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sharply indicated by the diminished importance of the Investiture Conflict in the later work. By changing expository modes, Otto also markedly changed his portrayals of Gregory VII and Henry IV, indicating that, over the years, his judgment had shifted in favor of the king. There is reason to think that the shift occurred, not merely because the *Deeds* had a panegyric object, but also because the Roman Church had not fulfilled the promise of the Danielic stone, as Otto had expected in 1147. It cannot be assumed therefore that judgments on parties to the conflict that Otto issued in the *Chronicle* illuminate those in the *Deeds*.

II. It also cannot be assumed that Otto wrote the *Deeds* in an entirely different mode from the one employed in the *Chronicle*. Otto loosely threw the eschatology of the *Chronicle* together with another structure of thought which, in his altered cast of mind, he proceeded to reexamine in the *Deeds*. This second cluster of organizing principles comprised a doctrine of form in which eternity and its image, time, were reciprocally in one another. By virtue of the power of God, which ramified through the "flux of forms," change was always for the good. Indeed, beneath the instability of human existence, there steadily ran an ancient, semi-Christianized pattern of cumulative advancement through reason, the faculty through which all men were one man, and all saints constituted progressively through time one Image of God. In the *Deeds*, the "one man" comprised by all human beings performed the same functions as the "one Body" comprised by Christians had done in the *Chronicle*. While the same principles appeared in the *Chronicle* and the *Deeds*, their implications in the later work were startling, due to the simple fact that eschatology played no role. The implications of indefinite progression were more apparent in Meister Eckhart's generation than they were, or could have been, to anyone at the middle of the twelfth century.

III. Otto recast ancient doctrines on the provisional character of knowledge, defining it explicitly as a historical phenomenon.²⁸ In so doing, he was among the first to attempt the extremely difficult task of combining the closed hierarchy of form taught by Augustine, Boethius, and Dionysius with the open progression of experience. There is, he argued, an enduring formal order of being; the course of events follows a divine plan; the morphology of change combines the order and the plan. And yet, personally, institutionally, and socially men are passing through a series of transformations, through time and eternity, toward an end without end. It was far from clear to Otto what kind of hermeneutic could satisfy the still contrary demands for closure and for openness. And yet, in a sense far different from what Otto intended or foresaw, this concept of the ceaseless transformation of man from lesser to greater degrees of ascetic illumination was one of the most potent legacies bequeathed by him and his generation to European society. It was, and has remained, the goad of militant minorities.

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²⁸ *Gesta* 1.prol., p. 11. Schmale, *Gesta*, p. 118.

Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy

By Franz H. Bäuml

"Es ist eine Zeit angebrochen, . . . in der die führenden Schichten der Gesellschaft keine Bildung besitzen, auch keine Bücher, ja nicht einmal eine Sprache, in der sich eine ihnen angemessene Bildung hätte ausdrücken können. Es gab eine gelehrte Sprache, und es gab unschreibbare Umgangssprachen; eine Bildungssprache gab es nicht."¹ The situation thus described by Erich Auerbach was to prevail throughout the Middle Ages. At all levels of society, the majority of the population of Europe between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries was, in some sense, illiterate. Yet medieval civilization was a literate civilization; the knowledge indispensable to the functioning of medieval society was transmitted in writing: the Bible and its exegesis, statutory laws, and documents of all kinds. The need for writing that served a wide variety of purposes is evident in the development of the *ars dictaminis*.

This combination of circumstances has elicited much comment since the classic overstatements of medieval illiteracy in the nineteenth century.² Me-

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* (Bern, 1958), pp. 191-192, translated as *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* by Ralph Manheim (London, 1965), p. 255.

² The most influential of these exaggerations were probably those of William Robertson, *A View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1818), which served also as introduction to his *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, ed. William Prescott (Philadelphia, 1870), and Henry Hallam, *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages* (London, 1818; revised ed., 1848). Such exaggerations, however, are by no means rare in the twentieth century; see, for instance, Henri Pirenne, "L'instruction des marchands au Moyen Age," *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* 1 (1929), 15-28, and Charles Seignobos, "Histoire des conditions générales de la vie civilisée chez les peuples de l'Europe," *Revue des cours et conférences* 37 (30 Dec. 1935), 110-121, particularly p. 113; such views are — albeit critically — still regarded as "received opinion" in 1972; see the inaugural lecture at the University of Southampton of Colin Morris, *Medieval Media: Mass Communication in the Making of Europe* (Southampton, 1972), p. 4. The earlier works were countered principally by Samuel R. Maitland, first in a series of essays which appeared between March 1835 and February 1838 in *The British Magazine*, then in collected form as *The Dark Ages* (London, 1845); the more recent representatives of the simplistic view that literacy was confined to the clergy are, in part, answered by James Westfall Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages*, University of California Publications in Education 9 (Berkeley, 1939; repr. New York, 1963). A flawed, yet useful introductory survey of the development of the use and valuation of public documents, primarily in Germany, is provided by William T. M. Gamble, *The Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Its Inheritance in Source-Valuation and Criticism*, diss., Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C., 1927), pp. 9-33. Fundamental to all concern with medieval literacy, of course, is Harry Bresslau, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1912-1251).

medieval literacy, in these discussions, has hitherto been defined as the ability of a given individual to read and write Latin: "Literacy during the Middle Ages may be measured almost wholly by the extent of the knowledge and use of the Latin language."³ This definition is not exactly incorrect. It is true that only individuals can read and write (although the ability to read is not necessarily dependent on the ability to write). It is also true, generally speaking, that Latin was the language of reading and writing in medieval Europe. Other languages, though widely spoken, were rarely written or read. Latin was the language in which reading and writing were taught, for the use of Latin in written form.⁴

³ Thompson, *Literacy*, p. v. Of particular importance for the entire subject of medieval literacy, especially as it pertains to medieval England, is the recent book by M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979). One of the discrepancies between medieval and modern conceptions of literacy lies precisely in the role of Latin as a literary language, and in the changing medieval definitions of what constituted a *litteratus*: "If a person in the old or new age had learned to read in English or French but not in Latin, he could never have become *litteratus*, nor could he have understood the majority of writings circulating in his own lifetime, because these were in Latin. . . . Moreover, in the later Middle Ages, an elementary reading knowledge of Latin became a matter of life and death for Englishmen. Any person charged with felony, who could read a prescribed verse from the Bible, was automatically entitled to benefit of clergy and hence escaped the death penalty. Now that middle-class freemen were beginning to assert themselves, they took over the old association of *litteratus* with *mercator* and turned it to their own advantage in order to save themselves from hanging. At Ely, by *John Mason's Written Record*, pp. 181-185. Clanchy points out that the association of *litteratus* with *mercator* resulted from a combination of the antitheses *Latinus, laicus* and *litteratus, mercator*, the one a medieval creation, the other of Roman origin. Gradually the terms of each antithesis became interchangeable and ultimately synonymous. By the twelfth century, *litteratus* meant *litteratus, laicus* in an *illiteratus*, and vice versa. . . ." so that Philip of Harlegh could complain that "if anyone is comparing a knight who is *litteratus* with a priest who is ignorant, he will exclaim with confidence and affirm with an oath that the knight is a better man than the priest" (p. 126). In any application of the concept "literacy" to medieval culture, it is crucial, moreover, to keep in mind not only that neither *clericus*, nor *litteratus* can be adequately rendered by their modern equivalents, but also that medieval assessments concerning the possession of maximum ability, the skills of the most learned scholars (*illiteratus*), whereas modern assessments measure the diffusion of minimal skills among the masses" (p. 183).

⁴ Herbert Grundmann, "Litteratus—Illiteratus," *Zeitschrift für Kulturgeschichte* 10 (1958), 3-6.

⁵ An exception to the general rule that, since one learned to write in Latin, anyone who could write had a knowledge of Latin, made from Ireland to ninth-century England. King Alfred, in the preface to his version of the *Latin Benedicti Pastoralis* of Pope Gregory I, leaves no doubt of the existence of vernacular *sc*. Of literacy and Alfred's Latin grammar in OE studies to its canonical existence over a century later, see John W. Adamson, *The Illiterate Anglo-Saxons* (Cambridge, Eng., 1968), pp. 1-19, and Grundmann, "Litteratus—Illiteratus," pp. 34-38. The mention of Bede reciting verses on his deathbed "in crastin die in nostris carminibus" is of course somewhat less clear-cut evidence of vernacular literacy, in general, see Auribach, *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters*, p. 203. "Trotz all dem entstand in England unter Alfred dem Grossen und seinen Nachfolgern in England gebildete, Geschichtliche und kein literarisches Publikum." Das Schreiben hat eine geliebten, kindlichen und dialektischen Charakter. . . . For the process of teaching to read and write during the early and high Middle Ages, see particularly Bernhard Bischoff, "Elementarunterricht und Produktionsweise in der ersten Hälfte des Mittelalters," in *Das Mittelalterliche Studien* 1 (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 71-87, see also Esvan Hjalmar, "Universities and the Development of Writing in the XIIIth and XIIIth Centuries," *Scriptorium* 6 (1952),

The definition of literacy in the medieval period as the individual ability to read and write, in Latin, is valid enough in a limited sense, but it will not serve when the intention is to describe, implicitly or explicitly, the function of literacy in medieval society.⁵ In the first place, the simplicity and clarity of the definition is only apparent, since it does not take into account the elusive intermediate levels between complete literacy and complete illiteracy. In the second place, the definition obscures the social function of literacy, since it neglects the use of literacy by individuals who were themselves illiterate or only partly literate in Latin. Finally, in that it considers only Latin literacy, the definition excludes consideration of the complex relationships between Latin and the vernacular languages.

In an attempt to understand medieval literacy in an ampler context, I shall consider literacy and illiteracy primarily as conditions defined by two differing modes of communication, one that was dominated initially by the conventions of Latin, the other by those of the vernaculars. By applying concepts devised in connection with studies of orality and the theory of text-reception (*Rezeptionstheorie*), I hope to clarify certain functions of medieval literacy and illiteracy. I also hope to explain the rapid development of illusionism in vernacular literature, based on a union of the fictionality of the written text with the characteristic isotopic structure of the vernaculars. A final and no less important concern is to demonstrate the importance, for the study of medieval culture, of much of the recent research in the areas of orality, text-reception, and semiotics in general — even at the risk of complicating what once appeared simple.

I

The literacy and latinity of an individual are in part elusive because the definition of both is necessarily a matter of degree. Was Charlemagne, who,

177-195, and "A propos de l'enseignement de l'écriture dans les universités médiévales," *Scriptorium* 11 (1957), 3-28, whose views must, however, be regarded with some skepticism in the absence of supporting evidence. For the use of the Palter in elementary education, see Franz Eick, *Bibelstudien, Bibelhandschriften und Bibeldrucke in Mainz vom achten Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Mainz, 1901), pp. 28-29, and Pierre Riche, *Education et culture dans l'occident barbare*, Parisica Sorbonensia 1 (Paris, 1962), pp. 515-518.

