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New Medieval Literatures 18

New Medieval Literatures

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New Medieval Literatures 18

Edited by
Laura Ashe, Philip Knox, David Lawton
and Wendy Scase

D. S. BREWER

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Abbreviations

ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
DOE	<i>Dictionary of Old English</i>
EETS	Early English Text Society
e.s.	extra series
o.s.	original series
s.s.	supplementary series
MCS	Medieval Church Studies
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>

Demonic Daydreams: Mind-Wandering and Mental Imagery in the Medieval Hagiography of St Dunstan¹

HILARY POWELL

St Dunstan stood in his ivied tower,
 Alembic, crucible, all were there;
 When in came Nick to play him a trick,
 In guise of a damsel passing fair.
 Every one knows How the story goes:
 He took up the tongs and caught hold of his nose.²

Richard Harris Barham was correct in his 1837 lay lampooning the legend of St Dunstan: the tale of the saint tweaking the devil's nose was indeed one which everyone knew. In fact, so famous was the tale that Barham felt it needed no further explanation.³ Few in the nineteenth century, however, could have known of its origins, nor indeed have imagined its

1 I wish to thank Julia McConville, Ralph Norman and Mary Carruthers for their help in discussing various aspects of this essay. This research was funded by the Wellcome Trust (grants WT098455MA; 108720/Z/15/Z and 103817/Z/14/Z).

2 Richard Harris Barham [as Thomas Ingoldsby], *The Ingoldsby Legends; or, Mirth and Marvels*, 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1881), 1: 168.

3 Some of Barham's contemporaries were more expansive; not only did John Hone reprint an engraving of the incident in his 1826 volume *The Every-Day Book* but he included the following ditty: 'St. Dunstan, as the story goes | Once pull'd the devil by the nose | With red-hot tongs, which made him roar | That he was heard three miles or more.' Hone's entry for 19 May also included a description of the company of the goldsmiths' re-enactment of the scene for the Lord Mayor's Pageant in 1687: John Hone, *The Every-Day Book; or, Everlasting Calendar or Popular Amusements, Sports, Pastimes, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs, and Event, Incident to Each of the Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Days in Past and Present Times*, 2 vols (London, 1826), 1: 335-7.

novelty when the story first entered the hagiographical tradition in the final decade of the eleventh century. St Dunstan (909–988) had been dead for over a century and at least two different accounts of his *Life* had already been written, but Osbern of Canterbury was the first to tell this tale in his *Vita S. Dunstani*, written c. 1090.⁴ This essay explores the origins of this story, addresses why Osbern chose to introduce it into the legend of Dunstan, and asks what his careful remodelling of the tale can reveal about the purposes of hagiographical narratives.

The Historical Context

When Dunstan, former abbot of Glastonbury and archbishop of Canterbury, died in 988, he was swiftly championed as a saint. Within a decade a secular cleric and personal friend of Dunstan from his Glastonbury years, known only by the initial 'B', had written a *Vita* and shortly afterwards Adelard, a monk from St Peter's monastery, Ghent, revised this text into a set of twelve liturgical lessons.⁵ When Osbern came to write his *Vita* shortly after 1090, he primarily relied on these two earlier *Lives*, to which he made a variety of alterations.⁶ He repeatedly supplemented and embellished the existing legend and even, as in the case of this tale, introduced entirely new material.

Although a recent addition, the story quickly acquired canonical status and became an integral feature of the legend; it is conceivable that Osbern added it precisely because of its capacity to capture the imagination. Eadmer of Canterbury reworked it some fifteen years later,

4 Osbern of Canterbury, 'Vita Sancti Dunstani Auctore Osberno', in *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 63 (London, 1874), 69–128. Hereafter cited as *OD*.

5 *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed./trans. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2012).

6 Osbern's work, for example, was the first to present Dunstan in a position of leadership in the Benedictine reform movement of the tenth century: Jay Rubenstein, 'The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury', in *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066–1109*, ed. Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (London, 1995), 27–40 (39). Osbern also added his own, somewhat unorthodox, spin on Dunstan's conversion and decision to become a monk: *OD*, 82–3; Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012), 57–60.

and William of Malmesbury incorporated it into his *Vita S. Dunstani* (written c. 1129–30); by the fourteenth century abridged versions of the story were circulating in both Latin and Middle English Legendaries.⁷ Moreover, the scene readily lent itself to pictorial representation, and soon became the predominant iconographic motif for the saint: it was chosen for a historiated capital in an early copy of Osbern's *Vita*.⁸ Images of Dunstan grabbing the devil's nose with a pair of tongs were a popular *bas-de-page* subject in the fourteenth century, adorning the pages of the Macclesfield and Luttrell Psalters, the so-called 'Smithfield Decretals', and a copy of Richard Rolle's *Vehiculum vitae*.⁹ The slapstick quality of the story lent itself to grotesque and absurd images, but its memorability was not incidental. Its immediately visual character holds the key to why Osbern introduced it into the Dunstanian hagiographical tradition, and it is only by paying close attention to his text and to Eadmer's careful revisions that we obtain a sense of its full significance.

The intention here, however, extends beyond the appraisal of a single hagiographical curiosity. This episode and its analysis will enable a more wide-ranging discussion covering theories of demonic operation formulated in the Egyptian desert, monastic concerns and counter-measures for mind-wandering, and the centrality of mental imagery to

7 Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed./trans. Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir (Oxford, 2006), 41–159 [hereafter *ED*]; William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed./trans. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002), 165–304. Legendaries: the *Sanctilogium Angliae Walliae Scotiae et Hiberniae* by John of Tynemouth (d. c. 1348) which was later reordered by John Capgrave (1394–1464) and subsequently printed in 1516: *Nova Legenda Angliae*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1901), 1: 272–95; London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 436/2, fol. 59b; *The South English Legendary, edited from Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 145 and British Museum MS Harley 2277, with variants from Bodley MS Ashmole 43 and British Museum MS Cotton Julius D. ix*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, 3 vols, EETS o.s. 235, 236, 244 (London, 1956–9), 1:204–11.

8 London, British Library, Harley MS 315, fol. 15v, digitized at www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_315 [accessed 7/8/2017].

9 Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 1-2005, fol. 140r; London, British Library, MS Add. 42130, fol. 54v; London, British Library, Royal MS 10 E. iv, fol. 250v; Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 218, fol. 59v. Further examples occur in a much-effaced wall painting at Barton Church, Cambridgeshire, and a fifteenth-century agricultural almanac (London, British Library, Royal MS 17 A XVI, fol. 9).

monastic meditative practice. In so doing, this essay seeks to make two important contributions. First, it will present a way of reading demonic hagiographical narratives which locates the battle between saint and demon firmly within the mind of the saint. And second, it will advocate a reader-centred or aesthetic approach to Latin hagiography, which foregrounds the texts' cognitive utility to their audience.

Osbern of Canterbury's 'Vita S. Dunstani'

Osbern was an Anglo-Saxon monk at the priory of Christ Church, Canterbury. He most likely entered the priory as a child oblate c. 1050 and, apart from a four-year sojourn at the Abbey of Bec (1076–c. 1080), he spent his whole life at Canterbury. In his later years, he rose to prominence as precentor and subprior.¹⁰ He was also a prolific hagiographer and wrote *vitae* for several of Canterbury's saints, including St Dunstan.¹¹ Their reception however, both medieval and modern, has been mixed. William of Malmesbury complimented his *Romana elegantia* ('Roman elegance') and considered Osbern 'nulli nostro tempore stilo secundus, musica certe omnium sine controuersia primus' ('second to none in our time as a stylist as well as leading the field without dispute in music').¹² William appears to have changed his mind, however, when he came to write his own *Vita S. Dunstani*, since he justified his composition with the claim that 'Antiquis enim sermonum gratiam, recentibus integritatem fidei deesse deprehendimus' ('the old Lives lack polish and the new reliability').¹³ Eadmer directly criticized both Osbern's florid prose, which he felt 'usitatae narrationis excessisse' ('exceeded the balanced

10 Osbern of Canterbury, 'Miracula Sancti Dunstani', in *Memorials of Saint Dunstan*, 129–61 (161): 'Osbernus huius ecclesiae commonachum et praecentorem et suppriorum.' On Osbern's life, see Rubenstein, 'Life and Writings.'

