How to Make a People

Medieval English cultural identity should be understood as the result of the development of rhizomatic assemblages – machines - co-opted by the sovereign apparatuses of the Church and/or of the State. I submit that at the time of the Norman invasion, there existed a medieval cultural identity-creating machine developed in a rhizomatic fashion co-opted by the sovereign and employed in an arborescent fashion for political gain. The *rhizome* is a metaphorical concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It describes theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in representation and interpretation. The concept of the rhizome is a concept of knowledge. The *rhizomatic* conception of knowledge is best understood in comparison to the *arborescent* conception of knowledge, according to Deleuze and Guattari.

The arborescent concept is the classical model of knowledge constituted of: dualist categories, binary and biunivocal choices, and vertical, linear connections. The root and tree represent this concept of knowledge best. Everything is hierarchical, stemming from the root, growing to the various limbs and branches of the tree. Aristotelian binarism: the one becomes the two, becomes the four, etc. The rhizomatic concept of knowledge is horizontal, making trans-species connections: multiplicities. It is schizophrenic. The interrelation of multiple multiplicities constitutes a machine. The tuber represents this concept best. The tuber has no center and sprouts in all directions, seemingly in a limitless fashion. Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature (*ATP* 21).

In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731, we are introduced to a major cog of ***the*** sub-machine of the medieval cultural identity-creating machine that desired to produce a Christian religious identity for the English people. A main aim of Bede's machine was to "tell the story of God's plan for the conversion of the English people and the building up of one united Church in [Britain]" (Colgrave xxx). In order to achieve the desired goal of such a machine, Bede had to "lay stress on the *unity* of all the smaller kingdoms in the one great English nation" (ibid). We enter this machine in the middle of operation. Bede, in his deep and devoted scholarship, has already interrupted the flow and operation of machines to which we are not privy. For example, Bede connected with a medieval literary machine, which in turn consisted of a Church literature machine, both of which were and are part of the Literary Abstract Machine. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "literature is an assemblage [collection of multiplicities] swept along by the Abstract Machine," which itself is simply a collection of all multiplicities and their interrelations (*ATP* 7). It is described how Bede "put together his account of the Church of Britain, and of the English people in particular, gleaned from ancient documents *or* from tradition *or* from his own knowledge" (Colgrave xxxii). In the creation of his Christian English identity machine, Bede interrupted the flow of machines that used Pliny, Gildas, Orosius, Rufinius and Gregory of Tours (xviii-xxvi). To express more systematically: the aforementioned authors were *BwOs*, machinic assemblages within the socius from which lines of flight exploded uniting in alliance with Bede. It was from the product of such existing machines that Bede gained an understanding of the geography over which his machine could operate, for example. It was Pliny's contribution to the existing medieval literary machine that supplied the background and scenery for Augustine's arrival in the first book of Bede's *History* (xxxi).

Bede was a bricoleur, a practitioner of bricolage. The bricoleur uses "the instruments which he finds at his disposal around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once" (Derrida 255). Bede's nature as a bricoleur inherently predisposed the thinker to a rhizomatic operational development regarding his Christian English identity-creating machine. His machine consisted of parts scavenged from the works of the great theologians and astrologists that came before him – St. Basil, the author of *Liber Pontificalis*, etc – and not from the beginning, foundations of their thought, but from the middle. Moreover, as Bede "gets closer to his own times he is dependent to a much greater extent on the faithful testimony of innumerable witnesses" (Colgrave xxxii). Bede used whatever sources available to assemble his machine.

Bede's machine transformed "the five languages of Britain" – the English, British, Irish, Pictish, and Latin – into one identity "devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of [religion]"(Colgrave i.I 17). He promoted one Church, one faith, one people. A theme of great importance in his enterprise was the sense of a promotion of the sense of unity and common cause among the Germanic Christian peoples of Britain – those he labeled "a Christian *gens Anglorum*," a Christian English people. The common cause uniting the Germanic peoples in Britain was Christianity in the eyes of Bede. And his machine identified these Germanic Christians as English. And while Bede's machine produced an identity that suggested that "the inhabitants of the island were all Britons," the machine's production did not suggest that all Britons were English. Only the Germanic Christian Britons were English.

While Bede's machine would seem the perfect creation for the production of a Christian English identity, its rhizomatic development does not betray its arborescent employment. Co-opted by the sovereignty of the Church from its inception, an underlying goal of Bede's machine is the production of an identity that is *Christian*. Bede's machine, while aiding in the production of an English identity, also creates fodder for the ecclesiastic, proselytizing machine of the Church. The insular reaction of Bede's identity creating machine, in comparison with the reaction from the exterior, underscores this take-over by the sovereign. While Bede and those in his close circle may have referred to all Christian Germanics in Britain as English, the outside world continued to use the same originary group names - Mercians, Men of Kent, Saxons – when referring to the separate areas of Britain. This does not detract from how the collective English may have viewed themselves as a result of Bede's machine, but speaks to the nature of an arborescent employment as opposed to a more rhizomatic employment: an attempt to control the dissemination of information regarding English identity in a hierarchical, orderly fashion versus a more schizophrenic, rhizomatic fashion. At any rate, Bede's machine did help refine, or more thoroughly conceptualize, who and what the people of Britain were before the Norman invasion of 1066, if only religiously. The English were Christian, but what did that mean? The machine of Abbot Aelfric would interrupt the machine of Bede and produce a Christian identity that was more specific, more detailed to the tenth century than was Bede's machine. Aelfric's tenth century machine sought to "refortify a failing faith" among the English people (Lees 326). A faith that was shaken and failing as a result of Danish, "Viking," invasions of Britain in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Aelfric obviously plugged into not only the identity machine of Bede, but in the process, interrupted the machines of medieval literature and of Church literature as well. His book

