THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

# OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

## SECOND EDITION

*Edited by Malcolm Godden
and Michael Lapidge*

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

Second edition

This *Companion* has been thoroughly revised to take account of recent scholarship and to provide a clear and accessible introduction for those encountering Old English literature for the first time. Including seventeen essays by distinguished scholars, this new edition provides a discussion of the literature of the period 600–1066 in the context of how Anglo-Saxon society functioned. New chapters cover topics including preaching and teaching, *Beowulf*, and literacy, and a further five chapters have been revised and updated, including those on the Old English language, perceptions of eternity and Anglo-Saxon learning. An additional concluding chapter on Old English after 1066 offers an overview of the study and cultural influences of Old English literature to the present day. Finally, the bibliography has been overhauled to incorporate the most up-to-date scholarship in the field and the latest electronic resources for students.

MALCOLM GODDEN is Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor emeritus of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford.

MICHAEL LAPIDGE is Elrington and Bosworth Professor emeritus of Anglo-Saxon, University of Cambridge, and Notre Dame Professor of English emeritus, University of Notre Dame.

*A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book*

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO

# OLD ENGLISH
# LITERATURE

SECOND EDITION

MALCOLM GODDEN
AND
MICHAEL LAPIDGE

CONTENTS

v

# CONTENTS

# CONTRIBUTORS

DANIEL ANLEZARK, University of Sydney

NICHOLAS BROOKS, University of Birmingham

MARY CLAYTON, University College, Dublin

CHRISTINE FELL (†), formerly University of Nottingham

ROBERTA FRANK, Yale University

MILTON MCC. GATCH, Union Theological Seminary, New York

HELMUT GNEUSS, University of Munich

MALCOLM GODDEN, University of Oxford

MECHTHILD GRETSCH, University of Göttingen

CHRIS JONES, University of St Andrews

MICHAEL LAPIDGE, University of Cambridge

PATRIZIA LENDINARA, University of Palermo

RICHARD MARSDEN, University of Nottingham

JOHN D. NILES, University of Wisconsin

KATHERINE O'BRIEN O'KEEFFE, University of California, Berkeley

ANDY ORCHARD, University of Toronto

DONALD G. SCRAGG, University of Manchester

On 26 November 1882 Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote to his fellow poet and friend Robert Bridges: 'I am learning Anglo-Saxon and it is a vastly superior thing to what we have now.' W. H. Auden too was inspired by his first experience of Old English literature: 'I was spellbound. This poetry, I knew, was going to be my dish . . . I learned enough to read it, and Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry have been one of my strongest, most lasting influences.' The list of modern poets who have been influenced by Old English literature (that term is now generally preferred to 'Anglo-Saxon' when referring to the language and vernacular writings of pre-Conquest England) could be extended to include Pound, Graves, Wilbur and many others. One does not have to agree with Hopkins's belief in the superiority of Old English as a medium for poetry to accept the importance of the writings of the Anglo-Saxons for an understanding of the cultural roots of the English-speaking world. The practice of looking back to their writings and their social organization in order to comprehend the present has continued ever since the sixteenth century, when the Elizabethans turned to them in support of their religious and political polemic.

It scarcely needs emphasizing that literature is the record of a particular culture; what Old English literature offers us is not only a mode of poetic expression which startled Hopkins and Auden but a window into a different world of beliefs, myths, anxieties, perspectives. The Anglo-Saxons were at the meeting-point of two major cultural traditions. From their barbarian origins, continually enriched by renewed contact with Scandinavian invaders and continental trade and political relations, they brought a Germanic inheritance of legend, poetic technique, law, pagan beliefs and tribal sympathies. From their contact with the representatives and books of Christianity, they absorbed much of the Latin, and a little of the Greek, tradition of history, religion, science and rhetoric. They were also at a chronological meeting-place. Late Anglo-Saxon England was a sophisticated and advanced country in politics, economic organization and vernacular literature; her peoples

looked back, sometimes critically, often nostalgically, to a past when they were barbarians and Rome was dominant. Looking forward, they saw themselves approaching a time of crisis, the imminent end of the world that they knew, and as that anticipated end drew near, they were increasingly inclined to see the Viking raids as signs of apocalypse. Their writings reflect at times the nostalgic brooding on the past, at times the excitement of newly acquired knowledge or the sophisticated possibilities of writing, and at times the urgency of a period of crisis.

In choosing the subjects to be considered in this book, we have been particularly concerned to show the range of writing in Old English and the ways in which that writing draws on the cultural and social preoccupations of the time. The small group of poems which have come to be recognized as the heart of the literary canon are discussed fairly extensively in the relevant chapters: *The Dream of the Rood* in ch. 13, *The Battle of Maldon* in ch. 6, the so-called elegies including *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* in ch. 10, and *Beowulf* has a chapter to itself (ch. 8). The collection aims to provide orientation and guidance for those approaching the study of Old English literature for the first time. The contributors have thus been asked by the editors to emphasize established understandings rather than new and more speculative ideas; but, perhaps fortunately, not all have followed the editors' request, and some indication of the many areas of uncertainty, the problems still to be resolved or the traditional views that need to be challenged will emerge, we hope, from the book as a whole.

Malcolm Godden
Michael Lapidge
June 1990

Although the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* has remained continuously in print during the past twenty or more years, and has become the staple of Old English instruction in many universities throughout the world – not only in British and American universities, but also in Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia and elsewhere – there have inevitably been developments in the field which are not fully represented in the earlier work. A revised, second edition therefore seemed called for. When we were invited by Cambridge University Press to contemplate such a revised edition, we were guided in the first instance by the helpful feedback of a number of university teachers of Old English whom the Press had consulted about the need (or otherwise) of a revised edition, and we hope that we have responded to the criticisms and suggestions of these consultants, and also that the present list of contributors more adequately reflects the worldwide distribution which the first edition has achieved.

In suggesting revisions to existing articles, and in commissioning new ones, we have tried to bear in mind various important developments which have taken place in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies since the publication of the first edition. In particular there has been ever-growing scholarly interest in Anglo-Saxon homilies, fuelled by the publication of monumental editions of the Vercelli Homilies and Ælfric's First Series of *Catholic Homilies* (accompanied by an equally monumental volume of commentary to the First and Second Series, and by many notable monographs on Anglo-Saxon homilies and their sources); by increasing interest in the geographical lore of the Anglo-Saxons (reflected, for example, in new editions of the 'Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn'); by closer studies of Anglo-Saxon literacy, and in particular of the emergence of a standardized written language from the late tenth century onwards; and by awareness that many of the formulaic expressions which are found in Old English verse, and which to previous generations of students were regarded as evidence for the oral composition of that verse, can more appropriately be seen as a reflex of literary composition, inasmuch as the use

of formulae can be shown to be as characteristic of the Latin verse composed by Anglo-Saxons as of their vernacular verse composition, with the further implication that close attention to the recurrence of such literary formulae can often illustrate the dependence of one Anglo-Saxon poet on another (such awareness has important bearing on the study of all Old English verse, and not least on *Beowulf*); and scholarly attention is increasingly being devoted to the afterlife and influence of Old English verse on subsequent English poets, from the Middle English period down to the twenty-first century. No doubt there are other important developments which deserve mention here (we have tried to attend to all such developments in the updated version of 'Further reading', pp. 331–48); but by attending at least to the developments sketched above, we hope to have produced a companion to Old English literature better suited than its predecessor to the needs of twenty-first-century students.

Malcolm Godden
Michael Lapidge
April 2012

# NOTE ON THE TEXT

Old English poetry, including *Beowulf* is quoted throughout from ASPR. Prose texts are quoted from the relevant standard editions, and are signalled by editor's name (e.g. *Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet, p. 10); full bibliographical details of the editions in question are to be found in 'Further reading', pp. 331–48.

# ABBREVIATIONS

*ASE*      *Anglo-Saxon England*
ASPR       The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie,
           6 vols. (New York, 1931–42)
AST        Anglo-Saxon Texts (Cambridge)
CSASE      Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge)
EETS       Early English Text Society
*EHD*      *English Historical Documents, I: c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn
           (London, 1979); cited by page number
*HE*       Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* or *Ecclesiastical History*, ed.
           and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); also trans.
           L. Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth, 1955)

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

| | |
|---|---|
| from *c.* 400 | Anglo-Saxon peoples settle in Britain |
| *c.* 540 | Gildas in *De excidio Britanniae* laments the effects of the Anglo-Saxon settlements on the supine Britons |
| 597 | St Augustine arrives in Kent to convert the Anglo-Saxons |
| 616 | death of Æthelberht, king of Kent |
| *c.* 625 | ship-burial at Sutton Hoo (mound 1) |
| 633 | death of Edwin, king of Northumbria |
| 635 | Bishop Aidan established in Lindisfarne |
| 642 | death of Oswald, king of Northumbria |
| 664 | Synod of Whitby |
| 669–70 | Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian arrive in Canterbury |
| 674 | monastery of Monkwearmouth founded |
| 682 | monastery of Jarrow founded |
| 687 | death of St Cuthbert |
| 689 | death of Ceadwalla, king of Wessex |
| 690 | death of Archbishop Theodore |
| *c.* 700 | 'Lindisfarne Gospels' written and decorated |
| 710 | deaths of Bishops Wilfrid and Aldhelm |
| 716–57 | Æthelbald king of Mercia |

| | |
|---|---|
| 731 | Bede completes his *Ecclesiastical History* |
| 735 | death of Bede |
| 754 | death of St Boniface, Anglo-Saxon missionary in Germany |
| 757–96 | Offa king of Mercia |
| 781 | Alcuin of York meets Charlemagne in Parma and thereafter leaves York for the Continent |
| 793 | Vikings attack Lindisfarne |
| 802–39 | Ecgberht king of Wessex |
| 804 | death of Alcuin |
| 839–56 | Æthelwulf king of Wessex |
| 867 | the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria falls under Viking control |
| 869 | Vikings defeat and kill Edmund, king of East Anglia |
| 871–99 | Alfred the Great king of Wessex |
| 878 | Alfred defeats the Viking army at the battle of Edington, and the Vikings settle in East Anglia (879–80) |
| 879 | end of the independent kingdom of Mercia |
| 899–924 | Edward the Elder king of Wessex |
| 924–39 | Æthelstan king of Wessex and first king of all England |
| 937 | battle of *Brunanburh*: Æthelstan defeats an alliance of Scots and Scandinavians |
| 957–75 | Edgar king of England |
| 959–88 | Dunstan archbishop at Canterbury |
| 963–84 | Æthelwold bishop at Winchester |
| 964 | secular (i.e. non-monastic) clergy expelled from the Old Minster, Winchester, and replaced by monks; the event is understood by contemporary witnesses to mark the beginning of the Benedictine revival movement |
| 971–92 | Oswald archbishop at York |

| | |
|---|---|
| 973 | King Edgar crowned at Bath |
| 978–1016 | Æthelred 'the Unready' king of England |
| 985–7 | Abbo of Fleury at Ramsey |
| 991 | battle of Maldon: the Vikings defeat an Anglo-Saxon army led by Byrhtnoth of Essex |
| *c.* 1010 | death of Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham |
| 1011 | Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* |
| 1013 | the English submit to Swein, king of Denmark |
| 1016–35 | Cnut king of England |
| 1023 | death of Wulfstan, archbishop of York |
| 1042–66 | Edward the Confessor king of England |
| 1066 | battle of Hastings: the Anglo-Saxon army led by Harold is defeated by the Norman army led by William the Conqueror |
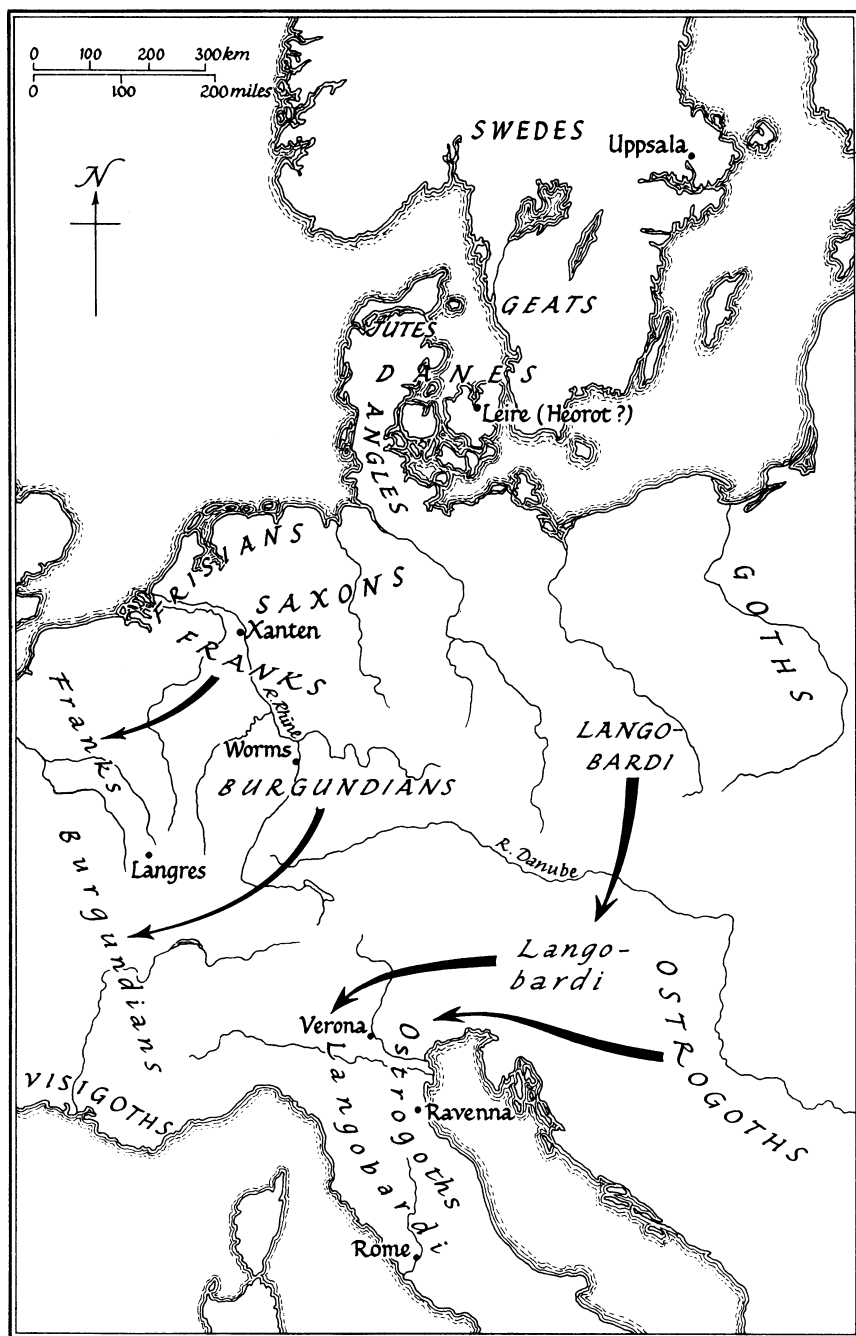
Figure 1 Map of the Germanic peoples of the Migration Age (*c.* 400 to *c.* 600 AD)

Figure 2 Map of Anglo-Saxon England

# I

NICHOLAS BROOKS

# The social and political background

The English language became established in the island of Britain in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. The settlement here of Anglo-Saxon peoples must be understood as one part of the radical cultural and political transformation of the late Roman world traditionally known as the 'Age of Migrations' or the 'Barbarian Invasions' (Figure 1).[1] In Britain there occurred a more radical linguistic and cultural change than elsewhere in the Western Roman Empire – that is, in the barbarian successor kingdoms that emerged from Roman Gaul, Spain and Italy. Whereas on the Continent Latin became the dominant language, spoken at all levels of society (eventually developing into the modern Romance languages of French, Spanish and Italian), in Britain Latin speech went into decline. In most of the lowland zone Romano-British culture was overwhelmed during the fifth and sixth centuries by that of pagan Germanic incomers, whose language was to develop into Old English; whilst in the west of Britain Latin also gave way, but to variant forms of the indigenous Celtic or Brittonic language (Primitive Welsh and Cornish).

It is not clear why Britain's linguistic fortunes were so distinctive. In the fourth century AD the island had been divided into a number of Roman provinces, with capitals at London, York, Lincoln and Cirencester. In the lowland zone, a Latin-speaking ruling elite had lived in high style in rural Roman villas and had also formed the dominant class in some twenty walled towns, most of which served as the administrative capitals of tribal territories or *civitates*. Latin had also remained – to judge from inscriptions – the language of the army, even though the late Roman troops themselves had been recruited from outside the Empire. Latin was also the language used for the brief inscriptions (or 'legends') upon Roman coins issued by numerous imperial mints on the Continent. Latin is therefore likely to have been the language of trade, certainly of long-distance trade, throughout the West.[2] As the fourth century progressed, the Romano-British elite had followed the imperial family's example and adopted Christianity, beginning to abandon

their former pagan temples. Bishoprics are also likely to have been established in the main towns.[3] In late antique Britain – as throughout the West – Latin was also the language in which the Christian Scriptures were transmitted, in which Christian liturgy was conducted and in which Christian theology was debated. How securely an urbanized Roman economy and this Christian Latin culture had actually taken root, even in lowland areas of late fourth-century Britain, remains an issue of debate.[4]

What does seem clear, however, is that the successive withdrawals to the Continent of all the mobile elements of the Roman army of Britain in the late fourth and early fifth century had culminated in the Emperor Honorius's renunciation in *c.* 410 of the Empire's commitment to control Britain, and had left the Latin-speaking civil aristocracy of Britain in a particularly vulnerable position.[5] Only for about a generation did the island's senatorial aristocracy prove able to negotiate the kind of agreement with groups of barbarian ('Saxon') warrior-settlers that elsewhere in the Empire helped to ensure the continued domination of Latin culture and speech. British tradition (preserved by Gildas and the *Historia Brittonum*) remembered thereafter a 'Saxon' rising against their British employers. English tradition (recorded by Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) preferred to record the arrival in the middle years of the fifth century of a succession of Anglo-Saxon warrior-leaders and their followers in a few ships, which Bede termed 'the arrival of the English' (*adventus Anglorum*). The subsequent victories of these leaders or of their descendants over British enemies were remembered as the foundation of English kingdoms and dynasties.[6]

In southern and eastern Britain this political and cultural transformation is detectable in the archaeological record by newly established burial grounds, the so-called 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries' of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries – some containing only cremation burials, with the ashes placed within hand-made but highly decorated pots or urns; some comprising inhumation burials with accompanying grave-goods (especially jewellery and weapons); while others were mixed-rite cemeteries (that is, with both cremations and inhumations).[7] Unless DNA analysis from burials in many of these cemeteries comes to provide clear and consistent evidence, it is unlikely ever to be possible to assess what proportion of those buried were immigrants of Germanic origin and speech, and what proportion were men and women from the indigenous British population, who had either been compelled or had chosen to use the new cemeteries and to adopt Anglo-Saxon burial practices and accoutrements. At present therefore, archaeology cannot determine whether the Anglo-Saxon settlements involved a migration of peasant farmers from the Continent or comprised a series of military land-takings by a Germanic warrior-elite, which subjected the indigenous British rural

population. But the designs of the cremation urns and most of the stylistic links of the jewellery and weapons buried as grave-goods do establish that the cultural affiliation of these burials was predominantly, though not exclusively, with the North German and Danish homelands of the Anglo-Saxons and with the 'Frisian' coastal sites of the Low Countries (Figure 1). These cemeteries may therefore already represent a conscious adoption of an Anglo-Saxon or 'English' identity in lowland Britain.

Linguistic evidence for the relations of Anglo-Saxons, Britons and Latin speakers in these 'Dark Ages' has proved equally problematic.[8] The extreme rarity of loan-words of Celtic origin in Modern English and their virtual absence from the recorded word-store of Old English indicates that Brittonic languages were perceived as having inferior status to English; British words were eschewed in written English, lest they betrayed the writer's low status. But the ways in which Old English came to differ in its morphology and syntax from other West Germanic languages hints that people whose first language was Celtic may have had a considerable influence upon how the English language developed within Britain. That would fit with the evidence of place-names. While the British names for many major Roman sites survived in use (at least as one element of the Anglo-Saxon and modern English names), a considerable number of Celtic names, especially of rivers and natural features, were also retained and applied to adjacent settlements throughout the lowland zone. But the vast bulk of the modern names of rural settlements (farms, hamlets and villages) are English coinages of the Anglo-Saxon period; they reflect the ultimate dominance of Old English in lowland Britain, but we do not have any clear chronology for their formation. Many of the earliest English names seem (like the Celtic survivals) to have been topographic names. 'Habitative' names, such as those in -*ham* and -*tun*, are not now presumed to be early formations from the period of the 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries'; some of them can indeed be shown to preserve the names of particular tenth- or eleventh-century lords, rather than (as once supposed) of the first Anglo-Saxon founders of new settlements. What remains clear is that the survival of a small but significant Celtic element in the place-names in even the most easterly English regions points to the survival of a population of Celtic origin, whose language was to be lost over a number of generations.

The pagan culture of the Anglo-Saxon settlers of Britain was fundamentally changed in the course of the seventh century by the two Christian missions to the English: the Roman monks sent by Pope Gregory I to Kent under King Æthelberht in 597, who were led by St Augustine, and the Irish-speaking monks from Iona under St Aidan received by King Oswald of Northumbria in 635. In his remarkable *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*,

completed in the year 731,[9] the Northumbrian monk Bede indicates that by the end of the sixth century a dozen or more pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been established in eastern and southern Britain, ranging from the Isle of Wight and the West Saxons in the south to Bernicia in the north-east, lying between the river Tees and the Firth of Forth (Figure 2). Bede concentrates upon the conversion of the ruling dynasties of these kingdoms to Christianity, having little to say about the beliefs of the mass of the rural population.[10] Bede did preserve Pope Gregory's advice to Augustine to facilitate the conversion process by reusing pagan temples as churches (after appropriate ritual cleansing) and by allowing great feasts at timely Christian anniversaries in lieu of the seasonal pagan animal sacrifices (*HE* I.30). That process of acculturation has given the English their days of the week named after pagan gods (Tiw, Woden, Thor and Frei), their Christmas ceremonies involving 'Yuletide' feasting (deriving from the pagan midwinter ceremony of *Giuli*), and most remarkably of all their retention of the name 'Easter' for the annual celebration of the supreme Christian commemoration of Christ's Resurrection, which is actually that of the Germanic fertility goddess Eostre, whose springtime fertility rites survive in popular gifts of decorated eggs.

Bede records the succession of bishops to the sees established by the two missions and the dramatic fluctuations of pagan and Christian fortunes in the seventh century. His *Ecclesiastical History* reinforced the message that the English were a 'chosen people' by calculating dates for events in their history from the birth of Christ; he thereby pioneered the use of AD dating and influenced subsequent history-writing in Europe, leading to the modern all-purpose numbering of years according to the so-called 'common era'. Bede's own mastery of the complexities of the Christian inheritance of solar and lunar calendars led him to emphasize the conflicts between the Roman and Irish missions over the calculation of the date of Easter and the difficulties in both his native Northumbria and in the kingdoms under its influence arising from the two missions' use of divergent calendars until 664, when King Oswiu supported Roman practice at the Synod of Whitby (*HE* III.25–6). That decision paved the way for the learned Greek ecclesiastic, Theodore, a papal nominee as archbishop of Canterbury (668–90), to reorganize the English Church. In his time and in the following quarter-century a network of monasteries (or 'minsters') was established in every Anglo-Saxon kingdom and diocese as the foundation for Christian worship and for routine pastoral work.[11]

It is noteworthy that the areas of Britain whose ecclesiastical history Bede recounts in detail correspond closely with those where the 'pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries' had been established. By contrast he seems to have had little knowledge of territories under English rule west of the Pennines, where

the British language lasted longer and where British churches may still have endured within his lifetime. Bede's intention was indeed to minimize the role of British Christianity, emphasizing instead the sins of the Britons, their doctrinal errors and their failure to convert the Anglo-Saxons. That all helped to justify the English takeover of much of the island of Britain and the continued reduction of Britons to servile or tributary status. Bede's purpose here, like that of the later *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, was to present Anglo-Saxon kings as the true successors of the Romans in the legitimate Christian rule of the island. In this endeavour his work is notable for its assumption that the kingdoms of his own day, which he considered to have 'Jutish', 'Saxon' or 'English' origins (*HE* 1.15), nonetheless shared a common ecclesiastical history, that of a single English people (*gens Anglorum*). That interpretative model reflected the structure of the English Church deriving from Gregory I's scheme for two provinces, each with twelve subordinate bishoprics under metropolitan sees at London and York (*HE* 1.29) – although in the event the southern archbishopric was to be set up at Canterbury in 597 (rather than at London), and not until 735 did it prove possible to establish York as an archbishopric. What emerged by the mid-eighth century was a Church with provinces for the 'southern' and the 'northern' English, which were never, however, in the pre-Conquest period to gain ecclesiastical authority over the politically independent British, Scottish or Pictish kingdoms of the west and north. York's authority therefore always remained significantly smaller than Canterbury's, with at most four suffragan sees in comparison to Canterbury's eleven or twelve. Within lowland Britain, however, the development of a common English identity was facilitated by the greater wealth and military power of the English rulers and also by the perception that the English Church was alone in being considered orthodox at Rome. The Anglo-Saxon Church was indeed careful throughout its history to maintain very close links with the papacy, in part as a means of strengthening the concept of a shared English Christian identity within Britain.

The use of the English language for the imposition of law and the maintenance of justice was another factor encouraging the general adoption of English identity. There survive four law-codes in the names of seventh-century English kings, three from Kent (Æthelberht, Hlothhere and Eadric, and Wihtred) and one from Wessex (Ine). Like all later Anglo-Saxon legislation (from the laws of King Alfred to those of Cnut) and in contrast to the continental barbarian codes, these early laws are all in the vernacular language rather than in Latin.[12] They strongly suggest that the law-courts of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had operated in the English language from the start and that access to the law depended upon use of that language. While the preservation of the text of laws in the name of King Æthelberht of

Kent – the first Anglo-Saxon king to be baptized a Christian – was of course a product of the continuity of church archives in Kent, we should beware presuming that the Anglo-Saxons had hitherto only known unwritten customary law, and that written law should itself be reckoned an innovation of the Gregorian mission – along with the Latin alphabet, the Holy Scriptures and Latin liturgical and exegetical books. For it seems very unlikely that St Augustine of Canterbury (or his Roman companions) composed any of Æthelberht's laws – except perhaps for the first clause providing legal protection for churchmen. All the rest seem uniformly non-Christian (or pre-Christian) in content. Until Æthelberht's baptism, laws may for generations have been written down in Old English (or in earlier West Germanic languages) in the runic alphabet (or *futhorc*, as it is called from its first six letters) by pagan rune-masters.[13]

The conversion of the English to Christianity meant that education had initially to be geared to training English monks and priests to read and understand the Scriptures and to deliver Christian rituals in Latin. It is therefore of interest that in the school of Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian at Canterbury there developed a practice of annotating the Latin biblical texts and many basic works of the Church Fathers with Greek or Latin synonyms written above key words in a smaller script, as a means of conveying inherited learning and also of translating some terms into English as a basic educational device. Lists of such 'glosses' were soon being formed and circulated for memorization.[14] We know, moreover, from Bede's account of the poet Cædmon that Christian poetry was being composed in the English language in the later seventh century, and (intriguingly) by one whose name was British and who seems to have been of peasant status until his admission into the male community at Whitby (*HE* iv.22). That may hint at the development of English identity in the North Riding of Yorkshire. We possess precious eighth-century witnesses to the Old English text of Cædmon's *Hymn*, as well as to a version of the anonymous *Dream of the Rood*. But the bulk of the extant Old English poetry, both religious and secular, is only extant in manuscripts of the late tenth or early eleventh century, and we lack – except perhaps for the heroic secular masterpiece *Beowulf* – clear means of determining whether the extant texts were composed significantly earlier than the script of the manuscripts.[15] What seems clear is that Old English poetry, both Christian and secular, was preserved in Anglo-Saxon monastic libraries and reflects the taste of the almost exclusively aristocratic membership of those houses.[16]

The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of the seventh and eighth centuries were the product of frequent warfare, both with the British kingdoms on the western marches and with their Anglo-Saxon neighbours. Two general developments

are evident: military predominance tended to pass to those Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that had a frontier with territories still under British rule, whose inhabitants could be enslaved or made tributary; secondly, the smaller Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were gradually subjected to the larger ones, and their royal dynasties were suppressed. Bede provides striking examples of both processes (*HE* I.34, IV.16): he recounts how no previous ruler before the pagan Northumbrian king Æthelfrith (592–616) had either rendered more land habitable for the English by exterminating the natives or subjected more of them to payment of tribute; he also records how the Christian West Saxon warrior-king Ceadwalla (685–8) compelled the pagan Jutish princes of the Isle of Wight to accept baptism and then had them executed, as part of a process to 'drive out all the natives' (*omnes indigenas exterminare*) and to replace them with men of his own (West Saxon) people. Bede's willingness to use the language of ethnic cleansing reveals that the forcible expulsion of existing landed lords was a normal concomitant of warfare in this period. Later in the eighth century, when our narrative sources are less informative, it is still possible to demonstrate, chiefly from the evidence of charters, comparable processes by which King Offa of Mercia (757–96) suppressed the ruling dynasties and local aristocracies of Kent, the South Saxons and the Hwicce and began to install Mercian nobles in their place.[17]

This process by which the 'pike' among the English kingdoms 'swallowed the minnows' had developed until just four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms remained by the early ninth century: Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia (which had taken over the whole Midland area between the Thames and the Humber) and Wessex, which had come to dominate all the area south of the Thames and was seeking to wrest control of the former East Saxon kingdom from the Mercians. English historians have indeed often been tempted to interpret the course of Anglo-Saxon political history as one of progress towards the desired political objective of a single English nation-state. Significant stages in that process have been detected in a famous passage of Bede's *History* (*HE* II.5) in which he claimed that Æthelberht of Kent was the third of seven English rulers to exercise a lordship (*imperium*) over all the southern English kingdoms. Bede only extended his list as far as Kings Edwin, Oswald and Oswiu, who ruled the Northumbrian kingdom between 617 and 670, and who at times had authority over the southern English and even over parts of northern Britain as well. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, compiled in Wessex at the court of King Alfred in the 890s, bombastically adds Alfred's grandfather King Ecgberht (802–39) to the list as the eighth *Bretwalda* ('mighty ruler' or 'ruler of Britain'), on the basis of his very brief conquest of the Mercians and of the peace that he established with the Northumbrians in the same year (829).[18]

It seems clear that several Mercian kings – Penda (626×33–55), Wulfhere (658–75), Æthelbald (716–57) and Offa (757–96) – had for somewhat longer periods of their reigns also been able to exercise a similar lordship over the southern English. These periodic military 'over-kingships' did not, however, amount to a regular office with settled institutions for succession and government. Their power depended upon the uncertain fortunes of battle. Yet the huge potential profits from booty and tribute and from trading captives as slaves attracted several Anglo-Saxon rulers to attempt to gain this form of predatory hegemony. An insight into the wealth of gold and silver and into the superb metalworking craftsmanship available to such powerful overlords in the seventh century is provided on the one hand by the 'Sutton Hoo ship-burial' (very probably the memorial of King Rædwald of the East Angles, the fourth overlord in Bede's list); and on the other by the 'Staffordshire Hoard', which contained inter alia wonderfully fine gold and garnet decorative adornments for the handles of more than seventy-five dress-swords. It thus conveys some impression of the conspicuous wealth that drew warriors into the service of Mercian overlords in the later seventh century.[19]

Owing to the remarkable longevity of two Mercian kings, Æthelbald (716–57) and Offa (757–96), the powers exercised by Anglo-Saxon overlords in the eighth century seem to have been becoming more durable. But neither ruler proved able to establish a lasting dynasty. Indeed the insecurity generated within an overlord's retinue, as age made him less willing to lead profitable military expeditions, may help to explain Æthelbald's murder by his own retainers at Seckington (Warwickshire) in 757. Offa was indeed to make a more coherent effort to perpetuate his regime by adopting methods of legitimization that had been successfully pioneered on the Continent by the Carolingian dynasty. In order to have his son Ecgfrith consecrated as king in 787, i.e. during the father's lifetime, Offa pushed through a radical restructuring of the English Church by raising his Mercian see of Lichfield to metropolitan status (at Canterbury's expense). But the antagonisms among the former royal families, aristocracies and leading ecclesiastics, whose power Offa had curtailed so radically, provoked a violent rejection of Mercian rule both in Kent and in East Anglia as soon as Offa died. Moreover, the death of Ecgfrith, in 796, within a few months of his father, exposed the fragility of Offa's plans and appeared to provide a divine judgement that Offa's violence had indeed exceeded what was appropriate for a Christian king.[20] Within a few years the archbishopric of Lichfield had been abolished and Canterbury's authority over the whole of its province re-established (803).

In the ninth century the trajectory of English political history changed. The rulers of the continuing Northumbrian, Mercian, East Anglian and West Saxon kingdoms now all faced a common external threat. In 793 seaborne

Viking raiders sacked the Northumbrian royal monastery of Lindisfarne, an event that caused Alcuin to lament that 'never before has such a terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made'.[21] Similar raids in successive years on Bede's former monastery of Jarrow (794) and on Iona (795) indicate the start of regular pagan Scandinavian raiding; there are also hints in Kentish charters between *c.* 790 and 815 that this Viking threat persuaded both Offa and Cenwulf of Mercia (798–821) to attempt to restructure military service and the building of fortresses and bridges to counter the new danger. Though the poverty of our narrative sources for English history in the first half of the ninth century has obscured the details of this early Viking activity, we can detect a new phase of 'Danish' activity in 851, when for the first time in England a 'heathen army' spent the winter on the island of Thanet rather than returning in the autumn to Scandinavia. That practice, already pioneered on the Continent, enabled Viking armies to remain longer in the field and to terrorize and extract booty from English rulers far more systematically than hitherto. Thus the 'great heathen army' which arrived in East Anglia in the autumn of 865 was thereafter to move each autumn to new winter quarters in different English or British kingdoms until the year 879, when a newly raised force followed the same strategy on the Continent (where its great size was also noted) for thirteen years until this 'large army' (*se micla here*) returned to England between 892 and 896. A final phase of ninth-century Viking activity had been reached when sections of these large armies under particular commanders chose to give up their full-time raiding and instead take over and rule territories in England. Thus the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes how in 870 the Danes killed King Edmund of East Anglia and 'conquered all the land', how in 876 'Healfdan shared out the land of the Northumbrians and they proceeded to plough and support themselves', and how the following year saw the 'sharing out' of the eastern half of Mercia.[22]

The Viking conquests of the 870s destroyed three of the four ninth-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria); but East Anglia and the southern half of Northumbria were soon to be replaced by new kingdoms with Scandinavian dynasties, while in the East Midlands a more fragmented regime emerged, structured around Viking boroughs. In these conquered areas Christian institutions struggled to survive in any form; indeed East Anglia, the East Midlands and Lindsey were to lack bishops for about seventy-five years. Pagan Scandinavian warriors became the lordly class, and distinctively Scandinavian legal customs and terminology were to be retained there throughout the rest of the Anglo-Saxon period, so that the region came to be known as the 'Danelaw'. Old Norse speakers also came to

have a huge influence on the evolution of the English language, particularly on that of the East Midlands, the dialect which underlies Modern English. Scandinavian speech also affected the place-names of the region, so that Norse terms (such as -by and -thorp) for farm settlements were used for new names, usually in conjunction with Scandinavian personal names. It remains controversial whether this huge linguistic impact could have been achieved just through the evolution of successive contingents of Viking armies into an enduring landed aristocracy in northern and eastern England, or whether we also need to posit a significant migration of Scandinavian peasant-farmers into the Danelaw.[23]

The attempt of the 'great army' to subjugate all four of the English kingdoms failed when King Alfred of Wessex (871–99) defeated 'King' Guthrum in the battle of Edington (878) and oversaw his baptism as a Christian in an elaborate ceremony involving thirty of his followers. Between 892 and 896 the successor 'great army' tried once more to conquer southern England, but by then King Alfred's military reforms had taken root and had fundamentally altered the balance of power in his favour.[24] Alfred and the ecclesiastical advisers attracted to his court regarded the Viking assaults as God's punishment of a people who had permitted the decline of religious life and of Latin learning in England. Their programme to assuage the Lord's anger by devising a strong Christian education in the English language for all aristocratic English children through the provision of vernacular versions of the books 'most important for men to know' was outlined in the king's preface to the translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, produced c. 890. It was accompanied by English versions of other patristic works, of Bede's *History* and by the composition of a new work, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, depicting the West Saxon dynasty as the successors in Britain of Christian Roman emperors.[25]

Alongside the West Saxon success against the Vikings, a fragment of the former Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria also remained independent north of the river Tees, under a dynasty of ealdormen based in Bamburgh; and western Mercia likewise avoided submitting to Scandinavian rule by alliance with Wessex, first under Ealdorman Æthelred and then from 910–19 under his widow, Æthelflæd (King Alfred's daughter). These developments enabled King Alfred and his successors to present themselves from the 890s as kings of the 'Anglo-Saxons' and his grandsons – King Æthelstan (924–39), Eadmund (939–46) and Eadred (946–55) – as 'kings of the English' (using the title *rex Anglorum*) from 928 onwards. Such titles portrayed the conquest of Midland and Northern England by Alfred's able descendants as a process of unification of the English people, rather than as the conquest of northern and eastern kingdoms by the southern dynasty. Key stages in the northward extension of

the dynasty's rule were: (1) the systematic conquest of Essex, East Anglia and the east Midlands by Edward the Elder and his sister Æthelflæd, by means of the incremental garrisoning of fortified boroughs; (2) King Æthelstan's incorporation of the kingdom of York under his rule in 927, seemingly confirmed by his great victory over a coalition of Scottish, British and Scandinavian northern rulers at the battle of *Brunanburh* (937), commemorated in Old English verse; and (3) the final expulsion of the last Viking ruler of the kingdom of York, Eric 'Bloodaxe', in 954, which paved the way for King Eadred's rule there.

These successful conquests made Alfred's descendants and their leading aristocratic supporters in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries phenomenally rich. The kingdom's growth facilitated a gradual restructuring of local government in the later tenth century, whereby the old Mercian provinces under ealdormen came to be replaced by smaller 'shires' based upon boroughs that had first been built either by Edward the Elder and Æthelflæd or (within the Danelaw) by the Danish armies. The new 'shires' served as the principal territories of judicial, military and fiscal administration. In the late Anglo-Saxon period the shire-reeve (sheriff) was normally an official appointed by the king to preside over the biennial meetings of the shire court, to exact fines and administer justice there; and to raise taxation and military forces from the shire community. Within the shires were smaller districts – called 'hundreds' in English regions or 'wapentakes' in much of the Danelaw – which were both fiscal units with regular assessments in terms of 'hides' or 'carucates' for taxation purposes and also judicial units with monthly courts, chiefly serving the needs of the rural peasantry of the locality. Both shire and hundred courts administered a harsh justice, set out in the law-codes issued in the names of the kings and built upon the principle that everyone had to take an oath of loyalty, to belong to systems of suretyship for the maintenance of peace, and to attend the appropriate courts regularly.[26]

The precocious establishment in the course of the tenth century of this remarkably centralized legal and fiscal administration throughout most of the English kingdom, that is, in territories south of the river Humber, was matched by the silver pennies issued in the name of each successive king, which became a uniform national coinage of high standard, available throughout the kingdom and serving as the sole legal currency both for trading and for fiscal purposes.[27] Royal control of this coinage was effective: foreign coins did not circulate in England, being instead melted down and reissued as English pence. After King Edgar's reform of *c.* 973 new coin 'types' were issued simultaneously throughout the kingdom at five- or six-yearly intervals (later every three years) by named moneyers working in named

boroughs or mint-towns. The coinage was also plentiful: the largest issue, in the reign of Cnut, may indeed have been in excess of forty million coins. That may have reflected a temporary need to pay off his troops and fleets, but by the early eleventh century the coinage both reflected and was itself generating significant urban and commercial growth in many of the kingdom's towns or 'boroughs'.[28] Urban and commercial development did indeed go hand in hand with the development of the coinage, the shire system and English law in the south and the Midlands. But its extension northwards was less regular. York, Chester and Lincoln each became substantial mints served by many moneyers, but they remained virtually the only mints or boroughs in northern England. Moreover, although Yorkshire and Lincolnshire did come to bear the name of 'shire', they were actually simply the older Scandinavian provinces, retaining their divisions into three 'ridings' or third parts (*þriðjungar*).

The reign of Edgar (957–75) marked the apparent apogee of the English royal dynasty's power within the kingdom and was remembered as a welcome time of peace, when the king supported a monastic 'Reformation', led by 'Saints' Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald, whom the king appointed to the richest English sees of Canterbury, Winchester and Worcester respectively. They founded reformed monasteries, where the *Rule of St Benedict* and a common customary, the *Regularis concordia*, composed by Æthelwold, were intended to be followed and where the pious king's protection would prevent secular encroachment upon monastic freedom and in return the monks would provide loyal prayers for the king and his family. Several of the forty-odd monasteries established in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries were to endure until the Dissolution and their libraries have preserved the bulk of the surviving manuscripts and manuscript books from Anglo-Saxon England. The reformed monasteries became centres of education and of Latin learning, imitating the intellectual concerns of Carolingian monasticism; and in the second generation they were to house the two most prolific, learned and accomplished authors of Old English prose, namely Ælfric, abbot successively of Cerne and Eynsham, and Wulfstan, bishop of London (996–1002) and later both of Worcester and of York (1002–23).[29]

The landed power of the tenth-century English kings weakened as they extended their power northwards by means of deals with the local Anglo-Scandinavian elites and also purchased peace on their northern frontier by encouraging the southwards ambitions of the Gaelic-speaking kings of the Scots at the expense of local British and Anglo-Saxon dynasties. Thus King Eadmund, after ravaging Strathclyde in 945, immediately recognized the claims of King Malcolm I of the Scots over that former British kingdom; while in 973 Edgar was to cede Lothian (the area from the Tweed to the Forth) to Malcolm's son King Kenneth II, thereby abandoning English claims

to rule a territory that had been under English rule for more than three centuries. That cession may have served to curtail any ambitions of northern conquest and of royal status harboured by the English lords of Bamburgh.[30] The Anglo-Scottish border, which thus came to be established on its modern Tweed–Solway line, made a mockery of the English kings' continued claim to rule all England or all *Angelcynn*. Indeed the dominant element among the nobility of the developing Scottish kingdom was thereafter to be of English speech and culture.

The ninety years from 975 to 1066 were characterized by military and political failures and the foreign conquests of 1016 and 1066. Æthelred II's succession in 978 as a minor occurred after his young half-brother Edward (975–8) was murdered; and after that inauspicious start most of Æthelred's long reign (978–1016) was to experience new and sustained Scandinavian Viking raids.[31] At one level the English kingdom responded impressively to this renewed threat: English armies were re-equipped with expensive helmets and with body armour ('byrnies') of mail, the earthwork and timber defences of the boroughs were replaced with stone walls and gateways at huge cost in labour and materials, and growing sums of silver were raised from taxation to buy off the Danish armies with payments of 'Danegeld'.[32] Indeed when the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* indicates that between 991 and 1018 phenomenal sums totalling 240,500 pounds of silver were raised both as tribute and to pay Scandinavian troops, it seems to have been well-informed. We do not know whether Æthelred (whose name literally means 'noble counsel') acquired the critical punning sobriquet *Unræd* ('no counsel', 'folly' or 'treachery') in his own lifetime. But the various meanings of *Unræd* leave intriguing doubt whether blame was being placed upon the king's advisers, his own foolishness or indeed on his criminally treacherous behaviour. Æthelred had been too young at his accession to have yet been trained as a warrior, but as king he never took personal command of English armies against the Danish forces endangering his kingdom. He thereby failed in the chief duty of an early medieval king. Military leadership therefore passed to the leading nobles and it is no surprise that many were disinclined to risk their lives in defence of a king unwilling to share their danger. The crushing defeat of the East Saxon force under Ealdorman Byrhtnoth in 991 was portrayed by an Old English poet in *The Battle of Maldon* as a striking example of named English nobles heroically fulfilling their obligations to their lord by fighting on to the death, even when that fight had become hopeless. But in the short run the poet's message may not have countered the negative effect of defeat on English morale.[33]

Æthelred's inadequacies as a military leader were followed by the early death at the end of 1016 of his son and successor, King Edmund 'Ironside', after a year of battles. This left the army of the Danish leader, Cnut, son of

King Svein Forkbeard of Denmark, in undisputed control of England. King Cnut reinforced his conquest of England by marrying Æthelred's widowed queen, the Norman princess Emma, and by taking care to rule with the advice of the archbishops of Canterbury and of York, and also of powerful earls, both Danish and English. For much of his reign (1016–35), however, Cnut was to be an absentee king, for it took a decade of expeditions using his English wealth (and troops) for him to win the thrones of both Denmark and Norway (1028).[34] In England he created a regime capable of running the kingdom in his absence and of supervising the transmission of power to his sons, Harold Harefoot (1036–40) and Harthacnut (1040–2) – the rival offspring respectively of Ælfgifu of Northampton and of Emma – but at the cost of ceding much effective territorial power to his leading nobles. When both Harold I and Harthacnut died young after brief reigns and without offspring, the English succession passed back to Æthelred's lineage; Edward 'the Confessor' (1042–66) was the elder (and the only surviving) of Æthelred's two sons by Emma. He had been raised ever since the accession of Cnut in exile in his mother's homeland (Normandy). Edward proved to be a survivor of considerable political cunning in the face of the power struggles of Earls Siward of Northumbria, Leofric of Mercia and Godwine of Wessex, and of their sons. But Edward's marriage to Godwine's daughter, Edith, produced no child, and in consequence his reign became a long preamble to an expected contest for the English throne. Edward wished the crown to pass to the family of the dukes of Normandy, which had sheltered him throughout his youth; but there is little sign that he had reconciled any of his Anglo-Scandinavian nobles to that outcome.[35]

Edward's death on 5 January 1066 lit the fuse for the long-anticipated succession struggle. Earl Harold Godwineson, though having no hereditary claim, seized power and had himself crowned king at Westminster on 6 January, as King Harold II. He decisively defeated an invading Scandinavian force under the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada, at the battle of Stamford Bridge (25 September), but was himself killed and his army destroyed at Hastings by the forces of Duke William of Normandy (14 October 1066). King William I's coronation on 25 December 1066 initiated the rule of his dynasty and the start of a dramatic replacement of the entire English aristocracy by a new ruling class of French-speaking barons, whose cultural domination of England was to last for some three centuries.

## NOTES

1. For general surveys, see L. Musset, *Les invasions: les vagues Germaniques* (Paris, 1965), translated as *The Germanic Invasions: the Making of Europe AD 400–600*

(London, 1975); and more recently G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007) and C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2005), esp. pp. 80–124.

2. Roman coinage is conveniently surveyed in R. Reece, *The Coinage of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2002). There is as yet no conclusive proof that Latin was in general use in late Roman towns in Britain for everyday purposes, in the manner that the Vindolanda tablets establish this for a second-century military site.

3. For minimizing interpretations of the role of Christianity in Roman Britain, see D. Watts, *Religion in Late-Roman Britain: Forces of Change* (London, 1998); W. H. C. Frend, 'Roman Britain: a Failed Promise', in *The Cross Goes North*, ed. M. Carver (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 79–91; and N. Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 116–20, 127–8; for maximizing interpretations, see C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (London, 1981); M. Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain* (London, 1984), pp. 214–16; and D. Petts, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2003).

4. For the view that Roman towns had already been in decay in the fourth century, see R. Reece, 'Town and Country: the End of Roman Britain', *World Archaeology* 12 (1980), 77–92; for the related view that Christianity had been particularly weak in Roman Britain, see Frend, 'A Failed Promise'.

5. The spectacular hoards of late Roman silver that include Christian items, such as those at Canterbury, Corbridge, Hoxne, Mildenhall, Water Newton and Traprain Law, stand witness to the insecurity of that aristocracy in the late fourth or early fifth century, and also to its failure to recover that wealth. See J. P. C. Kent and K. S. Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World: Gold and Silver AD 300–700* (London, 1977), pp. 15–20.

6. The best general introduction remains *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. J. Campbell, E. John and P. Wormald (Oxford, 1989), pp. 20–44; for individual kingdoms, see *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. R. Bassett (Leicester, 1989), and B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990); for the English primary sources, late though they are, see *EHD*, pp. 148–58 (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*), and 642–51 (Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*).

7. For the mixture of burial rites in England from *c.* 400–700, see *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. H. Hamerow, D. Hinton and S. Crawford (Oxford, 2011), pp. 221–87.

8. See A. Bammesberger, 'The Place of English in Germanic and Indo-European', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, I, *The Beginnings to 1066* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 26–66; and the papers of P. Schrijver, R. Coates, H. Tristram, O. J. Padel and D. Probert in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 165–244. For place-names, see M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England* (London, 1978); and M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000).

9. The fundamental edition remains *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969). Colgrave's translation was conveniently reissued under the same title by Oxford World's Classics with updated annotation, ed. J. McClure and R. Collins (Oxford, 1994).

10. The best account of the conversion remains H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (London, 1990), which can be supplemented by N. J. Higham, *The Convert Kings* (Manchester, 1997).

11. For the territorial impact of 'minsters' on English material culture and ecclesiastical topography, see J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 8–228; for a wider reassessment of English monasticism, see S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600–900* (Cambridge, 2006).

12. For the laws in question, see *EHD*, pp. 391–478; for parallel OE text and translation, see *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and trans. F. L. Attenborough (Cambridge, 1922), and *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1925).

13. Convenient introductions are R. W. V. Elliot, *Runes: an Introduction*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1989) and R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1999); for the continental origins, see *Old English Runes and their Continental Background*, ed. A. Bammesberger (Heidelberg, 1991). The inscribing of *The Dream of the Rood* in runes upon the Ruthwell Cross (see below, ch. 16) warns against the presumption that runes were only used for texts of a few words.

14. M. Lapidge, 'The School of Theodore and Hadrian', *ASE* 15 (1986), 45–72, at 53–62; for the texts, see *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, ed. B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, CSASE 10 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 297–424.

15. For the difficulty of dating the composition of anonymous poetry, see below chs. 3, 6 and 8. Even the composition of *Beowulf* is still attributed to various periods between the eighth and the turn of the eleventh century; see the essays in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981), and esp. M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41.

16. The fundamental study here, whatever the date of *Beowulf*, is P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. T. Farrell, Brit. Archaeol. Reports 46 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32–95, reprinted in his *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. S. Baxter (Oxford, 2006), pp. 30–105.

17. The interpretation of these processes by F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), pp. 206–12, has been subject to detailed revision, as the charter and numismatic sources have come to be better understood; see e.g. N. Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 111–14; and Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, pp. 111–17.

18. Key modern studies of the 'Bretwaldaship' include E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 1–63; P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald *et al.* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129; and S. Keynes, 'Rædwald the Bretwalda', in *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. C. B. Kendall and P. S. Wells (Minneapolis, MN, 1992), pp. 103–23.

19. R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols. (London, 1975–83); for the Staffordshire Hoard, see K. Leahy and R. Bland, *The Staffordshire Hoard* (London 2009). A lower level of royal (or aristocratic) display is represented by the burial at Prittlewell (Essex); see S. Hirst *et al.*, *The Prittlewell Prince* (London, 2004).

20. For the archbishopric of Lichfield and its association with Offa's plans to incorporate Kent and other kingdoms within Mercia, see Brooks, *Church of Canterbury*,

pp. 111–27; for the changing judgement of Alcuin, the Anglo-Saxon scholar at Charlemagne's court, on Offa's policies before and after his death, see *EHD*, nos. 198 and 202 (pp. 849–51, 854–6).

21. *EHD*, no. 193 (pp. 842–4). Modern study of the Vikings derives from P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London, 1962), who used archaeological and numismatic evidence to challenge the negative reactions of the victims of Viking raids and to minimize the exaggerations of monastic writers. N. Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century: the Crucible of Defeat', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 29 (1979), 1–20, suggested that contemporary annals may be more trustworthy than Sawyer allowed. There is a valuable Europe-wide synthesis in S. Coupland, 'The Vikings in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England to 911', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, II, *c. 700–900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 190–201. The course of the recorded Viking raids is mapped clearly in D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 32–54.

22. *EHD*, pp. 192–5.

23. Sawyer, *Age of the Vikings*, pp. 145–67 challenged scholars to rethink the interpretation of Scandinavian place-names; see K. Cameron, 'Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs, parts I–III', in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasions and Scandinavian Settlements*, ed. K. Cameron (Nottingham, 1975), pp. 115–71, and G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavian Settlement in the British Isles and Normandy: What the Place-Names Reveal', in *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350*, ed. J. Adams and K. Holman (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 137–47. For a synthesis from an archaeological standpoint, see D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (Manchester, 2006).

24. A most valuable collection of translated sources for King Alfred is S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983); for Alfred's military reforms, see R. Abels, *Alfred the Great* (London, 1998), pp. 194–207.

25. For the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, see *EHD*, pp. 887–90; for other productions of Alfred's court school, see Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 123–62; for the debates on the nature of Alfred's role, see M. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23, and J. Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 189–215.

26. We have law-codes in the name of every king from Alfred (871–99) to Cnut (1016–36); see *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and trans. Attenborough, and *Laws from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and trans. Robertson; for the workings of the system, see the articles of P. Wormald on 'Frankpledge' and 'Oaths' and of S. D. Keynes on 'Shire' in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge *et al.* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 192–3, 338–9, 420–2.

27. There is still no modern survey of the whole Anglo-Saxon coinage, but P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, I, *The Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1986) covers the period to the mid-tenth century; J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, I, *c. 600–1272*, 3rd edn (London, 1994) lists the succession of coin types; and D. M. Metcalf, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and*

*Norman Coin-Finds, c. 975–1086*, Royal Numismatic Society 32 (London, 1998) covers circulation in the later period.

28. The suggestion that by 1066 about one-tenth of the population already lived in towns was made by P. Sawyer, 'The Wealth of England in the Eleventh Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 15 (1965), 145–64, at 164, from estimates of the English population at the time of *Domesday Book*. J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), p. 189, supports figures in that range, rather than the cautious minimizing estimates of H. C. Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 89, 302–9, 364–8. For a survey of urban development from archaeological evidence, see R. A. Hall, '*Burhs* and Boroughs: Defended Places, Trade and Towns', in *Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, pp. 600–21.

29. Both authors are particularly distinguished for their Old English sermons ('homilies'), which utilize a wide range of patristic and Carolingian theological and hagiographical works; both have distinctive prose styles and their works were extensively disseminated in monastic libraries in the eleventh century. For references, see below, chs. 9, 11 and 15.

30. For the development of the Anglo-Scottish border, see G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Anglo-Scottish Border', in his *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London, 1973), pp. 139–61; M. O. Anderson, 'Lothian and the Early Scottish Kings', *Scottish Historical Review* 39 (1960), 98–112; and A. A. M. Duncan, 'The Battle of Carham 1018', *Scottish Historical Review* 55 (1976), 20–8.

31. Modern understanding of Æthelred's reign derives from the essays in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. Hill, British Archaeological Reports, Brit. ser. 59 (1978), and from S. D. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980).

32. For body armour, see N. P. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', in *Ethelred the Unready*, ed. Hill, pp. 81–104; for re-walling boroughs in stone, see *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, 1, *600–1300*, ed. D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 42, 172–3, 233; for the scale of taxation to pay off the Danes, see M. K. Lawson, 'The Collection of Danegeld and Heregeld in the Reigns of Æthelred II and Cnut', *EHR* 99 (1984), 721–38, and 'These Stories Look True', *EHR* 104 (1989), 951–61.

33. *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford, 1991) provides text, translation and an important range of critical studies, but the poem's precise date of composition remains uncertain; see also below, chs. 3 and 6.

34. For Cnut's rule and his dynasty, see M. K. Lawson, *Cnut, England's Viking King* (London, 2004); and for the exceptional political role of two eleventh-century queens, P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith* (Oxford, 1997).

35. F. Barlow, *King Edward the Confessor* (London, 1970), provides the standard, perhaps unduly sympathetic, analysis of the reign.

# 2

HELMUT GNEUSS

# The Old English language

Most Old English poetry and a considerable amount of Old English prose is now accessible through Modern English translations. But in order to understand fully and appreciate the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period – its style, verse structure and content – it is necessary to read the texts in their original language. The following chapter is intended as an introduction to Old English, with emphasis on those characteristics and developments that distinguish this older stage of the language from Modern English. The chapter is not, however, meant as a grammar or work of reference, particularly since some simplification of the complex linguistic facts has been unavoidable. Some standard works on Old English language are listed in 'Further reading' (see pp. 334–5).[1]

For the speaker and reader of Modern English who is beginning to study Old English, texts written in that language may at first appear strange and somewhat difficult. This is due mainly to the momentous changes that English has undergone during the last nine hundred years of its development, particularly during the Middle English period (*c.* 1100–1500), when the structure of English changed from that of an inflected language to one with hardly any inflexional endings, when sound-changes affected the pronunciation and spelling of most of the vocabulary, and when this vocabulary became subject to almost revolutionary changes owing to the loss of a large number of older, native words and to the large-scale borrowing of words from other languages, especially French and Latin.

On the other hand, English has to this day retained characteristic elements of its earliest recorded period: first, a 'basic' vocabulary of native origin, including most of the pronouns, conjunctions and prepositions, the auxiliary verbs and the verbs *to have* and *to be* as well as a large number of nouns, adjectives and verbs used in all types of speech; and secondly, certain grammatical features nowadays often labelled 'irregular', like the surviving strong verbs *(sing–sang–sung)* and plural forms like *foot–feet*, *ox–oxen*, *sheep–sheep*. A knowledge of Old English therefore is not only a prerequisite to a proper study of Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry; it also gives the student an

insight into the historical background of the lexical and morphological structure of present-day English.[2]

## The prehistory of Old English

Old English (or Anglo-Saxon, as it is sometimes called, the term commonly used until the early twentieth century) is the language spoken by native Anglo-Saxon speakers from the time of their earliest settlements in Britain, in the fifth century, until the late eleventh century, when the character of the language began to change rapidly.

Since the science of comparative philology was established in the nineteenth century it has become possible to trace the prehistory of Old English and its relationship to other languages. As early as the twelfth century, scholars had observed certain similarities in the vocabulary of several European languages, similarities that apparently were not due to borrowing, but only in the nineteenth century did scholars like Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) develop reliable methods for determining the genetic relationship of languages, and attempts could then be made even to reconstruct unrecorded, early stages of a language.

As a result, we now have the concept of the Indo-European family of languages, languages that are so closely related, especially in their earliest recorded stages, that they must be assumed to be derived from a common ancestor, 'Indo-European', which does not survive, but whose phonology and morphology have been tentatively reconstructed, while its original home remains uncertain. The more important languages or language groups that go back to Indo-European are Indic, Iranian, Armenian, Greek, Italic (with Latin as the best-known dialect), Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, Slavic and Albanian. The criteria that enable us to prove the genetic relationship of these languages are: a common basic vocabulary, and a large number of further lexical correspondences among all or at least some of the languages; a common inflexional system, evidenced by close agreements in morphology and grammatical categories; and phonological correspondences that obey strict rules, or 'sound laws'. As an example, we can take the regular correspondence – formulated in 'Grimm's law' – between the voiceless stops $p$, $t$, $k$ in languages like Greek and Latin, and the voiceless spirants $f$, $\þ$ (as in ModE *thin)* and $\chi$ (as in German *ach, ich*) in the Germanic languages:

| Latin | Old English | |
|---|---|---|
| piscis | fisc | 'fish' |
| tū | þū | 'thou' |
| cor, cordis | heorte (with $\chi > h$) | 'heart' |

Old English is one of the Germanic languages which derive from a prehistoric Common Germanic originally spoken in southern Scandinavia and the northernmost parts of Germany, from where it spread in the course of the migration during the early centuries of the first millennium after Christ. Again, phonological, morphological and lexical evidence enables us to distinguish between specific language groups and individual languages that developed out of Common Germanic under various historical, political and geographical conditions. Those for which written records have been preserved are:

1  *East Germanic*: the only language in this group for which we have written evidence is Gothic; a translation of parts of the Old and New Testaments made by Bishop Ulfila in the second half of the fourth century survives and, being so early, is of great value for the reconstruction of Common Germanic.
2  *North Germanic*: from which the Scandinavian languages derive. A number of runic inscriptions go back as far as the third century AD, but extensive written texts, from Iceland and Norway, are only preserved from the twelfth century onwards.
3  *West Germanic*: the languages of this group, for which there is no written evidence before the eighth century, are Old High German (spoken in the central west and in the south of Germany), Old Saxon or Low German (spoken in northern Germany), Old Frisian (spoken in areas along the southern coast of the North Sea, and not recorded before the thirteenth century), and Old English. Linguistically, Old English and Old Frisian are closely related, but there are also significant affinities between Old English and Old Saxon.

This classification of the Germanic languages, as well as the assumption of a Common Germanic language (often called Proto-Germanic, or Primitive Germanic) is again based on precise linguistic criteria. Thus, all the Germanic languages – and therefore Common Germanic – are marked by a number of significant innovations: the accent is always on the first syllable of a word; every adjective can be inflected in two different ways (see below, pp. 27–8); and a new way of forming the past tense and past participle of verbs by means of a dental suffix is introduced with the so-called 'weak' verbs (corresponding to the so-called 'regular' verbs in Modern English: *love–loved*, as opposed to the older type *sing–sang–sung)*. Similarly, Old English is clearly differentiated from the other Germanic and West Germanic languages by developments in its inflexional system and a number of regular early sound-changes (some even going back to the pre-Insular period). The development of the diphthong *ai* of Common Germanic to OE *ā* may serve as an example:[3]

| Gothic | Old Norse | Old High German | Old Saxon | Old English | |
|--------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|---|
| stains | steinn | stein | stēn | stān | 'stone' |
| taikn | teikn | zeihhan | tēkan | tācen | 'token' |
| hailags | heilagr | heilig | hēlag | hālig | 'holy' |

## The transmission of Old English

Apart from a few inscriptions, our Old English texts are preserved in manuscripts which were nearly all written between the late ninth century and the twelfth, and which show, with few exceptions, the dialectal forms of West Saxon. The fact that our grammars and dictionaries are largely based on such texts is apt to create an impression of a relatively stable and uniform language. It is important to remember, however, that such an impression is wholly misleading. Our textual transmission, which is late and predominantly in a south-western dialectal form, tends to obscure the wide range of dialectal variation that must have obtained in a language reaching from the Channel to the Firth of Forth; it also tends to obscure the developments in sounds, inflexions, syntax and vocabulary between the period of the early settlements and the Norman Conquest. There cannot have been any written record of Old English until the Anglo-Saxons (and then only a few of them) learned to read and to write in the seventh century; from the eighth and earlier ninth centuries we only have a few glosses and two glossaries, as well as a few lines of Old English poetry, including Cædmon's famous hymn. No English prose text can be said with certainty to have been written down before the later ninth century. Some of the poetic compositions preserved in manuscripts of the late tenth or early eleventh centuries may well be modernized copies of much earlier exemplars, but it is impossible to date and localize exactly, or even to reconstitute, the original texts in these exemplars. While it seems sensible, then, that our grammars and handbooks should describe as the 'regular' forms of Old English the Early West Saxon ones of the period of King Alfred, and the slightly different ones of the time of Ælfric and Wulfstan, we must always keep in mind that our written texts provide us with a mere fraction of what was once a living language, spoken all over England for more than six centuries.

Once this has become clear, however, it seems safe to say that Old English, as compared with other contemporary languages, has been extremely well preserved. Leaving aside single-sheet documents, we still have more than 1,200 manuscript books, or fragments of such books, written or owned in Anglo-Saxon England between the late seventh and the late eleventh centuries. More than a third of them, and a considerable number of twelfth-century

manuscripts, are written wholly or partly in Old English, or contain at least short texts or glosses in that language. Within the limits outlined above we can thus form a very clear and detailed picture of what the structure and characteristics of Old English were like.[4]

### Script, spelling and pronunciation

When the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain, they brought with them the knowledge of runes. The origin of the runic alphabet is obscure; it appears to have been derived from a Roman alphabet, perhaps in the first or second century AD, and to have spread to the various tribes of the Germanic world. Runes, however, were normally used only for short inscriptions and not for literary purposes. The runic inscription on the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross, an early version of part of the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, is a notable exception.[5]

During the course of the seventh century, Anglo-Saxons in religious institutions throughout the country must have learned to write. Presumably they would at first write Latin texts, but it would very soon have been necessary to record English personal and local names in writing, to supply Old English glosses explaining Latin words here and there, and finally to write Old English texts in prose or verse. In order to do so, the Latin alphabet had to be adapted so as to represent the English speech sounds. The type of handwriting used for the purpose was the same as that employed for most Latin texts (except in de luxe manuscripts) at the time in England, namely Insular minuscule, which in various forms remained the script of all English texts until the early twelfth century.[6]

Adapting the Latin alphabet to English speech was not overly difficult. Most of the vowels and consonants in English corresponded to those in Latin, at least as long as certain niceties of articulation and pronunciation were disregarded. For some Old English speech sounds (a term here employed in the sense of the linguist's 'phoneme'; Anglo-Saxon writing can be said to have been phonemic, with few exceptions) there were no Latin equivalents, and the alphabet was therefore supplemented by the vowel *æ*, by combinations of vowels for the Old English diphthongs (*ea*, *eo*), and by newly introduced symbols for two English consonantal sounds: (1) ð and þ (the latter being a runic symbol), used interchangeably for the sounds corresponding to ModE *th* in *thin* and *rather*; and (2) *ƿ*, another runic symbol, for a bilabial semi-vowel, as *w* in ModE *win*. In modern editions of Old English texts, the spelling is usually that of the Anglo-Saxon scribe, though *ƿ* has nearly always been replaced by *w*. Some editions unnecessarily reproduce the Insular letter-form ᵹ for *g*.

The speaker of Modern English who wants to read Old English texts aloud needs to observe the following points:

1 In accordance with the principles of Germanic accentuation, all words are stressed on the first syllable, except for words formed with a number of unstressed prefixes, especially *ge-*, *a-*, *be-*, *for-*, as in *gewínnan* 'conquer', *forléosan 'lose', etc.

2 As opposed to Modern English and Modern French, Old English has no 'silent' letters; every written letter, including word-final *-e* and the initial consonants in OE *cnāwan* 'to know' or *wrītan* 'to write', has to be pronounced.

3 The phonetic value of a letter is not always that of Modern English; it is always that of Latin and therefore often that of other modern languages (Italian, French, German). This is particularly important for the pronunciation of the vowels, which is explained in the following table:

| | |
|---|---|
| a | as in English *father*, but shortened |
| ā | as in English *father* |
| æ | as in English *cat* |
| ǣ | as (approximately) in English *mare* |
| e | as in English *let* |
| ē | as the first element of the diphthong in English *lane* |
| ea | as *æ* followed by *a* |
| ēa | as *ǣ* followed by *a* |
| eo | as *e* followed by *o* |
| ēo | as *ē* followed by *o* |
| i | as in English *pin* |
| ī | as in English *see* |
| o | as in English *got* |
| ō | as in French *côte* or in German *rot* |
| u | as in English *put* |
| ū | as in English *mood* |
| y | as in French *tu* or in German *Sünde* |
| ȳ | as in French *rue* or in German *Süden* |

Long and short vowels must be kept distinct because they are 'phonemic', that is, they distinguish different words, as OE *god* 'God' and *gōd* 'good'. Most text editions for beginners indicate vowel length by means of a superscript macron, although no such convention was followed systematically by Anglo-Saxon scribes. Diphthongs are usually stressed on their first element.

The pronunciation of most of the consonants corresponds to that of Modern English. Exceptions are:

(a) the spirants *f*, *ð/þ* and *s*, which are voiceless initially and finally, as in ModE *foot/thief, thin/cloth, sin/grass*, and voiced internally between

vowels or voiced consonants, as in ModE *drive* (OE *drīfan)*, *bathe* and *rose*.

(b) *h*, which is a breathing initially, as in Modern English, but finally and internally is a voiceless spirant as in German *ach* or *ich*.

(c) *c*, *g* and *sc*, and also *cc* and *cg*. For the somewhat complex rules affecting the pronunciation of these letters, a grammar should be consulted. As a general rule – to which, however, there are exceptions – it may be said that *c* is always a stop (as in ModE *can*) if followed or preceded by a 'dark' vowel (*a*, *o*, *u*), or if followed by a consonant, but often represents an affricate (as in ModE *chin*) if followed by *æ, e, i*, or preceded by *i*, while *g* – in early Old English actually a velar spirant – should be pronounced as a stop (as in ModE *go*) if followed or preceded by 'dark' vowels, or if followed by a consonant; otherwise it is frequently a spirant to be pronounced like the initial sound in ModE *yell*.

## Inflexional morphology

The structural development of English is often characterized as a gradual change from a 'synthetic' to an 'analytic' language. Synthetic languages indicate grammatical categories and syntactic functions by means of inflexional endings; analytic languages, in order to mark such categories and functions, employ other means instead of endings: fixed word-order, and elements like prepositions (for case-endings), adverbs (for the comparison of adjectives), auxiliary verbs (for moods and tenses of verbs), personal pronouns (instead of verbal inflexion).

This development had its beginnings in Common Germanic when the word-accent was shifted to and fixed on the initial syllable. As a consequence of this, and as the word-initial accent obviously had a strong, 'dynamic' character, there was an increasing tendency to weaken and reduce the final syllables, those carrying the inflexional endings, in all the Germanic languages. This tendency developed into a regular process which can be described in terms of rules or 'laws', with these results for Old English:

1 Old English is no longer a fully inflected or purely 'synthetic' language. Noun endings, for example, no longer clearly differentiate cases or even declensions. Thus the endings *-e* or *-an* occur in several declensions and with several functions (indicating different cases, in singular and plural of masculine, feminine and neuter words); very often, case, gender and number of a noun in a particular context have to be ascertained from an accompanying pronoun (article) or adjective.

2 The original morphological structure of the language has been obscured. In Common Germanic (as in Latin and other Indo-European languages), the forms of most nouns were combinations of three elements (cf. Latin *mens–a–m*): the root, carrying the lexical meaning; a thematic element, e.g. a vowel, indicating the inflexional class of the word and so, for nouns, the declension; and the inflexional ending, differing according to case and number; this may coalesce with the thematic element. Most verbal forms, by the way, were based on the same principle.

