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Darkness, Depression, and Descent in Anglo-Saxon England

edited by Ruth Wehlau

Darkness, Depression, and Descent in
Anglo-Saxon England

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Darkness, Depression, and Descent in Anglo-Saxon England

Edited by Ruth Wehlau

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Preface

MANY PEOPLE HAVE SUPPORTED me in the editing of this book, but special thanks are due to: Simon Forde, who first solicited a manuscript on medieval darkness; Shelley King who encouraged me throughout the entire process; and Garrett Wall, my very patient assistant, whose judicious good sense in editing and research was a great help. I would also like to thank my husband, John Corbett, whose love sustained me in this work as it does in life: “Pócan dó.”

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Introduction: Darkness in the Universe, Darkness in the Mind in Anglo-Saxon Literature

Ruth Wehlau and Fabienne L. Michelet

THE RECURRENT USE OF light and dark imagery is a contrast that runs deep in Old English literature, deriving from a structure of opposition in which a broad array of images and motifs of the fallen world—night, shadow, chaos, descent, damnation as well as nightmare, loss, sadness, and depression—are opposed to that which emanates from God—day, light, order, salvation, and joy. Darkness in this sense is more than absence of light; it is a way of structuring one's experience and of understanding the world, a fundamental image that extends into various aspects of culture, from the macrocosm—darkness in the universe—to the microcosm—darkness in the mind. The Anglo-Saxon notion of the dark not only underlies learned and intellectual constructs of the world. It also conveys an intimation of the world as lived experience; it is a sensibility, an opposite to the contained and controlled, and a metaphor for what is not known and is itself unknowable. Although such foundational metaphors are found throughout language, their power is amplified in Old English verse where poetic features originating in oral tradition—a reliance on visceral imagery, repetition, and an avoidance of abstract and analytical terms—allow for phenomenological analysis¹. The chapters in this collection follow this phenomenological turn, attending to darkness in multiple aspects, from cosmic chaos to representations of hell, from nighttime fears to the dread of unknowing, from loss of wisdom to sinfulness, deep sadness, and grief—that is, troubled mental states that vernacular authors often represent with images of shadows and darkness and that are now routinely called depression.² In so doing, the papers speak to three lively critical trends in Old English studies: cultural geography and spatial representations, depictions of the mind and its operations, and studies of emotions.

In considering darkness and descent essential to cultural and mental constructs of space, the contributions gathered here build on the work

of Nicole Guenther Discenza, Nicholas Howe, and Jennifer Neville.³ In a cosmic sense, darkness foregrounds motifs such as chaos, the abyss of hell, hostile environments, and exile. The realm that exists outside the order of the world comprises Hell and Chaos, both literally and symbolically dark. Chaos is “darkness palpable,”⁴ primal anti-structure or disorder, both a substance and a place, although a place of unknown length and breadth, thus simultaneously a place and no place. Outside the realm of order, Chaos is in some ways liminal, located between life and death (Jones, 33–34), but also close at hand, associated with the descent of night. Where Chaos is an unstructured, unlimited, and extensive nothingness, Hell in Anglo-Saxon literature is narrow and measurable, an anti-hall that exists in opposition to the heavenly hall; in *Christ and Satan*, Hell is a place where punishment consists of measurement. But, like Chaos, it can be close at hand: Grendel, a fiend from Hell, lives on the margins of the Danish territory.⁵

By its very location—underneath—Hell evokes the motif of descent, a fundamental trope that recurs in Christian-influenced literature and that partakes both of the phenomenology of downward movement and of Christian associations with the concepts of descent and fall, including the fall of Satan and the rebel angels, and the fatal succumbing to temptation of Adam and Eve. But it also calls to mind Christ’s descent into Hell, the Harrowing, which includes both conquest and triumphant return. As Christ’s triumph indicates, all darkness is ultimately within God’s control; even descent into the grave is understood to include a final return to existence in another form after death.⁶

If Hell is literally a place of entrapment, it is also a state of mind experienced by Satan. In like manner, macrocosmic darkness is co-extensive with microscopic darkness, the darkness of the mind. This association is hinted at in the Old English dialogue, *Solomon and Saturn II*, where Solomon’s question concerning shadows is followed by a question about joy and sorrow:

Ac forhwon ne mot seo sunne side gesceafte
scire geondscinan? Forhwam besceaded heo
muntas ond moras ond monige ec
weste stowa? ...

(162–165a)

Ac forhwam beoð ða gesidas somod ætgædre,
wop ond hleahtor? Full oft hie weorðgeornra
sælda toslitað.

(170–172a)

(But why can't the sun shine brightly across the ample creation?
Why does it shade mountains and moors and many other deserted
places as well? ...

But why are the companions, weeping and laughter, both together?
Very often they destroy the happiness of the well-intentioned.)⁷

With their exploration of shadows and darkness in the mental world, the present essays are indebted to recent studies on the conceptions of the mind and mental activities in vernacular literature, such as those by Leslie Lockett or Antonina Harbus.⁸ Especially relevant is Britt Mize's claim that a preoccupation with mental states is integral to the aesthetics of Old English verse.⁹ In poetic terms, language can be used performatively to combat the forces of darkness, be they terrors of the night, the dread of unknowing, or a darkened internal world of sinfulness and despair. The vernacular psalm *The Order of the World* best expresses the opposition to darkness as articulated within Old English poetry. The function of this poem, which is sometimes called *The Wonders of Creation*, is evident in the two different titles given by its editors: "wonders" evokes the mystery of divine power, while "order" indicates the boundary-making actions of God in constructing the cosmos.¹⁰ As the poem moves from instructions to a young poet to a sample praise poem based on Psalm 19 and including a lengthy paean to the sun, it represents the power of the poet in conversation with God to construct and create, to bring light, in imitation of God's own power. Yet even here the boundaries of what can be known are fixed. The wise man must seek out mysteries, and fix them within his mind, but he cannot expand his own mind beyond the limits given to humankind; there is always a realm beyond the power of speech and knowledge.

The contributions in this collection also address the darkened mind and gloomy thoughts that we would now call depression, as for instance the experience of listlessness and profound sadness described in *Beowulf*, in Hrethel's lament death over the death of his son (2435–2471). In Anglo-Saxon culture, this experience is also that of the exile, separated from his or her community and enclosed within his or her own mind, as in *The Wife's Lament*. In the world constructed by this poem, thoughts roam repeatedly over the same territory seeking relief and finding none. Although depression as a form of mental illness is a modern notion, there is no doubt that the medieval world understood something of

this condition in the concepts of *tristitia* and of *acedia*. Recent work on medieval emotions by Barbara Rosenwein, Damien Boquet and Piroška Nagy, and Alice Jorgensen sheds helpful light on how to approach the conventional expressions of emotions that we find in our texts, specifically here sadness and grief.¹¹

During the Carolingian period, medieval understandings of the emotions laid the foundation for moral teaching, and emotions were transformed into vices and virtues.¹² Recalling this background helps us go beyond our modern understanding of emotions as intimate experiences in order to consider them historical and cultural phenomena that grounded one's relationship to the world and to God. Medieval treatises on the vices and virtues classified sadness as a vice and they distinguished between a good and a bad sadness. Ælfric for instance says that the fifth vice, *tristitia*: "... Is þisre worulde unrotnyss, þonne se mann geunrotsað ealles to swiðe for his æhta lyre, þe he lufode to swiðe, and cit þonne wið God and his synna geeacnað. Twa unrotnysa synd: an is þeos yfele, oðer is halwende, þæt man for his synnum geunrotsige." (... [That] is sadness of this world, when a man is made utterly too sad because of the loss of his possessions, which he loved too much, and complains against God and increases his sins. There are two sadnesses: one is this evil one, the other is healing in that one is made sad because of one's sins.)¹³ The good sadness leads to God; the evil sadness diverts from God.¹⁴ This distinction is clearly present in the opening lines of *The Gifts of Men*, a catalogue poem that enumerates the various abilities granted to human beings: one is rich, one is strong, one is eloquent, etc. The poet points out that no one is so unhappy, so poor, so faint-hearted, or so slow-minded, to whom God has not given some gift, "þy læs ormod sy ealra þinga, / þara þe he geworhte in woruldlice, / geofona gehwylcre" (*The Gifts of Men* 14–16a, "lest he be despairing of everything that he has done in this worldly life, of each gift").¹⁵ And God never decrees that anyone should be so miserable. This passage thus distinguishes between the harshness of life which, despite misfortune, poverty, or personal mental failings, does not exclude a comforting trust in divine providence on the one hand, and despair, which annihilates confidence both in one's achievements and in God's grace on the other.

Several contributions to this volume explore different modalities through which vernacular authors summoned up the mood of regret and sadness so frequent in Old English literature. Reflecting on how medieval authors conveyed emotional and mental states points not only to the social and spiritual significance of emotions—as they were often

public and demonstrative, and thus part of the social fabric—but also to the use of concrete imagery to communicate abstract thought. In the world of Old English verse, poets rarely resorted to psychological terms to express emotions but rather made them manifest through actions or settings.¹⁶ Darkness, wintry weather, loneliness, and an indifferent natural world represent a character's troubled psyche. Discussions of gloomy landscapes figure prominently in the pages that follow. The darkness and discomforts of hell; the bleakness and loneliness of *The Wife's Lament's* settings; the unknowable and threatening nature of the monsters' shadowy dwellings in *Beowulf*; the grave, a dim house which none but worms will visit; all convey emotional states, such as sadness or dread at the limits of human knowledge.

Sometimes, an entire emotional journey is mapped unto these bleak settings, as in *The Wanderer* for instance. The poem's arc moves from an account of personal suffering to an exhortation to trust in God's mercy. It starts with "sadness of this world," caused by loss of worldly joys; it then proceeds to a "healing sadness" that increases wisdom; and it ends with sadness's corresponding virtue: spiritual happiness. The first part of the poem conveys the Wanderer's sadness with an elaborate contrast between the ice-cold sea and the speaker's moving recollections of happiness in the hall with his lord and companions. In the second part however, departed kinsmen and the dreary setting, now made up of frost-covered ruins, are evoked with contemplative detachment. The concluding lines of the poem invite the audience to turn their gaze towards heaven and to have faith in divine grace: "Wel bið þam þe him are seceð, / frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð" (*The Wanderer* 114b–115, "It is well for the one who seeks mercy for himself, consolation from the Father in heaven, where for us all stability stands"). Evocations of physical and mental darkness punctuate this spiritual progression: the darkness of the earth where the speaker buries his lord, his surprise at the fact that his mind does not darken at the thought dead kinsmen, the hostile darkness and night shadows of "þis deorce life" (this dark life, *The Wanderer* 89a) which the audience is invited to ponder. With its recognition that our true home is in heaven, the end of the poem traces a path to spiritual happiness, the virtue which, in Ælfric's words, teaches us that "gif we forleosað þas lænan weoruldþing, þonne sceole we witan þæt ure wunung nis na her, ac is on heofenum, gif we hopiað to Gode" (if we lose these transitory worldly possessions, then we must know that our dwelling is not here but in heaven, if we hope in God).¹⁸ The tradition of vices and virtues

invites a nuanced understanding of sadness and its representations. When it darkens the fool's mind, it leads to despair and ruin. But when it is a source of enlightenment—as we hope this volume is—it may lead to wisdom and happiness.

Opposed to that which is safe and enclosed, the boundaries of darkness itself are vague, yet the notions associated with the concept of the dark are susceptible to analysis. The articles in this collection adopt a variety of approaches to the subject, examining words, mental constructions, emotions, and narratives associated with the dark. Filip Missuno and Amy W. Clark address themselves to the terms for darkness, blackness, shade, and shadow in Old English. Missuno demonstrates how poetic collocation and alliteration played a role in the choice of terms used to describe shadows, concluding that a fascination with shadows may have been a uniquely Anglo-Saxon preoccupation. Clark examines the relationship between two common Old English terms for the color black, *sweart* and *blæc*, and the different connotations of each; where *blæc* is the dominant term, *sweart*'s association with sin and damnation means that it is usually restricted to religious poetry and prose. Gwendolyne Knight's paper concerns the concept of nightmare as found within Anglo-Saxon texts, examining the terms *mare* and *nihtgenga* as means of revealing attitudes toward the night and its terrors, and in particular the dread caused by darkness impeding human perception.

Matthew Scribner and Rafał Boryśławski's articles address epistemological limitations—the experience of a lack of knowledge or intelligibility. Scribner looks at the difficulty of interpreting signs in *Beowulf*, arguing that Beowulf himself, although somewhat limited, is still more capable of reading and interpreting the signifiers within the poem than are other characters. Boryśławski employs both modern medical theory on depression and Neoplatonic philosophy to analyze how Old English wisdom poetry confronts us with a mysterious world. He shows how the sadness that stems from this depressing encounter with our cognitive shortcomings may be beneficial and ultimately lead to wisdom and a better understanding of God.

Sadness, depression, and loss of wisdom are often depicted as darkness of the mind. Both James H. Morey and Ruth Wehlau discuss the image of dark thoughts in Old English poetry. Morey argues that dark thoughts are a fourth “fate of men,” that is, a form of mental death.

He makes of Heremod a figure of despair who suffers from *sorhwyldmas* (surging sorrows) that darken his mind, exclude him from society, and eventually cause his “mental death.” Wehlau looks at Beowulf’s dark thoughts when faced with the dragon’s attack, arguing that they indicate a serious clouding of the mind which leaves Beowulf susceptible to despair first, and then to an overconfident belief that he will be able to defeat the dragon alone. Daniel Anlezark shows how Guthlac’s mind is darkened by similar temptations of extreme sadness first,¹⁹ and then overconfidence during his confrontations with the demons when he arrives in his fenland retreat, and how the saint subsequently grows in mental stability.

Medieval emotions were socially significant, and sadness and despair often signal exclusion. Satan and Grendel, both famous outcasts who figure prominently in this volume, are repeatedly associated with deathly shadows and the darkness of primeval chaos. These associations underscore their sad mental states and attest to their exclusion from human society and their enmity with God, for both are forever *fah wið God* (in a state of feud with God, *Christ and Satan* 96b and *Beowulf* 811b). The sadness voiced by the speaker of *The Wife’s Lament* and by Satan in *Christ and Satan* also indicates the loss of their social position: alienated from their community, they are reduced to existence in dark underworlds, as seen in Francisco Rozano-Garcia’s contribution. Matthew Roby’s article on the Donestre, a tribe of monstrous polyglots who befriend foreigners, eat them, and then cry over their heads, ponders over the significance of their tears and suggests that they may also be a symptom of the Donestre’s separation from Christianity.

Several contributors deal specifically with descent, which is a motif often, although not always, associated with grief or depression. Anlezark’s paper traces Guthlac’s descent into the mouth of hell. Carl Kears’s paper examines the various portrayals of the fall of Lucifer within the poems of Junius 11, noting the representation of the fall in terms of darkness, shadow, and anti-creation. Haruko Momma discusses Anglo-Saxon representations of descent into the grave, with special attention to the trope of worms eating the bodies in the *Soul* and *Body* poems.

As various as these papers are, they all position themselves around the Anglo-Saxon understanding or experience of loss and lack, of failure, grief, and confusion, in short, of encounters with physical and mental darkness. We hope this collection will shed light on what is a deep structural element in the corpus of Old English literature.

NOTES

¹ On metaphors based on lived experience, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and also Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On the features of oral poetry, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp. 42–43. On the relevance of “figurative thought” to the nature of Old English poetry, see Stanley: “The Anglo-Saxons have no difficulty expressing abstract thought in their language; they do so often enough in prose. But in verse they achieve their effects by concrete imagery”; E. G. Stanley, “Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Penitent’s Prayer*,” *Anglia* 73 (1955): 413–466 (444).

² Previous studies of darkness include Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979). *Beowulf* offers particularly fruitful ground for such studies; Herbert G. Wright’s early article, “Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and Sorrow in *Beowulf*,” demonstrates a parallel between the light / darkness contrast and the binary of good and evil in the poem. (*Review of English Studies* vol. 8, no. 29 (1957): 1–11).

³ Nicole Guenther Disenza, *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Nicolas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Fabienne L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 27 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ Christopher A. Jones, “Early Medieval *Chaos*,” in *Verbal Encounters*, ed. Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 15–38 (p. 31).

⁵ Several studies of *Beowulf* have connected the monsters to notions of chaos, including Tolkien’s famous “The Monsters and the Critics,” in *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays* (London and Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1983); and James W. Earl, “Transformation of Chaos: Immanence and Transcendence in *Beowulf* and Other Old English Poetry,” *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10, no. 3 (1987): 164–185. Michael Lapidge looks at the attack of Grendel in order to identify terror as that which is nightmarish and unknowable in the poem. “*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror,” in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, ed. Helen Damico and John Leyerle, Studies in Medieval Culture 32 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), pp. 373–402. Joyce M. Hill, “Figures of Evil in Old English Poetry,” *Leeds Studies*

in *English* 8 (1975): 5–19, reflects on the term *deapscua* (“shade of death”) to describe Grendel. A study of a more general Anglo-Saxon understanding of chaos is found in Jones’s “Early Medieval *Chaos*.”

⁶ Studies of the Fall and of Hell in Old English poetry are found chiefly in criticism of the poems *Genesis B* and *Christ and Satan*, and are too numerous to mention here, but useful discussions of these subjects are also found in Antoinette diPaolo Healey, ed., *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1978), and Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). On Christ’s descent into Hell, see George Hardin Brown, “The Descent-Ascent Motif in Christ II of Cynewulf,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 73 (1974): 1–12; and Jackson J. Campbell, “To Hell and Back: Latin Tradition and Other Literary Use of the ‘Descensus ad Inferos’ in Old English,” *Viator; Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13 (1982): 107–158. For the notion of Hell as an anti-hall, see Kathryn Hume, “The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974): 63–74; and Alvin Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972).

⁷ Daniel Anlezark, ed. and trans., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 86–87. The translation is Anlezark’s.

⁸ See in particular Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) and Antonina Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry*, *Anglo-Saxon Studies* 18 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012).

⁹ Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

¹⁰ For studies of this poem, see Neil D. Isaacs, *Structural Principles in Old English Poetry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1968), pp. 71–82; Ruth Wehlau, “Rumination and Re-Creation: Poetic Instruction in The Order of the World,” *Florilegium* 12 (1994): 65–77; and Robert DiNapoli, “The Heart of the Visionary Experience: The Order of the World and its Place in the Old English Canon,” *English Studies* 79 (1998): 97–108.

¹¹ Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Age: Une histoire des émotions dans l’Occident médiéval* (Paris: Seuil, 2015); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

¹² On this point, see Boquet and Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Age*, pp. 95–97 and Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, pp. 67–71.

¹³ Ælfric, “De Octo Vitiis et de Duodecim Abusivis Gradus,” in *Two Ælfric Texts: The Twelve Abuses and the Vices and Virtues*, ed. and trans. Mary Clayton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), p. 146.

¹⁴ This distinction can be traced back to Paul, II Cor. 7:10: "For the sorrow that is according to God worketh penance, steadfast unto salvation: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

¹⁵ *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936; repr. 1966), pp. 137–140.

¹⁶ On this point, see Hugh Magennis, "Monig oft Gesæt: Some Images of Sitting in Old English Poetry," *Neophilologus* 70 (1986): 442–452; and Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁷ *The Exeter Book*, pp. 134–137.

¹⁸ Ælfric, "De Octo Vitiis et de Duodecim Abusivis Gradus," p. 150.

¹⁹ As Anlezark points out in his contribution to this volume, this form of despair is related to *acedia*, a sin that represented a particular danger for monks.

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Part 1

Darkness

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Chapter 1

Sweart as Sin: Color Connotation and Morality in Anglo-Saxon England

Amy W. Clark

THE RAVEN IN OLD English literature is a creature in need of what we might, today, diplomatically call “rebranding.” Sent by Noah over the waves of the Flood, the raven did not return; for this, as Adrian recounts to Ritheus, he became “swa sweart þe ær wæs hwit” (as black as he had been white before).¹ Warriors at the *Battle of Brunanburh* leave the “hræw bryttian / saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn” (“dark-coated, black raven to break up the dead,” 60b–61b), while the Soul of *Soul and Body I* tells her body “ne eart ðu þon leofra nænigum lifigendra ... þonne se swearta hrefen” (“you are no dearer than the black raven to anyone alive,” 52a–54b).² Not, it would seem, the bird to invite to one’s next dinner party. Yet in this decidedly negative context, *Beowulf*’s sunrise raven cuts a surprising figure: “hrefn blaca, heofones wynne, / bliðheort bodode” (“a black raven, blithe-hearted, announced heaven’s joy,” 1802a–1803a).³ Following on the heels of a hero’s victory, and signaling the moment of Beowulf’s triumphant return to his people, this raven is different—and not just because he is good, but because, unlike all but two other attestations in the extant Old English corpus, he is *blac*.

In this chapter, I address the connotative differences represented, in part, by the *blac* raven and his *sweart* counterparts through a quantitative exploration of these two color terms within the Old English corpus. From William Mead’s declaration in 1899 that “blackness and darkness meant to the primitive German mind something fearful and terrible” to Filip Missuno’s more recent assertion that “shadow words” connote “extreme otherness and disquieting monstrosity,” the link between dark colors and negative cultural associations in Anglo-Saxon England has been widely acknowledged.⁴ Yet in spite of (or perhaps due to) the seemingly

self-evident nature of this connotative link, which continues into Middle and Modern English, *blæc* and *sweart* have rarely been studied together, or in a larger context that might offer more precise insight into how and why these negative associations arise. I aim to address that contextual gap, tracking color-referent collocation within the Dictionary of Old English Corpus (henceforth the DOEC) in order to better understand the semantic role of *blæc* and *sweart* in Old English texts, both generally and in relationship to one another. My results suggest that while *blæc* is frequently listed as the “standard” or dominant term for Modern English “black” within the corpus, and has a more neutral valence overall, its easy confusion with *blac* (bleached; bright, shining) makes it less popular in contexts where denotative ambiguity would be problematic. Conversely, *sweart* has such a strong association with sin and damnation in poetry and religious prose that it appears to have had limited applicability outside these genres; only when *blæc* cannot provide an appropriate level of denotative clarity is *sweart* called upon to take its place. When taken together, the variation in the use of each term across genres—*sweart*’s omission from charter boundary clauses, and *blæc*’s relative infrequency in poetry and religious prose, for example—become evidence of a kind of dual lexical ecology, in which the two color terms have come to occupy distinct connotative and generic niches within the Old English language.

To discuss this ecology in full, however, we must begin with the data that displays it. In the case of *sweart*, 61 percent of attestations (shown in Table 1.1) display an association with sin or religious damnation; an additional 8 percent (included as part of Table 1.2) occur in negative but not explicitly sinful contexts. In tracking these associations, I have taken both grammar and narrative into account. Most frequently, *sweart* agrees grammatically with a sinful/negative referent; *deofol*, *hellegrund*, *gest*, and *lig*, for example, are among the most common nouns described by *sweart*’s adjectival forms in the DOEC, usually as part of the landscape of hell. In other cases, however, a color term’s negative implications only arise within a larger narrative context. The phrase “black as a raven,” for example, connotes little beyond hue to the modern reader—and ravens are, at a denotative level, black. Yet when this phrase appears in the DOEC, a closer examination of context reveals a devil in disguise: “[H]im cumað togeanes his sawle twegen englas, oðer bið Godes encgel, se bið swa hwit swa snaw, oðer bið deofles encgel, se bið swa sweart swa hræfen oððe silharewa” (Two angels shall come to him together with his soul; the one shall be God’s angel, and is as white as snow, while the other is the Devil’s angel, and is

Table 1.1. *Sweart*: Negative Moral Valence

	<i>Poetry</i>	<i>Prose (R)</i>	<i>Prose (S)</i>	<i>Glosses</i>	<i>Charters</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Devils	2	29		2		33
Hell	7	16		1		24
Atmospheric	10	7		3		20
Fire	13	6				19
Night	6	10				16
Internal State	5	9		1		15
Spirits	5	8				13
Water	5	5				10
Death	1	4		1		6
Sin	2	3		1		6
Animal	2	3		1		6
Prison/Chains	1	4				5
Soul	1	3				4
Raven	2	2				4
Tortures	2	2				4
Crowd		1		2		3
Books/Letters		3				3
Men		3				3
Earth	1	1				2
Journey	2					2
Trees		1		1		2
Eclipse	1	1				2
“Place”		1				1
Cloth		1				1
Heathens				1		1
Vision				1		1
Feathers		1				1
Totals	67	122		15		207/338

Table 1.2. *Sweart*: Neutral Moral Valence

	<i>Poetry</i>	<i>Prose (R)</i>	<i>Prose (S)</i>	<i>Glosses</i>	<i>Charters</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Gloss		1		25		26
Flesh/Rot		1	12	2		15
Herb/ remedy			12	1		13
Human	3 (riddle)	3	6		1	13
Raven	3	6				9
Night	1	1	1	4		7
Animal	1 (riddle)	1	3	1		6
Weather	2 (riddle)	1	3			6
Bile			1	4		5
Spot				4		4
Vision	1	1		2		4
Tracks	3 (riddle)					3
Eclipse		1	2			3
Fire	2					2
Name			1		1	2
Prison				2		2
Riddle (?)	2 (riddle)					2
Signal		2				2
Weapons	2					2
Wool			1			1
Earth		1				1
Internal State		1				1
Tree				1		1
Disease			1			1
Totals	20 (+/-4)	20 (+/-8)	44 (+/-9)	46 (+/-6)	2	132/338

Table 1.3. Blac/Blæc

	<i>Poetry</i>	<i>Prose(R)</i>	<i>Prose(S)</i>	<i>Glosses</i>	<i>Charters</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Landmark/Pl. Nm.					109	109
Bodily Char.	7	18	2	7		34
Illness/injury			29	2		31
Simple gloss				26		26
Animal	3	4	12	2	1	22
Devils	4	8				12
Plant/Herb		1	6	4		11
Ink		3		7		10
Personal Nm.		5			5	10
Fire	7	1				8
Cloth/ing	2	1	1		2	6
Light	3	1		2		6
Remedy			5			5
Army/Group	3		1			4
Soil/Rock	1	2	1			4
Moon/Sun	1	2		1		4
Raven	1	1		1		3
Writing	2					2
Gold		1		1		2
Lightning	2					2
Soul		2				2
Wool			2			2
Clouds	1					1
Cross	1					1
Emotion	1					1
Parchment	1					1
Snow				1		1
Water	1					1
Tar				1		1
Bile				1		1
Weapon		1				1
Riddle (?)	1					1
Totals:	41	51	59	55	117	325

as black as a raven or an African).⁵ When this wider net of collocational and narrative associations is taken into account, a clear cultural relationship between *sweart* and damnation begins to emerge from the corpus. Yet it is a relationship limited by genre and form: *sweart* primarily collocates with these negative/sinful referents in verse, homiletic prose, and glosses of Christian Latin texts, while the remaining 31 percent of attestations for this term are more neutral or ambiguous, and occur most frequently in the leechbooks, charters, and law codes.

In contrast to *sweart*, *blac/blac* is relatively evenly dispersed across genres within the DOEC. It is also more connotatively neutral, with only 9.8 percent of attestations having a textual association with sin or damnation (usually in the context of hellfire). Yet part of that neutrality arises not from the need for a positive term for darkness, but from *blac*'s orthographical interchangeability with *blac* (bleached; bright, shining) within the corpus. As the two lexemes are essentially homonyms due to the variability of scribal spelling, I have incorporated them into the same database and simply attempted to note, where possible, when context demands a pale or a dark hue denotation.⁶

While cultural color associations for *blac* and *sweart* are demonstrably present within the Old English corpus, they do not result in the uniform treatment of these lexemes across the genres of poetry, prose, charters, and glosses assigned by the DOEC. Instead, the formal and contextual environment of the text appears to affect the collocational grouping of color terms. These generic divergences have influenced my study in two ways. First, they have led me to split the DOEC "prose" category into two distinct sections during the process of analysis: religious and homiletic prose, labeled R-prose; and secular prose, including lapidaries and medical texts, labeled S-prose.⁷ Second, they have proven amenable to contextualization within the theoretical framework of discourse analysis. In *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, M. A. K. Halliday describes variation in collocational distribution as a feature of register:

[C]ollolocations are often fairly specifically associated with one or another particular register, or functional variety of [a] language. This is true, of course, of individual lexical items, many of which we regard as "technical" because they appear exclusively, or almost exclusively, in one kind of text. But it is also noteworthy that perfectly ordinary lexical items often appear in different collocations according to the text variety. For example, *hunting*, in a story of the English aristocracy, will call up *quarry* and *bounds*; ...

in an anthropological text, words like *gathering*, *agricultural*, and *pastoral*; as well as, in other contexts, *bargain*, *souvenir*, *fortune* and suchlike.⁸

In Halliday's grammatical model, collocation is part of a group of discursive tools, inherent to spoken and written language, which produce and maintain lexical cohesion. Register, in turn, exists on what Halliday calls a "cline of instantiation," which refers to the process by which a system of grammar is used to produce concrete examples of spoken and written language, or "text."⁹ The system is the "ideal" or abstract concept of the language; the text is the concrete manifestation.

Register falls somewhere in-between the abstract and the concrete. It conveys semantic meaning through text, but also adheres to and is identified by a set of abstract semiotic signifiers that produce a kind of "text type." These signifiers may include specialized vocabulary, preferred syntactic sequences or conventions, and situational cues such as body language or publication format. The semantic "sub-systems" marked by different registers often serve to streamline communication within specialized language communities. Britt Mize, drawing upon the work of Halliday and others to explore formal traditions in Old English poetry, illustrates this function of register using the example of modern legal texts:

For uninitiated audiences, this register's conventional forms of expression may defeat diligent attempts at full comprehension, but for those with appropriate experience—including the development of not just linguistic but situational (i.e. legal) knowledge—those same structures amount to highly efficient packages of communication, a significant part of which takes place above and around denotative meaning and can only work by assuming a shared frame of reference.¹⁰

Register thus narrows the semantic potential of language, alerting readers and speakers to access the specialized "lexical storehouse which [the addresser] and the addressee possess in common" during a particular communicative act.¹¹ What this means, of course, is that the "clustering" behavior evidenced respectively by *sweart* and *blæc* in different genres is not only typical but *informative*—and that an attestation of *sweart* in the *Lacnunga* must be read quite differently than an attestation of the same term in, say, *Genesis A*.

Anglo-Saxonists will recognize in this model the concept of the "word-hoard," the store of formulaic and stylized language associated with

the production of Old English poetry. Here, too, the poet draws upon a shared pool of linguistic possibilities with the expectation that the audience, recognizing lexical and supralexic common codes, will interpret aspects of the communicative act in a particular way, and thus properly receive his or her intended message. For Mize, poetic formulae function as one indicator of register; they signal to the audience the type of interpretative process that must be adopted for “right reading,” and thus the larger literary mode in which they are meant to operate.¹² Yet because formulaic language is not unique to the Old English poetic corpus, even when imbued with special semantic weight in that context, the communicative capacity of a poetic formula is intimately tied to its presentation within the poetic register:

The structures of association [that formulas] establish are cognitive and cultural categories according to which the poem’s meaning is organized through the connection of the given episode, motif, phrase, or poetically marked word to larger bodies of implication, which a reader or hearer who is also proficient in the special idiom perceives quasi-instinctively.¹³

In other words, poetic *formulae*, like legal idioms, function by connecting their audience to a wider nexus of associative cultural meaning; they are designed to demand a common code of poet and reader, addresser and addressee. The contextual cues required to infer connotative meaning are crucial to the production of Old English poetry: “It turns out that the ‘value-added,’ greater-than-literal signifying power that ... endows traditional poetic units with communicative nuance and efficiency is not only plausible, but certain, indeed normal.”¹⁴ Mize’s definition of poetic formulae as “structures of association” that organize meaning through “the connection of the given episode, motif, phrase, or poetically marked word to larger bodies of implication,” can also be applied to color terms. The connotative content of color terminology similarly requires a common code of both addresser and addressee; it draws upon a wider nexus of associative cultural contexts; and it is both flexible in that, like a poetic formula, a color term can be applied to referents in unique and unexpected ways, and traditional, in that this innovation is evident only within the context of typical use. In this way, Mize’s definition allows for Old English color terms to be understood as a kind of formulaic system of meaning.

Anita Riedinger’s examination of the formulaic sequence “*x* under (the heavens)” further illustrates the significance of reading color words and their referents as supralexic or formulaic units of meaning.¹⁵

Riedinger observes that linguistic variability in Old English poetry is such that any number of combinations may arise within the formulaic *system* “*x* under *x*,” yet “*x* under (the heavens)” occurs with such frequency that it comes to resemble a set formula in spite of an inherent lexical variability. That is, “*x* under (the heavens)” is recognizable as a separate, coherent pattern within the larger system of “*x* under *x*.” In the same way, *sweart* + (damned/damning referent) is recognizable within the larger system of color + (referent). For Riedinger, “the repetition of one general concept + one system + one function = one formula.” If Riedinger singles out “*x* under (the heavens)” as a significant formulaic pattern for appearing “more than 100 times,” within the Old English corpus, then surely *sweart*’s collocation with devils and hell across multiple genres is no less noteworthy:¹⁶

Weorpeð bega cyme,
 hwitra ond sweartra, swa him is ham sceapen
 ungelice, englum ond deoflum.¹⁷
 (*Christ*, 896b–8a)

(Both shall come, the white and the black, as home is
 shaped differently for them, angels and devils.)

Ða æt nextan comon cwelmbære deoflu. swutellice
 gesewene, on sweartum hiwe, into ðam cilde.¹⁸
 (Ælfric, *CH Second Series*, Hom. 21)

(Then at last came a death-bearing devil, plainly visible
 in dark appearance, into the child.)

Ða him andsweradan atole gastas,
 swarte and synfulle, susle [begnornende]:
 “þu us gelærdæst ðurh lyge ðinne
 þæt we helende heran ne scealdon.”¹⁹
 (*Christ and Satan*, 51a–54b)

(Then the foul fiends, black and sinful, chained in
 torment, answered him: “You through your lies taught
 us that we should not listen to the Savior.”)

Hit gelimpeð, þanne þæs synfullan mannes saul gæð
 of his lichaman, ðonne bið heo seofon siðum sweartre
 ðonne se hræfen.²⁰
 (anonymous homily)

(It shall happen that, when the soul of the sinful man
goes from his body, it will be seven times blacker than
the raven.)

Riedinger goes on to demonstrate that the contexts in which poetic formulae occur often reveal the underlying connotative structures of meaning described by Mize; in the case of *niht-langne fyrst*, for example, the “space of a whole night” is shown more specifically to connote “a terrifying period of time prior to a battle.”²¹ I argue that this type of contextual signification extends to lexically variable formulaic structures as well. If *sweart* + (damned/damning referent) is treated as a formulaic pattern—though, as with “*x* under (the heavens),” not a strict poetic *formula*—then a cumulative association with perdition can be understood as integral to the “common codes” that shaped the color term’s literary use and (presumably) reception in Anglo-Saxon England. Color-referent collocations act as formulaic linguistic cues, invoking a wider set of cultural and literary associations when they appear in genre- or register-specific groupings. Just as poetic formulae both indicate the Old English poetic register and rely on it for context-specific meaning, so color-referent collocations, too, may tell us something about the semantic contexts in which they appear.

The theoretical framing of discourse analysis thus allows us to investigate and refine genre categories within the Old English corpus. That is, it allows us to consider the possibility that homiletic prose has a semantic arena shared more closely with verse than with leechbooks, or law codes, and that this may be expressed via register and other semiotic sub-systems of grammar rather than by form—“prose” or “poetry”—alone. It also allows for the recognition of multiple, sometimes mutually exclusive, cultural color valences operating within the corpus. In the case of *sweart*, discourse analysis provides a means by which to refine and finesse the negative connotations of this color term in the Old English corpus, while considering the contexts in which such connotations carry diminished weight. As shown in Table 1.1, the characteristic uniting devils, fire, mist, trees, souls, and water is not necessarily a literal, visual blackness; rather, it is the blackness of moral turpitude, and the product of estrangement from God.²² This negative descriptive convention is so pronounced that it seems to imbue *sweart* with the capacity to “stain” connotatively neutral objects. In Genesis A, for example, the fallen angels are transformed on their journey to hell:

Heo on wrace syððan
 seomodon swearte, siðe ne þorfton
 hlude hlihhan, ac heo helltregum
 werige wunodon and wean cuðon,
 sar and sorge, susl þrowedon
 þystrum beþeahte, þearl æfterlean
 þæs þe heo ongunnon wið gode winnan.²³
 (*Genesis A*, 71a–76b.)

(They, black, sank afterwards in misery; they had no
 need to laugh loudly on the journey, but dwelt weary
 in the tortures of hell and knew affliction, soreness and
 sorrow, suffered torment covered by darkness, harsh
 retribution because they had struggled against God.)²⁴

This blackness, a product of the transformation from blessed to damned, is elsewhere used to describe the journey to hell itself: “Forþon hie leng ne magon / healdan heofonrice, ac hie to helle sculon / on þone sweartan sið” (“Therefore they may no longer hold the heavenly kingdom, but must (go) to hell on that black journey,” *Genesis A*, 731b–733a).²⁵ Although *sið* is sometimes associated with sin in the DOEC, it is not restricted to this context; instead, travel to hell has become *sweart* in order to contextualize it as the unambiguous product of damnation. Similarly, elsewhere in the corpus, rainclouds and pigs, both fairly common features of early English daily life, reveal their “true colors” when tagged as *sweart*: the pigs are devils in disguise, and the rainclouds are a metaphor for the way in which sin and suspicion block the light of the soul.²⁶ In this way, *sweart* functions similarly to a poetic formula, invoking a larger system of connotative meaning, and guiding the audience of the text to infer a negative moral and religious context where one might not normally exist.

This function of “staining” is often used to interesting and ambiguous effect in the Exeter Book Riddles. Accounting for only thirteen instances of *sweart* within the Old English corpus, the riddles comprise a minute 3.8 percent of my total data set, and a slightly larger 15 percent of the “verse” category within that data set. They represent, however, a much more significant 65 percent of the poetic instances in which *sweart* exhibits a neutral or non-religiously negative context. The riddles delight in coopting *sweart*’s negative moral connotations for their own peculiar purposes. The *ic* of Riddle 17, for example, who “sweartum swelgan onginne / brunum beadowæpnum, bitrum ordum, / eglum attorsperum” (begin[s]

to swallow black, dusky battle-weapons, bitter points, horrid poisoned spears, 7a–9a), guards a secret sweetness; if we accept Marijane Osborn's solution, as John Niles does, this creature's "dryhtgestreona" (treasures of the people) are honey, and he himself a beehive.²⁷ His *sweart* meal is thus a productive poison; the bees, safe within "eodowirum" (wire enclosures), only deploy their "bitrum ordum" (bitter spears) to protect the delights within. Color becomes part of the game, disguising domesticated bees as wild, deadly, and potentially supernatural weapons.

Elsewhere, the charade is more serious. In Riddle 3, the poet draws upon images of Judgment Day to create a terrifying scene:

Se bið swega mæst,
 breahmta ofer burgum, ond gebreca hludast,
 þonne scarp cymed sceo wiþ oþrum,
 ecg wið ecge; earpan gesceafte
 fus ofer folcum fyre swætað,
 blacan lige, ond gebrecu ferað
 deorc ofer dryhtum gedýne micle,
 farað feohtende, feallan lætað
 sweart sumsendu seaw of bosme,
 wætan of wombe. Winnende fareð
 atol eoredþreat, egsa astigedð,
 micel modþrea monna cynne,
 brogan on burgum, þonne blace scotiað
 scriþende scin scarpum wæpnum.
 Dol him ne ondrædeð ða deaðsperu,
 swylteð hwæpre, gif him soð meotud
 on geryhtu þurh regn ufan
 of gestune læteð stræle fleogan,
 farende flan. Fea þæt gedýgað,
 þara þe geræceð rynegiestes wæpen.

(39b–58b)

(The din shall be great, tumult over the towns, and the loudest clamor, when a cloud comes sharp against others, edge against edge; dark creatures shall rush over the people, sweat fire, black flame, and noises will travel darkly over the multitudes with a great crash; they will move forth, fighting, let black dripping liquid fall from their bosom, water from their womb. The loathsome troop will travel, warring; dread shall arise, great torment of mind among mankind, terror in cities, when the black spreading phantoms shall shoot

with sharp weapons. Folly to he who does not dread
 that death-spear; he shall die regardless, if the true
 God in right, down through the rain, lets an arrow fly
 from the tempest, a moving dart. Few escape it, those
 who the weapon of the running-guest reaches.)²⁸

Much of this language is echoed in Old English poems and prose about the Christian Day of Judgment, and I have translated the passage above in a way that reflects these echoes. Two especially relevant parallels occur in *Christ III*: the “gestun ond se storm ond seo stronge lyft / brecað brade gesceaft” (“tempest and the storm and the strong wind shall break broad Creation,” 990a–991b), while the righteous have no need to “ondrædan deofla strælas” (“dread the arrows of devils,” 779a–779b). Both lines evoke the *stræle* that flies from the *gestune*, and the fool who “ne ondrædeð” that *stræle* in Riddle 3; in fact, the *only* two verse attestations for *gestun* in the DOEC are those mentioned above. *Blæc* or *sweart* fire is also a common signifier of hellish punishment, appearing in *Judgment Day*, *Andreas*, and elsewhere. While these are not the only example of Christian imagery within the passage, they do demonstrate, I think, that readers with knowledge of religious poetry and homiletic texts would have found the language of Riddle 3 to be extremely familiar.

If we take Riddles 1–3 to be part of a single sequence, as Niles and Williamson do, the association with *domesdæg* become even more prominent.²⁹ In Riddle 1, the speaker is modeled after fire; it burns the “folcsalo” (“folk-buildings,” line 5) as “recas stigað haswe ofer hrofum” (“smoke rises greyly over the roofs,” 6–7), raging fiercely over the countryside:

heahum meahtum
 wrecan on waðe wide sended
 hæbbe me on hrycge þæt ær hada wreah
 foldbuendra flæsc ond gæstas
 somod on sunde.³⁰

(10a–14a)

(I am sent far and wide by the high powers to punish
 in wandering; I have on my back that which once
 covered the flesh and spirits of earth-dwellers together
 in water.)

This first riddle disguises itself as a sign of the second coming: fire, and the “wæcwehm wera” (“violent death of men,” 8). The water, while ultimately part of the riddle, recalls Noah’s flood while keeping to the theme of

Doomsday; that which once covered the *foldbuend* in water is not, technically, water itself, but the fury and judgment of God. Riddle 2, continuing in this vein, calls upon a more explicitly aqueous sign of Judgment: the rising of the waters. Here the creature departs “*secan garsecgas grund*” (“to seek the ocean’s floor,” 2–3) so that the “*gifen biþ grewreged, fam gewealcen*” (“sea is stirred up, foam rolled about,” 3–4), disturbing mankind with flood as Riddle 1 did with fire.

Fire and flood are the first two signs of the second coming in another Exeter Book poem, *Judgment Day*; after these, “*gromhydge guman*” (“fierce-minded men,” 17) are ensnared by devils, taken to the darkest pit of Hell, where “*næfre dæg scineð*” (“day never shines,” 19). Riddle 3 likely evokes this third event: dark creatures “rush over the people,” sweat black flame, and stir up “terror in cities.” The “*atol eoredþreat*” (loathsome troop) causes “great torment of mind among mankind.” We have seen fire, and water; now we see condemnation. *Sweart*, in this context, is simply one small part of the larger “hell topos” invoked in Riddle 3; it draws upon moral and religious convention to drive home the image of damnation.

The joke, of course, is that Riddles 1–3 are jointly solved as “storm”—fearsome and dark, indeed, but hardly the end of the world. Yet if Niles’ assessment of Mercedes Salvador Bello’s solution—that “each part has the initial solution ‘wind’ (or ‘wind as the cause of storm’)” and “the solver must then identify God as the master who sends the wind”—is accurate, then the poetic feint of storm-as-judgment may be intended to guide readers beyond a superficial answer.³¹ The imagery of Hell points us beyond weather, just as the Riddles’ references to “*sweart seaw*” (“black liquid”), rather than the typical “*lig*” (“fire”) an Anglo-Saxon audience might expect, tells us that we are not facing *domesdæg* quite yet; each undermines the other, pointing to a more sophisticated solution. The storm is *not* Judgment Day—but the Christian *dryhten* controls both.

The association between *sweart* and negative morality thus has a strong impact on this lexeme’s use in Old English texts. *Sweart* is a traditional, even conventional, descriptor of hell, devils, and sin; it also, as a result of this convention, is used to “stain” morally neutral referents in contexts of condemnation. Furthermore, the formulaic *sweart* + (damned/damning referent) is cunningly employed in the Exeter Book riddles, alluding to familiar Christian contexts where few, in fact, exist. Yet the patterns of cultural association evidenced above demand the question: why, if the term is so strongly negative in its valences, use *sweart* outside the context of sin at all?

In some cases, the answer appears simple: don't. The Old English charters omit *sweart* almost entirely, with the exception of a personal name, Ætsere Swearte, and the verbal *asweartode*: "Þa læg se king & asweartode eall mid þare sage & swor sybþan under God ælmihtine & under ealle halgan þarto þæt hit næfre næs na his ræd na his dæd þæt man sceolde æfre Sandwic don ut of Cristes cyrcean" (Then the king lay and turned quite dark at this speech, and thereupon swore by Almighty God and all the saints that it was neither his advice nor his decision that Sandwich should ever be taken from Christ Church).³² And in fact charter boundary clauses, known for their use of color descriptors for landmarks such as *readan ac* or *har stan*, make no use of *sweart*; instead, conspicuously, *blac* fills this textual niche. Boundary clause landmarks and place names ultimately comprise a significant 33.5 percent of *blac*'s total use within the DOEC, while *sweart* is entirely absent.

Yet while *blac* may be a more connotatively neutral choice for landmarks and place names, the term has denotative drawbacks. The University of Toronto's Old English Dictionary cites *blac* as denoting the Modern English "black" and *blac* as "pale, bright, or shining"; however, both dictionary entries acknowledge the orthographic interchangeability of these spellings in Old English literature, noting that context alone serves as a guide to modern readers.³³ In fact, *blac* is far and away the most common spelling—yet despite its "primary" meaning of paleness, 85 percent of relevant attestations (where context indicates a color sense) appear to at least tentatively require a dark hue. In a medical context, this denotative ambiguity could easily lead to misdiagnoses and botched recipes, potentially producing a number of undesirable consequences for both practitioner and patient. It thus is unsurprising to see *sweart* play a greater role in medical treatises than in other non-religious prose texts—or to observe that *sweart* and *blac/blac*, once again, divide the semantic labor in half. Here, *blac/blac* is primarily (though not exclusively) used to describe conditions of pallor in the human body, and as a technical term for disease involving depigmentation of the skin: that is, it usually denotes paleness. It also describes a small variety of denotatively ambiguous symptoms and ingredients—including, with peculiar frequency in both *Bald's Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga*, snails:

Gif næddre slea man þone blacan snegl awæsc on
halig wætre, sele drincan, oþþe hwæt hwega þæs þe
fram scottum come.³⁴

(If a snake strikes, wash the black snail in holy water, give it [to the patient] to drink, or something that comes from Ireland.)

Wiþ huntan bite, blace sneglas on hattre pannan
gehyrste & to duste gegnidene & pipor & betonican,
ete þæt dust & drince & on lecge.³⁵

(Against a spider's bite, fry black snails in a hot pan and grind to dust [with] pepper and betony; eat that dust and drink it and lay it on the wound.)

Wiþ utsihte, mergeallan, blæc snegl, wyl on meolcum,
sup on æfenne & on morgenne.³⁶

(Against diarrhea, [mix] mare's gall, black snail, and boil in milk; drink in evening and morning.)

Swear, by contrast, is rarely if ever used to describe healthy, living flesh: "Gif þæt asweartode lic to þon swiþe adeadige þæt þær nan gefelnes on ne sie þonne scealt þu sona eal þæt deade & þæt ungefelde of asniþan oþ þæt cwice lic þæt þær na miht þæs deadan lices to lafe ne sie þæs þe ær ne isen ne fyr gefelde" (If the darkened body then becomes so deadened so that there is no sensation in it, then you must immediately cut all that is dead and insensible from it, until there can be nothing left on the living body of the dead flesh which formerly felt neither iron nor fire).³⁷ What the latter color term does instead in Old English medical texts is describe plants: roots, seeds, stems.³⁸ *Blac/blæc* is rarely put to this purpose, likely because the denotative ambiguity of dark/pale could, in the case of recipes requiring specific herbal ingredients, lead to a number of unwanted results.

Contrast this practical division of semantic labor against a moment when the two terms are used to describe a single object at different points in *A Charm for Delayed Birth*:

Se wifmon, se hyre bearn afedan ne mæge, genime heo
sylf hyre agenes cildes gebyrgenne dæl, <wry> æfter
þonne on blace wulle and bebiċge to cepemannum
and cweþe þonne: Ic hit bebiċge, ge hit bebiċgan, þas
sweartan wulle and þysse sorge corn.³⁹

(16a–20b)

(The woman who cannot nourish her child [must] take herself a piece of her own child's grave, wrap it in black

wool and sell it to merchants, and then say: I sell it,
you sell it, this dark wool and this bitter corn.)

While the Old English metrical charms also prescribe treatment for various ills, they are verse rather than prose—and this is immediately evident in the behavior of *sweart*, now placed in the poetic register. As an ingredient for the charm, the wool in question is *blac*—probably black, possibly pale or bleached, but in either case described so that it may be collected and used in the charm. *Sweart* appears only in the ritualized language of the incantation—and here, in apposition with “sorge” (sorry; bitter), it is not only dark wool, but *bad* wool, filled with the negative experience of the *wifmon* and sold to the merchant to remove it from her life. The term’s practical ability to denote darkness is here overridden by its association with negativity in a poetic context; it is no longer appropriate for purely descriptive purposes.

In general, the pervasive negativity of *sweart* leads *blec/blac* to take on the more neutral territories of the corpus, resulting in lexical “niches” occupied by each color term. This type of “niche” use is evident in modern languages as well; Isabel Forbes, in her discussion of the relative basicness of the color terms *brun* and *marron* in modern French, notes that while the latter is currently the more dominant term for ModE “brown,” there are notable exceptions:

It is the use of color terms that reveals ... cognitive and cultural factors.
... The term for the description of physical type is definitely *brun*.
Marron in this context would be totally unacceptable. To describe
a person as being *marron* would be to invoke the other meaning of
marron which has a different etymology and means “dishonest.”⁴⁰

Similarly, Anna Wierzbicka points out although the Hungarian color terms *piros* and *vörös* both cover a denotative range roughly equivalent to the ModE “red,” *piros* is associated with blushing, love, and romance, while *vörös* tends to evoke violence or trouble. When *vörös* does describe human faces, it “has negative connotations. ... a *vörös arc* is likely to be the result of shame or anger. Thus there is something ‘abnormal’ or unhealthy about a face whose colour is described as ‘*vörös*.’”⁴¹ In both cases, as with *sweart* and *blac/blec*, the paired terms are not in immediate competition, but rather complement one another within their respective language communities.

That said, history has favored the *blac* raven over his *sweart* counterparts. Unlike most Germanic languages, where words descended from the Proto-Indo-European root **swartaz* continue to hold sway, *sweart* is not retained as a basic term for “black” in Middle and Modern English.⁴² By examining these terms in relationship to one another during the Old

English period, we can more clearly trace the unusual development of *blæc*'s dominance in the English language—as *sweart*, weighted (like the raven it so often modifies) by an increasingly negative set of connotative cultural associations, eventually seems to become inextricable from their semantic load. Yet the raven at least has his chance to rehabilitate himself: “Saga me for hwam si se hrefen þurh gehyrsumnisse geþingode þæt he ær þurh ofermodignisse agilde. Ic þe secge, þa he fedde heliam þa he in eode to þam westenne and him þenode” (Tell me how the raven through obedience repented for what he formerly sinned in haughtiness. I say to you, when he fed Elias when he went into the West, and served him).⁴³ As this passage from *Adrian and Ritheus*, and *Beowulf*'s (perhaps literally) shining example, show, the *sweart hrefn* need not be bound by negative descriptive conventions—all he needs is an author familiar with the connotations of Old English color terms to choose a different word for darkness and set him free.⁴⁴

NOTES

¹ James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill, *The Prose Saturn and Solomon and Adrian and Ritheus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 37.

² *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR VI (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 19, and *The Vercelli Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie ASPR II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 56.

³ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 61.

⁴ William E. Mead, “Color in Old English Poetry,” *PMLA* 14 (1899), pp. 169–206, and Filip Missuno, “‘Shadow’ and Paradoxes of Darkness in Old English and Old Norse Poetic Language” (PhD diss., University of York, 2012), p. 113.

⁵ R. Willard, “Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies,” *Beiträge zur englischen Philologie* 30 (1935, repr. 1967), pp. 38–54.

⁶ The University of Toronto's Dictionary of Old English states that “the orthographical forms of *blæc* and *blāc* cannot be easily distinguished and the context does not always make it clear which word is involved. Cf. the sense confusion between the two in the later history of the words.” Dictionary of Old English, s.v. “blāc,” accessed October 14, 2016, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsb.html#E02146>.

⁷ I use the same prose categories to discuss the color terms *read* and *fealo* elsewhere; see “More than Meets the Eye: Cultural Color Resonances in Old English Literature,” in *The Daily Lives of the Anglo-Saxons*, ed. C. P. Biggam, Carole Hough, and Daria Izdebska, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies* 8 ((Tempe, Arizona: AMRCS, 2017) pp. 139–157.).

⁸ M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, ed. Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen (London: Arnold, 2004), pp. 577-578.

⁹ Halliday, *Functional Grammar*, p. 525.

¹⁰ Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 103.

¹¹ Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), p. 97.

¹² Mize notes that other indicators of the OE poetic register include “the constraints of classical metre with its clear alliterative groupings, particular recurrent subject matter, and the presence of dedicated vocabulary,” *Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 103. While the Chomskian theory of grammar holds that an “ideal” speaker, in the moment of language production, selects spontaneously from the full range of grammatical possibility, this has not been supported by recent research. Instead, as Alison Wray points out, “[c]orpus linguistics has [revealed] formulaicity, in its widest sense, to be all-pervasive in language data ... words belong with other words not as an afterthought, but at the most fundamental level.” Language users rely upon formulaicity for the efficient production and reception of complex communicative processes; formulaic sequences, even when they can be dissected, signify more than the sum of their individual parts. See Wray, *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 13.

¹³ Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 94.

¹⁴ Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 100. Jakobson, too, acknowledges this phenomenon, referring to formulaic clusters as “phrase words” that “cannot be derived by adding together the meaning of [their] lexical constituents; the whole is not equal to the sum of its parts” (*Language in Literature*, p. 87).

¹⁵ Anita Riedinger, “The Old English Formula in Context,” *Speculum* 60 (1985), pp. 294–317.

¹⁶ *Sweart* collocates with devils, spirits, damned souls, and hell in 74 out of 339 recorded attestations, as Table 1.1 illustrates. These are not the only *sweart* referents associated with perdition, but they are certainly the most common.

¹⁷ *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 28.

¹⁸ *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden (London: EETS, Oxford University Press), p. 186.

¹⁹ *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. G. P. Krapp, ASPR I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 136–137.

²⁰ Rudolph Willard, “Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies,” *Beiträge zur englischen Philologie* 30 (Leipzig: Tauchnitz 1935; rpt. 1967), pp. 38–54.

²¹ Riedinger, “Old English Formula,” p. 296.

²² Filip Missuno demonstrates this nicely in his treatment of shadow in the Old English *Genesis A*; before Creation, the world is “drihtne fremde, / idel ond unnytt,” [hostile to God, idle and useless, 103–106a] but God’s intervention sees the “deorc sceado / sweart swiðrian” [dark, black shadows subside, 133b–134a].

See “The Sinister Sound of Shadows in the Old English Poetics of the Dark,” pp. 61–92 in this volume.

²³ *The Junius Manuscript*, p. 5.

²⁴ A quick search of the DOEC suggests that *sið* represents a variety of journey types, from the *sweart sið* discussed here to that described in the *Phoenix*, where one may “þære sunnan sið behealdan” (behold the journey of the sun).

²⁵ *The Junius Manuscript*, p. 25.

²⁶ The pigs can be found in *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, p. 219; the rainclouds appear in *The Old English Boethius*, ed. Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 250.

²⁷ *The Exeter Book*, p. 189. See John D. Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2006), p. 145, and Marijane Osborn, “‘Skep’ (Beinenkorb,* beoleap) as a Culture-Specific Solution to Exeter Book Riddle 17,” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 18, no. 1 (2005), pp. 8–18.

²⁸ *The Exeter Book*, pp. 181–182.

²⁹ Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 141, and Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

³⁰ *The Exeter Book*, p. 180.

³¹ Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 143.

³² *The Electronic Sawyer*, s.v. “S 1467,” accessed October 14, 2016, www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/1467.html.

³³ Dictionary of Old English, s.v. “blāc,” accessed October 14, 2016, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsb.html#E02146>.

³⁴ Thomas Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England ...*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864), p. 110.

³⁵ Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. 2, p. 296.

³⁶ Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. 2, p. 144.

³⁷ Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, vol. 2, p. 82.

³⁸ Two examples from Cockayne, *Leechdoms* vol. 1, p. 310 and 95: “Ðeos wyrte ... byþ afor & sweart, byð swaþeah innan hwit & biterre on byrginge” (This herb is rough and black; it is white within, and bitter in taste); “Ðeos wyrte þe man temolum & oðrum naman singrene nemneð þæs þe Omerus sægð ys wyrta beorhtust & þæt Mercurius hy findan sceolde, ðysse wyrte was ys swyðe fremful & hyre wyrtruma ys synewealt & sweart” (Some call this herb *temolus*, and others house-leek, which is so called because Homer said it is the brightest of herbs and that Mercurius is supposed to have discovered it; the juice in this herb is very beneficial and its root is round and dark).

³⁹ *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 123–124.

⁴⁰ Isabel Forbes, “Age-Related Differences in The Basic Colour Vocabulary of French,” in *Progress in Colour Studies*, vol. 1, ed. C. P. Biggam and C. J. Kay (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 102–109.

⁴¹ Anna Wierzbicka, "The Semantics of Colour: A New Paradigm," in *Progress in Colour Studies*, vol. 1, ed. C. P. Biggam and C. J. Kay (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 1–24.

⁴² See Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2003), p. 395.

⁴³ Cross and Hill, *OE Saturn and Solomon*, 37.

⁴⁴ Thanks are due to Emily Thornbury for her guidance and support throughout the development of this chapter.

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Chapter 2

“The Night is Dark and Full of Terrors”: Darkness, Terror, and Perception in Anglo-Saxon England

Gwendolyne Knight

Introduction

NIGHTMARES HAVE PLAGUED UNSUSPECTING sleepers throughout human history, and this is no less true in Anglo-Saxon England. This chapter will examine the intersection of darkness, terror, and perception in Anglo-Saxon England through the exploration of a particular collection of supernatural beings that exist at the point where these concepts meet in Old English texts: *maran*, commonly translated as “nightmares”; *nihtgengan*, variously translated as nightmares, evil night spirits, or goblins; and, of course, the quintessential creatures of nocturnal terror in Old English, the monsters of *Beowulf*: Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon. More specifically, the chapter will examine the existing evidence for the “nightmarish” qualities of *maran* and *nihtgengan* and explore the attribution of similar qualities to the monsters of *Beowulf*. Through a comparison between the “nightmare” beings and *Beowulf*’s “nightmarish” monsters, it becomes possible to probe the ways in which the concepts of night, fear, and perception related to each other in Anglo-Saxon England.

Mære

Mære survives in two main classes of source material: glossaries and medical manuscripts.¹ The first attestation for *mære* comes from the Épinail-Erfurt tradition of glossaries, and presents the curious problem of a variant of *mære* often appearing as a gloss for the feminine form *incuba* rather than the overwhelmingly more common masculine *incubus*.² This problem has been addressed by Hall, who points to an epitome of Isidore of

Seville's *Etymologiae* (identified by Lapidge in a northern French manuscript of the eighth or ninth century) as a likely source:³ This abbreviated version of Isidore's text contains *Incubae* where Isidore's entry has *Incubi*—presumably, as Hall suggests, a mistake rather than an intentional change. Items from Isidore's *Etymologiae* are known to be contained in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary,⁴ and Lapidge has observed that the manuscript of the epitome contains Old English glosses that in turn also appear in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary.⁵ Although Lapidge does not mention *incubae* as one of the glosses common between the epitome manuscript and Épinal-Erfurt, he does argue that the base text of the epitomator would have been a glossed manuscript also used by the compilers of that glossary.⁶ On this basis, Hall suggests that the glossed manuscript, in addition to those commonalities identified by Lapidge, not only contained the form *incubae*, but also the gloss *maran*, which then entered the Épinal-Erfurt tradition as the nominative singular *incuba* and *mare*.⁷

In a second group of glosses to the book of Isaiah, *mare* appears as a gloss for *pilosus* (literally “shaggy man” or “hairy man”).⁸ Finally, *mare* also appears in its strong variant in the compound *wudumar*, which is used in a group of related glossaries that gloss “Echo,” with the lemma most likely coming from Evagrius' Latin translation of Athanasius' *Vita Sancti Antonii*. Hall has argued convincingly that the gloss refers to the nymph Echo, rather than the reflection of sound, but points out that within the *Vita Sancti Antonii* Echo appears as a point of comparison for demons.⁹ These demons not only repeat what they hear (in this case, the Scripture read aloud), but they also appear to the monks in the form of monks themselves and pretend to act like pious men in order to ensnare the unvigilant.¹⁰

Three witnesses to *mare* remain. Two of these are to be found in the manuscript London BL Royal 12.D XVII. The manuscript is divided into three parts: two belong to a compilation which is known as *Bald's Leechbooks* because of a colophon declaring them to have belonged to a certain Bald, and which is a collation of Mediterranean and English medical traditions; the third, known as *Leechbook III*, is a separate work, which Pollington, following Cameron, claims to be “probably the only surviving example of an early English medical textbook or collection of remedies.”¹¹ *Mare* appears twice in the first of *Bald's Leechbooks* at the heading in the table of contents entry 64, and later in the entry itself:

lxiv. Læcedomas wiþ ælcra leodrunan 7 ælfsidenne
þ[æt] is fefercynnes gealdor 7 dust 7 drenca 7 sealf

7 gif sio adl netum sie 7 gif sio adl wyrde mannan
oððe mare ride 7 wyrde seofon ealles cræfta.¹²

(Leechdoms against every pagan charm and for a man with elvish tricks; that is to say, an enchantment for a sort of fever, and powder and drinks and salve, and if the disease be on neat cattle; and if the disease harm a man, or if a mare ride him and hurt him. In all seven crafts.)

Gif món mare ride . genim elehtran 7 garleac . 7
betonican . 7 recelf bind on næsce hæbbe him món
ón 7 he gange in on þas wyrte.¹³

(If a mare *or hag* ride a man, take lupins, and garlic, and betony, and frankincense, bind them on a fawns [sic] skin, let a man have the worts on him, and let him go to *his home*.)

The entry appears amid a group of remedies (entries 62–66) primarily aimed at alleviating various kinds of “mind-altering afflictions”:¹⁴ fevers, fiend- and brain-sicknesses, “witlessness,” and folly surround these protections against witch-women, elf-magic (after Hall), and *maran*. The table of contents heading for entry 64 classes the effects of witch-women and elf-magic together as kinds of fevers; indeed, throughout the Anglo-Saxon medical texts one may observe an association between madness or “mind-altering afflictions” and fevers.¹⁵ *Maran* stand apart, however, as suitable for the same treatment but not themselves one of the *fefercynnnes gealdor*. In both the heading description and the remedy itself we see a similarity to the Épinial-Erfurt glossary tradition described above: *maran* ride people and thus hurt them, not unlike the crushing (and possibly rape) suffered at the hands of *incubi*, or indeed *incubae*.

Leechbook III proceeds in a head-to-toe fashion; *maran* are to be found in the first entry, which treats mostly headaches but also indicates that a particular treatment is also effective:

Hi bioþ gode wiþ heafodece 7 wiþ eagwærce 7 wiþ
feondes costunga 7 nihtgengan 7 lenctenalde
7 maran 7 wyrtforbore 7 malscra 7 yflum
gealdorcræftum.

(They are good for head ache, and for eye wark, and for the fiend’s temptations, and for night *goblin* visitors, and

for typhus, and for the *night* mare, and for knot, and for
fascination, and for evil enchantments by song.)¹⁶

This particular entry spoils the reader with an abundance of afflictions to be remedied. It is difficult to draw many useful conclusions when the list is long on items but short on description: unfortunately, this problem is a common one since Anglo-Saxon medical remedies generally do not contain observations on symptoms of disease. The association with *wyrthforbor* is interesting in this context in the sense that both it and *maran* imply a kind of restraint, though *maran* generally seems to refer to a being that restrains, while *wyrthforbor* refers to the act of restraint itself. The association with headache and eye pain would appear to physically situate the affliction caused by *maran* in the head region; the case of *Bald's Leechbook I* is more uncertain, where some of the surrounding ailments suggest a more or less firm association with the head, but others remain ambiguous. *Mere* is, in fact, one of the more ambiguous afflictions: *gif mon mare ride* could be a physical oppression of the kind suggested by the glosses with *incuba*; on the other hand, it could refer to a metaphorical "riding" which obscures the senses and prevents accurate perception.

The final witness to *maran* is a single mention early in the Journey Charm, a metrical charm which survives in the margins of the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*:

Se me dege; ne me mer ne gemyrrene, ne me maga
ne geswence, ne me næfne minum feore forht ne
gewurþe; ac gehæle me æme gehr and sunu frofre
gast.¹⁷

(Let this avail me, let no night mare mar me, nor my
belly swink me, nor fear come on me ever for my life:
but may the Almighty heal me and his Son and the
Paraclete Spirit.)

The obstruction caused by a *mær* (the strong feminine variation of *mære*) is given alongside some manner of gastric distress as examples of the third repetition of the poetic *ne me* construction. The use of *gemyrran* with *mær* is interesting here: like *mare ride* and *Leechbook III's maran* it suggests hindrance or restraint of some kind. However, other uses of *gemyrran* or *gemirran* frequently apply the verb to mental obstructions, a troubled mind, or a deception that hinders proper thought.

