

Notker's Demons: Entertaining and Edifying Charles the Fat through the *Gesta Karoli Magni*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the curious depictions of demons found in the biography of Charlemagne written by Notker the Stammerer in the late ninth-century. The demons appeared in tales that were unrelated to the biography's subject matter. Historians of earlier generations dismissed the biography altogether as uninformative to a historical understanding of the late Carolingian empire. More recent historians, however, have revived Notker's text to show that it has much to offer modern readers in understanding the ninth-century. This study shows that the demon stories are informative for a historical understanding of the period as well. They illustrate a special relationship between the author and his patron, Charles the Fat, the Carolingian emperor who himself was reported to have suffered demonic assault. Written at Charles' request, Notker seems to have inserted the tales as enjoyable horror stories which served to instruct and entertain simultaneously. This thesis analyzes the Latin terminology used by Notker and applies the philosophical theories of phenomenology and horror in order to recreate the experience that these tales might have had on their intended audience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Charles the Fat was once possessed by an evil spirit.¹ A devil, disguised as an angel of light, appeared to Charles and urged him to rebel against his father, King Louis the German. Charles, “thoroughly terrified with fear,” fled to a nearby church.² But the apparition followed. It persuaded him with the following words: “Why are you afraid and run away? For unless I came from God...I would not be able to enter this house of the Lord.”³ Charles the Fat then accepted a sacrament from the demon’s hand and inadvertently permitted the devil to enter his body. Later, at an assembly convened by Louis the German, Charles broke into a loud fit. Six men were nearly unable to restrain him as he suffered diabolical torment, murmuring indistinctly and screaming loudly in turns. With teeth bared, he menaced his detainers with snapping jaws as they carried him into the church. Louis the German and an entourage of counts and bishops wept as they prayed for his recovery. The demonic assault finally ended as abruptly as it had begun. Charles addressed the crowd and admitted that he had been delivered into the power of the enemy because he had entertained a plot to depose the king. According to the *Annals of St. Bertin* and the *Annals of Fulda*, this happened on January 28, 873 CE in Frankfurt in the eastern Carolingian kingdom.⁴

Charles was crowned emperor in 881.⁵ Around this time, an Aleman monk by the name of Notker the Stammerer wrote a biography of Charlemagne and dedicated it to the new

¹ Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 40-41; and Paul Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 210-219, 225-251.

² “timore perterritus,” *Les annales de Saint-Bertin et de Saint-Vaast*, ed. C. Dehaisnes (Paris: Société de l’Histoire de France, 1980), p. 233.

³ “Cur times et fugis? nam nisi ex Deo venissem...in hanc domum Domini te sequens non intrarem.” *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, ed. C. Dehaisnes, p. 233.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233; and *Annales Fuldenses*, s.a.1873, ed. Friedrich Kurze, *MGH SRG 7* (Hanover, 1891), pp. 77-78.

⁵ MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. xv; Wolfram von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter und seine geistige Welt* (Bern: Verlag A. Francke, 1948); David Ganz, trans., *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer: Two Lives*

emperor.⁶ Notker's biography was anecdotal, humorous, followed a loose, thematic narrative, and seemed to ignore "historical fact" as recorded in other sources.⁷ Notker's biography also contained strange and eerie tales that were unrelated to the biographical subject. Demons loomed large in many of these weird stories. This study will argue that Notker included tales of demon encounters as entertaining *exempla* meant to harmonize with Charles the Fat's own experience with demonic forces. As a historical source for understanding ninth-century Francia, Notker the Stammerer's biography of Charlemagne poses a number of challenges to the modern reader. Writing from the temporal standpoint of nearly 80 years after the fact, Notker's portrait of the emperor was hardly a first-hand account. Notker framed his narrative according to a thematic paradigm, with little attempt at chronology. There also seem to be many "winks and nods" to people, events, and attitudes that were probably implicitly understood by contemporaries, but are lost on modern readers.⁸ What is more, Notker's talent for synthesis, for combining humor, moralization, and horror, can often bewilder.

At different times in its history, Notker's biography of Charlemagne has been dismissed as useless. In the early twentieth century it was seen as a "reckless, blundering saga" written by an "ill-informed monk;" a "mythical record;" a "creative vision."⁹ For its historical value, it was placed in the same category as Alexander Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*.¹⁰ The criticism stemmed from Notker's approach to writing the biography. Notker relied on oral accounts for

of Charlemagne (London: Penguin Classics, 2008); and Thomas F.X. Noble, trans., *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: the Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

⁶ Notker Balbulus, *Gesta Karoli Magni*, I.18, ed. H.F. Haefele, *MGH SRG NS*, (Berlin, 1959), p. 22.

⁷ MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 199.

⁸ Ganz, *Einhard and Notker*, pp. 50-52.

⁹ See Lewis Thorpe, *Two Lives of Charlemagne* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1969), p. 27; Philipp Jaffé, "Monachus Sangallensis De Carolo Magno," *Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum*, Vol VI, Berlin: 1867, p. 628; A.J. Grant, *Early Lives of Charlemagne by Eginhard and the Monk of Saint Gall*, 1922, xvi; and A. Kleinclausz, *Charlemagne*, 1934, p. xxxii.

¹⁰ Louis Halphen, *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de Charlemagne*, (Paris : Librairie Félix Alcan, 1921), p. 142.

good portions of the work which gave the entire text an almost conversational tone.¹¹ The work does not read in any sort of linear way with a clear beginning, middle and end, but functions more as a collection of anecdotes. Louis Halphen, for example, found the work to be “so jumbled that a connecting narrative thread was impossible to find.”¹² He called it a “strange monument of disorder and incoherence.”¹³

However, more recent scholarship has discovered that the *Gesta* has much to offer historians of the Carolingian period. The text contains subtle criticism of late ninth century religious politics, evidence of memory preservation and manipulation, and historical humor, all topics that recent historians have analyzed with relish. For example, Simon MacLean has found the *Gesta* to be indispensable for understanding the twilight years of the Carolingian dynasty.¹⁴ David Ganz has shown that the amorphous nature of the *Gesta* was actually a conscious literary choice, designed to invert the traditional “pagan” models of biography in order to place God at the center of the narrative.¹⁵ This approach to the biography also allowed Ganz to highlight the humor at work in Notker’s text. Matthew Innes outlined the light tension between oral tradition and the written word that is evident in the *Gesta Karoli* and its effect on collective memory in the Carolingian era.¹⁶ Notker’s achievement is perhaps found in what we might call his “misrepresentation” of the historical Charlemagne. Yet he did not live in the age of Charlemagne as David Ganz has argued: “to recapture a vision of that age, Notker and his contemporaries

¹¹ Notker, *Gesta*, preface to Book II, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.48.

¹² Halphen, *Etudes critiques*, p. 107.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁴ MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, pp. 199-229.

¹⁵ David Ganz, “Humour as History in Notker’s *Gesta Karoli Magni*,” in *Monks, nuns, and friars in mediaeval society* (Press of the University of the South, 1989), pp. 171-183.

¹⁶ Matthew Innes, “Memory, orality, and literacy in an early medieval society,” *Past & Present* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 158.

could read Einhard. To measure their distance from that age they needed to read Notker.”¹⁷ The text is also peppered with demons and horror, topics that have received very little attention.

Martin Claussen saw in Carolingian culture a serious but flexible attitude toward the past, and an understanding of the dynamic relationship between tradition and reform that allowed history to be adapted or transformed whenever it did not yield up material appropriate for present needs.¹⁸ Rosamond McKitterick understood that, for the Franks, understanding the past could work at several levels and was manifested in a number of different contexts.¹⁹ The interplay between memories, forms of historical record and the writing of history were essential components in the process of defining the Carolingians. History is always “suspicious” of memory because memory is not necessarily concerned with factual accuracy.²⁰ Rather it preserves a recollection of the past, both recent and distant, that corresponds to a collective understanding of those events remembered. It is a “current of continuous thought” which retains “only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive.”²¹ Notker called his work a history, because his ninth-century understanding of that term allowed for other ways of imagining the past than permitted by modern ideas of “proper” history.

This paper’s special emphasis on tales of demonic apparition in Notker’s biography of Charlemagne draws on certain methodologies. Notker’s contemporaries had a rich frame of reference from which to draw “sustained intellectual deliberations” about the phenomena of their

¹⁷ Ganz, “Humor as History,” p. 182.

¹⁸ Martin Claussen, *The Reform of the Frankish Church* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.

¹⁹ Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 8.

²⁰ Nora, “Les Lieux de Mémoire,” in *Theories of Memory: a Reader* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 148.

²¹ Maurice Halbwachs, “The Collective Memory,” in *Theories of Memory: a Reader* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 140.

world.²² Rather than rationalizing Notker's depiction of the fantastic in terms that cohere with a modern scientific and historical worldview, the analysis here follows the lead of David Brakke's investigation of early desert ascetics' dealings with demons by developing an analysis sensitive to the spiritual world and emotional life of the period.²³ In Notker's intellectual world, resistance to demons was as real as Charles the Fat's resistance to political enemies. Therefore, this essay approaches Notker's stories as much as possible in late ninth-century spiritual terms.

It is not that people of Notker's day were poor rationalizers, "but that rationalization itself was fallible in determining the truth or falsehood of wonders in a rural, oral, parochial informational context."²⁴ In an era of slow travel and communication, ascertaining credibility was a problem with which contemporaries lived, leading to an ambivalence between truth and falsehood, or as Keagan Brewer explained: "it was enough to record a story for [a mix of] entertainment, moral didacticism or posterity."²⁵ Notker prefaced the first of his demon tales with just such a justification: "Here, because the occasion has offered itself, I want to record other things, although they are not related to the subject, which happened at the same time and are worthy of being remembered."²⁶ Many places in Notker's text correspond to a system of evidence that medieval writers of hard-to-believe stories used to improve the perceived truth quality of the phenomena they recorded.²⁷ Notker relied on *auctores*—authorities, those whose testimony was trustworthy—to establish the credibility of his writing.²⁸ Also, the prose of Notker's *Gesta Karoli* was in a "correct, vigorous, and artful" style that would have been

²² Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 300.

²³ David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* (Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 8.

²⁴ Keagan Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 137.

²⁵ Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism*, p. 137.

²⁶ "Hoc, quia se ita obtulit occasio, extrinsecus inserto non ab re videtur etiam cetera, que isdem temporibus memoria digna gesta sunt, stili officio religare," Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 27.

²⁷ Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism*, p. 137.

²⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, preface to book II, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 48.

accepted by contemporaries.²⁹ Notker expressed a deference to God's authority when he dedicated the text to "the all-powerful disposer of everything and regulator of kingdoms and time."³⁰ Notker tied his stories to the credibility of older accounts, insisting that "the truth of our ancestors is more to be believed than the lazy inaccuracies of modern men."³¹ In anticipation of his reader's objection to the fantastic nature of some of the content of his text, Notker inserted "truth assertions," which, as identified by Jeanette Beer, were statements whose inclusion in medieval texts separated "history" from "fable."³² Through these elements, Notker established the necessary pedigree for his book of sufficient quality to enable his readers to accept his stories, even the fantastic ones.

The Carolingian religious *mentalité* was essentially one of anxiety.³³ The ubiquitous Carolingian programs of *correctio* and *reformatio* were reactions to the anxiety of sin and evil that threatened the realm from every corner.³⁴ One tool of spiritual correction and reform was the *speculum*, the literary mirror. There were as many types of mirrors as there were different classes of educated Franks, and each was designed to model the ideal behavior and values for its respective social caste.³⁵ This literary genre was a key influence on the *Gesta*. Notker drew on

²⁹ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, p. 52.

³⁰ "Omnipotens rerum dispositor ordinatorque regnorum et temporum," Notker, *Gesta*, I.1, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 1.

³¹ "nisi quia partum veritati plus credendum est quam modum ignave falsitati," Notker, *Gesta*, I.10, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 12.

³² Jeanette Beer, *Narrative Conventions of Truth in the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1981), pp. 9-11; and Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 32.

³³ Matthew Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent in the Carolingian Empire: the Case of Gottschalk of Orbais*, (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 3.

³⁴ Paul Fouracre, "Carolingian Justice: the rhetoric of improvement and contexts of abuse," *Settimane di Spoleto* 42 (1995), pp. 771-803.

³⁵ Hans Hubert Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscher Ethos in der Karolingerzeit*, Bonner Historische Forschungen 32 (Bonn, 1968); Courtney Booker, *Past Convictions: the Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Katrien Heene, *The Legacy of Paradise: Marriage, Motherhood, and Woman in Carolingian Edifying Literature* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1993).

the “saintly-mirror” and other types in his approach to the biography of Charlemagne.³⁶

Although the demon stories can be read as products of Carolingian anxiety, they also functioned as a hopeful and entertaining *speculum* that showed how a great empire led by a model emperor could withstand evil and correct sin.

As well as corrective, it will be shown that Notker was interested in making his work entertaining for his intended audience by incorporating elements of popular beliefs, humor and especially horror. Most of those elements are self-explanatory as entertaining devices except for horror whose particular entertainment value is considered peculiar.³⁷ Those seeking explanations of horror’s appeal need to recognize that horror is not an “autonomous cultural artifact,” but rather a conjuncture of the beliefs, commitments and social practices of a culture, which requires treatment in its own historical context.³⁸ Because horror can immerse its audience in a state of anticipation that endures across the text and does not become overwritten by specific narrative events or “occurrent” emotions, Notker’s use of horror will be demonstrated as a particularly effective narrative tool.³⁹ As primary agents of horror, demons take a central role in the analysis of Notker’s horror stories. David Ganz stated that “the devil is perhaps the most understudied Carolingian noble, sadly neglected in Carolingian *Personenforschung*.”⁴⁰ Monsters, those “extraordinary character(s) in our ordinary world,” will be analyzed alongside theories of the uncanny and the abject to show how Notker’s horrific tales might have affected his audience to the ultimate end of bringing about a catharsis—that is, a pleasurable resolution to the horrors and danger of sin through vicarious experience.⁴¹

³⁶ Ganz, *Einhard and Notker*, p.50.

³⁷ Andrew Tudor, “Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre,” in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (Routledge, 2002), p.49.

³⁸ Tudor, “Why Horror?,” p. 49.

³⁹ Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 25.

⁴⁰ Ganz, “Humour as History,” p. 180.

⁴¹ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 16.

