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**The “Old English Elegy” in the Context of Early Medieval
Latin and Vernacular Traditions: A Reappraisal of
Intertextuality, Poetics, and Literary Genre, with a Study
of Manuscript Context**

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College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies

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In partial fulfilment for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The close association of traditional “Anglo-Saxon Studies” with nationalist agendas since its inception to the present day have evidenced the need for deep revision of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the discipline. In the last two decades, the urgency to engage in revisionist exercise has become apparent, as certain taxonomies impose ideological preconceptions onto early medieval history and culture. The term “Anglo-Saxon” itself, coined in the mid-nineteenth century, is loaded with British imperialist connotations and white supremacist overtones. On the other hand, some field-specific terminology, such as the use of “elegy” as a textual generic classification, perpetuate anachronistic projections of modern aesthetics retroactively applied to medieval cultural artefacts. Hence, our understanding of the past is hindered by the limitations of traditional methodological lens and conditioned by ideological inferences.

This project provides an innovative approach to the re-evaluation of these taxonomies from a cross-disciplinary perspective. While primarily concerned with the consequences that the use of the term “elegy” has for the study of Old English poetry for both general and specialised audiences, the proposed project also engages in revision of the close relationship between the projection of modern literary sensibilities onto medieval texts, and post-Romantic nationalist discourse. Both aspects participate in a genetic understanding of history and literature based on a hypothesised continuity of recognisable racial traits across time.

As opposed to traditional anachronistic and ethnocentric methodologies, I propose that Old English language and poetics create a cohesive system transcending generic taxonomies, ultimately based on an assimilative principle. I produce the idea of the “familiarising principle,” which consists in the recontextualisation of received learning into familiar cultural parameters. This approach moves away from modern ideas of literary genres and proves that the largely established isolationist reading of a culturally and ethnically uniform “Anglo-Saxon England” is no longer tenable.

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STATEMENT REGARDING THE TREATMENT OF PRIMARY SOURCES

Throughout the present work, all quotations from Old English and Latin texts are taken from standard reference editions, unless otherwise specified. In the case of *Beowulf*, all quotations come from Fulk, Bjork, and Niles' 2008 edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf*, unless otherwise stated. Quotations from all other Old English texts come from Krapp and Dobbie's *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, except where explicitly stated in the case of individual texts. Any other texts in Latin or Old English are appropriately referenced throughout.

Editorial decisions and emendations have been kept unaltered, except in the case of certain modern punctuation conventions (double quotation marks, question or exclamation marks, etc.), unless otherwise stated in the case of specific textual cruxes. In the lack of clear scholarly and editorial consensus as to the formatting of Old English poems' titles, and considering the arbitrariness involved in applying modern criteria to early medieval cultural products, I have decided to italicise all titles for the sake of consistency.

The main dictionary of Old English referenced throughout is Bosworth and Toller's *Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon*, owing to its influence on twentieth-century scholarship. Where appropriate (and possible), the Toronto *Dictionary of Old English Project* has also been consulted.

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. I therefore take full responsibility for any mistakes in the said translations.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABR</i>	<i>American Benedictine Review</i>
ACMRS	Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
<i>ANQ</i>	<i>American Notes and Queries</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
<i>ASPR</i>	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records</i>
<i>Beitr.</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i>
B-T	Bosworth and Toller, <i>Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i>
CSAS	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CUP	Cambridge University Press
<i>CR</i>	<i>The Chaucer Review</i>
DOML	Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>EIC</i>	<i>Essays in Criticism</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
<i>ESC</i>	<i>English Studies in Canada</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>The Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
L&S	Lewis and Short, <i>Latin Dictionary</i>
<i>LSE</i>	<i>Leeds Studies in English</i>
<i>MÆ</i>	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLQ</i>	<i>Modern Language Queries</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>NDEJ</i>	<i>Notre Dame English Journal</i>
<i>Neophil.</i>	<i>Neophilologus</i>
<i>NM</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>NMS</i>	<i>Nottingham Medieval Studies</i>
<i>N&Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>

OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OUP	Oxford University Press
<i>PLL</i>	<i>Papers in Language and Literature</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Modern Language Association of America: Publications</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>RESns</i>	<i>Review of English Studies, new series</i>
<i>RIA</i>	<i>Royal Irish Academy (Proceedings)</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Studia Mystica</i>
SME	Studies in Medieval England
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>TSLL</i>	<i>Texas Studies in Literature and Language</i>
UTP	University of Toronto Press
<i>VSLÅ</i>	<i>Vetenskaps-Societen i Lund Årsbok</i>
WMUMIP	Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications
<i>YES</i>	<i>The Yearbook of English Studies</i>
<i>ZfcPh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie</i>

**STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY REGARDING THE
PRESENT WORK**

I hereby certify that the present work is entirely my own, resulting from original research; that no part of it has been published elsewhere; and that I have not already obtained another degree in this university (or elsewhere) on the basis of the present work.

Introduction – The Problematic Concept of “Old English Elegy”

The study of the past involves an exercise in the negotiation of meanings. When reconstructing a fragmentary narrative (whether material, historical, or ideological), there are gaps to bridge and blank spaces that may not always be mapped out in their totality. Providing a means to bypass such obstacles requires, at best, finding alternative pathways leading to a relatively objective and satisfactory explanation; at worst, it betrays an act of subjective interpretation and evaluation of the past. Very often, the two approaches intertwine and conjoin in an almost unconscious process. As noted by Lee Patterson,

while wanting to do justice to the otherness of a distant past, the historian is unavoidably conditioned by his own historical situation; while concerned to incorporate and understand as much of the material relevant to his chosen problem as he can, he is also aware that the material is never raw data but rather produced by elaborate processes of interpretation – many of which are so much second nature as to be unrecognizable as interpretations at all; and while attentive to the particularity and detail in which the significance of the past resides, he also knows that for detail to be significant at all it must be located within a larger, totalizing context.¹

Herein lies the dilemma that every student and scholar of the past must confront. Where a scholar is unaware or incautious of the pitfalls of historicist approaches, and by assuming the relevance of a historical moment or cultural artefact from the past in the light of their bearing on the present, they may produce a partial or total misinterpretation of the past that fails to consider the cultural meaning that a given object of study had at the

¹ *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), *Preface*, ix-x.

time it was produced.² The result of such misrepresentation is, then, a retrospectively construed discourse of cultural meaning that relies solely on modern sensibilities and horizons of expectations, and which alienates the historical narrative or object from its original environment.³

However, by taking an isolated fragment of data by and for itself, one should also be cautious not to construct a *pars pro toto* fallacy whereby the significance of a single instance is projected onto an imagined whole. This does not mean that the application of any historicist approach is flawed from its inception; rather, the increasing awareness of the inconsistencies of traditional and reformed historicist methodologies have led to the development of a more perceptive scholarship; one that is conscious that literature and literary texts, despite their being historical beyond dispute, bear “a privileged relation to the historical moment, [which] we must respect and rely upon,” and that, when treated as historical subjects rather than as objects of history, literary texts can help us illuminate and complete the historical narrative.⁴

The situations described by Patterson are all the more frequent in literary studies, as in analysing a work of literature from the distant past one is faced, on the one hand, with the obscurities of the text itself, which may or may not find correspondence in other extant material, if any have survived at all. On the other, the double placement of the literary text in different historical contexts—in relation to its reception history, as opposed to a synchronic approach—raises the questions of (a) how it fits within a reconstructed, historicised literary canon, and (b) whether it is representative of its original cultural and historical environments.

² Singular “they” is used here and elsewhere to avoid gendered pronouns where there is no specific identification.

³ Cultural meaning does not directly correlate to authorial intent, whether individual (a single author’s intent or bias) or collective (the projected morals or ethics of a society, reconstructed through hypothetical homogeneity as reflected in cultural artefacts). Cultural meaning does not derive from intention; it is the result of the joint agency of convention (namely, cultural aspects that recur consistently and are expressed in similar terms), tradition (namely, cultural aspects that have become conventional through historical perdurance), and familiarity (namely, cultural aspects that are recognisable to members of a society because they are traditional and conventional).

⁴ Cf. Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, 74. See Chapter 2, ‘Historical Criticism and the Claims of Humanism,’ esp. 62-74.

Thus, for example, upon encountering a literary work from the early Middle Ages that seems to bear an ambiguous relation to other works or fragments thereof pertaining to the same cultural background, the question must be asked how the said finding should be treated in relation to (a) its contemporary cultural and historical context, and/or (b) its place in the history of the literary form. To posit a tradition based on a single fragment is speculative, to say the least; this occurs when the existence of a literary genre is assumed on the grounds of scant and partial textual evidence. To marginalise a single instance as a taxonomical anomaly is to impose a false homogeneity on the corpus; this occurs when texts failing to meet our horizon of expectations are considered deviations from or corruptions of a tradition. Associating such artefacts with anachronistically imposed aesthetics and cultural principles was the flaw of nineteenth-century literary historicism, which current scholarship must avoid. How ought we approach, then, a work of literature or a handful of fragmentary evidence that seems to resist either assimilation into the canon or elevation to the level of a fully developed literary genre?

The so-called Old English “elegies” challenge our engagement with the past through these unresolved paradoxes. This group of poems from MS Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, more commonly known as the Exeter Book, have posed a challenge to scholarship since they were first published in the early nineteenth century. The canon of nine—sometimes seven, two, or even fourteen⁵—texts shares a number of common features and themes, which are in turn present in a large number of other Old English poems. These poems are, however, traditionally perceived as a tight-bound group despite disparities of tone, form, mode, and meaning. They present more affinities with other works and traditions than they do amongst themselves,

⁵ The standard of nine poems was first established by Ernst E. Sieper in *Die Altenglische Elegie* (Strasbourg: Karl J. Trübner, 1915), and recently perpetuated by Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992). Several scholars rejected the inclusion of *Resignation* and *The Rhyming Poem* in the group from very early stages, owing to their closer affinity to the homiletic and penitential traditions. On the other hand, some have broadened the scope of the genre by including “elegiac” passages from *Beowulf*, *Guthlac B*, *Genesis*, and others. Only B. J. Timmer, ‘The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry,’ *ES* 24 (1942), 33-44, has reduced the number of pure “elegies” to two: namely *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

but they do not belong to a single category, whether individually or as a group. Some show resemblances to heroic poetry, though they are not so in either tone or subject; most contain appeals to wisdom, but they are not gnomic or sapiential; two of them contain chant-like repetition,⁶ yet they do not seem to have been intended as charms; and some exhort to Christian living, while being framed against the secular world of the *medoheal* (“mead-hall,” cf. *Beowulf* 484 and elsewhere). In addition to this, the main constituents of the canon are found in a single manuscript (the Exeter Book), though they are not grouped together, nor do they show any formal or narrative continuity where they appear in proximity to other texts. They are, in short, parts of several “wholes” without belonging neatly in any. At the same time, they have been seen as single instances of an otherwise unattested “whole,” a hypothesised “elegiac tradition.”

The purpose of the present study is precisely to reconcile these two elements, the “whole” that is the Old English poetic corpus, and the “free agents,” the “anomalies” that are the Exeter Book lyric poems misleadingly labelled as “elegies.” To counter the critical notion that these texts make up to a literary genre of their own, it is necessary to apply two complementary perspectives, correlative with those introduced by Patterson. On the one hand, the idea of the Old English “elegy” has been informed by the application of ahistorical meaning to cultural artefacts from the past. The creation of the genre is the result of retroactive application of modern aesthetic, philosophical, and ideological discourses. Such a tendency runs parallel to the development of “Anglo-Saxon Studies” from their earliest stages to their establishment as an academic discipline and beyond; particularly during the reception of Old English poetry in the nineteenth century, when historicist or “evolutionary” views of literature dominated. On the other hand, the perpetuation of the scholarly construct known as the “elegiac tradition” in Old English poetry comes as a consequence of a failure to recognise the integrity of the Old English poetic corpus—to see a

⁶ The suggestion that *Deor* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* show formal elements reminiscent of the formulaic chant-like repetition present in charms was first advanced by Morton Bloomfield, ‘The Form of *Deor*,’ *PMLA* 79 (1964), 534-41, and Donald K. Fry, ‘*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Wen Charm,’ *CR* 5:4 (1971), 247-63.

“gap” where there is none, and to isolate fragmentary evidence as anomalous instead of attempting to reconcile it with the rest of surviving material.

In order to understand the cohesiveness of Old English verse, two fundamental aspects of the Old English imagination must be considered. First, the themes and motifs, and even the diction of Old English verse, are often mirrored in prose writings, which points to a remarkable consistency in terms of use of language and a firmly rooted set of culturally shared meanings and preoccupations. Some of these, such as the “theme of exile,” the “hall/anti-hall motif,” etc., have long been recognised as part of the traditional stock of imagery and display of formulaic language that is inherent to Old English verse.⁷ However, some others, such as the use of I-persona in dramatic speech, the idea of selfhood in a culture centred on the notion of community, or the projection of emotional and mental states, remain within the anomalous realm of “elegy” (as an extension of Romantic perceptions of lyric poetry), rather than being integrated as part of the corpus, because they are still perceived as atypical.

These elements are part of a cohesive literary imagination just as much as those previously mentioned. However, their recognition is hindered by the limiting effect of artificial generic boundaries, which project their diffuse, retroactively applied influence on texts falling outside the posited canon of “elegy” in the form of the “elegiac mood.” In so doing, a logical fallacy arises whereby the exception crawls into the standard and creates “gaps” in an otherwise homogenous tradition. In other words, the “elegiac,” as an offshoot of the fabricated “elegy” label, is perceived as evidence of the existence of a hypothetical genre or genre-in-the-making outside of the homogeneity of the corpus. Nonetheless, in order to legitimise the existence of an “elegy” genre, the texts so labelled are presented by the critical discourse as anomalies rather than as integral parts of the Old English poetic corpus. “Elegy” or “elegiac” are, then, the product of anachronistic selective

⁷ For the “hall/anti-hall motif,” see Kathryn Hume, ‘The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry,’ *ASE* 3 (1974), 63-74. The “theme of exile” will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

reading and re-arranging of texts: by grouping together those aspects that elude generic classification under “epic,” “gnomic,” “homiletic,” etc., the idea of “elegiac” takes form.

The imposition of modern literary labels to texts pre-dating the deployment by Romantic poets of the terminology that designates them limits the potential intertextual complexity of the Old English poetic corpus, over-simplifying it as it becomes divided by restrictive generic labels. Moreover, the systematisation of the Old English poetic corpus according to modern textual categories presupposes a hierarchy of genres, in which foundational epics and lyric modes are placed at the core of literary histories and poetic anthologies constructed around an ethnocentric misreading of the past. Such taxonomies and hierarchies are altogether extraneous to the cultural milieu in which the medieval texts would have been composed and preserved. The pre-eminence of lyric over narrative modes, pre-Christian over Christian materials, and subjective dramatic discourse over third-person narration, are all part of the Romantic conception of poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,”⁸ combined with the quest for the original voice of the poet as an emblem of uncorrupted innocence in communion with Nature, living in a primordial state of morally unblemished humanity. Hence, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship established cultural bridges between contemporary poets and medieval anonymous works; modern historians sought the roots of “national identity” in the deeds of brave heroes and their faithful retainers; and post-Romantic sensibilities appropriated the language and mode of ancient vernacular verse.

Thus, for example, we find the idea of “foundational epic” as a legitimate source for national history and character, from which other related though inferior genres derived. Such is particularly the case of “Christian epic” in Old English poetry, which is, like “elegy,” a theoretical construct applied by modern scholarship and perpetuated by the critical tradition. From such a notion two hypothetical schools were posited—

⁸ The phrase is first employed by William Wordsworth in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1798-1800).

namely, the “Cædmonian” (*Genesis, Exodus, Daniel, Judith, The Dream of the Rood*), and the “Cynewulfian” (*Andreas, Guthlac, Juliana, Elene*)—thereby retroactively projecting ideas about authorship, poetic style, and the canon, founded on Romantic sensibilities.⁹ The “elegiac tradition” in Old English poetry is, likewise, a scholarly construct designed to avoid what is perceived as “a gap” in the conventions of an otherwise homogeneous literary corpus, but which paradoxically introduces an artificial separation in so doing. It is shaped after the diluted meaning of “elegy” as introspective poetry in the vein of Gray, Keats, or Tennyson, which coexisted with the rise of the historical novel after Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, and still felt the influence of Macpherson’s *Ossian* and Percy’s *Reliques*, combined with popular Arthurian and Alfredian revivals.

All these texts and the aesthetics and literary trends in which they participate run parallel to the rise of Romantic nationalism, which exalted the cultural origins of national identity as found in the earliest expression of national language and literature: ancient vernacular poetry. Thus, the examination of the development of the term “elegy” and its application to early medieval texts cannot be separated from the ideological environment in which the process of cultural appropriation occurs. The privileged place of the Old English “elegies” in the modern canon is the result of the interaction of the Romantic literary and nationalistic discourses: they provide a picture of the past that complements the ideological function of heroic verse in that they reinforce its cultural significance. At the same time, they adhere to the modern aesthetic criteria retroactively imposed onto them as a result of the desire to establish a genetic continuity between past and present.

A second cultural element that has only recently gained recognition is the homogeneity of the Old English poetic corpus as an exercise in the

⁹ For a study of the genre, see Ivan Herbison, ‘The Idea of the “Christian Epic:” Towards a History of an Old English Poetic Genre,’ in M. J. Toswell and Elizabeth Tyler, *Doubt Wisely: Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, Studies in English Language and Literature (Oxford: Routledge, 1996), 342-61, who concludes that “the poems lack any real cohesion as a group. They are far from homogenous in structure, content, tone, or thematic development. Nonetheless, the idea of ‘Christian epic’ continues to influence the way in which critics perceive these poems,” 354.

implementation of received learning, aimed at constructing the Old English language as a powerful and versatile vehicle for literature and learning. As I intend to show throughout the present work, the fact that a large number of texts modelled after Latin sources are contained in the same codices than other texts clearly influenced by external traditions, though not finding exact equivalents in any of them—the Exeter Book lyrics being the clearest example—should lead to the exploration of how Old English poets perceived, used, and recontextualised the traditions within which they worked, and how the conventions of the Old English language serve as tools for the integration of such traditions into familiar cultural parameters. Across the four main poetic codices, *Beowulf* appears side by side not only with *Judith*, but also with the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, the *Liber Monstrorum*, and the *Wonders of the East*. The same can be said of *The Dream of the Rood* in the Vercelli Book, where *Elene* and *Andreas* have Latin correspondences; and of the totality of the Junius manuscript, which arguably shows the influence of the Late Antique Christian poets Sedulius and Arator, both of them demonstrably known in early medieval England.¹⁰ The Exeter Book provides the same mixing of materials, some of which, like the Riddles or the *Guthlac* poems, find correspondences in the Latin tradition; whereas others, like *Wulf and Eadwacer*, have closer affinities with medieval vernacular literatures. The resemblance that the codex shows with Continental poetic anthologies, and the background of its only known owner—Leofric of Exeter, presumably educated in Lotharingia—make it all the more likely that the Exeter Book participates in the incorporative trend previously mentioned.

The said implementing or *familiarising* strategy entails a gradual assimilation of culturally extraneous materials, such as the apocryphal New Testament narrative of Andrew and Matthew in Mermedonia, into the native literary imagination and traditional poetic diction, resulting, in this particular case, in the Old English poem known as *Andreas*. I have argued

¹⁰ Cf. Michael Alexander, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 69: “the major patristic authors are well represented [...] as well as a host of lesser figures [...] and most of the principal Late Latin poets: Juvencus, Caelius Sedulius, Arator, Cyprianus Gallus.”

elsewhere that such a process is responsible for the high degree of verbal and conceptual correspondence that the poem shows with *Beowulf* and *Elene*, rather than being a form of mechanical imitative paraphrase.¹¹ The present study takes such approach a step further, and argues that a familiarisation process underlies the design of the Exeter Book, and explains some of the formal anomalies that the Exeter Book lyrics show: namely, their highly stylised form, or their strong affinities with external traditions. It follows that Old English poetry should not be considered as a hierarchy of generic categories, but as a consistent system sharing similar cultural preoccupations, and displaying a homogeneous range of poetic diction, language, and imagery. Old English verse thus participates in a tradition of assimilation that is constantly developing and integrating new elements to construct a thematically and linguistically solid corpus, centred on the use of Old English as a suitable vehicle for the transmission of traditional and acquired meanings.

In this way, the interference of modern poetics and aesthetic theories can be avoided, and the hierarchisation of the corpus readily dismantled. The familiarisation principle, as opposed to the notion of “genre,” presents all texts as members of a horizontal structure, where differences are established on the grounds of their varying degrees of assimilation of material. Even within these various stages, several minor degrees can be distinguished, so that the process of familiarisation is neither diachronically uniform nor conceptually restrictive: different degrees can occur at the same time and, as new meanings are incorporated into the tradition, the process remains in a state of constant reinterpretation. Hence, for example, the literal glossing of the Lindisfarne Gospels occurs at a later stage than some of the Old English verse material or the prose translations of the Alfredian reform, and this does not necessarily imply an earlier stage of cultural development, but merely an alternative degree of assimilation subordinated to a particular purpose.

¹¹ Francisco J. Rozano-García, “‘Hwær is wuldor þin?’ Traditional Poetic Diction and the Alien Text in the Old English *Andreas*,’ *Peritia* 28 (2017), 177-94.

Prior to engaging in the study of the Exeter Book lyrics from the complementary approaches just introduced, some theoretical and methodological aspects relating to the present work must be briefly mentioned. What is meant by “genre” in current literary criticism and how it applies to the study of medieval cultural artefacts requires some commentary, particularly when it comes to how the concept of “genre” and the scope of its artificial boundaries have been questioned in recent critical theory. In addition to this, the use of the term “elegy” as applied to Old English poetry lacks any basis in relation to the Old English lexicon, as no immediately equivalent form exists. In terms of the study of Old English cultural artefacts and the methodology employed in the present work, it is necessary to differentiate between the uses of some vocabulary that may be susceptible of misinterpretation, as well as to establish a series of principles for the selection and study of the texts herein included. Finally, owing to the twofold approach provided, which combines a study of modern reception and a restoration of “elegy” into the homogeneity of the Old English poetic corpus, a brief commentary on the structure of the present work is offered in order to dissipate any trace of inconsistency.

Literary Genres: their Limits and Application to Medieval Literature

The concept of “genre” is difficult to define to begin with, even in reference to modern works of literature and art. The imposition of generic designations to texts that escape classification usually results in two different, though closely related, phenomena: either the genre begins expanding in order to accommodate the various individual features of its members, until it eventually becomes too vague to bear any meaning; or, to avoid the former, the boundaries of a genre become too rigid and accommodate only a very restricted number of elements, so that the genre itself becomes empty in that it does not designate a tradition but only a nonrepresentative group of texts showing limited common traits. Again, both situations apply to the Old English “elegy.” In providing a vague

description, the genre has become diffuse and all but distinctive; on the other hand, attempts to narrow its scope have resulted in a canon of only five poems in a corpus too large (even if relatively small in comparison to Anglo-Latin) to accommodate such a small genre as representative.

A recent attempt to produce a new taxonomy of Old English poetic genres has been suggested by Paul Battles, who argues that “the driving assumption that retrospective classifications of genre are inevitably arbitrary...is premature,” and defends that “identifying a poem as a member of a particular genre invites comparison to other works of the same kind and also raises expectations about its representational mode, purpose, plot, setting, character, style, and tone.”¹² Battles lays out a series of features in traditional openings whereby different genres may be identified, and then addresses the potential problem posed by the fact that “in Old English poetry...the mingling of genre is the norm, not the exception.”¹³ This obstacle eventually leads to the coinage of hybrid genres, such as “elegy-*planctus*” (*Judgement Day II*) or “elegy-epic” (*Fates of the Apostles*). As observed above, imposing a taxonomy of genres onto so homogeneous a corpus inevitably results in a stretching and blurring of generic boundaries, so that their defining features become excessively vague.

In an examination of genre theory as applied to medieval vernacular literature in general, Hans Robert Jauss notes that “a history and theory of vernacular genres in the Middle Ages bumps up against the particular problem that the structural characteristics of the literary forms...themselves first have to be worked out from texts that are, chronologically, highly diffuse.”¹⁴ In contrast to rigid generic classifications based on evolutionary

¹² ‘Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres: Epic, Elegy, Wisdom Poetry, and the “Traditional Opening”,’ *SP* 111:1 (2014), 1-33, at 3; 4. For an approach based on functionalist linguistics see J. Rubén Valdés Miyares, ‘The Functions of Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Old English Text Typology,’ *ES*, 100:7 (2019), 739-66. For an application of lexomic analyses to the study of literary genres in Old English, see Michael D. C. Drout, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature: An Evolutionary, Cognitivist Approach* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), esp. chapter five. ‘Application of the Theory: Genre and Adaptive Radiation in Poems of the Exeter Book.’

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴ ‘Theories of Genre and Medieval Literature,’ in *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, *Theory and History of Literature 2* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1982), 77.

or ahistorical criteria, Jauss proposes an alternative method based on Kantian aesthetics, reaching at a proposition that “no longer applies the generality of literary genres normatively (*ante rem*), or in a classificatory manner (*post rem*), but rather historically (*in re*).”¹⁵ Where various genres mingle, Jauss assumes the existence of a *dominant* mode, which shapes the inner system of a particular text, and which makes it possible to identify “its unique structure of “family resemblance”; namely, “an ensemble of formal as well as thematic characteristics...investigated in their function in a ruled coherence [whereby] the delimitations from other genres can be determined.”¹⁶ Jauss’s system is innovative in that it seeks to adopt a synchronic perspective (*in re*), although the idea of a *dominant* mode as the shaper and cohesive agent of a number of sub-modes still maintains the problem of assuming that every *dominant* belongs into a hypothesised larger “family” of texts and genres. In the case of “elegy” as applied to Old English, no evidence of such a “family” has survived, and the *dominant* is always a different mode (whether gnomic, homiletic, heroic, etc.).

The limits inherent to and imposed by generic classifications are laid out by Derrida in “The Law of Genre.” “As soon as the word *genre* is sounded,” he states, “as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind.”¹⁷ For our purposes, Derrida’s idea of “the law of genre” as “a principle of contamination...of participation without belonging—a taking part without being part of,” is most accurate. This principle establishes that once a generic category is created and applied, it is accompanied by a series of exceptions that force an “inevitable splitting of the trait that marks membership” in order to accommodate further constituents. As a result, “the boundary of the set comes to form...an internal pocket larger than the whole,” annulling its singularity, blurring its defining characteristics and becoming, in the process, “as singular as it is

¹⁵ Ibid., 80.

¹⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁷ ‘The Law of Genre,’ in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge. (NY: Routledge, 1992), 224.

limitless.”¹⁸ The “law of genre,” then, explains the evolution of the category of the so-called “Old English elegy” in time: in attempting to include within itself all “canonical” texts (those in the Exeter Book), as well as the “elegiac” passages from other poems, its defining features necessarily split and expand, thereby losing all delimiting value. In the end, the entire Old English poetic corpus is “polluted,” to use Derrida’s term, by the abstract, indefinite “elegiac.”

From a synchronic point of view, there is no evidence that Old English poets and their audiences conceived of the Exeter Book poems as “elegies,” nor as pertaining to any distinct genre. On occasion, it is possible to find explicit generic attributions to certain texts, usually derived from their Latin original designation. Hence, for example, Old English *sælm* (alternatively *psealm* or *sealm*) renders Latin *psalm*, and refers both to the Biblical poetic composition and to liturgical songs.¹⁹ However, there is no such correspondence with “elegy,” even though the poets were certainly familiar with the Latin term, and clearly understood its meaning. As evidence, compare the Latin first *Meter of Boethius*:

1 Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi,
 flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos.
 ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae
 et ueris **elegi** fletibus ora rigant.²⁰

[The poems which I once wrote in happier days I am now made to render in gloomy modes. Behold how the torn Muses bid me write, and *elegies* bathe my face with unfeigned tears.]

to the Old English *Meter 2*:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 227-8.

¹⁹ Cf. Bede’s *HEGA* V.14, “Nænig mon ne dorste for hine sælmas ne mæssan singan,” “Nor did any man dare sing psalms or say masses for him,” in reference to funerary services.

²⁰ Claudio Moreschini (ed.), *De consolatione philosophiae*, Bibliotheca scriptorium Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, Corpus philosophorum medii aevii byzantini, vol. 9: Philosophi byzantine (Academy of Athens, 2000). All Latin quotations from the *Conolatio* come from this edition.

1 Hwæt, ic lioða fela lustlice geo
 sanc on sælum, nu sceal siofigende,
 wope gewæged, wreccea giomor,
 singan sarcwidas.

[Listen, I formerly sang many songs, gladly, in prosperous times; now, lamenting, exhausted by weeping, I, a sad outcast, must sing *sad utterances*.²¹]

In contrast to the form *sælm*, which has completely assimilated *psalmus* into the Old English lexicon and rendered it in vernacular spelling and inflection, “elegi” (which may be kept as “elegies,” or more freely as “sad verses”) is replaced by the abstract “sarcwidas” (“sad utterances,” where “song” or “poem” is implied in “singan”), and the “mæstos modos” extended in “siofigende, / wope gewæded, wrecca giomor.” The same principle of non-correspondence applies to the Exeter Book lyrics, which use the even more diffuse term *gi[e]d* to describe the speakers’ monologues. *Gid* can be translated not only as “song” or “poem,” but also as “I. A song, lay, poem; *cantus, cantilena, carmen, poema*” and “II. A speech, tale, sermon, proverb, riddle; *sermo, dictum, loquela, proverbium, ænigma*.”²² Hence, *gid* includes any manner of formal speech that may be spoken in a stylised manner (a sermon, a proverb), or involving a particular set of rhetorical and prosodic devices, such as alliteration, rhythm, etc. (a poem, a song, a riddle). As opposed to the explicit tone introduced in *Meter 2* by the prefatory “Cleopode to drihtne | geomran stemne, gyddode þus” (“He called to the Lord with a sad voice, sang as follows,” Book I, 83b-84²³), the mode and mood of the Exeter Book lyrics are not set by their explicit generic affiliation, but by the affective aura constructed by their use of vocabulary

²¹ “Sælum” might refer to “halls” or “prosperous times.” Either possibility might be implied, especially given the close association between social prosperity and the mead-hall. “On sælum” could thus be interpreted as “in prosperous times, when I was in the halls.”

²² B-T, 474.

²³ Prose references from the Old English *Boethius* come from Susan Irvine and Malcolm Godden (eds. and trans.), *The Old English Boethius*, DOML19 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

related to the life of the mind and the discourse of emotion, expressed through a projected subjectivity in the form of I-persona.

If the Exeter Book lyrics do not have a specific textual designation derived from manuscript evidence, but are singled out in scholarship on the basis of their unusual deployment of themes and language otherwise ubiquitous in the corpus, then the genre of “elegy” in Old English “[does not] take part in the corpus whose denomination it nonetheless imparts. Nor is it simply extraneous to the corpus.”²⁴ In other words: while imposing its delimiting effect in the corpus, “elegy” is not part of it from a synchronic perspective; nonetheless, the set of features implied by the term are not culturally removed from it either. The assimilative quality implied by the familiarisation strategy employed by Old English poets across texts and manuscripts potentially resolves this paradox by locating the Exeter Book lyrics within a general trend in early medieval English culture that is particularly important for our understanding of the composition techniques in Old English verse.

As manuscript evidence suggests, conscious design underlies the compilations of anthologies such as Junius 11 or Cotton A.xv, whether doctrinal or thematic, respectively.²⁵ However, beyond concrete interests, the texts contained in such manuscripts share a common trait: most, if not all, are examples of received learning and imported textual traditions, which have been recontextualised into cultural conventions through the assimilative agency of the Old English “poetics of the familiar.” The poems of the Exeter Book also participate in this trend: the *Riddles*, the *Christ* poems, or the shorter religious texts are examples of this. The lyric poems, on the other hand, display a higher degree of stylistic sophistication in that they integrate a range of received traditions rather than showing the direct influence of specific textual models. It is precisely such assimilative and recontextualising agency that has made it difficult to assign the form and

²⁴ Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” 230.

²⁵ I reject the common denomination of Cotton A.xv as “the *Beowulf* manuscript” as it is misleading (it might be deemed to imply that *Beowulf* is either the only text contained in it), and presumes a privileged position for the poem in relation to the rest of the manuscript’s contents.

meaning of the poems to a single generic category. The presence of such elements in Old English verse, and the potential for the Old English language to incorporate learning received from a variety of influences and backgrounds, also evidences the need to abandon the use of term “Anglo-Saxon” as a restrictive, ethnocentrically biased, and historically inaccurate label that fails to represent the culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse reality of early medieval England.

A Note on the Terminology Used throughout the Present Work

I will be using the terms “Anglo-Saxonism,” “Anglo-Saxon, Studies” and “Old English Studies” throughout the present work, where each of these bears different implications. By “Anglo-Saxonism,” I mean the ideologically biased use of cultural artefacts dating from the early medieval period (ca. sixth to late eleventh centuries) with a view to producing and perpetuating a historicist and ethnocentric discourse of racial superiority. I use “Anglo-Saxon Studies” to designate scholarship of the past two centuries, whose inception and development run parallel to the growth of Anglo-Saxonism, and whose interests, theoretical foundations, and methodological approaches bear its influence and ideological baggage. On the other, hand, I use “Old English Studies” to refer to the scholarly interest in, and professional examination of the aforementioned cultural products, particularly from a linguistic and literary point of view, without any intended ideological, political, or racial bias. I also employ “Old English” to describe any texts written in the vernacular tongue dominant in England during the aforementioned period, chiefly in contrast to “Anglo-Latin,” or texts written in England in Latin during the same period. I reject the use of “Anglo-Saxon” throughout this study to refer to the inhabitants of Britain during the early medieval period, the period itself, or any of the cultural products produced during such time, owing to the racial, political, and cultural implications it carries as a result of its origins in British imperialistic discourse (as I will show in Chapter 1). In addition to this, I

avoid the label as it fails to represent the multiculturalism and multilingualism of the early medieval period in England and elsewhere, for which reason it is deemed historically inaccurate.²⁶

Instead, I have chosen to use “early medieval England,” “early medieval English,” or simply “Old English.” Although this terminology is itself not without its problems, and the debate remains open as to whether either term is actually free from political, ideological, and ethnocentric implications, I favour “English” over “Anglo-Saxon” on the grounds of the surveys provided by recent studies about the use of the term self-referentially by contemporary authors writing in the vernacular.²⁷ Given the higher occurrence of the term in a synchronic context rather than retroactively, I consider it more accurate in the context of the present discussion. As for “early medieval,” its use in the context of modern studies of the past, like all terminology implying periodisation, is necessarily restricted to the scope and limits of its application—much like “Renaissance” might refer to the Italian fifteenth-century *Quattrocento*, or to the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century Spanish *Siglo de Oro*. In the present context, I use “early medieval” to avoid the more restrictive “pre-Norman” or “pre-Conquest,” as Old English perdured until several decades after 1066, and to distinguish the period from the series of cultural and linguistic changes that came about from the mid-twelfth century onwards.

In terms of critical terminology, I use “elegy” only to refer to the critical construct of “Old English elegy,” and “elegies” to refer to the fabricated canon, as opposed to the texts as they appear in their manuscript context, whether individually or as a group. At any other point, I will refer

²⁶ For an early discussion on what the use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” involves, see Susan Reynolds, ‘What Do We Mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?’ *JBS* 24:4 (1985), 395-414. The topic has been the subject of much debate in the past few years. For a recent re-evaluation of the term and its implications, see Mary Rambaran-Olm, “Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting “Anglo-Saxon” Studies,” *History Workshop*, 4 Nov 2019; and Michael Wood, “As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term “Anglo-Saxon”?” *History Extra*, 4 Nov 2019.

²⁷ For further discussion, see also Joshua Davis, ‘The Middle Ages as Property: *Beowulf*, Translation, and the Ghosts of Nationalism,’ *Postmedieval* 10:2 (2019), 137–50; and Mary Dockray-Miller, ‘The Massachusetts Medievalist Thinks about the Power Dynamics of “Anglo-Saxon”,’ *The Massachusetts Medievalist*, December 17, 2019.

to the Old English texts as the “Exeter Book lyrics.” By “lyric” I do not mean to reduplicate the assumptions of traditional scholarship in projecting post-Romantic notions about aesthetics and poetry. I merely use the term as opposed to “narrative” to differentiate between poetic modes. “Narrative” is used throughout in two different senses: to designate a poetic mode, as opposed to lyric—where “narrative” involves an external third-person omniscient narrator, and “lyric” a dramatised, first-person subjective narrator—and in the sense of a story, a sequence of events or utterances making up to a coherent whole.

Lastly, in my use of the term “style” or “stylistic conventions,” I follow Elizabeth Tyler’s description of it as “those features of Old English verse which recur throughout the corpus, and which, although they may be responses to form, are not themselves, like alliteration and rhythm, formal requirements of the verse.”²⁸ Similarly, I use the terms “convention” or “conventional” in a neutral way “to refer to stylistic features which occur across the corpus.”²⁹ I extend this definition to the use of “traditional” when applied to Old English verse, to refer to stylistic conventions rooted in the Old English experience of the world; namely, in shared cultural, social, and aesthetic preoccupations. In this sense, the “Old English experience of the world” is largely correlative with Tyler’s “aesthetics of the familiar” in its application to the study of Old English poetry. Tyler’s phrase involves “both what is familiar because conventional and what becomes familiar because it occurs in an individual poem.”³⁰ I extend this idea to what is familiar because *socially and culturally* conventional, as witnessed by its occurrence across texts and genres, whether literary or not. By “aesthetics” I mean “both the social and artistic dimensions of style,” including “the delight in language and in complexity” and “what is appropriate to and distinctive about poetry.”³¹

²⁸ *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England*. (York: Medieval Press, 2006), 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

A Note on Methodology and Structure

The present work divides into two complementary parts. The first of these corresponds to the restoration of the Exeter Book lyrics to their original place within a cohesive poetic corpus. This process involves, first, the rejection of the modern application of the term “elegy” as a retroactively applied label founded on anachronistic aesthetic and ideological discourses; and second, close analysis of the thematic and stylistic affinities of the Exeter Book lyrics with other Old English poems across genres and manuscripts. On the other hand, once the intertextual relationships of the Exeter Book lyrics with the rest of the corpus have been established, the second part of this study focuses on the application of an original methodological strategy (the familiarisation principle) and its potential usefulness for the study of the Old English poetic corpus, taking the Exeter Book lyrics as a case study.

Chapter 1 addresses the early inception and evolution of “Anglo-Saxon Studies” parallel to nationalist ideologies, whether specifically Anglo-Saxonist or general supra-nationalist pan-Germanicist or Teutonist (sixteenth to late nineteenth centuries). Strictly linguistic studies have been discussed mostly in footnotes, if at all. While undoubtedly important in themselves, they tend to be less markedly nationalistic in tone and purpose than historical, religious, and political writings, and as they have been covered in previous publications, the reader is referred to them in due course. Considering the strong influence of German poets and philosophers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the development of British Romanticism and European nationalism, particular attention is drawn to their effect in the literary and aesthetic discourse surrounding the early reception of Old English verse. Chapter 2 emphasises how the modern academic discipline has preserved the literary historicist discourse derived from Romanticism and late nineteenth-century nationalism. It is in this second stage that the evolution of the term “elegy” as applied to Old English poetry is brought into scrutiny, especially in terms of how it evidences traces of Romantic poetics that have become fossilised in modern literary histories. This chapter concludes by drawing attention to the inconsistency

of those elements that have been traditionally considered as characteristic of the “elegiac mood” in Old English poetry, thereby giving way to the second section of the work.

Chapters 3 to 5 provide close textual analysis of some of the Exeter Book lyrics alongside other Old English poems falling outside the traditional generic category of “elegy,” in order to demonstrate how intertextual connections and thematic affinities transcend modern classifications, rendering them ineffective. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the life of the mind, while Chapter 5 discusses the discourse of emotion as opposed to the affective fallacy that has influenced modern scholarship, and which has resulted in the association of these themes almost exclusively with the “elegiac,” despite being ubiquitous in the Old English corpus. When it comes to the selection and treatment of Old English texts, I have given priority to the Exeter Book lyrics, though always in order to establish a comparison with other poems so that their affinities regardless of generic preconceptions is made clear. I have also sought to include those texts traditionally considered as “minor” elements of the corpus (such as *Pharaoh, Christ and Satan* or the *Meters of Boethius*) owing to their failure to meet the expectations of modern scholarship, in an attempt to demonstrate that their use of language and imagery is not dissimilar to other more favoured pieces such as the Exeter Book lyrics or *Beowulf*. In the case of *Beowulf* itself, I have tried to reverse the common pattern of criticism, which places the narrative poem at the centre of the poetic corpus and derives affective evaluation of other poems from comparison with it. On the contrary, I consistently show that it makes more sense to read *Beowulf* as a compendium of traditional features present in a wide range of Old English texts.

As every excerpt is accompanied by a translation into Present Day English, I often provide some commentary on the difficulties of rendering certain words and phrases. In general terms, where the Old English word is ambiguous, I opt for the most likely interpretation considering the overall sense and tone of the poem or excerpt. However, where more than one possibility is acceptable within a given context, the alternative is offered in a

brief explanatory note. This practice is most useful in cases such as that of the highly ambiguous *Wulf and Eadwacer*, where polysemy, allusiveness, and the variety of available choices make it difficult to capture the richness of the original Old English into a modern translation. In cases where editorial practice has blurred the meaning of an Old English term or limited syntactical ambiguity, I discuss the possible meanings and the implications of favouring one sense over the rest for the overall meaning of the poem. This is particularly relevant when discussing the characterisation of the Grendelkin as *anhaga*, or the syntactic vagueness of transition passages in *The Wanderer*.

Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 examine the role of the familiarisation principle as an agent for the cultural recontextualisation of received learning and traditions and their incorporation in the Old English experience of the world through the highly conventional medium of vernacular verse. The influence of the Latin and vernacular traditions (specifically Old Saxon and Old Norse) are considered in their various expressions. These chapters examine a crucial element in the definition of the “Old English elegy”: their formal aspects. The critical tradition has emphasised the uniqueness of the formal arrangement of *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, or *The Rhyming Poem*, arguing that such singularity reinforces the sense of their belonging to a closed group. However, their form is only unique as long as we limit our range of comparison to other Old English texts within the artificially established canon. The same traditional scholarship that has highlighted the singularity of the Exeter Book lyrics has produced a plethora of potential sources and analogues outside the Old English corpus—whether Latin, Norse, or Irish. The failure to pin down any single source contrasts with the prolificacy of suggested analogues for the poems, the reason for which can be found in their high degree of familiarisation of extraneous material, as I discuss in Chapter 7. The Exeter Book lyrics pose a challenge to comparative studies because external influence is too closely interwoven with Old English poetic diction and imagination to be identified as phenomena like interpolation or word-for-word translation. Within the Old English tradition, the evolution of this process can be traced through the

progressive penetration of Latin and Anglo-Latin texts into the Old English corpus, both in prose (Boethius, Orosius), poetry (Lactantius's *De ave phoenice*, Aldhelm's *Engimata*), and even from one into the other (the so-called "Cynewulfian" poems based on Latin prose sources). The familiarisation principle stretches over texts and manuscripts regardless of generic categories, source traditions, or subject matter, and its development can be associated with a proto-nationalistic desire to make Old English a language of art and learning, of equal worth and force to Latin

1 - Saxonism to Anglo-Saxon Literary Studies: Nationalism, Historicism, and the Recovery of the Past

1.1 – Introduction: Institutional and Identity-Defining Anglo-Saxonism

To understand the origins of Anglo-Saxonism and how it still underlies the modern discipline of “Anglo-Saxon/Old English Studies,” it is important to contextualise its inception in religious and political discourses. In England, nationalistic ideologies in the period immediately following the Reformation resulted from the necessity to provide a foundational origin that justified the claim of religious autonomy from Rome. The idea of “origin” here implies an objective, supra-interpretive concept that post-Reformation scholars sought to apprehend in an effort to frame their own historical moment against a larger historiographical narrative. The integration of the present into this narrative was carried out through ideologically biased hermeneutics, which consisted in the creation of an artificial point of departure to explain the course of history into the present as part of an evolutionary interpretation. Through this cycle of revision and reinvention, post-Reformation scholars investigated the past as it became a foreshadowing of the present, and the present a fulfilment of the prophecy of the past.

In this process of rediscovering and reinventing the past, two forms of primarily antiquarian, religious, and historical scholarship may be distinguished in the period between the Reformation and Romantic nationalism: the one was merely institutional; the other, identity-defining. Institutional Anglo-Saxonism pursued revision of the past in order to legitimise contemporary institutions without necessarily relying on ethnographical elements. Identity-defining Anglo-Saxonism, on the other hand, was characterised by a projection of the past into the present whereby scholars saw themselves as direct inheritors of the ethnic traits and character of their ancestors, as well as continuators of their traditions.

Institutional Anglo-Saxonism strove after the contemplation and study of the historically legitimising dimension of the national past to incorporate its most relevant aspects in the hope of sustaining claims of religious, political, or cultural autonomy. Reformist scholars found in the past a reflection *of their preoccupations, not of themselves*. They recognised cultural significance long before they had acquired sufficient knowledge of the language to decipher the artefacts to which such meanings were attached. Identity-defining Anglo-Saxonism, on the contrary, projected an anachronistically reconstructed identity onto the historical past, which legitimised itself through a genetic understanding of history.¹ As a result, cultural artefacts from the remote past also became endowed with identity-defining significance, so that Old English literature was incorporated in the reconstructed narrative of “Anglo-Saxon” descent during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²

By the mid-eighteenth century, the identity-defining discourse of Pan-Germanicism or Teutonism pervaded virtually the totality of scholarly investigation of the past and lay at the core of the contemporary political discourse, either in the form of a defence of its value for the idea of English cultural identity or as an opposition to it.³ In stark contrast to the centrality

¹ Several studies have been written about scholarly interest in early medieval English cultural artefacts from the sixteenth century onwards. For a more comprehensive and exhaustive dealing of the matter, the reader is referred to Carl T. Berkhout and Milton McC Gatch (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: The First Three Centuries* (Kalamazoo: WMUMIP, 1978); Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles (eds.), *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1997); Timothy Graham (ed.), *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Kalamazoo: WMUMIP, 2000); and John D. Niles, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England, 1066-1901: Remembering, Forgetting, Deciphering, and Renewing the Past* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015). For broader treatments of the nationalistic discourse in England ranging from late Tudor to the early twentieth century, see Hugh A. McDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1982); and Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Blackwell, 2008).

² It was as the first monarch of the House of Hanover, George I, ascended to the British throne that political connections with the Continent made scholars’ interests shift towards strengthening the ties between their own ancestral past and other ancient Germanic peoples. For example, Edmund Gibson takes pains to emphasise how fitting it seems for English subjects to be ruled by a Hanoverian monarch, owing to their shared origins in an ancestral past (cf. Appendix I: 1.A, from Gibson’s edition of Camden’s *Britannia*).

³ Daniel Defoe’s 1701 satirical poem “The True-Born Englishman” is a remarkable example of this. Enumerating the various peoples that had inhabited Britain in the past, Defoe concludes: “A true-born Englishman’s a contradiction, | In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.” Jonathan Swift also criticised the idea of a “national genius” running through the ages, thinking it “a great Error to count upon the Genius of a Nation as a standing

of Old English historical, legal, and ecclesiastical documents to the identity-defining discourse, literary texts had been largely neglected up to this point. Two exceptions are Francis Junius's publication of the "Caedmonian" *Genesis* and the appearance of some shorter pieces attached to Old English translations of Latin sources, such as the *Meters of Boethius*, which accompanied the prose translation of the *Consolatio*.⁴ The verse *Meters*, however, were not published for their own sake as pieces of early medieval vernacular verse, but as part of the *Consolatio* itself. The sole example of secular Old English verse that received some attention was *The Battle of Maldon*, the original of which was lost in the Cotton fire. The text was published together with Thomas Hearne's edition of John of Glastonbury's fourteenth-century *Chronica sive Antiquitates Glastoniensis Ecclesie* (1726), for its intrinsic value as a historical document related to a specific event rather than for its interest as a work of literature.⁵

As a further witness to the general neglect of Old English poetry in the wake of Romanticism, the first editor, translator, and publisher of the Old English *Orosius*, Daines Barrington, commented on the scant attention that literary texts received at the time: "There are so few who concern themselves about Anglo-Saxon literature that I have printed the work chiefly for my own amusement, and that of a few antiquarian friends."⁶ Barrington's remark evidenced the lack of critical and aesthetic interest in Old English poetry as works of literature rather than objects of antiquarian curiosity. Nonetheless, he was writing at a time when a series of developments in the continent, encompassing the areas of ancient language studies, history, philosophy, and aesthetics, largely contemporaneous, contributed to creating a propitious atmosphere for the rediscovery and

Argument in all Ages; since there is hardly a Spot of Ground in *Europe*, where the Inhabitants have not frequently and entirely changed their Temper and Genius." Cf. Swift's *Discourse of the contests and dissensions between the nobles and the commons in Athens and Rome, with the consequences they had upon both those states* (London, 1701), 50.

⁴ On Junius's *Caedmonis monachi: Paraphrasis poetica Genesis*, published in 1655, see Niles, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, 116-20. For the publication of the *Meters* by Christopher Rawlinson in 1698, see *ibid.*, 128-31.

⁵ *Johannis Confratris et Monachi Glastoniensis Chronica sive Historia de Rebus Glastoniensibus, e Codice MS Membraneo antiquo Descripsit* (Oxford: Theatro Sheldoniano, 1726).

⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Version from the Historian Orosius*. (London, 1773), preface.

reevaluation of Old English literature. It is in the second half of the eighteenth century that cultural past and national identity become most closely interwoven, and it is only through an examination of these phenomena that we can gain a sufficiently rich insight into the cultural milieu into which the first anthologies of Old English verse were produced.⁷

1.2 – The Cultural Contexts of Early “Anglo-Saxon”

Literary Studies

The shift in scholarly interests from a political and historical discourse to linguistic and literary studies can only be understood as part of a series of cultural and ideological movements taking place across Europe. At the same time, the continuity of the identity-defining Teutonic movement in England, which remained influential and consistent through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, should not be ignored, as it found renewed momentum in trends coming from the continent. These might largely be classified into three aspects: the aesthetic, the literary, and the linguistic-historicist; however, each of them largely bears on the others, so that this division is provided solely for the sake of clarity of exposition.

1.2.1 – The Aesthetic Context: *Romantic, Sentimental, and Elegiac*

The aesthetic reception of Old English poetry clearly reflects the influence of German Romantics, especially Friedrich Schlegel’s application of the term *romantische* or *Roman* to postclassical literature, and Friedrich Schiller’s distinction between *naïve* and *sentimentalische* poetry and the modes of poetic expression associated with either. While the meaning and application of these terms will receive due attention below, Schlegel’s use of the term *romantische* for works from a wide range of periods—from Boccaccio to his own contemporary Goethe—already implied the

⁷ As mentioned in the Introduction to the present study, language studies have been left out of this survey for reasons of extension and for their minor relevance for the nationalist discourse. An overview of the discipline in the period 1600-1800 can be found in Niles, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, Chapters 4, ‘The Founding of a Discipline, 1600-1700’ and 5, ‘A Period of Consolidation, 1700-1800.’

application of universal aesthetic principles for the interpretation of individual texts, which are the product of non-universal cultural and historical backgrounds.

What Schlegel meant by *Roman* is difficult to ascertain. It seems likely that he followed Herder in the application of the term to all postclassical poetry, from medieval romance to Dante, Shakespeare, and eighteenth-century novel, which he then classified into *fantastisch* and *sentimental*. The latter was probably a borrowing from Schiller, as the inclusion of the *idyll* and *elegy* modes demonstrates. However, *Roman* also included prose, divided into *philosophisch*, *psychologisch*, and *mimisch*, thereby comprehending virtually every postclassical literary form and genre.⁸ In his notebooks, Schlegel stated that “Roman kann episch, lyrisch, dramatische sein,”⁹ and in the *Athenäumfragmente* (1798) and *Gespräche über die Poesie* (1800), he further elaborated on his *Theorie des Romans*. In them, *Roman* and *romantische* are largely equivalent, which resulted in the conflation of the two senses of *romantic*. On the one hand, it kept its association with the *Roman*, and thus referred to all postclassical (and some classical) poetry; hence, *romantische* implied universality, totality, and comprehensiveness;¹⁰ on the other, Schlegel equated *sentimental* and *romantische* as a spiritual feeling of love and its universal expression respectively. Consequently, the principles of contemporary aesthetics were retroactively applied to postclassical poetry—including medieval verse—in the joint, vague meaning of *romantische*.¹¹ Much of Schlegel’s use of the term evidenced the influence Schiller’s *Über naïve un sentimentalische Dichtung*, particularly when it comes to the application of the term *sentimentalische*, which Schlegel then incorporated into *romantische*.¹² This

⁸ Cf. Hans Eichner, ‘Friedrich Schlegel’s Theory of Romantic Poetry,’ *PMLA* 71:5 (1956), 1018-41, esp. 1019-24.

⁹ “The *Roman* can be epic, lyric, [or] dramatic.” *Fragmente zur Poesie und Litteratur II und Ideen zu Gedichten* (1798-1801), entry no. 1755. Cited in Eichner, 1026.

¹⁰ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.1.A, from the *Athenäumfragmente* (1798)

¹¹ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.1.B, from *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800).

¹² For a more detailed discussion on the influence of Schiller in Schlegel and other early Romantics, see Arthur A. Lovejoy, ‘Schiller and the Genesis of Romanticism,’ *MLN* 35 (1920) 1-10 and 136-46; Hans Eichner, ‘The Supposed Influence of Schiller’s *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* on F. Schlegel’s *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*,’ *The German Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 30:4 (1955), 260-64; and

incorporation reflected the mutual influence that Schlegel and Schiller had on each other's theories of poetics, particularly when it comes to Schlegel's borrowing of *sentimentalische* and its sub-categories, *idyll* and *elegy*. However, Schlegel did not elaborate on the characteristics of either mode, for which reason we must turn to Schiller in order to understand the features and expectations associated with these generic classifications.

It is precisely Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795) that is of the utmost importance when it comes to understanding how the term "elegy" shifted in meaning and application, so that it no longer described a funeral dirge or eulogy and became instead almost correlative with the Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling." In this treatise, Schiller established, in the first place, the position of poetic genius according to their relationship with Nature, and so determined that only the *naive* type (one who is in harmony with nature, either because uncorrupted by society or through childlike qualities that set them apart from it) was the true poetic genius. All other poets he classified as *sentimental*, in that they seek to retrieve such harmony by means of idealised evocation.¹³ In representing nature, sentimental poets may do so with joy, as an actuality, or with sorrow, as a lost object of longing. To these two forms Schiller ascribed the poetic expressions of *idyll* and *elegy*, respectively; however, he warned against the derivation of rigid poetic genres from this division, as they merely referred to the *mode of perception* with which a sentimental poet might approach his subject.¹⁴ Both Schlegel's and Schiller's ideas reached England through the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who made ample use of Schlegel's lectures on *Geschichte der alten und neueren Literatur* (1815), and whose own notion of poetry and poetic genius were greatly influenced by his German contemporaries.

However, it is difficult to elucidate to what degree Coleridge would have been in direct contact with Schiller's theories of aesthetics.

Leonard P. Wessell, Jr., 'Schiller and the Genesis of German Romanticism,' *Studies in Romanticism* 10:3 (1971), 176-98.

¹³ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.1.C, section 1.

¹⁴ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.1.C, section 2.

Coleridge's knowledge of Schiller's prose and drama is traceable in his own notes, and recent scholarship has emphasised that Schiller's influence might be much greater than previously thought.¹⁵ Several of Coleridge's letters and notebooks evidence that he knew (and probably owned a copy) of the volume of Schiller's prose works in which *Über naive un sentimentalische Dichtung* was included, and that he often reverted to Schiller when he felt he was relying too much on Schlegel during his *Lectures on Literature* (1808-19).¹⁶ Moreover, their respective definitions of elegy provides a further example of the indebtedness of Coleridge to Schiller's essay.

For Schiller, the *sentimental* poet (the opposite of the *naive* ideal of Homer) “*reflektier über den Eindruck, den die Gegenstände auf ihn machen, und nur auf jene Reflexion ist die Rührung gegründet, in die er selbst versetzt wird und uns versetzt.*”¹⁷ The elegiac poet “*sucht die Natur, aber in ihrer Schönheit...in ihrer Übereinstimmung mit Ideen,*” where “*Freuden, über das aus der Welt verschwundene goldene Alter, über das entflohene Glück der Jugend, der Liebe usw..*” become “*der Inhalt der dichterischen Klage.*” In elegy, then, “*entweder ist die Natur und das Ideal ein Gegenstand der Trauer, wenn jene als verloren, dieses als unerreicht dargestellt wird.*”¹⁸ For Coleridge, elegy was

the form of poetry natural to the reflective mind. It *may* treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject *for itself*; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet himself. As he will feel regret for the past of desire for the future, so sorrow and love become the principal themes of elegy. Elegy presents every thing as lost and gone, or absent and future. The elegy is

¹⁵ The topic is addressed in detail in Michael J. Kooy, *Coleridge, Schiller, and Aesthetic Education* (NY: Palgrave, 2002). Kooy notes the scant scholarship on the influence of Schiller on Coleridge despite the many links between the two (cf. 1-6). See Chapter 1, ‘Schiller and the Young Coleridge.’

¹⁶ Cf. Kooy, *Coleridge, Schiller, and Aesthetic Education*, 58-59, 61-65.

¹⁷ “*Reflects upon the impression that objects make upon him, and only that reflection is the emotion grounded which he himself experiences and which he excites in us.*” Emphasis added.

¹⁸ The elegiac poet “*seeks nature, but in her beauty...in her correspondence with ideas,*” where “*Sadness at lost joys, at the golden age now disappeared from the world, at the lost happiness of youth, love, and so forth*” become “*the content of poetic lamentation.*” In elegy, then, “*either nature and the ideal are an object of sadness if the first is treated as lost and the second as unattained.*” Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.1.C, section 2 for full passage.

the exact opposite of Homeric epic, in which all is purely external and objective, and the poet is a mere voice.¹⁹

The similarities between the two definitions are too striking to be the result of mere coincidence: elegy is the product of reflective contemplation of a lost or unattainable ideal, expressed in purely subjective terms, and in the form of lamentation; the direct counterpart of ancient epic. This is the “union of deep feeling with profound thought” that Coleridge applied to his definition of poetry, and which is also elaborated upon in Wordsworth’s *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1800): a manifesto that Coleridge regarded as “half a child of my own Brain.”²⁰ Even if he distanced himself from Wordsworth’s enunciations about the use of prosaic language and his definition of Imagination, his acceptance of the relationship between the poet and nature, and the character of poetic genius (both of which arguably indebted to Schiller) remained unaltered.²¹

In addition to the comprehensiveness of “elegy” as understood by Schiller and adopted by Schlegel and Coleridge, the popularity of the form in England as a result of Gray’s sensationally successful *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), and the vagueness of the genre as dealing with things private and sentimental in a subjective, sometimes abstract way, gave rise to a number of generic permutations and hybridisations. Thus, for example, the coinage “epic elegy” appeared in reference to Anna Seward’s relatively unknown series of memorial poems, while Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) were met with widespread acceptance, reaching the ninth edition by 1800.²² John Keats’ *Odes* (1819), while not elegies in the strict sense, also participated in the momentous interest in introspectiveness and subjective contemplation of transience. Nonetheless, it is the nineteenth century that most notably popularises and dignifies elegy, both as a poem of

¹⁹ *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Henry N. Coleridge, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1835), II, 268.

²⁰ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 2000 rpt.), II, 831: 449, To Robert Southey (July 18, 1802).

²¹ For the possible influence of Schiller on the *Preface*, see Kooy, *Coleridge, Schiller, and Aesthetic Education*, 36-37.

²² The term “epic elegy” is first employed by Erasmus Darwin in 1798; cf. Stuart Curran, ‘Romantic Elegiac Hybridity,’ in Karen Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*. (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 238-50, at 239.

mourning and lament and as the expression of individualised emotions, as will be discussed later.

Schiller's definition of poetic genius presented an individual showing a particular set of features, while his and Schlegel's classifications of poetry highlighted its distinctively personal and introspective character. Both traits were, in turn, taken up by Coleridge and introduced to the English aesthetic and literary discourse. It would seem, then, that Romantic ideas of authorship focus on the poet's identity and his own perception of the world. However, the idea of a *Universalpoesie* took shape in a different form: that of the poet as the voice of the nation, where the latter is seen as an individual entity consisting of the unified consciousness of its parts. The poet became, then, an inheritor to the oldest traditions of *romantischepoesie*, those of bards and minstrels. The increasing individualisation of the author as a creative force acting out of personal feeling coexisted with the representation of poets as the voices of history and myth. In this way, the quest for national identity through the retrieval of the oldest expressions of national language promoted by Herder (as will be discussed below) found in Romantic ideas of the universality and atemporality of poetry an ideological ally. Interest in the national past was no longer restricted to the political and historical spheres: it became, through the retroactive application of newly developed aesthetic principles, the domain of *romantic* poetry as established by Schlegel, including medieval verse.

1.2.2 – The Literary Context: Macpherson, Percy, and the Romantic Ideal

Although interest in the past had been running for over a century in post-Reformation Europe and particularly in England, ancient vernacular literature had not yet been an object of study for itself. The reason for this might be that literary works, unlike historical, legal, or ecclesiastical writings, were of little use in the legitimising endeavours of early scholars. Only when antiquarian interests shifted towards learning the vernacular did some literary texts start to surface in early editions, and these only as objects of curiosity rather than as literary artefacts *per se*. The first notable

exception to this rule would not come until the mid-seventeenth century, when Paul Henri Mallet, appointed professor of *belles lettres* at Copenhagen, published *Monuments de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves* (1756). In it, Mallet not only declares that the “Celtic Religion” is the basis of the modern French national character, but also argues for a pan-Celtic common heritage based on a shared ancestral past.²³ Mallet’s argument thus comes close to the Teutonic trend upheld by his German and English contemporaries.

This cultural appropriation of the ancestral past as a token of inherited national identity would become particularly prominent in the second half of the eighteenth century, starting with James Macpherson’s publication of the *Ossian Poems* in 1760-65, which he allegedly collected from original Gaelic material handed down by word-of-mouth to his day.²⁴ Even as most critics agree that Macpherson’s work is largely the product of forgery and the projection of an imagined past, the indelible impression it left on the development of modern literature and aesthetics is still widely recognised.²⁵ The representation of the national past in the form of ancient vernacular epic, celebratory of the remote past and lamenting its loss at the same time, was too much in accord with the developing aesthetic and historicist trends of the time to pass unnoticed: within the first fifty years of its publication, the *Works of Ossian* were translated into thirteen different languages, ranging from French (1760) to Czech (1817). By the time the first anthologies of Old English poetry were being produced in the first half of the nineteenth century, *Ossian* was still an influential reference for the retrieval of a re-imagined past, and its reception potentially influenced that

²³ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.2.A.

²⁴ However, Macpherson’s work had not been the first to draw attention to the literary products of the past. A list of precursors is provided in Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy’s “Reliques”* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 63.

²⁵ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.2.C. Several recent works on the reception of *Ossian* have been published. See esp. Howard Gaskill, *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2004); Dafydd Moore, *Ossian and Ossianism* (London: Routledge, 2004), which provides a detailed timeline of the influence of *Ossian*; and Allan and Linda Burnett (eds.), *Blind Ossian’s Fingal: Fragments and Controversy* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011). On the topic of the authenticity of Macpherson’s materials, see Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossianic Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).

of most ancient and early medieval verse published in the aftermath of its success.

As evidence of the influence of *Ossian*, major contemporary literary and philosophical figures expressed their interest and admiration for it: Schiller, Schlegel, Herder, and Wordsworth among others frequently mentioned it in different contexts, often as models of early expressions of national character, or as examples of ancestral poetic genius. Schiller addressed *Ossian* in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, labelling it *sentimental* and *elegiac*;²⁶ while Schlegel, including it as *romantische Poesie*, discussed the virtues of *Ossian* at length in relation to Northern poetry of the early middle ages, and compared it to early Norse material.²⁷ Herder considered *Ossian* one of “die drei größten epischen Dichter in aller Welt,” together with Homer and Milton,²⁸ and often referred to the poems as examples of the “treasures” of national language that look back to the origin of the race.²⁹ The influence of *Ossian* inspired a generation of scholars and antiquarians that sought to imitate and partake of Macpherson’s success, and to bring to the public eye the remnants of ancient and popular verse that looked back to the cultural roots of national identity.

Conceived largely as a response to Macpherson’s success, Thomas Percy produced a three-volume compilation of traditional balladry entitled *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Before the *Reliques*, Percy had published a translation of some of Mallet’s material in *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763), thereby introducing the ancient Norse verse to the English literary scene. In addition to his, the publication of the *Reliques* relocated

²⁶ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.1.C, section 3. Ironically, Schiller’s association of *Ossian* with the sentimental or “modern” type of poet betrays the true provenance of the work. Schiller also quotes *Ossian* in his *Elegie: Auf den Tod eines Jünglings* (1784). For a more thorough analysis on the influence of *Ossian* on Schiller, see Wolf G. Schmidt, “‘Menschlichschön’ and ‘kolossalisch:’ The Discursive Function of *Ossian* in Schiller’s Poetry and Aesthetics,” in Gaskill, *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, 176-97. Goethe also interpolated long passages from *Ossian* in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774).

²⁷ E. J. Millington (trans.), *The Aesthetic and Miscellaneous Works of Frederick von Schlegel* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1860), 248-58, with numerous references in subsequent discussion of the *Edda*.

²⁸ “The three greatest epic poets in the world;” *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele* (Riga: Johan Friedrich Hartknoch, 1778), 31.

²⁹ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.D., from *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772).

the enthusiasm for literature from the remote past into an exclusively English context, and propitiated the reception of the earliest anthologies of Old English verse, appearing some seventy years later, within an environment dominated by the close associations of the Ossianic poems with the quest for the origins of national identity. It is precisely on the subject of ultimate cultural provenance that Percy's *Reliques* attempted to rival with Macpherson. Counterarguing the case for Gaelic/Celtic origins, Percy provided literary evidence of Germanic/Gothic descent in making available the oldest compositions of the *minstrels* (Norse ties thus implied) that travelled from the continent to Britain in the early days of Germanic settlement, and he justified their antiquity on the grounds of oral tradition, as Macpherson did before him.³⁰

However, Percy was by no means the sole follower of the *Ossian* trend in Britain. An urge to publish traditional or ancestral poetry as preserved by the people swept Britain, resulting in works of similar nature: Evan Evans's *Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh* (1764), John Clark's *Works of the Caledonian Bards* (1778), Thomas F. Hill's *Antient Erse Poems* (1784), Edward Jones's *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* (1784), Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), and Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1805) being only some of them. Balladry, once looked down on as a form of popular song associated with the illiterate and uncultured, gained pedigree as literary status as it came to be associated with preservation of tradition, identity, and, in effect, national character.³¹ It is interesting to consider how fragments from the *Works of Ossian*, as well as some of these compilations,

³⁰ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.2.D. For further discussion on Percy's reaction to Macpherson's *Ossian*, see Groom, *The Making of Percy's "Reliques,"* chapter 3.

³¹ An illustrating example of the restitution of popular ballad as a dignified literary form is John Aikin, *Essays on Song-Writing, with a Collection of English Songs as are most Eminent for Poetical Merit* (1772); a counterargument with some concessions is offered by Vicesimus Knox, 'On the Prevailing Taste for the Old English Poets' (1782). Excerpts from both are included in Appendix I: 1.2.2.E and F., together with the later entry on 'Ballad Poetry' by Francis J. Child in *Johnson's Universal Cyclopædia* (1900), cf. Appendix I: 1.2.2.G. For a more detailed discussion on the topic, see Groom, *The Making of Percy's "Reliques,"* 19-30, and David Atkinson, 'The Ballad Revival and National Literature: Textual Authority and the Invention of Tradition,' in David Hopkin (ed.), *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe during the Long Nineteenth Century*, National Cultivation of Europe 4 (Brill, 2012), 22-46.

contain some poems under the headings of “elegy” and “lament,” whether of a funeral or an amatory kind.³² In addition to his, Thomas Gray’s verse adaptations “The Bard,” “The Waking of Angantyr,” “The Descent of Odin,” and “The Fatal Sisters” (1698) contributed to the general interest in mythological themes and ancient poetry. The reception of these pieces would undoubtedly influence the later reception of Old English poems, all the more so considering that contemporary verse translations rendered them in ballad form, which displayed a mode and language similar to Gray’s poems.

The renewed interest for all things medieval, initiated by Macpherson and Percy, and brought in line with modern literary expression by Gray, would endure and pervade the literary and artistic scene during the nineteenth century, when nostalgia for pre-industrial simplicity, cultural association with the historical past, and the continuity of Romantic aesthetics would coalesce in a grand-scale revivalist movement. This aesthetic trend is supported by the development of historicist philosophies, which saw the past as a narrative of humanity’s progress in a sequence of rise and decline of succeeding civilisations. In the eyes of the German philosopher J. G. von Herder, the culmen of such evolution is not the modern age of rationality and philosophy, but the noble ideals embodied in the rise of the Germanic tribes following the fall of the Roman Empire. Accordingly, Herder, inspired by Macpherson’s *Ossian* and by the nascent discipline of philology, calls to the retrieval of national history and identity through its most distinctive agent: language in its oldest and purest poetic expressions.

1.2.3 – The Philological-Philosophical Context: Historicism and the *Volksgeist*

Schlegel’s view of poetry as *progressive* reflects on a general eighteenth-century tendency to interpret history as a long series of events building up to the progress of humanity. As such, every nation’s history is

³² Note especially the fragments from the *Poems of Ossian* reproduced in Appendix I: 1.2.2.B; compare to *The Wanderer*, the Lay of the Last Survivor, *The Wife’s Lament*, or *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

the narrative of its own development, from its demarcation from the rest of communities to its highest cultural, political, and philosophical achievements. Herder stands as a pivotal figure in the establishment of *historicism*, or the hermeneutic approach to history, as a major philosophical trend, which influenced not only later theories on the evolution of history and progress, such as Hegel's, but also the main literary figures of his time, Schlegel and Goethe among them.³³ The development and spread of a Herderian concept of history as a sustained narrative of events, where language, literature, and culture run parallel to the idea of national character, are fundamental for our understanding of how early medieval verse, including Old English poetry, was assimilated into the myth-making discourse of racial and national origins.

According to Herder, only through retrieval of the *Volkgeist*, the "spirit of the people," or "spirit of the nation," contained in the oldest expressions of the *national language*, could Germany hope to occupy its former place as the leading force of Europe.³⁴ For Herder, the songs of

³³ Herder is in turned influenced by Gianbattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, considered as the first philological treatise on the origin and development of languages. Amongst other theories, Vico's *Principi di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla Comune Natura della Nazioni* (1744) proposes that the languages of ancient nations (and of modern nations that preserve their mother tongue relatively unaltered) are witnesses to their history; that the *mythological age* of nations comprises their historical roots in abstract, metaphorical language; and that the *heroic age* of nations represents the evolution this symbolic language to fully developed poetic expression. Hence, heroic verse is by definition the oldest, developed in the infancy of nations by men whose main traits are childlike innocence, imagination, and imitative force. Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.A for a series of excerpts illustrating Vico's argument. Although there is no evidence that Herder was directly in contact with Vico's work, he became acquainted with it through the critical apparatus of Michael Denis's *Die Gedichte Ossians* (1768), translated from Melchiorre Cesarotti's Italian edition, which relied heavily on Vico's ideas about language, poetry, and history. See Michael Denis, *Die Gedichte Ossians*. (Vienna: J. Thomas Edlen, 1768); Melchiorre Cesarotti, *Poesie di Ossian figlio di Fingal, antico poeta Celtico* (Padua: Giuseppe Comino, 1763). The indebtedness of Denis on Cesarotti, and the resulting influence of Vico on Herder's ideas has been long noted. See Robert T. Clark, Jr., 'Herder, Cesarotti and Vico,' *SP* 44:4 (1947), 645-71; and William A. Wilson, 'Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism,' *Journal of Popular Culture* 6:4 (1973), 819-35. Like Vico, Herder links language, culture, and poetry as inherent elements of the development of each nation, and asserts that history progresses towards an improvement of mankind, displaying "eine neue [Sprache] in jeder neuen Welt, Nationalsprache in jeder Nation" ("A new language in every new world; a national language in every nation," *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, 192; cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.B and F, section 1). Such language reached its highest expression in poetry; and the purer and most ancient form of poetry was none other than epic, wherein the origins of the nation's history are recorded, as in a genealogical tree.

³⁴ Herder discusses the terms *Volks* and *Volkslied* at length in *Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Litteratur* (1767), *Über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* (1771), and *Von der*

heroes are metonymical celebrations of the national past, for in the individual figures the whole progress of one people is portrayed in its development towards a perfection that is gradual, generational, and personal as well as collective.³⁵ In *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774), after enumerating the improvements brought about by “the north” after the collapse of the Roman Empire, Herder launched the rhetorical question: “ist unrecht, wenn in diesen Jahrhunderten noch immer Krone des alten Stamms erschiene?”³⁶ Fascinated by the findings of Macpherson and the publication of Percy’s *Reliques*, Herder produced his own equivalent of German material, which he entitled *Alter Volkslieder nebst untermischten anderen Stücken* (1775-79), later *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1807). Insistently, Herder exhorted German writers and antiquarians to search for the ancient voice of the nation, and to recover the true national language; a call that would inspire the younger poets of the *Sturm und Drang* generation, and particularly Schlegel.³⁷ However, it would be the Grimms’ contribution that would satisfy the need for a well-documented Germanic past in the form of philological studies and the publication of ancient Germanic texts and folklore.

Jacob Grimm’s extensive work can be divided into the legal, the linguistic, and the literary. In all three, he perpetuated the historicist notion that the past should be studied not only for its own value but also in relation to how it can help understand the present. It is, in fact, in his legal treatises *Poesie im Recht* (1816) and *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer* (1828) that he develops the notion of *Germanistik* (the study of “Germanity,” its laws, language, literature, and institutions) as opposed to *Romanisten*, which he later applied to his philological work. Grimm also produced a Grammar, a History, and a Dictionary of German (1819; 1848; 1854, respectively), all of which betray a markedly historicist and nationalist bias in determining

Aehnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutsche Dichtkunst (1777). Passages from these are included in Appendix I: 1.2.3.B and C.

³⁵ Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.B. and E.

³⁶ “Is it wrong if the crown of the old tribal stem should still appear in these centuries?” Cf. Appendix I: 2.3.E for full passage.

³⁷ For the relationship between original language and national identity as exemplified by Ossian, cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.D. Herder vindicates the spirit of the German nation and calls to its retrieval on several occasions; cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.C and F, sections 1 and 2.

the natural history of early Teutonic tribes and their evolution through their native mother tongue, leading up to reconstructed etymologies in modern German.³⁸

The work of Herder, Grimm, and other German philosophers, poets, and philologists reached Britain through various channels. Wordsworth and Coleridge are obvious examples, both of them having been directly influenced by their stay in Germany in 1798 and, particularly in the case of Coleridge, making abundant allusion to their acquaintance with German thought and aesthetics.³⁹ The work of notable British Germanophiles such as Henry Mackenzie, who first introduced Schiller's drama to the public in England, or William Taylor of Norwich's *Historical Survey of German Poetry* (1828-30) and several contributions to the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Athenaeum*, or the *Monthly Review* praising German Romantic poetry and offering translations thereof, should also be taken into account.⁴⁰ In the field of "Anglo-Saxon Studies," the principles of Germanic philology were introduced in Britain by Benjamin Thorpe and John Mitchell Kemble, both of whom studied under Jacob Grimm and, in the case of Kemble, maintained a close friendship with him. The fact that a large number of editions, anthologies, and critical studies of Old English poetry were produced by German scholars (for Old English was in the first place seen as

³⁸ In collaboration with his brother Wilhelm, they produced their famous *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812-15), which, in effect, mirrors the gathering of folklore balladry and legend carried out in Britain by Percy and his contemporaries; the *Elder Edda* (*Die Lieder der alten Edda*, 1815); and the multivolume *Aldeutsche Wälder* (1813-16), *Deutsche Sagen* (1816-18) and *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835). Individually, Wilhelm translated *Altdänische Heldenlieder, Balladen un Märchen* (1811) and published *Die deutsche Heldensage* (1829); whereas Jacob published editions of the *Hildebrandlied* (*Das Lied von Hildebrand un des Weissenbrunner Gebet*, 1812), Tacitus's *Germania* (1835) and *Andreas und Elene* (1840). It is in the 1844 *Preface to Deutsche Mythologie* that J. Grimm most explicitly aligns himself with Herder's historicism in extolling the literary remnants of his native land and encouraging future generations to follow up on these tracks. Cf. Appendix I: 1.2.3.G.

