



MEDIATING THE WORD: ST. PATRICK, THE TRIVIUM, AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION

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While Ireland's previous exposure to Christianity and the Roman Empire, its ongoing contact with Britain, as well as the papal mission of Palladius to Ireland, precludes consideration of Patrick as the sole figure of Irish conversion to Christianity and "civilization,"¹ the implications of the Patrician theme are substantial. He is a logical starting point for the exploration of both Irish and Insular² Christianity as it evolved from the late-fifth century.³ Whereas Palladius has remained an elusive figure of history,⁴ Patrick became the

¹ On this subject see also Stevenson, "Literacy in Ireland: The Evidence of the Patrick Dossier in the Book of Armagh"; Dumville, "Some British Aspects of the Earliest Irish Christianity."

² "Insular" is a term of convenience, which in its broadest sense refers to the unique cultural milieu of Ireland and Britain, from the sub-Roman period of the fifth century to the eleventh-century arrival of the Normans in Anglo-Saxon England.

³ Cf. Ó Laoghaire, "Irish Spirituality," 73: "The first and indeed permanent, voice of our spirituality is found in the two small and touching documents left us by Saint Patrick ... it is remarkable how the special traits of our Christianity, particularly in the early days, can be traced in Patrick's account of his own life and spiritual experience.... I speak of spirituality in the sense of ... the expression of [the] Gospel in Irish terms and under Irish conditions." See also O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 1–27.

⁴ As for example in Prosper of Aquitaine's chronicle entry for 431: see Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, item 28 (for general discussion see De Paor, *Saint Patrick's World*, 70–87). On the identity of Palladius, see also Ó Cróinín, "Who was Palladius 'First Bishop of the Irish'?", in which it is argued that Palladius may be mentioned in the fifth-century poem *De reditu suo* by Claudius Rutilius Namatianus. Ó Cróinín has elsewhere made the argument that a remnant from Palladius' mission, an Easter table, is evidenced in the writings of seventh-century Hiberno-Latin authors ("New Light on Palladius"); Dumville disagrees and concludes, "whether the 'Easter-cycle of Patrick' was Palladius's or St. Patrick's, or belonged to neither, remains an open question" ("Bishop Palladius's Computus?", 88; but see Koch, "The Early Chronology for St Patrick (c. 351–428)", 114–118). As to the memory of Palladius and his mission in early Christian Ireland, Wood has offered his opinion that "Columbanus was after all born in Leinster in the sixth century; he probably regarded Palladius, not Patrick, as the apostle of Ireland. Luxeuil is not known to have promoted the cult of early Irish saints. Fursey, Foilán and Ultán, by contrast, travelled with relics of St. Patrick" ("The *Vita Columbani* and Merovingian Hagiography," 69).

prototypical icon of Irish Christianity, celebrated in legend from *circa* 600 CE.⁵ In the figure of Patrick, the Romano-British and Irish cultures and their respective technological stages pass through each other with the effect of reconfiguring the Irish environment.⁶ Evidence for this interface is embedded in his writings, and in the dramatization and myth of Patrick in legend, in which he is figured as the prime mediator between Christian and pagan cultures, the bearer of literacy and salvation for the Irish. His writings, the so-called *Confessio* (or “Confession”) and *Epistola ad Coroticum* (or “Letter to Coroticus”), are the effective beginnings of the Christian Latin literary tradition in the Insular world.⁷ Howlett has defined their importance as witnesses to this period of fundamental change:

The works of St. Patrick are the oldest extant Latin texts written in these islands by a native of these islands for inhabitants of these islands. In his words and patterns of thought and literary structures Patrick illustrates the reception and assimilation of an ancient Biblical tradition, which became through him the very foundation of our tradition.⁸

In addition to illustrating the “reception and assimilation of ancient Biblical tradition,” Patrick’s writings represent the effects of the transformation

⁵ The putative date of the *Audite omnes amantes*. See further discussion in Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 237, n. 237. The texts of both Tírechán and Muirchú date from the mid- to late-seventh century (see Lapidge and Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400–1200*, items 301, 303 [hereinafter referred to as *BCLL*]; Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints’ Lives*, 10–14), the first recension of the *Tripartite Life* is dated to the early ninth century (Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 8–15).

⁶ Cf. McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 182: “Two cultures or technologies can, like astronomical galaxies, pass through one another without collision; but not without change of configuration. In modern physics there is, similarly, the concept of ‘interface’ or the meeting and metamorphosis of two structures.”

⁷ Patrick’s *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Coroticum*: The Book of Armagh, fols 22–24v (*Confessio* only), s. ix; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 17626, fol 72 sqq, s. x; Arras, Bibliothèque Publique 450, fols 50v–52v, s. xii; London, British Library, Cotton Nero E. I, fol 169v sqq, *ca* 1000; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fell 4 fols 158–164, s. xi ex., and Fell 3 fols 7–11v, s. xii²; Rouen, Bibliothèque Publique 1391 (U. 39) fols 157v–9 (*Confessio* only), s. xi-xii. Edition: Hood, ed. and trans., *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu’s Life*. For more bibliographical and manuscript information see Kenney, *Sources*, item 29, and *BCLL*, items 25–26. The identified writings of Pelagius (*ca* 350–430) and Faustus of Riez (d. *ca* 490), provide additional evidence for Christian practice in Britain in the Roman and sub-Roman periods. On Pelagius see *BCLL* items 2–9 (“certainly” written by him) and items 10–20 (“very possibly” written by him); on Faustus see items 21–24. All subsequent references to Hood’s edition and translation of the *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad Coroticum* are indicated by the sigla C and E respectively; the life of Patrick written by Muirchú is referred to as *Muirchú*.

⁸ *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop*, 121.

and translation of the Late Antique Latin literary tradition. As a result of *transformatio* and *translatio* through Patrick, the Irish become part of the living and salvific “letter of Christ to the ends of the earth,” “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God”⁹—a process of remaking in which new physical and spiritual bodies are acquired in Christ, the Word made flesh. The *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad Coroticum* bear evidence of the Insular perception of the effects of the word on the physical and metaphysical body in its infancy. They reveal a mind affected by the influence of Late Antique conceptions of the mystical nature of writing, including the Pauline context, twinned with the post-Augustinian reformulation of the language arts, in particular the *ars rhetoricae*, as articulated in Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana*.¹⁰

My purpose is not to discuss Patrick’s literary expertise in terms of Late-Antique rhetorical style, as others have done,¹¹ but to advance the argument that an Augustinian view of the power of language in Christ as it connects with the human body, underscored by Christian Latin pedagogy, infuses Patrick’s writing.¹² Building upon the Pauline image of the *epistola* as a

⁹ C11; see discussion in Nagy, *Conversing*, 28–29. Nagy argues that Patrick is engaged in a wholesale discrediting of the written word through the use of Paul’s words (30).

¹⁰ The term “post-Augustinian” is used in relation to the Latin grammatical and rhetorical tradition to indicate the phenomenon of its adaptation by Christian intellectuals in Late Antiquity and its medieval continuation, as exemplified by and articulated in the works of Augustine, particularly *De doctrina Christiana*. Although the direct impact of this work on early medieval views of Latin education and language arts has been questioned (see below, n. 69 and n. 77), the position it represents, and Augustine’s thought on the matter, would seem to have had influence, for example, on the writings of Patrick explored in this study.

¹¹ For the most part, the on-going debate concerning Patrick’s facility with the Latin language, especially the verity of his claims of “rusticity,” seems to be an extension of two formative opinions: Mohrmann’s negative view, given in a four-part lecture series delivered to the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin (published as *The Latin of Saint Patrick* in 1961), favoured, for example, by Shanzer (see “*Iuvenes vestri visiones videbunt*: Visions and the Literary Sources of Patrick’s *Confessio*”); and Chadwick’s positive view, in *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (1963), favoured, for example, by Howlett (see “*Ex saliva scripturae meae*”).

¹² The influence of Augustine on Patrick has been a vexed question since the appearance of Misch’s *History of Autobiography*, in which he proposed that there were echoes of Augustine’s *Confessiones* in Patrick’s *Confessio*. Arguments for influence, parallels, and echoes: Misch, *ibid.*, II:681; Bieler, *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii* II:86 and “The Place of Saint Patrick,” 69–70; Courcelle, *Confessiones de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire*, 211–213; Dronke, “Saint Patrick’s Reading,” 27–34; against: O’Meara, “The Confession of St. Patrick and the Confessions of St. Augustine,” 190–197 and “Patrick’s *Confessio* and Augustine’s *Confessiones*”; Mohrmann, *The Latin of Saint Patrick*, 7, 34; Hanson, *Saint Patrick: Confession et lettre à Coroticus*, 50. For a summary of scholarly perspectives on the debate, see Dronke, “Saint Patrick’s Reading,” 22–24, and Shanzer, “*Iuvenes vestri visiones videbunt*,” 172–179.

figure of ontology, and through this figure, as an interface connecting the self to others and the human community to Christ, Patrick uses the epistolary form to transcend the limits of the individual and his private states of consciousness. Resonant with Augustine's literary expression in the *Confessiones*,¹³ Patrick rhetorically fuses exterior and interior experiences, through the figures of the dream-state, the "inner man," and autobiography, as a way of expressing the simultaneous nature of physical and metaphysical involvement in the body. In this way, both the body and the letter, as analogous images, become meeting places in which the divine and the human interconnect in a transformative process through the manipulation of word. In response to his audience, Patrick uses *rhetorica* as a literary figure in and of itself in order to highlight the tensions between himself and those enemies of Christ, from his ecclesiastical superiors to marauding apostates and pagans, who conspire to derail his mission.

