

Fall 2008

## Give Me That Old Time Religion: Nostalgia, Memory and the Rhetoric of Loss in Bede's Historical *Ecclesiastica Gentus Anglorum*

John T.R. Terry  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/inquiry>



Part of the [European History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Terry, J. T. (2008). Give Me That Old Time Religion: Nostalgia, Memory and the Rhetoric of Loss in Bede's Historical *Ecclesiastica Gentus Anglorum*. *Inquiry: The University of Arkansas Undergraduate Research Journal*, 9(1). Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/inquiry/vol9/iss1/18>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inquiry: The University of Arkansas Undergraduate Research Journal* by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu).

## GIVE ME THAT OLD TIME RELIGION: NOSTALGIA, MEMORY AND THE RHETORIC OF LOSS IN BEDE'S HISTORICAL ECCLESIASTICA GENTUS ANGLORUM

By John T. R. Terry  
History Department

Faculty Mentor: Lynda L. Coon

### Abstract

*Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* was composed by a monk of northeastern England around AD 731. It is a tome of nearly unparalleled prominence to this day in English church history. Many Bedan scholars have hitherto been concerned with common themes in Bede's works: biblical typology and exegesis, influences, sources, politics and even the nature of Bede's own mysterious life. This paper, however, seeks to add a definite human component to Bede and the times in which he lived where most studies have not, simply by using modern studies of nostalgia in a universal sense. Nostalgia is perhaps the deepest of human emotions, employed most often in tumultuous times. When combined with studies of collective or cultural memory, nostalgia in history can be defined as a literary or rhetorical construct of a time which may or may not have existed at all. Nearly all polemic on nostalgia as a human condition has focused on the "modern" period. For example, the pioneering models of nostalgia developed by Svetlana Boym have been used primarily to characterize the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but they seem universal and have yet to be applied to the early medieval period. Virtually no medievalists are concerned with the history of emotions save Barbara Rosenwein. Most medievalists have rejected anthropologic and sociologic studies, while the latter have generally ignored the early medieval period. In his *History*, Bede is at times susceptible to nostalgia for an earlier idealized age and constructs England's past accordingly. Nostalgia functions most frequently in the *History* as a rhetoric of loss, a painful rendition of the good and orthodox past for which Bede at a dynamic and often tumultuous time in England pines. Affected by the tumult and uncertainty of his own times, Bede constructs in the *History* what he imagines to be the ideal past in order to define the present in somewhat imagined terms. This paper examines nostalgia in Bede's *History*, exploring the possibility that both modern and pre-modern periods had the propensity for the nostalgic enterprise in various media: poetry, literature or any form which is transmitted widely.

### I. The Theoretical Background and Foreground for Nostalgia

This is how the present life [*vita praesens*] of man on earth, King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown [*incertum*] to us. You are sitting feasting with you

ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm . . . and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall [*domum*]. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm [*parvissimo spatio serenitatis*], it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all [*quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prosus ignoramus*].<sup>1</sup>

THE VENERABLE BEDE, c. AD 731

Man's life is like a Sparrow, mighty King!  
That—while at banquet with your Chiefs you sit  
Housed near a blazing fire—is seen to flit  
Safe from the wintry tempest. Fluttering,  
Here did it enter; there, on hasty wing,  
Flies out, and passes on from cold to cold;  
But whence it came we know not, nor behold  
Whither it goes. Even such, that transient Thing,  
The human Soul; not utterly unknown  
While in the Body lodged, her warm abode . . .<sup>2</sup>

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, c. AD 1821

As the tide ebbs and flows [*accedente ac recedente*], this place [*locus*] is surrounded twice daily by the waves of the sea like an island and twice, when the shore is left dry, it becomes again attached to the mainland. The king humbly and gladly [*humiliter ac libenter*] listened to the bishop's admonitions in all matters, diligently seeking to build up and extend [*aedificare ac dilatare*] the Church of Christ in his kingdom. It was indeed a beautiful sight [*pulcherrimo spectaculo*] when the bishop was preaching the gospel, to see the king acting as interpreter of the heavenly word [*verbi caelestis*] for his ealdormen and thegns . . .<sup>3</sup>

THE VENERABLE BEDE, c. AD 731

The Venerable Bede, penning these lines towards the end of his life in 731 at the monastery at Jarrow in northern England, colored his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* with many vernacular metaphors like these. Invoking Bede's famous analogy between the life of man and the flight

<sup>1</sup> Colgrave, Bertram and R.A.B. Mynors. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. 2.13; 182-185. Hereafter *HE*. The Colgrave and Mynors 1969 edition will be cited unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Potts, A.F., ed. *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets of William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922. 131.

of a sparrow, Wordsworth was doing more than utilizing a sacred metaphor for his ecclesiastical sonnets. From the eighteenth century onwards, the extent to which nostalgia for Britain before or during the Roman occupation is allowed into English literature and polemic is striking, while modern nostalgia for early medieval England is both less prolific and dramatic. Modern polemic on nostalgia or emotions in general rarely applies to the medieval period and never to the early Middle Ages. If references are made to nostalgia, they serve only as a prop for modern perceptions of emotions in history. Since the definition of some sort of “pre-modern” nostalgia is needed, it might be best to interpret nostalgia in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* as a literary construct.

This third and seemingly disjointed passage is Bede’s description of Lindisfarne, the Holy Island, off the coast of kingdom of Northumbria in northern England. This physical description of a pseudo-island which is both connected and detached from the mainland holds true today, as in the summertime automobiles daily drive back and forth on the causeway during low tide. Bede in describing Lindisfarne immediately employs a beautiful spectacle, a *pulcher spectaculum*. He has no need to describe an episode with which he was never familiar—Lindisfarne was founded about a hundred years prior to the composition of Bede’s *Historia*—but he goes out of his way to idealize the Holy Island. Just after this passage, Bede introduces an evangelist’s utopia in which “people flocked together with joy to hear the Word [*confluebant ad audiendum Verbum populi gaudentes*].”<sup>4</sup> Here *gaudium*, or joy, is just the type of superfluous detail often included by Bede to evoke some sort of emotional response. In his fantasy, lands were given for monasteries, Irish teachers taught the English children and the monks all lived under one rule (*regula*).