Comparison and reconstruction have made it possible for the grammarians of Old English to classify the nouns (and other word classes) according to this structural principle, but for those consulting the grammars it is not always immediately obvious why a word belongs (say) in what is called the *a*-declension. Here, by way of explanation, is an example taken from the declension of masculine *a*-nouns, the most frequent class of noun in Old English, to which about 35 per cent of all nouns belong. The Common Germanic forms (reconstructed and therefore marked with an asterisk), particularly in the singular, can give us a fairly clear idea of the morphology of this declension, and where its designation comes from, while the Old English forms show us the results of the process of weakening in unstressed syllables, with endings that are no longer all unambiguous. This process continued, and there is evidence that in spoken late Old English *a*, *e*, *o* and *u* in unaccented position had all coalesced into a 'neutral' vowel like that in the final syllable of ModE *token*. The Modern English plural in *-s*, incidentally, derives from the nominative and accusative plural forms of this class:

|     |      | Common Germanic | Old English |         |
| --- | ---  | --------------- | ----------- | ------- |
| Sg. | Nom. | *stainaz        | stān        | 'stone' |
|     | Gen. | *stainasa       | stānes      |         |
|     | Dat. | *stainai        | stāne       |         |
|     | Acc. | *stainam        | stān        |         |
| Pl. | Nom. | *stainōs        | stānas      |         |
|     | Gen. | *stainōm        | stāna       |         |
|     | Dat. | *stainumiz      | stānum      |         |
|     | Acc. | *stainans       | stānas      |         |

Four other Old English noun classes are frequent; their paradigms may illustrate what has previously been said about morphological developments in Old English, as may also the fact that some of the less frequent classes tend to adopt forms from the *a*- and *ō*-declensions.

| Class | | neuter ă | feminine ō | weak masculine -n | weak feminine -n |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Approximate percentage of OE nouns* | | *25* | *25* | *9* | *5* |
| Sg. | Nom. | scip 'ship' | giefu 'gift' | guma 'man' | tunge 'tongue' |
| | Gen. | scipes | giefe | guman | tungan |
| | Dat. | scipe | giefe | guman | tungan |
| | Acc. | scip | giefe | guman | tungan |
| Pl. | Nom. | scipu | giefa | guman | tungan |
| | Gen. | scipa | giefa | gumena | tungena |
| | Dat. | scipum | giefum | gumum | tungum |
| | Acc. | scipu | giefa | guman | tungan |

Please note that the preceding table is a highly simplified representation of the four noun classes, disregarding various subclasses and other special developments.[7]

It will have become clear that the grammatical categories which determine the forms of Old English nouns are case, number and gender. In view of the recent extension of the meaning of ModE *gender* it seems appropriate to remind the reader that the word here is a purely grammatical term: in Old English as in the other Indo-European languages, *every* noun, no matter whether it denoted a living being or not, belonged to one of the three genders, while the various declensions could be restricted to one of the three genders, or could comprise subtypes for two or even three genders. Personal nouns in Old English are usually masculine or feminine, in accordance with their meaning, but even here we have exceptions like *wīf* 'woman, wife', or *mægden* 'girl, young woman', which are neuter.

*Adjectives* in Old English are inflected like substantives, but with one important difference: for every adjective there are two types of inflexion.

1 the 'strong' inflexion, in most cases a type related to the *a*- and *ō*-declensions of nouns, but with some special endings. The forms of this inflexional type are used whenever the adjective is predicative, or when it modifies a noun referring to something indefinite and not previously introduced, especially when a demonstrative pronoun does not precede the adjective.
2 the 'weak' inflexion, which follows the paradigm of the *n*-declension. This form is used when the adjective modifies a noun previously referred to or specified; a demonstrative or possessive pronoun usually precedes the adjective.

The following example will demonstrate the difference:

Hī sendon þā sōna þām gesǣlig*an* cyninge sumne ārwurð*ne* bisceop, Aidan gehāten.

They then at once sent to the blessed king [referred to previously in the context] a venerable bishop called Aidan [not as yet referred to].

Here are the two paradigms for an adjective *(gōd* 'good'):

| | | Strong | | | Weak | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *masc.* | *fem.* | *neuter* | *masc.* | *fem.* | *neuter* |
| Sg. | Nom. | gōd | gōd | gōd | gōda | gōde | gōde |
| | Gen. | gōdes | gōdre | gōdes | gōdan | gōdan | gōdan |
| | Dat. | gōdum | gōdre | gōdum | gōdan | gōdan | gōdan |
| | Acc. | gōdne | gōde | gōd | gōdan | gōdan | gōde |
| Pl. | Nom. | gode | gōda | gōd | gōdan | gōdan | gōdan |
| | Gen. | godra | godra | gōdra | gōdra | gōdra | gōdra |
| | Dat. | gōdum | gōdum | gōdum | gōdum | gōdum | gōdum |
| | Acc. | gode | gōda | gōd | gōdan | gōdan | gōdan |

The forms of the *demonstrative pronoun* – which serves as the definite article (ModE *the*) and, as mentioned above, often provides a means of identifying case, number and gender of the noun it precedes – are as follows:

| | Singular | | | Plural |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *masc.* | *fem.* | *neut* | *all genders* |
| Nom. | sē | sēo | þæt | þā |
| Gen. | þæs | þǣre | þæs | þāra |
| Dat. | þǣm | þǣre | þǣm | þǣm |
| Acc. | þone | þā | þæt | þā |
| Instr. | þȳ | þǣre | þȳ | þǣm |

The fifth case, an instrumental, is only here preserved as a clearly distinguishable masculine and neuter form.

In the *personal pronoun* there are still separate forms for the second person singular and plural; the second person plural is never used – as in Middle English, where it is a polite form of address – for the singular. The dual forms ('we two', 'you two') are a remarkable survival from a system in which *all* inflected words had three numbers, singular, dual and plural.

|      |      | First person | Second person | Third person masc. | fem. | neuter |
|------|------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|------|--------|
| Sg.  | Nom. | ic           | þū            | hē                 | hēo  | hit    |
|      | Gen. | mīn          | þīn           | his                | hire | his    |
|      | Dat. | mē           | þē            | him                | hire | him    |
|      | Acc. | mē           | þē            | hine               | hī   | hit    |
| Dual | Nom. | wit          | git           | –                  | –    | –      |
|      | Gen. | uncer        | incer         | –                  | –    | –      |
|      | Dat. | unc          | inc           | –                  | –    | –      |
|      | Acc. | unc          | inc           | –                  | all genders | – |
| Pl.  | Nom. | wē           | gē            | hī                 |      |        |
|      | Gen. | ūre          | ēower         | hira, heora        |      |        |
|      | Dat. | ūs           | ēow           | him                |      |        |
|      | Acc. | ūs           | ēow           | hī                 |      |        |

Old English *verbs* have only two formally distinguished tenses: present and past; the distinction between the forms of the indicative mood and the subjunctive mood inherited from Common Germanic has been largely preserved. For the use of these forms, see below, pp. 32–3.

The majority of the verbs belongs to one of two inflexional types: 'strong' and 'weak'. Strong verbs form their past by means of a change of the vowel in the verbal root (cf. ModE *sing–sang–sung*); weak verbs do not change the vowel, but add a dental suffix *(-d-, -t-)* in the past forms (cf. ModE *love–loved, keep–kept)*. The following paradigms can do no more than illustrate this principle with examples from the three most common inflexional classes of Old English verbs. A thorough knowledge of the verbal system, which is essential for reading Old English texts, must be acquired from a grammar. Note that plural forms in Old English verbs are identical for all three persons.

|             |        | Strong 'to sing' | Weak class I 'to hear' | Weak class II 'to love' |
|-------------|--------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Present     |        |                  |                        |                          |
| Indicative  | Sg. 1  | singe            | hīere                  | lufige                   |
|             | 2      | singst           | hīerst                 | lufast                   |
|             | 3      | singð            | hīerð                  | lufað                    |
|             | Pl.    | singað           | hīerað                 | lufiað                   |
| Subjunctive | Sg. 1  |                  |                        |                          |
|             | 2      | singe            | hīere                  | lufige                   |
|             | 3      |                  |                        |                          |
|             | Pl.    | singen           | hīeren                 | lufigen                  |

Past

| Indicative | Sg. 1 | sang | hīerde | lufode |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 | sunge | hīerdest | lufodest |
| | 3 | sang | hīerde | lufode |
| | Pl. | sungon | hīerdon | lufodon |
| Subjunctive | Sg. 1 ⎫ | | | |
| | 2 ⎬ | sunge | hīerde | lufode |
| | 3 ⎭ | | | |
| | Pl. | sungen | hīerden | lufoden |
| Present imperative | Sg. 2 | sing | hīer | lufa |
| | Pl. | singað | hīerað | lufiað |
| Infinitive | | singan | hīeran | lufian |
| Present participle | | singende | hīerende | lufiende |
| Past participle | | gesungen | gehīered | gelufod |

The strong verbs are divided into seven classes according to the root vowels of the verbs in the various forms. The weak verbs are divided into three classes, depending on different vocalic suffixes which are no longer clearly distinguishable; only four verbs remain in the third class: *habban*, *libban*, *secgan*, *hycgan* ('have, live, say, think').

A third type of verbal inflexion besides strong and weak verbs is represented by the so-called preterite-present verbs (with a strong present and a weak past); they include the frequently used auxiliaries *can*, *sceal*, *mōt* and *mæg* ('can', 'shall', 'must' and 'may'). A fourth type of 'anomalous' verb comprises *willan*, *dōn*, *gān* and *bēon* ('will', 'do', 'go' and 'be').

## Syntax

The sentence structure of Old English is in no way 'primitive'. Authors, particularly of Old English prose, are well capable of constructing complex sentences, making use of coordination and subordination, and employing grammatical forms and syntactic devices for stylistic purposes, although there are some translations – like that of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* – which appear clumsy or unidiomatic in places, and although there is some early prose – like the episode of Cynewulf and Cyneheard in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (under the year 755) – in which syntactic relationships are not always clearly expressed.

The following examples are meant to illustrate the most important points in which Old and Modern English syntactic usage differ markedly:

1 Besides coordination and subordination, we frequently find *correlative structures*, in which two (or more) clauses are introduced by the same

adverbial element, like *þā . . . þā . . .*; *þonne . . . þonne . . .*; *þær . . . þær. . .*; in such sentences, we tend to translate one element as a conjunction, the other as an adverb (or not at all).

þā hē ðā þās andsware onfēng, þā ongon hē sōna singan.

When he received this answer, (then) he immediately began to sing.

2  *Word-order* in Old English is not as strictly regulated as in Modern English. But, as has been pointed out above, Old English is no longer a fully inflected language; thus, about 60 per cent of all Old English nouns have the same form for nominative and accusative in the singular, and all nouns have the same form for these two cases in the plural. As a result – if we consider only sentences with the three elements S(ubject), V(erb) and O(bject) – we see that the dominant type of word-order in Old English prose is S–V–O, just as in Modern English; in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*, 73 per cent of all main clauses show this order. In subordinate clauses, however, a different, older type of order is still frequent: S–O–V.

And se Ceadwalla slōh and tō sceame
tūcode þā Norðhymbran lēode        } *main clause*
æfter heora hlāfordes fylle,
oð þæt Ōswold se ēadiga his yfelynysse  } *subordinate clause*
ādwǣscte.

And this Ceadwalla slew and shamefully ill-treated the Northumbrian people after their lord's fall, until Oswald the blessed extinguished his wickedness.

Of the four other possible types of word-order, V–S–O is usual in interrogative sentences (where the Modern English periphrasis with *do* is unknown) and in sentences introduced by an adverbial 'head':

Gehȳrst þū, sǣlida?    'Do you hear, sailor?'
Þā ridon hīe þider.    'Then they rode there.'

The remaining types of word-order are much less frequent, but all do occur.

3  In an inflected language like Old English, *concord* has to be observed; nouns, adjectives and pronouns have to agree in number, case and gender (and similarly subject and verb in number and person), thus indicating syntactic relationships:

Hī sendon þā sōna *þām* gesǣlig*an* cyninge [dative] sum*ne* ārwurð*ne* bisceop [accusative].

They then at once sent to the blessed king a venerable bishop.

4 The use of the *oblique cases*, genitive, dative and accusative of nouns and pronouns as objects, is determined by the preceding verb, adjective or preposition:

Hwaet, ðā Ōswold cyning *his* cym*es* [genitive] fægnode.

King Oswald rejoiced at his coming.

þā flotan stōdon gearowe, wī*ges* [genitive] georne.

The vikings stood ready, eager for the fight.

þā sende se cyning sōna *þām* þearf*um* [dative] *þone* sylfren*an* disc [accusative].

Then the king immediately sent to the poor the silver dish. [Like *þearfum* in this example, adjectives can generally be used in the function of nouns.]

Sum man fēoll on īs*e* [dative].

A man slipped on the ice.

5 For the use of *weak and strong adjective forms*, see above (pp. 27–8).
6 The Old English verb has only two formally distinguished *tenses*, present and past: *ic singe, ic sang*. The future may be expressed by the present or, occasionally, with the help of the auxiliaries *sculan* or *willan*, as in Modern English, though these two verbs no doubt always retained something of their original modal force.

   The past has to serve for what in Modern English (and Latin) is the past, the perfect and the pluperfect. Compare:

Æfter ðan ðe Augustinus tō Engla lande becōm, wæs sum æðele cyning, Ōswald gehāten, on Norðhymbra lande.

After Augustine *had come* to England, there was a noble king named Oswald in the land of the Northumbrians.

But complex forms with *habban* 'to have' as auxiliary (or *wesan* 'to be' with intransitive verbs) are beginning to appear in Old English, as in:

Hē fulworhte on Eferwīc þæt ǣnlice mynster þe his mǣg Ēadwine ǣr begunnen hæfde.

He completed in York the noble minster that his kinsman Eadwine had previously begun.

7 Most Old English verb forms can still be distinguished according to their *moods*, and although the use of indicative and subjunctive cannot be as rigorously defined as in Latin, it is possible to give hard-and-fast rules for their employment. Indicative forms are used in most main and subordinate clauses, whereas the subjunctive appears in main clauses expressing a wish

or command, in object and adverbial clauses expressing negation, uncertainty or futurity, and especially in concessive and final clauses, as well as in conditional clauses where the condition is hypothetical or unreal. Compare:

Ōswold hine [i.e. Aidan] ārwurðlīce underfēng his folce tō ðearfe, þæt heora gelēafa wurde [*indicative*: wearð] awend eft tō Gode.

Oswald honourably received him, as a benefit to his people, in order that their faith should be turned again to God.

Gif þū sīe [*indicative*: eart] Godes sunu, cweþ þæt þā stānas tō hlāfum geweorþan [*indicative*: geweorþað].

If you are God's son, command that the stones become loaves (of bread).[8]

## Word-formation

In Old English, as well as in the Common Germanic language from which it developed, new words could be freely formed from existing words and elements by means of the three following processes:

1 *Compounding*: two (or more) independent words – most frequently nouns and adjectives – are combined so as to form a new word, as in ModE *teapot* or *loan-word*. As for the semantics of such formations, we can say that the meaning of the second element is usually determined or modified by the first: a *mynster-mann* is a man who lives in a *mynster* (monastery), hence a monk; a *dōm-bōc* is a book that has to do with *dōm*, laws and judgement, hence a law-book or law-code; *stæf-cræft* is the skill or science of letters (*stæf*) and writing, hence grammar; and *wīd-cūþ* is something that is known (*cūþ*) widely.

   Other types of compounds are less frequent, such as combinations of adjective + substantive like *bærfōt* 'bare-footed' or *heard-heort* 'hard-hearted', which are used as adjectives. It has also to be remembered that, just as in Modern English, the meaning of a compound cannot always be deduced from its component parts. Thus OE *godspell* is not just any 'good narrative' or 'good tidings' *(gōd + spell)*, but the Gospel, while *godspellbōc* (an example in which more than two elements are combined) is the book containing the Gospels.

   Morphologically, the second element of the compound is inflected like the simplex word. The first element remains unchanged. Most often it appears to be in the form of the nominative singular, as in *dæg-rēd* 'dawn', but originally this element stood in the uninflected form of the stem (i.e. root + thematic element), as can be seen in examples like *hilde-wīsa* 'leader in the fight'. In a number of compounds, the first element is

found in the genitive singular (cf. ModE *craftsman)*, as in *sunnan-dæg* 'Sunday', *dæges-ēage* 'daisy'.

2  *Prefixation*: this could be considered as a special type of compounding. An element that cannot occur independently or (using 'prefix' in a wider sense) a local particle is prefixed to an independent word (noun, adjective or verb) whose meaning it modifies. Old English had a considerable number of such prefixes, many of which were lost or became unproductive in later times.

Prefixes may have several functions or meanings, like *be-*, with the sense 'over, around', or with intensifying or privative force: *be-gān* 'to traverse', 'to surround'; *be-lūcan* 'to lock up'; *be-niman* 'to take away'. Other frequently employed prefixes include *a-, æfter-, for-, fore-, forð-, in-, of-, ofer-, on-, tō-, þurh-, under-, up-, ūt-, wið-, ymb-*. The common prefix *ge-* may give a verb perfective sense, stressing the result of an action: *winnan* 'to labour', 'to fight'; *gewinnan* 'to gain', 'to conquer'. The prefix *un-* is used, as in Modern English, in order to indicate the negation or opposite of the word (mostly adjectives and adverbs) it modifies.

3  *Suffixation or derivation*: an independent word is combined with a suffix, an element that does not (or does no longer) occur by itself. Old English had a wide range of such suffixes with which new nouns, adjectives and verbs could be formed. Compare *beorht* and *beorht-nes* 'brightness'; *scyppan* and *scyppend* 'creator'; *bodian* and *bod-ung* 'preaching'; *mōd* and *mōd-ig* 'proud'; *frēond* and *frēond-līc* 'friendly'; *fisc* and *fisc-ian* 'to fish', *fisc-ere* 'fisher'.

In word-formation, we must distinguish between types that are productive during a certain period, and types that have become unproductive. Thus we have in Old English numerous new formations of abstract nouns in *-nes*, or of agent nouns in *-end*. On the other hand, there are types of word-formation that are no longer employed; they may also have become obscured by sound-changes, as in *cyme* 'arrival' from *cuman* 'come' (masculine noun, *i*-declension, derived from a verb); *dēman* 'to judge' from *dōm* 'judgement' (weak verb class I, derived from a noun); *settan* 'to set' from *sittan* 'to sit' (a causative verb, 'to cause to sit', in the weak verb class I, derived from a strong verb).

A knowledge of the principles of Old English word-formation[9] is important for the student of literature for two reasons:

1  Compounds are extremely frequent in Old English poetry. Anglo-Saxon poets employed – and often coined – them in order to satisfy the requirements of verse structure and alliteration, and also as devices of style. A special kind of device is the 'kenning', a peculiar metaphorical expression usually – but not always – in the form of a compound word, like *hwæl-weg* 'the way of the whale' = the sea; *sǣ-mearh* 'the horse of the sea' = the ship; *mere-hrægl* 'the dress of the sea' = the sail.

2 As will have become clear, Old English had a highly developed system of word-formation; compounds and formations with prefixes and suffixes in other languages, particularly in Latin, could therefore be reproduced without difficulty by combining native elements. This is what we find in the numerous Old English loan-translations to be discussed in the section on borrowing below. Compare *trinitas* with *þrī-ness* 'trinity'; *salvator* with *neri-end* and *hǣl-end* 'saviour'; *evangelizare* with *godspellian* 'to preach the Gospel'; and *crucifigere* with *rōd-fæstnian* 'to crucify'.

## Vocabulary: words and meanings

The modern reader who has become conversant with the essentials of Old English morphology and syntax will want to acquire a sound command of the vocabulary. In spite of the limitations of our written transmission (see pp. 22–3), it seems fair to say that our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon lexicon, based on about thirty thousand recorded words, or lexical units (with a total of about three million occurrences), is quite comprehensive, although there must be gaps, and although uncertainties remain as to the meaning and use of not a few words. Some specific difficulties that a modern reader has to face in this field of study may conveniently be mentioned.

In the course of the Middle English period, a not inconsiderable number of vernacular, inherited words died out. Many, but not all, of them were replaced by loan-words of French or Scandinavian origin. Some of the lost words denoted concepts or institutions that had disappeared, like *scop*, 'a court poet and singer' (reintroduced as a technical term by historians in the nineteenth century), or *gesīð*, 'a member of the nobility, a retainer'. But the majority of the losses is found among 'common' words: verbs like *fōn* 'to seize, to catch', *hātan* 'to command, to name', *niman* 'to take', *weorpan* 'to throw', *weorðan* 'to become'; nouns like *rǣd* 'counsel', *ðēod* 'people'; adjectives like *ēadig* 'wealthy, happy, blessed', *earm* 'poor'; and adverbs like *swīþe* 'very'.

Most of the Old English words that have survived into Modern English have been affected by changes of sounds and spellings. In many cases such words will be recognized easily in an Old English text (more easily still if the reader has some knowledge of the phonological history of English), as e.g. OE *stān* > *stone*, OE *strǣt* > *street*, OE *hūs* > *house*, but with others the relationship is less obvious, and some words have changed almost beyond recognition; compare OE *āgen* with ModE *own*, OE *fēowertig* with *forty*, OE *hēafod* with *head*, OE *munuc* with *monk*, OE *hlǣfdige* ('the kneader of bread') with *lady*, and so on. Morphological developments also have to be taken into account: a number of Old English strong verbs became 'regular' or 'weak' in

Modern English, so that their past is then formed on a different basis (cf. above, pp. 29–30), as in ModE *laughed*, OE *hlōh* (1st and 3rd person sg.), or ModE *helped*, OE *hulpon* (plural); similarly, OE *bōc* 'book' had nom. and acc. pl. *bēc*, but later changed into the 'regular' Modern English declension with *books* as its plural form.

More important than these formal points are differences in the signification of a word in Old and Modern English. Change of meaning is a ubiquitous process in the history of language, and whenever an Old English word is being translated we must make sure whether its Modern English etymological successor actually retains its original sense or senses. Thus, to give only a few examples, OE *fugol* survives as ModE *fowl*, but its meaning in Old English is 'bird', not 'farmyard bird'; OE *wīf* denotes 'woman, married or unmarried'; OE *ceorl* is preserved as ModE *churl*, but is completely different in sense: it is used for 'man' and 'husband' and, in the Anglo-Saxon laws, for a freeborn man who is not, however, a member of the Anglo-Saxon nobility; OE *eorl* is continued by ModE *earl*, but signifies a man, warrior, also a man of noble rank in early law-codes; only from the eleventh century onwards does it replace OE *ealdorman* in the sense 'governor of a shire' and then refers to a genuine office and so is not a mere title as in later centuries.[10]

Semantic change may operate on words with a far more complex range of meanings. An example is OE *mōd*, ModE *mood*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records three basic meanings for the word: (1) 'mind, heart, thought, feeling'; (2) 'fierce courage; spirit, stoutness, pride'; and (3) 'a frame of mind or state of feelings; one's humour, temper, or disposition at a particular time'. It notes further that sense (3) is not always distinguishable from sense (1) in early use. What matters here is that OE *mōd is* found with all these meanings, whereas in Modern English only sense (3) remains. Thus when it is said in *Beowulf* (line 1167) of Unferth (a somewhat doubtful character) *þæt he hæfde mōd micel* – 'that he had great courage' – a translation based on the modern sense of the word would be quite misleading. A look at one of the glossaries or dictionaries of Old English will help us in such cases, while for a more thorough analysis of the meaning of an Old English word it may even be useful to examine its semantic field by considering all words with closely related or overlapping senses, and all etymologically related words.[11] In our case, OE *mōdig*, an adjective derived from *mōd*, is also instructive: in Old English, its meaning is either 'brave, bold, courageous, high-spirited', or 'proud, arrogant, stubborn', whereas the only sense of *moody* today (not recorded before the late sixteenth century!) is quite different: 'characterized by gloomy moods, by frequent changes of mood'. The matter is even more complex in the case of compounds: see, for example, discussion of the word *ofer-mōd* (below, pp. 113–14).

## Language contact and borrowing

While the morphology and the syntax of Old English may be said to be essentially those of a Germanic language, this is not so with the vocabulary. Before as well as after their migration to Britain, the Anglo-Saxons were in no way isolated from other peoples, cultures and languages. The result of this can be seen in their knowledge of foreign languages, and especially in those elements of Old English that were acquired through borrowing. Etymological research has enabled us to identify lexical elements, loan-words, borrowed directly from a foreign language, but it should not be forgotten that practically any element of one language can be taken over into another language under certain conditions: sounds, inflexional endings, prefixes and suffixes, types of word-formation, syntactic constructions, idioms.

In Old English, we have mainly to do with lexical borrowing, but it seems clear that there was also Latin influence on the syntax. Absolute participles in Old English are usually explained as due to syntactic borrowing. Compare the Old English version of Matthew, vi.6:

> þū sōþlīce, þonne þū þē gebidde, gang intō þīnum bedclyfan, and þīnre dura belocenre [ = Latin *clauso ostio tuo*], bide þīnne fæder on dīglum.

> You, however, when you pray, go into your chamber and, with your door closed, pray to your father in secret.

In order fully to appreciate the significance of the Old English stock of loan-words,[12] it would be necessary to deal in some detail with the political and cultural history of the Anglo-Saxons, which is impossible within the compass of this chapter (see, however, ch. 1, above). Among the languages known to some Anglo-Saxons, at least, must have been Celtic British and Irish, Latin, Greek, Old Norse, Old Saxon and French. If we disregard place-names, it seems remarkable how few British words found their way into Old English: words like *binn* 'basket', *brocc* 'badger', *cumb* 'valley', *torr* 'projecting rock, peak', are among the few exceptions. As the activities of the Irish mission in the north were not allowed to last very long, it is not surprising that only a small number of loan-words can be traced back to that influence, among them OE *ancor* 'anchorite' and *cross*.

Latin is of paramount importance. Hundreds if not thousands of Anglo-Saxon monks and clerics – and even laymen – will have had a more or less perfect knowledge of this great international language, but long before the Insular period, the Germanic tribes along the southern coasts of the North Sea must have been in touch with the language and the civilization of the later Roman Empire when Roman merchants reached them, or when Germanic

tribes further south transmitted to them the new words and concepts. Borrowing from Latin must therefore have been going on for nearly a thousand years. Philologists and historians have developed criteria for approximately dating the reception of Latin loan-words; thus it has become clear that such words in the continental and early Insular periods were taken over in their Vulgar (or 'spoken') Latin forms and then shared the sound developments of native English words. Also, early loan-words are often common to the West Germanic languages. OE *pund*, ModE *pound*, from Latin *pondo* is an example; it is recorded in Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Frisian (and even in Gothic).

Among the earliest Latin loan-words, borrowed mainly in the continental period, are terms from the spheres of war, state and trade, building, agriculture and household, of which quite a few have survived into present-day English. Examples are *camp* 'battle' (and the derived *cempa* 'warrior'), *cāsere* 'emperor', *cēap* 'goods, purchase' (cf. ModE *cheap*), *pund* 'pound', *mīl* 'mile', *strǣt* 'street', *weall* 'wall', *tigle* 'tile, brick', *mylen* 'mill', *plante* 'plant', *wīn* 'wine', *cycene* 'kitchen', *disc* 'dish', *cīese* 'cheese', and many others, including numerous names of plants.

Latin loan-words of the early Insular period cannot easily be distinguished from those already borrowed on the Continent, but it is clear that the introduction of Christianity from the end of the sixth century onwards must have necessitated the creation of an English vocabulary for the tenets and practice of the new religion. It is thought that a few of these words will have been in use even before the Christianization, among them *cirice* 'church' and *bisceop* 'bishop'. The bulk of the new words, however, must be borrowings of the seventh and possibly eighth centuries, when terms like *abbod* 'abbot', *alter* 'altar', *mæsse* 'mass', *munuc* 'monk', *mynster* 'monastery', *prēost* 'priest', *sealm* 'psalm', and many others were taken over. This is also the time when words from the sphere of learning and education (to mention only one field in which the Church was active) first came into English, like *scōl* 'school' *and glēsan* 'to gloss'.

Many more Latin words became loan-words in the time of the Benedictine Reform of the tenth century, and afterwards. As opposed to the earlier loans, these were always adopted from written Latin, and often retain their original form and sometimes, in the case of nouns, even their inflexional endings; examples are *altāre* 'altar', *corōna* 'crown', *prophēta* 'prophet'.

Loan-words do not constitute the only form of lexical borrowing. New and foreign concepts may also be expressed by means of utilizing the resources of the native vocabulary, and this practice was of utmost importance in Old English, as can be seen in its religious vocabulary or – to give just one more example – in the grammatical terminology devised by Ælfric for his

*Grammar*, one of the standard handbooks in late Anglo-Saxon libraries. Apart from loan-words, there are two basic types of lexical borrowing: semantic loans and loan-formations.

A semantic loan is created when a native word is employed with the specific meaning of a foreign word, a meaning which is usually somehow related to the range of senses of the native word. Examples are: OE *syn* – originally 'crime, guilt, hostility' – is used in the sense of Latin *peccatum* 'an offence against the laws of God and the Church'; OE *giefu* – 'gift' – translates Latin *gratia* '(God's) grace'; OE *ēadig* and *gesælig* – originally both mean 'happy, wealthy' – render Latin *beatus* 'blessed'; OE *dæl* 'part, portion' is also employed in the sense 'part of speech, word class', translating Latin *pars* (*orationis*).

Loan-formations are more or less exact copies of foreign compounds or derivatives, whose elements ('morphemes') are reproduced by means of semantically corresponding native elements. Where this correspondence is sufficiently close, we speak of loan-translations, as in OE *þrīness* ('three-ness') = Latin *trinitas* (the 'Trinity') and the examples given above in the section on word-formation. We may speak of a loan rendition when not all the morphemes in the translation word correspond exactly to its model; thus OE *mildheortness* is a skilful rendering of Latin *misericordia* ('mercy'), but *mild* is not precisely equivalent to Latin *miser* 'miserable'.

Apart from a few who had been taught in the school of Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian at Canterbury in the later seventh century, Anglo-Saxons had no knowledge of Greek; the literate among them may have been familiar, however, with Greek words occurring in Latin texts or in glossaries. Greek loan-words in Old English must, almost without exception, have come there by way of Latin. This applies to early loans like *engel* 'angel', *bisceop* 'bishop', and *dēofol* 'devil', as well as to later ones, like *antefn* 'antiphon' or *martir* 'martyr'. An exception is the West Germanic word for church, OE *cyrice*, German *Kirche*, which is from Greek *kyriakón* 'pertaining to the Lord', a word not used in Latin.

Most of the loan-words from Latin are expressions for new concepts and technical terms. The hundreds of Scandinavian loan-words that survive into Modern English and English dialects have a wholly different character; they are mostly words of everyday life and are thus witnesses of the linguistic situation that must have prevailed in the areas of the Scandinavian settlements in the north and east of England since the late ninth century. Language contact between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians was certainly very close, but we know very little about the process of mutual borrowing; tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon authors and scribes working mainly in the south or the West Midlands were unlikely to use loan-words that had become

current in eastern or northern dialects. The bulk of the Norse loan-words appears for the first time in Middle English texts of the twelfth century, by which time the Scandinavian language in Britain was largely extinct. A small number of Scandinavian words do, however, occur in late Old English texts, and it is interesting to see that the concepts they stand for are such as must have been of particular concern for the Anglo-Saxons then: there are words for different types of ship; words like *dreng* 'young man, warrior'; *griþ* 'truce, peace'; and especially terms characteristic of the administrative system and social conditions in the Danelaw: *hūsbonda* 'householder'; *hold* 'freeholder'; *wǣpentæc* 'wapentake', a subdivision of a shire, corresponding to the Anglo-Saxon *hundred*; *hūsting* 'court, tribunal'; *ūtlaga* 'outlaw'; and even *lagu* 'law'.

The Germanic dialect which the Anglo-Saxons certainly understood very well is not – as is sometimes claimed – Old Norse, however, but Old Saxon. There were contacts of various kinds with the speakers of this dialect; the Old Saxon biblical epic *Heliand* was copied and read in England, and the Old English *Later Genesis* (*Genesis B*), interpolated into the older epic *Genesis* (*Genesis A*), has been shown to be an adaptation of an Old Saxon poem. Whether words from Old Saxon were actually borrowed is doubtful and difficult to prove, but OE *hearra* 'lord' may be considered as a genuine loan from Old Saxon.

There had always been close relations between Anglo-Saxon England and France, but only a very few loan-words from French (since this had become a language in its own right) are found in English texts before the Norman Conquest, among them those that eventually replaced the Old English words for the sin of pride, late OE *prūd* 'proud' and *prȳde* 'pride'.

### Dialects

In his *Historia ecclesiastica* (I.15), Bede reports that the early Anglo-Saxon warriors and settlers came from three powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. This tribal division was no doubt the basis for the dialects of Old English. Grammarians distinguish four such dialects:

Northumbrian – spoken north of the Humber.
Mercian – covering roughly the area between Humber and Thames, except for what is now Essex, which must have been settled by Saxons.
West Saxon – spoken in most of southern England, south of the Thames, with the exception of Cornwall and of the Kentish dialect area.
Kentish – the dialect of Kent and Surrey.

Northumbrian and Mercian, because of certain common dialect features, are collectively called Anglian. Kentish according to Bede would be the dialect of

the Jutes (whose identity and original home are controversial); he points out that these peoples settled not only in south-east England but also on the Isle of Wight and in southern Hampshire. In any event, when we speak of Old English dialects it is important to observe three points:

1 The dialects are not coextensive with the Anglo-Saxon political or modern administrative units that bear the same names. Thus the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia for a long time covered only the western part of the area designated as 'Mercian' in dialect studies, while the modern county of Northumberland is only a small part of the Northumbrian dialect area, which extended from the Humber as far north as the Firth of Forth.

2 Because of the limited written evidence, our knowledge of Old English dialects is incomplete or even fragmentary; for some dialects and periods there is no evidence at all, and even for well-documented periods and dialects we cannot say anything definite about the numerous sub-dialects that must have existed. It is impossible, therefore, to produce detailed and reliable dialect maps for the Anglo-Saxon period, like those that can be drawn for Middle and Modern English dialects and dialect features.

Our knowledge of Northumbrian is mainly dependent on a few short eighth-century texts (including the inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross and the Franks Casket, and the hymn by Cædmon, preserved in early manuscripts of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*) and on three Latin manuscripts (one of them the famous Lindisfarne Gospels) extensively glossed in English in the late tenth century.

For Mercian, we have above all two early glossaries, the Épinal Glossary of the late seventh century and the Corpus Glossary of the early ninth century, and two Latin manuscripts with continuous Old English interlinear glosses entered in the ninth (*Vespasian Psalter*) and the later tenth century (part of the *Rushworth Gospels*).

For the Kentish dialect, there is even less written evidence; there are a number of ninth-century charters, and, in a tenth-century manuscript, two Old English religious poems as well as interlinear glosses.

West Saxon is extremely well documented, but not before the late ninth century. It has become usual to distinguish Early West Saxon (late ninth and early tenth centuries) and Late West Saxon (from the later tenth century onwards), which differ in a few respects. For the early period we have three manuscripts of Old English prose that are more or less closely linked with the literary activities of King Alfred; one of these is the earliest copy of his translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*. Texts written in Late West Saxon are abundant; they include – to mention only the most prolific and important author of the period – the works of Ælfric.

3 Although this is not the place for detailed discussion of such matters, it should be mentioned that texts said to be written in a particular dialect do not always represent such a dialect in a pure form. In West Saxon writings, in particular, we often find scattered forms from other dialects, especially Anglian; for example, such forms are not uncommon in works copied in, or going back to, the Alfredian period. Various explanations for such a mixture of forms are possible; one is certainly that a scribe's dialect was not always identical with that of the text he copied.

Dialectal features may be of various kinds: phonological, morphological, syntactical, lexical. Phonological differences between the Old English dialects appear to be most characteristic, and most easy to detect; they are treated in great detail in our standard grammars. Inflexional endings are less prone to dialectal variation; in any case, conservative spelling habits in the eleventh century may conceal from us the process of the levelling of final syllables operative at the time in all dialects. This process was most rapid and advanced in Northumbrian – perhaps accelerated there by the close language-contact with Scandinavian speakers – and here the decay of the inflexional system is already clearly visible in the interlinear glosses of the tenth century.

Recent research has greatly contributed to our knowledge of the dialect vocabulary of Old English, particularly in Anglian and West Saxon. While the overwhelming majority of Old English words are in common use throughout the country (but see below for the vocabulary of poetry), there is a not inconsiderable number of words that occur only in Anglian writings and thus can even be used as tests in investigations of the provenance of an Old English text. A few examples of such Anglian words are *lēoran* 'to go, depart', *morðor* 'murder, manslaughter', *symbel* 'feast'. In identifying lexical peculiarities in dialects it is of course necessary to consider chronology and meaning. For Latin *superbia* 'pride', Anglian has *oferhygd* or derivations from this, Early West Saxon uses *ofermōd* or derived words, while Late West Saxon in most cases employs *mōdig* and related words. OE *mōdig* also occurs in originally Anglian texts, but never with the negative semantic associations of pride as a sin.[13]

Among the vernacular languages of medieval Europe, Old English stands out as the only one that, as early as the tenth century, has developed a written literary standard. For this 'Standard Old English', as it is called, see discussion by Mechthild Gretsch, 'Literacy and the uses of the vernacular', below, pp. 273–94, at 290–1.

Much has been written about the dialect of Old English poetry. Most of it is preserved in the four great poetic manuscripts, copied in the late tenth or early eleventh century. In accordance with what has been said before, their type of

language is therefore West Saxon, but Anglian phonological forms and words in them led earlier scholars to believe that Old English poetry, with few exceptions, is Anglian in origin, probably going back to the time when the great religious and cultural centres of Northumbria and Mercia had not yet been wiped out by the Scandinavians. Nearly forty years ago, however, Kenneth Sisam suggested that what we find in this poetry is in fact an artificial and archaic poetic dialect, perhaps with a dialectally mixed vocabulary. More recent research on the Old English dialect vocabulary, however, tends to support the older view and would acknowledge only a few late poems, including *Genesis B* and *The Battle of Maldon*, as genuine southern works.[14]

## The language of poetry

Linguistic usage within a speech community may vary widely according to the purpose and subject of a speaker or writer, the situation in which he speaks, his education and the social group to which he belongs. As a result, a language – apart from geographically determinable dialects – can appear in a variety of forms, styles, or 'registers'. Leaving aside such well-documented special fields as legal or medical literature, we know very little about registers in Old English, and it is therefore next to impossible to say, for example, what colloquial Old English must have been like.[15] There is, however, one exception, and that is the language of Anglo-Saxon poetry, of which we are able to form a clear and comprehensive picture.

A great deal about this subject will be said in other chapters of this book, especially about Old English verse and its linguistic basis, and about such stylistic devices as kenning and variation (see below, ch. 3). Some words about the vocabulary and syntax of poetry are appropriate in the present chapter, however.

As is to be expected, authors of Anglo-Saxon prose like Alfred, Ælfric and Wulfstan differ in their styles in general and in their choice of words in particular. There is, however, a more fundamental difference between the vocabularies of Old English prose and poetry. Anglo-Saxon poets make use of a large stock of distinctly poetic words, words that never or very rarely occur in prose, and they employ such words side by side with others that belong to the common vocabulary of Old English. Among the poetic terms are synonyms, especially for concepts like 'prince, leader', 'man, warrior', for weapons and ships, for 'fight, battle', for seafaring and the sea, but also for 'house' or 'hall', and for 'mind, soul'. Thus for 'man' and 'warrior' we have in *Beowulf* the commonly used words *man*, *wer*, *gesīð*, *ceorl* and *eorl*, but also words that are restricted to poetry: *beorn*, *guma*, *hæleð*, *rinc*, *secg*. For 'fight, battle', *The Battle of Maldon* has eleven expressions, of which only two may

also occur in prose: *gewinn* and *wīg*; four are compounds which are not found outside poetry – *beadurǣs*, *gārrǣs*, *gūþplega*, *wīgplega* – and five are simple words (or formations with the prefix *ge-*) that are part of the special vocabulary of poetry: *beadu*, *gūþ*, *hild*, *gemōt*, *getoht*.

It seems significant that not a few of these poetic words are similarly employed (in their corresponding forms) in Old Saxon, Old High German and Old Norse poetry. There can be no doubt, therefore, that this poetic vocabulary of Old English represents an ancient Germanic tradition, just like the type of verse that is used without exception for all Anglo-Saxon poetry. Also, words like *beorn*, *beadu*, *gūþ* and *hild* are frequent as elements of Old English personal names.

It is difficult to say whether the groups of words cited above, as well as other, similar groups, consist of synonyms in the strict sense of the word. While the denotation of the terms within these groups should have been the same, connotations may have differed. It is certain, however, that words that were often used with a specific, 'technical' sense in prose did not carry that sense in poetry. OE *eorl*, *ceorl*, *þegn* and *gesīð* were terms denoting certain grades of social status of the person they referred to, especially in legal prose, but in poetry their meaning was usually just as general as that of *guma* or *secg*.

Such a wealth of synonyms no doubt helped to enhance the stylistic qualities of a poem. But, above all, these words served a practical purpose: in order to satisfy the requirements of the alliterative line, the poet needed for his key concepts a fairly wide choice of words, especially nouns, with different initial sounds. Such key concepts, it should be mentioned, came not only from fields like war and seafaring, but also from Christian religion. Anglo-Saxon religious poets adapted the traditional techniques to their purposes and so were able to give expression, for example, to a concept like 'Lord', 'God' by means of differently alliterating words: *dryhten*, *frēa*, *god*, *hlāford*, *þēoden*, *wealdend*.

Another characteristic of Old English poetry, already mentioned in the section on word-formation, is the large number of noun compounds. Poets were obviously free to coin such compounds as could best serve their metrical needs and their stylistic intentions. Again, the majority of these compounds are not found outside poetry, and many of them belong in semantic fields connected with fighting and seafaring. The statistics of a well-known poem's vocabulary structure may be of some interest. In *The Battle of Maldon*, a poem of which 325 lines survive, we have a total of 535 lexical units (many of them, of course, occurring more than once). Among these 535 words there are ninety-seven (= 18 per cent) that do not (or not normally, or not with the meaning in the poem) appear in prose. Out of these ninety-seven, forty-one are poetic words, almost all recorded in other Germanic languages; nine

words have a sense that they cannot bear in Old English prose. Forty-seven are compounds, of which only three are also found in prose. Sixteen of the compounds only occur in *The Battle of Maldon* and so may well have been created by its author.

The notes on Old English syntax in a previous section of this chapter (pp. 30–3) apply to prose as well as poetry. But, as is to be expected, owing to the exigencies of alliterative verse and its rhythm, and to stylistic considerations and traditions, the syntax of Old English verse differs in several respects from that of prose. As a general rule, it may be said that sentences are structured more loosely than in prose, and it should never be forgotten that the punctuation in our printed editions is essentially that of the modern editors who may want to impose on their text a grammatical precision that the poet may not have intended. Often enough, our difficulties with a sentence may have to do with the device of 'variation' (on which see pp. 59–60). Another characteristic of poetry is the insertion of parenthetic phrases which interrupt the progression of a sentence but allow the poet to place a comment or explanatory remark where he thinks it suitable, as in *Beowulf* 2706–8 (where the dashes were of course supplied by the editors):

> Fēond gefyldan    – ferh ellen wræc –
> ond hī hyne þā bēgen    ābroten hæfdon,
> sibæðelingas.

They felled the enemy (i.e. the dragon) – [their] courage had driven out its life – and they had cut it down, both the noble kinsmen.

The passage just quoted can also illustrate another typical feature of Old English verse syntax. Whereas (as pointed out above) there is an increasing tendency to employ the order S–V–O in Old English main clauses, this is not so in poetry, where word-order is handled much more freely; this is one of the reasons why such poetry makes rather more difficult reading than prose. Of other peculiarities of Old English poetry, at least the use of the definite article (originally a demonstrative pronoun) should be mentioned, which is here employed much less frequently than in prose texts.[16]

## Names

Names of places and persons are of great interest to the historian as well as to the philologist, who will want to examine their etymology and word-formation, and who may be able to draw important conclusions from them with regard to characteristic dialect features and the distribution of Old English dialects. A great deal of work has been done on Anglo-Saxon names, and the

student of Old English who is likely to come upon such names every now and then (not only in charters or in *Domesday Book*, but in literary sources like Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and in the poem *The Battle of Maldon*) should be familiar with a few basic facts of this subject.

English place-names[17] – but not those of Scotland, Wales and Cornwall – now as a thousand years ago are largely of Anglo-Saxon origin. This at any rate is true of the names of villages and hamlets; it certainly has to do with the fact that most English villages were created by Anglo-Saxon settlers. Some characteristic local feature, natural or man-made, may determine the name of such a settlement, as at Oxford (OE *Oxenaford* 'ford for oxen') or Cambridge (OE *Grantebrycg* 'bridge over the Granta'). Place-names containing an element denoting 'homestead' or 'village' are frequent; among the most common of such elements are *-hām* 'village, manor, homestead', *-tūn* 'homestead, village', *-wīc* (an early loan-word, from Latin *vicus*) 'farm, dwelling, hamlet, village', and *-burh* 'fortified place, manor, town'; cf. ModE *Waltham* (village by a wood), *Kingston* (the king's manor), *Greenwich* (green village), *Bamborough* (Bebbe's fortified place). Personal names are often part of place-names, such as those in ModE *-ing*, OE *-ingas*: *Barking* (OE *Berecingas*, 'Berica's people'); *Hastings* (OE *Hæstingas*, 'Hæsta's people'), and so on.

The names of the larger towns that had already existed in Roman Britain usually remained British (as *London*, *Dover*, *York*), but were often compounded with OE *-ceaster* (from Latin *castra*), as in *Manchester* and *Winchester*. Also, most of the English river-names (but not those of smaller streams) are of British origin, like *Thames*, *Avon*, *Ouse*, *Severn*, *Stour*, *Tees* and *Trent*.

Of the few Latin elements that appear in Anglo-Saxon place-names, *ceaster* and *wīc* have already been mentioned; to these should be added *port* (from Latin *portus* 'harbour'), as in *Portsmouth*. Scandinavian place-names and place-name elements provide the main evidence for our knowledge of where exactly Danish and Norwegian settlements occurred in England from the latter half of the ninth century onwards. In the Danelaw, such names and elements are especially prominent in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Characteristic Norse names or name-elements in these counties (and elsewhere) are *-by* 'village, homestead', *-toft* 'homestead', *-thorp* 'outlying farm', as in *Grimsby*, *Lowestoft* and *Thorpe*.

The Anglo-Saxons continued the Germanic practice of giving personal names.[18] There were no surnames before the Norman Conquest; normally, every man or woman had just one name, which in most cases was formed as a compound whose elements were taken from a limited stock of words that were traditionally used in name-making. Originally, all such compounds may

have been meaningful, but in the course of time, elements were combined that cannot always be said to have made sense as a whole. Examples of compound personal names are:

| Ēadgār | 'rich, happy' | + | 'spear' |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ēadweard | 'rich, happy' | + | 'guardian' |
| Æthelbeorht | 'noble' | + | 'bright' |
| Cūthbeorht | 'famous' | + | 'bright' |
| Dūnstān | 'hill' | + | 'stone' |
| Ōswald | 'god' | + | 'power' |

And for women:

| Æthelburh | 'noble' | + | 'fortress' |
|---|---|---|---|
| Æthelthrȳth | 'noble' | + | 'strength' |
| Hildeburh | 'battle' | + | 'fortress' |

It was a principle of name-giving that the names of close relatives should alliterate or even that a child's name should include one element of its father's (or sometimes mother's) name. Thus Byrhtnoth, the Anglo-Saxon leader in the battle of Maldon, is the son of Byrhthelm, and King Alfred (Ælfred) was the son of Æthelwulf and the brother of Æthelberht and Æthelred.

As the range of available name-elements was limited, and as there were no surnames, the same name was often borne by different persons, and this has created not a few problems for modern scholarship. It is the reason why, for example, Ælfric the homilist and grammarian was for a long time considered to be the same man as Ælfric, archbishop of Canterbury (995–1005), or to be identical with other contemporaries of the same name. One way of distinguishing bearers of the same Old English name was the occasional practice of adding a byname to the given name; such bynames could refer to the bearer's place of residence, to his father (*Ēadbeorht Ēadgāring* 'the son of Ēadgār'), or would simply be nicknames, often derived from physical characteristics. In *The Battle of Maldon* (line 273), *Ēadweard se langa* 'the tall one' may be an example.

Uncompounded personal names were not uncommon among the Anglo-Saxons, especially in the early centuries of their history. In later times, they became rare, at least among the upper classes. Such monothematic names could be either shortened forms of dithematic (compounded) ones, like *Goda* from *Godwine* or *Godgifu*, or *Hild* from compound names with this element. But there was also a large number of original uncompounded names, like *Beda*, *Ida*, *Penda*, *Offa*, whose etymology is often controversial. It is hardly surprising that there were also names of British origin from early times on,

like *Cædmon* and *Cedd*, while later numerous Scandinavian names, like *Thurstan* and *Swegen*, became common.

   The study of the Old English language has a long tradition. During the Middle English period, from the thirteenth century onwards, rapid and radical changes in the English language meant that there were few who were able or willing to read Old English texts. But in the later sixteenth century, after the suppression of the monasteries and the dispersal of their libraries, scholars began to collect Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, to print texts and to study the language. That activity has continued to the present: practically all Old English texts are now available in printed editions, and their language has been thoroughly analysed and described. Even so, a great deal of work remains to be done, in order to perfect our understanding of the Old English language.

## NOTES

1. The linguistic terminology employed in this chapter is essentially that of 'traditional' grammar. Readers not familiar with it may find explanations and definitions in works like P. S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English* (Oxford, 2003), chs. 3 and 4, or B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 7th edn (Oxford, 2007), Appendix D.
2. The standard work on the history of English is now *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (hereafter *CHEL*), gen. ed. R. M. Hogg, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1992–2001), with 1, *The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Hogg (Cambridge, 1992), for the Anglo-Saxon period. Of the numerous one-volume treatments of the subject, that by A. C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language*, rev. T. Cable, 5th edn (London, 2002), remains valuable.
3. For a detailed introduction to language change and the prehistory of English, see A. Bammesberger in *CHEL* 1, 26–66.
4. For the manuscript transmission of Old English texts, see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957); H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 241 (Tempe, AZ, 2001); and A. Cameron, 'A List of Old English Texts', in *A Plan for the Dictionary of Old English*, ed. R. Frank and A. Cameron (Toronto, 1973), pp. 25–306.
5. For runes and runic monuments in England, see R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1999); and Cameron, 'List of Old English Texts', pp. 255–61.
6. For the handwriting of Old English texts, see J. Roberts, *Guide to Scripts Used in English Writings up to 1500* (London, 2005). The indispensable scholarly handbook in the field of palaeography is B. Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. D. O Cróinín and D. Ganz (Cambridge, 1990); for Insular script, see pp. 83–95.
7. Phonology and inflexional morphology are more or less fully treated in numerous grammars and introductions to Old English. See R. M. Hogg in *CHEL* 1, 67–167, and, for inflexions, Mitchell and Robinson, *Guide*, pp. 17–54.

8. An excellent concise treatment of Old English syntax is ch. 3 in R. Quirk and C. L. Wrenn, *An Old English Grammar*, 2nd edn (London, 1957). More detailed are the chapters in *CHEL* I by E. C. Traugott (pp. 168–289), and in Mitchell and Robinson, *Guide* (pp. 61–117). For the comprehensive standard works on Old English syntax, and on phonology and inflexions, see 'Further reading' (p. 334).

9. A handbook of Old English word-formation remains to be written. A good introduction is provided by D. Kastovsky in *CHEL* I, 355–400. The historical sections in H. Marchand, *The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation*, 2nd edn (Munich, 1969), and the treatment of prefixes and suffixes in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (cited below, n. 10) are valuable.

10. Numerous books deal with general questions of meaning and semantic change, but the fullest and most reliable source for our knowledge of the history of English words that have survived from the Old English period is still J. A. H. Murray, H. Bradley, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 20 vols. (Oxford, 1988; also on CD-ROM, 1992). A third edition is in preparation; entries already revised for this edition can be seen in the *OED Online*. See also D. Kastovsky, 'Semantics', in *CHEL* I, 400–8.

11. For a stimulating and thorough study of the semantic field that includes OE *mōd*, see M. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 271–98.

12. Borrowing in Old English is well treated in Baugh and Cable, *History of the English Language*, ch. 4, and by D. Kastovsky in *CHEL* I, 299–338. A systematic survey is H. Gneuss, '*Anglicae linguae interpretatio*: Language Contact, Lexical Borrowing and Glossing in Anglo-Saxon England', in H. Gneuss, *Language and History in Early England* (Aldershot, 1996), no. v.

13. A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 4–11, serves as a good introduction to the Old English dialects. A comprehensive study of the field is needed. Ch. 6 in *CHEL* I, by T. E. Toon (pp. 409–51), is useful. For Old English dialect vocabulary, see D. Kastovsky, in *CHEL* I, 338–51.

14. See K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 119–39, and the literature quoted below, n. 16.

15. But see B. von Lindheim, 'Traces of Colloquial Speech in Old English', *Anglia* 70 (1951), 22–42.

16. For the language and style of Old English poetry, see ch. 3 below (pp. 50–65), and M. R. Godden, 'Literary Language', in *CHEL* I, esp. pp. 491–512.

17. A good introduction to the study of Old English place-names is by C. Clark in *CHEL* I, 471–84.

18. For Old English personal names, including the Scandinavian element, see the introduction by C. Clark in *CHEL* I, 456–71.

# 3

DONALD G. SCRAGG

# The nature of Old English verse

The verse form used for vernacular poetry throughout the Anglo-Saxon period was that common to all the Germanic peoples, and was carried to England by the migrating tribes of the fifth century. It is therefore rooted in an oral tradition of poems composed, performed and passed on without benefit of writing. Some signs of the ways in which this poetry was created and transmitted can be gleaned from occasional references in vernacular and Latin literature. Heroic poetry in Old English tells of the professional minstrel at the court of kings, singing traditional legends from the Germanic past, and occasionally adding Christian stories to his repertoire, familiar tales made delightful to his audience by his skill in developing and embellishing them. In Latin works we learn something of the transmission of poems in more humble surroundings: William of Malmesbury, in the twelfth-century *Gesta pontificum*, reports King Alfred's story of Abbot Aldhelm (d. 709/10) reciting secular poetry at the bridge in Malmesbury to attract an audience for his preaching, and Bede, in the *Ecclesiastical History*, suggests that it was normal in the seventh century for men of the lowest social classes when attending festive gatherings to recite poems that they had learnt by heart. Bede tells this in relation to the cowman Cædmon of Whitby who was graced, late in life, with a miraculous gift of song, in a manner reminiscent of other divine visitations of the early Middle Ages, and who thereby became the first to convert the inherited Germanic metre to Christian use. Many others, Bede goes on, did so after him, but none so well (*HE* IV.22).

By the end of the period, there are signs of a fully articulated written tradition. Amongst the poems surviving in manuscripts are four by a man called Cynewulf, who signed his name in an acrostic of runes which presumably would have to be seen rather than heard to make their impact. But the poetry which has come down to us in manuscript owes much to its oral background. Some of the surviving poems may themselves have been transmitted orally, perhaps across many generations, before they were committed to writing, and even those which were composed in writing use techniques

and rhetorical devices which were developed in an oral tradition and reflect the needs of that tradition, such as the repetition of sentence elements or the frequent use of mnemonic formulae.

Poems in Old English are untitled in the manuscripts in which they survive, the titles by which they are now generally known having been given to them, in the main, by their nineteenth-century editors. They are also for the most part anonymous. Although Bede reports that Cædmon composed poetic paraphrases of Genesis, Exodus and other biblical books, it is likely that only the nine lines composed at his initial inspiration survive. The only other named poet of note from the period is Cynewulf, who signed four poems, *Elene*, *Juliana*, *The Fates of the Apostles* and *Christ II* (the central section, lines 440–866, of the poem *Christ* as edited in the third volume of ASPR), so that those enjoying his poetry might pray for his soul. But beyond his name and his interest in translating Latin hagiographic and homiletic literature into Old English verse, nothing is known of him. Two other prominent Anglo-Saxons who are better known for their prose writings are associated with some surviving verse. Soon after King Alfred reportedly translated Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* from Latin into Old English prose at the end of the ninth century, someone recast the sections of the work which corresponded to the Latin *metra* into uninspired but metrically passable Old English verse. It is by no means certain that Alfred was that someone. And finally, towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, Archbishop Wulfstan, a prolific writer of ecclesiastical and civil legislation and well known for his fiery eschatological sermons, is thought by some scholars to have composed the brief poems on King Edgar that appear in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* annals for 959 and 975.

Cædmon's first nine lines of Christian verse are recorded in eighth-century manuscripts; almost all the other surviving examples of Old English poetry are in manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the greater part in the four so-called Poetic Codices, all written within the period 975–1025. These four books have little in common with each other except that they all contain verse. Only one, the Exeter Book, is an anthology of poetry (both secular and religious). In two of the others, the Vercelli Book and the *Beowulf* manuscript, the fact that some items are in verse is perhaps incidental. In the Vercelli Book, six religious poems are scattered in a collection of homiletic prose, the scribe showing no interest in making a distinction between the two mediums. The only convincing explanation of the compilation of the *Beowulf* manuscript is that it contains a series of 'monster' tales, some in prose, some in verse, the subjects being a mixture of Christian and secular. Finally, the Junius manuscript contains religious poetry, Old Testament paraphrase and some lyrics on Old and New

Testament themes. It is difficult to reconstruct the reasons for the creation of these books. The content and large format of the Junius manuscript suggest that it may have had some liturgical use. The Exeter Book was probably made for a wealthy patron; by 1072 it belonged to Bishop Leofric of Exeter, for it was amongst the collection of books that he bequeathed to his cathedral church. The variety of manuscript contexts in which the poems survive adds to the difficulty of determining anything of their origin and transmission.

That books of vernacular poetry existed at an earlier period we know from a story told about the boyhood of King Alfred, in Bishop Asser's Life of the king, in which his mother offered to give a book of Saxon poetry to whichever of her sons first learnt it by heart. (Alfred won it, of course.) It is impossible to know whether any of the poems that Alfred knew survived into the copies made a century and a half later. We can only speculate on the period of time over which poetry was copied, as we can about the relationship between oral and written composition and transmission. A few clues may be drawn from the very small quantity of verse that survives in more than one copy. A dozen lines from the middle of *The Dream of the Rood* were carved in runes on an eighteen-foot stone preaching cross in Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire, no later than the end of the eighth century, while the whole poem survives in the Vercelli Book, copied in Canterbury towards the end of the tenth. This suggests the freedom with which popular poems might move around the country, and their ability to survive (either orally or in writing) for hundreds of years. On the other hand, the marked differences between two copies of a passage of homiletic verse, *The Soul and Body*, in the Vercelli and Exeter Books (written within a generation of one another) indicate the freedom with which scribes sometimes made alterations to the material they were copying.

There are no sure objective tests by which poetry can be dated, and no means of proving which of the surviving poems were composed orally and which in writing. All Old English poetry is of such uniformity in form and language that it is impossible to establish even relative dating with any certainty. Bede's story of Cædmon suggests that Christian poetry began late in the seventh century, and analysis of the runes on the Ruthwell Cross and of the spelling of Cynewulf's name in the acrostics suggests that some surviving poetry was in existence in some form from early in the ninth century, although the manuscript copies that we have were not made until almost two hundred years later. The dating of secular poetry is extremely problematic, not least because so little survives beyond *Beowulf* and because the dating of that poem, which is so crucial to the study of Old English metre, is amongst the most vexed questions facing students today.

Many critics still hold trenchantly to the generally accepted view of earlier scholars, that the poem was composed in the seventh or eighth century, or just possibly in the early ninth, before much of England succumbed to the attacks of the Vikings. But the voices of those who argue for a later date are slowly becoming more assured. Although very few accept the recently argued case for the hand of one of the two scribes responsible for making the only surviving copy of the poem being that of the author himself, many now believe that the poem could have taken the form in which we have it some time between the birth of Alfred in 849 and the accession of his great-great-grandson Æthelred in 978. Poems on historical subjects can be dated with more precision, but offer no useful basis for establishing a comparative chronology. Those recorded in *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries for the tenth century lack inspiration. In *The Battle of Maldon*, composed after the historically documented battle of 991, traditional metrical patterns are very occasionally replaced by couplets linked with assonance or rhyme similar to that found in contemporary Latin verse, and this heralds the change which was to overtake English poetry by the twelfth century. But against this we must set the fact that the majority of lines in *The Battle of Maldon* do satisfy the constraints of traditional metre, and it is therefore necessary to accept that Old English classical verse could still be handled competently after 991.

Anglo-Saxon scribes copied poetry in continuous lines, as they did prose, although some used punctuation to mark metrical units. The manuscripts give no indication about performance. We might draw some inferences from other evidence, for example the fact that writers use the terms *leoð* ('poem') and *sang* ('song') interchangeably, but so do Latin writers of *poema* and *carmen*, and the word 'lyric' in Modern English may also apply to poetry or to song. The Old English translation of Bede's account of Cædmon renders Latin *cantare* (which may mean 'to chant or recite' as well as 'to sing') as *be hearpan singan*, literally 'to sing to the harp', and Old English poems frequently refer to minstrels as performing to the same stringed instrument, which in fact more resembled a lyre if we judge from manuscript illustrations. The fragmentary remains of a stringed instrument, carefully wrapped in a beaver-skin bag, were amongst the treasures laid in the great royal ship-burial at Sutton Hoo, and this bears witness to the fact that patronage of poetry and of the minstrel was considered an important function of the king. But none of this takes us any nearer to an appreciation of how poetry was performed, and whether the minstrel's art was closer to modern ideas of singing or of chant than of recitation.

The basis of Old English metre, as of English verse of later periods, is one of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. Some 30,000 lines survive, all of them divided into two, roughly equal parts, each containing two strongly

stressed syllables (or 'lifts') and a variable number of lightly stressed ones (each group of which is known as a 'fall'). The underlying rhythm may be said to be trochaic or dactylic, with the heavy stresses preceding the light ones, as in the nursery rhyme

<div align="center">

/ ×    / ×    /    ×    / ×

Mary, Mary, quite contrary

</div>

(where / represents a heavy stress and × a light one). This line falls into two sense-units, the repeated name being one, the character definition the other, and the two-part structure is underscored by the internal rhyme *Mary*: *contrary*. In Old English too a half-line is frequently a sense-unit, but the dividing-point or caesura is stressed by a change of rhythm, for example the trochaic pattern might become iambic or anapestic, as in *Beowulf* 7:

<div align="center">

/   ×    /   ×    ×  ×    / × × /

feasceaft funden,    he þæs frofre gebad

</div>

[Scyld was] found destitute; he lived to see consolation for that

or the 'reversed' pattern might occur first, as in *Beowulf* 32:

<div align="center">

×   ×  / ×  /     / ×  / ×

Þær æt hyðe stod    hringedstefna

</div>

there at the quay stood the ring-prowed ship

Instead of the internal rhyme linking the two halves of the nursery rhyme line, Old English lines regularly had alliteration of either or both of the stressed syllables in the first half (in my examples, the words beginning *fea-*, *fund-*; *hyð-*) with the first stressed syllable in the second half (*frof-*; *hring-*). Because of the strength of the caesura, editors usually print the poetry with a noticeable gap, as I have done, and metrists scan it in half-lines, called verses. The stress patterns are those of speech, emphasis falling on the semantically important part of a word, not on a grammatical element (e.g. as in Modern English *houses* which is stressed / ×). Usually nouns and adjectives carry the stresses, other parts of speech occurring as lifts only when the sense required them to be especially emphasized, and semantically light words such as the article *the* are generally excluded from the poetry altogether. The trochaic or dactylic pattern is known as Type A, such a semantically empty description being useful because classical terms like trochee and dactyl do not take account of the fact that many verses have three or even four light stresses between the heavy ones, and the lifts sometimes consist of two short syllables rather than a single long one. (The two-syllable lift is known as a resolved lift, and is marked in the scansion below with a cup-shaped accent ˘ over the short syllables.)

Type A verses are by far the commonest. The reversed pattern, *he þæs frofre gebad*, is Type B. Type C has the two lifts contiguous, with lightly stressed syllables before and after, as in *Beowulf* 4:

×　　/　　/ ×
Oft Scyld Scefing

Frequently Scyld son of Scef . . .

These three are the only patterns which contain variation on the simple alternation between heavily and lightly stressed syllables, but in Old English, as in Modern English, it was possible to distinguish not two but three levels of stress in normal speech. An example in Modern English might be found in the contrasting stress patterns of the phrases *a black bird*, where *black* and *bird* are equally stressed, and *a blackbird*, where *black-* is more heavily stressed than *-bird*, but where *-bird* is nevertheless more heavily stressed than *a*. The half-stress (most usually found in Old English in the second element of compound words) gives rise to further metrical patterns, Types D and E. There are two variants of Type D, depending on the position of the half-stress (marked \), either that represented by *Beowulf* 1409:

/　　/　　\ ×
steap stanhliðo

towering stone-cliffs

or that found in *Beowulf* 1400:

/　　/ ×　\
wicg wundenfeax

horse with braided mane

*Beowulf* 50 offers an example of Type E:

/　\　×　/
murnende mod

grieving heart

There are some slight variations upon these patterns; for example, Type D is occasionally found with an extra unstressed syllable between the lifts, and Types A and D are sometimes preceded by one or two unstressed syllables in some way outside the regular pattern of the scansion, but the vast majority of the verses fit the five major types.

Although the basic types are few, Old English poets achieved a remarkably wide range of effects with them. Most lines contain two contrasting metrical types to mark the caesura, but unity is given to the whole line by the binding of the two parts with alliteration. Few verses or lines are syntactically complete,

however. Sentences run on over a number of lines to form a verse paragraph, and it is the metrical pattern of the whole paragraph which is often significant to a poet's design. For example, increase in the number of unstressed syllables would quicken the verse in performance, and repeated used of Types A, B and C might give a passage an insistent beat suitable for narrative. Frequent use of Types D and E, on the other hand, would slow the verse down because of the relatively high proportions of weighted syllables, and produce a style suitable for moments of high drama. Two passages from *Beowulf* will illustrate the point. The first, lines 1008–17, introduces the celebratory feast and gift-giving at Heorot after the defeat of Grendel, where the dancing rhythm and intricate and melodious patterning of sounds provide an image of the gaiety of the company. (The right-hand column lists the metrical types. Elided syllables are unmarked in the scansion.)

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
| × × / × / | Þa wæs sæl ond mæl | B |
| × × / × / — / \ × / | þæt to healle gang Healfdenes sŭnŭ; | BE |
| × × / / × — / × / × | wolde self cyning symbel þicgan. | CA |
| (× ×) / × × — / × / × / × | Ne gefrægen ic þa mægþe maran wĕorŏde | AA |
| × × × / / × — / × / × | ymb hyra sincgyfan sel gebæran. | CA |
| / × × / × — / / \ × | Bŭgŏn þa to bence blædagande, | AD |
| / × × / × — / × × / × | fylle gefægon; fæ̆gĕre geþægon | AA |
| / × / × — / × / × | mĕdŏful manig magas þara | AA |
| / / \ × × — / × / | swiðhicgende on sĕlĕ þam hean, | DB |
| / × × — / × | Hroðgar ond Hroþulf | A (1008–17) |

Then came the proper and suitable time for the son of Healfdene [i.e. Hrothgar] to make his entrance into the hall; the king himself intended to take part in the banquet. I have never heard of a nation which behaved with greater decorum in so large a company around their lord [literally: giver of treasure] at that time. Then the glorious [Danes] rejoiced at the feast; Hrothgar and Hrothulf, the resolute ones, their kinsmen, drank many a toast courteously in the lofty hall.

The underlying trochaic pattern is strongly emphasized here, with a predominance of Type A verses. Frequent construction of a line with two A-verses (1011, 1014, 1015) or with C + A (1010, 1012) has the effect of reducing the usual dislocation of the caesura and increasing the overall regularity of pattern. Additional lyrical effects are produced with internal rhyme, *sæl ond mæl* (1008) and *gefægon*: *geþægon* (1014). Line 1014 has a most intricate design in that within the rhyme *gefægon*: *geþægon* the sounds of the first rhyme-word are picked up in the intervening word *fægere*, not just in the alliteration on *f* but in the vowel *æ* (long in the rhyme words but short in *fægere*) and in the syllable-final *g*. The three words together offer a remarkable pattern of alliteration, rhyme and assonance which a competent minstrel could put to good use. The melody of the passage is further enhanced by a subtle increase in alliterating consonants beyond that which is functional to the linking of verses within a line. Normally in Old English verse the fourth stressed syllable in a line is the only one which may not alliterate, but there are two exceptions, both illustrated here. Occasionally throughout the surviving poetry, lines are found with two pairs of alliterating syllables involving all four heavy stresses, either in the pattern *abab* or, less frequently, in *abba*. In line 1016 above, alliteration falls on both *s* (*swið*, *sele*) and *h* (*hicg*-, *hean*). And sometimes the initial sound of the fourth stressed syllable anticipates the alliteration of the following line, as happens in lines 1009–10 *sunu* (cf. *self*, *symb*-), again in lines 1012–13 (*ge*) *bær*(*an*) (cf. *Bug*-, *benc*-, *blæd*-), and yet a third time in lines 1016–17 *hean* (cf. *Hroð*-, *Hroþ*-). Some critics regard this feature as purely accidental, but it is an accident which happens more than 200 times in *Beowulf* alone, and it would be difficult for an audience attuned to the catching up of initial consonant sounds to ignore it. The effect in the quoted instances is to sweep the listener forward across both metrical and syntactic boundaries.

The second illustrative passage, lines 1408–21, occurs after Grendel's mother has savagely attacked the hall in the night following the feast, and carried off Hrothgar's favourite retainer, Æschere. Now Hrothgar and the Danes must lead Beowulf through the bleak landscape filled with unknown horrors that leads to her lair. The music of the poetry here must reflect the dangerous and frightening journey which ends with the horrific discovery that they make at the water's edge, and we find that many lines have the smallest number of syllables that the metre will allow, the performer slowing down his recitation to give his audience plenty of time to absorb the implications of his words. The larger proportion of stressed syllables associated with Types D and E, and the greater disruption of the flow of the underlying alternating stress pattern which those types create, increase the sense of discomfort that the audience feels.

```
×  ×  /  ×  /   /  \  ×   /
```
Ofereode þa æ̆þĕlinga bearn      BE
```
 /   /  \  ×   /  ×  /  ×
```
steap stanhliðo,   stige nearwe,      DA
```
/   /  \   ×   /  \  ×  /
```
enge anpaðas,   uncuð gelad,      DE
```
  /  ×  /  ×    /   \  ×  /
```
neowle næssas,   nĭcŏrhusa fĕlă.      AE
```
×  /  ×  /    ×  /    /  ×
```
He feara sum   befŏră̆n gengde      BC
```
 /  ×  /  ×    /   /   \ ×
```
wisra monna   wong sceawian,      AD
```
×   ×  ×  /  /  ×  /   ×  /    ×
```
oþþæt he færinga   fyrgenbeamas      CA
```
××  /  ×  /     /  ×  /  ×
```
ofer harne stan   hlĕonĭan funde,      BA
```
  /  \  ×   /    /   /  ×   \
```
wynleasne wŭdŭ;   wæ̆tĕr under stod      ED
```
  /  ××  ×  /  ×     /   /  ×   \
```
dreorig ond gedrefed.   Dĕnŭm eallum wæs,      AD
```
  /    /  \  ×   /  ××   /  ×
```
wĭnŭm Scyldinga,   weorce on mode      DA
```
×  ×  /  /  ×   /   ×    /  ×
```
to geþolĭănne,   ðegne mŏnĕgum,      CA
```
/   ×  /  ×  ××   \     ×  ×  /   /  ×
```
oncyð eorla gehwæm,   syðþan Æscheres      DC
```
×   ×   /   /  ×    /  ×  /  ×
```
on þam holmclife   hă̆fĕlan metton.      CA    (1408–21)

Then the son of princes set off across towering stone-cliffs, narrow defiles, confined single-paths, unexplored passages, steep headlands, many a lair of water-monsters. He and a few skilful men led the way to reconnoitre the terrain, until he suddenly discovered mountain trees leaning across a bare cliff, a joyless thicket; a pool lay beneath, bloody and turbid. For all the Danes, the friends of the Scyldings, there was the suffering of terrible mental anguish, for many a thegn, for every warrior, there was desolation, when on that cliff beside the mere they discovered Æschere's head.