**The double-edged sword:
Carving God's territory in the *Epistola ad Coroticum***

Patrick's letter to the leader Coroticus and his soldiers, traditionally known as the *Epistola ad Coroticum*, brings into view a social scene in fifth-century Ireland that would have otherwise remained invisible to history. As such, it is an important witness to the interaction of pagans, Christians, and apostates, Romans (presumably Romano-British), Irish (both *Scotti* and *Hiberionaci*), Picts, Franks, and Roman Gauls.¹⁴ The letter is potential proof of a modicum of pre-existing Latin alphabetic literacy in fifth-century Ireland, as well as Christian contact in Ireland that pre-dates Patrick's mission. It seems clear that Coroticus, or those in his entourage, were literate, and had familiarity with the Latin language and its media. The *Epistola* may shed light on the extent to which communication by letter was conducted in Ireland, by giving some evidence of the process involved: "With my own hand I have written and composed these words to be given, delivered, and sent to the soldiers of Coroticus";¹⁵ Patrick closes somewhat enigmatically, by asking that "whoever is a willing servant of God be a carrier of this letter, so that on no account it be suppressed or hidden by anyone, but rather be read before all the people, and in

¹³ The text of St. Augustine's autobiographical publication is referred to throughout as *Confessiones*; the Latin edition cited is O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*. English translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ See E2, E14.

¹⁵ E2: "Manu mea scripsi atque condidi verba ista danda et tradenda, militibus mittenda Corotici."

the presence of Coroticus himself.”¹⁶ It is not clear whether this address is to specific messengers selected for the task, or a call for the general circulation of the contents of the letter.

Reminding his audience that he had sent a previous letter to negotiate terms with Coroticus, he shows that he understood the power of the letter as an instrument of military and political communication,¹⁷ and was perhaps following some kind of protocol. Letters to and from Roman soldiers (among other administrative documents) found at the Vindolanda outpost in northern England indicate that communication by letter was a regular activity, even at the very fringes of the Roman Empire.¹⁸ Patrick was unsuccessful in his first attempt, and so this second letter is, presumably, of a different quality. It reinforces the work of the *legatio Christi*, who believed he had recreated Ireland and the Irish in the body and language of Christ. It sets that righteous body of Christ against those who would derange it through their evil behaviour. By the sword of the letter and the word of God, Patrick, in his capacity as priest and bishop, effectively kills the evilly transformed soldiers. It is not a final pronouncement, however, since Patrick ultimately invites these creatures to repent,¹⁹ not before reminding them that they have all received one baptism in Christ and have one God.

In the letter, Patrick excommunicates Coroticus and his followers, declaring them *alieni*.²⁰ The anathematization encompasses everything from their ontological status as human beings, to their secular legal status. He attacks their status as “citizens” or *cives*—an important Roman legal term—and exiles them from all human, earthly realms. The exilic action is done in a progressive manner that first severs them from his own community (whatever *civibus meis*

¹⁶ E21: “quicumque famulus Dei promptus fuerit ut sit gerulus litterarum harum, ut nequaquam subtrahatur vel abscondatur a nemine, sed magis potius legatur coram cunctis plebibus et praesente ipso Corotico.”

¹⁷ These were the two main uses of the letter in the Roman Empire. Roman magistrates and the Senate corresponded long-distance to officials in other regions by letter (Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 209). The written record of the Roman military is extensive, and includes letters among the “largest categories of preserved documents” (ibid. 217).

¹⁸ See Bowman and Thomas, eds., *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets*.

¹⁹ E21.

²⁰ E5: “Quapropter resciat omnis homo timens Deum quod a me alieni sunt et a Christo Deo meo, pro quo legationem fungor.” *Alieni* is the word used in the penitential literature and canons to refer to those who are excommunicated. That Patrick excommunicates Coroticus and his men has been interpreted as evidence that Coroticus was living in Ireland, assuming that Patrick considered his excommunicatory powers valid only there and only over residents (Thompson, “St. Patrick and Coroticus,” 108; see also Dumville, “Coroticus,” 107–115 for more on Coroticus’ identity).

may specifically mean), from the community of the holy Romans (whether Romano-Christians generally or Romano-British Christians), and then, by pronouncement, transforms them into “citizens of demons.” Obviously Patrick, coming as he did from a Romano-British family of some civic status, presumably having some notion of the importance of the Irish tribal unit,²¹ and with an awareness of the role of a Christian bishop, would have understood the implications of calling into question one’s “citizenship” on all those grounds.²² The problem of existing outside an implied central community is a problem that Patrick addresses for both sides; such distinctions are crucial to his self-image as slave and exile in the name of Christ.²³ Regardless of Coroticus’ secular allegiances, the Irish Christian being Irish does not justify a Christian doing evil to another Christian, and so Patrick reasserts the dominion of Christ as a total nation of believers. In doing so, he rhetorically self-identifies with the *Hiberionaci*: “The wickedness of the wicked has prevailed over us. We have become like outsiders. Perhaps they do not believe we have received one baptism or have one God as Father? It is an affront to them that we are Irish [*Hiberionaci*].”²⁴ By redefining the boundaries of inclusivity, Patrick re-asserts the Christian citizenry, and thereby, the integrity of Christ’s body. As opposed to Patrick, the *legatio Christi* and his *Hiberionaci*, the others are *rebellatores Christi* (E19), and for reasons that have their roots in religious as well as secular law, the validity and importance of which Patrick does not wish to belabour: “Outside are dogs and sorcerers and murderers” (E18, cf. Apocalypse

²¹ The most specific allusions occur in C41, E12 (“fili Scottorum et filiae regulorum monachi et virgines Christi”), C42 (“una benedicta Scotta genitiva nobilis pulcherrima adulta erat”), C52 (“Interim praemia dabam regibus praeter quod dabam mercedem filiis ipsorum qui mecum ambulant”), C53 (“Vos autem experti estis quantum ego erogavi illis qui iudicabant per omnes regiones quos ego frequentius visitabam”); he generally acknowledges the subversion that conversion to Christianity and, more specifically, conversion to the life of celibacy represents to the Irish, which speaks to his knowledge of Irish social order (C42).

²² Dumville cautions: “it is unwise to press the word *cives* to a specific association with Roman citizenship; the clue is provided by the *sancti Romani*, the Roman saints” (“Coroticus”, 108). However, Patrick was aware of his former “station” and his own words indicate a conscious recollection of his citizenship-status in Roman (and Roman ecclesiastical) terms (see C1, E10). There is reason to believe that Patrick’s familial estate in Britain was substantial (see further, Higham, “Literary Evidence for Villas”; compare Dark, “St. Patrick’s *villula*”). He is vocal about his renunciation of it in the name of his mission, intertwining Roman legal distinctions and Pauline language (E10).

²³ See McLuhan (Elizabeth), “*Ministerium servitutis meae*.”

²⁴ E16: “Praevaluit iniquitas iniquorum super nos. Quasi extranei facti sumus. Forte non credunt unum baptismum percepimus vel unum Deum patrem habemus? Indignum est illis Hiberionaci sumus.” *Scottus* refers pejoratively to the pagan Irish; *hibernus*, *hiberionacus* are likely used as neutral terms. For further discussion see Dumville, “Coroticus,” 109.

22:15); “Avarice is a mortal sin” (E9); “A murderer cannot be with Christ” (E9).

