Words that Tear the Flesh

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Words that Tear the Flesh

Essays on Sarcasm in Medieval and Early Modern
Literature and Cultures

Edited by
Alan Baragona and Elizabeth L. Rambo

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Acknowledgements and Dedications

In good 21st-century fashion, this book came to be, in part, thanks to social media. In the Spring of 2014, Alan Baragona, in semi-retirement, was invited to teach a survey of medieval European literature at James Madison University. He decided to include on the syllabus some of the stories of Cú Chulaind, which he had never taught in a class before. Rereading "The Death of Aífe's Only Son," he noticed a clear pattern of sarcasm. At seven years old, the son of Aífe and Cú Chulaind challenges the heroes of Emain Macha to combat. After he defeats the first one, two successive warriors begin their challenge by saying, in Jeffrey Gantz's translation, "Delightful your games, little boy."[1] Here was an instance where circumstance and wording combine to give a clear signal of a sarcastic speaker. On reflection, most of the other instances he could think of were in Irish or Welsh literature, so he turned to the hive mind of Facebook, specifically the Facebook page of the Southeastern Medieval Association. He gave his example, asked for others, and wisecracked that he wondered whether the Celts had "cornered the snarket" on sarcasm. Examples came pouring in from SEMA members, citing works in almost every medieval European language and genre. Larissa Tracy of Longwood University suggested he collect an anthology on the topic. His longtime friend from graduate school, Elizabeth Rambo of Campbell University, volunteered to co-edit it, and Melissa Ridley Elmes of Lindenwood University suggested the working title, *Cornering the Snarket*. The Call for Papers garnered even more examples from an even broader range of cultures, and the editors still think of their contributors as "The Snarketeers."

We would like to give special thanks to Larissa Tracy for encouraging the project and to John Skuce of Campbell University Computing Services, who helped compile this volume from files that did not always get along. Elizabeth Rambo dedicates this book to her father, who brought his children up to appreciate sarcastic humor on the page. Alan Baragona dedicates it to his wife, Kathy, and daughter, Laura, who are both masters of the flesh tearing technique but use it delicately.

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1 "The Death of Aífe's Only Son," *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, trans. Jeffrey Gantz, London: Penguin Books, 1981, 150 – 151.

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Introduction

The Problem of Sarcasm

In 1979, the sketch comedy show Saturday Night Live did a parody of a late night talk show. It featured the host, a writer, and an actor who was about to appear in the movie of the writer's book. The host announces "I'm your host, Joan Face. As you may know, this is our last show tonight, but we put together a really fascinating program. I'm sure you'll love it. My first guest is a great, great writer, Nigel Quist, who I know you're all big fans of, as who wouldn't be?" The writer responds "Thank you, Joan. Being on your show is a real thrill for me! It's certainly a must for any author promoting a book." Later, the actor, Greg, says "Working with Nigel has been so great. He's a real genius," to which Nigel replies, "Yeah, Greg's performance is absolutely amazing! A real Oscar winner."[1] The entire interview goes this way, and if all one had were the transcript, it would appear to be an ordinary, vacuous Hollywood love-fest. As such, it satirizes the emptiness of these affairs, but without being funny.

However, the sketch actually opens with a logo of the fake show's title, "Heavy Sarcasm," the three characters are sitting under a large sign with the title, and the host actually begins with "Good evening, and welcome to 'Heavy Sarcasm.'" The apparent flattery is laced with eye rolls, smirks, sidelong glances, and a sarcastic tone marked by unnatural emphasis, drawn out vowels, and roller coaster fluctuations in pitch. The satire of Hollywood hypocrisy comes in the delivery rather than the script, in vocal tone, facial expression, and body language that reveal the character's true feelings, all first signaled and driven home by the show's title. The "Heavy Sarcasm" title, in fact, is not necessary for the audience to get the point, but it telegraphs what is coming and makes it all funnier, because, unlike the usual bland title of talk shows, it is the one, straightforward true statement in the whole sketch.

In addition to hitting the mark of its satire, the skit illustrates four important things about the nature of sarcasm as usually conceived in the modern age. First, sarcasm requires that "the speaker is overtly meaning (and saying) the opposite

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[1] "Saturday Night Live Transcripts," accessed January 4, 2015, http://snltranscripts.jt.org/79/79bsarcasm.phtml.

of what he or she ostensibly claims to be saying."[2] Thus, a sarcastic utterance has a surface meaning, an opposite underlying meaning, and conveys a "meta-message" that the surface meaning should not be taken literally.[3] As such, it can be considered a species of irony. Quintilian argued that with *ironia* itself the hearer knows that "the opposite of what is said must be understood,"[4] but linguists like Margaret Sinex and Elisabeth Camp have argued that "oppositeness" is not a trait of all types of rhetorical figures that are regularly considered species of irony, such as litotes,[5] and limit that quality to sarcasm. Stephen Gordon clarifies the distinction, writing that "while irony is relativistic—that is, the meaning of the text is *something other* than its literal form—sarcasm can be seen as a direct exhortation by the speaker/writer to the audience, where the meaning of a phrase is *opposite* to what has been stated. In other words, the unsaid 'meta-messages' of an ironic statement are multiple and subjective; sarcastic utterances, by contrast, are singular and absolute."[6] As we shall see, this is a consensus opinion, but not a universal one.

Second, the true meaning must be derisive. Greek *sarkasmos*, after all, comes from *sarkasein* "to tear flesh."[7] Donald Muecke, in his 1969 *The Compass of Irony*, calls sarcasm "'the crudest form of irony,' functioning as a way of overtly ridiculing the object of the sarcastic statement."[8] John Haiman says "the humor in sarcasm (as in irony) lies in the contrast between the speaker's flattering or sympathetic words (his or her ostensible message...) and his or her hostile intentions."[9] He specifically connects it to mockery, as does Konrad Werkhofer,[10] but goes further and asserts that "[w]hat is essential to sarcasm is that it is overt irony intentionally used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression."[11]

2 John Haiman, *Talk is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 9–10.
3 Haiman, *Talk is Cheap*, 12, 16, and 21.
4 Margaret Sinex, "Echoic Irony in Walter Map's Satire against the Cistercians," *Comparative Literature* 54 (2002): 277.
5 Sinex, "Echoic Irony," 278; Elisabeth Camp, "Sarcasm, Pretense, and The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction," *Nous* 46.4 (2012): 587.
6 Stephen Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective in the *Nugae* of Walter Map," *JEGP* 116.1 (January 2017): 85.
7 "sarcasm, n." *OED* Online. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 1 November 2014.
8 Quoted in Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 85.
9 Haiman, *Talk is Cheap*, 21.
10 Haiman, *Talk is Cheap,* 21; and Konrad T. Werkhofer, "Traditional and Modern Views: The Social Constitution and the Power of Politeness," in *Politeness in Language: Studies in History, Theory and Practice*, Second Edition, ed. Richard J. Watts et al. (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005), 192.
11 Haiman, *Talk is Cheap*, 20.

Third, in verbal discourse, both the ironic meaning and the derision depend primarily on "incongruity between segmental and suprasegmental" aspects of the utterance, in other words, between the words and their delivery, such as exaggerated, often hyper-formal tone, eye-rolling, sneers, or other facial expressions.[12] These "extra-textual" features of language make it difficult to pick out sarcasm from reading the text alone without explicit written instruction, such as stage directions or an explicit narrative cue.

Finally, some elements of context, in this case the show title, can hint at or reinforce the perception that sarcasm is at work, though it is not absolutely necessary, what linguists sometimes call "framing" in discourse analysis and pragmatics, including "politeness studies" and "impoliteness studies."[13] This is, naturally, especially important to reading, rather than hearing, a potentially sarcastic remark. As Graham Williams notes, "[W]e have much less, if any, access to extra-linguistic cues when dealing solely with textual language. As opposed to speech, where it is more often possible to compare what is being said, literally, with how it is said (through intonation, body language, etc.), written irony, and specifically sarcasm, works by juxtaposing what is said in one part of a 'linear string' and what is said elsewhere."[14] "What is said elsewhere" can include what is written elsewhere in the same work and what is written elsewhere in related or analogous works, as well as taking into account larger social and cultural contexts.

