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Echoic Irony in Walter Map's Satire against the Cistercians

WALTER MAP'S TREATMENT of the Cistercian order of monks has long been recognized as a first-rate satire and a memorably acrid contribution to the many criticisms aimed at the Cistercians in the late twelfth century.¹ Map's satire appears in his *De Nugis Curialium* (*The Courtiers' Trifles*), which he composed largely in the 1180s and continued to revise during the following decade, perhaps, as some speculate, taking it with him to Oxford when he became arch-deacon in 1197.² During his long lifetime (c. 1135-1210) Map served his King, Henry II, as a "king's justice" (Rigg, *History* 88). His book appears to have been a private manuscript, what has been aptly termed "the commonplace book of a great after-dinner speaker" (Brooke-Mynors xlv).

The Cistercian order targeted in *Distinctio* 1:25 of *De Nugis* is one in a series of religious orders that Map scrutinizes.³ He was not alone in criticizing the monks of several different orders; we find parallels in the Latin works of better known contemporaries: Gerald of Wales, John of Salisbury, and Nigel de Longchamps.⁴ The Cistercians, or White Monks (so-called for their habits made from undyed wool), founded their order motivated by reformist zeal (Constable 188 n. 97). Yet, as Giles Constable notes, by the middle of the century "it was more or less open season for all religious orders" (32). Accusations against the Cistercians gained momentum in the 1130s; before 1150 critics targeted the White Monks' "self-righteousness," and after that date, their "avarice" (Constable 33). The narrator Map creates for his chapter on the Cistercians implacably condemns their attitudes and actions, saving his juiciest (and funniest) assaults for their fero-

¹ Nigel of Canterbury, Stephan of Tournai, and Joachim of Fiore, among others, also criticized the Cistercians. See Constable 32-34.

² Rigg, *History* 182. For discussion of the text's date of composition and its internal arrangement see Brooke-Mynors xlvii-xlviii and Rigg's review of the 1983 edition of *De Nugis Curialium*.

³ He takes aim at the Order of Grandmont (*Dist.* 1.17), the Hospitallers (*Dist.* 1:23), the Templars (*Dist.* 1.18), and the Carthusians (*Dist.* 1.16), among others.

⁴ Map 50 n. 1. A.G. Rigg comments that John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* surveys the orders in the same sequence as *De Nugis* does, and that while John's treatment is kinder than Map's, it does nevertheless point out the hypocrisy of each. Further, Rigg finds a particular pattern in Map's survey of the new orders, observing "how each in turn . . . had good beginnings but a bad end" (89).

cious rapacity and spiritual pride.⁵

In addition to its humor, one of the keenest pleasures Map's satire offers the modern reader is its beguiling illusion of immediacy. With a deftness of touch reminiscent of Chaucer, Map achieves a high degree of realism through the pretense of reporting direct speech. Like Chaucer's pilgrim narrator, Map's narrator presents himself as a witness to the rush of events around him—in his case, the tumult engulfing him at the court of Henry II. And like his pilgrim successor, he offers himself as a faithful recorder of words spoken by a wide range of personages and displays a comfortable familiarity with all the principals involved in this sorry exposé of monastic turpitude: Dom Reric, who curses the monks for their lack of modesty (102); the Lord Abbot of Pontigny, who defends his monks against the charge of tampering with an order of bacon they had sold (108); and Henry II's troops, who defend their brutality against civilians while campaigning in Limousin (96).⁶

The narrator's apparent chumminess with such a startling (if unlikely) array of people derives in large part from the richness and energy of the speeches he reports. In addition to evoking such detailed, textured realism, these speeches, which take the form of pairs of contrasting assertions, voice many of the most blistering charges against the Cistercian monks. And since we find a number of similar pairs throughout the satire, they constitute one of Map's key narrative strategies. Further, we find that their very forcefulness arises from pungent verbal irony. The following paired assertions, for example, illustrate the narrator's easy intimacy with the two speakers: the Christian God (*Noster*—our God) and the Cistercian's god (*deus eorum*—their god):

Noster dicit: "Qui non reliquerit omnia propter me, non est me dignus"; deus eorum dicit: "Qui non adquisierit omnia propter se, non est me dignus." (Map 92)

Our God says: "He who does not leave everything behind for my sake is not worthy of me"; their god says: "He who does not acquire all things for his own sake is not worthy of me."⁷

Together, these paired utterances target the avarice of the White Monks with deliciously humorous effect. The second assertion (by their god) is an immediate echo of the first (by Our God), although it is distorted by key substitutions: *deus eorum* for *Deus*, *adquisierit* (acquire) for *reliquerit* (leave behind), and *propter se* (for his own sake) for *propter me* (for my sake). It is the irreverent distorted echo of the second utterance that we can identify as a kind of verbal irony, a type best analyzed according to a new model developed recently by two pragmatics theorists, Deidre Wilson and Dan Sperber.⁸

⁵ While cautioning readers about the tricky business of evaluating authorial intention, Map's editors do feel nevertheless that *De Nugis* mirrors the complaints made against the Cistercian order at the time: "But there is no doubt that he gives us in his vivid fashion the elements of the common criticism against them" (Brooke-Mynors xlv).

⁶ Indeed, Map's narrator has even stimulated scholarly investigations similar to those of the early Chaucerians who sought to match each Canterbury pilgrim with an historically identifiable person.

⁷ See Matt. 10:37, *Biblia Vulgata*, ed. Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado, 6th ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1977). All references are to this edition.