All, in Bede’s eyes, was right with the world. Of course, the necessary historical use of an imperfect past tense (*confluebant*) couches this ideal picture of Lindisfarne firmly in the past, and one must wonder how the ideal compares with Bede’s contemporary times. Bede’s narrative is equally full of loss and of recovery. The monks at Lindisfarne physically lose the mainland daily, until the tides recede and the so-called Pilgrim’s Causeway reveals itself again (see Figure 1). In this regard Lindisfarne is a perfect monastic site, removed from the world yet not completely, affording a community to experience profoundly everything as a community, including cultural loss, as it oscillates between attachment to and detachment from the world, reality and memory, loss and regain.

But when attributing nostalgia to Bede, the core of the problem here can be found in the arguably redundant phrase: “modern nostalgia.” The adjective is hardly needed at all, since the study of nostalgia is largely a modern phenomenon, presented in forms with which we are familiar. At first glance, the word is purely Greek, stemming from *νόστος*, or return home, and *αλγος*, pain, with a suggestion of longing. This root would certainly make sense, considering the Homeric



Figure 1. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms c. 700. Lindisfarne is in the extreme northeastern portion of Northumbria, set apart from the mainland in the North Sea. Bede’s monastery at Jarrow is further south along the Northumbrian coast. ([anglo-saxons.net](http://anglo-saxons.net))

emphasis placed on *νόστος*, especially in *The Odyssey*. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that, one of the first images of Western literature is that of Odysseus weeping for his home on a beach.<sup>5</sup> But “nostalgia” is in fact a strange construct in itself, a post-classical Latin word of Greek derivative. The term was coined by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688 in his *Dissertatio medica de Nostalgia, oder Heimweh*. Indeed, nostalgia is so desperate a state of mind that Hofer considered it a curable disease, most effectively remedied by an actual return to a fatherland.

Nostalgia remained an epidemic throughout the nineteenth century, permeating the United States during the country’s own civil war in the 1860s. The only country which held fast to this now antiquated view of nostalgia as a curable disease is, almost appropriately, Israel.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, nostalgia might still be characterized as a disease, but the most intense states of nostalgia do not long for an *actual* home, but a home constructed by imagination and emotive response to contemporary times. Nostalgia is applied readily and thickly onto the modern European psyche and largely manifests itself

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 3.3; 220-221.

<sup>5</sup> Nagy, G. *Greek Mythology and Poetics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1922. 131.

in a form easily recognized. The operation of nostalgia for Bede is carefully crafted to add to his narrative a rhetoric of loss within the Latin. His past is one constructed through multigenerational memory, one informed by his dealings with Irish monasticism, ascetic traditions and Britain's pagan past, as he indicates a keen desire to recover that which he deems to have been lost by contemporary Anglia, or that which might never have existed at all. As with modern nostalgia, the past longed for is never actually past, and may be a construction in part or in whole. Bede's view of the past both blurs it and contrasts it with the present as he painfully returns to a home imagined.

Nostalgia hitherto has been seen as strictly a modern notion, and thus calls for a modern definition. It is therefore important to define nostalgia in modern and pre-modern terms. Nostalgia in the Oxford English Dictionary is defined as

1. Acute longing for familiar surroundings, esp. regarded as a medical condition; homesickness. Also in extended use.
2.
  - a. Sentimental longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past.
  - b. Something which causes nostalgia for the past; freq. as a collective term for things which evoke a former (remembered) era.

As a modern model applied to the real world, Svetlana Boym in her pioneering study of modern European nostalgia is careful to define it at the outset as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy."<sup>7</sup> Though the scope of her study rarely extends beyond seventeenth century Europe, Boym's models for nostalgia seem universal. Initial studies of nostalgia as a disease positioned it especially among the soldiery. But for Boym, by the twenty-first century, "the passing ailment turned into the incurable modern condition,"<sup>8</sup> an acute yearning for utopia. Nostalgia itself is not always manifested in the linear sense, that is, looking strictly backwards or forwards. For Boym's purposes, the emotion can direct itself sideways: "The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space . . . [nostalgia is] an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals."<sup>9</sup> Internal unrest as a reaction to external stress—whether a World War or simply a change in times perceived as too swift for comfort—triggers nostalgia. Prior to the twentieth century, with its tumultuous flux of regimes and advent of localized nostalgia, the reconstruction of the past

served Romantic literature well.

A consideration of "collective memory" might be a useful model in which to situate the propensity for nostalgia throughout history, as Bede's monastic existence was by definition collective. Though there is much to be said of medieval memory, the theoretical background for collective memory was most usefully and eloquently put forth by Maurice Halbwachs (d. 1945), French sociologist and philosopher responsible for developing the modern notion of collective memory. For Halbwachs, who often used the Gospels as basis for his hypotheses, collective memory is by nature fragmented, as narratives represent only a portion of what witnesses remembered and transmitted across generations largely by word of mouth.

Collective memory relies heavily on localities, or *loci*, usually centered on supernatural events. Christian groups therefore tried "to rediscover above all the places where Jesus had been tried, crucified, buried, and resurrected, and where he had appeared to his disciples . . . [I]f a truth is to be settled in the memory of a group it needs to be presented in the concrete form of an event, of a personality, or of a locality."<sup>10</sup> In an ever-expanding and widespread Christian community, the actual locations of Christ's birth, transfiguration, crucifixion and the like became abstracted, but were crystallized in the imagination by doctrine and belief. Thereby were consecrated spaces thrust into prominence, as cults of deceased saints sprung up around physical *loci*, fusing symbolism and belief into "memory."

Bede recognized his island's *loci* and past as a treasure trove of the ideal. A working definition of nostalgia for the eighth century is reasonably a mental and literary construction of a past which may or may not have existed. For Bede nostalgia takes over the narrative in the form of brief anecdotes, linguistic and fictional binaries, ideal descriptions and the occasional emotional outburst. More generally speaking, nostalgia most often manifests itself in solitary or collective states of melancholia, based on an acute sense of personal or cultural loss. The study of nostalgia so far finds its subjects largely the twentieth century. But as a monk accustomed to communal living in times perceived to be tumultuous, the Venerable Bede may well have experienced cultural loss within his community. Nostalgia then is perhaps the deepest of emotions. Though for Boym the famous Astrological Clock in Prague, erected in 1490, represents a constant retrospective reminder of time,<sup>11</sup> the argument can be made that even before modern timepieces, the agrarian or semi-agrarian life of a medieval peasant was a clock in itself, dependant on a series of cycles—sunrises, sunsets, seasons, sowing, reaping, etc. With the arrival of official church holidays, the cycle may even have been enhanced. But the church's weapon of choice in the war against pagan cyclical

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L.A. Coser. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 199-200.

history was a Christian linear history, situating the human experience within creation, present time and judgment. Both modern and pre-modern systems, it should be remarked, have the capacity for nostalgia.