³⁹ In addition to Kooy, see the seminal works and articles by Anna A. Helmholtz, *The Indebtedness of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to August Wilhelm von Schlegel* (NY: Haskell House, 1907); Max J. Herzberg, 'William Wordsworth and German Literature,' *PMLA* 40:2 (1925), 302-45; and more recently Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007); Philipp Hunnekuhl, *Imagination and Growth: Coleridge and Wordsworth in Germany* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2007); and Elinor Shaffer, 'Coleridge's Dialogues with German Thought,' in Frederick Burwick (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 555-71.

⁴⁰ For the reception of early Romantic German poetry, and Schiller in particular, see Frederic Ewen, *The Prestige of Schiller in England*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature (NY: Columbia University Press, 1932).

a dialect of the Teutonic family of languages) only adds to the importance of the legacy of post-Romantic German thought and aesthetics in Anglo-Saxon Studies.⁴¹

More importantly, the poetics of nostalgia and sentimental introspection were deeply rooted in English culture by nineteenth century, when major poetic and artistic figures such as Tennyson, Scott, or Rossetti prolifically celebrated an idealised past, if only from the perspective of contemporary Romantic sensibilities. In addition to this, the growth of the British empire, the independence of the American colonies, and the threat of Oriental influence, together with the millenary celebrations of King Alfred's birth and death, brought about a change in political discourse. Progressively, emphasis drifted away from continental supra-nationalist Teutonism to focus on the value of "Anglo-Saxon" as a comprehensive ethnocentric term that grouped together the disseminated British and anyone whose genealogy could be traced back to the early British settlers, but were scattered across the breadth of the Empire. Hence, in nineteenth-century England, nationalism, sentimentalism, nostalgia, and a renewed sense of cultural identity come together in the transition from political Anglo-Saxonism to "Anglo-Saxon" literary studies.

1.3 – English Nationalism and the Reimagining of the Past

From the point of view of the reception of early anthologies and editions of Old English verse, the first of which was published in 1826, three cultural aspects are worth noting in terms of their influence and ubiquity in England throughout the nineteenth century: the "elegiac trend" in contemporary poetics; the emergence of the term "Anglo-Saxon" as a preferred ethnocentric concept; and the identity-defining value of medieval revivalism. Each of these affected the critical reception of Old English poetry in a different manner. In the first and third cases, the preference for

⁴¹ Cf. Marvin C. Dilkey and Heinrich Schneider, 'John Mitchel Kemble and the Brothers Grimm,' *JEGP* 40:4 (1941), 461-73. Extended commentary on the works of Grimm, Kemble, and some contemporaries can be found in Niles, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, Chapter 6, 'The Romantics and the Discovery of Old English Verse,' which deals with some material covered in the next chapter of the present study, and Chapter 7, 'The Triumph of Philology.'

the aesthetics of introspective nostalgia and meditative evocation, often projected onto the cultural products of the past in revisionary form, provided a favourable atmosphere for the assimilation of some Old English poems (most notably the Exeter Book lyrics) into the contemporary literary discourse. This implementation propitiated a series of comparisons made by critics between the works of Old English poets (as most Old English verse was thought to be the work of either Cædmon or Cynewulf) and that of contemporary figures such as Gray or Tennyson; an anachronistic cultural bridge that would leave a deep imprint in “Anglo-Saxon Studies,” extending well into the twentieth century. Ultimately, the “elegiac trend” of the nineteenth century represents the continuity of Romantic poetics, as it emphasises the value of the individual voice of the poet and the principles of *sentimental* poetry. Schlegel’s pronouncement that “in einem gewissen Sinn ist oder soll alle Poesie romantisch seyn,”⁴² bearing the implications of supra-generic scope and sentimental mode of expression, contributes to the identification of elegy (and, to a lesser extent, pastoral and ode, which often merge with elegy) as the most suitable vehicle for “the union of deep thought with profound feeling,” and thus the dominating poetic form.

The great poets of the age elaborated on the themes of death, transience, and the passing age.⁴³ The cultural milieu of the Victorian period, even as it celebrates progress and growth, is infused with an ever-present sense of death and decay, symbolically impersonated in the figure of an ever-mourning Queen, and turned monumental by Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850), which the monarch highly praised, and which granted him the distinction of poet laureate, left vacant at Wordsworth’s death. The thematic breadth of scope of Tennyson’s “elegiac” composition, including the treatment of nature, progress and science, mortality, faith, or transience, makes its generic classification somewhat elusive, and witnesses to the vagueness of elegy as a genre by the time the first Old English verse anthologies were being produced, and the poems therein contained ascribed

⁴² “In a certain sense, all poetry is or should be Romantic,” *Athenäumfragmente*, in J. Minor (ed.), *Friedrich Schlegel, 1794-1802: Seine proseischen Jugendschriften*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Franz Leo & Comp., 1882), vol. 2: ‘Zur deutschen Literatur und Phiosophie,’ 222.

⁴³ Cf. Erik Gray, ‘Victoria Dressed in Black: Poetry in an Elegiac Age,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 272-88.

with generic affiliations. A further contribution to the generic ambiguity of both modern elegy and the retroactive application of the term to medieval literature, the sentimental (and, in Schiller's own classification, *elegiac*) tone of the *Poems of Ossian* and traditional balladry still lingered in popular imagination as characteristic of ancient poetry; a misconception reinforced by contemporary revivalist works such as Tennyson's historical drama *Harold* (1876).

When it comes to the second cultural agent previously mentioned, the shift from continental Teutonism to a more restricted cultural identity reshaped the nationalist discourse, which focused on reconciling its unifying spirit with the English colonial diaspora, rather than with establishing a brotherhood with the continental Germanic past. This does not mean that the Teutonist discourse disappeared altogether; on the contrary, its presence remains influential throughout the century, particularly in the literary and antiquarian fields, where cultural connections are endowed with historical and identity-defining meaning beyond the establishment of political alliances that were, in the wake of German nationalism, less desirable than the reaffirmation of British imperial identity. Where the term "Saxon" had served to defend the cultural unity of England against the influence of foreign monarchs, it now proved insufficient considering that the English abroad needed to feel a connection with the nation, and that "Saxonism" was too restrictive a notion. From this need, the compound "Anglo-Saxon" arose as the most convenient alternative, as it encompassed both the traditional Saxon heritage with a wider understanding of "Englishness" as a cultural marker.

1.3.1 – Teutonism and/or Anglo-Saxonism: Shifting Perspectives

The nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century did not always show the specificity of aim of previous ages. For one thing, it no longer sought to legitimise religious independence, or to champion a reconstructed sense of national identity founded on contemporary political institutions. Moreover, its propositions were not unanimous: no single sense of national identity was upheld against the imposition of non-native customs, laws, or rule. At the beginning of the century, continental Teutonism was the

dominant trend, though no longer generally accepted, and progressively losing ground to the idea of “Anglo-Saxon” as a preferred term. It is precisely the increasing momentum of the term “Anglo-Saxon” as a marker of racial identity that influenced the reception of Old English literature most notably. In the aftermath of Ossianic reimaginings of the past, which heavily relied on myths of national and racial origins, and the spread of medieval revivalism popularised by Gray’s poetry and continued by Tennyson, the invention of the “Old English elegy” in the nineteenth century cannot be separated from the rise of Romantic nationalist ideologies and the retroactive projection of modern literary sensibilities.

In the mid-1800s, “Anglo-Saxon” was used mainly as an anthropological term, “strictly limited to a combination of the Saxon and Anglian types;”⁴⁴ however, the creation of the *Anglo-Saxon Magazine* (1849) confirmed the existence of an emerging second meaning: that of a general character of the English race both in Britain and abroad.⁴⁵ Its main editor, the poet Martin F. Tupper, expressed the journal’s purpose “to harmonise the many members of the Anglo-Saxon race into the unity of the Faith, and Hope, and Love, even as they are now united in the unity of one noble Language.”⁴⁶ The celebratory issue showed an “Anglo-Saxon Map” of the world, accompanied by an explanation that “the Pride of an Anglo-Saxon, whose country is circumscribed by no arbitrary boundaries...is the pride of the eagle that range from North Pole to the South.”⁴⁷

The term “Anglo-Saxon” and its application to cultural products from the early medieval period also gained popularity by the 1850s, coinciding with the celebration of King Alfred’s birth, which triggered a wave of praise for the rule of Queen Victoria as a time of unity comparable only to that of the “Anglo-Saxons.” By the end of the century, “Anglo-Saxon” was used to refer to both the inhabitants of Britain in the early medieval period as ancestors of the modern English race, and to the

⁴⁴ Daniel Mackintosh, ‘Comparative Anthropology of England and Wales,’ *Anthropological Review* 4:12 (1866), 1-21, at 17.

⁴⁵ For a survey of previous uses, see Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 177-83.

⁴⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Magazine* 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

territories pertaining to the British Empire and English colonial presence. The term was also employed as a counterpart to the “Celtic” trend, particularly during the times of greater hostility towards Ireland and the Irish.⁴⁸ Hence, the two uses of “Anglo-Saxon” conflated and became correlative with nationalist agendas promoting an ethnocentric myth of racial descent and national origins based on the parallelism between the so-called Migration Period and English colonial diaspora. In the *History of Normandy and of England* (1851), Francis Palgrave echoes this idea in addressing “the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ in its modern political application,” which is “ethnographically incorrect, though morally true,” as “all differences and distinctions of race merge in that general character, best exemplified in...the Anglo-Saxon republics of the New World.”⁴⁹

The assimilation of both discourses around the use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” was best exemplified by J. M. Kemble’s usage in *The Saxons in England*. Kemble’s subject was, in his own words, “a grave and solemn one: it is the history of the childhood of our age,—the explanation of its manhood.”⁵⁰ Similarly, in his edition of *Beowulf*, which he dedicated to J. Grimm, he stated his purpose to further the developing trend of the time, “when a little more attention seems to be paid to the old feeling of England than heretofore.”⁵¹ Written in Germany in the context of the 1848 revolutions, Kemble’s *Saxons in England* sought to highlight the connection between the origins of English culture and national identity, the continental Teutonic tribes, and the wake of German liberties, which were congenial with those of the English. The markedly supra-nationalist Teutonic approach linking the use of “Anglo-Saxon” with continental roots

⁴⁸ Owing to the limited scope of the present survey, I will not deal with this aspect of British nationalism. An informative and insightful overview is provided in Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, Chapters 2-5.

⁴⁹ *The History of Normandy and of England*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1851), vol. 4, 306.

⁵⁰ *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth till the period of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), vol. 1, *Preface*, v. Cf. Appendix I: 1.3.1.A for full passage and further remarks.

⁵¹ *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of “Beowulf,” “The Traveller’s Song,” and “The Battle of Finnesburh.”* (London: William Pickering, 1833), *Preface*, i. Kemble also appropriates the cultural background of the poem as it is “shaped upon Angle legends, celebrates an Angle hero, and was in all probability both written in Angle, and brought hither by some of the earliest Anglo-Saxon chieftains who settled upon our shores” (*Preface*, xxii).

shown by Kemble was still in vogue in England at the time of the 1848 revolutions, and particularly present at universities. The *Inaugural Lecture* delivered by Thomas Arnold at Oxford in 1841, in which he claimed that “our English race is the German race,” witnessed to it; a speech that influenced his audience, among which were the later Oxford professors and eminent historians Edward A. Freeman and Goldwin Smith.⁵²

The use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” spread from 1848 onwards as a result of two related phenomena: a general tendency to abandon the use of the term “Teutonic,” which after the 1860s became almost exclusively restricted to German historians; and the “moral” status of the term “Anglo-Saxon,” undoubtedly related to the memorial celebrations of King Alfred’s birth in 1849, which came to signify an ideal of cultural and racial unity. The figure of Alfred acquired an ever-increasing cultural importance between the millenary celebrations of 1849 and 1901. During these years, several statues were erected across England, such as the ones in Wantage marketplace (1877) and Winchester’s East Gate (1899), where a series of *tableaux vivants* illustrating the life of Alfred were acted out in 1901 as part of the thousandth anniversary of his death, prior to the unveiling of another statue. More significant was William Theed’s representation of “Queen Victoria and Prince Albert dressed as Anglo-Saxons” (1867), which captured the cultural projection of the Victorian age onto the early medieval past.⁵³ The parallels drawn between Alfred and Victoria, as “Alfred united Anglekin in England; Victoria united a wider Anglekin the world over,”⁵⁴ were reinforced by the Queen’s death in 1901, (erroneously) thought to coincide with the millenary of Alfred’s obituary, and also leaving an Edward as heir. This was not, however, the only way in which the nineteenth century evoked the medieval past, whether actual or legendary. Countless artistic expressions commemorated the nation’s history in the

⁵² Cf. Appendix I: 1.3.1.B for full reference and lecture fragment.

⁵³ F. York Powell, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, describes the festivities in ‘The Alfred Millenary of 1901,’ *The North American Review* 173 (1901), 518-32. He describes Alfred as “one of our Queen Victoria’s ancestors,” 531. Poet Laureate Alfred Austin praised Queen Victoria as she “with her eighteen summers filled the Throne / where Alfred sate,” cited in Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-century British Literature* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 175.

⁵⁴ Rev. Edward Gilliat, *God Save King Alfred* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), *Preface*. Cf. Appendix I: 1.3.2.A.

form of novels, poetry, children's literature, and paintings, so that Victorian aesthetics combined the nationalist spirit of the age with a sentimental revivalist trend that saw in the Middle Ages a most appealing setting for the development of tragic love, heroism, and adventure.

1.3.2 – The Romantic Middle Ages and the Aesthetics of Nostalgia

In nineteenth-century England, the close relationship between Romantic literary medievalism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was responsible for the popularisation and contemporary representations of medieval themes. The Pre-Raphaelites combined a desire to evoke the naturalistic style of the Italian *Quattrocento*, with a fervent admiration of roughly contemporary poetic figures such as Keats or Tennyson, whom they labelled “immortals.” Among the Pre-Raphaelites, William Morris, who painted *Queen Guinevere* (1858) inspired by the aesthetics of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859-85), was also an avid translator of medieval texts, including several Old Norse sagas such as *Grettir's Saga* (1869), *Gummlang Saga* (1869), *Völsung Saga* (1870), and also *Beowulf* (1895). Moreover, although Old English enjoyed comparatively lesser attention than Chaucer, Dante, and Arthurian legend, Tennyson himself also produced a translation of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (1880). On the other hand, the popularity of the Alfred millenary also resulted in a series of commemorative paintings such as G. F. Watts's *Alfred Inciting the English to Resist the Danes* (ca. 1847), which still hangs in the Houses of Parliament; and William Bell Scott's *The Danes Descend upon the Coast and at last Possess Northumbria* (ca.1855), bearing an inscription based on verses from *Brunanburh*.⁵⁵

It would be, however, through Walter Scott's popularity that historical novel and medieval romance enjoyed great circulation and became most fashionable in England during the nineteenth century. *Ivanhoe* (1820) was greatly celebrated for its portrayal of the resistance of Saxon chieftains against the yoke of Norman nobility, and familiarised its

⁵⁵ A more detailed survey of Anglo-Saxon themed art during the nineteenth century is provided in Niles, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, 302-327.

audience with names derived from the Old English tradition, such as Wilfred of Ivanhoe, son of Cedric the Saxon; Wamba, son of Witless; Æthelstan; and Gurth, son of a “Beowulf.” Scott’s merit lay not only in symbolically celebrating the reconciliation of Saxons and Normans to construct a unified England, as represented by Ivanhoe and King Richard, but in introducing the broader audience with the national heroism of the last “Anglo-Saxon” chieftains. This theme would be exploited in the second half of the nineteenth century in the historical novel by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Harold: The Last of the Saxon Kings* (1848), to whom Tennyson’s *Harold* was dedicated; Charles Kingsley’s *Hereward the Wake: The Last of the English* (1866); and more particularly in children’s literature. In general histories such as Eleanor Bulley’s *Great Britain for Little Britons* (1880, reaching a sixth edition by 1904), juvenile novels such as Eliza F. Pollard’s *A Hero King: A Story of the Days of Alfred the Great* (1898), and in collections such as M. I. Ebbutt’s *Hero Myths and Legends of the British Race* (1910), of which *Beowulf* was the first volume, the glorification of national identity personified in the early medieval precursors of the race was ever present.⁵⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century, two generations of readers had grown to admire medieval-themed poetry in its most Romantic idealisation of Arthurian romance, and had come to be educated in the celebration of early medieval English heroes and kings, from *Beowulf* to King Alfred.

1.4 – Conclusion: The Post-Romantic Old English “Elegy”

The reception of the earliest anthologies of Old English poetry should thus be considered within the context of a general reevaluation of the Middle Ages as a source of national history in which to take pride, and as a source of literary enjoyment aligned with contemporary sensibilities. It is important to keep in mind that the first complete volume of Old English poetry was published in the same decade that Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, and that the earliest critical editions coexisted with the Alfred millenary and popular

⁵⁶ For a broader treatment of the topic, see Velma Bourgeois Richmond, ‘Historical Novels to Teach Anglo-Saxonism,’ in Frantzen and Niles, *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, 173-201.

juvenile representations of early medieval heroes. In addition to this, the influence of modern poetics and the ubiquitous feeling of nostalgia that pervades Victorian culture and society favoured the assimilation of Old English texts by the medieval revivalist spirit, particularly those which, like the Exeter Book lyrics, were susceptible of being absorbed into the contemporary poetic discourse, or, like *Beowulf*, *Brunanburh*, and *The Battle of Maldon*, would serve nationalist interests in the “Anglo-Saxon” past.

Therefore, when nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholarship applied generic terms such as “epic” or “elegy” to early medieval texts, it relied on a series of cultural misappropriations that reconstrued Old English poetry as the departure point of national history contained in its most valuable expressions: a comprehensive ethnic ancestry and a distinct cultural identity. The same invisible line of descent that aligned the reigns of King Alfred and Queen Victorian also brought together, in the Romantic literary mind, the work of Old English poets with that of contemporary figures who sought to retrieve the idealised nobility of the past and incorporate into the decaying present. It is in this way, then, that the nationalist agenda found in literary historicism a vehicle for the construction of an Old English canon focused, on the one hand, on the promotion of the Germanic ideal of the *comitatus* as an agent of social cohesion, and, on the other, on the fabrication of a distinctly English cultural and literary identity that ran across centuries.

2 – Literary Historicism and the “Old English Elegy”

2.1 – Introduction: The Hermeneutics of Literary Historicism

Nationalist discourses pervade the literary scholarly discourse of the early twentieth century, combined with a post-Romantic longing for the idealised past, in the form of ethnocentric criticism and literary historicism. In the present study, the term “literary historicism” denotes the combination of an interpretive approach to literary history with a desire to retrieve and incorporate the earliest literary expressions of the mother tongue into the narrative of national cultural identity. It involves, then, the creation of a “*genetic* literary history, concerned primarily with the genesis of events and texts,” and a “*hermeneutic* literary history, involving the reception and reading not just...of newly emerged texts but also with older ones, too.” The literary historicist approach makes the history of literature one “of literary memory, of literary anamnesis, of rereading, [and] of how readers’ eyes changed as they looked at the available inheritance of a literary canon.”¹ As such, it entails the joined action of late eighteenth-century ethnocentric interests in the cultural roots of the nation as envisioned by Herder; the philological study of the origins of languages and literatures as developed by Vico and continued by Grimm; and the concept of a “progressive universal poetry” that encompasses the past and the present, the individual and society, grandiloquence and sentimentalism, as expressed by Schlegel and adopted by Coleridge.

These *genetic* (or genealogical) and *hermeneutic* (or interpretive) dimensions of literary historicism correlate with the institutional and identity-defining aspects of the Anglo-Saxonism of the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, as applied to literary studies rather than to ecclesiastical or antiquarian interests. Institutional nationalistic Anglo-Saxonism sought to retrieve the origins of historical institutions much in the

¹ Joep Leerssen, ‘Literary Historicism: Romanticism, Philologists, and the Presence of the Past,’ *MLQ* 65:2 (2004), 221-43, at 241.

way that nationalist (genetic) literary historicism seeks the roots of literary expression (a form of national institution in Herderian philosophy); identity-defining nationalist Anglo-Saxonism finds continuity in hermeneutic literary historicism insofar as language and literature are conceived of as an inherent element of national cultural identity. In this way, the appropriation of Old English verse by the nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century seems the natural development of a trend that had originated two centuries earlier. As such, the earliest editions and collections of Old English poetry, though imbued with the scientific developments of philology, are ultimately the product of the revivalist wave initiated by the publication of *Ossian*. Their introductions, critical discussions, and aesthetic reception contain genetic and hermeneutic elements equivalent to those present in Macpherson's or Percy's prefatory essays. The publication of a large number of "Histories of English Literature" contributes to the reception of Old English texts as part of the literary historicist narrative, as the poems (most of which are assumed to be the works of Cædmon or Cynewulf) are set in direct line of descent with contemporary figures such as Tennyson or Gray, and assimilated into the "national genius."

2.2 – The Invention of the “Old English Elegy” in Early Editions to 1915

The earliest published anthology of Old English verse is William B. Conybeare's edition of *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826), left unfinished by his late brother John Conybeare, professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. The very title page of this comprehensive volume already triggers a series of expectations as to the aesthetic reception of the Old English texts. The inclusion of a few lines from Alexander Pope's *Temple of Fame* describing a Gothic façade, reading "Minstrels and Scalds" in place of the poet's original "Druids and Bards," conveys the idea that the medieval poems are to be held in monumental status in modern times, and counted alongside the highest exponents of recent English literature.² Moreover, the

² Cf Appendix II: 2.2.A, Section 1.

free substitution suggests continuity from early medieval verse to the eighteenth-century poet, thereby creating a literary historicist bridge that is to be maintained throughout the entire anthology in the form of free verse adaptations into heroic couplets and ballad form.

When it comes to the Old English texts, Conybeare includes *Beowulf*, excerpts from the Exeter Book, *Caedmon's Hymn*, and shorter poems from the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" and other prose MSS. Many of these had never been published and, as they appear under "Odes and Epitaphs," or "Moral and Didactic," their initial reception by a broader audience is greatly conditioned and limited by contemporary understandings of such labels. Conybeare makes a distinction between two poems labelled as "elegies" (*Elegy on the Death of King Edgar*, *Elegy on the Death of King Edward*), and those of the "elegiac class." Of these, *The Exile's Complaint* (that is, *The Wife's Lament*) is described as "the only specimen approaching the character of the Elegiac ballad," while "[m]any of the Meters of Boethius translated by Alfred...are of the elegiac class."³ The difference between the two labels is clear: "elegy" here applies to eulogistic funerary compositions, whereas "elegiac" loosely resembles the familiar tone of the traditional ballad in *Ossian's* vein. Nostalgia for the pan-Germanic past crawls into Conybeare's *Illustrations* in his descriptions of certain poems, where the mythological past is evoked. *The Wife's Lament* and *Deor* are considered texts of Scandinavian provenance, telling stories somehow related to Norse mythology and saga. However, Conybeare notes the emotional and descriptive force of *The Wife's Lament*, deeming it superior in this sense to the rest of Old English verse.⁴ Other than these two, none of the remaining Exeter Book lyrics are analysed in detail, except for *The Rhyming Poem* owing to its unusual form. The rest are undifferentiated or absorbed into different categories.⁵

³ *Illustrations*, lxxx-lxxxii.

⁴ "His situation and feelings are expressed with more pathos, and his lonely retreat amidst the woods exhibits more power of description, than can be usually found in in Saxon poetry." *Illustrations*, 245.

⁵ Cf. Appendix II: 2.2.A, Sections 2 and 3.

In 1832, only a few years after the publication of the *Illustrations*, the Society of Antiquaries of London commissioned Benjamin Thorpe to publish the transcripts he made from the Exeter Book, the results of which were gathered in his *Codex Exoniensis* (1842) the first complete edition of the manuscript, containing a revised division and new titles for the poems, many of which are still in use. Among these, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* appear for the first time as independent poems rather than as part of larger texts, and *The Husband's Message* (under the vague title of *A Fragment*) is for the first time identified as a discrete unit despite its obscurity. *Resignation* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* appear under the headings of *A Supplication* and *Riddle 1* respectively. Thorpe offers no generic labelling of the poems contained in the codex, nor does he apply the term “elegy,” only the broader term “complaint” for *Deor* and *The Wife's Lament*. A translation accompanies each text (with a few exceptions⁶), which Thorpe asserts he has tried to make “literal, and, at the same time, readable,”⁷ so that no free verse rearrangements are to be found, unlike in Conybeare's *Illustrations*.

Roughly contemporary with Thorpe, Ludwig Ettmüller does loosely apply generic labels to *Deor* (“Deori, Heodeningorum poetae lamentatio”), *The Wife's Lament* (“Exulis cujusdam uxoris querela”), *The Seafarer*, (“Nautae cujusdam de vitae marinae laboribus lamentatio”), and *The Wanderer* (“Agricultoris de vitae suae miseriis querela”). Neither *lamentatio* nor *querela* can be confidently taken as genre-defining headings; only in the case of *The Wife's Lament* does Ettmüller utilise an explicit literary category: “carmen generis elegici facile praestantissimus est.”⁸ In the last quarter of the century, Bernhard ten Brink concludes that “Die altenglische Lyrik kennt im Grunde nur eine Kunstform, die der Elegie”⁹ while Stopford

⁶ Thorpe confesses his own inability to make sense of *The Rhyming Poem*, of which he admits “I do not understand this poem, nor am I able to translate it,” and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, at which he states his bewilderment in conceding that “Of this I can make no sense, nor am I able to arrange the verses,” cf. *Codex Exoniensis* (London: William Pickering, 1842), 522, 527.

⁷ *Codex Exoniensis*, xi.

⁸ *Engla and Seaxna Scopas and Boceras* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1850), xiv, xv.

⁹ “The Anglo-Saxon lyric knows in reality only one form, that of the elegy.” *Geschichte der englischen Litteratur bis zu Wiclifs Auftreten* (Berlin: Robert Oppenheim, 1877), 78.

Brooke specifically calls five poems (*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *The Husband's Message*, and *Wulf and Eadwacer*) "elegies," asserting that the label is legitimate "at least in its earlier sense among the Greek. Three of [the poems] are *laments*, and one is a longing cry of love."¹⁰ In addition to this, literary historicist assumptions also appear in several early anthologies, as in George Saintsbury's description of *The Wanderer* as a man "'hurled from change to change unceasingly, his soul's wings never furled"—as the most Saxon of nineteenth century English poets has it" and attribution to *The Husband's Message* of "a pleasant seventeenth century touch."¹¹

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Alois Brandl fully asserts the existence of Old English "elegy" as a blooming genre, affirming that "die Elegie [ist] nicht bloss durch Zeugnisse, sondern auch durch erhaltene Denkmäler als eine blühende Gattung erkennbar."¹² Among the evidence gathered by Brandl are references to the national character of the poems. The "national element" as identified in the Exeter Book lyrics is directly related to the status of *Beowulf* as a national epic and its consideration as a foundational text, if not of the nation itself, of the character shared by all Germanic peoples, and especially preserved by the English.

2.2.1 – Competing Nationalisms, *Beowulf*, and the "Old English Elegies"

The recovery and publication of *Beowulf* had been, in origin, a Scandinavian endeavour. In 1785-91, Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin travelled to England with the express purpose of retrieving as many documents of Scandinavian origin as possible, and would have published *Beowulf* in 1807

¹⁰ *The History of Early English Literature* (NY: Macmillan & Co., 1892), 353.

¹¹ *A Short History of English Literature* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1898), 16-17. The lines are from Robert Browning's section VI of "James Lee's Wife" in *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

¹² "Elegy is identifiable not only through [textual] witnesses, but also through preserved monuments as a flourishing genre." *Geschichte der Altenglischen Literatur*, in Hermann Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, 2 vols. (Strasburg, 1908), vol. 2, 35.

had Copenhagen not been under siege.¹³ The reception of Thorkelin's edition in 1815, in which Old English is treated as a dialect of Old Danish, triggered an almost immediate appropriation of the text by the nationalist discourse.¹⁴ In the preface to his 1820 translation, N. F. S. Grundtvig describes the poem as "en Thors-Drape" ("a poem of Thor"), and later expresses his desire that the poem may "blive for Norden...hvad *Iliaden* og *Odysseen* var for Grækerne."¹⁵ Around the same time, Rasmus Rask published a *Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue* (1817), to which an epistle exalting the virtues of the mother Danish tongue was appended.¹⁶ Benjamin Thorpe translated Rask's *Grammar* in 1830, but omitted the epistle, and by the third edition of 1871 he also removed Rask's introduction.¹⁷ With the publication of the *Illustrations* and Thorpe's appropriation of Rask's *Grammar* and the commission of his *Codex Exoniensis*, Old English literature, with *Beowulf* at the fore, became an unquestioned marker of English cultural heritage.

The resemblance between the "elegiac" passages in *Beowulf* and the poems of the Exeter Book was soon noticed. Ten Brink mentions the occurrence of the elegiac mood in the poem, which is, in turn, regarded as the product of the race, while Francis Gummere attributes its presence in "our *Beowulf*," or "our early epic," to the characteristic Germanic temperament.¹⁸ Brooke is particularly lavish in exalting the national virtues preserved in Old English literature, and does not hesitate to establish comparisons between some of the "elegies" and nineteenth century poetry

¹³ Thorkelin so states in the preface to *De Danorum Rebus Gestis secul. III & IV*. (Copenhagen: E. Rangel, 1815), xv-xvi.

¹⁴ Cf. Appendix II: 2.2.1.A

¹⁵ "Become for Scandinavia...what the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are for the Greeks." *Bjovulfs Drape* (Copenhagen, 1820), 482, Bjork's translation. The term "Drape" bears the implication of *Beowulf* being an explicitly northern European type of poetic composition.

¹⁶ The epistle particularly described how "Vort nuværende Modersmaal saavel som vor gamle Historie kan ogsaa af Angelsaksisken vinde saa meget Lys, at denne vel fortjente af fremdrages af Mørket og skildres paa Dansk" ("Our modern mother tongue as well as our ancient history can gain so much light from Anglo-Saxon that it is well worth dragging it from the darkness, and describing it in Danish"). Cf. Rask, *Angelsaksisk Sproglære, tilligemed en kort Læsebog* (Stockholm, 1815), x. The translation is Robert E. Bjork's, cf. 'Nineteenth-Century Scandinavia and the Birth of Anglo-Saxon Studies,' in Frantzen and Niles, *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, 111-32, at 121.

¹⁷ *Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue, with a Praxis* (Copenhagen, 1830).

¹⁸ Cf. Appendix II: 2.2.1.B and C, respectively.

(especially that of Tennyson).¹⁹ In 1892, he considered *Beowulf* “the English ideal of a hero as it was conceived by an Englishman some twelve hundred years ago,” and goes on to assert that “Gentle like Nelson, he had Nelson’s irresoluteness.”²⁰ By then, he already considered the poem “English to its very root...sacred to us, our Genesis, the book of our origins,”²¹ thereby effecting the establishment of the poem as a national foundational epic.

The elegiac mood was, as a result of its presence in *Beowulf*, “ein wesenhafter Bestandteil der Volksseele.”²² As national epic, elegiac mood, and Teutonic nationalism come together, a tripartite structure is established between (a) the Germanic past recovered from poetic expression, (b) post-Romantic aesthetic appreciations imposed onto the texts, and (c) post-Romantic notions of “national literature” rooted in the heroic past, coexisting with preoccupations with the inner life of the individual (both successfully fulfilled by *Beowulf*). To these elements a fourth aspect should be added: the influence of Tacitus’s *Germania* and its depiction of the *comitatus*. From the commentaries of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars, it seems clear that the discourse of Teutonic virtue revolved around ideas of loyalty, kinship, and courage, all of which are exemplified in Tacitus’s description of the Germanic tribes. The ties of familial and personal allegiance contained in *Beowulf* satisfied the need to illustrate such bonds, and when the Exeter Book lyrics supplied the world of the *comitatus* with a sentimental dimension, present not only in the “Epos” but also outside of it as expressions of individual and universal feeling, Romantic nationalistic and aesthetic demands were fully satisfied.²³ Hroþgar’s tears upon *Beowulf*’s departure, the “Lay of the Last Survivor,”

¹⁹ Cf. Appendix II: 2.2.1.D, Section 1.

²⁰ *History of Early English Literature*, vi-vii. Cf. Appendix II: 2.2.1.D, Section 2.

²¹ *English Literature from AD 670 to AD 1832* (London: Macmillan, 1876), 11.

²² “An essential part of the national spirit.” Gustav Ehrismann, ‘Religionsgeschichtliche Beiträge zum germanischen Frühchristentum,’ *Beitr.* 35 (1910), 209-39, at 239.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the influence of Tacitus’s *Germania* in early scholarship of Old English heroic verse, see M. J. Toswell, ‘Tacitus, Old English Heroic Poetry, and Ethnographic Preconceptions,’ in idem, and Tyler (eds.), *Doubt Wisely: Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*. Studies in English Language and Literature (Oxford: Routledge, 1996). 493-507. See also by Toswell, ‘*Quid Tacitus...? The Germania and the Study of Anglo-Saxon England*,’ *Florilegium* 27 (2010), 27-62.

and the lamenting woman at Beowulf's funeral find a direct echo in *The Wanderer*, *Deor*, or *The Wife's Lament*, so that the "elegiac" was incorporated into the discourse of Teutonic character as an inherent quality, one that was inseparable from the tight bonds of the *comitatus*.

Such assimilation explains not only how the "elegies" grew in popularity among scholars and general reading audience at the same accelerated pace that *Beowulf* did, but also why those "elegiac" poems that were either translated from the Latin (*Meters of Boethius*) or imbued with too distinctive a Christian colouring (*Resignation*, *The Rhyming Poem*, *Christ and Satan*) soon fell out of the canon. The interweaving of national character as reflected by the *comitatus* institution with post-Romantic sensibilities as projected onto the Exeter Book lyrics was complete by the 1910s. Alois Brandl conceived of the genre as being all about heroic motifs and refers to *Beowulf* as proof,²⁴ and with the publication of Siper's *Altenglische Elegie*, anthropological considerations about funerary rites, reiteration of national character, and literary historicism came together in the final establishment of the Old English "elegy" as an autonomous literary genre with its own fabricated history and development.

2.3 – Sieper's *Altenglische Elegie*: The Canon of "Old English Elegy"

Although in earlier editions and verse anthologies the label of "elegy" had been loosely applied to a series of poems, mostly from the Exeter Book, no systematic study of the genre had yet been undertaken, and no fixed canon of texts had been provided. For these two reasons, Sieper's *Die Altenglische Elegie* (1915) stands as a turning point in the history of Old English scholarship in general, and of the development of the Old English "elegy" in particular. However, the monograph remains untranslated and no reprint has been issued, so that it has stayed relatively inaccessible and is rarely mentioned in current scholarship. In practical terms, this is not

²⁴ Cf. Appendix II, 2.2.1.E.

surprising, owing to the reference work status and greater availability of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* and to the rather conservative nature of Sieper's work. However, *Die Altenglische Elegie* did have a profound impact in the study of Old English literature insofar as it provides a specific set of "elegies," present even in the most recent editions, despite its constant questioning and reassessing during the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, the nine canonical "elegies" are first introduced here: "Dêors Klage" (*Deor*) "Rede der Frau an Eadwacer" (*Wulf and Eadwacer*), "Seefahrer," "Wanderer," "Botschaft des Gemahls" (*The Husband's Message*), "Klage der Frau" (*The Wife's Lament*), "Ruine," "Reimlied" (*The Rhyming Poem*), and "Klage eines Vertriebenen" ("The Exile's Lament;" i.e., *Resignation*).

Die Altenglische Elegie aims at providing the reader with a general view of the texts, the cultural milieu in which they would have been produced, and their main formal aspects, both as a group and in their most remarkable individual features. In the Preface, Sieper states that the very necessity of the study might not seem apparent, unless one is willing to throw light onto the origins of modern literary genres. Behind such reasoning lies the literary historicist need for origins and the tracing of an uninterrupted diachronic development of literary genres from their earliest stages. The bulk of Sieper's work focuses on the late medieval and early modern periods, and his incursion in early medieval lyric poetry evidences an antiquarian interest in the evolution of literary forms rather than a thorough investigation of Old English poetry *per se*, as he clearly states in his *Preface*.²⁵ For him, the correct interpretation of poetry necessarily relies on understanding its generic affiliations, its origins, and its place in the

²⁵ Some of Sieper's other works include *Die Geschichte von Soliman und Perseda in der neueren Litteratur*, Inaugural Dissertation on Obtaining the Doctorate at the Faculty of Philosophy at Heidelberg University (1895); "Les Échecs Amoureux:" *Eine altfranzösische Nachahmung des Rosenromans und ihre englische Übertragung. Literaturhistorische Forschungen*, eds. Josef Schick & M. Frh. V. Waldberg (Weimar, 1898); *Lydgate's "Reson and Sensuallyte" I Manuscripts, Text and Glossary*, EETS 84 (Oxford: EETS, 1901); *Longfellow's "Evangeline:" Kritische Ausgabe mit Einleitung, Untersuchungen über die Geschichte des englischen Hexameters und Anmerkungen*, Englische Textbibliothek 11 (Heidelberg, 1905); *Shakespeare un seine Zeit* (Berlin, 1907); and *Das Englische Theater im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1914).

diachronic evolution of a given style or form, so that Old English poetry can only be appreciated once it has been given its proper place.²⁶

However, Sieper's post-Romantic bias is most notable when he addresses the distinctively Teutonic character of the poems and how they reflect the origins of modern sensibilities. He significantly refers to the "Epos" as "naïve," and strongly echoes Herder in associating poetic expression (particularly epic) and national consciousness. Sieper keenly emphasises the group identity of "the Anglo-Saxons," for whom all sources of emotional and psychological distress came from being removed from society.²⁷ In chapter 5 of *Die Altenglische Eegie*, entitled "Zur Psychologie der alten Germanen," Sieper particularly exploits the idea of a pan-Germanic cultural heritage, whereby Old Norse and Old English show remarkably similar poetic expression, the latter being only subtler and richer.²⁸ As one would expect, all influence of Christianity is readily disregarded, and the pagan nature of the "oldest" poems, according to Sieper, is upheld as evidence.²⁹ The genre, Sieper concludes, "es sich nicht

²⁶ Cf. Appendix II: 2.3.A

²⁷ Cf. Appendix II: 2.3.B and C. Sieper uses the term *Volksbewußtsein*, literally "people-consciousness" or "folk-consciousness." The nationalistic overtone is difficult to escape considering the association of *Volk* and compounds thereof after Herder, whose ideas resound strongly here, perhaps through Hegel. Note also Sieper's remark on the Elizabethan poets, whom he sees as "zwar noch jung, aber nicht mehr naïv; kein gläubiges, aber ein suchendes Geschlecht" ("still young, but no longer naïve; not a believing, but an inquisitive race"). The division of poets into naïve and no-longer-naïve (sentimental?) according to the age again echoes Schiller. Sieper pursues this line further, calling Spenser "am wenigsten das Kind seiner Zeit. Mit einen Fuß steht er in der romantischen Welt Chaucers, mit dem anderen im Zeitalter geistiger Sehnsucht und moderner Ästhetik" ("the least child of his time. With one foot set in the romantic world of Chaucer, with the other in the age of spiritual longing and modern aesthetics," xv) for being able to compose something akin to old epics (namely, the *Faerie Queene*). The fact that he labels Chaucer's age "romantischen" is significant enough. Moreover, he blames the decay of English drama on its perception as a "nicht – wie unsere Klassiker – eine moralische Anstalt, sondern eine Stätte der Zerstreung" ("not a moral institution – as our Classics do – but a place of entertainment," xvii), bringing together moral and aesthetics. He goes on to explicitly refer to Schiller's *Rätsel* (*Riddles*, composed 1802-1804) as "eigentlich die direkte Fortsetzung der altenglische gleichnamigen Dichtungsart" ("actually the direct continuation of the Old English genre of the same name," xvii).

²⁸ Cf. Appendix II: 2.3.D.

²⁹ Thus Sieper provides a tentative chronology for the composition dates of the texts, starting with the "purer" forms in *Beowulf* and moving forward in time through *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *The Husband's Message*, *The Ruin*, the Christianity-influenced *Wanderer* and *Seafarer*, ending with *The Rhyming Poem* and *Resignation*, which show clear Christian and penitential influence, although not quite as much as the "Latinised" Chronicle poems. Cf. *Altenglische Elegie*, Chapter 1, "Ursprung und Entwicklung der altenglischen Elegie" ("Origin and Development of the Old English Elegy"), esp. 15-16.

um ein fremdes Pfropfreis, sondern um die Entwicklung bodenständiger Keime” (“is not a foreign graft, but the growth of a native germ”).³⁰

In addition to evident traces of Teutonic nationalism, Sieper also betrays a post-Romantic bias when it comes to the aesthetic appreciation of the texts. On several occasions, he draws parallels with modern German poets, and repeatedly elaborates on the close relationship between nature and the individual (nineteenth-century aesthetic criteria are most evident here), as well as on the realistic psychological and emotional dimensions of Old English poetic speakers.³¹ These two aspects encapsulate the essence of the Old English “elegy” as preserved in the last century of scholarship, creating an aural sense of “togetherness” that pervades literary histories, anthologies, and critical editions.

2.4 – The Discourse of “Elegy:” Language, Themes, and Influence

The first complete critical edition of the entire Old English poetic corpus, Krapp and Dobbie’s *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (1931-42), in which the Exeter Book occupies the third volume (1936), shows no specific display of the Exeter Book lyrics as a group, nor does it classify each text within a sole generic category. However, it does perpetuate some misconceptions about the texts and their display of an “elegiac mood.” These volumes are both heirs to and transmitters of the critical tradition that stems from Sieper and must be considered against such background of

³⁰ *Die Altenglische Elegie*, 122.

³¹ Cf Appendix II: 2.3.E and F. Although Sieper initially ascribes the “elegy” tradition to the anthropological background of funeral song (cf. *Altenglische Elegie*, xvi, 3-7), he later differentiates between a literal form of “elegy” that mourns the death of a hero or king, and a more abstract form that laments over the passage of time and earthly glory in general (cf. *ibid.*, 7-8: “Die Trostlosigkeit einer durch den Tod geschaffenen Lage — Einsamkeit, Verödung von Haus und Hof, Jammer anstatt der Jubellieder, Schutzlosigkeit, sehnsüchtiges Gedenken der glücklichen Vergangenheit — alles das konnte auch durch andere Umstände bemerkt werden: Unglück, Alter, Verstoßung, Trennung durch widrige Schicksale;” “The desolation of a situation brought about by death – loneliness, decay of home and land, misery instead of joy, vulnerability, longing memory of the happy past – all this could also be recreated in other circumstances: misfortune, old age, exile, separation by adverse fate”).

continuity.³² Although they do not show such markedly Teutonist bias, they do participate in the idea that “pagan” poetry must be of earlier composition date than Christian texts.³³ Hence, the discussion of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* echoes Sieper’s interpretation of the poems as a blend of traditional elegiac opening and later Christian interpolation.³⁴ As for the other poems, *The Rhyming Poem* is closely associated in “subject matter and general mode of treatment” to these two, as well as to “the other elegiac poems of the earlier period.”³⁵ *Deor* is “lyric and elegiac in form and mood,” though closer to *Widsið* in content.³⁶ *Wulf and Eadwacer* is “a dramatic monologue,” where “the rather cryptic treatment of the subject...reminds us of the WIFE’S LAMENT and the HUSBAND’S MESSAGE.”³⁷ *Resignation* is given its title for the first time in this edition, owing to its affinities with the penitential psalms and its display of “a subjectivity and preoccupation with abstract ideas which is quite foreign to the older lyrics.”³⁸ Finally, *The Ruin* is described as “predominantly elegiac, showing in this respect marked affinities with the WANDERER.” In the light of these comments, these volumes do in effect perpetuate Sieper’s classifications and relationships between texts and, through their reference status even today, ensure their continuity and historical legitimisation.

The treatment given to the Exeter Book lyrics by another general reference work, Charles W. Kennedy’s *The Earliest English Poetry* (1943), reinforces such phenomenon of continuity. Two passages from *Beowulf* (2231-70, “The Lay of the Last Survivor,” and 2444-62, “The Father’s Lament”) are included in the canon as containing “the conventional material of the Old English elegy,”³⁹ joining the five “pagan” texts. Kennedy’s work is less explicitly apologetic of a Teutonic background for Old English

³² For a contemporary example, see Appendix II: 2.4.A, from Edith Wardale’s *Chapters on Old English Literature* (1935).

³³ For example, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Rhyming Poem* (the latter on the grounds of its archaic diction) are counted among the “elegiac poems of the earlier period” (xlvi), whereas *Resignation* is deemed of “a rather late date of composition” because of the traceable Biblical influence in the poem (lx).

³⁴ *ASPR* 3, xxxvii-xxxviii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xlvi.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, liii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, lvi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, lx.

³⁹ *The Earliest English Poetry* (London: OUP, 1943), 128.

poetry, although it does contain allusions to Tacitus's *Germania* as a witness to the lives of the early Germanic peoples, and it vividly describes the post-migration settlement and its ties with continental tradition.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it is the literary historicist approach that dominates Kennedy's discourse, as he repeatedly takes pains to establish a sense of aesthetic continuity between the Old English poets and the main English literary figures of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even twentieth centuries, such as Gray, Swinburne, or Masfield.⁴¹

At a given point, Kennedy's definition of elegy echoes Coleridge in referring to it as "native to the thoughts of sensitive minds."⁴² In the closing remarks of the "Elegies" section of *The Earliest English Poetry*, the idea of a direct flow of national poetic character is reiterated and explicitly stated: "[The elegies] are, in our literature, a first welling up of that clear lyric strain which through the centuries has continued to pour its melody and passion into the full stream of English verse."⁴³ Therefore, the two aspects that first moved Sieper to establish a canon of "Old English elegy," namely, the quest for a literary historicist narrative of genre and ethnocentric ideas of cultural identity, also underlie Kennedy's work, with the shift in nationalist focus from Germany to England.

The analysis provided shows that by the mid-twentieth century the "Old English elegy" was an accepted generic category with its own place in the Old English poetic corpus. Critical editions such as the *ASPR* granted it scholarly legitimacy, while general literary histories such as Kennedy's promoted an historicist view whereby the Old English texts reflected the early Germanic roots of the later literary genius, most distinctively expressed in English Romantic lyric of Gray's kind. However, the "Old English elegy" still lacked a proper definition. Stanley Greenfield's landmark contribution would come to fill in this gap, whereas oral-formulaic theories of composition would reinforce the notion of an

⁴⁰ Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.B, Section 1.

⁴¹ Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.B, Section 2.

⁴² *The Earliest English Poetry*, 104. Cf. Appendix II, 2.3., 2.B for full reference.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 130. Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.B, Section 2 for full passage.

“elegiac” language and commonplace motifs that made up a fully developed poetic tradition.

2.4.1 – Pattern, Theme, and Formula: Defining the “Old English Elegy”

In a series of articles published between 1953 and 1955, Stanley B. Greenfield applied the principles oral-formulaic analysis to various Old English poems in order to illustrate a set of motifs and verbal repetitions that he would later describe as “the theme of exile.”⁴⁴ Greenfield identifies the elements that make up this theme (status, deprivation, state of mind, and movement into exile) in several poems, reaching the conclusion that “the formulas and formulaic systems outlined...do indeed constitute a poetic convention.”⁴⁵ The importance of this statement can only be measured in relation to its impact on the study and aesthetic reception of the Exeter Book lyrics, as such “poetic convention,” ultimately based on the recurrent use of commonplace poetic language, is accompanied by several others of a similar kind, the sum of which accounts for Greenfield’s later definition of the “elegy” genre in Old English poetry:

We may perhaps formulate a definition of the Old English elegy as a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation, and expressing an attitude towards that experience.⁴⁶

Several elements come together here: there is, on the one hand, an echo of Coleridge’s “form of poetry natural to the reflective mind...with

⁴⁴ These articles are ‘The Theme of Spiritual Exile in *Christ I*,’ *PQ* 32 (1953), 321-28 ‘*The Wife’s Lament* Reconsidered,’ *PMLA* 68 (1953), 907-12; and ‘The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of Exile in Anglo-Saxon Poetry,’ *Speculum* 30:2 (1955), 200-06. In the last of these, Greenfield follows the trail of Francis P. Magoun Jr.’s application of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord’s oral-formulaic analysis of epic poetry to Old English narrative poems, disclosed in ‘The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry,’ *Speculum* 28:3 (1953), 446-67.

⁴⁵ ‘The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of Exile,’ 204.

⁴⁶ ‘The Old English Elegies,’ in Eric G. Stanley (ed.), *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1966), 142-75, at 143.

reference to the poet himself' that evidences the extent to which the concept of the Old English "elegy" is shaped after post-Romantic aesthetic principles. On the other hand, all aspects of the "theme of exile" are listed: deprivation ("a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation"), status and movement into exile ("based upon a specific experience of observation"), and state of mind ("expressing an attitude"), endowing the genre with the same formulaic character that is indistinctively inherent to all Old English verse. In addition to this, Greenfield describes the "elegiac spirit" that imbues much of Old English poetry as "a compound of Teutonic melancholia and Christian utilisation of the *ubi sunt* motif," thus reiterating the two contrasting (or coexisting) elements first noted by Sieper and perpetuated in the earlier critical tradition. Finally, in Sieper's remark that the poems have a special appeal "to an age that has taken to its heart the poetry of John Donne," a sense of literary historicism colours the reception of the Old English poems.⁴⁷

The definition of the "Old English elegy" betrays the influence of modern literary sensibilities, while it ignores the irregular distribution of its characteristic features and the affinities of each individual poem with other genres and traditions.⁴⁸ As a consequence, the poems are discussed in two groups showing thematic affinities (the one consisting of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Ruin*; the other, of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*) while *Deor* stands alone, with no further analysis of the remaining poems or excerpts. Greenfield adopts a somewhat apologetic tone as he concludes that "Like all good poetry, the Old English elegies resist that final classification and clarification that readers long for and critics would like to be able to furnish," though he maintains "That the poets of the elegies had a feeling for form and structure is, I think, undeniable."⁴⁹ In later publications, he expresses the sense of "elegy" as a self-contained literary genre with more caution, addresses the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁸ Cf. Appendix II: 2.41.A. Greenfield excludes *The Rhyming Poem* and *Resignation* from discussion on the basis of their being "qualitatively inferior poems," without further elaborating on this value judgement. Cf. 'The Old English Elegies,' 143.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 172.

“relative importance of ‘typical meaning components’” and reaches at the open conclusion that “the notion of a genre itself is, alas, somewhat elusive.”⁵⁰ To this he adds a warning against generic assumptions by stating that “if the elegies are a genre in Old English, they are so by force of our present, rather than determinate historical, perspective; that is, by our ‘feel’ for them as a group possessing certain features in common.”⁵¹ However, Greenfield’s definition rapidly acquired an authoritative status and has been repeatedly quoted in a plethora of studies and anthologies, of which a few examples prove illustrating.

2.4.2 – Three Examples of Continuity in the Late Twentieth Century

The works of three scholars witness to the historical legitimisation of the “Old English elegy” in the second half of the twentieth century. They are representative of three different levels of dissemination of the aesthetic reception and critical study of the Exeter Book lyrics, ranging from general introductions to Old English literature to genre studies of the genre on its own. In consequence, their target audience also varies from a general reading public, to students acquainted to some degree with Old English, and finally Old English scholars. The first of these publications is C. L. Wrenn’s *Study of Old English Literature* (1967), aimed primarily at reaching “university students both in the early phases and the more advanced stages of their work,” particularly those “with some knowledge of Old English, and at least a little Latin.”⁵² A sense of an oral “Germanic heroic tradition” and references to Tacitus’s *Germania* colour Wrenn’s discourse, although he rejects the idea of national character.⁵³ When describing the term “elegy,” the sense of a “general meditation in solitude of which may be called universal griefs” is addressed as “*elegy* in Gray’s sense,” which is “the convenient term applicable in the classification of Old English poetry.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Stanley B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 12. Only the core of seven “elegies” is mentioned here. Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.1.B.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵² *A Study of Old English Literature* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1967), Preface.

⁵³ Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.2.A, Section 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139. Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.2.A, Section 2 for full reference.

The nine poems included in Sieper's canon are mentioned, although *Deor* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* feature as part of the "heroic tradition," and *Resignation* as "rare in its degree of subjectivity, [but] there is nothing of the quasi-autobiographical approach of other elegiac poetry."⁵⁵

The second work to be addressed is Michael Alexander's *Old English Literature* (1983), later *A History of Old English Literature* (2002). The Preface to *Old English Literature* states its intended scope as "an illustrative introduction, assuming little knowledge of this period or its surviving products and none of the language;"⁵⁶ the 2002 edition adds: "This is the sort of introductory book I should have like to have available when I first studied Old English as part of a degree in English literature."⁵⁷ In the introduction to "The Poetic Elegies" Alexander justifies the use of the generic, as "with the exception of *The Husband's Message*, these poems all mourn death and loss, and have other themes and motifs in common, so the assimilation to elegy is convenient and not inappropriate;" the 2002 edition reads "no more inappropriate than the title of Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*."⁵⁸ Gray is again introduced as a substitute for Andrew Marvell as an example of "the finished perfection of the products of a consummate literary culture."⁵⁹ The added references to Gray's *Elegy*, and particularly his substitution of a seventeenth century poet, relocate the reception of the poems as cultural products akin to those of the Romantic period in tone and mode (if not in generic resemblance), while the notion of a "finished perfection of a consummate literary culture" implies a sense of continuity from the "roughness" of the Old English poems to the polished style of the late eighteenth century. This markedly hermeneutic literary historicism resurfaces in Alexander's discussion of *The Wife's Lament*, which "reads coherently as a direct, personal and literal complaint, of a sort which would have interested Thomas Hardy."⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ibid., 148, 150, and 158 respectively.

⁵⁶ *Old English Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), Preface.

⁵⁷ *A History of Old English Literature* (Toronto: Broadview, 2002), Preface.

⁵⁸ *Old English Literature*, 111; *A History of Old English Literature*, 139.

⁵⁹ 116, 145 respectively, cf. Appendix II: 2.4.2.B and C.

⁶⁰ *Old English Literature*, 128; *A History of Old English Literature*, 159.

The final examples of perpetuation of the concept of the “Old English elegy” consist of Anne L. Klinck’s studies on the genre, first in “The Old English Elegy as Genre” (1984), and later in her critical edition of *The Old English Elegies* (1992), both of which are addressed to a much more limited audience. In ‘The Old English Elegy,’ Klinck refers to the unmistakably aural “widespread feeling that the Old English pieces designated by the term “elegy” belong together,” and perpetuates the historicist association of the Old English texts with Gray’s *Elegy*, with which “they have a kinship,” and “even with Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*.” She describes the genre as possessing “a characteristic form...contrastive to heroic narrative poetry...add[ing] the shaping devices characteristic of lyric.”⁶¹ In spite of this, she notes the formal affinities of the poems with the homiletic, gnomic, and riddle traditions, concluding that their formal features “have a correspondence elsewhere, though the way in which they are handled in the elegy is distinctive.”⁶² Such distinctiveness consists of “a more intense evocation of personality and a more deliberate arrangement of recurrent patterns,” which shows that “the elegies can be seen as the group of poems which more clearly and deliberately strive after lyrical form.”⁶³ In her critical edition of the Old English “elegies,” Klinck offers refers to Greenfield’s definition, and describes the label as “a convenient locus for particular themes,” concluding that “the structural features, like the scenic elements, are not peculiar to elegy...but the conjunction of several of them in the same poem is distinctive.”⁶⁴ What Klinck seems as “distinctive” here may be the result of the condensed form of the Exeter Book lyrics in comparison to longer pieces where the elements mentioned do appear in very similar arrangement, though not in a contextually isolated environment.

These are some representative examples of the critical tradition in Old English scholarship throughout the twentieth century, though by no means do they stand in isolation. The excerpts analysed here are echoed to a

⁶¹ ‘The Old English Elegy as Genre,’ *ESC* 10:2 (1984), 129-40, at 130. Cf. Appendix II: 2.4.2.D for full reference.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 133. The quotation is repeated almost verbatim in Klinck’s 1992 critical edition.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁴ *The Old English Elegies*, 11.

greater or lesser extent in a vast amount of individual studies, anthologies, and collections of textual criticism. Thus, Ralph W.V. Elliot finds it “particularly appropriate” to quote a few lines from Wordsworth as comparable to *The Wanderer*, and Martin Green, in the introduction to an essay collection entitled *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research* (1983), describes “the ambiguities of these allusive and elusive products of Anglo-Saxon verbal art, [which], like Keats’ Grecian urn... “tease us out of thought”,” and “the danger of becoming like Blake’s “Idiot questioner who is always questioning/ And never capable of answering”.⁶⁵ It is not surprising, then, that the volume of secondary literature questioning the validity of the existence of an Old English “elegiac” genre is comparatively insignificant in relation to the critical discourse supporting its use. Nonetheless, it has had a noteworthy impact in the study of Old English literature, as they have evidenced the inconsistent use of generic classification and the lack of cohesion of the aesthetic principles behind the “Old English elegy.”

2.5 – “Participation without Belonging:” The “Old English Elegy” as Genre

Although disagreement as to the validity of the “elegy” label had been previously expressed, no ground-breaking alternative was offered until B. J. Timmer’s “Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry” (1942). Starting from Sieper’s canon of nine elegies, Timmer’s foundational article disregarded *The Ruin* as the poem is “only a fragment and we do not know for certain what it was meant to be,”⁶⁶ and *Deor* because “so many characteristically elegiac elements are absent [that] the conclusion seems warranted that *Deor* is not an elegiac poem.”⁶⁷ The triad of *The Wife’s Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and *The Husband’s Message* are examined in some detail,

⁶⁵ Ralph W.V. Elliot, ‘Form and Image in the Old English Lyrics,’ *EIC* 11 (1961), 1-9, at 5; Martin Green (ed.), *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), *Introduction*, 11-12.

⁶⁶ ‘The Elegiac Mood,’ 34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35. Cf. Appendix II: 2.5.A, Section 1.

concluding that the first two are “eleg[ies] pure and simple;” but of the third he remarks that “the general tone of this poem is cheerful and there is no lament over any loss of happiness,” for which “this poem cannot be called an elegy at all.”⁶⁸

Timmer then goes on to discuss a group of four “distinctly religious poems,” comprising *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Resignation*, and *The Rhyming Poem*. The argument for the inclusion or exclusion of these in the elegiac group should be the same, as “the similarity in sequence of thought is too great to justify the inclusion of only two in a discussion of elegiac poems.”⁶⁹ Owing to the “religious propaganda” interwoven with their original elegiac openings, all ought to be considered “religious didactic lyrics.”⁷⁰ Thus out of nine original “elegies,” Timmer reduces the catalogue to only two, as “this *genre* comprised poems that are now lost to us and most of these poems that are at present often called elegies do not deserve the name.”⁷¹ Timmer’s criterion is based on the opposition of Germanic and Christian elements and, as his conclusion that “the origin of the elegiac mood is... a fundamental element of the Germanic character... [adapted] to Christian propagandistic purposes” shows, his argument is still largely framed against virtually the same genetic literary historicism present in nineteenth century editions and in Sieper’s work.⁷²

Although the genre of individual poems continued to be questioned and reassessed, as will be address below, it would be the publication of Tom Shippey’s *Old English Verse* (1972) that would provide a new far-reaching attempt to re-catalogue the entire corpus of “ Old English elegy.” In the interval between Timmer’s article and Shippey’s book, the use of the term “elegy” was largely legitimised by critics, from Kennedy’s historicist defence of the genre to Greenfield’s authoritative definition. In short articles and studies on individual poems, some dissenting voices were raised, although the consensus remained the term was practical, if vague and rather

⁶⁸ Ibid., 36-37. Cf. Appendix II: 2.5.A, Section 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 37-40. Cf. Appendix II: 2.5.A, Section 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 38.

⁷² Ibid., 41, and again 44. Cf. Appendix II: 2.5.A, Section 2.

inaccurate. Possibly the most noteworthy example of direct opposition is Herbert Pilch's remark in a comparative study of Old English and Old Welsh "elegy:" "The Old English elegy is an elegy neither in the classical Greco-Roman nor in the modern sense as represented (say) by Thomas Gray's "Elegy written in a Country Church Yard [*sic*]," thus opposing the hermeneutic approach. The generic terminology must be taken, then, "as purely arbitrary," for "it implies no relationship or similarity to other genres which are (with equal arbitrariness) called by the same name."⁷³

Other than Pilch's short commentary, it is to Shippey's largely influential *Old English Verse* that we must turn to find a serious challenge to scholarly consensus. Conceived as a general study of Old English poetry, without any particular emphasis on the nature of the "Old English elegy" as such (he actually refers to the term as "vague enough to be inoffensive if unhelpful"⁷⁴), Shippey's view offers a variation in their treatment. While not entirely opposing the usefulness of the "elegy" label, he notes its artificial, aural quality. Such impression comes from their being "urgent, passionate poems," which, "unlike the great bulk of Old English verse, with its anonymous and hortatory tones...claim insistently to be personal, the products of individual experience." Consequently, Shippey aptly calls into question the selection of poems from the Exeter Book (except *Resignation* and *The Rhyming Poem*), "with its implied rejection of eight or nine comparable ones," which "displays a certain arbitrariness which might be useful to be challenged."⁷⁵

He thus catalogues the texts as poetry of "wisdom and experience," based on the observation that "[m]any poems in the Exeter Book qualify for such treatment...by offering advice, the fruit of wisdom, [and] by describing the process of acquiring wisdom." In this general tendency, Shippey concludes, "the 'elegies' are planted without any mark of distinction, and from which they differ only through their deliberate illusions of

⁷³ Herbert Pilch, 'The Elegiac Genre in Old English and Early Welsh Poetry,' *ZfcPh* 29 (1964), 209-24, at 210.

⁷⁴ *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1972). 53.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

personality.”⁷⁶ Thus, the Exeter Book lyrics are only perceived as different from the rest of this block of wisdom poetry in their fictional subjectivity, which is only a rhetorical artifice aimed at embodying and voicing the wisdom that results from experience: they rely on “some similar alternation of involvement and detachment, and share as a basic theme the ability of the mind to control itself and resist its surroundings.”⁷⁷ Shippey’s innovative treatment of the poems has much to recommend it, not only because it exposes the artificiality of the extra-textual generic label applied to the Exeter Book lyrics, but also because it re-evaluates their position in relation to their overall thematic affinities with the rest of Old English poetry in general, and with that contained in their same physical, material context in particular.

One final authoritative study of the Old English “elegy” as an artificial genre in the second half of the twentieth century is Maria José Mora’s ‘The Invention of the Old English Elegy’ (1995), upon which the present study builds some of its arguments. Mora finds the foundations of the genre in “an essentially Romantic concept of elegy...alien to the OE period: elegy as sentimental or personal poetry,”⁷⁸ and reviews evidence that supports her claim in some early verse anthologies. Arguing that “both the generic concept and the canon are essentially 19th century fabrications...presented by the critical discourse as an almost miraculous find,” she concludes that “the gap between the actual object and the extraordinary significance attributed to it is bridged by faith alone.”⁷⁹

The far-reaching influence of Mora’s pioneering study further evidenced the invalidity of the application of the term “elegy,” based not only on the general inadequacy of its use, but also on its specifically historicist and hermeneutic bias. Hence, in some recent anthologies and histories of Old English literature, the term “elegy” is treated as “little more than a label for a group of dramatically voiced poems whose direct

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁷⁸ ‘The Invention of the Old English Elegy,’ *ES* 76:2 (1995), 129-39, at 129.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

expression of emotion has appealed to post-Romantic taste,”⁸⁰ only serving the purpose of “seeming to justify the lavish critical attention bestowed upon them...predicated on the modern preference, inherited from the Romantics, for poetry that takes the form of lyric self-expression,” and its application “fruitless and misleading.”⁸¹ As a direct consequence, studies on individual poems from the past decade have tended to focus on their individualities rather than on their similarities with other texts belonging to the group of “Old English elegy.” The effect of such studies, however, had already been noted in previous scholarship, and as such their contribution mark the progressive decay of the “Old English elegy” and the adoption of the alternative “elegiac” or “elegiac mode.”

2.6 – Conclusion: “Elegy” or “Elegiac”?

The one aspect that speaks most strongly against the cohesiveness the “Old English elegy” is the overwhelming production of individual studies addressing the affinities of individual poems with other genres and traditions. The number of attempts to relocate each text in alternative groups and literary or cultural backgrounds is too great to be treated at length here, so that the reader is referred to the exhaustive bibliographical references in Klinck’s *Old English Elegies* and Bernard J Muir’s recent edition of the Exeter Book.⁸² When it comes to “elegy” as a generic label, in more recent anthologies and critical editions the corresponding section has been either significantly reduced or replaced by an alternative heading; mostly the broader “lyric” or “poems of wisdom (and experience).”⁸³ The most recent

⁸⁰ Michael Alexander, *The First Poems in English*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2008, rpt), 46.

⁸¹ Robert D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Blackwell, 2003), 180. Cf. Appendix II: 2.5.B.

⁸² *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies, 2 vols. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, 2nd ed.) vol. 2: Commentary.

⁸³ To mention but a few recent examples, Lois Bragg includes the speakers of the Exeter Book poems under “lyric speakers,” cf. *The Lyrics Speakers of Old English Poetry* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), ch. 1; Richard Marsden includes *Deor*, *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and *The Wife’s Lament* in *Reflection and Lament*, together with the Durham proverbs and a few *Riddles* (“Swan,” “Shield,” “Onion,” “Bible,” “Bookworm”), whereas *The Seafarer* is contained in the “Example and Exhortation” section in *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010, 8th

reference edition of the complete corpus of Old English poetry, the *Dumbarton Oaks Library*, breaks down the Exeter Book into two small volumes, each labelled *Old English Short Poems*. Volume I, *Religious and Didactic*, contains only the first section of *Resignation*; the second section is contained in Volume II, *Wisdom and Lyric*, together with the rest of the poems traditionally labelled as “elegies.”⁸⁴

This does not mean that attempts to reinvigorate the use of the term “elegy” have altogether ceased; however, these are mostly constructed around general formulaic similarities, which only contribute to further obscure and hybridise the meaning of the label, and to stretch its application to an even broader scope of texts.⁸⁵ General discussion of Old English poetry and studies of individual texts also continue to use the more diffuse adjective “elegiac,” implying the presence of one or more themes traditionally associated with the original group of Exeter Book lyrics proposed by Sieper. The “theme of exile” still resonates to some degree as a typically “elegiac” feature, but the acknowledged ubiquity of language and

ed); Fulk and Cain discuss the poems as “Wisdom Literature and Lyric Poetry,” *A History of Old English Literature*, 164-192; Greg Delanty and Michael Matto catalogue *The Rhyming Poem* as a “Poem about Living,” *The Ruin* as a “Poem about Dying,” and all other “elegies” (except *Resignation*) as “Poems of Exile and Longing” in *The Word Exchange: Anglo-Saxon Poems in Translation* (NY and London: Norton, 2011); and, finally, Craig Williamson follows the MS layout and enumerates a range of interpretations upon introducing individual poems, without opting for any given one, though occasionally referring to them as “elegies” or by their “elegiac tone,” *The Complete Old English Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

⁸⁴ Christopher A. Jones (ed. and trans.) *Old English Shorter Poems, vol 1: Religious and Didactic*, DOML 15 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), and Robert E. Bjork, *Old English Shorter Poems, vol. 2: Wisdom and Lyric*, DOML 32 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014). It is unfortunate that, where the same collection features Cotton A.xv in its totality as a coherent unit, the remaining poetic codices have been dissected according to generic classification or modern editorial concerns; cf. Robert D. Fulk (ed. and trans.), *The “Beowulf” Manuscript*, DOML 3 (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2010) As a result, the poems of the Vercelli Book are separated into two volumes (*Poems of Christ and His Saints*, containing *Andreas* and *The Dream of the Rood*; and *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, containing *Elene* and *The Fates of the Apostles*), while the *Old Testament Narratives* combines the first three poems of Junius 11 (*Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Daniel*) with *Azarias*, from the Exeter Book. *Christ and Satan* falls under *Poems of Christ and His Saints*, together with the *Christ* and *Guthlac* sequences. The contents of the Exeter Book are scattered across several volumes according to various generic classifications, with only the *Riddles* being absent from the collection. Cf. Daniel Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Old Testament Narratives*, DOML 7 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Robert E. Bjork (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, DOML 23 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); and Mary Clayton (ed. and trans.), *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, DOML 27 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013)

⁸⁵ Cf. Battles, ‘Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres.’

imagery associated with social alienation across texts, manuscripts, and genres, both in prose and verse, has gradually diminished its force as a distinctive element and reinforced its view as a common *topos* in the Old English literary imagination.⁸⁶ Instead, “elegiac” usually refers to a poignancy of subjective perception and a vividness of psychological or emotional expression that marks a poem or passage thereof as surpassing the type character construction of narrative verse. In other words: “elegiac” largely applies to the *life of the mind* and the *discourse of emotion* of certain Old English texts. These two aspects are, in essence, the inheritance of Wordsworthian ideas that lyric poetry (virtually correlative with “elegiac,” if we attend to contemporary definitions of either) should be the “spontaneous outburst of powerful feeling” expressed in “the form natural to the reflective mind.”

The “Old English elegy” has become a genre in itself. The force of the scholarly discourse has resulted in the coinage of a sub-category of elegy that is presumably found exclusively in Old English literature. Thus, Fulk and Cain take notice of this as they reject the idea of “elegy:” “not in the sense of the word as it applied to Classical or later English verse, but to lyric composition of a type peculiar to Old English,”⁸⁷ and the Oxford *Handbook of Elegy* features a section dedicated exclusively to the “Old English elegy.”⁸⁸ The survival of the genre, then, is grounded on the assumption that psychological realism and emotional force are intimately interwoven with perceptions of transience in a series of poems and passages from longer texts. These assumptions, however, can only be maintained as long as we are willing to perpetuate literary historicist conceptions of poetic genre, and ignore the fact that both the *life of the mind* and the *discourse of emotion* are, like transience, eternity, and exile, elements inherent to the Old English literary imagination.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Christine Fell, ‘Perceptions of Transience,’ and Milton McC. Gatch, ‘Perceptions of Eternity,’ both in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013, 2nd ed.), 180-97 and 198-213 respectively.

⁸⁷ *A History of Old English Literature*, 179.

⁸⁸ Andy Orchard, ‘Not What It Was: The World of Old English Elegy,’ in Weisman, *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 101-16.

3 – “A Short Reflective Poem:” First-Person Voice and Self-Referentiality

3.1 – Introduction: The Psychological Focus of the “Old English Elegy”

The standard authoritative definition of the “Old English elegy” establishes that poems so labelled should be “*relatively short*,” expressed in a “*reflective or dramatic*” mode, and “be ostensibly based on a specific *personal experience or observation*.” Each of these aspects deserves some re-examination, not only as concerns individual poems, but in the broader perspective of Old English poetic corpus. The vague notion of the “shortness” of a poem as a defining element in its generic classification, while imprecise on itself, is further undermined by its *relativeness*. In addition to the disparities in length among the Exeter Book lyrics, the so-called “elegiac” passages in narrative poems may take over a few sentences (such as “The Father’s Lament” in *Beowulf*, 2444-62) or run on for entire sequences if reconstructed as a coherent unit (as Satan’s several speeches in *Christ and Satan*).

While it may be argued that these passages are not “elegies” proper but examples of the “elegiac mode,” according to traditional scholarship, and that “*relatively short*” is a valid premise if we take the obvious contrast in extension between, say, the whole of *Beowulf* and *The Wife’s Lament*, this concession allows for the question of how to classify such texts as the *Meters of Boethius* or the two funerary poems in the “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.” These are not contextually isolated in the sense the Exeter Book lyrics are; however, some of the *Meters* fit the generic label all too comfortably, and the two Chronicle poems are, strictly speaking, the only orthodox examples of elegy in the Classical funerary sense preserved in Old English. The issue can be pushed further if we consider how *The Dream of the Rood* adheres to the parameters of “relative shortness” in being scarcely longer than *The Seafarer*, and how it shows many of the features traditionally associated with “Old English elegy:” use of I-persona,

autobiographical narrative, expressing an attitude towards the said experience, lament, mind-related imagery, etc. In all these texts, generic boundaries clash and blur, making it difficult to stick to a rigid classification based on such weak parameters as the extension of the poems. For one thing, many of them have come down to us heavily damaged and incomplete (*The Ruin* or *The Husband's Message* are only the most relevant examples), for which reason pursuing a generic distinction which discriminates the span of a text seems, to say the least, unpractical. In this sense, modern editorial practices, including lineation, might have influenced our perception of the poems as a coherent group based on our own preconceptions about the formal aspects of lyric poetry.

No less problematic or influenced by the modern bias is the “reflective” quality of the “Old English elegy.” To be sure, most texts thus labelled focus heavily on the life of the mind, and their primary function is that of giving voice to the innermost thoughts of an individual. Nonetheless, preoccupation with the life of the mind and the place of the individual in society and Creation is a virtually universal aspect of Old English poetry *and* verse. Recently, several studies have greatly contributed to our understanding of representations of the mind, mental processes, and the self in vernacular verse. Malcolm Godden’s ground-breaking comparative study of Anglo-Latin and Old English conceptions of the mind and use of relevant terminology in either tradition set a landmark in the exploration of how early medieval English authors perceived the mind as a distinct entity from the soul, as well as the discourse around the faculties of either.¹ Britt Mize’s elucidation of the metaphorical representation of the mind as container, with an ability to hold, release, block, and permeate, has been furthered by Leslie Lockett’s thorough investigation of the “hydraulic model” of mental and emotional processes in the vernacular tradition in relation to notions implemented from Latin sources, with the chest-container as the seat of all

¹ Malcolm Godden, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,’ in Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss, (eds.), *Literature and Learning in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 271-98.

mechanics of reason and emotion.² Undeniably, many of these studies take on some of the Exeter Book lyrics as illustrative examples of their arguments.

The remarkably psychological focus of these poems has produced abundant exploration of their use of mind-related language and the various portrayals of the life of the mind.³ Peter Clemoes' seminal article on *The Seafarer* offered valuable insight into how the representation of the extracorporeal flight of the mind in this poem carries patristic echoes.⁴ Greenfield himself focused on the speaker's use of self-referential language to settle a scholarly disagreement with John C. Pope around the voices intervening in *The Seafarer*, which greatly contributed to our understanding of the poem's switches in narratorial voice.⁵ James L. Rosier drew attention to how *The Wanderer* is "intrinsically a mirror of a mind in its several states and faculties;"⁶ and the cycle of thought and evocation in *The Wife's Lament* has more recently been approached in terms of the value of memory as an agent for the reinsertion into society of the spatio-temporally alienated subject.⁷ These are but a few examples of a myriad valuable studies on the role of the mind and its various faculties in the Exeter Book lyrics to which general monographs touching on the various psychological readings of the poems should be added.

² Britt Mize, 'The Representation of the Mind as Enclosure in Old English Poetry,' *ASE* 35 (2006), 57-90; Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: UTP, 2011).

³ It is important to note here that I use the term "lyric" only in opposition to "narrative," and not as an echo of post-Romantic aesthetics (cf. the Note on Terminology in the Introduction to the present study).

⁴ Peter Clemoes, 'Mens absentia cogitans in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*,' in D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (eds.), *Medieval Literature and Civilisation: Studies in Memory of G.N. Garmonsway* (London: Athlone Press, 1969), 62-77.

⁵ John C. Pope, 'Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,' in Jess B. Bessinger and Robert P. Creed (eds.), *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis P. Magoun, Jr.* (NY: NY University Press, 1965), 164-93; contested by Stanley B. Greenfield in 'Min, Sylf, and Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,' *JEGP* 68:2 (1969), 212-20; agreed by Pope in 'Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*,' *ASE* 3 (1974), 75-86.