⁸ Wilson and Sperber, "On Verbal Irony." Since the publication of their initial article on this topic—"Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction"—in 1981, the authors have made one key alteration in their terminology, replacing the term "mention" with the broader one "interpretation." For an explanation of this change, see Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*. To my knowledge, Wilson and Sperber's model has until now not been applied in a sustained manner to any modern or medieval literary text.

Indeed, according to their model the second assertion in this example illustrates key elements of verbal irony. This assertion has two crucial functions: it communicates both the *content* of the preceding assertion and the speaker's *opinion of* (or *response to*) it. Thus, it is more than a simple *report* of the first assertion's content. Further, marred as it is by substitutions, this "echo" does not offer a word-for-word replication. Rather, it provides what Wilson and Sperber term "a resemblance of content" ("On Verbal Irony" 64). To grasp the verbal irony, the reader must recognize that the second utterance both echoes and interprets the preceding utterance.

To do so, the reader must determine the second speaker's *attitude toward*, or *opinion of*, the first assertion. Diction, tone, and "immediate context" all aid the reader in understanding the speaker's attitude ("Use-Mention Distinction" 307). In this example, the second utterance conveys the speaker's attitude (and the monks') since the phrase *eorum deus* (their god) implies that the Cistercians agree with their god's teachings. The echoic second utterance distances the speaker from the first, essentially repudiating it. Similarly, *Noster* (our God) implies that Map's narrator (and by extension his audience) concurs with the precepts of the God of scriptures. Map's sly use of pronouns here, combined with numerous contextual clues, establishes the monks' attitude toward biblical teaching, the narrator's opinion of their stance, and the audience's own (recommended) position. Further, the attitude of disapprobation conveyed by this example is always a component of verbal irony according to Wilson and Sperber.

More noteworthy than the nature of the monks' particular spiritual failings, however, is the power of such paired utterances, which Map repeatedly employs to articulate the monks' lapses with such humorous effect (see Knowles and Aberth). The chief function of these striking ironic pairings is to throw into relief the White Monks' peculiar and quite revealing use of language. While appearing to maintain a serious tone and intention, the narrator's ironic reporting of the Cistercians' speech lays bare their consistent disfigurement of God's word. And the word betrays the inner man, or, in this case, the monk, as this narrator would have it. The Cistercians' habitual abuse of spiritual language mirrors at a verbal level the moral perversion evident in their daily affairs. In Map's satire, irony foregrounds a disjunction at the linguistic level, signaling the gap between biblical morality and the White Monks' conception of their righteousness.

The Medieval Response to Classical Definitions of Irony

It is of course doubtful that Walter Map himself would have characterized these contrasting speeches as ironic. Yet Sperber and Wilson's model possesses exceptional explanatory power, and it is in my view far preferable to the semantic definitions of irony that Map and his contemporaries inherited from classical antiquity (see Green 14-19). For example, Quintilian writes that, when confronted with irony either as a trope or figure, the interpreter understands "something which is the opposite of what is actually said":

Igitur *ironia*, quae est schema, ab illa, quae est tropus, genere ipso nihil admodum distat; (in utroque enim contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est).⁹

Therefore *ironia*, which is a figure, differs in no way in its own nature from that which is a trope; (for in both cases the opposite of what is said must be understood).

This definition was cited by numerous medieval authorities, such as the fourth-century grammarian Donatus, who writes in his *Ars Maior* or *Barbarismus* that “ironia est tropus per contrarium quod conatur ostendens” (irony is a trope expressing what it intends through its opposite).¹⁰ One of Map’s contemporaries, Alexander de Villa Dei (c. 1170-1250) offers a similar formulation in his influential grammar *Doctrinale*: “per voces dictis contraria dant ironiam” (the opposites to what has been said produce irony) (cited in Knox 10 n. 26).

Yet Quintilian’s definition fails to explain instances of *litotes*, or understatement, which is often classified as a kind of irony. Consider, for example, the following line from *Beowulf*. Punctuating his speech describing the unnatural horrors of Grendel’s mere, Hrothgar observes: “Nis þaet heoru stowe!” (That is no pleasant place) (*Beowulf* 52, 1372b). While most readers easily sense that Hrothgar’s remark is ironic, the traditional definition of irony cannot accommodate that recognition: the Lord of the Scyldings obviously does not mean the opposite of what he says, namely, that “the mere is a pleasant place.” Consequently, as Wilson and Sperber observe in their examination of *litotes*, “[u]nderstatements are traditionally analysed as saying, not the opposite of what is meant, but merely less than what is meant.”¹¹

However, we could understand Hrothgar’s utterance, “That is no pleasant place,” as an excellent example of one of Cicero’s formulations, also well known in the Middle Ages. In his *De Oratore*, Cicero writes that irony is present when the speaker says something other than what he thinks: “cum alia dicuntur ac sentias” (one thing is said but you mean another).¹² Expressing something “less than” could be understood as Cicero’s *alia* (another), that is, a *something else*, which is not the

⁹ *Institutio Oratoria* IX. ii. 44. Medieval writers had access to the crucial sections of Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* through a variety of texts, which echo them consistently: lexicons, glossaries, and handbooks for tropes and figures. See Knox’s *Ironia*, which offers the fullest treatment of irony in the Middle Ages to date.

¹⁰ Cited in Knox 9 n. 20. Bede’s definition repeats that of Donatus (Knox 9 n. 20).

