

# The Untimely Subject

## Reporting Discourse and Bearing Witness in Villehardouin's *La Conquête de Constantinople* and Yannick Haenel's *Jan Karski*

### Abstract

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This article examines the use of reported discourse in Villehardouin's *La Conquête de Constantinople* (c. 1210), offering a comparison to Robert de Clari's text of the same name. The radical shift in direct speech across the first and second halves of the text is explored in relation to three existing interpretations put forward by scholars, before a fourth one is proposed that places new emphasis on the processes of memory and text-making behind the composition of the *Conquête*. Villehardouin's status as eyewitness, and the importance this has for the nature of his chronicle, is then analysed through a reading of the 2009 novel *Jan Karski* by Yannick Haenel, whose playful, distortional treatment of historical speech and meta-commentary on the act of bearing witness have important implications for the temporality and discursive features of the medieval text.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I would like to express special thanks to Simon Gaunt and Simone Ventura for reading various drafts of this article. An earlier version was presented at the Early Career Research Forum at King's College London and I am grateful for questions and comments from participants there. The research for this article was carried out with financial support from *The Values of French Language and Literature in the European Middle Ages*, an ERC-funded project running 2015–20 (PI: Simon Gaunt; grant agreement number 670726).

2. The manuscript tradition can be divided into two groups. The first, and the basis for Edmond Faral's critical

Geoffrey of Villehardouin, marshal of Champagne, was one of the leaders of the controversial Fourth Crusade that was diverted from its original objective to recapture Jerusalem, and ended up assaulting and sacking Constantinople in 1204 before falling apart due to internal division and external pressure. His eyewitness testimony, which we are told was dictated, is recorded in a narrative completed around 1210 (certainly after the death of Boniface de Montferrat in 1207). The text is one of the earliest surviving original compositions in French prose and has been subject to extensive literary and historical scrutiny. Some of the titles found in the seven surviving manuscripts, however, foreground a particular usage of the narrative: to laud the figure of Count Baldwin IX of Flanders, elected Emperor of Constantinople in 1204.<sup>2</sup> Villehardouin's account is generally preferred by historians to that of another eyewitness, Robert de Clari, a low-ranking knight, whose nar-

edition, includes Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud. Misc. 587 and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), fr. 4972, two manuscripts produced in Venice around 1330 (likely at the atelier of Marino Sanudo the Elder). These Italian copies have the same bas-de-page illustration on their opening folio depicting the assault on Constantinople: the Byzantines and their flag are at the centre, while knights bearing the banner of Flanders are situated on the right. The second group consists of BnF fr. 2137, BnF fr. 12203, BnF fr. 12204, BnF fr. 15100 and BnF fr. 24210. Unsurprisingly, it is the northern French manuscripts of the late thirteenth century, BnF fr. 12203 and BnF fr. 12204, that stress the text's connection to Baldwin: e.g. "Chi commence li histore dou conte Bauduin de Flandres et de Hainau, comment il conquist par sa proeche l'empire de Constantinoble et comment il en fu couronnés a empereour" (BnF fr. 12204, f. 1r, "Here begins the history of Count Baldwin of Flanders and of Hainault, how he conquered through his prowess the empire of Constantinople and how he was crowned emperor"). In a similar vein, Villehardouin's text in BnF fr. 12203 is preceded by a historical account in French about the counts of Flanders from 792 to 1152 (f. 50r–68v).

rative is more digressive and lacks the access to the decision-making machine behind the Crusade leadership. Indeed, it is Villehardouin's clear, precise, and relatively unembellished prose that has swayed many historians to accept his explanation for why the Fourth Crusade went wrong; a theory of 'accidents' suggesting it was an unfortunate contingency of events – rather than the vengeful design of their allies the Venetians or the avarice and glory-hunting of the crusading army – that led the host astray.

The aim of this article is to address the relationship between the presentation of speech in the *Conquête de Constantinople* and Villehardouin's status as eyewitness. There has been no shortage of studies that have considered the reliability of Villehardouin's account, and many have drawn attention to the narrator's seemingly wilful forgetfulness – that is, his omission of key episodes that would reflect none too well on the crusaders' intentions – and his careful manipulation of the narrative material (e.g. Madden and Queller 302–303). In a very recent book, Marcus Bull considers Villehardouin's and Robert de Clari's respective accounts of the Fourth Crusade from a narratological perspective. Bull's approach is to consider the relationship not between Villehardouin as author and Villehardouin as narrator (as with the majority of literary analyses), but rather between Villehardouin as narrator and historical actor. The interplay of narratorial identities responds, for Bull, to ethical and political imperatives that arise from Villehardouin's measured reflection on the past events: to switch between "je," "nous," "Joffrois de Villehardouin," and "li livre" ("I," "we," "Geoffrey of Villehardouin," "the book") is to move in and out of his personal memories, generic convention, *post hoc* rationalization, use of documentary material, and textual effect. Our limited access to the lines of sight that Villehardouin actually held, as well as a lack of authentic reaction to the events before him, point to a text that negates the experience of the witness all the while foregrounding its status as eyewitness testimony. In short, Bull evinces, "the *Conquête* is scarcely to be categorized as an 'eyewitness' text at all" (Bull 292).

What is missing in Bull's compelling argument, however, is consideration of a curious linguistic feature of the *Conquête*: its imbalanced use of reported discourse. In the following analysis, I will consider the three interpretations that have been put forward by scholars to explain the radically different proportions of direct discourse in the first and second halves of the text. I will then propose a fourth interpretation that makes use of Bull's discussion on 'transactive

memory,' or the way that memory of lived experience is less formed in the moment of perception than in its subsequent exchange within a social grouping, to suggest that we have approached the question back-to-front. If we entertain the possibility that Villehardouin's self-distancing and narratorial disaggregation arise not from professional, historiographical detachment but from an *overinvestment* in the narrative (somewhere between regret, trauma, guilt, or responsibility), then we might see how the ever-present epistemological, ethical, and representational issues surrounding bearing witness are present in the dynamics behind the *Conquête's* composition.

The act of testimony and its relation to trauma has become an increasingly popular critical tool for the analysis of modern and contemporary texts, and offers an undoubted heuristic potential for our understanding of canonical medieval texts.<sup>3</sup> While many of the issues explored in Holocaust literature, for instance, are historically contingent on the post-war context, they also encourage new ways of thinking about medieval textuality. Twenty-first-century concerns with the fictionality of testimony, as well as its necessary performance by a survivor, gesture towards debates in medieval literature regarding the difference between types of narrative subsumed under the category *histoire* or *historia* and the fundamental performativity of text and manuscript. Given a pre-modern literary culture where the material 'witness' stands in for a lost 'originary' speaker, whose speech is not only modified in scribal transmission but also often first recorded as part of a collaborative process, recent ideas about the relationship between the witness and his or her testimony, the ethical impetus behind voicing injustice, and the privileged status we grant eyewitnesses in modern discourses on traumatic events at once strike a chord with the interests of medievalists and allow us to challenge some of our underlying assumptions. This article takes the controversial 2009 novel *Jan Karski* by Yannick Haenel as an opportunity to re-read Villehardouin's text through a traumatic lens. The linguistic fact of the radical shift in reported discourse in the *Conquête*, it will be argued, can be understood better through the eyewitness testimony that Haenel re-narrativizes. With its playful, novelistic treatment (or distortion) of historical speech, as well as its meta-commentary on the act of bearing witness, *Jan Karski* focuses our attention on a crucial, yet rarely asked, question about Villehardouin's text: who is actually speaking *and when?*

3. Historians have rightly been cautious about using the term 'trauma,' which may lend itself to anachronism or an assumption of continuity between pre-modern and modern formations of subjectivity. As Nicholas Paul puts it: "The concept of psychological or emotional trauma, invented in the late nineteenth century and now a ubiquitous 'floating signifier,' applied freely and without much distinction in contemporary discourse, should be applied only with the greatest caution to societies of the distant past whose own categories of grace, peace and their opposites we understand poorly" (299). A growing body of medieval scholarship has sought, on the one hand, to identify cases of trauma among historical subjects (or its effects as what we now describe as post-traumatic stress disorder), and, on the other, to develop trauma theory as a valid mode of historical analysis. Donna Trembinski has argued, while cautioning against a confirmation bias when we go actively looking for it in medieval sources (21), that trauma "injects ambiguity and complexity into the thoughts, emotions and actions of historical actors" (31).

