

H. M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES 27

SUSAN IRVINE

UNCERTAIN BEGINNINGS: THE  
PREFATORY TRADITION IN OLD  
ENGLISH



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hector Munro Chadwick (1870–1947) was Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge from 1912 to 1941. Through the immense range of his scholarly publications, and through the vigorous enthusiasm which he brought to all aspects of Anglo-Saxon studies — philological and literary, historical and archaeological — he helped to define the field and to give it the interdisciplinary orientation which characterizes it still. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, which owes its existence and its own interdisciplinary outlook to H. M. Chadwick, has wished to commemorate his enduring contribution to Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic studies by establishing an annual series of lectures in his name.

Uncertain Beginnings: the Prefatory Tradition in Old English

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# Uncertain Beginnings: the Prefatory Tradition in Old English

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Not least amongst Hector Munro Chadwick's extensive scholarly achievements, as Michael Lapidge noted in his 2012 H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture, was the programme he devised for supplying accessible new English editions of the primary texts essential to Anglo-Saxon studies<sup>1</sup> — a kind of modern-day equivalent perhaps of King Alfred's own scheme for making available those texts 'most necessary for everyone to know'.<sup>2</sup> Chadwick not only put his postgraduate students to work on producing the new editions but also oversaw their labours.<sup>3</sup> Many of them have stood the test of time, and remain the standard editions of their texts. I am indebted to these, particularly the ones produced by Florence Harmer and Dorothy Whitelock,<sup>4</sup> for today's lecture, which arises out of my own current editorial project, the first collected edition of the prologues and epilogues to works associated with Alfred the Great.<sup>5</sup> This lecture will explore the genre of the preface or prologue — *forespræc* in Old English<sup>6</sup> — across the Anglo-Saxon period more generally, focusing on the ways in which a vernacular tradition with its own conventions can be seen to emerge from a series of texts which both have 'uncertain beginnings' and can themselves be described as 'uncertain beginnings'.

In Anglo-Saxon literary culture the preface stands out for its generic versatility. The variety of the vernacular prefaces in terms of form, content,

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<sup>1</sup> M. Lapidge, 'H. M. Chadwick: A Centennial Commemoration', H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 23 (Cambridge, 2013); revised version printed as 'Hector Munro Chadwick', in *H. M. Chadwick and the Study of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in Cambridge*, ed. M. Lapidge, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 69/70 (Aberystwyth, 2015), pp. 59–82, at 66–9.

<sup>2</sup> 'niedbeðearfosta ... eallum monnum to wiotonne', in H. Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, Early English Text Society, original series 45 (London, 1871), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> 'Hector Munro Chadwick', pp. 69–70.

<sup>4</sup> F. E. Harmer, *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914), and D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930). I have also consulted Florence Harmer's later edition of *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester, 1952).

<sup>5</sup> S. Irvine, ed., *The Alfredian Prologues and Epilogues* (Oxford, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> *Dictionary of Old English: A to G online*, ed. A. Cameron, A. C. Amos, A. diP. Healey et al. (Toronto, 2007), s.v. *forespræc*, *forespæc*, 3. '(written) prologue, preface, foreword'. The formation of the Old English word reflects Isidore's definition of 'praefatio' in his *Etymologies* as 'the beginning of a discourse ... joined on before the presentation of the main matter in order to prepare the ears of the audience ... as it were a pre-speaking (*praelocutio*)' (VI.viii.9); see S. Barney, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 140.

structure, style, and manuscript context makes it hard to characterise them in the same kind of way that Tore Janson has characterised the Latin prose preface,<sup>7</sup> for example, or Alastair Minnis has characterised academic prologues circulating from the twelfth century onwards.<sup>8</sup> Scholarship to date has tended either to focus on one group of prefaces as if they existed in isolation from other examples of their kind — the Alfredian prefaces, for example, or those by the late tenth-century monk and abbot, Ælfric<sup>9</sup> — or to trace the influence of an isolated preface — almost invariably the famous prose preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care* — on later writings.<sup>10</sup> In this lecture I will argue that Anglo-Saxon vernacular prefaces developed over time an identity of their own, a multivalent identity to be sure, and one that never strays very far from its Latin roots, but also one that can be seen to celebrate the distinctiveness of the vernacular. Building on examples of individual conventions identifiable in vernacular prefaces produced in Anglo-Saxon England, I hope to be able to offer a clearer sense of how these framing texts were situated in relation to their genre, and of the ways in which they reflected and shaped textual identity.

It's not surprising that to some extent scholars have shied away from engaging with the Old English prefatory tradition from a broader perspective. First, setting the boundary between what is and what isn't a preface is notoriously problematic. In my recent essay on prefaces and epilogues associated with Alfredian works, I note that 'a number of frame-pieces test the boundaries in various ways'.<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Wilcox, in his edition of Ælfric's prefaces, uses the term 'borderline case' for some pieces he chooses to exclude on the grounds of 'brevity' or of not being a 'substantial preface'.<sup>12</sup> Mary Swan, writing about these prefaces, comments that 'the textual sections we now categorize as prefaces are in fact a varied group in terms of their intended functions and their textual natures'.<sup>13</sup> We might note that some Anglo-Saxon authors themselves exploit this issue of identity: in manuscripts Oxford, Bodleian Library Hatton 115 and Junius 121, and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 178, Ælfric's preface to the first series of *Catholic Homilies*, for

<sup>7</sup> T. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions*, Studia Latina Stockholmiensia 13 (Stockholm, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, my own forthcoming edition of the Alfredian prefaces, and J. Wilcox, ed., *Ælfric's Prefaces*, Durham Medieval Texts 9 (Durham, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, B. F. Huppé, 'Alfred and Ælfric: A Study of Two Prefaces', in *The Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and B. F. Huppé (Albany, 1978), pp. 119–37.

<sup>11</sup> S. Irvine, 'The Alfredian Prefaces and Epilogues', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. N. G. Discenza and P. E. Szarmach (Leiden and Boston, 2015), pp. 143–70.