Across these different attestations for *maran*, there is a marked lack of an explicit connection between these beings and night. That they are associated with fearful or at least undesired experiences is well attested in the deployment of *mare* as a gloss for *incubae* and other fearsome creatures, as well as by their presence in the Journey Charm; *Bald's Leechbook I* and *Leechbook III* clearly saw *maran* as a threat to be counteracted, and associated it with other mind-altering conditions such as fever, various forms of fever and madness, and the negative effect of elves and humans wielding malicious magic. However, none of these specifically mention a nocturnal context for *mare*-attacks, and even in the case of Isidore's (and even Augustine's) *incubae*, night is not a prerequisite for attack. Recent research surrounding *maran* has tended towards an attempt to demythologize the phenomenon by associating it with, or diagnosing it as, sleep paralysis.¹⁸ The etymology of *maran* presumes a crushing or oppression, but the connection to sleep or night is nowhere made explicit. An analogue to *maran* appears in *Ynglinga saga*, when a king is said to be crushed in his sleep by a *mara*, an Old Norse word cognate with *mare*. However, the saga itself was written in the thirteenth century, well after any of the attestations for *maran* surveyed here, and the putatively much earlier poem embedded in the saga does not maintain the association between the *mara*'s attack and the king's sleeping status.¹⁹

One could argue on etymological grounds that the later attestations of *nightmare* argue for the *mare*'s nocturnal character, but according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the first attestation of *nightmare* in English is in 1300—again, significantly later than the Anglo-Saxon evidence.²⁰ In the absence of corresponding associations in our sources, this attestation should not be taken as confirmation that *maran* had the same characteristics associated with the *nightmare* in the Middle English period. While this does not preclude the possibility of an association of *mare* with nighttime attacks, it does leave plenty of space for semantic shift. The most likely cognates that indicate *mare* as referring to a nocturnal female being nearly all postdate the Anglo-Saxon evidence.²¹ In short, the evidence connecting *maran* to nocturnal attack, nightmares, or sleep paralysis is rather circumstantial.²² It is possible that *mare* had a tangential or non-prominent association with night or sleep, but if such an association was present, it was not strong enough to find expression in the sources for the Old English *maran* that survive.

Nihtgenga/-e

Like *mære*, *nihtgenga* survives mainly in glossaries and medical manuscripts. Palacios has identified the pair *nihtgenga* (m.) and *nihtgegne* (f.) as members of a category wherein a “lexical switch” affects the gender of the word in question, but not the denotation.²³ The suffix *gegne* is generally unusual outside of glosses and, where it elsewhere appears as part of a lexical switch, the change in gender is usually accompanied by a change in meaning as in, for example, *bigenga* (an inhabitant) and *bigenge* (worship; a female worshipper).²⁴ In the case of *nihtgengan* this becomes a rather complicated question, however, since so few of the attestations that survive are in the nominative singular, the only form in which the grammatical gender of weak nouns can be clearly discerned. Nevertheless, the unambiguously feminine nominative singular *nihtgegne* only appears in the Anglo-Saxon corpus as a gloss for “hyena.”²⁵ Hyenas are not widely attested even in Classical and Patristic Latin; the descriptions of Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 8.44) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 15.410) mention the supposedly hermaphroditic nature of hyenas, their imitative capacity, and their means of luring dogs to be devoured. However, the gloss most likely reflects such information as appears later in the same glossary where *hy<ae>nae* is glossed with “nocturnum monstrum similis cani” (a nocturnal monster similar to a dog).²⁶ Taken together, these glosses echo an entry in the second book of the *Liber Monstrorum* referring to “nocturnal beasts”: these beasts are “never seen in light, but in the nocturnal shadows,” and are reputed to be able to shapeshift when threatened.²⁷ More details are not forthcoming in either case, and the *Liber Monstrorum* entry does not mention a tendency for these night-beasts to attack or pose a danger to humans, though the reference to “nocturnal shadows” (*umbris ... nocturnis*) presents an intriguing echo of *Beowulf’s* *sceadugenga*, discussed in more detail below.

The other witnesses to *nihtgengan* are medical in character. The Old English translation of the *Herbarium* of Pseudo-Apuleius, like many early medieval manuscripts of the *Herbarium*, includes as its first entry an excerpt from a tract on betony by pseudo-Musa.²⁸ Here “unhyrum nihtgengum” appears as a translation for “nocturnas ambulationes.” At first glance this is a somewhat curious interpretation of the *Herbarium’s* source material: *ambulatio* refers to the action of walking about, “nocturnas amubationes” thus being taken to mean “a wandering about at night,” possibly sleep walking.²⁹ Because the dative plural makes the gender of *nihtgengum* ambiguous, “a wandering at night” would not be an impossible

interpretation of *nihtgengum*, if one assumes a change in meaning accompanying the change in gender comparable to that between *bingenga* and *bingenge* referred to above. However, the attestations for both *nihtgenge* and *nihtgenga* refer quite clearly to beings rather than actions, and the use of *unhyrum* (monstrous) suggests that these *nihtgengan* are some form of being, associating them with the phenomena of visions and dreams. According to the translator, betony:

hyne scyldeþ wið unhyrum nihtgengum 7 wið
egeslicum gesihðum 7 swefnum.³⁰

([Betony] shields him against monstrous nocturnal
visitors and against frightful visions and dreams.)

Although the “terrifying visions” are present in the source text, “dreams” appear to be an addition by the translator.³¹ Although these phenomena could be seen as partially synonymous categories in early medieval Europe, Old English texts tend to use *swefn* (dream) to refer to an experience that occurs during sleep, while *gesihe* (vision), may refer to an otherworldly vision experienced during wakefulness—during a vigil, for example.³² The *nihtgengan* are separated from the “terrifying visions and dreams” by the repetition of *wið*, but are nevertheless linked by the context of the entry much more closely than in the translator’s source. It could be the nocturnal quality of each fearful experience that links them, with *nihtgengan* lacking the emphasis on visual perception that visions and dreams share. The remaining ailments that betony remedies, according to the Old English *Herbarium*, mostly concern the head and eyes.

The remaining attestations for *nihtgengan* are contained within *Leechbook III*. The first of these is the entry quoted above with reference to *maran*; the remedy again associates *nihtgengan* with afflictions to the eyes and head. However, we know too little about the nature of most of the other afflictions listed to be able to say with confidence in what ways *nihtgenga* served as a partial synonym, and in what ways it stood out as a separate class of being. The salve against *nihtgengan*, in *Leechbook III* at entry 54,³³ helps little in this regard; no other ailments are listed alongside it, and the surrounding entries are as diverse as: spoiled milk, an “iron-bound” skull, inability to staunch blood at an incision, and digestive problems. Two points do stand out, however. First, the ingredients for the salve include lupine (*elehtran*) and bishop wort (*bisceop wyr̥t*), both of which appear frequently in remedies for various kinds of “mind-altering afflictions.” Dendle has singled out lupine in particular as not only characteristic

of treatments for mental ailments (especially epilepsy), but also potentially effective in mitigating the symptoms that may have accompanied an epileptic seizure.³⁴ Then, nearby at entry 58 the *Leechbook* gives a remedy for “feondes costunga,” an affliction translated variously as the “temptations” or “trials of the fiend” whose practical effects remain mysterious; the entry contains only the hapax legomenon “rud niolin” (?red stalk) as a remedy. Thus, two problems which were previously close enough in meaning or effect that they appeared in the same entry are here separated to the extent that not even their remedies are reminiscent of each other.

The final witness to *nihtgengan* is entry 61 of *Leechbook III*, which merits quotation in its entirety:

Wyr̃c seafe wiþ ælfcynne 7 nihtgengan 7 þam mannum
 þe deofol mid hæmð: genim eowohumelan, wermod
 bisceopwyr̃t, elehtre, æschrote, beolone, hare wyr̃t,
 haran sprecel, hæþ bergean wisan, cropleac, garleac,
 hegerifan corn, gyþrife, finul. Do þas wyr̃ta on an
 fæt, sete under weofod, sing ofer .VIIII. mæssan,
 awyl on buteran 7 on sceapes smerwe, do haliges
 sealtas fela on aseoh þurh clað, weorp þa wyr̃ta on
 yrnende wæter. Gif men hwile yfel costung weorþe
 oþþe ælf oþþe niht gengan, smire his andwlitan mid
 þisse sealfe 7 on his eagan do 7 þær him se lichoma
 sar sie, 7 recelfa hine 7 sena geloma his þing biþ sona
 selre.³⁵

(Work thus a salve against the elfin race and nocturnal *goblin* visitors, and for the women with whom the devil hath carnal commerce; take the ewe hop plant, *probably the female hop plant*, wormwood, bishopwort, lupin, ashthroat, henbane, harewort, vipers, bugloss, heathberry plants, cropleek, garlic, grains of hedgerife, githrife, fennel; put these worts into a vessel, set *them* under the altar, sing over them nine masses, boil *them* in butter and sheeps [sic] grease, add much holy salt, strain through a cloth, throw the worts into running water. If any ill tempting occur to a man, or an elf or *goblin* night visitors *come*, smear his forehead with this salve, and put it on his eyes, and where his body is sore, and cense him with incense and sign him frequently with the sign of the cross; his condition with soon be better.)

This is the only entry that brings *nihtgengan* directly into contact with *ædir*, but all attestations for *nihtgengan* found in *Leechbook III* associate the beings more or less consistently with *feondes costunga*. While there is little indication of what symptoms might have prompted a diagnosis of fiendish tribulation, we see here and elsewhere connections between both *nihtgengan* and *feondes costunga* and disturbances of the eyes and head. This aligns with the Old English *Herbarium*'s association of *nihtgengan* with visions and dreams, and the further predominance of head and eye ailments listed in proximity to the *nihtgengan*, visions, and dreams in the betony entry. Visions and dreams are commonly associated with the Anglo-Saxon *mod* (mind)³⁶ but not necessarily with the head, nor do the Anglo-Saxon medical texts advance a specific relationship between mind and brain, or head, that would encourage the direct association of a mind-based terror with a head-based pain.³⁷ But the possibility of associating *nihtgengan* with a visual-based terror, or a terror related to impaired visual perception with repercussions relating to madness remains intriguing. Dendle's suggestion, referred to above, that lupine may have had a particular association with madness, gains a particular relevance here since that herb appears in the only entry dedicated to *nihtgengan* alone. Also appearing in that entry is bishop wort (*bisceop wurt*), another common ingredient in remedies for "mind-altering afflictions," and one which often (though not always) was used as a byword for betony.³⁸

The Anglo-Saxon medical texts do not often go into great detail concerning the origin of the ailments their remedies treat. Nevertheless, the influence of various external beings, such as *ælf*, the *feond*, and people who use charms or herbs to nefarious ends, clearly forms an important element in the Anglo-Saxon understanding of various ailments, including but not limited to abnormal mental states.³⁹ Both by association and by the treatments recommended, *nihtgengan* are associated with such states, but they are also associated with external beings; in particular, the harm posed by *nihtgengan* seems to be in perceiving them visually—most likely at night. This is reminiscent of three other night-wanderers, part of whose terror derives from the fact that they attack at night, when the human faculty of sight is most challenged.

The Monsters of *Beowulf*

While Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon present diverse and not uncontested aspects of monstrosity, they share certain traits. Most

prominently for this paper, all three make their attacks at night, but the darkness does not serve merely as an atmospheric element intensifying the terror caused by their attacks. Night, darkness, and a lack of visibility condition each of the monsters' approaches as well as the reactions to them; at every turn, the *Beowulf* poet takes advantage of the obstruction to and interruption of human perception presented by nightfall to cast an umbra of inexorable dread. Brodeur has demonstrated the way in which the three repetitions of the verb *com*, each with a different infinitive, not only mark distinct stages in Grendel's approach to Heorot, but also build the terror of the moment.⁴⁰ This "cinematic technique" brings Grendel gradually closer with each repetition,⁴¹ yet leaves Heorot's inhabitants in joyful (if fleeting) ignorance and the audience unable to clearly visualize this terrible creature. As Lapidge observes, "The poet has carefully created an impression of the monster's dire impact but has avoided giving any indications of its appearance. ... It is because this monster lies beyond our comprehension, because we cannot visualize it at all, that its approach is one of the most terrifying moments in English literature."⁴² By calling Grendel one who dwelt in darkness ("se þe in þystrum bad," 87b), and by revealing that he sought out Heorot after night had come ("syþðan niht becom," 115b) and dwelt in that hall "on dark nights" thereafter ("Heorot eardode ... sweartum nihtum," 166b–167), the poet rapidly and explicitly ties both Grendel and his terrifying rampages to darkness and to night.

The single attack of Grendel's mother occurs not only at night, but following directly upon the first night of peace in Heorot since Grendel had first begun his rampages. Nor is she described in terms of visible attributes; rather, she is cast as a monstrous female and as a grieving family member seeking vengeance. Similarly, the dragon who plagues the Geats does so on dark nights ("deorcum nihtum," 2211), although he does not creep like Grendel and his mother; instead, the dragon waits with difficulty until nightfall ("Hordweard onbad earfoðlice oððæt æfen cwom," 2302b–2303), then emerges from his barrow to spew ("spiwan") fire upon the Geats as revenge for the theft from its barrow. Nevertheless, he is clearly either unwilling or unable to leave the barrow before evening, and makes sure to return before daybreak ("ær dæges hwile," 2320).

It is also worth noting that not only does each monster operate outside of its peripheral habitat exclusively at night, but each also visits its terror upon sleeping victims. Grendel makes his first attack when the band of noblemen are sleeping after the feast ("swefan æfter symble," 119a); on the night that Beowulf lies in wait for Grendel, the latter approaches in

the dead of night when those who ought to guard Heorot are all asleep, Beowulf excepted:

Com on wanre niht
scriðan sceadugenga. Sceotend swæfon,
þa þæt hornreced healdon scoldon,
ealle buton anum.⁴³

(The creature that prowls in shadows came stalking
through the black night. The marksmen who had to
guard that gabled building were asleep — all but one.)

We may note in passing the similarity of *sceadugenga* (shadow-goer; Swanton's "creature that prowls in shadows") to *nihtgenga*; this similarity will be returned to below. The correlation between attacks from nocturnal, peripherally-located, terrifying creatures and the sleeping state of their victims continues with Grendel's mother, who "[c]om þa to Heorote, ðær Hring-Dene geond þæt sæld swæfun" ("[She] came then to Heorot, where the Ring-Danes slept around the hall," 1279–1280a).⁴⁴ In the case of the dragon, the pattern temporarily reverses: here it is the dragon who sleeps while a man trespasses in its barrow and steals the flagon from the hoard. Once he has discovered the theft, though, the dragon must wait until nightfall to wreak his terrible revenge upon the thief's people:

Hordweard onbad
earfoðlice oððæt æfen cwom.
...
þa wæs dæg sceacen
wyrme on willan; no on wealle læng
bidan wolde, ac mid bæle for,
fyre gefysed.
...
Hord eft gesceat,
Dryhtsele dyrnne ær dæges hwile.⁴⁵
(*Beowulf*, 2302b–2303;
2306b–2309a; 2319b–2320)

(With difficulty, the keeper of the hoard waited until
evening came. ... Then to the serpent's gratification, the
day had passed; it would not stay longer within the walls,
but set out with flame, ready with fire. ... It darted back
to the hoard, its secret, splendid hall, before daytime.)

Again, the audience never gets a real sense of the dragon as a visible presence until Beowulf goes to meet it in battle. Until that point, the descriptions emphasize the darkness of the dragon's habitat, its guardianship of the barrow hoard, or its rage. Even once Beowulf enters the barrow and begins to fight, the darkness of night and the inside of the barrow obscure both the warrior's and the audience's visual perception of the fierce creature; indeed, most of Beowulf's men flee the encounter.

The hoard itself is peripherally located, both physically and meta-physically: the barrow is obviously located geographically outside of the settlement, and is so far from familiarity that the war band requires the guidance of the man who stole the flagon to find it. The poet clearly understands that this type of structure was raised for burial, and here and elsewhere one finds the expectation of dragons and treasure contained within these burial mounds.⁴⁶ The barrow thus represents a kind of liminal area between life and death as well as present and past, the suitable home only for a creature as fearsome as the dragon.

But darkness does not only upset the perception of monsters; it also impedes a person's ability to perceive the familiar, and the boundaries that demarcate the safe center from the unknown periphery. In her discussion of fenland monsters, including Grendel, Semple observes:

The darkness is significant in this discussion. At night, the physical landmarks which defined the landscape of the Anglo-Saxons, such as boundary markers, would no longer be visible. When the darkness swallowed up the visible, physical boundaries, the spiritual barriers also dissolved and supernatural monsters could come out of their lairs.⁴⁷

Thus, an imperfect perception of boundaries leads to boundaries that are themselves imperfect. Boundaries must be seen to be policed; when this becomes impossible, peripheral beings may intrude upon the center, upsetting order and causing terror. Both Grendel and his mother take advantage of these boundaries weakened by a lack of sensory input to sneak upon (at least in the first instance) an unsuspecting Heorot. Such transgression can also be accomplished by the transgression into the unknown by a member of the in-group, as when the theft of a flagon incurs the ire of a dragon:

He geheold tela
fiftig wintra – wæs ða frod cyning,
eald eþelweard – oððæt an ongan
deorcum nihtum, draca ricsian

se ðe on heaum hofe hord beweotode,
 stanbeorh steapne; stig under læg
 eldum uncuð. Ðær on innan giong
 niða nathwylc, se ðe neh gefeng
 hæðnum horde hond wæge nam,
 sid since fah.⁴⁸

(*Beowulf*, 2208–2217)

(For fifty winters he held it well—he was then a wise king, an old guardian of the homeland—until there began to hold sway in the dark nights a creature, a dragon, which in a lofty dwelling kept watch over a hoard, a high stone barrow; beneath lay a passage unknown to men. Into this some man or other had gone, who got near to the heathen hoard, whose had seized a flagon, large, adorned with treasure.)

The man who had stumbled across the dragon's hoard and stole the flagon while the dragon lay sleeping ("slæpende") and unaware had not done so intentionally, and reacted to his discovery in the first instance with "a terrible horror" ("gryrebrogā"). Nevertheless, he had undoubtedly transgressed a boundary by entering the barrow and upset the social order by his theft.

Sample's reference to spiritual boundaries hints at another parallel: the terror caused by the monsters of *Beowulf* is not infrequently associated with darkness, visual perception, and sleep, three qualities central to the Old English dream experience. Specifically, during sleep, or during the time when other people are asleep (in the case of vigils), the rational mind capable of judgement and discretion appears to give way to a more responsive, reactive state of mind that is also generally more receptive to communication from supernatural influences.⁴⁹ These communications, which range from miraculous apparitions of saints to *The Wanderer's* woefully wistful dreaming, tend to be visually charged experiences: of the sensory perceptions named, that of vision occurs most often, and even in dreams featuring conversation or physical altercation the visual aspect retains primacy. In *Daniel*, Nebuchadnezzar's fear of his first dream has two roots: first, the terror of the "swefnes woma," the "dream's noise"; and second, the fact that he has no memory of the visual aspect of the dream. Visions of saints frequently gain their legitimacy by means of visual recognition.⁵⁰ The emphasis on visual perception in dreams contrasts starkly with the lack of visual descriptors given to those beings who come out of

the darkness to terrorize sleepers, and with the *Beowulf*-poet's emphasis on darkness and the inability to visually perceive one's surroundings.

However, both the ingress of monsters constrained by night, and the sleeping state of their victims suggest that the state of the dreaming or visionary mind may extend beyond the experience of dreams or visions to also include one's experience of night itself: "Dense repetition of references to darkness most often occurs in the genre of biblical verse narrative where it usually denotes hell; but these *Beowulf* instances form their own intrinsic genre, and hell is not the most plausible contextual interpretation, but rather the fearful gathering of unknown shadows in the dark."⁵¹

Discussion

I have argued that *mare* leaves some strength of evidence to be desired if one were to translate it into present-day English as "nightmare," and suggested that an association between *maran* and night may exist at a non-primary level not immediately visible in the attestations that survive. *Beowulf*, and Grendel specifically, provides a tempting possibility to demonstrate this. Kiessling's argument that *mare* at line 103 and *mara* at line 762 are not adjectives describing Grendel as "notorious" but rather appositional nouns—i.e. *mare* as I have discussed them here, has been rather convincingly disproven;⁵² however, it is not impossible that their use in *Beowulf* deliberately echoes *mare*. The use of positively-coded⁵³ language to describe Grendel is consistent with the human, at times even heroic, terms that the poet often uses to modify the "monster,"⁵⁴ and Orchard has pointed out that "Anglo-Saxon audiences were well-attuned to the dual sense of certain terms, and to the twin values implied."⁵⁵ We may speculate that in calling Grendel "notorious," the poet does so in such a way that deliberately calls to mind similar contexts in which *mare* would mean something quite different, and in this way increases both the terror inspired by Grendel and the tension between the human and monstrous terms used to describe him.

It is possible, though also speculative, to see a similar associative word choice at work in line 703 with *sceadugenga*. The lexical parallel with *nihtgenga* is clear,⁵⁶ as is the metrical and alliterative need for *sceadu-* as opposed to *niht-*. Grendel is not restricted to shadows alone; he roams the shadowy fenlands, but only at night does he leave them to enter into the human sphere, cloaked in darkness. Furthermore, it echoes the parallel between "sc[e]aduhelm" (605) and "nihtelm" (1789), both

of which refer to the "cover of darkness." Missuno notes that one of the most frequent contexts for *sceadu* in Old English poetry is the darkness of night, observing moreover that *sceadu* and *niht* collocate on five occasions, and occur within three to seven lines of each other in four further passages.⁵⁷ Indeed, in line 702b the poet tells us that Grendel "com on wanre niht" (came in the dark night), and the *Beowulf* poet employs such terms of shadow, darkness, and night foremost with references to the stages immediately preceding and following the monsters' attacks.⁵⁸ The blurred distinctions between Grendel as *sceadugenga*—as the darkness and shadows that he inhabits—also characterize the *nihtgenga*, suggesting that the terror of this being may be located at least in part in the uncertain boundary between the being and the night that cloaks it. As *sceadugenga* is only attested in *Beowulf*, it is possible that the poet drew upon a general familiarity with the being or class of beings known as *nihtgengan*.

Old English is a language known for its variety in total and partial synonyms, owing in no small degree to the alliterative verse style and renderings into English from Latin.⁵⁹ Distinctions in both meaning and referent can be extremely difficult to prove with certainty, and in many cases it is likely that a concept's strength rested precisely on this ambiguity and context-dependence instead of on any kind of specificity. The evidence that survives for *maran* and *nihtgengan* is insufficient to produce anything near the level of certainty that one would require in order to associate them with a particular being or ailment while disentangling any overlaps of meaning. It is not impossible, for example, that *nihtgengan* and *maran* were conceptually related or members of the same or overlapping semantic categories. This is suggested, or at least hinted at, by the presence of lupine and betony/bishop wort in many remedies for both, though these are also the two most common herbs appearing in remedies for "demonic possession" (Dendle) and "mind-altering afflictions" (Jolly).⁶⁰ Although *nihtgenga* and *mere* appear together in only one remedy, they frequently appear singularly in the company of similar ailments. They may even have been partial synonyms to the extent that "nihtgengan 7 þam mannum þe deofol mid hāmð" could refer to two sides of the same (albeit broadly conceived) phenomenon: a remedy that wards off the attacking threat, and protects those already affected by it. Such a possibility would also suggest an implicit nocturnal aspect to *maran*-attacks; however, it does rely on a firmer basis of identifying *maran* with incubus-type beings than a single glossary tradition.

The commonalities between *mare* and *nihtgenga*, including the possible associations located within *Beowulf*, suggest that they dictate similar assumptions of meaning. Perhaps such a relationship made *mare* more susceptible to influence from cognates that already bore or had come to bear a more direct relationship to night, such as the Old Norse *mara*.⁶¹ If one were to support a later date for *Beowulf*,⁶² the Scandinavian influence on *mare* might be reflected in the play on words discussed above, and the more nocturnal character of these references than elsewhere in the attestations of *mare*.

Finally, I wish to return briefly to the matter of dreams and dream states alluded to at several points above. Lapidge discusses the separation in *Beowulf* of the “physical process of perception and the mental process of intellection” with reference to the philosophical schools of antiquity. He finds no firm evidence that Classical or Patristic texts on the subject would have been known to the *Beowulf*-poet, and concludes that its presence is most likely due to an interest in narrative perception rather than a literary model.⁶³ Taken together with the evidence provided by *maran*, *nihtgengan*, and dreams more generally, I suggest that the *Beowulf* poet may have drawn on a model of mind in which the gaps between different aspects of self are exaggerated during dreaming, or during dreamlike waking states. Alluding to *nihtgengan* via *sceadugenga* may awaken in the audience a sense of the terrifying, unrecognisable, and ill-defined “bad” dream taking advantage of the vulnerabilities presented by the nocturnal state of mind. Many dream narratives in Old English, both in poetry and prose, seem to imply that when a person dreams, they become more receptive to emotional, non-rational, and supernatural stimuli. This aspect of mind requires the waking, rational mind to interpret and understand what the dreaming mind perceived at night.⁶⁴

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to clarify the existing evidence for *maran* and *nihtgengan* as they relate to nocturnal based terror and “nightmares.” On the basis of comparison with the monsters of *Beowulf*, it has investigated how night or darkness, terror, and perception intersect in Old English. Regarding *maran*, it concludes that the evidence provided both by etymology and by the surviving Old English attestations only weakly supports an interpretation of *maran* themselves as night-hags or nightmares, or as agents of sleep paralysis. However, it is clear that such a meaning

developed prominence at some point; I suggest here that the most likely impetus for this change is the influence of the Scandinavian *mara*, which had a much clearer association with night-based attacks. It seems possible that the mentions of *mare* in *Beowulf* are meant to remind the audience of *maran* in a way similar to Kiessling's understanding, though the breadth of proposed or estimated composition dates complicate conclusions that one might draw regarding the specific elements that they shared at the time when the comparison would have been implied. In sum, we may conclude from the evidence available that *maran* were female beings whose threat to the human in-group seems most consistently associated with delusions and fevers (or madness of some kind).

The most compelling feature that *maran* and *nihtgengan* share is a tendency to be blithely interpreted as nightmares despite a very small and internally problematic data set. In the case of *mare* we have the tradition of the gloss "incuba"; *nihtgegne*, "hyena." Both *may* be alluded to elsewhere ("gif mon mare ride" being the most likely reference), but they generally lack common descriptors or referents. *Nihtgegne/-a* is particularly curious, since the flexibility between the grammatical gender and the gender of the referents is nearly impossible to ascertain. If the associations with *sceadugenga* and the parallel with *sc[e]aduhelm* and *nihthelm* are to be taken into account, then the potential lexical switch proposed by Palacios seems likely. And yet, the gloss of *nihtgegne* is the only nominative singular form, and thus the only one showing grammatical gender, that survives. *Nihtgengan* seem, at least, to be much more consistently associated not only with night, but also with problems in perception. The specific threats posed by *nihtgegan* remain unclear, but their association with head and eye ailments, as well as terrifying visual events, seems fairly consistent.

However, across the charms and medical texts, as well as within *Beowulf*, the major threat does not appear to be posed by something terrible that is seen; rather, it is the inability to perceive visually, the threat of something that impairs one's vision, or a creature moving about unseen, that frightens. Ultimately, the greatest terror is that which attacks when night has rendered even the unfamiliar strange, lurking under the cover of darkness when the rational mind (and with it the ability to "see" intellectually as well as "see" physically) is unable to mount any defense. Its attack may be physical, but we see suggestions as well that it may be more insidious as well, impairing visual perception by means of delusions or impeding rational thought, leaving the victim in either figurative or literal darkness.

NOTES

¹ Alaric Hall, "The Evidence for Maran, the Anglo-Saxon 'Nightmares,'" *Neophilologus* 91, no. 2 (2007), pp. 313–314. The exception to this trend is what is commonly known as the Journey Charm, which survives as marginalia in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 41. at pp. 350–353; the manuscript otherwise contains the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. See Heather Stuart, "'Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce': The Structure and Meaning of the Old English 'Journey Charm,'" *Medium Ævum* 50, no. 2 (1981), pp. 259–273.

² The lemma *incuba* is attested in British sources, but not prior to its appearance in the eighth-century Latin–Anglo-Saxon glossary contained in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS. 144. See: R. E. Latham, David R. Howlett, and Richard K. Ashdowne, eds., "incubi" in *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British sources* (Oxford: British Academy, 2015). Online at www.dmlbs.ox.ac.uk/.

³ The epitome is today contained within Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 1750. See Michael Lapidge, "An Isidorian Epitome from Early Anglo-Saxon England," in *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 183–223.

⁴ This point is acknowledged by the editor of the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary, J. D. Pheifer; see J. D. Pheifer, *Old English Glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. liv.

⁵ Lapidge, "An Isidorean Epitome," p. 190.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁷ Hall, "Evidence for Maran," pp. 303–304.

⁸ Note that the feminine form of *mare* remains even when it is used as a gloss for a masculine lemma. For the problems of gender related to a feminine Old English noun being deployed as a gloss for a masculine Latin lemma, see Hall, "Evidence for Maran," pp. 306–308.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 310. There is another group of glosses, but in these the lemma *faece/fecce* has not yet been adequately explained, and thus does not add to the discussion here. See Hall, "Evidence for Maran," p. 313.

¹⁰ P. Bertrand, ed., *Die Evagriusübersetzung der Vita Antonii* (PhD diss., Utrecht, 2005), p. 169.

¹¹ Stephen Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plantlore, and Healing* (Hereward: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2008), p. 71.

¹² Thomas Cockayne, ed. and trans., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864), pp. 14–15.

¹³ Italics indicate additions by Cockayne not present in the Old English. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.

¹⁴ "Mind-altering afflictions" is the term used by Jolly to describe the ailments that typically appear in the *Leechbooks* in connection with those related to elves

and demons. See: Karen L. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 132ff.

¹⁵ An association also observed by Jolly, *Popular Religion*, p. 147.

¹⁶ Italics indicate additions by Cockayne. Cockayne, *Wortcunning*, pp. 306–307.

¹⁷ Cockayne, ed. and trans., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864), pp. 388–389.

¹⁸ E.g. Christopher J. Duffin, "Night-Mare and Its Treatment," *Pharmaceutical Historian* 40, no. 4 (2010), pp. 58–61 and Stephen Gordon, "Medical Condition, Demon, or Undead Corpse? Sleep Paralysis and the Nightmare in Medieval Europe," *Social History of Medicine* 28, no. 3 (2015), pp. 425–444, Shelley R. Adler, *Sleep Paralysis: Night-Mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body Connection* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 44–45.

¹⁹ Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 134–136.

²⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. nightmare, *n.* and *adj.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, s.v. mare, *n.*2; *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* s.v. 6. mer-, mer-s-, possibly also s.v. 4. mer-, merā-; *Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen: Dritter Teil: Wortschatz der Germanischen Spracheinheit*, s.v. marōn.

²² Alaric Hall, *pers. comm.*, May 11, 2015.

²³ Miguel Lacalle Palacios, "Lexical Operations and High-Level Syntactic Operations with Old English -A, -E, -O, and -U," *Revista de Linguística y Lenguas Aplicadas* 6 (2011), pp. 243–259.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ W. M. Lindsey, ed., *The Corpus Glossary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921; repr. 2014), p. 90, H130; T. Wright, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, R. P. Wülcker, ed. and coll. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 25, line 34 and p. 417, line 15.

²⁶ Lindsey, *Corpus Glossary*, p. 91, H166; Herbert D. Meritt, *Fact and Lore about Old English Words*, Stanford University Language and Literature, vol. 13 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 178.

²⁷ Andy Orchard, ed. and trans., "Liber Monstrorum," in *Pride and Prodigies: The Monsters of the Beowulf-manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995) II.20, p. 299.

²⁸ De Vriend considers it possible that Antonius Musa could have written *De herba vettonica liber*, but finds more compelling reasons to doubt the authenticity of the dedication; hence my use of "pseudo-Musa" here. Furthermore, de Vriend has not been able to find a direct relationship between the Old English *Herbarium* and an earlier Latin manuscript from which textual tradition it might have been translated; his parallel text for the section on betony is Leiden, Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, Vossianus Latinus Q 9 (s. vi or vii) which, while not directly related to the Old English *Herbarium*, was likely to have been a near relation of the exemplar used by the Anglo-Saxon translator. Hubert J. de Vriend, ed.,

The Old English "Herbarium" and "Medicina de Quadrupedibus" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. lvi; l–li.

²⁹ De Vriend, *Herbarium*, p. 31. Niederer suggests that the *nocturnas ambulationes* refer to "dangerous nocturnal journeys" rather than sleepwalking "in the medical sense"; she finds little support for the latter in early medieval medical texts at all. M. Niederer, *Der St Galler "Botanicus": Ein frühmittelalterliches Herbar* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 152.

³⁰ Cockayne, *Wortcunning*, vol. 1, p. 70.

³¹ De Vriend, *Herbarium*, p. 31. See n. 27, however, for the caveat that the Latin tradition from which the Old English *Herbarium* was translated remains unidentified.

³² Gwendolyn Knight, "Anglo-Saxon Dreaming: Dreams and Attitudes towards Dreaming in Old English and Anglo-Latin Texts" (Master's thesis, Stockholm, 2013), pp. 61–63.

³³ Cockayne, *Wortcunning*, vol. 2, p. 342.

³⁴ Peter Dendle, "Lupines, Manganese, and Devil-Sickness: An Anglo-Saxon Medical Response to Epilepsy," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75, no. 1 (2001), pp. 91–101 (p. 91).

³⁵ Italics represent additions by Cockayne; I prefer the use of "people" rather than "women" with whom the devil has intercourse. Cockayne, *Wortcunning*, vol. 2, p. 344.

³⁶ Knight, "Anglo-Saxon Dreaming," pp. 76ff.

³⁷ Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 441.

³⁸ Pollington, *Leechdoms*, pp. 100–101. Of bishop wort, Pollington writes: "It seems likely that several plants bore the name *biscupwyr*t, either modified or as a by-name." Ibid., p. 101.

³⁹ See, for example, Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 108: "Ælfe, then, might be identified as the cause of a variety of ailments, afflicting both people and animals. The best attested pains are within the torso."

⁴⁰ Arthur Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1959).

⁴¹ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 35.

⁴² Michael Lapidge, "Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror," in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, eds. Helen Damico and John Leyerle, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 32 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), pp. 373–402 (p. 378).

⁴³ Michael Swanton, ed. and trans., *Beowulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), lines 702b–705a at pp. 66–67.

⁴⁴ Swanton, *Beowulf*, pp. 94–95.

⁴⁵ Swanton, *Beowulf*, pp. 144–145.

⁴⁶ Sarah Semple, "A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England," *World Archaeology* 30, no. 1 (1998), pp. 109–26 (p. 110).

⁴⁷ Semple, "A Fear of the Past," p. 114.

⁴⁸ Swanton, *Beowulf*, pp. 138–141.

⁴⁹ Knight, "Anglo-Saxon Dreaming," pp. 77–78.

⁵⁰ Jesse Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 35ff.

⁵¹ Filip Missuno, "'Shadow' and Paradoxes of Darkness in Old English and Poetic Language" (PhD diss., York, 2012), p. 36.

⁵² Nicolas K. Kiessling, "Grendel: A New Aspect," *Modern Philology* 65, no. 3 (1968) pp. 191–201; for arguments *contra* see esp. Lapidge, "Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror," p. 396 n. 11, and Hall, "Evidence for Maran," pp. 300–301.

⁵³ Although in present-day English "notorious" is not technically positively coded, connotations of the Old English adjective *mare* are most often positive in nature (though "notorious in a bad sense" is also present).

⁵⁴ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 29ff.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵⁶ In fact, given the ambiguity of *nihtgenga's* grammatical gender in the medical texts, this lexical parallel may have contributed to the separation of *nihtgengan* into two dictionary headings (masculine and feminine) in the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. See: Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. Thomas Northcote Toller, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), p. 720, s.vv. nihtgenga; nihtgegne.

⁵⁷ Missuno, "Shadow," p. 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.

⁵⁹ Michiko Ogura, *Verbs of Motion in Medieval English* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

⁶⁰ It is unclear the extent to which betony and bishop wort denoted distinct herbs. As mentioned above, "bishop wort" has survived as a byname for betony, but it is also listed alongside betony in many remedies. Pollington finds it likely that several plants bore the name *biscopwyrte* in some form (modified or as a byname). Nevertheless, betony has been shown to have a long presence in English folk tradition as protection against nightmares, delusions, and harmful spirits (though its original use appears to have been largely amuletic). Pollington, *Leechdoms*, pp. 100–101.

⁶¹ For the Scandinavian *maran*, see especially Catharina Raudvere, *Föreställningar om maran i nordisk folkro* (Lund: University of Lund Press, 1993) and "Now You See Her, Now You Don't: Some Notes on the Conception of Female Shape-Shifters in Scandinavian Traditions," in *The Concept of the Goddess*, ed. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 41–55.

⁶² Around the early eleventh century, consistent with the dating of the manuscript. This example is offered as a possibility only. I take no stance towards the dating of *Beowulf* here; such an argument would be beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶³ Michael Lapidge, "Beowulf and Perception," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001), pp. 61–97 (pp. 86–87).

⁶⁴ Gwendolyne Knight, "Sinning in Sleep: The Responsibility of the Anglo-Saxon Dreamer for Erotic Dreams" (Manuscript in preparation, 2016).

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Chapter 3

The Sinister Sound of Shadows in the Old English Poetics of the Dark

Filip Missuno

“THE MIND,” IT HAS been said, “has an uneasy relationship with shadows.”¹ Their darkness and their strange and shifting forms can obscure, bewilder, frighten. Hence these arresting but elusive borderline entities have, through various images and metaphors, always hovered at the edges of many important areas of experience: light, existence, visibility, shape, substance, reality, life, love, and so on. Shadows excel at suggesting doom, or dread; they insinuate death. Yet there is more complexity in shadows than that, and more surprise as well. They may, for example, also prove to be invaluable resources, both visually and conceptually. In an engaging study tackling the “philosophy of shadows,” Roy Sorensen shows how they work as “the irregular verbs of object perception:”² their grammar, if correctly understood, affords our brains subtle yet essential advantages as we make sense of our environment, or try to think beyond the borders of the real. By combining insights from vision science, physics, and philosophy, Sorensen demonstrates the usefulness of shadows and other related “dark” or “negative” objects. In literature especially, shadows tend to spill far beyond their physical definition: few are tame, passive patches of relative darkness cast by light-occluding objects. Rather, as John Hollander in particular has eloquently exposed in his recently published lectures on shadow,³ they have clothed themselves in the substance (and even radiance) that they lack, with which they have haunted poets, particularly in the English-speaking world, from the Renaissance to modern times.

What I propose to show in this chapter is that the type of fascinating behavior and intellectual stimulation that both Hollander and Sorensen detect and admire in shadows can, to a varying but often striking degree, already be found when one studies shadows in the contexts of the earliest English literature that survives. Some Anglo-Saxon poets and their

audiences, it would seem, were also haunted by the idea of shadow; at any rate, it constituted a remarkable, and remarkably strange, feature of the poetic language, diction, and form that they shared and enjoyed. Consider, for example, this evocation of Hell in *Christ and Satan* (104b–105a):⁴ “Ne her dæg lyhteð / for scedes sciman, sceppendes leoht” (Day, the Creator’s light, does not shine here on account of the shadow’s radiance.) Here is a shadow, set in the darkness of Hell, that yet collocates with several references to light, and possesses radiance. Most translations, admittedly, render *scīma* —which does normally mean something like “radiance”— as “gloom” or “haze” instead; though they do so with little justification: one suspects surrender to an intractable context.⁵ My blunt translation is deliberately provocative, but not demonstrably wrong. It serves in fact to highlight two points. First, this particular hellish shadow, whether radiant itself or not, sounds like a bewilderingly ominous entity that can match or even overpower day’s and God’s light. Second, Old English shadows in general, together with their immediate contexts, constitute a rarely explored, dark and disturbing domain of Anglo-Saxon poetics. They raise a number of questions and riddles that demand our attention.

Many of the more eye-catching or mind-stirring manifestations of the imagery of brightness and darkness, including shadow, in Old English literature have of course been well studied, either as ingredients in specific topics or as their own theme.⁶ Generally, however, Anglo-Saxonists have devoted comparatively little attention to Old English shadows as such, and to their lexical, semantic, and emotional effects. And while there have been a few interesting exceptions, none of them has aimed to cover this particular subject in any specific or systematic way.⁷ This article, then, investigates shadow(s) and shade(s) as linguistic and literary entities in the poetics of Old English. I analyze the words for “shadow” used by the Anglo-Saxons, together with their thematic and stylistic landscapes in the literature. Through close readings of a large and diverse array of short passages, I reveal the surprising strangeness, artfulness, and originality of Old English shadows. These are seen to form a strong undercurrent that runs through the themes of light and darkness, wonder and monstrosity, danger, death, and damnation, and often transcends them. My exploration of the “grammar” of these “irregular,” borderline, bewildering entities further reveals how deeply integrated they are within the Old English poetic tradition. The texts’ engagement with shadows was, it would seem, an original and powerful response to, and negotiation with, biblical as well as traditional images of evil, terror, and death.

Sorensen remarks that “shadows are in the landscape but are available only for the eye.” Shadows in literature, of course, impact primarily the imagination, the mind’s eye. But I propose to show in this essay that, in the surreal landscapes of Old English poetics, it is often through the *ear* that shadows can best be appreciated—and feared. Sound’s interactions with, and shaping of, sense are increasingly recognized and investigated by Anglo-Saxonists.⁸ I demonstrate here that sound, through a wide array of aural devices, is instrumental to the semantics of shadows, endowing them with added menace and power, but also an enlarged applicability.

The Old English Words for “Shadow”

To refer to shadow, Old English possessed two etymologically unrelated terms: *scead(u)* and *scua*. My notation *scead(u)* in fact groups together two related forms: the feminine *sceadu* and the neuter *scead*—so we may actually speak of three forms in all. All three enjoyed some currency in the surviving corpus across different genres, throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, in prose, in verse and, with the exception of *scead*, in glosses.⁹

Even before semantic and contextual details are considered, it is important to note that, in at least three different ways, the use and distribution of these words in Old English amounts to a strikingly unusual situation. First, a plurality of denotators for the basic sense “shadow” is highly unusual among European languages, old or new; most use only one. Other Germanic languages normally have a cognate of either *scead(u)* or *scua* as their sole operative term: Old Norse, for example, had only *skuggi* (related to *scua*) to signify “shade, shadow,”¹⁰ and Latin only *umbra*; and the corresponding daughter languages have continued this semantic exclusivity with their respective reflexes.

Second, while *sceadu*, *scead*, and *scua* all appear in verse, neither Old Norse *skuggi* nor the attested Germanic cognates of *sceadu*, save for an isolated case in Old Saxon,¹¹ ever do so. As far as one can judge from the vestiges of Germanic poetic traditions, shadow simply seems not to be a topic at all in them. Thus the deployment by various Anglo-Saxon poets, on some fifty occasions, of not one but two (or three) shadow words should be regarded as quite exceptional.

Third, the situation cannot be accounted for by the Anglo-Saxon composers’ need for quasi-synonyms to suit different patterns of alliteration and variation. Indeed, these terms virtually never occur together (in variation), and since they all begin in *sc-*, they provide no alliterating alternatives.

The most one could say is that the choice between them may sometimes have afforded poets some metrical flexibility.¹²

This set of riddles cannot be answered fully and neatly, but the detailed investigation conducted in the rest of this article will result in some insights and partial elucidations.

As regards *scead(u)*, the etymology indicates a relatively stable meaning through time. Its cognates in most Germanic languages mean “shadow,”¹³ and most of its remoter relations denote “shadow” (Old Irish *scáth*) or “darkness” (Greek *σκότος*). Modern English is remarkable in having a doublet: *shade* and *shadow*. The latter is clearly descended from the oblique forms of *sceadu* (such as dative *sceadwe*). The former may be a reflex of oblique cases of *scead* (such as *sceade*) or (more likely) of the nominative form *sceadu* (or possibly of both). Thus the two modern terms are probably reflexes ultimately of one and the same Old English term (*sceadu*).¹⁴

Furthermore, while Modern English normally allows for some nuances of meaning between *shade* and *shadow*,¹⁵ on the other hand *scead* and *sceadu* can hardly be distinguished semantically. Sometimes they actually cannot be told apart at all in their textual contexts, because of the considerable overlap between their respective inflected forms.¹⁶ Glosses contain some hundred instances of *sceadu* (but not *scead*), where the Latin lemma is invariably *umbra*, confirming that the core meaning of the word was virtually the same then as it is today.

Scead(u) is fairly frequent in the Old English literary corpus, with over a hundred occurrences, of which some seventy are in prose. The *scead* form, however, appears in prose but rarely, whereas in verse it seems to be preferred over *sceadu*, possibly for metrical reasons. The thirty-one instances of *scead(u)* in verse include forms of:

- *sceadu* (6x);
- nominal compounds (7x) where *sceadu* is the first element (2x) or the base word (5x);
- *scead* (18x).

Scua (or *scuwa*; perhaps representing *scū(w)a*) is more intriguing. It derives from an altogether different Proto-Germanic basis, **skuww-*, whence come also Old Norse *skuggi* and Gothic *skuggwa*; the latter however means “mirror,”¹⁷ while it is *skadus*, the Gothic cognate of *sceadu*, that signifies “shadow” in that language. Evidence from non-Germanic cognates points to underlying meanings to do with “seeing” or “covering.”¹⁸

Etymological considerations, then, suggest a more tortuous semantic history of this word than of *scead(u)*.

With nineteen verse instances and only five in prose, *scua* is significantly rarer and apparently more poetic in register than *sceadu*. It nonetheless appears in some thirty glosses, all of which translate Latin *umbra*, which *sceadu* also habitually glosses. Thus *scua* probably shares much of its surface semantics with *sceadu*.

However, while *scua* and *sceadu* both appear in psalter interlinear glosses, *scua* is mostly found in the mid-ninth-century Vespasian Psalter, with eleven instances to the exclusion of *sceadu*; in all the other psalter glosses, which are much later, *sceadu* predominates overwhelmingly. The two glossing words compete only in the chronologically intermediate, early-tenth-century Junius Psalter gloss (7x *scua*, 2x *sceadu*), and in the early-eleventh-century Bosworth Psalter gloss where the lemma *umbra* is glossed by the doublet “*scua* and *sceadu*,”¹⁹ possibly to explicate the more obscure term *scua*.²⁰ The implication is that *scua* is an archaic word going out of usage in the later period, while *sceadu* remains current—which correlates well with the word’s prose/verse distribution. It is a remarkable fact that, in all of its verse appearances, *scua* systematically fails to alliterate. Instead it consistently “hides” by staying away from alliterating positions, either at the end of a metrical line or as the second element of a compound. For an Old English poetic word, such behavior is, as far as I am aware, unique. The evidence so far, including this last oddity, points to gradual specialization of a rare alternant to restricted contexts. One such possible context is the topos of the shadow of death.

Shadows of Death

Anglo-Saxons were clearly interested in the phrase “the shadow of death.” Native versions of the Latin *umbra mortis*, involving *sceadu* or, more often, *scua*, found their way into vernacular homilies and translations of psalms, thus reaching a wide audience;²¹ and poetic reflexes of this ominous expression have in turn proven particularly worthy of adoption and adaptation, beyond their original contexts, into Old English verse. The image’s three occurrences in the metrical psalms have direct antecedents in interlinear glosses, with the addition of the poetic epithet *deorc* for alliteration, as in the line *deorc þeostru and deaþes scua* (“dark obscurity and death’s *scua*,” *Paris Psalter* 87.6.2). As noted above, *scua* is characteristically excluded from any alliterating position.

Thus it is interesting to observe one of the rare cases of a shadow of death featuring *scead(u)* instead of *scua*, in an appeal to the Lord in *Christ A* for the redemption of those who (116–118):

þrosme beþeahte ond in þeostrum her,
 sæton sinneahtes; synnum bifealdne
 deorc deaþes sceadu dreogan sceoldan.

(covered in murky vapors and in darkness, have sat
 here through the eternal night; enfolded in sins they
 have had to endure the dark shadows²² of death.)

One notes that *sceadu* bears the secondary alliterating stave in its cross-alliterating line—something *scua* is never allowed to do. Compare the following example, an enumeration from *Christ and Satan* of the devils' punishments in Hell (452b–454), this time with *scua*:

and egsan gryre,
 dimne and deorcne deaðes scuwan,
 hatne helle grund, hinsið gryre.

(and that fearsome terror, the dim and dark shadow of
 death, the scalding abyss of hell, the terror of dying.)

The stylistic pattern of ornamentation is similar: the formulaic wording for the shadow of death, the double alliterations, the semantic doublings and phonetic echoes, and the cross alliteration are all evident. But the latter (in line 454) is for *gryre*, not for *scua*, which as a result is the only stressed lexeme in this citation to stay outside of its net of criss-crossing phonetic links.

Many uses of *scua*, especially in compounds, could easily derive from the notion of “shadow of death” conceptualized as a place. Thus in *Guthlac B* the saint is approached by death *under dimscuan* (“under the dim shadow,” 998a). In *Andreas* the same phrase locates the Devil’s deadly teachings (141). The ambiguity in *Juliana* of the line *under hlinscuan helwarena cyning* (“under the prison-shadow the hell-denizens’ king,” 544), where *hlinscua* can signify either Juliana’s cell or Hell itself, is comparable to the use in *Andreas* of *under hlinscuwan* (1071a) and *under heolstorscuwan* / ... *searopancum beseted* (“under concealment-shadow ... oppressed by cunning thoughts,” 1253b–1255a). *Scua* may owe its deployment here, in contexts of confinement and oppression in Hell or by hellish foes or impending death, to extended interpretations of the biblical “shadow of death.”

Not all shadows in Old English literature, it must be said, are sinister ones. The psalmic metaphor of shadow as divine protection (“in the shade of God’s wings”) and its derivatives appears some nine times in the metrical psalms and a handful of poems based on Christian material.²³ What must also be said, though, is that on none of those occasions do the poets appear to strive for anything particularly artful; there are virtually no striking effects of diction, ornamental alliterations nor any soundplay. This is in stark contrast to the complexity attending most of the sinister shadows, as seen throughout this article; a clue, perhaps, to dominant Anglo-Saxon interests.²⁴

Prowling Shadows

Shadows tend, unsurprisingly, to collocate with other darkness imagery; but the collocations often bring out some interesting patterns in which shadows are seen, or sensed, to behave in striking ways. In *Genesis A*, God, after the first day of Creation, “geseah deorc sceado / sweart swiðrian” (“saw the dark, black shadows subside,” 133b–134a).²⁵ This constitutes a close lexical parallel to a passage found in one of Ælfric’s homilies:²⁶

Ðæs deofles rest bið on deorcum sceadewum for ðan
 ðe he slæpþ on ðam sweartum ingehydum þe ðæs
 geleafan leoht on heora life nabbað.

(The devil’s rest is in dark shadows because he sleeps in
 the black intentions that do not have the light of faith
 on their life.)

Note how the collocation *deorc, sceadu, sweart* recurs in the same order. The adaptation to different contexts, subject matters and modes of composition not only affords an insight into the formulaic aspects of Old English shadows, but also hints at the availability and congeniality of this formula diachronically, probably across a span of some three hundred years. But the similarity also gives more substance to the feeling that this emphatically dark shadow in *Genesis A* is something more than mere primeval night, something pregnant with a dark malevolence as yet unexpressed. In terms of poetic contexts of expectation, the shadow’s “subsiding” here is no unequivocal guarantee of light: for it is an example of a recurring motif in which dark and deathly shadows are described as moving in a sinister fashion.

This motif, or micro type-scene, has intersections with the *umbra mortis*. There is a very literal “shadow of death” in *Beowulf*, as the phrase undergoes a striking impersonation in the shape of Grendel. The monster from the mere, that emanation from traditional Germanic demonology which also, however, notoriously walks with at least one foot in the Christian Hell,²⁷ is suddenly dubbed a *deorc deapscua* (“dark death-shadow,” 160a). This label, as Michael Lapidge remarks, contributes, in a stroke of horrifying, nightmare-like half-visualization and incomprehensibility, to a vision (or feeling) of “death on the march.”²⁸ The lexical echoes it carries of the vernacular poeticization of *umbra mortis* (first observed in the metrical psalms) strongly suggest that we are here witnessing the old biblical image entering the heroic diction, already at this early stage.²⁹

The resulting hybrid of a religious concept and secular horror imagery, what one might call the “shadow of death on the march,” becomes tightly intertwined with the traditional chiming and echoic qualities of Old English poetics. Thus Grendel’s later characterization as a *dior dædfruma* (“fierce deed-performer,” *Beowulf* 2090a) is a well-crafted phonetic and metrical parallel to *deorc deapscua*, re-insinuating the shadow, horror and death through formulaic-sounding echoes rather than lexical repetition. Another instance of a monstrous figure of evil, Satan in *Christ A*, is not only an “accursed wolf” (256a) but also a *deor dædscua* (“fierce deed-shadow,” 257a). We have here a kind of a “shadowy” pseudo-formulaic system:

deorc deapscua
dior dædfruma
deor dædscua

The elements work chiefly through lexical-contextual-phonetic linkage, hinting in context at what they approximate in sound (so *dæd* (“deed”) “means” *dēap* (“death”), etc.). One feels already the substantial significance of *sound*: Old English shadows thrive on soundplay, using it to *spread*, as it were, across contexts, poems, and poetic devices.

Personified or otherwise uncannily animated shadows of, or related to, death can be found prowling through several other poems. In the most shadow-haunted passage of *Exodus*, the description of God’s nightly pillar of fire illuminating the Israelites, the poet enhances a visually arresting scene from his biblical material with some yet bolder imagery, as well as with added layers of symbolism (111–119):

byrnende beam. Blace stodon
 ofer sceotendum scire leoman;

scinon scyldhreoðan, sceado swiðredon,
 neowle nihtscuwan neah ne mihton
 heolstor ahydan; heofoncandel barn
 Niwe nihtweard nyde sceolde
 wician ofer weredum, þy læs him westengryre,
 har hæðbroga, holmegum wederum
 on ferclamme ferhð getwæfde.

(... a burning column. Gleaming over the warriors stood the shining rays; shields shone, the shadows (*sceado*) faded away, the abysmal night-shadows (*-scuwan*) could not conceal nearby their hiding-places; the heaven-candle burned. The new nightwarden in their need must abide above the hosts, lest the wasteland-terror, the hoary horror of the heath, should with sea-storms in sudden clutch deprive them of their lives.)

Although these shadows march not forth but away, their lexical and syntactic lingering in the text nonetheless leaves an impression of some vague, veiled menace: the shadows seem to retreat reluctantly; perhaps they are never really gone.³⁰ Nor, amid this winding and echoic diction, is the emphatic threat of death (a terrifying, yet, like the monster's nightmarish coming in *Beowulf*, also a terrifyingly unprecise and unresolved threat) unequivocally dispelled. Indeed, the *niwe nihtweard* (viz. the protecting pillar) echoes a little disturbingly the sound of *neowle nihtscuwan* (which the pillar of course does dispel, in fact, but not in feeling). The latter half-line may be in turn a distant echo of a shadow of death; it shares at any rate its alliterative, syntactical, and metrical patterning with *deorc deapscua*.

This passage is furthermore unique in poetry in having *scua* and *sceadu* appearing close to each other, which results in a faint and furtively artful interlinear alliterative effect between the two. In fact they are also linked by variation, and the verses *sceado swiðredon* and *neowle nihtscuwan* are metrically similar. The doubling of *sceado* with *scuwan*, moreover, conjures the impression that there are dark things out there, in the night's shadows, creeping and seeking to hide. By this poem's allegorical logic, those creepers could represent sins.³¹ But these dark *scuwan* scurrying away to skulk in the poem's fringes also resonate with other murky threats plaguing the Israelites' journey.³² All these disquieting effects probably owe something to the early association of *scua* with the biblical "shadow of death" and the resulting sinister connotations of this word.³³

The receding of the shadows as expressed by *sceado swiðredon* is formulaic. The same verse, with similar alliteration involving brightness imagery, is found near the end of *Guthlac B* (1286b–1292), where, significantly, the context is (a saint's) *death*: Guthlac's soul is about to ascend to heaven. The pattern is also closely repeated in *Andreas* in a context seemingly more benign: shadows yield before the dawn, and Andreas is merely asleep (834–838a):

oðþæt dryhten forlet dægandelle
scire scinan. Sceadu sweðerodon
wonn under wolcnum; þa com wederes blæst,
hador heofonleoma.

(until the Lord let the day's candle brightly shine. The shadows faded away, dark under the clouds; then came weather's flame, the radiant heaven-light.)

But since he wakes before the walls of Mermedonia, the city of sin where he will suffer martyrdom, perhaps these shadows represent the evil that plagues that place, or a foreshadowing of things to come (if any symbolism was intended).

Shadows prowl forward again in this passage from *The Dream of the Rood* (52b–55a):

 Þystro hæfdon
bewrigen mid wolcnum wealdendes hræw,
scirne sciman, sceadu forðeode,
wann under wolcnum

(Darkness had covered with clouds the Ruler's corpse, the bright radiance; the shadow advanced, dark under the clouds.)

This poeticization of the mention of darkness found in the biblical source narrative succeeds in setting up an oppressive, ominous atmosphere. As the shadows slowly move in under the sombre clouds, it is hard to shake off a physical, rather than spiritual, feeling of a storm closing in.

The *Beowulf* poet's arresting adaptation of the shadow of death motif is only one witness among many of his keen interest in shadow. Another one is his coining of two *sceadu-X* compounds, *scaduhelm* and *sceadugenga*, a type unique to this poem: shadow otherwise forms only *X-sceadu* or *X-scua* structures. The two nonce words are the focal points

of a spectacular contrivance whereby the terror of the monster and the darkness of the night are woven together, and provide us with two kindred instantiations of the “shadow on the march” type-scene. The stylistic parallels within these twin passages have been analyzed from an oral-formulaic perspective by John M. Foley, and I have here adapted his highlighting (in boldface) of recurring terms (649–651a and 702b–703a):³⁴

oþ ðe nipende **niht** ofer ealle,
scaduhelma gesceapu **scriðan cwoman**
wan under wolcnum

(until the darkening **night** over all, the creatures of
shadow-helms came gliding dark under the clouds)

Com on wanre niht
scriðan sceadugenga.

(In the **dark night came gliding** the **shadow-walker.**)

Dense repetition of references to darkness typically occurs in the genre of biblical verse narrative in respect to Hell and its denizens. But these *Beowulf* instances form their own intrinsic genre: the fearful gathering of unknown shadows in the dark, foreshadowing and aftershadowing the monsters and their multiform symbolism through echoing lexemic and phonemic clusters. “When the cluster recurs,” Foley concludes, “the terror that it encodes springs into the narrative.”³⁵ The unspecified and ambiguous horror thereby conveyed would have elicited some shuddering among both Christian and inherited Germanic identities.

The phrase *wan under wolcnum*, shared with the *Andreas* and *Dream of the Rood* citations, is a formulaic signature as well. Meanwhile the two *sceadu* compounds in the *Beowulf* citations above command a verb of motion, *scriðan*. One could therefore link these two cases to the formulaic system *sceadu sweðerodon* / *forðeode* and posit a large, somewhat protean shadow cluster, exemplified at least seven times in verse (in *Exodus*, *Genesis A*, *Andreas*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *Guthlac B*, and twice in *Beowulf*). This cluster’s redeployment by different poets within a variety of contexts and across time would account for its flexible structure, a variety that nonetheless remains within limits represented by a handful of core elements of lexis, syntax, and sense.

The ways in which *sceadu* and *scua* are articulated in these patterned passages call for two remarks. First, shadows are consistently *moving*, and

grammatically they are the active subjects, as though they were sentient beings or willful forces extending their dark menace. Second, even potentially cheerful passages, where shadows are dispelled by light, are given a sinister feel by the echoic diction. Old English shadow is perilously fluid, overflowing syntactical constraints and boundaries of expected sense.

Sound-Induced Conceptualizations of Shadow

We have seen how demons, monsters, and more or less identifiable foes in various poems are characterized in terms of shadow, and how they effectively become—by artful lexical, syntactic, and aural contrivance—walking shadows. The enemy of man as a shadow on the march is an imagistically powerful metaphor. But it becomes a yet more compelling one by virtue of what is at bottom a simple sound-link: namely, the resemblance in sound between the words *sceadu* and *sceaða*. Since *sceaða* is one of the main poetic terms used in the poems to signify “enemy, criminal, monster, hostile agent,” the similarity is, in the context of the present discussion of the behavior of Old English shadows, potentially pregnant in significance. *Sceaða* derives from the verb *sceþþan* “to harm, hurt, injure,” and thus means specifically “the one that harms.” This is one of those felicitous phonetic coincidences that play such a helpful role in Old English verse, enlarging meanings and enhancing themes.

The condition for this potential link to work is, of course, for *sceadu* and *sceaða* to occur close to one another, or for either of the two to appear in contexts which point to the other term. And this, I argue, is precisely what happens (often enough). A good illustration of this is offered, again, by the *Beowulf* poet’s introduction of Grendel. The monster is certainly by all accounts a *sceaða*. Indeed, he is called thus early on by Beowulf himself, before he—or the poem’s hearer or reader—can have any working notion of what kind of foe this might be (274b–275): “*sceaðona ic nat hwylc, / deogol dædhata deorcum nihtum*” “I know not what enemy, a hidden persecutor (literally, ‘hater through deeds’) on dark nights.” In the intense atmosphere of darkness, secrecy and mystery that the lexis builds up here, it becomes natural to imagine this menace as a very shadowy one. Had the word been *sceaduwa* instead of *sceaðona*, “shadow” instead of “enemy,” the general impression would presumably still have been virtually the same. Nor is this an idle musing, given the aural suggestiveness of the next half-line, *deogol dædhata*. On the one hand, the closest available phonetic neighbor of *dēogol* (“hidden”) is surely *dēofol* (“devil”; a term actually applied to Grendel

at 756a and 1680a).³⁶ On the other, *deogol dædhata* may recall the aurally and metrically proximate “death-shadow” phrase, *deorc deapscua*, used of the monster earlier (160a),³⁷ particularly since Grendel’s “deeds” (*dæd-*) mean deaths (*dēap-*). Given the semantic overflows discussed, the close phonetic and prosodic proximities apparent in these examples might well have triggered the underlying secondary associations in the minds of the poem’s performers and/or audiences. Through minimal shifts of sound and sense, grim tricks of perception thrive in the dark.

The lexical obfuscators enshrouding Grendel’s journey from the shadows (*in wanre niht* where *scaduhelma gesceapu* are prowling) and through them (*sceadugenga*)³⁸ all but equate him with his murky haunts and shadowy ways. The overall effect is that he is a shadow himself, in any or all of the word’s possible associations: advancing darkness, unclear shape, ghost, death, hellish and accursed spirit, exhalation of the landscape, imperfect and ever-shifting likeness (of a giant, a warrior, a man). Significantly, it is at this point in the narrative that *sceaða* and *sceadu* are finally brought together, in a line resounding with sound-effects (705b–707):

þæt wæs yldum cup
þæt hie ne moste, þa metod nolde,
se s[c]ynscaþa under sceadu bregdan.

(It was known to men that the spectral enemy
(*scynscaþa*) could not drag them under the shadows,
when Providence did not will it.)

Some have defended the manuscript reading *synscaþa*, which could mean either “sinful foe” or “eternal enemy,” partly on the grounds that it is securely attested elsewhere, both in *Beowulf* (801b) and in other poems.³⁹ *Scynscaþa*, on the other hand, would be a *hapax*. But surely the *Beowulf* poet would not have balked from coining an arresting nonce-compound; especially, one might add, if his new word could mend the line’s alliteration,⁴⁰ while at the same time conjuring up links within his poem as well as beyond it to the traditional poetic diction through the use of *scyn-*. The latter is a variant of *scinna* (applied to Grendel line 939a), and its root has distinct shadowy and shimmering associations (on which more below). I would suggest, therefore, that emending to *scynscaþa* does make excellent sense. The word would still carry, subliminally, through close similarity of sound, the thematic associations of the variant *synscaþa*—especially since *Beowulf* and other poems had also used the latter, ensuring that

connotations of sin, evil, and eternal damnation preexisted in the tradition. *Scynscapa* is in itself a terrible, and terrifyingly convoluted, “shadow-creature:” *scapa* is sandwiched by, and tightly bound to *sceadu* by secondary alliteration and assonance; and, through compounding, to *scyn*, which is itself joined with *sceadu* by primary alliteration (and other considerations to be discussed later on).

To return to the passage on the creature’s approach: just as *sceadu* is repeated twice within a few lines (703a, 707b), so is *sceaða* (707a, 712a). In the last of these, in one of the poet’s *mān/man* soundplays,⁴¹ the *mānscæða* (“evil ravager, criminal enemy,” 712a) is contrastively juxtaposed to *manna cynnes* (“of the race of men,” 712b). One arrives at a fourfold combination of soundplay, all of whose possible meanings would fit the context well: evil persecutor, enemy of man, shadow of a man, evil shadow. This shadow emerges out of the shadows not only to devour the men in the hall, but also to overshadow and engulf the meanings of a number of concepts on its path.

There are meetings and mergings of *scead(u)* with *sceaða* outside *Beowulf*, too. A prime example is found in *Solomon and Saturn I* at a point where the devil and his acolytes suffer a particularly crushing defeat (121b–123):

Hydeð hine æghwylc
æfter sceades sciman; sceaða bið gebisigod,
Satanes ðegn swiðe gestilled.

(Each hides itself along the gloom of shadow;
the enemy, Satan’s servant, is afflicted, mightily
restrained.)

There is in fact a secondary soundplay in the relevant line: in *bið gebisigod* the two-syllable sequence *bið ge-* is closely reproduced in the syllable pair immediately following, a rather rare and striking effect to be found in so small a unit as one half of a half-line. Further, (a) the line is marked by a repetitive alternation of the stressed vocalics /ea/ - /i/ - /ea/ - /i/; (b) the following line reruns (approximately) these vowels while de-alternating them (/a/ - /e/ - /i/ - /i/); and (c) there also is an (approximate) echo in line 121 of the sequence of consonants used in line 122 (s-t-ð, s-ð echoes sc-d-sc, sc-ð).