4. An excellent introductory work on the history of and critical debate surrounding reported discourse is Rosier, *Le discours rapporté. Histoire, théories, pratiques*. For a textbook with more examples in modern French, see Rosier, *Le Discours rapporté en français*.

5. I follow the vocabulary that Sophie Marnette translates from French into English. See *Speech*, especially her discussion of Oswald Ducrot's split subject (21) and chapter 2 "What is 'reported discourse'?" (39–63).

6. See also Jeanette Beer's discussion of this passage, *In Their Own Words* 49–50.

7. All translations are my own.

Reported discourse refers to the ways in which speech and thought are (re-)presented, whether spoken or written.<sup>4</sup> The main three categories of reported discourse are direct, indirect, and free indirect, but problems of definition and terminology abound in the vast linguistic scholarship. The reporting strategy affects many aspects of the phrase at a grammatical level (tense, pronoun, deictic markers), and may entail different relationships between the speaking subject (the person who physically produces the utterance [énoncé] in speech or writing), the locutor (the 'I' responsible for the act of enunciation [énonciation]), the enunciator (whose point of view is expressed), and the addressee (who reads or hears the utterance).<sup>5</sup> If we take an example from the *Conquête*, we see how differentiating between the above entities can be problematic, especially with tense switching and without systematic punctuation:

Et li apostoille dist aus messages qu'il savoit bien que por la defaute des autres lor convint a faire, si en ot grant pitié; et lor manda as barons et as pelerins salut et qu'il les asolt comme ses filz et lor conmandoit et prioit que il tenissent l'ost ensemble: *car il savoit bien que sanz cele ost ne pooit li servises Dieu estre fais*; et dona plain pooir a Nevelon lo vesque de Soisons et a maistre Johan de Noion de lier et de deslier les pelerins tresqu'adonc que li cardenax vendroit en l'ost. (Ed. Faral §107)<sup>6</sup>

(And the pope said to the messengers that he knew very well that because the others had defected they had to do it, and so he was full of regret; he sent greetings to the barons and to the pilgrims and (sent word that) he absolves them as his sons, and commanded and beseeched them that they keep the army together: *for he knew very well that without this army God's service could not be done*; and he gave full authority to Nevelon, Bishop of Soissons, and to Master John of Noyon to bond and to unloose the pilgrims until the cardinal came to the army.)<sup>7</sup>

The pope reports to the messengers his own thoughts and feelings (and thus is both locutor and enunciator). Yet if Villehardouin the narrator is reporting this, he heard it from the messengers, whose role as locutors is effaced presumably both to give the pope's message the immediacy it deserves and to avoid an even more complex

grammatical operation. The pope sends his greeting (“salut”) to the crusaders and absolves them of sin. The verb “asolt” is in the present tense, even if the *verbum dicendi* “manda” is in the preterit, and in the latter part of the same phrase the verbs of command, “conmandoit” and “prioit,” are in the imperfect tense, followed by the imperfect subjunctive, “tenissent.” The act of absolution is made relevant both to the time of enunciation (in the narrative shortly following the capture of Zara, a Christian city, in February 1203), and to the time of narrative composition (when Villehardouin is dictating his work after 1207 following the later conquest of Constantinople in 1204). The narrator, whether consciously or not (as tense mixing is relatively common in medieval French), grammatically unpicks the temporal contingency of the utterance. The following phrase begins with the conjunction “car,” which establishes a causal connection to the previous utterance. Yet it remains ambiguous whether the causal explanation was actually uttered by the pope, whether it was the messengers’ impression, or Villehardouin’s own understanding. The “car” can be either the narrator’s explanation for the previous utterance taking place (why the pope spoke in this way) and thus would ‘belong’ to the narrator, or the pope’s own explanation for his speech and thus would ‘belong’ to the pope.<sup>8</sup> It could also signal a convergence of opinion. In any case, the absence of explicit signalling means that the utterance is in free indirect discourse. The final phrase in which the pope “dona plain pooir” to two high-standing members of the crusading army is seemingly an instance of so-called ‘narrativized discourse’, or a summary of a speech act that reformulates a more complicated utterance into a narrative action, whilst also retaining the trace of religious terminology as the verbs ‘lier’ (*ligo*) and ‘deslier’ (*solvo*) are lifted out of Biblical quotation (Matthew 16: 19).

Given that papal absolution was a major sticking point in contemporary and later evaluations of the Fourth Crusade, and that the historical evidence from Pope Innocent III’s letters indicates that he was not as understanding as Villehardouin suggests, the use of indirect discourse here is by no means neutral or incidental. Historically, certain discursive frameworks have favoured one form of reported discourse over another to convey certain values and, once conventionalized, imitation, or transgression of these tendencies may impact the audience’s reception of the text or speech act. Classical Latin historiography, for instance, largely used indirect discourse for purposes of factuality and ‘historical truth’ and direct discourse for longer displays of rhetorical elaboration. Of course, it is not the case

8. In narratological terms, this is the distinction between internal and external focalization: that is, when the narrator channels discourse through the perspective of a consciousness internal to the narrative (the character) or external to the narrative (the narrator). The conjunction “car” is explored in detail by Jean Rychner, who devotes considerable discussion to its usage with regards to the expression of point of view in medieval French texts (115–37).

that back then anyone actually believed, just as nowadays anyone still believes, in the total factuality ('verbatimness') of historical speech (that is, as an utterance that took place exactly as recorded). Yet if this illusion is relinquished by the narrator, then what separates 'history' and 'fiction' becomes increasingly difficult to discern. As readers or listeners, we often buy into the conceit that the 'speech of the other' (*le discours d'autrui*) is conveyed transparently – that we simply bypass the reporting strategy to access the 'original' utterance – and hence fail to recognize that the reporting strategy ineluctably transforms the nature of the utterance. The choice of direct or indirect discourse can have significant effects on core ontological features of the utterance (and of the report that carries it), including temporality, authority, veracity, orality, and so-called narratorial 'control.' As the Russian formalist Valentin Vološinov famously stated in 1929, "Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also *speech about speech, utterance about utterance*" (Vološinov 115).<sup>9</sup>

9. Emphasis in the original. Many have attributed this text to Mikhail Bakhtin writing under a colleague's name, but this is debated.

Foundational in this regard is the work of Sophie Marnette, in which she proposes a clear correlation between strategies of reported discourse and genre of medieval French text. Through an expansive and partly statistical approach, Marnette compellingly demonstrates how strategies of reported discourse affect a myriad of aspects central to any literary analysis: the status of the narrator, the control he/she exercises over the characters, the sense of orality and the way the text was performed, the 'truth' of the text, the reliability and 'historical method' of the narrator, and the placement of the audience in relation to the action of the narrative (Marnette, *Narrateur* 115–136; *Speech* 197–204). According to her analysis, genres of medieval text (verse romances, prose romances, chronicles, *chantefables*, *lais*, *chansons de geste*, etc.) are characterized by different proportions of reported discourse that can be associated with certain features that underpin textual difference. Vernacular chronicles, for example, tend to employ an increased amount of indirect discourse compared to the epic poem, where almost all speech is reported through the prism of direct discourse. While both genres are held as 'historical,' the chronicle, with its obsession with distanced objectivity, often chooses not to reproduce long speeches in direct speech and thus, by acknowledging the limitations (or 'finiteness') of memory, respects the factuality of the spoken utterance. The epic poem, on the other hand, with its propensity for long and highly rhetorical interventions from the characters, treats speech in monumental and clearly-defined blocks kept separate from the words of the narra-

tor. This arises partly from the ‘staged orality’ that developed out of the genre’s origins in rhythmic performance. Thanks also to a more widespread use of the ‘backgrounding’ preterit in the chronicle as opposed to the ‘foregrounding’ present tense of the epic poem, the audience’s experience of the two genres could not differ more: if the *chanson de geste* immerses the listener-reader in the action (“in the same way as any historical re-enactment would”), the vernacular chronicle puts the listener-reader at a distance from the events and from “the ‘true’ voices of history” (Marnette, “Forms” 305 and 310).