Notker's various tales of horror and demons, therefore, should not be discounted for their seemingly bizarre nature and irrelevance to the biographical subject of Charlemagne. It is unlikely that Notker inserted these without a purpose, especially when the rest of the elements of the *Gesta* were clearly chosen to entertain and instruct. Paul Dutton found that "textual archaeology" was not necessary to see how Notker masterfully pulled at the heartstrings of his patron.⁴² Notker likely anticipated that these demon stories would appeal to Charles the Fat and his court. After all, it had been less than ten years since Charles' had recovered from his "widely reported" demon encounter.⁴³ It seems reasonable that Notker intended his demon stories to shock and delight his audience for they corresponded to Charles the Fat's own demonic struggle in many ways. The victims of Notker's demons suffered when they gave in to sin and most of them escaped the experience with a lesson learned. The style and elements of the *Gesta Karoli* were also a new kind of approach to history writing which suggests that Charles' court was open to novel literary experiences. It is likely that Notker was able to take such artistic license because he and Charles were friends. It is evident from the *Gesta* that Notker and Charles the Fat knew each other well: Notker often used the first person in his narrations; Notker made references to Charles' lack of legitimate heirs in a hopeful and playful way;⁴⁴ Notker addressed Charles directly in the text on a number of occasions, creating a feeling of dialogue;⁴⁵ and the text flowed in a free and almost conversant tone.⁴⁶ There is also extant evidence of Charles the Fat making frequent visits to St. Gall, where he and his queen borrowed books from the library.⁴⁷ The library registry for these borrowings was written by Notker himself. It has even been proposed that

⁴² Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, p. 204.

⁴³ Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Notker, *Gesta*, II.11 and II.12, ed. H. Haefele, pp. 68 and 74.

⁴⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, I.18, II. 14, and II. 16, ed. H. Haefele, pp. 22, 78, and 80.

⁴⁶ A good example can be found in the joke made by Louis the Pious' jester in Notker, *Gesta*, II.21, ed. H. Haefele, p. 92.

⁴⁷ Ekkehard, *Casus S. Galli*, ed. H.F. Haefele, *St. Galler Klostergeschichte* (vol. 10, Darmstadt, 1980), IX, p. 32 and LXVIII, p. 86.

Charles had a hand in deciding the content of the *Gesta*.⁴⁸ Notker had a keen interest in a happy reign for Charles the Fat and put pen to parchment in a spirit of celebration. The demon stories offered a way of exposing the dangers and sin that lurked in the Carolingian world from a safe vantage point, likely provoking an entertaining catharsis of emotions in its principle reader, Charles the Fat, one who was familiar with demons.

⁴⁸ Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 154.

Chapter 2: Historical Setting

Notker “Balbulus,” or the Stammerer, was born around 840 in the village of Jonswill in the canton of St. Gallen.⁴⁹ Notker had a brother, Othere, who was the leader over a *Hundertschaft*, which meant his family was likely to have been noble.⁵⁰ Notker was sent to live in the household of Adalbert, a veteran of Charlemagne’s wars against the Avars, Saxons, and Slavs.⁵¹ Notker grew up with Adalbert’s son, Werinbert.⁵² The two were friends and both were offered as oblates to the monastery of St. Gall.⁵³ Notker lived out the rest of his life there, as he put it, *inclusus*—“having been shut in”—because, like most monks of this period, he probably never left the monastery again.⁵⁴

Notker originally set out to write the *Gesta Karoli Magni* in three books.⁵⁵ He wrote that he relied on three oral sources for his narrative, thus one book per source. The first book held stories that Werinbert had told Notker during their monastic life together.⁵⁶ These mostly concerned Charlemagne’s dealings with bishops and his imperial achievements. Notker ended the first book when Werinbert died.⁵⁷ The second book was comprised of stories that Notker had heard as a child from his surrogate warrior-father, Adalbert, an old warrior who told tales of war.⁵⁸ The second book ends abruptly in the twenty-second chapter. The last paragraph ends mid-sentence, in an ominous moment of violence: “What are you doing, attacking violently the

⁴⁹ von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, p. 521.

⁵⁰ von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, p. 31; Ganz, *Einhard and Notker*, p. 47.

⁵¹ Notker, *Gesta*, preface to Book II, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 48.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, p. 52.

⁵⁴ Notker, *Gesta*, I.30, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 41; Mayke de Jong, “Carolingian Monasticism: the Power of Prayer,” ed. Rosamond McKitterick, *New Cambridge Medieval History II: c.700-c.900* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 636-640.

⁵⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, preface to Book II, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, preface to Book II, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

emperor's glass-worker?' They answered 'We will let you keep your job, but...'”⁵⁹ Notker never wrote the third book, nor is there any trace of who the oral source was going to be, although, Grimald, the then-abbot of St. Gall, is a likely candidate.⁶⁰

We know that Charles was the intended audience for the biography because Notker addressed him directly multiple times in the text of the *Gesta*.⁶¹ Charles may have even commissioned the work. There are extant records which show that Charles the Fat visited Notker at the abbey of St. Gall in 883.⁶² Notker was the monastery librarian at the time and his register shows that Charles the Fat borrowed books during his visit.⁶³ We may never know if the biography was commissioned because the preface to the *Gesta* was lost. No surviving manuscript contains an opening dedication; however, we know one existed because Notker referred to it in the interlude between Books I and II.⁶⁴

Through the centuries, the *Gesta Karoli Magni* was copied and transferred as an anonymous work. No authorship credit exists in the text. Shortly after it was written, the *Gesta* disappeared from the historical record. The oldest library catalogues at Saint Gall, where Notker lived and wrote, do not show any record of it being part of the collection.⁶⁵ The *Gesta* reappeared enigmatically in the twelfth century, always attached to copies of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*. Copyists may have considered Notker's work to be some kind of commentary on Einhard's better-known biography and so included it.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ “‘Quid facitis, vitreario Cesaris vim inferentes?’ responderunt: ‘Officium quidem tuum habere te permittimus...’” Notker, *Gesta*, II.22, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 93.

⁶⁰ Innes, “Memory, Orality and Literacy,” pp. 19-20.

⁶¹ See Notker, *Gesta*, I.18, II.9, II.10, II.11, II.12, and II.16, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 22-25, 62-75, and 80-81.

⁶² Ekkehard, *Casus S. Galli*, IX and LXVIII, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 32 and p. 86.

⁶³ Susan Rankin, “Ego itaque Notker scripsi,” *Revue Bénédictine* 101 (1991), pp. 268-298, here 292-295.

⁶⁴ Notker, *Gesta*, preface to book II, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Robert Folz, *Le souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne* (Geneva : Slatkine Reprints, 1973), p. 15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Notker's influential poetry and innovative liturgical *sequentiae*, which replaced wordless vocalizing refrains with simple lyrics, kept his name from oblivion and eventually led to a review of his life for canonization in 1513.⁶⁷ Although Rome ultimately declined to canonize Notker, the review encouraged interest in the life and works of the monk of St. Gall. Konrad Haller translated *Vita Notkeri Balbuli*, an almost forgotten record from the archive of St. Gall, into middle-high German in 1522.⁶⁸

Certain murky clues eventually tied Notker's name back to the *Gesta Karoli Magni*. The text itself, often attributed to an unknown monk of St. Gall, has always had a connection to the monastery.⁶⁹ In 1601, Hermann Canisius published an edition of the text, where he attempted to identify the author.⁷⁰ One authorial hint appears in the *Gesta* where the author refers to himself as "balbulus et edentulus."⁷¹ In a number of writings attributable to Notker, including his *sequentia* of St. Stephen and letters he wrote to contemporaries, he referred to himself with self-deprecating words that bore a resemblance to the cryptic clue in the *Gesta*.⁷² "Stammering," "toothless," and other references to poor oral health and speech impediments led Canisius to posit a connection. Subsequent research confirmed his hunch: in 1886, Karl Zeumer, one of the editors of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, undertook a detective-like analysis of the Latin prose of the *Gesta* and compared it to Notker's known writings. He found enough resemblance to confirm Notker the Stammerer as the author of *Gesta Karoli Magni*.⁷³

⁶⁷ Ivo Auf der Maur, "St. Gall's Contribution to the Liturgy," in *The Culture of the Abbey of St. Gall*, ed. Werner Vogler, pp. 42-46; Johannes Duft, "Sacred Music" in *the Culture of the Abbey of St. Gall*, ed. Werner Vogler, p. 58; and Erika-Anette Koeppel, *Die Legende des heiligen Notker von Konrad Haller, 1522* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1983), p. i.

⁶⁸ Koeppel, *Die Legende des heiligen Notker*, p. v.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁷⁰ Ganz, *Einhard and Notker*, p. 52.

⁷¹ "Stammering and toothless," Notker, *Gesta*, II.17, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 84.

⁷² Von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, p. 520.

⁷³ Koeppel, *Die Legende des heiligen Notker*, p. iii.

Notker wrote the biography at St. Gall in southern Alemannia. The monastery still lies today in an Alpine valley in eastern Switzerland near Lake Constance. St. Gall has ancient roots in the ascetic tradition. The traditional founder of the abbey was Gallus, a hermit from Ireland who came to the valley in the early seventh century to build a wooden sanctuary.⁷⁴ He was a comrade of the more well-known Irish missionary Columbanus but parted ways to seek a solitary life.⁷⁵ Before long, Gallus' isolation ended. A reputation for his miracles and teachings spread, bringing many to visit his hermitage.⁷⁶ Then Gallus died. He was regarded as a saint and his wooden hut became a pilgrimage destination.⁷⁷ One pilgrim, Otmar, decided not to leave the valley where St. Gallus had lived and founded a proper monastery there in 720.⁷⁸

Aided initially by Otmar's connections, the abbey prospered and over the following centuries purchased estates throughout Alemannia.⁷⁹ Otmar clashed with the nearby bishop of Konstanz, resulting in a lawsuit where Konstanz sued the monastery in 159.⁸⁰ Thereafter having to render an annual payment, St. Gall became subordinate to Konstanz for the next few centuries; perhaps lingering resentment to this fact was identifiable in the portrayal of certain bishops in Notker's *Gesta*.⁸¹ Despite the financial burden, St. Gall's fortunes remained positive and its real estate holdings continued to increase.⁸² St. Gall entered a "golden age" in the ninth century.⁸³ The abbey assembled a large library and developed an impressive literary culture.⁸⁴ The abbey scriptorium had over 100 different scribes and invented its own highly legible script, similar to

⁷⁴ Walafrid Strabo, *Vita Sancti Galli*, I.1 and IV.1, MGH SS., p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Werner Vogler, "Historical Sketch of the Abbey of St. Gall," in *the Culture of the Abbey of St. Gall*, ed. James C. King et al. (Stuttgart, Belser Verlag, 1991), p. 9.

⁷⁷ Vogler, "Historical Sketch," p. 9.

⁷⁸ von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Vogler, "Historical Sketch," pp. 10-12.

⁸⁰ Vogler, "Historical Sketch," pp. 10-12.

⁸¹ Halphen, *Etudes critiques*, p. 136.

⁸² Vogler, "Historical Sketch," p. 9.

⁸³ Koeppel, *Die Legende*, p. ii.

⁸⁴ Vogler, "Historical Sketch," pp. 10-12.

but completely pre-dating the minuscule of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance.⁸⁵ There were construction projects that expanded the edifices of the monastery.⁸⁶ In 854, the financial obligation to Konstanz were finally cancelled by royal intervention, showing the benefits of St. Gall's newfound status as a royally-favored monastery.⁸⁷

In the second half of the ninth century, St. Gall was governed by Grimald, chancellor and chief chaplain to Louis the German.⁸⁸ Louis, allied with his brother Charles the Bald, had fought against another Carolingian brother, Lothar, in a *Brüderkampf*—a civil war between brothers—for control of their father's empire.⁸⁹ To restore peace, they signed the Treaty of Verdun, which gave possession of west Francia to Charles, east Francia to Louis, and the central swath of territories to Lothar.⁹⁰ Grimald's leadership and position at Louis the German's royal court kept St. Gall in a strong place in eastern Frankish politics.⁹¹ Notker joined the "active and stimulating world" of St. Gall during this time.⁹² He wrote once that St. Gall was one of the "poorer and more austere" abbeys in all of Francia, but he must have meant it in rhetorical self-deprecation, a sort of Aleman pride framed in humility that was typical of St. Gall monks of the period, because St. Gall was one of the preeminent monasteries of the Carolingian world in his day.⁹³

Louis the German's territory of east Francia sat on the eastern bank of the Rhine and roughly corresponded to modern Germany (with old or west Francia corresponding to Gaul, or modern

⁸⁵ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, (Cambridge University, 1989), pp. 85-86.

⁸⁶ Vogler, "Historical Sketch," p. 14.

⁸⁷ Koeppel, *Die Legende*, p. ii.

⁸⁸ Von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, p. 14; see also Eric Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-76* (Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 71-72.

⁸⁹ Koeppel, *Die Legende*, p. ii.

⁹⁰ Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 165-166; Nithard, *Histoire des fils de Louis le Pieux*, IV.3, ed. Philippe Lauer and Sophie Glansdorff, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012), pp. 136-137.

⁹¹ Vogler, "Historical Sketch," p. 14; and Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, p.72.

⁹² "In diese tätige und anregende Welt trat Notker..." Koeppel, *Die Legende*, p. ii.

⁹³ "pauperior et angustior," Notker, *Gesta*, II.12, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 72; Walter Berschlin, "Latin Literature from St. Gall," in *the Culture of the Abbey of St. Gall*, (Stuttgart: Belser Verlag, 1991), p. 145; and Vogler, "Historical Sketch," pp. 13-14.

France).⁹⁴ The area comprised several regions, including Alemannia, which was the power base of Charles the Fat, the last Carolingian ruler.⁹⁵ His unflattering sobriquet makes for a striking mental image, but his actual size is unknown.⁹⁶ The nickname was a twelfth-century creation.⁹⁷ Not long after his encounter with the demon, Charles was made king over Alemannia.⁹⁸ This was during the “Carolingian crisis” of the late ninth century, an unprecedented time when eight members of the Carolingian family died within nine years.⁹⁹ Several of the would-be heirs met their fates in disturbingly violent ways. Louis III’s short rule of west Francia ended when he rode his horse after a girl into a house and cracked his head wide open on the lintel. Carloman II died in a freak hunting accident, caused by either a boar or a misplaced sword.¹⁰⁰ The empire now entered circumstances that “accelerated the historical process,” meaning it seemed to be hastening toward the decline of the Carolingian dynasty.¹⁰¹ As the sole legitimate Carolingian left alive in 885, Charles the Fat became the imperial ruler over all of the Frankish empire.¹⁰² He reunited Charlemagne’s realm for the last time, and it was a tenuous reunification. The uncanny ability of the Carolingians to govern such a geographically expansive patchwork of culturally diverse regions had always depended on heirs: sons and nephews who could be scattered throughout the empire to function as *reguli*, sub-kings who diffused access to imperial power and

⁹⁴ Ganz, *Einhard and Notker*, p. 126.

⁹⁵ Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *the Carolingian World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 422-423.