The pace of the metre during the description of the journey in lines 1408–13 is slow, with Types D and E predominating, and few unstressed syllables, but with *oþþæt* 'until' in line 1414 the retainers (and the audience) reach their destination, and two quicker lines of Types A, B and C urge us into the doom-laden *wynleasne wudu*, which opens line 1416. Here the E + D metre becomes staccato with the contemplation of something dreadful, although we are not to know what it is until five lines later.

In order to understand the full impact of this passage, it is necessary to move from metre to syntax, word-order and vocabulary, for in Old English poetry there are specialized uses of all three. It is clear even from the Modern English translations given above that sentences in Old English verse run on over many lines, and that they involve considerable repetition. In the passage just quoted, for example, there are six phrases which are parallel objects of the verb *ofereode*, each occupying its own verse in lines 1409–11. Repetition of a sentence element is known as 'variation', and is a distinctive feature of Old English poetry, introducing much of its imagery. Here the series of descriptive terms makes clear the hardship of the journey, for it forces the men into single file without tree cover through unknown territory where countless natural enemies abound. The sentence, although it extends over four lines, is not syntactically difficult, for it has a regular word-order of verb–subject–object, allowing the audience to dwell on what is said. In the last sentence of the passage, however, lines 1417–21, the poet builds up the tension by making the audience think about what is not said. Here the syntax is difficult, the variation and carefully manipulated word-order leading to one of the poem's most powerful moments. The sentence begins with an impersonal construction, with the deep-structure subject, the Danes, in the dative case: *Denum eallum wæs* 'For all the Danes there was'. The only verb carrying semantic weight is an inflected or gerundial infinitive *to geþolianne*; the verb has the primary meaning 'suffer' and use of the gerund implies necessity, 'a need to suffer'. The 'object' of this verb is a noun in the instrumental case, *weorce* 'by means of anguish', coupled with the slightly tautological *on mode* 'in their minds'. This complicated syntax forces the audience to attend more closely, and the variation *Denum eallum, winum Scyldinga, ðegne monegum, eorla gehwæm* allows them time to do so, but also holds up the narrative so that the listener or reader has to wait to learn the source of the Danes' distress. The first clue to it comes significantly at the end of a line in the possessive noun *Æscheres*, but what it is of Æschere that has been found we are not told until two verses later. Normally each verse has a certain syntactic completeness, in that words which are very closely linked grammatically, such as a noun with its qualifying adjective, constitute one verse, as in *steap stanhliðo* 'towering stone-cliffs' and *stige nearwe* 'narrow defiles' in line 1409. This is also the regular pattern with a possessive noun (which is syntactically similar to a qualifying adjective); for example, in this passage the genitive (possessive) case nouns *æþelinga*, *nicorhusa*, *Scyldinga* and *eorla* are all in the same verse as the word they are grammatically linked with (respectively *bearn*, *fela*, *winum* and *gehwæm*). But *Æscheres* is deliberately isolated, grammatical completion not being achieved before the alliterative pattern of the next line is established with *holm-*, so that the weight of the metre can fall upon the vital word *hafelan* 'head'. The horror is complete.

Complex syntax that overruns lines is frequent in Old English poetry, and one of the functions of variation may be to improve understanding in oral performance by the repetition of key sentence elements. In what seems to us the best of the surviving poetry, repetition is employed to identify different aspects of what is described. Here, in the four phrases used of the Danes, the poet first identifies them, stressing their unity, 'all the Danes', then uses the term *Scylding* which is both a general patronymic for the tribe and a pointer towards its line of kings, all of whom (including Hrothgar present here) are descended from Scyld. Hence *winum Scyldinga* 'friends of the Scyldings' implies the Danes' amity to one another and their love of their lord. Similarly *ðegne monegum* 'many a thegn' stresses their loyalty and *eorla gehwæm* 'each of the warriors' their individual bravery. This use of parallel phrases supplies one level of imagery in the poem. However, such variation makes great demands on the poet's vocabulary, and consequently the poetry of the period exhibits a specialized diction. In this passage, *oncyð* 'desolation' and *hafelan* are examples of simple words not found in prose. Also, the wide range of synonyms required for variation, the difficulty of satisfying the constraints of alliteration, and the need to reduce unstressed syllables to a minimum, especially in Types D and E, encouraged the use of compound words, many of which were created by the poets to satisfy the demands of particular contexts. One-third of the lexicon of *Beowulf* consists of compounds, most of which do not occur outside poetry or even outside the one poem. In this passage alone, the compounds *stanhliðo*, *anpaðas*, *wynleasne* and *holmclife* are words found only in poetry, while *nicorhusa* and *fyrgen-beamas* are both *hapax legomena*, words recorded only once. The frequency of occurrence of such nonce words is no doubt in part the result of the limited survival of early poetry, but it is hard to resist the suggestion that some examples were created by poets for the contexts in which they are uniquely found.

The compression involved in the act of compounding lends depth of meaning to the poetry. Superficially, *anpaðas* is a simple compound formed from the words 'one' and 'paths', but for an Anglo-Saxon audience – or indeed for anyone aware of combat conditions – a path along which only one person may pass at a time has frightening connotations. The adjective *wynleas* has the familiar pattern of a noun negated with the suffix meaning 'lacking', like Modern English *harmless* or *speechless*. What is lacking here is *wynn*, usually translated 'joy, delight, pleasure' although in *Beowulf* the word is used very specifically of human delight, associated with life in the hall and companionship, all of which are lacking in this lonely, comfortless forest. Many poetic compounds are not simple descriptive terms but circumlocutory, incorporating a metaphor, as when Hrothgar in line 1012 is called *sincgyfan* 'giver of

treasure', a reference to the pervasive image of the *comitatus* in Old English poetry, that is, a body of men who vow total loyalty to a lord in return for rich gifts. Such descriptive terms, often periphrastic, are known as 'kennings'. Compound words lend themselves to adaptation to different metrical and semantic conditions, since one element of the compound can be replaced by a synonym or a word in a related semantic field. For instance, King Beowulf is called *sincgifan* in line 2311 but *goldgyfan* 'giver of gold' in line 2652 where the poet needs to alliterate on a different consonant. However, the *Beowulf*-poet also uses the kenning *goldwine*, literally 'gold-friend', of both Kings Hrothgar and Beowulf, because the relationship between lord and retainer was much more complicated than that suggested by the mercenary arrangement of services offered in return for profit. *The Wanderer* expresses very movingly the desolation of a retainer deprived of the love and protection of his *goldwine* (lines 34–44). If *sincgifa* and *goldgyfa* may be said to be literal descriptions, albeit within the convention of the *comitatus*, *goldwine* involves the greater degree of compression found in many kennings.

Often kennings are found as phrases rather than compounds. Hrothgar is called *sinces brytta* 'distributor of treasure' or *beaga brytta* 'distributor of gold rings' to give double alliteration in the first verse of a line. In *Judith* this formula is developed to great effect: in line 30, the poet used the traditional phrase *sinces brytta* with reference to the villain of the poem, Holofernus, when he was entertaining his troops at a feast (the usual opportunity for the distribution of treasure), but an adaptation of the term is then employed twice by the heroine as she is about to behead her would-be ravisher, first when she refers to Holofernus as *morðres brytta* 'distributor of murder' (90) and immediately afterwards when she invokes God as *tires brytta* 'distributor of glory'. It was this ability to transfer epithets from heroic concepts to religious ones that encouraged the use of the traditional verse form for Christian purposes. Cædmon's nine-line hymn of Creation, cited by Bede as the first Christian poetry to be composed in English, has a number of examples of compounds and phrases which are developed from heroic vocabulary; for example, the kennings used for God, *heofonrices weard* 'guardian of heaven's kingdom' and *moncynnes weard* 'guardian of mankind', may be compared with the *Beowulf*-poet's description of Hrothgar as *beahhorda weard* 'guardian of hoards of gold rings' (921) or with the commonly used heroic formula for kings, *folces hyrde* 'guardian of the people'. The success of poets in adapting traditional forms to serve a variety of Christian purposes, from biblical paraphrase to hymns to the Virgin, testifies to the flexibility of poetic diction and imagery.

Kennings abound in Old English poetry, some of the better known being *banhus* 'bone-house = body', *hronrad* 'whale-road = ocean', *hæðstapa*

'heath-walker = stag'. All of these survive in more than one poem, but many more are unique, such as *feorhhus* 'life-house = body' which occurs only in *The Battle of Maldon*. The latter looks like an adaptation of *banhus*, but it is impossible for the modern reader to know when an Anglo-Saxon poet is being original in word- or phrase-formation because of the random survival of texts. The phrases *morðres brytta* and *tires brytta* work well in *Judith*, but the same kennings are found in other poems too. In fact, the use of traditional compounds and phrases, as well as their adaptation, is part of a wider pattern of the extensive use of traditional formulae, only occasionally changed to fit different circumstances or to satisfy artistic demands. The verse *on sele þam hean* quoted above in *Beowulf* line 1016, for example, occurs also in lines 713 and 1984 of the same poem, while the whole of line 1016 has been used by the poet already, with some slight difference of preposition to fit another context, in line 919: *swiðhicgende    to sele þam hean*. The frequency with which formulaic phraseology, including kennings, recurs throughout Old English poetry should not be seen as detrimental to its overall effect. The fact that a verse or kenning is traditional is of less significance than its suitability for the context in which it is found. A useful example may be seen in the epithets by which the *Beowulf*-poet reintroduces King Hrothgar on the morning after Grendel has attacked his hall for the first time, killing thirty thegns. Lines 129–30 describe the king as *mære þeoden, / æþeling ærgod* 'famous leader, fine prince', terminology traditionally used of a strong and victorious warlord which here by its ironic reversal underscores his helplessness in the face of the might of the enemy.

The same poet elsewhere shows an ability to create remarkable effects with the simplest of conventional poetic vocabulary. At the beginning of his poem, he wishes to give an impression of the magnificence of the valuable objects buried with Scyld Scefing in his ship funeral. Only once does he mention any specific items laid in the ship:

> ne hyrde ic cymlicor    ceol gegyrwan
> hildewæpnum    ond heaðowædum,
> billum ond byrnum                                  (38–40)

I have never heard of a ship more splendidly adorned with weapons of war and battle-dress, with swords and mail-coats.

At first sight the lines appear unremarkable. They open with conventional use of the 'I have (not) heard' formula seen above in line 1011, whereby the author gives a sense of immediacy and authenticity to a scene. The two words for swords and corselets in line 40 alliterate so conveniently that it is not surprising to find that this is not the only line in which they appear together.

As a variation upon line 39, they do not appear to add any further dimension to the meaning of the passage. But the sentence becomes more interesting when the metre of line 39 is examined more closely. The two compounds are constructed to create a perfect balance: each has as its first element a disyllabic poetic word for 'battle', *hilde* and *heaðo*, alliterating on *h*, and as its second element another disyllabic word, alliterating on *w* and with vowel assonance, *wæpnum* and *wædum*. Yet the metrical pattern is different in the two verses:

$$/ \times \quad / \quad \times \quad \times \quad / \quad / \quad \times$$
hildewæpnum  ond hĕaððwædum     AC

and there is a subtle shift of meaning, from offensive weapons to defensive armour. The next verse echoes the shift by picking out one example of each of the general terms of line 39, swords for weapons and mailcoats for armour. The metrical ingenuity represents the craftsmanship displayed in the objects, but the poet has used only the most traditional of formulae and the most obvious words from heroic vocabulary to suggest the glory of the passing of his archetypal king.

The caesura, and the marking of it with a change of rhythm, gave many Old English poets the opportunity to create paradox or antithesis within the poetic line. In *The Dream of the Rood*, the author captures the duality of Christ's crucifixion for the Christian, the horror and the joy, in a series of lines, including 22–3, where the dreamer-narrator contemplates the changing aspects of the cross in his vision:

> hwilum hit wæs    mid wætan bestemed,
> beswyled mid swates gange,    hwilum mid since gegyrwed

Sometimes it was drenched with moisture, washed with the running of blood, sometimes adorned with treasure.

In line 23 double alliteration (*swat-* with *sinc-*, *gang-* with *-gyr-*) is supported by a syntactic parallel to confirm what the poet himself refers to as *fuse beacen* 'the changing sign'. The *Beowulf*-poet similarly plays on the contrastive possibilities of the two-verse structure by creating a metrical reflection of discord amongst men. A group of Danes at the Frisian court of King Finn have been treacherously attacked by Finn's men, and their leader, Hnæf, has been killed. When it is clear that the fight has reached stalemate, Finn offers a truce. But the Danes, from whose point of view the tale is told, are torn between enforced loyalty to Finn and heroic compulsion to avenge Hnæf, while the Frisians have already shown themselves untrustworthy. The tension is admirably displayed in the metre of line 1100 in which Finn assures the Danes of the Frisian good faith:

> þæt ðær ænig mon
> wordum ne worcum wære ne bræce     (1099–1100)

that no man would break the truce there either by word or by deed

Each verse of line 1100 is a simple Type A, stressing the parallel of the two verses which appears in the patterning of words and the linking alliteration. On the surface, all is harmonious. But the underlying tension of the situation is represented by the assonance of each verse, the *or–um* sequence in the first verse contrasting with the *æ–e* vowels in the two stressed words in the second. The reader of alliterative poetry should be alive to sound patterns beyond the regular catching up of initial consonants.

The verses quoted in the last paragraph from *The Dream of the Rood* clearly do not fall into the system of five major types described above. Anglo-Saxon poets occasionally made use of extended lines, involving what are known as 'hypermetric verses'. These consist broadly of one of the five types preceded by a series of 'extra' syllables. If the hypermetric verse is in the first half of a line, it regularly contains one extra alliterative syllable, but if in the second half, it may not. Hence *The Dream of the Rood* line 23 may be scanned:

> [× / × ×] / × / ×  [× × ×] / × × / ×
> beswyled mid swates gange,   hwilum mid since gegyrwed

Both verses end with regular Type A verses, both have extra syllables before them, all of which are unstressed except -*swyl*- which alliterates with *swat*- and *sinc*-. Occasionally hypermetric verses occur singly but most are found in groups, and some poems, notably *The Dream of the Rood* and *Judith*, have a regular pattern of alternation between lines of hypermetric and of normal verses which gives them a stanzaic effect, although it should be stressed that the stanzas thus produced are far from regular. Such alternation may be seen to lay different degrees of emphasis on different parts of the poem. In *The Dream of the Rood* the two longest passages of hypermetric verses surround the nine lines of normal verses which describe Christ's last moments on the cross, when darkness covered the earth and all Creation wept (50–9). In *Judith*, the poet's description of the feast at which Holofernus shows himself to be a bad leader by getting his Assyrian followers drunk consists mainly of normal verses, but a shift into hypermetric verse allows for an effective use of the metre to stress a moral point.

> Swa se inwidda    ofer ealne dæg
> dryhtguman sine    drencte mid wine,
> swiðmod sinces brytta,    oðþæt hie on swiman lagon,

> oferdrencte his duguðe ealle,    swylce hie wæron deaðe
> > geslegene,
> agotene goda gehwylces                               (28–32)

Thus the evil one drenched his body of retainers with wine throughout the whole day, the resolute distributor of treasure, until they lay in a swoon, he made all his nobility drunk, as if they were struck down by death, drained of every goodness.

Hypermetric verses widen the gap between the alliterating sounds in the two halves of a line. In line 31, the pattern of alliteration is established by the stressed syllables -*drenc*- and *duguð*-, and an audience that delighted in the completion of patterns of alliteration would have its expectations of a word in *d*- raised through the long series of unstressed syllables in *swylce hie wæron*, to be fulfilled dramatically with the whole weight of the metre emphasizing *deaðe*, the fate that awaited the army at the end of the poem.

The Old English poetry that has survived may give an unduly limited impression of the range that existed. Scraps, such as the forty-eight lines of *The Battle of Finnsburh*, another poem on the treachery of Finn's men which was found on a single parchment leaf in the eighteenth century and then lost again, suggest that styles not evident in the rest of the corpus may have been attempted. This poem has a compression of story-telling, an example of concise direct speech and a certain wry humour which are lacking elsewhere. But we can deduce very little from an imperfect copy of a fragment of a lost poem, which may have been composed late, under external influences such as those of Old Norse. Most Old English poetry is slow-moving, elevated in diction and moral in tone, but enough has been said above to suggest that the best is far from monotonous. The alliterative metre retained its attraction for English speakers long after post-Conquest French influence introduced other patterns, and the so-called alliterative revival of the fourteenth century produced major works of literature in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Piers Plowman*. Alliteration continued to play an important part in the metre of dramatic verse in the fifteenth century, and the Germanic alliterative line should be seen as the basis of the blank verse metre of the sixteenth century. But the tradition of 'classical' Old English verse, with a two-part line, a strong caesura, alliteration, variation and heavy reliance on traditional diction and imagery, is lost with the Norman Conquest.

# 4

DANIEL ANLEZARK

# The Anglo-Saxon world view

The Anglo-Saxons were a nation of migrants, living on an island at the edge of their known world. They believed that this world was made up of three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa – and surrounded by a great world ocean. The earth they lived on was *middangeard*, the 'middle-zone', lying between the world above in the heavens, and the region below in hell. It is far from certain that the Anglo-Saxons, or indeed any other early medieval people, held that the earth was flat. Only the learned and social elite could have seen a map suggesting such a flatness; Bede the Venerable (d. 735), the greatest scientist of his time, inherited and passed on the Ptolemaic theory of classical antiquity that the earth was a globe, suspended within and surrounded by the celestial spheres. The Anglo-Saxon settlers who invaded and conquered large parts of the island of Britain from the middle of the fifth century were Germanic pagans from Northern Europe, though we have very few insights into their pre-Christian understanding of the cosmos. Our ignorance is mostly the product of their conversion to Christianity, which began at the end of the sixth century, and was complete by the end of the seventh. Their textual record is almost completely dominated by the understanding of the universe that this conversion produced, a world view that was often a hybrid of biblical lore on the one hand, and classical geography and cosmology on the other. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Saxons had their own unique way of seeing the world, which was the product of their own past in pagan Northern Europe, their conversion to Christianity, and their own physical location – on an island at the end of the world.

## Cosmos

Traces of a pre-Christian cosmos can be detected in Anglo-Saxon texts, often in surprising contexts. The Old English 'Charm for unfruitful land' represents a curious hybrid of Christian and pantheistic understandings of the earth.[1] The charm is designed to restore the fertility of soil no longer yielding good

crops, or when its fruitfulness has been damaged by witchcraft. The elaborate rituals prescribed include immersion of the fruits of the land in holy water, Latin prayers, the invocation of Christian saints, and the singing of masses over sods of earth. At one point the charm requires the singing of an incantation to 'Erce, Erce, Erce! Earth's Mother!' It is difficulty to identify this Earth-Mother, but she is clearly the relic of a pre-Christian world view, though here coupled with the Christian God in a fertile embrace: 'May you be healthy, earth, mother of men! May you grow in God's embrace, filled with nourishment for men.' Traces of this kind of pantheistic belief are not restricted to charms, but are also found in the literature that the Anglo-Saxons inherited from the late classical period. *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, a popular apocryphal work originating in antique Alexander romances, describes the Macedonian king's conquests in Persia and India, and the strange peoples and creatures he encountered there. An Old English translation of a Latin version of the *Letter* is found in MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, the so-called *Beowulf* manuscript, where it accompanies a partly illustrated Old English version of *Wonders of the East*, a work also interested in oriental marvels, beside the *Life of St Christopher*, *Beowulf* and *Judith*. Alexander's understanding of the origins of prodigies is briefly explained at the opening of the *Letter*, and his idea of natural history betrays no influence of a Christian point of view – it is the earth herself that produces life (§3):

> The earth is a marvel first for the good things she gives birth to, and then for the evil, through which she is revealed to observers. She is the producer of well-known wild beasts and plants and stones and metal-ore, and of wondrous creatures, all of those things which are difficult to comprehend for those who look and observe because of their variety of forms.[2]

In terms comparable to those of the Anglo-Saxon charm, in the *Letter* it is the earth who gives birth, in a pantheistic reflex shared by classical and Anglo-Saxon pagans.[3] We have almost no other access to popular ideas about 'Mother Earth' in Anglo-Saxon England, but the fact that this belief is found in two very different kinds of text even invites the conclusion that, for some Anglo-Saxons at least, pantheistic assumptions about the earth and its cosmic forces sat comfortably beside Christian belief.

   Prognostics, a popular genre in late Anglo-Saxon England, share the belief that natural phenomena have an inherent supernatural dimension, rather than simply having discernible meanings as God's creatures and as signs of his power and will. The prognostics found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts are a learned survival from antiquity, and attempt to predict future events by the use of dreams, or manifestations of natural phenomena, and their relationship to the days of the week and the cycle of the moon. Many are carefully

collected in lists in MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii, including a brontology, which promises that thunder at the seventh hour of the day, in any part of the sky, 'signifies fruitfulness and great abundance in the future'.[4] The popularity of this understanding of natural phenomena does not mean that either prognostics, or the cosmological assumptions underlying them, were universally accepted. The most prolific author of the late Anglo-Saxon period, Ælfric of Eynsham, condemns attempts at divining the future in any way; he states that the Christian faith of anyone who attempts to use the moon to predict the future, 'is worth nothing'.[5] Ælfric's scepticism about prognostics based on the lunar cycle is grounded in his own fuller comprehension of early medieval science, and its theories concerning the forces of nature. According to antique science, the cycles of the heavenly bodies passing through the celestial spheres had a direct, physical relationship with associated phenomena on earth. In his *De temporibus anni*, a treatise on astronomy and the calendar, Ælfric explains that 'it is in the nature of created things that each physical creature which the earth brings forth is fuller and stronger in the full moon than in the waning ... This is no divination, but is a natural thing in Creation.' His explanation of 'nature' rests on the hydraulic theory of lunar influence – as the moon controls the tides, so it also influences the element of water present in any physical body. Ælfric's earth is no mother giving birth, but rather a physical creature following natural laws.

Anglo-Saxon scientific works tend to be practical rather than theoretical, and their interest in the movement of the stars and planets through the heavenly spheres stems mainly from a need to understand the computus, the reckoning of calendars. Bede's *De temporum ratione* explains how to use observable phenomena in the heavens to make calendrical calculations,[6] focused primarily on the need to work out the varying date of Easter, which is reckoned using the relationship between the solar and lunar cycles. Bede's later followers, Ælfric in his *De temporibus*, and Byrhtferth of Ramsey in his *Enchiridion*, produced vernacular versions of the same science around the turn of the millennium. The Ptolemaic explanation of the universe, with its conception of the spherical earth suspended within and surrounded by the revolving celestial spheres and their heavenly bodies, is as difficult to comprehend in all its complexities as the twentieth century's cosmos of string theory and relativity, and few Anglo-Saxons, if any, were ever conversant with its finer details. This does not mean they were not interested in understanding how such a universe held together. In *Meter* 20 of the prosametric version of the Old English rendering of Boethius's *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, the Anglo-Saxon poet grapples with Boethius's presentation of the harmonious universe of the spheres. The poem takes the original Latin metre as a starting point for a lengthy meditation on the structure of the

cosmos, using the analogy of an egg to illustrate the concept of the heavenly waters surrounding the earth (lines 166–75):

> Indeed, though nothing earthly holds it, it is equally easy for this earth to fall up or down, which is most like in an egg, the yolk in the middle, however the egg glides about. So all the world stands still in its place, the streams about it, the motion of the seas, the sky and the stars, and the radiant shell turns around each day; it has long done so.[7]

This simplified – and easily intelligible – analogy of the spheres is also found in the *Old English Martyrology*, which may have been the poet's source,[8] and which does not enumerate the spheres, but reduces them to 'the sky and the stars' above, with the earth and its seas beneath. This more simplified conception, of the heavens above and the earth below, appears to have fixed itself in the Anglo-Saxon imagination.

The earth at the centre of this universe was made up of three continents and surrounded by a great ocean. This basic premise of medieval geography is stated at the beginning of the Old English translation of Paulus Orosius's *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, made some time around the year 900: 'Our forefathers divided all the orb of this middle-earth into three,' says Orosius, 'just as *Oceanus* (that is called *Garsecg*) lies around it, and they gave the three parts three names: Asia and Europe and Africa, though some people would say that there are only two parts: Asia, and the other Europe.'[9] The geographic preface of the *History*, written at the beginning of the fifth century, goes on to describe the geography of the world known to Orosius, a disciple of Augustine of Hippo. The earth described becomes the setting for his account of the rise and fall of the world's empires, culminating in Rome. The place of the all-embracing world ocean in the English imagination was naturally different from that of the Roman geographer – the Anglo-Saxon lived on the edge of ocean, looking in across the great landmass of the earth; the Roman lived towards the centre of this world, looking out.

The perspective of medieval maps placed east at the top, and west at the bottom, so the north was not 'up' as in the modern conception, but 'left', while south was on the right. North was associated with evil in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, a belief that was grounded in biblical authority (Isaiah XIV:13);[10] the association of the north with the sinister left side of the map would have complemented such a belief. In this reoriented universe, the sun made its daily journey from the top of the world's landmass to its bottom, rising from and setting into the great world ocean. This daily journey is described in the Old English poem *Order of the World* in the Exeter Book.[11] The poem describes the sun as the bright light that hastens from the east, and 'comes each morning over the misty cliffs to stride over the waves

wondrously clothed' (lines 60–1). After giving light to all the creatures of the earth, 'the preeminent star departs into the western sky to travel with the host, until in the evening out on the world's ocean they travel over the depths, call up another twilight' (lines 68–71). One mystery remains: where does the sun go at night? The poet refuses to speculate on the existence of Antipodeans, and states that no one knows 'how the gold-bright sun travels through the abyss, in that dusky darkness under the press of waters, or whether land-dwellers are able to make use of that light, after it turns over the ocean's brim' (lines 78–81). Others were more confident, and the compiler of the late Old English trivia dialogue *Adrian and Ritheus* believes he has the answer to where the sun shines at night (no. 6): 'in three places; first on the belly of the whale which is called Leviathan, and in the second period, it shines on hell, and in the third period it shines on the island which is called Glith, and the souls of holy men rest there until Doomsday'.[12] The ultimate (and distant) source of the compiler's information about the sun's journey under the earth is the Ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead* – in all probability transformed and transmitted to the English via early Christian apocryphal works known in Ireland. Other questions in *Adrian and Ritheus* offer more information about the sun: it is a burning stone; it is red in the morning because it comes up from the sea; and is red in the evening because it looks on hell.[13]

## Island and continent

The Anglo-Saxons found themselves on an island at the edge of ocean and continent because of an act of geographic displacement, the movement of disparate tribes across the North Sea from Northern Europe to the island of Britain from the mid fifth century.[14] From the time of this arrival, but especially after the conversion to Christianity in the course of the seventh century, the city of Rome developed a great significance in the Anglo-Saxon geographic imagination. On the European continent they had lived outside the bounds of the Roman Empire, but Britain had been part of the province of Gaul, and Roman remains were scattered across the landscape of their new island home. The genesis of an English nation and race in a new land from loosely associated migrant groups was inseparable from the collapse of Roman power in Britain, and the literate culture they inherited as converts to Christianity placed Rome at the centre of history and the map, presenting this new nation with a fundamentally new way of imagining the world around them. In his *Lives of the Abbots*, Bede reports that King Aldfrith of Northumbria (d. 705) owned a book of cosmographies, originally brought north from Rome by Bede's abbot, Benedict Biscop.[15] As the Anglo-Saxons acquired the learning of Rome, they also inherited the world view of Rome,

though over time this would give way to a more uniquely English under-standing of geography.

The centrality of Rome looms large in the geographical and historical imagination of Bede's Latin *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, completed in 731, and written at a time when the Roman mission to convert the English to Christianity was only just passing from living memory.[16] The Old English translation of the *History*, however, is the product of a later historical moment, and often leaves Rome out of the story of Britain. The island remains the vantage point on the world in the Old English text: 'Britain is an island of the Ocean, that was long ago called Albion, lying between the north and west, opposite, though well separated from, Germania, Gaul and Spain, the greater divisions of Europe.'[17] However, his translator takes the insular point of view to heart much more than Bede. This is noticeable in the Old English text's presentation of Julius Caesar's British expedition. The Old English omits not only all traces of Bede's parallel system for dating historical events (from the founding of Rome), but also the entire story of Caesar's British campaign, which is glossed over with a brief mention: 'The island of Britain was unknown to the Romans, until Gaius the Caesar, also called Julius, came with an army and overran it, sixty years before Christ's advent.'[18] What for Bede had been a key moment in establishing Rome as the centre of the British and ultimately English world view – a theme that runs throughout his *Ecclesiastical History* – is cut down in the Old English text to an annal entry. The translator is not interested in Britain's history as a province of Rome, even as a prelude to the advent of the Saxons, and much is left out or summarized.[19] The Old English text, however, keeps Bede's full account of the decline of Roman power in Britain in the wake of the Goths' sack of Rome.[20] The overall effect of these changes is not to cut the link between the island of Britain and Rome, but to intensify the *History*'s English orientation. Rome is much more at the centre of Bede's eighth-century imagi-native world than his ninth-century translator's.

The peripheral British Isles, at the far north-western corner of Europe, did not figure much in the imagination of Orosius – a Roman Spaniard living in the early fifth century. Nor did the Germanic peoples greatly interest him, except in the threats they posed to the order of the Roman world. The preface to Orosius's *History* sets the geographic boundaries of each of the three continents, before filling out the detail of the lands and peoples they contain. To the bare description of Germania found in the Latin, the Old English adds details about the various Germanic peoples who have settled Northern and Central Europe and become nations since Orosius wrote his geography in the early fifth century, as well as including two detailed descriptions of northern geography by travellers: of the Arctic as told by Ohthere; of the Baltic by

Wulfstan. To Orosius's solitary *Suebi* in Germania, the Old English adds East Franks, the Bavarians of Regensburg, Bohemians, Thuringians, Frisians, Old Saxons, and others.[21] It is not just that the translator is more familiar with northern geography than Orosius had been – the world he knows is a different one, seen from the north by one of the peoples who have come into existence since the collapse of Roman power, and remade the map. Orosius's perspective on history ends with the sack of Rome by Alaric's Goths in 410 – the expanded and updated Germanic geography of the Old English preface anticipates and recontextualizes the *History*'s end for the English reader looking at a Europe ruled by the Goths' followers. In the centuries between the writing of Orosius's *History* and its Old English translation, Roman dominion had collapsed. The *History* of Orosius establishes itself as the story of the contest for territorial dominion between rival urban centres, from Babylon to Rome; this world is centred on the Mediterranean. The 'Mediterranean' is easily read in Latin as the sea at the middle of the world – Orosius conventionally calls it *mare nostrum* (our sea). By the end of the ninth century it was the Romans' sea no longer: in the Old English *History* it is the *Wendelsæ*, the 'sea of the Vandals'. This change characterizes the unresolved tensions in the Anglo-Saxon world view – the Englishing of a historical account that imagines Rome as the centre of the world was necessary because the empire that had spoken Latin was no longer on the map, however much it was retained in the cultural imagination. There is no reason to doubt the Anglo-Saxon translator's belief in Rome's geographical and cultural importance – it was the primal see of the universal Church, and its historical prestige continued to shape imperial ideology in both East and West.[22] But in Western Europe the centre of political gravity had moved to the north and the Germanic world, culminating in the coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor in 800. The altered perspective of the Anglo-Saxons clearly influenced the draughtsman of the *mappa mundi* in MS Cotton Tiberius B.v, the only surviving world map from Anglo-Saxon England; the manuscript reveals a strong interest in cosmology and geography – it also contains a copy of the *Wonders of the East*, Ælfric's *De temporibus anni*, royal genealogies and other related works. On the map Rome is still on the Italian peninsula, and Jerusalem is conventionally marked as the physical centre of the world; but on the Cotton map Britain and its surrounding islands, as well as Scandinavia and the Baltic, are drawn much larger and more accurately than on the types of maps upon which it must be based.

The belief in a single English 'nation' or 'race' – living on the island of Britain, in a shifting imaginative relationship to the city of Rome – is something which could only develop over time among the descendants of a group of diverse Germanic settlers. This nation was most importantly imagined for

the English in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The Old English version of Bede's *History* (made in the later ninth century) translates the story of what the Anglo-Saxons believed was beginning of their nation:

> It was 449 years after our Lord's incarnation, when the emperor Martianus accepted the kingdom, and had it seven years … At that time the Angles and Saxons were called by the aforementioned king [Vortigern], and arrived in Britain in three great ships … Then they sent home messengers, whom they commanded to report the fertility of this land, and the Britons' cowardice. Immediately a larger fleet was sent here, with a stronger force of warriors … They came from the three strongest races of Germania, namely, Saxons, Angles and Jutes.[23]

Minor changes to Bede's original Latin suggest a viewpoint in the Old English text more at home in Britain than Bede's had been, though even Bede had patriotically believed that the English race was stronger than others, descended of the strongest Germanic stock. Bede's Latin had allowed for an international readership; the Old English text takes a more exclusive point of view. The English text locates itself firmly in the island 'here' (*hider*) as the migrants' destination, where Bede had described events from a continental viewpoint as a migration away from the European mainland.[24] This migration was so complete as to erase the trace of these migrants in the former homeland of the Angles: 'that is the land which is named Angulus, between the Jutes and the Saxons, and it is said to have lain deserted, from the time they left it until today'. The Anglo-Saxons never lost the sense that they were a migrant people, or of their geographical genealogy. The traveller Ohthere, whose account of the Baltic is included in the geographic preface in the Old English Orosius, looks towards Jutland and Zealand (*Gotland and Sillende*), and notes for the English reader that 'the Angles dwelt in those lands before they came to this country'.[25]

The inherent tension in the Anglo-Saxons' way of understanding where they fitted into world geography, between the 'objective' viewpoint of Roman mapping and a 'subjective' English one, emerges across different versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, revised and copied at different historical moments. The early entries of the oldest surviving manuscript, the Parker Chronicle, were copied around the year 900. From its opening with a genealogical prologue, this version looks at the world from Wessex: 'In the year 494 after Christ's nativity, Cerdic and Cynric his son landed at Cerdicesora with five ships.'[26] Cerdic was believed to be a descendant of the continental ancestor Woden (no longer a god in Anglo-Saxon genealogies), and is also a conqueror in a new land: 'Six years after they arrived they conquered the kingdom of the West Saxons. These were the first kings who conquered the land of the West Saxons from the Welsh.' Cerdic's descent introduces Britain

and Wessex not as a place of Roman conquest, but Saxon. The remapping of Britain begins with Cerdic's arrival at the newly named *Cerdicesora* (Cerdic's starting point), and Cerdic himself embodies the northern geographic continuum, emptying one land, and filling up another. The Parker Chronicle's perspective on history is oriented firmly on Wessex in nationalist, Germanic terms. Not all redactors shared this perspective. A version of the *Chronicle* made for Peterborough Abbey about six decades after the Norman Conquest – made not in Wessex, but in a unified English kingdom – opens its prologue with a debt to Bede's more 'objective' geography and ethnography of Britain: 'The island of Britain is eight hundred miles long and two hundred miles broad, and here on this island there are five races: English and British and Welsh and Scottish and Pictish. The first inhabitants of this land were Britons, who came from Armenia.'[27] The chronicler's confusion of 'Armorica' with 'Armenia' may derive from his ignorance of Brittany's old name, beside the more familiar resting place of Noah's ark (at the border between Asia and Europe), from which all the nations of the world had emerged, as described in Genesis x.[28] This alternative introduction to the *Chronicle* imagines an England no longer dominated by Wessex, and adopts a wider perspective than the exclusive West Saxon one, at a time when a new idea of England included more than the English. In the ninth century the royal genealogists of Wessex had their own ideas about how their rulers (and by implication all the Germanic peoples) were related to Noah, the second father of the human race – they claimed descent from an otherwise unknown fourth son of Noah called Scef, born in the ark. It seems this belief did not catch on outside the West Saxon court in which it was created.[29]

## Distant lands

While the Anglo-Saxons could use their own experience to modify antique geographers' inadequate or dated accounts of Britain and Northern Europe, and their imaginations to create a new line of descent for their own race from Noah, they had no experience of the furthest reaches of the world's other two continents, Asia and Africa. Indeed, they were forced to share Orosius's equivocation over whether or not Africa and Asia were even separate landmasses: 'some people would say that there are only two parts [of the world]: Asia, and the other Europe'. What they believed about distant Asia, at the opposite end of the world to their own, was largely influenced by what they read. Two texts translated into Old English – *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle* and *Wonders of the East* – provided detailed information about Asia's further reaches. *Alexander's Letter*, faithfully translated from its Latin source, purports to be a personal account of Alexander the Great's expedition to India,

framed as a letter to Alexander's supposed tutor, Aristotle. This frame presents the *Letter* in terms suggesting an educational purpose (§2): 'And since I know that you are well established in wisdom, then I thought to write to you about the great nation of India, and the disposition of heaven, and the innumerable kinds of serpents and men and wild beasts, so that your learning and knowledge might contribute to a certain extent to the understanding of these novelties.' Aristotle provided no such learned interpretation, and of course was not Alexander's tutor, though the Anglo-Saxons believed him to be. The presence of the *Letter* beside *Beowulf* in Cotton Vitellius A.xv invites the possibility that the work was read as an account of the pagan pride of the Greek king, though the presence of both beside *Wonders of the East* suggests the compiler may have been more interested in marvels and monsters than in morals.

The European homeland is the point of departure for the Macedonian king, as well as the destination of his *Letter*, and provides the measure of normality against which all marvels are to be compared; the Anglo-Saxon reader shared in this European perspective, albeit from the other end of the continent. It is to Greece that Alexander wishes to return, a thought he ponders in the sacred grove of the Sun and Moon at the furthest edge of his eastern journey. The presentation in both the *Letter* and *Wonders* characterizes the Orient in ways common in antiquity, and with some enduring stereotypes: it contains great wealth; many of its inhabitants are treacherous; its wildlife is monstrous and dangerous; it is a place associated with religious mystery and gods. From such works the Anglo-Saxons inherited their own beliefs about Asia. The strange creatures described in *Wonders of the East* are not drawn into a narrative as in *Alexander's Letter*. The Old English *Wonders* is found not only in the *Beowulf* manuscript, but also in MS Cotton Tiberius B.v, where it is accompanied by both its Latin text and illustrations of the creatures and races it describes; its presence here, with the world map, helps the reader to fill in the map's blank Asian landscape with the races believed to live in it. *Wonders* has a more direct focus in race than the *Letter*, as well as an interest in religion, diet and clothing. Despite the different format from *Alexander's Letter* (which is one of its sources) many of the same fascinations with the East recur: some creatures are associated with wealth, such as pepper-producing snakes and giant gold-digging ants. *Alexander's Letter* and *Wonders* share an interest in pagan religion. *Wonders* describes the temple of Baal, the god of the Chaldeans (§23): 'Then there is a certain island . . . In the days of Baal and Jupiter a temple was built there made from wrought iron and brass. And in the same place there is east from there another temple, sacred to the sun, in which is ordained a fine and gentle priest, and he governs the halls and looks after them.' There is nothing too marvellous here, except perhaps the morally

neutral discussion of pagan religion faithfully translated into Old English. Indeed, the description in *Wonders* of the 'fine and gentle priest' offers a positive attitude. The association of the East, the source of the rising sun, with many of the gods was common in Roman times. In the *Letter* Alexander wishes to discover the truth about 'the cave of the god Bacchus'.[30] He wants to know 'whether the tradition was true that [he] had been told, that no one could enter and emerge afterwards unscathed unless he entered the cave with offerings'. The condemned men who are forced into the cave perish three days afterwards, proving the truth of the belief. Alexander might be a boastful king who comes to a sticky end, but the work as a whole presents an enquiring spirit that seeks to find out what it does not know, and understand what can be understood. Alexander may take this too far when he asks the sacred trees of the Sun and the Moon – which speak both Indian and Greek – about his death, which will happen in Babylon. The East emerges from *Wonders* and *Alexander's Letter* not just as a continent full of marvels, but one closely associated with the gods, whether these continue there, like Bacchus, or have been euhemerized like Jupiter and Baal; the latter was often identified with Jupiter's father, Saturn. In the Old English dialogues of Solomon and Saturn, Saturn becomes a Chaldean prince who wanders across the continents of the world in search of wisdom and knowledge.[31] The Anglo-Saxons knew that across the world, in both the past and present, there were many races who did not share their Christian faith, but they did not always feel the need to condemn or even comment on this difference.

Alexander's *Letter* begins his account in the aftermath of his conquest of Persia, as he moves into India. In the royal city of King Porus the Greeks find vast wealth (§8): 'There were golden columns, very great and mighty and rigid, which were immeasurable in their great height, of which we counted a tally of four hundred. The walls were also golden, sheathed with gold plates a finger thick.' Alexander's amazement is the guiding point of view, but as conqueror he also takes possession, and pushes further into the land, where he marvels at the soil's fertility. The fertile East quickly gives way to a desert waste, where nature becomes hostile. When Alexander attempts to take a shortcut across the desert with the help of guides, the natural world of India makes travelling increasingly difficult. His army finds their gold-plated weapons burdensome in the desert heat, and are tempted to cast them off; more useful are the iron tools they lick in their thirst. In the unknown land Alexander needs guides, but those he finds prove untrustworthy. They frustrate his wish to find 'the secret weavers of precious cloth, who spun it wondrously from a certain tree'; the Anglo-Saxon would have known wool, silk and linen, but not the mysteries of cotton. The *Letter* does not explain these either, as it is governed wholly by Alexander's viewpoint – what he does

not see, the reader does not see. The guides' treachery extends further when they reach an unnamed river, which Alexander orders some of his men to cross (§15): 'When they had swum about a quarter of the river, then something awful befell them. There appeared a multitude of water-monsters, larger and more terrible in appearance than the elephants, who dragged the men through the watery waves down to the river bed, and tore them to bloody pieces with their mouths, and seized them all so that none of us knew where any of them had gone.' The hungry water-monsters (Old English *nicras*, glossing the Latin *hippopotami*), would have been more mysterious to the Anglo-Saxon reader than to many ancient travellers in Asia or Africa, though the watery Scandinavian world of *Beowulf* is also haunted by *nicras*. Other beasts encountered by the Greeks, including the rhinoceros and crocodile, were also unknown to the Anglo-Saxons outside books. These were as real to the Anglo-Saxon reader as Asian serpents with two heads or three, or others as large as columns, or with breath 'like a burning torch'.

Alexander's march eastwards provides a sense of the distance away from a defined start – the familiar world of Europe. *Wonders* measures Eastern lands in relation to each other, taking Babylon as its reference point (§1): 'The colony is at the beginning of the land Antimolima . . . On the island there is a great multitude of sheep. And from there to Babylon it is 168 of the lesser measurement called *stadia*, and 115 in the greater measurement called *leuuae*.' In *Wonders* races of humans are human because they are both like and unlike us; animals are animals because they are both like and unlike known animals. For the reader the Anglo-Saxon experience of the world becomes the norm. The hens in 'a place called Lentibelsinea' are born 'like ours' (§3); but they also spontaneously combust if touched. The Anglo-Saxons knew that human bodies could vary in size, shape and colour, and that birth defects could create greater divergences from an assumed norm; this norm is the measure of humanity in *Wonders*. Women thirteen feet tall with boar's tusks and teeth and camels' feet are so 'unclean' and have such 'foulness in body' that they are killed with impunity (§27); others have so much 'humanity' (*menniscnysse*) that Alexander will not harm them (§30). These are differences of degree, rather than of kind. There is nothing too remarkable about the first of two races called *Homodubii* (§8): 'In a certain land men are born who are six feet tall. They have beards to their knees, and hair to their heels. They are called *Homodubii*, that is 'doubtful ones', and they eat raw fish and live on them.' Here any sense of location is lost, but the race itself diverges only slightly from the familiar, and its description could as easily be found in a more scientific account of an early modern traveller. There is nothing doubtful about the humanity or existence of these 'doubtful ones'. A second group given the same name is far more

striking, and perhaps doubtful even to the occasional Anglo-Saxon reader (§17): 'There are born *Homodubii*, that is "doubtful ones". They have a human shape to the navel and below that the shape of a donkey; they have long legs like birds, and a soft voice. If they see or perceive anyone in those lands, they run far off and flee.' The focus on Babylon in the geography of *Wonders* may offer a moral perspective, as the well-known etymology of the city's name identified it with the 'confusion of sin'. However, the same biblical event – the dispersal of the human race at Babel – which confirmed the city's role in human moral history, could also simply provide a geographical logic to the relationship of these strange races to it. Neither *Alexander's Letter* nor *Wonders* seeks to impose a fixed interpretative perspective for the Anglo-Saxon reader moving eastwards.

What the Anglo-Saxons believed about the East was entirely dependent on fictional tales of travellers like Alexander. What they believed about the far north of their world was known from comparable sources. In *Beowulf* the Anglo-Saxon reader could find a world of giants, fiery serpents and proud pagan kings, not unlike that described in *Alexander's Letter*, if a little colder. Another source of information was travellers' tales, two of which are included in the Old English translation of the preface to Orosius's *History*.[32] Ohthere's journey introduces a first-hand account of the Arctic region into Orosian world geography: 'Ohthere told his lord, King Alfred, that he lived farthest to the north of all the Norwegians … he said that the land extended very much further north … on one occasion he wished to find out how far that land extended due north, or whether anyone lived north of the wilderness.'[33] The tone and style are not unlike those of the opening of *Alexander's Letter*, with Alfred here fulfilling the role of Aristotle, to whom the exotic travels are reported. However, Ohthere is a trader and no conquering hero, and while his detailed mapping also echoes both *Alexander's Letter* and *Wonders*, he deliberately avoids territories and peoples that are potentially hostile. As a result, these peoples are not described: 'Then he had to wait there for a wind directly from the north, for at that point the land turned due south – or the sea in on the land – he did not know which. From there he sailed due south, close to the land for as far as he could sail in five days. There a great river extended up into the land. Then they turned up into that river because they dare not sail beyond the river for fear of hostility, because on the other side of the river the land was all inhabited.'[34] The way the physical world is presented is not the vertical view of the map, but the horizontal view of the earth-bound observer. The early medieval explorer does not give names to rivers – if they have names that are unknown to him, they remain anonymous. The empty space of the wilderness is similarly unnamed, as names of the lands come from the peoples who live on them. Ohthere's timidity makes his account far less exciting than

Alexander's. Ohthere is a trader interested in neither marvels nor conquest, and he refuses to pass on travellers' tales outside his personal experience: 'The Permians told him many stories both of their own land and of the lands which were round about them; but he did not know what the truth of it was, since he did not see it for himself.'[35] The Anglo-Saxon reader wanting to know more might have regretted Ohthere's commonsense caution as much as the modern reader does.

Wulfstan's account of his voyage begins from Hedeby, a major trading centre in the western Baltic in the Viking Age: 'Wulfstan said that he travelled from Hedeby and that he was in Truso within seven days and nights, since the ship was running under sail all the way. Wendland was on his starboard, and on his port was Langeland, and Laaland, and Falster, and Skane; and all these lands belong to Denmark.'[36] Wulfstan's list of lands and peoples around the Baltic continues, so that together his voyage and Ohthere's give an account of the northern, western and southern limits of Scandinavia. The geography Wulfstan narrates on port and starboard is also the setting of parts of *Beowulf*, but there are no sea-monsters or other marvels in Wulfstan's Baltic. His account of the southern Baltic coast serves to complete Orosius's description of Europe, defining its northern limit. The delimitation of Scandinavia (even with uncertainty about whether it connected to Europe or Asia at its eastern end) and Europe completes the geography of the source from an Anglo-Saxon viewpoint. The nature of the detail provided by Wulfstan suggests his greater curiosity about the strangeness of other peoples than Ohthere's. While Ohthere deliberately refuses to report unverifiable tales, Wulfstan enjoys describing the unusual funeral customs of Estonia, where dead men can lie uncremated for months. This is made possible because the Ests possess the technology for making ice, which Wulfstan apparently does not understand, but simply mentions without comment. What interests Wulfstan most is the way the Ests disperse the accumulated wealth of the dead in ritual horse races, by placing shares of various size at spaced intervals: 'Then they all gallop towards the valuables; then the man who has the swiftest horse acquires the first and also the largest share, and so on one after another until it is all taken . . . And then each rides on his way with the valuables, and may have it all.'[37] Wulfstan's description suggests more amazement at the destruction of accumulated wealth than at either the surprising technology or religious rituals. The account's morally neutral treatment of Northern pagan practice presents a striking parallel to the presentation of religion in both *Alexander's Letter* and *Wonders*.

The parallels between both the accounts of the North in the Old English Orosius and the descriptions of the East in *Alexander's Letter* and *Wonders* do not suggest that the journeys of Ohthere and Wulfstan are fanciful tales.[38]

The reliability of most of their geographic detail suggests they describe real journeys. The stylistic similarities of the accounts more likely suggest that when it came to writing down the descriptions of the distant North, familiar rhetorical models provided by texts describing the distant East were followed. The stylistic borrowings suggest that for the Anglo-Saxons, the claim to truth of all the accounts was equally strong, and that Alexander's objectivity might lend weight to Ohthere's equivocation. The Anglo-Saxon way of looking at their world was one that developed over time. The Anglo-Saxons emerged into the world as the result of their own conquering journey from the European mainland to a new land, the fertile island of Britain. They became a new nation as they became Christians, converted by Roman missionaries not just to a new religion, but also to a new way of seeing the world. They appropriated elements of the learning of antiquity and its cosmos into what they believed, as well as biblical lore and improbable tales about the East. But the dynamic world view they constructed from these was uniquely their own.

## NOTES

1. *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 6 (New York and London, 1942), pp. 116–18.
2. Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), edits and translates both *Alexander's Letter* (pp. 183–203) and *Wonders of the East* (pp. 225–53).
3. See G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague, 1948), pp. 172–86.
4. See *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: an Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.III*, ed. R. M. Liuzza, AST 8 (Cambridge, 2011), p. 173.
5. *Ælfric's De temporibus anni*, ed. M. Blake, AST 6 (Cambridge, 2009), p. 90 (c. VIII. 7). See Liuzza, *Prognostics*, p. 27.
6. *Bedae opera de temporibus*, ed. C. W. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 1943); *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. F. Wallis (Liverpool, 1999).
7. *The Old English Boethius*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), I, 463–70.
8. *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. G. Kotzor, 2 vols. (Munich, 1981), II, 34.
9. *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, EETS ss 6 (London, 1980), p. 8, lines 11–15; *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, trans. A. T. Fear (Liverpool, 2010).
10. An idea also found in *The Wanderer* 104–5, and *Genesis A* 32.
11. *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York and London, 1936), pp. 163–6.
12. *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, ed. J. E. Cross and T. D. Hill (Toronto, 1982).
13. *Ibid.*, nos. 7, 8, 10.
14. See N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, CT, 1989), pp. 33–71; F. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest:*

*Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 235–69.

15. See N. Howe, *Writing the Map in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, CT, 2008), pp. 1–2.

16. Bede draws on personal accounts of some who knew Roman missionaries in Northumbria, including James the Deacon, who survived to Bede's own day; see *HE* II.16 (p. 193).

17. *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. T. Miller, EETS os 95, 96, 110 and 111 (London, 1890–8; repr. 1959–63), I, 24, line 29–26, line 1.

18. *Ibid.*, I, 30, lines 13–15.

19. *Ibid.*, I, 30–2, and *HE*, pp. 20–8 (I. 2–6).

20. *Old English Bede*, ed. Miller, I, 42, line 24–44, line 6.

21. See *Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. 12, line 17–13, line 28.

22. See J. L. Nelson, *The Frankish World 750–900* (London, 1994), pp. 89–98.

23. *Old English Bede*, ed. Miller, I, 50, line 17–52, line 4.

24. See *HE*, p. 50 (I. 15).

25. *Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, p. 16, lines 18–19.

26. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 3: MS A*, ed. J. Bately (Cambridge, 1986), 1. Three Chronicle versions are translated in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. G. N. Garmonsway (London, 1972).

27. See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 7: MS E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004), 3.

28. See D. Anlezark, *Water and Fire: the Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 241–90.

29. See D. Anlezark, 'Sceaf, Japheth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons', *ASE* 31 (2002), 13–46.

30. *Alexander's Letter*, ed. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 244 [§31].

31. See D. Anlezark, *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, AST 7 (Cambridge, 2009), p. 32.

32. See I. Valtonen, *The North in the 'Old English Orosius': a Geographical Narrative in Context* (Helsinki, 2008).

33. *Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. 13, line 29–14, line 7.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 14, lines 14–20.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 14, lines 27–9.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 16, lines 21–5.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 17, lines 21–6.

38. See H. L. C. Tristram, 'Ohthere, Wulfstan und der Aethicus Ister', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 3 (1982), 153–68.

ROBERTA FRANK

# 5

# Germanic legend in Old English literature

Scholarly tradition wants us to speak well of the works we study; there would be little point in talking about something that was not beautiful and truthful, not 'interesting'. Germanic legend has interest, almost too much so, but its beauty is not in the usual places. The names of heroes and nations that the poets so endlessly roll off are not there for their euphony. It is a rare ear that lingers in delight over –

> Ðeodric ahte    þritig wintra
> Mæringa burg;    þæt wæs monegum cuþ.    (*Deor* 18–19)

Theodoric possessed for thirty years the stronghold of the Goths; that was known to many.

or

> Ætla weold Hunum,    Eormanric Gotum    (*Widsith* 18)

Attila ruled the Huns,    Ermanaric the Goths

As for uplifting plots, the poets seldom tell the stories they allude to, and their allusions are elliptical to the point of obscurity. When the tales are told, they turn out to be about sibling rivalry, kin murder, incest, shaky marriages, treachery and theft. Germanic legend seldom eulogizes the figures it condemns to historical action, and its themes are the stuff that fantasies of younger brothers are made of: an underdog's defiant resistance, the fall of a leader, the automaticity of revenge (called by Auden the earth's only perpetual motion machine). And as for truth, the poets prove by their inventiveness, their cavalier reorganization of chronology and geography, that the urge to create history out of next to nothing was not lost with the Greeks and Romans.

Nevertheless, Germanic legend matters to us: because it was somehow important to the Anglo-Saxons, who tried harder and harder with each passing century to establish a Germanic identity; and because an

acquaintance with the stories enables us to follow what is going on in five Old English poems. But the lasting appeal of Germanic legend has little to do with utility, societal imperatives, or other practical considerations. Germanic legend holds our interest because it is extraordinary, a strange and enchanting offspring of the real and the dreamworld, of Clio and Morpheus.

Many have written much about a very few texts. The relevant Old English poems can be counted on the fingers of one hand: *The Finnsburh Fragment, Waldere, Beowulf, Widsith* and *Deor*, the first a single (now lost) leaf, the second two separate leaves, and the third charred around the edges. The first three poems are narratives, rich in action and dialogue; the last two are lyrical monologues that allude, in a sometimes riddling way, to the world of epic. Although Germanic legend in Old English literature is a small and much trampled cabbage-patch, the pre-1100 harvest from Scandinavia and the Continent is even sparser: the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* (about 68 lines, probably fragmentary, and written down in the early ninth century); the Latin *Waltharius*, probably from the late Carolingian period, and a paraphrase of the same legend in an early eleventh-century Italian chronicle; perhaps 500 lines of Old Norse poetry, only a few verses of which survive in a contemporary inscription. Completing the corpus are a scattering of names in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, a reference to Hygelac the Geat in the *Liber monstrorum*, allusions to the legendary Ingeld and Ermanaric in Latin letters from the Continent, and an entry in two related German annals from *c.* 1000.[1]

Germanic legend as usually defined has to do with figures and events situated in a two-hundred-year period extending between the fourth and sixth centuries, from the incursions of the Huns and death of Ermanaric in 375 to the conquest of Italy by the Langobardi (Lombards) under Alboin in 568: the 'heroic' or founding age of a new Europe (see fig. 1). When history becomes legend, events and circumstances change beyond recognition. Rulers from different centuries are represented as coexisting in some vague period 'before' our time, a past lacking all definition and substance. Ermanaric, mighty king of the Ostrogoths (d. 375), Guthhere (Gundaharius), the Burgundian ruler killed by the Huns around 437, Attila, the greatest and, as far as legend is concerned, only Hunnish king (d. 453), and Theodoric the Ostrogoth, ruler of Italy (d. 526), are portrayed as contemporaries and sometimes relatives. Within this fabulous time-span, it is absurd to ask whether Finn was killed before Weland raped Beadohild, or whether Sigemund slew his dragon before Heoden abducted Hild. Situated somewhere between history and fairy-tale, Germanic legend tells of a distant and largely imaginary past.

None of the stories takes place in the British Isles. The tales pay little attention to politics or religion. Architecture gets barely a sideways glance. The poets are concerned with one group in society – the king and his retainers – and with the aristocratic pastimes of this elite. Their heroes act out elaborate rituals of greeting, fighting and drinking, boasting and arming, gift-giving and parting, the generative grammar of life in the hall. The backdrop is painted in dramatic chiaroscuro: splashes of dark and light, deep shadows, glistening swords, night and fire, raven and dawn. The only primary colour mentioned is the yellow of shields.

National catastrophes are depicted as a series of personal and psychological conflicts. Ingeld loves his wife but, when reminded, his honour more; Ermanaric is a manic gift-giver but a depressed head-of-family who destroys his kin; Theodoric, a bad-luck Goth if ever there was one, is an exile and fugitive, harassed by monsters and bullied by his uncle; and Ongentheow, the fierce, grizzled ruler of the Swedes, brings an army to bay, cutting its king to pieces, just to get his wife back. The poets convey meaning economically, through stark gestures and familiar motifs: the silent placing of a sword on Hengest's lap screams out vengeance; the wild circling of ravens in the skies over Finnsburh predicts slaughter. All the legends, at a certain distance, seem ingenious variations on a few formulae: courageous death, the good ruler and the grasping, the generous act and the cowardly, the loyal retainer and the treacherous. Despite, or perhaps because of, their focus on a masculine pride of life, the legends reveal a taste for stories in which women play a part. The *Beowulf*-poet's own penchant for women of legend, such as Hildeburh, is well known; he looks on, with a torturer's pity, as she suffers, guiltless, her world collapsing around her. Deor's six examples of legendary misfortunes name two Hilds (Beado- and Mæth-) and allude to a third. Widsith begins his far-travels by escorting a Hild (Ealh-) to the home of her future husband and slayer. And two of the three speeches in *Waldere* have been attributed to yet another Hild (*Hildegyth). Just as Fair Ellen or Fair Eleanor can be the heroine of almost any ballad, so the name 'hild' ('battle') seems favoured by Old English poets for the sorrowful princesses of Germanic legend.

The question of how legendary material reached the Anglo-Saxons has a traditional answer: song. Andreas Heusler, whose theories dominated the study of ancient Germanic poetry in the twentieth century, accepted the unanimous opinion of scholars that short, narrative songs or 'lays' were the most important instrument for transmitting Germanic legend.[2] The key references to a singing *Germania* – in Tacitus, Ammianus, Ausonius, Priscus, Procopius, Gregory the Great, Bede, Altfrid, Einhard and Thegan – have been collected and discussed many times.[3] Yet no matter how memorable Julian the Apostate's comparison of the songs of the barbarians across the

Rhine to the croaking of harsh-voiced birds, or Sidonius's complaint that he had to 'bear up under the weight of Germanic words' and to praise 'whatever the Burgundian, with his hair smeared with rancid butter, chooses to sing', or Venantius Fortunatus's dismay at the incessant humming of the harp that accompanied barbarian lays, their words tell us nothing about the kinds of poetry in question (work songs, drinking songs, satires, dirges or whatever). Nor do Tacitus's references to 'ancient songs' and to the enduring reputation of Arminius, Cassiodorus's allusion to the celebrated Gensimundus, Jordanes's statement about Goths singing of the deeds of their ancestors, or even the reference in Einhard to vernacular poetry, tell us more than that eulogistic poetry was widely known and practised.

The *Beowulf*-poet's depiction of two anonymous Danish *scop*s reciting stories from Germanic legend (lines 853–97, 1068–159) indicates only that one Englishman, in whatever century he lived, believed that sixth-century Danes were likely to behave that way, not that song was *his* medium of exchange. Curiously, none of the singers in the five Old English poems is an Angle, Saxon, Jute or Frisian. Paul the Deacon, the first 'German' historian with a sense of ethnic solidarity, notes around 790 that the bravery and success in war of the Lombard Alboin were still praised in the songs of the Bavarians, Saxons and other men of the same language. But it is not until 797 that we get our first unambiguous reference to narrative songs about a figure of Germanic legend, and this from a clergyman who was not amused.

St Paul's question to the Corinthians about light consorting with darkness, or Christ with Belial, was imitated first by Tertullian (What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?) and then by Jerome (What has Horace to do with the psalter? Virgil with the Evangelists? Cicero with the apostles?). Alcuin gave the formula new life when, in 797, he wrote to the head of an English community charging that his clerics delighted more in listening to certain songs than in reading the word of God:

> Let the words of God be read when the clergy dine together. It is fitting on such occasions to listen to a reader, not a harper; to the sermons of the Fathers, not the songs of the heathen. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? The house is narrow; it cannot contain them both; the King of heaven will have no part with so-called kings who are pagan and damned; for the One King reigns eternally in heaven, while the other, the heathen, is damned and groans in hell. In your houses the voices of readers should be heard, not the tumult of those making merry in the streets.[4]

Jerome's classical allusions are replaced with the name of a king from Danish legend, Ingeld, who is mentioned in both *Beowulf* and *Widsith*:

> Hrothulf and Hrothgar, nephew and uncle,
> kept kinship-bonds together for the longest time,

after they drove off the tribe of pirates,
crushed Ingeld's battle-force, cut down at Heorot
the might of the Heathobards. (*Widsith* 45–9)

Alcuin may have thought it particularly distasteful for the clerics to be listening not to just any old heathen tale but to one celebrating a great Danish victory, so soon after the monastery at Lindisfarne had been hit by Viking raiders. A fondness for Danish stories in the north of England seems to have gone hand in hand with a weakness for Scandinavian fashions in general. In a letter written a year or two earlier to King Æthelred of Northumbria (d. 796), Alcuin, writing with reference to the raid on Lindisfarne, scolded his countrymen for imitating the appearance of the Northmen:

> Consider the dress, the way of wearing the hair, the luxurious habits of the princes and people. Look at your hairstyle, how you have wished to resemble the pagans in your beards and hair. Are you not terrified of those whose hairstyle you wanted to have?[5]

A more positive attitude towards the pagan past is visible a century later in translations of the Alfredian period. Pagan Germanic legend is increasingly treated as if it had intellectual value and interest for Englishmen. At one point in his paraphrase of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, the translator abandons the world of classical paganism for a Germanic allusion, translating Boethius's question 'Where now are the bones of faithful Fabricius?' as 'Where now are the bones of the famous and wise goldsmith Weland?'[6]

Weland, who has no known historical prototype, is depicted on the Franks Casket and on several Gotlandic and Northern English stones; he is mentioned by the *Waltharius*-poet (*Wielandia fabrica*, 965), and by three Old English poets (*Beowulf* 455, *Deor* 1, *Waldere* 1.2; 11.9). (Only the Goths Ermanaric and Theodoric are named by as many.) In Old Norse, the smith appears in verse and in prose; and he is referred to in Middle English and Middle High German texts. Ingeld, like all the other North Sea/Baltic heroes with the exception of Hygelac (who gained the attention of two Frankish historians by raiding their kingdom), is not found outside Scandinavia or England.[7] Both Weland and Ingeld may be regarded as 'Germanic' on the grounds, familiar to us from modern comparative linguistics, that items labelled Gothic, Old Franconian, Old Saxon, Old Frisian, Old High German, Old English and Old Norse have something in common. But I would argue that this concept of 'Germanic' was not shared by the early Anglo-Saxons. The literary category we call 'Germanic legend' is ours, not theirs, and it is not so much a description as an explanation. Like the terms 'sunrise' and 'sunset', it is an interpretation of the evidence that has the potential to mislead.

W. P. Ker was clear about what he meant by Germanic legend, and it is different in at least two ways from what current scholarship means. He speaks movingly of the sense of kinship existing among all Germanic speakers in the fourth to sixth centuries, of how the legends of each group were from the beginning viewed as common to all:

> In the wars of the great migration the spirit of each of the German families was quickened, and at the same time the spirit of the whole of Germany, so that each part sympathised with all the rest, and the fame of the heroes went abroad beyond the limits of their own kindred. Ermanaric, Attila, and Theodoric, Sigfred the Frank, and Gundahari the Burgundian, are heroes over all the region occupied by all forms of Teutonic language.[8]

It is true that the Anglo-Saxons never forgot that they had come over the water. (People who live on islands tend to remember such things.) And certainly Bede and the eighth-century English missionaries knew that Frisians, Danes and Saxons were *gens nostra*, 'our people'. But it was not until the Franks under Charlemagne had forged a new empire, stretching from Barcelona and Rome in the south up to Saxony and the frontiers of Denmark in the north, that Goths, Burgundians and Lombards were spoken of as part of that same group.

An Englishman in the age of Bede was unlikely to have heard of Ermanaric, let alone to have regarded him as kin. Goths were not seen as chic or German during the long period stretching from the death of Theodoric to the coronation of Charlemagne. Isidore, writing in seventh-century Spain, could see no family relationship between Goths and Franks; he believed that the former were descended from the Scythians. Fredegar, a Frank writing around 660, portrayed Theodoric the Ostrogoth as a Macedonian, reared in Constantinople; he, like the author of the *Liber historiae Francorum* (*c.* 727), honoured the Franks with Trojan, not Germanic, ancestry.

In history, the very appearance of movements for the defence, revival or recognition of common traditions usually indicates a break in continuity. 'Gothicism', the desire to forge ancestral links with the people of Ermanaric and Theodoric, suddenly became fashionable around 800. Jordanes's *Getica*, which traced the descent of the latter king back to the former, surfaced briefly in mid-seventh-century Lombard Italy, and was circulating by the late eighth century in Frankish territory. In 801, after his coronation in Rome, Charlemagne visited Ravenna. He took from there an equestrian statue which he believed was of Theodoric the Ostrogoth, and set it up before his palace at Aachen. Shortly afterwards, in the *Hildebrandslied*, we find for the first time a story of the exiled Theodoric; and somewhat later in the ninth century, in a verse in runes on the Rok stone in Östergotland (Sweden), the same Theodoric, brave lord of the Mærings, is said to sit on his steed, shield on his shoulder.

People with a professional interest in the past – historians, scholar-clerics, kings and vernacular poets – tend to talk to each other. A degree of literacy at some level in society is all that is needed to ensure a measure of influence for the written word. Between 805 and 860, we can trace, decade by decade, a growing interest in the Goths and their language: shortly before 800, in one early Carolingian text, the term *theodisca lingua* ('Germanic language': cf. modern German *Deutsch*) had expanded to include Old English and Langobardic as well as Frankish; by 805 Gothic had joined; by 830 all *nationes theotiscae* ('Germanic peoples'), Franks included, were, like Jordanes's Goths, given Scandinavian ancestry; and finally, around 860, a theologian could speak of a *gens teudisca*, a community of German-speaking *people*.[9] Stories about Ermanaric were recorded by scholars, and, on at least one occasion, used by a cleric to restrain a king. Towards the end of the century, Archbishop Fulk of Rheims (883–900) asked Arnolf of Carinthia, the East Frankish king and emperor (887–99), to show mercy to his kinsman Charles, exhorting him 'not to follow evil counsels, but to have pity on his people and strengthen a declining royal race, keeping in mind the example found in German books (*ex libris teutonicis*) of King Hermenricus [Ermanaric] who, through the wicked promptings of a certain counsellor, brought about the death of all his family'.[10]

Interest in Gothic language, legend and ancestry was something new, and almost certainly a response to the multicultural empire of Charles and his successors. Carolingian politics probably even influenced which fourth- to sixth-century 'German' kings made it into legend. The great Clovis, regarded by Gregory of Tours as establishing Frankish power throughout Gaul, and the remarkable Gaiseric, ever-victorious leader of the Vandals, are for some reason missing from the roll-call. The absence of Clovis may have something to do with the fact that he had set up residence in Paris, making north-west Gaul (the largely Latin-speaking Neustria) his power-base; if his son, the Frankish Theodoric I, was admitted into legend, it was because he had inherited what was, from a later perspective, the politically correct north-east portion of the kingdom (the largely Frankish-speaking Austrasia, where the Carolingians came from). The Vandals never in the Middle Ages became real 'Germans' or entered Germanic legend: they invaded Spain in 408 and crossed to Africa in 429, effectively detaching themselves from territory that would in the late eighth century become *Germania*.

Ker's list of heroes of Germanic legend includes none from the lands surrounding the North Sea and Baltic, probably because the fame of Ingeld, Onela, Hrothulf and a few score others never reached their continental cousins. His description treats as marginal the regions that provided Anglo-Saxon England with the bulk of its legendary material, and probably its trade

as well. We call the legends of the Danes, Swedes, Geats and Frisians, 'Germanic' because, as Eric Stanley has vividly demonstrated, modern Anglo-Saxon scholarship was born of the Romantic movement, when Germany was the world centre of Germanic philology.[11] From the German perspective, Old English poetry was a temporarily alienated segment of German literature; and Scandinavia, needed storehouse of legend, was a kind of *Germania germanicissima*, preserving untarnished an antiquity that others rather carelessly lost. It is true that each of the three non-fragmentary Old English poems dealing with Germanic story treats its Scandinavian and Frankish material together. That they do so probably reflects their date and encyclopaedic intention rather than a fourth- to sixth-century reality, a pan-Germanism that never was.

Even the most abstract and hypothetical notions can become commonplace if they are what people want to hear and what those in power want them to believe. In England, the devising of elaborate royal genealogies was a fairly late, antiquarian exercise.[12] The several backward expansions of the Anglo-Saxon king-lists testify to a growing, and constantly changing, need to establish legitimacy through illustrious continental ancestors. In the age of Bede, Woden was the stopping point. But the Anglian collection of royal pedigrees, compiled around 796, gives Woden a progenitor; and then – for the kingdoms of Lindsey and (in a narrative part of the *Historia Brittonum, c.* 830) Kent – additional ancestors going back several generations to Geat (Primitive Germanic *\*Gautaz*, probably the Gothic eponym). A pedigree going back to Geat apparently had propaganda value for English kings around 800, when the Carolingians were rediscovering their Gothic roots. The genealogy of King Alfred's father Æthelwulf, added around 892 to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, gives Geat a number of northern ancestors, among whom five – Scyld, Scef, Beaw, Heremod and Hwala – appear as legendary figures in Old English poetry. The expansion backwards to Scyld, eponymous ancestor of the Danish Scyldings, marks what looks like a new social reality, the integration of Dane and Englishman in one kingdom. Royal houses acquired not a little mythological depth and perhaps even some political legitimacy by claiming descent from the gods and rulers of the heartland of northern Europe. And what was of interest to kings was of practical and immediate interest to their subjects.