<sup>12</sup> Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, pp. 72–3.

<sup>13</sup> M. Swan, 'Identity and Ideology in Ælfric's Prefaces', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. H. Magennis and M. Swan, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 18 (Leiden and Boston, 2009), pp. 247–69, at 249.

example, was adapted to form short self-contained homilies.<sup>14</sup> And in the Old English poem known as *Solomon and Saturn I* a playful treatment of the Latin word *prologus* indicates a self-conscious attitude to the nature of a preface or prologue on the part of the poet. The context is a battle between the letters of the Pater Noster and the devil, in which each letter takes on particular warrior-like qualities. P offers the first line of attack: the devil, we are told, will flee

gif ðu him ærest on ufan ierne gebrengest  
 prologa prima ðam is . ƿ . P. nama;  
 hafað guðmægga gierde lange,  
 gyldene gade, ond a ðone grimman feond  
 swiðmod sweopað.<sup>15</sup>

(if you first throw over him the angry one, *prologa prima*, which is named . ƿ . P.; the warrior has a long staff, with a golden goad, and brave he ever swipes at the grim fiend.)

The letter P is here presented as the *prologa prima* of the phrase Pater Noster. There may also be a pun here, as Daniel Anlezark has suggested, through the combination of *pro-* ‘before’ and Greek *logos* ‘word’, which would create the nonce word *prologa* meaning ‘initial letter’.<sup>16</sup>

The second reason why the prefatory tradition has proved so rebarbative is the difficulty in establishing the relationship between the prefaces and the works they accompany. There are, for example, two prefaces to the Old English translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues*, one in prose and one in verse though they occur only in separate manuscripts. We don’t know whether they circulated simultaneously, or whether one replaced the other,<sup>17</sup> but each of them shapes differently the responses of readers to the work and indeed the book as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Prefaces continued to be added to works well after their original composition, participating thereby in the on-going evolution of the text on the page so characteristic of manuscript culture. With so many unknowns about their origins, status and identity, the Old English prefaces risk being immersed

<sup>14</sup> See Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> D. Anlezark, ed. and trans., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 7 (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 68 (*Solomon and Saturn I*, lines 88–92, trans. Anlezark).

<sup>16</sup> Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, pp. 50–1.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, M. Godden, ‘Wærferth and King Alfred: the Fate of the Old English *Dialogues*’, in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. J. Roberts and J. L. Nelson with M. Godden (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 35–51.

<sup>18</sup> The idea of paratext as a threshold, a zone of ‘transaction’ between text and off-text, is explored in G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. J. E. Lewin (Cambridge, 1997).

in a large prefatory soup within which manuscript context, authorship, chronology and Latin sources swirl haphazardly.

Any study of the vernacular prefatory tradition has to take full account of the crucial role played by Latin models in its development. Works written in the vernacular in Anglo-Saxon England from at least the late ninth century onwards derive their authority in no small part from their close links with Latin literary culture, where the provision of prefaces was well established. Latin prefaces, though themselves extremely varied in form, relied on a fairly limited set of conventions which were clearly known in Anglo-Saxon England, if not through some knowledge of classical rhetoric then at least through examples that were circulating at the time.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge of Latin prefatory conventions shaped the presentation of vernacular texts in Anglo-Saxon England. The case for prefaces as tropes, whose contents cannot be taken literally, has been made trenchantly and convincingly by Malcolm Godden and, most recently, Helen Gittos.<sup>20</sup> Authors of prefaces, we can be sure, weren't necessarily reflecting their own views, or those of their contemporaries, but rather participating in a much wider tradition of preface-writing which had its own established set of generic conventions. Even when addressing the problem of translation into the vernacular, Jerome's topos of translating 'not word for word but sense for sense' from the sacred languages is upheld as a convention.<sup>21</sup> But alongside this overarching assimilation of Latin tradition, I would argue, we can identify a series of stylistic conventions which represent evidence for a distinctively vernacular prefatory tradition. In this lecture I will examine particular examples of these conventions, and consider their significance for our interpretation of individual prefaces and for the ways in which vernacular works were received in Anglo-Saxon England.

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<sup>19</sup> On the extent of the knowledge of classical rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England, see especially J. J. Campbell, 'Knowledge of Rhetorical Figures in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 66 (1967), 1–20, H. Gneuss, 'The Study of Language in Anglo-Saxon England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 72 (1990), 1–32, G. Knappe, 'Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998), 5–29, and L. M. Reinsma, 'Rhetoric in England: the Age of Aelfric, 970–1020', *Communication Monographs* 44 (1977), 390–403.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, M. Godden, 'The Alfredian Project and its Aftermath: Rethinking the Literary History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2009), 93–122, and 'Editing Old English Prose and the Challenge of Revision or, Why It Is Not So Easy to Edit Old English Prose', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. V. Gillespie and A. Hudson, Texts and Transitions 5 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 91–110; and H. Gittos, 'The Audience for Old English Texts: Aelfric, Rhetoric and "the Edification of the Simple"', *Anglo-Saxon England* 43 (2014), 231–66.

<sup>21</sup> 'non uerbum e uerbo, sed sensum ... de sensu': *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Opera 1.1: Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54, 55, 56, 3 vols, 2nd ed. (Vienna, 1996), I.503–26 (*Epistula* 57), at 508; trans. P. Carroll, in D. Robinson, *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed. (Manchester, 2002), pp. 23–30, at 25.