⁶ James L. Rosier, 'The Literal-Figurative Identity of *The Wanderer*,' *PMLA* 79:4 (1964), 366-69, at 366.

⁷ Sachi Shimomura, 'Remembering in Circles: *The Wife's Lament*, *conversatio*, and the Community of Memory,' in Charles D. Wright *et al.* (eds.), *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill* (Toronto: UTP, 2007), 113-29.

However, the fact that scholarly consensus exists around the idea that the Exeter Book lyrics are crucial examples of how Old English authors understood the mechanics of the mind, the heart, and the soul, does not necessarily imply that these texts are unique in their exploration of these themes. On the contrary, it is precisely because there is ample textual evidence to back up readings of the Exeter Book lyrics as deeply psychological poems that we have come to perceive them as such. In other words, the availability of textual sources, both in Latin and the vernacular, dealing with the “life of the mind” and its distinctness as a *topos* related to, but not cognate with, the spiritual life, is what allows us to gain deeper insight into the world of the poems. They represent a highly sophisticated, condensed rendering of the tradition dealing with the inner life of the individual as identified by scholars in the Old English cultural background: they *grow from* a normative tradition rather than being its point of departure. The privileged position that the Exeter Book lyrics have traditionally enjoyed in the canon has contributed in no small degree to their upholding as the culmination of the psychological/mental thematic preoccupation shared by authors of prose and verse alike. Other poetic texts less favoured by the critical eye also participate in the exploration of psychological processes and the inner sphere of the individual’s mind, in ways that resemble their treatment in the Exeter Book lyrics at times, providing confirmation that the “life of the mind” is not limited to or concomitant with the idea of “elegy.”

3.2 – The “Life of the Mind” in Old English Poetry: Voices and Subjects

The phrase “life of the mind” appears frequently in Old English scholarship, although it is sometimes not altogether clear what it is meant by it. In general terms, it entails two distinct yet closely related elements: one the one hand, it refers to the mechanisms and processes that take place in an individual’s mind, or more precisely, in his *mod* (here understood as

the centre of cognitive, emotional and rational-deductive processes);⁸ on the other, it alludes to the relative degree of autonomy that the mind has in relation to the body, where the *mod* is capable of leaving its physical seat through memory, evocation, and even an extracorporeal form of flight or anticipation. Although I will deal with each of these aspects of the phrase in due course, for the time being I will focus only on the first one, as it is more representative of the vernacular tradition and poetic diction, whereas the second is largely influenced by the Latin tradition (which does in no way exclude a pre-existing or contemporary understanding of the extracorporeal mind/soul in the vernacular). Therefore, in referring to the “life of the mind,” I will be alluding to “mental processes (perception, imagination, cognition, memory, intention), faculties, (reason, intellect, belief, sensation), and experiences (meditation, reverie, dreams and visions).”⁹

When it comes to our understanding of the “life of the mind” in Old English poetry, Antonina Harbus concludes in her thorough and illuminating work that instances of exploration of mental processes are “sufficiently numerous and prominently situated to suggest that psychology constitutes a definite thematic concern” throughout the corpus; so much so that “poetic interest on the inner person is so habitual in Old English verse as to be considered conventional.”¹⁰ It is precisely because elaborations on the life of the mind and self-recognition of identity are ubiquitous in poetry, to the point of conventionality, that its validity as a defining feature of “elegy” cannot be accepted. Any aesthetic, ideological, or figurative principle that appears consistently throughout the corpus, regardless of generic limitations, is likely to be part of the extra-textual socio-cultural milieu—which I will be calling the *Old English experience of the world*—expressed in a variety forms and therefore not constituent of a

⁸ There is some debate as to how and to what extent does “mod” include all these elements. For Lockett’s discussion on the precise meaning and application of related Old English terms, see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, Chapter 1.

⁹ Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam and NY: Rodopi, 2002), 3. Of these, I will only deal with those mental experiences where the mind is shown as a corporeal agent; namely, where no active detachment from the body is mentioned (as in, for example, the eagerness of the soul to re-join the Creator, or dream-visions). The reason for this is that I consider them to pertain to the spiritual rather than psychological dimension of the “mod.”

¹⁰ Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, 3

single textual category. Two such principles of the life of the mind in Old English poetry that are usually referred to in the scholarly discourse surrounding the Exeter Book lyrics are the definiteness of an I-persona producing an utterance, and the complex mechanisms of self-recognition and reconstruction of identity established as a result of such development of the self.

In the eyes of traditional scholarship, the one feature that most powerfully sets apart the Exeter Book lyrics from the rest of the canon is their distinctive use of the I-persona. Usually, it appears not so much as a narratorial device than as the unifying principle of an otherwise disjointed autobiographical account with no temporal or spatial references whatsoever; “a medium for expression [and] a way of organising and processing thought.”¹¹ On given occasions, this organising and processing principle constitutes not only a means for the conveyance of a given psychological state (or a rational/emotional series of them), but a cathartic confessional utterance whereby the self is exposed, questioned, or even rejected, to then be reconstructed through reinterpretation of memory and self-perception. Harbus states how such process is most poignantly expressed in the “elegies,”

where the thematic interest in self-autonomy, resolution, and self-reflection locates individual identity and consciousness in a conspicuous place in poetic discourse. By these means, the development of the self through meditation arises as a central concern, [telling] us as much about the perceived functions of poetry in society as it does about the poet’s working model of the mind.¹²

However, although accurate in its description of how poetic language brings notions of the self and its de- and re-construction to the centre of thematic preoccupation, this view falls short of taking two aspects into consideration. First, Harbus refers here and elsewhere to some of the Exeter Book lyrics only, leaving *The Ruin* and *The Husband’s Message* out,

¹¹ Ibid., 12

¹² Ibid., p. 13

so that it remains uncertain whether such process of self-exploration is in truth common to *all* of them; a crux that is not easily solved considering there is no fixed canon of texts. More importantly, the generic label again limits our perception of the poetic canon, and by implication of the texts in which the self-referential exploration of the “I” is brought to the centre of attention. Harbus’s work, which is highly sophisticated and has contributed in no small way to our understanding of the psychological and emotional richness of Old English poetry, is constrained by its adherence to the limitations of poetic genres, and so it should be better understood as applicable to the entire corpus rather than to specifically “poignant” elements. By granting that even if exploration of identity does not belong exclusively to the realm of “elegy” it does find its highest expression in it, there is danger of assuming that texts falling outside the scope of this category do not partake of the crucial discussion of identity and self-exploration through meditation, or at least that they are not good enough examples of it. However, not only does questioning and exploration of identity occur in other texts, it features even more centrally and distinctively so than in some of the alleged “elegies,” at times expanding and elaborating on its poetic value.

3.3 – Subjective Discourse: Delimiting and Defining the “I”

In Old English poetry, a taxonomy encompassing three main categories of speakers can be largely differentiated:

a. The third-person voice of narrative verse, almost a conventional narratorial device rather than an actual poetic voice, as it merely introduces actions, events, and characters’ speeches without being part of or affected by them. This is the omniscient, non-intrusive external speaker of *Beowulf* and other narrative verse.

b. The conversational “I-you” voice, where the audience is directly addressed and included in the world of the poem, as in the “saga hwæt ic hatte” formula in the *Riddles*, the *Soul & Body* poems, or in the Cynewulf signature passages, where narration turns into conversation as the narratorial third-person voice shifts to a direct address to the audience. The

Soul & Body addresses are an interesting case in point: they are meant to reproduce a dramatized dialogue between the soul and the body, although, in truth, the only voices intervening are those of a third-person narrator and the accusing soul, so that the conversation is not so much within the poem itself as it is aimed at the audience/body. Thus, in *Soul and Body II*:

Hwæt drug ðu dreorga, to hwon dreahtest þu me,
 eorþan fylnes; eal forweornast,
 lames gelicnes.

(*Soul and Body II*, 17-19a)

[“What have you done, wretched one? Why did you torment me; you, fully corrupted filth of the earth; you, the semblance of mud?”]

Here, the audience becomes the extra-textual “ðu” and is thereby expected to identify with the soul’s address—or rather, compelled to *avoid* being the soul’s interlocutors as its discourse rebukes sinners. The appealing force of the poem lies precisely in its conversational voice, as the audience feels admonished by the reproachful soul, and is implicitly entreated to lead a righteous life. This conversational voice is thus different from the conventional dialoguing voice, where the second person is explicit in the text. The “I-you” structure may also be implicit in the first-person plural form when it affects the external world of the poem, as in the closing lines of *The Seafarer*, introduced by the homiletic *uton* formula in line 117.

c. The first-person dramatic or lyric voice, where the speaker introduces an autobiographical account not addressed to a particular audience directly (there is no “you,” only an “I” and a “them,” who are not directly addressed either), and which is of a confessional or self-exploratory nature rather than narrative one. This is the dominating voice in the Exeter Book lyrics, but also in the *Riddles*, the *Meters* of Boethius, and in the soliloquies of *Christ and Satan* and *The Dream of the Rood*.

These voices occur across genres and transcend any other classification, for which reason they are particularly useful in analysing the “reflective” element in Old English poetry. It is not infrequent that more than one voice appears in the same text, especially if we consider that a narratorial voice may introduce a first-person dramatic monologue (usually through the *maðelode*, *cleopað*, or *cwæð* formulae), in which case it serves

as a dramatic framework for the speech it precedes or follows. Similarly, voices may shift to adapt to the purpose of a poem: the “I” of *The Seafarer* shifts to the inclusive “we” as it introduces the exhortative *uton* passage, thereby becoming a conversational rather than confessional utterance; in a similar way, the first-person opening of many *Riddles* is only broken at the end, where the “say what I am called” formula is stated. Interestingly, in many of the *Riddles* no such formula appears, for which the entire monologue develops in the same first-person lyric voice we find in *The Wanderer* or *The Wife’s Lament*. Take as an example *Riddle 5*, which strongly echoes the language and diction, as well as the tone and voice of the Exeter Book lyrics:

1 Ic eom anhaga iserne wund,
 bille gebennad, beadoweorca sæd,
 ecgum werig. Oft ic wig seo,
 frecne feohtan. Frefre ne wene,
 5 þæt me geoc cyme guðgewinnes,
 ær ic mid ældum eal forwurðe,
 ac mec hnossiað homera lafe,
 heardecg heoroscearp, ondweorc smiþa,
 bitað in burgum; ic abidan sceal
 10 laþran gemotes. Næfre læcecynn
 on folcstede findan meahte,
 þara þe mid wirtum wunde gehælde,
 ac me ecga dolg eacen weorðað
 þurh deaðslege dagum ond nihtum.

(*Riddle 5*)

[I am a solitary one, wounded by iron, smitten by the sword, sated with works of battle, exhausted by blades. Often do I see conflict, daring fighting. I expect no comfort; [no] consolation that [may] come to me from the strife of battle, before I utterly perish among men; but the hammer’s legacies beat me, hard-edged, sword-sharp, the work of smiths, [they] bite me in the battlements. I must always await a more hateful clash. Never could I find a leech on the battlefield who might heal my wounds with

herbs,¹³ but the scars of edges grow greater on me by day and by night with a mortal blow.]

The only indication that the text is in fact a *Riddle* is its placement in the sequence, and the *S* rune for “shield” at the bottom, providing a solution. However, were the text isolated from its context and placed in line with *The Wanderer* or *Wulf and Eadwacer*, its allusiveness, martial vocabulary, and above all its lamenting, soliloquising I-persona would be in accordance with their mode and tone. The opening line immediately echoes the *anhaga* in *The Wanderer*, while the speaker’s hopelessness for consolation or relief is a common motif in all poems labelled as “elegies.” This leads to the question of whether the text of *Riddle 5* is a deliberate imitation of such autobiographical narratives, or whether the similarity between texts comes from the conventional use of the lyric-dramatic I-persona.

Nonetheless, the first-person lyric voice has become inevitably associated with “elegy” or the “elegiac mode” in Old English poetry. Even if the universality of mental experience is accepted as a general principle of the totality of Old English poetry, where the poetic exercise “is both conceptualised as a mental process and construed as a forum for enunciating the experiences of the life of the mind,”¹⁴ the primacy of “elegy” over any other genre in epitomising such universality is invariably referred to. Somehow contradictorily, the universal, unifying principle of psychological focalisation becomes here “a recognisable feature of the genre.”¹⁵

Since universality and exceptionality are mutually exclusive concepts, the cohesive value of the psychological focus of Old English poetry seems to be at odds with its delimitative use in defining the “elegiac” genre. To illustrate how focalisation on the mental world of a first-person speaker is by no means a valid criterion for the formation of a genre-defined group of poems, I will discuss the central importance of the use of I-persona

¹³ *Folcstede* may be rendered as “the dwelling of people” (i.e., towns) or “field of battle,” as in *Judith* 318b-19, “Hæfdon domlice / on þam folcstede fynd oferwunnen” (“They had, to their honour, overmatched the enemy on the field of battle”). I take the second option is the more coherent in context, but either might be possible.

¹⁴ Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

in three texts not pertaining to the canonical “elegiac” strain. In the case of *Meter 2* of Boethius, the strategic use of first-person pronouns shifts the focus from the decay of art in the original Latin to the mental decay of the speaker in the vernacular rendering. “Satan’s Lament,” (*Christ and Satan*, 1-364) structurally and thematically close to the “elegies,” is constructed around the collapse of Lucifer’s identity as he becomes Satan, whose sense of individuality fades into non-definiteness as he acknowledges his loss of power and privilege. Finally, the double use of I-persona in *The Dream of the Rood* exemplifies the value of voice taxonomies in relation to narratorial variation to construct a first-person based psychological focus. The latter poem, though akin to the “elegiac” group, is usually left out of the survey owing to its thoroughly Christian subject and its assimilation into the broader “Christian poetry” label. In all these texts, syntax and the uses of repetition and variation play a key role in understanding the crucial importance of their psychological dimension, built around the various mental shifts in the speaker’s perception of the “I.”

3.3.1 – *Meter 2* of Boethius and the Diction of Autobiographical Narrative

The critical history of the Old English *Meters of Boethius* is interesting in terms of the position of the *Meters* in the canon. Once considered *the* one example of the “elegiac” in Old English, together with *The Exile’s/Wife’s Lament*, they soon lost their privileged position.¹⁶ There can be little doubt that the reason for this is the devaluation of all verse ultimately rooted in a Latin source during the early stages of Old English literary scholarship in the nineteenth century; very likely the same reason why Satan’s or Adam’s laments, the latter in *Genesis B*, were never included in the canon. Even during the years of increasing popularity of formulaic theories, the *Meters* were largely ignored despite their high verbal resemblance to the Exeter Book lyrics in terms of diction, imagery, and style. The importance of aesthetic similarities between Old English poems in relation to their treatment of sources received from extraneous traditions

¹⁶ Cf. Conybeare’s *Illustrations*, lxxx-lxxxii.

will be dealt with in later chapters. For the time being, I will only address the differences between Latin and vernacular as the Old English texts strategically use syntax to focus on the use of I-persona.

There are several structural differences between the Latin and Old English versions of the *Consolatio*: prose sections are condensed or augmented, some *Meters* are omitted, while others merge into one another, and often the Old English author takes great poetic licence to elaborate on his source. Hence, the Old English Boethius opens with a historical preface in verse, which does not exist in the Latin original, where we hear Boethius's voice from the start. Here, a third-person narrative voice, the same one that often interrupts the narrative to introduce explanatory notes, provides the dramatic framework for Boethius to utter his opening lament, preceded by the formulaic "Clepode to drihtne | geomran stemne, gyddode þus" ("He called to the Lord | with a sad voice, sang as follows," *Meter 1*, 83b-84).

Two aspects immediately recall the lyric voice of the Exeter Book lyrics in this formulaic overture. First, even before the poetic persona of Boethius intervenes, the narratorial third-person voice forewarns us that the speaker sings "geomran stemne," providing us with information as to his mental and emotional state. Second, and more importantly, as opposed to *cweðan*, *mapelian*, *sprecan*, or *clepian*, Boethius's utterance is described as *giddian*. The verb can be used in a number of different registers, usually taking either the meaning of "to make a formal speech, speak out,"¹⁷ or "sing, recite in verse."¹⁸ The latter option seems contextually more accurate, particularly as we compare Boethius's lament to the "giedd" of the speakers in *The Seafarer* and *The Wife's Lament*, who are "earnmcearig" ("miserable," *The Seafarer*, 14a) and "ful geomorre" ("utterly wretched," *The Wife's Lament*, 1b) respectively. Therefore, it seems clear that the tone

¹⁷ Thus *Beowulf* 628b-30, "[Beowulf] þæt ful geþeah / ...æt Wealhþeow, / ond þa gyddode guþe gefysed" ("[Beowulf] took the cup / ...from Wealhþeow, / and then made a speech, primed for battle") or *Daniel* 598-99a, "Ongan ða gyddigan þurh gylp micel / Caldea cynin" ("The king of the Chaldeans then started a great speech with much boasting").

¹⁸ As in *Phoenix* 548b-49a, "Gehyrað witedom / lobes gieddinga" ("Listen to the wisdom / of Job's verses"), and again in 570-71a, "Ðus frod on fyrndagum / gieddade gleaw-mod" ("Thus a sage man in the days of old / sang wise in mind"). B-T, p.474 yields "to sing, recite, speak" without any further commentary, so that the meanings here offered are derived from the semantic nuances drawn from contextual use.

and nature *Meter 2* is remarkably alike to those of at least two of the Exeter Book lyrics.

The use of poetic voice in *Meter 2* greatly differs from the original Latin, even if the thematic focus on the contrast between former joy and present sorrow has been kept somewhat unaltered. However, while the Latin opens with Boethius's *carmina* as its focus, the Old English reverts to the formulaic *Hwæt* immediately followed by the first-person pronoun, placing the focus on the speaker's persona rather than on his work. The formulaic opening of *Meter 2* acquires greater significance if considered as part of a syntactical arrangement running through the entire piece, whereby first-person pronouns are repeatedly emphasised. The Latin goes on to elaborate on how the nature of Boethius's verse has become the sorrowful expression of *maestos modos*, where the poet is merely an instrument of the Muses that force him into "gloomy moods/modes." The Old English rendering, on the other hand, shows the poet in the height of his mental turmoil, a slave to his emotions. The strong focus on the I-persona in the first half of the *Meter* introduces a correlation between the speaker's mental tribulation and the decay of his art. Compare:

5 has saltem nullus potuit peruincere terror,
 ne nostrum comites prosequerentur iter.
 gloria felicis olim uiridisque iuuentae,
 solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis.

(*Consolatio, Meter 1, 5-8*).

[Yet at least they were not conquered by fear, they still attend me on the path I tread. Once the glory of youth's verdant happiness, [they] now in the gloom of old age console my fate.]

In these lines, it is the muses, metonymically the speaker's art, that occupy the central role; it is "has" ("they") that have not yielded. The Old English version, which greatly expands and elaborates on these lines, brings their autobiographical aspect to the fore through use of diction (in bold) and syntactic arrangement (underlined), focusing on the use of I-persona:

Me þios siccetung hafað
 5 agæled, ðes geocsa, þæt ic þa ged ne mæg
 gefegean swa fægre, þeah ic fela gio þa

sette soðcwida, þonne ic on sælum wæs.

(*Consolatio*, Meter 2, 4b-7)

[This sighing, this sobbing, have hindered me, so that I cannot compose those songs so beautifully, although I formerly arranged many a true speech, when I was prosperous.¹⁹]

In the Old English version, the emphasis is placed not so much on the consolatory quality of verse and on the personification of Boethius's art, but on his own person, change of fate, and the emotional distress derived thereof. The triple variation of "þæt/þeah/þonne ic" at the beginning of each second half-verse emphasises the importance of the "I," not only in *Meter 2*, but in the entire *Consolatio*, as the Meter acts as a general introduction to the work. The repetition of *þ*- sounds before the pronoun links the three half-lines together, and so creates a sense of progression from one statement to the next, reinforced by the correlation between the three discourse markers ("so that," in the present, "although," introducing contrast, "then/when," in the past). The resulting image is that of three different through somehow connected "I's:" the present "I" is the one speaking, which contrasts with the artistically prosperous "I" from the past, who is also spatially removed from the present, as he was "on sælum" (7b), both emotionally and in terms of social status. Thus, the "I" of *Meter 2* is a different person mentally, temporally, and spatially, from the one who used to sing at the halls in former times. None of these implications are present in the Latin original: they are the result of the Old English poet's reworking of his sources within the conventions of Old English verse, and in accordance to the conventions of his own cultural environment.

The fragmentation of identity in *Meter 2*, representative of Boethius's state of mind, reflects Old English preoccupations with transience and the mutability of fate, which find in the *Consolatio* a suitable vehicle for expression, adapted to the familiar linguistic and cultural parameters. The contrastive use of images of the self is thus a recurrent

¹⁹ Alternatively, "when I was in the great halls." It depends on whether we take *sælum* to come from *sæl* ("great hall") or from *sæ̅l* ("happiness, prosperity"). Comparison with the Latin renders the latter more likely, although the exiled condition of Boethius makes the first possibility also admissible, thus introducing an interesting wordplay whereby prosperity and Boethius's former social status are implicitly bound together. "Prosperous" seems to capture both meanings felicitously enough.

motif in Old English verse, as is the importance attached to the use of personal pronouns and their emphatic placement in significant lines. These correspondences in phraseology, style, and thematic concerns evidence the cohesive force of Old English verse, and stand in stark opposition to notions of sharply defined genres; particularly when such classifications rely on broad cultural preoccupations. In the context of the present discussion, *Christ and Satan*—traditionally a marginalised text in the corpus owing to its being, on the one hand, a Biblical poem (and thus of lesser relevance for early scholarship concerned primarily with digging out the relics of a distant Germanic past) and, on the other, of later date than the rest of the poems in Junius 11—provides ample evidence for the ubiquity of certain rhetorical strategies and thematic concerns across Old English texts and manuscripts, thereby countering the idea of a distinctly “elegiac” set of formal features.²⁰

3.3.2 – “Satan’s Lament:” Personal Pronouns and the Disintegration of the Self

Of all the Old English poems falling outside the scope of canonical “elegy,” the first section of *Christ and Satan*, significantly referred to as “Satan’s Lament,” yet for some reason not included in the “elegiac” group at all, is the one that most closely follows the pattern of the Exeter lyrics, as it contains some of the elements traditionally ascribed to them.²¹ The psychological focus of “Satan’s Lament,” while not so prominent in the poet’s use of mind-related vocabulary,²² is inescapable in terms of mental projection, use of memory and evocation, and self-exploratory discourse.

²⁰ Scholarship on *Christ and Satan* is scarce and usually focuses on the first section of the poem. A complete critical edition with source study and a general analysis of themes and structure is Charles Sleeth, *Studies in “Christ and Satan”* (Toronto: UTP, 1982). See also Thomas D. Hill, ‘The Fall of Satan in the Old English *Christ and Satan*,’ *JEGP* 76:3 (1977), 315-25; and Ruth Wehlau, ‘The Power of Knowledge and the Location of the Reader in *Christ and Satan*,’ *JEGP* 97 (1998), 1-12.

²¹ Lines 1-364 of the poem has been known as “The Fallen Angel’s Lament” or “Satan’s Lament” since Richard P. Wülker labelled it “Die Klagen der Gefallnen Engel” in his *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1894).

²² *þyncan* appears in 19a, 55a, and 186, while *geþohtas* is used in 204b, and again in 283b. Forms of *hycgan* other than *oferh[y/i]gdum* (69a; 226a) appear in 84, 178a, and 343b. *Wenan* is used in 59, and again in 89. Minor terms include *gemunan* in 201b, 205b, and 285a; *deman* in 298a; and *ongeotan* in 300a.

The entire account of Satan's distress in finding himself banished from the heavenly host and divested from former glory is an exercise in redefinition of identity: the angelic Lucifer is no more, and the demonic Satan struggles to come to terms with his new self. Exiled and despised by his former lord, Satan engages in a series of dramatic monologues where he revisits the past in order to understand his present, eventually accepting his new reality and seeking to construct a future based on his newly acquired identity, if only in despair of recovering what survives now only in memory. In its use of self-referential discourse and deployment of memory as its organising principle, "Satan's Lament" resembles the use of similar rhetorical strategies in *The Wanderer*, whereas the contrastive element of "difference" evokes the vivid phraseology of *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

The poem opens in a third-person narrative voice, introducing some of the recurrent patterns running through the first section of *Christ and Satan*: the fall of the rebel angels is told through an accumulative use of movement up and downwards (from heaven to earth and hell, then back to heaven), contrast between light and darkness, images of bliss and woe, the unfathomability of God's designs, and the futility of Satan's insurrection. Nonetheless, as poetic voice shifts to the first person, so does the tone of the poem from narrative to lyric. Satan's opening lament is echoed in the much-quoted *Hwær com* passage of *The Wanderer*:

Cleopað ðonne se alda ut of helle,
 35 wriceð wordcwedas weregan reorde,
 eisegan stefne, "Hwær com engla ðrym,
 þe we on heofnum habban sceoldan."

(*Christ and Satan*, 34-37)

[Then the old one cries out from hell, utters these words with an evil voice, a dreadful noise: "Where has the glory of angels gone, which we were destined to have in the heavens?"]

The *ubi sunt* lament in *The Wanderer* follows a similar structure, although the series of *Eala* exclamations found immediately following the passage in the Exeter Boo lyric are found in a later section of "Satan's Lament:"

- Pu** us gelærdæst ðurh lyge **ðinne**
 þæt we helende heran ne scealdon.
- 55 Ðuhte **þe anum** þæt **ðu** ahtest alles gewald,
 heofnes and eorþan, wære halig god,
 scypend seolfa. Nu **earttu** sceaðana sum,
 in fyrlocan feste gebunden.
- Wendes **ðu** ðurh wuldor ðæt **þu** woruld ahtest,
- 60 alra onwald, and we englas mid **ðec**.

(*Christ and Satan*, 53-60)

[“You persuaded us with your lies that we needed not obey the saviour. It seemed to you alone that you had power over everything, heaven and earth; that you were the holy God, the creator himself. Now it is *you*, a wretched evildoer, who is firmly bound in a prison of fire. In your glory you believed that you possessed the world, had power over everything, and we angels with you]

The separation of first-person plural (underlined) and second-person singular pronouns and adjectives (in bold) is consistent, as they do not appear together in the same half-line after the initial “Pu us” juxtaposition. The form “earttu/eart þu” appears to have a particularly emphatic force, as the placement of the affixed pronoun is syntactically unnecessary and introduces a sharp contrast with the use of “seolfa” in reference to God in the previous half-line. The effect is that of stark differentiation between God *himself* (who had been at first the subject of Satan’s denunciation) and *you* (Satan, who turns out to be the greater wrong-doer); hence, the line acquires a distinct tone of reprobation for Satan’s extreme pride. It is at this point that Satan’s voice moves more definitely to the “I,” and introduces for the first time a second-person reference. The emphatic “Ic wæs” and the accumulative use of first-person singular pronouns and adjectives at the start of his own account of the fall illustrate the shift:

- Ic** wæs iu in heofnum halig ængel,
 dryhtene deore; hefde **me** dream mid gode,
 micelne for meotode, and ðeos menego swa some.
- Pa ic** in mode **minum** hogade
- 85 **þæt ic** wolde towerpan wuldres leoman,

bearn helendes, agan **me** burga gewald
 eall to æhte, and ðeos earme heap
þe ic hebbe to helle ham geledde.
 Wene þæt tacen sutol þa ic aseald wes on wærgðu,
 90 niðer under nessas in ðone neowlan grund.
 Nu **ic** eow hebbe to hæftum ham gefærde
 alle of earde.

(*Christ and Satan*, 81-92a)

[“I was once a holy angel in heaven, dear to the Lord; I had great joy with God, in the presence of the creator, as did this multitude. Then I resolved in my mind that I would overthrow the radiance of glory, the Son of the saviour, [and] obtain for myself control over the boroughs with everyone as my possession, and [so did] this wretched crowd that I have led home to hell. Consider that clear omen when I was banished into damnation, deep underground into the deep abyss. Now I have driven you all [to this] home out of your native land as captives.]

The emphatic first-person voice used here to indicate the start of Satan’s complaint brings the audience’s attention to his own persona, moving away from the dramatic framework. The fronted use of “þa/þe/þæt ic” (underlined) is strongly reminiscent of the anaphoric structure of *Meter* 2, and occurs only when the poet wishes to single out Satan’s identity, as its non-emphatic presence elsewhere in Satan’s discourse shows (compare, for example, the inverse arrangement of “Ic wæs iu in heofnum” and “Iu ahte ic gewald,” 106a). Satan’s intention seems clear: to highlight his former angelic status as God’s dearest retainer, and in so doing separate himself from the many (“menego,” 83b, 110a) and the crowd (“heap,” 87b) thereby turning the “we” into “they;” not “us,” but “you” (“eow,” 91a, 112b). The inclusive plural appears again sporadically when Satan complains about the torments of hell and the privation of heavenly joy, though separated at times by as much as forty-odd lines (94b, 98b, 100, 114, 150a, 153a), and only more prominently after 228b.

Satan contrasts his two states of being and introduces the psychological conflict that runs through his account of the fall: “Ic wæs iu in heofnum hælīg ængel” (“I was once a holy angel in heaven,” 81) as opposed to “Ic eom fah wið God” (“I am God’s enemy,” 96b); “Iu ahte ic

gewald ealles wuldres” (“Once I had power over all heaven,” 106), contrasting with “Nu ic feran com | ...to ðissum dimman ham” (“Now I have come |...to this dark abode,” 109b-110b). Satan’s conflict of identity crystallises in a series of negative statements highlighted by anaphora:

Ne mot ic hihtlicran hames brucan,
 burga **ne** bolda, **ne** on þa beorhtan gescaeft
ne mot ic æfre ma eagum starian.
 [...] **Ne ic** þam sawlum **ne mot**
 145 ænigum sceððan,
 butan þam anum þe he agan nyle;
 þa **ic mot** to hæftum ham gefeferian,
 bringan to bolde in þone biteran grund.
 Ealle we syndon ungelice
 150 þonne þe we iu in heofonum hæfdon aror
 wlite and weorðmynt.

(*Christ and Satan*, 137-39; 144b-51a)

[“I shall never be allowed to possess a more pleasant abode, a citadel or hall, nor shall I ever be allowed to gaze upon bright creation again with my own eyes. [...] I must not harm any of those souls, except only for those which He does not wish to have; I shall lead those home as captives, bring them to my dwelling in the bitter abyss. We all are different from what we were, when we used to have beauty and honour, long ago in heaven.]

The parallel anaphoric structures “I shall/shall not” (underlined), constructed around Satan’s self-obsessive use of first-person subject pronouns, introduce a sense of negation of his former self, highlighted by the repetition of negative particles (in bold). As he becomes divested of privileges, Satan resolves his inner conflict through negation of his angelic being and of his individuality among demons: “Ealle we syndon ungelice” (149). The intertextual implications of this line are inescapable: echoes of *Wulf and Eadwacer* reverberate as the dissociative “Ungelic[e] is us” (“We are different/It is different with us”) comes to mind. Just as the speaker in *Wulf and Eadwacer* separates herself and her addressee from her “people,” Satan assumes his own non-belonging to the angelic troop and his assimilation into the host of demons.

In a final lament for the loss of his former self, Satan produces a series of *Eala* outcries (bearing significant reminiscences of a similar passage in *The Wanderer*, 94-95a), in which the first-person *ic* takes an emphatic turn again. As the passage is too long to be reproduced here in full, an excerpt will suffice to show how Satan’s discourse is heavily centred on his own persona, and how the paraphrastic sequence of negative statements produces the effect of separation from Satan’s former self:

- Eala Drihtenes þrym, Eala duguða helm;
 Eala meotodes might, Eala middaneard;
 165 Eala dæg leohta, Eala dream Godes;
 Eala engla þreat, Eala upheofen;
 Eala **þæt ic** eam ealles leas ecan dreames,
þæt ic mid handum **ne mæg** heofon geræcan,
ne mid eagum **ne mot** up locian,
 170 **ne** huru mid earum **ne sceal** æfre geheran
 þære byrhtestan beman stefne,
ðæs ic wolde of selde sunu meotodes,
 drihten adrifan, and agan **me þæs** dreames geweld,
 wuldres and wynne, **me þær** wyrse gelamp
 175 *þonne ic* to hihte agan moste.

(*Christ & Satan*, 163-75)

[“Alas for the majesty of the Lord, alas for the lord of hosts!²⁵ Alas for the creator’s might, alas for middle-earth! Alas for day’s light, alas for God’s joy! Alas for the troop of angels, alas for the heavens above! Alas that I am forever deprived of eternal joy, that never again shall I reach for heaven with my own hands, nor look up with my own eyes, nor ever hear with my own ears the sound of the clearest trumpet! Because I wished to drive the Lord, the creator’s son away from his throne and gain for myself the power of its joy, glory and bliss; it turned out all the worse for me than I might have ever expected.”]

The accumulative principle at work in the repetitive use of the negative (underlined) and first-person pronouns (in bold), which goes on for a few lines longer, (“*Ne mæg ic*,” “*hu ic*,” 176; “*wat ic*,” 180b; “*Ic...sceal*,”

²⁵ Or, alternatively, “lord of virtues,” depending on which sense of *duguð* is preferred; although both are probably implied considering Satan’s covetousness for power.

183b; “ic geþohte,” 186a), constructs a dissociative image of Satan’s persona as a “not I, not me” litany resonates in each sentence. From this amalgamation of pronouns, the elided anaphoric “þæt ic” at the start of lines 169-70 is left out, although their placing between lines opening with “þæt/þæs ic” (167a, 168a, 171a) sufficiently implies their presence, reinforced by their alliterative association with “þonne ic” (175a) and the “me þæs/me þær” pair in 173b-74b (all italicised). The distribution of pronouns in Satan’s speech is telling in itself: “ic” is used a total of thirty-nine times, whereas “we” appears only on fifteen occasions, three of which occur before the demons’ first intervention, and six after Satan has relinquished his former self. The consistent use of “we” after line 228, “Nu is gesene þæt we syngodon,” reveals Satan’s ultimate de-individualisation. After his last speech, where the “I” featured prominently, his voice is lost in the crowd of demons: the narratorial voice refers to him in the singular no more (“cwædon,” 227a; “gnornedon,” 279a) and introduces only what the host of the damned cries out. It seems peculiar that, where Satan has been the centre of dramatic attention and his soliloquising the leading thread of poetic expression, the poet now silences him without any closure to his discourse or any indication as to his final words.

“Satan’s Lament” is an exceptionally valuable piece for the *précis* with which it displays the progressive collapse of Lucifer’s/Satan’s identity in time and space, physically as well as mentally, through use of an accumulative principle of diction and imagery that reflects on the speaker’s distorted, self-centred perception of reality.²⁶ In terms of its core thematic preoccupation—the discourse of self-exploration and the (re-)construction of identity through the agency of memory—“Satan’s Lament” is reminiscent of *The Wanderer* and *Meter 2*; in its deployment of imagery of separation and difference, it echoes *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife’s Lament*. It provides, then, a bridge between some of the texts that have traditionally been considered “elegies” and some that have not, thereby

²⁶ I discuss the relationship between time, space, and self in Satan’s discourse in ‘The Heart of Darkness: Descent, Landscape, and Mental Projection in *Christ and Satan* and “The Wife’s Lament”,’ in Ruth Wehlau (ed.), *Darkness, Depression, and Descent in Anglo-Saxon England* (Richard Rawlinson Center Series. Kalamazoo: WMUMIP, 2019), 277-98.

showing that generic distinctions are arbitrarily applied despite strong formal and thematic intertextual affinities.

More importantly, Satan's monologue, constructed around his use of "I" and the various implications associated with its reiteration or relinquishment, fits within a consistent tradition that shows dramatised speakers soliloquising on the nature of the self, identity, and the language of self-exploration; hence supporting the traditionality and conventionality of the *topos* in Old English verse. As a corroborating example, the Vercelli Book poem *The Dream of the Rood* provides an alternative approach to the use of dramatic monologue in Old English poetry. Based on the occurrence of several I-personae in the same text, each of these provides insight into their own mental world to construct a single cohesive narrative, thereby echoing the mental polyphony of *The Wanderer* and further blurring the boundaries of the "elegiac."

3.3.3 – Competing Narrators in *The Dream of the Rood*

This interplay of voices in *The Dream of the Rood* is more complex in its narrative pulse, but straightforward enough when it comes to its display of lyric polyphony. The use of "I" in the poem is slightly deceptive, as its function seems at first sight merely narratorial rather than lyric-dramatic: it serves as a foreword that provides the background for the actual first-person speech to commence. However, the very dramatic framework in which the second speaker's speech takes place is located within the first speaker's mind, in "swefna cyst" ("the choicest dream," 1a). For a dream vision to occur, a mental landscape needs to be introduced, which can only be provided by an I-persona narrative voice. Thus, the unusual double lyric voice becomes a poetic device aimed at creating a likely scenario for the action to take place, as well as at constructing the atmosphere of introspection and the supernatural that a dream vision requires.²⁷ As in

²⁷ The dream-vision framework of *The Dream of the Rood* has been the object of much scholarly debate, particularly in the context of early medieval and late antique dream-theory; see, for example, B. Heatt, 'Dream Frame and Verbal Echo in *The Dream of the Rood*' *NM* 72:2 (1971), 251-63; Richard C. Payne, 'Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of *The Dream of the Rood*,' *MP* 73:4 (1976), 329-41; Antonina Harbus, 'Dream and Symbol in *The Dream of the Rood*,' *NMS* 40 (1996), 1-15; and Britt Mize,

Christ and Satan and *Beowulf*, the dramatic monologue is then introduced by a formulaic phrase: “Ongan þa word spreca wudu selesta” (“Then the most excellent tree spoke these words,” 26), separating the unusual first-person narratorial voice from a more definite lyric I-persona. The intrusive “ic þæt gyta geman” (“I still remember it,” 28b) at the very opening of the second speaker’s narrative draws attention to this new subjective voice. The anastrophe “ic þæt/ þæt ic” (28b-29a), places the first-person pronoun at the fore of the discourse opening, and completes the shift from narrative to lyric voice.

The lyric-dramatic I-persona is kept through the entire narration, which is permeated with prosopopoeia in order to endow the inanimate speaker’s speech with psychological realism, often resembling the language of the Exeter Book lyrics. Compare, for example, “Nu ðu miht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa, | þæt ic bealu-wara weorc gebiden hæbbe, | sarra sorga.” (“Now, my dear man, you may hear that I suffered the deeds and grievous afflictions of men, the pain and sorrow,” 78-80a) to the following lines from *The Seafarer*:

1 Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wreccan,
 siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
 earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
 bitre breastceare gebiddan hæbbe...

(*The Seafarer*, 1-4)

[I can tell a true tale of myself, relate my journeys, how I, in days of toil,
 have often suffered times of hardship, endured bitter sorrow in my breast.]

In both passages, the lyric speakers present their own autobiographical narratives using a similar tone and displaying related diction and phraseology, though with a fundamental difference in style: while the speaker of *The Seafarer* focuses on the use of lyric-dramatic I-persona (*I* can speak about *myself* and *my* journeys), the one in *The Dream of the Rood* introduces a conversational “I-you” structure (*you* may hear about *my* suffering), emphasising both the interplay between competing narratorial and lyric voices in the poem and its intended address to the

‘The Mental Container and the Cross of Christ: Revelation and Community in *The Dream of the Rood*,’ *SP* 107:2 (2010), 131-78.

audience. The autobiographical account turns into exhortative and prophetic speech, addressing the narrator/audience directly: “Nu ðu miht geyran” (“No you may hear,” 78a), “Nu ic þe hate” (“Now I beseech you,” 95a), whereas the first-person narratorial voice returns at the end of the Cross’s intervention in a quasi-homiletic mode, resembling the closing *uton* passage of *The Seafarer* in tone and subject matter. Only when the speaker and Christ are one after His death on the Cross does the lyric voice shift from “I” to “we,” implying the blending of their two identities as the Cross metonymically stands for the figure of Salvation. Imbued with the authority of his new status, the Cross/speaker leaves dramatic introspection aside to acquire a commanding conversational voice.

The two speakers in *The Dream of the Rood* take on the first-person confessional/autobiographical voice seen in the Exeter Book lyrics and other poems such as the *Meters of Boethius* or “Satan’s Lament.” From the foregoing discussion, the inappropriateness of the use of an “I”-persona voice uttering an autobiographical account of his/her own cares as a defining feature of the “Old English elegy” becomes self-evident. As a rhetorical device, it appears in a variety of texts from widely different traditions and on an ample range of dramatic contexts, so that its use does not belong to one form of poetic expression only. Indeed, it is not unusual for many of these occurrences to bear a degree of resemblance in tone or theme, but this can hardly be attributed to the self-conscious use of a set of well-established generic conventions as we understand the elegiac, pastoral, or any other lyric form today. Instead, the use of an I-persona to voice the cares and sorrows of an individual’s mind reflects on the very preoccupation with the life of the mind that is part of the Old English experience of the world, and in which the first-person voices of the Exeter Book lyrics participate rather than originate.

3.4 – Conclusion: Dramatic Voices, Dramatised Discourse

The practicality of establishing a rigid taxonomy of poetic voices that is applicable to the totality of Old English poetry depends on the degree of strictness of which the structural device is conceived. One of the most

salient features of Old English verse is its high degree of dramatization: the reproductions of speeches performed by personae that are extraneous to the text as it has come down to us. Thus, considering the hierarchy of voices in any of the “Cynewulf” poems, we find the poet re-enacting utterances to which he is no direct witness, but rather a reproducer separated by several degrees from his source (the speech of a certain character). These are, in turn, transmissions of these voices as recorded by a second author in a different language (the Latin source), who usually bases his own account on hearsay, historical sources, and legend. It is therefore essential to always bear in mind the dramatic or, more accurately, *dramatising* quality of Old English poetry when talking about poetic voices. The various *swa cwæð* narratorial interludes in *The Wanderer*, for example, complicate the degree of impersonation that the lyric speaker is carrying out in each of the dramatic monologue fragments.

It is interesting to consider what these apparent impersonations or reproductions of extraneous discourse imply: dramatic enactment, mental re-enactment of past forsaken identities, or simultaneous interaction of mental states voiced by separated I-personae enacted by a single speaker. These possibilities coexist within the text, and it is only our interpretation of speech and speaker boundaries that might favour one over any of the others. On the other hand, the conversational turn of *The Seafarer* echoes the addresses to the reader in the *Riddles* and the *Soul and Body* fragments, where a lyric-dramatic I-persona speaks out his own mind to then direct his discourse a posited external audience. Finally, the emotional soliloquies of *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, whose affective impact streams from the narratively disjointed stories, are unified only by the pathetic force of their dramatised discourse. The speakers’ utterances are not linear or even narrative, but almost thespian in their re-enactment of past emotional climaxes that survive in memory and can only be recovered through a highly performative use of language. It is this performative dimension of language in Old English poetry that creates a sense of subjectivity, which is more sharply defined in some of the Exeter Book lyrics because of their isolation from any explicitly stated dramatic framework, but which is nonetheless well paralleled elsewhere in the Old English poetic corpus.

4 – Attitudes towards Personal Experience: Identity, Memory, and the Self

4.1. – Introduction: Self-Referentiality and Reflexive Discourse

The focalisation of Old English poetic discourse through the individual “I” voice in highly dramatised lyric form evidences a cultural interest in the idea of the self and the mental processes whereby it is retrieved and projected onto language, as opposed to the collective consciousness of the third-person narrative mode. Explorations of the self appear in a variety of forms across different texts, sometimes portraying the individual struggling to recover a sense of identity that is defined by their position in the social hierarchy (as in the case of Satan or the speaker in *Deor*), whereas in certain cases the speaker is the passive object of transformative forces operating upon the individual, such as bestowal of divine grace or the agency of fate. Where identity is defined and transformed by the individual’s interaction with the community, the main active element at work is memory, through which the speaker is able to evoke a former self, often dramatically impersonating it in the present in order to either relinquish or reconstruct it as a posited future self (as in *The Wanderer*, where several *personae* intervene as part of a single speaker’s dramatised monologue). As for the possibility of external transformative agency, where it occurs, the individual undergoes a series of changes brought about by symbolically charged events and the intervention of supernatural forces, so that the transformation is not only psychological but also metaphysical; it affects identity and the self as well as the very physical and spiritual status of the subject. The main difference between these two mechanisms of retrieval and reconstruction of the self is that the one is internal and inherent to the meditative mind; the other is external and requires thought as well as word and deed conjoined in a propitiatory liminal environment—such is the case of saints and heroes as they experience trials of faith and/or valour.

As with the use of I-persona, the self-exploratory dimension of Old English poetry has been both acknowledged as universally present in the corpus and restrictively defined as distinctively “elegiac.” When discussing the construction of selfhood and individual identity in the Exeter Book lyrics, the process has been described as

a self-reflective enunciation of personal feeling, informed by the application of remembered details to present circumstances and focussing on the mental outlook [of] this procedure. A dynamic between the past and the present is set up which enables a change in outlook to be shown at the same time in which the expression of that outlook occurs. This dual time-frame is made possible by an alienation from the self, or individual identity, on the part of the speaker.¹

While this enunciation is true of most texts under the “elegy” label, it is also applicable to poems or excerpts thereof falling outside its scope, and so it is even more illuminating insofar as traceable across texts and manuscripts. In the course of analysis of the use of I-persona in some of the texts discussed in Chapter 3, I briefly alluded to the central importance of evocative language and the speakers’ juxtaposition of past and present as a means to place the “I” at the axis of the discourse. It is therefore only logical that the inherent self-awareness that accompanies the use of dramatic monologue relies heavily on self-referentiality and temporal dislocation of the self to construct an identity—be it figurative/dramatic or literal/psychological—behind the speakers’ lyric *personae*. A brief definition of these terms in context might prove useful. By *self*, it is meant “the totality of the individual, consisting of all characteristic attributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical,” which may refer “either to the person as the target of appraisal...or to the person as the source of agency.”² It thus involves “an “I” that thinks and a “me” that is the content of those thoughts;” *self-referentiality* or *reflexive capacity* involves, then,

¹ Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, 137

² Shridhar Sharma, ‘Self, Identity, and Culture,’ in Sangeetha Menon *et al.*, (eds.) *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Consciousness and the Self* (Springer India, 2014), 117-124, at 118; 120.

“thinking, being aware of thinking, and taking the self as an object of thinking,” focalising experience and discourse through the “I.”³ While continuous, the self can be dynamic, subject to evaluation and de- or reconstruction through introspective examination. *Identity*, then, refers to “a person’s conception and expression of individuality, [based on] a set of definitive characteristics that ma[ke] a “natural self” or a “real self” preserved over time.” In this sense, identity “becomes people’s source of meaning and experience.”⁴ While the “self” is internal and relies on one’s own capacity for individual identification and realisation, “identity” ultimately relies on what we perceive as an external manifestation and projection of the “self.” The two are closely intertwined, however, as our sense of identity has an impact on how we perceive and construct our idea of “self.” In self-referential discourse, memory provides the bridge between past and present, which may take on different roles or values depending on the speakers’ situation and the thematic focus of the text itself.

The value of memory as a cultural element in the Old English conception of the mind operates on several levels. It acts as a cohesive agent in bringing together some of the principles that recur in Old English prose and verse alike as constituents of the fully realised self: age (in which past and present are implicit), as a means to achieve wisdom; self-reflectiveness, as a quality of the meditative mind that seeks wisdom; and speech, as a vehicle for the transmission and preservation of wisdom. Moreover, memory is presented by the speakers as the very instrument for the coalescence of past and present, whereby a recovery of the former self and an exploration of the present through juxtaposition of a dual time-frame are possible. Memory also allows for the resolution of the conflict of temporal dislocation of past and present selves through a cathartic resolution in the form of a future self in the making. Hence, in “Satan’s Lament,” Satan presents his past angelic being and his present fallen state as conflicting selves, which can only be reconciled as he accepts his

³ “Self” in Gary R. VandenBos (ed.), *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (American Psychology Association, 2015).

⁴ Sharma, ‘Self, Identity, and Culture,’ 117.

otherness (his being *ungelic*) and shifts perspective towards a potential future self, subject to God's forgiveness.

Thus, the self in Old English poetry is presented chiefly as the product of meditation (as a tool for self-exploration) and memory (as the leading and cohesive agent for such exploration). It crystallises as the result of an exploration of parallel, temporally juxtaposed discourses, the outcome of which is a third narrative that exists only as a potential realisation of a projected identity. In terms of the relationship between dramatic monologues focalised through the use of I-persona and the tripartite agency of memory, *The Wanderer* provides a much discussed example of exploration of the self.⁵ The highly dramatised form of the text creates a striking sense of juxtaposition of past, present, and future selves, all of which coalesce in the same temporal framework through the agency of memory. Traditionally, one of the main cruxes of the poem has been how to reconcile its polyphonic structure, leading to a variety of theories as to the number of speakers, the purpose of the text, or the progression of thought in a logical sequence led by rationality and the finding of consolation in grace.⁶ However, the mechanisms of remembrance allow a single mind to reproduce different discourses internally (or indeed externally) without it necessarily implying the intervention of more than one speaker or a flaw in the cohesion of the text.

4.2 – Surrendering the Self: Overcoming the Past in *The Wanderer*

The several *swa cwæð* interludes that separate each of the speeches in *The Wanderer* give voice to two manifestations of the same self occurring at different moments in time. Memory allows for such phenomena, where evocation does explicitly play a major role, without

⁵ See, for example, the Greenfield-Pope argument over the number of speakers in the poem and how establishing a fixed number of voices affects its mode and meaning; cf. Chapter 3, n.4.

⁶ The main trend in scholarship establishes a single speaker's progression from *anhaga to snottor on mode* through meditative contemplation. See Stanley B. Greenfield, 'The Wanderer: A Reconsideration of Theme and Structure,' *JEGP* 50 (1951), 451-65; and Thomas C. Rumble, 'From *eardstapa* to *snottor on mode*: The Structural Principle of *The Wanderer*,' *MLQ* 19 (1958), 225-30. This interpretation has remained largely unchallenged.

relying on hypothetical, extra-textual interpretive frameworks: “Swa cwæð eardstapa earfela **gemyndig**” (“So spoke the wanderer, mindful of hardships,” 6) and more explicitly in 88-91, where the correlation between memory and the meditative mind is clearly established through the syntactic parallel “deope geondþenceð” / “feor oft **gemon**” (89b-90b). Upon introducing each of the two dramatised speakers, the narrator refers to their mental processes and enunciations thereof as exercises of memory. It is difficult to ascertain where one speech finishes and the next begins, but following the indications of the *swa cwæð* or “so spoke” transitions, it is reasonable to assume that the narrative of the *eardstapa* begins at line 8 and finishes at line 84, where a brief interlude introduces the “wise man” (“þas word acwið,” “[who] spoke these words,” 91b), whose speech takes over up to line 110, where a new *swa cwæð* passage gives way to the concluding lines of the poem, presumably spoken by the same voice enunciating the previous two introductory/transition passages.

On two different occasions the first voice, that of the *anhaga* or *eardstapa*, refers to memory as both the cause of his sorrow and the means to retrieve former joy. First, as he discusses the longing for past joys,

Wat se þe cunnað,
 30 hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan,
 þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena.
 Warað hine wræclast, nales wunden gold,
 ferðloca freorig, nalæs foldan blæd.
Gemon he selesecgas ond sincþege,
 35 hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
 wenede to wiste. Wyn eal gedreas.

(*The Wanderer*, 29b-36)

[He understands, he who knows how cruel a companion is sorrow for the one who has few beloved companions. The path of exile claims him, not at all twisted gold; the frozen mindlock, not at all the splendour of the earth. He remembers the hall thanes and the receiving of treasure, how in his youth his gold-friend accustomed him to feasting. All joy is gone.]

and again, as the fleeting image of kinsmen appears before him and rapidly fades away:

50 Ponne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
 sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwad,
 þonne maga **gemynd** mod geondhweorfeð;
 greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
 secga geseldan. Swimmað eft on weg.

(*The Wanderer*, 49-53)

[Then the grievous wounds of the heart will be heavier, sorely longing for the dear one. Sorrow is renewed, when the memory of kinsmen passes through his mind; he greets with joy, eagerly looks at companions of warriors. Away they swim again.]

In both instances, memory is closely linked with the retrieval of the speaker's former identity as a member of society, as opposed to his present situation cut off from the company of kinsmen. It is significant that while "ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan / ne hreo hyge helpe gefremman," ("the weary mind cannot oppose fate, / nor distressed thought provide help," 15-16), memory appears as the only mental process capable of providing solace, though it also brings misery in the form of cyclical remembrance and fleeting comfort. The only means to reconcile the twofold agency of memory is offered in the form of understanding the ways of the world and acquiring wisdom through contemplation. The enumeration of the virtues of a wise man brings the speech of the *anhaga* to closure and serves as a transition to the words of the *gleaw hæle*, whose steadfastness relies on moderation and acceptance of the inevitability of fate:

75 Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
 swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
 winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,
 hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.

(*The Wanderer*, 73-77)

[The wise man must understand how terrible it will be when all the richness of this world shall stand waste, as now variously throughout this middle-earth walls stand beaten by the wind, covered by frost, the enclosures [covered] by the storm.]

Eventual resolution of the conflicting effects of memory (consolation and misery) comes in the form of relinquishing that which is

placing hope and stability in the life to come, not in memory (114-15). The lack of an I-persona in the opening, transitional, and closing passages exemplifies the performative value of the narrative: as the *gleaw hæle* abandons the first-person, it seems only fitting that the external narratorial voice does the same when looking back in time, thereby further utilising memory as an agent for the transmission and preservation of wisdom. There is no contradiction in the use of memory on the speaker's part as he dramatises his resolution of past and present selves. On several occasions he states that a wise man must not unlock his thoughts unless he already knows where they are leading to: "Beorn sceal gebidan þonne he beot spriced, | oppæt collenferð kunne gearwe | hwider hreþra gehygd hweorfan wille" (A stout-hearted man must wait when he would boast, until he may clearly know whither his heart's thought will turn," 70-72), and again,

Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ; ne sceal næfre his torn to
rycene]

beorn of his breostum acyþan, nemþe he ær þa bote kunne,
 eorl mid elne gefremman.

(*The Wanderer*, 112-14a)

[Good is he who keeps his promise, nor must he ever give voice to his heart's affliction too readily, unless he knows how to supply the remedy with courage beforehand.]

In giving voice to his past and present selves, the speaker is doing precisely what he advises: he is using memory as a means for the acquisition, interpretation, and transmission of wisdom. For him who passively awaits the bestowal of grace ("him anhaga are *gebideð*," "the solitary one *awaits* Grace for himself," 1), memory is a source of illusory comfort and renewed sorrow; by contrast, for him who actively seeks the path towards grace ("him are *seced*," "he *seeks* grace for himself," 114b), memory is the active agent for its eventual acquisition. The ring structure of the poem completes the pattern of recovery and reinterpretation of identity. A lonely man ("anhaga," 1a) discloses his thoughts in the hope of retrieving lost joy, actively resisting fate though inevitably bound to stay a passive subject under its agency:

- 1 Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
 metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig
geond lagulade longe sceolde
hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,
 5 **wadan** wræclastas. Wyrð bið ful aræd.

(*The Wanderer*, 1-5)

[Often the solitary one awaits grace for himself, the creator's mercy, although he, anxious in his mind, for a long time has to stir the frost-cold sea with his hands across the waterways, to wander the paths of exile. Fate is fully fixed.⁷]

Verbs and phrases expressing the speaker's movement or action (in bold) sharply contrast with those ascribed to Grace and fate (underlined), which denote inalterability ("ful aræd") or connote lack of agency ("are gebideð" suggests that Grace must be received or bestowed upon rather than actively sought for). Similarly, expressions of binding and fastening ("ferðlocan fæste binde, | healed his hordcofan," "bind fast the soul-enclosure, hold his treasure vault" 13b-14a; "in hyre breostcofan bindað fæste," "bind fast in their breast-coffers," 18) contrast with internal restlessness ("ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan, | ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman," "the weary mind cannot oppose fate, nor distressed thought provide help," 15-16), culminating in a stark juxtaposition of physical activity and mental/emotional oppression:⁸

- "Swa ic modsefan minne sceolde,
 20 oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
freomægum feor, feterum sælan,
 siþþan **gearsa iu** goldwine minne
hrusan heolstre biwrah, ond ic heran þonan
wod wintercearig **ofer wapuma gebind,**
 25 **sohte** seledreorig since bryttan,

⁷ "gebideð" has also been interpreted as "endures" or "suffers" (in the hope of grace/mercy). Cf. B-T 373. The DOE yields "to endure," "to await," "to expect...with hope."

⁸ References to binding and fastening in the context of Old English poetics of mentality also carry implications related to the interpretation of the mind as enclosure, hence the frequent use of verbs and periphrases related to locking, releasing, etc. For a detailed discussion see Britt Mize, 'The Representation of the Mind as Enclosure in Old English Poetry,' *ASE* 35 (2006), 57-90.

hwær ic **feor oþþe neah** findan meahte
 þone þe in meoduhealle mine wisse,
 oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
 weman mid wyнным.

(*The Wanderer*, 19-29a)

[Thus often I, wretched, deprived of homeland, far from kinsmen, had to bind my heart with fetters, since long ago the darkness of earth covered my gold-friend, and I, downcast, travelled from there, winter-weary, over the binding of the waves; sad for the lack of a hall sought out a giver of treasure, where I, far or near, might find one in the mead-hall who might know of my kind, or would console me, friendless, entertain [me] with joys.]

Again, images of binding or stasis (underlined) contrast with physical or temporal displacement (in bold), in terms of the speaker's current psychological state and his spatio-temporal removal from a former or future identity (in the company of days past, which remains static, covered by darkness and earth, or in a hypothetical future, whether far or near). The pattern is progressively reversed, with the speaker remaining static while the external world withers and vanishes. Memories pass through the wanderer's mind and then disappear; all life is fleeting: "Swa þes middangeard | ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ" ("Thus this middle-earth perishes and decays each and every day," 62a-63). By contrast, the wise man's virtues lie precisely in posing an unchanging state of mind in the face of the transient world: "Wita sceal geþyldig" ("A wise man must be patient," 65b), "Beorn sceal gebidan" ("A man must wait," 70a), culminating in the closing sententiae:

"Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice,
 onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
 Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
 her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,
 110 eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð."
 Swa cwæð snottor on mode, gesæt him sundor æt rune.

(*The Wanderer*, 106-11)

[“All is onerous in the kingdom of earth; the dictate of fates alters the world under the heavens. Here wealth is fleeting, here a friend is fleeting, here

man is fleeting, here a kinsman is fleeting; the foundations of this entire earth shall stand waste!" Thus spoke the wise one in his mind, [as he] sat apart in meditation.]

The opening of the poem showed fate as immutable, and the individual as constantly striving to move past his present situation, both physically and mentally ("wyrð bið ful aræd"). In this speech, however, fate is the agent of constant change, which sweeps away every defining feature of collective identity: wealth, companionship, and society ("onwendeð wyrða gesceaft weoruld under heofonum"). The sense of instability ascribed to these elements is reinforced by the rapid succession of paratactic clauses, linked through accumulation of rhetorical devices: anaphora ("her bið"), and epiphora ("læne") create a syntactic uniformity reminiscent of maxims or universal truths, whereas asyndetic juxtaposition introduces a sense of movement that builds on the semantic force of "læne" through isocolon, thereby echoing the swift course of fate. The finality of "eal...idel weorþeð" thus stands as the inevitable consequence of the feeble structures of society. The feeling of motion and change that runs through the passage is then suddenly confronted by the image of the *snottor on mode* sitting alone in meditation, where "gesæt," implies stasis; "sundor," individuality; and "him...æt rune" inner mental activity centred on the self. This triple negation of movement, company, and interaction with society thus separates the speaker from the world, and by implication from preoccupation with the mundane.

The poet establishes a ring structure, constructed around the shifting relationship of the individual with fate, the world, and society. On the one end, the *anhaga* dwells in memory and is mentally bound to the past as he resists the absolute nature of fate and denies the fleetingness of the world; on the other, the *snottor on mode* accepts the inevitability of change, renounces society and places hope in the future. *The Wanderer* hence gives voice to what might be considered as three stages in the speakers' exploration of the self: conflict (as *anhaga*), resolution (as *snottor on mode*), and transmission (as the third-person narrative voice). Its highly dramatised structure facilitates the interaction of these different aspects of self-referentiality within the same timeframe by creating a performative

space in which memory is shown to have transformative and perpetuating qualities. In this way, the dramatic framework of the poem is internally provided, and the tripartite agency of memory offered in all its realisations. *The Wanderer* and *Christ and Satan* thus share a set of common features: they are both structured around a series of soliloquies uttered by speakers whose main focus is the exploration of their past, present, and future selves. In “Satan’s Lament,” three stages of Satan’s discourse mirror those of the speaker in *The Wanderer*: conflict (as he obsessively looks back to the time when he was “iu in heofnum halig ængel,” “a holy angel in heaven back then,” 81), resolution (as he realises that he and the fallen angels are “ungelic”), and transmission (as he finally surrenders his own sense of identity to become one of the many, and accepts that “God seolfa him...| is ana cyning,” “God Himself alone is king,” 258b-59).

A similar pattern arises in *Beowulf*; although, as the poem is set exclusively in the past and based on referential use of legend and history, the narrative shifts from individual to collective memory as a means to explore and transform the self through transmission of shared wisdom. It participates in the same self-exploratory discourse present in *The Wanderer* or “Satan’s Lament,” though it takes a different approach: Beowulf is seen as both an individual and a member of a community, for which reason he has to assert his own identity while finding a place in history and tradition as sources of collective identity. The presence of a similar theme and parallel rhetorical strategies in so disparate texts as *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer* or *Christ and Satan* hints at their common origin in Old English conceptions of the self and identity. The “reflective” quality of the “Old English elegy” is in reality a manifestation of a well-established tradition concerned with the life of the mind, in which “elegy” as a genre and the “elegiac” strain that early scholarship identified in *Beowulf* and other narrative poems grow from and participate in the poetic exploration of such cultural preoccupation.

4.3 – Preserving the Self: *Beowulf* and the Anxiety of Memory

Kin(g)ship as a marker of identity lies at the core of *Beowulf* and occupies many of the lengthier monologues and digressions⁹. As a long narrative poem, *Beowulf* is more concerned with the life of the mind and the construction of individual selfhood in the community than with the exploits of a young hero and king. The entire poem is “a sustained act of remembering and thinking about [the] past...apparently addressed to the human faculties of memory and intelligence, and also to the capacity to...foresee the implications...of individual and group behaviour.”¹⁰ As with the wise man’s narrative in *The Wanderer*, *Beowulf* is preoccupied in the first place with the discourse of memory and inheritance: “it looks to the traditional past for guidance...to live well in the present and the future.”¹¹ Memory and the ability to perdure as part of its collective expression are thus crucial elements for the development of identity both as a righteous individual and as a good king.

The opening scene of *Beowulf* provides insight into the various faculties of memory as a cohesive agent for the functioning of society: the life and burial of Scyld Scefing are part of the collective memory: “we [gefrunon] in geardagum,” (“we have heard in the old days,” 1), an example of individual virtue and a model of kingship. Good ruling, of which wisdom is an essential part, generates fame, which survives in memory and becomes preserved through transmission to future generations: identity becomes imitation; memory, a source of wisdom. The value of the transmission of wisdom from father to son to ensure success and integrity as a ruler (where paternal wisdom microcosmically stands for the macrocosm of history and collective memory) thus becomes key to ensure social cohesion, which becomes in turn part of inherited memory, from Scyld Scefing to Hroþgar.¹²

⁹ Cf. Levin L. Schücking, ‘The Ideal of Kingship in *Beowulf*,’ in Lewis E. Nicholson (ed.), *An Anthology of “Beowulf” Criticism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 35-49.

¹⁰ Alvin A. Lee, *Gold-Hall and Earth-Dragon: “Beowulf” as Metaphor* (Toronto: UTP, 1998), 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Material cultural inheritance also plays a major role in the shaping of individual and collective identity. Possessing ancient treasures, precious because of their intrinsic value

The unfolding of events in the poem is linked with tokens of collective memory by association, usually intertwining different timeframes and playing with the audience's familiarity with history and legend to create a sense of foreshadowing and dramatic irony. The prophesied fate of Heorot is a clear example of this. As soon as the poet introduces it as the culmination of Hroþgar's long and prosperous reign (64-81a), the mention of treason and murder reminds the audience of its inevitable downfall, thereby shifting the focus to the impending destructive agency of Grendel. Even in moments of celebration, the poet never loses sight of the dramatic potential of this retrospective mode. After Beowulf defeats Grendel, his identity is reaffirmed through its integration and preservation in common lore, as "Ðær wæs Beowulfes mærdō mæned" ("There was Beowulf's glory proclaimed," 854b-55a):

Hwilum cyninges þegn,
 guma gilphlæden, gidða gemyndig,
 se ðe eal fela ealdgesegen
 870 worn gemunde, word oþer fand
 soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
 sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
 ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
 wordum wrixlan.

(*Beowulf*, 867b-72a)

[At times one of the king's retainers, a man laden with lofty words, with a memory for stories, who remembered all the many multitudes of ancient tales, who accurately found words bound with others; the man then

and their symbolic implications, is repeatedly shown as a mark of distinction on the social and identity-defining levels. Hrunting, Unferþ's sword, confers his owner a degree of dignity based on the material memory it carries: it is "an foran ealdgestreon" ("a uniquely distinct ancient treasure," 1458), "eald laf" ("an old heirloom," 1488b); Nægling, Beowulf's sword, is "gomel laf" ("an ancient legacy," 2563b), "incgelaf" ("a shining heirloom," 2577a), "iren ærgod" ("iron improved with age;" 2586a). Naming sword endows them with an identity of their own and charges them with historical and personal significance as they metonymically stand for their owners' reputation. As tokens of alliance, their individual memory is also preserved and transmitted onto the new owner. Wealþeow's gift, the "Brosinga mene" (1199b), is charged with historical and legendary meaning; Hroþgar's gift to Hygelac is a memento of the historical identity of the Scyldings, as "hyt hæfde Hiorogar cyning, / leod Scyldunga lange while" ("it was king Heorogar's, who led the Scyldings for a long time," 2158-59). Finally, the sword presented to Beowulf by Hygelac upon his return (perhaps Nægling itself), is referred to as "Hreðles laf" ("Hreðel's legacy," 2191b).

proceeded to tell of Beowulf's exploit with great learning, to fluently deliver an artful narrative, to create variety with words.]

The process of incorporation to the memory-preserving agency of fame is thus established by way of witnessing/hearsay, spreading word of the deeds, and repeating them in the form of commemorative song by one skilled in the transmission and preservation of memory ("gidda gemyndig"). Beowulf's acquisition of broad renown effectively reconciles him with his inherited memory and confirms his identity as one worthy of being remembered. However, immediately after the mention of celebratory songs about the killing of Grendel, the legend of Sigemund is introduced, itself ironically "uncupes fela" ("unknown to many," 876b) despite surpassing Beowulf's own giant-slaying feat: perhaps a hint of the frailty of identity rooted in collective memory. Sigemund's slaying of a dragon (887-92) introduces a double temporal framework where past and future come into play: the collective memory of Sigemund's triumph foreshadows Beowulf's own fatal encounter with the dragon, where dramatic irony relies on the audience's acquaintance with the narrative *a priori*. As the story of *Beowulf* is itself set and narrated in the past, the interplay between the memory of things as told in the poem (namely, Sigemund's story and other digressions, the "past within the past") and the memory of Beowulf's fate as a "future within the past," is effective only insofar as both parallel narratives work by association in the audience's omniscient position in the historical, extra-textual present. The meta-narrative structure of *Beowulf* is therefore constructed as a complex web that can only be untangled through the agency of memory as a tool to preserve and transmit knowledge, both inside and outside of the poem. *Beowulf* thus participates in the exploration of some of the same cultural preoccupations found in poems pertaining to the canon of "elegy," such as *The Wanderer*, and in others closely associated with it, such as *Christ and Satan*. In so doing, it corroborates the cohesive nature of Old English verse, as it engages in treatment of similar themes and motifs from an alternative perspective, while it denies the delimitation of such themes to the generic dominion of "elegy."

Beowulf's own identity is founded on the preserving and perpetuating qualities of memory, so that his conflict and resolution of self-

exploration are not based, like those of the speakers in *The Wanderer* or “Satan’s Lament,” in the display of past and present selves, but in the integration of his own identity in collective memory and history.¹³ Upon being questioned by the Danes’ watchman, he is demanded information about his “frumcyn” (“lineage,” 252a). The answer comes in the form of a proof of pedigree of sorts, as Beowulf mentions how his father was “folcum gebynced” (“widely known,” 262b), and “hine gearwe geman | witena welhwylc wide geond eorþan” (“every knowledgeable across the world remembers him readily,” 265b-66). Therefore, Beowulf’s rank is expressed according to his household’s position in common memory. His purpose in travelling to Daneland is no other than to fulfil his duty with his inherited identity in order to achieve individual accomplishment in the present. His presence in Denmark is due, in the first place, to the pledge of allegiance established in former times between Hroþgar and Beowulf’s father (372-76), for which reason he is admitted to the Danish court once the king as acknowledged “þæt he eower æþelu can” (“that he knows your [i.e. Beowulf’s] background,” 392b). In these diplomatic procedures, the importance of memory as a determining factor in the individual’s identity as part of the community becomes clear.

The importance of memory as an identity-defining element is again highlighted in Unferþ’s retelling of Beowulf’s swimming contest with Breca (499-528). An inglorious deed in Beowulf’s past, and the shared memory of it, are enough to call his credentials into question. The opening of Unferþ’s speech downplays Beowulf’s reputation, as Hroþgar’s seneschal seems to recall Beowulf’s name only by association with the incident with Breca. Intentionally ambiguous as to how the Geat’s name was known to him, Unferþ addresses him by seeking reassurance of his identity: “Eart þu *se* Beowulf se þe wið Brecan wunne | on sidne sæ...”

¹³ Recent studies have also considered the value of the fatherland as an element of collective identity rooted in the past and the role of the Grendelkin in the nation-building discourse. See Nicholas Howe, ‘Beowulf and the Ancestral Home,’ in Eileen A. Joy and Mary K. Ramsey (eds.), *The Post-Modern “Beowulf:” A Critical Casebook* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 49-89. See also, in the same volume, Alfred K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac’s Mound and Grendel’s Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building,’ 199-257; James W. Earl, ‘Beowulf and the Origins of Civilization,’ 259-285; and Janet Thormann, ‘Enjoyment of Violence and Desire for History in *Beowulf*,’ 287-318.

(“Are you *that* Beowulf who ventured with Breca on the open sea...” 506-7a, emphasis added). In Unferþ’s version of the story, Breca is the more relevant character since he defeated Beowulf, and his return to the land of his people provides the climax of the narrative while nothing is said of Beowulf’s fate. Whether by deliberate omission or as a result of misinformation, the purpose of Unferþ’s questioning is to wield common knowledge of the past as the instrument of Beowulf’s shame in falling short of his inherited identity as Ecgþeow’s son and Hygelac’s nephew.

Beowulf’s reply fittingly seeks not to deny the truth of the episode, but to prove Unferþ’s mastery of common knowledge weak and to rebuke his opponent by disclosing the shared memory of the seneschal’s own ignoble past. On three occasions Beowulf proves his acquaintance with Unferþ’s background: first, he points out his and Breca’s lack of fame in battle (583b-85); then he reveals Unferþ’s notoriousness as a kin-slayer (587-88a); and concludes by showing familiarity with his lineage by recognising him as “sunu Ecglafes” (“Ecglafe’s son,” 590b), an act of courtesy Unferþ denied Beowulf in the first place. The entire exchange unfolds on the grounds of each character’s acquaintance with the other’s past and the position in the memory of the community that each of them holds. While Beowulf reasserts his identity as a worthy inheritor to his ancestor’s memory, evidencing his opponent’s weaker handling of knowledge in the process, Unferþ’s reliability as the king’s spokesman is questioned, as indeed is the appropriateness of his presence at the Danish court considering his notoriety.

Beowulf complicates the Old English discourse of self-exploration and identity, taking these themes a step beyond their treatment in other texts that focus on the life of the mind, including the Exeter Book lyrics and “elegiac” passages. The poem provides a unique perspective on the relationship between memory as an identity-defining element and its importance in the integration of the individual within collective identity founded on the historical past. Identity through *absence* of memory appears in the poem in descriptions of the supernatural. The Grendelkin’s descent from the lineage of Cain (104b-07a; 1260-63a) endows them with a twofold supernatural quality, as their existence transcends human

history and goes back to a time of legend. Their shape and nature have been lost in time: Grendel walks the fens “on weres wæstmum” (“in the shape of a man,” 1352a) and is given social status as “healðegn” (“hall-thane,” though “hell-thane” may be implied, 142a), while his mother roams the earth “idese onlicnæs” (“in the likeness of a woman,” 1351a), yet time has erased all other trace of their humanity. Their identities are shrouded in mystery: Grendel’s name is a relic (“on geardagum Grendel nemdon | fold-buende,” “earth-dwellers named him Grendel in the old days,” 1354-55a), his mother is unnamed, and their lineage remains unknown, “no hie fæder cunnon, | hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned | dýrnra gasta,” “they knew of no father, or whether any other mysterious creature had been born before him,” 1355b-57a). The dragon, on the other hand, is “wintrum frod” (“old in winters,” 2277a), and has kept the treasure hoard for “þreo hund wintra” (“three hundred winters,” 2278b) and “þusend wintra” (“a thousand winters,” 3050a), both suggesting a life-span far beyond the reach of common memory. They are most terrible for their timelessness, immutability, and most awe-inspiring for the unfathomability of their origins.

In its transmissive dimension, memory works not only as a vehicle for models of conduct, but also as a warning against deviations from the righteous path. As a living *exemplum*, Hroþgar’s duties entail dissuading Beowulf from becoming a second Heremod (who stands as the Danish king’s antagonistic model of a worthy ruler) as well as instructing him in his own virtues. A figure of paternal and tribal wisdom and an incarnation of living memory, “wintrum frod” (“wise in [his] age,” 1724a), Hroþgar embodies the transmissive and didactic elements of memory, as conveyed in his address to Beowulf: “**Ðu þe lær be þon**, | gumcyste ongit; **ic þis gid be þe** | awræc wintrum frod” (“Take a lesson from this, understand virtue in man; this tale I have told for your sake, wise in [my] age,” 1722b-24a; notice the parallel in bold, which emphasises the transmissive “me-you” structure). The didactic value of memory takes over the following lines as Hroþgar elaborates on the dangers of pride and the fleetingness of earthly glory, heeding Beowulf to “bebeorh þe ðone bealonið [...] | ond þe þæt selre geceos” (“guard yourself against that deadly affliction [...] and choose

what is better for you,” 1758-9). In a further twist of dramatic irony, the poet plays again with a tripartite temporal framework, whereby Hroþgar warns Beowulf in the present against “fyres feng” (“fire’s embrace,” 1764a), foreshadowing his demise in a future that belongs to the audience’s past, thus becoming itself a realisation of the transmissive/instructive value of collective memory.

It is precisely as Beowulf is about to face the dragon that his inability to separate himself from his former self as young warrior and monster-slayer sets him distinctively apart from Hroþgar’s acceptance of his role as preserver of wisdom in his old age. The parallel lines “fela ic on giogoðe guðræsa genæs” (“I survived many armed conflicts in my youth,” 2426) and “Ic geneðde fela | guða on geogoðe” (I survived many conflicts in my youth,” 2511b-12a) introduce a sense of repetitive evocation in Beowulf’s mind, emphasised by the appositive “ic þæt eall gemon” (“I remember all of it,” 2427b). In Beowulf’s cyclical thinking, identity becomes stagnant as he seeks to bring the memories of his former self into the present. Like the *eardstapa* in *The Wanderer*, Beowulf seeks reaffirmation in his past in an attempt to retrieve his status as a hero and warrior instead of accepting his position as wise man and king. The bulk of Beowulf’s speech (2428-43; 2462b-2509) looks back to his ancestry down to his succession to the Geatish throne, focusing on his victory in battle. Longing for the past that survives only in memory creeps into his discourse on several occasions, particularly when it comes to the fight with Grendel (cf. “swa ic gio wið Grendle dyde,” “as I once did with Grendel,” 2521b), and in Beowulf’s dying moments. In a final reminiscence, he recalls his peace-keeping, “næs se folccyning | [ðara] þe mec guðwinum gretan dorste,” (“there was no king of any people who dared confront me with allies,” 2733b-35); good ruling, “heold min tela,” (“managed my possessions well,” 2737b); righteous oath-keeping, “ne me swor fela | aða on unriht,” “did not swear too many oaths in dishonour,” 2738b-39a); and respect for the life of kinsmen, “me witan ne ðearf waldend fira | morðorbealo maga,” (“the ruler of men may not accuse me of the murder of kinsmen,” 2741-42a). No mention of wisdom is made, and no meditation on the trials of fate is offered; more importantly, while Beowulf does keep his

victory over Grendel constantly in mind, he does not allude to Hroþgar’s cautionary speech at any point.

