have when other, more straightforward, explanations will suffice. It is possible that those few manuscripts of Old English poetry that survive, a handful of codices containing the vernacular poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, represent not so much the only such manuscripts to survive, but rather the only such manuscripts ever produced. It is possible that the significance attributed to this poetry by modern scholars is a product of Elizabethan and Victorian

nationalism and that these vernacular works were less significant to their original audience.

Bishop argues that the extant corpus of vernacular Anglo-Saxon poetry was the product of West Saxon monasteries in the years bracketed by the reign of king Alfred and the reforms of the Benedictines; and that we need to seek out an origin for this poetry not among tomes of lost vernacular literature but within the Latin corpus which survives—in short, that the question scholars should be asking is not what happened to the other vernacular texts, but rather what events transpired that permitted these few manuscripts to emerge from an environment so heavily Latinised as that of the clerical scriptoria of tenth-century Wessex.

This corpus, as it stands, comprises less than 35,000 lines contained almost entirely within four codices—the *Nowell Codex*, the *Junius Manuscript*, the *Vercelli Manuscript*, and the *Exeter Anthology*. Several entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which take the form of verse are also discussed in some detail, along with the inscriptions on the Ruthwell Monument and the Franks Casket, poetry from the *Leechbook*, the West-Saxon translations of the *Metres of Boethius*, and a number of other fragmentary poems.

There is no disagreement among scholars that the four principal manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus were all inscribed within a relatively short period of time—between 960 and 1040 CE. Moreover, as this chapter illustrates, there is a general consensus that this period of manuscript production was even more brief, occupying what may have been a single generation between 965 and 1015. To many, this has seemed unproblematic, and scholars have maintained that this manuscript record represents merely the final stage in a long history of transmission. Bishop, however, argues that the great majority of the surviving vernacular poetry of the Anglo-Saxons was in every sense the product of tenth-century Wessex—that not only was it inscribed in Wessex during the last decades of that century, but that its composition does not, for the most part, predate the reign of Edward the Elder (899-924).

Where Bishop's chapter focuses on the transmission of Anglo-Saxon poetry as a physical artefact, Bob DiNapoli shifts our attention to a close reading of the genre of Old English poetry commonly termed 'wisdom literature'—a genre traditionally viewed as problematic by scholars of literary studies. The term 'wisdom literature' is itself a borrowing from scriptural scholarship, where it denotes a disparate body of texts including the *Book of Proverbs*, the *Psalms*, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes*. DiNapoli points out that, in the study of Old English texts, 'wisdom literature' as a category seems sometimes to serve a purpose similar to that of 'anomalous

verbs' in Old English grammars: to corral a class of refractory beasts that share only a common unfitness for membership in more confidently labelled paradigms. Given such ongoing uncertainty about the internal constitution of this putative genre, it is scarcely surprising that modern critics have tended to relegate 'wisdom' texts to the margins of the extant corpus of Old English poetry, summoned forth for direct scrutiny only when they occur as passages within larger texts of more certain status—biblical and heroic narratives, for example, or elegies.

As objects of literary study, pure 'wisdom' texts such as *Maxims I*, *The Order of the World*, or *The Fortunes of Men* have commonly been made to stand to one side while serious scholarship lavished its full attention on *Beowulf* or *Genesis B* or *The Dream of the Rood*. Broadly grounded literary discussions of the Old English 'wisdom' tradition, such as Shippey's *Poems of Language and Learning in Anglo-Saxon England*, Tuttle-Hansen's *The Solomon Complex*, or Cavill's *Maxims in Old English Poetry* have been relatively rare. More common have been studies focused narrowly on issues of textual criticism or the elucidation of linguistic cruces and difficult allusions.

In 'Close to the Edge: *The Fortunes of Men* and the Limits of Wisdom Literature', DiNapoli treats us to a close reading of one particular wisdom in order to draw our attention to its fundamental strangeness, a strangeness that appears to have escaped the notice of the poem's modern commentators, all of whom accept without qualification that the poet is engaging in conventional Christian didacticism. In fact, despite its occasional statements of Christian belief and sensibility, the poem as a whole appears to defer or evade the moralizing attitude toward death that was so characteristic of most medieval authors. Although commonly understood as a didactic poem, *The Fortunes of Men* does not appear to be teaching the expected lesson. Any attempt to understand the poem, therefore, must look less to a background of Christian teaching and more to what can be discerned of the poem's own internal dialogue. In short, we must learn to read it first and foremost as a poem, rather than as a versified sermon.

The first half of *The Fortunes of Men* comprises a catalogue of dreadful necessities, but the poet has not chosen these items randomly nor have they been ordered so—together they map out a clear progression from wholly helpless victims to those who are likely to have borne some responsibility for their misfortune to those whose fates are almost wholly self-wrought. The poet's organization of these instances is as precisely arranged as the circles of Dante's *Inferno*, albeit on a far smaller scale. The contrast with Dante also underscores how different the Anglo-Saxon

poet's project is, for, unlike the *Inferno*, the primary interest of the *The Fortunes of Men* lies with the existential dimension of life on earth rather than with any moral, anagogical, or eschatological revaluation of its particulars.