First, though, it may be useful to give a very quick overview of the corpus of vernacular prefaces that survive. These can be in either prose or verse: a work may be furnished with a prose preface alone, a verse one alone, or both. As in Latin tradition, vernacular prefaces can be formally distinguished as either dedicatory or non-dedicatory. In Old English the dedicatory prefaces are generally also more specifically epistolary, showing the formal characteristics of a letter by having a salutatory phrase at the beginning and sometimes a farewell at the end.<sup>22</sup> Conventionally they begin in the third person before moving to the first person. So, famously, the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* begins: ‘Ælfred kyning hateð gretan Wærferð biscep his wordum luflice ond freondlice’ (King Alfred commands Bishop Wærferth to be greeted lovingly and affectionately),<sup>23</sup> and Ælfric’s preface to his *Lives of Saints* begins: ‘Ælfric gret eadmodlice Æðelweard ealdorman’ (Ælfric humbly greets the nobleman Æthelweard), and ends ‘Vale in Domino’ (farewell in the Lord).<sup>24</sup> The non-dedicatory prose prefaces are a more amorphous group. They offer statements of explanation, admonition or exhortation, often but not always using a first person voice.<sup>25</sup> They range from short prefatory notes to the lengthy exposition of biblical material offered in the preface to Alfred’s law-code.<sup>26</sup> Although the formal distinction between dedicatory and non-dedicatory prefaces is a useful one in terms of establishing a taxonomy of vernacular prefaces in Anglo-Saxon England, that distinction is cut across by shared prefatory conventions, as we shall see.<sup>27</sup> The particular set of prefatory conventions that I shall focus on for the purposes of this lecture are those linked to the use of the first person pronoun, and I shall look at their use first in verse and then in prose.

<sup>22</sup> Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, p. 106 fn. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Sweet, ed., *King Alfred’s Version*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Wilcox, ed., *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, pp. 120–1. To the category of dedicatory (and epistolary) prefaces belong the prose preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, the preface to the Old English *Bede* which translates Bede’s own preface, a number of prefaces by Ælfric, both in English and in Latin, and a prefatory note by Wulfstan found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201. On the latter, see J. T. Lionarons, ‘Textual Identity, Homiletic Reception, and Wulfstan’s *Sermo ad Populum*’, *The Review of English Studies*, new series 55 (2004), 157–82, at 162 and 171–2.

<sup>25</sup> The main exception to this is the prefaces which are merely informative, such as the genealogical preface to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or the historical introduction to the Old English *Boethius*, neither of which arguably qualifies as a preface at all.

<sup>26</sup> The category of non-dedicatory prefaces includes prose prefaces to Old English works linked with Alfred’s reign, the *Dialogues*, the *Boethius*, and the *Laws*. It also includes a number of prefaces by Ælfric and a curious prefatory note to the *Vitae Patrum* in London, British Library, Cotton Otho C. i Part 2. On the latter, see W. Rudolf, ‘The Old English Translations of the *Verba seniorum* in Late Eleventh-century Worcester’, in *The Medieval Translator / Traduire au Moyen Age* 12, ed. D. Renevey and C. Whitehead (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 33–44, at 38–9.

<sup>27</sup> In some cases, to be discussed below, it is not in fact possible to identify whether a preface is dedicatory or non-dedicatory because of loss of text at the beginning or end.

The corpus of vernacular verse prefaces that survives may be relatively small, but is of extraordinary interest, not least because of its tendency to assign the first-person voice to the book itself.<sup>28</sup> The device has been linked by scholars to vernacular analogues in the riddle tradition in which personified objects describe themselves in the first person, and in the first person inscriptions on objects such as the Alfred Jewel (‘Ælfred mec heht gewyrcañ’, Alfred commanded me to be made).<sup>29</sup> But the trope wasn’t unheard of in Latin prefaces, as this example of Alcuin’s preface to his *De dialectica*, cited by Malcolm Godden as a possible analogue to the verse preface to the *Pastoral Care*, shows:<sup>30</sup>

Me lege, qui veterum cupias cognoscere sensus,  
 Me quicumque capit, rusticitate caret.  
 Nolo, meus lector segis sit, nolo superbus,  
 Devoti et humilis pectoris antra colo.  
 Has rogo divitias sophiae non temnat amator,  
 Navita quas pelagi portat ab orbe suo.  
 Me legat, antiquas vult qui proferre loquelas,  
 Me qui non sequitur, vult sine lege loqui.<sup>31</sup>

(Read me, you who wish to know the meaning of the ancients. Whoever comprehends me, lacks rusticity. I do not want my reader to be idle, or proud, I dwell in the caves of the devout and humble heart. I ask the lover of wisdom not to despise these riches, which the sailor on the ocean brings from his region. Let him read me who wants to discover ancient speeches; he who does not follow me, wishes to speak without law.)

We can’t be sure that Alcuin, an Anglo-Saxon author, was not himself drawing here on vernacular tradition of riddles and inscriptions in constructing the book as speaker. In any case, this verse preface is noteworthy for its use of the pronoun *me*, repeated at the beginning of four of its eight lines. It serves to mark out both verse lines and sense units, and connects the first two lines of the preface with the last two. The use of first person pronouns as a structuring device that we see in Alcuin’s Latin preface occurs as a characteristic feature of the Old English verse prefaces. In the verse preface to the Alfredian translation

<sup>28</sup> See J. W. Earl, ‘King Alfred’s Talking Poems’, *Pacific Coast Philology* 24 (1989), 49–61, reprinted in *Thinking About ‘Beowulf’* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 87–99; P. Orton, ‘Deixis and the Untransferable Text: Anglo-Saxon Colophons, Verse-Prefaces and Inscriptions’, in *Imagining the Book*, ed. S. Kelly and J. J. Thompson (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 195–207; and U. Schaefer, *Vokalität: Altenglische Dichtung zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit* (Tübingen, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

<sup>30</sup> M. Godden, ‘Prologues and Epilogues in the Old English *Pastoral Care*, and their Carolingian Models’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 110 (2011), 441–73.

<sup>31</sup> E. Dümmler, ed., *Alcuini Carmina*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini (Berlin, 1881), *Carmen* 77, p. 298. Cited and trans. by Godden, ‘Prologues and Epilogues’, p. 463.

of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, the pronouns *min* and *me* in lines 11 and 12 mark a new direction in the poem: here it moves away from its focus on the Latin text and its journey from Rome to England to Alfred's active role in its translation and distribution:

Siððan min on Englisc    Ælfred kyning  
awende worda gehwelc,    and me his writenum  
sende suð and norð,    heht him swelcra ma  
breggan bi ðære bisene.<sup>32</sup>

(Afterwards King Alfred translated every word of me into English and sent me south and north to his scribes, and commanded them to produce more such copies according to the exemplar.)