Medieval rhetoricians were keenly aware of these subtleties, although it was not always thought to be so. As late as 1979, one scholar, K.S. Campbell, asserted that "there was 'a singular lack of theoretical interest in allegory and irony'" in

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12 John Haiman, "Sarcasm as Theater," C*ognitive Linguistics* 1.2 (1990): 181 and *passim*; see also, Rebecca Clift, "Irony in Conversation," *Language in Society* 28.4 (Dec., 1999): 545–46; and Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 86.
13 See Shoshana Blum-Kulka, "The Metapragmatics of Politeness in Israeli Society," in Watts, *Politeness in Language*, 264; Clift, "Irony in Conversation," *passim*; Suzanne Fleischman, "Philology, Linguistics, and the Discourse of the Medieval Text," *Speculum* 65.1 (1990): 28 ff.; Marta Dynel, "The Landscape of Impoliteness Research," *Journal of Politeness Research* 11.2 (2015): 340 ff.; Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 95; Haiman, *Talk is Cheap*, 12–13 and *passim*; David S. Kaufer, "The Functions of Sarcastic Irony in Speech," *Journal of Pragmatics* 26 (1996): 614–615; Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Dialogue and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), *passim*; and Graham Williams, "'trobled wth a tedious discours': Sincerity, Sarcasm, and Seriousness in the Letters of Maria Thynne, c. 1601–1610," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 11.2 (2010): 169.
14 Williams, "'trobled wth a tedious discours,'" 171.

the Middle Ages.[15] In his *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony*, which includes the only extensive treatment of sarcasm in medieval and Renaissance literature, Dilwyn Knox points out that even discussions of medieval understanding of irony used to be limited to a few "classical and late classical definitions, including those in Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae*" and "a handful of medieval ones."[16] However, Knox believes a full picture of the medieval understanding of irony and related tropes requires study of a wide variety of medieval writers, including the Venerable Bede, Aelius Donatus, Isidore of Seville, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in addition to less well known writers such as Julian of Toledo, Boncompagno da Signa, Alexander de Villa Dei, Eberhardus Bethuniensis, Petrus Lombardus, and pseudo-Aristotle.[17]

The same can be said of sarcasm. In fact, Knox himself writes that *sarcasmos* is "of little importance" before the fifteenth century except in theoretical discussions,[18] a contention that this volume seriously calls into question. Perhaps it is because sarcasm relies so much on non-verbal signals. Medieval commentators were well aware that, in oratory, facial expression, gesture, and/or tone are meant to make clear the intended meaning that the verbal expression alone might hide. They recommended the use of such non-verbal signals to convey intended meaning instead of purely literal statement for its expressive value, affecting "the emotional tenor of a sentence."[19] On parchment, however, without facial expressions and gesture, tone that works by indirection, such as sarcasm, becomes harder to pick out or pin down. In fact, there is some evidence of medieval readers missing the point. Stephen Gordon gives reasons to believe that the irony in Walter Map's *Nugae* might have been "too subtle for his readership to decipher."[20]

That most subtle of writers, Chaucer, is a prime example of the challenge modern readers face deciphering sarcasm in medieval literature where the framing context can be even more difficult to reconstruct than it was for his contemporaries. We know that the poet-Chaucer employs irony when he calls the Friar a "worthy limitour." The general context of antifraternal satire and the specific content of the portrait make it impossible to believe that any fourteenth-century author or reader would really believe the Friar is worthy. But what of the narra-

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15 Dilwyn Knox, *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, vol. 16 (Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 2n.

16 Knox, *Ironia*, 2.

17 Knox, *Ironia*, 2 and *passim*.

18 Knox, *Ironia*, 153–154.

19 Knox, *Ironia*, 78.

20 Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 88.

tor, the pilgrim-Chaucer? For over a century in Chaucer scholarship, it has been assumed that the speaker "Geoffrey" is either naïve enough or obsequious enough to mean everything he says about the other pilgrims, including fawning flattery of the Monk, Friar, Merchant, Physician, and others. If this is the case, the pilgrim-Chaucer is an indirect and ironic vehicle for the poet-Chaucer's satire. His naïveté complicates our reading of figures like the Knight, Squire, and Clerk, who may very well be just as worthy as the narrator says, but, under the circumstance of his skewed perceptions, might not.

However, the same narrator openly excoriates the Summoner and the Pardoner, obvious scoundrels, so he is not wholly naïve. And what are we to make of his view of the pirate Shipman? Can he really mean it when he calls him "a good felawe" (l. 395)[21] and then a few lines later tells us that he murders prisoners by making them walk the plank?

> Of nyce conscience took he no keep.
> If that he faught and hadde the hyer hond,
> By water he sente hem hoom to every lond. (ll. 398–400)

It is not out of the realm of possibility that a naïve narrator might romanticize a pirate, as has been done throughout history, but it is hard to accept that even the most naïve speaker would so openly praise murder, so it seems likely that "good felawe" is an instance of sarcasm. It is thus perfectly possible that, when "Geoffrey" compliments the Friar or Monk, we are also meant to imagine a tone of heavy sarcasm, which would make him a direct mouthpiece for the poet's low opinion, and the distinction between the poet and the narrator would break down, changing the view of Chaucer's ironic method. Unfortunately, it also means that, as in the Saturday Night Live sketch, the sarcastic tone could just as easily be applied to the Knight and even the Parson. Even more unfortunately, while this sort of sarcasm is less subtle than other forms of irony, it is much harder to pick out of a text. There is no definitive way to explain why the poet-Chaucer would have his alter-ego, "Geoffrey," openly excoriate the Pardoner, use sarcasm for the Shipman, and be more subtly ironic with the Friar. In the case of the pilgrim-Chaucer, there is simply no way to tell.

There are, however, medieval and early modern texts in which the combination of circumstance and word choice make clear that the speaker, whether a character or a narrator, is being sarcastic. The essays in this volume identify and analyze instances of such unambiguous sarcasm in a broad range of

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21 All quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, Third Edition. Larry Benson, gen. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

works. Essays address questions such as what clues the writers provide that sarcasm is at work, how it conforms to or deviates from medieval rhetorical theory, whether it shows up mostly in the mouths of characters or of narrators, what role it plays in building character or theme, the differences between sarcastic language and sarcastic action, how prominently sarcasm appears in particular cultures or specific genres, and how sarcasm fits into the Christian milieu of medieval Europe and the Islamic culture of medieval Arabia.

Sarcasm through (Rolling) Medieval Eyes

The usual modern view of sarcasm, as illustrated above, is that it is a subtype of irony, because the speaker means the opposite of what is said. Unlike other forms of irony, sarcasm is supposed to have a hurtful intent, usually "blame by praise," and the blame is signaled by tone of voice and perhaps facial expression and gesture. However, medieval treatises on rhetoric are much more varied in their discussion of both irony and sarcasm. The imprecision is understandable because of the nature of the terms. Jorg Rawel has said, "In common linguistic usage, there is barely a difference between irony and sarcasm. Often the impossibility to distinguish subcategories of humorous phenomena are even described as one the characteristics of humor itself."[22] The variety of false etymologies alone for both *ironia* and *sarcasmos* or *sarcasmus* among rhetoricians, the medieval equivalent of linguists, illustrate how differently individual writers might understand their nature. Most importantly, it can be unclear whether any given literary author is working with a particular conception of sarcasm, or even the term itself, in mind.

Knox's *Ironia* serves as a basis for the discussion of the history of the trope, along with primary texts of writers such as Donatus, Bede, Isidore, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf. The grammarian Donatus is a foundational text for later writers, especially Bede, who quotes his definitions and categorizations almost verbatim.[23] Unlike what we characterize as the common modern view, however, Donatus does not classify sarcasm as a species of irony; rather, he classifies both as subtypes of allegory.[24] Allegory is saying one thing and meaning another. Irony more

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22 Jorg Rawel, "The Relationship between Irony, Sarcasm and Cynicism," *Zeitschrift fur Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik (LiLi)* 37.145 (2007): 142.

23 Knox, *Ironia*, 9–10. See also Joseph M. Miller, Michael H. Prosser, and Thomas W. Benson, eds., *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric* (Bloomington: U. of Indiana Press, 1973), 106 ff., esp. 118, where Bede defines *Sarcasm* as "'hostile derision, laden with hate.'"

24 Knox, *Ironia*, 159n.

specifically means the exact opposite of what is said. Sarcasm is contrary meaning but not necessarily the opposite and is defined by its "hostile derision full of hatred."[25] (Contrast Sinex, Camp, and Gordon, above.) The quality of hateful derision is consistent with the true etymology of the word as "flesh tearing."

Despite the influence of Donatus's very systematic approach, Knox has shown that conceptions of both irony and sarcasm and their relationship fluctuated greatly over time. Knox suggests that medieval and Renaissance authors, like modern linguists and rhetoricians, were not consistent in their categorization. Unlike most modern scholars, however, they were not necessarily systematic, because of "an uncritical imitation of classical sources and love of superfluous terminology."[26] Not all commentators, for instance, rigorously observed the distinction between contrary and opposite meanings for irony. A few writers, both medieval and Renaissance, did not even conform to the requirement that sarcasm be indirect, equating it with straightforward *insultatis* and direct mockery.[27] Others defined irony itself as derisive in the same way Donatus characterizes sarcasm. "*Sarcasmos*…illustrates arguments applicable to the remaining species [of *allegoria*], namely, that the terms had their own histories independent of *ironia*, that usually they were forms of derision which were confused with *ironia* because *ironia* was predominantly derisive…."[28] This arguably makes the term *sarcasmos* superfluous or requires rhetoricians to make even finer distinctions, such as that irony was humorously insulting while sarcasm was aggressively so.[29] By the seventeenth century, the terms could be interchangeable (The 1605 *OED* citation from clergyman John Dove simply equates irony and sarcasm: "a figure called *Ironia*, or *Sarcasmus*").[30]

In the early modern era, the definition of sarcasm continued to be fluid in much the same ways. In a supplement to a 1599 edition of Angel Day's 1586 letter-writing manual, *The English Secretorie*, sarcasm is listed under "Tropes, Figures and Schemes":

> *Ironia*, a scoffe or flout, as when wee saie, Alas good man, or to one that hath set debate or contention, you haue spun a faire thred: or to him that hath made a long speach to no pur-

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25 Donatus, *Ars maior*, quoted in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter. Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, vol. 16 (Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 173.