The association of eyewitness testimony with the use of indirect discourse, however, requires further consideration. Both Villehardouin and his contemporary Robert de Clari differentiate between their ‘narrating’ and ‘experiencing’ selves; the former much more, it is argued, than the latter (Marnette, “The Experiencing Self;” Bull 332–36). Scholars are quick to point out the testimonial statements of both authors that qualify the nature of their witnessing:

Et bien testimoigne Joffrois li mareschaus de Champagne,  
qui ceste oevre dita, que ainc n’i menti de mot a son escient,  
si com cil qui a toz les conseils fu, que onc si bele chose ne fu  
veüe (Ed. Faral §120)

(And Geoffrey, Marshal of Champagne, who dictated this work, truly testifies that he has not knowingly spoken a single lie, and as someone who was at all the councils, that never was such a beautiful thing seen.)

[...] chis qui i fu et qui le vit et qui l’oï le tesmongne, Robers  
de Clari, li chevaliers, et a fait metre en escrit le verité, si  
comme ele fu conquise; et ja soit chou que il ne l’ait si  
belement contee le conquete, comme maint boin diteur  
l’eussent contee, si en a il toutes eures le droite verité contee,  
et assés de verités en a teutes qu’il ne peut mie toutes ramem-  
brer. (Ed. Lauer §120)

([which is the testimony of] a man who was there, who saw it and heard it, Robert de Clari, the knight, and he has had put into writing the truth of how it was conquered; and although he may not have narrated the conquest so finely as many good poets would have done, nevertheless he has told

nothing but the truth, and he has omitted many truths because he cannot remember them all.)

The declaration of the name in the third person accompanied by the social rank and the use of the verb *tesmoigner* recall the legal context of bearing witness. It is only in later chronicles, such as Joinville's *Vie de Saint Louis*, that the author refers to himself in the first person. Marnette suggests that the separation of the 'I' that narrates from the 'I' that witnesses – supported elsewhere in these texts through reference to the impersonal "livre" (of which there are seventeen occurrences in Villehardouin's *Conquête*) that tells the story – bolsters the historicity of these narratives, thereby creating a 'rhetoric of truth' (Marnette, "The Experiencing Self" 118). The importance of spatial positioning ("a toz les conseils fu," "qui i fu") and sensory perception ("veüe," "vit," "oi") is likewise foregrounded, even if Robert de Clari's use of the deictic pronoun "i" (there) lacks any kind of specificity, simply designating the crusading experience as separate from the 'here' of narration. Along with explicit reference to lying ("menti de mot") and truth-telling ("verité" in both the general and specific sense), the opposition to fictional invention ("diteur") makes use of a variant of the humility *topos* to stress the veracity of eyewitness testimony. What we may understand as the 'witness function' of these narratorial interventions is established ostensibly at the expense of aesthetic quality, even if both Villehardouin and Robert de Clari (or, that is, their scribes) certainly do not squander every opportunity for 'literary' inflection. They act as extra-textual guarantors of the truth of their narratives, but are cast more ambiguously in relation to the processes of textual composition.

It is in this respect that the use of reported discourse might reveal the relationship between the eyewitness and their narrative. A quantitative analysis indicates that both eyewitness testimonies attest similar trends in the employment of direct and indirect speech across the two halves of the text (taken as the first and second 50% of the total words).

Table 1. Proportion of reported discourse in the first and second halves of Villehardouin's and Robert de Clari's texts. Percentage refers to the total number of words in the utterance (for indirect discourse, excluding the conjunction).

	Villehardouin		Robert de Clari	
	Direct discourse	Indirect discourse	Direct discourse	Indirect discourse
First half	16.1%	2.8%	14.9%	10.8%
Second half	4.3%	2.6%	6.0%	10.7%

These figures are remarkable on two counts. First, the frequency of direct discourse drops dramatically as both texts go on, and more so in Villehardouin than in Robert de Clari. Second, the frequency of indirect discourse, however, is almost identical, with only a marginal decline in the second halves of both texts. While, of course, we should acknowledge that the rudimentary division into two halves is reductive, it goes to show that not only does it matter which strategy of reported discourse is used and in what quantity, but also what position in the narrative it occupies.<sup>10</sup>

I have come across no reference to the decrease in direct discourse in Robert de Clari's text. In the vast scholarship on Villehardouin's *Conquête*, however, it is possible to identify three different interpretations (whose appellations are my own) that recognize and seek to rationalize the inconsistency in direct speech across the text.<sup>11</sup>

## I. The *emerging historian* interpretation

Jean Frappier, who sees in Villehardouin's prose a reluctance to employ rhetorical figures, a dry and sober style, and an almost total absence of digression, emblemizes this view. Villehardouin's narration, for instance, cuts a keen contrast with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, one of the most popular contemporary models of prose historical writing. Although Frappier does locate a limited use of certain literary inflections, such as the use of subordinate clauses (for effects of symmetry) and the inversion of past participle and auxiliary verb, he notes that the speeches, in particular, are certainly shortened, made more concise and less grandiloquent than they would have actually been. Frappier suggests that even Villehardouin would not have been able to reduce his real-life oratorical interventions to such pithiness. This leads to a stark conclusion:

[...] il faut moins voir le mépris ou l'impuissance du style – car Villehardouin se révèle capable de deux ou trois réussites d'ordre littéraire, à la limite extrême où la concision n'est pas encore la sécheresse – qu'un succès remporté par l'histoire sur la rhétorique. (70)

([...] we should consider this less as scorn for or impotence of style – since Villehardouin shows himself quite capable of two or three literary achievements, insofar as this conciseness

10. The division into two halves is done on a purely mathematical basis, and is not justified by any codicological or paratextual indicator, even if the main editor of Villehardouin's *Conquête* also splits the text into two volumes. Marnette only uses the first edited volume as part of her corpus and therefore is not in a position to comment on the drop in direct discourse.

11. The statistics provided in Table 1 are based on my own calculations and were therefore not available to previous scholars who recognized, but did not precisely quantify, the drop in direct discourse across the two halves of the *Conquête*.

does not quite reach the point of dryness – than as a victory for history over rhetoric.)

The reduction of direct discourse over the course of the text, insofar as speeches are possibilities for rhetorical invention, is for Frappier linked into this emergence of a historical discourse that eschews the demands for long, overwrought speeches. Frappier contends that indirect discourse is gradually substituted for direct discourse as the narrative progresses (a claim that we are able to refute through our quantitative evidence). It is Villehardouin's self-awareness of how the past should be reported that makes him, in Frappier's eyes, a "véritable historien" (53).<sup>12</sup> The 'historian' within Villehardouin develops into consciousness and grows into his conciseness as the narrative progresses, as the values that dictate what is worthy of inclusion and how it should be conveyed become transformed from beginning to end.

12. "Faut-il reconnaître dans cette suprématie accordée au style indirect la démarche d'un véritable historien? Je suis enclin à croire que oui dans une certaine mesure." (53; "Should we recognize in the supremacy accorded to the indirect style the workings of a real historian? I am inclined to believe so to a certain extent.")