The full depth of this contrast becomes clear when we consider how the second half of the poem proceeds. After this catalogue of painful or fatal necessities, the poet turns to a general consideration of the overall variability of human fortunes, before moving on to the conclusion in which the previous observations of God's control of all fates are reiterated. *The Fortunes of Men* closes with a call to thanksgiving for God's mercy. Although such a sentiment is, in itself, an unexceptional expression of early medieval piety, it seems alien to all that has preceded it. What the poet has catalogued can be taken only partially, even superficially, as illustrations of God's mercy, rendering this final refrain at best inattentive and at worst rather dim-witted. The careful patterning of the poem's language and imagery, however, argues strongly against such a reading. What the poet calls the audience to voice their thanks for is neither God's favour nor miraculous release from necessity, but rather its successful management, in which the creative spark of the human intellect and imagination plays as critical a role as God's own omnipotence. We can do nothing to alter the necessities that beset us, but through our response to them we can shape ourselves so as to transcend causality.

Walter Kudrycz's chapter 'Perpetual Devotion: Interpreting Medieval Mariology' examines medieval Mariology with reference to issues of historical continuity, changes in outlook, and the transmission of ideas, beliefs, and practices. In the eleventh and, especially, the twelfth century there was a startling growth in the worship of the Virgin Mary in western Europe. This growth in Mariology is often seen as an important aspect of the wider intellectual and cultural transformations, notably the apparent emergence of individualism and humanism, that occurred at the time. It also laid the foundations of the popular Mariology of the later Middle Ages, traces of which still exist today.

Taking a multi-perspective approach, Kudrycz offers three interpretations of eleventh- and twelfth-century western Mariology. Although the three interpretations are distinct, they are not inconsistent with each other. In fact, they can be read as mutually supportive, thus adding up to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

The first interpretation involves ecclesiastico-political factors such as the Cluniac and Gregorian church reform movements, and the trends towards centralisation and universalism inherent in these movements. As a universal object of veneration, Mary was a figure appropriate to the

reformist church and so Mariology increasingly replaced the veneration of saints, especially those associated with particular localities. As part of this interpretation, Kudrycz shows that the worship of Mary was actively sponsored by high-profile reformers such as Peter Damian and Pope Gregory VII, and that Mary's role as intercessor came to be associated with aims and claimed prerogatives of the reformist church.

The second interpretation also focuses on the increased importance assigned to Mary's intercession during the Middle Ages, but draws connections between Mariology and eschatological needs and fears. This interpretation suggests that the widespread increase in Marian worship was a response to an eleventh-century religious crisis in western Europe.

Eleventh-century eschatology was based on Augustinian notions of sin and featured a rigid distinction between the damned and the saved, and a related emphasis on the idea of Christ as Judge. Within this framework individuals could not achieve salvation on merit, and so Mary's intercession became a vital element in the drama of redemption, providing hope for the hopeless and the unworthy—that is to say, for almost everyone. The works of St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) are assigned a particular prominence in this interpretation, with Anselm himself being seen as an important transitional figure. Anselm's prayers to Mary are shown to place him within this "eleventh-century" eschatological outlook. It is argued, however, that Anselm's later *Cur Deus Homo*, which has been regarded by historians as representing—or as having brought about—an humanistic "twelfth-century" outlook, not only solved the problems at the centre of eleventh-century eschatology, but also meant that there was no further theological or intellectual need for Mary.

While the first interpretation considers what might be regarded as external factors, the second interpretation of Mariology operates more on an internal level. The third interpretation continues this movement inwards and examines Mariology from a psychological or, more specifically, a psychoanalytical perspective.

This interpretation proposes that the growth of Mariology was a neurotic consequence of the repressive reformist movement. This psychoanalytical interpretation also makes particular use of the Freudian idea of the Oedipus complex, showing that the Mariology described can be seen in terms of an Oedipal transition, and that the intellectual outlook said to have emerged in the course of the twelfth century represents a post-Oedipal state.

Taken together or individually, these three interpretations serve to minimise the importance of the transmission of ideas and practices from

Byzantium to the West, making Kudrycz's chapter such a fascinating adjunct to that of Neil.

Much of the early history of western Mariology had been determined by Byzantine influence, and historians have often continued this theme into the period under consideration, generally positing increased contact with Byzantium in the course of pilgrimages and crusades as the cause of the growth of Mariology in the West. The interpretations offered in Kudrycz's chapter, however, point to specific western factors for the phenomenon as it occurred in the West. All three interpretations also militate against the commonly held belief that Mariology was an essentially democratic movement that occurred in opposition to the dictates or desires of the institutional church. Similarly, the interpretations offered counter the "Jungian" idea that medieval Mariology was a manifestation of a widespread and possibly innate—and therefore, again, in a sense democratic—tendency to worship a goddess or mother figure.