Figure 2. This image of Bede is from the Nuremberg Chronicle, composed around 1493. Bede's popularity on the Continent among the Carolingians perpetuated his work for centuries (retrieved July 3, 2008 from <http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet/?do=get&type=map&id=submap700>)

The life of the Venerable Bede is perhaps a good example of just why the period has been known by the misnomer “Dark Age.” In fact, the only source for biographical details is his own work. Already it is easy to see how Bede’s life is his own construct, and understanding Bede the man is a difficult proposition indeed. Bede was probably born around 672 in Northumbria, a region in present-day northern England, just south of Scotland. He entered the monastery at Wearmouth and Jarrow at the age of 7 and was later ordained as a deacon and priest. Bede never, however, rose above the station of priest, ironic given his prominence in ecclesiastical history. He completed the *Ecclesiastical History* in 731 and died on

25 May 735.<sup>12</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History* is dedicated to King Ceolwulf of Northumbria who, with the exception of a deposition from 731 to 732, reigned from 729-737. Bede clearly respected this “most glorious King” (*Gloriosissimus rex Ceoluulfus*), and his deposition around the time of writing must have been shocking enough for Bede to be distressed by his own times.<sup>13</sup> Bede probably never traveled very widely—a fact which perhaps made him even more susceptible to nostalgia—but the content of the *Historia ecclesiastica* (hereafter *HE*) indicates a substantial awareness of the politics of his day.<sup>14</sup> Other than the rough dates of his other works, this is virtually all we know about the life of Bede.

Henry Mayr-Harting, reflecting a widely-held view, unreasonably asserts that for Bede, “the real world was to a considerable extent the world of books.”<sup>15</sup> This almost romantic picture of Bede as isolated monk surrounded by books is an attractive one, an image bordering on the popular. Indeed, evidence for this perception of Bede comes directly from the monk’s pen: “I have spent all my life in this monastery [*tempus vitae in eiusdem monasterii habitatione peragens*].”<sup>16</sup> But besides this self-constructing passage full of monastic tropes, there is really no solid foundation for Mayr-Harting’s claim.

Bede’s audience of course was clerical and aristocratic, and it is reasonable to think that he was also trying to reach a wider lay audience, given the amount of the *HE* devoted to vernacular or oral narrative. We have no way of knowing the capacity of Bede’s interaction with the world outside the cloister, though his work remained massively popular on the continent in the eighth and ninth centuries, especially in Carolingian Francia. Bede’s sources were prolific and the models upon which he based his history mammoth. He was probably most attuned to the styles of two major histories, those of Eusebius (d. 339) and Gregory of Tours (d. 594), but for most of his early Christian content Bede relied heavily on Gildas (d. 570) and oral sources. Other authors referenced in the beginning stages of the *HE* are Pliny the Elder (d. 79) and Orosius (d. 420), a disciple of St. Augustine of Hippo. A more local source, Abbot Albinus of Canterbury provided Bede with both written records and oral tradition regarding the 597 Gregorian mission.

Despite this seemingly mechanistic assemblage of sources, nostalgia seeps through the narrative as nostalgia for Irish monasticism, eastern ascetic traditions and Britain’s pagan past. Neither Bede nor most of his subjects in the *HE*, however, are

<sup>12</sup> Bede, J. McClure, and R. Collins. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People; The Greater Chronicle; Bede’s Letter to Egbert*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. xii-xiii.

<sup>13</sup> *HE* Praefatio, 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Though much doubt has been cast on the literalness of this particular passage, it is important in constructing Bede’s image of himself and his physical surroundings. His physical and emotional attachment to the monastery is indicated well by the Latin *eiusdem* above, where *eius* is the pronoun and *dem* is an emphatic suffix. Though Bede’s writings lend credence to the view that he was perpetually immersed in esoteric studies and had little awareness of the world around him, even in an eighth-century sense, our discussion will rely heavily on the claim that Bede was acutely aware of the political scene of Anglia. The *Letter to Egbert*, discussed below, indicates his awareness of the spiritual and political workings of monastic communities in and around Northumbria, and in his *History* Bede spills copious amounts of ink on the geopolitical interactions of kings in a Christian context.

<sup>15</sup> Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to England*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 40. Cf. Goffart, W.A. *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 235-328.

Irish monks, eastern ascetics or admirable pagans. These and more are all constructions for Bede, writing from the periphery in Northumbria on the outside looking in and, in many ways, at the present looking back. The Venerable Bede was a figure larger than life, with a well-formed political thrust to his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, but he was also simply a monk looking both backwards and forwards, with an aim to situate himself and his "nation" within the linear events of Christian history.

## II. Situating the Problem of Emotions in Anglo-Saxon England

Barbara Rosenwein in her fascinating article "Worrying about Emotions in History" sets up the problem in difficult terms: "Emotions have seemed tangential (if not fundamentally opposed) to the historical enterprise."<sup>17</sup> The historiography of emotional history is brief but complex and Rosenwein's unique article is worth an extended discussion, especially in setting up theoretical terms for tracing Bedan nostalgia. She takes head-on Lucien Febvre's argument as a theme. Febvre was the founder of the Annales School of historical thought in France, which sought to incorporate social sciences into history. In 1929 he founded the journal *Annales d'Histoire Economique et Sociale* for which his school is known. The Annales, truly pioneering for its time, fundamentally applied the study of the present to the past. Febvre viewed the progression of emotional history as one in which emotions were eventually tempered through state-building and civilizing. For Rosenwein, Febvre sought to construct a moral history or "public policy masquerading as history."<sup>18</sup>

Norbert Elias, the great Jewish-German philologist whose historical view is illustrated well by the title of his 1938 two-volume set, *The Civilizing Process*, added a Freudian dimension to the discussion, observing that medieval people had not developed a "strict and stable super-ego" under a modern state.<sup>19</sup> Rosenwein also takes exception to the views of others such as the modernists Carol and Peter Stearns of the 1980s who called for a formation of "emotology" as a discipline. The commonality among these theorists is their dismissal of the pre-modern era in their studies. The medieval period is virtually ignored, save when Stearn notes that courtly love plays do not permeate popular society and are therefore useless to emotology. Regardless, there was virtually nothing viable in pre-modern culture to qualify as emotology. So far, emotology, though useful in theoretical terms, can only be extended so far back in time.