## II. The *diminishing enthusiasm* interpretation

Jeanette Beer disagrees with Frappier. While Frappier's hypothesis, according to Beer, would rely on there being a completely different approach to historical writing in the first and second parts, the presence of certain hallmarks of Villehardouin's sober prose, such as a simple sentence structure and limited adjectival variety (a hundred different adjectives across the entire text), from the very beginning suggest that the author had a set of principles about how to relay the historical events before the work was dictated. Instead, Beer posits, Villehardouin was drawing extensive and direct inspiration from the *chansons de geste*, and this inspiration was more palpable when Villehardouin saw the events of the Fourth Crusade through the eyes of epic. This connection between speech and epic would be corroborated by Marnette's corpus of epic poems, which contain 40–60% direct discourse (Marnette, *Narrateur* 251). The beginning of the Crusade was full of hope and expectation, but as the army gradually went further and further off course, Villehardouin could not help but reflect his diminishing enthusiasm in the relation of events. Beer states:

Villehardouin's presentation of a viewpoint through direct speech reveals that he felt it to be dramatic and spontaneously presented it as such, not that he was a propagandist. The second half of the narrative shows a decrease in direct speech

(and other vivid devices) because it reflects Villehardouin's attitude to the whole Crusade. The beginning was alive with idealism, dramatic in conception. The difficulties of the Crusading army and its diffusion over the territory for isolated conquests undermine the epic vision, and, with it, the appropriate epic style. (Beer, *Villehardouin* 94)<sup>13</sup>

13. These views are also repeated, but perhaps less emphatically, in Beer, *In Their Own Words* 49–56.

Moreover, Beer acknowledges that moments of tense switching, when the historic present of the epic poem infiltrates the narrative written in the preterit, occur largely around occurrences of direct speech and dramatic *topoi* (Beer, *Villehardouin* 79–80). Direct speech is almost the only instance where Villehardouin employs rhetorical techniques (most clear in Conon de Béthune's oratorical displays) that elsewhere appear to be deliberately avoided. The other effect of direct speech is to alter the speed of the narrative, and the frequent brief interchanges (sometimes with a 'Socratic stooge' who facilitates the divulgence of useful information) fulfil less 'literary' objectives (as in other utterances where point of view shifts, and the limited psychological depth given to the characters is developed) than they do pragmatic ones. Likewise, the speeches from the *vox populi* (or "discours collectifs" in Frappier's terms) – the moments where a group of people speak as one in a sharp, emphatic chorus – should not be understood as verbatim reports, but an expression of a certain position. Beer thus recognizes the quasi-legalistic role of direct speech in the passages in which negotiation takes place. The idea was not to record an accurate transcription of the discussions, but rather to show that both sides actively engaged in them. The spoken word was a guarantor of a formal pledge that could then be dramatized in direct speech.

### III. The *retrospective justification* interpretation

It is Villehardouin as propagandist that interests Noah D. Guynn. The text, for Guynn, follows a carefully-designed providential structure that works – for very pertinent political reasons – to defend the outcome of a controversial campaign. Villehardouin sought to resolve points of tension in the narrative by imbuing them with rhetorical and narrative devices, such as direct discourse, which appear "at moments when the military and moral integrity of the crusade is most seriously in doubt" (Guynn 108). Dramatic oratory thus works to persuade both intra- and extra-diegetic audiences of the validity

of the course of action taken, even if in hindsight it is shown to be problematic. A key point of tension is the negotiations between the crusader leadership and the Venetians – for it is here that the Franks are fundamentally taken off course – and these passages therefore attest to some of the most “dramatic, calculated, efficacious oratory” (Guynn 107).

Guynn gives more weight than the other two interpretations to the choice of prose for Villehardouin's text. Drawing on Gabrielle Spiegel's work on vernacular prose historiography, he suggests that, as with the contemporaneous *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, the nascent prose form, appearing in French almost *ex nihilo*, was chosen in an act of aristocratic self-differentiation in the face of a looming threat from rapidly centralizing, monarchic power (Spiegel 55–98). Geographical and temporal proximity, as well as thematic coincidence, between the two texts leads Guynn to surmise “that Villehardouin, too, used prose less as an instrument of clarity than as a rhetorically and ideologically inflected signifying practice” (Guynn 109).<sup>14</sup> The need to justify retrospectively the decisions taken by a Fourth Crusade that was led and populated by many northern French and Flemish lords and knights took on particular urgency as Philip Augustus sought to expand his kingdom beyond the Île-de-France. This was about demonstrating that barons could rule as sovereign figures, as “li plus haut home qui soient sanz corone” (ed. Faral §16, “the highest men uncrowned”) or “la meillor gent qui soient sanz corone” (ed. Faral §143, “the best people uncrowned”). These are two expressions we find in passages of direct speech.

Guynn's overtly political reading of the text dispels a number of our preconceptions about the ‘intended’ effect of the prose form (that is, lucidity and clarity). Direct discourse, likewise, is not just about animating the narrative, nor providing orally-delivered, documentary evidence, but about fulfilling broader aims: as Guynn concludes, it is not the case that Villehardouin “falsified evidence in order to mislead his readers” but rather “that he used stylistic devices to bring about cohesion among them” (Guynn 110).

The three interpretations outlined here are not mutually exclusive and overlap at times. The point is that they all view the employment of direct discourse as a central component of the text, working in some sense to ‘dramatize’ content and align it with the narrative methods of the *chansons de geste* but in the new, ideologically-imbued prose form. Notions of proximity and distance also underlie all three interpretations: Villehardouin is ‘closer’ to the material of the first

14. Guynn might also have mentioned that both are framed as eyewitness testimonies, with their narrators often referring to themselves as characters in the third person. Of course, in the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, this is a fiction and the narrator (Archbishop Turpin of Rheims) sometimes forgets himself by switching narrative position (for instance when recording Turpin's – that is, his own – death). Nevertheless, the *Pseudo-Turpin* might well have been an important model for Villehardouin's *Conquête*. See also Bull 41–46.

half, either because it was important to him or the social group he represents, and is thus betraying what Frappier so keenly identifies as his nascent 'historical' method.

#### IV. The *untimely subject* interpretation

Table 1 above makes it clear that indirect discourse does not come to replace direct discourse as the narrative progresses, which is one of the declared premises behind Frappier's 'emerging historian' reading, but rather that indirect discourse is a constant feature of Villehardouin's (and Robert de Clari's) narrative style. It is important to note at this point that the narrative action becomes more fragmented following the second assault on Constantinople in 1204, which means that later in the text Villehardouin as historical actor was not always physically present at the events he recounts. That said, in the first half there is no strict correlation between Villehardouin directly witnessing a speech event and his use of direct discourse. The number of spoken situations, in which discourse could be reported, does not necessarily impact the proportions either, since Villehardouin could have chosen to turn to direct, instead of indirect, discourse in the events of the second half of the text. While we often see authors as constrained by the events of history (or of their histories), the idea that they can only write about what actually happened is itself, as Hayden White tells us, an illusion of emplotment: there is no doubt that Villehardouin could have elaborated any of these opportunities for speech into longer, oratorical displays (e.g. White 121–34).

It is time, then, to advance a fourth interpretation, taking into account the use of indirect discourse across the text. I have called this the 'untimely subject' interpretation. There are three elements to this position: the experience of time, the nature of memory formation, and the impossible subjectivity of the witness.

One aspect that remains acknowledged only implicitly in the other interpretations stated above is the effect of different strategies of reported discourse on conceptions of temporality. This is relevant on two levels: the first is that the utterance in direct discourse uses deictic markers and a full range of tenses that allows a clearer articulation of a present in which the future is not yet decided;<sup>15</sup> and the second is that while indirect discourse has the effect of shortening or speeding through an utterance, direct discourse, in theory, elapses at the same rate in the story world as it does in the real world, thereby

15. One example would be when Alexius, the young prince of Constantinople, and his brother-in-law King Philip of Swabia propose to the crusaders a number of rewards in return for military assistance. However, after Alexius has duly been restored to the throne, these rewards cannot be delivered by the Byzantines. In hindsight, the proposition might appear to be too good to be true, but as a promise it is too profitable for the leaders to turn down. To convey the alluring potential of the offer, and hence to justify the act of usurpation of which they are partaking, nine verbs in this spoken utterance are conjugated in the future tense. Ed. Faral §92–§93.

16. This is broadly the terminology that Gérard Genette uses as part of his narratological framework. See *Figures III*.

confronting the time outside the narrative with the one inside it.<sup>16</sup> Direct discourse captures the attention of audiences not only because it introduces another voice into the narrative, but also because it plays on their sensation of temporal movement, disrupting the relentless progress of the narrative towards the present of performance (whether read privately or performed out loud).