The second and third interpretations offered by Kudrycz also suggest a reassessment of recent understandings of twelfth-century cultural and intellectual change, for it is argued that Mariology was not central to twelfth-century intellectual life. In other words, and notwithstanding its association with many of the elite within the church, Mariology was not part of the developments—the "discovery" of the individual, the emergence of humanism, the cognitive reorientation associated with the effects of literacy—that historians believe typified twelfth-century culture and, perhaps, prefigured modernity. It was, in fact, the abandonment of fervent Mariology on an intellectual level that signalled the formation of a new twelfth-century outlook. However, the ultimate persistence of Mariology—inspired, at least in part, by the efforts of well-known members of the church—suggests that this new outlook did not dominate within its own elite, educated environment or, for that matter, exert any substantial and lasting influence.

Manuscript art flourished in Jewish Diaspora communities throughout the medieval period and numerous extant illuminated Bibles, *Haggadoth* (Passover prayer-books), commentary texts and secular works attest to the popularity of these visually adorned books. Indeed, the book occupied a special position in medieval Jewish communities, as the sole vehicle for safeguarding and transmitting the revealed Word and the Laws that governed Jewish life. Books were held in high esteem throughout medieval Europe, and within the wider community of medieval Iberia book buying and reading played an important role in society, particularly within the Arab-ruled regions. We learn in Vanessa Crosby's 'Illuminating Ritual Texts: Text, Image and the Creation of Sacred Space

in Jewish Manuscripts of the Iberian Peninsula', however, that there are no extant Hebrew manuscripts originating from Arabic Spain, that all extant Spanish Hebrew bibles were produced in the Christian regions.

The earliest of these codices were copied and illuminated in Toledo, the political and cultural centre of Spain, where Jewish scholars were involved in the translation of scientific and philosophical works from Arabic into Latin during the period of the *convivencia*, in the reign of Fernando III (1217-52). Jewish literature, art and culture evidences considerable development at this time through interactions with the majority Christian population and contacts with the Arab world. In addition to illuminated Bibles, *Haggadoth* were produced in large numbers from the thirteenth century, their popularity in the Jewish community paralleling that of the *Book of Hours* in Christian circles.

This proliferation of books designed for private use in both Christian and Jewish communities was the result of significant changes in the culture of book production. During the early middle ages, illumination in Iberia—as elsewhere in Europe—was a monastic monopoly and it was necessary for Jews to be employed by Christians in order to practice this trade. By approximately 1250, however, manuscript production had largely become a lay rather than a monastic enterprise, a change in circumstance stimulated by the rise of literacy among the Christian laity.

Prior to the thirteenth century, families of scribes were an established tradition amongst Jewish communities in the Diaspora, but early manuscripts were most likely illuminated in Christian workshops. Evidence points to the gradual emergence of Jewish illustrators and illuminators in Iberia from the thirteenth century. A technical manual written in Hebrew and dating from 1262, for example, provides extensive instructions detailing the preparation and illumination of manuscripts using coloured pigments.

Illuminated manuscripts, with their interplay between textual and visual elements, create a range of interpretive problems for those addressing the issues surrounding textual transmission. Moreover, Jewish illuminated manuscripts represent a unique and problematic group of visual artefacts. Theories of medieval visuality, developed to study medieval visual culture, have been based largely upon Christian art and Christian aesthetic theories. Rather than assume that theories of medieval visuality based upon Christian assumptions can be appropriated wholesale when analysing Jewish illuminated manuscripts, Crosby's chapter considers the unique cultural and artistic heritage of these artefacts.

The final chapter of this collection is Diane Speed's 'A Ballad of Twelfth Day: Texts and Contexts'. This chapter explores a little-studied

Early Middle English poem that tells the story of the Epiphany—the visit of the Wise Men to the Christ Child. Speed argues that the poem brings into focus a striking complex of factors in the transmission of texts and ideas and, for the first time, describes its distinctive narrative procedures and discursive preoccupations in the light of biblical traditions, contemporary ecclesiastical concerns, and popular culture. An edition of the medieval text, together with a modern translation, is appended to the chapter for the reader's convenience.

'Twelfth Day', as the poem is more appropriately named in this chapter (there is no title in the manuscript), survives in Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 14. 9, an anthology of religious and moral texts from the middle of the thirteenth century. This was a period of considerable growth in the production of didactic texts and books, in large part a gradual response to the requirements of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 for better Christian instruction of the laity and lesser clergy and for annual confession on the part of every person. The texts in the manuscript, written variously in English, Latin and French, would generally have been suitable for use in preaching or teaching situations, and 'Twelfth Day' would have contributed to such an agenda. The manuscript was compiled by a team of ten scribes working together in a substantial religious house in the West Midlands. A concentrated study of this one particular text provides an illuminating glimpse into the practicalities of their collaboration and the scribal culture of which that text was a part.