These modernist conceptions of the "state" do not fit gracefully within the contours of the medieval state. For Rosenwein, a medievalist for whom the Foucaultian approach does not quite work, the treatment of emotions in history is troubling: "The history of the West is the history of increasing emotional restraint. Greece and Rome may be quickly dismissed: did not Homer sing of the sweet delights of anger? The Middle

Ages had the emotional life of a child: unadulterated, violent, public, unashamed. The modern period (variously defined) brought with it self-discipline, control, and suppression."<sup>20</sup> The medieval period, in other words, is a prop for modernist polemic and its grand narrative. As most theory indicates, many historians, especially when dealing with emotions, mark a massive break at the "enlightenment" which situates an impassible disparity between "modern" and "pre-modern" periods. The problem is that medievalists have been all too hesitant to take on newer studies of sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers, who are in turn seldom interested in the early medieval period. Nostalgia has been treated as a modern phenomenon, but the basic emotion must predate the word's coining in 1688. This "civilizing process" to which most emotive historians adhere is simply of no use to the early medieval historian while nostalgia or emotions seem to have been of minimal use to most pre-modern scholars. The early Middle Ages have been mistreated by emotive historians by not being treated at all.

Bede's nostalgia was indeed for an ideal but was founded firmly on intellectual practicality, as he was aware both of his audience and which sorts of carefully filtered nostalgia would be well-received. Bede's was in a sense an inheritance of loss. Given the tenor of his *Letter to Egbert*, things were not quite as they seemed in the rose garden of the *HE*. Bede urges his bishop in light of "the harm that has been done to our people [*nostra gens*]" to "strive zealously to recall to the right way of life [*rectam vitae*] any whom you see acting so wickedly."<sup>21</sup> The loss here is the right way of life and it was certainly felt personally by Bede. But the solution of recovery is an active one. It is the responsibility of Bishop Egbert "to recall [*revocare*]" the right way of life in Northumbria. As a nostalgic historian, Bede was wont to construct or reconstruct a history incorporating the best bits of Irish monasticism, ascetic models and pre-Christian British tradition. It is to these types of nostalgia we now turn.

## III. Nostalgia Goes Native: Paradoxical Nostalgia for the Irish and Britain's Pagan Past

How frugal and austere [*quantae autem parsimoniae, cuius contentiae*] he and his predecessors had been, the place [*locus*] itself over which they ruled bears witness. When they left, there were very few buildings there except for the church, in fact only those without which the life of a community [*conversatio civilis*] was impossible. They had no money but only cattle; if they received money from the rich they promptly gave it to the poor . . . The sole concern of these teachers [*tota sollicitudo doctoribus*] was to serve God and not the world [*Deo serviendi, non saeculo*], to satisfy the soul and not the belly."<sup>22</sup>

THE VENERABLE BEDE, c. AD 731

<sup>17</sup> Rosenwein, Barbara. H. "Worrying about Emotions in History". *American Historical Review*, vol. 107 (June 2002): 821.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 823.

<sup>19</sup> Elias, N. *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols. in 1: *The History of Manners and State Formation*, E. Jephcott, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. 319.

<sup>20</sup> Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions," 828.

<sup>21</sup> Bede, McClure, and Collins. *The Ecclesiastical History* 348. See also Bede, and C. Plummer. *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum, Historiam abbatum, Epistolam ad Egbertum, una cum Historia abbatum auctore anonymo*. Oxonii: E typographeo Clarendoniano, 1961. 412.

Here Bede breaks his narrative on the correct dating for Easter to praise Bishop Colmán's predecessors at the monastery of Iona, just off the coast of the Isle of Mull and founded by St. Columba in 563. This passage directly follows the lengthy debate between the Irish and orthodox Christians regarding the correct dating of Easter. The fundamental problem with the Irish for Bede was that their "imperfect rules [*minus perfecta institutione*]" were underscored by their incorrect dating of Easter. Bede was actually instrumental in aligning the conflicting dating methods of Easter in Britain and the continental Carolingian world. Bede's fondness for the Irish actually goes much deeper than this, since their "sole concern" was to serve God. References in the *HE* to the Irish are abundant and repeatedly betray a particular affinity for them. The Irish were the first real evangelists in the north of England, and this was certainly important to Bede.

But for Bede, it was a sense of *time* and *place* which he seems to have admired most in hagiography, a clear instance of Boym's nostalgia as an "archeology of memory and place."<sup>23</sup> To frame this notion, in opening his chapter on the death of King Oswald, Bede, as elsewhere, is careful to include the time, place and circumstances of the terrible event.<sup>24</sup> For Halbwachs, the location of an event triggered community memory, since "if a truth is to be settled in the memory of a group it needs to be presented in the concrete form of an event, of a personality, or of a locality."<sup>25</sup> At the foundation of Lindisfarne around 635, Bede embellishes that it was "indeed a beautiful sight [*pulcherrimo spectaculo*]" when the bishop was preaching the gospel.<sup>26</sup> Bede obviously never witnessed the foundation of Lindisfarne, as it predated the composition of the *HE* by about a century. He is under no obligation to describe the event as a *pulcher spectaculum*, but since he does, he betrays deep sentiment for those early days of Lindisfarne monastery. This particular passage involves all three of Halbwachs' communal memory model: event, personality and locality.

For Irish nostalgia, perhaps one of the most important passages in the *HE*—or in all Bedan literature—is found in 3.26, the opening passage of the chapter. Directly following a chapter in which Bede, indulging his orthodox sensibilities, could have engaged in a healthy diatribe against the Irish for not accepting the correct date of Easter, we find a poetic snapshot of Lindisfarne under the Irish: "The sole concern of these teachers was to serve God and not the world, to satisfy the soul and not the belly."<sup>27</sup> Not only this, but Bede is writing

about Colmán's Irish whom he accuses of being unorthodox. It is without doubt that Bede admires the Irish deeply, as he would never in reference to orthodoxy praise them with phrases like "Irish method" (*mos Scottorum*) in a favorable context and "beautiful sight [*pulcher spectaculum*]." Does Bede then value *stabilitas* or simplicity more? Organization or austerity? The Irish monks are no paradigm for the former but the *mos Scottorum* is transmitted in sentimental fashion in the *HE*.