The introduction of the first person voice here ('min' and 'me'), the first explicit evidence that the book is itself speaking, acts as a structural marker in the preface. But even as the poem shifts its focus from the Latin text brought by Augustine to the English text translated by Alfred, the pronoun 'min' (of me) acts as a pivot between the original and the translation, serving to invest the vernacular version, wherever this preface accompanies it, with all the authority of the Latin.

In the verse preface to the translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*, the structuring function of the first person voice is again evident. The opening three words of the preface play with the connection between reader and book by juxtaposing the pronouns *se ðe* (he who) and *me*: 'Se ðe me rædan ðencð tyneð mid rihtum geðance' (The person who sets out to read me will close me with proper understanding).<sup>33</sup> Then at line 12, *me* marks the point at which the preface shifts its focus from the contents of the book to the process by which the book was produced: 'Me awritan het Wulfsige bisceop' (Bishop Wulfsige commanded me to be written).<sup>34</sup> As in the *Pastoral Care* preface the first person pronoun apparently serves here to mark a structural division, this time emphasized by its placement at the beginning of the verse.

First person pronouns are also used as a structural device in two other verse prefaces, one accompanying a translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and the other known as the poem *Aldhelm* which serves as a preface to a late tenth-century copy of Aldhelm's treatise *De Virginitate*.<sup>35</sup> A comparison of the use of the pronoun 'ic' in the two poems may suggest a closer relationship between them than has been previously acknowledged. We may

<sup>32</sup> S. Irvine and M. R. Godden, eds. and trans., *The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), p. 408. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>33</sup> Irvine and Godden, *Old English Boethius*, p. 404.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> In Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 326.

look first at the *Boethius* preface, composed some time between the late ninth and mid tenth century when the prosimetrical version of the work was produced.<sup>36</sup>

Ðus Ælfred us ealdspell reahte,  
 cyning Westsexna, cræft meldode,  
 leoðwyrhta list. Him wæs lust micel  
 ðæt he ðiossum leodum leoð spellode,  
 monnum myrgen, mislice cwidas,  
 þy læs ælinge ut adrife  
 selflicne secg, þonne he swelces lyt  
 gymð for his gilpe. Ic sceal giet spreca,  
 fon on fitte, folccuðne ræd  
 hæleðum secgean. Hliste se þe wille.<sup>37</sup>

(Alfred, king of the West Saxons, told us an old story in this manner, made known his ability, his skill as a poet. He had a great desire to proclaim verse to these people, entertainment for them, varied speeches, lest tedium should drive away the self-regarding man, when he pays little heed to such a matter because of his pride. I must yet speak out, engage in poetry, tell to men well-known advice. Let him listen who will.)

It's worth noting that this preface has a number of features in common with the ones we've already looked at. It too focuses on investing its text with authority through connecting it with the wisdom of the past ('ealdspell', line 1) and royal involvement ('Ælfred ... cyning Westsexna', lines 1–2).<sup>38</sup> King Alfred is again imagined as following in the tracks of the source authors themselves: here he is implicitly compared to Boethius in his role as a maker of verse who interpreted old stories, revealed skill, spoke various utterances, and put well known advice into poetry.<sup>39</sup> And finally this preface too uses the first person pronoun as a structural marker: in line 8 'ic' (I) marks the point at which the preface moves from a focus on the past to engaging with the present.

But who does 'ic' refer to in this poem? It presents a notoriously puzzling shift of voice.<sup>40</sup> The relationship between 'ic' and the earlier first person

<sup>36</sup> On the relationship between the prose and prosimetrical versions of the Old English *Boethius*, see M. Godden and S. Irvine, ed., *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Version of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, with a chapter on the Metres by M. Griffith and contributions by R. Jayatilaka, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009), I.44–9.

<sup>37</sup> Godden and Irvine, *Old English Boethius*, I.384.

<sup>38</sup> There is a curious linguistic parallel between the *Pastoral Care* and *Boethius* verse prefaces: the phrase 'swelces lyt' four lines from the end of the latter curiously resembles 'swelcra ma' four lines from the end of the former.

<sup>39</sup> See also S. Irvine, 'The Protean Form of the Old English *Boethius*', in *The Legacy of Boethius in Medieval England*, ed. J. McMullen and E. Weaver (Arizona, forthcoming 2017).

<sup>40</sup> See Godden and Irvine, *Old English Boethius*, II.245.

pronoun in the poem, ‘us’ in line 1, is far from clear. On its own ‘us’ would seem to be the voice of the reader, recording the composition of the poem by King Alfred, himself referred to in the third person. One possible interpretation, then, is that ‘ic’ is one of ‘us’, specifically the person who is engaged in reciting the work. This is the argument put forward by Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, who rebuts previous suggestions that it might be the voice of the king, reflecting the shift from third to first person that we see in epistolary prefaces, or that it was the voice of the book itself.<sup>41</sup>

But the issue might be usefully revisited, I think, in the light of the poem *Aldhelm*. Despite its macaronic form, this prefatory piece bears some comparison with the *Boethius* preface:

Bus me gesette *sanctus et iustus*  
 beorn boca gleaw, *bonus auctor*;  
 Ealdelm æþele sceop *etiam fuit*  
*ipselos* on æðele Angol-Sexna,  
 byscop on Bretene. Biblos ic nu sceal  
*ponus et pondus*, *pleno cum sensu*,  
 geonges geanoðe *geomres iamiamque*  
 secgan, soð nalles leas, þæt him symle wæs  
*euthenia* oftor on fylste,  
 æne on eðle, ec ðon ðe se is  
 yfel on gesæd. *Etiam nusquam*  
 ne sceal ladigan *labor quem tenet*,  
*encratea*, ac he ealneg sceal  
*boethia* biddan georne  
 þurh his modes gemind *micro in cosmo*,  
 þæt him drihten gyfe *dinamis* on eorðan,  
*fortis factor*, þæt he forð simle ...<sup>42</sup>

(Thus did *a holy and righteous man* compose me, a nobleman learned in books, *an estimable author*; Aldhelm, a bishop in Britain, *was also exalted* as a glorious poet in the country of the Anglo-Saxons. Now I, *a book*, must tell *in all their particulars the toil and the burden*, the lamentation of that young man, sorrowful *at present*; I must tell not falsehood but truth, that *lowliness* was more often a constant help to him, *hardship* in his native country, and the fact as well that he is wrongly criticized. *Even so, the self-mastery, the toil that he sustains*, shall *never* acquit him, but in the thoughts of his mind he must, while *in this lesser world*, always pray eagerly for *help*, pray that the Lord, *the mighty creator*, would grant him *the might* while on earth that he may ever henceforth ...)

