P. S. Langeslag and Julia Stumpf (eds.)

Forcing Nature

Essays in Medieval Literature

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Seminar für Englische Philologie

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Preface

Every semester, talented students gather in university classrooms to improve their knowledge of medieval studies and hone their research and composition skills. Many courses culminate in the term paper, a labour-intensive exercise performed for an audience of one. This arrangement gives lecturers a good sense of their students' abilities, but it condemns a good deal of valuable work to oblivion. In a world increasingly played out in social media, the term paper has come to stand out as one of the more private undertakings in a student's life.

There is good reason why coursework remains private by default: medieval studies is a daunting field in which to conduct research. It is characterised above all by uncertainties. Early medieval literature in particular is often anonymous, and our understanding of the circumstances in which it was produced is patchy and highly speculative. The situation is further complicated by the field's other trademark: its interdisciplinarity. Many literary texts are informed by theology, but their origins and social commentary can only be appreciated with a thorough understanding of social history, which in turn relies on archaeology as well as documentary evidence, which combined reveal a complex world requiring years of study to comprehend to any meaningful degree. These aspects cannot be done justice in language and literature departments. Indeed, even the languages themselves tend to receive short shrift, as there is no time in most undergraduate curricula to ensure students have a thorough grasp of Old English as well as Latin, let alone Old Norse and beyond. All of this is supposed to happen alongside the study of a literary tradition that spans centuries, not to mention the overwhelming part of a typical English Language and Literature curriculum that postdates the Middle Ages. Thus a training in medieval studies is bound itself to be as patchy as our collective understanding of the period. How, then, could students be expected to deliver research worthy of publication?

One objection to this reasoning consists in the sobering observation that these limitations do not disappear even after advanced study: the scholar's knowledge of the Middle Ages is just as much characterised by unknowns as is the student's. As she passes through the stages of graduate school and book authorship, the medievalist certainly improves her knowledge of the matters in which she specialises, and indeed she is likely to become the world expert in some small domain, but a scholar with a deep knowledge of all the disciplines involved would be a rare thing indeed. As such, we are all called upon to share the insights we have gained: work that does not break new ground may nevertheless help others advance the state of their knowledge. In the same way, students are well advised to start within well-defined territories, such as the diegetic world of a text, but there is no reason why they could not there do work that is as as important as any scholar's, and certainly worth sharing.

This volume demonstrates that student papers are indeed worth reading and sharing. Readers may approach these essays with different objectives, but it is our hope that they will learn something new from each contribution. Sometimes, the knowledge gained will consist in groundbreaking insights, helping the reader reach a set of coordinates on the edge of the universe of current knowledge. In other cases, a reader may find that one or other of these papers provides a particularly useful overview of the material it engages. Regardless of their individual merit, however, all essays here collected are examples of outstanding student scholarship, which makes them especially instructive for ambitious students of medieval literature in search of models whose standard is entirely within their reach.

The contributions to this volume were originally submitted as coursework and undergraduate theses between 2015 and 2017. Whereas the thesis authors (Kai Friedhoff, Julia Josfeld, and Verena Klose [second contribution]) have plotted their own course, the other papers were submitted for courses entitled "The Cosmic Conflict in Old English Literature," "Fate and Fortune in Old English Literature," and "Literary Environments of Middle English Poetry." The combination of these thematic strands has yielded a range of perspectives on the nature of the sublunary world as understood in the Middle Ages and the cosmic forces that were thought to govern it. Taken together, these essays offer considerable insight into medieval models of the world. It is our hope that they will inspire readers to continue the quest for knowledge undertaken by our contributors.

Paul Langeslag and Julia Stumpf

Free Will and Eternity in the Old English Poem *Soul and Body*

Bente Offereins

Introduction

During the Middle Ages the focus of Christian faith was not on this world so much as on the next world, since the earthly life was merely regarded as the preparation for a more enduring one (Gatch 198). Hence Old English literature offers a variety of reflections on the period between death and Judgement Day (Gatch 207), for instance in the poem called *Soul and Body*, which survives in two versions.

The poem forms part of the literary tradition known as the Body and Soul Legend, which was influenced by the *Apocalypse of Paul* (Silverstein 12), in the West also known as *Visio Pauli* (Jiroušková 4–5). The vernacular texts influenced by the *Visio* often consist of a soul's address to its body after death (Gatch 207), as do the versions of the *Soul and Body* poem. The shorter of the Old English poems, surviving in the Exeter Book, is comprised of the damned soul's address only, whereas the longer one, contained in the Vercelli Book, additionally presents the address of the saved soul (Jones, "Introduction" xxx). The latter version forms the basis of this paper.

In its depiction of the conflict between the will of the damned soul and the will of its body, the poem follows the bipartite anthropology often found in the Latin tradition, which assumes that a human being consists of body and soul only (Lockett 17). However, most Old English texts, poems especially, rely on a

fourfold anthropology, containing body, mind, life-force and soul (18). *Soul and Body* may therefore be regarded as a special case.

The poem illustrates how man's earthly conduct affects the afterlife. Although it distinguishes between the will of the body and the will of the soul, this paper will suggest a reading that complies with the Augustinian understanding of free will, according to which a human being only has one will. The doctrine of St Augustine was among the most influential ones during the Middle Ages and was to a certain extent influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition of later Greek philosophy. In order to interpret the poem within an Augustinian framework, therefore, this paper will examine the theory on free will by the Neoplatonist Plotinus as well as Augustine's own thoughts on the matter. For a general underlying definition of free will, the paper draws on Eleonore Stump: "an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if her own intellect and will are the sole ultimate source or first cause of her act" (Stump 126). Besides, the agent has to have at least one alternative action available to him (125). In addition to the theories on free will, both the Plotinian and the Augustinian theory on the soul will be considered. Furthermore, medieval notions of eternity need to be examined in order to analyse the effect of free will on eternity. All in all, this paper aims to show that although the poet of *Soul and Body* distinguishes between the will of the soul and the will of the body, the poem's understanding of will nevertheless matches Augustinian doctrine.

Free Will

Free Will According to Plotinus

Plotinus's view of free will differs a great deal from the general modern understanding inasmuch as his concept of freedom is closely linked to necessity. This connection is established by the soul. The Plotinian notion of freedom may best be understood as a circle that begins and ends in the One. The One causes itself and thereby constitutes the preeminent form of necessity since "that being is necessary which could be no other than it is and which owes its existence only to itself" (Leroux 293). This form of necessity may be equated with freedom. The One, also called the Good, is not a being, because a being "for Plotinus is always limited by form or essence" (Armstrong 237). It rather constitutes "the supreme reality" (238), which produces Intellect as its first product (236).

Intellect, in turn, produces the so-called World Soul (Armstrong 240), which functions as the unifying principle of the cosmos (Clark 286). An individual soul is a "particular version of the Soul (or else the Soul itself is present in all its temporal manifestations), but it is not therefore derived from the soul of the cosmos" (287). Nevertheless, the individual soul only comes into existence when it descends into

the body (Leroux 298), constituting a human being. Thus the descent or self-abasement of the soul is necessary, but it also "results from a guilty will to be itself" (296). Accordingly, the soul's individuation is characterised by "two inescapable demands: the necessity of wishing for inferior existence and the impossibility of remaining in the realm of the intelligible" (297).

Once soul and body are united, they form a human being. As the human body is the origin of desire (Leroux 301), the soul must needs become subject to desire, too, due to its conjunction with the corporeal (297). Desire involves failure, and thus soul and body in interaction with each other as well as in interaction with matter "are … coextensively responsible for that which is to become evil" (297). However, the soul in itself "is unable to exercise freedom contrary to the Good" (301). It is important to note here that in the thought of Plotinus the same individual soul exists at two different levels at the same time, namely in the body and in the World Soul (299). The descended soul feels the desire originating in the body that may lead to evil, but only its non-descended equivalent "determines whether the desire will be satisfied" (Leroux 302) and is therefore free to will (304). Thus "freedom exists only on the higher plane of the soul" (304), whereas the responsibility for evil lies with the descended soul exclusively (300). The soul is fully responsible for good and evil actions alike, in spite of the involuntariness of evil deeds (311).

The aforementioned circle is completed by the soul's ascent, which leads to its reunion with the One. By achieving this reunion, the soul also regains purity, but its ascent is not necessary in the same way as its descent. In order to ascend, the soul must make an effort and discipline its passions, and thus has to struggle to regain purity. Ascent also means liberation from desire, but not all souls will ascend, since not all are able to free themselves (Leroux 298–99). Ascent, therefore, "expresses the freedom of risk-taking, the sense of choosing" (299) and is not in itself necessary, but derived from the necessity of descent (298). The conception of freedom to ascend resembles the general modern notion of free will and corresponds to Stump's notion of an available alternative to the respective choice, although it depends on necessity. According to Plotinus, there are thus two kinds of freedom, which can be traced back to the fact that humans are dual beings (302). "[T]his duality brings with it a double liberty: the sovereign freedom of the perfect soul and the empirical freedom of the self existing in action" (302). Freedom in general can be regarded as "liberation from manifold existence" (Leroux 304), since the ascended soul ceases to exist on different levels. Thus "[f]reedom is in fact a predicate belonging to the human soul, insofar as it maintains its spiritual origin within itself and fulfills its destiny in the ascent and union with the One" (299).

Taken as a whole, freedom and necessity are not mutually exclusive in the thought of Plotinus, but free will is contained in necessity (Leroux 299). The will can be regarded as free according to Stump because it leads to the action of

ascent, which is not caused by necessity but by the soul itself. However, human freedom can merely be regarded as a faint shadow of the freedom of the One (293–94).

Free Will in Augustinian Doctrine

Scholars differ on the reconstruction of Augustine's views on free will. Some reject the notion of free will in his doctrine, arguing that men's destinies are predetermined by God so that human will has no influence on them at all (Rist 420). The more relevant opinion for this paper, however, is the one that includes both predestination and free will. According to Augustine, faith depends on God's call: "No one … believes who has not been called, but not all believe who have been called" (Burleigh 393). By mercifully calling men, God also bestows will on the ones he calls because "will is given with the mercy itself" (394). God calls many people in the same way, but only the chosen ones are able to follow the call (395). Those are the ones who actually believe in God and by virtue of their faith receive God's grace (386).

All human beings are free, but they do not enjoy freedom. To be free needs to be understood as being free from virtue and free to sin (Rist 424). Freedom, by contrast, means "obedience to God, the choice and performance of good works under the guidance of God's grace. It is freedom from the necessity of sin" (424). Thus human beings are free to do evil, but unable to perform good deeds without the help of God. Augustine states that no one could "have done good works unless he had received grace through faith" (Burleigh 386). The chosen ones, therefore, who receive God's grace due to their faith, are able to perform good deeds; the ones who are called but not chosen are bound to do evil. Consequently, "[s]in cannot be overcome without the grace of God" (377). But God's grace does not have to be persevering, therefore "no one can know that he is saved and even those who are saved do not lead perfect lives" (Rist 428).

As outlined earlier, human will is given by God. But in fact, "[t]here are two different things that God gives us, the power to will and the thing that we actually will" (Burleigh 393). As Markus puts it: "Human nature embraces a multitude of desires, impulses and drives … and often they are in serious and sometimes agonizing conflict" (Markus, "Human Action" 381–82). This introduces a hierarchy of wills that Eleonore Stump divides into a so-called first-order volition and a second-order volition. The first-order volition is the will that leads to action, whereas the second-order volition describes a will to will something (Stump 126). According to Augustine, "[t]he power to will he [i.e. God] has willed should be both his and ours, his because he calls us, ours because we follow when called. But what we actually will he alone gives" (Burleigh 393). Thus human beings only have one will. The first-order volition is determined by God, whilst the ability to will on the level of second-order volition lies with man. However, in Stump's interpretation of Augustine, this ability is sufficient for a human being "to form

the first-order volition to ask God to strengthen his will in good; and when he does, God gives him the strength of will he wants and needs. In this sense, even a post-Fall human being *is* able to will not to sin" (Stump 133). Hence the human will is able to change that which is willed with the help of God and can therefore influence its God-given will, which offers an alternative to every first-order volition. Thus a particular volition is caused by the human being itself, corresponding to Stump's general definition of free will. Stump's interpretation of Augustine's hierarchy of wills therefore also explains why human beings are responsible for their choices and actions despite their dependence on God in order to do good.

Free will is closely linked to action, but not a prerequisite for acting. Augustine distinguishes voluntary action as "the range of actions for which a man can be held responsible" (Markus, "Human Action" 383–84) from natural action, which is "the kind of activity or states of mind and feeling which are not in his control" (384). Thus man cannot be held responsible for his feelings and other states of mind, but for what he makes of them by either encouraging them and turning them into actions or restraining them (385). Man, therefore, freely chooses which natural actions cause voluntary action.

As this explanation has shown, Augustine leaves room for free will and voluntary action as well as predestination in the sense of calling and choosing. This paradox resembles Plotinus' notion of necessity containing free will. Both in Plotinian and Augustinian thought human beings must necessarily sin but are nevertheless responsible for their actions. The dependence of good deeds on God and the implied predetermination of salvation in Augustinian doctrine furthermore resemble Plotinus' notion of the soul's ascent depending on the fulfilment of desire which is itself determined by the superior soul. Thus there is free will in either school of thought, but it never exists on its own.

The Soul

Plotinus' Theory on Soul and Body

As has already been delineated, there are different kinds of soul in Plotinian theory. Individual souls and the World Soul are different from each other and yet the same in the sense that the World Soul is present in all individual souls (Clark 287). Simultaneously, each individual soul exists on the level of the World Soul as well as on the level of a human being at the same time (Leroux 299). These different levels of existence are what Plotinus calls the eternal and the temporal self, and they also form the paradox of his theory on the soul. The eternal self is indivisible, whilst the temporal self is both indivisible and divisible. It is indivisible because the entire soul directs the whole body (which is not a contradiction to its simultaneously existing on two levels) and divided in the sense that it is present in every

part of the body (Clark 284). This can be regarded as the essential thought of Plotinian theory on the soul, for it both explains the aforementioned duality of a human being and constitutes the crucial difference between soul and body.

Keeping in mind that the soul is both the eternal and the temporal self, human beings are dual in the sense that they are comprised of the unity of soul and body, but at the same time their self is the soul (Clark 276). Accordingly, the human self exists on different levels, but it only is the human self by virtue of its unity with the body.

Indivisibility is also the feature that distinguishes the soul from the body. In Plotinian thought, "bodies are always composites" (Clark 277) and depend on a soul: "Without soul there could be no bodies—and therefore no body separate from soul" (276). A body cannot be alive by its own nature because all corporeal elements that might constitute a body are lifeless (277). The soul, by contrast, is indivisible and "essentially alive" (277) because it is not corporeal. It functions as the unifying principle of the composite body and by making "it a unity also makes it alive" (278). The soul's indivisibility and incorporeality are thus mutually dependent and distinguish the soul from a body.

The unity of soul and body is essential for the body. For the soul, on the other hand, the life of compound is evil, so that it eventually has to separate itself from the body (Clark 275–76). Due to the soul's simultaneously being inside and outside the body, most souls are not fully in power while in the body (288–89). As Clark explains, "[b]y its involvement with corporeal … being, the soul may lose touch with its own noncorporeality" (280). This is what subjects the soul to desire.

The soul experiences what affects the body, but is not itself affected by it (Clark 280). Nevertheless, "[b]odily affections may encourage us to make poor judgments" (281) and judgement as well as memory and self-awareness are predicates of the soul (280) since souls are part of the Intellect (Leroux 295). Thus bodily affections do not directly influence the soul, but due to the soul's engagement with the body may cause the soul to react. Memory, judgement and self-awareness, however, may remind the soul of its incorporeality and thus its connection with Intellect may lead the soul back to good if it manages not to live the life of compound (Clark 275). This means that the soul remains in power while in the body and thereby disciplines the bodily desires. Thus the soul may detach itself from the evils that originate in the unity of body and soul, even during its involvement in the body (275).

The soul's ability to govern the body determines its fate after the separation of soul and body. Those who do not ascend become men again, or if they lived by sense alone they become animals. Some who additionally possess a passionate temper are even degraded to wild animals (Clark 281). Thus each soul descends into a body that fits its disposition (Clark 288). Whilst descending, the soul "passes through the heavens, and has a celestial body before it reaches" (287) the human body. This is the Plotinian explanation why "what we are and do is figured

in the heavens" (287), but thereby he also makes clear that in spite of the heavenly prefiguration the self is responsible for its earthly conduct (287). Thus the self, meaning the soul, chooses its way of life even before its descent and gives life to an appropriate body. Desires and evil therefore originate in the body, but the soul determines whether the human being will actually indulge in earthly pleasures. Hence the soul also determines whether it will react to bodily affections.

Augustine's Theory on the Soul

In his theory of man, Augustine abides by the bipartite anthropology and thus regards both soul and body as essential constituents of a human being (Markus, "Man" 355). His definition of man follows the Platonic tradition, describing a human being as a rational soul which uses a mortal earthly body (357). Thus reason is ascribed to the soul. It is important to note that in Augustinian thought all living beings have a soul, but only the human soul is capable of reason (Teske 116). Augustine differentiates between two kinds of reason, namely higher reason and lower reason. The only difference between them is the object they are concerned with, since higher reason deals with eternal truth, whereas lower reason focusses on the corporeal and temporal (Markus, "Reason" 363). Together, higher and lower reason constitute "man's rational mind" (363). As reason determines knowledge, there are also two kinds of things known (362–63). The mind can either perceive things by itself or through the bodily senses (363). Knowledge of eternal truth means "the mind's participation in the Word of God" (366) and is obtained "independently of sense-experience" (366), whilst the mind only acquires knowledge of the temporal and corporeal via the body. Since reason is a predicate of the soul, but in its different forms also constitutes the human mind, the soul can be said to imply the mind.

Augustine, like Plotinus, asserts the immateriality and immortality of the soul (Markus, "Man" 360). Unlike Plotinus, however, he draws a connection between the soul's immortality and the resurrection of the body (Teske 122). As previously shown, he furthermore denies the soul's immutability as stated by Plotinus and instead stresses that the soul "shares the essential instability of all created beings" (Markus, "Man" 360). It is itself "liable to all the vicissitudes of change and living, to sin and repentance, and is ever in need of God's grace" (360). Thus the soul itself can change and therefore sin.

Moreover, Augustine firmly distances himself from the Plotinian notion of two kinds of self and insists on a single human self, "which is the subject and the agent of his empirical career" (Markus, "Man" 360). Before his conversion to Christianity, however, he himself believed in a soul in the flesh and a godly soul both belonging to the same human being and equalling each other (Teske 117). Additionally, he followed the idea of the soul being divine in his earlier writings and was consistent with the notion of a universal or World Soul (117–19). But his view changed and he "came to the conviction that the soul is not what God is, but

a creature made by God, made not out of God, but out of nothing" (118). Hence there is no room anymore in later Augustinian doctrine for an equivalent to the Plotinian eternal self.

Despite his disagreement with Plotinian theory in this respect, Augustine remains in accordance with him regarding the notion of the whole soul being present in all parts of the body at the same time (Teske 119). He denies "that the soul is merely one" (119) and states that it "is both one and many" (119), resembling Plotinus' notion of the temporal self being both indivisible and divisible.

By and large, the human being according to Augustine consists of both body and soul, but the soul can be regarded as the more important constituent. It corresponds to the human self and as the seat of reason it distinguishes man from beast and moreover functions as the willing instance. As Stump puts it, "[a] person who wills has to will something … and unless this something were suggested by the bodily senses or arose in some way in the mind, the will wouldn't will it" (132). What the mind perceives itself as well as what the body feels is ultimately processed in the mind. Hence will is closely tied to the mind (132). Due to the mind's involvement in the soul, it may be regarded as a predicate of the soul as well.

Medieval Notions of Eternity

Neither medieval nor modern philosophy provides a proper definition of eternity, but it generally denotes either "timelessness or everlastingness" (Kukkonen 525). For the purpose of this paper it is sufficient to equate eternity with the afterlife and understand it in a broader sense as the time after death or in a narrower sense as the time following Judgement Day. In both of these understandings eternity possesses a starting point, but it can be understood as everlastingness from that point on.

As has been outlined, the main feature that distinguishes the soul from the body is its immortality. The soul leaves the body at death because it is "destined to outlive that union" (Clark 276). Death, therefore, is defined as the separation of soul and body (Gatch 205). According to Augustine, the immortality of the soul is paralleled by the resurrection of the body. In Anglo-Saxon England it was commonly believed that their joint life on earth prepares man for a more enduring life (198), which begins on Judgement Day, when "the beings judged would be not just spirit or soul but embodied creatures" (204). The time between death and Judgement Day, however, was of comparative indifference during the Middle Ages since all hopes were concentrated on Doomsday (204).

The prevailing notion of the body's fate after death was natural decay and resurrection on Judgement Day, when it would somehow be restored to its former state. Thus the body dies, but its death is not final. Opinions on the fate of the soul, on the other hand, are less consistent. Occasionally, being was thought to simply stop for the period between death and Judgement Day (Gatch 205). The

Augustinian view is that "souls are in a state of rest, or possibly of purification, until the resurrection, when the good will rise to beatitude and the evil to everlasting punishment" (Teske 122). The damned would suffer an infinite state of dying, meaning that they would be neither dead nor alive for eternity. The saved ones, by contrast, would be perfected after the resurrection, but they would never reach the nature of God due to the fact that they were created by him (Pelikan 33).

Although the period between death and Judgement Day was of less importance in medieval thought than Judgement Day itself, Old English literature offers a variety of accounts on the afterlife before Judgement Day, which were primarily written in the vernacular. Hence they could function as a means of edification for the less educated people who did not know Latin (Gatch 207). The purpose of the texts consisting of a soul's address to its body "is not to spell out doctrine so much as to admonish the audience to live well in view of the eternal consequences of temporal behaviour" (208). Souls in this kind of Old English literature "usually describe themselves as helpless victims of their bodies' thoughts and desires" (Jones, "Introduction" xxx), but as the following analysis will show, this is not the only possible reading of a poem such as *Soul and Body*.

The Relationship of Soul and Body in the Poem

Soul and Body I, which survives in the Vercelli Book, comprises two accounts of the fate of soul and body after death and thereby follows the bipartite anthropology. Both in the account of the damned soul and in the account of the saved soul, the soul is characterised by its yearning for God (40–41, 143–44), who joined it with the body (46).[1]

The poem's division into the account of the damned soul and the account of the saved soul serves the didactic purpose of vernacular literature dealing with soul-body addresses, namely to demonstrate the importance of preparation for the afterlife in preference to earthly pleasures: "Ne synt þine æhta awihte / þe ðu her on moldan mannum eowdest" (74–75).[2] Other characteristics of this tradition featured in the poem are the soul's utter helplessness and the corresponding supremacy of the body.

In the account of the damned soul, the body's supremacy is depicted by the contrast of the will of the soul and the will of the body:

[1] References to and translations of *Soul and Body* follow the edition by Christopher A. Jones throughout.

[2] "Those possessions of yours that you displayed before others here on earth amount to nothing" (197).

Wære þu þe wiste wlanc ond wines sæd,
þrymful þunedest, ond ic ofþyrsted wæs
Godes lic-homan, gastes drynces (39–41).[3]

The soul's will is subjected to the will of the body and hence the body determines their fate after death. Whilst both bodies inevitably die and afterwards decay until their resurrection on Judgement Day (100), the fates of the damned soul and the saved soul during the period between death and Judgement Day differ a lot.

The damned soul is obliged to seek out its body every seventh night for three hundred years (10–12), "butan ær þeod-cyning, / ælmihtig God, ende worulde / wyrcan wille."[4] It is "synnum gesargod" ("wracked with sins," 197) and has to leave the body again "on han-cred, þonne halige men / lifiendum Gode lof-sang doð."[5] Thus it has to stay remote from God even after its separation from the body. It moreover dwells in an "arleasan eardung-stowe" ("merciless abodes," 197), whereas the saved soul already lives in the kingdom of God, "fægere gefrætewod" ("beautifully adorned," 201) and "arum bewunden" ("wreathed with honors," 201). This depicts a strong contrast between the fates of the damned soul and the saved soul, which matches the Augustinian notion of punishment and beatitude. The damned soul's obligation to seek out its body against its will (63) may furthermore be regarded as the process of purification in the Augustinian sense.

During their earthly life, the damned soul was longing for its separation from the body (37–38). It may even be said to regret that it was sent into the body at all because it wishes that the body had never been endowed with *snyttro* ("reason," 197), which according to Augustine belongs to the soul itself. Furthermore, the poem concurs with the Augustinian and Plotinian notion of the soul being present in all parts of the body, as may be derived from the following lines:

Þonne ne bið nan na to þæs lytel lið on lime aweaxan,
þæt ðu ne scyle for anra gehwylcum onsundrum
riht agildan, þonne reðe bið
dryhten æt þam dome (96–99).[6]

Since the damned soul knows of all the deeds of every bodily limb, it must be present in all parts of the body simultaneously. As the quotation shows, the body's deeds will be judged in their entirety on Doomsday and the body will have to

[3] "You were flushed with food and sated with wine, you were puffed up with grandeur, and I was thirsting after God's body, after drink for the spirit" (195).
[4] "Unless the king of nations, almighty God, … wills to make an end to this world before then" (193).
[5] "At the cock's crow, when the holy offer their hymn of praise to the living God" (197).
[6] "No member that has grown on a limb of your body is so small that you will not then be obliged to give an account for every single one individually, when the Lord is angry in that judgment" (199; square brackets by the translator have been omitted.).

answer for both its own and the soul's conduct on earth (87–88), for they will then jointly be reborn (99–100). The body's sole responsibility for their shared fate afterwards is also emphasised by the damned soul's accusation: "sculon wit þonne eft ætsomne siððan brucan / swylcra yrmða, swa ðu unc her ær scrife!" (101–02).[7] The saved soul, on the other hand, is looking forward to Judgement Day because they will afterwards jointly be rewarded for the body's pursuit of the soul's needs (139–45): "moton wyt þonne ætsomne syþþan brucan / swylcra arna swa ðu unc her ær scrife" (160–61).[8] Thus the saved soul is subjected to the body as well. But given the body's good conduct, it regrets its decay (154–56), whereas the damned soul uses the body's transiency as a means of insulting it, as at the beginning of its address: "to hwan drehtest ðu me, / eorðan fulnes eal forwisnad, / lames gelicnes?"[9] The damned soul's attitude towards its body may therefore be regarded as despising and reproachful, whilst the saved soul's relationship to the body is characterised by sympathy and gratitude.

Taken as a whole, *Soul and Body* complies with Augustinian doctrine in its differentiation between eternal punishment and beatitude as well as in its connection between the soul's immortality and the resurrection of the body. In the poem, the relationship of the two human constituents is characterised by the soul's lack of power. The soul was sent into the body by God and is from that point on entirely subjected to it. Hence it has no influence on its own fate after death, whilst the body bears the sole responsibility for both the soul's fate before Judgement Day and their common fate thereafter. Albeit united during the earthly life, both soul and body seem to have individual wills, but the will of the soul is ruled out by the will of the body when it comes to action. Thus the poem appears at first glance to be at odds with the Augustinian doctrine on free will.

The Problem of Two Willing Instances

Notwithstanding the ostensible will of the body, the soul can be regarded as the sole willing instance in the poem, opening up a reading of the poem's understanding of the will compatible with both Augustinian and Plotinian thought. As previously delineated, free will is a predicate of the soul in both of these schools of thought. According to Augustine, it belongs to the mind, which itself is a property of the soul, so that the body cannot have a will of its own. This hypothesis is also supported by Plotinus, who asserts that the body is not even alive without a soul, so that the soul functions as a necessary condition for the existence of a live body. Nevertheless, that which is willed can be either suggested by the mind itself or by

[7] "Then, brought together once more, we will have to experience from that point on such miseries as you have previously ordained for the two us [sic] here" (199).
[8] "Then the two of us will afterward be able to enjoy together such graces as you previously ordained for us" (203).
[9] "Why did you torment me, you wholly corrupt filth of the earth, you likeness of mud?" (193).

the body. The soul's yearning for *gastes dryncc* ("drink for the spirit," 195), for instance, derives from the mind itself, whereas the desire for earthly pleasures originates in the body. In order to be capable of reacting to bodily suggestions, the soul must be present in all parts of the body simultaneously, and this is true of the soul in the poem. It knows about all deeds of every single limb of the body (96–97), in addition to its own desire for God. Hence it complies with Augustinian and Plotinian doctrine in that respect. This also matches the Augustinian doctrine of natural and voluntary action inasmuch as natural action can be caused both by the mind itself and by bodily affections. Thus the mind and thereby the will determine which natural action influences voluntary action, suggesting that the man constituted by the damned soul and its body has chosen the feelings caused by the body as a basis for his voluntary actions, while the man comprised of the saved soul and its body has turned the natural action determined by the mind itself into voluntary action. Since will according to both Plotinus and Augustine is a predicate of the soul, the soul can be held responsible for man's voluntary actions. Its choice of voluntary action on the basis of natural action also complies with Stump's notion of there being an alternative to an action that is caused by free will.

The opposing kinds of will governed by soul and body can either be read as distinct wills, as the poem suggests, or as two volitions on different levels in a hierarchy of wills of the same willing instance, as in Stump's understanding of Augustine. This also matches the notion of human desires and drives being in conflict with each other, although they belong to a single human will. According to the damned soul's account, the body's desire is dominant and hence may be regarded as the first-order volition according to Stump. The soul's yearning for God would then occur on the level of second-order volition. Applying Augustinian doctrine to the poem, the soul may be regarded as the sole willing instance, which itself wills on the first-order level to indulge in earthly pleasures, as suggested by the body, although it wills to seek God on the second-order level.

According to Augustine, the first-order volition is determined by God, whereas the ability to will on the second-order level lies with the soul. In Stump's interpretation, the second-order volition suffices to attain the first-order volition of requesting God's assistance in refraining from sinning. Accordingly, the damned soul of the poem must have proved unable to form that volition. There is both an Augustinian and a Plotinian explanation for this. The Augustinian solution refers to the mutability of the soul as well as to predestination. The soul itself is liable to sin due to its mutability, but since the damned soul of the poem is conscious of its sins, the human being to which it belonged must have been called by God. However, it was not chosen; otherwise it would have been able to follow the call by resisting bodily desires. Thus the human being comprised of this particular body and soul remained free to sin and was not freed by God. Even if it might have been able to honour God's call for a while, this does not guarantee salvation, since God's grace need not last. Hence the soul's mutability as well as

God's predestination may affect its ability to form the requisite volition. The explanation according to Plotinus, on the other hand, is concerned with the soul's involvement in the corporeal. Due to its unity with the body, the soul is not fully in power during its earthly life, but is subjected to bodily desires. Accordingly, these desires constitute the first-order volition.

The man constituted by the saved soul and its body, by contrast, must have been both called and chosen by God, according to Augustinian doctrine, and is therefore freed from sin during its earthly life. He has followed God's call and hence the soul has been able to restrain bodily desires. The soul's will to seek God and refrain from sinning must have been either given by God as first-order volition, which would only lead to its salvation if God's grace has persevered, or the soul itself must have been strong enough during its union with the body to form the second-order volition—which then becomes the first-order volition—of asking God to change its first-order volition. But even in that case the volition is God-given in a sense, since "any goodness in the will … is a gift of God" (Stump 131). This is also the reason why the second-order volition can become the first-order volition. Thus the saved soul is able to will good by virtue of God's mercy, as is the damned soul, but unlike the damned soul, the good soul has also received the grace required in order to obtain the first-order volition to actually do good. It has achieved this state of its own free will, since its second-order volition is decisive in order to attain God's grace. Thus the soul's will during its life in the body prompts God's assistance in controlling the body's desires.

This analysis of *Soul and Body* from an Augustinian and Plotinian point of view shows that the damned soul may be regarded as the victim of the body's sinfulness, as the poem suggests at first glance. In addition, it can be understood as the sole willing instance of the poem and thereby may itself be held responsible for the conduct of man on earth as well as for the fate of soul and body after death.

The Effect of Free Will on Eternity

Interpreting the poem in a way that conceives of the soul as the only willing instance, the following section delineates to what extent this entails the soul's responsibility for the fate of both soul and body after death.

As has been outlined, *Soul and Body* depicts how man's conduct on earth influences the fate of the soul after death and the fate of both soul and body after Judgement Day. According to the account of the damned soul, indulging in earthly pleasures and forgetting to provide for the afterlife leads to damnation. During life, the human being constituted by the now-damned soul and its body committed the sin of gluttony, being "wiste wlanc ond wines sæd" ("flushed with food and sated with wine," 195), and amassed earthly goods (57–60), additionally indulging in the sin of greed. Due to this bad conduct, the soul is *synnum gesargod* ("wracked with sins," 197) after death and has to dwell in an *arleas eardung-stowe*

("merciless abodes," 197) until Judgement Day, followed by each individual's account of their deeds:

> Đonne wyle dryhten sylf dæda gehyran
> hæleða gehwylces, heofena scippend,
> æt ealra manna gehwam muðes reorde
> wunda wiðer-lean (91–94).[10]

Soul and body will then be "geedbyrded oþre siþe" ("brought … to life a second time," 199) and they will have to suffer such miseries as fit their past conduct (101–02).

The account of the saved soul, on the other hand, explains how abiding by the needs and wants of the soul instead of pursuing bodily desires leads to salvation. After death, the soul lives on in the kingdom of God (137) and, addressing its body during a visit, describes the body's conduct during life:

> Fæstest ðu on foldan ond gefyldest me
> Godes lic-homan, gastes drynces.
> Wære ðu on wædle, sealdest me wilna geniht.
> …
> Bygdest ðu þe for hæleðum ond ahofe me
> on ecne dream (143–53).[11]

The soul is therefore looking forward to its reunion with the body on Judgement Day since the body's fate of decaying in its grave will then be over and they will jointly be rewarded for their past conduct:

> Moton wyt þonne ætsomne syþþan brucan
> swylcra arna swa ðu unc ær scrife,
> ond unc on heofonum heah-þungene beon.
> Ne þurfon wyt beon cearie æt cyme dryhtenes,
> ne þære andsware yfele habban
> sorge in hreðe, ac wyt sylfe magon
> æt ðam dome þær dædum agilpan,
> hwylce earnunga uncre wæron (160–67).[12]

[10] "Then the Lord himself, the creator of the heavens, will hear the deeds of each and every man, hear in speech from the mouth of every single person his recompense for Christ's wounds" (199; square brackets by the translator have been omitted).

[11] "You fasted on earth and filled me with God's body, with the drink of the spirit. You were in poverty and gave me abundance of joys … You made yourself low in men's eyes and raised me up to everlasting joy" (201–03).

[12] "Then the two of us will afterward be able to enjoy together such graces as you previously ordained for us, and be utterly perfected in heaven. We will not need to be worried at the Lord's coming and have anxious care at heart concerning our response. Rather the two of us will be able to exult there about our deeds and what merits were ours" (203).

Although both of these accounts ascribe the actions during earthly life to the body, the soul can be regarded as the sole willing instance. Since will leads to action and hence also to sinning, the soul can thus be held responsible for either fate after death. As has been explained by the hierarchy of wills, action, in Augustinian thought, is freely chosen by the soul in spite of God's predestination.

This idea is supported by Plotinian doctrine, according to which desire and evil originate in the body, whilst the non-descended soul decides whether to give in to them. Furthermore, the soul itself decides upon a way of living before its descent and in consequence of its decision descends into a suitable body. Following these notions of Plotinian thought, the damned soul of the poem can be held responsible for the body's actions by virtue of its choice of lifestyle. Thus it would have descended into a body that was less inclined to sin, if it had really been as innocent as it claims after the death of its body. Hence the damned soul bears the responsibility for the body's sinful behaviour, although it becomes subjected to the bodily desires on the descended level, and thereby also determines their fate on Judgement Day. The saved soul, on the other hand, must have chosen a good life and consequently descended into a body less inclined to sin.

In Plotinian thought, the soul must make an effort during its descended life, for instance by restraining the bodily desires, in order to ascend. Depending on its choice of lifestyle, it may either be able to do so—and hence liberate itself from its existence on two different levels—or not. Applying this thought to the poem, the soul would thus have to prove itself by resisting the body's desire for food, drink and earthly riches in order to be admitted to its *fæder rice* ("kingdom of my father," 201). This resembles the Augustinian notion of predestination to salvation in that the earthly conduct and the consequential fate after death are already determined before the soul's union with the body. However, in a Plotinian reading of the poem, both the earthly lifestyle and the afterlife are the responsibility of the soul exclusively. In an Augustinian interpretation, by contrast, they are determined by the soul's free will as well as by God's mercy. Accordingly, the saved soul must have been given God's grace either as a good first-order volition or as an answer to a second-order volition and hence it was able to resist the bodily desires and instead followed God's law.

Since free will leads to action, both in the Augustinian sense of asking God to change one's first-order volition and in the Plotinian sense of choosing a way of life beforehand, the soul can be held responsible for the human conduct during life as well as for the fate of soul and body after death, which is determined by one's previous lifestyle. Free will can therefore be said to have significant influence on the fate of body and soul in eternity.

Conclusion

By and large, *Soul and Body* forms part of the Body and Soul Legend by virtue of the soul's address to the body and its conveyed didactic purpose, which relies on the differentiation between the will of the soul and the will of the body in order to illustrate the effects of man's earthly conduct on the afterlife. Due to its depiction of the soul as a helpless victim of the body's desires, this tradition contrasts strongly with both Augustinian and Plotinian doctrine on free will and the soul since in both of these doctrines free will is ascribed to the soul only. Nevertheless, the preceding analysis has shown in how far the souls in the poem can be regarded as the sole willing instances of the soul-body compounds as well, following the logic of Augustine and Plotinus. Especially relying on Augustine's hierarchy of wills, it has been shown that the will of the body and the will of the soul can be interpreted as different levels of volition of the same willing instance, which due to the will's connection with the mind can be identified as the rational human soul. Since the second-order volition, which is caused by the soul itself, determines whether the first-order volition will be altered, both the damned soul's and the saved soul's actions during earthly life correspond to Stump's general definition of free will.

In general, the poem complies with Augustinian doctrine in several respects. Thus it mirrors Augustine's link between the soul's immortality and the resurrection of the body as well as his juxtaposition of punishment and beatitude in the afterlife. Furthermore, the damned soul's obligation to seek out its body at night may be regarded as a process of purification, which according to Augustine characterises the period between death and Judgement Day.

Plotinian thought, on the other hand, has pre-eminently been applied to the poem in order to demonstrate the soul's responsibility for man's earthly conduct, since the soul chooses a way of life prior to its descent and accordingly descends into an appropriate body. Following Augustinian doctrine, it has furthermore been shown that the soul's free choice of a natural action as the basis for voluntary action always leaves an alternative to the respective voluntary action due to the variety of natural actions that can either be suggested by the body or the mind itself. This notion is supported by the Plotinian view that the soul chooses an earthly lifestyle even before its descent.

As the poem shows, man's conduct on earth determines the soul's fate after death as well as its joint fate with the body after Judgement Day. In an Augustinian and Plotinian interpretation of the poem, the soul can therefore be held responsible for its own and the body's fate in eternity. Its accusations of the body may hence be regarded as self-accusations.

This analysis of *Soul and Body I* has shown an alternative to the poem's default interpretation. Although the reading that distinguishes between the will of the soul and the will of the body is more straightforward, it has been demonstrated that the soul can also be understood as the sole willing instance in the Augustinian sense,

freely choosing man's earthly conduct and hence responsible for the joint fate of soul and body on Judgement Day. As such, *Soul and Body I* is fully compatible with Augustine's teachings on free will.

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Apocalyptic Landscapes in Old English Poetry and Homilies

Verena Klose

Apocalypticism in Anglo-Saxon Literary Tradition

Christianity and its eschatological focus had a significant impact on Anglo-Saxon literary culture. A major part of the surviving corpus deals with "last things," be it the biblical Last Days and the associated events of the end of the world, general fatalistic expressions of transience that concern one's own death, or the downfall of societies and cultures. Consequently, one could get the impression that apocalypticism was a particular obsession of Anglo-Saxon writers and teachers. However, in a Christian world-view the end of the world is only the end of the world as we know it. One can argue that the imminent end of the world constitutes both a demolition of the known order and the chance of renewal for the Christian soul, as it signifies the Last Judgement which marks the moment of truth for any believer. Depending on the outcome of said judgement, the apocalypse uncovers the access to a blissful afterlife in heaven or the sentence to eternal suffering in hell.

As the apocalypse is accompanied by various physical signs and events, it is interesting to look at the ways that the depiction of landscape creates and supports this ambiguous atmosphere of doom and hope. This paper's main focus is on the changes that take place in the natural world and the ways in which they relate to one's moral and mental state. The comparison between humanity's earthly dwelling and the transcendental landscapes of heaven and hell is especially relevant,

though it remains to be determined whether the landscape in Old English poetry functions as a threat or a comfort to the human individual—or whether it can be both at different times. Furthermore, this paper will argue that the Anglo-Saxon vision of the Last Days can be seen in the broader context of an environmental theology that expresses the ambiguous relationship between humanity and its surroundings as it is shaped by Christianity and its perception of the natural world. In order to analyse the Christian relationship towards the doomed creation as the temporary home of humanity, I will examine poetry as well as religious prose.

Many of the surviving texts in Old English are preoccupied with eschatology and present imaginations of the last things, their onset, and process. The accounts of the events leading up to the Last Judgement and their impact on the natural world as they are described in the Old English poems at hand are heavily influenced by a literary apocalypticism that is based on the accounts found in the New Testament as well as in patristic commentaries and homilies. According to the Book of Revelation as well as the Gospels, the Last Days are marked by both physical and moral developments. While the appearance of false messiahs and the increased violence and aggression among nations are internal changes (Mark 13:22, Luke 21:25),[1] the Bible also describes physical developments in great detail. This includes natural disasters such as earthquakes, thunder and lightning, and celestial events, such as stars falling from the sky and the darkening of sun and moon, as well as the emergence of beasts and animals attacking humans and their settlements (Apoc. 6, 8, and 9). The demolition of cultural settings such as cities, buildings, and kingdoms by wars, famines, and pestilence is also part of this end-time (Apoc. 6, 16, and 18). Both Ælfric and Wulfstan elaborate on these signs of doom in their homilies (Risden 39), which shows that they are part of a well-established tradition concerning the world's end.

Sinful Degeneration: Human Existence in a Postlapsarian World

Wulfstan, who became bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York in 1002, was one of the most influential authors who wrote about apocalyptic themes. Especially his early writings are evidence of his "theological preoccupation" (Gatch 105) with eschatological topics and his familiarity with the "entire range of ideas dealing with the destiny of mankind" (63). Five of Wulfstan's homilies deal with the Christian vision of the end of the world (Caie 11): *De Antichristo*, *Secundum Matheum, Secundum Lucam*, *De Temporibus Antichristi*, and *Secundum Marcum*.[2] While he

[1] Biblical references are taken from the Douay-Rheims translation (*The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate*).

[2] This paper uses Bethurum's edition of Wulfstan's homilies. Translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

comments in great detail on the Antichrist theme, he also elaborates on Doomsday and its specific circumstances. In *Secundum Lucam* (ed. in Bethurum 123–27), Wulfstan argues that "clæne wæs þeos eorðe on hyre frumsceafte, ac we hi habbað syððan afylede swyðe and mid urum synnum þearle besmitene" (ll. 27–29; "this earth was clean at its creation, but we have since polluted it greatly and defiled it severely with our sins"). With this statement, he expresses a notion that was prominent in environmental theology and which contributed to the complex and ambiguous relationship between Christianity and the natural world: while medieval scholars such as Augustine in his *De civitate Dei* argue that the creation in itself is originally and essentially beautiful, good, and useful to humanity (Neville 27–29), the harmonious perfection is destroyed by the Fall of Man. According to this, humankind's sins and crimes directly affect the world around them—as Wulfstan puts it, people pollute their god-given habitat by acting against the Creator's will.

This relationship between humanity's conduct and the moral state of the natural world is also reflected in Old English poetry: as a result of the moral deterioration, landscape is rarely described as exclusively pleasant and favourable. As Neville puts it, the natural world is rather seen as an "Other" that is depicted as alien and threatening to humanity (3). Furthermore, "nature" is oftentimes equated with "wilderness" which, in turn, is defined by "an opposition to the village, the dwelling, and the knowable zone" and experienced either as a "place of biblical exile" or as the habitat of dangerous wild animals (Mellor 104). This adds to the perception of the natural world as an entity that does not mean well and against which one has to defend oneself. In this concept, humans are not part of the environment, but rather its opponents or victims.

The rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is seen as the root of this ambivalent relationship: it not only creates an emotional and spiritual alienation between them (and subsequently all of humanity) and God, but it also causes an estrangement from the natural world. Their misbehaviour results in their expulsion from Eden and the loss of all the privileges that were associated with the place. Adam and Eve have to lead a sorrowful existence full of hardships on earth as their exile, which Adam laments:

> Hu sculon wit nu libban oððe on þys lande wesan,
> gif her wind cymð, westan oððe eastan,
> suðan oððe norðan? Gesweorc up færeð,
> cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge,
> færeð forst on gemang, se byð fyrnum ceald.
> Hwilum of heofnum hate scineð,
> blicð þeos beorhte sunne, and wit her baru standað,
> unwered wædo. Nys unc wuht beforan
> to scursceade, ne sceattes wiht

to mete gemearcod, ac unc is mihtig god,
waldend wraðmod. To hwon sculon wit weorðan nu? (805–15)[3]

This passage shows the threats and discomforts that humans are confronted with in the postlapsarian world: the weather of their new dwelling is characterised as very harsh, with either extremely hot or extremely cold temperatures and other severe weather conditions like storms and hail. This is intensified by the lack of shelter and protection, adduced by Adam when he describes Eve and himself as helpless in the face of the cruel natural elements. Another trial is the arduous work that is now necessary in order to provide food and to make one's living. Therefore, the defilement of the sacred site of Paradise leads to its loss, so that the whole of creation falls together with humankind and functions now as the temporary home of exiles which is simultaneously a form of punishment for their misdeeds. However, one of Christianity's core teachings is the hope for salvation. Many theologians argue that in the Christian history of salvation, the natural world is orientated towards its eschatological conclusion in which the created order is finally restored (Northcott 199–203). The life of Jesus Christ and especially the events surrounding his crucifixion and resurrection serve to reaffirm and renew the "original goodness and moral significance" (200) of creation that have been lost after the Original Sin. Thus the case of humanity and the earth is not completely beyond hope, although it is certain that this reconciliation between humanity and creation can only take place after God's destruction of the current world order and the judgement of every soul. Until then, mankind must make do with the status quo.

The prelapsarian world and its physical features are ideal landscape models by which the natural world is measured. For instance, the description of the earthly paradise in *The Phoenix*[4] is what one could consider an archetype of what Anglo-Saxons imagined to be a delightful and desirable landscape. It has a "beautiful" ("wlitig," 7a) and "delightful" ("wynsum," 13a) plain that is surrounded by "forests green" ("wealdas grene," 13b). Unlike the cold and harsh climate that Adam and Eve have to face after their expulsion, the place described in the poem is characterised by its moderate temperatures and the general absence of extreme conditions (14–19a and 57–64a). Even the landscape is free of topographical landmarks such as mountains, valleys, caves, or cliffs that would create a rough disturbance of the fair and flat plain (21–24a). Other attributes that are ascribed to the site include light ("sun-bearo," 33b), an overall greenness ("wealdas grene,"

[3] "How shall we two now live or be in this land, if a wind comes here, from west or east, south or north? A cloud will rise up, a shower of hail will come pressing from the sky, will come mingled with frost, which will be sinfully cold. At times the bright sun will shine, blaze hot from the heavens, and we two will stand here naked, unprotected by clothes. There is nothing at all covering us two as a protection against the storm, nor any goods at all planned as our food, but rather mighty God, the ruler, is furious with the two of us. What must become of us two now?" (Anlezark 60–64).

[4] Text and translation from Jones 18–63.

13b; "þa beamas a grene stondað," 35b–36a; "græs-wonge grene," 78), a flora with an abundance of fruits and flowers ("blostmum," 21a; "bledum," 71b), as well as a pleasant tranquillity ("smylte," 33a). Needless to say, humanity's current dwelling-place as it was described by Adam above falls far short of these expectations. This vision of an ideal landscape is rooted in the *locus amoenus*, the "pleasant place," which is a motif that can be found in the depiction of pastoral landscapes in Classical Western literature. Its main features are trees, grass, and water, which are often cultivated and arranged in a way that is both aesthetic and comforting to the human observer (Pearsall and Salter 9–12). In Old English literature, it is often adapted and merged with vernacular features and characterised by "adjectives of greenness, light or space and a noun denoting an open area of vegetation" (Kabir 144).

Interestingly, the poem *Judgement Day II*[5] begins with a scene in which the speaker resides in an environment that is the epitome of the *locus amoenus*:

> Hwæt! Ic ana sæt innan bearwe,
> mid helme beþeht, holte tomiddes,
> þær þa wæterburnan swegdon and urnon
> on middan gehæge (eal swa ic secge);
> Eac þær wynwyrta weoxon and bleowon
> innon þam gemonge on ænlicum wonge
> and þa wudubeamas wagedon and swegdon
> þurh winda gryre. (1–8a)[6]

From a literary perspective, the use of the *locus amoenus* motif is not surprising, because *Judgement Day II* is based on the Latin poem *De die iudicii* which has been ascribed to Bede or Aldhelm. Yet, it may appear as a peculiar opening to a poem about Doomsday. At first, the person speaking describes a setting in which the natural world is a pleasant and peaceful background; inside the sheltered grove, they are protected and are therefore able to enjoy the landscape with its plants, trees, and meadows, without feeling threatened by or exposed to it. It is only in the next lines that the mood suddenly changes as the poet makes use of pathetic fallacy: "Wolcn wæs gehrered, / and min earme mod eal wæs gedrefed" (8b–9; "The clouds were agitated and my poor mind was wholly troubled," Caie). The contrast between the outside world and the poet's inner state illustrates that the former tranquillity is deceptive, so that this antithesis represents and also criticises the human ignorance in the face of the imminent apocalypse. Firstly, this reveals that it is dangerous for the individual to imagine the soul to be safe and unaffected

[5] Quotations from *Judgement Day II* follow Caie's edition.

[6] "Lo! I sat alone within a grove concealed with sheltering cover in the middle of a wood where the streams of water murmured and ran midst an enclosure (just as I say). Pleasant plants also grew and blossomed there midst the throng in this incomparable meadow, and the trees swayed and murmured through the force of the winds." (Caie).

by worldly (mis-)deeds. The human being indulges in sins and vices while feeling safe and unbothered. Thus the speaker indicates that taking pleasure in the agreeable landscape without considering that it is transitory and will therefore not remain intact forever equates to the spiritual ignorance that many people display. They are blissfully unaware of the consequences that await them on the day of the great judgement and focus too much on temporary gratifications. Secondly, on a universal scale, the placidity of the place could be the proverbial calm before the storm, while the appearance of clouds foreshadows and announces the oncoming violent disturbances that will be brought on by the apocalypse.

Eschatological Transformation: Natural Changes Heralding the Last Days

One notion that is shared by many medieval Christian scholars is the idea that the world keeps degenerating and veering away from its original state. The analysis of apocalyptic Old English literature reveals that the world's degeneration and worsening are often mirrored in the landscape, which creates a reciprocal connection between the physical deterioration of the natural world and the moral decay of humanity. This can be seen in the natural disasters and monsters described in the poems *Judgement Day I* and *II*. The natural world is thus not only a marker of the end, it is also an instrument and means of God to exercise his power and dominance in order to punish his disobedient children.

When it comes to the apocalyptic events that change and destroy the natural world, one can see that the poem's vision draws heavily on the biblical account of the Last Days. The devastation that marks Christ's Second Coming affects all spaces of the natural world: the all-encompassing desolation alters land and oceans as well as the sky. The poet of *Judgement Day II* describes earthquakes and avalanches that cause the collapse of mountains (99–101), the sea as it is churned by storms (102-03), the darkening of sun and moon (104–06; 108-10), as well as the falling of stars (107):

> Eall eorðe bifað, eac swa þa duna
> dreosað and hreosað,
> and beorga hliðu bugað and myltað,
> and se egeslica sweg ungerydre sæ
> eall manna mod miclum gedrefeð.
> Eal bið eac upheofon
> sweart and gesworcen, swiðe geþuxsað,
> deorc and dimhiw, and dwolma sweart.
> þonne stedelease steorran hreosað,
> and seo sunne forswyrcð sona on morgen,

ne se mona næfð nanre mihte wiht,
þæt he þære nihte genipu mæge flecgan. (99–110)[7]

These phenomena are an omen of the things to come; they herald the procedures of Judgement Day, i.e. the gathering of "eal Adames cnosl eorðbuendra" ("all earth-dwellers of Adam's race," 130) in front of God who sits on his heavenly throne and summons them to decide on their respective fates. By referring to humanity as "Adam's race", the poet connects the imminent end of the world to its very beginning; the history of mankind began with Adam and now finds its closure with the Lord's judgement of all souls that live and have lived since then. As a result, people are petrified and their minds are greatly troubled ("eall manna mod miclum gedrefeð," 103), both by the calamities happening around them and the prospect of being judged unfavourably. In this context, the use of the verb *gedrefan* in order to describe the men's mindset seems to be an understatement, but it also connects this part of the poem with its beginning. Thus it illustrates that there is a strong link between the sentient individual and their surroundings, because the physical conditions influence the mental state as well as the perception and assessment of oneself in both instances. Therefore, the passage quoted above also emphasises that the environmental changes themselves are already part of the impending punishment: it appears as if the natural world is unleashed and out of control as it strikes against humanity.

The same sentiment is expressed by Wulfstan in the homily *Secundum Lucam*, in which the aforementioned connection between the worsening state of the world due to humanity's sins and the occurrence of natural disasters is one of the main themes:

> And forðy us eac swencað and ongean winnað manege gesceafta, ealswa hit awriten is: Pugnabit pro Deo orbis terrarum contra insensatos homines. Dæt is on Englisc, eal woruld winneð swyðe for synnum ongean þa oferhogan þe Gode nellað hyran. Seo heofone us winð wið þonne heo us sendeð styrnlice stormas and orf and æceras swyðe amyrreð. Seo eorðe us winð wið þonne heo forwyrneð eorðlices wæstmas and us unweoda to fela asendeð. Eac hit awriten is, ðæt sunne aþystrað ær worulde ende and mona adeorcað and steorran hreosað for manna synnum. (ll. 34–43)[8]

[7] "All the earth will shake, and the hills too will fall and perish, and mountain slopes will fall down and dissolve, and the terrifying noise of the ranging sea will greatly trouble all men's minds. All the heavens will also become black and darkened, extremely overcast, dark and murky with the blackness of chaos. Then the stars, displaced, will fall and the sun will become immediately dark in the morning; nor will the moon have any might at all to banish the darkness of the night" (Caie).

[8] "And because of that many created things also torment us and fight against us, just as it is written: The whole world will fight for God against foolish people. That is in English, all of the world will fight greatly on account of sin against the proud ones who are unwilling to listen to God. The heaven strives against us when it sends us harsh storms that severely damage cattle and fields. The earth strives against us when it denies earthly fruits and sends us too many ill weeds. It is also written that

According to Lionarons, Wulfstan cites Wisdom 5:21[9] here and then adds some examples of his own in order to support his claim (53). As Wulfstan bases this homily on Luke 21, his examples correspond to the biblical accounts and include storms and plagues that destroy the harvest and kill the cattle, darkening of sun and moon, falling of the stars, and the appearance of the Antichrist (ll. 38–48). Similar to the circumstances in Judgement Day II, the disintegration of God's creation is the first and most important sign of the end. Both texts mention the land, the sea, and the celestial bodies as natural objects that were created and arranged by God in the beginning of Genesis; Neville calls them the "trio of sea, earth, and heaven" (142) that uniformly appears in texts mentioning the creation. The fact that the created order of the "trio" begins to fall apart at the end is evidence of the Christian world view: by referencing to significant details of Creation, the poet revisits this very first act of God. By looking at the beginning, it becomes clear to the reader that in its downfall, the world reaches its eschatological conclusion. In this paragraph of *Secundum Lucam*, creation has lost its initial purity and consequently turns into a weapon against humans and their immoral behaviour. Former certainties are no longer fixed; for instance, people can no longer rely on being able to feed themselves by cultivating the soil, although that has been the case ever since the loss of Eden. This adds to their helplessness and forces them to realise that they are completely at God's mercy. Especially from an ecocritical perspective it is most striking that Wulfstan's interpretation of the natural world is rather ambiguous in this context. It is not clear whether he understands the environment as an instrument controlled by God or whether nature has an agency of its own. This struggle of authority and autonomy is also discussed by Neville: she points out the "contradiction between the natural world representing threats to humanity and the natural world representing the Saviour's power" (163) that leads to the "unresolved paradox" (177) that is God's relationship to nature. Especially the idea of a hostile environment causes a problem for the Christian conception of the world: God as a destructive and powerful ruler who uses his creation in order to strike against his children is not compatible with the image of a forgiving and loving God as it is evoked in the New Testament. However, the thought that nature could in fact be beyond any divine control and thus able to exercise power on its own is equally unacceptable. While Old English poetry does not address this issue directly, Neville observes that it often portrays nature as a "semi-autonomous agent" (171) that serves as a means of demonstrating God's power, by reflecting either his divine design or his ability to overcome and control the adverse natural forces (177). In the case of apocalypticism, however, one can argue that the natural disasters function both as a punishment for humankind having

the sun will become dark before the end of the world and the moon will darken and the stars will fall because of men's sins."