At Aidan's death, Bede remembers the Irishman with distinctive personal attachment. Though Aidan's view of the Easter date was imperfect at best, Bede acknowledged warmly that he "had no other thought in his heart, revered and preached no other doctrine than we do, namely the redemption of the human race [*redemptionem generis humani*]." Aidan's memory was soon honored by the erection of a church which housed the remains of "so great a bishop [*tanto pontifice dignam*]." On top of this, posthumous miracles came to be associated with a primitive wooden buttress against which a dying Aidan leaned.<sup>28</sup> To that primitive wooden buttress is moored a collective memory and an attempt at retrieval.

Bede certainly picked and chose the more favorable bits of Irish culture and tailored his language only as far as he needed to in order to negotiate the hills and troughs of Irish monasticism. These times were ones with which Bede was not readily familiar, and only could have idealized them for *noster historia*. Our history: this collective invocation was based on something Walter Goffart engages and from which he quickly shies away, the notion of "artificial perfection" in Bede's work.<sup>29</sup> This is precisely that which we have seen so far from Bede. The *HE* is by definition a construction, and artifice of mnemonic retrieval. The loss for Bede is Irish austerity while it is synthetically reconfigured in the *HE* by nostalgia.

#### IV. The Primitiva ecclesia: Nostalgia for Ascetic Tradition

As soon as they had entered the dwelling-place [*mansionem*] allotted to them [in Canterbury], they began to imitate the way of life of the apostles and of the primitive church [*coeperunt apostolicam primitivae ecclesiae vitam imitari*]. They were constantly engaged in prayers, in vigils and fasts: they preached the words of life [*verbum vitae*] to as many as they could; they despised all worldly things [*cuncta huius mundi*] as foreign to them; they accepted only the necessities of life from those whom they taught; in all things they practised what they preached and kept themselves prepared to endure adversities, even

<sup>23</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii.

<sup>24</sup> *HE* 3.14; 254-257: "In his second year, that is in the year of our Lord 644, the most reverend father Paulinus [*reverentissimus pater Paulinus*] . . . departed [*transiit*] to be with the Lord on 10 October having held the office of bishop for nineteen years, two months, and twenty-one days. He was buried in the sanctuary [*secretario*] of the church of the blessed apostle Andrew . . ."

<sup>25</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 200.

<sup>26</sup> *HE* 3.3; 220-221. Colgrave's translation of *spectaculum* as "sight" is a bit bland here. A "spectacle," rather, implies more than simply the sensory and mundane "sight," as it implies a more intentionally contrived and grandiose *display*.

<sup>27</sup> *HE*, 3.26; 311.

<sup>28</sup> *HE* 3.17; 262-267.

<sup>29</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 306. Much debate surrounds Bede's treatment of the Irish. See Mayr-Harting's *Coming of Christianity*, 69 and Probert's "Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*: A New Perspective," 258-262.

to the point of dying for the truths they proclaimed. To put it briefly, some, marveling at their simple and innocent way of life and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine, believed and were baptized [*Crediderunt nonnulli et baptizabantur, mirantes simplicitatem innocentis vitae ac dulcedimen dontrinae eorum caelestis*].<sup>30</sup>

This passage opens up the twenty-sixth chapter of Book I of the *HE* and introduces the Augustinian mission, commissioned by Pope Gregory the Great in 597 to convert the people of Kent in southern England. Here Bede straightaway evokes the dwelling places of heaven with *mansio* and couples it with this fascinating phrase, the *primitiva ecclesia*. This latter phrase is not at all unlike an invocation of the “ancient times” or *antiquus* (employed to set up the ideal), thus situating the primitive church comfortably in the past with overtones of originality (*prima*). Bede’s nostalgia for the simplicity of the Irish is readily apparent, and much of it manifests itself in praise for their asceticism.

Much of this chapter shall hinge on St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (d. 687) as an ascetic standard for Bede, presented in the *Ecclesiastical History* itself. Cuthbert lived from 634 to 687 and saw the extremes of Christian existence during his lifetime, as he was both an ascetic and reluctant bishop of Lindisfarne and is still considered the patron saint of present-day County Northumberland. An anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* was written in Lindisfarne around between 699 and 705, and Bede followed this with verse and prose lives around 716 and 721, respectively. Many among his ecclesiastical audience would certainly appreciate Bede’s efforts to align Cuthbert with older ascetic and hagiographic traditions, and his lay audience would at least be attracted to bits of oral tradition which made their way into the literature.

In the *HE*, Bede mentions four individuals whose bodies remained incorruptible upon their death: Æthilburg, Fursey, Æthelthryth and Cuthbert.<sup>31</sup> This feature of ascetic devotion is almost peculiar to early ascetic tradition, namely that philosophy largely constructed by St. Athanasius (d. 373) with which Bede was certainly familiar. St. Antony in Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* was the Athanasian superman or, in simple terms, a divine orthodox champion contrived in Athanasian literature through and through. Bede was acutely aware of this and seems to have established Cuthbert as a veritable Bedan man in a loose Athanasian context. It is important, however, to note that we are not concerned so much by the influence of eastern asceticism on Bede, as that much is readily apparent. It is rather more useful with respect to Bede’s emotional fixation on Cuthbert to see how he fills the present void with the lost past.

As far as Lindisfarne was from the epicenter of

Christendom, Bede was well attuned to Roman Christianity. In order to evoke the *primitiva ecclesia*, Bede constructed the ideal past in a literary nostalgia. In so doing, Bede positioned the *primitiva ecclesia* invariably in the past, a lost form of ecclesiastical utopia in which peasants flocked together to hear the word of God. With these models in mind, we now turn to St. Cuthbert, “Irish in training but Roman in his respect for the Rule of Benedict, and the reckoning of the date of Easter.”<sup>32</sup> Cuthbert for Bede is presented as a man of the people, though polarizing at times. As a near-contemporary comparison, Bede in the *HE* actually drops a subtle hint that even in the early days of Christianity in the South, British bishops and peasants were wont to consult their own hermits. Upon realizing that Augustine and his missionaries spoke the truth of the correct dating of Easter, the people of Kent “could not disown their former customs without the consent and approval of their own people.” This incident not only underscores the importance of local custom of the Britons, but indicates Bede’s recognition of it.