The first section of the chapter re-examines and amplifies previous scholarship on the material text of the poem. What is extraordinary about the material text is that the one manuscript contains not only the full text of forty lines, in the third quire, but also what can be shown, with virtual certainty, to be a draft of the last sixteen lines of the full text in the fourth quire. This is written in the margins of a text known as the 'Trinity Poem on Biblical History', whose own narrative includes a substantial and detailed section devoted to the story of the visit of the Wise Men. The draft of 'Twelfth Day' is in the same hand as that of the 'Biblical History' and a couplet in another part of the manuscript, in which the scribe names himself as Michel of Arras. This Michel, then, is the actual author of 'Twelfth Day', though the full copy of his poem in the third quire has been made by one of his colleagues. Comparison of key variations between the draft and the full copy both confirms the basic relationship of the two texts and illustrates aspects of scribal culture at the time.

The fact that Michel apparently began to compose his own poem as he read and copied out the 'Biblical History' positions the 'Biblical History' as the immediate source of his inspiration to compose; indeed, his

involvement with this text almost certainly went beyond reading and copying it to the point of composing the last few lines to complete an apparently incomplete exemplar. In the one manuscript, therefore, we can track the genesis and transmission of a poem from its author's initial conception, through his drafting of his ideas in written form, to his colleague's reproduction of the poem for the edification of any with direct or indirect access to the manuscript. The hard evidence that a scribe might also function as an author is a particular contribution to our understanding of medieval manuscript culture.

The fact that the 'Biblical History' would have been the immediate inspiration for 'Twelfth Day' does not mean, however, that other factors were not in play. The story of the Wise Men had become particularly popular in the preceding half-century, due to the political creation of the legend of the three kings of Cologne and the popularity of their magnificent new shrine as a major destination for pilgrimage; but the biblical pericope had long been subjected to learned scrutiny in an endeavour to fill the silences of the biblical narrative and identify its place in Christian teaching. The second part of the chapter addresses the semantic text of 'Twelfth Day' with reference to the wider context of the story's reception, as represented in a range of learned, religious, and artistic texts, as well as its immediate context in the manuscript, in relation to the 'Biblical History'.

Departures from the basic biblical pericope are identified, variously, as traditional understandings developed over time in studies by the Fathers and others, liturgical and broader ecclesiastical influences, narrative restructuring and refocussing, and medieval poetic conventions related to generic and rhetorical factors. The extra-biblical elements of Michel's narrative are shown to accord with the common awareness of the story in his day: he would automatically have believed, for instance, that the unnumbered Wise Men of the Bible were in fact three kings, and that twelve days had elapsed between their departing from Herod and their coming to the Christ Child. That similar understandings inform the 'Biblical History' points not so much to a specific borrowing from this text as to a shared cultural background.

The two poems part company to some extent, however, in respect to their narrative structures and rhetoric. The 'Biblical History' is concerned to lay out the overall salvation history of the world, in which the story of the three kings is just one episode, and to locate the present reader in this historical view as a statement of fact. 'Twelfth Day', on the other hand, is focally concerned with their story, which is presented in its extended form, beginning with scenes prior to their coming to Herod and ending with their

continuing life back home, in a manner reminiscent of historical romance. On the one hand, the reader is invited to engage with their quest through a lively, imaginative narrative; on the other, to remember what Jesus suffered for them. The appeal is affective and individual rather than dogmatic and public; the dominant image of salvation is the humility of Christ rather than his victory over the devil.

The chapters of this present work then, cover an enormous tract of time, a vast span of geography and a considerable diversity of disciplines. That they do not fall into a disparate and disconnected heap is due largely to their thematic correspondence and their shared focus on an epoch that now finds itself lamentably understudied. It was my hope as convenor that the conference from which many of these chapters initially sprang would do something to remedy that situation, and it is my hope still as editor of this collection that 'Text and Transmission in Medieval Europe' will continue to do the same.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IRISH BIRDMAN: KINGSHIP AND LIMINALITY IN *BUILE SUIBHNE*

BRIDGETTE SLAVIN

The Tradition of *Buile Suibhne*

Early Irish literature illustrates a prominent regard for liminal occasions in both time and space. The threshold between day and night, for example, as well as the coexistence of physical and non-physical worlds, are recurrent motifs. Likewise, some medieval Irish tales suggest an individual space where the boundaries between the soul and the body are blurred; often expressed in an alteration of the physical form. Within this body of literature the transformation of a human into a bird, either completely or partially, is a common representation of this personal state of liminality. Such use of bird symbolism is found both within the native Irish tradition, particularly in association with supernatural figures, as well as Christian tales, in which birds can represent the liminal state of the soul, existing neither within a human body, nor as a pure spiritual being in heaven.¹ At least three distinct causes for the human to bird transformation can be identified:² the result of personal will, as is the case

¹ These two traditions will be elaborated upon below. Nevertheless, an example of the native tradition can be seen in the figure of Nemglan, a bird warrior, who is the father of Conaire Mor mac Eterscel, in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*; and in a Christian context, the birds who claim to be half-fallen angels met by St Brendan in *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*. Whitley Stokes (Ed. and Trans.), “The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel,” *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901), pp. 9-61, ll. 165-215, 282-329, 390-437; David Farmer (Ed.) and J.F. Webb (Trans.), “The Voyage of St Brendan,” in *Age of Bede* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983).