The cumulative effect of these soundplays is to give these lines a special prominence. Their acoustic quality impresses the ear, while simultaneously highlighting a passage in the poem where the *Pater Noster*

letter-warriors' attack presumably reaches its climax: the devil is overthrown, physically cast down. Arguably the most significant element here, in terms of both the phonetic jugglery and the semantic values partaking in it, is the linking of *scead* with *sceaða*. Thereby the swift double conceptualization of the one in terms of the other is effected: the enemy as belonging in the shadow, and the shadow itself as harmful foe.⁴²

To the phonetic and semantic entanglement of *sceadu* with *sceaða*, one scribe has even added an orthographic tangle. For the line "scinon scyldhreoðan sceado swiðredon" (*Exodus* 113, discussed already above) the manuscript reading is actually *sceaðo*. While this scribal *sceaðo* is "probably an error, perhaps induced by the medial ð in the preceding and following words," in light of the present argument it is nonetheless tempting to speculate whether it might have been something more than an innocent oversight.⁴³ *Sceaðo*, on the face of it a meaningless form, would have looked (and sounded) half-way between *sceado* and nominative plural *sceaðan* (end-rhyming with the preceding word and a not so unlikely subject of the following verb: "enemies" subsiding in their desperate attempt to hide would not be out of place in a text that keeps referring to shadowing enemies).⁴⁴

Although the evidence is in each case circumstantial, taken together the diversity of the examples argues against this association being merely a result of on-and-off attempts at artful phonetic ornamentation. There is more than aesthetics at play here. The potential for contextual assimilation of *sceaða* to *sceadu* is part of a poetic amplification of the concept of darkness, an extension which comes to encompass natural shadows of darkness, malevolent enemy-shadows, and shadowy enemies.⁴⁵

On the other hand, darkness often collocates with light in Old English verse, typically across the caesura within a long line. Given the well-known propensity of Old English poets to use the alliteration within a line for a clash of opposites, this is hardly surprising, and this contrastive deployment of light and darkness has been amply described.⁴⁶ The situation becomes more interesting with shadow(s). Thus the root *scead-* has a marked tendency to alliterate with the etymological family of the verb *scīnan* ("to shine"), the adjective *scīr* ("bright") and the substantive *scīma* ("radiance, light"). In some Indo-European languages, cognates of *scīnan* mean "shade, shadow,"⁴⁷ though the continued significance of such etymological data through the (pre)history of poetry and language is hard to gauge. This old relationship suggests at least that the relevance of shadow in the understanding of light, and vice versa, long predates (and perhaps, at many removes, underlies) their stylistic treatment in Old English.

This specific alliterative pattern, in which shadow clashes semantically and thematically with brightness, occurs unambiguously ten times across the corpus, representing nearly one third of its poetic occurrences; and there are furthermore a handful of more uncertain (but intriguing) instances which will be dealt with below.⁴⁸ We have already noted this pattern in the prowling shadow motif, as in the line “scire scinan sceadu sweðerodon” (*Andreas* 836). A representative example of the larger alliterative convention, and one in which the opposites are set against one another very explicitly, is seen in one of God’s first creative acts in *Genesis A* (126–128a):

Ða gesundrode sigora waldend
ofer lagoflode leoht wið þeostrum,
sceade wið sciman.

(Then the Lord of victories sundered light from
darkness, shadow from radiance, above the waters.)

It is notable in this passage that darkness itself, here represented by *þeostrum*, does not alliterate with its obverse: it is shadow, *sceade*, that does. This observation actually exemplifies the striking fact that, among the quite numerous poetic lexis of the dark in Old English, *scead(u)* is the only item to form recurring alliterative pairs with light or brightness terms.

It is often *scīma* that provides the alliteration with *scead(u)*. There is no dispute that *scīma* means “light, radiance” or even “splendor”: it is known from prose and glosses as well as from ten verse occurrences in crystal-clear contexts, and has a reputable etymology with satisfying cognates in other Germanic languages. Akin to *scīr* (bright) and *scīnan* (to shine), it is in effect a rhyming quasi-synonym of *lēoma*—which in turn is related, with similar clarity, to *lēoht* (light) and *lēohtan/lyhtan* (to give light). Given this semantics, then, what are we to make of the riddle at the beginning of this essay? I requote here the passage in *Christ and Satan* where the devil bitterly complains about the dismal darkness of Hell (103b–105a):

Feond seondon reðe,
dimme and deorce. Ne her dæg lyhteð
for scedes sciman, sceppendes leoht.

(The fiends are fierce, dim and dark. Day, the Creator’s
light, does not shine here on account of the shadow’s
(?) *scīma*.)

In such a context the semantic clarity of *scīma* is troubled by the suspicion that it had a rare but insidious double, a strange philological twin: *scīma*, with a short vowel, which would mean quite the opposite of *scīma*,—i.e. “darkness,” conceivably even “shadow.” But this meaning is found neither in glosses nor in prose, and the vowel’s length is undetectable in manuscripts. The existence of *scīma* in Old English is only predicted by comparative etymology; and even that evidence is patchy.⁴⁹ Essentially, then, we are left with context.

Now context here would call for *scīma*, the dark-meaning noun. By its double reference to darkness *scedes scīman* would then parallel the alliterating pair *dimme and deorce*. This obfuscating murkiness would in turn be inscribed within a contrastive frame of bright light, *lȳhteð* and *lēoht*, also doubled. The pattern would set off the sinister darkness of Hell against Heaven’s gleaming glory. How fitting, in this dance of doublets, for the *dim* and *dark* demons to dwell in *shade* and *shadow* away from *light* and *sunshine*. Semantically, though, the *lȳhteð*–*lēoht* framing device is negative, since of course the divine light “does *not* shine here;” and the whole passage quoted is itself enclosed in further envelopes signalled by the negative adjectives *dim* “dark, dim,” 104a and 111b, and *fāh* “stained (by sins), gleaming (darkly/ominously),” 96b and 110a.⁵⁰

Yet there is a final twist: to scan properly, the half-line must in fact read *for scedes scīman*. This metrically correct reading is furthermore supported by internal textual evidence: an unambiguous *scīma* does occur in the same poem later on, when “*hu scīma þær scīneð*” “how the radiance (*scīma*) shines there,” 351, refers to Heaven. In the light of this evidence, therefore, the “right” meaning is “shadow’s shine,” or “shadow’s radiance” or its “splendor.” But no one of course would translate it thus, nor think an Anglo-Saxon poet capable of such an excessive oxymoron, not to mention the suggestion of radiant splendor in Hell. And so we fall back on philologically unsupported compromises like “haze.”

This paradox raises a number of questions about our interpretation of strange Old English images. One such interrogation would be the extent to which metrical regularity could be bent to accommodate meaning. More interestingly, though, this crux should highlight the question of how far Old English poetic imagery, and poetic thought, could go. This is, after all, a poetry that does not shy from bold images, whether paronomastic, synaesthetic, or incongruous, and that often revels in adventurous lexical and semantic experimentation.⁵¹ Sound is indeed a decisive factor. Far from being only an artful ornament, it interacts with sense in crucial ways.

Thus the devil has just been saying of the shadowy Hell that it is not only a dark home (101a), but also one riddled with fire (96a), with fiery dragons at the doors (97), and filled with punishment (99b). There are perhaps in *scedes sciman* echoes, or *shadows*, of such ideas: foul darkness (*scima*); raging fires (a parody or paradoxical antithesis of *scima*); even perhaps moral guilt, shame (*sceomu*), as a reflection of the text's unrelenting references to crime, guilt and punishment.

This kind of equivocation involving layers of ambivalent shadows would not be out of place in the company of some much later English poetry. Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems, for instance, are riddled with shadows; this is his "The Triumph of Life" (lines 481–489):⁵²

The earth was grey with phantoms, and the air
Was peopled with dim forms, as when there hovers
A flock of vampire-bats before the glare
Of the tropic sun, bringing ere evening
Strange night upon some Indian isle, — thus were
Phantoms diffused around, and some did fling
Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves,
Behind them ...

For all the difference in contexts and presumed referents of the "grey phantoms," "dim forms," and "shadows of shadows," one cannot help but hear some echoes, however accidental (or at least untraceable), of Old English shadowings. "Shelley's shadows," Hollander says, "leave a high-water mark for the accumulating levels and sorts of figuration that poetic shadows had been acquiring since the later sixteenth century."⁵³ Indeed, the bewildering flutterings and inversions of Old English shadows and radiances find some similarly unlikely yet arresting echoes in some of Shakespeare's verse: compare his Sonnet 43, lines 3–8:⁵⁴

But when I sleep, in dreams they [the speaker's eyes]
look on thee,
And darkly bright are bright in dark directed;
Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so?

The phrase "thy shade shines so" recalls the Old English alliterative pairs discussed above—although, again, the contexts and themes widely differ. While I am not suggesting outright continuity between

the early medieval and these much later paradoxes, there is a sense that, if an interest in the figurative possibilities of shadows and the poetic strategies to foreground them, had fallen with the demise of the Anglo-Saxon tradition following the Norman Conquest and the importation of foreign models, then they have fallen on a ground that was and long remained fertile. Shakespeare, Shelley, and others engaged with potent foreign tropes and influences and combined them with their own imaginations and, no doubt, some threads of local old lore now impossible to detect; but that was after all what Anglo-Saxon poets had also done in their own times. And in this literary historical situation the Old English passages under study may stand as important comparanda in the larger history of English literature.

The other problematic instance comes from the passage in *Solomon and Saturn I* already discussed above in respect to *sceaða* (121b–122):

Hydeð hine æghwylc
æfter sceades sciman; sceaða bið gebisigod.

(Each will hide himself under the shadow's *scima*; the
fiend will be oppressed.)

The bookending of *scima*—which, here too, must on metrical grounds be *scīma*—by the close-sounding *sceades* and *sceaða* may be seen as an envelope, especially in view of the argument that *sceaða* and *scead(u)* enjoy a tight-knit relationship. This phonetic/connotative framing thus recalls the one in the preceding example, with the also close-sounding and related *lyhteð* and *lēoht*; except of course that semantically this one is a “shadowy” envelope, surrounding and “trapping” the radiant *scīma*, confining it perforce to the darker and more terrifying end of the word's spectrum of connotations.

However, we should translate these genitival constructions in both quotations (shadow's gloom? shadow's shade? shadow's radiance?), it is likely that *for/æfter sce(a)des sciman* represents a poetic formula or formulaic system (although two occurrences are hardly enough to verify such a hypothesis.) At any rate the collocation provides further evidence for the relatively wide availability to poets of a type of dictional cluster conjoining “shadows,” *scead(u)*, and “shining” words (sharing the root *scī-*). On the other hand, however, these two loci for *scima* seem to simultaneously undermine the pattern, since the hellish contexts make it difficult for *scima* to mean anything like “light” or “shine” here. In light of the deployment of radiant *scīma* throughout the corpus to the near-exclusion of *scima*, and

of other etymologically related “shining” lexis,⁵⁵ the “shadow’s shade” of *Solomon and Saturn I* and *Christ and Satan* both fulfil and, simultaneously, frustrate the context of expectation. The core of this patterning is shadow, or the *scima* of shadow. The aural rings around this center project darkness and only fluttering, uncertain light. A possible effect, which would be a compelling one given the extent to which this poem is cast in terms of struggle, victory and defeat, is the impression that the shadow and darkness of Hell is so powerful that it is able, at a lexical and sublexical level, to trap, deny, and pervert even the mere mention or suggestion of light.

Another ambiguous dark/bright word collocating with shadows is *scinn* (variant forms *scīn*, *scȳn*, *scinna*). This noun, usually translated “specter, demon,” is etymologically related to the “shining” root, through a semantic shift involving such senses as “apparition, portent, phantom” (attested in glosses).⁵⁶ The term is always used negatively and usually connotes shadow and murk, referring as it does to evil spirits (from biblical or native tradition, or a synthesis of both). Such beings eminently include the fallen angels who haunt the shadows of Hell in (again) *Christ and Satan* (71b–72):

Blace hworfon
scinnan forsepene, sceaðan hwearfedon.

(Pallid misshapen specters (*scinnan*) roamed, the
ravagers (*sceaðan*) roamed about.)

No shadow appears here explicitly, though the suggestiveness of the phraseology and the aural presence of *sceaða* are worthy of note.⁵⁷ Meanwhile the adjective *blāce*, plural of *blāc*, which in a few contexts such as this one appears to signify “pale, pallid,” on most occasions elsewhere in verse means “bright, shining.”⁵⁸ On the other hand, *blāce* may subliminally invoke the metrically unlikely but contextually more congenial possibility of the form *blace*, plural of *blac* (“black”).⁵⁹ Thus these penumbral spirits are plagued (doubly) by almost the same kind of slippery double-shaded etymology that has just been shown to mark the “shadow’s *scima*” — the very realm, that is, which they so fittingly roam. But the parallels go further. Here, just as in the case of *lȳhteð/lēoht*, we have an envelope pattern in the form of a paronomastic figure: *hworfon* / *hwearfedon*; both pairs moreover occupy the same prosodic slots in their respective textual settings.

These shadowy specters force us to return to the *Beowulf* line “se scynscapa under sceadu bregdan.” To the rich suggestiveness of *scynscapa*, the “demon-foe” or “spectral ravager,” may now be added the ironic but also somewhat disturbing possibility that *scyn-* may actually suggest radiant beauty, through subliminal association with *scýne* (“bright, beautiful”) and *scīnan*. This would anticipate the *unfæger* (“unlovely,” understatement for “hideous”) rays of the monster’s eyes (727b); as to the aural suggestion of “shining,” it would clash with *sceadu*, with which it alliterates, as well as stir up the possibility of the alliterative pattern analyzed above, thus invoking both the opposition and the paradoxes of Old English shadows with light. This play of sinister shades and no less sinister shimmers, together with the presence in between of *-scapa* joining in the phonetic fray, is a remarkably compact and compelling stroke on the poet’s part in his conceptualization of Grendel.

It would be difficult to represent visually the essentially sound-based interactions of shadow with ambiguous light. The following merely highlights the obvious lexical echoes across four of the more striking lines that have been dissected:⁶⁰

<i>scinnan</i> forscēpene,	<i>sceaðan</i> hwearfedon (<i>Christ and Satan</i> , 72)
for scedes <i>sciman</i> ,	<i>sceppendes</i> leoht (<i>Christ and Satan</i> , 105)
æfter sceades <i>sciman</i> ;	<i>sceaða</i> bið gebisigod (<i>Solomon and Saturn I</i> , 122)
se <i>scynscapa</i>	under sceadu bregdan (<i>Beowulf</i> , 707)

The extent of these congruences, penetrating three poems so distinct in genre, theme, tone and structure (as well as in terms of manuscript context and, probably, date of composition), bears witness to the relatively wide circulation of complex ideas about the treatment of shadows in the Old English poetic tradition.

Taken together, the lines and passages studied here encompass Old English shadow(s) in a tightly woven net of criss-crossing associations. The phonetic, as well as semantic, conditioning of these links appears to allow a suggestion of “shadow” to be operative even when the word is actually absent: this has been seen when *sceaða* is able to “stand for” *sceadu*, as the spectral fiends of *Christ and Satan* 72 illustrate. But the same poem provides yet another example of subliminal, sound-induced shadows, in this excerpt from a speech by Satan (176–180a):

Nu ic eom asceaden fram þære sciran driht,
 alæded fram leohte in þone laðan ham.
 Ne mæg ic þæt gehicgan hu ic in ðam becwom,
 in þis neowle genip, niðsynnum fah,
 aworpen of worulde.

(Now I am excluded (*āscēaden*) from the radiant company, led away from the light into this loathsome home. I cannot imagine how I came there, into this dismal darkness, stained/gleaming (*fāh*) with malicious sins, cast out from the world.)

The thrust of this passage, spiritually and literally, is that the speaker is effectively tainted by the shadow (of sin/death/hell) and condemned to it. It would be tempting, therefore, to see the choice of the term *āscēaden* as involving a paronomastic suggestion of *scead(u)*. If this an accident, then it is in this context a fortunate one. Nor is this type of suggestiveness, underscored by contrastive pairing with brightness words, an isolated case.⁶¹ The relatively frequent collocation of *sceaða* with the ominous adjective *fāh*, which connotes both radiance and hostility/shadow/death, arguably represents a sub-pattern in itself.⁶²

One could detect another sub-pattern in the intriguing tendency of the verb *scūfan* (“to shove”) to alliterate with either shadow terms or *sceaða*. The word nearest phonetically to *scūfan* is *scua*,⁶³ and the contexts in question do suggest shadow or darkness. This is the case for example in a passage in *Guthlac A* where the saint taunts the tormenting devils (673–678a):

Ne þurfun ge wenan, wuldre biscyrede,
 þæt ge mec synfulle mid searocræftum
 under scæd sconde scufan motan
 ne in bælblæsan bregdon on hinder,
 in helle hus, þær eow is ham sceapen,
 sweart sinnehte.

(You need not hope, sinful ones shorn of glory, that you can with treacherous tricks shamefully shove me under/into shadow, nor thrust me down into the blazing fire, the house of Hell, where a home was made for you, a black eternal night.)

The choice of just this verb to alliterate with “shadow” may be a pointed one, for *scūfan* tends to be used in “shadow of death” contexts of sin,

damnation and alienation from God; including in a warning against those who, like Grendel, should *bescūfan* their soul to damnation.⁶⁴ Essentially the same alliterating pair is found in *The Phoenix* 168, while a vista of Hell in *Christ and Satan* has *scūfan* alliterating with *sceaðena scref* (“pit of fiends,” 631).

It seems fitting to end this enquiry into Old English shadow with what must, in the absence of anything else, come closest to being the only vernacular enquiry about shadow—or rather, about something that, somehow, involves shadow; for the poem containing it, *Solomon and Saturn II*, is a notoriously enigmatic contest of riddles (362–369):

Salomon cwæð:

“Hwa deær ðonne dryhtne deman, ðe us of duste
geworhte, nergend of niehtes wunde? Ac sæge me
hwæt næren [ð]e wæron.”

Saturnus cwæð:

“Ac forhwon ne mot seo sunne side gesceafte
scire geondscinan? Forhwam besceadeð heo
muntas and moras and monige ec
weste stowa? Hu geweorðeð ðæt?”

(Solomon said:

“Who will then dare to judge the Lord, the Savior,
who made us from dust, from the wound of night? But
tell me what were not that were.”

Saturn said:

“But why cannot the sun brightly shine through the
wide creation? Why does it overshadow (*besceadeð*)
mountains and moors and also many wastelands? How
does that happen?”)

This is another formulaically conditioned extension of the shadow/shine pattern, in that *besceadian*, a unique use in verse of a verb whose meaning in prose is “to cast into shadow, cast a shadow on, overshadow,” here takes the place of the noun.⁶⁵ These lines, whose “pattern suggests a thematic development around a particular metaphor” involving night and shadow,⁶⁶ are some of the most obscure and yet also most stylistically ornamented in the poem, with strong-linked, back-linked, end-linked, and cross alliterations as well as intra- and extra-linear assonances.⁶⁷ It may be that, like the other instances of stylistic craft involving shadow, even this extreme case of obfuscation leaves us the possibility of an insight into

some Anglo-Saxon intellectual attitudes to their world. There is a suggestion that conflicts and paradoxes, whether religious, biblical, traditional, or empirical, that need to be confronted (in life, or in thought), can be made sense of in terms of this elusive, liminal, dark, darkly shimmering, alarming entity that is Old English shadow. There is darkness and terror in shadows, but also much food for thought.

Conclusion

Shadows in Old English literature are not a mere element of the contrastive symbolics of light and darkness. Their artistic treatment turns them into a much richer and more interesting phenomenon, a strange but conceptually powerful poetics, whose very domains and contours shift and shimmer like a host of cast shadows in uncertain light.

The rich and variegated patterns analyzed here—the “shadow of death” with its striking extensions, the prowling and ominously lingering shadows, or the overshadowing of the concept of monster, specter or other enemy, and even of light itself—appear to have been deeply integrated into the poems’ diction and texture, and the formulaic, echoic poetics of Old English. This observation is the more remarkable as these patterns, in their intensity or artistry, are matched or even approached neither by the learned, Latin, biblical sources that in many cases seemingly underlie them, nor by any cognate Germanic tradition (of representation of darkness, of demonology or other). Old English shadows, in other words, have come to loom much larger than any and all of their putative analogues and antecedents, whether oral or scriptural.

The deftness in handling and juggling with shadows and shades constitutes to a large extent an original Old English artistic expression, presumably representing a specifically Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with the dark and some degree of interest in the problems of shadow. Nor does it seem that interest or preoccupation with such matters has wholly vanished along with the eradication of the cultural elites responsible for our surviving textual artefacts. Whether through an undercurrent of continuity in patterns of language, or of thought, or by the resurgence of recurring concerns matched by linguistic availabilities, shadows have lengthened and spread across a vast spectrum of the English literary world.

As this chapter makes clear, a fuller awareness of the *sound* of Old English shadows *in context* is essential to the interpretation of their meaning and an appreciation of their likely stylistic and thematic effects. Much would

have depended on poets' voices, emphasizing or obscuring echoes and distinctions; on hearers catching (or missing) shifting shades of pronunciation, perhaps; or on readers' choices, as their eyes and lips reshaped the words. Such data being forever unrecoverable, however, we must for lack of hearing try and capture the nuances with philologically trained eyes and minds.

Old English shadows weave a rather disquieting and depressing strand in a literature that already tends to the gloomy in its outlook. Among the various possibilities offered by this protean subject, it is the more sinister ones that were preferred. But these, it would seem, were particularly amenable and relevant to the traditional form and themes of the poetic medium; and, not least, to its tendency for aural patterning. Whether they were also the most imagistically or intellectually useful to Anglo-Saxons must remain open to conjecture—notwithstanding what a relatively influential Anglo-Saxon book, the Alfredian adaptation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, has to say on the matter in *The Meters of Boethius* (12.15b–12.17):

Nænegum þuhte
dæg on þonce, gif sio dimme niht
ær ofer eldum egesan ne brohte.

(Nobody would find pleasure in the day, if the gloomy
night did not first bring terror over men.)

One hopes, at any rate, that some such feeling was shared by those who saw and heard so many shadows in their verse.

NOTES

¹ Roberto Casati, *Shadows: Unlocking Their Secrets, from Plato to Our Time*, trans. Abigail Asher (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 203.

² Roy Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

³ John Hollander, *The Substance of Shadow*, ed. Kenneth Gross (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016). On shadow as substance in particular, see pp. 15ff.

⁴ I quote Old English poems from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. George Philip Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–1953), except *Beowulf*, quoted from *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk et al., 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

⁵ Robert Finnegan, ed., *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977) is led to the somewhat *ad hoc* claim that *scīma* is “an appropriate word for the shadowy character of hell, since, in context, it can connote either ‘light’ or ‘dark.’” *A Thesaurus of Old English in 2 Volumes*, ed. Jane Roberts and Christian Kay (London: King’s College, London, 1995) and *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. J. R. Clark Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) subsume the two words and their meanings under the sole *scīma*. But *scima*, with the short vowel and glossed as “twilight, gloom,” is found in both *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. and trans. Daniel Anlezark (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009) and *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. Robert J. Menner (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1941). Cf. S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Everyman, 1982), p. 90. I discuss this crux more fully towards the end of this article.

⁶ Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1979); Joyce M. Hill, “Figures of Evil in Old English Poetry,” *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 8 (1975), pp. 5–19; Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Alain Renoir, “The Terror of the Dark Waters: A Note on Virgilian and Beowulfian Techniques,” in *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 147–160; Michael Lapidge, “Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror,” in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, ed. Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), pp. 373–402; *idem*, “Beowulf and Perception,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001), pp. 61–97.

⁷ These exceptions include Lapidge’s excellent discussions in his articles listed in the footnote above. I have also found the short but thought-provoking discussions of some instances of Old English “shadow” by T. A. Shippey in his works on Tolkien of great interest for the arguments of this study: see e.g. his *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), pp. 146–148.

⁸ Important investigations into the significance of sound-effects in Old English poetry include Roberta Frank, “Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse,” *Speculum* 47 (1972), pp. 207–226; Andy Orchard, “Artful Alliteration in Anglo-Saxon Song and Story,” *Anglia* 113 (1995), pp. 429–463. *idem*, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 64–69, 75–76; Richard Dance, “‘*Þær wearð bream abafen*’: A Note on Old English Spelling and the Sound of *The Battle of Maldon*,” in *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), pp. 278–317.

⁹ See further Filip Missuno, “Shadow” and Paradoxes of Darkness in Old English and Old Norse Poetic Language (PhD diss., University of York, 2012), pp. 47–64.

¹⁰ Norwegian *skodde* and Faroese *skadda* do suggest that an unrecorded ON cognate of *sceadu* existed; but both these modern words mean “mist,” not “shadow:” cf. *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, ed. Guus Kroonen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), s.v. **skadu-*.

¹¹ For a comparative study of darkness lexis see Missuno, “Shadow.”

¹² The heavy syllable *sceadw-* would normally preclude metrical resolution in oblique forms of *sceadu*. These forms could in theory have been replaced with corresponding forms of *scead* or *scua* which would be amenable to resolution when need arose.

¹³ *Proto-Germanic*, s.v. **skadu-*. *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, ed. Vladimir Orel (Leiden: Brill, 2003), s.v. **skaduz ~ skadwaz*.

¹⁴ See Oliver Farrar Emerson, “Mead-Meadow, Shade-Shadow, a Study in Analogy,” *Modern Language Notes* 35.3 (1920), pp. 147–154.

¹⁵ See OED Online (Oxford University Press, 2017), s.vv. *shade*, *shadow*, <http://www.oed.com>.

¹⁶ Thus for example the form *sceadu* can be either the nominative singular feminine word, or the nominative/accusative plural of neuter *scead*; meanwhile in the feminine word’s dative *sceadwe* is often spelled *sceade* like the neuter’s dative.

¹⁷ Cf. Old Norse *skuggsjá* in that sense.

¹⁸ *Proto-Germanic*, s.v. **skuwwan-*; *Germanic Etymology*, s.v. **skuwōn*.

¹⁹ Uno L. Lindelöf, “Die altenglischen Glossen im Bosworth-Psalter,” *Mémoires de la société néophilologique de Helsingfors* 5 (1909), pp. 137–230, ps. 101.12.

²⁰ For the dating of these psalter glosses, see *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. D. H. Wright (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967); Mechthild Gretsch, “The Junius Psalter Gloss: Its Historical and Cultural Context,” *ASE* 29 (2000), pp. 85–121, (p. 85); P. M. Korhammer, “The Origin of the Bosworth Psalter,” *ASE* 2 (1973), pp. 173–187 (173).

²¹ For an account of ecclesiastical views current in the Anglo-Saxon period on the meanings of the “shadow of death,” and of their interpretation in Old English homiletic writings, see Hill, “Figures of Evil,” pp. 12–14.

²² The reason for the use of the plural here might have been nothing more than the need to conform to metrical requirements.

²³ *Paris Psalter* 56.1.3a, 79.10.1a, 90.4.1b, *Genesis A* 859a, 874a, 2740b, *Genesis B* 813a, *The Meters of Boethius* 8.28a, *The Phoenix* 168b.

²⁴ The same is true of the transience trope. While the use of “shadow” as a metaphor for it has enjoyed some level of appreciation among translators and adaptators in vernacular prose, in original Old English verse it seems to have had very little traction. In *Instructions for Christians* (a religious poem listing precepts) the fleetingness and insignificance of earthly life and riches is *sceaduwa gelic* (“like shadows,” 37b) (and *Paris Psalter* 143.7 embodies a similar idea), but the few other poetic embodiments of the trope (with both *scead(u)* and *scua*) are all in the metrical psalms.

²⁵ *Genesis A* is generally dated to ca. 700; see *Genesis A: A New Edition*, ed. A. N. Doane (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 25ff, and R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Metre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 64, 135, 264, 391–392.

²⁶ “Dominica III in Quadragesima” in *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, 2 vols., EETS 259, 260 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–68), vol. I, 264–80, lines 224ff.

²⁷ Grendel belongs to the *helrunan* (“hell-whisperers,” line 163a).

²⁸ Lapidge, “Psychology of Terror,” p. 380; citing Arthur G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, p. 90) at p. 384.

²⁹ For the application of *dēapscua* to Grendel and this compound’s ecclesiastical affiliations, see also Hill, “Figures of Evil,” pp. 10–16. I believe, following R. D. Fulk and others, that *Beowulf* belongs to the very earliest Old English poems, along with *Genesis* and *Exodus*.

³⁰ See the discussion of this passage and some parallels in the study of *sceadu* above.

³¹ *Exodus*, ed. Peter J. Lucas (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), p. 94.

³² See Denis Ferhatović, “*Burh* and *Beam*, Burning Bright: A Study in the Poetic Imagination of the Old English *Exodus*,” *Neophilologus* 94 (2010), pp. 509–522; and Missuno, “Shadow,” pp. 61–62.

³³ The negative, deathly, religious connotations that *scua* (but not *scead(u)*) brings to the narrative can be usefully compared to the morally negative effect of *sweart* (as opposed to *blæc*) in instances of blackness imagery, as revealed by Amy W. Clark’s chapter in the present volume. In the terms of her argument, *sweart* and *scua* are the more culturally loaded and restricted terms, while *blæc* and *sceadu* are respectively the more neutral, dominant terms.

³⁴ Cf. John M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 32–33; I have partly reused his translations.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁶ The only phonetic difference is the substitution of one fricative for another.

³⁷ Note also that *deogol dædhata* alliterates with the same epithet, *deorc*, that describes the “death-shadow.”

³⁸ See the discussion of this vocabulary above.

³⁹ Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, “*Beowulf*, lines 702b–836. Transformations and the Limits of the Human,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 23.4 (1981), pp. 484–494 (p. 485). Beside *Beowulf* the compound *synsceaða* also occurs in *Genesis A* 55a, *Juliana* 671b, and *Christ B* 706a.

⁴⁰ The alliterating stave in this line is *sc-*, demanded by *sceadu* in the off-verse. Because in nominal compounds it is the *first* element that bears the main stress, *-scapa* cannot provide the alliterative requirement. Faulty alliteration is extremely rare in *Beowulf*, and there seems to be no reason to accept it here.

⁴¹ The collocation recurs l. 2281, and compare lines 735b with 737b, and 1055a with 1057a.

⁴² Another enemy which belongs in the shadows is the thief. The *Resignation* poem brings together shadow and the verb *sceþþan* which is directly related to *sceaða*: *Regnþeofne læt / on sceaðe sceþþan* ("Let not the mighty thief harm [me] in the shadow," 15b–16a).

⁴³ The scribe in question, who copied over 4,000 lines of verse in the Junius manuscript, wrote ð for *d* at only two other occasions, neither of them being in *Exodus* (cf. *Exodus*, ed. Lucas, 94 [note to 113b]). The substitution in question, therefore, stands out as a very uncommon one.

⁴⁴ Such a construction, besides, would strikingly recall *Solomon and Saturn* 122b–123, hiding, shadow, and *sceaða* are all involved.

⁴⁵ Additional circumstantial evidence exists in the shape of suggestively recurring collocation of *sceaða* with other darkness-related lexis, which would arguably further consolidate the associativity with *sceadu*: *Christ C* 867–872 (line 870), *Christ C* 1559–1561 (line 1559), *Exodus* 37–41 (line 37), *Guthlac A* 127–128 (line 127), *Guthlac A* 648–651 (line 650), *Christ and Satan* 68–73 (line 72) (the latter also involving *scinnan*).

⁴⁶ Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*.

⁴⁷ *Proto-Germanic*, s.v. *skinan*-.

⁴⁸ *Scead(u)* clearly and contrastively alliterates with one or more "shining" words in *scī*- in *Andreas* 836, *Guthlac B* 1288, *The Dream of the Rood* 54, *Exodus* 113, *Genesis A* 128a, *Christ C* 1088 and 1584, *The Phoenix* 210a and 234, *Maxims I* 66.

⁴⁹ Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, s.v. **skimōjanan*.

⁵⁰ The syntactically and semantically mirrored phrases in *ðissum neowlan genipe* (101a) and to *ðissum dimman ham* (111b) reinforce the envelope.

⁵¹ See e.g. Fred C. Robinson, "Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat," in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature*, ed. J. L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), pp. 99–110.

⁵² Quoted from Hollander, *Shadow*, p. 98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). I am grateful to Elizabeth Tyler for drawing my attention to this sonnet a few years ago.

⁵⁵ Including, interestingly, in *hu scīma þær scīnēð* "how the radiance (*scīma*) shines there," *Christ and Satan* 351, in the same poem where shadowy *scīma* also appears.

⁵⁶ *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. and enlarged by T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898–1921), s.vv. *scīn* (both entries), *scīn*-, *scinna*.

⁵⁷ This passage is also analyzed by Carl Kears in the present book. While he does not discuss *sceaðan*, his argument that the fallen angels, in their fall and

their misshaping, are being closely related to the darkness and chaos of their new abode, adds some interesting background to my point about aurally driven shifts and congruences of meaning (such as *sceaða*–*sceadu*, *scinnan*–*scīnan*, and *blāce*–*blace*).

⁵⁸ DOE, s.v. *blāc*.

⁵⁹ On this problematic pair of adjectives, see further Amy W. Clark's chapter essay in this book; and Missuno, "Shadow," pp. 84–91.

⁶⁰ "Shadowy" echoes are in bold, "shining" ones are underlined. Italicizing indicates close similarities of sound and (to some arguable extent) sense in respect to non-italicized lexemes.

⁶¹ A strikingly similar situation occurs in *Beowulf* 1939, where a *sceādenmæl* ("pattern-welded sword," with a possible suggestion of *sceadu*) will *scȳran* ("make clear" < *scīr*) a killing.

⁶² On this adjective's shadowy associations see Filip Missuno, "Glowing Paradoxes and Glimmers of Doom: A Re-evaluation of the Meaning of Old English *fāh* in Poetic Contexts," *Neophilologus* 99 (2015), pp. 125–142. See, too, the *scīma*/*scima* paradox discussed above.

⁶³ It is likely that *scua* was, at least by some speakers, pronounced *scuwa* or even *scūwa* (as spelling variants and etymological date suggest): thus its phonetic closeness to *scūfan* is probably even greater than that which the common spelling *scua* would seem to allow for.

⁶⁴ See Hill, "Figures of Evil," p. 15.

⁶⁵ DOE, s.v. *besceaduwian*, *besceadian*.

⁶⁶ *Solomon and Saturn*, ed. and trans. Anlezark, p. 128. For further discussion of the "night's wound" and the interpretative trials of the manuscript reading *nærende wæron*, both of which cruces must somehow inform this extended shadow riddle, see *Solomon and Saturn*, ed. Menner, 133–34, and *Solomon and Saturn*, ed. and trans. Anlezark, pp. 127–129.

⁶⁷ My labelling of these different patterns of alliteration follows Orchard, "Artful Alliteration," p. 433.

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Chapter 4

Into the Darkness First: Neoplatonism and Neurosis in Old English Wisdom Poetry

Rafał Boryśławski

WITH ALL OF ITS challenges, reading emotional states in the texts of the distant past has recently been gathering momentum in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies.¹ This chapter offers an enquiry into a specific aspect of emotion studies attempting to trace the echoes of emotional and mental infirmity present in Old English wisdom poetry. I will discuss them within the scope of the Old English gnomic *Weltanschauung* as stemming from the sense of frustration with one's cognitive limitations and I will also discuss the apparent paradox of the productiveness of such a frustration that appears to be present in Old English gnomic verse. The specific question I pose here is whether we can talk about the phenomena reminiscent of anxiety disorders and neurotic states, as defined by contemporary psychiatry, as traceable in Old English gnomic poetry, and, secondly, whether we can discern any methods that may have served to alleviate the mental suffering and depressive states possibly reflected in the poems. My intention is to explore these themes beyond the narrative poetry depicting dejection and to interpret selected texts belonging to the broadly understood category of non-narrative gnomic poetry by focusing on the logocentric approaches which are applied in them to conceptualize reality as a form of confrontation with its bewildering aspects emanating from the confines of human cognition as such.

The chief focus of this chapter will be on *The Maxims* and *The Order of the World*, the poems that apply the strategies of what I call here a verbal reification of reality, and on some of the Exeter Book Riddles with their strategy of its re-reification. By reification I understand trying to render the cognitive reality concrete within the poetic boundaries of language

and thus confirming its internal relations. Re-reification, in turn, is taking a step further: initially distancing the reader from the verbalizations of reality in order to reaffirm it with its internal structures even more firmly. I intend to view these concepts and texts against Neoplatonic thought since it is this philosophical tradition that appears to find virtue and a form of necessity in the human sense of confusion. Thus, the concern in this chapter will not be with the anxiety-conducive confusion related to individual human experience, as is the case of the social and existential disorientation in which, for instance, the characters of the Old English elegies find themselves. Instead, the focus will be on confusion understood more broadly, in textual and metaphysical senses, explainable as akin to the form of the riddle depicting progress from the frustrating darkness of the mystery posed as a necessary state before the moment of illumination. What I call here textual confusion is to be understood as serving as an allegorical representation of Old English cognitive reality and as a method of dealing with the anguish stemming from the awareness that human powers of acumen are necessarily restricted.

In other words, the purpose of this chapter lies in discussing an apparently paradoxical approach to confusion in Old English gnomic verse. It may be exemplified by the figure of Saturn in the two *Solomon and Saturn Dialogues* in which he is an apt example of understanding the potential of confusion to reach beyond the dispiriting gloom and seeing in it instead motivational force, an opportunity, and an invitation to act despite human limitations. Thus, although the sense of disorientation intrinsically accompanies depressive states, I will discuss its use in Old English gnomic verse not in its detrimental capacity, but as a productive factor which must be embraced in order to dispel the initial darkness it exudes. I will begin by a necessarily brief explanation of the modern clinical take on the connection between the sense of confusion and mental disorders which I will set against two Old English instances of the frustration stemming from confusion mentioned by Bede and by the Old English translation of Boethius. A short reference to Alcuin's attempt at explaining the 793 catastrophe at Lindisfarne will serve as a historical example of looking for sense in a seemingly random event and of deriving a kind of sobering wisdom from it. All this will eventually provide the basis for the examination of the complementariness of confusion and discernment in *Maxims* and *The Order of the World* with excursions towards similar perspectives in other Old English texts, notably displayed by the logocentrism of the riddles, and their correlations to the apophatic theology of

Pseudo-Dionysius emphasising the importance of confusion on the path towards wisdom.

Clinical psychiatry explicates the state of mental depression as stemming from a combination of several generally described elements: “a cognitive triad of recurrent negative views that directly shape how the person sees themselves (negative self-concept— e.g., worthless), the world (overestimation of demands—e.g., life is meaningless), and the future (e.g., hopelessness); irrational schemata based on the past and logical errors that pervade the assessment of oneself and life events; and a number of typical processing errors, through which perceptions of events are distorted.”² Uncertainty is emphasized as fundamental in contemporary studies of neurotic disorders which recognize in it the key feature of the so-called Generalized Anxiety Disorder. In his introduction to the study of anxiety disorders Eric J. L. Griez, an authority on affective diseases and the neuroscience related to them, emphasizes that it is the sense of uncertainty that often prevents afflicted persons from using existing and effective coping strategies and, ultimately, leads them to switch between intolerance of uncertainty and intolerance to emotional arousal leading to its avoidance. In result, it is impossible for patients to apply appropriate coping strategies despite the obvious prophylactic value of worrying.³ Therefore, since the sense of uncertainty is both an inherent experience related to anxiety disorders and since it lies at the core of the Old English perception of the world, we may see a connection between understanding depression as a clinical state and its potential depiction in Old English wisdom poetry. The key point of the present discussion, however, is to highlight the humanizing capacity of the sense of confusion in Old English wisdom poems. Arguably, the problem with such an approach to the literary texts chosen here is that they do not represent clinical records of individual experience, but offer generalized perspectives on human interactions with physical and spiritual reality, and on human cognitive powers. Additionally, their original purpose is not immediately clear and is subject to ongoing scholarly debates. In spite of this, I will argue for the meaningfulness of approaching Old English gnomic texts through the prism of depression on two broad premises: that of the existence of notable similarities between the symptoms of anxiety disorders and the specific *topoi* of Old English wisdom poetry, and that of the ways of conceptualizing reality that the poems offer as responses to the anxieties present in them. This latter point, comparable to a form of literary therapy, will be presented as offering a productive potential connecting the poems to Christian Neoplatonic philosophy.

Before due attention is given to selected gnomic pieces, I shall begin by invoking two Old English literary instances of presenting the world as ostensibly confusing and thus as conducive to anxiety: Bede's parable of the sparrow, and the King Alfred-inspired translation of the *Meters of Boethius*. If the anguish of a mind suffering from depression lies in the conviction that reality is essentially beyond one's cognitive and active grasp and that it is dominated by confusion and a sense of flux, then this state of emotional and intellectual turmoil is one of the most distinct generative substances behind them and thus also behind a considerable part of Old English poetry. The parable of the sparrow flying in and out of a wintry hall invoked by a nameless thegn of King Edwin (possibly one of the most recognizable accounts of the origins of Christianity recalled by the Venerable Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*) famously helps to convince the king to follow the new faith precisely in the hope that it would bring some more certain knowledge of what went before human life and what follows it:

Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet;
quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus
ignoramus. Unde si haec noua doctrina certius aliquid
attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur.⁴

(Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it.)⁵

Whatever we are to think of the historicity of the account, what may be inferred from it is a perception of reality and man's place in the world that is recognizable from a number of later Old English texts. Central for the thegn, who likened his reality to the chaos and confusion of a wintry storm, is a need for a sense of greater confidence in existence and a need for the meaningfulness of reality. Crucially then, Bede's history of Old English Christianity opens with a form of grappling with disorientation, darkness, and depression stemming from them. It is the essential question of how to approach reality thus perceived that will become an important foundation of Old English Christian identity and that will be manifest in numerous instances of Old English literature.

Equally importantly, some 150 years later a markedly similar motivation is repeated in the *Meters of Boethius*, a philosophical confrontation

with the perception of the world as apparently chaotic and tumultuous. Once more it is based upon a portrayal of natural turmoil as an illustration of the frustrating search for validity and purposefulness of existence. In the Old English rendering of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* the third of the meters speaks of the distress of the mind engulfed by darkness in a "grundleasum seaðe" (bottomless pit) of despair against "strongan stormas" (fierce storms). The representation of anguish is conceivably convincing enough to serve as a depiction of a mental torment of a depression-consumed mind:

Eala, on hu grimmum and hu grundleasum
 seaðe swinceð þæt sweorcende mod,
 þonne hit þa strongan stormas beatað
 weoruldbisgunga. Þonne hit winnende
 his agen leoht anforlæteð,
 and mid uua forgit þone ecan gefean,
 ðringð on þa ðiostro ðisse worulde,
 sorgum geswenced

(*Metre 3, 1–8a*)

(Oh what a terrible and bottomless
 pit the gloomy mind struggles in
 when the fierce storms of worldly cares
 pound it. When in distress
 it abandons its own light
 and wretchedly forgets eternal joy,
 it rushes into the darkness of this world,
 afflicted by sorrows.)⁶

The hopelessness expressed here is likely recognizable by anyone suffering from depression: the anhedonia—that is, the loss of purpose and any willingness to act that is common to the anxiety disorders linked to depression⁷ is clearly detectable in the loss of "agen leoht" (own light). Similarly, the sense of directionlessness is also evident in the passage. As the source of these sensations the *Meter* mentions the desperation which effectively springs from a source similar to the words of the thegn called upon by Bede. The storms and the darkness of the world, although present also in the original Boethian meter, are evocative of the wintry storms of *Historia ecclesiastica*, and the mind is unable to recognize the goodness of God, instead being confronted only with the misery inflicted upon it by the strangeness of the world:

... Swa is þissum nu
 mode gelumpen, nu hit mare ne wat
 for gode godes buton gnornunge
 fremdre worulde. Him is frofre ðearf.
 (*Metre* 3, 8b–11)

(... So it has happened
 now to this mind, since it does not know any more
 of the goodness that relates to God, but only the misery
 of a strange world. It has need of comfort.)

Given the cultural impact of Bede and the translation of Boethius, which were stipulated by King Alfred as belonging to the books most needful for men to know for his scheme of the renewal of learning,⁸ both these works should probably be understood as essential in the cultural formation of the Old English existential and cognitive outlook and, presumably therefore, as also essential for much of Old English gnomic poetry. The fact that they both spoke of the state of cognitive confusion as the foundation of a Christian enquiry into the world, and into man's place in it, seems to be central for similar enquiries and existential modes which we may find in representations of distress and depression in Old English poetry. The Exeter Book elegies in particular, with their male and female speaking personas cast into states of despair, desolation, and disorientation, appear to be representative of such motivations and as such they have already merited their own numerous critical studies. They are particularly illustrative of various forms of anxiety disorders and depression earning Old English poems the clichéd description as the poetry of "doom and gloom."⁹ Granted, the speakers of *The Wanderer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and, although to a lesser degree, *The Seafarer*, all perceive their individual environments and the world as a whole in manners similar to the "wintry storms" mentioned in Bede's account and in the Old English Boethius. But the sense of confusion, and resultant depressive potential, is not only reserved to Old English narrative poems.

We may find a historical example of a coping strategy formed by trying to make sense of an outwardly confusingly unexpected event in Alcuin's epistolary reactions to the news of the sack of Lindisfarne by Northmen in 793. The attack, which clearly was unanticipated and which may have seemed an act of chance, was conceptualized by Alcuin soon after it took place into a divine sign and thus it was approached in the way one may try to solve a riddle: "Either this is the beginning of greater tribulation, or

else the sins of the inhabitants have called it upon them. Truly it has not happened by chance, but is a sign that it was well merited by someone.”¹⁰ In trying to decode the true meaning behind the attack, Alcuin’s letters to Bishop Higbald of Lindisfarne seek for the answer in biblical correlations to Chaldeans razing the temple of Solomon and to meteorological portents.¹¹ The conclusion, or rather, solution to the vexing question of why the Holy Island of Lindisfarne was sacked, that Alcuin eventually reached saw in the attack a likely indication of God’s displeasure with what happened several months before, namely the burial within the monastic complex of one Sigga, a Northumbrian nobleman involved in a conspiracy to murder King Ælfwald in 788.¹² Understood in this light, the event which may have seemed perplexing and thus conducive to depression, for Alcuin was an invitation to a Christian interpretation of only an apparently confounding divine message.

Old English poetry, whether narrative or not, never shuns the possibility of including a gnomic statement and, in this sense, it may be seen as wisdom poetry as a whole. However, it is the Old English poems categorized as gnomic verse—that is, the poems which are expressly focused on moral instruction, advice, functions, and transmitting of wisdom—that in particular encapsulate the essential human need to assign meaning to and make sense of what appears elusive and beyond human cognitive capacities. The following section of this chapter will consider the concretization of reality present in several of this group’s poems as the reification strategy effectively acting against confusion and thus against the potential of depression. Referring to both *Maxims* poems and to *The Order of the World*, I shall argue that this operates on the principles of two dualities; first between the state of the world as it ideally should be and its state as it is, second as a duality between what is made explicit and what is to remain necessarily hidden.

The discussion of the interplay between these opposing elements will begin by considering an instance of a likely wordplay appearing at the beginning of the apparently haphazard *Maxims II*, a collection of preceptive, ostensibly unconnected statements from mid-eleventh century British Library Cotton MS Tiberius B I.¹³ After a series of eight obvious statements on royal rule, grandeur of cities, swiftness of wind, loudness of thunder, greatness of Christ’s glories, strength of fate, coldness of winter, frostiness of spring, and heat of the summer, the poem introduces a pithy statement on the nature of truth: “Soð bið swicolost” (truth is most deceitful, 10), only to continue to refer to treasure and wisdom of all men in the

manner similar to the opening lines—that is, by using phrases that seem blatantly obvious and banal. What is there that is so *swicolost* about the truth, one may ask, and in order to offer an answer to this question, I propose to see in this word a pun resulting from a phonetic and palaeographic similarity between *swicol* (or *sweacol*) in its superlative form and the adjective *switol* (*sweatol*) that is “plain,” “manifest.” A subtle invitation to notice the possibility for punning may result from the relatively similar shapes of the letters “c” and “t” in insular script, the scriptural difference between them formed only by the horizontal bar marking the “t” letter. It is additionally possible to speak of their phonetic resemblance, as both are stop consonants, which, in very rapid speech, may be mistaken for one another. Thus the use of *swicolost* allows for an interplay of meanings between that which is at once deceptive and treacherous and that which, from a different angle, is clear and manifest. In this minuscule instance we seem to be presented with the way meaningfulness is construed, which is similar to the method of enquiry present in the opening examples of Bede and the Old English Boethius. Human cognition and faith are continually tested and forged by the unnerving sense of uncertainty and deception, which, however, are the foundation of knowledge. The *swicol*–*switol* relationship in the poem is a reminder of the necessary duality between deception and perception, between the darkness of unknowing and the light of understanding. The former is a necessary condition of the latter, the poem seems to be saying. Later in the course of this chapter, I will revisit this duality in the light of the Neoplatonic mysticism where, in the form of apophatic theology, it is portrayed as the only manner in which the ineffability of God can be made comprehensible on human scale.

The real question seems to be what it is that the word *swicolost* refers to and what it is that is in fact deceptive about the truth if everything that is said prior to it can hardly be questioned. “Cyning sceal rice healdan” (a king ought to hold a kingdom, 1) is as true as the fact that “Prymmas syndan Cristews myccele, / wyrd byð swiðost” (Christ’s powers are great, / fate is strongest, 4–5)¹⁴ and the following apothegms are self-evident. The self-evidence of the poem has baffled scholars who, as outlined in Elaine T. Hansen’s and Paul Cavill’s studies, initially saw them as either plainly banal, uninspired, and obscure or magical, esoteric, and enigmatic.¹⁵ How are we, then, to understand the poem’s description of the truth as *swicolost*? Is it yet another maxim on the professedly disorderly list, which states that reaching the truth requires sacrifice and does not come easily? Or is it a partial conclusion to be derived from the poem’s opening lines? Is it

supposed to set the mindset for the precepts that follow, or is it a generally wry statement whose real intention may be that all the precepts above and below are, naturally, true, but true in a potentially misleading manner? If *sodð bið swicolost* is to be understood in the last sense, then the essence of both the poem and the essence of truth lies not so much in what it is that happens, but, in accordance with the example of Alcuin's attempted reading of the Lindisfarne raid, in *why* it is that all of it happens. In other words, the true nature of things is both *switolost*, as it is plainly manifest in their external appearance and attributes, as much as it is *swicolost*, since their internal governing principles are not immediately clear, if they ever are clear at all. In this sense there resound the words of St. Paul's letter to Corinthians that ours is a temporarily blurred vision of what we are to understand fully beyond this life: "we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13: 12).

In a number of ways the *swicolost-switolost* conundrum is, therefore, emblematic of the Old English manner of perceiving reality in wisdom literature and in the gnomic elements of other poems. It is also emblematic of the necessarily dualistic nature of the world that is found in the potential pun itself and that appears in the second half of the poem, which presents the nature of things known to people as emanating from conflict and mediation. The passage on conflicts has both a descriptive and a prescriptive nature and as such resembles a therapeutic approach since it both states the necessity to accept the world as composed of internal conflicts, and since it prescribes the necessity of finding meaning within such an understanding of reality. It is evidently descriptive in listing examples of conflicts:

God sceal wið yfele, geogoð sceal wið yldo,
lif sceal wið deaþe, leoht sceal wið þystrum,
fyrd wið fyrde, feond wið oðrum,
lað wið laþe ymb land sacan,
synne stælan.

(*Maxims II*, 50–54a)

(Good ought to be with evil, youth ought to be with
old age,
life ought to be with death, light ought to be with
darkness,
army with army, foe with another,
hatred with hatred, fight for the land
declare enmity.)

Yet it is also prescriptive, with the repeated obligation enclosed in the word *sceal* (“ought to” and “is”) with, as Paul Cavill observes, the dichotomies of the present and the future, condition and obligation, generality and particularity contained in the usages of *bið* and *sceal* of the *Maxims*.¹⁶ The nature of the world is therefore mediated through conflicts of oppositions, but, at the same time the repetitiousness of description and the repeated emphasis on bonding resound with tones akin to litanies and incantations, as if the *Maxims* offered a charm-like formula not against the opposites, but against the lack of bonds between them. The therapeutic sense of the description/obligation is further on imposed on the audience, since the lines immediately below insist that wisdom comes from the obligation to consider the binary character of reality:

A sceal snotor hycgean
ymb þysse worulde gewinn
(*Maxims II*, 54b–55a)

(A wise man ought to be mindful
Of this world’s conflicts.)

The obligation upon the wise is to understand the potential of the oppositions in the world not so much as a source of confusion, but as an invitation to active and thoughtful interaction with them. Seen in this light, oppositions and conflicts offer opportunities similar to those leading to the enquiries by Bede and the Old English Boethius recounted above. In this sense mutual antitheses observed within the elements as the world’s true substance force the vision of the world which is similar to that of Neoplatonic and even apophatic theology. Confusion and conflicts are therefore essential in any attempt at making sense of the world and they enforce positive and creative action—meditating upon them is a deep form of Christian introspection, which, ultimately, becomes a chance not only to alleviate the neurotic sense of apparent hopelessness of human effort, but, more importantly, in itself becomes a positive and truly Christian act of charity towards others and of partaking in the dissemination of wisdom and thus in the dissemination of the good.

The Exeter Book *Maxims I* is grounded upon a comparable encouragement to meditate on the nature of things that emanates from mediation, first between the wise who are to consider them and, second, between the opposing elements of reality. One of the chief objectives of the poem may again be connected with a general attempt at making the multifaceted reality cognitively manageable and meaningful as a whole, not as a

series of its individual emanations. As in *Maxims II*, the Exeter gnomes enumerate oppositions, but the opening invocation of the poem leaves no doubt that the true nature of wisdom is vectoral—that is, it emerges from the space between those who meditate upon it. The poem calls for an exchange of “frodum wordum” (“wise words,” 1)¹⁷ and obliges those who are wise to engage in the exchange of thought: “gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan” (“wise men ought to exchange songs/lays/riddles,” 4). Not surprisingly, after a fitting praise of God between line 7 and line 18, the poem returns to the trope of exchange and arbitration of wisdom and oppositions, whose effect is the settlement of discord:

Ping sceal gehegan
frod wiþ frodne; biþ hyra ferð gelic,
hi a sace semaþ, sibbe gelærað,
þa ær wonsælge awegen habbað.
(*Maxims I*, 18b–21)

(The wise ought to hold meeting with the wise
their souls will be alike, they rejoice in learning,
they bring peace to discord, which earlier
those unblest destroyed.)

Subsequently, after reaffirming the place of *red* (counsel) with *snytro* (prudence), *ryht* (righteousness) with *wisum* (the wise), and *til* (goodness) with *tilum* (the good), in a manner resembling both reassurance and command—because of the presence of *sceal*—the essentiality of duality is invoked again. The proclamation “tu beoð gemæccan” (“two shall make a match,” 23) refers both to all the comments before this phrase—that is, to the meeting and mediation of the wise and to the commendable attributes of virtuous men—as well as to what follows—that is, to the productivity of the match between “wif ond wer” (woman and man, 24)—but also to the images of the cyclicity of life and death which follow later, in lines 25–27.

Such a holistic vision of existence and of reality as remaining in the state of constant becoming is repeated in yet another gnomic text from the Exeter Book. *The Order of the World* also opens with an invitation to debate the nature of the world, in particular, however, focusing on “stipe stefnbyrd” (“stern regulations,” 45) governing it. Granted, reality is presented as perplexing and confusing on the human scale since it is portrayed by the poem as a “searoruna gespon” (web of mysteries) and as such its impenetrability may be distressing or even depressing. And yet,

paradoxically, this confusion possesses a reassuring potential, since *The Order of the World* argues for it to be understood as a divine lesson in the limitation of human cognitive capacities. The related question present in line 26, “Is þin meaht forswiþ?” (is your power great?), is answered in the lines that directly follow:

Nis þæt monnes gemet moldhrerendra,
 þæt he mæge in hreþre his heah geweorc
 furþor aspyrgan þonne him frea sylle
 to ongieltanne godes agen bibod.

(*The Order of the World*, 27–30)

(It is not appropriate for man, of those moving on
 earth,
 that he may in his heart explore further
 than his lord allows, the sublime work
 of God in his understanding, any further than God's
 decrees.)

Thus the world as a “web of mysteries” which initially may have seemed devoid of the meaning attainable on human scale, is ultimately portrayed in the poem as carrying the most potent message of all, that of divine greatness and that of the constructiveness of human limitations. It is these concepts that both confirm the existence of God as the ultimate sense and source of the world and that lead men towards continuous reflection on that sense. If the Old English perception of reality, at least in the way it is shown in wisdom poetry, is, so to speak, neurotic in the way that it involves incessant struggle with obscurity and confusion, then the gnomic texts such as both the *Maxims* poems and *The Order of the World* are a form of textual reaction to it. On the one hand they may resemble a poetic form of compulsive disorder of sorts as they persistently relate the state of the world as it should be. In their nearly obsessive repetitions of the laws and shape of the world they adopt the logocentric strategy of reification and reiteration of the reality. By inculcating language upon reality and reality upon language, the poems are an attempt to transfer that which is cognitively experienced into the poetic capacity of words, reaffirming in this way the internal relations of reality. On the other hand, the strategy of dealing with the confusing complexity of the world that Old English gnomic texts propose may be said to correspond to the mitigation of depressive states in the process of bibliotherapy—i.e., cognitive psychotherapy of depression through reading specifically selected texts.¹⁸

Nonetheless, if the understanding of the discussion of the beneficial limits of human cognition presented above is correct, the logic present in several of the Old English gnomic poems is correspondent to the attempts at conceptualizing God and the world in the tradition of Neoplatonic thought. Christian understanding and applications of Plato's philosophy are chiefly present in the writings of Boethius, and the Old English rendition of *The Consolation of Philosophy* maintains the original's references to Plato. More significant for Old English gnomic poetry may be the Boethian understanding of the sense and equilibrium of suffering and the variety of human fates. This is evident in passages speaking about both the search for deeper understanding and the natural importance of *unwynsum* (unpleasant) fate. *Meter 22*, for instance, opens with an invitation to an inquiry into what is right, which may bring to mind the lines of *The Order of the World* cited above; here the anxiety related to unknowing is important, if not imperative:

Se þe æfter rihte mid gerece wille
 inweardlice æfterspyrian
 ... he ærest sceal
 secan on him selfum þæt he sume hwile
 ymbutan hine æror sohte.
 Sece þæt siððan on his sefan innan
 and forlæte an swa he oftost mæge,
 ælcne ymbhogan ðy him unnet sie
 (*Meter 22*, 1–2; 5b–10)

(He who wishes to inquire
 after what is right, inwardly with due order,
 ... he must first
 search in himself for what he earlier at one
 time sought outside himself.
 Let him look for it then within his mind
 and abandon as often as he can
 each anxiety, which is useless for him.)

The anxiety is described as *unnet* (useless), but its uselessness is only so in the long run, as it should not be hindering man from the search for the truth. Initially, however, it is not meaningless, for Boethian Wisdom does not see meaninglessness in anything, on the contrary—it is the starting point for any righteous exploration. Linguistically, it is also to be observed in the *ymbhoga* of line ten, the word translated by Irvine and Godden as “anxiety,” which is a compound noun whose second element, *hoga*, denotes

attributes related to prudence and thoughtfulness. Translated literally, *ymbhoga*'s meaning might be clumsily rendered as "thoughtful-around" "careful-around" and "prudent-around,"¹⁹ but even such awkward paraphrases highlight the connection of anxiety with heightened mental activity and the tension caused by excessive thoughtfulness that are typical for people in situations of emotional distress. With this premise in mind, the *ymbhoga* is a necessary state of darkness before the light of the truth is to be found and it is the necessary inward journey before venturing out on the search of meaning. Thus, the fate bringing about the *ymbhoga* is not only meaningful, but also necessary, as if the malaise was the prerequisite of the healing which is to follow. The Wisdom of the Old English Boethius speaks plainly of the importance of comprehending ill fate in this manner in *Prose 30*, when explaining the sense behind different kinds of experience and fate that befall human beings:

Nis þæs nan twoo ðæt ælc wyrd bið good þara ðe riht
and nytwyrðe bið. Forðæm ælc wyrd, sam hio bio
wynsum sam hio sie unwynsum, forðy cymþ to ðæm
goodan þæt hio oðer twega do, oððe hine þreatige to
ðon þæt he bet do þonne he ær dyde oððe him leanige
þæt he ær tela dyde. And eft ælc wyrd þara þe to ðæm
yflum cymð, cymð for þæm twæm þingum, sam hio
se reðe sam hio sy wynsum. Gif to ðæm yflum cymð
reðu wyrd, þonne cymð hio to edleane his yfla oððe to
þreunge and to lære þæt he eft swa ne do.

(*Prose 30*)

(There is no doubt that every kind of fate that is just and useful is good. Therefore every kind of fate, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, comes to the good person to do one of two things, either to threaten him so that he does better than he did before or to reward him because he did good before. And again, every kind of fate that comes to the wicked, comes for one of two things, whether it is harsh or pleasant. If harsh fate comes to the wicked it comes as a reward for his evils or as a threat and warning that he should not do so again.)

The unpleasant or harsh fate, and the sense of anxiety, are meant to instigate the search for understanding and, ultimately, are presented as productive and necessary. Similar to the earlier quoted gnostic fragments, the Old

English Boethius speaks of a tight connection between the state of confusion and anxiety and the state of enlightenment and wisdom.

At this juncture, it is tempting to take the Neoplatonic references a step further and consider the parallels between the demonstration of the importance of confusion present in Old English gnomic verse as a necessary prerequisite for wisdom, and the way in which unknowing functions as the necessary background to the apophatic understanding of God proposed by the mystic Neoplatonic theosophy of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, himself known only by his apophatic name. Admittedly, the directness of his influence on Old English thought is debatable, if not rather unlikely.²⁰ Nonetheless, J. D. A. Ogilvy mentions Pseudo-Dionysian works, notably *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* as possibly familiar from Eriugena's translations into Latin,²¹ and the Dionysian corpus may have also been known indirectly, via Gregory the Great's references to him.²² The parallels between the gnomic texts and Pseudo-Dionysius are understandably indirect, possibly coincidentally stemming from the Neoplatonic influence on both, and from the fact that both the gnomic texts and Dionysian apophatic theology appear to intend to express totalizing mental principles of approaching reality, in which the place of confusion and unknowing is prominent.

The chief aim of Pseudo-Dionysius and, simultaneously, his chief paradox is the attempt to express that which is beyond the effable and, primarily, beyond human comprehension, that is, to propose an approach with which people may come within the reach of grasping the true nature of divine wisdom and God. Key to this is Pseudo-Dionysius's use of language in, as it were, reverse to the established meanings behind it. The call here is, naturally, not to abandon knowledge itself, but to conceptualize the true knowledge as existing beyond the limitations of human categories. Thus, since God and God's wisdom are ultimately beyond human cognition, the only way to speak of God is by expressing what God is not, and this may be done by denying human cognition, or rather transcending it. In attempting this, Pseudo-Dionysius unites his thinking with what is unknown to such an extent that he proceeds to overstep language itself, and speaks of seeing beyond the light, that is seeing the truth in the kind of darkness which only then becomes enlightening. In the poetic introduction to chapter 1 of *The Mystical Theology* he pleads with heavenly wisdom to:

ἴθουνον ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν
 μυστικῶν λογίων ὑπεράγνωστον
 καὶ ὑπερφαῖ καὶ ἀκροτάτην κορυφήν·
 ἔνθα τὰ ἀπλᾶ καὶ ἀπόλυτα καὶ

ἄτρεπτα τῆς θεολογίας μυστήρια
κατὰ τὸν ὑπέρφωτον
ἐγκεκάλυπται τῆς κρυφιομύστου
σιγῆς γνόφον.²³

(Lead us up beyond unknowing and light,
up to the farthest, highest peak
of mystic scripture,
where the mysteries of God's Word
lie simple, absolute and unchangeable
in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.
Amid the deepest shadow
they pour overwhelming light
on what is most manifest.)²⁴

The reversal of language is complete to the point of ineffability even: the light, as hitherto understood by people, is a hindrance and is as blinding and limiting as darkness. The true darkness, however, that is the true *agnosia*, unknowing, which exists beyond human perception of darkness, is the genuine illumination; whereas the deepest shadow of detachment from humanly recognized categories becomes "the brilliant darkness" of divine wisdom. In one of the most recent anthropological studies of Dionysian mysticism, Charles Stang speaks of such an approach as a conscious exercise in rendering oneself truly unknown in order to experience the union with the unknown God,²⁵ a practice dangerously, perhaps, verging on madness. Incidentally, Pseudo-Dionysius seems to be aware of the possibility of being perceived as, in fact, mentally unstable in Chapter Seven of *The Divine Names*.²⁶ Indeed, the desire for ultimate detachment and for entering the enlightening darkness strongly resounds in Dionysian theology. In Chapter Two of *The Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius continues the call cited above, avidly urging:

I pray we could come to this darkness so far above light! If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge. For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way, namely through the denial of all beings.²⁷

Few other texts of mystic theology speak so passionately of the true knowing that arises from unknowing and the true discernment which arises from the initial awareness and even conscious stepping into confusion.

And even if it is impossible to prove the immediate impact of Dionysian mysticism on Old English gnomic literature, it is possible to discern in both analogous approaches to the productiveness of the awareness of human cognitive limitations. Both the gnomic poems cited earlier and Pseudo-Dionysius see the stage of confusion and darkness as not meant to be paralyzing, but as the necessary stage with which the path towards the enlightenment is supposed to begin.

The interplay between knowing and unknowing, confusion and revelation, anxiety and peace is also notably present among one other very distinct group of Old English poetic compositions, namely the riddles. In fact, the very essence of Old English poetic riddles, as indeed any other riddle, lies in their logocentricity, but their aim as a whole may be defined as yet another attempt at portraying the true substance of the world in the process of their gradual individual disclosures. In this sense, they may be also discussed as a literary device providing a means of confronting an apparently confusing and anxiety-ridden reality. While the strategy of Old English gnomic texts, reinforced by their associations with the Neoplatonic importance of adverse fate and productive confusion, is grounded upon verbal reification of reality and upon inviting their audiences to reconsider the true senses of the order of its individual constituents, the principle upon which riddles are formed is more similar to the journey towards enlightenment from the apparent initial chaos and obscurity. This may naturally bring to mind the apophatic quest for wisdom by negation contemplated by Pseudo-Dionysius. In the most likely self-referential Riddle 94, the fascination with concealment is evident in its closing gnomic statement, curiously also the final words extant in the Exeter Book:

Nu snottre men swiþast lufiaþ
 midwist mine; ic monigum sceal
 wisdom cyþan; no þær word sprecað
 ænig ofer eorðan. Ðeah nu ælda bearn
 londbuendra lastas mine
 swiþe secað, ic swaþe hwilum
 mine bemipe monna gehwylcum.²⁸
 (Riddle 94, 7–13)

(Now wise men love very much
 my presence; to many shall I
 announce my wisdom; nor will there be spoken any word
 over earth. Although now the sons of men,

the earth-dwellers, fiercely seek
 my tracks, I sometimes
 conceal my path from all men.)