[9] "And he [the Lord/Jesus Christ] will sharpen his severe wrath for a spear, and the whole world shall fight with him against the unwise" (Wisd. 5:21).

lived in sin and as a marker for the fundamental cosmological changes that the final judgement will bring.

Purifying Destruction: The Cleansing of Soul and Landscape by Fire and Water

One theme that has been adapted prominently in many apocalyptic religious writings is destruction by fire: the Bible describes how a censer filled with fire is cast on the earth where it burns great parts of the land, mountains, and sea (Apoc. 5:8). Having said that, fire is not the only means of destruction and subsequent purification in the analysed material. For instance, Wulfstan compares the Doomsday fires to Noah's flood: "And witodlice ealswa flod com hwilum ær for synnum, swa cymð eac for synnum fyr ofer mancynn and ðærto hit nealæcð nu swyðe georne" (ll. 7–9).[10] Thus in an allegorical reading one can say that the Flood prefigures the consumption by fire at the world's end. In the case of Wulfstan's homily, Gatch argues that he may have been inspired by Ælfric, who also links both the Flood and the burning of Sodom to Judgement Day in *De die iudicii* (109). However, Lionarons argues that due to the dating of Ælfric's homily, it is more likely that Wulfstan used the same source as a basis for his arguments. While the Book of Revelation only mentions blazing fires as an instrument of cleansing, Lionarons identifies Luke 17:26 and 17:29–30 as the origin of a Doomsday vision that includes both fire and water and that compares the circumstances of the apocalypse with the first biblical natural disaster (52).[11] The same connection is also made in *The Phoenix* when the poet declares that the earthly paradise remained unaffected by the "wætres þrym … mere-flod" ("the water's force … the flood of water," 41b; 42b) because God protected it from the *yðfaru* ("waves," 44b) and *hreore wægas* ("fierce waters," 45b). Because of that, the place will stay unviolated and intact until the Day of Judgement when the *bæl* ("fire" or "flame," 47b) will come. By singling out the earthly paradise as an exceptionally pure site, the poet associates the violation of landscape by natural forces such as water and fire directly with the divine sanction of moral failures.

The poem *Judgement Day I*[12] even depicts fire and water in a specific sequence. It begins with an allusion to a flood that is brought upon the earth by God: "Dæt gelimpan sceal þætte lagu floweð, / flod ofer foldan" ("It must come to pass that water will flow, a flood over the earth," 1–2a). After the flooding, which brings

[10] "And certainly just like the flood came once before because of sin, so a fire will come over mankind as well because of sin and we are rapidly approaching that time now."

[11] "And as it came to pass in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26); "and in the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man shall be revealed" (Luke 17:29–30).

[12] Text and translation are taken from Jones 232–41.

the death of every living creature (2b–3a), God will induce a large and fiercely burning fire to thoroughly destroy the earth (6b–7a):

> Hat bið onæled,
> siþþan fyr nimeð fildan sceatas,
> byrnende lig beorhte gesceafte;
> bið eal þes ginna grund gleda gefylled,
> reþra bronda (9b–13a)[13]

Along with the resident demons and devils, the disobedient sinners have to endure the eternal flames as a punishment (18), while the people who have led pure and pious lives are granted eternity in heaven (60–67a). Throughout *Judgement Day I*, the poet also mentions other apocalyptic signs such as the absence of light due to the darkening of the stars (45), and earthquakes (112b–13), but his main focus is the fiery calamity as he repeatedly describes the Doomsday and hell fires in great and terrifying detail (50b–59; 116–19). In this way, he ensures that his audience realises and envisions the torments that will await them if they do not lead a lifestyle that is agreeable to God. Risden interprets this fire as a "sacramental purification" and calls it the "final baptism" (37) that complements the first baptism carried out by the Flood. Subsequently, the flames turn into the all-encompassing eternal fire of hell's pit in which the damned soul will have to reside from now on. Once the fires will have cooled, there will be nothing but dire emptiness in the world. In analogy with the useless and chaotic void that the cosmos was before God's intervention, after the fire there will be nothing left except the *wætres sweg* ("the sound of the water," 38). In *Judgement Day II*, the land after the great firestorm is also referred to as *æmtig* ("vacant" or "empty," 149a), which corresponds to the idleness of the world before God's exercise of divine strength. Thus one can read the purification by fire that eradicates all life on earth as an attempt of reversing the process in which the creation had been spoilt.

The poet of *Judgement Day II* assigns similar cleansing qualities to fire and water. On the one hand, they admonish themselves as a sinful person who should show their remorse by crying (26–42). In the physical demonstration of one's regret, the tears function as a means of purging the body of the immoral acts that it has committed. Thus the flowing teardrops mirror the purification of the earth by the flooding and therefore symbolise a moral cleansing by water that affects nature and body likewise. Additionally, later on in the poem the author also alludes to the Flood by referring to the ignited fires as a *reðe flod*, a "cruel flood" (166a) that incinerates the unfortunate souls. On top of that, he or she compares the wrongful and corrupt state of their soul to lying in dirt:

[13] "Heat will be stoked, then fire will claim the surfaces of the earth, searing flame grip the bright creation. With glowing coals, furious burning, this whole, vast region will be filled."

> Hwæt ligst þu on horwe leahtrum afylled,
> flæsc, mid synnum? Hwi ne feormast þu
> mid teara gyte torne synne? (77–79)[14]

This passage is another reference to the polluted earth (*horu*) and the general connection between materiality, be it body or nature, and the commitment of sins. Later on in the poem, the author describes how every person will be consumed by the fire until they are completely cleansed from the filth (155–58). The notion of a fiery purification that "disinfects" the contamination caused by corrupt behaviour is not exclusive to this text, it can be found in other poems as well. For instance, the poet in *Christ III*[15] also denounces the sinful behaviour of his fellow men that ruins the creation which then needs to be cleansed from the *weoruldwidl* (1006a), the "pollution of worldly filth." After this, Christ laments that people have foully defiled both "þæt selescot þæt ic me swæs on þe / gehalgode, hus to wynne" (1480–81; "that dwelling that I myself sanctified for you, as a house for delight") and "þone lichoman þe ic alysde me feondum of fæðme" (1484–85b; "the body that I delivered from the enemy's embrace"). This example illustrates the connection between the world (as humanity's assigned abode) and the body (as the soul's house) in terms of their inclination toward impure and immoral acts. The "pollution" by committing sins therefore affects the inner landscape of the soul as well as the outer landscapes of creation.

The flames that will spread over the whole surface of the earth are described in *Judgement Day II* as more violent and powerful than any normal fire as they truly assume apocalyptic dimensions: the fire will be poisonous (*ættren*, 146b) and no living creature will be able to withstand it (147b–48). The fire is almost envisioned as a sentient being. The poet personifies and anthropomorphises it by describing it as *reðe* ("cruel," 153a) and as a *wrecend* (155a), an avenger that neither holds back from its violent behaviour nor takes pity on the damned souls (152–58). Moreover, he or she associates fire with the appearance of monsters ("foul serpents," 168b; "cruel serpents," 212, with "fiery teeth," 213b) and the "horrible torments of hell" (190b). Hence, one can argue that the outbreak of the apocalyptic fires transforms the earth into a hell-like place or even a preliminary stage of hell, as the destruction of the environment and the burning of souls foreshadows the torture that the soul has to endure in hell. However, hell is depicted as a place in which fire and extreme cold are combined in order to intensify the punishments (191–93). Once again, this represents the human fear of being exposed and powerless in the face of natural forces. The imagery of either being severely burned or gnashing one's teeth due to the unbearable frost is a striking contrast to the *locus amoenus* mentioned at the beginning of the text and the portrayal of Paradise with

[14] "Why, flesh, do you lie in filth, filled with vices and sins? Why do you not cleanse distressing sins by shedding tears?"

[15] References to *Christ III* follow Krapp and Dobbie throughout; translations are my own.

which the poet concludes the poem. In accordance with the inexpressibility topos, they choose to represent heaven by describing what it is not, namely a place of physical and psychological deprivation. For the happy souls who are allowed to reside there, the entry into Paradise equates to the return to the original state as it used to be in the Garden of Eden. The saved souls are eternally protected from death, hardships, pain, and sorrow, while they inhabit a landscape that does not have any harsh weather and which is therefore perceived as pleasant and agreeable (255–72).

However, one has to remember that the Christian apocalyptic outlook is not the renewal or restoration of the old world, but rather the foundation of a new one, which means that this utopian vision of a reconstructed Edenic site is only possible after the complete destruction of the (con-)temporary world. For instance, the Apocalypse of Saint John tells of the kingdom of God in which the heavenly city Jerusalem is constructed after the old and flawed world has been destroyed (Apoc. 21). The fact that it is a cityscape that stands at the end of the apocalyptic process can be read as a triumph over the hostile and uncultivated wilderness. Furthermore, the dualism of beautiful (moderate, tranquil, cultivated) and horrible (extreme, disturbing, wild) landscapes represents the cosmic battle between good and evil powers; it also illustrates what Haught calls the eschatological approach to environmental theology, because these "good" landscapes can only be found in past and future ages. He argues that in answer to nature's perceived status of transience and incompletion, Christianity proposes that the believer accept its imperfection as a promise for future fulfilment and focus on the security of their immortal soul instead (277–83).

Conclusion: The Apocalypse as the Ultimate Unleashing of Divine Power and Natural Forces

In conclusion, this paper has shown that the portrayal of the natural world in the apocalyptic writings of Anglo-Saxon England is characterised by the tension between the earth as humanity's imperfect and transitory dwelling-place and the outlook of paradise as the eternal home. There were pleasant landscapes before the current state of things (the Garden of Eden) and there will be after (the heavenly paradise), but in the here and now, the world is in a state of pollution. Both poets and preachers remind the audience of the cause of this corruption and defilement: the Fall of Man. The subsequent misdeeds of humanity continue to desecrate God's creation even more, so that the Lord has no other choice but to initiate the apocalypse as an overall purification scheme. In this context, it seems only fitting that the polluted world is also the setting of the great and final judgement. In this instance, nature appears as the threatening Other from which God protects only the people who are in his favour. As this paper has pointed out, the

exact role of nature in the apocalypse is ambiguous and open to interpretation: the analysed texts allow the understanding of nature as an instrument of God as well as a reading of nature as a (semi-)autonomous agent that takes revenge on the people who have defiled it. In any case, the apocalyptic landscapes are a cause of great pain and distress for humanity: as the state of things progressively becomes more chaotic, people have to face frightening natural phenomena such as earthquakes and meteor showers and the loss of former certainties such as being able to feed themselves or living peacefully on their native land. The relation between this state and the moral deterioration has been emphasised in the poems as well as by Wulfstan in his homily *Secundum Lucam*. In the eyes of Christianity, the current world is often perceived as little more than a temporary home and exile because it cannot bear comparison with the ideal landscapes of Eden and heaven.

Furthermore, when it comes to the actual destruction of all the earthly spaces, this paper has highlighted the particularly interesting connection between the Flood of Noah and the Doomsday fires. Both are means to make a clean sweep and to obliterate the sin-ridden earth including all of its inhabitants. However, according to the Anglo-Saxon texts at hand these two events are occasionally combined and thus parts of the apocalypse that both mark the imminent end and collapse of the world order. As there are many more texts that explicitly and implicitly deal with the last things, this paper could only deal with extracts from a small selection; there are definitely several other texts, especially homilies by Ælfric and Wulfstan, that are worth further examination in order to determine the currency of this motif in Anglo-Saxon literature.

All in all, one can observe that the poems studied portray the apocalyptic natural world as an intensified version of its already threatening self. The events of Doomsday cause the worsening of the world that consequently approximates hell in its characteristics and impact on the human individual. Wulfstan also blames humanity for abusing the creation by sinning against God and predicts the signs of doom that will be the result of said sinful behaviour. In all these accounts, the natural world is perceived as an entity that is immensely powerful and potentially destructive and surrounded by a morally ambiguous atmosphere. In times of global warming and an increasing number of natural disasters, the Anglo-Saxon descriptions of this unleashed potential, be it by God's order or as nature's independent act of revenge against humanity, are strikingly similar to contemporary ecological dystopias, which illustrates the universality of the expressed fear of being subject to nature's devastating forces.

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Transience in Four Old English Elegies

Irina Rau

Introduction

To many of us, it oftentimes feels as if the years and our time on earth fly us by. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, dating from the early 8th century, the Venerable Bede brings immediacy to this image by picturing a sparrow whose swift flight through a hall represents the ephemeral nature of human life. An unnamed counsellor of King Edwin asks him to imagine how

> adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exierit, ipso quidem tempore quo intus est hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens …[1]
> (II.13, p. 184)

The motif of transience, likewise found in Old English elegies surviving in the late tenth-century Exeter Book, parallels Bede's simile of the sparrow. *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Deor*, and *The Ruin* all share the notion of a transient earthly life and together allow us to study different portrayals of transience.[2] It is noticeable that earthly transience manifests itself in the momentary forces of nature, in decaying

[1] Ed. Colgrave and Mynors. "Arriving, one of the sparrows were to fly swiftly through the house; which, entering by one door, were to exit by another soon; during the time it is inside, it is certainly not affected by the storm of the winter, but with the very short time of peace having run out, it soon flies from one winter into another." Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.

[2] References to these four elegies follow the edition by Bjork throughout.

architecture, and in temporary human hardship. Accordingly, these aspects constitute the outline of the argumentation in order to support the thesis that these four elegies reinforce the contrast between life in the transient world and heavenly eternity. At least *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* share the Christian undertone suggesting that eternity and stability inhere in God and in heaven after death.

Etymologically, transience derives from Latin terms. *Transitio* is the feminine noun and describes an "(act of) crossing, passage," "transition," "change," or "transformation." The masculine noun *transitus* holds similar meanings: "(act of) crossing (over from one place to another)," "passage," "ceasing to be," (i.e. dying) and the "elapsing (of time)." Its adjective *transitorius* signifies "of or pertaining to passage across from one place to another," "passing," and "(esp. of worldly things) transient, fleeting," "temporary" (Howlett s.vv. *transitio*, *transitorius*, *transitus*). In the Old English language, *feallendlic* and *læne* carry similar meanings. *Feallendlic* means perishable, transitory, and frail, and *læne* signifies that something is granted for a time only, impermanent, transitory, and temporary (Bosworth–Toller s.vv. *feallend-lic*, *láne*). The *Wanderer*-poet particularly uses *læne* to define the quality of earthly goods and human relationships in lines 108–10. Christine Fell stresses the dichotomy of *læne*, emblematising a journey, and *ece*, which signifies eternal, perpetual, and everlasting, and is associated with eternal life in the next world (181).

This opposition between the transient world and heavenly eternity dominates (whether or not explicitly) at least *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, whereas views of an almighty Lord or the rule of fate prevail in all four elegies. Their literary classification as elegies requires reconsideration in the way that they cannot be grasped in the classical sense as lengthy songs of lament and melancholy written in elegiac couplets. Klinck affirms an influence, that is a "parallel between … the Latin genre" and the Old English form although the latter "had other roots" (7, 11). Occurrences of Christian ideas and Latin patterns are intrinsic to many of the Old English elegies (Orchard, "Not What It Was" 102), which share, alongside transience, themes such as "loss, suffering and morality" (Fell 108). Except for *The Ruin*, the other three poems include a speaker referring to himself as "I" who realises that the once joyous life has gone and that he is left alone without purpose and companions. Their authors use both natural, architectural, and emotional imagery to confirm the sublimity of both fate and divine eternity in a transient world. The following sections, whose topics cohere and intertwine, provide a thorough analysis of the motif of transience surfacing in the description of earthly things: seasons, architecture, treasures, and human suffering.

Transience in Four Old English Elegies

The Transient Nature of Elemental Forces

Seasonal imagery is intrinsic to the elegies. Certainly, the cold seasons with their different appearances and forms of precipitation symbolise transient earthly hardship and are thus inseparable from the third subsection of the main part addressing human suffering. As exiles, both Wanderer and Seafarer are troubled by tempestuous weather and stormy seas during their journeys. The climate in *The Ruin* is similarly relentless and causes the once solid architecture to decay. Depictions of wintery atmospheres and cold emotions provide the setting and serve to introduce this topic: the "hrim-cealde sæ" ("frosty cold sea," *Wanderer* 4) is a hardship for the Wanderer, challenging him on his watery path of exile. As if it was not hard enough to travel all on one's own, the weather on the ice-cold sea where "hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged" ("rime and snow, mingled with hail," 48) fall ceaselessly intensifies his grim mood. The Seafarer's mental and physical condition resembles the Wanderer's mood. A frosty cold governs the former by fettering his feet and body with icicles, his perception of "hlimman sæ, / is-caldne wæg" ("the sea roaring, the ice-cold wave," *Seafarer* 18–19)[3] gives shape to his wintery surroundings. Stanley B. Greenfield points out that winter allegorises human sinfulness on earth. Indeed, *The Seafarer* warns against being sinful and praising earthly relationships and treasures (Greenfield 208). In *Deor*, Welund's fate shares the wintery tone insofar as his exile is *winter-ceald* ("winter-cold," 4). In the four elegies, storms most notably ravage the earth and display its vanity. This manifests itself in the destruction of walls, halls, and buildings. The winds and storms have overthrown them and govern nature as well as humanity inasmuch as "þas stan-hleoþu stormas cnyssað, / hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð"[4] as depicted in *The Wanderer*, and "stormas þær stan-clifu beotan" ("there storms beat the rocky cliffs," 23) in *The Seafarer*. It is the same case with hail which both Wanderer and Seafarer encounter in the form of heavy showers: "hægl-fare hæleþum on andan" ("a hailstorm against men in malice," *The Wanderer* 105) and "hægl scurum fleag" ("hail flew in showers," *Seafarer* 17).

Whether the author deliberately used the Old English verb *fleogan* here in connection to hail remains a question of interpretation. However, it perfectly heralds the start of the passage in *The Seafarer* that features a band of six birds such as wild swan, gannet, or seagull which "become surrogates for his former human companions" (Klein 120). Similarly, the Wanderer beholds a group of "baþian brimfuglas" ("seabirds bathing," *Wanderer* 47)[5] while dwelling on the memory of his dead kinsmen. This memory fades as quickly as the spoken words of the birds,

[3] See also ll. 8–9, 17.
[4] "These storms beat the stone-slopes, the falling storm binds the ground," 101–02.
[5] See also *Seafarer* 19–24.

making both metaphors of earthly ephemerality (Irvine 131–32). While the birds' language and sounds are alien to the Wanderer, the Seafarer knows what the sorrowful voice of the cuckoo indicates. Although the bird represents "sumeres weard" ("summer's guard," *Seafarer* 54) and is accordingly regarded as a joyous creature, his singing "sorge beodeð / bitter in breost-hord" ("summons sorrow, bitter in the heart," 54–55). Pheifer concisely summarises the cuckoo's ambivalent associations in his approach to lines 53–55 of *The Seafarer*, which compare the bird's joyful function as "the messenger of spring" with its occasional appearance in "Slavic and Celtic folk-lore … [as] a harbinger of sorrow and death" (282). Its ambiguity parallels the concept of the sea voyage which can signify both "attraction and hardship" (283). The cuckoo's sad song can be interpreted as an audible sign of transience: time passes with the circular change of the seasons and nothing lasts forever. The theme of transience displayed by birds likewise surfaces in the term of the *fleotendran* ("floating ones," 54) in *The Wanderer*. While "the floating ones" refers to the group of bathing seabirds, it can also stand as a metaphor for the souls of the dead kinsmen the Wanderer remembers while looking at the sea. The memory of them passes through his mind as swiftly as the seabirds swim past him and deprive him of any companionship.

To return to the storms, the "atol yþa gewealc" ("the horrid tossing of the waves," *Seafarer* 6)[6] already suggests that the tempestuous forces of nature trouble the Seafarer's voyage. He experiences that "norþan sniwde; / hrim hrusan bond; hægl feol on eorþan, / corna caldast"[7]—three forces which make the waves roll and subjugate the world both metaphorically and literally. Particularly in *The Ruin*, it is visible how storms devastate whole cities and leave ruins behind. Not only "hrim on lime" ("frost on the mortar," 4) but also heavy storms have either shattered the buildings or attempted to damage them: "scearde scur-beorge scorene, gedrorene" and "ofstonden under stormum."[8] One can easily associate storms with transience since they are temporary conditions of the weather belonging to the colder seasons of autumn and winter. Just like Bede's sparrow, the human being lives on from storm to storm, from winter to winter, and thus from year to year. The warm hall in his simile, typifying a "comfortable haven against the cold and uncertainty of what goes before and of what comes after …, encourages the [attentive audience] to embrace Christianity in the hope that … there will be a further haven" after death (Toswell 8). The sparrow is emblematic of "the human soul" that can select a "life of comfort and security in the [heavenly] hall" (8).

Where there are storms, there is typically also darkness. At a moment's notice, darkness comes and goes and oftentimes accompanies the wintery storms. The Wanderer recognises "wintres woma, þonne won cymeð" ("the noise of the winter, then darkness comes," 103) which makes it reasonable to conclude that winter

[6] See also ll. 35, 46.

[7] "It snowed from the north; frost bound the earth; hail fell on the earth, the coldest of grains," 31–33.

[8] "The gaping shelters against storm are torn, have fallen," 5; "remained standing under storms," 11.

announces and implicates darkness. The poet creates a strong mental image when he contrasts the bright friend of gold, that is the lordly treasure giver, with the dark soil that covers him after his death: "gold-wine minne / hrusan heolstre biwrah" ("the darkness of the ground covered my gold-friend," 22–23). Heart and life can become dark as well as lines 59 and 89 reveal: "mod-sefa min … gesweorce" ("my heart … grow dark") and "þis deorce lif" ("this dark life") express the Wanderer's grief and desperation. His "earthly life implicitly contrast[s] with the heavenly one, where there is eternal light" (Bately 7), and his mood matches the dark atmosphere that winter creates. *Deor* contains a passage that parallels this one: an individual suffering from sorrow "on sefan sweorceð" ("darkens in the mind," 29) and feels as if he would never experience any joy of life again.

Concerning the aspect of subjugation of the earth, the force of darkness is qualified as a helmet that lies on the ground like a heavy cover: "hu seo þrag gewat, / genap under niht-helm, swa heo no wære!"[9] This description illustrates the transience of time by using the colour black, which suggests that the time that has passed was once bright and joyful. Furthermore, it seems as if time can easily be extinguished like a flame, leaving nothing but darkness as a reminder of its momentary nature. In addition, darkness and night symbolise evil and allude to the devil in a Christian context. Abandoning the land means abandoning darkness and human sinfulness, striving for the light of heaven (Holton 210). Both Wanderer and Seafarer encounter the "niht-scua" that "nipeð" ("the night shadow grows dark," *Wanderer* 104) or "nap" ("grew dark," *Seafarer* 31) and strikingly, darkness precedes and announces showers of hail and snow from the north in both cases. The corresponding use of both register and structure as it is observable in these two elegies is remarkable. Although *Deor* and *The Ruin* include a few references to the natural forces, they are more prominent in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. All four elegies share frosty atmospheres and landscapes where sorrowful individuals and exiles—if there are any survivors at all—are bereft of any joy. Severe winters, storms, and darkness surround them and reflect their mood. When minds and hearts darken, their owners metaphorically lose their lives and become mindful of their limited time on earth.

Ancient *enta geweorc* in Ruins

Following the above analysis of the rapid change of the seasons and the forces of storms against the background of transience in nature, this subsection will be more concerned with the transience of architecture. Unlike nature, architecture is created by human hands; it is the material result of human ideas. As the elegies exhibit, time, heavy storms, and warfare could damage these "concrete" ideas expressed by the set phrase of the "work of giants." Appearing in *The Wanderer*

[9] "How the time departed, darkened under the night helmet, as if it had not been!"; *Wanderer* 95–96.

("eald enta geweorc idlu stodon," "the old work of giants stood empty," 87) and in *The Ruin* ("brosnað enta geweorc," "the work of giants decays," 2), it testifies to the fact that the monumental stone buildings could not withstand the effects of time and militant attacks. Less explicitly, the "or-þonc ærsceaft" ("skilful ancient work," *Ruin* 16) praises the skills and creations of ancient master builders and expresses admiration for antiquity. *Enta geweorc* connotes "an awed regard for Roman ruins, considered to be the products of a technologically superior culture" (Anderson 69).[10] However, these lines reveal the vanishing of ancient architecture and their cultures along with it. The decay of buildings immediately implies how rapidly and easily societies and kingdoms are replaceable by others.

Highly detailed descriptions of cities, walls, buildings, and halls accompany the *enta geweorc* throughout the entire poem. As it "reads like a description of an actual site," some scholars concluded that it pictures Bath, once occupied by the Romans (Klinck 61). In fact, *The Ruin* survives incomplete and among many others, Andy Orchard qualified the text's condition as "a ruin, scarred by a diagonal burn that affects no fewer than twelve of the thirty-six surviving manuscript lines" ("Reconstructing" 45). The first twelve lines of *The Ruin* dismember the city in its parts which equally reflects the text's ruinous state:

> Wrætlic is þes weal-stan, wyrde gebræcon;
> burg-stede burston, …
> Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,
> hring-geat berofen. (1–4)[11]

The picture of decay and devastation continues:

> Oft þæs wag gebad
> ræg-har ond read-fah rice æfter oþrum,
> ofstonden under stormum; steap geap gedreas.
> Worað giet se weall-steall wæpnum geheapen;
> fel on foldan forð-gesceaft bærst
> grimme gegrunden. (9–14)[12]

The passage illustrates how enduring the city had been before it finally surrendered to the attacks of time, weather, and war. The following lines in *The Wanderer* echo the image of tottering walls and buildings: "winde biwaune weallas stondaþ /

[10] See also p. 70, in which Anderson associates the wires and rings being parts of the architectural constructions with connectors in a society, and p. 80.

[11] "Wondrous is this wall stone, broken by fate; the city has broken apart … Roofs are fallen, towers ruinous, the ring gate is bereaved (i.e. destroyed)."

[12] "Often this wall survived, grey with lichen and red-stained, one kingdom after another, remained standing under storms; towering, curved, it decayed. The wall place still totters, hewn by weapons; it fell to the earth, its future condition burst, grimly ground down."

hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas. / Weorniað þa win-salo";[13] the whole dwelling-place is left in devastation. Subsequent lines of *The Ruin* picture the ancient city with its "burg-ræced, burn-sele monige, / heah horn-gestreon, … meodoheall monig"[14] and even further "wig-steal" ("bastion," 27), "hofu" ("houses," 29), "baþu" ("baths," with a wall encircling them, 40), "ond þæs teafor-geapa tigelum sceadeð / hrost-beages hrof."[15] While the mead-halls allude to Germanic culture, the bath-houses repeatedly mentioned represent Roman culture and customs and thus revisit the notion of the *enta geweorc*. The use of the past tense is noticeable throughout the poem and foreshadows the contrast between the city that was once bright, full of life and human joys, and the remaining ruins now standing in a wasteland. Janet Bately studied the role of time and use of tenses in *The Ruin*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Wife's Lament*. She concluded that the four elegies share the links between past, present, and future to the extent that shifts between past and present tenses reflect experiences such as passages approaching the *ubi sunt* topos, present suffering, dreaming, future divine consolation, and eternity (3–4, 13–14). Accordingly, approximately the first third of *The Ruin* is written in the present tense, whereas the description of the city's vivid and joyful past dominates the remainder. The majority of verbs denote decay and collapse. Stone walls and buildings moulder, decay, fall, burst, totter, or collapse and the half-line reading "forweorone, geleorene" ("decayed, departed," 7) indicates that the inhabitants have died with their city. The "stan-hofu stodan" ("the stone houses stood," 38) once solid and impressive, the grey stone buildings and the wide kingdom even possessed a "bright" splendour but lay in ruins on the earthly ground now.[16]

The ground has its peculiarities. It seems as if the ground has its independent existence insofar as it is personified and plays a minor part in *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*. At first, the ground appears as a grave that keeps the bodies of the master architects in a figurative tight grip, as in "eorð-grap hafað / waldend wyrhtan … / heard-gripe hrusan."[17] It also serves as a hiding place both for the dead one ("eorð-scræfe," "in the earth-cavern, i.e. grave," *Wanderer* 84) and for his hoard of gold ("græf wille golde stregan / broþor his geborenum"[18]). In addition to its tight grip, the dark ground also "swallows," as if it possessed a great mouth that devours living beings and cities alike: "grund eall forswealg" ("the ground devoured all," *Ruin* 14). Similarly, the crusts of clay are qualified to be so strong as to bend and deform the works of concrete ("lam-rindum gebeag," 17). In contrast to architecture, the earth protrudes as an all-absorbing force to which no earthly creation can do any damage. Besides its transient character immanent in

[13] "Walls stand blown by the wind, covered with frost, the houses shaken by storms. The wine halls fade away," 76–78.
[14] "City dwellings, many bath-houses, an abundance of high pinnacles, … many mead-halls," 21–23.
[15] "And the woodwork of the red curved roof sheds its tiles," 30–31.
[16] Lines 21, 37, and 40 praise how "beorht," "bright" the city once had been.
[17] "Earth's grasp holds the almighty architects … the hard grip of the earth," *The Ruin* 6–8.
[18] "The brother wants to strew the grave with gold for his brother," *Seafarer* 97–98.

this imagery, the devouring of the earth likewise presages its capability of self-destruction.

However, counter-images occur that are less dark and forlorn. The concluding passage of *The Wanderer* praises the heavenly Father in whose kingdom the believers expect consolation. This promise conveys the notion that stability is absent from the buildings of stone the supposed giants had attempted to build for eternity, but rests in the heavens where the almighty Lord rules (*The Wanderer* 115). Evidently no one is able to imitate the divine architecture which stands the test of time. Indeed, it is, being *ece*, built for eternity and not located on *læne* earth but in heaven. This search for consolation and a safe haven appeals to the Seafarer. He is a solitary voyager who has abandoned civilisation for the sake of salvation. To him, the endless sea is the path to the eternal heaven where he finds comfort (Holton 213, 215, 217). This even gets to the point where the Seafarer proposes "uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen, / ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen."[19] Clearly, he does not think of his home as an earthly location, otherwise he would not have left it. He rather considers it to be in heaven with God, which makes him a Christian exile (Holton 209, Irvine 132). With the seasons alternating and spring leaving its visible traces on earth, "byrig fægriað / wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð,"[20] and the transience of earthly beauty and time are recalled to the mind. This image of transience differs from the one portrayed in *The Ruin*. The former is positive and addresses spring and the awakening spirits of nature, while the latter draws the picture of a decaying city whose parts have fallen to the ground and have been swallowed by it. The brickwork of buildings, once interrelated and cohesive through mortar, has broken apart in *The Ruin*. Every brick can represent an inhabitant of the city and similarly, every wall can represent a human creation. In this sense, one can conceive of the ruinous city as a past society or human culture that has, with all its joys, feasts, and companionships, fallen under the mighty rule of time. By beholding the ruins, human generations are warned not to cherish earthly things beyond measure since they will fade as the masonry has. Accordingly, architecture as an aspect of transience functions as a lesson in prudence.

Ephemeral Earthly Gifts and Human Hardship

Worldly riches and human suffering equally recur and interrelate as images of transience. The elegies portray fate and God as the ruling forces either providing individuals with treasures and honour or inflicting misery on them. Deprivation of gifts can be the cause of human hardship. For valiant warriors, the mead-halls

[19] "Let us think where we have our home, and then think how we can get there," *Seafarer* 117–18.
[20] "The city becomes fair, the plains grow beautiful, the world moves rapidly," *Seafarer* 48–49.

("meodo-heall monig monn-dreama full"[21]) are the centre of human joys, feasting, boasting, and host the company of lords and their retainers. In these halls, they receive their treasures which are specified thus: a warrior "seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searo-gimmas, / on ead, on æht, on eorcan-stan"[22] and is granted gold and rings.[23] These material joys go hand in hand with the joys of the feast, the pleasures of wine and music, the company of a woman, or any other *worulde hyht* ("hope" or "joy in the world," *Seafarer* 45). Among warriors, valiant deeds usually entail boasting about them. However, the Wanderer as well as the Seafarer recognise the transience of reputation; the former even warns against boasting and recommends patience, prudence, and wisdom in lines 65–72. In order to become "wita," "wis" or "snottor" ("a wise person" or "wise," *Wanderer* 64–65, 111), a man needs to identify the transience of earthly, superficial goods and contain his emotions. They are mere outbursts of momentary impressions and must never be revealed too hastily. Being "mod-wlonc," "deor [in his dædum]," and "geoguþ" ("proud," "brave [in his deeds; see also 76]," and "youth," *Seafarer* 39–41) constitute additional qualities and values regarded as desirable on earth. Only the few individuals outside of heroic society, such as the exiled protagonists, are aware of their *læne* nature. Kingship, presented in the fourth and fifth stanzas of *Deor*, can be classed with earthly transient goods insofar as Ðeodric's and Eormanric's reigns—and with them, their reputation as Gothic kings—lasted for restricted periods of time. This is equally applicable to Deor's own situation, as he had been honoured with serving as a people's poet, but lives in grief now, deprived of his life's vocation. Recalling Bede's image of the sparrow, time is uncertain, and, according to the Seafarer, uncertainty is also an issue where "adl oþþe yldo oþþe ecg-hete" ("a disease or age or hostile hate," *Seafarer* 70) are involved. Disease and hate can end one's life; as the speaker explicitly visualises in lines 89–96, the process of aging certainly does.

The transience of human and earthly joys is evident in all four elegies.[24] The Wanderer mentions "gear-dagas" ("days of old," 44) and notices that "wyn eal gedreas" ("all joy has perished," 36) with the fact that "þonne eall þisse worulde wela weste stondeð."[25] Emphasising that there is "this world" insinuates that the speaker knows of other worlds consecutively replacing the present one. It parallels the Seafarer's perception, since to him, life is "dead …, / læne on londe" ("dead … transient on land," 65–66) and he overtly states: "ic gelyfe no / þæt him eorð-welan ece stondað."[26] Both Seafarer and Wanderer are solitary characters. In contrast to the Seafarer, who chooses to experience separation from society, the

[21] "Many mead halls full of human joys," *Ruin* 23; see also "sele-dreamas," "hall joys," *Wanderer* 34–36, 78–80, 93.
[22] "Looked at treasure, at silver, on precious stones, on riches, on property, on jewels," *Ruin* 35–36.
[23] *Seafarer* 44, 83, 97, 101; *Wanderer* 22, 32, 35, where *gold* is an element of *gold-wine*.
[24] The poems both include "wyn" and "dream" (*Wanderer* 29, 36, 79; *Seafarer* 27, 45, 65, 80, 86).
[25] "When all the riches of his world stand empty," 74.
[26] "I do not believe that the wealth of earth lasts eternally," 66–67.

latter's exile is not self-imposed since all his kinsmen and his lord have died and left him alone dwelling in nostalgia about the past. In the manner of the *ubi sunt* topos, which scholars have derived from Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma*, the Wanderer wonders where all the earthly things and people have gone. Isidore's astonishment "Dic ubi sunt reges? ubi principes? ubi imperatores? ubi locupletes rerum? ubi potentes saeculi? ubi diuites mundi? quasi umbra transierunt, uelut somnium euanuerunt"[27] was highly popular in Anglo-Saxon England and caught on in both poetry and prose (Fell 185, Orchard, "Not What It Was" 103, Sciacca 105, 138). Accordingly, the Wanderer eventually detects that "her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne, / her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,"[28] leaving the world an "idel" ("empty," 110) place.[29] This recognition accords with the refrain of *Deor* which declares "þæs ofereode; þisses swa mæg,"[30] affirming that there is an end to every kind of hardship and thus providing a consoling conclusion for sufferers. All three speakers realise at some point that earthly goods and gifts "are merely transitory delights" and opposed to the "true and everlasting … joys of the Lord" (Klein 120). In particular, the second half of *The Seafarer* directs towards Christian ideas and advocates for readiness for God's judgement.

No earthly splendour lasts forever, and neither does human misery. Either other people, fate, or the mighty Lord are presented as the causes for sudden changes in life and suffering. Deor's situation resembles Welund's confinement, and both Beadohild and Mæðhild have fallen victim to male revenge and passion. Another case in point is a people's suffering under the "grim cyning" ("cruel king," 23) Eormanric under whose rule even the warriors were "sorgum gebunden, / wean on wenum."[31] Similarly, the speaker addresses someone "sorgcearig" ("one oppressed with sorrow," *Deor* 28) who notices how the "witig Dryhten" ("wise Lord," 32) honours some and punishes others by inflicting misery on them. Here, the mighty Lord is responsible for the changes in the world and his will is unchangeable. Deor knows that God moves in mysterious ways. Bringing his fate into line with other individuals' misfortune and ultimately reminding himself of the fact that his suffering is just as transient as the divine gift of being the chosen poet gives him solace. Since God has a purpose for every human being, "suffering must have a purpose" as well (Fell 192).

In the case of *The Wanderer*, the reader is confronted with the hardship of solitude. Toswell stresses the "anthropomorphic connection of birds with individual Christians" as glossed psalters testify (9). Defining the "sparrow in Psalm 101.8 as

[27] "Speak, where are the kings? Where the princes? Where the emperors? Where the wealthy ones of possessions? Where the powerful of this age? Where the rich men of this world? They have passed away like a shadow, they have vanished like a dream," Sciacca 106.

[28] "Here money is transient, here friend is transient, here man is transient, here kinsman is transient," 108–09.

[29] See also the *ubi sunt* topos in *The Wanderer* 92–93.

[30] "That passed away; so may this," 7, 13, 17, 20, 27, 42.

[31] "Bound with sorrows, in supposition of misery," 24–25.

an *anhoga*" (9) immediately recalls the Wanderer's characterisation: the speaker, initially identified as an "an-haga" ("recluse" or "one dwelling alone," *Wanderer* 1), misses his kinsmen and friends; notably his lord was dear to him as he imagines himself embracing and kissing him (9–11, 20, 29–31, 34–43). Just as Bede's solitary sparrow has the pleasure of catching the feeling of warmth and safety, so has the Wanderer experienced the ephemeral pleasure to be of service to a generous "gold-friend." Furthermore, the Christian message, revealing itself at the end, lets the Wanderer appear as a Christian believer whose hope enables him to endure his exile. Keeping in mind that there is no friend left who could have conveyed comfort to him, the Wanderer travels *winter-cearig* ("depressed by winter" or "sad from age," 24) on the sea with a *ferð-loca freorig* ("frozen soul enclosure," 33), matching both the ice-cold sea and the weather. Nostalgia and feelings of loss influence his mood and worry his heart. Nevertheless, he knows that a sorrowful emotion or thought "ne mæg … wyrde wiðstondan"[32] since "wyrd bið ful aræd" ("fate is fully resolute," 5). Fate does not alter its course for any human being but is controlled by God and hence serves as his instrument to order life on earth: "onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum."[33] Concerning its caprice, fate's nature resembles that of the Lord as Deor perceives it and appears as a force that is predestined. However, the Wanderer sees two superior forces operating. While fate is qualified as "mære" ("mighty," 100), God "yþde swa þisne eard-geard" ("thus destroyed this dwelling place," 85). This implies the motif of transience and equally establishes the world's contrast with the kingdom in heaven "þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð" ("where for us all stability stands," *The Wanderer* 115)—a fortress without an earthly, decaying nature but one that ensures eternal safety and stability. Every Christian reader can certainly deduce hope from this conclusion. However, the theme of transience is not primarily a Christian idea. It already inheres, together with the focus on fate's power, in Scandinavian and Germanic poetry.[34] In a way, these two motifs operate as links between the pagan poetic tradition and Christian ideas (Gordon 1, 4, 7–8, 13).

The Seafarer's fate resembles the Wanderer's suffering. He laments over his *bitre breost-cearu* ("bitter grief of the heart," *Seafarer* 4) and "hu ic geswinc-dagum / earfoð-hwile oft þrowade,"[35] and he is harrowed by the terrible cold. Corresponding to this, Klein noticed that "[i]n male-voiced elegies, the natural world appears as a series of threatening forces that register human frailty in the face of social and spiritual alienation" (118). Protected neither by society nor "God's love, the male exile must acknowledge his own vulnerability as a human and bodily being" in-

[32] "Cannot … withstand fate," 15.
[33] "The decree of fate changes the world under the heavens," 107.
[34] The *Hávamál*, an Old Icelandic eddic poem, is often quoted since it resembles the Old English phrase: "Deyr fé, deyja frændr, deyr sjálfr it sama"—"Cattle die, kin die, one's self dies." The poetic lines as well as their translation are taken from Fell p. 183.
[35] "How I, in days of toil, have often suffered a time of hardship," 2–3.

stead (118). Feeling *earm-cearig* ("miserable and sad," 14) with a *fea-sceaftig ferð* ("poor soul," 26), the Seafarer realises that the ones who have never left the safe ground ashore and enjoyed their lives cannot empathise with him in his misery. He is solitary in every aspect; his *modes lust* ("desire of the mind," 36) and his *longung* ("longing," 47) for isolation and a spiritual experience make him an exceptional character in his world. There, both God and fate determine the course of events. The "ece Dryhten" ("eternal Lord," 124) has a purpose for everyone in his overarching plan and as "the author of linear time, is seen in his role as the initial creator of mankind and the final destroyer of it" (Bately 13). Transient earth and eternal heaven are juxtaposed in opposition by referring to a *fæge* ("doomed one," *Seafarer* 71) who awaits "Godes egsan" ("God's terror," 101) on the Day of Judgement for the "sawle þe biþ synna ful" ("the soul that is full of sins," 100) and to "þa ecan eadignesse / þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes, / hyht in heofonum."[36] The following statement assures the insignificance of mankind compared to the powers of God and fate: "wyrd biþ swiþre, / meotud meahtigra þonne ænges monnes gehygd."[37] Heaven is the eternal kingdom and the true stable home where one receives consolation from God. Through his absence from *The Ruin*, this poem distinguishes itself from the other three. *Wyrd seo swiþe* ("strong fate," *Ruin* 24; see also 1) is the only almighty power that alters the course of events, takes lives, and destroys buildings. Fate changed the once wondrous city and transformed it into a desolate, dead place without any joy or splendour. Earthly misery is seen from a more general perspective as well. There is no mention of individual characters but we learn that age and death prevailed in the forms of slaughter, war, and "wol-dagas" ("days of pestilence," *Ruin* 25), having killed valiant men and "hund cnea / wer-þeoda" ("a hundred generations of people," 8–9).

If earthly goods and gifts are not certain or granted forever, one thing is certain: God and fate cause changes and determine human destiny. Whereas the human soul can expect an eternal life in the safe haven of the heavenly kingdom, the world is solely deemed a transient interstation. Lives, joys, treasures, cities, dynasties, and ages will depart at some point and clear the space for other times. The line of thought in *The Seafarer* resembles the one in *The Wanderer*: the larger part of the poems stresses the elapsing of time on earth, but the eternity of God's heaven and its location outside of any temporal measurement become evident at the end. All elegies revisit the Boethian concept as presented in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Since they fade and leave sheer misery behind, worldly goods are classified as the wicked or "human" goods and contrast with the truly desirable goods

[36] "The eternal happiness, where life comes from the love of the Lord, hope in the heavens," 120–22.
[37] "Fate is stronger, the Lord mightier than the thought of any man," 115–16.

of divine virtues whose climax is ultimate happiness (Boethius 42–51).[38] In this sense, exile and suffering can technically be regarded as desirable hardships since they highlight the importance of higher values and virtues that really enrich earthly life and make the human being appreciate it.

Conclusion

Having approached four Old English elegies against the background of transience as their pivotal theme and its different images, one conclusion immediately presents itself: human life as conceived and depicted in Old English poetry does not only have a transient nature but it is insignificant compared to *wyrd seo swiþe* and the *ece Dryhten*. This can be seen in the various ways *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Deor*, and *The Ruin* approach and depict earthly life. Seasons change while the elemental forces unfold or withdraw their power. They emerge as wintry cold, stormy seas, and icy tempests of hail or snow, occasionally involving a threatening darkness. Just like the natural environment can darken, so can both the heart and the mind of the seafaring exile. In its function as their burial place, the dark earth holds the bodies of warriors and architects in its metaphorical tight grip. The ground is a grave as well as a force that devours whole cities. It has "swallowed" the ancient *enta geweorc* in *The Ruin* and has left a desolate place behind. On top of this, winter and darkness represent sinfulness and evil that reside on earth and stand in opposition to the light and stability of heaven. Once, walls, halls, and buildings had been full of life and human joys, the city's appearance had been bright and splendid before *wyrd* destroyed and deprived it of the colours of life. These images evoke the Christian view of apocalypse which Greenfield sees appear particularly in *The Seafarer* (210). The image of ruins as well as the Seafarer's and Wanderer's perceptions that earthly gifts and goods are *læne* and should be treated with caution serve as warnings for themselves and the audience. Life is short and transient and resembles the swift flight of a sparrow through a warm hall in winter. All stability and eternity rest in God and the heavenly realm. The human soul, in search for this safe haven, travels from earth to heaven just as both Seafarer and Wanderer voyage on the open sea in order to find divine comfort. The contrast between earthly transience and heavenly eternity prevails in the four elegies to a greater or lesser extent. Transience appears as a tool of prudence in order to remind the human audience of how momentary gifts, honours, and even human relationships can be. Nothing lasts forever and therefore, as the speaker of *The Wanderer* recommends, one must be patient, moderate, and prudent.

[38] To be more precise, the wicked goods are riches, reputation, power, fame, and (bodily) pleasures, while the true goods are not of a material nature. Self-sufficiency, renown, respect, joy, and power equate happiness with goodness. God is the final destination.

Statements and boasts are not to be made too hastily but one should attain wisdom beforehand.

On earth, cold atmospheres set the background for the elegies and already imply their topics. Wintry weather and dark surroundings create images of destruction, desolation, decay, and death. Ruinous architecture visualises transience, which is mirrored in the fates of individual characters. In particular, the Wanderer, the Seafarer, and Welund experience their personal hardships in a frosty-cold exile. Their exiles, whether or not self-imposed, imply isolation and remoteness from any companions. In contrast to Welund, the Seafarer and the Wanderer follow a common goal: they strive for consolation from the heavenly Father in his eternal home. The situation is different with Deor. The mighty Lord has deprived him of his vocation in life and replaced him with the new poet of his people. He has lost his aim which allows for the reasonable argumentation that at closer inspection, aimlessness is far worse than exile, since Wanderer and Seafarer gain something out of their spiritual voyages.

Fell's harsh judgement that the elegies do not have a lot in common other than central themes (180) definitely needs reconsideration, which leads us, at last, right back to their common source: the Exeter Book unites them and has kept them safe until today. Indeed, the elegies differ from each other in many ways and every single one undoubtedly—and wonderfully—speaks for itself. Nevertheless, their common features transcend the main themes. Not only the motif of transience runs like a golden thread through the poems but also does the depiction of cold and stormy landscapes, decay, death, lost treasures, past joys, suffering, and human solitude. Everyone reading and appreciating the Old English elegies is invited to remember the wise words of the Wanderer: "swa þes middan-geard / ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ."[39]

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[39] "So this middle earth perishes and falls each day," 62–63.

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The Journey of Life in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*

Julia Stumpf

Introduction

The Wanderer and *The Seafarer* can be interpreted as poems about men who, wandering the paths of exile, not only embark on a physical journey, but also on a spiritual one. It is the object of this paper to reconstruct the progress of this journey with regard to these two levels of meaning and to the way they are connected with each other. Having left behind a golden past as heroic warriors, the speakers find themselves in the most desolate state of exile and are challenged to find a path both physical and spiritual that could lead them towards a new future.

In my analysis, I will trace the development of this path, in the course of which the exiles have to locate themselves in time and in space, in order to find out more about where the speakers of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* come from, where their journey leads to, and how they might get there. My aim is to show that both characters undergo an intellectual development during their time in exile, in which they realise the transience of earthly goods and renounce their former life in order to find comfort in heaven.

I argue that each journey is characterised by a constant tension between the attempt to exercise free will, the repressive impact of external factors, and the controlling force of Fate as an instrument of divine will. Thus I will further examine what determines the course of the journey. To this end, I will start by analysing the speakers' identities, their relation to time, and their cultural background

as heroic warriors, and continue with an investigation of the exile-theme and its significance. I will then illustrate to what degree the depiction of transience influences their search for a new future. A closer look at the power of Fate over these journeys will conclude my analysis.

Man in Time

The poems' apparent themes form a good starting point from which to work towards an in-depth analysis. Firstly, the highly personal perspective through which the poems are presented calls for an examination of each character's construction of identity. As a second step, I will analyse the conceptualisation of time as a dimension in which both speakers have to locate themselves.

The Wanderer

Construction of Identity

In the first line, the speaker is introduced as an *anhaga*, a small but meaningful word that straightforwardly reflects the main features of his situation: his loneliness and his hitherto undefined dwelling. The complete opening phrase continues as follows:

> Oft him an-haga are gebideð,
> metudes miltse, þeah þe he mod-cearig
> geond lagu-lade longe sceolde
> hreran mid hondum hrim-cealde sæ,
> wadan wræc-lastas. (1–5b)[1]

The first words prefigure the proverbial quality of the poem and the third person singular presents the speaker as a representative rather than as an individual. Griffith notes that the subsequent "lengthy qualification gives a powerful sense of mood and situation, but is not proverbial, for proverbs are generally pithy, and do not deal in lengthy concession" (135); thus the passage successfully creates a personal atmosphere. The speaker's desolate situation on the ice-cold sea makes him feel *modcearig* (2), but the subsequent "oft … are gebideð, / metudes miltse" (1–2) emphasises that he is far from giving up all hope. There is a great deal of uncertainty about how to properly translate *gebidan* here.[2] Translating it as

[1] "Often the lonely dweller experiences mercy, the mildness of the Creator, though anxious at heart for a long time he has had to stir with his hands, away across the water, the ice-cold sea, pass the tracks of exile." All translations are my own. The edition used for both *The Wanderer* (*Wd*) and *The Seafarer* (*Sf*) is Bjork; I have occasionally taken the liberty of modifying Bjork's punctuation according to my own insights.

[2] See Griffith, "Does *wyrd* mean 'Fate'?" for a concise summary of the discussion.

"await" would imply that the receiving of *are* and *miltse* is still pending, but if it is understood as "experience," it signalises that the speaker has already received are and miltse before and therefore has reason to hope for more. In either case, the verb allows the reader to recognise a sense of hopefulness in the speaker's situation, and I personally agree with Griffith who argues that "the *anhaga* is active in his search for divine favour, and not just a passive recipient of it," the references to grace suggesting "that his activity may be rewarded … in heaven" (150).

Various accounts of self-identification can be traced in a subsequent passage of direct speech: the speaker himself refers once more to his loneliness (8, *ana*) and then regards himself as *hean* (23). *Hean* ("humble") also allows for multiple readings. One may understand it socially, in which case it suggests a decline in status as a material result of his master's death. Alternatively, we may take it dispositionally to mean "meek" or "modest," describing a psychological consequence of his loss. I suggest a combined reading of both, and an interpretation of the second association as a sign of the speaker's personal development towards humility, triggered by his lord's death and its factual consequences expressed in the first meaning.

Furthermore, the wanderer describes himself as "wintercearig" (24, "sad from the gloomy winter") and "seledreorig" (25, "sorrowful for [lack of] a hall"), two terms that can be interlinked insofar as "whoever finds himself … in a scene of wintery desolation is to feel all the misery there can be on earth … [and] may well remember the joyous feasting in the wine hall" (Stanley 441). *Wintercearig* immediately evokes a feeling of dejection, and *seledreorig* conveys a sense of deprivation. Interestingly, the speaker chooses compounds to express his grief, one of which refers to his present situation (winter) and the other to the past (the hall). The abovementioned solitude is reiterated by the speaker with the term *freondleas* (28) and again by the narrator with the word *wineleas* (45, "friendless"). Social isolation and the stay on the wintry ocean constitute formative elements in the construction of identity here.

With regard to his behaviour, the wanderer generally seems to be a man of thought rather than of action, for he appears multiple times as "remembering" (6, "gemyndig"; 34, "gemon") or "contemplating" (60, "geondþence"; 89, "deope geondþence"). His thoughts drift away to the past again and again, providing only limited information about his present activity aside from wandering around aimlessly (see *wod*, 24), and even then he has hardly any possibility for action because he is paralysed by sorrow and sleep.[3] The wanderer is not a daydreamer: at the end of his ruminations, he becomes "snottor on mode" (111, "wise in mind"), one of the only two instances of verbal identification in the text; the other one is *eardstapa* in line 6. Though there has been much scholarly discussion on whether

[3] See 39–40, "Đonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre/ earmne an-hogan oft gebindað," "then sorrow and sleep together often bind the lonely dweller."

the attributes "earth-stepper" and "wise man" symbolise two individual speakers,[4] I have come to the conclusion that the poem tells the story of one and the same character, but of one who has undergone a fundamental personal development, which enables us to understand the *eardstapa* and the *snottor on mode* as the same person in "two spiritual states" (Osborn 6). In view of all the bitter experiences that the wanderer illustrates, such a process is very likely and evidence that "he has gained wisdom through experience" (Lumiansky 106) can in fact be found right in the text: "forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer ær he age wintra dæl / in woruld-rice" (64–65a).[5] This phrase proves that the speaker has obviously lived through his share of winters and thus experienced first-hand that "man's life is commonly fraught with hardship, the patient endurance of which strengthens the virtues of his mind, and brings him ultimately to wisdom" (Hogan 45). A similar realisation, though less definite, has already been pronounced earlier: "forþon wat se þe sceal his wine-dryhtnes / leofes lar-cwidum longe forþolian" (37–38).[6]

However, it is line 64 that demarcates a significant turn in the tone of the poem. The speaker's intellectual development may be reconstructed as follows: his life at court was dominated by abundance and self-indulgence, thus anything but "humble." He then set off on his voyage, in the course of which the loss of his lord and companions made him aware of the worthlessness of earthly goods. Finally, he learned to value and strive for higher goods, such as the mercy of God. As Lumiansky puts it, "the fundamental contrast which is present in *The Wanderer* is between the individual who set great store by earthly things and who is desolated by their loss … and the individual who knows that earthly things must perish and who conducts himself virtuously and trusts in God … [T]he 'eardstapa' means to represent himself as a person who originally fitted into the former category but who afterwards learned that the latter view is wiser" (108).

As a final step, it is worth having a closer look at the speaker's personal agency. First of all, it should be kept in mind that his opportunities for action are

[4] Osborn provides a comprehensive overview of each position's central representatives and their respective arguments. Above all, it was Pope who, in his article "Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*" suggested that the poem be read as narrated by "dramatic voices" belonging to two different speakers like those in a dramatic dialogue; his position is presented and partly refuted by Greenfield in his article "Min, Sylf and 'Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*'," who claimed that what Pope construed as change of speakers is rather a shift in the attitude of one speaker, which conforms to my theory of personal development. According to Griffith, the number of speakers depends on the interpretation of *nyrd* in line 5 and 15: we are either dealing with two speakers having different attitudes towards the same concept, or with one single speaker who understands it slightly differently in each of the lines. Shippey pointed out that the theory of two speakers has been "spoilt by the inability of any two readers to agree where the dividing lines between one speaker and another might be" (54). Lumiansky adds to the discussion by reciting Huppé's viewpoint of the poem's structure as formed by two separate monologues (104).