From their designation as “citizens of demons,” Patrick fills in the profile, calling them slaves and sons of Satan, patricides, fratricides, and rapacious wolves on account of their wicked deeds and their ensnarement by sin and the devil.²⁵ He uses an echo of formulaic language marked by triple repetition to emphasize the alien nature of the soldiers, who, in the manner of the enemy, live in a state of death. Singling out the soldiers’ associates, Irish,²⁶ Picts, and apostates,²⁷ gives contour to the image of the “enemy” living in death. It mirrors the triplicate emphasis of the soldiers’ “bloody” nature, forming a unit that would have been read (aloud) to striking effect: “Ritu hostili in morte vivunt, socii Scottorum atque Pictorum apostatarumque. Sanguilentos sanguinare de sanguine...”²⁸ It is evident that repetition—including alliteration and some homeoteleuton—is important to this section of the letter, excerpted below. It has the overall effect of an incantatory cadence that, reminiscent of a curse, is directed at a specific target.²⁹ It may have been engineered to bring about the kind of attention that a line of address (a formality not employed in this document) would otherwise have done in a conventional letter:

Manu mea scripsi atque condidi verba ista danda et tradenda,
militibus mittenda Corotoci—non dico civibus meis neque
civibus sanctorum Romanorum sed civibus daemoniorum, ob
mala opera ipsorum. Ritu hostili in morte vivunt, socii
Scottorum atque Pictorum apostatarumque. Sanguilentos
sanguinare de sanguine innocentium Christianorum, quos ego
innumerum numerum Deo genui atque in Christo confirmavi!³⁰

²⁵ E2: “civibus daemoniorum, ob mala opera ipsorum”; E5: “patricida, fratricida, lupi rapaces”; E4: “qui facit peccatum servus est et filius zabuli nuncupatur.”

²⁶ On the use of *Scotti* rather than *Hiberionaci* as a derogatory term for certain segments of the Irish/Scottish population see above, n. 24.

²⁷ On *apostataeque*, see discussion by Dumville, “Picti apostatae(que),” 129–131.

²⁸ E2; see full quotation and translation below.

²⁹ On such figures in Irish curse, see Travis, “A Druidic Prophecy”; for the Graeco-Roman context, see Versnel, “The Poetics of the Magical Charm,” especially 130–135.

³⁰ E2: “With my own hand I have written and composed these words to be given, delivered and sent to the soldiers of Coroticus—I do not say to my fellow-citizens nor to fellow-citizens of the holy Romans, but to fellow-citizens of the demons, because of their evil actions. Like the enemy they live in death, as allies of Irish and of Picts and apostates. These blood-thirsty men are bloody with the blood of innocent Christians, whom I have begotten for God in countless numbers and have confirmed in Christ!”

Against these *alieni*, Patrick asserts his God-given sacerdotal powers, reminding his audience that he has binding and loosing powers: those who may be bound on land are also bound in the heavens (“those whom they bound on earth should be bound in heaven also”).³¹ The letter must be seen as an invocation of this power, analogous to those “letters” of antiquity, the *tabellae defixiones* (or curse tablets), that bind or “defix” one’s enemy in the name of a god or goddess who will punish them in the spiritual and physical body.³² (One might also call to mind the reverse of the textual defixion in the story related by Bede of Imma and the *litterae salutoriae*, which were thought by his pagan captors to have been carried on his body, causing his fetters to fall away.³³) The assertion further enhances the supernatural impact of the letter, which should not be mistaken for a secular appeal to justice (a course presumably pursued in the previous letter), but as an effective weapon in the ever-present battle against the “enemy,” who “shows himself through the tyranny of Coroticus” (E6).

In extending himself in literary form to the enemy, Patrick wages war not only by condemning the acts committed and formally excluding them from the world of the Christians, but also by turning the fire of biblical prophecy—or curse—on them, purposefully translating words of admonition and damnation into Latin.³⁴ The *Epistola* is, in part, an extended curse against Coroticus and his cohorts. The biblical substitutions serve to amplify Patrick’s own voice:

Like clouds or smoke which is soon scattered by the wind, so
deceitful sinners shall perish from before the Lord’s face; but
the righteous shall feast in full assurance with Christ; they shall

³¹ E6: “quos ligarent super terram ligatos esse et in caelis.”

³² For discussion of the *tabellae defixiones* in the Mediterranean world, see Harris, *Ancient Literacy*; Ogden, “Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds”; Graf, Chapter 5, “Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls” (118–174), in *Magic in the Ancient World*; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*; for the Insular region see Tomlin, “The Curse Tablets,” Herren, ed. and trans., *The Hisperica Famina II*, and Reid, “The *Lorica of Laidcenn*: the Biblical Connections”; for a collection of primary sources see Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*.

³³ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, IV:20. On the story of Imma and the tradition of the *litterae salutoriae*, see Orton, “Sticks or Stones? The Story of Imma,” and Di Napoli, “Odd Characters: Runes in Old English Poetry,” especially 146–147. See also Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 187–197.

³⁴ E20: “Testificor coram deo et angelis suis quod ita erit sicut intimavit imperitiae meae non mea verba sed Dei et apostolorum atque prophetarum quod ego Latinum exposui.”

judge the nations and hold sway over wicked kings for ever and ever, Amen.³⁵

Elsewhere in the letter Patrick uses God's voice in aggressive combat against Coroticus and those in league with him. For example, he uses Romans 1:32, "Not only those who do evil but also those who agree with them are to be damned."³⁶ In "translating" the message he has received from God for the soldiers of Coroticus, Patrick curses again with a quotation from Mark 16:16, "He who believes will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned." He concludes dramatically: "God has spoken."³⁷

Muirchú's interpretation of the *Epistola ad Coroticum* in his late-seventh-century life of Patrick presents an analogous narrative development of the themes examined above, with the addition of describing their final outcome.³⁸ In his account of the *mirabile gestum Patricii*, Patrick's powers of epistolary *maledictio* are distilled to a single verbal pronouncement, "My God, if it is possible, expel this godless man from this world and from the next." As the ultimate effect of Patrick's letter and *maledictio*, Coroticus is turned into a fox (compare Patrick calling Coroticus and his band "rapacious wolves," *lupi rapaces*). This episode may have been perceived by Muirchú as a logical

³⁵ E19: "Sicut nubes vel fumus qui utique vento dispergitur, ita peccatores fraudulentio a facie Domini peribunt; iusti autem epulentur in magna constantia cum Christo, iudicabunt nationes et regibus iniquis dominabuntur in saecula saeculorum. Amen."

³⁶ E14: "Non solum facientes mala sed etiam consentientes damnandi sunt." It is to be debated whether in the Irish context these would constitute curses against the enemy or prophecies with the aim of reforming the sinner; Patrick's statements here would conform to canon 61 of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*. As Wiley observes: a "*maledictio* must bear the guise of *prophetia* (*haec non optantis animo, sed prophetantis dicuntur*)" ("The Maledictory Psalms," 272–274). It should be noted that demonic men, nominally Christian, are brought to conversion by similar means (see Sharpe, "Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men"). See also general discussion in Bitel, "Saints and Angry Neighbours." On the related topic of ecclesiastical malediction, see Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*.

³⁷ E20: "Qui crediderit salvus erit, qui vero non crediderit condempnabitur. Deus locutus est." While seemingly prototypical in the Irish context, the *Epistola ad Coroticum* may be a substitute for a liturgical rite of excommunication or malediction, perhaps indicating that the practice was already familiar (or at least in use) in fifth-century Ireland; compare the provisions for malediction "imposed by Adomnán for breaking of the Law of Adomnán" on all Ireland, section 31 of the "Law of the Innocents" (trans. Ní Dhonnachadha, "The Law of Adomnán: A Translation", 60–61; for further discussion see Ó Néill, "A Middle Irish Poem on the Maledictory Psalms"). Wiley suggests that Columbanus (d. 615) and Fursa (d. 648) may have had some impact on Frankish practices relating to malediction and "clamour" (Wiley, "The Maledictory Psalms," 263).

³⁸ Identified as Muirchú Moccu Maethéni, writing *ca* 690 (see *BCLL*, item 303).

corollary to Patrick's request at the end of the letter that it be distributed and read among everyone, even in the presence of Coroticus himself:

I shall not pass over in silence an amazing feat of Patrick. News came to him of the quite iniquitous action of a certain British king called Coroticus, an ill-starred and cruel tyrant. He was a very great persecutor and murderer of Christians. Now Patrick tried to recall him to the way of truth by means of a letter; but he scoffed at its salutary warnings. When this was reported to Patrick, he prayed to the Lord and said: "God, if it be possible, cast this traitor out from this present world and the world to come." After only a short time had elapsed, Coroticus heard someone give a musical performance and sing that he would soon pass from his royal throne; and all his dearest friends took up the cry. Then, when he was in open court, he suddenly had the misfortune to take on the appearance of a little fox; he made off before his followers' eyes, and from that day and that hour, like a passing stream of water, he was never seen anywhere again.³⁹

Patrick is transformed into a wonder-worker whose power resides in the ability to use words as weapons against enemies. Muirchú's account obscures Patrick's appeal for repentance on the part of Coroticus, and puts great emphasis on the physical consequences the letter sets in motion. That Muirchú includes the letter shows the importance placed on this component of the legend with respect to causation. Nagy observes that "the poem of blame works in a 'native' fashion. The verses arouse [Coroticus'] people against him and have a physical impact on their subject."⁴⁰ This is, according to Nagy, an "example of cooperation between Christian and pagan cultures and their respective modes of communication, the written letter and the oral poetic performance."⁴¹ The

³⁹ Muirchú, 29: "Quoddam mirabile gestum Patricii non transibo silentio. Huic nuntiatum est nequissimum opus cuiusdam regis Britannici nomine Corictic, infausti crudelisque tyranni. Hic namque erat maximus persecutor interfectorque Christianorum. Patricius autem per epistolam ad viam veritatis revocare temptavit; cuius salutaria deridebat monita. Cum autem ista nuntiarentur Patricio, oravit Dominum et dixit: 'Deus, si fieri potest, expelle hunc perfidum de presenti seculoque futuro.' Non grande postea tempus effluxerat, et Corictic musicam artem audivit a quodam cantari quod cito de solio regali transiret. Omnesque karissimi eius viri in hanc proruperunt vocem. Tunc ille, cum esset in medio foro, ilico vulpeculae miserabiliter arepta forma, profectus in suorum presentia, ex illo die illaque hora velut fluxus aquae transiens nusquam comparuit."