⁹⁶ Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Klaus Nass, *Die Reichskronik des Annalista Saxo und die sächsische Geschichtsschreibung im 12. Jahrhundert* (Hanover, 1996), p. 49.

⁹⁸ Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 84.

⁹⁹ Stuart Airlie, “Les élites en 888 et après, ou comment pense-t-on la crise carolingienne?” *Les élites au haut moyen âge : Crises et renouvellement* (Brepols Publishers, 2006); and Airlie, “The Nearly Men : Boso of Vienne and Arnulf of Bavaria,” *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe : Concepts, Origins and Transformations*, ed. Anne Duggan (Boydell Press, 2000), p.26.

¹⁰⁰ Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 124.

¹⁰¹ Airlie, “The Nearly Men,” p. 26.

¹⁰² Riché, *The Carolingians*, pp. 216-217.

linked the peripheries to central authority.¹⁰³ Charles had no legitimate heirs. Notker even noted this fact in the text of the *Gesta*, refusing to expound on a story about Louis the Pious until a future date when he anticipated seeing a *Ludowiculus* or a *Carolastrus* (diminutives of Louis and Charles) at Charles the Fat's side.¹⁰⁴

Despite the impending crisis of succession, there was optimism in Charles' favored Alemannia. Charles itinerated almost exclusively in the middle swath of the empire and paid closest attention to his pre-imperial lands—northern Italy, Franconia and Alemannia.¹⁰⁵ From the cloisters of the abbey of St. Gall in southern Alemannia, Notker the Stammerer anticipated a happy reign for Charles the Fat, unabashedly calling him a greater emperor than his great-grandfather Charlemagne.¹⁰⁶ It was with such optimism that Notker wrote the *Gesta Karoli Magni*. The biography seems to have been the result of hope in the new emperor, a celebration of the unbroken Carolingian dynasty. The region benefitted and enjoyed a sense of peace and prosperity that might have felt like a glorious new imperial era, even while the other areas of the Carolingian empire dwelt in political uncertainty.¹⁰⁷

Charles' preference for Alemannia and his lack of heirs who could act as sub-kings meant his imperial presence was missing in the other parts of the empire. This situation created a new political foothold for regional magnates who were becoming increasingly excluded from a system of politics which depended largely on patronage at the highest levels: favors, friendship, “seeing and being seen.”¹⁰⁸ These circumstances lead to political destabilization in west Francia and other areas neglected by Charles. Physical safety was a worry experienced by many. Coastal

¹⁰³ Costambeys, et al., *Carolingian World*, p. 424.

¹⁰⁴ Notker, *Gesta*, II.11, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 68.

¹⁰⁵ Costambeys, et al., *Carolingian World*, pp. 422-23; and MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, pp.81-91.

¹⁰⁶ Notker, *Erchanberti breviarium continuatio*, MGH SS II, ed. Georg Pertz, pp. 329-30.

¹⁰⁷ Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ Costambeys, et al., *Carolingian World*, p. 425.

and riparian lands were exposed to Viking raids which increased in intensity as the ninth century headed towards its close.¹⁰⁹ Religious anxiety was attendant throughout the empire. In a tradition reaching back to the writings of Gregory of Tours, the Franks had long seen themselves as the chosen people of God.¹¹⁰ The attitude appeared in Notker's *Gesta*: "The omnipotent disposer of all things and regulator of kingdoms and time... through the illustrious Charles, set up the golden head of another no less marvelous statue among the Franks."¹¹¹ The appropriation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream as interpreted by Daniel reorganized the rise and fall of empires to place the Franks in primary position.¹¹² The Frankish self-image as God's elect may seem like self-congratulation (or even more cynically, a moral pretense for conquest of new territory), but the designation came with grave responsibilities. Frankish kings believed that they were morally liable for the souls over whom they ruled.¹¹³ Concern for one's place in the after-life was also growing among the population of the Carolingian empire, evidenced by the practices of individual atonement for sin and rites concerning death, which were expanding in the eighth and ninth centuries.¹¹⁴ "Secret" penances started to be seen as having a proximate effect on the souls of the dead during this period as well, extending the climate of concern even further.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Bauduin, *Le monde franc et les Vikings* (Editions Albin Michel, 2009), p. 23.

¹¹⁰ Matthew Innes, "Memory, orality, and literacy," p. 5; and Owen Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: the Carolingians, Baptism and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.48-49.

¹¹¹ "Omnipotens rerum dispositor ordinatorque regnorum et temporum... alterius non minus admirabilis statue caput aureum per illustrem Karolum erexit in Francis," Notker, *Gesta*, I.1, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 1.

¹¹² See Dan 2:31-8.

¹¹³ Costambeys, et al., *Carolingian World*, p. 80.

¹¹⁴ Paul Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 99; Mayke De Jong, *The Penitential State* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 5; and Frederick Paxton, *Christianizing Death: the Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 201.

¹¹⁵ Peter Brown, "Vers la naissance du purgatoire," *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 52^e année, No. 6, (1997), p. 1249.

Chapter 3: Mirror for an Emperor

As a consequence of demonic intervention, Charles the Fat repented of his political treachery against his father. The rebellion of sons against fathers was a common feature in Carolingian politics from the time of Louis the Pious.¹¹⁶ Rebels did not always come away from their treasonous plots as well as Charles did: blinding, confinement to a monastery, and death were common Carolingian responses to treason.¹¹⁷ In fact, Notker recorded the fate of one of Charlemagne's offspring who had been involved in a botched coup against the emperor.¹¹⁸ According to Notker, this son, known as Pippin the Hunchback, was imprisoned at St. Gall where he took up gardening. Pippin's fate was not sealed, however. He obtained partial forgiveness for his crimes when he offered Charlemagne a horticulturally-based metaphor for dealing with new rebellion. As a reward for this good advice, Pippin was sent to a "better" monastery.¹¹⁹ These examples illustrate that Charles had been fortunate regarding the aftermath of his rebellion. His eyes were not put out, he was not confined to a monastery; instead, he was pardoned and ultimately lived to become emperor. Notker's story about Pippin the Hunchback illustrated for Charles the good fortune of his circumstances and a reminder of the responsibility he owed to it. As a collection, the tales in the *Gesta* functioned as a common Carolingian literary genre, that of the *speculum*—the mirror of correction and admonition. Notker's use of this genre in his biography of Charlemagne was partially modelled on the saints' lives of a vintage anterior to Notker's day. In this way, the *Gesta Karoli* offered Charles the Fat an example of how an ideal ruler dealt with evil in an ideal empire.

¹¹⁶ De Jong, *Penitential State*, pp. 40-44.

¹¹⁷ MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, p.26; de Jong, *Penitential State*, p. 43; and Costambeys, et al., *Carolingian World*, p.67

¹¹⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, II.12, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 72-74.

¹¹⁹ Notker, *Gesta*, II.12, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 74.

The *speculum* was a literary genre that proliferated during the Carolingian epoch.¹²⁰ Also called “edifying literature,” *specula* were designed to show a model of behavior and attitude befitting the station of the intended reader. Although the “mirror for princes” category is probably the most well-known, thanks to H.H. Anton’s seminal work on the topic, Carolingian edifying literature contained several sub-genres that addressed lay elites, clergy, monastics, and even women, as Katrien Heene has shown.¹²¹

Notker seems to have intended the *Gesta* to function as a *Fürstenspiegel* (mirror for princes) for Charles the Fat, an idea already put forward by Theodore Siegrist and Simon MacLean.¹²² The various stories of Charlemagne’s dealings with wayward or short-sighted bishops coupled with the chapters on his warfare and international diplomacy show an idealized emperor worthy of emulation. The achievements of the past no longer needed defending, they needed to be recalled to the mind of the current generation “in order to spur the survivors to comparable triumphs.”¹²³ Given the tenuous position of the Carolingian dynasty at the time, Notker very well could have been concerned for the future of the empire. Courtney Booker saw that the proliferation of the edifying text in the upper echelons of Frankish society contained a metaphor of which Carolingians were particularly fond, that if the *Fürstenspiegel* was designed to help plot the future course of the king, then the future course of the kingdom naturally followed.¹²⁴ Rosamond McKitterick found the same phenomenon at work in the *renovatio* of Carolingian scholarship: “Notker, therefore, gives us a far better idea...that favouring (sic)

¹²⁰ Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 3.

¹²¹ See Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscher*; Booker, *Past Convictions*, p. 11; and Katrien Heene, *The Legacy of Paradise*, pp. 11-18.

¹²² Theodore Siegrist, *Herrscherbild und Weltsicht bei Notker Balbulus: Untersuchungen zu den Gesta Karoli*, *Geist und Werk der Zeiten*, 8 (Zurich, 1963), pp. 71-108; and MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, pp. 199-200.

¹²³ Ganz, “Humour as History,” p. 182.

¹²⁴ Booker, *Past Convictions*, p. 168.

scholars had also the wider purpose of promoting scholarship throughout the kingdom.”¹²⁵ The *Gesta* can thus be read as a “mirror for emperor,” or perhaps even as a “mirror for *empire*.”

As monastic identity developed in late antiquity, certain ascetics came to be identified within the new category of “saints,” and a new body of literature grew up around this category: hagiography.¹²⁶ Like any literary genre, medieval hagiography created its own set of expectations. In their collection of early medieval saint’s lives, Thomas Noble and Thomas Head pointed out that “the primary aim of the authors (of medieval hagiography) was not to compose a biographical record of the saint, but rather to portray the subject as an exemplar of Christian virtue.”¹²⁷ The *Gesta* was not preoccupied with composing a biographical record of Charlemagne, either, but was rather an aggregate of tales communicated to Notker by friends and informants that messily fit two large categories: Charlemagne’s dealings with the church and his dealings of war and policy. Notker certainly painted Charlemagne as the example of a virtuous Christian king. The majority of the first book of the *Gesta* shows the emperor judging and regulating the Frankish church with wisdom and piety. Weak, foolish and greedy bishops are corrected or punished; humble, diligent clerics are rewarded.¹²⁸ As David Ganz has argued, Notker’s work may have been intended to function as a commentary on the popular *Vita* of Einhard, recasting the warrior-hero in a more religious and humble tone.¹²⁹ Notker, like most monks of his day, was accustomed to the tropes of hagiographical style, which may have informed his stylistic and narrative choices in the *Gesta Karoli Magni* more than has previously

¹²⁵ Rosamond McKitterick, “Royal Patronage of culture in the Frankish kingdoms under the Carolingians: motives and consequences,” in *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages: Collected Studies of Rosamond McKitterick* (Variorum, 1995), pp. 96-98.

¹²⁶ René Aigrain, *L'hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2000), pp.294-304.

¹²⁷ Thomas Noble and Thomas Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints' Lives* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. xviii.

¹²⁸ Ganz, “Humour as History,” p. 177; Kershaw, “Laughter after Babel’s Fall,” pp. 192-194; and Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, pp. 204-213.

¹²⁹ Ganz, *Einhard and Notker*, p. 49.

been supposed. When comparing Notker's *Gesta* to Einhard's "classicizing" *Vita*, it becomes clear that Notker intended to cast Charlemagne in a much more saintly light.¹³⁰ The moral significance of rulers was heightened in edifying texts because, unlike other individuals, the sins of the emperor could potentially destroy the empire.¹³¹ This would have been an important example to show Charles the Fat, for the moral future of the empire was now in his hands. It is also possible that Notker partially modelled the *Gesta* on saints' lives as he planned how to present his collection of tales to Charles the Fat.¹³² Notker perhaps could not include stories of Charlemagne struggling directly with demons where there were none, but he could show how the empire at-large ought to fare in the struggle with evil through triumphs over demons.

Demons appear in much of the hagiography that might have influenced Notker. The *Lives* of St. Martin of Tours, written around 395 by Sulpicius Severus, and Germanus of Auxerre, written by Constantius of Lyon in the late fifth century, serve as exhibits because of their revered place in the Gallic past.¹³³ In fact, Notker even quotes from the *Life of St. Martin* in the *Gesta*.¹³⁴ In St. Martin's story, it is not long before demonic assaults enter the narrative. We read about Satan in human and animal forms, a foul ghost mistakenly revered as a martyr, and the efficacy of the sign of the cross against evil.¹³⁵ Decidedly less folkloric in its flavor of demonology than Notker, the author, Sulpicius Severus, shies away from addressing the problem of evil: "You must judge for yourself of God's reasons for permitting the devil to wield such power."¹³⁶ Looking next at the *Life* of St. Germanus of Auxerre, a similar pattern emerges. There are episodes where Germanus halted the activity of demoniacs, where dangerous water demons tried

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

¹³¹ Stone, *Morality and Masculinity*, p. 25.

¹³² Ganz, "Humour as History," p. 177.

¹³³ Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ: Saints' Lives*, p. xxviii.

¹³⁴ Notker, *Gesta*, II.11, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 70.

¹³⁵ Severus Sulpicius, *Vie de Saint Martin*, ed. Jacques Fontaine, Sources Chrétiennes 133 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1967), pp. 160-162, 204-212, and 290-298.

¹³⁶ Sulpicius, *Vie de Saint Martin*, ed. Fontaine, p. 296.

to capsize Germanus' boat on the ocean, and where flying evil spirits forced their hapless victims to prophesy.¹³⁷ As a counter-example, the *Lives of St. Willehad* and *St. Benedict the Goth (Abbot of Aniane)*, two Carolingian hagiographies, contain much historical detail, but they contain very few miracles, and no demons.¹³⁸ If Notker was partially modelling the *Gesta* on saints' lives in some way, he must have drawn his inspiration from older ones including demon stories, and not from more contemporary ones. Courtney Booker found that Carolingian edifying texts held a preference for the past, because "the past could provide guidance for the present in order to attain a more secure—and, hence, salutary—future, a relationship among the three aspects of time that was often conflated, crystallized, and polished to form the reflective surface of a mimetic mirror."¹³⁹

Heene explained that late antique- and Merovingian-era saints' lives were addressed to the laity, whereas Carolingian-era ones typically were not.¹⁴⁰ The miracles and demon stories were purposely eliminated from saints' lives as the genre became increasingly confined to the cloister.¹⁴¹ Therefore, the miracles and demons of the older saints' lives might be seen as elements tied to the interest or entertainment of a lay audience. Notker's inclusion of demon tales, unrelated for the most part to Charlemagne, reflects that his target audience was lay, and therefore likely to take similar pleasure in these more crowd-pleasing elements of the *Gesta*.

Notker, it should not be forgotten, was a monk himself. He was considered, at least in the tradition of St. Gall, to have possessed special experience with demons. The annals of St. Gall contained an amusing anecdote about dealing with double-crossers in monastery life that

¹³⁷ Constance de Lyon, *Vie de Saint Germain D'Auxerre*, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 26, ed. René Borius, Sources Chrétiennes 112 (Paris : Les Edition du Cerf, 1965), pp. 132-142, and 170-172.