² William Sayers argues similarly that “shapeshifting can be both willed (Merlin, Tristan) and suffered (Picou),” William Sayers, “Avian Wild Men: Merlin in His Mew and Tristan as Picou,” *Mediaevalia*, forthcoming, pp. 1-19, at 11. I would

with Midir, who turns himself and Étainne into swans in *Thormac Étainne*,³ by force, as when the children of Lir are transformed into swans by their stepmother,⁴ and by mental imbalance.

No medieval Irish tale demonstrates the last two examples better than the twelfth century *Buile Suibhne*⁵ [The Frenzy of Sweeny], which appears as part of a story cycle connected to the Battle of Magh Rath, fought in 637 CE. Extant forms of the *Buile Suibhne* are found in only three manuscripts: B IV I. fo. 82a to 95b, written between 1671-74; 23 K 44, p. 131 to 180, written between 1721-22; and Brussels, 3410, fo. 59a to 61b, written in 1629.⁶ The most valuable of these texts also contains the *Banquet of Dun na nGedh*, *The Battle of Magh Rath*, and the *Adventures of the Two Idiot Saints*. There are two obvious themes tying these together with the story of Suibhne Geilt, the battle with the first two tales, and the theme of madness in the last. The language of the texts provides an ambiguous period of a late Middle Irish to Early Modern Irish composition (anywhere between 1200 and 1500 CE) and yet, because *Buile Suibhne* is closely connected to the other tales, John O’Keeffe argues that they must have been composed about the same time. The text of *The Battle of Mag Rath* has been dated to the late twelfth century. Therefore, O’Keeffe ascertains that *Buile Suibhne* may have been written at about that time.⁷

The hero of *Buile Suibhne*, Suibhne Geilt⁸ [Sweeny the Mad], loses his ability to reason through the curse of a saint and rather than flee to the

like to extend my gratitude to Dr Sayers’ for providing me with his unpublished article.

³ Osborn Bergin and Richard I. Best (Eds and Trans), “Tormac Étainne,” *Ériu* 12 (1938), pp. 137-193.

⁴ Transformation is a motif commonly associated with birds. For example, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Picus is transformed by the envious Circe into a woodpecker through magical means. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book XIV, ll. 308-439 in Allen Mandelbaum (Trans.), *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1993), pp. 486-491. James Carney argues that *Oidhe Clionne Lir* is heavily influenced by *Buile Suibhne* in “*Suibhne Geilt and The Children of Lir*,” *Studies of Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), pp. 129-164, at 129.

⁵ *Buile Suibhne: Being The Adventures of Suibhne Geilt*, John O’ Keeffe (Ed. and Trans.), (Irish Texts Society 12, London, 1913). All Old Irish text and translation of *Buile Suibhne* in the following paper derive from this edition.

⁶ O’Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne*, pp. xiii-xv.

⁷ O’Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne*, p. xvi; Pádraig Ó Riain, “The Materials and Provenance of ‘Buile Suibhne,’” *Éigse* 15 (1974), pp. 173-188, at 173.

⁸ For a discussion on the definition of *geilt* and *geltacht*, see Nora Chadwick, “Geilt,” *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 5 (1942), pp. 106-153, at 106-107; Carney,

woods, flies like a bird to perch on tree tops.⁹ The ambiguities of Suibhne's character, particularly the tension between his status as a king and the Church, connect him with other liminal kings in early Irish literature. Furthermore, his avian nature demonstrates Suibhne's association with divine information and transformation in both the native Irish and Christian traditions. In this chapter I aim to illustrate that these liminal characteristics of Suibhne Geilt provide an occasion to identify two strains of influence, native and Christian, regarding the transmission of the idea of kingship in early Irish literature. Indeed, the compiler of *Buile Suibhne* specifically used the space of liminality to demonstrate the transformation of Suibhne encompassing both native and Christian imagery.

Although Suibhne is referred to elsewhere, for the purpose of this chapter I will examine the fullest account and most scrutinized of the texts relating to him, being *Buile Suibhne*, which is written in the traditional saga form with intermittent prose and verse.¹⁰ A brief summary of the tale

"Suibhne Gelt," pp. 150-51; Pádraig Ó Riain, "A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man," *Éigse* 14 (1973), pp. 179-206, at 179-181; John Carey, "Suibhne Geilt and Tuán mac Cairell," *Éigse* 20 (1984), pp. 93-105, at 95-99.