Through direct discourse the first half of the *Conquête* dwells on these pivotal moments of the narrative, situating the audience in the moment of the utterance and conveying that from the future-oriented perspective of that moment the course of action was justified. Later on, by contrast, the impression is that the text seeks to move more quickly through the events, continuing to employ indirect discourse but abstaining from the decelerating effects of direct discourse. Despite being closer to the time of composition and therefore easier to recollect, the years 1205–07, taking up the final third of the text, contain limited cases of direct speech. Is Villehardouin, apparently constrained to recount the entire history of the Fourth Crusade (unlike Robert de Clari whose personal experience stops around April 1205), accelerating through the final years, thereby retroactively placing emphasis on the preceding years in which the baron-led army achieved the extraordinary, if not controversial, feat of capturing Constantinople?

This cuts across the second and third interpretations above. It is also important to dwell, as Beer and Guynn do, on the fact that the *Conquête* recounts the lived experience of an individual fully involved in the history he is recounting. Villehardouin was not just an actor of the Fourth Crusade, but a driving force. His frequent narratorial interventions (recalling providential design and assigning blame to those who sought to break up the crusading army by making their own way to the Holy Land) deflect criticism away from the group of leaders, of which he was an integral part. Robert de Clari's account makes clear that the rank and file of the Crusader army held the leaders with a certain mistrust. Villehardouin's continual condemnation of the defectors might, in fact, imply that he was held partly accountable, or harboured feelings of responsibility, for the ostensible failure of the campaign. Dictating his work from his fief in the Latin Empire, and never returning to France (unlike Robert de Clari), we have no indication that he remained abroad out of duty rather than volition, guilt, or shame following the death of Boniface de Montferrat. He was close to losing his life on more than one occasion; but let us suppose that as a hardened military general, prob-

ably in his late fifties, he could cope with the traumatic experience of warfare – at least certainly more so than the younger Robert de Clari, who recounts in vivid detail his brother Aleaumes's daring leap into the breach of Constantinople's Theodosian walls (ed. Lauer §71; Bull 324–26). Villehardouin's psychological engagement with the Fourth Crusade was more likely caught up in the strategic direction it took, the religious implications it generated, and the resultant state of Latin presence in the East. Villehardouin was a survivor, and arguably the only other more influential figures that shaped the campaign both died in action (Baldwin of Flanders in 1205 and Boniface de Montferrat in 1207). Even if he was a 'perpetrator' and in no way a 'victim,' could Villehardouin have been affected by the well-documented mental condition that denotes how survivors feel responsible for an event they witnessed and from which they, unlike others, did not die?<sup>17</sup>

17. For a critical account of the concept of 'survivor guilt,' see Ruth Leys, especially chapter one, 17–55.

The abrupt end of the *Conquête* and its insinuated pessimism was no doubt negatively coloured by a retrospective view of the Crusade. However, the way in which we remember events is not one-directional from present to past – that is, memories are not encoded in a 'pure' state at the moment of perception whose content can be retrieved at any subsequent point. Memories are formed in the subsequent re-telling, sharing, and discussion of past experience. It is here that Marcus Bull's analysis of 'transactive memory' in relation to medieval eyewitness testimony is most useful (Bull 84–88). The shared, collaborative nature of the memory-making process means that one's recollections can be shaped by how others perceived the event and the ethical dimensions it took on in the collective environment. When Villehardouin articulates his memories at various stages prior to the composition of his text, the transactive situations of these moments of articulation may have shaped not only what he remembered, but also how he remembered them. This has particular relevance to our consideration of reported discourse: this process of telling, hearing, and re-telling means that the spoken utterance (whether one's own or of another person) goes through various reformulations into or out of direct discourse. Reported discourse in eyewitness testimony is, from this perspective, not just the act of 'reporting' a speech from memory, but the act of 'reporting' a speech that has already been reported and re-reported as part of the encoding of that memory.

The final act of reporting takes place – at least according to the frame that the text presents – when Villehardouin dictates his work

to a scribe (e.g. ed. Faral §120). The extent to which the latter moulded the oral content communicated to him from the former is up for debate (Bull 85–86). Whether the ‘clarity’ with which the text is written can be attributed to eyewitness or scribe (or the interpretative process between them) cannot be easily ascertained. The quasi-legalistic, deposition-like opening – often seen as a trademark of Villehardouin’s impassionate, ‘historical’ style – does not refer to the conditions in which the text was composed:

Sachiez que ·M· et ·C· et quatre vinz et ·XVII· anz après  
l’incarnation Nostre Sengnor Jesu Crist, al tens Innocent,  
apostolle de Rome, et Phelippe, roy de France, et Ricchart,  
roy d’Engleterre, ot un saint home en France [...] (Ed. Faral  
§1)

(Know that 1197 years after the birth of Our Lord Jesus  
Christ, in the time of Innocent, apostle of Rome, and Philip,  
king of France, and Richard, king of England, there was a  
holy man in France [...])

Dominique Boutet sees in this initial statement an exercise in control and authority. He describes this opening imperative as:

Une parole brute, absolue, impérieuse, que seule la prose  
pouvait rendre dans son immédiateté: à cette condition  
seulement le discours pouvait passer pour historiquement  
vrai, puisque l’Histoire se confond pour lui avec l’expérience  
vécue, et son sens avec la méditation personnelle de cette  
expérience, avec sa mise en ordre intellectuelle. (Boutet 145)

(A raw, absolute, imperious word that only prose could  
render in all its immediacy: only in this form could the  
discourse pass as historically true, since for [Villehardouin]  
History becomes confused with lived experience, and its  
meaning mixed with his personal reflection on this experi-  
ence, with how he puts it into an order intellectually.)

Boutet reads this “Sachiez que” as indicative of Villehardouin’s qualities as a historian, and as a necessary complement to an emerging historical discourse in the vernacular, concerned with its own relation to truth. But Boutet alludes to another possibility. This act of

control, if we understand it as such, occurs precisely because Villehardouin *cannot* control the historical matter, and *cannot* control his emotional reaction to it.

The performativity of “sachiez” – that is, as a speech act whose enunciation amounts to its performance (it *does* rather than *says*) – is relevant here. The rare textual instances in which we might identify Villehardouin’s personal reaction outside of an explicit moralization are likewise introduced by this imperative verb.<sup>18</sup> To take an example from the first and second halves of the text:

18. Other examples not shown here are ed. Faral §31, §89, §100, §181, §411.

Et sachiez que il n’i ot si hardi cui la car ne fremist; et ce ne fu mie mervolle, que onques si grant affaires ne fu empris de tant de gent puis que li monz fu estorez. (Ed. Faral §128)<sup>19</sup>

19. Faral (vol. 1, 131, n. 3) suggests that Villehardouin would originally have meant “so few men,” but this was changed in manuscript transmission.

(And know that there was no man there so brave whose flesh did not tremble, which should come as no surprise, as never was such a great project undertaken by so many men since the creation of the world.)

Et sachiez qu’il en furent mult esfreé et cuiderent bien que li remanz fust toz perduz que il avoient devant Andrenople laissié, que il n’en savoient nouvelle. (ed. Faral §368)

(And know that [the men who had fled] were mightily afraid and very much believed that the rest [of the army] that they had left outside Adrianople would all be lost, as they had received no news of them.)