education was narrowed to the machine of the cloister-schools: the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*. His historical tutelage consisted of a summary of the Origensitic world-ages and his association with the machines of Bede and Eusebius: the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and the *Chronicle of Eusebius*, respectively. Aelfric's theological mechanics were thoroughly learned by studying the mechanics of the Church literary machine, especially the interrelations revolving around the lives of saints. Aelfric's machine forged connections with machines of Biblical knowledge and dogmatics, ecclesiastical history, customs and statues, and liturgical and pastoral theology as it moved forward in its desire to produce Christian Englishmen who would reflect a refortification of the faith (White 71-83).

The machine of Aelfric used the "iconic meaning of saints' religious practices," centered on chastity, to produce "idealized Christian subjects whose will and whose faith, however much contested, remained resolutely uncontestable" (Lees 327). Aelfric's machine operated according to the English vernacular. Use of the vernacular, as opposed to Latin, permitted as wide an audience as possible to be able to make connections and passages within the machine. His machine would be made available to a circle larger than that of Bede; the multiplicity of Bede's machine was enlarged, rhizomatically speaking, by Aelfric, and this, accordingly, changed the nature of the machine. The machinic assemblage that was of Aelfric produced a chaste, Christian English identity.

Aelfric's machine, formally entitled *Lives of Saints*, uses a multivalent group of saints to produce the type of Christian English identity that would remain chaste and faithful to the *lord* no matter what the situation. The bodies of women saints are used as the primary site of instruction: female lives can be understood as products of the "martyred virgin who resist

marriage and devote their lives to God" machine, of the Christian subject "doubly married yet chaste" machine, of the "fallen lady redeemed through renewed chastity" machine, etc. The chastity emphasized by Aelfric's machine should be understood as an undying obedience to the law of God's authority. The good Christian, according to Aelfric's bricolage, would under no circumstances break her, or his, vow of chastity, which equated to placing one's love to God above all.

Aelfric's creation of a machine which emphasized the production of a chaste, loyal, Christian English identity did not have to connect with Bede's identity making machine directly; the interruption could have been totally indirect. Constructing his machine in the tenth century, Aelfric's machine could have very well connected with the politically driven, state apparatus sponsored, court machine of King Alfred with its internally vital "education reform programme" dimension (Foot 56). Alfred's programme "invented" the English following a connection made with Bede's machine (56). Adhering to the practice of bricolage, Aelfric could have interrupted the machine of Bede or of Alfred, or both; rhizomatically speaking, either connection would have led Aelfric to use an English identity that was the product of what I have labeled the medieval English cultural identity creating machine. Interrupting the machine of Alfred, Aelfric would have had to understand that the identity produced by Alfred's machine was not only religious in nature, but political as well.

In 886, Alfred's machine used "all people who were not under subjection to the Danes" found in Britain as components for his political identity making machine (Bately 199). The Alfredian "court machine" (Foot 52) "advanced the notion that all Germanic subjects" of the West Saxon king, of the Mercians, and the men of Kent were essentially of one *Englishkind*, of

one *Angelcynn* (Stevenson 66). The common identity of the Englishkind was produced by the Alfredian machine with "specific reference to their otherness from those subject to Danish rule and their common cause under one leader in opposition to the Danes" sharing the religion of Christianity (Keynes and Lapidge 38-41). Alfred interrupted the flow of "one people, one Church, one faith" produced by Bede's machine. Alfred's machine would emphasize "one heritage, one faith, and one *shared* history" (ibid).