⁴⁰ Nagy, *Conversing*, 108. Carey, in his often "sceptical" review of Nagy's book, commends this observation ("Sages, Saints, and Semiotics," 71).

⁴¹ Nagy, *Conversing*, 108.

episode, as narrated by Muirchú, brings together all linguistic events as causative elements of Coroticus' metamorphosis and exile.

Medium and message: The Pauline 'epistola Christi' theme in Patrick's writings

Patrick raises the problem of human physical and metaphysical constitution by calling into question the nature of Coroticus and his men, characterized as "sons of Satan" and "citizens of demons."⁴² His use of the epistolary form to destabilize or cancel their civic, religious, and ontological status may be further understood through his articulation of the Christian's constitution in the *Confessio*. The central motif is Paul's analogy of the Christian as a "letter of Christ," "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God."

But if I had in fact had the same privileges as others, out of gratitude I should not keep silent, and if by chance certain people feel that I am pushing myself forward in this for all my ignorance and slow tongue (Ex. 4:10), it is, after all, written; "The stammering tongues shall quickly learn to speak peace" (Is. 32.4). How much more ought we to make that our aim, since we are, as it is written, "The letter of Christ for salvation to the ends of the earth," and even if it is not eloquent, "It has been written in your hearts not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:2). And again the Spirit declares that rusticity too was created by the Most High (Eccl. 7:16).⁴³

Patrick's apologetic self-assertion in these lines receives its strength through biblical language that is ostensibly concerned with communication and identity. The central point that Patrick makes, via the Pauline image, is that Christianity is the great leveller in terms of social status, especially as it may be recognized in terms of "polished" language. That Patrick should find it necessary to remind his audience of the point of Christian communication either in mission or Church business is ironic, if indeed his main purpose is to address an

⁴² E2; see full quotation and translation above, 60.

⁴³ C11: "Sed si itaque datum mihi fuisset sicut et ceteris, verumtamen non silerem propter retributionem, et si forte videtur apud aliquantos me in hoc praeponere cum mea inscientia et tardiori lingua, sed etiam (scriptum est enim): 'Linguae balbutientes velociter discent loqui pacem'. Quanto magis non adpetere debemus, qui sumus, inquit, 'epistola Christi in salutem usque ad ultimum terrae', et si non deserta sed ratum et fortissimum 'scripta in cordibus vestris non atramento sed Spiritu Dei vivi'. Et iterum Spiritus testatur et rusticationem ab Altissimo creatam."

ecclesiastical authority.⁴⁴ But in accessing the Pauline context, Patrick invokes a challenging figure of *transformatio* and *translatio* in Christ that invalidates Roman concepts of “citizenship” and “speech.” Such concerns are the theme of the *Epistola ad Coroticum* and the *Confessio*.

Paul’s analogy describes a dual process of inscription and outward manifestation that signifies an ontological transformation of the individual:

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need (as some do) epistles of commendation to you, or from you? You are our epistle [*epistola*], written in our hearts, which is known and read by all men: being manifested, that you are the epistle [*epistola*] of Christ, ministered by us, and written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart (2 Cor. 3:1–3).⁴⁵

The Christian is thus a transmitter of Christ to the world in terms of “word made flesh,” as well as an identifiable part of him as “flesh made word.” The analogy turns on the image of a familiar medium of communication, signified by the Greek word ἐπιστολή (L. *epistola*). It does not necessitate the use of “ink,” but allows for both the embodied and disembodied message, indicating anything sent by a messenger, in verbal or written form. The verb ἐπιστέλλω, “to send to,” usually signifies the sending of a message, order or command, but especially by letter.⁴⁶ *Epistola* is thus a convenient way to express both “message” and “letter,” both of which converge in the manifested Word and the communicative actions of His body through the Church.

The theme of the *epistola Christi* in its Pauline context references the historical association of letters with negative consequences.⁴⁷ In Paul’s pre-conversion persecution of Christians, he actively sought out letters that would allow him to bring men and women of Christ to Jerusalem in chains: “meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the

⁴⁴ On this topic see Ó Raifeartaigh, “A Rationale for the Censuring of Saint Patrick.”

⁴⁵ English translation: *Douay-Rheims Bible*; *epistola/epistula* per Latin vulgate.

⁴⁶ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*.

⁴⁷ The association extends to Homeric tradition: the first description of an act of writing in European literature is in the *Iliad* (vi.168). Proetus sends a “letter” containing *semata lugra*, or “baneful signs” on a folded, presumably lead tablet to the King of Lycia concerning Bellerophon; the letter is intended as an instrument of death. For further discussion see Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 37, 48–49, 66–93; see also Foley, “Reading Bellerophon’s Tablet,” in *Homer’s Traditional Art*, 1–5. For the biblical context, compare the proverbial “writing on the wall” in Daniel 5:5–28. Nagy remarks that writing is a “putatively hostile medium,” and that letters are a “potentially treacherous medium” in the Patrician context (*Conversing*, 28, 29).

Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1). While the “good news” is spread by the existing apostles, Paul breathes threats and murder which seek translation into letter form from the religious authority. But when the scales were removed from Paul’s eyes, he entered a new world of power based on the reformulation of language through the Word, Jesus Christ. Having converted to the Way, he too becomes the bearer of “good news,” subsequently transmitted in letters to the churches in a reversal of authority. The “treacherous medium” is transformed through the Holy Spirit as a message of the living God, and becomes an embodiment of it. Like the messenger himself, the written words are no longer mere images, but contain the Word. This seems to be the logic underscoring Paul’s image of the Christian as the *epistola Christi*.

The act of writing is thus accomplished with the Spirit, signalling the change to the *novum testamentum*, which exposes new faces from behind their veils to reveal the new glory in Christ. The *vetum testamentum*, which signifies the *ministratio mortis letteris deformata in lapidibus* (“ministration of death, engraven with letters upon stones”), was not devoid of glory, but was not transmissible between individuals and was not infused with the life of the Spirit; to this end it should be noted that Paul does not consider the writing of the old law an *epistola*, but *litterae* (2 Cor. 3:6–10). While the *epistola Christi* is not written on stone, it is nonetheless written in the *tabulis cordis carnalibus* (“fleshy tablets of the heart”), that while hidden from view, is still a definitively physical marking mutually recognizable to other members of the body of Christ (2 Cor. 3:1–3).⁴⁸ The interior becomes visible by which each member must recognize each other as letters of Christ, both in message and medium. In the Christian context, this becomes the zone of interconnectivity in which a new power of communication is in operation. Those who exist outside of this interconnectivity are certainly *alieni*, having no constitution as members of the Christian body.

Paul’s notion of inner inscription does not reflect an exclusively Christian opposition of good versus bad ways of writing, or the laws of the Old versus the New Testament, but was doubtless also influenced by an underlying classical (and Platonic) cosmological and anthropological assumption “that the human being, especially its sentient parts or its soul, was like a wax tablet into which social class, ethics, morals, and their external manifestation were inscribed with each interlinked act of thought, speech, and writing, and thus the

⁴⁸ Compare this image with Augustine’s image of the *scripta conscientia* (*Confessiones*, 1:18), discussed below.

whole person formed.”⁴⁹ Roman social and religious practice reflected this belief as well. The numerous genres of inscription from this world, such as curse and prayer tablets, epitaphs, tattoos, brands, personal inscriptions on public structures, Imperial edicts, letters, and censuses, had a serious impact on an individual’s social and cosmological existence.⁵⁰ Elm, in her examination of the language of Gregory of Nazianzen’s orations, notes that the ancient Church Fathers frequently used the metaphor of inscription to describe the process of conversion and the event of baptism;⁵¹ this usage would seem to correspond with Paul’s image. The materiality implicit in the concept of “inscription” juxtaposed with the immateriality of the soul in the act of baptism mirrors the “paradoxical fusion” represented by Christ as God and man, word and flesh, and militates against Platonic (and/or Gnostic) dualism.⁵² Inscription, or re-inscription, of the individual through conversion to and baptism in Christ, the only true authority, signified an overturning of the authority of the Roman Empire and the pagan cosmological order upon which it was dependent.