<sup>41</sup> K. O’Brien O’Keeffe, ‘Listening to the Scenes of Reading: King Alfred’s Talking Prefaces’, in *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green*, ed. M. Chinca and C. Young (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 17–36, at 34–5.

<sup>42</sup> C. A. Jones, ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume 1: Religious and Didactic*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), pp. 126–7 (trans. Jones).

The poem ‘poses extraordinary difficulties’, as its latest editor Drew Jones has noted,<sup>43</sup> not least because of its complex combination of Old English, Latin and Grecisms. But some correspondences with the *Boethius* verse preface can be clearly identified. In line 5, we find, as is conventional in these prefaces, the use of a first person pronoun as a structural device, marking the point at which the focus shifts from Aldhelm as a glorious poet to Aldhelm as a man of sorrows. ‘Ic nu sceal’ seems to echo the similar moment of transition in the *Boethius* poem, ‘ic sceal giet’, which in both cases leads to verbs of speaking (‘sprecan’ and ‘secgan’ respectively), creating a strong sense of orality in these lines. There are other curious correspondences between the two. Both open with ‘ðus’ (thus), an adverb that only once elsewhere — in the poem *Precepts* — serves as an initial word in an Old English poem.<sup>44</sup> Following ‘ðus’, both poems turn their attention to praising the author’s poetic skill. The phrase ‘beorn boca gleaw’ (nobleman learned in books) in line 2 of *Aldhelm* is of particular interest. As Andy Orchard has noted, this half-line is used elsewhere of Boethius (and only once otherwise in the Old English corpus).<sup>45</sup> Significantly, perhaps, the description of Boethius as ‘beorn boca gleaw’ comes in the historical introduction of the prosimetrical Old English *Boethius* that follows on immediately from the verse preface. The poet of *Aldhelm* may have had in mind not only the *Boethius* preface but also the work’s historical introduction. Indeed the way Aldhelm is described in the poem as a whole — sorrowful, suffering hardship in his native country, with evil said against him, and praying eagerly in the thoughts of his mind to the Lord — recalls Boethius’s situation as described in that introduction.<sup>46</sup> The poet of *Aldhelm* seems to have found in this depiction of Boethius a useful model for his own depiction of Aldhelm.

We may not know how to interpret ‘ic’ in line 8 of the *Boethius* verse preface. But the *Aldhelm* poet apparently did: he read it as the book itself speaking out. Revisiting the *Boethius* verse preface in the light of *Aldhelm* may

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<sup>43</sup> Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems*, p. 393.

<sup>44</sup> If ‘ðus’ in the *Boethius* preface refers forwards rather than backwards (which would make more sense), then ‘ðus’ in *Aldhelm* is likely to refer forwards too. The case for the latter is put by F. C. Robinson, “‘The Rewards of Piety’: “Two” Old English Poems in Their Manuscript Context’, in *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, ed. P. J. Gallacher and H. Damico (Albany, New York, 1989), pp. 193–200, reprinted in his *The Editing of Old English* (Oxford and Cambridge, 1994), pp. 180–95, at 184; for a conflicting view, see E. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, 2014), p. 24 fn.43.

<sup>45</sup> A. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge, 1994), p. 283. The only other use of this half-line occurs at line 4 of the poem *Vainglory*; see G. P. Krapp and E. van K. Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III (London and New York, 1936), p. 147.

<sup>46</sup> *Aldhelm* is a notoriously derivative poem and other correspondences can be found elsewhere in the poetic corpus, e.g. ‘soð nalles leas’ recurs at line 356 of *Juliana*; see Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, p. 123.

suggest that we too can interpret ‘ic’ not as the king nor as someone reciting the work, but rather, in line with vernacular prefatory convention, the book itself, here speaking as if it were the verses ready for oral recitation within the mead-hall.

As we have seen, a convention of using first person pronouns as a structuring device can be identified in vernacular verse prefaces, and analysing the uses of this convention may have significant implications for the interpretation of individual prefaces and the relationships between them. Can we see similar kinds of conventions in the vernacular prose prefaces too? I think we can, and that once again an exploration of the convention across the corpus allows us to read and connect texts in new ways.

It is now some time since Mark Griffith suggested, in the context of a discussion of Ælfric’s Old English preface to *Genesis*, that repetitious sentence openings with personal pronouns in pole position used as a structural device might represent a vernacular epistolary convention.<sup>47</sup> Griffith shows that these kinds of sentence openings mark out the section divisions of the preface to *Genesis*:

Ƣu bæde me, leof, Ƣæt ...  
 We secgað eac foran to Ƣæt ...  
 Ic cweðe nu Ƣæt ...  
 Ic bidde nu, on Godes naman ... Ƣæt ...<sup>48</sup>

Although Griffith’s main interest in his article lies elsewhere, his observation here is an important one. We can identify a similar structuring device in another of Ælfric’s vernacular prefaces, that to the *Lives of Saints*:

Ic secge þe, leof, Ƣæt ...  
 Ƣu wast, leof, Ƣæt ...  
 Ic bidde nu ... Ƣæt...<sup>49</sup>

Each of these sentence openings marks out the beginning of a new section of the preface, divided according to epistolary tradition. This vernacular convention, so rigorously observed by Ælfric, can I think be linked to the prefatory genre.<sup>50</sup> My

<sup>47</sup> M. Griffith, ‘Ælfric’s Preface to Genesis: Genre, Rhetoric and the Origins of the *ars dictaminis*’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000), 215–34, at 225–6.