¹³⁸ *Vita sancti Willehadi*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH Scriptores, 2, (Stuttgart, 1829); and Ardo, *Vita Benedicti abbatis Anianensis et Indensis*, ed. Wilhelm Wattenbach, MGH 15.1, (Stuttgart, 1829).

¹³⁹ Booker, *Past Convictions*, p. 250.

¹⁴⁰ Heene, *Legacy of Paradise*, p. 43.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

featured Notker and two of his close friends.¹⁴² The story had apparently persisted in the oral culture of the abbey until Ekkehard IV, one of the continuators of the annals of St. Gall, wrote it down in the eleventh century.¹⁴³ Ekkehard offered a lively description of Notker's personality: "Notker had a weak body, but not a weak mind, a stammering voice, but not a stammering spirit; he was elevated in divine things, patient in opposition, mild in everything, a sharp enforcer of the discipline in our monastery..."¹⁴⁴ Ekkehard then continued with this strange additional detail: "and in sudden, unexpected things, he was a little timid, *except in the assaults of demons*, which he certainly opposed fearlessly."¹⁴⁵ Here Notker was remembered as one who struggled triumphantly against demons, the epitome of the monkish identity. Unfortunately, Ekkehard did not record any specific tales about Notker's struggles with demons, leaving any further details of this side of Notker's personality to the imagination alone. The tradition may, in fact, have stemmed from the very demon stories that Notker recorded in the *Gesta*, a sort of conflation of authorial personality with written work. Or perhaps the description written in the annals represented Notker's actual experiences. With this picture of Notker in mind, it is tempting to wonder whether the demons were the strangest characters in the *Gesta*, or rather the storyteller behind the tales. This would suggest that Charles the Fat, a former demoniac, and Notker, a demon-resisting monk, understood one another in a unique way: as fellow survivors of demonic assault. As one who "certainly opposed [demons] fearlessly," Notker himself may have been authoritative in the mirror he offered for Charles.

¹⁴² Ekkehard IV, *Casus sancti Galli*, ed. Georg Waitz (St. Gallen: Verlag von Huber & Comp, 1877), pp. 126-164.

¹⁴³ G. G. Coulton, *A Medieval Garner* (London, 1910), p. 18.

¹⁴⁴ "Noker (sic) corpore non animo gracilis, voce non spiritu balbulus, in divinis erectus, in adversis patiens, ad omnia mitis, in nostratium acer erat exactor disciplinis..." Ekkehard IV, *Casus sancti Galli*, ed. G. Waitz, p. 128.

¹⁴⁵ "ad repentina timidulus et inopinata, praeter demones infestantes, erat, quibus quidem se audenter opponere," Ekkehard IV, *Casus sancti Galli*, ed. G. Waitz, p. 128.

Chapter 4: Demonology

We will now move on to the specific knowledge and ideas that informed Notker's characterization of demons. The way in which Notker described the demons of his tales reveals what was inherited from the past and what was currently happening in Carolingian understanding of the demonic. Being able to understand these characterizations allows us to imagine how Charles the Fat and his court would have perceived the tales, and what kinds of effect they may have had on him. Notker combined an inherited Christian demonology with a more popular form of understanding of the demonic in his depictions in the *Gesta*. This served to demonstrate for Charles that he possessed the means to overcome evil, chiefly by making the sign of the cross and using physical means to defeat demons. Notker also showed that demons customized their assaults to the weaknesses of their victims, demonstrating that the first line of defense against the demonic was *correctio*. If the inhabitants of the realm resisted temptation to sin, evil became impotent.

In order to understand how and why Notker's contemporaries interpreted their world the way they did, it is important to "put ourselves into the mentality of the people of that time, experience things as they were, and use the same assumptions and models of conceptual organization that they would use," as Jerome Kroll outlined in his survey of the treatment of mental illness throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁶ For example, medieval scholars differentiated between supernatural and medical causes for strange behavior and experiences.¹⁴⁷ Kroll debunked the modern idea that all mental illness in the Middle Ages was considered demonic possession and showed that mentally ill people, distinct from those considered possessed by

¹⁴⁶ Jerome Kroll, "A Reappraisal of Psychiatry in the Middle Ages," in *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 29, (1973), p. 278.

¹⁴⁷ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Strange Case of Ermine de Reims* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. x.

demons, were often treated with kindness.¹⁴⁸ Behavior that would be considered extremely pathological today was merely considered peculiar back then—self-flagellation, dancing manias, and so forth.¹⁴⁹ Understanding just how medieval thinkers made these types of distinction is not always apparent to modern readers, but it is clear that there were distinctions.¹⁵⁰ Maintaining a posture sensitive to these types of concealed distinctions is therefore crucial to seeing how the *Gesta Karoli* may have been received by Charles the Fat.

Despite the spirit of optimism that Notker had toward the new emperor and the hope for a revived Carolingian empire, the more general Carolingian anxiety of the times is also apparent in the text of the *Gesta Karoli*.¹⁵¹ Many of the unsettling stories that populate the work deal with worry: about avarice, about corruption, about temptation, about sin. Adding to these worries and fears of Notker's contemporaries was the prospect of encountering supernatural beings who could influence human actions toward perversion and destruction. That demons could lead human beings to sin through temptation and assault carried heavy implications for the Carolingians.

It is understandable, as Hans Haefele pointed out, that the majority of historians have dismissed Notker's work as akin to Grimm brothers' fairy tales: "it goes without saying, in a manner of speaking, that, when the Devil appears, the sympathy of historians disappears."¹⁵² However, he showed that demons were just as much a part of the Carolingian world-view as other phenomena that are no longer apparent to modern eyes. An example of this is the auroch. Notker recorded an episode where Charlemagne was wounded by an auroch, a species of wild

¹⁴⁸ Kroll, "Reappraisal," p. 277

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. pp.277-278.

¹⁵⁰ Dendle, *Demon Possession*, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Notker, *Gesta*, I.1 and II.11, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 1-3 and 67-70.

¹⁵² "Es versteht sich sozusagen von selbst, daß mit dem Auftreten des Teufels die Anteilnahme des Historikers erlischt." Hans Haefele, "Teufel und Dämon in den Gesta Karoli," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, 51, 1955, p. 5.

bovine, during a hunting excursion.¹⁵³ This animal is now extinct, but it used to roam European plains and figured as one of the dangerous creatures of the world. Its extinction makes it difficult for us today to comprehend its significance to Notker's audience. In a similar way, because of the limits of the frameworks of explanation that are available to us today, demons are also "extinct" to the modern reader. Yet, Carolingian belief in and fear of demons was a necessary reality of the period that could be variously manipulated.¹⁵⁴ Through stories like those contained in the *Gesta Karoli*, we can reconstruct the Carolingian framework to peer into a past where both aurochs and demons were once alive, thriving, and dangerous in the consciousness of late ninth-century Franks.

Religious intellectuals of Notker's day had to grapple with the uncomfortable cosmic issue that has perturbed theologians throughout time: the problem of evil.¹⁵⁵ How can a God, who is wholly good, create a cosmos where evil is allowed to exist? Does this mean that God also created evil? Or should the question be approached from a more "human-centered" angle? Namely, is the existence of sin, humanity's capacity to do harm, the real problem of evil?¹⁵⁶ It is a logical conundrum that has been met with various solutions in Christianity over time. Carolingian Christianity inherited the latter, anthropocentric, approach to resolving the problem of evil for which Augustine had laid the foundation.¹⁵⁷ God is all-powerful and wholly good. His goal is to increase goodness, so he gave free-will to his creations because agents choosing good freely, rather than being coerced, increases the net voluntary goodness of the cosmos. But free will can also lead to evil through sin, the corruption of the good by humanity's choice to act

¹⁵³ Notker, *Gesta*, II.8, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 60.

¹⁵⁴ Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1991), pp.156-157.

¹⁵⁵ G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. viii-ix.

¹⁵⁶ Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, p. 170.

¹⁵⁷ Russell, *Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 96, 110.

contrary to God's will.¹⁵⁸ The main concern of Carolingian theology was an intense desire to avoid and correct sin, both on an individual level and, especially, on an empire-wide level.¹⁵⁹ Carolingian *correctio* can be detected in Notker's *Gesta* through the various episodes of Charlemagne's dealings with "proud but stupid bishops" that largely fill the first book.¹⁶⁰

However, it was not only humankind who was capable of enacting evil. Some of the angels that God had created in the beginning chose to exercise their free will to act contrary to God's order. These fell and became demons, chief among them Satan.¹⁶¹ Their only desire henceforth was to disrupt good in whatever way they could. Starting with Satan's influence to sin on the first humans, Adam and Eve, demons came to torment all people with temptation and suffering.¹⁶²

Christian demonology drew on an old, rich tradition. In Graeco-Roman polytheism, demons could be deceased souls, nature spirits and sometimes even the pantheon of gods; their primary role was mediator, facilitating communication between the realm of humans and the gods.¹⁶³ This type of intercessory demon was seen as a real force in the world, but one that could be anything: negative, neutral, and positive. Augustine was instrumental in the Christian transition to an unambiguous interpretation of demonology. In *City of God*, he asked whether it was possible for demons to mediate the good works of humans and gods when it was clear that

¹⁵⁸ Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, pp. 115-116.

¹⁵⁹ Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁰ See Notker, *Gesta*, I, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 1-3; Paul Kershaw, *Laughter After Babel's Fall, Humour, History, and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 193-194; and Maclean, *Kingship and Politics*, pp.204-213.

¹⁶¹ Nienke Vos, "Introduction," in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity* (Brill, 2011), pp. 3-36.

¹⁶² Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: the Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 29; and Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 96.

¹⁶³ Keimpe Algra, "Stoics on Souls and Demons" in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, eds. Voss and Otten (Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 71-96.

demons delighted in doing bad things. To this Augustine's answer was a resounding absolutely not.¹⁶⁴ Henceforth in Christian demonology, the demon took on a solely negative role.

In the early middle ages, monasteries were the nexus of religious, social, and political life, forming the cross-point in the boundary between sacred and secular.¹⁶⁵ The early Middle Ages experienced a "radical turnabout" in the relation of theological authors to their lay public when they began writing two kinds of works: popularizing and strictly theological.¹⁶⁶ The sermon, or homily, part of the liturgy, was consciously adapted to the mainly illiterate and uneducated congregation.¹⁶⁷ The homilists often dwelt on demons for their ability to frighten the congregation into avoiding sin, presenting a powerful and often terrifying vision of evil.¹⁶⁸ The undercurrent of lay religion, however, tempered the devil's sinister powers of temptation and torment, making the Satan of folklore and legend seem ridiculous and impotent.¹⁶⁹ Notker's representation of demons could be powerful and frightening, but it could also resist aspects of established theological demonology, offering a portrayal that combined serious theological discourse with popular belief.

One demon story in the *Gesta* offers an example of Notker's incorporation of both aspects of the demonological trends of the ninth century. In one particularly bad crop year, a certain greedy bishop of Old Francia rejoiced that the people of his diocese were dying because he could sell the food from his storehouse to the survivors at exorbitant prices.¹⁷⁰ Amidst this climate, a demon started haunting the workshop of a blacksmith, playing with the hammers and anvil by

¹⁶⁴ Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, VIII, 17-18, ed. Emanuel Hoffmann, CCEL 40 (New York: Johnson Reprints), pp. 382-385.

¹⁶⁵ Mayke de Jong, "Carolingian Monasticism: the Power of Prayer," p. 623.

¹⁶⁶ Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 15.

¹⁶⁷ Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁸ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 111.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 31.

night, much like a poltergeist, as Hans Haefele pointed out in his study of Notker's portrayal of demons.¹⁷¹ The blacksmith attempted to protect his house and his family with the sign of the cross, but before he could, the demon proposed an arrangement of mutual benefit: "My friend, if you do not stop me from playing in your workshop, bring your little pot here and you will find it full every day."¹⁷² The starving blacksmith, "fearing bodily deprivation more than the eternal damnation of the soul," agreed to the demon's proposition.¹⁷³ The demon burglarized the bishop's storehouse repeatedly, filling the flask and leaving broken barrels to spill on the floor. The bishop discovered the theft and concluded, based on the excessive waste, that it must be the work of a demon rather than a starving parishioner. So he protected the room with holy water and placed the sign of the cross on the barrels. The next morning, the guard of the bishop's house found the demon trapped in the larder. It had entered during the night, but, because of the holy protections placed by the bishop, was unable to touch the stores nor exit again. Upon discovery, it assumed a human form. The guard subdued it and tied it up. It was brought to a public trial where it was publicly beaten (*ad palam cesus*). Between blows, it cried out: "Woe is me, woe is me, for I have lost my friend's little pot!"¹⁷⁴

Certain details in this story demonstrate both the clerical and popular approaches to dealing with demons. Both the blacksmith and the bishop employed the cross in their defense against the demon. In her study of Carolingian representations of the crucifixion, Celia Chazelle demonstrated that the use of the sign of the cross, both as a gesture and as an image applied to clothing or other objects, to combat demonic apparitions was a practice that was gaining in

¹⁷¹ Haefele, *Teufel und Dämon*, p. 18.

¹⁷² "Mi compater, si non impedieris me in officina tua iocari, appone hic poticulam tuam, et cottidie plenam invenies illam," Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 31.

¹⁷³ "plus penuriam metuens corporalem quam eternam anime perditionem," Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.31.

¹⁷⁴ "Ve mihi, ve mihi, quia poticulam compatris mei perdidi!" Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 32.

importance during the Carolingian period.¹⁷⁵ In a warning at the end of this story, Notker reminded his audience of the efficacy of the sign of the cross: “let it be known...how strong the invocation of the holy name is, even if turned to by the wicked.”¹⁷⁶ The sinful profiteering of the bishop could not reduce the power of the cross. The application of this orthodox practice against the demon was perhaps an element that would be expected by a clerical audience, and was a reminder for Notker’s reader of the importance of its use. However, other aspects seem directed toward the entertaining of Notker’s lay audience—the very particular lay audience of Charles the Fat.

The appeal to the sign of the cross was an instructive element of the story, but the tale was resolved in a way that was likely humorous and entertaining to contemporaries. The demon was ultimately caught by the bishop who had it tied up and beaten like a thief. The image of a supernatural entity being punished by humans must have been satisfying for Notker’s audience. It was a tension-relieving device that tamed the power of evil in the popular imagination.¹⁷⁷ The demon’s plaintive cry for the loss of the pot that the blacksmith had entrusted to him was a humorous ending. It recast the demon in a ridiculous light and dampened its otherwise dangerous nature, revealing that humans had the means to counter the appearance and influence of demons. Notker may have been suggesting that Charles, in like manner, could overcome the evil within and without the empire, much as he had overcome his own demonic entanglement years before.