The *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad Coroticum* reflect Patrick’s role as an *epistola Christi*—“an immediate form of sacred metawriting to his fellow Christians”⁵³—transmitting a new way of being to the Irish while at the same time separating them and himself from the enemies of Christ. Lacking official lines of address, both epistles have been considered “open letters,”⁵⁴ and thus serve as practical reminders of Patrick as an interface between many states of being: Romano-British, Pictish, and Irish Christians, apostates, and pagans;

⁴⁹ Elm, “Inscriptions and Conversions: Gregory of Naziansus on Baptism (Or. 38–40),” 12. For discussion of the mind as “wax” or “wax tablet” in Greek and Latin writings on cognition, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, especially at 21–22, 28–29. She notes Plato’s use of the image, who claims to be merely developing a Homeric metaphor (21).

⁵⁰ Elm, “Inscriptions and Conversions,” 8–14.

⁵¹ For an overview, see *ibid.*, *passim*.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6, 14–15.

⁵³ Nagy, *Conversing*, 29.

⁵⁴ Bieler accepts this formal designation, though with some qualification (“Saint Patrick in Latin Language and Literature,” 97–98); Dumville questions it totally, remarking that “It is striking that in spite of a detailed commentary by Ludwig Bieler, of numerous annotated translations, and of a vast outpouring of books and articles, there has been no straightforward attempt to understand the structure of Patrick’s tract on Coroticus and to follow the progress of his argument. If such an analysis had been undertaken, it seems unlikely that the text would be known simply as the ‘Letter to Coroticus’” (Dumville, “Verba Militibus Mittenda Corotici,” 117). Patrick refers to the present document as *litterae hae* (E21), and to his previously sent message as an *epistola* (E3). It should be noted that Dumville concedes elsewhere that it may be “an open letter” (Dumville, “Coroticus,” 107), perhaps to be compared with Bieler’s designation of the *Confessio* as “an open letter” (*ibid.* 97). Gildas’ *De excidio Britonum* is considered an *epistola* by its author (§ 1); on the genre of Gildas’ letter, see Kerlouégan, *Le ‘De excidio Britanniae’ de Gildas*, 31–36.

literate and illiterate; sophisticated speakers and “rustics”; central and marginal cultures; ecclesiastical authority and pastoral ministry. Through his words, Christians are reminded that they reside in a world of language in which “ignorance” and the “slow” and “stammering” tongue are accommodated, and directed towards peace.⁵⁵ By throwing into question the concept of discursive “standards,” the perceived divide between the literate and the illiterate is collapsed, along with the centre-margin polarity. As an overall statement of core Christian views, it stands in opposition to Roman ideals of “civilization,” and gestures towards the concerns of Christian authors in Late Antiquity who were in the process of establishing a new *Romanitas* by way of a Christian literary tradition and pedagogy.⁵⁶ The effect of language—in both speech and writing—on the interior world of the Christian was a central concern in this endeavour. These themes are key in the *Confessio*.

Translation in Christ: The “rusticus” versus the “domini cati rethorici” in the *Confessio*

In the *Confessio*, a letter apparently written to ecclesiastical superiors in Britain in answer to unspecified charges, Patrick defends his mission in analogy to Paul’s, and vindicates the use of “rustic” Christian language against the speech of the intelligentsia as received from Roman tradition—apparently a contentious point in the validation of his mission.⁵⁷ Patrick’s choice of words proves the point:

⁵⁵ C11.

⁵⁶ Patrick may be viewed as a figure of the new *Romanitas* as established in Ireland (see Reid, “*Caro verbum factum est*: Incarnations of Word in Early English and Celtic Texts,” 102–119). On the propaganda-value of Patrick in terms of *Romanitas* and the see of Armagh, consult: Bray, “The Making of a Hero”; Sharpe, “Armagh and Rome in the Seventh Century”; Binchy, “Patrick and his Biographers,” 59–60; Ó Néill, “Romani Influences.” As Nagy remarks after O’Leary, “Muirchú implied that the church of Armagh was the Rome of the Irish people” (Nagy, *Conversing*, 14 n. 36). Nagy points out, however, that “there is more to the political subtexts of [the] Patrician documents than monomaniacal Armagh propaganda” (ibid. 24; see also Swift, “Tírechán’s Motives”). As noted by McCone and Moisl, Patrick is viewed as bringing “recht litre”—the “law of the letter”—to Ireland in imitation of Moses, and with it, the written Christian tradition and the superiority of Christian law (see McCone, *Pagan Past*, 86–99; Moisl, “The Church and the Native Tradition of Learning,” 265).

⁵⁷ On the question of Patrick’s unsuitability for mission work due to rusticity, see C46: “et misertus est mihi Dominus in milia milium, quia vidit in me quod paratus eram, sed quod mihi pro his nesciebam de statu meo quid facerem, quia multi hand legationem prohibebant, etiam inter se ipsos post tergum meum narrabant et dicebant: ‘Iste quare se mittit in periculo inter hostes qui Deum non noverunt?’ Non ut causa malitiae, sed non sapiebat illis, sicut et ego ipse testor—intellege propter rusticitatem meam; et non cito agnovi gratiam quae tunc erat in me;

So then, be amazed, you great and small that fear God, and you skilled rhetorical masters [*domini cati rethorici*], listen and take stock. Who raised me up, a fool, from the midst of those who seem to be wise and learned in the law and powerful in speaking and all else, and inspired me in preference to others, execrated as I am by this world, to prove fit (if only I could!), faithfully, with fear and reverence and without complaint, the people to which the love of Christ brought and gave me for the rest of my life, if I am worthy; in short, to serve them sincerely and with humility?⁵⁸

Patrick challenges his “rhetorical” superiors to identify the work of God in placing him at the ends of the earth to evangelize the Irish; that is, he dares them to “read” the “letter of Christ,” if they can. There are some key phrases in this passage that directly question the ability of the Romano-British clerical intelligentsia to identify the Christian God at all. First is the contrast, noted by Howlett, between the *magni et pusilli qui timetis Deum* (“you, great and small, who fear God”) *et vos, domini cati rethorici* (“and you, the skilled rhetorical masters”),⁵⁹ whom he invites to *audite et scrutamini* (“listen and scrutinize”).⁶⁰ Howlett draws the following comparison:

With this [quotation above] compare the quotation from the Apocalypse 19:5: *magni et pusilli qui timetis Deum*. The chiasmic structure of [this sentence] implies that the *domini cati rethorici* are not included among the great and small who fear God. The quotation comes from the centre of a passage which contrasts

nunc mihi sapit quod ante debueram.” Cf. discussion in Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 230–233; Lapidge, “Gildas’s Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain”; Howlett, *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop*.

⁵⁸ C13: “Unde autem ammiramini itaque, magni et pusilli qui timetis Deum, et vos, domini cati rethorici, audite et scrutamini. Quis me stultum excitavit de medio eorum qui videntur esse sapientes et legis periti et potentes in sermone et in omni re, et me quidem, detestabilis et cum metu et reverentia et sine querella fideliter prodessem genti ad quam caritas Christi transtulit et donavit me in vita mea, si dignus fuero; denique ut cum humilitate et veraciter deservirem illis?” For a source analysis of the passage see Grosjean, “*Dominicati Rethorici*,” 44–45.

⁵⁹ Various *domini ignari/ignavi* in the manuscripts (see textual notes to C13). On *domini cati rethorici* as perceived in earlier scholarship see Grosjean, “*Dominicati Rethorici*,” who suggests that glosses on *sapientes (rethorici)* and *legis periti (domini cati)* were absorbed into the main text over the course of its recension history (45–46). He notes Bury’s solution from 1905, currently accepted: *domini cati*, “clever, or smart, sirs” (see 46 n. 2).

⁶⁰ It is suggestive that the hymn on Patrick should begin “Audite omnes amantes deum,” perhaps in answer to “Unde autem ammiramini itaque, magni et pusilli qui timetis Deum, et vos, domini cati rethorici, audite et scrutamini” (C13).

the fall of the harlot Babylon the great, in which the blood of prophets and saints has been found, with the preparation of the chaste Bride for marriage to the Lamb. One infers from these quotations that Patrick has been compelled to write at a time of tribulation and that his critics are among the *pseudochristi* and *pseudoprophetae*, those in Babylon who attack prophets and saints, while he is one of the *electi* with the Bride.⁶¹

From the view at the ends of the earth, the British ecclesiastics would seem to reside in Babylon.⁶²

Use of the verb *scrutari* would seem to effect not only a contrast with the role of Christ as ultimate judge (*scrutator cordis et renis*, literally, “scanner of the heart and kidneys”), but also a jibe against those who “seem to be wise and learned in the law and powerful in speaking and all else.” Patrick is accusing them all of impaired or inept judgement; whereas earlier in the text he compares himself generally against those “who have successfully imbibed both law and Holy Scripture [*iura et sacras litteras*] alike,”⁶³ the subjects of comparison here are simply *legis periti*, “skilled in the law,” not scripture.⁶⁴ This is a conscious exclusion. The implication is that the clerical intelligentsia is tantamount to pagans in their use of oratory and law (in the guise of the legalism of the Old Testament). His commanding phrase, *audite et scrutamini*, is an imperative that silences their uninspired rhetoric. One might compare Gildas’ use of this motif in the *De excidio Britonum*, directly linked to expression in language. Following the rhetorical humility expressed in section one,⁶⁵ he writes: “And it was, I confess, with unmeasured grief at heart [*cordis*] that I kept silent (the Lord, scanner of consciences [*renum scrutator*], is my witness),” adding, “Then, as now, my inexperience [*imperitia*] and my worthlessness restrained me from writing any warning, however modest.”⁶⁶ For

⁶¹ Howlett, “*Ex saliva scripturae meae*,” 96.