<sup>48</sup> Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, preface no. 4, lines 1, 41, 111 and 115 (pp. 116–19).

<sup>49</sup> Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, preface no. 5b, lines 1, 6 and 32 (pp. 120–1).

<sup>50</sup> The convention may also have been shared with the epistolary tradition more generally, as two further examples (cited by Griffith, ‘Ælfric’s Preface’, p. 226) suggest: they occur in Ælfric’s letter to Brother Edward (see M. Clayton, ‘An Edition of Ælfric’s *Letter to Brother Edward*,’ in *Early Medieval English Text and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. E. Treharne and S. Rosser (Tempe, Arizona, 2002), pp. 263–83, at 280–2), and

focus in what follows will be on the implications of this and other conventional techniques for interpreting prefaces composed rather earlier than Ælfric was writing, and in particular for the preface to the Old English *Soliloquies* and the piece known as ‘King Edgar’s Establishment of the Monasteries’.

We may start, though, with the late ninth-century prose preface to the *Pastoral Care*, in which King Alfred laments the state of learning in England and announces a new educational programme. In this preface the clause *ða ic ða* (*ðis eall*) *gemunde* (then when I remembered all this) acts as a kind of refrain throughout. The phrase, in slightly varied forms, is used four times as a means of separating out sections.<sup>51</sup> As Griffith notes, this may be an early example of the same convention observed a century or so later by Ælfric.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, though, the purpose of the repetitious sentence openings in the earlier preface is not to mark out the Latin epistolary divisions,<sup>53</sup> but rather to create a structure independent of them, a structure defined by Alfred’s thought process rather than by Latinate tradition.

Syntactic parallelism in section openings is also a feature of the prologue to the Old English *Laws*. The first part of the prologue consists of translations of parts of the Book of Exodus, followed by other biblical and historical precedents for law-giving. The prologue then presents Alfred’s own voice explaining how he went about compiling and affirming his own law-code. The two sections of this part of the prologue are marked out by syntactic parallelism reminiscent of that seen in the *Pastoral Care* preface:

Ic ða Ælfréd cyning þas togædere gegaderode ...

Ic ða Ælfréd Westseaxna cyning eallum minum wítum þas geowde ...<sup>54</sup>

Just as in the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care*, so here too the section openings are marked by a pronoun in pole position, an adverb *ða* ‘then’ and a preterite form of the verb. In this case the syntactic parallelism is combined with the repetition of Alfred’s name: vernacular prefatory convention is exploited to emphasise the authority invested in the laws through Alfred’s own active role in compiling them. There may of course be an additional nuance here if the author of that personal pronoun ‘ic’ is not Alfred himself but a ghost-writer putting

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Eadwine’s Letter to Ælfsige (see S. Miller, ed., *Charters of the New Minster, Winchester*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 9 (Oxford, 2001), no. 34 (pp. 164–5)).

<sup>51</sup> Sweet, *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version*, p. 5 lines 8, 17 and 25, and p. 7 line 15.

<sup>52</sup> Griffith, ‘Ælfric’s Preface’, p. 226.

<sup>53</sup> On the correspondence between the structures of this preface and the early papal epistle, see Huppé, ‘Alfred and Ælfric: A Study of Two Prefaces’.

<sup>54</sup> F. Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903–16), I.46 (with *ond* for 7).

himself into the mind of the monarch.<sup>55</sup> But I shall resist the temptation to go down that particular road.

Within the sections marked off in this way, there seems to have been a further convention in early prefatory tradition of marking a new direction by means of a sentence beginning with *forðæm* ‘therefore’ followed by a first person pronoun, usually *ic* or *we*. So, for example, in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, the sections marked out by opening clauses of remembering are all, with one exception, subdivided by a sentence beginning with ‘forðæm’ (or a cognate form such as ‘forðy’), meaning ‘therefore’, followed immediately by a first person pronoun:

Me com swiðe oft on gemynd ... & forðon ic ðe bebiode ðæt ...  
 Ða ic ða ðis eall gemunde ... & forðæm we habbað nu ægðer forlæten ge ðone welan  
 ge ðone wisdom ...  
 Ða gemunde ic ... Forðy me ðyncð betre ...  
 Ða ic ða gemunde ... Forðy ic wolde ðætte ...<sup>56</sup>

It’s worth noting that although *forðæm ðe* ‘because’ is used elsewhere in the preface, no other sentences begin with *forðæm* followed by a first person pronoun. The repeated causal relationship serves rhetorically to provide an extra level of structural underpinning for the preface. It thereby lends authority to the vernacular since it confirms the careful shaping of the text as it is presented to the reader.

If we look again at the preface to the Old English *Laws*, the same syntactic pattern can be observed in the first of the two sections beginning with ‘Then I’ + past tense verb:<sup>57</sup>

**Ic ða Ælfred cyning** þas togædere **gegaderode** ond awritan het monege þara þe ure forengan heoldon ða ðe me licodon, ond manege þara þe me ne licodon ic awearf mid minra witena geðeahte, ond on oðre wisan bebead to healdanne. **Forðam ic** ne dorste geðristlæcan þara minra awuht fela on gewrit settan, forðam me wæs uncuð hwæt þæs ðam lician wolde ðe æfter us wæren ...<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See M. Godden, ‘Did King Alfred Write Anything?’, *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23, at 6; for the view that Alfred was himself the author, see J. M. Bately, ‘King Alfred and the Old English Translation of Orosius’, *Anglia* 88 (1970), 433–56, though she notes that ‘it is possible that only one paragraph [the first-person part of the introduction] of the collection of *Laws* in its final form is the work of King Alfred’ (p. 453), and her ‘Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of Alfred’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988), 93–138, at 118; Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042*, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), p. 407; and P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*. I. *Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), p. 272.