Whatever Beowulf’s unspecified *hamartia* may be that caused him to feel that he “ecean Dryhtne | bitre gebulge” (“had bitterly aggrieved the eternal Lord,” 2330b-31a), it seems clear that failing to let go of his memories of youth is a fatal flaw in terms of the dynamics of wisdom and community in the poem. He clings to his former self, ignores the warnings of patriarchal wisdom, and becomes doom-bound in so doing. On a broader sense, Beowulf disrupts the social cohesion that memory provides. He does not act as a preserver and transmitter of wisdom, but as a perpetuator of an ideal of heroic youth and strength that, in Hroþgar’s own premonitory words, “is...blæd | ane hwile” (“is the glory of but one moment,” 1761b-62a), as opposed to the ideal of Scyld, celebrated as immemorial in the opening lines of the poem. As an individual, Beowulf represents the failure to integrate his own identity with the community. He is an inheritor to the memory of his ancestors and of patriarchal models such as Hroþgar; he follows in the succession line as one accomplished in diplomacy and war, but in unfulfilling his role as preserver and transmitter of wisdom, Beowulf disrupts the mechanisms of collective memory. Significantly enough, he dies heirless, unable to transmit the values of wisdom and ancestry that ensure social cohesion, and attempts to single himself out from collective memory through the building of a monumental barrow, “to gemyndum minum leodum” (“as a reminder to my people,” 2804), which will they come to know as “Biowulfes Biorh” (“Beowulf’s Barrow,” 2807a). In a world where identity is defined “in intensely ancestral (familial), political (social), and mythical (theological) ways,” in a world where “to be remembered is a form of survival,”¹⁴ Beowulf’s failure to perpetuate the dynamics of collective memory dooms his own community to “fæhðo ond se feondscipe, | wælnið wera” (“feud and the enmity, deadly hostility of men,” 2999-3000a); “nalles hearpan sweg | ...ac se wonna hrefn | fus ofer fægum” (“not the music of the harp...but the dark raven, expectant over the doomed,” 3024b-25a).

¹⁴ Lee, *Gold-Hall and Earth-Dragon*, 133; 135.

Beowulf and “Satan’s Lament” exemplify two aspects of the same preoccupation: the perdurance of individual identity in collective memory through fame or power. *The Wanderer*, on the other hand, provides a counterpoint to *Beowulf*’s and Satan’s anxiety over loss of identity. As *Beowulf* fails to move from attaining fame in the individual past to perpetuating wisdom in collective memory, he comes closer to the lamenting Satan, who obsessively clings to his former angelic self and struggles to reconcile his past and present selves, than to the *snottor on mode* whose former identity blends into the cycle of transformation, preservation, and transmission of memory. The fact that these three texts approach similar themes from different though related perspectives, displaying a cohesive use of language, imagery, and phraseology, while only one of them belongs to the canon of “elegy” should serve as indication that the reflective quality of Old English verse is by no means limited to the texts falling under such category. To assume that autobiographical accounts constructed around the use of I-persona and self-referential language might constitute an exclusive or genre-defining criterion is to force a fabricated, misplaced projection of modern sensibilities onto the Old English texts.

4.4 – Conclusion: Emotions and the Mind beyond “Elegy”

While some of the so-called “elegies” show a distinctively high occurrence of self-referential language, the relative extension and structural arrangement of these texts should be considered in relation to the corpus, not in isolation or within artificially imposed aesthetic parameters. As opposed to *Beowulf* or “Satan’s Lament,” the Exeter Book lyrics display highly dramatised representation of certain elements that otherwise participate in complex aesthetic structures running through the entire length of the narrative poems. It is precisely such focalisation through the individual and the projection of mental processes onto performative language that most strongly links together the Exeter Book lyrics with the rest of the corpus and blurs their integrity as a self-contained group. However, modern preconceptions about the nature of lyric as opposed to narrative verse have led to the artificial separation of these modes despite

their similarities in tone, thematic concerns, and use of language. Such differentiation is ultimately based on the Coleridgean idea of elegy as “the form of poetry natural to the reflective mind,” echoed by Greenfield’s description of the “Old English elegy” as a “reflective poem.” Old English poetics, which heavily relies on conventions of style and diction, and draws from the “aesthetics of the familiar” across texts and traditions, renders this defining criterion inaccurate. Discussions on the “life of the mind” abound in Old English poetry, whether in lyric or narrative verse, religious, heroic, or autobiographical. To assume that self-reflective discourse belongs in the realm of “elegy” or lyric poetry in general is to apply an anachronistic division to the early medieval English poetic corpus, and to introduce a gap in our understanding of Old English verse.

A similar breach in the cohesiveness of the poetic corpus is introduced by the retroactive application of modern conceptions about emotions and affective engagement onto the early medieval texts. The poignancy in use of language and imagery related to the “discourse of emotion” which is complementary and strongly correlates to the “life of the mind,” that the Exeter Book lyrics show have traditionally led to the assumption that they belong into the same group, that of “elegy,” as a result of post-Romantic ideas of lyric poetry as primarily concerned with “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.” However, the “discourse of emotion,” which involves the treatment of emotions and their effect on the human condition, is a common theme in Old English poetry, which again hints at a thematic cohesion ultimately rooted in cultural preoccupations characteristic of the Old English experience of the world

5 – The Discourse of Emotion:

Affective Engagement and Affective Criticism

5.1 – Introduction: Affective Engagement and Empathic Response

Discussing the “life of the mind” in Old English poetry usually entails dealing with psychological processes as well as with emotional responses. The difficulty in separating these two aspects comes from the Old English conception of the mind as the seat of both rationality and affectivity, so that the semantic field of terms referring to the mind also contains within itself the vocabulary of emotion. Hence, while some non-physical entities are more clearly differentiated, such as the immortal *sawol* (“soul”) which is clearly distinct from the enlivening *feorh* (“life-force”), the simplex *mod*, though usually translated simply as “mind,” encompasses the psychological processes of thinking, willing, or understanding, as well as the emotional manifestations of disposition, character, and passions.¹ The semantic ambiguity of *mod*, often but not always interchangeable with *hyge*, *sefa*, and *ferhð*, is reflected in its various entries in the dictionary of Old English, including “the inner man...with more especial reference to intellectual or mental qualities,” but also “with reference to the passions, emotions, etc.,” and even “a special quality of the soul,” be it in a positive or negative sense (“courage” or “pride”).²

Therefore, it is common to find phrases referring to one or the other aspect, where *mod* or compounds thereof may refer to intellectual processes (“*þinceð* him on mode,” “he thought in his mind,” *The Wanderer*, 41a) as well as connote emotional states (“*yrre* on mode,” “angry in his mind,” *Genesis A*, 63a). Consequently, it comes as little surprise that in texts where the discourse of the “life of the mind” is prominent, the emotional

¹ For a detailed discussion on the various meanings and uses of these terms, see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, Chapter 1, ‘Anglo-Saxon Anthropologies.’ See also Mize, ‘The Mind as Enclosure.’

² B-T, 693.

implications of psychological processes also feature significantly. The coalescence of both in the Exeter Book lyrics has led to an almost complete critical assimilation of affectivity and the discourse of emotion into the “elegiac,” particularly in the case of scholarship on *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, where the succession of emotional states works as a cohesive narratorial element.³

However, like the discourse of the “life of the mind,” such aspects are by no means unique to a restricted group of texts. As shown in Chapter 4, the Exeter Book lyrics are startling in their dramatised deployment of a fictional subjectivity, which excites an empathic reaction insofar as they rely on their audience’s capability for mental and emotional engagement with familiar psychological and affective responses. In other words: they appeal to an audience regardless of cultural separation because the situations themselves, as well as the speakers’ responses to them, are re-constructible through empathic engagement. This process has been described by Antonina Harbus in relation to *The Wife’s Lament*, although it is applicable to any text inviting a similar response. According to Harbus, Old English texts, and the Exeter Book lyrics in particular,

invit[e] empathic engagement from [their] audience through emotional contagion, made possible through the combination of imagery produced in the mind in the process of making sense and the embodied emotional response produced automatically while entertaining a recognisably affecting scenario created during the act of interpretation. [...] In so doing, the reader enacts feeling, which is implicated in cognitive processing, and thereby becomes emotionally engaged in the narrative.⁴

³ Thus, for example, in discussing *The Wife’s Lament*, Kennedy draws attention to the poem’s “note of passion which is highlighted by the unusual dramatic situation, [...] nameless and timeless in its rehearsal of tragic fate;” *The Earliest English Literature*, 117-18. As for *Wulf and Eadwacer*, David Daiches comments on its portrayal of an “intense romantic passion in a way quite uncharacteristic of Anglo-Saxon Poetry;” *A Critical History of English Literature*, 2 vols. NY: Martin and Warburg (1960), vol. 1, 20.

⁴ Antonina Harbus, ‘Affective Poetics,’ in Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English*

In this sense, the claimed distinctiveness of the Exeter Book lyrics comes not from their alleged intrinsic emotional force,⁵ but from their affective impact on the reader. The sense of belonging that arises from reading the Exeter Book lyrics as a group results from empathic engagement with them, partly because they portray transcultural feelings of grief, isolation, or sorrow. In addition, these feelings are placed in an unspecific context devoid of any dramatic framework that may condition our affective response by contextualising the speakers' discourse against a non-relatable situation. The modern affective bias (namely, the tendency to seek an authentic psychological or emotional meaning in a fictional or fictionalised narrative, and to empathically engage with it as a mirror response) is responsible for the artificial hierarchisation and classification of Old English texts according to their degree of affective or psychological appeal.

However, a distinction must be made between the *affective quality* of Old English poetry that results from the *discourse of emotion*; and *affective criticism*, which is a response to modern audiences' *empathic engagement* with the Old English texts as a result of the modern affective bias. The affective quality of Old English poetry is, then, intrinsic to the texts: it relates to the text world and its appeal for the audience to participate in it; empathic engagement, on the other hand, is an extrinsic phenomenon based on the projection of subjective affective responses onto the texts. A definition of the "discourse of emotion" in Old English poetry first requires clarification on what is meant by "emotion" in the context of the present discussion. To avoid projecting modern ideas about emotions onto the Old English experience of the world, a broader, self-referential approach seems adequate, so that "emotion" may be understood as

a relatively complex state, involving past and present episodes of thoughts, feelings, and bodily changes, dynamically related to a narrative part of a person's life, together with a disposition

Language, Literature, and Culture, Studies in Medieval Britain and Ireland (Ashgate, 2015), 19-34, at 30.

⁵ See n. 3 above.

to experience further emotional episodes, and to act out of the emotion, and to express that emotion.⁶

The definition above is particularly adequate in the context of Old English poetry, as descriptions of emotions and emotional states appear indissolubly associated with a specific event in the speakers' lives and refer to further emotional episodes in the past or in the present, linked through the agency of memory, and expressed through changes in the embodied mind or *mod*. The "discourse of emotion," then, refers to the degree to which a speaker's discourse is dominated by expressions of emotional states and the means whereby they are projected; be it implicitly (as in "Satan's Lament," where psychological distress and physical oppression convey an implicit pathetic force) or explicitly (as in *The Wife's Lament*, where the vocabulary of emotion is most prominent). In addition to this, the "discourse of emotion" also involves the speakers' production of narratives that are based on a series of emotional states that relate to one another on an associative rather than chronological principle. Often, the "discourse of emotion" appears together with the speakers' exploration of the "life of the mind," which is nonetheless organised on a logical premise—so, for example, in *The Wanderer*, where the emotionally charged discourse of the *anhaga* is otherwise structured around the logical sequence of memory.

The "life of the mind" and the "discourse of emotion" are, in turn, part of a larger cultural preoccupation with the inner sphere of man, where both work as integral though well differentiated constituents of the same expression of the Old English experience of the world. In the broader concept of the "inner life" of the Old English poetic speakers, it is possible to distinguish a *self-referential quality*, preoccupied with identity and the mechanisms of the self, on the one hand; and an *affective quality*, concerned with the events and states that arise from, or result in, a series of emotional reactions and bonds established between the individual and the community. In this sense, as with the coalescence of thought and feeling in *mod*, the discourses of the life of the mind and of emotion in Old English poetry grow

⁶ Patrick C. Hogan, *What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 123.

from and support one another as inherent parts of the same concept: the microcosmic inner life of the individual in relation to the external macrocosm of society and the bonds of community.

The affective quality of Old English verse, on the other hand, does not refer so much to the language of individual poems as to an overall tendency of the poetic corpus to associate mental struggle with emotional distress as interrelated aspects of the human psyche, which in turn influences and is conditioned by the individual's place in the community (what may be called a "socio-centric" sense of identity). The one thing that the discourses of the speakers in *The Wanderer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and "Satan's Lament" have in common is their position outside society: their mental and emotional distress comes as a result of their rupture with the sense of identity that belonging to the community provides. In a broader sense, outside the narrowing scope of Old English poetics, "affectivity" refers to a quality of things concrete or abstract that arises from the perception or expression of emotions.⁷ Therefore, the affective quality of Old English poetry involves a textual dimension and an extra-textual implication whereby the audience "is invited to engage in narrative thinking and emotional reaction, and to recruit memory, imagination, and synthetic reasoning, a process made possible by the shared cognitive basis of meaning and feeling."⁸ Considering the nature of Old English poetry in terms of its constant interplay between text and audience (the conversational "I-you" voice), it is not unusual to find both implicit and explicit addresses for the audience to engage with the internal world of the poems.

"Empathy," or "empathic engagement," on the contrary, is a form of emotional response to the affective quality of Old English poetry, which "integrates cognitive and affective processes creating a complex and dynamic psychological experience that draws on different capacities we

⁷ The OED is more succinct in its definition of "affective," yielding "relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes," while the Merriam-Webster comes closer to the meaning herein utilised, rendering "relating to, arising from, or influencing feelings or emotions." ("Affective." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2018.)

⁸ Harbus, 'Affective Poetics,' 32.

have for connecting and responding to the world and those in it.”⁹ Through empathic engagement, then, a modern reader may react to and participate in the text world of the Old English poems, particularly when it comes to emotional projection and personal narrative. The psychological and emotional principle of *empathy* intervenes in such response, which consists of a cognitive component, “involv[ing] using the imagination to undergo a shift from one’s own cognitive perspective to the cognitive perspective of the target,” and an emotional component, “involv[ing] the empathizer’s imaginative adoption of the target’s emotional state.”¹⁰ Therefore, “with *empathy*, we try to imagine the world from the target’s point of view and simulate the target’s psychological states.”¹¹

In Old English scholarship, empathic engagement with texts inviting an affective response has usually derived in a fabricated sense that two or more texts belong together on the basis of affective criticism. Hence, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are often treated as companion pieces, while *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* are considered members of a same sub-group of “love lyrics,” to which a third poem, *The Husband’s Message*, is added. This does not mean that the texts do not share common elements in terms of thematic affinities, use of phraseology, or display of imagery; however, they also share such traits with other texts with which they are not usually associated (cf. the remarkable similarities between *The Wanderer* and “Satan’s Lament”). Affective criticism elevates aural aesthetics to the level of an assumed explicit textual correlation, from which the idea of “companion pieces” results. To understand how the discourse of emotion is different from the affective responses it may trigger, an examination of the text world of *Wulf and Eadwacer* and scholarly reactions to it proves illuminating.

⁹ Amy Coplan, ‘Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions,’ *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62:2 Special Issue: Art, Mind, and Cognitive Science (2004), 141-52, at 143.

¹⁰ *Idem*, 144

¹¹ *Idem*, 146, italics mine.

5.2 – Emotion and the Boundaries of Empathy in *Wulf and Eadwacer*

In *Wulf and Eadwacer*, emotional states succeed one another without any apparent chronological or logical sequencing and acquire cohesion only as one emotion relates to or reflects onto the next to create a sense of narrative structure. The sole unifying element in the text is the refrain “ungelic[e] is us” (“we are different,” 3; “it is different with us,” 8), which introduces a sense of emotional response cyclically disrupting the already disordered stream of thought, rather than a specific temporal or narrative reference. The difference between the two occurrences of the line is subtle, and often overlooked. Klinck ascribes it to “probably a scribal variation without significance;”¹² Muir follows her and concludes that such “seems to be the case.”¹³ However, it may also involve a change in narrative perspective: “ungelic is us” implies the speaker’s awareness of their “otherness” in relation to her people; “ungelice is us” may imply the “otherness” is imposed by her people—they are “different” *because* they are treated “differently.” This feeling of otherness is what ties together the elusive man named Wulf, the speaker, and her unspecified “leod,” as it is associatively placed between references to one or the others:

Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife;
willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.

Ungelic is us.

Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre.

5 Fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen.

Sindon wæltreowe weras þær on ige;

willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.

Ungelice is us.

¹² *The Old English Elegies*, 170

¹³ *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 2, 604

Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode...

(*Wulf and Eadwacer*, 1-9)

[It is to my people as if a gift had been given. They will kill him if he comes in their midst. We are different. Wulf is on one island, I on another. Fast is that island, surrounded by a fen. Bloodthirsty men are there on that island; they will kill him if he comes in their midst. It is different with us. I tracked with hopes my Wulf's far wanderings...]¹⁴

While it is possible to trace patterns of imagery and verbal repetition in every Old English poem, *Wulf and Eadwacer* differentiates itself from the rest of the corpus for its allusive language, with only vaguely animalistic references providing some traceable self-contained aesthetic principle: “wulf,” (4a, 9a, 13a, 17a), “hwelp” (16b), and the more abstract “lac” (“gift, sacrifice,” 1b), “aþecgan” (“consume, devour,” 2a), and “bogum” (“branches,” also “fore legs;” by extension, “arm, shoulder,” 11b), to which “dogode” (9b) may be added with some uncertainty.¹⁵ Animal imagery dehumanises Wulf but also the speaker: she remains nameless, shapeless, and deprived of identity. Precisely owing to the poem’s unspecific use of conceptual references, the repetition of four identical lines (2-3, 7-8) seems

¹⁴ I opt for translating *dogode* as “tracked” here in the hope of conveying both the suggested reconstructed meaning of “traced,” “followed,” and the animalistic nuance that seems to underlie the *hapax legomenon* (thus some editors render “dogged” in the sense of following a track or scent in a hound-like manner). “Tracking” seems to me a satisfactory alternative in that it solves the problem of semantic ambiguity by preserving it in modern English. For the lexicological problem of “dogode” and suggested solutions, see Anne L. Klinck, ‘Animal Imagery in “Wulf and Eadwacer” and the Possibilities of Interpretation,’ *PLL* 23 (1987), 3-13; and Marijane Osborn, ‘Dogode in “Wulf and Eadwacer” and King Alfred’s Hunting Metaphors,’ *ANQ* 13:4 (2000), 3-9.

¹⁵ For the difficulties involved in translating and interpreting terms subject to scholarly debate, see Anne L. Klinck’s textual notes on the poem in *The Old English Elegies*, 168-73. “Dogode,” in particular, offers some remarkable interpretive difficulties. The term has often been emended to “hogode” since Fritz Hocketier first provided the alternative in ‘Fünf Rätsel des Exeterbuches,’ *Anglia* 10 (1888), 564-600, at 579. He was followed by W. J. Sedgefield, *An Anglo-Saxon Verse Book* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1922), 39; Kemp Malone, ‘Two English *Frauenlieder*,’ *Comparative Literature* 14 (1962), 106-17; and Peter S. Baker (ed.), ‘A Classroom Edition of *Wulf and Eadwacer*,’ *OEN* 16:2 (1983), 1-8 (Appendix). Malone translates “I was mindful of my Wulf in his wanderings, his expectations.” However, Klinck notes some syntactical problems with this emendation, in that “a dative object for *hycgan/hogian*... is supported only in *agenum hicgean welan*, a very literal rendering of *propriis studere divitiis*,” while “a genitive object (Hocketier construes *hogode* with *Wulfes*) is found only as a substantival adjective or pronoun anticipating a clause.” On the other hand, “one would expect a dative object with a verb *dogian*, “to follow (like a dog),” on an analogy with *fyl(g)ian*,” cf. *The Old English Elegies*, 172.

all the more startling; especially as they establish a faint dramatic framework through association of “hy” (presumably, though by no means certainly, the “leod” of line 1, though perhaps the “wælreowe” of line 6, or both), “us” (again presumably, the unnamed speaker and “Wulf”), and “Wulf,” to which most editors would add “Eadwacer” as the fourth (third, or fifth) character.

The situation that this sequence of elements portrays is that of the speaker being caught between her own people and Wulf, emotionally as well as spatially, as implied by the placing of “ungelice is us” as a bridge line, or indeed as indicative of an emotional separation. The intensely emotional language that pervades the second half of the speaker’s discourse (“reotugu,” 10b; “wyn,” 12a; “lað,” 12b; “murnende mod,” 15a) contrasts with the first nine lines of the poem, where repetition implies circular thinking and anxiety:

10 Þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt,
 þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
 wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað.
 Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine
 seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas,
 15 murnende mod, nales meteliste.
 Gehyrest þu, eadwacer, uncerne earne hwelp
 bireð wulf to wuda.
 þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
 uncer giedd geador.

(*Wulf and Eadwacer*, 10-19)

[When it was rainy weather and I sat mournful, when the one brave in battle embraced me; there was joy in it for me, there was also grief. Wulf, my Wulf, my longings for you have made me sick; your rare comings, a mournful heart, not at all want of food. Do you hear, keeper A wolf shall

bear our wretched whelp off to the woods. Man may easily tear apart what was never joined, our song together.]

The focus shifts now to a series of images where poignant emotions overlap and intertwine: sorrow, pleasure, disgust, and mourning succeed one another by association without any clear unifying element except for the parallel “þonne...þonne” structure, which implies the juxtaposition of loneliness and the mixed emotions at being embraced by some “beaducafa;” perhaps the same man, though again this remains speculative, addressed as “eadwacer.”¹⁶ In fact, absence of a definite purpose is precisely what underlies the discourse of *Wulf and Eadwacer*: it is never clear what the aim of the poem is, only Wulf’s elusive identity remains at the end, mirroring the disjointed affectivity of the poem. The closing lines may not only refer to the disruptive emotions present throughout the poem (the sense of otherness in “ungelice,” the physical isolation of the speaker, and her opposing emotional responses). As the speaker’s discourse is deliberately constructed around absence and separation, it is possible that this “giedd” is elusive in its form and meaning precisely for the same reason. The one element that would provide a unifying dramatic background to the narrative, Wulf’s identity and his relationship with the speaker and her people, is significantly left out as means to project the emotional impact of its absence. Through omission, the speaker creates a gap in the narrative that is perceived by the audience as a reflection of her own emotional distress, focalised through the speaker’s perception of Wulf’s physical and affective “seldcymas” (14b), which are the cause of her “murnende mod” (15a).

The elusive narrative of the poem has inspired numerous different interpretations based on reconstructed dramatic frameworks, which are heavily biased by empathic engagements with its emotionally charged discourse. In 1888 Henry Bradley first identifies the poem as a “dramatic

¹⁶ I deliberately avoid identifying *eadwacer* as a third party in the narrative of the poem and render “property-watcher” or “keeper” as a translation, on the basis of two aspects. One is textual and results from the fact that *eadwacer* may be read merely as an epithet rather than an actual male name. The other is extra-textual and is directly related to the present discussion: the commonly accepted love triangle story is exclusively a scholarly construct, built up around a projection of a series of reader responses and failed horizons of expectations as to narrative cohesion.

soliloquy” and advanced the most widely accepted reading: “the speaker [is] a woman, Wulf is her lover and an outlaw, and Eadwacer (I suspect, though it is not certain) is her tyrant husband.”¹⁷ Ferdinand Holthausen labelled the poem a few years later as *Klage um Wulf*,¹⁸ echoed by Bradley, who simply called it *Wulf*.¹⁹ It is not until 1907, however, that Bradley himself refers to “this lyric (which I will call *Wulf and Eadwacer*),”²⁰ justifying his choice of a title on the very love-triangle interpretation he had constructed. It is with the inclusion of Bradley’s title in the *ASPR* that the title became standard.²¹ From Bradley’s interpretation and title, subsequent readings have taken the love-triangle approach as their basis. More importantly, the inclusion of the epithet *eadwacer* as a proper noun conditions the reception of the poem and limits interpretation to a reading for which there is no textual evidence.²²

Although the affective force of the poem is remarkable, as its pre-eminent discourse of emotion shows, a significant volume of scholarship has been devoted to justifying Bradley’s generally accepted reading with extra-textual, aural arguments based on affective responses. In addition to this, the lexical and semantic ambiguity that characterises the poem has produced a plethora of variations in terms of possibilities of translation, each of which accommodates to the interpretation being forwarded. This proliferation of interpretive frameworks ultimately reflects the modern bias surrounding the nature of lyric poetry in the context of the Wordsworthian “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” The necessity to contextualise the poem against a larger autobiographical background betrays the influence of post-Romantic notions about the author as identified

¹⁷ Review of Morley, *English Writers*, vol. 2, *Academy* XXXVIII (1888), 197-98

¹⁸ ‘Zu alt- und mittelenglischen Denckärlen,’ *Anglia* XV (1893), 187-203

¹⁹ Letter to the editor, *Anglia* XV (1893), 390.

²⁰ Review of Rudolf Immelmann, *Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung*. Berlin (1907), *MLR* 2 (1907), 365-68, at 366

²¹ The heading “Wulf and Eadwacer” appears in the table of contents for the *ASPR* edition of the Exeter Book and is maintained throughout. Before the *ASPR*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* had been used by Sedgfield, *An Anglo-Saxon Verse Book*, 39; and W. S. Mackie, *The Exeter Book*. London (1934), part II: Poems IX-XXXII, 86.

²² The implications of having *eadwacer* in the title for reading and interpretation were already beginning to be noticed by the mid-twentieth century by John F. Adams: “Possibly the understanding of this poem has been made to suffer from its having been given a title at all. A certain circularity may have been entailed as a result, perpetuating the theory that *Eadwacer* in the text must be a personal name because it is a personal name in the title,” cf. ‘*Wulf and Eadwacer*: An Interpretation,’ *MLN* 73 (1958), 1-5, at 1.

with the poetic persona (hence incurring in a form of response to a posited authorial intent); while the reconstruction of potential narratives against which the speakers' emotions might be contextualised evidences the implication of an empathic response on the readers' part. Both phenomena stem from and look back to Coleridge's definition of the discourse of elegy as being presented "always and exclusively with reference to the poet," where they may "feel regret for the past or desire for the future, so sorrow and love became the principal themes of the elegy." This post-Romantic influence is again explicitly brought into the Old English critical discourse by Greenfield's statement of "a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon specific personal experience" being a defining trait of "Old English elegy."

The prodigality of critical interpretation surrounding *Wulf and Eadwacer* has become in itself a matter of scholarly debate, to the point that one critic suggested "that Thorpe should have said not "Of this I can make no sense," but "Of this I can make *any* sense.""²³ Alain Renoir, going a step further, offered a view of the poem (which he somewhat deceptively called a "non-interpretation") where he tried to restore criticism of the poem to a purely textual approach, and rejected fictionalised narrative backgrounds:

Whether or not the speaker is an exile in a foreign land,
 whether or not Eadwacer is her husband and the father of her
 child, whether or not the man who embraces her is her lover,
Wulf and Eadwacer reaches us through the passionate
 intensification of grief, which it expresses as few poems have
 done in any language. It moves us through the juxtaposition of
 powerful emotions and through the sense of tragic separation it
 conveys.²⁴

It is precisely such "juxtaposition of powerful emotions," which so closely echoes Wordsworth's phrase, that has given way to the empathic

²³ Terrence Keough, 'The Tension of Separation in *Wulf and Eadwacer*,' *NM* 77 (1976), 552-60, at 552.

²⁴ 'Wulf and Eadwacer; A Non-Interpretation,' in Bessinger and Creed (eds.), *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis P. Magoun, Jr* (NY: NY University Press, 1965).147-63, at 161.

engagement of audiences at different times and with widely varying interpretive results. However, the process of affective identification with the narrative of the poem transcends the limits of the text world and becomes an exercise in affective criticism as soon as a fictionalised narrative frame is provided for the dramatic monologue. *Wulf and Eadwacer* is constructed in an associative rather than sequential way, so that the unifying principle for the poem's reading and interpretation must be "based on assumed common ground [and] predicated on an assumption of consistent human emotional and rational experience over time."²⁵ In other words: the lack of a narrative framework for *Wulf and Eadwacer* should not in any case be an obstacle; rather, modern expectations of a linear narrative development need to be suppressed in order to effectively engage with the affective text world of the poem without inflicting interpretive violence to its associative structure. To a certain extent, part of the richness of *Wulf and Eadwacer* lies in "the reader's contribution of emotional disposition, experience and involvement,"²⁶ but such contribution is only acceptable insofar as it participates of the text world without projecting an extra-textual "emotional disposition" based on modern assumptions.

As opposed to these subjective projections, the affective quality of Old English poetry is part of the textual fabric of the poems; it is an inherent part of the speakers' discourse of emotion. The affective circle constructed by the speakers is extended to the audience through a series of textual strategies, so that the text world of the poem is projected onto extra-textual world of the audience rather than the other way around. As opposed to empathic narrative reconstruction, affective engagement does not require that a dramatic framework is provided: it uses the information contained in the text to trigger an emotional reaction, which allows access to the speakers' inner affective circles.

²⁵ Antonina Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2012), 96

²⁶ *Idem*, 102

5.3 – The Affective Quality of Old English Poetry

Reading involves a degree of active engagement in order to recreate literally transmitted meanings, demanding a more dynamic role in the case of non-literal layers of meanings (such as dramatic irony and metaphor), or where the reader is expected to interpret cultural and linguistic elements not immediately available from the text (such as implicatures, *double entendre*, or extra-textual allusions). In Old English poetry, some of these mechanisms involve *a priori* knowledge of historical events on the audience's part (as in the case of the future past and foreshadowing in *Beowulf*), while some others require that the audience position themselves as part of the social world of the poetic speakers; part of their *affective circle*. Such speaker-reader identification demands active reading insofar as reaching the internal text world of the poems require "multiple processing...determined by common human mental capacities enacted by an individual mind in specific sociocultural contexts, [relying] on the interaction of literature, culture and cognition."²⁷ In this way, potential audiences (contemporary or modern) may be addressed and influenced through the act of reading, either through direct invitation (as in Cynewulfian pleads for prayers; cf. *Juliana* 718b-29a) or through indirect affective appeal. Two examples from *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* best exemplify the intra-textual workings of the discourses of emotion and the life of the mind together within the framework of the poems' affective quality, which result in an implicit invitation to participate in the speakers' affective circle.

5.3.1 – A Mind for Emotions: *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*

In *The Wanderer*, grief, as part of the discourse of emotion, and memory in the form of a dream, as part of the life of the mind, take over the speaker's discourse and endow it with distinct affective force:

Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes

²⁷ Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 1.

leofes larcwidum long forþolian.
 Donne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
 40 earmne anhogan oft gebindað.
 þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
 clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge
 honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
 in geardagum giefstolas breac.

(*The Wanderer*, 39-44)

[Therefore he understands, who must be a long time without his beloved lord's council. Then both sorrow and sleep together often bind the wretched, solitary one. It appears to him in his mind that he embraces and kisses his lord and [that] he lays hands and head on his knee, as once in the days of old he enjoyed the gift-seats.]

Here, the speaker's language introduces a sense of physical binding as well as emotional and psychological stagnation ("sorg ond slæp... | gebindað," 39a-40b), which is reinforced by the following lines, where "sorg/cearo bið geniwad," (50b/55b) and "geneahhe | ofer waþuma gebind werigne sefan," (56b-57) are representative of the discourse of emotion in Old English poetry:

50 Sorg bið geniwad,
 þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð;
 greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
 secga geseldan. Swimmað eft on weg.
 Fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
 55 cuðra cwidegiedda. Cearo bið geniwad
 þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe
 ofer waþuma gebind werigne sefan.

Forþon ic geþeancan ne mæg geond þas would
 forhwan modsefa min ne gesweorce...

(*The Wanderer*, 50b-59)

[Sorrow is renewed when the memory of kinsmen passes through his mind; he greets with signs of joy [and] eagerly watches companions, warriors. Away they swim again. The spirit of the floating ones there does not bring many familiar utterances. Care is renewed for the one who must very often send his weary heart over the binding of the waves. Therefore, I cannot imagine throughout all the world why my mind should not grow dark...]

Throughout both passages, the speaker constructs an associative narrative where memories and dreams intensify the present isolation, though no chronological or sequential reference is used beyond the juxtaposition of past and present tenses (“gebindað,” “gebind”) and imagery of community as opposed to the barren landscape. The affective quality of the passage resides on such overlap, whereby the audience reconstructs a tripartite structure of emotional affliction, psychological distress, and alienation from the community. Extensively, the audience becomes at once part of the inner world of the speaker (around whose subjectively focalised utterance the discourse of emotion is constructed) and part of his affective circle, participating of his suffering and empathically engaging with a relatable picture of longing. Such double identification takes place as part of the twofold cognitive/emotional dimensions of active reading. Notwithstanding, this passage is embedded within a logical sequential framework, organised by the causative/consecutive value of “forþon,” standing at each end of the section. The audience is thus invited to affectively engage with the discourse of emotion of the *anhaga*, though at the same time they must consider it within the overall dramatic monologue of the speaker shifting perspectives as he moves towards resolution of identity, as shown in Chapter 4.

In a similar way, *The Seafarer* utilises the illusion of a projected affective circle in the form of a natural world turned into a mirage of human society, embedded in turn within a thought-driven sequence:

Þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ,
 iscaldne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song
 20 dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor
 ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor weras,
 mæw singende fore medodrince.
 Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
 isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal,
 25 urigfeþra; ne ænig hleomæga
 feasceaftig ferð frefran meahte.

(*The Seafarer*, 18-26)

[There I heard nothing but the roaring sea, the ice-cold wave; at times the swan's song I kept for myself as entertainment, the gannet's cry and the curlew's sound for men's laughter, the singing seagull for the drinking of mead. Where storms beat against stone-cliff, there the icy-feathered stern replied, full often the dewy-feathered eagle screeched; no kinsmen's protection could console the weary heart.]

The discourse of emotion works here at an even more abstract associative level: rather than juxtaposing emotional states to create a sense of narrative structure, the affective force of the passage is implied in the illusory, fleeting quality of the speaker's projected anxieties onto the surrounding natural world. References to laughter, drinking, and singing are interlocked with the roaring of the sea, beating of the waves, and the dissonant screech of the eagle that breaks the spell of emotional projection. From the point of view of the Old English experience of the world, a culturally recognisable portrayal of isolation triggers affective engagement with the speaker's narrative and use of language, as the symbolic value of bird and sea imagery would have been available to a contemporary audience.²⁸ The discourse of emotion thus allows for the speaker to integrate

²⁸ For the potential associations of sea imagery, see Frederick S. Holton, 'Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*,' *YES* 12, Heroes and the Heroic, Special

the audience in his affective circle, making them participate in his illusory mead-hall.

This integration is carried out by establishing a common space of metaphorical meaning, whereby not only the speaker is able to recreate the sounds and images of the mead-hall through personified elements of nature, but his audience, too, would have been familiar with such associative imagery. A certain degree of familiarity can be assumed considering both sea imagery and the bird-soul association appear in texts that would have been widely circulated in early medieval England, some of which were translated into Old English.²⁹ The audience thus becomes at the same time the first-person observer and part of the projected discourse of emotion. Active engagement allows the audience to enter the “text world” of the poem, and to recover the associative meaning of the passage and engage with the speaker’s narrative, where “text world” implies

a conceptual space, or mental construct, created specifically from accumulated textual information, and built from knowledge that the reader assumes is held in common with the writer. This assumed body of shared information is both crucial and mercurial: it is driven by the text, but ultimately governed by the reader’s cognitive processing.³⁰

In *The Seafarer*, the text world establishes a conceptual common ground between the speaker, who produces a given meaning (in this case, the birds/kinsmen association and the invitation to take part of this illusion of the mead-hall) and an audience who reconstruct such meaning through a shared experience of the world. As in *The Wanderer*, the passage is followed by the consecutive “forþon” (27a), which relocates the discourse within the general framework of the life of the mind. However, by means of the inclusive affective quality of the passage under discussion, the speaker

Number (1982), 208-217. The idea of life on earth as the fleeting flight of a bird comes from Wis, 5:11, and is elaborated on by Bede in *HEGA* II.12.

²⁹ Amongst others, Isidore’s *Synonyma*, Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, and Gregory’s *Moralia in Job*. These works are mentioned by Michael Lapidge as part of the “small core of staple patristic texts” that would have made up a typical early medieval English library; cf. *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 127.

³⁰ Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches*, 71

has already made an implicit transition from the *dramatized* self-referentiality of “Ic be me sylfum” (1a) to the later conversational inclusive “Uton we” (“Let us,” 117a). The plural exhortative form only reiterates what the affective quality of the poem has already established: the speaker is addressing the emotional world of his audience, which has become, through affective engagement and integration of common experience into the text world, part of both the speaker’s internal and external realities. The affective response that the text demands for this integration to take part is triggered by a mirror-effect process, whereby

the patterns of emotional behaviour depicted in the text are mimicked by the reader in the act of interpretation, and so experienced in some atavistic manner in this mobilisation of an affective stance towards the text that is cognitive as well as emotional.³¹

Hence, on a primary level, the self-referential quality of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is reflected by the speakers’ attempts to reconstruct their respective selves through the finding of grace, whereas the underlying affective quality of their discourse is established by the associative narrative of their emotional reactions to their present situations and the broken bonds with their past communities. These two levels of meaning run parallel through the speakers’ discourses in an interdependent, mutually supporting structure in which the audience becomes a necessary participant, further emphasising the dramatic/dramatising and performative nature of these poems. The need for self-exploration in each case results from an emotional reaction to a given event (self-imposed exile, death of kinsmen, etc.), while the relinquishment of such emotional states (mourning, isolation) is precisely what allows for a resolution of the speakers’ respective conflicts of identity.

³¹ Idem, 173

5.3.2 – Projecting the Text-World: Affectivity and the Audience of *Christ III*

As the previous examples from the two Exeter Book lyrics show, some poems actively invite their audiences to participate in their text worlds. However, at times, the text provides a series of juxtaposing, sometimes competing emotional discourses that demand a much more proactive engagement from the audience in order to unravel their affective quality. Two examples illustrate this sense of affectivity in Old English poetry: the invitation to repentance and examination of conscience in *Christ III*, on the one hand, and the uncanny, contradictory affective responses triggered by the Grendelkin, on the other. These instances represent a more highly allusive use of the affective quality of Old English poetry, which require that the audience, rather than reacting positively to a situation that finds correspondence in a common experience of the world, face familiar emotional responses embodied in unusual physical containers: the one, insentient (bleeding trees); the other, non-human (supernatural, antagonistic beings).

In a recent article on the affectivity of *Christ III*, or *Christ in Judgement*,³² Frances McCormack examines the image of creation weeping on doomsday at the memory of Christ's crucifixion and its intended effect on the poem's audience.³³ Specifically, the trees shedding tears of blood stand in stark contrast with the apparent indifference of mankind to Christ's sacrifice: a juxtaposition meant to inspire grief and contrition as well as to condemn unrepentance:

Ða wearð beam monig blodigum tearum
 birunnen under rindum, reade ond þicce;

³² Krapp & Dobbie do not make any textual subdivision within *Christ*, while Muir differentiates between *Advent*, *The Ascension*, and *Christ in Judgement* based on codicological evidence (two-lines separation between sections). *Christ III* bears the title *Diei Iudici descriptione* written in the blank space by a modern hand, cf. *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, 79.

³³ 'Those Bloody Trees: The Affectivity of *Christ*,' in Jorgensen, McCormack, and Wilcox, *Anglo-Saxon Emotions*, 143-62.

sæp wearð to swate. þæt asecgan ne magun
 foldbuende þurh frod gewit,
 hu fela þa onfundun þa gefelan ne magun
 dryhtnes þrowinga, deade gesceafte.

(*Christ III*, 1174-79)

[Then, many a tree became drenched underneath their bark with bloody tears, red and thick; sap became blood. Thus earth-dwellers may not be able to tell, through wise understanding, how much these lifeless creations, which cannot feel, experienced the Lord's suffering.]

The weeping trees, reminiscent of the bleeding Cross in *The Dream of the Rood*,³⁴ bear the grief and sorrow that the “foldbuende...frod gewit” ironically fail to understand, and therefore neglect in remaining unsympathetic. The oxymoronic image of the “deade gesceafte” enacting a shockingly vivid display of emotion, even if lifeless and thus un sentient (“þa gefelan ne magun”), emphasises the contrast between creation's expression of its affective bond with Christ and man's disavowal of it:

Hwæs weneð se þe mid gewitte nyle
 1200 gemunan þa mildan meotudes lare,
 ond eal ða earfeðu þe he fore ældum adreag,
 forþon þe he wolde þæt we wuldres eard
 in ecnesse agan mosten?

[...]

On werigum sefan

geseoð sorga mæste, hu se sylfa cyning
 mid sine lichoman lysde of firenum
 1210 þurh milde mod, þæt hy mostun manweorca

³⁴ Cf. 48b, “Eall ic wæs mid blode bestemed” (“I was completely drenched in blood”).

tome lifgan, ond tires blæd
 ecne agan. Hy þæs eðles þonc
 hyra waldende wita ne cuþon;
 forþon þær to teonum þa tacen geseoð
 1215 orgeatu on gode, ungesælge.

(*Christ III*, 1199-215)

[What does he expect who does not wish to remember the creator's gentle teaching, and all the suffering he underwent for the sake of men, because he wished for us to obtain a heavenly home in eternity? [...] Grieving at heart they will behold the greatest of sorrows, how the King himself, out of his merciful disposition, redeemed them from transgression with his own flesh, so that they might live free from sin and obtain the eternal bliss of glory. For this reward,³⁵ they did not show any gratitude to their ruler, and so they shall see the ominous signs of affliction manifest in God.]

As the contrast between the lamenting trees and unrepentant mankind becomes explicit, the bloody tears become “a model for human compunction [that] should produce an affective response in the listeners of the poem itself – the lamentation of the inanimate is surely a reproach to those who do not feel.”³⁶ In so doing, the affective world of the poem, encompassing man, Christ, and the weeping trees, is extended and projected onto the extra-textual world of the audience, who are invited to participate in the affectivity of the text's world by identifying themselves with the unsympathetic, and to feel compelled to repent and lament by the moving quality of the trees' bloody tears. Thus, the affectivity of *Christ III* involves not only the emotional response provoked by a specific event (the memory of the crucifixion), but the intended affective engagement triggered by such response (examination and repentance), which reaches out to the unfeeling man inside and outside the text. To borrow McCormack's own words,

³⁵ Cf. *eðles*, lit. “home/dwelling;” here treated as a metonymical abstraction for “the reward of an eternal home.”

³⁶ McCormack, ‘The Affectivity of *Christ*,’ 147.

Through the trees taking on human characteristics the listener takes on the viewpoint of the anthropomorphised trees, comes to experience the Passion vicariously as a participant, and reconfigures his understanding of the psychological process of grief into a concrete, material, vivid, brutal image of bloody tears.³⁷

It should be noted, though, that the external audience is invited to experience shame rather than (or as a previous stage to) grief, and to find their affective textual counterpart in the earth-dwellers who lack understanding. Only when the extra-textual witness acknowledges a breaking of the affective bond between creator and creature will they be able to shift perspective and come to identify themselves with the lamenting trees through integration into the text world of the poem. The strategies of affective engagement of *Christ III* become inverted in *Beowulf*, where the mechanisms of affectivity and the text world are further complicated. Both Grendel and his mother are presented as abominable creatures that the audience perceives—through other characters’ eyes—as abhorrent, but this image becomes progressively blurred as an altogether different picture arises, and the audience come to perceive them as uncannily engaging.

5.3.3 – Mothers and Murderers: Confronting Negative Affectivity in *Beowulf*

The increasing humanisation of Grendel as the narrative of *Beowulf* progresses is well noted in scholarship. The poet displays three main strategies to construct a conceptual bridge between the monstrous and the heroic in the poem: the use of similar terms to describe Grendel, his mother, and Beowulf; the psychological dimension of Grendel; and Grendel’s ambiguous position as a man transfigured into a monster-like creature.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 161

³⁸ For a lexicographical analysis of terms applied to both the Grendelkin and Beowulf, see Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe, ‘Transformation and the Limits of the Human in *Beowulf*,’ *TSL* 23:4 (1981), 484-94 (on the use of *rinc*, *wer*, and other male warrior-related terminology). On the mixed reaction arising from Grendel’s position as an exile, see Joseph L. Baird, ‘Grendel the Exile,’ *NM* 67:4 (1966), 375-81; and for a vision of Grendel as the

Two moments in particular may excite affective responses in an audience that would have been aware of the hardships of exile and the precariousness of living outside the protective cover of society. The first of these comes a result of the ambiguous terms utilised by the poet when first introducing Grendel, whose name and nature are at this point yet unknown:

Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice
 þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,
 þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde
 hludne in healle; þær wæs hearpan sweg,

90 swutol sang scopes.

(*Beowulf*, 86-90a)

[Then the powerful spirit, he who awaited in darkness, suffered harshly for a time, for every day he heard the loud joy of the hall. There was the music of the harp, clear song of the *scop*.]

From this preliminary image of Grendel, prior to the description of his attack on Heorot, we get an image of alienation and psychological distress, which ultimately drives the “wonsæli wer” (l. 105a, “miserable man”) to take revenge on the Danes. It is unusual that, where the poet is introducing the antagonist for the first time, he does so by first mentioning his wretchedness and isolation from the life of the hall, thereby providing sympathetic justification for Grendel’s ravaging, and inviting the audience to take on his perspective on the situation. The term “gæst” is ambiguous enough to allow for a variety of interpretations,³⁹ and the fact that the unidentified “spirit” dwells in the shadows only implies *a priori* that he lives outside the boundaries of society, away from the light of the mead-hall. Moreover, assuming that Grendel suffers greatly

“Negative Man,” see Edward B. Irving, Jr., *A Reading of “Beowulf”* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 15-22.

³⁹ Cf. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 19: “*gast* can refer to God (especially the Holy Spirit), angels, saints, demons, the monster Grendel, fire, breath, and the mortal soul of non-human animals.” However, *gæst* can also mean “guest” and, by extension, “stranger” and, in a negative sense, “enemy/outsider,” cf. B-T, 357. The OED yields “visitor, stranger,” and also “soul,” “spirit,” “demon.”

(“earfoðlice.../geþolode”) every day for an indefinite amount of time (“þrage,” “dogora gehwam”) implies that he is a sentient being, capable of experiencing grief and therefore closer to humanity.

Repeatedly throughout his encounter with Beowulf, Grendel is described as having thoughts and a will of his own, acting on the grounds of rationality rather than by instinct, which contrasts with the non-human predatoriness of the sea-monsters in the swimming match with Breca (529-606), or the archetypal destructive agency of the dragon. Grendel intended (“mynte,” 712a, 731a, 762a), knew (“wisse,” 715b; “wiste,” 764b, 821b), thought (“þohte,” 739b), and realised (“onfunde,” 750a, 809a); he was capable of feeling anger (“gebolgen wæs,” 723b; “yrremod,” 726a; “yrre wæron begen,” 769b), joy (“mod ahlog,” 730b), and fear (“on mode wearð / forth on ferhðe,” 753b-54a). Grendel’s unusually rich psychological dimension is heightened by the poet’s adoption of his point of view on several occasions, of which the fight at Heorot is the most illustrative example. At this dramatically and narratively crucial moment, in which a sympathetic response is again ambiguously addressed, it is not Beowulf’s perspective that the poet offers, but Grendel’s: we witness his realisation of defeat rather than Beowulf’s confidence in triumph, and in so doing the predator becomes prey in the eyes of the audience.

Ða þæt onfunde se þe fela æror
 810 modes myrðe manna cynne,
 fyrene gefremede –he wæs fag wið god–
 þæt him se lichoma læstan nolde,
 ac hine se modega mæg Hygelaces
 hæfde be honda...

(*Beowulf*, 809-14a)

[Then he realised, he who had, [with] many miseries in his heart, perpetrated many crimes against men—he [who] was a foe to God—that his body would not endure, for Hygelac’s courageous kinsman had him by the hand.]

Not only that, but on three occasions Grendel is denied escape, being forced to face Beowulf even as he finds out his life is endangered:

He on mode wearð
forht on ferhðe; no þy ær fram meahte.

755 Hyge wæs him hinfus, wolde on heolster fleon,
secan deofla gedræg; ne wæs his drohtoð þær
swylce he on ealderdagum ær gemette.
Gemunde þa se goda, mæg Higelaces,
æfenspræce, uplang astod

760 ond him fæste wiðfeng; fingras burston.
Eoten wæs utweard; eorl furþur stop.
Mynte se mæra, þær he meahte swa,
widre gewindan ond on weg þanon
fleon on fenhopu; wiste his fingra geweald

765 on grames grapum.

(*Beowulf*, 753b-65a)

[In his heart he grew frightened in spirit; none the sooner could he get away. In his mind he was eager to escape, intent on fleeing into the darkness, to seek the company of demons; his state there was such as he had not experienced before in the days of his life. The righteous man, Hygelac's kinsman, then remembered the words he had pronounced that evening, [so that] he stood upright and laid firm hold of him: fingers burst. The ogre was outbound, the warrior took a further step. The renowned one ["se mæra"]⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *Mære* is a complex term. B-T yields "Great, excellent, distinguished, illustrious, sublime, splendid, celebrated, famous, widely known (of persons or things)" so that it is often used to refer to God (cf. "se mæra," *Gen* 52a, for example); however, it also renders "notorious, distinguished by evil deeds," giving only Barabbas and Grendel as instances of this use (B-T, 660). Considering the restricted use of *mære* with a negative connotation and taking into account the prominence of the two figures mentioned in B-T, the sense of "renowned," "widely known for his deeds (whether good or evil)" seems a broad yet comprehending enough translation as to encompass its use when referred to Grendel and Beowulf alike.

intended to revolve farther wherever he could and flee from there away into the marshes; he knew his fingers' power in the fierce one's grasp.]

And again:

Nolde eorla hleo ænige þinga
 þone cwealmcuman cwicne forlætan,
 ne his lifdagas leoda ænigum
 nytte tealde.

(*Beowulf*, 791-94a)

[The protector of men would by no means suffer the deadly guest [to stay] alive, nor did he give any worth to his life.⁴¹]

The image constructed here is not that of a dangerous anthropophagous monster preying on the hero, but that of a wounded creature seeking escape from certain death, animalistic in his pain and all too human in his fear. In a twist of dramatic irony, the poet, after building an elaborate atmosphere of terror in describing Grendel's advance towards Heorot,⁴² shows the fight in quite a different light, with Beowulf overpowering a horrified Grendel. The poet employs no names in the narrative of the fight itself (Grendel's is used as he approaches in line 711a; Beowulf's at the end of the struggle, when his victory is explicitly stated in lines 818b-19a), so that is only through association of epithets with the respective contenders that we know of their fate (cf. "eorla hleo," "cwealmcuman"). On more than occasion these epithets are vague enough to refer to either Grendel or Beowulf, and some of them are applied to both indistinctively throughout the poem. The phrase "se mæra" (762a), in particular, is used mostly to refer to the desirable qualities of glory and fame

⁴¹ lit. "did not consider the days of his life to be of use to anybody."

⁴² Cf. Alain Renoir, 'Point of View and Design for Terror in *Beowulf*,' *NM* 63 (1962), 154-67; Michael Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror,' in Helen Damico and John Leyerle (eds.), *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Essays in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr* (Kalamazoo: WMUMIP, 1993), 373-402; and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*: Mutilation, Decapitation, and Unburied Dead,' in Elaine Trehan and Susan Rosser (eds.), *Early Medieval Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 252 (Tempe: ACMRS, 2002), 81-100.

(cf. 504a, 659a, 687a), which Scyld, Hroþgar, Unferþ, and Beowulf hold.⁴³ Only twice does the poet use the term in relation to Grendel: when he first introduces him by name (“Grendel haten, | mære mearcstapa,” “Grendel was his name, [the] renowned boundary-walker,” 102b-03a), and during the fight. It seems reasonable, then, to assume that the audience would have associated the epithet with Beowulf in the first place, until the reference to the “fenhopu” frustrates this expectation. Moreover, the seemingly disconcerting use of the adjective leads to ambiguity as to who is being described, thereby conveying the confusion of the scene and implicitly blurring the boundaries of the antagonists’ identities.

When it comes to the perception of Grendel, then, conflicting impressions arise in the audience. On the one hand, the Danes’ perspective as the wounded party dominates the discourse of the first half of the poem, to which the poet’s design for terror and Grendel’s murdering incursions contribute. On the other, the first image of Grendel as a wretched exile isolated from the joys of the hall, and the implied inversion of roles during the fight with Beowulf, after which Grendel flees mutilated and bleeding out, invites a re-evaluation of the greater picture. The attribution of *mære* and man-like features to Grendel, later confirmed by Hroþgar (“earmsceapen,” 1351b), complicates the assumption of his monstrosity, while his capability for feeling and horror in the face of death endow him with an uncannily human aura.

Grendel’s mother’s intervention further obscures the already diffuse boundaries between the monstrous and the human. The absence of any mention of her existence until she takes revenge on the death of her son, far from being a narrative weakness, introduces a dramatic turn of events that is the more poignant precisely because of its unexpected placement in the sequence of events. After Grendel has been mortally wounded and the revels in Heorot are taking place, the Finnsburg episode intrudes as part of the story-telling of Hroþgar’s *scop* (1071-1158b). Immediately after,

⁴³ Thus: “[leofne þeoden,] mærne be mæste,” 36a for Scyld; “Mære þeoden,” 129b; “mærne þeoden” 201a; “Habbað we to þæm mæran [Deniga frean],” 270a; “sunu Healfdendes, / mærum þeodne,” 344b-45a; and “[frean Scildinga,] þeoden mærne,” 353a for Hroþgar; and “habbe ic mærða fela,” 408b for Beowulf.

Wealhþeow's two speeches follow, in the second of which she entreats Beowulf to be mindful of the ties of kinship, particularly towards her sons:

"Bruc ðisses beages, Beowulf leofa,
hyse, mid hæle, ond þisses hrægles neat,
peodgestreona, ond geþeoh tela,
cen þec mid cræfte ond þyssum cnyhtum wes

1220 lara liðe; ic þe þæs lean geman.

[...] Beo þu suna minum
dædum gedefe, dreamhealdende.

Her is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe,
modes milde, mandrihtne hold;

1230 þegnas syndon geþwære, þeod ealgearo,
druncne dryhtguman doð swa ic bidde."

(*Beowulf*, 1216-20; 1226b-31)

[“Enjoy this ring well, Beowulf, young and dear warrior, and make use of this corselet, treasures of [our] people, and fortune be with you; prove yourself with virtue, and to these young men be gracious in [your] advice. For that I shall be mindful of your reward. [...] Treat my sons with kindness,⁴⁴ possessing joy. Here is every man true to each other; kind at heart, loyal to their lord; thanes are of one mind, the people [stand] ready [in service], the revelling retainers do as I bid.”]

The narrative of the Finnsburg episode and Wealhþeow's speech initiate a thematic sequence constructed around the idea of maternal sorrow and anxiety, the culmination of which is represented by Grendel's mother's grief. Jane Chance notes how this structure also revolves around the poem's preoccupation with memory and foreshadowing, thus establishing a

⁴⁴ Lit. “be kind in deed to my sons.”

tripartite image of motherhood in which each female figure mirrors each other's situation:

The *past* helplessness [of] Hildeburh to requite the death of her son counterpoints the anxiously maternal Wealhþeow's attempt to weave the ties of kinship and obligation, thereby forestalling a *future* danger to her sons. Later that night, Grendel's mother, intent on avenging the loss of her son in the *present*, attacks Heorot.⁴⁵

The *Beowulf* poet introduces Grendel's mother indirectly, as he had done with Grendel, focusing not on the antagonists' positions as threats to the stability of society, but on their perspective as the aggrieved party. Just as Grendel's relentless attacks had been triggered by his long suffering as an outcast and his distress at the sounds of merriment at the hall, Grendel's mother's coming is the result of her "yrmþu" ("misery," "wretchedness," 1259b). Again, like Grendel before, she is described in neutral terms, as "ides, aglæcwif" ("noblewoman, female warrior," 1259a) and given the status of an exile inhabiting the "wæteregean" ("dreadful waters," 1260a), "cealde streamas" ("cold currents," 1261a).

After offering conflicting images of Grendel in affective terms—one from the Danes' point of view as "heorowearh hetelic" ("hostile war-outcast," lit. "sword-wolf," 1266a), the other from Grendel's own, "hean... | dreame belæded deapwic seon" ("cast down...bereft of joy, looking for a place to die," 1274b-75)—Grendel's mother's motivation is clearly stated: "gifre ond galgmod, gegan wolde | sorhfulne sið, sunu deað wrecan" ("ravaging and sad-minded, intended to depart on a sorrowful journey to avenge her son's death," 1277-78). The term *aglæcwif* in particular has caused much scholarly dissent owing to the overwhelmingly negative connotations attributed by editors, critics, and translators based on lexicographical choice. Recent scholarship has revised the case for Grendel's mother and the affective construction of female monstrosity upon

⁴⁵ *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 100.

biased lexicographical choice. Hence, in an exhaustive revision of lexical and critical evidence, M. Wendy Hennequin concludes that

the poem itself refuses to make a demon or monster out of Grendel's mother. The text clearly makes her frightening and threatening, but it does not associate her with monsters (except Grendel). She is not particularly monstrous, either; she has supernatural traits, but the poem assigns the same traits to heroic characters. Nor does the poem identify Grendel's mother as evil or associate her with hell or demons, as it does with Grendel (101b; 756a; 788a; 852b; 1274a). In neither dialogue nor narration does the text specifically condemn or even criticize her actions. Instead of a monster, the poem constructs her as a noblewoman and a brave opponent, and it is the critics and translators, not the poem itself, who demonize Grendel's mother.⁴⁶

The poet's ambiguous treatment of Grendel's mother becomes evident in the context of previous episodes related to the theme of maternal anxiety. Grendel's mother's "sorrowful journey" stands as a companion and counterpart to Hildeburh's and Wealhþeow's narratives: she is both the passive mourner of her son's death and the active avenger of his killing; affectively engaging as a grieving mother, yet unlike the standard of resignation set by the previous images of motherhood. It is precisely in such opposition of affective responses that Grendel's mother's uncanny appeal lies. Although the characters in the poem condemn her actions, the poet does not offer a negative portrayal of her condition or her doings. Her revenge is only too intimately linked with the account of Hildeburh's grief, so that the juxtaposition of both narratives creates a sense of contrastive affective engagement. The audience is invited to participate in the pathos conveyed by the Finnsburg episode, only to find its affective force re-embodied in an unexpected figure of motherhood whose existence is only

⁴⁶ 'We've Created a Monster: The Strange Case of Grendel's Mother,' *ES* 89:5 (2008), 503-23, at 513. See also Christine Alfano, 'The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity: A Reevaluation of Grendel's Mother,' *Comitatus* 23:1 (1992), 1-16.

revealed within a strategically constructed thematic sequence. From the implication of uncanny representation of Grendel's mother as a potentially sympathetic character and the audience's resulting identification with her suffering, negative affectivity arises.

Moreover, the affectivity of Grendel's mother's portrayal also works on a different level: the inversion of gender roles implied in her active seeking of revenge and dominion over the mere. She personifies the duties of warrior and king as well as the affectively engaging role of a grieving mother; she antagonises Hroþgar as much as she mirrors Wealhþeow, the implications of which are left for the audience to consider. The poet does not pass judgement on either of these aspects (the maternal or the warrior-like); rather, it is the coalescence of these otherwise contrastive elements that constitute her alleged "monstrousness," which ought to be seen as "otherness," a negative reflection of human qualities. Not only is she a female character taking on traditionally male roles, she is, unlike Hildeburh and Wealhþeow, an avenging mother and the personification of the decadent system of feuding that the poet ambiguously portrays as both noble and corrupt:

Seen from within the socialized world of the hall, such a figure could only be a monster from the frontiers of the human world, on the borders of the animal. [...] The system of feuding has produced a monstrous, avenging mother...that must be cast away, abjected –the very birthplace of death.⁴⁷

To an extent, then, the inversion of social functions that is negatively portrayed in the Grendelkin represents the failure of the warrior-heroic society that Beowulf and the downfall of the Geats eventually epitomise at the end of the poem. Grendel's mother invites affective engagement from the maternal point of view, but also from the moral and social insofar as the juxtaposition of passive grieving and active avenging complicates the

⁴⁷ Paul Acker, 'Horror and the Maternal in *Beowulf*,' *PMLA* 121:3 (2006), 702-16, at 707-08.

[He delivered retribution for that, the fierce warrior, as he saw Grendel lie in his resting place, exhausted from the fight, lifeless, as the struggle at Heorot had wounded him before; the corpse ripped wide asunder when it suffered a blow after death, a hard sword-stroke, and thus [he] cut the head off from him.]

The gory description of Grendel's beheading echoes the tearing apart of his victim on his last attack on Heorot (739-45a) and completes the reversal of roles started off by Beowulf's expedition to the mere and maintained throughout the entire episode by the attribution of epithets such as *aglæca* to Beowulf, Grendel, and Grendel's mother indistinctively.⁴⁹ However, whereas both Grendel's and the dragon's corpses are disposed of in some way or another (the dragon's carcass is thrown off the cliff, 3131b-33), we never hear of Grendel's mother's fate. She disappears from the narrative as unexpectedly as she enters it, left behind at the bottom of the mere and abandoned by the narrator, leaving behind a disturbing image of degraded though affectively engaging humanity.

The affectivity of Grendel's mother is thus constructed through negative correlation with other maternal figures, on the one hand, and through gender inversion of social roles, on the other. Unlike the bleeding trees of *Christ III*, however, she is no pathway to positive affective engagement with other characters in the poem; and, unlike the female speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, she is not allowed to voice her sorrow. Instead, she represents a departure from traditional affectivity inasmuch as she personifies the basic human affective bond of motherhood projected onto a de-humanised recipient, triggering an uncanny reaction in an audience that is reluctant to identify themselves with a figure presented as culturally abhorrent.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For a recent study on the postural significance of beheading scenes in Old English and their affective dimension, see Ciaran Arthur, 'Giving the Head's Up in Ælfric's *Passio Sancti Edmundi*: Postural Representations of the Old English Saint,' *PQ* 92:3 (2013), 315-33.

⁵⁰ The idea of the "uncanny" was first developed by Freud in his 1919 essay, *Das Unheimliche*. It designates "the emergence of something which was once familiar...and which has been repressed and alienated from the mind;" cf. Michael Payne and Jessica Rae Barbera (eds.), *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 669. Julia Kristeva elaborates on the idea of the uncanny to develop the concept of the "abject" in *Pouvoirs de L'horreur* (1980), where "abject" refers to "a threat that seems to emanate

However, not unlike the reconstructed narrative surrounding *Wulf and Eadwacer*, empathic engagement with *Beowulf* from the point of view of the modern affective bias also conditions our understanding of the role of the Grendelkin in the poem. It also qualifies our perception of Grendel and his mother, as it further dehumanises them by means of translation practices based on subjective lexicographical choice; namely, the tendency to provide a positively or negatively nuanced translation to render an Old English word on the grounds of an empathic response to the context in which it appears. Modern editors and translators of *Beowulf* have been faced with the dilemma of whether to follow one potential representation of the monsters or the other where ambiguous terms, such as *mære*, appear; but, more often than not, all ambiguity is eroded from the text in the act of providing a subjective, affectively biased rendering. Thus, for example, differing treatments of Grendel's state prior to his first attack on Heorot in lines 86-87 (discussed above) construct a more-or-less biased character perception:

Old English:

Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice / þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad

Literal translation:

Then the mighty spirit grievously suffered for a time, he who awaited in darkness.

Provided translations:

- Then for a time the mighty spirit who dwelt in darkness bore it angrily (Hall, 1901)⁵¹

from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable;" it is "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself [...] What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite;" cf. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. European Perspectives (NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1; 4. Kristeva develops the idea of the abject in relation to motherhood and the idea of "the two-faced mother," which Paul Acker applies to Grendel's mother in 'Horror and the Maternal.'

⁵¹ John R. Clark Hall (ed. and trans.), "*Beowulf*" and "*The Fight at Finnsburg*" (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1901)

- Then an **evil** spirit who dwelt in the darkness endured it ill
(Kennedy, 1940)⁵²
- Then the fierce spirit that abode in darkness grievously endured a
time of torment (Tolkien, 1940-42)⁵³
- Then the mighty spirit who dwelt in darkness bore grievously a
time of hardship (Hall, revised ed.)⁵⁴
- A powerful **monster**, living down in the darkness, **growled** in
pain (Raffel, 1963)⁵⁵
- Then a powerful **demon**, a prowler through the dark nursed a hard
grievance (Heaney, 1999)⁵⁶
- A bold **demon** who waited in darkness wretchedly suffered all the
while (Liuzza, 2000)⁵⁷
- Then the powerful **demon** endured the time with effort (Fulk,
2014)⁵⁸
- Then the **monster** who lived in shadows, the dark's **demon**,
suffered pain. (Williamson, 2017)⁵⁹

The consistently negative representation of Grendel introduces a biased mistranslation of the non-negative term “gæst” and a view of the marshes a place of demons that is not explicit until much later in the poem. Kennedy even goes on to render the “ellen” element as “evil,” for which

⁵² Charles W. Kennedy (ed. and trans.), *“Beowulf:” The Oldest English Epic, Translated into Alliterative Verse with a Critical Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 1940)

⁵³ J. R. R. Tolkien (trans.), *“Beowulf:” A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2016). Tolkien’s posthumous edition can be safely located sometime around 1940-1942, according to his son Christopher’s introductory notes: [A] further typescript...can be dated to about 1940-2. [...] There are no other texts,” 2.

⁵⁴ John R. Clark Hall, (trans.) *“Beowulf” and “The Finnesburg Fragment,”* ed. C. L. Wren. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950).

⁵⁵ Burton Raffel (ed. and trans.), *“Beowulf”* (New American Library, 1963)

⁵⁶ Seamus Heaney (trans.), *“Beowulf:” A New Verse Translation* (Faber & Faber, 1999)

⁵⁷ Roy M. Liuzza (ed. and trans.), *“Beowulf:” A New Verse Translation* (Broadview, 2000)

⁵⁸ Fulk, *The “Beowulf” Manuscript.*

⁵⁹ *The Complete Old English Poems.*

there is no basis other than a negative affective reading.⁶⁰ In so doing, the deliberately ambiguous description of Grendel, with its implication of potential affective engagement on the part of the audience, becomes obliterated from the original Old English text. To this it should be added that, where the poet uses terms like “aglæca” indistinctively for Grendel, his mother, Beowulf, and Sigemund, translators generally agree on a negative rendering based on Klæber’s proposed translation: Klæber renders “wretch,” “monster,” “demon,” “fiend,” “warrior,” and “hero.” The poet is ambiguous in his use of the term in line 1512a to designate either the monsters of the mere or Beowulf, but he later uses “ðā aglæcan” (2592a) to refer indistinctly to Beowulf or the dragon.⁶¹ For the various occurrences of the term, Hall gives “monster” for Grendel, “warrior” for Sigemund, and “champions” for Beowulf and the dragon; Tolkien consistently renders “fierce slayer/s;” Luizza yields “monster” or “monstrous beast” for Grendel, “fierce creature” for Sigemund, and “great creatures” for Beowulf and the dragon;⁶² while Fulk consistently gives “troublemaker” regardless of the character. Based on etymological reconstruction, the meaning of the term might be “the awe-inspiring one.” Indeed, “awe-inspiring” or “formidable” conveys the ambiguity that the poet constructs in his use of language throughout the Danish episode of *Beowulf*, and avoids the affective bias introduced by the examples provided.

In this sense, Grendel and his mother are examples of the extra-textual modern psychological and affective bias.⁶³ Even if the situations of these poetic figures are virtually equivalent to those of other characters (namely,

⁶⁰ B-T yields “power, vigour, valour, courage, fortitude,” glossing “vis, robur, vigor, virtus, fortitudo,” where none of the provided terms have a negative implication. Cf. B-T, 246. The OED renders “courage,” “strength,” “fervour.”

⁶¹ Cf. Klæber (ed.), *“Beowulf” and “The Fight at Finnsburg,” Edited, with Introduction, Bibliography, Notes, and Appendices* (Boston and NY: D. C. Heath & Co., 1922), 277. Fulk, Bjork, and Niles modify Klæber’s glossary entry and render “one inspiring awe or mystery, formidable one, afflicter, assailant, adversary, combatant;” cf. *Klæber’s “Beowulf,”* 347.

⁶² Liuzza concedes that the term is difficult to translate and admits “monster” is an “admittedly tendentious” rendering for Grendel; *Beowulf*, 75, n.1.

⁶³ Another example is Unferþ, whose obscure name and role as Hroþgar’s *pyle* have resulted in a myriad of different interpretations, most of them negative. I engage with earlier approaches and reassess the case for Unferþ in ‘*Unferþ maðelode: The Villain in Beowulf Reconsidered*,’ *ES* 100:8 (2019), 941-58.

the speaker in *The Wanderer*, the archetypal exile figure, and the other two portrayals of motherhood in *Beowulf*), our modern socio-cultural bias prevents affective engagement with them. Indeed, just as such bias results in a hierarchisation of texts based on the degree of affective involvement with their respective text worlds, a gradation in the treatment of certain poetic figures comes as a by-product of such discriminating principle. At such point, it is no longer the *affective dimension* of Old English poetry that influences our perception of the texts, but the imposition of anachronistic criteria based on *affective criticism*, or the evaluation of cultural products based on the effect they produce on their audience.

5.4 – Conclusion: Affective Criticism and the Affective Fallacy

As I have attempted to show, Old English poetry often requires a degree of active engagement on the audience's part in order to fully deploy its emotional and affective dimensions. This implies that, to a certain extent, the audience is the main agent for the retrieval of a series of meanings not explicit in the text, such as the ambiguous affective force of the Grendelkin. Precisely because of such interaction with the extra-textual world, Old English poetry lends itself to new readings as it becomes available to different audiences beyond its immediate context of composition. What has been referred to as its "modern" feeling comes not from its alleged psychological verisimilitude, but from its trans-cultural representation of abstract ideas about emotions and the mind, and its appeal to affective engagement. This aspect of Old English poetry, described by Harbus as its "affective poetics," explains how a contemporary audience may relate to a series of poems separated centuries from them:

Old English poetry shares with more recent literary texts a reliance on representations of consciousness, an embodied mind, and a hard-wired predisposition for narrative, as well as an expansive use of conceptual metaphor to communicate abstract ideas. Given the durability and transmission of these

literary characteristics, audiences beyond the immediate context of composition are able to recognise and appreciate literary representations of embodied emotions, and to deploy the same combination of cognitive and emotional responses in literary processing.⁶⁴

In other words, it is the psychological/affective relatability and reconstructability of Old English portrayals of the life of the mind and its close association with embodied emotions that have aroused empathy on modern audiences, as we recreate and become part of the affective world of the texts. There is, however, a danger of over-interpreting such affective quality and extrapolating its discourse to a modern biased reconstruction of meaning. Where contextual information is missing or deliberately omitted from the narrative, the audience's affective engagement may lead to imposing a series of elements on the texts that are irrecoverable in some cases, or altogether extraneous to them. As the modern affective bias becomes a criterion for the evaluation of literary texts and a tool for their inclusion in generic categories and canons, empathic engagement is taken to an immoderate and textually unjustified degree, thereby verging on affective fallacy.

The phrase “affective fallacy,” alternatively referred to as “affective criticism,” refers to “a confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does),” which “begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effect of the poem” and leads to an interpretive relativism in which “the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear.⁶⁵ As a discourse characteristically constructed around “both emotions and objects, or about the emotive quality of objects,” poetry becomes a means for “fixing emotions or making them more permanently perceptible when objects have undergone a fundamental change from culture to culture.” Emotions and objects become, in any case, “part of the matter dealt with –not communicated to the reader like an

⁶⁴ ‘Affective Poetics,’ 21

⁶⁵ William K. Wimsatt, Jr and Monroe C. Beardsley, ‘The Affective Fallacy,’ in idem, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 21

infective disease...but presented [and] contemplated as patterns of knowledge.”⁶⁶

In other words: the discourse of emotion in Old English poetry is correlative with the cultural and historical context in which it originates, and its immediate impact is lost to us as a result of temporal and cultural separation. We cannot retrieve the immediate affective implications that the texts might have had on their contemporary audiences, although we can attempt to reconstruct them through our knowledge of Old English language, culture, history, and society (an example of this is our understanding of the hydraulic and cardio-centric model of the mind and emotions in Old English, as identified by Leslie Lockett).⁶⁷ Nonetheless, these emotions remain affectively engaging insofar as they are ultimately rooted in familiar cognitive processes. We are able to recognise patterns of thought or embodiment of emotions, even at the highly abstract level of metaphor, so that the affective force of language is still re-constructible even if its immediate cultural significance is not—at least not completely.

Thus, where the emotions and their objects in Old English poetry have “undergone a fundamental change,” insofar as they should be contextualised against their contemporary cultural-historical moment of composition, they are presented to a modern audience as a fixed “pattern of knowledge.” This pattern of knowledge is none other than its affective quality, consisting of the collaborative discourses of emotion and the life of the mind. The affective quality of Old English poetry is, however, not transmitted onto a modern audience; namely, it cannot be re-enacted in the present. It is instead presented in its permanent state, which must be interpreted and engaged with within the boundaries of individual text worlds, not in terms of modern-based affective criteria. The fine balance that separates affective engagement from affective fallacy lies in “establishing as discrete cultural moments the past when the poem was written and first appreciated,” namely, the moment when a given emotion was fixed in reference to a

⁶⁶ *Idem*, 38

⁶⁷ Cf. *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, esp. Ch. 2, ‘The Hydraulic Model of the Mind in Old English Narrative.’

particular pattern of knowledge (in this case, the Old English social, historical, and cultural milieu), and “the present into which the poem with its clear and nicely interrelated meanings, its completeness, balance, and tension has survived,” without retroactively projecting the latter onto the first.⁶⁸

The survey of several early anthologies, histories, and companions of English literature provided in Chapter 2 shows how a restrictive canon of Old English poetry, consisting mostly of *Beowulf* and some of the Exeter Book lyrics has been perpetuated and extended onto the non-specialised audience on the grounds of affective criticism. A major factor that influences our perception of emotions and affectivity in Old English poetry in relation to their portrayal across different texts is the post-Romantic legacy that informs the modern bias. As early scholarship retroactively projected aesthetic criteria derived from Wordsworthian and Coleridgean descriptions of lyric poetry (and particularly of elegy), a gap was introduced in the Old English poetic corpus whereby narrative and lyric (and their various sub-generic classifications) became separated as distinct units. Sieper’s canon of “elegy” and Greenfield’s definition of the genre then confirmed and perpetuated such affective bias. However, as we perceive the affective quality of Old English poetry as an inherent aspect of the text world of each individual poem, as well as a cultural element deeply rooted in the Old English experience of the world, we can see the Exeter Book lyrics in a new perspective: one that reconciles them with the Old English poetic corpus as a coherent unit displaying themes and preoccupations across a variety of texts and manuscripts.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, 39

6 – Cultural Assimilation and Literary Imitation: The Familiarising Principle and the “Old English Elegy”

6.1 – Introduction: Translation as an Act of Interpretation

The discourses of emotion and the life of the mind in Old English verse underlie, as I have shown, much of the thematic cohesion that supports the extant corpus of poetry, regardless of artificial generic boundaries. However, the Old English poetic corpus is rich and varied despite its stylistic conservatism. Considering the limited amount of textual evidence that has survived, the range of poetic forms within the corpus is remarkably broad, including riddles, wisdom or “catalogue” poems, charms, lyric as well as narrative verse, translations and adaptations of Latin prose models (such as the poems in MS Junius 11, the verse *Guthlac*, the Cynewulf poems, or the Christian animal allegories of the Exeter Book), and even a few experiments outside the conventions of traditional verse (such as *The Rhyming Poem* or the complex verse *Solomon and Saturn*). In the light of such variety, one would expect Old English poetics to sometimes replicate borrowed styles and traditions, as Old English poets might have sought to follow their sources almost verbatim rather than to assert the creative independence of the vernacular.¹ However, the case is almost invariably the opposite. The thematic cohesiveness of the Old English corpus is so strong, its poetic diction so firmly rooted in the

¹ This does not necessarily imply a total independence of Old English verse from its Latin models. Instances of stylistic literalism do occur in the corpus. See, for example, Janie Steen’s discussion of *Judgment Day II* in the light of its model, the Latin *De die iudicii*. Steen argues that the poet-translator provides “a close version of the source, but rather uninspired vernacular verse, whose links with the Old English poetic tradition have been weakened” (79) as a result of “slavish borrowing” of Latin rhetorical artifice (82). Cf. Janie Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: UTP, 2008). The authorship of the Latin original remains a matter of debate, although Michael Lapidge has convincingly argued for its attribution to Bede on the grounds of its remarkable metrical affinities with the *Vita metrica S. Cuthberti*; cf. ‘Bede and the *Versus de die iudicii*,’ in Andreas Bihrer and Elisabeth Stein (eds.), “*Nova de Veteribus*,” *Mittel- und neulatinische Studien für Paul Gerhard Schmidt* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2004), 103-111.

expression of the Old English experience of the world, that the vernacular dominates over its Latin models, bending the adopted forms and themes to the conventions of Old English verse. The consistency with which Old English poets treat cultural preoccupations such as the life of the mind and the discourse of emotion bears witness to this, as I showed in Chapters 3-5.