26 Knox, *Ironia*, 156.

27 Knox, *Ironia*, 154.

28 Knox, *Ironia*, 157.

29 Knox, *Ironia*, 176.

30 "sarcasm, n." *OED* Online. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 1 November 2014.

pose, you haue brought forth a mighty mole-hil, or to a lewd person, you are an honest man.

Sarcasmus, a bitter bob as wee saie, or enuious derision, as of one arraigned for fellonie, to twit him, that hee had like to haue knockt his head against the gallowes, or of one suffering for treason to saie, that it made him hop headlesse.

Antiphrasis, when a word scornefullie deliuered, is understoode by his contrarie, as of a dwarfe, to saie in iest, what a gyant haue we here, or of him that telleth a matter ordinarie for strange, to saie, what a wonder telleth he, or to say, the man hath a sharpe wit, when we intend he hath a verie blunt capacitie, or of a blacke Boore woman, to saie, Will ye see a faire pigion.

Charientismus, as when we scoffe a man in his threatning mood to say, O good words, I pray you, or kill vs not at the first dash, or, Bite not my nose off I pray you, and such like.[31]

Note that what Day calls *antiphrasis* is more akin to the understanding of sarcasm as meaning the opposite of what is said in a derisive manner. In fact, *sarcasmus* is the only figure of the four that doesn't seem to have an alternative, nonliteral message. It is pure mockery, more akin to Bede's notion of sarcasm as straightforward derision and hate.[32]

The earliest citation for the word in English is from E.K.'s commentary on Spenser's *Shepheardes Calendar:* "Tom piper, an ironicall Sarcasmus, spoken in derision of these rude wits." Here, although E.K. does call sarcasm "ironicall," we cannot be absolutely certain what he means by that, and, in any case, as with Day, the focus is on the bitterness of the gibe rather than its indirectness. Derision seems to be the one consistent trait ascribed to sarcasm throughout the seventeenth century. The 1619 *Follie's Anatomy* refers to "harsh Sarcasmes, dissonant and smart" without specifying that they also have a double meaning. However, sarcasm's dual nature seems to become more prominent as time goes on. A 1690 Bible commentary says "No lye, but an irony...a witty way of speaking...such sarcasms Elijah used," and a 1725 text refers to "Scoffs and ironical Tartness...usually call'd a Sarcasm," directed, mostly cruelly of all, at "a dying or dead Person."[33]

This unremitting emphasis among medieval and early modern rhetoricians on hostility as a (perhaps the) fundamental trait of sarcasm suggests a narrower use of the trope than has arisen in more recent times. David Kaufer refers to studies that show sarcasm "creating solidarity in work groups" where insults among friends are actually sarcastic and therefore compliments or at least allow hearers

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31 Williams, "'trobled wth a tedious discours,'" 187–188.

32 Miller, Prosser, and Benson, 118.

33 "sarcasm, n." *OED* Online, Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 1 November 2014.

to interpret them that way, thus being face-saving rather than truly hostile.[34] What he describes here is actually language play with a double metamessage, "mock sarcasm" in the service of bonding rather than alienation, which is the more common goal of sarcasm.[35] Sarcastic banter gives a literal compliment in a sarcastic tone that suggests the speaker doesn't mean it but in a social context where the listener knows the speaker means exactly what he says. It is a hedge against sentimentality rather than sincerity in a particular kind of social setting.

Pre-modern writers, by contrast, tended to see both *ironia* and *sarcasmos* through a moral, rather than just a social, lens. Classical authors from Plato to Theophrastus characterized irony, not only as derisive, but as mean-spirited and even hypocritical.[36] As medieval rhetoricians mostly took a more positive view of irony and transferred the quality of mockery to sarcasm, many of them in turn disapproved of sarcasm's use on moral grounds and often ascribed it to the sinful and to villains. Although Donatus does not elaborate on the morality of sarcasm, his use of "*plena odio*" [full of hatred] in his definition takes on a moral dimension and implies that sarcasm is a weapon of the wicked. Thus, a common example of *sarcasmos* would be the mockery of Christ by the chief priests during the buffeting in Matthew 26.68: "Prophesy to us, O Christ, who is he that smote you?" Their "command" does not, as with *ironia*, say the opposite of what is meant, but it is contrary to what the speakers believe, which is that Christ is not a prophet, it is clearly full of hatred and derision, and the speakers are to be condemned for it.[37] It is what a modern American might call "snark" (for which, see the "Postscript" below). A fourteenth-century anonymous commentator on the thirteenth-century *Graecismus* of Eberhardus Bethuniensis scorns anyone who uses sarcasm, "'for only carnal and bestial men who forsake reason are wont to deride others.'"[38] Donatus's own brief example of sarcasm that goes with his definition is from *The Aeneid*, Bk. 12, ll. 395 ff., the words of Turnus as he kills a Trojan: "'There! Lying down you can measure out, Trojan, the lands and Hesperia, which you tried to conquer through war.'"[39] While Donatus makes no further comment, we can infer that he considers the Greek Turnus to be a villain, given his source.

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34 Kaufer, "The Functions of Sarcastic Irony in Speech," 614.
35 Haiman, *Talk is Cheap*, 10 – 11.
36 Knox, *Ironia*, 139 – 140.
37 Knox, *Ironia*, 29.
38 Knox, *Ironia*, 173.
39 Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 98.

It is worth noting that, even though Donatus makes *sarcasmos* and *ironia* separate subcategories of *allegoria*, irony potentially has some of the same moral stigma as the more hateful sarcasm:

> In some early Latin glossaries...*ironia* was described as a mendacious jest (*mendax iocus*). Its standing was hardly improved when Renaissance dictionaries described those who indulged in *ironia* to be derisively deceiving and to be withholding the truth; or when theorists described *ironia* as a device in which the tongue was quick to suggest one thing while the heart concealed another. How does this differ from, say, the following definition of lying given in Petrus Lombardus' (c. 1095–1160) *Sententiae*? "For this is the peculiar sin of the liar: to conceal one thing in the heart, but to express another by the tongue."[40]

Others, as we have seen with the seventeenth-century example of Elijah, saw it as a useful tool to indicate cleverness, satire, and arguably justifiable criticism, though the medieval examples tend to be more ambiguous than the 1690 Bible. Knox tells us that a "prevalent medieval and Renaissance conception of *sarcasmos* [is that it] was a bitter quip (*motto amaro*), and, as befitted a form of address used by the vanquisher to the vanquished, it conveyed a haughty air."[41] Sarcasm has always implied that the speaker feels superior to the target, and the "haughty air" opens the rhetorical technique up to the charge of the sin of Pride. If "[s]arcasm is the perception of comic agency with marked superiority,"[42] can *Superbia* be far behind? When Iago makes a series of sarcastic observations about Cassio but as asides, out of earshot of his target, what is he doing but exhibiting Pride, making himself feel superior about his own wit?[43] However, the association of sarcasm with vanquishing a foe also raises the possibility that it might be considered appropriate, or at least natural, as goading between warriors. An anonymous twelfth-century poem says "*Sarcasmos* is spoken to provoke one's enemy," and the thirteenth-century Italian grammarian, Bene de Firenze, wrongly "derived *sarcasmos* from *sarcos* meaning 'enemy' and *cosmos* meaning 'derision.'"[44] Consequently, just as Chaucer might use irony despite the common denigration of it on moral grounds, so might the warriors Beowulf and King Arthur, like the prophet Elijah, justly use sarcasm in a battle against a wicked enemy. Context can trump theory.

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40 Knox, *Ironia*, 51–52.
41 Knox, *Ironia*, 171.
42 Jeroen Vandaele, "Narrative Humor (I): Enter Perspective," *Poetics Today* 31.4 (2010): 771.
43 Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Dialogue and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171–172.
44 Knox, *Ironia*, 171.