But before anything is settled, “they went first to a certain holy and prudent man [*virum sanctum ac prudentem*] who lived as a hermit [*anachoreticam*] among them to consult him as to whether they ought to forsake their own traditions at the bidding of Augustine. He answered, ‘If he is a man of God, follow him.’”<sup>33</sup> Curiously enough, this advice given by our unknown holy man in Kent echoes almost exactly advice given in reference to St. Antony: “Whatever he says to you, go by his decision, for God speaks to you by him.”<sup>34</sup> Bede clearly wants to illustrate here the importance of the holy middle man who, as in the East, filled an important void in local life, especially where law courts or ecclesiastical systems were remedial or nonexistent. Though about 130 years removed from the conversion of Kent, Bede felt a special connection with the kingdom’s spiritual development. In St. Augustine’s miracle of healing a blind man near the beginning of the mission, Bede goes out of his way to note that Augustine was emotionally “compelled by genuine necessity [*iusta necessitate compulsus*]” to pray for the man. The “primitive church” was endowed with such noble compulsions.

In many passages like that of *HE* 2.2, Bede betrays a peculiar affinity for pastoral country scenes of conversion, preaching and public enthusiasm for Christianity. His “good old days” were certainly introduced by St. Cuthbert at times. But Cuthbert was much more than a traditional holy man to Bede. He only spent parts of his life in solitude but often “went forth from the monastery to correct the errors of those who sinned in both these ways, sometimes on horseback but more often on foot.” The Bedan ideal for the holy man is made manifest in Cuthbert:

<sup>30</sup> *HE* 1.26: 76-77.

<sup>31</sup> *HE* 3.8: 3.19: 4.19: 4.30.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, G.H., *Bede the Venerable*. Twayne’s English authors series, TEAS 443. Boston: Twayne, 1987. 88. See also Wormald, Patrick. “Bede and Benedict Biscop” in Bede, and Gerald Bonner. *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*. London: S.P.C.K. 1976.

<sup>33</sup> *HE* 2.2: 136-139. See below, chapter 6. “Conference” is used three times in this particular passage: *colloquium* (134); *synodus* (136); *concilium* (138).

<sup>34</sup> Brown, P. “The rise and function of the holy man in Late Antiquity” in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. 1982. Berkeley: University of California Press. 134.



Now it was the custom [*moris*] amongst the English people at that time, when a clerk or a priest came to a village, for all to gather [*confluerent*] at his command to hear the Word, gladly [*libenter*] listening to what was said and still more gladly [*libentius*] carrying out in their lives whatever they heard and could understand. So great was Cuthbert's eloquence [*peritia*] . . . that none of those present would presume to hide from him the secrets of their hearts..."<sup>35</sup>

Can we really believe this, that people were so enthusiastic and malleable upon hearing the Gospel from Cuthbert? In a sense, this question is irrelevant since Bede's was not always a history concerned with what *actually* happened.

Regardless, what we see here in 4.27 is a glimpse at the characterization of the Bedan ideal. As Antony was for Athanasius, Cuthbert is Bede's champion, endowed with *peritia* which was neither witnessed nor experienced by Bede. With respect to orthodoxy, Cuthbert is the superstar where Antony was for Athanasius. At Lindisfarne he upheld the Rule with dignity, as he "trained many in life under a Rule [*regularem*]. . . but he also sought to convert the neighbouring people far and wide from a life of foolish customs [*stultae consuetudinis*] to a love of heavenly joys [*ad caelestium gaudiorum convertere curabat amorem*]."<sup>36</sup> In this passage and others, the presence of the word *regula* almost acts as a signpost for Bedan fantasy, since it cannot be said with certainty whether or not any large monastic groups lived under one "Rule." The contrast here of "foolish customs" and "heavenly joys" can also be seen as a binary of all times. Bede in a sense is projecting his contemporary time backwards, assuming the binary of good and evil which Cuthbert mitigated and where the leaders of Bede's time failed. The holy duality of Cuthbert's life—part evangelist and miracle worker and part Farne Island anchorite—is paramount for Bede, as in Cuthbert Bede establishes a Northumbrian champion. Like the passage on Lindisfarne, the binary of present and past is one of loss and gain—"foolish customs" and "heavenly joys"—with Bede struggling to reconcile the two in an historical context.

With words attributed to Cuthbert, the modern reader is naturally inclined to be dubious, but this reaction is not so certain for Bede's contemporary audience, whether lay or clerical. Upon leaving Lindisfarne to become a hermit, Cuthbert parts with this declaration: "If by divine grace it is permitted to me to be able to support myself in this place [*in loco*] by the work of my hands, I will gladly stay there; but if matters turn out otherwise, I intend, God willing, to return [*revertar*] to you forthwith."<sup>37</sup> Not only does Bede indicate his own attachment to his Lindisfarne in this chapter, but this passage also illustrates Cuthbert's own attachment to the

monastery. But when Cuthbert does leave for his eremitic *locus*, he fashioned a cell with no roof so that he could see nothing but heaven.<sup>38</sup> This echoes the architectural design of the round church at the place of Christ's ascension, described later by Bede and situated between descriptions of various holy *loci* in the life of Christ himself.<sup>39</sup>

Such attachment to place is perhaps the ultimate nostalgia, as Bede moors the beliefs of the monastic group in the place of Lindisfarne. Cuthbert's attachment to his monastic home is underscored further by Bede in the following chapter in which a monk named Herbert engages in an emotionally-charged farewell with Cuthbert, imploring him not to leave. Bede here certainly is willing to exploit human bonds in "spiritual friendship [*spiritualis amicitiae*]."<sup>40</sup> Even though Cuthbert during his life separated himself from his beloved Lindisfarne, he later returned by unanimous vote to be bishop of the see and, though reluctant, was eventually buried there, in Bede's eyes, at home in his *patria*.