<sup>56</sup> Sweet, *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version*, pp. 3–9.

<sup>57</sup> The second section is only one sentence long and moves directly on to the legislation itself.

<sup>58</sup> Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, I.46 (with *ond* for 7). Bold emphasis is my own.

(**Then I, King Alfred, gathered** them together and ordered to be written many of the ones that our forefathers observed — those that pleased me; and many of the ones that did not please me I rejected with the advice of my councillors, and commanded them to be observed in a different way. **Therefore I** dared not presume to set down in writing at all many of my own, since it was unknown to me what would please those who should come after us ...)

Once again convention seems to be observed here, not only in the syntactically distinct sentence opening marking a new section but also in the *forðæm ic* construction marking a subdivision within that section.

The identification of such conventions may have implications for our interpretation of other vernacular prefaces. The opening of the preface to the Old English *Soliloquies*, another Alfredian production, has long been acknowledged as a puzzle. Notwithstanding the twelfth-century scribe's apparent obliviousness to any problem — he supplies a large initial 'G' to give the semblance of a proper opening<sup>59</sup> — the preface seems to begin *in medias res*:

**Gaderode me þonne** kigclas and stuþansceaftas, and lohsceaftas and hylfa to ælcum þara tola þe ic mid wircan cuðe, and bohtimbru and bolttimbru, and, to ælcum þara weorca þe ic wyrcan cuðe, þa wlitegostan treowo be þam dele ðe ic aberan meihte. Ne com ic na þer mid anre byrðene ham þe me ne lyste ealne þane wude ham brengan, gif ic hyne ealne aberan meihte; on ælcum treowo ic geseah hwæthwugu þæs þe ic æt ham beþorfte. **For þam ic** lære ælcne ðara þe maga si and manigne wæn hæbbe þæt he menige to þam ilcan wuda þar ic ðas stuðansceaftas cearf.<sup>60</sup>

(**Then [I]** collected for myself sturdy sticks and posts, and staves and handles for each of the tools which I knew how to use, and curved timber and straight timber and, for each of the buildings which I knew how to make, the most beautiful trees that I could carry. There I never came home with one load without wishing to bring home the whole forest if I could have carried it all; in every tree I saw something I needed at home. **Therefore I** advise each person who is strong and has many wagons to proceed to that same wood where I cut these posts.)

Although Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge have noted that 'the word "then" (*þonne*) seems to imply a sequence of previous statements which have been lost',<sup>61</sup> recent scholarship has been more cautious: 'There is no way to be certain how much has been lost, if anything', writes Paul Szarmach in his 2015 essay on the *Soliloquies*.<sup>62</sup> But the evidence of prefatory convention perhaps allows for

<sup>59</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, fol. 4r, line 1.

<sup>60</sup> T. A. Carnicelli, ed., *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's 'Soliloquies'* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 47. Bold emphasis is my own.

<sup>61</sup> S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 299.

<sup>62</sup> P. E. Szarmach, 'Augustine's *Soliloquia* in Old English', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. N. G. Discenza and P. E. Szarmach (Leiden and Boston, 2015), pp. 227–55, at 33.

more certainty of at least some loss than this would suggest. The beginning of the preface as it stands bears the hallmarks of a truncated form of a conventional sentence opening marking a structural division, with the first person pronoun ‘ic’ now lost before ‘gaderode me þonne’ (then I gathered for myself ...). It’s not surprising to find later in the section a *forðæm ic* construction being used to denote a change of tack: ‘Therefore I advise each person who is strong ...’.<sup>63</sup> The evidence of prefatory convention strongly suggests that the beginning of the *Soliloquies* preface as it stands represents a slightly truncated sentence opening of a new section, making it likely that at least one section of text is missing before this, either excised deliberately by a copyist for some unknown reason, or lost in transmission.<sup>64</sup>

Prefatory convention of the kind I have been discussing may also enhance interpretation of the piece known as ‘King Edgar’s Establishment of Monasteries’, referred to here as the Edgar document. The text survives only in an early twelfth-century copy,<sup>65</sup> alongside a version of the Old English translation of the Rule of St Benedict, whose composition Mechthild Gretsch assigns to the mid tenth century.<sup>66</sup> Although the Edgar document follows on from the Rule in its only surviving copy, and is imperfect at its beginning, there is other evidence, as Dorothy Whitelock has shown, indicating that it was originally Æthelwold’s prologue to the work.<sup>67</sup> The point at which it shifts from a third person to a first person voice is marked by a conventional sentence opening for a new section:

**Ic þ[a]** geþeode to micclan gesceade **telede**. Wel mæg dugan hit naht mid hwylcan gereorde mon sy gestryned 7 to þan soþan geleafan gewæmed, butan þæt an sy þæt he Gode gegange. Hæbben forþi þa ungelæreden inlendisce þæs halgan regules cyþþe þurh agenes gereordes anwrigenesse, þæt hy þe geornlicor Gode þeowien and nane tale næbben þæt hy þurh nytennesse misfon þurfen. **Forþi** þonne, **ic** mid ealre estfulnessse mine æftergangen bidde 7 þurh Drihtnes naman halsige, þæt hy þyses

<sup>63</sup> It is interesting, even where the copy is a late one, to note that the ‘F’ of ‘For þam’ is written as an enlarged capital (Cotton Vitellius A. xv, fol. 4r, line 11).

<sup>64</sup> The second part of the preface takes a different direction, moving, as Scott Thompson Smith has noted, from a first person to a primarily third person voice; see S. Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012), p. 125.

<sup>65</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Faustina A. x, fols 102–51.

<sup>66</sup> M. Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 25 (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 226–60. The date conflicts with Æthelwold’s claim in the piece that Edgar commissioned the translation himself: Gretsch explains that ‘although Edgar is styled king, and although the translation is attributed to his instigation, the suspicion must be that it was Æthelwold himself who had kindled the desire for a thorough knowledge of Benedictine monasticism already in the young ætheling’ (p. 238). Cf. Godden, ‘Alfredian Project’, p. 98 and fn. 13.