Further complicating the definition, use, and identification of sarcasm is the way it is conveyed. Knox demonstrates that, just like moderns, medieval thinkers recognized that one of the distinctive traits of sarcasm was the importance of *pronunciatio*, that is, oral delivery and body language. By extension they apply to dramatic texts, where actors have to decide how to deliver lines, and to narrative works, in which readers must decipher tone in both dialogue and narration.[45] For example, in the fourth book of his dialogue, *Saturnalia*, a commentary on *The Aeneid*, Macrobius reads the epic as oratory, characterizing Virgil as an orator in a court of law, using rhetoric to express and manipulate emotion.[46]

In the case of an actual speaker with the requisite skill, there should be little ambiguity or uncertainty for the listener about ironic intent. For a reader, however, unless a passage is explicitly identified in some way as sarcastic, word choice and circumstance are the only signals for how to read the tone of the words. There is evidence that even medieval readers, immersed in their cultural context, could have the same problems that modern readers have from a greater distance. For example, one mid-thirteenth-century parodic Latin saint's life, *St. Nemo*, illustrates the difficulty of interpreting the purpose of a parodic/ironic/ sarcastic text. It plays on confusion between the Latin for "nobody" and a name. Thus, "*nemo*" is mistaken for a person named "Nemo," who is sanctified because of his revered position in the Bible: "Deus cuius ire nemo resistere potest" becomes "Nemo is immune to the wrath of God"; "his arithmetic skills were so great that only Nemo could identify the number of souls seen by John in Revelations" from Rev. 7:9, "Et vidi turbam magnam quam dinumerare nemo poterat." St. Nemo must have been "a trusted confidant, for after the Transfiguration Christ was heard to say "visionem quam vidistis nemini dixeritis" (tell the vision you have seen to [Nemo])."[47] Stephen Gordon believes this is a critique of "the follies of adhering to literal interpretations of the Word,"[48] a satire of scholasticism; however, this could just as easily be a joke on clerics whose Latin was poor and who were earlier targets of Jerome. Regardless of authorial intent, he suggests that contemporary readers of the mock saint's life got it wrong by taking it seriously: "The production of refutations against the *Nemo* tradition—see Stephanus's *Reprobratio Nefandi Sermonis* (ca. 1290), for example—suggests that not

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45 Knox, *Ironia*, 58–77.

46 Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 33–34.

47 Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*, Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1996), 57–63.

48 Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 88.

everyone was aware of the joke."[49] Similarly, Knox points to a thirteenth-century German satire on the Pope and the Curia that was "sometimes...construed literally as panegyric," prompting papal librarians in the fifteenth century to have a manuscript of it "elaborately bound and illuminated"[50] for the Vatican, perhaps even more embarrassing than the people who wrote serious refutations of the mock saint's life of St. Nemo.

In *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality*, Ruth Morse describes the medieval penchant for systematic rules and for appreciating art for conforming to known, often very complex conventions. In Macrobius, "Virgil is praised for exemplifying a series of rules, as if he had written his poetry with a checklist of figures in hand, and ticked each off as he used it; the student is encouraged in turn to read with his own mental checklist, making extracts as he goes....This in turn emphasizes an artificial kind of composition."[51] On the one hand, knowing this is a medieval habit of mind would justify analyzing writers' use of irony and sarcasm in terms of definitions and "rules" set down by medieval rhetoricians. It can be valuable to keep in mind medieval conceptions of sarcasm rather than imposing modern ones, especially with writers who show signs of having been trained in rhetoric and who do not otherwise exhibit much independence of thought. On the other hand, any study of medieval rhetoric might fall into the trap of implying that rhetorical "rules" led to stilted, formulaic literature. In fact, many writers show evidence of not being satisfied merely to follow a playbook step by step.

This is especially true because there were so many playbooks. The variety of theories of sarcasm throughout the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period and the slipperiness of its practice mean that individual medieval and Renaissance authors did not necessarily restrict themselves to a single, rigid definition of the trope. When the medieval tradition is so diverse, one cannot and should not feel constrained to read any given text in light of one theory. This is certainly true of irony and sarcasm, so it is not necessarily anachronistic to see instances of sarcasm according to a modern definition, even if the writers themselves may have called it something else. A rose by any other name can be just as thorny.

Similarly, the essayists in this volume will demonstrate their awareness of the theories, but they are not necessarily bound by them. Keeping in mind the

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49 Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 88.

50 Knox, *Ironia*, 17.

51 Morse, *Truth and Convention*, 35.

cultural context of period and place, they follow the individual texts wherever they lead and illuminate them for modern readers.

A Postscript on Terminology: *Snark* and *Sarcasm*

The fluctuating line between irony and sarcasm in the Middle Ages is analogous to the relationship between the modern understanding of sarcasm and the more recent term "snark." As demonstrated above, today, sarcasm most commonly includes saying the opposite of what one means in a derisive and superior tone. The evolution of "snark" as a term in relation to "sarcasm" has led to a situation much like *sarcasmos* and *ironia*, from something quite different to sometimes being interchangeable. Furthermore, the fluidity of "snark" is comparable to the changes in *sarcasmos* over time and between cultures.

No-one knows exactly why Lewis Carroll coined "Snark" as the name of his monstrous Boojum in 1876, but we do know that at least as early as 1866, "snark" was a verb that meant "snore" (a variant of "snork"). Within a few years of *The Hunting of the Snark*, the verb shows up with the meaning of "find fault" or "nag," possibly influenced by the regionalism "nark" ("to annoy, exasperate, infuriate"), also from the 1880s, and conflated with "snark." It may be worth noting that Eric Partridge's 1949 *A Dictionary of the Underworld: British and American* suggests that "nark" is a shortened form of French *narquois*, which started out in the 1500s as a noun for a vagabond soldier, then in the 1600s referred to thieves and their slang, and by the mid-1800s was used as an adjective meaning both "cunning, deceitful" and "mocking," a double sense that matches the range of meaning of both "snark" and "sarcasm" with their mocking double meaning. The *OED* does not put much confidence in this connection, however, and "snark" as a noun is still defined only as Carroll's whimsical, elusive monster. By at least 1906, with E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, the adjective "snarky" had come into being with the meaning "Irritable, short-tempered." The *OED* relates this to "snark" as "snore," but almost certainly the connection to "snark" as "nag" makes more sense. "Irritable, short-tempered" remains the only official definition of "snarky" as a British usage.[52]

In America, "snarky" started out the same way. The 1993 *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, for example, considers "snarky" to be "*Chiefly Brit[ish] Slang*" and defines it only as "testy or irritable." The 1998 tenth edition of *Mer-*

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[52] "snark," "snarky," and "nark," *OED* Online. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 8 June 2016.

riam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary no longer identifies it as primarily British but similarly defines it only as "crotchety, snappish." However, the current *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* gives 1999 as the first appearance of "snark" as a back-formation of "snarky" meaning "an attitude or expression of mocking irreverence and sarcasm,"[53] and now the online collegiate version has added "sarcastic, impertinent, or irreverent in tone or manner" as a second definition of "snarky."[54] The word "or" here is key to the range "snarky" can have. Merriam-Webster.com includes this usage note:

> Snarky vs. Sarcastic
> Some have questioned whether *snarky* is a real word. There can be no doubt that it is; the adjective has been recorded in English since 1906. Its original meaning, "crotchety, snappish," has largely been overtaken, however, by the far more frequently-encountered sense "sarcastic, impertinent or irreverent." The precise difference between utterances described as *sarcastic* and *snarky* will vary somewhat based on the individual using each word. Some feel that *sarcastic* usually implies irony, or stating the opposite of what is really intended (for example, "thank you so much for your promptness" spoken to someone who arrives late), whereas *snarky* implies simple impertinence or irreverence (as when *Downton Abbey*'s Dowager Countess asks Isobel Crawley, "does it ever get cold on the moral high ground?")[55]

Meanwhile, the online *American Heritage Dictionary* reverses the order of definitions in *Merriam-Webster*, following common usage rather than chronology: "1. Rudely sarcastic or disrespectful; snide. 2. Irritable or short-tempered; irascible."[56] And use of "snark" and "snarky" remain common, indeed. As of April 2017, a Google search returns 10,800,000 hits for <snark>, 16,900,000 for <snarky>.

Thus, "snarky" went from referring to a personality or a statement that is curmudgeonly and purely derisive to being interchangeable with "sarcastic". And yet, certainly in both British and American usage, a snarky comment does not necessarily require the double meaning that is almost always a defining characteristic of sarcasm. The difference between a pure insult and a snarky one can be only the use of a tone we associate with sarcasm, superior, snide, even sneering. The snarky insult can be direct, or it can have a sarcastic double mean-

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53 "snark," n. *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* Online. Merriam-Webster, 2015. Web. 8 June 2016.
54 "snarky," adj. *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* Online. Merriam-Webster, 2008. Web. 8 June 2016.
55 "snark," n. *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* Online. Merriam-Webster, 2015. Web. 8 June 2016.
56 "snarky," adj. *American Heritage Dictionary* Online. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. Web. 8 June 2016.

ing. Medieval *sarcasmos* could be either one, as well. What snark and sarcasm have in common, self-evident in the tone, is the intent to wound. Since snark can lack the cleverness of sarcasm's indirection, it can be perceived through the lens of its original British meaning as being even more socially unpleasant. However, sarcasm and snark, whether synonyms or variations on a theme and whether called that or not, have been useful tools to rhetoricians and to writers.