11 His material on Ælfheah, Odo and Bregwine, all former archbishops of Canterbury, was printed by Henry Wharton in his *Anglia sacra, siue collectio historiarum, partim antiquitas, partim recentior scripturarum, de archiepiscopis & episcopis Anglie, a prima fidei Christianae susceptione ad annum MDXL*, ed. H. Wharton, 2 vols (London, 1691), 2: 75–147.

12 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed./trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998), 1: 241.

13 William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, 166. He then proceeded to enumerate all of Osbern's historical, stylistic and theological shortcomings.

style of everyday narrative'), and his historical inaccuracies, claiming that his work 'uulgatae rerum historiae non omnimodis concordasse' ('did not concur in every respect with the history of events as it is widely known').¹⁴ Modern critics have focused on Osbern's historical errors. For Richard Southern, Osbern 'did his best, but he was a man of the old school whose talent lay in music and not in writing or history ... he eked out his few facts with a great deal of imaginary discourse and rhetorical elaboration'.¹⁵ Other historians have been even less generous; Antonia Gransden writes that 'Osbern was not a man of great gifts. His Latin is verbose and contorted, and his critical faculty negligible'.¹⁶ This essay will argue for some modest reappraisal of Osbern's hagiographical talents; I suggest he was a more gifted and innovative hagiographer than has been appreciated.

Scholars have long since ceased criticizing hagiography on the grounds of its historical accuracy or otherwise, which is not to say that veracity was not a primary goal of the genre.¹⁷ Concern for testamentary truth certainly appears to have weighed heavy on the hagiographer: hagiographical texts, particularly *miracula*, are laden with references to the authority, trustworthiness, or quantity of those who had witnessed the reported events.¹⁸ These apparent attempts to authenticate the occurrence as an actual event, as something which had, or genuinely could have, happened, may obscure an importantly different, and socially

14 *ED*, 44. Nevertheless, far more copies of Osbern's *Vita S. Dunstani* survive than of Eadmer's. R. W. Southern observed that 'it easily out-distanced in popularity the works which set out to supersede it. His critics failed to drive him from the field': *Saint Anselm: a Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990), 251.

15 Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 250. He subsequently criticized Osbern for having taken 'refuge in extensive imaginary oratory', 280.

16 Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England I, c.550-1307* (Abingdon, 1996), 128.

17 David Rollason has termed attention to the specificities of time and place the 'provincial viewpoint' of a text, 'The Miracles of St Benedict: A Window on Early Medieval France', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (London, 1985), 77.

18 See Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate. Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2011); Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000-1215*, 2nd edn (Aldershot, 1987); Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000); and Simon Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities. Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England* (Oxford, 2006).

useful, relation to the ‘truth’.¹⁹ Hagiographical truth is not primarily rooted in an empirical epistemology, but rather a transcendent truth about divine grace, symbolized through the religious, ethical and moral behaviours of the saint.²⁰ This is not to say that hagiographers did not care about accurately presenting actual events, only that they need not necessarily have been factually true to convey truth. By this same token, eyewitness reports in the third- (or occasionally first-)person may not have been incorporated to authenticate the veracity of the event but to testify to a higher, universal truth. The truth to which these texts speak was spiritual, not empirical.²¹

Osbern’s story about Dunstan tweaking the devil’s nose is a classic example which interweaves multiple levels of truth-claim. Having made the decision to become a monk, Dunstan travelled to Glastonbury and built a cell for himself next to the church of St Mary. The objective reality of the cell is guaranteed by Osbern’s first-person account of his experience: ‘Ut enim de re quam ipse vidi, testimonium feram.’ (‘For I saw the thing myself about which I bear witness.’)²² A lengthy preamble follows in which he offers a detailed description of the cell, estimating it to have been five feet long, two and a half feet wide and very low, since he declared that one could only stand up straight by standing on the dug earth. He thought it ‘magis mortui videatur sepulcrum quam viventis habitaculum’ (84: ‘seemed more like the tomb for a corpse than the dwelling-place of a living man’). Osbern ends his description with the striking image of the author sitting alone in the cell, ‘manuum illius opera, peccatricibus manibus contrectasse, oculis apposuisse, rigasse

19 Yarrow has argued that miracle narratives were communally negotiated between hagiographers, literary elites, and the lay faithful ‘from whose social practices they garnered their material’. If hagiographers ‘aspired to achieve social purchase’, their narratives had to possess ‘functional meaning’ and remain credible to their audiences: *Saints and their Communities*, 16–17. See also Felice Lifshitz, ‘Beyond Positivism and Genre: “Hagiographical” Texts as Historical Narrative’, *Viator* 25 (1994), 95–113; Cynthia Turner Camp, *Anglo-Saxon Saints’ Lives as Historical Writing in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2015).

20 Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford, 1988 and 1992), 164–5.

21 See, for example, Norman W. Ingham, ‘On Historical Truth and Hagiographical Truth: Saint Feodosii’s Mother’, *Russian History* 18 (1991), 127–41. For a comparative context see *Hagiography and Religious Truth*, ed. Rico G. Monge, Kerry P. C. San Chirico and Rachel J. Smith (London, 2016).

22 *OD*, 83.

lacrymis et flexis genibus adorasse' (84: 'caressing with sinful hands the works of [Dunstan's] hands, eyes fixed, wet with tears, kneeling in adoration'). Osbern's emotional appeal is compelling; the reader is persuaded both of the authenticity of the cell and the writer's visit.²³

At this point Osbern returns to his narrative, explaining that just as the devil had forced Dunstan to leave King Æthelstan's court in a previous episode (81), the devil 'eum nunc nititur depellere tugurio' (84: 'now sought to drive him from his cell').

Fallax ergo fallacem hominis adopertus imaginem, sub obscuro vespere cellam petit adolescentis, immisso capite fenestree incumbit, cernit illum fabrili opere occupatum, postulat sibi quippiam operis fabricari. Dunstanus autem neque calliditatem eius advertens, neque importunitatem ferens, operi quod postulabatur animum intendit. Interim ille perversa compositione verba facere, mulierum nomina inserere, luxurias commemorare; deinde religionem ostendere, et denuo eadem repetere. Tum vero athleta Christi quis esset intelligens, tenacula quibus ferrum tenebat fortiter ignire, suppressis labiis Christum invocare. Cumque per summos fines eadem tenacula candentia videret, sancto actus furore, celeriter ea de igne rapit, larvalem faciem tenaculis includit, et totis viribus renitens monstrum introrsum trahit. Jam stando vires sumebat Dunstanus, cum is qui tenebatur avulso pariete tenentis se manibus aufugerat, tales immani rugitu fremens ululatus: 'O quid fecit calvus iste, O quid fecit calvus iste.' Tenui namque sed formosa caesarie erat, et ea re talia de homine clamitabat. Mane autem facto congregata est ad eum non parva propinqui populi multitudo, sciscitans quisnam ille clamor fuisset qui tanta eos vehementia dormientes terruisset. 'Daemonis,' ait, 'furus ille fuit, qui nusquam me vivere sinit, e cella quoque ejicere temptat. Cautae vos agite ab illo; quia si vocem irati ferre non potuistis, societatem damnati quo pacto sustinebitis?' (84–5)

23 It has been treated as a fact of Osbern's life, see R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059–c.1130* (Cambridge, 1963), 251; Rubenstein, 'Life and Writings', 38. This passage, however, is the only direct evidence for Osbern's visit. Eadmer also claims to have visited Dunstan's cell at Glastonbury (*ED*, 66), and in a letter to the monks at Glastonbury (c. 1120) he expressed gratitude for their hospitality: Stubbs, *Memorials of Saint Dunstan*, 412.

(And so the deceitful one, disguised in the false likeness of a man, in the darkness of evening sought the cell of the youth and, leaning forward, thrust his head through the window. Seeing him occupied with the work of a blacksmith, he demanded some work be done for him. But Dunstan, neither turning his attention to [the devil's] cunning nor surrendering to his persistent solicitation, extended his mind to the work required of him. Meanwhile to preach an evil lesson, he introduced the names of women, and called luxuries to mind; then showed reverence and repeated these things again. Then indeed the champion of Christ understood who this was, and boldly made the tongs with which he held the iron red hot, calling on Christ through compressed lips. And when he saw the the end of the tongs glowing bright white, driven by pious rage, he rapidly drew them from the fire, grabbed the devilish face with the tongs and with his whole strength dragged the struggling monster inside. Now standing firm Dunstan gained strength, while he who was being held tore apart the imprisoning walls with his own hands and fled with a great roar, howling in rage: 'Oh what has this bald man done! Oh what has this bald man done!' For Dunstan did indeed have thin but beautiful hair, and he was shouting such things about the man. In the morning, however, there gathered a not inconsiderable crowd of his neighbours, asking what that din had been which had frightened them so severely in their sleep. 'That was the fury of a demon,' he said, 'who will not permit me to live anywhere and tried to drive me from my cell. Take care to stay away from him, because if you cannot stand his angered voice, how will you be able to bear his wretched company?'