In this sense, Old English translation of Latin sources, especially in verse, is in reality “an interpretation that fundamentally domesticates the source” rather than mere transliteration, if we follow Lawrence Venuti’s illuminating treatment of translation practices in the Western world. Venuti sees such “domestication” as inherent to the exercise of translation, “insofar as [translation] aims to interpret the source text in terms that are intelligible and interesting in the receiving situation.” The target language thus “domesticates” the source “by detaching [it] from the multidimensional contexts of production and reception in its original language and culture,” and then recontextualises it “by constructing another, comparable set of contexts in the translating language and culture.” This recontextualisation is carried out by means of “interpretants” or “formal and thematic factors that include a relation of equivalence and a particular style as well as values, beliefs, and representation;”² namely, language structures (at the level of word, phrase, or formulaic expression) that carry cultural as well as linguistic meaning. These interpretants work as cultural referents that trigger a series of associations and relocate the source into familiar parameters. Interpretants result, in turn, from “the hierarchical arrangement of linguistic and cultural resources [and] derived from dominant resources and ideologies, which because of their very dominance, are likely to be immediately accessible.”³

While Venuti’s theory of translation/interpretation is highly useful and his terminology proves practical when defining the intervening factors in the material as well as the cultural transmission of texts, Old English poetics works in slightly different ways. The term “domestication” does not

² *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, Routledge Translation Classics. (London: Routledge, 2008, 2nd edition), xii, new 2017 introduction.

³ *Ibid.*, xiv.

accurately reflect the reality of Old English verse, as it implies a degree of submission of the received tradition to the receiving culture. Instead, rather than replacing cultural resources or imposing dominant discourses (in the broadest sense of the term), Old English “interpretants,” namely, Old English culture and experience of the world and the means to express them, create a “third space” of semantic transference whereby Venuti’s “domesticating” and “domesticated” meanings coexist in *familiarised* form. “Interpretants” may be lexical, where an Old English word accommodates a received meaning to become semantically ambiguous depending on context-specific use; or structural, where a series of aesthetic elements (lexical choice, phraseology, and theme) act together as a recontextualising agent for the incorporation of received learning (including stylistic, narrative, and cultural elements) into the Old English experience of the world. I will refer to the organising system that underlies these interactions and rules the accommodating behaviour of cultural and linguistic interpretants in Old English as the *familiarising principle*. Such principle may be defined as *an assimilative process whereby an extraneous “source element” is received by a given culture, incorporated into its own experience of the world, and reconceptualised as a “target product” through the medium of traditional modes of representation.*

6.2 – The Familiarising Principle: Theory and Practice

The following discussion will consider the familiarising principle in the context of language acquisition to illustrate how the Old English poets reconceptualise terms and concepts borrowed from the Latin tradition. This involves, in turn, a three-stage process of initial reception, represented by glosses; incorporation, present in partially or completely literal translations; and total assimilation or reconceptualisation, particularly advanced in verse, at which end stand the Exeter Book lyrics. The familiarising process does not, however, emerge spontaneously as an immediate effect of interaction between cultures; it entails a series of stages of exposure and learning, in which the receiving culture gradually becomes the domesticating agent for

extraneous meanings to be effectively assimilated and eventually incorporated into the familiar language and experience of the world. The model of Experiential Learning developed by David A. Kolb illustrates this process (cf. Figure 1).⁴

In Kolb's diagram, *concrete experience* is largely correlative with the reception of, or exposure to a given cultural element (a language, an idea, a technique, etc.); *reflective observation* implies familiarity through observation or study; *abstract conceptualisation* involves the incorporation of the said element onto the receptor's conceptual mapping of the acquired element onto the known experience of the world; and, finally, *active experimentation* refers to the final product of the learning process, which can in turn be the object of further study, leading back to *concrete experience*. In this diagram, *concrete experience* and *abstract conceptualisation* are opposites insofar as the one involves direct exposure, the second mental representation; they involve different forms of *prehension* or grasping of the source material: *comprehension*, when abstract and mental, and *apprehension*, when direct and immediate. Likewise, *active experimentation* is the opposite of *reflective observation*, in the same way that theoretical observation opposes material manipulation; they represent different means of *transformation* of the source element, whether through *intention* (reflective mental process), or through *extension* (external projection of acquired knowledge; a product).

Therefore, to recapitulate, there are two different aspects of learning. *Prehension* refers to how the receptor familiarises himself with an extraneous cultural element, whether by *apprehending* (being immediately exposed to it physically), or by *comprehending* it (incorporating a mental representation of the object). Thus, for example, Old English poets would *apprehend* Latin linguistic forms and grammatical rules because they are in direct contact with the language through exposure to the material culture that comes with it; however, they would *comprehend* certain cultural aspects and meanings associated with the received learning because they must form

⁴ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (FT Press, 2015, 2nd ed.), 66-68.

a mental image in the lack of a physical reference. Hence, the translator of the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* recontextualises the unfamiliar *hippopotami* as the generic *niceras* (“water monster,” Latin, line 405; Old English, line 87), because even if he is acquainted with the linguistic form, the object it describes does not find a direct correspondence either in the Old English language or in the Old English experience of the world.⁵

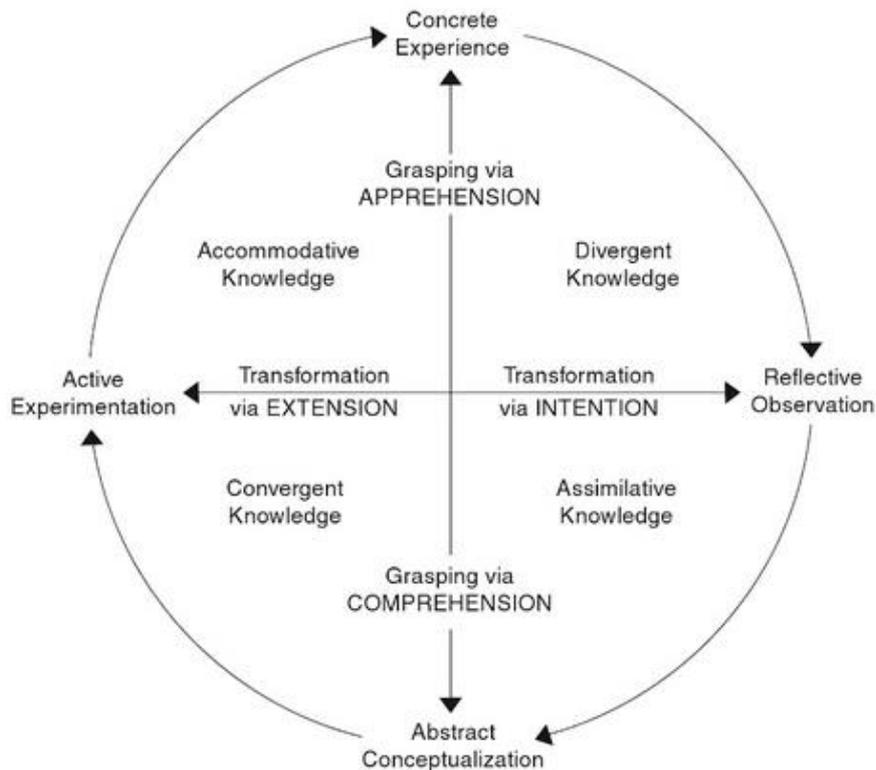


Figure 1: Structural dimensions underlying the process of Experiential Learning and the resulting basic knowledge forms. Rep. from Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 68.

The translator of the *Epistola* apprehends the form *hippopotamus* as he has knowledge of its lexical aspect and experience of its grammatical features; however, in lacking a physical reference, he must infer an abstract conceptualisation of the meaning of *hippopotamus* derived from contextual

⁵ The term *nicor* also appears in *Beowulf*, where the poet uses it in reference to the sea-monsters that attack Beowulf during his match with Breca (cf. “*niceras nigene*,” 575a). The exact nature of the monsters (whether they are fish- or serpent-like) remains undetermined precisely because of the semantic ambiguity of *nicor*. The editions here used are V. Di Marco and L. Perelman (eds.), *The Middle English “Letter of Alexander to Aristotle.”* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978) for the Latin text, and Fulk, *The “Beowulf” Manuscript* for the Old English translation.

information (a large, potentially dangerous water-creature). As he comprehends this abstract conceptualisation through *reflective observation*, he is able to recontextualise it within familiar cultural parameters (transformation via *intention*), eventually leading to its accommodation into a lexically correlative term in the target language; (*nicor*) this process marks the end of transformation vis *extension* and the beginning of *active experimentation*, as *nicor* now refers to a “water-monster” in general, and to *hippopotamus* in a specific textual environment.

The theoretical background provided by Kolb thus serves to support the learning process behind the cycle of cultural assimilation that underlies the familiarising principle. Using Kolb’s terminology to illuminate the concept, a given culture (in this case, early medieval England) become receptors of extraneous cultural products (be it Latin or vernacular) and acquire a *concrete experience* of it through the material support in which the products are contained (the MS sources). The reception of such sources results in a process of grasping through both *apprehension*, as they are directly exposed to the cultural object, and *comprehension*, as they form a mental idea of their contents. The transition from direct exposure to mental representation is carried out by means of *intention*; namely, through study, observation, and reflection of the cultural objects, which become in turn *assimilated* into the Old English perception of the world; the familiar cultural milieu. Finally, as previous knowledge and acquired learning *converge*, the stage of *active experimentation* is reached, resulting in a new cultural product that incorporates both the familiar means of expression and the acquired learning, reproduced in a conventional form. Such product becomes, in turn, the object of study and exposure to subsequent exercises in cultural assimilation, even within the same familiar environment.

Through each of these stages, several minor cycles occur, so that, for example, the production of glosses or literal translations, which are in themselves finalised cultural products reflecting the incorporation of linguistic learning.⁶ It is precisely through the study of these products that

⁶ See, for example, the rendering *wudumær* (lit. “wood-sprite”) in relation to the nymph Echo in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary; cf. J. D. Pfeifer (ed.), *Old English Glosses in the*

the evolution of a larger process of assimilation can be traced, as linguistic learning is, on its own, an essential aspect of the familiarising principle: a textual product cannot be reproduced or imitated until its various constituents have been grasped and assimilated. The glossing tradition, then, as well as the various degrees of adaptation of extraneous cultural products into the familiar linguistic and cultural environment (namely, the various degrees of “literality” of both prose and verse Latin texts) witness to the progressive incorporation of acquired learning into the vernacular tradition. The relationship of the resulting products with their potential sources provide valuable information about the assimilative and productive strategies of Old English poets. In turn, these processes provide the basis for full cultural and linguistic assimilation, culminating in the interpretants’ adoption of received meanings. Ultimately, as the familiarising principle becomes refined, the source element and target product become part of shared experience of the world, resulting in a strongly unifying, cohesive literary tradition that combines familiar cultural tradition with acquired knowledge.

6.3 – *Twelwe Peodnes Pegas*: Lexical and Cultural Interpretants

When it comes to illustrating these concepts, the cultural and conceptual tension maintained between Christianity and the warrior ethos is particularly rich in examples of familiarisation; not only in terms of reconciling pre-existing tradition with new doctrine, but also regarding the social structures and conventions that Christianity carried with it. The idea of “disciple” or “apostle,” for example, would have been strictly theological and thus culturally removed from the Old English experience of the world, as no equivalent religious figure, or official title to go along with it, might have been available in the familiar linguistic or cultural stock. Thus, as a

Épinal-Erfurt Glossary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 19. The association with Echo has been argued by Alaric Hall in ‘The Evidence for *maeran*, the Anglo-Saxon “Nightmares”,’ *Neophilologus* 91:2 (2007), 299-317.

means to bridge the linguistic and conceptual gap, the twelve apostles of Christ become, in *Fates of the Apostles* and elsewhere, the renowned retainers of a certain high king. The nature of the four signed poems, which display a high degree of familiarity with Latin learning and is also abounding in traditional Old English formulaic language, provides an excellent example of how the vernacular acts upon the received meaning:

Hwæt, Ic þysne sang siðgeomor fand
 on seocum sefan, samnode wide
 hu þa æðelingas ellen cyðdon,
 torhte ond tireadige. Twelfe wæron,
 5 dædum domfæste, Dryhtne gecorene,
 leofe on life. Lof wide sprang,
 miht ond maerðo, ofer middangeard,
 þeodnes þegna, þrym unlytel.

(*Fates of the Apostles*, 1-8)

[Listen, I devised this song in my aching heart, weary from my journey, [I] gathered widely how the noble men, bright and glorious, made their courage known. Twelve there were, renowned in their deeds, chosen by the Lord, dear to him in life. [Their] glory spread widely across the earth, the might and fame of the lord's retainers, no small majesty.]

The lexical interpretant *þegn* does not replace the cultural significance of the source language, but accommodates itself to new semantic possibilities, thereby familiarising the extraneous element while retaining its original societal/cultural value. The choice of *þegn* carries with it the cultural and contextual implications of the term in a secular environment, so that that the functions of the lexical interpretant become extended and turned into a structural interpretant, as the aesthetics, style, and motifs of the *dugub* take over the opening of the poem. The traditional formulaic diction of these lines works as the domesticating agent working in

this passage, as it recontextualises the source narrative within recognisable cultural parameters by means of structural interpretants.

The “I/we have heard” structure that we find elsewhere in Old English poetry triggers immediate associations with the familiar discourses of memory, history, and bonds of affection within the community. As I have shown, the Scyld opening in *Beowulf* illustrates how these elements intertwine to create a sense of collective identity founded in memory (“we have heard”), thereby including the audience in the world of the poem. In the lines above, the topic is part of the larger collective memory of Christendom, though on this occasion the story is told by one weary of his journeys and aching in heart; the sort of poetic diction we associate with the Old English discourses of emotion and the life of the mind. The result of this conflation of narrative styles is a hybrid poetic diction that draws from elements normally associated with heroic verse focalised through an autobiographical dramatic monologue in the vein of the Exeter Book lyrics. The opening lines of *Fates of the Apostles* are, then, doubly traditional in their display of two different modes of conventional themes and imagery: they combine narrative and lyric elements to bestow historical as well as narratorial authenticity to the poem. The I-persona presents an objective narrative through the lens of subjective experience, somewhat resembling the shifting pattern in *The Dream of the Rood* I discussed in previous chapters, in an implicit rather than explicit manner.

It is, however, the cultural significance of substituting for *apostoli* the vernacular interpretants *æþelingas* and *þegnas*, with their implicit military and socio-political connotations, to refer to Christ’s disciples that is of the greatest importance here. By means of lexical substitution, the poet turns an unfamiliar concept into one that is readily identifiable in the cultural context of Old English language and poetics. This process is confirmed by similar strategies in relation to imported specific terminology, such as *þrinness* for *trinitas* or *godspel[boc]* for *evangelium*.⁷ The idea of the followers of Christ (apostles or otherwise) as part of the *militia Christi*

⁷ B-T 1070 and 481; 84, respectively.

certainly antedates the Old English poem, but again the poets did not merely borrow the terminology as they did with loanwords like *[p]sealm*, *engel*, or *biscop*. The process is rather the opposite: the discourse of the *militia Christi* takes on the cultural implications of the Old English terms to acquire nuanced meaning in a vernacular context.

The case of *apostolus* is illustrative of this: although the term is used and adapted to the inflections of Old English (cf. “*Đá gesawon ða apostolas Drihten*,” “Then the Apostles saw the Lord”⁸), the poet prioritises the ambiguous military and religious associations of *þegn* to create a hybrid discourse instead of choosing lexical accuracy by employing the Latin loanword. The use of *apostol* seems to be restricted almost exclusively to prose, with the exception of a sole verse occurrence in the *Menologium*.⁹ In this way, a poetic convention emerges, which participates in the familiar tradition as much as it assimilates an extraneous narrative and the alien concepts therein contained into its discourse. The image of Christ and the apostles as a *cyning*, *dryhten*, or *þeoden* surrounded by *æþelingas* or *þegnas* in fact has a conventional status in Old English—so much so that its influence extends to the reconceptualization of Heaven and Hell as opposing *duguða* or “hosts of nobles.”

The resulting overall poetic discourse, then, is again a hybrid one, as it encompasses elements that are both familiar to the Old English experience of the world and extraneous to it. However, it is also remarkably uniform and cohesive because these aspects are not at odds within the world of the text. Instead, they coexist as part of the same tradition rather than evidence their disparate origins. From the interaction of the two languages and their cultural associations, a third semantic code arises, which derives its significance from both the “domesticating” and the “domesticated” cultures: secular and religious, military and ecclesiastical, are contained in the same

⁸ Cf. “*apostol*,” B-T, 47.

⁹ Cf. *Menologium*, 122b-23: “*Hwæt, þa apostolas, | þeodenholde, þrowedon on Rome*” (“Listen, the Apostles, faithful to the Lord, suffered in Rome”).

familiarised linguistic space. It is important to distinguish *cultural coexistence* from *cultural blending* and *cultural dominance*.

Cultural blending would assume an erasure of cultural difference; namely, that the meanings of *þegn* and *apostolus* have become indistinguishable regardless of contextual occurrence, eventually leading to the relinquishment of the Latin term. The parallel occurrence of *þegn* in verse, where semantic ambiguity is intended, and *apostol* in prose witness to the survival of clearly distinguished environments for the lexical interpretant and the Latin loanword. Cultural dominance would imply a degree of *translatio studii et imperii*, which would legitimise Old English as the language of a new intellectual and political elite. Cultural coexistence, however, involves neither: it takes the form of shared (but not merged) meanings, while these remain markedly differentiated even as they take on similar cultural values. A *þegn* is, primarily, a military secular figure belonging into a warrior society; the fact that it takes on the meaning of “religious follower” in a metaphorical sense does not make the two concepts one and the same. They are merely *equivalent* from a strictly figurative point of view; a projection of cultural relatability onto an accommodating linguistic form. The unifying force behind the complex cultural coexistence shown above lies not in the resulting product; namely, in the poems themselves as they have come down to us, but in the various stages of conceptual and cultural interaction reflected in the poets’ sophisticated use of language.

6.3.1 – The Traditional Opening and Psalmic Diction in Old English Poetry

It is possible to complicate the strategies of cultural assimilation to the point where it becomes almost impossible to ascertain when the receiving culture adopted the extraneous element, or whether there is an element of domestication involved at all. To keep with *Fates of the Apostles*, textual evidence from the Paris Psalter gives different insight into

the lines above and the idea of the “traditional opening.” Psalm 43 thus reads:

2. Deus, auribus nostris audivimus, patres nostri annuntiaverunt nobis, opus quod operatus es in diebus eorum, et in diebus antiquis.

3 Manus tua gentes disperdidit, et plantasti eos; afflixisti populos, et expulisti eos.

[2. O God, we have heard with our ears: our fathers have declared to us the work thou had wrought in their days, and in the days of old.

3. Thy hand destroyed the peoples, and thou planted them: thou did afflict the people and cast them out.]

The Paris Psalter translation renders:

1. Drihten, we gehyrdon mid urum earum and ure fæderas hit us sædon.

2. þa weorc þe þu worhtest on hiora dagum and on hiora foregengena dagum:

3. þæt wæs, þæt þin hand towearp þæ elðeodegan folc and plantode and tydrede ure foregengan; þu swenctest þa elðeodgan folc and hy awurpe.

[1. O Lord, we have heard with our ears and our father related to us

2. the deeds you performed in their days and in their forefathers' days:

3. namely, that your hand destroyed the alien peoples and planted and dispersed our forefathers; you harassed those foreigners and expelled them.]

To be sure, the Old English prose translation is notably faithful to the original, and thus it is not remarkable in that sense. However, when transferred to poetic diction, it immediately calls to mind the language of the “traditional opening” of *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, *Juliana*, and others: the vocative or exclamative “Hwæt” takes the place of “Drihten,” while the formulas “we [ge]hyrd[o/a]n” (*Christ II* 586a, *Juliana* 1a) or “gefrun[o/a]n,” (*Beowulf* 2b, *Andreas* 1a), “we...grefrigen” (*Exodus* 1) and “gefæragn ic” (*Daniel* 1a) are kept almost intact, as are “in geardagum” (*Beowulf* 2a) or “on fyrndagum” (*Andreas* 1b), followed by the works, deeds, or fame of nobles,

or God, introduced by a relative pronoun: “þa weorc þe þu worhtest,” (Psalm 43.2), “hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon” (*Beowulf*, 3); “hu þa æðelingas ellen cyðdon” (*Fates of the Apostles*, 3), “hu þæt hælubearn | ...hals eft forgeaf” (*Christ II*, 585b-86b). The terrorising and expulsion of foreigners also recurs in *Beowulf*, 5-6a (“monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah, | egsode eorlas,” “[he] deprived many peoples of mead-benches, made men fear him”). The resemblance is sufficiently striking to posit several questions: is Old English traditional diction making use of a psalmic trope, to the extent that it has become commonplace in poetic language? Or is the Psalm opening coincidentally (and remarkably) similar to a pre-existing structural interpretant in the vernacular linguistic stock, or even part of a transcultural idea of orally retold feats?

In cases such as this, where the possibilities are not mutually exclusive, the textual tradition offers limited information, as the rough contemporariness of all extant translations calls for caution when it comes to venturing a hypothesis—all the more so in the case of such a central text in the early medieval monastic life as the Book of Psalms. It remains clear, however, that Old English poets did find in the Biblical text a source of malleable diction that might have suited their need for an immediately identifiable and authoritative way to locate action in a remote yet culturally available moment of the past. The Biblical *in diebus antiquis* becomes recontextualised as the vernacular *in geardagum*, which no longer refers to the days of the Old Testament patriarchs, but to the equally authoritative and legitimising days of the ancient kings.

The familiarising principle thus contributes to elucidate how structural interpretants act as recontextualising agents for the assimilation of received meaning set against culturally unfamiliar parameters. It also illustrates how narratives that can potentially be mapped onto the Old English experience of the world but that contain elements that require a high degree of abstract conceptualisation (namely, that do not find direct correspondence on the immediate physical environment) become relocated within recognisable cultural markers. Particularly relevant in the context of the present study is the use of the *language of lament* as a distinct structural

interpretant with a well-defined set of elements that act as recontextualising agents. The language of lament has often been identified as one of the defining features of the “Old English elegy,” but close analysis of its occurrence in contexts other than the Exeter Book lyrics reveals that, much like the discourse of the heavenly *dugub*, the so-called “language of elegy” becomes, by virtue of its own ubiquity in verse and prose, a domesticating agent for the recontextualisation of received cultural materials.

6.4 – The Language of “Elegy” and Cultural Assimilation in *Genesis*

The linguistic and aesthetic features traditionally associated with the artificial construct of “Old English elegy” also participate in the hybrid discourse of familiarisation: they convey traditional meanings and appeal to recognisable cultural markers, so that they can in turn act as interpretants for the assimilation of extraneous narratives into the Old English poetic imagination. The two ensembled pieces of verse that make up the Old English *Genesis* poem—conventionally edited in two separate texts, the larger *Genesis A* and the integrated translation from Old Saxon known as *Genesis B*—provide illustrative examples of such familiarising quality of the “language of lament.”¹⁰ They are, in fact, particularly useful in that they accommodate sources from two different cultural and linguistic backgrounds: the Latin prose that underlies the literalistic verse rendering in *Genesis A*, on the one hand; and the Old Saxon verse source of *Genesis B*, on the other. In the case of Latin, the close prose translation of the Old English *Heptateuch* provides a further frame of reference against which the poetic reworking of the source text can be measured.

Occurrences of the “language of lament” in the larger section of *Genesis* are relatively scarce. The main sources for this sort of discourse

¹⁰ It should be noted that the Junius 11 MS makes no distinction between *Genesis A* and *B* in terms of the layout, punctuation, or capitalisation of the text. Both pieces work as a coherent unit, whose division results from modern editorial practices. However, for the sake of convenience in discussing the fragment translated from Old Saxon as opposed to the larger section of *Genesis*, I will be using the titles given in modern critical editions.

come from *Genesis B*, as the characters of Satan and Adam disclose their thoughts in long dramatic monologues. There are, however, two significant passages in the longer *Genesis*: Cain’s speech upon banishment for murdering Abel (1022-1035), and Hagar’s exchange with the angel as she flees Sarah’s anger (22668b-2279). Because Cain’s utterance is shorter and somewhat echoes Adam’s and Satan’s soliloquies in *Genesis B*, I will focus on Hagar’s lament, which, in addition to providing a larger dramatic framework, might be treated as a sample of the “language of lament” in dramatic monologues uttered by female speakers, thus directly echoing that of some of the Exeter Book lyrics.

6.4.1 – Hagar and *The Wife’s Lament*: Typologies of Female Exile

There are three versions of Hagar’s lament. On the one hand, there is the Latin Vulgate version for Gen.16.8:

7. Cumque invenisset eam angelus Domini juxta fontem aquae in solitudine, qui est in via Sur in deserto, 8. dixit ad illam: Agar, ancilla Sarai, unde venis, et quo vadis. Quæ respondit: A facie Sarai dominæ meae ego fugio.

[And the angel of the Lord, having found her, by a fountain of water in the wilderness, which is in the way to Sur in the desert, said to her: Hagar, handmaid of Sarai, where do you come from, and where are you going? She answered: I flee from the face of Sarah, my mistress.]

The Old English *Heptateuch* version provides a literalistic, almost verbatim prose rendering:

7. Ðær þær wæs an wylspring: þa ofseah hi Godes engel, 8. [And] hi sona clypode: Agar, Saries þinen, hu færst ðu, oððe hwyder wylt ðu. Heo andwyrd þam engle: Ic forfleo mine hlæfdian.¹¹

[There was there a fountain of water; then the angel of God saw her, [and] he said to her: Hagar, handmaid of Sarah, where do you come from, and

¹¹ Richard Marsden (ed.), *The “Old English Heptateuch” and Ælfric’s “Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo,”* EETS 330, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 2008), vol. 1, 36.

where are you going? She [then] replied to the angel: I flee from my mistress.]

The Old English *Genesis* verse adaptation, on the other hand, expands Hagar's stoic reply to the angel, and displays her misfortune, prospective misery, and emotional distress in greater detail:

Ðær hie wuldres þegn,
engel Drihtnes an gemitte

2270 geomormode, se hie georne frægn:
“Hwider fundast þu, feasceaft ides,
siððas dreogan, þec Sarre ah.”
Heo him ædre andswarode:
“Ic fleah wean, wana wilna gehwilces,
2275 hlæfdigan hete, hean of wicum,
tregan and teonan. Nu sceal tearighleor
on westenne witodes bidan,
hwonne of heortan hunger oððe wulf
sawle and sorge somed abregde.”

(*Genesis* 2268b-79)

[A servant of glory, an angel of the Lord, met her alone, sad in mind, [and] eagerly asked her: “Where are you hastening to, destitute woman, struggling your way on? Sarah owns you.” She promptly replied to him: “I fled from sorrow, grief and misery, deprived of all things desirable, [fled] my mistress's hate, exalted in the towns. Now I, with tears on my face, must await in the wilderness for what is bound to happen, when hunger or the wolf shall at once tear soul and sorrow from my heart.”]

The Vulgate and the Old English *Heptateuch* versions are virtually identical, with only minor variations in phrasing that do not alter the overall mode or tone of the original. However, the *Genesis* poet richly elaborates on Hagar's state of mind through her reply to the angel. Hagar's extended

lament is traditional in diction and conventional in imagery, as it displays several elements that occur elsewhere in similar passages in Old English poetry: loss of comfort (“wana wilna gehwilces,” 2274), misery and grief (“wean,” 2274a; “tregan and teonan,” 2276a; “tearighleor” 2276b), and exile in a hostile environment (“hean of wicum...on westenne,” 2275b-77a). Moreover, the traditional motifs and imagery of death as a result of hunger or the wolf’s predatory presence (“hunger oððe wulf,” 2278b) are also commonplace in Old English verse.

Take, for example, the presence of both in the catalogue of mishaps in *The Fortunes of Men*: “Sceal hine wulf etan, | har hæðstapa” (“The wolf, hoary heath stalker, will devour him,” 12b-13a) and “Summe sceal hungor ahiþan” (“Hunger will destroy one,” 15a). The wolf also appears in *The Wanderer* (“sumne se hara wulf | deaðe gedælde,” “the hoary wolf shared one with death,” 81b-82a), while hunger affects the speaker in *The Seafarer* (“hungor innan slat | merewerges mod,” “hunger tore the spirit of the seaweary one from within,” 10b-11a). Nonetheless, it is precisely in the conventionality of Hagar’s speech that its importance lies: through aesthetic elaboration on an otherwise unremarkable exchange between Sarah’s handmaid and the angel, the *Genesis* poet not only adds emotional force to Hagar’s lament, but also relocates the Latin text within recognisable cultural references, thereby turning the extraneous into the familiar.

Through strategic utilisation of the Old English aesthetics of the familiar, the poet suggestively places Hagar’s lament in direct associative context with similar dramatic monologues uttered by female speakers. Particularly relevant is the situation depicted in *The Wife’s Lament*. In the Exeter Book lyric, the speaker is likewise forced into exile to roam the wilderness (“Het mec hlaford min her hired niman,” “My lord bid me take my abode in this place,” 15; “bitre burgtunas [...] | wic wyna leas,” “a bitter settlement [...] | deprived of joys,” 30a-31a; “ic on uhtan ana gonge,” “I roam alone at dawn,” 35), while she must endure sorrow (“ful geomorre,” very sad, 1b; “is min hyge geomor,” “sad is my mind,” 17b), and dispossession (“wineleas wrecca,” “a friendless exile,” 10a). The use of language in Hagar’s lament is remarkably reminiscent of the one employed

by the speaker of *The Wife's Lament*: the angel finds Hagar "an" ("alone," 2269b) and "geomormode" ("sad in mind," 2270a); she is separated from her lord (in this case, her mistress, "hlæfdigan," 2275a); she, like the speaker in *The Wife's Lament*, experiences woe ("wean," 2274a; "weapearfe," "woeful need" in *The Wife's Lament*, 10b); and is doomed to await her fate ("witodes bidan," 2277b; "leofes abidan," "await a loved one" in *The Wife's Lament*, 53b).

These correspondences are undoubtedly significant, as they evidence the poet's strategy in reconceptualising Hagar within a culturally familiar scenario. However, the difference in use of conventional language and imagery between the two poems is of even greater importance. While the circumstances of the speaker in *The Wife's Lament* serve merely an aesthetic and aural purpose, as it is the speakers' subjectivity and powerful discourse of emotion that stand out as the organising principle, their use in Hagar's lament is definitory of her identity. Until the poet expands on her lament, we know Hagar only as an Egyptian slave struggling to free herself from the abusive authority of her mistress. It is through the poet's use of conventional imagery that she assumes an entirely new role in the narrative, and is then presented as an exile, a victim of misfortune, and a sympathetic figure defined by culturally recognisable parameters.

Unfortunately, the folios containing a hypothetical Hagar's second lament, corresponding to Genesis 21.14-17, have been cut out from the Junius MS, so that it is impossible to know whether the poet would have seen an opportunity to further individualise Hagar through the mother and son's banishment from Abraham's household. As it is, though, the passage from *Genesis* serves as sufficient evidence of the poet's methodology in handling an extraneous source. Hagar's situation, however culturally, socially, and temporally removed from the Old English experience of the world, becomes relocated and recontextualised in the form of a typical figure who fulfils a clear purpose: to function as a recognisable cultural reference that brings an alien narrative into the Old English literary imagination.

This integration does, in fact, reach beyond the scope of poetic craft, as in elaborating on the short biblical passage, the Old English poet also takes the chance to give his verse socio-political verisimilitude from an immediate cultural point of view. As Hagar's profile shifts from resister of authority to voluntary exile, a cultural nexus between the extraneous Latin source and the "domesticating," ultimately familiarising agent (the narrative of social and emotional isolation) is established, so that her story "slid[es] smoothly into a narrative groove associating her with a whole complex of Old English poetic concomitants of displacement and dispossession."¹²

6.4.2 – Adam's Lament and the Representation of Exile in Old English Poetry

Without leaving the textual world of *Genesis*, the case of Adam's lament presents a further difficulty in lacking a clear Latin analogue. The passage belongs into the section first identified by Eduard Sievers as an interpolation based on a Saxon original, translated almost verbatim into Old English and interwoven with the narrative of the longer *Genesis*.¹³ Therefore, the text has been twice assimilated by an extraneous culture: namely, by the Saxon poet in the first place, who reinterprets a hypothetical Latin source (if such a source did indeed ever exist) and incorporates it into the vernacular imagination, and then by the Old English poet, who reconciles the Old Saxon discourse with his own textual and cultural milieu. This situation poses a series of questions: given that there is no surviving Latin model for the Old Saxon *Genesis*, and that such model might have never existed, how does the fact that the Old English poet is drawing from a (presumably) original vernacular source affect the familiarising process? Is the treatment given to the vernacular any different to that shown by comparison with the Latin biblical text in Hagar's lament? And, more importantly, why did the Old English poet feel the need to incorporate a

¹² Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality*. Toronto: UTP (2013), 76.

¹³ Cf. Eduard Sievers, *Der "Heliand" und die angelsächsische "Genesis."* Halle: Lippert'sche Buchhandlung (1875).

second extraneous source into his project, especially when most of the material contained in it was already present in the narrative?

To begin with, neither the *Vetus Latina* nor the Vulgate contain an account of Adam's lament prior to God's rebuke, for which the episode seems to be the work of the Saxon poet's imagination. In the Latin biblical source, Genesis 3.7 relates Adam and Eve's realisation of their own nakedness and their urge to cover and hide themselves. Genesis 3.8 introduces God's voice calling to Adam, so that any events occurring between Adam and Eve's realisation and God's retribution are not recorded. The suggestion has been made that the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* underlies sections of *Genesis B*, particularly the account of the Fall. If the *Vita* can be accepted as a potential source, then the *Genesis B* poet richly elaborated on the Latin, as the only parallel to Adam's Lament is his rebuke of Eve: "quid fecisti; induxisti nobis plagam magnam" ("What have you done? You have brought a great affliction upon us").¹⁴ The comparison can only be established, then, between the Old Saxon and Old English versions:

"Uuela, that thu nu, Êua, habas," quað Adam, "uþilo gimarakot
 unkaro selbaro sîð. Nu maht thu sehan thia suarton hell
 ginon grâdaga; nu thu sia grimman maht
 hinana gihôrean, nis heþanrîki
 5 gelîhc sulîcaro lôgnun; thit uuas alloró lando scôniust,
 that uuit hier thuruh unkas hêrran thank hebbian muostun
 thar thu them ni hôrdis thie unk thesan haram giried,
 that uuit uualdandas uuord farbrâkun,
 heþankuningas.

(Old Saxon *Genesis*, 1-9a)

¹⁴ Cf. Brian Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the "Vita Adae et Evae."* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), esp. Ch. 3, 'England, Wales, and Cornwall.'

[“Indeed, Eve,” said Adam, “you have set an evil course for us now. Now you can see the dark hell gaping greedy, now you can hear them roaring from here. The kingdom of Heaven is not like that flame; this was the loveliest of all lands, which we two might have had by our Lord’s grace, had you not listened to he who disposed this harm for us,¹⁵ so that we had violated the Lord’s command, [the word] of Heaven’s king.”]

The Saxon poet’s construction of Adam’s discourse, focused on the physical and material (note references to hearing, gaping, sensorial enjoyment, and holding of the land) provides a fertile ground for the Old English poet to work on, so that up to this point the *Genesis B* version is virtually identical to its original:

Adam gemælde and to Euan spræc:
 "Hwæt, þu Eue, hæfst yfele gemearcod
 uncer sylfra sið. Gesyhst þu nu þa sweartan helle
 grædige and gifre. Nu þu hie grimman meah
 795 heonane gehyran. Nis heofonrice
 gelic þam lige, ac þis is landa betst,
 þæt wit þurh unces hearran þanc habban moston,
 þær þu þam ne hierde þe unc þisne hearm geræd,
 þæt wit waldendes word forbræcon,
 800 heofoncyniges.

(*Gen B*, 791-800a)

[Adam spoke, and said to Eve: “Indeed, Eve, you have set an evil course for ourselves. Do you see now the dark hell, greedy and insatiable? Now you can hear it roaring from here. The kingdom of Heaven is not like that flame; rather, it is the best of lands, which the two of us could have had by our

¹⁵ Old Saxon *girādan* (“giried,” l. 7b) may signify “advise, recommend” as well as “provide,” so that an ambiguity arises in that Adam’s words can be interpreted either as “had you not listened to him who advised this evil to us” or as “had you not listened to him who disposed this harm for us.” In each case, two sides of the same coin are implied: Eve’s Temptation and the Satan’s scheme for the Fall of Man.

Lord's grace, had you not listened to him who disposed this harm for us,¹⁶
so that we have violated the Lord's commandment, Heaven's king.]

The Old English version is extremely close to the source, with the exception of the substitution of "ginon" for "gifre," a variation that is easily explained on the grounds of verbal familiarity and formulaic arrangement.¹⁷ The direct consequence of such variation, however, is noteworthy: where the poet might have chosen to use Old English *ginian* and so keep with the literal approach to his translation he otherwise maintains, he alters his method to bring the text closer to Old English poetic language. As the alternative *ginian* would have been metrically and stylistically acceptable, the poet's choice reflects his intention to assimilate the Saxon *Genesis* into the Old English tradition, and to accommodate *Genesis B* to its textual surroundings as part of the overall narrative of *Genesis*. This tendency is confirmed by the more significant changes introduced in the following lines:

Nu uuit hriuuig mugon

10 sorogon for them sîða uuand he hunk selbo gibôð,
 that uuit unk sulic uuîti uuardon scoldin,
 haramo mēstan. nu thuingit mi giu hungar endi thrust,
 bitter balouuerék, thero uuâron uuit êr bêðero tuom.

22 [...] nis unk hier uuiht biuoran
 [ni te skadoua] ni te scûra, unk nis hier scattas uuiht
 te meti gimarcot: uuit hebbiat unk giduan mahtigna god,
 uualdand uurêðan. Te huî sculun uuit uuerðan un.

(Old Saxon *Genesis*, 9b-13; 22b-24)

¹⁶ Again, Old English *gerædan* ("geræd," l. 798b) can take the meaning of "give counsel" as well as "provide," "dispose," so that the Old English poet is faithful to the original ambiguity.

¹⁷ The formula *grædige and gifre*, literally or inverted, occurs elsewhere in Old English poetry, almost exclusively in reference to a figurative hell's mouth, the one exception being "The Seafarer" l. 62a, where it refers to the speaker's bird-like *modsefa*. Cf. Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, 113-124 for a detailed discussion of the occurrence of this formula.

[“Now we may sadly grieve for [our] fate, for He Himself commanded us that we must beware of punishment, the severest affliction. Now hunger and thirst oppress me, bitter harm; we were once free from care for both for all time. [...] There is not a thing to shelter us from the dark or the storm, not a thing to serve as nourishment; we have made the powerful, almighty God angry at us. What shall become of us now?”]

The first elements of mental and emotional distress are introduced (mourning, sadness, and God’s wrath), but the poet emphasises the prelapsarian state of freedom from these rather than their effect on Adam, or the very fact that he is now able to discern a change in his psychological and emotional state. The Old English version, on the contrary, contains some meaningful variations that intensify and refine these emotions, showing Adam’s awareness of their occurrence as a consequence of transgression and the loss of God’s favour:

Nu wit hreowige magon

800 sorgian for þis siðe. Forþon he unc self bebead

þæt wit unc wite warian sceolden,

hearma mæstne. Nu slit me hunger and þurst

bitre on breostum, þæs wit begra ær

wæron orsorge on ealle tid.

[...] Nys unc wuht beforan

to scursceade, ne sceattes wiht

815 to mete gemearcod, ac unc is mihtig god,

waldend wraðmod. To hwon sculon wit weorðan nu

(*Genesis B*, 800b-804; 813b-816)

[“Now we may sadly grief for [our] fate. For He Himself commanded us that we must beware of punishment, the severest of afflictions. Now hunger and thirst are tearing bitterly in my breast; we were once from care for both for all time. [...] There is nothing to shelter us from the storm, not a thing to serve as nourishment; instead, the powerful, almighty God is angry at us. What shall become of us now?”]

Three changes take place in the translation process from Old Saxon to Old English in the passage above. First of all, the affective force of Adam's monologue is augmented by the cluster of words and imagery related to mental and emotional distress: in addition to the literalistic "sorgian" (800a) for Old Saxon "sorogon" (10a), the Old English poet substitutes "thuingit" (12b) for "slit" (802b), and "bitter bealouuerek" (13a) for "bitre on breostum" (803a). The lexical substitution of the verb seems of little consequence at first glance; if anything, it adds a more poignant sense to Adam's suffering in it being "tearing" rather than "oppressing," but the replacement may well be caused by the lack of an Old English cognate for Old Saxon *thwingan*.

As for "bealouuerek," the poet also had several alternatives at his disposal, among which the coinage of **bealoweorc* as a *hapax legomenon* to fit his needs—an altogether viable option and not an unusual resource in Old English poetry.¹⁸ However, the rephrasing "bitre on breostum" modifies the original Old Saxon in two significant ways. On the one hand, it follows a similar pattern than "grædige and gifre" in that it accommodates the source text to familiar poetic diction, assimilating into the well-attested *q on breostum* formula. On the other, the formula itself is part of the discourse of emotion that I discussed in previous chapters, so that the source becomes domesticated not only stylistically or lexically but also thematically. The Old English poet emphasises the emotional consequences of Adam's transgression, and he does so by repeatedly alluding to his experiencing sorrow and grief as a consequence of the Fall.

By rephrasing and expanding line 13 of the Old Saxon, the poet introduces a new dimension to the text, again reinforced by the extra line "wæron orsorge on ealle tid" (804). The use of the negative *or-* as a prefix to *sorg*, while poetically unattractive, conveys the idea of a state of prelapsarian "un-sorrow," which sharply contrasts with the accumulative effect of "hreowige" (799b), "sorgian" (800a), and "bitre on breostum" (803a). To this, the bodily dimension of "wit" (801a), "hearma" (802a),

¹⁸ Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, 124-144 discusses this and other possibilities with regard to the passage under consideration, which I follow here.

“hunger and þurst” (802b) and the temporal suspension of “on ealle tid” (804b) should be added, so that the resulting effect is that of Adam facing not only the physical hardships of life outside of Paradise, but also the more lasting effects of sorrow, grief, and regret. All of these aspects, while present in the Old Saxon *Genesis*, are taken to a heightened level by the modifications introduced by the Old English poet, who reconciles the extraneous material with the Old English poetic conventions of mentality and affectivity.

At this point, Adam’s lament is reminiscent of responses to an inhospitable environment of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, using the well-established structures of the “language of lament.” The speaker is usually placed in the midst of a violently hostile natural world, typically as a result of hail, frost, rain, wind, and thunder. Similarly, Adam’s concern is with his immediate physical surroundings:¹⁹

805 “Hu sculon wit nu libban oððe on þys lande wesan,
 gif her wind cymð, westan oððe eastan,
 suðan oððe norðan. Gesweorc up færeð,
 cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge,
 færeð forst on gemang, se byð fyrnum ceald.

(*Genesis*, 805-809)

[“How shall we two live or stay in this land, if wind comes here, from west or east, south or north? A cloud will rise up, a shower of hail will come pressing from the sky, it will come mingled with frost, [and] it will be dreadfully cold.”]

The “wind” (806a), “hægles scur... | forst on gemang” (808-809a), “fyrnum ceald” (809b), and “scur” (813a), described by Adam find an echo in the “winde” (“wind,” 76a), “hrime,” (“rime,” 77a), “stormas” (“storms,” 101b), “hrið” (“tempest,” 102a), “wintres woma” (“the tumult of winter,”

¹⁹ The Old Saxon and Old English versions are virtually identical, so it seems redundant to include both.

103a) and “hreo hæglfare” (“a fierce hailstorm,” 105a) of *The Wanderer*; and the “calde” (“cold,” 8b), “forste” (“frost,” 9b), “iscealdne sæ” (“ice-cold sea,” 14), “hrimgicelum; hæglscurum,” (“icicles; showers of hail,” 17), “iscealdne wæg” (“ice-cold wave,” 19a), “hrim” (“rime,” 32a) and “hægl...| corna caldast” (“hail...the coldest of grains,” 32b-33a) of *The Seafarer*. Adam’s complaint that “slit me hunger and þurst | bitre on breostum” (803b-804a) paraphrase the Seafarer’s own “bitre breostceare” (“bitter breast-care,” 4a) and “hungor innan slat” (“hunger tore from within,” 11b). Significantly enough, the apparently unremarkable substitution for Old Saxon *thwingan* of Old English *slitan* matches the formulaic expression of the same motif in *The Seafarer*, with the addition of “bitre on breostum,” which appears in the same context in the Exeter Book lyric. The *Genesis* poet adapts his source stylistically as well as lexically, and more importantly, he recontextualises the Old Saxon original against the familiar cultural reference of the “language of lament,” which acts as a structural interpretant.

An equally illuminating example occurs at the end of the Old Saxon fragment. Adam states “uuit hebbiat unk giduan mahtigna god” (“we have made the almighty God *angry* at us,” 24b), whereas the Old English reads “unc is mihtig god, | waldend wraðmod” (“the almighty, powerful God *is angry at us*,” 815b-816a). There are two important differences in diction here: first, the Old Saxon version shows Adam’s awareness of himself and Eve being the instigators of God’s wrath, while the Old English shows God already in anger, which may lead to various hypotheses about Adam’s attitude.²⁰ In addition to the nuance in style and meaning that *wraðmod* carries, its significance lies in the fact it seems to be the poet’s own coinage, appearing only in *Genesis B*, and very possibly adapted from the Old Saxon *wrêðmôd*. However, *-mod* compounds are abundant in Old English, so that it would not appear out of place or indeed unidiomatic; it would, precisely,

²⁰ Alger N. Doane sees in this substitution “a certain insensitivity to the point of the passage” on the poet’s part, cf. *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon “Genesis B” and the Old Saxon Vatican “Genesis”* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 33. Mize posits that it could “for instance, be seen as a melioration of Adam and Eve’s culpability consistent with the famous narratorial apology in *Genesis B* for Eve’s capitulation to the tempting devil,” *Traditional Subjectivities*, 137.

seem perfectly at home in the context in which it appears.²¹ Therefore, it seems safe to assume that the poet's intention in coining *wraðmod* is to supply a familiar or, at least, familiar-looking term that serves a double function: on the one hand, it carries an important variation in meaning that shows God in a different light when compared to the original Old Saxon, and has important consequences for how we perceive Adam's attitude towards transgression. On the other hand, it immediately recontextualises the text and places it in line with the Old English conception of the mind and the morphologically derivative lexis associated with it; namely, the productive quality of *-mod* and other mind-related elements, whether as the first or the second compound element; take *geomormod*, *acolmode*, *reonigmode*, *eaðmod*, etc.

Any composition date for Old English poems is necessarily speculative, since only one copy of each exemplar has survived, and linguistic evidence is often misleading owing to the coexistence of archaisms and dialectal differences with standard West-Saxon(ised) forms introduced in the transmission history of the texts. Notwithstanding, the application of similar composition techniques in Adam's lament and the Exeter Book poems evidences the pre-existence of culturally shared motifs and specific language structures associated with them; namely, the "language of lament" and the Old English conception of the mind. This does not mean that such structures could be used as fixed tools in the way formulaic theories have suggested, but rather they are vehicles for the transference and transmission of meanings, much in the same way "þegn" acts as a hybrid marker.²² The "language of lament" provides a linguistic and cultural bridge for the conveyance of culturally shared meanings: Hagar and Adam remain exiles in their respective cultural environments, and the significance of their situations and utterances stays unaltered. Through their

²¹ Cf. Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities* 138-41.

²² A notable example of oral-formulaic theories reducing Old English poetic composition to the systematic application of fixed phrases combined in certain effective ways is Robert P. Creed, 'The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem,' in Stevens and Mandel, (eds.), *Old English Literature: Twenty-two Analytical Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 52-61. Creed attempts to make his own Old English poem by artlessly combining a handful of formulae from *Beowulf*.

cultural recontextualisation, they merely become more conventional, relatable, and altogether familiar in their representation.

Adam has been previously been referred in scholarship as the prototype of exile: an original typological figure from which the conventions of exile derive, which shows his appeal as a cultural equivalent from the point of view of the Old English poet.²³ While Adam's lament does condense the basic features of the imagery of exile (banishment, dispossession, hostile environment, preoccupation with psychological and affective processes, physical projection of inner states of mind), it does not develop any of them to a sufficient degree to be considered of the "elegiac" type. This, again, is the case of Hagar's lament, which, while echoing the female speakers of the Exeter Book lyrics, leaves its affective potential unresolved. Consequently, in giving both figures a similar treatment, the Old English poet seems to be pursuing the same goal: to bestow an air of familiarity on otherwise unrelatable situations derived from an extraneous source. In both cases, the social and political implications of lordlessness and banishment provide the foundation for the poet to construct a familiarised reinterpretation of the respective narratives, respecting the source but imbuing it with new significance insofar as directly relevant to his audience's experience of the world.

As to the rationale behind the interpolation of the Saxon *Genesis* fragment, several solutions have been proposed by previous scholarship, none of them completely satisfactory. Critical arguments tend to either devalue the poetic artistry of the *Genesis A* in favour of the more vivid Saxon counterpart, which is believed to have been integrated for its aesthetic superiority, or to attribute its presence to the loss of a quire prior to the writing and final compilation of Junius 11.²⁴ Unfortunately, either

²³ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, CSAS 27 (Cambridge: CUP 1999), 19.

²⁴ Two examples of these arguments are Doane's and Colette Stévanovitch's. Doane, ventures that "the interpolation of *Genesis B* was probably not undertaken for aesthetic reasons, as is frequently said, but because the exemplar at some point before about 900 had lost pages, probably a quire, containing [the Fall of Man] and so vaguely appropriate text was found," cf. "*Genesis A*:" *A New Edition, Revised*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 435 (Tempe: ACMRS, 2013), 10. Stévanovitch, on the other hand, maintains that the two parts of *Genesis* share aesthetic integrity, carrying over to Exodus through

possibility relies on the assumption that the poet/scribe/compiler was careless enough to duplicate material he has previously introduced without apparently realising or giving any importance to the narrative inconsistency thereby created. Another explanation might be proposed, however, which does not take for granted compositional or scribal errors. While the reduplication of material remains undeniable, we should not look at *what* is reduplicated, but at *how* the story is retold. *Genesis B* can be broken down into two well differentiated parts, both of which involve dramatic monologues: the Fall of Angels, followed by Satan’s lament; and the Fall of Man, followed by Adam’s lament. In comparative terms, the account of Satan’s Fall in *Genesis A* covers lines 28-81 (53 lines) with no speech sections; in *Genesis B*, it stretches over lines 246-441a, where a lacuna interrupts the narration (195 lines), of which 99 lines are Satan’s dramatic monologues. At least 86 of these correspond to Satan’s lament over his fall from grace, which corroborates the Old English poet’s interest in establishing transcultural parallels between typical figures of exile and dispossession.

6.4.3 – Recontextualising Satan: An Unlikely Model

In stylistic terms, Satan in *Genesis B* is much closer to the lamenting exile of *Christ and Satan* than to his *Genesis A* counterpart. So much so that even the imagery and diction of his speeches are remarkably alike. Compare, for example, the highlighted phrases in the following excerpts:

“Her is **fyr micel**,

375 ufan and neoðone. Ic a ne geseah

laðran landscape. Lig ne aswamað

hat ofer helle. Me habbað **hringa gespong**,

sliðhearda sal siðes amyrrred,

“extensive, though different, use of envelope patterns;” cf. ‘Envelope Patterns in *Genesis A* and *B*,’ *Neophil.* 80:3 (1996), 465-78.

afyrrred me min feðe; fet synt **gebundene**,
 380 handa gehæfte. **Synt þissa heldora**
wegas forworhte, swa ic mid wihte ne mæg
 of þissum lioðobendum.”

(*Genesis B*, 374b-382a)

[“There is a great fire here, above and below. I have never seen a more dreadful landscape. The flame does not fail, hot across hell. The chains’ cruel clasp has impeded my journey, kept me from leaving; my feet are bound, hands tied. The roads through these hell doors are blocked, so that there is no way I can free myself from these bonds.”]

In *Christ and Satan*, Satan laments his being “ðearle **gebunden** | **fæstum fyrclommum**” (“bound tightly | by firmly fastened chains of fire,” 38b-39a), and again “sceal nu þysne **wites clom** | beoran beornende in bæce micnum, | **hat on helle**,” “now I must bear this burning bonds of torment on my back, hot in hell,” 156b-58a). Another passage echoes *Genesis B* in its description of hell: “is ðes **atola ham** | **fyre onæled**” (“this dreadful abode is burning with fire,” 95b-96a), and “is ðis wites clom | **feste gebunden**” (“this prison of torment is firmly locked,” 102b-103a). The similarity in style and diction shows the existence of an underlying structural principle that gives cohesion to both descriptions, while the variations in language evidence a degree of adaptability within similar referents. In turn, the closeness of “Satan’s Lament” to *The Wanderer* in style, diction, and imagery, as I have previously discussed, again brings an extraneous narrative into familiar cultural parameters through the familiarising agency of structural interpretants.

It seems reasonable to assume, then, that the Old English poet consciously drew from the Saxon *Genesis* in order to bring the figure of Satan closer to a familiar image of exile and dispossession—a typical figure that was not available in the Biblical model, and which, in his largely literal rendering, the *Genesis A* poet had not developed in his early account of the Fall. In other words: a hypothetical model provided by the Saxon poet’s portrayal of a culturally integrated Satan served the purposes of the Old

English poet in attempting to reconcile his Latin source with the Old English experience of the world, much as he does with Hagar. A tentative borrowing strategy between the Saxon poet and the *Genesis* and *Christ and Satan* poets in terms of the construction of Satan's identity might be thus ventured. The continental model antedates both Old English poems, and there is sufficient evidence to assume a later date of composition for *Christ and Satan* than for *Genesis*, for which the older poem, based in turn in its Saxon model, might have served as the basis for the first section of *Christ and Satan*. The remarkable similarity in tone, diction, and imagery between the two Old English poems and the Saxon exemplar, and the presence of both in the same manuscript, further supports the suggested borrowing timeline. From the point of view of the familiarising process, each stage represents a new cycle of reception, implementation, and reinterpretation, so that every new portrayal of Satan adds to the complexity and richness of his cultural recontextualisation.

6.5 – Conclusion: The Collapse of the “Elegy” Genre in Old English

What conclusions follow from the fact that the three laments under consideration find close correspondences in the dramatic monologues of the speakers in the Exeter Book lyrics? To begin with, the presence of equivalent dramatic situations described in conventional language, using familiar imagery, and making use of direct speech as the vehicle of transmission for similar themes and preoccupations in the context of narrative poems with identifiable Latin sources directly opposes the idea that the Exeter Book lyrics represent a closed group tied together by a set of distinctively concurring features. A direct consequence of the presence of the various aspects mentioned above in the poems of Junius 11 is that the Exeter Book lyrics can no longer be considered as isolated instances of a poetic discourse centred on the inner life of the individual. If anything, they represent the culmination of an assimilative process that had been ongoing from the earliest stages of Old English verse. Just as their treatment of

broader thematic clusters such as the life of the mind and the discourse of emotion can only be fully understood within a larger cultural context, so their form and style, their diction and imagery, only acquire full significance if placed in a historically authentic frame of reference.

By applying the fundamentals of the familiarising principle to the analysis of the Exeter Book lyrics, any sense that they are members of the restrictive yet all too vague genre of “elegy” collapses. The true challenge of reading poems such as *The Wanderer* or *Deor* lies not in their apparently obscure language or irrecoverable cultural immediacy, but in the complex interaction of several layers of meaning within a same text. Rather than attempting to locate the poem(s) within a given textual tradition or pinpoint a single source that may help us decipher its intricacies, we should read each text as a polygenetic artefact wherein numerous cultural and literary discourses converge.

7 – The Exeter Book Lyrics and the Quest for the Source: Received Traditions and Familiarised Form

7.1 – Introduction: Sources, Models, and Traditions

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed how early scholarship polarised into two competing approaches to the study of Old English poetry: one positing a pagan, traditional Germanic background for much of the poetic corpus; the other the influence of Christian Latin learning. As I have attempted to show, the assumption that these are opposing aspects of the Old English experience of the world, and the claim that one or the other should be identified as the dominant cultural influence on Old English verse not only combines to deny or ignore the assimilative nature of the textual fabric of the poems, but also hinders our understanding by favouring cultural dominance over the possibility of cultural coexistence.

Nonetheless, the quest for textual sources is still often understood as the establishment of competitive readings that seek to establish tight affinities between the Latin or vernacular source and the Old English target. Hence, for example, competing approaches to *The Wanderer* seek to establish a plausible source for the Old English poem that effectively solves its textual complexities by mapping meanings derived from the posited analogue onto the target product, in the hope of setting up a relationship of direct textual dependence.¹ In so doing, the possibility of polygenesis—namely, that the poems as we know them originated from the

¹ A Boethian origin has been argued for, cf. A. D. Horgan, ‘*The Wanderer*, A Boethian Poem?’ *RESns* 38:149 (1987), 40-46; and Richard North, ‘Boethius and the Mercenary in *The Wanderer*,’ in Hofstra, Houwen, and MacDonald (eds.), *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, Germania Latina 2 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 71-98. At the same time, the influence of Augustine has also been suggested, cf. James F. Doubleday, ‘The Three Faculties of the Soul in *The Wanderer*,’ *Neophil.* 53 (1969), 189-94; and John L. Selzer, ‘*The Wanderer* and the Meditative Tradition,’ *SP* 80:3 (1983), 227-37; as has that of Gregory the Great, cf. Andrew Galloway, ‘Dream-Theory in *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Wanderer*,’ *RESns* 45:180 (1994), 475-85. Lastly, Biblical analogues have been provided, cf. Paul De Lacy, ‘Thematic and Structural Affinities: *The Wanderer* and Ecclesiastes,’ *Neophil.* 82 (1998), 122-37.

interaction of more than one textual or cultural tradition—is implicitly left out.²

In the particular case of the Exeter Book lyrics, any attempt at identifying a single textual source is especially fraught, owing, in the first place, to the assimilative nature of Old English verse, which combines pre-existing traditional conventions with acquired knowledge, thereby acting as a cohesive agent. An easily observable example of this is the Old English adaptation of Lactantius’s *De ave phoenice*. The poem, also in found in the Exeter Book, combines a close translation of the original Latin text with a lengthy explanation on the symbolic value of the phoenix, after the mode of the *Physiologus* tradition. However, the *Phoenix* poet recontextualises his model “to make [it] fit contemporary Anglo-Saxon generic expectations [for] how...natural history should sound.”³ Moreover, the closing lines of the poem, in macaronic verse, illustrate how the poet adapts Latin diction to Old English metric demands:

Hafað us alyfed *lucis auctor*
 þæt we motun her *merueri,*
 goddædum begietan *gaudia in celo,*
 670 þær we motun *maxima regna*
 secan ond gesittan *sedibus altis,*
 lifgan in lisse *lucis et pacis,*
 agan eardinga *almæ letitię,*

² That polygenesis underlies the composition of complex texts like “The Wanderer” has only started to be suggested in the last few decades. See Paul S. Langeslag, ‘Boethian Similitude in *Deor* and *The Wanderer*,’ *NM* 109:2 (2008), 205-22, where he concludes that an alleged influence of the *Consolatio* on either poem must be merely superficial, owing to “an essential discrepancy between the respective world-views of the works,” so that “while piecemeal borrowing cannot be disproved, there is no reason to favour it over the possibility of polygenesis,” which proves “the most natural explanation,” 219.

³ Daniel P. O’Donnell, ‘Fish and Fowl: Generic Expectations and the Relationship between the Old English *Phoenix*-poem and Lactantius’s *De ave phoenice*,’ in K. E. Olsen, Antonina Harbus, and Tette Hofstra (eds.) *Germanic Texts and Latin and Models: Medieval Reconstructions*, *Germania Latina* 4 (Leuven, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001), 157-72, at 164.

brucan blæddaga, *blandem et mitem*
 675 geseon sigora frean *sine fine,*
 ond him lof singan *laude perenne,*
 eadge mid englum. *Alleluia.*

(*The Phoenix*, 667-77)

[The *creator of light* has allowed us that, we may here *earn* and acquire through righteous deeds *joy in heaven*, where we will be permitted to seek *the greatest dominions* and take our seats *on lofty thrones*, live in the bliss of *light and peace*, possess abodes of *prosperous happiness*, enjoy days of abundance, [to] look upon *the gentle and kind* Lord of victories *forever*, and with *unending adoration* sing his praise, blessed among the angels. *Alleluia.*]

The placement of these lines at the end of *The Phoenix* serves a twofold purpose: on the one hand, the alternation of Old English and Latin reinforces the cultural coexistence between the received tradition and the familiarising agency of Old English verse, metonymically standing for the assimilation of Lactantius's poem into the Old English experience of the world. On the other, the adaptation of Latin diction to Old English metre reasserts the poet's agency in recontextualising his model, at the same time it demonstrates his familiarity with Latin diction.

Therefore, the poems as we know them are *not* the immediately traceable result of linguistic and cultural interaction: they are finalised artefacts reflecting the sophisticated expression of long exposure to and acquired familiarity with other traditions, expressed through the highly conventional medium of vernacular verse. Given that such exposure has led to the incorporation of received forms and meanings to the Old English experience of the world, the result product shows hybrid diction, shifting generic affiliations, and heterogenous cultural backgrounds. In the course of such series of developments, received forms and meanings might have become in time virtually identical with the expression of the Old English experience of the word, conveyed through the same linguistic structures even if cultural difference is maintained.

Therefore, it is rarely possible to speak of direct dependence when considering a textual source for Old English poems that, like the Exeter Book lyrics, show hybrid diction and undefined generic affiliations. Analogues may witness to a shared or common tradition, but it is difficult to differentiate between transcultural elements that may pre-exist received learning in early medieval England and elsewhere, and provable textual borrowing or direct influence. In such cases, it is possible to speak of the *influence of a tradition* more confidently than the *influence of a model*, in which the role of poetic originality is constrained by textual authority. The hypothesis of significant cultural interaction should not be exclusively applied to the idea of Christian learning in juxtaposition to Germanic traditional ethos, but to the incorporation of received linguistic elements, style, and diction of works written in Latin (and indeed in other vernacular languages), and the opportunities that the assimilative quality of Old English verse presents for the adaptation of such received learning to familiar cultural parameters.

Where received learning has acquired fully integrated status, it will not be discussed merely in localised, isolated instances. Where incorporation into the Old English poetic imagination is complete, the presence of familiarised forms of a given tradition should be found across texts, genres, and modes, in poetry and prose alike. An illustrative counter-example is the occurrence of a direct borrowing in *Maxims I*: “Swa monige beoþ men ofer eorþan, swa beoþ modgeþoncas; | ælc him hafað sundorsefan. (“are as many men on Earth, as [many] thoughts; each for himself has his own mind,” 166-67), a literalistic translation of Terence’s *Phormio* II.4.454, “Quot homines, tot sententiae; suus cuique mos” (“As many men, so many opinions, to each his own disposition”).⁴ Even if the Latin *sententia* seems to fit “into a clearly defined thematic context...reflect[ing] a learned author and a multifaceted interaction between ultimate classical sources...their reception in Anglo-Saxon

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the occurrence and different viable options whereby the Latin *sententia* might have found its way into *Maxims I*, see Johanna Krammer, ‘Mapping the Anglo-Saxon Intellectual Landscape: The Old English *Maxims I* and Terence’s Proverb “Quot homines, tot sententiae”,’ *Anglia* 128 (2010), 48-74.

England, and their reworking into a vernacular text,”⁵ there are two reasons for which it cannot be considered an instance of familiarisation. First, it appears only on a unique, small-scale instance, following isolated affinities with a single text, for which it is less likely to be embedded in the common culture; and second, its literalistic rendering and hypermetric style point at a conscious insertion of an extraneous motif into the poem rather than the reiteration of a long assimilated tradition, which ought to have been incorporated into Old English poetic diction.

On the other hand, the possibility of identifying several traditions in the Exeter Book lyrics that also appear in vernacular narrative verse *and* in homiletic prose implies that they are the result of the interaction of various layers of meaning, both local and received, whose almost total assimilation in aesthetic terms seem to hint at long exposure resulting in familiarisation. Moreover, the sophisticated textual structures that underlie the poems stand as evidence that they are conceived of as complex artefacts not to be read in terms of a single, overruling set of conventions, but to be accessed in as many ways as the textual fabric allows for.

7.2 – The Latin Tradition and the Exeter Book Lyrics

In terms of the traditions considered in this survey, the natural distinction from a linguistic point of view, and the most practical for the sake of clarity of exposition, is that of Latin as opposed to the vernacular. However, to provide a thorough study of the many ways in which the Latin tradition and Old English verse interact is far beyond the scope of this study.⁶ Instead, I will examine how the recurrence of certain stylistic

⁵ Ibid., 73-74.

⁶ Likewise, the scholarship on the topic is too extensive to be mentioned in detail. For a thorough study of Biblical influence in the composition techniques of Old English poets, both in Latin and the vernacular, see David Howlett, *British Books in Biblical Style* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997); see also Richard Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSAS 15 (Cambridge: CUP, 1995); for the influence of Christian doctrine and patristic thought, see Bernard F. Huppé’s seminal *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine’s Influence on Old English Poetry* (NY: State University of NY, 1959); for the adoption of Latin style in Old English verse, see Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity*. For a recent collection of essays on the topic of cultural interaction, see Rebecca Stephenson and

patterns at the level of phrase, theme, and structure across several Exeter Book lyrics and other texts seems to point at the influence of a particular branch of the Latin tradition. Because of the difficulty of adapting the suggested approach to so vast an amount of material, I will consider only a small portion of Biblical style and Christian Latin learning (which involves the influence of patristic as well as liturgical and homiletic writings); and their presence in Old English verse.

7.2.1 – Biblical Phraseology and Vernacular Lyric: The Style and Mode of Lament

Scholarship on individual texts has been able to identify numerous instances of close intertextual linkage with Biblical passages in most of the Exeter Book lyrics.⁷ When considered in conjunction with some of the points raised throughout the present study, the posited borrowings acquire new formal significance as they reinforce stylistic and structural patterns. The Psalms and the book and Lamentations offer the most relevant examples from which Old English poets might have derived some of the phraseology that appears in verse. The Old English translation of the Psalms should be considered as a witness to possible adaptation, for which reason the Latin original will be read next the vernacular rendering and excerpts from Old English poems.

Emily V. Thornbury (eds.), *Latinity and Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*. Toronto: UTP (2016).

⁷ Again, a selection of major treatments will suffice. On *The Seafarer*, see Kenneth Sisam, 'Seafarer, Lines 97-102,' *RES* 21:84 (1945), 316-17; Andrew Galloway, '1 Peter and *The Seafarer*,' *ELN* 25:4 (1988), 1-10; and Georgiana Donavin, 'A Preacher's Identity: Allusions to Jonah in *The Seafarer*,' *YES* 22, Medieval Narrative Special Number (1992), 28-37. On *The Wanderer*, see De Lacy, 'The Wanderer and Ecclesiastes.' On *Wulf and Eadwacer*, see James B. Spamer, 'The Marriage Concept in *Wulf and Eadwacer*,' *Neophil.* 62 (1978), 143-44. For specific line echoes and potential borrowings, the reader is referred to the apparatus and textual notes in Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, 106-219; and Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 2: Commentary.

7.2.1.1 – Psalmic Diction: Speaking One’s Heart

Psalmic diction provides possible models for several modes and themes found across the Old English corpus, such as dramatic monologue, lamentation, and consolation in the promise of eternal reward, rendered in poetic style and diction. In addition to this, recent studies have argued for the didactic value of the Psalms as sources of knowledge on the language and expression of emotions.⁸ It is interesting to consider how the heading of some of the Old English Psalms present the etymologisation of *sealm* (“psalm”) as related to *seofian* (“to lament, complaint”), thereby relating poetic form with mode of expression. Thus, the heading to Psalm 2 reads: “for þæm he ys *sealm* gecweden, for þi he *seofode* on þæm sealme and mænde to Drihtne be his feondum...” (“and so it is called a psalm because he lamented in the psalm and complained to God about his enemies...”).⁹ This association of form and mode, together with the I-persona that characterises the style of many of the Psalms, supports the form of a dramatic monologue structure that immediately brings to mind the language of lament.¹⁰

The penitential Psalm 30.30 reads: “Ego autem dixi *in excessu mentis meae*: Projectus sum a facie oculorum tuorum” (“Indeed I said in my mind’s excess: I am cast out from thy sight”). The translator of the *Paris Psalter* takes “*in excessu mentis meae*” as a sign of mental distress, and so translates: “Ic cwæð on *minre fyrhto* þæt ic wære aworpen of þinra eagen ansyne” (“I said in my fear that I was cast out from your sight” Ps, 30.25). The implication seems to be that either the translator took the liberty to add an emotional dimension to make the mode of the utterance clear, or that he

⁸ Cf. Tahlia Birnbaum, ‘Naming Shame: Translating Emotion in the Old English Psalter Glosses,’ and Alice Jorgensen, ‘Learning about Emotion from the Old English Prose Psalms of the Paris Psalter,’ both in Jorgensen, McCormack, and Wilcox, *Anglo-Saxon Emotions*, 109-26 and 127-42 respectively.

⁹ Cf. Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 122 ff.

¹⁰ Cf. M. J. Toswell, ‘Structures of Sorrow: The Lament Palms in Medieval England,’ in Tolmie and Toswell, *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 21-44, at 21: The language of lament is the language of the Psalms. The structure of lament is the structure of the Psalms...The Psalms provide both the earliest and the most common, most recognizable language and structure of lament to the Christian medieval mind.”

understood “excessu” as verbal *improprietas*, which he ascribes to lack of self-possession.¹¹ When the phrase occurs almost verbatim in Ps, 115.2 (the only other occurrence), the implication is even more explicit:

1. Credidi, propter quod locutus sum; ego autem humiliatus sum nimis.

2. Ego dixi *in excessu meo*: Omnis homo mendax.

[1. I believed, therefore I spoke; indeed I have been exceedingly humbled.

2. I said “in my excess:” All men are liars.]

The Old English translator expands on these lines, as he introduces interesting nuances that have far-reaching implications for the study of style in the Exeter Book lyrics:

1 Ic þæt gelyfde, for þon ic lyt sprece;
ic eom eadmede ungemete swiðe.

2 Swylce **ic sylfa** cwæð, þa **me** swa ðuhte
on modseofan **minum** geþancum,
þæt wæron ealle menn ungemete lease.

[1. I believed; therefore, I will say little: I am indeed exceedingly humbled.

2. Likewise, I myself said, when it so seemed to me from my innermost thoughts, that all men are exceedingly untruthful.]

While “swylce” might simply indicate a reiteration of the “ic...sprece” structure introducing “ic...cwæð,” it is also possible that it looks back to both “ic lyt sprece” and “ic eom eadmede ungemete swiðe” as a means to establish a contrastive parallel with “wæron ealle menn ungemete lease:” namely: “in few words I will say that I am exceedingly humbled, and likewise, in a few words I said that all men are liars.” More significantly, the Old English translator/poet interprets *in excessu* as “on modseofan minum geþancum,” thus reinforcing the idea that the Latin

¹¹ L&S renders “excessus” in a figurative sense as “a leaving of the mental powers, loss of self-possession,” “without mentis,” and cite Ps, 30.30 and 115, 2. Also as a “digression,” or “deviation, aberration.” It is likely that the Old English translator saw an implication of loss of moderation in speech in these meanings.

phrase was interpreted as an act of emotionally unrestrained speech—a sincere utterance. Therefore, when translated into Old English, *in excessu [mentis]* takes on the implied nuance of confessional mode and the expression of innermost emotions and thoughts; particularly in the case of Psalm 115, where the opening lines establish the self-referentiality of the I-persona by creating the anaphoric structure “**Ic þæt gelyfde,**” “**ic lyt sprece,**” “**ic sylfa cwæð,**” reinforced by the use of “ic,” “me,” and “minum” in four lines, as shown in bold.

As I discussed in Chapter 3 of the present study, it is precisely such use of self-referentiality and emphasis on the I-persona of the speaker that is most characteristic of dramatic monologues in Old English lyric and narrative verse. In some of the Exeter Book lyrics, the same performative formula occurs, where the speaker opens his speech with a confession that “I [will/can] speak [about] my [thoughts/story/self],” using similar phraseology:

Mæg **ic** be **me sylfum** soðgied wreccan (*The Seafarer*, 1)

Þæt **ic** bi **me sylfum** secgan wille (*Deor*, 35)

Ic þis giedd wrece bi **me**..., | **minre** sylfre sið (*The Wife’s Lament*, 1-2a)

Ic bi **me**... | secge þis sarspel (*Resignation B*, 27b-28a)

The narratives that these opening formulas introduce also share thematic affinities with either Psalm in which the phrase appears: all present confessional accounts insofar as they are autobiographical, all of them contain some form of lament or implicit plea for deliverance from tribulation, and all of them are emotionally-focused speeches.¹² Considering the pivotal importance of the Psalms in monastic life, and the consequent familiarity of a literate audience with Psalmic diction, the openings of these

¹² The influence of Psalmic style and form in the Exeter Book lyrics is also noted by Geoffrey Shepherd: “The Psalter was undoubtedly the book of the Bible best known to individual Anglo-Saxons in religion. [...] The influence is pervasive, often in phrase and also in form. The style and construction of many of the semi-lyrical, semi-elegiac pieces in the Exeter Book testify to this influence;” cf. ‘Scriptural Poetry’ in Stanley, *Continuations and Beginnings*, 1-36, at 13.

poems might have triggered immediate associations of monologues framed by phrases like *in excessu [mentis]*: in an act of mental sincerity.