⁶ Oswald Redlich, *Urkundenlehre. Die Privaturkunden des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1911), pp. 17, 67, offers a particularly succinct example of the inadequacy of the criterion of the knowledge of reading and writing for an examination of the function of literacy in medieval society: on the one hand the regression in the use of *cartae* and *notulae* as legal documents in the tenth century is ascribed to the illiteracy of the Germanic tribes, on the other hand it is precisely this development which demonstrates, by first reducing the *notula* to a *notula testium* and then to the simple notation without legal value of any sort, an increasing dependence on the written word as a stable record, quite apart from any usefulness as legal evidence. Redlich himself clearly delineates this development (p. 79): "Der vorherrschende Zug dieser Zeit stand der Urkunde feind und ablehnend gegenüber. Die schriftliche Aufzeichnung über Rechtsgeschäfte diente nicht dem unmittelbaren Beweise, sondern nur der Erleichterung des Zeugenbeweises und damit, wenn die Zeugen nicht mehr lebten, der Erinnerung. . . endlich aber auch der Übersicht der Erwerbungen, also Zwecken der Verwaltung und Wirtschaft."

according to Einhard's *Vita Caroli Magni* (chapter 25), could speak Latin "ut aeque illa ac patria lingua orare sit solitus," but "temptabat et scribere . . ." literate or not? But principally it is a matter of the difficulties of evaluating the evidence. These difficulties are predominantly of two kinds: (1) the difficulty of evaluating evidence which may be formulaic, and (2) the necessity of allowing for the social function of the act of reading and writing. Examples for the former are innumerable; they range from Einhard's indebtedness to the patterns of Suetonius's imperial biographies in crediting Charlemagne with literary interests, to the use of dedicatory formulae to establish the "learning" of the recipient of a work.⁶ As to the latter, if one is to understand the role of literacy, it is essential to consider the act of reading and writing, or of *not* reading and writing, as a socially significant sign, although this renders questionable some generally accepted criteria of an individual's ability to read or write.⁷ Among such criteria one of the most common is that of the signature.⁸ The problem is not the employment of a signature as one of several criteria, or as possibly conclusive evidence for literacy, but the reliance on its *absence* or *substitute* as necessarily an indicator of illiteracy.⁹ For the act of signing (or not signing) by writing one's name

⁶ The fact, for instance, that Hrabanus Maurus dedicates his *Commentaria in Cantica* to Louis the Pious, whom he addresses with "In autem, sapientissime rex, in omnibus bene eruditus" (PL 117, 1094), does not support Thompson's conclusion that he was able to read — even if one adds the dedications of Hrabanus's *De universis* and the Daniel commentary; see Thompson, *Literacy*, pp. 47, 43, no. 38, 39. Grundmann, "Literatus — Illiteratus," pp. 42–43, is more careful in his evaluation of such dedications. For some examples of the influence of Suetonius's biography of the Roman emperors on Einhard, see the notes to *Einhard Vita Caroli Magni*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum I, ed. Philipp Jaffé (Aalen, 1963), pp. 301–303.

⁷ See, for instance, V. H. Galbraith, "The Literacy of the Medieval English Kings," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 51 (1955): 291–298, specifically p. 206: "In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries English kings could read Latin but do not even if they can write it . . ." — which obviously raises questions about the reliability of the evidence of not writing for an assumption of illiteracy.

⁸ Thus Rudolf Ullrich, *Urkundenlehre*, p. 108, and the obverse, p. 25: "Wenn wirkliche Unterschriften vorliegen, dürfen sie in der Regel gewiss als eigenhändige angesehen werden." See also P. Kienast, "Zum Problem der Kontinuität zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter," *Archiv für Urkundenlehre* 10 (1926): 137: "Die Karolinger unterschreiben nicht mehr persönlich, weil sie nicht schreiben konnten . . ." Thompson, *Literacy*, p. 29: "The early Carolingian mayors of the palace and kings, since they could not write, had to be satisfied to make a dot or a line in the cross or monogram prepared by the chancellers," and still Grundmann, "Literatus — Illiteratus," p. 43: "selbst die Urkunden unterschreiben sie [die Carolinger] nicht mehr wie die Merowinger mit dem Namen sondern vollzogen nur einen Schlussstrich am Monogramm." And what of the authentic signature which, however, misspells the name of its writer? Is he therefore less than literate? I am grateful to Paul Meyvaert for directing my attention to the signatures of Pope Gregory VII, two of which are transmitted as "Heldibrandus," and two as "Heldiprandus." See Paul J. Meyvaert, "A Spurious Signature of Pope Gregory VII," *Rome Benedictine* 65 (1955): 189–202.

⁹ The role of formulaism must, of course, also be considered in the apparent presence of a signature. Thus the ascription of the words "Orate pro nobis, domini ac venerabiles patres" to Theobald's hand because they differ from that of the scribe in MGH AA 12:420 and 422 (W

below a given text is a statement, a socially conditioned message, quite apart from the name which is, or is not, written by the hand of its bearer. A similar statement is made by the act of writing (or not writing) itself, which — as in the case of the educational plans of Theodoric's daughter Amalsuntha for her son Athalaric¹⁰ — may be thought of as unbecoming, or — in the instance of a modern executive writing his own letters — as decidedly odd, if not downright insulting to his secretaries. And just as the executive can have letters and memoranda leave his desk initialed by his secretary "im Auftrag," "for" him, without necessarily being illiterate, the absence of a signature on a medieval document does not necessarily indicate an inability to write on the part of the bearer of the subscribed name — a fact often ignored, despite its mention by Mabillon.¹¹ The act of not writing, in short, is as much a sign as

Enslin, "Theoderich, König der Ostgoten: Rex Theodericus illiteratus?" *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft* 60 [1940]: 391–396, and Ernst Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 2 [Paris, 1949–59], p. 792 is justly referred to as "pure hypothesis" by Thompson, *Literacy*, p. 13, as well as by Grundmann, "Literatus — Illiteratus," p. 28, n. 28, who also refers to an edict of Chlodhar of 511.

¹⁰ Procopius, *De bello gotico* 1.2.16, in *Opera*, 2, ed. Jacobus Haury (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 10–12, and Grundmann, "Literatus — Illiteratus," pp. 29–32.

¹¹ Johannes Mabillon, *De re diplomatica*, 1, 3rd ed. (Naples, 1789), pp. 163, 544. Mabillon (*ibid.*, p. 169) gives four reasons for the subscription of a name by others than its bearer: (1) inability of its bearer to write because he never learned to write; (2) inability to write for some other reason, such as sickness or injury; (3) an affectation that writing is — at least in a given instance — below the dignity of the bearer of the subscribed name; and (4) a general preference for the subscription of a name by a scribe and the provision, *manu propria*, of the actual signature. This usually took the form of a cross, or — as in the case of Charlemagne — the completion of a scribally pre-drawn monogram. In the latter case, for instance, the cruciform arrangement of the letters *K*, *R*, *L*, *S* around a lozenge, within which two lines forming a *v* yielded the vowels *a*, *o*, and *u*. By drawing these two lines, therefore, Charlemagne completed the name *KAROLVS* in monogrammatic form. See Arthur Giry, *Manuel de diplomatique* (Paris, 1894), p. 717, or Franz H. Baum, *Medieval Civilization in Germany 800–1271* (London, 1969), p. 27. That the delegation of the subscription of a name to a scribe was indeed not only a result of necessity, arising from the inability of its bearer to write, but also an affectation of literate persons, is borne out, for instance, by the testament of Hagano, canon of St. Martin's at Tours, from the year 819: "Hagano diaconus cessionem a me factam sub signum Sanctae Crucis confirmavi," as well as a charter of the abbot of St. Martin's, of the year 897: "Robertus Comes et inclitae congregationis S. Martini Abbas, per hoc signum Sanctae Crucis subethrimate studuit." These and other examples are cited by Maitland, *Dark Ages*, pp. 14–15, and can easily be increased, for instance by the examples of Merovingian *referendarii* signing *ad vicem* for another; see Bresslau, *Urkundenlehre*, I:363. Maitland remarks, that "the subscriber, in thus making the sign of his holy religion, was considered as taking an oath. He was, in fact, said *manu propria* . . . and, for greater solemnity, the cross was sometimes made with the consecrated wine," for which see Du Gange, *Glossarium methae et infimae latinitatis*, 2 (Graz, 1954), s. v. "CRUX," p. 636. Conversely, the mark of the cross is often made by the notary, particularly in Italian documents prior to the thirteenth century, and in Germany the formula "signum + illius" can be regarded as a fiction; see Bresslau, *Urkundenlehre*, 2:177, 209. M. T. Clanchy's remarks concerning this point are instructive: "In twelfth- and thirteenth-century England the ability to sign one's name was . . . considered important, but it was not directly associated either with writing or with schools. The personal signature or sign manual was not accepted by itself as a lawful symbol of authentication on a document unless the signatory were a Jew. A Christian was required either to sign with a cross, indicating that he was making a promise in the sight of Christ crucified, or

the word "write," and, like the act of writing, its function derives from its temporal relationships. Documentary evidence purporting to be, or not to be, executed *manu propria* is therefore not always a reliable indication of the literacy or illiteracy of an individual.

But not only is an inference of illiteracy of an individual on the basis of his delegation of the act of writing or reading methodologically unjustified;¹² the very definition of illiteracy as an individual's inability to read and write neglects the far more significant circumstance of the presumed illiterate's use of another's literacy, and thus obscures some crucial social functions of literacy and illiteracy. As a consequence of the customary definition of literacy and illiteracy as an individual's ability or inability to read and write, the relationship of the functions of both is usually envisaged, if it is considered at all, more or less in terms of Herbert Grundmann's formulation:

Illitoti und illotar, die also des Lateins, des Lesens und Schreibens unkundig waren, brachten jedoch deshalb keineswegs 'ungebildet' zu sein, sie konnten vielmehr gleichwohl oft auf ihre Laienweise hoch gebildet sein. Denn neben der literarisch-lateinischen Bildung mit ihrer schriftlichen Überlieferung blieb immer eine andersartige Laien- und Adelsbildung lebendig wirksam mit ihren eigenen vielfältigen Traditionen, die nicht geschrieben und gelesen, sondern 'gesungen und gesagt' wurden auf den Adels- und Bauernhöfen, gehört und gemerkt.¹³

That *illitoti* and *illotar* — synonyms denoting those unable to read or write and applicable to members of all social levels — need not, by virtue of this inability, be "uneducated," is quite true. But to identify their education with the oral tradition, which is "gesungen und gesagt," with the narrative poetry that assumed written form beginning with the twelfth century, is quite simply anachronistic and self-contradictory.¹⁴ True, this narrative ma-

more commonly be affixed to the document his signum or seal. In medieval England possession of a seal bearing the owner's name comes closest to the modern criterion of making the ability to sign one's own name the touchstone of literacy. Although the possessor of a seal might not be able to write, he or she was a person familiar with documents and entitled to participate in their use" (p. 181).

¹² An occasionally cited example for the generality of illiteracy is the delegated act of reading a letter in *Rudolich*, ed. K. Langosch in *Waltharius, Rudolich, Marchenepen* (Darmstadt, 1956), pp. 128, 130, 136. Rudolich receives a letter, and the messenger hands it over, "Susceptaque dice scolum laet ham recitare" (line 228). So far so good, but Rudolich then gives it to the king: "Sic an nupie manus lat literulas sibi missas / Rex ait his lectis . . ." (lines 286-87). The king reads it, and then he turns to his barons: "En hic est carta, nunc uos audite, quid illa / Dicat. Sic nupit et eam scolis recitant" (lines 397-98). The fact that the literate king turns the letter over to someone to have it read to his barons is not at all puzzling if one considers the consequence of his not doing so — is the king to act as reader to his barons?

¹³ Grundmann, "Litteratus — Illiteratus," p. 8.