[5] "Therefore a man cannot grow wise before he has a share of winters in this earthly empire."

[6] "Therefore he understands who has had to live a long time deprived of the guidance of his beloved gracious lord."

limited by outer circumstances. He is paralysed not only by the extent of his grief, but also by the restricting impact of the wintry weather. Apart from these external factors, the speaker's self-determination is limited by another influence, as indicated by the frequent use of the verb *sculan*. With regard to volition, *sculan* is significant because it denotes a moral obligation or duty, but not explicitly an authoritative command that has to be followed without resistance. Thus where *sculan* is used, the possibility of alternative actions still exists, but some moral authority or higher law actually prohibits them. Since *sculan* can also be translated as "denoting the necessity of fate,"[7] the speaker's construction of identity is characterised by a constant tension between implementing his own will and yielding up to a higher power.

Cyclical Time

Under the premise that "the dominant problem for the central figures of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is locating their lives in a meaningless present" (Green 506), I will now analyse how time is conceptualised in the wanderer's narration in order to find out what makes his relation to it so complicated.

To begin with, it is striking how often the poem uses the adverb *oft*. It is the poem's very first word, and it is used four more times in the first 40 lines (1, 8, 17, 20, and 40). This frequency denotes the speaker's ability to identify recurring phenomena insofar as he can tell which things happen "often" in exile, implying that he has already spent a considerable amount of time out there, which is confirmed by remarks on how *longe* (3, 38) he has already been exposed to the perils of exile.

Though it can, as here, convey a sense of long duration, *oft* first and foremost indicates a structure of repetition. The fact that everything the wanderer perceives continually reappears presents time as an infinite "historical continuum" (Green 505). To be more precise, this infinity takes on the form of a repetitive cycle of mourning, expressed in the phrases "sorg bið geniwad" (50, "sorrow is renewed") and "cearo bið geniwad" (55, "care is renewed"). Sorrow constantly reproduces itself, as the passive construction suggests, in an automatic process the speaker is subject to and has no power to influence. Apparently, his personal agency is thus also limited in his attempt to locate himself in time. The mourning is caused by ever-present memories of the past, of "hu hine on geoguðe his gold-wine / wenede to wiste" (35–36, "how in youth his prince entertained him at feasts") and "swa he hwilum ær / in gear-dagum gief-stolas breac" (43–44, "as he at times before, in days of old, enjoyed the thrones of grace"). Considering time as divided into past, present, and future, it is the past, or rather the memory of it, that without doubt dominates the wanderer's notion of time insofar as it overshadows his

[7] Greenfield in particular strengthens this position and provides sufficient evidence for it ("Min, Sylf" 200).

view of the present, owing to the contrast that "the past was joyful and rich, the present is painful and abject, and the future is, at best, uncertain" (Green 506).

Allusions to the dualism of night and day, or of sleep and waking, reveal the extent to which the wanderer is trapped in time: he is situated in a constant in-between stage. "He "ceare cwiþað … uhtna gehwylce" (8–9, "mourns his care … each time before daybreak")—thus in a time neither really at night nor at day, but at a moment of indefiniteness, and he is fluctuating between sleep and wake when he "onwæcneð eft" (45, "awakes again") after a long dream about the time with his lord. The repeated use of *þonne* (23, 39, 45, 49, 70, 89) conveys a minor sense of temporal or causal succession, yet it remains unclear what constitutes its final point. While the poem emphasises singular moments in time, and single images of memory, it shows no clear temporal progression. The question arises whether the speaker is unable to see advancement or whether he willingly turns a blind eye to it, which again is a matter of volition and restriction. In the first case, the cause for this inability might be the captivating effect of his memories, taking away from him any power to move on. In the second case, he deliberately refuses to advance, unwilling to let go of the security of his past once and for all.

Following Green's precise observations (506–07), we may conclude that it is the wanderer's inability to see a connection between past, present, and future that makes his confrontation with time so difficult. One cannot adapt to, let alone influence, what is invisible, which is why the wanderer clings to the well-known past and thereby virtually stabilises the repetitive cycle that has him trapped. In his in-between stage, he cannot grasp the passing of time, either in the metaphorical or in the literal sense, and this is precisely what makes him feel powerless.

The Seafarer

Construction of Identity

The Seafarer shares many similarities with *The Wanderer* in terms of form and general tenor, but there are some significant differences regarding the construction of identity. First of all, the poem opens with an introductory statement by the speaker himself:

> Mæg ic be me sylfum soð-gied wrecan,
> siþas secgan, hu ic geswinc-dagum
> earfoð-hwile oft þrowade,
> bitre breost-ceare gebiden hæbbe. (1–4)[8]

The first person singular here has the effect that "the mood of the poem is brought closer to the audience than would be possible by an entirely impersonal

[8] "I can recite a true tale about myself, speak of my voyages, how in days of toil I often suffered times of hardship, have endured bitter breastcare."

treatment" (Stanley 447). It is a demonstration of literary authority that hints at the content of the following lines and at the same time confirms its correctness. The subtly communicated self-confidence signifies a capacity for action broader than that of the wanderer. The notion of the seafarer's activity is carried to extremes in the idea that he has even entered into exile on a voluntary basis.[9] Irrespective of whether or not this is the case, there is no doubt that he likewise expresses his exhaustion and depression by calling himself *werig* (29, "weary") and *earm-cearig* (14, "miserable and sad"). A self-determined, verbal construction of identity is thus far from preventing one from affliction and is by no means a guarantee for unrestricted vitality. To characterise the speaker, the narrator uses *mere-werges mod* (12, "the mind of the sea-weary one"), a noun phrase containing a compound similar to those already encountered in *The Wanderer*, and describes how the outside reality of the sea-journey affects the mental and physical condition of the *fea-sceaftig ferð* (26, "destitute soul").

In contrast to *The Wanderer*, self-reflective assertions occur throughout the entire poem. After the phrase *be me sylfum* has already signalised distinct agency, the importance of personal experience is emphasised:

> Forþon cnyssað nu
> heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
> sealt-yþa gelac sylf cunnige. (33b–35)[10]

The speaker in *The Seafarer* consciously exposes himself to the challenging voyage and demonstrates a keen introspection into his body and mind, as can be seen in the following lines:

> Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþer-locan,
> min mod-sefa mid mere-flode
> ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide. (58–60)[11]

He is not only able to explore and follow the desires of his heart, but also to verbalise the operations of his mind. Moreover, his capability to give decisive, rational judgements about personal preferences indicates clear intellect. In the course of his journey through exile, he comes to the conclusion that

> Forþon me hatran sind
> Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,

[9] Greenfield argues that the seafarer, like a pilgrim, decided to actively seek God's favor in exile after he has realised the vanity and increasing sterility of earth (*Hero and Exile* 119–20). Stanley, with reference to Whitelock's approach in 1950, adds that "voluntary exile was a penitential discipline in Anglo-Saxon society" (454). I will analyse the possible voluntary motivation of his experience in the section on "Finding a Home."

[10] "Therefore now the thoughts of my heart urge me that I experience the ocean, the play of salt waves on my own."

[11] "Thus now my mind wanders beyond my breast, my spirit along with the flood of water widely wanders around the realm of the whale."

læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
þæt him eorð-welan ece stondað. (64b–67)[12]

A similar affirmation of personal belief has already been observed in *The Wanderer*, but that in *The Seafarer* is more specific. The wanderer claims that experience has given him insight, but he does not clearly express the nature of his transformation. The seafarer, by contrast, decidedly turns away from *þis deade lif* in order to gain access to *Dryhtnes dreamas*, suggesting that he has ceased to believe in the value of earthly goods.

The seafarer has undergone a personal development similar to that of the wanderer, but in the end is much more strengthened in his belief, and his initial sense of selfhood has increased in the course of his experience. In the end, he is self-determined enough to invite others to follow his lead, thereby revealing the poem's didactic aim:

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
ond we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten
in þa ecan eadignesse
þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes,
hyht in heofonum. (117–22a)[13]

The personalities of both speakers are shaped in an almost identical way, with the seafarer being more aware of this formative process on which he actively reflects, while the wanderer mostly just accepts it. The latter indulges in memories of the past that offer little consolation, whereas the former risks a look into the future just far enough to realise that consolation lies there, and not in the past. Both exiles nevertheless share "a turn from the active life towards a more contemplative experience" (Osborn 6).

Linear Time

Time is presented in *The Seafarer* as a more complex unit that comprises well-structured, linear features in addition to cyclical patterns. What both poems have in common, however, is the sense of repetition created by the adverb *oft* that also occurs four times in the first third of *The Seafarer* (3, 8, 24, 29) and assumes a function similar to that in *The Wanderer*, namely to identify recurring phenomena. Another similarity between the poems is how memories of the past make up a large part of the narration, for instance when the seafarer vividly recalls "ealle

[12] "Consequently fiercer are to me the joys of the Lord than this dead life, transient on earth. I believe not that earthly wealth remains forever."
[13] "Let us now think where we have a home, and then think how we may get there, and then we must also strive to proceed to that eternal happiness, where life goes along with the love of God, hope in heaven."

onmedlan eorþan rices" (81, "all the glory of earthly kingdoms") and the way "cyningas, caseras" (82, "kings, emperors") and "gold-giefas" (83, "gold-givers") "mærþa gefremedon / ond on dryht-licestum dome lifdon" (84–85, "achieved most glory and lived in the most lordly majesty").

Yet the seafarer's relation to the present is fundamentally different: although he endures similar sorrows, his attitude towards the present is much more positive, even allowing him to discern an interruption of the daily monotony in the song of the swan.[14] Further evidence for this positive attitude towards time is provided by the fact that the seafarer often uses the past tense to refer to the woes of exile, so that phrases like "gebiden hæbbe" (4), "wunade wræccan lastum" (15) and "in brim-lade bidan sceolde" (30) categorise his sufferings as part of the past. I understand this grammatical feature as an expression of his ability to mentally leave exile behind and to look ahead. Although he still wanders the tracks of exile, its end and a next phase in his life are in sight, even if still obscure. This prospect gives him the necessary strength to break away from the fetters of memory. A focus on the present dominates the notion of time in the seafarer's world: it is a *longung* (47) he feels *nu* (33, 58) that controls him and influences his view of the past.

Besides this significance of the present, the seafarer, in contrast to the wanderer, is far from being blind to progress when he describes how with the upcoming spring "woruld onneteð" (49, "the world hastens on") and is then followed by the already announced *sumer* (54).[15] However, these symptoms of progress do not have a positive meaning in his worldview, as they remind him of his own mortality. The general restriction of a man's life is hinted at in *The Wanderer*, but described with much detail in *The Seafarer* by reference to the process of aging: "monna gehwylc geond middangeard … ealdað ond searað" (89–90, "every man throughout the middle-earth … grows old and withers") and when "yldo him on fareð" his "onsyn blacað" (91, "old age happens to him" his "face grows pale") until eventually his "feorg losað" (94, "soul escapes"). The awareness of personal mortality is indicative of an overall notion of the finiteness of life and therefore stands in clear contrast to the infinite temporal continuum in the wanderer's narration. Moreover, the seafarer assumes that events in life follow a scheduled, yet unpredictable order, because

[14] 19–20, "Hwilum ylfete song dyde ic me to gomene" ("At times I took swansong for my pleasure").

[15] Greenfield argues that the fact that all seasons are mentioned (winter, spring, and summer explicitly, and autumn implicitly by references to decay and aging) constitutes a strong evidence for the sequential structure of time in the poem ("Sylf, Seasons" 208).

Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
ær his tid gegang, to tweon weorþeð:
adl oþþe yldo oþþe ecg-hete. (68–70)[16]

A last aspect that constitutes the seafarer's notion of time is the knowledge about a possible life of *ece eadignes* (120, "lasting happiness") in eternity that will last "awa to ealdre" (79, "for evermore"). He knows that after exile there is another, probably better life lying in front of him, a goal to have in mind that might be the cause for his ability to look ahead and the ease with which he leaves the past behind. We may conclude that in *The Seafarer*, the theme of present—as a preparation for the future—outweighs that of past, and that memories of former joys also play a role here, but are explicitly classified as components of the past, allowing the speaker to concentrate on his dealing with the present. The linear structure of time explicitly aims at arriving in the heavenly home, while acknowledging that life on earth may not take one there in a straight line but may be interrupted or unexpectedly diverted.

Life on Earth

After an analysis of their personalities, I will now demonstrate that the seafarer and the wanderer were born and raised in an almost identical cultural environment. Their lifestyle was that of warriors in a heroic society, full of prosperity, entertainment, and abundant luxuries. This society taught them fundamental heroic virtues, some of which become objects of reflection in their exile. This section will outline this culture and the heroic virtues it comprises before discussing the relevance their cultural background still has in the exiles' present lives. With the idea of a physical and spiritual journey in mind, the following pages illustrate the starting point of this journey, providing an answer to the question where the exiles come from.

Heroic Community

In the heroic community, the mead-hall as a place to perform the social practice of mead-drinking is of central importance, with regard to which Green designates "the function of the hall as container and boundary of human activity … and [as] the symbol of the social order" (510). Although the wanderer plays rather a passive role in the lyric present, he recalls his active participation in the social domain. The memory leads him to bewail its loss: *seledreorig*, he travels in search of a *sinces brytta* (25, "sorrowful for [lack of] a hall"; "dispenser of treasure"). The constantly

[16] "Always one of three things happen before his time is to come, becomes a matter of uncertainty: disease or age or sword-hate."

recurring image of the *meoduheall* (27; 78 *winsalo*) haunts his memory.[17] Mead-hall culture formed an integral component of the seafarer's life as well, although his account of it is less definite. He describes the archetypal landsman as "se þe ah lifes wyn / gebiden in burgum, bealo-siþa hwon, / wlonc ond wingal" (27–29a, "he who has spent his life in towns, endured few misfortunes, proud and flushed with wine"). Despite the general tone of this account of the common life, it can easily be read as one of his own life, too, because his mind is full of vivid recollections of *hleahtor wera* (21, "laughter of men") and *medodrinc* (22, "mead-drinking"), pleasures he now looks for in vain. Prior to their departure, the warriors found joy in mead, the harp, and women (*Sf* 44–45; *Wd* 34–36). Taken together, these feasting images "imply warmth and hope for the exile who sees only his narrow predicament as one capable of remedy in another place, another time" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 101).

An equally important element of their socialisation was wealth. The wanderer contrasts the paths of exile to his former existence in his observation that those are neither *wunden gold* (32, "wound gold") nor *foldan blæd* (33, "the prosperity of the land"). In the seafarer's culture, it seems to have been common practice to use riches in an effort to procure God's favour for those who have passed away:

> þeah þe græf wille golde stregan
> broþor his geborenum, byrgan be deadum
> maþmum mislicum þæt hine mid wille,
> ne mæg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful
> gold to geoce for Godes egsan. (*Sf* 97–101)[18]

His familiarity with this custom is overshadowed by his now irrevocable certainty about its vanity. Treasures served not just as funerary objects but also formed part of an important social custom amongst the members of heroic societies. Irving argues that "to the Germanic mind, what binds such a community together is the exchange of material wealth, the gold and silver" (155). This ritual is recalled in our poems as *hringþege* (*Sf* 44, "ring-receiving") or *sincþege* (*Wd* 34, "treasure-receiving"), along with its significance for the reproduction of loyal bonds between lord and retainer. In terms of spatially locating oneself, setting off for exile means stepping out of the protective boundaries of the hall and leaving behind all known sources of orientation. Given that the heroic culture defined every aspect of their former life, it is hardly surprising that the speakers now sink into deep mourning and melancholy when "the fall of princes, the ruin of courts

[17] See Hume's article "The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry" for a comprehensive account of the social meaning of the hall in Anglo-Saxon literature; she would even go so far as to suggest a reading of the exile as a form of *anti-hall*.

[18] "Although a brother may want to strew gold in the grave of his born brother, bury by the dead various treasures that he wants with him, he cannot give gold to the soul full of sins as a help before the wrath of God."

and the dispersal of the comitatus" are to be read as "the most potent symbols for the mutability of worldly glory" (Stanley 463). In addition, the detailed commentaries on heroic life serve to increase, by means of contrast, the effectiveness of the image of present misery.

Heroic Virtues

Apart from being trained how to feast and drink like a warrior, their culture has given the wanderer and the seafarer the fundamental virtues that guide the everyday behaviour of the *modge magupegnas* (*Wd* 62, "bold young retainers") and constitute a code of heroic conduct that is still recognisable in their current behaviour. The virtue of emotional control, for instance, is perfectly illustrated in a statement by the wanderer:

> Ic to soþe wat
> þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þeaw,
> þæt he his ferð-locan fæste binde,
> healde his hord-cofan, hycge swa he wille. (11b–14)[19]

The ability, if not duty, to always keep emotions under full control was important in order to maintain a reputation, "forþon dom-georne dreorigne oft / in hyra breost-cofan bindað fæste" (*Wd* 17–18)[20]—which is reflected in the wanderer's behaviour: "swa ic mod-sefan minne sceolde … feterum sælan" (19–21).[21] Neville observes that "the binding is performed by the individual, not upon him"; against a backdrop of larger forces outside his control, he "maintains himself through the exercise of control over his mind—a limited kind of power, but still valuable" (Neville 113). For a profound interpretation of this act, Malcom Godden's observation that "the Anglo-Saxons typically figured emotions as acts of personal volition" (Klein 121) is indispensable. Generally speaking, "the self-discipline of the isolated individual" is an expression of what "in the context of heroic poetry are the fundamental human virtues: courage and open-eyed resistance to the irresistible forces of the world" (Irving 163). The disintegrating world around the exile hardly provides any orientation, so that he willingly recalls the rules that guided his past life (Irving 160). Even though the wanderer might proceed on his journey in a physical sense, he remains mentally at his starting point and thereby inhibits his overall progress.

The seafarer gives a comparable account of emotional control, yet it cannot be said with certainty whether he had already internalised this rule from the beginning, or whether he only comes to acknowledge its validity during exile. He claims:

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[19] "I truly know that it is a noble custom in a man to firmly bind his soul's enclosure, confine his heart, think what he may."
[20] "Because the ambitious ones often bind dreariness firmly in their breast-chamber."
[21] "Thus I had to restrain my spirit with fetters."

Stieran mon sceal strongum mode ond þæt on staþelum healdan,
ond gewis werum, wisum clæne;
scyle monna gehwylc mid gemete healdan
wiþ leofne lufan ond wið laþne bealo. (109–12)[22]

Aside from keeping composure, showing loyalty was also crucial in the heroic community. The wanderer's dream of an encounter with his master depicts a ritualistic exchange of loyalty for protection, in which he "his mon-dryhten / clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge / honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær / in geardagum gief-stolas breac" (41b–44).[23]

The seafarer states that in order to be remembered after death, one has to prove one's courage in brave deeds to earn the praise of those one has left behind; it is in this way that the forefathers "mærþa gefremedon" (84, "achieved glory"). While bravery probably also plays a role in the wanderer's community, it is the seafarer who explicitly makes it a subject of discussion when he states that "eorla gehwam æfter-cweþendra / lof lifgendra last-worda betst" (72–73),[24] a reputation one earns through deeds on earth against enemies secular or spiritual (72–80). In summary, emotional self-discipline, loyalty, courage in brave deeds and temperance in speech were the central virtues in the heroic communities of the wanderer and the seafarer.

Man in Transition

On their journey, the individuals characterised in the above pages not only have to locate themselves in time, but also in space. The locus of exile is characterised first and foremost by "physical and psychological alienation from the heroic hall"; it "is figured as a loss of place and consignment to perpetual movement" (Klein 115). Exile is thus conceptualised at once as a place in the factual sense and as a loss of place in a more symbolic sense. In this section I will analyse how exile is presented in the poems, focusing on the individual's response and the function of exile in the overall context of the journey.

Representations of Exile

Greenfield provides a comprehensive typology of the exile theme in Anglo-Saxon literature, identifying "four aspects or concomitants of the exile state" (*Hero and Exile* 126). I will deploy his categorisation here in order to outline the representation

[22] "A man must steer with a strong mind and keep that in fixed condition, true to his pledges, clean in his manners; each man should keep in proportion love for his friend and malice towards the hated."
[23] "Embraces and kisses his lord, and lays hands and head in his lap, as he at previously, in days of old, used to enjoy the thrones of grace."
[24] "The praise of the living spoken after him is every man's best reputation."

of exile in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* without having to elaborate on every detail given in the texts, and to prove that each poet draws on this traditionally formulaic expression of the theme in his work.

The first formative aspect is a "status of excommunication" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 126) that refers to the utter loneliness of the exiles, expressed not only in the abovementioned friendlessness, but also in the absolute silence perceived by the seafarer (*Sf* 18), which is only interrupted by occasional sounds of non-human nature. The second aspect can be considered an augmentation of the first, as it regards the "deprivation" of "properties rang[ing] from the physical ones of gold and land to abstract concepts of comforts and joy" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 126): the wanderer mourns the absence of gold and prosperity together with his being "eðle bidæled" (20, "bereft of a home"), and the seafarer laments how he wanders "wine-mægum bidroren" (16, "deprived of loving kinsmen"). The third concomitant of exile describes the interior condition of the individual, more precisely his "state of mind" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 128). In the case of the wanderer, formulaic expression for his sorrow is to be found in terms such as *earmcearig* (*Wd* 20), *wintercearig* (24) and *seledreorig* (25); emotional suffering in exile is traditionally referred to by a combination of compounds with *-cearig*, *-dreorig* or *-werig* (*Sf* 29), and more periphrastic figures such as "beoð þy hefigran heortan benne" (*Wd* 49, "the wounds of his heart are the heavier for it"). Ultimately, the "movement in or into exile" forms the last component of the formulaic tradition, which can be further subdivided into five "major categories" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 128). As was the case with all previous aspects, these subcategories recur in the poems. "A sense of direction away from the 'homeland'," (128) the first step of this progress, emerges in the wanderer's being "freo-mægum feor" (21, "far from kinsmen") and even more clearly in the seafarer's compulsion to "on flod-wegas feor gewitan" (52, "depart away on waterways"), while *gewitan*, together with *hean streamas* (34), at the same time exemplifies the second subcategory, the "departure or initiative movement into exile" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 128). This departure is temporally and spatially expanded into an "initiative-continuative movement" (128), as for instance when the wanderer "longe sceolde wadan wræclastas" (3b–5a) and the seafarer's "mod-sefa … ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide" (59–60, "spirit wanders widely in the realm of the whale"). A yet further expansion of the movement is indicated by the fourth subcategory, the "endurance of hardships" (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 129) the exiles have to withstand in their abode, while they either *wadan* (*Wd* 5), *stondan* (*Wd* 97), *wunian* (*Sf* 15) or *lecgan* (57) in "exile-tracks," a term whose frequent occurrence forms a leitmotiv in both narrations (*Wd* 5, 33, 97; *Sf* 15, 57). The final part of this generic movement is the "seeking" of its overall goal (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 129), which is perfectly expressed in the seafarer's question "hwær we ham agen" (117).

Interpretations of Exile

Now that it has been sufficiently demonstrated that both poems represent the exile-theme in full compliance with the formulaic tradition identified by Greenfield, its meaning and function for the individual will constitute the second analytical step.

Both speakers are exposed to a threatening snowstorm, in the course of which "hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged" (*Wd* 48, "hoar-frost and snow, mixed with hail") aggravate their plight on the *isceald sæ* (*Sf* 14, "ice-cold sea"), a weather that constantly "provides the impetus for [each] speaker's recognition of his personal mortality" (Greenfield, "Sylf, Seasons" 208). Aside from the fact that the "imagery of frozenness and barrenness" (Holton 210) stands in marked contrast to the warmth of the hall, it also symbolises the general sterility of earth, so that the *corna caldast* (*Sf* 33, "coldest of grains") of the hailstorm can be interpreted as "a conscious inversion of the fecundity of Paradise" (Holton 210) brought out in contrast with the observation "bearwas blostmum nimað" (48, "the groves move into blossom") in the following passage.

The surrounding water is a concept both characters mention repeatedly, never without a remark on its paralysing coldness, for the wanderer complains of the *hrimceald sæ* (4) and its *wapuma gebind* (24, "binding of waves"), and the seafarer emphasises the iciness of the waves (14, 19). The temperature not only freezes the landscape, but also impedes the seafarer's bodily functions: he laments how "calde geþrungen. / Fruron mine fet, forste gebunden, / caldum clommum" (8b–10a).[25] The part of the body most important for forward movement is bound by fetters of frost, to the effect that the natural world around him literally holds him prisoner. It is unclear who or what really controls his movement here, as it is rather the "atol yþa gewealc" (6, "horrid tossing of waves") than the seafarer's own effort that determines the direction and speed of his odyssey—the forces of nature prevail over his self-determination simply by impairing his physical abilities. This bitter struggle against the destructive waves of the ocean is further complicated by an all-surrounding darkness evidenced in the tautology "nap nihtscua" (*Sf* 31a, "the shades of the night grew dark"; *Wd* 104). I suggest an interpretation of this image of cloudiness as an allusion to the clouded minds of the exiles, which can only be enlightened in the course of time with the growing insight that is only to be gained through the wisdom of experience.

Besides all these causes of misery, it is their social isolation that especially gnaws at the men, yet at the same time it constitutes the one critical aspect of their experience that impels their progress and prompts them to leave the past behind. The absence of lord and kinsmen, or rather that of any other human being at all, is referenced in a way that is of particular interest for the analysis here due to a remarkable structural congruence. Each of them bemoans a lack of comfort:

[25] "Oppressed by coldness were my feet, bound by frost, by cold fetters."

hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
…
mec freondleasne frefran wolde. (*Wd* 26–28)[26]

nænig hleo-mæga
fea-sceaftig ferhð frefran meahte. (*Sf* 25b–26)[27]

The perceived scale of suffering constantly increases because there "nis nu cwicra nan" (*Wd* 9) with whom to share the own sorrow. The fact that each exile considers the idea of openly voicing his distress shows on the one hand that the misery has reached a dimension where it is impossible to bear it all alone any longer, on the other hand that the exiles start to question the validity of heroic values outside of heroic societies. As they realise that to disguise thoughts and emotions is of no help anymore, they start to detach themselves from the behavioural bonds that tie them to the past and are finally able to advance in the spiritual sense, too. Because comfort cannot be found in kinsmen, the speakers develop a motivation to seek it elsewhere. The wanderer is stuck in a repetitive cycle of mourning that requires effective strategies of coping in order not to perish under its threat. His "sorg bið geniwad" (50, "sorrow is renewed") again and again and he claims that no one who has not gone through an experience like his will ever understand "hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan" (30, "how cruel is sorrow as company"). I argue that his personal strategy of coping can be discerned between the lines of the poem as a whole, a strategy that can be described as entering into a dialogue with God, whom the wanderer believes will eventually answer his constant lamentations. Even though he is aware of the importance of not talking about feelings, he has by now realised the insignificance of this principle—in exile there is nobody to notice whether he *asæcgð* (11) or *bindeð* (18) his heart, except for God, who will reward only those who actively seek for mercy.

With consideration of all the imagery mentioned above, "its distinctive combination of emotional, physical and social stress produces a vivid and pathetic picture of the Anglo-Saxon exile" (Shippey 56). The highly effective multi-layered challenge of exile demands "the ability to negotiate his environment—physically, psychologically, and intellectually—[which] is figured as a crucial component of the exile's spiritual awakening" as part of which "the hardships of the natural world function as educative tools" (Klein 118). The turbulent ocean is the place where this spiritual awakening takes place, the tossing waves initially "indicate the spiritually lost condition" (Holton 210) of the once heroic warrior, with "the chaos of the sea [being] a metaphor for lack of grace" (214). Yet it turns out that the sea has further significance for the physical and spiritual journey of the exiles, because "transcendentally it has been endowed with a far more inspiring notion:

[26] "Where I might find one far or near who would comfort my friendless self."
[27] "Not any protection of kinsmen could comfort the destitute soul."

the passage to heavenly life" (214). The almost unbearable suffering on the wintry ocean is thus necessary because "the progress by which the heavenly fatherland can be reached always starts with the experience of tribulation" (Diekstra 438), which is exactly the sort of experience that represents the only possible path to understanding. In treading this path, the wanderer and the seafarer have learned that in order to find comfort in heaven and to ensure a life in eternity, it is absolutely essential to turn away from those values and goods cherished on earth and to actively open up to the receiving of grace.

Having said this, it seems reasonable that the seafarer might have departed into exile on a voluntary basis, which is why at the end of this section I would like to make a final comment on three passages that provide sufficient evidence for this theory. The first one is the following:

> Forþon cnyssað nu
> heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
> sealt-yþa gelac self cunnige;
> monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
> ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
> el-þeodigra eard gesece. (33b–38)[28]

It is his *heort*, not his mind, together with his *modes lust* that urges him to travel. Desire is a sentiment of an inherently strong nature, and can be considered the opposite of reason. Although an exploration of dangerous waters also complies with the heroic notion of proving courage, and might therefore be a conscious decision to acquire renown, in this case it is clear that the seafarer is admonished by an intrinsic, more spiritual than merely social motivation, initiated by his preceding recognition of the sterility of earth. This impression is confirmed in his explanation that "hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað" (47, "he who puts out to sea experiences longing"), which is the reason why he personally focusses on the experience itself, the *yða gewealc* (46), and tries not to be distracted by memory of former joys. In addition, he states that

> ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
> sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
> flod-wegas feor gewitan. (50–52)[29]

Right before this statement, the arrival of spring in the city is described, a phenomenon that for the seafarer is a reflection of the transitory character of the

[28] "Therefore now the thoughts of my heart urge me that I experience the ocean, the play of salt waves on my own; the desire of the mind each time admonishes the soul to make a journey, that I seek a foreign land far from here."

[29] "All these things admonish the one keen of mind to make a journey, for the one who thinks thus to depart on far waterways."

earth and therefore reason enough for him to follow his urge to explore the waterways for a possible alternative to the transitory life.

Finding a Home

The issue of transience and the way the individual comes to terms with it is distinctive of elegiac poems such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The transience of earth and life is a problem both speakers address and attempt to deal with in similar ways. One effect of its depiction is to highlight the emptiness and mutability of earth, another is the glorification of the heavenly kingdom owing to the marked contrast between earthly instability and divine stability. I will now outline the transience of earth and the way it affects the worldview and behaviour of the speakers in order to shed a light on the significance of heaven in the journey of the exiles, and on the way it represents a desirable aim.

Transience and Instability on Earth

The most straightforward reflection on transience is the extensive application of the *ubi sunt*-motif in *The Wanderer*:

> Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþum-gyfa?
> Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon sele-dreamas?
> Eala beorht bune! Eala byrn-wiga!
> Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
> genap under niht-helm, swa heo no wære! (92–96)[30]

It can be derived from this comprehensive account that decay does not spare anything, neither living beings nor material objects nor abstract concepts, but that everything constitutive of the heroic life is transient. The seafarer adds that "gedroren is þeos duguð eal" (86, "perished is all this nobility"; see also *Wd* 36, 79). In addition to its apparent reference to lifelessness, I argue that the verb *dreosan* ("fall, perish") can also connote uselessness. In our poems, it appears to suggest both: past heroes have themselves ceased to be, but the joys of the hall have also lost their value for the characters.

In combination with statements like "dreamas sind gewitene" (*Sf* 86, "joys have departed") and "wyn eal gedreas" (*Wd* 36), the following lines affirm how everything living, material and abstract is impermanent:

[30] "Where has the horse gone? Where has the man gone? Where has the treasure-giver gone? Where have the seats of feasts gone? Where are the hall-joys? Alas, the bright cups! Alas, the mailed warrior! Alas, the lord's majesty! How that time departed, darkened under the night's curtain, as if it had not been."

Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,
eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð! (*Wd* 108–10)[31]

Forþon me hatran sind
Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
læne on londe. (*Sf* 64b–66a)[32]

The word *læne* reemphasises the transience of earthly life and stresses the spatial and temporal instability of these things. All float away, and therefore nothing is worth holding on to.

In the course of their experience, both speakers have gained the wisdom to recognise the barren emptiness of earth and of life, which enables them to turn away from "þis deade lif," a life whose reality the wanderer ends up questioning with the words "swa heo no wære." These statements reflect the speakers' awareness of the inherent mortality of all existence. Moreover, they imply that earth is no lasting source of vital energy, because it is subject to the change of time due to its material nature, which is why energy and motivation have to be sought elsewhere. Besides, by questioning whether *seo þrag* has ever been an actual part of reality at all, the wanderer also asks whether all that constituted his former life was even true, unconsciously knowing that it was not, as real truth can be found in heaven only.

In response to the all-encompassing transience of which the exiles become increasingly aware, they choose to employ patience and endurance. It is therefore a combination of two central principles that constitutes their strategy of coping: on the one hand, they have internalised that patience is a virtue (see *Wd* 65, 70), a principle they now draw on even in total isolation from the society from which it derives; on the other hand, their experiences have taught them that endurance is the only possible way to positively increase one's chance of survival. Even in isolation the wanderer does not scrutinise the importance of patience, a virtue that will pay off immediately after having borne the miseries of exile. Enduring can be understood as a form of acceptance here: the seafarer has realised that enduring the challenges of earthly life significantly enhances the probability of receiving comfort in heaven because God will have mercy on those who prove persistent in their faith. However, this facet of endurance is one none of them has been taught in his community, but learned by *sylf cunnian* during his experience.

[31] "Here money is transient, here friend is transient, here man is transient, here kin is transient, all this earth's frame loses its value!"
[32] Translated in fn. 12 above.

Comfort and Security in Heaven

The wanderer has learned early on that a weary spirit and a troubled heart are not of help on the passage through exile (see 15–16), as both are effects of indulgence in false goods, in other words, redundant ballast to get rid of. In turn, one who "his treowe gehealdeþ" (112, "keeps his faith") is much more likely to find the path to heaven. It is therefore crucial not to cling to earthly goods, but to let them go and to keep the faith instead. Though it remains unclear until the very last lines what exactly the wanderer and the seafarer are searching for, there are instances that allow for educated guesses. The wanderer "sohte sinces bryttan" (25), which in view of his lamentations over the death of his former lord suggests the search for a new "treasure-giver," yet the possibility of translating *brytta* as Lord with a capital L, indicative then of a search for God, cannot be ruled out. The seafarer's search for *elþeodigra eard* (38) even transgresses "eorþan sceatas" (61, "the corners of the earth"), and since the translation here is similarly ambiguous, "foreign land" can easily be read as an allusion to heaven as well, the more so since *eard* strongly connotes a homeland (Cameron et al. s.v. *eard*, sense 1.a). Both of them are desperate for comfort and already know that they probably will not find it on earth anymore, because everything that once served as a source of *frofor* is either floating away or gone already. By method of elimination, consolation can only be found where stability is to be found, and that is in heaven. The earthly instability is the consequence of the citizens' addiction with false goods and indulgence in sinful pleasures, all of which arouses *meotudes egsa* (108, "the anger of the Creator"). Their behaviour imparts ingratitude towards God's creation, so that He punishes their ignorance inasmuch as he "seo molde oncyrreð" (*Sf* 103, "turns the earth aside"), in the course of which he "yþde swa þisne eard-geard" (*Wd* 85, "has devastated this dwelling place") until "eall þisse worulde wela weste stondeð" (*Wd* 73, "the wealth of all this world stands waste"). God is both the initiator of destruction and the creator of stability. He has in the same way "gestaþelade stiþe grundas, eorþan sceatas ond up-rodor" (*Sf* 104–05).[33] After this irreversible act of devastation, those who hold to a steadfast belief will be saved and eventually accepted into heaven, because "eadig bið se þe eaþ-mod leofaþ; cymeð him seo ar of heofonum, / meotod him þæt mod gestaþelað forþon he in his meahte gelyfeð" (*Sf* 107–08).[34] The seafarer would not make such an affirmation if he did not believe it to be true. In the end, the wanderer, too, arrives spiritually and factually at a point where he can finally confess that "wel bið þam þe him are seceð, / frofre to Fæder on heofonum þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð" (*Wd* 114–15).[35]

[33] "Established firm grounds, the corners of the earth, and the sky."
[34] "Blessed is the one who lives humbly; to him comes the mercy of heaven, the Creator restores in him the spirit, because he believes in his might."
[35] "It will be well for the one who seeks mercy, comfort in the Father in heaven, where all stability stands for us."

Both exiles are now searching for the security of a heavenly home. The narration of the wanderer begins with one who "often experiences mercy," and it ends with the realisation that those who actively seek mercy will in fact receive it and be rewarded with the consolation in God. Even though it is not evident in the beginning, the wanderer has striven for "fæstnung on heofonum" all along, and the same holds true for the seafarer, who even set out to his journey of his own accord, with the clear aim of "foreign land" in mind. The purpose of their entire transition from earth over exile into heaven is summed up in the seafarer's conclusion:

> Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
> ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
> ond we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten
> in þa ecan eadignesse
> þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes,
> hyht in heofonum. (117–22a)[36]

The lesson that *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* convey through the example of the exile is that "in spite of misfortunes and hardships, one should not lose hope, but remain faithful to God: in Heaven one finds the security one cannot find on earth" (Timmer 221).

A Matter of Fate?

When reading the poems, I perceived a certain tension between each individual's attempt to self-determination and its factual impossibility within the unalterable course of events ordered by Fate, which is why I will now delineate the underlying concept of Fate in the poems in order to figure out what this tension consists in. Thereby I will focus on *The Wanderer*, since Fate is less prominent in *The Seafarer*.

The first time *wyrd* is mentioned is in "wyrd bið ful aræd" (5), a phrase whose proper translation still causes much disagreement.[37] I chose a rather common version by translating it as "Fate is fully resolute," denoting a meaning of determination and inalterability at the same time.[38] No matter which exact translation the reader decides on, what all of them have in common is an emphasis on man's lot on earth being determined (*aræd*) from the very beginning by a higher power that lies beyond his range of influence, and that there is no way to elude this lot.

Line 15 describes the inescapability of Fate in detail: "ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstondan, / ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman,"[39] clarifying that nobody,

[36] Translated in fn. 13 above.
[37] See Griffith, "Does *wyrd* mean 'Fate'?"
[38] I find my decision supported by Timmer's suggestion to read *aræd* as the past participle of *arædan*, "to appoint/ determine" (221).
[39] "The one weary in spirit cannot withstand Fate, nor can the troubled heart provide help."

but especially not those with weary minds or troubled hearts, can obstruct or influence the course of events because the operations of Fate stand above what is happening on earth and are uncoupled from it. Here the importance of self-discipline is once again underlined as a necessary requirement for self-determination, which in turn is necessary in order not to break in under the struggle with Fate. It is worth considering the seafarer now, who in line 109 starts to elaborate on the immense importance of self-control and steadfastness. As shown above, the wanderer really strives for self-discipline, but that he at least partly reveals his feelings in the end, because their exposure will bring him closer to God, poses the question in how far Fate and God are connected. I understand both as two self-contained entities that are still closely linked without being synonyms.[40] The ultimate struggle is thus not to withstand Fate—which is futile—but to find the right balance and to know when and to what extent it is appropriate to disclose one's inner self without being categorised as weary spirit. Only those who have found this balance are truly wise.

Line 100 shows on the one hand that *wyrd* is presented in the poem as the instrument of God's will executing the divinely imposed destruction;[41] on the other hand, the attribute *mære* implies that to accept the might of Fate is to accept the will of God and thereby honour him, all in all an expression of true wisdom again. A last reference to *wyrd* appears in line 106: "eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice; / onwendeð wyrda gesceaft woruld under heofonum" (106–07).[42] This passage reveals the genuine function of Fate: to challenge man's willpower and his fortitude. Even though withstanding Fate is evidence of mental and physical strength, the reward of this effort is not the manipulability of the course of life. The real challenge is to endure transience and inalterability long enough to learn that the reward awaits the patient ones in heaven, and "the general idea expressed by these lines seems to be that the solitary one, the exile, lives to see grace, Mercy of God, although he has to undergo all kinds of troubles. He cannot avoid these troubles, for his lot is appointed by God" (Timmer 221). In addition, the effectiveness of this passage is heightened by the fact that it is preceded by considerations about *læne*: if everything one holds dear will float away, will one give way at the sight of its destruction, or stay strong-minded in the service of God? Fate challenges fortitude and patience. I would like to conclude by returning once more to the seafarer and repeat his only explicit reference to Fate, summing up all that I derived from the single references in the wanderer's narration: "wyrd biþ swiþre, / meotud meahtigra þonne ænges monnes gehygd" (115b–16).[43]

[40] Since a profound analysis of the concept of Fate is not the primary aim and would exceed the framework of this paper, I would like to leave it at this short account.
[41] *Wyrd* functions as the subject of a long verse describing the extent of the devastation of the earth.
[42] "All is irksome in the earthly kingdom; the operations of Fate change the world under the heavens."
[43] "Fate is stronger, the Creator is mightier than any man's thought."

Conclusion

The speakers in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* set out on their journeys as two quite different personalities, but both are significantly influenced in their development by external conditions in their state of mind, and thus in their construction of identity, not least because the untamed forces of nature exercise a restricting power over their personal agency. Although they differ in the way they reflect upon and assess their current situation, both of them, in their attempt to cope with the challenges of exile, grow in experience and ultimately gain true wisdom.

Their relation to time is complicated, and their past in the heroic community plays an important role for both men. Firstly, because the contrast to it makes it even harder to bear the present, secondly, because its heroic code of conduct still functions as behavioural orientation, but, thirdly, at the same time symbolises a literal burden from which the exiles have to free themselves in order to advance on their journey.

Exile reminds the wanderer and the seafarer of the finitude of life, and has paralysing effects on them that evolve into a constant power struggle about life and death. At the same time, it triggers a change of attitude towards their former lives and allows them to open up to God. Fate is likely the force that poses the manifold challenges of exile to them in order to test their fortitude. As they master these challenges, they undergo a process of maturation at the end of which they are able to recognise heaven as a source of comfort, and divine consolation as the only good of true value.

In the course of this process, the confrontation with transience constitutes the main lesson the exiles learn, as it emphasises earthly instability and thereby glorifies heavenly stability, making heaven the only desirable aim. After all, heaven is the "home" both the seafarer and the wanderer sought on their journey through exile, a home only open to those who, when physically weakened, remain spiritually strong.

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Landscapes between Heaven and Hell in the Old English Guthlac Material

Verena Klose

Introduction

Nature and more specifically landscape is a space that humans inhabit and share with others, such as animals and plants as well as other products and features of the earth. Naturally, the relationship between the individual and the physical world is influenced by various factors that are subject to change. In any case, one expects that the experiences humans have in and with the environment are represented in the cultural images of nature that they create. Accordingly, literature functions as a form of artistic expression that conveys attitudes and behaviours towards the natural world.[1] The art historian W. J. T. Mitchell argues that landscape can be "a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other" while it constitutes at the same time "a natural scene mediated by culture" (Mitchell 5). This means that there is never an experience of nature that is purely sensory or physical; the perception of the landscape is also influenced by the cultural meanings and values that are imprinted on it. These impressions are based on any previous contact with and exposure to nature that is preserved either as

[1] This is essentially the widest definition of ecocriticism as a literary theory that is interested in the "study of the relationship between literature and physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii), especially in the mutual influence between man and nature. One ecocritical premise is to not measure landscape by its usefulness or to see it solely as a potential object of aesthetic pleasure, but to recognise it as an independent entity with an intrinsic value and dignity

individual experiences or as the understandings of a whole group of people as they are passed down across generations.

Religion is certainly an important part of this mediating culture, especially in the Middle Ages. It has not only a significant impact on the recognition of any intrinsic value of any non-human life, but also on the way that humans are aware of the world and their standing in it. For instance, many have argued that the Abrahamic religions with their belief that the earth was created by God so that humanity could inhabit it contribute to the anthropocentric perspective on nature that is predominant in Western society today. If one examines the Bible as the cultural artefact that is the basis of the Judaeo-Christian religions, one finds that it is concerned with the concrete landscapes inhabited by people as well as with metaphysical places like heaven and hell. However, these metaphysical landscapes are not merely abstract concepts but notions that are often described in naturalistic terms; one example of this would be the depiction of Paradise as the Garden of Eden which is the embodiment of a perfectly delightful and harmonious place that leaves nothing to be desired. Likewise, those settings are crucial to the human self-awareness as creatures placed within God's creation who simultaneously affect and are affected by it. In her study *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, Jennifer Neville states that "humanity is first of all situated both morally and spatially between heaven and hell and is thus subject to forces from both" (23). This paper will argue that the same can be said of the landscapes that they inhabit.

The surviving texts about Saint Guthlac of Crowland and his dwelling-place in the Fens constitute an important source for the early history of East Anglia and the creation of this local saint's cult. The main source for his cult and the accounts about him is the Anglo-Latin saint's life *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* by the monk Felix. There is little information about the author himself, although it is assumed that he lived and worked in East Anglia (Colgrave 16). In the Prologue of his *Vita*, Felix dedicates the text to king Ælfwald who was the ruler of said kingdom from 713 until 749 (Gonser 15–19, Colgrave 15). After the consideration of intra- as well as extradiegetic evidence, Colgrave dates the *Vita* between 730 and 740 (19).

The Anglo-Latin *Vita* inspired several other works on the saint. One of them is an Old English translation that can be found in Cotton Vespian D. xxi and which was edited in 1909 by Paul Gonser. The Old English version of this *Vita* is not a close translation, but it follows the narrative outline of the Latin text. Another fragment consisting of two slightly altered chapters (sections four and five) from the *The Life of St Guthlac* is included in the Vercelli Book as Homily XXIII (Scragg 383–94). Additionally, there are several anonymous epitomes and also a Middle English translation of the *Life* (Colgrave 20–25).

The two poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* appear in the Exeter Book, which is dated to the latter half of the tenth century (Roberts 12). The poems were composed in Mercia, most likely by different writers. Even though it is not possible to

determine the exact extent to which the authors made use of the saint's life in their writing process, it is generally agreed that the *Guthlac B* poet follows the *Vita* more closely and uses especially the fiftieth chapter as a basis for the poem, which focusses on the saint's death (Roberts 36). The *Guthlac A* poet, on the other hand, gives a more general account of the saint's life that seems to be informed by the Latin source but alludes only modestly to its main features (Roberts 19–23, Colgrave 20).

The texts on the English saint Guthlac offer valuable material for a discussion about morally charged landscapes, because the protagonist is not a regular human being but in his role as a saint he functions as a mediator between a morally ambiguous human nature and the deity. In his dwelling on earth, Guthlac encounters both divine and demonic settings, and the natural world does not remain unaffected by his presence. In literature, the portrayal of the outer world is oftentimes closely connected to the inner world of the literary characters. For instance, the landscape often serves as a generic background that is taken for granted, as a stage on which the protagonist has to face their personal trial, as a threatening and overpowering force, or even as an aesthetically pleasing object. Therefore, it is important to analyse landscape not only as an independent entity that is preserved in textual form, but also as a medium that can be used to discuss and project moral issues. This paper will focus on the mediation between the natural world and Guthlac as a man who exposes himself to a specific external setting as an act of devotion to God in order to pursue spiritual growth and achieve absolute purity of the soul. For this, there will be a concise overview of the textual portrayal of landscape as it can be found in the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* by Felix, the Anglo-Saxon translation of this life, and in the two poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*. A survey of the literary and theological concepts that inform the texts is essential for the analysis of landscape as a cultural image that mediates between nature and humankind. This paper's emphasis will be on the most distinctive landscape features found in the poems and how they relate to some of their major themes, namely spiritual pilgrimage, exile, and the cosmic battle between good and evil, as well as to the abovementioned metaphysical landscapes of heaven and hell.

Fens, Deserts, and Mountains: Locating Landscapes in the Guthlac Material

The Portrayal of Landscape in the Guthlac Material

Felix's *Vita* documents the spiritual journey of a man of noble birth who spends the first part of his life serving as a soldier and establishing himself as a reasonably successful military leader. One night, he is overcome by an existential crisis which leads to his conversion and entrance into ecclesiastical life. After taking the

monastic vows and spending two years at the monastery of Repton, he decides to leave the religious community in order to pursue life as a hermit in the wilderness. Guthlac settles on an island that is situated in the fens and builds his hermitage there. Based on contemporary events described in the text as well as references to ruling kings that can be verified with other historical sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, one can determine 714 as the year of his death (Roberts 1).

The place that he chooses as his settlement is depicted in various ways in the Guthlac material. In the *Vita*, Felix describes the region to which Guthlac decides to retreat as "inmensae magnitudinis aterrima palus, nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus" (Colgrave 86).[2] This fen is located near Cambridge, between the River Granta and the North Sea. Furthermore, Felix presents the marshlands as a vast and far-stretching desert (*vastissimus heremus*, Colgrave 86; *spatiosus heremus*, Colgrave 88) with wild places (*inculta loca*, Colgrave 86). On his search for an adequate spot, Guthlac consults the natives of the region, who point him towards an island called Crowland in the middle of the marsh. He even has to travel by boat in order to reach the isle, which shows that it is an intensification of the aforementioned vast and wild region. It is not only located in "the more remote and hidden parts of that desert" (89) but due to its closeness to the river and sea also surrounded by water or at least distinctively muddy moors, which adds the sense of a liminal borderland (89). The inhospitality of the location is further illustrated by the previous attempts of occupation that were all in vain: many have tried to live on the island but eventually they all had to give up due to the unknown monsters of the desert ("incognita heremi monstra," Colgrave 88) and the terrors of various shapes ("diversarum formarum terrores," Colgrave 88) that haunted the place.

Thus main attributes of the territory are not only its concrete topography (size, natural features) but also the lack of human cultivation that corresponds to the threatening unknown and the "monsters" it emanates. The uncultivated conditions in this waste land are expressed by the term *incultus* which is used to describe the fens (Colgrave 86; 88). *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* gives several meanings for the word *heremus*, which is used whenever Felix talks about the setting; among them are "desert," "wilderness," and "waste land" (Howlett s.v. *heremus*). It is also used to refer to a solitary life and the eremitic life in general. While a desert is usually imagined as a dry, barren area of land that is characteristically sandy, hot, waterless, desolate, and mostly without any vegetation, this vernacular version is composed of features that are representative of the local English landscape, but shares the notion of desolation and wilderness with the conventional desert. Therefore, Felix establishes the marshlands as an English version of

[2] "A most dismal fen of immense size … now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams" (ch. 24: Colgrave 87).

the desert by referring to the Fens as a desert while giving a description of a native landscape that is characterised by marshes, bogs, various waters, and fog. All in all, these factors contribute to a place that offers the ideal conditions for Guthlac's solitary retreat. Accordingly, he begins to dwell on the island and builds himself a hut in the side of a *tumulus* ("mound," Colgrave 92).

The Old English *Life of St Guthlac* mostly follows the Latin source in its portrayal of the environment that Guthlac discovers. It also emphasises that it concerns a "fen of immense size" ("fenn unmætre mycelnysse," Gonser 113) and draws attention to the general "vast wilderness" (*widgill westen*, 113) that defines the land. The translation also makes use of authentic knowledge of the place and illustrates the fen's size by referring to specific place names. In addition to the River Grante, which is already mentioned in Felix's *Vita*, it refers to the nearby city Granteceaster and describes the moorlands as extending from there to the North Sea (Gonser 113). Furthermore, the translation expands on the marshland's distinct elements: "Þær synd unmæte moras, hwilon sweart wætersteal, and hwilon fule eariþas yrnende, and swylce eac manige ealand, and hreod, and beorhgas, and treowgewrido" (Gonser 113).[3]

Both Felix's *Vita* and the Anglo-Saxon translation agree on the moor as a setting that is characterised by the juxtaposition of water and earth, which manifests itself in its bogs, streams, and islands, but the *Life* also notes reeds, hills, and thickets. While it can be argued that the "thickets of trees" echo the "wooded islands" in Felix, the reeds and hills are definitely an addition of the Anglo-Saxon text. Especially the *beorgas* are of significance throughout the text, as the following analysis will show.

Concerning the island, its position is described as "on middan þam westene … þæs foresædan fennas, swyðe digle" (*LSt.Guth.* 114).[4] The reasons that are given for the place's lack of inhabitation are the same as in Felix's *Vita*: no man was able to endure its "solitude" (*annys*, 114), seclusion, and the terrors ("menigfealdum brogum and egsum," 114) that are associated with the place. Nevertheless, these bleak circumstances do not keep Guthlac from settling there, "betwyx þa fenlican gewrido þæs widgillan westenes, þæt he ana ongan eardian" (*LSt.Guth.* 115).[5] He finds a *hlaw mycel* ("great mound," 118) with a *wæterseað* ("water-pit," 118) on which he then erects a house.

In comparison, the two poems do not speak in great detail about the specifics of Guthlac's settlement. This is understandable in the case of *Guthlac B*, as this text mostly skips the beginning of the saint's settlement in order to focus on the last

[3] "There are immense moorlands, sometimes black stagnant water, sometimes foul water-streams flowing, and also many islands, and reeds, and hills, and thickets of trees." References to the Anglo-Saxon *Life of Saint Guthlac* follow the edition by Gonser. Translations of the Old English primary texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

[4] "In the middle of the wilderness of the fens mentioned before, very secret."

[5] "Among the fenlike thickets of that vast wilderness, which he began to inhabit alone."

part of the saint's life, especially on the events and temptations before his death. Still, the poet makes a point of emphasising the wilderness (*westen*, 899a; 935a[6]) of the dwelling-place that the holy man has chosen for himself. Moreover, the text does not locate the setting on an island until the very end: in Guthlac's dying moments, "beofode þæt ealond, / foldwong onsprong" ("that island trembled, the earthly plain burst forth," 1324b–26a) and his servant travels by boat to deliver the message of the hermit's death to his sister (1326a–43b). According to this section, which is charged with imagery referring to a water journey, the island is not merely a dry spot in a marshy region, but rather surrounded by the (open) sea and therefore strictly separated from the mainland. For instance, the portrayal of the servant's journey includes a wide range of kennings for the word "ship": *wæghengest* ("sea-steed," 1329a), *wæterþisa* ("water-rusher," 1329b; this term can denote either a ship or a whale), *brimwudu* ("sea-wood," 1331b), *lagumearg* ("sea-steed," 1332b), and *hærnflota* ("wave-floater," 1333b). In this situation, both the island and the sea convey a sense of insecurity and mobility that is opposed to the *sondlond* ("sea-shore" or "sandy land," 1334b) that is "grond wið greote" ("ground with dust," 1335a) and therefore suggests stability and the security of a harbour. This can be seen as a reflection of the North Sea which is alluded to in both prose versions of Guthlac's hagiography. Although the poet does not specifically state the proximity to the sea, he apparently presumes a certain basic knowledge of the saint and a familiarity with the location of his residence.

Guthlac A, on the other hand, does not mention the island at all, but concentrates on the *beorg* and Guthlac's heroic and saintly actions in the wilderness. At the beginning, the poem explicitly introduces the concept of voluntarily leaving the safety and comfort of human civilisation: "sume þa wuniað on westennum / secað and gesittað sylfra willum / hamas on heolstrum" (81–83a).[7] Jennifer Neville argues that this choice of habitat distinguishes the saints from people who are engrossed in worldly matters such as wealth; in Guthlac's case, that he chooses to live as a hermit under such dire conditions is even a result of his "holy condition" and "inner saintliness" (125). This concept of a self-imposed exile comes into practice when the former soldier begins to live on his own in a *beorgsepel* ("mountain-dwelling," 102a) and to defend his *bold on beorge* ("building on the hill," 140a) despite the hardships that await him there. Moreover, the specific place where he erects his home is described as a *beorg on bearwe* ("mountain in a grove," 148a), which is certainly reminiscent of the woods mentioned in both Felix's *Vita* and the Anglo-Saxon *Life*.

The omission of a specific scenery in the poems results in a rather generic description of the landscape in the poetic accounts in comparison to the prose texts. While they appear to be not overly concerned with the outside world as a scenic

[6] All quotations of the Guthlac poems are taken from Jane Roberts's edition.

[7] "Some then dwell in the wilderness, they search for and settle down in homes in the darkness by their own will."

framework, they do not depict the environment as something that is essentially evil or sinister in itself either. This is true for both poems; for example, the mountains are described as *grene beorgas* (232b) in *Guthlac A*, a rather pleasant and peaceful image that is a stark contrast to the *wræcmægas* ("devils," 231b) that used to inhabit it. The focus is more on the impact that the environment has on the saint, as well as the creatures that are part of the natural setting and the way that they interact with the hermit.