While the veracity of the cell remains open for debate, there can be little doubt that this story was entirely the product of Osbern's invention. Leaving aside the likelihood that had the story any traction with the Glastonbury community it would have been included in the *Vita* written by 'B', it seems to have been imported, almost in its entirety, from an episode found in Rufinus of Aquileia's early fifth-century *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, a travelogue following a group of monks on their journey through the Egyptian desert.²⁴

24 The original fourth-century Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Brussels, 1961), trans. Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, introd. Benedicta Ward, SLG (Minnesota, 1980) was translated and expanded by Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 400–410) and enjoyed wide circulation

The Exemplar: Apelles of Achoris

In chapter fifteen of the *Historia monachorum* the monks arrive at Achoris, where they meet a priest named Apelles about whom they hear the following tale:

Quodam autem tempore, cum ad fabrilia opera vigilaret in silentio noctis, conversus diabolus in formam mulieris speciosae, venit ad eum tamquam aliquid operis ei deferens. Tum ille arreptum manu nuda de fornace ferrum candens, in faciem ejus injecit. At illa clamans et ululans aufugit, ita ut omnes fratres, qui in circuitu commanebant, ululatum ejus fugientis audirent, et ex eo jam vir ille in usu habuit, ferrum candens manu nuda tenere, nec laedi. (*HM*, 433)

(One time, in the dead of night, when [Apelles] was awake and working as a blacksmith, the devil transformed into the shape of a beautiful woman came to him as though bringing him some work. Then Apelles seized a white-hot iron from the fire with his bare hands and hurled it into her face. And she fled, wailing and howling, so that all the brothers who dwelt in the neighbourhood heard the cries of the fugitive. And from then on, that man had the capacity to grasp glowing iron with his bare hands and not be injured.)

Although the two stories are not identical, the parallels between this story and Osbern's tale about Dunstan are unmistakable, and unlikely to have been coincidental. Apelles and Dunstan are both blacksmiths from whom the devil demands 'some work'. And both of the devils, once defeated, reportedly flee with a volley of howls heard by their immediate neighbours.

The *Historia monachorum* was a well-known text within Benedictine houses. Osbern must certainly have known the story of Apelles of Achoris, but if he had encountered it, so most likely would his fellow brethren. This was not an obscure story poached in the hope that no one would notice; it was intentionally imported, in the expectation that everyone would.

throughout the Latin West: Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia monachorum seu liber de vitis patrum* (hereafter *HM*), PL 21: 387–461.

The Eleventh-Century Eremitical Revival

During the eleventh century there was a pan-European resurgence of interest in eremiticism; the number of men and women becoming hermits and recluses multiplied and *anchoresis* came to be regarded as the model of spiritual perfection.²⁵ Hagiographers expressed their admiration for this revival of anchoritic ideals by patterning their saints' Lives on those of the Desert Fathers, foregrounding their subject's stringent asceticism and withdrawal from society. Eremiticism became a key marker of sanctity: in Tom Licence's words, a 'career-enhancing attribute'.²⁶ The prolific hagiographer Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (d. c. 1100) invested nearly every saint he wrote about with eremitic credentials.²⁷ Osbern was equally keen to frame his saintly subjects within an anchoritic context. In his earlier *Life* of St Ælfheah, an active bishop whose sanctity rested on his arguable 'martyrdom' at the hands of the Danes in 1012, Osbern nevertheless cast the saint as aspirant recluse who, on arriving in Bath, 'habitaculum stuit, structo sese includit, inclusum rigore incredibili constringit' ('built a dwelling, enclosed himself in the structure, and so enclosed confined himself with startling severity').²⁸

In order to associate Dunstan with the Desert Fathers, Osbern turned not only to Rufinus's story of Apelles but to other paradigmatic texts in the early eremitic tradition, particularly the *Vita S. Hilarionis*, written by Rufinus's associate, St Jerome (d. 420). In his preamble Osbern pretended to cast about to find the right word to describe Dunstan's cell at Glastonbury but each word he used enmeshed his subject in a web of scriptural and hagiographical allusions, as the saint is said to have constructed 'adhaerentem cellam sive destinam sive spelaeum, sive alio quolibet nomine rectius nominari potest, non enim invenio qua id appellatione quam proxime vocem, cum non tam humani habitaculi quam formam gerat sepulcri' (*OD* 83: 'an adjoining cell, whether a lean-to or a cave or by whatever other name it could rightly be called,

25 Tom Licence, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society, 950–1200* (Oxford 2011), 112. See also Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000–1150* (London, 1984) and Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of Twelfth-Century Recluse', *History* 60 (1975), 337–52.

26 Licence, *Hermits and Recluses*, 112.

27 Anchorites are also found in ten of his known works. See Licence, *Hermits and Recluses*, 60–2.

28 Osbern of Canterbury, 'Vita S. Elphegi', in *Anglia sacra*, 2: 122–42 (124).

for I cannot find that closest in name by which I might call it since it was not so much a human habitation but rather something of a tomb'). The 'spelaeum'/'sepulcrum' analogy was obviously Christological, but Osbern used 'sepulcrum' a second time in relation to the cell's cramped dimensions, in a description parallel with Jerome's description of Hilarion's 'cellula': 'altitudine pedum quinque, hoc est statura sua humilior, porro longitudine paulo ampliore, quam ejus corpusculum patiebatur, ut sepulcrum potius, quam domum crederes' ('five feet high, that is less than his own height, but slightly wider than his body demanded, so that you would have thought it his tomb rather than his home').²⁹ A further nod to Jerome appears in a subsequent chapter. In the earliest *Vita S. Dunstani* 'B' described how one night, while praying, the devil appeared to Dunstan in shape of shaggy bristly bear, then a savage dog, and finally as an ugly fox.³⁰ Osbern retold this story in his *Vita*, but substituted an *immanem lupum* ('monstrous wolf') for the bear and dog (*OD*, 93). Osbern's account chimes perfectly with his Heironymian exemplar: besides the myriad of other trials which plagued Hilarion, 'Interdum orantem lupus ululans, et vulpecula ganniens transilivit' (32: 'sometimes a howling wolf and a snarling fox leapt over him as he prayed').

Osbern's *Vita* also gestured towards the literature of early Egyptian monasticism by offering intergenerational advice. In the desert, novice hermits learned how to become monks by listening to the experience and wisdom of their elders. The blacksmith episode in Osbern's *Vita* is prefaced by Osbern's long and emotional first-person testimony, witnessing the realities of Dunstan's life in the cell. Medieval hagiographers rarely incorporated their own experiences so centrally in their saints' *Lives* and, for this reason, the episode stands out from the rest of the *Vita*, forcing the reader to pay special attention. Osbern's identification of his own experience has the effect of enabling a metaphorical, or a transferable, reading of what follows. Below the case is made for the story as a figuration of intrusive, unchaste thoughts. His impassioned claims to have stood where Dunstan had stood, and held the things

29 St Jerome, *Vita S. Hilarionis*, PL 23: 29–54 (32). The notion of descent into a tomb was a standard motif of reclusion in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Licence, *Hermits and Recluses*, 123.