¹¹ “On Verbal Irony” 54. See also Green’s categorization of *litotes* as a “small-scale type of [verbal] irony” (189-94). Green also identifies two kinds of understatement in romance: one is “a denial of the contrary,” and “[t]he other makes use of a minimum where circumstances call for a maximum” (190).

¹² “Urbana etiam dissimulatio est, cum alia dicuntur ac sentias, non illo genere de quo ante dixi, cum contraria dicas, ut Lamiae Crassus, cum toto genere orationis severe ludas, cum aliter sentias ac loquere” (dissimulation is witty, when one thing is said but you mean another, not in the way I spoke of earlier, when you say the opposite, as Lamius did to Crassus, when you mock severely with the whole style of the speech, when you mean otherwise from what you say) (*De Oratore* II. lxxvii. 269, cited in Knox 31 n. 55). Cicero also defines *dissimulatio* in a similar manner: “tum illa quae maxime quasi irreperit in hominum mentes, alia dicentis ac significantis dissimulatio, quae est periucunda cum orationis non contentione sed sermone tractatur” (then *dissimulation* is saying one thing and meaning another, which, as it were, especially creeps up on men’s minds and which is very pleasant when it is practiced not in the strife of debate but in casual conversation) (*De Oratore* III. liii. 203). Quintilian includes a similar definition: “et *ironia*, quae diversum ei quod dicit intellectum petit” (and *irony* which intends something different to be understood from what is said) (*Institutio Oratoria* VI. ii. 15, cited in Knox 31 n. 56).

opposite of the surface meaning. Hrothgar would then be understood to mean "The mere is a truly terrible place." But—like many classical writers who preceded them and many Renaissance authors who followed—some medieval scholars found the notion that irony means something other than what it says too broadly applicable to be useful. After all, the same definition could apply not only to allegory but to other tropes and figures as well.¹³

The scholastics also discovered that injunctions and commands resisted the semantic definitions of irony they had inherited from classical authorities. This resistance proved awkward since medieval authorities sometimes identified several biblical injunctions as ironic—for example, Elijah's words to the priests of Baal after they call upon their god: "Clamate voce maiore; deus enim est, et forsitan loquitur, aut in diversorio est, aut in itinere, aut certe dormit, ut excitetur" (Call out in a louder voice; for he is god, and perhaps he is conversing, or in lodgings, or on a journey, or asleep no doubt, to wake him) (I Kings xviii. 27; cited in Knox 29). Yet, the scholastics asked, if irony means the opposite of what it says, what constitutes the opposite of a command? Questions also posed the same difficulty for biblical interpreters in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. For example, the questions posed in I Corinthians xv. 55—"Ubi est, mors, victoria tua? Ubi est, mors, stimulus tuus? (O Death, where is thy victory? Death, where is thy sting?) are plainly ironic, yet what are the "opposites" of these questions?¹⁴

The Echoic-Interpretation Model of Irony

Classical definitions of irony are also ill-suited to the task of analyzing the Cistercian monks' contortion of biblical language. Of the models available to us, Wilson and Sperber's echoic-interpretation theory of irony has the greatest explanatory power for making sense of the pairs of reported speeches so crucial to Map's satire. As we have seen, their model proposes that irony is a particular kind of "echoic utterance, in which the speaker implicitly disassociates [himself or] herself from the opinions [he or] she is echoing" (Smith and Wilson 7). The distinction between simply "reporting" and "echoing" is fundamental to their model. A report confines itself merely to conveying the "content" of a preceding remark: "[a] report of speech or thought merely gives information about the content of the original" ("On Verbal Irony" 59). An echoic utterance does more. It conveys not only the content, but also the "the speaker's attitude or reaction to what was said or thought" (59). And, of course, echoic utterances can convey

¹³ Knox 32. Green also acknowledges the difficulty: "[I]rony and allegory, like irony and metaphor, both say one thing and mean another" (7). In formulating his own working definition of irony, Green seeks to differentiate it from lying, metaphor, and allegory, noting for instance that "whereas allegory establishes a correspondence between statement and meaning, irony insinuates a contrast" (7).

¹⁴ See Knox 30-31. Acknowledging the problematic nature of commands and questions, the scholastics developed a propositional model of irony based on Aristotelian principles of opposites. Their model recognized both the idea of implication and the role of the speaker's implied belief. However, Walter Map would not have known this propositional model, since he died before it was formulated. See Knox 19 ff.

quite a spectrum of “attitudes,” as Sperber and Wilson illustrate with the following example:

(16a) *Peter*: Ah, the old songs are still the best.

(16b) *Mary (fondly)*: Still the best.

(17a) *Peter*: Ah, the old songs are still the best.

(17b) *Mary (contemptuously)*: Still the best! (59)

Both of Mary’s responses (16b and 17b) are echoic, the former conveying approbation and the latter disdain (60). Through (17b) she distances herself from the “thought” she echoes and suggests that those bygone tunes are inferior (60). Sperber and Wilson contend that verbal irony “invariably involves the expression of an attitude of disapproval, thus falling into the same broad category as (17b)” (60). “The speaker echoes a thought she attributes to someone else, while disassociating herself from it with anything from mild ridicule to savage scorn” (60).

The speaker’s attitude is crucial. Like Sperber and Wilson, H. Paul Grice also believes that irony necessarily involves emotions and judgments: “irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation” (“Further Notes” 124). Grice believes that ironies primarily communicate a negative valuation. An ironic remark “reflect[s] a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt.”¹⁵ He concludes that an ironic statement “has to be, or at least appear to be, the expression of a certain sort of feeling or attitude” (125).