A theme that the two poems have in common is the outstanding presence of the *beorg*. Among others, Hugh Magennis identifies the hill that the saint settles on as the "key feature" of the physical setting in the Guthlac poems which should be understood in spiritual and symbolic terms (181–82). The analysis of the *beorg* as a crucial element of the poetic landscape has been the object of academic discussion for a long time. While the Latin *Vita* as well as the Anglo-Saxon *Life* are well-defined in their use of the words *tumulus* and *hlæw*—both signifying "mound"—for the site that Guthlac decides to inhabit, neither of the poems follows this notion. Thus the Old English *beorg* is often seen as a rather ambiguous term that can be understood in multiple ways. Laurence K. Shook argues that the translation of *beorg* as a "hill" or "mountain" is inconsistent with the geographical setting of the Crowland fens and should therefore rather be rendered as "burial mound" or "barrow," following the Latin hagiography. In its symbolic mode, the barrow denotes attributes that are important in the spiritual Christian life: "grace, struggle, the Will of God, temporal perseverance, and eternal salvation" (10). In contrast, Paul F. Reichardt proposes that "mountain" is in fact the most appropriate interpretation, because "this reading creates important symbolic associations which would have reinforced the poem's themes in the minds of its original Anglo-Saxon audience" (331). Hence, Reichardt links the *beorg* to an overarching and comprehensive symbolic pattern: he finds that it resonates with the "mount of saintliness" as it can be found in early Christian theology so that a contemporary audience would have interpreted Guthlac's conquest as the symbolic ascent of a mountain that would transform him into a holy person (336). For him, the mountain is both a geographical setting and a symbol of "interior spiritual achievement," because it indicates the state of ascetic perfection that Guthlac is able to reach (335). Karl P. Wentersdorf counters that although the mountain is a widely used symbol in both Christian and heathen mythology, this reading ignores the identification of the *beorg* as a *tumulus* in Felix's *Vita* (135). For him, Guthlac's claim and defence of the mound not only represents his individual struggle and "spiritual war against his personal demons" but also the Church's endeavour to fully convert England and to cast out any "lingering remnants of heathendom" (136).

In any case, all four texts agree on the distinctiveness and peculiarity of the location that Guthlac selects for his dwelling. Both an island and a mountain, be it a natural elevation or one that was created by human intervention, are topographical

landmarks that stand out in the landscape. They also enhance the monk's eremitical status, because they intensify the isolation he voluntarily seeks out. The island, for one, attracts attention as the only dry spot in surroundings that are characterised by their wet and muddy nature. The fact that Guthlac needs a boat to get there shows that the place is not easily accessible but rather separated and shielded from the world. This not only complicates access to the island, it also means that it is harder for the saint to keep in touch with the worldly matters that affected his ordinary life before the hermitage. In the case of a hermit, this obviously constitutes an advantage, because it enables a categorical withdrawal from the earthly community. The same applies to a mountain: first of all, it may be approachable by foot, but the route of ascent may also prove to be difficult and demanding. At the same time, any person who undertakes the climb or walk to the summit of a mountain is automatically exalted in a way. In addition, they are granted a view that exceeds the perspective that one has on the ground in its extent, which is why mountains were often used as preferred location for the strategically convenient erection of buildings, both secular and religious.

Saintly Dwellings: Christian Asceticism in the Desert and its Relation to Guthlac

Guthlac's departure into a self-imposed exile in the marshlands and the subsequent events in his life as an anchorite are the main focus of the texts at hand. The outset of his journey as a saint is similar to those of his holy predecessors, which can be traced in hagiography as well as in the Bible. The idea of leaving one's home and the associated comforts behind in order to expose one's body and mind to the afflictions of wilderness and loneliness for the benefit of gaining wisdom and spiritual strength is a common trope in religious writing. The destination of the monk's departure is also part of a wider hagiographical tradition: as stated before, both Guthlac poems call the English marshland *westen*, which can be translated as both "wilderness" and "desert." Therefore, one can analyse the fens and their literary representation as the portrayal of an external setting that is equivalent to a desert.

The desert as a specific geographical setting has a unique role in the history of Christianity and it figures in both the Old and the New Testament. If one takes the narrative of Exodus as an example, the desert functions mostly "as a place of encounter with God who makes his presence known through revelation, chastisement, nourishment, and protection" there (Rapp 94–95). The Israelites are led by Moses through the desert for forty years until they reach the Promised Land; thus the desert functions as a border between the original and the final state, in both a geographical and a spiritual sense, as the people not only travel from Egypt to the Promised Land, but also focus on their relationship with their creator. This makes the desert a "locus of transformation and transition to a greater unity with God" (95). In the New Testament, the desert features as the location of several significant narratives. For one, John the Baptist announces the coming of Christ

in the desert of Palestine. More importantly, Jesus spends forty days in the desert after his baptism. He spends his time fasting, praying, and contemplating, and is tempted by the devil who takes him "in montem excelsum valde" ("up into a very high mountain") and offers him all the kingdoms of the world that he can see from that perspective (Matt. 4:8–10).[8] In *Guthlac A*, the monk is also lifted up high in the air by demons and they give him the ability to observe the actions of other men in the monasteries who do not live according to God's law (*Guthlac A*, 412–26), with the intention of breaking his spirit and persuading him to give up his quest as a hopeless case. But both Jesus and Guthlac pass this test and overcome the demons that torture them. The biblical account of Christ's temptations is not only the precondition of his later life as a healer and preacher, it also establishes the desert as a space in which evil spirits can potentially take up their residence.

The aspirations of hermits and monks in Late Antiquity who chose the desert as their dwelling-place are a reaction to both the Old and the New Testament, because they wanted to "reenact the experience of the Exodus and … bring alive God's promises to his chosen people given by Jesus" (Rapp 94). The desert myth as it was constructed in early Greek hagiography imagines it as a place where Christians could transform their own souls by living an ascetic life as well as their surroundings by battling against the resident demons (98–99). This gives them the opportunity to "participate and contribute to the history of Salvation" (103). The desert in its inhospitality and dissociation from everything worldly enabled the monks to create a space in which they could prove themselves and their devotion as God's servants. Both the notion of escapism and the major challenge of facing the devil in his domain are part of the fundamental experience of God that the anchorite can find in the desert, which then allows him to lead an authentic life (Schulz and Ziemer 19–23). Furthermore, the constant effort for spiritual growth that all Christians undertake after their baptism can be seen as analogous to the Exodus of the Israelites through the desert. In this understanding, the whole world is interpreted as a desert, in which the individual Christian leads the life of a pilgrim on his or her spiritual journey to heaven (Rapp 102–03).

In the case of Guthlac, the textual accounts reveal a familiarity with several hagiographical writings, most importantly Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*. Saint Anthony settled in the Egyptian desert in the second half of the third century; he is generally considered the first monk who went into the wilderness in order to live as an ascetic. Shortly after Anthony's death in 357, Athanasius began to write the biography of his life, which became one of the most important documents about the solitary ascetic life of early Christian monks (Meyer 3–15). Therefore, one can assume that Felix was familiar with this well-known text. Especially the structure of his *Vita* bears resemblance to the *Vita Antonii*: both Guthlac and Anthony come from a wealthy and privileged background before they take their monastic

[8] Except where otherwise indicated, biblical quotations follow Weber for the Latin and Douay-Rheims for the English (*The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate*).

vows. Anthony's progress as an ascetic monk is symbolised by his change of location and scenery; his retreats become increasingly reclusive the more he advances as a spiritual being (Schulz and Ziemer 36–37). Another outstanding similarity to Guthlac's life is the presence of a summit: the *Vita Antonii* specifically mentions both an actual hill (Mount Kolzim) as well as the concept of an "inner mountain" that is to be conquered and climbed (Schulz and Ziemer 367; Meyer 4–7). Correspondingly, the hill that figures prominently especially in the poems can be identified as a feature of eremitical hagiography, because hills or mountains often dominate the landscape in these writings (Magennis 184).

Guthlac's Surroundings and Their Moral Quality

Divine Light and Paradisal Places

Apart from the concrete landscape of East Anglia as it is depicted in the Guthlac material, the immaterial landscapes of heaven and hell also plays an important role. The premise that these settings can either be described with visual imagery that is based on the natural world or with abstractions that often already carry a moral judgement in them applies to both.

The association of light with heaven and joy is based on both theological and literary conventions. For one, light is a feature of the *locus amoenus*. The *locus amoenus* ("pleasant place") is a literary motif in Classical Western literature that conveys an idealised notion of a landscape that is characterised by tranquil and amiable nature imagery. It embodies the idea of a cultivated and ordered landscape which is typically safe and comfortable for the dweller. The setting is often described with the help of stock images, such as woodlands, a waterscape, and a form of green vegetation. A merging of the classical *locus amoenus* with vernacular features as it was found by Ananya J. Kabir in Old English literature includes "adjectives of greenness, light or space and a noun denoting an open area of vegetation" (144). In contrast, the *locus horribilis* ("dreadful place") can be seen as the opposite of Paradise: "a blighted landscape, place of horror, vast solitude, and impassability, abounding in savage beasts and demons" (John Howe 212).

For that reason, heaven and hell as they are depicted in the Bible and especially in *Genesis A* can be seen as the epitomes of the *locus amoenus* and the *locus horribilis*. As both places refer to the soul's eternal destiny after the body's death, they can be regarded as the two main locations of the landscape of the afterlife in the Christian imagination. Their contrasting juxtaposition creates a spectrum of possibilities for a landscape portrayal that conveys both physical features and a Christian morality. Naturally, this notion influences the perception and evaluation of earthly landscapes, as the concrete realities of this world are compared to what one expects of the hereafter. The fact that *Guthlac A* as well as *Guthlac B* begins

with an allusion to Paradise and heaven as an area of the divine creation demonstrates the importance of heavenly and infernal landscapes in both poems.

The Creation narrative marks the first assignment of moral categories to light and darkness in Christian mythology. Only after God creates light and separates day from night can the world be transformed from a vast and void chaos into a habitable living environment. Thus light and darkness are a significant part of the medieval Christian cosmology. Alvin A. Lee finds that the *westen* of the Guthlac poems is reminiscent of the description of the *westen* in Genesis A (105). Before God created the earth, there was also nothing but darkness, a vast and deep abyss that was equally empty and useless (Gen.A 103–11).[9] This changes when God commands a *halig leoht*, a "holy light" (124) to appear over the *westen* as part of his creational process. Although Guthlac does not create the site of his hermitage by himself, he is the one who undertakes the task of turning it into a place that, although it can never reach a state of paradisal perfection, is nonetheless habitable for a pious person. On first sight, the conditions that Guthlac finds on the fens are a striking contrast to the imagination of paradise as the most perfect place. The following analysis will examine whether this is true throughout the narrative and turn its attention to the occasions when Guthlac's surroundings exhibit ambiguous or even positive characteristics.

Guthlac B begins with a rendition of the Christian creation myth and Adam and Eve's dwelling in Paradise. Adam as the first man and forefather of humankind was born in Paradise, which had been created as a *leoht ham* ("bright home," 834b) for Eve and himself. The depiction of this ideal place is rather abstract, as the poet focusses rather on transcendental categories such as immortality or eternal bliss than on the actual setting: Adam wants for nothing in the idyllic place and neither death nor transience in general can touch him. This shows the link between the *locus amoenus* and the inexpressibility topos (*Unsagbarkeitstopos*): instead of giving a detailed account of the delights and joys that await the soul after its passing, the absence of negative attributes such as death, decay, misery, and grief is emphasised:

> on neorxnawong þær him nænges wæs
> willan onsyn ne welan brosnung
> ne lifes lyre ne lices hryre
> ne dreamas dryre ne deaðes cyme
> ac he on þam lande lifgan moste
> ealra leahtra leas, longe neotan
> niwra gefeana (*Guth.B* 827–33a)[10]

[9] All quotations and translations from *Genesis A* are taken from Anlezark.

[10] "In Paradise, where he [Adam] had no lack of any desire, nor corruption of happiness, nor loss of life, nor fall of the body, nor decline of pleasures, nor the coming of death, but he was able to live on that land free from all sins, and to make use of the new joys for a long time."

The enumeration of negative attributes, connected by the repeated use of *ne*, forms an antithesis to the place of perfection and allows the poet to avoid a definite portrayal of the unmentionable; this formula is frequently found in Old English descriptions of Paradise (Steen 43–53; Tristram 104). What is more, the abode allows a perfect unity between the mind and the body, which is presented as a desirable ideal state (827–44). Thus Paradise is established as the true homeland (*eðel*, 844a) of humanity in which they are allowed to dwell for as long as they will obey their creator. This psychological quality of Paradise had already been established by Augustine, who understood it as a physical as well as a spiritual site: Paradise is not only the place where God places humanity after its creation, but also "every place where the soul is in a state of well-being or grace" (Piehler 79).

After the Fall of Man, which marks the greatest disobedience they could commit, this harmonious home and state of inner peace is taken from them: "Siþþan se eþel uðgenge wearð / Adame and Euan, eardwica cyst / beorht, oðbroden" (*Guth.B.* 852a–54a).[11] As a punishment for their sins, they—and all their children after them—are expelled and forced to live in a "world of toil" (*gewinnoruld*, 857a) in which they have to face death. The separation of the soul from the body is another way in which they have to atone for their immoral act. As a result, they deprive the whole of humanity of the experience of this *deore ham* ("dear home," 871a). Although Adam and Eve are not exactly homeless, they can still be considered exiles, because they are compelled to live in an environment that lacks many of the pleasures and especially the felicity of Eden. In comparison to their former home, the earth is inferior and flawed.

Both the displacement and the forced existence of the eternal soul in a mortal body are unfortunate conditions that will be amended by salvation. According to Christian belief, the imminent Resurrection of the Dead will apply to the believers' bodies as well as their souls, which means that there will a restoration and subsequent transformation of the transient physical form into a glorified figure (Alexander 9). This outlook is repeatedly emphasised in the accounts of Guthlac's life and spiritual process. The poet of *Guthlac B* raises the hope of the reader by stating that there are many on earth who are holy in their spirit and who are accordingly living by God's will and performing their work in his name. The abodes of these men can be found in "stedewonga stowum" ("plain and open places," 875) and they supply healing, consolation, and general support for the dwellers of earth who are afflicted by death, illness, or depression (871b–90a). After this prelude, the poet identifies Guthlac as one of those holy men and supplements this with the reference to books that tell of Guthlac's achievements (876a–80a). Nevertheless, even the saint's habitation reflects the imperfect state of the world: troops of devils trespass on his house (894–97). This creates a notable contrast to the aforementioned tranquillity and safety of Paradise. The demons

[11] "Afterwards the homeland passed out of Adam and Eve's possession, the bright choicest of dwelling-places was taken away."

attack Guthlac in various ways and the "wilderness" (*westen*, 899a) is filled with their presence. This is the first time that Guthlac's surroundings are mentioned in this poem, and the placement in the wilderness alludes to a region that is characterised by the lack of civilisation and cultivation. Likewise, the wilderness and the dark and secret places as they are portrayed in *Guthlac A* are violated by evil spirits who were able to settle there. Guthlac's arrival marks the end of an era of "spiritual pollution": according to the poet, the *dygle stow* ("secret place," 215a) that used to stand "empty and desolate" ("idel and æmen," 216a), was waiting for a *betra hyrde* ("better guardian," 217b) to make his claim. The secrecy and mystery surrounding the mountain is also an indicator for its possible connection to the Otherworld or hell (Michelet 183). Early on, this points to the superiority of heaven as a home, especially in comparison to the transient earth, whose wild places are dominated by Satan and his host of fiends. A similar notion is also expressed in *Guthlac B* when the dying man conveys a feeling of pleasant anticipation for the "sellan gesetu" (1268a), the "better habitation" offered by the "eternal dwelling-place" ("ecne geard," 1267a). *Guthlac A* introduces not only the concept of the soul's detachment from any "earthly pleasures" ("eorthan wynne," 2b) and "temporary joys" ("laenan dreamas," 3a), but also the idea of death as the ultimate return of the soul to its much-desired true home. This introduction foreshadows Guthlac's death as it describes how the soul of the blessed one is accompanied by angels on its last journey to the *halig ham* ("holy home," 10a). The paths that lead him to heaven are pleasant and illuminated by a glorious and bright light ("wuldres leoht / torht," 8b–9a). In contrast, the earthly home is merely a stopover that is marked by its deterioration (30–59). The poet emphasises that heaven is—unlike *middangeard*—an eternal homeland for Christians ("eðel ece bideð," 67).

The House of Hell: Hidden Domains of Darkness and Death

In contrast, darkness resonates with death, sickness, and the foulness of demons and criminals. Neville finds that the natural world is "explicitly identified with darkness" in *Guthlac A* (138). Not only humanity's helplessness in the face of the natural world is more prominent at night, darkness also enables secrecy and mystery: the *hamas on heolstrum* (83a) that some occupy in the wilderness can either be translated as "houses in hidden places" or as "houses in darkness." Both renderings convey a sense of isolation, because they illustrate the houses' concealment from the world. The voluntary exile in these places is evidently only a transitionary dwelling-place, because the inhabitants are yet waiting for the "heavenly dwelling" ("heofuncundan / boldes," 83b–84a). In contrast to the holy home, the *helle hus* ("house of hell," 677a) to which the demons carry Guthlac in the *Guthlac A* poem is not only characterised by affliction and destruction but also by *sweart sinnehte* (678a), the black perpetual night that dominates there.

Guthlac is heavily affected by the absence of light as it increases his vulnerability, thus the demons often choose the night-time to attack and assault the holy

man (*Guth.A* 129a and 350a). In *Guthlac B*, the saint falls ill at night, because his composure is weakened in the *nihtglom* ("gloom of night," 943a). He himself reports to his servant that the pain began to affect his body "in this dark night" ("in ðisse wonnan niht," 1028b) and predicts his own death on the eighth day after seven nights of suffering (1034b–38a). Nevertheless, he manages to stay faithful and keep his courage despite the darkness ("deormod on degle," 952a), because he has the support of God and his angels. The account of his death is filled with images that symbolise the struggle between darkness and light that takes place not only on an individual level but also on a bigger scale. The separation of body, mind, and soul is of utmost importance in this context. As the poet emphasises, both the *bancofan* ("bone dwelling," "body," 942b) and the *breosthord* ("treasure of the breast," "mind," 944a) falter, the soul is keen to move on and enter the paths towards heaven (944b–45a). Later on, the body and mind are depicted as a *sinhiwan* (968b), a married couple, whose shared life is separated by death (967b–69a). In conversation with his servants, Guthlac points out the parallel between the transitory state of the earth as the dwelling-place of the human race and the body as a transient home for a person's soul. By calling his *sawelhus* ("soul house," 1030b) a *fæge flæschoma*, a fleshly covering that is doomed to death (1031a), he stresses the mortality of his body, but also the transience of the sickness that has befallen it (1027–33). In the end, both the world and the body are destined to pass, because they are only temporary abodes that will be replaced by the Christian's true home. Thus for the Christian, dying and going to heaven mean the return of his or her soul to the eternal homeland, a union that was disrupted by Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise. Guthlac's sickness is even directly related to the *deaðwege*, ("deadly cup," 991a) that Eve took from Satan and prepared for Adam and consequently for all their descendants (976–96). It is due to Eve's wrongdoing that Guthlac is suffering from sickness and death. It is interesting to note that the poet chooses to retell this narrative with a "bitter drinking cup" ("bittor bædeweg," 985a) as the origin of sin instead of picturing a forbidden fruit as the object of offence. Thus they embed Guthlac's personal story of suffering once again into the greater context of the history of salvation that spans the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. It also clarifies Guthlac as Christ's follower, because a cup—or more specifically, a chalice—has an important role in the events surrounding Jesus's death. It is not only used in the Eucharist where it contains the blood of Christ, but it also functions as a symbol of sin and suffering. Jesus prays to God to "let this chalice pass from [him]" (Matt. 26:39), which means that he pleads to be spared from his imminent death on the cross. Even though humankind may not escape the ancient decree (*fyrngewyrht*, *Guth.B* 971a) and inherited doom (*dom*, 972b) of death altogether, it is still only owing to Christ's sacrifice that Guthlac as one of his successors can hope for the preservation of his soul and the deliverance from sin after his passing.

Furthermore, death is personified as the *enge anhoga*, the "cruel solitary one" (997a) that approaches the ill man through the shade of night (999a). However, it is only the prelude to Guthlac's death in which death, darkness, and sickness dominate. When it comes to his actual passing, the hopefulness with which he keeps comforting his servant who is distressed by the saint's condition is reflected in the appearance of light. Guthlac's focus on his journey onward to heaven is intensified by the fact that it takes place around Easter; this draws another parallel between Guthlac and Christ's Passion and following resurrection (1098b–104). The poem is deliberately ambiguous in its use of pronouns, so one cannot determine whether it is Jesus or Guthlac who is meant by *eadig wer*, the "blessed man" (1105a) who rejoices in bliss on the "bright day" ("beorhtan dæg," 1106a) and triumphs in his trial.

The Battle of Light and Darkness: The Biblical Narratives

On the evening of Guthlac's death-day, the sun sets as always, and the poet describes how the sky turns dark (*Guth.B*, 1278b–79). Clouds ("wolcnum," 1280a), mist ("miste," 1280b), and darkness ("þystrum," 1281a) contribute to the impression that Guthlac will experience the ultimate night before the salvation of his soul. The following imagery of the juxtaposition of light and darkness is characterised by the extended use of superlatives in the description of the light phenomena that are taking place. The sudden appearance of the *leohta mæst* (1282b), the "greatest light" that shines from heaven, disrupts the previous sombre scene of nightfall. The splendid radiance illuminates Guthlac's house for the whole night and casts out the gloom (1282–92). There is a wide range of synonyms for this light, which stresses its association with God: the poet calls it *wuldres scima* ("splendour of glory," 1286b), *leohta glæm* ("bright radiance," 1289b), and *heofonlic condel* ("heavenly lamp," 1290b), which illustrates that the glow is not only a source of light but also an important attribute of heaven. Although one can argue that all these phrases represent the sun, the fact that the scene takes place at night adds a sense of wonder. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that this multitude of expressions not only denote the sun as a light-giving body but also the concept of a godly and holy light. This imagery becomes even more prominent in the account of Guthlac's soul leaving his body after his passing. The heavenly light turns into a *beama beorhtast* ("brightest of beams," 1309a) that shines on and around the saint's dwelling-place. It is also compared to a *beacen* ("beacon," 1309b) that reaches from the earth into the sky like a "flaming tower" ("fyren tor," 1311b). Moreover, the beam is described as surpassing natural phenomena in their grandeur. Firstly, it is raised from the ground to *rodera hrof*, the "roof of the heavens" (1312b) which is in itself a reflection of Guthlac's extraordinary connection to the realms above the earth; as a saint, he is closer to God and heaven in mind and body. It also illustrates a cosmic architecture in which heaven is stretched above the earth like the roof of a house, and therefore functioning both as a border and as a protection. This image

already appears in the story of *Genesis A* (112–16a; 146b–50). Secondly, the beam excels both the brightness of the sun and the beauty of the stars (1313b–14a) which demonstrates its divine quality.

Both *heofonlic condel* as a metaphor for the sun and the beacon that takes the form of a flaming tower bear some resemblance to a passage in the Old English Exodus narrative. When Moses leads the Israelites through the desert, they are accompanied by two beams that offer guidance and protection by day and night (*Exodus* 93–97). Especially the ray that appears at night is described in a strikingly similar manner to the one that appears in *Guthlac B*:

> Heofon-beacan astah
> æfena gehwam, oðer wundor,
> syllic æfter sunnan setl-rade beheold,
> ofer leod-werum lige scinan,
> byrnende beam.
> …
> sceado swiðredon,
> neowle niht-scuwan neah ne mihton
> heolstor ahydan; heofon-candel barn. (*Exodus* 107b–15)[12]

This leads one to believe that God prefers a certain type of landscape in which he chooses to place his people. Both incidents take place in the wilderness, and in both cases God sends divine help in the form of light phenomena. The landscape's desolation influences the way in which the people have to prove themselves worthy, but they also allow a very specific interaction with the divinity. Neither the Israelites nor the English saint are left to their own devices, because they have shown their willingness to face hardships in order to achieve transformation and development. The blazing beam can be read as both a physical and spiritual sign post that keeps the pilgrims safe and on the right track towards the heavenly kingdom. The miraculous appearance and intensity of light serves as a proof that God does not let his believers lead a life in darkness but provides shelter and direction for those who put their trust in him. Thus the journey of Guthlac's soul to heaven is once again connected to another narrative that tells of a journey undertaken by God's chosen people. This reinforces Guthlac's special status and strengthens the objective of his endeavour. It also constitutes one of the perquisites that the Lord grants for the honouring of his name and the search for wisdom. This idea is expressed in a similar fashion at the end of *Guthlac A*: God rewards the aspirations for wisdom and truth by clearing pleasant paths of life for the souls that are reaching for the light ("sawlum rymeð / liþe lifwegas

[12] "The heaven-beacon rose up each evening, the second wonder, kept its course happy behind the sun, shining over the people with flame, the burning beam … The shield covers shone, shadows diminished, the deep night-shades could not hide in the darkness; the heaven-candle burned" (Anlezark 213–15). All quotations and translations from *Exodus* follow Anlezark's edition.

leohte geræhte," 767b–68). Admittedly, Guthlac's self-imposed exile in the English wilderness may not be the epitome of an easy and pleasant life, but it is nevertheless eased by God's aid, and the prospect of the eternal life in the Lord's kingdom outweighs the misery.

This is hardly the only reference in the Guthlac material to a biblical story concerning lighting conditions. Another look at *Genesis A* reveals that there is a distinct and well-established theological connection between holy light and devilish darkness. Adam and Eve were not the first ones to experience the deprivation of heavenly light as a punishment for their sins: the traitor Lucifer and the angels who follow him in his arrogance are disciplined by being banned to hell which is described as a "torture chamber of exiles, deep, deprived of joy" (Anlezark 5). They are "bound in unending night, filled with torment, pervaded with fire and intense cold, fumes and red flame" (*Gen.A* 42–44a).[13] This depiction of the banishment that the fallen angels have to dwell in after their conspiracy against the Lord is very similar to the hell that is described in *Guthlac A*. After he successfully overcomes one of their attacks, the demons abduct Guthlac and lead him to the "gate of hell" ("heldore," 559b). They enter that "hideous dwelling-place" ("atule hus," 562b) which is apparently located in an abyss beneath the ground ("niþer under næssas neole grundas," 563). The contrast between the heavenly home and the infernal abode could not be made more obvious than in this conversation between the saint and the wicked spirits. The demons threaten Guthlac with his descent into hell and his loss of the light that the Lord has in heaven (582b–84a). Interestingly, the demons are also the ones who give an account of the heavens as *heahgetimbru* ("lofty buildings," 584b) and who place God on a "seld on swegle" ("seat in the sky," 585a). Likewise, *Guthlac B* describes heaven as "halig on heahþu" ("holy in the high place," 1088a) and the saint states that he is eager for his soul to take its abode in the afterlife, that is the dwelling on high ("upeard," 1078a). On top of that, the path to heaven that his soul is led on is twice referred to as an *upweg*, as an "ascent" (1306a, 1366a), which clearly alludes to Christ's ascension and therefore encompasses a spiritual movement upwards. Thus heaven and hell are portrayed as places that are above and beneath the space that humans inhabit. Still, the journey to one or the other is usually triggered by a person's death, which encourages their interpretation as real places that are only accessible to humans as spiritual destinations.

Another incident that exhibits the prevailing spatial concept is one of Guthlac's very first trials when the expelled demons lift him up in the air and give him the power of superhuman vision (412–26). In an attempt to break his steadfast posture, they proceed to show him the moral failures of other ecclesiastical men. Although it can be argued that the monk is at the mercy of the forces that raise him up and does not voluntarily take the position of a seer, it is still telling that he

[13] "Syn-nihte beseald, susle geinnod, / geondfolen fyre and fær-cyle, / rece and reade lege."

is brought into this situation in the first place. His heightened position "on þa hean lyft" ("high in the air," 412a) comes with an increased potential of wisdom and power that can be related to the closer proximity to heaven—hence, the demons recognise the sky as the realm of the Lord which is why they imitate God's position in the cosmos in order to expose Guthlac to the corrupt godlike power that is part of their scheme. Yet again, they remain unsuccessful in their endeavour and they have to lead the man back to his dwelling-place on the ground (427–28). Guthlac's subsequent climbing on the hill then reads as a triumphant ascent (428–30). He is not only able to survive the assault unscathed, but even reinforces his entitlement to the land by walking up the mountain. Especially in a Christian context, mountain tops are frequently portrayed either as the divinities' place of residence or as a site where mortals would receive divine revelation. Wentersdorf gives the pronouncement of the Ten Commandments to Moses on the Mount Sinai as an example. As a further matter, he finds that the concept of Guthlac's exile and conquest of a "high and lonely mountain of faith and virtue" is a widely used symbol for the Christian way of life in general (136). By climbing the hill after the devils let him down again, he brings himself in a similar position as before—that is in physical closeness to the sky and consequently to God—but this time he does it on his own terms and by his own strength. As a result, this whole episode not only recalls the aforementioned experience of Christ in the desert who was also led onto a mountain and given extraordinary vision, it also makes use of the imagery of an ascent as a symbol of spiritual progress and growth. One can argue that the mountain as a geographical landmark is situated between the sky and the ground, which can be interpreted as a symbol of an intermediate state between heaven and hell. This contributes to a certain ambiguity surrounding Guthlac's abode, but it also highlights his spiritual condition, which is clearly influenced by his human existence as well as his standing as a holy warrior. Accordingly, Guthlac's place in the world is situated somewhere between salvation and damnation, which makes his elevated residence a perfect reflection of this status.

Another reading of this scene that has been brought forward by Lee is the interpretation of Guthlac's re-appropriation of the mountain as holy territory as necessary for the "cleansing of his soul" and thus analogous to Christ's Passion (107). The persecution and torment that Guthlac has to endure is analogous to the suffering and hardships that God put on himself when he sent his son Jesus Christ into the world (*Guth.A* 521–29). With this in mind, Guthlac's afflictions form a significant part of his own salvation history. Similar to the saviour who died in order to redeem humanity's sins, Guthlac becomes a *halig cempa* ("holy warrior," 513b) and *martyr* ("martyr," 514a). His faith does not waver and he identifies his abusers as the fallen angels who were condemned to exile, which links his own battle against the devils in England to the very first strife and disturbance of creation:

Sindon ge wærlogan: swa ge in wræcsiðe
longe lifdon, lege biscencte,
swearte beswicene, swegle benumene,
dreame bidrorene, deaðe bifolene,
firenum bifongne, feores orwenan,
þæt ge blindnesse bote fundon. (*Guth.A* 623–28)[14]

This shows that hell is simultaneously perceived as a physical and as a spiritual realm. Its physicality is characterised by its location beneath the ground, a dominating darkness, and agonising flames. The darkness that the exiles experience there is both an absence of light and a symbol of the utter hopelessness of the place. The presence of sin, suffering, and death is equally part of the punishment they have to face. Because of their pride ("oferhygdum," 634a), the evil spirits are forced to eternally endure "deað and þystro" ("death and darkness," 635b) in hell, which is specifically designed as their home (677). On top of that, there is no prospect of a possible redemption for them in the future, as they are bound to live in hell forever and cannot expect pardon (635–37). Guthlac uses this condition as a self-defence and as a means to strengthen his own claim of the land. He reminds the devils of their penalty and opposes them by emphasising his own chance of salvation. Unlike the fallen angels, Guthlac can hope for heaven as the *betra ham* ("better home," 654b), because his heart is filled with the light of belief and the love of God ("leohte geleafan … lufan dryhtnes," 652). In his faith in God, he is illuminated by light ("leomum inlyhted," 655a) and looks forward to entering the eternal homeland. In contrast to the "fæger and gefealic" ("beautiful and pleasant," 657a) abode that is heaven, the dreadfulness of hell is illustrated by the "sweart sinnehte, sacu butan ende, / grim gæstcwalu" (678a–79a). Again, the cruel nature of the place affects both the body and the soul: while the black perpetual darkness contributes to an abominable physical landscape, the never-ending contentions and the bitter torment of the soul impact the spiritual well-being of its inhabitants.

However, Guthlac is not alone in this fight. God provides him with spiritual guardians and warriors, namely angels who act as his moral support. The tradition of angels as heavenly messengers whose comings are often marked by light phenomena such as halos or a general illumination can be traced to several biblical passages, but one of the most prominent occurrences is surely in the Gospel of Luke. When the angel visits the shepherds on the fields in order to bring them the message of Christ's birth, it is written in the Gospel of Luke that "ða stod Dryhtnes engel wið hig, and Godes beorhtnes hym ymbe scan" (Thorpe 117).[15]

[14] "You are faithless people: accordingly, you have lived long in exile, sunk into flame, darkly deceived, removed from light, deprived of joy, commended to death, surrounded by sins, being without hope of life, that you might find the cure for your blindness."
[15] "There stood God's angel with them, and God's brightness shone upon them."

The "brightness of God" that shines upon the shepherds can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically; in a figurative sense, it embodies the message of hope and salvation that the angel delivers to the people. In *Guthlac A*, the connection between light and life is further explored by depicting Jesus Christ as "lifes leohtfruma" ("origin of light and life," 593a). Thus brightness and light can have a divine quality and function as an indicator of holiness. The angel who arrives shortly before Guthlac's passing shines *daeghluttre* ("brightly as day," 693b); his task is to protect the man's spirit and to put the "servants of darkness" ("þeostra þegnas," 696a) into chains. For Guthlac, the angel also functions as a spiritual guardian who leads him in the darkness of this world; assigned to him by God (110b–13), the celestial attendant supports and comforts him. This is also emphasised in *Guthlac B*: only at the end of his life, Guthlac reveals to the servant who takes care of him that the mysterious person who comes to visit the monk, often between dawn, the dark of night, and in the morning (1216b–21a) is in fact a messenger from God. He explains that ever since his second year in the hermitage the Lord has sent him an angel to comfort and heal him after the nights he spent battling the devils (1238b–48a).

As God's servant and warrior, Guthlac is naturally aware of the earth's transitory state and focusses his spiritual efforts on the afterlife: he rejects his earthly native land and puts his mind towards the home in heaven (96–98a). The angel's protection and assistance is especially useful at night when the monk is visited by evil spirits who try to tempt him. One of them specifically urges Guthlac to seek the company of criminals at night (127b–28a) and to imitate their corrupt lifestyle. On another occasion, the demons attempt to manipulate him emotionally into surrendering his hermitage and returning to the comfort and safety of human settlement. They come "þurh nihta genipu" ("through the darkness of the night," 350a) and appeal to his presumed longing for companionship (350–55). The night is therefore the time when the devils find the monk at his most vulnerable. Apparently it is also the time when they can roam most freely, as God's power is if not diminished then at least less present, especially in the wilderness. However, all their attempts to hurt or to tempt him are in vain, because Guthlac is protected by the angel serving as God's light, even at night. After he has successfully endured another attack of the devils, the "light of the firmament" ("swegles leoht," 486b) is revealed to him. This enhances his grace and distinguishes him even more from the wretched creatures that refuse to obey God and his power.

The above analysis has shown that the lighting conditions give the landscape a spiritual quality. In general, bringing light into the darkness is a complex theme in the Guthlac poems. While it is a significant act in the aforementioned creation of the world, it can also refer to the transformation of the wilderness and spiritual enlightenment in general. This notion is indicated in the prologue of Felix's *Vita*. He draws a theological connection between darkness, ignorance, and evil: "[W]hen you think you have the light, you be blinded by darkness—that is to say,

lest when you would refute certainties, you be darkened by the blackness of ignorance … indeed, the origin of all evil springs from ignorance" (Colgrave 63).

In the *Vita*, this theme of illuminating blindness and ignorance forms a frame. When Guthlac is dying, the house is filled with a "heavenly light" and a "tower as of fire" (Colgrave 159) and one of the miracles that is performed by means of his relics is the healing of a blind man through salt that was previously consecrated by Guthlac (167–71). This is certainly a reference to Christ's miracles of healing as they are described in the New Testament; it is also further proof of Guthlac's holiness, because his body and the objects attributed to him perform miracles after his death.

Tracing Visions of Paradise: The Garden and the Hall

One of the most prominent features of medieval landscape symbolism is the polarity of city and wilderness (Piehler 72). According to Paul Piehler, the human experience of the environment adds to an underlying psychological concept that manifests itself in the fundamental conflict between man and wilderness as it was adapted by writers in the Middle Ages from ancient literature (72–75). While society and accordingly the city represent a state of "rational consciousness," the settings outside of the city are "symbols of the vast powers of the imagination" as well as "the very place of their operation" (73). Based on this notion, a hero can be defined as a person who is able to acquire the rational perception of their community and perform it while living in the wilderness, to "bear into the wildness a city within himself" (74–75).

Likewise, the dichotomy of the paradisal wilderness and the heavenly city or the hall in Old English poetry is a recurring theme in the literary discussion of landscape and its religious symbolism (Kabir 4–5; 7–8). The stylistic devices and stock images in the description of Paradise that Tristram locates in *Guthlac B* are part of several formulae she identifies in Anglo-Saxon poetry which are used either for the visual or the metaphysical portrayal of landscape. Since the ones she finds in the *Guthlac* poem are usually used to depict heaven, she argues that "heaven is often confused with paradise" (106) in Old English literature. Kabir relates the equivocality surrounding Paradise and heaven to the prevailing semantic fluidity as well as the coexistence of various imaginations of the afterlife in early Christianity (3). A continuous transition between the two predominating representations of life after death can be found especially in *Guthlac A*. Paradise is pictured as the Garden of Eden that is the epitome of natural beauty, while heaven is imagined as a delightful hall filled with companions and riches (Kabir 142). Thus the Christian landscape contains visualisations of idealised spaces of contrasting features, most importantly inside and cultural (the hall) versus outside and cultivated nature (the paradisal garden). Although one should refrain from applying these concepts without questioning and challenging them, they can still be useful points of reference and provide a categorical framework.

Lee points out the mythical, paradisal connotations surrounding the portrayal of the landscape in the poem, which can be seen especially in Guthlac's last return to the *beorg* after the intervention of Saint Bartholomew (107–08); he argues that the imagery in the passage resembles the "revival of the life of Paradise, especially as [it] is depicted in the lives of the desert fathers" (108). Serving as Guthlac's habitat enables the site to realise its full potential: after his return to the hill, Guthlac finds it to be a *sigewong* ("place of victory," 742a) and a *sele niwe* ("new hall," 742b). As the saint has been established as a warrior and soldier of God throughout the poem (91a, 153a, 180b, 324b, 402a), the reference to a hall in this context equates his homecoming to the entry into Paradise. The hall is not only a location of celebration after a victorious and glorious battle, it is also part of the pagan concept of Heaven. As it is, the identification of the hill as a "new hall" may be another faint pagan echo; for instance, Valhalla as it is described in several Old Norse texts is a location where kings, soldiers who have died in combat, and heroes feast and drink side by side with the Gods (Patch 60–66). Even without this mythical connotation, the hall is an architectural structure that is erected by humans as both a meeting place and a shelter. In an ideal case, it provides a safe space and keeps out dangers of the natural world, be it harsh weather or monsters. Architectural imagery is often used to represent the magnificence and delightfulness of heaven (Kabir 147–50). Hence the hall has an appeal that affects the human being emotionally, visually, and architecturally.

The hall in Old English poetry is a prominent image representing the community and its values that influences the landscape both literally and metaphorically (Magennis 35–40). It is noteworthy that the *Guthlac B* poet also makes use of the image of the hall, but in a distorted sense: in the poem, hell is considered to be a *deaðsele* ("hall of death," 1075a), which is characterised by pain, sorrow, deprivation, exile, shame, cruelty, and hopelessness (1072b–76a). This reinforces its contrast with the pleasant and idyllic hall that Guthlac finds on his return, and sets him even further apart from the devils. This is especially fitting if one looks at the way Guthlac fights his sickness in *Guthlac B*: while it is the ongoing battles for the land that make him a soldier of God in the first place, his final struggle is against a disease. Despite the use of battle imagery such as "war-shower" ("hildescurum," 1143b), "flickering force of arrows" ("flacor flanþracu," 1144a), "stricken by deadly darts" ("awrecen wælpilum," 1154a) and "fatal arrows" ("wælstrælum," 1286a), it is nevertheless expressed that his true victory is based on his endurance and acceptance of death, not on brave and tireless fighting. Guthlac becomes an exemplary being due to his unfailing piety and faith in God that causes him to not be afraid of leaving the earth but to look forward to entering the realm of heaven instead.

For Guthlac, the return to his hill marks the completion of his duty as God's servant, because the transformed hermitage symbolises his purified soul and the triumph of his unfailing faith. According to Lee, bringing the location under the

protection of God (746) and depriving the demons of all authority over it marks the "realisation of Paradise" for Guthlac (108). *Guthlac B* also features an episode that sees the blossoming and reawakening of the natural world. The poet compares the sweet smell that comes from Guthlac's mouth to a fertile and delightful summer scene with blooming flowers filled with honey (1273b–78a). The fact that his departure from earth is accompanied by such a life-affirming scene shows that the saint's death is not the end of all things but rather the transition into a promising and spirited existence. This odour of sanctity is a recurring theme in Catholic liturgy and one of the ways in which the incorruptibility of the saint's body is foreshadowed. It is revisited at the very end of the poem: combined with the holy songs sung by the angels, the fragrant odour adds to the sensual experience of Guthlac's death as it is perceived by himself and the present living beings (1322b–25a).

Furthermore, this scene demonstrates that it is not only Guthlac's presence in the wilderness that affects the landscape; in addition to the miraculous visual and olfactory phenomena that mark the onward journey of his soul, the land reacts rather violently to the death of his body with an earthquake: "Beofode þæt ealond, / foldwong onsprong" ("That island trembled, the earthly plain burst forth," 1324b–26a). At first sight, this sudden and disruptive movement of the ground is a paradoxical contrast to the peaceful and idyllic scene that has been evoked before, as the potentially great destruction of an earthquake appears to be incompatible with the restoration of Eden on earth. However, earthquakes serve several purposes in the Bible: they can signal the coming of Christ or represent a punishment for committed sins, for instance. The occurrence of seismic activity as a corollary of Guthlac's death is another reference that connects his life with Christ's. Immediately after Jesus's death on the cross, a strong earthquake occurs that damages the temple and destroys the rocks. It also prompts the resurrection of a number of holy individuals from their graves (Matt. 27:51–54). Likewise, an earthquake happens when it is discovered that the tomb is empty because Jesus has risen (Matt. 28:2). Following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the earth's tremor proves to both believers and sceptics that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. It also calls attention to his sacrifice and the huge impact that his actions have, especially on the salvation of humanity. Hence, the saint whose death is accompanied by the same natural disaster is once again ranked among the group of saints who aspire to follow the saviour in their actions and achievements. In this context, his accomplishments as a hermit in the wilderness are his contribution to the history of salvation and analogous to Christ's sacrifice for humankind. Thus the earthquake in *Guthlac B* is not only a symbol of destruction, but another indication of the forthcoming resurrection of the holy man's soul and his entry into heaven.

The aforementioned *sele niwe* carries the notion of a renewed dwelling for Guthlac, which corresponds to the Christian understanding of Paradise as the *betra*

ham, the better home for the soul after the end of one's earthly existence. Other words and phrases that indicate the hill's transformation into a greater, more paradisal place include *smolt* ("pleasant," 742a), "wæs … folde geblowen" ("the earth was in bloom," 743b), and *grene wong* ("green place," 746a). The green place is another example of the use of formulaic phrases in order to describe Paradise as a place of natural perfection. In Old English poetry, the adjective green is regularly associated with the landscape of Paradise; thus *ælgrene* ("all green") is the favoured adjective for the land of Canaan in *Genesis A* (Alexander 15). This formula is apparently inherited from Germanic tradition as it is paralleled in Old Norse and Old Saxon literature (Magennis 147–48). Especially the collocation of *grene* and *wang* also appears in the idealised landscape descriptions in Old Norse and Old Saxon texts (Kabir 144; 146), for example in the *Heliand* (Behaghel and Taeger): "grôneo uuang" (757), "grôni godes uuang" (3082), and "grôni uuang" (3135; 4285).

However, it is necessary to note that the place Guthlac selects for his hermitage is described in surprisingly pleasant terms even before the fulfilment of his quest. In *Guthlac A*, the mountain is located in a grove ("on bearwe," 148a), which is one of the stock images of the *locus amoenus* and also designates a certain greenness. Thanks to the angel's comfort and support, his experience as a hermit is not solely characterised by terrors and demonic assaults, but also by a pleasurable and delightful landscape:

> siþþa[n] frofre gæst
> in Guðlaces geoce gewunade,
> lufade him and lærde, lenge hu geornor,
> þæt him leofedan londes wynne,
> bold on beorhge. (136b–40a)[16]

As Fabienne Michelet points out, the happiness that the man gains from his remote dwelling-place does not come easily to him; it is rather the combination of the agreeable landscape and the angel's spiritual support that contribute to Guthlac's ability to appreciate his surroundings (172–73). His perception of the landscape undergoes some significant changes in this poem: in the beginning the site that God reveals to him as the place of his retreat is solely a means to the end of spiritual completion. Even so, the mountain grows dear to him and the delight he finds in the natural world is the only pleasure he allows himself after his self-imposed withdrawal from the world of human desires and gratifications. In his engagement with the physical world around him, he also mirrors and imitates God's attitude and emotions towards the world, no matter how flawed it appears: the Lord unconditionally loves and cherishes every creature of his creation (*Guth.A* 760–62).

[16] "From then on, the spirit of comfort remained in Guthlac's aid, he treated him with kindness and taught him ever more gladly, so that the joys of the land, the building on the mound, delighted him."

Needless to say, the scenery's appeal increases after the conclusion of Guthlac's battle with the demons. As described before, the transformed residence exhibits qualities that make it a paradise-like place—at least as much as this is possible for an earthly location. This shows that Paradise serves as an "archetype of the good landscape" (Magennis 145), which means that Anglo-Saxon poets revert to characteristics such as abundance of greenness in order to mark their portrayed landscapes and natural places on earth as paradisal and therefore attractive and desirable (151). The banished demons also recognise of the place's universal beauty and lament its loss:

> hleahtor alegdon,
> sorge seofedon þa hi swiðra oferstag
> weard on wonge; sceoldon wræcmægas
> ofgiefan gnornende grene beorgas. (229b–32)[17]

Once again, the adjective "green" is used in order to demonstrate that the place is attractive to both the demons and Guthlac (Magennis 185). Lee connects their wailing and the envy that the demons feel towards the monk—who is an unwelcome trespasser from their perspective—to Lucifer and Cain who are also banished from "the green places they desire" and who then "wait as joyless exiles for future opportunities of attack on the idealized place inhabited by God's servant" (105). The former inhabitants are clearly offended at what is according to them an intrusion into their territory; the fact that the intruder is even supported by the same deity who sent them to exile in the first place even intensifies their bitter emotions which then result in their antagonistic actions.

The recovery and regeneration of the flora and fauna that can be found in *Guthlac A* represent the powerful oxymoron of the blooming desert. The alteration of his dwelling-place is therefore another step in the preparation of his journey towards the "Father's homeland" ("fæder eðle," 801), which is Jerusalem, the holy and eternal city (812–18). Magennis considers this another poetic paradox: "in turning his back on earthly communities he [Guthlac] aspires to share in the community of the heavenly city" (187). But the vision of Guthlac joining the other saints and angels as the "cempan gecorene Criste leofe" ("the chosen warriors dear to Christ," 797) in the everlasting kingdom is not only in contrast to the loneliness and his voluntary separation from human company that he experiences on earth. It also conveys the patristic idea of a heavenly city as it can be found in Augustine of Hippo's *De civitate Dei* (Siewers 36).

In general, Anglo-Saxon religious poetry imagines cities as strongholds that represent society as a whole as well as success and achievement (Magennis 156). In this discussion it is also important to consider what has been pointed out by Nicholas Howe: unlike many modern Western authors, the Anglo-Saxons "did

[17] "They gave up laughter, they lamented their grief when the stronger guardian defeated them on the field; the mourning wretches had to give up the green hills."

not cultivate a moralizing binary between the innocence of landscape and the corruption of civilization." Their imagination of landscapes was rather affected by the "binary between the transience of this loaned, earthly life and the permanence of the heavenly home" (92), which means that the building of a city would not have been interpreted as the intrusion or even destruction of sacred natural spaces.

What makes the imagination of heaven as a city especially appealing is surely the prospect of security as well as the splendour that a community under the regiment of God promises (Magennis 40–41). This tradition of thought makes the transformation of the desert into a city such a compelling image, because city and desert are usually seen as topographical and demographical opposites (Rapp 99). *Guthlac B* also picks up this theme: in his last conversation with his servant, Guthlac asks him to bring a message to his sister whom he has refused to see in his earthly life so that their reunion in the afterlife could be free from sin (1178b–89a). He then explains that he expects to see her again in the *beorht burh* (1191a), the "bright city" that is Jerusalem, where they will dwell among the angels and enjoy the heavenly bliss. One of the first indications of the arrival of the Holy City is surely the warm weather-sign (1293a) that comes from the East, which is the direction that is traditionally associated with Jerusalem and Paradise (Michelet 17). However, Magennis observes a coalescence of the images of a city and the image of a hall in Old English poetry, which means that the classical idea of heaven as a city is merged with the Germanic notion of heaven as a hall (42). That this can observed in the Guthlac poems has been demonstrated by the preceding analysis: the transformation of the saint's dwelling-place into a site with an increased divine quality is described in terms that provokes associations with both the paradisal Garden and the heavenly hall and city, respectively.

The Inner Retreat and Animal Companionship in the Wilderness

Despite his original intention to find solitude in the wilderness, Guthlac finds the landscape to be by no means empty. Aside from demons and angels, it is also populated by wildlife, which is not—in contrast to God's and Satan's delegates—assigned a distinct and constant morality. The animals' moral status is ambiguous, because they do not form a homogeneous group in the Guthlac material. In any case, as they are the only living creatures apart from the saint, the interaction with the animals is an integral part of his living conditions in the English desert. The *Guthlac A* poet describes how the hermit is welcomed by an amiable wildlife (733–42) that behaves very friendly and tame towards him, because he feeds it (736–38). Moreover, it is explained that he turns to the birds as a replacement for the lack of a human community in his exile:

Swa þæt milde mod wið monncynnes
dreamum gedælde, dryhtne þeowde,
genom him to wildeorum wynne siþþan he þas woruld forhodge. (739–41)[18]

Accordingly, in his triumphant return to the new hall, he is not greeted by the songs of men but by the wild creatures' "earnest voices" ("meaglum reordum," 734b) and "beautiful bird song" ("fæger fugla reord," 743a). Guthlac's loneliness and separation from any civilised settlement is one of his presumed weaknesses that the devils address; naturally, they also attempt to use it to their own advantage in their battle against his conquest. They try to disturb him by visualising the possibility of starvation in the wilderness (273–88) and hope that he would start longing for his home and "human love" ("monlufan," 353b). However, none of these hopes are fulfilled, as Guthlac neither starves nor becomes depressed by the prevailing lack of human society. The end of *Guthlac A* shows that he even finds an adequate prophylactic cure for solitude in the region's wildlife. Still, the birds are not anthropomorphised in the sense that Guthlac uses them as actual substitutes for human interaction, but they provide a distraction and an opportunity for him to redirect the need to communicate. With his delight in feeding them and listening to their songs as a reward, Guthlac himself becomes a nurturing father who enjoys taking care of the lives that are put in his trust. It also shows his appreciation of the natural world and in a broader sense God's creation.

Guthlac B, on the other hand, has a different approach to dealing with the assumed loneliness of a hermit, because it focusses on the communal monastic disciplines that Guthlac retains in the wilderness, such as giving counsel. The poem mentions several guests that pay Guthlac a visit on his *sigewong* and who are healed and comforted by him (919b–32a). He has the company of one faithful servant in his dying moments who is distressed by his condition and mourns his passing (1197–200; 1293–95). Thus withdrawal and separation from the world need not evoke a feeling of loneliness in a person. In Guthlac's case it is apparently no concern of the monk; on the contrary, he is even able to give consolation and advice to the people who come to him. One can even trace a seemingly paradoxical movement in the Guthlac poems: his withdrawal and the isolation from worldliness and worldly communities enable him to alter his spiritual position. Guthlac's life as a hermit forms a passage to the kingdom of God, where he finds an environment in which he can accomplish spiritual completion (Clarke, *Writing Power* 20). Even though he decides to retreat from his kin and companions, he is still part of the community of God's followers. Guthlac finds a "place of spiritual fellowship" (24) in his solitude and he partakes both as a patron and as a protégé. This also explains his invulnerability and immunity to the devils' attacks: despite

[18] "Thus the gentle soul parted with the pleasures of mankind, served the Lord, and took his delight in wild beasts after he turned his back on the world."

his external withdrawal, he continues to engage with God's spiritual community that grants him protection and support (23–25).

The significance of birds in the context of a saint's becoming is even more apparent by taking a look at Felix's *Vita* and the Anglo-Saxon *Life*. In both texts, Guthlac's interaction with birds is given more attention than in *Guthlac A* and it is also more nuanced. The prose texts are more specific about the different species: Felix mentions a thievish jackdaw (Colgrave 116–19; 124–27), which becomes a raven in the Old English version (Gonser 140; 143–45). Although these encounters with birds may not suit the peaceful image that is drawn in *Guthlac A*, they still contribute to Guthlac's characterisation as a saint, because they illustrate his benevolence, patience, and trust in God. In general, the nearby animals do not function as mere substitutes for human companionship, but they represent further proof of his holiness. Guthlac himself explains the phenomenon of the animals coming to him without any fear or restraint in the Old English prose version. Wilfrið, one of his visitors, asks him "forwhon þa wildan fuglas þæs widgillan westenes swa eadmodlice him on sæton" (Gonser 143)[19] when he sees two swallows flying into Guthlac's house. The two birds proceed to sit on the monk's shoulders and sing for the man (142). Guthlac tells his guest that it is already written in the Bible that wild beasts are able to recognise a prudent servant of God and consequently approach him. Likewise, the angels come nearer to him because of his voluntary isolation and withdrawal from worldly people (143). In fact, this situation shows a remarkable resemblance to Jesus's temptation in the desert: according to Mark the Evangelist, Christ "was in the desert forty days and forty nights, and was tempted by Satan; and he was with beasts, and the angels ministered to him" (Mark 1:13). Thus one can interpret animals and angels as markers of the holy man in the wilderness. Additionally, Jesus often uses animals in his parables, and encourages people to identity with them. For instance, in the parable of the mustard seed, the birds specifically serve as a metaphor for those who make the kingdom of God their home (Matt. 13:31–32). On another occasion, Jesus uses the carefree birds that do not worry about their nourishment as a metaphor for the care and aid that Gods accords the people who trust in him (Matt. 6:26).

The submission of the wildlife and the companionship of animals is another hagiographical trope that "contrasted the disobedience of men with the compliance of animals to God and his saints" (Alexander 43). This theme is mostly explored in the prose texts about Guthlac: "and næles þæt an þæt him þa fugelas underþeodde wæron, ac eac swa þa fixas and wilde deor þæs westenes ealle hi him hyrdon, and he hym dæghwamlice andlyfene sealde of his agenre handa, swa heora gecynde wæs" (Gonser 142).[20]

[19] "Why the wild birds from the vast wilderness were sitting on him so submissively."

[20] "And by no means was it just the birds that were subject to him, but also the fish and wild animals of the wilderness all obeyed him, and he gave them food from his own hands every day, each according to their kind."

In the *Vita*, this account is even more extended and besides the animals, nature itself submits to the saint:

> For the grace of his excellent charity abounded all creatures, so that even the birds of the untamed wilderness and the wandering fishes of the muddy marshes would come flying or swimming swiftly to his call as if to a shepherd; and they were even accustomed to take from his hand such food as the nature of each demanded. Not only indeed did the creatures of the earth and sky obey his commands, but also even the very water and the air obeyed the true servant of the true God (Colgrave 121).