⁶² The theme of Babylon in relation to Patrick’s mission (that is, Tara as Babylon, Loegaire as Nebuchadnezzar) is explored in Muirchú; see discussion by Moisl, “The Church and the Native Tradition of Learning,” 267.

⁶³ C9: “qui optime itaque iura et sacras litteras utraque pari modo combiberunt.”

⁶⁴ C13. Cf. Herren’s interpretation of *iura et sacras litteras* (*Christ in Celtic Christianity*, 84–85).

⁶⁵ Winterbottom, ed. and trans., *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, § 1: “In hac epistola quicquid deflendo potius quam declamando, vili licet stilo...”; “In this letter I shall deplore rather than denounce; my style may be worthless....”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* § 2: “silui, fateor, cum inmenso cordis dolore, ut mihi renum scrutator testis est dominus”; “imperitia sic ut et nunc una cum vilibus me meritis inhibentibus ne qualemcumque admonitiunculam scriberem.” Christ’s role as *scrutator renis et cordis*, based on “ego sum scrutans renes et corda,” Apoc. 2:23, and interior inspection are key—and early—themes in

this reason, a belief in Patrick's authentic *rusticitas*, devoid of all artifice and redolent of his individual psychology, is questionable.⁶⁷ He seems to be using rhetoric as a figure in and of itself in order to impugn his superiors, as opposed to rusticity, which has unambiguous justifications.

Patrick would seem to have been influenced by, and thence exemplifies, a trend in Romano-British Christian education that had begun in the earlier Christian centuries on the Continent. Still based on the Trivium, an Augustinian stance had been adopted towards the traditional materials of Classical learning that had its roots in the early Patristic writers. Augustine expresses a coalescence of such views in his writings.⁶⁸ Rhetoric was not abandoned, but adapted to a new purpose as the Christian writers of Late Antiquity rehabilitated the place of biblical literature against pagan standards; the Bible became a text of literary instruction.⁶⁹ That there was an endorsement of

Insular penitential and devotional literature (see further Reid, "Incarnations of Word," 166–205).

⁶⁷ Cf. Shanzer, "'*Iuvenes vestri visiones videbunt*,'" 200: "Patrick was immensely insecure about writing, and about his linguistic abilities. In him we finally have an author whose protestations of *rusticitas* are entirely believable." For a contrary view, see Howlett, "*Ex saliva scriptura meae*," and *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop*. For the genesis of such views amongst Patristic scholars, see above, n. 11.

⁶⁸ For a convenient synopsis of their views and influence on Augustine's thought, see Voiku, *A Primer on the Language Theory of Saint Augustine*. For general remarks on the parameters of Classical learning in early medieval Ireland, see Herren, "Classical and Secular Learning Among the Irish Before the Carolingian Renaissance"; see also the studies included in Lapidge, *Columbanus*, and Lapidge and Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*. Kerlouégan's *Le 'De excidio Britanniae' de Gildas* is the most comprehensive guide to-date on the parameters of Gildas' learning and that of his milieu.

⁶⁹ See Auerbach's chapter on "Sermo Humilis" in *Literary Language*, 27–66 (see also discussion below). The theory of *sermo humilis* has been a topic of some debate from the publication of Auerbach's study (1958). Witke's 1959 *Speculum* review points some of the difficulties with Auerbach's account, and gestures towards the contention lurking in the emphasis on Augustine's role in the formation of Christian Latin letters as a break-away from developing trends in Latin literary culture as a whole. I include an excerpt here that specifically identifies these areas: "Auerbach has not made clear the distinction between early Christian literature turned out for Christians, and that written for pagans. Consequently he cannot deal with the highly interesting and fully Ciceronian *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, nor with those evangel-epics of Juvencus or Avitus. Further, he makes no mention of the newest development in pagan Latin letters, the serious use to which Horace, Persius, and Juvenal put a *sermo pedester*. This latter is not as far removed from the Christian *sermo humilis* as one may infer from Auerbach's silence on this point. Both Vergil and St. Paul discovered an interior landscape, *nova Arcadia*; and if the Christian movement had Augustine as an articulate guide to the *terra aliena*, the rest of the world could read Horace on the subject, and imitate his self-examination at the end of *Epistles*, II, 2" (Witke, "Review: *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* by Erich Auerbach," 443).

rhetoric by Christians and a recognized difference between *spiritalis vel forenses regulae* is encapsulated in a letter from Sidonius Apollinaris to an Insular figure, Faustus of Riez:⁷⁰ “I have a boundless admiration for that style of yours rich in tropes and figures and distinguished by the varied elegance of its vocabulary, as shown in the letter of yours which I have taken as an example.”⁷¹ A little further on in the letter, Sidonius expresses his appreciation for Faustus’ oratory: “you delivered an oration, steering as it were, a middle course between the rules of religious and forensic usage [*spiritalis regulas vel forenses*], being yourself a master of both lores.”⁷² Sidonius does not view these modes of rhetoric as incompatible; however, he does provide evidence that they were considered different *disciplinae*. Patrick, too, recognizes a distinction when he specifies the training of his cohorts in “iura et sacras litterae utraque.”⁷³ It would seem that Patrick is trying to manipulate this distinction—dependent upon a post-Augustinian view of the rhetorical art—in his favour by questioning the orthodoxy of the *domini cati rethorici*.

Certainly the use of the *ars rhetorica* was a fact of Romano-British, and later Irish, religious education. The Insular writers Gildas and Columbanus, writing in the century after Patrick, exemplify post-Augustinian *eloquentia*.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ On Faustus’ origins and life see Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters in Early Christian Gaul*, 192–207, and Chadwick, “A Note on Faustus and Riocatus.” Faustus’ writings are recorded in Lapidge and Sharpe, *BCLL*, items 21–24.

⁷¹ Anderson, ed. and trans., *Sidonius Apollinaris: Poems and Letters*, Book IX:3: “quod immane suspicio dictandi istud in vobis tropologicum genus ac figuratum limatisque plurifariam verbis eminentissimum, quod vestra quam sumpsimus epistula ostendit.”

⁷² Ibid.: “...te inter spiritalis regulas vel forenses medioximum quiddam contionantem, quippe utrarumque doctissimum disciplinarum.” See discussion in Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters in Early Christian Gaul*, 196.

⁷³ C9; see also above.

⁷⁴ For discussion on Gildas, see Wright, “Gildas’s Prose Style and its Origins”; Lapidge, “Gildas’s Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain”; and Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians*, 3. In addition, Law remarks, that “the writings of Gildas also imply the existence of a significant British audience conversant with Latin” (3). But as Howlett observes, literary Latin would seem to have been the greatest influence: “one sees clearly the effect in the correct literary language of Gildas.... The difficult polished Latin of Gildas emerges favourably from comparison with the orthography, grammar, and syntax of a Continental writer like Gregory of Tours. Gildas had a readership; he addressed his elegantly rhythmical prose in *lingua nostra* ‘our language’ to fellow Britons who could read, quote, and imitate it” (“Early Insular Latin Poetry,” 61). On the Latin literary and educational milieu in Britain see Kerlouégan, *Le ‘De excidio Britanniae’ de Gildas*, 1–14; on Gildas’ influences and sources see Chapter 2, “La bibliothèque de Gildas” (70–142), *ibid.* On Columbanus and his writings, see Lapidge, *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*; Winterbottom, “Columbanus and Gildas”; Wright, “Columbanus’s Epistulae”; Stancliffe, “The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus”; Wood, “The Vita Columbani and Merovingian Hagiography.”