30 'B', 'The *Vita S. Dunstani*' in *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, 1–109 (54): 'apparuit ei Dei et hominum inimicus, hispidus et horrens in ursina specie, 'simulata canum saeuitia' and 'turpem uulpeculam'.

he had touched, could conceivably be read as a confession to having harboured similarly disturbing and unwelcome thoughts.³¹

Metaphor and the Monastic Craft of Prayer

The multiple layers of *lectio divina* are well known, involving attention firstly to the text's literal or historical truth before considering its allegorical, tropological and finally its anagogical meanings.³² This fourfold method of reading was not limited to scripture, and necessarily also informed monastic writing practice; moral or allegorical messages would routinely be folded into statements of literal fact. This enables a second look at the description of Dunstan as a blacksmith. Dunstan's metalworking skills are mentioned more than once in the *Vita*, and other texts attest to his practical and artistic abilities.³³ Moreover, smithing or metalworking does not appear to have been incompatible with life as an anchorite or a bishop in the early Middle Ages: a colophon added to the Lindisfarne Gospels in the tenth century attributed the binding of jewels and precious metals to 'Billfrith the anchorite',³⁴ while the Merovingian St Eligius (588–660), the bishop of Noyon-Tournai,

31 In the mid 1070s Osbern appears to have been punished for a serious breach of monastic conduct and was sent to Bec to study under Anselm. Around 1076, Anselm wrote several letters to Archbishop Lanfranc and Prior Henry on Osbern's behalf, swearing to his reformed character: St Anselm, *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1946–51) 3: 187 (*ep.* 67); see also 150–1, 173 and 186 (*ep.* 39, 58 and 66). The character of Osbern's indiscretion is not known; see also Rubenstein, *Life and Writings*, 29–31.

32 Broad introductions are given in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, trans. Mark Sebanc, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998; first publ. 1959); and Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN, 1964), 1–36.

33 Osbern lists talents which include drawing, writing and engraving in many different metals (*OD*, 79). 'B' only specifies Dunstan's writing, harp-playing and painting but adds he was a 'careful exponent of all useful arts,' *The Vita S. Dunstani*, 40.

34 F. E. Harmer, *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914), 36: 'Billfrið se oncre, he gismioðade ða ðe vtan on sint, 7 hit gihrinade mið golde 7 mið grimmvm, ec mið svlfre ofgylded faconleas feh.' See J. L. Bradley, 'Legendary Metal Smiths and Early English Literature', unpubl. PhD thesis (University of Leeds, 1987), 84–5.

was also a celebrated goldsmith.³⁵ Nor was metalworking disapproved of within coenobitic communities. In 1044 King Edward appointed a monk named Mannig as abbot of Evesham, a learned man, ‘accomplished cantor, scribe, painter and goldsmith (*aurique fabrilis*)’.³⁶ St Benedict had ruled that all monks should undertake daily manual labour and, judging from these examples, metalwork may have been a highly esteemed form of such labour. The historical Dunstan could quite conceivably have been a skilled blacksmith.

Dunstan’s activities, however, should also be read allegorically. In the Scriptures metallurgical metaphors were readily applied to the Faith. In Ezekiel 22.17–22 the prophet compares God’s justice to the work of a goldsmith.³⁷ By the early Middle Ages blacksmithing had become a popular metaphor for the ascetic labour of monasticism. The monastic life was one of penance and purification and the monastery was frequently compared to a smithy. In the Old English copy of the *Rule of St Benedict*, the word *officina* (‘workshops’), referring to the monastic cloister, was glossed as *smeðe* (‘smithy’).³⁸ Meanwhile in his commentary on the Book of Job, Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) compared the devil to an anvil since we are wrought into shape by his persecutions.³⁹ Thus the monk was analogous to the blacksmith, his cell was the forge and his prayers – the product of monastic labour – were the crafted objects wrought by the smith. Osbern’s claim that the devil wished to drive Dunstan from his cell makes perfect sense if we read his metalworking skills as an allegory for the monastic craft of prayer: the devil’s request is that Dunstan lay aside his own work and turn his attention to the work of the devil.

Framing monasticism as an artisanal craft was a familiar trope in the Middle Ages, as Mary Carruthers demonstrated in *The Craft of*

35 Audoen of Rouen, *Vita S. Eligii*, ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 4 (Hannover 1902), 669–742.

36 Thomas of Marlborough, *The History of the Abbey of Evesham*, ed./trans. Jane Sawyers and Leslie Watkiss (Oxford, 2003), 156.

37 For further scriptural examples, see Bradley, ‘Legendary Metal Smiths’, 107–10.

38 St Benedict, *The Rule of St Benet: Latin and Anglo-Saxon Interlinear Version*, ed. H. Logeman, EETS o.s. 90 (London, 1888), 23.

39 Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, 3 vols, CCSL 143, 143A, 143B, Scholars Version. 2 vols (Turnhout, 1979–1985), 2: 1741.

Thought.⁴⁰ There Carruthers defined monastic meditation as ‘the craft of making thoughts about God’ and stressed how the composition of prayer was a cognitive skill which the monk had to learn, practise and refine throughout his life. Carruthers used the term ‘monastic rhetoric’ to refer to this craft, a shorthand for the process of cognitive invention which was essentially image-based. Mental images or cognitive *picturae* provided the basis for all meditative practice.⁴¹ In composing thoughts and prayers, mental images were formed and re-formed into ‘pictures’. Although the framing of this compositional process emphasizes the visual sense, these mental *picturae* were primarily synaesthetic, incorporating and utilizing a variety of sensory media. Rhetorical tropes, figures and schemes were the instruments by which these ‘pictures’, the pathways for contemplative thought, were composed. Carruthers termed rhetorical tropes and figures the ‘tools of mnemotechnic’ and likened them to ‘a chisel or a pen’ (4). Apprentice craftsmen also needed to learn to make their own tools. Carruthers gives the example of scribes preparing their own parchments, making their own pens and mixing their inks, or masons making their adzes, mallets and files. We might add blacksmiths, forging their own anvils, hammers and pincers. Monks had to lay down their own cognitive pictures and schemes: ‘tool-making [was] an essential part of the orthopraxis of the craft’ (5). Reading Osborn’s *Vita* through the lens of rhetoric as proposed by Carruthers, we can interpret Dunstan’s practice not as metalwork but as prayer. In this allegorical sense, his raw materials were not wrought iron or steel but the mental images laid down in his memory from the Bible, Patristic writings and the liturgy; his anvil, hammer, fire and tongs are the rhetorical tropes and schemes with which he forged, crafted and composed these images into new and inventive forms of prayer, in the *cubiculum* or *cella* which was the ubiquitous setting for mnemotechnical invention.⁴²

As Dunstan *animum intendit* (84: ‘extends his mind’) to his work, it is the image of prayer which stands behind the smith’s labour. *Intentio animi* (or *animae* – mind, heart, soul) was the phrase used by Augustine to describe the animating force central to all cognitive processing.⁴³

40 Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge, 1998).

41 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 2–3.

42 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 85 and 174.

43 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, PL 21: 463, 465, 470 and 471.

Modern approximations, ‘attention’ or ‘concentration’, however, fail to adequately reflect the importance of the will. *Intentio animi* was an act of volition and the product of desire, as indicated by the English term ‘intention.’ With regard to the monastic craft of thought, *intentio animi* was required at two stages: first, in the act of reading or listening when the monk inventively laid down memories as mental images for later retrieval, and second at the point of recall, when the images were re-collected into new compositions.⁴⁴ The act of prayer or contemplation required *intentio animi*. The devil’s aim was twofold: Dunstan had to stop making thoughts about God and turn his *intentio* towards diabolic thoughts. From this perspective, the devil’s methods and motives are in perfect accordance: thinking such thoughts would certainly have driven Dunstan from his cell, understood as his contemplative state of mind.

The Devil in Classical Demonology

Central to the idea of Christian monasticism was the notion that the devil operated by means of psychological assault, inducing thoughts in the monk’s mind which, if harboured, would arouse the passions and result in sinful behaviour. According to Christian exegetical norms, the devil did not know to which temptation each monk would be most susceptible, so he was obliged to experiment.

Nescit Satanas qua passione seducatur anima, et ideo seminat quidem in ea ziziniam suam, sed metere nescit: spargit aliquando semina fornicationum, aliquando detractio-num, et caeterarum similiter passionum; et in qua passione viderit animam declinantem, hanc ei ministrat; nam si sciret ad quid proclivis est anima, non ei diversa vel varia seminaret.⁴⁵

(Satan does not know which passion will seduce the soul, and so he sows his weeds in it not knowing which will bear fruit. At one time he throws in the seeds of lust, at another of slander, and the other passions likewise, and on seeing a soul sink into a particular passion, that he provides. If he knew a soul’s weaknesses, he would not sow such a variety.)

44 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 14–16.

45 *Verba seniorum*, PL 73: 855–988 (918C); hereafter VS.