¹⁴ Cf. ibid.: "Was aber seit dem 12. Jahrhundert neu gedichtet und nun erst aufgeschrieben wurde (ins nächst von den Helden und Laien der Frühzeit, von Burgundern und Nibelungen, Dietrich von Bern und Gudrun, vom König Artus und seiner Tafelrunde, Karl dem Grossen und seinen Paladinen, das muss vorher durch die Jahrhunderte lebendig und bildungskraftig geblieben sein wie alle Rechtsüberlieferung auch, daran war das Laienvolk, der Laienadel des Mittelalters gebildet auf seine Art." Grundmann's contention is anachronistic because he as-

terial had previously been, and indeed continued to be, part of the oral tradition, but its socio-didactic function had changed radically in post-tribal medieval society. This change was not unrelated to the increased dependence on literacy forced upon the higher and lower orders of the lay nobility.¹⁵

The change in the function of the oral narrative tradition and the dependence of the lay nobility on Latin literacy as the only literacy is noticeable in central and western Europe at the latest from the Carolingian administrative reforms onwards, in southern Europe and Gaul much earlier.¹⁶ The relationship between these two factors becomes obvious when a distinction is made between preliterate and illiteracy.¹⁷ By definition, no one is literate in preliterate society, and the members of at least the social elite, if not of all social levels, are dependent on the oral tradition, and particularly oral narrative, for the knowledge necessary to execute their social functions in a culturally acceptable manner. Conversely, in a literate society culturally essential knowledge is transmitted in writing, and whoever has no ready access to it is — also by definition — disadvantaged in respect to his ability to carry out social functions requiring such access. But ready access to the written word is not to be equated with an ability to read and write. It is determined,

cribes the function of the oral tradition in a subliterate society to an illiterate subgroup of a literate society (see below), and it is self-contradictory, since — apart from the anachronism inherent in his view of the centuries preceding the fixation of oral poetry in writing as a period in which the oral tradition still exercised its preliterate social function — one may be inclined to ask, for what audience this material was now "neu gedichtet . . . und aufgeschrieben," if not for one which could read, or was accustomed to being read to. From a somewhat different standpoint M. T. Clanchy points out (p. 198) that "Clerici and litterati might claim that book learning was the only intellectual and noble pursuit. Yet the slightest consideration of the languages an English knight needed to know, or any knowledge of the subtleties of heraldry or hawking, suggests that knightly education was equally demanding intellectually though in a different way. The suggestion cannot be incontrovertibly proved, however, because knightly culture before the fourteenth century has been largely lost to posterity, as it was primarily oral." True, the orally transmitted knightly education was doubtless just as demanding as book learning, but its purposes must not be confused with those served by a knowledge of, or access to, the written word. The latter was of increasing importance to anyone concerned with the administration of property and could scarcely be substituted for by a knowledge of the tales of Dietrich.

¹⁵ "Lay nobility" is to be understood as "féodalité," "Adel," in the sense of an "idealtypische Schicht . . . die sich aufgrund von Lebensformen, Selbstverständnis und einem entsprechenden sozialen Ansehen in ihrer Umwelt . . . vom 'Unadel' abgrenzte." Erich Kleinschmidt, "Minesang als höfisches Zeremonialhandeln," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 58 (1976), 37; see also Karl Bosl, *Frühformen der Gesellschaft im mittelalterlichen Europa* (Munich, 1964).

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that Grundmann, "Litteratus — Illiteratus," p. 30, characterizes Procopius's viewpoint of Gothic illiteracy as follows: "Prokop . . . versucht vielmehr als erster zu erklären, wie sich die Goten und ihr König — und man darf sagen, die Germanen überhaupt und noch der mittelalterliche Adel — zum Schrifttum verhielten: bei allem Respekt vor der *unenüberlichen* [my italics] Schreibkunst, die man anderen überlässt, . . . ist Schreibwerk und Schulwissen doch nicht Sache des Kriegers, des Adels, des Herrschers."

¹⁷ For the transmission of knowledge in preliterate society as distinct from literacy, see Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), particularly chapters 2-5 and 7-13.

rather, by the combination of two circumstances: (1) the need for access to the written tradition for the exercise of one's social function, and (2) the use of available means of such access, be it one's own ability to read and write, or another's.

Clearly the socio-political functions of the higher as well as the lower nobility increasingly required such access to the written transmission of knowledge from the ninth century onwards. The gradual, though not uninterrupted, spread of literacy among the lay nobility, accelerating with the latter half of the twelfth century, made the required access ever easier.¹⁸ Beginning with the last half of the twelfth century, the increase in the use of writing in the vernacular, both for literary and documentary purposes, breached the link between literacy and Latin, and vernacular literature from the oral tradition made its appearance in written form. In England, of course, where vernacular literacy existed in the ninth and probably the eighth century, the emergence of oral literature in writing took place some four hundred years earlier. This development, however, was interrupted by the consequences of the Norman Conquest, and English vernacular literacy comes into its own a century after literacy became established in the continental vernaculars.¹⁹ I have noted that the oral tradition within a literate society serves, in part, a social stratum which is disadvantaged in the sense that it lacks ready access to literacy. A social stratum, on the other hand, which requires and possesses access to literate transmission in a literate society is not disadvantaged in respect to its ability to use the written transmission for the execution of its social functions. A narrative from the oral tradition which assumes written form therefore changes its public: it makes its appeal, in part, to a stratum of society different from that which neither

¹⁸ For the spread of literacy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Auerbach, *Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 218-225; H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (Cambridge, Eng., 1950), pp. 83-90; Leonard Boyle, "The Emergence of Gothic Handwriting," *Journal of Typographic Research* 4 (1970), 307-316; and, of course, the transmission of vernacular manuscripts itself. It is not to be denied, however, that there were pauses, and even regressions, in the gradual increase of dependence on literacy, particularly in tenth-century Germany, of which the decree of Otto I (967), revoking the right of proof of documentary authenticity on the basis of script comparison, is but one example; see Gamble, *The Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, p. 20; Redlich, *Urkundenlehre*, pp. 66-77; and Bresslau, *Urkundenlehre*, I:653-54. On the whole, the description of the situation in England by Clanchy (p. 201) applies to continental western Europe as well: "The knights of English county courts, like knights all over Europe, were educated and cultured men regardless of whether they were literate. Perhaps by 1200, and certainly by 1500, they had usually learned enough Latin to cope with the documents which came their way. But this restricted knowledge of literacy was a pragmatic convenience, rather than a positive contribution to their intellectual education. . . . Literacy became something more positive for non-churchmen only when writing recorded a substantial part of their own heritage in vernacular languages."

¹⁹ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 185, observes that "English non-churchmen were slower than their French counterparts to abandon Latin as the basis of literate skills, probably because of the competition between English and French as alternative literary languages. In general from c. 1300 lawyers and government officials preferred French, while creative writers favoured English."

has, nor requires, access to literacy for the performance of its social functions.²⁰ Of course, the line between these two strata of society cannot be drawn on the basis of literary "appeal." That written vernacular narrative was not only read, but probably more frequently heard, requires no documentation after Ruth Crosby's study and a calm consideration of the parchment prices cited, for instance, by Wattenbach.²¹ Nevertheless, there is a difference between a traditional "performance" on the part of an oral poet and a reading of a text by a minstrel — a difference which, as I shall attempt to show, is not to be underestimated. Yet, as Professor Albert C. Baugh has convincingly demonstrated, "romances were sometimes sung, sometimes recited, and sometimes read from a book"²² — at least in England and France — and therefore their performance sometimes must have resembled that of an oral narrative poem. With the increase in vernacular literacy, moreover, the oligoliterate structure of medieval society, in which the ability to read and write and the possession of access to the written word were socially distinctive, was replaced by a proliferation of social distinctions based on the matter written or read. The variety of attitudes toward the romances, some of which are referred to below, may be regarded in part as an early manifestation of this development. But the differences between the two types of literary public — the one with the need and the means for access to the written word, the other with neither the need nor the means for such access — are not limited to patterns in social stratification.

²⁰ For this as well as some of the consequences of the shift of a given work from the oral to the written tradition, see Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1962-63), 304-345. The mere bulk of written vernacular literature written between 1100 and 1300 in Iceland, however, suggests that individual literacy in the vernacular was perhaps more common in Iceland than in the rest of Europe, and that ready access to literacy was more general and therefore of little if any significance in terms of social stratification. Some hypothetical reasons for Icelandic manuscript production are advanced by Sigurdur Nordal, "Time and Vellum," *Bulletin of the Modern Humanities Research Association* 24 (1952), 15-26; however, see also Lars Lönnroth, "Tesen om de två kulturerna," *Scripta Islandica* 15 (Copenhagen, 1965). I am grateful to my colleague Professor Jesse Byock for elucidating the somewhat superannuated debate in saga studies of which these two articles form a part. It is essential to recall, moreover, that the sociological concept of strata is based on certain methodological assumptions current in the 19th and 20th centuries, and must be applied to medieval society with care. I use the concept of social strata only for the sake of brevity and practicability. See Johanna Maria van Winter, "De middeleeuwse ridderschap als 'classe sociale,'" *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 84 (1971), 262-275, and *Wörterbuch der Soziologie*, ed. Bernsdorf (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 908-911.

²¹ Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," *SPECULUM* 11 (1936), 88-110; Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig, 1896), pp. 129-131. See also Pierre Gallais, "Recherches sur la mentalité des romanciers français du moyen âge: Les formules et le vocabulaire des prologues," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 7 (1964), 479-493, and Roger M. Walker, "Oral Delivery or Private Reading? A Contribution to the Debate on the Dissemination of Medieval Literature," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 7 (1971), 36-42, who, however, is exclusively concerned with the *Libro del cavallero Zifar*. Specifically for Germany, see Teresa Paroli, *Sull'elemento formulari nella poesia germanica antica*, Biblioteca di ricerche linguistiche e filologiche 4 (Rome, 1975), pp. 346-351, and the sources cited.

²² Albert C. Baugh, "The Middle English Romance," *SPECULUM* 42 (1967), 1-31.

In order to clarify the functions of literacy and illiteracy in medieval society, it will be necessary to analyze the consequences of the following circumstances: (1) the existence of three socially conditioned and socially functional modes of approach to the transmission of knowledge: the fully literate, that of the individual who must rely on the literacy of another for access to written transmission, and that of the illiterate without need or means of such reliance; (2) the existence of two types of transmission: the written and the oral; and (3) the existence of functional differences between the spoken and the written word.

In regard to the consequences of the distinction between the socially functional modes of approach to written and oral transmission (point 1), it has become clear that the customary distinction between *litterati* and *illitterati* is misleading. In fact, those *illitterati* who must and do have access to literacy are, in respect to their dependence on the written word for the exercise of their socio-political function, to be classed with the *litterati*, and can be referred to, for lack of a better term, as "quasi-literate."²² In reference to the coexistence of written and oral transmission (point 2), it is essential to note that the social distinction between the *litterati* and the "quasi-literates" on the one hand, and the *illitterati* on the other, cannot be extended to a distinction between the two types of transmission — oral and written — by assuming a public's exclusive dependence on, or acquaintance with, one or the other. *Litterati* and "quasi-literates" are acquainted with the oral tradition, but are

²² An essentially literate orientation toward the written epic text by illiterate individuals whose function has become dependent on literacy is illustrated by Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 137–138. Conversely, if there is no such functional dependence, the mere ability to write does not itself imply a recognition of the fixity of a text, for the absence of textual stability in oral tradition apparently extends to singers who have learned to write; see Albert B. Lord, "The Influence of a Fixed Text," *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, 2 (The Hague, 1967), pp. 1199–1206. In drawing distinctions between the oral tradition and literacy, it is essential to define one's terms: distinctions must be drawn between the processes and constituents of composition, dissemination, reception, and genres. Differences in genre, dictating differences in expectation, length, compositional techniques, and types of performance and dissemination, in turn imply differences in the relationships between oral transmission and the written text of, say, the ballad on the one hand, and the epic on the other. Just as the presence of formulaic expressions in Latin riddles proves nothing about the function of formulaic expressions in the vernacular epic, the relationships of the oral to the written ballad proves nothing about those of the oral to the written epic. That they can coexist is obvious and denied by no one. That reading and oral composition are mutually exclusive is maintained by some, e.g. Lord, *Singer of Tales*, pp. 129, 137; see, however, Bäuml, "Der Übergang mündlicher zur artes-bestimmten Literatur des Mittelalters. Gedanken und Bedenken," *Fachliteratur des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Gerhard Ew* (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 1–10, for some definitions. It is unfortunate, that in scholarship concerned with such matters, such distinctions are seldom made. I am here concerned with the reception of written texts by those who depend upon them precisely because they are written texts, and the distinction between this reception and that of those who have neither need for such texts, nor access to them. Accordingly, I purposely avoid such archaeological connotations as "protoliterate," "conditionally literate," or "oligoliterate" in this context; the first two designate a civilization rather than a segment of population, the last is applicable to medieval civilization, but denotes the individually literate as a social group.

functionally dependent on the written word.²⁴ The *illitterati* are not unacquainted with the content of the Bible and of written vernacular narrative;²⁵ they are, however, functionally dependent on orally transmitted directives for the conduct of their lives. These orally transmitted directives for the daily life of the illiterate with no need for access to literacy in a literate society must, however, be distinguished from the oral tradition as it functioned in preliterate society:²⁶ it is, in form, proverbial and anecdotal, and — as far as its medieval manifestations are concerned — it remains as inaccessible as the oral epic except insofar as it is transmitted in writing.