In contrast to the Old English material, the Latin source gives a justification for nature's obedience. According to Felix, this submission is the restoration of the natural order, because the world was created in subjection to Adam's species. While the creation gladly serves any faithful servant of God, humanity as a whole has lost its supremacy due to its disobedience of the Creator. Interestingly, all of the mentioned living beings (birds, fish, wild animals) also appear in the biblical accounts of the prophet Job. According to Alfred K. Siewers, Gregory's commentary on the Book of Job in his *Dialogues* was an authoritative text that also influenced Anglo-Saxon literature; thus it is reasonable to assume that Guthlac's hagiography was informed by Gregory's ideas, especially by his allegorising approach to landscape (Siewers 19–20). When Job is confronted by heretics who doubt the creation of God, he answers them: "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee: and the birds of the air, and they shall tell thee. Speak to the earth, and it shall answer thee: and the fishes of the sea shall tell. Who is ignorant that the hand of the Lord hath made all these things?" (Job 12:7–10). This section pictures animals as creatures that, unlike unworthy and arrogant men, are aware of their place within creation and thus have the wisdom of teachers. Likewise, the animals in Guthlac's realm are able to sense his worthiness as God's retainer and act accordingly. In addition, the relationship between the saint and the creatures he feeds is portrayed as amicable and affectionate, which further contributes to the overarching pastoral theme as it can be found in the poem's portrayal of Guthlac's dwelling-place. The friendly relations between the hermit and the animals in the wilderness recall the Garden of Eden, where mankind and animals live peacefully side by side (Alexander 44–46). Furthermore, the birds in *Guthlac A* are part of a greater theme of renewal and rebirth, which extends the paradisal connotation of his return to the beorg and also foreshadows the resurrection of Guthlac's soul. Especially the sound of the cuckoo is highlighted (744), because it functions as a "metonym or emblem for springtime."[21] Hence the birds are an essential part of the imagery with which Guthlac's mountain is portrayed as an Eden restored.

[21] This is interesting, because the cuckoo does not usually connote the hopefulness and revival of spring (Clarke, *Literary Landscapes* 52). In other Old English poems, such as *The Seafarer*, this bird is associated with melancholy, forthcoming sorrow, and the general impermanence of all things. Clarke

However, the saint's interaction with the fauna is by no means exclusively pleasant. This becomes apparent in *Guthlac B*, which gives a remarkably similar account of the bird-feeding scene. Nonetheless, the family of birds (917a) is strongly contrasted to the devils who take the form of *wild deor* ("wild beasts," 907b). The birds come "afflicted by hunger" ("hungre þreatad," 916b) to be fed by the saint and then express their gratitude by worshipping him with *meagle stefna* ("earnest voices," 919a). Especially the sound of those earnest voices—a phrasing that is indeed very close to the *meagle reorda* in *Guthlac A*—is an antithesis of the shrieking devils that imitate wild creatures in their forms and noises (905–12). While the first poem does not specify the demons' appearances, *Guthlac B* gives an account that combines visual and auditory impressions from the natural world such as the simple "human form" ("mennisc hiw," 909b) as well as supernatural elements like dragons ("wyrmes bleo / earme adloman, attre spiowdon," 911b–12). Demons that take the forms of animals as a disguise frequently appear in texts that deal with Christian asceticism—for instance, in Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*, which served as a major inspiration of Felix's *Vita*, Anthony is attacked by demons who almost exclusively imitate animals that are considered unclean for eating in the Bible (Spittler 46). Anthony also makes peace with the wild animals, but unlike Guthlac he neither tames nor befriends them, because their textual portrayal is influenced by a patristic tradition that offers a rather negative conception of animals as symbols of sin and immorality (46–49). The selection of wild beasts that the monk has to face in the wilderness once again shows the close connection between the *Vita Antonii* and Guthlac's *Life*. Anthony is assaulted by demons who take the form of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents, asps, scorpions, and wolves (*Vit.Ant.* 9, Meyer 28). Guthlac's assault by evil spirits' posing as animals is featured in the sixteenth chapter of Felix's *Vita*. Felix describes how the demons appear as lions, bulls, bears, serpents, boars, wolves, horses, stags, oxen, and ravens and attempt to frighten the saint with their visual appearance and the terrifying noises they make (Colgrave 115). In a similar manner, the Anglo-Saxon *Life* depicts this episode of a demonic attacks as follows:

> Dæt gelamp sumere nihte, þa se halga wer Guðlac his gebedum befeal, þa gehyrde he grymetunga hryþera and mislicra wildeora. Næs þa nan hwil to þam, þæt he geseah ealra wihta and wildeora and wurma hiw incuman to him. Ærest he geseah leon ansyne, and he mid his blodigum tuxum to him beotode; swycle eac fearres gelicnysse, and beran ansyne, þonne hi gebolgene beoð; swylce eac næddrena hiw,

relates these differing connotations to variations between insular, Celtic, and continental Latin traditions that influenced the poet in his interpretation. See *Seafarer* lines 53–55a and the note to these lines in Klinck (text on pp. 79–83; note on p. 137).

> and swynes grymetunge, and wulfa geþeot, and hræfena crǽcetunge, and misclice fugela hwistlunge, þæt hi woldon mid heora hiwunge þæs halgan weres mod awendan (Gonser 139).[22]

The interrelation of visual impressions and aural effects can be found in all three prose texts as well as *Guthlac B* and it creates an atmosphere of fear and terror that the saint experiences at night. The portrayal of the demons as *dugupa byscyrede* ("deprived of salvation," 895b) as well as raising animalistic cries (898b–99) serves to illustrate that the dangers that Guthlac has to face in the wilderness are both concrete and spiritual, because it depicts the demons as creatures that are corrupted on both levels.

This corresponds to the general portrayal of animals in hagiographical writing: they appear both as illusions created by the devil and as real beasts (Alexander 20). Hence they function as symbols and manifestations of the threat that the natural world poses to the physical and psychological well-being of its human inhabitants. This literary tradition originated in ancient literature and not only can it be found in the accounts about the Egyptian desert fathers, it also influences the poet's imagined landscape as it is portrayed in the Guthlac poems. For Piehler, the unpredictable shapes of the animals can be identified as either real physical threats or as representations of nightmares and imaginative terrors, which is why they present the primary danger to the rational being in the wilderness (Piehler 73). This notion is based on Prudentius's *Psychomachia* in which personified virtues and vices fight against each other in order to gain dominance and authority to rule over the soul of man. In this allegory, an army of virtues such as Faith, Chastity, and Patience withstands the attacks of vices such as Lust, Idolatry, and Pride. The combat is described in a naturalistic way resembling the demonic attacks in the Guthlac poems but using military terms to illustrate the spiritual conflict. Thus the allegory represents the moral struggle within the postlapsarian Christian mind (Smith 109–13).

For Guthlac and his diabolical encounters in the wilderness, this raises the question whether the saint experiences real attacks from physical life forms or whether they are projections of his mind that reflect his disturbed inner mental state. In any case, the demons both represent and reinforce the Christian struggle as it is portrayed in the Guthlac material: as unholy outcasts, they have failed the fundamental Christian trial of choosing between worldly desires and the wish to overcome them. Consequently, they tempt the holy man with these human crav-

[22] "It happened one night, when the holy man Guthlac was saying his prayers, that he heard the roaring of cattle and various wild beasts. It was not long then before he saw the shape of all the creatures and wild beasts and serpents coming to him. First he saw the appearance of a lion, and it threatened him with its bloody teeth; similarly, the likeness of a bull, and the appearance of a bear, when they are angry; likewise also the shape of serpents, and the roaring of boars, and the howling of wolves, and the croaking of ravens, and the chirpings of various birds, because they wanted to agitate the mind of the holy man with their forms."

ings in order to keep him from serving God with a pure heart and to the best of his abilities. In any case, the monk has to prepare himself to fight against evil spirits that embody the threat that the natural world poses to humanity as well as the danger to the soul that emanates from the world and its temptations.

In addition, this passage demonstrates one of the ways in which Guthlac's biography is inspired by other hagiographical writings as well as the process of the cultural adaptation of a known text to a new audience. Both Anthony and Guthlac as they are portrayed in these texts are confronted by devils in the form of lions, bears, bulls, serpents, and wolves. Although Felix keeps the lion and serpents as animals that must have appeared foreign and exotic to Anglo-Saxon audiences, he omits the leopards, asps, and scorpions and replaces them with a few species that are native to England, such as boars, horses, stags, oxen, and ravens. In turn, the Old English translation keeps the boars and ravens, but excludes the horses, stags, and oxen. The fact that the Old English version of the saint's life puts wolves and ravens in sequence inevitably creates an association with the beasts of battle motif, which further reinforces Guthlac's standing as a religious warrior and hero.

The Spiritual Conversion of a Landscape: Guthlac as a Coloniser

In addition to the question concerning the inherent and expressed moral value of the landscape, the dispute over territory is especially interesting from an ecocritical point of view. It raises questions concerning the issue of legitimate ownership: who owns the landscape? Should it even be considered property or is it rather an autonomous entity that cannot be owned? The answers given by the *Guthlac* poets in their verses are unmistakably influenced by Christian theology, which has at its core the notion that the natural world is first and foremost God's creation; therefore, it is subject to his will and command. Accordingly, the justification of Guthlac's conquest is intrinsically tied to his status as a holy man and hence his connection to the Lord. The notion that a creature's immanent status can either be divine or demonic and determines a person's position in the world is reinforced when Saint Bartholomew comes down from heaven in order to rescue Guthlac from the hands of his enemies. The concept of a hierarchy among the living creatures in terms of their spiritual rank is already outlined at the beginning of *Guthlac A* when the poet assigns the speaking angel an older rank or degree ("yldran had," 4b) that indicates his state of being superior to humans in authority and power. Saint Bartholomew is also the only holy messenger who can be identified by his name. His unique relationship to the hermit and the place in which he settles is further explained in Felix's *Vita*: Guthlac begins to settle in the fens on 25 August, which is the day on which the feast of Saint Bartholomew is celebrated (ch. 27: Colgrave 90–91). Therefore, it appears that the monk's undertaking is under the protection of this particular saint from the very beginning. However, Bartholomew is not only depicted as a spiritual guardian but also as an executor of God's will: he constrains the demons and forces them to not only leave Guthlac be, but to serve him

as underlings (692b–97; 703–21). The saint states, "he sceal þy wonge wealdan, ne magon ge him þa wic forstondan" (702).[23] With this declaration, Guthlac's power and right to occupy the place is confirmed by a religious authority. Bartholomew also declares that the holy man is the only one who is allowed to live there; this right of abode obviously also includes the right to expel its former, now illegitimate occupants. Hence, one can assert that Guthlac's rank as a holy man is verified and strengthened by the saint's support.

Although both the monk and the demons share their desire to inhabit the same landscape, this motivation is an expression of the crucial difference between them. The evil spirits seek out the fens and wilderness as a refuge that allows them to exist outside of the realm governed by God. It is therefore a reflection of their demonic condition, and they appreciate it because of the suitable living conditions. This becomes obvious in the lamentation of their loss, which is portrayed in a surprisingly sympathetic way: the devils experience great anxiety and sorrow over their homelessness (*Guth.A* 215–25) which causes them to raise up their voices with grief after they are driven from the green hills (229). They even long for the Lord to put them out of their misery (224–25)—a wish that will never be granted, as one learns from Guthlac's explanations about their nature. Guthlac, on the other hand, wants to dwell in the lands both despite and because of their desolation. To him, the location of his hermitage is not exclusively dreadful, as it already has pleasurable traits like *grene beorgas* before he converts it into a sanctified place. Still, he arrives with the quest of transforming the region into something that is more agreeable to God while simultaneously proving his own piety. Accordingly, the landscape provides him with the conflict situation that is required for his task and challenges him both physically and spiritually.

As a result, one can say that the Guthlac poems convey a concept of natural abodes that sees hermits and monks dwelling in paradisal sites while demons reside in hellish places. The fact that the same place has the potential to be both or to change from one to the other shows that it is essential to examine the landscape, Guthlac, and the demons as elements of a triangulated network. This angle of analysis allows to observe these three nodes as entities that influence each other in various ways. One of the most pressing matters in this regard is surely the question of the relation between inside and outside, both of the natural world in general and the individual person who inhabits it. According to Neville, the basic state of the environment is amoral: "the natural world is not assigned any inherent moral status" (26). If this is true, one can assume that the portrayal of a morally charged landscape—and the description of a physical scenery that resembles connotations with the religious landscapes of heaven and hell without a doubt adds a certain moral value to the depicted setting—is solely based on the perceived interaction and mediation that takes place between a conscious being and nature.

[23] "He must rule that land, you are not able to withhold this dwelling-place from him."

This is compatible with Neville's statement that "the natural world in Old English poetry does not have an independent identity or meaning … its meaning is determined by its role, and its role is always a supporting, even a minor, one" (137). Hence, the natural world does not have an intrinsic moral value, but it can only be ever judged by its interaction with the creatures that inhabit it, be they divine, human, or demonic.

Moreover, Guthlac expresses a sense of belonging as well as the notion of a natural order with this argument. The moral value of a landscape and its inhabitants therefore becomes an ideological question of territory, ethnicity, and inheritance. Although it may not be a palpable reality at this point, as he is living as an exile on a transient earth and even forced to reside in hell for some time, Guthlac sees a clear distinction between the destined dwelling-place of the devils and his own, at least on a spiritual level. He reasons that hell is the traditional place for creatures like the wretches that used to inhabit the fens before his arrival; he bases this on the idea that the devils abide in hell as an atonement for their disobedience. Similar to the original sin that Adam and Eve passed on to their offspring and which results in their withdrawal from Paradise, the fallen angels are expelled from their homeland and sent to a place that is not only foreign but also hostile. These circumstances explain their distress about the disturbance of their chosen earthly dwelling-place and the sorrow about its loss due to Guthlac's settlement. In both narratives the devils are actual creatures of the natural setting; apparently, they are also either capable of leaving hell in order to torment people on earth or they have been assigned grim and barren sites outside of the infernal regions as their habitat. Thus Guthlac's interaction with them and his description of the land as home of wretched spirits reveals a world-view that reflects an underlying concept of the natural world that does not exclude supernatural elements such as demons or monsters. Jennifer Neville explains the presence of these devils with the tradition that the fallen angels were not all banned in hell but that some of them were assigned residencies in the sky, water, and woods (105). In general, wild and desolate places are often seen as the natural habitats of supernatural creatures (132). While the fens are not explicitly mentioned as part of the natural scenery in the poems, Felix's *Vita* and the corresponding Anglo-Saxon *Life* are not the only occurrences in which fens are the home of monsters. For instance, Neville mentions "the joyless woods, wolves, and monsters" that can be found in the fens according to *Beowulf* (44). The monster Grendel comes "of more under misthleoþum" ("from the moor under the misty cliffs," *Beowulf* 710)[24] to attack the hall, and he flees after his defeat to the "fen-hop" ("land in the midst of fens," 764).

Overall, as Guthlac's choice of habitat is intimately connected with his saintly status, the devils' environment is likewise a part of their devilish status (128). This

[24] Note that *mor* can also be rendered as "mountain," which would mean that Grendel comes "from the mountain." The ambiguity of the term has been pointed out by Paul S. Langeslag; depending on the context in which it occurs, it can either denote "marsh" or "mountain" (122–23).

leaves the landscape as an entity that seems to be altered and transformed by its inhabitants while simultaneously affecting them in turn. For instance, Siewers reads both the monsters in their oceanic setting in Beowulf and the demons in the fen-land in *Guthlac* accounts as "landscape narratives both of conquest and possession, and of the formation of cultural identity" (2). Accordingly, Guthlac's triumph over the demons and his subsequent appropriation of the land is interpreted as a "exorcism of an earlier indigenous culture" (14). The notion of a sacred geography that sees sites and abodes in the wilderness as filled with spiritual beings and deities of all kinds is not exclusive to Christianity; it is evident that the founders of early Christian monasteries exhibited a preference for sites that carried a ritual significance that predates the Christian and maybe even Anglo-Saxon settlement (Wickham-Crowley 99). Especially isolated or enclosed places of natural beauty such as springs, hills, caves, and groves were perceived as carrying a numinous aura of divinity (Caseau 24). In this context, the extraordinary attractiveness of certain locations—such as the *beorg* in the *Guthlac* texts that is sought after by both the holy man and the demons—can be explained by their inherent spiritual significance. As a result, Christian monks who were settling in areas known as pagan sanctuaries usually expected complications and conflicts with the remaining heathen gods who wanted to defend their territory (Caseau 33).

The landscape's pagan past and the effects of its conversion to a Christian environment find repeated expression in the texts. Remnants of the landscape's heritage include the already mentioned burial mound on which the saint chooses to dwell and the presence of the demons which Siewers regards as spirits of the site's native non-Christian population (25). The subject of ancestry and former inhabitants is explored in a general as well as in a more specific way: on the one hand, Guthlac identifies the demons as descendants of the rebellious fallen angels. Felix also classifies them as "sons of darkness, seed of Cain" (Colgrave 102). On the other hand, both the Anglo-Latin and the Old English hagiography describe the attacking devils as "British," i.e. as Celtic-speaking Britons, in a way that portrays them as savages and allies of the devil. Felix tells of one night when Guthlac is approached by "British hosts" who speak in "sibilant speech" that the saint is able to understand because he used to live in exile with them (Colgrave 111). The Old English *Life* also mentions this encounter: "þa gehyrde he mycel werod þara awyrgedra gasta on bryttise sprecende; and he oncneow and ongeat heora gereorda, forþam he ærhwilon mid him wæs on wrace" (Gonser 136).[25] Depicting the devils as spirits of the Brittonic inhabitants who dwelt in the region before the Anglo-Saxon settlement allows a reading of Guthlac's mission as a conquest and territorial appropriation of land. Conversion and missionary activities in foreign lands form an important part of the saints' responsibilities; the desire for the extension and stabilisation of God's kingdom is the driving force behind this pursuit

[25] "Then he heard a troop of cursed spirits there speaking in British; and he knew and recognised their language, because he formerly was in exile with them."

(Michelet 164). The creation of cults of local saints—which in turn supported the development of local churches—was encouraged by the idea of a universal mission that takes possession of new land in order to colonise it with a Christian population (Michelet 17). Therefore, it is important to take this context of conversion and colonisation into consideration for the analysis of the Guthlac poems.

Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley refers to Guthlac's conquest as the Christianisation of a pagan site which can be seen as "an exercise of religious control" and as an assertion of "real power over the land, over the past and over the imagination" (99). The transformation that the saint causes in the landscape can be seen as a process of conversion of its own. Hence the hermit's task is not to teach people about God, but to take possession of a barren land in order to purify and colonise it. Siewers even calls Guthlac's settlement and his conflict with the place's past residents which ends with their expulsion an "exorcism of quasi-human land spirits … that marks cleansing and restoration" (36). In this understanding, heathendom affects both the people and the physical world, which is why a saint like Guthlac has to alter the realm around him physically as well as spiritually. Shook points out that the appeal of the *beorg* seems to increase the more Guthlac learns to appreciate it. The saint's attachment to his dwelling-place in *Guthlac A* provokes a reaction in the devils that is notably different from their demeanour in Felix's *Vita*: while the demons in the Anglo-Latin hagiography are mostly interested in leading the saint astray and destroying his faith, the evil spirits in the Anglo-Saxon poem try to chase the saint away from the barrow in order to reclaim it as theirs. The fiends in Felix also try to persuade Guthlac to leave the wilderness and to return to human civilisation, but they do not assert ownership of the desert. The demons in *Guthlac A* on the other hand consider themselves to be the legitimate owners due to the fact that they have been inhabiting the mountain before and longer than Guthlac (Shook 8–9).

The saint's power and authority become obvious not only in the changed quality of the landscape that expresses itself in the increased attractiveness and similarity to Paradise, but also in concrete changes and acts he performs. One example of this is the erection of the "Cristes rode," the cross of Christ (*Guth.A* 180a) in order to mark the land as belonging to God. In fact, the whole passage pictures Guthlac as a strong and capable warrior of God who undertakes the challenge of living in a remote and abandoned area and banishing the demons from this place. His conquest is described in almost ritualistic terms:

> þær he mongum wearð
> bysen on Brytene siþþan biorg gestah.
> Eadig oretta, ondwiges heard,
> gyrede hine georne mid gæstlicum
> wæpnum [and wædum], wong bletsade,
> him to ætstælle ærest arærde

Cristes rode; þær se cempa oferwon
frecness fela. (174b–81a)[26]

Once again, this emphasises the theme of spiritual warfare against the demonic powers that rule over the land he has chosen for himself. The sequence of his ascent, arming himself with "spiritual weapons," and erection of the cross is important for the saint's mission, because it reveals a process that overwrites the history and former quality of the landscape. Interestingly, the change in ownership is communicated in a Christian and in a pagan way: on the one hand, Siewers interprets Guthlac's acquisition of the burial mound as a way of marking one's territory that goes back to a prehistoric coding of landscape monuments (16–17). By constructing a barrow or occupying an already existing one, a person or a community would demonstrate their claim to be the legitimate landowner. On the other hand, Guthlac erects the cross as a symbol of Christianity, hence it serves as a visible proof of God's rule and power over the lands. Likewise, Guthlac appears as a "builder" ("bytla," 148b) when he constructs his *halig ham* ("holy home," 149). In this instance, Guthlac's dwelling-place is similar to a military outpost used to keep watch and stand guard against hostile forces; the poet also points out that the monk does not assert his claim to the lands for himself out of a desire for possession, but he appears as a safe-keeper for God's territory (148b–53a). The issues of legitimate ownership are addressed by dealing with the land as a property to which God and Guthlac stake a claim that is spiritual as well as proprietary. Needless to say, the demons detest the Christian entitlement to the location, but they do not emerge victorious from the conflict and even have to serve the holy man in the end. The saint's position as a builder who creates his own dwelling in the wilderness connects him to the architectural imagery surrounding the portrayal of heaven, while his role as a safe-keeper establishes him as a patron figure for the fens.

The Christian policy of settlement as it can be found in the poems at hand allows for only a specific kind of inhabitation. This is reflected in the fact that all previous attempts to populate the land have failed. Moreover, since they take part in each significant encounter in the battle for the *beorg*, one can also regard the angels as semi-permanent inhabitants that have been approved by God. As described before, they also participate in the transformation of the landscape, both indirectly by teaching the saint to appreciate it and directly by providing divine light and songs. In general, this reflects the notion of a landscape that has its own history of settlement, by mystic and spiritual beings. Consequently, the past of a landscape including its prior population can be recognised and inherited in form of traditions by any self-aware being. By emphasising the gradual and subtle

[26] "There he became an example for many in Britain after he ascended the hill. The blessed warrior, brave in resistance, eagerly prepared himself with spiritual weapons and garments; he first set up Christ's cross at the station, and blessed the plain; there the warrior overcame a great number of dangers."

changes that Guthlac causes in his environment, the poet portrays the replacement of the pagan and demonic presence with a Christian occupant as a wholesome kind of progress that improves the setting's quality and value. As he restores some of the Edenic features, Guthlac not only cleanses his own soul, he also contributes to a general process of civilisation and sacralisation that strongly affects the landscape. As Clarke puts it, "the conversion of hostile, wilderness landscape into a *locus amoenus* functions as a metaphor for spiritual conversion and cultivation, and for the establishment of peace and order" (*Literary Landscapes* 34). Moreover, in this transformation she sees a "localised enactment of a mythology that conflates cultivation of the land with spiritual cultivation" (51), which essentially means Christianity appears as a cultural imperialism that aspires to dominate, change, and ultimately displace pagan culture. This extends Guthlac's role from a simple warrior to a godly conqueror who sets out in order to introduce and establish a belief system that is presented as more rightful, advanced, and cultivated; simultaneously, he tames the landscape and transforms it into a more hospitable and enjoyable place. Once again, this shows that there is no fixed and immanent moral quality to the natural world; the landscape as it is presented in the Guthlac poems is only as demonic or divine as its inhabitants. Depending on the force in control, the same place can exhibit different features that characterise it as either paradisal or hellish. Thus the saint's endeavour to overcome the demons and take control of the land is not only a struggle for territory but also another way in which the cosmic conflict between good and evil is fought out by projecting it onto the landscape.

Conclusion

The earth as the transient home of humanity is not only spatially located between heaven above and hell below. As this paper has shown, the landscape itself is also often portrayed as morally ambiguous in the Old English Guthlac poems. Furthermore, the texts exhibit a preference for a fundamentally dichotomous representation of landscape that is based on heaven and hell as the ultimate Christian landscape archetypes. This is one of the reasons why an analysis of the poems' literary and theological influences enriches their interpretation, especially in terms of their attitudes towards nature. A preference for portraying symbolic landscapes alongside with representations of the physical world manifests itself in the creation of literary landscapes, which appear to be rather generic while being unmistakably influenced by the tension between Paradise and the underworld as scenic archetypes. The Guthlac poets frequently make use of these prototypical landscapes in their depiction of the saint's surroundings. They create a whole map of different locations by alluding to familiar and recognisable natural settings that already carry a distinct spiritual and moral meaning. The prime example of this would be heaven and hell as the two places of the Christian afterlife that constitute the best and

the worst landscape possible, respectively. Hell appears as an actual place that is visited by Guthlac as part of his temptations, but it is also reflected in the earthly landscape and especially in its demonic inhabitants. Likewise, the stock images associated with heaven are used in order to demonstrate the mountain's positive transformation that is caused by the saint's presence. The association of greenness with the *locus amoenus* and Paradise is in this context surely one of the most important formulae that is used in order to convey the attractiveness of a place.

However, the surroundings that humankind experiences and occupies on earth are not actual realisations of either heaven or hell, but watered-down versions that display similar features. Yet the poets do not strictly adhere to the conventions used to convey these stereotypical settings, but they adapt them in order to add their own nuances. An example of this would be the modification of well-known tropes used in the hagiographies about the desert saints, such as the construction of a plain abode in a desolate and wild territory which is then frequently attacked by evil spirits. The fenlands that Guthlac chooses for his hermitage are described in a way that allows their classification as a vernacular version of the desert to which others saints such as Anthony have retreated. The wilderness of England not only shares topographical features such as its isolated vastness with the desert in hagiographical writings, but it also serves the same purpose: it enables an absolute retreat from worldly matters and the opportunity to realize an ascetic lifestyle free from comfort and pleasures. However, the authors give the saint's solitary dwelling-place a distinctive local twist by interlacing the rather generic wilds with descriptions of regional landmarks such as rivers and mountains, thereby creating a vernacular tradition of the desert located in medieval England. This paper has also demonstrated that light and darkness are closely connected with heaven and hell as important mediators of moral quality in the Guthlac poems. Light and darkness influence the ways in which Guthlac perceives and assesses his surroundings. While light signifies an increased quality of his (spiritual) life, its absence intensifies the hardships and struggles.

The Guthlac poems illustrate that the dichotomy of day and night is not merely a symbol of the passing of time that structures the natural world, but that it is a part of a symbolic pattern in which the duel between light and darkness is representative of the cosmic battle between good and evil. While the devils preferably dwell in dark and hidden places, Guthlac is protected by a holy light that comes in various forms to keep the darkness at bay. Likewise, the angels are portrayed as holy messengers who bring him both actual and spiritual light as a support when he is struck by terror and assaulted by wild demons at night. It is interesting to note how much Guthlac interacts with other beings, at least for someone who purposely chooses to live apart from his community. The frequent references to angels and demons vying for the holy man's soul suggest that a greater battle is fought in the wild. However, while the representation of animals in the Guthlac

poems is influenced by biblical as well as hagiographical writings, the wildlife does not take sides, at least not as a uniform group.

The contrast between the wilderness and the city is surely a dichotomy that features prominently in the Guthlac poems. Although the poets emphasise that the isolation and the predominant lack of cultivation are some of the reasons why the monk chooses the specific surroundings as his hermitage, it is still evident that the truly desirable landscape is somewhat ordered and domesticated. Both the Garden of Eden and Jerusalem as the Heavenly City are places that are characterised by their orderliness and tranquillity. They are also cultivated sites in the sense that their creation is heavily influenced by man-made structures. For instance, the garden can be seen as a place of wilderness that is tamed in order to appease the demand for recreation and food. The same applies to the city and the hall as imaginations of heaven that offer security and companionship. Both of these places reflect a human desire to control and dominate one's surroundings. Following the Creation narrative, in which God places the world in the hands of humanity to make it theirs to inhabit, the submission of nature to Guthlac is tantamount to the restoration of what is perceived as the natural order. The imperialistic endeavour of winning the land for God and his Christian kingdom reinforces this reading. The expulsion of any pagan remains still attached to Guthlac's mound is necessary for the creation of a sanctified landscape that can accommodate Christian people. This, too, is an act of (re-)acquisition of what is perceived as an inherent right to a land and its population.

The Guthlac poems can also be read as meditations on the division of nature and culture. The conflict of man versus nature is a recurring theme in Old English literature; it is often a struggle of power between the vulnerable human being and the violent natural forces to which they are exposed. The Guthlac poems offer a version of this confrontation in which the natural world does not pose a deliberate threat to the man's well-being, yet it houses the devils and offers them ideal living conditions. It is the devils that are the real danger to Guthlac's soul, which makes the natural world at least part of Satan's scheme. Nevertheless, it is also a source of pleasure and delight for him: once he settles on the mountain, Guthlac soon starts to feel at home and the place grows dear to him. Guthlac's residence in the wilderness allows him to direct his attention inward. Besides his spiritual journey towards the heavenly kingdom, he also develops an understanding of the formerly despicable land and forms an emotional bond with the mountain. Against all odds, the saint achieves the seemingly impossible: the transformation of the previously bleak and uninviting landscape into a pleasant abode—which he does not inhabit for long, as the conversion of the site is shortly followed by his soul's journey to heaven. Still, he leaves a landscape behind that has been heavily affected by his presence; the altered state of the natural world signifies the fulfilment of his saintly mission. At the same time, the landscape also served its purpose as an instrument in the hands of God and Satan. The landscape may not have an autonomous

morality, but a spiritual balance of powers lends it the capacity to manifest as either divine or demonic.

All in all, the written accounts of the English saint Guthlac show that the longing for authentic experiences in and with nature is not a modern phenomenon reserved for people who feel alienated and detached from the natural world and consequently their own human nature. Guthlac's desire to leave society behind in order to settle as a hermit on a mountain is certainly not based on a lack of closeness or exposure to the environment, as it is the case for many individuals today. Still, his desire to explore a coarse and undomesticated part of the planet, to challenge himself, and to push his limits in order to connect with the world around him in a way that is both physical and spiritual resonates with a contemporary audience. In the Christian mindset that influenced the Guthlac poems, Guthlac's actions can be seen as expressions of the immortal soul's restlessness on a transient earth; the insatiable longing for the true home—a paradisal place that has become rather obscure in its elusiveness—is an experience shared by all inhabitants of the post-lapsarian world. Yet the hermit's state at the close of his life is something that every Christian can hope for: as he reaches the end of his earthly existence, Guthlac's death marks the closure of his existence as a pilgrim and the beginning of his dwelling in the heavenly home.

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Forms and Functions of Nakedness in Middle English Romances

Julia Josfeld

Introduction

We live in a highly sexualised culture. Images of naked bodies are used to sell us everything, from clothing to beer, and the phrase "sex sells" has become so commonplace that it is rarely ever challenged. Especially in popular culture, in movies, magazines, music videos, and so on, erotic imagery is normal, in some contexts even expected. But has it always been this way?

During the High and Late Middle Ages, one very popular genre of literature was the romance: stories of valiant knights, virtuous kings, mysterious fairy folk, and beautiful ladies. Many of these stories have as one of their central elements the pursuit of love or conflicts caused by sexual desire. Over the centuries, the importance of this aspect seems to have grown in the perception of readers, to the point where in modern English the name of the genre has become a word we associate exclusively with love, wooing, and relationships. Judging by this, it might be tempting to assume that an equivalent to our sexualised popular culture might have flourished in these particular texts. However, there are some scholars who strongly urge caution when talking about eroticism and sexualised bodies in the Middle Ages.

In her article "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," Caroline Walker Bynum set out to refute an argument made by Leo Steinberg a few years earlier regarding the depiction of Christ in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

Steinberg had brought together a number of paintings which, according to him, put a clear focus on the penis of Christ to emphasise his sexuality.[1] While Bynum does not contradict Steinberg's findings regarding the images, she draws a different conclusion: the depiction of and focus on Jesus' genitals would not necessarily have been perceived as sexual in the late Middle Ages. She finds that

> [t]wentieth-century readers and viewers tend to eroticize the body and to define themselves by the nature of their sexuality. But did medieval viewers? For several reasons, I think we should be cautious about assuming they did. (Bynum 406)

Bynum goes on to argue that the focus which later medieval theology and especially Mysticism placed on Christ's body only rarely, if at all, concerned his existence as a sexual man. Rather, his physicality was associated with his "humanation" (403), his becoming human so he could suffer and die on the cross, thus leading humankind to salvation (407–08).

While Bynum's article makes some sweeping statements questioning the connection of the body and sexuality in medieval minds (like the one mentioned above), she only elaborates in detail on the body of Christ and whether it was sexualised in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Nevertheless, her conclusions have been applied more broadly, causing academics to challenge ideas about sexuality and the erotic in medieval depictions of naked bodies (see e.g. Schultz 92, reiterated in Hopkins 60). In this paper, I will continue along this line of questioning: is the instinct to associate naked bodies with eroticism and sex justified in the context of Middle English romances? And what does it even mean to be "naked" in the Middle Ages?

To answer these questions, I will first try to shed some light on the scholarly debate concerning nakedness in the Middle Ages. As one might expect, a topic that borders so strongly on the taboo has not yet been studied to a great extent, although in recent decades, as more scholars have turned towards the fields of sexuality and bodies in literature, some interesting theories have been put forth. Despite the relatively small amount of available research, establishing an understanding of the medieval conceptions of nakedness is crucial: literary devices exist in context, and to decipher the meaning they held for their contemporary audience, one must understand that audience's reality.

The specific texts which will be analysed in this paper are a collection of relatively well-known thirteenth- and fourteenth-century romances, which contain a wide variety of scenes presenting different forms of nakedness.[2] On a surface level, many of these scenes seem to entail a certain erotic *frisson*, or at least potential for such, but this is not always the case. By examining the naked bodies

[1] The arguments of his book, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* are summarised in Bynum 403.

[2] The chosen romances will be introduced in greater detail in the first subsection of "Nakedness in Middle English Romances."

present in these romances in their textual and historical context, I will endeavour to determine in how far nakedness was used as a signal for eroticism and sexual tension, and if, as a literary device, it could serve any other functions.

Being Naked in the Middle Ages

The Meaning of "naked"

The first question that needs to be asked when talking about nakedness in a medieval context may also be the most fundamental one: what did it mean to be described as "naked" in the Middle Ages? In 1992, Robert Jütte attempted a semiotics of the naked body throughout time. He pointed out that nakedness could have two modes: being with or without clothing (112–15). Nakedness *without* clothing is what we in modern times would still understand as being naked, but nakedness *with* clothing might not be as familiar.

Examining medieval plays, German ethnologist Hans Peter Duerr has pointed out that characters were often explicitly described as naked while the actors portraying them were in fact dressed in flesh-coloured suits or white chemises (292). He finds that sources draw a clear distinction between someone being "naked," meaning poorly or inadequately dressed, and being "fully naked"; a sentiment that is reiterated for example by Silke Winst (347). Nakedness is generally regarded as a social construct rather than an absolute value (see e.g. Bießenecker 12), and it would appear that the medieval conception of nakedness expanded beyond our modern understanding to include any form of socially insufficient clothing.

A literary example of this expanded concept can be found in the first few lines of the late thirteenth-century romance *Havelok*.[3] We read about the eponymous hero: "The tale is of Havelok i-maked: / Wil he was litel he yede ful naked" (5–6). While Shepherd gives a translation here of "completely naked" and adds a note interpreting this statement to mean "in youth he was destitute," other editors have glossed the word "naked" as "poorly dressed" (54). Later in the same poem, the word is used to describe a state of complete undress (2123) as well as to imply poor clothing, but clothing nonetheless (853).[4] Similar evidence can be found in other romances of the time, suggesting that the medieval concept of "nakedness" includes more than just bodies entirely devoid of clothing. Therefore, to properly examine the function of nakedness and its erotic qualities in Middle English literature, the medieval conception of nakedness should be taken into account, and instances of inadequate clothing must be considered alongside scenes of explicit nudity.

[3] All quotations refer to Shepherd's edition of *Havelok*.

[4] For a more detailed discussion of nakedness in *Havelok*, see the subsections on "Poverty" and "Identity."

The Historical Debate over Nakedness

Before looking at the actual text, it is necessary to examine medieval attitudes towards nakedness. What might have gone through the minds of medieval readers when they were reading about a man running naked through the woods? Or a noble lady lying in bed with another man, both of them only wearing nightclothes, if any clothes at all? Would they have regarded such displays as extraordinary, worthy of particular note, maybe even subversive, or would they have shrugged them off as not too far removed from ordinary, everyday occurrences? When trying to analyse the functions of nakedness in medieval texts, we must first attempt to answer these questions. If, as some scholars have argued, public nakedness was indeed commonplace in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, ascribing erotic meaning to the naked bodies of Middle English romances would distort their narrative function. On the other hand, if nakedness was generally completely unacceptable, scenes involving even just implied nakedness might have inherently held strong meaning, erotic or otherwise, for medieval readers. To answer this question, we need to take into account the scholarly debate on the topic of nakedness and shame that has taken place over the past decades.

Two of the most important and influential voices in this debate are those of sociologist Norbert Elias and ethnologist Hans Peter Duerr. In 1939, Elias published his seminal, multi-volume work *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, which was reprinted and started to gain wide recognition in 1969. In these books, Elias puts forth the theory that society in the Middle Ages was less disciplined, less restrictive, in short: less civilised than it is today. A shift occurred in the Renaissance, when people in the West started to impose stricter rules and behavioural norms on themselves and on their communities as a whole, thus moving us gradually towards what we recognise as our modern society (Elias 79). Hans Peter Duerr, meanwhile, devoted his most celebrated work to disproving Elias's theory in detail and in its entirety. The aptly-named *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozess* was published in five volumes, starting in 1988 with the book *Nacktheit und Scham*. The conflict between these two scholars and their ideas has sparked enough controversy that it is still referred to and discussed as the "Elias-Duerr-Kontroverse."[5] However, for the purposes of this paper, the general merits and failings of Elias's and Duerr's claims regarding the process of civilisation will not be discussed in detail. Rather, I will use those of their arguments that touch on nakedness in the Middle Ages to gain insight into the state of scholarly thinking on this topic.

According to Norbert Elias, nakedness, even in public, was accepted in the Middle Ages and not regarded as shameful or embarrassing. Bodily functions were only moved into private and concealed spaces towards the beginning of the Renaissance (Elias 49), and being naked in front of members of the opposite sex, e.g. in bed or while bathing, was not an extraordinary occurrence (294). Elias's

[5] A detailed discussion can be found in Hinz 349–91.

assumptions are based on conduct books from the thirteenth century onwards, as well as medieval and early modern literary texts, eye-witness accounts, and illustrations, covering a wide range of pre-modern Western European societies. Hans Peter Duerr, on the other hand, has taken issue with Elias's interpretation of most, if not all, of these sources, as well as with his colleague's broader conclusions. According to Duerr, humans have always regarded nakedness as inherently shameful, and this can be deduced from the sources if one knows where to look (12). He does not find a significant shift in attitudes towards the naked body between the Middle Ages and today, claiming that no medieval person would have willingly exposed their body in front of strangers, unless they were prostitutes or deviated in some other way from the societal norm (32).

Throughout the years, most scholars have taken a view that falls somewhere between these two positions, arguing sometimes for more, sometimes for less permissiveness. But to better understand the implications of this controversy, I will look at two examples of hotly-debated aspects of historical medieval nakedness. Beyond the general assertions made by Elias, Duerr, and their commentators, several concrete situations in which one would expect to find—or not to find—nakedness are often highlighted and examined in detail, trying to gauge medieval attitudes towards the naked body. First among these are the bed and the bath.

Bed, Bath, and Beyond: Nakedness in Context

The question of whether medieval people slept naked has been debated for several decades. Elias asserts that sleeping in the nude was the norm during the Middle Ages, and that specialised clothing to be worn at night was not developed until the Renaissance (224). Going one step further, he claims that it was commonplace for people to share a bed, even if they did not know each other, and sometimes even if they were of different gender (240). Even before Elias, other cultural historians have made this claim, citing for instance illustrations of seemingly naked men and women lying in the same bed, but—as is to be expected—Duerr takes issue with this view.

According to Duerr, it would have been highly unlikely to find a medieval man and woman sleeping in the same bed unless they were husband and wife, and it would have been even stranger to find them naked (177). Looking at the same sources as Elias, he interprets them entirely differently. Where men and women are depicted sharing a bed, Duerr reads the image as a romantic or even erotic scene, if not a straightforward medieval representation of a brothel (179). Similarly, Elias uses a medieval text in which a lord allows an honoured guest to share his wife's bed, to back up his claim that strangers sleeping together was commonplace (230). Duerr, on the other hand, raises the objection that the existence of this report showcases how exceptional such an offer would have been, since it was only made to a very special guest of the house (183). Indeed, two unmarried

people sleeping in one bed could have harmed their reputation irreparably, even if no sexual intercourse occurred (183).

In addition to refuting Elias's arguments, Duerr also adds some sources of his own, to strengthen his position. For example, he quotes ordinances from guest houses along a popular pilgrimage route that forbid guests to sleep in their normal clothing—a requirement that would only be necessary if guests did habitually go to bed fully dressed (Duerr 181). Other evidence Duerr produces stems from religious houses, which appear to have enforced strict policies of single occupancy and all-night lighting to prevent untoward goings-on (191–92).

However, just as Duerr took issue with Elias's conclusions, other scholars have criticised Duerr's sources for being too selective. While it is quite likely that religious orders and the institutions they ran, such as boarding houses and hospitals, adhered to a strict moral code, this does not necessarily reflect the general attitudes of society (Classen, *Sexuality* 76). Additionally, some scholars think that night shirts, which survive from the late Middle Ages or are at least credibly attested, were rare items that would have been a luxury of the upper classes, not a usual household item for the majority of medieval society (Classen, "Naked Men" 145). Most scholars, including Robert Jütte, once again find the truth somewhere between the two extreme positions. They consider it most likely that the decision whether to sleep in the nude or in some form of night-dress, be that a shirt, breeches, or a full-on nightgown, would have depended on the situation and on individual preference (Jütte 120).

A similar divide can be found regarding the question whether it would have been normal for medieval people, especially people of different genders, to bathe together or in front of each other, and if so, whether they would have been naked doing it. Here too, positions are extremely divided, with Elias giving sources that seem to demonstrate the commonplace nature of naked, mixed-gender bathing (319), and Duerr discrediting his reading of those sources and claiming that nakedness in the bath would have been highly problematic (24). Sources include depictions that clearly show men and women sharing a bathtub while very lightly dressed, if they are dressed at all. These images are taken by Elias as proof of mixed public baths (319), whereas Duerr recognises them as scenes from brothels or other disreputable houses (50). Furthermore, Duerr argues that even if men and women had bathed in each other's presence, they would not have been naked. Rather, they would have worn a chemise or braies (44), and many medieval bathtubs would have been covered with a cloth or a wooden partial lid to preserve the heat. In the absence of such covers, flower petals or leaves might have been strewn on the water to preserve the bathing person's decency (Duerr 25–26). The question of nakedness in the bath has not been as hotly debated as that of nakedness in bed, but where scholarly discourse exists, it predictably tries to find a middle ground between the two extreme positions, stating that whether or not bathing

naked in the company of others was acceptable depended wholly on the circumstances (Classen, "Naked Men" 159).

One issue of relevance for the interpretation of Middle English romances is bathing in front of servants. In Duerr's understanding, discrepancies in social class did not mitigate the shame of revealing one's naked body in front of another person (243). The story of a noblewoman who gleefully exposes her private parts in front of a male servant, used by Elias once again to reinforce his thesis (77), is taken by Duerr to represent an anomaly, which is why a report of this episode survives at all (243). Robert Jütte takes the moderate position that bathing naked in front of servants, or, similarly, a lady being washed by a bather, would not have been perceived as embarrassing or transgressive, as long as everyone adhered to their social roles. Uncomfortable moments would only arise if a person broke the conventions by insisting on being perceived as an individual rather than filling a specific role. He gives the example of a lady asking a bather to tell her whether her breasts were more beautiful than those of other ladies, thus making her more than just another naked body among the many the bather would deal with on a daily basis, and causing great embarrassment to the man (Jütte 118).

To sum up, there seems to be no clear consensus among scholars on how the average medieval mind would have viewed a naked body, whether nakedness was pervasive and accepted or taboo and transgressive. If, as Elias and his followers suggest, being naked in front of strangers was a normal part of life, scenes involving naked characters in medieval literature might not necessarily have incited thoughts of eroticism and sexuality in their audience. If, on the other hand, as Duerr surmises, nakedness was always perceived as embarrassing and shameful, basically every scene involving characters explicitly or implicitly in a state of undress would hold specific, probably sexual significance. But because the truth most likely lies somewhere in between these two extremes, each mention of nakedness in Middle English romance, and indeed each scene where we expect nakedness but do not find it, needs to be examined and evaluated individually. By determining the specific forms that nakedness takes and the narrative functions it serves, we may gain a better understanding of whether or not the naked body was generally used as a symbol of eroticism and sexuality in this particular medieval genre.

Nakedness in Middle English Romances

The Romances

The texts here examined date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Mainly, I will be looking at four romances: *Havelok*, *Ywain and Gawain*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Launfal*. While it is difficult to tell how widely texts were received in the Middle

Ages, these four texts hold a certain popularity among scholars and critics today. Although they represent different thematic sub-genres of romance,[6] such as the Breton Lai (*Orfeo* and *Launfal*) or the Matter of England (*Havelok*), there are some surprising parallels in motifs, plot elements, and characterisations between them, and they all contain scenes that allow interesting insights into the forms and functions of nakedness.

In addition to these main texts, I will cover some material from the very well-known Chaucerian romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, as well as the less famous tales *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, and *The Avowyng of Arthur*. The latter two texts also mark the latest romances in this study, since *Carlisle* is presumed to have been composed in the last quarter of the fourteenth or the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and *The Avowyng* is traditionally dated to around 1400.[7] Of course there are many more romances that involve naked characters at some point or other, but this selection already covers a wide range of different contexts in which nakedness occurs, and lays out a broad variety of forms and functions of the same.

Hot, Erotic, and Exotic: The Naked Lady in the Woods

One of the more striking examples of nudity in an erotic context to be found in Middle English romances is the first meeting between the fairy princess Tryamour and the Arthurian knight Sir Launfal in the romance of the same name.[8] Launfal, who has left King Arthur's court after being snubbed by Queen Guinevere, has fallen destitute, and, one summer morning, tries to escape his misery by riding away from the town where he resides into a nearby wood. There he is met by two beautiful ladies who invite the knight to meet their mistress, who has long admired him from afar. Launfal follows the ladies to a clearing where he finds Tryamour, lying on a luxurious bed inside a splendid pavilion. The poet describes the lady as follows:

> For hete her clothes down sche dede
> Almest to her gerdylstede;
> Than lay sche uncovert.
> Sche was as whyt a lylye in May,
> Or snow that sneweth yn wynterys day;
> He seygh never non so pert. (289–94)

Upon seeing that the object of her desire has arrived, Tryamour proposes to Launfal that she will give him unending riches and become his secret lover, as

[6] I use this term loosely: the hotly debated definition of romance and its subgenres is beyond the scope of this paper.

[7] For details of the dating, surviving manuscripts, and general state of scholarship on all of these texts, see their respective introductions in the listed editions.

[8] All quotations refer to Shepherd's edition of *Sir Launfal*.

long as he keeps her existence a secret. Launfal agrees and the two have dinner and spend the night together. The erotic nature of the initial encounter cannot be denied—not least because it is followed by declarations of love and, ultimately, by sex: "For play lytyll they sclepte that nyght, / Tyll on morn hyt was daylight" (349–50). What is not entirely obvious, however, is which elements of the scene would have made it appear erotic to a medieval audience.

In her article on Christ's body and sexuality, Bynum writes that female breasts were not necessarily sexualised in the Middle Ages. Rather, they were associated with nurturing and motherhood. To support her claim, she points out the many depictions of Jesus' mother Mary with exposed breasts, feeding her son (Bynum 407). Of course, Mary's status as a (if not *the*) virgin and the mother of Christ might have made it more acceptable to depict her in a fashion which would have been unsuitable for medieval noblewomen, but even so, these depictions demonstrate that naked breasts did not immediately imply eroticism. Looking at the half-naked Tryamour in this light, we are forced to reconsider her presentation, which can so easily be construed as pure erotic wish-fulfilment (Kelly 250).

Despite Bynum's argument, readers are unlikely to find many half-naked ladies displaying themselves semi-publicly for male view in Middle English literature, so why is Tryamour allowed such a transgression? One clue can be found in the way she is introduced to the reader:

> He fond in the pavyloun
> The Kynges doughter of Olyroun,
> Dame Tryamour that hyghte;
> Her fadyr was Kyng of Fayrye (277–80)

Tryamour is a fairy princess, which gives her an inherently exotic quality and might allow her more transgressive behaviour than a human lady (Saunders 108). When Launfal encounters the two ladies that lead him to his fairy mistress, he is sitting under a tree during a summer morning (*Launfal* 211–31), a situation which often leads to visitations by fairies and magical creatures (*Sir Orfeo* 65 and note).[9] Combined with the splendour of Tryamour's pavilion and bed (*Launfal* 265–67), the indescribability of her magnificent clothing (299–300), and her beauty, this setting gives the whole scene a dreamlike, otherworldly quality. It only adds to Tryamour's exotic nature that she dares present herself topless in a forest clearing where—at least theoretically—any given number of people might find her. These matters make her more desirable than the treacherous, human Guinevere.

If we concede that the lady's exposed breasts might not be the (only) erotic focal point of the forest meeting, however, we need to look for it elsewhere. In his article "'Some Like it Hot': The Medieval Eroticism of Heat," Robert Rouse argues that the answer can be found in the heat of the day that is so frequently

[9] All quotations refer to Shepherd's edition of *Sir Orfeo*.

referred to throughout Launfal's ride to the forest and his meeting with his beloved. The poet tells us that "the wether was hot the underntyde" (220) when Launfal sets out, and a few lines later the knight takes off his cloak "for hete of the wedere" (223). In the same fashion, Tryamour's state of undress is blamed on the heat (289). Rouse suggests that this connection between heat and romantic scenes would have read as erotic to a medieval audience. While the season traditionally connected with chaste, courtly romance is spring, especially May (77), "[s]ummer, and the hot weather that the season brings, seem to occupy a particular place in the rhetoric of love and desire" (76). In several texts the heat of summer is decried as causing impure (i.e. lustful) thoughts and making people more aware of their sexual desires (76). Rouse links this association back to the theory of the four humours, which was central to the leading medieval understanding of the body. Heat and summer are connected with yellow bile and a choleric temperament. Usually, women are thought to be of a cooler disposition, so an excessively "hot" woman would exhibit more sexually forward (i.e. masculine) traits (Rouse 79–80). Following this line of reasoning, Rouse suggests that Tryamour's actions, her striptease and active wooing of Launfal, might have made her seem "hot" and thus inherently erotic to a medieval audience (80). Thus it would not be the fairy's naked body itself, but her very nature and the trappings of the exotic summer scene that are responsible for the eroticism of this encounter.

Despite Rouse's and Bynum's assertions, however, the erotic appeal of Tryamour's nakedness cannot be entirely disregarded, especially when we take into consideration the romance's source material. The Middle English *Sir Launfal* is based on a French romance by Marie de France called *Lanval*. While some of the Middle English episodes can be traced back to a different source, the scenes relevant to this paper already appear in Marie's text and consequently in other Middle English redactions of the same. Comparing the meeting scene between Launfal (or his counterparts) and Tryamour in the different versions, Amanda Hopkins finds that the fairy's nakedness becomes less subtle and more pronounced in later texts (66). In Marie's twelfth-century version, Tryamour is still wearing a shift and has drawn an expensive mantle over herself for warmth (Hopkins 64); in *Launfal*, as stated above, not only does she not wear a shift anymore, she has taken off her cloak because of the heat, putting more emphasis on her nakedness. In one of the latest redactions of the text, *Sir Lambewell*, traditionally dated to around the year 1500,[10] the scene becomes even more explicit, adding that Tryamour's clothing is lying next to her, thus eradicating any subtlety from the revealing of her naked state (Hopkins 66). While Hopkins goes into some detail regarding the reasons for such changes, the takeaway for this paper is that even though Tryamour's half-naked body might not be the only, maybe not even the primary, factor for the

[10] For further discussion of the different Middle English redactions of *Lanval*, as well as questions regarding authorship and dating, see Spearing 117–56.

eroticism in this scene, it undoubtedly plays a part, and was identified that way by the Middle English redactors of the Old French romance.

Romance in Bed and Bath

After examining this example of blatant, possibly even transgressive nakedness, we should take a look at other situations where naked bodies might be expected more readily: the bed and the bath. As explained above, it is not entirely clear whether sleeping and bathing actually involved taking off all of one's clothing, especially in front of other people. Therefore, when talking about scenes involving characters in bed or taking a bath, we must examine carefully whether definite nakedness is involved, and how it is connected to the scenes' eroticism, if any is suggested.

There are many romances in which characters share a bed at some point, though most of these scenes fall into one of two categories. The first possibility is that the characters are married, and their sleeping together is a natural state of affairs. Sometimes these scenes involve sex (especially on wedding nights), but often they just offer one possible setting for plot elements to happen. In a scene from *Havelok*, which I will discuss in further detail in the subsection "Identity," the titular character and his wife sleep in the same bed, when they both have dream visions (1247–1312). When they wake up, they are conveniently placed next to each other and can discuss their respective experience. For the purposes of this paper, the fact that they are sharing a bed is incidental, serving mostly as a framing device for their visions. Also, the fact that they are most likely naked at the time does not convey any inherent eroticism; rather, it serves a very specific function for the plot (cf. below). In cases like this one, the characters' nakedness, if it exists, is either incidental, due to circumstance, or instrumental to the plot. Either way it does not really add to our deeper understanding of different functions of nakedness.

The second type of bedroom scene, which is found more commonly in Middle English romances, is a scene involving two lovers sleeping together. An example for this would be the first night Launfal spends with Tryamour, in which "For play lytyll they sclepte" (*Launfal* 349). Here we must assume that both characters are at least partially naked, but the erotic nature of the scene derives from the actual love-making, not necessarily from the fact that both participants have taken off their clothes. Another example can be found in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*,[11] when the eponymous couple sleep together for the first time, although here the detailed description of Criseyde's naked body adds significantly to the scene's eroticism (*Troilus* III, 1247–53).[12] But no matter whether a bedroom scene

[11] All quotations refer to Benson's edition of *Troilus and Criseyde*.

[12] For a closer analysis of the eroticism of this scene see Hopkins 61.

between two lovers involves explicit mention of nakedness and eroticised bodies or not, their presence, assumed or otherwise, is not surprising, given the context.

Much more interesting for our study are cases which fall into neither category, where two unmarried characters who are not lovers share a bed, or one character lies in bed while others watch. One such constellation occurs in similar iterations in *The Avowyng of Arthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*.[13] In both these romances, a man is made to lie in bed next to a married woman, under strict instructions not to let the situation escalate sexually. While this setup sounds as though it might hold some erotic potential, the mood is subverted by the surrounding circumstances.

In *Avowyng*, Sir Baldwin has made three vows, the third of which is never to be jealous of his wife, and King Arthur has devised a test to see if Baldwin will be true to his word. When Arthur and his court are staying at Baldwin's castle, the king orders his host to go hunting, and instructs one of the hunters to make sure the party will be back early the next morning. Arthur's plan is to order one of his knights to share a bed with Baldwin's wife, but not to touch her on pain of death. In the morning, the lady's husband will return and catch the two *in flagrante delicto*, which—so Arthur's hope—will make him jealous and angry, thus breaking his vow.

At night, while the hunting party is still away, Arthur is allowed into the lady's bedchamber, when he tells her that he will not sully her reputation. The lady has already gone to bed, although her maids are still with her, so Arthur sits down at the foot of the bed (835) and explains that he does not intent to hurt her, he is merely trying to settle a bet (841–44). The king has brought a knight who will pose as her lover with him to the chamber. The ensuing scene has to be quoted at length to understand its full effect.