<sup>67</sup> D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. N. L. Brooke, *Councils & Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1981), I.142.

halgan regules bigenc a þurh Cristes gife geycen, 7 godiende to fulfremedum ende gebrencgen.<sup>68</sup>

(**Then I considered** translation a very sensible thing. It certainly cannot matter by what language a man is acquired and drawn to the true faith, as long only as he comes to God. Let the unlearned natives have therefore the knowledge of this holy rule by the exposition of their own language, that they may the more zealously serve God and have no excuse that they were driven by ignorance to err. **Therefore**, then, **I** pray my successors with all devotion and implore in the Lord's name, that they ever increase the observance of this holy rule through the grace of Christ, and may, improving it, bring it to full perfection.)

The sentence opening 'Then I considered' serves to demarcate a new section, with 'Therefore I' marking a further structural division. In other words Æthelwold seems to be observing vernacular prefatory practice in his stylization here. The Edgar document has recently been read interestingly as an expression of early royal ideology by David Pratt,<sup>69</sup> who argues that it may be 'a text consciously modelled on Alfred's Prose Preface [to the *Pastoral Care*]'.<sup>70</sup> But it is perhaps rather the Laws preface that serves as its most formative model. Both texts review the religious and historical contexts for their own compositions before employing a conventional structural device to mark their shift into the first person voice of someone spearheading a royal enterprise, in one case a king compiling his law-code, in the other a bishop translating the Rule of St Benedict at the king's behest.<sup>71</sup> The Edgar document's echoes of the *Laws* preface, both substantial and stylistic, serve to remind readers of the continued relevance of Alfredian initiatives and achievements, and more specifically of the king's vital role in imposing laws, a concern which pervades the last part of the Edgar document.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Whitelock, *Councils & Synods*, pp. 151–2, with *þ[onne]* altered to *þ[a]*, as cited in J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London, 1898), s.v. *geþeode* (but there with erroneous *ða* for *þa*); trans. Whitelock, with 'I therefore' altered to 'Then I', and 'consider' emended to 'considered' as in Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, p. 922. Bold emphasis is my own.

<sup>69</sup> D. Pratt, 'The Voice of the King in "King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries"', *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012), 145–204. Pratt argues that the third person report with which the piece begins gives way to a construction of Edgar's voice in the first person, but his reasons for this are not compelling: the verb of command in the third person, 'het', for example, appears a number of times previously in the piece without implying 'the act of speaking' ('Voice of the King', p. 160).

<sup>70</sup> Pratt, 'Voice of the King', p. 167.

<sup>71</sup> Pratt, 'Voice of the King', p. 160, views the shift from a third to first person voice as 'part of an epistolary protocol', but the shift may perhaps reflect a prefatory rather than epistolary protocol.

<sup>72</sup> See Pratt, 'Voice of the King', p. 190, and, on specific parallels with *IV Edgar*, Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 319.

When Ælfric, in his prefaces to Genesis and the *Lives of Saints*, chooses to mark structural divisions by means of repetitious sentence openings with personal pronouns in pole position, he is observing a convention which, I have argued, was long established in the vernacular prefatory tradition. Ælfric's techniques of vernacular composition were highly idiosyncratic — his alliterative style alone attests to that — but he was also, as Malcolm Godden has shown, responsive to the methods and matter of his predecessors who wrote in English.<sup>73</sup> Ælfric exploits the convention to enhance his own stylistic and structural techniques, using it to support the Latin epistolary structure of some of his vernacular prefaces, as we have seen.

In this lecture I have attempted to convey some sense of a vernacular prefatory tradition in Anglo-Saxon England that ranges across different time-periods, authors, manuscript contexts and forms of preface. I have suggested that first person pronouns conventionally played a prominent role in structuring techniques for both verse and prose prefaces. An analysis of the convention of the use of the first person voice of the book in verse prefaces as a structuring device has offered new ways of reading the *Boethius* preface and *Aldhelm*, and the relationship between them. I have argued moreover that we can identify in vernacular prose prefaces a convention of using two causally linked sentence openings with first person pronouns in pole position as a structuring device, and that the particular way in which the convention was observed in some earlier vernacular prefaces may allow us to establish more firmly the textual status of the *Soliloquies* preface, and to reveal the nature and extent of the debt of the Edgar document to Alfredian discourse. Such careful shaping of the text, I've suggested, may have helped to lend authority to the vernacular as a literary language.

One final thought — is there any reason why this patterning and rhetoric around the first person pronoun is so prominent in these frame pieces? It is impossible of course to be certain. So much is not known about how these pieces were communicated to their readers, how the prefaces related to their historical and literary contexts, whether or not contemporary with the works they accompany, what was read and what was heard, not to mention the uncertainties of authorship in some cases. I wonder though whether the prominent first person pronoun, vacillating in these works between the book, the author, and the bringer of authority, acts as a kind of bridge between text and audience, identifying the vernacular book as an autonomous object with

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<sup>73</sup> M. R. Godden, 'Ælfric and the Alfredian Precedents', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. H. Magennis and M. Swan, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 18 (Leiden and Boston, 2009), pp. 139–63; M. Godden, 'Ælfric and the Vernacular Prose Tradition', in *The Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and B. F. Huppé (Albany, 1978), pp. 99–117.

authority but also as an animate and engaging presence, reaching out directly so as to move hearts and minds.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> I would like to thank Malcolm Godden and Winfried Rudolf for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this lecture.

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic offers programmes of study, at both undergraduate and graduate level, on the pre-Norman culture of the British Isles in its various aspects: historical, literary, linguistic, palaeographical, archaeological. The Department also serves as a focal point for scholars visiting Cambridge from various parts of the world, who are attracted to Cambridge by the University Library (one of the largest in the world), the collections of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic manuscripts in the University and various college libraries, the collection of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Scandinavian coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, or the rich collection of Anglo-Saxon artefacts in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is possible for the Department to host a small number of Visiting Scholars each year.

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