The Use of Abuse

If the conceptions of sarcasm in the pre-modern and early modern periods are variable, the various uses of sarcasm are legion. The essays in this volume are arranged more or less chronologically according to their subjects. The intention is not to suggest that there is a consistent evolution in the use of sarcasm through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. It is simply an objective way to organize such a broad range of topics. However, the arrangement does create certain logical, cultural connections that may or may not be coincidental. The cultures and languages treated cover all of Europe and beyond: Old English, Old Norse, Old and Middle High German, Old Irish, Middle Scots, Middle English, Old French, Latin, Italian, Galician-Portuguese, Early Modern English, and Arabic. There is hardly a genre in which writers of the period could not find a way to employ sarcasm. The essays cover heroic epics, sagas, and romances, comic tales and plays, fabliaux and fables, saints' lives and historical poems, political letters and treatises, *cantigas* and three kinds of Arabic "speech acts," even curses. Examples range from the intellectually subtle to the raunchily X-rated. The users of sarcasm are villains, heroes, shrews, devils, saints, popes, heretics, and, of course, the authors themselves. Sometimes the essayists indulge, because sarcasm is catching and because the best way to understand a tool is to use it.

The volume begins with Rick McDonald's essay on Old English poetry, not only because it is some of the oldest literature in the volume, but mainly because McDonald's focus is on issues of translation, so vitally important when not only narrative context but word choice provides the sometimes cryptic signals readers have for sarcasm. McDonald argues that identifying sarcasm in a text, even one written in a reader's native tongue, is essentially an act of translation. He examines "The Battle of Maldon," "The Battle of Brunanburg," and, of course, *Beowulf*, all heroic poems where one would expect sarcasm in the martial challenges, *flytings*, and banter between warriors, but also saints' lives. In the process, he reveals how humor and snark were present in Anglo-Saxon society in ways that many critics of the last century would have denied. He also joins in the spirit of

the humor in his texts by constructing his essay as a Dave Letterman style Top Ten List.

Christopher Abram follows by mixing medieval and modern in a different way, linking internet trolls to the *trolls* in an Icelandic *þáttr*, or tale. The heroic ethos of both Germanic cultures, the Anglo-Saxon and the Norse, seems connected to the prevalence of sarcasm in their literature, but *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* depicts sarcasm in a very different setting than the Old English poems and with very different antagonists. Here the snarky verbal combat is between the historical eleventh-century Norwegian warrior king, Haraldr Sigurðarson harðráði ("hard ruler"), and Halli, a poet and master of derision. It will come as no surprise that the poet is the victor. However, what is surprising is his exploitation of so many verbal weapons—ambiguity, disingenuousness, abusive language, sarcasm, and humor—to flout the courtesies of Haraldr's court. At the same time, like the trolls of the internet age, Halli gains a grudging prestige by revealing the flaws and limitations of others.

Medieval Irish literature is also noted for its verbal duels between kings and poets, but Máire Johnson's essay explores a different but analogous cultural impulse to sarcasm, not the heroic, but the religious and legal. She examines the *Lives* of medieval Irish saints and the texts of Old Irish law to arrive at a highly original reading of the presence of sarcasm in stories of saints' curses. The curses themselves are straightforward with no opposite, contrary, or double meaning at all. It is in the magical effects of those curses that Johnson finds sarcastic intent and ironic, even snarky commentary on the saints' enemies.

The volume then moves briefly out of Europe and into Arabia. Jeremy Farrell examines thirteenth-century Arabic texts that bear comparison to the Irish in that they are mostly non-fiction and are written in a context that is similarly suffused with religion and religious division. In addition, the range of pre-modern Arab theorizing on speech acts that exhibit a conflict between "apparent" and "hidden" meanings is reminiscent of the ideas of Donatus, Bede, Geoffrey de Vinsauf, and other European thinkers. However, Farrell brings modern linguistic theory to bear on a variety of genres, such as exegesis, biography, and poetry, going well beyond the current state of scholarship.

The next essay returns to Europe, in some ways to the center of medieval Europe, in fact, and the crossroads of culture and of historical periods, Italy in the *trecento* and *quattrocento*, on the threshold of the Renaissance. Nicolino Applauso looks at sarcasm as a political instrument in the work of Dante and of his teacher, Brunetto Latini, as well as in the responses of their antagonists, including the pope and his representatives. Brunetto's diplomatic "Letter to Pavia" and Dante's political treatise, *Monarchia*, were both undiplomatic and impolitic in their use of sarcasm, and Applauso explores the very real effects they had on

Italian politics and public opinion, including sarcastic papal responses, angry public demonstrations, and violence.

Debra E. Best moves to lighter fare with the Middle English romance, *Bevis of Hampton*. Best analyzes a use of sarcasm and snark that Plato and Donatus could not have imagined, the creation of laughter as a force for good. She argues that control of language through sarcasm and the laughter it evokes contributes to the growth of both hero and heroine. Laughter and sarcasm also establish relationships between characters and between the fictional creations and the reader. Hidden just behind this particular use of humor as self-assertion and self-defense, Best tells us, is the theme of the power of language itself.

Brian S. Lee also finds new ideas in the more familiar territory of Chaucer's only Arthurian romance, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, as well as *The Owl and the Nightingale* and John Clerk's *Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*, among others. Lee applies theories of sarcasm that span more than sixteen hundred years, from the ancient, anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*c.* 80 B.C.), wrongly attributed to Cicero in the Middle Ages, to the early medieval *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (7th cent. A.D.), to the Renaissance English rhetorician George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589). Lee finds remarkable consistency over time in viewing sarcasm as a weapon to assert power over an adversary, all exemplified in these mostly fourteenth-century texts.

Esther Bernstein moves north and ahead about one hundred years to the so-called Scottish Chaucerian, Robert Henryson. Like Chaucer, Henryson uses traditional forms, in this case fables, but, Bernstein argues, in ways that inject complexity into a genre that evokes simple expectations in readers. One way he does this, she says, is by manipulating both narrative structure and language itself to make readers complicit in a conventional response that the fable ultimately shows to be wrong-headed. Thus, Henryson maneuvers readers into recognizing a meaning opposite to the apparent one, a sarcastic trick played on the audience. However, as in *Bevis of Hampton*, Henryson's objective is not scorn but improvement, not of his characters, but of his readership.

Further south, just as Bernstein demonstrates how Henryson uses conventional fables to subvert the norms, Patricia Sokolski turns another genre on its head, but in the opposite direction. Old French fabliaux, usually considered the ultimate subversive genre in medieval literature, Sokolski argues can often be used to support the social order its characters violate. In particular, she contends, socio-economic changes in Northern France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to a particular concern with disharmony in marriage, typified in fabliaux of the time by sarcasm used by husbands and especially wives against each other. In depicting marital sarcasm as destructive instead of clever,

the fabliau form, usually thought to be the high point (or low point) of anti-establishment literature, instead supports the doctrines of the Church.

If the fabliaux of Northern France became less disruptive of social convention, the *cantigas d'escarnho e de mal dizer* of Galicia took up the slack. Ellen Lorraine Friedrich examines a form that is not often studied and, she believes, may be under-appreciated. These particular Galician-Portuguese *cantigas* may have more to do with personal vendettas than the social order or may be purely frivolous, but they fall into two categories that correspond to one modern distinction between sarcasm and snark, as well as the changeable medieval taxonomy of *sarcasmos*, *ironia*, and *insultatio*. One uses veiled references and indirection; the other, direct attack, usually naming the target. Friedrich concentrates on a subset of these derisive *cantigas* that uses explicit and grotesque sexual imagery, rivaling anything in the saltiest Gallic fabliaux, that gives this volume its X-rating. Keep away from the children.

Albrecht Classen delves into an even darker side of human nature in the use of sarcasm in Old Norse, Old and Middle High German works either as a substitute for physical violence or a way to cap it off with a final, verbal kick to the groin. Classen points out that previous scholars have assumed sarcasm plays little role in these mostly heroic works, but medieval writers and readers were well aware of the power of sarcasm to depict particularly bitter strife. He begins with the Old Norse *Njál's Saga* and then moves to a range of medieval German texts, "Hildebrandslied" and even the courtly *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg. In so doing, like other essayists in the book, Classen demonstrates that the characters in the stories, as well as the authors and their readers, are closer to us than some might assume.

The Prince of Darkness is at the center of Elza C. Tiner's examination of the York *Fall of the Angels*. Like the medieval theorists who characterize sarcasm as a trope for the wicked, Tiner points out how the play depicts the origin of sarcasm in the originator of sin and his followers. However, she goes further by placing the York cycle and this particular play in the context of Church politics of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. It is no surprise that plays written by clerics and sponsored by the Church should support Catholic doctrine as much as fabliaux in Northern France, but Tiner's surprising and original argument is that *The Fall of the Angels* has a very specific target, Wyclif and the Lollards, who challenge the pope as Lucifer challenged God and who employ sarcasm to create disharmony.