The consequences of the functional differences between the spoken and the written word (point 3 above) are, for the most part, obvious: the spoken word is heard, and, as sound, it is ephemeral.²⁷ It therefore is limited to two modes of existence: its utterance and its remembrance. Its utterance being ephemeral, its remembrance is critical and is served in the oral narrative tradition by the mnemonic functions of the means of oral epic composition: formulae and narrative themes are traditional, and therefore familiar; their

²⁴ The acquaintance of the *litterati* with the oral tradition is testified to by numerous indications, from Alcuin's letter to bishop Hildald of Lindisfarne (MGH Epist. 4:124, 183), containing the famous admonition that only sacred writings are fit for monastic reading, for "quid Hinielidus cum Christo?", to the references in the fourteenth century to songs of Dietrich, "von dem die geburen singent und sagent," cited by Werner Fechter, *Das Publikum der mittelhochdeutschen Dichtung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1935; repr. Darmstadt, 1966), p. 73. For the very apt characterization of the cultural relationship between the literate and illiterate strata as "symbiotic," see Hans Fromm, "Der oder die Dichter des Nibelungenliedes?" *Acta IV Congresso Latino-Americano de Estudos Germanísticos* (São Paulo, 1974), pp. 51–66, and Michael Curschmann, "The Concept of the Oral Formula as Impediment to our Understanding of Medieval Oral Poetry," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 8 (1977), 63–76. Since Froinm's definition of literacy and illiteracy is the traditional one, however, he is led to overlook the dependence of the lay nobility on literacy. In this connection, as well as for some related methodological problems, see Bäuml, "Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy: An Essay toward the Construction of a Model," *Germanic Studies in Honor of Otto Springer*, ed. Stephen Kaplowitt (Pittsburgh, 1979), pp. 41–54.

²⁵ Baugh, "Middle English Romance," pp. 12–13, despite the fact that (p. 17) "the romance was not only in its inception an aristocratic type."

²⁶ In preliterate society, the oral tradition is the "encyclopaedia" (Havelock) essential to the entire culture; in a literate society, the degree of necessity of the "encyclopaedic" function of the oral epic tradition will have been sharply reduced, if not eliminated, for two reasons: (a) the illiterate who has no access to literacy in a literate society and has no need for such access, does not exercise a social function for which the information conveyed by the oral epic tradition is necessary or even useful; and (b) the information conveyed by the oral epic tradition in a tribal society is likely to be detrimental, if translated into action, to the requirements of a literate society. The oral epic tradition, therefore, loses the informational, "encyclopaedic" function which it exercised in a preliterate society, and assumes a role which can probably be subsumed under one of the four causes of a belief in heroes and heroic ages suggested in the Earl Grey Memorial Lecture by Cecil M. Bowra, reprinted in *In General and Particular* (London, 1964), pp. 63–84, particularly pp. 73–80: conquest, exodus, disintegration of an apparently reliable political system, and suppression of heroic beliefs by a priestly caste. In this connection, however, see the cautionary remarks of Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1977), pp. 246–250, concerning H. M. and Nora Chadwick's view of the heroic epic as product of "heroic ages."

²⁷ Walter J. Ong, S.J., *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, 1967), pp. 17–53.

delivery is rhythmical, and therefore quantitatively organized;²⁸ themes are units of narrative composed primarily of an imagery of action,²⁹ which, like the act of delivery itself, are paratactically arranged in temporal sequence; and abstractions, if not personified, rendered in visual imagery, or cast in the form of proverbial expressions, are absent.³⁰ Conversely, the written word is fixed: verba volant, scripta manent.³¹ The written word, therefore, exists independently of the writing writer and the reading reader; all or any part of a written text is available in any sequence to anyone with access to it; its arrangement is spacial, lending itself to organization in terms of symbolic systems extraneous to its content, such as the alphabet or numbers. Accordingly, the rhetorical means of "storing" a written text in the memory are likewise spacially organized systems, in which concepts such as *topos*, *locus communis*, and architectonic structures play a considerable role.³²

But of course the spoken as well as the written word can only be effective if it is perceived, i.e. perceived "correctly" or "incorrectly," remembered accurately or not, dreamt about, quoted or misquoted, in short, utilized in the formulation — or the avoidance of the formulation — of a thought.³³

²⁸ Havelock, *Preface*, pp. 88–89, 91–93, 148–154, 166–167. Quantitative organization inheres in the very nature of an oral formula, which is defined by Milman Parry as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea"; see his "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41 (1930), 80. The fact that this definition of the formula is subject to question from the standpoint of linguistics and anthropology does not affect my present argument, since much of the criticism of Parry's definition is based on — and aims at — a generalization of its application to genres and cultures other than those of the texts from which it was derived. Whatever the shortcomings of Parry's definition and some of its applications, it is applicable to certain medieval texts; see, for instance, the first five essays in *Oral Literature*, ed. Joseph J. Duggan (Edinburgh, 1975). Concerning the formula, see Benjamin A. Stolz and Richard S. Shannon, eds., *Oral Literature and the Formula* (Ann Arbor, 1976).

²⁹ Havelock, *Preface*, pp. 148–154, 166–167, 171–174, 180–182, 185–187.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–187; and Howard Becker and Harry E. Barnes, *Social Thought from Lore to Science*, 1 (New York, 1961), pp. 15–16.

³¹ The fixity of the written word, of course, does not necessarily imply "stability" of a written text in its transmission. It merely means that, in contrast to the spoken word, the written word does not change or disappear without being made to change or disappear — unless the written symbol fades.

³² Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 50–81; Walter J. Ong, S.J., *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (Ithaca, 1971), pp. 104–112; and Robert Kollog, "Oral Literature," *New Literary History* 5 (1973), 55–66, specifically pp. 61–62.

³³ The terms "correctly" and "incorrectly" are placed in quotation marks, since otherwise they imply an unhistorical view of the function of a text, by making the "validity" of its perception dependent on imponderables, such as the "intention" of its author, or on historical variables independent of the text, such as specific techniques of "criticism" or the "sensitivity" of the "critic." I am here concerned with providing a (partial) basis for analyses of texts in terms of the conditions of their perception. I regard a text as a communication, i.e. a manipulation, the reception of which, and the response to which, is determined not by unascertainable elements such as the author's "intention," nor is it identifiable merely by superimposed criteria such as specific types of content analysis, useful as they may be, but by the demands the medium makes upon the perceiver.

And it is surely difficult to dispute William Ivins's assertion, that "at any given moment the accepted report of an event is of greater importance than the event, for what we think about and act upon is the symbolic report and not the concrete event itself."³⁴ Our dependence on the personal experience of events is minimal in comparison with the influence exerted on our lives by symbolic reports and the experience with such reports. An examination of some consequences of the functional differences between the oral tradition and literacy in medieval society may therefore be useful, and may help to develop a hypothesis that can be systematically tested.

II

The differences between the oral tradition and literacy arise partly from the fact that the written text is fixed and exists independently of author and reader, whereas the oral performance is protean, ephemeral, and dependent for its existence on the performer, and partly they arise from the difference in the perceptual situation dictated by oral recitation and the written text. The independent existence of a fixed text eliminates the possibility — and the necessity — for a homoeostatic, "pastless" view of the past, of the sort which characterizes preliterate societies and which can be assumed, on the basis of the evidence offered by medieval epics originating in the oral tradition, to characterize illiterate subcultures in a literate society as well.³⁵ It was, of course, primarily this aspect of a written text, its fixity, which made access to written transmission absolutely essential to the higher and lower nobility, as well as anyone concerned with the administration of property. Testimony to the consciousness of the function of a written text as transmitter of a recorded fact in fixed and verifiable form on the part of "quasi-literates" is afforded, among other things, by common scribal formulae of the type "Ut autem cunctis in posterum temporibus nihil ex his vel negligentia pretereatur, vel obliuione deleatur, paginam hanc conscribi & sigilli nostri impressione fecimus insigniri" (circa 1166).³⁶ Similarly, formulae make explicit reference to this attribute of a written text as primary reason for its use: "Et ut ista traditio firma & rata & inconuulsa permaneat hanc in cartam conscribi . . ." (circa 1233), "Und daruber das di obgeschriben Sach stät, vest, und unzprochen peleib, geben wir in disen Briefff versigelten . . ." (circa 1334).³⁷ A further consequence both of the fixity and the independent existence of a fixed text is the fact that it does not necessarily require the

³⁴ William M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 180.

³⁵ Goody and Watt, "Consequences of Literacy," pp. 307–11; also Rüdiger Schott, "Das Geschichtsbewusstsein schriftloser Völker," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 12 (1968), 184, 197; Paul Radin, *Method and Theory of Ethnology* (New York, 1933), pp. 262–263.

³⁶ I cite at random: *Monumenta Boica*, (Munich, 1763), p. 61 et passim.

³⁷ *Monumenta Boica*, 2 (1764), p. 400 and vol. 1, p. 302 respectively. Certainly these are scribal formulae, yet they form part of documents most frequently written at the behest of, and for the use of "quasi-literates," who must be credited with an awareness of their function.

commitment of its bearer to its content;³⁸ the scribe, the reciter, or the reader of a written text can confront that text critically, even ironically.³⁹ In short, not only in a physical sense is the distance greater between fixed text and writing author or reading reciter than between oral poem and oral poet, but also in a perceptual sense: form and content of a written narrative can be manipulated by the writing author or scribe and the reciting reader to a much greater extent than a traditional oral poem by a performing oral poet. The increased distance between author/scribe and text, and between text and reciting reader, leads to an increase in the distance between text and content: the content, no longer dependent on formulation by traditional themes and formulae, can now be subjected to alienating functions of a text which, while relying on tradition to arouse traditional expectations, counteracts that tradition, vitiates its expectations, and thus — by “defamiliarizing” it, as the Russian formalists would say — comments upon it. An early example is a passage in Hartmann’s *Iwein* (lines 1029–1044), which has no parallel in the *Yvain* of Chrétien. After a description of the battle between Iwein and Ascalon, the narrator observes that he really is in no position to know how they fought, since one is dead and cannot tell about it, the other is far too courtly to boast of his prowess, and no one else was there. This type of alienation of a traditional narrative element — in this case the traditional battle descriptions in the Arthurian romances — is not likely to occur in the

³⁸ This in contrast to the relationship between oral poem and oral poet; see Bäuml and Spielmann, “From Illiteracy to Literacy: Prolegomena to a Study of the *Nibelungenlied*,” *Oral Literature*, ed. J. J. Duggan (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 65–66; for a description of a contemporary (Serbian) oral performance illustrating its ritual character and lack of distance between performance and audience, see John Miles Foley, “The Traditional Oral Audience,” *Balkan Studies* 18 (1977), 145–153. See also Havelock, *Preface*, pp. 36–86; Cecil M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London, 1952), pp. 404–475; Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, pp. 201–206, confuses anonymity with the romantic notion of “communal creation,” and does not distinguish adequately between the various types of oral poetry.