The riddle, whose solutions have been suggested to include concepts revolving either around learning or the concept of the riddle itself,²⁹ speaks of offering wisdom to many, but, equally importantly, it speaks of wisdom as also resulting from an arduous and potentially frustrating process in which concealment plays an integral part.

The reification of the real and reiteration of the marvelous found in ordinariness, which are recognizable in the *Maxims* and *The Order of the World*,³⁰ are also the literary tactics of Old English riddles and, as was the case of the gnomic texts, the riddles may be discussed as serving to alleviate the anxiety of the unexpected or the anxiety of the uncertain by employing unexpected approaches to speak of what is supposed to be familiar. Riddles are, so to speak, even more neurotic or apophatic than other wisdom poems, as their primary goal is to render reality, at least externally, by means of what it is not, that is by rendering reality as dissimilar as it is possible without losing internal connection with thus obscured objects. The key to solutions lies in internal structures and bonds within them that are superficially hidden and thus, if gnomic verse offers a reification of reality, riddles are its re-reification—that is, its reification anew. By rephrasing reality into what it seemingly is not, they essentially fixate on its true, inner structures and meaning. Understood from this perspective, riddles thrive on the sense of confusion in a way similar to the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, but they also thrive on the transformation from the unknowing to discernment. Virtually any of Old English riddles could serve as an example here, but different degrees of such transformations are particularly visible in Riddle 26, which follows the metamorphosis of an animal into parchment and then into the Bible, which in turn is meant to transform those who follow it into people with “heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygebliþran” (more resolute hearts and internal joy, 20), and, on yet another level, is meant to furnish those who read and confront the riddle with a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of the Scriptures. The changes occur on several levels: from the physical death of the animal and the work on its hide before it becomes vellum, through the detailed description of the process of turning vellum into a book and the artistic effort involved, to the eventual conversion of those who are to follow the book, which

is mirrored in the experience of the riddle's audience moving from the initial obscurity of the riddle to the understanding of its solution. Even if the actions depicted in the first half of the riddle must have seemed instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with book production then, each of these stages requires a form of annihilation of the previous stage, not only with reference to physical action, but also with reference to the meaning which is forced out to make room for an expanded sense. And the overall effect of the riddle is little short of miraculous: the physical death of an animal facilitates eternal life and bliss to Christians, much as the end of one level of understanding for the riddle's audience facilitates a much deeper, anagogic meaning. Stepping into confusing darkness here once more is an illustration of the Old English awareness of the constructiveness and importance of anxieties and cognitive limitations.

In conclusion, it appears that anxiety and confusion performed important roles in Old English wisdom texts, particularly in the way that gnomic poems as well as poetic riddles conceptualized reality. Not only did they understandably initiate poetic insights into reality, but it is likely that they were also productive in a different way. The Neoplatonic thought seems to have influenced the perception of anxiety and confusion as inherent elements of whatever may have been deemed the divine plan. In accordance with it, Old English gnomic verse presents humanity as ultimately being blessed with the senses of confusion, uncertainty, and doubt. They enable and empower people to experience them as a heightened state of consciousness of reality which leads to self-reflection. Painful though they are, as self-reflection they serve the purpose of an active prayer and meditation, whose qualities are, through its distressing mental torments, purifying, leading people towards an ever-closer understanding of the truth and God. The methods by which Old English wisdom poetry attempts to harness human anxiety and confusion are naturally logocentric: the nearly compulsive reification and reiteration of reality, its defamiliarization and re-reification are meant to see beyond what is apparent and external. If such strategies display common points with neurotic thinking, it may be so because of their similarities to the apophatic importance of confusion and unknowing, but their experience is essential in an emotional and spiritual quest for the Christian understanding of the human condition. It may be said that what seems neurotic and depressing in the dwelling on confusion present in Old English wisdom poems, offered important intellectual guidance that, paradoxically, may have been liberating to enlightened readers.

NOTES

¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the possibility of studying emotions in Old English literature, see Antonina Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 130–161 and Antonina Harbus, “Affective Poetics: The Cognitive Basis of Emotion in Old English Poetry” in *Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. Alice Jorgensen et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 19–34.

² David S. Baldwin and Jon Birtwistle, *An Atlas of Depression* (Boca Raton, FL: The Parthenon Publishing Group, 2002), p. 49.

³ *Anxiety Disorders: An Introduction to Clinical Management and Research*, ed. Eric J. L. Griez et al. (Chichester: John Wiley, 2001), p. 269.

⁴ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Book II, xiii, *The Latin Library*, 2016, accessed May 3, 2016. www.thelatinlibrary.com/bede/bede2.shtml#13.

⁵ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 130.

⁶ All subsequent citations and translations from the Old English Boethius are from *The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred*, ed. and trans. Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁷ See Mario May and Norman Sartorius, *Depressive Disorders* (Chichester: Wiley, 2002), pp. 9–10.

⁸ *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. Simon Keynes, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London: Penguin Books, 1983; repr. 2004), pp. 28–29.

⁹ Clare A. Lees, “Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997), pp. 17–39 (p. 23).

¹⁰ *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042*, ed. David Charles Douglas and Dorothy Whitelock (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 844.

¹¹ Donald A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 410–411.

¹² Bullough, *Alcuin*, p. 141; pp. 395–396.

¹³ The manuscript has been digitized by the British Library and is available for viewing online at: www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_i_f112r

¹⁴ All subsequent citations from *Maxims II* are from *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (London: Routledge, 1942). Translations are my own.

¹⁵ Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *The Solomon Complex: Reading Wisdom in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 155; Paul Cavill,

Maxims in Old English Poetry (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 156–157. Scholarly opinion is still divided as to the purpose of both *Maxims* poems: T. A. Shippey, understands *Maxims II* as “a catalogue poem” and focuses the relations between its individual element, for Hansen their function was to puzzle and remind their readers that the truth is constant becoming, whereas for Cavill both *Maxims I* and *II* are all but esoteric and they express “the common store of everyday knowledge which the Anglo-Saxons would take for granted.” See: T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), pp. 13–15; Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 157; Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, p. 185.

¹⁶ Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 48–50.

¹⁷ All subsequent citations from *Maxims I* and *The Order of the World* are from *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994). Translations are my own.

¹⁸ On the role and effectiveness of bibliotherapy see May and Sartorius, *Depressive Disorders*, p. 164.

¹⁹ See *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. Joseph Bosworth, T. Northcote Toller (London: Oxford University Press, 1898), p. 548; p. 1296.

²⁰ See: David Knowles, “The Influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Western Mysticism,” in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. Peter Brooks (London: SCM Press, 1975), pp. 79–94; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 159–178.

²¹ J. D. A. Ogilvy, *Books Known to the English, 597–1066* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America Press, 1967), pp. 129–130.

²² Jean Leclercq, “Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 26.

²³ Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *De Mystica Theologia*, ed. G. Heim and A. M. Ritter, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), p. 142.

²⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 135.

²⁵ Charles Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: “No Longer I”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 204–205.

²⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, p. 110.

²⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, p. 138.

²⁸ All subsequent citations from the Exeter Book riddles are from *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, ed. Bernard J. Muir. Translations are my own.

²⁹ Donald K. Fry, “Exeter Book Riddle Solutions,” *Old English Newsletter* 15 (1981), p. 26.

³⁰ On conceptual and formal similarities between Old English gnomic verse and riddles see Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, pp. 126–152.

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Chapter 5

Signs, Interpretation, and Exclusion in *Beowulf*

Matthew Scribner

*B*EOWULF IS FULL OF poems within the poem, full of moments of writing within the written work that draw our attention to the interpretive process by having its characters themselves attempt to interpret events.¹ It therefore bodes ill for the critic of *Beowulf* that these attempts often end in failure or misunderstanding. But such misunderstandings can be perceived in Augustinian terms as functions of the Fall. According to Augustine, Adam and Eve lost contact with God's spiritual communication when they fell, and thus had to endure signs and language as mediators in communication. This idea was highly influential in the Middle Ages: the Fall meant that Adam and Eve had to approach the signs that God had already created, only now they were on their own, bereft of divine assistance and susceptible to misinterpreting the signs.² This doctrine never appears explicitly in *Beowulf*, and it is entirely possible that the poet was unaware of Augustine's formulation, but nevertheless the whole poem seems to be infused with an idea like it. Signs in *Beowulf* do not illuminate, they obfuscate, and serve as obstacles to the characters in the poem, excluding them from groups and calling attention to their exclusion from divine grace brought about by the Fall. (I define signs broadly as any speech, song, act, occurrence, or object to be interpreted.) Moreover, the general sense of misunderstanding and non-understanding in the poem brings about a nostalgia for the brief moment in scriptural history when perfect comprehension existed. Focusing on four interpreters—Grendel, Hrothgar, Beowulf, and *Beowulf*'s real-life audience—I evaluate the extent to which each suffers from the signs' obfuscation, and in what way. Of these four, it seems that only Beowulf himself is able to properly succeed as a user of signs.

The first individual character depicted as interpreting in the poem is Grendel: "Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice / þrage gepolode, se þe in þystrum bad, / þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde / hludne in healle. Pær wæs

hearpan sweg, / swutol sang scopes" (Then the fierce creature, he who lived in darkness, suffered with difficulty hearing each day loud joy [*dream*] in the hall for a time; there was the sound of a harp, the clear song of the scop [singer]).³ The *Beowulf* poet delays telling us what exactly Grendel is going to do about his grief and instead elaborates on the joyous sounds. It is a song about the creation of the world that details how "se ælmihtiga eorðan worhte, / wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð, / gesette sigehrepig sunnan ond monan, / leoman to leohte landbuendum, / ond gefrætwaðe foldan sceatas / leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop / cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ" (the Almighty made earth, a beautiful plain, as water surrounded, established in triumph the sun and moon lights to illuminate the earth-dwellers; he also created [gesceop] each of the races that move about alive) (92–98). The *Beowulf* poet immediately continues, "Swa ða drihtguman dreamum lifdon, / eadiglice, oð ðæt an ongan / fyrene fremman feond on helle" (So those retainers lived in joys [*dreamum*] and happiness, until a fiend from hell performed wicked deeds) (99–101). The repetition of the word for "joy" used before the song reminds the audience of *Beowulf* that this joy is somehow inspiring Grendel's anger. Grendel's resentment comes from his identity as a monster and outcast. Grendel is a:

mære mearcstapa, se þe moras heold,
 fen ond fæsten; fifelcynnes eard
 wonsæli wer weardode hwile,
 siþan him scyppen forscrifen hæfde
 in Caines cynne— þone cwealm gewræc
 ece drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog.
 (103–108)

(famed wanderer in borderlands, who occupied the moors, fen and stronghold; the unblessed creature occupied the dwelling place of the race of monsters for a long time, after the Creator [Scyppend] had proscribed him as Cain's kin—the killing the eternal Lord avenged, because he killed Abel.)

This retelling of the first murder calls to mind the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden that closely preceded it in the book of Genesis. Grendel has been engendered by one of the sins enabled by that fall; indeed, in some ways he is more fallen than humans, because Cain was banished not only from Eden, but also, as the *Beowulf*-poet reminds us, from the rest of humanity (109). According to Andy Orchard, when

the above passage is compared with contemporary analogues that discuss Cain, the identification of Grendel as an exile becomes stronger.⁴ Doubly removed from the Paradise that was created to be the pinnacle of human happiness, Grendel resents even modest instances of human enjoyment. But while the *Beowulf* poet does not give any indication that Grendel is annoyed at anything other than the joy implied in the simple sound of the song, it is possible that his rage is actually roused at the content of the song. At least, the offending song's subject matter makes for an appropriate juxtaposition with Grendel's origins. The image of creation presented in the song is a pre-lapsarian state full of beauty, light, and life. God has ordered the world in an unambiguous way, taking care to maintain distinctions between water and earth, and to present this order with the utmost clarity through the lights of the sun and moon. This presentation is a positive view of a natural world that comes straight from the deity without any human intervention or corruption. It is, then, a world antithetical to the fallen Grendel, who lives in an earth that has been invaded by the surrounding water to create fens and moors. Moreover, it has been established already that he "lives in darkness," so the emphasis on light can only be displeasing to him. Whether Grendel understands the content of the song or not, the song is constructed as a force of antagonism towards him; he and the song are on opposite sides of a binary.

Yet the sense of exclusion may be even stronger if we assume that Grendel does not understand that the song is about the divine creation that stands in opposition to him. Most banally, Grendel's lack of understanding would mean that he does not share a common language with the Danes. Indeed, this seems likely, since neither Grendel nor his mother ever speak any intelligible words. The only possible instance of the language of giants portrayed in the poem is the sword hilt gazed on by Hrothgar, and even that is not necessarily legible to the Danes, as will be explored later.⁵ But taken more broadly, Grendel's failure to comprehend the poem would be a comment on Grendel's ability to interpret signs, possibly relatable to Augustine's thesis about the confusion after the Fall. Both the Danes and Grendel are, of course, fallen, and as non-Christians, very much outside a state of grace. The Danes must derive joy out of signs by using poetic language to describe the divine, rather than experience it directly. But Grendel, again, is banished not just as a son of Adam, but also as a son of Cain, and his inability to feel the joy communicated by the sign attests to his additional level of exclusion.

This point is underlined by the parallels between the Danes' scop and the divine creator. As noted in the quotations above, the Danish singer uses the word "gesceop" when God creates the world in the song, and the *Beowulf* poet calls God the "scyppen" when God avenges Abel (106). Of course, the scop is a creator too. The scop and the Creator are "shapers" who make their creations out of different materials: words in the case of the scop; earth, water, and light in the case of God (who nonetheless moves these objects with words in the biblical account given in Gen. 1). John D. Niles argues that poetry with an oral heritage like *Beowulf* has many social purposes besides entertainment, one of which is structuring the imaginative world of the poet and listeners, but he also notes that this world is limited by the poet's lexicon.⁶ Poets shape their creations out of words that already exist.

What is true of the author of *Beowulf* is also true of the scop. God can shape the world out of matter, kings can shape a realm out of people and lands, and poets can shape songs out of words. The world the scop imagines is not his own world, but rather a pristine fiction that is meant to establish itself against the fallen qualities of the real world. His artistic endeavor is itself a sign of human civilization, but he uses a lexicon drawn from the natural, non-human world to invoke a perfect order untouched by human foibles. After all, Nature can be a sign, according to the Church fathers. Ambrose says that Adam and Eve misread the sign of the Tree, which can be understood as God's Word: "The Word would not perhaps have caused injury to Adam and Eve if they had first touched and handled it, as it were, with the hands of the mind."⁷ The earth was originally shaped in such beatific glory that it included no place for the Grendelkin, and God was still Scyppend doing his shaping when he banished Cain from his kin. Grendel is enraged when he hears the shaping going on in Heorot, as the orderly arrangement of natural symbolism is antithetical to him. Frustrated that he encounters signs from which he has been excluded, he counters with what he understands best: violence.

This contrast between destruction and creation has been dealt with by Seth Lerer, who contrasts the scop's song and the images on the Grendelkin's sword hilt (159). The hilt portrays giants being drowned in a primeval flood, as a "retribution" to the "fremde þeod / ecean dryhtne" (estranged people from the eternal Lord) (1691–1692). Again, the *Beowulf* poet emphasizes the otherness of the monsters, and their antagonistic relationship to divinity: the "wundorsmiþa" (wondrous smith) who made the sword perhaps chose this design to remind the giants using

it both of how they had been wronged in the past, and of their present need to fight back (1681). But now, it is the Danish king who is doing the interpreting, and not Grendel. Again, we have the problem of whether or not the communication can be understood by the audience. The *Beowulf* poet's description of the hilt's content interrupts a notice that Hrothgar is speaking:

Hroðgar maðelode; hylt sceawode,
ealde lafe. On ðam wæs or writen
fyrngewinnes; ...
Swa wæs on ðam scennum sciran goldes
þurh runstafas rihte gemearcod,
geseted on gesæd, hwam þæt sweord geworht,
irena cyst ærest wære,
wreopenhilt ond wyrmfah. Ða se wisa spræc
sunu Healfdenes; swigedon ealle[.]
(1687–1689a; 1694–1699)

(Hrothgar spoke, looked at the hilt, old heirloom, on which was written [*writen*] ancient strife ... Such was on that plate of metal of shining gold rightly marked through runic letters, set down and stated for whom that sword, best iron, first was wrought, with a twisted hilt and serpentine patterning. Then the wise son of Healfdane spoke—all were silent[.])

Given that the description is framed in this way by Hrothgar speaking, presumably what he says thereafter is inspired by the hilt; there are moments in his sermon that could indeed be allusions to the hilt. When he admonishes Beowulf about pride and uses his own humiliation by Grendel as an example, he creates a connection to the image of God deflating the pride of the giants.⁸ The general theme of the sermon is the transience of life and power, and this certainly makes for a nice parallel with the image of the fall of the race of giants. But then again, it is possible that the connection is to be attributed solely to the *Beowulf* poet and not to Hrothgar; the Danish king is perhaps completely puzzled about how to interpret the inscriptions before him. To decisively prove that he understands what he is seeing and reading, there would have to be an explicit reference to the drowning giants in his speech. There are two candidates for this—namely, the nearby words “ealdgewinna” (ancient adversary) to refer to Grendel and the end of the “eald gewin”

(old struggle) that Hrothgar thanks God that he has lived to see (1776a and 1781). In the context of having just considered the prehistoric struggle between God and the giants, Hrothgar could be referring to a feud between the godly and the monsters here; however, it is just as likely that he is talking about his own contemporary conflict with Grendel, which has, after all, been going on for twelve years (147). Instead of bringing up mythological references, Hrothgar uses the Danish tyrant Heremod to furnish an example for his sermon. It is telling that he takes a case from Danish history as a teaching tool, rather than trying to interpret a foreign story. Heremod is a reference from his own people—unlike the giants, he is within the Danish poetic world (1709b–1715). Hrothgar's speech, then, does not supply any solid evidence that he understands the hilt. Even if he understands it in a general sense, his understanding has to be incomplete, because he lacks the biblical history behind it. He does not know the identity of the biblical God, nor does he know the origin of the giants and their relationship to humanity through Cain. The punishment of both humanity and the giants by their divine creator is a crucial part of the flood story, and *Beowulf's* Christian audience understands its lesson—but Hrothgar misses it.

It is also questionable whether the hilt could be understood by a non-monstrous onlooker. The inscriptions on the hilt are usually interpreted as having two parts, one pictographic, displaying the fall of the giants ("on which was written [written] ancient strife"), and one runic, where the smith gives the name of his or her client ("rightly marked through runic letters"). In place of this reading, Lerer argues for a unified hilt written completely in runes.⁹ As he points out, the verb "writan" refers to runic inscriptions in all of its other extant uses in Old English.¹⁰ I raise the issue because, if there is no pictorial image illustrating the flood, and the Grendelkin and the Danes have no language in common, then it would be impossible for Hrothgar to know what he is looking at. The poem gives no indication as to what language is behind the runes, or whether that language is human or giant in origin. But even if Hrothgar can read the runes, the additional layer of separation between simply seeing a picture of the Flood and reading a story about it distances Hrothgar from the material and calls attention to the interpretative process. There is a less controversial point that is worth raising—that even if Hrothgar understands the content of the hilt from the viewpoint of pure textual clarity, he remains unaware of its biblical context.¹¹ Even the giants apparently know the Flood story better than the Danes, having needed to survive the worst

of it, and they keep the memory alive as a vendetta. Hrothgar therefore experiences a perplexity with regards to the hilt similar to the rage felt by Grendel hearing the creation song, and like Grendel, he reacts to the demonstration of his lack of knowledge by an ejaculation of what he does know, as the ruler of “hund missera” (one hundred half years) who “feor eal gemon” (remembers everything far back), and tries to fill up the gap of history with lore that has been passed on by his own people (1769b; 1701b). Mary Catherine Davidson observes that Hrothgar uses conventional heroic language in this speech to tell a story of warriors overcoming opposition: “Without an overt description of the hilt ... Hrothgar exclusively molds its meaning for his thanes.”¹² Hrothgar, like Grendel, receives an unknown sign by asserting an aggressive stance. He too reacts with an unconscious nostalgia for the divine grace that he has never known when he encounters a mysterious biblical image.

This episode is actually the last of several instances where Hrothgar and the Danes misinterpret signs, the most explicit being when they misread the blood seeping up from the mere as Beowulf’s and not Grendel’s mother’s. They subsequently depart, leaving the Geats to remain in the hope (however doubtful) that the sign will have the significance that they want, namely that Beowulf has survived, and is thus the author of this sign, not the victim of violence perpetrated by Grendel’s mother (1591–1605a). Once again, the ability to interpret the sign stays within the group, and those outside misunderstand. The Danes are similarly surprised. The head is an “egeslic for eorlum ond þære idese mid” (terror for the lords with the lady) (1649). Eric Jager points out that the word used for the head is “tacne” (declined from “tacen”), which literally means “sign.”¹³

Misunderstanding of signs is also evident in the Finnsburgh episode sung by a scop, which is positively received by the Danes upon its conclusion: “Gamen eft astah, / beorhtode bencsweg” (amusement rose up, a bench-noise sounded clearly) (1160b–1161a). While it is fair enough for the Danes to be entertained by the song, the tragic story of powerless women and the danger of blood feuds should also have provoked some introspection among them. However, as George Clark points out, Beowulf is able to hear the tragedy in the story, for when he reports back to Hygelac, he says that the stories he heard at Hrothgar’s court were “soð ond sarlic” (true and mournful).¹⁴ Admittedly, the fact that more than one story is referred to in this passage calls into question my claim that Beowulf is reading the song tragically. There is also the possibility that

Hrothgar might be the teller of all the tales to which Beowulf refers; the narrator says in the passage that Hrothgar told tales, but the tales which are “soð ond sarlic” are attributed only to someone who is “hildedeor” (brave in battle) and who “hearpan wynne, / gomenwudu grette” (struck the harp’s joy, delightful wood) (2107–2108a).

Yet even if Beowulf does not take a lesson from the tragedy of Hildeburh and company, he does interpret the story and uses his interpretation to create his own story. As Natalia Breizmann writes of Beowulf’s report to Hygelac and his other speeches, “In an environment of interpretive plurality, Beowulf tries to assert his narrative authority over the other storytellers.”¹⁵ He reports that Hrothgar is planning to marry his daughter Freawaru to Ingeld, king of the Heatho-Bards, to heal the feud between them and the Danes, but he expects this plan to fail on account of the inevitability of a Heatho-Bard warrior inciting Ingeld to revenge (2020–2056). The connection to the Finnsburh episode is that the same sort of incitement doomed the peace there, despite Hildeburh linking the two sides through marriage (1143–1144). There is no way of knowing whether the scop intended his song to be a warning; what is clear is that Hrothgar does not change his plan, because Heorot is eventually burned through “ecghete aþumsweoran” (“violent hatred between son-in-law and father-in-law,” 84). Of course, a more immediate reason to question the celebratory nature of the poem, from the perspective of the *Beowulf* poet, is that Grendel’s mother comes that very night to put a halt to the Danes’ happiness. A central part of the poem is the re-igniting of a latent feud, and Grendel’s mother likewise reignites the feud between her kin and the Danes which, from the Danish perspective at least, was over. Only those outside the Danish perspective can read the message, be it Beowulf, or, perhaps, the woman, for Wealtheow is foreign from this masculine world on account of both her gender and her possible origins from outside the tribe—her name could mean “foreign slave.”¹⁶ Her two speeches directly after the song (as Orchard argues) at least draw attention to the need to reaffirm the peace between Hrothgar and Hrothulf.¹⁷ Perhaps something in the song worried her and made her think that feuds that tore apart Finnsburg could tear apart Heorot.

In listing all these examples of the Danes’ inability to interpret signs, I hope to show that there is a pattern of misunderstanding, though the pattern is not absolute; there are also examples of Danes correctly identifying signs. For example, the word “tacen” is also used for Grendel’s arm, and the Danes are pretty safe in interpreting that as a sign that Grendel is

mortally wounded.¹⁸ They then follow the footprints Grendel left behind to find the mere (thus successfully interpreting them), and likewise correctly understand the blood welling up in the mere this first time to designate the giant's demise (843–852).¹⁹ But signs that are interpreted correctly are less interesting. Rather, it is the departures from intention and the expected that are significant; it is partially from this conflict between signs and signifiers that *Beowulf* derives its art. Overall, misunderstanding is the rule rather than the exception.

The Danes may experience difficulty in reading signs, but they also create signs: the scop's songs and Heorot itself are attempts to create orderly signification for the Danes, with the hall additionally serving as a symbol of the Danes' glory against the wilderness and other tribes. Lerer sees the entire project of Heorot as, on some level, an attempt at the recovery of the prelapsarian semiotic perfection: "Hrothgar names the hall, and in so doing comes to stand as something of a Danish Adam, giving name and nature to the creatures of *his* world."²⁰ Yet in a fallen world populated by Grendelkin, Heorot is too small a stronghold, and the hall eventually becomes a sign of things horrible to the Danes when Beowulf and Grendel engage in battle:

Dryhtsele dynede; Denum eallum wearð,
ceasterbuendum, cenra gehwylcum,
eorlum ealuscerwen. Yre wæron begen,
reþe renweardas. Reced hlynsode.
Ða wæs wundor micel þæt se winsele
wiðhæfde heapodeorum,

(767–772a)

(The noble hall resounded, dire distress came to all the
Danes, fortress-dwellers, each brave man, the warriors.
Both [Grendel and Beowulf] were furious, fierce hall
guardians, the hall resounded. That was a great wonder
that the wine-hall withstood the brave in battle.)

Having built the hall, the Danes understand it (and it is a sign, as Grendel's reaction to it shows), but that does not stop the monsters and a group of outsiders, the Heotho-Bards, from violating it. The Danes understand the din it produces all too well.

By contrast, Beowulf's career as a sign interpreter in the poem is more successful. We have already seen how he catches the nuances of the Finnsburh episode. He also seems to take the lesson that Hrothgar

has given him about Heremod, for the *Beowulf* poet tells us that when Beowulf becomes king, he is not only a *good* one, but more specifically, he gives out rings and gifts instead of hoarding them like the tyrant (2390; 2635–2638). Heremod appears in another poetic digression, that having to do with Sigemund, where he again is used as a contrast to Beowulf, both directly and via the hero's comparison to Sigemund (884–915). The fact that Heremod and his hoarding are featured so prominently in the digressions links these poetic and rhetorical interludes to the context of exchange between lord and thanes, as signs offered and received. Heremod's hoarding of treasure reflects a misuse of the exchange and companionship represented by treasure. The same could be said of the dragon, whose attacks initiate another set of signs and interpretations.

I have already established that the Danes are successful in receiving signs originating within their own world, but have difficulty with outsiders. The Geats, at first, seem to follow the same paradigm when the dragon attacks:

Ða wæs Biowulfe broga gecyðed
 snude to soðe, þæt his sylfes ham,
 bolda selest, brynewylmum mealt,
 gifstol Geata. Þæt ðam godan wæs
 hreow on hreðre, hygesorga mæst;
 wende se wisa þæt he wealdende
 ofer ealde riht, ecean dryhtne
 (2324–2330)

(Then terror was made known to Beowulf quickly and truly, that his own home, the best building was melted by a surge of fire, the gift-seat of the Geats. For that the good man was sorrowful in heart, the greatest grief; the wise man thought the he severely offended the Ruler, eternal Lord, contrary to the old law.)

The Geats are able to communicate to their king “quickly and truly,” but upon encountering the attack from the unknowable, alien dragon, Beowulf interprets it as a sign that throws him into the same anxiety over life and existence suffered previously by Grendel and Hrothgar. The dragon's violence is an act of revenge motivated by a very concrete trespassing, but Beowulf initially interprets his harsh fate as a divine exclusion, and wonders how he has placed himself outside of God's legal order. The only difficulty with this interpretation is that Beowulf does not know why he is experiencing divine punishment. Hrothgar may or may not understand

the hilt, but he certainly has no way of knowing its context, and similarly, Beowulf does not know all of the details surrounding the destruction of his hall. Yet Beowulf is arguably already a better interpreter than the other characters in the poem, and here his exegesis grows even more rigorous and complete. This is simply because he finds other signs that facilitate a better interpretation of the dragon's wrath. Leaving with his retainers, Beowulf goes to investigate the dragon and learn the truth:

Gewat þa twelfa sum torne gebolgen
 dryhten Geata draacan sceawian;
 hæfde þa gefrunen hwanan sio fæhð aras,
 bealonið biorna; him to bearme cwom
 maðpumfæt mære þurh ðæs meldan hond.
 (2401–2405)

(Then the lord of the Geats went with eleven others,
 enraged with anger, to look upon the dragon; he had
 then learned from where the feud arose, dire affliction
 to the men; possession of the famous precious vessel
 came to him through the hand of the informer.)

Rather than despairing over the mysteries of signs, Beowulf seeks to learn as much as he can about the world and its violence. His knowledge may be human and thus ultimately limited, but he does the best that he can with the post-lapsarian multiplication of signs and signifiers. The fact that Beowulf is able to interpret even one sign correctly means that he is more successful than other interpreters in the poem.

In seeking the reason for the dragon's attack, Beowulf can be seen as transgressing against the most idealistic interpretations of Augustine in being interested in the worldly and pragmatic uses of signs. On the other hand, because his purpose in this interpretation is to do good for his people, he does fit a more moderate Augustinian ideal: when considering things that might appear as immoral in the Old Testament, Augustine says that they have to be taken in their historical and cultural context.²¹ He concludes: "Therefore in the consideration of figurative expressions a rule such as this will serve, that what is read should be subjected to diligent scrutiny until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced. If this result appears literally in the text, the expression being considered is not figurative."²² It would be assuming far too much to say that Beowulf, or even the *Beowulf* poet, is a strictly Christian exegete of the Augustinian school who knew this passage or its nuances. Nevertheless, the *Beowulf* poet's main character is able to overcome eschatological interpretations of

signs in favor of localized ones grounded in their own social context, all in the name of a heroic code that is neither the equivalent of, nor in conflict with, *caritas*. He is not able to overcome the barrier of understanding that blocks Grendel and Hrothgar from comprehending outside signs, but he can expand his repertoire of signs to include new information. He is a model secular reader in a fallen world.

Finally, there is one last group of readers that the *Beowulf* poet mentions whom I have not yet considered, the group mentioned in the poem's opening lines: "Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in geardagum, / þeodcyniga þrym gefrunon" (Indeed [Hwæt], we have heard of the glory of the kings of the Spear-Danes in former times) (1–2). The fact that the narrator invokes the audience ("we") listening to the poem establishes the audience of *Beowulf* as interpreters like the characters within the poem itself.²³ The effect is further established if we take "Hwæt" as "Listen!" as Roy Liuzza does in his translation.²⁴ The poem does not try to hide itself; it is proud of its existence as a linguistic performance. The very creation of the poem itself is a celebration of the fall of signs, both as inducers of nostalgia and as things to be heroically overcome. As Eugene Vance points out, poetic language assumes in its varieties of signs an Augustinian unlikeness from the divine *logos*.²⁵ The Christian audience has religious knowledge that the poem's characters lack, but even the audience lives in the imperfect, postlapsarian world. What would be the point of using metaphors and kennings if we were still participating in the mentality of the deity like the prelapsarian Adam and Eve? As interpreters of *Beowulf*, then, we should take our cue from the interpreters within the poem, and place our expectations no higher than theirs. We, after all, are outsiders to the poem, just as so many of the characters are outsiders to the signs that they are interpreting. Critics of the poem have often expressed a desire to know more about the Anglo-Saxon culture that produced it in order to more clearly interpret it, but perhaps we should also be aware of the impossibility of this knowledge.²⁶ Even if every document ever written in Old English and Anglo-Latin had survived and come down to us—even if we could invite the *Beowulf* poet to deliver a lecture in the flesh—we would still suffer from the postlapsarian communication failure. There will always be holes in our knowledge, and thus ambiguities in our interpretation. If the poem has one absolutely correct interpretation, we are excluded from it.

Beowulf reminds us of this by subverting our expectations on various occasions. Clark argues that while the audience has a huge knowledge advantage over the characters in the lead-up to Beowulf's encounter with

Grendel, this gap is closed more and more with each fight, until Beowulf can snatch away the surplus knowledge the audience had about the stolen cup by finding out about it himself (286–288). It is also interesting to compare what Beowulf says in Heorot to what the audience is told upon his homecoming. Beowulf tells Hrothgar that he comes with the blessing of a Geat court confident in his strength, and the audience has no reason to doubt it, but when we are finally introduced to Hygelac, that king tells a different story (415–418; 1988–1995). Furthermore, Beowulf boasts about his youthful strength as demonstrated in his swimming contest with Breca, leading the audience to assume that he would be well-regarded by his fellow Geats during that period of his life, but the narrator later says that that was not the case (530–581a; 2183b–2189). Each of these examples shows that the narrator knows more than the audience, and is willing and able to subvert their expectations. In a poem of shifting location and shifting signs, no interpreter, not even an objective audience, can take any signification for granted.

Beowulf weaves in and out of sub-stories and sub-writings, leaving the audience uncertain and unsteady. It disrupts its own narrative to the point that the “digressions” become central in their decentering.²⁷ The way the characters in the larger poem encounter these signs suggest that the act of interpretation is often problematic. Grendel is enraged by a happy song, Hrothgar is baffled by a simple story, and Beowulf takes an act of monstrous vengeance for an act of God. As for the audience of *Beowulf*, its plurality alone makes it impossible to summarize an interpretation for it, but even if the audience existed as a unity, it would still have doubts and second-thoughts. The impossibility of perfectly interpreting signs, whether or not attributable to the Augustinian Fall, is simply a reality. Beowulf’s success as a warrior partially relies on enduring that reality, and *Beowulf*’s success as a poem comes from celebrating it. It is an elegy nostalgic for times long gone, but one that invites us to (mis)interpret it in disparate ways.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Scott-Morgan Straker and the editors of this volume for their advice and comments on this chapter.

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² Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 54, 60.

³ Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lines 86–90. All quotations from *Beowulf* are my translations from Klaeber's *Beowulf*, edited by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, although I was heavily reliant on the edition's glosses.

⁴ Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the "Beowulf" Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 59–64.

⁵ This occurs in line 1687 of *Beowulf*, but I took this interpretation from Seth Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 175.

⁶ John D. Niles, "Reconceiving *Beowulf*: Poetry as Social Praxis" in *Beowulf: A Prose Translation*, ed. Nicholas Howe, trans. E. Talbot Donaldson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 125.

⁷ Quoted in Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p. 76.

⁸ Orchard, *Pride*, p. 67. The *Beowulf* reference is lines 1760b–1776.

⁹ Lerer, *Literacy*, pp. 170–171.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 167.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 171.

¹² Mary Catherine Davidson, "Speaking of Nostalgia in *Beowulf*," *Modern Philology* 103, no. 2 (November 2005), pp. 143–155 (p. 149).

¹³ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p. 174. It is, of course, the word from which the Modern English "token" derives. The *Beowulf* reference is line 1654.

¹⁴ George Clark, "The Hero and the Theme," in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 277. The *Beowulf* reference is line 2109a.

¹⁵ Natalia Breizmann, "'Beowulf' as Romance: Literary Interpretation as Quest," *MLN* 113, no. 5 (December 1998), pp. 1022–1045 (p. 1029).

¹⁶ This reading, though traditional, is not confirmed. See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles's glossary of proper names in their edition of *Beowulf*, p. 472.

¹⁷ Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to "Beowulf"* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 219–221.

¹⁸ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p. 174.

¹⁹ Alexandra Bolintineanu notes that the Danes have two different reactions on each of the trips to the mere, suggesting that the ambiguity is part of the unknowability of the realm of monsters: "wild, frightening, and infested with monsters." Alexandra Bolintineanu, "Declarations of Unknowing in *Beowulf*," *Neophilologus* 100 (2016), pp. 631–647 (p. 642).

²⁰ Lerer, *Literacy*, p. 174. Emphasis in original.

²¹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 3.XII.20.

²² Ibid, 3.XV.23.

²³ Niles, "Reconceiving," p. 127.

²⁴ *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, trans. Roy M. Liuzza (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000).

²⁵ Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 49–50.

²⁶ Eric John, "Beowulf and the Margins of Literacy," in *The Beowulf Reader*, ed. Peter S. Baker (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), p. 74.

²⁷ It is commonplace among *Beowulf* criticism to refer to the Finnsburg episode, Scyld's conquests (lines 1–52), the Unferth flyting (lines 499–661), the Sigemund myth (lines 875–900), the Lay of the Last Survivor (lines 2241–2270), and other episodes as digressions that depart from the main plot of *Beowulf*, but which perhaps underline some themes. For more information, see (among others) John Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967), pp. 1–17.

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Part 2

Depression

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Chapter 6

Beowulf's Dark Thoughts: Heremod, Hrethel, and Exempla of the Mind

Ruth Wehlau

IN LINES 2327–2352 OF *Beowulf* the poet details Beowulf's thoughts immediately after he receives news of the dragon's attack. Grief-stricken, Beowulf wonders if he has inadvertently broken a divine command; he fears that he has offended God, and his breast boils with dark thoughts. Shortly after this speculation, Beowulf contemplates his battle with the dragon, recalling his prowess in earlier days, and making the assumption that he can easily defeat the dragon as he has defeated so many other foes in the past. Critics are divided in their assessment of Beowulf's mental state at this point, yet it seems clear that the *Beowulf* poet meant us to look closely at the hero's response to disaster; there is no other passage in the poem that outlines the hero's mental processes so carefully.¹ In fact, Beowulf's vacillation between despair and overconfidence in this passage indicates a mind that is ill-equipped to deal with disaster. This understanding is enhanced when we compare the construction of Beowulf's mental state here to constructions of the mind offered in two exempla found elsewhere in *Beowulf*, in Hrothgar's description of Heremod, and in Beowulf's own description of Hrethel. These exempla portray the mental lapses that follow a separation from wisdom; as they delineate the means by which these lapses occur, they offer us a means of analyzing Beowulf's own fallible thought processes at the point of crisis.

Wisdom, and its inculcation within the mind, is not an incidental aspect of *Beowulf*; rather, a variety of gnomes and maxims are found throughout the poem, advising, guiding, and admonishing in a manner that is clearly meant to provide useful instruction to the reader. The concepts underlying these maxims, as classified by Susan Deskis, include fate, death, joy, and sorrow, as well as an understanding and acceptance of God's rule on earth, all concepts that can be linked to the traditional

Germanic sense of the transience of life.² For the Anglo-Saxon audience, these maxims had immediacy and potency, revolving around the knowledge that “our eternal fate will be determined by our understanding and application of the wisdom the poem presents.”³ Wisdom provides the wise man with a true understanding of the workings of the cosmos and his position within it, and this in turn serves to fortify the mind in preparation for the future, offering a means of internal resistance to external disorder. Wisdom relies on memory in order to function properly; wisdom precepts must be frequently repeated until they are deeply engrained within the mind so that they can be employed at a time of crisis.⁴ In this way, memory itself must be performative. The maxims and wisdom lore embedded within *Beowulf* encourage the audience to consider the principles of wisdom in relation to their own lives as well as to the characters of the poem. In particular, the narrator draws our attention to the necessity of making mental preparation for changes in fortune, advising us to consider the future even in moments of joy. Thus the narrator interrupts the story shortly after Beowulf’s first triumph, during the festivities following the defeat of Grendel, to offer a warning:

Metod eallum weold
 gumena cynnes, swa he nu git ded.
 Forþan bið andgit æghwær selest,
 ferhdes foreþanc. Fela sceal gebidan
 leofes ond lāpes se þe longe her
 on dyssum windagum worulde bruced!⁵
 (1057b–1062)

(The lord ruled all mankind, as he does now.
 Therefore, discernment is best everywhere,
 forethought of mind. Much of joy and of loathing he
 will experience, who long makes use of this world here
 in these days of strife.)

This passage, and its positioning immediately after Beowulf’s victory, draws attention to the need for mental restraint even in times of good fortune. The lesson focusses on the notion of forethought; the wise man must remember this lore even at moments of greatest happiness in order to prepare himself for future tribulations, as it is only by calling to mind the experience or lore of the past that he will be able to prepare for the future. The poet places the words *leofes* and *lāpes* in apposition and alliterates them, providing a sense that the world’s joys and griefs are linked to each

other, and also of the mental balance required of the man experiencing these events. Overall, the goal of the wise man, as explained by the narrator, is the acquisition of mental equanimity, the ability to accept both joy and sorrow with an understanding that neither is of lasting consequence in the world. The wise man must be capable of both recalling and putting into practice this lesson, as acceptance of God's will allows one to recognize that one's fortune, good or bad, is dispensed by God, and this knowledge provides moral fortitude.

In emphasizing the vicissitudes of fortune as a threat to the mind, the *Beowulf* narrator echoes not only traditional Germanic wisdom lore, but also the philosophy of Boethius; thus it is not surprising to find similar instruction on mental fortitude in the Old English Boethius, a text that also includes descriptions of the mind that is ignorant of, or has forgotten, essential wisdom precepts.⁶ These include the allegorical depictions of the mind in despair that are found within the Meters, where threats to the mind, or Mod, are variously represented as storms, as darkness, and as descent. Thus Wisdom, on first encountering Mod, describes the mind in despair as struggling within a pit while battered by storms, as in Metre 3.⁷ In Metre 5, Wisdom warns Mod against two contrasting but complementary threats: pride (*wlenc*), brought about by excessive good fortune (*worulldgesældum*); and despair (*ormod*), brought about by worldly woes (*woruldearfoda*). The poet links the two evils through the alternation and interweaving of words alliterating on "w" and "o" as the poem moves from *woruldearfoda* and *ormod* to *wlenca*, *ofermettum*, *orsorgum* and *worulldgesældum*:

þu scealt eac yfelne ege anforlætan
 woruldearfoda. Ne most þu wesian for dæm
 ealles to ormod, ne þu þe æfre ne læt
 wlenca gewæcan þe læs þu weorde for him
 mid ofermettum eft gescended
 7 to up ahafen for orsorgum
 worulldgesældum.

(C text, Metre 5, 28–34a)

(You must also abandon evil fear of worldly troubles. You may not be too sad at all because of those, nor should you ever let earthly splendour afflict you, lest you later become corrupted with pride because of it and too exalted because of trouble-free worldly blessings.)⁸

Although they appear to be opposites, these two evils work together to cloud the mind so that the light of the sun cannot penetrate:

Forþæm simle bið
se modsefa miclum gebunden
mid gedrefnesse gif hine dreccean mot
þissa yfla hwæðer, innan swencan,
forþæm þa twegen tregan teoð tosomne
wiþ þæt mod foran mistes dwoleman
þæt his seo ece ne mot innan geondscinan
sunne for þæm sweartum mistum ær ðæm hi
geswiþrad weorðen.

(38b–45)

(For the mind is always greatly fettered with anxiety
if either of these two evils is allowed to torment it,
afflict it within; for those two griefs together pull the
chaos of mist in front of the mind so that the eternal
sun cannot shine into it because of the dark mists until
they are cleared away.)

Here the darkness and mist are explicitly linked with cosmic chaos; separated from the light of God, or wisdom, the mind struggles in a darkness that implies not only despair (as in Metre 3), but also a foolish pride or complacency. The linking of pride with despair in this meter demonstrates that the threat to mental equilibrium is two-fold, a result of inadequate responses to both good and bad fortune. It is thus an echo of the *Beowulf* narrator's alliterative linking of "leofes" and "lapes" in his "sermon" to the audience following the defeat of Grendel.⁹

After laying out these complementary dangers, Wisdom inquires into the nature of Mod's distress, which is in fact a form of forgetting, as we discover in the Prose 5. Mod complains that grief has deprived it of memory: although it remembers that it began with God, it does not know its end. Based on this information, Wisdom is able to make a diagnosis, commenting to Mod: "Nu ic hæbbe ongitan þine ormodnesse / nu þu self nast hwæt þu self eart," ("Now I have understood your despair, now that you yourself do not know what you yourself are," B text, Prose 4, 76–77).¹⁰ Mod is further weakened by ignorance about the unstable nature of worldly fortune. In the prose passage that follows, Wisdom makes clear to Mod that changes in fortune occur very quickly and unexpectedly. Worldly joys flatter the minds of men but, when least expected,

they will remove themselves and abandon those minds to despair: “þonne hi læst wenad, hi on ormodnesse forlætað on þæm mæstan sare,” (“when they least expect it, they abandon them to despair and to the greatest misery,” C text, Prose 5, 8–9).¹¹ Wisdom emphasizes the fact that change of fortune is not caused by one’s own behavior, stating bluntly: “Gif ðu þonne wenst þæt hit on þe gelang sie þæt ða woruldsælpa on þe swa onwenda sint, þonne eart ðu on gedwolan,” (“If you think that it is attributable to you that the worldly infelicities have thus changed towards you, then you are in error,” C text, Prose 5, 24–26). Mod’s loss of wisdom here involves a self-forgetting that is evident in his faulty assumption about his own ability to cause or create misfortune, indicating a confusion about his place in the cosmos. The dark mists represent not just an emotion (grief), but also a cognitive lack—a failure of wisdom.

The careful detailing of the mind in confusion that we find in the Old English Boethius is echoed in *Beowulf*, in two contrasting and complementary exempla, Hrothgar’s depiction of Heremod, and Beowulf’s depiction of Hrethel. Like the Old English Boethius, these exempla portray minds in distress brought about by misunderstanding and forgetting. The location of these portraits within the text is significant; the first occurs while Beowulf is a young man, untouched by adversity, while the second occurs in Beowulf’s old age, following the catastrophe of the dragon’s attack. The first exemplum is focussed on pride, a failure of gratitude for God’s gifts, while the second marks a descent into despair that leads to death.

Hrothgar’s exemplum follows his portrait of Heremod in his “sermon” to Beowulf. Hrothgar begins his exemplum with the language of the praise-poem, employing a traditional formulation of praise for God the Creator in words that echo the words of the scop (poet) earlier in the poem, but here referring specifically to the gifts given to mankind, including the gift of wisdom: “Wundor is to secganne, / hu mihtig God manna cynne / þurh sidne sefan snyttru bryttað, / eard ond eorlscipe; he ah ealra geweald.” (“It is a marvellous thing to relate how mighty God through his profound understanding dispenses to mankind wisdom, land and rank; he possesses power over all things,” 1724b–1727). As Hrothgar continues, he makes clear that the very gifts bestowed by God—lordship, wealth and power—are so all-encompassing that the man in his folly cannot imagine an end to them (“þæt he his selfa ne mæg / for his unsnyttrum ende geþencean,” 1733b–1734), and his perceptions are warped by that same lack of sorrow:

Wuna(ð) he on wiste; no hine wiht dweled
 adl ne ylðo, ne him inwitsorh
 on sefa(n) sweorced, ne gesacu ohwær
 ecghete eowed, ac him eal worold
 wended on willan; he þæt wyrse ne con.
 (1735–1739)

(He lives in prosperity; nothing hinders him, neither sickness nor old age, nor does an inner sorrow darken his mind, nor does enmity anywhere bring about war, but the whole world wends according to his will. He does not know the worse.)

For this man, the world appears in false guise as a place that wends according to his own will; he perceives himself as a kind of cosmic center, a creator, not a receiver. Chief among his blessings is the absence of all evil; he lacks experience of any of the hardships of the world, not only violence and enmity, but the natural evils of sickness and old age, so that his mind is never darkened by sorrow.¹² The lack of mental darkness is thus itself partly the cause of the man's failure of imagination; lacking experience of suffering, the man is incapable of understanding his true position in the world and is thus vulnerable to temptation.

Hrothgar continues with an allegorical description of the mind, as lack of experience and imagination allows pride to grow, leading the conscience, the soul's guardian, to fall asleep so that the devil is able to shoot the darts of sin into the man's heart. The man cannot protect himself because he does not know how to do so: "him beorgan ne con" (1746b). Thereafter, the man becomes covetous, and Hrothgar makes clear that this is, in fact, a form of forgetting:

þinced him to lytel, þæt he lange heold,
 gytsað gromhydig, nallas on gylp seled
 fætte beagas, ond he þa forðgesceaft
 forgyted ond forgymed, þæs þe him ær God sealde,
 wuldres Waldend, weordmynda dæl.
 (1748–1752)

(He thinks it too little, what he has held for a long time. Fierce-minded, he is covetous, not at all does he proudly give ornamented rings, and he forgets and neglects his destiny because God, heaven's ruler, gave him earlier a share of honours.)

The man “thinks it too little what he has held for a long time,” “forgets” his place in the cosmos, and refuses to dole out gifts as a king ought. Having literally forgotten himself, in that he has forgotten who he is, he has removed himself from the system of exchange that ties a lord to his people, while his refusal to consider his “destiny” (*fordgesceaft*) means that he has also lost a sense of his location in time.¹³ He lives in an eternal present, accepting the gifts of fortune without looking forward to his certain death. The man is lacking in precisely the forethought that the narrator urged earlier in the poem after the conquest of Grendel; he has foolishly succumbed to the influence of excessive worldly joys that is outlined in *Boethius* Metre 5.

The man's death, when it comes, brings an end to his rapaciousness—after he dies, he is replaced by another less miserly ruler who doles out the treasures previously hoarded. Hrothgar's description of the man's death is concise: “Hit on endestæf eft gelimped/ þæt se lichoma læne gedreosed, / fæge gefealled” (“Then at last, in the end it happens that his transitory body declines, the doomed man falls,” 1753–1755a). The concision of this passage might leave one to conclude that the man's death is not of great significance, yet the speed with which the man is dispatched is itself part of Hrothgar's lesson. There is no any indication that the man has died in battle, and thus heroically, and when compared to the elaborate mourning and funerary rituals following the deaths of heroes such as Scyld or Beowulf, it is clear that this passage illustrates an ignominious end, a punishment worse than death within the heroic culture that *Beowulf* depicts. Nor is there any reference to punishment after death. Instead, Hrothgar describes the man as doomed (*fæge*), as indeed all men are, his death a function of his human nature. In his careful analysis of Hrothgar's sermon, Scott Gwara argues that it is the *oferhygd* or “false confidence” illustrated in the exemplum that leads Heremod to tyrannical kingship; the sermon thus is meant to prepare Beowulf for his own future as a king rather than a hero (194–213).¹⁴ Yet Hrothgar's warning is certainly meant to prepare Beowulf for old age and death. In the exemplum the man's death is a result of the weakening of his body, a body which is not his own, but *læne*, “lent” to him for the duration of his life. Death itself reveals the man's forgotten failing, his own mortality, thus reducing him to the same state as all other men. In concluding his exemplum this way, Hrothgar's lesson goes beyond an admonition against neglectful lordship to demonstrate that one's death as a man is as important as one's death as a king.

Hrothgar's sermon is a gift of wisdom offered to Beowulf: he enjoins Beowulf to protect himself against pride ("Bebeorh þe," 1758), in language that echoes his description of the proud man who does not know how to protect himself ("him bebeorgan ne con," 1746b). Hrothgar's sermon offers Beowulf an opportunity to acquire wisdom at second hand, avoiding the fate of Heremod, but without being taken unawares as Hrothgar has been. Thus it is significant that Beowulf delivers a "sermon" of his own to his followers, a speech that includes, amongst a discussion of historical events, the death of Beowulf's grandfather Hrethel, and which, like Hrothgar's description of Heremod, relies partially on the construction of the mind of a fictional man. Where Hrothgar described a man who was incapable of gratitude and thus of praise, now Beowulf describes someone whose grief cannot be assuaged by the language of elegy.¹⁵

Beowulf begins his speech by making clear that he is calling on a memory of his youth, but he goes on to relate a story not of battle, but of the accidental killing of his uncle Herebeald by Herebeald's brother, Hæthcyn. Since Hæthcyn and Herebeald are brothers and the attack is accidental, the killing is a "feohleas gefeoht" (2441), an unavengable attack, a fact that proves to be more serious than the death itself as Hrethel, unable to avenge his son, falls outside the traditional system of exchange and compensation and eventually dies of grief. In relating the story of Hrethel, Beowulf has recourse to the same device used by Hrothgar earlier in the poem; he constructs a hypothetical man and describes his inner world, comparing Hrethel to the father of a hanged man, a man old and wise who can offer no help to his young son. Like Hrethel, this man suffers the death of his son in an unrevengable act, not through any fault of his own, and like both Beowulf and Hrothgar, the man's advanced age means that this experience of grief comes at the end of his life. As wise as he is, the man's wisdom can neither save the son, nor avenge him. Even more serious, the man's wisdom proves to be incapable of resolving his sorrow, as the man sinks into a kind of depression wherein the hall and the entire world appear as a wasteland. This excessive grief is partly a function of an inability to act,¹⁶ but this is exacerbated by failures of wisdom as it should function within the mind, as Beowulf's description makes clear:

þonne he gyd wrece,
 sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
 hrefne to hroðre, ond he him helpe ne mæg
 eald ond infrod ænige gefremman.

Symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce
 eaforan ellorsid̥.

(2446b–2451a)

(Then he recites a lament, a mournful song, when his son hangs for the solace of the raven, and he, old and wise, can offer no help. Always, every morning, his son's departure is remembered.)

Here we can see that a central aspect of wisdom, memory, is malfunctioning, as the man repeatedly recalls, not the precepts of wisdom, but the fact of his son's death. His "misremembering" is a faulty and non-functional recollection born of despair. Like the Danes earlier in the poem, who "remembered hell in their minds" ("helle gemundon in modsefan," 179b–180a) when they turned to pagan practices after the attack of Grendel, memory here marks not the presence of wisdom, but its absence. Not truly performative, it is of no help in recalling the precepts that lead to mental equanimity, and only serves to promote inaction.

Shortly after, the man withdraws to his bed, "Gewited þonne on sealman, sorhleod gæled / an æfter anum, þuhte him eall to rum, / wongas ond wicstede" ("He goes then to his bed and sings a sorrowful song, one man [singing] for another; fields and dwelling-places, all seemed to him too spacious," 2460–2462a).¹⁷ As in the previous passage, Beowulf mentions that the man is singing of a lament, a "sorhleod," and this points to a second failure, of language. The song here, like those referred to in the previous passage, does not function as a proper elegy, allowing for a recollection of precepts and an acceptance of loss.¹⁸

Beowulf's depiction of the man engaged in a series of repetitive and non-functional recollections and recitations portrays a failure of elegy that parallels Hrothgar's depiction of the proud ruler, whose ingratitude revolved around a failure to recognize the gifts of fortune. Each man, isolated by his excessive good or bad fortune, inhabits an internal world emptied of all value, the first separating himself from gift-giving in a misguided notion of his own self-sufficiency, while the second has withdrawn into a single room, perceiving his world as desolate and meaningless. The first portrait portrays a lack of memory, a sleeping conscience, while the second displays an excess of unhelpful memory and language, yet each marks a kind of fall, a lapse in wisdom and fortitude. The parallels are also apparent in the descriptions of the deaths of both men. Hrothgar presented death as reducing the proud man to the level of other men as death

brought another lord to the throne, someone who dealt out the previously hoarded treasures. In *Beowulf*'s tale, as well, the goods are distributed after death as the death of the sorrowful man parallels that of the proud man:

He ða mid þære sorhge, þe him to sar belamp,
gumdream ofgeaf, Godes leoht geceas;
eaferum læfde, swa deð eadig mon,
lond ond leodbyrig, þa he of life gewat.
(2468–2471)

(He then, with that sorrow too bitter that befell him,
renounced human joy, he chose the light of God, left
land and castles to his heirs, just as a happy man does,
when he departed life.)

As in *Hrothgar*'s exemplum, the important message is the fact of death; the grieving man dies and leaves his property to his heirs just as a happy man would, a comparison that draws our attention to the similarity between all men.

Hrothgar's and *Beowulf*'s exempla illustrate failures of the performative function of memory. The two portraits parallel two complementary poetic genres, the praise-poem and the elegy, genres designed to help the mind recall the essential precepts of wisdom. The praise-poem offers a means of combatting the threat implicit in excessive good fortune—i.e., pride—by means of an act of thanksgiving directed toward God and away from the self. Elegy, on the other hand, involves a philosophical consideration of the ephemeral nature of life on earth and as such is a form of protection against despair. The portraits of *Heremod* and *Hrethel* are, in some sense, the contraries of these two genres, detailed depictions of the mechanisms by which wisdom fails to function in the mind. In each case the man whose mental state is depicted becomes isolated and effectively removed from the social world of exchange; in *Hrothgar*'s story, the king has removed himself from all interactive gift-giving and lives in a world of his own creation, a place where he is self-sufficient and disconnected, while in *Beowulf*'s, the man has fallen into a state of inertia, and lives in an internal wasteland. The narrative makes no mention of punishment after death: instead, it is death itself that provides the judgement, reducing the men to a state of commonality, essentially re-placing them among other men by means of their mortality.

With this in mind, we can revisit *Beowulf*'s responses to the dragon's attack. *Hrothgar* functions as both a teacher and a living exemplum

to Beowulf, and Beowulf's life echoes Hrothgar's. Where Grendel's attack marked an "edwenden" (1774), a sudden reversal in fortune, in Hrothgar's old age, now Beowulf himself must recall Hrothgar's teaching in order to react to his own change of fortune. The poet's construction of Beowulf's mental state at this point indicates that Beowulf has failed in this. Instead, he veers between two emotional extremes, initially reacting with grief and confusion, and thereafter falling into a false sense of self-confidence.

Beowulf's first reaction indicates a loss of wisdom reminiscent of Mod in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, as he thinks that he has somehow offended God, and is thus himself responsible for the dragon's attack:

Ðæt ðam godan wæs
 hreow on hredre, hygesorga mæst;
 wende se wisa, þæt he Waldende
 ofer ealde riht ecean dryhtne
 bitre gebulge; breost innan weoll
 þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs.
 (2327b–2332)

(That was grief in the heart of the good man, the
 greatest of mind-sorrows; the wise man thought that
 he had grievously offended against an old law of the
 ruler, of the eternal lord; his breast within boiled with
 dark thoughts, such as were not customary to him.)

As wisdom lore and Boethius make clear, misfortune must be expected in life.¹⁹ As Beowulf thinks of his misfortune as a result of human action, it is a clear indication that he is not adequately recalling the precepts of wisdom.

Beowulf's distress is also indicated by the dark thoughts boiling within his breast. These thoughts have been interpreted in a variety of ways by critics, ranging from the positive, R. E. Kaske's assessment of them as "evidence of a proper and wise *tristitia*," George Clark's reading of them as excessive scrupulosity that is soon corrected, John Hill's treatment of them as "a right-thinking dismay that is legalistic to the core," and Scott Gwara's interpretation of them as "helplessness in the face of defeat," yet a part of Beowulf's scrupulous fear of offending divine law; to the negative, Irving's interpretation of them as guilt, and Goldsmith's reading of them as an indication of true separation from God brought about by pride and greed.²⁰ What might the dark thoughts imply? Darkness is almost exclusively negative in Old English literature, often associated with primal

chaos, as well as with sin and evil, as in Grendel's association with darkness.²¹ Mental darkness may indicate guilt, but it is more often associated with grief: it is used in this way in Hrothgar's exemplum.²² The poet tells us that the dark thoughts "were not customary" to Beowulf.²³ The phrase "not customary" (*swa him geþywe ne wæs*) used by the poet is likely an instance of litotes. Thus Beowulf, like the proud man in Hrothgar's exemplum, is a man whose mind has been hitherto "un-darkened" by bad fortune. Yet Beowulf's mental darkness may indicate something more than grief and dismay—a close look at this passage reveals similarities between the poet's portrayal of Beowulf's mind and the description of the mind sunk into darkness and travail found in the Old English Boethius, as in Metre 3. Beowulf's confusion, represented as not only darkness, but also turmoil, is a further indication of the chaotic nature of his mind, as the Anglo-Saxons understood cosmic chaos not only as darkness, but as a roiling substance.²⁴ Ill-prepared for this great grief, Beowulf has become momentarily confused, and his mental state, encompassing a combination of darkness, turmoil, and misunderstanding, approximates that of Mod in the Old English Boethius, a clear indication that he has forgotten the tenets of wisdom.

The same forgetfulness is evident in the mental reversal that follows this initial response, as grief is replaced by overconfidence. Beowulf assumes that he can easily defeat the dragon, scorning to bring a large army to fight the dragon, as he recalls his prowess in earlier days:

Oferhogode ða hringa-fengel,
 þæt he þone widflogan worode gesohte,
 sidan herge; no he him þa sæcce ondred,
 ne him þæs wyrmes wig for wiht dyde,
 eafod ond ellen, forðon he ær fela
 nearo nedende nida gedigde,
 hildehlemma, sidðan he Hroðgares,
 sigoreadig secg, sele fælsode.

(2345–2352)

(Then he, the ring-prince, disdained to seek the far-flyer with a troop, a large army; he did not fear the battle, nor did he think much of the worm's fighting force, his might and his courage, because he had earlier survived many contests, battle-crashes, venturing through narrow straits, after he, a victorious man, cleansed Hrothgar's hall.)

As Beowulf recalls his youth as a "sigoreadig secg," we can see that he underrates the dragon's fighting power largely because he has forgotten the effects of old age on his body. Thus Beowulf has forgotten Hrothgar's warning about the weakening of the body in old age and has failed to protect himself internally. Like Mod in the Old English Boethius, he has forgotten who he is.

Beowulf's reactions to the dragon's attacks are thus complex, involving a brief period of severe grief, exemplified by his dark thoughts and confusion over the causes of the attack, and quickly followed by a misjudgment of his own strength. The two reactions spring from the same source, Beowulf's mistaken understanding about his place in the cosmos. Yet Beowulf recollects himself before his death, a change signalled by the poet's description of the hero as he sits on the bluff before his fight with the dragon. Here the poet tells us that Beowulf is mentally preparing for his death: "Him wæs geomor sefa, / wæfre ond wælfus, wyrd ungemete neah / se done gomelan gretan sceolde." ("His mind was sorrowful, restless and ready for death, the fate which would meet the old man [was] extremely close," 2419b–2421). Although Beowulf's change of heart is not fully explained, its significance, the sense that Beowulf now recognizes his own mortality, is signalled by the poet's own description of Beowulf as "done gomelan" (the old man). Beowulf does fight the dragon on his own, but the tone of his boast as he prepares to fight demonstrates a new understanding of his position. Beowulf's remarks here, unlike his inner world detailed earlier, are a formal statement and a less reliable indication of his thought than the previous description of his thoughts, but it is clear that he no longer perceives himself as completely in control of the situation; he invokes both *metod* and *wyrd* as arbiters of the battle, declaring that the battle will go "swa unc wyrd geteod / metod" ("as wyrd, Lord of men, allots," 2526b–2527).²⁵ A second change is evident in Beowulf's attitude towards his own strength. Where his first reaction to the dragon demonstrated his faulty reasoning, his assumption that he could win the fight because he had won victories in the past when he was young, his boast now appears to be concerned as much with protecting his followers from death, as proving his own prowess, as he declares that he will fight because it is inappropriate for others to do so: "Nis þæt eower sið, / ne gemet mannes nef(ne) min anes þæt he wið aglæcean eofodo dæle" ("That is not your way, nor [is it] meet for any man but me that he deal out strength against the monster," 2532b–2535).

Beowulf's first reactions to the dragon's attack indicate he has fallen prey to the twin dangers laid out in Wisdom's speech to Mod in the *Boethius*, the same two sins that form the subject of the two exempla from *Beowulf*. Thus Beowulf moves first in the direction of despair, paralleling the description of Hrethel in his grief, and shortly thereafter, veers in the opposite direction, mistakenly assuming that he will have no difficulty with the dragon, thus echoing the mistaken assumptions of Heremod that he will live forever. Nevertheless, Beowulf cannot be accused of truly succumbing to either despair or pride as both responses are temporary. Beowulf's confusion is resolved by a recognition of his own mortality, a growth in understanding that is clear from the descriptions of his behavior before death. Just as Hrothgar did earlier, so Beowulf now offers guidance to his followers by reflecting on his own life, creating an exemplum that neatly parallels Hrothgar's. In so doing, Beowulf demonstrates that he has learned from experience and is able to convert this knowledge into lore. Beowulf's response to the catastrophic attack of the dragon, which demonstrated a lack of equilibrium is now replaced by a growth in wisdom that offers a contrast to the darkness that dominates the latter portions of the poem.²⁶

NOTES

¹ Most references to Beowulf's emotions are found earlier in the poem and refer in a fairly cursory manner to his rejoicing in victory. See, for instance, lines 827b, 1624b, 1785a, 1624b, 1785a.

² Susan Deskis, *Beowulf and the Medieval Proverb Tradition* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), pp. 38–60. Deskis's study, although it places the gnomes of *Beowulf* in a larger European tradition, is a valuable means of establishing essential elements of the Germanic tradition as evident in *Beowulf*. Also see Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999); T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), pp. 25–27; Robert B. Burlin, "Gnomic Indirection in *Beowulf*" in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975): 41–49; and "Gnomes in Elegy" in Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) pp. 174–199.

³ Larrington, referring to *Precepts*, in *A Store of Common Sense*, p. 221.

⁴ For more on the relationship between wisdom literature and memory, see Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *The Solomon Complex* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 27–40 and pp. 41–67, as well as Cavill, *Maxims*, esp. pp. 7–24.

A discussion of the relationship between wisdom and control of the mind can be found in Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 74–77.

⁵ I take quotations from *Beowulf* from Klaeber's *Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th edition (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008). The translations are mine, with some help from S. A. J. Bradley, trans. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent, 1982) and R. M. Liuzza, trans. *Beowulf* (Toronto: Broadview, 2000). Other citations of Old English poetry, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. George Philip Krapp, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931); and *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

⁶ Given our ignorance as to the date of the composition of *Beowulf* it is impossible to know if the *Beowulf* poet was aware of the Old English version of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, or indeed the Latin original. There appear to be parallels between the philosophical outlook of *Beowulf* and Boethius's *Consolation*, although the sympathy between the two works may be a matter of universal Christian wisdom themes being present in both. In her study of the Old English Boethius, F. Anne Payne interprets *wyrd* in *Beowulf* as a form of Fortune akin to the Boethian concept, commenting on the hero's inability to control his fate: "No excellence, no dedication to the code of generosity (a lack of greed) or to possible shortcomings (a lack of arrogance) prevents the uncontrollable from happening, the frightened man from taking the cup of the dragon and the world from going awry." *King Alfred & Boethius, an Analysis of the Old English version of the Consolation of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 1968), p. 105.