Attempting to date and place the five Old English poems dealing with Germanic legend is difficult and controversial. Distinguishing genres in a literature lacking, as far as we can tell, special terms for 'epic', 'elegy' or 'lay' can also be troublesome. The five poems are over and over again affirmed to be a very small, probably unrepresentative sample of what must have once existed. Yet so great is the desire to find an authentic 'lay', just one scrap of the

kind of short song believed to have transmitted knowledge of the legends from generation to generation, that scholars have until recently made the *Finnsburh Fragment* one.[13] It has been thought that the forty-eight-line fragment is almost complete, missing only a few verses at the beginning and end, even though the loose (and now lost) leaf containing it may well be all that is left of a once sizeable poem. The extant portion deals in a vivid, close-up way with five days of the same battle at Finn's stronghold sung of by the *scop* (court poet) in Heorot (*Beowulf* 1063–162). At this pace, the Old English poet could have gone on for several thousand lines, from Hengest's birth to his betrayal of Vortigern and subsequent settlement of Kent, constructing a dark founding myth that undermines the foundation on which it rests. As it stands, the *Finnsburh Fragment* does not even exhibit the 'terseness' we require of a 'lay'. Surely there were quicker ways of announcing an enemy's approach, of explaining what that bright light flashing in the distance might be, than the one chosen by its first speaker:

> Ne ðis ne dagað eastan,   ne her draca ne fleogað,
> ne her ðisse healle   hornas ne byrnað.
> Ac her forþ berað;   fugelas singað,
> gylleð græghama,   guðwudu hlynneð,
> scyld scefte oncwyð.   Nu scyneð þes mona
> waðol under wolcnum                                    (3–8)

This is no dawn from the east, nor does a dragon fly here, nor are the gables of this hall burning here. Rather weapons are carried forward here; carrion birds sing, the grey-coated one [wolf] howls, war-wood resounds, shield answers shaft. Now the moon shines, wandering under the heavens.

Parallels to this stylistic device (the offering of alternative explanations before arriving at the correct one) have been located in Irish and Welsh literature, a useful reminder of the degree to which Old English 'Germanic' poetry was a part of contemporary society.[14]

If the two-leaf *Waldere* is not regarded as a 'lay', it is at least partly because a verse-epic treating the same legend survives in the 1456-hexameter *Waltharius*. The story of Walter – his escape from Attila's court with treasure and with Hildegyth (unnamed in the Old English fragment), and his great battle against Guthhere and Hagena (Old Norse Gunnarr and Hǫgni) – was popular over a wide area and for at least four centuries. The Old English text presents a number of problems: the original order of the leaves is uncertain; we cannot decide which of the four chief characters speaks the first ten lines of the (traditionally) second leaf; and the (probable) lack of a tragic ending bothers Germanists, who want Walter to end his days in battle, not marriage. Nevertheless, the poem is important for students of Germanic legend because

its sixty-three lines provide vivid examples of, among other things, the tension between a heroic code and human affection, the lack of concern with chronology (the poet portrays Theodoric the Ostrogoth, Nithhad, Weland and Widia as older than Attila), weapons with a legendary past, stolen treasure, the hero's headlong drive for everlasting glory and the role of women in Old English poetry. Hildegyth, who does much of the talking in the first fragment, praises Waldere for his valour, saying that she will never have cause to chide him for fleeing the field. After playing the valkyrie to perfection and inciting her hero to battle, she starts to worry and, anxiously, to repeat herself:

> ac ðu symle furðor   feohtan sohtest,
> mæl ofer mearce;   ðy ic ðe metod ondred,
> þæt ðu to fyrenlice   feohtan sohtest
> æt ðam ætstealle,   oðres monnes
> wigrædenne                                      (I, 18–22)

But you always sought the battle further forward, a position (?) beyond the limit; I feared God on your behalf, because you too rashly sought battle at the front (?), according to the war-plan of the other man.

The relationship between *Waldere* and *Waltharius*, or between them and the tenth-century poem by Ekkehard I of St Gallen and the Latin paraphrase in the early eleventh-century *Chronicon Novaliciense*, is unclear. Because literature in written form was not accessible to the vast majority of Anglo-Saxons, the latest fashions in Germanic legend had to come to them as oral narrative. But there was a continual interchange in early medieval Europe between written and oral modes of transmission, between the historical scholarship that recorded the presence of hostages among the Huns and the tall tales that told of their adventures. *Waldere*, like the other four Old English poems on Germanic subjects, did not exist in an enclosed 'oral' world.

In *Widsith, Deor* and *Beowulf*, knowledge of Germanic legend is taken for granted as belonging to both the poet and his public. Material is used in an allusive, referential way, not just thematically. It is true that, in *Beowulf*, the poet tells us as much as we need to know to follow the main story; in *Widsith*, the poet's opening and closing lines, and the *scop*'s narrative insertions, give us a good idea of what is going on; and in *Deor*, acquaintance with the tales behind the allusions is not essential for understanding the general drift of the poem. But this minimalist inventory gives a wrong impression of the kind of enjoyment to be derived from the three poems. The pleasure of recognition, of sharing in an erudite game, seems to have been as important to the Anglo-Saxons as to readers of Ovid and Milton. Germanic legend was something people had to know, like chess, claret or cricket, if they wanted to be thought cultured. *Widsith* names some seventy kings and as many tribes in its 143

lines; *Deor*, in 42 lines, refers to five or six stories (depending on whether Weland and Beadohild count as one or two); and *Beowulf*, in 3182 lines, draws on about twenty legends. The audience's memory, like a frame, shapes and gives meaning to the poet's often fleeting allusions.

There was also the pleasure of surprise. All three poems introduce a fictive or new character into the known world of legend: Widsith, the far-travelled poet; Deor, the supplanted *scop*; and Beowulf, the Good Samaritan Geat. We follow each *novus homo* as he meets and mingles with the heroes of past times. The poet tends to use his titular character to explore the early stages, the *enfances*, of an established legend or hero, reconstructing what might have happened just before the main story starts. No-one had ever mentioned, for example, who took Ermanaric's bride-to-be, the legendary Svanhild, to the land of the Goths; it was Widsith. No story gave the name of Heoden's first court poet, the *scop* cast aside when his patron hired the golden-voiced Heorrenda; he was called Deor. Did anyone ever beat the legendary Breca ('breaker, wave') in a contest out on the ocean? The young Beowulf did. We can never be absolutely certain that the Anglo-Saxon poets knew the stories about Svanhild, Heoden and Breca that we think they knew. That they could have, however, is confirmed by the Old Norse *Ragnarsdrápa*, attributed to the ninth-century Bragi, a court poet thought to have British relatives. His famous *dróttkvætt* poem, probably the first in that metre to have come down to us, focuses on the climactic moments of the same three (or in the case of the mythological third, similar) legends: the death of Ermanaric at the hands of Svanhild's brothers; the abduction of Hild by Heoden; and Thor's famous rowing out with the giant Hymir ('sea') to engage the monster on the ocean floor.[15]

The fictional *scop*, whom the *Widsith*-poet introduces and overhears, recites three supposedly traditional name-lists. The first is a catalogue of the kings of legend and the peoples they ruled, with the structure:

<div style="text-align:center">

Þeodric weold Froncum, Þyle Rondingum       (24)

Theodric ruled the Franks, Thyle the Rondings.

</div>

The second is a catalogue of tribes, mostly the North Sea and Baltic nations, with the structure:

<div style="text-align:center">

Mid Seaxum ic wæs ond Sycgum ond mid Sweordwerum     (62)

I was with the Saxons and with the Sycgan and with the Swordsmen.

</div>

The third is of heroes and rulers of legend, with the structure:

<div style="text-align:center">

Emercan sohte ic ond Fridlan    ond Eastgotan      (113)

I sought Emerca and Fridla and Eastgota.

</div>

There is a tendency to think that this roll-call did not sound to Anglo-Saxon ears as it does to ours, but it probably sounded, if anything, more artificial and pedantic: a returned traveller's tedious enumeration of all the important people he saw on his last trip abroad, and how nice they were to him, how terribly generous. That is all Widsith tells us, for example, about two great heroes of legend: Guthhere, king of the Burgundians, and Ælfwine [Alboin], king of the Lombards. Many of the names in Widsith's catalogues are known to history (Theodoric the Frank) and legend (Ermanaric's nephews Emerca and Fridla); others are unknown but appear in another Old English poem (Sycgan = Secgan, *Finnsburh* 24); still others are 'speaking-names' (Thyle 'Spokesman', Sweordweras 'Swordsmen'), perhaps traditional, perhaps invented by the poet, perhaps a rationalization, a translation into recognizable elements, of an unfamiliar personal or tribal name. Some of the names are clustered in such a way as to suggest that the poet had a particular story in mind: lines 27–31, for example, mention three figures from the Finnsburh legend.

The three catalogues of *Widsith* are separated by short narrative episodes, which refer to major legendary events, such as the battle between the Goths and Huns. In contrast to the sometimes obscure names in the catalogues, all the stories alluded to in these 'epic' sections are well known. Several of the heroes named are mentioned in *Beowulf*: Offa establishing the southern boundary of his father's kingdom; Hrothulf and Hrothgar crushing at Heorot the attacking Heathobards under Ingeld; and the adventures of the legendary outlaw Hama. *Widsith* is, for no good reason, usually regarded as a very old poem, perhaps even older than Cædmon's *Hymn*. Whatever its age, it was probably not composed at any great remove, in time or place, from *Beowulf*.

The wit of *Deor* lies in part in the way it treats the legendary on an equal footing with everyday reality: the supplanted poet, as if to put his unhappiness into perspective, names famous figures of Germanic story who had (or gave others) a hard time. It is as if a jilted woman were to calm her nerves by reflecting that Medea, Clytemnestra, even Pasiphaë, had boyfriend troubles too. *Deor* is divided by a repeated refrain into six stanzas, each one alluding to a situation from legend: Weland abused by Nithhad; Beadohild's pregnancy; the fatal love of Mæthhild and Geat (details unknown); the Gothic Theodoric's oppression of his subjects; Ermanaric's cruelty to his; and, finally, the abduction of Hild by Heoden. It is hard to find truly 'happy' endings among these Germanic tales; but the *scop*'s refrain seems to turn each story into an exemplum of misery overcome:

> Beadohilde ne wæs    hyre broþra deaþ
> on sefan swa sar    swa hyre sylfre þing,
> þæt heo gearolice    ongieten hæfde

þæt heo eacen wæs;   æfre ne meahte
þriste geþencan,   hu ymb þæt sceolde.
Þæs ofereode,   þisses swa mæg!                    (8–13)

> To Beadohild the death of her brothers was not so painful in her mind as her own affair, that she clearly had recognized that she was pregnant; she could never resolutely think how she should act about that. That passed over; so can this.

Beadohild, raped by Weland after he had killed her two young brothers, gave birth to Widia, a famous adventurer featured in *Waldere* and *Widsith*; so, Deor seems to be saying, everything turns out for the best in the end. (That need not have been Beadohild's view.) The *scop* explains his own miseries in the final stanza: he was forced into early retirement by the minstrel whose artistry (in the Middle High German *Kudrun*) so captivated Hild that she consented to elope with Heoden. In the Old Norse accounts, early and late, the result is not only tragic but permanent: an everlasting battle between father and husband over which Hild, true to her name, presides; at her command, the slain awaken each day at dawn to begin hostilities anew. A story of suffering destined to last until the end of the world was an odd choice for a *scop* wanting to console himself with the thought that sorrow, like joy, is transitory, or a poet to assure his audience that, man being mortal, his miseries must pass. This is not to suggest that Deor was fired for incompetence, just that an audience knowing the version of the legend that Bragi knew would find some irony, if not self-mockery, in the *scop*'s concluding refrain.

Like Widsith and Deor, and like Aeneas, Troilus, Sir Galahad, Palamon and Arcite, Robin Hood and a host of others, Beowulf is a new hero in legendland. The Old English poet endows him with a remarkable sense of the past and of the future. He can look back two generations, tracing the origins of the feud between the Swedes and Geats (2379–96, 2472–89, 2611–19 and 2922–98). He can also forecast the feuds of the next generation: on the basis of a piece of information picked up at the Danish court, he turns the Ingeld legend referred to by Alcuin into a political prophecy, a sequence of events likely to occur in the near future (2024–69). Earlier heroes of legend like Scyld, Heremod, Finn, Offa, Sigemund, Ermanaric and Hama are not made contemporaneous with the sixth-century events described, but are set in a distant mirror, conveying the illusion of a many-storied long-ago. The poet's reconstruction for his protagonist of a northern heroic age presents such an internally consistent picture of Scandinavian society around AD 500 that his imitation of historical truth has been taken for the reality. Indeed, the one event in *Beowulf* recorded by the literate world – Hygelac's raid on the Merovingian kingdom – is referred to no less than four times (1202–14, 2354–66, 2501–8 and 2911–21), almost as a touchstone of authenticity.

Like a scholar, the *Beowulf*-poet imparts to things a unity they do not possess, and gets away with it: his interpretation is passed off as true.

The legends in *Beowulf* seem to come in waves. Sometimes they function as an agreeable negative argument: a king should not behave like Heremod, or a queen like the murderess who later became Offa's wife. Sometimes they are used, indirectly, to praise. Pindar could think of no better way to honour a winning athlete than to tell him some old legend; the *Beowulf*-poet has an anonymous Dane celebrate Beowulf's victory by reciting the story of Sigemund's dragon-fight: in this way the new hero is raised to the level of the legendary world. When necessary, even myth becomes history: Beowulf's story of Hæthcyn's accidental slaying of Herebeald (2535–43) euhemerizes a fratricide in the Norse pantheon. Stories are told of Scyld, featured in the West Saxon royal genealogy; of Offa, in the Mercian; and of Hengest, in the Kentish. There is a high concentration of *hapax legomena*, particularly compounds, in the *scop*'s story of Hengest at Finnsburh. These words are sometimes imagined as 'older', deriving from a pre-existing 'lay'; but they may well be, like Beowulf himself, newly coined, constructed on traditional (and thus 'old') patterns, claiming links to 'the past' and 'the ancestors'. The final scene of the Finnsburh episode shows Hengest boarding a ship and putting to sea, intending to sail to Denmark. Did a storm come up? Did the Danes fear to keep him? Was it boredom at home or long, sad evenings sipping tea with Hildeburh that led him to accept an invitation to England? Causal connections are never made. The poet's hearers are expected to be as sly and agile as he is, to serve as his accomplices, his conspirators in breaking and entering the past.

Each name or episode in *Widsith, Deor* and *Beowulf* may be regarded as an allusion to another poem. The notion that no text is an island, that every work is a response to a conversation or dialogue that it presupposes but need not mention, was learned long ago by students of Germanic legend. The hard part is applying this wisdom to poems that are, indeed, islands, the preserved tips of icebergs that melted away long ago. We know how large a part ephemera – newspapers, children's literature, schoolbooks, cheap paperbacks, movies, television, pop music – play in our own lives, and can imagine equivalent 'oral' classes of material having a similar cultural importance in Anglo-Saxon England. But they have not come down to us; we shall never know what songs the cowherds sang the night Cædmon left the party early. To hear any part of the other side of the conversation, readers of the Old English poems have to tap material from a variety of foreign sources, many from the thirteenth century or later, in full awareness that the 'dialogue' changes dramatically over the years, that each poet makes the story again in his own way. Our ignorance means that we may expect to make mistakes.

It is, of course, safer, and more scientific, to say 'there is no positive evidence that the Anglo-Saxons knew the story of . . .', for there rarely is. Explicitness was not a virtue in the poetry of Germanic legend; reticence was. But reading too much into this verse is probably less dangerous than reading too little. Poets give clues when they are responding to something outside their texts, when they want us to know that they mean more than they say. If we do not listen, it is not good manners but laziness: it is easier to believe that Old English verse is simpler, more innocent, less interesting to pry into than our own. Resentful at having to strain to hear, we deafen ourselves to the poet's voice.

A useful working principle for the student of Germanic legend is that all details in the text are capable of explanation, even at the cost of oversubtlety and error. Listen carefully to the poet, for example, as he tells us that Widsith escorted a certain young princess to her future husband:

> Widsith spoke, unlocked his word-hoard, he who of men had travelled through most tribes and peoples over the earth; often he received on the floor of the hall a handsome treasure. His ancestors sprang from the Myrgings. He with Ealhhild, the good peace-weaver, first, from Angeln in the east, sought the home of the Gothic king Eormanric, the cruel oath-breaker. (1–9)

It seems likely, as Chambers thought, that some specific evil deed accounts for the epithet 'cruel oath-breaker' at this point. Malone disagreed; he refused to see any allusion here to Ermanaric's future slaying of his lovely bride on trumped-up charges of adultery with her stepson, declaring that as far as we can tell the Ealhhild of the Old English poem was on the best of terms with her husband (this is like arguing that, because a friend of Caesar's said so, Brutus was an honourable man).[16] Old Norse verse evoking the same legend shows us just how devious early Germanic poetry can be. Bragi, at the very moment that Svanhild's brothers are poised to dispatch Ermanaric, refers to the Gothic king as 'joy, or love, of Foglhild' (= Svanhild); the poet also calls him 'chief kinsman of Randvér' (= his son). Both epithets are ironic reminders of what might have been, not assertions that Ermanaric was a devoted husband and father, and that the boys were wrong to want to kill him. When Widsith boasts that he sang the praises of Ermanaric's wife, spreading her fame through many a land (97–108), he is telling us, if we are listening, that she is a famous figure in Germanic legend, and that he alone, our self-regarding *scop*, was responsible. The Old English poet, no less than Hamlet, worked by indirections.

Different authors had different techniques. The *Widsith*-poet was partial to the half-said thing, distilling the complexity of legend into a single epithet or detail. Offa, he tells us, fixed the boundary of his kingdom *ane sweorde* 'with a solitary sword' (41), an emphatic phrase that suggests something more specific than 'in single combat'. The incident alluded to here may be related

to the legend told by Sweyn Aageson and Saxo Grammaticus, in which Offa, wielding a famous sword, strove alone against two foes in order to wipe off the disgrace that earlier stained his people, when two warriors together killed one opponent.

The *Beowulf*-poet, on the other hand, is almost Chaucerian in his ability to make neutral or even mildly approving statements that suggest, despite the innocence of the speaker, that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. A *scop*, jubilant at Beowulf's victory, sings of Sigemund, relating how that hero would sometimes tell his adventures to Fitela, 'uncle to nephew' (881); but the Old English audience probably knew what even Sigemund did not yet realize, that Fitela was not only his sister's son but his own, through incest. (At least one event leading up to the incest story seems to be portrayed on a stone carving, perhaps from the early eleventh century, found at the Old Minster, Winchester.)

A single temporal adverb or adverbial phrase ('at that time', 'then still', 'for a while') can signal trouble. The *Widsith*-poet has his fictive *scop* declare that 'Hrothulf and Hrothgar kept for the longest time kinship-ties together, nephew and uncle' (45–6). And the *Beowulf*-poet, depicting the same pair, says in almost the same words 'at that time their kinship-bonds were still together, each true to the other' (1164–5), adding that both of them trusted Unferth. We can be pretty sure, even without consulting the late Scandinavian authorities that in part confirm our hunch, that Scylding family feelings will soon sour, and that Unferth might have something to do with the break. When Wealhtheow anxiously insists that Hrothulf will repay her and Hrothgar for their kindnesses to him, that he will be good to their boys when her aged husband is gone (1180–7), the poet is probably recalling a tradition that Hrothulf, an even more important figure in legend than Hrothgar, did not remain on good terms with his cousins. And when Beowulf announces mysteriously that King Heorogar, who ruled the Danes for a long time, did not want to give his battle-equipment to his son, the bold Heoroweard (2155–62), we and the audience perhaps know, even if the Geat did not, that Heoroweard will eventually try to get his own back, attacking and killing Hrothulf, whose heroic last stand is probably the most famous episode of the entire Scylding cycle.

It is impossible to know how much more (or less) the Anglo-Saxons knew of Germanic legend than we do. Some conservative readings of the texts are based on the belief that our five poems are very old, that Germanic legend had only just begun to develop when they were composed. Even though the *Widsith*-poet names Emerca and Fridla immediately after mentioning the Herelingas (112–13), our scholarship is still unwilling to accept that the story of the two Harlung brothers, Embrica and Fritla, found in the German *Quedlinburg Annals c.* 1000, formed a part of the Ermanaric cycle when the poem was

new. Hama, a Gothic hero mentioned in *Widsith* (124), is described in *Beowulf* as having fled Ermanaric; he carried treasure to a 'bright stronghold' and chose 'eternal gain' (1198–201). This sounds like the story, known to us only from the thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga*, that Hama, after years at odds with Ermanaric, entered a monastery, bringing with him weapons and gold. But we hesitate to draw a connection, for the penitential motif, so redolent of medieval romance, seems 'out of place' in an ancient Germanic work. To some extent we still share with Tacitus an idealized vision of the Germanic past, of a northern frontier brimming with simple, loyal, brave, proud and warlike pagans, men who were everything that materialistic, intellectual, cosmopolitan Romans were not.

The first certain use of Tacitus's *Germania* after 525, when it is cited in Cassiodorus's *Variae*, occurs in the *Translatio Sancti Alexandri* by the mid-ninth-century monk Rudolf of Fulda.[17] In both periods, the *Germania* appears, like a fairy godmother, to mark and legitimize the birth of a Germanic consciousness, conceived by kings and scholars in emulation of the Caesars. The imagination of the Anglo-Saxons was stirred by this tradition, vague and unformed, of something majestic out of the distant past, of a golden age in which men were taller, bolder, freer and more glorious. And Old English poets were moved to find and make some drama played by these great kings and heroes, cutting them loose from history and setting them free to perform their collective magic on a stage larger than their own lives or society. And if, despite their legendary courage, they meet, as most do, a tragic end, so much the better: a brave but defeated Ingeld becomes for centuries a symbol of the northern will to go down fighting; a charismatic but doomed Ermanaric or Theodoric provides for future generations an image of Germanic sovereignty. According to the poet of the *Voluspá*, the first thing gods do, when the new world rises out of the wreck of the old, is to sit on the ground and tell stories about their all-powerful past, sifting it for clues to the present:

> Þar muno eptir  undrsamligar
> gullnar tǫflor  í grasi finnaz,
> þærs í árdaga  áttar hǫðo

There shall afterwards the wondrous golden chess-pieces be found in the grass, those which they had owned in days of old.[18]

Auden's poem 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud' (d. 1939), uses the same image:

> While as they lie in the grass of our neglect,
> So many long-forgotten objects
> Revealed by his undiscouraged shining
> Are returned to us and made precious again.

Poets of Germanic legend, too, conjured up for their contemporaries a magnificent, aristocratic descent, a proud history embodying current hopes and fears, a dream transmuting the desert of daily existence into a landscape rare and strange.

## NOTES

1. For the major texts, see 'Further reading' below (pp. 331–48), esp. *Beowulf and its Analogues*, trans. Garmonsway and Simpson (London, 1968), and Calder *et al.*, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, II: *the Major Germanic and Celtic Texts in Translation* (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1983), and also F. P. Magoun, Jr and H. M. Smyser, *Walter of Aquitaine: Materials for the Study of his Legend*, Connecticut College Monographs 4 (New London, CT, 1950), and Joyce Hill, *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*, 3rd edn (Durham and Toronto, 2009). On the pictorial monuments of Germanic legend, see R. N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London, 1980), esp. ch. 6; J. Lang, 'Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 48 (1976), 83–94; and S. Margeson, 'The Volsung Legend in Medieval Art', in *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: a Symposium*, ed. F. G. Andersen *et al.* (Odense, 1980), pp. 183–211. Important early studies in English include W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature*, 2nd rev. edn (London, 1908); H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1912); and J. de Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, trans. B. J. Timmer (London, 1963). For cogent criticism of Chadwick's linking of Germanic heroic legend with 'heroic age' society, see R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge, 1977). On early attempts to find pagan remains in this literature, see E. G. Stanley, 'The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism' in his *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 3–110. See, too, J. D. Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems and the Social Life of Texts* (Turnhout, 2007), esp. chapters 1–3.
2. *Lied und Epos in germanischer Sagendichtung* (Dortmund, 1905), p. 4.
3. Examples are reviewed for English readers in J. Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: a Study of the Traditions* (New Haven, CT, 1980), pp. 40–73, and T. M. Andersson, *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford, CA, 1987), pp. 3–16.
4. Letter no. 124, ed. E. Dümmler, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 4.2 (Berlin, 1895), p. 183. See D. A. Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?', *ASE* 22 (1993), 93–125.
5. *EHD*, p. 843.
6. *De consolatione Philosophiae* II, met. 7; *The Old English Boethius*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), I, B.19.16–17.
7. The *Beowulf*-poet's account of Hygelac's raid is not as close to the version in the sixth-century *History* of Gregory of Tours as it is to the abridgement of Gregory's narrative in the eighth-century *Liber historiae Francorum*: see W. Goffart, '*Hetware* and *Hugas*: Datable Anachronisms in *Beowulf*', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase, Toronto Old English Series 6 (Toronto, 1981), pp. 83–100. I must acknowledge here my profound debt to Walter Goffart for his comments and advice during the writing of this paper, for providing it with any stylistic niceties that it might have, and for the constant stimulation of his ideas and teaching.

8. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, pp. 21–2.

9. The key references are conveniently assembled in *Der Volksname Deutsch*, ed. H. Eggers, Wege der Forschung 156 (Darmstadt, 1970), pp. 406–7. See also W. Haubrichs, '*Theodiscus*, Deutsch und Germanisch', in *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung 'germanisch-deutsch'*, ed. H. Beck *et al.*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 24 (Berlin and New York, 2004), pp. 199–227, at 201–2.

10. Flodoard, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* IV.5, ed. J. Heller and G. Waitz, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 13 (Hanover, 1881), p. 564. *The Poetic Edda I*, ed. U. Dronke (Oxford, 1969), pp. 192–224, has a good account of the legendary Ermanaric.

11. 'The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism' (cited above, n. 1).

12. Major studies are K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953), 287–346; D. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies, and Regnal Lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72–104; 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50; H. Moisl, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies and Germanic Oral Tradition', *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 215–48; and A. C. Murray, '*Beowulf*, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Chase, pp. 101–12.

13. But see E. G. Stanley, 'The Germanic "Heroic Lay" of Finnesburg', in his *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English*, Publications of the Dictionary of Old English 3 (Toronto, 1987), pp. 281–97. Also *Finnsburh: Fragment and Episode*, ed. D. K. Fry (London, 1974), pp. 25–6.

14. P. Sims-Williams, 'Is it Fog or Smoke or Warriors Fighting? Irish and Welsh Parallels to the *Finnsburg Fragment*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1976–8), 505–14.

15. English translations of *Ragnarsdrápa* are in *The Poetic Edda I*, ed. Dronke, p. 206 (partial); E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 1–6 (partial); L. Hollander, *The Skalds* (New York, 1945), pp. 32–7 (full but incomprehensible); and A. Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (London, 1987), pp. 7, 73–4, 106 and 123–4 (full but dispersed). Margaret Clunies Ross's new edition and translation of Bragi's stanzas are now in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I* (Turnhout, 2011).

16. Chambers, *Widsith*, p. 24; Malone, *Widsith*, pp. 140–1.

17. Cassiodorus Senator, *Variae* V.2, ed. T. Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores antiquissimi 12 (Berlin, 1894), pp. 143–4; *Translatio Sancti Alexandri*, ed. B. Krusch, Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse (1933), pp. 405–36.

18. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, I: Text*, ed. G. Neckel, 5th edn, rev. H. Kuhn (Heidelberg, 1983), p. 14 (str. 61)

# 6

KATHERINE O'BRIEN O'KEEFFE

# Values and ethics in heroic literature

In an image of compelling sadness, the Wanderer evokes the life of a lordless man. Cold and alone, he can do nothing but remember the joys of the past – companions in the hall, the giving of treasure and the favour of his lord. Not even sleep brings forgetfulness:

> Forþon wat se þe sceal    his winedryhtnes
> leofes larcwidum    longe forþolian,
> ðonne sorg ond slæp    somod ætgædre
> earmne anhogan    oft gebindað.
> Þinceð him on mode    þæt he his mondryhten
> clyppe ond cysse,    ond on cneo lecge
> honda ond heafod,    swa he hwilum ær
> in geardagum    giefstolas breac        (*The Wanderer* 37–44)

Indeed, this he knows, who must long be deprived of the counsels of his beloved lord, when sorrow and sleep together often bind the wretched solitary one. It seems to him in his mind that he embraces and kisses his lord and lays hands and head on his knee, as he had previously, from time to time in days gone by, gained benefit from the throne.

Sleeping, the lordless man dreams of what he longs for most, the life of a retainer, here represented by synecdoche in the act of homage and the giving of treasure. To lack a lord is to lack place and role, friend and kin, help in need, and vengeance after death. The Wanderer's misery, having no remedy in this world, is balanced by the astringent comfort of the next. But even the Wanderer's final spiritual rejection of the world is figured in a lovingly detailed enumeration of its heroic joys: horse, kinsman, gift-giving, feasting, hall-joys, treasure, warriors and lord (*The Wanderer* 92–5).[1]

   The ethos of heroic life pervades Old English literature, marking its conventions, imagery and values. The touchstone of that life – as represented in Old English literature at least – is the vital relationship between retainer and lord, whose binding virtue is loyalty. Continuing loyalty is ensured in the lord's giving

of treasure. Through gifts of worth, a lord enhances both his own reputation and that of his retainer, and he lays upon his man the obligation of future service. In the transaction of the gift, the object given – ring, armour, horse or weapon – becomes the material reminder of the retainer's reciprocal obligation when war service or vengeance is required. This certainly is the meaning of *Beowulf* 20–5, where Beow is praised for prudent munificence, because generosity is expected to ensure loyalty.[2] It is in the nature of a king, as *Maxims II* 28–9 observes, to distribute rings in the hall. Before the combats with Grendel and Grendel's mother, Hrothgar's last word to Beowulf is to assure him that he will be generously rewarded if he survives (*Beowulf* 660–1 and 1380–2). Upon his return home, Beowulf presents horses, armour and treasure to Hygelac and in turn receives golden armour, high rank and extensive land (2190–6). The economy of such generosity must be understood in the function of the exchange to enhance the reputation of both parties and confirm a continuing interdependence. It must also be understood (as the poetry clearly recognized) that the generosity of the lord was not necessarily effective when war came.

In the poetic articulation of the heroic ethos, a warrior's paramount goal is the achievement of a lasting reputation: *Dom biþ selast* (*Maxims I* 80: 'Glory is best'). In the world of *Beowulf*, a lasting reputation is a warrior's only hope for immortality:

> Ure æghwylc sceal   ende gebidan
> worolde lifes;   wyrce se þe mote
> domes ær deaþe;   þæt bið drihtguman
> unlifgendum   æfter selest       (*Beowulf* 1386–9)

Each of us must await the end of life in the world – let him who can achieve glory before death; that will be best afterwards for a warrior no longer living.

In his final words, Beowulf asks that his tomb be built on a coastal headland, so that seafarers, using the promontory as a landmark, will recall the barrow as *Biowulfes biorh* (2807). Both his desire for glory and his pursuit of it are thus appropriately memorialized in the last word of the poem, where Beowulf's men praise him as *lofgeornost* ('most eager for glory'). In a very different context, though once again connecting *deaþ* and *dom*, are Hildegyth's words of encouragement to Waldere in the fragmentary poem of that name:

> . . . is se dæg cumen
> þæt ðu scealt aninga   oðer twega,
> lif forleosan   oððe l[. . .]gne dom
> agan mid eldum,   Ælfheres sunu       (*Waldere* I, 8–11)

Son of Ælfhere, the day has come that you must necessarily do one of two things – lose your life or achieve among men a ?lasting glory.

Lasting glory is won only under conditions where one's life is in doubt. The good deeds (*godum dædum*, 23) by which Waldere will enhance his reputation are specifically acts of valour achieved with his sword, Mimming.[3] That achievement of such glory could be thought fitting praise for a contemporary king is suggested by the entry for 937 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This entry in verse memorializes the victory of Æthelstan and Edmund, who achieved lifelong glory (*ealdorlangne tir*) in battle at an unidentified place called by the poet *Brunanburh*.[4] Put to flight, their enemies have no cause to boast of prowess in battle and have lost stature. The goal of heroic conduct is *dom*, or *lof*, or *mærðu*, which lives in the speech of those coming after. The medium for such lasting praise, *Widsið* suggests, is heroic verse. Even in poems whose focus is the world to come, rather than the present one, the concern for the afterlife is, nonetheless, sometimes phrased in the language of heroic convention, as we see in *The Seafarer* lines 72–80 (see below, pp. 183–4).

If the ultimate heroic reputation may be gained by risking death in a glorious combat, the ordinary obligations of a retainer's life manifest themselves in the literature in less spectacular ways. As the Old English poem *Andreas* suggests, if the lord were to go into exile, his retainers were apparently expected to accompany him. When Andreas resolves to leave alone for treacherous Myrmedonia (where he will suffer for his faith), his companions protest that if they allow the saint to depart alone, they, being lordless (*hlafordlease*), would be welcome nowhere (*Andreas* 405–13).[5] The primary tasks of a retainer, however – at least as represented in Old English verse texts – were defence of the lord in battle and revenge for injuries.

What, precisely, was the nature of the loyalty which the hero owed his lord? The counterpart of the scenes of feasting and giving of treasure detailed in *Beowulf* and nostalgically evoked in *The Wanderer* and *Widsið* was warfare. *The Battle of Finnsburh* praises the five-day battle of Hnæf's men against the Frisians as a fitting repayment for their lord's 'white mead' (39).[6] The retainers of the young Beowulf on the evening of Grendel's mother's attack are praised for their warlike readiness to support their lord (*Beowulf* 1246–50). And Wiglaf's first speech at the dragon's lair suggests that Beowulf's chosen men had formally undertaken to fight for the lord whenever he had need. His comment that death is better for a warrior than a life of disgrace (2890–1) should be understood in the context of the exile enforced as punishment on those who fled to save their own lives. The price of their cowardice was the loss of land rights for themselves and their kin.[7]

Those manifestations of loyalty which are praiseworthy in *Beowulf* – the killing of Dæghrefn (for the death of Hygelac), of Ongentheow (for the death of Hæthcyn), of Finn (for the death of Hnæf) and of Onela (for the death of

Heardred) – are all acts of vengeance taken to repay the death of a lord. Not in every case was the vengeance immediate: Beowulf repaid Onela years later by supporting Eadgils; Hengest brooded for a winter as Finn's unwilling guest until the time when he could avenge Hnæf's killing. Such loyalty reflects the perceived importance of communal obligation as a way to protect the individual from isolation. The loneliness of a solitary life was greatly feared, and *Maxims I* (172–82) presents as axiomatic the observation that it is best for a man to have a brother for mutual comfort and protection.

The entry for 755 in the A-version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* uses the literary conventions of heroic life to shape its narrative of a struggle for power in Wessex (*c.* 757×86), and in so doing provides an unusually detailed representation of conflicts implicit in the heroic ethos.[8] It offers a story of loyalty (with an additional conflict between loyalty to lord and to kin), valour and vengeance, and its detail repays attention. According to the account, Cynewulf became king of the West Saxons after expelling Sigebryht, his kinsman, *for unryhtum dædum* ('for unjust deeds'). Some time later, Sigebryht confirmed the justice of this action by a further outrage – the killing of Cumbra, that nobleman who had been most loyal to him. This treachery earned Sigebryht an inglorious end, when a swineherd, most probably a dependant of Cumbra, avenged the murder by stabbing Sigebryht to death. The annal indicates that after thirty-one years had passed (correctly, twenty-nine), Cynewulf wished to expel Sigebryht's brother, Cyneheard, as well.

Having given this background, the account presents Cyneheard's response. Seizing the opportunity to attack the king when he is only minimally protected, Cyneheard rushes to Merton in Surrey to surprise the king while he is with his mistress. Unguarded and surrounded, the king mounts a valiant defence in the doorway of the woman's *bur* (her private chamber), wounding Cyneheard, though finally being overwhelmed by numbers. Cynewulf's guard, alerted too late, arrive to receive an offer from Cyneheard of *feoh ond feorh* ('property and life') as a settlement if they will agree to follow him. They refuse to serve their lord's *bana* ('slayer') and are slaughtered, save for a single British hostage who is gravely wounded.

The situation is reversed when the rest of the king's retinue arrive in Merton. Upon Cyneheard's offer of compensation, if they will follow him as king, the king's men decline settlement on the grounds that they could not follow the *bana* of their lord. They nonetheless offer safe conduct to any of their kinsmen in Cyneheard's company who wish to leave. Taking a heroic decision which mirrors that of the king's guard, however, Cyneheard's men refuse the offer, claiming that they could do no less than the king's guard who refused *feoh ond feorh*. In the ensuing fight, Cyneheard's men are all

slaughtered, save for the godson of Osric, Cynewulf's ealdorman. He too has been grievously wounded.

The extraordinarily lengthy account of Cynewulf and Cyneheard almost certainly owes its presence in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to its dramatic interplay of conflicting allegiance, absolute loyalty and valour against odds. That it would seem to be a textbook illustration of the themes of heroic conduct found in secular poetry should not be surprising. The appearance of these themes throughout Old English literature demonstrates their continuing appeal, and these heroic conventions offered familiar and satisfying narrative devices both for organizing the struggle between Cynewulf and Cyneheard and for conveying its moral point.

The symmetrical offers of compensation and safe conduct combined with the survival in each battle of only one man from the losing side suggests that the attraction of the account of Cynewulf and Cyneheard lies in the narrative creation and exploitation of balance. Narrative sympathy rests with Cynewulf, and the focal point of the story is social order, which Sigebryht and Cyneheard both violate. The disturbance of order has a moral dimension as well which is reflected in the shifting balance of power between the king's men and those of the usurper.[9] The king, weakened morally by his dalliance, is open to attack. Similarly, his band of select retainers pay for their lack of preparedness with their lives. The narrative focuses on the tensions created by the conflicting demands of kin and group, of king and usurper and of loyalty and self-interest. Order is seen to triumph as the attraction of life and compensation yields to the necessity for vengeance and as the demands of kinship, though pressing, give way to the demands of loyalty to lord.

In the poetry, feud and vengeance are more than practicalities; they are matters of honour and means to enhance a reputation or lose it. However, in contrast to the emphasis on kindred in the feuds of Icelandic literature, feud in Old English literature focuses primarily on conflict within the social group. In *Beowulf*, the grip of feud and vengeance is intimately connected to social order and is as inexorable as fate itself. Grendel's depredations necessitate vengeance, but the feud he engenders is beyond peaceful settlement, since

> sibbe ne wolde
> wið manna hwone    mægenes Deniga,
> feorhbealo feorran,    fea þingian,
> ne þær nænig witena    wenan þorfte
> beorhte bote   to banan folmum          (*Beowulf* 154–8)

He did not wish peace with any of the men of the host of the Danes, to remove the deadly evil, compound with money, nor did any of the wise men there have reason to expect a noble compensation at the hands of the slayer.

Beyond the pale, Grendel is too savage to understand wergild or too monstrous to acknowledge its vital social function. While the imbalance created by Grendel's crimes requires redress, the inevitable price of Beowulf's victory over Grendel is further death, as Æschere's life is exacted by Grendel's mother, *sunu deoð wrecan* (1278: 'to avenge the death of her son').

The Grendel kin are descendants of the fratricide, Cain, whose killing of Abel God himself avenged ('þone cwealm gewræc / ece Drihten', 107–8). But the monstrous progeny of Cain merely mirror behaviour in the civilized human world. Heorot is built only to await the destructive flames from the rekindled Heathobard feud (82–5). Finn and Hengest endure through the Frisian winter a fragile, unwilling peace until vengeance shatters their agreement (1127–53). The Franks and the Swedes nurse their enmity towards the Geats, and the sombre promise of their vengeance lends further poignancy to Beowulf's death (2910–27).

In its deadly necessity vengeance is more comprehensible and more predictable than fate, for it is the expected and praiseworthy duty of both kin and thegn. One of the classic expressions of the value and duty of vengeance is Beowulf's response to Hrothgar's grief at the death of his counsellor, Æschere:

> Ne sorga, snotor guma;  selre bið æghwæm,
> þæt he his freond wrece,  þonne he fela murne          (1384–5)

Do not grieve, wise man. It is better for each man that he avenge his friend than that he mourn much.

But the heroic and praiseworthy pursuit of vengeance has tragic consequences as well. Freawaru, promised in marriage to Ingeld to seal the settlement of a feud between the Heathobards and the Scyldings, would necessarily be unsuccessful (2029–31). Heorot itself would not survive this feud. Hildeburh, a Dane married to the Frisian Finn, having lost son, husband and brother in the feud at Finnsburh, must return to her people. So binding is the necessity for revenge that when Hrethel, as father to both men, is unable to avenge the presumably accidental killing of Herebeald by his brother, Hæthcyn (the poem calls it a 'feohleas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad', 2441: 'a fight without compensation, grievously undertaken'), he takes to his bed and dies.

To this point the discussion of kings, warriors and the ideals of their behaviour has been focused substantially on the literary conventions by which they are presented in Old English literature. However, assessing the congruence between the conventions of heroic literature and the 'reality' which called it forth is extraordinarily difficult. When H. M. Chadwick postulated a 'heroic' stage of society in Western cultures (for Germanic peoples, the period of Migrations, approximately the fourth to sixth centuries AD), he did so in part

to establish authority for 'historical' information possibly contained in national epics and lays written long after that 'heroic' stage.[10] (Old English heroic literature appears in manuscripts of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.) Chadwick's hypothesis cannot be extended to recover a historical reality for the social customs of the migration. Still less do the representations of heroic conduct in Old English literature provide reliable evidence of contemporary culture in Anglo-Saxon England.

The features of early kingship in Anglo-Saxon England are insufficiently documented to allow a specific portrait of the relationship of lord and retainer and the conduct expected of each. In the absence of contemporary evidence, some have looked to Tacitus's *Germania* – a work of the late first century AD – where in chs. 14–15 is found a general outline of the behaviour and expectations of Germanic barbarian war-bands. Certainly, many of the traits which Tacitus describes in his account of the Germanic *comitatus* are consonant with features of heroic convention found in Old English literature. Tacitus speaks of generosity and feasting, feud and settlement, the valour expected of man and chief. In *Germania*, the chieftain leads in battle by example, not by authority, and wishes not to be surpassed in valour by his men. Further, Tacitus claims, the retainer's duty is to defend and protect the lord. It is a lasting shame for a retainer to survive his lord in battle. However, the virtues which Tacitus found praiseworthy in the Germanic warriors were those virtues he found lacking in the Romans of his own day. Thus the *Germania* must be read as a work with a political and moral bias and is an unreliable guide to 'historic' details about either contemporary German barbarians or their post-migration descendants.

The divergence between the literary representations of warrior life and the social realities of both kingship and military life are usefully illustrated by the activities of Alfred the Great. The Anglo-Saxon king about whom we know the most, King Alfred (871–99), left behind both a military and an intellectual legacy. In a kingdom harried for forty years by Viking raiders, Alfred managed during his reign to contain the Vikings, limit their disruptions and secure Wessex. His military reforms, including the institution of a system of fortifications, paved the way for the territorial expansion of his son and grandson (see above, p. 11). Mindful as well of the importance of learning in the kingdom, Alfred instituted a programme of translating Latin works he considered most needful – Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies* and the first fifty psalms.[11] Other important Latin works were translated at his suggestion. The prose Preface to the Old English translation of Gregory's *Regula pastoralis* (the *Pastoral Care*) presents these two activities, warfare and learning, as integral to a successful kingship.

This prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* reflects nostalgically on an English past of heroic and righteous kings, marking 'how the kings who had power over

the people in those days obeyed God and his messengers; and they held peace, morality and power within the country, and also extended their territory abroad; and how they succeeded both in war and in wisdom' (Sweet 3.5–9).[12] In this vision of kingship, the king occupies a middle position, exercising power (*onweald*) over his people but in turn being obedient to God and to the Church. In this way the good king might keep peace, morality and power.

For Alfred, the external military affairs consisted in fighting the heathen Vikings, and a related domestic military concern lay in the deployment of defences and the organization of fighting forces. Of the three kingly pursuits which the Preface discusses (*sibbe*, *siodo* and *onweald*), *siodo* most sets Alfred and his ideal kings apart from the kings of literary heroic convention. In *Widsith* a king lives 'fittingly' (11: *þeawum lifgan*), and these words also praise Beowulf as an old king (*Beowulf* 2144). Nonetheless, the customs of the bands of retainers which they lead are material and secular, concerned with the imagined heroic life of the hall. For example, to the extent that Hrothgar embodies custom, he acts with restraint, cares for his men, makes good his promises, shares treasures and distributes land (*Beowulf* 71–3 and 80–1). But the Preface's use of *siodo* reveals the belief that in his internal affairs the king was responsible as well for the moral guardianship of his people. The translations of important instructional works associated with Alfred's programme of learning reflect this commitment.

One representative endeavour, the translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (chs. 18–19), calls into question and presents an unsparing corrective to the heroic pursuit of lasting praise. Wisdom renames such a goal 'þone idelan hlisan and ðone unnyttan gilp' ('empty fame and idle boasting'). In its treatment of Boethius's argument on the vanity of pursuing fame, the OE *Consolation* observes that in comparison to the universe, the earth is small, but a man's reputation cannot even extend very far on earth. Different languages and customs make the spread of reputation difficult, and death, finally, levels rich and poor alike. To Boethius's allusions to the Romans Brutus and Cato, the translation adds from Germanic legend a reference to the smith, Weland. What little reputation is left for all of these can be written in a few letters (*mid feaum stafum awriten*, B19.26). By meditating on the vulnerability of writing, the text emphasizes how transitory a reputation preserved in this fashion must be. In Boethius, fame of the great lives in stone (II, pr. 7). In the translation of this passage of Boethius, writing is a fragile vehicle for fame, not only because (as in Boethius) histories may be lost, but also because of the shortcomings of the writers of those histories. Reputation may die out 'through the misconduct of those writers who for their sloth and carelessness and also negligence have left unwritten the deeds and the conduct of those men, who in their days were most illustrious and desirous of honour. And even though they

have written down all their lives and deeds, just as they ought if they have done well, nevertheless, have their writings not grown old and perished as soon as they came into being, just as the writers did and also what they wrote about?' (B18.78–85). Reputation is not eternal; it is ended by death.

Moral stewardship can be seen as well in the laws Alfred promulgated and in those of his successors. The Preface to Alfred's law code makes the king's promulgation of secular law an extension of the divine lawgiving of Moses in Exodus xx–xxiii.13 (ed. Liebermann 1.28–42). Æthelred's law-code of 1008 (drafted under the supervision of Archbishop Wulfstan) explicitly connects the religious and the political in its prologue: 'that we all shall love and honour one God and … will hold one Christian faith under the rule of one king' (*EHD*, p. 405). Such positioning of royal power extends the definition of a *god cyning* well beyond the conduct of successful wars and generosity to his men (*Beowulf* 11b; 80–81a). Indeed, the modifications which Asser reports Alfred to have made in the service of his household retainers, by requiring their service in three shifts of one month each (presumably to allow them time to attend to their own estates), make the realities of royal service in the ninth century very distant from the service of the Germanic war-band.

During the Viking depredations, warfare was a brutal reality, but the concept of war itself could be subject to analysis and question. A theory of the just war, with roots in late Christian antiquity, developed in the early Middle Ages by virtue of custom and necessity. Isidore of Seville distinguished between just and unjust wars, and Ælfric adapts this distinction to the realities of life in late tenth-century England. Of justifiable war (*iustum bellum*) Ælfric writes that it 'is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flotmenn oððe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon' (Skeat II, 114: 'is a just war against the savage seamen or against other peoples who wish to destroy our land').[13]

There was, however, ample encouragement in the Gospels for declining to kill at all, and according to literary tradition King Edmund of East Anglia gained a martyr's crown by his saintly refusal to fight the *flotmenn*. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 870 simply records that Edmund had fought unsuccessfully against the Danes and was killed. Ælfric's Life of Edmund, however, presents the king's death within the framework of the passion of a saint (see below, p. 262). Edmund, having consulted a bishop who advises flight or tribute, considers such counsel shameful. He refuses to bear arms and resolves on a martyrdom follow-ing Christ's example. In Ælfric's account, Edmund's reasons against flight are an interesting reversal of the loyalty of a thegn to his lord: 'ic gewilnige and gewisce mid mode, þæt ic ane ne belife æfter minum leofum þegnum, þe on heora bedde wurdon, mid bearnum and wifum, færlice ofslagene fram þysum flotmannum' (Skeat II, 318: 'I desire and wish heartily, that I alone do not live after my beloved retainers, who were, with their children and wives, suddenly slain by these

pirates'). As admirable as Edmund's piety was, secular and political order could not survive such royal self-sacrifice.[14]

The pointed inversions of loyalty and vengeance in this account of Edmund's wish to die suggest another direction from which heroic values could be questioned. If the austere code of revenge which drives heroic behaviour in Old English verse made a satisfying hero, it also presented problematic ideals in an increasingly complex political order. The care which the narrative of Cynewulf and Cyneheard takes in representing appropriate loyalty and vengeance suggests how dangerous these forces, when unbridled, were perceived to be. The requirements of vengeance and loyalty to family and to group were powerful forces in Anglo-Saxon society, and royal law-codes both recognized and sought to control them.[15]

Vengeance could be exacted in one of two fashions – by blood or by wergild. Quite obviously, a routine indulgence in blood feud would embroil families in continual conflict, but a system of wergild (the establishment of a price for compensation depending on the act and on the station of the injured individual) had the attraction of providing an externally determined, honourable alternative to bloodshed. Both the law-codes and the penitentials acknowledge the powerful obligation of vengeance, and secular payment for transgression was complemented by ecclesiastical penance. In the eighth-century penitentials attributed to Theodore and Bede, the penance assigned for murder was reduced if the murderer paid compensation. Such a reduction for the man who killed in warfare or under the orders of his lord suggests that the writers of these penitentials recognized war and loyal service as circumstances mitigating the gravity of the act.[16]

Despite the civil alternative of wergild, private vengeance in the form of blood feud seems to have been widely practised. In the blood feud the reciprocal relations of individual and kindred are most clear. By making good his obligation to pursue his kinsman's rights, the individual likewise ensured that his kin would look after him and exact vengeance or compensation if necessary.[17] The potential conflict between obligations to kin and to king exploited in the narrative of Cynewulf and Cyneheard appears elsewhere as a matter of royal concern. The Laws of Alfred specify that in case of attack, a man and lord might fight on each other's behalf without incurring vendetta, but they further stipulate 'a man may fight on behalf of his born kinsman, if he is being wrongfully attacked, except against his lord; that we do not allow' (EHD, p. 415, nos. 42.5–6). Among the tenth-century regulations governing the payment of wergild is Edmund's code on the blood feud, limiting the liability of the kindred in the case of a murder. If the kinsmen of a man who has slain another formally abandon him and refuse to pay compensation, they are exempt from the feud and the slayer alone is liable (EHD, p. 428, nos. 1–1.3). Such an enactment made it

possible for the kin in law and in honour to distance themselves from the originator of a feud. Financially and physically it was in the interest of the kinsmen to take advantage of such an opportunity.

*The Battle of Maldon* presents an opportunity to examine the points of intersection between the Old English literary conventions of the heroic ethos and the events of 'real life' in an occasional poem which is both a polished work of literature and a memorial of a historical event.[18] At this intersection there is another meeting, this one between the language of heroic values and that of religious judgement. The poem is not datable precisely, and although several arguments have been made for composition after 1020, it is likely that the poem was composed not too long after the battle (which according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* took place in 991). The poem's precise place of origin is similarly unclear – it has been attributed both to Ramsey and to Ely. The latter foundation is slightly more likely, since Byrhtnoth's remains were interred there and the monastic community had received from him a generous endowment.

*The Battle of Maldon* commemorates the heroic resistance of an English army against a substantial force of Vikings in an engagement in August 991. The entry in the E-version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* merely records the death of Byrhtnoth and the subsequent payment of tribute to the Vikings: 'In this year Ipswich was ravaged, and very soon afterwards Ealdorman Brihtnoth was killed at Maldon. And in that year it was determined that tribute should first be paid to the Danish men because of the great terror they were causing along the coast. The first payment was 10,000 pounds. Archbishop Sigeric first advised that course' (*EHD*, p. 234). The contrast between the spareness of the *Chronicle* account and the rich heroic detail of the poem suggests that *The Battle of Maldon* was composed as praise for Byrhtnoth, a great secular magnate and religious benefactor. The only copy of the poem to have survived the Middle Ages was already a fragment, bound in a composite manuscript which was badly burned in the disastrous Cotton fire of 1731. The remains of the manuscript are now London, British Library, Cotton Otho A. xii, but that part containing the poem is burnt beyond use. That the poem is known to modern readers is due to a transcription made by one David Casley several years before the fire.[19] As we now have it, the poem lacks a beginning and an end, and its fragmentary condition must be kept in mind in any evaluation of the poem. The remaining fragment shows the English preparations for the battle, the decision to allow the Vikings safe passage, to permit a fair fight, the death of Byrhtnoth, ealdorman of Essex, the flight of a portion of the English army, and the valour of the English who remained.

The leader of the English forces, Byrhtnoth, is seen at the beginning of the fragment encouraging, arranging and advising his troops. These are composed of the *folc* and the *heorðwerod*, though the significance of this distinction ought

not to be overemphasized. The *folc* were the men of the *fyrd* (the levied army), though the size of the army at this battle is unclear, and the *heorðwerod* were presumably Byrhtnoth's personal retinue.[20] If he dismounted to fight amongst them in the expectation that they would be most loyal, he was greatly mistaken, for the Godric who flees from the battle was one of this *heorðwerod*. And Godric's flight on his slain lord's horse throws the English forces into disarray.

The impression of Byrhtnoth as a noble leader conveyed at the beginning of the poem is enhanced by his stirring and defiant reply to the Viking messenger's request for tribute to secure peace. Byrhtnoth flings back the messenger's own words, promising spear and sword as tribute. The only arbitration the English will accept is battle:

> Ne sceole ge swa softe     sinc gegangan;
> us sceal ord and ecg     ær geseman,
> grim guðplega,     ær we gofol syllon.          (59–61)

> Nor shall you get treasure so easily; point and edge [i.e. spear and sword] will arbitrate for us before that, grim battle, before we give tribute.

These are noble boasting words, and Byrhtnoth's courage, nobility and prowess have never been questioned. His subsequent action, however, in allowing the Vikings safe passage to permit a fair fight has been closely examined by modern students of the poem to determine both his motive for the decision and the judgement of the poet on his conduct.

Various suggestions have been made for the circumstances of the battle, but the most probable is that the Vikings had made a base on Northey island in the tidal estuary of the Blackwater river in Essex (near the modern town of Maldon). While it would be mistaken to take the details of the poem as historical 'fact', the situation which the poet outlines makes clear that the Vikings had to cross a tidal channel to get to the English. The English thus had a tactical advantage in protecting the mainland, but the situation was actually an impasse, since neither side could effectively attack the other. Even at low tide, the 'bridge' (probably a low-water ford) could be defended by just three men (*The Battle of Maldon* 74–83).

The lines which have caused the greatest interpretative controversy in the poem are those which describe the Vikings' request for safe passage and Byrhtnoth's response:

> Þa hi þæt ongeaton     and georne gesawon
> þæt hi þær bricgweardas     bitere fundon,
> ongunnon lytegian þa     laðe gystas,
> bædon þæt hi upgang     agan moston,
> ofer þone ford faran,     feþan lædan.

Ða se eorl ongan    for his ofermode
alyfan landes to fela    laþere ðeode.                    (84–90)

> When they recognized and perceived clearly that they had found the bridge-guardians fierce, the hated guests began to use cunning. They asked that they might have passage to cross over the ford, to lead the footsoldiers. Then the earl began, out of excessive courage, to allow too much land to the hated people.

The crucial terms in this passage are *lytegian* and *ofermode*. The Vikings (as much 'guests' in Essex as Grendel was in Heorot) request the chance to cross in safety to allow a decisive battle. *Lytegian* is a word unrecorded elsewhere in Old English, but it is related clearly enough to the adjective *lytig*, 'cunning' or 'wily'. Although attempts have been made to build a case for a relatively benign meaning for *lytegian*, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that *lytegian* had an unfavourable sense: the Vikings 'used cunning' to secure their passage. One need not, however, draw the severe conclusion that Byrhtnoth was deceived or that his *ofermod* deluded him. The Vikings' 'cunning' may simply reflect a poetic judgement that the Vikings talked their way across the ford.

The second crucial term is *ofermode*. The philological evidence for *ofermod* meaning 'pride' or 'excessive courage' is substantial, although the noun occurs only infrequently. Most interestingly, *ofermod* occurs in an identical half-line in a collection of religious aphorisms, *Instructions for Christians* 130, where its meaning is clearly 'pride'. Similarly, Satan is described as the 'angel of pride' (*se engel ofermodes*: *Genesis B* 272). The religious context of both uses is apparent. However, the second possible Modern English gloss, 'excessive courage', may well be the more appropriate translation for a secular context.[21] It is difficult to reconcile a stinging judgement of sinful pride with a poem which is otherwise generous in its praise of a secular lord (and one well known as a religious benefactor). Yet in isolation, even the gloss 'excessive courage' appears to be critical. Understanding the word, the passage, and the portrait of Byrhtnoth requires putting the comment in context. In other words, it is necessary to understand as much as possible the circumstances of the battle (and the way in which the text understands them), the context of leadership in late tenth-century England and the use of heroic conventions in the composition of the text.

There is no indication in the poem that the English were obviously outnumbered in the battle. Quite the contrary. Byrhtnoth's concluding words to the Vikings, 'god ana wat / hwa þære wælstowe wealdan mote' (94–5: 'God alone knows who will control the place of slaughter') suggests a perception that the sides were even. Assuming that the Vikings were coming from an island, Byrhtnoth's tactical advantage extended only to the area

which his men controlled on the mainland, but offered no opportunity to drive the Vikings out or to prevent their making a sortie elsewhere. Byrhtnoth's supposed tactical advantage is, upon examination, limited if not illusory, for its only advantage lay in protecting the lives of his men. In practical terms, using this 'advantage' would keep him from protecting the *folc and foldan* (54: 'the people and land') of Æthelred. In heroic terms, it was no advantage at all.

If Byrhtnoth was at all deceived, it was not by the Vikings but by the men on whom he had counted. Evidence from the Latin Life of St Oswald (a roughly contemporary account by Byrhtferth of Ramsey) suggests that the battle celebrated by the *Maldon*-poet was actually part of a continuing campaign and that the Viking raid of 991 was revenge for an encounter in Devon in 988 in which the English forces had been victorious. If the interpretation of this evidence is correct, then Byrhtnoth's decision to engage the Vikings was founded on two pieces of secure information: that England's defences had been adequate to ensure peace during the preceding fifty years and that the Vikings had been unsuccessful in their immediately previous encounter.[22]

Byrhtnoth's own valour as lord and leader is exemplary. He urges his men *dom gefeohtan* (129: 'to achieve glory by fighting') and his boast to the messenger is backed by deeds. When he is first wounded, Byrhtnoth kills his opponent and another warrior. Two other deadly strikes, a spear wound and a slashing blow to his sword arm, are required to disable the earl. Even then, before he drops to his knees, he encourages his *gode geferan* (170: 'good companions') to go forward. His last words are a prayer, after which 'heathen' warriors hew him down along with two companions. No such valour can be recorded of Godric (Odda's son) or of his brothers. In the context of the cowardly behaviour of these men, Byrhtnoth's courage and confidence were indeed too great.

Lines 185–201 of the poem highlight the enormity of the cowards' betrayal by twice alluding to Byrhtnoth's heroic munificence to them:

> and þone godan forlet
> þe him mænigne oft   mear gesealde;
> he gehleop þone eoh   þe ahte his hlaford            (187–9)

and he abandoned the good man who had often given him many a horse; he mounted the horse which his lord owned.

Others follow:

> and manna ma   þonne hit ænig mæð wære,
> gyf hi þa geearnunga   ealle gemundon
> þe he him to duguþe   gedon hæfde            (195–7)

and more men than was in any way fitting, if they had recalled all the favours which he had done for their advantage.

Godric's cowardly escape on Byrhtnoth's own horse is deliberately emphasized by the single named gift which defines Godric's failed heroic obligation to his lord. Similarly, the other cowards are condemned by mention of the gifts which Byrhtnoth is said to have given for their benefit. If the lord's munificence failed to secure the battlefield loyalty of his men, its memory would nonetheless serve to condemn them.

The reproof of the cowards in *The Battle of Maldon* is reminiscent of Wiglaf's exhortation to Beowulf's men during the dragon-fight and his cold condemnation of their flight afterwards.

> Ic ðæt mæl geman,   þær we medu þegun,
> þonne we geheton   ussum hlaforde
> in biorsele,   ðe us ðas beagas geaf,
> þæt we him ða guðgetawa   gyldan woldon
> gif him þyslicu   þearf gelumpe,
> helmas ond heard sweord                    (2633–8)

I recall the occasion when we partook of the mead, when we promised our lord in the beerhall, him who gave us there precious rings, that we would repay him for that battle equipment if such need befell him, repay the helmets and hard swords.

When Beowulf's chosen men return from their flight into the woods, Wiglaf meets them with the bitter judgement that their lord had thrown away the battle equipment they were standing in. Their punishment of exile is a living death.

The actions of the cowards and the suicidally valiant behaviour of the remaining English army at Maldon are schematically opposed in terms of the values of the literary heroic code, and this opposition forms the second part of the picture of the relationship which the poem develops between lord and men. Upon perceiving that Byrhtnoth lay dead, his faithful *heorðgeneatas* urge each other to continue the fight to avenge their beloved lord or die ('lif forlætan oððe leofne gewrecan', 208). Ælfwine, a young Mercian nobleman, is the first to speak. He claims a double obligation to Byrhtnoth, that the ealdorman was both his kinsman and his lord ('he wæs ægðer min mæg ond min hlaford', 224). His resolve to fight to the death may be owing to his twofold relationship to Byrhtnoth, but he states it in terms reminiscent of Tacitus's *Germania* – that thegns will not be able to reproach him that he left the field after his lord was dead. One after the other, the members of the dwindling English army vow to avenge their lord's death or die. Such loyalty

is not the preserve of the aristocracy, and Dunnere, described as an *unorne ceorl* (256: 'a simple free man') urges that men fight without concern for their lives. The slaughter is terrible, and though the English take their toll on the Vikings, by the close of the fragment defeat seems inevitable. In the last speech of the poem, an old warrior, Byrhtwold, utters the words which have come to epitomize the heroic valour of the poem:

> Hige sceal þe heardra,    heorte þe cenre,
> mod sceal þe mare,    þe ure mægen lytlað           (312–13)

Courage shall be the fiercer, heart the bolder, spirit the greater, as our strength diminishes.

These ill-fated warriors portray their own resolve as if such behaviour were expected, and Ælfwine, especially, appears to suggest that disgrace follows the man who survives his lord (220–3). While there are instances recorded of men dying with their lord (for example, Bede reports in his prose Life of St Cuthbert, ch. 27, that Ecgfrith and most of his army were killed in 685 at Nechtansmere) and of suicidal loyalty (in the account of the retainers of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, discussed above), loyalty unto death seems not to have been the rule either in literature or in life. The Wanderer lives (albeit unhappily) without a lord, and the various heroes in *Beowulf* seek timely vengeance for their lords rather than death by their sides. It is possible that the stirring resolve in the battlefield speeches of Ælfwine, Offa and their companions was designed less as an expression of the norm than as a moral counterpart to the cowardice of the sons of Odda. Battlefield desertion may well have been a common occurrence, as Æthelred's law-code of 1008 acknowledges.[23]

In *The Battle of Maldon*, as in the *Chronicle* entry on Cynewulf and Cyneheard, the principles of balance and symmetry are sources of heightened interest in the narrative. The English are arrayed against the Vikings, Byrhtnoth's speech of defiance hurls back the Viking's own words, the young Wulfmær pulls the spear out of Byrhtnoth's dying body and uses it to pierce Byrhtnoth's killer; slaughter inflicted is slaughter avenged. On a higher narrative level, balance plays off the cowardice of those who fled against the honour of the men who stayed. And at this level the focus of narrative interest is different in the two texts. In the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, doubt and resolution lie in the conflict between two routes to honour, the obligations of kin and group. In *The Battle of Maldon*, the struggle is of another sort, and the choice is not between forms of honour but whether to stand or to run.

There has always been a conflict between the individual heroic ethic (in the pursuit of valour and reputation whatever the cost) and the requirement for

prudent aggression from an established army. The daring risk (for example, Beowulf's *beot* to fight Grendel without a sword) brings praise, reputation and treasure when made good, but is a problematic subject for verse when the hero is less obviously successful. The dramatic problem which the *Maldon*-poet had to treat was the simple and well-known fact that the English lost. Within the heroic tradition, the composer of a praise poem had limited options when his subject died in the middle of the battle and had part of his army run away in the process.

Virtue was found in the necessity when the *Maldon*-poet chose for his commemoration a heroic idiom pressed to its extreme. Its austerity and remoteness from the realities of tenth-century English military obligation provided a model of nobility in defeat, though there may be some irony for us in the poet's choice of idiom – the suicidal military virtues ascribed to the English may more nearly have been those of their opponents. The note of complaint which the text seems to make in lines 89–90 arises out of the nature of the code which it ascribes to Byrhtnoth and his loyal retainers. The realm of the heroic lies apart from the mundane, and the poem locates the nobility of the English precisely in their excess. For Byrhtnoth the measure of heroism lies in the excess defined by '*ofer*mode' and 'landes *to fela*'. Such excess must necessarily involve for us a paradox. His noble decision to engage the enemy ultimately led to his death, but it is his death, in part responsible for the following defeat, which ensures his glory. The heroic excess of Byrhtnoth's men lies in their choice of death in battle. For them too, death transforms the army's defeat into personal victory. *Dom* and *deað* are frequent companions. The heroic idiom of *The Battle of Maldon* is anything but naive. Its use suggests at once admiration, nostalgia and regret – admiration for the greatness of a secular magnate, nostalgia for the heroism of a brighter day, and regret that such heroism makes death its companion.

## NOTES

1. As he commits the treasure hoard of his now dead people to the earth, the so-called Last Survivor (though in a clearly secular context) similarly mourns the vanished pleasures of the retainer's life (*Beowulf* 2247–66).
2. Similarly, Hrothgar is praised for munificence in *Beowulf* 71–3 and 80–1. By explicit contrast, the avaricious king is liable to suffer exile and death (1709–22). On the social expectations in gift giving, see J. M. Hill, *The Cultural World in 'Beowulf'* (Toronto, 1995), pp. 85–107.
3. 'Weorða ðe selfne / godum dædum, ðenden ðin god recce' (*Waldere* 22–3: 'Make yourself worthy by good deeds [i.e. bold action], while God guides you').
4. *The Battle of Brunanburh* 3. Similarly, a warlike and victorious Abraham, after his battle to free Lot, is described in *Genesis A* as 'elne gewurðod / dome and sigore' (2137–8: 'made worthy by his courage, by glory and victory').

5. Aldhelm's letter to the abbots of Wilfrid similarly draws on the convention of the loyal retainer: 'Now then, if worldly men, exiles from divine teaching, were to desert a devoted master, whom they embraced in prosperity, but once the opulence of the good times began to diminish and the adversity of bad fortune began its onslaught, they preferred the secure peace of their dear country to the burdens of a banished master, are they not deemed worthy of the scorn of scathing laughter and the noise of mockery from all?' See M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 169–70 (Letter XII).

6. For the reading *hwitne* rather than *swetne*, see *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008), p. 290 (note to line 39).

7. R. Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in the *Germania* and in the *Battle of Maldon*', *ASE* 5 (1976), 63–81, at 68–9, notes that the band of men which Wiglaf describes as Beowulf's retainers does not really constitute a *comitatus*, since the men have land rights which can be revoked.

8. R. H. Bremmer, 'The Germanic Context of "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" Revisited', *Neophilologus* 81 (1997), 445–65. For an argument on the episode and its evidence for contemporary social practice, see S. D. White, 'Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: the Story of Sigeberht, Cynewulf and Cyneheard', *Viator* 20 (1989), 1–18, repr. in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven, CT, 2002), pp. 157–81.

9. That Cynewulf might appear to be a usurper is smoothed over in the account by mention of the king's acting in conjunction with the West Saxon council and of their justification for banishing Sigebryht because of wicked deeds.

10. H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1912).

11. The attribution of these works to Alfred himself, long generally accepted, has been questioned in a series of articles by Malcolm Godden. In *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), I, p. 146, the authors argue 'that the OE Boethius was the work of an unknown writer of substantial learning, not necessarily connected with King Alfred or his court, but working some time in the period 890 to 930, probably in southern England'.

12. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 124 n. 2, suggest that this passage recalls *HE* IV.2, where Bede praises the times of Archbishop Theodore during which Christian kings terrified barbarian nations and when learning in sacred subjects was widely available.

13. For a discussion of war in Old English verse and its background in patristic commentary, see J. E. Cross, 'The Ethic of War in Old English', in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 269–82. For a view of Ælfric's thinking on warfare, see J. W. Earl, 'Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's "Passion of St. Edmund"', *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999), 125–49.

14. For the representation of holy kingship within which Abbo of Fleury constructs King Edmund in his *Passio S. Eadmundi* (Ælfric's source), see J. E. Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 167–91.

15. See *EHD*, pp. 391–478, and discussion above, p. 11. Many of the points raised here are usefully illustrated in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon laws. For example, the Laws of Ine extend *wergild* beyond blood relationship to spiritual relationship (godfather or -son) (*EHD*, p. 407, nos. 76 and 76.1). The Laws of Alfred set limits to vendetta in an effort to force civil settlement, and specify that no vendetta would be incurred when fighting for one's lord or born kinsman, or against an adulterer or fornicator (with one's wife, daughter or sister) (p. 415, no. 11), and the Laws of Edmund specify the involvement of leading men and advocates in the civil settlements of a feud (p. 428, nos. 7–7.3).

16. See A. J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983), pp. 76–7.

17. See H. R. Loyn, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 3 (1974), 197–209, at 203–4. For a discussion of social and legal issues in feud, see P. R. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY, 2003).

18. For a subtle argument on the interrelation of literary convention, heroic history, and the ideological force of nostalgia, see R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009), esp. ch. 3.

19. See *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 1–17. This volume offers an important collection of individual essays on historical and literary topics relating to the battle and the poem.

20. On the Anglo-Saxon use of the *fyrd*, see C. W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions* (Oxford, 1962), esp. pp. 59–102.