Thenne the Kyng sayd to his knyghte,
"Sone that thou were undyghte,
And in yondur bedde ryghte!
  Hie the gud spede!"
The knyghte did as he him bade,
And qwenne ho se him unclad
Then the Lady wex drede,
  Worlyke in wede.
He sayd, "Lye downe prevely hur by,
Butte neghe noghte thou that Lady;
For and thou do, thou schall dey
  For thi derfe dede;

[13] All quotations refer to Hahn's editions of *The Avowyng of Arthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*.

Ne noghte so hardy thou stur,[14]
Ne onus turne the to hus."
The tother sayd, "Nay, sur!"
For him hade he drede.

Thenne the Kyng asshet a chekkere,
And cald a damsel dere;
Downe thay sette hom in fere
Opon the bedside. (845–64)

Although this scene has two unmarried naked people sharing a bed, it could not be further from erotic. The complete unconcern with which King Arthur orders his knight to strip, threatens to kill him if he disobeys, and then proceeds to play chess while sitting on the side of the bed is juxtaposed with the very clear discomfort of the lady and her pseudo-paramour, creating a strong comedic effect. The knight is explicitly barred from arousal by Arthur's command (857), which further drains any possible eroticism from the scene, and he takes care not to look under the cover (867–72). Throughout the night, the two supposed lovers lie next to each other, naked under the sheets,[15] but the only "play" (a common Middle English euphemism for sex, e.g. Carle 486) that occurs is the game of chess between Arthur and one of the handmaidens (869).

The script is flipped somewhat in *The Carle of Carlisle*, because here the hero has to spend the night next to another man's wife without allowing himself any sexual stirring. Throughout the romance, the lowly Carle tests the courtesy of Gawain who is staying at his castle. In every situation that presents itself, Gawain follows his host's instructions to the letter, even though he is socially above the Carle's station. When the Carle discovers that Gawain is strongly attracted to his (the Carle's) wife, he devises a final test: Gawain must join the Carle's wife in bed, and embrace and kiss her while her husband watches. Gawain is undressed by the Carle's servants (452–53), and is only too eager to follow his host's commands (457–64). He climbs into the bed "fast and that good spede" (462), and kisses the lady, which her husband observes with satisfaction (464–65). However, "When Gawen wolde have doun the prevey far, / Then seyd the Carle, 'Whoo ther! / That game I the forbade'" (466–68). Instead, he allows Gawain to spend the night with his beautiful daughter, as a reward for the knight's courtesy.[16]

[14] Hahn translates this as "Nor be so bold that you become aroused."
[15] Although Baldwin's wife is described as "worlyke in wede," literally "excellent in clothing" (*Avowyng* 852), this is most likely a standard phrase to describe her beauty and virtue, not a comment on her current state of dress.
[16] Both episodes described above raise a variety of issues concerning the commodification of female bodies, agency, consent in romances, and more, which cannot be discussed in this paper, but deserve further study.

This scene has a lot of potential for erotic tension. We learn that Gawain is strongly attracted to the Carle's wife, so much so that the Carle is able to detect his thoughts and gently mock him for them (406–14), and once the two "lovers" are naked in bed together, Gawain even tries to initiate sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, the fact that all this is taking place under the knowing eyes of the Carle, who watches the unfolding events like a puppet master (409–14, 465), destroys any erotic potential the scene might have had and draws it into the comical.[17]

To sum up, there are several different ways in which scenes involving nakedness in the bedroom can play out. If the bed is shared between two lovers, married or otherwise, we are likely to find sexualised naked bodies. However, being in bed (and consequently probably naked) can also be used as a convenient setting to further a romance's plot, in which case it does not necessarily depend on or conjure up eroticism. And sometimes the expectation of erotic tension created by the naked characters in a bedroom scene is used in some other way, for example to achieve a comedic effect through subversion.

Much rarer than bedroom scenes, though, are scenes in which characters take a bath. Elizabeth Archibald has written a whole article on the question, titled "Did Knights have Baths?" in which she evaluates evidence from a wide range of texts. Archibald's first observation is that scholars' claims that bathing scenes, often with erotic overtones, are common in medieval English literature suffer from a lack of evidence in the sources. In fact, she finds that the MED lists hardly any instances of *bath* or *bathen* in Middle English romances (101–02). Furthermore, she asserts that the "link between baths and sex is lacking in Middle English romance, in spite of the comments of [some] social historians" (Archibald 108). So what do the few baths that we do find in the romances look like?

The Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*,[18] which adapts Chrétien de Troyes' French *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion*, has two instances of the titular knight taking a bath, or, to be more precise, being bathed. The first one occurs when Ywain is hiding in the castle of the knight who used to protect the magical spring. Lunet, the maid who saved Ywain's life upon his arrival to the castle, has convinced her lady, Alundyne, to receive Ywain, and to consider him as a possible new husband and protector. To prepare the knight for this meeting, Lunet gives him a bath and new clothing:

> Bilive sho gert Syr Ywaine bath
> And cled him sethin in gude scarlet
> Forord wele and with gold fret,

[17] Similar constellations occur in other romances, most prominently *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, when Lady Bertilak comes to Gawain's room while he is lying in bed, possibly naked, and sits down next to the knight, trying to seduce him. The different possible implications of those scenes have been studied many times, most relevantly for this paper by Hopkins (56).

[18] All quotations refer to Shepherd's edition of *Ywain and Gawain*.

A girdel ful riche for the nanes
Of perry and of preciows stanes. (1102–06)

These lines do not give any explicit information on how this bath takes place, whether Lunet only leads Ywain into a chamber where a bath has been prepared for him or whether she personally washes the—presumably naked—knight. But even if the line "sho gert Ywain bath" entailed a completely undressed man being attended during his bath by a woman, the scene does not hold any erotic potential. For one, it is glossed over quickly, seemingly only providing a precursor for Ywain's being outfitted in new, splendid clothing, which is described in much greater detail. Furthermore, Lunet makes it very clear that she does not harbour any romantic interest for the Arthurian knight. It is true that the maid saves Ywain when he is caught between the castle's portcullises with his enemies about to discover him. She presents him with a magic ring of invisibility and hides him from his enemies in her own bed. She does not join him there, however; indeed, she only intends to facilitate a marriage between her lady Alundyne and Ywain (see esp. 915–18). Perhaps a medieval audience would not have expected a servant woman to be a viable romantic partner for a noble knight like Ywain, the son of king Urien, but even if such a connection had been conceivable, it is never acted upon, and thus the bathing scene seems a mere practical matter, not a possibility for erotic interaction.

Later in the same text, Ywain is once again bathed by a lady's handmaiden and once again there does not appear to be any sexual tension between the two. The scene occurs after Ywain has spent several years living in a forest, naked and insane.[19] He has fallen asleep on the forest floor when a lady rides along with her two handmaidens, who take pity on him and decide to cure him with a magical ointment. One of the handmaidens is tasked with anointing Ywain, bringing him new clothing, and leading him to the lady's castle. Once there,

sho gert him washe and bathe
And gaf him mete and drink of main,
Til he had geten his might ogayn. (1864–66)

Not only is this practically the exact same phrasing used 800 lines earlier; the circumstance seems to be exactly the same as well. Although the maid has watched the naked knight sleeping, and anointed "his body ilka dele" (1780) with the curative ointment, she does not seem to have any sexual interest in him. Here, the bath is equivalent to food and drink, restoring Ywain to his former strength, and washing away the signs of his time spent in the woods and in madness.

In *Sir Orfeo*, we find another example of such a cleansing bath in circumstances that closely resemble Ywain's. After King Orfeo returns from living in the woods for ten years and rescuing his beloved wife from the fairy realm, he looks so

[19] See further below.

shabby that none of his former advisors recognises him. However, once he reveals his true identity, he receives a bath and new clothing.

> To chaumber thai ladde him als bilive
> And bathed him, and schaved his berd,
> And tired him as a king apert. (584–86)

Once again, the bath is merely a part of the required process to restore Orfeo to his former state and there is no mention of nakedness or the presence or absence of servants.

What these examples show is that Elizabeth Archibald appears to be right in asserting that baths did not occur too often in Middle English romances, and where they did, they hardly ever had sexual connotations (102–03). The cliché of romances teeming with erotic bathing[20] is very much based on continental texts, and in the rare instances where Middle English romances actually do mention baths, they are remnants of continental originals (Archibald 113). The bathing scenes described above serve clear narrative functions of cleansing and restoration, but are never used to induce a romantic relationship, even where they involve a woman washing the naked body of a knight.

So far, we have discovered textual evidence for the fact that naked bodies can be signals for eroticism and sexuality, as is arguably the case with Tryamour, but the situation is not always so clear. Even scenes involving characters in bed or in a bath—and thus arguably nudity—do not necessarily entail occurrences of romance or sex. This raises the question what other functions the depictions of nakedness might serve in the context of Middle English romances.

Poverty

Going back to the opening lines of *Havelok*, we come across the first category of non-erotic nakedness that will be examined in this paper: nakedness in the context of poverty. Throughout the Middle Ages, but especially with the rise of the mendicant orders, self-imposed poverty was strongly connected to spiritual purity. One expression of this ideal took the form of simple clothing. Monastic orders gave up worldly luxury to focus on religious devotion, and to live in poverty was regarded as a form of *imitatio Christi* (Rahner 178). While those who had no choice but to live in poverty were not typically viewed through the same lens, charity was considered a central Christian value throughout the Middle Ages, and helping the needy was seen as a worthy path towards salvation. According to Robert Jütte, beggars, the sick, and the poor could show themselves "naked" (likely meaning insufficiently clothed) in public with impunity, using their poor appearance to inspire pity and Christian charity in their fellow men, making them the only people for whom public nakedness was not a moral detriment (119).

[20] Discussed in Archibald 102.

In *Havelok*, the eponymous hero grows up in great poverty, which is frequently expressed through his state of (un-)dress. In the beginning of the poem (quoted above), we learn about Havelok that "Wil he was litel he yede ful naked" (6). The poet follows this line with a brief discussion of Havelok's virtue and courage in battle (7–10, 23–26), before he begins the story proper. Thus our protagonist's very first description calls him "naked" in his youth. This lends a certain weight to this piece of information, making it one of Havelok's defining characteristics throughout the poem. Whether "naked" in this case would have been interpreted by a medieval audience as literal nakedness or being clothed in rags is not quite clear, but at numerous points in the story, Havelok is described as either "naked" (e.g. 853) or "almest naked" (962), sometimes referring to full, sometimes to clothed nakedness, but always highlighting his inadequate state of dress.

No matter which specific definition the nakedness in these scenes fulfils, the question remains: what function does it serve? On a surface level, Havelok's "naked" body is a visual representation of his poverty. While his foster father Grim provides the family with food, he is not able to give his ward sufficient clothing. Even after finding employment with the cook Bertram, Havelok still lacks the means to dress himself suitably. Digging deeper, however, this poverty and consequent nakedness is not a simple story element propelling the plot forward or illustrating a point. Rather, it seems designed to evoke the audience's pity and sympathy for Havelok.

When Grim decides to send his foster-son off to Lincoln, he laments, "But wo is me thou art so naked" (853). He cannot afford to give the young man more than a plain cloak made out of his boat's sail as a parting gift (854–58). Havelok has to go into town *barfot* (862), without stockings or shoes (860), a state of dress that was highly unacceptable unless you were a beggar.[21] This display of extreme poverty combines with Havelok's enduring gratitude in the face of his adversity to make him appear very favourable in the eyes of the audience. Another example of Havelok's nakedness inciting pity occurs when he works as Bertram's servant. The young prince is extremely kind and generous towards everyone he meets, but his ragged, dirty clothing stands in stark contrast to his virtuous character and beautiful appearance. Eventually, Bertram "bigan of him to rewe" ("takes pity on him," 967), and buys Havelok new clothes.

Somewhat connected to this aspect, there is another, spiritual component to Havelok's nakedness. Havelok is presented to us as a perfect king, right from the beginning of the romance. At the very beginning of the tale, we already hear about the young man's virtues as a courageous knight, and good, worthy man. The story proper starts with descriptions of the perfect kings Athelwold of England (27–109), and, a little later, Birkabeyn of Denmark (338–47), and ends with a description of Havelok's own reign as benevolent, exemplary ruler. So when we

[21] Even bathers, who were not held in very high regard in medieval society, were explicitly forbidden from going out into the street barefoot (Brander 292).

meet Havelok as a child, he is naked and living in poverty, but destined to be the saviour and perfect king of his people. From a medieval perspective, such a characterisation would very likely resemble that of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born in a lowly stable, and many images of the baby Jesus show him naked. As discussed in the introduction, most scholars today assume that this depiction was chosen to highlight Christ's human nature, not any sense of poverty (e.g. Duerr 207), but the fact remains that in the medieval mind, this image of Christ as a naked child, poor, but destined to be the saviour of his people, would have been very present. This association strengthens the function of Havelok's characterisation as a role model and mantra for English kings: Be modest, be content with your lot in life, follow in the footsteps of Christ, and your reign will be prosperous.

A slightly different evaluation of nakedness born out of poverty can be found in Sir Launfal. While the word "naked" is not used once in the entire tale, there are several instances of people in poor or inadequate clothing, which (as established above) would have been included in the medieval concept of "nakedness". One of them occurs after Launfal has taken up residence in Cærleon.

When Launfal leaves King Arthur's court, the king gives him a purse to live on (79–84) but within a year, the knight has fallen into debt due to spending *savagelych* (130). The ensuing consequences are described almost exclusively through lack of clothing. Arthur's nephews, who had accompanied Launfal to the town of Cærleon, take their leave of him after he loses all his money, explaining:

> Syr, our robes beth to-rent,
> And your tresuor ys all y-spent,
> And we goth evyll y-dyght. (139–41)

The deciding factor for their leaving Launfal is not that he cannot provide them food, sport, or treasure, but that they do not have any adequate clothes left, and the knight is unable to buy them new ones. The interaction demonstrates the significance placed on proper attire in the romance of Launfal, and likely among its audiences.

This trend is compounded a few lines later. A week after Launfal's servants leave him, the mayor of Cærleon hosts a great feast, from which the knight is excluded due to his poverty (187–88). When the mayor's daughter decides to invite him regardless, Launfal declines, saying that he has "no herte" (195) to dine in company. He explains that he has not eaten in three days (197–98) and recounts:

> Today to cherche I wolde have gon,
> But me fawtede hosyn and schon,[22]
> Clenly brech and scherte—

[22] The expression "me fawtede hosyn and schon," mirrors closely a line from *Havelok*, "Havede neyther hosen ne shon" (860), which is how Havelok is described after Grim has given him his cloak made out of sail. It follows directly after Grim exclaims how his charge was "so naked" (853), which further strengthens my argument that Launfal's poor state of dress can be classified as nakedness.

And for defawte of clothynge
Ne myghte I yn wyth the peple thrynge—
No wonder though me smerte. (199–204)

What these two passages demonstrate is how embarrassing it feels to Launfal and his companions to be unable to dress in the proper manner of their social rank. Their inadequate clothing, their "nakedness," exposes them to ridicule and shame. When Launfal's companions return to court, they feel it necessary to explain their poor state of dress to the king, and because they have promised Launfal that they would not expose his poverty, they come up with a wild excuse (166–74). Of course, this might only serve to demonstrate their loyalty to their former lord, but it still shows that appearing at court improperly dressed warrants a lengthy explanation.

Launfal's exclusion from the feast is explained with the sentence "Lyte men of him tolde" (189),[23] which highlights how much his poverty has demeaned him in the eyes of the townspeople. This contempt is further illustrated in another episode, after Launfal returns from his meeting with Tryamour in the forest. Tryamour's servant, Gyfré, rides into Cærleon with the riches the fairy princess promised her lover, but since he does not know where to find Launfal, he asks a boy if he knows where the knight resides. The answer is rather telling: "Nys he but a wrecche; / What that any man of hym recche?" (394–95).[24]

The image presented here of poverty and consequent nakedness is very different from that in *Havelok*. Havelok's nakedness causes people to pity him and offer him clothes (thus Grim in ll. 853–59 and Bertram in ll. 967–70). He is depicted as innocent, morally good, and—arguably—saintly, if not Christlike in the face of adversity. By contrast, Launfal's poverty and nakedness are met with derision and contempt from the people in Cærleon. His social isolation and hunger might cause an audience to pity him, but his situation is not presented as unambiguously deserving of it. Whether or not Launfal's destitution makes him more sympathetic depends on how one interprets his excessive spending. At the beginning of the poem, we learn that Launfal is renowned for giving generous gifts to his friends and servants (28–36). This *largesse* (31) even impresses Arthur so much that he makes Launfal his steward. However, it does not become clear from the story whether it is also his *largesse* that causes the knight to spend all of his money in a single year. All we are told is "So savagelych hys good he besette / That he ward yn greet dette, / Ryght yn the ferst yere" (130–32), which does not yield any definitive information either way. The question of generosity and gift-giving in *Sir Launfal* has been much discussed in academic discourse, but for the purposes of this paper, I merely want to stress that Launfal's destitution and subsequent "nakedness" do not make his character appear in an unequivocally good or bad light.

[23] Shepherd glosses this as "people reckoned him of little account."
[24] Shepherd gives as translation: "He is nothing but a wretch; what does any man care of him?".

Nakedness born out of poverty, therefore, can serve to inform the audience's moral judgement of a character, although the specific results of this evaluation depend heavily on the surrounding circumstances.

Identity

The final aspect of nakedness that is to be examined here is that of identity. Probably the best and most obvious example of this can be found in Ywain, preceding the bathing scenes discussed above. After Ywain's wife leaves him because he has broken a promise to her, Ywain goes mad with grief and self-loathing and runs into the forest, where he lives like an animal for "a grete sesowne" (1667), an unspecified amount of time. There is no explicit mention of Ywain shedding his clothes, but after living off roots and raw game for a while, he happens to come across a hermitage and we read "The ermyte saw and sone was war / a naked man …" (1674). The Old French *Yvain* provides more detail for this particular scene, describing how the knight tears his clothes to shreds in despair before running away into the wilderness (330).[25] Thus it seems reasonable to assume that when he lives in the forest, Ywain is, in fact, entirely naked.

In her article "Körper und Identität: Geschlechtsspezifische Codierung von Nacktheit im höfischen Roman um 1200," Silke Winst analyses the corresponding scene in Hartmann von Aue's Middle High German rendition of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* (*Iwein*).[26] She comes to the conclusion that Ywain's nakedness is strongly connected to his identity as a knight. When he breaks his vow to his wife Alundyne, he commits a transgression of the knightly values of duty and honour, and he spends the rest of the romance trying to re-establish his honour and his character. This "crisis of identity" (Winst 349) is what Ywain's nakedness emphasises. Without any social markers to identify him by, he becomes aimless, unthinking, no longer bound to human reason, and lives like an animal. Only after the lady with her two handmaidens happens on the sleeping (naked) knight, whom they recognise by a scar on his face, is there a chance for Ywain to regain knowledge of his true character.

As mentioned above, Ywain's restoration is achieved when one of the lady's maids returns to the sleeping knight with a curative ointment, which she rubs on "his body ilka dele" (*Ywain* 1780). After doing so, the woman hides and keeps watch over Ywain, making sure he finds the clothes she has left next to him, and then pretends to happen upon the knight coincidentally once he is dressed. Looking at this scene from a modern perspective, it seems to have great erotic potential, and Albrecht Classen argues that indeed there is some sexual tension in the

[25] Quotations refer to the modern English prose translation *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* by Kibler.
[26] For ease of reference, I will not differentiate in spelling between the Middle High German Iwein, the Old French Yvain and the Middle English Ywain, but use the normalised Middle English form of the name and make it explicit when I refer to one of his literary counterparts.

Middle High German version of this encounter ("Naked Men" 157). The Old French source takes it one step further. The encounter between Ywain and the maid is described in great detail:

> She rubbed his temples and his forehead and his entire body down to his toes. She rubbed his temples and his whole body so vigorously under the hot sun that she expelled the madness and melancholy from his brain … (Yvain 333)

Not only does Chrétien repeatedly emphasise that she massages Ywain's "whole body," there is also—seemingly randomly—a reference to the heat of that particular day. As established above, heat could have a very strong connection to sexual desire, especially female sexual desire, in medieval literature, which makes it even more likely that this scene would have been perceived to have erotic overtones.

However, these subtleties seem to be entirely absent from the Middle English text. The anointing is reduced to two short lines: "Sho enoynt hys heved wele / And his body ilka dele." (1779–80), and when the maid hides and watches Ywain until he wakes up, this is relegated to an aside "Than he wakend of his slepe / (The maiden to him toke gude kepe)" (1789–90). In the Middle High German poem, we get more insight into the maid's thought process, and Classen interprets her actions as holding a certain amount of thinly veiled erotic voyeurism ("Naked Men" 156–57). The Middle English rendering of *Yvain* is generally regarded to be less introspective and detailed than its French source (and German counterpart), so subtle subtext might have been omitted for the sake of moving the plot along, in the knowledge that the audience would be able to read between the lines. However, it appears clear that what they would have found there is not the erotic tension which seems to underlie the Continental versions of the story. Rather, Ywain's nakedness, his encounter with the three ladies and subsequent restoration to sanity (and clothing), seems to reflect exclusively on his loss and rediscovery of identity and knightly virtue.

Sir Orfeo contains a thematic parallel to this scene that should be mentioned here. When Queen Heurodis is kidnapped by fairies, King Orfeo is so bereft that he decides to leave his kingdom to live in the woods. While he does not run away in immediate anguish but takes his leave of his councillors and settles his affairs, he discards his royal robes and dons a plain pilgrim's mantle instead (227–28). His loss of status, as symbolised by his loss of luxurious garments, is thrown into relief in a passage that explicitly contrasts Orfeo's simple existence in the forest with the splendours of his former life:

> He that hadde y-werd the fowe griis,
> And on bed the purper biis –
> Now on hard hethe he lith,
> With leves and gresse he him writh. (241–44)

Orfeo is not called "naked," and his state of dress is never described as poor enough to fully justify his inclusion in that category, but the striking parallels with Ywain still help to illuminate the function of nakedness as regards identity.

In Middle English literature in general, and romances in particular, a character's identity is often established or at least underscored by the kind of clothing he or she wears.[27] It stands to reason, therefore, that a loss of identity would go hand in hand with a loss of clothing, even to the point of complete nakedness. Once the characters return to their rightful place in society (Ywain upon being cured, Orfeo after he rescues his wife and reveals himself to his loyal councillors), they also immediately return to a socially appropriate state of dress (*Ywain* 1803; *Orfeo* 584–86).

In the two examples above, nakedness or inadequate clothing marks a crisis of identity that the heroes need to overcome, but nakedness can also have a revealing function. For this, we need to return to *Havelok*. Havelok, the rightful heir to the throne of Denmark, spends the majority of the romance hiding his true identity, but on three occasions his royal nature is revealed, once even saving his life.

When King Birkabeyn dies, the wicked Earl Godard, who is supposed to serve as Havelok's guardian, instead orders the young boy to be killed, so he can take the kingdom for himself. His thrall, the fisherman Grim, is told to drown the boy in the sea and obediently takes him to his home, where he binds and gags him. At night, when Grim and his wife rise to carry out the deed, they discover that the room in which Havelok is sleeping is "Al-so brith so it were day" (589). A beam of light is issuing from the young boy's mouth. When the two strip him looking to explain this miracle, they discover a *kynemerk* on his shoulder (604). This cruciform birthmark also gleams bright and beautiful (605). Grim and his wife interpret it and the mysterious light to mean that Havelok is indeed the son of king Birkabeyn and heir to the Danish throne. This discovery causes the pair to defy Godard's orders, and instead of executing Havelok, they decide to save him. Shepherd explains that since Havelok should be king by divine right, Grim and his wife have to fear God's judgement should they kill him (604 and note).

The second time Havelok's birthmark is revealed, albeit under less dramatic circumstances, occurs after he has been forcibly married to Goldeboru, the rightful heiress to the kingdom of England, by her guardian, the wicked Earl Godrich. Godrich thinks that Havelok, who works for the castle cook, is nothing but a slave and thus if Goldeboru marries him, she will forfeit her right to the throne and Godrich himself can rule unimpeded. After the wedding, Goldeboru feels betrayed and disheartened at having been married beneath her social rank, but in the first night, she, too, discovers the light coming from Havelok's mouth and

[27] For discussions of the connection between clothing and identity in medieval literature in general, see Smith and Denny-Brown.

"On his shuldre, of gold red / She saw a swithe noble croiz" (1262–63).[28] As soon as she has made this discovery, an angel appears to her, telling her about Havelok's true nature and that he is fated to defeat their foes and become king of Denmark and England.

Finally, when Havelok and Goldeboru go to Denmark to reclaim the kingdom, they are hosted by a Danish nobleman, Lord Ubbe, and Havelok's royal nature is revealed for the third time. When Havelok, Goldeboru, and their companions meet Ubbe, they claim to be merchants and impress him with their strength and fighting prowess when they fend off a band of thieves that attacks Ubbe's house during the night. Out of gratitude, Ubbe gives Havelok and his companions the chamber adjacent to his own, and when he wakes up in the middle of the night, he sees a mysterious light shining from his guests' room. Ubbe calls his men to witness this miracle and they go into the chamber to investigate, where they find Havelok, the miraculous light shining out of his mouth. The young prince and his companions are asleep and the scene is described as follows:

> And Havelok lay on his lift side,
> In his armes his brithe bride;
> Bi the pappes he leyen naked.
> So faire two weren nevere maked
> In a bed to lyen samen;
> The knithes thouth of hem god gamen,
> Hem for-to shewe and loken to.
> Rith al-so he stoden alle so,
> And his bac was toward hem went,
> So weren he war of a croiz ful gent
> On his rith shuldre—swithe brith,
> Brither than gold ageyn the lith—
> So that he wiste, heye and lowe,
> That it was kunrik that he sawe.
> It sparkede and ful brith shon
> So doth the gode charbuncle-ston (2130–45)

Immediately, Ubbe and his men understand that Havelok is the son of King Birkabeyn. They swear him fealty and declare that they will support his fight against Godard.

In all three scenes described above, the discovery of Havelok's identity is dependent on the revealing of his naked body. Not only the royal birthmark on his shoulder, but also his beauty are understood as signs of his royal birth: "So this

[28] As an aside, this scene would be an example of tacit nakedness in bed. Grim and his wife have to strip Havelok to see his birthmark; there is an explicit mention made of his nakedness on a later occasion, but not here. Quite possibly, two newlyweds sharing a bed for the first time were so clearly expected to be naked that it does not merit explicit mention.

man, that is so fayr, / Als Birkabeyn: he is hise eyr!" (2156–57). At the same time, Havelok's lack of appropriate clothing also plays a part in keeping his identity secret. As mentioned above, when he goes to Lincoln, Bertram the cook takes pity on Havelok and gives him new clothes (967–70). As soon as Havelok is dressed in this new attire, the people of Lincoln are convinced that he is sufficiently beautiful to be a king:

> It was nevere man that yemede
> In kinneriche that so wel semede
> King or cayser for-to be,
> Than he was shrid—so semede he. (975–78)

It seems that Havelok's nobility can be gleamed from the physical beauty of his body, but it only fully reveals itself when that body is either dressed in appropriately fine clothing or stripped bare. The "ful and swithe wicke" attire Havelok is forced to wear in his poverty (965) sufficiently conceals his royal nature to convince the Earl Godrich that he is nothing but a thrall (1095), which is why he deems him the perfect match to disenfranchise Goldeboru.

A similar thing happens to Orfeo, when he appears before the fairy king to bargain for the return of his wife. After Orfeo performs a beautiful piece of music on his magical harp, the fairy king promises to grant him any wish as payment, so the knight asks to take Heurodis back with him to his world. The Fairy king refuses however, declaring

> … that nought nere!
> A sori couple of you it were—
> For thou art lene, rowe and blac,
> And she is lovesum, withouten lac;
> A lothlich thing it were, forthi,
> To sen hir in thi compayni. (Orfeo 457–62)

After living in the forest for ten years, and with no sign of his royal status left, Orfeo is not deemed of the appropriate station to be given such a beautiful and worthy lady as Dame Heurodis.

The contrast between physical beauty and poor clothing in *Havelok* and *Orfeo* elicits responses revealing the role of both in the assertion of social status in these texts. Neither Havelok's kindness and generosity, which make him well-liked by all the people of Lincoln (e.g. *Havelok* 957), nor Orfeo's ethereally beautiful harp-play (*Orfeo* 435–52) is enough to convince these protagonists' adversaries of their worth. Their true character, and thus their true identity, remains hidden behind their insufficient exteriors.

To sum up, it appears that nakedness, with clothing and without, can have complex implications for the identity of romance characters. On the one hand, it can be used as shorthand for a crisis or loss of identity. On the other, it can reveal

a character's true nature by stripping away an impeding disguise and showing their true beauty or unique features. In pursuit of these ends, nakedness serves absolutely no erotic function and the naked body is used as a symbol of identity, not sexuality.

Conclusion

As difficult as it is to come to definitive conclusions on the social history of nakedness, it is equally challenging to do justice to the semiotic nuances of its literary counterpart from our modern perspective. We tend to overvalue the sexual significance of nakedness and miss or misinterpret other clues that might have created an erotic setting in the minds of medieval readers. Despite these insufficiencies, however, what has become clear is that there are many different aspects of nakedness, which were used to a variety of effects. While there are a number of cases in which nakedness is indeed used to heighten erotic *frisson*, it can also serve to inform a moral judgement of a character, by making the audience feel sympathetic or disdainful towards them, or it can highlight discrepancies in a character's identity.

So far, there has not been much scholarship on this particular subject, and this paper only provides a first, general approach, but some aspects already stand out, which could yield interesting results upon further study. One possible approach would be to look at different instances of nakedness with a focus on gender. Most of the scenes examined in this paper depict naked men, so a question that could be asked in the future is whether naked women were treated differently. Does nakedness become inherently more erotic when exhibited by, or inflicted upon female characters? And if they are sexualised, can they use it to their advantage, as Tryamour does, or does her otherworldly nature grant the fairy princess privileges which would be withheld from other ladies? Another possible point for study might be the relationships between continental and English texts. While there has been a lot of scholarship on cultural transfer in romances in general, this specific aspect has not yet been examined on a larger scale. Perhaps the small differences that I have been able to highlight hint at wider discrepancies, which can give some insight into cultural differences between medieval European societies.

Ultimately, studying the connections between the treatment of a potentially controversial subject such as nakedness in society and its place in literature might be able to produce some answers to questions of authorship and audiences. In the pursuit of such insights, we should be careful not to project literary attitudes towards nakedness and sexuality onto medieval society as a whole. After all, the sexually charged mass media in some modern countries does not necessarily reflect their conservative political discourse. It is clear that the connections between those two are complex and would probably be hard to reconstruct from a distance of several centuries. Nevertheless, understanding the varied and nuanced ways in

which naked bodies are portrayed in Middle English romances can add to the appreciation of the Middle Ages as the diverse and complex epoch that it was.

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Wisdom in Old English Literature and *The Lord of the Rings*

Kai Friedhoff

Introduction

> "There is nothing like looking,
> if you want to find something."
> (*The Hobbit* 69)

"All that is gold does not glitter, / Not all those who wander are lost." This is the beginning of a famous poem from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, appearing in a letter from Gandalf to Frodo in which the wise wizard reveals Strider's true identity to the hobbits (169–70). While the first line offers much room for interpretation, I would like to draw attention to the second line of the poem where the act of wandering is described as a deliberate and purposeful activity. Goethe once said that he learned by the act of wandering what he did not learn in the conventional way ("Was ich nicht erlernt hab / Das hab ich erwandert," qtd. in Kimura 14)[1] and this remark is analogous to Bilbo and Frodo who return somewhat wiser from their journeys. The image of wandering and roads is very present in *The Lord of the Rings* and it functions not only as a metaphor for life as such but also as a metaphor for the acquisition of wisdom, with characters progressing on their earthly roads of exploration, gaining ever more experience and insight along the road. This connection is brought out in Frodo's name, which

[1] A related form is the participle *bewandert* "experienced, skilled."

derives from the Old English word *frod*, translated by Tolkien as "wise by experience" in a letter to Richard Jeffery (*Letters* 224). Since the name *Sam* evinces similar connections to the concept of wisdom—it derives from Old English *samwis* "halfwise" (*Lot*R 1136; App. F)—the notion of wisdom in Tolkien's mythology clearly deserves some attention.

The metaphor of the road and wandering, however, is not the only way of understanding wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings*. One could consider Tolkien's notion of wisdom as reliant on the different races in his created world, of which the Elves appear to be the wisest. Yet it is equally conceivable to see the author's notion of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings* as primarily related to a firm rootedness in tradition and to the characters being intricately bound with earlier ages of Middle-earth. Given the fact that Tolkien spent his professional life delving into British and Scandinavian history and their literary legacies, this obvious connection between the wisdom of Tolkien's characters and their relation to the past makes it tempting to look at the medieval sources from which Tolkien took his inspiration for the creation of Middle-earth. The general influence of such sources on Tolkien's works is well-researched by now, most notably with Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth*, which has been a cornerstone in the field for more than thirty years and provides a comprehensive guide to the medieval footprints in Tolkien's mythology. Specifically Anglo-Saxon imprints have been demonstrated by many critics to date. Honegger, for example, shows the relationship between historical Anglo-Saxons and Tolkien's Rohirrim ("The Rohirrim"). There is, however, still no contrastive approach to the literary representations of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings* and Old English literature to my knowledge. Book-length studies are scarce and concerned with biblical parallels exclusively (e.g. Pollard; O'Day) and none of the main experts on Tolkien like Shippey or Flieger seems to have focused on this specific aspect. *Mythlore* and *Tolkien Studies*, two of the most renowned scholarly journals about the works of Tolkien, do not yield any promising articles either (Croft and Crowe). It would be interesting, however, to analyse the representation of wisdom in both *The Lord of the Rings* and its Old English sources, in order to find out in how far Tolkien's literary depiction of wisdom can be seen in the light of his scholarly, philological activities. Such an approach might not only shed some light on the notion of wisdom in one of the most famous pieces in world literature, but also help to better understand Tolkien's employment of medieval sources in general. It will be significant to look at the moments when the author breaks loose from these sources, and unearths some of his own philological considerations in the process.

The main argument of this paper is that Tolkien's representation of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings* mirrors the author's love for his philological profession in times when philology started to play an increasingly declining role in British universities (Shippey, *Road* 1–31). Traditional knowledge, or *ancient* knowledge, seems to be the key ingredient to his characters' wisdom, and this wisdom can be

recovered philologically via the study of age-old texts such as are found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts today. On that basis, a general love for the old and a passion for rediscovering the wisdom of earlier days is a good way of understanding the term *philology* in this paper. However, Tolkien not only turns his main characters into philologists in the broadest sense, revaluing philological endeavours. His representation of wisdom can also be put into direct relation with his personal philological contemplations about the medieval literature he studied over the course of his career. In fact, it is via his representation of wisdom that one can see his reworking of the Northern theory of courage, the famous ideal that Germanic heroic literature like *Beowulf* has at its core. In this way, *The Lord of the Rings* turns into an extended literary commentary on the Old English poem: by emphasising the role of wisdom, which it celebrates as more important and desirable than an Old English heroism based on courage and glory on the battlefield, the novel reveals Tolkien's own perception of the Old English poem. By its link to tradition and former ages, the representation of wisdom refers back to the medieval material that served as a source of inspiration for Tolkien's own literary creations. Old English heroism thus dethroned, the main characters in *The Lord of the Rings* themselves become philologists. Gandalf, for instance, only understands about the Ring after filing through the ancient texts in the libraries of Gondor and both Bilbo and Frodo become compilers, scholarly chroniclers in a sense, after they return home from their adventures (Kraus). Tolkien's representation of wisdom is thus coupled with the old and traditional, to be gained by studying old texts, by learning from and about the past, and from the experiences of those having trodden similar roads a long time ago.

As a first step in this paper, I am going to provide an extensive overview of common representations of wisdom in Old English literature. This overview is intended to give a broad picture of what wisdom was associated with in Old English literature in general before we turn to *Beowulf* in particular as our main medieval source of comparison for the following sections. After all, Tolkien studied the poem his entire life and it might easily be the single most influential medieval inspiration for his writings. In a second step, I will briefly discuss the general role and influence of wisdom for the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* in order to touch on the interaction of wisdom with other, higher powers in Middle-earth. Moving then to our main analysis with a focus on Middle-earth, I will address the philological road to wisdom in the fourth section. In this first section, we are going to look at songs and stories as sources of ancient wisdom, and how the characters' own fictionalisations of their reality are attempts to chronicle their experiences for the benefit of later generations. The fifth section will be about information and counsel as the currencies of wisdom. It will show that *The Lord of the Rings* places more emphasis on strategy and tactics, on reflecting together in councils, which ultimately proves that wise characters in Tolkien's work choose and behave differently from the heroes from the Old English poem. The last section before the

conclusion will look at the interplay of wisdom and heroism in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf*, illustrating that Tolkien's mythology demystifies the sort of heroism portrayed by the Old English hero, and that it is the wise characters of Middle-earth who are glorified in his world.

The Anglo-Saxon Road to Wisdom

How would Anglo-Saxons define wisdom, and what kind of road would they point to? Wisdom being an abstract concept, it is difficult to answer such a question even based on our modern understanding of the term, and the question becomes all the more difficult if we consider that there are no Anglo-Saxons left to ask for their opinion. The goal of this section is not to give an exhaustive definition of Old English wisdom but rather to provide an overview of the different representations and notions of the concept found in Old English literature. Sources for this endeavour include shorter works from the Exeter Book, such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, as well as the Old English version of *Apollonius of Tyre*, some texts by and about King Alfred, and *Beowulf*.

Let us start our discussion of wisdom in Old English literature with lines 65–69 from *The Wanderer*, as they give a fairly straightforward idea of what constitutes wisdom for the poet:

> Wita sceal geþyldig:
> ne [sceal] no to hatheort, ne to hrædwyrde,
> ne to wac wiga, ne to wanhydig,
> ne to forht, ne to fægen, ne to feohgrife,
> ne næfre gielpes to georn, ær he geare cunne.[2]

If interpreted very broadly through a modern lens, one could imagine this to mean that a wise man is someone who is patient and calm and as such someone who is also less likely to lose his temper in times of adversity. One could further imagine him to speak in a reflective and eloquent manner, while never giving up on his endeavours when he wants something. He would never lose his sense of moderation, though, never becoming condescending towards his peers and never falling prey to arrogance either. Yet the context of Anglo-Saxon literature and the poem in particular forces us to look at the passage from a different perspective. One has to take into consideration, for example, that Christianity was a relatively new thing in England and that contemporary literature was strongly marked by the influence of monks, as literacy was far from universal in Anglo-Saxon society. From that

[2] "A wise man shall be patient: / he shall not be too hot-hearted, not too hasty of speech, / nor too weak a warrior, not too reckless, / nor too timorous nor too eager, nor too greedy for riches / nor ever too desirous of boasting, before he clearly may have knowledge." All quotations and translations from *The Wanderer* are taken from Treharne's *Old and Middle English, c. 890–c. 1450: An Anthology* unless otherwise indicated.

perspective, it is relevant that many of the dos and don'ts seem to refer to the virtues and sins that Anglo-Saxons could have found in the Bible and early religious writings. One could for instance relate *hatheort* ("hot-hearted") to wrath (*ira*), just as one might see *feohgifre* ("greedy for riches") as an allusion to greed (*avaritia*). What is more, some of the words employed by the poet were normally used in a religious context at his time. The word *forht* is a good example of this as it meant "fearful" and "in awe of God," while the word *wanhydig* falls into the same category as a word used to refer to men at odds with "the Father in heaven" ("Fæder on heofonum," 115; Dunning and Bliss 36–73). It is aspects of this nature which lead Dunning and Bliss to the affirmation that the wisdom in *The Wanderer* is "the wisdom of the counsels of the Christian life" (101).

From such a religious perspective, the poet's mention of the *wac wiga* ("weak warrior") or the boasting ("ne næfre gielpes to georn") seems somewhat out of place in this reading, as these references allude to a more heroic understanding of the world. But the poet's combination of character traits and attitudes can be seen as a unification of a formerly heroic and purely pagan understanding of the world with the advent of Christianity. The Anglo-Saxon period does not allow us to see these worlds in isolation from each other because people continued to ascribe heroic attributes to a God who was in general often depicted "as a warrior, ruling with power" (Coogan 775). One can see this fusion of Christianity and heroism in the account of the crucifixion in *The Dream of the Rood* (Mitchell and Robinson), for instance. As Langeslag points out, the characteristics and attitudes from lines 65–69 of *The Wanderer* are in fact all "tailored for use in a heroic context." Whether more religious or more secular, it would seem, then, that a first description of Anglo-Saxon wisdom is that a wise man is one who is able to fare well as a Christian in a heroic society, finding consolation in the promises of his religion in light of the inevitable transience of his world.

The awareness of this worldly transience is at the heart of the poem and it is necessary for the *eardstapa* ("earth-stepper," 6) to ruminate on this principle because that is part of the road to wisdom—a wisdom "by meditation" in the words of Dunning and Bliss (84). Hence, it is the verb *geondþencan* from line 89 that we need to turn our attention to now. Bosworth–Toller gives "to think over," "consider" or "contemplate" as possible translations and Sheppard provides the more literal "to think through or beyond" (131). All of these interpretations have a deep mental investment in common and such a notion of reflection is crucial for our discussion of wisdom. The question now arising is what one would need to reflect upon if one wants to be wise. The immediate context of the poem suggests that such reflections need to revolve around God's divine power and the bitter certainty that all life on earth is *læne* ("transitory," 108). But the *eardstapa* is also said to ruminate on his personal experiences, which might represent another building block of Anglo-Saxon wisdom and one that possibly marks a more secular way of understanding *The Wanderer*.

The relevance of *geondþencan*, or reflection, becomes all the more interesting if one considers that Anglo-Saxons were a "riddling culture" (Roberts 18). Roberts points out that riddles were seen as a "truer representation of reality" which led Anglo-Saxons to be "more minded than moderns to view life as a puzzle and a mystery" (18–20). The link between riddles and wisdom is relatively easy to construct as the idea of riddles being used in competitions and as tests for wisdom is ancient (Honegger, "Riddle" 90). Such a notion of riddles as a measure for wisdom is also present in the Old English version of *Apollonius of Tyre*. The plot of this romance revolves around Apollonius reaffirming his identity as a wise man by first solving King Antiochus' riddle and later showcasing his scholarly, more bookish wisdom as a teacher for King Arcestrates' daughter. The motif of wisdom and learning is a very important one in *Apollonius of Tyre* and the main character Apollonius is said to be *snotor* ("wise") from his earliest appearance (l. 41).[3] King Antiochus sets a riddle that every potential future husband of his daughter needs to solve before he can have her hand in marriage. Although King Antiochus does not hold true to his word and beheads every potential husband whether able to solve his riddle or not, we witness the riddle as an obstacle to overcome—and an obstacle, we should note, that requires a thorough mental investment. Apollonius trusts in his wisdom (*snotornesse*, l. 42) and his "scholarly learning" (*boclicu lar*, l. 43)[4] and rightly thinks he is well prepared to solve the riddle.

The word *riddle* as such is even etymologically related to reading (Holmes 88) and the link between wisdom, riddles, and books implies that the act of reading alone might have been thought to lead to wisdom in Anglo-Saxon England. People would have ruminated on the contents of particular books far more than modern readers tend to do because books were less numerous and most literate people would either know a particular book very well or not at all. We learn from Alfred's translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* that it is *gewit* ("intelligence," ch. 5, l. 32)[5] which gives value to books; hence, books can be seen as a source of wisdom to the extent that people reflect upon what they read. It is such bookish, scholarly wisdom (*boclicu snotornesse*, l. 37) that is specifically required to solve King Antiochus' riddle, which Apollonius does "mid wisdom" (l. 55) and consulting a book to make sure. The character passes the test and even though King Antiochus is a fraud, one should keep in mind that the riddle can be seen as a test to find out who is worthy enough to take his daughter as wife and thus marry himself into a courtly position with potential chances of ruling. From such a perspective, the

[3] All quotations from *Apollonius of Tyre* are taken from Treharne's anthology, just like the translations.
[4] The terms *lare* and *snotornesse* are used almost synonymously in *Apollonius of Tyre*, which further highlights the close link between wisdom and learning. Bosworth–Toller also gives "teaching," "instruction," or "lore" as alternative translations for *lare* (I).
[5] All references to the Old English version of *The Consolation of Philosophy* are by chapter and line number to the B-text in the edition by Godden and Irvine.

riddle can be seen as a test of wisdom and thus of the likelihood of later good governance, the practice and ability of being a good ruler, on which more below.

It is worth having a look at two further aspects from *Apollonius of Tyre*: the notion that wisdom can be taught and the continuity of wisdom that follows from this belief. When we talk about bookish learning as a prerequisite for wisdom, it is clear that the aspect of teaching must play a role to some extent because nobody is born literate, let alone having read all the books. It is also clear that this introduces a certain dependence on others (a willingness to teach or to lend books, people having written down something worthwhile) and on providence (being born into a situation where books and literacy are accessible). Having said that, the idea of wisdom via books also provides a certain independence, as books can be read by oneself if one is literate and if reading material is available. An author stores his thoughts and insights in the material object of the book, thus making it possible that a later person can read the material and decode its meaning via the use of *geondþencan*. Apollonius is "well instructed in all things" ("on eallum þingum wel gelæred," ll. 269–70) and his character functions as a *lareow* ("teacher," l. 372) in the romance. His relationship to Arcestrate is primarily that between a student and a teacher; the king's daughter is "lare lufigend" ("a lover of learning," l. 293) and proves to be a committed student spending her time reading and learning while other young men want to court her. This idea of being taught wisdom, or being taught to read, which might be seen as a prerequisite for wisdom, can also be found in the Bible, where Wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs 1–9 (Coogan 895). Such a notion is also present in Alfred's version of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, where Wisdom is established as Mind's teacher from the beginning as a sort of *fostermodor* ("fostermother," ch. 3, l. 12). When Apollonius and Arcestrate are separated after the shipwreck, the woman becomes herself a *lareow*, passing her wisdom on to others as a priestess. Apollonius does so too by writing two books about his adventure, placing one of which into a *bibliotheca* (l. 464) for others to read and reflect upon.

It should be noted that Arcestrate becoming a priestess after the teaching she receives from Apollonius is something that puts the romance's scholarly wisdom into a rather religious light. The thought imposes itself that the bookish learning entailed primarily studying the Bible and other available religious texts. The Bible, one should remember, is in itself a book which requires serious *geondþencan* on the part of its readers. Christians are supposed to ruminate on the meaning of God's words, which makes Scripture itself a source of wisdom: the text and the complex issues it addresses, such as mortality and the afterlife, require deep reflection in order to be digested. The question is whether the reading of purely secular books can provide the same level of wisdom. This is clearly possible if the act of *geondþencan* is understood as something leading to wisdom sooner or later regardless of its content or whether there must be a particular awareness at the end of the process of reflection. In my opinion, Old English literature stresses the importance of

the religious themes subject to reflection, whereas today we might be more tempted to make the secular process of reflection as such responsible for the acquisition of wisdom. In general, we can say that Saint Augustine's definition of wisdom as "the knowledge of things divine" (*De trinitate* 14.1: Haddan 361) seems fairly accurate for the Anglo-Saxon period as well because the concept of wisdom is associated with Christianity throughout Old English literature. Staying with Apollonius for the moment, we read that he solves King Antiochus' riddle "with God's help" ("mid Godes fultume," l. 55) as if the solution comes to him via divine inspiration. Such a thought suggests that wisdom is nothing else than God's practical help offered in times of necessity. The Bible often equates wisdom with the fear and acceptance of God and his power as the Creator. People conscious of God's power and the transience of their earthly existence were more likely to be associated with wisdom, because wise decisions, from this perspective, revolve around the need to behave in such a way on earth as to assure entry into heaven once the earthly roads can no longer be trodden.

Moving on to the aspect of wisdom being tested in order to assure good governance, we can say that both passages involving kings in *Apollonius of Tyre* have this underlying motif. King Antiochus' riddle contest, though a fraud, is ultimately a test of wisdom for those desirous of a position with kingship. Similarly, Apollonius winning Arcestrate's heart is also nothing else than the main character's wisdom being tested to find out about good governance—the king's daughter explicitly states that she loves Apollonius for his wisdom (l. 407). It is clear that these ideas emphasise the requirement of wisdom for anybody wishing to rule.

No analysis of this subject based on Old English material could do without looking at the role of King Alfred. His contemporary biographer Asser, a Welsh clergyman, relates how Alfred bemoaned the fact that some of his subordinates in high positions did not pursue wisdom with as much attention as he would have liked. Following any unjust sentence, he has the king berate his judges in words like the following:

> I am astonished at this arrogance of yours, since through God's authority and my own you have enjoyed the office and status of wise men, yet you have neglected the study and application of wisdom. For that reason, I command you either to relinquish immediately the offices of worldly power that you possess, or else to apply yourselves much more attentively to the pursuit of wisdom. (Keynes and Lapidge 110)

What Alfred does is establish a link between the requirement of wisdom and the responsibilities of kingship, or of those people in a position to rule over others on a smaller scale. What Alfred generally understands as wisdom will hopefully become clearer in the following paragraphs, though Ryan suggests that his "emphasis is on practical *wisdom* and it seems to refer to the king's ability to make society work, and to maintain good order. [He] puts the emphasis on temporal things

and never on ideals or on the spiritual dimension to the life of mortals" (159). Shippey strikes a similar chord when he says that Alfred's wisdom means "doing [one's] job, building for the future, considering matters (whether secular or spiritual) in the long term" ("Wealth and Wisdom" 354; both his analysis and Ryan's build on Alfred's *Preface to the Pastoral Care*). We see already that the two scholars introduce a more secular layer in Alfred's understanding of wisdom, arguing for practical applications related to the requirements of good governance.

The general notion of wisdom associated with King Alfred—and wisdom is one of the "most persistent themes" about him in medieval writings (Keynes and Lapidge 47)—is one similarly marked by bookish and scholarly learning as the impression we get in *Apollonius of Tyre*. In his *Preface to the Pastoral Care*, Alfred famously laments the state of learning in his realm. Unlike in earlier times, most people were no longer able to read the books that survived in Latin because they were no longer trained to read the language of sophistication and knowledge, and depended on vernacular translations instead. Shippey points out that the *wela* ("wealth" [i.e. of books], l. 29)[6] that Alfred's country possessed was no longer worth anything if people could not take any advantage of it—despite the fact that "[t]he wealth was all around them" ("Wealth and Wisdom" 347). For Alfred, England had been a better place in these former times when people paid more attention to scholarly learning and he speaks of that past in a melancholy way. For England not only saw a decrease in reading and learning but also a decrease in religious fervour which might be explained by the fact that many of the neglected books in that time were religious in nature and many of the literate men were clerics. Alfred's laments epitomise an idea of loss—the loss of the former ability to indulge in Latin learning, and thus in the wisdom from earlier days, all swallowed up by the ever so apparent incapacity of reading the ancient languages.

However, Alfred has also been called "the ultimate scholar king" and this must be due to his reputation as a medieval translator (Irvine 143). As he suggested in his *Preface*, vernacular translations of the most important books are the ideal solution to the increasing loss of wisdom that he felt in his time. The list of works that he and his collaborators translated, though, is a list of almost exclusively Christian works which was supposed to form the basis for religious improvements (Keynes and Lapidge 23–35). Such a canon implies that the concept of wisdom was inseparable from religious fervour in Alfred's eyes and that the more secular idea argued for above would in fact be nothing more than a direct result of religious devotion, rewarded by God with the ability of good governance. The act of translation itself is of course something which makes a deep and thorough reading of the original necessary and this is in direct relation to the concept of *geondþencan*. In order to translate, a scribe must decode the foreign language, interpret the exact meaning of the text, think about how he could express the idea in his own language while

[6] All quotations and translations from the *Preface* are taken from Treharne's anthology.

constantly thinking about potential deviations in light of his audience. Alfred tells us in his *Preface* that he himself translated "sometimes word for word, sometimes in a paraphrase" ("hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete," ll. 53–54) which shows that he was not unwilling to take certain liberties in his translations. His Old English version of *The Consolation of Philosophy* is quite loosely translated from the Latin original—with adaptations aimed at his Anglo-Saxon context making the work more Christian (Godden and Irvine 1: 66–67)—which implies that Alfred reflected on the work very thoroughly. This aspect of deep reflection on the writings available underlines once again that reading was more associated with reflection in medieval times than it is in our time. Today, many people consume literature without ruminating on what they read, their literary adventures being aimed more at entertainment rather than the attainment of wisdom.

If we look at the construction of Alfred's reputation as a wise man, taking Asser's accounts as a basis, we see that Alfred seemed to be renowned for an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and learning which he had from young age on. According to Asser, it is the "desire for wisdom" and the "nobility of his birth" which characterised the king (Keynes and Lapidge 75). This is an interesting point, as it suggests not only an interest in wisdom as a prerequisite for attaining it but also an aspect of genealogy. This aspect of birth can be understood from two different perspectives. The first one would be that Alfred was lucky to be born into a family which made books and learning accessible to him, while the second one would be that his birth as a future king marks him with a certain kind of divinity, as God's chosen representative on earth to rule over Wessex. Obviously, the first aspect is linked to religion no less than the second, because much of the available literature would have been religious in nature. Moreover, it is a well-known anecdote that Alfred learned a book by heart while still a child (Keynes and Lapidge 75). The very idea of him being wise as a child suggests that the common association of wisdom with older people, something we will turn to in a moment, did not seem to apply in his case, since he is portrayed as a relatively wise person from the beginning. But such information has to be taken with care, because Asser later reveals that he did not personally know Alfred before the latter was an adult, meaning that Asser himself has to rely on hearsay (93). Neither should it be forgotten that Alfred was the King of Wessex and that people should be expected to be deferential to the king and to speak well of him, especially if they are personally known to the king and write a biography about him. We should therefore consider that Alfred's wisdom might have been something external to him as an individual, rather pertaining to his position as a king. After all, kings were believed to rule by divine will, which makes their association with wisdom only too understandable. One should also take into account that Asser was writing with the purpose to present Alfred as a good and just ruler to Welsh monks and that his approach thus cannot have been altogether objective (Keynes and Lapidge 56). This is also why Alfred is presented in a very Christian light, as a

biblically learned man, having visited the Pope in Rome, even being compared to Solomon (ch. 8, 76). The idea of his wisdom at a young age can also be seen as Asser's attempt to present a more straightforward picture of Alfred's road to kingship and wisdom in retrospect. After all, the king was a "literary construction" in his own time already (Keynes 14) and his close link to wisdom led later people to name a collection of proverbs after him, assuming they must have derived from him (Keynes and Lapidge 47).

The contemporary and later veneration for King Alfred might or might not be due to his wisdom. It is questionable whether he would have enjoyed the same reputation if he had not saved Wessex from the numerous Viking attacks in his lifetime. It is likely, then, that the ascription of wisdom to Alfred is closely tied to the king's success on the battlefield, when he served and protected his (future) kingdom. As Asser describes it, wisdom served him well on the battlefield, receiving "divine help" in moments of great need (79). This makes it only symbolical that he fights on the Christian side against the Viking pagans, which almost makes him seem like a Messiah. Perhaps Asser renders the accounts more religious than a less devout person would have done, but both Alfred's wisdom and his heroic achievements on the battlefield are linked to religion. It has already been mentioned that wisdom is a prerequisite for good governance, but Alfred is also established as a rightful king via his success in battle. "[L]uck in battle" was considered to prove divine justification of kingship according to early Germanic beliefs before the Christianisation of England (Ford and Reid 71–73). It is clear that such an emphasis on battles becomes all the more important if we consider the heroic past of Anglo-Saxon England. Alfred conforms to the twin prerequisites of good governance, wisdom and heroism (here as success in battle),[7] and this makes it all the clearer why he lamented the decrease of both *wig* ("warfare") and *wisdom* (l. 7) in his *Preface*—because only such a combined presence of the two could usher in new times of glory. As Asser shows, it is his unification of both wisdom and a general aptitude in battle which made his early rise to power possible. Alfred preceded his older brothers because he surpassed them "both in wisdom and in all good habits; and in particular because he was a great warrior and victorious in virtually all battles" (80–81). Hence, King Alfred combined, at least according to Asser, both the religious, even Christian element of wisdom—described in his version of the *Consolation* as "the highest virtue" ("hehsta cræft," ch. 27, l. 47)—and the heroic element of warfare.