Wilson and Sperber also observe that the echoed thought or opinion does not necessarily have to be conveyed by an utterance spoken by an identifiable individual. That is, the thought may be an ideal or standard widely held within a community: “it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm.”¹⁶ The ironies of Map’s text do depend on the cultural attitudes of late twelfth-century society towards those who chose the monastic calling. As Constable states, it was “a call to a more difficult and demanding life, and one that excited almost universal admiration” (23). And he notes that the “experience of monastic life . . . was seen as part of society as a whole and as representing its highest values” (22). Further, we can identify with some degree of confidence certain aims shared by the monastic reformers themselves: “The reformers did not all have the same objectives, but austerity of life, seclusion, regularity, silence, and manual labour clearly excited admiration and imitation” (Constable 111).

In addition to the role such cultural norms can play, Wilson and Sperber’s notion of distance, that is, the delay between the original utterance and the ironic echo, is equally essential for grasping the ironies of *Distinctio* 1:25. They stress that it is not necessary for the beliefs which are commented on ironically to be held by an actual speaker:

¹⁵ Grice 124. Many theorists consider a broader range of judgments and emotions to be ironic than Grice does here. However, Grice’s suggestion that irony conveys an essentially negative judgment suits Map’s chapter on the Cistercians, where the narrator’s attitude to his subject is plainly hostile.

¹⁶ “On Verbal Irony” 60. In their example, they use the “code of an officer and a gentleman” to illustrate a current cultural norm. They also acknowledge that the speaker’s motives for disavowing the original idea, “disassociating herself,” may vary. The speaker may seek to distance herself from the original attitude because she regards it as simply untrue, or she regards it as “absurd” or ridiculous in a particular situation (60).

Some are immediate echoes, and others delayed; some have their source in actual utterances, others in thoughts or opinions; some have a real source, others an imagined one; some are traceable back to a particular individual, whereas others have a vaguer origin. ("Use-Mention Distinction" 309)

This notion of distance is important to Map's satire because in his text, as in others, the degree of distance between the original utterance and the echoic interpretation can vary considerably. In some cases, the echo immediately follows the original remark, as in the example "[n]oster dicit . . . deus eorum dicit" cited above. In others, the utterance echoes a remark that took place some time in the past (307). Echoes of scripture, which abound in Map's text, provide examples of echoes at a considerable remove from the original.

In addition, Wilson and Sperber also suggest that ironic, echoic utterances share many characteristics with indirect quotations. Like indirect quotations, ironic echoes do not necessarily offer "identical reproductions of the content of the original" ("On Verbal Irony" 64). "They may be paraphrases or summaries; they may be elaborations, spelling out some assumptions or implications that the original speaker took for granted, or that struck the hearer as particularly relevant. In such cases, the content of the indirect speech report resembles the content of the original without, however, being an identical reproduction of it . . ." (64).

An ironic echo, then, does not replicate the original word for word. Yet an ironic echo does possess what the authors term an "interpretive resemblance," or, in other words, "a resemblance of content" (64). More specifically, the term "interpretive resemblance" refers to "the resemblance of the propositional content" (65). Broadly speaking, resemblance "involves a sharing of properties: the more shared properties, the greater the resemblance" (65). In addition, when two utterances share a resemblance of their propositional content, they have "logical and contextual implications" in common.¹⁷ And since the degree to which these implications are shared can vary, the authors offer the following illustration: Mary says to Peter: (23) (a) "I met an agent last night." (b) "He can make me rich and famous" ("On Verbal Irony" 65). Wilson and Sperber contend that (b) can be interpreted in two ways: as a "straightforward assertion," (24) (a) "He can make me rich and famous, *I believe*" (65, emphasis added). Or, (b) could also be interpreted in the following manner: (24) (b) "He can make me rich and famous, *he says*" (65, emphasis added). The hearer or recipient of this sentence must understand it either as a *report of speech*, or as an *echoic utterance*. Consider the significance if the agent originally had said to Mary: (25) "I can make you rich and famous" (65). If the agent had said this, then (24) (b) "He can make me rich and famous, he says" would share the same propositions in all contexts and would constitute a literal interpretation (66). But (24) (b) would be understood differently if the agent had said to Mary instead: (26) "I can do for you what Michael Caine's agent did for him" (66). In this case, "Mary's utterance would be

¹⁷ Wilson and Sperber "On Verbal Irony" 65. Sperber and Wilson regard the context of an utterance as a part of the interpretive work performed by the hearer. That is, context is not encoded by the speaker: "the context for interpreting an utterance is generally not fixed in advance: it has to be constructed as part of the interpretation process" (Smith and Wilson 3). A contextual implication is "a logical implication derivable neither from the new information alone, nor from the context alone, but from the new information and the context combined" (Smith and Wilson 4).

less than a literal interpretation" because the proposition in (26) is not identical to that in (24) (b) "He can make me rich and famous, he says" (66). Consequently, (24) (b) is neither a straightforward assertion of (26) nor a literal interpretation of it.

Yet, while they are not identical in this instance, (23) (b) "He can make me rich and famous" and (26) do share what the authors call "a looser form of resemblance," if the context in which these conversational exchanges takes place contains at least one key assumption (66), namely, the common knowledge that Caine's agent did make him both wealthy and well known. The propositions conveyed by (23) (b) and (26) would then indeed share some implications (66). If so, "(26) would contextually imply (23) (b)" (66). (That is, "I can do for you what Michael Caine's agent did for him" contextually implies "He can make me rich and famous.") Since the propositions in each share some implications, "the report in (23) (b) thus interpretively resembles the agent's utterance in (26).