21. For a review of various strategies used to translate *ofermod*, see H. Gneuss, 'The *Battle of Maldon* 89: Byrhtnoth's *ofermod* Once Again', *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976) 117–37, at 119. For a sympathetic discussion of a neutral meaning for *ofermod*, see T. A. Shippey, 'Boar and Badger: an Old English Heroic Antithesis', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 16 (1985), 220–39, at 228.

22. E. John, 'War and Society in the Tenth Century: the Maldon Campaign', *Transactions of the Royal Society* 5th ser. 27 (1977), 173–95, at 185.

23. *EHD*, pp. 445–6: 'And if anyone deserts from an army which the king himself is with, it is to be at the peril of his life and all his property. And he who otherwise deserts from the army is to forfeit 120 shillings.'

# 7

JOHN D. NILES

# Pagan survivals and popular belief

Bede tells the story of the conversion of the pagan English with lively detail and predictable bias in the first half of his *Ecclesiastical History*. For Bede, as for the sixth-century British historian Gildas, on whose writings he leans, the Angles and Saxons were invited to mid-fifth-century Britain as mercenaries who then turned against their Romano-British employers. Bede refers to them bluntly as 'pagans', 'heathen conquerors' and 'the enemy'. On the other hand, he is careful not to direct sympathy towards the Christian Britons, whose heart-wrenching miseries at the hands of the Saxons he paints with equanimity, assuring his readers that 'the fires kindled by the pagans proved to be God's just punishment on the sins of the nation'.[1] Having characterized each party to this warfare as distasteful, whether through rapacity or inner depravity, Bede proceeds to introduce the heroes of his tale. These are St Gregory's Roman missionaries, together with the enlightened English rulers who accepted their teachings.

According to Bede, the missionaries who landed in Kent in 597 had no interest in restoring the Church to the status it had enjoyed during the late years of Roman Britain, nor did they wish to imitate the forms of the faith that still flourished in Ireland and Wales. Instead, after a pagan hiatus of a hundred years or more, they set out to establish the true apostolic Church in England once and for all. Their ecclesiastical model was the Church of St Peter in Rome. Their spiritual models were Christ and the early saints and martyrs, in all their zeal and poverty:

> As soon as they had occupied the house given to them [in Kent] they began to emulate the life of the apostles and the primitive Church. They were constantly at prayer; they fasted and kept vigils; they preached the word of life to whomsoever they could. They regarded worldly things as of little importance, and accepted only the necessities of life from those they taught. They practised what they preached, and were willing to endure any hardship, and even to die for the truth which they proclaimed. (*HE* 1.26)

In Bede's account, no arm-twisting was necessary to persuade the English kings to give up their pagan rites. All that was needed was the example of the missionaries' own devotion; and as with any good conversion stories, a strategic number of miracles helped the process along (see also above, pp. 3–4).

Like all things evil, if we are to believe Bede, paganism had an innate capacity to self-destruct. The story of the conversion reaches its climax in the scene in which Edwin, king of Northumbria and *bretwalda* or high king of the English, summons his chief noblemen to advise him on the wisdom of accepting the new faith (*HE* II.13). The most potent speech in favour of Christianity is made by Edwin's pagan priest, Coifi, who abruptly declares the old religion to be 'valueless and powerless' and who then, filled with joy at his new-found knowledge, proceeds to profane and then torch the old temple. Implausible as this scene might be if presented in isolation, it is given depth by a second speech that is framed by Coifi's two appearances. In it Bede gives an unnamed nobleman the part of a philosopher brooding about earthly transience. The nobleman likens the present life of man to the flight of a sparrow through a banquet-hall on a dark winter's night: 'While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came' (see below, p. 160). The desire for a more secure shelter from the storm persuades this adviser to follow the new teachings, and the other elders follow suit.

Paganism in England, as opposed to English paganism, did not die out so easily. Within three or four generations after Bede's death and continuing until the Norman Conquest, it came to be reintroduced by wave after wave of Viking settlers. A scattering of Northumbrian place-names and picture stones, together with some dismissive references in Ælfric's tenth-century treatise *De falsis deis* to the cults of Odin, Thor and 'the shameless goddess' Frigg confirm that the Vikings imported their mythology to England, though without much effect on Old English imaginative literature. The early eleventh-century laws of Cnut speak out strongly against the practice of witchcraft, divination or idolatry; and they take idolatry to mean, 'if one worships heathen gods and the sun or the moon, fire or flood, wells or stones or any kind of forest trees'.[2] Proscriptions like these, which are reinforced in the sermons and penitentials of this period, were directed against not just old Germanic and British practices that had persisted beyond the Conversion, but also the pagan practices of Scandinavians who had settled in England during the Viking Age.

Much as one is tempted to associate with the age of pre-Christian English heathendom the colourful stories that the Vikings later told about frost giants, Odin's eye and the final cataclysm of Ragnarǫk, there is no evidence that such

tales had currency in England before the Viking Age. Anglo-Saxon paganism from the period before the Conversion remains fairly opaque to our eyes, chiefly because of the cloak of silence that early Christian writers cast over the whole subject of cursed rites. Indeed, since 'paganism' implies a more-or-less organized religion, that term is best used with caution when applied to a period when power was not centralized and religious practices may have been based, in part, on local traditions whose origins precede the Saxon conquest.[3]

The unconverted English revered the main gods of the Germanic pantheon. We would not otherwise still name four days of the week after the war-god Tiw (Old Norse *Týr*), Woden the god of divination and the dead (Old Norse *Óðinn*), the storm-god Thunor (Old Norse *Þórr*) and the fertile Frīg (Old Norse *Freyja*).[4] Concerning how these gods were worshipped, with what attendant myths, we have little knowledge. The heathen English offered sacrifice at altars, but they had nothing resembling monasteries devoted to regular prayer. Lacking both a hierarchical Church and the technology of book-making, they could have had no received body of theology. Whether or not they had professional priests is unclear. Bede and other monastic authors cannot be taken at face value on this point, as their writings are likely to be coloured by early Christian accounts of paganism in Mediterranean lands.[5] If there were people who specialized in cures, they may have differed from their neighbours only in their degree of knowledge and self-assurance. As in later Iceland, some high-ranking men may have served as their own priests, as is suggested by the fact that several Anglo-Saxon holy places (such as Patchway, Sussex, from *Pæcces weoh* or 'Patch's shrine') were named after an owner rather than a god. It may be significant that when the first Roman missionaries in Kent wrote down a body of English laws, one of their first concerns was to devise a price for themselves within the Old Germanic system of wergild. No such step would have been necessary had there already been an accepted wergild for priests.

The heathen English kept a great holiday at or near the midwinter solstice (Yule) and – like other peoples of Northern Europe – observed other festivals during the spring and fall, of which we have echoes in the May Day and harvest home celebrations. Their word *fulluht* (a native term corresponding to Latin/Greek 'baptism', which is a later borrowing) probably denoted a native ceremony for naming children. They appear to have maintained shrines on hilltops, in natural clearings, and alongside ancient roadways, perhaps using them for offerings of consecrated food or drink, but such places are unmarked by archaeological remains comparable to Roman temples or the great megaliths erected by pre-Celtic inhabitants of Britain. Pillars or posts were sometimes erected in religious precincts. Originally designed as cult objects, they were sometimes apparently allowed to stand as boundary

markers or signs of meeting-points for local assemblies. Only one site of a former temple has been plausibly identified, a modest sixth- or seventh-century wooden structure situated close by the former great hall at Yeavering, Northumbria, in the vicinity of a Bronze Age tumulus and an ancient stone circle.[6] A great heap of ox-skulls speaks to the number of sacrifices offered there, probably for the most part during *Blotmonath*, 'the month of sacrifice', corresponding more or less to our November, when all cattle were slaughtered except those to be fed over the winter.

Such pagan religious festivals as we know of matched the rhythms of the pastoral and agricultural year and featured cult figures rather than the high gods of the pantheon. One female cult figure, Nerthus, seems to have been worshipped widely among Germanic tribes dwelling in the region from which the continental Angles migrated to Britain. Writing in the first century AD, Tacitus (*Germania*, ch. 40) tells of her holy grove, chariot and rites and calls her *terra mater*, 'Earth Mother'. Little is known, however, about cult figures in Britain of the Anglo-Saxon period. Bede mentions in his computistical work *De temporum ratione* that the feast name Easter, corresponding to Latin/Greek *pascha*, derives from the goddess Eostre, for whom the English named the fourth month *Eosturmonaþ*. Bede also states that the preceding month, *Hredmonaþ*, corresponding to our March, took its name from festivities honouring a goddess Hreda (who is otherwise unknown), while the eve of 25 December was celebrated as *Modranect*, or 'night of the Mothers'. One would give much to know who these mothers were and what connection their worship had to the Christian commemoration of the Nativity. Such scraps of information as these suggest that no matter how firmly patriarchal their social system was, the pagan English found room for honouring the female principle within the earthier reaches of their syncretistic religion.

Place-names fill out this picture, especially when supplemented by topographical and archaeological evidence.[7] The 'Harrow' names of England, like Harrow-on-the-Hill in Greater London, indicate the site of a former place of worship (OE *hearh*). Names like Wyham (Linconshire) and Weedon (Buckinghamshire) are thought to derive their first element from Old English *wih* or *weoh*, 'shrine' or 'place of sacrifice'. Place-names like Wednesbury (Staffordshire) and Winslow (Bedfordshire – formerly spelled 'Wodneslawe') indicate sites, sometimes in the proximity of ancient earthworks, where Woden was once respected, whether viewed as a god, an ancestral figure or a great builder. Names like Thunderfield and Thundridge speak to former reverence for Thunor. From *draca*, an OE loan-word from Latin *draco* meaning 'dragon', comes the place-name Drakelow ('dragon's hill') in both Derbyshire and Worcestershire, while from *wyrm*, the native term for serpent or dragon, comes Wormwood Hill near Cambridge. The

name of Eldon Hill (Derbyshire – formerly spelled 'Elvedon') is thought to derive from Old English *ylfe* 'elf' plus *dun* 'hill'. Puck of Pook's Hill, via Shakespeare's Puck, gets his name from Old English *pucel*, 'evil spirit', a borrowing from Welsh *pwca*. Other place-names may reflect fear of such dangerous creatures as the *þyrs* 'marshland monster', *scucca* 'demon', *scinn* 'spectre or ghost', or *dweorh* 'dwarf'. The Grendel of *Beowulf* appears to have a folkloric connection to scary creatures of the hinterland, for 'Grendel' place-names figure in the boundary clauses of over a half-dozen charters of the Anglo-Saxon period. Just how the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons conceived of the numinous creatures that inhabited their world is impossible to say. It has been suggested that while elves were viewed as beautiful and dangerous beings dwelling in woods, fields, hills, and bodies of water, dwarves were associated not with mountains or underground regions but rather with high fever and with the dementia that fever can cause.[8]

St Gregory's policy of gently weaning the pagan English from their repugnant practices – 'whoever wishes to climb to a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap' (*HE* 1.30) – permitted heathen shrines to be adapted to Christian use. The sacrifice of cattle could continue, as long as the bloodletting was rationalized by being linked to a Christian theme. Fountains or wells could be dedicated to the Virgin, though not to a pagan cult figure. The existence of a host of angels and demons compensated for the loss of numinous figures of pagan belief. While grave-goods became much less common, gifts to the Church at death were encouraged as a form of alms-giving.

Exceptionally, even the provision of grave-goods could be rationalized within the framework of Christian belief: the tomb of St Cuthbert (d. 687), which was unearthed in 1104, 1539 and 1827, contained a comb and scissors, a paten, a golden chalice and a gold pectoral cross set with garnets.

The heathen grave-goods that were unearthed in 1939 from Mound One at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, where they were buried at the centre of a tumulus that covered an entire ship, provide striking evidence of pagan funerary customs at a point when they had already been influenced by Christian beliefs.[9] Notably lacking among the objects are depictions of gods or scenes from mythological stories. The nearest thing to a pagan object included among the finds is an awe-inspiring ceremonial whetstone, thought to be a sceptre, each of whose ends is carved with the figures of four human heads. The eight heads ornamenting the two ends of the sceptre have been thought to relate to the veneration of ancestors and, possibly, to the idea of dynastic descent from Woden, who with Tiw and Thunor represented the martial and patriarchal powers in Germanic religion.

The Sutton Hoo barrow is believed by some to have commemorated the death of Rædwald, king of the East Angles, whom the Venerable Bede speaks

of as *bretwalda* or high king of the English and who died in 624 or 625. According to Bede (*HE* II.15), Rædwald accepted baptism in Kent, but when he returned home to East Anglia his wife and advisers persuaded him to continue to honour the old religion. Bede condemns him for having tried to serve both Christ and the ancient gods. Whether or not the person honoured by the ship burial was King Rædwald, his funeral must have represented an emphatic affirmation of time-honoured pre-Christian practices. On the other hand, its lack of heathen motifs – and, perhaps, the absence of clear evidence that a body was ever deposited there, though this point is disputed – may speak to an attachment to the new faith. In addition, some silver bowls with cruciform designs on them and, more significantly, two spoons inscribed 'Saulus' and 'Paulus' – christening spoons, it is believed – point to Christian contacts or influence. What appears to be fence-straddling here may not have seemed so to the members of that community. Kings have always had both public and private selves. The Sutton Hoo ship burial may have been a king's concession to his public self, which was bound to be a conservative one to be invoked on state occasions.

Boar images figure prominently among the Sutton Hoo treasures, most strikingly in the form of two cunningly superimposed boars that ornament a pair of gold, garnet and enamel shoulder-clasps. In the verses known as *Maxims II*, which are included as part of the material prefacing a handsome manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i), the wild boar *toðmægnes trum*, 'strong in its mighty tusks', is mentioned in company with two other creatures admired for their fierce independence, the hawk trained for falconry and the wolf of the woods. Boars were associated with the god Freyr, and their images embodied martial qualities. When the *Beowulf*-poet alludes to a helmet decorated with boar images so that 'no swords could cut through it' (1453–4), his remark suggests both literal and talismatic defence. The helmet unearthed at Benty Grange, Derbyshire, that is now preserved in the Sheffield City Museum, provides striking confirmation of the prominence of the boar as a symbol of valour. Surmounting the helmet is a free-standing boar image with eyes of garnet, set in gold.

It is clear that bears were venerated by the early peoples of Northern Europe, and bear-like images too have a place in Germanic metalwork. The ursine characteristics of the hero Beowulf, who prefers bear-hugs to weapons, are of interest in this regard. If the name 'Beowulf' derives from the two simplexes 'bee' and 'wolf', as some scholars think, then it might be a buried euphemism for 'bear', the bear being metaphorically the wolf of the bees whose honey it eats. Unlikely as this identification may seem, it is strengthened by the close parallel that exists between the first two-thirds of *Beowulf* and the 'Bear's Son' type of folktale, a pan-European tale, especially popular

in Scandinavian and Celtic variants, that tells of a young man whose unusual strength derives from his being the son of a woman and a bear.[10]

Two of the most expressive designs in early Germanic metalwork are the winged dragon that once decorated the Sutton Hoo shield and the pair of fantastic creatures, resembling a serpent and a bird of prey, that formed the eyebrows and ridge of the Sutton Hoo helmet together with the nose and moustache of the face-mask. These images are clearly visible on the replica of the helmet that has been fashioned at the Royal Armoury in the Tower of London. Zoomorphic designs of this kind illustrate the skill with which Germanic artisans depicted the fearsome *wyrm*, in particular. Dragons were taken to be part of the natural world. Their chief vocation was to guard over treasures that had been ritually buried with the dead, thereby being 'killed' as far as the living were concerned. *Draca sceal on hlæwe, / frod, frætwum wlanc*, as the author of *Maxims II* succinctly remarks: 'Dragons live in barrows, aged, proud of their treasures' (26–7).

The fear inspired by dragons is amply evident from the last part of *Beowulf*, with its magnificent evocation of a dragon enraged by a fugitive's theft of a cup from its hoard. The destruction that ensues was surely meant to teach a lesson regarding the sanctity of grave-mounds. To reduce this awesome creature to the level of the dragons of fairy-tale would border on insult. As one critic has remarked, the *Beowulf* dragon is the *Beowulf* dragon. It is winged, fifty feet long, with a nearly impenetrable hide and an unforgiving disposition. With its poisonous teeth and its breath of literal fire, it readily fulfils its narrative task of providing the hero with a suitable death.

When one considers the dragons, serpents, giants, demons, elves, dwarfs and hags that are mentioned in Old English literature, it is both easy and condescending to dismiss the pagan Anglo-Saxons as 'frightened of all sorts of supernatural forces, like children lost in a forest'.[11] The heathen English believed in 'flying venom' and in invisible darts shot by elves with the same readiness as we believe in microbes or traitors, without necessarily ever having seen either. In many cultures besides our own, a belief in the workings of unseen creatures helps to render the phenomena of life comprehensible, hence less threatening. A shaman can deflect the evil eye or can ward off the darts of invisible enemies, but no one can cure a patient of a disease of unknown nature or cause.

Rather than dismissing the pagan English as superstitious, we might consider them as possessed of quasi-animistic beliefs of the sort that are well known to anthropologists. The essence of animism is the belief that the world is alive in its various parts. To return to the passage from the laws of Cnut quoted earlier, it is the perception that 'the sun or the moon, fire or flood, wells or stones or any kind of forest trees' are parts of a single world endowed

with spirit. Human beings are viewed as part of this animate world; they are not souls, exiled from God, who temporarily inhabit it or make use of it. For this reason, members of early and traditional societies routinely ask for the favour of divine powers before setting out on important undertakings, revere the spirit of fire that bursts out in the form of flame and avoid offending numinous beings believed to inhabit mountains, woods and streams.

Pagan burials were apparently based on the widespread ancient conviction that the soul is not annihilated at death, nor, as in Christian belief, is it released from this world. Rather, in association with the body (in a manner that remains a mystery), it journeys to a new home in a land unknown to the living. For this reason, a place was often found for the burial or cremation of a real or symbolic horse, chariot, ship, or other vehicle, as well as for the provision of things that could be of use to the departed, such as food, drink, combs, scissors and other valuables. On occasion, women have been found buried with small crystal balls or with bags filled with objects that may have had an amuletic function.[12]

Not believing in an absolute parting of the spirit and the flesh at death, the pagan English cared devotedly for the bodily remains of the dead. Tacitus, ever with an eye for heroic virtues, remarks that Germanic warriors of his day would bring back the bodies of the fallen 'even when a battle hangs in the balance' (*Germania*, ch. 6). On the other hand, the decapitated corpses or isolated human skulls that occur in the archaeological record may point to the practice of desecrating the bodies of criminals. Whether or not the poetic motif of the 'Birds and Beasts of Battle', present in eight Old English poems, derives from the respect that was once accorded the raven and wolf as creatures sacred to Woden, it gives grim expression to the idea of people being converted into carrion. In *Beowulf* the motif sums up the desolate mood that ensues after the hero's death, when an unnamed messenger predicts future warfare and tribal dissolution:

> Forðon sceall gar wesan
> monig, morgenceald,   mundum bewunden,
> hæfen on handa,   nalles hearpan sweg
> wigend weccean,   ac se wonna hrefn
> fus ofer fægum   fela reordian,
> earne secgan   hu him æt æte speow,
> þenden he wið wulf   wæl reafode.   (*Beowulf* 3021–7)

Therefore many a spear, morning-cold, shall be raised in the hand and brandished aloft; no sound of the harp will wake the warriors, but the dark raven, eager over the slain, will have much to say, will tell the eagle how he fared at the feast when he strove with the wolf to strip the slain.

Although sometimes used exultantly, as at the end of the celebratory poem *The Battle of Brunanburh*, here, in grimly ironic tones that are typical of this author, the motif of the beasts of battle accents the horrors of war.

Three pagan funerals are described in *Beowulf*, and together they provide the pagan colouring of the poem with some of its sombre and majestic tints. They feature in turn a stately ship-funeral for the legendary Scyld Scefing, a pyre for the Danish hero Hnæf and other slain warriors, and a pyre and tumulus for Beowulf himself. A look at Latin and Arabic ethnographic accounts of actual Germanic funerals confirms the basic verisimilitude of these poetic descriptions while raising the possibility that the *Beowulf*-poet deliberately played down the uglier aspects of paganism. According to Jordanes's account of the funeral of Attila the Hun, Attila's tribesmen not only buried weapons, insignia and precious treasures with him, but also sacrificed some of his human attendants. The tenth-century Arab merchant Ibn Fadlan, who wrote a detailed and fascinating account of a funeral among the Rus (a people who had relocated from Scandinavia to the region of the Volga), also mentions human sacrifice. Consigned to the chieftain's pyre were his ship, his weapons, a quantity of food, a dog, a cock and hen, two horses, two cows, and a slave-girl who had previously volunteered for this duty and with whom some of the surviving noblemen first had ritual intercourse. The *Beowulf*-poet's decorous accounts of pagan funerals may have been part of his general effort to portray the old Germanic way of life in elevated tones, with the aim of integrating heroic values into a Christian world view.[13]

Just as one can speak of competing mythologies and burial customs in early Anglo-Saxon England, there were competing bodies of folklore as well, though in this realm it is hard to see where Celtic or Germanic elements leave off and Mediterranean ones take over. Beginning with Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and continuing on to Ælfric's Lives of saints and other tenth- and eleventh-century texts, the Christian literature of Anglo-Saxon England abounds in dream-visions, miracles, portents, blessings, curses, magical cures and other expressions of folk belief. The Church had its own 'folk' narratives in the form of popular saints' Lives. Adding miracles to miracles like beads on a string, these tales existed for the sake of their display of dramatic events proving both the human capacity for sanctity and God's willingness to intervene in human affairs (see also below, pp. 251–5).

One celebrated native saint was Guthlac, a reformed warrior who traded in his shield for St Paul's breastplate of righteousness. Thus defended, he waged a successful campaign against demons in what was once the East Anglian wilderness. Just as dragons dwelt in pagan barrows, monsters lurked in fenland retreats. From the fenland *þyrs*, or 'goblin', who is named matter-of-factly in *Maxims II*, to the diabolical monsters of *Beowulf* – Grendel at one

point is called a *þyrs* – is a short step. Spiritually aligned with such adversaries are the satanic minions who beset Guthlac. All the same, Guthlac's demons have a cartoon-like predictability that makes them seem like creatures who have stepped out of a homilist's fantasy rather than a real-life nightmare. At one point in the Old English prose *Life of St Guthlac*, the saint starts up from sleep and hears a throng of devils speaking Welsh. They disappear from sight 'just like smoke' as soon as Guthlac intones a Latin psalm. There is nothing so wispy about the *Beowulf* monsters, which preserve the corporeality of their antecedents in pagan belief.

When clerical authors did not negate pagan culture through silence, they reinvented it in their own terms. They made no attempt to deny the existence of the old gods. Instead, they euhemerized them: they identified them as real human beings, and thus they integrated them into Christian world history. Woden is a prime example. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Woden is named as the ancestral figure from whom kings of the Kentish, Northumbrian, Mercian and West Saxon royal lines all claim descent. At some point during the late ninth century, probably at King Alfred's instigation, the West Saxon royal line was dramatically expanded via a pseudo-genealogy introduced into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the entry for the year 854. Woden, going back another fifteen generations, is said to be descended from Noah; and Noah, going back another nine generations, brings us back to Adam and thence to 'our father Christ'. Woden is thereby made a lineal son of Christ, notwithstanding his shady past. Still more importantly, the Germanic peoples as a group are assimilated to the larger Judeo-Christian kin-group and are integrated into its history: in short, they are welcomed to the fold.

The work known as *The Rune Poem* contains striking examples of Christian mediation of pre-Christian lore. Here, according to what seems to be an adaptation of an ancient formula, each of the letters of the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet (the *futhorc*) is written out next to a short set of alliterative lines that tells something about its name. The old rune ↑ (TYR), elsewhere associated with the martial god Týr (OE Tiw), here means 'heavenly sign' or 'constellation'. The old rune ᛟ (OS), the old word for 'god' (cf. the Old Norse plural form *Æsir*), is reinterpreted as 'mouth', thanks to the suggestive power of Latin *os*, 'mouth'. Although the rune ᛝ (ING) is elsewhere associated with Old Norse Freyr, alias Yngvi-Freyr, the eponymous ancestor of the tribes whom Tactitus calls the Ingaevones (*Germania*, ch. 2), here that rune-name seems to refer to a mythological hero rather than a god. While the first rune in the list, ᚠ (FEOH, 'wealth'), keeps its conventional meaning, it introduces a short passage telling of the dangers of hoarding wealth if one hopes for salvation. The last rune, ᛠ (EA, whose meaning is a puzzle), initiates a homiletic reminder of death and fleshly corruption. While *The Rune Poem* may be loosely based on Germanic precedent, as it

stands here it demonstrates how effectively pagan beliefs could be sanitized in a monastic context.[14]

Similar acts of appropriation abound in the several collections of Anglo-Saxon magical and medical texts that have come down to us.[15] What is interesting in these texts is that here and there, perhaps because of the desperate need that was felt for cures that worked, certain pagan elements slipped through. An example is the wonderfully elaborate field blessing known as *Æcerbot* (Storms, no. 8). Included among its four masses, its sixteen or more paternosters, its litany and its various other prayers is a heterodox invocation of a mysterious *Erce, eorðan modor* ('Erce, mother of earth'). Whoever this Erce was believed to be, she is integrated into the Christian universe, for the celebrant calls for the Almighty to bless her. Her consequent well-being, it is hoped, will make the fields fertile again.

In an overtly pagan spell, *Wiþ færstice* (Storms, no. 2; Pettit, no. CXXVII) – a title that means 'Against a Stabbing Pain' – the healer first tells of the loud ride of a host of creatures over a burial mound, then announces his intention to cast back the darts of 'mighty women' whom he later calls *hægtessan*, 'hags', who ride in the company of gods and elves, all of whom hurl spears. The stricken person has been hit by 'elf-shot', or invisible darts hurled by a hostile power. By means of this spell, plus a surgical operation whose exact nature one would perhaps wince to know, the healer intends to work a cure. Elsewhere among the Old English charms, 'elf-shot' is the name given to a disease afflicting horses. Even in the modern era, folklorists have encountered tales of 'elf-shot' as a cattle disease. Stricken cattle are believed to have been struck by projectiles that are sometimes identified with unusual stones lying about in the fields.[16]

In another cure (Storms, no. 4), the healer attempts to remove a wen by banishing it to a nearby hill. A claim that the wen will shrink to nothing 'under the wolf's paw, under the eagle's feather, under the eagle's claw' probably alludes to tokens of power that the healer wears or brandishes. In another (Storms, no. 7; Pettit, no. LXXXVI), the afflicted person seems to have been the victim of dwarf-riding. The dwarf has cast a *hama*, or animal pelt, over some poor person and has fastened reins on him so as to ride him like a horse. The concept of nightmare – originally, night-riding by a demon – may be operative here. The result of this dwarf-riding seems to be a runaway fever that must be broken. Yet another cure (Storms, no. 20) is directed indiscriminately against the work of elves, 'night-striders', and people with whom the devil has had sexual intercourse. The same salve, suitably blessed at the altar, will do well against all three.

As this last example suggests, Anglo-Saxon cures and charms generally operated within a Christian context no matter how unsanctified their origin.

They are the science of their day, and their ingredients make up a curious brew of herbalism, Mediterranean medical lore and Christian exorcism, with a dash of native shamanism thrown in. The wonderful thing about them is their unpredictability. One never knows what apotropaic powers or malevolent influences are going to be named next. Normally, if a mythological cure is attempted, the myths in question are Christian, as in a number of remedies against cattle theft. The usual logic of the cure is along the lines, 'Just as St Helena discovered the True Cross where it lay hidden, so may I now find those stolen beasts'. But in one unique charm that presents a striking example of syncretism (Storms, no. 9; Pettit, no. LXXVI), when the healer specifies the power that nine herbs have against poison, infection and 'the hateful ones who rove through the land', he alludes to the power of both the Crucified Lord, who sent chervil and fennel to the seven worlds while He hung on the Cross, and Woden, who once smote a serpent into nine pieces.

Nowhere in Old English literature is the fusion of Germanic and Christian lore brought to more effective literary form than in *Beowulf*. Especially if this poem can be attributed to a Christian author composing not earlier than the first half of the tenth century, as has been argued in some quarters,[17] then there is little reason to read it as a survival from the heathen age that came to be marred by monkish interpolations, as used to be the fashion.[18] Rather, it can be approached as a reinvention of the legendary Germanic past by a poet who was almost as distant from this age as we are from Elizabethan England. Since the poem was linked to this past by an evolving oral tradition rather than the anchor of written history, we can look upon its making as a great act of historical imagination. By recreative acts such as this, the people of later Anglo-Saxon England fashioned a unique spiritual identity, reflected as if in a distant mirror.

If this approach to *Beowulf* is justified, then the making of that poem (and, presumably, other works like it, including the fragmentary *Waldere*) must have been a major assimilative act, analogous in its own way to the ascription of Woden to the line of Christ. *Beowulf* presents a vision of ancestral heroes and kings who, as pagans, were surely damned, according to orthodox theology. Surprisingly, however, it presents them as noble souls who by their own reason or intuition seem capable of discerning the one true God, and who – though only vaguely cognizant of the spiritual significance of what they are doing – are willing to war against God's enemies on earth. The great importance of *Beowulf* for its contemporary audience would have been its mediating role in relation to the early history and culture of the Germanic peoples, a subject about which Bede is silent.

Mention has already been made of the pervasive ways in which *Beowulf* draws on ancient traditions and popular beliefs. What remains to be stressed

is that by casting these elements with a new die, struck in the Christian faith, the poet endows them with a spiritual significance that they could not have had before. Beowulf is no muscled sword-slinger. Rather, he moves through the narrative as a selfless thegn and dignified king whose dominant trait – power held in abeyance – recalls the character of the Christian Saviour. Significantly, he is given no leading role in the dynastic wars that are so frequently mentioned in the poem, and in the end he is praised for being the 'most gracious of men, gentlest and most magnanimous to his people', rather than for martial exploits.

Grendel and his mother, correspondingly, are given a home that is suggestive of hell mouth, and their evil is literally diabolic. The epithets the poet uses for them encompass practically everything unpleasant, whether earthly or unearthly in nature. They are like human beings, with a kind of rudimentary culture that encompasses fireplaces, swords and game-bags. At the same time, they have the size and appetite of giants or trolls. On one hand they recall the night-striders of Germanic folk-belief: the poet identifies them with *scuccum ond scinnum*, 'demons and spectres'. On the other hand, they are the devils of Christian belief: Grendel is pointedly referred to by the term *feond moncynnes*, 'the foe of humankind', as well as by other names usually reserved for Satan. The result of this unsettling mixture is terrifying uncertainty as to just what these creatures are. They show both real malice and real teeth. One suspects that neither a good coat of mail nor St Paul's breastplate of righteousness, taken by itself, would defend the hero against them. What he needs is an extraordinary synthesis of strengths, and this is what the poet gives him, in a creative act that must have had broad significance for members of the audience who were seeking to align their Germanic heritage with their Christian faith.

By giving his monsters an ancestry that derives from Cain, the poet makes them a ghastly incarnation of the spirit of division in human affairs that, in the Augustinian view, has been present on earth from the time of the first siblings and that makes civil polity necessary. Like all beings of their kind, they are headed for hell. Their evil is absolute, unlike that of earthly trolls or dragons; and thus through one saviour's fortitude, in the more-than-faintly eschatological terms of this Christian poem, it can be completely purged. When Beowulf ascends through the waters of Grendel's mere after having put an end to both Grendel and his mother, the pool is miraculously *eal gefælsod*, 'entirely cleansed' (1620), as if by a successful exorcism.

As for the hero himself, in the end, he is released from this plane of existence. Despite the pomp of the pagan ceremonies that are portrayed so majestically at the close, with the building of a pyre, the consignment of grave-goods to the earth, and the ritual circling of the dead king's barrow, the rites are appropriately empty. For Beowulf is a curious anomaly: he lives and dies

by a heroic code of kinship-loyalty and vengeance, and yet he has an immortal soul. Long before his pyre is lit, his soul has left his corpse to seek out 'the judgement of the righteous' (2820), which one likes to think it finds.

In his gift of a spiritual dimension to the Grendel creatures, the *Beowulf*-poet transcended not only early Germanic monster-lore, but late antique pseudo-science as well. For, at some remove or some stage of rumination, the poet's conception of monstrous creatures was surely influenced by the accounts of arcane races that figured in books of natural history deriving from the writings of Pliny and other classical authorities. This engaging science found specific expression in the *Liber monstrorum*, or 'Book of Monsters'; in the book of exotica known as *De rebus in oriente mirabilibus*, or 'Marvels of the East'; and in the so-called 'Letter of Alexander to Aristotle', which purports to be an eye-witness account of oddities of the Orient. Perhaps not by coincidence, copies of these last two works precede the unique copy of *Beowulf* that is preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv.[19]

Among the dragons, centaurs, griffins, camelopards, hermaphrodites, satyrs, Ethiopians, bearded Amazons and cannibalistic giants that are featured in these works are such other creatures, less well known today, as the 'blemmyae', men whose eyes and mouth are in their chest; the 'cynocephali', or fire-breathing dog-headed men with boars' tusks and horses' manes; and the 'sciopods', with one giant foot which they use like a parasol. Examples like these confirm that from whatever source or sources the *Beowulf*-poet derived his conception of monstrous creatures, it was not chiefly from here. Monster-books make fascinating reading for their bric-à-brac of information with a bearing on early medieval popular belief, but in themselves they could never inspire the vision of good and evil that is on display in this poem. This vision is something more grand and chilling. In its dynamic portrait of a magnanimous hero's struggle against creatures that well from the very source of all ills, *Beowulf* evokes a grandeur and touches on depths of pain that go far beyond the contents of these compendia.

Much as one may like to think of 'pagan survivals' as having long since shrivelled away beneath the withering gaze of Reason, the study of folklore provides abundant evidence that old ideas die hard, if rooted in the rich soil of popular belief and custom. The burning of the Yule log and the hanging of mistletoe at Christmas; the maypoles, May queens and morris dancers of spring; the bonfires, the corn dolls and the harvest festivals of autumn; the Jack-in-the-Green, the Hobby Horse, the horn dancers, the plough stots and the guisers and mummers of many a local festival – these are just a few examples of survivals that, for all we know, date back to Anglo-Saxon or Celtic prehistory. Relics of ancient belief, surviving in fossil form as thought-less customs, are as banal in our world as every 'bless you' for a sneeze or

every penny thrown into a wishing well, and their influence on popular attitudes can be at times profound. While the study of Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian religion cannot account for all such beliefs and customs, it can improve one's understanding of more than a few of them.

As for Old English literature, one can scarcely hope to comprehend it without reference to both its Christian themes and forms and its substrata of popular belief. Since 'cultural paganism' encompassed not just religious ideas but also the beliefs, customs, values, hopes, fears and collective memories of a people,[20] it did not die with the Conversion, but rather lived on both in the form of odd survivals and, more importantly, in deep-set patterns of belief. The great challenge facing authors of this period was to find ways of integrating their ancestral heritage with the worship of Christ and with the whole intellectual order that derived from Mediterranean lands. Their success in this venture has had no small effect on how English-speaking peoples have thought and lived in subsequent centuries.

## NOTES

1. *HE* 1.15, trans. Sherley-Price (from which I quote throughout), p. 57. I wish to acknowledge a debt to C. Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*: a Semantic Fairy-Tale', in *Pagans and Christians*, ed. T. Hofstra *et al.* (Groningen, 1995), pp. 9–34, for her caustic criticisms of features of the present chapter as published in the 1991 edition of the present book. Doubtless some shortcomings remain, given how uncertain our knowledge is of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England.

2. *EHD*, p. 455 (II *Cnut* 5.1). On what heathenism meant to the people of late Anglo-Saxon England, see A. Meaney, '"And we forbeodað eornostlice ælcne hæðenscipe": Wulfstan and Late Anglo-Saxon and Norse "Heathenism"', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. M. Townend (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 461–500.

3. J. D. Niles, 'Pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon Religion', forthcoming in *Pre-Christian Religions of Europe*, ed. Olav Hammer, in the series 'European History of Religions' (London). Much information on Anglo-Saxon pagan beliefs and practices can be found in E. A. Philippson, *Germanisches Heidentum bei den Angelsachsen* (Leipzig, 1929); G. R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons*; and D. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London, 1992). J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), points out arresting continuities between the pagan and Christian pasts.

4. This is true even though these day-names are likely to be a learned innovation based on Roman practice; see Philip Shaw, 'The Origins of the Theophoric Week in the Germanic Languages', *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007), 386–401.

5. See e.g. A. L. Meaney, 'Bede and Anglo-Saxon Paganism', *Parergon* 3 (1985), 1–29.

6. This is building D2; see B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: an Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London, 1977), esp. pp. 277–8.

7. See Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, pp. 5–21, with references to prior place-name scholarship, and more recently J. Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and their Prototypes', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8 (1995), 1–28; A. Meaney, 'Pagan Anglo-Saxon Sanctuaries, Place-Names and Hundred Meeting-Places', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8 (1995), 29–42; and S. Semple, 'Defining the OE *hearg*: a Preliminary Archaeological and Topographic Examination of *hearg* Place Names and their Hinterlands', *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007), 364–85.

8. A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007); A. Liberman, *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (Minneapolis, MN, 2008), pp. 46–62.

9. The 1936 Sutton Hoo excavations were published in a set of volumes under the general editorship of R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols. in 4 (London, 1975–83). Discoveries resulting from more recent excavations are presented in M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: a Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context* (London, 2005).

10. Tale type 301 ('The Three Stolen Princesses') in H. Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: a Classification and Bibliography*, FF Communications nos. 284–6 (Helsinki, 2004). F. Panzer made the connection between *Beowulf* and the 'Bear's Son' tale in his *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte, I: Beowulf* (Munich, 1910). Specific versions of type 301 may or may not include princesses; regularly, however, they feature the hero's sequential struggle against two adversaries, one of whom makes repeated attacks on a house, while the other must be sought out in an alien landscape that sometimes features a nether world. The oft-cited resemblances between *Beowulf* and certain episodes of *Grettir's Saga* and other Old Icelandic tales may reflect a common debt to this folktale type.

11. R. Muir, *The National Trust Guide to Dark Age and Medieval Britain 400–1350* (London, 1985), p. 22.

12. For an overview of the archaeological evidence, see S. Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death* (Stroud, 2000). On one unusual female burial, see T. Dickinson, 'An Anglo-Saxon "Cunning Woman" from Bidford-on-Avon', in *In Search of Cult*, ed. M. Carver (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 45–54.

13. Note in this connection L. Benson, 'The Pagan Coloring of *Beowulf*', in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. R. Creed (Providence, 1967), pp. 193–213. For broad analysis of the merging of heroic and Christian values in this poem, see *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk *et al.*, 4th edn (Toronto, 2008), pp. lxvii–lxxix. The accounts by Jordanes and Ibn Fadlan can be consulted in English translation in *Beowulf and its Analogues*, trans. G. N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson (London, 1968), pp. 340–5.

14. I have emphasized the innovative character of the *Rune Poem* in my study 'Runic Hermeneutics in the *Rune Poem*', in Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 251–79. For a balanced approach to a topic about which much that is fanciful has been written, see R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1999).

15. See G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague, 1948); B. Griffiths, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 2nd edn (Hockwold-cum-Wilton, 2003); and – for scholarly treatment of a single fascinating manuscript – *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585*, ed. E. Pettit, 2 vols. (Lampeter,

2001). Only the metrical charms – the charms incorporating *gealdor*, 'spells' – are included in ASPR 6, which thereby takes these pieces out of a useful context for interpretation, that of the manuscripts in which they are written. K. L. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), offers a critical framework for understanding the place of Old English magical texts in a Christian society.

16. For a modern Irish charm against fairy darts, with translation, see A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica I* (Edinburgh, 1900), pp. 58–9, and cf. similar invocations at pp. 278–9 and 174–5.

17. A number of essays in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981), open up the possibility of a date for *Beowulf* considerably later than the seventh- or eighth-century one that used to be assumed. For more recent discussion see R. Liuzza, 'On the Dating of *Beowulf*', in *Beowulf: Basic Readings*, ed. P. Baker (New York, 1995), pp. 281–302, and *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. Fulk *et al*., pp. clxv–clxxx.

18. On the Romantic biases of much early Old English scholarship, see E. G. Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge, 1975), first published as a set of essays in *Notes & Queries* 209–10 (1964–5), and repr. in his *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 3–110.

19. On relevant monster-lore, see J. B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), with remarks about *Beowulf* on pp. 103–7, and A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995).

20. Cf. J. Jesch, 'Scandinavians and "Cultural Paganism" in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. P. Cavill (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 55–68.

# 8

ANDY ORCHARD

# *Beowulf*

*Beowulf* is generally seen as the greatest literary relic from Anglo-Saxon England, and has seemed to some so far to surpass the other extant texts that few have troubled to look for links that might connect it more closely to the rest of the corpus.[1] Yet while *Beowulf* is of evident excellence and subtlety, it is somewhat eccentric in both narrative and language, and it is precisely because of its eccentric and idiosyncratic character that it can also prove perhaps a perfect companion to the wider world of Old English literature. Indeed, in its opening lines *Beowulf* bills itself as a shared and familiar story, and even in its use of extraordinary language and images can still benefit from being read in a broader context. The continuing lack of consensus about the date of *Beowulf*, coupled as it often is with the somewhat sterile and debilitating discussion about how best to interpret the undoubted ultimately oral and formulaic aspects of the poem, has long hampered any investment of perceived parallels with specific significance, so leaving what most consider the finest of all Old English poems languishing in solitary splendour.[2]

Part of the problem is undoubtedly the difficult diction. Shakespeare is often praised for the innovative quality of his language, albeit the precise number of new words he coined has been revised down dramatically over time, as more texts emerge from the shadows. But in a poetic culture where many poems contain words, particularly compounds, found in a single text, *Beowulf* still stands out for the freshness and power of its tightly wrought language, even as the poet seems to trade on a degree of familiarity for many aspects of both the diction and the story, which is set deliberately way back when and over there, a doubly distancing perspective that is only emphasized by the often archaic and outlandish language.[3]

As for the narrative, the poet jumps straight in, with an assertion that the story will begin with the familiar, which he (and that is the most likely gender) immediately dresses up in new ways. So (he says), we have heard and can share the story of how when the Danes of old were in their direst distress,

when they were unexpectedly left helpless and mortally afflicted inside Heorot, their newly built hall unsurpassed in splendour, by the man-shaped monstrous and cannibalistic Grendel, who takes them thirty at a time. After twelve years Beowulf, the young nephew of King Hygelac of the neighbouring Geats, appears unexpectedly from overseas and offers help. He is at first challenged by Unferth, a senior member of the Danish court, on grounds of inexperience, then accepted for the sake of an inherited obligation on the hero's side and a frustrated desperation on the part of the aged King Hrothgar of the Danes. Feasting follows, after which Beowulf triumphs both man to man and hand to hand with his foe, who escapes, quite literally dis-armed, to die a bloody death in the middle of a mere full of monsters. Feasting follows, after which Grendel is avenged unexpectedly by of all creatures his own mother, now introduced for the first time, who snatches a single warrior in a measured life-for-life response. But Beowulf chooses to pursue the feud, hunting down Grendel's mother in her own home in the same monster-mere, killing her with her own weapon, and despoiling her even in death through her own decapitation and that of her dead son, whose head is hauled back to Heorot. Feasting follows, after which one might reasonably expect from the narrative rule of three some further escalation by a hitherto unknown fiend (Grendel's grandmother? his second cousin twice removed?), which in fact and somewhat anticlimactically fails to materialize. And then Beowulf goes home. Flash forward fifty years, when Beowulf, now the aged king of the Geats, is himself helpless and mortally afflicted by an unexpected dragon, whose motives are explicitly explained: the creature has been roused to wrath by neighbouring men (like Grendel), robbed (like Grendel's mother), and (like them both) blames its human neighbours for its wrong. Beowulf, accepting personal responsibility, goes out, again alone, again against advice, to face his foe, whom nonetheless in his superannuated state he can only kill with the help of a younger man, the model of his youthful self, and at the cost of his own life. Beowulf, childless, leaves his folk bereft, facing invasion and desolation, but in honour of his past and present achievements they duly bury him as a hero and brace themselves for their fate. No feasting follows.

Set in such stark terms, *Beowulf* seems a nostalgic and retrospective poem of tumbleweed and tears, a staccato series of set-piece heroic situations that cannot quite be reconciled. Given that the poem begins and ends not only with a funeral, but with whole nations on the brink, it is perhaps unsurprising that certain sections of *Beowulf* are routinely compared with the so-called 'elegies' that survive from the period.[4] Yet such passages make up only a small part of *Beowulf*, the longest surviving narrative poem in Old English, and its archetypal depiction of a monster-slaying hero in youth and old age connects it not only to similar narratives in both prose and verse on quite different topics, but

to texts far beyond its immediate geographical and chronological purview. *Beowulf* exists today in only a single manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv), and the formal dating of that manuscript (most likely 975–1025, with a focus on the first decade of the eleventh century) places its putative preservation squarely within the reign of King Æthelred the Unready (978–1016, with a hiatus in 1013–14 when he was exiled for bad behaviour), one where the threat of Viking and specifically Danish incursion was a constant threat.[5] The copying in those days of *Beowulf*, dealing as it does with some of the darker details of Danish history, says much for the wider perspective of Anglo-Saxon England, as well as for the broader background against which *Beowulf* might be measured.

*Beowulf* is transmitted alongside four other texts, three in prose and one in verse, each of which has some connection with what seems to have been the final text in the manuscript as it was originally conceived, and which together lend insight into the compilation as it currently exists.[6] *Judith*, which is now bound as the final text, lacks a beginning and an end and seems likely to have originally preceded the other works with which it is now bound. This 349-line poem retells the biblical tale of the Jewish widow Judith, who decapitated the leader of the invading Assyrian army, Holofernes, when, drunk, he had her brought to him to rape. Such a sometimes visceral recasting seems clearly to project the anxieties of an Anglo-Saxon community where women were routinely abducted and raped by Viking raiders generally characterized as 'Danes'. Judith decapitates her dehumanized adversary in his own abode, and escapes with his severed head, just as Beowulf returns with the man-shaped monster Grendel's head after defeating Grendel's monstrous mother in the depths of the mere that was their shared lair. *The Passion of St Christopher*, which is, like *Judith* and *Beowulf*, an incomplete text unique to the manuscript, where it currently stands first in the collection, tells the story of an unusual hero from a race of 'dog-heads'. Unlike the rest of his kind, Christopher becomes a Christian, and despite his monstrous appearance (other versions of the text in other languages specify that he is eighteen feet tall as well as dog-headed, but that part of the Old English version is missing), he sets out to convert the neighbouring pagan King Dagnus. In *Beowulf*, when the monster Grendel encroaches upon the hall of the pagan King Hrothgar, the Danes attempt to ward him off in a distinctly unchristian fashion, and likewise here Dagnus captures, tortures and martyrs his (to him) unwelcome guest, with whom, despite his monstrous appearance, we are invited to sympathize. *The Wonders of the East*, which follows *St Christopher* in the manuscript, talks about a series of marvellous creatures discovered by Alexander the Great in foreign parts, mainly in India, including the race of 'dog-heads'. This seems to have been a popular text in Anglo-

Saxon England, to judge from the three further surviving witnesses, two in Latin and another in Old English. *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, another unique text (at least in Old English: there are dozens of examples in many other languages) that follows in the *Beowulf*-manuscript, is clearly connected to *Wonders*, but also to *St Christopher* in that it too mentions the race of 'dog-heads'. The Alexander of this text (and the Old English version differs markedly from the others that survive) is depicted primarily as a killer of curious creatures, a man considerably concerned with his own legacy and fame. Parallels have been seen between certain passages in the *Letter* and in *Beowulf* itself, notably a description of a river infested with hippopotami hostile to Alexander in the former, and the monster-mere in *Beowulf*; the description of the monster-mere in *Beowulf* has also been noted to have very close parallels with a Christian description of hell found in Blickling Homily 16, and such a combination of Christian and non-Christian perspectives is the hallmark of the *Beowulf*-poet's approach, as we shall see. *The Letter* ends part-way down 196$^v$, but *Beowulf*, which seems to be the culmination of the original compilation, begins, like all the other texts in the manuscript, right at the top of the facing page, at 197$^r$, as if in response.

The manuscript itself seems a self-conscious collection of texts about monsters, both man-shaped and otherwise, with *Beowulf* as the last word. *Beowulf*, like the manuscript as a whole, is copied by two scribes, one of whom (up to line 1939b) is also responsible for *The Passion of St Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, and the other (from line 1939b to the end of *Beowulf* at line 3182), the second and apparently senior scribe, to judge both from the style of the script and the fact that he (and that is the most likely gender) corrects the first scribe's work several times, as well as copying most of the surviving lines of *Judith*. The extent of correction undertaken by both scribes with regard to *Beowulf*, far more than is found in the other texts in the manuscript, suggests that *Beowulf* is perhaps either esteemed more highly, or is more difficult to copy, or both. On the other hand, the demonstrable differences in spelling between the two scribes involved suggest a willingness on the part of the first scribe in particular to update the orthography of the exemplar, a process extending even to the name of the hero, which appears as some form of *Beowulf(-)* in the stint of the first scribe, and some form of *Biowulf(-)* in that of the second; the two scribes likewise differ consistently on the forms *Grendles/Grendeles* and *Higelac(-)/Hygelac(-)* for the names of Beowulf's first monstrous adversary and royal uncle respectively. In each case, the form copied by the second scribe is the earlier. A useful illustration of this point can be made with respect to the place-names 'Grendel's mere',

'Grendel's pit' and Grendel's mire' found scattered throughout Anglo-Saxon England from Devon to Middlesex (which also suggest some currency for the monster's name, if the place-names are not simply to be understood as topographical features): of the various spellings, the forms *Grendeles/ Grindeles/Gryndeles* are found in charters dated both before and after 750, while the forms *Grendles/Grindles/Grendels* are found only after 900. The date 750 is also the outer limit for a series of palaeographical changes that together neatly explain a notable proportion of scribal errors that seem to result from misreading of outdated letter-forms.[7]

It also seems significant that the first two times the word *Beowulf* appears in the manuscript (lines 18 and 53) it appears to be an error for *Beow*, as if the scribe had anticipated the hero's name. Yet despite these indications of some basic acquaintance with the major figures and respect for the text of the poem, several less commonly appearing personal and tribal names in *Beowulf* are botched in transmission, as if unfamiliar to the scribes, both of whom are responsible for miscopying the text in many ways. However, several early Old English witnesses, including charters and other non-narrative texts written down long before the sole surviving manuscript of *Beowulf*, not only preserve a great number of the same names as appear in the poem, but do better with the spelling, including names that are in fact not attested in later texts at all.[8] So, for example, in the Durham *Liber vitae*, which was written out sometime around 840, albeit drawing on lists from (among other places) Lindisfarne and Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, originally compiled as early as the seventh century, the name Beowulf (spelt *biuulf*) appears, alongside forms of Heremod, Hygelac, Ingeld, Offa, Sigemund and Unferth (spelt *hunfrið*, with an *h-*, as in *Beowulf* consistently, although all editors routinely emend the name), as well as other characters from Norse heroic legend, such as Bǫðvar bjarki, who, like Beowulf, is associated with the international tale-type known as the Bear's Son's tale.[9] Likewise, the so-called Anglian genealogies (*c.* 765–79) contain, like *Beowulf*, the names Eomer, Finn, Folcwald, Hengest, Hrothmund and Offa, while Scyld, Geat, Beaw, Sceldwa, Heremod and Sceaf all appear (in that order) in the genealogy preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 855 for Æthelwulf, the father of King Alfred the Great (871–99), a genealogy likely inserted with Alfred's approval. *Beowulf* is one of only a handful of poems surviving from Anglo-Saxon England that celebrate figures from the Germanic heroic past (the others are *Widsith* and *Deor* in the Exeter Book, and *Waldere*, which survives only in fragments), and yet the degree of overlap between them is striking: *Widsith*, despite its short length (143 lines), mentions many characters and tribes that also occur in *Beowulf* (Eormanric, Finn, Hama, Hnæf, Offa and Ongentheow; Danes, Frisians, Geats, Heaðobeards, Heaðoræmas,

Hetwære, Swedes and Wulfings), while the still shorter poems *Deor* and *Waldere* (42 and 63 lines respectively) both mention the legendary smith Weland, and *Deor* alludes in addition to Eormanric. Weland also appears in the Old English rendering of Boethius that can be associated with the Alfredian period, if not necessarily with Alfred himself. The case for a *Beowulf* no later than Alfred seems relatively secure, and the notion of a *Beowulf* earlier still is extremely enticing: other explanations require the assumption of a good deal of antiquarian reconstruction on the poet's part, although the possibility of later interpolation of specific passages, in a period where scribes seem to have felt relatively free to tinker with vernacular texts, cannot be ruled out entirely. But such issues of potential interpolation raise further questions about the integrity and provenance of the text that survives in the early eleventh-century copied form that is all that survives. Another set of questions naturally follows: if *Beowulf* did exist in written form for anything up to three centuries, then who was reading it? And do any traces of such reading remain? And on what stories did the *Beowulf*-poet himself draw in composing his own?

The last question is the easiest to answer. The story of *Beowulf* is on the face of it a simple one, albeit told in complex fashion, in a manner that, as we have seen, defies easy summary. Why and when such a story of long ago and far away would have appealed to Anglo-Saxons in their own troubled times, perhaps across an extended period, let alone later audiences, is a complex question that likewise resists a simple solution. Even the most basic narrative structure of the poem is at issue, since a bipartite pattern is implied by the fifty-year hiatus dividing the accounts of the young Beowulf gaining glory in Denmark, and the old King Beowulf dying defending his homeland and that of his people, the Geats, while a tripartite arrangement is suggested by the three key fights with monsters that the hero undertakes at home and abroad. The first monster, Grendel, is emphatically man-shaped, while the second, Grendel's mother, is figured more as a beast, a 'female outcast of the deep' (*grund-wyrgen*, 1518b), in the formulation enshrined in the unique compound apparently coined by the *Beowulf*-poet. Such a tripartite designation of monsters as shaped like humans, beasts or serpents (in that order) is found in a curious Latin text, likely composed by an Anglo-Saxon some time before 750, the *Liber monstrorum* ('book of monsters'), which has other links to *Beowulf*. The *Liber monstrorum* details around 120 monsters, and is broken down into three books, dealing with man-shaped monsters, bestial monsters and serpentine monsters respectively; the second of the man-shaped monsters described is in fact Beowulf's uncle, King Hygelac of the Geats, and the text as a whole draws heavily on the Latin versions that underlie both *The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, as well as on the most

important pagan and heroic Latin poet of the Anglo-Saxon period, Virgil, and such stalwarts of Christian Latin literature as Isidore of Seville and Augustine of Hippo. In its eclectic mixture of sources and influences, combining inherited and retrospective material in an innovative fashion, as well as lending monstrous attributes to long-dead pagan heroes, the *Liber monstrorum* stands as a useful analogue not simply for *Beowulf* itself but for the *Beowulf* manuscript as a whole.[10]

Apart from the principal focus on Beowulf himself, there are other structural parallels that link the three monster-slaying episodes, and lend a backbone to the poem as a whole. We are told that Hrothgar ruled Denmark for fifty years before Grendel attacked (*hund missera*, 1769b), while Grendel's mother ruled the monster-mere for fifty years before Beowulf attacked (*hund missera*, 1498b), and likewise Beowulf ruled Geatland for fifty years before the dragon attacked (*fiftig wintra*, 2209a and 2733a). We are similarly told that Hrothgar ruled successfully 'until one began' ('oð ðæt an ongan', 100) to cause problems (in this case, Grendel); likewise, Beowulf ruled successfully 'until one began' ('oð ðæt an ongan', 2210) to cause problems (in this case, the dragon). It has long been acknowledged that the story of Beowulf and the man-shaped monster Grendel has many parallels with a tale-type known widely from elsewhere and described as 'the Bear's son's tale'. In its simplest form, the tale describes a bear-like or bear-descended hero, who after a sluggish childhood where his worth is undervalued eventually defeats a marauding monster and wins fame. The best specific analogues for the twin fights with Grendel and his mother are found in a range of Old Norse-Icelandic narratives, of which the clearest example is the fourteenth-century *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, which stands at some chronological and cultural distance from *Beowulf* (although it should be borne in mind that no sagas survive from earlier than the late twelfth century).[11] Other more or less puzzling details of the fight with Grendel in particular have Celtic, specifically Irish parallels, such as the ripping off of Grendel's arm (hardly the usual result of a wrestling-match) or the strange inability of Beowulf's men to stay awake, when one might expect greater wakefulness in the face of impending dismemberment. Such parallels seem perhaps less surprising given that the monsters in *Beowulf* have archetypal characters of their own: Grendel is an enraged exile, his mother an aggrieved kinswoman, and the dragon an affronted ruler devastated in his own domain. Still further connections link the main non-human figures: Grendel and his mother share a lineage, while Grendel's mother and the dragon are each provoked by unexpected loss and attacked in their own abodes; all three are enraged by human action in different ways.

Such characters in the human sphere generally evoke sympathy in Anglo-Saxon England, and even though each is depicted as a 'terrifying

troublemaker' (to adopt a recent suggested translation for the term *aglæca*, which describes Grendel, his mother, the dragon and, perhaps, the monsters in the mere), the *Beowulf*-poet does deal sympathetically with each in turn. By contrast, the human monster-slaying heroes Beowulf and Sigemund are themselves also designated by the same term, in each case specifically when they are attacking the monsters on their own territory. Beowulf and Sigemund are also described as battle-hardened killers of giant-kin in remarkably similar terms (cf. *eotena cynnes … wiges heard*, 883b, 886a – Sigemund; *eotena cynn … beadwe heard*, 421a, 1539a – Beowulf); both progress to dragon-slaying, and both can be seen as aggressive assailants of monstrous creatures that, if hardly wholly sympathetic, are nonetheless caught unawares. A similar association of Beowulf, the monsters and a named hero from bygone days is effected by the poet through the notion of an excessive kind of wrath, with which those affected are literally 'swollen' with rage: the relevant term *(ge-)bolgen(-)* is used of Grendel, the dragon and the monsters in the mere, as well as Beowulf and Heremod. The human heroes Sigemund and Heremod are attested from (again, generally much later) Old Norse-Icelandic sources, but it seems certain that (as with Weland) the *Beowulf*-poet expects his audience to be familiar with their basic stories, much as Homer alludes casually to the travails of Herakles in the *Iliad*. It is clear in the poem not only that Beowulf himself is directly compared and contrasted with these heroes from a still earlier past, neither of whom is portrayed in entirely positive terms, but that in some sense the pagans Beowulf and Sigemund and Heremod are all perceived by the poet as potentially on an uneasy par with the monsters with whom they are matched. So Heremod, the last king of Denmark mentioned in the poem before the arrival of Scyld Scefing, is mentioned in two episodes (898–915 and 1709–24) as an example of a ruler gone wrong, an exile who slaughtered his Danish hearth-companions in the feast-hall ('to deað-cwalum Deniga leodum / breat … beod-geneatas', 1712–13) and abandoned both them and human joys (*ana … mon-dreamum from*, 1714b–1715; *dreamleas*, 1720b) to pass 'into the power of enemies' (*on feonda geweald*, 903a). Such a series of descriptions of Heremod links back closely to that of both Grendel (*deað-cwealm Denigea*, 1670a; *heorð-geneatas*, 1580b; *dreamum bedæled*, 721a; *dreama leas*, 850b; *dreame bedæled*, 1275a; *on feonda geweald*, 808a) and his ancestor, the first outlaw, Cain (*gewat … man-dream fleon*, 1264b). The compounds *beod-geneat* and *deað-cwealm* are unique to *Beowulf*, while the compounds *deað-cwalu* and *heorð-geneat* are found both in *Beowulf* (notably in 3179b) and just one other poem in the surviving corpus (in Cynewulf's *Elene* and the *Battle of Maldon* respectively). Such connections not only highlight the way in which the *Beowulf*-poet often inverts expectations and mingles the worlds of monsters

and men (much as happens in the *Beowulf* manuscript as a whole, where the monstrously shaped Christopher invites our sympathy, just as the human 'hero' Alexander evokes our awed distaste), but also point out how the unusual vocabulary invites comparisons both between parts of the poem and within the surviving corpus.[12]

The complex character of the poem as a whole, with its idiosyncratic language and implicit internal echoes often emphasized by the use of heightened language, can be illustrated by almost any passage. One that seems less studied in this regard and might make the point is the scene describing Beowulf's angry assault on the dragon's barrow:

> Let ða of breostum,   ða he gebolgen wæs,
> Weder-Geata leod   word ut faran,
> stearc-heort styrmde;   stefn in becom
> heaðo-torht hlynnan   under harne stan.
> Hete wæs onhrered,   hord-weard oncniow
> mannes reorde;   næs ðær mara first
> freode to friclan.   From ærest cwom
> oruð aglæcean   ut of stane,
> hat hilde-swat.   Hruse dynede.
> Biorn under beorge   bord-rand onswaf
> wið ðam gryre-gieste,   Geata dryhten;
> ða wæs hring-bogan   heorte gefysed
> sæcce to seceanne.                    (2550–62a)

Then, since he was enraged, the prince of the Weder-Geats [Beowulf] let an utterance fly out from his chest, the stout-hearted one stormed; his voice entered in and roared, grimly ringing beneath the grey stone. Hatred was stirred up: the guardian of the hoard recognized a man's voice; there was not then the time to seek for peace. First there then came forth the breath of the terrifying trouble-maker, out of the stone, hot battle-steam. The ground resounded. Beneath the barrow the warrior, the lord of the Geats, swung his shield against the terrible stranger; then the heart of the ring-coiled one was inspired to seek strife.

From the simple perspective of sound, the scene is embellished by a notable amount of double alliteration in the first half-lines, as well as interlinear alliteration and assonance: of the twelve and a half lines given here, nine exhibit double alliteration in the first half-line, ten connect alliteratively to the lines immediately preceding or following, including continuing alliteration on *h-* in 2553–4, and ten contain words with assonance on *-r-*, emphasized in such semi-rhyming sequences as *stearc-heort … heaðo-torht … hord-weard … reorde*; the passage concludes with a half-line containing both double alliteration and assonance (*sæcce to seceanne*). Here the primary intrusion is the sound of Beowulf's voice as it enters the dragon's barrow (*becom*, 2552b);

there are parallels with the approach of both Grendel (*com ... com ... com*, 702b, 710a, 720a) and Grendel's Mother (*com*, 1279a), but while their respective approaches are all too physical, Beowulf's aggression is aural, an inverted echo (as it were) of the sound of human happiness that so aggrieved Grendel more than half a century before.

This passage also offers a splendid example of the extraordinary artistry in coinage of the *Beowulf*-poet, who seems to exult in the creation of compound words (here and elsewhere signalled through the use of hyphens) that are unattested elsewhere. Of the seven compounds in the passage, no fewer than six are unique to *Beowulf* (the exception is the self-rhyming *hord-weard*, which appears in the poem six times, signifying both human kings and the dragon, while likewise *stearc-heort*, unique to *Beowulf*, is used only of Beowulf and the dragon). In illustrating such a propensity for innovation, this passage is simply symptomatic: so, for example, of the twenty other noun compounds in *Beowulf* with the prefix *heaðo-*, fourteen are unique to the poem, without counting the four proper names with the same prefix; likewise, all of the seven other noun compounds in *Beowulf* with the prefix *hring*[*ed*]- are unique to the poem. The half-line 'the earth resounded' (*Hruse dynede*, 2558) recalls similar formulations with regard to the battle with Grendel, during which 'the noble-hall resounded ... the building reverberated' (*Dryht-sele dynede* [767] ... *Reced hlynsode* [770]; incidentally, *dryht-sele* is unique to *Beowulf*). By such ear-catching means the *Beowulf*-poet invites his audience to make connections between sections of the text.

In the passage under examination, the combined metrical and self-contained syntactical structure of the opening phrase *stefn in becom* in 2552b (where a monosyllabic noun is separated by a monosyllabic adverb from a bisyllabic verb stressed on the final syllable) is relatively rare in extant Old English verse (I count only just over forty examples, or less than 0.15 per cent of the whole corpus of more than 30,000 lines, a third of them in *Beowulf*), so it is particularly striking that in the first phase of the dragon-fight the poet should employ no fewer than three further such half-lines in swift succession within the following twenty-five lines – *sweord ær gebræd* (2562b), *scyld wel gebearg* (2570b), *hond up abræd* (2575b) – so identifying the pattern closely with this part of the poem. By contrast to Beowulf's bellowing, the monsters are mostly voiceless, although Grendel in defeat makes a terrifying sound, in a passage which notably opens with precisely the same unusual metrical and syntactical structure:

> Sweg up astag
> niwe geneahhe; Norð-Denum stod
> atelic egesa, anra gehwylcum
> þara þe of wealle wop gehyrdon,

> gryre-leoð galan    godes andsacan,
> sigeleasne sang,    sar wanigean
> helle hæfton.    Heold hine fæste
> se þe manna wæs    mægene strengest
> on þæm dæge    þysses lifes.              (782b–90)

A sound rose up, wholly without parallel; for the North-Danes there arose a dread terror, for every single one of those who heard the cry from the outer wall, God's adversary chanting a terrible lay, a song without victory, hell's captive bemoaning his wound. There held him fast the one who was the strongest in might of men in that day of this life.

In this case, again describing the dread sound made by an assailant on the edge of a hall (although here Grendel is attempting to exit), there are only two compounds, one of which (*Norð-Denum*) is routine, since the designation of the Danes as from the North or South or East or West throughout the poem is entirely predicated upon the demands of alliteration, and the second of which (*gryre-leoð*) is found only in this passage and *The Battle of Maldon*, a poem composed after 991 when the battle it commemorates was fought, and which has a remarkable number of such uniquely shared parallels with *Beowulf*, including the compound *heorð-geneat* already noted.

 Yet of all Old English poems extant, it is another poem, *Andreas*, an account of the apostle Andrew and his adventures among the cannibalistic Mermedonians, which seems to echo most often both *Beowulf* and the four signed poems of Cynewulf, frequently in uniquely shared formulations. A passage from that poem with little warrant in its putative source, describing the wretched behaviour of a young Mermedonian selected for killing and common consumption seems relevant here, depicting as it does the dreadful wailing of a captive oppressed by 'terrifying troublemakers' (*æglæcan*), and reads as follows (*Andreas* 1125–32):

>                  Cyrm upp astah
> ða se geonga ongann    geomran stefne,
> gehæfted for herige,    hearm-leoð galan,
> freonda fea-sceaft,    friðes wilnian.
> Ne mihte earm-sceapen    are findan,
> freoðe æt þam folce,    þe him feores wolde,
> ealdres geunnan.    Hæfdon æglæcan
> sæcce gesohte.                           (1125b–32a)

A cry rose up, when the young man, held captive before the host, began to sing a song of sorrow, bereft of friends, to wish for peace. The sadly abandoned one was not able to find grace, peace among the people, so that they would want to grant him life and living. The terrifying troublemakers sought strife.

Just as it begins with the same rare metrical and syntactical structure identified above, so too this passage concludes with a similar phrase to that seen at the end of the first quoted passage from *Beowulf* (*sæcce to seceanne*, 2562a; *sæcce secean*, 1989a); the formulation is unique to these two poems. Likewise, the term *earm-sceapen* appears here and at *Andreas* 1345, as well as at *Beowulf* 1351 and 2228 (where it refers to Grendel and the dragon respectively), though it is not unique to these two poems, unlike the half-line *freonda fea-sceaft*, which appears only here and at *Beowulf* 2393a (in the form *fea-sceaftum freond*). Another passage from *Andreas* also seems to draw on this one from *Beowulf*, describing how when Andreas is confined by the cannibalistic Mermedonians, they are urged to torment him by a devil who is called a 'dreaded terrifying troublemaker' (*atol æglæca*, line 1312a), a description that is also used three times in *Beowulf* of Grendel.[13] In an explicit echo of the earlier passage, when the Mermedonians are turned back by the saint's faith, we are told that: 'Again, as earlier, the ancient attacker, the little captive of hell, sang out a song of sorrow' ('Ongan eft swa ær eald-geniðla, / helle hæftling, hearm-leoð galan', 1341–2). From the mouth of the devil, following this expression of grief, the saint is also described as a 'terrifying troublemaker' (*æglæca*, 1359a), using the 'power of a terrifying troublemaker' (*æclæc-cræft*, 1362b; this last term is unique to *Andreas*). These references to a 'terrifying troublemaker', all in the context of a captive's anguished cry, constitute the only such in the whole poem, and bind *Andreas* to *Beowulf* closely.

A very similar scenario, apparently also echoed by the *Andreas*-poet, is found in Cynewulf's *Juliana*, when again a devil approaches an imprisoned saint in similar circumstances (*Juliana* 242b–246):

> Ða cwom semninga
> in þæt hlin-ræced    hæleða gewinna,
> yfeles ondwis.    Hæfde engles hiw,
> gleaw gyrn-stafa    gæst-geniðla,
> helle hæftling,    to þære halgan spræc        (242b–6)

Then there came suddenly into that confined building the opponent of warriors, the expert in evil. He had the appearance of an angel, clever in cunning plans; the spirit-attacker, the little captive of hell, spoke to the saint.

The terms 'cunning plans' (*gyrn-stafa*) and 'spirit-attacker' (*gæst-geniðla*) are unique to *Juliana*, and the second of these, like the phrase 'little captive of hell' (*helle hæftling*), connects this passage back to that in *Andreas* mentioned earlier, which speaks of 'the ancient attacker, the little captive of hell' ('eald-geniðla, / helle hæftling', 1341–2). Very little of this passage from *Juliana* has a basis in the Latin source, the relevant part of which speaks simply of 'a demon coming at that time in the form of an angel' ('Tunc . . . daemon ueniens

in figura angeli').[14] In an evidently parallel passage later in the poem, a similar formulation is used when the devil appears to urge the death of the saint:

> Ða cwom semninga
> hean helle gæst, hearm-leoð agol,
> earm ond unlæd, þone heo ær gebond
> awyrgedne ond mid witum swong (614b–17)

> Þa seo eadge biseah
> ongean gramum, Iuliana,
> gehyrde heo hearm galan helle deofol. (627b–9)

Then there came suddenly a wretched hell-spirit, and screamed out a song of grief, miserable and ill-favoured; he was the outcast one that she had previously bound and scourged with punishments . . . Then the saint, Juliana, looked on her enemy; she heard the devil from hell screaming out his grief.

The Latin source partly echoes the earlier formulation 'the demon suddenly came' ('daemon . . . subito . . . uenit'), but the notion of a constrained demonic figure screaming out in pain at the edge of a hall, emphasized here through repetition, connects Cynewulf's *Juliana* both to *Andreas* and to *Beowulf*.