Scott O'Neil also deals with conflict between an individual and a pope and with the "intellectual violence" of personal feuds in Renaissance Italy. Lorenzo Valla exposes the forgery of the Donation of Constantine, a challenge to papal power, and he does so with well-known vitriol. Martin Luther later used Valla's

exposé as an example of papal corruption and a call to break away from the Church. O'Neil, however, argues that Valla subtly employs two layers of sarcasm, the harshest and most overt aimed at deriding the forger of the Donation. The other, O'Neil shows, is subtextual, an indirect warning to the pope to reform rather than a frontal assault on the institution that Luther wanted it to be. Then, as now, sarcasm was easy to misread.

The volume closes with Shakespeare but also harks back to medieval traditions, conjoining the Middle Ages and the Renaissance by way of the figure of the shrew, particularly of the female kind. While acknowledging that *The Taming of the Shrew* is rife with sarcasm, Joe Ricke disputes the notion that Kate's final monologue on marriage is sarcastic and uses that speech, in comparison to others in the play, to illustrate the difficulty of "unpacking" discourse that may or may not use sarcasm and the importance of context in doing so. This takes him back to earlier, medieval dramatic representations of shrewishness, sometimes in surprising figures (the Virgin Mary as a shrew?), as part of a continuum that leads back to sarcastic dainty Kate. And Ricke makes his own continuum, ending the volume as Rick McDonald began it, with some lighthearted fake sarcasm of his own.

These essays on the intricacies of the use of a single, particularly malleable rhetorical trope, sarcasm, demonstrate the variety and richness of rhetorical practice across genres, time, and cultures. The authors show how close scrutiny of medieval texts and contexts, of the skillful choice of words combined with distinctive situations (the "language worlds"[57] of the writers and readers), can help us, like Hamlet, "by indirection find direction out."

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57 Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 5.

Rick McDonald
Encountering Snarks in Anglo-Saxon Translation

One Translator's Top 10 List

Fit the First: The Opening Gambit

> "We will hunt for the Snark" they cried with a whoop!
>> In a CFP crafted with care.
> Baragona and Rambo recruited a Troop
>> Who thought Snarking a bit of a dare
>
> "There is Snark in the Theatre," I tell you quite true
>> "There is Snark in the Home and at War;
> We must find them and tag them for science's due;
>> Snarks are nothing that scholars ignore."[1]

With a nod to Lewis Carroll, the great white snark-hunter himself, and a recognition of my debt to this collection's editors, I begin my perilous journey into the snark-pit which is Anglo-Saxon translation and interpretation. Certainly, snarks can be found in Anglo-Saxon texts, although they can be difficult to subdue, and there is always the threat that one will encounter the boojum of snarks and vanish away like Lewis Carroll's heroic Baker.[2] I'll admit that the pursuit of snark within a scholarly essay could be perceived by some as a foolhardy endeavor.

I am, for all intents and purposes, a general medievalist, but I'm a competent Anglo-Saxon translator, and I have always found a fair amount of dark humor in Anglo-Saxon texts. I believe critics no longer take as seriously some of the earlier scholarly arguments that there is little to no humor in Anglo-Saxon literature, claims that were often supported with comments made by Fr. Klaeber and D.W. Robertson's contention (in *A Preface to* Chaucer) that the expe-

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1 As I cannot write on snark without fitting tribute to Lewis Carroll, I determined that I should follow his poetic lead in hunting snark and reference my debt to Carroll, himself, and Alan Baragona and Elizabeth Rambo, the editors of this essay collection in my opening poetic snarklet.
2 Here I allude to "Fit the Eighth" of Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark,* wherein the Baker vanishes from existence when he attempts to capture a snark which turns out to be of the boojum variety. Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark.* Project Gutenberg, January 8, 2013, accessed March 15, 2015 http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13/13-h/13-h.htm.

rience of medieval individuals is so drastically different from our own world as to make comparisons with how we think, act, and feel unproductive. I find myself in agreement with Frederick Bracher in his "Understatement in Old English Poetry," that "I see no *a priori* reason for assuming, as Klaeber does, that 'in such a gloomy atmosphere there can be no room for levity, fun, or humor.'"[3] John D. Niles similarly questions Robertson's denial of the similarities between medieval and modern thought and feelings in his "Byrhtnoth's Laughter and the Poetics of Gesture."[4] I prefer the attitude expressed by E.L. Risden in "Teaching Anglo-Saxon Humor," where he asserts, "I would like to suggest that *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon culture, and more generally the medieval heroic world, had a more varying and sophisticated sense of humor than readers might first suspect."[5] A good exemplar of this would be Harold Zimmerman's 2015 article for *Pedagogy,* where he uses Aelfric Bata's *Colloquies* to show how humor was an integral part of Anglo-Saxon culture by looking at the sample discussions of Anglo-Saxon students within Bata's work, concluding "the boys depicted within the colloquies led lives of mind and spirit, but also liked to fool around, get drunk, insult each other, and laugh."[6] Jonathan Wilcox's year 2000 collection *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature* provides eight essays that ought to convince any disbelievers that humor was alive and well in the Anglo-Saxon period and that, although times have changed, we are still able to laugh along with our ancestors. I particularly agree with Hugh Magennis when he argues "The Anglo-Saxons clearly did appreciate humorous incongruity and took pleasure in unlikely correspondences and juxtapositions."[7] Of course snark is not exactly humor, but snark and humor are clearly not unrelated. I have found Anglo-Saxon snark in a number of genres; I especially think the language's penchant for both boasting and dramatic understatement, as revealed by Anglo-Saxon poets' frequent deployment of litotes, makes the literature a promising hunting ground for Lewis Carroll's elusive beast.

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[3] Frederick Bracher, "Understatement in Old English Poetry," *PMLA* 52.4 (1937): 923.

[4] John D. Niles, "Byrhtnoth's Laughter and the Poetics of Gesture," in *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature,* ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 13.

[5] E.L. Risden, "Teaching Anglo-Saxon Humor or Yes, Virginia, There is Humor in *Beowulf*," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 9.1 (2002): 35.

[6] Harold C. Zimmerman, "Drinking Feasts and Insult Battles: Bringing Anglo-Saxon Pedagogy into the Contemporary Classroom," *Pedagogy* 13.2 (2013): 242.

[7] Hugh Magennis, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Heaven: Humorous Incongruity in Old English Saints' Lives," in *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer 2000), 138.

Fit the Second: The Defining of the Snark

In order to proceed we need a definition of "snark." The introduction of this volume covers some of the various possibilities for the history of the word "snark." I find most convincing the 1999 *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary's* claim that "snark" is a backformation from "snarky." Nevertheless part of me likes the more informal definition offered by UrbanDictionary.com, where "snark" is a portmanteau word composed of "snide" and "remark." Even if their explanation lacks etymological depth, as an invention of the king of portmanteau words Lewis "Jabberwocky" Carroll, it seems appropriate that "snark" would be a portmanteau, although it could be argued it is not used as a portmanteau within Carroll's poem. The *OED* refrains from suggesting an etymology of "snark" within its entry. Nevertheless, by extrapolation from the information the *OED* provides for cognate words, "snark" could have come from similar sounding verbs in North Frisian, Swedish, and German meaning "to snort." Our modern usage almost certainly is a backformation of "snarky," an adjective that the *OED* finds multiple uses of in the first few decades of the 1900s. Looking at the group of related morphemes circulating around the first half of the 1900s, snark involves irritability, short temperedness, nagging, and finding fault.[8] Snark from its inception has been associated with derision. One of the more prolific authors on snark in our current century would be Lawrence Dorfman, who defines "snark" in his 2009 *The Snark Handbook: A Reference Guide to Verbal Sparring* as "a smartass remark," "a slyly disparaging comment," and "biting wit";[9] all of these definitions fit well within the historical framework of snark from the early 1900s, for the Anglo-Saxon period, and especially the present day. The idea of "snark" as "biting wit" nicely associates the term with the similar concept of "sarcasm," which comes from the Latin *sarcasmos* or flesh tearing.[10]

For my purposes snark is a behavior (most often an utterance) which results in its target experiencing some level of mockery. Snark is a condescending remark or gesture directed at a recipient for either antagonistic or ludic purposes. It is closely related to insults, a form of speech act which Jucker and Taavitsainen argue is present in Anglo-Saxon literature and "trends through time up until the present day."[11] Snark is not always overtly humorous, but it often is; it is not al-

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8 "Snark," *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971).

9 Lawrence Dorfman, "*The Snark Handbook: A Reference Guide to Verbal Sparring*" (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2015), preface.

10 "Sarcasm." *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.*

11 Andreas Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, "Diachronic Speech Act Analysis: Insults from Flyting to Flaming," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 1.1 (2000): 70.

ways abusive, but it sometimes is. Like sarcasm or sardonic wit, snark requires interpretation and a proper understanding of the context within which it is being deployed. The end result of my defining process is that, as with so many things in our post post-structural world, snark is often in the eye of the beholder. In identifying my 10 instances of snark, I will attempt, as much as possible, to provide you with the vantage point whence my eye beholdeth the snark.