While it is important to acknowledge the conventional function of “sachiez” to place emphasis, it does so by drawing attention to the fact of its enunciation. As with expressions such as “I am telling you that...” (“je vous dis que”), it would express, according to Marnette, two different things: “a speech act *and* the staging of that speech act” (Marnette, *Speech* 67, emphasis in original). Does “sachiez,” then, allow the witness to stage his own speech and enter into discourse? Does the supposition of an audience engender a dialogic conception of testimony that is less about the relation between the subject and the objective world than the relation between the subject and his or her addressees?<sup>20</sup>

20. See the epilogue ‘A Return to Dialogue’ in Frisch 181–87.

The idea of testimony as a dialogue between witness and addressee is fundamentally tied into the potential fictionality of eye-

witness texts. If the experience of testimony lies not in the subject's enunciation but the audience's reception of the speech act, then the truthful nature of the testimony is less important than its verisimilitude. The fictional memoir *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (1995), written under the pseudonym Binjamin Wilkomirski, for instance, famously sparked debate about how testimony's truth value may depend on the textual effect it generates amongst its readers and, by consequence, about *who testimony is really for*. The ethical dimensions of 'false testimony,' and more generally historical fiction, is a topic that has seen a surge in interest in contemporary French literature. Following on from the theoretical challenges by the 'eyewitness era' in which we are thought to live, and expounded by Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi, Jorge Semprún, and Élie Wiesel, these texts have garnered controversy about the limitations placed on the *romancier* to write about the past.<sup>21</sup> Three of the most polemical, and most successful (in terms of sales and literary prizes), have been Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* (2006), Yannick Haenel's *Jan Karski* (2009), and Laurent Binet's *HHhH* (2010). The concepts of the 'unsayable' (*indicible*) and the 'unrepresentable' (*irreprésentable*) abound in the scholarship on Holocaust studies, and refer to the representational and epistemological quandaries of a historical event that defies verisimilitude and comprehension. Giorgio Agamben, following Levi and Semprún, provocatively states that there is no absolute witness of the Holocaust – since those who saw *everything* were killed – and therefore that testimony is always performed on behalf of somebody else who cannot testify (Agamben 33–39, 158). Speculative fiction may at once attempt to provide impossible perspectives – for instance, Jonathan Littell's fictional narrator in *Les Bienveillantes* (2006) provides the first-person testimony of the executioner, a Nazi SS officer, whose discourse is constructed partly out of the real testimonies of Holocaust victims – as well as allude to the problems inherent in using testimony and survivors' narratives to evidence an objective 'historical truth.'

While we should continually remind ourselves of the evident anachronism in an analogy between thirteenth- and twentieth-century eyewitness testimony, the way in which contemporary authors approach, on the one hand, the boundary between 'history' and 'fiction,' and, on the other, the representation of the 'voices of the past' offers a productive insight into the dynamics of the composition of Villehardouin's *Conquête*. The *Conquête* as we now read the text

21. This term was coined by Annette Wieviorka in her 1998 book *L'Ère du témoin*. Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand has suggested we now live in a 'post-witness era' (*ère sans témoin*) insofar as the Shoah has passed beyond living memory (147).

22. Variance across the manuscript tradition is relatively high, and there has been debate about which manuscript should form the basis of a critical edition. It is also the case that the reporting strategy can vary between manuscripts: Faral's group I (BnF fr. 4972 and Oxford, Bodleian, Laud. Misc. 587), believed to contain the text closest to the 'original,' presents the spoken utterance in §106 in direct discourse, while the four group II manuscripts use indirect discourse, albeit in this latter case mixing tenses as well as employing both second-person and third-person pronouns. Faral sees this, problematically perhaps, as an example of grammatical inconsistency that establishes the superiority of the group I manuscripts. See *Conquête*, ed. Faral §106.

23. Guynn (106) charges Madden and Queller with this dubious citational practice in *The Fourth Crusade*, 18, ix.

24. The debate about *Jan Karski* consumed talk-shows and newspaper space following the 2009 *rentrée littéraire*. In an article in French news magazine *Marianne* Claude Lanzmann levelled charges of plagiarism at Yannick Haenel, claiming the novelist did not acknowledge the intellectual property of the filmmaker. Haenel replied shortly after in a piece in *Le Monde*, entitled "Le recours à la fiction n'est pas seulement un droit, il est nécessaire, par Yannick Haenel," defending the *romancier's* right, or rather duty, to fictionalize the past. For an account of the text's reception, see Braganca, especially 37–39.

has undergone various stages of reformulation from Villehardouin's visual and auditory perception of the events described. Even his memories, as we have suggested, were to an extent a collaborative effort, infiltrated by the words of others. Nor can we access the first written 'transcript,' since the earliest manuscript text dates from the late thirteenth century, and therefore practically beyond the living memory of the Fourth Crusade.<sup>22</sup> Villehardouin's words can only ever be represented, never retraced. Others have intervened in 'his' message, and it is impossible to know precisely the extent of these interventions. When modern historians quote speeches from Villehardouin's text to evidence 'what was said,' they perform a double disservice: not only is direct discourse a rhetorical elaboration and a literary conceit, but these words may not even be the ones that Villehardouin himself remembered and dictated.<sup>23</sup> This two-fold displacement of the 'factual content' of the historical is something that the aforementioned contemporary writers bring to the fore, and above all, as we shall now see, Yannick Haenel in *Jan Karski* (2009), whose major accomplishment, I contend, is that it makes the role of mediation in the act of bearing witness explicit.

Jan Karski was a Polish resistance agent tasked in 1942 with delivering news of the earliest signs of the Holocaust to the Allies in London and Washington. Karski's (hi)story is one of good intention and personal heroism, but also ultimately one of momentous failure. Yannick Haenel's novel is divided into three sections, each of which adopts a different approach to handling 'historical truth' through literary techniques. The first offers a narrative account of the real 1977 interview in English between renowned French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann and Karski as part of the former's 1985 documentary film *Shoah*. The second is a summary of Karski's own book of 1944 *Story of a Secret State*, while the third sees a shift of perspective to that of a fictional Jan Karski, who speaks in the first person to describe his encounter with the West. This last section is prefaced by Haenel with a crucial disclaimer: "les scènes, les phrases et les pensées que je prête à Jan Karski relèvent de l'invention" (9, "the scenes, phrases and thoughts that I attribute to Jan Karski are fictional invention").

This tripartite structure was a main sticking point in the reception of *Jan Karski*. A commonly-voiced criticism was that the juxtaposition of the documentary style of the first and second sections with the imaginative content of the third, regardless of the prefatory note, enacted an equivalence between them.<sup>24</sup> This, it is contended, obscures the fact that the startling 'truth' revealed in this last section

25. Lanzmann famously referred to his film *Shoah* as “une fiction du réel” (“a fiction of the real”), claiming that the overall message of the film was more truthful than any of its testimonies in particular. See Lanzmann, “Le lieu et la parole” 301.

– in short, that the American and Allied governments, symbolized by a yawning Franklin D. Roosevelt, were indifferent to the plight of the Jews – is not Karski’s, but Haenel’s. Two of the most vocal critics, filmmaker Claude Lanzmann (whose *Shoah* forms the basis of the first section) and historian Annette Wieviorka, would criticize Haenel for showing no respect to the witness and his testimony, thereby presenting, according to Wieviorka, “un faux témoignage” (Wieviorka, “Faux témoignage” 30–31) and for Lanzmann, “un faux roman” (Lanzmann, “*Jan Karski*” 1–10).<sup>25</sup> Lanzmann’s criticism bears thinking about, not only because it implies through opposition the normativity of the ‘true’ or ‘real’ novel, but also because *Shoah* is replete with editorial decisions that attest to Lanzmann’s supposition of a superior truth that differs from that of the witness. Manuel Braganca has shown that Lanzmann’s own slippery use of the terms “vérité,” “fiction,” and “histoire” should lead us to ask a fundamental question: what puts Lanzmann’s film on the side of truth? (Braganca 35–46) The interview, according to Karski himself, was spread over eight hours of filming across two days (Karski 112–14). The resulting forty minutes of footage in *Shoah* were taken from the first day because Karski adopted a different attitude on the second. Lanzmann writes: “Il fut si différent entre la première et la seconde journée (...) [lors de la seconde] [i]l devenait mondain, satisfait, théâtral, parfois cabotin et cela contre-disait le tragique qu’il incarnait jusque-là” (Lanzmann, “*Jan Karski*” 5, “He was so different between the first and second days (...) [on the second] he became haughty, smug, theatrical, and at times over-the-top, and this contradicted the sense of tragedy he had encapsulated up to that point”). Lanzmann is clearly reacting, then, to Haenel’s deconstruction of the filmmaker’s tragic vision of Karski. Yet there is no reason *a priori* to assume that the interview as Haenel reassembles it is any less ‘truthful’ or any more artificial than Lanzmann’s filmic creation.