While the interruption of Bede's machine - along with an interruption of the machine of the Church, and the Latinate, etc. – were major components of the court machine initiated by Alfred, the most important system within the Alfredian machine was the educational programme of reform and revival, with respect to identity formation. The educational programme highlighted the rhizomatic development of Alfred's machine and Alfred's character as a bricoleur. The educational programme could also be interpreted as a "conscious effort to shape an English imagination by disseminating beyond the court Alfred's ideas about the nature of Englishness and his fictive interpretation of history through the works he determined the English should read" (Foot 56). This fictive history, this created Englishness, was transferred upon the Germanic subjects residing in Britain in the ninth century not under the jurisdiction of the invading Danes. Loyalty to Alfred meant acceptance of the identity created by his court machine. It was Alfred that "collected" the many compensations for human misdeeds – here one law, there another – written in many synod-books (Keynes and Lapidge 163-64). Alfred selected those that he liked and rejected those that he did not. The texts and laws chosen for the programme of educational reform and revival were not chosen randomly. Alfred's machine consisted of carefully designed and crafted parts, "which if mastered would serve to restore Christianity among the English aristocracy, which in Alfred's opinion had declined so far, notably through their loss of

understanding of Latin, that God had sent the Danes as divine punishment" (Keynes and Lapidge 109-10). This emphasis on the loss of the ability to understand Latin may account for the necessity of Alfred's machine to translate Latin works of the programme, deemed worthy for the use of creating English subjects, into the English vernacular. Latin was not the shared, common tongue. Alfred decided that the common tongue, shared by his subjects, was English. And so, in producing the ideal political English subjects, the machine of Alfred would concentrate on the English vernacular.

Alfred's machine, like that of Aelfric, responds to the English vernacular. Alfred's machine desired to produced an identity of English readers among "all the free-born young men of the Angelcynn" (126). Alfred's machine did not seek to only teach Christian Germanic subjects not under the jurisdiction of the Danes to read the vernacular English, but all men found within the jurisdiction not subject to Danish rule. Alfred's machine used the English vernacular language to cut across all ancestral or inherited bonds that may have existed among his Mercian or Kentish or Saxon subjects in order to create and help shape a common shared history among the Angelcynn. Once literate, the subjects of Alfred could read about this shared history and shared destiny in the text that Alfred selected and had commissioned for his programme, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: presented in a vernacular language that they could feel was all their own as Englishmen.

The separate and individual identities of the different kingdoms of pre-Conquest Britain were clearly important to the subjects of Mercia and Kent and Wessex, but Alfred's use of a consistent vocabulary component in his identity machine, specifically his continued and consistent use of *Angelcynn* to refer to his subjects in official text and documents (Foot 53-56),

undermined any ancestral identity that was not political in nature. The words chosen by one culture to express its ideas are one sign of its own distinctive and individual thought, but the collective names adopted by communities play a significant part in the mechanics producing their identity. Alfred's mechanism produced such an identity (Foot 53).

The arborescent nature of the employment of the product of Alfred's court machine should not be overlooked. It is the result of the machine being co-opted by the sovereign apparatus of the state. Alfred's political identity creating machine is used in a didactic fashion, with the state being the ONE arbiter of what is correct and incorrect regarding of whom and of what an Englishman consists. With relevance to the dissemination of information regarding an English identity, arborescent employment is not efficient. Information is only disseminated through the control of the hierarchy of the state apparatus, where rules and codes and regulations dictate the flow of production. The rhizomatic dissemination of the information, in a more schizophrenic manner, would allow for a more fluid exchange of information with the outside world, one with more connections. And under such circumstances the identity produced by the machine would not be so insular. For example, the identity produced as Saxon with relevance to the inhabitants of Britain was used by most non-insular authors who describe affairs in Britain, such as Constantius, author of the *Life of St. Germanus*.

The arborescent dissemination techniques employed by the sovereign state apparatus of Alfred did facilitate the interruption of the medieval English identity machine by the Norman invaders after 1066. Alfred's strict codified manner of disseminating the ideas about English identity limit the dimensionality of such an identity, making it easier to isolate the characteristics that are consistent with such an English identity. The very politically chaste, Christian English

identity resulting from the condition of the medieval English cultural identity creating machine at the time of Alfred was usurped to help further colonize and control those of English identity who Alfred sought to invent.

When the last of William the Conqueror's sons died in 1135 without a surviving male heir, it was said that he designated his daughter Matilda as heir (Finke and Shichtman 46). This designation complicated the operation of the Norman succession machine, which usually produced male heirs. Due to the unexpected multiplicity within the machine, a great-grandson of William's, Stephen, created a machine that allowed for a quick seizing of the throne in 1135.

Stephen's machine sought legitimacy for his claim to rule the island by appropriating aspects of an English identity already existing, ready for rhizomatic extraction. Acting as a bricoleur, Stephen could easily create a machine that produced an identity of the Angevins that reflected characteristics of the oldest and most essential people to inhabit the island: a people beholden to a mythic king that the machines of Bede and Aelfric and, especially, Alfred, used to produce an identity of the Englishkind with which all Christian subjects, not under the jurisdiction of the Danes, living in Mercia, Kent, and Wessex, free-born, who could read vernacular English, shared a common history: that of King Arthur.

Stephen's connection with the machine that produced King Arthur also highlights the Norman understanding of the existence of an English identity prior to the invasion of 1066. The people of Britain – more specifically, the chaste, Christian subjects free from the rule of the Danes who lived in Mercia, Kent, and Wessex – understood themselves as a product of the medieval English cultural identity creating machine; they were English. The desire of the

machine of Stephen – to legitimize his reign through transference of an already existing English

identity – attests to the advent of an English identity prior to the Norman invasion of 1066.

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