Such twin prerequisites of good governance can also be found in *Beowulf*, where kings like Hrothgar and Beowulf are consistently associated with both wisdom and heroism. The notion of good governance in *Beowulf* will be discussed at greater length in the section on heroification of the wise below and shall not

[7] Although there are and were certainly other characteristics of good rulers, the scope of this paper obliges me to focus exclusively on wisdom and heroism as the most basic and most important requirements of good governance.

preoccupy us for the moment. Instead we will now turn to another notion connected to the concept of wisdom. A look at Hrothgar, the "snottra fengel" ("wisest of princes," Heaney, 1475),[8] suggests that wisdom is related to old age. For example, we learn that he is "in the wisdom of [his] winters" ("wintrum frod," 1724), the idea being that the passing of time alone brought him wisdom. This aspect can also be found in *The Wanderer*, where nobody is able to become wise before having his "share of winters" ("Forþon ne mæg wearþan wis wer ær he age / wintra dæl in woruldrice," 64–65). Such a link between wisdom and old age might be explained by a general human veneration for older things although one could also imagine a link to the idea of *geondþencan* again. *Maxims II* teaches us that "an old man knows most things, a man made wise by distant years, who has *experienced* a great deal before."[9] This notion of older people being wiser because of their wider experience suggests that these people also ruminate on their experiences and are able to apply lessons learned to their current situation. If an idea of applicability is behind the experiences, this also means that experiences as such are not worth much, as they first need to be reflected on actively in order to provide wisdom and practical help. If this were not the case, every old man or woman could be considered wise just because of his or her time already lived. It certainly needs explanation why Beowulf and Wiglaf are described as wise even though their age is not yet far advanced.[10] It is possible that their experiences are the reason for their apparent wisdom; both Beowulf and Wiglaf are experienced warriors despite their age, which means that they have seen more bloodshed and suffering than normal Anglo-Saxons would have experienced. This makes them more likely to think about the meaning of the suffering, of life as such and what might happen to the people left slaughtered on the battlefields. It is Christianity which offers an answer to the above and it is not age, then, which determines a person's wisdom, but the "spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty" (Job 32:8)[11] and ultimately whether the person believes in God or not. Old people were and are naturally closer to their own death and hence more likely to reflect upon issues like mortality and worldly transience. From that perspective, young people might also be considered wise if they ruminated on the same issues. However, it might be of more help to frame such an explanation of young people being wise more directly in the heroic context of Anglo-Saxon England and its literature. Both Beowulf and Wiglaf might simply be called wise because of their heroic spirit as demonstrated in the poem. Their wisdom might be grounded in their obvious ability to get by and even excel in a heroic society.

[8] All quotations from *Beowulf* follow Liuzza's second facing page edition (2013), with omission of all macrons. Translations are generally also Liuzza's, except when marked as Heaney's.

[9] "[A]nd gomol snoterost, / fyrngearum frod, se þe ær feala gebideð" (11–12, my emphasis). All quotations from *Maxims II*, and later also from *Maxims I*, follow the edition and translation in Shippey's *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*.

[10] The same may be said of King Alfred and Apollonius.

[11] All biblical quotations follow Coogan's edition of the New Revised Standard Version.

If we look at Hrothgar's sermon now, we realise that this is in essence a description of an old man explaining worldly transience to a younger man in the blossom of his strength. The motif of the old teaching the young is ancient and also figures in the Bible, for example when the student of wisdom is described as a child listening to his parents (Prov. 1:8–9). In lines 1761–68, the old and wise Hrothgar instructs the protector of his realm:

> Nu is þines mægnes blæd,
> ane hwile; eft sona bið,
> þæt þec adl oððe ecg, eafoþes getwæfeð,
> oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,
> oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht,
> oððe atol yldo; oððe eagena bearhtm
> forsiteð ond forsworceð; semninga bið,
> þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð.[12]

As Hrothgar explains, death is inevitable and the old know this by personal experience because they have witnessed themselves the way old age sips away the strength and agility of youth. I want to draw attention to the heroic manner of Hrothgar's description of death: words like *ecg* ("sword"), *eafoð* ("strength") and *gar* ("spear") mark this passage about death and it almost seems as if the wise old king describes death as a lost battle that was fought heroically until the end, with death as the logical culmination of all his earthly battles. This means there is a close connection between the awareness of mortality and the heroic nature of the poem. Christianity brought the hope of an afterlife to Anglo-Saxon England (Crossley-Holland xvi), to all those who behaved according to biblical maxims, which means that death is no longer final but only something which "split[s] asunder / … life and … body" ("sundur gedælan / lif wið lice," 2422–23), because the soul would ascend to heaven. This means that people no longer needed to fear death theologically and such an absence of fear might be especially useful for heroic warriors, who constantly had to risk their lives.[13] Hence, Christianity comes in handy for the old heroic spirit and it is even wise for the hero to cling to the new religion because it gives him all the more strength to pursue his heroic endeavours, knowing that he will only step onto the next road if he were to die. Death under such heroic circumstances as Beowulf's own death after his fight with the dragon represents a *wundordeað* ("wondrous death," 3037) and Beowulf tells us he is "ready to be slain" (*wælfus* 2420, trans. Bosworth–Toller) and to part on his next adventure.

[12] "The glory of your might / is but a little while; too soon it will be / that sickness or the sword will shatter your strength, / or the grip of fire, or the surging flood, / or the cut of a sword, or the flight of a spear, / or terrible old age—or the light of your eyes / will fail and flicker out; in one fell swoop / death, o warrior, will overwhelm you."

[13] Prior religious belief came without promises of heaven. See also the discussion of Ragnarök under "Heroification of the Wise and Demystification of the Heroic" below.

Hrothgar describes life as a heroic battle which can only be lost in the end, though the manner of it is decisive. It is such an awareness of worldly transience, then, which seems to represent the wisdom in *Beowulf* and so many other Old English texts. It should be noted that young people like Wiglaf or Beowulf in the first part of the poem can also be called wise as they frequently see people lose the battle against death on the battlefield. The awareness of mortality is very close to them. And it is indeed such veterans to whom the poem typically ascribes wisdom, especially if we take into consideration that many of the people surrounding the king would have probably had some battle experience as well. It is thus the heroic fighters who are wise and it is their wisdom, their trust in an afterlife, which reinforces their courage in battle, with their religious faith thus refuelling their heroic conduct.

The aspect of worldly transience is found throughout the corpus of Old English literature and is far from being unique to *Beowulf*. It is commonly agreed that the notion of loss and death encapsulates the main theme of Old English literature as a whole. Coming back to *The Wanderer*, we can say that it is this aspect of mortality which forms the basis of a wise man's awareness. The poet concludes:

> Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice;
> onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
> Her bið feoh læne; her bið freond læne;
> her bið mon læne; her bið mæg læne.
> Eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð. (106–10)[14]

The Wanderer emphasises the worldly transience from its beginning with the lonely *eardstapa* until the end of the poem. The word *læne* as such can be found throughout Old English literature and this high frequency of use also suggests, on a lexical level, that the theme of loss and death was an omnipresent one.[15] All this earthly struggle can lead to the assumption that real wisdom is shown only by him who concludes, like the speaker in *The Seafarer*, that "the joys of the Lord are / warmer to me than this dead life, / transitory on land. I do not believe / that earthly happiness will endure eternally."[16] All those not believing in God are foolish, whereas "the man who lives humbly [is blessed and] the favour of heaven will come to him."[17] It is this notion of *eaþmod* which is decisive and Bosworth–Toller gives "lowly," "submissive" (Supplement sense i) or "obedient" (original entry)

[14] "All is hardship in the earthly kingdom; / the action of fate changes the world under the heavens. / Here, wealth is transitory; here a friend is transitory; / here a man is transitory; here a kinsman is transitory. / All this earth's foundation will become empty."

[15] The word appears throughout the Old English texts subject to my analysis and its numerous occurrences referred to in Bosworth–Toller further cement this impression.

[16] "Forþon me hatran sind / Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif, / læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no / þæt him eorðwelan ece stondeð," 64–67. All quotations and translations from *The Seafarer* follow Treharne.

[17] "Eadig bið se þe eaþmod leofaþ: cymeð him seo ar of heofonum," 107.

along with Treharne's choice of "humbly." This seems to be a man's road to the afterlife, via the awareness of God's power and his willing subordination to it. Therefore, it is wise "to look after [one's] soul" ("snotre men sawlum beorgað," *Maxims I* 36) because it is the part of humans that will go to heaven, the soul being, as we learn in Alfred's *Consolation* or the Bible, eternal ("undeaþlice and ece," ch. 11, l. 84). In *Beowulf*, the ignorance of worldly transience is called *unsnyttru* ("folly," 1734), the opposite of wisdom, which means by implication that wisdom entails an awareness of worldly transience. Such a representation of life on earth as transitory, hard, and ending in death is a representation that borders on fatalism and yet also gives birth to the consolations of the afterlife offered by the Christian religion. However, it seems to be this respectively fatalistic or promising aspect of life, death, which is at the core of the *geondþencan* in *The Wanderer*, the faithful reflections leading onto the road to Anglo-Saxon wisdom.

Drawing our overview together, we can say that the notion of wisdom in Old English literature fuses the Christian present of the Anglo-Saxons with their heroic heritage, giving the idea that wise people are those who are able to cope well as Christians in a heroic world. The fact that many scribes had a religious background certainly biases the findings and it would seem that wise decisions are primarily those that are made with existence after death in the back of the mind. However, this does not mean that the Anglo-Saxons acknowledged no other way to wisdom than the biblical path. Reading, experience, and reflection, three of the most common associations of wisdom in the Old English literature I analysed here, are just as important prerequisites from a purely secular perspective, as I hope this section has shown. Even in our modern times, where the commitment to the Church is more and more declining, we might be tempted to think of these three prerequisites as the cornerstones of any road to wisdom.

Tolkien's Road: The Importance of Wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings*

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines wisdom as the "[c]apacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct" or a "soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends" (1a), and it is primarily through such a lens of decisions that we will approach the concept in *The Lord of the Rings*. We will briefly examine the general influence and importance of wisdom in Tolkien's *magnum opus*, especially as far as the execution of the quest is concerned. The most promising way of doing this is by looking at Elrond's Council, the strategic core of the novel, where the wise are gathered to decide what to do with the Ring.

To start with, the Council of Elrond scene is an important moment for the plot as it describes how an assembly of the wisest minds in Middle-earth[18] discusses what to do about the Ring. The Council's decision is based on the reflection, the *geondþencan*, of the people present, over the facts established during the meeting. The conclusion is that the Ring needs to be destroyed at the Cracks of Doom, a fellowship is sent out on that errand and the story ends, some 800 pages later, with the successful destruction of the Ring and the victory over Sauron. One might feel tempted to say that the plans of the wise people from the Council bear fruits and that the final victory is a direct consequence of the meeting's decision. Such a conclusion would be too simplistic, though, as Tolkien's novel continuously gives the impression that the quest's success depends on chance and luck at various critical moments. As Gandalf points out, "there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker" (56), thus alluding to a higher power ruling over the protagonists. It is called "chance" that the hobbits have the Ring and both Bilbo and Frodo are supposedly "*meant*" to bear it (51, 56). One could even argue that Frodo's decision to carry the Ring to Mordor himself is prompted by the fact that the Ring came to him, chose him as its bearer and burdened him with the task, making Frodo's decision seem to hinge on his fate more than on his own desires. This shows, then, that there is a constant interplay of fate and free will at the heart of the quest.[19]

It is therefore necessary to look at such an overarching power if we want to assess the importance of wisdom for the quest's success. "Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel," Beowulf tells us ("fate always goes as it must," 455), and the wise characters in Middle-earth also seem to be aware of a higher power to which they are subject. Consequently, it is the mark of wisdom to know that one does not necessarily understand all the purposes of such a power, as Gandalf teaches Frodo when the hobbit presumes the right to judge the death of Gollum deserved:

> Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. (59)

[18] Interestingly, some of the wisest people, such as Celeborn, Galadriel or Faramir, are not at the Council. One could imagine these characters and their wisdom and counsel to be landmarks in the quest. Concerning the question of which characters I consider to be wise in my paper, I follow Dickerson's experiment which shows that Gandalf, Aragorn, Faramir, Elrond and Galadriel are the characters most commonly associated with wisdom by readers of *The Lord of the Rings* (48). My research about wisdom will revolve around the requirements of the quest, however, which means that I will also take different characters into account.

[19] For the sake of brevity, I will not differentiate between the different layers of meaning implied by fate, providence, *wyrd*, chance, luck, divine will or other similar notions in this section. There is much to explore in terms of Tolkien's use of fate and providence in relation to Germanic or classical ideas, as done for example by Dubs. For our current purposes, however, it suffices to say that there is an interplay of what the characters can do and achieve by their own volition and in how far they are controlled by a higher, external source of power.

The hobbit cannot know what providence has preordained for Gollum; indeed, in a dramatic resolution, Gollum, "the instrument of divine providence" (Hibbs 170), will inadvertently complete the task once Frodo gives in to the lure of the Ring. This shows that the Council's plan would not have been successful if the higher power had not done its share. The Council's decision to take the Ring to Mordor emphasises agency on the Fellowship's part, though in the end, it is the unforeseen developments which turn their fate around, making Frodo not an active hero but a passive bystander at the critical moment.

All this suggests that the protagonists are not in control of the outcome of the quest and this might even lead to the assumption that all decisions, no matter how wise, are ultimately vain because the higher power always has the final word. Yet such a conclusion could not be further from the truth, as Shippey explains:

> [T]he logic of luck (or chance, or fate, or fortune, or accident, or even wyrd) seems in Tolkien's view to be this: there is no knowing how events will turn out, and it is certainly never a good idea for anyone to give up trying, whether out of despair or out of a passive confidence that some external power will intervene. If there is an external power (the Valar), it has to work through human or earthly agents, and if those agents give up, then the purpose of the external power will be thwarted. (*Author* 146)

The conscious decision for agency, brave and heroic in nature, is thus an important prerequisite for the quest's success, and it is this decision which embodies Tolkien's notion of wisdom as far as the quest is concerned. Frodo accepts his fate and displays the necessary agency, which brings the higher power to work and leads to the "eucatastrophic" (Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" 153) situation where Gollum can stumble together with the Ring into the Cracks of Doom. "[I]t is wisdom to recognize necessity," Gandalf proclaims at the Council of Elrond (269), and even though many of the subsequent decisions following the Council seem more careless than wise—even without real alternatives such as trusting in Gollum—it is important to note that these decisions are still made with the required responsibility and agency in mind. They are in accordance with the final goal established by the wise in Rivendell. The characters go "ever on and on," just like in Bilbo's walking song (35), for dismissing their responsibility is unthinkable as it will only leave the problem for another generation with even worse chances of success, as both Elrond and Gandalf explain (279, 879). Staying passive is neither wise nor heroic and that makes agency necessary, even if walking out of one's door is "a dangerous business," as Bilbo tells us, and "there is no knowing where [one] might be swept off to" along the road (74). It is obvious that the initial decision of the wise people gathered at Elrond's Council is at the heart of the later victory, even though the characters' courage and persistence, coupled with the sudden positive turns issued by fate and providence, are of greater importance once they are on their way.

The following three sections will examine representations of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings* directly related to Tolkien's philological background. While I will make occasional reference to other texts from Anglo-Saxon England discussed in the overview section, the main focus of my Old English analogies will be on *Beowulf*. The link between wisdom and religion, however, will only be of marginal interest to us even though there is a great deal to explore in that direction,[20] given that Tolkien was a devout Catholic and that Christianity figures prominently among Old English associations of wisdom. The next section will examine philology as a source of wisdom, by looking at songs and stories and the way they relate to what I call the circularity of fiction. The subsequent section will analyse the role of information and counsel as the currencies of wisdom, which are sought and traded like the gold in *Beowulf*. The final section will present some more elaborate thoughts on the interplay of wisdom and heroism in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf*.

Ancient Wisdom and the Circularity of Fiction

Let us now turn to songs and stories in *The Lord of the Rings* in order better to understand how Tolkien emphasises the importance of ancient texts and philology. These metafictional entities have the power to bring the examples and wisdom of earlier people into the minds of the characters and they can encourage characters in key moments of the quest. Many of the instances when the characters show their own poetic skill are examples of characters fictionalising reality for the benefit of later audiences, real or imagined. "Legend and History have met and fused," Tolkien proclaimed in "On Fairy-Stories" (156), and such a blurred line between fiction and reality can also be seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, where legends turn out to be true and events from the plot are reworked into fiction by the characters. It will be interesting, then, to contrast the songs and stories in *The Lord of the Rings* with the metafictional moments in *Beowulf*. While *real* and *reality* are understood as terms designating things that are considered normal in Middle-earth, my notion of *fiction* refers both to the imagined and to that which is deemed impossible in Tolkien's world. Reality and fiction are merging concepts in *The Lord of the Rings* and this is why my use of the term *fictionalisation* also comprises putting events into supposedly factual accounts. If Tolkien's portrayal of songs and stories is linked more with reflection and wisdom, as a potential basis for good decisions, the metafictional moments in *Beowulf* seem to only put more stress on the heroic quality of the hero.

The fact that history and legend, or reality and fiction, are not clearly separable was very clear to Tolkien as a scholar of Anglo-Saxon. Because of his professional

[20] See for example Kerry and Miesel's collection of articles *Light beyond all Shadow: Religious Experience in Tolkien's Work* for further information.

background, he knew that "legend often became a matter of everyday," as Shippey put it (*Road* 34). The poem *Beowulf* makes this quite clear. It relates the fictional story about Beowulf and his struggles against the monsters but the poet obviously draws on reality because there are characters like Hygelac who were apparently historical. This is quite logical because, as Tolkien points out in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," there are always elements from the real, the "primary world," in the fictionally created "secondary" one (113). Even a look at the etymology of the term *history* shows that earlier generations did not seem to differentiate too much between factual history and fictional narratives, as the word *history* could refer to both things (Onions). According to his friend C. S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, one of the things Tolkien wanted most with his literature was to show the world that "the real life of men is of that mythical and heroic quality" to be found in these ancient tales (15–16). And I think it is clear that, for Tolkien, his mythology and real life fused and there are instances in his *Letters* where the author tries to make sense of reality by way of his fiction. In a letter to his son Christopher, for example, who was fighting in South Africa during World War II at the time, Tolkien Senior tried to encourage his son by telling him to keep up his "hobbitry in heart" and to think "that all *stories* feel like that when you are *in* them," going on to assure him that he is "inside a very great story" (78). By doing that, he gives encouragement to his son, by making him feel part of a fictional narrative, equal to reality, just like his *Lord of the Rings*, where hobbits may "shape the fortunes of all" (Jackson, *Gefährten* 00:07:12). Thus Tolkien ascribes a fictional character to reality and treats it like fiction by putting it on the same level. In the end, myths are taken from the real world, as Lewis points out, and by virtue of such myths, we can better understand reality. The line between the two is more blurred than modernity realises. In *The Lord of the Rings*, there is no clear separation between factual history and legend either. Many of the preliminary pieces of information concerning the Ring are no more than philological remains researched by Gandalf in the libraries of Gondor. Lore and story are therefore two concepts that are barely differentiated in Tolkien's work.

Stories and songs can in general only work as a source of practical wisdom if the people who hear or read them reflect upon them and look for their applicability for their own lives and situations. The link between songs and stories and the importance of reflection is alluded to several times in *The Lord of the Rings*. For one thing, hearing stories is described as something that does not happen effortlessly (131) and the clear association of Rivendell with both songs and reflection is quite telling as well. The House of Elrond represents "Lore" and the "ancient wisdom" as Tolkien describes it himself, going on to say that it is a place of "*reflection*" rather than "*action*" (Letters 153). Stories and songs inspire the characters to reflection in Tolkien's novel, just as his novel might do for its readers, and the reflection is something that transfers the fictional to the real, by applying that which the characters hear in tales with their own immediate situation. Shippey points out for

example that "the 'Road' poem" appears three times in *The Lord of the Rings* and that it is each time adapted to the immediate situation of the character reciting it (*Author* 190). It is hence not much surprising that the wise characters in Tolkien's work are associated with a knowledge of songs and stories and consider the possibility of fiction being real. Bilbo speaks of an unbelievable "appetite for music and poetry and tales" that all the Elves have, for instance, and Aragorn, who is himself firmly rooted in this tradition, tells us that Elrond knows stories best, and this one is the "master of wisdom" after all (237, 191, 1034; App. A). These stories and songs can provide access to the ancient wisdom of former days, and as Gandalf says, there is "a chapter of ancient history which it might be good to recall; for there was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valour, and great deeds that were not wholly vain" (52). Whether the characters reflect upon such things knowing they are factual or not is beside the point; it might provide them with guidance in their current situation in either case. Such metafictional examples where characters tell stories, recite songs or delve into history represent moments where "they bring the wisdom of ancient folk into present" (Holmes 88). These characters are aware of "the shaping of present by past" (Shippey, *Road* 33) and be that past "true or feigned" (*LotR* xxiv), it can be of service either way.

There are, however, also characters who do not accept the reality of fiction as a possibility and also refuse the idea that stories and songs can provide ancient wisdom. In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien lamented the fact that many people regarded fairy-stories as children's literature and as something that adults should not take too seriously. But as Shippey points out, there is a form of wisdom in the hobbits because they do not downgrade old tradition to children's tales and children's stories; for the hobbits, that remains an "unforgotten wisdom" (*Author* 26–27). Boromir is more sceptical in that regard, for example when asked about the potential existence of Fangorn: "Indeed we have heard of Fangorn in Minas Tirith … But what I have heard seems to me for the most part old wives' tales, such as we tell to our children" (374). Celeborn, "the wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth" (357), promptly replies: "But do not despise the lore that has come down from distant years; for oft it may chance that old wives keep in memory word of things that once were needful for the wise to know" (374), thus explaining to Boromir that stories might contain practical knowledge whether they be true or imagined and therefore, wise people do not reject them for their fictionality, or for the possibility that they might merely be imagined. Celeborn understands that being wise and serving as a counsellor is not possible without acknowledging the fact that all his assessments of future outcomes are in his imagination and therefore per definition not real. And those people that see stories or songs as potentially real, or at least as something that might be educational, will be able to apply that wisdom and perform acts in the process that might themselves be worthy to be put into song. Fictional stories and songs can serve as a basis for counsel, like Isildur's written legacy does for the great Council in Rivendell, but stories

and songs can also function as counsel as such—as the words of Malbeth the Seer do when they remind Aragorn of the Paths of the Dead (781). Stories and songs can only provide that, however, as long as the characters do not reject them too eagerly. Boromir, if we stay with this character, also does not believe in, or understand, the implications of Isildur's example who also tries to use the Ring but fails in the process; showing that it is indeed important to consider legend, or history, or whatever it actually is. Children, Gandalf implies, can do better than many grown-ups because they value fairies differently, as the wizard's discussion about Ents with Théoden shows:

> 'They are the shepherds of the trees,' answered Gandalf. 'Is it so long since you listened to tales by the fireside? There are children in your land who, out of the twisted threads of story, could pick the answer to your question. You have seen Ents, O King, Ents out of Fangorn Forest, which in your tongue you call the Entwood. Did you think that the name was given only in idle fancy? Nay, Théoden, it is otherwise: to them you are but the passing tale; all the years from Eorl the Young to Théoden the Old are of little count to them; and all the deeds of your house but a small matter.'
>
> The king was silent. 'Ents!' he said at length. 'Out of the shadows of legend I begin to understand the marvel of the trees, I think. I have lived to see strange days. Long we have tended our beasts and our fields, built our houses, wrought our tools, or ridden away to help in the wars of Minas Tirith. And that we called the life of Men, the way of the world. We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land. Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And now the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun.' (549–50)

If the King of Rohan had not dismissed songs and stories as mere fiction created for the entertainment of children, he would have known what overpowered Saruman and now "walk[s] visible under the Sun." Those who are wise know well that fiction merges with the real, that legend might turn out to be true, and they understand that a knowledge of old songs and stories might give them access to the ancient wisdom potentially vital for the quest.[21] Given the situation of philology in universities in Tolkien's time, his use of stories and songs as purveyors of wisdom can be regarded as a call for philology, an attempt to reaffirm those who are interested in texts like *Beowulf*.

[21] Having said that, I should point out that a knowledge of songs and stories is of course not exclusive to wise characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Hobbits, as we learn, are also a singing culture yet not considered to be very wise. The difference might be that wise characters try to learn from songs and stories and let themselves, to some extent, be guided by them along their journey. It might also be worth noting that, unlike Bilbo's songs that are inspired by the Elves and his adventures, the songs in the Shire might not be such a good source of wisdom as they are merely for feasting and do not provoke serious contemplation.

In the Old English poem, there is a different relationship between the metafictional moments and wisdom. We have a different yet similar portrayal of songs and stories with regard to wisdom in *Beowulf*. The characters can still think about them and learn from them, as in *The Lord of the Rings*, but the legends behind the legend rather serve to reemphasise Beowulf's heroism, though, and we are never explicitly told that the characters take a breath and actually reflect about the poems inside the poem and try to apply them to their own situations. We have to infer such information from later dialogues or the characters' subsequent actions and the immediate context of these digressions—we will focus on the Sigemund and Finnsburh episodes (867–915, 1063–159)—is one of feasting and the celebration of Beowulf's heroic victories. The poet does not mention that Beowulf stops and reflects on the meaning of the poems, nor does he tell us explicitly that Beowulf tries to apply these legends to his own life. The atmosphere during the *scops'* contributions is one of celebration, drinking and entertainment and not one of thoughtful reflection like the one in Rivendell. If we look at line 2109, when Beowulf relates his experiences with the Danes to Hygelac, he refers to the *scops'* tales as "strange stories" ("syllic spell"), "true and sad" ("soð ond sarlic"), which means that the hero must at least have listened to the *scops* and his assessment of their contributions also suggests that he has thought about them to some extent. How deeply, though, remains speculative. It is Hrothgar, the wise old king, who picks up the Heremod analogy of the Sigemund episode in order to warn Beowulf of stepping into Heremod's footprints; Beowulf should learn from Heremod ("Ðu þe lær be þon," 1722) and beware of following the road that the latter lays out. These metafictional moments might have been intended for the listeners of the Beowulf-poem rather than for the characters inside of it, giving listeners the possibility to think about moral and virtuous implications of the hero's actions by comparing the plot of the poem with other well-known legends. The digressions serve to foreshadow future events, such as the later fight against the dragon for example (886), but neither do they provide any direct and tangible wisdom for the main character nor can we link decisions back to Beowulf's reflections about these digressions. However, they provide ancient or imaginative examples, the reflection on which can reignite past guidelines for present situations. The world of *Beowulf* is a story culture and we can assume that references to Sigemund were understood by the fictional characters as well as by actual Anglo-Saxons in a medieval audience. But Beowulf himself does not need these poems as much as the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* need them. He is a hero, described as God-sent with all his extraordinary powers, and he does not decide to become a hero only after being inspired by the *scops*. He is already a hero and therefore, the poetic contributions do not fulfil any function of en*courage*ment—Beowulf already has courage and he does not need further inspiration to fulfil his quests. The Sigemund and Finnsburh episodes do provide a moral warning, but Beowulf either does not realise it or does not follow the counsel of legend. Instead, the *scops'* performances are linked

more with Beowulf's heroism rather than with wisdom. Bonjour remarks for example that the Sigemund and Heremod digressions are "a glorification of the hero by means of parallels and significant contrasts" (74) and this could not be more true as the episodes reinforce the level of heroism demonstrated by Beowulf. The two episodes rather suggest that Beowulf himself is of that same heroic calibre and will be put into legend, his heroic achievements fictionalised like the ones of his famous predecessors. The episodes emphasise heroism rather than inspiring reflection in the characters and make us understand that Beowulf himself will one day be remembered among such heroes, as befits his well-earned status. Unlike in Tolkien, none of the characters needs any reminder that legend can become a reality because the world of *Beowulf* knows quite well that heroes such as the main character of the poem exist—the reality of fiction is accepted in the poem and Beowulf's heroic deeds represent the realisation of fiction; another hero steps out of legend into the spotlight. Wise people in *Beowulf* are not necessarily associated with songs or stories other than the ones they themselves inspire by their heroic deeds. Other than in *The Lord of the Rings*, then, the aspect of the fictionalisation of reality, of putting into future legend what is achieved in the here and now, is more present than the aspect of using songs and stories as sources of ancient wisdom.

A brief look at *Apollonius of Tyre* might also be worthwhile. Even though the romance does not have any comparable metafictional moments, it presents bookish learning as an important milestone on the road to wisdom. The characters inside the Old English *Apollonius* do seem to obtain much of the ancient wisdom via books, but the impression is that it is primarily the riddle as such which inspires true and deep reflection rather than the content of the books. From that perspective, the main character uses the books only as a way to a solution, a support for the *geondþencan* process initiated by King Antiochus' riddle. In Tolkien, the songs and stories generally lead to *geondþencan*, and characters like Sam only find out along the way that they are applicable to the quest. What is more, Apollonius does not have any comparable quest to fulfil. Accordingly, the romance does not show how Apollonius tries to apply what he has learned from books for any personal mission. A notable difference between *Apollonius* and the majority of Old English literature is that the former has a pagan setting, implying that its protagonist's readings are not biblical. Other characters in Anglo-Saxon literature may find guidance for their earthly decisions in the Bible's many stories and characters. As we learn in the Old English *Consolation of Philosophy*, "books are full of the examples" of earlier men ("Hu ne wast þu þætte ealle bec sint fulle þara bisna þara monna þe ær us wæran?" ch. 29, ll. 11–12), which shows that the guidance and applicability people receive from the past can also mean nothing more than learning from other people's experiences, and without these experiences having already been interpreted by others.[22]

[22] The Old English *Consolation* is quite interesting in that regard. Wisdom (the character) often passes his teachings on in song and often makes use of small analogies to history. This suggests that the

Coming back to Tolkien, we can say that *The Lord of the Rings* shows that mere words as such are portrayed in such a way as to have power over reality. This is not especially surprising given Tolkien's philological background. We see this for example with Tom Bombadil who can sing Old Man Willow into obedience or with the little verse he teaches Frodo and the others to call him if the need arises (120, 134). This is an interesting point, as it gives the impression that words can bring reality into being, conjuring people and things up from mere imagination. The moment when Gandalf tells Saruman that his staff is broken and it breaks in that very instant is another forceful illustration of the power of words (583). Such a power in songs can also be seen when Sam saves Frodo from the Tower of Cirith Ungol: the hobbit sings "old childish tunes out of the Shire" and gains some "new strength" because of it (908). This shows that songs can also have an encouraging function, the lines bringing back thoughts about home and the reason for fighting on in the first place. In general, songs and stories can either function as a way of tapping into ancient wisdom, of finding inspiration in the stories and examples of others, or as a way of reworking one's own experiences into fiction. The Ride of the Rohirrim into The Battle of the Pelennor Fields might serve as a last example of this. We learn that "all the host of Rohan burst into song, and [that] they sang as they slew, for the joy of battle was on them, and the sound of their singing that was fair and terrible came even to the City" (838). Songs and stories are like fictional entities inherently bound up with reality.[23] While the Rohirrim sing, the battle "is poeticized and perceived from the aesthetic distance of a future generation" (Eilmann 102). When they sing, they immediately bring the action into fiction again, perhaps retold by a fireside at a later time.

The examples of myth becoming reality are so abundant in *The Lord of the Rings* that a brief selection must suffice for our purposes. The actual existence of hobbits or Ents, though deemed the stuff of fairy-tales before, is just one case out of many interspersed throughout Tolkien's work. Let us first look at Aragorn's return to the throne of Gondor, an example for the realisation of fiction, for the fulfilment of a legend.[24] As the last descendant of Isildur, Aragorn is the lost heir to the old Kings of Gondor and much of the plot revolves around him taking over this responsibility by stepping more and more into the role ordained for him by legend. Aragorn proves to be the great healer that was prophesised for Gondor and the sword that Isildur used to cut off the Ring from Sauron's hand is reforged, as legend announced it, making Háma, the doorward of Meduseld, proclaim in astonishment: "It seems that you are come on the wings of song out of

mere musicality in communication might play a role itself and that history might teach as a good or bad example.

[23] The March of the Ents is similar in that regard. Pippin relates his impression of the moment: "But I thought it was only marching music and no more, just a song—until I got here, I know better now," showing the power behind the song (565).

[24] This marks the prophetic nature of the poem in Gandalf's letter to Frodo quoted at the beginning of the introduction.

the forgotten days" (511). Aragorn is an embodiment of legend and therefore illustrates with his very person that the old days should never be forgotten as they might still hold very tangible implications for the present. We see here that myth and legend, the fictional, have even a kind of prophetic side to them in *The Lord of the Rings*—in the end, Aragorn does get to step into the role ordained by legend and is crowned in an old traditional ceremony that gives life to the past. But Aragorn is not only himself the stuff of legend, he also knows a lot of stories and songs in general, as the hobbits find out on their trip to Rivendell where Aragorn serves them as a guide. One example would be his song about Beren and Lúthien (191–93). This song about the love between a mortal and an Elf, published in *The Silmarillion*, describes the ancient and sad tale of two lovers doomed to be separated by death and this song is entirely applicable to Aragorn's own situation with the immortal Elf Arwen who will choose death on his behalf. It is a moment when the character looks back into the past, whether real or fictional, thus giving Tolkien the possibility of implicitly foreshadowing the future turns of the plot. Aragorn's song of Beren and Lúthien is an instance where fiction becomes reality again because the two are married once Aragorn becomes king. "[T]he tale of their long waiting and labours was come to fulfilment," we read (973), and Tolkien's combinative use of the words *tale* and *fulfilment* implies connections to prophecies. This specific tale is of particular interest as it found its inspiration in the author's personal love for his wife Edith (*Letters* 420). Tolkien fictionalised the real-world love for his wife in his mythology, thus showing once again that there is always some reality in fiction and that authors always have a foundation, be that other tales or their personal life (Shippey, "Appeal of the Pagan" 160). Tolkien reworked his personal reality into his fiction, only for his characters to draw from that as elements of fiction in the fiction itself, making it a reality for them within the overall fiction Tolkien created with his mythology.

The passage which reflects perhaps most clearly the link between fiction and reality is when the Fellowship passes through the Mines of Moria and Gandalf reads from the Book of Mazarbul (321–32). The book is a chronicle of the Dwarfs of Moria and the last pages end with the description of an imminent orc attack.[25] When the orcs come to attack the Fellowship in a scene closely mirroring the events described in the Book of Mazarbul, different characters from the Fellowship repeat the exact wording that the Dwarfs supposedly used according to the chronicle. This shows that history repeats itself and that there is a close relationship between past and present, showing that it is beneficial to delve into writings

[25] It should be noted that history in our common understanding of the word also carries some traces of fiction for nobody knows whether the described events took place as the chroniclers claim and whether they provide the full truth. "History is written by the winners," the saying goes, accordingly, a notion of subjectivity is always present. This is also why we will not look at the Book of Mazarbul as a necessarily non-fictional work inside the fiction. After all, reality and fiction fuse and they are both fictional in one way or another.

of earlier times because they might hold the key to one's own imminent future, the knowledge being much more applicable than people think. Even though this is not a moment where the characters can draw any ancient wisdom from the book, it shows again that there is a certain prophetic nature to the writings from earlier times. But although the characters find themselves in the same situation like the Dwarfs who were slaughtered, their fate does not have to get repeated as well, meaning that their fate is independent from the situations in which they find themselves. There is another outcome possible for them; Tolkien does not simply write a reproduction of the past in his mythology, the characters still have free will and the chance to produce a different outcome of this dangerous situation. Except for Gandalf, who one might say is later resurrected, the Fellowship survive the Mines of Moria, and likewise, Aragorn does not fail in his mission either, as his ancestor Isildur so famously did. The passage in the Mines shows once again that people do have to take action in order to ensure the workings of providence, as we discussed in the previous section. By looking back in history one fears they have seen their future, but the fate of their predecessors does not have to become a reality for them as well. Although situations are repetitive, they are not forcibly prophetic, because the outcomes can be different. "You are not bound to his fate," Arwen points out to Aragorn in Jackson's movie version of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (01:31:27), an affirmation to which Tolkien would have agreed.

The example no discussion about songs and stories in *The Lord of the Rings* can avoid is the one of Samwise Gamgee. Sam is a character who is immensely interested in and moved by songs and stories, especially about Elves, and he surprises even his hobbit friends with his knowledge of poetry when they are still in the Shire. In Lothlórien, he gets the idea for the first time that he is actually inside a song, as though fiction encompasses him as a representative of reality (351). He realises that songs and stories are about nothing else than things related in some form or another to reality and he understands that their quest is of such an importance as might be sung about if successful. He thinks about the quest increasingly metaphorically in terms of story and song, especially once he and Frodo come closer to Mordor. At the Stairs of Cirith Ungol, for example, we read:

> Still, I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards. And people will say: 'Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!' And they'll say: 'Yes, that's one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn't he, dad?' 'Yes, my boy, the famousest of the hobbits, and that's saying a lot.' (712)

In other words, he wonders whether the account of their adventure will ever be put into a tale, so that others might read or listen to their story just as he likes to do with other people's tales. One could argue of course that Sam seeks fame and glory similar to Beowulf, and that he therefore wants to be put into the legends of

future days, his memory living on in the fiction about him so to speak. But this is not an accurate comparison, as the hobbit does not want any of the fame and opts for an ordinary life once he is back in the Shire. His association of the quest with fiction is something that provides hope and reinforces his sense of duty towards Frodo and the mission. Sam draws comparisons between the ancient stories he knows and their current situation: "Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours," he tells Frodo (712). This shows that these legends do fulfil a function of encouragement; the two hobbits rely on these stories in order to find the strength to continue their quest. Beowulf does not need such a function of encouragement, as he already is a hero, and one with a power the two hobbits can only dream of. Hence the stories help Sam put things into perspective, to find the hope he needs in order to keep Frodo going. Such a connection between ancient songs and stories and the characters' hope becomes even more evident:

> 'And we shouldn't be here at all, if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on—and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things right, though not quite the same—like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into?'
>
> 'I wonder,' said Frodo. 'But I don't know. And that's the way of a real tale. Take any one that you're fond of. You may know, or guess, what kind of a tale it is, happy-ending or sad-ending, but the people in it don't know. And you don't want them to.' (711–12)

This illustrates that people might be thrown into situations (providence) but that they have the choice of not "turning back" (free will). Unlike Beowulf, they do not go looking for trouble, but trouble has found them and they find themselves to be the main protagonists in this story, forced out of passiveness into action. The dialogue shows the reality of fiction and its applicability to real-life problems,[26]

[26] It is also noteworthy that Sam is held to be a mighty Elvish warrior by the orcs before he saves Frodo from their clutches in The Tower of Cirith Ungol. He seems like one of the Elvish heroes he

demonstrating its value as a source of wisdom. Stories and songs are something they can both take courage from, and just like the characters inside those stories and songs, the hobbits have to "see things through" even if they do not yet know how everything will end and where their road will lead them, inspiring perhaps others one day to put the deeds of Frodo and Sam into fiction.

Once the Ring is destroyed and the two hobbits are safely back in Rivendell, the symbolic place for song and reflection (*Letters* 153), their quest is indeed remembered in song just as Sam imagined it. A minstrel sings of "Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom," taking the reality of the achieved quest into the realm of songs and stories for coming generations to marvel at (954). This acknowledgment of their victory over Sauron and the Ring is something that epitomises a certain circularity of fiction and reality. After all the support from fictional songs and stories, the reality of the Fellowship's success is itself fictionalised, first in Sam's mind, then by a minstrel and later by chroniclers, and thus it can provide hope and encouragement in the form of stories and songs for later people on similar errands, thus giving life to the fiction again, bringing it and its influence back into reality. The characters "shape future legend" and their own lives "are shaped by legendary narratives of the past" (Bolintineanu 267–68). If we compare that to Beowulf, this circularity is somewhat less complete, because the hero himself does not really need the legends as encouragement for his own heroic deeds.

To make such a thing possible, that later people can read up on one's adventures so that these might serve as a source of wisdom for others, it is important that the experiences are written down by the characters involved, as it is done in *Apollonius of Tyre* for example. This is in fact the "pleasant advice" Bilbo receives from Gandalf; he is supposed to serve only as a "recorder" from that moment on, keeping track of the events and contributing in that manner (270). By writing things down, the characters externalise what they have experienced[27] and thus make it accessible for others. Bilbo urges Frodo to keep a diary on his quest and Sam suggests that Frodo would need to be locked up in a tower of Minas Tirith, forcing him to start writing before he forgets anything. All this implies that there is almost an obligation to write things down, a serious responsibility towards later generations. This is a point which would of course be dear to Tolkien the medievalist, whose work largely depended on what survived in writing. Isildur having written down his experiences with the Ring proves invaluable to Gandalf and hence to the whole quest and the act of writing the experiences down is in itself something which forces people to remember things and to reflect on them as well. This fictionalisation of reality is important, because it lets songs and stories serve

glorifies so much and in him, their fictional heroism is brought into present reality. This comparison also likens Sam more with the Elves and their ancient wisdom as such.

[27] One can consider learning from such fictional accounts to be equal to learning from other people's experiences, similar to reading in history with the difference that the narrated events might only be hypothetical.

as potential sources of wisdom, inspired by real events, and it should once again be reiterated that the line between fiction and reality is blurry at best. The Red Book of Westmarch that Frodo continues becomes a source of lore, of a more scholarly learning based on facts, and not a book primarily of stories and songs. There will be personal touches by Frodo or his collaborators and we know from Gandalf that the information Bilbo gives in *The Hobbit* is not fully truthful, but feigned, imagined in parts in order to conceal the real power of the Ring and how he got it (*LotR* 13). Frodo's book title pays tribute to nearly all of the Fellowship, as his accounts are "supplemented" with "the learning of the Wise" (1027)—and, surprisingly in light of hobbit-culture, we learn that especially the four hobbits engage in a lot of writing after their return. The hobbits become scholars themselves, which is important according to Kraus, "because being heroic ties into being scholarly" in Tolkien's mythology (145). This change can best be seen in Merry and Pippin who become learned librarians in the Shire; they circulate books, they help Frodo redact The Red Book of Westmarch and they seemingly care about the fact that their memories can serve as the basis for wisdom in future times. Having lived through "a very great story" themselves metaphorically, just like Tolkien's son in World War II (*Letters* 78), their experience makes them wiser.

But even though the adventure of the Fellowship is written down, the memory of it will eventually fade just like everything else. The appendices of *The Lord of the Rings* make this idea very clear and, as Shippey notes, "prevent any sense of easy, happy closure" because they show their memory's passing into "oblivion" (*Road* 373). If we compare this point to *Beowulf*, we realise that Hrothgar tells the hero that his heroic deeds have made him "immortal" (Heaney) in a sense, because his "fame will endure / always and forever"[28]—as if the legends about Beowulf will keep the hero alive in the earthly world forever. But the idea of prolonging life via fame is foolish because everything will fade come its day, as the Old English *Consolation* makes clear (ch. 18). Earthly things like fame are not worth aspiring to, but maybe this forms another attempt at reconciling the two worlds: thanks to his heroic achievements, Beowulf will be remembered on earth in legends, at least for a time far longer than the perception of anyone alive can fathom, and thanks to his Christian faith, he may also get to ascend to heaven, thus living on in both worlds. From such a perspective, the scops' songs in the Old English poem give the impression that Beowulf will join other heroic warriors in legends and that he will be in society's memory for days innumerable. In Tolkien, however, the appendices make it very clear that the memory of the heroes, their fame, is to fade as well. For Sam, stories and songs work as a metaphor for life itself: even though the story continues, its characters come and go, eventually to be forgotten because others take over the leading roles, and this is exactly what happens in *The Lord of the Rings*. The metafictional moments in *Beowulf* and the poem as such do not give

[28] "Þu þe self hafast / dædum gefremed, þæt þin (dom) lyfað / awa to alder," 953–55.

the impression that the remembrance of the hero will at some point cease. The poem has death as a theme, though without compromising Beowulf's status as a hero, making his heroism stay in the world after his death. Many of the songs and stories in Tolkien are about death too. Even his whole mythology has death as its overarching theme (*Letters* 284). As Legolas remarks, the songs of the Rohirrim, the people corresponding to Anglo-Saxons in Tolkien's mythology, are "laden with the sadness of Mortal Men" (508). We get the idea that whole species are dying out in Middle-earth, and this notion is even emphasised with the passing of the Third Age. "Swa þes middangeard / ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ" (*Wanderer* 62–63)[29]—it is this awareness which is at the heart of many of the songs and stories interspersed throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, as for example the songs of the Elves, which embody a certain "sense of remoteness from the world" (Kelly 183).[30] And this sense of loss and mortality represents another association with the wisdom attainable via songs and stories, in both Old English literature and Tolkien's mythology alike.

Summing up, we can say that songs and stories move on a fine line between reality and fiction and that they are recognised as a common source of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings*, encouraging the characters, helping with important decisions, providing, last but not least, insight into the wisdom of long-forgotten days. This connection between wisdom and the vast history of Middle-earth shows to what extent Tolkien's philological profession influenced his mythology. Although the digressive moments in *Beowulf* are important too, their function is more aimed at emphasising the heroic quality of the main character. The metafictional moments in *The Lord of the Rings* are also connected to the overall quest, but Tolkien's work places more emphasis on reflection and the wisdom potentially acquired by that road. Situations where fiction is realised or reality fictionalised are common to both texts and show that there is a certain circularity of fiction. Yet while the Old English poem stresses the fictionalisation of Beowulf's heroic achievements, aligning him even more with his great predecessors, Tolkien puts the applicability of old songs and stories into the foreground, as pathways to the ancient world, showing that these characters inside old stories, whether they existed or not, wandered on the same roads.

Information and Counsel as the Currencies of Wisdom

Now that we are familiar with the philological path to wisdom, let us analyse in how far the characters apply that wisdom in councils about the final achievement of the quest. This section will introduce the idea that wisdom is more important

[29] "So this middle-earth / each and every day declines and falls."

[30] Songs and stories also portray a kind of cosmogonic knowledge about Middle-earth, especially the songs of the Elves. This seems to be a common association of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings* as well.

than Old English heroism, which I will turn to more specifically in the next section. Information and counsel are the currencies of wise people in *The Lord of the Rings*—pieces of information are essential to making good decisions for the quest, and this quest in turn becomes a race for information and counsel and for the denial of such to the enemy. The Fellowship's overall success depends on the members' ability to keep their attempt at destroying the Ring low profile. The company's journey is about preventing the enemy from realising what they are doing while at the same time trying to make the best decisions possible according to the counsel they can get. The heroic deeds of Beowulf, on the contrary, only marginally depend on information and counsel.

The most important piece of information is of course that a fellowship has been set up in order to destroy the Ring. The main strategy is to deceive Mordor by keeping Sauron unaware of this threat. As Elrond says, their hope is "in secrecy" (275), and this leads the Fellowship to take routes the enemy would not suspect, such as the path through Moria. This approach of secrecy and avoidance of any direct confrontation with the enemy is of course at odds with the heroic ideals embodied by Beowulf.[31] While the Council of Elrond consciously opts for secrecy as the main strategy, the Anglo-Saxon poem is designed in such a way as to give the hero every opportunity to prove his heroic valour in battle. Beowulf is a famous warrior, people celebrate him for his courage and he himself is "the most eager for fame" (*lofgeornost*, 3182) and does not shy away from taking on a dragon all on his own. The problems in *Beowulf* are met squarely with purely heroic solutions, which means that we have an opposition between the boasting and direct confrontations in the Old English poem and the secrecy required in Tolkien's quest. In contrast, the Fellowship becomes anxious that Sauron might have suspicions and, in obvious cowardice, the company tries its best to conceal its doings. The initial problem obliging Frodo to leave the Shire is that the opposing camp finds and questions Gollum, as Gandalf explains:

> Yes, alas! through him the Enemy has learned that the One has been found again. He *knows* where Isildur fell. He *knows* where Gollum found his ring. He *knows* that it is the Great Ring, for it gave long life. He *knows* that it is not one of the Three, for they have never been lost, and they endure no evil. He *knows* that it is not one of the Seven, or the Nine, for they are accounted for. He *knows* that it is the One. And he has at last heard, I think, of *hobbits* and the *Shire*. (59, my emphasis; "hobbits" and "Shire" Tolkien's italics)

Tolkien's anaphoric emphasis on the fact that Mordor knows where the Ring is, in other words that he has this particular piece of information, is the core of the problem. If Sauron were to learn that the Ring is to be destroyed, then he could simply use all his forces to guard Mount Doom and all hope would be lost, as

[31] The question in how far Tolkien's own heroism distinguishes itself from the Old English foundation will be analysed in the last section.

Gandalf points out (497). But Sauron cannot imagine that anybody would try to destroy the Ring because he rather fears somebody taking the Ring himself and trying to confront him in open battle, as in an epic poem like *Beowulf* (497). It is telling, then, that Frodo is fated to carry the Ring as a hobbit. After all, we learn on the first page that hobbits have a talent for remaining out of sight which seems almost magical. While the rest of Middle-earth is fighting, Frodo and Sam are sneaking into Mordor to strike the final yet least violent blow.

But in order to do that, Frodo is dependent on counsellors and guides. When he steps into the spotlight to announce that he will take the Ring to Mordor during the Council of Elrond, he admits that he does not "know the way" (270). This emphasises immediately that Frodo lacks specific pieces of information, here of a geographical nature, to start the quest, let alone to complete it successfully. Such counsellors are first and foremost found in the Fellowship itself, but they also come up at different milestones over the course of their adventure (e.g. Elrond, Galadriel or Faramir).[32] It is mainly characters associated with wisdom that carry out such a counselling position in Tolkien's mythology. Elrond is described as the "master of wisdom" and Gandalf as the "wisest of counsellors," for example (1034, 524–25). The case of Gandalf might serve to illustrate the importance of information both for a counsellor and as currency among the wise. The wizard is always on the lookout for new information related to the quest and tries to gather as much news of the enemy's doings as he can, being a member of several council meetings along the road. As a wise character, he knows that this information will be crucial for later counsels and he does not shy away from seeking counsel himself, as his early consultation of Saruman shows. He also trades or shares this information with others, such as Théoden or Denethor, whom he tries to advise based on what he has learned and the piece of information only he and a selected few others can share—namely the discovery of the Ring and the secret plan to destroy it.

But all this information cannot be of any use unless it is thoroughly reflected on and put to practical use for the quest, which brings the concept of *geondþencan* back into the equation. Let us look at Merry and Pippin meeting Treebeard in Fangorn for illustration. The Entmoot, the Council of Treebeard so to speak, takes ages to arrive at a decision concerning the Ents' potential involvement in the war to come (475–87). Treebeard tells the two hobbits, who grow increasingly impatient, that it does not take the Ents long to decide what to do but that it is the process of hearing and discussing all the available information which takes that much time. The Ents take their time for rumination and this is even reflected in their language, which requires a long time to say anything because it goes to the

[32] One could consider Gollum a counsellor as well. There is hence an idea of having to accept counsel, in a sense of guidance, in Frodo and Sam's relationship with the creature. Gollum knows "secret ways [into Mordor] that nobody else could find" (715) and this introduces an idea of obligation in the acceptance of counsel, the idea that one cannot always choose one's counsellors.

bottom of anything that it deals with. The problem of the "hasty people,"as Treebeard calls them (475), is that they do not reflect on things long enough before committing to an action and this is something Aragorn also reaffirms when he says that "[t]he hasty stroke goes oft astray" (780). It is clear that the members of the Fellowship cannot always think about and discuss their actions at great lengths, but the general way of the wise, it seems, is to take time for reflection whenever and wherever possible, preferably in a collaborative way during a council. In that light, it is also significant that the first meeting point of the future Fellowship is in Rivendell, the place of reflection, and that the characters seek counsel whenever and wherever they can.

Due to the importance information has for the quest, it is hardly surprising that we find spies to be an important motif in *The Lord of the Rings*. Saruman seems to employ many birds for such purposes and, along similar lines, the Nazgûl are primarily called Sauron's "winged messengers" (498), stressing even more that the acquisition of news is vital for both sides. Sauron as such is only represented as a great eye, which means that Big Brother is always watching the hobbits, trying to counter all attempts at secret undertakings. The image of the great Eye of Sauron also shows that there is power associated with seeing, with knowing what other people—friend or foe—are doing, because the Eye has the information, and this information is an important currency for decisions. When Frodo is captured by orcs, these think of him as a spy, which shows that both sides take it for granted that information is important for their respective enemies. And information having the importance it has, it is clear that the loss of Saruman to the enemy is a devastating one as he was "deep in [their] councils" (265) and can therefore potentially give a lot of useful information to the other side. According to Elrond, "treason has ever been [the] greatest foe" in their dealings with Mordor (251) and this underscores once again that the danger of good people converting to the bad side—along with the inside knowledge they might have—is a significant factor in *The Lord of the Rings*. When Isengard has fallen and Gandalf speaks with Saruman, he offers the many-coloured wizard a chance to atone for his ways by helping him and his company "in [their] need" (584). It does not require a lot of imagination to see that it is inside information that Saruman could have revealed, and that this would have put the Fellowship at an advantage in the game of information.

The Fellowship is hence constantly tested with riddles on their road, which is littered with obstacles that need to be overcome. A riddle is the prerequisite for entrance into Moria and the idea of the riddle as such is closely tied with the quest for information. Particular subtasks are called riddles (cf. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli's attempt to rescue Merry and Pippin) and their role for the overall quest is pointed out by Aragorn: "[We] must guess the riddles, if we are to choose our course rightly" (416). The word itself goes back to Old English *rædan* meaning "to advise, to counsel, to guide" as Crossley-Holland remarks (x). The etymology clearly associates it with the wise characters in the story because solving riddles is

what the counsellors do, and what to do with the Ring is the most important riddle in their time. The riddle further epitomises the idea of *geondþencan* and the quest for information. The wise people try to get new information, which is often represented as a new riddle. They ruminate on it, try to solve it and once they do, they can give new counsel determining future action. This means that the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are required to think a great deal on their quest. Their minds are more important than their muscles, and this shows that reflection, and ultimately wisdom, is more important than mere strength.

The riddles in *The Lord of the Rings* all have immediate practical implications for the characters and are designed by divine providence rather than by humans. This differentiates them from the riddles in *Apollonius of Tyre* because these are artificially constructed and find their importance only in the role devoted to them by their earthly creator Antiochus. The king's riddle can be seen as a test by humans for humans to figure out who is worthiest of his daughter's hand in marriage: it is the king himself who is testing wisdom and not a higher power as such. The king's riddle only requires reflection and no new information. In Tolkien on the other hand, the riddles are associated with the rumination on new pieces of information gathered on the road, and all of them might prove decisive for the achievement of the quest. The riddles embody the necessity to properly digest all information mentally in order to put one's wisdom to a practical use which will then facilitate important decisions. The biggest riddle is what to do with the Ring, on which Elrond gravely remarks: "None here can [read this riddle for us]. At least none can foretell what will come to pass if we take this road or that" (267). Elrond's remarks show that part of the nature of their practical, real-life riddle is that nobody can safely say which plans will work and which will not because the future is unforeseeable even for the wise.

This aspect of the inability to look ahead with certainty is something that represents a clear limitation to the quest for information as a prerequisite for the destruction of the Ring. But this is also a limitation to all counsel as such because counsel always involves (educated) guesses about what the future is going to be if a particular action is initiated instead of another. Holmes calls this "semantic displacement from present to future" (88). This uncertainty about what the future will hold is probably what leads Gildor to tell Frodo in the very beginning of the story that counsel is "a dangerous gift" (84), for one does not know the future in advance. The Elf is reluctant to give advice and we learn from Frodo that it seems to be commonly known in Middle-earth that one should not ask Elves for advice, as they will "say both no and yes" (84) and Lady Galadriel makes this point even clearer when she says that she is "not a counsellor" (363).[33] The Elves are the wisest species, probably together with the Wizards, yet they do not know the

[33] One has the impression that Elves such as Elrond or Galadriel seldom give clear advice, but only present new information or lead the characters to think about problems from a new angle. The responsibility of decision remains with the Fellowship.

future either, and therefore they do not claim that their judgments about the future will necessarily prove accurate. As Elrond says when Frodo steps forward to take the Ring to Mordor: "Who of all the Wise could have foreseen it? Or, *if they are wise*, why should they expect to know it, until the hour has struck?" (272, my emphasis). There are characters, however, who pursue the game of information too earnestly and put too much faith in information they cannot be certain about. This is accordingly no longer represented as wise. This shows that future is an ill counsellor because it can only be inside the characters' heads, imagined not yet real, still *fictional* in a way. The act of trying to gain knowledge of the future proves disastrous in *The Lord of the Rings*. Shippey calls these attempts "speculation" in *The Road to Middle-earth*, pointing out that the ancient meaning of the term is to look into a mirror or a crystal ball (423–26). The characters speculate by use of the *palantír*, but obtain false information and only come to the "wrong conclusion" (423–26) due to the enemy's power to create "false images" (Amendt-Raduege 50). One should add that the use of the *palantíri* has negative influences on the hope of the characters as well.