⁷ "Eala, on hu grimmum and hu grundleasum / seade swinced þæt sweorcende mod / þonne hit þa strongan stormas beatad / weoruldbisunga." ("Alas what a terrible and bottomless pit the darkening mind struggles in when the fierce storms of worldly cares pound it." C text, Metre 3, lines 1–4a). For a discussion of the construction of the mind within the Old English Boethius, see Elan Justice Pavlinich, "Into the Embodied *inneward mod* of the *Old English Boethius*" *Neophilologus* 100 (2016): 649–662. All quotations from Boethius are taken from Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De consolazione philosophiae*, 2 vol. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Translations are mine, with help from Godden and Irvine.

⁸ Godden and Irvine note that the Old English translation of this passage reduces the traditional concept of the four passions (joy, fear, hope, and grief), as found in Boethius, to two concepts, pride and despair (2.274–2.275).

⁹ Also, see this concept in Wulfstan's homily, "De Septiformi Spiritu," ed. Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 185. "ne biþ on gefean to fægen ne on wean to ormod ("Do not be too 'happy' in joy, nor too despairing in woe." Quoted in Scott Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 94.

¹⁰ Also interesting in this context is Benjamin Saltzman's investigation of the capacity for self-forgetting as a motif in Alfred's translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. Saltzman argues that in early medieval understandings of the mind, the core of the self is reserved for God. Thus "as the ruler forgets himself, he forgets God." "The Mind, Perception and the Reflexivity of Forgetting in Alfred's *Pastoral Care*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 42 (2013): 147–182 (p. 181).

¹¹ The Old English Boethius survives predominantly in two manuscripts; the B Manuscript, which is entirely in prose; and the C Manuscript, which also incorporates the "Metres of Boethius," translations of Boethius's metres into Old English alliterative poetry. In this passage the scribe of the B text has written "ofermodnesse" (overconfidence or pride) rather than "ormodnesse" (despair) as it appears in the later C version; thus in the B version, rather than being abandoned to despair, the minds are abandoned in their excessive confidence, an indication of how easily the two moral failings of overconfidence and despair are linked. The Latin reads "intolerabili dolore confundat quos insperata reliquerit" ("[she] confuses with unbearable sorrow those whom she left unexpectedly," Godden and Irvine, 2.271).

¹² There is some ambiguity as to how to interpret this passage. It is possible that the absence of the darkening of mind is one of the blessings enumerated. Conversely, it may be that its absence is a result of the other blessings.

¹³ For more on the definition of the term "fordgescaft," see Mary A. Parker, *Beowulf and Christianity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 143.

¹⁴ See Gwara, *Heroic Identity*, pp. 197–213.

¹⁵ Elegy is generally assumed to contain an element of consolation or a philosophical understanding of loss that allows for some degree of acceptance; in this it is differentiated from lament. See Stanley Greenfield's definition of elegy as a relatively short poem "employing a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation," quoted in Anne Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill Queens, 1992), p. 60. A discussion of elegy as a genre falls outside the bounds of this chapter, but more information on Anglo-Saxon elegy can be found in Klinck.

¹⁶ See the analysis of the speech by Lawrence De Looze, who describes the manner in which Beowulf's story examines "two polar strategies of response, active and passive," with the active strategy represented by the Swedish wars and the passive strategy represented by the father's lament. Lawrence N. De Looze, "Frame Narratives and Fictionalization: Beowulf as Narrator" in *Interpretations of Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991): 242–50, (p. 250). Also interesting is Pope's argument that Beowulf is revived through the process of narration. John C. Pope, "Beowulf's Old Age" in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature*, ed. James L. Rosier (Paris: Mouton, 1970), pp. 55–64.

¹⁷ See my article "'Seeds of Sorrow': Landscapes of Despair in *The Wanderer*, Beowulf's Story of Hrethel, and *Sonatorrek*," *Parergon* 15 (1998): 1–17, on the depiction of grief in this passage. Also, Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense*, pp. 176–181. The recurring memories, like the imagery of excessive spaciousness, are

associated with depression and trauma. See Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 121–130. The behavior of the grieving man is similar to that of the depressed son who keeps to his quarters in *Solomon and Saturn II*, 382–383a. *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie. ASPR VI. New York: Columbia University Press, 1942.

¹⁸ The powerlessness of elegy may be part of a general weakening of speech at this point. See Robert Bjork, “Speech as Gift in Beowulf,” *Speculum* 69 (1994): 993–1022, where he argues that “speech ... lapses finally into ineffectuality” at the end of the poem (p. 1016).

¹⁹ Beowulf’s fear of breaking an ancient law has been discussed by Scott Gwara, who points out that Beowulf’s response may be a sign of his humility: “Beowulf’s anxiety proves his virtue, since he searches his own past for present miseries, just like Hrothgar did. Similarly, Beowulf arguably attributes the dragon’s rage not simply to fate, but to a Boethian divinity theoretically in charge of ‘moral’ punishment” (Gwara, *Heroic Identity*, pp. 256–257). I hope it is clear that I disagree with Gwara here, as moral punishment is not the purview of the Boethian divinity; it would be more “Boethian” of Beowulf to ascribe the dragon’s attack to fate. The belief in suffering as moral chastisement might be considered Augustinian. See Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 158–159.

²⁰ R. E. Kaske, “Fortitudo and Sapientia as the Controlling Theme in *Beowulf*” in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 297; George Clark, *Beowulf* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1990), pp. 118–119; Edward Burroughs Irving, *A Reading of Beowulf* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 220; John M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 133–134; Gwara, *Heroic Identity*, pp. 256–257. Goldsmith perceives Beowulf’s misfortune to be a result of his greed, and the darkness as the dark breath of Leviathan, i.e. the dragon; the attack of the dragon is allegorically parallel to the devil’s assault as described in Hrothgar’s exemplum (*The Mode and Meaning of “Beowulf”* (London: Athlone Press, 1970, p. 209)). She similarly sees Grendel’s assault on Heorot as caused by Hrothgar’s sins (p. 207). These interpretations are partly a function of reading the story as allegory, but it is possible to perceive the dragon and Grendel in terms of Christian myth—as agents of the devil—without the implication that such evils are brought about by the mental state of the hero.

²¹ Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979), p. 188. In *Genesis A*, originary chaos is described almost exclusively through images of darkness: “and þa stowe beheold, / dreama lease, geseah deorc gesweorc / semian sinnihte sweart under roderum, / wonn and weste.” (And [God] beheld the place, bereft of joys, saw the dark cloud languishing in eternal night, black under the sky, wan and empty, lines 107b–110a). See chapters by Carl Kears and James H. Morey in this volume.

²² See *The Wanderer*, “Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld / forhwan modsefa min ne gesweorce, / þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþenc,” (“Therefore I cannot think why my mind does not darken when I consider the whole life of men in the world,” lines 58–60). Also, *Judith* 269, *Deor* 29 and *The Fortunes of Men* 25. The association of dark thoughts with guilt occurs in *Elene* line 312 where Elena tells the Jews that they lived in darkness “with dark thoughts” (Peostrum geþancum), and also in *Christ I* in which the Jews have “dark understanding in their minds” (“deorc gewit / hæfdon on hreþre,” lines 640b–641a). Dark thoughts may also represent a kind of mental illness; see James H. Morey’s “The Fourth Fate of Men” in this volume.

²³ Beowulf’s thoughts are experienced in his breast, as Old English poetry does not normally locate the seat of thought in the head: “The mind was ... associated with the emotional life by virtue of the belief that it was situated in the breast and by transference, the heart or breast were afforded cognitive as well as emotional powers,” Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 38. Detailed discussions of Anglo-Saxon terminology related to the mind and emotion can be found in Harbus, pp. 23–59; Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Soon-Ai Low, “Approaches to the Old English Vocabulary for ‘Mind,’” *Studia Neophilologica* 73 (2001), pp. 11–22; Simon Nicholson, “The Expression of Emotional Distress in Old English Prose and Verse,” *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 19 (1995): 327–338, and Malcolm Godden, “Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,” *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁴ Christopher A. Jones, “Early Medieval *Chaos*,” in *Verbal Encounters*, ed. Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp. 15–38), p. 31. It is also possible that the turmoil is a representation of the “hydraulic” model of the mind held by the Anglo-Saxons, according to Leslie Lockett.

²⁵ Or possibly “as the Creator of every man allots our destiny to us.” See B. J. Timmer, “A Note on *Beowulf* ll. 2562b–2527a and l. 2295” *English Studies* 40 (1959): 49–52.

²⁶ I would like to thank Jane Tolmie and Shelley King for their assistance in reviewing this article for me.

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Chapter 7

The Fourth Fate of Men: Heremod's Darkened Mind

James H. Morey

A BROAD INTERPRETATION OF THE causes of physical death applies as much to modern as to medieval bodies: one can succumb to sickness (*adl*), one can become subject to age (*ylde*), or one can die by violence (*ecghete*). Hrothgar enunciates these alternatives in lines 1735–1738 of his “sermon” (lines 1700–1784 of *Beowulf*) and variations on the fates of human bodies appear in numerous elegiac poems such as the Exeter Book’s *Fortunes of Men*. Similarly, the definition of mental death such that interpersonal and social relationships are impossible is as complex in Anglo-Saxon England as it is today. I wish to argue that, in addition to the three causes of physical death, there is a fourth, ambiguous category in the Anglo-Saxon imagination that describes a mode of death that today we would categorize as some kind of mental illness. It is designated most often by variations on the verb *sweorcan*, to grow dark. Hrothgar includes this fate among the others in lines 1735–1738, and I argue that it has been overlooked as a significant and pernicious human doom on a par with death by sickness, age, or violence. A darkened mind is not an emotional state or rhetorical figure, but is in fact a mode of death. I wish to connect this usage with other passages in Old English, notably in the *Wanderer* when the speaker “geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld / for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce” (“cannot think beyond this world why my mind should not darken,” 58–59).¹ A darkened mind is the epic, heroic analogue to entering a monastery in a saint’s life or to being taken by fairies in a romance. The body lives, moves, and appears to function, but one is dead to this life. Mental death is as significant a category as bodily death, and Hrothgar’s inclusion of the category is far from casual or merely figurative. Heremod is, perhaps, the most memorable victim of the fourth fate of men, and Hrothgar cites him as the negative example of good kingship near the beginning of his sermon

(lines 1709b–1724a), just before he describes the four fates. Reading the sermon in the context of all four fates of men gives added significance to Hrothgar's warnings of the inner demons Beowulf must resist, and it allows a glimpse into the notoriously various Anglo-Saxon understandings of the mind.²

The Indo-European root of *sweorcan* is **suord*, Latin *sordes* (hence modern English *sordid*) and the word finds its way into a variety of Germanic languages. In Old English, adjectives and verbs build on the *sweorc* element. In a gloss to Aldhelm's *De Laudibus Virginitatis* the word *fuscatus* (dark-colored, black) is glossed as "forsweorced," and the word appears, variously spelled, in Middle English.³ It becomes, of course, modern German *schwartz* and modern English *swarthy*. More archaic forms are the adjective *swart* and the verb *swerk*, which is found in the *OED*. The literal meaning is straightforward: dark, dirty, base, or mean, as when Grendel is said to inhabit Heorot "sweartum nihtum" ("in the dark nights," 167), or when, over Beowulf's funeral pyre, the "wudurec astah, / sweart ofer swioðole" ("wood smoke rose, dark over the flames," 3144–3145).⁴ Similarly, the Old English verbs *sweorcan*, *gesweorcan*, and *forsweorcan* also have literal application when they describe how the sky, for example, grows dark. The moment just prior to the Creation in *Genesis* in the Junius manuscript is an emphatic evocation of darkness as the antithesis of divine plenitude:

On þone eagum wlat
stiðfrihþ cining, and þa stowe beheold,
dreama lease, geseah deorc gesweorc
semian sinnihte sweart under roderum,
wonn and weste, oðþæt þeos woruldgesceaft
þurh word gewearð wuldorcynginges.⁵
(106–111)

(The resolute King looked with his eye and beheld the
place, joyless, he saw the dark darkness hovering in
perpetual night, dark under the sky, black and waste,
until this world-creation came into being through the
word of the glory-king.)

Correspondingly, at the second coming the sun will grow dark, as in Ælfric's homily for the eighth day of Pentecost: "se Hælend sylf cymð mid his scinendum englum, and seo sunne forsweorcð, and soðlice se mona, for ðam ormætan leohte þæs mihtigan Drihtnes" (the Savior himself shall

come with his shining angels, and the sun will grow dark, and indeed also the moon, because of the boundless light of the mighty Lord).⁶ This is, admittedly, a negative definition: it will be so light that the sun will look dark in comparison. More positively, we have the description in one of the Rogationtide Homilies: “and æt þam feower healfum þyses middaneardes se heofon tobyrsteð and micel sweg cymð and gesweorcð and of helle astihþ dimnysse” (and at the four corners of this earth the heaven will crack and great noise come and it shall grow dark and from hell darkness will rise).⁷ Figurative uses of the word apply to individuals who grow dark in mind because they harbor malice, as we see in another homily by Ælfric on the Passion of St. Stephen, Protomartyr: “Ne truwiġe nan man be ælmesdædum oððe on gebedum, butan ðære foresædan lufe; forðan ðe swa lange swa he hylt ðone sweartan nið on his heortan, ne mæg he mid nanum ðinge þone mildheortan God gegladian” (Let no man trust in alms-deeds, or in prayers, without the aforesaid love; for so long as he holds black malice in his heart, he cannot in any way delight the merciful God).⁸ Also figuratively, the Assyrian warriors in *Judith* sense foreboding when they stand around the tent of Holofernes “sweorcendferhðe” (“with darkening spirit,” 269).⁹

I wish to argue for a figurative use that shades back into the literal. In certain circumstances, to be dark in mind is more than just a rhetorical figure or emotional state. It can designate a distinct metaphysical status. The extreme physical and emotional distress of the speaker in *Deor*, for example, is well known, and after his litany of horrors and hardships he speaks of the man who

Siteð sorgcearig, sælum biðæled,
on sefan sweorceð, sylfum þinceþ
þæt sy endeless earfoða dæl.¹⁰
(28–30)

(He sits sorrowful, deprived of joys, he darkens in
mind, and for himself he thinks his share of hardships
to be endless.)

Compare the state of Boethius in the Old English version of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, in Book I, meter 3:

Eala, hu grimmum and hu grundleasum
seaðe swinceð þæt sweorcende mod
þonne hit þa strongan stormas beatað

weoruld-bisgunga. Þonne hit winnende
 his agen leoht an forlæteð,
 and mid uua forgit þone ecan gefean,
 ðringð on þa ðiostro ðisse worulde,
 sorgum geswenced. Swa is þissum nu
 mode gelumpen, nu hit mare ne wat
 for Gode godes buton gnornunge
 fremdre worulde.¹¹

(Alas, what a grim and bottomless pit the darkening mind labors in, when the fierce storms of worldly cares beat it. When struggling it abandons its own light, and with woe forgets the eternal joy; it presses into the darkness of this world, afflicted with sorrows. So it has now happened to this mind, now that it does not know any more of the good pertaining to God, only the sorrow of a strange world.)

The light / dark opposition is already in the Latin, but Alfred chooses the verb *sweorcan* to describe a *mod* that is not just depressed, but in an altered state and indeed in an alien world (“fremdre worulde”) comparable to the chaos preceding Creation in Genesis. In these examples, I wish to argue that we are dealing with something beyond the usual repetition and variation so common in Old English and that the image of darkening is more than just metaphorical. The consistent association of adjectival and verbal forms of *sweart* and *sweorcan* and their association with states of mind (“heort,” “ferhð,” “sefa,” “mod”) signal a special mental condition.

An example from the Junius Psalter strengthens the claim that the mental condition is somehow metaphysical. A translation of verse 13 from Psalm 30 connects the idea of growing dark with death. The Junius wording follows the Roman Psalter: “Excidi tamquam mortuus a corde et factus sum sicut vas perditum” (“I am forgotten as one dead from the heart. I am become as a vessel that is destroyed,” Douay Rheims translation). Junius translates: “Ic geswearc swa swa dead fram heortan 7 geworden ic eom swa swa fæt forloren.”¹² The Old English retains the metaphor of the broken vessel, but the notion of darkening in the first clause is original. The glossator was free to choose any number of verbs to translate *excidere* (“to fall out [of memory],” “to be forgotten”) but here he chose *sweorcan* to express an extreme form of social and psychological isolation.¹³

Likewise, the narrator in the *Wanderer* suffers so acutely that “geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce” (“I cannot

think beyond this world why my mind should not darken," 58–59).¹⁴ Again, we are not just dealing with a case of being in a bad mood. It is a kind of sickness or despair unto death. The speaker contemplates entering a mental space beyond his control, and the idea of an altered consciousness gives special point to the phrase "geond þas woruld." A search of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* finds fifteen instances of the phrase "geond þas woruld": twice in poetry (here in *Wanderer* and once in *Deor*) and thirteen other times in prose, mostly in homilies and letters by Ælfric. In every instance, the phrase seems to mean "throughout this world," and even in *Wanderer* it may just be an idiom along the lines of "for all the world." Nevertheless, there is the possibility that the speaker in the *Wanderer* envisions a realm indeed "beyond this world"—like the "fremde woruld" of Boethius—that represents a distinct metaphysical status. A sea voyage is metaphor enough for a mental journey to such a state.¹⁵ Beyond the metaphor, however, the point is that when we think of the laments of *Deor* in his sorrows or of Boethius in prison, of the cries of David in the Psalter or of the *Wanderer* at sea, we see human beings not just at the limit of what can be borne in this life but in another metaphysical state.

The literal application of the darkening metaphor adds an important dimension to Hrothgar's famous sermon. Beowulf has emerged victorious from both battles with the Grendelkin, he has presented the hilt of the giant sword to Hrothgar, and Hrothgar stands in Heorot contemplating its runes. After complimenting Beowulf, Hrothgar outlines the outrages of Heremod for some fifteen lines, and then he begins the sermon proper. Hrothgar presents the example of a king favored by God who foolishly thinks himself immune from the fates of men:

Wunað he on wiste; no hine wiht dweleð
 adl ne ylðo, ne him inwitsorh
 on sefan sweorced, ne gesacu ohwær
 ecg-hete cowed, ac him eal worold
 wended on willan; he þæt wyrse ne con.¹⁶
 (1735–1739)

(He dwells in plenty, nothing harms him at all, illness
 or old age, nor to him does malicious sorrow darken his
 mind, nor strife anywhere display violence, but for him
 all the world wends to his will; he knows nothing worse.)

The passage continues with the well-known lines about how pride grows, how the soul's shepherd sleeps, and how the slayer shoots arrows so as to

corrupt the ruler and turn him into a hateful, miserly, and miserable king. The speech has allegorical overtones, with the battle between good and evil writ large. In a 1959 *PMLA* article R. E. Kaske outlines how here the major themes of *sapientia* and *fortitudo* are supplanted by *malitia*.¹⁷ Kaske calls this the “psychological part” of the sermon and describes Heremod’s problem as a “descent from *sapientia* into *malitia*.”¹⁸ The speech is one of the rare moments in Old English heroic poetry when we penetrate the surface and see behind what are often static, flat characters. Epic, by convention, is largely exterior and deed-oriented, but here we have an interior and psychological treatment that is more frequently found in romance narratives and with patristic analyzes of the origin and remedies of sin. Kaske notes how Heremod’s behavior follows the Gregorian pattern of beginning with *superbia*, the head of all sins that produces *inanis gloria*, which then “dum oppressam mentem corruperit, mox invidiam gignit,” and so on through a cascade of sins.¹⁹ The state of the *mens*, however, is the crucial starting point. A disordered mind precedes and causes the pernicious outward behaviors in lines 1709b–1722a.

Heremod’s behavior connects with the fates of men outlined by Hrothgar in lines 1735–1739. The fate most to be feared is the darkening of the spirit. In Hrothgar’s enumeration it is the third, after illness and old age, and before violence, but because it has been hitherto unnoticed as an analogous fate, I call it the fourth fate of men. The *Beowulf*-poet foregrounds Heremod as its premier victim. In his first appearance in the poem he is paired with Sigemund, and Heremod is described as being overcome by “sorhwylmas” (“sorrow surges,” 904). In both appearances he functions as a foil to Beowulf himself, as Kaske and many other critics have outlined. Beyond foregrounding Heremod as the paradigmatic bad king and negative example, I wish to suggest the mechanism for his failure. He succumbs to the fourth fate and finally undergoes two exiles, first in his darkened mind and then among the “eotenas” (“the Jutes,” or perhaps “giants,” 902) which Kaske reads as avatars of *malitia*.²⁰ The passage goes on to describe how “snottor ceorl monig” (“many a wise man”) mourns this condition as a “sið swiðferhþes” (“a journey of the strong-minded one,” 908), further emphasizing the mental distance traveled between the king and his people, and between behavior and social norms.²¹ The imagery of exile repeats in the second appearance of Heremod, when “he ana hwearf, / mære þeoden, mon-dreamum from” (“he turned alone, the famous prince, from the joys of men,” 1714–1715). The word “ferhþ” appears again, as the narrator tells us that “him on ferhþe greow / breostheord blodreow” (“in his spirit

grew a blood-wild breast hoard," 1718–1719). We have here an interior *immram*, a voyage to another realm, and it is the psychological counterpart to the kind of physical *immram* undertaken by the Wanderer. Gwara reads Heremod as a "king-turned-*wrecca*" who, because of his *oferhygd*, is a negative example for Beowulf and an analogue to Ermanaric in *Deor*.²² In other interpretations, Heremod has been roundly faulted: his "prowess and courage somehow died" (Kaske); "drunk or sober he murdered his men for their gold" (Vickrey); he "slew his companions in his drink . . . and failed to reward his followers" (Lawrence); he is guilty of "arrogance (*oferhygde*, leading to tyranny) and avarice" (Bonjour); he is the "protector turned destroyer and the provider turned niggard" (Goldsmith); he "has allowed the emotive faculty of thought to overrule his judgement" (Harbus).²³ Blake concludes that "The Heremod story is in effect very simple. Heremod was exalted by God over other men. Because of this he succumbed to pride. . . . Because of his sin he was sent to hell, where he suffered torment ever afterwards."²⁴ John M. Hill simply says that "Heremod's fate is inexplicable."²⁵

All of these criticisms are no doubt deserved, but Heremod is more than just a weak or morally compromised king who made bad choices. I would claim that he had no choice at all. His mental exile—the "sorhwylmas" that had disabled him for a long time ("hine sorhwylmas lemede to lange," 904–905)—precedes and causes whatever physical exile is imposed.²⁶ He is at the extreme of human conduct and thus an example of what moderns would categorize as some kind of psychosis. Here I agree with Gwara who states that "The *wrecca* exemplar that Heremod represents therefore describes a psychopathy related to the unrestrained ambition that causes a warrior's banishment."²⁷

Names themselves appear to embed clues to psychology and temperament, and there is the much-discussed question of whether the names of characters in *Beowulf* resonate allegorically.²⁸ There is, for example, the inscrutable Queen Hygd ("mind") and her husband Hygelac ("play of mind"?). His raid upon the Frisians (ca. 520) is mentioned more than once in the poem with implicit criticism for its rashness ("for wlenco" in line 1206, and cf. 2354–2372, 2501–2508, 2910–2921) and thus it appears to be onomastically consistent that the name of the most unsuccessful king—Heremod—contains an element connected to mind. The first element, *here* ("army" or "war band") more often refers to marauding Vikings (*fyrd* is the more common term for English armies), and thus Heremod parses as "war mood."²⁹ These word plays can exist without requiring

an elaborate allegorical superstructure any more than a historical correspondence (as for example Gregory of Tours records for Hygelac's raid) would require that critics read the poem historically, or that mythological allusions would require reading the poem as myth. The *Beowulf*-poet was capable of mixing elements in large and small quantities for dramatic purpose. At the risk of over-thinking the question, the names are not allegorical, but descriptive. The poet chose names that described, and did not determine, behavior.

The speaker in the *Wanderer* fears the darkening mind but he is still sufficiently in command of his faculties to recognize what is happening. Note that, for the Wanderer, "gesweorce" (59) is in the subjunctive and thus signifies a potential, not a reality. The exile and social exclusion come first, and the darkness threatens. Heremod, on the contrary, darkens first; the psychosis causes the exile and social exclusion. In the context of the fates of men as presented by Hrothgar in lines 1735–1738 of *Beowulf*, Heremod is insane to the degree that he is beyond all social and human bounds. Mental illness strikes fearsomely, as much in Anglo-Saxon England as now. Finding fault with Heremod, or defining the nature and degree of his sins, largely misses the point. I do not intend to provide an apology for Heremod, merely an explanation for his behavior in terms of categories that Old English texts provide. He is a victim of the fourth fate of men.

NOTES

¹ All quotations from Old English poetry are taken from *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (hereafter *ASPR*), ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–1942), vol. 3, p. 135. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

² The classic treatment is by M. R. Godden, "Anglo-Saxons on the Mind," in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 271–298; repr. in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 284–314. The major study by Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) is very helpful on what she calls the "physiology of emotion" (p. 9), but she does not mention Heremod.

³ Arthur S. Napier, ed., *Old English Glosses*, *Anecdota Oxoniensia* iv, part xi. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1900), p. 146.

⁴ *ASPR*, vol. 4, p. 97.

⁵ *ASPR*, vol. 1, p. 6.

⁶ John. C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, vol. 1, EETS 259, 260 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–1968), p. 430.

⁷ Joyce Bazire and James E. Cross, eds., *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, Toronto Old English Series 7 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 49. Similar language appears in a sermon from Hatton 116, on the third day before Doomsday: Max Förster, ed., “Der Vercelli-Codex CXVII nebst Abdruck einiger altenglischer Homilien der Handschrift,” in *Festschrift für Lorenz Morsbach*, ed. F. Holthausen and H. Spies, *Studien zur englischen Philologie* 50 (Halle, 1913), p. 132.

⁸ Text and translation from Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (London: Ælfric Society, 1844–1846), vol. 1, p. 54.

⁹ *ASPR*, vol. 4, p. 106

¹⁰ *ASPR*, vol. 3, p. 179.

¹¹ Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden, eds., *The Old English Boethius*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 19 (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 14.

¹² Eduard Brenner, ed., *Der altenglische Junius-Psalter: Die interlinear-Glosse der Handschrift Junius 27 der Bodleiana zu Oxford*, *Anglistische Forschungen* 23 (Heidelberg, 1908), p. 35.

¹³ The Gallican and Hebrew Psalters read “Oblivioni” for “Excidi.”

¹⁴ Godden notes how *modsefa* in this passage “seems to be an inner self or consciousness which the conscious self cannot penetrate” (“Anglo-Saxons,” p. 292). See also Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, who reads *mod* in this and other contexts as “the mind traveling out of the breast in the act of remembering” (p. 39).

¹⁵ Antonina Harbus examines the tropes of sea voyages and mental wandering in *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 38–49.

¹⁶ *ASPR*, vol. 4, p. 53. The second “i” in *inwitsorh* is presumably long, thus making the first part of the compound cognate with *wite* (punishment) and not *wita* (wise man). The *OED* dates the earliest manuscript attestation of *inwit* in the sense of conscience or inward understanding to ca. 1230, but in the context of the noun *sefa* the association with psychological distress—what will later be called the “prick of conscience”—is plausible. See Ruth Wehlau’s discussion of these lines in her contribution to this volume.

¹⁷ R. E. Kaske, “The Sigemund-Heremod and Hama-Hygelac Passages in *Beowulf*,” *PMLA* 74 (1959), pp. 489–493. This article builds on Kaske’s “*Sapientia et Fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme in *Beowulf*,” *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958), pp. 423–456.

¹⁸ Kaske, “Sigemund-Heremod,” p. 492. Kaske makes the important observation that “The two pictures of Heremod given by Hroðgar, then, are not

chronologically sequential ... the first (1709–22) emphasizing the later, outward aspects of Heremod's personal degeneration, the second (1722–1752) its earlier, inward aspects" (p. 493). This kind of asynchrony is consistent with the *Beowulf* poet's frequent use of analepsis and prolepsis.

¹⁹ Kaske, "Sigemund-Heremod," p. 492, note 9, citing Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*, PL 76.621.

²⁰ Kaske, "*Sapientia et Fortitudo*," pp. 432–435. Andy Orchard reviews other interpretations of Heremod in *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 110–114. See especially N. F. Blake, "The Heremod Digressions in *Beowulf*," *JEGP* 61 (1962), pp. 278–287.

²¹ Scott Gwara reads *sið* as a physical journey and exile, which may indeed have been the case, but I wish to emphasize that the primary connotation is psychological. *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 71. The narrator of the *Seafarer* speaks of his "siðas" in line 2, and also of how the "sefa" is "on siðe" (line 51; *ASPR*, vol. 3, pp. 143–144). Again, the journey is physical and mental.

²² Gwara, *Heroic Identity*, p. 45, and see pp. 59 and 69.

²³ Kaske, "Sigemund-Heremod," p. 490; John Vickrey, "Egesan Ne Gymeð and the Crime of Heremod," *Modern Philology* 71 (1974), pp. 295–300 at p. 298; William Witherle Lawrence *Beowulf and Epic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 84; Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), p. 50; Margaret Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf* (London: Athlone, 1970), p. 189; Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 169.

²⁴ Blake, "Heremod Digressions," p. 287.

²⁵ John M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 130.

²⁶ Blake reads "to lange" as "too long *or* for a very long time" ("Heremod Digressions," p. 281, emphasis in original) but he understands the time to refer to his everlasting torment in hell due to his pride. I am agnostic concerning where Heremod is now, but I do argue that he was in an altered mental state for a prolonged period in this life.

²⁷ Gwara, *Heroic Identity*, p. 76.

²⁸ See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 172–173, and Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, who says that "Heremod acts according to the connotations of his name, 'military mind'" (p. 179). I disagree with Harbus's use of the active voice here. Heremod behaves due to prior mental constraints; rather than acting, he is acted upon by his mental illness.

²⁹ Richard Abels, "Here," in the *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, p. 234). See also Gwara, *Heroic Identity*, p. 66, and Constance B. Hieatt who suggests a parallel

between Modþryð (“mood power”) and Heremod (“army mood”) in “Modþryð and Heremod: Intertwined Threads in the *Beowulf*-poet’s Web of Words,” *JEGP* 83 (1984), pp. 173–182 (p. 179).

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Chapter 8

Eating People and Feeling Sorry: Cannibalism, Contrition, and the Didactic Donestre in the Old English *Wonders of the East* and Latin *Mirabilia*

Matthew Roby

THE OLD ENGLISH *WONDERS of the East*, referred to as *De rebus in oriente mirabilibus* or just *Mirabilia* in its Latin versions, is an inventory of outlandish animals, vegetables, and minerals that will allegedly affront unwary travellers in the furthest corners of the world. At the heart of this text, we find the enigmatic Donestre, a race of monsters exceptional in emotional complexity not merely in *Wonders* and *Mirabilia*, but arguably in medieval monster literature more broadly. The Donestre are trapped in an endless cycle of deceit, depravity, and despair. They attack and eat their human guests, whom they have beguiled with linguistic and prophetic flourish, only to weep over their victims' disembodied heads. Though this baffling display could elicit countless responses from both past and present audiences, with no one reading requiring exclusive legitimacy, this chapter outlines one potential interpretation for the Donestre's mysterious behavior. Moreover, though I recognize that *Wonders* and *Mirabilia* belong to continental traditions stretching back to antiquity, this interpretation focuses on their reproduction and consumption in late Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest England. The texts are here preserved in three extant manuscripts, and it is also here that we find the first extant accounts of the creatures' weeping. By analyzing the Donestre in these contexts, taking into consideration cues both from within these three codices and from other contemporaneous traditions, I investigate these monsters as symbols of contrition and, more specifically, as assertions of the role of sacramental penance to assuage chronic sin and sadness.

Wonders and *Mirabilia* belong to a complex continental tradition of marvels texts. Some individual phenomena associated with this tradition, such as Cyclopes and Pygmies, derive from at least as early as Greek antiquity, featuring in the works of Homer, Herodotus, Ctesias, and Megasthenes.¹ These marvels seem to have entered the Latin tradition through Pliny, who perhaps most profoundly influenced the monster traditions of the Middle Ages, especially via his third-century abbreviator, Solinus.² In particular, the idea of the so-called “monstrous races” gained considerable traction in medieval Europe. These were purported anthropomorphic beings with unusual characteristics, such as exceptional size, an abnormal number or location of body parts, or non-human appendages. Both Augustine and Isidore devoted considerable attention to these races, which is especially significant here, as their works were some of the most widely circulated in Anglo-Saxon England.³ Throughout this convoluted transmission history, various marvels were added to and subtracted from the inventory, though certain races enjoyed sustained interest from classical antiquity, throughout the Middle Ages, and beyond. These usual suspects included big-eared Panotii, headless Blemmyae, and dog-headed Cynocephali. The Donestre were not, however, one of these more prevalent races. Rather, they seem to have belonged exclusively to one textual tradition, of whose bewildering stemmatic network the *Wonders/Mirabilia* texts constitute only a single branch.

This tradition has numerous forms, including the catalogue found in *Wonders/Mirabilia*. However, it likely originated as an epistolary work in the voice of a fictive traveller, whose name is a variation of Pharasmenes. This pattern might have been originally composed in Greek as early as the second century.⁴ However, as we have no extant classical attestations of the *Pharasmenes* material, it is possible that its composition may not long predate its first attestations in continental Latin manuscripts from the eighth and ninth centuries.⁵ The Donestre appear in only one branch of the *Pharasmenes* tradition, specifically that to which the lost *Epistola Premonis* text belongs; hence, this branch is referred to as the P-group. In fact, the Donestre entry is one of the features that distinguishes this group from the rest of the tradition. Other iterations of the *Pharasmenes* material, such as the ninth-century *Fermes* text, do not refer to this marvel at all.⁶ However, in some form or another, the Donestre are found in the *Epistola Premonis*, all versions of the *Liber Monstrorum*, the English attestations of *Wonders/Mirabilia*, and a thirteenth-century epistolary version in Old French.⁷ The Donestre are only named as such in the three English

Wonders/Mirabilia texts, and only weep in these three and the Old French version. Hence, as deduced by Knock, at some point prior to the eighth- or ninth-century production of the *Epistola Premonis*, a loquacious and anthropophagous monster was accreted into the P-group. At some later point, this group diverged into two strands: one containing the *Liber Monstrorum* and *Epistola Premonis*, and another containing the English *Wonders/Mirabilia* and the Old French version, with only that latter strand including the monster's lachrimosity.⁸

Based on these continental and classical origins, it may seem spurious to analyze these texts with specific reference to medieval England. In response to such concerns, one point to consider is that the first extant version of the Donestre entry to include all three of its peculiar behaviors—encompassing tongues, teeth, *and* tears—is found in the Anglo-Saxon attestations. As such, it is possible that this manifestation of the Donestre was first assembled in Anglo-Saxon England, and should therefore be discussed in reference to that context. This notion is problematized in a number of respects, however. First, Knock and McGurk have proposed that *Mirabilia* texts featuring the Donestre precisely as they appear in our English versions (weeping and all) were conveyed to England in Carolingian manuscripts, now no longer extant.⁹ Second, though the amalgamation of the dramatic traits embodied by the Donestre occurs uniquely in this marvel, the primary attributes themselves have longstanding, non-insular origins. They are found in numerous bodies of animal lore, including the *Physiologus* and *Bestiary* traditions, from which *Wonders/Mirabilia* scribes likely derived their monster. Specifically, mimicking human speech belongs to the hyena or corocotta, and postprandial weeping belongs to the crocodile.¹⁰ Moreover, textual evidence suggests that the general concerns these attributes might represent, such as insincere remorse in the weeping crocodile, might have been recognized as early as the fourth century.¹¹ As such, positing their specific relevance to England in the tenth to twelfth centuries may seem questionable.

However, somewhat overshadowing such concerns is the notion that translated or imported works are significant to both their original *and* secondary contexts. Not only might a trope's so-called "original" interpretive potential travel with it into new cultural and linguistic environments, but also its significance might shift based on the presence of different cultural concerns.¹² Additionally, though we might hypothesize the presence of earlier continental depictions of the weeping Donestre, it seems far less defensible to base our interpretation of their relevance solely on such

speculated contexts *without* manuscript evidence, rather than grounding our readings in Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest England, from which three attestations survive. Based on the manuscript record alone, it is certain that accounts of the weeping Donestre were recorded and consumed here; indeed, the number of extant attestations suggests a healthy circulation of this text in England. Whether or not these accounts of the Donestre prove to be derivative, their significance while read in England still certainly pertains to the Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest insular context, where their interpretations could have been influenced by—or have influenced—those particular cultural milieus. As such, though future studies should investigate other iterations of *Pharasmenes* material in relation to their own contexts, I intend here to explore only the three attestations produced in England between the tenth and twelfth centuries.¹³

As mentioned above, the *Wonders/Mirabilia* text appears in three extant English manuscripts. The earliest and most famous attestation is found in the Nowell Codex, otherwise known as the *Beowulf* Manuscript (s.x^{ex}/xiⁱⁿ), which is now bound in London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A.xv.¹⁴ The Nowell Codex contains five texts, all in Old English and all betraying an interest in monstrosity: *The Passion of St. Christopher*, *Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Beowulf*, and *Judith*.¹⁵ The *Wonders* text appears here in Old English only and features thirty-two marvels. Its illustrations, which have been considered comparatively shabby, also seem to belong to a different pictorial tradition from the other two.¹⁶ Indeed, regarding overall production quality, it has been noted that the scribe seems to have treated *Wonders* with especial carelessness.¹⁷ However, this purported negligence should not imply a lack of interest by medieval readers. Several words in the Vitellius *Wonders* have interlinear Middle English glosses, suggesting that it continued to enjoy attention long after the Norman Conquest.¹⁸

The second English attestation is found in London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B.v (s.xi^{2/4}) (Fig. 8.1).¹⁹ Its production and use have been linked to both Winchester and Christ Church Canterbury, with Ford recently favoring the latter suggestion.²⁰ Unlike Vitellius's fantastical and religious persuasions, this miscellany is usually discussed as having a "scientific or even taxonomic interest."²¹ Its contents include the *Aratea*, computational tracts, a zonal map and *mappa mundi*, as well as regnal and episcopal genealogies.²² As for the marvels text itself, this manuscript contains a total of thirty-seven entries, including five not found in Vitellius, with each marvel presented in both Latin and Old English. This manuscript also

contains what are generally considered to be the finest illustrations of the three English witnesses.²³

The final extant English attestation is in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614 (s.xii^{med}).²⁴ This manuscript's contents are entirely in Latin, and share the "scientific" focus of the Tiberius manuscript.²⁵ The Bodley marvels text, found here as the Latin *Mirabilia* only, also seems to descend directly from the Tiberius version. Indeed, Ford has recently speculated that the latter was the exemplar for this manuscript, and was consulted by the Bodley scribe at Battle Abbey, while Tiberius was there in the mid-twelfth century.²⁶ In addition to some general correcting and revising of his source text, the Bodley scribe includes twelve additional marvels. His alterations are largely based on material from both Ambrose's *Hexameron* and Isidore's *Etymologiae*.²⁷ The Bodley *Mirabilia* also features illustrations, though ostensibly less impressive, which follow the same pictorial tradition as Tiberius.²⁸

The Donestre appear roughly in the middle of the *Wonders/Mirabilia* catalogue, flanked by a cacophony of colorful and combustible beasts. However, it is no exaggeration to claim that the Donestre stand out even from this eclectic crowd. Though they remain allegedly "little known," few scholars who have studied *Wonders/Mirabilia* have failed to note their remarkable nature.²⁹ Against a backdrop of monsters that Friedman calls "flat" and devoid of "emotional range," the Donestre have been variously identified as the "most active," "most sinister," "most mysterious and intriguing," "most dramatically ... monstrous," "most disquieting," "most haunting," and "most shocking" marvels in the whole *Wonders/Mirabilia* tradition.³⁰ This cascade of superlatives indicates that, at least for modern scholars, but perhaps also for medieval readers, the Donestre break a mold established throughout the remainder of the text. But how do they differ so significantly from the other marvels? According to Orchard, the marvels that interact with humans all display basic fight or flight reactions, a principle that is largely borne out in the text.³¹ A cursory tally of the Vitellius *Wonders* reveals that, of eleven marvels whose interactions with humans are described, five will immediately attack anyone whom they perceive, while three will immediately run away. Of the remaining three, two are described only insofar as Alexander interacted with them, killing one group and sparing another, which evinces a similarly binary capacity for narrative complexity to that expressed in the other marvels. The third exception, however, is the Donestre entry. Far from merely being killed or spared by, or merely killing or fleeing from,

Figure 8.1. London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B.V., fol. 83v.
(Photo © The British Library Board.)]

the people they meet, these monsters engage in a uniquely complex interaction with their acquaintances-cum-aperitifs.

The greater intrigue elicited by the *Donestre*'s description is, at its most basic, one of narrative complexity. They perform a more varied sequence of tasks than their fellows:

Donne is sum ealand on ðære Raedan Sæ, þær is moncynn þæt is mid
us *Donestre* genemned, þa syndon geweaxene swa frihteras fram
ðan heafde oð ðone nafelan, 7 se oðer dæl byð mannes lice gelic.

7 hi cunnon eall mennisc gereord. Þonne hi fremdes kynnes mann geseoð, ðonne næmnað hi hine 7 his magas cuðra manna naman, 7 mid leaslicum wordum hine beswicað, 7 him onfoð, 7 þænne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde 7 þonne sittað 7 wepað ofer ðam heafde.

Itaque insula est in Rubro Mari in qua hominum genus est quod apud nos appellatur Donestre, quasi diuini a capite usque ad umbilicum, quasi homines reliquo corpore similitudine humana, nationum omnium linguis loquentes; cum alieni generis hominem uiderint, ipsius lingua appellabunt eum et parentum eius et cognatorum nomina, blandientes sermone ut decipiant eos et perdant; cumque comprehenderint eos, perdunt eos et comedunt, et postea comprehendunt caput ipsius hominis quem comederunt et super ipsum plorant.

(Then there is a certain island in the Red Sea, where there is a race of humans that among us is named the Donestre. They are grown like soothsayers from the head to the navel, and the rest is like a human's body. And they know all human languages. When they see someone from a foreign nation, then they name him and his relatives with the names of those he knows, and with false words they deceive him, and seize him, and after that they devour him, all except his head, and then sit and weep over the head.)³²

Unlike the other marvels' entries, which describe uncomplicated and unchanging behaviors, this passage presents the Donestre carrying out a process of three distinct steps: beguiling, attacking, and crying. This procedure encompasses multiple reversals. First, there is a reversal of exterior appearance, from hiding malicious motivation to blatantly expressing it. This is paralleled by the implication of a later reversal of interior state, from aggressive intent to some form of sadness. In addition, this theme of antithesis is given a physical manifestation in the contradictory co-opting the Donestre's facial features, which are employed to both ostensibly positive and emphatically negative purposes. The mouth and tongue with which the Donestre "næmnað" the traveller are also those with which they "fretað" him; the eyes with which they "geseoð" him are the very same ones that later "wepað" over his head. It is further curious that the vestige of this crime—"ðam heafde"—is also the one that, for the Donestre, houses these incongruously employed and guilty body parts. This narrative complexity, involving both interior and exterior reversals, might partially explain the Donestre's status as the "most active" of the marvels.

However, there seems to be more at play in the Donestre's unique allure, particularly as the work's "most mysterious and intriguing" marvel. The root of this enigmatic quality seems to be the silence that pervades the excerpt. The content of the passages cited above, in tandem with the illustration in each witness, is the *only* information readers receive about the Donestre. As such, the creatures' motivations are left almost entirely to speculation. This vastly contributes to their interpretive potential, both for modern scholars and, presumably, for medieval readers. Of course, this is true for all the catalogue's entries: laconism and a lack of narratorial mediation are widely noted features of the work.³³ However, the other marvels' monotonous and reactionary behaviors suggest a simplicity of interior state and motivation that demands little speculation from the reader. The Donestre, on the other hand, are endowed with an implicit psychological and emotional complexity, which, when paired with this narratorial silence, more powerfully compels readers to consider their interiority.

The unique level of intrigue created by this explicative vacuum has led to numerous prior interpretations of the Donestre. Examining their nakedness in the pictorial tradition, some have interpreted them with regard to sexuality or gender.³⁴ Others have considered the Donestre as cultural or ethnic Others.³⁵ During the question period following my paper on this subject in Toronto, yet more scholars were fascinated by the potential of the Donestre as premodern depictions of self-destructive habit or addiction. Though there is much to recommend these interpretations, I seek here to examine the Donestre specifically based on their emotional behavior, since I believe the text spurs us to examine their interiority more than any other of their attributes. Indeed, Tom Tyler recently identified this as the entry's "most perplexing" quandary: "Why do the Donestre weep?"³⁶ According to Fabiszak, Anglo-Saxon tears are often associated with grief following the loss of something or someone significant, which is an avenue worth future exploration for this monster.³⁷ Conversely, though he previously dismissed the notion as lacking primary evidence, Tyler and others have proposed that the Donestre's tears might express remorse; however, none has devoted substantial discussion to the subject.³⁸ After admitting the potential viability of any of these suggested interpretations, if we proceed from the assumption that these tears might indeed have elicited considerations of remorse within medieval readers, what might the Donestre's lachrymose compunction signify?

How we derive the significance of monsters has been widely debated. A central tenet of the monster theory of Cohen and others is

that the monster represents all that a society rejects. In creating such a monster, communities circumscribe the parameters of their *episteme* via negation, and simultaneously aggrandize themselves by exiling the monster beyond these parameters.³⁹ Numerous scholars have applied such reasoning to *Wonders/Mirabilia*, suggesting that its book-bound marvels exist at a comfortable distance, and thereby facilitate the consolidation of the reader's non-monstrous identity.⁴⁰ However, in the specific case of the Donestre, Kim and Mittman have questioned this notion, suggesting that both the text's use of the phrase "mid us" and the illustration's disregard for its border, visible in both Vitellius and Tiberius, thwart this reassuring detachment.⁴¹ However, it is more than merely these features that demand reevaluation of monster theory as it relates to self-aggrandizing negation. Recent uses of monster theory have emphasized the unique role of anthropomorphic Others to expose the unsettling proximity of a monster's behaviors and values to its originating human society. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has asserted, these monsters may provoke *discomfort* in readers, since they explore undesirable aspects deriving from inside their cultural context. They do not pacify by establishing what is not; they unsettle by probing what ought not to be, but that uncomfortably and defiantly is.⁴² They thereby conjure the highest peak of either individual or communal feelings of Kristevan abjection: they expose unwanted attributes emanating from within.⁴³

The Donestre are humanized in a number of ways. First, though they possess physically hybridized bodies, attested consistently in the text and images in all three manuscript witnesses, they are described as a "moncynn" or "hominum genus," which unambiguously presents them as human.⁴⁴ Second, they are the only human-monster hybrid in the text to communicate using speech. This quality is, of course, deeply humanizing; in the Anglo-Saxon context specifically, "reordberend" (bearers of language) is a commonplace idiom for humans, found in both *Daniel* and *Dream of the Rood*.⁴⁵ Finally, relating specifically to the illustrations in the Vitellius and Tiberius witnesses, this monster unashamedly bares its genitals.⁴⁶ According to Friedman, nakedness is a common feature in medieval monster depictions, since it accentuates the physical differences between the human and monstrous body, thereby heightening the comforting alterity discussed above.⁴⁷ However, as Saunders asserts, the Donestre's nakedness does the exact opposite, affirming their humanity via the unambiguously human shape of their male genitalia.⁴⁸ Indeed, with particular reference to the Tiberius illustration, Cohen posits that

the Donestre possess a hypermasculine physique in comparison to their “stooped, ill-proportioned” human guests, presumably referring to the creature’s impressive musculature and imposing penis.⁴⁹ If the size and shape of this member were not enough to draw attention to the monster’s defiant manhood, the Tiberius manuscript emphasizes the fact further, featuring bright red coloring on the monster’s genitals. Physically, this creature is more impressively anthropomorphized than his victim. According to the model outlined by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir and others, all these humanizing traits preclude a comforting distance between the Donestre and humanity. They compel us to analyze how medieval English readers might have considered the monsters’ behaviors of crime and sorrow as emanating from within their own cultural context; they do not reveal the other, but the self.

One such response may be the recognition that remorse can be feigned or hypocritical. This reading stems from the notion that the Donestre’s actions are endlessly repeated, an impression noted briefly by Campbell.⁵⁰ As is the case throughout most of the *Wonders/Mirabilia* entries, the Donestre’s actions are described in the simple present tense, creating the impression not only that the monsters’ actions are temporally concurrent with the reader, but also that they occur continually. This is not what one of the Donestre *did when* it saw a human; this is what it *does whenever* it sees one. This effect of implied recurrence is heightened by the cascading, frequentative effect created towards the end of the passage: “7 þanne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde 7 þonne sittað 7 wepað ofer ðam heafde.” This combination of polysyndeton and the rapid delivery of simple-present verb phrases is suggestive of expeditious automatism, intimating a habitual pattern of behavior, due for repetition no sooner than the Donestre have wiped away their tears. The same combination of stylistic and grammatical techniques is also present in the Latin versions. The consequence of these devices is the implication that the Donestre will, in a further contradictory reversal, repeat their criminal acts despite having wept for their offences. Relating to their remorse, this may imply that the monsters’ tears do not signify deep or honest contrition; their regret is theatrical or mocking, not authentic enough to instigate behavioral change.

Though I do not seek to indicate direct influence of these expressions on the users of our manuscripts, this interpretation is lent plausibility by numerous extant moralizations of the weeping crocodile in other contexts. Perhaps the first attestation of crocodile tears, ascribed

to Plutarch, ostensibly interpreted the creature's tears as betraying insincere grief.⁵¹ Photius, ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople, also makes reference to this interpretation, as do some medieval *Physiologus*/*Bestiary* manuscripts, such as one produced in late tenth-century Italy.⁵² Though proximally, temporally, and/or culturally discrete from the English manuscript witnesses of *Wonders/Mirabilia*, these interpretations of insincerity in an animal weeping after having eaten its prey suggest, at the very least, the potential for the Donestre to be interpreted along similar lines. Moreover, crocodile tears *were* explicitly linked to insincerity in some medieval English moralizations, though extant references slightly postdate the period of our manuscripts' production. The earliest of which I am aware is from Alexander Neckam's late twelfth-century *De naturis rerum*.⁵³ However, in reference to Neckam's text, it is worth noting that his moralization might have been drawn from insular manuscripts, though no longer extant, that were contemporaneous with our *Wonders/Mirabilia* texts. Indeed, the indisputable presence of the *trope* of the weeping crocodile, if not an explicit moralization, is attested in earlier sources circulating in England, as it appears in Philippe de Thaon's early twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Bestiary*.⁵⁴ Even more compelling for our purposes is the Donestre entry itself, which represents the probable accretion of this crocodilian trope from traditions such as these prior to the eleventh century.⁵⁵ Indeed, this accretion intimates the knowledge of this trope specifically by scribes in the transmission chain of P-group *Pharasmenes* texts. Though weeping might not have been the most common trope associated with the crocodile in Western European animal catalogues of this period, these facts suggest that the motif was current throughout the period of our texts' production.⁵⁶ As such, though I am not aware of any extant insular example of the *moralized* weeping crocodile that predates Alexander Neckam's *Bestiary*, it is tempting to suggest that other texts of the period might also have included a similar exegesis when describing crocodile tears. For the scribes responsible for the accretion of this crocodile trope into the Donestre, this intimates the possibility of their consideration of such an interpretation of the bestial former when contemplating the monstrous latter.

Furthermore, even if no English or even northwestern European manuscripts included this explicit moralization of the crocodile until the late twelfth century, it is important to bear in mind two notions. First—much as I arguing for the Donestre below—considering the pervasiveness of exegesis as an interpretive technique, scholars of the *Physiologus*

and *Bestiary* traditions have long suggested that medieval crocodile tears were likely interpreted as concerning remorse and hypocrisy, even without explicit moralization.⁵⁷ If this were a pervasive interpretation for crocodiles, it is possible that the same is true for the Donestre. Second, Alexander Neckam's text was allegedly "very well known at the end of the twelfth century" in England.⁵⁸ If this is the case, his moralization of the crocodile might have influenced readings of the Donestre after this period. The Bodley *Mirabilia* had only been compiled a few decades earlier and, as mentioned above, the Vitellius *Wonders* features Middle English glosses, suggesting that it too was still in use after this time. As such, since the two accounts share the basic feature of killing, eating, and weeping, it seems plausible that the Donestre's tears might have been interpreted in this same light as the crocodile's: as representations of inauthentic or insincere regret.

However, another interpretation of the Donestre's weeping seems plausible: the notion of authentic yet fleeting remorse and, in the same vein, the supposition that tendencies toward vice may be inevitable, despite lingering guilt in the individual. The latter clearly intersects with the interpretation of the Donestre as premodern representations of addiction or habit, as proposed by my colleagues in Toronto. These interpretations also rely, as above, on the grammatical and stylistic implication that the Donestre's actions occur on a repetitive loop. However, this more sympathetic reading also draws on the illustrations in some of the English manuscript attestations. Both the Tiberius and Bodley manuscripts feature evocative visual depictions of the Donestre's faces, displaying certainly woeful or arguably empathetic expressions as they stare into their victims' eyes.⁵⁹ The interpretation of the Donestre's authentic sympathy for their victims is made more compelling by the creatures' grasping of their own heads, which presents the two appendages as parallel in both the reader's mind *and* the imagined mind of the monster. According to numerous Anglo-Saxonists who have worked on affect, emotional displays portrayed visually via facial expressions have a powerful effect on the reader. Harbus suggests that such pictorial representations are more likely to elicit empathetic responses—what Coplan has called "emotional contagion"—than textual ones, which are more likely to stimulate cognitive reactions.⁶⁰ Likewise, Fabiszak suggests that artistic or literary expressions of emotion such as this may "secure [the reader's] co-operation."⁶¹ If these empathetic processes are at work in the medieval English reception of the Donestre, especially for those consulting the Tiberius manuscript,

it seems more likely that readers would have responded to the Donestre's remorseful tears in a sympathetic light, perhaps interpreting them as indicators of authentic sorrow, pity, and guilt. As such, considering their immediate re-offence, the Donestre might have served to represent the transience of human contrition. This would be a troubling notion for the medieval English reader, reflecting a recognition that deeply felt guilt does not always ensure behavioral amendment, since it is soon forgotten. Moreover, readers who were compelled to experience this empathy might also have interpreted the Donestre's tearful killing sprees as poignant signifiers of the fragility of the human will to refrain from transgression even in the face of permanent guilt. In such a case, these tears may represent not only somber regret, but also self-loathing, intimating the monster's sorrowful and persistent awareness of the ineffectuality of its remorse to inhibit its murderous urges. Through the Donestre, therefore, the reader may be prompted to consider the potential inevitability of human deviance, as well as to lament the impotence of authentic and even abiding guilt to prevent such habitual (or even addictive) vice.

These two speculative interpretations follow a recent impulse within literary studies to examine emotive expressions within our texts. However, though some scholars have extended this approach to speculate on the lived experience of emotion by historical individuals, I do not presume to use the Donestre to explore how individuals in medieval England actually experienced regret or remorse.⁶² Rather, I propose that these creatures might serve as examples of how Anglo-Saxons conceptualized and depicted such emotions, with particular reference to which external behaviors might signify certain internal states, as well as what is portrayed as triggering, exacerbating, or relieving such behaviors. In examining such depictions of interior states, it is important to question how such representations intersect with, and possibly draw significance from, other contemporaneous discourses that share similar characteristics. One such concept with which readers of *Wonders/Mirabilia* might have been familiar is that of sacramental penance. Indeed, in the religio-cultural context of our three manuscripts, this mechanism was intrinsically linked to actions and emotive displays of which the Donestre is conspicuously reminiscent: offence, remorse, re-offence, and—most significantly—tears.

Penance was a central component of religious life and pastoral care in late Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest England.⁶³ Though it is difficult to determine how much it was practiced among the laity, it was certainly of sustained high priority among clerical writers during this period.⁶⁴

Indeed, the late tenth century is considered a quantitative apex for English writings on penance.⁶⁵ Penitential issues dominate the writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan, both of whose work is approximately contemporaneous with the production of the Nowell Codex.⁶⁶ It is also the primary subject of the mid-twelfth-century *Liber pastoralis sive poenitentialis* by Bartholomew of Exeter, concurrent with the copying of *Mirabilia* from Tiberius to Bodley.⁶⁷ Moreover, writers throughout the period, including Ælfric and Bartholomew, express particular concern for the interior state of the penitent, and for the practice of gauging this state during confession.⁶⁸ Significantly, the sign most persistently employed to connote the coveted interior state of contrition is that of sorrow and, more specifically, of weeping.⁶⁹ Indeed, in the Anglo-Saxon context, the connection between penance and inward sorrow is so potent as to influence the sacramental vocabulary. For example, the term *breowsung* (penance, repentance, contrition), containing within it the adjective *breow* (sorrow, grief, sadness), is pervasive in discussions of the sacrament from as early as the ninth century to the composition and reproduction of the vernacular penitentials throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁷⁰ These late Anglo-Saxon handbooks also attest the expectation of tears in the practical context of penance, including instructions to make “wependre stefne” (weeping-voiced) confession, or to prostrate one’s self “lacrimas fundens” (pouring forth tears) before the priest.⁷¹ It is worth noting that these Anglo-Saxon penitentials attest conceptions of penance relevant throughout our period of interest, as they continue to be used more than a century after the Norman Conquest, with some even featuring annotations from the thirteenth century.⁷²

Hence, the concept of contrition was not only central to this discourse, but was also tightly bound with both metaphorical descriptions and practical expectations of tears. As such, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that individuals aware of penitential ideologies, if interpreting the Donestre, might have considered the monster in light of this sacrament. Indeed, though Frantzen suggests that defining penitential tropes is a fraught endeavor, he does assert that works that “describe or directly parallel the essential elements of the church’s penitential system” should be considered as conceptually connected to the sacrament. However, Frantzen is keen to point out that simply dealing with the subject of regret is insufficient: specifically, he criticizes the repeated identifications of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as penitential poems. Though they engage with sensations of grief in response to past events, “neither poem expressed sorrow for sin”;

therefore, neither “should have been called penitential.”⁷³ Here, Frantzen implies that texts describing grief for former misdeeds should be viewed as penitential. As we would expect in the context of penance, the Donestre’s tears in *Wonders/Mirabilia* are both textually and visually linked with their crimes, both in the phrase “wepað ofer ðam heafde” and in the connection between the monster’s sadness and the victim’s head forged by the Donestre’s pitiful gaze in the Tiberius and Bodley illuminations. However, before employing Frantzen’s reasoning as a blank check to propose the Donestre’s significance in this light, it is important to establish further evidence for such Christian exegesis in a text that has been characterized as part of a “secular collection of wonder tales.”⁷⁴

First, the religious context for each manuscript has already been widely asserted. Tiberius and Bodley are the products of clerical contexts, Christ Church Canterbury and Battle Abbey respectively, with Tiberius apparently commissioned for use at Winchester Cathedral.⁷⁵ Likewise, though the Nowell Codex’s origins are less well established, its untidy production leads Sisam to conclude that it was not an aristocratic commission, but rather was meant for use within the cloister.⁷⁶ As such, each extant manuscript witness to the *Wonders/Mirabilia* was likely subject to interaction with clerical scribes and readers throughout its production and consumption history. Moreover, since the vast majority of extant penitential literature survives from monastic and episcopal contexts, including in cathedral libraries such as that of Canterbury, it is probable that such readers would have been familiar enough with sacramental penance, and its ubiquitous association with tears, to connect the Donestre to this practice.⁷⁷

Contributing to this notion, moreover, would be their comfort with moralization and Christian exegesis as interpretative practices. According to Howe, clerical figures’ interpretations of these marvels texts by would have been “guided by the principles of Christian interpretation,” arising from their formal training and experience of homilies and sermons.⁷⁸ Frantzen also comments on the irresistible urge toward exegesis in learned English audiences of the period, suggesting that an Anglo-Saxon bird may never “get off so lightly” as to be read literally, being forced instead to represent the mind or soul.⁷⁹ Further relevant to this discussion is the treatment of the monstrous races in particular by luminaries well known among Anglo-Saxon learned communities. Though their monstrous catalogues are generally more descriptive than interpretive, neither Augustine nor Isidore can resist providing exegetical

interpretations of certain individual prodigies. For example, Augustine asserts that the fall of biblical giants demonstrates the superiority of spiritual magnanimity over physical might.⁸⁰ Likewise, in his discussion of satyrs, Isidore retells an apocryphal narrative of St. Anthony, discussing this monstrous race in relation to pagans and apostates who have taken to worshipping them as deities, again placing a monster at the center of a moralizing parable.⁸¹ As two of the most widely circulated authors during the late Anglo-Saxon period, it is possible that their works encouraged readers of *Wonders/Mirabilia* to consider links to biblical narratives, Christian practices, and general moral lessons.

Moreover, an additional tradition running parallel to the English *Wonders/Mirabilia* attestations is that of the aforementioned *Physiologus*. This work, which was the ultimate model for the Latin and vernacular *Bestiary* traditions, had included moralizations for each of its catalogued marvelous beasts since its composition in third- or fourth-century Greece.⁸² Texts belonging to the *Physiologus* tradition were widely circulated, copied, and translated throughout the Middle Ages. Indeed, numerous copies existed in Anglo-Saxon England, including the Old English *Physiologus* and two fragmentary Latin *Physiologi*, all of which also contain explicit exegetical interpretations for each of their bestial entries.⁸³ As mentioned above, the crocodile's postprandial weeping, with or without moralizations relating to remorse, was not the most common attribute associated with this beast in *Physiologi* or *Bestiaries* of this region or period. Nor, indeed, is the crocodile, with or without such a moralization, present in any extant *Physiologus* from Anglo-Saxon England.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, the general mode of exegetical interpretation of catalogued beasts was well known. However, even if the *Wonders/Mirabilia* redactors and consumers were familiar with the *Physiologus*'s exegetical mode, previous scholars have denied an "organic connection" between the two works, an assumption that makes the generalization of the latter interpretative method less likely.⁸⁵

However, more recent stemmatic and pictorial observations suggest that, at multiple points in the *Wonders/Mirabilia* transmission chain, scribes and illustrators *did* consider the texts as containing overlapping content, and possibly as encompassing overlapping conceptual significance also. First, as mentioned above, the Donestre themselves corroborate this connection. At probably two distinct points in the transmission of *Pharasmenes* material, scribes accreted animal attributes likely derived from a *Physiologus* or related work into this wonders text: first, the hyena

or corocotta and, second, the crocodile.⁸⁶ Knock has asserted that this suggests the presence of *Physiologus/Bestiary* material during the process of copying, either in exemplars containing both this and the marvels, elsewhere in scriptorium libraries, or in the memories of scribes.⁸⁷ In any case, compilers resolved to accrete entries and attributes from these traditions into their marvels texts, clearly considering the two traditions as similar and their content as somewhat interchangeable. Moreover, the Tiberius and Bodley images of the Donestre, showing a lion-headed hybrid, also indicate a conflation of the two traditions during transmission.⁸⁸ Knock postulates that, when creating an image for this marvel in a P-group text, an illustrator might have recognized the behaviors of the corocotta from the *Physiologus/Bestiary* tradition, which is the hybrid offspring of a lion and hyena, and created an image based on the beast's leonine pedigree.⁸⁹ The fact that individuals recognized a commonly moralized beast from the *Physiologus/Bestiary* in *Wonders/Mirabilia* raises the possibility that they and others considered these works as comprising similar subject matter, and might have implicitly recalled or considered the former's moralizing mode when reading the latter. Even more recently, Ford has noted similarities between the Vitellius Donestre illustration and an image from the Icelandic *Physiologus A*, suggesting that the two derive from a mutual source.⁹⁰ In the same way as the accretions noted above, this sharing of pictorial traditions may suggest one of two things. Either the *Physiologus* and marvels text existed together in an antecedent manuscript containing an earlier copy of this image, from which both the Vitellius *Wonders* and the Icelandic *Physiologus A* are derived, or an illustrator familiar with the image from one tradition used it as inspiration for the other. In either case, it seems likely that the traditions were seen as conceptually related, since similar images were seen as suitable accompaniments for both.

These connections all indicate the physical and conceptual proximity of these two traditions. Of course, this similarity might only have been perceived to be one of format; both traditions comprise a catalogic presentation of animate marvels, with only the *Physiologus/Bestiary* tradition including explicit moralizations. However, even if the perceived relationship were limited to form, this does not rule out exegetical responses to the marvels of *Wonders/Mirabilia*. Both Kline and Campbell assert medieval readers' aptitude for interpreting Christian symbolisms without explicit narratorial prompting. Indeed, Campbell goes so far as to posit that the terse catalogic form of *Wonders/Mirabilia* possibly makes creative exegesis *more* likely, since the lack of explicit moralization serves to invite the interpretation of readers

by its very absence.⁹¹ However, even without this supposition, the perceived proximity of the traditions suggests that the kind of exegesis found in the *Physiologus/Bestiary* tradition might have been employed, though not textually recorded in any extant manuscript, when *Wonders/Mirabilia* texts were read and contemplated.

Furthermore, it is worth evaluating the contents of the English *Wonders/Mirabilia* manuscripts themselves, in order to consider how these might also have elicited Christian readings of the marvels. The *Beowulf* Manuscript, which has long been noted for its exploration of monstrosity and humanity, has also been persuasively shown to explore these identities as related to Christianity.⁹² In particular, monstrosity is at certain points intimated to emanate from an anti-Christian status. For example, *Judith's* Holofernes is internally monstrous—"niða geblonden" (suffused with hostilities)—and also anti-Christian—"nergende lað" (hateful to the savior).⁹³ This pairing refracts his negative qualities through a religious lens, perhaps implying a connection between these two attributes. Even more compelling is Grendel, whose internal *and* external monstrosities are framed as the explicit results of the antediluvian exile of his wicked ancestor, Cain.⁹⁴ As such, monstrous characters in both the manuscript's verse texts are characterized in explicitly anti-Christian terms. When read in light of these notions, it might have been tempting for readers the Vitellius *Wonders* to couch the Donestre's monstrous deeds within a similar framework, seeking a religious context for their heinous behavior. In such a case, the Donestre might symbolize anti-Christian forces in their murderous and cannibalistic behavior, and mockeries of Christian penance in their theatrical remorse.