Interestingly, although there are several other expressions throughout the Psalms that convey similar meanings, such as “Ic cleopode” (“I cried out”), “Ic andette” (“I confessed”), and even, in Ps, 55.9, “vitam meam annuntiavi tibi” (“I have related my life to you”), rendered in the Old English Ps, 55.7 as “ic nu leofum Gode lif min secge” (“I will now relate my life to [my] beloved God”), none of these have been incorporated into Old English poetic diction outside the Psalms themselves. *In excessu [mentis]*, on the other hand, has been adapted to different narrative contexts and fully incorporated into Old English poetics, thus reinforcing the potent psychological implications that the phrase carried for the Old English translator.

It is also not uncommon to find Psalmic phraseology engendering conventional Old English poetic formula. The phrase *cwæð on mode* appears in various contexts where interior monologue is implied; in Old English poetry, it is most notably used in *The Wanderer*, 111a, “swa cwæð snottor on mode,” (“thus spoke the wise one in his mind”).¹³ Outside the vocabulary of interiority, speech, and confession, the phrase *dolores mortis* (“the tribulation of death”) in Ps, 17.5 becomes in Old English *sar and sorga* (“pain and sorrow”), which occurs with minor variations in verse as many times as *Genesis A*, 75a; *Christ I*, 209a; *Guthlac B*, 1092a; *Christ and Satan*, 28a; *The Dream of the Rood*, 59a and 80a; and more loosely in the Exeter Book lyric, *The Rhyming Poem*, 52.

Lastly, a corroborating case of potential stylistic affinities is that of Psalm 68 and “The Seafarer.” From a thematic point of view, the two of them share remarkable likeness, but more importantly, the speakers in each

¹³ It is given for “dixi/t in corde” (“said in my/his heart”) in Ps, 9.17,32 (Old English Ps, 9.31,33); and Ps, 13.1; for “confitebor” (“I confess”) in Ps, 31.5 (Old English Ps, 31.6); for “dixit in semetipso” (“said to himself”) in Ps, 35.2 (Old English Ps, 35.1); where interiority is implied in Ps, 54.5-7 (Old English Ps, 54.6) and Ps, 72.11-13 (Old English Ps, 72.11, where “cwæð on mode” is contrasted with “gif ic sylfe cwæðe and sæge” to distinguish the implied interiority of “dixi” as opposed to “si dicebam: narrabo...”); and once to imply remembrance in Ps, 142.5, where interiority is implied, and where it renders “memor.” Interiority is often implied in the texts by explicit mention of the heart in the preceding verse or verses, where they make up for a single syntactical unit.

use similar imagery, phraseology, and dramatic structure to convey their stories. Similarities in phraseology and imagery between Psalm 68 and *The Seafarer* can be divided into four main categories: maritime imagery, expressions of emotional or psychological distress, references to exile and isolation from the community, and contrast between the speaker's isolation and the hostile community.

The first of these —maritime imagery— relates to the tempestuous sea as a metaphor for inner tribulations. Hence, Psalm 68 reads

2. *Salvum me fac Deus, quoniam intraverunt aque usque ad animam meam.*

3. *Infixus sum in limum profundi et non est substantia, veni in altitudines maris et tempestas demersit me.*

4. *Laboravi clamans, raucae sunt fauces meae, defecerunt oculi mei dum spero in Deum meum.*

[2. Save me, O God, for the waters have come in even into my soul.

3. I stick fast in the mire of the deep, and there is no safe landing. I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest has overwhelmed me.

4. I have laboured with crying, my jaws have become hoarse, my eyes have failed, while I hope in my God.]

The *Seafarer* speaker begins his dramatic monologue by stating

hu in geswincdagum

earfoðhwile oft þrowade,

bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,

5 gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,

atol yþa gewealc, þær mec oft bigeat

nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,

þonne he be clifum cnossað calde geþrunge.

(*The Seafarer*, 2b-7)

[How in days of toil I often suffered times of hardship, endured bitter breast-care, known in the ship many a place of sorrow, the terrible tossing of the waves, where the anxious night-watch often held me at the ship's prow, when it tosses along the cliffs, oppressed by the cold.]

Further on, he describes how “stormas þær stanclifu beotan” (“storms beat the rocky cliffs there,” 23a), as “hungor innan slat | merewerges mod” (“hunger tore the spirit of the sea-weary one from within,” 11b-12a). Furthermore, he establishes a correlation between distress and the harsh conditions of the sea: “Ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ | winter wunade” (“I, care-worn, dwelled on the ice-cold sea in the winter,” 14-15a), and “Ic werig oft | in brimlade bidan sceolde” (“I, weary, often had to remain on the sea-way,” 29b-30), thus making the connection between the first element (sea imagery) and the second (emotional and psychological distress) explicit. In Psalm 68, the connection is less clear, but the speaker does convey his anxiety on several occasions: “tribulor” (“I am in distress,” 18), “dolens et pauper” (“sorrowful and destitute,” 30), and “improperium expectavit cor meum et miserum” (“my heart expected sorrow and scorn,” 21).

The remaining two aspects in which Psalm 68 and *The Seafarer* show remarkable similarities are also connected. Images of exile and isolation appear in the Latin text, as the speaker declares: “extraneus factus sum fratribus meis et peregrinus filiis matris meae” (“I have become a stranger amongst my brethren, a foreigner to my mother's sons,” 9) and “sustinui qui simul contristaretur, et non fuit; et qui consolaretur, et non inveni” (“I looked for one to share my grief, and there was none; for one to console me, and found none,” 21). Psalmic phraseology finds close affinities in *The Seafarer* as the speaker states: “wunade wræccan lastum, | winemægum bidroden” (“I dwelled on the tracks of exile, deprived of friendly kinsmen,” 15-16) and “nænig hleomaga | feasceaftig ferð frefran meahte” (“no protecting kinsmen could console the grieving heart,” 25b-26). As a consequence of the loss of social status in both speakers' narratives, their situations are contrasted to the hostile community, described in

Psalm 68 as “qui exspectant” (“those who wait,” 7), and “qui sedebant in porta” and “qui bibebant vinum” (“those who sat at the gates” and “those who drank wine,” 13). In *The Seafarer*, the inhabitant of the mead-hall is defined as “se þe ah lifes wyn | gebiden in burgum... | wonc on wingal” (“he who has experienced joy in life as he remained [or awaited] in the cities...proud and flushed with wine,” 27-29a).

From the analysis above, it seems the *Seafarer* poet might have followed a similar narrative of personal experience focused on isolation, tribulation, and consolation, which also employs sea imagery as a leading motif. In its literal and symbolic value, seafaring would serve as a thematic cohesive agent that recontextualises received meanings and sets them against the familiar cultural parameters of the Old English experience of the world.¹⁴ It is therefore plausible that Old English poets found in some of the confessional and penitential Psalms a source of adaptable style and diction that could easily be recontextualised in culturally familiar parameters. In some cases, such as *Resignation*, Psalmic inspiration is more recognisable, its diction more explicitly embedded in Old English metric form.¹⁵ In others, such as *The Seafarer*, Psalmic diction acts as an indirect source providing the poet with a suitable thematic framework within the larger tradition from which he may derive his own work, which is neither restricted in style nor limited in interpretation. In the same way, Old English poets may have availed themselves of rhetorical devices and narratorial voices derived from the Biblical tradition in order to shape the mode and form of their work. *The Ruin*, in its subjective detachment from its object of description, exemplifies how a relatively uncommon pattern is likely to have originated in the familiarisation of a received style.

¹⁴ On this subject, see Holton, ‘Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*’ for a detailed account of how the poem seems to echo Biblical and patristic symbolic interpretations of sea imagery.

¹⁵ The influence of the confessional and penitential Psalms in *Resignation* has long been recognised. See Philip Pulsiano, ‘Spiritual Despair in *Resignation B*,’ *Neophil.* 79:1 (1995), 155-62, where he addresses the poem’s affinities with Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and particularly 142.

7.2.1.2 – Contemplative Lament: *The Ruin* and the Aesthetics of Decay

The Ruin is an exception among the Exeter Book lyrics in that it does not provide an autobiographical narrative of personal woe and alienation. However, its description of a desolate urban landscape is not unique in Old English verse. There are at least two other examples of such passages in narrative verse—one describing the dragon’s barrow in *Beowulf*, 2542-49, 2715b-19; the other the ruined Mermedonian prison-hall in *Andreas* 1492-95a, 1523b-24a—and one in lyric, at lines 73-76, 97-98 of *The Wanderer*.¹⁶ All four share a descriptive force that lies in the mixture of awe and sorrow arising from the juxtaposition of references to the ruined glory of the buildings and the imagined life that filled them, now long gone. Various Biblical sources have been suggested for *The Ruin*, as depiction of temples and cities, both in splendour and decay, appear in various passages.¹⁷ However, among these posited sources, the poetic book of Lamentations has, to my knowledge, never been mentioned. Lamentations consists of five poems on the destruction and decay of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon, describing the bleak landscape of the ruined city and the misery of its inhabitants. Two Biblical passages show remarkable stylistic affinities with the Old English lyric. The first of these, Lam. 1:1-6, introduces the desolation and emptiness of the temple as no people are left to attend the formalities:

1. Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! [...]
4. Viae Sion lugent, eo quod non sint qui veniant ad
solemnitatem: omnes portae ejus destructae, sacerdotes ejus
gementes; virgines ejus squalidae, et ipsa opressa amaritudine.
[...]
5. Et egressus est a filia Sion omnis decor ejus...

¹⁶ I have elsewhere discussed the relationship between the *Beowulf* and *Andreas* passages from the point of view of the assimilative principle in Old English poetry. See Rozano-García, ‘Traditional Poetic Diction and the Alien Text.’

¹⁷ Cf. Muir, *The Exeter Book Anthology*, vol. 2, 705 for the specific Biblical passages and related scholarship. Venantius Fortunatus’s ‘De excidio Thoringiae’ has also been suggested as a potential source.

[1. How does the city sit solitary that was full of people! [...]

4. The ways of Sion mourn, because those who attended the ceremonies are no more: all her gates are broken down, her priests moan; her virgins are wretched, and she is oppressed with bitterness.

6. And from the daughter of Sion all her beauty is departed...]

The corresponding passage in *The Ruin* can be read against a the Old English experience of the world, and thus recontextualised within a familiar cultural background: no priests or virgins are to be found, but instead the traditional images of death by disease or the sword appear, while the mead-hall takes the place of the temple:

Beorht wæron burgræced, burnsele monige,
 heah horngestreon, heresweg micel,
 meodoheall monig monndreama full,
 oþþat þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe.
 25 Crungon walo wide, cwoman woldagas,
 swylt eall fornom secgrofra wera;
 wurdon hyra wigsteal westen stapolas,
 brosnade burgsteall.

(*The Ruin*, 21-28a)

[Bright were the city buildings, the many bathing-halls, the abundant high gables, much martial noise, many mead-halls full of the joy of men, until mighty fate changed that. Slaughtered men fell dead widely, days of pestilence came, death took away all the brave men; their strongholds became waste, the city decayed.]

The Old English passage echoes the Biblical lament not literally but aesthetically and stylistically: the once prosperous city is now deserted; its citizens are gone and its buildings empty. The Old English poet familiarises received learning according to culturally recognisable parameters, retaining an identifiable aural form but endowing it with familiar significance. By means of traditional Old English poetic diction, the poet recontextualises not

only the phraseology of the original Latin, but also the affective impact of the language by relocating the centre of social life from the Temple of Jerusalem to the mead-hall. A similar process can be identified in Lam. 4:1-2:

1. Quomodo obscuratum est aurum, mutatus est color optimus.
Dispersi sunt lapides sanctuarii in capite omnium platearum.
2. Filii Sion incltyti, et amicti auro primo: quomodo reputati sunt in vesa testea, opus manuum figuli.

[1. How has gold become dim; the finest colour changed. The stones of the sanctuary are scattered atop every street.

2. The noble sons of Sion, and those clad in the best gold: how they are esteemed on earthen vessels, the potter's hands' work.]

Lamentations 4 describes the demise in wealth and reputation of the city's inhabitants, which exists now only in relics and memory. The use of rusting gold, fading colours, and other material wealth as metonymic representations of the city's downfall also appears in *The Ruin* and, corroborating this motif, also in *The Wanderer*:

Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,

30 ond þæs teaforgeapa tigelum sceadeð
 hrostbeages hrof. Hyre wong gecrong
 gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig
 glædmod ond goldbeorht glioma gefrætwed,
 wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;

35 seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
 on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
 on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices.

(*The Ruin*, 29b-37)

[Therefore, these buildings grow desolate and the red vault sheds tiles, the wooden-crowned roof is bare. The place crumbled, broken into heaps,

where once many a man happy and splendidly adorned, gold-bright, proud and flushed with wine, shone in his war-gear; he gazed on treasure, on silver, on jewels, on wealth, on prosperity, on gems, on this bright city of the broad kingdom.]

The Old English poem expands on the motifs of decaying wealth and splendour, constructing an image of materialism on the city dweller's part through the accumulative anaphoric use of "on+object" and the explicit association of "glædmod ond goldbeorht." The crumbling walls and dimming gold thus reflect on the superfluous and transitory nature of the "bright city on the broad kingdom," mirroring the reflection of the inhabitants of Jerusalem's prosperity on frail earthen pottery.

The fleetingness of worldly riches is a commonplace motif in both Biblical and Old English literature, so that it is likely that the Latin tradition provided further stylistic devices, in Lamentations as well as in the Psalms and elsewhere, for its expression in vernacular verse. In this way, a third semantic space is created where received and familiar meanings coexist without precluding the possibility of reading one or the other. Several other minor parallels can be found between Lamentations and *The Ruin*, such as Lam. 2:2, "destruxit...munitiones...et dejecit in terram" ("he destroyed...the strongholds...and brought them to the ground"), which finds an echo in "se weallsteall... | fel on foldan, forðgesceaft bærst | grimme gregrunden" ("the enclosure...fell to the earth, the creation burst grimly ground down," *The Ruin*, 12a-14a), evidencing remarkable similarities in phraseology and diction. There is a possible intertextual relationship with Lamentations, as the Old English poet recontextualised its style to produce a familiarised equivalent that maintains an aesthetic resemblance while expressing culturally recognisable meanings. Regardless of whether the poem describes an actual or imagined landscape, the poet seems to have been aware of the existence of a tradition, and of the possibilities it offered from an aesthetic point of view.

The metonymic relationship between the decay of once prosperous centres of social activity and the passing away of a people also appears in *The Wanderer*:

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne eall þisse worulde wela weste stondeð
 75 swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
 winde biwaune weallas stondap,
 hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.
 Weorniað þa winsalo, waldend licgað
 dreame bidrorene, duguþ eal gecrong
 80 wlonc bi wealle.

(*The Wanderer*, 73-80)

[The wise man must understand how terrible it will be when all the richness of this world shall stand waste, as now variously throughout this middle-earth walls stand beaten by the wind, covered by frost, the enclosures [covered] by the storm. The wine-halls decay, the lords lie bereft of joy, the whole company of men has perished, proud by the wall.]

The association of the ruined halls with the departed company is established through the contrastive parallel “weallas stondap” / “duguþ...gecrong,” which highlights the fleetingness of life as it conveys a twofold image of desolation: the decay of men and, as a consequence, the devastation of abandoned buildings. The metonymic representation of society’s downfall through the image of ruins is reversed in the case of *The Wanderer*: where “hyre wong gecrong” in *The Ruin*, it is the company of men that decays here; likewise, instead of gold and ornaments dimming as an image for the city’s barrenness, it is the solitary “weal wundrum heah, wyrmlcum fah” (“majestically high wall, decorated with serpentine patterns,” 98) that conveys an image of decline in apparent isolation from the world of men, long departed. In both cases, *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* create an aesthetic structure whereby the material world and society are directly related, so that the collapse of one symbolically stands for the decadence of the other. As with sea imagery in Psalm 68 and *The Seafarer*, it is all but possible that the poet found a reflection of familiar realities in the Biblical text and came to associate the expression of these realities with

the style and diction of the received tradition. It is the interaction of such experience of the world with the corresponding expression of similar meanings in the Biblical tradition that allows for the coexistence of literal and symbolic readings. On the other hand, the homogenising quality of Old English verse, based on the aesthetics of the familiar, establishes a cohesive relationship between poems across the corpus, and incorporates the received knowledge into the stock of conventional poetic diction.

The identification in Old English verse of Biblical phraseology does not, however, necessarily imply direct dependence on any specific passage. In the discussion above, I have provided examples of likely instances that may have provided a frame of reference for Old English poets, without necessarily establishing a limiting source-target relationship. The Psalms occupy a central enough position in monastic life to have become progressively assimilated, both thematically and stylistically, into the Old English experience of the world, and to have influenced to some degree the phraseology associated with the expression of certain modes and motifs. The case of the book of Lamentations is slightly different in that it provides a sample of a tradition that, although present elsewhere in the Bible, is here expressed in significantly relatable terms from an Old English point of view: the passing of splendour and wealth represented in the decay of the city's centre of religious/social activity and the fall of its people metonymically expressed in the form of rusting, fleeting wealth. The posited relationship must, however, be seen as open and multiform. It is the interaction of several received meanings that is at work in the composition process; especially when it comes to stylistic adaptation.

7.2.2 – Christian Latin Received Traditions and the Possibilities of Interpretation

The Exeter Book lyrics are possibly the most studied Old English poems in terms of their reflection of assimilated learning from Christian Latin writings: the influence of Isidore, Augustine, and Gregory in particular has attracted scholarly interest since the second half of the last

century.¹⁸ In the same way, the presence of structures and motifs borrowed from patristic writings has also been identified, best exemplified in the *ubi sunt* motif, while a “homiletic strain” within the “elegiac” genre in Old English has long been acknowledged.¹⁹ It then seems reasonable to question the function of these stylistic affinities in the text world of the poems. By considering how both patristic and homiletic styles relate to Biblical phraseology and the Old English experience of the world, their interaction acquires full textual as well as cultural coherence and significance. As a case study, I will consider the role and influence of one particular work, Isidore’s *Synonyma*, whose impact on early medieval English authors has long been recognised, in order to illustrate how the *influence of a model* eventually becomes *the influence of a tradition*, thus complicating the identification of direct textual dependence.

Isidore’s *Synonymorum de lamentatione animae peccatricis libri duo* is structured around a sinful man’s monologue of complaint and misery and Reason’s dialogue with him as she urges Man to redirect his sorrow to a more beneficial end by amending himself (Book I). A series of *normae vivendi* for the penitent brings the dialogue to a close (Book II).²⁰ Probably because of its dialogue structure, the work is often referred to by the title of *Soliloquia*, through association with Augustine’s work of the same title—though the two are substantially different in style and purpose. The presence of the *Synonyma* in early medieval England is well attested by surviving inventories, manuscripts, and citations as one of the core patristic

¹⁸ Especially in relation to *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Some examples are James E. Cross, ‘On the Genre of *The Wanderer*,’ *Neophil.* 45 (1961), 63-75; F. N. M. Diekstra, ‘*The Wanderer*, 65b-72: The Passions of the Mind and the Cardinal Virtues,’ *Neophil.* 55:1 (1971), 73-88; and ‘*The Seafarer* 58-66a: The Flight of the Exiled Soul to its Fatherland,’ *Neophil.* 55:4 (1971), 433-46; Marijane Osborn, ‘Classical Meditation in *The Wanderer*,’ *Comparison* 1 (1975), 67-101; and ‘Towards the Contemplative in *The Wanderer*,’ *SM* 1 (1978), 53-69; John C. Shields, ‘*The Seafarer* as *Meditatio*,’ *SM* 3 (1980), 29-41; Holton, ‘Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*,’ Selzer, ‘*The Wanderer* and the Meditative Tradition,’ Claire McPherson, ‘The Sea a Desert: Early English Spirituality and *The Seafarer*,’ *ABR* 38:2 (1987), 115-26. Text-specific source criticism has for some time been abandoned in more recent scholarship of the Exeter Book lyrics.

¹⁹ Timmer, in ‘The Elegiac Mood,’ already identifies a markedly homiletic tone of some Exeter Book lyrics. For the *ubi sunt* lament, see James E. Cross seminal article ‘*Ubi Sunt* Passages in Old English: Sources and Relationships,’ *VSLÅ* (1956), 21-44.

²⁰ Cf. *PL* 83, 825-68. The edition used here is Faustino Arévalo (ed.), *S. Isidori hispalensis episcopi Opera omnia*. 7 vols. Tomus VI, ‘Opera Theologica, Liturgica, et Mystica’ (Rome: Typis Antonii Fulgoni, 1797-1803), 472-524.

texts, often used and mentioned by several Anglo-Latin authors, including Aldhelm.²¹ In addition to this, the utilisation of the *Synonyma* in homiletic prose has been noted for a long time, and is explicitly present in Vercelli XXII, which directly acknowledges Isidorean inspiration: “Her sægð hu *sanctus* Isidorus spræc...” (“Here is told how Saint Isidore spoke...,” 1), even if it takes considerable liberties in expanding and reworking passages from its source.²² Above all, it is the *ubi sunt* section in *Synonyma* II, 91 that seems to have been most successfully incorporated into the vernacular, with at least fourteen attested instances, two of them in verse, from *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.²³

91. Brevis est huius mundi felicitas, modica est huius seculi gloria, caduca est, et fragilis temporalis potentia. Dic, ubi sunt reges, ubi principes, ubi imperatores, ubi locupletes rerum, ubi potentes seculi, ubi divites mundi; quasi umbra transierunt, velut somnium evanuerunt. Quaeruntur, et non sunt.

[91. Fleeting is the bliss of this world, insignificant is the glory of this age, passing and frail is temporal power. Say, where are the kings? Where the princes? Where the emperors? Where are those replete with riches? Where are the powerful people of the age? Where the wealthy of the world? They have passed on like a shadow, vanished like a dream. They are sought and exist not.]

Isidore possibly derived *Synonyma* II, 91 from the composite paraphrasing of Bar, 3: 16-19, and Wis, 5:8-9. The passage is included and elaborated on in Vercelli X, 231-45, where the Old English homilist follows his source with some degree of literalism but also takes liberties to accommodate the original to his own rhetorical and aesthetic design:

²¹ The *Synonyma* also enjoyed wide circulation in Ireland; cf. Claudia di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words: Isidore's "Synonyma" in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: UTP, 2008), Chapter 3, ‘Isidore and the *Synonyma* in the British Isles.’

²² All references from the Vercelli homilies come from Donald G. Scragg (ed.), *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS 300 (Oxford: OUP, 1992). For a complete survey of the use of the *Synonyma* in Old English and Anglo-Latin prose, the reader is referred to di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, Chapter 3-6.

²³ Cf. Cross, ‘*Ubi sunt* Passages.’ He does not mention the passages in *Christ and Satan* and *Meter 10* of Boethius, possibly because they do not show an obvious relation to the homiletic tradition based on the *Synonyma*.

For þan nis naht þysse middangeardes wlite 7 þysse worulde
wela; he is hwilendlic 7 yfellic 7 forwordenlic, swa ða rican
syndon her in worulde. / Hwær syndon þa rican caseras 7
cyningas þa þe gio wæron, oððe þa cyningas þe we io cuðon.
Hwær syndon þa ealdormen þa þe bebodu setton. [...] Wa is
woruldescriptum, butan hie mid rihte reccen. [...] Hwær coman
middangeardes gestreon. Hwær com worulde wela. Hwær
cwom foldan fægernes. [...] Swa læne is sio oferlufu eorðan
gestreona, emne hit bið glice rena scurum, þonne he of
heofenum swiðost dreoseð 7 eft hraðe eal toflideð [...] Swa
tealte syndon eorðan dreamas, 7 swa todæleð lic 7 sawle.

[Therefore, this earth's beauty and this world's prosperity is nothing; it is
transitory, and devious, and perishable, as are the powerful here in the
world. Where are the powerful caesars and kings that once were, or the
kings we once knew? Where are the elders who made decrees? [...] Woe to
the judges of the world, unless they judge with righteousness. [...] Where
have the treasures of the earth gone? Where has the world's prosperity
gone? Where has the land's fairness gone? [...] So fleeting is that excessive
love of earthly treasures; it is even like the showers of rain, when it pours
most heavily from the heavens and then quickly glides away. [...] So
unstable are earthly joys, and so do body and soul part.]

The homilist begins his *ubi sunt* sequence by referring to kings and emperors, then moves to the judges of the world and interrupt the enumeration with a “Woe to them” statement, only to commence a second *ubi sunt* section focused on the everchanging nature of the world itself. The image of fleeting shadow is fittingly replaced with a simile taken from the natural world, which is absent in Isidore’s *Synonyma*. In this, the Old English homilist shows the degree to which he had “assimilated his source and had come to master it so as to able to insert his own original contributions without upsetting the semantic and structural consistency of the whole.”²⁴ The homilist’s variation of the *ubi sunt* passage is particularly relevant when taken together with *The Seafarer*:

²⁴ Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, 85-86.

80 Dagas sind gewitene
 ealle onmedlan eorþan rices;
 nearon nu cyningas ne caseras
 ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,
 þonne hi mæst mid him mærþa gefremedon
 85 ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.

(*The Seafarer*, 80-85)

[The days are gone, [and] all the splendour of the kingdom of earth; there are now no kings or caesars, no givers of gold as there once were, when they performed among themselves the greatest feats of glory and lived in most distinguished renown.]

As an *ubi sunt* sequence, the passage is innovative in that it takes the form of negative statements (“nearon nu cyningas ne caeseras”) rather than a series of rhetorical questions, as the poet recontextualises and rephrases an established tradition or use of diction, familiarising the form and placing received learning alongside conventional expression. Even more relevant is the association of the passing of natural beauty in relation to the *sic transit gloria mundi* motif, as reflected in Vercelli X. A similar idea lies at the core of one of the most debated sections of *The Seafarer*:

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
 wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð;
 50 ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
 sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
 on flod-wegas feor gewitan.
 Swylce geac monað geomran reorde,
 singeð sumeres weard, sorge beodeð
 55 bitter in breost-hord.

(*The Seafarer*, 48-55a)

[The groves start to blossom, adorn the cities, make the meadows fair, the world hastens on; all these things admonish the one eager in spirit, exhort the mind on the journey, for he who thus thinks to depart far away on the sea ways. Likewise, the cuckoo urges with a mourning voice, the keeper of summer sings, announces sorrow, bitter in [his] breast.]

The speaker introduces the *reverdīe* or reawakening of the natural world shortly after he has lamented the harshness of winter (lines 31-33a), immediately followed by the urge to set out (33b-38). The mention of spring, which triggers a similar impulse and is then succeeded by the cuckoo's heralding of summer, creates an accumulative effect whereby a sense of perpetual motion is conveyed, reinforced by the appositive style of lines 48-49, culminating in "woruld onneted̄," "the world hastens on."

The cuckoo's singing with bitterness echoes the speaker's own "bittre breostceare" ("bitter breast-care," 4a), which again constructs an image of cyclical succession of events, ultimately leading up to the turning point of the poem in line 64a-66a: "Forþon me hatran sind | Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif, | læne on londe" ("And so the joys of the Lord are more warming for me than this dead life, fleeting on land"). The poet is possibly echoing Ps. 62:4, "Ys þin milde mod micele betere þonne þis læne lif" ("Your gentle disposition is much better than this fleeting life"), which glosses the Latin "melior est misericordia tua super vitas" ("your mercy is better than life"). Again, the phraseology of the Latin tradition is incorporated into the Old English experience of the world, as the notion of "lænland" ("leased land") reflects the application of a familiar cultural interpretant to the idea of "temporary stay on earth" as opposed to "eternal life in heaven."²⁵ It is this statement that initiates a second *sic transit gloria mundi* section, leading up to the *ubi sunt* passage previously discussed.

The *Seafarer* poet is working, then, within the parameters of several traditions, both received and familiar: the Isidorean *ubi sunt* is incorporated into the Old English stock of homiletic diction, then adapted to the Old English experience of the world as it becomes expanded through recontextualisation within conventional cultural references. As to the

²⁵ Cf. Christine Fell, 'Perceptions of Transience,' 181-82.

potential relationship between Vercelli X and *The Seafarer*, two possibilities arise. Either both texts partake of a common tradition that features an elaboration on the decay of the natural world (whether derived or independent from the *Synonyma*), or the lines are the homilist's own original addition, from which the *Seafarer* poet might also and independently have drawn, directly or through mediation of an intermediate witness. In either case, the *Seafarer* poet adapts the received *ubi sunt* form to his own composition process, in which he also utilises the familiar diction of the Psalms and incorporates both to his own overall aesthetic design, resulting in the sophisticated textual fabric of the poem as it has survived.

A similar process can be traced in the other three occurrences of the *ubi sunt* motif in Old English poetry—namely, *The Wanderer*, 92-96; *Christ and Satan*, 36b-37 and 163-71; and *Meter 10* of Boethius, 33-37 and 52-53—the last two of which Cross failed to identify because they fall outside the scope of direct Isidorean influence. The *Christ and Satan* passage in particular has been largely neglected by scholarship; perhaps owing to its disjointed occurrence, or as a result of the comparatively minor critical attention that the poem has received.²⁶ As both the *Wanderer* and *Christ and Satan* passages have already been addressed in previous chapters, I will focus on a final example: *Meter 10* of Boethius, which elaborates at length on the Latin Book II, Meter 7, lines 15-18:

ubi nunc fidelis ossa Fabricii manent,
 quid Brutus aut rigidus Cato?
 signat superstes fama tenuis pauculis
 inane nomen litteris.

[Where do faithful Fabricius's bones rest now; what about Brutus, or the stern Cato? The tenuous fame of just their empty names is marked with a few letters.]

²⁶ I have elsewhere examined the *ubi sunt* passage in *Christ and Satan* in relation to identity, emotion, and displacement of the self. See Rozano-García, 'The Heart of Darkness.'

The Old English rendering introduces a sequence of rhetorical questions and subsequent explanatory commentary on the identity of Brutus and Cato, but Fabricius is replaced by a different figure:

Hwær sint nu þæs wisan Welandes ban,
 Þæs goldsmiðes, þe wæs geo mærost.
 35 Forðy ic cwæð þæs wisan Welandes ban,
 forþy ængum ne mæg eorðbuendra
 se cræft losian þe him Crist onlænð.
 [...]

 Hi wæron gefyrn forðgewitene;
 nat nænig mon hwær hi nu sindon.

(*Meter 10, 33-37; 52-53*)

[Where are now the bones of wise Weland, that goldsmith who was once most broadly renowned? For this reason, I spoke of the bones of wise Weland, because the skill which Christ grants to any dweller on earth cannot be lost by him [...] They passed away long ago, no man knows where they are now.]

In these lines the total assimilation of the *ubi sunt* motif is fulfilled. The Old English poet reutilises the phraseology of the *topos* for his own aesthetic design, which emphasises the importance of historical figures by means of epistrophic doublets (the repetition of a word at the end of two or more lines; in this case “þæs wisan Welandes ban”). Moreover, he recontextualises his source by introducing a more culturally recognisable figure than the obscure Fabricius, while keeping the better-known Cato and Brutus. The poet constructs a complex rhetorical design around the figure of Weland with the apparent purpose of justifying his choice and its placement in the *ubi sunt* sequence. The correlative “forðy...forþy” introduces a causative/consecutive structure that works together with the parallel of lines 33 and 35 to emphasise Weland’s wisdom (“þæs wisan Welandes”) and to reinforce the poet’s subsequent claim. The brief *ubi sunt* passage in the

original Latin acquires greater significance in the overall context of the Meter in its Old English translation.

The fundamental idea that glory and fame are fleeting is explicitly brought to the fore as the poet effectively does away with the rhetorical quality of the *ubi sunt* by answering it in the form of the parallel structure “Hwær sint nu” / “hwær hi nu sindon” (“Where are they now?” / “where they are now”). Nothing like the Isidorean postscript “they are long gone” appears in the original source, which states instead that “signat superstes fama tenuis pauculis | inanen nomen litteris” (“thin fame marks an empty name in a few fleeting inscriptions,” 17-18). Therefore, *Meter 10* shows the work of a poet who consciously combines received traditions with culturally recognisable references through the assimilative and homogenising quality of Old English poetic diction. Because the meaning and the cultural independence of the received remain unchanged by the addition of the Weland reference, it can be seen that the poet’s purpose is purely aesthetic in his use of a phraseology that was potent for him through prolonged exposure to the tradition from which they originated.²⁷

There is nothing explicitly Isidorean in *Meter 10*, and nothing that calls for an explicit reference to a continental Germanic figure, unless we are willing to allow for the early English poet’s self-conscious use of originally extraneous style and phraseology, which had in time become incorporated to the stock of Old English poetic diction, for the sole purpose of triggering associations of form and mode by means of a familiarised discourse. Likewise, introducing Weland in the list of historical figures both expands and recontextualises the source by adapting it to a culturally relevant framework and making its application more universal. It is in this sense that what might have once been deemed as the direct *influence of a model* in the form of a literalistic rendering of the *Synonyma* II, 91 eventually becomes, through constant reworking and recontextualisation,

²⁷ The Weland passage is neglected by Cross, and only mentioned *passim* by Di Sciacca, who does not go into the cultural significance of the inclusion of Weland in the sequence, concluding only that “the Old English meter appears to be a highly syncretistic composition” and “despite the pagan figures named...the general outlook of the Old English meter is definitely Christian,” *Finding the Right Words*, 146.

the *influence of a tradition*, in which the poet is no longer drawing upon a specific source, but rather reflecting the degree to which received knowledge has been incorporated into the Old English experience of the world, expressed in familiar terms through conventional language and diction.

It is possible, however, to extend this model of cross-influence to form as well as meaning if we consider the appositive, paratactic style in which the *Synonyma* was composed. Compare, for example, the resemblance in phraseology between “multa intolerabilia sensi, multa acerba sustinui, multa gravia pertuli” (“I have felt many unbearable things, suffered many hardships, bore many heavy cares,” *Synonyma* I, 18) to “earfoðhwile oft þrowade, | bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe, | gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela” (“I have often suffered times of hardship, endured bitter sorrow in [my] breast, known many an abode of care on the ship,” *The Seafarer*, 3-5). A further example can be found in I, 15 of the *Synonyma*:

Sic exilio trusus sum...sic exilii damnationem
 gemo...conditionis pondere pressus...in algore, in nive, in
 frigore, in tempestatibus tetris, in omni labore, in omne
 periculo positus. Post damna bonorum, post amissionem
 omnium rerum...qui misereatur, non est.

[Thus I am thrust into exile...thus I bemoan the punishment of
 exile...oppressed by the weight of my condition...in cold, in snow, in
 chilliness, in terrible storms, placed in every toil and danger. Beyond the
 loss of my goods, beyond the privation of all things...there is none to pity
 me.]

Consider these lines alongside the many occurrences of similar phraseology in Old English poetry, some of which have already been considered in previous chapters (for example, in Hagar’s and Satan’s laments). As a widely circulated text, it is possible that the poets were familiar with the phraseology employed by Isidore, which in turn often draws from Psalmic and Biblical diction, to the extent of having incorporated the construction of a similar discourse in the vernacular. Of all the instances in verse, it is perhaps *The Seafarer* that best illustrates the

assimilation of Isidorean style in relation to the Old English experience of the world:

hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
 15 winter wunade weæccan lastum,
 winemægum bidroren,
 bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.

(*The Seafarer*, 14-17)

[How I, careworn, remained in winter on the ice-cold sea on the paths of exile, deprived of friendly kinsmen, hung around with icicles; hail flew in showers.]

Both the passage from the *Synonyma* and the lines from *The Seafarer* show the core elements of the language of lament in Old English verse: a hostile, wintry environment; loss of kin; exile; and emotional or psychological distress. The phraseology and style are similar and, from a thematic point of view, both texts draw from a common Biblical and exegetical tradition.²⁸ The question arises, then, as to what extent the language of lament is an actual structural interpretant based on the Old English experience of the world, and not a trope borrowed from the Latin tradition—a somewhat similar conundrum to the origins of the *Hwæt* sequence. It is difficult to ascertain whether the elements that make up the language of lament in Old English verse pre-existed the received expression of similar meanings in Latin, or whether its conventionality is the result of long exposure resulting in total stylistic and semantic assimilation. More likely, though, the value of the language of lament as a structural interpretant comes from its transcultural quality: from the point of view of the Old English experience of the world, its constituents bear genuine socio-cultural meaning: cold, exile, loss of kin, and the emotional distress derived thereof are all familiar realities. However, the fact that similar elements had a powerful symbolic meaning in the received Latin tradition possibly

²⁸ On the significance of sea imagery, hostile cold weather, and other natural phenomena in relation to the exegetical tradition and their presence in Old English poetry, particularly *The Seafarer*, see Holton, 'Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*.'

facilitated the assimilation of complementary forms of expression that could be easily adapted to conventional prosaic and poetic diction.

Hence, it is not a matter of cultural or even linguistic domestication but of stylistic and semantic correlation. In other words: unlike the term *þegn*, which required that its semantic value was extended depending on the context for it to take on an extraneous meaning conveyed by an unfamiliar lexical form (*apostolus*, as “disciple” or “religious follower”), the constituents of the language of lament in Old English needed only extend their referential significance, as the lexical and structural forms were virtually equivalent in the received tradition. As a result, they carry both literal *and* context-dependant symbolic value, which comes from the incorporation of familiarised received meanings into the conventional expression of a similar theme. Just as *þegn* moves within the third semantic space resulting from lexical domestication, the language of lament can be read as a structural interpretant that familiarises received forms (as in Hagar’s lament), or as a homogenising element that conveys familiar/literal or received/symbolic meanings. If this possibility is acknowledged, then the incorporation of Latin-derived phraseology to the indigenous stock of poetic language is simply an extension of the “aesthetics of the familiar.” From the creation of the same third semantic space as that presented by *þegn*, but on the scale of a structural rather than lexical interpretant, the possibility of reading various layers of meaning into a single text as a result of cultural coexistence, without any of them overruling the others through cultural dominance, becomes available.

The Old English poets had at their disposal a vast amount of material to which they had long been exposed, and which had become in time part of their own experience of the world and incorporated into the pre-existing stock of poetic language. For this reason, it is more accurate to speak of the traditions that intervene in the creation of the text world of the poems than to selectively establish exclusive relations between specific potential models. The relationship of Old English verse with other vernacular traditions is somewhat different in nature, but the same principle of correlation may be applied. The possibility of identifying a potential source

or model is much more remote than in the case of Latin, for the sole reason that nothing like a glossed text or translation of a vernacular texts exists in Old English verse, apart from *Genesis B*. However, the identification of partial syntactic, lexical, and semantic affinities may hint to a degree of influence, or at the very least to enough familiarity as to enable the poet to incorporate extraneous linguistic structures to conventional poetic language.

7.3 – The Vernacular Tradition and the Exeter Book Lyrics

The influence of Old Norse sources in Old English verse is attested by Old English texts in the form of digressions, allusions, and explicit mention of characters from history and legend. In addition to this, linguistic analysis hints at borrowing, adaptation, and possibly imitation.²⁹ Some Old English poems do contain unequivocal references to saga and history. Leaving *Beowulf* aside, for its relationship to the continental past lies at the core of the debate around its dating,³⁰ *Deor* and *Widsið* feature names and narratives that are well attested in Old Norse and other continental sources, while *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *Widsið* itself show apparent affinities with eddic poetry.

In this section, I propose to take a purely formal approach to some of the poems I mentioned, in order to objectively assess the probability of borrowing, influence, or imitation on the Old English poets' part. I do not intend to examine the source, implications, or accuracy of cultural references, but the poets' use of language in the hope of determining

²⁹ The influence of the Irish tradition, though comparatively well documented in extant studies, particularly in liturgical and homiletic texts, is lacking support in verse, and where a comparative approach has been taken, no conclusive evidence has been provided beyond the suggestion of potential analogues. The most influential work on the affinities between early Irish and Old English lyric poetry is still P. L. Henry's *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966). Other book-length studies include Martin Puhvel, *Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979); Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, CSAS 6 (Cambridge: CUP, 1993). See also Peter Orton, 'To Be a Pilgrim: The Old English *Seafarer* and its Irish Affinities,' in Kay and Sylvester (eds.), *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies Presented to Jane Roberts* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 213-23.

³⁰ The topic is too broad to be discussed here. An overview can be found in Fulk and Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, Ch. 9, 'Germanic Legend and Heroic Lay,' esp. 193-213.

whether self-conscious design underlies the unusual arrangement of these poems. The case of *Deor* is particularly interesting, for in it both the Latin and vernacular traditions coalesce to give the poem its unique form and style. *Widsið* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, on the contrary, show distinct affinities with Old Norse poetic diction. In *Widsið*, it is a mere aural device aimed at constructing a certain aesthetic design; whereas in *Wulf and Eadwacer* the potentially imitative nature of its unusual phraseology hints at the work of a poet that was familiar with Old Norse diction and compositional style.

7.3.1 – *Deor*, Boethius, and the Uses of the Past

For nearly a century, *Deor* has mystified scholars for the obscurity of its reference to continental Germanic history and legend, on the one hand, and for its no less uncertain relation to Boethian philosophy, on the other.³¹ William W. Lawrence first referred to it as “a veritable *Consolatio Philosophiae* of minstrelsy,” and since then several attempts have been made to elucidate the nature of the relationship between the two texts.³² In this and previous chapters, I have shown how at least the metrical sections of the Old English version of the *Consolatio* evidence a remarkable familiarity with the style of the Latin original, to the point of it being reworked and elaborated on within familiar cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic parameters. Similarly, I will propose that *Deor* participates in the same process of poetic recontextualisation of Boethian influence as *The Seafarer* or *The Ruin* in relation to the Biblical tradition, and certainly in the same way as the *Meters*. The *Deor* poet, thus, “seeks to reproduce an aspect of that tradition altered in both form and cultural content to suit an English

³¹ Considering the scope and timespan of critical work done on the allusions in *Deor*, the bibliography derived from it is too extensive to be quoted in full here. The reader is referred to Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, 158-68 for a synopsis of the stories associated with each allusion, and to Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, 597-602 for an overview of critical approaches.

³² ‘The Song of Deor,’ *MP* 11 (1911), 23-35. In favour of the dependence of the Old English poem to the Latin treatise, see Murray F. Markland, ‘Boethius, Alfred, and “Deor”,’ *MP* 66 (1968), 1-4; and F. W. Bolton, ‘Bethius, Alfred, and “Deor” Again,’ *MP* 69:3 (1972), 222-27. For a recent contestation, see Langeslag, ‘Boethian Similitude.’

milieu.”³³ In this recontextualisation, the poem’s references to continental Germanic legend and history play a major role.

The function of the five references in *Deor*—Weland, the legendary smith; the tragic figures of Beadohild and Mæthild; and the ruling figures of Theodric and Eormanric, of uneven reputation—has for some time been assumed to be that of *exempla*; what they represent as *exempla* is, nevertheless, still the matter of much debate. Bolton suggests that they work as a parallel to “the fivefold view of human ambition” as explained by Philosophy in Book III of the *Consolatio*.³⁴ Assuming that “Boethian” means “directly derived from the work of Boethius,” whether in the original Latin or through the medium of Alfredian translation, leads to interpretive limitations: the poem and the Latin treatise construct divergent text worlds, and ultimately convey disagreeing meanings.

While from a stylistic and formal point of view the poem seems to bear an uncanny similarity to the phraseology and structure of certain parts of the *Consolatio*, it is precisely the presence of the various Germanic figures from the historical and legendary past that best illustrate the impossibility of direct dependence. The *Deor* poet is weaving the fabric of the text around these figures, so they must have carried a strong cultural significance from the point of view of the Old English experience of the world; a relevance that moves away from the world of the *Consolatio*. It is possible that some of these meanings are lost to us as a result of temporal and cultural distance, but to an Old English audience they must have triggered immediate associations, considering their centrality in the poem’s structure and the vagueness of the refrain “þæs ofereode; þisses swa mæg” (“that passed away; [and] so may this,” 7, 13, 16, 19, 27, 42). While “þisses” can be assumed to refer to the speaker’s (or the audience’s) own present condition, what “þæs” looks back to in each case we can only guess at based on extant historical material.

³³ Bolton, ‘Boethius, Alfred, and Deor Again,’ 227.

³⁴ Cf. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, 597-602 for an overview of the historical and legendary figures’ identification. On their role as *exempla*, see Bolton, ‘Boethius, Alfred, and “Deor” Again,’ 225 ff.

Regardless of the difficulty in ascertaining the exact implications of each reference, it seems clear that the stories associated with them are meant to carry some sort of exemplary meaning, whether positive or negative. If we free the Old English poem of a reading strategy tightly bound to the *Consolatio*, we are left with stylistic and structural affinities that are not dissimilar from those evidence by other Exeter Book lyrics in relation to extraneous traditions. As observed above, the fact that Weland was the poet's choice to replace Fabricius in *Meter 10* is evidence enough that the narrative associated with him would have seemed appropriate in the context of the Boethian tradition, while being at the same time an effective agent for the recontextualisation of the received source. The poet of *Deor* takes this familiarising process further by constructing his own sequence of *exempla* derived from culturally familiar and relevant narratives, in order to convey a similar meaning that may have been *influenced* by a tradition, but needs not, in any case, to have been *borrowed* from a single textual model. Therefore, references to figures from the remote past have an instrumental value in *Deor*: they act as tool for the recontextualisation of a received tradition, while they also serve as vehicles for the conveyance of the meanings associated with their respective narratives.

Another fundamental flaw undermines the argument that *Deor* directly relies on the *Consolatio*: namely, that it “betrays its dependence on fortune in its failure to gain independence of worldly goods, thus demonstrating that it subscribes to a tradition essentially at odds with that of the Latin work.”³⁵ This point, however accurate in its identification of an essential discrepancy of the Old English poem with its alleged source, relies on the assumption that *Deor* is the result of borrowing from a model. The poem may take the form of a Boethian approach to a similar problem; it may even recontextualise and adapt its style and form to resemble the traditional use of *exempla*, as I have argued, but that does not necessarily imply that in reflecting familiarity with the formal aspects of the tradition the poet must adhere to the philosophical principles of the *Consolatio* itself. When speaking about “Boethian similitude” in *Deor*, the term “Boethian”

³⁵ Langeslag, ‘Boethian Similitude,’ 219.

ought to be used in the sense of after the style of, and not directly influenced by the *Consolatio*. Continental Germanic history and legend are a fundamental aspect of the text world of *Deor*, as they participate in its meaning and shape its style and structure.

7.3.2 – *Widsið*, Deliberate Archaism, and the Semblance of Antiquity

The use of archaic linguistic forms in *Widsið* and the hypothesised provenance of the name lists that make up for most of the text’s structural arrangement have likely attracted scholarly attention over the last few years. In a recent article, Eric Weiskott has drawn attention to the fact that archaic forms such as “suhtorfædran” (“uncle and nephew,” 46b) or “Rumwalum” (“Roman foreigners,” 69b) were still available to the poet in the late ninth and tenth centuries.³⁶ It is reasonable to assume, then, that access to these forms implies that “Old English poet could manipulate traditional terminology long after the desuetude of the cultural conditions to which it referred.”³⁷ In deliberately using archaic forms, the *Widsið* poet is shaping a text that self-consciously takes on a semblance of antiquity, and which seeks to endow the speaker with a timeless quality insofar as it embodies the voice of

140 se þe for duguþe wile dom aræran,
 eorlscipe æfnan, oppæt eal scæceð,
 leoht ond lif somod; lof se gewyrceð,
 hafað under heofonum heahfæstne dom.

(*Widsið*, 140-43)

³⁶ More precisely, “another familial *dvandva* compound, *gisunfader* ‘son and father’ occurs in the ninth-century Old Saxon *Heliand*. . . . the term *Galwalas* ‘Gallic foreigners, Gaul,’ occurs in the ninth-century Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a. 649/650 and 660, while *quiritum* is glossed with *Romwala* in the tenth-century Old English Gloss to the *Durham Ritual*,” cf. ‘The Meter of *Widsið* and the Distant Past,’ *Neophil.* 99 (2015), 143-50, at 144.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

[He who wishes to spread glory before the troop, perform deeds of courage until all life and light depart together; he performs praise, has enduring glory under the heavens.]

The idea of “*heahfæstne dom*” works within a series of allusions to universality and timelessness that occur at several points: the very epithet that describes the fictitious speaker, *Widsið* (“far-journey,” “long-journey”), encapsulates these aspects, as do references to how he “*monna mæst mægþa ofer eorþan | folca geondferde*” (“went through most nations and peoples across the earth,” 2-3a); “*geondferde fela fremdra londa | geond ginne grund*” (travelled through many a strange land across the wide land,” 50-51a); and roamed “*scriþende gesceapum... | ...geond grunda fela*” (“moving through creation... across many lands” (135-36b). Ubiquity and everlastingness are the qualities of the speaker in *Widsið*, and as such he mentions peoples from places other than the Germanic world, and in the expanse of several centuries.³⁸ Archaic diction thus works together with these ideas to construct the speaker’s identity as an aesthetic and stylistic device rather than as a relic of ancient Germanic poetry. Metrical phonology reinforces this hypothesis. As Weiskott has shown, if the poem (or at least sections thereof) originated in a pre-Old English period, then there are at least a dozen verses whose meter “is spoiled by the reconstruction of pre-Old English phonology;” furthermore, “there is no theoretically sound reason to believe... that these [allegedly pre-Old English] patterns were metrical in prehistoric alliterative verse.”³⁹ It follows, then, that as the archaisms appear in metrically stable classical Old English verse, they must have been incorporated in a composition period that is contemporary with the metrical structure of the poem.⁴⁰

The name lists, on the other hand, have for a long time been considered of an earlier composition date than *Widsið* itself. This hypothesis

³⁸ Hence, Leonard Neidorf’s suggestion that “something like a pan-Germanic identity, an awareness of shared origins and intertwined histories, is evident in various sources from early Anglo-Saxon England, including texts like *Widsið*” lacks all ground, as the references to Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks would serve little purpose in constructing a pan-Germanic supra-national identity. Cf. ‘The Dating of *Widsið* and the Study of Germanic Antiquity,’ *Neophil.* 97 (2013), 165-83, at 174-75.

³⁹ ‘The Meter of *Widsið* and the Distant Past,’ 146; 147.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 148.

assumes that the poet composed his work by bringing together pre-existing material and giving it the overall form as we know it through insertion of a preface, interlude, and epilogue.⁴¹ The list sections have come to be known in traditional scholarship as *pulas*, from Old Norse *þula*, plural *þulur*, which can be defined as verse catalogues or lists of names, as in the *Nafnapulur*.⁴² The objective similarity in style again hints at an act of deliberately imitative composition technique, which would make sense in the context of the archaicising devices adopted by the poet. If the Old English poet was familiar with Old Norse history and legend, and the very presence of references to continental figures in *Widsið* and elsewhere seems to confirm that he was, he might have decided to imitate and assimilate the poetic composition techniques employed in Old Norse *þulur* and incorporate them to a text that consciously takes on the form of a learned catalogue of history, geography, and poetry, which spans from the remote past to the present day, and extends over continental and insular sources.

The case of *Wulf and Eadwacer* deserves closer scrutiny: the poem, even in the absolute lack of contextual reference or explicit mention of continental historical figures, has been repeatedly associated with a Norse background. The reason for this lies not in its hypothetical origin in saga, but in its use of hybrid poetic diction, which combines Old Norse phraseology adapted to the lexical and syntactic assimilative quality of Old English verse.

⁴¹ Cf. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, vol 2, 542-49 for an extensive commentary on the critical history of the various names contained in the lists.

⁴² The deliberate use of archaicising diction and style to convey a sense of antiquity to the text is not unique to *Widsið*. A clear example of this technique is found in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which, as identified by scholars, makes use of meter and language borrowed from older narrative verse in order to endow the poem with a sense of nostalgia and glorification of the past that becomes projected onto the present. See Alistair Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London: Heinemann, 1938), 8-15; and Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 452.

7.3.3 – *Wulf and Eadwacer*, Eddic Verse, and Aural Aesthetics

As early as 1902, Lawrence first proposed that *Wulf and Eadwacer* was a translation from an Old Norse original, largely basing his argument on metrical and lexical peculiarities.⁴³ However, more often than not, attempts to elucidate the affinities of the poem with eddic verse are usually accompanied by analogues or potential sources, the reliability of which is compromised by the total lack of contextual reference in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, as I discussed in Chapter 5. For this reason, I propose to approach the text from a strictly formal point of view in order to reassess the possibility of Old Norse influence in its composition. Close analysis of the poet's use of specific terms and syntactical constructions will suggest that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is not a translation or a fragment of Old Norse saga, but that the Old English poet was working within the parameters of a received literary tradition, and producing in turn a new form that reflects both the assimilation of such tradition and the poet's artistry in accommodating it to the conventions of Old English verse.

Although Lawrence's main statement that *Wulf and Eadwacer* "was first written in Old Norse by a Norseman, and...later rendered literally into Anglo-Saxon" has long been abandoned,⁴⁴ many of his observations on the poem's language and style have not been convincingly countered.⁴⁵ Less

⁴³ 'The First Riddle of Cynewulf,' *PMLA* 17:2 (1902): 247-261.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁴⁵ In fact, they are often omitted or rejected without justification, probably as a result of his overall argument being dismissed. As an example, the *ASPR* mention Lawrence's suggestions without further comment; whereas, more recently, Klinck refers to some of Lawrence's explanation of "earne" as "now discredited" without specifying where or why, even though the *ASPR* cite it as a plausible reading; cf. *The Old English Elegies*, 176. Muir, on the other hand, largely omits Lawrence, and mentions him only precisely as concerns "earne," referring to the *ASPR*; cf. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 2, 605. Lawrence sees in the unusual *on þreat cymeð* an echo of the rather common Old Norse *at þrotum koma*, meaning "to be[come] worn out," "exhausted" (256). However semantically removed, there is nothing in terms of style that prevents the Old English poet from borrowing a syntactical structure in which the Old Norse aural aesthetic is retained, while an Old English meaning is conveyed. This seems to be, in fact the general strategy used by the poet. The uncommon placing of *to þon* at the end of a clause in line 12a, "wæs me wyn to þon" ("there was joy for me in that") might be "an attempt to render the Old Norse *at því*," which does normally appear at the end of a clause (256). Klinck, drawing from B-T and Bruce Mitchell, corroborates the unusual position of the clause: "*To þon* is usually translated "to an extent" or "to a degree." But when the phrase is used in this manner it precedes a clause;" cf. *The Old English Elegies*, 173; and Mitchell, *Old English Syntax* (Oxford. OUP, 1985), §§ 2889-2904. The meaning seems clear enough, and the unusual but not ungrammatical syntactical construction in Old English hints at stylistic imitation rather than translation. Another

straightforward is the suggestion that *earne*, usually emended to *earmne* (“wretched, miserable”), might be an unusual rendering of Old Norse *ǫrr*, “in the form *ǫrvan*, which, being disyllabic, cause the use of *earne* [instead of] *earone*.”⁴⁶ There are some objections to this possibility: first, Old English *earu*, from which *earne* would be derived, means “quick, active, swift,” which would, *a priori*, make little sense in context. However, editors and translators alike have favoured *earmne* as a result of affective criticism, as I pointed out in Chapter 5. From an affectively conditioned point of view, a “wretched whelp” seems to tie in with the speakers’ discourse better than an “active” or “swift” one. Peter Orton, advising caution, concludes that “the choice of meaning here will either reflect or determine our idea of the speaker’s attitude.”⁴⁷

Choosing *earmne* over *earne* forces an unnecessary emendation and imposes the readers’ horizon of expectations upon the language of the text. Just as the whelp might be “wretched,” in accordance to the overall mode of the poem, it might be “active” in sharp contrast with the static world of the speaker, introducing a sense of dramatic irony. Moreover, one might take the poetic licence of interpreting “swift” as indicating fleetingness or momentariness; our “ephemeral” or “short-lived” whelp—all the more so considering its fate: “bireð wulf to wuda” (“Wulf/a wolf is taking [it] to the woods,” 17). It would not be the only case in the poem where a literalistic term is taken metaphorically: *aþecgan* in line 2a is usually taken to mean “consume” as in food, or “receive” a gift or sacrifice. However, it is

example is the inverse use of *ig* and *eglonð* in lines 4a and 5a, “Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre. | Fæst is þæt eglonð, fenne biworpen” (“Wulf is on one island, I on another. Fast is that island, surrounded by fen”). Klinck notes the peculiarity of the use, noting that “*Ea* is the usual form of the simplex, but *e(i)g-* and *eg-* are common in compounds,” (*The Old English Elegies*, 171) which would agree with Lawrence’s suggestion that “in Old Norse the case is reversed,” and once more “we must assume Scandinavian influence” (257). Lawrence makes the clarification that the difference in use in each line is also consistent with Old Norse: “As has been said, we find in Norse the word *eyland* rarely used instead of *ey*. Since *land* meant “land” and *ey* alone meant “island,” it is natural to suppose that to a Norseman the compound *eyland* would have had the sense of “island-land.” [...] the mention of the fen suggests that the land, the earth of the island, was emphasized by way of contrast to the marsh around. Hence it would have been quite natural for a Scandinavian to use *eyland* here, rather than the common word *ey*,” (257). Neither the *ASPR* nor Muir mention this or the previous crux.

⁴⁶ ‘The First Riddle of Cynewulf,’ 258.

⁴⁷ ‘An Approach to *Wulf and Eadwacer*,’ *RIA* 85C (1985), 223-58, at 230.

assumed to take the extended sense of “destroy” or even “kill;” thus “Willað hy hine aþecgan” is almost invariably translated as “they will kill him,” despite the lack of objective evidence to support the figurative meaning. Keeping the original reading *earne* avoids an otherwise uncalled-for emendation and provides further evidence that the poet was likely seeking to adapt Norse diction and style to his own purposes.

In a recent article, Richard North follows Schofield’s overall argument favouring the identification of the speaker in *Wulf and Eadwacer* with Signý.⁴⁸ While North’s argument is necessarily speculative insofar as the Old English poem provides no contextual information or dramatic framework whatsoever, he does raise some points that add to the present discussion. North addresses several metrical irregularities in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, such as the uneven distribution of line lengths or the seemingly strophic arrangement of the text, which would correspond to common eddic arrangements.⁴⁹ He then goes on to explain away certain unusual diction, which would be acceptable if we assume Norse influence.⁵⁰ Additionally, North sees in *giedd* (“song, poem,” 19) a semantic ambiguity that takes on both the usual Old English meaning and that of the Old North *geð* (“wit, passion”); hence rendering the final line of the poem as “man may easily tear asunder what was never joined, our joined passion-poem.” North’s hypothesis comes reinforced by the frequent occurrence of *geð* in short *ljóðahátr* lines with the same alliterative pattern as “uncer giedd geador.”⁵¹

The possibility of an Old English poet intentionally bending the lexical and morphological possibilities of Old English to accommodate an imitative compositional style is not an isolated phenomenon. I have shown in Chapter 6 how the *Genesis B* poet takes on a deliberately imitative style in adapting and expanding his Old Saxon source. If this is the case for *Wulf and Eadwacer*, too, we would be facing a poet whose ultimate intention is to

⁴⁸ William H. Schofield, ‘Signý’s Lament,’ *PMLA* 17:2 (1902), 262-295; Richard North, ‘Metre and Meaning in *Wulf and Eadwacer*: Signý Reconsidered,’ in Houwen and MacDonald (eds.), *Loyal Letters: Studies on Medieval Alliterative Poetry and Prose*, *Medievalia Groningana* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994), 29-54.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 32-36-

produce a familiarised reworking of a literary tradition that was or had been current in his own time, and which he knew closely enough as to adopt its style and diction. When taken together, the presence of historical and legendary figures in *Meter 10*, *Deor*, and *Widsið* seems to hint at a conscious use of these sources for various aesthetic and stylistic ends, as well as to a deliberate instrumentalisation of the past to bring extraneous traditions into familiar cultural parameters. In *Wulf and Eadwacer*, however, the poet seems to have taken a different approach: to work within the aesthetic and stylistic principles of a received tradition and to incorporate such formal features to Old English verse, while maintaining the lexical and syntactic ambiguity that is characteristic of the third semantic space created as a result of familiarisation.⁵² All three cases, to which *Genesis B* should be added, provide further evidence that early English poets were capable of recontextualising received traditions from various backgrounds, and demonstrate that the assimilative quality of Old English verse underlies the stylistic and formal peculiarities of some of the Exeter Book lyrics.

7.4 – Conclusion: The Familiarising Principle in and Beyond the Exeter Book Lyrics

The examples of familiarisation provided in this chapter represent but a small representation of a process that is traceable across the Old English poetic corpus. Although I have focused exclusively on the Exeter Book lyrics and some other relevant associated texts, it is possible to identify how Old English poets recontextualised received tradition in various other ways. The *Riddles* of the Exeter Book, based on the Anglo-Latin tradition, often expand and rework their sources according to the demands of vernacular verse, to the point that they often resemble the style and diction of some of the lyric poems (cf. *Riddle 5*, as discussed in Chapter

⁵² At least one other critic would agree in seeing *Wulf and Eadwacer* as an adaptation of Old Norse materials. Roberta Frank has noted that “when critics charge an Old English poet with ‘faults’—mixed metaphors, rapidly shifting perspective, violent, forced, extravagant diction—they are describing skaldic verse of the Viking period.” This is precisely the case, and the faults attributed to the poet, of *Wulf and Eadwacer*. See Frank, ‘Anglo-Scandinavian Relations,’ *ANQ* 3:2 (1990), 74-79, at 77.

3). Moreover, the case has been made recently that the *Riddle* sequences follow Isidorean notions of structural arrangement as a whole, modelled after the influence of the *Etymologiae* on the medieval Latin tradition.⁵³ In addition to this, some of the Exeter Book lyrics that have not been included in the present discussion owing to space limitations show close resemblances to styles that originated in traditions outside the vernacular, as is the case of *The Rhyming Poem*, whose unusual form seems to owe much to the Hisperic style developed by Insular Latin poets.⁵⁴

The Exeter Book lyrics, insofar as they participate in the familiarising process that is traceable across different modes, texts, genres, and styles, represent and maintain the continuity and stability of the Old English poetic corpus. They are not, in any way, exceptions or deviations from the norm. Consequently, in its assimilative and homogenising quality, Old English verse effectively asserts the dramatic and poetic force of the language, which is capable of adapting and recontextualising received meanings to express them in conventional form and through familiar cultural parameters. Therefore, to speak of Old English “elegy” as a genre, or of an “elegiac” strain in Old English poetry, is to create an artificial gap in the stylistic and aesthetic continuum of the tradition. Instead, we must acknowledge that the language and aesthetics of lament are inherent elements of the Old English experience of the world, which work as structural and lexical interpretants for the conveyance of culturally shared meanings through the creation of a third semantic space. This does not mean that Old English poetry as a whole is unoriginal or essentially imitative. Quite on the contrary, it means that Old English as a language, and Old English verse as a conventional medium for its expression, are powerful elements that reflect the poets’ ability to assimilate acquired learning and incorporate it to their own experience of the world in an inclusive, non-culturally-dominating way.

⁵³ Cf. Mercedes Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order: The Exeter Book Riddles and Medieval Latin Enigmata*. Medieval European Studies XVII (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ Cf. James W. Earl, ‘Hisperic Style in the Old English “Rhyming Poem”,’ *PMLA* 90 (1987), 187-96.

Conclusion – The Exeter Book and Early Medieval European Literature

The constructed genre of “elegy” assumed to exist in Old English literature stems, as I have attempted to show, from a principle “of participation without belonging—a taking part without being part of,” to refer back to Derrida’s “law of genre.” Its inception looks back to a historicist approach to literature rooted in post-Romantic sensibilities and nationalistic reinterpretations of the past, and results in a gap that is forced onto an otherwise homogenous poetic corpus. The “themes of elegy” are, in fact, part of shared cultural preoccupations rooted in the Old English experience of the world and expressed through the conventional style of the “aesthetics of the familiar,” while the “language of elegy” works on a supra-textual level as a structural interpretant for the recontextualisation of familiar and received learning. Only the material environment of the poems, the Exeter Book, remains to be examined, both by itself and in the broader contexts of the Old English poetic canon and the place of the vernacular in early medieval European literature.

The Exeter Book and the Problem of Unity

Based on the nature and arrangement of the texts contained in each of the main Old English poetic codices, it has been suggested that Cotton A.xv may have been compiled out of an interest in monsters and narratives about the extraordinary, and that Junius 11 is constructed around a narrative of the history of salvation based on various Biblical, patristic, and liturgical traditions.¹ The unifying principle of the Vercelli Book is still a subject of

¹ The idea that the unifying concept underlying the compilation of the *Beowulf*-manuscript was an interest in things extraordinary (whether monstrous or exotic) was first posited by Sisam, *Studies in Old English Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1953) and has remained largely unchallenged until the present day. The unity of Junius 11 has been the subject of some debate. J. R. Hall first proposed the idea that “the contents of Junius 11 regularly correspond to and can usually be understood in the light of the course of sacred history” in ‘The Old English Epic of Redemption: The Theological Unity of MS Junius 11,’ *Traditio* 32 (1976), 185-208, at 208. He was contested by Barbara C. Raw, ‘The Construction of Oxford Bodleian Library, Junius 11,’ *ASE* 13 (1984), 187-207, who questions the

debate. Donald G. Scragg remarked how “it is difficult to discern any principle of arrangement in the items of the collection,”² while Samantha Zacher has recently noted that “it does seem that the manuscript can be regarded as a kind of florilegium or collection of more-or-less popular items,” supporting this statement on the correspondences between the “Cynewulfian” items in the Vercelli and Exeter Books and the existence of numerous witnesses to the homiletic texts contained in the manuscript.³

On the relationship between the four longer poems in the codex—*Andreas*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Elene*, and *The Dream of the Rood*—I have elsewhere argued that at the core of the Vercelli group “there seems to lie a common narrative of the passion, crucifixion, and imitation of Christ, told in distinctively ‘heroic’ language and martial imagery, drawing from the common stock of native literary imagination.”⁴ I would add that, once the contents of the twenty-three homilies are considered in the same perspective, the unifying quality of these themes becomes apparent: homilies I, V, VI, XI, XII, XIII, XVI, XVII, XIX, XX, and XXI focus on various aspects of the life of Christ; homilies XVIII and XXIII narrate the lives of St Martin and St Guthlac respectively; and homilies II, III, IV, VII, VIII, XIV, XV, and XXII display various eschatological themes, from transience to death and the horrors of hell to the Harrowing. To these, *Soul and Body I* and *Homiletic Fragment I* should be added, touching on similar themes of transience and foreboding of Judgement. It seems, therefore, that the Vercelli Book, even as a florilegium, follows a conscious design structured around the life and Passion of Christ; the idea of *imitatio Christi*,

placement of *Christ and Satan* in the original manuscript design; and Phyllis Portnoy, “‘Remnant’ and Ritual: The Place of *Daniel* and *Christ and Satan* in the Junius Epic,” *ES* 75:5 (1994), 408-22, who points at the influence of the Easter Liturgy, particularly the Holy Saturday lections. Hall restated his own argument and addressed these and other contestations in “‘The Old English Epic of Redemption:’ Twenty-Five-Year Retrospective,” in Liuzza (ed.), *The Poems of Junius 11: Basic Readings*, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England (NY and London: Routledge, 2002), 53-68. For a related approach, qualifying some of Hall’s points, see Judith N. Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), ch. 2, ‘The Junius Codex: A Vernacular *Heilgeschichte*.’

² ‘The Compilation of the Vercelli Book,’ *ASE* 2 (1973), 189-207, at 190.

³ S. Zacher and A. Orchard, *New Readings in the Vercelli Book* (Toronto: UTP, 2009), *Introduction*, 4.

⁴ Rozano-García, ‘Traditional Poetic Diction and the Alien Text,’ 187.

exemplified in the lives of St Martin, St Guthlac, *Andreas* and the *Fates of the Apostles*; and as an invitation and warning to meditate upon the Last Judgement. The figure of the Cross thus acts as a symbolic and metonymic element that brings together all these aspects, represented in poetry by *Elene* and *The Dream of the Rood*.

A corroborating example is MS Corpus Christ College Cambridge 201, an eleventh-century collection of vernacular prose and verse containing, among others, the Old English version of the *Regularis concordia*, many of Wulfstan's homilies, and the poems *Judgment Day II*, *Exhortations to Christian Living*, *Summons to Prayer*, *The Lord's Prayer II*, and *Gloria I*. Even though the manuscript was once seen as "a miscellaneous and not particularly careful compilation with no very evident sense of order,"⁵ Graham D. Caie has recently argued that, once the prose and verse elements are read together as a coherent whole, a sense of overall homogeneity arises based on the exposition of eschatological themes and a didactic approach focused on the act of penance.⁶ The Vercelli Book and CCCC 201 thus share a similar structure constructed around the exploration of particular aspects of Christian living represented in prose and verse alike. The consistent recognition of an underlying pattern that unifies the contents of Old English codices hence suggests that compilers assembled their manuscripts with a conscious, if not always immediately obvious design in mind.

However, the Exeter Book resists a systematic approach to the varied nature of its contents, which appear not to adjust to a single thematic preoccupation.⁷ I suggest that such textual eclecticism is precisely the

⁵ Peter Clemons, 'The Old English Benedictine Office,' *Anglia* 78 (1960), 265-83.

⁶ Cf. 'Codicological Clues: Reading Old English Christian Poetry in its Manuscript Context,' in Cavill (ed.), *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-axon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 1-14.

⁷ Some short thematic sequences have been suggested, but none account for the manuscript as a whole. The first attempt to find a sense of grouping was Rudolf Imelmann's series of publications on a hypothetical Eadwacer/Odeaker cycle, long since disproved; cf. *Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung* (Berlin, 1907), involving *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and *The Husband's Message*, and later extended to *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* in "Wanderer" und "Seefahrer" in *Rahmen der altenglischen Odeaker-Dichtung* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1908). James Anderson argues that *Soul & Body II*, *Deor*, and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, on the one hand, and *The Wife's Lament* through *The Ruin*, on the other, develop specific themes; cf. 'Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, and The Soul's Address:

defining feature of the codex: the Exeter Book is an anthology of miscellaneous poetry that is not governed by matters of content, but of form and style. I propose that the Exeter Book is, in fact, an anthology of *familiarised* poetry. As I have attempted to show in the present work, the familiarisation principle does not apply to individual texts alone; it is found across genres and modes regardless of their specific thematic concerns. As a culturally-based phenomenon, familiarisation can be expected to recur across a poetic corpus that consists primarily of adaptations of Latin models into vernacular verse, and it is based on the recontextualisation of received learning. This principle can be easily recognised in any of the other three main codices, but in none of them is it the unifying force binding the contents of the manuscript together. In the Exeter Book, however, its presence is felt most notably, particularly when we take into account individual pieces whose transmission history is witnessed by other manuscripts.

In addition to the longer poems ostensibly based on Latin analogues in prose or verse, such as *The Phoenix*, *Juliana*, the *Guthlac* the and *Christ* poems, or the *Riddles*, some of the shorter religious verse seem to confirm this focus on the assimilative force of Old English poetry. The fact that analogues to these texts survive in the vernacular provides grounds for comparison in terms of their stylistic treatment in the Exeter Book, thereby

How and Where the Old English Exeter Book Riddles Begin,' in Green, *The Old English Elegies*, 204-30. Liuzza sees systematic design in the arrangement of the texts, particularly the *Christ* sequence, and concludes that "manuscript divisions and stylistic differences are less important than thematic concatenations;" cf. 'The Old English *Christ* and *Guthlac* Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics,' *RESns* 41 (1990), 1-11, at 10. Patrick Conner groups the poems according to his rearrangement of booklets as 2, 3, 1, and divides them into "monastic," "clerical," based on how they reflect the style and aesthetics of the community at Exeter before, during, and after the Benedictine Reform; cf. *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon Exeter (The Boydell Press, 1993), ch. 6, 'Poetry and Cultural History,' esp. 148-49. Conner is contested by Fiona and Richard Gameson in their review of *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, *N&Q* 42:2 (1995), 228-30; Richard Gameson in 'The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry,' *ASE* 25 (1996), 135-85; and by Joyce Hill in 'Anglo-Saxon Scholarship and Viking Raids: The Exeter Book Contextualised,' *Filoloski pregled* 25:1 (1998), 9-28. Muir suggests that "the first eight poems [*Christ I-III*, *Guthlac A-B*, *Juliana*, *Azarias*, and *The Phoenix*] were placed together because they are related thematically in their concern with different models for Christian living;" and finds "a strong thematic link in the series of poems from *Judgement Day I* [through *Resignation A-B*, *The Descent into Hell*, *Pharaoh*, and *The Lord's Prayer I*] to *Homiletic Fragment II*, all of which are concerned with aspects of the Easter liturgical season" and "the juxtaposition of *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message*." Cf. *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, 23-24.

allowing us to perceive the varying degrees to which they recontextualised received learning. The first case, *Azarias*, finds a parallel in *Daniel*, 279-443 so that the Exeter Book version, at 190 lines against 164 in *Daniel*, can be considered an elaboration on the same theme; particularly considering that the text significantly departs from its Junius 11 analogue after line 76.⁸ Furthermore, the fragment also features some of the elements that appear in the Exeter Book lyrics, which are highlighted as the poet diverges from the *Daniel* account.

Azarias is a dramatic monologue spoken out “ingeþoncum” (“from [Azarias’s] innermost thought,” 279b; 1b); treating the theme of exile and dispossession; “Wurdon we towrecene geond widne grund, | heapum tohworfene, hylda lease,” “We were exiled across the broad land, dispersed in crowds, without protection,” 21-22); utilising a reworking of the traditional opening formula (“þu...gehete...on fyrndagum,” “you promised in the distant days,” 32-33); and organised around similar structural patterns (note “þas word acwæð,” 4b; “swa se halga wer hergende wæs,” 49; and “swa hi þry cwædon,” 71b, reminiscent of the “swa cwæð” interludes in “The Wanderer”). The Exeter Book poet, however, departs from the *Daniel* version in two ways: first, he focalises the Song of the Three Youths mostly through Azarias’s voice alone, as neither Hananiah nor Mishael are mentioned by name until the very end of the song (153-54a), but merely implied in the use of *þry*, whereas the *Daniel* poet introduces their names much earlier. Second, the *Azarias* poet conceives his version as a fully finished rendering, so that he reworks the ending by omitting Nebuchadnezzar’s first intervention (cf. *Daniel*, 409-15) and focusing on his courtier.

Moreover, where *Daniel* goes on to elaborate on Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion after line 443, *Azarias* concludes with the three youths’ escape from the fire, thereby focusing only on the miracle itself rather than on its consequences. As such, *Azarias* stands as an independent narrative devoid

⁸ Cf. R. T. Farrell, ‘Some Remarks on the Exeter Book *Azarias*,’ *MÆ* 41 (1972), 1-8. The usual correspondence is *Daniel*, 279-365, where Azarias’s monologue ends. However, the parallel goes on through the three youths’ canticle and up to their facing Nebuchadnezzar.

of an explicit dramatic framework (no prologue precedes Azarias’s speech), much like *The Seafarer* or *The Wife’s Lament*. The *Azarias* poet also introduces several references to the psychological states of the speakers that do not appear in *Daniel*: Azarias is “wis in weorcum,” (“wise in deeds,” 4a), speaks “his modsefan | rehte þurh reorde (“his mind aloud in speech,” 49b-50a); and Nebuchadnezzar’s retainer is “eorl acolmod” (“a terrified nobleman,” 167a), and “gromhydig guma” (“a fierce-minded man,” 170a). Finally, a further elaboration on the *Azarias* poet’s part brings the poem closer to another of the Exeter Book lyrics:

Wis bið se þe con
ongytan þone geocend, þe use all good syleð
þe we habbað þenden we her beoð,
90 ond us milde meotod mare gehateð,
gif we geearniað, elne willað,
ðonne feran sceal þurh Frean hæse
sundor anra gehwæs sawl of lice.

(*Azarias*, 87b-93)

[Wise is he who is able to perceive in You the saviour, who gives us all the good that we have while we remain here, and the mild Creator promises us more, if we merit it, [if] we zealously will it, then we must depart at the Lord’s behest, [and] each soul be separated from the body.]

The opening of this passage, absent in *Daniel*, directly has affinities with the closing lines of *The Wanderer*, in which the hope is salvation and the reward of eternal life are stated:

Well bið þam þe him are seceð,
115 frofre to Fæder on heofonum þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð.

(*The Wanderer*, 114b-115)

[Well it is for him who seeks grace, consolation from the Father in the heavens, where for us all stability stands.]