⁹ The frenzied state of Cú Chulainn in battle as well as his love-sickness provide further examples of mental instability leading to bird-like characteristics. In the *Táin* he leaps like a bird onto the shields of his provokers; *Táin Bó Cuailnge*: Recension I, Cecile O'Rahilly (Ed. and Trans.), (Dublin, 1976), p. 207, ll. 3091-2. In *Serlige Con Culainn*, his lovesickness causes him to lose his mind and travel in great leaps; Miles Dillon (Ed.), *Serlige Con Culainn* (Mediaeval and Modern Irish Studies Series 14, Dublin, 1953), p. 29, ll. 829-830. In *Mesca Ulad*, Cú Chulainn makes a great leap onto the "upper part of the courtyard" (par. 56), and further on in the tale, he makes a giant leap through the host during which he struck at it three times (par. 68), John Koch (Trans.), "The Intoxication of the Ulstermen," in John Carey and John Koch (Eds.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales* (Andover, Celtic Studies Publications, 1994, repr., 1997), pp. 95-117. John Carey points out the similarities between Cú Chulainn and Suibhne's behaviour in, "Suibhne Geilt and Tuán mac Cairell," p. 98.

¹⁰ There is a reference to Suibhne in the *Book of Aicill*, one of the earliest collections of law treatises, which dates from the ninth or tenth century, therefore indicating that the legend of Suibhne was certainly in existence prior to the extant composition of *Buile Suibhne*: "Three were three triumphs (*buadha*) of that battle (i.e. the battle of Magh Rath): the defeat of Congal Claen in his falsehood by Domhnall in his truth, and Suibhne *Geilt* having become mad, and Cennfaeladh's brain of forgetfulness having been taken from his head. And Suibhne *Geilt* having become mad is not a reason why the battle is a triumph, but it is because of the stories and poems he left after him in Ireland." *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vol. 3

is as follows: Suibhne, a warrior king of Dál Riada, is outraged when learns that St Ronan is marking out the site of a new church on Suibhne's lands. His wife attempts to restrain him, clinging to his robe. Nevertheless, Suibhne yanks himself away, and rushes to the site of the new church naked and angry. There he finds Ronan singing psalms and proceeds to fling the holy man's psalter into the water before dragging Ronan by the hand out of the Church. At this point, a servant of Congal Claon, the king of Ulster, comes seeking Suibhne and asks on the king's behalf to support him in the battle of Magh Rath against the High King, Dumnall. Suibhne leaves Ronan to follow the servant. Meanwhile, St Ronan, whose psalter is miraculously returned undamaged by an otter, is greatly offended by Suibhne and therefore curses him:

Be it my will, together with the will of the mighty Lord, that even as he came stark-naked to expel me, may it be thus that he will ever be, naked, wandering and flying throughout the world; may it be death from a spear-point that will carry him off.¹¹

St Ronan then attempts to stop the fighting between Congal (whom Suibhne supported) and the High King, Dumnall. But on the day of the great battle, Suibhne slays one of Ronan's psalmists, and attempts to kill

(Buffalo, New York, Hein Co.), p. 89; O'Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne*, p. xvi. In addition to this reference, there is a poem attributed to Suibhne dating from the eighth or ninth century in an Irish manuscript in the monastery of St Paul in Carinthia, John Strachan and Whitley Stokes (Eds), *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1901-1903), p. 293. In this same manuscript there is another poem ascribed to St Moling, who died in 697 CE and is attached to Suibhne in *Buile Suibhne*. Strachan claims that Moling's poem dates to around 700 CE and was likely composed by the saint himself, *Ibid*, p. xxxiii; David Cohen, "Suibhne Geilt," *Celtica* 12 (1977), pp. 113-124, at 116. The names of Suibhne and the saint are again connected in a collection of poems attributed to St Moling in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1908), p. 20; Cohen, "Suibhne Geilt," p. 116; Kenneth Jackson, "The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of Suibhne Geilt," in John Ryan (Ed.), *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, (Dublin, 1940), pp. 535-550, at 540. A note in the text claims that Suibhne composed the first three poems while Moling wrote them down. According to O'Keeffe, this evidence suggests that the tradition of Suibhne's madness, poems, and adventures date to the time an historical Suibhne, who may have been a contemporary with Moling. Moreover, the saint seems to have shared in the shaping of the Suibhne tradition, O'Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne*, p. xix-xxx.