However, this manuscript also offers an alternate perspective on the interplay between Christianity and monstrosity, since some of its monsters are characterized as sympathetic and redeemable figures. Orchard identifies this lens in *Beowulf*, referring to Grendel's pitiable wretchedness, as well as the adoption of the monsters' points of view at various points in the text.⁹⁵ Much like the expressive faces discussed by Fabiszak, the poem thereby demands the readers' "co-operation" by compelling them to consider the monster's perspective. However, the monster's specifically Christian redeemability is most thoroughly demonstrated in *The Passion of St. Christopher*. This text is fragmentary, lacking its opening section. As such, though the remaining narrative does imply the saint's gigantic stature—he is "twelf fæðma" (twelve fathoms) tall—his status as cynocephalic, or dog-headed, is uncertain.⁹⁶ However, on the basis of his size here

and his “hunda heafod” (hound’s head) in the *Old English Martyrology*, scholars have overwhelmingly concluded that this fragment originally narrated the passion of the dog-headed, formerly cannibalistic version of the saint.⁹⁷ This bestial giant, who is of course the saintly hero and martyr of the narrative, proves to be both more admirably Christian, and arguably more human, than the pagan King Dagnus. The presence of this narrative in the Vitellius manuscript, therefore, compels its readers to consider monsters more sensitively. Monstrosity may be related to Christianity in negative terms, with internal and external deviances and deformities resulting from heathen wickedness. However, converted monsters may also be portrayed sympathetically or even as paragons of piety. The juxtaposition of their monstrous and Christian pedigrees emphasizes the awesome power of faith, implying that Christianity can save even the most unlikely wretches. However, a further consequence of this juxtaposition is the tacit assertion of the potential redeemability of monsters, tempting the reader to pity their wasted potential when unconverted, and perhaps even to imagine their fulfilment of this potential in a missionary context. The Anglo-Saxon consideration of this interpretation is substantiated by the attention Augustine paid to the potential humanity and salvation of the monstrous races.⁹⁸ As such, though Vitellius readers may be compelled by the manuscript’s contents to consider the Donestre via Christian moralization and symbolism, the significance associated with it may not be wholly damning for the monster. Rather than merely being seen as immutably anti-Christian forces, the Donestre may be interpreted as potential Christians, whose defiant anthropomorphization, though currently squandered in serial cannibalism and depravity, only makes their need for Christianization more urgent.

Lastly, the manuscript contexts of the Tiberius and Bodley attestations ought to be considered, in order to speculate on whether or not Christian exegetical readings might have been prompted here also. As mentioned above, the contents of these manuscripts betray a “scientific” interest in the natural world. Hence, scholars have suggested that these *Wonders/Mirabilia* texts might have been read as factual, intimating sincere belief in their constituent marvels.⁹⁹ Though I cannot broach this ontological issue here, scholars have asserted that such hypothesized belief need not have ruled out additional, symbolic interpretations.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as I will now outline, there are numerous features in both the Tiberius and Bodley manuscripts that prompt readers to consider the marvels’ exegetical implications alongside their potential reality. Scholars have suggested that the

Vitellius *Wonders* lacks an “explicit Christian interpretive frame”; despite the potentially religious tack of the whole codex to which I just alluded, it is true that relatively few of its marvels have immediately recognizable exegetical meanings.¹⁰¹ This is not the case for Tiberius or Bodley. First, the Tiberius scribe includes numerous marvels with obvious Christian freight, such as the phoenix, whose significance as a symbol of the resurrection would have been well known to Anglo-Saxon readers.¹⁰² Moreover, Tiberius contains the further marvel of “Iamnes and Mambres,” an apocryphal narrative on God’s judgment against “deofelgildes” (devil-worship) or “idolum” (idolatry).¹⁰³ To numerous scholars, this entry appears to cohere less seamlessly with the other additions, leading to the conclusion that it is not accreted from a similar marvels text. Rather, it seems to represent the conscious inclusion of explicitly Christian material, made either by the Tiberius scribe, or the scribe of one of its antecedents.¹⁰⁴ In either case, as argued by Orchard and Ford, the willingness to include such material indicates that *Wonders/Mirabilia* might have been read according to Christian symbolic modes.¹⁰⁵

Likewise, the Bodley scribe heightens the text’s “Christian interpretive frame.” As well as reproducing “Iamnes and Mambres,” he adds marvels of his own, mostly taken wholesale from the *Etymologiae*. This includes an entry on satyrs, which refers explicitly to Isidore’s story of St. Anthony. Though not including Isidore’s complete narrative or moralization, he does include Anthony’s name specifically, and it is likely, based on the verbatim redaction of numerous phrases, that the scribe was abbreviating from an exemplar of the *Etymologiae*.¹⁰⁶ In such a scenario, at least the scribe would have been aware of the exegetical implications while copying the marvels text, as would any later reader familiar with Isidore’s account. This is also true of the scribe’s expansion of the Tiberius phoenix entry; he here takes phrases directly from Ambrose’s *Hexameron*, which refers explicitly to the eschatological resurrection.¹⁰⁷ Though again neglecting to relate this exegesis explicitly, possibly to uphold the conventional omission of narratorial mediation in the rest of the text, the consultation of Ambrose’s account indicates that the scribe would have been reminded of the marvel’s Christian implications as he abbreviated it, as would other readers familiar with the bird’s standard exegeses. As such, the Tiberius and Bodley attestations contain more overtly religious and more widely moralized marvels than Vitellius, possibly prompting readers to scour the other constituent marvels—including the Donestre—for similarly Christian commentary.

There is, therefore, a range of textual and contextual cues that supports the likelihood that the Donestre were interpreted as Christian symbols. As such, it seems defensible to consider how penitential issues could nuance the Donestre's reception. If the general interpretations derived via through monster and affect theories hold true, the first analysis of the monster's tears as inauthentic would construct the Donestre as a symbol of an unrepentant sinner engaging in false confession. A contemporaneous and conscious awareness of the notion of false contrition during confession is evinced in the *Old English Penitential*: "þeah he on hreowsunge ær wære 7 hit fullice gebet næbbe" (though he ought to have been before in penance-sorrow and does not fully repent it).¹⁰⁸ Like the hypothetical sinner considered here, the Donestre may go through the motions of repentance by weeping; however, by not truly feeling guilt for their crimes, the creatures doom themselves to endless repetition of sin and sorrow. As penitential symbols, they therefore serve as a stark warning against insincere confession in human society.

However, what of the more sympathetic arguments for the Donestre's authentic but short-lived contrition? Or their abiding guilt being overridden by habitual or irresistible vice? These interpretations, substantiated not only by the "emotionally contagious" sadness of the Bodley and Tiberius images, but also by the potential piety of monsters touted elsewhere in the Vitellius manuscript, gain fruitful new facets when seen as related to sacramental penance. First, it is worth mentioning that, based on the penitential sources, it seems more likely that the Donestre's tears would have been considered authentic rather than inauthentic. This is substantiated by another passage from the *Old English Handbook*: the penitent must "cunnige georne mage man of eagam tearas geræcan 7 sinna bewepan" (try earnestly such that a man might get tears from his eyes and weep for his sins).¹⁰⁹ This reveals the high value placed on weeping as an indicator of sincere remorse, as it suggests that confessors desired tears even when they were not spontaneously forthcoming.¹¹⁰ If this sentiment proves representative of notions within the penitential discourse of this period, the Donestre's tears would seem more likely to indicate authentic compunction to medieval readers.

As such, how might aspects of sacramental penance nuance the interpretation of the Donestre's heartfelt but ineffective remorse? If they have authentic contrition, what is precluding their successful reconciliation? One possible answer is their status as exiles from Christian society. As monsters isolated to the fringes of the world, they lack religious

infrastructures that might improve the outcome of their sincere repentance, such as a Christian community and confessor. This reading—the imagining of the Donestre as potential Christian converts—is derived in part from an extension of the anthropomorphic monster theory discussed above. In their anatomical, linguistic, and emotional connection humanity, the Donestre are monsters whose significance comes not only from their distance, but also from their perceived proximity to their culture of production and consumption. Therefore, it seems plausible that contemporary readers might have considered not only how little it might take for humans to succumb to the weaknesses and vices the creatures represent, but also what it might take for the creatures—or metaphorically monstrous persons—to become more fully human. This is especially true for readers of the Vitellius manuscript, whose awareness of the *Christopher* text indicates their familiarity with the notion that Christian conversion could deprive monsters of their Otherness.

The importance of the ritual act of confession to a priest, as distinct from contemplating remorse independently, is widely attested in the late Anglo-Saxon period, with both Wulfstan and Ælfric asserting its role in functional atonement.¹¹¹ Indeed, the distinction between inward contrition and confession as a performative act, and the separate importance of each in the remission of sins, is emphasized numerous in the vernacular penitentials, as well as in prevalent literary topoi.¹¹² Perhaps most cogently, this distinction is noted in an eleventh-century pontifical: “*ure faſten ne mæg to nahte butan anddetneſſe. ne ſeo anddetneſſ butan dædbote. ne ſeo dædbot butan geſwicenneſſe. Giſ hwa þonne ne truwiġe þæt he to anum lareowe ga fare him to oðrum*” (our fasting avails nothing without the act of confession, nor that act of confession without repentance, nor repentance nothing without desisting from sin. If anyone cannot ensure that he go to one teacher, let him go to another).¹¹³ Though the vocabulary referring to the separate steps of penance as contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution was not widespread before the scholastic period, this excerpt demonstrates an understanding of the sacrament in similar terms.¹¹⁴ Engaging in contemplations or even acts of atonement without having been prescribed penance by a confessor, and thereby skipping a portion of this multistage sacrament, is characterized as futile. The prevalence of this sentiment in Anglo-Saxon thought emphasizes the potential for the Donestre to be viewed as tragically isolated penitents; they weep and experience contrition, but cannot atone without a confessional apparatus.

There is substantial evidence to support such a reading in *Wonders/Mirabilia*, with both text and image indicating the Donestre's simultaneous isolation from Christian communities and potential for salvation. First, the Donestre are said to inhabit "sum ealand on ðære Raedan Sæ" (a certain island in the Red Sea). Isolation in the natural world has been noted to play a unique role in Anglo-Saxon literature, since it is often associated with the need for Christian redemption or missionary activity.¹¹⁵ Indeed, watery locations in particular have been numerous connected to concepts of Christian exile, and to apostate or pagan activity, which cry out to be banished by Christian missionary activity or conquest. These themes have been noted for water-bound lairs or islands in the Old English *Guthlac* and, especially applicable to the consumers of the Vitellius manuscript, in *Beowulf*.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the manuscript illustrations contribute both to this sense of the Donestre's isolation from Christianity, as well as to their readiness to be converted. First, contrary to the textual accounts, which imply through plural pronouns and conjugations that there are numerous Donestre here, the images all indicate that their actions are carried out alone.¹¹⁷ This is particularly apparent in the Tiberius and Bodley illustrations, which is the only pictorial tradition to show the monster weeping. If tears are indeed connected to penance so strongly as to be almost synonymous with the sacrament, these images depict the monster's confession as solitary, without friend or confessor. This implied lack of community is heightened by the presence of rocky outcrops as settings in the Tiberius and Bodley pictorial tradition, or simply by the unadorned landscape in Vitellius. These barren environments are juxtaposed with another illustration only three marvels later, which enhances the impression of the Donestre's isolation from social and, specifically, religious communities. In all manuscripts, this marvel is accompanied by the first illustration of a building in the text: the visibly populated temple of the Sun, replete with holy men, such as "þaes stillestan bisceopes" (the gentlest bishop) in Vitellius, and "sum geþungen 7 gedefe sacerd" (a certain excellent and righteous/worthy priest) in Tiberius.¹¹⁸ The visual contrast is especially noteworthy in the Tiberius text, since the Donestre and temple are on opposite leaves—fol. 83v and fol. 84r—and so are facing one another when the codex is opened.¹¹⁹ This juxtaposition creates a dichotomy between human and monster, between civilization and isolation, and between piety and profanity, drawing attention to the simultaneous separateness and proximity of these categories. Furthermore, almost directly after this temple marvel, the reader is informed that a kingdom of "gedefelice men" (righteous/worthy humans) holds dominion over

the Red Sea.¹²⁰ Since the Donestre's island is located in this same sea, this marvel implies the monster's proximity to a potentially benevolent missionary force. This detail spurs the reader to envisage their imminent concurrence, possibly leading to cannibalistic consumption but also—considering the “anwealde” (sole power) of men over the region—perhaps resulting in conversion.¹²¹ As such, these cues simultaneously place the monster in contrast with, but also in hopeful proximity to, noble religious forces.

These textual and pictorial features all compel the reader to consider the Donestre's current, if temporary, isolation from social and religious communities. For all the other isolated marvels on their rocky outcrops, whether beasts or non-speaking humanoid hybrids, this estrangement is no doubt somewhat significant to their interpretive potential. However, considering the exceptional anthropomorphization of the Donestre, and the empathy their emotional display might have provoked, this particular marvel's exile from salvific Christian society is especially moving; it arguably demands greater reader involvement, greater sympathy for the Donestre's depravity, and greater hope for their potential redemption. In this interpretive context, the proximity of these monsters to civilization and spiritual community—in both physical manuscript leaves to the temple and imagined geographical distance to the “gedefelice men”—is deeply significant, since it prompts the reader to consider the readiness of the Donestre to be brought into the Christian fold. The Donestre's penitential symbolism is therefore complex: in their depraved state, they serve as a monstrous mirror to Christendom, highlighting the dangers of isolation from Christian and confessional communities. Humans who subsist without these keystones of spiritual society are doomed, with or without sincere inward contrition, to a life of wretchedness and sin. However, the empathy elicited by the Donestre's sorrow, coupled with the cues that intimate their proximity to missionary forces, provokes the reader to imagine how such dangers may be averted through the introduction of Christianity—how sinners who possess sincere remorse can be saved through the sacraments. By their failure to gain functional absolution, the Donestre therefore exhibit the value of penance to those to whom it is available, and the necessity to extend it to those to whom it is not.

Through the adverse effects of the Donestre's impotent contrition, this monstrous symbol functions to explicate the consequences of unsuccessful penance. However, by interpreting the negative space surrounding these adverse consequences, the positive functions of penance are also given symbolic airing. The first of these negative effects is

centrifugal—affecting those around sinners—since the monster’s incomplete penance leads to the repetition of its violent crimes. This emphasizes the important regulatory role of Christian confession, preventing anti-social behavior and temporal disorder. The second effect is centripetal and emotional—affecting the sinners themselves—since the Donestre’s repeated criminal activities force them to endure endless cycles of sadness. Hence, the Donestre also characterize penance as a form of counseling against chronic sorrow, intimating that successful confession may counteract cycles of sin and sadness in Christian communities.

This chapter has explored numerous potential interpretations of the Donestre’s enigmatic emotional journey, particularly insofar as it relates to regret and remorse. As general symbols of contrition, the Donestre invite numerous interpretations on the dangers of inauthentic remorse, as well as the pitfalls—both behavioral and emotional—that may yet befall those who experience heartfelt or abiding guilt. However, when considering the interpretive potential of a marvel like the Donestre, appearing as it does in a catalogic context primed for symbolic or exegetical analysis by its readers, it is critical to examine the text in the religious-cultural context of its production. Specifically, to which contemporaneous discourses might this depiction relate? Such speculation on cues from manuscript contexts and parallel traditions is especially helpful in the case of texts such as this, since the stark brevity of the *Wonders* and *Mirabilia* entries leave little room for confident close reading in a vacuum. Given the clerical context of the Donestre’s production and consumption in Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest England, a monster so connected to misdeeds and tears seems ripe for a discussion alongside the sacrament of penance. As such a symbol, the Donestre function as powerful representations of the importance of confession in the lives of English Christians, demanding that readers not only experience heartfelt contrition, but also share this guilt in performative acts of ritual penance. By intimating the results of even true remorse in the absence of a confessional context, the Donestre may remind its readers of the pivotal importance of sacramental penance to prevent recurrent cycles of depression and depravity.

NOTES

¹ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 5–6; Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007),

pp. 3–5; and A. J. Ford, *Marvel and Artefact: The Wonders of the East and Its Manuscript Contents* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 8–9.

² Rudolf Wittkower, “The Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters,” in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols: The Collected Essays of Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Margot Wittkower (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 49; and Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, p. 5.

³ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, n. pg. (lib. 16, cap. 8, lines 1–45), ed. Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1955). See also Isidore, *Etymologiarum sive originum*, vol. 2, pp. 26–32 (lib. 11, cap. 3), ed. Wallace Martin Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911). There are at least four full or partial copies of Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, and twenty-two of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, extant from Anglo-Saxon England; see Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 894, 916.

⁴ Paul Allen Gibb, “Wonders of the East: A Critical Edition and Commentary,” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1977), pp. 15–16; and Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 7.

⁵ Gibb, “Wonders,” pp. 17–18, and Andrew P. Scheil, “Bodies and Boundaries: Studies in the Construction of Social Identity in Selected Late Anglo-Saxon Prose Texts,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1996), pp. 19–20. The earliest manuscript that survived into the modern era was perhaps the Latin *Epistola Premonis* (Strasbourg C. iv. 15). Though this manuscript was destroyed by fire in 1870, it was dated as eighth or ninth century, a fact since questioned by scholars; Patrick McGurk and Ann Knock, “The Marvels of the East,” in *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany*, ed. Patrick McGurk et al. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1983), p. 88. Our earliest extant attestation is the ninth-century Latin *Fermes* text (Paris Bibl. Nat. nouv. acq. lat. 1065); see McGurk and Knock, “Marvels,” p. 88. An additional early work apparently influenced by *Pharasmaenes* material is the *Liber Monstrorum*, which survives in five ninth- and tenth-century manuscripts, and whose composition is hypothesized to be eighth-century or earlier; see Michael Lapidge, “Beowulf, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum*, and Wessex,” *Studi Medievali*, 3rd Series, 23 (1982), pp. 151–192 (pp. 168–176), and Andy Orchard, “The Sources and Meaning of the *Liber Monstrorum*,” in *I ‘monstra’ nell’inferno Dantesco: Tradizione e Symbologie*, ed. E. Menestò (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 1997), pp. 75, 86.

⁶ See Edmond Faral, ed., “Une Source Latine de l’Histoire D’Alexandre: *La Lettre sur les Merveilles de l’Inde*,” *Romania* 43 (1914), pp. 199–215, 353–370 (p. 211). See endnote 5.

⁷ For the primary text of the *Epistola Premonis*, see Faral, “Une Source Latine.” For the *Liber Monstrorum*, see Andy Orchard, ed., “*Liber Monstrorum*,”

in *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript*, ed. Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). For the Old French version, see A. Hilka, ed., "Ein neuer (altfranzösischer) Text des Briefes über die Wunder Asiens," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 46, no. 1 (1923).

⁸ Ann Knock, ed., "Wonders of the East: A Synoptic Edition of the Letter of Pharasmanes and the Old English and Old Picard Translations." (PhD diss., University of London, 1981), pp. 801–802.

⁹ McGurk and Knock, "Marvels," p. 98. Scholars have noted similarities between illuminations in the Berne *Physiologus* and in the Tiberius *Wonders/Mirabilia*, implying that one of the latter's antecedents was produced at Rheims. The Rheims-style Donestre in Tiberius depicts all stages of the creatures' behavior, including weeping, which would require continental awareness of the complete Donestre portrayal before the mid-eleventh century. See McGurk and Knock, "Marvels," pp. 98–99. This does not rule out, of course, the Donestre's composition in the Anglo-Saxon context before this point—corroborated by their appearance in the older Vitellius manuscript, which lacks this continental pictorial style—followed by their subsequent conveyance between insular and continental contexts.

¹⁰ Knock, "Wonders," p. 70.

¹¹ See Photius's citation of Asterius of Amasea; Photius, *Bibliothèque*, vol. 8, p. 93, ed. René Henry (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1959–1991).

¹² See David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 17.

¹³ Future studies should examine, for example, the Old French version, which preserves a possible scribal error—mistaking "plorant" for "orant"—so that the Donestre *pray* rather than weep. See Hilka, ed., "Ein neuer (altfranzösischer) Text," pp. 95–97, and Knock, "Wonders," pp. 177–178.

¹⁴ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Sisam was the first to propose this monster mash theory; see Kenneth Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 67.

¹⁶ See McGurk and Knock, "Marvels," 96–97, and Susan Kim, "The Donestre and the Person of Both Sexes," in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, eds. Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), p. 170. Kim and Mittman have recently considered the significance of these ostensibly shabby illustrations more deeply. Whether or not they were accidentally poor, their untidiness and occasional contradiction of the text serve to question the role of verbal and visual signs as meaning makers; see Susan Kim and Asa Simon Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013), pp. 14–15.

¹⁷ Robert D. Fulk, ed., *The Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. xi–xii.

¹⁸ Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. xii.

¹⁹ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 6.

²⁰ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, pp. 60–61. See also Gibb, “Wonders,” pp. 5–6.

²¹ Ann Knock, “Analysis of a Translator: The Old English Wonders of the East,” in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Jane Roberts et al. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), p. 124. See also Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 83.

²² For a complete account of the Tiberius manuscript’s contents, see Scheil, “Bodies and Boundaries,” pp. 34–35.

²³ Wittkower, “Marvels,” p. 52, and Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 20.

²⁴ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 6.

²⁵ For a complete account of the Bodley manuscript’s contents, see Gibb, “Wonders,” p. 8.

²⁶ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 127.

²⁷ Gibb, “Wonders,” p. 9, and Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 22.

²⁸ McGurk and Knock, “Marvels,” pp. 98–99.

²⁹ Tom Tyler, “Deviants, Donestre, and Debauchees: Here Be Monsters,” *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 13–131 (p. 114).

³⁰ Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, p. 106; Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, p. 73; Heide Estes, “Wonders and Wisdom: Anglo-Saxons and the East,” *English Studies* 91, no. 4 (2010), pp. 360–373 (p. 364); Tom Tyler, “Donestre,” in *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 170; Dieter Bitterli, “Strange Perceptions: Sensory Experience in the Old English ‘Marvels of the East,’” in *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Annette Kern-Stähler et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 156; Christopher Monk, “A Context for the Sexualization of Monsters in The Wonders of the East,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012), pp. 79–99 (p. 80); Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 172; and Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 146, respectively.

³¹ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 27.

³² Andy Orchard, ed., “Wonders of the East: Old English Text,” in *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 196, and Andy Orchard, ed., “Wonders of the East: Latin Text,” in *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 179. My translation follows the Old English version. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. All quotations from *Wonders/Mirabilia* are taken from these editions by Orchard.

³³ Campbell, *Witness and Other World*, p. 82, and Mary C. Olson, *Fair and Varied Forms: Visual Textuality in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 131.

³⁴ Kim, "Donestre," p. 172; Dana M. Oswald *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), pp. 43–44; Rosalyn Saunders, "Becoming Undone: Monstrosity, *lealicum wordum*, and the Strange Case of the Donestre," *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 2 (2010), pp. 1–36 (pp. 15–17); Monk, "Sexualization," pp. 80–84; and Kim and Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts*, p. 97.

³⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) pp. 2–5, and Howe, *Writing the Map*, pp. 172–173.

³⁶ Tyler, "Donestre," p. 171.

³⁷ Małgorzata Fabiszak, "A Semantic Analysis of Fear, Grief, and Anger Words in Old English," in *A Changing World of Words: Studies in English Historical Lexicography, Lexicology, and Semantics*, ed. Javier E. Díaz Vera (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 266. For example, especially considering their presence in the Nowell Codex, the Donestre may serve as potent counterpoints to the paradoxical *feohleas gefeoht* in the Hreðel episode in *Beowulf*, as the monsters are both friends and killers of the slain travellers. See Friedrich Klaeber et al., eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 84 (line 2441).

³⁸ Tyler, "Donestre," p. 171. See also Scheil, "Bodies and Boundaries," p. 50; and Bitterli, "Strange Perceptions," p. 149. For Tyler's offhand dismissal of the Donestre's remorse for lack of evidence, see Tyler, "Deviants," p. 117.

³⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 8.

⁴⁰ Scheil, "Bodies and Boundaries," p. 5, and Olson, *Fair and Varied*, p. 132.

⁴¹ Kim and Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts*, pp. 148, 151.

⁴² Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 161.

⁴³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 5. Though chiefly employed to defend the identity-affirming role of the monster, Cohen's manifesto actually also intimates this notion; see Cohen, "Monster Culture," pp. 9, 12.

⁴⁴ See M. R. James, *Wonders of the East: A Full Reproduction of the Three Known Copies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Roxburghe Club, 1929), n.pg. "Vitellius, fol.103b," "Tiberius, fol.83b," and "Bodley, fol.43a (mislabelled fol.43b)." See Kim and Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ George Philip Krapp, ed., "Daniel," in *The Junius Manuscript* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931), p. 114 (line 123), and George Philip Krapp, ed., "Dream of the Rood," in *The Vercelli Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 61 (line 3). Others note this parallel; see Kim, "Donestre," pp. 177–178.

⁴⁶ See James, *Marvels*, "Vitellius, fol.103b" and "Tiberius, fol.83b."

⁴⁷ Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ Saunders, "Becoming Undone," p. 13.

⁴⁹ Cohen, *Of Giants*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *Witness and Other World*, p. 73.

⁵¹ Arnaud Zucker, ed., *Physiologos: Le Bestiaire des Bestiaires* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2004), p. 300.

⁵² Photius, ostensibly referencing Asterius of Amasea, identifies remorse as the obvious interpretation, but subsequently offers the more novel explanation that the unfeeling beast laments only that the head is not fleshy enough to be appetizing. See Photius, *Bibliothèque*, vol. 8, p. 93. On New York, Pierpont Morgan, MS 397, see Zucker, ed., *Physiologos*, p. 298.

⁵³ Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum et De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, pp. xiii–xiv, 186, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863).

⁵⁴ Philippe de Thaon, *The Bestiary of Phillippe de Thaon*, pp. 85–86, ed. Thomas Wright (London: R. and J. E. Taylor, 1841). However, considering Philippe's propensity to moralize elsewhere, including the "ydrus" story in his entry on the crocodile itself, the fact that the beast's tears are not explicitly interpreted is significant. It may suggest that, though that both motifs were known in his milieu, only the *hydrus/nilius* story was commonly moralized.

⁵⁵ Knock, ed., "Wonders," pp. 801–802.

⁵⁶ See Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), p. 17. Amongst other interpretations—including the crocodile's amphibious nature and medicinal dung—the most common motif associated with crocodiles in the western European, and especially English, traditions from the twelfth century onwards is that of the *hydrus/nilius*, entering and subsequently breaking out of the crocodile's belly to symbolize the resurrection. See Michael J. Curley, ed., *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 53–54, and Baxter, *Bestiaries*, pp. 29, 47–48.

⁵⁷ George C. Druce, "The Symbolism of the Crocodile in the Middle Ages," *The Archaeological Journal* 66 (1909), pp. 311–338 (p. 316).

⁵⁸ Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum*, p. xiv.

⁵⁹ See James, *Marvels*, "Tiberius, fol.83b" and "Bodley, fol.43a (misabeled fol.43b)."

⁶⁰ Antonina Harbus, "Affective Poetics: The Cognitive Basis of Emotion in Old English Poetry," in *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature, and Culture*, ed. Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 27.

⁶¹ Fabiszak, "Semantic," p. 259.

⁶² For statements defending the use of affect theory to discover the lived experience of emotion from Anglo-Saxon texts, even to the extent of diagnosing and speculating on the experience of mental disorders or emotional

exceptionalities by historical personages, see Mary Garrison, "Early Medieval Experiences of Grief and Separation through the Eyes of Alcuin and Others: The Grief and Gratitude of the Oblate," in *Anglo-Saxon Emotions*, ed. Jorgensen, McCormack, and Wilcox, pp. 230–262.

⁶³ Francesca Tinti, "Introduction," in *Pastoral Care in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), p. 1.

⁶⁴ Rob Meens, "The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance," in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (York: University of York and York Medieval Press, 1998), pp. 51–53, and Sarah Hamilton, "Remedies for 'Great Transgressions': Penance and Excommunication in Late Anglo-Saxon England," in *Pastoral Care in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), p. 85.

⁶⁵ Allen J. Frantzen, "The Tradition of Penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1982), pp. 23–56 (pp. 53–54).

⁶⁶ Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 142–145, and Catherine Cubitt, "Bishops, Priests, and Penance in Late Saxon England," *Early Medieval Europe* 14, no. 1 (2006), pp. 41–63 (pp. 41–48).

⁶⁷ Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the New Medieval Literature of Confession, 1150–1300* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2009), p. 13, and Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe: 600–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 205–209.

⁶⁸ Cubitt, "Bishops," p. 49, and Payer, *Sex*, pp. 16–17, respectively.

⁶⁹ See Sarah Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance: 900–1050* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), p. 40; Karen Wagner, "Cum Aliquis Venerit ad Sacerdotem: Penitential Experience in the Central Middle Ages," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 209–210; Abigail Firey, "Blushing Before the Judge and Physician: Moral Arbitration in the Carolingian Empire," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 174; and Lyn A. Blanchfield, "Considerations of Weeping and Sincerity in the Middle Ages," in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (London: Routledge, 2012), p. xxiii.

⁷⁰ Cubitt, "Bishops," pp. 44–48.

⁷¹ Allen J. Frantzen, ed., "Old English Introduction," *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, Loyola University of Chicago, 2003–2018, <http://anglo-saxon.net/penance/>, 368 (Cambridge, CCC MS. 190), and Allen J. Frantzen, ed., "Old English Handbook," *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, Loyola University of Chicago, 2003–2018, <http://anglo-saxon.net/penance/>, 170 (Cambridge, CCC MS. 201).

⁷² Frantzen, "History of Penance and Penitentials," *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, Loyola University of Chicago, 2003–2018, <http://anglo-saxon.net/penance/>, n. pg.

- ⁷³ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, pp. 179–181.
- ⁷⁴ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 4.
- ⁷⁵ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, pp. 60–61, 127.
- ⁷⁶ Sisam, *Studies*, p. 96. See also Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 155.
- ⁷⁷ See Meens, *Penance*, p. 163–164.
- ⁷⁸ Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 194. See also Gibb, “Wonders,” pp. 66–67.
- ⁷⁹ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 91.
- ⁸⁰ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, n. pg. (lib. 15, cap. 23, lines 130–139).
- ⁸¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, vol. 2, p. 29 (lib. 11, cap. 3).
- ⁸² F. N. M. Diekstra, “The *Physiologus*, the Bestiaries, and Medieval Animal Lore,” *Neophilologus* 69 (1985), pp. 142–155 (p. 146), and Alan Scott, “The Date of the *Physiologus*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998), pp. 430–441 (p. 430).
- ⁸³ Andrea Rossi-Reder, “Beasts and Baptism: A New Perspective on the Old English *Physiologus*,” *Neophilologus* 83 (1999), pp. 461–477 (pp. 461–462, 474).
- ⁸⁴ Gneuss and Lapidge, *Handlist*, pp. 120, 142, 202.
- ⁸⁵ James, *Marvels*, p. vii.
- ⁸⁶ Knock, “Wonders,” pp. 801–802.
- ⁸⁷ Knock, “Wonders,” pp. 70–71.
- ⁸⁸ See James, *Marvels*, “Tiberius, fol.83b.”
- ⁸⁹ Knock, “Wonders,” pp. 800–802.
- ⁹⁰ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, pp. 25–28. The Icelandic *Physiologus A* is found in AM 673 a I 4to (s.xiiiⁱⁿ).
- ⁹¹ Campbell, *Witness and Other World*, p. 75, and Naomi Reed Kline, “The World of Strange Races,” in *Monsters, Marvels, and Miracles: Imaginary Journeys and Landscapes in the Middle Ages*, eds. Leif Søndergaard and Rasmus Thorning Hansen (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), p. 38.
- ⁹² Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 18.
- ⁹³ Robert D. Fulk, ed., “Judith,” in *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 300 (lines 34, 45).
- ⁹⁴ Klaeber et al., eds., *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, p. 6 (line 108).
- ⁹⁵ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 29–36.
- ⁹⁶ Robert D. Fulk, ed., “The Passion of St. Christopher,” in *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 2.
- ⁹⁷ Christine Rauer, ed., *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), p. 91. See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 12–14; Olson, *Fair and Varied*, p. 133; Blurton, *Cannibalism*, p. 39; Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 178; and Estes, “Wonders and Wisdom,” p. 368.
- ⁹⁸ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, n. pg. (lib. 16, cap. 8, lines 29–70).
- ⁹⁹ Gibb, “Wonders,” p. 6, and Susan Kim and Asa Simon Mittman, “*Ungefragelicu deor*: Truth and the Wonders of the East,” *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 2 (2010), pp. 1–22 (p. 2).
- ¹⁰⁰ Williams, *Deformed*, pp. 11–12; Kim and Mittman, “*Ungefragelicu deor*,” pp. 2–3; and Kim and Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts*, pp. 12–13.

¹⁰¹ Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 57. Certain Vitellius marvels *do* have medieval exegetical pedigrees. For example, Hrabanus Maurus interpreted the horned snakes as devils and the ant-dogs as industrious Christians; see Gibb, "Wonders," p. 47.

¹⁰² Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, pp. 97–98.

¹⁰³ Orchard, "Wonders: Old English," p. 202, and "Wonders: Latin," p. 181.

¹⁰⁴ McGurk and Knock, "Marvels," p. 99, and Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 21. See also Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁶ Gibb too notes this verbatim copying; see Gibb, "Wonders," p. 9. For reference, see Isidore, *Etymologiae*, vol. 2, p. 29 (lib. 11, cap. 3).

¹⁰⁷ Gibb, "Wonders," p. 9. For reference, see Ambrose of Milan, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, pp. 219–220 (V.79), ed. John J. Savage (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1961).

¹⁰⁸ Allen J. Frantzen, ed., "Old English Penitential," *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, Loyola University of Chicago, 2003–2018, <http://anglo-saxon.net/penance/>, 3b (Oxford, BodL Laud Misc. 482).

¹⁰⁹ Frantzen, ed., "Old English Handbook," p. 124 (Cambridge, CCC MS. 201).

¹¹⁰ See also Christopher Swift, "A Penitent Prepares: Affect, Contrition, and Tears," in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 80, 93–94.

¹¹¹ Cubitt, "Bishops," pp. 49, 52. See also Ælfric of Eynsham, *Homilies of Ælfric*, vol. 2, pp. 775–779, ed. John Collins Pope, 2 vols., Early English Text Society, o.s. Vols. 259 and 260 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967–1968). For Wulfstan, see Wulfstan II of York, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, pp. 225–232, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), and Wulfstan II of York, *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar*, pp. 14–15, ed. Roger Fowler, Early English Text Society, o.s. vol. 266 (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1972).

¹¹² See Frantzen, ed., "Old English Introduction," 413 (Cambridge, CCC MS. 190). On the expression of this sentiment in a frequently recurring literary trope, see Malcolm R. Godden, "An Old English Penitential Motif," *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973): 221–239 at 222.

¹¹³ Neil R. Ker, ed., "Three Old English Texts in a Salisbury Pontifical, Cotton Tiberius C I," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959), p. 279. The University of Toronto's *Dictionary of Old English* notes that *andetnes* refers especially to sacramental confession to a priest.

¹¹⁴ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 8.

¹¹⁵ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 37. These connotations are allegedly contrasted to contemporaneous Welsh and Irish portrayals of uninhabited nature; see Alfred K. Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound

and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation Building," *Viator* 34 (2003), pp. 1–39 (p. 2).

¹¹⁶ Kelly M. Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*: The Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts," in *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, eds. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 97; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 44, 142–144; and Siewers, "Landscapes," pp. 30, 33.

¹¹⁷ See James, *Marvels*, "Vitellius, fol.103b," "Tiberius, fol.83b," and "Bodley, fol.43a (misabeled fol.43b)."

¹¹⁸ Orchard, "Wonders: Old English," p. 198.

¹¹⁹ See James, *Marvels*, "Tiberius, fol.83b" and "Tiberius, fol.84a."

¹²⁰ They are only described with positive adjectives—"gedefelice" (righteous) and "honesti" (honorable)—in Tiberius and Bodley. However, their dominion over the Red Sea is explicit in all versions; Orchard, "Wonders: Old English," p. 198, and "Wonders: Latin," p. 179.

¹²¹ Orchard, "Wonders: Old English," p. 198.

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Part 3

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Chapter 9

Darkness and Light in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11

Carl Kears

Dark Matter in a Luciferian Book

OXFORD, BODLEIAN LIBRARY, MS Junius 11 was compiled during the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries and contains poems on biblical and extra-biblical subject matter.¹ It is the only Anglo-Saxon poetic manuscript to have had a planned cycle of illustrations for its verse. Junius 11 is also a unique early medieval artifact because the different poems collected within it—known by their editorial titles as *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*—were arranged to form one long epic narrative. Received and read together, the poems provide a journey through the scheme of Christian history, from Creation to the Last Days. The manuscript's outline of history, corresponding roughly to the Six Ages of Man, is not as linear as the influential study by J. R. Hall, which labeled Junius 11 an “epic of redemption,” would suggest, however.² As Catherine E. Karkov writes, “the story [of Junius 11] moves forward while at the same time circling back on itself, certain episodes are told (and depicted) more than once, but always with variation.”³ The recurrence of certain events throughout the manuscript, and the occasional flashbacks or time-loops within particular poems, can be attributed to compilers' attempts to replace parts of text that had been lost as well as to their use of the only material available to them for the construction of a salvation history in vernacular poetry. On the other hand, the powerful, cumulative effect of the episode detailed in text and image more than any other in Junius 11—Lucifer's fall through and into darkness—suggests that this composite book, still commonly known as “the Cædmon manuscript,”⁴ also warns against disobedience by offering several different perspectives on the same event.

The fall of the disobedient angels story was a popular one for poets and religious prose writers in Anglo-Saxon England. But the versions of

this origin story found in several of the Junius 11 poems go beyond any related contemporary accounts or possible source material in their detail and scope. The manuscript and its various depictions of Lucifer's plight provide further evidence of the cultural and religious importance of the tale of the angelic rebellion in the late tenth century while also demonstrating the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons may have expanded, accreted, and appropriated this largely apocryphal tale. In Junius 11, accounts of the angelic fall are pervaded by an interest in the repercussions of rejecting God's light, which represents the essence of created form and of the intellect. This interest contributes significantly to the manuscript's overall impression of the threat and presence of Satan, who is defined by his attempts to undo created order throughout history.

Moments of contact, movement, and exchange between light and darkness also define the opposition at the core of the *agon* imbricated throughout Junius 11: the conflict between creation and anti-creation, between the Luciferian and the Satanic.⁵ To paraphrase R. E. Finnegan, the contrast between light and darkness is of the very fabric of the manuscript.⁶ Daniel Anlezark has recently made a convincing case for the readership of Junius 11, which helps explain to some extent the presence of these Luciferian narratives and accounts. He suggests that "Junius 11 was made for a politically powerful lay reader who moved in royal circles, and provided this reader with a practical understanding of the relationship between divine and human sovereignty."⁷ As the manuscript is an epic of strife through time, its versions of the events that took place before the earthly Creation center on the transformation of rebel angels from enlightened beings to dark devils, a trans- (or mal-) formation that is the result of a rebellion against divine rule—a process, *Genesis A* (which begins the manuscript narrative) suggests, that set all of Creation and history in motion. That tale of change in Junius 11, then, in which the angels tumble from obedient, enlightened beings to become enemies existing in the shadows, evokes the origins of misrule and disobedience as tied to the beginnings of the world and of time.

The account of Lucifer's rebellion seems to have first entered the Anglo-Saxon cultural imaginary by way of Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* or through the influence or transmission of the Book of Enoch, which is likely to have been known during the ninth century.⁸ The angelic fall is only briefly mentioned in the Bible, although Isaiah 14:11–15, with its reference to Lucifer as the morning star who fell from heaven, serves as the base from which many explorations of the event develop. The rebellion in heaven became commonly associated with the beginning of Genesis

before the Anglo-Saxon period, with the elaboration of the legend occurring “in extensive attempts to reconcile various Old Testament mentions of angels with their absence from the account of Creation” in early apocryphal writings.⁹ In Old English poetry, references to Lucifer’s transgression are found throughout the corpus, and the story was well suited for treatment in the heroic mode.¹⁰ These poetic versions are not as expansive or comprehensive as those found in Junius 11, however, nor do they give the same level of detail to the concept of light-deprivation. *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, and, particularly *Christ and Satan* join a very small number of surviving Old English texts in conceiving of the lead rebel angel as the “light-bearer.” The cross-manuscript preoccupation with this theme suggests one of the major ways in which the tragedy of the angelic fall was being explained in the later Anglo-Saxon period: as a loss of the light that gives life and form to God’s creations.

One writer whose major works were contemporaneous with the copying out of Junius 11 who referred to Lucifer’s illuminated essence was Ælfric of Eynsham, whose prose writings often turned to the matter of Creation and the angelic fall.¹¹ In his *Grammar* and his *Letter to Sigeward*, Ælfric rendered the Latin *Lucifer* into Old English *leohtberend* (light-bearer) and explained that this word referred to the form and condition of the lead angel prior to his expulsion “for ðære miclan beorhtnisse his mæran hiwes” (because of his great brightness and beauteous form).¹² In *De initio creaturae*, Ælfric again views that brightness as tied to Lucifer’s shaped, created nature, writing that he was *wlitig gesceapa* (created beautiful) and *gehaten Leohtberend* (called light-bearer).¹³ *Lucifer* is never glossed as Satan or the devil in Old English sources, although in a few cases the word, when tied to the Old English *leohtberend*, does become associated with the lead angel prior to his fall.¹⁴ *Lucifer* itself seems to have had positive associations because for the most part in Anglo-Saxon writings it refers to the morning star (something seen in the sky, rather than located back in the primordial past) and was often rendered *morgensteorra*, *dægsteorra*, or *earendel*, not *leohtberend*. The use by Ælfric of *leohtberend*, however, conveys the identity of the foremost angel in the heavenly kingdom. More specifically, it refers to the one who carried the light of God.

Vercelli Homily XIX and the final attachment to the Junius 11 codex, *Christ and Satan* (to be discussed below and examined by F. J. Rozan-Garcia in this collection), gloss *Lucifer* in the same way as Ælfric does above. Vercelli Homily XIX frames its account of the angelic fall with reference to the transformation from angel to devil:

Ærest on frymþe he geworhte heofonas and eorðan and sæ ... And ealle þa ðe of englum to deoflum forscæpene wurdon ... and þone þe he formærostne hæfde ofer ealle þa oðre englas þe Lucifer wæs haten, þæt ys on ure geþeode 'leohtberend' gereht, ac he eft, þa he hine sylfne his scyppend gelicne don wolde and him þyrmsetle on norðdæle heofena rices getimbrian wolde ... ealle hie wurdon of englum to deoflum forscæpene and on helle bescofene.¹⁵

(First in the beginning he [God] created the heavens and the earth and the sea ... And all those which were misshaped from angels to devils ... and that one whom he considered foremost over all other angels who was called Lucifer, which is rendered "light-bearer" in our language, but he [Lucifer] then afterwards wanted to make himself like the creator and wished to construct himself a throne in the northern part of the kingdom of heaven ... all those were misshaped from angels to devils and shoved into hell.)

The homilist is keen to repeat the description of the angels transforming into devils, employing the verb *forscyppan* to describe that change—the *Dictionary of Old English* entry on *forscyppan* defines it as "to change, metamorphose, transform (someone / some creature) for the worse"—as if to suggest that the angels' undoing is a direct result of trying to be like the *scyppend*, which is Lucifer's most terrible error. It is the creative failure of the angelic rebellion that, in turn, leads to the loss of light, and this is a matter that is detailed at length in Junius 11.

The Junius poems that deal explicitly with the angelic fall share with both Ælfric's and the Vercelli homilist's comments on the "lightbearer" a concern with the metamorphosis that afflicts the prideful angels who attempted to miscreate in heaven. Yet, the Junius accounts of this plight expand the concept of *leohtberend* and refashion Luciferian history, delving into the aftermath of that loss of light in greater detail than any other Old English account of the angelic rebellion. *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, and *Christ and Satan* describe the particular kinds of darkness that occluded and concealed the fallen angels following their plummet from God's kingdom. What is more, and what makes these poems speak to one another across a poetic manuscript, is the deep interest they have in making the very absence of light one of Satan's primary tortures, one experienced in a hellish realm that was "leohtes leas and wæs liges full" (without light and was full of fire, *Genesis B*, line 333), where, in visible darkness, "fyreleoma stod / geond þæt atole scræf attre geblonden" (flamelight stood throughout that terrible grave, blended up with poison, *Christ and Satan*, lines 127b–128).

Catherine Karkov has written that “there is an unusual focus on light” in those images in Junius 11 concerned with Creation, which could be connected to the expanded focus on the opposition light of heaven and the darkness of hell in *Genesis A*, “the poem they accompany.”¹⁶ This opposition is carried through the manuscript, which might be expected in a book that deals with the threat of damnation and the promise of salvation at such length. But the Junius poems concerned with Lucifer’s loss of light also delve into the specifics and gradations of darkness associated with the fallen host, employing them to signal the equation between falling, and fallen, angel, and with that which is antagonistic, or alien to Creation.

Genesis A, the first poem in the Junius 11 manuscript, begins with a call to praise the Creator and with an overview of the heavenly state. The qualities, characteristics, and faculties of the angels are defined by their illumination, and they live in *beorhte blisse* (“bright bliss,” line 14a) before the loss of *torhte tire* (radiant glory, line 58a). That loss occurs through ill-advised attempts to partition the kingdom and possess a *heahsetl* (high throne, line 33a), for which they are *leohte belorene* (“deprived of light,” line 86a). In *Genesis B*, the poem translated from Old Saxon and interpolated into *Genesis A* at some point before Junius 11 was compiled, it is said of the lead rebel angel that “gelic wæs he þam leohtum steorrum” (he was like the illumined stars, line 255a), but because he attempted to *stol geworhte* (create a throne, line 273b) through arrogance, against God, he was forced to fall *on wyrse leoht* (into a worse light, line 310b). Indeed, Lucifer’s pride in *Genesis B* is expressed through boasts about his own “light” and created essence: “cwæð þæt his lic wære leoht and scene, / hwit and hiowbeorht” ([he] said that his body was radiant and shining, luminous and hue-bright, lines 265–266).

Christ and Satan, the final poem in the Junius collection, added within a couple of decades after the first part of the manuscript had been written out, offers a “possible way into understanding how the thematic unity of the book was understood by its earliest known readers.”¹⁷ It was likely to have been three separate poems, beginning with Creation and the laments of the angels who fell, followed by an account of the Harrowing and then of the Temptation, all interspersed with homiletic exhortation. *Christ and Satan* refers to *Lucifer* directly, translating that word as “light-bearer” in a way that seems to speak back to, and even gloss, the intense emphases on the loss of light in the manuscript’s previous versions of the angelic fall found in the *Genesis* poems and illustrations:

Wæs þæt engalcyn¹⁸ ær genemned
 Lucifer haten, leohtberende,
 on geardagum in godes rice
 (*Christ and Satan*, lines 365–367)

(The angel-kin was previously named Lucifer, light-bearer, in bygone days in God's kingdom.)

As R. E. Finnegan notes, this is “the only occurrence of the name Lucifer in the surviving Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus” and, as in Ælfric's writings mentioned above, that name is translated as “light-bearer.”¹⁹ The retrospective tone looks back—as the tortured Satan does throughout *Christ and Satan*—to a former state (it is *ær*—before, irretrievable), one that is temporally and physically out of reach, in *geardagum*, but exists as torturous collective memory. As this passage continues in *Christ and Satan*, the cause of the loss of that former state of light is located in the very emergence of those thoughts bent on scheming and creating in heaven:

Se Satanus swearte gēpohte
 þæt he wolde on heofonum heseld wyrcan
 uppe mid þam ecan
 (370–372a)

(Then Satan thought darkly that he would create a high throne in the heavens, up amidst the eternal.)

These lines mark the transformation of Lucifer to Satan as one that occurs simultaneously with the thought of miscreation. Implied in the very idea of “working” a throne *upwards* is the notion that, in conceiving of something above it, the lead angel is already falling from the *swegles leoma* (light of heaven, *Christ and Satan*, line 350). These thoughts are “dark” perhaps because their will to miscreate alters the light of Lucifer, transforming him into Satan in the very moment of their birth.

This transformative moment is documented in the *Genesis* poems and in the manuscript's illustrations of Lucifer's fall, although, in these, the word *Lucifer* is not mentioned. In *Genesis B*, the change from Lucifer to Satan is God's work, as the angel is altered through the Creator's speaking and “shaping”: “sceop him naman siððan, / cwæð se hesta hatan sceolde / satan siððan, het hine þære sweartan helle / grundes gyman” (afterward [God] shaped him a name, the one most high said that afterward he should be called Satan, and commanded him to rule that swarthy abyss, lines 343b–346a). In the prologue to *Genesis A*, this moment is

presented as the cause of the Creation of the world (and of man), and evoked in terms that resemble the Creation from the opening of the biblical Genesis (as a separation of darkness from light): the fallen angels in *Genesis A* are described in a way that draws relations between them and the increate void that preceded the Creation.

The Shadows and Voids of Anti-Creation

Genesis A, the first poem in Junius 11, is generally considered to be a paraphrase that adheres faithfully to the sequence of events found in the biblical Genesis up to the account of the rescue of Isaac from sacrificial flames (Genesis 22:13).²⁰ In the poem the events of Genesis 1:1. are preceded by a prologue detailing Lucifer's fall and God's vengeful construction of hell. The poet views the rebellion of Lucifer and his followers as the cause of the Creation found in Genesis 1:1 and foregrounds God's construction of hell as the *first* divine, creative act.²¹ Furthermore, *Genesis A*'s prologue colors angelic history in such a way as to connect it with the Creation of the world *ex nihilo*: the apostate host are divided from heavenly light as day is from night and, in the very process of their malformation, they are equated with the dark substance and nothingness of the "void" out of which God shaped the universe. This serves to link the rebels' erroneous will to create with the increate matter that lacked form and required God's light to emerge into full existence.

The *Genesis A* poet's language and wordplay suggests that the first wayward thought of the disobedient angels was predisposed to darkness because, like Satan's *swearte gepohhte* in *Christ and Satan* mentioned above, the very premise that the angels can create *against* or equal their own Creator is misinterpretation, confusion and error—intellectual pitfalls associated with the darkened or clouded mind elsewhere in Old English, and elsewhere in the Junius 11 manuscript.²² The poet depicts the prideful boast of the angels as one that desires segregation:

elles ne ongunnon
ræran on roderum nymþe riht and soþ,
ær ðon engla wearð for oferhygde
dæl on gedwilde.

...

hæfdon gielp micel
þæt hie wið drihtne dælan meahton

wuldorfæstan wic werodes þrymme,
 sid and swegltorht.
 (*Genesis A*, lines 20b–23a, 25b–28a)

(they began to raise nothing but right and truth in the heavens, until a part of the angels were in error because of their pride ... they had the great boast that they could divide the glory-fast dwelling, the majesty of the host, wide and heavenly-bright.)

C. A. Jones has written that *gedwilde*, the word occurring in the quotation above at line 23a, was one of a “family” of Old English words for “error” or “wandering” and, at its base, it is related to OE *dwolma*, which glosses *chaos* ten times in the corpus in the sense “elemental confusion.” Jones notes further that the same root, IE **dheu-*, shows many derivatives fundamentally related to the idea of “rising in a cloud, as dust, vapour or smoke, and hence notions of breath, various (dark) color adjectives, and forms denoting defective perception of wits,” while “a few citations of OE *dwolma* suggest that it too requires a definition ‘darkness’ not as the mere absence of light but as a turbid, obscuring substance.”²³ What is interesting here is that the angels will take on the aspect of the darkness of chaos through the parallels the poet will draw between their transformed state and the primeval void. So, in describing their plan to partition the kingdom, the *Genesis A* poet also implicitly refers to the dark obscurity into which this error will lead. The separation of good and bad angels that follows in *Genesis A*’s prologue corresponds “to the separation of light from darkness” found in the Creation account of Genesis 1:1, but here in the poem, in what A. N. Doane calls “the proto-creation,” the division “takes place with the provision of Hell as a place for the fallen.”²⁴ Emphasis falls on the creation of hell by God as punishment, so as to further accentuate the failure of the ill-advised angels as creators. The authority and ability to distribute and segregate lies with the God the ruler, a line of thought established in *Genesis A*’s prologue and recurrent through the history presented by Junius 11.²⁵

The attempt to *dælan* by Lucifer and his followers, then, is also a failure to do what *the* Creator does. This becomes more apparent in the account of the earthly Creation that immediately follows the prologue, in which God’s acts of division and distribution, verbally echoing Lucifer’s propagations, succeed in forming the world for humankind, as the Creator casts “halig leoht / ofer westenne” (“holy light over the

void,” lines, 124b–125a) before he “holmas dælde” (divided the seas, 146b) so that the “flod wæs adæled” (the flood was divided, line 146b). Similar divine action by God, the *leohtfruma* (originator of light, line 175a), cuts the angels from heaven: “sceop þa and scyrede scyppend ure / oferhidig cyn engla of heofonum” (our shaper judged and segregated from heaven the proud kin of angels, lines 65–66).²⁶

The accounts of Lucifer’s rebellion in Junius 11 are invested in the dramatic and disastrous failure of prideful artifice, and they connect these endeavors to the misshaping and unmaking of the illuminated angels themselves: the erroneous attempt to carve out a part of the heavenly kingdom, and to possess a throne, results in banishment and loss of light. The assembly of these interlinked and comparative Luciferian narratives in the manuscript would have formed an exemplary warning for lay rulers in positions of power, evoking the consequences of misrule on a cosmological plane. The reference in Isaiah to Lucifer’s attempt to exalt a throne higher in heaven also gives the poet of *Genesis A* a springboard from which to describe the lead angel’s anti-creative impulses. This deceitful angel, through *unred* (ill counsel, line 30a), began to “wefan and weccan” (“weave and waken,” line 31a) and said in a “word” (a direct affront, perhaps, to the creative word of God that brings light to chaos at Creation) that he on norðdæle / ham and heahsetl heofena rices / agan wolde (he in the northern part of heaven’s kingdom would possess a home and a high throne, lines 32–34a).²⁷ *Genesis B* will speak back to this moment and further emphasize not only Lucifer’s will for possession and power, but for construction: the *Genesis B* poet repeats the phrase *cwæð he* (spoke he) (again a stand against the Creator’s word) during the account of Lucifer’s boasting and attempt to *stol geworhte* (create a throne, line 273) in the *west and norð* of heaven (lines 265–276). Spatially, these desires are rooted in a place that has connections with hell and therefore with darkness—hell was traditionally thought to be located in the north.²⁸ The foundations of this movement, however, are brittle, built on a misdirected striving for opposition and breakage, suggested further by the manuscript’s full-page illustration of the angelic fall on page 3, which details the failed fabrication of a citadel in heaven by Lucifer and his subjects and compliments the prologue to *Genesis A*.

In this full-page pictorial narrative of the fall on page 3 (Fig. 9.1), episodes from the angelic fall are depicted in horizontal registers, with Lucifer crowned and decorated at the top, next to his high-built tower and its ready—though empty—throne. As the pictorial narrative continues downwards, God casts the rebels out of heaven and in the bottom register they are depicted tumbling into the abyss. Fragments of Lucifer’s

Figure 9.1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, p. 3. (Photo courtesy of The Bodleian Libraries, The University of Oxford.)

citadel, related to his imagined *ham and heahsetl* in the lines from *Genesis A* quoted above, crash down with the fallen figures and break apart, while the angels themselves, entering a hell-space that has at its apex shrouding and smudged waves of ink, contort and darken. In the upper registers of this page the angels are drawn in both red and brown colors, but the artist allows dark brown to predominate in the lower registers, as if to emphasize the fall from light to darkness. Also in the lower registers the angels bend out of physical shape as they become devils.²⁹ The lines from the poem above, which can be read or heard in unison with the upper registers of the illustration on page 3 of the MS, have particular power when contemplated alongside those fragments of that fallen palace in the illustration. As Lucifer, at the center of the bottom panel, is shown falling towards his approaching state of being bound in the mouth of hell, the throne falls right behind him as if he fell sitting on it: an ironic turn, gesturing towards the approaching “throne” in the dark abyss.

Severed from heavenly light in *Genesis A*, Lucifer and his followers enter into a container molded by the hands of God, a *witehus* (torture-house, line 39a) that is

synnihte beseald, susle geinnod,
geondfolen fyre and færcyle,
rece and reade lege. heht þa geond þæt rædlease hof
weaxan witebrogan.

(lines 42–45a)

(Sealed in perpetual night, inlaid with torment, filled throughout with fire and ferocious cold, smoke and red fire. He commanded monstrous tortures to grow throughout that disordered dwelling.)

The prideful angels are banished to a place of disorder full of that ill counsel that motivated the erroneous movements amidst the light of heaven, which now becomes a part of their identity: hell is a *rædlease hof*.³⁰ The smoke and flame obscure the angels. In what seems a development of those connections between the “error” (*gedwilde*) of division (*dæl*) and darkness noted above, this place is “sealed in perpetual night.” The detail is an intriguing one. *Beseald* has the implication of enclosure, a complete surrounding, while *synnihte* suggests both a “continual night” and “the darkness of chaos.”³¹ So Lucifer and his comrades have not only fallen from light, but are now unable to perceive it. This is stressed further in *Genesis B*, where the fallen angels have “æfyn ungemet lange” (evening

immeasurably long, line 313) in hell, ever looking forward to a daylight that will never come.

The notion that the fallen are *synnihte beseald* in *Genesis A* gestures too towards hell's connection with that which is concealed, hidden or deceitful. But, while the scenes in Eden in *Genesis A* and *B* will pick up on the ability of devils to shroud the perception of human beings (particularly those that lead Eve to the *dimman dæd* (dim deed, *Genesis B*, line 685a) of taking fruit from the *dim and þystre* (dim and dark, line 478a) tree of death), these early parts of *Genesis A* accentuate how the fallen angels are blemished as they pass through darkness:

wæs him gylp forod
beot forborsten, and forbigeð þrym
wlite gewemmed. Heo on wrace syððan
seomodon swearte

(lines 69a–72a)

(their boast for them was broken apart, and their
vow burst, and their glory humbled, beauty stained.
Afterward they hovered darkly in exile).

That *wlite*, which was the essence of angelic being (line 36a), their beauty and radiance, is marred, marked, defiled. As the falling angels “hover darkly,” increate, exiled to obscurity and vapor, they are *þystrum beþeahhte* (covered with darkness, line 76a).³² The malformation, the misshaping, is also documented in *Genesis B*, where, during the long fall, the damned host undergo an irrevocable change: “feollon þa ufon of heofnum / þurhlonge swa þreo niht and dagas, / þa englas of heofnum on helle, and heo ealle forsceop / drihten to deoflum” (“they fell then from the heavens continuously for three nights and three days, the angels from heaven into hell, and the lord misshaped them all into devils,” lines 306b–309a). As in Vercelli Homily XIX, the change in *Genesis B* is marked by the verb *forscyppan*, which gestures towards deformation, dark metamorphoses, and the alteration of form into something grotesque. It is a fitting punishment for those who have disrespected their sovereign and his kingdom by attempting to “shape” things for their own gain. In *Christ and Satan*, the misshaping of the angels is also described as a movement from light to darkness:

Blace hworfon
scinnan forscapene; sceaðan hwearfedon

earme æglecan, geond þæt atole scræf,
for ðam anmedlan þe hie ær drugon.
(lines 71b–74)

(pale they were changed, the misshapen spirits, and
the scathers wandered throughout that terrible pit,
wretched enemies, because of their arrogance which
they had previously performed.)

The loss of angelic identity is a movement into a futile, endless wandering, into a state defined by absence, by that which is *blac*, which can mean either pallid or dark, and suggests something with the luminescence drawn out of it.³³ As the *Genesis A* prologue moves into the events from Genesis 1:1., readers and auditors are encouraged to observe that this strife motivated the Creation *for humankind* (who will replace the empty thrones left behind by the exiled angels), and also to make connections, which are called for with verbal echoes, between the unlit, unformed matter of the primordial chaos and the fallen angels regressed state of non-entity:

Ne wæs her þa giet nymþe heolstersceado
wiht geworden ac þes wida grund
stod deop and dim, drihtne fremde,
idel and unnyt.
...
geseah deorc gesweorc
semian sinnihte, sweart under roderum,
won and weste, oð þæt þeos woruldgesceaft
þurh word gewearð wuldorcyninges.
(*Genesis A*, lines 103–106a;
108b–111)

(There was nothing here yet except darkness, nothing
formed but this wide abyss stood deep and dim, alien
to the lord, idle and useless ... (God) saw dark mists
hanging in perpetual night, swarthy under the skies,
wan and void, until this worldly creation came into
being through the word of the glory-king.)

The reference here to *sinnihte*, to “perpetual night,” recalls the use of the same word earlier in the prologue, when hell was described as being “sealed” in the very same thing. This draws a parallel between the inhabitants of the interior of the hellish abode and the empty void “alien” or hostile to the Creator, which hangs suspended, just as the falling angels did.

The cumulative impression of the transformative event in which the lighted angels become shadowy devils, generated by the poems and images of Junius 11, is one that forces its audience to acknowledge the obscurity and entropy of fallen nature, fallen being. In *Genesis A*, *sinnihte* does not occur beyond the first parts of the poem concerned with pre-creation and the earthly creation itself, suggesting further the link between fallen angel and unformed dark matter.

In his writings about the Creation, Bede was concerned with the meaning of the “unformed matter” mentioned in Wisdom 11:18, where the phrase refers to the earth and the waters before they were given shape by God. For Bede, this “matter” was only “unformed” because “before they [the earth and the waters] came into light from which they derived their beauty, it [matter] did not exist” (*quia priusquam in lucem uenirent, unde formositatem haberent, non erat*).³⁴ Bede attempts to explain this by arguing that darkness was “nothing positive, nothing created; it is merely the absence of light”: it is light that reveals the form and the beauty of matter.³⁵ While the *Genesis A* poet is not too concerned with what was “unformed” prior to *the Beginning*, he certainly considers substance or matter without the light of the lord to lie increate, *idel and unnyt* (idle and useless, line 106a), and disordered. The poet’s unique detail that this darkness is *drihtne fremde* (alien/hostile to the lord, line 105b) is an aspect left unsaid in other Old English accounts of Creation that resemble the one in *Genesis A*. The Old English Hexateuch version of the Creation describes the void as *idel and emti*, for instance, but does not elaborate. Elsewhere in the Old English corpus, *fremde* often refers to “foreign” people or places, to that which is “strange” or “not natural,” to “false gods” or things “alien in character.”³⁶ In the Old English *Meters of Boethius*, contemplation of the mind’s weakness tells of how the giving up of light leads to a dark intellectual misery that makes one’s surrounding world “strange” or “foreign” in this way: “*þæt swearcende mod ... þonne hit winnende / his agen leoht anforlæted ... nu hit mare ne wat / for Gode godes buton gnornunge / fremde worulde*” (“the darkened mind ... when in distress it abandons its own light ... since it does not know any more of God’s good, but only the mourning of an alien world,” *Metre 3*, lines 2b–11a).³⁷

The rebel angels’ doomed project in heaven, as the account in *Genesis A* has it, was an erroneous attempt to be like the God who will go on to create the world, an act which follows his construction of hell and unmaking of the angels and reinforces his superiority and rule over the unenlightened. These events, foundational for the poem (the prologue sets out the terms,

words, and colors by which both disobedient and obedient figures from biblical history can be read) and for Junius 11, offer the manuscript's audience a way of contemplating the causes of Creation, which are not mentioned in the Bible, in terms of Creation itself—as light against darkness, as light separated from darkness. David F. Johnson has called for caution when reading the separation of good and bad angels in the prologue as an event corresponding to the separation of light and darkness that takes place at the Creation. But given the verbal echoes that draw connections between the falling angels and the increate void and the strong light–dark contrasts that run throughout both the prologue and the poet's response to Genesis 1:1, the early portions of the poem attempt to attune manuscript readers to the unrivalled power and rule of the Creator by positioning the Creation as a response to the failures of Lucifer, and as an extension of the power of God's light over darkness already stressed in the fall of the angels account.³⁸

Past and Future Light

In his late tenth-century *De temporibus anni*, a work on computus, astronomy, and natural science for those requiring an introduction to such subjects, Ælfric wrote that the bright stars “getacniað ða geleaffulan on Godes gelaðunge, ðe on goddre drohtnunge scinað” (betoken the faithful in God's congregation, who shine in their good behavior).³⁹ Quoting John 1:9 on Christ as the *lux vera* (true light), Ælfric then concludes that “Næfð ure nan nan leoht ænigre godnysse buton of Cristes gife, se ðe is soðre rihtwisnysse sunne gehaten” (None of us has any light but through the gift of Christ, who is rightly called the sun of righteousness).⁴⁰ Ælfric's remarks suggest that divine radiance can be transmitted through faithfulness. He makes clear that the light of being is a gift from Christ, who was himself the light of Creation embodied in Word and Flesh.

Christ and Satan, the final poem in Junius 11, also contends that the salvific light of Christ is a gift for humankind, one that will bring them to the heavenly *ham* at the end of time and defeat once and for all the dark devils in hell. In contrast to its companions in Junius 11, *Christ and Satan* shows signs of a difficult production,⁴¹ but maintains an interest in Lucifer's loss of light, which it turns to repeatedly in order to reflect the eternal ruination of the rebel angels who sought to possess heaven's radiance for themselves. The voices of the condemned devils, in sequences of admissions and confessions that make up a large portion of the poem as it stands, also speak back to the narratives of Junius 11's *Genesis* section.⁴²

One of the effects of the placement of *Christ and Satan* after the Old Testament poems is its reassertions of their warnings that, while the betrayal of one's lord and misguided attempts to partition, build, and possess a kingdom can result in exile and loss of identity on earth, the cosmological consequences of comparably anti-creative and disobedient behavior against God results in eternal obscurity, exile and affliction. *Christ and Satan* suggests as much with the following statement: "Læte him to bysne hu þa blacan feond / for oferhygdum ealle forwurdon" (let him take as an example how the black fiends were completely ruined because of their pride, lines 195–196).