The sapiential mode of the two passages, expressed in similar phraseology, establishes a stylistic bridge between *Azarias* and “The Wanderer,” which further reinforces the poet’s use of other elements that appear in several of the Exeter Book lyrics, and also elsewhere in the corpus, but are nonetheless absent in the *Daniel* version of the Cantic. These aspects bring *Azarias* closer to the aesthetic and thematic qualities of the Exeter Book lyrics than to the mode and style of Biblical narrative poetry, hence showing that the *Azarias* poet was aiming towards a rendering of the Cantic that moved away from a narrative context and focused on the miracle of the three youths through an act of faith in and praise of the Lord, expressed in dramatised form.⁹

Another illustrative example is *Pharaoh*, which can be said to relate to the Junius 11 *Exodus* in the same way *Azarias* relates to *Daniel*, or at the very least that all these texts are the result of the cultural recontextualisation of Biblical narratives. *Pharaoh* shares with *Exodus* the martial imagery and vocabulary used to portray the Egyptians, but is, at barely eight lines, one of the shortest Old English poems, unlike the lengthy narrative of Pharaoh’s prosecution of the Israelites:

“Saga me hwæt þær woruldes wære ealles
on Farones fyrde þa hy folc Godes
þurh feondscipe fylgan ongunnon.”

“Nat ic hit be wihte, butan ic wene þus:

5 þæt þær screoda wære gescyred rime
siex hundred godra searohæbbendra;
þæt eal fornam yþa færgripe
wraþe wyrde in woruldrice.”

⁹ Krapp and Dobbie so confirm, as they state that “As it stands in the Exeter Book, AZARIAS might well be a complete poem...And the Prayer and the Song may well have been the only original cause and purpose of the poem, which would then have been lyric rather than epic in intention;” *ASPR* 3, xxxiii.

[“Tell me what part of all the host in Pharaoh’s army was there when they began pursuing God’s people out of enmity.” “I do not know at all; but I believe thus: that six hundred chariots full of good warriors were there counted in number; [and] that the sudden grip of the waves took [them] all by a cruel fate in the worldly kingdom.]

In tone and phraseology, it resembles the sapiential *Solomon and Saturn* dialogues (cf. “Sæge me from ðam lande | ðær nænig fyra ne mæg fotum gesteppan,” “Tell me of that land where no man can set foot,” *Solomon and Saturn II*, 210b-11) and the Latin Dialogues used for instruction.¹⁰ However, within the Exeter Book, it may also be associated with the *saga hwæt ic hatte* formula present in some of the *Riddles*, many of which also use martial imagery (cf. *Riddle 5*, discussed in Chapter 3). It is impossible to ascertain what the purpose of *Pharaoh* was, but the “Nic ic hit be wihte” answer seems to point at a rhetorical question or unsolvable riddle rather than at a Dialogue-type construction, where some knowledge is to be gained from the answer. The poem, however, is akin in tone to the *ubi sunt* laments found elsewhere in Old English prose and verse, as it succinctly ponders on the military power of Pharaoh and how it was swept away all the same by a sudden change of fate. It is indeed surprising that Pharaoh’s defeat is here ascribed to fate, whereas in *Exodus* his fall is explicitly said to be the result of his opposition to God: “Se ðe sped ahte, | ageat gylp wera. Hie wið God wunnon” (“He who had success destroyed the vaunt of men. They struggled against God,” *Exodus*, 514b-15a). In this sense, *Pharaoh* might be deemed to recontextualise the fall of a prosperous political and military figure by a twist of fate within familiar cultural parameters, in the same way Brutus is associated with Weland in the same *ubi sunt* passage in *Meter 10*, or *caseras* (carrying Classical overtones) are mentioned alongside *cyningas* in *The Seafarer*.

Azarias and *Pharaoh*, like *The Phoenix*, witness to the particular interest of the Exeter Book compiler in putting together a collection of texts that best exemplify the familiarising quality of Old English verse. In so doing, he drew from a wide range of poetic forms, styles, and modes, in

¹⁰ Cf. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 2, 686.

order to provide a variety of received traditions brought together by the cohesiveness of conventional Old English poetic diction. In terms of their subject matter, thematic preoccupations, or cultural backgrounds, texts such as *The Phoenix*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Lord's Prayer I*, *The Wanderer*, *Pharaoh*, the *Guthlac* poems, or *The Rhyming Poem* have little to do with one another. Nonetheless, all these poems share a common element in their composition: they evidence the assimilative force of Old English verse, the agency of which homogenises the expression of transcultural themes through the accommodating property of the "aesthetics of the familiar," as an extension of the Old English experience of the world. Once the Exeter Book is approached not as a miscellaneous compilation of apparently unrelated texts of various natures, but as a coherent anthology of poetry based on the adaptation of received learning into the familiar expression of Old English verse, the unifying principle of the codex becomes clear.¹¹

¹¹ The question remains as to why the Exeter Book compiler chose to include the texts that appear in the manuscript over any other available options; what rationale underlies the catalogue of vernacular poetry. As I have shown, Old English compilers selected their themes and the texts to illustrate them carefully, following an explicitly planned design; hence, just as we assume that the texts in Junius 11 or Cotton A.xv were not haphazardly selected, we can expect that the Exeter Book answers to similar anthologising criteria. However, since the Exeter Book is constructed around a stylistic rather than thematic organising principle, the logic for the inclusion of the texts that make up the manuscript must be found outside the codex itself. As I mentioned in the introduction to the present chapter, familiarisation occurs across the Old English poetic corpus, so that the Exeter Book compiler must have considered that some poems served his purpose better than others following an extra-textual selection principle. Owing to the limitations of the present study, these matters cannot be addressed in full here. However, I intend to further develop the idea that the Exeter Book is a witness to both the rise of the vernacular as a language of learning in the aftermath of the reforms carried out under Alfred the Great, and to the multicultural and multilingual influence of the early medieval European traditions. in the West Saxon court under Æthelstan's reign and beyond.

Afterword – Nationalism and Old English

Literature: Then and Now

The intellectual and aesthetic flourishing that underlies the composition of much Old English poetry and its compilation into anthologies derived from continental models ultimately derives in its appropriation by nationalist reutilisation of cultural identity. Alfred's reinvigoration of the vernacular cannot be separated from his political agenda: the enlargement of the functional domain of Old English also entailed the necessity to standardise the language. By imposing the dominance of West Saxon over other dialects in the translations commissioned under his reign, Alfred imbued his linguistic reform with an assertion of his own political power, just as all literature composed thereafter came to be identified with West Saxon patronage. Old English as it has come down to us is, for the most, part, Alfred's own design of a unified and unifying language tailored to suit and legitimise his political reforms. His policy of translating the books "niedbeðearfosta...eallum monnum to witonne" ("most needful for man to know") relies on the creation of an "imagined community" of readers centred on the figure of the king as political ruler and as donor of learning, which was perpetuated by Æthelstan and the House of Wessex.¹

Moreover, the production of texts in the vernacular under royal commission involves a process of reception and transmission of knowledge, in which fundamental changes to the nature of the source occur in order to legitimise the new status of the result product. Hence, the alterations introduced in the Paris Psalter headings subtly present a specific image of royal power and wisdom, which legitimises Alfred's own position: his association with David as king-wiseman-poet "heightens the resonance between the psalm passages that emphasize teaching and [Alfred's] own description of his translation project: it is the wise king's duty to teach."²

¹ The phrase was first coined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso (1983).

² Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*, 124.

Alfred's programme of restoration of a golden age of learning and of *translatio studii et imperii* does not mean, however, that Old English literature is itself the product of a nationalistic endeavour seeking to assert cultural dominance over Continental Latin influences.

As I have attempted to show, Old English literature participates in a rhetorical strategy based on the force of the language as an agent for the recontextualisation and incorporation of received learning into familiar socio-cultural parameters. If anything, Old English poetry illustrates a strong sense of cultural identity expressed in highly conventional style, which is nonetheless adaptable and inclusive rather than rigid and invasive. However, we can find examples in which the language and aesthetics of Old English verse are used with nationalistic propagandistic aims. A well-known example is *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which distinctly portrays the House of Wessex, and Æthelstan in particular, as "an elite group as representative of the people who inhabit the island as a whole," so that the poem "works to create an image of an unbroken tradition of national and racial heroic glory extending from the early king...to the house of Alfred."³ Corroboration of the use of Old English poetic diction within a political agenda that seeks to associate the house of Alfred with learning and literature comes from the eulogistic Chronicle poems *The Death of Edgar* and *The Death of Edward*. Jennifer Neville has addressed some strategies of nationalistic rhetoric and also drawn attention to how in *The Death of Edward* "the term 'English'...seems to be both exclusive and inclusive," as the poem "shows a series of overlapping identities" and "begins by celebrating Edward as king of what seems to be a 'nation,' but goes on to celebrate Edward as an emperor over many peoples."⁴ *The Death of Edgar*, on the other hand, makes extensive use of the language of lament, as it mentions how Edgar "þis wace forlet, | lif þis læne" ("gave up this feeble, transitory life," 3b-4a),

³ Martin Irvine, 'Medieval Textuality and the Archaeology of Textual Culture,' in Frantzen (ed.), *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*. Albany: State University of NY Press (1991), 181-210, at 202; see also 207-08.

⁴ 'History, Poetry, and 'National' Identity in Anglo-Saxon England and the Carolingian Empire,' in Olsen, Harbus, and Hofstra, *Germanic Texts and Latin Models*, 107-26, at 125.

echoing “The Seafarer,” and moves on to describe the ealdorman Osric of Northumbria’s exile in similar terms:

And þa wearð eac adræfed deormod hæleð,
 25 Oslac, of earde ofer yða gewealc,
 ofer ganotes bæð; gamolfeax hæleð,
 wis and wordsnotor, ofer watera geðring,
 ofer hwæles eðel, hama bereafod.

(*The Death of Edgar*, 24-28)

[And then was Oslac, the brave man, banished from the land over the tossing of the waves, over the gannet’s bath; the grey-haired warrior, wise and shrewd in words, [travelled] over the throng of waters, over the whale’s domain, deprived of homeland.]

The phrase “ofer yða gewealc” appears in *Beowulf* 464a, as Hroþgar eulogises the deeds of Beowulf’s father (cf. 456-72), and in “The Seafarer” as “atol yða gewealc.” From a contextual point of view, its use in *The Death of Edgar* ties in thematically with the *Beowulf* passage. Also reminiscent of its use in *Beowulf* is “wis wordsnotor,” which echoes “wis wordcwida” as Hroþgar praises Beowulf’s wisdom (cf. 1845a). On the other hand, the formula *q* [*bereafod/bedæled/benoemed/bedroden*] appears in *Christ and Satan* (“wuldra benoemed, | duguðum bedæled” 120b-21a), “The Seafarer” (“winemagun bedroden,” 16), *Juliana* (“hroðra bedæled,” 390b), and within a similar rhetorical strategy in *The Death of Edward* (“lande bereafod,” 16b). The accumulation of *kennings* for the sea in four lines suggests a deliberately over-stylised composition that seeks to evoke the language of earlier verse as a rhetorical strategy in myth-making and implicit heroisation of specific political figures through associative poetic imagery.

The political/propagandistic utilisation of Old English poetic style and conventions, and the ultimately nationalistic purpose of Alfredian linguistic reform (in the broad sense of the term “nationalistic” as applied to

pre-modern communities⁵) is key to understand how these elements resonated eight centuries later with identity-defining Anglo-Saxonism and its quest for national origins. In the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century British imperialism, the celebration of the Alfred millenary thus takes on new significance. Particularly illustrating is the blatant Anglocentrism of Thomas Babington Macaulay, colonial officer on the Supreme Council of India between 1834 and 1838. Macaulay envisioned a barbaric India, which must be educated and civilised through the medium of the English language. In his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), Macaulay addressed the Act of Parliament of 1813 “for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India,” and concluded that a “learned native”⁶ must be one familiar not with the vernacular tradition but with English learning; “I have never found,” Macaulay concluded, “one among [the Orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”⁷ Macaulay compared English colonialism to a second Renaissance, where “what the Greek and Latin were...our tongue is to the people of India,” and stated the need to “do our best to form a class who may be...Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”⁸

Macaulay’s imperial Orientalism is ultimately a manifestation of Victorian Anglo-Saxonism at its highest expression: his proposal for an Education Reform differs little, in rhetoric and purpose, from Alfred’s politically charged reinvigoration of the vernacular. Both seek to bring the totality of British colonial territory under the linguistic and cultural domination of centralised power—to “unify” the territories and peoples under the King’s patronage, and the Empire under the Queen’s rule. As I showed in Chapter 1, identity-defining Anglo-Saxonism permeates early

⁵ See the Introduction to Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, and Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*. London: Penguin (1991), chapter 1, esp. 8-14.

⁶ Cited in Macaulay, *Speeches, with his “Minute on Indian Education,”* ed. G. M. Young. NY: AMS Press (1935), 345.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 351; 359.

“Anglo-Saxon Studies,” as in most cases scholars were also staunch partisans of imperialist and colonialist ideologies.

An extreme instance of the politisation of the past and of the term “Anglo-Saxon” in particular within a clearly racialised discourse is the extravagant rhetoric of Josiah Strong in *The New Era, or The Coming Kingdom* (1893). In this controversial work, Strong conflates the Social Gospel movement, of which he was a founding figure, with ideas of racial supremacy, thus arguing that “evidently it is to the Anglo-Saxon race that we must look for the evangelization of the world.”⁹ Strong carries this narrative of colonisation onto the field of culture and learning, stating that “the Anglo-Saxon, like the ancient Greek, has the rare power of propagating his civilization, which, together with his language, he is carrying around the world.”¹⁰ When Strong speaks of the language of “the Anglo-Saxon,” he is echoing ideas of genetic historical descent, and establishing a clear line of evolution from Old to Modern English. Strong culminates by bringing together concepts of racial ancestry with a posited linguistic and cultural legacy and a clearly imperialistic rhetoric as he asks “is it not reasonable to believe, then, that [the Anglo-Saxon] race is destined to dispossess many weaker ones, assimilate others, and mould the remained until...it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?”¹¹ Even if *The New Era* is taken as an extreme case, many of the concepts it portrays permeated the cultural, political, and historical discourse of late nineteenth-century America and England. In this context, it is crucial to consider how scholarly editions of Old English texts were being produced at the time, and how they are influenced by the same genetic understanding of history and racial ancestry.

A case in point is John M. Kemble, whose nationalist bias has already been mentioned in relation to his edition of *Beowulf*. His *History of the English Commonwealth* betrays further alignment with identity-defining Anglosaxonism, particularly in Kemble’s dedication “to the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty” of “this history of the principles which have given her

⁹ *The New Era, or The Coming Kingdom* (NY: Baker and Taylor, 1893), 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

Empire its preeminence among the nations of Europe...inscribed by the most humble and devoted of her servants.”¹² Kemble’s generation is pivotal in the early edition and publication of much of the Old English materials available to us today. However, these editions are not without clear political significance, and are rarely exempt of anachronistic readings that seek to legitimise British colonial power on historicist grounds.

To refer back to early editions of *Beowulf*, its appropriation as an English foundational epic immediately resulted in its placement at the core not only of the corpus of Old English poetry, but of early medieval English history and culture as a window through which early scholars envisioned an idealised myth of racial and ethnic descent. Post-Romantic narratives of the generational transmission of poetic genius confirmed the place of the anonymous *Beowulf*-poet at the head of a long line of English writers, from Chaucer through Milton and leading up to Tennyson. The invention of the Old English “elegy” is a by-product of the cultural appropriation of early medieval literary culture by the imperialist discourse. Insofar as the “elegies” reflect and expand the world of *Beowulf*, they are valuable witnesses to its centrality in the construction of English national identity; moreover, in their expression of subjective modes and affective appeal, the poems fall in line with another branch of Post-Romantic sensibilities: the Wordsworthian “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.” Consequently, they are also assimilated into the literary historicist discourse and placed in direct line of descent of a distinctly English poetic voice; that of Coleridge, Keats, Gray, and, above all, Tennyson—not coincidentally, the Queen’s favoured Poet Laureate. Victorian Anglo-Saxonism enacts a racialised re-imagination of the past constructed around the idea of the monarch as a political leader endowed with the legitimising agency of tradition and culture: a figure that incarnates the nation in its own racial, historical, and cultural legacy.

It is thus the responsibility of modern scholarship to break ties with the rhetoric of British imperialism, and to re-evaluate the place of Old

¹² *The Saxons in England*, dedicatory to Queen Victoria.

English literature in the light of recent political and social phenomena in which academia—and Medieval Studies in particular—plays an essential part. The de-colonisation of the discipline of “Anglo-Saxon Studies” starts by addressing the inadequacy of the use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” to begin with; not only because it is erroneous in application and inaccurate in scope, but because its use perpetuates the very racial mythmaking that identity-defining Anglo-Saxonism first promoted.¹³ The identification of the term with the narrative of English cultural and ethnic origins contains within itself an implied historical continuity running from Alfred’s reign to Elizabethan and Victorian imperialism, thereby sanctioning historicist readings of Old English literature.

The current standard conception of the corpus of Old English poetry also reflects the nationalist discourses that surround the discipline. Generations of scholars and students have perceived the literary production of the pre-Conquest period as fundamentally articulated around *Beowulf* as the axis and peak of poetic expression, followed by the “elegies.” However, as the present study has attempted to show, *Beowulf* represents only a small part of the various traditions it stems from: it problematises generic boundaries between epic and lyric modes, makes extensive use of traditional themes and motifs such as the language of lament or the discourse of emotion, and participates in the familiarisation tradition as it recontextualises Latin and vernacular sources (Biblical as well as continental Germanic). That all these elements appear across texts and genres, in various manuscripts containing verse and prose, should lead to questioning the extra-textual criteria for the evaluation of *Beowulf* as the central piece of Old English poetry. The same principle of textual and contextual re-evaluation applies for the generic categorisation of the Exeter

¹³ The invalidity of the term has been felt for some time. Shippey lamented that “it was a mistake for English historians to use the term “Anglo-Saxon” at all,” cf. ‘The Undeveloped Image: Anglo-Saxon in Popular Consciousness from Turner to Tolkien,’ in D. G. Scragg and C. Weinberg (eds.), *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: CUP (2000), 215-36, at 232. More recently, Niles suggested that “Anglo-Saxon,” like “Romano-British” or “Anglo-Norman,” “remain[s] of value as long as they help us to talk about the past in a manner based on rational distinctions,” and thus “we should feel free to discard them if they are felt to imprison us in habits of thoughts that have outlived their usefulness;” cf. *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, 35.

Book lyrics, and indeed of the entire corpus. To become a discipline that faithfully represents the multiculturalism (including multiethnicity and multilingualism), heterogeneity, and inclusiveness of its object of study, Old English literary studies must undergo a deep process of reform that acknowledges the cultural, historical, and material reality of Old English language and literature, and confront the racist, nationalist, and colonialist inheritance that shape and underlie the term “Anglo-Saxon” and the idea of “Anglo-Saxon Studies.”

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Supplement to Chapter 1

1.1 – Introduction : Institutional and Identity-Defining Anglo-Saxonism

1.1.A – From Edmund Gibson’s Translation of Camden’s *Britannia* (1722)

It is this Alliance which has made *Us* happy in your Majesty and your Royal Family, and which entitles *You* to the Love of every Subject, as a Prince of our own Blood; especially, when that Endearment of Blood is enforced by so much Graciousness of Temper and Disposition. But the ensuing Work points out a Relation between your Majesty and these Kingdoms, of a more Ancient Date. Not only our Histories, but our Language, our Laws, our Customs, our Names of Persons and Names of Places, do all abundantly testify, that the greatest part of your Majesty’s Subjects here are of SAXON Original. And if we enquire from whence our Saxon Ancestors came, we shall find, that is was from your Majesty’s Dominions in *Germany*, where their Brethren who staid behind, spread themselves through a noble and spacious Country, which still retains their Name. So that the main Body of your People in both Nations, are really descended from one and the same common Stock; and now, after a Disunion of so many Ages, they live again under the same common Parent.¹

¹ “*Britannia*,” or *A Chorographical Description of Great Britain and Ireland, together with the Adjacent Islands*,” Written in Latin by William Camden, Clarenceux, King at Arms; and Translated into English with Additions and Improvements. The Second Edition, Revised, Digested, and Published, with Large Additions (London: Mary Matthews, 1722), dedication to George I.

1.2 – The Cultural Contexts of Early “Anglo-Saxon” Literary Studies

1.2.1. – The Aesthetic Context: *Romantic, Sentimental, and Elegiac*

1.2.1.A – From Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäumfragmente* (1798)

116. Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennte Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen, und die Poesie mit der Philosophie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig, und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen, den Witz poetisieren, und die Formen der Kunst mit gediegnem Bildungsstoff jeder Art anfüllen und sättigen, und durch die Schwingungen des Humors beseelen. Sie umfasst alles, was nur poetisch ist, vom größten wieder mehre Systeme in sich enthaltenden Systeme der Kunst, bis zu dem Seufzer, dem Kuss, den das dichtende Kind aushaucht in kunstlosen Gesang. Sie kann sich so in das Dargestellte verlieren, dass man glauben möchte, poetische Individuen jeder Art zu charakterisieren, sei ihr Eins und Alles; und doch gibt es noch keine Form, die so dazu gemacht wäre, den Geist des Autors vollständig auszudrücken: so dass manche Künstler, die nur auch einen Roman schreiben wollten, von ungefähr sich selbst dargestellt haben. Nur sie kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden. Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allen realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen. Sie ist der höchsten und der allseitigsten hinein: indem sie jedem, was ein Ganzes in ihren Produkten sein soll, alle Teile ähnlich organisiert, wodurch ihr die Aussicht auf eine grenzenlos wachsende Klassizität eröffnet wird. Die romantische Poesie ist unter den Künsten was der Witz der Philosophie, und die Gesellschaft, Umgang, Freundschaft und Liebe im Leben ist. Andre Dichtarten sind fertig, und können nun vollständig zergliedert werden. Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, dass sie ewig

nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann. Sie kann durch keine Theorie erschöpft werden, und nur eine divinatorische Kritik dürfte es wagen, ihr Ideal charakterisieren zu wollen. Sie allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frei ist, und das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, dass die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide. Die romantische Dichtart ist die einzige, die mehr als Art, und gleichsam die Dichtkunst selbst ist: denn in einem gewissen Sinn ist oder soll alle Poesie romantisch sein.²

116. Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its mission is not merely to reunite all separate genres of poetry and to put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetorics [sic]. It will, and should, now mingle and now amalgamate poetry and prose, genius and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature, render poetry living and social, and life and society poetic, poetize wit, fill and saturate the forms of art with solid cultural material of every kind, and inspire them with vibrations of humor. It embraces everything poetic, from the greatest system of art which, in turn, includes many systems, down to the sigh, the kiss, which the musing child breathes forth in artless song. It can lose itself in what it represents to such a degree that one might think its one and only goal were the characterization of poetic individuals of every type; and yet no form has thus far arisen appropriate to expressing the author's mind so perfectly, so that artists who just wanted to write a novel have by coincidence described themselves. Romantic poetry alone can, like the epic, become a mirror of the entire surrounding world, a picture of its age. And yet, it too can soar, free from all real and ideal interests, on the wings of poetic reflection, midway between the work of the artist. It can even exponentiate this reflection and multiply it as in an endless series of mirrors. It is capable of the highest and the most universal education; not only by creating from within, but also from without, since it organizes in similar fashion all parts of what is destined to become a whole; thus, a view is opened to an endlessly developing classicism. Among the arts Romantic poetry is what wit is to philosophy, and what society, association, friendship, and love are in life. Other types of poetry are completed and can now be entirely analysed. The Romantic type of poetry is still becoming; indeed, its peculiar essence is that it is always becoming and that it can never be completed. It cannot be exhausted by any theory, and only a divinatoric criticism might dare to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, as it alone is free, and as its first law it recognizes that the arbitrariness of the poet endures no law above him. The Romantic genre of poetry is the only one which is more than a genre, and which is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be Romantic.³

² *Athenäumfragmente*, in *Friedrich Schlegel, 1794-1802: Seine proseischen Jugendschriften*, ed. J. Minor, 2 vols, (Vienna: Franz Leo & Comp., 1882), vol. 2: 'Zur deutschen Literatur und Philosophie,' 221-22.

³ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, ed. and trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), 140-41.

1.2.1.B – From Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800)

Was ist denn nun dieses Sentimentale? Das was uns anspricht, wo das Gefühl herrsch, und zwar nicht ein sinnliches, sondern das geistige. Die Quelle und Seele aller dieser Regungen ist die Liebe, und der Geist der Liebe muss in der romantischen Poesie überall unsichtbar sichtbar schweben. [...] Er lässt sich freundlich locken von sterblicher Schönheit und in sie verhüllen; und auch die Zauberworte der Poesie können von seiner Kraft durchdrungen und beseelt werden. Aber in dem Gedicht, wo er nicht überall ist, oder überall sein könnte, ist er gewiss gar nicht. Er ist ein unendliches Wesen und mitnichten haftet und klebt sein Interesse nur an den Personen, den Begebenheiten und Situationen und den individuellen Neigungen: für den wahren Dichter ist alles dieses, so innig es auch seine Seele umschließen mag, nur Hindeutung auf das Höhere, Unendliche, Hieroglyphe der Einen ewigen Liebe und der heiligen Lebensfülle der bildenden Natur.⁴

What then is this sentimental? It is that which appeals to us, where feeling prevails, and to be sure not in a sensual but a spiritual feeling. The source and soul of all these emotions is love, and the spirit of love must hover everywhere invisibly visible in romantic poetry. [...] It cannot be grasped forcibly and comprehended mechanically, but it can be lured by mortal beauty and veiled in it. The magic words of poetry can be infused with and inspired by its power. But in the poem in which it is not everywhere present nor could be everywhere, it certainly does not exist at all. It is an infinite being and by no means does it cling and attach its interest only to persons, events, situations, and individual inclinations; for the true poet all this—no matter how intensely it embraces his soul—is only a hint at something higher, the infinite, a hieroglyph of the one eternal love and the sacred fullness of life of creative nature.⁵

⁴ *Gespräch über die Poesie*, in *Friedrich Schlegel, 1794-1802: Seine proseischen Jugendschriften*, ed. J. Minor, 2 vols. (Vienna: Franz Leo & Comp., 1882), vol. 2: 'Zur deutschen Literatur und Philosophie,' 371.

⁵ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, ed. and trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), 99-100.

1.2.1.C – From Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), Section 1: On the Kinds of Poetry and Poets.

Was hätte auch eine unscheinbare Blume, eine Quelle, ein bemooster Stein, das Gezwitscher der Vögel, das Summen der Bienen usw. für sich selbst so Gefälliges für uns? Was könnte ihm gar einen Anspruch auf unsere Liebe geben? Es sind nicht diese Gegenstände, es ist eine durch sie dargestellte Idee, was wir in ihnen lieben. Wir lieben in ihnen das stille schaffende Leben, das ruhige Wirken aus sich selbst, das Dasein nach eignen Gesetzen, die innere Notwendigkeit, die ewige Einheit mit sich selbst.

Sie sind, was wir waren; sie sind, was wir wieder werden sollen. Wir waren Natur, wie sie, und unsere Kultur soll uns, auf dem Wege der Vernunft und der Freiheit, zur Natur zurückführen. Sie sind also zugleich Darstellung unserer verlorenen Kindheit, die uns ewig das Teuerste bleibt; daher sie uns mit einer gewissen Wehmut erfüllen. Zugleich sind sie Darstellungen unserer höchsten Vollendung im Ideale, daher sie uns in eine erhabene Rührung versetzen.⁶

For what could a modest stream, a flower, a mossy stone, the chirping of birds, the humming of bees, etc., possess in themselves so pleasing to us? What could give them a claim even upon our love? It is not these objects, it is an idea presented by them which we love in them. We love in them the tacitly creative life, the serene spontaneity of their activity, existence in accordance with their own laws, the inner necessity, the eternal unity with themselves.

They are what we were; they are what we should once again become. We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature. They are, therefore, not only the representation of our lost childhood, which eternally remains most dear to us, so that they fill us with a certain melancholy. But they are also representations of our highest fulfilment in the ideal, thus evoking a sublime tenderness.⁷

⁶ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, in *Schillers sämtliche Werke*, 12 vols. (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1800), vol. 12: Kleine Schriften vermischten Inhalts, 103.

⁷ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, trans. Julius A. Elias, in H. B. Nisbet (ed.), *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller and Goethe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 180-232, at 181; italics original.

Wir schreiben einem Menschen eine naive Gesinnung zu, wenn er in seinen Urtheilen von den Dingen ihre gekünstelten und gesuchten Verhältnisse übersieht und sich bloß an die einfache Natur hält. Alles, was innerhalb der gesunden Natur davon geurtheilt werden kann, fordern wir von ihm und erlassen ihm schlechterdings nur das, was eine Entfernung von der Natur, es sei nun im Denken oder im Empfinden, wenigstens Bekanntschaft derselben voraussetzt. [...]

Das Naive der Denkart kann daher niemals eine Eigenschaft verdorbener Menschen sein, sondern nur Kindern und kindlich gesinnten Menschen zukommen. Diese Letztern handeln und denken oft mitten unter den gekünstelten Verhältnissen, der großen Welt naiv; sie vergessen aus eigener schöner Menschlichkeit, dass sie es mit einer verderbten Welt zu tun haben, und betragen sich selbst an den Höfen der Könige mit einer Ingenuität und Unschuld, wie man sie nur einer Schäferwelt findet.⁸

We ascribe a naïve temperament to a person if he, in his judgement of things, overlooks their artificial and contrived aspects and heeds only their simple nature. We demand of him whatever can be judged about things within healthy nature, and absolutely ignore whatever presupposes any detachment from nature, whether due to thought or feeling or any knowledge thereof. [...]

The naïve mode of thought can therefore never be a characteristic of depraved men, rather it can be attributed only to children and those with a childlike temperament. The latter often act and think naively in the midst of the artificial circumstances of fashionable society; they forget in their own beautiful humanity that they have to do with a depraved world, and comport themselves even at the courts of kings with the same ingenuousness and innocence that one would find only in a pastoral society.⁹

Naiv muß jedes wahre Genie sein, oder es ist keines. Seine Naivität allein macht es zum Genie, und was es im Intellektuellen und Ästhetischen ist, kann es im Moralischen nicht verleugnen. Unbekannt mit den Regeln, den Krücken der Schwachheit und den Zuchtmeistern der Verkehrtheit, bloß von der Natur oder dem Instinkt, seinem schützenden Engel, geleitet, geht

⁸ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 108.

⁹ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 184.

es ruhig und sicher durch alle Schlingen des falschen Geschmacks, in welchen, wenn es nicht so klug ist, sie schon von weitem zu vermeiden, das Nichtgenie unausbleiblich verstrickt wird. [...]

Mit dieser naiven Anmut drückt das Genie seine erhabensten und tiefsten Gedanken aus; es sind Göttersprüche aus dem Mund eines Kindes.¹⁰

Every true genius must be naïve, or it is not genius. Only its naivety makes for its genius, and what it is intellectually and aesthetically it cannot disavow morally. Unacquainted with the rules, those crutches for weakness and taskmasters of awkwardness, led only by nature or instinct, its guardian angel, it goes calmly and surely through all the snares of false taste in which, if it is not shrewd enough to avoid them from afar, the nongenius [sic] must inevitably be entrapped. [...]

By its naïve grace genius expresses its most sublime and profound thought; the utterance of a god in the mouth of a child.¹¹

Wenn man sich der schönen Natur erinnert, welche die alten Griechen umgab; wenn man nachdenkt, wie vertraut dieses Volk unter seinem glücklichen Himmel mit der freien Natur leben konnte, wie sehr viel näher seine Vorstellungsart, seine Empfindungsweise, seine Sitten der einfältigen Natur lagen, und welche in treuer Abdruck derselben seine Dichterwerke sind, so muß die Bemerkung befremden, daß man so wenige Spuren von dem sentimentalischen Interesse, mit welchem wir Neuern an Naturscenen und an Naturcharakteren hängen können, bei demselben antrifft. [...]

Daher kommt es, weil die Natur bei uns aus der Menschheit verschwunden ist und wir sie nur außerhalb dieser, in der unbeseelten Welt, in ihrer Wahrheit wieder antreffen. Nicht unserer größere Naturmäßigkeit, ganz im Gegenteil die Naturwidrigkeit unserer Verhältnisse, Zustände und Sitten treibt uns an, dem erwachenden Triebe nach Wahrheit und Simplizität, der, wie die moralische Anlage, aus welcher er fließet, unbestechlich und unaustilgbar in allen menschlichen Herzen liegt, in der physischen Welt eine Befriedigung zu verschaffen, die in der moralischen

¹⁰ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 110-11.

¹¹ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 186-87.

nicht zu hoffen ist. Deßwegen ist das Gefühl, womit wir an der Natur hangen, dem Gefühle so verwandt, womit wir das entflohene Alter der Kindheit und der kindischen Unschuld beklagen. [...]

Das Gefühl, von dem hier die Rede ist, ist also nicht das, was die Alten hatten; es ist vielmehr einerlei mit demjenigen, welches wir für die Alten haben. Sie empfanden natürlich; wir empfinden das Natürliche. [...] Unser Gefühl für Natur gleicht der Empfindung des Kranken für die Gesundheit.¹²

If one recalls the beautiful nature that surrounded the Greeks; if one ponders how familiarly this people could live with free nature beneath their fortunate skies, how very much closer their outlook, their manner of perception, their morals, were to simple nature, and what a faithful copy of this their poetry is, then the observation must be displeasing that one finds so little trace among them of the *sentimental* interest with which we moderns are attached to the scenes and characters of nature. [...]

It is *because* nature in us has disappeared from humanity and we rediscover her in her truth only outside it, in the inanimate world. Not our greater *accord with nature*, but quite the contrary, the *unnaturalness* of our situation, condition, and manners forces us to procure a satisfaction in the physical world (since none is to be hoped in the moral) for the incipient impulse for truth and simplicity which, like the moral tendency whence it derives, lies incorruptible and inalienable in every human heart. For this reason the feeling by which we are attached to nature is so closely related to the feeling by which we mourn the lost age of childhood and childlike innocence. [...]

The feeling of which we here speak is therefore not that which the ancient possessed; it is rather identical with that which we have for the ancients. They felt naturally; we feel the natural. [...] Our feeling for nature is like the feeling of an invalid for health.¹³

Der Dichter sind überall, schon ihrem Begriffe nach, die Bewahrer der Natur. [...] Sie werden also entweder die Natur sein, oder sie werden die verlorene suchen. Daraus entspringen zwei ganz verschiedene Dichtungswesen, durch welche das ganze Gebiet der Poesie erschöpft und ausgemessen wird. Alle Dichter, die es wirklich sind, werden, je nachdem

¹² *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 114-16.

¹³ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 189-90, italics original.

die Zeit beschaffen ist, in der sie blühen, oder zufällige Umstände auf ihre allgemeine Bildung und auf ihre vorübergehende Gemüthsstimmung Einfluß haben, entweder zu den naiven oder zu den sentimentalische gehören. [...]

Der Dichter, sagte ich, ist entweder Natur, oder er wird sie suchen, Jenes macht den naiven, dieses den sentimentalischen Dichter.¹⁴

The poets are everywhere, by their very definition, the *guardians* of nature. [...] They will either *be* nature, or they will *seek* lost nature. From this arise two entirely different modes of poetry which, between them, exhaust and divide the whole range of poetry. All poets who are truly so belong, according to the temper of the times in which they flourish, or according upon the general education or passing states of mind by fortuitous circumstances, either to the *naïve* or to the *sentimental* poets. [...]

The poet, I said, either *is* nature or he will *seek* her. The former is the naïve, the latter the sentimental poet.¹⁵

Da der naive Dichter bloß der einfachen Natur und Empfindung folgt und sich bloß auf Nachahmungen der Wirklichkeit beschränkt, so kann er zu seinem Gegenstand auch nur ein einziges Verhältnis haben, und es gibt, in dieser Rücksicht, für ihn keine Wahl der Behandlung. Der verschiedene Eindruck naiver Dichtung beruht (vorausgesetzt, daß man alles hinwegdenkt, was daran dem Inhalt gehört, und jenen Eindruck nur als das reine Werk der poetischen Behandlung betrachtet), beruht; sage ich, bloß auf dem verschiedenen Grad einer und derselben Empfindungsweise; selbst die Verschiedenheit in den äußeren Formen kann in der Qualität jenes ästhetischen Eindrucks keine Veränderung machen. Die Form sei lyrisch oder episch, dramatisch oder beschreibend; wir können wohl schwächer und stärker, aber (sobald von dem Stoff abstrahiert wird) nie verschiedenartig gerührt werden. Unser Gefühl ist durchgängig dasselbe, ganz aus einem Element, so daß wir nichts darin zu unterscheiden vermögen. Selbst der Unterschied der Sprachen und Zeitalter ändert hier nichts, denn eben diese

¹⁴ *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 116-7; 119.

¹⁵ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 191; 193, italics original.

Einheit ihres Ursprungs und ihres Effekts ist ein Charakter der naiven Dichtung.

Ganz anders verhält es sich mit dem sentimentalischen Dichter. Dieser reflektiert über den Eindruck, den die Gegenstände auf ihn machen, und nur auf jene Reflexion ist die Rührung gegründet, in die er selbst versetzt wird und uns versetzt. Der Gegenstand wird hier auf eine Idee bezogen, und nur auf dieser Beziehung beruht seine dichterische Kraft. Der sentimentalische Dichter hat es daher immer mit zwei streitenden Vorstellungen und Empfindungen, mit der Wirklichkeit als Grenze und mit seiner Idee als dem Unendlichen zu tun, und das gemischte Gefühl, das er erregt, wird immer von dieser doppelten Quelle zeugen. Da also hier eine Mehrheit der Prinzipien stattfindet, so kommt es darauf an, welches von beiden in der Empfindung des Dichters und in seiner Darstellung überwiegen wird, und es ist folglich eine Verschiedenheit in der Behandlung möglich. Denn nun entsteht die Frage, ob er mehr bei der Wirklichkeit, ob er mehr bei dem Ideale verweilen – ob er jene als einen Gegenstand der Abneigung, ob er diese als einen Gegenstand der Zuneigung ausführen will. Seine Darstellung wird also entweder satirisch, oder sie wird...elegisch sein; an eine von diesen beiden Empfindungsarten wird jeder sentimentalische Dichter sich halten.¹⁶

Since the naïve poet only follows simple nature and feeling, and limits himself solely to imitation of actuality, he can have only a single relationship to his subject and in *this* respect there is for him no choice in its treatment. The varied impression of naïve poetry depends...solely upon the various degrees of one and the same mode of feeling; even the variety of external forms cannot effect any alteration in the quality of that aesthetic impression. The form may be lyric or epic, dramatic or narrative: we can indeed be moved to a weaker or stronger degree, but (as soon as the matter is abstracted) never heterogeneously. Our feeling is uniformly the same, entirely composed of *one* element, so we cannot differentiate within it. Even the difference of language and era changes nothing in this regard, for just this pure unity of its origin and of its effect is a characteristic of naïve poetry.

The case is quite the contrary with the sentimental poet. He *reflects* upon the impression that objects make upon him, and only that reflection is the emotion grounded

¹⁶ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 123-24.

which he himself experiences and which he excites in us. The object here is referred to an idea and his poetic power is based solely upon this referral. The sentimental poet is thus always involved with two conflicting representations and perceptions – with actuality as a limit and with his idea as infinitude. Since in this case there is a plurality of principles it depends which of the two will *predominate* in the perception of the poet and in his representation, and hence a variation in treatment is possible. For now the question arises whether he will tend more toward actuality or toward the ideal – whether he will realise the former as an object of antipathy or the latter as an object of sympathy. His presentation will, therefore, be either *satirical* or it will be...*elegiac*; every sentimental poet will adhere to one of these two modes of perception.¹⁷

1.2.1.C – From Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), Section 2: On the Genres of Sentimental Poetry.

Setzt der Dichter die Natur der Kunst und das Ideal der Wirklichkeit so entgegen, daß die Darstellung der ersten überwiegt und das Wohlgefallen an demselben herrschende Empfindung wird, so nenne ich ihn elegisch. [...] Entweder ist die Natur und das Ideal ein Gegenstand der Trauer, wenn jene als verloren, dieses als unerreicht dargestellt wird. Oder beide sind ein Gegenstand der Freude, indem sie als wirklich vorgestellt werden. Das erste gibt die Elegie in engerer, das andere die Idylle in weitester Bedeutung. [...]

Der elegische Dichter sucht die Natur, aber in ihrer Schönheit, nicht bloß in ihrer Annehmlichkeit, in ihrer Übereinstimmung mit Ideen, nicht bloß in ihrer Nachgiebigkeit gegen das Bedürfnis. Die Trauer über verlorene Freuden, über das aus der Welt verschwundene goldene Alter, über das entflohenen Glück der Jugend, der Liebe u.s.w. kann nur alsdann der Stoff zu einer elegischen Dichtung werden, wenn jene Zustände sinnlichen Friedens zugleich als Gegenstände moralischer Harmonie sich vorstellen lassen. [...]

Der Inhalt der dichterischen Klage kann also niemals ein äußerer, jederzeit nur ein innerer idealischer Gegenstand sein; selbst wenn sie einen Verlust in der Wirklichkeit betrauert, muß sie ihn erst zu einem idealischen umschaffen. [...] Der elegische Dichter sucht die Natur, aber als eine Idee

¹⁷ *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, 195-96, italics original.

und in einer Vollkommenheit, in der sie nie existiert hat, wenn er sich gleich als etwas Dagewesenes und nun Verlorenes beweint.¹⁸

If the poet should set nature and art, the ideal and actuality, in such opposition that the representation of the first prevails and pleasure in it becomes the dominant feeling, then I call him *elegiac*. [...] Either nature and the ideal are an object of sadness if the first is treated as lost and the second as unattained, or both are an object of joy represented as actual the first yields the *elegy* in the narrower sense, and the second the idyll in the broader sense. [...]

The elegiac poet seeks nature, but in her beauty, not merely in her pleasantness, in her correspondence with ideas, not just in her acquiescence in necessity. Sadness at lost joys, at the golden age now disappeared from the world, at the lost happiness of youth, love, and so forth, can only become the material of an elegiac poem if those states of sensuous satisfaction can also be constructed as objects of moral harmony. [...]

The content of poetic lamentation can therefore never be an external object, it must always be only an ideal, inner one; even if it grieves over some loss in actuality, it must be transfigured into an ideal loss. [...] The elegiac poet seeks nature, but as an idea and in a perfection in which she has never existed, even if he bemoans her as something having existed and now lost.¹⁹

Daß ich die Benennungen Satire, Elegie und Idylle in einem weitem Sinne gebrauche, als gewöhnlich geschieht, werde ich bei Lesern, die tiefer in die Sache dringen, kaum zu verantworten brauchen. [...] [I]ch sehe bloß auf die in diesen Dichtungsarten herrschende Empfindungsweise, und es ist ja bekannt genug, daß diese sich keineswegs welche ausschließlich so genannt wird; auch der dramatische und epische Dichter können uns auf elegische Weise bewegen. [...] Schließlich bemerke ich noch, daß die hier versuchte Einteilung, eben deswegen, weil sie sich bloß auf den Unterschied in der Empfindungsweise gründet, in der Einteilung der Gedichte selbst und der Ableitung der poetischen Arten ganz und gar nichts bestimmen soll; denn da der Dichter, auch in demselben Werke, keineswegs an dieselbe

¹⁸ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 129-30.

¹⁹ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 200-01, italics original.

Empfindungsweise gebunden ist, so kann jene Einteilung nicht davon, sondern muß von der Form der Darstellung hergenommen werden.²⁰

That I employ the terms satire, elegy, and idyll in a wider sense than is customary, I will hardly need to explain to readers who will penetrate deeper into the matter. [...] I look merely at the *mode of perception* predominant in these poetic categories, and it is sufficiently well known that this cannot be accommodated at will within those narrow limits. We are not moved elegiacally solely by the elegy which is exclusively so called: the dramatic and epic poets can also move us in the elegiac manner. [...] Finally, I would still observe that the division attempted here, for the very reason that it is simply based on the distinction of mode of perception, should by no means whatever determine the division of poetry itself nor the derivation of poetic genres; since the poet is in no way bound, even in a single work, to the same mode of perception, that division therefore cannot be based upon it, but must be taken from the form of the presentation.²¹

1.2.1.C – From Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795): section 3: On Macpherson's *Ossian*.

Wenn uns Ossian von den Tagen erzählt, die nicht mehr sind, und von den Helden, die verschwunden sind, so hat seine Dichtungskraft jene Bilder der Erinnerung längst im Ideale, jene Helden in Götter umgestaltet. Vergänglichkeit erweitert, und der gerührte Barde, den das Bild des allgegenwärtigen Ruins verfolgt, schwingt sich zum Himmel auf, um dort in dem Sonnenlauf ein Sinnbild des Unvergänglichen zu finden.²²

When Ossian tells of the days which are no more, and of the heroes who have disappeared, his poetic power has long since transformed those images of recollection into ideals, and the heroes into gods. The experience of a particular loss has been broadened into the idea of universal evanescence and the bard, affected and pursued by the image of omnipresent ruin, elevates himself to find there, in the cycle of the sun, an image of the immutable.²³

Indessen klagt auch schon Ossian über einen Verfall der Menschheit, und so klein auch bei seinem Volke der Kreis der Kultur und ihrer

²⁰ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 129-30, n.1.

²¹ *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, 292-93, "k." Schiller's own note on the text.

²² *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 130-31.

²³ *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, 201.

Verderbnisse war, so war die Ersahrung davon doch gerade lebhaft und eindringlich genug, um den gefühlvollen moralischen Sänger zu dem Leblosen zurückzuscheuchen und über seine Gesänge jenen elegischen Ton auszugießen, der sie für uns so rührend und anziehend macht.²⁴

Yet even Ossian complains of a decline in humanity and, as small among his people as the extent of civilisation and its perversions was, yet the awareness of it was still lively and penetrating enough to drive the emotion-laden moral poet back to the inanimate and to pour out in his songs that elegiac tone that makes them so moving and attractive to us.²⁵

1.2.2. – The Literary Context: Macpherson, Percy, and the Romantic Ideal

1.2.2.A – From Paul H. Mallet, *Monumens de la mythologie* (1756)

Je ne sais si dans cette multitude d’objets si variés & si frappans que l’histoire semble offrir à la réflexion, il en est de plus digne de nous occuper que les diverses religions qui ont paru avec éclat dans le monde.

C’est sur cette Scène, si j’ose ainsi parler, que les hommes sont véritablement représentés tels qu’ils sont, c’est là qu’ils se caractérisent par les traits les plus expressifs, c’est là qu’ils déploient tout ce qu’ils ont de foiblesses, de passions, de besoins dans le cœur, de ressources, de talents & d’imperfections dans l’esprit.²⁶

I do not know whether in this multitudes of objects so varied and so striking of which history seems to invite to meditate upon, there is any worthier of our attention than the diverse religions that have appeared with distinction across the world.

It is on this Scene, if I dare speak thus, that men are more faithfully represented such as they are, it is here that they are portrayed in their most expressive aspects, it is here that they display every weakness, passion, urges of the heart, resources, talents, and imperfections of the spirit.

²⁴ *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 115, n.1.

²⁵ *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 291, “f.” Schiller’s own note on the text.

²⁶ *Monuments de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves: pour servir de supplément et de preuves à L’introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc* (Copenhagen: Claude Philbert, 1756), 3.

La Religion met de si grands ressorts en mouvement, elle fait parler de si pressans intérêts, que si elle n'est pas née, assortie au génie de la nation qui la suit, elle lui donnera un caractère analogue au sien; il faut qu'une de ces deux forces triomphant de l'autre, l'unisse à soi pur en être augmentée: Ce sont deux fleuves qui, mêlés, forment un courant commun plus rapide qui entraîne tout avec soi. [...]

C'est cette Religion Celtique que les Européens peuvent appeller avec fondement la Religion de leurs peres... C'est cette religion qu'ils suivroient apparemment encore, s'ils eussent toujours été laissés à eux mêmes & à leurs ténèbres: C'est cette religion que comportent, qu'inspirent, si j'ose ainsi parler, notre climat, notre naturel, nos besoins; car qui peut nier que dans les fausses religions il n'y ait mille choses relatives à ces différens objets?²⁷

Religion sets such great wheels in motion, it excites talking of so many interests, that if it is not born, overcome by the genius of the nation which comes after it, it will give it a character alike to its own; one of these two forces must triumph over the other, to incorporate it onto itself, [and] grow in so doing. They are two rivers which, [when] they merge, they form a faster common stream that drags everything into itself. [...]

It is this Celtic Religion that Europeans may rightfully call the Religion of their forefathers... It is this religion that they would apparently still follow, had they themselves always been left in the dark: This is the religion that supports, that inspires, if I may so say, our climate, our nature, our desires: for who can deny that in religion itself there are a thousand things concerning these different elements?

Que les Savants appellent cette Religion, en France Gauloise, en Angleterre Britannique, en Allemagne Germanique &c., il importe peu. On avoue aujourd'hui partout, qu'elle étoit la même dans tous ces pays, du moins quant aux dogmes fondamentaux. Comme je la considère toujours ici par ce qu'elle avoit de général, j'emploie le terme de *Celtique*, comme le plus universel, sans prétendre entrer dans toutes les disputes auxquelles ce

²⁷ Ibid., 4; 6. By "Religion," Mallet here is referring to pre-Christian paganism, as confirmed in the second excerpt.

mot a donné lieu, & qui ne viennent, je pense, que de ce qu'on ne s'entend pas.²⁸

That Scholars call this Religion, Gaulish in France, British in England, Germanic in Germany, etc., matters little. As of today, it has been everywhere acknowledged that it was the same in every region, at least in its fundamental dogmas. As I always consider it here in general terms, I use the term *Celtic* as the most universal, without seeking to go into all the arguments to which this word has given rise to, and which come, I think, only from what we do not understand.

Une génération imite celle qui l'a précédée: Les fils héritent des sentiments de leurs peres, & quelque changement que le tems y puisse apporter, il y a toujours dans les mœurs d'une nation bien des choses qui tiennent aux opinions de ses fondateurs. Ces fondateurs de nos nations sont les Celtes, & la suite de cet ouvrage montrera peut-être, que leurs opinions, quoique oubliées subsistent toujours dans quelques-uns des effets qu'elles ont produits. Ne seroit-ce point ainsi, par exemple, que l'admiration pour le métier des armes auroit été poussée parmi nous jusqu'au fanatisme, & que pendant des siècles entiers les Européens fous par système & féroces par point d'honneur se seroient battus avec tant de zèle, sans autre vûe que de se battre?²⁹

A generation imitates the one that precedes it: Sons inherit their fathers' feelings, and whatever change time may bring, there always remains in the traditions of a nation plenty of things that are owed to the disposition of their founders. The founders of our nations are the Celts, and the result of this origin may well be that their inclinations, though forgotten, still remain in some of the legacy they produced. For would it not be for this reason, for example, that the admiration for the profession of arms would have been instilled in us to the point of fanaticism, and that for whole centuries the Europeans, mad by inclination, and ferocious for their honour, strove with so much zeal, with nothing in view but fighting?

²⁸ Ibid., 6, note to use of the word "Celtique."

²⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

1.2.2.B – From James Macpherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760).

VIII

By the side of a rock on the hill, beneath the aged trees, old Oscian sat on the moss; the last of the race of Fingal. Sightless are his aged eyes; his beard is waving in the wind. Dull through the leafless trees he heard the voice of the north. Sorrow revived in his soul: he began and lamented the dead.

How hast thou fallen like an oak with all thy branches round thee! Where is Fingal the king? where is Oscar my son? where are all my race? Alas! in the earth they lie. I feel their tombs with my hand. I hear the river below murmuring hoarsely over the stones. What dost thou, O river, to me? Thou bringest back the memory of the past.³⁰

X

It is night, and I am alone, forlorn on the hill of storms. The wind is heard in the mountain. The torrent shrieks down the rock. No hut receives me from the rain; forlorn on the hill of the winds.

Rise, moon! from behind thy clouds; stars of the night, appear! Lead me, some light, to the place where my love rests from the toil of the chase [sic]! his bow near me, unstrung; his dogs panting around him. But here I must sit alone, by the rock of the mossy stream. The stream and the wind roar; nor can I hear the voice of my love.

Why delayeth my Shalgar, why the son of the hill, his promise? Here is the rock, and the tree; and here the roaring stream. Thou promisedst with night to be here. Ah! wither is my Shalgar gone? With thee I would fly my father; with thee, my brother of pride. Our race have long been foes; but we are not foes, O Shalgar! [...]

³⁰ *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gallic or Erse Language*. Edinburgh: G. Hamilton and J. Balfour (1760), 37.

I sit in my grief. I wait for morning in my tears. Rear the tomb, ye friends of the dead; but close it not till I come. My life flieth away like a dream: why should I stay behind? Here I shall rest with my friends by the stream of the sounding rock. When night comes on the hill, when the wind is upon the heath; my ghost shall stand in the wind, and mourn the death of my friends....³¹

1.2.2.C – From the “Dissertation on the Antiquity of the Poems of Ossian” (1765).

Inquiries into the antiquities of nations afford more pleasure than any real advantage to mankind. The ingenious may form systems of history on probabilities and a few facts; but at a great distance of time, their accounts must be vague and uncertain. [...] The actions of former times are left in obscurity, or magnified by uncertain traditions. Hence it is that we find so much of the marvellous in the origin of every nation; posterity being always ready to believe any thing, however fabulous, that reflects honour on their ancestors.³²

When virtue in peace, and bravery in war, are the chief characteristics of a nation, their actions become interesting, and their fame worthy of immortality. A generous spirit is warmed with noble actions, and becomes ambitious of perpetuating them. This is the source of that divine inspiration, to which the poets of all ages pretended. [...] It is to this vanity that we owe the preservation of what remains of the works of Ossian. His poetical merit made his heroes famous in a country where heroism was much esteemed and admired. The prosperity of these heroes, or those who pretended to be descended from them, heard with pleasure the eulogiums of their ancestors; bards were employed to repeat the poems, and to record the connection of their patrons with chiefs so renowned. Every chief in process

³¹ Ibid., 46-49.

³² *The Works of Ossian, the Son of Fingal, in two volumes, translated from the Galic Language by James Macpherson*. London: T. Beckett and P. A. Demondt (1765), ii-iii.

of time had a bard in his family, and the office became at last hereditary. By the succession of these bards, the poems concerning the ancestors of the family were handed down from generation to generation [...] This noble custom came down near to our own times; and after the bards were discontinued, a great number in a clan retained by memory, or committed to writing, their compositions, and founded the antiquity of their families on the authority of their poems. [...]

The actions of great men, and the eulogiums of kings and heroes, were preserved in this manner. All the historical monuments of the old Germans were comprehended in their ancient songs; which were either hymns to their gods, or elegies in praise of their heroes, and were intended to perpetuate the great events in their nation which were carefully interwoven with them.³³

1.2.2.D – From Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765)

The Minstrels seems to have been the genuine successors of the ancient Bards, who, under different names, were admired and revered, from the earliest ages...by almost all the first inhabitants of Europe...but by none more than by our own Teutonic ancestors. [...]

As these honours were paid to Poetry and Song, from the earliest times, in those countries which our Anglo-Saxon ancestors inhabited before their removal to Britain, we may reasonably conclude, that they would not lay aside all their regard for men of this sort immediately on quitting the German forests. [...] And though, as their art declines, many of them only recited the compositions of others, some of them still composed songs themselves, and all of them could probably invent a few stanzas on occasion. I have no doubt but most of the old heroic ballads in this collection were composed by this order of men; for although some of the longer metrical romances might come from the pen of the monks or others,

³³ Ibid., xvi-xii; xviii-xix.

yet the smaller narratives were probably composed by the minstrels who sang them.³⁴

1.2.2.E – From John Aikin, “Essay on Ballads and Pastoral Songs” (1772)

The Ballad may be considered as the native species of Poetry of this country. It very exactly answers the idea formerly given of original Poetry, being the rude uncultivated verse in which the popular tale of the times was recorded. As our ancestors partook of the fierce warlike character of the northern nations, the subjects of their Poetry would chiefly consist of the martial exploits of their heroes, and the military events of national history, deeply tinged with that passion for the marvellous, and that superstitious credulity, which always attend a state of ignorance and barbarism. Many of the ancient Ballads have been transmitted to the present times, and in them the character of the nation displays itself in striking colours. The boastful history of her victories, the prowess of her favourite kings and captains, and the wonderful adventures of the legendary saint and knight errant, are the topics of the rough rhyme and unadorned narration which was ever the delight of the vulgar, and is now an object of curiosity to the antiquarian man of taste. [I]t is not my design to collect pieces of this sort, which is already done in a very elegant manner by Dr Percy, in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* [...].³⁵

1.2.2.F – From Vicesimus Knox, “On the Prevailing Taste for Old English Poets” (1782)

The popular ballad composed by some illiterate minstrel, and which has been handed down by tradition for several centuries, is rescued from the hands of the vulgar, to obtain a place in the collection of the man of taste.

³⁴ ‘An Essay on the Ancient Minstrels,’ in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets; together with some few of later date, in Three Volumes*. (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1886, 3d ed.), vol. 1, xxi-xxiii.

³⁵ In *Essays on Song-Writing; with a Collection of such English Songs as are most Eminent for Poetical Merit* (London: W. Bulmer and CO. Cleveland Row, 1810), 23-24.

Verses which, a few years past, were thought worthy of the attention of children only, or of the lowest and rudest orders, are now admired for that artless simplicity, which once obtained the name of coarseness and vulgarity.

[...] Every lover of poetry is pleased with the judicious selection of Percy, though he gives himself little concern about dates. The antiquary may perhaps admire the oldest and the worst piece in the collection, only because it is old. The common reader, however, does often partake with the antiquarian in the pleasure resulting from labour bestowed in researches after poetry, though he has no adequate idea of the supreme felicity of finding an Otho, or of possessing a worthless old song.

The mere antiquarian taste in poetry, or the admiration of *bad* poetry solely because it is ancient, is certainly absurd. [...]

In perusing the antiquated pages of our English bards, we sometimes find a passage which has comparative merit, and which shines with a greater lustre, because it is surrounded with deformity. While we consider the rude state of literature, the want of models, the depraved taste of readers, we are struck with the least appearance of beauty. We are flattered with an idea of our own penetration, in discovering excellencies which have escaped the notice of the world. We take up the volume with a previous determination to prove that it contains valuable matter. We are unwilling that our pains should be unrewarded. We select a few lines from a long work, and by little critical refinement, prove that they are wonderfully excellent. [...]

Rowe has said that the old English bards and minstrels soared many a height above their followers; and it is true, that those old bards, which are in the mouths of peasants on both sides of the Tweed, have something in them irresistibly captivating. Vulgar, coarse, inelegant, they yet touch the heart. Many of them, when read as the writers intended, are musical. They have pleased the ear and the mind of a whole people, and therefore, in spite of the cold feelings of the critic, must be pronounced beautiful. [...]

Notwithstanding the incontrovertible merit of many of our ancient relics of poetry, I believe it may be doubted, whether any one of

them would be tolerated as the production of a modern poet. As a good imitation of the ancient manner, it would find its admirers; but, considered independently as an original, it would be thought a careless, vulgar, inartificial composition. [...]

That a work should loose [*sic*] its value in the eyes of the antiquary, when it is found to wear only a counterfeited rust, is not wonderful...though at the same time it is true, that most men have so much of the antiquarian spirit, as to feel an additional pleasure when excellence is united with antiquity. By an effort of imagination, we place ourselves in the age of the author, and call up a thousand collateral ideas, which give beauties to his work not naturally inherent.

Whether the antiquarian taste in poetry is reasonable or unreasonable, it affords an elegant and a pleading amusement to those who possess it.³⁶

1.2.2.G – From Francis J. Child, “Ballad Poetry” (1900)

The word *ballad* in English signifies a narrative song, a short tale in lyric verse, which sense it has come to have, probably through the English, in some other languages. [...] The *popular* ballad, for which our language has no unequivocal name, is a distinct and very important species of poetry. Its historical and natural place is anterior to the appearance of the poetry of art, to which it has formed a step, and by which it has been regularly displaced, and, in some cases, all but extinguished. Whenever a people in the course of its development reaches a certain intellectual and moral stage, it will feel an impulse to express itself, and the form of expression to which it is first impelled is, as is well known, not prose, but verse, and in fact narrative verse. The condition of society in which a truly national or popular poetry appears explains the character of such poetry. It is a condition in which the people are not divided by political organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes, in which consequently there is such community of

³⁶ In *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2 vols. (NY: T. Allen, 1793), vol. 1, XLVII, 206-10.

ideas and feelings that the whole people form an individual. Such poetry, accordingly, while it is in its essence an expression of our common human nature, and so of universal and indestructible interest, will in each case be differentiated by circumstances and idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, it will always be an expression of the mind and heart of the people as an individual, and never of the personality of individual men. The fundamental characteristic of popular ballads is therefore the absence of subjectivity and self-consciousness. [...]

The primitive ballad, then, is popular, not in the sense of something arising from and suited to the lower orders of a people. As yet, no sharp distinction of high and low exists, in respect to knowledge, desires, and tastes. [...] But whatever may be the estimation in which it may be held by particular classes or at particular epochs, it can not lose its value. Being founded on what is permanent and universal in the heart of man, and now by printing put beyond the danger of perishing, it will survive the fluctuations of taste, and may from time to time serve, as it notoriously did in England and Germany a hundred years ago, to recall a literature from false and artificial courses to nature and truth.³⁷

1.2.3. – The Philological-Philosophical Context: Historicism and the *Volksgeist*

1.2.3.A. – From Giambattista Vico, *Scienza Nuova* (1744 edition)

LIBRO PRIMO: LO STABELIMENTO DE' PRINCIPI

XVIII. *Lingua di Nazione Antica*, che si è conservata *regnante*; finchè pervenne al suo *compimento*, dev'esser' un gran *testimone de' costumi de' primi tempi del Mondo*.

Questa Dignità ne assicura, che le *pruove filologiche del Diritto natural delle Genti*, del quale senza contrasto *sapientissima* sopra tutte l'

³⁷ 'Ballad poetry,' in *Johnson's New Universal Cyclopædia: a Scientific and Popular Treasury of Knowledge, illustrated with maps, plans, and engravings*, ed. Frederick A. Barnard *et al.*, vol. 1, part I: 'A-Cavalier' (NY: A. J. Johnson & Co., 1831), 365-68, at 365.

altre del Mondo su la *Romana*, tratte da' *parlai latini* sieno *gravissime*. Per la stessa ragione potranno far' il medesimo i *Dotti della Lingua Tedesca*, che ritiene questa *stessa propietà della Lingua Romana Antica*.³⁸

FIRST BOOK: ESTABLISHMENT OF PRINCIPLES

XVII. A language of an ancient nation, which has maintained itself as the dominant tongue until it was fully developed, should be a great witness to the customs of the early days of the world.

This axiom assures us that the weightiest philological proofs of the natural law of the *gentes* (in which the understanding of which the Romans were unquestionably pre-eminent) can be drawn from Latin speech. For the same reason scholars of the German language can do the like, since it retains this same property preserved by the ancient Roman language.³⁹

XXXVII. *Il più sublime lavoro della Poesia è, alle cose insensate dare censo, e passione; ed è propietà de fanciulli di prender cose inanimate tra mani, e, trastullandosi, favellarci, come se fussero quelle persone vive.*

Questa Dignità filologico-filosofica ne approva, che gli *uomini del Mondo fanciullo per natura furono sublimi Poeti*.⁴⁰

XXXVII. The most sublime labor of poetry is to give sense and passion to insensate things; and it is characteristic of children to take inanimate things in their hands and talk to them in play as if they were living persons.

This philologico-philosophical [sic] axiom proves to us that in the world's childhood men were by nature sublime poets.⁴¹

XLIII. *Ogni Nazione Gentile ebbe un suo Ercole, il quale fu figliulo di Giove: e Varrone dottissimo dell' Antiquità ne giunse a noverare quaranta.*

³⁸ *Principi di Scienza Nuova di Giambattista Vico d'intorno alla Comune Natura delle Nazioni*, 2 vols. (Naples: Gaetano and Steffano Elia, 1744), vol. 1., 78, italics original.

³⁹ "The New Science of Giambattista Vico:" *Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744) with the Addition of "Practice of the New Science,"* trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 65.

⁴⁰ *Scienza Nuova*, 85, italics original.

⁴¹ *New Science*, 71.

Questa Dignità è '1 *Principio dell' Eroismo de' primi popoli*, nato da una falsa opinione, gli *Eroi* provenir *da divina origine*.

Questa stessa Dignità con l' antecedente, che ne danno prima *tanti Giovi*, dappoi tanti *Ercoli* tralle Nazioni Gentili, oltrechè ne dimostrano, che non si poterono fondare senza *religione*, nè ingrandire senza *virtù*: essendone elle ne' lor' incominciamenti *selvagge*, e *chiuse*; e perciò non sappiendo nulla l' una dell' 'altra, per la *Dignità*, che *idee uniformi nate tra' popoli sconosciuti debbon' aver' un motivo comune di Vero*, ne danno di più questo gran Principio: che le *prime Favole* do vetter contenere *verità civili*, e perciò essere state le *Storie de' primi popoli*.⁴²

XLIII. Every gentile nation had its Hercules, who was the son of Jove, and Varro, the most learned of antiquarians, numbered as many as forty of them.

This axiom marks the beginning, among the first peoples, of heroism, which as born of the false opinion that the heroes were of divine origin.

This axiom and the preceding ne, giving us so many Joves and then so many Hercules among the gentile nations, together show us that these nations could not have been founded without religion and could not grow without valor. Moreover, since in their beginnings these nations were forest-based and shut off from any knowledge of each other, must have a common ground of truth, these axioms give us this great principle as well: that the first fables must have contained civil truths, and must therefore have been the histories of the first peoples.⁴³

L. *Ne' fanciulli è vigorosissima la memoria, quindi vivida all' eccesso la fantasia; ch' altro non è, che memoria o dilatata, o composta.*

Questa Dignità è '1 *Principio dell' evidenza dell' Imaginini Poetiche*, che dovette formare il primo *Mondo fanciullo*.⁴⁴

L. In children memory is most vigorous, and imagination is therefore excessively vivid, for imagination is nothing but extended or compounded memory.

⁴² *Scienza Nuova*, 87-88, italics original.

⁴³ *New Science*, 73.

⁴⁴ *Scienza Nuova*, 90, italics original.

This axiom is the principle of the expressiveness of the poetic images that the world formed in its childhood.⁴⁵

LII. I *fanciulli* vagliono potentemente nell' *imitare*; perchè osserviamo per lo più trastullarsi in assemblare ciò, che son capaci d' apprendere.

Questa Dignità dimostra, che 'l *Mondo fanciullo fu di nazione poetiche*, non essendo altro la *Poesia*, che *Imitazione*.⁴⁶

LII. Children excel in imitation; we observe that they generally amuse themselves by imitating whatever they are able to apprehend.

This axiom shows that the world in its infancy was composed of poetic nations, for poetry is nothing but imitation.⁴⁷

LXI. Il *verso eroico* è lo *più antico* di tutti; e lo *spondaico* il più tardo; e dentro si troverà il *verso eroico* esser nato *spondaico*.⁴⁸

LXI. Heroic verse is the oldest of all, and spondaic the slowest; and we shall see later that heroic verse was originally spondaic.⁴⁹

LIBRO SECONDO: DELLA SAPIENZA POETICA

COROLLARI D' intorno all' Origini della Locuzion Poetica, degli Episodi, del Torno, del Numero, del Canto, e del Verso.

Il *primo verso*, (come abbiamo poco fa dimostrato di fatto, che nacque) dovette nascere *convenevole* alla *Lingua*, ed all' *età degli Eroi*, qual fu il *verso eroico*, il *più grande* di tutti gli altri, e *proprio dell' Eroica Poesia*; e nacque da *passioni violentissime di spavento*, e di *giubilo*, come la *Poesia Eroica* non trata, che *passioni perturbassime*.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ *New Science*, 75.

⁴⁶ *Scienza Nuova*, 90, italics original.

⁴⁷ *New Science*, 75.

⁴⁸ *Scienza Nuova*, 93, italics original.

⁴⁹ *New Science*, 77.

⁵⁰ *Scienza Nuova*, 193.

SECOND BOOK: POETIC WISDOM

Colloraries concerning the Origins of Poetic Style, Digression, Inversion, Rhythm, Song, and Verse.

The first verse must have spring up comfortably to the language and time of the heroes; that is, it was heroic verse, the grandest of all, and the proper verse for heroic poetry; and it was born of the most violent passions of fear and joy, for heroic poetry has to do only with extremely perturbed passions.⁵¹

LIBRO QUARTO: DEL CORSO, CHE FANNO LE NAZIONI

In forza de' *Principi di questa Scienza* stabiliti nel *Libro Primo*, e dell' *Origini* di tutte le *divine*, ed *umane cose* della *Gentilità ricercate*, e *discoverte* dentro la *Sapienza Poetica* nel *Libro Secondo*...ora con tai *lumi* così di *Filosofia*, come di *Filologia*, in seguito delle *Degnità* d' intorno allá *Storia Ideal' Eterna* già sopra poste, in questo *Libro Quarto* soggiugniamo IL CORSO, CHE FANNO LE NAZIONI, con costante uniformità procedendo in tutti i loro tanto vari, e sì diversi costumi sopra la *Divisione* delle TRE ETA', che dicevano gli *Egizi*, essere *scorse innanzi nel loro Mondo*, degli DEI, degli EROI, e degli UOMINI.⁵²

FOURTH BOOK: THE COURSE THE NATIONS RUN

In virtue of the principles in this Science established in Book One, and of the origins of all the divine and human institutions of the gentile world which we investigated and discovered in Book Two...we shall now, by the aid of this philosophical and philological illumination, and relying on the axioms concerning the ideal eternal history, discuss in Book Four the course the nations run, proceeding in all their variations and diverse customs with constant uniformity upon the division of three ages which the Egyptians said had elapsed before them in their world, namely, the successive ages of gods, heroes, and men.⁵³

⁵¹ *New Science*, 155, italics original.

⁵² *Scienza Nuova*, vol. 2, 414, italics original.

⁵³ *New Science*, 335.

TRE SPEZIE DI NATURE

La *prima Natura* per forte inganno di *fantasia*, la qual' è robustissima ne' debolissimi di raziocinio, fu una *natura poetica*, o sia *creative*, lecito ci sia dire *divina*; la qual' a' *corpi* diede l' essere di *sostanza animate di Dei*, e gliele diede *dalla sua idea*; la qual *natura* fu quella de' *Poeti Teologi*; che furono gli più *Antichi Sappienti* di tutte le Nazioni Gentili; quando tutte le Gentili Nazioni si fondarono sulla credenza, ch' ebbe *ogni una* di certi suoi *propi Dei*. [...] La *seconda* fu *Natura Eroica*, creduta da essi Eroi di *divina origine*; perchè credendo, che *tutto facessero i Dei*, si tenevano esser *figliuli di Giove*, siccome quelli, ch' erano stati *generati* con gli *auspici di Giovi*. [...] La *terza* fu *Natura umana intelligente*, e quindi *modestia, benigna, e ragionevole*; la quale riconosce per legi la *coscienza, la ragione, il dovere*.⁵⁴

THREE KINDS OF NATURE

The first nature, by a powerful deceit of imagination, which is not robust in the weakest reasoning, was a poetic or creative nature which we may be allowed to call divine, as it ascribed to physical things the being of substances animated by gods, assigning the gods to them according to its idea of each. This nature was that of the theological poets, who were the earliest wise men in all the gentile nations, when all the gentile nations were founded on the belief which each of them had in certain gods of its own. [...] The second was heroic nature, believed by the heroes themselves to be of divine origin; for, since they believed that the gods made and did everything, they held themselves to be sons of Jove, as having been generated under his auspices. [...] The third was human nature, intelligent and hence modest, benign, and reasonable, recognizing for laws conscience, reason, and duty.⁵⁵

1.2.3.B – From Johan G. Herder, *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (1767)

Wenn also jede ursprüngliche Sprache, die ein Landesgewächs ist, sich nach ihrem Himmels, und Erdstriche richtet: wenn jede Nationalsprache sich nach den Sitten und der Denkart ihres Volks bildet: so muß umgekehrt die Literatur eines Landes, die ursprünglich und national ist,

⁵⁴ *Scienza Nuova*, vol. 2., 415-16, italics original.

⁵⁵ *New Science*, 336.

sich so nach der originalen Landessprache einer solchen Nation formen, daß eins mit dem andern zusammenrinnt. Die Literatur wuchs in der Sprache, und die Sprache in der Literatur: unglücklich ist die Hand, die beide zerreißen, trüglisch das Auge, das eins ohne das andere sehen will.⁵⁶

If then each original language, which is the native growth of a country, develops in accordance with its climate and region, if each national language forms itself in accordance with the ethics and manner of thought of its people, then conversely, a country's literature which is original and national must form itself in accordance with such a nation's original native language, and the way that the two run together. The literature grew up in the language, and the language in the literature; unfortunate the hand that wants to tear the two apart, deceptive the eye that wants to see the one without the other.⁵⁷

Die ältesten Sprachen hatten vielen lebenden Ausdruck, wie es die Reste alter und ursprünglicher Sprachen, doch jede nach ihrem Lande bezeugen. Unmittelbar nach der lebenden Natur, und nicht wie die neuern nach willkürlichen todten Ideen gebildet, hatten sie nicht bloß einen nachdrücklichen Gang für das Ohr; sondern waren auch bei der leichtesten Anwendung fähig, mit dem Wirbelwinde zu rasen, in der Feldschlacht zu tönen, mit dem Meere zu wüten, mit dem Fluß zu rauschen, mit dem einstürzenden Felsen zu krachen, und mit den Thieren zu sprechen.⁵⁸

The oldest languages had much *living expression*, as the remains of ancient and original languages, though each according to its country, bear witness. These languages, found immediately according to living nature, and not like modern languages according to arbitrary, dead ideas, not only had an emphatic stride for the ear, but were also capable, with the easiest application, of rushing with the whirlwind, or resounding in the battle, of raging with the sea, or roaring with the river, of cracking with the collapsing rock, and of speaking with the animals.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ In *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1877), vol.2, 19

⁵⁷ From *Fragments on Recent German Literature (1767-68)*, in Michael N. Forster (ed. and transl.), *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 50, italics original.

⁵⁸ *Neuere deutsche Literatur*, 71.

⁵⁹ *Recent German Literature*, 61, italics original.

Was ist sie, wenn etwas Kunst über sie kommt?—Nicht anders, und nichts besser, als eine Poetische Sprache. Nicht die Sprache allein brachte Poeten hervor; sondern das Zeitalter, das die Sprache hervor brachte, schuf Poeten, die ihn damals Alles waren, die es mit Allem unterstützte, und unter diesen Unterstützungen war die Sprache wenn nicht mehr so die letzte.⁶⁰

What is this language, when a little art comes on top? Nothing other and nothing better than a *poetic language*. Language did not produce poets alone, but the age which produced created *poets* who were at the time everything to the age, whom it supported with everything, and among these supports language was, if not more, then the final one.⁶¹

1.2.3.C – From Johan Gottfried Herder, *Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst* (1777)

Aus ältern Zeiten haben wir also durchaus keine lebende Dichterei, auf der unsere neuere Dichtkunst, wie Sprosse auf dem Stamm der Nation gewachsen wäre; dahingegen andre Nationen mit den Jahrhunderten fortgegangen sind, und sich auf eigenem Grunde, aus Nationalprodukten, auf dem Glauben und Geschmack des Volks, aus Resten alter Zeiten gebildet haben. Dadurch ist ihre Dichtkunst und Sprache national worden, Stimme des Volks ist genutzt und geschätzt, sie haben in diesen Dingen weit mehr ein Publikum bekommen, als wir haben. Wir arme Deutsche sind von jeher bestimmt gewesen, nie unser zu bleiben: immer die Gesetzgeber und Diener fremder, Nationen, ihre Schicksalsentscheider und ihre verkaufte, blutende, ausgesogne Sklaven.⁶²

From ancient times we have absolutely no living poetry on which our newer poetic art might grow as a branch upon the national stem. Other nations have progressed with the centuries and have developed on their own foundations, on national production, from the beliefs and tastes of the people, from the remains of the past. In this way their literature and language have become nation. The voice of the people has been used and cherished, and they have in these matters acquired a much larger public than we have. We poor Germans have been destined from the beginning never to be ourselves, always the lawgivers and

⁶⁰ *Neuere deutsche Literatur*, 75.