¹¹ *Mo ched-sa fri ced an Choimdedh chumachdaigh, ar sae, amail tainic-siomh dom dhiochur-sa 7 é lomnocht, gurab amhlaidh sin bhias doghrés lomnacht ar faoinnel 7 ar folúamhain sechnóin an domhain, gurab bás do rinn noséra, O'Keeffe, Buile Suibhne, pp. 4-5, par. 5.*

Ronan himself. The attempt is unsuccessful because the saint's holy bell diverts the spear. Again, St Ronan curses Suibhne:

I pray the mighty Lord that high as went the spear-shaft into the air among the clouds of Heaven may you go likewise even as any bird, and may the death which you have inflicted on my foster-child be that which will carry you off, to wit, death from a spear-point.¹²

Suibhne goes forth with the rest of the army, but when the battle hosts meet, he loses his mind and flies into the air, thus fulfilling Ronan's curse.

His fingers were palsied, his feet trembled, his heart beat quick, his senses were overcome, his sight was distorted, his weapons fell naked from his hands, so that through Ronan's curse he went, like any bird of the air, in madness and imbecility.¹³

From this point forward, Suibhne lives in the woods and perceives himself as growing feathers, all the while jumping or flying from mountain to mountain and tree to tree, in whose tops he prefers to make his home. Throughout the tale he recites poems, some praising his forest existence, others bemoaning it and recalling better times. He has a number of adventures and is brought back by his people on three occasions; however each time he leaps away back into the woods. Eventually Suibhne ventures to the church of St Moling, who befriends him. Moling requests that Suibhne return once a day so that the saint can write down the madman's stories and poems. Moling then tells the wife of his swineherd to provide Suibhne with milk every day. She does this by thrusting her heel in a pile of cow dung and filling the depression with milk. Suibhne then lies down and drinks from it. In the end, Ronan's curse is fulfilled and Suibhne dies by a spear, which is thrust into him—while he lay drinking his milk—by Mongán, the swineherd, who believed that his wife was having an adulterous affair with the mad man. St Moling vehemently curses the swineherd, who dies by the same fate as Suibhne.

¹² *Guidhim-si an Coimide cumachtach, ar sé, an ccomhairde dochúaidh crann an fhoga isin aer 7 a nellaibh nimhe co ndeachair-si amail gach n-ethaid 7 an bás roimris-[s]I for mo dhalta-sa, gurab eadh notbéra .i. bas do rinn, Ibid, pp. 10-11, par. 9.*

¹³ *Romheirbhlighset a meoir, rocrióthnaighsiot a chosa, roluthadh a choidhe, roclódhadh a chedfadha, rosaobadh a radharc, rotuitset a airm urnocht asa lámhuibh co ndeachaidh la breithir Rónáin ar gealtacht 7 ar geinindecht amail gach n-ethaid n-æerdha, Ibid, pp. 14-15, par. 11.*

Finally, Moling ensures that Suibhne is redeemed and buries him in hollowed ground.

Scholarship on Suibhne Geilt places him as a direct descendant of the Wild Man tradition; a universal motif that has been reinterpreted by many cultures and includes among its numbers Endiku in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Biblical figure of Nebuchadnezzar. Basically human in form, the Wild Man lives a solitary existence away from civilization, usually in the woods, subsisting on a diet of roots and berries. He is generally characterized by shaggy hair that covers his entire body except for his face and hands, a long beard, discoloured skin (usually black), and clothing of foliage or skins. Although generally unable to reason, the Wild Man is often depicted exercising supernatural powers over animals. In essence, within the context of medieval European culture—as it grew more centred on rational disposition and a rigid social order with faith in God to sustain it—the Wild Man demonstrates the phobias of society, including chaos, insanity, and ungodliness.¹⁴

Suibhne is, more importantly, directly related to the Celtic variation of this tradition, which includes alongside him, Myrddin of Middle Welsh poetry, the Scottish Lailoken who appears in *The Life of St Kentigern*, and Merlin in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, all of whom have been traced to the British Kingdom of Strathclyde.¹⁵ The extant versions of all of these tales date from the twelfth century, yet each relates to events that took place in the sixth or seventh centuries, particularly revolving around battles. Kenneth Jackson provides a concise comparative summary of the tale underlying the Celtic Wild Man tradition:

A man goes mad in battle (Magh Rath A.D. 637, Suibhne; Arfderydd in Cumberland A.D. 574, Myrddin-Lailoken-Merlin) because of the curse of a saint (Suibhne) or a horrible vision in the sky (Lailoken; traces of it in Suibhne) or fear of battle (traces in Suibhne) and grief for the slain (Merlin). He takes to a life in the woods (all), where he lives on berries, roots or apples, etc. (all). Being mad, he is a prophet, and has dealings with various visitors (all) to whom he prophesies (Myrddin, Lailoken, Merlin).¹⁶ Finally, he makes friends with a saint (Suibhne with Moling; Lailoken with Kentigern) and dies.¹⁷

¹⁴ Neil Thomas, "The Celtic Wild Man Tradition and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*: Madness or *Contemptus Mundi*?" *Arthuriana* 10, no. 1 (2000), pp. 27-42, 29; Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press 1952), pp. 1-20.

¹⁵ Carney, "Suibhne Gelt," p. 129.