³⁹ The oral poet, were he to ironize the exemplary epic hero in his heroism, i.e. in that which makes and characterizes him as exemplary hero, could run the risk of questioning his heroism, i.e. his fitness as performer of exemplary actions and possessor of exemplary qualities. He could thus be understood to place the exemplified cultural values themselves in question. This, of course, is not to say that there can be no irony in the oral epic; it is not even to say that the epic hero cannot be ironized. In instances, in which an oral poem has entered written transmission and still preserves some of its formulaic content, these very formulae, being no longer essential traditional elements of expression, function as series of potentially exchangeable words, and as such can yield ironic comment. See in this respect Bäuml and Spielmann, “From Illiteracy to Literacy,” pp. 62–73, particularly pp. 67–71. On the other hand, a written text cannot function satirically by virtue solely of its form and quite apart from its content, unless it is read aloud, and can therefore be placed in a social context which, together with its form, endows it with its function. As far as I know, there is no record of such a use of an epic or an aspect of an epic; for such use of songs, see Donald Ward, “The Satirical Song: Text versus Context,” *Western Folklore* 36 (1977), 347–354. I am grateful to my colleague Professor Donald Ward for drawing my attention to his paper, “The Performance and Perception of Folklore and Literature,” which is to appear in a special issue of *Fabula* dedicated to Max Lüthi, in which he places the interaction of form and performance in a methodological context and, incidentally, provides an example for “meaning” derived from such interaction in the case of a narrative.

performance of an oral poet. The freedom of the written word from cultural constraints governing formulaic composition and reception, together with its fixity, results in a sharply reduced measure of redundancy of a written text as message, permits its manipulation, and through it that of its readers/hearers. This manipulation is exercised by the author, the reciting reader, and the hearer/reader, and enables a text to yield a variety of “meanings.”⁴⁰

Another dimension is added to the perception, and therefore the “meaning,” of a written text by the absence of the author at the time of its perception — an absence presupposed in the act of writing. A text, after all, is written in order to function without the necessary presence of the author or the memory of his performance. This, of course, is the ultimate cause of the reduced redundancy of the written text, of the absence of non-verbal modification of the text on the part of the author by means of vocal inflection, gesture, stance, appearance. As a result, this modification is supplied by the reciting or silent reader and listener to a much greater extent than is possible, or necessary, when these modifications are supplied by the present and performing author. The “meaning” of a text, moreover, is determined not only by such active modification. Stanley E. Fish has recently pointed out that “a sentence is never not in a context. We are never not in a situation. A statute is never not read in the light of some purpose. A set of interpretive

⁴⁰ An example of classic clarity illustrating both the uses to which the distance between text and content can be put, as well as the decreased possibility (or need) of the manipulation of “meaning” when such a distance is absent, is provided by the famous incident related by Rahewin (*Gesta Friderici I. imperatoris*, ed. G. Waitz [Hannover, 1884], pp. 139–140), involving the papal legates at the Diet of Besançon in October 1157: the cardinal legates Bernard and Roland, bishop of Siena and papal chancellor, carried a papal letter to Frederick Barbarossa, concerned primarily with the matter of archbishop Eskil of Lund, who had been ambushed and captured by bandits on imperial territory, and regarding whose fate Frederick, who had no love for the archbishop, exhibited no particular interest. Among other things, the papal letter contained mention of matters in which the emperor was said to be indebted to the pope: the *collatio* of the imperial crown, and the pleasure the pope would have derived from a bestowal of even greater *beneficia*. The imperial chancellor Reinald von Dassel, in translating the letter to the assembled throne, rendered *conferre (collatio)* as *schenken*, though it can also simply refer to the physical act of coronation, and *beneficium* as *Lehen*, though it could equally well be translated as “gift” or “favor.” So far the imperial manipulation of the written text; its papal manipulation was to follow in June 1158. When, however, one of the legates, amid the resulting uproar, asked the rhetorical question, from whom the emperor had the crown if not from the pope, the distance between text and content was sharply reduced — and Otto of Wittelsbach drew his sword against the legate. It is, moreover, possible to see a reflection of the increased distance between text and content occasioned by writing in the identification of the messenger with the message in narratives originating in the oral tradition (*Chanson de Roland*, *Rother*, *Kudrun*), as compared with a relative scarcity of such identification in narratives of literary origin (see, for instance, the distinction rendered explicit in Wace’s *Brut*, ed. I. Arnold [Paris, 1940], lines 10621–10724, and even more clearly in Layamon’s *Brut*, ed. F. Madden [London, 1847], lines 24731–24866). Exceptions are, of course, to be noted, such as the non-identification of the messenger with the message in the *Nibelungenlied* (stanzas 143–166) and the opposite in *Rosen-garten A* (*Die Gedichte vom Rosengarten zu Worms*, ed. G. Holz [Halle/Saale, 1893], p. 13, stanza 59), of which the former probably reflects the literate tradition in which the epic in its transmitted form originated.

assumptions is always in force. A sentence that seems to need no interpretation is already the product of one." In short, although "there always is a text (just as there always is an ordinary world) . . . what is in it can change, and therefore at no level is it independent of and prior to interpretation."⁴¹ Even the reading of a written text by its author cannot impair its independence from him. For the author of a written text is absent in two senses: at the time of a public's perception of a text, its author, in the "form" in which he wrote it, no longer exists; and his physical presence is superseded by the "author" as he is constituted by the perception of the text. Contrary to the usual view, Wolfram von Eschenbach, in *Parzival* 2.115, line 1711, does not "say" "Ine kan decheinen buochstap"; he wrote the words "Ine kan . . ." He thus endowed a fictional "I" called "Wolfram von Eschenbach" with the inability to read and write, or with an ignorance of learned literature, depending — in the absence of sufficiently limiting redundancy — on the reader's interpretation of "buochstap."⁴² And even that which in a written text may appear to be the controlling factor "behind" the fictional narrator and the narrative is necessarily an aggregate of inferences based on the text, i.e. the "implied author."⁴³ It is necessary here to stress the fact that the fictionality of the "narrator" and "implied author" is not limited to texts commonly regarded as narrative, but that it characterizes all written texts, including textbooks in mathematics. My main concern here, however, is with narrative texts.

An awareness of the inevitable fictionality of the narrator and of the narrative possibilities it offers is attested early in the development of the written vernacular narrative: the narrator explicitly posing as author (Chrétien's *Erec*, Hartmann's *Iwein* and *Der Arme Heinrich*, Wolfram's *Parzival*, the *Libro de Buen Amor* of Juan Ruiz), the narrator within a narrator (Calogrenant/Kalogrēant in *Yvain/Iwain*), the disposing narrator (Wace's *Brut*, Wolfram's *Parzival*, Gottfried's *Tristan*), the participating narrator (Hartmann's *Iwein*, in a different sense the *Espurgatoire S. Patrice* of Marie de France,

⁴¹ Stanley E. Fish, "Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1978), 625-644, specifically pp. 637 and 627.

⁴² Among the latest in a long line of critics who simply accept this statement as autobiographical are Herbert Gumbmann, "Dichtete Wolfram von Eschenbach am Schreibtisch?" *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 49 (1967), 391-405, and Dietmar Jürgen Ponert, *Deutsch und Latein in deutscher Literatur- und Geschichtsschreibung des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1975), pp. 40-41.

⁴³ I use the terminology of Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 71-76, as being particularly apt. In connection with the *Espurgatoire S. Patrice* of Marie de France, Leo Spitzer, in a "Note on the Poetic and the Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors," *Traditio* 4 (1946), 114-122, speculates that "in the Middle Ages, the 'poetic I' had more freedom and more breadth than it has today; . . . the concept of intellectual property did not exist because literature dealt not with the individual but with mankind; the 'ut in pluribus' was an accepted standard" (p. 415). The development of the "poetic I," however, is an automatic and inevitable consequence of the independent existence of the written text, and Marie's use of it in the *Espurgatoire*, as also that of Pierre de Roissy in his *Manuale de mysteriis ecclesiarum*, with a reference to which Professor Spitzer begins his essay, testifies to the recognition of its fictionality.

Dante's *Commedia*), the unreliable narrator (*Parzival*, Gottfried's *Tristan*), and, of course, the ironic narrator who disports himself everywhere from the romances of Chrétien to Gottfried's *Tristan* and the *Nibelungenlied*, all testify to a recognition of the distance between author, narrator, text, and public, and to the narrative possibilities this distance offers.

Accompanying the inevitable creation of a fictional narrator in written narrative is the equally inevitable creation of a fictional public. For just as the author is absent from the public, which must "constitute" a narrator on the basis of the text, and an "author" implied by the text, the public is absent from the author, who must "constitute" the public whom he addresses in his text.⁴⁴ And just as the function of the narrator in the text, that of the fictional public may be explicit or implicit, and it serves to provide the "real" public with a mask — e.g. the "edelen herzen" of Gottfried's *Tristan* — by means of which its relationship to the text may be manipulated.⁴⁵ There is, of course, nothing new or startling in a recognition of the existence of fictional narrators and fictional publics. It is referred to here merely for two reasons: (1) to emphasize their link to the written text, and thus to demonstrate that the critical concepts of ironic distance, of fictional narrators and fictional publics and analyses of their function are applicable not only to post-Jamesian literature, but to any written narrative text; and (2) to provide the basis for a number of conclusions regarding the function of certain medieval written narratives.

Obviously the reception, the understanding, of written texts, as of everything else, is conditioned by the expectations of the perceiver, which are formed by prior experience.⁴⁶ The experience forming the expectations of the perceiver, and therefore the reception, of written vernacular narrative literature was, initially, that of Latin literature. This was true both of the individually literate as well as for the quasi-literate dependent on readers and translators. In general one learned to read and write in Latin for the purpose of reading and writing Latin. If one could not read and write, access to the written word consisted in having Latin written and read and translated for one. The Latin language itself had come to occupy, since the fourth century at the latest, an increasingly isolated position: it had become solely a literary language. Certainly Latin was spoken also; but one learned Latin by learning to read it and write it, and the rules and conventions of spoken Latin were dictated by written Latin. In its relation to the Romance languages as well as to the vernaculars in Germanic territories, Latin was a learned language in both senses of the term.⁴⁷ Its isolation was emphasized

⁴⁴ Walter J. Ong, S.J., "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90 (1975), 9-21.

⁴⁵ For techniques of such manipulation see primarily Wolfgang Iser, *Der implizite Leser* (Munich, 1972); specifically for Gottfried von Strassburg, see Ruth G. Kunzer, *The Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg: An Ironic Perspective*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology 105 (Berkeley, 1973).

⁴⁶ Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt, 1970), pp. 144-207.