The conclusion of the description of Beowulf at the height of his battle with Grendel, given above, as 'the strongest in might of men in that day of this life' ('se þe manna wæs mægene strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes', 789–90) recalls an earlier description of him in strikingly similar terms as one who 'was the strongest in might of mankind in that day of this life' ('se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes', 196–7). It is intriguing to note that the biblical strongman and mighty hunter, Nimrod, is depicted in terms uniquely similar in the surviving corpus in *Genesis A*, where it is reported that after Chus the father of Nimrod dies, his son comes to the throne:

> Frum-bearn siððan
> eafora Chuses yrfe-stole weold,
> wid-mære wer, swa us gewritu secgeað,
> þæt he moncynnes mæste hæfde
> on þam mæl-dagum mægen and strengo.
> Se wæs Babylones bregorices fruma,
> ærest æðelinga; eðel-ðrym onhof,
> rymde and rærde. (1628b–35a)

Then his first-born, the son of Chus, took control of the ancestral throne; he was a man widely famous, as writings tells us: he had the greatest strength and power of mankind in those specific days. He was the ruler of the mighty kingdom of

> Babylon, the foremost of princes; he exalted the power of his homeland, expanded and raised it up.

Note that the parallel phrasing here is emphasized through continued alliteration on *m-*, and dramatically expands the equivalent source in the Latin Vulgate, which simply says 'he began to be mighty on earth' (Genesis x.8: 'ipse coepit esse potens in terra'). The compounds *eðel-ðrym* and *mæl-dagas* are unique to *Genesis A*. The passage describes the rule of Nimrod, who in Christian exegesis is widely figured as a type of aggressive pride, a successor to Cain, a chief builder of the Tower of Babel (described in 1649–1701), and a figure inextricably linked with the Flood. The tale of the Flood and the birth of giants is shown in quite different terms in *Genesis A*, which rather glosses over the troubling verses in Genesis vi.4 concerning the miscegenation of the sons of God and the daughters of men, and still less addresses the proclamation that 'there were giants in the earth in those days, mighty men, which were of old', who could be interpreted as human heroes, instead focusing on their destruction:

> Siððan hundtwelftig   geteled rime
> wintra on worulde   wræce bisgodon
> fæge þeoda,   hwonne frea wolde
> on wær-logan   wite settan
> and on deað slean   dædum scyldige
> gigant-mæcgas,   gode unleofe,
> micle man-sceaðan,   metode laðe.   (*Genesis A* 1263–9)

> After 120 years were tallied up in the world, exile afflicted the doomed people, when the Lord wanted to inflict punishment on those breakers of the covenant, and strike down in death that giant-kin, guilty in their deeds, mighty criminal assailants, unloved by God, hateful to the Creator.

The mechanism for that destruction is of course the Flood itself, an event that features prominently in *Beowulf*. Of the compounds used here, *gigant-mæcgas* is unique to *Genesis A*, and while *man-sc(e)aða* has wider circulation, it is used in *Beowulf* specifically to describe in turn Grendel (712a, 737b), his mother (1339a) and the dragon (2514b). Like the exiles described here, Grendel too is both 'guilty' (*scyldig*, 1683) and 'doomed' (*fæge*, 846), specifically 'doomed to death' (*deað-fæge*, 850; the term is unique to *Beowulf*).

   In this connection, it is notable that Grendel's own genealogy is indistinct, but is traced by the poet back via his unnamed mother and an unknown father to the biblical kin of Cain. The ultimately human ancestry of Grendel aligns him with the first exile, expelled for fratricide, and so with the prototypical outcast (*wearh*). The biblical story of Cain appears twice in *Beowulf*, before the first attacks of both Grendel (100b–14) and his mother (1258b–67a); in

each case there is an implicit allusion to the biblical Flood that was sent to obliterate the wicked. The first passage concludes with a grim litany of the evil offspring of Cain's crime, and their fate:

> Þanon untydras  ealle onwocon,
> eotenas ond ylfe  ond orc-neas,
> swylce gigantas,  þa wið gode wunnon
> lange þrage;  he him ðæs lean forgeald.          (111–14)

Thence arose all the evil breed: giants and elves and evil monsters, also those gigantic ones who strove against God for a long time; he repaid them for that.

The whole of the last line is paralleled verbatim in *Genesis A* 2546, where again it refers to divine retribution; the direction of borrowing (if that is what it is) is unclear. The second passage relating to the Flood in *Beowulf* is evidently related, and likewise revealing:

> Grendles modor,
> ides, aglæc-wif,  yrmþe gemunde,
> se þe wæter-egesan  wunian scolde,
> cealde streamas,  siþðan Cain wearð
> to ecg-banan  angan breþer,
> fæderen-mæge;  he þa fag gewat,
> morþre gemearcod,  man-dream fleon,
> westen warode.
>                   Þanon woc fela
> geosceaft-gasta;  wæs þæra Grendel sum,
> heoro-wearh hetelic,  se æt Heorote fand
> wæccendne wer  wiges bidan.
>   Þær him aglæca  ætgræpe wearð;
> hwæþre he gemunde  mægenes strenge,
> gimfæste gife  ðe him god sealde,
> ond him to anwaldan  are gelyfde,
> frofre ond fultum;  ðy he þone feond ofercwom,
> gehnægde helle gast.
>                   Þa he hean gewat,
> dreame bedæled,  deaþ-wic seon,
> man-cynnes feond,  ond his modor þa gyt,
> gifre ond galg-mod,  gegan wolde
> sorhfulne sið,  sunu deað wrecan.          (1258b–78)

Grendel's mother, a lady, a terrifying troublemaker in woman's form, called to mind her misery, she who had to inhabit the dread waters, the cold streams, since Cain became the sword-slayer to his only brother, his paternal kinsman: for that he went forth stained [or 'guilty'], marked by murder, fleeing the joys of men, dwelt in the wilderness. From there arose many fatal spirits; Grendel was

one, a hateful and fierce criminal, who at Heorot found a man awake, awaiting battle. There the terrifying troublemaker took a grip of him; yet he recalled the power of his might, the vast gifts that God had granted him, and he trusted in the sole-ruler for help, aid and support; thereby he overcame that enemy, humbled the spirit from hell. Then he departed abjectly, deprived of joy, to look on his death-dwelling, mankind's enemy, and his mother still, greedy and gallows-minded, was willing to travel a sorrowful path, to avenge her son's death.

The *Beowulf*-poet emphasizes here the female aspect of this monster, by three consecutive references to her as a 'mother, a lady, a terrifying troublemaker in woman's form' (*modor*, *ides*, *aglæc-wif*), so aligning her with the human world. So too, outside this passage, Grendel is aligned with the world of men, and specifically with Heremod, as we have seen. The initial, albeit quickly resolved, ambiguity over whether the 'terrifying troublemaker' (*aglæca*) of line 1269a is Grendel or Beowulf only underlines the identification of the human and non-human worlds. The heightened language here is again striking: of the ten compounds in this passage, only two are common-place (*man-cynn*, and *man-dream*); six are unique to *Beowulf*, one is pre-dominantly a legal term and is found only here in verse (*fæderen-mæg*), while the last (*wæter-egesa*) is rare, being found outside *Beowulf* only in *Andreas*, where it is twice used (at lines 375b and 435b) of the storm that hits the saint and his men, and threatens their destruction, in a reversal of perspective that, as we have seen, is characteristic of the *Andreas*-poet.

The biblical story of the Flood also appears explicitly in a third passage in *Beowulf*, depicted on the monstrous sword-hilt that Beowulf brings back to Hrothgar from the monster-mere:

> Hroðgar maðelode,   hylt sceawode,
> ealde lafe,   on ðæm wæs or writen
> fyrn-gewinnes,   syðþan flod ofsloh,
> gifen geotende   giganta cyn,
> frecne geferdon;   þæt wæs fremde þeod
> ecean dryhtne;   him þæs ende-lean
> þurh wæteres wylm   waldend sealde.          (1687–93)

Hrothgar spoke: he gazed on the hilt, the ancient heirloom, on which had previously been inscribed the origin of ancient struggle, when the flood, the streaming ocean, slew the race of giants (they suffered terribly [or 'they dared boldly']); that was a race hostile to the eternal Lord; to them the Ruler gave final recompense through the surging of the water.

There are only two compounds in this passage, which notably begins with a rhyme (*maðelode . . . sceawode*), of which the first, *fyrn-gewinn* ('ancient strug-gle') is unique to the poem, and the second, *ende-lean* ('final recompense'), is

found outside *Beowulf* only in *Daniel* 187b. The key term here seems to be *ende-lean*, which links back to the twice-used phrase *he him ðæs lean forgeald*, the first occurrence referring to God's vengeance on the giants through the Flood (114b), and the second to Beowulf's vengeance on Grendel and his mother in their underwater lair (1584b). The parallel passage from *Daniel* containing the same rare compound offers an account of pagan practice (lines 180–7):

> Þa hie for þam cumble   on cneowum sæton,
> onhnigon to þam herige   hæðne þeode,
> wurðedon wih-gyld,   ne wiston wræstran ræd,
> efndon unriht-dom,   swa hyra aldor dyde,
> mane gemenged,   mode gefrecnod.
> Fremde folc-mægen,   swa hyra frea ærest,
> unræd efnde,   (him þæs æfter becwom
> yfel ende-lean),   unriht dyde.          (180–7)

Then they sank to their knees before that icon, the heathen people bowed down before that idol, worshipped the pagan god, did not know a more fitting counsel, performed unrighteousness, just as their lord did, mingled with sin, emboldened in his heart. The mighty people, as their lord first performed bad counsel, acted out unrighteousness: an evil final recompense came on them for that afterwards.

This description represents a considerable elaboration on its biblical source, *Daniel* III.7: 'Omnes populi et tribus et linguae adoraverunt statuam auream quam constituerat Nabuchodonosor rex' ('all the nations, tribes, and languages fell down and adored the golden statue which King Nabuchodonosor had set up'), and contains a good deal of parallelism, repeating the essential concept that what is done is wrong four times, in a chiastic construction (*efndon … dyde … efnde … dyde*; *wræstran ræd … unriht-dom … unræd … unriht*). It contains four compounds, two of which are unique to the poem (*wih-gyld* and *unriht-dom*), the third rare (*folc-mægen*), and the fourth (*ende-lean*), as we have seen, uniquely shared with *Beowulf*. But as a representation of pagan practice it seems curiously bookish and unspecific, very like descriptions of purported pagan practice within *Beowulf* itself.[15]

The two funerals (of Scyld Scefing and Beowulf respectively) that book-end the poem seem to describe pagan rites, as does the cremation described in so much unnatural detail in the so-called Finnsburh episode.[16] But otherwise, previous critical focus has often been on a particular passage early in the poem, describing the lengths to which the pagan Danes were prepared to go to seek a solution to Grendel's depredations (layout mine):

> Hwilum hie geheton   æt hærg-trafum
> wig-weorþunga,   wordum bædon

> þæt him gast-bona    geoce gefremede
> wið þeod-þreaum.
>                             Swylc wæs þeaw hyra,
> hæþenra hyht;    helle gemundon
> in mod-sefan,    metod hie ne cuþon,
> dæda demend,    ne wiston hie drihten god,
> ne hie huru heofena helm    herian ne cuþon,
> wuldres waldend.
>                         Wa bið þæm ðe sceal
> þurh sliðne nið    sawle bescufan
> in fyres fæþm,    frofre ne wenan,
> wihte gewendan;    wel bið þæm þe mot
> æfter deað-dæge    drihten secean
> ond to fæder fæþmum    freoðo wilnian.            (175–88)

At times they vowed at pagan temples homage to idols, asked in words that the spirit-slayer grant them succour against their dire distress. Such was their custom, the hope of heathens: they recalled hell in their hearts. They did not know the Creator, the Judge of Deeds, nor did they recognize the Lord God, nor truly did they know how to praise the Protector of the heavens, the Ruler of Glory. It shall be woe for the one who must through cruel enmity thrust his soul into the fire's embrace, not hope for comfort, or any change; it shall be well for the one who may seek the Lord after his death-day, and ask for protection in the father's embrace.

The passage divides easily into three parts, becoming progressively sanitized from a Christian perspective, as emphasized here through the layout, with the first giving little sense of first-hand acquaintance with pagan practice, but including four unusual compounds in three and a half lines, three of them unique to the poem in the extant record, although a formation parallel to one of them is found uniquely in *Andreas* (*hell-trafum*, 1691b), and the fourth rare (the related *weoh-weorðinga* also appears in Cynewulf's *Juliana* 180a, in a similarly disapproving context). The first two compounds incorporate words associated with pre-Christian worship (*wig-* and *hærg-*; the second is in fact copied as *hræg* by a scribe perhaps ignorant of its meaning) that are elsewhere attested in place-names, but the third, the unique term 'spirit-slayer', of itself offers a Christian view: heathens have no spirits to slay. The second part of this passage is almost an inventory of Old English poetic words for the Christian God, with six different terms (or five, if *drihten god* is counted as a single item) appearing in the space of six consecutive half-lines, and a string of four negatives (*ne . . . ne . . . ne . . . ne*) emphasizing the Danes' ignorance of the various manifestations of that God. The clear patterning of this section is emphasized by the fact that the first half-lines in this part of the

passage contain three formulations comprising a fixed pattern of two nouns, the first in the genitive, referring to God (*dæda demend … heofena helm … wuldres waldend*), while the second half-lines contain the negative verb-phrases already noted (*ne cuþon … ne wiston … ne cuþon*). In these few lines, the single phrase 'the hope of heathens' (*hæþenra hyht*) tells us clearly that the author is not one: the perspective is entirely Christian, and acknowledges implicitly that, in a Christian world, heathens have no hope.[17] The parallel formulations comparing heaven and hell ('Wa bið þæm ðe sceal … in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan'; 'wel bið þæm þe mot … ond to fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian') in the third part of the passage have many parallels with homiletic writings from the period.

But if the descriptions of pagan worship in both *Beowulf* and *Daniel* appear alike, so too a set of references to God the Father (strikingly similar to that found in this passage of *Beowulf*) comes in the closing lines of *Juliana*, which follow Cynewulf's characteristic use of runes to spell out his name. Just as the relevant passage in *Daniel* represents a great expansion on its biblical source, so too these lines from *Juliana* have no parallel at all in the Latin *Passio S. Iulianae* which is Cynewulf's main source:

> Bidde ic monna gehwone
> gumena cynnes,    þe þis gied wræce,
> þæt he mec neodful    bi noman minum
> gemyne modig,    ond meotud bidde
> þæt me heofona    helm helpe gefremme,
> meahta waldend,    on þam miclan dæge,
> fæder, frofre gæst,    in þa frecnan tid,
> dæda demend,    ond se deora sunu,
> þonne seo þrynis    þrym-sittende
> in annesse    ælda cynne
> þurh þa sciran gesceaft    scrifeð bi gewyrhtum
> meorde monna gehwam.    Forgif us, mægna god,
> þæt we þine onsyne,    æþelinga wyn,
> milde gemeten    on þa mæran tid. Amen.            (718b–31)

I ask each person of the human race who recites this poem that he necessarily and thoughtfully remember me by my name, and ask the Lord that the Protector of the heavens grant me help, the Wielder of virtues, on that great day, the Father, the Spirit of comfort, in that dangerous time, the Judge of deeds, and the dear Son, when the Trinity, sitting mightily in Unity throughout that bright Creation, will inscribe for every kind of people a reward for each person according to their deeds. Grant us, God of powers, that, joy of princes, we may find your face gentle in that celebrated time. Amen.

This passage demonstrates neatly the difference between *Beowulf* and the rest of Old English poetry extant: here, there is just a single compound, where in *Beowulf* one would expect many, and the one here seems inserted for the sake of a piece of wordplay emphasizing the 'power' (*þrym*) of the 'Trinity' (*þrynis*); both the compound and the association are only found in poems signed by Cynewulf, or otherwise associated with his *œuvre*. There are no fewer than seven different ways of addressing God the Father (as opposed to the rest of the Trinity) here, two of which are simplexes (*meotud ... fæder*), and the rest formed on a fixed pattern of two nouns, the first in the genitive plural. The sequence of epithets for God the Father in *Beowulf* ('metod ... dæda demen ... drihten god ... heofena helm ... wuldres waldend') is strikingly like that here ('meotud ... heofona helm ... meahta waldend ... fæder ... dæda demen ... mægna god ... æþelinga wyn'). The further references here to Doomsday, and what will happen 'on that great day ... in that dangerous time ... in that celebrated time' ('on þam miclan dæge ... in þa frecnan tid ... on þa mæran tid') again echo parallel phrasing not only elsewhere in Old English verse, but (as in the closing words of the parallel passage in *Beowulf*) widely in homiletic prose. Whatever their respective relationship, when compared with the fervent invocations of God in the face of depicted paganism in the equivalent passage in *Beowulf*, this extended prayer seems somewhat bloodless; but the two passages certainly seem to share a story.

A random pen-trial in the lower margin of 88$^v$ of London, British Library, Harley 208, a ninth-century continental manuscript of the letters of the Anglo-Saxon Alcuin (who died in 804), reads 'Listen, I [have heard? have remembered?] very many ancient tales' ('hwæt ic eall feala ealde sæge').[18] The phrase closely echoes the description in *Beowulf* 869–70a of a Danish court poet (*scop*) as 'he who remembered a great multitude of ancient tales' ('se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena / worn gemunde'). This pen-trial, which is dated to around the same time the *Beowulf* manuscript was copied, is in the same hand as that which scribbles an alphabet and a *Pater noster* on the preceding folios, and in writing this piece of Old English the scribe seems also to be recording a remembered snatch of text, perhaps even (mis-)remembering some version of *Beowulf* itself. At all events, with its unique and literally marginal chance survival alongside a series of texts all ultimately derived from the world of Christian Latin literature, this scribble can usefully stand as a metaphor for *Beowulf* itself, which certainly seems the product of remembering very many ancient tales, and may itself have served as a model for other poets across very many years.

    *Beowulf* is often held up as the finest example of Old English literature, and is without doubt the best-known, most closely studied, and most loved text from

the period, as the many editions, translations and adaptations in many media attest.[19] If the language and allusions are occasionally opaque, their relative obscurity only contributes to the allure: this is a text that invites rereading, and continues to demand a hearing in many different ways. Although scarcely surviving flame and age and under-appreciation, *Beowulf*, built as it is from old stone, remains a memorial to ages already old when their shared story was first told, representing as it does the conflation of the oral and the literate, the secular and the Christian, the inherited and the innovative, the native and the imported that is the hallmark of Anglo-Saxon literature as a whole and especially that which is preserved in Old English. In that sense, *Beowulf* remains what it perhaps has been for longer than we can now know: the best and most complete companion to Old English literature.

## NOTES

1. The secondary scholarship on *Beowulf* is vast; here I rely heavily on the standard edition of the poem, *Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008), as well as the facing-page edition by R. D. Fulk, *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and 'The Fight at Finnsburg'* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2010). There is an excellent facsimile of the *Beowulf* manuscript in *Electronic Beowulf 3.0*, ed. K. Kiernan (London, 2011), one DVD plus booklet; see http://ebeowulf.uky.edu. Some control over the various specific areas discussed here can be gained from *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Lincoln, NE, 1997), and A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003).
2. Still useful for a conspectus on the dating problems is *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981; repr. with an extra chapter, 1997). Leonard Neidorf has in hand an edited collection, *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*. On orality and literacy in Anglo-Saxon literature, see in general A. Orchard, 'The Word Made Flesh: Christianity and Oral Culture in Anglo-Saxon Verse', *Oral Tradition* 24 (2009), 293–318.
3. The best guide to the style of the poem remains A. G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley, CA, 1959).
4. For an overview, see A. Orchard, 'Not What it Was: the World of Old English Elegy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy*, ed. K. Weisman (Oxford, 2010), pp. 101–17.
5. On the difficult question of dating the manuscript (rather than the poem itself), see D. N. Dumville, 'Beowulf Come Lately: Some Notes on the Palaeography of the Nowell Codex', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 225 (1988), 49–63, as well as his 'The *Beowulf*-Manuscript and How Not to Date it', *Medieval English Studies Newsletter* 39 (1998), 21–7.
6. See, in general, A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto, 2003).
7. See further M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41; R. Frank, 'A Scandal in Toronto: the Dating of "Beowulf" a Quarter Century

On', *Speculum* 82 (2007), 843–64; and G. Clark, 'The Date of *Beowulf* and the Arundel Psalter Gloss', *Modern Philology* 106 (2009), 677–85.

8. A useful summary is found in P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in his *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. S. Baxter (Oxford, 2006), pp. 30–105, esp. 71–81.

9. See further J. M. Stitt, *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga, and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition* (New York and London, 1992).

10. See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 86–115, 254–320.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–68; see also M. Fjalldal, *The Long Arm of Coincidence: the Frustrated Connection between 'Beowulf' and 'Grettis Saga'* (Toronto, 1998).

12. See also M. Lapidge, '*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr*, ed. H. Damico and J. Leyerle, Studies in Medieval Culture 32 (Kalamazoo, MI), 373–402; repr. in *Beowulf: a Prose Translation*, trans. E. T. Donaldson, ed. N. Howe (New York, 2002), pp. 134–53.

13. The references in *Beowulf* are at lines 592a, 732a and 816a. The *Andreas*-poet further describes the devil as 'mindful of evils' (*yfela gemyndig*), and so seems also to be drawing on a description of yet another hellish devil in Cynewulf's *Elene*, lines 900–1: 'then there began to speak a hell-devil, a dreaded terrifying trouble-maker, mindful of evils' ('Ongan þa hleoðrian helle-deofol, / eatol æclæca, yfela gemyndig'), where the Latin source simply states that 'a devil began to speak with anger' ('diabolus cum furore vociferebatur').

14. The precise Latin source has been identified by M. Lapidge, 'Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*', in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr*, ed. M. C. Amodio and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Toronto, 2003), pp. 147–71.

15. See further C. Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*: a Semantic Fairy-Tale', in *Pagans and Christians: the Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. T. Hofstra *et al.*, Germania Latina 2 (Groningen, 1995), pp. 9–34, at 21–3; and F. C. Robinson, 'The Language of Paganism in *Beowulf*: a Response to an Ill-Omened Essay', *Multilingua* 18 (1999), 173–83.

16. See, in general, G. R. Crocker-Owen, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf: and the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester, 2000).

17. See further E. G. Stanley, '*Hæthenra Hyht* in *Beowulf*', in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. S. B. Greenfield (Eugene, OR, 1963), pp. 136–51.

18. See M. B. Parkes, '*Rædan, areccan, smeagan*: How the Anglo-Saxons Read', *ASE* 26 (1997), 1–22, at p. 19.

19. See M. Sharma, 'Metalepsis and Monstrosity: the Boundaries of Narrative in *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology* 102 (2005), 247–79.

# 9

MARY CLAYTON

# Preaching and teaching

Old English texts designed for preaching and teaching comprise the major proportion of what survives in the vernacular from Anglo-Saxon England. They account in all for approximately 60 per cent of our vernacular records; we have, on a rough count, about 370 individual texts, of varying lengths. The most prominent homilist, Ælfric, wrote about 15 per cent of all surviving Old English, including 84 homilies for liturgical occasions and another 37 for saints' days. Many of the individual texts, moreover, are found in multiple manuscripts; Ælfric's first collection, *Catholic Homilies* 1, for example, survives either whole or in part in thirty-four manuscripts or fragments and there were, presumably, once many more. That most Old English poems survive in only a single copy makes the figures for these prose texts even more impressive. Interest in Old English homilies endured until well after the Conquest and they were still being copied in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Very considerable resources, therefore, over a lengthy period of time, were devoted to writing and transmitting these texts and it is clear that they were thought important enough to merit this effort and expense.

Vernacular prose homilies, sermons, saints' Lives and Old Testament narratives offer us an unparalleled insight into how English people were instructed from the pulpits in the tenth and later centuries and give us a vivid sense of what the Anglo-Saxon Church considered important for people to hear and to read. Homilies are of enormous importance for understanding the intellectual culture of the period, but they also allow us an insight into how the belief of the non-intellectuals was shaped. They were the primary medium by which the faith of ordinary people was formed and maintained and they were the medium through which the Church attempted to reinforce the traditional hierarchies in society and to control numerous aspects of daily life. These included sexuality and marriage, eating and drinking (both the times and the amounts), work practices (such as not working on Sundays and feast days) and morality, and the sermons were a powerful means of inculcating the norms that the Church considered desirable. The primary aim of these texts was to explain, and to participate in the

formation of, Christian doctrine, morality and history; in the course of this they often register, sometimes with great force, the impact of the turbulent times and social upheavals through which their authors lived. Ælfric's and Wulfstan's works, in particular, witness to their struggles to find explanations for the calamitous events inflicted by the pagan Vikings on a Christian people and to find ways of influencing the policies adopted to cope with these disasters.

Most students come to Old English literature via the poetry initially but reading the poems in conjunction with the homilies, rather than in isolation, has many benefits; there are numerous passages which parallel and throw light on themes in the poetry. The memorable *ubi sunt* passage in *The Wanderer*, for example, takes its place alongside other, rather different, *ubi sunt* passages in the homilies, and the passage on the different means of death in *The Wanderer* echoes passages in Old English homilies on the resurrection of all, regardless of their means of death. The eschatological homilies find their counterpart in poems such as *Christ and Satan* or *Christ III*. For readers of Old English heroic poetry, such as *The Battle of Maldon* or *Beowulf*, the Lives of royal and military saints offer us insights into other ideas about violence and heroism that were current in the same society. To read Ælfric's *Judith* alongside the poem of the same name is a fascinating exercise, as is reading his Lives of virgin martyrs alongside Cynewulf's *Juliana*.

Conversion depends on preaching and teaching. The process of converting pagan Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity was a twofold one, with missionaries coming from Rome and settling in Kent in 597, headed by a Roman abbot, Augustine, and with Irish missionaries coming to the north of Britain and teaching about Christianity there, beginning *c.* 635. Bede, whose *Ecclesiastical History* is our main written source for this period, was deeply interested in preaching and records much about it. Augustine's first message to the Kentish king, Æthelberht, was that he had brought with him 'very glad news, which infallibly assured all who would receive it of eternal joy in heaven, and an everlasting kingdom with the living and true God' (*HE* I.25). This emphasis on offering heaven and everlasting happiness to converts was probably typical of the early preaching; it is reflected also in the famous story about the conversion of Northumbria in 627, where what swung the decision for Christianity was the certitude it appeared to offer about the afterlife. According to Bede, King Edwin's pagan counsellor, advising the king to opt for Christianity, offered the story of the swallow coming from the winter darkness, flying through the lit hall and flying out again into the dark as a metaphor for human life: 'Similarly, man appears on earth for a little while, but we know nothing of what went before this life, and what follows. Therefore if this new teaching can reveal any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it' (*HE* II.13).

Since neither the Romans nor the Irish spoke Old English, language problems must have loomed large at the beginning of the Conversion. The Roman mission to Kent initially wished to turn back after a short distance, appalled at the prospect of 'going to a barbarous, fierce, and pagan nation, of whose very language they were ignorant' (*HE* 1.23). Urged on by Pope Gregory, however, they set off again. Gregory also advised Augustine to take Frankish interpreters with him; Old Frankish was a Germanic language and therefore related to Old English. Like the Romans, the Irish also initially needed interpreters; Aidan (d. 651), who was responsible for converting much of Northumbria, was able to call on the Northumbrian king, Oswald, to interpret for him, as Oswald had spent time as an exile in Ireland. Both Irish and Roman missionaries trained English boys and men for the Church so that language ceased to be a problem fairly quickly.

The early missionaries, both Roman and Irish, were monks and some were monastic bishops, but, as the Church became established in England, secular bishops and priests were naturally also involved in preaching and pastoral care. For most of the Anglo-Saxon period, the fundamental centre of religious life was the minster; in the early period this was inhabited by monks, priests and some laity (and quite often nuns, in double houses ruled by abbesses). The minster was responsible for the provision of pastoral care for the laity and its church was used by them; it is probable that the priests, along with the bishops, undertook much of this pastoral care. Bede paints a vivid picture of monastic bishops such as St Cuthbert preaching to the laity; Cuthbert would set out from the monastery, generally on foot, and preach in towns and villages, even 'the villages that lay far distant among high and inaccessible mountains which others feared to visit, and whose barbarity and squalor daunted other teachers' (*HE* IV.27). As well as their own preaching to lay people, however, bishops, priests and monks must have experienced other forms of preaching. Bishops were expected to preach to their priests as well as to their congregations and both monks and secular clerics living in communities listened to homilies and sermons as part of their Night Office.

These different preaching contexts were not unique to Anglo-Saxon England, and Old English preaching, from the very beginning, was deeply and inextricably linked to preaching throughout the Church. The history of Christian preaching dates, of course, back to Christ, with roots beyond that in Jewish preaching. The apostles, as the Acts of the Apostles eloquently testify, continued Christ's preaching mission, originally for the purposes of making converts to Christianity but then also to guide the faith of the new Christian communities as they became established. Preaching on the fundamentals of the Christian faith, or catechetical preaching, was what missionaries offered to converts, but the need to instruct lay Christians in the basics never ceased

and catechetical preaching was a prominent aspect of preaching throughout the Middle Ages. As the Church put down roots and developed, a whole organizational structure grew up within it, consisting of laity, secular clergy of different ranks, monks and nuns; these different categories had different religious needs and some at least required explanations more complex and complete than catechetical preaching could offer.

In the early centuries of the Church, preaching seems to have been primarily the responsibility of bishops and took two main forms, apart from missionary preaching; one was exegesis or interpretation of the Bible, particularly of the pericope (a biblical reading, usually from the Gospels, appointed for a particular day of the liturgical year), while the other focused more on what was necessary for a good Christian life, that is, explanations of Christian doctrine, morality or liturgy and exhortations to live in accordance with Christian principles. Texts of the first type are termed homilies and of the second sermons by many modern scholars and some medieval scholars recognized this distinction too, but by no means all; the Anglo-Saxons, for the most part at least, did not. Texts can also, of course, combine elements of both genres. As the terms are useful shorthand designations of different types of text, I will use the terms homily and sermon in these specialized senses here, but will also use homily as a blanket term covering both types. A homiliary is, strictly speaking, a collection of homilies, generally arranged in the order of the biblical readings in the liturgy for Sundays and feast days, but it is also used of collections incorporating both homilies and sermons; as most Old English collections are of this type, homiliary will be used in this sense here. From an early date, the homilies of some particularly famous bishops, such as St Ambrose, were written down and disseminated and, by the fifth century, we begin to find homiliaries. Homiliaries probably originated in Africa and they soon spread to the West, where more homiliaries were composed or compiled. As the Church grew, an episcopal monopoly on preaching would have left many congregations without any regular instruction and by the fifth century priests, too, had taken on the task of preaching, although not without some objections over the centuries. Caesarius of Arles (*c*. 470–542), a bishop whose work was to be popular in late Anglo-Saxon England, produced an influential collection intended for the use of secular clergy in preaching to the people.

Homiliaries had different uses and audiences. The first was preaching to the laity; examples of this are the collections of Caesarius of Arles or of Pope Gregory the Great (540–604), who wrote a collection of forty homilies on the Gospels, probably originally for preaching at mass in Rome to a mixed audience of lay and religious. Such texts could be read aloud by a priest or bishop or used more freely, as an inspiration or prompt for their own

preaching. Other collections aimed at the laity were produced in the Carolingian period (for example, the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres, very popular in late Anglo-Saxon England); these were written at least partly in response to the attempts by Carolingian Church councils to ensure that bishops and priests preached regularly and comprehensibly at mass. The Carolingian collections for the laity are characterized by a high sermon content, with moral exhortation, instruction in the faith and explanations of the liturgy, by some fairly basic exegesis of Gospel pericopes and by their inclusion of saints' Lives and some apocryphal material.

A second context in which homiliaries were used was the Night Office, the 2.00 a.m. prayer service observed by both monks and those secular clergy who lived in communities attached to cathedrals and large churches; homilies and sermons were read as part of this Office. Homiliaries, drawing on patristic texts, were compiled specifically for the Night Office, the most famous and important being that of Paul the Deacon, commissioned by Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century; Paul did not write new texts for his collection but instead assembled sermons and homilies for Sundays and feast days throughout the liturgical year, drawing on works by, for example, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bede, Maximus, Leo and John Chrysostom. Paul the Deacon's collection, largely in an augmented form, is found in a number of late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

A third context was private devotional reading, both for monks and secular clergy and for the small numbers of literate and devout lay people; clearly any collection of homilies could be used for this purpose, but some homiliaries appear to have been composed with it in mind. Even when a homiliary was composed or compiled for a specific type of audience, however, this does not mean that it was used only by that audience.

As will be evident by now, preaching was an activity which took place in very different contexts, which varied from illiterate lay people living in remote areas being preached to extempore in the vernacular, to monks and nuns in their monasteries being read aloud to from Latin homiliaries, to literate lay and religious men and women reading in private. Questions concerning audiences, function, context and who was responsible for preaching will all arise again as we turn to look at the Old English collections.

As far as we know, no vernacular sermons survive from the first centuries after the Conversion, if indeed they were ever written down, but presumably the missionary preaching aimed to cover what was recommended in books of catechetical instruction in the early Church. This was the story of Creation, the fall of the angels and of man, the commandments, the story of Christ, eschatology (eschatology deals with the four last things, death, judgement, heaven and hell), the necessity of abandoning idol worship and pagan shrines,

Christian morality and doctrine and the most important prayers, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Even this list of topics is ambitious; given the rural nature of the life lived by most people, their illiteracy and the lack of mass communication, it is likely that the vast majority knew only the absolute fundamentals of Christianity, if that. We have, moreover, some documents which give us an idea of what was considered essential for the laity and it appears to be very basic instruction indeed. Bede, for example, wrote to Archbishop Ecgberht of York in 734, urging him to preach and telling him that he should seek to impress the Creed and the Lord's Prayer on the memories of those in his care. The second synod of Clovesho declared in 747 that priests should be capable of explaining the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the mass and baptism in English and of telling their congregations about their spiritual significance. The very basic level of what is expected is in stark contrast to the fifty Latin homilies that Bede composed for monastic use; these expound biblical pericopes and their sophistication and erudition are remarkable.

There is very little evidence for what kind of preaching went on in England from the time of Bede to the tenth century. From the second half of the tenth century on, however, collections of vernacular homilies and sermons survive. The earliest extant collections are the Vercelli Book, the Blickling Homilies (both anonymous) and Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* I and II, his *Lives of Saints* and his later collections of homilies for the *temporale* (that part of the liturgical calendar dependent on the movable date of Easter). Slightly later, at the beginning of the eleventh century, come the works of Wulfstan. It is at least possible that some of the anonymous texts date from the ninth century, decades before the surviving manuscripts.

The manuscripts transmitting the Old English collections, however, come from the period when the Benedictine Reform was well established in England. This movement, beginning about the middle of the tenth century, was responsible for the foundation or refoundation of a large number of Benedictine monasteries in England; as well as the new foundations, the secular clergy who had staffed the cathedrals and minsters were replaced with monks in some English cathedrals, while in others monks were introduced alongside them. The reformers saw themselves as rescuing the English Church from what they considered the laxity and ignorance of their predecessors; while their position on the pre-Reform Church and on the secular Church which coexisted with the reformed institutions is understandable, it is not necessarily accurate. The founders of the movement (Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, 959–88, Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester, 963–84, and Oswald, bishop of Worcester from 961 and archbishop of York, 971–92), with the strong support of the king, Edgar (959–75), seem to have

been concerned principally with establishing correct monastic observance based on the *Rule of St Benedict*; they insisted on the full communal life, with no private property, and on celibacy. However, they also took from Bede a sense of the early English Church as one in which monastic bishops had been responsible for pastoral care. Because of a desire to emulate this model and because the monks took over or established a presence in the major English cathedrals, most of whose bishops were now monks, the English monastic Reform movement seems to have been involved to an unusual degree in pastoral care, even though the dominant contemporary theory of monasticism was one which stressed withdrawal from the world and enclosure in the monastery. In any case, in those churches from which secular clerics were expelled, such as the Old Minster in Winchester, the monks presumably had little option but to take over their pastoral responsibilities. In the next generation of the Reform movement, that is, the period contemporaneous with the first extant collections of vernacular homilies, we can see the results of this pastoral involvement, especially in the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan. While very dominant in the records, the reformed institutions seem to have amounted to only about 10 per cent of the total number, so most lay people would still have received pastoral care and preaching from secular priests. We do not know whether anonymous texts, such as those in the Vercelli and Blickling collections, come from a Reform milieu or whether some of them were pre-Reform or, if written in the Reform period, were written by figures outside the Reform. Apart from the collections of vernacular homilies and sermons, other evidence testifies also to a late tenth-century concern with teaching and preaching. Pastoral letters written by Ælfric and Wulfstan, and many passages in the homilies themselves, show a deep concern to ensure that the lay people were taught about their faith.

Old English homiliaries typically include some or all of the following: sermons and homilies, saints' Lives, apocrypha and occasionally some Old Testament narratives (mostly by Ælfric). The apocrypha are texts associated in some way with the Old or the New Testament, either in genre or content, but not accepted into the biblical canon. They often satisfied curiosity about biblical characters' lives and filled gaps in the Bible. Old Testament apocrypha are not found in Old English homiliaries but New Testament apocrypha in them include Gospels (such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, telling of the Virgin Mary's birth and childhood and her life up to the flight into Egypt, or the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, telling of the death of Christ and the harrowing of hell), apocalypses (such as the *Apocalypse of Paul*, where the apostle Paul is given a tour of heaven and hell, witnessing the torments of the damned, or the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, with prophecies of the events in the seven days before Judgement Day), acts of the apostles (such as the *Acts of Matthew and*

*Andrew*), accounts of the deaths or passions of the apostles (such as the *passio* of Andrew or of James the Great), epistles (such as the so-called Sunday Letter, purporting to have been written by Christ and dropped from heaven in order to instil strict observance of Sunday) and *transitus* texts of the Virgin Mary, telling of her death and Assumption. In addition, vernacular homiliaries were used to preserve other types of Old English material, such as laws, penitential and confessional material, prayers, letters, poetry and even science (as with the preservation of Ælfric's *De temporibus anni*, a handbook of computistical, astronomical and scientific material, in a manuscript containing *Catholic Homilies* I and II). Clearly, as compendia of useful and instructive material they offered a home to a range of disparate material which we would nowadays keep strictly compartmentalized.

These vernacular homiliaries in England seem at first sight most unusual in the context of early medieval Europe. Homilies, sermons, saints' Lives and apocrypha survive in Irish, such as those in the *Leabhar Breac*, a fifteenth-century manuscript considered to have at its core an eleventh-century collection, and there are some short sermons in Germanic dialects from the Continent, but there is nothing comparable to the scale of what we find in Old English.[1] However, in the areas of the Continent where people spoke what were becoming the Romance languages, it seems that Latin acted for some centuries as the written equivalent of what in the spoken language was becoming Old French or medieval Italian or Spanish. In these areas, priests or bishops could read Latin homilies and sermons aloud, not with classical Latin pronunciation but with a pronunciation intelligible to their audiences. Latin therefore functioned as the written version of quite different and diverging vernaculars, just as written English can be read aloud today by a speaker of African American Vernacular English in down-town Chicago or by an English speaker of Received Pronunciation – what one hears is very different in each case, but they can use the same written text. So the new Latin collections being compiled on the Continent for preaching to the laity in the Carolingian period needed only to be pronounced in the vernacular way to be suitable for reading to contemporary congregations. It was only in the non-Romance-speaking areas of Europe that separate homilies and sermons had to be written, therefore, and England was very much to the fore here. The necessary process of translation (understood in its broadest sense as including all kinds of adaptation) into English has given us a body of preaching literature which is unique; elements of vernacular style permeate the corpus of religious prose and Anglo-Saxon England's openness to different traditions, the Roman, the Irish and the Germanic, enriched its preaching tradition.

The earliest extant collection of Old English homilies is the Vercelli Book, so called because it has been in Vercelli Cathedral Library since at least the

twelfth century, probably left behind by an Anglo-Saxon en route to Rome. The Vercelli Book, which contains twenty-three anonymous Old English sermons and homilies and six poems, is dated *c.* 975; it was compiled in the south-east of England, possibly in Canterbury or in Rochester. The manuscript was written by a single scribe who copied texts in blocks; he seems to have assembled them from a variety of sources, probably also south-eastern collections. It is clear that he had poor Latin, as Latin quotations often contain errors. The poems (all of which have some homiletic features, such as the homiletic address in *The Dream of the Rood*) and prose texts were intermingled and the order of the pieces is not determined by the cycle of the liturgical year. There has been much discussion of the intended function of the Vercelli Book, with many arguing that it is a personal collection, one person's book bringing together texts for private devotional reading, and others that it could have had a more public function, such as a bishop's preaching. Some at least of the texts seem to have been intended for preaching in the collections from which the Vercelli scribe worked, although this particular volume does seem intended more for private use. There is a marked emphasis on texts to do with Judgement Day and with the penitential seasons of the year, Lent and Rogationtide (the three days before Ascension Thursday, a season of penitence, processions and prayer). However, some texts, such as Homily I, on the Passion of Christ, or VI, on the portents at Christ's birth and the Flight into Egypt, are narrative and others consist of biblical exegesis (XVI, for Epiphany, and XVII, for the Purification). There are two saints' Lives, of St Martin and St Guthlac. The eschatological, penitential sermons feature descriptions of the signs of Judgement Day and the horrors of judgement, with, for example, a speech by Christ accusing man of his torments at the Passion (Homily VIII) or a scene in which Satan demands from Christ the just judgement of the damned (Homily X) or one in which, after the Judgement, the Virgin Mary, St Michael and St Peter plead for the sinners and are granted a third each, although many more remain to be driven into hell, whereupon St Peter locks the door of hell and throws away the key (Homily XV). The preference for Last Judgement material and exhortations to repent while there is time means that much of the Vercelli Book belongs to what Charles Wright has called the 'pastoral scare' genre,[2] of which the following is a good example; this is from Vercelli Homily XIII, a dramatic monologue delivered by the 'dry bones' from the grave, castigating the body:

> To hwan, la, ðu earma man ⁊ þ[u] ungesæliga, gymest ðu þysse worulde swa
> swiðe, oððe to hwan begæst ðu ungesæliga þe in geweald oferhiede oððe
> fyrenlustum, oððe to hwan begæst ðu þe ðam wælhreowestan hlafordum þæt
> is leahtrum ⁊ uncystum? Beheald me ⁊ sceawa mine ban ⁊ ondræd þe þinne

fyrenlust ⁊ þine gytsunge. Þæt ðu eart nu, þæt ic wæs io; þæt ic eom nu, þæt ðu wiorðest eft.

Why, o you wretched and miserable person, do you care for this world so much, or why, miserable person, do you give yourself up to the control of pride and sinful desires or why do you devote yourself to the cruellest lords, that is, vices and sins? Look at me and consider my bones and be afraid of your sinful desires and your greed. What you are now, I was formerly; what I am now, you will become in the future.

Wherever the Vercelli Book was written, it is clear, then, that that centre possessed a range of homiletic (and poetic) material about twenty-five years before Ælfric began to write, demonstrating a developed tradition of writing vernacular preaching texts; some of the texts included may be considerably older than the date of the manuscript, while others could be very recent. Charles Wright has argued that Homilies XI to XIII were written for secular clerics and that the end of Homily XI, which expresses the homilist's dismay at kings and bishops and ealdormen robbing the spiritual orders, is a protest 'against the state-sponsored expulsions and confiscations of the Benedictine Reform movement'.[3] If so, then these texts date from after 964, when the first expulsion of secular clerics took place in Winchester. Eleven of the prose items are unique but the others are all found elsewhere, sometimes in multiple manuscripts (twenty-six manuscripts contain one or more texts also found in Vercelli), suggesting both that the centre where Vercelli was copied was an important one in the dissemination of vernacular homilies and that scribes compiling such collections had a limited number of texts on which to draw. Some of the Vercelli homilies are translations of a single Latin source; others combine different Latin sources and some may have been composed quite freely. These include the Bible, pseudo-Augustinian sermons, texts from the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres, Gregory the Great's homilies, Isidore of Seville, Caesarius of Arles's sermons, the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, Sulpicius Severus's *Life of St Martin*, Alcuin, Felix's *Life of Guthlac* and a Latin translation of one of John Chrysostom's homilies. Vercelli IX is indebted to Hiberno-Latin sources and literary models, as are other Old English anonymous homilies. Recent work on the style and rhetoric of the Vercelli texts by Samantha Zacher has demonstrated striking use of such techniques as verbal repetition, metaphors and rhythmic and alliterative prose, with lines of embedded verse in some homilies.[4]

As the Vercelli texts were not written by a single author, it is possible that different texts were written for different contexts, but some of the homilies provide a sense of whom they were intended for originally. There are some indications of a mixed audience of laity, male and female, and religious and,

whether the setting was a reformed monastic church or cathedral or a secular cathedral or minster, such a mixed audience is easy to envisage – a bishop would be expected to address both groups at mass on important occasions of the Church year and so, presumably, would a priest in a large church served by a number of priests. The implied audience is, unsurprisingly, what must have been the standard Anglo-Saxon congregation.

The other early collection of anonymous homilies, the Blickling Homilies (now in the Scheide Collection in Princeton), is preserved in a manuscript of *c.* 1000, contemporary with the works of Ælfric. It consists of eighteen texts, or fragments of texts (the beginning of the manuscript is missing and so is a quire later on). The manuscript was written by two scribes, in an as yet unidentified centre. Like the Vercelli texts, with which they have some textual overlap, the Blickling Homilies cannot be the work of one person but have been collected from a variety of sources and are difficult to date. Homily XI mentions the year 971, in the context of the imminent end of the world:

> we witon þonne hweþre þæt hit nis no feor to þon; forþon þe ealle þa tacno & þa forebeacno þa þe her ure Drihten ær toweard sægde, þæt ær domesdæge geweorþan sceoldan, ealle þa syndon agangen, buton þæm anum þæt se awer-igda cuma Antecrist nu get hider on middangeard ne com ... Þonne sceal þes middangeard endian & þisse is þonne se mæsta dæl agangen, efne nigon hund wintra & lxxi. on þys geare.

> nevertheless we know that is it not far off; because all of the signs and portents which our Lord previously said were impending here, that would come before Doomsday, have all come to pass, except for one only, that the cursed stranger Antichrist has not yet come here to this world ... Then this world must end and the greatest part of this has elapsed, exactly nine hundred and seventy-one winters in this very year.

However, all this shows is that the text was copied in the year 971 and was written either then or before then; 971 is probably not the date of the manu-script. The Blickling texts are generally arranged according to the liturgical year, in the order: the Annunciation, the Sunday before Lent, the first, third, fifth and sixth Sundays in Lent, Easter, Rogation Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Ascension, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the Nativity of John the Baptist and the feasts of SS Peter and Paul, Michael, Martin and Andrew. It contains, therefore, texts for the *temporale* followed by texts for the *sanctorale* (saints' feastdays, celebrated on a fixed date); some of the texts are exegetical, commenting on Gospel readings but often with a moral emphasis, some are sermons and others are narrative texts, relating some or all of the life of a saint. The sources include Gregory the Great, Caesarius of Arles, Sulpicius Severus, Paulinus of Aquileia and some Pseudo-Augustinian

homilies and apocryphal acts (the text for the Assumption of the Virgin is apocryphal, as is that for the feast of SS Peter and Paul).

The structure of Blickling is similar to that of Carolingian collections for preaching to the laity (i.e. the major feasts of the year to Pentecost, then saints' days), as is the choice of texts, especially the inclusion of saints' Lives; in monastic collections homilies and saints' Lives were generally kept separate. Passages in the texts themselves imply a lay audience, such as Homily IV, for example, where the congregation is exhorted to pay tithes, or Homily X, which begins:

> Men ða leofostan, hwæt nu anra manna gehwylcne ic myngie & lære, ge weras ge wif, ge geonge ge ealde, ge snottre ge unwise, ge þa welegan ge þa þearfan, þæt anra gehwylc hine sylfne sceawige & ongyte, & swa hwæt swa he on mycclum gyltum oþþe on medmycclum gefremede, þæt he þonne hrædlice gecyrre to þam selran & to þon soþan læcedome.

> Dearest people, listen, now I exhort and teach every person, both men and women, young and old, wise and foolish, rich and poor, that each and every one consider and understand himself, and whatever he has committed in great or in small sins, let him quickly turn to the better and to the true medicine.

Homily IV, though it stresses the need for tithes, also, like other texts in the collection, deals with the duties of bishops and priests, suggesting again a listenership composed of both laity and those in religious life. Those listening to this collection over the course of the year would, then, have heard exemplary narratives of saintly lives and deaths, would have had passages from the Gospels interpreted to them and would have been instructed in how to conduct their lives as good Christians.

While the Vercelli Book and the Blickling Homilies are our earliest anonymous collections, the corpus of anonymous homilies, sermons and saints' Lives is not limited to them and we find more texts in later collections, very often mixed with the works of Ælfric. These two early collections provide us, then, with a vivid sense of the kind of vernacular preaching with which Ælfric, the most famous Anglo-Saxon homilist, must have been familiar. He himself said that the impetus for his first collections came when he was sent to Cerne as a monk and encountered there what he terms in the preface to *Catholic Homilies* I 'mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum' ('much error [or heresy] in many English books').[5] Like the author of Blickling XI, he was conscious of the imminence of Antichrist's coming and the end of the world, a context which required urgent and correct teaching. Ælfric was probably born *c.* 950, educated first by a priest whom he later considered ill-educated (quite possibly a secular priest) and then at the school established by Bishop Æthelwold in Winchester. Ælfric identified himself very much as a product of

the Reform. He became a monk in Winchester, where he was probably also ordained as priest, and was then sent *c*. 987 to the newly founded Benedictine monastery of Cerne Abbas in Dorset; about 1005 he became abbot of another newly refounded monastery, Eynsham (near Oxford), and he probably died *c*. 1010. At Cerne he composed *Catholic Homilies* I and II (Ælfric, however, never uses the term homily and prefers sermon in his own title), two separate homiliaries to be read in alternate years, each covering forty occasions and organized according to the cycle of the liturgical year; they were completed by 995. Both collections were sent to Sigeric, archbishop of Canterbury, and Canterbury took a major role in their dissemination all over England. Although he himself was a Benedictine monk, then, the main impetus behind Ælfric's works was a pastoral concern and he aimed to supply correct and reliable texts which bishops and priests could use instead of having to compose texts themselves. The primary context in which the homilies were to be read was mass, to the typical minster or cathedral mixed congregation. Some of the texts seem specifically for the use of bishops; *Catholic Homilies* II, XXXVI seems intended for preaching to secular clergy, a bishop's role, and II, XL, for the dedication of a church, must also be for a bishop's use. There are indications that, while the First Series was to be read as written, the Second Series allowed more discretion to the individual preacher. As well as preaching, Ælfric clearly intended his works to be read by private readers, such as his lay patron Æthelweard, who asked for a copy of the First Series with forty-four rather than forty texts. His intended readership very probably also included monks (and perhaps nuns) who may not have been as comfortable reading in Latin as their monastic status might suggest; given the reformers' self-identification as more learned and conscientious than their secular predecessors and contemporaries, then, vernacular translations of Latin sources had to be presented as intended primarily for the laity, regardless of the extent to which they met the needs of reformed monks.

Compared to the much smaller Blickling collection, Ælfric was very ambitious in his idea of how much the laity could and should be taught. There are clear signs too that *Catholic Homilies* I was planned to cover the main events of Christ's life, while the Old Testament is left largely for *Catholic Homilies* II;[6] designing homiliaries in advance facilitates this, in a way that compiling a collection from pre-existing texts does not. The two series contain a mixture of Gospel exegesis, saints' Lives for major saints whose feasts were celebrated by the laity, sermons and Old Testament narratives. The last is a new departure in vernacular preaching collections and their inclusion in the *Catholic Homilies* is a feature which suggests an intended readership beyond the laity, as the Old Testament was normally read as part of the monastic Office rather than to the laity. Gospel exegesis is the dominant form and

Ælfric typically translates the pericope for the day and then comments on it verse by verse, with much allegorical interpretation. In his treatment of the Gospels, Ælfric displays the same ambition as he does in the scope of his homiliaries and goes far beyond what we find in the anonymous homilies; he tackles difficult theological concepts, such as the nature of the Trinity, Christological doctrine, free will and predestination, the nature of the soul (he was a committed creationist, holding that God created a soul for every human being born) and original sin. The complexity of some of these issues also lends support to his texts being for those in religious life as well as the laity. Along with this, however, he also provides advice on matters like sexual behaviour (Christians, he says, should not have sex during Lent and other penitential seasons or after the woman's menopause or during pregnancy or during a woman's period), tithes, almsgiving, the need to come to confession. When choosing saints, Ælfric focused on the major saints: the Virgin Mary, the apostles, Stephen the first martyr and some other early martyrs, John the Baptist, Michael the Archangel, St Benedict (an obvious choice for a Benedictine monk), St Martin and two saints important in England, Pope Gregory the Great, the 'apostle to the English' as Ælfric called him, and the Northumbrian St Cuthbert.

The Carolingian collection of Paul the Deacon (in an expanded form) was the main source used by Ælfric in his *Catholic Homilies* and he drew on over a hundred texts from it; he supplemented it, as he himself pointed out in the preface to the First Series, by the Carolingian collections of Smaragdus and Haymo of Auxerre. Ælfric never alludes to Paul the Deacon by name but instead he mentions the principal patristic authorities upon whom Paul had drawn, Augustine, Jerome, Bede and Gregory. In doing so, he validates his own work by placing it among the authoritative works of the Church and in a tradition of orthodoxy that was tremendously important to him, even if he sometimes differed from these sources. Ælfric gives no source for the many saints' Lives in the *Catholic Homilies*, saying merely that he has included the passions of the saints for the benefit of the uneducated, but we now know that he used a collection of saints' Lives, known as the Cotton-Corpus legendary, probably compiled on the Continent *c.* 900. The scale of Ælfric's sources may be gauged from the fact that Paul the Deacon, Haymo and the Cotton-Corpus legendary together 'may have made over 600 homilies and saints' Lives available to him'.[7] He supplemented these sources with others: the Bible, biblical commentaries, other sermons, historical texts and some treatises on doctrinal matters. As he says in the preface to *Catholic Homilies* I, Ælfric explicitly objected to some vernacular texts current in his day and he makes clear in the course of his work what some of these were. Some of the texts of which he did not approve survive in Blickling and Vercelli; so, for example, Ælfric is scathing

about certain Latin and English accounts of the Assumption of the Virgin, saying that he would be like *dwolmannum*, heretics or fools, whose work has been rejected by the Church Fathers, if he were to include them. Exactly such a work is found in Blickling XIII, however, as is another such apocryphal account in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41. Similarly, the scene preserved for us in Vercelli xv in which Mary, Michael and Peter are each given a third of the damned roused his anger and he declared:

> Sume gedwolmen cwædon þæt seo halige Maria cristes modor. and sume oðre halgan sceolon hergian æfter ðam dome ða synfullan of ðam deofle. ælc his dæl. Ac þis gedwyld asprang of ðam mannum. þe on heora flæsclicum lustum symle licgan woldon. and noldon mid earfoðnyssumm þæt ece lif geearnian.

> Some heretics said that the holy Mary, Christ's mother, and certain other saints will seize the sinful from the devil after the judgement, each taking a portion. But this heresy arose from those people who wished to remain subject to their fleshly desires and did not wish to earn eternal life with hardships.

Ælfric's objections seem to be based partly on authorities who had rejected such apocrypha as non-canonical, partly on his own low opinion of their ideological and moral content (such as the implication that the damned could be saved). While Ælfric objected strenuously to these apocrypha, he did, however, make use of texts now considered apocryphal, especially the apocryphal acts of the apostles; an example is the *Passio Andreae* which clearly for him had, for the most part, the status of orthodox teaching, akin to hagiography. He sometimes censored these texts by omitting episodes or details but must have regarded them as too useful spiritually to exclude. And some at least of the apocrypha which he rejected as *gedwyld* seem to have been acceptable to prominent figures in the Benedictine Reform, such as Bishop Æthelwold himself. He also strenuously objected to what he regarded as superstitious practices like divination and witchcraft; this, too, is *gedwyld*.

While the anonymous homilies often rely on a single source, Ælfric frequently uses several source texts in his homilies; he also differs from them in his reliance on Carolingian source collections which were intended for monastic purposes. The anonymous texts tend to rely more on sources originally written for lay audiences, such as the works of Caesarius or Gregory. That Ælfric relies quite heavily on earlier sources might lead one to believe that his are second-hand, derivative works, out of touch with the world in which he lived; this, however, is far from the truth. Ælfric had his own decided views and could on occasion be critical of his sources, even when they were highly respected Fathers of the Church such as Augustine. In his saints' Lives, the same critical and selective spirit is evident both in his selection of saints and in

his abbreviation and manipulation of narrative to impress his own interpretation on his source material and to avoid giving what he evidently felt was an inappropriate impression to his audience. Some of Ælfric's comments offer tantalizing glimpses of ideas and questions current around the last millennium: do animals have souls, for example, or are some animals improved by cursing rather than blessing them, or could Judas have been saved on the grounds that he acted as he did under compulsion? Ælfric's stance on each of these issues is an emphatic 'no'. He also addressed the issues of his own day, both indirectly and very directly, and with increasing trenchancy as his career developed and as the situation in England worsened.[8] So, for example, in one of his late homilies, Pope XIV,[9] we find this passionate attack on those Englishmen who submit to the Danes:

> Swa fela manna gebugað mid ðam gecorenum
> to Cristes geleafan on his Gelaðunge,
> þæt hy sume yfele eft ut abrecað,
> and hy on gedwyldum adreogað heora lif,
> swa swa þa Engliscan men doð þe to ðam Deniscan gebugað,
> and mearciað hy deofle to his mannrædene,
> and his weorc wyrcað, hym sylfum to forwyrde,
> and heora agene leode belæwað to deaðe.

So many people turn with the chosen ones to the faith of Christ in his Church that some of them, the evil ones, break out again and live their lives in error/heresy, as the English do who go over to the Danes and mark themselves for the devil, in allegiance to him, and do his works, and betray their own people to death.

'Marking themselves for the devil' here may well be a reference to those English who adopted a type of hairstyle popular among the Vikings, with – as Ælfric put it in a letter, transmitted in three collections of his homilies, in which he denounces those Englishmen who imitate Danish hairstyles – 'bared necks and blinded eyes'.[10] He could be very critical, too, of King Æthelred and his policies, even though in Pope XVIII he accused himself and his contemporaries of not daring to speak out:

> ac we ne durran nu to þam gedyrstlæcan,
> þæt we Cristenum cyninge oððe Cristenum folce
> Godes beboda and Godes willan secgan.[11]

but we do not dare now to presume to say God's commands and God's will to a Christian king or a Christian people.

After the *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric's next series was the *Lives of Saints*, composed of saints' Lives, some sermons and Old Testament pieces, and

written, at least ostensibly, for Ælfric's lay patrons, Æthelweard and Æthelmær. It was for private reading and it concentrates on those saints venerated in the monasteries. Presumably, the texts could also have been used for devout reading by monks. Ælfric was very selective in his choice of saints, excluding contemplatives and hermits and saints such as Mary of Egypt, a repentant prostitute (an anonymous version of her Life is included, however, in our principal surviving manuscript of the *Lives of Saints*); he demonstrates a distinct preference for male lay saints, such as the English kings Oswald and Edmund or the soldier saints Maurice and the forty soldiers, married virgin saints such as Cecilia and Valerianus, who may have been intended as models for the married English nobility, virgin martyrs and some other English saints important in the Benedictine Reform, Swithun and Æthelthryth. In the *Lives of Saints* the impact of Viking attacks, already alluded to by Ælfric in the Latin preface to *Catholic Homilies* II, makes itself increasingly evident and we can see this also in some of his later homilies. He defends war against the 'cruel seamen', the Vikings, as a just war in *Lives of Saints* XXV, his version of the Old Testament Maccabees, but in a coda to the same text takes issue with churchmen going into battle, saying that they should not be compelled to do so; how topical this issue was is evident when we consider that Eadnoth, bishop of Dorchester from 1007 and before that a monk in Ramsey, whose diocese included Ælfric's monastery of Eynsham, was killed in the battle of Ashingdon in 1016.

One of Ælfric's greatest achievements was to devise a prose style so distinctive that it can be used to attribute works to him, a signature style which he developed in the course of writing *Catholic Homilies* II. It relies on a pattern of two-stress phrases which are usually linked in pairs by alliteration, very reminiscent, of course, of Old English poetry but with a much looser structure, far less strict rules on alliteration and with the word-order and diction of prose. Ælfric began using this rhythmical prose for saints' Lives but it soon became his habitual style. There has been much debate about whether it should be termed prose or poetry, sharing as it does features of both; while some editions set off the lines as verse, others print it as prose. The distinctive features can best be seen in an example, as in these lines describing some of the consequences of Adam and Eve's fall:

> Eac swylce seo sunne, and soðlice se mona
> wurdon benæmde heora wynsuman beorhtnysse
> æfter Adames gylte, na be agenum gewyrhtum.
> Be seofonfealdan wæs seo sunne þa beorhtre
> ærþam se mann agylte, and se mona hæfde
> þære sunnan beorhtnysse, swa swa heo scinð nu us.

> Likewise the sun, and indeed the moon, were deprived of their delightful bright-
> ness after Adam's offence, not by reason of their own deeds. The sun was
> sevenfold brighter before this man sinned and the moon had the brightness of
> the sun, as it now shines on us.

It is evident even from the number of lines here that have commas in this modern
edition how Ælfric's lines tend to fall into two half-lines by virtue of their
syntactical phrasing, each with two stresses and linked together by alliteration.
Key elements tend to be repeated in different forms (*beorhtnysse*, *beorhtre*;
*gylte*, *agylte*). Ælfric consciously decided to write clear, simple prose, as he
explained in the Latin preface to *Catholic Homilies* I: 'Even if rashly or pre-
sumptuously, we have, nevertheless, translated this book from Latin works,
namely from Holy Scripture, into the language to which we are accustomed for
the edification of the simple who know only this language, either through
reading or hearing it read; and for that reason we could not use obscure
words, just plain English, by which it may more easily reach to the heart of the
readers or listeners to the benefit of their souls, because they are unable to be
instructed in a language other than the one in which they were born.'[12]

Ælfric's influence is evident in the numbers of manuscripts containing his
works, but he is also one of the principal sources for the works of Wulfstan,
one of the most important public figures of early eleventh-century England, as
well as one of its most important law-writers and homilists. Wulfstan, like
Ælfric, was enormously prolific but his work and his career were very
different. Patrick Wormald has aptly called him a 'state-builder'. Wulfstan
was bishop of London from 996 to 1002, bishop of Worcester from 1002 to
1016 and archbishop of York from 1002 to his death in 1023. He was a key
adviser to King Æthelred (978–1016) and then to the Danish king, Cnut, who
conquered England in 1016; in this capacity, he wrote a series of law texts in
Latin and English, for the laity and clergy, as well as the *Institutes of Polity*, a
work on political theory. He was at the centre of the huge upheavals which led
to the Viking conquest of England. Wulfstan did not have Ælfric's fondness
for adding authority to his work by naming his sources, and much work
remains to be done on them, but they include the Bible, Ælfric, Alcuin, Adso,
Abbo of St Germain, Atto of Vercelli, Gregory the Great and Theodulf of
Orleans.

Wulfstan's sermons are difficult to count, both because he was much
imitated and because he reissued texts in different forms, frequently rewriting
things for stylistic reasons or to take changing circumstances into account;
they number about forty in English, along with other sermons in Latin. His
laws are also very sermon-like and, in many ways, the distinction between his
legal writings and his preaching is an artificial and modern one; Wulfstan

himself seems to have regarded them as two different facets of the same activity, reforming morality and keeping people in their traditional places in a law-abiding and Christian society. Like Ælfric, Wulfstan saw the coming of Antichrist as imminent and the approaching end of the world was a major theme in his preaching. Unlike Ælfric, he rarely expounds a Gospel pericope and, when he does, it tends to be a passage concerned with the end of the world, such as Sermon II in Bethurum's edition, based on Matthew XXIV, or Sermon V, which uses Mark XIII. He made no attempt to cover the liturgical year and very few of his sermons are limited to specific days of the Church year. A number of Wulfstan's sermons are catechetical, expounding the fundamentals of the faith, such as the significance of baptism (Sermon VIIIb and VIIIc) or the outline of Christian history from the Creation to Doomsday, based on Ælfric, in Sermon VI. He draws on the Old Testament, not for narratives as Ælfric had done, but for passages of warning, denouncing sins or negligent preachers; in keeping with this avoidance of narrative texts, he wrote no saints' Lives. As archbishop, he had to preach at occasions at which a bishop or archbishop had to officiate, such as the consecration of a bishop or the dedication of a church, and we have texts for each of these occasions. Wulfstan also seems to have preached to the *witan*, the King's council, of which he was, of course, a prominent member. The audience implied in Wulfstan's texts is either the people in general, presumably a mixed audience of lay congregation and clergy, or the clergy in particular, as in the short text based on Ezekiel dealing with lazy and negligent pastors (XVIb). His most famous work, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, addressed to the English nation, has come down to us in different versions; Wulfstan reworked it on a number of occasions in response to changing circumstances, one of them being in 1014, the year when England was briefly ruled by the Danish Svein Forkbeard before he died and King Æthelred was invited back to rule England again after his expulsion the year before. The national crisis overtakes the apocalyptic in importance in the successive versions of this remarkable text.[13]

Like Ælfric, Wulfstan devised a highly individual style but, even though he often took an Ælfric text as a starting point, Wulfstan preferred a style based on two-stress phrases linked by alliteration; they give his work a very distinctive rhythm. He also had characteristic lexical preferences, with a special liking for intensifying adverbs, doublets and catalogues. The following example from the *Sermo Lupi* (Bethurum XX (c)) is characteristic of his heightened, emphatic style:

> Forðam hit is on us eallum swutol ⁊ gesene þæt we ær ðisan oftor bræcon þonne we betton, ⁊ þi is þisse þeode fela onsæge. Ne dohte hit nu lange inne ne ute, ac wæs here ⁊ hunger, bryne ⁊ blodgite on gewelhwylcum ende oft ⁊ gelome; ⁊ us stalu ⁊ cwalu, stric ⁊ steorfa, orfcwealm ⁊ uncoðu, hol ⁊ hete, ⁊ ripera reaflac

derede swiðe þearle, ⁊ us ungylda swiðe gedrehton, ⁊ us unwidera foroft weoldon unwæstma; forðam on þisum earde wæs, swa hit þincan mæg, nu fela geara unrihta fela, ⁊ tealte getriwða æghwar mid mannum. Ne bearh nu foroft gesib gesibban þe ma ðe fremdan, ne fæder his bearne, ne hwilum bearn his agenum fæder, ne broðor oðrum . . .

Therefore it is clear and evident in us all that before this we have violated more often than we amended and therefore much is attacking this people. Nothing has done any good now for a long time at home or abroad but there has been war and hunger, burning and bloodshed in every district again and again; and robbery and murder, plague and pestilence, cattle-plague and disease, slander and hatred, and robbery by plunderers have damaged us very severely; and excessive taxes have greatly oppressed us, and bad weather has very often caused us crop-failures; wherefore for many years now, so it seems, there have been in this country many injustices and unsteady loyalties among men everywhere. Now very often kinsman will not protect a kinsman any more than a stranger, nor a father his son, nor sometimes a son his own father, nor one brother another . . .

Here the two-stress phrases (*us stalu ⁊ cwalu*, *stric ⁊ steorfa*, *orfcwealm ⁊ uncoðu*), occasionally rhyming and very often alliterating, dominate the rhythm, and his fondness for synonyms (*swutol ⁊ gesene*, *oft ⁊ gelome*) and for intensifiers (*swiðe*, *swiðe þearle*, *foroft*) is evident. Many of the phrases in this sermon are repeated in others, and in using this kind of formulaic repetition Wulfstan's work is similar to the traditional oral style of Old English poetry.

Ælfric's and Wulfstan's works were quickly and widely disseminated and, like some of the anonymous homilies, went on being copied into the twelfth century. Their works were also drawn upon by later anonymous homilists, who reused passages in creating new works. The manuscripts in which Ælfric's works were transmitted would, by and large, have displeased him as, despite his express request, his works were often mixed with anonymous texts, some of which would certainly not have met with his approval; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198, for example, while largely consisting of *Catholic Homilies* texts, replaced Ælfric's Assumption homily with the apocryphal one also found in Blickling. While his texts survive, the sets in which he presented them often did not fare so well. Parts of his and Wulfstan's texts were also combined with parts of others, in a cut-and-paste-type exercise, to produce composite homilies. New Old English homilies were still being written well into the twelfth century; we have an English version of a Latin text on the Virgin by Ralph d'Escures who died in 1122. The influence of Old English homilies was not confined to England; they were exported to Scandinavia, where English missionaries were involved in the conversion to

Christianity, and some of them served there as sources for vernacular texts, as well as influencing the style of Old Norse-Icelandic homilies.

The preaching texts which survive from Anglo-Saxon England bear witness to a culture dominated by the Church and allow us to experience with great immediacy the world view that the Church presented to generations of English Christians. The homilies enable us to follow the liturgical year which shaped people's lives, to understand how they were instructed in their faith, to trace the intellectual influences which the Anglo-Saxons looked to, to share their fascination with saintly figures from the universal Church and from their own English tradition and to discern, in many texts from shortly before and after the millennium, how some of the most important Anglo-Saxon thinkers faced and responded to an urgent national crisis.

## NOTES

1. A considerable amount of New Testament material was translated into the vernacular in the German-speaking parts of Francia, but very little homiletic material survives, if it was ever written down.
2. C. Wright, 'Old English Homilies and Latin Sources' in *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. A. J. Kleist (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 15–66, at 48.
3. C. Wright, 'Vercelli Homilies XI–XIII and the Benedictine Reform: Tailored Sources and Implied Audiences', in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Muessig (Leiden, 2002), pp. 203–27, at 207.
4. S. Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: the Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009).
5. *Catholic Homilies* I, preface, in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the First Series, Text*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS ss 17 (Oxford, 1997), 174.
6. M. R. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000), p. xxvii.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xli.
8. See S. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12', *ASE* 36 (2007), 151–220.
9. *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope, II, 521, lines 128–35.
10. M. Clayton, 'An Edition of Ælfric's Letter to Brother Edward', in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. E. Treharne and S. Rosser, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 252 (Tempe, AZ, 2002), pp. 263–83.
11. *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope, II, 598, lines 183–8.
12. *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. J. Wilcox, Durham Medieval Texts 9 (Durham, 1994), p. 127.
13. See M. Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (Oxford, 1994), pp. 130–62.

# 10

CHRISTINE FELL

# Perceptions of transience

> They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep.
> *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

Preoccupation with transience is not found solely within Old English elegiac poetry, though students of the genre may be forgiven for gaining that impression. There can be no major literature of the world that does not number among its themes wonder at the demise of earlier civilizations and regret for the brevity of human life and human joy. In a literature such as that of the Anglo-Saxons, marked by a variety of influences and traditions, it is hard to attribute with certainty all manifestations of the transience motif. Earlier scholars drew our attention to parallels in other Germanic medieval literatures, notably in the prose and poetry of Scandinavia written down in Iceland. Old Icelandic poetry of the type called 'eddic' has obvious similarities with Old English in style, vocabulary and subject matter. Possible influence on Old English elegy from Celtic lament has also been explored. Recently scholarship has focused more on the Christian Latin background to Anglo-Saxon thought, and shown how many apparently native wood-notes wild are in fact straight translation from theological sources.