¹⁶ Suibhne does show some prophetic capabilities. For example, *Bidh ann bhias mo bhithlighi tes ag Tuidhin tenn, ag Tegh Moling biothainglighi taotus do bheind,*

From this synopsis, it is apparent that a few distinctive characteristics separate Suibhne from his Celtic counterparts. For one, he represents the only Irishman among the group, and secondly he alone has the ability to fly or leap.¹⁸ I will now focus more directly on the liminal characteristics of Suibhne. First in connection to the portrayal of his kingship and secondly, regarding his avian characteristics.

Liminality and Kingship

The term liminality, from the Latin *limen* [threshold], is often closely associated with ritual, particularly rites of passage. The seed was planted by Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 publication of *The Rites of Passage*, in which he describes the symbolic force of liminality in secular and sacred customs.¹⁹ Victor Turner further developed Van Gennep's ritual theory in *The Ritual Process*.²⁰ For Turner, ritual results in a transformation that produces obvious “before” and “after” conditions; there is a dissolution of identity from which a new one is created. In other words, “the *limen*, or

“At ever-angelic Tech Moling, at puissant Tiodhen in the south, tis there my eternal resting-place will be, I shall fall by a [spear]-point,” O’Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne*, pp. 80-81, verse 40.

¹⁷ Jackson, “The Motive,” p. 546. Merlin has a similar association with Taliesin in *Vita Merlini*. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, Basil Clarke (Ed. and Trans.), *Life of Merlin* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1973).

¹⁸ Debate on Suibhne has a long history. In addition to those works already mentioned regarding the dating of *Buile Suibhne*, also note the following scholarship connecting the tale to the motif of the threefold death motif: Ó Riain, “A Study,” pp. 179-206; Cohen, “Suibhne Geilt,” pp. 113-24; Joseph Nagy, “The wisdom of the *geilt*,” *Éigse* 19 (1982), pp. 44-60; Joan Radner, “The significance of the threefold death in Celtic tradition,” in Patrick Ford (Ed.), *Celtic folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara, 1983), pp. 180-200; William Sayers, “*Guin & Crochad & Gólad*: The Earliest Irish Threefold Death,” in Cyril Bryne, Margaret Rose Harry and Pádraig Ó Síadhail (Eds), *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the second North American congress of Celtic studies, Halifax 1989* (Halifax, 1989), pp. 65-82.

¹⁹ “The boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination, and funeral ceremonies.” Arnold van Gennep, *The Ritual Process* (Paris, 1909, 2nd Ed. London, 1960), pp. 20-21; Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth Monographs 3, Maynooth, 2000), p. 185.

²⁰ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (Chicago, 1969).

threshold, is not just a phase in a rite but a creative ‘space’ resulting in a temporary state known as liminality.”²¹ Therefore, according to Turner:

Put a man’s head on a lion’s body and you think about the human head in the abstract. Perhaps it becomes for you, as a member of a given culture and with appropriate guidance, an emblem of chieftainship. There could be less encouragement to reflect on heads and headship if the same head were firmly ensconced on its familiar, its all too familiar human body. Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation.²²

In essence, according to this model, an individual is separated from his or her community (rite of separation), followed by a state of isolation, which is associated with various taboos (marginal state), from which the individual is brought back into society having been transformed in isolation (rite of aggregation).²³ Suibhne’s experience follows this outline of liminal transformation. As a king he leaves his family and subjects, is transformed both mentally (he goes mad) and physically (bird-like attributes), and is then brought back into an acceptable position in society which is demonstrated by his Christian burial. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh argues that such episodes of transformation in Irish heroic literature parallel mythic stories relating to rites of passage, or border experiences.²⁴ Likewise, Padraig Ó Riain applies van Gennep’s approach to the Wild Man tradition in Ireland and points out an overall correspondence in thematic elements between the *geilt*’s madness and the non-madness of other heroes whom he calls “novices.”²⁵

²¹ Ronald Grimes, “Ritual,” in Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (Eds), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London and New York, Cassell, 2000), p. 264.

²² Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, 1967), p. 106; Grimes, “Ritual,” p. 265.

²³ Edmund Leach, “Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness,” in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Eds), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London, 1987), pp. 579-599, at 584; McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 185.

²⁴ Tomás Ó Cathasaigh argues that these transformations focus mainly around the life- crises of the protagonists. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, 1977), p. 22; McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 185.

²⁵ Ó Riain, “A Study,” p. 186. Ultimately, Ó Riain argues, the madness of Suibhne was “incidental to the pattern of behaviour exhibited by its exponents,” and that separation from social status was the basic unifying theme in early Irish literature, *Ibid*, p. 184. Moreover, he states that tales have a common combination of “saint- and battlefield-agents resulting in the downfall of kings,” *Ibid*, p. 187. While Ó Riain does not believe that Suibhne makes the final recovery as explained in van Gennep’s ritual theory (rite of aggregation), Joseph Nagy postulates that Suibhne,