What Sperber and Wilson call a "looser form of resemblance" is crucial for our investigation of Map's ironies. This form of resemblance marks the reported speeches we are considering in his satire, and, as Sperber and Wilson demonstrate, they are found in everyday speech (66). According to their model, verbal ironies are "literal or non-literal interpretations . . . of an attributed thought or utterance" (66).

Accordingly, when encountering an ironic text such as Map's, the reader must first recognize that an ironic utterance is an echoic interpretation (literal or non-literal) of a preceding proposition. The reader must then ascertain the attitude of the speaker to what he has echoed. Sperber and Wilson suggest that when deciding whether or not a remark is ironic, the hearer relies on "information external to the utterance—contextual knowledge and other background assumptions—rather than the form or content of the utterance itself" ("Use-Mention Distinction" 301). Three elements in particular contribute to clarifying the speaker's "attitude" towards the proposition he or she echoes: diction, tone, and the "immediate context" (307). Once the hearer has recognized that an utterance is an example of echoic interpretation, and has determined the speaker's attitude, he or she can recover the necessary conversational implicatures.¹⁸

Establishing Context and the Narrator's Attitude in *De Nugis Curialium*

Fortunately for Map's readers, the detailed descriptions that contextualize the reported speeches of the monks leave no doubt about the narrator's attitude towards his subject; the chapter abounds with intratextual clues that guide the reader's understanding of the ironic interpretations of the Cistercians' own words. From the outset, *Distinctio* I:25 encourages the reader to identify both with the narrator's viewpoint and with the suffering of the Cistercians' many victims. Indeed, it explicitly urges the reader to perceive himself or herself as a fellow victim.

¹⁸ "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction" 309. "Conversational implicatures" is a term used by Grice and others to analyze verbal exchanges. An "implicatum" is that which is implied by an utterance. Conversational implicatures are those that can be "worked out" by an argument, whereas conventional implicatures are grasped intuitively. See pages 44-45 of his "Logic and Conversation" in *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, Ed. P. Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

One representative passage compares the Cistercians to a series of humanity's traditional oppressors.¹⁹ These monks, for example, lack the pity and restraint shown by "every invader" (*"omnis inuasor"*), who usually leaves something behind to inspire hope in his unfortunate victims (92). They leave nothing in their wake, whereas fields, walls, and plowshares survive the burning of the "fiercest robber" (*"seuissimus predo"*) (94). They empty the lands of their rightful inhabitants, whereas even a Nero or a Dacian doesn't expel the entire population from the land he conquers. The desolation they create is even greater than that wrought by nature itself. Although victims can salvage some possessions after the ravages of fire, water and wind, nothing is usable after the Cistercians have swept through the area.²⁰

The chapter's opening simile is crucial for defining the narrator's attitude toward the Cistercians. It suggests that like a pitiless bird of prey the Cistercians ceaselessly search out weak and defenseless victims to exploit:

Monachi tam albi quam nigri, sicut nisus alaudam territam, ita predam suam agnoscunt, milites scilicet quos deplumare possunt, qui uel patrimoniorum suorum consumptores sunt uel compediti debitis. (84)

Just as the hawk recognizes the frightened lark, monks both the white and the black recognize their prey, namely knights whom they can pluck, who have either consumed their patrimonies or are shackled with debts.

This image is especially important because it establishes the monks' appetitive financial motive at the outset. It implies that the Cistercians actively seek a particular kind of victim, those who are economically vulnerable and thus perhaps emotionally desperate. This passage begins to define the oppressive world in which the Cistercians operate, one in which the lack of money is equated with complete powerlessness and real fear (*"alaudam territam"*) (see Constable 85).

In addition to making these damning comparisons, the narrator associates the Cistercians with morally compromised characters. They speak, for example, with the voice of the Pharisee:

Cum Phariseo dicunt: "Non sumus ut ceteri hominum," sed non dicunt: "Decimas damus omnium que possidemus." Cum eo dicunt de singulis nobis: "Nec ut iste publicanus," et nos dicimus: "Deus propicius esto nobis peccatoribus." (Map 88; see Luke 18:11-13)

With the Pharisee they say: "We are not as other men," but they do not say: "We give tithes of all that we own." With him they say about each of us: "Neither like this publican," and we say: "God be merciful to us sinners."

In this passage, the narrator distances himself from the Cistercians through a characteristic juxtaposition of speakers—"with the Pharisee they say," "with him they say"—in contrast to "we say." Both the Cistercians and the narrator are characterized by the company they keep; they are not isolated antagonists, but have

¹⁹ This is by no means a complete list of the many unflattering comparisons found throughout the text. For example, the Cistercians are also compared to the Welsh, who were in the author's eyes a barbaric people. *"Illi tamen inuerecundius et manifestiore ui captiuant et interficiunt homines quam isti"* (Yet these Cistercians seize and kill men with a more shameful and open violence than the Welsh [100]).

²⁰ Map 94. For a discussion of the Cistercians' land policies and the issue of depopulation, see Constable 118-19.

many allies. The narrator opposes the Cistercians and their associates (the Pharisee, their god, Nero, Dacian, the circling hawk) to himself with his allies (Our God, the Truth, the reader, the Cistercians' victims, and the terrified lark).