No monk was safe from such mental violation, or could expect to be immune from temptation; a monk could no more prevent thoughts from entering his mind than air from entering his lungs: 'sed tuum est eis resistere.' (922A: 'but your task is to resist them.) The spectacle of the saint's fighting against temptation was ubiquitous, as in the most celebrated example of St Antony (251–356), the best known of all the Desert Fathers. Despite renouncing his ties to the world only a short while before, Antony had already acquired a reputation as an exemplar of virtue. His outstanding *anchoresis* displeased the devil, who sought to drag him away from his virtuous life:

immittebat ei memoriam possessionum, sororis defensionem, generis nobilitatem, amorem rerum, fluxam saeculi gloriam, escae variam delectationem, et reliqua vitae remissioris blandimenta; postremo virtutis arduum finem, et maximum perveniendi laborem, necnon et corporis fragilitatem suggerebat, et aetatis spatia prolixa: prorsus maximam ei cogitationum caliginem suscitabat, volens eum a recto proposito revocare.

([the devil] sent in memories of his possessions, his sister's protection, the nobility of his birth; desires for material things, the fleeting honours of this world, pleasures of different kinds of food and all the other attractions which belong to a more relaxed life. Finally he suggested to Antony how difficult it is to attain the goal of virtue and the very hard work involved in achieving it; and reminded him of the weakness of the body and the length of time needed. In short he roused a great cloud of thoughts in him, hoping to call him back from his proper intention.)⁴⁶

Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 458) compared the soul surrounded by divine grace to a city built on a height, walled all around and surrounded by a deep moat. The castle was impregnable unless someone within the castle turned traitor and opened a postern gate. By extension, the demons making war outside could not overcome a soul 'nisi cogitationis alicuius socordia, nostrorum sensuum aliquam fenestram aperuerit' ('unless the compliance of some thought open some postern in our

46 Evagrius, *Vita beati Antonii abbatis*, PL 73: 125–69 (129B–C); hereafter VA. All translations from Caroline White, *Early Christian Lives* (London, 1998), 8–70.

senses and receive the enemy within it.’⁴⁷ In his widely-read *Conferences*, John Cassian (c. 360–435) repeatedly used the adjective *lubricus* in relation to thoughts. In the twenty-third conference Abba Theonas described thoughts as ‘lubricos occultosque pruritus qui mentem tenui atque subtili suggestione compungunt’ (‘slippery and hidden itchings which prick the mind with their fine and delicate suggestions’).⁴⁸ Abba Theonas told Cassian that a person who is ‘inverecundis semper cogitationibus evagantes ... mentem suam ingruentibus, ut libitum est, cogitationibus expandentes’ (‘constantly wandering about in shameless thoughts ... lays open their mind to any thoughts that want to enter’).⁴⁹ This happens when monks ‘nihil habent propositum quod principaliter teneant, vel quod omnimodis concupiscent’ (1256B: ‘have no set point which they can hold on to as a principle or upon which they can fix all their desires’). So the solution lay in fixing the whole and entire attention of the mind on God.

Fixing his attention on God, by means of profound concentration on his spiritual work, was precisely what Osborn’s Dunstan attempted to do. He refused to turn (‘advertens’) his attention to the devil and continued to extend his mind (‘animum intendit’) to the work in hand. Significantly at this stage the work (‘operis’) or thoughts to which the devil wanted Dunstan to attend was left unspecified (‘quippiam’). Yet the hermit’s resolve appears to have wavered in the face of the devil’s persistence. We subsequently learn that the devil tempted Dunstan as he had Antony, by speaking the names of women and reeling off past luxuries. These details, however, do more than merely situate the narrative within the Antonine tradition; they suggest that Dunstan had begun to listen. According to Augustine’s theory of sensory perception, *intentio* is the force which activates the sense organs and keeps them trained on the object to be perceived for as long as it is perceived.⁵⁰ Processing the devil’s words required a degree of *intentio* from Dunstan which meant

47 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa seu Ascetica vivendi Ratio*, PL 74: 9–116 (13). Trans. R. M. Price, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: History of the Monks of Syria*, Cistercian Studies 88 (Kalamazoo, MI, 1985), 6.

48 John Cassian, *Collationes patrum in scythica eremo*, PL 49: 477–1328 (1256A); trans. Boniface Ramsey O.P., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, 1997), 23.VI.5. My own translation departs on occasion from that of Ramsey.

49 *Collationes*, 1256A–B; *Conferences*, trans. Ramsey, 23.VI.5.

50 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, PL 42: 819–1098 (985).

that he no longer had his whole attention fixed on God – he must have directed some of it elsewhere.

This development was not unexpected. The devil's foothold in Dunstan's mind had already been foreshadowed by the fact that when he arrived at Dunstan's cell he leant forward and thrust his head through the window in the door ('immisso capite fenestae incumbit'). The devil, though uninvited, had gained entry because Dunstan had not shut the door of his mind, as instructed in Matthew 6.6: 'When you pray, go into your room. Close the door and pray to your Father in secret.' The Apostolic mandate was recycled in the early monastic literature emanating from the Egyptian desert. John Cassian, for example, included this verse in his conference with Abba Isaac.⁵¹ Significantly there are also verbal echoes of Cassian's next sentence later in Osbern's narrative. Isaac continues: 'Intra nostrum cubiculum supplicamus, cum ab omnium cogitationum sive sollicitudinum strepitu cor ... Clauso oramus ostio, cum strictis labiis nostris omnique silentio supplicamus, non vocum, sed cordium scrutatori.' ('We pray in our room when we withdraw our hearts completely from the clatter of every thought and concern ... we pray with the door shut when, with closed lips and in total silence; we pray to the searcher not of voices but of hearts.') Having recognized the man who had thrust this face through the window as the devil, Dunstan likewise calls on Christ with *suppressis labiis*, compressed lips.

For Osbern's intended audience at the Benedictine priory of Christ Church, Canterbury, the narrative's desert origins and echoes would have been immediately recognizable. Sitting in his cell, Dunstan was occupied in the spiritual work of prayer. He had not, however, readied himself for the task by shutting the door of his mind. He was thus susceptible to thoughts intruding upon him as he prayed; his attention began to waver. This portrayal of Dunstan slowly inclining his *intentio* towards the devil may have been an innovation in the context of the Dunstanian tradition but was far from a hagiographical novelty. What is curious, however, is that within a matter of years, this portrayal of Dunstan was significantly revised.

51 *Collationes* 817A; *Conferences*, trans. Ramsey, 9.XXXV.1.

Eadmer of Canterbury's Revisions

Seeking to explain why Eadmer chose to correct and supersede a *Life* written so shortly before, his modern editors, Andrew Turner and Bernard Muir, suggested that Eadmer's changes reflect a different approach, and point to deeper concerns, such as the presumption of the necessity of courting the new Norman ecclesiastical elite.⁵² They remained at a loss, however, to explain those changes which they considered 'extremely petty'.⁵³ The 'most notable' of these petty corrections was Eadmer's description of Dunstan's cell at Glastonbury in which he revised Osbern's estimate of its length, from five feet to four.⁵⁴ But in pointing out the pettiness of this change, the editors overlooked the more significant revisions made to this episode.

Eadmer's prologue is far shorter; the cell is simply a *domunculam* ('little cell'). Nor is he equivocal about the nature of Dunstan's work. He might have the tools of a blacksmith, but Dunstan's main occupation was prayer: 'Illic ergo conuersari, orare, psallere, non nulla quae loci angustia patiebatur manibus operari, et uni Deo placendi per omnia et in omnibus operam dare.' (66: 'And so he dwelt, prayed, sang psalms there and did with his hands whatever things the narrow space allowed, and devoted himself to pleasing only God in all things and in every way.') Eadmer follows this by repeating Osbern's description of the devil's intention 'to expel him from that place' and then begins his narrative.

Quibus exercitiis eius antiquus humani generis aduersarius inuidens, sicut eum a curia regis nuper expulit, ita qualiter a loco isto expelleret maligne sollicitus fuit. Quadam igitur uice, cum uir ipse, iam die aduesperascente, fabrili intenderet operi, astitit fenestrae ipsius demon unus humana effigie tectus, rogans sibi nescio quid operis ab homine fieri. At ille pietatis affectu ex more permotus, intermissis iis quae faciebat, parabat se satisfacere postulanti. Interim is qui uenerat formam ac uerba mutare, ut nunc senis, nunc pueri, nunc lasciuae puellae estimares te uultus cum uoce uidere. Quod Dunstanus audiens, quis esset protinus agnouit. Et sedens motus eius patienter se ferre dissimulauit. Sumptis interea tenaculis, quibus calida ferra tenere solebat, fortiter ea igniuit, et candentia de fornace subito proferens,

52 See Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles*, lxxvii–lxx.

53 Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles*, xxxi.