Cuthbert's cult was perpetuated long after his death, as Bede's nostalgia for Cuthbert is channeled through his cult. By focusing on his incorruptible body and place of burial, Bede supports and perpetuates the cult, fostering belief through attachment to place. Furthermore, by adding a component of realism of humanity to Cuthbert's life story (of which Bede had no first-hand knowledge), he disconnects the life of Northumbria's most venerable saint with the present through drastic contrasts of the past ideal and present spiritual malaise, only mitigated in literature through nostalgia. This is Bede's champion, an individual who combated demons and communicated with animals.

Bede's nostalgia for asceticism speaks through his narrative especially when he deals with Cuthbert. At the time of Bede's writing, cults of saints in England were certainly widespread. The cults depended heavily upon popular support and good advertising, and miracles performed by saints while alive or dead were less likely to be recorded if they were not believed. Regardless of whether Bede expected his audience actually to believe that seals ministered to Cuthbert following a conversation with the divine in the North Sea as reported in his *Life of Cuthbert*,<sup>41</sup> he certainly expected the elements of extreme *askesis* and divine communication to be appreciated. These inventive and invented stories belonged to him and to the Northumbrians and would not be considered falsehood. The tales presented, as claimed, a highly admirable life and cemented in Northumbrian memory the spiritually attractive qualities of a man of the past, a man of his times, a man of all times.

Bede's transmission of miracle stories in the *HE* and in his lives of Cuthbert underscores a wider problem he sees

<sup>35</sup> *HE* 4.27; 432-433.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 4.28; 434-435.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 436-439.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.16-5.17; 508-513.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.29; 440-441. See above.

<sup>41</sup> Colgrave and Barron, and Bede, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969. 188-191.

with contemporary society. Bede is reluctant to include any outstanding stories from the period roughly *c.* 700-730 (around the time of writing), perhaps indicating that Bede marked the cessation of miracles with a decline of morality in Northumbria's recent times. Cuthbert, who died some 45 years prior to the composition of the *HE*, had already gained legendary status in Northumbria and his extreme holiness brought on miracles, even after his death in 687. Holiness had been lost but kept on life support through Cuthbert's cult and Bede's literature, and, though Cuthbert in his exceptionality exercised dominion over nature by calming storms and communicating with animals, creation by the time of Bede's writing has been lost. Invoking Cuthbert as an outstanding *exemplum* in a long, universal history of asceticism, Bede seeks to reconstruct the past, to regain that which is lost, to resuscitate it through nostalgia.

### VII. The Politics of Nostalgia and Mnemonic Mechanics

Great is the power of memory, extraordinarily great, my God, a sanctuary vast and infinite. Who has penetrated its depths?<sup>42</sup>

SAINT AUGUSTINE, AD 397

Susan Stewart in her pioneering 1984 study notes that "nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetitions and denies the repetition's capacity to define identity."<sup>43</sup> Svetlana Boym fleshes out these ideas with a brilliant synthesis of modern nostalgia in her study meant "to unearth the fragments of nostalgia one needs a dual archeology of memory and of place, and a dual history of illusions and of actual practices."<sup>44</sup> Though nostalgia studies have until now been focused on the "modern" period with its tumultuous social upheavals, this is the point at which modernism should meet medievalism.

We return for the last time to the famous *Letter to Egbert*, as it is extremely useful in positioning Bede as a troubled traditionalist or reformist at the end of his life. The *Letter*, composed in 734 to the bishop of York and the last of Bede's writings extant before his death in the following year, reflects most accurately the monk's cynicism of the state of affairs in England. Virtually nothing in the letter is in exuberant praise of monks or laymen, as the purpose of the letter is to admonish and, for our purposes, contrast with the past and identity Bede has constructed in his *Historia*. While Bede's *Letter* engages with contemporary issues directly, the *HE* illuminates them through the illustrious past. Monastic abuses in Bede's eyes intensified from the beginning of the eighth century until Egbert's rise to power in York in 731, which Bede may have hoped would spur on reform in the Northumbrian Church. This in part explains why the *HE* is so lacking in detail and especially miracle stories from the period *c.* 700-730 and

establishes the background against which Bede articulated his concerns to Egbert in 734.

Bede in his old age finds it "shocking to say [*turpe est dicere*] how many places that go by the name of monasteries have been taken under the control of men who have no knowledge of true monastic life." In an extensive reform, these monasteries "that only in the most foolish way [*stultissimo*] deserve the name of monastery . . . [should be] turned by the authority of a council from luxury to chastity, from vanity to verity, from indulgence of the stomach and the gullet to continence and heartfelt piety [*de luxuria ad castitatem, de vanitate ad veritatem, de intemperantia ventris et gulae ad continentiam et pietatem cordis*]."<sup>45</sup> It is tempting to pass this off simply as biblical typology, but Bede might well be up to more.

In his *Letter* Bede has shed his use of good-evil binaries until this last passage in which they abound. By far the most marked contrast between the tenor of the *Letter* and the *HE* is that Bede's indictments of the past in the latter, though fewer, are generally put forth retrospectively. The *Letter* bemoans the present with urgency, while the *HE* simply looks backward to redeem and reclaim the present. Gregory's 597 mission, though ushering in the exaggerated "golden age" fantasy of English monasticism, had yet to come to a head on the island, a fact which frustrated Bede to no end in his *Letter*. For Bede, the contemporary Church had failed the English people where the Church of the past had not. Bede's *Letter* indicates much deeper anger than had been conveyed in the *HE*, as the audience has now drastically changed and Bede sees more fit to use words like *stultissimus* (perhaps "most foolish" is too bland a translation). It might also, however, illustrate that England by 734 for Bede has worked backwards through this sentence, lurching gracelessly from good to evil, from "heartfelt piety" of, say, Cuthbert or the laymen eager for the Word near seventh-century Lindisfarne, to the "indulgence of the stomach" of contemporary "monks." Bede's disenchanting view of Northumbria and England is that of a playground for the corrupt in contrast with his *HE* stories of the grand Anglo-Saxon conversion and its holy men. In the *Letter* Bede's acute sense of loss is confirmed and in England, the blind now lead the blind.