Notker tended to write his tales of demonic encounters using a demonology that relied on both of the prevailing approaches of the time, placing more popular-styled beliefs next to standard theology. Einhard, who wrote an early medieval biography of Charlemagne, also wrote

¹⁷⁵ Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 136.

¹⁷⁶ “ut sciatur...quantum valeat divini nominis invocatio, etiam per non bonos adhibita,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.31.

¹⁷⁷ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 111.

about demonic encounters.¹⁷⁸ However, his depiction of demons does not seem to share the elements of popular belief apparent in Notker's *Gesta*. In the *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, some well-meaning grave robbers raided Roman tombs for the relics of two early Christian martyrs, Marcellinus and Peter.¹⁷⁹ They brought the relics back to Francia to be received in Einhard's own churches where miracles ensued. Besides healing several people with crippling joint problems and other health issues, the relics assisted in casting out demons in possession of the bodies of members of the laity.¹⁸⁰

Einhard became aware of one demon through a report about a possessed girl that had been exorcised by the power of the relics.¹⁸¹ A demon named Wiggo had inhabited her body. Already, this demonic encounter differed from those that would appear in the *Gesta*, where the demons only assumed human form, rather than possessing the bodies of mortals. Einhard's demonology was closer to that of the New Testament, where demons infest human bodies and speak through their mouths.¹⁸² Wiggo used the girl's mouth to speak Latin, which was shocking because the girl was a native German speaker and had never learned a word of Latin, making this a sure sign that she was possessed. Through the girl, the demon told the exorcising priest that it was an "assistant and disciple" of Satan who had been a gate-keeper in hell until the past few years when it had been unleashed upon Francia to destroy crops and herds.¹⁸³ The priest asked why the demon had been granted those destructive powers. Wiggo replied "because of the wickedness of this people." It went further to inventory all of the various sins of the Franks: fearing men more

¹⁷⁸ Einhard, *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, ed. G. Waitz, in *MGH SS* 15 (Hanover : Hahn, 1888), pp. 239-264.

¹⁷⁹ Einhard, *Translatio*, ed. G. Waitz, pp. 239-264; and Paul Dutton, ed. and trans. *Charlemagne's Courtier: the Complete Einhard* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1998), pp. xxiv-xxxii.

¹⁸⁰ Julia Smith, "Einhard: the Sinner and the Saints," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (2003), pp.55-77.

¹⁸¹ Einhard, *Translatio*, 3.14, ed. G. Waitz, p. 253.

¹⁸² Gerald Messadié, *Histoire Générale du Diable*, (Paris : Robert Laffont, 1993), pp. 310-335; See also Mark 5:1-18.

¹⁸³ Einhard, *Translatio*, 3.14, ed. G. Waitz, p. 253.

than God, oppressing the poor, allowing justice to be bought, drunkenness, adultery, murder, theft, fraud. Wiggo explained that it had been allowed, in fact ordered, to do harm so that the human race would pay for its lack of faith. Wiggo finally abandoned the girl's body, irresistibly cast out by the power of the martyrs. She awakened as if from sleep, her health fully recovered. She could no longer speak Latin. Einhard concluded the story with a pessimistic invective: "Oh what suffering! That our times have fallen to such misery that it is not good people, but evil demons who now teach us, and those who used to incite us to vice and persuade us to commit crimes are now advising us to reform ourselves."¹⁸⁴ The message in this story, which revealed that demons were unleashed as punishment for sin, was clearly tied to Carolingian preoccupations with *correctio*.¹⁸⁵

The nature of Einhard's demon, however, is markedly different from those who appear in the *Gesta*. Wiggo possessed the body of the young girl; Notker's demons were apparitions that took the various forms of monsters and humans, but never invaded the bodies of their victims. A possession encounter requires an exorcism to rid the body of an evil spirit,¹⁸⁶ but the sign of the cross and physical means were enough to counter the demons in the *Gesta*. The fact that possession encounters never figured in the text perhaps further illustrates Notker's blending of ecclesiastical and popular understanding of demons which may have corresponded to Charles' experience. In its initial phase, Charles was haunted by a demon that took the form of an angel of light. It was not until he accepted the tainted sacrament that the devil entered his body and the harrowing fits began. Perhaps Notker concentrated on demonic tales of encounter, rather than

¹⁸⁴ "Heu pro dolor! ad quantas miserias tempora nostra sunt devoluta, in quibus non boni homines, sed mali daemones doctores sunt, et incentores vitiorum ac persuasores criminum de nostra nos correctione commonent," Einhard, *Translatio*, 3.14, ed. G. Waitz, p. 254.

¹⁸⁵ Paul Fouracre, "Carolingian Justice," pp. 771-803.

¹⁸⁶ Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, p. 258.

possession, in a sensitive way of not reminding Charles the Fat too painfully of his own experience.

The descriptions of several of Notker's demons harken back to earlier tradition. Imagery that Notker used can sometimes seem like standard types, but it is important not to dismiss them. They can represent a "hard kernel" under which "layers that matter and mean" have been deposited, which carry nuanced, complex ideas and forceful images in just a few words.¹⁸⁷ Further examination of Notker's references reveal curious and rather specific terms. The tale of the demon who played in the blacksmith's shop at night contains excellent examples of this. Notker used three words variously to describe the evil entity: *demon*, *larva*, and *pilosus*. The first corresponds to its English cognate, demon, and, as we have already seen, is a term that goes back to classical Greece. The other two, however, have an interesting connection to patristic authors who were literary authorities for Carolingian writers.¹⁸⁸ Augustine used *larva* ('worm,' 'ghost,' or 'hobgoblin') to describe the state of the souls of extremely wicked individuals in the hereafter. In fact, Notker describes the entity as *demon vel larva* (a demon or a larva), which is somewhat reminiscent of Augustine's *vel larvas... vel manes deos* (either larvae... or divine ghosts).¹⁸⁹ The *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, another important reference for Carolingian writers, has an entry on *larva* which states that they were "demons made from people who were deserving of evil. It is said that their nature is to frighten children and chatter in shadowy corners."¹⁹⁰ Close in proximity to *larva* in the *Etymologies* is *pilosus*—'hairy thing.' Isidore identified *pilosus* as synonymous with incubi, demons who inseminated animals and women to produce hairy

¹⁸⁷ Paul Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 9

¹⁸⁸ McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁸⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *de Civitate Dei*, IX.11, ed. Emanuel Hoffmann, p. 423.

¹⁹⁰ "Larvas ex hominibus factos daemones aiunt, qui meriti mali fuerint. Quarum natura esse dicitur terrere parvulos et in angulis garrere tenebrosis." Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, VIII.11, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 101.

offspring, and satyrs. Although Notker never mentioned horns or cloven hooves, the definition of *pilosus* as satyr brings Notker's usage even closer to traditional associations. Christians originally categorized all pagan deities as demons, but Pan, the original satyr, more so than others.¹⁹¹ Pan's affiliation with the wilderness, "the favorite haunt" of evil spirits, and with sexuality, made him the clear target for diabolical trait transfer: "Pan's horns, hooves, shaggy fur, and outsized phallus became part of the Christian image of Satan."¹⁹² These two entries in the *Etymologies* make a strong case for Isidore as Notker's source for demonic terminology. Despite the *larva*'s playfulness, its identification as *pilosus* might have been a frightening element of the story to Notker's audience. If the 'hairy thing' was an incubus then the blacksmith had placed the female members of his household in new danger by allowing it to inhabit his workshop, a horrible connection that Notker's audience might have made.

Athanasius, another early Christian authority, provided much of the iconographic framework for later descriptions of demons. Valerie Flint described the *Life of St. Anthony* as enjoying an enormous and enduring success on the imagining of demons in the Carolingian period.¹⁹³ In his *Life of St. Anthony*, written in 360, Athanasius depicted the life of the eponymous hermit as one long struggle against the devil and his demons.¹⁹⁴ Their fall from grace had condemned them to a perpetual state of darkness and nothingness; lacking a true form of their own, the demons were able to take on visible shapes in their assault on the ascetic Anthony in the desert: beasts, monsters, men, giants.¹⁹⁵ Notker described demons who took on similar shapes for his

¹⁹¹ Messadié, *Histoire générale du diable*, p. 275.

¹⁹² Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 17.

¹⁹³ Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, p. 110.

¹⁹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *La vie primitive de S. Antoine*, trans. René Draguet, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vols. 183-184, 1980, pp. 4-89.

¹⁹⁵ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 88.

audience—lepers, humans, mules, and monsters.¹⁹⁶ Among the monsters, one described as a giant had a clear relationship with the image of certain demons who tormented Saint Anthony.

According to the story, Charlemagne put a steward in charge of the workers of a building project at Aachen.¹⁹⁷ Liutfrid, the steward, was supposed to support the workers through public funds. But, once Charlemagne was away, Liutfrid secretly embezzled the money instead. One night, a poor local cleric experienced a dream while he dozed waiting for the early morning office. He saw a giant, which he described as being “taller than the adversary of Anthony,” crossing the construction site towards Liutfrid’s dwelling.¹⁹⁸ The giant was guiding along an enormous camel laden with an impossible pile of treasure. Shocked, the cleric asked the giant what his purpose was. It gave a chilling response: “I go on to the house of Liutfrid to put him on top of this bundle and in like manner with it plunge him down to hell.”¹⁹⁹ The cleric woke up in fright. The terrifying conclusion of this story will be discussed further on in this paper. The giant, akin to “the adversary of Anthony,”²⁰⁰ was a clear reference to a giant deformed demon who reached up to the clouds to swat angels from the air that Athanasius reported in one of the visions of Anthony.²⁰¹ Notker was clearly influenced, either directly or through an inherited tradition, by Athanasius’ demonic iconography found in the *Life of St. Anthony* in his report of the giant demon who came to haul Liutfrid to hell.

Athanasius was also one of the early sources for the devil’s association with fire, smoke and brimstone. He described demons as burning with fire and using flame and coals to frighten their

¹⁹⁶ See Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, I.23, I.24, I.31, I.33, and II.15, ed. H.F. Haefele.

¹⁹⁷ Notker, *Gesta*, I.31, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 42.

¹⁹⁸ “gigantem Antoniano illo adversario proceriorem,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.31, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 42-43.

¹⁹⁹ “Ad domum Liutfridi pergo, ut eum super hos fascies imponam et pariter cum eis in infernum dimergam,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.31, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 43.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁰¹ Athanasius, *La Vie Primitive de S. Antoine*, p. 41.

victims.²⁰² Fire and sulfur figured in one of Notker's stories. In the tale, there was a cleric who was practically perfect.²⁰³ He knew all literature, sacred and profane. He sang popular songs and ecclesiastical chant with a sonorous voice. He was, in general, a well-liked individual. Here, Notker interjected that God gave men faults to counter their virtues. Moses was ineloquent; John the Baptist was restrained from performing any miracle. By his extreme degree of perfection, there was clearly something amiss with that cleric, something uncanny, for only Christ alone should be so perfect. One day, as the cleric was chanting with others, Charlemagne entered the church, and joined the circle of clergy. The nigh-perfect cleric suddenly disappeared. The emperor crossed himself in shock as he looked at something lying where the cleric had stood. It was a "nasty lump of burned-out coal."²⁰⁴ This burnt coal is meaningful because it matches Athanasius' fundamental description of evil: fire and brimstone. Notker offered no explanation or speculation on the nature of the burned-out cleric. Was he just an overly-talented man who neglected to praise God for his gifts and was consequently sent to hell, making this a cautionary tale akin to Icarus whose beeswax wings melted when he flew too close to the sun? Or does the smoldering coal imply that he was actually a demon-in-disguise who could not stand to be in Charlemagne's saintly presence? Both options are possible, and Notker's audience would have been receptive to both possibilities. However, if the implication *is* that the cleric was a demon, the inclusion of Charlemagne would break the pattern in the *Gesta*, making this the lone demonic encounter that included Charlemagne as a principle character. As a model for emperor, the purity of Charlemagne's presence that revealed the demonic nature of the perfect cleric would not have been lost on Charles the Fat. The message was possibly that Charles needed to be pure in order to uncover the impurity among the clerics of the Carolingian empire.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 31-32.

²⁰³ Notker, *Gesta*, I.33, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 45.

²⁰⁴ "Quasi carbonem teterrimum et modo extinctum," Notker, *Gesta*, I.33, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 46.

By their nature in Christian demonology, the demons possessed a “superficial cleverness” that they used to scrutinize the lives of Christians, seeking opportunities to attack wherever they could.²⁰⁵ Demons turned human sensory perception against itself with bad smells and loud noises. Other disturbing weapons that they had at their disposal were visions and nightmares.²⁰⁶ The demons custom-fit their temptations and assaults to the age, sex, and circumstances of their victim.²⁰⁷ Notker’s demons, too, knew and understood the weaknesses and predispositions of their victims: hunger, brought on by fasting or famine, was used against some, like the blacksmith; greed was another human weakness that Notker’s demons exploited.²⁰⁸

In demonstrating that Satan customized his snare to his victim’s tendencies, Notker may have been subtly reminding Charles of the demonic trap to which he himself had fallen prey and narrowly escaped. Charles’ rebellion that resulted in demonic assault grew out of his dissatisfaction with his father’s reapportioning of territories between heirs.²⁰⁹ The demon had used this to tempt Charles into a rebellious plot. In a similar brush with the demonic, the following tale from the *Gesta* told the story of an extremely covetous (*cupidissimus*) bishop who had a frightening experience with a mule.²¹⁰ One day a man rode near the bishop astride a most fine-looking mule. The bishop’s desire was ignited and could not be quenched until he owned the animal for himself. After a hard negotiation, the owner of the animal finally accepted the bishop’s offer of a “vast sum of money” (*infinita pecunia*) for the mule.²¹¹ But the bishop had been deceived by an elaborate ruse. Notker revealed that the mule in this story was actually Satan himself, transmogrified. The bishop, ignorant of the trap, immediately leaped upon the

²⁰⁵ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 91.

²⁰⁶ Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 44.

²⁰⁷ Athanasius, *La Vie Primitive de S. Antoine*, pp. 32, 44.

²⁰⁸ See Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, I.23, I.24, I.31, I.33, and II.15, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 27-33, 42-46, and 80-81.

²⁰⁹ Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, p.210.

²¹⁰ Notker, *Gesta*, I.24, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 32-33.