The narrator also quietly co-opts the reader's allegiance by using the first person plural. And when "we" echo the scriptures, and especially the words of Christ or John the Baptist, the reader is explicitly allied with the Christian God against the Cistercians. He wastes no time in identifying both himself and the reader with the numerous victims of these monks as well. For example, after describing the Cistercians' left-handed alms-giving and their failure to relieve the suffering of the poor, he concedes that they are in fact capable of a genuine (if highly selective) hospitality:

Hospitales inuicem, id est inter se, sine murmure possunt esse, sed non nobis, Domine Deus noster, non nobis. (Mapp 98; see Peter 4:9, Ps. 113 B:1)

Without complaint they can be mutually hospitable, that is among themselves, but not to us, oh Lord our God, not to us.

Through his choice of pronouns, the narrator implies that this has been his own experience of the Cistercians in the past, and implies that the reader might experience a similar fate at their hands.

Ironic Echoic Utterances in *Distinctio I*:25

The juxtaposition of "Noster dicit" and "deus eorum dicit" cited at the outset illustrates a relatively simple form of ironic utterance. In this instance, the ironic utterance immediately follows the original utterance which it echoes:

Noster dicit: "Qui non reliquerit omnia propter me, non est me dignus"; deus eorum dicit: "Qui non adquisierit omnia propter se, non est me dignus." (Map 92; see Matt. 10:37)

Our God says: "He who does not leave everything behind for my sake is not worthy of me"; their god says: "He who does not acquire all things for his own sake is not worthy of me."

As we have seen, the narrator's use of "Noster dicit" identifies both himself and the reader with the content of the original, simultaneously conveying his approval for the first statement, and distancing himself (and us) from the words of "deus eorum." "Their god" echoes the words of "our God" almost verbatim, and, initially, the closeness of the wording might suggest that the two utterances share identical propositions. This similarity seems to imply that the Cistercians adhere to "our God's" injunction just as zealously as "we" do. Yet, as we have seen, a non-literal echoic utterance is not a word-for-word account. The key substitution of "adquisierit" for "reliquerit" subverts the meaning of the original injunction, communicating the Cistercians' fundamental disdain for it. Their deliberate perversion of the first injunction conveys unambiguously their contemptuous attitude towards it. Further, the narrator himself reports this utterance within the context of his own unflagging condemnation of the monks.

Indeed, this ironic echo is a perfect inversion of the first injunction. Although "their god's" ironic echo does indeed communicate the opposite of the original injunction, it does not "mean the opposite of what it says," as the traditional model of irony would suggest. Further, it does not mean "something other than what it

says," as Cicero proposed.²¹ And finally, in order for readers to savor Map's patterned juxtapositions, it is not necessary for them to substitute figurative meanings for literal ones. In this instance, the irony is only comprehensible when it is perceived as a contemptuous echoic interpretation of "our God's" words.

This example is drawn from a dense passage composed entirely of similar juxtapositions, which can be analyzed in the same way:

Noster: "Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem"; eorum: "Beatus qui fecerit egenum et pauperem." (Map 92; see Ps. 40:2)

Our God: "Blessed is he who considers the poor and the needy"; theirs: "Blessed is he who makes the poor and the needy."

and

Noster dicit: "Nemo potest seruire Deo et mammon"; eorum dicit: "Nemo potest seruire Deo sine mammona." (Map 92; see Matt. 6:24)

Ours says: "No one can serve God and mammon"; theirs says: "No one can serve God without mammon"

Again, substitutions for single words effectively subvert the meaning of the first utterance ("fecerit" for "intelligit" in the first example and "sine" for "et" in the second). Despite the almost perfect replication of the original injunctions, the crucial alterations completely disfigure biblical language.

Other ironic utterances display a somewhat more complex method of inversion, as in the following example:

Noster dicit: "Qui habet duas tunicas, det non habenti"; eorum: "Si non habes duas tunicas, aufer habenti." (Map 92)

Our God says: "He who has two tunics, let him give to one who has not"; their god says: "If you do not have two tunics, take from one who has."

Again, the echoic utterances contain the crucial, disfiguring substitutions: "aufer" for "det." In addition, the ironic echo also displays a syntactic shift by changing the first clause to a negative and the second to an affirmative.

These passages mirror at a verbal level what the narrator claims the Cistercians are doing in the world at large. Like these verbal substitutions, the apparently innocent, self-denying innovations the Cistercians have introduced into their new order, such as the decision not to wear breeches, simply create more opportunities for sinfulness:²² "And the wind is desired to curb Venus, and it is good that they lack breeches and are breathed upon" ("desideraturque uentus pro freno Veneri, bonum est ut braccis careant et insufflentur," 102); "although the wind not unjustly penetrated the places yielded to it" ("licet uentus non iniuste in loca sibi concessa impegert," 102). The deformation of biblical language evident in the Cistercians' speech reflects their equally systematic subversion of Chris-

²¹ That is, it does not mean "He who acquires all things for my sake is worthy of me." In his *De Oratore* (II. lxvii. 269) Cicero writes: "Urbana etiam dissimulatio est, cum alia dicuntur ac sentias, non illo genere de quo ante dixi, cum contraria dicas . . ." (Irony is humorous when one thing is said but you mean another, not of the same type concerning which I spoke earlier, when you say the opposite [cited in Knox 31 n. 55]).