54 *ED*, 66.

monstrum per nasum arripuit et strictissime tenuit. Videres itaque pulchrum certamen inter amicum Dei et inimicum. Ille ardorem sentiens, ac detectis insidiis superbiam suam deiectam non ferens, totis nisibus conabatur euadere, iste illum retinens, et intro uiriliter trahens, laetabatur quod in nomine Christi poterat de inimico eius taliter triumphare. Tandem cum dedecore a uiro abiectus fugit, et per plateam currens, querula uoce clamitabat, dicens: ‘Ve, quid ille caluus diabolus fecit, ue, quid ille caluus diabolus fecit? En me miserum, misericordiae opus ab eo petentem, misere afflixit ...’ (66–8)

(Therefore on a certain occasion, as day was advancing towards evening and Dunstan was engaged in smith’s work, a demon appeared at the window disguised in human likeness and asked him to do some work or other for him. He was moved as usual by pious affection; he stopped the things he was doing and prepared himself to fulfil the request. While he was doing this the one who had come there began to change his appearance and voice, so that you might have thought that you were seeing the face and hearing the words now of an old man, now of a boy, and now of a seductive young girl. Hearing these things, Dunstan, recognized immediately who it was. And sitting down, he pretended patiently to tolerate the other’s movements. Meanwhile he took up the tongs with which he usually held the red-hot iron, heated them up greatly, and drawing the glowing iron out of the furnace suddenly he seized the monster by the nose and held him very tightly. Then you could have beheld an exemplary struggle between the friend of God and his enemy. Feeling the heat and unable to accept that his treachery had been detected and his pride humbled, the demon tried with all his might to escape, but Dunstan held onto him and bravely dragged him inside, rejoicing because in the name of Christ he was able to triumph in such a manner over his enemy. Finally he was thrown out in disgrace by Dunstan and fled running down the street crying out in a mournful voice and saying: ‘Woe is me! What has that bald devil done! Woe! What has that bald devil done to me! Look at me a poor wretch. I sought a work of mercy from him, but he attacked me mercilessly ...’⁵⁵

Eadmer’s narrative departs from Osbern in a number of small but significant ways but the first difference is in the degree of mental deflection.

55 Trans. Turner and Muir.

Whereas Osbern's Dunstan refused to turn his *intentio* towards the devil, Eadmer's Dunstan instantly stops what he is doing and attends (unknowingly) to the devil's work.

Expressing mental states through physical orientation or movement was common practice. Osbern's Dunstan refused to turn ('advertens') but Eadmer's Dunstan was moved ('permotus'). He was so moved that he ceased his work entirely ('intermissis'). In his first letter to the Thessalonians, St Paul had exhorted Christians to 'pray without ceasing' ('sine intermissione orare') (1 Thess. 5.17). This challenge had been enthusiastically taken up by the early Desert Fathers, who saw continuous manual labour as a way of achieving the ideal of unceasing prayer.⁵⁶ It is no coincidence that Eadmer emphasized not only that Dunstan worked 'with his hands' ('manibus operari') but that he later 'ceased' this work. Later in the passage, Dunstan has to resume hold of his tongs ('sumptus tenaculis') in order to grab the devil's nose. Not only has Dunstan stopped his prayers but he has put aside the tools he uses to make them. While Osbern's Dunstan tried valiantly to withstand the thoughts pricking his attention, Eadmer's Dunstan surrendered himself to them entirely. His mind has completely wandered; his hands lie idle and he sits staring out of the window. At the window, Dunstan sees the devil change into a variety of human figures. This is another departure from Osbern's narrative, where the devil only spoke evil words. Not only is Eadmer's Dunstan more receptive to the devil; his thoughts take on a different form.

Thoughts and Phantasia

Evagrius's *Vita S. Antonii* was the exemplar of anchoritic hagiography and was most likely the inspiration for both Osbern and Eadmer's demonic portrayals. In Antony's first diabolic encounter, the devil had tried to use memories and wicked suggestions to rouse a 'great cloud of thoughts' in Antony's mind. When his attempts were repelled by Antony's prayers the devil redoubled his efforts and returned a second time in far more specific and visible form:

⁵⁶ Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, 14. It was also a theme to which Cassian returned on several occasions: see Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford, 1998), 100–13.

Ille titillabat sensus naturali carnis ardore; hic fide, vigiliis et jejuniis corpus omne vallabat. Ille per noctes in pulchrae mulieris vertebatur ornatum, nulla omittens figmenta lasciviae; hic ultrices gehennae flammam et dolorem vermium recordans, ingestae sibi libidini opponerebat. Ille lubricum adolescentiae iter, et ad ruinam facile proponebat; hic aeterna futuri iudicii tormenta considerans, illaesam animae puritatem per tentamenta servabat. (VA 129C–D)

(The devil tried to titillate his senses with the natural passions of the flesh, but he defended his whole body with faith, vigils and fasting. At night the devil was turned into the shape of a beautiful woman, omitting no image of wantonness, but he recalled to mind the vengeful flames of hell and the torment inflicted by worms; in this way he resisted the onslaught of lust. The devil without hesitation set before him the slippery path of youth that leads to disaster, but Antony concentrated on the everlasting torments of future judgements, and kept his soul's purity untainted throughout these trials.)

If Osbern's narrative was reminiscent of the devil's first attack on St Antony, then Eadmer's version evokes parallels with the second. The different routes through which Osbern and Eadmer chose to characterize Dunstan's experience corresponded to the two stages of demonic assault found in the *Vita S. Antonii*.

Proceeding from his reading of the *Life of Antony*, David Brakke has concluded, as other historians have done before him, that the devil had two modes of attack: 'internally through thoughts and externally by apparitions'.⁵⁷ Brakke believed that Athanasius took care to emphasize this external quality and thought he gave greater prominence to the 'nightmarish external appearances of the demons' rather than the 'subtle, internal mode of demonic suggestions', arguing that Athanasius may have sought in doing so to forestall any allegations that thoughts were 'merely projections of a monk's psychology'.⁵⁸

Early medieval commentators took their lead from Ephesians 6:12 ('For our struggle is not against the enemies of blood and flesh, but ... against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places') and pronounced demons

57 David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore, 1995), 220.

58 Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism*, 221.

to have invisible, aerial bodies.⁵⁹ Yet this did not prevent theologians from entertaining other, physicalist notions of demonic operation.⁶⁰ St Augustine repeatedly wrote of the subtlety and lightness of demons' ariel bodies, yet he also believed them capable of filling human minds with corporeal images, inducing diseases and rendering the air unwholesome.⁶¹ Demons played with human perceptions but Augustine could not make up his mind whether this occurred internally, through a process of mingling with men's thoughts which thereby allowed for the violability of the human soul, or externally, in the form of apparitions. In the end, he admitted that he just did not know.⁶² While expository literature may have indulged and even courted such uncertainty and contradiction, those engaged in artistic production – painters, poets, dramatists and hagiographers – had to commit themselves to more concrete details of demonic operation and reify the devil as an external, visualized character.⁶³ Hagiographers were thus bound by the requirements of their genre to depict demons in the guise of nightmarish external apparitions or, in some instances, as even physically tangible beings. But, contrary to Brakke's reading of Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, fleshing out the demons did not necessarily mean they were any less psychological. In fact, the more sharply realized the demonic figure, the greater the complicity of the monk.

At the heart of patristic theories of demonology was the moral compass of the monk; demonic thoughts could not succeed without the monk's compliance. If the monk failed to cast out a thought when it first pricked his attention, it would take hold and grow in his mind. In his *Moralia on Job*, Gregory the Great outlined a fourfold etiology of sin in which the devil was responsible for only the first stage (*suggestio*). The remaining three were the fault of the individual: *delectatio* (pleasure) which proceeded from the body, *consensus* (consent) from the spirit, and *defensionis audacia*, the final stage, in which the individual justified

59 For example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus described demons as 'bodiless, invisible, encroaching unperceived, plotting secretly, setting ambush and attacking suddenly' ('Talis enim est hostium quoque natura, incorporea, minime aspectabilis, obscure invadens, clanculum insidians, repenteque et praeter expectationem irruens'), *Historia religiosa*, 11; Price, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, 5.

60 Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound. The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto, 2001), 25.

61 Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, PL 40: 581–92 (586).