²¹¹ Notker, *Gesta*, I.24, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 33.

animal's back and took it for a ride in the countryside. The bishop and the mule reached a river and entered the waters, where Satan's purpose was revealed. The mule, "truly raging with the fires of hell," suddenly refused to obey the reins and spurs of the bishop.²¹² It swam vehemently into the depths of a whirlpool, impotent rider in tow. Were it not for the saving efforts of boaters who happened to be nearby, the bishop would have drowned. Satan sought to claim the life and soul of the greedy *episcopus* by dragging him to hell through a watery death, a trap he had laid because of the bishop's sinful preoccupations.²¹³ This story may have felt familiar to Charles the Fat whose own demon encounter hinged on his dissatisfaction and agitation with the redistribution of Louis the German's kingdom among his brothers. His desire for power had provoked him to sin, exposing him to the trap of an insidious demon. Like the bishop above, Charles only narrowly escaped through the intervention of others, those who brought him before the relics and prayed for his recovery.²¹⁴

The demons of the *Gesta* appear as unsettling apparitions. They take widely varying forms and exhibit different temperaments. The *larva* that we have already encountered had a striking contradiction in nature: it was almost childish in its desire to make a nightly din with the metal-working tools in the blacksmith's shop, yet perhaps it possessed the dangerous potential for demonic insemination of the blacksmith's family. While some demons seemed to be content with psychological torment only, others were capable and unhesitant of enacting sinister violence on humans, like the satanic mule who was literally hell-bent on drowning the bishop.²¹⁵ The depiction of a range of demonic personalities in an evil hierarchy was inherited by Notker from earlier generations of Christian demonologists. The second-century Origen taught that angels,

²¹² "vere gehenne ignibus estuans," Notker, *Gesta*, I.24, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.33.

²¹³ See Notker, *Gesta*, I.24 and I.32, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 32-33 and 44-45.

²¹⁴ *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, ed. C. Dehaisnes, p. 233-234.

²¹⁵ See Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, I.24, and II.15, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 27-29, 32-33, and 80-81.

humans, and demons were rational beings who all fell from the contemplation of God.²¹⁶ The degree to which each caste fell determined their category; varying degrees within each caste also shaped the individual personalities and dispositions of each.²¹⁷ The fourth century Evagrius of Pontus, influenced by the *Life of St. Anthony*, developed a ranking system of demons in his writing addressed to monks, *Practical Advice*.²¹⁸ The work has been called a “sophisticated psychology” aimed at helping monks learn to discern promptings of God from bodily, mental or demonic urges.²¹⁹ The work taught how to discern not only between angels and demons, but even between different classes of demons, describing demons who occupy different places in an evil hierarchy of torment and temptation, from demons of fornication to demons of pride, and even a demon of acedia: “the noonday demon” who makes the day seem to drag slowly by, compelling the monk to feel impatience with the ascetic lifestyle.²²⁰ Many of the pioneering ascetics who established the first monasteries in Gaul and Germany were heavily influenced by Evagrius and spread his brand of demonology throughout the Merovingian kingdoms of Western Europe during the centuries prior to the Carolingian era.²²¹ Notker showed this influence in his description of the *larva*. He characterized it as being of the sort “whose function was to cause men to be idle with games and deceit,” a reminder to his reader that different demons possess different traits designed to tempt people by means of different sins.²²² Sin stemmed not only from the free will of the individual, but from a conjuncture of demonic temptation with human choice. Notker was reminding Charles that temptation was, in effect, a powerful force.

²¹⁶ Brakke, *Demons*, p. 12.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Evagrius of Pontus, *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert Simeon (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 99-108.

²¹⁹ Evagrius, *Ascetic Corpus*, pp. 99-108; and Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 91.

²²⁰ Evagrius, *Ascetic Corpus*, pp. 98-100.

²²¹ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, pp. 40-41.

²²² “cui cure fuit ludicris vel hominum illusionibus vacare,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.23, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 31.

The temptation to plot against his father to which Charles had yielded in the past was embodied in the very demon that had possessed him. Historically, monks were the usual foil for demons. Coming from a monk, then, Notker's stories would likely have been received by Charles' court as authoritative. Monks are described in the *Rule of Benedict*, the monastic guide widely propagated throughout the Carolingian realm as part of ninth-century monastic reforms, as an elite army possessing special fortitude for withstanding demonic assault.²²³ Early ascetics, especially in Egypt, withdrew from society into remote, unpopulated places in order to escape temptation and focus their attention on worship and self-perfection as Christians.²²⁴ There, monks came face to face with demons. The desert was already associated with Satan and his minions because of the New Testament account of Christ's temptation in the desert.²²⁵ With the spread of Christian churches in the cities of the Late Antique Roman Empire, wastes became the gathering place for demonic forces now ejected from their former urban homes; here, demons were thought to be especially hostile towards the monks who came to the wilderness, seeing their arrival as a deliberate challenge.²²⁶ Tales of the monks' battles with the Devil in the wastelands proliferated and transmitted from east to west, adding a rich layer of experience, detail, and color to demonology by the time of the establishment of monasticism in Western Europe.²²⁷ The ascetics moving to the deserts and wastes furthered the development of both the demonic identity, as well as the monkish.²²⁸

²²³ De Jong, "Carolingian Monasticism," pp. 629-631; Benedict of Nursia, *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, I, eds. Adalbert de Vogüé and Jean Neufville (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1977), p.14.

²²⁴ Vincent Wimbush, ed., *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, (Minneapolis: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1990), pp. 6-7; see also Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, (Oxford University Press, 1978), pt. I "The Desert," pp. 7-76.

²²⁵ Matt. 4:1-11; and C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 4th edition (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.

²²⁶ Russel, *Prince of Darkness*, p. 86.

²²⁷ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 10.

²²⁸ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 13.

Early ascetics occupied a strange, new place in the late Roman world. Their practices of extreme self-denial and often, especially in the earliest days, solitude, were socially bizarre. The spiritual struggle of the ascetic life was, indeed, a feat, but it was one invisible to all but the monk himself. The values that the monks strove for broke the boundaries of what was expected of Roman men, emasculating themselves in the eyes of their contemporaries.²²⁹ Monks still desired to assert themselves as possessing “manly virtue,” but their choice in lifestyle barred them from typical Roman avenues of demonstrating *virtus*. This gendered struggle was still apparent during the Carolingian era where monks living communally in monasteries had come to see their collective strength as superior to that of ancient hermits, as demonstrated by Lynda Coon.²³⁰ Demons presented a unique opportunity for the early desert monks to reaffirm their masculinity. Demonic appearance, it turned out, served the useful function of transforming an internal, invisible struggle into external combat where, whether in lived experience or only in literary description, what previously only took place in the mind and soul could now be seen.²³¹ By going to the desert, not just to live an ascetic lifestyle, but with the express purpose to fight with demons, monks became spiritual gladiators. The idea of the monk as a warrior against the forces of evil rapidly caught hold of the Christian imagination and became an essential part of the monkish identity.²³² Early demonology developed hand in hand with monastic practice: the identity of the Christian monk was forged through imagining him in conflict with the demon, which in tandem shed its neutrality and became the evil, harmful entity of the Middle Ages.²³³

²²⁹ Ibid., pp. 182-183.

²³⁰ Lynda Coon, *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 70.

²³¹ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 183.

²³² Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*, p. 79.

²³³ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 5.

With the important role of the monk in the development of demonic characteristics, it may seem odd initially that demons never attacked monks in the *Gesta*. However, overcoming demons was not necessarily part of Notker's aim. Monastic strife with demons was typically a celebration of the triumph of the ascetic ideal over the evil entity, of resistance to temptation. Notker's demon tales were concerned with entrapment, torment, and violence toward the victim. In the *Gesta Karoli*, the various demons were more interested in attacking bishops, who were spiritually weaker, at least in monastic eyes. Notker idealistically held his own monastic class, as well as the imperial family, on a higher moral plane than the bishops and nobles upon whom he placed scorn and blame and, literarily speaking, unleashed demonic assault. Usually spared a final gruesome end and a trip to hell, the sinful behavior of the bishop-victim was nevertheless revealed by the demonic encounter.

The revelation of sin as part of Notker's characterization of demon assault would have been meaningful to Charles the Fat, whose own possession episode revealed his involvement with an assassination plot against his father. Years later, Charles was now the emperor and sole legitimate heir of the Carolingian dynasty. It was Notker's subtle suggestion that, having learned from his errors, Charles was now able to be like his forebears who had worn the mantle of their station righteously to overcome the demonic assaults against the Carolingian empire.

Chapter 5: Horror

The monk of St. Gall was clearly trying to instruct when he presented Emperor Charles with portraits of his illustrious ancestor Charlemagne, as well as his father, Louis the German and his grandfather Louis the Pious.²³⁴ But the variety of anecdotes contained in the work suggests also that Notker wanted to entertain Charles the Fat.²³⁵

Obviously, we cannot know about the provenance of the details of these anecdotes beyond what Notker provided, but we can attempt to understand how his tales' literary devices worked within the *Gesta*. Peter Dendle showed in a survey of the demonic in Anglo-Saxon literature that demons typically played a causal role in their respective narratives.²³⁶ In contrast to cases of demonic bodily possession of individuals, tales of demon apparitions in the early Middle Ages typically served a purely narrative function. They could be causal agents who tempted individuals to sin, or, especially as they functioned in saints' lives, they typically served as agents of conflict who forged or tested the saintly; in essence, becoming a "mirror for saints."²³⁷ These two major "demonological processes" that Dendle identified correspond in many ways to the agency of Notker's demons, as well, who caused horror and violence or tested the saintly and the weak.

Many features of the *Gesta Karoli* served important narrative functions. David Ganz undertook a study that analyzed Notker's *Gesta* for its elements of humor and the impact of humor on the narrative.²³⁸ Indeed, any analysis of the *Gesta* which ignores the central role of humor essentially distorts the nature of Notker's achievement.²³⁹ The *Gesta* has been shown to

²³⁴ Halphen, *Etudes critiques*, p. 136.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: the Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (University of Toronto Press, 2001).

²³⁷ Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, pp. 42, 61.

²³⁸ Ganz, "Humour as History," pp. 171-183.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 171.

be a work self-conscious of its funny elements and apparently designed to entertain its audience through the fumbling of inept bishops and the muddling of an unwise nobility juxtaposed with the “fixed point of order” of the wise morality of the central figure, rather like the straight man in a comedy routine.²⁴⁰ The entertainment of Notker’s *Gesta* comes from its humor working together with a very different and very visceral element: horror.

As has been suggested in the various demonic episodes cited above, the *Gesta* contains elements of horror. Notker’s use of the horrific is not solely restricted to demons, however. Notker wrote other types of horror stories which required no demonic presence. In one curious episode, Notker described a deacon who put so much effort into his appearance that he was “fighting against nature.”²⁴¹ This may have meant that the cleric was considered effeminate, a state that monks and clerics like Notker feared because they were often unable to present their masculinity in traditional ways.²⁴² He bathed regularly, had a perfectly shaved tonsure, wore a clean, white linen shirt, and his fingernails were always clean. He never missed his turn to perform the reading of scripture, especially when Charlemagne was present. He expended such efforts in order “to appear full of glory” to those around him.²⁴³ But consequences lurked for this deacon of “defiled conscience” (*polluta conscientia*).²⁴⁴

During his public reading of scripture, a spider unexpectedly and silently descended from the ceiling to light on top of the deacon’s head. Charlemagne, ever-watchful, noticed the arachnid. He watched as it pierced the cleric’s head (*caput eius percussit*) and then climbed stealthily back up its thread, only to return to deliver two more tiny bites.²⁴⁵ Charlemagne pretended not to

²⁴⁰ Kershaw, “Laughter after Babel’s Fall,” p. 192; and Paul Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization: a Reader* (Ontario: Broadview, 1996) pp. 500-501.

²⁴¹ “contra naturam pugnare,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.32, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 44.

²⁴² Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*, pp. 71-72.

²⁴³ “ut per hoc gloriosior appareret.” Notker, *Gesta*, I.32, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 44.

²⁴⁴ Notker, *Gesta*, I.32, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 44.

²⁴⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, ed. H.F. Haefele, I.32, p. 44.

notice. The terrified cleric, on the other hand, more fearful of breaking decorum in the emperor's presence than of what was happening to him, did nothing to swat away the attacking spider.

After services, "having left the basilica, (the deacon) soon swelled up and, in less than the space of one hour, he died."²⁴⁶ The deacon paid the ultimate price for his impure heart. In this tale, the spider acted as an agent of moralizing horror, entering the scene to enact retribution for the deacon's sin, which was concern only for the appearance of holiness. The horrible fate of the vain deacon would likely have been well-received in Charles the Fat's court who might have known similar individuals who scorned the simpler Carolingian standards of grooming, as exemplified by Charlemagne himself.²⁴⁷

In another horrific episode, a cheating bell-founder met a gruesome end. As an aside, Notker explained that the bell-maker, Tanco, had once been a monk at St. Gall. Tanco received a commission from Charlemagne for an enormous bell to be cast from pure silver. However, in deceitful greed, he cast the bell from polished tin in order to keep the hundred pounds of silver for himself. His trick worked initially and his bell was mounted in a bell tower. However, after repeated tries, no one could make the bell ring. They soon called on the bell-maker to rectify the problem. Tanco began to pull at the rope, but still no sound issued from the swinging bell. Suddenly, the clapper broke loose from inside the tin shell. It plummeted down on top of the dishonest metal-worker, killing him as it passed through his carcass, tearing his bowels and testicles to the ground.²⁴⁸ Tanco's horrible end revealed his deceit and brought about the recovery of the misappropriated silver. Notker was sure to include the gory violence to Tanco's

²⁴⁶ "Egressus autem de basilica mox intumuit et infra unius hore spacium defecit." Notker, *Gesta*, I.32, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.45.

²⁴⁷ Notker, *Gesta*, I.34, ed. H. Haefele, pp. 46-48.

²⁴⁸ "Et ecce ferrum de medio elapsum in verticem ipsius cum iniquitate sua descendit et per cadaver iam iamque defunctum pertransiens ad terram cum intestinis et virilibus venit," Notker, *Gesta*, I.29, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 40.

corpse in anticipation of a certain approval from his audience, in essence, offering a visceral example to Charles' imperial court of the consequences for those who would try to deceive their emperor. Tanco was horribly destroyed by divine punishment; the same fate awaited those who would act in a similar way.

Noël Carroll analyzed the emotional effect that horror is designed to cause in its audience and answered the question of why anyone would want to be horrified since being horrified is so unpleasant.²⁴⁹ It is a paradoxical emotional state that audiences often find entertaining; Notker's inclusion of horrific tales in the *Gesta* suggests that Carolingian audiences were no different. It is perhaps not surprising to find such tantalizingly diabolical horror in the *Gesta*. Notker was a monk, after all, and it may be argued that the same reasons which prompt a hermitic life are related to those which prompt artistic work: "whatever one might say about it, access to the artistic universe is more or less reserved for those who are *a little sick of [life]*."²⁵⁰ Monastic life was an escape from the world; it is no coincidence, then, that it was also monastics who largely guarded, monopolized, and championed the liberal arts throughout the Middle Ages.²⁵¹

Works of horror can be identified by the affect, the emotional state, that they produce in their audience, specifically (and obviously) that of being horrified.²⁵² H.P. Lovecraft took this idea further, arguing that horror makes its audience feel "cosmic fear," a state of fear mixed with awe that confirms a deeply natural human conviction that the world contains vast, unknown forces.²⁵³ In Carroll's estimation, cosmic fear is something very much like religious experience.²⁵⁴ Cosmic

²⁴⁹ See Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, pp. 158-214.