The Old English poems traditionally called 'elegiac' are all found in one manuscript, the late tenth-century Exeter Book. It is a disturbing thought that had that particular codex been lost or destroyed we should have had scarcely any evidence of this genre in Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetry. There would still be the 'elegiac' passages in poems of epic dimensions such as *Beowulf* and *Elene* as well as a considerable corpus of Latin poetry by seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Saxons. Also the transience motif surfaces, of course, in other types of poem, not to mention appearing frequently in homiletic prose. But the vernacular 'elegiac' poems, so called because no other covering adjective has yet been found for them, are a group with little in common except a preoccupation with loss, suffering and mortality. These poems include *The Seafarer, The Wanderer, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, The Ruin, Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Exile's Prayer* (sometimes called *Resignation*) – all stuck with these dreary titles imposed on them by early editors with more sense than sensibility. They are without titles of any kind in the manuscript.

There are practical difficulties in considering these poems as a group. For one thing they are not grouped in the manuscript. There is little to tell from the layout of the poems quite where one ends and another begins. Sometimes the change of subject matter is clear enough. But the scribe uses ornate initials when introducing sections of poems as well as new poems, and certainly in the case of the consecutive pieces *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message* it is not determinable whether we have two parts of one poem or two distinct poems with an overlap of subject matter. A more fundamental problem is that, though we can with precision date the manuscript, there are no linguistic tests that enable us to date the actual composition of the poems. The reading of them as a group is a matter of convenience determined by their similarities of tone and theme.

The Latin word from which 'transient' derives implied something that is passing, and the image therefore is one of a journey. The word, however, that the Anglo-Saxons use most often for the temporary nature of things of this world is *læne*, 'lent' or 'on loan', contrasted mostly with the *ece* 'eternal' nature of things of the next. 'Lent' and 'eternal' are not, for the modern reader, such a natural pair of opposites, and it is worth examining why they seemed so to the Anglo-Saxon mind. King Alfred provides the clearest answer:

> Ac se þe me lærde . . . se mæg gedon þæt ic softor eardian (mæge) ægðer ge on þisum *lænan* stoclife be þis wæge ða while þe ic on þisse weorulde beo, ge eac on þam *ecan* hame . . . Nis it nan wundor þeah man swilc ontimber gewirce, and eac on þa(re) lade and eac on þære bytlinge; ac ælcne man lyst, siððan he ænig cotlyf on his hlafordes *læne* myd his fultume getimbred hæfð, þæt he hine mote hwilum þar-on gerestan, and huntigan, and fuglian, and fiscian, and his on gehwilce wisan to þere *lænan* tilian, ægþær ge on se ge on lande, oð þone fyrst þe he *bocland* and *æce* yrfe þurh his hlafordes miltse geearnige. swa gedo se weliga gifola, se ðe egðer wilt ge þissa *lænena* stoclife ge þara *ecena* hama.[1]

> But the one who taught me . . . may bring it about that I live more comfortably both in this temporary place on the road while I occupy this world, and also in that eternal home . . . It is no surprise that we work hard with such materials both in transporting them and building with them: it pleases everyone who has built a home, as his lord's tenant and with his help, to be there sometimes, and to hunt and hawk and fish and in every way to cultivate his rented property, sea and soil, until the time that he may acquire, through his lord's generosity, bookland and a permanent heritage: the rich benefactor can do this, since he has under his control temporary houses and eternal homes.

King Alfred, born teacher that he is, is using the terms *bocland*, land granted by written charter as an inheritance in perpetuity, and *lænland*, land granted for the duration of one or more lifetimes, as images for eternal life and mortal life. He could scarcely have used such images unless he were confident that

they would be instantly understood, and it is arguable that it was precisely this practical distinction between two forms of land tenure that gave rise to the regular use of *læne* in poetic and homiletic antithesis to *ece*. Earth is *lænland*, heaven is *bocland*, the country guaranteed by no less a charter than the Gospels. In Modern English, Gospel and charter are not interchangeable words, but in Old English *boc* could be used equally for either. The Gospels are *feower Cristes bec* 'the four books of Christ', but *boc* also regularly glosses Latin *cartula* 'charter'.

John Mitchell Kemble pointed out as early as 1849 the link between the concepts *lænland* and *læne*. In a discussion of *lænland* he adds the footnote:

> The transitory possessions of this life were often so described, in reference to the Almighty: 'ða æhta ðe him God alæned hæfð'.[2]

The quotation is from the tenth-century will of Æthelric, who 'grants' to his widow 'those possessions which God has lent him' – though we may note that he 'grants' them for her lifetime only. Similarly, in the poem *Genesis*, what Adam forfeits is (consecutively) *læn godes, ælmihtiges gife* and *heofonrices geweald* 'the loan of God, the gift of the Almighty, possession of the kingdom of heaven'. The last of these is transient in the sense that the right of access to it may be restricted or conditional. And clearly even Paradise was *lænland*.

It is this kind of background that allows us to make sense of the distinctions between *læne* and *ece* in a poem such as *The Seafarer*. The poet draws a careful distinction between life on earth (*læne*), life after death (*ece*), and the voyage or voyages of his persona which represent rejection of all secular pleasures and values of the one in search for the other. In savage paradox *lif on londe* 'life on land/life on earth' is not merely *læne* but *deade* 'dead'. The poet then tells us of his disbelief in the permanence of any *eorðwelan*, and it is clear from the context that 'the riches of earth' are a synonym for life itself. Three words which normally denote earthly well-being are wrenched into use for the eternal: *ecan lifes blæd / dream mid dugeþum* 'the splendour of eternal life, joy among heroes' (?'joy in the courts'). Seven lines later the same words reappear in their normal role to underline the abnormality of their use earlier:

> Gedroren is þeos duguð eal,   dreamas sind gewitene ...
> Blæd is gehnæged                          (86–8)

All these heroes have gone, joys departed ... Splendour declined.

The demonstrative here and in the intervening lines is stressed as a reminder to the reader of the distinction between transient and eternal *dream, duguð* and *blæd*.

The things that are *læne* are divisible into three: life itself, property and happiness. The first is a single entity, the other two composite. The poet of *The Wanderer* says:

> Her bið feoh læne,   her bið freond læne,
> her bið mon læne,   her bið mæg læne          (108–9)

which, summarized rather than translated, tells us that property, friend, man and kinsman are all 'on loan' or transient. The third, *mon*, probably refers to self, the implication being that one's own life is merely lent to one, while the necessarily impermanent nature of friendship and kinship ties is one theme of *The Wanderer* throughout. Since people may outlive all those they love, the only rational course of action is to transfer their affections to the undying, to seek *frofre to Fæder on heofonum* 'consolation from the heavenly Father'. It is customary to cite in this context the parallel text from the Old Icelandic eddic poem *Hávamál*, which offers the same wisdom in a pagan and secular context:

> Deyr fé,
> deyja frændr,
> deyr sjálfr it sama.[3]

It is somewhat simpler: 'cattle die, kin die, one's self dies', followed by the reminder that the one thing that does not die is one's reputation. It contrasts transient with permanent but both are human-centred, reputation being in the hands of the living. The Old English and Old Icelandic texts are linked by thought, vocabulary and alliteration and the motif may come from common Germanic stock, but in spite of superficial similarities there is a significant difference. The message of *The Wanderer* is God-centred, not only in the poem as a whole but also in this important use of the Christian-oriented concept *læne* where *Hávamál* has the straightforward verb *deyja* 'to die'. On the other hand, in *The Seafarer* there is a passage which blends, in careful contrivance, human-centred and God-centred posthumous benefits:

> Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam   æftercweþendra
> lof lifgendra   lastworda betst,
> þæt he gewyrce,   ær he on weg scyle,
> fremum on foldan   wið feonda niþ,
> deorum dædum   deofle togeanes,
> þæt hine ælda bearn   æfter hergen,
> ond his lof siþþan   lifge mid englum          (72–8)

Therefore for every man the praise of the living, of those speaking afterwards, is the best of epitaphs, in that he should bring it about before dying, by actions on earth against the hostility of enemies, by valiant deeds against the devil, that the

children of men should afterwards praise him and his glory live then with the angels.

The praise of the living clearly includes heavenly and earthly voices. The two lines which speak of actions on earth carefully balance human activity against human foe with spiritual battle against the infernal. The following two lines, equally impartially, balance rewards in reputation among the children of men and among angels. Anthropologists who tell us of shame cultures and guilt cultures might define the obsession with reputation among one's fellow men as exemplifying the former, reliance on the judgement of God rather than one's peers as the latter. For the Anglo-Saxons, having inherited one set of values through secular Germanic thought and acquired another through Christian Latin teaching, the one does not preclude the other. Milton, some centuries later, had a similar experience. He also put the two side by side when he called the urge for earthly fame the 'last infirmity of noble mind' and tried instead to concentrate only on 'the perfect witness of all-judging Jove'. The poet of *The Seafarer*, in combining two traditions, the heroic – if we may so define it, preoccupation with survival of honour after loss of life – and the Christian hope for security of tenure in heaven, is perceiving transience on two levels, or, at any rate, as contrasted with two types of permanence. The fighters in the tenth-century poem *The Battle of Maldon* by contrast, though Christian enough to call the Vikings 'heathens', express their thoughts mainly in terms of the human wavelength – what people will say about them. Their attitude to the nature of immortality has some justification in that a millennium later we are still reading the poem and accepting the poet's judgements on individual heroes and cowards, those who followed their leader's exhortation to achieve fame, *dom gefeohtan*, by fighting the enemy, who preferred death in battle to the long-lasting shame of riding home *hlafordleas* 'lordless', and those on the other hand who saved their lives at the expense of their name. The cheerful secular courage of the former is certainly closer to the teaching of *Hávamál* (as would doubtless have been that of their opponents) than of *The Wanderer*.

What we may loosely call the Germanic or heroic or secular perception of immortality in this period is the survival of personal reputation. It is narrowed to the individual. But Anglo-Saxon poets were demonstrably well-read in a range of literatures and they have a wider perspective. Elegiac poets could find plenty to muse on in the Bible alone, whether their thoughts on transience entailed not putting trust in treasures of earth 'where moth and rust doth corrupt', or comparing the life of man to the briefly blossoming flowers of the field. Some scholars have seen in certain elegiac poems direct borrowing from parts of the Bible. But our earliest known Anglo-Saxon poets were educated in

classical as well as biblical traditions and it is clear that they enjoyed the intellectual challenge and the emotional and cultural riches which their reading brought them. We know that Bede could compose poetry in the vernacular but it was not a skill which he himself valued and apart from his *Death-Song*, preserved out of reverence for Bede rather than for composition in a barbarian dialect, none survives. His hymns and epitaphs in Latin do, as does his *De arte metrica*. Boniface and his circle, especially Lull and some of his contemporaries, were eager in the practice and understanding of Latin metres. Aldhelm and Alcuin probably felt undressed without a quill in their hands. But among these it is Alcuin whose poems deal most directly and gracefully with the theme of mortality, and who seems closest to the lyric and elegiac poems of late antiquity. In his prose letters Alcuin advises the love of eternal not perishable wealth: *Redemptio uiri proprie diuitie* and *amemus eterna et non peritura* 'redemption is man's true wealth' and 'let us love the eternal not the transient'.[4] Elsewhere he reminds his correspondents that we are stewards not owners of earthly goods, thoughts which can easily be traced back to patristic theology and exposition.

For the influences on Alcuin's poetry we do not need to look far. He himself tells us what manuscripts were in York's ecclesiastical library in the eighth century and this must be considered a list of his own reading. He names several poets, one of them being the sixth-century poet Venantius Fortunatus, for whom Alcuin's own courteous epigram shows particular affection. But there also were Virgil, Arator and Boethius, to name obvious influences. And of course the library, in addition to the works of poets and philosophers, held also the tomes of the great theologians with their sights always on eternity and their rejection of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Venantius, a Christian, was as happy to chant Virgil to himself for recreation as the psalms. Other early Christian Latin poets could not rid their minds of the words and cadences of their pagan predecessors however much their Christian rationality urged them to do so. The Anglo-Saxons similarly had a poetic and cultural inheritance which did not disappear because of Christian-educated literary sensibilities. But whether we are talking about poets writing in Latin or the vernaculars, in England of the eighth century onwards or Europe in the sixth, one link between them is the anguished affection with which a Christian poet regards those lovely things of the world that the preacher tells him to despise. Isidore is often cited as the source of the so-called *ubi sunt* passages in Old English elegy. Certainly Isidore was known to the Anglo-Saxons and certainly his heavyweight *Dic ubi sunt reges? ubi principes? ubi imperatores?* 'where are the kings, the chieftains, the emperors?' etc. etc. can be seen as one source for *The Seafarer*'s

> nearon nu cyningas    ne caseras
> ne goldgiefan    swylce iu wæron                    (82–3)

There are now no kings nor caesars, nor gold-givers such as there were.

But the poet goes on to recall their splendour with a sense of love and loss, which is far closer to the grieving tone of Venantius than the pompous one of Isidore.

Seventh-century English scholars such as Bede and Aldhelm were well known to later generations of Anglo-Saxons, eighth-century writers perhaps less so. I do not know of any Old English translation of Alcuin's poetry, but still it is barely imaginable that it was unknown and without influence. In the elegiac vein his greatest tour de force is his lament over the Viking attack on Lindisfarne. It is his letters home rather than his poem on this event which are usually quoted by historians, but the poem *De clade Lindisfarnensis monasterii* deserves attention. It can be compared with Venantius's *De excidio Thoringiae* which Alcuin undoubtedly knew. Both poems are descriptions of destruction and as such are bound to have themes in common, but Alcuin is not using Venantius's poem as a model and there are no close verbal echoes. Venantius looks to Troy for comparison. Alcuin looks at Babylon, Rome and Jerusalem. Many of the themes that we find later in Old English vernacular poetry are signalled in Alcuin. The notion that since Adam's fall man is an exile on earth is the opening to Alcuin's poem, a theme we meet frequently in the literature of the period, and which may help our reading of *The Seafarer*. Alcuin begins:

> Postquam primus homo paradisi liquerat hortos
> Et miseras terras exul adibat inops ...                    (1–2)

Since first man left the gardens of Paradise and, a destitute exile, entered desolate lands ...

The persona of *The Seafarer* is, similarly, always in exile, turning his back on loved but transient luxuries, hoping

> þæt ic feor heonan
> elþeodigra    eard gesece                    (37–8)

that I, far from here, may search for the home of exiles.

*Elþeodigra eard* means literally 'land of foreigners', but in the context must refer to those who are foreigners on earth, citizens (at any rate *in spe*) of heaven. The poet then claims that there is no one living who 'will not always have sorrow because of his sea-journey', a statement that is manifestly non-sensical on a literal level and can only apply to the journey of the exile to his true home.

Alcuin continues with what might be termed the commonplaces of lament, that nothing earthly remains eternal, that no joy lasts. But Alcuin's poem is not commonplace. His grief for Rome is as poignant as his grief for Lindisfarne:

> Roma, caput mundi, mundi decus, aurea Roma,
>   Nunc remanet tantum saeva ruina tibi          (37–8)

Rome, capital of the world, glory of the world, golden Rome, now is left of you only a wild ruin.

Having then sighed over Jerusalem he draws the expected but none the less aching conclusion:

> Sic fugit omne decus, hominis quod dextera fecit,
>   Gloria seclorum sic velut umbra volat          (55–6)

So flies all wonder that man's hands have made, glory of ages flees like a shadow.

Venantius and Alcuin grieve over known places, even if not all the victims of attack and slaughter can be identified. But one curious feature of Old English elegiac poetry is that most of it mentions neither personal nor place-names. (*Deor* is an exception.) These vernacular poems give the reader no clues, or meagre ones at best, to help define the context that produced them. *The Ruin* is unique among them in having no persona, no 'I' whose anonymous experiences are presented. It is a poem about a place not a person, and we have no voice between us and the poet's direct observation. Even so the absence of firm identification of this place has caused much controversy. This used to be about whether the ruin was the Roman city of Bath or some other Roman site. Now it is about whether we are contemplating an actual place or an allegorical one, Bath, as one critic has asked, or Babylon? In the following discussion I assume the actual. It is a short poem, a mere fifty lines, and since the Exeter Book is damaged at this point we do not even have a complete text. But more clearly than any other of the elegies it focuses on the transient by focusing on the past, and especially the contrast between past and present.

In the opening lines we have conflicting tenses and responses. The masonry is both wonderful and decaying. Events have shattered it but it is still *enta geweorc* 'the work of giants'. The roof is picked out as a *scurbeorg* 'protection against storms' but that it is failing in its protective function is signalled by the accompanying adjective *sceard* 'gaping'. The poet moves from contemplation of the ruin to contemplation of the builders, held in the grip of earth for a hundred generations. But the walls themselves, lichen-covered, have known kingdom after kingdom.

We are much accustomed to see in Anglo-Saxon literature the influence of other literatures. But we should also take into account visual reminders of mortality. Anglo-Saxons mostly built in timber, and even when they built in stone they did not rival Roman architecture. How fully any Roman site was occupied in the days of early Anglo-Saxon settlement is still under dispute by Romano-British historians, but even so there must have been a fantastic number of ghost-towns or ghost-villas with no neat National Trust lawns surrounding them. Those of us who saw the Anglo-Saxon skeletons buried among the fallen pillars of Roman York under the present Minster were given a sharpened awareness of how the *enta geweorc* was perceived. But buildings are silent witnesses except for occasional memorial inscriptions or grafitti, and the poet of *The Ruin* can give no names to builders, rulers or citizens. He does, however, visualize these magnificent and nameless inhabitants:

> þær iu beorn monig
> glædmod and goldbeorht    gleoma gefrætwed,
> wlonc ond wingal    wighyrstum scan;
> seah on sinc, on sylfor,    on searogimmas,
> on ead, on æht,    on eorcanstan,
> on þas beorhtan burg    bradan rices          (32–7)

where once many a man bright in mood, bright with gold, glittering, proud, happy from wine-drinking, shone in his armour; he looked on treasure, on silver, on jewellery, on wealth, on property, on pearls, on this bright stronghold of the broad kingdom.

It is impossible in translation to get all the nuances of this description, but the general tenor is clear enough. The poet tries to parallel the evident splendour of the former city with equal imagined splendour of life within it. And in evoking past splendour he necessarily evokes too the passing of time between his vision and present reality.

As *The Ruin* is presented in the only surviving text there is no overt Christian comment. We are not formally invited to look at the transient in the light of the eternal. The 'ruined hall topos' may have been a commonplace, but this particular poet is as much impressed by achievement as musing on mortality and it is the tension between these two responses that differentiates *The Ruin* from either the lament of Venantius Fortunatus over the collapsed Thuringian roofs and palaces or that of Alcuin over Lindisfarne's altar. The impersonal quality of the poem must lie in the fact that as a traveller in an antique land the poet looks on an alien civilization. When we meet the 'ruined hall topos' in *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer*, it is drawn into the context of Germanic tribal loss.

The poet of *The Wanderer* may, like the poet of *The Ruin*, be contemplating Roman architecture. The *weal wundrum heah wyrmlicum fah*, 'a

marvellous high wall decorated with serpent shapes', has certainly suggested Roman stone bas-relief to one editor. But ruins, for this poet, only serve to call up thoughts of death. His tenses move between past and implied future:

> Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle    hu gæstlic bið,
> þonne ealre þisse worulde wela    weste stondeð    (73–4)

The wise man naturally perceives how ghostly it will be when all the rich places of this world lie deserted.

He looks at the buildings, not as the other poet did in order to imagine the brilliance of life within them, but to catalogue modes of death:

> sumne se hara wulf
> deaðe gedælde,    sumne dreorighleor
> in eorðscræfe    eorl gehydde    (82–4)

The grey wolf tore one apart as he died; another by a grieving man was hidden in a hole in the ground.

This is a universal, not a specific, description of death in battle. (From the Anglo-Saxon viewpoint the lurking wolf is de rigueur.) But the poet moves on to specify loss in terms which would naturally suggest to the Anglo-Saxon audience their own culture. When he asks where is the treasure-giver or where are the joys of the hall he is not inviting them to take a historical perspective as the poet of *The Ruin* did. He uses the remnants of a Roman past to focus on transience and mortality then shifts to emotive rhetoric evoking the same themes within a local context. His purpose is to demonstrate the inadequacy of the earthly in the light of the eternal. In this he is much closer to Alcuin than the poet of *The Ruin*. Alcuin focused on the eternal by describing the destruction of those named cities that had been the pride of the known world. The vernacular poet names nothing, but the effect is there:

> Yðde swa þisne eardgeard    ælda scyppend
> oþþæt burgwara    breahtma lease
> eald enta geweorc    idlu stodon    (85–7)

So the Creator of men destroyed this place until, empty of sounds and citizens, the old works of the giants stood desolate.

With the same technique of oxymoron whereby the poet of *The Ruin* focused on the non-roofly quality of the roofs, so this poet deliberately calls God *scyppend* in the moment of describing his destructive powers.

Turning to the same *topos* in *Beowulf* we find it treated differently yet again. There are two passages commonly called 'elegiac'. In the shorter one the relevant lines end an account of a man mourning his son's death. They are

not entirely appropriate to the restricted context, suggesting loss on a tribal rather than an individual scale. The poet is already anticipating the destruction of the Geats, which, he implies, will follow his hero's death:

> Gesyhð sorhcearig   on his suna bure
> winsele westne,   windge reste
> reote berofene.   Ridend swefað,
> hæleð in hoðman;   nis þær hearpan sweg,
> gomen in geardum,   swylce ðær iu wæron          (2455–9)

He looks, bitterly sorrowful, on his son's home, the empty wine-hall, the wind-swept resting-place robbed of delight. The riders sleep, the young men in their graves; there is no music of the harp, no pleasure in the courts such as used to be.

This is a rhetorical pattern we find often enough in Old English poetry, description by negatives. Present misery is defined as absence of the joys of the hall. Desolation is evoked by contrast. It is as far as it can be from the triumphant note of *The Ruin* even though both poets are ostensibly engaged in the same activity – contemplating deserted buildings and contrasting their present with their past.

The other elegiac passage in *Beowulf* has, with the usual imaginative brilliance of editors, been named 'The lay of the last survivor'. The action that calls out the 'ruined hall topos' is the burial of a treasure hoard by one who believes himself to be the last of his tribe. General desolation is therefore more appropriate in this context. The poet moves from the specific thoughts associated with the treasure to the empty hall, from the unpolished cups and unwielded swords to,

> Næs hearpan wyn,
> gomen gleobeames,   ne god hafoc
> geond sæl swingeð,   ne se swifta mearh
> burhstede beateð                                        (2262–5)

There was no joy of the harp, pleasure of music, no good hawk winging through the hall, no swift horse tramping the courtyard.

The similarity with the earlier quotation is obvious, and, equally obviously, there is not in either passage any immediate suggestion of eternal benefit to be set against mortal loss. The poet of *The Wanderer* and Alcuin are overt in their antitheses. For Alcuin the raid on Lindisfarne prompted the exhortation:

> Quapropter potius caelestia semper amemus
> Et mansura polo, quam peritura solo          (119–20)

Therefore let us always love heavenly and abiding things rather than the dying ones of earth.

The persona of *The Wanderer* similarly found no reason, in pondering matters of this world, why his mind does not grow dark, and could only lighten it by looking towards heaven. But if these thoughts are in the *Beowulf*-poet's mind (as indeed many readers would claim) they are less transparent. This is, of course, reasonable in one sense in that, however Christian the poet, his speakers in both elegiac passages are sited in the pagan past. However, since he allows his pagan king Hrothgar to speak of God, the absence of religious consolation here may well be deliberate.

The poet of *Deor* has, among vernacular poets, possibly the most philosophical approach to the temporary nature of earthly experience, which is one reason why scholars have read into so short a poem the influence of Boethius. Like the *Beowulf*-poet he sets his thoughts within the context of the Germanic past, a past, for both poets, in which legend and history merge. The layout of *Deor* in the manuscript gives the effect of a stanzaic poem (as opposed to the continuous alliterative long line elsewhere). The scribe divides it into six sections, beginning each with an ornamental initial and ending each with the statement *þæs ofer eode þisses swa mæg* 'that came to an end, perhaps this will too'. As this moral suggests, what we have here – in contrast to all the poems we have considered so far – is a meditation on the transient nature of earthly unhappiness. The consolation which the poet offers is not that of eternal bliss, but the fact of transience itself. In the first five sections he specifies well-known people, alludes to their misfortunes (or those of others in connection with them) in at most six lines, then offers his bleakly rational comfort. Nothing here about an everlasting future of song and banqueting!

Again, in contrast to the *Beowulf*-poet's technique of evoking desolation by describing lost pleasures, the *Deor*-poet accumulates the vocabulary of suffering. In the first four lines he alludes to Welund's *wræc*, *earfoð*, *sorg*, *longað*, *wea* and *wintercealdu wræce*: 'persecution', 'hardship', 'sorrow', 'longing', 'misery' and 'winter-cold suffering'. He then takes two lines to describe the actions that caused these, imprisonment and deliberate crippling. His language would be opaque to the modern reader if we did not know enough of Welund's story from elsewhere to feel fairly confident that the reference to Welund's enemy placing him in 'supple sinew-bonds' refers to the cutting of his sinews as an act of mutilation. The poet expects us to know enough about all his characters to fill in background for ourselves (cf. above, pp. 91–2). This may have been a valid assumption for his original audience. It is not always so for us and perhaps we miss many of his subtleties. The general progression is, however, clear. After four sections on the varied sufferings of individuals the poet moves to the reign of Eormanric (Ermanaric) and in a fine compression of ideas shows us the effects of a tyrant's rule. The standard half-line of praise for a good ruler – *þæt wæs god cyning* 'he was a good king' – is rewritten for

the villain as *þæt wæs grim cyning*, the adjective 'savage' replacing 'good'. Instead of suitable ideas of government he had *wylfen geþoht* 'wolfish thought', the wolf, associated with outlawry, being the opposite of social order. Instead of inspiring proper loyalty in a society where the bond between lord and retainer was supreme,

> Sæt secg monig    sorgum gebunden,
> wean on wenan,    wyscte geneahhe
> þæt þæs cynerices    ofercumen wære          (24–6)

many a man sat, bound by suffering, expecting sorrow: he often wished for the overthrow of that kingdom.

The poet has moved from perception of transience in relation to the individual to analysis of wider effects. He and we know of the final outcome of battles between Goths and Huns and it follows that those who endured the tyranny had their wishes eventually fulfilled. The 'ruined hall topos' might here be replaced by the 'vanished empire topos' except that this poet leaves much to the educated imagination.

In his final section the poet moves to an overtly Christian perspective. The unhappy man – *sorgcearig* – finds, like the persona of *The Wanderer*, that his mind grows dark under the contemplation of earthly grief:

> sylfum þinceð
> þæt sy endeleas    earfoða dæl          (29–30)

it seems to him that his share of hardships is endless.

Yet the poet denies this explicit statement by juxtaposing the words *endeleas* and *dæl*. The mere fact of something being a 'division' or 'share' implies that it is finite and contained, and – as he has already demonstrated – everyone's share of misery, however harsh or prolonged, passes eventually. He reminds his *sorgcearig* man that all fate and change are under the control of a wise God, the distributor of fortune and misfortune alike.

As a consolation it is still bleak. But the comfort of the message must be that suffering (as well as being transient) is not random, a comfort that can only help those whose trust in the wisdom of God is secure. It is possible that the poet, as well as assuming knowledge of Germanic history and legend, assumes in his readers a similar grasp of Boethian philosophy to that of recent interpreters of *Deor*. But it is also possible that it would have seemed to him a simple truism of Christian thought that in a world created by a wise God suffering must have a purpose, and those who endure know, like the martyrs, that they are part of the divine pattern. As Alcuin said in honour of Lindisfarne's dead:

> Per gladios, mortes, pestes, per tela, per ignes,
> Martyrio sancti regna beata petunt                              (223–4)

Through swords, deaths, plagues, through spears, through fires, the saints, in martyrdom, look for the blessed lands.

A passage in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, rhythmic enough in its antitheses to be sometimes printed as poetry, says of the martyrdom in AD 1011 of Ælfheah, archbishop of Canterbury,

> Wæs ða ræpling se þe ær wæs Angelcynnes heafod ond Cristendomes. Þær man mihte þa geseon earmðe þær man ær geseah blisse on þære ærman byrig þanon us com ærest Cristendom ond blisse for Gode ond for worulde.[5]

> He was then a prisoner, he who had been the head of England and of Christendom. There could be seen misery where once was seen joy in that sad city from which first came to us Christianity and joy in God and the world.

The writer of the *Chronicle*, a couple of hundred years later than Alcuin, still sees the ironic and subtle patterns in the alternation of earthly good and earthly ill and eventual eternal gain.

Finally, there are three 'elegiac' poems which deal with the transience of earthly happiness in the purely secular context of human relationships. They are *Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*. Though I treat these as secular, readers should be warned that other scholars have seen two of them as Christian allegories, and there are probably as many interpretations of *The Wife's Lament* as there are readers of it. Of all the poems discussed, *The Husband's Message* stands out as the only one with an apparently happy ending in human and earthly terms. The main protagonist, whether one calls him husband or lover, has been separated from the woman promised to him. Like the unhappy characters in *Deor* he has had his share of suffering. In *Deor* it is not always clear whether suffering ended only when life itself ended, or whether there was a recompense, a turn of Fortune's wheel, during life. It has been suggested that Welund's recompense was his revenge, that Beadohild's compensation for rape was to become mother of a hero. (Feminist critics might not see it that way.) But many of Eormanric's victims must have died before they could see their wishes fulfilled. We are told, however, that the protagonist of *The Husband's Message* has overcome suffering. The tone is jubilant. The reversal of fortune is largely attributed, in a somewhat sketchy plot, to his own efforts. We are given to understand that he was driven from home by feud, went into exile alone, but has in his new country established himself as a lord with all the good things that accompany such prosperity – gold, land, followers. His confidence does not

seem to be shaken by any reflections on the transience of such. But the reader needs to be reflective. The man looks with equal confidence to the woman's arrival, reminding her of the vows that bind them. But in telling her to let no one living hinder her from the journey, he alerts us to the possibility of hindrance and therefore failure. And though he does not thank the Almighty for his present achievements he recognizes, if his messenger reports him correctly, that their union is within god's gift:

> þonne inc geunne    alwaldend god,
> <þæt git> ætsomne    siþþan motan
> secgum ond gesiþum    <sinc brytnian>            (32–4)

Then Almighty God may grant to you both that the two of you together may share out treasure among men and comrades.

Without the background knowledge of Anglo-Saxon awareness of transience it would be easy to take this poem at face value. As it is, given a sentence which tells us that the man has all he wants if he may also obtain his bride, we inevitably respond to the conditional as a warning signal.

*The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* present the themes of loss, suffering and impermanence of human ties through a woman's voice. Both voices tell us of estrangement or separation from loved ones. Neither poem offers consolation in earthly or eternal terms. The implications of *The Wife's Lament* are that only death will end sorrow. She speaks of her wretchedness *in woruldrice* 'the earthly kingdom', tells us that,

> ic æfre ne mæg
> þære modceare    minre gerestan,
> ne ealles þæs longaþes    þe mec on þissum life begeat      (39–41)

I can never rest from my sorrow, nor from all the longing that troubles me in this life.

Her final comment – that those are always unhappy, who endure longing for a loved one – would be equally appropriate to the woman in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. In its stoicism it has some affinities with *Deor*, but it lacks any perspective beyond the immediacy of suffering. What these poems have in common with the ones considered earlier is the focus on transience. What they lack is the theological or philosophical dimension.

The preoccupation with transience is not one which the twentieth century comprehends very readily. The average undergraduate meeting Anglo-Saxon intimations of mortality is probably anticipating something like another seventy years of life in this world before facing the next. But one recent excavator of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery estimates the life expectancy of the

Anglo-Saxon male as 32 years, of the female as 30.5 years. Recent statistics from a Kentish cemetery suggest a life expectancy into the late thirties, but demonstrate a peak mortality rate in the teens and early twenties. Infant mortality, less easy to demonstrate from the archaeological evidence, would be, inevitably, high. It is not surprising that Anglo-Saxon thinkers occupied themselves with meditations on that which might endure a little longer. They knew, with the poet of *The Seafarer*, that:

> adl oþþe yldo   oþþe ecghete
> fægum fromweardum   feorh oðþringeð          (70–1)

 disease or age or violence crush life from the doomed.

The poet of *The Fates of Men* has a more depressing list. People may die in the wolf's jaws, they may starve, be wrecked at sea, be killed by spear or sword in private quarrel or battle. They may fall from trees, be executed on the gallows or burned to death. The writers of Anglo-Saxon medical texts remind us of the appalling range of illness and accident that their contemporaries suffered. The students of excavated bones demonstrate the prevalence of arthritic complaints. For many their day-to-day existence must have been constant endurance of physical pain.

   Yet physical suffering is not what the poems are about. The preoccupation is with emotional deprivation, the loss of those things which put joy into life, usually expressed in terms of human relationships. The poet of *The Dream of the Rood* waits with longing for heaven because

> Nah ic ricra feala
> freonda on foldan,   ac hie forð heonon
> gewiton of worulde dreamum,   sohton him wuldres cyning;
> lifiað nu on heofenum   mid heahfædere          (131–4)

 I have scarcely any powerful friends on earth: they went from here, left the joys of this world, sought the king of glory. They live now in heaven with the high father.

The friends that he has lost have found new and imperishable relationships. It is no accident that the poet chooses the words 'king' and 'father' for God. The closest bonds in Anglo-Saxon society were the ties of lordship and kinship. One of the commonest compounds for a lord places equal stress on the lordship and friendship elements of the relationship, *winedryhten* 'friend-lord'. One of the commonest compounds for a comrade in the hall is similarly dual in its emphasis, *winemæg*' friend-kin'. When the poet tells us of his desire to join *Dryhtnes folc / geseted to symle* 'the people of the lord, sitting at the feast' it is clear that he visualizes heaven as a re-creation of the joys of the hall,

the reciprocal love between lord, friends and kin established in an enduring context. The persona of *The Wanderer*, having lost the joys of the hall, foolishly attempted to find them again on earth:

> sohte sele dreorig    sinces bryttan,
> hwær ic feor oþþe neah    findan meahte
> þone þe in meoduhealle    min mine wisse
> oþþe mec freondleasne    frefran wolde ...          (25–8)

> Desolate without a hall, I sought a giver of treasure, where I could find, near or far, one who in the mead hall would show love for me, or would comfort me, friendless.

By the end of the poem he too finds the only security in the eternal. It should come as no surprise that the vision of the eternal is the re-creation and continuation of what has seemed to be the best of earth.

For the poet Cynewulf this life was a flickering torch. The common stock of poetic vocabulary reiterates the ephemeral nature of human existence. The body is only a *flæschama*, a 'flesh-garment', to be laid aside. The mind or heart or spirit is treasure locked in a *bancofa*, a 'box of bone'. The image links the physical reality of the rib-cage with the idea of carved and ornamented artifacts like the whale-bone Franks Casket. Such boxes intended for the safe-keeping of secular or spiritual treasure, jewellery or relics, were, however beautiful, of less value than their contents. But the image is sometimes less of safe-keeping than of imprisonment, the idea of a bone cage or prison, from which the spirit will be released into freedom. Hope of eternity often comes across as a longing for just such release. The poet of *The Seafarer* anticipates his voyage to heaven in the following terms:

> For þon nu min hyge hweorfeð    ofer hreþerlocan,
> min modsefa    mid mereflode
> ofer hwæles eþel    hweorfeð wide,
> eorþan sceatas,    cymeð eft to me
> gifre ond grædig          (58–62)

> And so my thought now passes beyond the locked place of my breast, my soul with the sea-tide travels far over the whale's homeland, the surfaces of earth: it comes back to me eager and ready.

Eager and ready, as we shortly see, for *Dryhtnes dreamas*, 'the joys of the Lord'.

Bede's story of a pagan Northumbrian for whom this life was comparable with the flight of a sparrow through a warm and lighted room has been rehearsed often enough (e.g. above, pp. 121 and 160). For him as for Bede

the moral was that in pagan terms the contrast with this warmth and comfort was darkness, winter and storm from which the sparrow (or, by implication, the human soul) came and to which it returned. The promise of Christianity was, at any rate for the righteous, of a life after death that surpassed in brilliance anything experienced on earth. For the Anglo-Saxons the hope of a heaven filled with everlasting joy, feasting and music must have been implicit in Christ's promise: *On mines Fæder huse synt manega eardung-stowa ... ic fare and wylle eow eardungstowe gearwian* – 'in my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.'

## NOTES

1. *King Alfred's Version of St Augustine's 'Soliloquies'*, ed. T. A. Carnicelli (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 47–8 (italics mine).

2. J. M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1849), I, 310, n. 3. The will of Æthelric is printed in *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 42–3.

3. *Hávamál*, ed. D. A. H. Evans (London, 1986), p. 54; trans. W. H. Auden and P. B. Taylor, *Norse Poems* (London, 1981), p. 156.

4. From Alcuin's letter to Bishop Higbald and an unknown community (see above, p. 85, n. 4), printed in *Two Alcuin Letter-Books*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1975), p. 52; trans. S. Allott, *Alcuin of York* (York, 1974), p. 37. Alcuin's poems are printed in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini I (Berlin, 1881); *De clade Lindisfarnensis monasterii* is trans. M. Allen and D. Calder, in *Sources & Analogues of Old English Poetry: the Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1976), pp. 141–6.

5. *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer and J. Earle, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892) I, 142; trans. D. Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1961), p. 91.

MILTON McC. GATCH

# Perceptions of eternity

If in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England there are strong motifs of fatalism about life in this world and a sense of its transience, there is the equally persistent belief that this life prepares one for a more enduring life. At the end of *The Seafarer*, the speaker declares that *wyrd* ('what happens') and *meotud* (God as the ordainer of what happens) are more powerful than anyone's *gehygd* ('mind', 'thought') and concludes:

> 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.   Þæs sy þam halgan þonc,
> þæt he usic geweorþade,   wuldres ealdor,
> ece dryhten,   in ealle tid. Amen.          (117–24)

Let us reflect where we may get a home and then consider how we might come to it, and then we ought also to strive so that we might come there, into the eternal blessedness, where life is dependent on the love of the Lord, hope in heaven. Thanks be to the holy one because he, the begetter of glory, honoured us, the eternal lord, throughout all time. Amen.

This present, worldly life is passing, but there is hope for a more stable and enduring life. The content of this hope and the forms it took are the subject of this chapter. We shall consider first the major thrust of early medieval eschatology, its focus upon the Last Judgement and the Kingdom of God which the judgement will initiate. Then we may review the lesser motif of expectations concerning the state of the soul between the time of death and the day of judgement.

The theological term 'eschatology' means in Greek the study of the 'last things', or the end of history as it is presently known.[1] It is, in its most fundamental sense, the expectation that God would intervene in a final and

definitive way in the history of the Chosen People, perhaps by re-establishing the kingship of David, who had been anointed as Messiah. (The Greek word *christos* translates the Hebrew *messiah*, a person anointed or set aside for some special role.) The early Christians recognized Jesus as the Messiah and believed that the Resurrection and Ascension certified the truth of this identification. In the Gospels Jesus spoke of a coming time of cataclysm – of misrule by an Antichrist, of war and hardship, of cosmic disaster – that would presage the return or second coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of all the dead for judgement. Like messiahship, the resurrection of the dead was a notion that was current in Jewish circles at the time of Jesus. Because of the subjection of the Jews to foreign powers in the several centuries before and including the time of Jesus, expectation of divine intervention to re-establish the place of the Chosen People amongst the nations was politically seditious. A literature expressing these hopes of political and spiritual redemption came into being but, because espousing such ideas was so dangerous, the books tended to be both symbolic and cryptic. The prophet Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones that rise and live again is both the most famous and one of the more accessible examples in the Hebrew canon of the genre, which is usually called apocalyptic literature.[2] Among the early Christian writings, eschatological notions are prominent in Paul (e.g. 1 Corinthians XV.35–54), in the so-called Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark XIII, Matthew XXIV–XXV, Luke XXI) and in the so-called New Testament Apocalypse or The Revelation of Saint John the Divine (to use the title it is given in the Authorized or 'King James' Version).

As time passed, expectations of an early *parousia* or return of the Christ were dashed, but not the basic hope itself. Christians saw the whole of history – 'salvation history', we have come to call it – as a piece, running from Creation through the Fall and the events recounted in Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch whereby God elected and made covenants successively with such figures as Noah and Abraham and, most importantly and definitively, Moses at the time of the exodus from Egypt to the 'promised land'. Thereafter come the ages of kings and prophets, the troubled times after the fall of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel and finally the great pivotal moment, the Resurrection of the Christ, which assured that God's promised victory for his people – now a new people, not simply Israel – would be effected. The Christ event gave new meaning to the events of scriptural history, which could now also be seen as presaging the events of the history of Christ. And the present time is the age of waiting for the final turning point or consummation (the *parousia*, resurrection and Last Judgement), sometimes spoken of as the millennium or the last of six thousand-year ages of history before the seventh and eternal age. (The 'thousand' years were taken

to be round numbers signifying a long time, not as denoting literal, calendrical time). The ages, obviously, are analogous with the days of Creation and the post-millennial era with the seventh-day rest. Eschatology (the term is a creation of modern theologians, although *ta eschata*, 'the last things', is of some antiquity) is the part of theology that deals with the ultimate hopes of the Christian community; and in the theology of the early Middle Ages and (hence) Anglo-Saxon England it is a very central part of doctrine.

It is difficult to select just one or two sources to illustrate discussions of eschatology in Old English literature, for there are many interesting possibilities. The anonymous sermons of the Blickling and Vercelli manuscripts, for example, provide a number of interesting witnesses, some of them dependent on apocryphal writings (i.e. early Christian writings that were not accepted into the official canon of the New Testament but were often attributed to New Testament authors or other apostolic figures).[3] A thorough survey would of necessity touch on such exegetical treatments of apocalyptic passages in Scripture as can be found in Bede's commentaries on the Gospel of Luke and the Apocalypse.[4] Here we must be contented with two samples in the verse literature, both Old English adaptations from Latin poems attributed to Bede, and references to important sermons of Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham. Although all of these texts were written in the form in which we now know them within a half-century of the year 1000, the poems at least adapt sources about three centuries older.

The poem called *The Judgement Day II* (to distinguish it from another poem of similar subject in the Exeter Book) translates a rather shorter poem by Bede, *De die iudicii*.[5] The speaker in the poem is found in a sheltered grove with pleasant waterways. But a threatening sky belies his pleasant surroundings, reflecting or causing distress of mind. Fearful of the Last Judgement because of his sins, and also mindful of the contrasting futures of the blessed and the wretched, the speaker mournfully begins his speech, which continues the penitential mood of the opening passage and recalls the repentant thief on the cross next to Jesus's who quickly won salvation. Forgiveness is readily available now, but the day of judgement is coming when one will no longer be able to repent but must give an accounting for the manner of one's life. A description of the events of the signs of the last times follows: earthquake and storm, falling stars and darkened sun and moon.

> Eac þonne cumað hider   ufon of heofone
> deaðbeacnigende tacn,   bregað þa earman;
> þonne cumað upplice   eoredheapas,
> stiþmægen astyred,   styllað embutan
> eal engla werod,   ecne behlænað,

> ðone mæran metod    mihte and þrymme.
> Sitt þonne sigelbeorht    swegles brytta
> on heahsetle,    helme beweorðod.
> We beoð færinga    him beforan brohte,
> æghwanum cumene    to his ansyne
> þæt gehwylc underfo
> dom be his dædum    æt drihtne sylfum.            (111–22)

Then also from heaven on high will come hither signs indicating death; they will terrify the wretched; and then come the heavenly host, a strong, excited troop; they will leap about, the entire band of angels, surround the eternal one, the glorious Creator with might and majesty. Then will the victorious author of the heavens sit on the throne, adorned with his crown. Woe be to those forthwith brought before him, coming from all quarters before his countenance so that each might receive judgement according to deeds from the Lord himself.

There is a description of the purging and punishing fire that surges throughout the Creation. The punishment causes great suffering; all the solaces and joys of earthly life and company are gone. But for those judged worthy, now decked with flowers, there is bliss in the realm of heaven. There is no hardship in denial and right-doing in this world if one has in mind the state of the blessed in the kingdom.

*The Judgement Day II* is a reflection on the Last Judgement from the point of view of the penitent. It is consequently a fairly stark and foreboding picture of the last times with primary emphasis upon the depiction of the consequences of leading a less than upright life in the world, although it is clearly not from the point of view of a profligate person but of a human with deep moral sensitivity and great humility. Because of its purpose as a warning to those living this present life it tends to stress punishment and reward, not to describe the events of the last times.

More narrative is the Exeter Book poem known as *Christ III* or *Doomsday*,[6] which paraphrases and embellishes the Gospel accounts of the last times in ways that were characteristic of the period. It greatly expands its principal source, an alphabetical verse of twenty-three couplets that is attributed to Bede. *Christ III* begins with no introductory ceremony, but with a simile drawn from the Gospels and introduced almost as abruptly as the day of doom itself:

> Ðonne mid fere    foldbuende
> se micla dæg    meahtan dryhtnes
> æt midre niht    mægne bihlæmeð,
> scire gesceafte,    swa oft sceaða fæcne,
> þeof þristlice,    þe on þystre fareð,
> on sweartre niht,    sorglease hæleð

semninga forfehð    slæpe gebundne,
eorlas ungearwe    yfles genægeð.                    (867–74)

Then with sudden calamity for earth-dwellers the great day of the mighty Lord
at midnight will surprise with might the bright Creation, as often the treacher-
ous robber, bold thief, who travels in shadows, in the dark night, suddenly seizes
carefree heroes sound asleep, accosts unready men with evil.

God's host assembles, the trumpet is sounded and the dead, raised for judge-
ment, quake with fear. Christ (called both Creator and Son of God)
approaches Mount Sion with the splendour of the sun, a welcome sight to
the blessed among those raised but dreadful to the sinful. Fire precedes the
judge, with trumpets and a great din, as the world is consumed. As judge and
host assemble on the mount, the poet once more stresses that for the blessed it
is a glorious and welcome sight but for others quite the reverse.

                          Daga egeslicast
weorþeð in worulde,    þonne wuldorcyning
þurh þrym þreað    þeoda gehwylce,
hateð arisan    reordberende
of foldgrafum    folc anra gehwylc,
cuman to gemote    moncynnes gehwone.                (1021–6)

The most dreadful of days will come to pass in the world when the king of Glory
through his power, will punish all nations, command human beings to arise
from their earthen graves, [shall call] all people to come to the assembly, every
one of humankind.

All of those raised will have bodies, will be young[7] and will bear the moral
characteristics of their historical lives. 'Wel is þam þe motun / on þa grimman
tide gode lician' (1079–80: 'Well is it for those who are able in that awful time
to be pleasing to God').

The cross appears in the heavens; as in *The Dream of the Rood* it is seen as
both the blood-stained instrument of torture and the radiant sign of victory.
The multitude of raised humankind is divided, as in the Gospel accounts, the
good (sheep) on the right and the evil (goats) on the left. The judge addresses
them separately in a long and elegant paraphrase of Matthew xxv.34–46. As
the words of condemnation are spoken the accursed fall into the abyss of hell.
Although theirs is a fate of non-being in which God no longer thinks of them,
yet, too, they suffer eternally in heat, discomfort, torment and regret; and the
audience of the poem is urged to mark this fact well. For the blessed, both
angelic and human, in contrast, all is light and joy, as they sing eternally the
praises of God.

And so, the poet concludes, it is a fair and joyful thing when the blessed person dies, for death fixes one's destiny once and for all time. For on Doomsday such a one is admitted to the *eðel* or 'homeland' (1639), the goal for which all the righteous have yearned and laboured.

If one wants to follow the motifs of the Last Judgement and the kingdom of God in a more theological context, no better sources (after Bede's Latin exegetical commentaries on the relevant portions of Luke and the Apocalypse) can be recommended than two long sermons of Abbot Ælfric which have only fairly recently been published and have not yet found a prominent place in the literature.[8]

The first roughly parallels *The Judgement Day II*. It is a sermon entitled 'De die iudicii' ('Concerning the Day of Judgement') that comments on passages in Luke XVII.20–37, Matthew XXIV.15–31 and Mark XIII.14–27. The opening section is based on Jesus's answers to questions put to him concerning the coming of Doomsday. His answers stress that the coming will be sudden and unexpected, whence it is important that one be in a constant state of preparedness. The flood of Noah and the destruction of Sodom are mentioned as biblical types or anticipations of the judgement, and it is said that it will be possible for pairs of humans (two in bed, grinding meal at a mill or ploughing in a field) at the moment of the coming to be found one just and the other damned. From line 227 the sermon paraphrases Matthew's and Mark's descriptions of the signs of the last times. The distressing times of the Antichrist will be the first warning that the end is near, with their wars and apostasies from Christian faith. The time of trial and martyrdom will persist for three and a half years. Then there are to be the astronomical signs: darkening of sun and moon, the falling of heavenly bodies. These will presage the slaying of Antichrist and the *parousia* of the Christ in clouds and glory. The dead are raised at the sound of the trumpet and the judgement will take place. The evil are separated from the good and consigned to the eternal fire 'þær bið wop and wanung, and toða gristbindung' (433: 'where there will be weeping and wailing and grinding of teeth'). For the saved, however, there is 'unasecgendlicre blisse a butan ende' (439: 'indescribable joy for ever and ever').

The other piece by Ælfric is the most developed treatment of eschatological concerns in Old English, the so-called 'Sermo ad populum, in octavis Pentecosten dicendus' or 'Sermon for the laity, for recitation on the octave of [or seventh day following] Pentecost'. Later in this essay there will be occasion to refer to its two earlier sections; here allusion must be made to the final passage (273–574) in which the Doomsday motifs are summarized. Using a Latin theological treatise, the *Prognosticon futuri saeculi* of Julian, bishop of Toledo (680–90), of which Ælfric had made a Latin summary for his own use,[9] as his source rather than Scripture at first hand, as was primarily

the case in 'De die iudicii', the sermon rehearses the narrative of Doomsday once more. Among points that are emphasized more than would be the case in an explication, say, of Matthew xxv, is the description of the bodies in which those raised from the dead will be clothed:

> Ælc man hæfð swaðeah his agene lenge,
> on ðære mycelnysse þe he man wæs ær,
> oððe he beon sceolde, gif he fulweoxe,
> se ðe on cildhade oððe samweaxen gewat.          (308–11)

Each person will have nevertheless his proper height, in the size he had before or would have had if (in the case of death in infancy or half-grown) he had been fully grown.

The apostles will sit about the judge on thrones of their own, and they will be joined by 'ealla ða halgan weras ðe ðas woruld forleton' (356: 'all the holy ones who renounced this world'), for Ælfric characteristically gives a place of preference to his fellow monastics in the kingdom. Four groups are discerned: the specially blessed (apostles and monastics) who join in the act of judgement, the redeemed, Christians who did not persevere in the faith and the heathen peoples. There is emphasis on the nature of the punishment of the damned after an extended paraphrase of the speech of the judge from Matthew xxv, and there is a description of the dwelling place of the elect, where thoughts are visible so that there is no cloud on the unanimity of thought in that 'an ece dæg, ðe næfre geendað' (568: 'one eternal day that will never end'). Although it is in many ways a personal account of the Doomsday strongly marked by the personality, beliefs and style of its remarkable English author, this sermon may serve as a benchmark of orthodox early medieval beliefs concerning the last times with which to compare other accounts in the literature.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the events of the last times, of the last day with its resurrection and judgement, were at the very centre of Christian eschatology in the earliest centuries of the Christian community and in early medieval times. That is to say, the primary concern was with the ultimate salvation of the world, or at least of the People of God. The raising of women and men of all ages of human history to stand judgement together and to join (if it had been their way of life within history) in the full and eternal life of bliss was stressed in the picture of a general or universal resurrection and in the insistence that the beings judged would be not just spirit or soul but embodied creatures. Thus what happens to the individual between the moment of death and the hour of the general resurrection was a matter of comparative indifference. Individual salvation in isolation from the rest of mankind and notions of the continuing existence of the soul in a state of freedom from

the physical body were, though present, not at the centre of the early medieval Christian's conception of the afterlife. It must also be stated once more that life in the kingdom was more important than life in history, but it would not take place without life in the world and it gave the quality of life in the world a very great urgency and importance: the way one lived affected one's own future, indeed; but it was more important that the way one lived was a part of the history of salvation, of the great drama of which the Resurrection was the pivotal point.

From the times of the New Testament writings, however, the fact that the *parousia* and the last day were to be deferred to the end of the millennium raised the question of the state of the faithful who had died before the last day. What was the nature of their being before their resurrection at the return of Christ to inaugurate the kingdom?

Occasionally, it was said or implied that being was suspended by death. Thus in *The Phoenix*, the poet speaks of life in the world as a period in which the blessed earn or merit (*earnað*, 484) 'ecan dreames, / heofona hames mid heahcyning' (482b–3: 'everlasting joy, a home in the heavens with the high king'),

> oþþæt ende cymeð
> dogorrimes,   þonne deað nimeð,
> wiga wælgifre,   wæpnum geþryþed,
> ealdor anra gehwæs,   ond in eorþan fæðm
> snude sendeð   sawlum binumene
> læne lichoman,   þær hi longe beoð
> oð fyres cyme   foldan biþeahte.          (484–90)

until the end of his days comes, when death, murderous and armed warrior, snatches the life of everyone and quickly sends transitory bodies deprived of souls into earth's bosom, where they will remain, covered by ground, until the coming of the fire.[10]

The view that humans awaited the resurrection in a state of suspension or of sleep would be the strictly orthodox position. Whether the poet of the Old English *Phoenix* took this position is not exactly clear. He is drawing an analogy with the mythical phoenix (which he believed to be historical), which dies on its funeral pyre and rises from the ashes. Thus he speaks in this context only of the body and its fate, which is of burial and natural decay until the resurrection when it will be somehow reconstituted.

Death is defined in the early Middle Ages with remarkable unanimity as the separation of the body and soul. There is universal agreement about the fate of the body between death and the last day: it is destroyed in the natural order of things. Concerning the soul, however, there is considerable ambiguity. On

this subject, perhaps it will be most convenient to return to Ælfric's sermon 'In octavis Pentecosten', which gives the most fully developed theological treatment of the subject in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England. Then we can glance at more imaginative and problematic accounts.

According to Ælfric's account, death, which can come at any stage of human life, is of two kinds, physical and spiritual (118 ff.). Everyone fears the former – which all, nevertheless, experience – but not enough take adequate account of spiritual death, which comes through sin and cannot claim righteous men and women. There is a great host awaiting us beyond the present life, and the prayers of the Church (especially of the monastic order) and its sacraments are a great source of strength. At the death of good persons, God's angels are present to receive the soul and lead it to its reward. Similarly, the evil have their reward; but if a sinner wanted to repent his sins and do penance, the judge

> him wolde mildsian, þæt he moste huru
> on Domes-dæge þam deofle ætwindan.          (198–9)

will be gracious to him so that he can indeed escape the devil on Doomsday.

On some occasions the prayers of the Church serve to alleviate the sufferings of those who have sinned.

It is generally agreed by historians that the doctrine of purgatory was not fully developed until at least a century after the time of Ælfric. When it came into being, it was inextricably associated with the sacrament of penance and the belief that one ought after death to complete penances that had been imposed by the Church but not satisfied by the time of death.[11] Ælfric and his source, Julian of Toledo, came as close as any writers before the twelfth century to an expository description of purgatory, although they did not use the term or locate a specific place for purgation within the cosmic geography.

The following section of *In octavis Pentecosten* (216–72) speaks further of the soul between death and the day of doom and is the most closely related to the matter of purgatory. Books tell us, Ælfric says, that the soul has

> þæs lichaman gelicnysse on eallum hire limum,
> and heo gefret softnysse oððe sarnysse,
> swa hwæðer swa heo on bið, be þam ðe heo geearnode ær. (217–19)

the likeness of the body in all its limbs, and it experiences comfort or pain, whichever it is in, according to what it earned before.

The souls of the wicked suffer in purging fire as long as necessary for the punishment of their sins, but sometimes intercessory prayers alleviate their

situation. Meanwhile the blessed are in far better condition, although they are anxious for those still living and yearn for the double joy of the kingdom after the resurrection. But they must await the perfection of the number of the saints or citizens of the kingdom.

There are numerous reflections on the afterlife between death and the Last Judgement in Old English literature. Many of these are visionary, if only because they describe states of existence quite beyond the ordinary. Indeed, they have their source in a passage from the apostle Paul:

> I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ [i.e. Paul himself, in the opinion of most scholars and of the tradition] who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.
>
> (2 Corinthians XII.1–4)

Paul's refusal to speak here was an invitation for later writers to fill in the missing content of the vision, and an apocryphal tradition which originated as early as the third century survives, known as the *Visio Sancti Pauli* or *Vision of St Paul*.[12] Among other things, the *Visio* describes the going of good and evil souls, led by good and evil angels, from their bodies at the time of death, their judgement and the habitations of the good and the wicked. The *Visio*, in a variety of versions, was extremely influential in the production of visionary literature and of the language and geography of the afterlife to the time of Dante. It is noteworthy that motifs from the *Visio* were especially productive of literature in the European vernacular languages, including a prose adaptation in Old English: that is, they provided material not for theologians and professional churchmen, whose language was Latin, but for the instruction of folk who did not know the learned language of the Church; they provided material for popular edification.

Among the vernacular materials that sprang from the *Visio Pauli* are a number of writings in which souls speak to their bodies at the time of death or (more characteristically) at the time of a periodic return to the body. There are two versions of a Soul and Body poem in Old English in the Vercelli and Exeter Books. *Soul and Body I*, the Vercelli Book version, is the longer and more complete. It is also the more instructive for our purpose here, although the question of priority between these texts is vexed.[13] All should be mindful of the soul's *sið* (2: 'journey') when death comes and sunders the bond between body and soul. But weekly the soul will seek out its body, *geohðum hremig* (9: 'clamorous in its cares' – *hremig* ironically evokes the boasting of warriors and heroes) to berate it with the suffering it now endures. Unless Doomsday

itself intervenes, it will come on these weekly visits for three hundred years.[14] Sorrowfully and coldly, 'spirit speaks to dust' ('cleopað ... se gast to þam duste', 15–16). The body is berated for its lack of forethought. It did not consider that, although it must be food for worms, it also housed a soul. The soul claims to have longed for things spiritual but to have been denied by the body's greed and lust. Once adorned with gold and other ornaments, the body is now bone stripped bare. Happier by far had this body been born a bird or fish – or even one of the worms that now feast on it – than that it was born a human and baptized so that the soul must suffer damnation. What will the judge say at the doom? Together again after the resurrection, body and soul will suffer together eternally. The dust is dumb, cannot answer, and its decay is graphically described as a sharp-toothed worm called Greedy, making his feast. 'Be warned!' the poet is saying to the audience. The case is different for the holy soul, which consoles the body on its return visits. Though worms eat it as well as the wicked body, this body helped its soul to win salvation by fasting and despite poverty. But at the resurrection, reunited with the soul, it will partake in the life of joy. The poem breaks here, incomplete (and the Exeter version has only the speech of the wicked soul).

The soul–body address, here placed in the interim between death and Doomsday, is in other contexts assigned to the hour of death and the Last Judgement itself. Wherever it is used, its purpose 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. From the frequency with which it is used, it must have been thought effective; and however different modern sensitivities may be from Anglo-Saxon, the address of the soul of the wicked and the description of decay are as chilling and graphic passages on the ravages of the grave as one can imagine. One cannot but wince at such lines as:

> Rib reafiað    reðe wyrmas,
> beoð hira tungan totogenne    on tyn healfa
> hungregum to frofre;    forþan hie ne magon huxlicum
> wordum wrixlian    wið þone werian gast.
> Gifer hatte se wyrm,    þe þa <g>eaglas beoð
> nædle scearpran                            (112–17)

Violent worms rob the rib, their tongues are torn in ten halves as compensation for the famished ones; therefore they cannot ignominiously mix word with the weary spirit. 'Greedy' is the name of that worm, whose jaws are sharper than a needle.

A large number of visions, many of them influenced in a general way by the *Visio Pauli*, take the form of visions recounted by persons who have apparently died and whose souls have been into the next world from which they

return with cautionary messages for the living – and with a last chance in many cases to amend their own lives. It has been pointed out recently that these visions have much in common with a number of cases of near-death experience reported in modern times and sometimes taken as evidence of immortality. This is true to a remarkable extent, as the scholarly study of Carol Zaleski has demonstrated, but the modern near-death visions are almost always without content other than a general rosiness and sense of well-being, whereas the medieval accounts invariably have much to teach about the destiny of the soul and the necessity of reform in the worldly lives of the audience. Despite striking resemblance to the medieval visions, the differences in the modern are very great: 'gone are the bad deaths, harsh judgement scenes, purgatorial torments, and infernal terrors of medieval visions; by comparison the modern other world is a congenial place, a democracy, a school for continuing education, and a garden of unearthly delights'.[15]

A remarkable number of the medieval otherworld visions have strong connections with Anglo-Saxon England. *The Vision of St Paul*, as we have already seen, was known in pre-Conquest England and translated into Old English as well as adapted in a number of ways to both verse and instructional prose. The visionary narratives in the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) came from the pen of a pope greatly revered as the instigator of the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Bede has several important accounts in his *History*, which were also adapted by or known to writers of English. Boniface (d. 754), the Anglo-Saxon cleric who became the 'Apostle of Germany', included the influential account of the vision of the Monk of Wenlock in a letter.[16] In all of these cases (even though they may have been translated later into English) we are dealing with a learned literature in Latin. They themselves had a subsequent influence on such English poems as *Guthlac A*, one of two verse accounts of an Anglo-Saxon ascetic, but they were neither so popular nor so manifold in their influence as was the material derived from the *Visio Pauli*.

Of all the visionary accounts, by far the most famous and seminal is the account in Bede of the vision of Dryhthelm, a layman.[17] Bede, who says that he recounts it 'in order to arouse the living from spiritual death', characterizes the story as one of a person who 'already dead came back to life and related many memorable things that he had seen'. He had, indeed, evidently died of an illness during the night; yet he sat up in the morning, terrifying those about his deathbed, and stating that he had been allowed to return from death to live very differently. Giving over his property to his family and the poor, he entered the monastery at Melrose and lived an exemplary life that gave witness to his remarkable experience.

With a resplendent guide, he recounted, he had passed through a great valley with fire, hail and snow on the left where souls leapt from heat to cold

and back again. This was not hell, he was told. Passing into a region of darkness, he was left alone in fire and stench and met a great crowd of lamenting souls, harassed by laughing demons. Rescued by his guide, he was taken to a more welcoming region of flowers, light and happy inhabitants. The guide explains that the first area was one of purgation for those who had confessed but not completed their penance. The happier zone was for those who had lived well, even though they were not so perfect as to merit immediate admission to the kingdom.

The visionary is told that he will return to the land of the living and is admonished to live a better life than he had before. Pious persons – a monk, a king and a bishop are named – came to him for instruction. At his retreat he would often chastise his flesh by bathing in very cold water, praying and reciting the psalter as he did so. Leaving the water, he would never put on dry clothing, even though it was icy winter. To those who asked how he stood such torture, he replied 'Frigidiora ego uidi' ('I have seen colder things'). Bede contrasts this tale with another in the next chapter of the *History* (v.13), concerning a man who, refusing to repent, had died after having a vision that showed that the record of his bad deeds far outweighed the good. This person's vision was not for his own benefit, because it was too late for him; but it served for the benefit of others who heard of it and heeded its message.

Visions of the destiny of the soul in the interim between death and the resurrection of the last day are almost uniformly motivated, as were these accounts in Bede, by the desire to admonish individuals to live uprightly and to reform their lives. They are aimed more at the individual and her or his state of spiritual health than are accounts of the Last Judgement. They use language and imagery that are highly pictorial and vivid, that go beyond everyday life but follow recognized patterns and touch responsive chords in their audiences. Their utility as teaching devices and their popularity are undeniable. We would probably be better advised to emphasize their metaphoric appropriateness and communicative effectiveness than to regard them as literal pictures of the hereafter. Although they are not all among the great writings of European history, they descend not only from the Judeo-Christian tradition but also from the underworld voyages of the classical epic and they are part of the ancestry of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

One report of a vision, however, is neither from the learned tradition nor a popularization based on an apocryphal writing like *The Vision of St Paul*. It is an account of several visionary experiences of a pious nobleman, Leofric, earl of Mercia; and it has the air of a contemporary record by someone close to Leofric, who was created earl by King Cnut (1016–35) and died in 1057 during the reign of Edward the Confessor. His wife, 'Godiva', is of legendary

fame, and he was one of the great Saxon nobles of the eleventh century. A little manuscript written not many years after his death records Leofric's visions.[18] Three of the four visions have to do with appearances to the earl as he prayed late at night in the cathedral at Canterbury or during a mass, also attended by the king, at Sandwich. The first vision reported in the document, however, is extremely interesting as an example of visions of the afterlife. In content, it resembles such near-death reports from the other side of death as Bede's account of Dryhthelm, and it includes a number of the features of such visions as are outlined by Zaleski in her study. Yet the account states not that Leofric was taken off in death and restored to life but that he had the *gesihðe* ('vision') 'on healfslapendon lichaman' (2: 'in a state [body] of half sleep'), although he saw more clearly in this state than one normally does in dreams. Leofric must cross a very narrow bridge far above a raging river. A voice assures him that he will make the crossing safely. Across the bridge, he is taken to 'a very beautiful and fair field, filled with a sweet smell' (10). There is a great crowd, as on the Rogation days in England, wearing white (or baptismal) clothes like those of a deacon when he reads the Gospel at mass. Leofric sees a man who is identified as St Paul, who has just celebrated the mass. Finally, residents of the place ask why Leofric, a sinful, living man, is among them. He is, it is said, 'baptised anew by repentance' (21) and will join the blessed in several years. The bridge, the explaining voice or guide and the sweet-smelling fair field with people all recall traditional elements of such visions; yet the absence of detail about the frightening place (and the lack of people in it) and the unusual reference to the Rogation days – a character-istically English liturgical detail – mark the account with strong individuality and freshness. The little report of Leofric's visions, then, has both strong connections with the tradition and departures from it that mark it as rooted in the nobleman's life and experience. It is very precious for that reason.

One might contrast with this the sense of the fundamental darkness of what lies beyond death as expressed by the unknown author of the poetic *Maxims II*:

> Meotod ana wat
> hwyder seo sawul sceal   syððan hweorfan,
> and ealle þa gastas   þe for gode hweorfað
> æfter deaðdæge,   domes bidað
> on fæder fæðme.   Is seo forðgesceaft
> digol and dyrne;   drihten ana wat,
> nergende fæder.   Næni eft cymeð
> hider under hrofas,   þe þæt her for soð
> mannum secge   hwylc sy meotodes gesceaft,
> sigefolca gesetu,   þær he sylfa wunað       (57–66)

God alone knows where the soul will go afterwards, and all the spirits which depart for God after the day of death and await judgement in the protection of the father. The future is dark and secret; the lord alone knows, the saving father. No one comes back here into the world who can tell people truly what kind of place is the ruler's Creation, the dwellings of the victorious people, where he himself lives.

But for many Anglo-Saxons there was light and clarity about the future. They could describe in vivid detail an afterlife in which the soul was separated from the body and journeyed to rest or torment. And beyond that they could depict the eventual return of Christ, the resurrection of all bodies to be reunited with their souls, and the Last Judgement, inaugurating the eternal reign of God with the saints. The picture of eternity was one of a world transformed and redeemed. The picture of the afterlife was constructed to admonish those who heard or read of it to strive to win the final goal.

## NOTES

1. An extremely useful reference for matters of Christian history and doctrine, with extensive and reliable bibliographies and with a predilection for matters touching on the English Church, is F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1997). For further bibliography, see M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), esp. notes at pp. 212–13.
2. On apocalyptic themes (and especially the Antichrist) in early and medieval Christianity, see B. McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1979); and esp. *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. K. Emmerson and B. McGinn (Ithaca, NY, 1992).
3. See M. McC. Gatch, 'The Eschatology in the Anonymous Old English Homilies', *Traditio* 21 (1965), 117–65, and 'Two Uses of Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon Homilies', *Church History* 33 (1964), 379–91. For knowledge of biblical apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England, see now *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: the Apocrypha*, ed. F. M. Biggs (Kalamazoo, MI, 2007).
4. A modern edition of the commentary on Luke appears in Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 120, pp. 5–425; the work on the Apocalypse (*Expositio Apocalypseos*) is ed. R. Gryson, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 121A. An annotated translation of Bede's *Expositio Apocalypseos* by Faith Wallis is found in the series Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool, 2012).
5. L. Whitbread, 'The Old English Poem *Judgement Day II* and its Latin Source', *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966), 635–56; and *The Old English Poem 'Judgement Day II'*, ed. G. D. Caie, AST 2 (Cambridge, 2000). For further bibliography and comment, see S. B. Greenfield and D. G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York and London, 1986), pp. 237–40.
6. Three poems on the Advent of Christ, the Ascension and Doomsday, grouped together at the beginning of the Exeter manuscript, were considered a tripartite 'epic' on the subject of the hero Christ by A. S. Cook and assigned to Cynewulf,

whose signature clearly marks at least the Ascension poem as his: *The Christ of Cynewulf* (1900; repr. with preface by J. C. Pope, Hamden, CT, 1964). There is now a consensus that the three parts are separate poems. For bibliographical and critical details, see Greenfield and Calder, *New Critical History*, pp. 183, 193–4. Lineation of the poem follows the convention, established by Cook, of continuous line numbering throughout the *Christ* group, in which *Doomsday* begins at line 867.

7. Sometimes it is said that, no matter the age at which they died or the manner of their dying, all will be the age of Christ at the time of his crucifixion. See, for example, the discussion of the resurrection of the body in Ælfric's homily, Pope XI, below.

8. Both are found in *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, EETS os 259 and 260 (London, 1967–8), nos. XI ('Sermo ad populum, in octavis Pentecosten dicendus') and XVIII ('De die iudicii'). Both sermons are in Ælfric's rhythmical prose style and are printed in lines, which I cite. I have commented on both in *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 88–101.

9. Edited in Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 129–46.

10. Translation adapted from my *Death: Meaning and Mortality in Christian Thought and Contemporary Culture* (New York, 1969), where *Phoenix* is discussed at pp. 81–7; see nn. 3–11 at pp. 200–1 for further bibliography.

11. A widely cited examination of the history of the doctrine is J. LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1981). It is a very useful survey, although many critics agree that its view of the development (while chronologically quite accurate) is too mechanistic.

12. For bibliography and the text of the OE version, see A. di P. Healey, *The Old English Vision of St Paul*, Speculum Anniversary Monographs 2 (Cambridge, MA, 1978).

13. For discussion and bibliography, see Greenfield and Calder, *New Critical History*, pp. 235–7.

14. See Healey, *Old English Vision*, esp. pp. 45–50, on variant traditions in the Latin and OE texts. In some texts the return of the wicked soul to the body occurs on Sunday as a sabbatical respite from its sufferings.