²² The Cistercians' lack of underclothes and the increased risk of embarrassment it offered was a *topos* exploited by Nigel of Canterbury and Matthew of Vendome among many others. See Curtius 434. Constable speculates: "The issue was certainly overblown and perhaps manufactured, like the question of what Scotsmen wear under their kilts, since monks working out of doors in the illustrations in the manuscripts from Cîteaux are depicted wearing trousers" (193).

tian values in their daily lives.

The following examples display a different kind of juxtaposition. Instead of contrasting "our God's" words with "their god's" words, the narrator highlights the monks' suspicious silence, that is, the holy words they have left unspoken. Echoing the scriptures, he pretends to report the pious speeches he has never heard them utter:

Non dicunt: "Domine, non sum dignus vocari filius tuus, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum." (90)

They do not say: "Lord, I am not worthy to be called your son, I am not worthy that you should come beneath my roof."

This sentence is another characteristic pastiche of phrases borrowed from two different biblical passages.²³ Here the narrator echoes the biblical phrases, but disassociates the Cistercians from them, since they do not themselves echo and affirm them. The context lets the reader know that he disapproves of their failure to do so. In this example, instead of disfiguring scripture with their irreverent echoes, the Cistercians refuse to ally themselves with it through their silence. Their very speechlessness condemns them.

The narrator's account of this incriminating silence can also be explained by Wilson and Sperber's model, for they theorize, as we have seen earlier, that "[t]he thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance . . ." ("On Verbal Irony" 60). The narrator is not claiming to report the speech of an identifiable Cistercian monk or even an imaginary chorus of monks. His utterance evokes the monks' attitude, their refusal to ally themselves with other Christians through the pious repetition of biblical verse. A further example again emphasizes their lack of genuine Christian humility:

"Non dicunt: Non sum dignus procumbens solvere corrigiam calceamentorum eius" (90)

They do not say: "prostrating myself, I am not worthy to loosen the lachet of his shoes."

Here, the narrator echoes Mark 1:7:

"Venit fortior me post me: cuius non sum dignus procumbens solvere corrigiam calceamentorum eius."

A more powerful one comes after me, the lachet of whose shoes I, prostrate, am unworthy to loosen.

The ironic echoic utterances examined here convey, in their own unusual way, many of the common charges made against the late twelfth-century reformers and the Cistercian order in particular. They expose attitudes and practices that contravene society's ideal of monasticism and that certainly collide with the Cistercians' own self image. The narrator's exploitation of what he considers their damning silence is particularly pointed because it resonates against the priority monastic reformers placed on silence.²⁴ Both the Cluniacs and Cistercians developed systems of "sign-language . . . in order to avoid unnecessary speech"

²³ Luke 15:21: "Dixitque ei filius: pater, peccavi in caelum, et coram te, iam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus" (And his son said to him: "Father, I have sinned in heaven, and before you, now I am not worthy to be called your son"). Matthew 8:8: "Et respondens centurio ait: Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum: sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur puer meus" (And answering the centurion said: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter beneath my roof: but say only a word, and my boy will be healed").

²⁴ Constable stresses that "[s]ilence is mentioned frequently in the Rule of Benedict and figures prominently in programmes of monastic reform" (198).

(Constable 198). According to Map's narrator, however, theirs is not the quiescence of spiritual contemplation and self-restraint; they are silent for all the wrong reasons.

Other ironic echoes dramatize the Cistercians' superciliousness, which also drew fire from some of Walter Map's irritated contemporaries. Consider his narrator's account: "With the Pharisee they say: 'We are not as other men' . . . With him they say about each of us: 'Neither like this publican.'" To their foes, the Cistercians appeared to present their order as the most certain path to personal salvation among a number of possible routes. For example, their claim of exclusivity and self-righteousness provoked Peter the Venerable to write in his Letter 28: O the new breed of pharisees that has come again into the world . . . who separate themselves from others, prefer [themselves] to others, and say that the prophet predicted that they would be called, "Do not touch me" [John 20:17] because I am clean" [Job 33.9]. (cited in Constable 219)

Irony also underscores the White Monks' repudiation of humility, a virtue essential to their calling: "They do not say: 'Lord, I am not worthy to be called your son, I am not worthy that you should come beneath my roof.'"

A number of the ironies examined here also involve the chief accusation brought against the Cistercians in the second half of the twelfth century: greed. Stephen of Tournai, for example, criticized the order "for cupidity and robbery" (Constable 32). And, according to Map's narrator, they are not merely acquisitive, disenfranchizing both needy individuals and institutions, but positively predatory, as the following ironic utterances suggest:

He who does not acquire all things for his own sake is not worthy of me.
Blessed is he who makes the poor and needy.
No one can serve God without mammon.
If you do not have two tunics, take from one who has.

Further, the Cistercians were also linked with the phenomenon of depopulation, a result of the monks' penchant for obtaining land for the order's members to farm, and for turning out the original occupants (Constable 33-34). Institutions suffered as a result of their policies as well. As the Cistercians gained more and more land, they deprived other, often less affluent, monasteries and churches of crucial income (33). Indeed, their practices stimulated Pope Alexander III to threaten to revoke the Cistercians' exemption from paying tithes, which had originally been granted to the monks when they were struggling to establish their order earlier in the century (Constable 33).

Walter Map employed the echoic utterances analyzed here in order to accentuate important misdeeds and spiritual failings; they showcase particular faults (indeed often a rank criminality) absolutely central to his satire. While these particular ironies are significant and unusual, in many other respects, Map's satire is a traditional one. As a whole, Map's *Distinctio* 1:25 reflects satire's traditional—and conservative—corrective purpose. It champions a return to the values and conduct that flourished before the rise of the new religious orders.