²⁵⁰ "Quoi qu'on en dise, l'accès à l'univers artistique est plus ou moins réservé à ceux qui en ont *un peu marre*." Michel Houellebecq, *H.P. Lovecraft: Contre le monde, contre la vie* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2005), p. 32.

²⁵¹ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: a Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), pp. 255-256.

²⁵² Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, pp. 15 and 24.

²⁵³ H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), pp. 14-16.

²⁵⁴ Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, p. 163.

fear was not incompatible or dissimilar from the prevailing Christian mysticism of the early medieval period, where religious experience was a way of coming into touch with the unseen forces at work in the world. The insertions of horror in the *Gesta* should therefore not be read as incongruous departures from the pious tone of the work, but as enhancements of it.

Notker's demonic agents are essentially one of many kinds of monster in the medieval imagination.²⁵⁵ Notker used a number of terms to refer to the unearthly apparitions that populate the *Gesta Karoli*: *larva*, *pilosus*, *diabolus*, *inimicus*, *hostis*, *gigantes*, etc. One important term that he employed was *monstrum*: cognate to our modern English "monster," it also meant an omen, a supernatural appearance, a portent.²⁵⁶ Etymologically, it refers to that which reveals, that which warns; its usage dates back to Antiquity, of course, where it applied to all abnormal phenomena regarded as warnings from the divine.²⁵⁷ Isidore of Seville recorded *monstra* as omens which "in giving a sign, they indicate (*demonstrare*) something, or else because they instantly show (*monstrare*) what may appear."²⁵⁸ Horrific, supernatural beings who were embodiments of warning populated the pages of Notker's *Gesta*: monsters who torment mortals in order to reveal humanity's sins and God's will.²⁵⁹ Monsters, although not necessary for horror, are often one of the defining marks of it, which is certainly the case in Notker's horror stories.²⁶⁰

One of Notker's most terrifying monsters was a shadowy demon who lurked in the natural hot springs near Aachen.²⁶¹ Notker included the occasional reference or story about relatives and descendants of Charlemagne, rendering the *Gesta* at times a "collective biography" of Charles

²⁵⁵ Claude Kappler, *Monstres, Démon, et Merveilles* (Paris: Payot, 1980), p. 14.

²⁵⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 27-29.

²⁵⁷ David Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 9.

²⁵⁸ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XI.iii.3, ed. W.M. Lindsay, p. 244.

²⁵⁹ See Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, I.31, I.33, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 27-29 and 42-46.

²⁶⁰ Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, p. 14.

²⁶¹ Notker, *Gesta*, II.15, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 80.

the Fat's imperial pedigree.²⁶² So, in this tale of demonic apparition, Charlemagne's father, Pippin III, was the target of the evil presence. Before construction had happened at Aachen, the natural spring was known to have healing properties. Pippin wanted to soak in its waters and had a servant perform a visual check to make sure that the pool was clean and that no strangers (*quis ignotus*) were in it. Dressed only in a robe and slippers, nearly at his most vulnerable except for the sword he had in his hand, Pippin stepped into the water. Suddenly, a shadowy demon rose up from the water and attacked, nearly destroying him.²⁶³ Pippin made the sign of the cross in self-protection. At the center of the shadow, he made out the vague outline of a human form. In a desperate move, he thrust his sword so hard and deep into the form at the center of the shadow that the blade stuck into the ground and could scarcely be pulled back out. "The shadow was so thick with filth that it altogether filled the fount with blood and abominable gore and slime."²⁶⁴ Triumphant over the monster, Pippin demonstrated for Notker's audience, Charles the Fat, how the ideal warrior-monarch should face pure evil: with the sign of the cross and sword drawn.

The inclination, by both modern and medieval commentators alike, is often to rationalize monster tales (by reading them as allegorical struggles within the human soul, for example) in order to reduce their fantastic and unbelievable nature.²⁶⁵ "Saving" fantastic stories from the appearance of superstition or categorically denying the belief in literal monsters can inadvertently deny an important dimension of our relationship with the natural world.²⁶⁶ The violent power of the shadow demon was a reminder of the threat of evil to all members of

²⁶² Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, p. 55.

²⁶³ "cum repente hostis antiquus eum quasi perempturus aggreditur," Notker, *Gesta*, II.15, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.80.

²⁶⁴ "Que tamen umbra tante crassitudinis erat, ut cunctos illos fonts tabo et cruore abhominandaque pinguetudine deturparet." Notker, *Gesta*, II.15, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 80.

²⁶⁵ Dendel, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014), p. xiv.

²⁶⁶ Dendel, *Demon Possession*, p. xvi.

Carolingian society. Even those at the top of the hierarchy needed to be prepared to combat the monsters of evil that populated the world.

Humanity has almost always seemed to “need” monsters as embodiments of everything dangerous and horrible in the human imagination; there is a rich variety of monsters throughout recorded time and they hold a primal power as cultural metaphors and literary devices on which human fears can safely settle.²⁶⁷ In his study of images of monsters in the Middle Ages, Claude Kappler found that the “never-vanquished” category of monster across the ages seems to have been more concentrated in some periods than others, particularly the Middle Ages.²⁶⁸ This means perhaps that, at those times of greater frequency of representation in art and literature, humans had more *need* of monsters.²⁶⁹ Monsters were responsible for a great deal of cultural work in the Carolingian world. They challenged and questioned; they troubled, they worried, they haunted. Asa Mittman explained the role of monsters as agents who tear and rend cultures, all the while constructing them and propping them up.²⁷⁰ “They swallow up our cultural mores and expectations, and then, becoming what they eat, they reflect back to us our own faces, made disgusting or, perhaps, revealed to always have been so.”²⁷¹ Notker’s audience needed demonic monsters to reveal the aspects of Carolingian civilization that required correction and reform. By pitting Pippin III against the shadow demon, Notker demonstrated that the ideal Carolingian ruler never hesitated to combat sin and evil wherever it appeared. Charles the Fat was likely to have perceived the fight with the monster in this way. After all, he knew the dangers that demons posed first hand when he had inadvertently turned himself over to the devil. In that instance, he

²⁶⁷ Gilmore, *Monsters*, p. 1.

²⁶⁸ Kappler, *Monstres, Démons, et Merveilles*, pp. 12-13.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁷⁰ Asa Mittman, “The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstruous* (Ashgate, 2012), p. 1.

²⁷¹ Mittman, “The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies,” p. 1.

had not been prepared for the assault; in the future, he should protect himself as Pippin did, with the sign of the cross and the sword of righteousness drawn.

As Matt Hills explained in his introduction to *The Pleasures of Horror*, “horror does not only provoke object-directed emotions; it also significantly provokes objectless states of anxiety.”²⁷² Anxiety from a state of objectless-ness is very akin to the concept of the abject that Julia Kristeva laid out, where the abject is neither subject nor object, but the place where meaning collapses.²⁷³ Kristeva outlined one way to view of the differences between Judaism and Christianity where religious abjection (impurity) for the former was external and internal for the latter. Scholars of religion and history likely balk at the oversimplification inherent in this schema, but the conclusions she drew from it are beneficial for understanding the effect that Notker’s portrayals of horror may have had on his audience. Abjection viewed as external treats sin as an outside influence. One became impure through touching filth; sin was an external force. However, when sin is interpreted as internally-derived abjection, one becomes impure through that which comes from within; making abjection “permanent.”²⁷⁴ In a world-view of external impurity, one can be divested of the abject through ritual cleansing. But in the Christian world-view of Notker’s contemporaries, impurity became internal and completely intangible and therefore much more difficult to erase. Notker’s literary demons perhaps acted as agents of the abject who restored externality to filthiness. Demons therefore gave Christians an easier way to cope with sin and filth. The shadow demon was, quite literally, an embodiment of the filth and sin that threatened the Carolingian world, for, when stabbed violently, the foul contents of the monster gushed out to render the spring impure.

²⁷² Hills, *Pleasures of Horror*, p. 25.

²⁷³ Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), p. 9.

²⁷⁴ Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 135.

One of the filthiest impurities of the Middle Ages was excrement. In Kristeva's estimation, excrement represents the external threat of the abject to the identity of the individual.²⁷⁵ In medieval thought, the devil had a close relationship to excrement and the latrine.²⁷⁶ In Notker's story involving the giant demon previously discussed, we see that relationship. Liutfrid, the dishonest steward of Charlemagne's building project was found dead one morning sitting on the toilet. His servants claimed he had headed for the latrine in good health, but after staying in there all day, they went looking for him and found him dead.²⁷⁷ As wretched a fate as that sounds, the tale takes a demonic twist when we recall that one of the clerics abused by Liutfrid had a nightmare in which a giant demon came to carry Liutfrid off to hell on his heavily-laden camel. Notker informed us that the vision happened simultaneously to the toilet-seat death of Liutfrid—the giant claimed Liutfrid's soul in the designated place of filth. A contemporary reader would not have failed to make the connection between the demon and the latrine, the filthy domain of sin and impurity, the abject. Charles probably would have read this as a just consequence for the abject sins of Liutfrid and maybe would have given him pause to consider the impurities of his own stewards.

Houellebecq finds the cosmos, the universe to be abject: "this abject universe, where fear lies in concentric circles around the unspeakable revelation, this universe where our only imaginable destiny is to be scattered and devoured, we absolutely recognize it as our own mental universe."²⁷⁸ Now, this is a modern view heavily couched in an atheistic pessimism that seems at first to have no relation to the so-called "age of faith" of the Middle Ages. However, the cosmos

²⁷⁵ Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 86.

²⁷⁶ Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, p. 2.

²⁷⁷ "Domini mei, sanus ad latrinam exivit, et cum ibi diutius moraretur, egredientes defunctum invenimus illum," Notker, I.31, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 43.

²⁷⁸ "Cet univers abject, où la peur s'étage en cercles concentriques jusqu'à l'innommable révélation, cet univers où notre seul destin imaginable est d'être *broyés* et *dévorés*, nous le reconnaissons absolument comme notre univers mental," Houellebecq, *Contre le monde*, p. 37.

of Notker's world was also one of concentric circles of fear—a mortality filled with demonic opposition compelling humanity to sin, surrounded by the infinite realm of damnation for the eternal soul. Another accomplished poet from Notker's era, Walahfrid Strabo, recorded a terrifying vision of what awaited mankind in the afterlife, the 'unspeakable revelation' at the center of the concentric rings, in the *Visio Wettini*.²⁷⁹ There, fornicating couples are bound naked to stakes and their genitals are beaten every third day next to a river of fire; demons punished sinners according to their mortal deeds, like the piles of treasure, representative of what the avaricious amass in life, which the demons heap upon the laps of the greedy to crush them eternally when they arrive in hell.²⁸⁰ It was a completely alarming idea that demons had free reign to torment mortals on earth, as Notker related in his tales of demons afflicting greedy bishops and starving peasants, as well as in the *au-delà*. H.P. Lovecraft's words are perhaps fitting for the Carolingian worldview: "Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemoniacal (sic) hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold (sic) more hideous."²⁸¹ Although Wetti did not set himself on fire after learning the truth of what the afterlife had in store for him, as Sir Arthur Jermyn did upon learning of his own true and inescapable nature, he *did* attempt to alter his fate with as much death-bed penitence as possible.²⁸² Demonic encounters in the *Gesta* illustrate moments where the unseen other-half of the Carolingian world "could erupt at any moment into [the seen] world and that the two worlds were invisibly intertwined."²⁸³ This happened when the cleric dreamed that a giant demon was coming for Liutfrid and awoke to discover that the bad steward had actually simultaneously died

²⁷⁹ David Traill, trans., *Walahfrid Strabo's Visio Wettini: text, translation, and commentary*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1974), pp.187-207.

²⁸⁰ Traill, *Visio Wettini*, pp. 194 and 197-198.

²⁸¹ H. P. Lovecraft, "Arthur Jermyn," in *The Lurking Fear and Other Stories* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), pp. 49-53, here p. 49.

²⁸² Traill, *Visio Wettini*, pp. 206-207; Lovecraft, "Arthur Jermyn," pp. 57-58.

²⁸³ Michael Bishop, "Children Who Survive: an Autobiographical Meditation on Horror and Fantasy," in *Horror Literature: a Reader's Guide*, ed. Neil Barron (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), p. xxvi.

on the latrine or when the shadow monster erupted out of the depths of the hot spring. This was an important message that Notker wanted to impress upon Charles the Fat, whose own seen world had become intertwined with the invisible during the demonic possession of his body. Charles the Fat perhaps felt sympathy for the cleric who had spoken with a demon in vision, just as he had exchanged words with his own demon disguised as an angel-of-light; Charles would have understood all too well Liutfrid's fall and possibly felt gratitude that he had been allowed time to alter his course. Like Wetti, Charles the Fat had time left in which to correct his sins.

The presentation of demons in the *Gesta* is one that can prompt a sense of the uncanny in the reader. According to Freud's foray into aesthetics, the uncanny is a "quality of feeling" related to fear, in "the realm of the frightening."²⁸⁴ Uncanny is often used to describe anything scary or gruesome, but Freud cautions that it should be restricted to a specific terminological use: that of the familiar turned *unfamiliar*.²⁸⁵ That which once was well-known but returns as a stranger. The faint contours of a faded memory now wrongly embodied in something else. In his definition of the uncanny, Freud rules out the appearance of supernatural beings in literature such as fairy tales, because the writers of those kinds of works choose from the outset to present a world that deviates from the reader's familiar reality, thereby making it impossible to evoke the uncanny. However, if the writer has to "[take] up his stance on the ground of common reality," like Notker did in presenting his *Gesta Karoli* as a work of biography, then the conditions for evoking the uncanny through the written word parallel those of the reality of the reader. That is the effect that many of Notker's demons must have been able to suggest to the mind of the contemporary reader. If the modern reader can sense it, the effect it had a millennium ago must have been

²⁸⁴ Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 123.