All of this does well to add a considerable human dimension to the Venerable Bede. It might be reasonable to see Bede's nostalgia as part of his case for legitimacy, especially considering that his *Historia* is arguably that of the Northumbrians in an English context. If Bede is a nostalgic for the right times and places, he might have been able to speak to his audience on a more personal, familiar level. It is not as if collective memory and nostalgia here are one in the same, but they might be closely tied. Collective memory is the mechanism by which nostalgia and the rhetoric of

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, and Luc Verheijen, ed. *Confessiones. Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 27. Turnhout: Brepolis, 1981. 10.8.15. *Magna ista vis est memoriae, magna nimis. Deus meus, penetrare amplum et infinitum. Quis ad fundum eius pervenit?* Translation mine.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Bede, McClure, and Collins, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 350. See also Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae*, 414.

loss attach themselves to places, memories, oral traditions and abstractions. The rhetoric of loss has a special place in collective memory and best represents its emotional, human side.

Bede attributes many of these features of *loci* in describing places in the *HE*. In the Anonymous *Life* of St. Cuthbert, the Lindisfarne author is obsessive when associating events with places. Two seemingly random events in the life of Cuthbert for this author suddenly make sense juxtaposed simply because they took place near Carlisle.<sup>46</sup> As has been discussed, topography and geography are apparently paramount for medieval memory and also indicates collective memory, especially in monastic settings. Curiously enough, though drawing heavily from it, Bede departs in his *Prose Life of Cuthbert* from the Anonymous *Life* in that he omits many of the specific local details of the latter. Bede's omission of geographical detail perhaps situates St. Cuthbert closer to Lindisfarne where the anonymous author was fixated on Melrose and surrounding areas.

As far as reaction for loss and a longing for past time, Bede's nostalgia is roughly parallel to that which historians have put forth for modern history. To quote Svetlana Boym once again, nostalgia is necessarily "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy."<sup>47</sup> The question of why Bede does not fit into this model is a simple one, both to ask and to answer. He does, as a matter of fact. Though an exaggerated and thoroughly fabricated notion for Bede, the "golden age" is invariably put firmly in the past, and Bede employs collective memory and rhetoric in order to retrieve it. It is then difficult to distinguish Bede's *beliefs* from his politics of legitimization, but when it comes to collective memory, the distinction seems not to matter as much. Nostalgia is situated in models of collective memory, *i.e.* emphases on places to which abstract beliefs are moored. To Maurice Halbwachs' work I might add this literary model of nostalgia, that collective memory almost invariably introduces rhetoric of loss and literary effort to recover. Most historians, perhaps unintentionally, adhere to post-"enlightenment" models no longer tenable, given the progress made in the history of emotions. The literature of Bede itself disproves the grand narrative of history. The human propensity for nostalgia, especially for historians both past and present, mitigates the rough patches between compartmentalized historical "periods" perpetuated by "enlightenment" theory.

Theoretically then, Bede fits well into a model for nostalgia usually reserved for modern history. He understood that as a proponent of *vera lex historiae* he both enjoyed the freedom to write down in a constructive sense rather than a truthful one, and the responsibility to position his see at Lindisfarne in the wider geopolitical scene. It is a fact of the human condition that would-be reformers or social theorists who feel alienated and oppressed by an ever-changing world

almost invariably look backward for salvation of their times. In his perception, Bede's was an age of loss, but loss and recovery coalesced in the *HE* by constructed models of the past applied directly to the present. To this end Bede's image of Lindisfarne proves ideal, as the path to the monastery is lost and recovered daily at the mercy of the tides of time.

### Mentor Comments

Mentor Lynda Coon continues a theme seen in other mentor comments when she notes that John Terry's work goes beyond what might typically be expected from an undergraduate student. She paints a picture of a bright future for this young scholar.

*John Terry earned a summa cum laude for his thesis on historical and religious nostalgia in the writings of the Anglo-Saxon monk and biblical exegete, the Venerable Bede (d. 735). Terry came to the complex study of Bede uniquely prepared. A double major in Classical Studies and History (with a specialization in late ancient and medieval history), Terry was able to tackle Bede in the original Latin. Moreover, Terry used his Sturgis Fellowship to fund a year at Cambridge University, where he sat examinations for the History of Roman Britain, the Classical Body, Death in the Middle Ages, and the Transformation of the Roman World. Terry brought all of his superb training to bear on the study of Anglo-Saxon monasticism—its intellectual and ascetic cultures.*

*In the thesis, Terry broke new scholarly ground, and he did so at a level beyond that which one might expect from an undergraduate, even an Honors student. Terry grappled with the hagiographical traditions surrounding the life and cult of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, a site he spent some time visiting while living in the United Kingdom. Terry also took on Bede's famous Ecclesiastic History and he did so in the service of theorizing how the exegetical imagination of ascetic writers and practitioners played a role in the production of a sacred landscape and how that landscape worked as a tool of conversion. His angle was singular—Terry made the case that early medieval writers, like the Venerable Bede, approached ascetic landscapes and even the bodies of the ascetics themselves with a certain degree of nostalgia. In arguing for an early medieval category of nostalgia, Terry countered current scholarly views that nostalgia as an emotion is an invention of the Enlightenment. I found Terry's corrective to the Enlightenment model of nostalgia to be very persuasive. Indeed, this Fulbright College Honors student covered some of the ground that the top scholars in the field of early medieval history are just now beginning to research. No one to date has applied the kinds of theories of collective memory and landscape as mnemonic tool (Halbwach, Nora) to early medieval texts that Terry*

<sup>46</sup> Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 116-117

<sup>47</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiv-xv

*applied to the study of Bede. In all, the theoretical scope of Terry's project—combined with his rigorous training—marked him off as exceptional among our very best Honors students in the Humanities.*

*Mr. Terry's overall goal is to pursue a career in academia as an early medievalist. As he told me one day, there 'simply isn't any other option for him'. Happily, both Cambridge University and the University of Virginia offered him positions in their graduate programs (the M.Phil. at Cambridge and the Ph.D. at Virginia). After a long struggle making the decision where next to cloister*

*himself in a major research library, Mr. Terry settled upon the University of Virginia, which has an excellent program in early medieval history, art history, and late Latin studies. Terry intends to spend more time at Cambridge University, working with top scholars there and continuing his passion for libraries (Cambridge houses an impressive collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts). Mr. Terry will be missed, both in the halls of Old Main and in his current cloister, the Special Collections division of Mullins Library.*