In their 1997 study, "Interpreting Figurative Statements," Albert Katz and Penny Pexman provide some insights into ironic and sarcastic statements. They show how incongruity between what a speaker says and what we believe about that speaker affects how strongly an audience experiences irony.[12] Overall they find that an increased understanding of the context from which an ironic or sarcastic statement is generated aids in resolving any ambiguity inherent to ironic statements.[13] In a later, related study, Christopher Lee and Katz examine how sarcasm differs from irony in requiring a target victim. They find that "ridicule of a specific victim is one way in which sarcasm differs from irony."[14] Snark is in many ways similar to sarcasm, but there can be snark without a clear victim, although a possibility exists that the victim of the free-floating snark could be perceived as the remark's audience or some non-present imagined victim. I find myself heartened in my quest for snark by the ideas expressed by T.A. Shippey in his "Folly and Wisdom in Anglo-Saxon Humor." While defining Anglo-Saxon humor he states: "I am arguing for a sardonic quality in Anglo-Saxon humor, triggered above all by any too easy optimism, and leading on the one hand to contempt, which may be cruel and derisive, for the laughter of fools, and on the other hand to a more concealed admiration for those who can view uncomfortable realities with an amusement at the gap between them and the wishes of those who experience them *even when the latter includes themselves*" (italics in original).[15] The snark I am pursuing is clearly related to Shippey's sardonic Anglo-Saxon humor, reassuring me that we are truly on a hunt for snark and not snipe.[16]

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12 Albert Katz and Penny Pexman, "Interpreting Figurative Statements: Speaker Occupation can Change Metaphor Irony," *Metaphor and Symbol* 12.1 (1997): 20.

13 Katz and Pexman, "Interpreting Figurative Statements," 48.

14 Christopher Lee and Albert Katz, "The Differential Role of Ridicule in Sarcasm and Irony," *Metaphor and Symbol* 13.1 (1998): 1.

15 T.A. Shippey, "'Grim Wordplay': Folly and Wisdom in Anglo-Saxon Humor," in *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature,* ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 39.

16 For those unfamiliar, a "snipe hunt" is a rite of passage in many scouting organizations where a naïve individual is told to wait numerous hours in the dark, possibly scary, undoubtedly mosquito-infested woods for an elusive snipe to appear. No snipes are ever caught, but many

Fit the Third: Snarking Anglo-Saxon Translation

I have always been fascinated by the relation between translation and interpretation and flummoxed by commentators who behave as if there can be translation without interpretation. There is no one to one relation between an original Old English edition of a text and even the most faithful, intelligent, painstaking translation. In my 1997 dissertation, I discussed at length the problems created by scholarly editions of texts and translations which rely too heavily on an uncritical acceptance of the work of previous translators and editors and how that resulted in the illusion that Anglo-Saxon texts inherently lack persistent ambiguity.[17] In establishing Anglo-Saxon as an important literary language, scholars strove to present texts as clear, meaningful and worthwhile. Often they felt the need to support their emendations of texts by highlighting the limitations of the extant manuscripts which contained scribal error and attesting to their scholarly capacity to resolve any errant manuscript errors. In his contribution to D.G. Scragg's and Paul Szarmach's *The Editing of Old English*, Michael Lapidge expresses such ideas, and he is far from alone in his belief that editors "have a responsibility to conserve the transmitted text when it is sound, but—and here I dissent from the prevailing opinion—to emend it when it is not....The editor's first duty is not to dictionary makers, not to beginning students, not to historians, not to 'trouble makers,'...but to someone far more important than any of these—the author."[18] Of course from my position as a post-structural theorist looking for possible snarky manipulations of language, I am never entirely confident that one can know or recover what the author intended. My position is that any snark I find might or might not be "intended," and it is up to my audience to judge the viability of whatever snark I perceive.

And I am not alone in my questioning of any uncritical acceptance of scholarship's ability to reveal an Anglo-Saxon *Ur*-text behind any given manuscript. Within Scragg and Szarmach's collection on Old English editing, Antonette di Paolo Healey's observation about the editorial neatening up of words which run counter to grammatical rules (rules not formally known to the Anglo-Saxon author or scribe—owing to the nonexistence of any contemporary gram-

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snipe hunters are subsequently mocked for their participation in this somewhat mandatory hazing ritual.

17 Richard McDonald, "Mapping Polysemous Language in the Middle Ages: Mystics, Scholars, Poets," (Dissertation, University of South Florida, 1997), 35–40.

18 Michael Lapidge, "On the Emendation of Old English Texts," in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference,* ed. D. G. Scragg, and Paul E. Szarmach (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 67.

mar handbook) highlights the problem that scholarly editorial decisions can have for lexicographers.[19] Moreover, she presents a number of Old English words whose ambiguity often vex editors and translators of prose, adding that "verse particularly is open to ambiguity."[20] In a similar vein, Peter Clemoes's *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* seeks to rehabilitate some of the received scholarly pronouncements about the formulaic nature of Old English verse. He claims that recurrent word patterns and kennings which many critics have treated merely as oral formulas to assist the scop/scribe's memory were much more than "formulas": "It [the possibly formulaic word or word group] was semantic potential in a received form of wording. The meaning existed through the wording."[21] For Clemoes, in the poet's decision between two metrically and alliteratively equivalent words, such as "hordburh" [treasure stronghold] and "hleoburh" [sheltering stronghold], "the choice between them was not dictated by style for style's sake, but by the distinction of meaning called for by the differing narrative contexts."[22] Although the Anglo-Saxon terms are quite similar, the subtle difference between "treasure stronghold" and "sheltering stronghold" leads to the poet's selection of either based primarily upon their lexical differences. Poets were clearly choosing carefully between variants of words that differ for only subtle shades of meaning. Translation (or the identification of snark, as in this case) requires a recognition of the ability of Anglo-Saxon to achieve a subtlety of meaning that is sometimes lost or overlooked in an attempt to project certainty regarding one's editorial or translational decisions. Raymond Tripp argues for a complete reconsideration of major Anglo-Saxon texts which increasingly acknowledges the pervasive word play of their poets: "To reveal the sinews of the poet's humor, new emphasis needs to be placed upon the ways in which word play is inherent in the poet's frame of mind and his frame of mind is inherent in the linguistics of cultural conflict [often between pagan and Christian expectations]."[23]

19 Antonette diPaolo Healey. "The Search for Meaning," in *The Editing of Old English: papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference,* ed. D.G. Scragg & Paul E. Szarmach (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 88.
20 Healey, "Search for Meaning," 95.
21 Peter Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 126.
22 Clemoes, *Interactions,* 135.
23 Raymond Tripp, "Humor, Wordplay, and Semantic Resonance in *Beowulf*," in *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature,* ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 51.

Fit the Fourth: A Snarkin' Safari

With these preliminary remarks about the nature of snark and Anglo-Saxon translation established, it's time to dive into the mere of Anglo-Saxon texts and attempt to apprehend some snark—which hopefully survive the translation process. As someone who has just examined a large quantity of scholarship to aid in my identification of snark in Anglo-Saxon texts, I cannot resist observing that, while I did not find examples of Anglo-Saxon snark in every piece of scholarship I read, I did identify a fair amount of snark in Anglo-Saxonists' scholarly arguments directed both at previous scholarly pronouncement and critics who fail to interpret texts in a manner consonant with the writer's opinion. My post-structural training frequently causes me to lament that scholars still cannot be convinced that there are many different interpretations possible for every text.

Although a concept that has been around for more than 100 years, snark seems like a quintessentially contemporary phenomenon. Within the remainder of this essay, I hope to identify one of today's hottest linguistic constructions in English's earliest texts. One of the snarkiest genres in our contemporary world is the numbered list. Although ubiquitous across today's social media platforms, David Letterman,[24] for my generation, will always serve as the progenitor of the snarky "Top Ten List" format. So, keeping one eye on the present while mining the Anglo-Saxon past for its snarkiest tidbits: get your cameras ready, stay alert, and keep your arms and legs inside the vehicle at all times as we embark on an Old English snarkfari.

#10 Wondrous Things and Snarky Riddlers

When is a riddle snarky? They are funny and sarcastic; they sometimes lead the solution-finder into momentary discomfort and this, arguably, could create a fertile environment for snark. As D.K. Smith points out in "Humor in Hiding," the original purpose of the riddle game was to cause the riddle-solver to guess incorrectly.[25] Especially with the double-meaninged sexual riddles, the riddle's solution would result in laughter and embarrassment, once the innocent answer is

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24 David Letterman hosted *Late Night with David Letterman*, a comedic talk show, for more than 33 years, during which his snarky lists of top 10 reasons for almost anything were a wildly popular component.