As Charles-Edwards summarizes, neither “had turned their backs on the art of rhetoric, the culmination of Late Antique education. Both were capable of writing highly crafted prose; for neither of them was a complex style inconsistent with a practical purpose.”⁷⁵ The difference between a “forensic” and a “spiritual” mode of rhetoric may be observed in the so-called Christian *sermo humilis*, which accommodates the juxtaposition of “complex style” and “practical purpose.” The style overthrows the pagan subject categories and their matching styles, low, intermediate, and grandiloquent, in favour of biblical rhetorical style, especially that of the New Testament. The Christian world was suffused with the sublime, therefore Ciceronian categories were no longer relevant without modification or adaptation.⁷⁶ Such a reinvention of the Ciceronian levels of oratory is articulated in Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana*, which sought to reconcile the Classical *ars rhetorica* with Christian teaching.⁷⁷ Through Augustine, “Cicero’s *doctus orator*” becomes a “potent instrument of Christian education.”⁷⁸ Given that the “Christian orator’s subject is always revelation,” and “every single auditor is considered as an individual whose salvation is at stake,” it is therefore reasonable to see how Christianity may be perceived to have breathed new life into the “rigid formalism” of pagan rhetoric at the time of Roman decline.⁷⁹

Book Four of *De doctrina Christiana* does not represent a wholesale endorsement to apply the *ars rhetorica* (as previously known) to Christian

⁷⁵ Charles-Edwards, 178. He provides a good summary of current knowledge of the topic with up-to-date bibliography, 176–181; 230–233. For a detailed examination of Gildas’ rhetorical knowledge see Kerlouegan, *Le ‘De excidio Britanniae’ de Gildas*, especially Chapter 3, “La mise en oeuvre rhétorique du *DEB*,” 143–198.

⁷⁶ See Auerbach, *Literary Language*, 32–39.

⁷⁷ Cf. Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 190–191: “Like *De catechizandis rudibus*, *De doctrina [Christiana]* had its origin in a request. Shortly after Augustine’s accession to the bishopric of Hippo, Aurelius, the primate of Carthage, asked him to draft a treatise on Christian education to serve a manual of instruction for young clergymen. Although the work that resulted is not ‘a fundamental charter of Christian culture’ or a programme of ‘education for a Christian intellectual’, as H.-I. Marrou proposed, it nonetheless makes space within a discussion of biblical hermeneutics for a ‘digression’ on the ‘general principles of classical culture pertaining to the baptised’. In this endeavour, a large role is played by rhetoric....” See Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 387–413.

⁷⁸ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 205; for discussion on the aims of *De doctrina Christiana*, see pages 190–206. See also McLuhan, *The Classical Trivium*, 66. Cf. the image of the *praesul animarum* in Gregory the Great’s *Regula Pastoralis*, 3:36, who may be similarly equated with the Augustinian notion of the Ciceronian *doctus orator* (see Judic, et al., ed. and trans., *Grégoire le Grand: Règle Pastorale*, 3:36).

⁷⁹ Auerbach, *Literary Language*, 35, 53. Auerbach’s emphasis on the didactic nature of *sermo humilis* should be tempered by recognition of the importance of the diagnostic element in Christian oratory (cf. Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, Book 3).

teaching. On one level it appears an effort to reconcile certain aspects of rhetoric to Christianity; this appearance might be reinforced by recalling how Augustine, disgusted with the art's abuse (in the courts and the marketplace), and under Ambrose's influence, resigned his professorial chair of rhetoric at Milan, as described in the *Confessiones*.⁸⁰ It would seem reasonable that Augustine should endeavour to "retain" that which is useful of rhetoric for Christian purposes, and discard those things for which no accord was found. However, rhetoric is a necessary tool of language, and Christian life depends on teaching through language. Rather than engage in a foolhardy attempt to extricate and exclude, Augustine explicates a Christian theology of rhetoric, which he seems to believe restores its proper definition and purpose. Thus the heretofore accepted purpose of the *ars rhetorica* (as he formulates it), equally backing both truths and falsehoods, is revealed as a corrupt notion.⁸¹ Rather, rhetoric is the proper tool for giving conviction to truth and vanquishing falsehood alone. This is the subtle new distinction on which the restoration is based. Rhetoric is no longer a neutral art: it has good (true) and evil (false) use, and this distinction must be kept clear. As Augustine establishes in Books I-III, truth is from God alone: man cannot give conviction to it, but he may convey it through his eloquence, or at least, according to his means, and in faith. Any speech crafted to put falsehood over on its audience is evil, and works evil. It is not merely persuasive of an untrue argument for the sake of challenge or acclaim, but an offence against God. The Christian orator goes to battle with his words in the proclamation of God against evil (cf. 4:148; 156), not for the sole purpose of persuasion in and of itself.

The corollary to this explication of rhetoric is Augustine's treatment of *eloquence* (4:143), which is not wholly out of touch with Cicero's notion of *eloquentia* in *De oratore*.⁸² But he transforms *eloquentia* in accordance with his own explanation of speech for the purposes of Christian teaching. It is an instance in which Augustine may be said to recognize a recreation of an existing concept through Christ, rather than a restoration. *Eloquentia* is given new life as though *sui generis*, seeming almost outside of *rhetorica* per se, perhaps even subsuming and superseding it (4:11–12). Thus the apostle Paul is not falsely elevated as an example of Christian eloquence, that is, in opposition or as a complement to eloquence otherwise (we may assume "pagan"), such as

⁸⁰ *Confessiones*, 9:2, 4.

⁸¹ Green, ed. and trans., *Augustine: De doctrina Christiana*, 4:4: "Nam cum per artem rhetoricam et vera suadeantur et falsa...."

⁸² Sutton and Rackham, ed. and trans., *Cicero: De oratore*, I:lv:236–lvi:239.

Augustine's readers may think.⁸³ In Augustine's text, Paul represents an integrated complex of *exempla* on a linguistic basis as an apostolic authority of the Christian church. He is thus the embodiment of the new *eloquentia* that Augustine seems to propose, realized in the fully armed orator of God, who is *praemunitus praeparatusque*, that is, "forearmed and forewarned" (cf. Praefatio 1:2; Ephesians 6:11–17).

In 4:3, the "rhetorical rules," *praecepti rhetorici*, are subordinated to the experience of eloquence: "For we have known many who, without having learned rhetorical precepts, are more eloquent than many who have, but no eloquent person who has not read and heard the arguments or speeches of the eloquent."⁸⁴ What Augustine subtly champions in this passage before the *ars rhetorica* per se is the "*ars eloquens*"—arguably constituting its own, but related, discipline in the Christian context, since it relies on "rules" and "tradition" which, as Augustine states in his *Praefatio*, he sets out to elucidate in its relationship with the *ars rhetorica* as it was known up to that point in time. The same unlearned-types are not only capable of being eloquent, but even more eloquent than those learned in rhetoric. However, down to a man, no one can be eloquent, without having experienced, insofar as he is capable (either through sound or sight), *eloquentia* itself. The genres associated with the rhetor, composed of rhetorical figures, may be appraised for their eloquence by the unlearned. But the habit of eloquence should be acquired via Christian literature, not secular rhetoric;⁸⁵ and furthermore, eloquence does not necessarily entail anything more than plain communication of God's truth. Patrick, with his *inscientia et tardior lingua*, and *rusticitas*, is a precise example of the type—or so these figures of self-description would indicate. The successful effect of such images is seconded by a critical view of Patrick as an *unius libri homo*.⁸⁶ Augustine closes his tome with a discussion of how even an evil or an ineloquent person may convey the truth through their words, regardless of their "wills and actions" (4:162): a return to the notion that Truth may be recognized wherever it is found (2:72), as it is God's alone, not subject to human beings. Such would seem to be the ultimate point in restoring rhetoric to God's authority.

⁸³ Green, ed. and trans., *Augustine: De doctrina Christiana*, 4:46: "Sed forte quis putat tamquam eloquentem nostrum elegisse me apostolum Paulum."

⁸⁴ Ibid.: "Nam sine praeceptis rhetoricis novimus plurimos eloquentiores plurimis qui illa didicerunt, sine lectis vero et auditis eloquentium disputationibus vel dictionibus neminem."

⁸⁵ For further discussion see Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 205.

⁸⁶ Mohrmann, *The Latin of St. Patrick*, 8, 12–15, 17. See also discussion by Shanzer, "'*Ivenes vestri visiones videbunt*,'" 171.

For comparative purposes, one might keep in mind Augustine's criticism of rhetoric in Book 9 of the *Confessiones*, which is similarly tied to civil law. Augustine experiences a rebirth of his tongue through Christ (9:1), and resolves, "in your sight, not to rip tumultuously, but to withdraw gently the ministry of my tongue from marketplace of loquacity,"⁸⁷ in order that his students, "meditating not your law, nor your peace, but insane lies and legal wars,"⁸⁸ could not purchase weapons from his mouth for such purposes (9:2).⁸⁹ In effect, Augustine, like Patrick, willingly adopts the *tardior lingua*⁹⁰ against the *lingua subdola*, a metaphor for the secular art of rhetoric (9:2).