⁴⁷ Ferdinand Lot, "A quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler Latin?" *Archivum Latinitatis Mediae*

periodically by the imposition of standards upon the use of Latin which did not apply to the vernaculars,⁴⁸ and it was used for specific communicative functions: as a "learned" language, its learned texts, from biblical exegesis and the Church Fathers to homiletic narratives and bestiaries, served a predominantly elucidative or illustrative purpose.⁴⁹ And conversely, Latin literary production was determined by a public with restricted, primarily liturgical, learned, administrative concerns. These functions, associated with medieval Latin generally, shaped the expectation which, in turn, tended to determine, in part and for a short time, the reception, i.e. the understanding, of written vernacular literature. In part and for a short time the structure of the vernacular text, its use of various types of symbolism, are seen as constituting a function of its lexical content which reflects and formulates a typologically functioning chain of "occurrences."⁵⁰ For a short time the written vernacular narrative text is, to some degree, read *per tropologiam*, as consisting of both *matière* and *san*, of the *aventure* *meine* which is *mit rede figieret*. This is less a matter of the possession, on the part of the

Arta 6 (1931), 97-159; Grundmann, "Litteratus — Illiteratus," pp. 22-24; in general see Auerbach, *Literatursprache*, pp. 189-192, and also Roger Wright, "Speaking, Reading and Writing Late Latin and Early Romance," *Neophilologus* 60 (1976), 178-189.

⁴⁸ E.g. Alcuin's rule for the pronunciation of written Latin: cf. Wright, "Speaking, Reading and Writing Late Latin," p. 181; and, of course, the conventions of rhetoric which came to be adapted to vernacular texts once the vernaculars themselves became "literary," i.e. written languages. In this connection it should be emphasized that the beginnings of vernacular literacy are not to be identified with the first attempts — whether by means of translation or original composition — to develop a vernacular lexicon in the service of Christianization, as e.g. in OHG in the eighth and ninth centuries. Such texts as the *Abragan*s and other glossaries and glosses, as well as the OHG translations of religious texts, are not to be regarded, as they still commonly are — e.g. by Heinz Rupp, *Forschung zur althochdeutschen Literatur 1943-1962* (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 3 — as serving to facilitate the learning of Latin, but as attempts to render the familiar Christian Latin lexicon in written German. In the eighth and ninth centuries anyone who could read knew Latin, but it was still necessary to form, learn, and use German equivalents to the Christian Latin vocabulary in order to appeal to the *illiterati*, whose Christianity was still superficial at best. In the Romance literatures, of course, the earliest vernacular texts are also religious, although conversion was no longer as pressing an issue. It is noteworthy, that despite repeated urging of the use of the vernaculars on the part of ecclesiastical authorities (e.g. Theodulf of Orléans. Rather of Verona, the councils of Clovesho in 747, of Tours and Mainz in 813), not a single manuscript intended for an exclusively or primarily vernacular text is transmitted from the eighth, ninth, or tenth centuries; see Auerbach, *Literatursprache*, p. 210; Karl Langosch, et al., *Geschichte der Textüberlieferung*, 2 (Zürich, 1964), pp. 190, 321-22, 543-51; an exception to this generally late beginning of vernacular manuscript transmission is, as has been remarked above, the case of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

⁴⁹ I use the term "illustrative" in the sense in which it is used by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York, 1966), pp. 84-85; methodologically fundamental in this respect is Friedrich Ohly, "Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 89 (1958), 1-23, reprinted in Friedrich Ohly, *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt, 1977), pp. 1-31, wherefrom I cite below.

⁵⁰ I use the term "typological" not in the restricted sense in which it is employed in biblical exegesis, but rather as denoting the guaranteed relationship between "fact" and "truth"; see Lutz Huth, *Dichtersche Wahrheit als Thematisierung der Sprache in poetischer Kommunikation*, *Hamburger philologische Studien* 28 (Hamburg, 1972), pp. 263-300.

public of such texts, of a "key" to their symbolic "meanings" that is now lost, than of the experience with Latin texts and the expectations arising from it. In fact, the expectation arising from experience with written Latin is the fundamental "key."

Both the length of time for which such a reading of a narrative text in the vernacular can be posited and the consistency with which such readings were applied to vernacular texts must be regarded as limited. One reason for this limitation lies in the differences between the isotopic structure of Latin and the vernaculars: that of Latin being determined by its special functions as learned and administrative language, that of the vernaculars by an absence of these functions.⁵¹ Another reason lies in the nature of written narrative. For a written narrative is not only necessarily a fiction, its fictionality was recognized early in the development of written vernacular literacy, primarily, as we have seen, in its manifestation of its inherent characteristic: the fictional narrator. But a fiction, in the sense in which the concept applies to a written text, implies that the fiction is not a fiction — an implication to be unmasked, as by Hildebert of Lavardin (PL 171:633), as a "croaking of frogs." The recognition of this implication explains, in part, the opposition to the Arthurian or other romances on the part of churchmen from John of Salisbury to Thomasin of Circlaria and St. Peter Pascual, bishop of Jaén, and also the milder characterization of them as "vain et plaisant" by Jean Bodel. Similarly, an abbot Gervardus is said by Caesarius of Heisterbach (*Dialogus Miraculorum* 1.4.36, ed. J. Strange [Cologne, 1851], p. 205), to have awakened his somnolent monks during a sermon by exclaiming: "Audite, fratres, audite, rem nobis novam et magnam proponam. Rex quidam fuit, qui Artus vocabatur," whereupon he lectured them: "Videte, fratres, miseriam vagabundum. Quando locutus sum de Deo, dormitatis; mox ut verba levitatis inserui, evigilantes erectis auribus omnes auscultare coepistis." But the point is that they instantly awoke, that John of Salisbury regarded the matter as sufficiently serious to be exercised by "quaevis inania, non modo aures et cor prostituit vanitati, sed oculorum et aurium voluptate, suam mulcet desidiā, luxuriam accendit, conquiens undique fomenta vitiorum" (*Policraticus* 1.8 in PL 199:405), and that Thomasin finds himself forced to equivocate.⁵² The success of the implication of the fiction that it is not a

⁵¹ I use the notion of "isotopy" as developed by J. A. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris, 1966), pp. 53 ff. The semantic core of a lexical item consists of minimal semantic features, called "semes"; together with textual semes, these constitute the semantic representation of a lexical item in a given context. Repetitions of semes in a text constitute "classemes," which provide the coherence of a text, and the repetition of classemes forms the "isotopy" that gives the text its unity. For a critical analysis of Greimas's theory, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), pp. 75-95.

⁵² On the one hand, the condemnation "swenner vürbaz versien mac, / sô verlies niht einen tac / an der aventure maere. / er sol volgen der zuht lère / und sinne unde wärheit. / die aventure sint gekleit / dicke mit lüge harte schöne; / die lüge iat ir geizerde kröne" ["whoever wants to understand better, let him not waste his time with romances. Let him follow the precepts of propriety, intelligence and truth. Romances are often garbed in beautiful lies: lies crown their beauty"] (Thomasin von Zirclaria, *Der Welsche Gast*, ed. H. Rückert [Berlin, 1965],

fiction arouses abbot Gervardus's monks from their slumbers, and the "lie" which that implication, as well as the fiction as "deceit" constitutes, prompts John of Salisbury and others to excoriate the romances, and Thomasin to equivocate between John of Salisbury's viewpoint and a reading of the romances as illustrative narratives. These attitudes toward the romances are, of course, conditioned by the Platonism that dominated twelfth-century philosophical views of poetry, which based its valuations on the variously defined notions of the opposition "true/false," echoing "the judgment of Plato by which poets are condemned because philosophers are engaged on a more truly poetic enterprise."⁵²

Fictions purport to be fictions in two ways: a fiction purports to "tell" a "fact" which is not a "fact" in the sense the fiction "tells" it: e.g. the "quoted" speech of any epic hero, or the verbal formulation of actions purporting, explicitly or implicitly, to have taken place outside of the text. And, in part by means of this fictional "factuality," a fiction necessarily formulates a coherent pseudo-"reality." This recognition is the basis for the evolution of the concept of fiction not as a lie, but as a third category beside "truth" and "falsehood." The reading of a fiction as "telling" a "fact" (or "lying" about it) is to ignore this inherent function of fiction and, aside from a possibility of its serving an elucidative function in the service of "truth," to view it as a record of occurrences beyond its own limits.⁵⁴ It is, as with the novice described in 1142 by Aelred Rievaulx (PL 195:565), to shed tears over the

lines 1113-1120), and on the other hand the justification, indeed the ascription to secular narrative in the vernacular of a novel function: "ich schilt die äventiure niht, / swie uns ze liegen geschicht / von der äventiure rât, / wan si bezekhenunge hât / der zuht unde der wârheit: / daz wân man mit hige kleit" ["I don't condemn romances, although their counsel lies to us, for they carry significations of propriety and truth: truth is garbed in lies."] (lines 1121-1126). It is in Thomasin's equivocation that the reason for Bishop John's outburst appears to be reflected. For Thomasin presents us, in effect, with the two possible ways of reading these narratives: (a) as a fiction purporting not to be a fiction, which is John's reading also, as well as St. Peter Pascual's ("E si algun buen exemplo ay, ay muchas malas arterias y enganos para los cuerpos y para las animas" [Juan Argote de Molina, *Nobles de Andalucía* (Jaén, 1966), p. 362]), and (b) as the narrative elucidation of a meta-textual truth and "concrete" exemplification of an abstraction, for the perception of the guaranteed relationship between which Latin tropological literature provides the basis in experience and expectation. It is worthy of note, that, according to a letter of King John of Bohemia, the Dominican Order in the fourteenth century still condemned romances as being "in magnum . . . delectus et contemptum facti"; see Du Gange, *Glossarium*, vol. 7, s. v. "Romanus," pp. 210-211.

⁵² Richard McKeon, "Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century: The Renaissance of Rhetoric," *Modern Philology* 43 (1946), 217-234.

⁵⁴ Unlike Thomasin, John of Salisbury disregards any possibility of an elucidative function, presumably because he still views this as the unique province of Latin learned literature, which, being learned, is competent to elucidate. Here the communicative type itself is a signal of its function. At any rate, this disregard of its possible elucidative, illustrative function as well as of its implicit formulation of a pseudo-"reality" leads him to apply the inapplicable pair of values "true/false" to fiction, and, of course, to find it wanting. See also Jean Mirahil, "Symbolism and Allegory in Arthurian Romance," *Romance Philology* 17 (1964), 555-569, particularly concerning John of Salisbury's attitude toward secular texts.

tales "quae vulgo de nescio quo finguntur Arturo," a mode of reception similarly deplored a little later by the sometime secretary of Henry II Plantagenet and Eleanor of Aquitaine, Peter of Blois (PL 207:1088-89). These "lies," however, could be "useful," if the text was regarded as illustrative, a view conditioned by the function of medieval Latin literature. This is not to say that no voices were raised against the reading of symbol-laden texts such as Chrétien's *Perceval*: Peter Haidu has recently cited Odo Tusculanus as an example of the opposition to such "fictions," the perusal of which is an "insult to God," and which, through the implication of the fiction that it is not a fiction, "allowed the insertion of an imaginative activity which could transform received structures of value incrementally and . . . carry out a destructive activity. . . ." ⁵⁵ With the spread of written secular narrative literature in the vernacular, however, the way became clear for the inherent function of written narrative, its necessary formulation of a coherent pseudo-"reality," to be recognized both by writers and by their publics.⁵⁶ And again this development has two divergent, though not necessarily mutually exclusive effects upon the "understanding" of such fiction: the fictional pseudo-"reality" may, on the basis of experience with Latin exegetical and illustrative literature, be understood as elucidation of a meta-textual "reality" and thereby escape the stigma of "falsehood," or it may be understood as a construction of a separate "reality."⁵⁷ In the one case the construction and effect of the pseudo-"reality" of a fiction is determined by faith in the reliability ("truth") of the relationship of the fiction — or, in the case of

⁵⁵ Peter Haidu, "Repetition: Modern Reflections on Medieval Aesthetics," *Modern Language Notes* 92 (1977), 875-887, specifically pp. 882-883.