The fallen angels represented in *Christ and Satan* are plagued by the memory of their failures. In hell, the devils recall the realm of light in a manner that suggests the relentlessness of their psychological torments as well as the obscurity of their senses and the loss of their hold on time. The section of the poem marked "V" by a later annotator, in which is contained lines 223–253, is a well-structured confession, in which the fallen think over the spiritual riches they once possessed. Section "IV" precedes the angelic lament of "V" with a description of heaven and, as if to accentuate the horrors of their state, describes how those angels who remain in the kingdom "scined ð / geond ealra woruldra woruld mid wuldorcyn-inge" ("shine all throughout the world of worlds with the glory king," lines 221b–223). The fallen host in section V, however, are seared with thoughts of light that is forever out of reach, as they "cwædon eft hraðe oðre word" ("spoke swiftly another word," line 227):

Pa we þær wæron,
wunodon on wynnum, geherdon wuldres sweg,
beman stefne. Byrhtword aras,
engla ordfruma, and to þæm æþelan
hnigan him sanctas; sigetorht aras
ece drihten.

(*Christ and Satan*, lines 234b–239a)

(When we were there (in heaven), we dwelled in joys,
heard the voice of glory, the sound of the trumpet.
Brightword arose, the originator of angels, and to that
prince bowed every saint; the victory-radiant arose, the
eternal lord.)

The "two unique compounds" here⁴³—*Byrhtword* and *sigetorht*—are both linked by the *aras* that gives them their motion and their music,

and by their emphasis on radiance. *Byrhtword*, which the *DOE* defines as “Radiant Word,” is a fitting way for the angels to refer to their *ordfruma* in a poem that elsewhere makes the loss of light a core torment for those in hell (and also glosses *Lucifer* with *leohtberend*).⁴⁴ The compounds here can also be interpreted as denoting Christ, something that, at least temporally, the poem’s most recent editor, R. E. Finnegan, has viewed as confusion on the part of the poet:

there is a dramatic inconsistency here. The poet has included lines that can only refer to the welcome in heaven afforded to those men who have proved themselves worthy on earth in a section which comprises the devil’s recollection of their blissful situation in heaven before the fall. If we recall that no one was allowed to enter heaven proper until the ascension of Christ, then the measure of confusion is large indeed.⁴⁵

The “confusion” might also lie with the fallen angels, however. In their chaos, in their “wandering” in the pit (lines 71–74), the Satanic host loses any hold on time or any sense of the “eschatological outcomes set in motion by their crimes.”⁴⁶ In such temporal collapse, their punishment follows suite. The lamenting devils are confronted by inflamed memories and visions in which the heavenly light they once possessed becomes a radiating reminder of not only their former essence and identity (and meaning), but also a revelation: they are assaulted by the heavenly joys, praise and bliss that was ever-present at the expulsion from heaven and will be once more at the suppression of devilry at the Last Judgement, through the creative power of God and its embodiment in the “bright word” (the *verbum* and *lux* of John 1:1–12), Christ. It is characteristic of *Christ and Satan* to collapse biblical time and reorder chronology in this way. Indeed, the poem brings a Christological tone to events associated with Genesis: at the beginning of the poem, for instance, Christ is present at the Creation of the cosmos, of which hell is part, and is involved in the expulsion of the Luciferian army (lines 1–33).

Catherine E. Karkov writes that, in this acknowledgement of “loss and fate” by the fallen company in “hell, a sort of world turned upside down, words are used in lament rather than in praise. Nevertheless, the words that might have been now present to us an absent mirror of the songs of praise sung by the poet, angels and readers, a recurring theme throughout the manuscript.”⁴⁷ Finnegan, on the other hand, notes that *Byrhtword*—the radiant word, that is, Christ—cannot be easily

"Radiant Word," picks up the image of the *torht* to reveal how the reclamation of light lies in wait for the faithful who will be rewarded in heaven. That this is to be a replacement of, or reacquaintance with, the light that the prideful angels gave up is suggested by the interest of the poet in segregation and division, which is here not a division of good and wicked angels, or of darkness and light, but of the soul from its sorrows—a division that comes full circle to refer to the unity of the heavenly kingdom before the angels' first "dark thoughts" in *Christ and Satan*. Furthermore, the reference to the *stol* in a restorative context recalls moments from the narratives in the earlier texts and images of the manuscript. The *stol*, of course, was what Lucifer, in his pride, hoped to fabricate in those stories of the rebellion documented in Junius 11. The fragmentation that occurred during the war in heaven, detailed in earlier portions of *Christ and Satan* as well as in the *Genesis* poems, will finally be rectified when the faithful enter the kingdom at the end of time, led there by Christ's radiance and teaching.

As a manuscript that achieves many of its effects through its particular placement of and variation on events from salvation history, the cumulative impression of Junius 11's Luciferian narratives, images, and expansions insist on the repercussions of misrule and anti-creation by thoroughly enquiring into what it meant that Lucifer lost his light, into what—spatially, spiritually, and psychologically—the effects of the absence of light were: the complete loss of God-gifted, created being. Such darkness, the manuscript suggests, awaits those who recycle Lucifer's error on earth by engaging in unwise artifice or sinful propagation. This is a central warning in a manuscript of extremes.

Christ and Satan, as a slightly later attachment to the Junius 11 book, might demonstrate how those narratives of *Genesis A* and *B* were received and related to by manuscript audiences. As such, the poem's concern with the plight of the devils in hell (a kind of aimless wandering through memories of former brightness), and also with the final restoration of that light to the faithful at the end of time, suggests a concern on the part of compilers to reassert that Lucifer's attempt to rival the Creator led to an irreparable state of non-entity for those involved in the great rebellion. Compilers of Junius 11 may have felt the need to put together a book in which the angelic failure was extensively detailed in order to reflect the hellish repercussions of prideful misrule and miscreation. The poems that detail the rebellion and its aftermath might share interests in light and darkness because that imagery was commonplace in Christian poems and

in tales of Lucifer's fall, but the emphasis on the *loss* of Lucifer's light in the Junius 11 poems is more detailed than any surviving Old English text from the period: the conception of light-deprivation clearly influences the way the *Genesis A* poet structures and reimagines his version of the post-Luciferian Creation; it has an impact on the *Genesis B* poet's elaborations on the psychological and physical tortures of the fallen host (which turn repeatedly to their memories of light); and, in *Christ and Satan*, it informs passages about the reclamation of heaven by the faithful at the end of days. Taken together, and combined with several illuminations depicting the angelic fall and Satan in hell, these variations produce a thematic strand that runs through the manuscript and asks the form these events take in one poem be read in relation to the form they take in another within the same book. Junius 11 details clearly and repeatedly that evil is that which threatens to undo created order, obscure the intellect, and fragment and unhinge the laws of God and kings. Those on earth who align themselves with the Satanic darkness that clouds identity, the manuscript suggests, place themselves in a shadowy exile that torments through its absences and through its lack of a resolution. Those who remain faithful, on the other hand, will inherit the light that was lost by the apostate angels before the world came into being.⁵⁰

NOTES

¹ Leslie Lockett has convincingly dated the first portion of the manuscript to ca. 960–ca. 990, combining analyzes of the codicology, initials, illustrations, script and colour of “Liber I,” the main portion of Junius 11, to rule out the early decades of the eleventh century for the compilation. See Lockett, “An Integrated Re-Examination of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002): pp. 141–173.

² J. R. Hall argued that Junius 11 was in fact a “nonliturgical epic of redemption,” related to treatments of salvation history such as Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus*. Hall succeeded in making a strong case for the role of the scribe in the compilation and organisation of a manuscript, but his reading of Junius 11’s poetry and poetic language is cursory. See J. R. Hall, “The Old English Epic of Redemption: The Theological Unity of MS. Junius 11,” *Traditio* 32 (1976): pp. 185–208, reprinted in Roy Liuzza, ed., *The Poems of MS Junius 11: Basic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 20–52. See further J. R. Hall, “The Old English Epic of Redemption: Twenty-Five Year Retrospective,” in Liuzza, ed., *The Poems of Junius 11*, pp. 53–68.

³ Catherine E. Karkov, *The Art of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2011), p. 236. Karkov wrote that the “majority of

scholars today would agree that the manuscript was deliberately compiled according to a predetermined plan in order to create a narrative centered on the theme of Fall and Redemption" in her *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2. The lack of linearity does not counteract the manuscript's redemptive emphases, but the manner in which they achieve their effects is not by way of a narrative as straightforward as the one posited by Hall.

⁴ While it has long been acknowledged that the poems are the works of different poets, the association between the manuscript and the cowherd Cædmon, whose name was written on the manuscript by Junius himself, persists. See the recent collection of translations by Damian Love, *The Cædmon Poems: A Verse Translation of Anglo-Saxon Christian Poetry* (Ely, Cambridgeshire: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2014).

⁵ The contrast between light and darkness is of course a structuring principle in Old English poetry and it has been investigated in these terms by critics who were concerned with the oral-formulaic nature of Old English verse and by others who have studied color classification within the Old English vocabulary. See, for instance, Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt: P. D. Lang, 1979), who is concerned with possible "pagan" survivals in Old English references to light and darkness, but who does not address the Junius poems. For a study of colour in Old English, see N. F. Barley, "Old English Colour Classification: Where Do Matters Stand?," *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974): pp. 15–28.

⁶ R. E. Finnegan, in his edition of *Christ and Satan*, writes that the contrast is "of the very fabric of the poem." Finnegan, ed., *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 101. All quotations of *Christ and Satan* are from this edition. Translations of Old English are my own.

⁷ Daniel Anlezark, "Lay Reading, Patronage and Power in Bodleian Library, Junius 11," in Giles E. M. Gasper and John McKinnell, *Ambition and Anxiety: Courts and Courtly Discourse, c. 700–1600* (Durham Medieval and Renaissance Monographs and Essays, 3. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2014), pp. 76–98 (p. 76).

⁸ See Daniel Anlezark, "The Fall of the Angels in *Solomon and Saturn II*," in *Apocryphal Texts and Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*, eds. Kathryn Powell and Donald Scragg (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 121–135. Interestingly, evidence for the use of the fall of the angels story by Anglo-Saxons to reflect and interpret particular contemporary events can be identified in the document known as King Edgar's Refoundation Charter of the New Minster, Winchester (London, British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian A. viii, folios 2v–33v), in which the story is used to justify the expulsion of secular clerics from and the establishment of Benedictine monks within the New Minster ca. 963–964. This charter has intriguing connections with the prologue to *Genesis A*, the first poem in Junius 11, as identified by David F. Johnson, "The Fall of Lucifer in *Genesis A* and

Two Anglo-Latin Royal Charters," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97 (1998): 500–521.

⁹ A. N. Doane ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition, Revised* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2013), p. 290. All quotations from *Genesis A* are from this edition.

¹⁰ In poetry outside of Junius 11, the fall of the angels is referenced in cursory and often indirect ways. A poet or one of his characters will recall Satan's wrongdoing or the fall into hell as something that happened long ago in order to intensify the presence of pride or evil in that poem's present narrative (see *Vain-glory*, lines 57–69a and 61b–63a; *Juliana*, lines 418–424; *Elene*, lines 759–771; *Andreas* lines 1185–1194, 1376–1385). The version of the fall of the angels that most resembles the other accounts found in the Junius 11 poems *Genesis B* and *Christ and Satan* is that found in *Solomon and Saturn II* (lines 273–296).

¹¹ In his comments on the opening lines of *Genesis* (*In principio creauit Deus celum et terram* [In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, Gen. 1:1]) in the Preface to *Genesis*, the *Interrogationes Sigewulfi* and the *Hexameron*, Ælfric's rewrites the history of the angelic Fall. Michael Fox notes that in Ælfric's other narrative accounts the "temporal location of the creation of the angels is either not specified, or is simply placed under the works of the first day." See Michael Fox, "Ælfric on the Creation and Fall of the Angels," *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002): pp. 175–200.

¹² Richard Marsden, ed., *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, vol. 1: Introduction and Text, EETS, vol. 330 (Oxford, 2008), lines 65–69.

¹³ Peter Clemoes ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text*. EETS supplementary series 17 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), I.I., lines 29–30.

¹⁴ Tiffany Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), p. 105. Latin *Lucifer* may have become more commonly associated with the story of the angelic fall from light to darkness in later Anglo-Saxon England, as evidenced by its occurrence in Ælfric's writings and in the Junius 11 manuscript. Junius 11 might certainly be a sign of the growing importance of that motif.

¹⁵ Donald Scragg ed., *The Vercelli Homilies*, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xix, 12–23.

¹⁶ Karkov, *Text and Picture*, p. 52.

¹⁷ Anlezark, "Lay Reading," p. 87.

¹⁸ Finnegan notes that this refers "either to the angelic order of which Lucifer was the head, or to Lucifer himself" and that if "the poet is thinking here of the angelic order which followed Satan in rebellion, rather than of Satan himself, it is a proper and logical extension to denote such an order by the name of its chief." *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*, p. 106.

¹⁹ *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*, p. 106.

²⁰ When the poet comes to Genesis 3–5 and 8–22, events are followed closely, meaning that a form of the biblical narrative with these chapters in sequence is likely to have served as a source. See Charles W. Wright, “*Genesis A* ad litteram,” in Fox and Sharma, eds., *Old English Literature and the Old Testament* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 121–172 (pp. 149–150). The main source text is likely to have been a combination of Vulgate and Old Latin versions of Genesis.

²¹ This sets the poet apart from scriptural commentators who viewed the angelic fall as taking place simultaneously with the Creation described in Genesis, or on the fifth or sixth days of it (as Ælfric does in the quotation from his *Letter* above and in his *Exameron Anglice*).

²² The image of the clouded or darkened mind runs throughout the Old English Boethius, for instance, where it often refers to those who are in error. See Karmen Lenz, *Ræd and Frofer: Christian Poetics in the Old English Frofer-boc Meters with a Foreword by Kurt Otten* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 67–93.

²³ Christopher A. Jones, “Early Medieval *Chaos*,” in *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, ed. Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 15–39 (p. 29).

²⁴ Doane, *Genesis A*, p. 291.

²⁵ This is particularly prominent in the accounts of God severing the angels from light. Satan gives voice to this power, his repetition suggesting its assault as memory, in *Genesis B*, for instance: “he hæfð us þeah leohtes bescyrede / beworpen on ealra wita mæste ne magon we þæs wrace gefremman / geleanian him mid laðes wihte þæt he us hafað leohtes bescyrede” (“God has nevertheless severed us from the light, cast us into the greatest of all tortures, we may not perform revenge for this, repay him any hostility at all, because he has severed us from the light,” lines 392b–394).

²⁶ For discussion of the importance of the theme of division to the structure of the early parts of *Genesis A*, see Constance B. Hieatt, “Divisions: Theme and Structure of *Genesis A*,” *NM* 81 (1980): pp. 243–251.

²⁷ Satan’s pursuit of vengeance in *Genesis B* is full of scenarios in which his distorted reflections of God’s own creative acts threaten to overhaul and rupture Creation itself. When first moving against heaven, Satan “ongan ... winn up ahebban” (began to raise up strife, line 259b); “ongan ofermod wesian” (began to be proud, line 262); “ongan ofermede micel” (began great pride, line 293) and “wyrcean ongunne / trymede getimbro” ([should] begin to create and raise up a structure, lines 275b–276). Later in the poem, the demonic emissary sent by Satan to Eden, the place referred to as God’s *handgeweorc* (“handiwork,” line 241b), parodies the biblical notion that in the beginning was the Word (John 1:1) when he speaks to Adam: “Ongon hine þa frinan forman worde / se laða mid ligenum” (then the hostile one probed him [Adam] with deceits, with his first word, lines 495–496a).

Forma (first) is related to Old English *fruma* (beginning, origin) (*DOE*, s. v. *fruma*) and the words first creeping out of the messenger's mouth, the wordplay suggests, seek to undo the bond established between Eden and Heaven during the "first" shaping of heaven and earth.

²⁸ See Doane ed., *Genesis B*, p. 261: "we search in vain for the location of Satan's throne in the north and the west for the simple reason that was never established there, the rebellion proving futile. What the angel is planning, without knowing it, is a kingdom in Hell, with which north and west are associated."

²⁹ Similar use of dark colours to signal this change can be seen on fol. 2r of the Illustrated Old English *Hexateuch*, which shows angels falling into hell and, as they descend into the bottom register, they are stripped of their heavenly trappings and colour, becoming black-haired, with black, spikey waistbands. Satan is upside down in the bottom corner, in an upturned mandorla, his very head and visage smothered by dark rubbing.

³⁰ The description of hell as a *rædleaze hof* on line 44 is not coincidental. A lack of *ræd* [good counsel] is associated with disorder, misinterpretation and ill-advised action throughout surviving Old English. In *Genesis A*, however, the poet is keen to identify this quality as one at the core of the rebellion in heaven and a main cause of disobedient, hostile action throughout history. Abandoning wisdom and the obligations of their position within the heavenly community, the movement of the wicked angels against God is one rooted in this ill counsel: "noldan dreogan leng / heora selfra *ræd* ac hie of siblufan / godes ahwurfon" (they would no longer work for their own good counsel/benefit, but they turned away from God's natural love, lines 23b–25a). Satan's first pursuits and anti-creative utterances are those that surround and give origin to *unræd*, a word evoking ill counsel as well as misinterpretation and confused or misdirected speech: Old English *redan* has as one of its cognates Gothic *rodjan*, meaning "to speak," see Nicholas Howe, "The Cultural Construction of Reading in Anglo-Saxon England," in Jonathan Boyarin ed., *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press), pp. 58–79. *Ræd* was innate to the angels who *synna ne cūpon*, / *firena fremman ac hie on friðe lifdon* (did not know of sins, the performing of crimes, but lived in peace, lines 18b–19) before their fall. It is disregarded and abandoned by Satan and his followers, who turn from peace to disorder. In *De initio creaturæ*, Ælfric also stresses that the division of the kingdom, the division of obedient and disobedient angels, is because of the *ræd* that binds and blinds the rebels and motions them toward the hostile consideration of how to *dalan* heaven with God, which echoes *Genesis A*, lines 25b–27a. This "counsel" and "ill-counsel" was clearly significant for both Ælfric and the *Genesis A* poet and it is interesting to think of how these descriptions of events would have been read through and after the reign of Æthelræd II. Stephen Pelle has noted the changes to *De initio creaturæ* evident in the twelfth century MS version (London, British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian D. xiv): in this manuscript's

passage outlining the main reason for Lucifer's rebellion, the twelfth-century writer changes the three occurrences of the term *ræd* (referring to the angel's counsel that causes the Fall) to *unræd*, emphasising the negativity of the counsel that breeds rebellion, pride, and hostility. See Pelle, "*Ræd, Unræd, and Raining Angels: Alterations to a Late Copy of Ælfric's Homily de initio Creaturae*," *Notes & Queries* 57.3: 295–301. Daniel Anlezark has observed that it is possible to imagine a book like Junius 11 "being made for a young Æthelred in the period to 984, when he was under the influence of his mother Ælfthryth and Bishop Æthelwold; reflecting on the course of events especially in the light of the poem *Daniel* would have been salutary," "Lay Reading," p. 97.

³¹ DOE, s.v. *besellan*; B-T, s.v. *synnihte*.

³² *Beþeccan* [to cover] often occurs in relation to evil or concealment in Old English literature. DOE, s.v. *beþeccan*, 5a.

³³ DOE s.v. *blac*.

³⁴ C. W. Jones ed., *Bede: In Genesin*. Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 118A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), I. i, 2, lines 113–114.

³⁵ As noted by Calvin B. Kendall ed. and trans., *On Genesis: Bede* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 71.

³⁶ DOE, s.v. *fremde*

³⁷ Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden, eds. and trans., *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De consolazione philosophiae*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁸ David F. Johnson, "The Fall of Lucifer in *Genesis A* and Two Anglo-Latin Royal Charters." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97 (1998), pp. 500–521 (p. 506). That angels could be viewed as representative of both light and darkness is further suggested by the manuscript images, particularly those depicting Creation and especially the image on page 6, where an angel representing the *tenebrae* of the void covers its face with cloth.

³⁹ Martin Blake, ed. and trans., *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), p. 78, lines 69–70. This particular use of celestial phenomena has its roots in Bede's DTR, C. 6, 40–42.

⁴⁰ Blake, *De Temporibus*, p. 78, lines 74–75.

⁴¹ *Christ and Satan* has been copied out by at least three scribes. The copying process evident in "Liber II" suggests trouble and pressures on labor, demonstrating just how much the compilers wanted this final poem to be included. Barbara C. Raw has convincingly argued that *Christ and Satan* was added to the main body of the manuscript only a short while after the initial compilation, on vellum prepared for the end of *Daniel*. See Raw, "The Construction of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11," *Anglo-Saxon England* 13 (1984): pp. 187–207 (p. 188).

⁴² Ruth Wehlau has written that *Christ and Satan's* anachronistic structure "avoids the construction of tension or suspense that is a common function of narrative. The poem is iconic, creating symbolic images to be contemplated."

See Wehlau, "The Power of Knowledge and the Location of the Reader in *Christ and Satan*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97 (1998), pp. 1–12, 10.

⁴³ Finnegan, *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*, p. 101.

⁴⁴ In *Christ and Satan*, Satan is *yflæs ordfruma* (originator of evil, line 373a).

⁴⁵ Finnegan, *Christ and Satan*, p. 102.

⁴⁶ Jill M. Fitzgerald, "Measuring Hell by Hand: Rogation Rituals in *Christ and Satan*," *Review of English Studies* (2016), pp. 1–22, 14.

⁴⁷ Karkov, *Text and Picture*, 107.

⁴⁸ Finnegan, *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*, p. 101. Strangely, Finnegan sees *sigetorht* in different terms, noting that it is a sign that the angels have experienced Christ as "brightly victorious in all things" and views it as a word that fits in with the themes and characters of the poem in all parts.

⁴⁹ Roberta Frank, "Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Verse," in R. M. Liuzza ed., *The Poems of MS Junius 11: Basic Readings*, pp. 69–99 (p. 73).

⁵⁰ I would like to thank Daniel Anlezark, James Paz, and Ruth Wehlau for their contributions to the session on "Anti-Creation in the Anglo-Saxon World" at the Leeds International Medieval Congress, 2014, from which this essay has grown. I would like to say an extra special thanks to Ruth Wehlau for her patience and understanding during the time since that event.

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Chapter 10

Darkness Edible: Soul, Body, and Worms in Early Medieval English Devotional Literature

Haruko Momma

There were still battles to be fought but these would be *post mortem*, the soundless, inert wars of chemicals contesting for her trenches and her bastions amid the debris of exploded cells. Calcium and water usurped the place of blood and oxygen so that her defunct brain, almost at once, began to swell and tear its canopies, spilling all its saps and liquors, all its stored immersions of passion, memory, and will.

(Jim Crace, *Being Dead*)¹

Introduction: Worms and the Anglo-Saxon Literary Mindset

Memento mori is a theme commonly found in western literature, but the image used for remembering death varies from one cultural space to another. If the Elizabethan audience was encouraged to meditate on a skull just dug up from the grave, John Lydgate had, almost two centuries earlier, composed a poem on the dance of death based on the *danse macabre* shown on a mural in the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris.² The reverse side of this phenomenon—that is, the diversity of images used as a trigger for such meditative practice—is that a group of literary texts (and other instances of mimetic art) that employ similar images for this purpose belong to the same or a similar cultural space.

In this chapter I will focus on a certain motif that is frequently found in early medieval English texts, both before and after the Norman Conquest: that is, worms devouring a corpse in the grave as part of the theme of soul and body. This visual trigger relies on a rhetorical function

that differs from those used in later periods: while both a skull and a dancing skeleton are synecdoches for a lifeless body, worms are metonymic in relation to the corpse. Thus, readers who come across ravenous worms in a text dealing with the subject of death are encouraged to imagine a body still encased in flesh. The trope of ravenous worms as an accoutrement of the theme of soul and body gives poets and prose writers alike a golden opportunity to describe how the corpse gradually loses its integrity in the most gruesome fashion imaginable—that is, imaginable within the bounds of their own cultural space. In the next section, I will consider the use of the image of bodily decay by analyzing the *Soul and Body* poem from the Exeter Book and several other examples, both verse and prose, taken from Anglo-Saxon literature. I will demonstrate how the trope of ravenous worms was elaborated by vernacular writers to generate a range of variation in terms of both form and application. I will point out that these worms thrived especially in verse, so much so that they have become a staple—almost a commonplace—in poetic texts dealing with the theme of soul and body. In the section that follows, I will turn to Early Middle English verse to show how worms as a symbol of death endured the linguistic blow of the Norman Conquest and crawled their way into new literary habitats. I will begin with *The Soul's Address to the Body* from the Worcester Fragments and then move on to another Early Middle English poem known as *The Grave*. In order to explore the continual and creative use of the trope within the theme of death and decay, I will examine this short alliterative verse in its manuscript context. The chapter will close with further consideration on the organic tie between the trope of ravenous worms and alliterative form.

Gifer the Ringleader

According to Isidore's etymology-based natural history, "Vermin (*vermis*) are animals that are generated ... from flesh or wood or some earthly substance, without any sexual congress."³ In like manner, literary worms seem to be generated in Old English verse almost every time mention is made of a dead body in the grave. An example of such a ghastly image is found in *Soul and Body II*, in which the narrator describes the disintegration of the body, part by part:

Biþ þæt heafod tohliden, honda tohleopode,
geaflas toginene, goman toslitene,
seonwe beoð asogene, sweora bicowen.⁴
(*Soul and Body II*, 103–105)

(The head is cracked open, the hands broken into pieces,
the jaws forced open, the mouth lacerated within,
the sinews are sucked dry, the neck chewed through.)

Here the body lies motionless, while being tagged, chewed upon, torn, split, and penetrated. In the grave, the body is reduced to a mere object, while the worms hold the subject position even at the grammatical level:

rib reafiað reþe wyrmas,
drincað hloþum hra, heolfres þurstge.
(*Soul and Body II*, 106–107)

(savage worms plunder the ribs,
gorge on the corpse in a throng, thirsting for blood.)

The premise of this poem is that the soul is allowed to visit the grave “once every seven nights” (“ymb seofon niht,” 10a) and gives an address to its former consort. The body remains mute, because its tongue, the narrator explains, has been “shredded into ten pieces as a solace to the hungry ones” (“totogen on tyn healfe / hungrum to hroþor,” 108–109a), so that “it cannot exchange witty words with the accursed soul” (“heo ne mæg horsclice / wordum wrixlan wið þone wergan gæst,” 109b–110).

This Old English soul and body poem underlines the agency of the worms by individualizing—almost personifying—the insects: they are like a band of intruders, and they have a leader whose name, *Gifer*, means “glutton” in Old English. True to his name, he is appetite incarnate:

Gifer hatte se wurm, þam þa geaflas beoð
nædle scarpran. Se geneþeð to
ærest ealra on þam eorðscræfe;
he þa tungan totyhð ond þa toþas þurhsmyhð,
ond to ætwelan oþrum gerymeð,
ond þa eagan þurhiteð ufon on þæt heafod
wyrnum to wiste.
(*Soul and Body II*, 111–117a)

(That worm is called Gifer. His mouth is
sharper than a needle. He is the one to press on,
before all others, inside the earth cave;
he tears apart the tongue and eats away the teeth,
and clears for others a pathway to a feast,
and penetrates the eyes, entering the head,
a place of mirth for the worms.)⁵

The *Soul and Body* poem of the Exeter Book is a narratological triumph, in that the text is designed to increase the horror of the body's decay in stages. Before providing the repulsive description of the activities of Gifer and his band, the poet makes the condemned soul give a direct speech to the body. In its virtual monologue, the soul wishes to retaliate by accusing the body of its former wrongdoings, or, to use its own words, by setting out "to give offence with words, just as you did it to me with deeds" ("wemman mid wordum, swa þu worhtes to me," 59). To put it differently, the hapless—and utterly helpless—body receives violence of the mouth twice: first, from the soul, which, with its piercing words, berates the body for its pleasure-driven behavior while the two were still together on earth; second, from Gifer and his band, which, with their penetrating teeth, consume the very organs that used to give pleasure to the body.

Worms that feast on human flesh have a long literary life, which most likely goes back to the pre-Christian period. As a trope to accompany the theme of soul and body, ravenous worms are found in a homily from late antiquity known as the Nonantola Version, in which the soul of a rich but corrupt man gives an address to the body in front of a troop of demons waiting to claim it:

Tu eras fecunda, o caro, et ego maculenta; tu eras virens et ego pallida; tu eras hillaris ego tristis; tu ridebas et ego semper plorabam. Modo eris esca vermium et putredo pulveris, et requiesces modicum tempus, et me deduxisti cum fletu ad inferos.⁶

(Flesh, you were fat and I was thin; you were vigorous and I was wan; you were merry and I was sad; you laughed and I always wept. Now you will be food for worms and dust's decay. You will rest for a little while, but you have led me with weeping to hell.)⁷

The Old English trope of rapacious worms, then, has its origin in Latin prose. But as far as cultural compatibility is concerned, it was a good "match" for the vernacular tongue of early medieval England. Once there, these tropic creatures were to stay for a very long time. And this gruesome image seems to have been particularly compatible with the traditional verse form, for the expression "food for worms" is used as a formula in many poems of homiletic or didactic nature. In addition to the two Old English soul and body poems, Cynewulf's work, which is recorded in both the Vercelli Book and the Exeter Book, uses the worm formula to conjure up the image of a soul journeying to the otherworld: for example, *weormum to broðre* (*Fates of the Apostles*, 95b) and *wyrme to broþor* (*Juliana*, 416b). Worms also found their way into homiletic prose: for instance, the two Old

English translations of the Nonantola Version both use the expression “food for worms” (*wurma mete/wyrma mete*).⁸ Even in prose homilies, the trope of ravenous worms has a tendency to seek an alliterative environment. The use of alliteration in homiletic prose in conjunction with the trope of worms is found, for example, in an anonymous composite homily from the eleventh century known as Napier XXX. In this text, the trope is expressed in the equivalent of two alliterative long-lines:

we syndon *deadlice* men and to *duste* sceolon,
on *worulde wurðan* *wurmum* to æte.⁹

(we are mortal men and must turn to dust,
become food for worms in this world.)

In Old English literature, the trope of ravenous worms was so well developed that writers often came up with variations. It was likewise applied to diverse types of writing, although alliteration still seems to have been a good conveyer of this gruesome image. And this Anglo-Saxon literary legacy was strong enough to survive the Norman Conquest, a historical event that to the Anglo-Saxons was not only a political blow but also a linguistic and literary one. In the next section I will consider the resilience of the trope by showing how these literary worms not only lived on but also evolved into diverse forms during the Early Middle English period.

Worms in Early Middle English Alliterative Verse

Generally speaking, the production of new vernacular texts declined in England during the so-called long twelfth century, as the English language had to yield to French the position of the high diglossic variety, while Latin retained its status as the ultimate language of prestige.¹⁰ No longer favored by the ruling house as a medium for disseminating useful knowledge, English was, most commonly, the tongue of the third order and, at best, a means to express political discontent in a local chronicle.¹¹ But the fact remained that English-speakers were still the numerical majority, and hence the church or, perhaps rather, various local churches and other religious institutions, recognized the importance of instructing them in their own tongue.¹² In recent years, scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance of the post-Conquest production of manuscripts containing vernacular materials from the Anglo-Saxon period.¹³ This literary phenomenon has two ramifications for our purpose.

First, Anglo-Saxon literature had no small influence on vernacular writing long after the end of the era. Second, since a good number of Old English texts copied during this period were homilies, the vernacular literary scene of post-Conquest England, insofar as it existed, provided a friendly environment for the trope of ravenous worms together with the theme of soul and body.

While I hope to discuss the transmission of homilies dealing with the theme of soul and body and the trope of ravenous worms on some other occasion, the rest of this chapter will analyze examples of Early Middle English poems that deal with the theme and the trope in question. I believe that such a focus is warranted, because poetic compositions from the period immediately following the Conquest are mainly homiletic or didactic. Two such texts refer to ravenous worms: *The Soul's Address to the Body* and *The Grave*. The former is preserved in the so-called Worcester Fragments from the first half of the thirteenth century, although the composition of the poem itself probably goes back to the twelfth century.¹⁴ Like the Old English *Soul and Body* poems of the Vercelli Book and the Exeter Book, *The Soul's Address to the Body* follows the convention of the theme of soul and body, complete with the trope of ravenous worms. At the same time, this anonymous Middle English poem, which comes in seven fragments, has widened the scope of the theme in a number of ways. The poet has particularly enhanced the description of the process of the body's decay, so that the worms in this text are multitudinous, voracious, and relentless. Compared to Gifer of the Old English *Soul and Body* poems, who mainly attacks the head, these worms crawl deeper and deeper into the body until they reach its very core:

Þe sculen nu waxen wurmes besiden,
 þeo hungrie feond, þeo þe freten wulleþ.
 Heo wulleþ þe frecliche freten, for heom þin flæsc
 likeþ.
 Heo wulleþ freten þin fule hold, þeo hwule heo hit
 findeþ.
 Þonne hit al biþ agon, heo wulleþ gnawen þine bon,
 þeo orlease wurmes. Heo windeþ on þin armes,
 heo brekeþ þine breoste, ond borieþ þurh ofer al;
 heo creopeþ in ond ut: þet hord is hore owen!
 Ond so heo wulleþ waden wide in þine wombe,
 todelen þine þermes þeo þe deore weren,
 lifre ond þine lithe lodliche torenden.
 Ond so scal formelten mawe ond þin milte. ...¹⁵

(Now worms will multiply all around you,

Dureleas is þet hus and dearc hit is wiðinnen.
 Ðær þu bist feste bidytt and dæð hefð þa cæge.
 (*The Grave* 13–14)

(Doorless is the house, and it is dark inside.
 There you are shut in fast and death has the key.)

The poet duly mentions worms. But because the grave is seen as a house, these pesky little creatures are now the sole companions of its occupant:

Ladlic is þet eorð-hus and grim inne to wunien.
 Ðær þu scealt wunien and wurmes þe todeleð.
 (*The Grave* 15–16)

(Loathsome is the earth-house, and gruesome to stay
 inside.
 There you must stay, and worms will tear you apart.)

It is more than probable that readers who were familiar with the theme of soul and body imagined the address to the body as an invective uttered by a condemned soul. But the poem's variation on the trope of ravenous worms gives a new perspective on the theme of soul and body. After introducing the metaphor of a house, the speaker tells the body that none of his (or her) former friends will visit this gloomy house. As the speaker extends the metaphor of a house into an allegory, the poem almost turns into a fable, a universal story that not only speaks to everyone but may also be told by anyone. In other words, the original portion of *The Grave* is a product of a poet who assumed readers to be not only familiar with the convention of soul and body literature but also capable of interacting with variation on this convention. Such an assumption held by the poet in turn points to the existence of a rich literary culture and also of a dialectic relationship between poet and audience—a relationship that without doubt goes back to the earlier period.

Reading *The Grave* in Its Manuscript Context

We may also observe such a dialectic relationship in the manuscript of *The Grave* itself. Even though this poem is somewhat open-ended like *The Soul's Address to the Body*, and is, in fact, even shorter than *The Soul's Address*, it can provide us with slightly more information about its production and reception. This 25-line alliterative piece occurs in Bodley

someone else), who was attentive to the tone and phrasing of the original portion of the poem. For instance, the second hand ended the piece with the speaker's pronouncement that the addressee, the body, will be left with no friends except for worms,

For sone þu bist ladlic and lad to iseonne.
(*The Grave* 22)

(For soon you will be loathsome and vile to look at.)

The first lone-line that this continuator put down reads as follows:

For sone bið þin hæfet faxes bireued.
(*The Grave* 23)

(For soon your head will be deprived of hair.)

It is evident that this is an imitation of the immediately preceding sentence, for the continuator repeats the line-initial *for sone* (for soon) to create an anaphoric construction comparable with the opening two lines of the poem, both of which begin with *ðe wes* (for you, ... was), and also with lines 5 and 6, both of which begin with *nu me* (now people).²³ The continuator thus demonstrates literary sensibility by echoing the rhetoric of the original portion of the poem. There is, however, one important defect in this first added line—a defect if we were to see it in the light of the poetic tradition from the earlier period: namely, this sentence lacks alliteration. The continuator, however, rectifies this shortcoming in two more lone-lines:

al bið ðes faxes feirnes forsceden;
næle hit nan mit fingres feire stracien.
(*The Grave* 24–25)

(the beauty of this hair will all be dispersed;
none would stroke it gently with fingers.)

These two long-lines use both alliteration (*faxes/feirnes*, *fingres/feire*) and traditional syntactic rhythm comparable with the original portion of the poem. And yet, these two lines also show innovative formal features that are more common in later Middle English alliterative verse than in traditional Old English poetry. First, they have running or consecutive alliteration, with each line alliterating on the same consonant < f >.²⁴ Second, they have what might be called near-rhymes created by the verb

ending *-en* at the end of the long-lines (*forsceden*, past participle, and *stracien*, infinitive), and possibly also by the noun declension *-es* at the end of the first half-lines (*faxes*, genitive singular, and *fingres*, plural). Furthermore, we note a thematic innovation made by the continuator: that is, the introduction of a new motif, the hair, as a body part to be meditated on in order to remind oneself of death and the shortness of life on earth. As small as this innovation may seem, the reference to hair introduces a new kind of meditative practice. Earlier poems on the theme of soul and body were built on the idea of penetration and loss of integrity: worms will find a passage way through the mouth, breaking the teeth and shredding all the sensory organs contained in the head; or these creatures may puncture the chest to have a grand tour of the torso, conquering one internal organ after another, until they have nothing left but the bones to chew on. This new body part, the hair, generates a new sensation, for it appeals to the sense of touch, so that those who meditate on this motif may think of the ephemeral nature of physical beauty every time they touch their own hair, or someone else's, and let it run through the fingers.

We may only speculate why the continuator stopped after these three long-lines. Maybe it was simply because there was next to no space left in the margin, or perhaps because he (or she) was completely satisfied with the added passage. Regardless, this folio page shows how the theme of soul and body continued on beyond the Conquest, both sustained by the alliterative tradition and propelled by new literary inspirations. The theme of soul and body, along with the trope of ravenous worms, clearly had great appeal to Middle English speakers, for we see Old English prose homilies on the subject—many of them alliterative—repeatedly copied into manuscripts during the long twelfth century, while new alliterative poems were composed in the same period to give new expressions to the theme. The practice of meditation on death from the Anglo-Saxon period lived on in vernacular literature.

Conclusion

Gifer and his kin continued to thrive in English writing during the high Middle Ages. It would take too long even to have a survey of later Middle English texts using the trope of ravenous worms as part of a thematic treatment of soul and body, or death and the transitoriness of life. These little creatures can be found in all manner of places: verse anthologies, religious miscellanies, short verse passages inserted in prose homilies, and more.

The tropic worms were highly adaptable, as well. For instance, the thirteenth-century *Latemest Day* is believed to be a “condensed version” of *The Soul’s Address to the Body* from the Worcester Fragments. It does contain alliteration, which presumably comes from the source material; and yet it is composed in rhymed quatrains.²⁵ While the trope can be found in vernacular texts composed in various forms, Gifer’s kin still seem to have kept the alliterative tooth. One such example—and probably one of the shortest—is the thirteenth-century lyric *Whan the turuf is thy tour*, which uses both rhymes and partial alliteration:

Whan the turuf is thy tour,
 And thy pit is thy bour,
 Thy fel and thy whitë throtë
 Shullen wormës to notë.
 What helpëth thee thennë
 Al the worildë wennë?²⁶

(When the turf is your tour,
 And your pit is your bower,
 Your skin and your white throat
 Shall become matter for worms.
 What help will you then get
 from all the world’s delight?)

Thus this literary tradition continued on even into the later Middle Ages. As Ralph Hanna comments on the nature of Middle English verse, “[a]lliterative experience is always poised at the moment of transience.”²⁷ In medieval English literature, worms, then, function as a signifier for death at the most immediate level imaginable. In this realm of imagination, neither body nor worm may speak in the grave,²⁸ but these bedfellows in this fine and private place become eloquent in urging readers to remember death and meditate on what awaits them at the end of their time on earth.

NOTES

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¹ Jim Crace, *Being Dead* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), p. 10.

² *Hamlet*, V.i. For Lydgate and the tradition of *dance macabre*, see, for example, Seeta Chaganti, “*Danse Macabre* and the Virtual Churchyard,” *Postmedieval* 3 (2012), pp. 7–26, esp. pp. 17–23. For the medieval tradition of the dance of death

at large, see Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

³ Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, trans., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, with the collaboration of Muriel Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 258 (XII.v.1). In some scientific treatises, worms are said to come from the spines of corpses; see, for example, Danielle Westerhof, *Death and the Noble Body in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2008), p. 26, n. 48.

⁴ In this essay Old English poems are taken from the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book* (ASPR, vol. 2. New York: Columbia University Press, 1932) and George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book* (ASPR, vol. 3. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936). All translations in this essay are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵ An almost identical passage occurs in *Soul and Body I* (lines 116–122a), a poem recorded in the Vercelli Book. The majority of *Soul and Body I* (1–126) overlaps with *Soul and Body II*, but it also offers a blessed soul's address to its body at the end (127–166); see further Michael Matto, "The Old English *Soul and Body I* and *Soul and Body II*: Ending the Rivalry," *In Geardagum* 18 (1997), pp. 39–58.

⁶ Théodor Batiouchkof, "Le Débat de l'âme et du corps," *Romania* 20 (1891), pp. 1–55; 513–578 (p. 577).

⁷ Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), pp. 41–42. For further information about sources and analogues for the Old English *Soul and Body* poems, see *ibid.*, pp. 40–50.

⁸ Arthur Napier, *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, vol. 1 Text und Varianten (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883), p. 140 (Napier XXIX); Benjamin Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 2 vols. (London: Public Records, 1840), Vol. 2, p. 398. See further Louise Dudley, "An Early Homily on the 'Body and Soul' Theme," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 8 (1909), pp. 225–253.

⁹ Napier, *Wulfstan*, p. 145 (Napier XXX). Emphasis my own. This particular section of the homily uses Vercelli Homily XXI or a similar (and lost) witness of the same homily. See further D. G. Scragg, "Napier's 'Wulfstan' Homily XXX: Its Sources, its Relationship to the Vercelli Book and Its Style," *Anglo-Saxon England* 6 (1977), pp. 197–211 (pp. 197–198). See also his *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 356. Scragg argues that the alliteration in this section of the homily "suggests dependence upon a poem which has been lost" (p. 348).

¹⁰ For the concept of diglossia, see Charles A. Ferguson, "Diglossia," *Word* 15 (1959), pp. 325–340.

¹¹ See my "Narrating the Battle of Hastings: Multilingual Britain and the Monolingualism of William of Malmesbury," in *Multilingualism in Medieval*

Britain (c. 1066–1520): Sources and Analysis, ed. Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter, with the assistance of Amanda Hopkins (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 227–229.

¹² See, for example, Jonathan Wilcox, “The Use of Ælfric’s Homilies: MSS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85 and 86 in the Field,” in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 345–368.

¹³ For example, *Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060 to 1220*, accessed March 20, 2017, www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/index.html.

¹⁴ See, for example, Christopher A. Jones, ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems*, vol. 1, Religious and Didactic (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. xxxi. For the manuscript (Worcester Cathedral F. 174, ff. 63v–66v), see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), pp. 466–467 (no. 398).

¹⁵ Fragment C38–49. I have used the edition of the poem in Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems* (pp. 204–28) and consulted his translation and notes on the poem (pp. 205–229, 364–368, and 415–420). I have also consulted Douglas Moffat’s edition of the poem in *The Soul’s Address to the Body: The Worcester Fragments* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1987).

¹⁶ See Louise Dudley, “The Grave,” *Modern Philology* 11 (1914), pp. 429–442.

¹⁷ *The Grave*, 7–10. The text is taken from Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems*, p. 230.

¹⁸ N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 368 (no. 310); the poem occurs on folio 170^r (article 85).

¹⁹ Bruno Assmann, ed., *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben* (Kassel: Georg H. Wigand, 1889), p. 64 (lines 289–294; MS N).

²⁰ For a summary of the relationship between prosody and syntax in Old English poetry, see my “Old English Poetic Form: Genre, Style, Prosody,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 303–305.

²¹ For the contents of the manuscript, see further Ker, *Catalogue*, pp. 368–375.

²² See further Gail Dana Dauterman Ricciardi, “The Grave-Bound Body and the Soul” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976), pp. 10–11.

²³ On this topic, see further Douglas D. Short, “Aesthetics and Unpleasantness: Classical Rhetoric in the Medieval English Lyric *The Grave*,” *Studia Neophilologica* 48 (1976): 291–299, esp. pp. 294–296.

²⁴ See, for example, M. F. Vaughan, “Consecutive Alliteration, Strophic Patterns, and the Composition of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*,” *Modern Philology* 77 (1979), pp. 1–9.

²⁵ See Eleanor K. Heningham, “Old English Precursors of the Worcester Fragments,” *PMLA* 55 (1940): 291–307 (p. 293); Carleton Brown, *English*

Lyrics of the XIIIth Century (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), pp. 46–54 and 188–191. For various other examples of poems dealing with the theme of soul and body in later medieval England, see, for example, Robert W. Ackerman, “*The Debate of the Body and the Soul* and Parochial Christianity,” *Speculum* 37 (1962), pp. 541–565; and Michel-André Bossy, “Medieval Debates of Body and Soul,” *Comparative Literature* 28 (1976), pp. 144–163.

²⁶ Thomas G. Duncan, ed., *Medieval English Lyrics and Carols* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), p. 94; see also Alan J. Fletcher, “The Lyric in the Sermon,” in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 204–206.

²⁷ Ralph Hanna, “Alliterative Poetry,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 506.

²⁸ For some fascinating exceptions from the earliest and the latest parts of the Middle Ages, see, respectively, Antonette diPaolo Healey, “The Vision of St. Paul,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1973), pp. 71–72, note 20, and Karl Steel, “Abyss: Everything is Food,” *postmedieval* 4 (2013), pp. 93–104, esp. pp. 98–100.

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Chapter 11

“Stand Firm”: The Descent to Hell in Felix’s *Life of Saint Guthlac*

Daniel Anlezark

THE CULT OF THE Mercian saint Guthlac was an enduring one in Anglo-Saxon England. In addition to the Latin *Vita sancti Guthlaci* (*Life of Saint Guthlac*) by Felix, a later prose translation of the *Life* (surviving in two versions) and two separate poetic treatments of Guthlac’s struggles with demons survive.¹ In this chapter I will examine Felix’s presentation of Guthlac’s journey to hell’s mouth in the *Life* (Chapter 31), where the saint is carried by a host of demons. The episode comes in the context of a series of demonic encounters soon after Guthlac’s arrival in his fenland retreat, and the way in which they are told is inseparable from the author’s careful attention to Felix’s vulnerable emotional state and his growth in mental stability. I will argue that the journey to hell episode is presented with heightened rhetoric, and is crucial for a meaningful understanding of Guthlac’s sufferings. The description of the fantastic journey is accompanied by a more applicable examination of Guthlac’s developing mental and emotional resilience, relevant to the real world of readers, providing them with direction “on the wide open way.”

It is probable that Guthlac was born in 674, and Felix tells us that he was of royal blood, and a descendant of the legendary Icel; Guthlac’s name is indicative of his aristocratic inheritance, called as he is “after the tribe of the Guthlacingas” (Chapter 10). Various references to historical figures fix his life against a historical backdrop, and there is little doubt not only that Guthlac lived, but also that his fenland retreat was located in the border territory between Mercia and East Anglia, so that devotion to him extended into both kingdoms.² Guthlac died in 714, and his cult must have developed immediately upon his death; Felix’s *Life* may not have been written until some time later. In his Prologue Felix tells us that he has written the *Life of Saint Guthlac* at the request of King Ælfwald of East Anglia, who ruled between approximately 713 and 749, and who

was a correspondent of Saint Boniface and a patron of the German mission. Despite his interest in church affairs and literature, not much else is known of Ælfwald. There is little doubt that Felix was a monk, revealed not only by his devotion to Guthlac, but also by some aspects of the learning revealed in the *Life*.

Felix often quotes Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini* and his other writings about Saint Martin, as well as Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* (in Evagrius's Latin translation), and Book 2 of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, which is a life of Saint Benedict.³ Felix also reveals a pervasive debt to Bede's prose *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, which was written in 721 or later. Felix's debt to Aldhelm of Malmesbury's *De virginitate*, and his close knowledge of the metrical version of this treatise is also evident. Felix's classical learning is also widely on display, most clearly of the works of Virgil, but his language also indicates some knowledge of the works of Ovid and Lucan, and perhaps others. Felix's *Life* is dense with borrowings from both monastic and classical authors. These borrowings and allusions, however, extend far beyond those noted by Felix's editor, Bertram Colgrave, who provides only a hint towards the extent of Felix's familiarity with classical authors known in the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon classroom—especially Virgil. Felix's use of Virgil is not simply a reflex on a turn of phrase picked up in his grammatical and rhetorical education, but is designed to elevate the sufferings of the saint in their literary presentation. Colgrave suggests that the absence of Guthlac from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, despite Bede's demonstrated interest in both East Anglia and the kind of sanctity Guthlac embodies, would suggest a date of composition for the *Life* "somewhere between 730 and 740," though this is far from conclusive.⁴ There is no doubt, however, that it must have been written after 721 (the earliest possible date for Bede's prose *Life of Saint Cuthbert*) and before 749 (when King Ælfwald died).

Like all medieval hagiographers, Felix makes claims for the veracity of his *Life of Saint Guthlac* (Prologue):⁵

Quoniam igitur exegisti a me, ut de sancti Guthlaci conversatione tibi scriberem, quemadmodum coeperit, quidve ante propositum sanctum fuerit, vel qualem vitae terminum habuerit, prout a dictantibus idoneis testibus, quos scitis, audiui, addendi minuendique modum vitans eadem ortodemia depinxi.

(Since therefore you have required of me that I should write for you about the occupation of Saint Guthlac, I have described how

it began, what his manner of living was before his holy vow, and how his life ended, just as I learned it from the words of competent witnesses whom you know: and I have avoided, by the same right craftsmanship, any tendency to add or subtract from their account.)

However, even as Felix claims originality and authenticity, half of this statement is quoted from Evagrius's *Vita Antonii*.⁶ Nevertheless, for the medieval reader the authority imparted by this literary debt was as important to the truth of the *Life* as any genuine historical contact with living witnesses Felix might have had. For the earliest period of Guthlac's life, the reliance on first-hand accounts is perhaps unlikely if the *Life* was written as late as 740, though if Guthlac began his life alone in the fens in 699, then it is easily possible that people who knew the saint (including Ælfwald himself) were still living. This does not, of course, mean that the *Life* is a true biography in any modern sense.⁷ Guthlac's many encounters with demons represent a standard feature of the genre, though Felix tells them in an original way. Felix also tells us something about the purpose in his writing (Prologue):

ad huius utilitatis commodum hunc codicellum fieri ratus, ut illis qui sciunt ad memoriam tanti viri, nota revocandi fiat, his vero, qui ignorant, velut late pansae viae indicum notescat.

(I considered that this book should be composed for this useful purpose that, for those who know, it may serve as a sign to call them back to the remembrance of so great a man, and for those who do not know may be an indication to direct them on a wide open way.)

Here the author is borrowing freely from Bede's Prologue to the prose *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, and like Bede he draws together into his readership those who knew the saint, and those who could not have.⁸ The point of reading for both is not only to remember a great man, but to follow the way he has opened. The ways in which the example of Guthlac and his demonic encounters might mean something to readers will be explored in this essay, by drawing attention to Felix's careful depiction of Guthlac's developing psychological state, especially his quest for mental *stabilitas* (stability).

The short early chapters of the *Life* (1–15) are concerned with Guthlac's family origins, and focus attention on the extensive telling of the miracle attendant on his birth (Chapter 5): "mirabile dictu! ecce humana manus croceo rubri nitoris splendore fulgescens ab aethereis Olympi

nubibus ad patibulum cuiusdam crucis ante ostium domus" (marvelous to tell, behold a human hand was seen shining with red-gold splendor, and reaching from the clouds of the heavenly Olympus which reached as far as the axis of a certain cross in front of the door of the house). The miraculous vision is most likely designed to echo that which occurred at the birth of Saint Wilfrid in Eddius's *Vita sancti Wilfredi*, where the house in which the saint was born seemed to burst into flames that reached the sky, but remained unconsumed.⁹ Felix has taken the miracle of Wilfrid's "burning" house, which echoes the burning bush (Exodus 3), and created a sign that echoes the Passover (Exodus 12.7), as Guthlac's heavenly portent marks the door of the house ("signato praedictae domus ostio"). Embedded in this allusion to a biblical antecedent entailing the coming of both terror and hope is the language of Virgilian theophany—*ab aethereis Olympi nubibus*—echoing a favorite phrase in Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹⁰ Those outside the house enter into debate about the meaning of the sign, when a woman rushes out to tell them (Chapter 8): "Stabilitote, quia futurae gloriae huic mundo natus est homo" (Stand firm, because a man has been born who will be a glory for the world). The woman's words poignantly recall those of the angels who announced Christ's birth to the shepherds (Luke 2:2, "quia natus est vobis hodie Salvator"), though her command to "stand firm" is perhaps surprising; there is no suggestion that the onlookers are moving, and their turmoil is found in their mental confusion. As will be seen, the ideal of *stabilitas*, especially of the mind, is a central motif of Guthlac's struggles with demons, and his increasing ability to resist their attacks. This ideal is articulated at the very moment the saint's birth is announced, and "stability" will become the way in which Guthlac will achieve the glory prophesied by the mysterious woman paradoxically running at great speed ("mulier inmensa velocitate currens"). The significance of the name given to the saint is also emphasized (Chapter 10): "Anglorum lingua hoc nomen ex duobus integris constare videtur, hoc est *Guth* et *lac*, quod Romani sermonis nitore personat *belli munus*, quia ille cum vitiis *bellando munera* aeternae beatitudinis" (the name in the language of the Angles is shown to consist of two separate words, that is *Guth* and *lac*, which in the Roman meaning is "reward of war," because by warring against the vices he was to receive the reward of eternal bliss). This kind of onomastic etymologizing simultaneously recalls the Isidorean tradition in the *Etymologiae* and Jerome's listing of the Latin meanings of Hebrew names in his *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*—texts certainly familiar to Felix—with a linguistic self-awareness presumably suited to the tastes of his readers.

Guthlac lives a conventionally exemplary and holy childhood (Chapters 12–15), but this gives way to the kind of young manhood that can only have been normal for a real-life aristocratic youth in late seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England (Chapter 16). As if woken from sleep ("veluti ex sopore evigilatus"), and inspired by the memory of the powerful deeds of heroes of old ("valida pristinorum heroum facta reminiscens"), Guthlac goes to war all too literally, accompanied by a band of followers. It would seem that the source of Guthlac's inspiration is stories about the kinds of noble heroes he is descended from, and the clear implication is that these memories have been passed on in heroic poetry. It is this recollection that leads Guthlac to a turn in his mind—*mutata mente*—to war. This is the first occasion on which Felix offers the reader insight into Guthlac's *mens*—at the moment when it is subject to mutability and change away from a holy life. Felix is careful not to directly criticize Guthlac's conduct at this point—his behavior is, after all, normal among the circle of Felix's patrons. In this vein, he informs the reader of Guthlac's exemplary conduct in war, because the saint-to-be returns one third of their seized property to those he had attacked (Chapter 17). After nine years of fighting in literal battles and overcoming all enemies, Guthlac finds himself in a time of peace. This lassitude leads to a reversal of the bellicose events of the years since his holy childhood, but now instead of waking, he falls asleep, and is confronted by a different aspect of the old stories (Chapter 18):

Itaque cum supradictus vir beatae memoriae Guthlac inter dubios volventis temporis eventus et atras caliginosae vitae nebulas, fluctuantes inter saeculi gurgites iactaretur, quadam nocte, dum fessa membra solitae quieti dimitteret et adsueto more vagabunda mente sollicitus curas mortales intenta meditatione cogitaret, mirum dictu! extimplo velut percussus pectore, spiritalis flamma omnia praecordia supra memorati viri incendere coepit. Nam cum antiquorum regum stirpis suae per transacta retro saecula miserabiles exitus flagitioso vitae termino contempleretur, necnon et caducas mundi divitias contemtibilemque temporalis vitae gloriam pervigili mente consideraret, tunc sibi proprii obitus sui imaginata forma ostentatur, et finem inevitabilem brevis vitae curiosa mente horrescens, cursum cotidie ad finem cogitabat.

(And so when this same man of blessed memory, Guthlac, was being flung about among the uncertain events of passing time and the dusky clouds of the darkness of life, and tossed among eddying whirlpools of this world, he abandoned his weary limbs one night

to their accustomed rest; and his wandering mind thought with the usual intense meditation on anxious mortal cares, when suddenly, marvelous to say, a spiritual flame, as if it had pierced his breast, began to engulf this man's heart. For when, with wakeful mind, he considered the miserable deaths and shameful ends of the ancient kings of his race in the course of past ages, and also the declining wealth of this world and the contemptible glory of this transitory life, then in his imagination the shape of his own death presented itself to him, and with a violent shaking in mind anxious at the inevitable end of this brief life, and he thought of the course of daily life to that end.)

The language around Guthlac's disturbed mind falling into troubled sleep inevitably recalls *The Wanderer* for the modern reader of Anglo-Saxon literature, with its intense meditation on the darkness of this life, the imagery of storms, anxious cares, declining wealth, and the deaths of men;¹¹ indeed, we now find Guthlac with a "wandering mind" (*vagabunda mente*). Felix focuses closely on Guthlac's fluid emotions, which are, as for the *Wanderer*, difficult to distinguish fully from his mental state.¹² The whirlpool and its waves become a recurrent image associated with Guthlac's internal disposition. Like the *Wanderer*, Guthlac's turbulence finds resolution through the contemplation of mutability in search of stability, and Felix employs a range of verbs (*contemplare, considerare, imaginare, cogitare*) to point to the intensity of Guthlac's thought. Chapter 18 is crowded with the imagery of movement and instability, from the revolving years ("transcursis novem circiter annorum"), through Guthlac's whirlpool mind, to the winding down of days. "Utterly shaken in his mind" (*horrescens mente*), Guthlac resolves to change his life, should he live until the next morning. The next day arrives with a rhetorical flourish that evokes a key moment in Aeneas's account of the fall of Troy (cf. *Aeneid* 2.268; Chapter 19): "Ergo exutis umbrosae noctis caliginibus, cum sol mortalibus egris igneum demoverat" (So when the mists of the dark night had been dispersed and the sun had risen in fire over helpless mortals). Surrounded by this conventional, but nevertheless meaningful, imagery of light triumphing over darkness, Guthlac bids his companions farewell so that he can "devote himself to the service of God."

Guthlac's journey into the monastic life takes him first to the monastery at Repton (Chapter 20), where his refusal to drink alcohol stirs up animosity in his confreres, who nevertheless are won over by his exemplary virtue and "sincerity and serenity of mind" (*sinceritatem et serenae mentis*, Chapter 21).

For twenty-four months, matching his age of twenty-four years on his arrival at Repton, Guthlac serves his novitiate, acquiring the skills of reading and writing, and learning to sing the cycle of the Divine Office.¹³ After this time his access to a new literary tradition inspires him to take on a new kind of warfare (Chapter 24):

heremum cum curioso eximiae sollicitudinis animo petere meditabatur. Cum enim priscorum monachorum solitariam vitam legebat, tum inluminato cordis gremio avida cupidine heremum quaerere fervebat.

(he was intent upon seeking the desert with the greatest diligence and the utmost earnestness of mind. For when he read about the solitary life of monks of former days, then the seat of his heart was enlightened and burned with an eager desire to make his way into the desert.)

The focus on Guthlac's mind and feelings continues,¹⁴ but now he learns from a different kind of past hero, even as Felix inscribes the saint's own story into this same literary tradition.¹⁵ The desert Guthlac will occupy is a fenland waste, an unpleasant wetland that recalls Grendel's home in *Beowulf*,¹⁶ not only in its topography, but in its habitation by unknown monsters ("incognita heremi monstra et diversarum formarum terrores," Chapter 25) and demonic phantoms ("fantasias demonum"). It is here that Guthlac will fight his war against the demonic world of hell, a battle also symbolically aligned with the psychomachic conflict with his own turbulent emotions.

Once he is shown his solitary dwelling, Guthlac decides to return temporarily to the more tranquil setting of his monastery for ninety days, so as to say farewell to his community; after these three months he returns to his island in the fens to become a *veri Dei militem* (soldier of the true God, Chapter 27). Felix arms him with the spiritual weapons Paul outlines in Ephesians 6.11–17, in a description derived from Jerome's *Vita Pauli* (c. 8). With these weapons, Guthlac believes he will be able to take on his spiritual enemies (Chapter 27): "Tantae enim fiducia erat, ut inter torridas tartari turmas sese contempto hoste iniecerit" (So great, in fact, was his confidence that, despising the foe, he hurled himself against the torrid troops of Tartarus). The language is heightened, not only by classical vocabulary, but also with intense alliteration, and Felix reminds the reader of the way Guthlac has travelled to reach this point (Chapter 27):

sic et sanctae memoriae virum Guthlac de tumido aestuantis saeculi gurgite, de obliquis mortalis aevi anfractibus, de atris vergentis mundi faucibus ad perpetuae beatitudinis militiam, ad directi itineris callem, ad veri luminis prospectum perduxit.

(so he led Guthlac, a man of saintly memory, from the eddying whirlpool of these turbid times, from the tortuous paths of this mortal age, from the black jaws of this declining world to the struggle for the eternal bliss, to the straight path and to the vision of the true light.)

This passage recalls the statement made by Felix in the Prologue that the purpose in writing the *Life* was to open this same way for his readers. Given the anticipation developed by Felix in the course of his narrative, it comes as something of a surprise that the first challenge Guthlac faces in his desert is not a host of monsters or demons (these certainly come later), but rather the experience of despair (Chapter 29):

Sub eodem denique tempore, quo praefatus vir beatae memoriae heremitare initiavit, cum quodam die adsueta consuetudine psalmis canticisque incumberet, tunc antiquus hostis prolis humanae, ceu leo rugiens [1 Pet. 5.8], per vasti aetheris spatia tetra numina commutans novas artes novo pectore versat. Cum enim omnes nequitiae suae vires versuta mente temptaret, tum veluti ab extenso arcu venenifluam desperationis sagittam totis viribus iaculavit, quousque in Christi militis mentis umbone defixa pendit.

(And so about the time when the said man of blessed memory, Guthlac, had begun the eremitical life, when one day he was carrying out the customary duty of singing psalms and canticles, when the ancient foe of the human race, like a lion roaring through the spaces of the limitless sky, was ever varying his foul demonic might and pondering anew fresh designs. So, testing all his wicked powers, with crafty mind he shot, as from a bow fully drawn, a poisoned arrow of despair with all his might, so that it stuck fast in the very mind of the soldier of Christ.)

Felix's language concerning the way in which Guthlac is saying his prayers is significant. The hermit would appear to be going through the motions—he is singing his psalms as the rule and custom require (“consuetudine”), but there is no mention of fervor. The verb *incumbere*, can mean “diligently attend to,” or can simply mean “pay attention to duty,” but also “settle in, recline,” and, even more ominously given the approaching lion, “to bear

down upon."¹⁷ The implication, both from the description of Guthlac at his prayers and the allusion to 1 Peter 5:8, is that Guthlac has been caught spiritually off-guard. The contest that opens up in this passage is one very clearly between the devil's "crafty mind" (*versuta mente*), and the mind of Guthlac, which is pierced to the very center by the devil's arrow. This is undoubtedly a reference to the "noonday demon," a reading of Psalm 90.6 ("a sagitta volante per diem a peste in tenebris ambulante a morsu insanientis meridie"). This psalm verse was associated with despair by patristic writers, and also in Old English verse,¹⁸ and still today is associated with the despair of depression.¹⁹ Guthlac's spiritual warfare has now begun in earnest, and the heightened language of the passage emphasizes the initiation of the heroic contest. The borrowing of the line *novas arte nov[o] pectore versat* from Virgil is perfectly apt. In the *Aeneid* it refers to Venus's stratagem of sending Cupid to deceive Dido (*Aeneid* 1.657). Virgil uses *arte nova* again at *Aeneid* 7.477, referring to Allecto's eruption from hell to disrupt the Trojan hunt. The expression *umbone ... pependit* borrows from Virgil's description of the ineffectual spear thrown by Priam in a last futile gesture as Troy falls (*Aeneid* 2.546); for the informed reader there is perhaps in this latter borrowing already the suggestion that the devil's attack will fail.

The immediate effect, however, is the clouding of Guthlac's mind with doubt (Chapter 29):²⁰ "tum miles Christi totis sensibus turbatus de eo, quod incoeperat, desperare coepit et huc illucque turbulentum animum convertens, quo solo sederet, nesciebat" (then every feeling of the soldier of Christ was stirred up, and he began to despair about what he had begun, and turning things over in his disturbed mind he did not know on what ground to rest); Guthlac will discover this ground in Chapter 33. What causes Guthlac great distress is the recollection of his past sins ("crimini inmensa"), so that he despairs utterly for three days ("tantum enim desperare"). Guthlac resists the despair and baleful thoughts ("pestiferus meditationibus") with his robust mind ("robuste mente"). The presentation of the saint's resilient mind overcoming the turbulence of emotion owes a clear and certain debt to the thought of the Stoics, as this was mediated to the Christian West from the Egyptian Desert Fathers via the works of monastic writers such as John Cassian.²¹ Felix's story-telling is florid and undoubtedly designed to entertain as much as to edify readers familiar with the emotional problems presented by a life of monastic solitude, but also for those widely read in the lives of the Fathers, and apparently also in the *Aeneid*.

The three-day duration of Guthlac's despair is loaded with meaning, evoking the days Christ spent in hell between the crucifixion and resurrection—a moment in scriptural history which Felix will allude to again.²² The first appearance of Guthlac's patron, Saint Bartholomew, immediately follows; Bartholomew is Christ-like during the morning watches (Chapter 29):²³

Ecce beatus Bartholomaeus, fidus auxiliator, in matutinis vigiliis
sese coram obtutibus obtulit illius; nec sopor illud erat ... extemplo
discussis nefandarum cogitationum nebulis, inluminato turbulenti
pectoris gremio, velut triumphali voce psallebat.