²⁸⁵ Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 148.

several fold more palpable because the familiarity of the strangeness would have been greater. In one creepy story, uncanniness was a particularly strong element.²⁸⁶

Notker related the woes of a bishop in east Francia who had trouble keeping his fast during Lent. In particular, he struggled to forgo meat. Abstaining from meat brought him to such corporeal distress that he believed his own death was imminent. He sought the counsel of several holy and respectable priests who advised him to eat meat right away to avoid “becoming the destroyer of his own life.”²⁸⁷ But as soon as he placed a piece of meat in his mouth, he was overcome by despair over his own weakness, losing hope in the salvation of his now-abject soul. The same priests now recommended a plan of atonement to him, a way to “vanquish, diminish, and wash away his momentary sin.”²⁸⁸ Following their advice, he brought a massive tub, hot water, and clean white robes into the streets of his urban diocese where he washed the decrepit bodies of every leper in the local colony. He scraped the purulent scabs (*purulentiae scabies*) from their flesh with his own fingernails, shaved the bedraggled hair from their necks, and dressed them in clean garments.²⁸⁹

The late afternoon sun was waning as the bishop stood up from his labors outside of the church doors as long shadows crept over the porch behind him. The ground was covered with dirty water, rags infected with bodily fluids, human hair, and scabs. The labor was complete. All had been washed, cleaned, shaved, and dressed according to the bishop’s vow of penance. Now, at the end of an entire day of gruesome public service, it was the bishop’s turn to enter the bath and emerge, with body and conscience cleansed alike. But post bath, as he draped his own limbs in clean linens, a limping figure met the bishop at the doors to the church, a “most filthy and

²⁸⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, pp. 27-29.

²⁸⁷ “et vite sue proditor inveniretur,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 28.

²⁸⁸ “momentaneum illud peccatum superducere, extenuare vel abluere niteretur,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, p. 28.

²⁸⁹ Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, p.28.

ghastly leper with flowing bloody pus, ragged clothes stiff with gore, a trembling, stumbling gait, and the hoarse voice of a wretch.”²⁹⁰

The bishop beckoned the pus-leaking man near as he called for more hot water. Like the countless wretches before, this leper was stripped of his gore-caked tatters, plunged into the cleansing water of the wooden basin, and brought forth, his slippery, naked body to be groomed. But this time, something unsettling happened. All of the neck hair that the bishop shaved off grew back immediately. He made repeated passes with the blade, but the stiff bristles sprouted anew each time. As the bishop worked away at shaving, a great eyeball suddenly appeared in the windpipe of the leper’s neck. It stared at the bishop who jumped back in horror. As the bishop raised his hand to make the sign of the cross, the entire ghastly figure turned to smoke. As it vanished, the eyeball spoke in a low, hoarse voice: “This eye watched carefully when you ate the meat during Lent.”²⁹¹

The response of the leper-washing bishop to the unearthly eyeball is a good example of the human affective response to the monstrous: he was *pavefactus*—in terror, alarmed.²⁹² Notker, as narrator of the event, admitted that, even as he wrote the story down, he shuddered to relate (*horresco referens*) the appearance of the eyeball in the throat of the leper. Both the bishop and the narrator moved from a normal physical state to an agitated one of perturbation, recoiling, shuddering; the hallmark of the experience of horror.²⁹³ This emotional state was diagrammed by Carroll in his study of horror as follows:

“I am occurrently art-horrified by some monster X, say Dracula, if and only if 1) I am in some state of abnormal, physically felt agitation (shuddering, tingling, screaming, etc.) which

²⁹⁰ “fedissimi luridissimique leprosi, sanie fluvidi, pannis tabo rigentibus amicti, gressu tremente nutabundi, nimia raucedine miserandi,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 29.

²⁹¹ “Iste oculus vigilanter intendit, quando carnem in quadragesima comedisti,” Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 29.

²⁹² Notker, *Gesta*, I.21, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 29.

²⁹³ Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, p. 24.

2) has been *caused* by a) the thought: that Dracula is a possible being; and by the evaluative thoughts: that b) said Dracula has the property of being physically (and perhaps morally and socially) threatening in the ways portrayed in the fiction and that c) said Dracula has the property of being impure, where 3) such thoughts are usually accompanied by the desire to avoid the touch of things like Dracula.”²⁹⁴

It is this process that causes us to share sensations with characters (and/or narrators) relevant to the emotive evaluations of horror.²⁹⁵ Despite our temporal distance from the Carolingian world, we can experience the same sensation that Notker drew out of his original audience through this process.

The presence and description of the demon-leper in this tale provides a truly uncanny aspect to Notker’s horror. Lepers are only an intellectual concept to the modern, western mind. Leprosy is a disease that largely disappeared (almost unexplainably) from the European continent in the sixteenth century, and remained mostly restricted to “the third world” since.²⁹⁶ But in Notker’s age, lepers were part of everyday life. A contemporary reader of Notker’s demonic leper would likely have been familiar with the ulceration and destruction of epidermal tissue attendant to victims of leprosy because they probably would have seen it firsthand at some point, as opposed to the modern reader who, more than likely, can only imagine what leprosy looks like, removing the level of familiarity by several degrees, if not altogether. The rotting flesh of leprosy was often described as “moving cadavers,” “walking corpses,” “the living dead.”²⁹⁷ These were strong metaphors but they described a *daily* reality in the Carolingian world. Notker’s reader would have also been familiar with a disturbing question about the nature of leprosy that

²⁹⁴ Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, p. 27.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁹⁶ Edgar Stoez, *Contagious Compassion* (Providence House Publishers, 2006), p. 5.

²⁹⁷ Timothy Miller and John Nesbitt, *Walking Corpses: Leprosy in Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. xi and 2.

completely escapes the modern reader: “were its victims being punished or being readied for heaven?”²⁹⁸ The image Notker draws of the penitent bishop laboring away to wash the leprous bodies and scrape the crusty lesions from their flesh with his fingernails is unsettling to us; to the imagination of Notker’s audience, intimately familiar with the effects of the disease, it was probably unbearably repulsive. With this background established, the demon disguised as a leper described by Notker is no longer only gruesome, it becomes uncanny. When the leper’s true nature was revealed, it was not the pitiable victim of divinely inflicted disease but something truly familiar and yet *other*, adding a frightening sense of uncanniness to the already eerie nature of a demonic encounter. Being more familiar with the scene that Notker set, a Carolingian reader such as Charles the Fat would have likely felt the uncanniness in the tale far more palpably than a modern reader.

The bishop’s struggle with the leper demon was a rounded tale that can ultimately be described as a catharsis. The bishop struggled to remain pure of sin, but fell short through extreme temptation. After the disgusting task of scab removal and washing, the bishop underwent the frustrating, repetitive shaving of the hair that constantly grew back. When the demon’s eyeball appeared in the neck of the leper, it was because it could no longer conceal its own nature. By the same act, the very temptation that had led to the bishop’s sin and penance was revealed. The revelation is a resolution, a catharsis, because he witnessed demonic powers and escaped.

Poetic catharsis takes us away from ethical purity toward that which breaks boundaries and limits.²⁹⁹ When Notker’s demons broke through the boundary between the worlds of the seen and of the unseen, they take the audience away from an Aristotelian catharsis (akin to sacred

²⁹⁸ Miller and Nesbitt, *Walking Corpses*, p. 2.

²⁹⁹ Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 37.

incantation) toward Kristeva's idea of catharsis, one that is not simply a "cleansing of affects," but one that incorporates, as Bernard Waldenfels concluded, pathos, "a learning through suffering, yet not a learning of suffering."³⁰⁰ Through the demonic eyeball's assault, the bishop learned about sin and temptation through suffering; Notker's audience learned the same through a vicarious suffering. The encounter with the demon, the horror story, relies on pathos, an appeal to the reader's emotions that simultaneously elicits feelings which are already present, but dormant in the reader, and arouses them in the experience of "those events which are not at our disposal... but rather happen to us, overcome, stir, surprise, attack us."³⁰¹

The evocation of horror is one way that a writer arouses certain moods and expectations in readers, "directing [their] feelings away from one consequence and towards another."³⁰² It is possible that Notker included unrelated stories about demons and horror in a biography about Charlemagne for the purpose of directing the reader's feelings to the specific consequence of catharsis. Waldenfels and Kristeva found that experiencing horror in literature brings about a change in the viewer.³⁰³ Because it is not real-life horror, the experience becomes a pleasurable resolution. The real-world dangers of sin were reduced to vicarious vignettes safely controlled by the author to allow those feelings to be encountered and ultimately appeased and resolved. Reading uncanny or horrifying stories about demons, monstrous agents of the abject who exact punishment on greedy bishops, who reveal deceits and sin, may have brought about a significant change in Notker's audience, that of renewed motivation to correct the problems of the empire. Notker was concerned for the future of the empire and the Carolingian line; by appealing to the present-but-dormant emotions of Charles the Fat and his court, Notker was attempting to direct

³⁰⁰ Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, pp. 34-36; and Bernhard Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, trans. Alexander Kozin and Tanja Stähler (Northwestern University Press, 2011), pp. 26, 86.

³⁰¹ Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, p. 26.

³⁰² Freud, *Uncanny*, p. 158.

³⁰³ Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, pp. 21-27; and Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, pp. 34-35.

their feelings towards the conclusion of reforming the parts of the realm that were most mired in sin. If the demonic predilection in the tales was any indication, that part must have been bishops and clerics. But Notker also wanted Charles the Fat and his court to consider the nature of temptation and different kinds of sin. His presentation of such in the form of demon stories was an effective teaching method that edified while it entertained.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The text of the *Gesta Karoli Magni* ends without warning in the middle of a story, leaving the reader denied of the release of tension created by the narrative arc of the episode. For unknown reasons, Notker never finished his biography of Charlemagne. The most likely reason was that internal controversies over royal and episcopal succession between the various Carolingian principalities and the ultimate deposition of the heir-less Charles the Fat made the politically-aware Notker cease writing. The biography contained many critical references to contemporary individuals, and without Charles' protection, Notker might have wound up on the wrong side of politics had he continued the work.³⁰⁴ This does not necessarily mean that Charles the Fat never read the text; he may have seen an unfinished form during one of his visits to St. Gall.

Louis Halphen quipped that “the book by the monk of St. Gall remains...one of the most curious monuments of Latin literature of the period of Carolingian decline.”³⁰⁵ Curious to modern eyes, perhaps, but it does not seem reasonable that this is how Charles would have received the work. Notker did not set out to write a “bad history” of Charlemagne. He fully intended the work to be well-received by the audience who commissioned it in the first place. Notker did not include non-sequitur demon stories out of ineptitude. Notker was the writer of Latin verse praised as “one of the few great poets between the Gospels and Dante.”³⁰⁶ His demon stories were calculated, incorporating “truth assertions” and other common medieval literary devices to establish the credibility of his work. Notker wanted his audience to accept all of the stories in the *Gesta* as true, including the fantastic, supernatural ones. The approaches in this

³⁰⁴ MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, pp. 205-207; and Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, pp. 53-54.

³⁰⁵ “Le livre du Moine de Saint-Gall reste...un des monuments les plus curieux de la littérature latine au temps de la décadence carolingienne,” Halphen, *Etudes critiques*, p. 142.

³⁰⁶ “Denn ohne Frage ist Notker einer der wenigen großen Dichter zwischen dem Evangelium und Dante.” Von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, p. 7.

study bring us closer to seeing the past as the Carolingians saw it, where the past offered examples that served the needs of the present. Notker drew on a rich history of demonology as he constructed the details of his demon stories, characterizations which demonstrated contemporary Carolingian understanding of the unseen in order to help his audience consider key aspects of evil and sin.

These stories together tell us something about Charles the Fat, a former demoniac who had escaped the consequences of his treachery, and Notker. Notker knew his audience and he was confident in the content he chose to include. He never shied away from controversial commentary about contemporaries. He also included the demon stories, unrelated to Charlemagne, with confidence that they would mean something to Charles. Notker was aware of his emperor's position as the last standing Carolingian with no heirs. He optimistically anticipated this situation to change when he wrote in the *Gesta* that certain stories should wait until Charles had a son of his own.³⁰⁷

Martha Bayless argued persuasively that "serious medieval writers" used topics that had the power to disgust and horrify with the express purpose of provoking reactions in their readers in the very way that "dispassionate modern scholarship" tries to avoid.³⁰⁸ In this way, Notker was certainly a serious medieval writer, unlike his sometimes historiographical dismissal as the "ill-informed monk of St. Gall" with nothing to offer history.³⁰⁹ Whether intentionally or unconsciously inserted, it is likely that the various elements of horror in Notker's work would have brought about a resolution of emotions toward sin through the vicarious experience of struggles with it. The tension borne of anxiety over sin, one's place in the afterlife, and the evil in the world could be released through the vicarious, horrific, and entertaining encounters with

³⁰⁷ Notker, *Gesta*, II.11, ed. H.F. Haefele, p. 68.

³⁰⁸ Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, p. xvii.

³⁰⁹ Jaffé, "Monachus Sangallensis," p. 628.

demons contained in the *Gesta*. By presenting human failings and the unseen world in nuanced and complex terms, the demon stories made *correctio* and the fight against evil more entertaining, more enjoyable.

Openness to enjoying new literary experiences, then, seems to have been a feature of Charles the Fat's imperial court. The literary experience that Notker's demons provided a mixture of approaches to dealing with evil, both theological and popular. As the stories showed, both the sign of the cross and mortal means (swords, beatings) could be effective against demons. The main problem in the empire that Notker's demons addressed were the sins of the clergy: greed, preoccupation with one's appearance, hoarding of wealth and food, and a general lack of care for the laity. Notker showed Charles that the ruler held a special place in the fight with the evils in the empire.

A partisan for redeeming Notker's work as historically valuable through the very same strange tales we have analyzed, Hans Haefele still found many of the demonic episodes to be "sinnlos" (senseless).³¹⁰ This paper has spent a lot of time trying to make sense of the demons in Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, but it should also be remembered that the entertainment in horror does not always have to make perfect sense.³¹¹ Sometimes, searching too hard for hidden meaning can rob pleasurable experiences of their potency.³¹² Reading the *Gesta Karoli Magni* is an entertaining experience because it shows us that the Carolingian world of Charles the Fat and Notker the Stammerer was both more exciting and more terrible than we think.³¹³

³¹⁰ Haefele, *Teufel und Dämon*, p. 18.

³¹¹ Houellebecq, *Contre le monde*, p. 37.

³¹² Hills, *Pleasures of Horror*, pp. 7-8.

³¹³ Bishop, "Children Who Survive," p. xxv.

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Vita

Klayton Tietjen grew up in southeast Idaho and spent a few years after high school in France. He earned his BA at Idaho State University where he majored in History and minored in French. After about a decade working in the real estate industry as a commercial broker, property manager, and investor, he decided to return to his passion for medieval European history.

Klayton enrolled in the MA program in pre-modern European History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2015, where he learned theoretical approaches to the study of medieval history such as memory and phenomenology, and where he added Latin and German to his research languages. He graduated with his Master's degree in May of 2017, after which he continued his studies for a PhD in Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures with an emphasis on medieval French texts.