⁵⁶ I use the term pseudo-"reality" to denote fictional "reality" with the intention of distinguishing clearly and simply between extra- and intra-poetic "realities," and not in order to characterize these "realities" of the relationships between them. The phenomenological excursus essential to attempt this is neither necessary nor to the point here. It is not beside the point, however, to cite Erich Köhler, *Der literarische Zufall, das Mögliche und die Notwendigkeit* (Munich, 1973), pp. 116-117, in this connection: "Die der Dichtung eigentümliche Fiktionalität ist erfundene Wahrheit und darum nichts weniger als Lüge. Souverän fasst sie zerstreutes Mögliches zusammen, wählt aus, konzentriert es im selbstgewählten Zufall, realisiert in der Fiktion Möglichkeiten, die in der Wirklichkeit nicht aktualisiert werden, und die doch wesentliche Elemente dieser Wirklichkeit und der ihr innewohnenden Notwendigkeit sind." For some relationships between intra- and extra-textual "realities," especially in reference to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Erich Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1970), is fundamental. Some crucial issues concerning the relationship of literary to extra-literary "reality," particularly as they apply to German medieval literature, are discussed by Hugo Kuhn, "Soziale Realität und dichterische Fiktion am Beispiel der höfischen Ritterdichtung Deutschlands," *Dichtung und Welt im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1959), pp. 22-40. In regard to the limitation of the view of the text as elucidative or illustrative to Latin literature, it is noteworthy that Friedrich Ohly seems to suspect a relationship between Latin and vernacular literature similar to that posited here: "Das etymologische Begründen der Wortbedeutung nimmt im Mittelalter, wenn ich richtig sehe, in dem Masse ab, als die Volkssprachen an Bedeutung zunehmen, weil die etymologische Stützung der Wortbedeutung . . . nicht vom Latein auf die Volkssprachen übertragbar ist . . ." ("Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter," p. 17).

⁵⁷ Both of these effects, incidentally, are also reflected in Thomasin's vacillation.

Dante's *Commedia*, of extra-textual "reality" — to a meta-textual "reality," in the other by the illusion that the illusion is not illusory, i.e. by the illusion that the fiction is not a fiction. Three aspects in the relationship between the text of a "fiction" and extra-textual "reality" — aspects too often obscured by a simplistic opposition of "fiction" to "reality" — must be distinguished here: the text may present its "fiction" illusionistically by means of (a) organizing it in terms of the structure of extra-textual "reality" (time, space, movement through both); (b) breaking the boundary between the textual and extra-textual "realities" — in textual terms by identifying an action or figure, usually the narrator, with both "realities," pictorially by depiction of an object such as a frame, or a balustrade, in ambiguous terms; and (c) a combination of both.

In the last analysis, the illusion that the fiction is not a fiction is reducible to the illusion that the narrator is not a fiction. This, in turn, rests on a transference of the formulations of the narrator from the text into extra-textual time and space. The general characteristic underlying the fiction that the fiction is not a fiction, the common procedure for the establishment of the illusion that the fiction is "real" in the sense of extra-textual "reality," is the breaching of the boundary between the text and extra-textual "reality." If this boundary is to be breached effectively, "realistic" space and time must become textual elements. Since the second half of the twelfth century, this breach in the boundary between textual and extra-textual "reality" becomes an ever more pronounced characteristic in medieval literature. The increasing use of the fictional structure of space and time in terms of extra-textual "reality" can be traced clearly from the classical Arthurian romances, such as those of Chrétien and Hartmann von Aue, through, for instance, *Die Crâne* of Heinrich von dem Türlin and the French Lancelot cycle.⁵⁸ And Ulrich von Lichtenstein's and Neidhart von Reuenthal's provisions of explicit ambiguity by the pretense of autobiographical narration are but forerunners of Johann von Tepl's creation of a protagonist with extra-textual links that lead even modern Germanists to identify him with the author.⁵⁹ In principle this

⁵⁸ Christoph Cornemann, "Wigolov" und "Die Crâne": Zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des mittelalterlichen Aventiureromans, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 57 (München, 1977), pp. 231-241, and Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit*, pp. 255-56. Dennis H. Green, "The Absconded and the Emergence of the Romance," *German Life and Letters* 28 (1975), 246-263, describes an instance of the initial phase of the development of narrative toward its own construction of time and space. Paradoxically, that phase is characterized here — in the instance of the second part of the Strassburg *Alexander* — by the narrative's construction of "a world which is remote from the categories of space and time" (p. 253). Yet the eventual construction of fictional time and space, as it is encountered in the romances, is provided for by its basis in the subjective dimension of the action: Alexander's adventures in India have subjective implications so that his journey is not so much a movement from point A to point B, but a series of dangers to be met and challenges to be accepted" (p. 258). For the further development of space in the romance, see Dennis H. Green, *Der Weg zum Abenteuer im höfischen Roman des deutschen Mittelalters* (Göttingen, 1974), and particularly "The Pathway to Adventure," *Exotica* 8 (1977), 145-188.

⁵⁹ For instance Willy Krogmann, ed., *Der ackerman* (Wiesbaden, 1954), pp. 11-28. An excel-

lent treatment of Ulrich von Lichtenstein's fiction is that of Ingeborg Glier, "Diener zweier Herrinnen: Zu Ulrichs v. Lichtenstein Frauendienst," *The Epic in Medieval Society*, ed. H. Scholler (Tübingen, 1977), pp. 290-306.

breach of boundaries is comparable to the procedure of the artist who paints a fly on the frame of his painting.⁶⁰ The allusion to pictorial art in this respect is not gratuitous: the often repeated dictum of Gregory the Great in a letter to the bishop of Marseille — "Aliud est enim pictoram adorare, aliud picturae historia, quid sit adorandum, addiscere. Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa . . . legunt, qui litteras nesciunt: unde praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est" (PL 77:1128) — clearly demands the inclusion of the pictorial arts in any consideration of the function of literacy and illiteracy in the Middle Ages. Of course, it is obvious that pictures could not always have served the purpose suggested by Pope Gregory. But his dictum also immediately suggests the familiar attribute of medieval art that a picture must be "read" — an appropriate description of the function of medieval pictorial art produced prior to the second half of the twelfth century. The characterization of medieval pictorial communication as essentially textual, however, becomes less applicable after the thirteenth century. Given the close relationship of the function of the two types of communication, the textual and the pictorial, during this period, an investigation of one may benefit from a look at the other.

Already in the first half of the thirteenth century Richart de Fornival explains the function of the illustrations in his *Bestiaire d'Amours* in terms of making that which is depicted seem to be present; and the adventures which one hears read he describes as being as vivid as if one could see them.⁶¹ Similarly, despite the obvious dominance of schemata in his effort, Villard de Honnecourt (c. 1235) captions his drawing of a lion with the admonition "Et scacies bien, qu'il fu contrefais al vif."⁶² William Durandus, on the other

⁶⁰ It is precisely in rendering the "frame" between intra- and extra-textual (or pictorial) "reality" questionable as a boundary that the principle of illusionism lies: quite apart from the fact that the fly painted on the frame may be a case of *trompe l'oeil*, designed to bring the illusion of extra-pictorial "reality" closer to the picture, an illusion designed to be discovered as an illusion, yet the discovery raises the question of where the frame with the fly belongs: to intra- or extra-pictorial "reality"? A pictorial parallel to the fictional narrator in the guise of "author" is afforded by the breach of the frame in Jan van Eyck's portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne de Chenany, in which the mirror on the back wall reflects the backs of the two figures, as well as the "painter," and, of course, in much more complex a manner, in Velasquez's "Las Meninas." In contrast, one may regard the depiction of the "scribe/author" Heinrich praepositus on the right margin of the miniature of Frederick Barbarossa as crusader in Bibl. Vat., cod. vat. lat. 2001, fol. 1r (Bäumli, *Medieval Civilization*, plate 44) as an example of a signature in the guise of the "author." There is no intra-pictorial illusory "reality."

⁶¹ Cesare Segre, ed., *Li bestiaires d'amours di maistre Richart de Fornival e li response du Bestiaire* (Milan, 1957), pp. 3-4.

⁶² See the illustrations in Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*. Bollingen Series 35, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, 1965), p. 78, and in Elizabeth G. Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art*, 1 (Princeton, 1957), fig. 10.

hand, exemplifies a conservative view of the function of pictures in his *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (1285–91).⁶³ Pictorial art here has other concerns. Clear outlines, clearly marked boundaries between pictorial and non-pictorial space, size relationships dictated by the relative significance of the objects represented in a predominantly narrative context, heavy reliance on traditional formulae, all facilitate recognition of essential elements of narrative themes — concepts applicable to oral poetry are readily adaptable to the purpose of describing Romanesque art.⁶⁴ There is, however, a difference between the formulicity of the oral tradition and that of the conventions governing all written discourse. Similarly, the formulaic imagery of the Romanesque picture cannot be equated with the conventional formulicity essential to the communicative function of all pictorial art. Neither the oral narrative tradition nor Romanesque pictorial art can tolerate substantial deviations from their formulaic traditions without loss of their ability to communicate clearly. The conventional, necessary formulicity of all forms of communication, however, can be broken within certain limits, and those "violations" of a code can themselves become communicative factors and, in turn, a code. This, after all, is what is meant by "artistic innovation." This does not mean that no innovation can take place in oral epic poetry or Romanesque pictorial art, but merely that the forms basic to instant recognition of a narrative element, be it theme, formula, or shape, are inviolate in their recognizability. The written text and, in increasing measure, post-Romanesque art allow innovation precisely in those patterns which are basic to communication; in fact, they make those innovations part of the communication itself.

Among the types of innovation possible, it was the breaking of the unam-

⁶³ For pertinent passages from William Durandus's *Rationale*, see Holt, ed., *Documentary History of Art*, I: 121–129.