62 Augustine, *Retractationum libri duo*, PL 32: 581–656 (643).

63 Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, 20–4.

or rationalized his actions to himself.⁶⁴ Once the process had begun, it was increasingly difficult to stop and the individual found himself sliding deeper and deeper into sin.⁶⁵

The Desert Fathers knew that the monk's only recourse was vigilance. He had to make sure that he did not 'entertain even the first suggestion of wicked and indecent thoughts, let alone indulge in sordid mental fantasies'.⁶⁶ Thoughts were unavoidable, but under no circumstances must they be allowed to become fantasies, which indicate the consent of the will to temptation.

Eadmer depicts Dunstan indulging in *phantasia*; he has ceased his prayers and his hands, no longer holding their tools, lie idle. Although unoccupied, his mind remains busy, either re-robing recollected thoughts in new images or *phantasmata*, or creating thought pictures from fresh. With his entire *intentio* directed towards this 'work', the *picturae* produced are highly *enargistic* and affecting. In the ninth of Cassian's *Conferences*, Abba Isaac explained how such *picturae* could provoke a variety of emotions within the thinker:

Ex praecedenti enim statu mens in supplicatione formatur, eorumdemque actuum procumbentibus nobis ad pacem, verborum quoque vel sensuum ante oculos imago praeludens, aut irasci nos secundum praecedentem qualitatem faciet, aut tristari, aut concupiscentias causasve praeteritas retractare; aut risu fatuo ...⁶⁷

For the mind in prayer is shaped by the state that it was previously in, and, when we sink into prayer, an image of the same deeds, words and thoughts plays itself out before our eyes. This makes us angry or sad, depending on our previous condition, or it recalls past lusts or business, or it strikes us with foolish laughter ...

Memories or past thoughts automatically occurring in the mind during prayer can trigger or reignite authentic affective responses. *Phantasmata* work not just on the mind but on the body and its emotions; they are real and enacted. Wicked thoughts were unavoidable, but if the monk idly allowed himself to entertain and take delight in them, they would

64 Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, 1: 193.

65 Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, 27.

66 Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 72.

67 *Collationes*, 563B; *Conferences*, trans. Ramsey 9.III.4.

develop into vivid and elaborate fantasies which both absorbed and aroused the daydreamer. Osbern's Dunstan may have been fighting a losing battle but the operative word is 'fight'; he tried to keep hold of his *intentio* and prevent it slipping away. Thus the thoughts only just being sown in his mind have not yet blossomed into full-blown daydreams. Eadmer's Dunstan, on the other hand, temporarily surrendered, and freely allowed his mind to indulge in *phantasia*.

Redrawing Dunstan absorbed in his daydreams was a deliberate decision on Eadmer's part. What did he hope to achieve?

Resisting Demonic Thoughts

In choosing such an obvious exemplar for his 'new' story about Dunstan, Osbern had immediately alerted the reader to its main theme, the identification and management of intrusive thoughts. But having bargained on his readers' familiarity with the figure of Apelles, he suddenly deviated from the expected *dénouement*. Instead of picking up a white-hot iron from the fire with his bare hands as Apelles had done, Dunstan drew a pair of tongs from the fire, caught the devilish face and dragged the struggling monster into his cell. Using a pair of hot tongs to grab hold of the devil is certainly more comical, but this revision also made a serious contribution to the debate by offering a new piece of advice about dealing with wandering thoughts.

We have already seen how when the devil tried to sow sordid thoughts in Antony's mind and titillate his senses, he defended his body with 'faith, vigils and fasting'. The bodily sins of gluttony and lust could be purged by acts of *ascesis*, but other thoughts required different treatment. In his sermon, Antony exhorted to his novitiates to '... raise the single banner of the Lord's cross', to neither fear nor assent to such thoughts and to ensure at all times that their hearts were 'fortified in Christ', explaining that 'even when [the devil] uses thoughts and other tricks he still cannot overturn a heart that stands firm for God'.⁶⁸

Abba Isaac had reportedly told Cassian that whenever he sensed himself having gluttonous thoughts or experiencing the prickings of lust he would meditate on the opening verse of Psalm 69: 'O God, come

68 VA, 137D: 'adversus disparem pugnam unum Dominicae crucis elevare vexillum'; 145D: 'munita in Christo corda'; 140A: 'nec tamen potest firmum Deo pectus cogitationum et caeterarum fraudum arte pervertere'.

to my assistance: O Lord, make haste to help me'. He would also use it when he found himself disquieted by avarice or sadness, or when 'the disturbance of rage' threatened to carry him off 'into a poisonous bitterness'.⁶⁹ It was a formula, Isaac said, which catered for every eventuality of thought. Reciting the Psalter lay at the centre of monastic practice both in the Egyptian desert and the Benedictine cloister. It provided a lynchpin for their lives, creating an imaginative world for the monks onto which they might map and interpret their own emotional experiences, and a vocabulary for their articulation.⁷⁰

Singing a psalm to discharge the negative affect aroused by such thoughts correlates closely with another psychological strategy used by Antony called *antirrhêtikos*. Translated literally as 'talking back', this technique was to come associated primarily with Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345–399) whose ascetic career began some years after Antony's death.⁷¹ It basically involved using one thought as a means of driving out another. When Antony had to banish the thought of the beautiful woman, as we have seen, he did so by bringing 'to mind the vengeful flames of hell and the torment inflicted by worms [and] in this way he resisted the onslaught of lust.'

Calling on Christ, making the sign of the cross, singing the psalms, and *antirrhêtikos* were psychological interventions which gave the monk stability, security and a practised method for coping with and resolving negative emotions. These techniques may have been packaged in neat hagiographical narratives, but they nevertheless encoded genuinely practical advice. Some of the solutions presented in other desert narratives, however, were far less pragmatic and usable. Burning the devil's face with a white-hot iron ingot as Apelles had reportedly done hardly contains an easily transferable message for the monk. Narratives depicting demons physically attacking monks and monks parrying their blows can only be read allegorically. Earlier it was argued that in the physical portrayal of the devil we find a statement concerning the monk's psychological state; the more 'fleshed-out' the demonic figure, the greater the complicity and involvement of the monk. Episodes

69 *Conferences*, trans. Ramsey, 10.X.10. *Collationes*, 835B–C: 'ne in amaritudinem fellis perturbatione furoris abducar.'

70 Columba Stewart, 'The Use of Biblical Texts in Prayer and the Formation of Early Monastic Culture', *American Benedictine Review* 64:2 (2011): 188–201 (189).

71 Evagrius of Pontus, *Talking Back. A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, trans. David Brakke, Cistercian Studies Series 229 (Collegeville, 2009).

depicting physical assault, such as the occasion when Antony was 'tortured' by the devil and his minions 'beating him all over' and left in such pain that he could neither move nor speak, are in fact gesturing to the intensity and impact these thoughts have had on the monk.⁷² Correspondingly, monastic counterblows should be read as the monk regaining control over his thoughts: the moment of *discretio*, when the source of the sinful thoughts has been discerned.⁷³

In such cases a decisive defeat over the devil was crucial. In his sermon, Antony told his disciples about the time he saw the devil towering over him: 'At ego sputaculum maximum in os ejus ingeminans, totum me in eum Christi nomine armatus, ingressi: et statim ille procerus aspectu inter medias manus exolevit,' (VA 144C–D: 'I spat hard in his face and attacked him, protecting my whole self against him with the name of Christ, and at once this tall figure disappeared from between my hands.')

Had the devil simply vanished, this would have been yet another example of how recalling the name of Christ operated as a successful resistance strategy. However, the devil's disappearance 'inter medias manus' suggests he was not so much banished as had escaped. The devil had slipped from Antony's grasp. To take hold of something is to gain a better understanding of it, to gain control of it. Grabbing hold of the devil is therefore about understanding the bent of one's thoughts and assuming responsibility for dealing with them. In letting the devil slip through his fingers, Antony failed to get purchase on his thoughts, and left himself susceptible to future attacks.

The inability to achieve physical purchase on the devil is also an issue in an episode found in the earliest *Vita S. Dunstani*, written by 'B'. One day, Dunstan fell asleep while singing the psalms. Lying there, neither fully awake nor sleep, it seemed to him that a huge, shaggy and frightening bear came violently towards him, towered over him with gaping jaws and encircled his neck with its paws.⁷⁴ Waking suddenly, Dunstan grabbed his staff and aimed a blow at the bear. However he missed, striking only the church wall. Recovering himself, he sang Psalm 67(68): 1–3 ('Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered'), whereupon the devil beat a baffled retreat. The devil may have disappeared but it was

72 VA, 131C: 'ita eum aggregatis satellitibus suis, varia caede laceravit, ut doloris magnitudo et motum auferret et vocem.'