25 D.K. Smith, "Humor in Hiding: Laughter Between the Sheets in the Exeter Book Riddles," in *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 82.

revealed. There is something snarky about baiting your audience into an embarrassing situation. For example riddle 25[26] plays on how the audience's misinterpretation of a carefully (and snarkily) worded description of an onion will cause them to guess "penis" as the solution to the riddle, allowing the riddler to tease the answerer about their unnecessarily sexual interpretation. Smith explains that "the humor of these [sexual] riddles would have arisen from the confusion between high and low discourse and the imagined incongruity between the sexual solutions and the polite setting."[27] There would seem to be evidence of this type of snark in at least 8 of the traditional *Exeter Book* riddles. Below, I provide the riddle number and a sexual then nonsexual solution to each riddle to refresh your memory: (12—Female Masturbation/Ox Hide; 25—Penis/Onion; 37—Sex Act/Bellows; 44—Penis/Key; 45—Penis/Dough; 54—Sex/Churning Butter; 61—Vagina/Shirt; 62—Penis/Poker).

I am also intrigued by the possibility suggested by Jonathan Wilcox in his 1996 article on mock riddles in Old English for *Studies in Philology* that riddles 19 and 86 are trick riddles. If he is correct that riddles 19 and 86 are "neck riddles" intended to lead the readers on a merry goose chase of possible misinterpretations for a riddle whose actual solution is hidden in a play on words, then the riddler's violation of the rules of the game—that a riddle should be solvable from information included within the riddle—make both 19 and 86 mock riddles.[28] The word play in question revolves around a frequently emended line included in both poems. Riddle 86 ends with the statement: "Saga hwaet ic hatte" [say what I am called], which editors have tended to emend to "Saga hwaet hio hatte" [say what it is called], but if the solution to this riddle is, as Wilcox conjectures, "I am called the riddler," then, there is a mock solution to this riddle. The emended change from "I" to "it" misleads the audience to think the riddle is answered by a word denoting some thing, but if this is a trick riddle, then the answer may just be the riddler's name, and that's pretty snarky.

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26 For my numbering of the Exeter book riddles I am following the order established by George Phillip Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book,* Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3 (New York, 1936).

27 Smith, "Humor in Hiding," 82.

28 Jonathan Wilcox, "Mock-Riddles in Old English: Exeter Riddles 86 and 19," *Studies in Philology* 93.2 (1996): 182.

#9 Beowulf Feeds the Sea Monsters a Snark Sandwich

As part of Beowulf's reply to Unferth's flyting, Beowulf sets the record straight about what happened during his swimming contest against Breca. A "fah feonds-catha" [hostile enemy]—a "mihtig mere-deor" [mighty sea-beast] has dragged him to the bottom of the sea, where "lath-geteonan" [evil harmers] threaten him severely. The sea monsters are biting his "beado-hraegl" [war garment] and trying to eat him. He pulls out his sword and serves them a very different meal than they desire: "Ic him þenode / deoran sweorde, ~ swa hit gedefe waes"[29] (560b-561) [I them served noble sword as was fitting]. The snarky scenario is as follows: Beowulf is swimming in the open sea, trying to beat Breca in a swimming contest, and an enormous sea-monster drags him to the bottom where a bunch of sea-beasts attempt to chew through his byrnie, but he serves them some "deoran sweorde" [lovely sword] instead. The only problem with this example is that it may be multiply snarky in that not only the creatures, but the audience, Unferth, and possibly Breca may all be the recipients of this snark sandwich. Hugh Magennis similarly defines this as a humorous moment in *Beowulf*, commenting "Beowulf plays insistently with the language of decorous feasting in the incongruous context of mortal combat," and explaining "he [Beowulf] served (thenode) them his sword at the banquet at which they intended to feast on him."[30] Beowulf serves up a snarky flyting to Unferth, defiantly asserts his dominance over Breca in the swimming contest, and ludically snarks the entire audience (both Dane and contemporary) with word play where feasting becomes slaying.

#8 A Snark Tsunami of Bitter Beer

When St. Andrew from the *Andreas* has finally endured enough traditionally hagiographic torture to substantiate his apostolic street cred, he takes the fight to the Mermedonians, unleashing a mighty prayer. He instructs the pillars outside the prison walls, "nu ðe ælmihtig / hateð, heofona cyning, ~ þæt ðu hrædlice / on þis fræte folc ~ forð onsende / wæter widrynig ~ to wera cwealme, /

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29 All translations from Old English throughout the essay are mine. For Old English excerpts from *Beowulf*, I consulted editions by C.L. Wrenn and W.F. Bolton, Howell Chickering and the very helpful website: Internet Sacred Text Archive, www.sacred-texts.com.
30 Magennis, "Funny Thing Happened," 139 and 138.

geofon geotende" (1505b-1509a).[31] [Now Almighty God, heaven's king, commands you hastily, on this obstinate folk, to send forth water storming to kill the people, ocean over flowing]. As the flood begins to rise, the poet weaves some snark into his depiction of the drowning warriors, associating the highly corrosive salt water they are ingesting with an overindulgence in particularly bitter beer. "þæt wæs sorgbyrþen, / biter beorþegu. ~ Byrlas ne gældon, / ombehtþegnas. ~ þær wæs ælcum genog / fram dæges orde ~ drync sona gearu" (1533b-1536). [That was a load of trouble, bitter beer; the cup-bearers were not impeded, those dutiful servants; there was ale enough from daybreak on; each man had his drink soon finished]. Johnathan Wilcox, in his "Eating People is Wrong," emphasizes the importance of the corrosiveness of this salty water which the Mermedonians are forced to imbibe, pointing out that those who had eaten others and intended to eat Andrew instead were eaten by the corrosive flood of salt water."[32] Associating the drowning of evil Mermedonians with drinkers who over indulge in beer snarkily accentuates the biblical notion that we reap what we sow, and the text considerably softens the punishment when all but the worst 14 of the Mermedonians are resurrected and then happily convert to Christianity.

#7 Artisanal English Snark

The Battle of Brunanburg is often considered one of the most important and decisive victories for establishing British identity, and many historians believe it is the most significant battle on the island prior to the Battle of Hastings. The poetic account of the battle from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 937 may inaugurate snark as a time-honored British attribute. (What fan of British comedy, *à la* Monty Python or Benny Hill, could deny that?) After King Æðelstan and Prince Eadmund's West Saxon and Mercian armies defeat the Scots and Norse, the enemy troops become "werig, wiges sæd" (20a),[33] [weary, battle sated]. Their

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31 All Anglo-Saxon quotes from the *Andreas* are from Kenneth Brooks, *Andreas and the Fate of The Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). I have on occasion consulted Robert Root's translation to perfect my own. Robert Kilburn Root, *Andreas: The Legend of St. Andrew* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1899).

32 Johnathan Wilcox, "Eating People is Wrong: Funny Style in *Andreas* and its Analogues," in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov and George Hardin Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 212.

33 Citations from the *Battle of Brunanburg* are based on the Internet Sacred Text Archive and Robert Diamond, *Old English Grammar and Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1970), 112–117.

leaders dead, their fellow thanes pursued by angry Mercians and West Saxons, the Norse and Scots have had their fill of fighting for the day, it seems. Nevertheless, the snark keeps flowing from our British chronicler as he points out that Olaf, leader of the Norse, and King Constantine of Scotland both choose to flee in defeat with their remaining forces (28b-39a). The narrator explains:

> ...~ Hreman ne þorfte
> Meca gemanan; ~ he wæs his maga sceard,
> Freonda gefielled ~ on folcstede
> Beslægen æt sæcce, ~ and his sunu forlet
> On wælstowe ~ wundum forgrunden,
> Geongne æt guðe. (39b-44a).

> [Constantine had no need to exult about those sword dealings; he was deprived of his kinsmen, friends fallen on the battle field, slain in battle, and his son, destroyed by wounds on the warground, the young man [killed] in battle.]

Constantine and Olaf (and the remainder of their troops) "hliehhan ne þorfton" (47b) [had no need to laugh]. Throughout the passage litotes serve to remind the reader that the non-English forces had no need to rejoice about the battle because they had been thoroughly and embarrassingly beaten by Æðelstan and his brother. While the Scots and Norse are rudely mocked by the poet, the two English rulers return home "wiges hremige" (59b) [combat exultant].

#6 Snarking Back to Trash-talking Demons

There can be a blurring of lines between "talking smack," "trash talk," and a snarky retort. The hero of the *Andreas* unleashes a word-hoard of derision on none other than the Devil himself.[34] One of the few acceptable moments for saints to get snarky in any time period is when they are responding to tormenting/tempting demons. Shari Horner in her "Why Do You Speak Such Foolishness: Gender Humor and Discourse in Aelfric's *Lives of the Saints*," finds derisive replies to demons in the legends of Saints Cecilia, Agatha, and Lucy. In *Andreas*, Satan's minions have been frustrated in their attempts to torment St. Andrew by the miraculous appearance of the Christ's holy cross on the face of our hero (1338). The ancient fiend then takes matters into his own hands and threatens

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34 Shari Horner, "Why Do You Speak Such Foolishness: Gender Humor and Discourse in Aelfric's *Lives of the Saints*," in *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (D.S. Brewer, 2000), 134 – 135.