⁶⁴ If the pictorial narrative is chronologically coherent, it tells a "story" in pictures which, in their composition, may comment on the "story" itself — a process analogous to the use of a formerly oral formula or conventional phrase in writing in order to comment on the text. An example is the frontal presentation of Otto III (Munich, Staatsbibl. Cod. lat. 4453) within the narrative illustration of the various parts of his realm (Roma, Gallia, Germania, Sclavinia) approaching his throne, bearing gifts. The frontal view of the enthroned emperor, the center around which everything on the picture of the emperor is arranged symmetrically, and the fact that the picture of the four nations depends for its meaning solely on that of the emperor, comments on his majesty and that of his empire. And, in fact, a verbal analogue to the picture exists in the words of Gerbert of Aurillac in the preface to his *Libellus de rationali et ratione uti* (PL 139:139): "Nostrum, nostrum est Romanum imperium. Dant vires ferax frugum Italia, ferax militum Gallia et Germania, nec Scythicae nobis desunt fortissima regna"; see Hans Jantzen, *Ottomache Kunst* (Hamburg, 1959), pp. 92–93; for an illustration see Adolph Goldschmidt, *German Illumination*, 2 (Florence, 1928; repr. New York, 1970), plate 24. If the narrative is not chronologically coherent, the anachronism itself imparts a symbolic function to the narrative by lifting it out of chronological coherence and placing it into a meta-chronological frame of reference. In both cases a distinction must be made between artist and "narrator," for the compositional function of the picture perceptible to the viewer is determined by a fictional intermediary between artist and viewer. This intermediary performs the controlling function of the narrator in a text.

biguous outline which appears to have had extensive influence on the function of pictorial art as communication.⁶⁵ Once the outline had been rendered ambiguous, the establishment of an ambiguous relationship between the picture plane and the space of the viewer was only a matter of experimentation.⁶⁶ And this gradual merging of the picture plane with that of the viewer, and the attendant creation of ambiguities, goes hand in hand with an equally gradual development away from the clearly outlined formula. The unambiguous formula, as determined by the "minimum stereotype," the universal, now yielded to the particular, the observed, i.e. the transmission of "visual" information.⁶⁷ Of course, this "visual" information — provided it is understood as "visual" and not metaphoric information — is a fiction, it is "information" about a past or absent condition which, at the time the "information" is received, is no longer as the portrayal suggests, if it ever was. And this quite apart from any reliance on traditional patterns of rendering that which is seen, or the suggestiveness of types (masks) in shaping expectations,⁶⁸ for purely "visual" information is usually regarded as irrelevant, even misleading, and only serves as a basis for those characteristics of a scene which are of more general import.⁶⁹ Here also, then, is a similarity in the transmission of "visual" information and that of a "reality" transmitted by a written text — a similarity ultimately due to the fact that in both instances the "reality" is transmitted not in terms of likenesses, but of "equivalences which enable us to see reality in terms of an image [or imagery] and an image [or imagery] in terms of reality."⁷⁰ The fiction of "visual" information

⁶⁵ An early example may perhaps be the "Flying Fish of Tyre" (ca. 1170) in MS 81 of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, and illustrated in M. L. d'Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art* (New York, 1975), p. 14, in which the wings of the fish, who is sailing above the little ship and is the center of attention of the two figures, break through the frame of the picture and into the text above. Moreover, there are three frames involved in the picture. The innermost frame, two narrow vertical lines left and right, "becomes" the yard of the little ship; its upper horizontals are obscured by the fish, its lower horizontals by the ship and the water. Fish, ship, the two figures, and the water, moreover, are superimposed on the second frame: the decorative field surrounding the central area. The outer frame contains the entire composition — the elbow of one of the figures appears even to be forced back into the picture plane — except for the wings of the fish, which jut across it into the area of the text. Apart from the fact that the fish thus appears to "leap out of the picture plane, and into the space of the text" (d'Otrange Mastai, p. 54), and the boat with its two figures is itself freed from containment by the inner frame, both fish and boat present the viewer with an ambiguity: is the boat, instead of being contained by the inner picture plane, in fact passing it by, and is the fish part of the "picture," or part of that which is "not picture"? The latter question is further complicated by the fact that the two figures in the "picture" are looking at the questionable fish, thus raising the question of whether they are therefore looking at something not in their picture frame.

⁶⁶ d'Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art*, pp. 54–55.

⁶⁷ Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 144. Of course, the particular, the observed, is not independent of the schema in its rendering; see *ibid.*, pp. 63–90.

⁶⁸ Ernst H. Gombrich, "The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and Art," in Ernst H. Gombrich, Julian Hochberg, Max Black, *Art, Perception, and Reality* (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 1–46.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 345, and Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley,

and of literary imagery, combined with the extension of the illusion — whether by means of pictorial or verbal equivalences — through the "space curtain" between the picture or the text and extra-pictorial or extra-textual reality, create the increasing "realism" of both post-Romanesque pictorial art and written vernacular narrative.

If this is indeed a parallel development in pictorial and written verbal communication, the question arises whether it received its impetus in one or the other form of communication, or whether the impetus is to be sought elsewhere.⁷¹ The history of pictorial art offers no contemporaneous parallel to the profound change that the rapid development of vernacular literacy signified for written verbal communication. It appears, therefore, more likely that the cause of the increasing tendency to formulate the illusion of an extra-textual or extra-pictorial "reality" in pictorial art is one of the consequences of the rise of vernacular literacy.

The formulation of this illusion, i.e. the creation of the fiction that the fiction is not a fiction, results inevitably from the fixation of a narrative in writing and the perception of the narrative as fixed. In principle, it is therefore not limited to written narrative in the vernacular; in instances in which medieval Latin (or any other) narrative does *not* create the expectation that it concerns itself with an elucidation of other texts, and does *not* function *per tropologiam*, the illusion of an extra-textual "reality" immediately springs into being. As such it was to be perceived, however, by a public consisting only of the *litterati*, and — unlike that of vernacular narrative — generally excluding the "quasi-literates," whose access to it was limited to vernacular translations and who constituted the bulk of the audiences listening to readings of vernacular narratives.⁷² The reception of the vernacular

1974), p. 98: "image-making, artistic or otherwise, does not simply derive from the optical projection of the object represented, but is an equivalent, rendered with the properties of a particular medium, of what is observed in the object."

⁷¹ The "realistic" tendency in thirteenth-century art and vernacular literature is usually considered in conjunction with diverse manifestations, if not as a result, of secularism. To the extent, however, that an intensification of subjective consciousness is adduced as one of these manifestations, and to the extent that such consciousness is formulated and transmitted by written texts — e.g. the autobiography of Guibert de Nogent, the correspondence of Abaelard and Heloise, the pseudo-autobiographical *Frauentrost* of Ulrich von Lichtenstein, the formation of a subjective "self" in the romances, the renewed influence of Augustine's *Confessions* — literacy as an agent of transmission, as possible indicator of popularity, and as the means for the formulation of the subjective "self," is one of those commonly — if only implicitly — considered factors. See, for instance, Hans Dewald, *Minne und "sgrätes aventiur"*, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 158 (Göppingen, 1975), pp. 3–14, and Hans Bayer, *Zur Soziologie des mittelalterlichen Individualisierungsprozesses*, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 58 (1976), 115–153. The dependence of the development of the subjective "self" on its formulation as part of narrative fictionality, and the dependence of this fictionality on the development of written vernacular narrative, are factors which do not appear to have been investigated.

⁷² An example of the creation of such an illusion in Latin literature is the *Historia Regum Britannie* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, particularly with its linkage of textual and extra-textual "reality" by way of the combination of Archdeacon Walter, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Caradoc of Llancarfan in the dedicatory epistle to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and the conclusion of his last chapter.

narrative, moreover, was not subject to the constraints imposed by medieval Latin and its conventions upon the expectations aroused by Latin narrative. The isotopic structure of the vernaculars was unmetaphorical and "concrete," rather than metaphorical and "abstract," and accordingly answered to a paradigm of perception distinct from that formed by the experience of Latin narrative. Although the expectations of the predominantly "quasi-literate" and literate public of written vernacular narrative were initially formed by its indirect or direct experience with Latin texts, justifying the ascription of an initially typological or tropological reception of the romances to those quasi-literate and literate publics, these expectations were soon altered as the distinctiveness of the vernacular asserted itself in its written form. It is this written form which created the expectations based on Latin literacy; the vernaculars, however, carried an entirely different set of associations: their lexicon and imagery, as well as the entire cultural context of their past use, were — although not untouched by the Latin tradition — distinctly their own. They had not been developed to serve the administrative and illustrative or elucidative functions of the church and governmental officialdom, their fields of reference remained predominantly secular,⁷³ and their secular, non-abstract aspects may well have been the decisive factors in rendering the "space curtain" between intra- and extra-textual space ambiguous. And to the extent that Romanesque pictorial art derived its "messages" primarily from verbal, narrative communication,⁷⁴ it is to be expected that the fundamental changes in verbal communication which vernacular literacy brought about, with all their consequences for the emergence of fictionality, will have had no less effect on pictorial art than previous developments in Latin verbal communication, such as the effects of biblical exegesis on Romanesque sculpture or scholasticism on Gothic architecture.⁷⁵

Ruth Mellinkoff, in her examination of *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought*, has succinctly described the process of demetaphorization implicit in the rise of vernacular narrative and its effect on pictorial imagery.⁷⁶

⁷³ Such efforts as those of the translators of Christian texts of the eighth and ninth centuries, of pedagogic translators such as Notker Labeo, and of various councils advocating the use of the vernacular in preaching, remained sporadic and their effects on the preliterate vernaculars minimal.

⁷⁴ Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 150.

⁷⁵ For the latter see especially Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York, 1968). This is not to maintain, of course, that Romanesque and Gothic art were simply extensions, in another medium, of "messages" of the Church, or that every element functioned as an item of purely religious communication; see, in this respect, Meyer Schapiro, *Romanesque Art* (New York, 1977), pp. 1–27. In fact, the examples, both positive and negative, for an "aesthetic attitude in Romanesque art" adduced by Schapiro illustrate the gradual evolution of fictionality in art and its recognition as fiction, i.e. as an illusion of extra-artistic "reality" on the part of the viewers. St. Bernard's famous diatribe against Cluniac art in his letter to Abbot William of St. Thierry (PL 182:914–916) can be compared, in its standpoint to such art — e.g. "that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books" — to that of John of Salisbury toward the romances.

⁷⁶ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought* (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 22–27.

As far as written vernacular texts are concerned, this demetaphorization, inhering in the transformation of the metaphor from a learned language to vernaculars whose concrete imagery had not become metaphorized, only gradually came to affect the impingement of the text on the literate and "quasi-literate" public. During the initial phase of the development of written vernacular narrative the expectations of a written text on the part of these publics were necessarily formed by Latin texts. Before the middle of the thirteenth century the expectation of the literate and "quasi-literate" public, increasingly formed by vernacular texts, underwent the demetaphorization demanded by the concrete, non-metaphoric imagery of vernacular narrative, and facilitated, with the receptions of those texts as "fiction," the creation of ambiguity in the delimitations of intra- and extra-textual "reality." The relationship between the written word and the picture as defined by Gregory the Great was far from broken; it merely changed. With the rapid development of vernacular literacy, both in the sense of an increase in the number of written texts and of the number of individuals able to read and write, the function of the picture ceased to be that of a substitute for a text — even in theory. Whether pictures ever functioned as substitutes for texts in practice is highly questionable: merely the fact that many sculptures and pictures cannot easily be seen from any likely public vantage point makes the general applicability of Gregory's dictum extremely unlikely. At any rate, narrative pictorial art, whether because it was relieved of the function of substitute for the written word by the spread of vernacular literacy or not, increasingly assumes the aesthetic function of creating a "reality" separate from that which physically surrounds it. And, like contemporaneous vernacular written narrative, pictorial art from the thirteenth century on formulates an increasingly ambiguous relationship between the two "realities" — a relationship perhaps dictated by the consequences of vernacular literacy. The path from Hartmann's conversation with *vrou Minne* in *Iwein* (lines 2971-3019) to the "autobiographical" journey of the marshal of Styria from Mestre to Bohemia clad as Dame Venus, and to the merging of pictorial with extra-pictorial space in the symbolism of a very feminine Ecclesia looking over at an equally feminine Synagoga at the South Portal of Strasbourg cathedral is neither long nor twisted.

A consideration of medieval literacy and illiteracy as determinants of different types of communication, rather than as personal attributes, corrects the oversimplifications inherent in the traditional view, and makes possible an examination of the characteristics of medieval preliteracy, illiteracy, quasi-literacy, and literacy. On this basis, it appears that the union of some attributes of Latin literacy with the isotopic structure of the vernaculars in vernacular literacy led to the development of an illusionistic function of narrative texts. The new ambiguity of the limits of a text, which was one consequence of the new mode of communication represented by vernacular literacy, is closely related to the simultaneous development of the concept "fiction" as distinct from "falsehood." Moreover, the close functional rela-

tionship between verbal and pictorial communication during the Middle Ages offers the opportunity of observing analogous developments in the treatment of pictorial space. With the evolution of vernacular literacy, textual as well as pictorial narrative changes its communicative function from commenting on "reality" to constituting a "reality."

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