Since Map entrusted such key elements in the satire to these ironic, echoic utterances, he must have hoped that they would be correctly understood by his audience. But as many theorists of irony observe, "the subtler the irony, the greater the risks" (Sperber and Wilson, "On Verbal Irony" 67). As we have seen, Map guides his readers, helping them first to recognize an utterance as echoic and

then to determine the speaker's attitude, from features such as diction, tone, and immediate context. While grasping these ironic, echoic utterances may require effort, that effort is "later offset by appropriate rewards" (Wilson and Sperber, *Relevance* 242).

For a number of twentieth-century readers at least, amusement is one reward for overcoming such "processing difficulties." There is something delicious about Map's seemingly irreverent treatment of scriptural verse: the cheeky substitutions for key words, the impertinent snatching of verses and their radical recontextualizing in his own pages. Yet, this job is so deftly handled that the end result of this exuberance, as A.G. Rigg observes, is Map's "seamless texture of classical, medieval and biblical allusion" (92).

When we consider this business of rewards, we should also recall the medieval commonplace that what does not entertain, fails to instruct. We are reminded of this sentiment by Chaucer's Host, for example, who asserts that the Monk's Tale was so boring that he was in danger of falling asleep and slipping off his horse into the mud, but for the tinkling of bells festooning the bridle of the Monk's horse. So soporific is the Monk's performance that his attempt to instruct is sabotaged:

Thanne hadde your tale al be toold in veyn;
For certainly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
"Whereas a man may have noon audience,
Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence"
(Prologue to the Nun's Priest's Tale, lines 2799-3991)

It is Map's unusual ironic utterances and their humorous effects that render his "sentence" memorable.

Furthermore, when we consider the rewards Map's unusual ironies offer us, we recognize several significant advantages provided by Sperber and Wilson's model. Grasping Map's ironies does not require the appeal to the distinction between figurative and literal utterances typical of many traditional definitions of irony. Noting that "an ironical utterance is traditionally analyzed as literally saying one thing and figuratively meaning the opposite," they observe that these "traditional semantic accounts" do not define "figurative meaning," nor do they outline "a mechanism for deriving the figurative meaning of a sentence" ("Use-Mention Distinction" 295). Further, these definitions do not offer a basis "for explaining why figurative utterances exist," that is, for explaining what motivates a speaker to substitute an ironical utterance for a literal, straightforward one, since they both mean the same thing (according to the traditional account) (295). Consequently, because the classical semantic definition fails to offer a sound pragmatics of irony, it is a limited analytic tool.

In addition, their model does not presuppose that the reader possess special methods or abilities to attain these rewards. They note that we use ordinary processes to grasp these ironies: understanding such utterances "follows from very general mechanisms of verbal communication rather than from some extra level of competence" (*Relevance* 242). In other words, "whatever abilities and procedures are needed to understand it are independently needed for the interpretation of quite ordinary non-figurative utterances" (238).

We might add that their model also does not presuppose special knowledge on the part of the reader. This issue of the reader's special knowledge (of authorial beliefs and intentions, for example) is a particular weakness of the communications model of irony developed in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Wayne C. Booth's influential model, for example, an ironic utterance implies a set of assumptions held by the historical author. The successful reader must first recognize the incongruity between the assumptions apparently embraced by the speaker and those of the historical author, and then repudiate the speaker's point of view, distancing himself or herself from both the speaker and all those who share such beliefs.²⁵ Booth suggests that the study of the historical author and his or her surroundings (especially the knowledge of the author's canon and its critical reception) will familiarize the reader with the author's crucial set of assumptions (personal beliefs and values) and so enable him or her to interpret the ironies correctly, that is, as the author intended (149). Yet, familiarizing ourselves with a set of assumptions attributable to Walter Map would be problematic indeed, as it would be for many other authors.²⁶

And finally, the echoic-interpretation model outlined here also emphasizes the second critical function of these utterances within Map's satire. They are revelatory in two ways, for not only do they disclose the link between word and deed, between language and opinion among the White Monks, but they also convey the narrator's attitude towards the Cistercians, and thus contribute significantly to building the narrator's dominating presence in this satire. Even if that attitude is expressed obliquely through echoic utterances, its communication is essential to verbal irony. In fact, Wilson and Sperber contend that "verbal irony *invariably involves the implicit expression of an attitude*, and that the relevance of an ironical utterance invariably depends on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed" (*Relevance* 239, emphasis added). And, indeed, Walter Map's narrator expresses himself with such memorable virulence throughout *Distinctio* I:25 that his own attitudes seem to compete at times with the Cistercians' depredations and offenses for the right to be considered the principal subject matter of his satire.

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²⁵ See his analysis of Huxley's *Brave New World* in *A Rhetoric of Irony* 85-86. See also the various studies by D.C. Meucke.

²⁶ No extra-textual sources such as personal letters survive to illuminate Map's intentions. Further, an author's canon provides an unstable foundation for constructing his or her personal beliefs, as scholarship on Map's works demonstrates. While nineteenth-century scholars attributed to him some of the best twelfth-century secular poetry and the early thirteenth-century prose *Lancelot*, twentieth-century scholars have withdrawn the prose romance and all but a handful of poems. The set of beliefs that might be constructed by recent scholars would thus differ significantly from that of their nineteenth-century predecessors. For Map's canon see Brooke-Mynors xix-xxiii, and A.G. Rigg, "Golias and Other Pseudonyms" 65-109.

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