(Behold, the blessed Bartholomew, faithful helper, presented himself in his presence at the time of Vigils and Matins. Nor was it just a dream ... immediately the clouds of abominable thought were dissipated, his troubled heart was enlightened and he sang psalms triumphantly.)

The motif of sleeping, dreaming, and waking is recurrent in the *Life*, and the borrowing from the *Aeneid* (“nec sopor illud erat,” *Aeneid* 3.173) is particularly poignant here, marking the moment when the Penates bring a hopeful message from Apollo to the despairing hero, promising the exiled Trojans a new home in Italy. Bartholomew's intervention gives Guthlac the hope that he needs to overcome all tribulations (“omnibus tribulationibus”). The apostle brings Guthlac hope (“spes”), the perfect remedy for the emotion of despair, so that depression is no longer a demonic weapon that he will fear, “quia ab illo semel infracta contra illum ultra praevalere nequiverunt” (because from that time it could never again prevail against him).

Guthlac's first victory does not mean that the devils will not use other weapons against him. Having first attacked the hermit with an arrow, in Chapter 30 two devils seek to befriend the saint, and induce him into excessive fasting (a “holy anorexia” as Audrey Meaney has called it) in imitation not only of Moses, Elijah, and Christ, but also the famous monks of Egypt (“famosi illi monachi habitantes Aegyptum”), who, as the reader knows, are the new literary inspiration for Guthlac's life.²⁴ The devils first flatter Guthlac for his initial success against attack, but recall his ongoing anxious preoccupation with his past sins:²⁵

Et idcirco, si tu vis ante commissa crimina abluere, inminentia
necare, carnem tuam abstinentiae flagellis adflige, et animi tui
insolentiam ieiunii frange fascibus.

(And therefore if you wish to wipe away your sins committed in the past and to destroy those that threaten, afflict your flesh with the whips of abstinence and crush the arrogance of your mind with rods of fasting.)

The deception of the devils is subtle, as they offer Guthlac the possibility of crushing his pride even as they appeal to it in an attempt to destroy him both physically and spiritually. Guthlac simply banishes the two with a scriptural lorica (Psalm 55:10). The devils' successive attacks probe different aspects of Guthlac's psychology: first despair, then spiritual pride. In both instances the weak point in his psychology that is explored is his guilty recollection of past sins, implicitly those of his warrior days. The third attack also explores this vulnerability by terrifying Guthlac during a journey to hell—where despair and pride did not work, fear possibly can.

Immediately after Guthlac's victory over the two tempting devils, he comes under siege from a host of demons from hell, who attack his cell (Chapter 31):

Per idem fere tempus, paucis intervenientibus dierum cursibus, cum vir beatae memoriae Guthlac adsueto more vigil inintermissis orationibus cuiusdam noctis intempesto tempore perstaret,²⁶ en subito teterrimis inmundorum spirituum catervis totam cellulam suam inpleri conspexit. Subeuntibus enim ab undique illis porta patebat; nam per criptas et cratulas intrantibus non iuncturae valvarum, non foramina cratium illis ingressum negabant; sed caelo terraque erumpentes, spatium totius aeris fuscis nubibus tegebant.

(About that same time, after the passage of a few days, when Guthlac the man of blessed memory in his usual way was once keeping the vigil at the dead of night in uninterrupted prayer, he suddenly saw the whole tiny cell filled with horrible troops of foul spirits; for the door was open to them as they approached from every quarter; as they entered through floor-holes and crannies, neither the joints of the doorways nor the openings in the wattle-work denied them entry, but, bursting forth from the earth and sky, they covered the whole space beneath the heavens with their dusky clouds.)

Guthlac now follows Saint Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17)—the saint is even more vigilant now than he had been earlier. Felix describes the demons in detail, from head to toe, with a physicality

that matches their need to enter through cracks, however small, suggesting a blending of the bodily and the incorporeal in their nature which recalls the monster Grendel.²⁷

The literary purpose of the description, like that of the shrieking devils, is to create an atmosphere of terror. Guthlac might now be sure he can resist the spiritual attacks of demons, but these devils attack him physically (Chapter 31):

Nec mora, ingruentes inrumpentesque domum ac castellum, dicto citius virum Dei praefatum, ligatis membris, extra cellulam suam duxerunt, et adductum in atrae paludis coenosis laticibus inmerserunt. Deinde asportantes illum per paludis asperissima loca inter densissima veprium vimina dilaceratis membrorum compaginibus trahebant. Inter haec cum magnam partem umbrosae noctis in illis afflictionibus exigebant, sistere illum paulisper fecerunt, imperantes sibi, ut de heremo discedisset.

(Without delay they attacked and burst into his home and castle, and quicker than words they bound the limbs of the said man of God and took him out of the cell; and leading him away, they plunged him into the muddy waters of the black marsh. Then they carried him through the wildest parts of the fen, and dragged him through the dense thickets of brambles, tearing his limbs and all his body. Meanwhile, when they had spent a great part of the gloomy night in these persecutions, they made him stand up for a short time, commanding him to depart from the desert.)

The passage is replete with literary allusion. The description of the devils' movement ("quicker than words") is a borrowing from the *Aeneid* (1.143); the "gloomy night" of terror is taken from Coelius Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale*, a verbal parallel that associates Guthlac's struggles with Christ's own.²⁸ Guthlac's torture in the brambles recalls Saint Benedict's recourse to brambles as a cure for carnal temptation.²⁹ Felix's description of Guthlac's cell as his "domum ac castellum" (home and castle) also suggests an elevated style, but with no obvious debt to Latin literature, and in any case the phrase jars in Latin. It is possible that the author is turning for effect to the idiom of Old English verse, where the formula *hamas and heaburh* (*Beowulf* 1127) would connote for the reader of the *Life* both the homely and defensive associations of the phrase, but which also serves to elevate the style of an important passage.³⁰ However, while Guthlac's body is moved, his mind is not (Chapter 31):

Ille stabilita mente tandem respondens prophetico velut ore psallebat: Dominus a dextris est mihi, *ne commovear*. ... illum *inmota* mente, robusta fide in eo quod incoeperat perstare viderent.

(He, however, answered at last with steadfast mind, singing as though with prophetic words: "The lord is at my right hand, *lest I should be moved*." ... they saw him *unmoved* in mind and beginning to persevere with robust faith. Emphasis added.)

Guthlac's singing of the psalm focuses on his mind, not his body, which is caught up in the turbulent movement embodied by the devils, who cannot keep still. His defiance only encourages the demons further, and he is carried off to the summit of the sky and given a vision of hell that evokes both the vision of Furseus (also reported in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*) and elements of the *Visio Pauli*. I have included citation of the sources of Felix's literary borrowings to show how much they color this passage (Chapter 31):³¹

horridis alarum [cf. *Aeneid* 3.225–226] stridoribus inter nubifera gelidi aeris spatia illum subvectare coeperunt. Cum ergo ad ardua aeris [cf. *Aeneid* 8.221] culmina adventasset, horrendum dictu! ecce septentrionalis caeli plaga fuscis atrarum nubium caliginibus [*Georgics* 2.308–309; *Aeneid* 9.36; 11.876] nigriscere videbatur. Innumerabiles enim inmundorum spirituum alas in obviam illis dehinc venire cerneret. Coniunctis itaque in unum turmis, cum inmenso clamore leves in auras iter vertentes, supra memoratum Christi famulum Guthlac ad nefandas tartari fauces [Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.1012] usque perducunt. Ille vero, fumigantes aestuantis inferni cavernas prospectans, omnia tormenta [*De rerum natura* 5.317], quae prius a malignis spiritibus perpressus est, tamquam non ipse pateretur, obliviscebatur. Non solum enim fluctuantium flammaram ignivomos [*Aeneid* 8.199; cf. 10.270–271] gurgites illic trugescere cerneret, immo etiam sulphurei glaciali grandine mixti [*Aeneid* 4.120, 161; *De rerum natura* 6.159] vortices, globosis sparginibus sidera [*Aeneid* 3.574] paene tangentes videbantur;³² maligni ergo spiritus inter favillatium voraginum atras [*Aeneid* 9.105, 10.114; cf. 6.296] cavernas discurrentes, miserabili fatu [cf. Lucan, *Bellum civile* 4.769, 10.411; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.90, 6.582] animas impiorum diversis cruciatuum generibus torquebant.

(they began to drag him through the cloudy stretches of the freezing skies to the sound of the horrid beating of their wings.

Now when he had reached the lofty summit of the sky, then, horrible to relate!, lo, the region of the northern heavens seemed to grow dark with gloomy mists and black clouds. For there could be seen coming thence to meet them innumerable squadrons of foul spirits. Thus with all their forces joined in one, they turned their way with immense uproar into the thin air, and carried the afore-named servant of Christ, Guthlac, to the accursed jaws of hell. When he indeed beheld the smoking caverns of the glowing infernal region, he forgot all the torments which he had patiently endured at the hands of the wicked spirits, as though he himself had not been the sufferer. For not only could one see there the fiery abyss swelling with surging flames, but even the sulfurous eddies of flame mixed with icy hail seemed almost to touch the stars with drops of spray; and evil spirits running about amid the black caverns and gloomy abysses tortured the souls of the wicked, victims of a wretched fate, with various kinds of torments.)

Felix's numerous borrowings from classical authors in his description of Guthlac's approach to hell hang on the framework of an extended passage from *Aeneid* (Book 8.251–261), which itself resonates with verbal parallels across the passage (“faucibus,” “fumum,” “mirabile dictu,” “caligine,” “prospectum,” “fumiferam,” “fumus,” “igne,” “evomit,” “animis,” “aestuatur,” “atra”); there are at least twelve close verbal borrowings here from a ten line passage in the epic poem. The context in the *Aeneid* is significant, as it describes Hercules's fight with the fire-belching monster Cacus in his cave—like Guthlac, Virgil's Hercules does not enter the underworld. Like Christ and Aeneas, Guthlac finds himself at the gates of hell, but unlike either Christ or Aeneas, he does not enter.

Guthlac's reaction to his vision of the tortured souls in hell is terror (“Igitur vir Dei ... horresceret”), and Felix employs the same verb here as the one he used in Chapter 18 to describe Guthlac's horror at the fates of men. The demons play on Guthlac's lingering fear, and their speech to Guthlac, mimicking homiletic rhetoric, informs him that his past sins will at last bring about his eternal destruction (Chapter 31):

Ecce nobis potestas data est te trudere in has poenas, et illic inter atrocissimarum gehennarum tormenta variis cruciatibus nobis te torquere commissum est. En ignis, quem accendisti in delictis tuis, te conumere paratus est; en tibi patulis hiatibus igniflua Herebi hostia patescunt; nunc Stigiae fibrae te vorare malunt, tibi quoque aestivi Acherontis voragines horrendis faucibus hiscunt.

(Behold, the power has been granted to us to thrust you into these pains; and we have been commissioned to torture you there with manifold punishments in the torment of the most cruel depths of hell. Behold, the fire which you have kindled by your lusts has been prepared to consume you. Behold, the fiery entrances of Erebus gape for you with yawning mouths. Now the bowels of the Styx long to devour you and the hot gulfs of Acheron gape with dreadful jaws.)

The devils' classicized hell is in perfect keeping with the heightened tone of the passage, which elevates Guthlac's conflict in literary and epic terms, but also focuses the reader's attention on what kind of hero Guthlac is. Guthlac is far from being a pagan hero like Aeneas, though Aeneas also overcame his carnal desire in pursuit of a higher destiny. Nor does Guthlac any longer wish to emulate his pagan Anglo-Saxon forebears, and at this moment of the *Life* the saint is confronted with the kind of "wretched death and shameful end" that the heroes of the Anglo-Saxon past had met. Guthlac lives the life of the Egyptian desert in the fenlands, and his internal stability of mind and sobriety of heart cut through the emotion of fear experienced at the sight of the tormented souls to the emptiness of the devils' words:

Illis haec et alia plurima his similia dicentibus, vir Dei minas eorum despiciens, *inmotis sensibus, stabili animo, sobria mente*, respondens aiebat: "Vae vobis,³³ filii tenedrarum, semen Cain, favilla cineris. Si vestrae potentiae sit istis me tradere poenis, en praesto sum; ut quid falsivomis pectoribus vanas minas depromitis?"

(But as they said these and many other things like them, the man of God despised their threats, and *with unshaken senses, with steadfast heart and sober mind* he answered them: "Woe to you, you sons of darkness, seed of Cain, you are but dust and ashes.³⁴ If it is in your power to deliver me into these tortures, look! I am ready; so why spew these empty threats from your lying hearts?" Emphasis added.)

The reappearance of Guthlac's protector, Saint Bartholomew, "ab aethereis sedibus radiantis Olympi" (from the heavenly thrones of radiant Olympus)³⁵ is associated with the splendor of heavenly light, and again the imagery around the apostle evokes the harrowing and the resurrection of Christ who broke the power of hell, and significantly for the guilt-ridden Guthlac, forgave sin. Where earlier Guthlac had been disturbed in every sense, now

his senses are unshaken. The ideal of the “stable soul” was a commonplace among the Roman Stoics, and quickly adapted into the thought of patristic authors. Most importantly for the current discussion was the integration of early Christian Stoic idealization of “stability of mind” by the monastic writer John Cassian in his *Conferences*, where this disposition and the practice of unceasing prayer are recommended as the remedy for the noonday demon of accidie.³⁶ After his journey to hell Guthlac has not only maintained his inner stability, but gained a new emotion from his purgative experience, as he is filled with spiritual joy (“spirituali laetitia repletus”).

It is now the devils who suffer, in a flourish of alliteration and string of infinitive verbs worthy of an Anglo-Saxon poet (Chapter 32): “Maligni ergo spiritus non sustinentes caelistis splendoris fulgorem, fremdere, fremere, fugere, tremere, timere coeperunt” (Now the evil spirits could not bear the glory of the heavenly splendour, but began to gnash their teeth, to howl and to flee, to fear and to tremble).³⁷ His victory over vice and sin complete, the demons are commanded to carry Guthlac back to his cell (Chapter 33):

Nam illum revehentes cum nimia suavitate, velut quietissimo alarum remigio [*Aeneid* 1.301], ita ut nec in curru nec in navi modestius duci potuisset, subvolabant. Cum vero ad medii aeris spatia devenissent, sonus psallentium convenienter audiebatur dicens: Ibunt sancti de virtute in virtutem et reliqua [Psalm 83.8]. Inminente ergo aurora, cum sol nocturnas caelo demoverat umbras [*Aeneid*, 11.210], praefatus Christi athleta, adepto de hostibus triumpho, *in eodem statu*, a quo prius translatus est, grates persolvens, constitit.

(For they carried him back with the utmost gentleness and bore him up most quietly upon the oarage of their wings, so that he could not possibly have been conveyed more steadily in a chariot or a ship. And indeed when they had reached the spaces of mid-air the sound of voices was heard singing in unison and saying: “The saints shall go from strength to strength,” and so on. So when dawn was at hand and the sun drove the shades of the night from the sky, the same athlete of Christ, having won the victory over his enemies, *stood* giving thanks to Christ *in the very spot* from which he had been carried off. Emphasis added.)

The return journey’s gentleness and calm contrast markedly with Guthlac’s turbulent outward journey, and its peace matches and emphasizes the saint’s stable inward disposition. His final posture is representative of his state of mind, and he ends the wild adventure standing still,

thanking Christ. In place of the screeching demons he now hears the heavenly hosts singing the praise of his victory, and offering encouragement for the fight. Guthlac the spiritual athlete finds himself back where he began in his home and castle, but knowing the place for the first time. Further attacks by demons in the form of Britons (Chapter 34) and monsters of various forms (Chapter 36) make no impression on the saint, and only serve to demonstrate Guthlac's strength in the face of their deceptions.

In the early days of his eremitical life, Guthlac travels to hell and back. His difficulties with devils are described colorfully by Felix, and occasionally with a touch of humor. But there is no doubting the earnestness of the endeavor which both the saint and his hagiographer have undertaken. Guthlac seeks holiness—his movement beyond the communal life of the monastery into the wasteland of the fens is inspired by his reading of the lives of the desert fathers. In his move to the desert, Guthlac imitates Paul and Antony very literally; there he confronts his demons. There is no doubt that eighth-century Anglo-Saxons would have believed in the existence of devils, but there is also no doubt that Felix's accounts of Guthlac's troubles with devils are highly self-conscious constructs that draw on a variety of literary traditions. Felix is not setting out to deceive the reader with fantastic stories, but rather to satisfy the literary expectations of readers in a tradition that appreciated the representation of the struggles of the interior life as a cosmic battle for the soul. In the best writers, such as Felix, the imaginative portrayal of these battles does not overwhelm the more quotidian struggles of the psyche, felt very keenly by anyone living in isolation—feelings of low self-worth, inadequacy, guilt and emotional turmoil, especially fear. Felix's solution to these demons draws on the ancient Stoic tradition as mediated by monastic writers, which recommends a Christian form of *apatheia*, overcoming the turbulence of the emotions and vices. Beside this the *Life* also develops a more classical Christian spiritual doctrine, the freedom from guilt that comes with accepting God's forgiveness of sin. Guthlac travels to the jaws of hell, but when he reaches them, he finds that where he really belongs is back home, standing on the firm ground of his hermitage.

NOTES

¹ The Latin text is *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); this edition is cited here. The two versions of the Old English prose translation are: P. Gonser, ed., *Das angelsächsische*

Prosa-Leben (Anglistische Forschungen 27. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1909); *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), no. 23, 381–394. The two Old English poetic versions are found together in the Exeter Book, and edited and studied in *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. J. Roberts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). See also Jane Roberts, “An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials,” *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970), pp. 193–233, and her “The Old English Prose Translation of Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*” in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions*, edited by Paul E. Szarmach, pp. 363–379 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986). To date, the great majority of studies of the Guthlac tradition have focused on the vernacular texts, especially the poems, demonology, or on Guthlac in history.

² Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, pp. 1–7; see N. J. Higham, ““Guthlac’s *vita*, Mercia and East Anglia in the First Half of the Eighth Century” in *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth-Century Mercian Kings*, edited by D. H. Hill and M. Worthington, pp. 85–90. British Archaeological Reports, British Series 383 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005).

³ See Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, pp. 15–17; Benjamin Kurtz, “From St. Antony to St. Guthlac: A Study in Biography,” *University of California Publications in Modern Philology* 12 (1926), pp. 191–203, discusses Felix’s place in the Antonian tradition.

⁴ Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, p. 19.

⁵ Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, pp. 62–65. Translations follow Colgrave’s, with modifications.

⁶ As noted by Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, p. 62.

⁷ See Audrey Meaney, “Felix’s *Life of Guthlac*: History or Hagiography?” in D. H. Hill and M. Worthington, eds. *Æthelbald and Offa*, pp. 75–86.

⁸ Noted by Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, p. 64.

⁹ *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, Chapter 1, pp. 4–5.

¹⁰ See *Aeneid* 7.557–58, 8.319, 10.621, 11.867; see also Lucan, *Bellum civile* 7.477–478.

¹¹ See especially lines 57–63, pp. 73–84. See also Daniel Anlezark, “From Elegy to Lyric: Changing Emotion in Early English Poetry,” in *Understanding Emotions in Early Europe*, edited by Michael Champion and Andrew Lynch (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 73–98.

¹² See Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 5, 34.

¹³ On reading and orality in the *Life*, see Gernot Wieland, “*Aures lectoris*: Orality and Literacy in Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997), pp. 168–177.

¹⁴ *cordis gremio* (the seat of his heart), is a phrase Felix echoes in Chapter 29, *pectoris gremio* (the seat of his breast).

¹⁵ Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *Guthlac of Croyland: A Study of Heroic Hagiography* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), discusses the creation of a heroic character for Guthlac in the two Old English poems, *Guthlac A* and *B*.

¹⁶ See Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 76.

¹⁷ *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources*, svv.

¹⁸ See *Iohannis Cassiani de institutis coenobiorum*, X.1, on accidie. Compare the *biteran stræle* (bitter arrow) of *Beowulf* 1746 (*Klaeber's Beowulf: And the Fight at Finnsburg*, eds. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008)) and *Solomon and Saturn II* lines 326–327, "Ne meahte ic of ðære heortan heardne aðringan / stylenne stan, sticað him tomiddes" (I could not dislodge the hard steel stone from his heart—it is stuck in his middle).

¹⁹ See Andrew Solomon, *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* (New York: Scribner, 2001).

²⁰ Guthlac is referred to as a soldier (of Christ) four times in this chapter.

²¹ See Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 82–109.

²² On the symbolism of Easter later in the *Life*, see Peter J. Lucas, "Easter, the Death of St Guthlac and the Liturgy for Holy Saturday in Felix's *Vita* and the Old English *Guthlac B*," *Medium Ævum* 61 (1992), pp. 1–16.

²³ On the significance of Bartholomew, see Graham Jones, "Ghostly Mentor, Teacher of Mysteries: Bartholomew, Guthlac and the Apostle Cult in Early Medieval England," in *Medieval Monastic Education*, edited by G. P. Ferzoco and C. A. Muessig (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp. 136–152.

²⁴ Audrey Meaney, "Felix's *Life of St Guthlac*: Hagiography and/or Truth," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 90 (2001), pp. 29–48 (p. 36); also, see Rudolph Bell's *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985); see Sarah Downey, "Too Much of Too Little: Guthlac and the Temptation of Excessive Fasting," *Traditio* 63 (2008), pp. 89–127.

²⁵ On Guthlac's strategy of dealing with the devil/s, see Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 105–106.

²⁶ See *Aeneid* 3.587, 12.846.

²⁷ See J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936), pp. 245–295 (Appendix).

²⁸ Coelius Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale*, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 19, col. 658: "Tunc umbrosae noctis quarta fere vigilia calcatas Dominus super undas obambulans, tumidos spumosi gurgitis fluctus placido comprimebat incensu, sacraque Christi vestigia miti pelagus abluvione lambebat" (Then around the fourth watch of the shadowy night the Lord trod upon the waves and walked over them, and compressed the swollen flood of the foaming whirlpool with his gait, and the sea licked at the holy footsteps of Christ with its gentle washing).

²⁹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, trans. Paul Antin. Sources Chrétiennes, 251, 260, 265. (Paris: Cerf, 1978–1980), vol. 2, Book II.2, p. 138.

³⁰ Compare *Battle of Maldon* 291–292, *on burh ridan, hale to hame*.

³¹ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), III.19.

³² Compare *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin together with Nine Texts*, ed. Theodore Silverstein (London: Christophers, 1935), 209: “Et erat flumen igneum et feruens; fluctus autem eius exaltat se super usque ad nubes et ad celum” (And there was a fiery and boiling river; its wave-surge mounts up to the clouds and to the heavens); this vision is seen to the north in the *Visio Pauli*. On the use of the *Visio Pauli* in Anglo-Saxon literature, including *Beowulf*, see Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 113–136.

³³ Matthew 23.15, etc.

³⁴ See Whitelock, *Audience of Beowulf*, pp. 76–82.

³⁵ See Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 3.550.

³⁶ *Conlationes XXIII*, X.10, 297–302 (*De institutione orationis perpetuae*). On the integration of Stoic thought into early Christian thinking, see Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990). Vol. 2, pp. 114–122 for John Cassian in this tradition.

³⁷ On this motif of reversal see Thomas D. Hill, “Drawing the Demon’s Sting: A Note on a Traditional Motif in Felix’s *Vita sancti Guthlaci*,” *Notes and Queries* 221 (1976), pp. 388–390.

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Chapter 12

The Heart of Darkness: Descent, Landscape, and Mental Projection in *Christ and Satan* and *The Wife's Lament*

Francisco J. Rozano-García

TRADITIONAL OLD ENGLISH SCHOLARSHIP has long recognized that one of the most salient features of Anglo-Saxon poetry is its richness in descriptions of landscapes pertaining to both the natural world and the inner sphere of thought and evocation. Critical readings emphasize the descriptive force of Old English poetry and explore the ways in which physical and mental landscapes build a complex set of meanings that support and grow from one another. Surrounding natural settings are often described as immobile and unchanging, mirroring the mental and emotional stagnation of the speakers in several Old English poems. However, there is not a sufficient degree of personification in descriptions of the landscape to allow for the application of pathetic fallacy, nor do poetic speakers attribute human qualities to the natural world, figuratively or literally.¹ Instead, in Old English poetry, natural phenomena are devoid of intention, moral inclination, or allegorical representation. This quality of natural phenomena has been referred to as the “amorality” of the natural world. The landscape remains a neutral agent of fate, indifferent to the human condition even when it acts as a mirror for it; “physical and material even when it is symbolic.”²

It is precisely this aspect of natural phenomena, their lack of alignment with the agents of good or evil, which is most revealing when trying to define the individual against his environment. The human race is constrained and negatively defined by the limits of the natural world: constrained because it is in constant struggle against it, and seeking to assert its place within it, and negatively defined because “the natural world stands as a negative mirror for human capability, its power reflecting the unstated but apparent lack of human power.”³ This negative reflection of

human power not only comprises the physical dimension of society, its edifications and settlements, but also social bonding, individual endurance and awareness of the hostility of the natural world, and above all, consciousness of man's position in Creation. In this sense "describing the natural world [serves] to define the human condition,"⁴ as we learn what man is by asserting what he is not.

The present discussion endeavors to further engage with the study of the use of natural imagery in Old English poetry in relation to psychological and emotional states, not as embellishment or rhetorical artifice, but as a self-contained poetic trope. More precisely, my textual analysis will focus on the representation of mental distress through images of oppression and release, light and darkness, and descent and ascent in *Christ and Satan* and *The Wife's Lament*, where their presence is remarkably significant. The present study suggests that the speakers in these poems utilize the surrounding landscape as a vehicle for the conveyance of psychological and emotional distress. Such technique involves direct correspondence between the microcosm of the speakers' minds, where the outer world is seen through the lens of restrained emotions and mental tribulation, and the macrocosm of the natural world, which projects onto the speakers' experience without taking on human-like features. Hence, the thoughts of the speakers in these poems progressively shift from memory and distress to their self-identification with their surroundings, while the landscape in turn becomes identity-defining in their psychological portrayals.

Christ and Satan 1–364, also known as Satan's Lament, displays a series of contrasting pairs working on an accumulative principle, aimed at reinforcing the ultimate antagonism between heaven and hell. This polarizing structure is maintained throughout Satan's long speeches, which elaborate on the evocation of his former angelic self and his transition to a new identity, which Satan refuses to accept. Imagery of sensory privation becomes a projection of Satan's psychological distress in his description of hell's torments. *The Wife's Lament* shares several features with Satan's Lament that provide insight into how the speakers perceive themselves as dislocated subjects. Hell is repeatedly located in the deepest, darkest pit, which finds an echo of its subterranean darkness and oppression in the earth-cave in *The Wife's Lament*. The cave itself suggests an image of death, burial, and afterlife—so much so that the poem has been interpreted as a ghost-woman's lament.⁵ Indeed, the narrator in the short lyric describes her situation as if she were both physically and mentally isolated from society, unable to overcome the past that binds her to her former self, yet somewhat

trapped in a perpetual cycle of sorrow and longing. The use of landscape descriptions and temporal references participate of this fragmented image of the speaker's self, so that these convey a sense of desolation and psychological distress. In both poems, images of darkness, literal or figurative descent, and physical oppression feature prominently alongside vocabulary related to the life of the mind, thereby establishing a common *topos* of mental projection within the immediate physical surroundings.

Darkness, Descent, and Privation of the Senses in *Christ and Satan*

One of the most criticized features of Part I of *Christ and Satan* has been its overuse of repetition with slight variations of phrasing. However, it is precisely the accumulative effect of this deliberate use of repetition that most powerfully portrays Satan's mental distress. His constant, almost cyclical lament over his powerlessness effectively creates a sense of stagnation in his mental process, of dwelling in frustration over his fall from grace to an obsessive degree. To an extent, the whole of Satan's discourse in Part I of the poem can be summarized in his opening *Hvær com* lament, as each of his interventions is an elaboration on the motif of the irrecoverable former splendor in the high heavens—a mourning cry for his lost identity, which only survives in his memory. Considering the large amount of space dedicated to Satan's dramatic monologues, it seems unusual that only a few phrases refer to the fallen angel's state of mind. Surprisingly enough for a poetic fragment preoccupied in the first place with Satan's lamentation and despair, the use of mind-related terms is remarkably spare.⁶

How, then, do we get so vivid a portrayal of Satan's psychological struggle when there is virtually no direct allusion to his mental state? Focused on the material and the sensorily apprehensible, Satan's lament offers insight into his emotional state without any explicit reference to mental processes and creates a scene of emotional devastation without making use of related vocabulary. In moving upwards and downwards in space or back and forth in time, the poet uses Satan's evocative discourse to emphasize the sharp differences between former and present states of mind. In addition to this, there are a number of physical aspects that are transferred from the landscape of hell to its inhabitants, such as its darkness, the burning fires, or its hideousness.⁷ This symbiosis between the individual and the landscape serves to reinforce the importance of mental projection in Satan's discourse, as it is by means of the allusiveness of his descriptive

language that we get an insight into his self-definition in terms of identity and emotional suffering. Owing to the dispersed arrangement of the poetic structure whereby the individual speeches are separated by exhortative intermissions, each of these aspects will be dealt with separately.

*Physical Torment and Privation of the Senses:
No Bright Light in the Deep Darkness*

In *Christ and Satan*, the explicitly material nature of the torments serves to emphasize Satan's *cupiditas* and to "camouflage" his restrained emotions.⁸ Additionally, Satan's own claim over heaven is overwhelmingly physical and material in nature: it is based on power over cities, dwellings, and the joys of heaven. Of these privileges, those pertaining to sensory enjoyment, such as song and music, beauty and light, are repeatedly highlighted. The poet inverts this pattern by reversing the role of imagery, so that hell is full of unpleasant sounds and sights, or simply devoid of any pleasure. Satan's opening speech first looks up to heaven, as he laments lost glory, then rapidly switches to a description of hell, that "ðeostre ham" ("dark home," 38a) where "flor is on welme / attre onæled" ("the ground is surging with fire / mixed with poison," 39b–40a):

Nis nu ende feor
þæt we sceolun ætsomne susel þrowian,
wean and wergu, nalles wuldres blæd
habban in heofnum, hehselda wyn.
Hwæt, we for dryhtene iu dreamas hefdon,
song on swegle selrum tidum.

(40b–45)

(The end is not far now,
when we will have to suffer torment together,
woe and misery, have no splendor of glory
in the heavens, no joy in its high halls.
How much joy did we once have for [the] Lord,
the song in heaven in better times.)

The sudden displacement in Satan's mental process contrasts with his own oppressive situation, as he is trapped in hell, "ðearle gebunden / fæstum fyr-clommu" ("held fast / by firm chains of fire," 38b–39a). The physicality of torment is reinforced by the only reference to mental suffering, "wean and wergu," as opposed to the numerous mentions of bodily pains,

whereas the contrast between past and present is supported by Satan's evocation of "selrum tidum." Thus, the poet emphasizes Satan's condition as exile and his loss of identity as an individual standing out from the boundaries of society in terms of both spatial separation and loss of privilege.⁹ The abrupt changes of location in Satan's speech, together with his contrasting limitation of movement and imagery of light and darkness, present a preliminary insight into his mental distress. The repetition of "habban in/on heofnum" dislocates action and takes it back to the upper space, thereby creating a sharp contrast in scenery and a sense of emotional disruption.

The poet's remarks contribute to maintaining the structure of tension and balance through the bridging sections. Line 68a finishes a sentence with "dreamum bedede" (cut [them] off from joy), while 68b opens a new thought with "Hæfdan Dryhtnes liht / ... ufan forleton" (They had lost the Lord's light / from above); on the other hand, 71a closes a description of the depths of hell with "beornende bealo" (burning pain) and portrays the demons as "blace" (black). This depiction maintains the shifting perspective and movement downwards from above ("liht ufan" down to "helle floras"). Moreover, the association in the same line of "dreamum" with "Dryhtnes liht" and "bealo" with "blace" by means of their immediate closeness in the speech sequence and in the use of alliteration emphasizes the antagonism between the light of celestial joy and privation in the darkness. Thus, the demons' alienation from the macrocosmic *dryht* of heaven reflects on the microcosm of their mental distress and frustration: the despair of their "otherness" is conveyed in terms of their spatial (dis)location.

This direct correlation between subject and landscape can be further traced in the image of un-heavenly light of "fyre and atre" ("fire and poison," 79a) coming out of Satan's mouth and voice, which, unlike the melodies of heaven, "ne bið swelc fæger dream" ("is no pleasant melody," 79b), recurring in 126b–127a and 161b–162a. The frustration in Satan's mind is similarly expressed through correlative association with his surroundings: fire and noise mark him out as antagonistic to the joy and music of the angels, while his identity becomes interwoven with the very nature of his abode in hell:

Nis her eadiges tir,
wloncra winsele, ne worulde dream,
ne ængla ðreat, ne we upheofon
agan moten. Is ðes atola ham
fyre onæled. Ic eom fah wið God.

æce æt helle duru dracan eardigað,
 hate on reðre; heo us helpan ne magon.
 (92b–98)

(There is no glory of the blessed ones here,
 no wine-halls of the great, no joy of this world,
 no troop of angels, nor may we gain possession
 of heaven above. This horrible home is
 surging with fire. I am God's enemy.
 Dragons dwell eternally at hell's door,
 flaming inside their breasts; they cannot help us.)

Satan's self-defining "Ic eom fah wið God" reveals an implied expression of mental distress at the assertion of his newly acquired identity. The contrasting image of the troops of angels in heaven with the dragons at hell's door, together with Satan's remark about how they "us helpan ne magon," adds to the sense of frustration and helplessness that we get from the image of fire burning from the outside, as well as from inside their chests, a common enough image in Old English.¹⁰ An interesting image is introduced in lines 100–101a: "nagan we ðæs heolstres þæt we us gehydan mægon / in ðissum neowlan genipe" (we have no shade in which we can hide ourselves / in this deep darkness). The implications of this statement are worth noting in terms of mental projection: the devils' guilt cannot be hidden, their sin remains visible and they cannot fuse with the shadows in shame and disgrace. In favoring a physical manifestation of mental distress, the poet emphasizes its material consequences for the devils.

Through use of a similar paradox, Satan laments that he is "limwæstmum þæt ic gelutian ne mæg / on þyssum sidan sele, synnum forwundod" ("so large of limb that I cannot hide / in this vast hall, wounded by sins," 129–130), a hyperbolic image of bodily oppression that conveys a feeling of claustrophobia and anxiety. The suggestiveness of the passage is reinforced by the presence of violent natural phenomena, such as extreme heat and cold (131) or raging winds (135b–136), in conjunction with images of nakedness and confrontation with beasts (134b–135a), all of which are common elements in projections of mental distress onto the surrounding landscape.¹¹ The agitation in Satan's mind becomes all the greater as the focus shifts once again to creation and heavenly light:

ne on þa beorhtan gescæft
 ne mot ic æfre ma eagam starian.
 Is me nu wyrsa þæt ic wuldres leoht

uppe mid englum æfre cuðe,
 song on swegle, þær sunu meotodes
 habbað eadige bearn ealle ymbfangen
 seolfa mid sange.

(138b–144a)

(Nor shall I ever be allowed to look upon
 bright creation with my own eyes.
 It is worse for me now that I ever knew
 the light of glory above with the angels,
 the song in heaven, where all his blessed children
 have surrounded the Creator's Son
 Himself with song.)

These images sharply contrast with the previous passage, in which the devils are described as “hellescealcas, / gnornende cynn, grundas mænan” (“the subjects of hell, / the lamenting tribe, moaning over the abyss,” 132b–133). Darkness, lament, and the abyss take the place of the upper regions, celestial light, and songs of praise, in such a way that although we do not hear of Satan's psychological suffering, the mental projection of his memories on the surrounding landscape creates a sense of nostalgia and regret. Satan's speech takes on an overtone of frustration at this stage, as his powerlessness becomes evident in the fact that he cannot physically harm any souls, “butan þam anum þe he agan nyle” (“except for those alone that He [God] does not wish to have,” 146), nor drag them to “þone biteran grund” (“the bitter abyss,” 148).¹² The preoccupation of the poem with the material dimension of Satan's covetousness is best exemplified by the devil's dramatic speech lamenting his loss of privileges:

Eala drihtenes þrym! Eala duguða helm!
 Eala meotodes miht! Eala middaneard!
 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,
 ne huru mid earum ne sceal æfre geheran
 Þære byrhtestan beman stefne!

(163–171)

(Alas for the Lord's majesty! Alas for the lord of hosts!
 Alas for the creator's might! Alas for middle-earth!

Alas for the bright day! Alas for the joy of God!
 Alas for the troop of angels! Alas for the heavens
 above!
 Alas that I am forever deprived of eternal joy,
 that I cannot reach heaven with my own hand,
 nor look up with my own eyes,
 nor ever hear with my own ears
 the sound of the clearest trumpet!

This passage shifts from “middaneard” to the angels up in heaven, then immediately introduces a contrastive pattern of negative statements focused on privation of the senses. However, Satan’s despair is only a half-truth, as he is still able to mentally move up to heaven through use of memory and mental evocation. The recovery of all these elements only through remembrance creates a powerful image of mental and emotional distress. It is interesting to read the poet’s account of how the blessed souls will “wlite scine” (“shine with beauty,” 209b), and will seek “fægere land” (“a land more fair,” 211a); a land “wlitig and wynsum” (“beautiful and full of joy,” 212a), possessing “dreama dream” (the joy of joys, 313a). More importantly, unlike hell, heaven is a spacious “brade lond” (“broad land,” 213b), not constrained by any physical boundaries or shrouded in darkness. The righteous will be “sorgum bedælde,” (“freed from sorrows,” 295b); the same verb is used for Satan’s privation of “dream” (68a, 343a), “duguð” (121a), and “god” (185a), implying both emotional release and the mental distress brought about by the loss of these.

Keeping up with the series of antithetical images, the audience is admonished to consider the eternal reward, and “onlucan mid listum locen waldendes, / ongeotan gastlice” (“to unlock the ruler’s locks with skill, / to understand spiritually,” 299–300a). This image ironically juxtaposes the physical chaining of Satan with the acquisition of spiritual salvation through liberation from mental bonds. The use of “deman” and “ongeotan” at each end of the sentence reinforces the mental/spiritual dimension of the exhortation, whereas the image of unlocking echoes bodily torment. A similar, more poignant, example of this technique can be identified in the poet’s quotation of Matthew 13:43 in 306–308a: “Soðfæste men, sunnan gelice, / fægre gefrætwod in heora fæder rice / scinað in sceldbyrig” (The righteous, like the sun, / beautifully adorned, / shall shine in their father’s kingdom, / the city of refuge). The poet both expands and reduces the original “tunc iusti fulgebunt sicut sol in regno Patris eorum qui habet aures audiat” (The righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father; he who has ears, let him hear).

The use of the biblical passage here furthers the tension between light and darkness, while “sceldbyrg” echoes Satan’s inability to hide or cover himself in the vastness of hell. However, the poet does not include the closing phrase, the omission of which triggers a reminiscence of Satan’s “ne huru mid earum ne sceal.” This negative correlation looks back to Satan’s lament in a mordantly ironic way, bearing the implication that he was once “deaf” to God’s word of authority as he is now deprived of the sound of celestial song. A short closing passage introduced by the remark “þæt synd word Godes” (those are God’s words, 357b) condenses all the recurrent motifs as identified in this analysis:

þonne hie befæðmeð fæder mancynnes,
and hie gesegnað mid his swiðran hond,
lædeð to lihte, þær hi lif agon
a to aldre, uplicne ham,
byrhtne burhstyre.

(358–362a)

(When the father of mankind embraces them,
blesses them with his right hand,
leads them into the light where they shall receive
eternal life, a home on high,
a bright city.)

Ascent and Descent: The Boundaries of Satan’s Identity

Satan’s identity is one of the main preoccupations of Part I of the poem, which counterpoises his former angelic being and the identity he intended to usurp as lord of heaven against his fall from grace, and his loss of status. Echoes of God’s or Christ’s majesty appear frequently in Satan’s speeches, to emphasize his powerlessness and non-being through negative comparison. The poet highlights the omnipotence of God through His freedom of movement in the upwards/downwards cosmological structure of the poem. Not only is God able to “survey the sea, / the foundations in heaven/the ocean” (“sæ geondwlitan, / grundas in h/geofene,” 9b–10a¹³), but He also imposes Satan’s fall to the darkest abyss without possibility for return—unlike Christ, who is able to freely return from his descend into hell. In stark contrast with God’s omnipotence, Satan’s inferiority is accentuated through his inability to move at all owing to his large size and binding in chains of fire.

The first reference to the band of rebellious angels is introduced in terms of their literal “un-doing” (“forward,” 21b), and their pretence of

ruling over heaven. The account of the descent contrasts “heofnum heahgetimbrad” (“the lofty heavens,” 29) with the devils’ plunging “in ðone deopan wælm / niðær under nessas in ðone neowlan grund” (“into the deep surging fires / deep underground in the deep abyss,” 30–31). The correlation between how God/Christ “gefestnade foldan sceatas” (“fixed the foundations of the world,” 3)¹⁴ and imprisoned the devils in hell is established through the parallel “Hwa is þæt ðe cunne / orðonc clene nymðe ece God” (“Who except for the eternal God / is able to fully understand his ingenious work?” 17b–18) and “God ana wat / hu he þæt scyldige werud forscifen hefde!” (“God alone knows / how he punished that guilty host!” 32b–33). More importantly, time and again Satan crosses the boundaries between the upper and lower spheres of heaven and hell in mentally shifting between his two forms of being— the angelic and the demonic.

The devils’ first brief intervention introduces Satan’s usurpation of identity as “scypend seolfa” (“the creator Himself,” 57a). The use of “seolfa” here is reminiscent of both the attribution of Creation to God, “seolfa he” (4a) or “he selfa” (9a), and the ironic mention of the devils as they believed that “hie weron seolfe” (“they themselves were,” 23a) lords of heaven. The use of “him/them-self/ves” complicates the motif of usurpation of identity, particularly as Satan proclaims that “þæt ic wære seolfa swægles brytta” (“that I myself was the lord of heaven,” 123). Satan’s subsequent response looks again into the past and relocates the action “iu in heofnum” (“once in heaven,” 81a):

þa ic in mode minum hogade
þæt ic wolde towerpan wuldres leoman,
bearn helendes, agan me burga gewald
eall to æhte ...
Wene þæt tacen sutol þa ic aseald wes on wærgðu,
niðer under nessas in ðone neowlan grund.
(84–90)

(Then I thought in my mind
that I would overthrow the radiance of glory,
the Son of the Healer, get myself absolute power
and possession over the cities ...
I believe it was a clear sign when I was banished into
damnation,
deep underground, into the deep abyss.)

In these lines the identities of Christ and Satan are again juxtaposed as Satan thinks that he could usurp Christ’s seat of power.¹⁵

The use of “*tacen sutol*” parallels “*underne*” in line 1 when Satan’s lack of might and strength becomes ironically “manifest.” The echo of line 31 completes the reminiscence of the opening section, providing a similar narrative with an antithetical protagonist: power is made manifest in earth (as opposed to the plain failure of angelic rebellion), culminating in the imposition of banishment from God/Christ unto Satan. The opening and closing sections of Satan’s second speech parallel this sequence: the darkness of demons in hell and the dimness of the cavern merge into one another as they are both deprived of the Creator’s light (“*sceppendes leoht*,” 105), a further reference to cosmological design. The most remarkable element in Satan’s speech here is his self-definition as “*fah on flora*” (“enemy in the abyss,” 109a); an aspect of Satan’s perception of himself that he does not reveal to the audience until this point in the poem. This phrase joins Satan’s spatial location and his identity as God’s enemy by means of alliteration, explicitly asserting a direct relationship between space and the self, and completing the projection of mental states onto the macrocosmic scenery.

The rhetorical pattern follows a reverse structure from this point on, creating an envelope structure around “*ealle we syndon ungelice*” (“we all are different,” 149). This significant phrase marks a turning point, as Satan’s perspective is again located “*iu in heofonum*” (150a, note the repetition of 81a); where the former angels enjoyed the sound of “*wuldres sweg*” (“glorious song,” 151b) and “*lof-songa word*” (“songs of praise,” 154b), as opposed to the groans of the “*gnornende cynn*” (“the lamenting tribe,” 133a). In terms of Satan’s self-definition of his identity, his former speech opened with “*Ic wæs iu in heofnum halig ængel*” (“I was once a holy angel in heaven,” 81), whereas he relocates his situation in the present as “*Nu ic eom dædum fah*” (“Now I am stained by my deeds,” 155b). The direct temporal correlation between “*Ic wæs iu*” and “*Nu ic eom*” resonates in terms of spatial location “*in heofnum*” and “*on helle*,” as well as in Satan’s perception of himself as formerly “*halig*,” now “*fah*.” Thus, Satan’s speeches in lines 81–124 and 129–158 display Satan’s loss of status and his acquirement of a new identity at each end of the discourse. The turning points of this assimilative process are made explicit in Satan’s realization of his new identity as “*ungelic*,” and his new status as “*fah in flora*.”

Satan’s long closing speech should be read against this structural progress, as from comparison a sense of mental realization arises. The opening line of this section, “*Nu is gesene þæt we syngodon / uppe on eared*” (“Now it is obvious that we had sinned / up on earth,” 228) directly reflects upon Satan’s earlier statement, “*Ne mæg ic gehicgan hu ic in ðæm*

becwom, / in þis neowle genip" ("I cannot understand how I ended up here, / in this deep darkness," 178–179a). The narrative of the angelic rebellion introduces Christ as "Byrhtword" ("the bright word," or "the clear-voiced one," 236b). Describing Christ in such terms is reminiscent of the poet's remarks about Satan's voice (its being "hateful" and "dreadful," cf. 35–36a); at the same time it creates a further antithetical identity-defining feature marking Satan and Christ as antagonists. Following his uprising, Satan ultimately admits and enunciates God's supreme authority: "God seolf a him / rice haldeð. He is ana cyning" ("God Himself / keeps the kingdom for Himself. He alone is king," 258b–259). As Satan assumes the loss of his former angelic being, the acquisition of a new identity as God's enemy, and the utter failure of his endeavor to take Christ's seat of power, his own conflict of identity resolves itself. At the same time, Satan's perception of hierarchy and cosmology is reorganized: the attribution of a higher position, both spatially and in terms of power, is finally attributed to God, whereas Satan accepts his literal and figurative inferiority.

Satan's final speech then closes with a structure that echoes the opening *Hwer com* lament that introduced his miserable condition. On this occasion, Satan's utilization of temporal displacement focuses on the present with regard to the past ("here I must now long for what I once had"), instead of on the present with regard to the future, as he did in his opening claim ("where is now what I was destined to have?"). In Satan's *Hwer com* lament, the phrase expresses not only frustration for the loss of former power, but also a sense of demand of the restoration of privileges unjustly taken from him ("habban sceoldan"). The question that Satan puts forth now allows no room for lamentation or a feeling of pride; instead, it only conveys a sense of nostalgia and alludes to God's forgiveness as the ultimate decisive agent in his fate: "Hwæðer ūs se ēca æfre wille / on heofona rīce hām ālēfan, / ēðel tō æhte, swā hē ær dyde?" ("Will the eternal one ever be willing / to grant us a home in the Kingdom of Heaven, / a land to hold, as he once did?" 276–279)

The accumulative principle at work in the first part of the poem effectively comes to its culminating point in Satan's acceptance of his newly acquired identity, as he moves away from memory and evocation to subjugation to God's authority. Throughout his various speeches, Satan expresses his inner conflict in terms of spatio-temporal dislocation, obsessively going back to his original state of being *in illo tempore*, yet progressively realizing that he has crossed the threshold between the heavenly and the infernal. The "now and then" sections exemplify this constant re-crossing

of boundaries through mental evocation, until Satan himself leaves his former self behind and turns to a hypothetical future redemption. It seems only adequate, then, that the *intermezzo* between parts I and II opens with a straightforward statement of Satan's identity as he once was in God's kingdom, resolving the motif of dislocation of identity in Satan's Lament:

Wæs þæt engelcyn ær genemned,
 Lūcifer hāten, lēohtberende,
 on gēardagum in godes rīce.
 (365–367)

(That angelic being had once been named
 Lucifer, the Light-Bearer,
 in the days of old, in the kingdom of God.)

Emotional Dislocation and Figurative Descent in *The Wife's Lament*

However dissimilar in poetic form and dramatic background, *The Wife's Lament* and the first section of *Christ and Satan* share their treatment of a self-referential exploration of identity, expressed in an introspective mode, and based on a temporally disjointed narrative voiced by a physically and mentally constrained individual cut off from society. The two texts may be seen, in fact, to provide contrasting views of a virtually equivalent situation, as they approach their respective speakers' discourse by providing, in each case, a token of *a priori* information that is absent in the other. Thus, in the case of the short lyric, unlike in Satan's Lament, we do find explicit statements about the state of mind of a given individual; on the other hand, we lack any circumstantial information as to the speaker's background. The text is rich in vocabulary referring to a series of extreme mental states and disturbing scenarios: expressions of sadness, longing, and anxiety permeate the speaker's discourse. The tone and purpose of the text are difficult to miss; the speaker herself clearly states them in its very first lines: "Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre, / minre sylfre sið" (I recite this poem about myself overcome with sadness, / [relate] my own experience).¹⁶ The poem is explicit about its concern with a subjective view of the speaker's emotions. However, in addition to its evident preoccupation with the life of the mind, *The Wife's Lament* is a poem that constantly revolves around physical location—or rather, around physical and emotional *dis*-location.

The speaker's "giedd" is told in a series of flashbacks and sudden returns to the present, where images of the past are rapidly succeeded by impressions of an on-going situation. The abundant use of juxtaposed spatio-temporal references in relation to mental and physical suffering in the short lyric is particularly interesting. The landscape contributes to creating a narrative pulse in which the emotional takes over the rational in telling the speaker's story. The narrator in *The Wife's Lament* builds up a story constructed around a series of emotional climaxes, in which memory plays a major role in accommodating the surrounding landscape to the speaker's mental projection. By recalling oppressive memories of anxiety and separation, the speaker creates a sense of the claustrophobic and secretive which pervades the poem, appearing at various points as darkness, concealment, and physical oppression. These elements not only contribute to building up an atmosphere of emotional alienation, but also add a physical dimension to the speaker's misery.

The first event in the speaker's narration involves an unnamed "hla-ford" ("lord," 6) and his sudden departure to unknown shores. It is precisely her ignorance as to the man's fate that brings the speaker to misery and longing. The ambivalence in language ("gewitan" may imply bodily or spiritual "departure") and the unknown circumstances surrounding the event introduce a sense of uncertainty and disquietude. The mismatch between the lord's journey "ofer yþa" ("over the waves," 7a) and the speaker's ignorance concerning his whereabouts on land (8b) create an atmosphere of distress and anxiety about the lord's final destination. Such ambiguity in physical location and verbal interpretation hints at potential self-delusion in the speaker's hopes that her lord might be actually somewhere and not have passed away. The use of "uhtcearu," moreover, is indicative of a cyclical pattern, where sorrow is renewed at dawn as the speaker's knowledge of her lord's situation remains unaltered, and her emotions stagnant. The movement–stasis contrast between the lord's departure and the speaker's being physically "bound" to the land where she must wait for a hypothetical return implicitly points to the narrator's mental distress, as she remains oppressed by her attachment to the memory of her lord, and is thus mentally constrained in addition to physically immobilized. In this sense, her subsequent journey as "wineleas wrecca" ("a friendless exile," 10a), motivated by her "weapearfe" ("woeful need," 10b), might be seen as either a desire to end her physical isolation or an attempt to separate herself from the bonds of memory and waiting.

A further element of concealment is introduced as the men plotted "þurh dyrne gepoht" ("with dark thoughts," 12a), where "dyrne" implies

both secrecy and darkness or evil. The association of darkness with uncertainty reinforces the speaker's anxiety at being ignorant about the reality of her situation. The following lines reintroduce the theme of separation, emphasizing the association of physical dislocation with emotional isolation: it is the fact that speaker and lord were "gewidost in worouldrice" ("as far apart as possible in the kingdom of earth," 13) that caused her to feel "longade" ("longing," 14b) and her "hyge geomor" ("sad mind," 17b). "Ða" (18a) gives way to another apparently disconnected event, followed a few lines below by the temporal reference "eft" ("afterwards," 23b) without clearly establishing a logical sequence. A second unnamed man is mentioned, apparently a different person than the "hlaford," but even this is left unclear. His secretiveness of mind ("mod miþendne," 20a) links him with the kinsmen in lines 11–12, whereas the reference to death and separation (22–23a) echoes the speaker's relationship with the lord and the ambiguous meaning of "gewitan." Mental distress is implied here by the accumulation of "mod-" and "hycg-" compounds (19–20) and the abrupt interruption of thought in 23b. Temporal and physical separations appear together in the next two lines, culminating in the breaking of the emotional bond between the mysterious man and the speaker:

eft is þæt onhworfen,
 is nu seo neawest swa hit no wære
 freondscipe uncer. Sceal ic feor ge neah
 mines felaleofan fæhðu dreogan.
 (23b–26)

(Afterwards, that changed.
 This friendship of ours is now
 as if it had never been. I must, far or near,
 suffer the hostility of my beloved one.)

Imagery of natural scenery accumulates throughout the following ten lines, which depict the speaker's abode "on wuda-bearwe, / under actreo in þam eorðscrafe" ("in the woods, / under an oak-tree in the earth-cave," 27b–28), surrounded by a bleak landscape where "sindon dena dimme, duna uphea, / bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne" ("the dens are dim, the hills steep, / the boroughs bitter, overgrown with briers," 30–31). The speaker is completely possessed with longing (29b), which implies both affective and physical desire, and contrasts with the imagery of dryness and infertility of the surrounding scenery. The association of caverns and underground spaces with the maternal and female sexuality has long been recognized by cultural anthropologists to be a common

feature of pre-Christian folklore.¹⁷ The identification between these two elements become all the more significant if we consider the lines immediately after:

Ful oft mec her wraþe beþeat
 Fromsiþ frean. Frynd sind on eorþan,
 leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,
 þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
 under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
(32b–36)

(For a long time the departure of one dear to me
 has kept me here. Lovers are on earth,
 beloved living ones, occupying their beds,
 while I walk alone at dawn
 under the oak-tree, through this earth-cave.)

The juxtaposition of the first-person “mec her wraþe beþeat” with the general “sind on eorþan” implies, in the first place, a contrastive pair of images where quasi-captivity is opposed to freedom. The thought sequence conveys a sense of oppression and anxiety at the speaker’s own inability to abandon her dwelling place, reinforced by the parallel of “eorðscrafu” with “eorþan,” where the simplex implies a broad space as opposed to the underground cave. In terms of emotional dislocation, the narrator’s reference to lovers occupying their beds stands out as the culmination of a lament for physical and affective frustration. Her unsatisfied longing becomes projected onto the surrounding unfertile landscape (both reflecting and contrasting with her current emotional state), which is in turn set against the fulfillment of others’ love. Eventually, loneliness becomes stagnation in the cyclical repetition of experience implied by the rising of the sun, and concludes with a displacement downwards into the dark, barren earth-cave.

The parallel structure “þær ic sittan mot ... / þær ic wepan mæg” (“there I must sit... / there I must weep,” 37a–38a) restates the temporal and physical stasis (made explicit by the summer-long day, “sumorlangne dæg,” 37b) that binds the speaker to a perpetual time and a permanent space.¹⁸ Similarly, the static verb “sittan” in contrast with the memories of “wraesciþas” (“exile journeys,” 38b) reintroduces the motif of physical binding and limitation of movement, supported by “gerestan” (“to rest,” 40b) and “begitan” (“to seize,” 41b). The connective “forþon” (39b) establishes a consecutive correlation between temporal stasis (summer-long

day), physical paralysis (sit, rest), and emotional devastation or mental distress (weep). Where “gerestan” implies a need for both physical and mental relief, psychological distress is implied by the emotional unrest of “modcearu” (“grief,” 40a) and “longaþ” (“longing,” 41a), whereas physical stasis and temporal suspension are hinted at by “mec ... begeat” (“seized me,” 41b). The ambiguous use of “longaþ” seems particularly appropriate, as it may imply anxiety for the unknown, sexual desire, and/or affective frustration. Lines 42–45a are overwhelmingly emotional in tone, with a heavy use of mind and heart related vocabulary. The young man alluded to suffers from “geomormod, / heard heortan gepoht” (“a sad mind, / harsh thoughts in [his] heart,” 42b–43a), resulting in extremes of emotion, so that “bliþe gebæro” (“a merry mood”) gives way to “eac þon breostceare, / sinsorga gedreag” (43b–45a). It is interesting to compare these lines with the virtues of the wise man in *The Wanderer*, 65b–72, which preach mental balance; perhaps the emotional instability of the young man is a sign of the bold inexperience of youth as opposed to the tempered wisdom of old age.

The final passage (45b–53) brings together mental distress and violent natural phenomena, in a manner reminiscent of the situations of the speakers in *The Seafarer* or *The Wanderer*, as well as of the departed “hlaford” and the speaker herself. The isolation of the weather-beaten seascape contrasts with the barren earth-cave, providing a complementary image of emotional desolation and physical dislocation. The phrasing parallels of “min freond siteð / under stanhlife ... / wine werigmod” (“my friend will sit / under a rocky cliff ... / a companion weary in mind” 47b–49a) with 36–38 (“under ac-treo ... / ic sittan mot, sumor-langne dæg, / þær ic wepan mæg”), and “Dreogeð se min wine / micle modceare; he gemon to oft / wynlicran wic” (“My friend will suffer / great sorrow; he will often remember / a more joyful dwelling,” 50b–52) with 30–32a (“Sindon dena dimme, duna up-hea, | bitre burg-tunas, brerum beweaxne, | wic wyne leas”) and 39b–40 (“forþon ic æfre ne mæg | þære modceare minre gerestan”) support this connection. These structures hint at an act of mental projection on the speaker’s part, in order to establish an emotional correlation with an external subject, in a somewhat similar way to the speaker in *The Seafarer* when he opposes the man in land to his own experiences. The poem then closes with a statement addressed to a posited addressee, resolving the three main elements in the speaker’s story (mental distress, physical stasis, and emotional frustration): “Wa ið þam þe sceal | of langope leofes abidan” (“Woe to the one who must / await a beloved one with longing,” 52b–53).

The implications of an afterlife dwelling mentioned in the introduction to this study cannot be ignored, especially considering its consequences in terms of self-definition and identity. For the speaker in the poem, the earth-hall is very similar to a grave, signifying not only her symbolic death in terms of emotional alienation, but also her being “dead to the world,” and, indeed dead to society. The contrast between the deep and dim valleys and the tall hills surrounding the grove echoes Satan’s lamentations over the darkness and remoteness of his abode in hell, cut off from light and society. In the same way, the barren natural scenery is simply described as “wic wynna leas” (“a dwelling deprived of joys,” 32a), which strongly resembles hell’s privation of the “wyn” of the heavenly “dryht.”

Traditional scholarship might see similarities between the language of Old English texts as examples of the oral-formulaic basis of Old English poetry and their recurrence as mere examples of selection of appropriate phrases for the creation of similar structures (type-scenes, themes, and motifs).¹⁹ However, this view has the inevitable disadvantage of oversimplifying the composition techniques of Old English poets, reducing their phraseology to a matter of semi-systematic reutilization of known materials. In the light of the analysis provided in the present study, it seems difficult to see the coincidences in use of spatiotemporal references in such two disparate texts as the recycling of familiar images for the conveyance of a similar effect. Although some coincidences in phrasing can be found, as it has just been shown, these hint at the conscious construction of significant scenery where a same self-contained *topos* is being used. This view does not necessarily invalidate traditional readings, but rather expands it insofar as it reaches beyond the choice of imagery and language for merely aesthetic reasons. What brings Satan and the speaker in *The Wife’s Lament* together is not their similar phraseology, but their similar circumstances of emotional alienation and physical oppression. In addition to this, they are non-beings, subjects deprived of their former identities because they are exiles who inhabit the literal and symbolic margins of their respective societies.

Liminal subjects, as these *personae* might be identified, are symbolic elements in pre-modern societies. They “live outside their normal environment and ... are brought to question their self and the existing social order ..., [they] come to feel nameless, spatiotemporally dislocated and socially unstructured.”²⁰ All of these aspects of liminality can be effectively applied to Lucifer/Satan and to the unnamed speaker of *The Wife’s Lament*. They exist outside their own social structure, having been forced

to abandon it as outlaws and divested of status and privilege. Their discourse focuses on their own spatio-temporal dislocation, where the role of memory and evocation becomes essential for the recuperation of their former identities. Therefore, the ultimate significance of the physical-psychological *topos* that the present study has attempted to identify in these two poems is the creation of a negative space where the self experiences a state of transition and suspension. Sometimes the subject reaches the other side of the liminal space it inhabits through repeatedly crossing the boundaries of identity, as in the case of Satan. Other times, however, the individual's identity becomes stagnant, cyclical, and warped into itself, as in *The Wife's Lament*. The stark contrast between what was and is no more, what flourished and now withers, the known and the unknown, lies at the core of both poems. Ultimately, the "dryht" as opposed to the "wræclastas," materialises in the speakers' becoming, spatiotemporally and psychologically, anathema to their former selves.

NOTES

¹ The application of the term "pathetic fallacy" in Old English scholarship is not unanimous and does not appear in early studies any more frequently than it does in recent ones. As early as 1905, one critic stated that, in Old English poetry, "of that anthropomorphic view of nature now so common in verse, and especially of that sentimental attributing of feeling and emotion, aptly termed 'the pathetic fallacy,' there is practically no trace" (Elizabeth Deering Hanscom, "The Feeling for Nature in Old English Poetry," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1905), pp. 439–463 (p. 465)). On the other hand, a much later critic comments on "the astonishing degree to which Old English lyric poems employ personification and the pathetic fallacy" (Lois Bragg, *The Lyric Speakers of Old English Poetry* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991) p. 26).

² Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³ Ibid, p. 21.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Elinor Lench, "The Wife's Lament: A Poem of the Living Dead," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (1970): pp. 3–23.

⁶ References to mental processes are scarce in general in Part I of *Christ and Satan*, and are mostly used in reference to the past or as part of the poet's admonitions to his audience: "Pyncan" (19a, 55a, 186a), "geþohtas" (204b, 283b), "hycgan" (84b, 178a, 343b), "wenan" (59a, 89a). Related terms include "gemunan," (201b, 205b, 285a), "deman" (298a), and "ongeotan" (300a).

⁷ Thus, hell is “atole scref” (“a horrible cavern,” 26a, 73b, 127a), “atola ham” (“a horrible home,” 95b), “atolan æðele” (“a horrible abode,” 107), “atole gefyllled” (“filled with horror,” 136b), and “atolan eðles” (“a horrible hall,” 326a); the demons are “atole gastas” (“horrible spirits,” 51b), while “atol is þin onseon” (“[Satan’s] appearance is horrible,” 61a), and he is referred to as “atol æglæca” (“a horrible enemy,” 160a).

⁸ Concerning the confrontation between Christ’s *caritas* and Satan’s *cupiditas* as a controlling theme in the poem, see Charles R. Sleeth, *Studies in “Christ and Satan”* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 13–26.

⁹ There are numerous approaches to the social dimension of Satan’s banishment and its relationship to the Anglo-Saxon “dryht” (“people,” in the sense of human group). An extensive treatment of the subject in relation to other Old English poems can be found in Sleeth, *Studies in “Christ and Satan”*, pp. 71–121; see also Constance Harsh, “*Christ and Satan*: The Measured Power of Christ,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 90 (1989): pp. 243–253.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive explanation on the ‘Old English hydraulic model of the mind’ and survey of its uses in verse and prose, see Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), ch. 2.

¹¹ Note here the parallelism with the harsh weather conditions of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, particularly the sweeping winds against the ruined walls in *Wanderer*, lines 97–105.

¹² The use of “bitter” here might be seen as a clearer example of Satan’s mental projection on his surroundings rather than as an instance of pathetic fallacy, as the abyss does not actively participate of Satan’s bitterness but rather becomes the passive object and source of it.

¹³ The manuscript reading “heofene” was repeatedly emended by early editors of the poem to “geofene” owing to the apparent inconsistency in the cosmological design. Robert E. Finnegan (“*Christ and Satan*: A Critical Edition. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977, p. 91), was the first to argue for the manuscript form, being later supported by Miranda Wilcox, “Meotod, the Meteorologist: Celestial Cosmography in *Christ and Satan*, lines 9–12a,” *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 39 (2008): pp. 17–32. However, in the light of the pattern of upper/lower regions of Creation that governs the passage, it might be interesting to reconsider the sense of the original emendation. Arguably, the manuscript reading is still certainly admissible, while the emendation would restore the “g” alliteration and eliminate the need for a theological explanation that is otherwise apparently unnecessary at this point. Moreover, emending “geofene” would not inflict any violence to the overall sense of the passage or to the poetic structure, as it would make perfect sense in the poet’s use of imagery: celestial bodies-ground-sea-clouds, mirrored by air-world-ocean-rain, and again heavens-earth-high seas.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note the connotations of “gefæstan,” bearing the meaning of “fix” or “establish,” but also “imprison,” perhaps anticipating His confinement of Satan in hell.

¹⁵ Note the reference to “mod” is here in the past, and that it does not occur in the present in Part I of the poem.

¹⁶ I follow the unemended rendering of the feminine inflections in the opening line of the poem, so that the speaker will be referred to accordingly throughout this study. The edition used here is Bernard J. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501* (2 vols. 2nd edition Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), except line 24, where I follow Anne L. Klink, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ This commonplace motif was taken up and applied to modern feminist criticism from the perspective of psychoanalytical theory by Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 243–253, where she reads Plato’s myth of the cave as a metaphor for man’s relation to the maternal womb.

¹⁸ It is interesting to consider here a possible reference to the natural phenomenon known as midnight sun, whereby the sun does not set during the central weeks of summer in the northern regions. If such reference—or a natural phenomenon of a similar sort—is admissible, then the ‘summer-day long’ acquires even greater relevance.

¹⁹ For the treatment of the theme of exile in Old English poetry in particular, as it applies to the two poems under discussion and a number of others, see Stanley B. Greenfield, “The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of Exile in Old English Poetry,” *Speculum* 30:2 (1955), pp. 200–206.

²⁰ Bjørn Thomassen, “Liminality,” in *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, edited by Austin Harrington et al. (Routledge: London, 2006, pp. 322–323), p. 322.

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