Lanzmann’s critique misses the point, therefore, that the intermingling of document, paraphrase, and fictional invention is precisely what is at stake in all historical eyewitness accounts. Given that Villehardouin would have used his personal experience in conjunction with documents or notes taken by himself or others to form his narrative, Haenel demonstrates that to make a coherent text is to elide the temporally- and epistemologically-distinct processes behind narrative creation, whether or not it is based in first-hand observation. This is the thrust of Derrida’s explanation behind the paradox of bearing witness: to testify is conditional on speaking in the

present (“le faire présentement”), but equally to produce an intelligible, because temporal, sequence of events is to anticipate their subsequent repetition or “reproductibilité quasi technique” (Derrida 35–36). To reduce bearing witness to an epistemic model of communication (*i.e.* to transmit knowledge) is to overlook the fact that it is fundamentally a present act (Derrida 44).

Karski, the historical figure, may function as an especially appropriate point of comparison with Villehardouin. What makes Karski a person of such interest, after all, are the feelings of guilt and responsibility he is considered to have harboured for having been unable to prevent the Holocaust, and thus his role as ‘messenger’ going from East to West, reporting what he had seen and what others had told him. This sense of Karski’s inextricable psychological involvement with the historical narrative is emphasized in the first section of the novel (Haenel’s account of Lanzmann’s interview). At the outset of the interview, as Haenel writes, Jan Karski says a single word, “Now,” pauses, before saying that he will “go back in time.” But he is visibly distraught and has to stop, deciding to step out of frame. When he returns to the camera, he starts anew. In Haenel’s words:

[Karski] commence à parler au passé, au passé simple même – comme dans un livre: ‘Au milieu de l’année 1942, je décidai de reprendre ma mission d’agent entre la Résistance polonaise et le gouvernement polonais en exil, à Londres.’ Cette manière de commencer le récit le protège de l’émotion.  
(Haenel 13–14)

([Karski] starts to speak in the past tense, in the past historic tense even – like in a book: ‘In the middle of 1942, I decided to go back to my secret mission for the Polish Resistance and the Polish government-in-exile in London.’ This way of beginning the story protects him from his emotions.)

Karski’s opening, as refracted through Lanzmann’s and Haenel’s representations, situates his testimony in time and space. The first verb he uses is in the past tense (in the French subtitles as the past historic tense), and it is this detached, impassionate statement that allows the speaker to put distance between him and the events he experienced.<sup>26</sup> This is the opening that Karski seemingly intends to record, and his initial breakdown is included by Lanzmann not because it tells us anything about what happened, but rather because it ap-

26. There is a problem at a historical level insofar as Haenel uses the French subtitles of the English interview as quotations. The French translator has made a number of choices (such as translating the past tense here as the *passé simple*) that are objectionable. When Karski’s English is grammatically incorrect or non-idiomatic, the French translator has not rendered these errors or peculiarities in the French. Yet, in a sense, this presents a further parallel to the act of dictation and transcription, in which the scribe listens and in transforming the words into a literary discourse may ‘correct’ certain turns of phrase in the process.

pealed to the tragic lens of the filmmaker. Haenel, by including this part of *Shoah*, stresses an altogether different point: what we know originates in individuals who cannot disassociate knowledge from experience. By restarting with this book-like introduction, Karski, as Haenel sees it, would therefore seek to negate his own status as witness, looking, but failing, to separate his speaking, 'narrating' self with his past 'experiencing' self that become conjoined in the first-person subject pronoun "je."

This recalls our earlier reference to Villehardouin's narratorial disaggregation, whereby "je," "nous," "Joffrois li mareschus de Champagne," and "li livre" all participate in telling the story (Beer, *In Their Own Words* 40). It might be a stretch, given its conventional nature, to liken Karski's opening to the introductory phrase of the *Conquête*, which also establishes the year and the place, followed by a reference to the socio-political situation (the names of the kings and the pope), with the first verb in the preterit form of *avoir*. Nevertheless, there appears to be a correlation between pronominal designation and the drop in direct discourse that we saw in the first and second halves of the *Conquête*: of the forty-four references in the narrator's discourse to Villehardouin in the third person, 75% occur in the second half of the text. This inverse relationship between the frequency of direct discourse and the proportion of self-designation in the third person may arise from Villehardouin's attempt to distance himself from his testimony, to assert control over the historical matter. For Agamben, in his discussion of the shame that survivors feel after witnessing an event, testimony is the very condition of language insofar as it holds together the ability to enter into discourse as an 'I' (to become a subject) and the illusory ability to refer to oneself as a living being set apart from language (to be objectified) (Agamben 87–135). Hence this 'I' is also desubjectified as the shifter through which it designates itself can only operate, in Émile Benveniste's terms, at the level of discourse. As a "field of forces incessantly traversed by currents of subjectification and desubjectification," testimony gives rise to "the intimacy that betrays our non-coincidence with ourselves" (Agamben 121, 130).

It is this tension at the heart of bearing witness – that is, as a simultaneously necessary and impossible act – that *Jan Karski* brings into the foreground. Like Laurent Binet's *HHhH* (2010), whose narrator continually implicates the present of authorial creation into the past of the historical narrative, *Jan Karski* reflects on the historian's claim to veracity by highlighting the subjectivity that underpins historical interpretation and representation. Helena Duffy demon-

strates that *Jan Karski* is predicated on the act of “metawitnessing,” which is the Derridean concept that distinguishes how the author mediates the testimony of the witness (“secondary witnessing”) from how the author calls into question the problems inherent in the representation of the testimony. Duffy draws on Jean-François Lyotard’s writing on the *différend* to make the case that Haenel paradoxically goes some way to “revaloriz[e] eyewitness accounts as a source of knowledge about the past” by acknowledging that while testimony may be unstable and unreliable, it performs the vital duty of voicing the injustices and trauma experienced (Duffy 14–15).

Haenel reports the rest of the interview in a mixture of direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse, stopping at times to comment on or query the manner in which Jan Karski relates his experiences. Punctuation is employed erratically, and Karski’s speech is broken down, re-arranged, re-narrativized. As readers we are not given a transcript of the interview, but its novelistic, ekphrastic impression. This led Lanzmann to criticize vehemently how Haenel distorts the interview, abusing the authorial power of citation to alter the historical record (Lanzmann, “*Jan Karski*”). Yet what Haenel probes at is the layering of these different voices: how meaning shifts in new discursive contexts, how the trace of the spoken utterance moves across time periods and speakers, how speech belongs and does not belong *historically* to one sole voice. In short, Haenel shows with polemical deftness that the speech of Karski is not an originary utterance, but is itself constituted of different utterances from voices which emerge and disappear as they come to and fade from one’s memory.

The message with which Karski is tasked to deliver originates in 1942 from two Jewish leaders of the Warsaw ghetto, who have witnessed the early stages of the Nazi extermination. Visibly distressed, Karski recounts to Lanzmann his private interview with the two men, initially reporting what they said to him through indirect discourse. But as he continues to speak (free) direct discourse gradually takes over. Haenel writes:

Jan Karski ne recourt plus seulement au discours indirect, il se met à transmettre directement les paroles des deux hommes, comme si c’était eux qui parlaient par sa bouche. Il ne s’exprime plus au passé, il révèle le message – il le transmet à Claude Lanzmann. En parlant il s’anime, sa main droite se lève, ses yeux sont baissés, parfois il les ferme, il se concentre. Réciter le message, sans doute l’a-t-il fait des dizaines de fois,

trente-cinq ans ont passé, il a déjà témoigné, ce sont des paroles qu'il a prononcées mille fois, qui ont tourné dans sa tête, et pourtant les voici, prononcées par Jan Karski comme elles sont sorties de la bouche des deux hommes au milieu de l'année 1942, prononcées au présent, directement, comme si c'était eux, les deux hommes, qui parlaient, et que lui, Jan Karski, s'effaçait. (Haenel 17–18)

(Jan Karski no longer only uses indirect discourse, he starts to communicate the words of the two men directly, as if it were they speaking through his mouth. He no longer expresses himself in the past tense, he reveals the message – he communicates it to Claude Lanzmann. He livens up as he speaks, he raises his right hand, lowers his eyes, occasionally closing them, he's concentrating. Recounting this message, no doubt he's done it dozens of times, thirty-five years on, he's already testified, these are the words that he's spoken a thousand times, which have turned around his head, and yet here they are, spoken by Jan Karski as they came out of the mouths of the two men in the year 1942, spoken in the present, directly, as if it were they, the two men, who were speaking, while he, Jan Karski, stepped aside.)