⁶¹ *Recent German Literature*, 64, italics original.

⁶² In *Herders Sämmtliche Werke zur Schönen Literatur und Kunst*, ed. Johan W. Müller; Tübingen: J. G. (Cottaschen Buchhandlung, 1807), vol. 8, 54.

servants of foreign nations, the directors of their fate and their bartered, bleeding, impoverished slaves.

Großes Reich, Reich von zehn Völkern, Deutsche land! Du hast Keinen Shakespear, hast du auch keine Gesänge deiner Vorfahren, deren du dich rühmen könntest? Schweizer, Schwaben, Franken, Baiern, Westphäler, Sachsen, Wenden, Preussen, ihr habt allesamt nichts? Die Stumme eurer Väter ist verklungen und schweigt im Staube? Volk von tapfrer Sitte, von edler Tugend und Sprache, du hast keine Abdrücke deiner Seele die Zeiten hinunter?

Kein Zweifel! Sie sind gewesen, sie sind vielleicht noch da; nur sie liegen unter Schlamm, sind verkannt und verachtet. [...] Legt also Hand an, meine Brüder, und zeigt unsrer Nation, was sie ist und nicht ist, wie sie dachte und fühlte, oder wie sie denkt und fühlt.⁶³

Great empire! Empire of ten peoples, land of Germany! You have no Shakespeare. Have you also no songs of your forebears of which you can boast? Swiss, Swabians, Franks, Bavarians, Westphalians, Saxons, Wends, Prussians, have you all together nothing? The voice of your fathers has faded and lies silent in the dust. Nation of heroic customs, of noble virtues and language, you have no impressions of your soul from the past?

Without a doubt! They one existed and perchance still do, but they lie under the mire, unrecognised and despised. [...] Lend a hand, then, my brothers, and show our nation what it is and what it is not; how it thought and felt, or how it thinks and feels.

1.2.3.D – From Johan G. Herder *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772)

Unsre Väter, die nichts selbst gedacht, nichts selbst erfunden; die alles mechanisch gelernt haben—was bekümmern sich die um Unterricht ihrer Söhne? um Verewigung dessen, was sie ja selbst nicht besitzen? Aber der erste Vater, die ersten dürftigen Spracherfinder, ...welchen Informator konnten die bestellen? Die ganze Sprache iher Kinder war ein Dialekt ihrer

⁶³ Ibid., 59-60.

Gedanken, ein Loblied ihrer Thaten, wie die Lieder Ossians auf seinen Vater Fingal.⁶⁴

Our fathers, who thought nothing for themselves, who invented nothing about themselves, who learned everything mechanically—what do they care about the instruction of their sons, about making eternal what they do not even possess themselves? But the first father, the first needy inventors of language...what informant could they call upon? The whole language of their children was a *dialect of their own thoughts, a paean to their own deeds*, like the songs of *Ossian* for his father *Fingal*.⁶⁵

Und welcher Schatz ist Familiensprache für ein wedendes Geschlecht! Fast in allen kleinen Nationen aller Weltteile, so wenig gebildet sie auch sein mögen, sind Lieder von ihrer Vätern, Gesänge von den Taten ihrer Vorfahren der Schatz ihrer Sprache und Geschichte und Dichtkunst, ihre Weisheit und ihre Aufmunterung, ihr Unterricht un ihre Spiele und Tänze. Die Griechen sangen von ihren Argonauten, von Hercules und Bacchus, von Helen und Troja bezwingern; und die Celten von den Vätern ihrer Stämme, von Fingal und Ossian!⁶⁶

And what a *treasure familial language is* for a developing race! In almost all nations of all parts of the world, however little cultivated they may be, ballads of their fathers, songs of the deeds of their ancestors, are the treasure of their language and history and poetic art, [they are] their wisdom and their encouragement, and their games and dances. The Greeks sang of their Argonauts, of Hercules and Bacchus, of heroes and conquerors of Troy, and the Celts of their fathers and tribes, of Fingal and Ossian.⁶⁷

1.2.3.E – From Johan G. Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774)

Ist die Menschliche Natur keine im Guten selbstständige Gottheit: sie muss alles lernen, durch Fortgänge gebildet werden, im allmällichen Kampf immer weiter schriten; natürlich wird sie also von den Seiten am

⁶⁴ *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Berlin: Christian Friedrich Voss, 1772), 179.

⁶⁵ *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), in Forster, *Herder*, 143, italics original.

⁶⁶ *Abhandlung*, 185-86.

⁶⁷ *Treatise*, 147, italics original.

meisten, oder allein gebildet, wo sie dergleichen Anlässe zur Tugend, zum Kampf, zum Fortgange hat—in gewissem Betracht ist also jede Menschliche Vollkommenheit National, Säkular, und am genauesten betrachtet, Individuell.⁶⁸

If human nature is no *independent divinity* in goodness – it has to *learn* everything, be *formed* through *progression*, *step* ever further in *gradual struggle* – then naturally it is formed *most* or *only* on those *sides* where it has such *occasions* for virtue, for struggle, for progression. Therefore, in a certain respect each human perfection is *national*, *generational*, and, considered most exactly, *individual*.⁶⁹

Auch die Römische Weltversassung erredichte ihr Ende...wie ein Riss im der Welbegebenheiten! Nichts minder, al seine neue Welt war nöthig, den Riss zu heilen.

Norden wars. [...]

Nicht blos Menschenkrafte, auch welche Gesetze und Einrichtungen brachten sie damit auf den Schauplatz der Bildung der Welt! [...] Ihre Gesetze, wie athmen sie männlichen Muth, Gefühl der Ehre, Zutrauen auf Verstand, Redlichkeit und Götterverehrung! [...] Ihr späteres Ideal über die Bedürfnisse hinaus—es ging auf Keushheit und Ehre, veredelte den besten Theil der Menschlich Neigungen: obgleich Roman, so doch ein hoher Roman: eine wahre neue Blühte der menschlichen Seele.⁷⁰

Even the Roman *world-constitution* reached its end...Like a tear in the thread of world events! nothing less than a *new world* was necessary to *heal the tear*.

It was the *north*. [...]

Not merely *human forces*, but also what *laws* and *institutions* did they thereby bring onto the *stage of the world's formation*. [...] Their *laws*, how they breathe *manly courage*, feeling of *honor*, *faith in understanding*, *honesty*, and reverence for the gods! [...] Their later *ideal beyond needs*—it aimed at *chastity* and *honor* – ennobled the best of part

⁶⁸ *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Behtrag, 1774), 505.

⁶⁹ *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774), in Forster, Herder, 294, italics original.

⁷⁰ *Auch eine Philosophie*, 513-16.

of human inclinations—although a *novel*, nonetheless a *lofty novel* – a true *new bloom* of the human soul.⁷¹

Die Werke des Geistes und der Genies aus diesen Zeiten sind gleicher Art, ganz des zusammengesetzten Dufter aller Zeiten voll: zu voll von Schönheiten, von Feinheiten, von Erfindung, von Ordnung, als dass es Schönheit, Ordnung, Erfindung bleibe—sind, wie die Gothischen Gebäude! Und wenn sich der Geist bis auf die kleinsten Einrichtungen und Gebräuche erstreckt—ist unrecht, wenn in diesen Jahrhunderten noch immer Krone des alten Stamms erschiene!⁷²

The works of the *spirit* and of the *genius* of from these times are *of the same kind*, entirely full of the composite *scent* of all times – too full of *beauties*, of *subtleties*, of *invention*, of *order* to remain *beauty*, *order*, *invention* – they are like the Gothic buildings! And if the spirit reaches down to the smallest *institutions* and *customs*, is it wrong if the crown of the old tribal stem should still appear in these centuries?⁷³

1.2.3. F – From Johan G. Herder, *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität* (1793-97), Section 1: On the Ancestral Quality of National Language.

Hat wohl ein Volk, zumal ein uncultivirtes Volk etwas Lieberes, als die Sprache seiner Väter? In ihr wohnet sein ganzer Gedankenreichthum an Tradition, Geschichte, Religion und Grundsätzen des Lebens, alle sein Herz und Seele. Einem solchen Volk seine Sprache nehmen oder herabwürdigen, heißt ihm sein einziges unsterbliches Eigenthum nehmen, das von Eltern auf Kinder fortgeht.⁷⁴

Does a people, especially an uncivilised people, have something more valuable than the language of their fathers? In it lives its entire spiritual treasury of tradition, history, religion, and principles of life, all its heart and soul. To deprive such a nation of their language, or to demean it, is to take away from it its sole immortal possession, transmitted from fathers to children.

⁷¹ *This Too a Philosophy*, 300-01, italics original.

⁷² *Auch eine Philosophie*, 528-29.

⁷³ *This Too a Philosophy*, 311, italics original.

⁷⁴ *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität* (Riga: Johan Friedrich Hartknoch, 1793), vol. 1, 146.

1.2.3.F – From *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität* (1793-97), Section 2: On National Language and National Culture

Vaterländische Cultur gehört hiezu, und in dieser auch Cultur der Sprache. Was ermunterte die Griechen zu ihren rühmlichen und schwersten Arbeiten? Die Stimme der Pflicht und des Ruhmes. Woldurch dünkten sie sich vorzüglicher, al s alle Nationien der Erde? Durch ihre cultivirte Sprache und was mittelst derselben unter ihnen gepflanzt war. Die imperatorische Sprache der Römer gebot der Welt; eine Sprache des Gesetzes und der Thaten. Worduch hat eine nachbarliche Nation seit mehr al s alle Völker Europa's gewonnen? Nebst andern Ursachen vorzüglich auch durch ihre im höchsten Sinne des Worts gebildere Nationalsprache. Jeder der sich an ihren Schriften ergötzte, trat damit in ihr Reich ein und nahm Theil an ihnen. Sie bildeten un mißbildeten; sie befahlen, sie imponirten. Und die Sprache der Deutschen, die unsre Vorfahren eine Stamm- Kern- und Heldensprache nannten, sollte wie eine Ueberwundene den Siegeswagen Ander ziehn, un sich dabei noch in ihrem beschwelichen Reichs- und Hofstyl brüsten? Wirf ihn weg, den drückenden Schmuck...und sei, was du seyn kannst und ehemals warest, eine Sprache der Vernunft, der Kraft, und Wahrheit.⁷⁵

A fatherland's culture is part of [its glory], and in it also the culture of language. What encouraged the Greeks to their glorious and most difficult works? The voice of duty and glory. Through what did they think themselves to be superior to all the nations of the earth? Through their cultivated language and what was planted amongst them by means of it. The imperious language of the Romans commanded the world—a language of law and deeds. Through what has a neighbouring nation won so much influence over all the peoples of Europe since more than a century ago? Besides other causes, especially also through its—in the highest sense of the word—formed *national language*. Each person who took delight in its writings thereby entered its realm and sympathetically shared in them. They formed and deformed, they ordered, they impressed. And the language of the Germans, which our ancestors called a language of tribal stem, pith, and heroes should pull the victory cart of others like a conquered prisoner, and in the process give itself airs in its clumsy empire- and court-style? Throw it away, this oppressive finery,...and be what you can be and formerly were: a language of reason, of force and truth.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Briefe* (1795) vol. 5, 144-46.

⁷⁶ From *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1793-97), in Forster, *Herder*, 378, italics original.

1.2.3.G – From Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (1844 edition)

Weil ich lernte, daß seine Sprache, sein Recht und sein Alterthum viel zu niedrig gestellt waren, wollte ich das Vaterland erheben. Die eine Arbeit ward mir zur andern, und was dort bewies half auch hier stützen, was hier gründete diente dort zu bestätigen. Vielleicht werden meine Bücher in einer stillen, frohen Zeit, die auch wiederkehren wird, mehr vermögen; sie sollten aber schon der Gegenwart gehören, die ich mir nicht denken kann, ohne daß unsere Vergangenheit auf sie zurückstrahlte, und an der die Zukunft jede Geringschätzung der Vorzeit rächen würde. Die nachgelesen Ähren vermache ich dem, der auf meinen Schultern stehend nach mir mit Ausstellung und Ernte des großen Feldes in vollen Zug kommen wird.⁷⁷

Having observed that her Language, Laws and Antiquities were greatly underrated, I was wishful to exalt my native land. To me one labour became the other: what was evidence there was also a confirmation here, what furnished a foundation here served there as a prop. Perhaps my books will have more influence in a quiet happy time which will come back some day; yet they ought to belong to the Present too, which I cannot think of without our Past reflecting its radiance upon it, and on which the Future will avenge any depreciation of the olden time. My gleanings I bequeath to him who, standing on my shoulders, shall hereafter get into full swing the harvesting of this great field.⁷⁸

1.3 – British Nationalism and the Reimagining of the Past

1.3.1. – Teutonism and/or Anglo-Saxonism: Shifting Perspectives

1.3.1.A – From John M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England* (1849)

On every side of us thrones totter, and the deep foundations of society are convulsed. [...] Yet the exalted Lady who wields the sceptre of these realms, sits safe upon her throne, and fearless in the holy circle of her domestic happiness, secure in the affections of a people whose institutions have given to them all the blessings of an equal law.

⁷⁷ *Deutsche Mythologie*, 2 vols. Göttingen: Dieteriche Buchhandlung (1844, 4th ed.), vol. 1, xlviii.

⁷⁸ *Teutonic Mythology*, 4 vols., trans. James Steven Stallybrass. London: George Bell & Sons (1883), vol. 3, lv.

Those institutions they have inherited from a period so distant as to excite our admiration, and have preserved amidst all vicissitudes with an enlightened will that must command our gratitude. [...]

I believe these things to be worthy of investigation, from their bearing upon the times in which we live, much more than from any antiquarian value they may be supposed to possess. We have a share in the past, and the past yet works in us; nor can a patriotic citizen better serve his country than by devoting his energies and his time to record that which is great and glorious in her history, for the admiration and instruction of her neighbours.⁷⁹

1.3.1.B – From Thomas Arnold, *Introductory Lectures on Modern History* (1847)

Here then we have, if I may so speak, the ancient world still existing, but with a new element added, the element of our English race. And that this element is an important one, cannot be doubted for an instant. Our English race is the German race; for though our Norman fathers had learned to speak a stranger's language, yet in blood, as we know, they were the Saxons' brethren: both alike belong to the Teutonic or German stock. [...] If we consider the Roman empire in the fourth century of the Christian æra [*sic*], we shall find in it Christianity, we shall find in it all the intellectual treasures of Greece, all the social and political wisdom of Rome. What was not there, was simply the German race, and the peculiar qualities which characterize it. This one addition was of such power, that it changed the character of the whole mass: the peculiar stamp of the middle ages is undoubtedly German; the change manifested in the last three centuries has been owing to the revival of the older elements with greater power, so that the German element has been less manifestly predominant. But that element still

⁷⁹ *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth till the period of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), vol. 1, *Preface*, v-vi; viii.

preserves its force, and is felt for good or for evil in almost every country of the civilized world.

We will pause for a moment to observe over how large a portion of the earth this influence is now extended. It affects more or less the whole west of Europe...even in France, and Italy, and Spain, the influence of the Franks, Burgundians, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Lombards, while it has colored even the language, has in blood and institutions left its mark legibly and indelibly. Germany, the Low Countries, Switzerland for the most part, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and our own islands, are all in language, in blood, and in institutions, German most decidedly.⁸⁰

1.3.2 – The Romantic Middle Ages and the Aesthetics of Nostalgia

1.3.2.A – From Rev. Edward Gilliat, *God Save King Alfred* (1901)

When I was a small boy I used to wonder why Alfred the Great was not one of the Saints whose names appeared in the prayer book. [...]

Perhaps in this year of 1901, when we are celebrating the Millenary of the great King of Wessex, the Truth-teller, the re-founder of London, the deliverer of Anglekin from a cruel foe, we may be awakened to the thought that in King Alfred we have a National hero and Saint who is more worthy of our reverence than the mythical St George—even with his dragon thrown in!

But who is to make Alfred a Saint for us? Have we not lost the art? What would the Nonconformist conscience, what would the militant Protestant say! Alas! The age of Reverence is past and gone.

Nay! Not so fast! For the city of Winchester is inviting us even now to do homage to her king. She will atone for her old neglect in allowing Saint Alfred's ashes to be carted away from Hyde Abbey—for rubbish. Every Englishman, and every American too, regrets that untoward carelessness now.

⁸⁰ *Introductory Lectures on Modern History*, ed. Henry Reed (NY: Appleton, 1847), 44-45.

Alfred united Anglekin in England; Victoria united a wider Angleking the world over. We may not forget wither the one or the other; and if this little story, taken in part from the Saxon chronicle, shall help a few readers to know and love the Darling of Old England, I shall therein have my reward.⁸¹

⁸¹ *God Save King Alfred* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), *Preface*.

Appendix II – Supplement to Chapter 2

2.2 – The Invention of the “Old English Elegy” in Early Editions to 1915

2.2.A – From William Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826), Section 1: Front Page

Of GOTHIC structure was the NORTHERN side,
O'erwrought with ornaments of barbarous pride:
There huge Colosses rose, with trophies crown'd,
And RUNIC characters were grav'd around.
There on the huge iron columns, smear'd with blood,
The horrid forms of SCYTHIAN heroes stood;
MINSTRELS and SCALDS (their one loud harps unstrung),
And youths that died, to be by Poets sung.¹

Compare to the 1715 original by Pope:

Of *Gothick* Structure was the Northern Side,
O'erwrought with Ornaments of barb'rous Pride.
There huge Colosses rose, with Trophies crown'd,
And *Runick* Characters were grav'd around:
There sate *Zamolxis* with erected Eyes,
And *Odin* here in mimick Trances dies.
There, on rude Iron Columns smear'd with Blood,
The horrid Forms of Scythian Heroes stood,

¹ Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, title page.

Druids and Bards (their once loud Harps unstrung)

And Youths that dy'd to be by Poets sung.²

2.2.A – From William Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826), Section 2: On *Deor* and *The Wife's Lament*.

VI. SCALDIC POEM. Book X. Sect 2. Leaf 100. This poem is chiefly remarkable from its allusions to the mythological and mytho-historical narratives which have been incorporated into the Icelandic Edda; and more especially as fully attesting the popular estimation in which Weland, the Vulcan of Northern mythology, was held by our ancestors long after their conversion to Christianity; and proving also the antiquity and general diffusion not only of a belief in his existence and attributes, but even of the details of his wild and singular history. [...]

It appears to be a species of rude song, *De infortuniis illustrium virorum*, composed for the purpose of alleviating the sorrows of the writer himself.³

VII. THE EXILE'S COMPLAINT. Leaf 115. [*Inserted by the Editor.*] The Editor has, in the present instance, been induced to deviate from the rule he had prescribed to himself, of confining these Illustrations to the materials prepared by the late Author, by two reasons; — First, the extreme scarcity of compositions of an elegiac character, such as the subjoined poem, in the Saxon language: the translations from the Boethian metres afford, perhaps, the only other instance; and the following lines may therefore be considered as an unique specimen of an original attempt of this kind by an Anglo-Saxon Scop. The style will be found closely to resemble that which the royal paraphrast of Boethius has adopted, in its extreme simplicity, or, as Hickes considers it, purity; a fact affording confirmation to the views previously advanced, that this style was chosen as being better

² Pope, *The Temple of Fame: A Vision* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1715), 15-16.

³ Conybeare, *Illustrations*, 225-26. "The Wanderer" is thus counted as the seventh and final section of *Juliana*.

accommodated to subjects of a moral or elegiac nature than the grandiloquism of the Cædmonian school.

The second reason, which exerted still more influence over the Editor's determination, was the appearance which this poem presents of allusions to the adventures and misfortunes of some hero once familiar to the Scaldic Muse: he was anxious, therefore, to submit it to that part of the literary public interested in such inquiries, in the hope that some one more conversant with the cycle of early Northern poetry and roman than himself may trace it to its original dependence and source, and discover in it...one of those interesting links that connect the remains of Anglo-Saxon literature with that of their continental Brethren of the same great family of nations.⁴

2.2.A – From William Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826), Section 3: On the Structure of the Exeter Book

THE SEVENTH BOOK relates the Passion of St Juliana, in the time of Maximian; in seven sections, extending from leaf 65 to 78. No transcripts were made.

THE EIGHTH BOOK (leaf 78 to 84) is, according to Wanley, a metrical Homily, treating on the doctrines of Theology, in four sections. No extracts were made. [...]⁵

7. (leaf 94.) Is a poem remarkable chiefly for its metrical structure, possessing throughout the ornaments of final rimes [...] It is expressed in the first person...and (if I understood the composition rightly) ...uttered in the character of a sufferer in purgatory, which moralizes on the destruction that thus closes on all earthly greatness, but expresses a hope of final happiness in the heavens.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 245-46.

⁵ Ibid., 204. The four sections being *The Seafarer*, *The Gifts of Men*, *Precepts*, and *Vainglory*.

⁶ Ibid., 207. *The Rhyming Poem*.

2. (leaf 101.) A Scaldic poem, containing allusions to the histories of Weland and Theodric of Berne.⁷

Intermixed with these ænigmata, we find towards the latter part of the volume other poems, religious and miscellaneous.

1. The first of these is the complaint of an exile separated from his lord. [...]

4. “Age mec se ælmihta God.” – A prayer for pardon. [...]

After this, from the 122nd page, the MS. is much mutilated to the end: the subjects appear to be principally ænigmatical; but their obscurity is rendered hopeless, from the imperfect state in which they occur. One of these fragments, however, is of a descriptive nature, the subject being a ruined city.⁸

2.2.1. – Competing Nationalisms, *Beowulf*, and the Old English “Elegies”

2.2.1.A – From G. J. Thorkelin, *De Danorum Rebus Gestis* (1815)

Igitur hercle miror Hiccesium Anglosaxonibus tribuisse carmen, quod vates Danus Appolinis hyperborei igne calefactus fudit...Eqvidem non bene meminit lingvam, qva ante Wilhelmum I. utebantur Angli, fuisse communem tribus septentrionis populis, qvi vocati uno nomine Dani, omnes ore eodem dialectice solummodo differente loqvebantur. Hujus si vel aliunde auctoritas nulla peti posset, plena sane hic in aprico cubat. Epos etenim hoc, qvale id nunc habemus, evidenter docet, idioma Anglosaxonicum esse revera Danicum, quod Islandi extra solis vias fere jacentes hodiedum servant purum, et studiose colunt.⁹

By Hercules! I am astounded that Hicces attributed to the Anglo-Saxons a song that poured forth from the Danish bard, fired by the flame of hyperborean

⁷ Ibid., 208. *Deor. Wulf and Eadwacer* is not differentiated from the first group of Riddles.

⁸ Ibid., 213-14. *The Wife's Lament, Resignation*, and a brief reference to *The Ruin*, respectively. *The Husband's Message* is lost in the group of texts rendered unintelligible.

⁹ *De Danorum Rebus Gestis secul. III & IV*, x.

Apollo... Obviously he does not remember that the language spoken by the English before William I had been common to three peoples of the north—all called by one name, “Danes”—who spoke slightly different dialects of the same tongue. This fact is as clear as the light of day, even if no other authority could be found for it. For our epic plainly teaches that the Anglo-Saxon idiom is actually Danish, a language cultivated and kept pure even to this day by the inhabitants of Iceland, who dwell almost beyond the path of the sun.¹⁰

2.2.1.B – From B. ten Brink, *Geschichte der englischen Litteratur* (1877)

Die Tiefe und Nachhaltigkeit der Empfindungen erscheint hier begleitet von einer gewissen Weichheit des Gemüths, einer Neigung zur Gefühlsschwärmerei, welche der rücksichtslosen Wirklichkeit gegenüber leicht den Charakter der Melancholie annimmt. Merkwürdig contrastirt diese Seite ihres Wesens mit dem unbändigen Mannestrotz, der die Gefahr verachtet und dem Tod entgegenlacht; doch entspringt Beides schließlich derselben Wurzel, dem Uebergewicht, das die Mächte des Gemüths innern Leben des Germanen behaupten. Woher es freilich komme, daß jene Weichheit, welche in neuerer Zeit und noch vor kurzem für ein Erbtheil der Deutschen im engern Sinne galt, in Alterthum unserer Geschichte besonders den englischen Stamm kennzeichnet, dürfte schwer zu erklären sein. Kaum zweifelhaft aber scheint es, daß der Keim zu dieser Eigenschaft schon vor der Bekehrung zum Christenthum und vor der Niederlassung in Britannien bei ihm vorhanden war, wenn auch erst das Christenthum ihn zur vollen Entfaltung führte.¹¹

The depth and intensity of feeling, characteristic of the Teutonic race, seems, among the English of that early time, to have been accompanied by a certain emotive excitability and a disposition to sentimental exaggeration, which, opposed to stern reality, was wont to take on the character of melancholy. These phases of their character are a remarkable contrast to the unyielding defiance which made them despise peril and laugh at death. But both spring from the same source: the ascendancy which the emotional nature asserts in the inner life of the Teuton. How it happens that this tenderness of feeling, which, in modern times, and in truth quite recently, was held to be the inheritance of the German in the narrower sense, especially distinguished the English branch in the antiquity of our

¹⁰ Robert E. Bjork, ‘Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin’s Preface to the First Edition of *Beowulf*, 1815’ *Scandinavian Studies* 68:3 (1996), 291-320, at 302-03.

¹¹ *Geschichte der englischen Litteratur*, vol. 1, 10.

history, is not easy to explain. But it seems scarcely doubtful that the germ of this quality was already present in it before the conversion to Christianity, and before the settlement in Britain; although Christianity alone carried it to complete development.¹²

Was aber jene Zeit wesentlich von der unsern unterscheidet: das Product der dichterischen Thätigkeit war nicht das Eigenthum, nicht die Leistung eines Einzelnen, sondern der Gesammtheit. Das Werk des einzelnen Sängers dauerte nur so lange als der Vortrag währte, persönliche Auszeichnung erwarb er sich nur als Virtuose. Das Bleibende an dem was er vortrug: der Stoff, die Ideen, ja Stil und Versmaß waren gegeben. Die Leistung des Sängers bildete nur eine Welle in dem Strom der Volkspoesie. Wer hätte zu sagen vermocht, wieviel der Einzelne zu jenem Strome beigetragen, oder wo im dichterischen Vortrage das Erinnern aushörte, die schöpferische Thätigkeit begann? Jedesfalls lebte das Werk Einzelnen nur als ideeller Besitz der Gesammtheit fort und verlor gar bald das Gepräge der Individualität.

Eine derartige Entwicklung der Poesie setzt eine Zeit voraus, wo das Gesamtbewußtsein eines Volkes oder Stammes in seiner Einheit übermächtig ist, wo das geistige Leben eines Jeden sich von demselben Schätze der Anschauungen und Erinnerungen, der Mythen und Sagen nährt, wo gleiche Interessen jede Brust bewegen, das ethische Urtheil eines Jeden denselben Maßstab anlegt. In solchen Zeiten wird auch die Form des dichterischen Ausdrucks eine Allen gemeinsame, selbstverständlich eine ernste, feierliche, einfache sein.¹³

But herein lies the essential difference between that age and our own: the result of poetical activity was not the property and not the production of a single person, but of the community. The work of the individual singer endured only as long as its delivery lasted. He gained personal distinction only as a virtuoso. The permanent elements of what he presented, the material, the ideas, even the style and metre, already existed. The work of the singer was only a ripple in the stream of national poetry. Who can say how much the individual contributed to it, or where in his poetical recitation memory ceased and creative

¹² *Early English Literature (to Wiclif)*, trans. Horace M. Kennedy (NY: Henry Holt & Co., 1883), 6-7.

¹³ Ten Brink, *Geschichte*, 17-18.

impulse began[?] In any case the work of the individual lived on only as the ideal possession of the aggregate body of the people, and it soon lost the stamp of originality.

In view of such a development of poetry, we must assume a time when the collective consciousness of a people or race is paramount in its unity; when the intellectual life of each is nourished from the same treasury of views and associations, of myths and sagas; when similar interests stir each breast; and the ethical judgement of all applies itself to the same standard. In such an age the form of poetical expression will also be common to all, necessarily solemn, earnest, and simple.¹⁴

Die altenglische Lyrik kennt im Grunde nur eine Kunstform, die der Elegie. Schmerzliche Sehnsucht nach entschwundenem Glück ist der Grundton, der sie durchzittert. Diese Stimmung liebt es nun, sich in Betrachtung und Schilderung auszusprechen. [...] Auch im Epos gelangt es zur Ausführung. Man vergleiche im *Beowulf* V. 2255-2266 die Klage jenes einsamen Mannes, der sein ganzes edles Geschlecht überlebt hat.

Der epische Charakter der alten Lyrik spricht sich namentlich darin aus, daß das Lied weniger als Ausdruck einer momentanen Stimmung denn als Bild einer dauernden Lage, ja als Abglanz einer Lebensgeschichte erscheint. Die Lage ist gewöhnlich die eines Vereinsamten, seiner Beschützer und Freunde durch den Tod oder Verbannung beraubten. Das Umherirren auf der kalten öden See, der Aufenthalt im finstern Wald wird mit lebhaften Farben ausgemalt und im Gegensatz dazu die früher in der Heimath genossenen Freuden, zu denen die Erinnerung sehnsüchtig zurückkehrt.¹⁵

The Old English lyrical feeling knows in reality but one art-form, that of the elegy. Painful longing for vanished happiness is the key note. It seeks to voice its mood in reflective and descriptive language. [...] It occurs also in the epos; as in *Beowulf*, v. 2255-2266, where we find the lament of that lonely man who is the last of a noble race.

The epic character of the ancient lyric appears especially in this: that the song is less the utterance of a momentary feeling than the portrayal of a lasting state, perhaps the reflection of an entire life, generally that of an isolated or bereft by death or exile of protectors and friends. His roving upon the cold, desolate sea, and his sojourn in the dark

¹⁴ Kennedy, *Early English Literature*, 13.

¹⁵ Ten Brink, *Geschichte*, 78-79.

forest are graphically painted; and in contrast, the joys of his early home, to which memory returns with longing.¹⁶

2.2.1.C – From Francis Gummere, *Germanic Origins* (1892)

This elegiac mood [in *Beowulf*] has been attributed by a German critic not to the tendency of the race itself, but rather to the softening influences of Christianity. This seems to be a surface criticism; melancholy of some sort is inherent in the Germanic temperament, and a sheer ferocity of the Viking or even Berserker type is not enough to offset the countless examples of the elegiac and pathetic in our oldest literature. Thus the “dying with a laugh” of Scandinavian heroes is not necessarily opposed to a melancholy habit of mind. There are laughs and laughs.¹⁷

2.2.1.D – From Stopford Brooke, *History of Early English Literature* (1892), Section 1: On the National Element in Old English Poetry

It will be seen that a great number of the main branches of the tree of English poetry had already opened out at this time from the stem, and that the ideal and sentimental elements of the earliest poetry have continued, with natural changes, up to the present day. Here, then, in the two hundred years between 670 and 870, the roots of English poetry, the roots of that vast and over-shadowing tree, were set; and here its first branches clothed themselves with leaves. [...] Here, too, we can best discern, and here isolate most easily, those elements in English character which, existing before the race was mixed, have been, not the cause of our poetry, but the cause why the poetry has been of so high an excellence,—that steady consistency of national character, that clinging through all difficulty to the aim in view, that unrelenting curiosity, that desire to better what has been done, which, though not art themselves, are the effectual powers which enable art to strive, to seek and at last reach its goal.

¹⁶ Kennedy, *Early English Literature*, 61-62.

¹⁷ *Germanic Origins: A Study in Primitive Culture* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892), 331.

Moreover, no national art is good which is not plainly that nation's own. In this Anglo-Saxon poetry of which I write we grasp most clearly the dominant English essence. The poetry of England has owed much to the different races which mingles with the original English race; it has owed much to the different types of poetry it absorbed...but below all these admixtures, the English nature wrought its steady will. It seized, it transmuted, it modified, it mastered these admixtures both of races and of song.

Of what kind the early English poetry is, what feelings inspired the poets, what imaginations filled their hearts, how did they shape their work—that is the vital the interesting question; and to answer it, the poetry itself must be read.¹⁸

There is nothing so modern in sentiment, nay in very expression, in the whole of English literature till we come to Tennyson, as the first part of the *Seafarer*. The cry of Tennyson's *Ulysses* is in it, and the cry of the *Sailor Boy*. Were I to put it into blank verse, everyone would say that I was imitating Tennyson. Even in lines of mere description, without the elegiac sentiment of humanity, this Tennysonian likeness appears...Nor is the psychological passage in the *Seafarer* less modern in feeling...and I do not know where, in the history of English poetry, to find the poetic temper likely to produce it except in the later Elizabethans of the reign of James I., and in the last thirty years. [...]

[*The Wanderer*] is not so modern as the passage in the *Seafarer*, but it is quite at home in the nineteenth century. When we think that these poems were written fully 1100 years ago, this is very remarkable; and the recurrence, after all those centuries, of a special distinct note of sentiment, only shows how constant are the roots of English song, and how needful it is, if we would fully understand it, to go back to the ground in which it was planted.¹⁹

¹⁸ Brooke, *The History of Early English Literature*, vi-vii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 357-58.

2.2.1.D – From Stopford Brooke, *History of Early English Literature* (1892), Section 2: On the “Englishness” of *Beowulf*

The second question to ask is, Where is the scene of [*Beowulf*] laid? [...] [T]here is not a word about our England in the poem, not a single hint that the original singers knew of the existence of such a people as the English in Britain. [...]

It is held then that the earliest lays of the story arose among the Geats and the Danes, and it is chiefly with these tribes, their manners, their customs, that we are here concerned. But their manners and their customs were the same as those of the Angles. Angle and Geat and Dane spoke the same language, and were all kinsmen—and I am not sure whether we might not with propriety call Angle the tribes of South Sweden, or at least the Geats of the poem. At any rate, *Beowulf* became English. The earliest lays of the poem were adopted by the older English on the mainland, the scenery of the poem was scenery with which the elder English were well acquainted before they came to Britain.²⁰

We approach [the poem] with a reverence which it deserves for its great age, and with a delight which is born of its association with the history of our people and our poetry. It is a moment of romantic pleasure when we stand beside the long undiscovered sources of an historic river, besides whose waters a hundred famous cities have arisen. It is a moment of the same romantic pleasure when we first look at the earliest upwelling of the broad river of English poetry, and think of the hundred cities of the imagination that have been built beside its stream.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 14-15.

²¹ Ibid., 24-25.

2.2.1.E – From Alois Brandl, *Geschichte der Altenglische Literatur* (1908)

Auch die übrigen Elegien handeln alle von heroischen Motiven, entweder von bedrängten Edelfrauen oder leidenden Recken oder gefallenen Burgen. [...]

Dass dies Thema ebenfalls ein altbeliebtes bei den Angelsachsen war, ergießt der Vergleich mit dem in Beowulfepos eingesponnenen Elegiestrücken.²²

The other elegies, too, all deal with heroic motives, either by beleaguered noblewomen or suffering warriors or fallen cities. [...]

The fact that this topic was also an old favourite among the Anglo-Saxons is shown by the comparison with the elegiac passages in the *Beowulf* epic.

2.3 – Sieper’s *Alterenglische Elegie: The Canon of “Old English Elegy”*

2.3.A – On the Historical Interest of Old English Poetry

Die vorliegende Arbeit ist gedacht als erster Band einer Monographiensammlung über die Geschichte der englischen Lyrik. Es mag deshalb angebracht sein, über Absicht und Plan dieser Sammlung hier einiges anzumerken.

Eine wissenschaftlich begründete Darstellung der Geschichte der englischen Lyrik und Epik ist bis heute noch nicht versucht worden. Ja, soweit meine Kenntnis reicht, ist diese Aufgabe nicht einmal als notwendig oder auch nur als wünschenswert erachtet worden. Warum, so hat man gefragt, eine Gattung aus dem natürlichen Zusammenhang mit den andern Gebieten der Poesie herausreißen und gesondert betrachten, was in Wirklichkeit nicht gesondert existiert? [...]

Darum ist es unendlich schwieriger, eine Geschichte der epischen und lyrischen Poesie zu schreiben. Nur derjenige wird beispielsweise den

²² Brandl, *Geschichte der Altenglischen Literatur*, 37-8.

Gesamtverlauf der englischen Lyrik darzustellen vermögen, der die Entwicklung der einzelnen Arten, aus denen die Gattung besteht — des Liedes, der Ode, der Elegie, des Sonettes, der kirchlichen Hymne, der Ballade —, klar überschaut. Tatsächlich bin ich, angelockt von der Aufgabe, eine Geschichte der englischen Lyrik zu schreiben, bei näherer Prüfung der zu bewältigenden Aufgaben bald zu der Überzeugung gelangt, daß, um sie befriedigend zu lösen, zunächst die Entwicklung der einzelnen Arten dieser Gattung, also der lyrischen Stilformen, untersucht werden müßte. Und was für die Lyrik notwendig ist, gilt auch für die anderen Gattungen der Dichtung. Die literarische Forschung wird sich der Aufgabe nicht entziehen können, die Geschichte der einzelnen Dichtungsarten (Kategorien) einmal für sich zu betrachten und darzustellen.

Gewiß spielt in den literarhistorischen Werken, die wir besitzen, bei der Betrachtung einzelner Epochen und Dichter die Scheidung nach Gattungen und Arten (Kategorien) eine gewisse Rolle. Aber von einer konsequenten Durchführung dieses Einteilungsprinzips in der Weise, daß die Entwicklung jeder Dichtungsart bis zu ihrer Blüte und ihrem Verfall durch die Jahrhunderte hindurch genau und lückenlos zu verfolgen wäre, kann nicht die Rede sein.

Daß auch die dichterische Stilform, d. h. die formale Vollendung, die eine Kategorie in einer bestimmten Epoche erreicht historisch erklärt und verstanden werden muß, d. h. durch eine genaue Betrachtung jener Muster, die den Dichtern vorlagen: diese Forderung ist m. E. noch nicht genügend gewürdigt.

Werden wir, wenn beispielsweise von der Odendichtung im Zeitalter der Romantik die Rede ist, darüber belehrt, an welche Vorbilder sich Dichter wie Coleridge, Shelley, Keats mit ihren genialen Schöpfungen anschließen, wie ihre Muster aussahen und inwiefern sie — auch in der Form schöpferisch — darüber hinausgingen? Wissen wir wirklich, was für sie der Begriff 'Ode' eigentlich bedeutete und warum sie gerade in dieser Dichtungsart so vollendetes leisteten? [...]

Welches innere und äußere Erlebnis hat die Dichtung veranlaßt? Aus welchen Quellen ist dem Dichter der Stoff geflossen? Welche Mitteilungen, Beobachtungen, Erfahrungen, Kenntnisse und Erkenntnisse haben den Stoffkreis belebt, erweitert oder sonst verändert? Inwieweit ist das Werk der Ausdruck der dichterischen Persönlichkeit ein Spiegelbild seiner Zeit, ihrer Gedanken, geistigen Strömungen und Bewegungen? Alle diese Fragen sind bedeutungsvoll, ihre Lösung ist interessant, ja notwendig. Doch reichen sie zu vollkommener Erklärung und Würdigung eines Werkes nicht aus. Es fragt sich insbesondere noch: In welcher Form erscheint das Zeugnis? Zu welcher Art, welcher Kategorie von Dichtungen gehört es, und welche besondere Stellung nimmt es ein in der Entwicklungsreihe, die diese Kategorie durchlaufen hat?²³

The present work is intended as the first volume of a monograph collection on the history of English lyric poetry. It may therefore be appropriate to note some of the intentions and plans of this collection.

A scientifically founded account of the history of English lyric and epic has not yet been attempted. Indeed, as far as my knowledge goes, this task has not even been considered necessary or even desirable. Why, it has been asked, is it necessary to tear a genre out of its natural connection with the other realms of poetry and to look at it separately, which in reality does not exist on its own? [...]

Only in this way will one be able to, for example, attest to the overall course of English lyric, as he clearly outlines the development of the individual types of which the genre consists – the song, the ode, the elegy, the sonnet, the church hymn, the ballad. In fact, lured by the fact of writing a history of English lyric, I, upon closer examination of the tasks to be accomplished, soon came to the conviction that, in order to carry it out satisfactorily, the development of the early types of this genus, that is, the lyric genres, should be examined. Literary research cannot avoid the task of examining and presenting the history of individual genres (categories) of poetry.

Certainly, in the literary historical works we possess, separation into genres and types (categories) plays a certain role in considering individual epochs and poets. But there can be no question of a consistent implementation of this classification principle in such a way that the development of each type of poetry could be traced precisely and completely through the centuries to its blooming and decline.

²³ Sieper, *Die Altenglische Elegie*, viii-ix.

That the style of a poetic genre, which is, the formal that a category reaches in a particular epoch, must be explained and understood historically; namely, by close examination of the patterns used by the poets, is, in my opinion, an approach not yet sufficiently appreciated.

If, for example, we discuss the form of the Ode in the age of Romanticism, then we must be instructed on the models to which such poets as Coleridge, Shelley, or Keats, and their ingenious creations are connected; how are their patterns similar and to what extent – also in formal terms – were they creative beyond that? Do we really know what the term “ode” really meant for them and why they were so accomplished in this poetic genre? [...]

What inner and outer experiences have motivated the poetry? From what sources did the poet draw the material? What communications, observations, experiences, knowledge and insights have animated, expanded or otherwise changed the subject matter? To what extent is the work the expression of the poetic personality, a reflection of his time, his thoughts, spiritual currents and movements? All these questions are meaningful, their solution is interesting, indeed necessary. But they are not enough for a perfect explanation and appreciation of a work. In particular, it still remains to ask: in what form does the evidence appear? To what kind, which category of poetry does it belong, and what special position does it occupy in the line of development that has passed through this category?

Es kommt beispielsweise alles darauf an, ob die in diesem Buche behandelte 'Rede der Frau an Eadwacer' als Rätsel oder als Elegie aufgefaßt wird. Jahrzehntelange spitzfindigste Deutung haben das Gedicht als Rätsel nicht befriedigend zu erklären vermocht; als Elegie, als Klage der Frau um den friedlosen Mann erhält das Fragment Leben, Farbe, Bewegung; es ist ein lyrischer Erguß, voll von Schwung und pathetischer Kraft. Überhaupt ergibt ein tieferes Eindringen in den Gegenstand (und ich hoffe, auch die vorliegende Monographie wird dies erkennen lassen) wie wertvoll, ja wie unbedingt notwendig es ist, Stücke, die derselben Kategorie angehören, einmal im Zusammenhang zu betrachten. Nur auf diese Weise wird man über Wesen und Art dieser Kategorie ins Reine kommen und manches deuten können, was sonst dunkel und unverständlich war; nur so wird man auch, wenn es sich um verderbte Texte handelt, das Echte, Ursprüngliche von den späteren Zutaten mit einiger Sicherheit zu scheiden imstande sein.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., x-xi.

For example, it all depends on whether the 'speech of the woman to Eadwacer' treated in this book is taken as a riddle or as an elegy. Decades of the most subtle interpretation have failed to explain the poem satisfactorily as a riddle; as an elegy, as a complaint of the woman to the outcast man, the fragment receives life, colour, movement; it is a lyrical outpour, full of momentum and pathetic force. In general, a deeper intrusion into the subject matter (and I hope that the present monograph will reveal this) also makes it as valuable, indeed as absolutely necessary, to consider pieces belonging to the same category in context. Only in this way will one be able to come to terms with the nature and art of this category, and be able to interpret many things that were otherwise obscure and incomprehensible; only in this way, when dealing with corrupted texts, will it be possible to divorce the genuine, original from the later ingredients with some certainty.

2.3.B – On the National Element in Old English Poetry

Das Epos ist seinem eigentlichen Wesen nach naive, — ist Heldendichtung.

Als die Griechen noch an das Walten ihrer Götter und die Taten ihrer Heroen glaubten, schrieb Homer seine unsterblichen Gesänge. Solange unsere germanischen Vorfahren dem geheimnisvollen Leben der Natur noch in kindlich achtungsvoller Scheu gegenüberstanden und Manneskraft und Heldenstärke als das Höchste priesen, konnte aus ihrem Volksbewußtsein ein 'Beowulf' erwachsen. Ihrem Volksbewußtsein, sage ich, denn in der klassischen Zeit des epischen Gesanges taucht das Bewußtsein des Einzelnen im Denken und Empfinden des Volkes völlig unter.²⁵

The epic is naïve in its very essence – it is heroic poetry.

When the Greeks still believed in the governance of their gods and the deeds of their heroes, Homer wrote his immortal songs. As long as our Teutonic ancestors still regarded the mysterious life of nature with childlike respectful shyness and praised the power of men and heroic strength as most worthy, a *Beowulf* could grow out of their national consciousness. Their national consciousness, I say, for in the classical period of epic song, individual consciousness disappears in the thinking and feeling of the people.

²⁵ Ibid., xiv. Sieper uses the term "Volksbewußtsein," which literally translates as "people-consciousness" or "folk-consciousness." The nationalistic overtone is difficult to escape considering the association of the term "Volk" and compounds thereof after Herder, whose ideas resound strongly here. The reiterative and emphatic "Ihrem Volksbewußtsein, sage ich" suggests that Sieper was keen on stressing this implication.

2.3. C – On the “Sentimental” Character of English Literature

Jedenfalls ist dem englischen Volke schon in den Anfängen seiner literarischen Betätigung eine gewisse Weichheit und Sentimentalität eigen gewesen. Und diese Eigenschaften haben sich, — vielleicht gemildert durch mancherlei Einflüsse, die im Laufe der Jahrhunderte auf den englischen Nationalcharakter gewirkt haben (insonderheit durch die Vermischung mit den straffen, kräftigen Normannen) bis auf den heutigen Tag erhalten.

Die Sentimentalität der modernen Engländer ist freilich eine andere als diejenige der Deutschen ; aber sie ist unzweifelhaft vorhanden und hat auch in der Geschichte der englischen Kultur bis auf den heutigen Tag ihre Spuren hinterlassen. Die stimmungsreiche, ernste, grüblerische Art war auch den stammverwandten Angelsachsen und Friesen, die auf dem Kontinent blieben, von jeher eigen. Sie scheint zum Charakter aller germanischen Stämme, die die Niederungen der Nordsee bewohnten, gehört zu haben. Bei den kontinentalen Volksverbänden hat sich diese Stammeseigentümlichkeit reiner und unvermischter erhalten können. In dem Quickborn und den lyrischen Erzählungen Klaus Groths, in Storms und Allmers' schwermütigen Gedichten, in G. Frenssens Romanen und selbst Detlev von Liliencrons lyrischen Novellen gelangt sie zu unverkennbarem Ausdruck.²⁶

In any case, even in the early days of his literary activity, the English people had a certain softness and sentimentality. And these qualities have been preserved, perhaps tempered by many influences that have influenced the English national character over the centuries (in particular by mixing with the tight, vigorous Normans) to the present day.

The sentimentality of the modern English, of course, is different from that of the Germans; but it is undoubtedly present and has left its mark on the history of English culture to the present day. The atmospheric, serious, brooding nature was always inherent to the native Anglo-Saxons and Frisians who remained on the Continent. It seems to have belonged to the character of all Germanic tribes who inhabited the lowlands of the North Sea. In the continental ethnic branch, this tribal peculiarity has been preserved more pure and unmixed. In Quickborn and the lyrical stories of Klaus Groth, in Storm's and Allmers's melancholy poems, in G. Frenssen's novels, and even in Detlev von Liliencron's lyrical novellas, it achieves an unmistakable expression.

²⁶ Ibid., 118

2.3.D – On the Pan-Germanic Origin of Old English Poetry

Der Germane der alten Zeit...ist von dem Menschen unserer Tage durch eine weite Kluft getrennt. Er erscheint zunächst und im wesentlichen nicht als eine individuelle Persönlichkeit, sondern als Glied seiner Sippe, seines Stammes. Das Sippengefühl beherrscht ihn durchaus. Er steht vor uns als Repräsentant einer Ganzheit; außergewöhnliche Umstände und gewaltige innere Erschütterungen ändern daran nichts — im Gegenteil: je mehr die Seele im Aufruhr, desto mehr verschwindet die Persönlichkeit im Geschlecht.²⁷

The German of the old days...is separated from the man of our day by a wide gap. He appears first, and essentially, not as an individual, but as a member of his clan, his tribe. The sense of tribe determines him. He stands before us as a representative of a wholeness; unusual circumstances and violent inner turmoil do not change that — on the contrary: the more the soul in distress, the more the individual merges with the race.

Nun wäre es trotzdem falsch zu glauben, daß die Seele unserer Vorfahren von dem Stammesgefühl in einem Grade beherrscht gewesen sei, daß sie individuellen Regungen nicht Raum gab. Die Liebe zu Haus und Hof, zu Weib und Kind und heimatlicher Erde, die Freude am Hammerwurf und Harfenschlag, an Sonnenschein und Seemannsfahrten — alles das war auch in ihrem Herzen lebendig. Daß diese Regungen im Kampf mit dem alles beherrschenden Stammesgefühl so häufig unterlagen, bedingte eben in nicht geringem Maße die Tragik ihres Lebens.²⁸

Nun besteht freilich zwischen den Angelsachsen einerseits und den Skandinaviern und Isländern anderseits ein beachtenswerter Unterschied. Die germanischen Eroberer der britischen Inseln sind weicher, grüblerischer, schwermütiger als ihre skandinavischen Vettern. Das persönliche Erlebnis, die individuelle 'Note und insbesondere das reflektive Element tritt stärker in die Erscheinung.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 107.

²⁸ Ibid., 110-11.

²⁹ Ibid., 114

Of course, there is a remarkable difference between the Anglo-Saxons, on the one hand, and the Scandinavians and Icelanders, on the other. The Germanic conquerors of the British Isles are softer, more brooding, more melancholy than their Scandinavian cousins. The personal experience, the individual note and, in particular, the reflective element appears more strongly in their views.

Wenn sich also die ae. Elegien von den Literaturwerken der übrigen germanischen Stämme mehr oder minder deutlich unterscheiden, so muß dies auf andere Gründe zurückzuführen sein. Und der Hauptgrund liegt wohl darin, daß das Seelenleben der Angelsachsen reicher, inniger, wenn auch nicht leidenschaftlicher war als das ihrer germanischen Vettern.³⁰

If, therefore, the Old English Elegies differ more or less clearly from the literary works of the other Germanic tribes, this must be due to other reasons. And the main reason lies in the fact that the spiritual life of the Anglo-Saxons was richer, more introspective, if not more passionate, than that of their Germanic cousins.

2.3.E – On the Lyric Quality of Old English “Elegy”

Tiefe und Innigkeit des Gefühles, die dichterische Kraft des Ausdrucks und ihr stark individuelles Gepräge machen die Elegien zu einer der bemerkenswertesten Erscheinungen nicht bloß in der altenglischen, sondern in der gesamten altgermanischen Literatur.³¹

The depth and intimacy of feeling, the poetic power of expression and its strongly individual character make the elegies one of the most notable phenomena, not only in Old English, but throughout Old Germanic literature.

So läßt sich die Entwicklung der verschiedenen Formen der altenglischen Elegie auf natürliche Weise erklären. Sobald wir nämlich die Entwicklung auf die Totenklage als Ausgangspunkt zurückführen, scheint uns dieser spontane Ausdruck subjektiver Empfindungen ohne weiteres verständlich. [...] Zweifellos half der natürliche Hang zur Schwermut, zum

³⁰ Ibid., 116

³¹ Ibid, 3.

Grübeln; der durch alle Lebensäußerungen der Angelsachsen hindurchgeht, die Ausbildung und weitere Entwicklung dieser Klage-lieder fördern. —

Wenn wir den Ausgangspunkt der altenglischen Elegien im Auge behalten, so wird noch zweierlei begreiflich: einmal die Form der Erzählung, welche die Klage den Personen, deren Lage geschildert wird, selbst in den Mund legt und ferner das stark individuelle Gepräge der Lieder.³²

Thus the development of the various forms of Old English elegy can be explained in a natural way. For as soon as we trace the development back to the lament for the dead as a starting point, this spontaneous expression of subjective feeling seems to us to be readily understandable. [...] Undoubtedly, the natural inclination to melancholia, to the grief that goes through all the life expressions of the Anglo-Saxons, helped to further the mastery and development of these lament songs.

If we turn our eyes to the origins of the Old English elegies, two more things become clear: first, the narrative structure, which puts the lament in the mouth of the persons whose situation is portrayed, and, moreover, the strongly individual character of the songs.

2.3.F – On the Aesthetic Evaluation of Early Medieval Poetry

Den Dichtern der altenglischen Elegien — um zunächst einmal bei diesen Zeugnissen zu verweilen — ist unzweifelhaft ein stark entwickeltes Naturgefühl eigen.

Die unwiderstehliche Macht, die denjenigen immer wieder zur See hintreibt, der den Zauber des Meeres hat auf sich wirken lassen, die Sehnsucht und das rastlose Verlangen in die Weite inmitten des erblühenden Frühlings, die doppelt schmerzliche Empfindung des Unglücklichen in des Waldes schauerlicher Einsamkeit oder am Seegestade, wo Sturm und Mövenschrei und das Brausen der ewig wandernden Wellen seine Gefährten sind — alles das ist lebendig gefühlt und wirkungsvoll dargestellt. [...] Nicht das Meer schlechthin ist Gegenstand seiner Schilderung, sondern die brandungumstürmte felsige Küste des Nordens, wo Seehundsruf ertönt, der

³² Ibid., 13.

Sturm an die Klippen schlägt und die feuchtbeschwingte Schwalbe Antwort singt.³³

For the poets of the Old English Elegies — to deal first of all with these accounts — there is undoubtedly a strongly developed feeling for nature.

The irresistible power that drives the sea again and again, the magic of the ocean, the yearning and the restless longing in the midst of the blossoming spring, the doubly painful feeling of dreadful loneliness of the exiled, on earth or at sea, where the storm and the seagulls' scream and the roar of the ever-wandering waves are his companions — all that is vividly felt. [...] Not the sea itself is the subject of his description, but the surf-ridden rocky coast of the north, where voice of the seal calls, the storm strikes the cliffs and the dewy-feathered swallow sings in reply.

Bemerkenswert erscheint mir, daß in den Elegien nicht bloß einfache, ursprüngliche Eindrücke geschildert werden — die Lieblichkeit des erwachenden Lenzes, die Schauer der windgepeitschten See, die traurige Öde des frost- und schneegebundenen Gefildes — es handelt sich vielmehr um feinere und komplizierte Stimmungen: die lockenden Frühlingsstimmen wecken im Herzen Sehnsucht und den Drang ins Weite; die Furchtbarkeit und Fährnisse des Wogenkampfes wirken die leidenschaftliche Liebe zur See; der Ruf des Frühlingsvogels löst traurige Empfindungen aus. Man erwidere nicht: Der Sommerruf des Kuckucks und die Klage am Meeresstrande sind konventionelle Motive der kymrischen Poesie und dorthier entlehnt. Es ist darauf zu achten, in welchem Zusammenhang auf den Kuckuck verwiesen wird: sein Ruf, zur Ausfahrt mahnend, gibt gleichsam Antwort dem sehnsuchtsvollen Drängen des Herzens. Auch die Klage am Meeresufer unterscheidet sich wesentlich von den typischen Stellen in den kymrischen Elegien. Die traurige Öde des winterlichen Meeres tritt in Kontrastwirkung zu der wonnevollen Rückerinnerung des einsamen Wanderers. Wie sehr alles das an die Art der besten modernen Dichter erinnert, wurde bereits früher dargelegt.³⁴

³³ Ibid., 114

³⁴ Ibid., 115-16.

Remarkable to me is that in the elegies not merely simple, basic impressions are described — the sweetness of the awakening spring, the showers of the windswept sea, the sad desolation of the frost- and snow-bound field — it involves rather finer and more complicated moods: the enticing spring voices arouse yearning in the heart, and the urge to [go into] the wide; the fearfulness and the dangers of the surging waves, the passionate love for the sea; the call of the spring bird [that] triggers sad feelings. There can be no doubt: the summer call of the cuckoo and the lament on the beach are conventional motifs of Welsh poetry, borrowed [from] there. It should be noted in what context the cuckoo is referenced: his call, admonishing for an exit, gives as it were an answer to the yearning urge of the heart. Even the lament on the seashore differs significantly from the typical places in the Welsh elegies. The sad desolation of the wintry sea contrasts with the blissful reminiscence of the lonely wanderer. How much all this reminds of the nature of the best modern poets has been explained earlier.

2.4 – The Discourse of “Elegy:” Language, Themes, and Influence

2.4.A – From Edith Wardale, *Chapters on Old English Literature* (1935)

[A]most all O.E. lyrical poems are elegiac in character.

There are in the Exeter Book seven short poems of great beauty, worthy representatives of this kind of literature. They are generally known by the titles, Deor or Deor’s Lament, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Lament of the Wife, The Message of the Husband, The Wanderer, The Ruin, and The Seafarer. All, in spite of their differences of theme and treatment, show certain marked points of resemblance, and they may therefore be treated with advantage as a group [...].

Beowulf is of its time and country; the matter of the lyrics is of all time and every country. These poems are nearer in spirit to the Finnsburg passage and to the O.H.G. Hildebrandslied, as far as we can judge from the few lines left. May not this be the spirit of the older Germanic literature?³⁵

³⁵ *Chapters on Old English Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1935), 29; 32. Wardale refers to Sieper’s *Altenglische Elegie* in her discussion of *The Wanderer*, 31, n1.

**2.4.B – From Charles W. Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry* (1943),
Section 1: On the Pan-Germanic Origin of Old English Poetry**

The successive waves of the Settlement had brought to England a wealth of Continental tradition: myth and saga, folk-tale and chronicle, legends known among the Germanic tribes, and now preserved and retold in England. A race does not easily lose memory of its past, even in the dark centuries and on foreign soil. Tradition may grow obscure with passing years, and alien strains engraft themselves on ancient legend in strange and puzzling ways. But tradition survives, and the past lives on. In the songs of the early English, and the lays that enlivened their banquets, old memories still lingered, famous names and heroic deeds of chronicle and legend. The singer was an English *scop*, but the song was often of the Continental past. Through the dusk of their great halls echoed the glory of heroes long dead: Attila the Hun and Eormanic the Goth, Theodoric and his thanes, Hildeburh of Finnsburg, Sigemund and Signy of the Volsungs, Walther of Aquitaine and his lady Hildegund, Beowulf of the Geats, shapes of the dead rising in repeated resurrection as the gleeman sang.³⁶

**2.4.B – From Charles W. Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry* (1943),
Section 2: On the Aesthetic Evaluation of Old English Poetry**

In spite of the centuries which lie between the present and the age reflected in this body of verse, the spirit and in many instances the details of the *Elegies* have that timeless quality which marks the simple treatment of themes universal in significance, and independent of changing civilizations. The *Seafarer*, for example, is one of the finest sea-poems in our tongue. English poetry has given us a large body of verse which reflects emotionally the impact of the sea upon the lives of men, and the varied moods and images arising from contemplation of sea life have contributed to the realisms and symbolisms of our literature from the age of the Saxon raiders to the days of Swinburne and Masfield.

³⁶ Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry*, 3.

These Old English elegies differ markedly in mood and pattern from the personal elegy. They do not bewail the death, or eulogize the life, of an individual. They have little in common with modern elegies of the type of *Lycidas* or *Adonais*. In detail and design they own no debt to the pastoral idyll. Their range of interest is universal, deriving from a sense of the tragedy of life itself—*sunt lacrimae rerum*—a consciousness of the transience of earthly joy, and fleeting glory of earthly strength. Their rhythm is tuned to the ceaseless flow of time and change. Their pathos springs from knowledge that all life moves with frail feet and fragile wings. Their dignity clothes a recognition that man's years of breath are first a hope and brief struggle, then silence, memory, and the ruin of time.

The mood of the Old English elegies is the mood of undaunted reflection upon the universal lot of mankind, the inexorable limitation of man's existence by the mutable and mortal. [...]

But it is not necessary to emphasise the external literary or social influence for the development of popular elegy. Elegiac themes are native to the thoughts of sensitive minds, and the appeal of these themes, clothed with the dignity of universal application to human fortune, is amply illustrated in English poetry by the popularity of so characteristic an expression of the genre as Gay's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. The contemporary spirit of the Old English elegies is itself a reflection in poetic style of the poignancy of emotion with which each generation must recognize the weakness of human strength, the fleeting breath of earthly beauty, the hovering mystery of death.

Not the least characteristic quality of these elegies is the temper of stoic endurance whereby their emotional intensity never weakens to sentimentalism, nor their meditations on mortal fate to self-pity or despair. Their genius blends a sensitive perception of human woe with an acceptance of a mortal destiny in whose grip man's virtue is less to struggle than to bear.³⁷

³⁷ Ibid., 102-05

Such are the themes, and the spirit, of these Old English elegies. They are, in our literature, a first welling up of that clear lyric strain which through the centuries has continued to pour its melody and passion into the full stream of English verse. A thousand years have not staled their freshness, nor changed convention made them strange. Their substance is familiar to all who have felt deeply the moving pathos of human fate; their decorative background to all whose daily lives have known unsheltered contact with the world of nature. Time itself bears witness for them that, in the poetry of our tongue, they have their place with all forms which are a shaping into beauty of the timeless and universal.³⁸

2.4.1. – Pattern, Theme, and Formula: Defining the Old English “Elegy”

2.4.1.A - From Stanley B. Greenfield, ‘The Old English Elegy’ (1966)

The elegies by no means form a homogeneous group, and at least one critic would deny all except the two *Frauenlieder* (*The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*) classification as *elegy*. Still, they do have several qualities in common. They are relatively short pieces, ranging from *Wulf and Eadwacer* (19 lines) to *The Seafarer* (124 lines); they have (except for *The Ruin*) a first-person speaker; and they all (again “*the Ruin* excepted) emphasise at least in part the speaker’s state of mind arising from his reflection on the contrast between past and present conditions. However consolatory (*Deor*) or hortatory (*The Seafarer*) or expectant of a brave new world (*The Husband’s Message*) they may be, they moreover call attention in varying degrees to the transitory nature of the pleasures and security of this world. We may perhaps formulate a definition of the Old English elegy as a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation, and expressing an attitude towards that

³⁸ Ibid., 130.

experience. We may further note that many of the motifs in the elegies have analogues in Old Welsh, Old Norse, or Latin literature, and in the commentaries of the Fathers; that their diction has affinities with the diction of heroic poetry on the one hand and with that of Christian poetry on the other, with the diction of secular gnomes or maxims and with that of prose homiletic material; and that the verse is traditionally formulaic, ultimately of oral provenience.³⁹

2.4.1.B – From Stanley B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (1972)

The effect of genre identification upon the interpretation of poems is well illustrated by the various displacements of the ‘general horizon of meaning’ in the critical history of such poems as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, *The Husband’s Message*, *Deor*, *The Ruin* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*. These are the famous elegies of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Their identification as *elegy* occurred in the nineteenth century, probably because they seemed to reflect something of a sense of personal loss in a ‘complaint’ or *Klage*. And if we read these poems with this expectation in mind, we find a particular kind of meaning in them that has satisfied many critics, and struck a resonant chord in the general reader’s mind, down to the present day.⁴⁰

2.4.2. – Three Examples of Continuity in the Late Twentieth Century

2.4.2A – From C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Poetry* (1967), Section 1: On the Pan-Germanic Origin of Old English Poetry

Although almost all the surviving Old English poetry appears only in manuscripts of the late tenth or early eleventh centuries, there is included in

³⁹ Greenfield, ‘The Old English Elegies’, 143. The “one critic” alluded is Timmer; see below.

⁴⁰ Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems*, 12.

this corpus a group of fragmentary short pieces which contain material going back to heroic traditions brought from the Continental homes of the Anglo-Saxon settlers in Britain (as does *Beowulf*), presenting echoes of a way of life belonging to the age of the Germanic migrations, before the fundamental effects of Christian and Latin contacts. These poems, which link Anglo-Saxon culture with its Germanic places of origin, embody the oldest expression of the Germanic heroic spirit in Anglo-Saxon. [...]

These earliest Old English remains of Germanic heroic verse, though occasionally touched by the fact that their authors and audiences were already Christian-influenced, preserve much of the culture described by Tacitus in his *Germania*, an account of the Germanic tribes written near the close of the first century, with its emphasis on the basic Germanic values—loyalty to chosen aristocratic leaders even to death and beyond, the sacredness of the ties of kinship, the supreme duty of avenging a slain leader, and a deep devotion to a type of naturalistic religion which derived heroic rules from the gods through carefully remembered genealogies. [...]

They are what remains, in fragmentary and allusively incomplete form, of material from Germanic heroic story which the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes must have brought to Britain from their homelands, with an already established tradition of metre, diction, and style. But this material and the outlook in which it is expressed is properly to be regarded as Germanic rather than English. For the Germanic peoples had thought of themselves as based upon the idea of the clan, not in any sense of nationality. Even as late as *Beowulf*, in which the characters of the stories which make up the poem are of differing Germanic tribes—Danes, Geats, Swedes, etc.—the outlook is still mainly Continental Germanic, though fundamentally touched by Christian culture.⁴¹

⁴¹ Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature*, 75-76.

**2.4.2A. – From C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Poetry* (1967),
Section 2: On the Application of “Elegy” to Old English Poetry**

If we consider the term ‘lyric’ as implying in a general way the musical utterance of feeling in a limited personal expression of a single mood, then there are certainly lyrics in Old English verse. Yet it is true that the expression of lyric in Anglo-Saxon is only to be found in single poems or in passages of epic where the tone is ‘elegiac’. The term ‘elegy’ in English poetry has commonly be used in two senses: (a) the expression of grief in studied verse for the death of a valued personality, or (b) the general meditation in solitude of what may be called universal griefs. Of the first type carried to excellence by universalized feeling, English literature has been very productive. The outstanding examples are Spenser’s *Astrophell*, Milton’s *Lycidas*, Shelley’s *Adonais*, Arnold’s *Thyrsis*, and Tenyson’s *In Memoriam*. The second type provides England’s most admired and best-known poem in its class, Gray’s *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*. It is *elegy* in Gray’s sense that is the convenient term applicable in the classification of Old English poetry. Indeed, it is only in the elegiac mood in Gray’s sense that lyric expression as defined above is usually to be encountered.⁴²

2.4.2.B – From Michael Alexander, *Old English Literature* (1983)

Though more coherent than *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer* seemed at times a little obscure and baffling, and its dramatic effectiveness was more apparent than its completeness as a resolved work of art, compared with *Beowulf*, *Maldon*, or *Deor*—not to mention the finished perfection of the products of a consummate literary culture such as, say, Marvell’s *The Garden*.⁴³

⁴² Ibid., 139.

⁴³ Alexander, *Old English Literature*, 111.

2.4.2.C – From Michael Alexander *A History of Old English Literature* (2002)

Though more coherent than *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer* seemed at times a little obscure and baffling, and its dramatic effectiveness was more apparent than its completeness as a resolved work of art, compared with *Beowulf*, *Maldon*, or *Deor* —not to mention the finished perfection of the products of a consummate literary culture such as, say, Gary’s *Elegy*.⁴⁴

2.4.2.D – From Anne L. Klinck, ‘The Old English Elegy as Genre’ (1984)

The word “elegy” has a variety of applications, among which its use in an Old English context appears to be idiosyncratic. Everybody knows what the major Old English elegies are, but it often seems rather strange that we should be calling them “elegies.” I would like to consider a particular aspect of this problem: that is, the question of whether the Old English elegies possess elegiac form, as I believe they do. I intend “elegiac form” to be understood in a specifically Old English context, but with reference to a broader notion encompassing both reflective and lyrical elements. [...]

Although these poems and passage have been grouped together in this way, there are distinct sub-categories among them. *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, like the lesser known *Riming Poem* and *Resignation*, have close affinities with homiletic literature, and *Deor* with heroic legend, while *Wulf and Eawacer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, and *The Husband’s Message* are love poems, *The Ruin* is a purely descriptive piece, and the passages from *Beowulf* and *Guthlac* are coloured by their respective narrative contexts.

The use of the term “elegy” as applied to these various works is also misleading because they are not elegies in the classical sense of compositions in elegiac meter (*ελεγεῖον*) nor in the tradition of later English pastoral elegy. The basic notion of a lament (*ελεγος*) is more or less applicable to all of them, with the significant exception of *The Husband’s*

⁴⁴ Idem, *A History of Old English Literature*, 139.

Message, where unhappiness is a thing of the past. Though the poems have little in common with the later pastoral elegies in English, modelled on the eclogue and the idyll (e.g. Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais*, Arnold's *Thyrsis*), they have a kinship with Gray's *Elegy*, which treats themes of death and transience in a general way, and even with Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, which though far longer than the Old English poems, resembles them in consisting of rather various reflections prompted by the need to come to terms with a sense of loss. On this basis, then, it is appropriate to call the Old English pieces "elegies." [...]

I believe that the term "elegy" has a further justification; it can be shown that, in addition to its characteristic themes, Old English elegy also has a characteristic form. This form, which is visible in the complete poems rather than in the passages from longer works, manifests itself in a use of some of the following devices: monologue, conventional introduction of the speaker, gnomic conclusion, repetition of key phrases, repetition of entire lines, and, occasionally, rhyme. [...]

In this respect, the Old English elegy can be perceived as formally contrastive to heroic narrative poetry.⁴⁵

The Old English elegies, then, can be seen as a group of poems with a distinctive structure, intermediate between the stichic form of traditional Germanic verse and the strophic form found in later medieval lyrics. As a genre, the elegies are rooted in reflective poetry, but they have affinities with other types of poetry that contain within themselves the seeds of lyric: riddle, chant, and charm. Of these three genres, the first contains something of the personal element we associate with lyric, and the other two, something of its song-like quality. What makes the elegies distinctive is a more intense evocation of personality and a more deliberate arrangement of recurring patterns. The movement towards lyricism is not displayed equally by all the elegies: it is most pronounced in the love poems, especially *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Lyricism never emerged fully fledged in Old English

⁴⁵ Klinck, 'The Old English Elegy as Genre,' *ESC* 10:2 (1984), 129-30.

poetry...But, in a poetry remarkably homogenous in its metrics and without a distinct lyrical genre, the elegies can be seen as the group of poems which most clearly and deliberately strive after lyrical form.⁴⁶

2.5 – “Participation without Belonging:” Old English “Elegy” as Genre

2.5.A – From B. J. Timmer ‘The Elegiac Mood in Old English’ (1942), Section 1: On the Canon of Old English “Elegy”

Deor is included in the group of elegiac poems...Yet it has been doubted whether the poem is at all elegiac, for *Deor* does not complain of the personal loss that he feels at being pushed out of his position by Heorrenda and he does not seem to be exiled. He merely says that if life seems to be dark and difficult one should put one’s trust in God who gives honour to one man and sorrow to another (ll. 28-34) and the autobiographical part (ll. 35-42) is not elegiac at all. Thus, although there is a small section in the poem that contains some complaint of a change of luck this section is so unimportant when compared to the rest of the poem and so many characteristically elegiac elements are absent, e.g. the personal loss of the lord, the exile, the transitoriness of life, comparison of former luck with present ill-luck, that the conclusion seems warranted that *Deor* is not an elegiac poem.⁴⁷

Now whatever the meaning of [“The Wife’s Lament”] may be...so much at least will be clear that it is a non-religious poem in which we find elements that may be taken as characteristically elegiac: lament over misery, separation from the lord, and banishment, change of luck, comparison with former happiness...and a longing for love are expressed in a lamenting tone. These characteristic features make the poem as it stands into an elegy pure and simple, without any religious didactic purpose.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁷ Timmer, ‘The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry,’ 35.

The second complaint of a woman, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, is even more difficult to understand. [...] Here, too,...[t]here are enough typically elegiac features to justify the view that this short poem is also an elegy pure and simple, again without any religious-didactic purpose.

The Husband's Message is altogether different in tone. [...] The general tone of this poem is cheerful and there is no lament over any loss of happiness, nor does it show any of the other typically elegiac features. Although a longing for the beloved is expressed, it is in an entirely different mood: no sadness, no resignation, but a joyful desire to start life afresh with his wife, because he has overcome his misfortunes. This poem cannot be called an elegy at all.⁴⁸

Then follow the two poems that are sometimes called companion pieces, the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*. These poems differ from those discussed above in one important respect: they are distinctly religious poems, both with a strong religious-didactic tendency. [...] There is another poem that shows the same sequence of thought than the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*, viz. the *Rhyming Song*, while also *The Exile's Prayer* is similar in structure to these religious poems. [...] The structure that is common to the three poems is...as follows: 1) comparison of former luck with present ill-luck; 2) pessimistic generalization: the poet's case is only an example of the transitoriness of things in general; 3) the wise man therefore puts his trust in God. [...]

So we should judge these poems two poems in their completeness and if we include the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* in any group of elegiac poems we should also include the *Rhyming Song* and *The Exile's Prayer*, or else exclude all four of these poems. The similarity in sequence of thought is too great to justify the inclusion of only two in a discussion of elegiac poems. [...] For this reason it would be better not to call the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* "elegies," but "religious didactic lyrics."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., 36-7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 37-38.

The *Rhyming Song* and *The Exile's Prayer*, both poems of a distinctly religious character in which the elegiac elements are even vaguer than in the *Seafarer*, have already been mentioned above. They are poems that belong to the same class of religious didactic poems as the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*, but as the elegiac mood is kept entirely in the background they need not be discussed any further.⁵⁰

2.5.A – From B. J. Timmer's 'The Elegiac Mood in Old English' (1942), Section 2: On the "Christian Elegies" and "Religious Propaganda"

[The] two questions, that of the structural connection between *Wanderer*, *Seafarer*, and *Rhyming Song* (and to a lesser degree *The Exile's Prayer*, for the elegiac lament is least strong in this poem), and that of taking the elegiac introductions to the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* to be the original poems, can both be reduced to the same origin: the fact that the elegiac parts of the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* serve as an introduction to the main idea and the main purpose of these poems, which are pieces of religious propaganda.⁵¹

If, however, we had better avoid the name of elegies for the poems discussed above, we are certainly justified in speaking of an elegiac mood in Old English poetry. [...] Still, it is impossible to show any connection between these various expressions of the elegiac mood in Old English poetry, apart from the general tendency to lament which is thoroughly Germanic and continues well into the Christian period.⁵²

Now the question has often been asked: what is the origin of the elegiac character of Old English poetry? In view of the evidence that we have of laments made by nobles and kings in the Heroic Age it may be said that the usually accepted explanation of the origin of the elegiac mood is right, viz. that melancholy forms a fundamental element of the Germanic character. [...] Yet it seems to me that the question should be put

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵² Ibid., 41.

differently. It should not be asked what was the origin of the elegiac mood, but rather: why is it for a long time such a prominent trait of Old English poetry in contrast with the contemporary poetry of the other Germanic peoples? [...] [T]he adaptation of the elegiac mood to Christian propagandistic purposes provides the answer to our question.⁵³

2.5.B – From Fulk and Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (2003)

The Seafarer is one of a group of poems commonly referred to as “elegies”—not in the sense of the word as it applied to Classical or later English verse, but to lyric composition of a type peculiar to Old English. Greenfield’s definition of elegy is the most widely appealed to... Yet several other definitions have been offered, and this fact, along with the concurrent complexity and vagueness of Greenfield’s, which combines considerations of length, structure, content, narrative perspective, and affect in an attempt to accommodate all the short poems that interest modern scholars most, invites scepticism about the validity of the concept. Moreover, the number of elegies in Old English ranges widely in different estimates from 2...to 14 or more in the view of those who would make elegy a mode rather than a genre [...].

Regarding these poems as a recognizable group only serves the purpose of seeming to justify the lavish critical attention bestowed upon them, to the neglect of many other poems mixed together with them in the Exeter Book. Yet the critical preoccupation with them is predicated on the modern preference, inherited from the Romantics, for poetry that takes the form of lyric self-expression. To privilege and highlight the self-expressive element of these poems is possibly to misconstrue them, since the lyric speakers in them are generally anonymous, and little attempt is made to individualize them.

Moreover, the features that bind the group together are often less striking than the features that bind each other to the poems outside the

⁵³ Ibid., 44.

group. [...] Accordingly, we believe the term “elegy” contributes to ahistorical and ethnocentric misconceptions about these poems, and prefer to avoid it. [...] Indeed, poetic types are so intermixed in these compositions that to attempt to define the category on a principled basis would be fruitless and misleading.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Fulk and Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, 179-81.

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