Augustine, in describing the secular rhetorician, returns to the intimate correspondence between language and the body, which is not localized solely in the tongue or the mouth. In the first place, the language of Christ provides the ultimate protection against the cannibalistic violence of the rhetorical tongue:

As we climbed up from the valley of tears, singing the song of ascent [Psalms 119–33], you had given us sharp arrows [*sagittas acutas*], and burning coals [*carbones vastatores*] to use against any cunning tongues [*adversus linguam subdolam*] that might speak against us under the pretence of giving good advice and devour us with their love, just as men devour food for which they have a liking.⁹¹

Augustine continues, repeating the theme of "arrows" and "coals":

You had pierced our hearts with the arrows of your love, and we carried your words with us as though they were staked to our living bodies [*Sagittaueras tu cor nostrum caritate tua, et gestabamus uerba tua transfixa uisceribus*]. Ranged before our minds, so that our thoughts were full of them, were the examples of your servants whose darkness you had made light and whose death you had changed to life. Their example fired us [*urebant et absumebant*] and banished our dull inertia, so that we turned no more to wordly things. It lighted in us so strong a flame that

⁸⁷ "in conspectu tuo non tumultuose abripere, sed leniter subtrahere ministerium linguae meae nundinis loquacitatis."

⁸⁸ "mediantes non legem tuam, non pacem tuam, sed insanias mendaces et bella forensia,"

⁸⁹ "ne ... mercarentur ex ore meo arma furori suo."

⁹⁰ C11; Exodus 4:10.

⁹¹ Pine-Coffin, trans., *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, 182; *Confessiones*, 9:2: "quamquam tu nobis a conualle plorationis ascenditibus et cantantibus canticum graduum dederas sagittas acutas et carbones uastatores aduersus linguam subdolam uelut consulendo contradicentem et, sicut cibum adsolet, amando consumentem."

no cunning tongue [*lingua subdola*] could puff it out with the breath of antagonism, but only fanned it to a fiercer heat.⁹²

In these passages, Augustine explains the process whereby the language of Christ simultaneously enters the very viscera by way of the same weapons he provides against the rhetorical enemies. Patrick retrieves these correspondences between words and the flesh by his allusions in the *Confessio*, especially with the Pauline concept of the letter of Christ “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). Augustine’s image is analogous: the living God fixes his words in the entrails (*verba transfixa visceribus*), having first pierced the heart with His love, in essence, creating the body and spirit of the individual a medium of His message, which he carries with him against the “cunning tongue.”

Augustine’s choice of the verb *sagittare*, which combines action and weapon in one (*sagitta*, “arrow,” shading into the *sagax*, “sharp, perceptive [mind]”), and the permanence implied by *verba tua transfixa visceribus*, emphasize the notion of inscription in the physical body, as well as the power of God’s word. This parallels the description of the new body and its new language which emerges from the valley of tears, saved from the depths, and reformulated by way of “sharp arrows” (*sagittae acutae*), comprising a new sort of human being. To emphasize the totality and intimacy with which this occurs within the body of those transformed and translated, Augustine uses the singular of *cor*, but the first person plural possessive adjective (*Sagittaveras tu cor nostrum caritate tua*). It corresponds with the Pauline notion that the multitude becomes a single *epistola Christi* (*epistula estis Christi*), echoed also in Patrick’s change of number from the first person singular to the first person plural in reference to that image.⁹³ Augustine’s final freedom from his professorship of rhetoric is the moment in which his tongue is rescued by Christ, who had previously rescued his heart (“Et venit dies, quo etiam actu solverer a professione rhetorica, unde iam cogitatu solutus eram, et factum est: eruisti linguam meam, unde iam erueras cor meum, et benedicebam tibi gaudens,” 9:4). The description is not incongruous with Patrick’s contrast between his own *inscientia et tardior lingua* and the *domini cati rethorici* (C13).

⁹² Ibid.: “Sagittaueras tu cor nostrum caritate tua, et gestabamus uerba tua transfixa uisceribus et exempla seruorum tuorum, quos de nigris lucidos et de mortuis uiuos feceras, congesta in sinum cogitationis nostrae urebant et adsumebant grauem torporem, ne in ima uergeremus, et accendebant nos ualide, ut omnis ex lingua subdola contradictionis flatus inflammare nos acrius posset, non extinguere.”

⁹³ C11.

For Augustine and Patrick the distinction between the Christian rhetorician of truth and the paganistic *domini cati rethorici* is in the transformation of the linguistic body through Christ. As Nagy has remarked of Christian speech, “speaking in Christ is hardly the same as ordinary speaking.”⁹⁴ We should say that language in Christ is hardly the same as ordinary language. In the *Confessiones* 1:18, Augustine laments those orators, neglectful of body and soul, who are, in fact, not held to any higher judgement than the correctness and ornament of their speech according to the *scientia litterarum*. Using an allusion similar to Paul’s image of the inscribed interior, he points out the disordered nature of that perspective, saying “certainly the science of letters is not more interior than the written conscience”; again this is analogous to Patrick’s aim in juxtaposing faithful rusticity with the *domini cati rethorici*.⁹⁵ The alternative is an individual who, disregarding his own salvation, has a fundamental misperception of the effects of his linguistic warfare:

A man seeking fame of eloquence before a human judge, with a surrounding multitude of men, cutting down his enemy with the most ferocious hatred, takes the utmost care lest he should say, by a slip of the tongue, *inter omnes* [rather than *inter homines*; or alternatively, according to some manuscripts, *inter hominibus*, rather than *inter homines*], and cares not if he, through the furor of his mind, should kill an actual man.⁹⁶

Inner conscience and outward speech must be interconnected through the laws and language of God through the “perpetual covenant of eternal salvation.”⁹⁷ Patrick’s *Confessio* is an externalization of the “written conscience” in Christ, with *rusticitas*, rather than *eloquentia*, serving as the figure of both justification and judgement.

In the foregoing comparison of Augustine and Patrick, no intertextuality is proposed. The evidence is suggestive that Patrick may have had some knowledge of Augustine, either by means of education, or perhaps by influence

⁹⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 2:17. See also Nagy, *Conversing*, 29.

⁹⁵ “Certe non est interior litterarum scientia quam scripta conscientia” (1:18). Cf. discussion of the inscribed interior above.

⁹⁶ *Confessiones*, 1:18: “Quam tu secretus es, habitans in excelsis in silentio, Deus solus magnus, lege infatigabili spargens poenales caecitates supra inclitas cupiditates, cum homo eloquentiae famam quaeritans ante hominem iudicem, circumstante hominum multitudine, inimicum suum odio immanissimo insectans, vigilantissime cavet, ne per linguae errorem dicat: Inter omnes, et ne per mentis furorem hominem auferat ex hominibus non cavet.”

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: “aeterna pacta perpetuae salutis.”

of a foreign milieu.⁹⁸ It is questionable that he had direct knowledge of Augustine's texts, just as it is uncertain that Gildas had direct knowledge of Augustine.⁹⁹ Shanzer has pointed out that the approaches heretofore engaged by critics in an attempt to prove such a connection have been methodologically unspecific, and inconclusive. Perhaps "tales of Patrick's use of Augustine deserve to vanish from the secondary literature";¹⁰⁰ however, sensitivity to Patrick's Augustinian cast should not. Shanzer asserts that there is an "intellectual abyss" separating Patrick and Augustine. But she demonstrates that Patrick seems to have general conceptual parallels in common with other Classical and Late Antique authors, especially Paul, and not excluding Augustine.¹⁰¹ Having gazed into this "intellectual abyss," it seems reasonable to state that it was not a vacuum. The Patrician writings show an intimate, personalized connection with the Augustinian argument that militates against the traditional view of *eloquentia* and *rhetorica*, corresponding to the transformation and translation of the whole being in Christ.

⁹⁸ On the potential influence of Augustine on Patrick see Dronke, "Saint Patrick's Reading," and the critique by Shanzer, "*Iuvenes vestri visiones videbunt*." For discussion of Patrick's anti-Pelagianism and compatibilities with an Augustinian view of grace, see Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, 82–84. See also Herren, "Mission and Monasticism," in which he discusses, after Ladner (*The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*), the possible influence of Augustinian monasticism on Patrick's mission. Herren excuses Mohrmann for not having utilized Ladner in her discussions of Patrick and his continental influence, stating that it must not have been available to her due to its publication date (76). It would seem, however, to have been a purposeful omission from her scholarship: Mohrmann had, in fact, read Ladner, and negatively reviewed his book in *Vigiliae Christianae* 16:3–4 (Sept. 1962), 235–237.

⁹⁹ The *De excidio Britanniae* shares some clichés and rare words in common with the Augustinian oeuvre (as well as a number of other patristic sources), but it is inconclusive whether Gildas would have known these via direct exposure to the texts, or as mediated through verbal instruction or glossaries in the course of his ecclesiastical education (see Kerlouégan, *Le 'De excidio Britanniae' de Gildas*, 121, 122, 124, 131, 132, 134, 136, 138, 139).

¹⁰⁰ Shanzer, "*Iuvenes vestri visiones videbunt*," 179.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 197. She sees a parallel in the *Soliloquies*, 1:1 (178). Shanzer concedes that "even though Patrick may have had no literary sources other than the Bible, I do not deny literary qualities to his writing" (197).

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