73 *Discretio* is the subject of Cassian's first *Conference* with Abba Moses, but it is a topic to which he returns repeatedly.

74 'B', 'The *Vita S. Dunstani*', 56.

hardly a decisive victory, and Osbern chose to significantly revise this story in his *Vita*. In his version, he left out the psalm and made the staff find its target: ‘retractum ad se baculum erigit in sublime, fugientem beluam dirissime caedit, nec prius monstrum caedendo desistit, quam flagellum tergo illius tribus in partibus comminutum apparuit.’ (*OD*, 100: ‘[Dunstan] having drawn the staff to him, raised it high in the air and struck the fleeing beast most horribly, and nor did he stop striking the former monster until he found the staff had been broken into three parts by his back.’)⁷⁵ There is no question that Dunstan had won this battle. Stories featuring monks fighting back in a physically aggressive way, whether with hot ingots, an episcopal staff or a pair of tongs, impressed on the reader the necessity of confronting and managing their wayward thoughts. But whereas stories showing monks dealing with their demons by signing the cross, calling on Christ or singing a psalm offered helpful and practical advice, what message did stories of monastic bellicosity provide? Not only is Dunstan’s use of the tongs more entertaining, it models a far more creative approach to dealing with intrusive thoughts.

Re-imagining Resistance

Not only would Osbern’s audience have been surprised by the unorthodox ending to the story, they may also have been puzzled by the use of the term ‘tenacula’. Forceps (‘forcipes’) would have been a far more conventional choice for ‘tongs.’⁷⁶ Viewed in the context of wandering thoughts, however, ‘tenacula’ makes perfect sense. *Tenaculum* means ‘an instrument for holding’ and has its root in the verb *teneo* (‘to hold’). The metaphor of ‘holding’ features repeatedly in discussions of mental distractions. Not only should people ‘take hold’ of their thoughts but ‘holding fast’ to something can stabilize a mind that is wandering. Osbern presents Dunstan using the ‘tenacula’, the rhetorical tools of mental invention, to recast his disruptive thoughts. Attacking the thought with the rhetorical figures of *enargeia* and parody, he transformed the intrusive devil into a

75 Eadmer retained the accuracy of Dunstan’s blow and restored the psalm in his version of this story, *ED*, 94–6.

76 Isidore listed the tools of the *faber* as *incus* (anvil), *malleus* (hammer) and *forcipes* (forceps), which are unambiguously those of a blacksmith: *The ‘Etymologies’ of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, 2006), 377 (19. 6–7).

figure of farce. With the devil transformed into a ridiculous caricature, the thoughts, once a site of lust and negative affect, are now a source of mirth; the danger for the monk has been thoroughly neutralized. Dunstan drew the creature inside his cell which, if we recall, was his space for cognitive creation, and the devil now mocked, humbled and disfigured, broke free and stormed off, bitterly defeated. Not only has Dunstan seized hold of the intrusive thoughts inciting his mind to wander, but he has radically transformed them and ensured they will never be remembered in the same way again.

A divisive, anti-authoritarian figure in his youth, we must take seriously Osbern's heartfelt claims to have sat where Dunstan had sat: he too had experienced wandering and sinful thoughts. His advice stemmed from personal experience and was applicable to all. Whenever the monk's mind started to stray and drifted off to dwell on more attractive memories and thoughts, he should not indulge in these fancies and allow these daydreams to take root in his mind. Instead he should take hold of these images and refashion them using his imagination, consciously recrafting them in such a way that it would be impossible to remember them as they had first appeared. Once permanently disfigured they will be incapable of conjuring in the monk the sinful feelings they once aroused. Compared with signing the cross or singing the psalms, Osbern's strategy may well have had greater success. While the former helped the monk by reorienting his mind and provided a vehicle for the resolution of complex and negative emotions, Osbern's approach struck at the underlying problem, and disarmed the thought entirely.

In this story about Dunstan, Osbern provided his audience with a bravura example of how effective this approach could be. Indeed, he made his point about the potency of mental imagery so persuasively that this scene outshone all the other stories about the saint. The version of the story which became canonical was not quite Osbern's, however, but Eadmer's. Rather than grabbing his face, Dunstan's tongs grip the devil's nose, substituting *nasum* for *faciem* – a change which certainly aids the visual image, and carries an undercurrent of castration. He also changed the description of the devil's departure; instead of breaking free from Dunstan's cell, Eadmer's devil is thrown out by the saint, which not only underscores the decisiveness of the devil's defeat but crafts in the reader's mind a vivid and persisting image of the saint victorious. In Osbern's version, this final image is the devil breaking free from the cell and fleeing, which shifts our mental gaze away from Dunstan and his victory. Viewed from the perspective of the reader's aesthetic experience,

Eadmer's alterations are improvements; they direct the reader towards conjuring more visually arresting *picturae* which render his narrative and the points he wished to make more effective.

All imagining, whether undertaken in our own daydreams or under authorial instruction in the stories we read, is an act of perceptual mimesis.⁷⁷ When we are told by Eadmer 'you might have thought you were seeing the face and hearing the voice ... of a seductive young girl', we instinctively perform a mimesis of actually seeing a seductive young girl, imitating 'not only the sensory outcome ... but the actual structure of production that gave rise to the perception, that is, the material conditions that made it look, sound, or feel the way it did'.⁷⁸ As readers, we imagine her hair, her clothes, her posture and bearing. Eadmer's narrative is thus an open invitation to daydream. For the eleventh-century monk, conjuring up erotically charged *picturae* using images drawn from his memory, was a risky business, even under authorial direction. Dunstan's intervention with his tongs at this stage of the narrative was thus a timely one. As he metaphorically seizes hold of his thoughts, his collective audience do likewise. Eadmer's readers are not so much shown how to remake mental images as coached through the process. His presentation of Dunstan, laying down his tools and gazing out of the window, would have been achingly familiar to many, as indeed the idea of a young girl as a lust object may have been. These were mental experiences with which most eleventh-century monks would have identified, problems they would have faced in their everyday lives. Eadmer's message was inclusive, empathetic and humane.

Conclusion

Osbern's introduction of this story into the Dunstanian legend was a skilful and imaginative piece of hagiographical writing. Banking on his brethren recognizing his story's eremitic origins, Osbern instantly located his reader in the thought-world of the Egyptian desert and signalled his intention to engage with the themes and concerns which preoccupied the Desert Fathers, particularly the importance of resisting

77 Elaine Scarry, 'On Vivacity: The Difference Between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial-Instruction', *Representations* 52:3 (Autumn, 1995): 1-26 (3).

78 Scarry, 'On Vivacity', 4-5.

the incessant and indiscriminate onslaught of slippery thoughts. It is not, however, a critical or cautionary tale about mind-wandering. On the whole, Osbern was more empathetic than judgemental: Dunstan was not immune to such faults and nor is anyone else. Osbern was less interested in teaching avoidance behaviours than in modelling effective coping or defensive strategies. He advocated a more creative approach to dealing with intrusive thoughts and, using Dunstan as an example, showed his readers how they might remake their mental images using the tools of mnemotechnical invention. By employing the tropes of parody and humour, Osbern demonstrated how the reframing of thoughts could neutralize the toxic feelings generated by such images. Eadmer, writing only a few years after the completion of Osbern's version, was sympathetic to this creative approach, and sought to extend the lesson beyond the level of the example. In portraying an idling Dunstan, temporarily absorbed in reverie, Eadmer offered up Dunstan's *fantasies* for his readers to mimetically reproduce in their own imaginations. By conjuring up images of a seductive young girl from their own memories, not only did Eadmer make his readers complicit in Dunstan's crime, but he provided them with a safe, controlled and ethically suspended environment in which they could practise discharging harmful images or thoughts.

This reading of Osbern's and Eadmer's redactions of Dunstan's *Life* suggests new ways of approaching Latin hagiographical texts which foregrounds the aesthetic experience afforded to their readers. Hagiography offered a space for imaginative play set apart from the world of the everyday. For the monk it was a tool for the refinement of thought, an apparatus through which they might better understand, and hence improve, their own monastic practice.