The first example I want to adduce for illustration is Denethor. Denethor is a character who was formerly known for his great wisdom and learning as we learn in the appendices (1056–57; App. A), but when he makes his appearance in *The Two Towers*, he no longer comes across as a particularly wise character. It is owing to his use of the *palantír* that Denethor has "many ways of gathering news" and can even "read somewhat of the future" (765). He "sees far" (765) with the help of the stone which allows him to gain "great knowledge of things that passed in his realm, and far beyond his borders" (1056; App. A). His use of the *palantír* leads him so far as to believe that he knows everything he needs to know in order to make his decisions, but he fails to understand that the information he gets from the *palantír* only represents "fractions of the truth," as Shippey notes (*Road* 424). He fails to question the source of his knowledge, and is convinced that Frodo and Sam have been captured and Mordor will win, which is why he subsequently loses all hope:

> 'Pride and despair!' he cried. 'Didst thou think that the eyes of the White Tower were blind? Nay, I have seen more than thou knowest, Grey Fool. For thy hope is but ignorance. Go then and labour in healing! Go forth and fight! Vanity. For a little space you may triumph on the field, for a day. But against the Power that now arises there is no victory … The West has failed. It is time for all to depart who would not be slaves.'
>
> 'Such counsels will make the Enemy's victory certain indeed,' said Gandalf. (853)

It is clear that Denethor's notion of departure is nothing more than a euphemism for the suicide he will later commit. While Denethor looks into the future and despairs, Gandalf's retort is also to look at the future. But contrary to the Steward of Gondor, the wizard emphasises the possibility that action might change the

course of time. Denethor's despair ("The West has failed. It shall all go up in a great fire, and all shall be ended. Ash! Ash and smoke blown away on the wind!" 852) is grounded in the false conclusions he draws from what he sees in the *palantír* and he erroneously thinks that the image he saw was reality, thinking that Mordor has won and that all resistance is vain. But Denethor is neither omniscient nor a creator-figure knowing what the future may bring and this is why he has no right to despair, because he cannot possibly know in advance whether what he thinks will happen will turn into reality. The wiser Gandalf tries to explain this to Denethor: "[Fighting on] is not despair, for despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not" (269). From such a perspective, his hopelessness is not only foolish, but also a theological sin, as Patrick Curry points out in the documentary *J. R. R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth* (Pellerin, *Creator*, 00:15:36), because nobody in Middle-earth is in such a position. He looks into the *palantír* and is deceived, misinterpreting what he sees, much like Saruman whose treason also goes back to his use of the *palantír*. As an ideal king, Denethor should be both heroic and wise but he turns out to be neither: by choosing not to fight, he proves cowardice and goes for the only option guaranteeing the success of the enemy. Denethor would have been well advised not to turn down Gandalf's counsel and the ignorance of other people's advice has become his habit of late, as we learn in the appendices (1056–57). "[T]he wise listen to advice," we learn in the Bible (Prov. 12:15), but Denethor seems no longer to figure among them. Like Isildur, like Boromir, or even Beowulf, as we will see, he looks down on counsel that takes away the possibility of learning other people's opinions on the depressing pieces of information. As Gandalf summarises: "The knowledge that [Denethor] obtained was, doubtless, often of service to him; yet the vision of the great might of Mordor that was shown to him fed the despair of his heart until it overthrew his mind" (856).

A quick look at the other uses of the *palantíri* shows that not a single one of them leads to a good conclusion. Pippin's motive for looking at the stone has nothing to do with the acquisition of news about the enemy's doings. He steals the *palantír* mainly out of curiosity because Gandalf does not give him enough information. When he looks into the stone, he is soon completely helpless: "Closer and closer he bent, and then became rigid; his lips moved soundlessly for a while. Then with a strangled cry he fell back and lay still" (592). Although he gives away some information to the enemy, the enemy is once again deceived and arrives only at a wrong conclusion. The only information Pippin gives away is a false one; he does not have the Ring and hence the hobbit's use of the *palantír* has no negative effects for the quest. After that, Aragorn intentionally uses the stone to lead somebody, once again, to a wrong conclusion. He shows himself to Sauron, as the heir of Isildur, which makes Sauron believe that Aragorn now has the Ring

and will try to overthrow him (cf. Road 423–26).[34] All of this makes Sauron focus on the military battles ahead while the real danger to him remains in the secrecy of Frodo and the Ring. All in all, the uses of the palantíri show that the wise people in Middle-earth are those who do not meddle with the future; they realise that the quest for information is limited to the extent that even the best of their *geondþencan* will not accurately predict the future, especially not if the information they obtain is not at all or only partly correct.

A last example of deceptive information is Frodo and Sam's opportunity to look into the Mirror of Galadriel. Before looking into the Mirror, Frodo asks the Lady of Lothlórien whether or not he should use it. Galadriel answers that she cannot help him with his decision, in a typically Elvish manner given Gildor's words earlier, only directing the following words of caution at the two hobbits: "What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be. But which it is which he sees, even the wisest cannot always tell" (362). What the Mirror shows is of a quite perturbing nature, vaguely foreshadowing the plot but also, supposedly, showing the evil turn of events back home in the Shire. Sam cannot take the news about his home and hastily says that he needs to go back. Galadriel criticises Sam's reaction:

> 'You cannot go home alone,' said the Lady. 'You did not wish to go home without your master before you looked in the Mirror, and yet you knew that evil things might well be happening in the Shire. Remember that the Mirror shows many things, and not all have yet come to pass. Some never come to be, *unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their path to prevent them*. The Mirror is dangerous as a guide of deeds.' (363, my emphasis)

The Mirror, one could argue, shows a reflection of what the situation of Middle-earth will be like if Frodo and the Fellowship were to fail, but it also shows the evil things already happening as a consequence of Sauron's power. The hobbits, though, have to stay in the present and undertake the job at hand, not letting themselves be discouraged by the bad things that are supposedly happening all around them, or about to happen if they do not succeed. The Mirror may show the deceiving future only to the extent that the characters show no agency and give in to despair like the Steward of Gondor. They must not be intimidated by the frightening prospects of their quest—instead, they have to take action and show the kind of bravery any Anglo-Saxon hero would be proud of. Wisdom is to acknowledge the fact that the future cannot be foreseen; it will remain blurry until

[34] The fact that Gandalf initially wanted to look into the *palantír* himself is something which falls within the framework of fate and providence again. Gandalf would not have been able to withhold all his knowledge from Sauron and thus it is Pippin's foolishness which prevents the disaster. This shows that folly, in addition to wisdom, also plays a role and that the folly and carelessness of one can lead to the success of a whole quest under the right circumstances.

it comes to pass, and therefore the characters need to be aware that the information they obtain from devices such as the *palantíri* or the Mirror of Galadriel is deceiving, and does not represent reality (if anything does). They must not trust the "vision[s]" (856) but rather understand their own responsibility, still trying to look ahead on their road but only with a constant awareness of the remaining uncertainty.

There is no foreknowledge in *The Lord of the Rings*, only premonitions and good gut-feelings that characters like Gandalf seem to possess. It is the wizard's "heart" which tells him early on that Gollum will play a role in the quest (59), and the story could not prove him more right. However, his wisdom forbids him to pretend to *know* it because he cannot foresee what the higher power might still throw in their way. Just like Frodo, Gandalf cannot "see very far," telling the hobbit: "It may be your task to find the Cracks of Doom; but that quest may be for others: I do not *know*" (66, my emphasis). It is part of the wizard's wisdom to be aware of such limits. Such premonitions, however, might stem from the character's experiences, or the learning (both historical and legendary) and may sometimes be due to simple common sense, like Sam's mistrust of Gollum. The characters must know that information can be of a deceiving nature and thus joins itself to the game of deception. There are limits to the game of information, pitfalls to be avoided, and this means that the characters should try their best to make sure that the information they gather does not compromise the action they still have to carry out. The quest for knowledge must not go to the detriment of their own agency, no matter how despaired they might become. The game of knowledge, of acquiring information that may be used as a basis for action, is an important one, but it cannot take the place of showing courage and resisting the enemy with well-considered action.

We learn from these passages that the characters have to pay attention not to be deceived while joining in the quest for information. This deception can occur not only when characters place their faith in false information, but also when they receive bad counsel. The idea of bad counsel can also be found in Old English literature, of course, most famously with regard to King Æthelred II in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, where the responsibility of a disaster is diverted from the king and blamed instead on the bad counsel he received (Swanton 122–48). Likewise, counsel is not always presented as a good thing in *The Lord of the Rings* either. If Frodo had listened to Faramir's advice and not trusted Gollum as a guide, would he still have come to Mount Doom? If Gandalf had listened to Saruman's counsel to form an alliance with Mordor, would the enemies of Sauron have stood a chance? Even though Saruman is described as no longer in possession of the wisdom of earlier days, Faramir is a wise character and one should think that his advice would be good. Yet there is also a notion of wilfully bad counsel, the idea of being deceived not by information but by information that is no longer clear but interpreted and biased when received from the counsellor. That leads us to the

dangers of counsel and the relationship between Théoden and Gríma, king and counsellor.

In Jackson's movie version of *The Two Towers*, the initial representation of Théoden is the one of an incredibly aged, suffering, and ultimately helpless creature dependent on the help of his counsellors in order to rule (*Türme* 01:09:47). The impression we get is that the king even has to rely on his counsellor's interference when people talk to him. It is ultimately Gríma they talk to and Gríma who holds the sceptre in Meduseld because the counsellor has effectively replaced the king in all but name. Théoden himself looks ill, even dying, as if the bad counsel he receives from Gríma makes all life in him slowly wither away, just as his kingly responsibilities have long transferred to Gríma and Saruman.[35] But also in Tolkien's original (506–25), a reliance on bad counsel is represented as an illness causing the king to become dependent on one of his subordinates ("Your leechcraft ere long would have had me walking on all fours like a beast," 519). The imagery of Théoden's healing is marked by a chiaroscuro between the light and hope that Gandalf, clothed in white, brings, and the shadow on Théoden's mind that Gandalf emphasises with the darkness he produces in the hall. This distinction can also be seen in the staffs: the one of Gandalf is white and pure whereas Théoden's staff is black and marked by the counsels of evil. "[T]he tongue of the wise brings healing," it says in the Bible (Prov. 12:18), and with Gandalf there enters a good counsellor into Théoden's halls and one who is able to heal the king.[36] Contrary to this almost Christ-like interference of Gandalf, we have Gríma "Wormtongue," called a "snake" by Gandalf and constantly dehumanised by the wizard's referral to him with the personal pronoun "it" (513–20). In the Bible, snakes are representatives of human vices and the compound nickname *Wormtongue* combines the reptile's vice with the organ of speech. Thus his counsels are inherently venomous and evil, spoken with his "forked tongue" (514). What Gríma does counsel is passiveness, contrary to the required agency, as Gandalf points out:

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[35] There is a striking resemblance to Denethor as well here. We learn in the appendices that the Steward is "aged before his time by his contest with the will of Sauron" (1056)—something which introduces again a notion of old age deprived of veneration, because the two characters do not portray any wisdom worthy of it. It is something that negatively affects their potential of good governance, which they no longer carry out.

[36] The counsel that Gandalf brings is of a different kind to Gríma's, of course. When Gandalf enters Meduseld, Gríma calls him a *láthspell*, Old English for "Ill-news" (513) and the opposite of Old English *godspell*, which became Modern English *gospel*. (The Old English spelling is according to the entry in Bosworth–Toller.) In this manner, Gandalf reverses the accusations and attributes these character traits to Gríma. It is widely known that Tolkien thought of Gandalf as an angelic figure, a *messenger* from the West (*Letters* 159) and as such, it is Gandalf's role to inspire the free people of Middle-earth into resistance, to en*courage* them. And Gandalf does not merely share bad news with others but he travels much in order to spread hope and to tell people that which they do not necessarily want to hear—the kind of "unpleasant advice" which often proves best (270). He counsels action against the evil rising in the East, even militarily so that the secret part of the plot may work out as hoped.

> But when I escaped and warned you, then the mask was torn, for those who would see. After that Wormtongue played dangerously, always seeking to delay you, to prevent your full strength being gathered. He was crafty: dulling men's wariness, or working on their fears, as served the occasion. (521)

Being himself bought by Saruman, Gríma's "craven" counsels (426) would eventually compromise all hope of a military victory against Sauron, because Rohan and its ally Gondor would slowly but steadily disintegrate.

Consequently, what Théoden needs is the ability to see beyond the ill counsel and the ability to look at the situation without Gríma's or Saruman's corrupted lenses. The name Tolkien chose for Théoden's counsellor is Old English for "mask" (*Road* 302)—a *mask* because Saruman is behind all this and because Théoden only gets information which is spoiled, tampered with, deceiving, and not as it truly is. He only gets "twisted tales" from Gríma (*LotR* 514) and his failure lies in the fact that he ascribes too much value to the counsellor's bad advice. It becomes dangerous when a king stops reflecting upon things for himself and Théoden's meeting Saruman at Isengard proves to be another test for the King of Rohan. Although overpowered, Saruman still has his voice, which is a dangerous weapon, as we learn:

> Suddenly another voice spoke, low and melodious, its very sound an enchantment. Those who listened unwarily to that voice could seldom report the words that they heard; and if they did, they wondered, for little power remained in them. Mostly they remembered only that it was a delight to hear the voice speaking, all that it said seemed wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement to seem wise themselves. When others spoke they seemed harsh and uncouth by contrast; and if they gainsaid the voice, anger was kindled in the hearts of those under the spell. For some the spell lasted only while the voice spoke to them, and when it spoke to another they smiled, as men do who see through a juggler's trick while others gape at it. For many the sound of the voice alone was enough to hold them enthralled; but for those whom it conquered the spell endured when they were far away, and ever they heard that soft voice whispering and urging them. But none were unmoved; none rejected its pleas and its commands without an effort of mind and will, so long as its master had control of it. (578)

Saruman's voice urges people to be agreeable without thinking for themselves and not to be mistrustful of what he says.[37] However, such an approach leads to the loss of one's "mind and will," just as Théoden was effectively replaced as king by his counsellor Gríma. And once Théoden reclaims the responsibility over his decisions, he "live[s]" again and seems old still but now "wise with many winters" as

[37] As far as counselling ability goes, Gandalf tells Saruman that he should have become a "king's jester … by mimicking his counsellors" (582). He is also described in a similar snake-like way to Gríma, which condemns his immoral actions.

opposed to the helpless impression he gave earlier (515–16). He combines both wisdom and heroism again, turning into a strong leader for the Rohirrim.

All this shows the pitfalls of counsel whether good or bad in *The Lord of the Rings*: any kind of counsel presupposes that somebody else interprets a set of information, making his reflection, and potentially also his intentions, the basis for the recommended action. The idea in Tolkien's work is that it is good and wise to listen to counsel and to respect the opinions of others in one's own decision-making process, but the deceptions of Gríma and Saruman in particular have shown that the ultimate responsibility in the decision-making process must remain with the decider. "[I]n doubt a man of worth will trust to his own wisdom," Háma says (511), and it is essential to do a bit of *geondþencan* oneself: on the situation, the information as such, and the advice from others. If children must solve a riddle on their own after receiving a clue, a king must ruminate and decide himself, even if he has received counsel. The trick seems to be the ability to question advice while at the same time remaining eager to hear it. Counsel, after all, emphasises the interdependence of the characters, who have to walk a fine line between accepting help and advice and being autonomous decision-makers in case there comes a moment when they cannot rely on their trusted advisors anymore. If we look at Frodo or the other hobbits, for example, we realise that they are all reliant on Gandalf or Aragorn as their leaders, as the main decision-makers, but all of them are more or less on their own at times over the course of their quest, which forces them to make their own decisions, consciously in favour of agency and not to its detriment.

The acquisition of new information is an important motif in *The Lord of the Rings*, as we have seen. Yet even despite possible limitations to the quest for information, it is a game every character in Middle-earth needs to play, whether willingly or not. Far-reaching events such as Sauron's rise to power affect everyone; we see this with the Ents who are involved in the war against their initial thoughts. But the best example of this is Frodo's realisation that the Shire is no longer the place of idyllic beauty and quietness:"

> 'I knew the danger lay ahead, of course; but I did not expect to meet it in our own Shire. Can't a hobbit walk from the Water to the River in peace?'
> 'But it is not your own Shire,' said Gildor. 'Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you; you can fence yourself in, but you cannot for ever fence it out.' (83)

The Elf teaches Frodo two things. First, the world is bigger than the hobbit is aware of, both spatially and temporarily and second, even if he neglects what happens outside the borders of the Shire, it will still affect him. Jackson's hobbit proverb, "Keep your nose out of trouble, no trouble will come to you"

(Gefährten, 00:34:19)[38] cannot be more effectively refuted than it is with the chapter "The Scouring of the Shire" in the book (998–1020). Once the hobbits return from their journey, they realise that the formerly utopian peace of the Shire has been overtaken by the global problems affecting the whole of Middle-earth. The personal story of Tolkien, who fought in World War I and lost all but one of his close friends only to see his son Christopher drawn into World War II a couple of decades later (Carpenter), shows that problems do not go away if people are ignorant of them, like our hobbits with regard to the "world apart from their perception of reality" (Baltasar 30). The characters can fence themselves in, but they cannot fence the world out, and it is via information and reflection that they best seem to cope with it. In the end it is the four wandering hobbits that beat the ruffians and restore peace in the Shire. Once again, responsibility is required, and it is only fitting that the overarching quest is mainly decided by information. Significantly, those who wander obtain more of it and learn it faster.

Beowulf does not have any comparable quest for information and counsel at its basis and the role of information and counsel is subservient to the primary heroic action the Old English poem is all about. Yet "[w]ise men must hold meetings together," it says in *Maxims I* ("Þing sceal gehegan / frod wiþ frodne," 18–19), and therefore we should quickly look at Hrothgar's councils when his realm is plighted by monsters. In lines 171–74 of *Beowulf*, it says: "Monig oft gesæt / rice to rune; ræd eahtedon, / hwæt swiðferhðum selest wære / wið færgryrum to gefremmanne."[39] These councils, however, are rather ineffective and except for a few useless pagan rituals and the poet's comment on the Danes' unawareness of the Christian God, we do not learn much about them. The council is a failure, showing the helplessness of Hrothgar's people with regard to the action that needs to be taken. We learn how Hrothgar constantly mourns the presence of Grendel without having any clue of what to do about it and he and his councils fall short of a solution for a whole twelve years (170–93). It is only fitting that he willingly accepts Beowulf's "ræd" ("counsel," Heaney, line 278), which embodies overt heroism in its full force. He, as a single man, is to free Hrothgar's people of the monster in an act of heroism. Yet maybe a hero was the only valid answer to their situation considering the fact that his realm was faced with monsters. But then again we could ask ourselves whether it would not have been wiser, though less heroic, to provide him with assistance during his fights. Hrothgar obviously knows about the existence of Beowulf and the hero's powers, so him not having consulted Beowulf of his own initiation might not have been a wise decision

[38] To my knowledge, the proverb does not exist exactly like that in Tolkien's original, but might be a rather free adaptation of the following monologue of the Old Gaffer: "*Elves and Dragons!* I says to him. *Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you. Don't go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you'll land in trouble too big for you,* I says to him" (24, italics in original).

[39] "Many a strong man sat / in secret counsel, considered advice, / what would be best for the brave at heart / to save themselves from the sudden attacks."

either, even though one has to take into account that he must not appear helpless before his people. All of this makes the councils at Hrothgar's court blatantly ineffective, even though the king holds his counsellors in high esteem, like Æschere for example who gets killed by Grendel's mother. A look at Beowulf's own relation to counsel does provide a slightly different picture. Although counsellors surround the hero as well, Beowulf seems to have made his decisions always before these advisors step into the spotlight, giving the counsellors a reaffirming role of his decisions when he decides to take on Grendel. Furthermore, Beowulf's counsellors are generally *d'accord* with those decisions that help Beowulf showcase his heroism. When the hero decides to fight the dragon all on his own, Beowulf's resolution is firm and independent of any opinion of one of his advisors and were it not for Wiglaf, he would not have succeeded in killing the *wyrm* ("dragon," 2287). While the hobbits would have failed spectacularly without counsel on their way, Beowulf does not need or want anybody to tell him what to do as a hero, thus emphasising what he can achieve all by himself.

Everything taken together, Tolkien's portrayal of information and counsel suggests a more prominent role in his created world than the two currencies seem to play in *Beowulf*. While counsel emphasises the interdependence of Tolkien's main characters, the Old English poem portrays a more singular heroism; and the quest for information, or for the denial of it respectively, underlines the importance of reflection, of plans, councils, and sound decisions for the destruction of the Ring in Tolkien's quest. Gold and fame seem to be more valuable currencies in the Old English poem (cf. Baker). In *Beowulf*, after all, information and counsel play only a minor role for the main character because of his status as a hero.

The Heroification of the Wise and the Demystification of the Heroic

Moving now to the final section, we will have a look at the interplay of wisdom and heroism and Tolkien's reworking of the Northern theory of courage into *The Lord of the Rings*. By doing that, Tolkien deemphasises aspects linked to the Germanic understanding of heroism and demystifies the whole idea of a heroism based on fame and achievement in battle, depriving it of the valuation it receives in Old English texts like *Beowulf*. Tolkien reframes his own heroes into the ordinary and shows by virtue of the hobbits that his heroism stands on a different basis. At the end of the day, it is the wise characters that are looked up to in Middle-earth, and it is they who become heroified in his world.

According to Tolkien himself, perhaps the most famous lines of all Old English verse stem from *The Battle of Maldon*, lines 312–13, which read: "Hige sceal þe

heardra, heorte þe cenre, / mod sceal þe mare þe ure maegen lytlað."[40] These lines give a compelling description of the Northern theory of courage, the ideal that was underlying Old English heroic literature. It describes the "unyielding will" of the heroes ("Monsters" 20–21), who find themselves fighting "alongside the gods against the monsters and outer darkness" in a battle "they were always doomed to lose" (Greenwood 183). This battle against evil refers to Ragnarök, an event from Norse mythology which foretells an ultimate battle of good against evil, but other than in Christian eschatology, the evil side will win and therefore, fighting on for the good in such circumstances requires substantially more courage, especially if one considers that there was no heaven or paradise promised to the Anglo-Saxons, but only the knowledge of having fought for the good side (*Author* 149–50). The theory of courage represents a courage that is not based on hope (Greenwood 183) and this should sound familiar to readers of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien himself described the ideal as the "great contribution of early Northern literature" ("Monsters" 20) and reworked it into his own mythology.

Many critics have already pointed to Tolkien's inspiration from the Northern theory of courage before (e.g. Bowman; *Author*). And indeed Tolkien's concept of heroism seems to be a modification of the theory that does not mirror the original directly. The way Tolkien employs it in *The Lord of the Rings* is by demystifying the kind of heroism found in poems such as *Beowulf*. He deemphasises the supernatural physical strength of the heroes while putting the ability to suffer and to endure hardship into the foreground, thus achieving a heroism more familiar to ordinary people. Readers of *Beowulf* know that the poem's main hero seems like a God-sent warrior, like somebody vastly superior in battle skill capable of defeating the heathen monsters that afflict the court of Hrothgar. He has "thirty / men's strength" ("þritiges / manna mægencræft," 379–80) and he is able to win against Grendel without even being armed. His swimming contest with Breca further highlights this idea. What we find in the Old English poem, then, is a representation of the heroic as the extraordinary, the otherworldly or supernatural, as the etymological connection of the word *hero* to Greek demigods implies (Onions). Tolkien takes this idea and moulds his main heroes back into the ordinary by ascribing the decisive deeds for the destruction of the Ring to plain everyday folk. It is the hobbits who carry the Ring to Mordor, the small and humble people from the Shire who never seek fame or glory in battle but still find the strength to endure the journey. It is the "unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten" ones that "represent the unexpected heroism of ordinary men 'at a pinch'," as Tolkien remarked in his *Letters* (158). It is the ordinary people like him who had to fight in World War I

[40] "Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder, spirit the greater as our strength lessens" (Tolkien, "Homecoming," 3). Although I also worked with the edition of *The Battle of Maldon* in Treharne's anthology, quotations from the text (and all translations) are taken from Tolkien's essay "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son."

and such people can surprise many, themselves not least, of their courage when they have no other option. As Elrond points out during the Council, the quest at hand is one where mere heroic battle skills such as those portrayed by Boromir will not suffice to save Middle-earth (269). The "wheels of the world" are moved "by small hands" that have no other choice than to grudgingly accept the situations into which they are thrown (269) and this adequately describes Frodo's situation before setting out to Mordor. The hobbits do not possess any kind of heroic supernatural qualities like Beowulf, but their adventure pays tribute to a modified heroism of its own kind, a heroism independent of physical attributes but based more on the mental struggle in the course of the quest.

The real heroism of the hobbits is of a mental nature, then. This can be shown quite well with Sam and Frodo once they are separated from the rest of the Fellowship. The closer the two hobbits get to Mordor and the Cracks of Doom, the more the themes of imminent death and the obligation of personal sacrifice gain importance. Frodo gradually loses all hope of ever coming out of his mission alive, but he does not yield to the temptation of the Ring until Gollum is there to save the quest. He is different from Denethor, whose lack of hope gives him up to suicidal ideas: Frodo remembers his duty and continues even when he has no hope left. His resolution in front of the Stairs of Cirith Ungol is a good illustration of this:

> Frodo raised his head, and then stood up. Despair had not left him, but the weakness had passed. He even smiled grimly, feeling now as clearly as a moment before he had felt the opposite, that what he had to do, he had to do, if he could, and that whether Faramir or Aragorn or Elrond or Galadriel or Gandalf or anyone else ever knew about it was beside the purpose. He took his staff in one hand and the phial in his other. When he saw that the clear light was already welling through his fingers, he thrust it into his bosom and held it against his heart. Then turning from the city of Morgul, now no more than a grey glimmer across a dark gulf, he prepared to take the upward road. (708)

Similar to the Ragnarök ideas, Frodo defies despair and manages to go on without hope. It is the strength of his "will" and his "strength to endure," the two attributes the lembas bread reinforces (936), which mark the Ring-bearer's hobbit-like heroism. As pointed out by John Howe, the journey of the two hobbits is about "finding hope in hopelessness" and continuing with the quest until it is completed (Pellerin, *Creator*, 00:13:20). Their heroism seems to revolve around the concepts of despair versus hope, and there is a similar description to the one quoted above related to Sam:

> But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and

> he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue. (934)

These lines are only too reminiscent of lines 312–13 from "The Battle of Maldon."[41] It becomes clear, then, that the heroism of the hobbits is one of resistance against all odds, a mental struggle to keep moving one foot in front of the other physically regardless of there being any hope. Tolkien's main heroes are heroes of mental resistance, then.[42] Although physically weak, Frodo and Sam have tremendous persistence and their being ordinary people provides hope not only for the characters inside Tolkien's work: it might also inspire readers outside of it. In contrast to that, the association of heroism with supernatural strength in Old English literature merely increases the reliance on external help, by giving to understand that heroic deeds are done by heroic people, who are above the ordinary. After the quest is fulfilled and Aragorn steps onto the throne, the new King of Gondor bows to the hobbits which represents a recognition of the courage shown by the small and ordinary people from the Shire. It is a demonstration of respect from a king skilled in battle, directed at a more modern kind of heroism, reworked by Tolkien from the Northern theory of courage.

There are a number of binary oppositions differentiating Old English heroism from Tolkien's reworked form of it. The necessity of secrecy for the Fellowship's quest is contrasted with the boasting culture represented by Beowulf and Byrhtnoth. The Old English emphasis on brute force and physical strength bordering on the supernatural is contrasted with a struggle that is first and foremost mental carried out by those without such physical qualities. Furthermore, the Old English heroic idea of actively seeking fame and glory in battle is contrasted with an idea of obligation to do that which one is fated to do even though one is not interested in fame or glory and seems woefully unfit for the task. This ties into the opposition of fighting and killing for the sake of honour, as well as Tolkien's idea of pity and mercy, the idea of "true courage" consisting in the sparing of a life rather than taking it unnecessarily (Jackson, *Hobbit* 01:11:40).[43] Indeed, the ultimate destruction of the Ring is only achieved because Frodo, Sam and Faramir show mercy to Gollum in several key moments, just as Gandalf had recommended in the

[41] Hammond and Scull point out in their *Companion* that the whole chapter "The Choices of Master Samwise" echoes the famous lines from the Old English poem (498).

[42] Gandalf repeatedly reminds the characters that it is their courage and their persistence "to the last" (222) which assures their survival, as for example the fact that Frodo is only wounded in the shoulder on Weathertop. "*Wyrd* often spares / an undoomed man, when his courage endures," it says in *Beowulf* ("Wyrd oft nereð / unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah," 572–73), and in Middle-earth, this mantra seems to apply as well.

[43] Although this quote does not figure directly in Tolkien's works but only in Jackson's version, it summarises quite adequately the theme of pity and mercy in Tolkien's mythology.

beginning. At the Cracks of Doom, Sam has a chance to kill Gollum, but his pity and mercy are stronger than his revulsion of the creature:

> Sam's hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again. But Sam had no words to express what he felt. (944)

Sam spares Gollum's life, lets him live "just a little longer" (Jackson, *Hobbit* 01:11:40), and only therefore Gollum can retake the Ring from Frodo and fall into the lava; his courage to spare a life, even though dangerous for their immediate safety, resulting in the final success of the quest. When Frodo spares Saruman's life after this one tried to stab him in the Shire, the fallen wizard admits that Frodo "ha[s] grown very much" and is now "wise" and "cruel" (1019). And as noted, the name Frodo is inspired by Old English *fród*, translated in Tolkien's *Letters* as "wise by experience" (224); in another letter, Tolkien explains that it is Frodo's ability to suffer which gives him "more insight" (191). It is Sam's *wise by experience* transformation, of having borne and suffered the Ring, which allows him to spare Gollum's life in the decisive moment.

Let us now turn to the interplay of wisdom and heroism. If we concentrate first on *Beowulf*, we can say that many of the named characters combine both wisdom and heroism in the Old English poem. It is necessary to differentiate between two notions of heroism here. While Beowulf represents the extraordinary and supernatural branch of heroes, we might see a different kind of Old English heroism in the performance of honourable deeds on the battlefield, without having any extraordinary qualities but displaying bravery worthy of the Northern theory of courage. And according to Kaske, such an interplay of wisdom and heroism, which he calls *sapientia* and *fortitudo*,[44] is "the most basic theme in the poem," the references to heroism and wisdom being the climax "of and after each battle" (423, 428). In order to analyse this interplay further, together with the idea of good governance, we are going to look at the three good kings ("god cyning," 11, 863, 2390) according to the poet: Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar, and Beowulf. Scyld Scefing is described as a fierce warrior, as somebody who has won great battles and is praised as a heroic warrior in consequence. Unlike the other supposedly two good kings, Scyld Scefing is not described as a wise character in the passage devoted to him (1–52), which means that his good governance solely relies on his achievements on the battlefield. Hrothgar is the next example and he also wins

[44] Notions of Kaske's *sapientia* include "practical cleverness," "skill in words and works" or a "knowledge of the past," while his definition of *fortitudo* refers to "physical might and courage" (425).

great acclaim in battle before ascending the throne. Unlike Scyld Scefing, he is described as wise many times in the poem, his sermon to Beowulf suggesting a firm foundation in Christianity, where much of his wisdom may come from, but he is also generally a reflective character (Kaske 439). Last but not least, Beowulf also combines both wisdom and heroism, even of the extraordinary kind, although the notion of wisdom is only mentioned once he has proved his courage and skill by slaying Grendel (826). Hence it seems as if wisdom is something closely tied to the concept of heroism in the poem, with heroism maybe even being a kind of prerequisite for people to be considered wise. To an extent, this seems to be only logical as Anglo-Saxon rulers would need to excel on the battlefield to ensure kingship and in a world marked by omnipresent suffering and early death, a kind of heroism would be required to even live to old age where associations of wisdom seem more common. In *Beowulf*, heroism plays a much more important role than it does in Tolkien and it is first and foremost the heroic which is put into legend and mystified. One aspect of wisdom, then, seems to be that decisions in favour of battle and glory are the mark of a wise man in Old English literature. Wisdom seems to be tied closely to heroic success and it is these heroic achievements which ultimately keep populations safe. Neither Hrothgar nor Beowulf gets to reign in periods of peace. Hrothgar's rule sees the occurrence of Grendel and his mother and Beowulf, after a jump of fifty years in the story, rules justly for a time until "the incident with the dragon" (Jackson, *Gefährten* 00:13:27). And despite their (former) proficiency on the battlefield, neither of them manages to save his realm. Hrothgar's *fortitudo*, to pick up Kaske's term again, is gone and he relies on the external *fortitudo* of Beowulf to save his population, noting that Beowulf's supernatural heroism seems to be the only possibility against the monsters. Beowulf later tries to kill the dragon alone, maybe to prove that he, unlike Hrothgar, is not reliant on other people's help to keep his population safe, but just as Hrothgar pointed out to him before, his physical strength would abandon him, even if it is of Beowulf's supernatural kind. This might mean, then, that good governance according to Old English literature hinges on the ruler's ability to display heroism, courage and proficiency in battle, either himself or by external help, rather than any kind of superior wisdom. After all, Hrothgar tells Beowulf that he will make a good ruler after he has killed the two monsters at his court (1840–65), having proven once again his supernatural heroism and thus the supreme quality of governance in the context of his society. In old age, though, the aspect of wisdom seems to become a more characteristic sign of a good ruler than any kind of heroism. This might be due to the fact that strength lessens over time and that might also help explain why many wise characters in Beowulf are former warriors. Ascriptions of wisdom gave poets the chance to point out people's good governance once their primary prerequisite for that, skill on the battlefield, is no longer present. Thus one could see wisdom as a characteristic trait of rulers used by poets

to maintain a king's reputation once his heroism, mystified and venerated, is steadily fading into oblivion.

The interplay between wisdom and heroism can be found in *The Lord of the Rings* as well. In Tolkien's mythology, there is also a character who represents more of an Anglo-Saxon ideal of heroism, if not supernatural in physical ability, then at least focused on warfare and glory in battle with all his heart. This character is Boromir. Boromir values traditional heroism with all the fame to be won over the less glorious quality of wisdom required for the plot, and he is proof of the fact that his kind of heroism fails, and is demystified in the process. As Faramir notes, Boromir is a character who is "proud and fearless, often rash, ever anxious for the victory of Minas Tirith (and his own glory therein)" (671) and he proposes to trust in the strength of Men and to use the Ring against Sauron. Yet even after the premise has been established at the Council of Elrond that the Ring cannot be used against Sauron, Boromir remains stubborn in his views. The decision in favour of secrecy does not offer him the possibility to win glory (Librán-Moreno 20) and therefore he tries to persuade Frodo of his own plans. He doubts whether those who opted for secrecy at the Council "are wise and not merely timid," thus twisting the actual wisdom in the story to cowardice, and he affirms that "[t]rue-hearted Men … will not be corrupted" (398). "The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory," he continues, asking himself, "[w]hat could not a warrior do in this hour, a great leader?" (398). In his fantasies, he sees himself as a "mighty king, benevolent and wise" after having defeated the forces of Sauron in a "glorious" victory, which allows him to indulge into well-earned fame in battle (398). We can see here that the desire for the Ring, for power, fame and glory, is an ill counsellor, something that deceives people, making them unable to construct reality from an unbiased perspective. The character is too easily ensnared by the Ring and fails to understand that it has to be destroyed and that such a plan requires secrecy rather than overt confrontation on the battlefield, giving the reader to understand that mere heroism like that in Old English literature will not be enough to succeed in their quest. Boromir does not learn from Isildur's example and seemingly does not reflect on the premises established at the Council of Elrond, or is unable to put the results of his reflections into action. As Greenwood remarks comparing Boromir with Frodo, "the stronger shows himself to be the weaker and the weaker stronger" (181). The Ring is "too sore a trial" (*Lot*R 681) for the "traditional heroic figure" and this figure fails its test (Greenwood 181).

The example of Boromir invites a comparison with the heroes from Old English literature, such as Beowulf or Byrhtnoth from *The Battle of Maldon*. Tolkien published on both poems over the course of his career ("Monsters"; "Homecoming"), these articles being, in fact, "critiques of heroic society, its values and heroes," as Clark explains ("J. R. R. Tolkien and the True Hero" 40). The term *ofermod* from line 89 of *The Battle of Maldon* was a term Tolkien awarded specific atten-

tion. The term as such has been widely interpreted by critics over the years (cf. Gneuss) and Tolkien himself offered "overmastering pride" and heavily criticised Byrhtnoth[45] for letting the Vikings pass the bridge ("Homecoming" 13). The choice for pride shows a religious connotation to sins and this pride seems to gain control, almost taking on agency itself without well-reflected decisions standing a chance. Tolkien criticises Byrhtnoth for apparently allowing his desire for glory to outweigh his sense of duty towards his people. As Tolkien puts it, "the king wished for glory, or for a glorious death, and courted disaster" (18). This *ofermod* can be seen in Boromir as well, and the link between the Old English term and his desire for the Ring has long been made by scholars (for example by Forest-Hill). "[W]yrce se þe mote / domes ær deaþe," Beowulf proclaims ("let him who can / bring about fame before death," 1387–88), and Boromir's actions are based on this sentiment. But as we learn in the Old English *Consolation of Philosophy*, those who are wise and reflect on fame will understand that it is worthless in the earthly world (ch. 18). Boromir, Byrhtnoth, and Beowulf all die shortly after giving in to pride,[46] their deaths being more or less glorious. Beowulf's death can certainly be seen as a personal sacrifice in order to buy safety for his people with his remaining strength and ability, trying to stay in good memory as a capable ruler. Instead of dying rather unspectacularly from the consequences of old age, he chooses to die a heroic death, a *wundordeað* (*Beowulf* 3037), but one has to point out that, had it not been for Wiglaf, Beowulf would have been killed and the dragon would have probably survived and could have continued to harass Beowulf's people. From that perspective, the decision to confront the dragon alone is not a sensible one. Byrhtnoth's death was avoidable and the initial decision to invite the Vikings over the bridge to be condemned. The poet of *The Battle of Maldon* does exactly that in the line following the mention of *ofermod*. He "should not have done" that ("alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode," 90), Tolkien translates ("Homecoming" 13). Boromir's failure also has some positive benefits as it makes Frodo understand that he has to break loose from the Fellowship because he cannot trust people blindly. Boromir does not die directly as a consequence of his treason, but Tolkien gives him the opportunity of "regain[ing] honor" by defending Merry and Pippin, thus "dying well" according to the *ars moriendi* (Forest-Hill 86). What we can draw from all this is that Boromir would not make a good ruler because he places too much importance on the old heroism, on strength and courage, and too little on the wisdom, the *sapientia*, required in Tolkien's Middle-earth. Although the most eager for fame, he is the one who proves least decisive for the overall success of the

[45] Tolkien refers to this character as Beorhtnoth, but I will stick to the more typical late West Saxon form Byrhtnoth.

[46] As far as *Beowulf* is concerned, Orchard shows that the word *oferhogode* in line 2345 mirrors the use of a related noun during Hrothgar's sermon, where the old king warned Beowulf of pride, or "overconfidence" as Orchard translates. His conclusion about this "twin use" is that "Beowulf goes to face the dragon doomed" (260).

quest. His desire for glory and fame cost him the qualities of good governance that seem far more evident in his younger brother.

The differences between Faramir and Boromir are too abundant to be dealt with exhaustively here. Whereas Boromir is described as proud, "delighting chiefly in arms," "fearless and strong" and "caring little for lore, save the tales of old battles," Faramir is "otherwise in mind." He is merciful, "gentle in bearing," "a lover of lore and of music" which is why he is thought to have less courage than Boromir. He does not "seek glory in danger without a purpose" and he is in awe of Gandalf and always trying to learn "from his wisdom" whenever the wizard is in the vicinity (1056; App. A). All this information shows that Faramir is centred more on wisdom than on heroism in battle and that he is reputed to be wiser than his brother although deemed by many less brave. Unlike Boromir, Faramir passes the test of the Ring and does not try to take it from Frodo once the two hobbits walk into his arms. Sam recognises how respectable this decision is and praises Faramir:

> Sam hesitated for a moment, then bowing very low: 'Good night, Captain, my lord,' he said. 'You took the chance, sir.'
> 'Did I so?' said Faramir.
> 'Yes, sir, and showed your quality: the very highest.'
> Faramir smiled. 'A pert servant, Master Samwise. But nay: the praise of the praiseworthy is above all rewards. Yet there was naught in this to praise. I had no lure or desire to do other than I have done.'
> 'Ah well, sir,' said Sam, 'you said my master had an Elvish air; and that was good and true. But I can say this: you have an air too, sir, that reminds me of, of—well, Gandalf, of wizards.'
> 'Maybe,' said Faramir. 'Maybe you discern from far away the air of Númenor. Good night!' (682)

Faramir's "quality," or wisdom, is in the decision against his own fame and glory, in understanding that it is wiser to trust the hobbits' way of secrecy.[47] Sam even compares Faramir to Gandalf, who is one of the wisest inhabitants of Middle-earth

[47] In fact, the individual decision in favour or against of claiming the Ring can be seen as a test of wisdom, and therefore of good governance in Middle-earth. Characters like Saruman, Boromir or Denethor fail it, though characters perhaps less directly associated with wisdom like Sam pass the test spectacularly. When he is forced to take the Ring from Frodo after Shelob's attack, he puts the Ring on for a while and we learn how it affects him. He thinks of himself as "Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age" but his "plain hobbit-sense" prevails and he realises that he does not need anything more than a nice garden to take care of (901). Sam becomes Mayor of the Shire later and it is significant to point out that he does not want any fame or glory when he sets out and that it all "comes unbidden" to him (Clark, qtd. in Timmons 235–36). Sam is an ordinary character, who contributes extraordinary things to the quest by virtue of his normality, later going back to being ordinary with his quiet life in the Shire, thus "pass[ing] *out* of the Heroic Age" (Bradley 125). His wisdom, as Kraus remarks, is founded in traditional knowledge from poetry and in Bilbo's teachings, which help him in the darkest moments of the quest.

and as a representative of wizards also of a certain supernatural kind detailed below. Boromir's brother masters the test of the Ring and does not have any fantasies of himself ruling Middle-earth in his glory. He is not tempted by such a desire, unlike the Faramir in Jackson's versions, and he portrays humility as opposed to *ofermod*. He is "wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee" (681) and it is this avoidance of direct confrontation to which I would like to draw attention now. Contrary to Boromir, who pans the decision to destroy the Ring as foolishness and cowardice, Faramir links this same decision with wisdom because he understands the necessity of their attempt and he is not blinded by the prospect of fame and glory on the battlefield. "I would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No, I do not wish for such triumphs, Frodo son of Drogo," Faramir tells the Ring-bearer to his relief (671). It is Tolkien's story that makes a boasting culture like the one from the Old North, as represented by Boromir, seem utterly misguided compared to the wisdom and reflection of avoiding direct confrontations whenever that is possible. As one would expect, Gandalf recognises the potential of good governance in Faramir:

> He is bold, more bold than many deem; for in these days men are slow to believe that a captain can be wise and learned in the scrolls of lore and song, as he is, and yet a man of hardihood and swift judgement in the field. But such is Faramir. Less reckless and eager than Boromir, but not less resolute.[48] (766)

It is possible to combine both wisdom and heroism on the battlefield, and Faramir is the only one in Gondor who unites the twin prerequisites of good governance, with Denethor being desperate and Aragorn not yet having claimed the throne. Faramir makes time to *geondþencan* before a hard decision and he does not like battle for battle's sake, not loving the glory of battle but only that which battle ultimately defends, namely his home (672, 665). This links him again to a more modern adaptation of the Northern theory of courage, as he uses violence only pragmatically and grudgingly, only if necessary and never for the sheer glory and domination possibly resulting from it. Thus Faramir does not become a hero by his action but by his well-reflected inaction, his renunciation of power, which further demystifies the concept of a heroism based on military and physical strength and an eagerness for glory.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, unlike in *Beowulf*, it is the wisdom of people which makes characters portray a certain kind of majesty and royalty. It is the wise who

[48] Although a little far-fetched, the word *resolute* can be seen as a play on etymology here. In addition to its usual modern meaning of having firmly committed to something, its etymological connection to the verb *to solve* provides a link to solving problems or riddles (Onions). The first sense does not much differentiate between Boromir and Faramir, though Faramir is the wiser one, he who tries to "guess the riddles" (*Lot*R 416).

are looked up to in veneration and their wisdom makes them seem almost extraordinary and supernatural, which is why one could even say that the wise are heroified. Gandalf would be one such example and the people of Gondor think he "should rule [them] all in the days that follow and in [their] dealings with the Enemy" (862). Gandalf is the wise protector, the Messiah, sent to Middle-earth by the Valar to help protect the free people from the shadows of Mordor. There is a striking comparison between Gandalf and Denethor when Pippin wonders who diffuses more of a kingly air and the wizard is said to be both wiser and more majestic than the Steward of Gondor. Gandalf, as we learn, has a far greater responsibility and influence over Middle-earth than Denethor and this not only refers to the back story of the Istari, the wizards, but also shows that Gandalf is a sort of ruler himself, representing great wisdom, and accordingly good governance, by virtue of his status as a wizard (757).[49] Therefore, Gandalf seems like somebody from a distant planet, somebody sent to Middle-earth on purpose in order to complete the task he was fated to accomplish. This makes the character otherworldly by extension, supernatural and extraordinary, and the people look up to his great wisdom which is heroified and associated with the extraordinary in the process. He seems "like some wise king of ancient legend" (*Lot*R 226), somebody who not only carries out good governance, but also teaches others the right way to attain it, like a missionary, for example for Théoden's cure. Aragorn is of a similar calibre, someone who reveals great "power and royalty" over the course of the plot (540), and we get an interesting description of him directly after his crowning:

> But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. (968)

Aragorn is "one of the Kings of Men born into a later time, but touched with the wisdom and sadness of the Elder Race" (810).[50] His wisdom stems from an earlier time and it is this ancient wisdom which is heroified in *The Lord of the Rings*—it is the ancient wisdom that seems supernatural, though not in a sense linking it to another world but to an older one where "old wives' tales" are still considered important (374). Characters like Gandalf, Aragorn, or even Elrond, whose might "is in wisdom not in battles" (246), are not remnants of a former heroic world, but of a reflective one, a society with "wisdom on [its] brow" (968) and blood on its swords only when unavoidable. In *The Lord of the Rings*, good governance is first

[49] As Tolkien explains in his *Letters*, he uses the term *wizard* consciously and to the exclusion of terms like *sorcerer* or *magician* because of the word's etymological link to wisdom (159).

[50] This quote is actually used in a scene when Pippin marvels at the kingly air of Faramir. Faramir seeks inspiration in the kings of old and this is something that links him to Aragorn, who is of that sort.

and foremost about wisdom and not about strength on the battlefield and an unquenchable thirst for glory.

A heroism based on strength and ability in battle is not all unimportant in Tolkien's mythology, of course, and the same wise characters do acknowledge the occasional necessity of military confrontations. Even though Gandalf, Elrond, or Aragorn (though the last to a lesser extent[51]) are associated more with wisdom than with warlike heroism, we still have to examine the fact that these characters fight battles too, and the question should be addressed whether their wisdom hinges to some extent on these former achievements in battle. Their wisdom, though, is not a function of their former heroism. It is not linked to battle skills but to both cosmogonic and traditional knowledge fuelled by deep and consistent reflection. The impression we get from *The Lord of the Rings* is that there can be wisdom in heroism and heroism in wisdom. As Aragorn says about Gandalf's counsels, they were not "founded on foreknowledge of safety, for himself or for others," adding himself that "[t]here are some things that it is better to begin than to refuse, even though the end may be dark" (441). And Gandalf himself explains in Gondor that "by arms [they] can give the Ring-bearer his only chance, frail though it be" (880), by deflecting Sauron's Eye and by using the latter's sheer inability to see past the threats on the battlefield. The only conscious decision for battle is made after the attack on Minas Tirith, and this is only owing to their attempt to enhance Frodo's chances of secretly coming to the Cracks of Doom; all other battles are defensive in nature. This also shows that a certain level of heroic endeavours on the battlefield is necessary to carry out the quest, even a quest marked by secrecy as much as the Fellowship's. "It is wisdom to recognize necessity," Gandalf proclaims (269), and their attack on Mordor is a purely pragmatic attempt to enhance the likelihood of Frodo's success far away from the battlefield. When they think that Frodo and Sam have been captured, and that their faint hope is vain, they still move into battle. Though from this moment on no longer with the pragmatic purpose in mind but to die themselves a *wundordeað*, dying for a good cause rather than giving up—in the true spirit of the *ars moriendi*.

Hence, just like his medieval inspirations, Tolkien offers an intricate interplay of wisdom and heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*. He modifies the Northern theory of courage in order to demystify the particular notion of heroism it represents. Even though his characters still show courage and resilience worthy of the traditional Germanic heroes, the emphasis is drawn away from the extraordinary attributes and skills of the hero, and away from the pursuit of glory towards

[51] Although Aragorn's achievements in battle are quite important for the plot, he is still a wise character and values his wisdom over his strength in battle. Unlike Boromir, he supports the decision for the secret destruction of the Ring wholeheartedly, and, as pointed out by Ford and Reid, Aragorn's success on the battlefield is needed for the story because he needs to prove his luck in battle in order to be accepted as king by the people of Gondor. Honegger sheds some light on this as well in his essay "Arthur – Aragorn – Ransom: Concepts of Kingship in the Works of Three Inklings."

the plain and unadorned abilities of quite ordinary hobbits. In Middle-earth, the wisdom of the characters is heroified instead and people see potential for good governance in those characters who display this quality. Either explicitly or implicitly, wisdom links these characters to the ancient days, for example to the traditional knowledge of former kings, gained by listening to historical prose such as *Beowulf* is for our own time and day.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the representation of wisdom in *The Lord of the Rings* can reveal a great deal about Tolkien's relation to philology and the way his creation of Middle-earth was affected by his knowledge of Old English literature. Tolkien represents wisdom in such a way that it derives primarily from a knowledge of older times, but his characters are aware at the same time that supposed fiction and tales by the fireside, not unlike *Beowulf* itself, might reveal a lot of wisdom from the past, which can be highly relevant for the characters' present. The wise characters in Middle-earth do not look down on ancient tales or songs, dismissing them as mere fiction or entertainment for children, but they rather see them as important points of connection between the immediate presence of their practical problems and the potential solutions and hints with which these tales can provide them. All the experience they gain on their road makes them compilers, chroniclers for later times, and this means that they are not only inspired by ancient tales themselves but also promote the ancient wisdom of the future, by putting into fiction what they achieve along their quest. These records in turn may contribute to the wisdom of future generations, helping these people with decisions along their roads. Thus the ancient wisdom of one time reignites the ancient wisdom of a later time, and this means that the circularity of fiction harbours a circularity of wisdom, functioning like a stable source of guidance for the inhabitants of Middle-earth. What is more, wise characters understand the importance of information and counsel as the key currencies for anybody who wants to call himself wise. Tolkien's plot is constructed in such a way as to show the necessity of gaining information and knowledge before the enemy does; wisdom and wise decisions can only be effective if these pieces of information are there. It is similar with counsel, as the novel showcases not only a willingness to listen to advice and recommendations but also the interconnectedness of Tolkien's characters and the requirements of the quest. This urge for counsel deflects the attention away from the individual, all of these currencies suggesting in the process that the quality of being wise is more important than mere heroism in the old sense of the word. This is an aspect which we discussed at great length in the last section. While Beowulf presents a mainly heroic culture, a "shame culture" according to Jones (qtd. in Clark, "The Hero and the Theme" 285), where courage has to be shown on the battlefield, Tolkien's Middle-earth presents heroism in a different light,

deemphasising the physical and military side to it, moving the notion of heroism into a category that values courage as a purely mental quality, as portrayed especially by those who are physically weak. The application of this interplay of wisdom and heroism to the concept of good governance has shown that Tolkien's real heroes are heroes for their wisdom, while representatives of a purely heroic society, like Boromir, fail spectacularly on the quest, ultimately appearing primitive and ill equipped to carry responsibility.

In Tolkien's *Letters*, we learn that of all the characters in his created world, the author identified most with Faramir (232). From our philological perspective, that is not especially surprising, as Faramir is described to take great pleasure in learning, especially things of old, and this alone makes him almost an alter ego of Tolkien the medievalist. But Faramir also shares the author's dislike of war and the pursuit of fame and glory on the battlefield. Tolkien's general de-emphasis of the military side of heroism originates in his personal experiences as a recruit in World War I, having witnessed first-hand the misery at the Battle of the Somme (Carpenter). This might be why he presents the action and decisions of the wise people in Middle-earth as alluding to a more pacifist way of understanding the world. Frodo is the ideal embodiment of this once he returns to the Shire: he feels terrible and sad when Saruman and Gríma can only be toppled by the use of military means. While Tolkien's world is more pacifist and pragmatic about violence, the world of *Beowulf* presents belligerence as the pathway to heroic glory. The path of secrecy, so counterintuitive to any boastful warrior hero, proves to be the wiser choice for the specific requirements of Tolkien's quest, resulting in a situation where Frodo and the Fellowship have to show just as much courage as their peers who confront the forces of Mordor on the battlefields of Middle-earth. In general, there is an emphasis on mercy and pity as opposed to seeking glory in battle. The pillars of fame, glory and domination, which the Ring can bestow and the Old English heroes represent, disintegrate in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is not possible to destroy the Ring in this very manner of direct confrontation in battle; the characters have to display different qualities, such as wisdom and cunning and an ability to keep their doings discreet. Thus Tolkien's plot is a valuation of wisdom and a devaluation of the Northern theory of courage, a rejection of Old English heroism as it appears in *Beowulf*. Instead, humility is required and not (overmastering) pride, *humilitas* and not *superbia*, which ultimately shows Tolkien's own, very Catholic, philological contemplations.

Wisdom in Tolkien's mythology seems then to be based on an acceptance of and personal investment in the knowledge of former days, fuelled by constant reflection which may lead to practical help in various difficult situations. It would be interesting to widen the scope of the medieval sources contrasted to Tolkien's works in order to see in what ways this might provide a clearer picture of the author's employment of medieval ideas in his representation of wisdom. Middle English texts would be a good starting point in that regard, but also Old Norse

literature and the Finnish *Kalevala* might be interesting sources to keep in mind as Tolkien drew a lot of inspiration from them. This overall idea of wisdom clearly reflects Tolkien's love for his philological profession, showing that there is a point in reading and studying the texts from days long past, creating a world where this kind of knowledge proves crucial for survival. In reality, though, we are given a different picture in which not only philology is struggling to maintain its position in universities but also the humanities as a whole (Delany; Lill). Governmental decisions like the closing of the humanities and social science departments in a number of Japanese universities are just an extreme example of a worldwide trend towards ever more practical knowledge (Dean). Taking such developments into account, it would have pleased Tolkien to know that his love letter to philology, his famous *Lord of the Rings*, has not yet disappeared under the dust.

I would like to close by presenting the remainder of Gandalf's poem that I quoted at the head of the introduction. While the first two lines show that real worth is not always apparent and that those who wander have not necessarily lost their way, the poem continues as follows:

> The old that is strong does not wither,
> Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
> From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
> A light from the shadows shall spring;
> Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
> The crownless again shall be king. (169–70)

"Estel," an earlier name of Aragorn, who is at the centre of the poem, means "Hope" (1057; App. A) and the character symbolises not only the hope for the return of the King of Gondor but also the hope that Tolkien wanted to see for philology. The character embodies the old and traditional which gets to wear a crown again at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, and he gets to rule with traditional "wisdom [on] his brow" (968). There is an image of the dead being resurrected, of something thought useless and lifeless brought to fruition again. Life is *læne*, we learn from Old English literature, and even though people die their wisdom might not "wither," waiting instead to be rediscovered by philological endeavours. "From the ashes a fire shall be woken," we read, and its light, present and yet remote, illuminates the road ahead.

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