27. The tendency of indirect discourse to drift back to direct discourse is well documented by linguists (see, for instance, Marnette, *Speech* 183–84). Norris J. Lacy has even suggested that “emergent direct discourse,” where an utterance in indirect discourse subtly transitions to direct discourse, was a deliberate literary technique in thirteenth-century prose texts, like the Vulgate Cycle, that worked to subordinate the different voices of the narrative to “a single overarching voice (a ‘metavocality’) known as *li contes*” (24).

28. For a discussion of how interviews with Holocaust survivors present a problem for historians, who are implicated into an “affectively charged relationship” with their interviewees, see LaCapra 86–91. Haenel, like the survivors whose testimonies LaCapra considers, bears witness by “acting out, working over, and working through” his testimony, thereby destabilizing the purely epistemological value of his utterances (89, 91).

The shift that Karski effects, as Haenel sees it, between indirect and direct discourse allows the voices of the two leaders to emerge, and the reporter of the message, Karski, to disappear.<sup>27</sup> The message is performed; Haenel's impression of the interview draws on the body language that the purely written record, the transcript, cannot convey.<sup>28</sup> How the message is delivered, likewise, influences Haenel's narrative: the sentences that Karski utters are “entourées de silence” (14, “surrounded by silence”). This speech event is at the centre of Karski's testimony, with its prospective and even greater retrospective importance. Karski cannot help but report it directly. With each repetition the need for direct discourse becomes consolidated, more necessary. The more time separates the act of reporting from the original utterance, the more only direct discourse can satisfy the immediacy of the message in the mind of the reporter (the speaking subject).

Could we understand Villehardouin's use of direct discourse in the first half of the *Conquête* as following a similar dynamic? We have no filmed interview of Villehardouin recounting his experiences; worse yet, we do not have a transcription, not even the original writ-

ten record, the first *Conquête* manuscript. Many of the traces of Villehardouin transforming his lived experience into historical narrative are irretrievably lost, but one wonders whether the decision to record speech in direct or indirect discourse is one of the most telling. The many speeches of the first half of the text had to be recorded in direct speech because that is how Villehardouin remembered and recounted them. The indirect utterances that intersperse the ones in direct discourse perhaps display an attempt by Villehardouin to order and to distance this past speech, but, in the end, the original voices emerge. Aware of the retrospective importance of these vocal interventions (in contrast to those of the second half), and having repeated his narrative numerous times before coming to compose the *Conquête*, Villehardouin simply cannot help but report directly.

Twentieth-century critics have tended to consider Villehardouin as a premeditative and clear-sighted individual, whose formal and stylistic choices in the *Conquête* somehow knowingly anticipate certain aspects of modern historical discourse. Yet it is Villehardouin's status as eyewitness that remains a neglected part of the explanation behind the innovative nature of his testimony, that is, as deliberately unembellished vernacular prose. Formal innovation, after all, can arise from the challenges and limits of representation and the sayable. My argument has been that the radical shift in proportions of reported discourse across the two halves of the text reveal, on the one hand, Villehardouin's attempt to control the historical material, and, on the other, the fact that Villehardouin's memories must have been formed in a collaborative, 'transactive' environment – that is, he had necessarily already told and re-told the narrative both while the Crusade was ongoing and in the years before composing the *Conquête*, thereby remembering certain passages in direct speech precisely because they took on such retrospective importance. Direct discourse, as both Beer and Guynn recognize, draws attention to dramatic moments of the narrative, either through playing on temporal experiences of the text or through allowing a shift to a future-oriented perspective that places the reader-listener at a juncture when the course of history could still be changed. Indirect discourse (coupled, crucially, with a greater absence of direct discourse) appears, then, to work in inverse fashion, speeding through the second half and presenting that chapter of history (the period following the successful 1204 assault of Constantinople) as a closed book.

Villehardouin's text encourages us to think through the modern (and postmodern) theoretical concerns about eyewitness testimony as explored in Haenel's *Jan Karski*. The processes behind the *Conquête*'s

29. See Agamben's discussion of the relation between testimony and the archive, 137–65.

composition are hidden in order to lend coherence to the narrative end product. The traces that have survived this mediation, the imbalanced use of reported discourse and, to a lesser extent, the interplay of narratorial identities, remind us that the present act of testimony fades into historical record, into the archive (taken here as the corpus of retrievable formulations of language).<sup>29</sup> Haenel's *Jan Karski* calls into question what distinguishes 'history' from 'fiction' not by returning to philosophical and theoretical cornerstones, but instead by playing with and remoulding historical speech to draw attention to the illusion that 'real' historiography inadvertently obscures: that speech cannot belong *historically* to one sole voice, since any individual utterance is the product of an uncountable number of other utterances themselves constituted of several voices. It makes the case, therefore, that the only ethical way of dealing with this fundamental issue of ownership is to be clear that such voices are always mediated. Criticism of *Jan Karski* is unjustified when its role as meta-discourse is forgotten, when it is given the status of the work of historians. Haenel's account of Lanzmann's interview with Karski shows, on the one hand, how the witness embodies disembodied speech, how the act of enunciation gives presence to the words of others, and, on the other, how the text disembodies the speech of the real-life historical figure (the man Jan Karski died in 2000). Back to Haenel's novel:

À ce moment précis, en écoutant Jan Karski, on n'a plus du tout l'impression qu'une voix sort d'un corps; au contraire, c'est le corps de Jan Karski qui sort de sa voix, parce que sa voix semble le révéler à lui-même; il est enfin celui qu'il n'arrivait pas à rejoindre au début de l'entretien: non pas quelqu'un d'autre, mais ce personnage en lui qui s'accorde au secret même de la parole: le témoin. Est-ce la souffrance qui fait le témoin? Plutôt la parole, l'usage de la parole. (Haenel 31)

(At this precise moment, when listening to Jan Karski, we no longer have the impression whatsoever that a voice emerges from a body. The opposite in fact: it is the body of Jan Karski which emerges from his voice, because his voice seems to reveal it [his body] to himself; he is finally the person whom he wasn't able to reach at the start of the interview: not somebody else, but this character inside him who is accorded the very essence of speech, the witness. Is it suffering that makes the witness? More like speech, the use of speech.)

We may think of the body as transmitting speech, but perhaps we should think about it in terms of speech presupposing a body. In the frame of Haenel's novel, the body in question is that of Jan Karski, who remains the unifying principle of the three juxtaposed sections. Thus, as Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand and Helena Duffy point out, Jan Karski is little more than a textual construct: "une présence désincarnée constituée d'un amalgame de textes et de représentations" (Ledoux-Beaugrand 160, "a disembodied presence made up of an amalgam of texts and representations"). This necessarily has an untimely quality insofar as the multi-temporal amalgam of Karski's discourse is flattened out into a linear sequence and assigned to a historically-situated speaker. Villehardouin is, of course, also a textual construct. This is not to deny the empirical reality of Villehardouin's existence, his role in the Fourth Crusade, or his involvement with the dictation of 'his' work. But rather to understand that, from the audience's perspective, the evocation of Villehardouin in the *Conquête* performs an important 'witness function:' it gives voice to the narrative. This voice is all that remains in the manuscripts of the text.

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