15. C. Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York and Oxford, 1987), p. 7.

16. No. X; see *Briefe des Bonifatius, Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius*, ed. and trans. R. Rau (Darmstadt, 1968) or the English translation by E. Emerton, *The Letters of St Boniface* (New York, 1940), pp. 25–31.

17. Bede, *HE* v.12. For further commentary, in addition to LeGoff and Zaleski, see C. Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà d'après la littérature latine (Ve–XIIIe siècles)* (Rome, 1994); and esp. P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800*, CSASE 3 (Cambridge, 1990), 243–72.

18. Ed. by A. S. Napier in 'An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1907–10), 180–8. On the rhetorical strategy of the piece, see P. Pulsiano, 'Hortatory Purpose in the OE *Visio Leofrici*', *Medium Ævum* 54 (1985), 109–16, as well as M. McC. Gatch, 'Piety and Liturgy in the Old English Vision of Leofric' in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss,* ed. M. Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 159–79.

MALCOLM GODDEN

# Biblical literature: the Old Testament

The Old Testament captured the Anglo-Saxon imagination in some unexpected ways, as one of the poetic riddles in the Exeter Book reveals:

> Wer sæt æt wine mid his wifum twam
> ond his twegen suno ond his twa dohtor,
> swase gesweostor, ond hyra suno twegen,
> freolico frumbearn; fæder wæs þær inne
> þara æþelinga æghwæðres mid,
> earn ond nefa. Ealra wæron fife
> eorla ond idesa insittendra. (*Riddle* 46)

A man sat at wine with his two wives and his two sons and his two daughters, beloved sisters, and their two sons, noble, first-born; the father of both of those princes was in there, the uncle and the nephew. In all there were five lords and ladies sitting in there.

The conundrum by which twelve people are specified but the total is only five finds its solution in the book of Genesis, where it is recorded that after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the two daughters of Lot got him drunk and lay with him and each had a son by him, so that his daughters were also his wives and his sons were also his grandsons. Yet though such episodes were for this poet an occasion for wit, for other Anglo-Saxon writers they posed a troubling challenge, forcing them to argue against taking the morals and marital practices of the patriarchs as any sort of precedent for present practice.

In terms of quantity if not quality the Old Testament was the major influence on Old English literature, at least in terms of what survives: it was the source for about a third of the extant poetry and for a large part of the prose, as well as influencing other writings. Some of that work is admittedly fairly unadventurous translation, but much of the writing shows how intensely and productively the Anglo-Saxons were engaged with the Old Testament. Poets, preachers, historians, even kings and generals found it an ever-useful storehouse of information and inspiration; its great collection of stories, poems, proverbs

and prophecies provided a rich literary tradition for the Anglo-Saxons which both complemented and challenged the literary tradition of the Germanic inheritance and what they knew of classical Latin literature.

The process of adapting and retelling Old Testament story in Old English began early. The poet Cædmon, according to Bede, composed poems in the late seventh century using stories from Genesis and Exodus. Though these have not survived, a group of three poems drawing on the books of Genesis, Exodus and Daniel, probably from the eighth century, appear in the late tenth-century Junius manuscript, together with *Christ and Satan*, a poem which is partly on the fall of the angels, while a poem on the story of Judith, perhaps composed in the tenth century, appears in the *Beowulf* manuscript. There are fourteen surviving copies of the psalter in Latin with an English gloss, and a complete English version appears in an eleventh-century manuscript known as the Paris Psalter: the first fifty psalms (ascribed by some to King Alfred) are in prose while the remaining hundred are in verse, probably taken from a verse translation of the whole book. At the end of the tenth century Ælfric translated part of the book of Genesis and composed a series of homiletic texts and narrative pieces using material from Joshua, Judges, Kings, Judith, Esther, Maccabees and Job. Around the year 1000 a prose version of the first five books of the Old Testament was compiled, using translations provided by Ælfric and another translator.[1] Both this version and the Junius poetic collection were provided with extensive illustrations. But the response to the Old Testament extended much further than these translations and retellings, through commentaries, sermons, discussions of military and political issues, and in poems such as the riddle of Lot. Indeed, in many ways the most imaginative response to the Old Testament is to be seen in *Beowulf*, which draws on biblical stories of Creation, of Cain and the giants to form part of its mythic structure.

For the Anglo-Saxons the Old Testament was in the first place a history book, a record of events in antiquity. One major point of interest was that it offered an account of how the world and mankind began. Bede's story of the conversion of the Northumbrians suggests that one of the major advantages which Christianity appeared to offer the heathen Anglo-Saxons was a coherent account of the world's beginning. The same interest is evident in the genealogies, which trace the ancestry of the West Saxon kings back through the pagan god Woden to Noah and ultimately Adam. Some, going beyond the testimony of the Bible itself, traced the line through a fourth son of Noah, here named Sceaf, who according to apocryphal tradition was born in the ark.[2] Despite the distance in time and space, the Anglo-Saxons could also see close parallels between themselves and the Hebrew tribes. At first it was perhaps the fact that the Hebrews of the early books were, like the Anglo-Saxons in

the sixth and seventh centuries, invaders trying to establish themselves in a new and hostile land: that similarity seems to have struck Bede at least, who is thought to have modelled his *Ecclesiastical History* on the Book of Samuel.[3] Later, increasingly, the Anglo-Saxons came to see the parallels between their own experiences at the hands of the Vikings and that of the Israelites who, though believing in the one true God, found themselves inexplicably oppressed and humiliated by the forces of the non-believers.

If the Anglo-Saxons found it fruitful to trace the similarities between Old Testament Hebrews and their own situation, there were also dangers. The Old Testament was the word of God, but too many of the practices which had been acceptable in the Old Testament world were perilously close to practices which the Anglo-Saxon Church considered pagan or at least objectionable. Ælfric records the tendency of his contemporaries to cite Old Testament support for their own practices of taking concubines, and for their fondness for revenge, and he has to warn that sacrificial offerings, rituals concerning forbidden food, the marriage of priests and the involvement of the clergy in warfare were all Old Testament practices that were no longer acceptable in Christian times. One way of neutralizing these dangers was to insist that such biblical stories should be understood in a quite different, non-historical way, as allegories. Thus Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac at God's command was not a precedent for human sacrifice but a figurative foreshadowing of God's sacrifice of his own son in the New Testament. The practice of interpreting Old Testament narratives as allegories probably goes back to pre-Christian Jewish tradition, but it was soon adopted by Christian theologians such as Origen and absorbed into the mainstream of Christian tradition.[4] Allegory was used to make the Old Testament safe for Christian readers or to make it consonant with the New Testament by discovering Christian doctrines such as the Trinity hidden within it. But allegorical interpretation soon became a way of using the Old Testament, and the New Testament as well, as a vast store-book of imagery, a source of riddling metaphors and imaginative parallels. The impetus here is not to save the Old Testament for Christianity but to invite the reader to see imaginative parallels between moral truths and physical actuality, or between spiritual experience and historical events.

Such allegorical interpretation always attracted Anglo-Saxon writers, and was one of the important ways in which they perceived the relationship between the Old Testament and their own times. Perhaps this is clearest with Bede, who wrote a whole series of Latin commentaries on shrines and temples in the Old Testament – the tabernacle in Exodus, the building of Solomon's temple in Kings and the rebuilding of the temple after its destruction in I Ezra – and used allegory to relate these accounts to the spiritual qualities of the Church and the priesthood in his own time. Just as he used the historical narratives as a literal

model for his own account of the development of the English Church, so he used allegory to make the Old Testament stories of temple-building into a potent symbol for the spiritual development of the Church. His tour de force is the commentary on the Book of Tobias where the strange figure of Sara must have represented a disconcerting challenge to his powers (this female equivalent of Bluebeard marries seven times and each time her husband is found dead in the morning after the first night in her bed; but Tobias still insists on marrying her). Bede interprets her as an emblem of the Christian Church. The tradition continued in the vernacular. The Old English *Pastoral Care*, translated from Gregory the Great's work and issued in the name of King Alfred, is particularly rich in extravagant allegories. Ælfric uses such allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament again and again in his homilies, and explains the theory of such allegory in his preface to Genesis. There are further examples in Byrhtferth of Ramsey's *Enchiridion* and the anonymous homilies. Old Testament reading invited an imaginative and individual response to literature. Allegory coexisted with literal or historical interpretations of the same stories, and allowed for multiple interpretations of the same episodes. It spilled over too into the interpretation of classical legend; thus the Old English prose version of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* briefly tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, insisting that it is not true in the literal sense but that it carries an allegorical meaning, by which Orpheus looking back to hell symbolizes an individual returning to his old vices after reform. Allegory seems to have spread into the making of new narratives too (as in *The Seafarer*).

The variety and richness of response can perhaps best be shown by looking at the ways in which different Anglo-Saxon writers handled particular books of the Old Testament. The book which the Anglo-Saxons in general knew best was probably Genesis. *Genesis A*, a long fairly faithful rendering of the Book of Genesis into lively and often magniloquent verse, reflects many of the ways in which the Old Testament interested the Anglo-Saxons. Its structure is narrative and literal, following the sequence of the biblical book closely, but it often hints at particular points of interest and allegorical significance. One of the poet's particular concerns is the explanation of the origins of the human condition. It is evident in his treatment of the Adam and Eve story, and also in his account of Cain and Abel, where Cain's murder of his brother brought into the world evil and violence:

> Æfter wælswenge    wea wæs aræred,
> tregena tuddor.    Of ðam twige siððan
> ludon laðwende    leng swa swiðor
> reðe wæstme.    Ræhton wide
> geond werþeoda    wrohtes telgan.        (*Genesis* 987–91)

After that bloody stroke evil was raised up, the fruit of misery. From that shoot sprang terrible things, worse and worse, cruel fruits. The branches of that crime reached widely over nations.

This idea of Cain's act giving birth to violence had a much more literal manifestation in the traditions about his descendants, discussed below. The role of sexual desire in the origins of evil also interested the poet, in his accounts of the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the subsequent incest of Lot, and in the stories of Abraham and Sarah and the desires that she aroused in other men. But it was the apparently unimportant incident of Abraham's conflict with four kings which seems most to have inspired this poet. Four kings lead their armies to attack the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they carry off Lot and his family and possessions as part of their plunder; Abraham, hearing the news, collects his forces and defeats the four kings in battle to rescue his nephew Lot. The shift into dramatic detail and excited comment, using such traditional motifs of battle poetry as the raven circling in anticipation of corpses, probably owes something to the poet's recognition that here at last was an episode made for Anglo-Saxon poetry. But one can also see the poet's awareness of the story's relevance: for him it is a glorious victory over northern raiding armies, achieved by a force which was small but had God on its side:

> Næfre mon ealra
> lifigendra her    lytle werede
> þon wurðlicor    wigsið ateah,
> þara þe wið swa miclum    mægne geræsde          (2092–5)

No one, of all living creatures, has ever achieved a more glorious victory with a small army, fighting against so great a power.

The language here closely resembles the end of *The Battle of Brunanburh* when it celebrates the Anglo-Saxon defeat of the Vikings and Scots.

Ælfric calls Genesis the *gecyndboc* or 'book of beginnings', and it was indeed the story of origins that particularly appealed to Anglo-Saxon writers. The miracle which launched the first Anglo-Saxon religious poet Cædmon into poetry was, according to Bede's account, a visitation from an angel who compelled or inspired the peasant to sing a hymn of Creation. This nine-line hymn, which survives in some copies of Bede's Latin account and was incorporated in the later translation of it, celebrates God's creation of heaven as a roof for mankind and then the earth itself. Such celebrations of Creation seem to have been, or become, a literary theme. A similar poem is sung by the minstrel in *Beowulf* (see below) and there is a longer poem on the Creation in the Exeter Book, known as *The Wonders of Creation* or *The Order of the World*. It

emphasizes the sun as the greatest of the miracles of Creation, and celebrates the mystery and wonder of the created world; no one, however wise, says the poet, can tell how the 'goldbright' sun moves under the earth or what land-dwellers may enjoy its light after it has dipped beneath the brim of the ocean.

Something of the same sense of wonder at the plenitude of Creation is also to be found in prose, in Ælfric's *Hexameron:*

> The birds which live on the water are webfooted by God's providence, so that they can swim and seek food. Some are longnecked, like swans, so that they can reach food on the bottom; and those which live on flesh are claw-footed and sharp-billed, so that they can bite, and with short necks, and swifter in flight . . . Not all kinds of birds live in England, nor in any country are all birds easily found, for they are many, and variable in size, and fly in various ways.
>
> (ed. Crawford, lines 250–81)

If the Creation story could be used to celebrate the goodness of the world, Anglo-Saxon writers also looked to the Bible to articulate their ideas about the origins of evil. One traditional explanation was the story of the fall of the angels. This story had been pieced together in Jewish and early Christian tradition from stray references later in the Bible, but for most Anglo-Saxon writers it was closely associated with the Genesis tradition of the Creation of the world and the fall of man. Traditionally it was a story of pride and ambition, but Anglo-Saxon poets present a surprisingly dramatic and sympathetic picture of Lucifer's rebellion. *Christ and Satan* (a poem of 729 lines in the Junius MS) narrates the Creation of the world and the fall of the angels, and then presents a plaintive series of speeches by Lucifer in which he evokes a sense of loss and grief very similar in mood to the Old English elegies:

> Hwær com engla ðrym,
> þe we on heofnum    habban sceoldan?
> þis is ðeostræ ham,    ðearle gebunden
> fæstum fyrclommum;    flor is on welme
> attre onæled . . .
> Hwæt, we for dryhtene iu    dreamas hefdon,
> song on swegle    selrum tidum,
> þær nu ymb ðone æcan    æðele stondað,
> heleð ymb hehseld,    herigað drihten
> wordum and wercum,    and ic in wite sceal
> bidan in bendum,    and me bættran ham
> for oferhygdum    æfre ne wene
>
> (*Christ and Satan* 36–40, 44–50)

Where has the glory of angels gone, which we were destined to have in heaven? This is a home of darkness, narrowly constrained by strong fetters of fire; the

floor is in flame, burning with poison . . . Once we had joys in the presence of the lord, and song in heaven in better times, where now around the eternal one nobles stand, heroes around the high throne, praising the lord with words and works, and I in torment must endure in bonds, and never hope for a better home, because of my pride.

An even more dramatic account of the fall of the angels appears in what is known as *Genesis B*. Embedded within the Old English poem *Genesis* is a long sequence (lines 235–851) describing the fall of the angels (for the second time) and the fall of man, a sequence which derives from an Old Saxon poem composed on the Continent early in the ninth century. It seems that at some early stage, probably in the later ninth century, the leaves containing the account of the fall of man in the Old English *Genesis A* poem (in some earlier manuscript than Junius) were lost or discarded and replaced by inserting the equivalent episode from the Old Saxon poem.[5] Whoever turned the latter into Old English verse was clearly skilled in Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition, whether an Englishman who had lived in Germany or a continental Saxon familiar with Anglo-Saxon literature, though it is uncertain whether he translated the whole poem or just what was needed to fill the gap. What clearly inspired the original poet, and presumably his translator, was the challenge of dramatizing the feelings and thoughts of the world's first sinners: the fallen angels and Adam and Eve are for him archetypes of rebels and sinners, whose experiences can tell us how evil came into the world. What marks this account is the quality of sympathetic understanding. Lucifer is driven by his passionate objection to being God's underling and his aspiration to higher things, dramatically expressed in soliloquy:

> 'Hwæt sceal ic winnan?' cwæð he.   'Nis me wihtæ þearf
> hearran to habbanne.   Ic mæg mid handum swa fela
> wundra gewyrcean.   Ic hæbbe geweald micel
> to gyrwanne   godlecran stol,
> hearran on heofne.   Hwy sceal ic æfter his hyldo ðeowian,
> bugan him swilces geongordomes?   Ic mæg wesan god swa he.
>
> (278–83)

What shall I toil for? he said. I have no need to have a superior. I can perform just as many wonders with my hands. I have great power, enough to make a more splendid throne, higher in heaven. Why must I serve for his favour, bow down to him with such subordination? I can be as good as him.

When he rebels and is inevitably crushed by the omnipotence of God, he vividly describes the misery of failure, injustice and hell, and meditates revenge. The sense of a powerful, energetic spirit imprisoned by his pre-ordained place in the hierarchy is given substance by his literal chains in

hell. From his fetters he conceives a plan for revenge, and invokes the claims of loyalty to persuade one of his followers to make the journey to earth.

The fall of the angels is one kind of tragedy. Lucifer is created stronger and brighter than all other angels but strives for still higher status, for freedom and independence. He is fully aware that he is rebelling against his lord, and the poet loads his account with references to Lucifer's pride. Yet the dramatization of his grief and resentment, together with the frequent echoes of a heroic society, strongly recall the sympathetic protagonists of the Old English elegiac poems, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Lucifer becomes a kind of tragic figure like Prometheus or Macbeth, a powerful spirit fully aware of his act but also acutely sensitive to his failure, and still struggling to resist while chained in hell.

Equally important as an explanation for the world's evil was the story of the fall of man. This was one of the central themes for most writers on the first book of the Bible. Bede and Alcuin discuss it in detail in their commentaries on Genesis, and Ælfric deals with it in several of his Old English prose writings. For Ælfric it is an exemplary story of human free will. Because Adam and Eve's submission to the divine will would have had no value or meaning if they had no choice, God placed an arbitrary prohibition on one tree in Paradise:

> Why would God forbid them so small a thing, when he had entrusted other great things to them? Truly, how could Adam know what he was, unless he was obedient in some thing to his Lord? . . . It was not shaped for him by God [that he should fall], nor was he compelled to break God's commandment, but God left him free and gave him his own choice.
>
> (*Catholic Homilies* I, ed. Clemoes, pp. 181, 184)

The devil seduced Adam and Eve into disobeying God by appealing to their gluttony, their vainglory and their greed, telling them that they would be like angels, but it was through their own free choice that they fell, and God punishes them by making them mortal. But a rather different emphasis appears in *Genesis B*'s full and individual account of the fall of man. The sequence of events is very carefully constructed, and the poet's account is once again marked by a quality of sympathetic engagement. Here Eden contains two trees, one of good and the other of evil: to eat the fruit of the latter is irretrievably to bring sin and mortality and hell upon mankind. The devil, disguised as a serpent, first approaches Adam with his claim that he is a messenger from God who now wishes Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. The devil imaginatively suggests to Adam that God cannot face the rigours of the journey to earth and so has sent his subordinate with a message. Adam, more literal minded, refuses to budge from the explicit commands of God and complains that the tempter has brought no tokens of his divine authority.

The devil then turns to Eve and persuades her to eat. With Eve the tempter appeals to her concern for Adam, suggesting that God will be angry with him for rejecting his messenger and that she can save her husband by accepting the fruit and persuading Adam to eat. She cajoles Adam into eating too, and the devil returns with a triumphant speech to hell. What is striking in this account is the apparent innocence of the sinners. Eve is moved by her concern for Adam and believes that the tempter is from God; the vision of heaven which she receives on eating the fruit appears to confirm that she has acted rightly. The poet points out that God had given her a weaker mind than Adam, and that she persuaded Adam to eat out of a genuine loyalty to him, believing it was for his own good. Adam too accepts the fruit because he genuinely believes Eve's promise that it is God's will. We are facing here a failure in perception, an intellectual failure reflecting the limited powers of the mind which God gave them, not the overpowering of reason by greed or pride. Where Ælfric emphasizes the act of free will, the poet shifts the responsibility back to the devil and ultimately to God himself:

> Ne wearð wyrse dæd
> monnum gemearcod!    Þæt is micel wundor
> þæt hit ece god    æfre wolde
> þeoden þolian,    þæt wurde þegn swa monig
> forlædd be þam lygenum    þe for þam larum com.    (594–8)

No worse action was ever marked out for men. It is a great wonder that the eternal God would ever permit it that so many a thegn should be led astray by lies, as came about through that advice.

Two kinds of tragic fall are thus dramatized in *Genesis B:* the angels act in full knowledge that they are in conflict with God, but are impelled by 'heroic' qualities of vengeance, loyalty, defiance, aspiration to freedom, rejection of a subordinate position; Adam and Eve, on the other hand, wish to serve the divine will but find themselves caught in a situation where that will is hard to discover. Elegiac laments invite our sympathy with both sets of fallen, while God becomes an almost impersonal figure of nemesis, the Almighty who by definition cannot have a rival and whose condemnation of Adam and Eve to mortality and exile is in a sense predetermined by the nature of the two trees.

It was not only the evil within human nature and the human situation for which explanations were sought in the Book of Genesis; it was also the evil within the rest of Creation. Ælfric reports a belief that some beings were created not by God but by the devil, and although he repudiates this doctrine it is clear that Anglo-Saxons were concerned about the origins of the darker creatures in the world and looked to the Bible for explanations. Genesis reports that the sons of God took wives from among the daughters of men,

who gave birth to giants (ch. VI). Christian tradition interpreted this as marriage between the descendants of Cain and those of Seth, Adam's third son, and apocryphal legends developed about the giants and monsters who were descended from Cain and who, according to some versions, managed to survive the flood.[6] There is a fleeting reference to this myth in Felix's *Life of St Guthlac*, where the demons are called the seed of Cain, but it becomes a more central issue in *Beowulf*. The poet makes no overt reference to the Bible or the Christian religion but draws imaginatively on Old Testament story and themes to suggest the symbolic and mythic power of his creation, in the same way as he used Germanic legend. The way in which Cædmon and other poets drew on the opening of Genesis to celebrate the Creation of the world has already been discussed above. The *Beowulf*-poet, showing his extraordinary talent in this as in all else he touched, turned the theme of the world's beginning into a challenge. When Hrothgar has finished his great golden hall for the Danes, he has his minstrel sing a song of God's Creation of the world as if in celebration of the creative urge:

> cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga   eorðan worhte,
> wlitebeorhtne wang,   swa wæter bebugeð,
> gesette sigehreþig   sunnan ond monan
> leoman to leohte   landbuendum,
> ond gefrætwade   foldan sceatas
> leomum ond leafum,   lif eac gesceop
> cynna gehwylcum   þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ   (*Beowulf* 92–8)

He said that the almighty made the earth, the beautifully bright land, with water surrounding it, the conqueror set the sun and the moon as lamps to bring light to landdwellers, and adorned the surfaces of the earth with branches and leaves; life too he created for all the kinds that live and move.

The Danish minstrel invites his audience, as the Anglo-Saxon poet invites his, to see a parallel between the building of Heorot and God's building of the world. But already the figure of evil, Grendel, is lurking threateningly in the darkness. As the minstrel concludes his song it merges with the narrative, so that we are not at first clear whether the enemy in the darkness threatening the creatures living in bliss is Satan threatening Adam and Eve or Grendel threatening the Danes. Old Testament allusion is here used to suggest the Satanic aspects of Grendel and the Edenic aspects of Heorot. Yet the parallel raises doubts not only about the hall's safety but also about the idea of Creation: if the world was made by a wise, benevolent and all-powerful God, where do monster-figures like Grendel come from? The juxtaposition of the song and the monster impels the poet to go on to tell the story of Cain, who brought death and violence into the newly created world and became the

ancestor of all the evils – goblins, orcs, giants and others. The Cain story in turn introduces the concept of fratricide, invoking the archetypal example of that feuding between tribes and families which pervades the world of *Beowulf*. The Cain myth manages both to insist on the alien nature of Grendel and all he represents, and to hint at its origins in conflict between brothers. Old Testament allusion plays a complementary role when it returns once more after the death of Grendel and his mother. Beowulf brings back the hilt of the giants' sword with which he had killed them, and on it Hrothgar finds depicted the story of the Flood which destroyed the giants who lived in the old days. As Grendel is introduced by a reference to the Old Testament legend which described the origin of monsters, so his end is announced by an allusion to the biblical myth of their destruction.

For a rather different theory of the origins of giants, equally reliant on Genesis legend, one might turn again to Ælfric. He does not refer to the tradition about Cain's monstrous progeny, and his firm insistence that all his offspring were destroyed in the Flood suggests that he knew the story and gave it no credence. He prefers an alternative tradition, that the giants or *entas* were the descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons. It is one of these giants, Nimrod, who in Ælfric's view was responsible for the building of the tower of Babel. Ælfric identifies this with the great city of Babylon and sees Nimrod as the first person who wished to make himelf a king.[7] (This tradition perhaps lies behind the reference in *The Wanderer* to the ruined city as *eald enta geweorc*, 'the old works of the giants'.) The Babel story is for him a myth explaining not only the origin of all the languages and nations of the world but also the origins of kingship and of cities, all associated with the giants. For Ælfric the 'ents' were also the reality behind the stories of the pagan gods.

If Genesis was the most influential of the early books, the account of the Hebrews' departure from Egypt and their wanderings in the wilderness which forms the subject of the book of Exodus also interested the Anglo-Saxons, in several different ways. The legal code of King Alfred begins with a long excerpt from Exodus describing Moses promulgating his laws: it thus presents Alfred himself in a tradition of law-givers which began with Moses. Ælfric too presented Moses as the law-giver, in a homiletic account of the exodus focusing on the promulgation of the ten commandments. In another piece, called *On the People of Israhel*, he narrates their experiences in the desert, drawing attention to their murmurings against God and the clergy (*Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope, pp. 638–66). Both allegorically and literally, the Anglo-Saxon Church saw itself in continuity with the priesthood of the Hebrews, similarly faced with reconciling a rebellious people to God. Easily the most inventive and challenging response to this biblical book is the Old English poem called *Exodus*. Rather than tell the whole story of the Book of

Exodus the poet limits himself to a few central episodes: the Hebrews' escape from Egypt, their crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians. The literal aspect of the narrative is not the poet's central concern and his method is highly oblique and allusive, almost in the manner of an extended riddle. Towards the end the poet seems to invite allegorical interpretation:

> Gif onlucan wile   lifes wealhstod,
> beorht in breostum,   banhuses weard,
> ginfæsten god   gæstes cægon,
> run bið gerecenod,   ræd forð gæð   (523–6, repunctuated)

If the interpreter of life, bright in the heart, the guardian of the body, will unlock the lavish good with the keys of the spirit, the mystery will be explained, counsel will come forth.

The allegorical meaning of these events was familiar to the Anglo-Saxons: Pharaoh stood for the devil, the Hebrews represented the Christians leaving the world (Egypt) for the next life (the Promised Land) and passing by way of baptism (the Red Sea) from servitude to the devil to the service of God. There are several possible allusions to such an interpretation and yet much of the poetry seems to have little to do with such a way of reading the text; it is rather as if allegory is just one of a number of ways in which the poet invites us to read his poem. The most striking feature of the poem is its multi-valency: the way it throws off sparks of significance in all directions as the poet explores the story of the exodus. There are hints of symbolic parallels between the Hebrews' experience and man's journey to heaven and the harrowing of hell, which are never followed up; there are suggestions of great battles which do not actually occur; there are indications of an imaginary sea-voyage which takes place over a desert and a dry sea-bed. The whole is invested with a sense of drama and excitement as the Hebrews fight their way through sand and sea while the Egyptian army is destroyed by the descending waters.

The poem opens with praise of Moses as a law-giver (as in the work of Alfred and Ælfric), and presents him as the dominant figure throughout, both war-leader and speaker of wisdom; indeed, the dramatic climax of the story, the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea, takes place within his speech rather than in authorial narrative. The story of the escape from Egypt, the flight through the desert and the crossing of the Red Sea is presented in a strongly heroic and military light. Both fleeing Hebrews and pursuing Egyptians are seen as warriors, with repeated reference to their weapons, their armour and their courage. The biblical account has no battle, indeed much of the point of its story is that it was God who protected his people, and the battle never quite happens in the Old English version either, though it seems constantly threatened. Instead, the crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians

are treated as if it were a battle, with dramatic descriptions of blood and conflict, and the poem ends with the Hebrews collecting the plunder from their fallen enemies on the sea-shore. It is difficult to be sure how these scenes are to be read. Is the poet implying that, contrary to the Bible's emphasis on God's protecting hand, the Hebrews had to fight their way to the Red Sea? Or is he pointing to a figurative meaning, a reference to spiritual conflict with the devil? Or is it simply that the imagery of warfare, of blood and wounds and weapons, is his imaginative way of suggesting the grandeur of the conflict between Hebrews and Egyptians?

The questions are equally pressing in the case of the nautical imagery. The Hebrews are described as seamen, as sailors, as sea-vikings. The poet imagines them being protected from the heat of the sun by a God-sent cloud which he likens to a sail, though one, he says, without visible ropes or mast, so that the journey through the desert becomes a kind of sea-journey, which may in turn relate to the use of sea-voyage as an emblem of life in *The Seafarer, Christ II* and perhaps *The Wanderer*. Yet the cloud is also likened to a tent, and is somehow related to the pillars of cloud and fire, which not only guide the Hebrews through the desert, as in the Bible, but also protect them at night from the horrors of the wilderness and threaten them with punishment if they disobey Moses. The protecting cloud and the pillars seem almost to become emblematic of God himself, as guide, protector and stern judge. The theme of God's protecting role for his chosen people seems indeed to run through the poem, and prompts a digressive discussion of Noah and Abraham, to whom similar assurances of protection were given. The characteristic Anglo-Saxon interest in the Old Testament as a storehouse of examples of God defending his chosen people clearly plays a part here, though there may also be allusions to their own made-up history, as a nation that crossed the sea to Britain and their own promised land.

The historical books which follow Exodus and the associated books of law in the Old Testament struck Anglo-Saxon writers with a sense of the resemblance to their own time. Thus when Wulfstan adapted Ælfric's account of Old Testament history (around the year 1000) he added a passage on the Babylonian captivity in terms which inevitably remind us of his later account of the troubles of the English at the hands of the Danes:

> At last the people became so estranged from God by their guilt that he let a heathen army (*here*) come and plunder that land; and the king Sedechias was taken prisoner and all the nobility who were in that country were killed or taken captive and brought away from that land, and for fully seventy years afterwards that nation was subjected to the power of their enemies, so completely were they estranged from God. (*Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, pp. 149–50)

In the short treatise on the books of the Old and New Testament which he wrote for a landowner called Sigeweard, Ælfric indicates the purpose of his translation of the book of Judith:

> Judith the widow, who overcame Holofernes the Syrian general, has her own book amongst the others, concerning her own victory; it is also set down in our manner in English, as an example to you people that you should defend your land with weapons against the invading army.
>
> (*The Old English Heptateuch*, ed. Marsden, p. 217)

His comments a few lines later on the wars of the Maccabees against their oppressors are even more pointed and critical of his contemporaries:

> They would not fight just with fair words, promising much but changing their minds afterwards, lest they should suffer the troubling saying which a prophet spoke about a certain nation: 'The Lord became angry with his people and shunned his inheritance and committed them into the hands of the heathens, and their enemies truly had power over them' … I translated those books into English; read them if you wish as counsel for yourselves.

If one turns at his suggestion to his translation of the story of the Maccabees, one finds that it not only celebrates their heroic defence but ends with a discussion of the notion of the just war (the first in English) and of the three estates of society, those who pray, those who work and those who fight. The translation appears in a large collection by Ælfric now known, somewhat misleadingly, as the *Lives of Saints*, which also includes his version of the Book of Kings and several accounts of soldier-saints. It is probably no co-incidence that Ælfric attributes the inspiration for the the collection to Æthelweard, the ealdorman responsible for the military defence of the south-west against the Vikings; Æthelweard is also cited as inspirer of Ælfric's translation of the Book of Joshua, another account of heroic battles against the heathens. It was presumably someone of the status of Æthelweard, or possibly King Æthelred himself, who prompted Ælfric to write a short piece setting out the Old Testament and classical precedents which justified a king deciding not to lead his armies in person (*Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope, pp. 725–33).

Alongside this interest in military and political parallels at the literal level there was also an awareness of the figurative possibilities. Thus Ælfric offers a multiplicity of figurative interpretations of the story of Judith, as an alternative to the literal and historical significance noted above:

> In her was fulfilled the Saviour's words: 'Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.' She, humble and pure, overcame the proud one; small and weak, she cast down the mighty one, because

she undoubtedly signified by her actions the holy assembly that believes now in God, that is Christ's church in all Christian people, his one clean bride, who with bold faith cut off the head of the old devil, always serving Christ in purity … She would not keep the cruel one's war-gear which the people gave her, as the narrative tells us, but cursed it with all his clothing, would not wear it but cast it from her, would not have any sin through his heathenness. There are some nuns who live shamefully and account it a small sin that they fornicate and think that they can easily make amends for something so small … Take example for yourselves from Judith, how cleanly she lived before Christ's incarnation.

<div align="right">(ed. Assmann, pp. 114–15)</div>

Such interpretative possibilities provide a useful context for the anonymous poem on Judith. Only the last part of the poem survives but the poet's imaginative leanings are evident enough. The biblical version had been almost anti-heroic in its approach. When the Assyrian army under Holofernes invades Israel military resistance proves useless: it is God that destroys them, through the unlikely agency of the pious widow Judith, who seduces Holofernes by her ornaments and beauty and beheads him in his sleep, leaving the Assyrians to flee the country in dismay when they discover their leader's death. Judith seems to have been chosen, by God or the original story-teller, to emphasize that God has no need of man's military power: piety is enough. The Old English poet presents the story in a very different light, as a heroic conflict between opposing leaders and their armies. The beheading of Holofernes does not in itself bring victory: the head is only a sign of divine favour which the Hebrew warriors then need to convert into reality by taking up their weapons and marching in confidence against the Assyrians, for whom the headless body of Holofernes becomes a matching sign of divine disfavour and hopelessness. The climax is a lovingly described battle evoking all the traditional imagery and fervour of Anglo-Saxon battle poetry.

The poet is clearly skilled in handling the traditional themes and much of the art is expressed in the subtle undermining of the imagery of a heroic society. The Assyrians are presented as a version of the warrior society and Holofernes is a perversion of the traditional war-leader, using much of the old poetic formulae for a hero. The motif of a feast, so feelingly described in *Beowulf* and alluded to in *Maldon* and *The Wanderer*, is here perverted into an orgy at once comic and disastrous, at which Holofernes screams and yells, forcing his men to drink to their own destruction:

> Ða wearð Holfernus,
> goldwine gumena, on gytesalum,
> hloh and hlydde, hlynede and dynede,
> þæt mihten fira bearn feorran gehyran
> hu se stiðmoda styrmde and gylede,

modig and medugal,   manode geneahhe
bencsittende  þæt hi gebærdon wel.
Swa se inwidda   ofer ealne dæg
dryhtguman sine   drencte mid wine,
swiðmod sinces brytta,   oðþæt hi on swiman lagon,
oferdrencte his duguðe ealle,   swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene,
agotene goda gehwylces.                                      (*Judith* 21–32)

> Then was Holofernes, that gold-lord of men, in pouring joy, he laughed and shouted, called out and resounded so that people could hear that from afar, how that sternhearted one stormed and yelled, proud and merry with mead, he repeatedly urged the bench-sitters that they should feast well. So that evil one through all that day drenched his warriors with wine, that strong-hearted treasure-giver, until they lay in a swoon, utterly drowned all his war-band, as if they were struck down by death, drained of all strength.

The usual loving relationship between warriors and war-leader (seen particularly in *The Wanderer*) is replaced by a relation of fear and distrust, symbolized best by the wonderful curtain or flynet surrounding Holofernes' bed, through which he can watch his men while they cannot see him. He commands arrogantly and his men hasten fearfully to obey. The theme comes to a climax in the semi-comic scene in the midst of battle when the Assyrians are destroyed by their own terrified reluctance to wake Holofernes and tell him of the Hebrew attack: thinking that he is still sleeping with the Hebrew maiden, though in fact he is dead, they stand distraught outside his tent, coughing nervously in an attempt to wake him, until one particularly bold warrior ventures in. On finding him dead the warriors then reverse the tradition of heroic loyalty and take to flight, leaving their leader alone and dead on the battlefield.

Against Holofernes is set Judith herself, not a pious widow as in the Bible, but a confident and beautiful virgin. She is a dominating figure who issues commands to her fellow citizens, instructing them to guard the gates in her absence and commanding them to go to war when she returns. But she clearly exists in an affectionate relationship with them, marked by the account of the thronging of the ecstatic crowd around her when she returns. Her military status is emphasized by the fact that her prize at the end of the battle is not the bedcoverings and pots and pans of Holofernes, as in the biblical version, but his war-equipment, and there is no suggestion here, as there is in Ælfric, that she refuses to accept them. The poet underlines the point at the end when he remarks that God gave Judith both fame in the world and reward in heaven. Though the traditional vision of the heroic society seems to be mildly ironized

or subverted in the picture of the Assyrian army, in the representation of Judith and the Hebrews there seems to be a full-hearted acceptance of heroic values within the context of a citizen army and the defence of the native land.

Yet just as Ælfric was able to read the Judith story both as a literal story of warfare paralleling Anglo-Saxon experience and as an allegorical narrative, so in the poem the figurative aspects seem to be at least faintly present. The emphasis on Judith's status as a virgin and the presentation of Holofernes as a diabolic figure intent to defile her hint at spiritual and religious symbolism. The imagery of light and darkness, purity and foulness, seems to lock together Judith herself, her city of Bethulia and the inviolate faith of the Hebrews (a faith which is marked as apparently Christian by Judith's prayer to the Trinity). Judith, the bright virgin who cannot be defiled by the foul Holofernes, is matched by the closely guarded city under siege, with its vigilant watchmen guarding its gates, the city whose inviolate walls are seen shining bright through the darkness as Judith and her maid cross the no-man's land. It is perhaps at this level of symbol that literal or historical relevance and spiritual themes involving the conflict between devil and pure faith begin to merge.

Like other books of the Old Testament, the books of the prophets were read by the Anglo-Saxons in several ways. Within the context of the Old Testament the prophets are seen as intermediaries between God and his people, warning them of their crimes and of impending retribution. The Anglo-Saxon writer who responded to the prophets most on these terms was Wulfstan, who perhaps found himself more in tune with them than most Anglo-Saxons. His collection of excerpts from Isaiah and Jeremiah begins like this:

> There are many things in books which can serve as an example, let him who will pay heed, for his own need. There was in olden days a man dear to God, the prophet Isaiah who foretold many things to the Jewish people, as it afterwards truly turned out, and that can be an example to every nation. Isaiah saw in a vision, as God granted it to him, what should happen to the people for their sins. He began then to sing and said as follows: 'Hear now what God said in clear words. I have fed children and raised them up and they have left me and despised me. They mocked what they should have praised, and neglected what they should have followed, and took up foreign customs and changed all their ways; and therefore I tell you truly, your land shall be laid waste and your cities destroyed by fire. Foreigners shall harry you and when you pray and call to me, I will not hear you.'                    (*Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, pp. 214–15)

Once again, the topical reference to the Viking invasions is difficult to miss. There follows a series of excerpts from the two prophets on robbery, pride, greed, gluttony, treachery and other vices of the time. Another Wulfstan piece

gives excerpts from Ezekiel on negligent priests. It is difficult indeed to distinguish between the prophets' voices and Wulfstan's; Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are clearly the model for his own writing. But Byrhtferth too, in his Latin *Life of St Oswald*, could appropriate the voice of the prophet Jeremiah as a warning to the English, quoting the prophet's warning that God would 'send and take all the kindreds of the north, and I will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof' (Jeremiah xxv.8–9).

More commonly, however, the Anglo-Saxons saw the prophets in a different light, as holy men who foretold or foreshadowed the coming of Christ. That was a role they had already begun to play in the New Testament references to them, and quotations from them therefore figure commonly in Anglo-Saxon writings on Christian themes. Bede's commentary on the song of Habakkuk (one of the minor prophets) thus interprets it as if spoken by Christ at the Passion. Ælfric lists a whole series of quotations from the prophets foretelling the coming of Christ and the Virgin Mary (see *Catholic Homilies*, I, xiii and II, i). This aspect is evident too in the references to Daniel, who was easily the most popular of the Old Testament prophets for the Anglo-Saxons: 'Daniel spoke clearly in his writings about the birth of Christ,' says Ælfric. But the main interest for the Anglo-Saxons in the book of Daniel was neither its prophecies of Christ nor its examples of dream-interpretation, but its role as a historical book, a repository of dramatic stories about confrontations between God and a series of emperor-figures who represent the highest reach of man. Nebuchadnezzar in particular is an interestingly ambivalent figure. His conquest of Jerusalem is regularly presented as an act of divine retribution for the sins of the Hebrews, and Ælfric singled him out as one of the few pagans granted a perception of Christ before his coming. The account of him in the Book of Daniel shows him coming to recognize and acknowledge the true God. Yet he was also seen as a figure of grandiose pride, as we see for instance in the *Pastoral Care* (ed. Sweet, p. 38).

Both pride and divine retribution are important themes in the Old English poem called *Daniel*. The poem presents a series of falls, from prosperity and glory to pride and blasphemy, punished repeatedly by God. It begins with the Hebrews in Jerusalem, living in wealth and grandeur under the favour of God until they turn to devil-worship and neglect him, and passes on to the successive falls of Nebuchadnezzar and Balthasar (Belshazzar). In some ways this poem resembles *Genesis B* and *Christ and Satan*, using the biblical story as a framework for powerful and dramatic speeches of personal grief. Here it is particularly the speeches of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace that caught the poet's powers of imagination, as they lament their captivity and enslavement by the heathens but express their trust in God's power and call on him for help. Both the song of Azarias and the joint song of the three

youths were frequently used in the liturgy, and their part in the religious life of Anglo-Saxon Christians surely contributes to the resonance these speeches have in the poem. Indeed, that part of the poem appears in expanded form as a separate poem or extract in the Exeter Book, no doubt prompted by the liturgical parallel. But one is also struck by the importance of the walled and secure city as a symbol in the poem: first Jerusalem, then Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, and then Babylon under Balthasar are celebrated as powerful and safe citadels, only to be humbled by the destructive power of enemies. There is a pervading sense of human vulnerability in the poem: the poet dramatizes the human need to trust in the power of kings and the safety of walls, but articulates also an awareness that both can be crushed in a moment. The poem is of unknown date and one can only guess at the circumstances in which it developed. The lament over enslavement by heathens would have had a potent relevance when the poem was copied out at the end of the tenth century, but the sense of frailty and of the fleeting strengths of kings and city-walls would perhaps have had significance to the Anglo-Saxons at any time in the preceding centuries.

The sense of continuity is the characteristic note of Anglo-Saxon literary treatments of the Old Testament. For the Anglo-Saxons the Old Testament was a veiled way of talking about their own situation. Sometimes it was a matter of explaining how things came to be as they are in the world. Sometimes it provided a figurative framework for analysing the Church and the clergy. But most often the Old Testament offered them a means of considering and articulating the ways in which kingship, politics and warfare related to the rule of God. Despite Ælfric's insistence that the old law had been replaced by the new, at least in its literal sense, in many ways the old retained its power for the Anglo-Saxons, and gave them a way of thinking about themselves as nations.

## NOTES

1. Ælfric's treatise on the Old and New Testaments, his preface to Genesis and the Old English prose versions of the first five books of the Bible are to be found in *The Old English Heptateuch*, ed. R. Marsden, EETS 330 (Oxford, 2008). His versions of Judith and Esther are in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. B. Assmann, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 13 (Kassel, 1889; repr. with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes, Darmstadt, 1964), and online in *Ælfric's Homilies on Judith, Esther and the Maccabees*, ed. Stuart Lee (1999), at http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings. Also relevant are 'Ælfric's Version of *Alcuini Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesin*', ed. G. E. MacLean, *Anglia* 6 (1883), 425–73 and 7 (1884), 1–59; and his *Hexameron*, edited as *Exameron Anglice or the Old English Hexameron*, ed. S. J. Crawford, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 10 (Hamburg, 1921; repr. Darmstadt, 1968). Ælfric's other renderings of Old

Testament narrative and commentaries on it are to be found in the editions of his homilies and saints' Lives by Clemoes, Godden, Skeat and Pope cited below (p. 342).

2. See D. Anlezark, 'Sceaf, Japheth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons', *ASE* 31 (2002), 13–46.

3. See J. McClure, 'Bede's Old Testament Kings', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. P. Wormald *et al.* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 76–98.

4. There is a lucid account of the development of allegorical interpretations of the Bible by J. Leclercq in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, II: the West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 183–96.

5. See A. N. Doane, *Genesis A: a New Edition* (Madison, WI, 1978), pp. 22–3.

6. See R. Melinkoff, 'Cain's Monstrous Progeny in *Beowulf*', *ASE* 8 (1979), 143–62, and 9 (1980), 183–97.

7. See *Ælfric's Interrogationes*, ed. MacLean, p. 40, and *Catholic Homilies*, ed. Clemoes, p. 358.

# 13

### RICHARD MARSDEN

# Biblical literature: the New Testament

The Old Testament seems to have all the best stories. The ancient myths of Creation and fall, exodus and wandering, oppression and revenge lend themselves readily to re-imagining by later writers, including Anglo-Saxons. The New Testament was never composed with aesthetic considerations in mind, as 'literature'. Its twenty-two books emerged in the century or so after Christ's death to meet the urgent needs of the fledgeling Christian Church, and its rhetoric is essentially that of the pulpit. The New Testament is an instruction manual, shaping the lives of individual Christians and the Church to which they belong. In a sense, the whole work tells a single 'story', that of the life and sacrificial death of a Christ figure whose subsequent Resurrection brings the hope of redemption to sinful humankind. There is certainly no shortage of dramatic details in Christ's life: a virgin conception, birth in a stable, miracles, betrayal, a trial, crucifixion alongside criminals; but for the writers of New Testament literature in Old English these are incidental to the overriding theme of salvation, which is the climax of God's plan for humankind.

Fundamental to the New Testament is the sequence of four Gospels which opens it (those of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), and 'the Gospel' became a shorthand term for the whole body of doctrine taught by Christ and his followers. With typical clarity, the homilist Ælfric spells out its significance by analysing the Old English word *godspell* itself, which is a compound noun used to translate Latin *evangelium*, 'glad tidings':

> Godspell is witodlice Godes sylfes lar and ða word þe he spræc on þissere worulde, mancynne to lare and to rihtum geleafan, and þæt is swyðe god spell, þurh Godes tocyme, us to gehyrenne, þæt we habban moton þe heofonlican wununge mid him sylfum æfre.

> For 'Gospel' is God's own teaching and the words he spoke in this world, as instruction for humankind and a guide to true faith. And it is a very 'good message' for us to hear as a result of God's coming, that we can possess a heavenly dwelling place with him for ever.

The ubiquitous presence of the Gospel in the life of the Anglo-Saxons is well illustrated in their 'charms'. These strange texts are incantations or formulae aimed at achieving an end by magic means and often include passages of Old English poetry, along with bits of Latin or gibberish. One of them, a forty-line poem known as the *Journey Charm*, invokes a long list of protectors for a traveller: first is the Trinity, then a veritable cast-list of the Bible – including Abraham, Isaac, Moses and David, and Eve, Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) and Mary – and then a thousand angels, and finally the four evangelists, escorted (appropriately in view of their status) by the 'seraphim', the grandest angels of all:

> Biddu ealle    bliðu mode
> þæt me beo Matheus helm    Marcus byrne,
> leoht, life rof,    Lucos min swurd,
> scearp and scirecg,    scyld Iohannes,
> wuldre gewlitegod    wælgar Serafhin.    (26–30)

And besides all these, I entreat with cheerful heart that Matthew may be a helmet for me; Mark a mail-coat, sparkling, valiant in life; Luke my sword, sharp and bright-edged; John a shield, adorned in splendour; [and] the Seraphim a deadly spear.

These lines explicitly echo a passage from the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (VI.10–15), where military metaphors convey the key idea of the spiritual fight which the true wayfaring Christian (to adopt the Miltonic designation) must wage against the ensnaring devil. How charms such as this were used, by whom and when, is unclear, but part of their fascination for us is the origin of many of them in the pagan past of the Anglo-Saxons. Most have been thoroughly 'Christianized', as here, and they serve to show us similarities, as much as differences, between the old religion and the new. Prayers in the Church's liturgy, too, are often invocations, in which Christians plead for support against the temptations of sin. The line between prayer and charm, and thus between the mystical and the real, may be hard to discern.[1]

   Biblical passages were integrated into the formulaic patterns of the liturgy in the daily round of Offices (church services) in monastic and secular churches, and most New Testament literature in Old English is based directly or indirectly on such sources. The liturgy was said or chanted in Latin, but some of the most frequently used declarations and prayers were put into Old English as well, probably for instructional purposes. A good example is the Lord's Prayer (the *Pater noster*, 'our Father'), a prayer taught to his apostles by Christ and given in Matthew VI.9–13:

   Fæder ure, þu þe eart on heofonum, si þin nama gehalgod, to becume þin rice, gewurþe ðin willa on eorðan swa swa on heofenum. Urne gedæghwamlican hlaf

> syle us todæg and forgyf us ure gyltas swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum, and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge ac alys us of yfele.

> Our father, thou who art in the heavens, may thy name be hallowed, may thy kingdom come, may thy will be done on earth just as in the heavens. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins, just as we forgive sinners against us, and lead us not into temptation but free us from evil.

This prayer occurs in many manuscripts, sometimes in expanded versions which provide a commentary on its themes.

Anglo-Saxons had access to the whole text of the four Gospels in their own language, in a close but idiomatic translation made in the later tenth century from the Latin Vulgate (which always remained the official Bible in the medieval period). Eight copies of these vernacular Gospels are extant (fragmentary in two cases) and the above version of the Lord's Prayer is taken from one of them. However, this does not mean that ordinary people read them. They were probably used mainly by monks and clerics, to help them in their doctrinal studies or in the learning of Latin, and also by a few devout and wealthy lay people.[2] Most Anglo-Saxons encountered the Gospels and other parts of the New Testament piecemeal, week by week throughout the Church year, mediated by a priest in carefully constructed sermons and homilies. A homily typically begins with a scriptural extract in Old English, followed by a meticulous analysis of it, including an explanation of its hidden meanings and its practical significance for Christians. For example, in his 'Sermon on the Nativity of the Lord', to be preached on Christmas Day, Ælfric first translates, word for word, the account in Luke II.1–20 of the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the birth of the baby Jesus in a stable, and the coming of the shepherds to worship him. He then unpicks the narrative section by section, drawing his commentary from the works of Bede and Gregory, among others. Thus, after alluding to an Old Testament prophecy of Bethlehem's future greatness, he explains the meaning of that town's name:

> Bethlehem is interpreted 'bread house', and in it Christ, the true bread, was born, who says about himself, 'I am the bread of life which descended from heaven, and whoever eats of this bread will never die.'

Explaining the significance of the crib in which the child was laid, Ælfric indulges in the Christian commentator's love of instructive contrast and paradox: 'The Almighty Son of God, whom the heavens could not contain, was laid in a narrow crib, so that he might release us from the narrowness of hell.' As for the shepherds, who had been guarding their flocks at the time of Christ's birth, they signified

the holy teachers in God's church, who are the spiritual shepherds of faithful souls . . . It is proper for the teacher to be ever watchful over God's flock, so that the invisible wolf does not scatter God's sheep.

It is with the shepherds that Ælfric ends his homily: just as they, following the announcement by an angel, went to worship Christ, so should we, the Christian audience, 'glorify and praise our Lord'.[3]

Ælfric's allusions to Old Testament prophecy, along with the list of biblical names in the *Journey Charm*, remind us that it is impossible to read the New Testament without constant reference to the Old, for together they provide an integrated scheme of salvation history. The details of this emerged during the first centuries after Christ when Christians began to read back into the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament) prophecies of the new era. Once the 'messiah' (a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one') predicted in Isaiah and Ezekiel had been identified with Jesus of Nazareth, he became the 'Christ' (a name derived from the Greek version of 'anointed one'). Then, by an infinitely creative sleight of hand, everything that had gone before in history, as chronicled in the Old Testament, could be seen in a new way, reinterpreted in the light of the events of the New Testament era. Following patristic precedents, Ælfric described this relationship in terms of the two parts of the cloven (i.e. split) hoofs of animals, such as cattle, which are considered 'clean' in Jewish tradition:

> Those beasts are clean which cleave their hooves and chew their cud. They signify the believers in God's congregation who with faith receive both the Old Testament and Christ's law, that is, the old law and the New Testament, and constantly chew God's commands in meditation.

The expression of the relationship between Old and New Testaments in this metaphorical or allegorical way is a fundamental technique of Church writers. All is explained in terms of typology: each event and each person in the old dispensation is a 'type' of (that is, signifies) a future event or person in the new. The analogies may be inverse, as well as direct. Thus Pharaoh, keeping the Israelites captive in Egypt, is a type of the devil, and the Red Sea, which miraculously recedes to allow the Israelites to escape, is a type of baptism. Eve, on the other hand, whose sin led to her and Adam's, and thus humankind's, expulsion from Eden, is the 'anti-type' of the Virgin Mary, who bore humankind's saviour; or, as Ælfric puts it, 'our old mother Eve shut to us the gate of heaven's kingdom, and the holy Mary opened it again to us'. Thus the Old Testament holds the key to the New and to the unfolding of Christian history towards the end of time.

It is in the Old English poets that we find some of the more imaginative treatments of New Testament material, though their themes are always

dictated by pastoral need and the logic (and urgency) of the Christian journey. The New Testament on which the poets draw is an extended one. Parallel with the canonical collection of books – the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Pauline and Catholic Epistles, and Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) – is a mass of other texts, many of them purporting also to be Gospels or epistles. Now known as 'apocryphal', they were rejected by the Church as lacking apostolic authority and sometimes as heretical, because they encouraged doctrines antithetical to received Church teaching (a problem which Ælfric frequently warned against). Nevertheless, they were mined assiduously for details about Christ's life and, especially, those events after his death which are not dealt with in the canonical books. The story of Christ's 'harrowing' of hell, when he freed righteous souls from Satan's clutches, is a notable example (discussed below).

All the major themes of salvation history are rehearsed in the trio of poems which opens the Exeter Book, a compilation of verse made during the second half of the tenth century and owned by the first bishop of Exeter (d. 1072). Some of the items are distinctly secular in tone but there is arguably an overall devotional purpose to the volume, in that collectively its contents address that basic New Testament preoccupation: how a Christian should live in this world and how he or she may prepare for the next one. The opening poems – *Advent* (or the *Advent Lyrics*), *Ascension* and *Judgement* – vary greatly in style and appear to be by different poets, but they address in sequence three key Christ-centred themes: Christ the messiah, Christ the redeemer and Christ the judge. Accepting this interconnectedness, scholars usually treat the three as one poem in three parts, *Christ I, Christ II and Christ III*, and number their lines consecutively (1–439, 440–866 and 867–1660).[4]

The beginning of *Advent* is missing, owing to the loss of at least one folio. As it survives, the work consists of twelve separate lyrics, ranging in length from about twenty to over seventy lines in length. Each of them (except the first, whose opening lines are missing) begins with Old English *Eala!*, an exclamation equivalent to modern English (and Latin) 'O!' Thus the second lyric starts 'O judge and just king' and appeals to Christ as the one who guards the way to heaven from the prison of the earthly world, while the third, 'O Jerusalem', develops the idea of the holy city as the throne of Christ and a figure for the Christian Church, which will be freed by the expected child. The sixth lyric, 'O Emmanuel', dwells on the meaning of Emmanuel ('God with us'), an alternative Hebrew name for the messiah, as given in Isaiah, and interprets it as a prediction of the coming of the saviour. *Advent* has a particularly close connection with the liturgy, for most of the lyrics are based on identified Latin 'antiphons' sung at Vespers during the Advent season, the period leading up to Christmas. Antiphons, or responses, are

238

verses in Latin, usually from Scripture, said or sung before or after a psalm or canticle as part of a church service. Modern editions of the Old English poem usually include the Latin versions, though they are not given in the Exeter Book. The author of the lyrics was obviously deeply familiar with these liturgical sources and his own responses are part analysis and part further meditation, in which the use of the pronoun 'we' involves us, the audience, too, as we meditate in the Advent season.

The Virgin Mary features prominently in several of the lyrics, with the emphasis on her role in the incarnation. Lyric no. 7, 'O my Joseph', is a dialogue between Mary and Joseph in which she unwraps for him the 'true mystery' of the miracle by which she, though a virgin, has conceived a child. In the longest lyric, no. 9, 'O lady of the world', Mary is exalted for offering her maidenhood to God, thereby deserving to be chosen to bear his son. It elaborates the image which Ælfric also used in his Nativity homily, derived from Ezekiel (though the poet himself alludes to Isaiah), of a closed gate which bars the way to heaven and whose opening will be made possible by Mary's becoming the gateway through which Christ enters the earthly world. The lyric culminates in a prayer to the Virgin for intercession on our behalf, which includes a rare reference to her suckling of the child:

> Huru þæs biddað burgsittende
> þæt ðu þa frofre folcum cyðe
> þinre sylfre sunu. Siþþan we motan
> anmodlice ealle hyhtan
> nu we on þæt bearn foran breostum stariað. (337–41)

Especially we earth-dwellers pray for this, that you will reveal to people that consolation, your own son. Then we may all with one accord rejoice, when we gaze on the child at [your] breasts.

It has been suggested that this bold image was prompted by the poet's familiarity with a painting of such a scene. None is extant from Anglo-Saxon England, but the 'painterly' character of many of the New Testament poems is notable; dramatic tableaux and striking images are their staple, and no doubt they served a function parallel with that of church paintings in inducing Christian compunction in their audiences.

The second of the *Christ* poems, *Ascension*, with the theme of Christ the redeemer and based on a homily by Gregory the Great, is unusual in that we know the identity (or at least the name) of its author. He is Cynewulf, who 'signs' the poem by weaving his name into it acrostically. The opening lines are addressed to an 'illustrious man', and this has been taken by some readers to be the patron of the poet, but it is just as likely to be an uplifting way of addressing *all* wayfaring Christians individually. One of the most important

feasts in the Church calendar, Ascension commemorates the taking up of Christ into heaven, forty days after his Resurrection, according to tradition, to sit on God's right hand. The opening lines of the poem make an explicit link between this glorious event, which occurred at Bethany, and the more low-key Nativity in Bethlehem. Gathered as witnesses are the apostles – or, rather, the illustrious Lord's 'band of thegns' (*þegna gedryht*, 457). Christ tells them to rejoice in spirit and to go out across the world and preach to the masses. A dazzling squadron of angels comes to escort Christ upwards and two of these address the sorrowful apostles, reminding them that Christ will come again to judge (that will be the theme of *Christ III*). A brief account of Christ's harrowing of hell follows (apparently given again by the angels, though this is not clear): hell is robbed of its spoils and the saved souls, described as an 'enormous booty' (*huþa mæste*, 568), are led up to heaven. At this point the poet-as-preacher takes over. The child of salvation has given us back health, he declares, and now there is a clear choice for humankind: the humiliation of hell or the glory of heaven, and he stresses the need for our gratitude that Christ took human shape. The latter part of the poem is an anticipation of Judgement Day and a more personal note enters: I too, says the poet, must dread the day because I have not been perfect; the end will be terrifying and evil deeds will be punished, and so I want to teach all of my dear friends not to neglect the needs of their souls.

*Judgement*, the last and longest of the trio of *Christ* poems, draws freely on the book of Apocalypse and on a variety of patristic sources. It is a rhetorical tour de force, the verbal equivalent of those medieval paintings which show hordes of the blessed surrounded by angels above and hordes of the condemned below, lapped by flames and goaded by devils. Its mode is polemical and bombastic, designed to induce a penitential mood in its audience, and events are described in emotionally charged human terms: the blessed will gloat at the sufferings of the damned, who in their turn will show bitter envy. In a particularly striking passage, the cross appears and is described as both 'the brightest of beacons' and 'soaked in blood' (*beacna beorhtast, blode bistemed*, 1085): as such, it is both a consolation for the blessed, who accepted Christ's sacrifice, and a reproach to those who rejected it. The latter theme is taken up again when God himself speaks, in a wrathful voice reminiscent of the one we hear more often in the Old Testament. He reminds humankind of his favours to them: he gave them Eden but they listened to Satan; he sent them a child but they rejected it; and he sacrificed himself on the cross but they continue to crucify him by acting uncharitably. In return for thus slighting God, they will suffer infinite torment. It is the simplest of transactions.

Although each of the three *Christ* poems addresses a particular theme, each makes implicit or explicit reference to a range of interrelated events in the

story of salvation: that is the essence of all the New Testament literature. As far as those events are concerned, the Nativity, so prominent in modern perceptions of Christianity, and a frequent subject of homilies, gets scant attention from the poets. They are more interested in the topics of redemption, including the crucifixion, and above all Judgement Day. The latter is given little consideration by most Christians today but it was in the forefront of medieval perceptions of Christianity. The emphases in the redemption story also differ from those of today: the agonies of Calvary and the physical torments of Christ are relatively underplayed and what the poets are keen to show us is *Christus victor*, the victorious Christ who overcomes Satan in the key event of the harrowing of hell.

The crucifixion, as the poet of *Judgement* reminded us, was God's redemptive sacrifice, made to pay off the debt incurred by humankind through their sinning. The symbolism of the cross, representing both sacrifice and salvation, is nicely evoked in the *Riddle* 30a. Using the technique much favoured by Anglo-Saxon riddlers, the poet gives us a personified object: it is fairly clearly a tree which becomes a cross, though other possibilities are there, for creative ambiguity is the hallmark of riddles, stretching us to think more deeply about their subjects.

> Ic eom legbysig, lace mid winde,
> bewunden mid wuldre, wedre gesomnad,
> fus forðweges, fyre gebysgad,
> bearu blowende, byrnende gled.
> Ful oft mec gesiþas sendað æfter hondum,
> þæt mec weras ond wif wlonce cyssað.
> Þonne ic mec onhæbbe ond hi onhnigaþ to me
> monige mid miltse þær ic monnum sceal
> ycan upcyme eadignesse.

I am alive with flame, at play with the wind, enveloped in glory, united with the skies, eager for the forward way, afflicted by fire, blossoming in the wood, a burning ember. Many a time companions lay me across their hands, so that proud men and women may kiss me. Then I raise myself up and many of them bow down to me in relief, since I shall increase for people the source of blessedness.

The opening four lines are full of the playful ambivalences which characterize the riddle genre and whose significance would be easily accessible to a Christian audience: 'I' am blown by the wind in the forest, used as wood for burning and perhaps as timber for building a ship ('eager for the forward way'), but also enveloped in glory and united with the skies. The last five lines develop into a scarcely disguised statement of the practice and promise of cross worship, in which even the proud will become humble.[5]

Today the cross symbol and Christianity are synonymous, but it was not always so. Only with the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine early in the fourth century did the 'cult of the cross' begin to develop, and it was at its height during the Anglo-Saxon period. The cult's origins are vividly told in the longest of the Old English poems known to be by Cynewulf, *Elene*. It is collected with five other poems and twenty-three prose pieces in the Vercelli Book, a volume designed for meditative reading and copied in England in the later tenth century before being taken to Italy. The poem, which derives ultimately from the Greek *Acta Cyriaci*, a Life of St Judas of Cyriacus, begins with an account of how Constantine, his Empire threatened by invading 'Huns' in 312, has a vision in which he is told to carry a cross into battle. When this brings him victory, he embraces Christianity and before long this becomes the Empire's official religion. Subsequently, Constantine dispatches his mother, Elene (i.e. Helen), to the Holy Land to find the 'true cross' on which Christ died. Depicted as a heroic leader in the Germanic tradition, Elene crosses the sea with a group of high-spirited 'thegns'. With the help of a wise Jew, Judas (whose slowness to cooperate provokes Elene to throw him into a pit at one point, but who later becomes a bishop), she has the cross dug up and identified. Constantine orders a church to be built on the site and the cross is encased in gold. The feast of the 'Invention [i.e. finding] of the Cross' was based on this legend and was to become one of the most important in the Church calendar.

The rationale for the worship of the cross is expressed most compellingly in *The Dream of the Rood*, an intense poem of personal witness, for which, unusually, no direct precedents in earlier Latin or other literature are known.[6] The individual Christian struggle is experienced by the 'dreamer' of the poem as he contemplates the crucifixion of Christ, but the poet brings in a third 'character' also, the cross itself, which, as in *Riddle* 30a, is given a dramatic and self-promoting role. Its great central monologue (28–121) is framed by the opening and closing narratives of the dreamer (1–27 and 122–56). The effect of the poem derives from the dynamics of this three-way relationship, as the spiritual zeal of the Christ is transferred to the cross and then to the dreamer. Despite the title which is universally used today for the poem, this is more of a waking vision than a sleeping dream. In the opening frame, it is the middle of the night and the dreamer (as we shall continue to call him) is amazed to see the glorious image of a cross, though it is not actually named as a cross (or rood, Old English *rod*) until line 44, but is given a series of epithets, such as 'most wondrous tree' (*syllicre treow*, 4), 'the brightest of beams' (*beama beorhtost*, 6a) – the description used also in the poem *Ascension* – and 'tree of glory' (*wuldres treow*, 14). Already the dreamer is troubled, aware of the contrast with his own far from glorious self. In a telling pun,

he uses the adjective *fah* to describe himself as both 'decorated' and 'stained' with sin (13). There is more ambiguity when the bejewelled object in the sky is seen to be simultaneously shining gloriously and 'soaked in blood' (*mid blode bestemed*, 48b) – an image used again in *Ascension*. What is the dreamer to make of it?

The long central section of the poem is the story of the crucifixion from the perspective of the cross, which both shares Christ's experiences, such as feeling the nails being rammed in, and describes them. It has been plausibly argued that one reason for the poet's decision not to express Christ's own thoughts and feelings directly was to avoid accusations of heresy, for in the medieval Church there were fierce debates about the extent and nature of Christ's humanity while he was on earth and it could be dangerous to undermine received dogma. But even without this possible spur, personalizing the cross is a highly effective strategy, for it allows the cross to be both observer of and actor in the crucifixion, so that we also (as readers or auditors) experience it both as witness and victim. This Christ, in any case, is not the suffering man who has been depicted generally in art since about the twelfth century, staggering under the weight of the cross which he must carry to Calvary and then hanging gaunt and pitiable. He is instead the victorious Christ who defeats death (see Hebrews II.14 and 1 John III.8). He accepts his fate willingly and pro-actively, striding up to the cross, stripping off his own clothes, climbing up unaided. The cross calls him a *geong hæleð* (39), for which the translation 'young warrior' is appropriate in the context. It is significant that the same noun will be used later in the poem by the cross, twice (78 and 95), when it exhorts the dreamer to emulate Christ with his own active faith. Most critics have interpreted the relationship between the cross and Christ in terms of the lord–retainer bond familiar in heroic literature: each has obligations to the other based on gift-giving and sworn loyalty. This adds a further layer of paradox, for it seems that the retainer (the cross) must show its loyalty and obedience by holding back from defending its lord's life – 'I did not dare,' it says four times (35, 42, 45 and 47) – and even participating in the taking of it. By the end we will understand the paradox well enough: Christian soldiers march onwards with the weapons of the spirit, not of mortal combat, and their obedience is owed to divine, not earthly, authority.

Almost exactly halfway through the cross's monologue in this meticulously constructed poem, the most sombre stage is reached, as Christ lies in his tomb (or, as the cross puts it, he 'rests', weary of limb), alone after the departure of those who laid him there. The shadowing of Christ's life by the cross continues, as it too is taken down and buried in a deep pit (a detail which is not in the canonical Gospels). Incomplete lines and an abrupt change in pace at this point in the poem suggest corruption in transmission, but narrative integrity

is not affected. In what is in effect its own 'resurrection', the cross is found by 'thegns of the Lord' and adorned with gold and silver (76–8), an allusion to the events described also in *Elene*. Now, its past revealed, it reverts to the present and declares, with extraordinary assurance, its status among people the world over:

> Is nu sæl cumen
> þæt me weorðiað    wide ond side
> menn ofer moldan    ond eall þeos mære gesceaft
> gebiddaþ him to þyssum beacne.    On me bearn Godes
> þrowode hwile;    forþan ic þrymfæst nu
> hlifige under heofenum    ond ic hælan mæg
> æghwylcne anra    þara þe him bið egesa to me.          (80–6)

The time is now come when people far and wide across the earth and this this great Creation worship me, pray to this beacon. On me the son of God suffered once: thus now, covered in glory, I tower beneath the heavens, and I can heal every one of those who fear me.

With the cross's task over, the closing frame of the poem becomes a concentrated expression of Christian desire and belief, as the dreamer – now transformed into a happy and assured individual – seeks to outdo all others in the fervour of his worship and longs for the day when his Lord's cross will lead him from this transient earthly life to heavenly bliss and eternal feasting with the angels. Pivotal is a reference to Christ the hero in his victorious harrowing of hell and his leading of a multitude of righteous souls heavenward: *Se sunu wæs sigorfæst*, 'the son [of God] was victorious' (150). The dreamer has acquired his own heroism of faith: so too, the poet no doubt intends, will we, the audience who constitute a fourth participant in this Christian drama.

*The Dream of the Rood* seems to have been well known and influential during much of the Anglo-Saxon period. We have noted already that two half-lines that occur in this poem occur also in *Ascension* (*beacna beorhtast* and *blode bistemed*). This could be no more than the sharing of epithets conventional in cross worship, but there is more certain evidence on two inscribed crosses. The earlier of them is the Ruthwell Cross, a red sandstone structure nearly twenty feet high and dating probably from the mid-eighth century. It stood in the parish church at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire, near the Solway Firth, until 1642, when it was badly damaged by protestant iconoclasts, who saw it as 'idolatrous', but it was reconstructed in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. How precisely the Ruthwell Cross (along with the many other Anglo-Saxon stone crosses that we know of) was used is not known, but its elaborate synthesis of verbal and visual imagery is clearly designed to provoke meditation on the key events of biblical history. The whole cross

would originally have been brightly painted. The two broad faces have scenes from Christ's life, including the annunciation, crucifixion and visitation, with inscriptions in Latin. Then on the narrow sides of the lower part of the cross, filling the borders between representations of birds and animals, text corresponding to four sections of the cross's monologue in *The Dream of the Rood* (39–42, 44–9, 56–9 and 62–4) is inscribed in Old English, but in the runic, not Latin, alphabet. Much of the wording is now hardly legible. We cannot now recover details of the relationship between the Ruthwell inscription and the Vercelli poem but presumably a pre-existing version of the latter was the source of the former.

In contrast with the Ruthwell Cross, the Brussels Cross, so called because it has been in the Cathedral of Saint-Michel in Brussels since the seventeenth century, is small and portable, measuring only about 21 inches high and 12 inches wide. It was made in England, probably in the early eleventh century, from oak faced with precious metal sheeting. The front face was once covered with gold and jewels and no doubt carried an image of the crucifixion, but these have not survived. Exposed slots cut into the wood show that this was a reliquary cross, which will once have held a fragment of (supposedly) the 'true cross', making it an object of intense veneration. The back still has its silver facing, with an image of the *Agnus Dei* ('Lamb of God', a symbol of Christ) holding the 'book of judgement' engraved at its centre and symbols of the four evangelists at the ends of the arms of the cross. Inscribed on a silver strip round the edges of the cross, in Latin letters, are four half-lines of verse:

> Rod is min nama.   Geo ic ricne cyning
> bær byfigynde,   blode bestemed.

Cross is my name. Once, trembling and soaked with blood, I bore the powerful king.

Direct verbal correspondences with lines 44 and 48 of *The Dream of the Rood* show that the inscription was made by someone familiar with a version of the poem – conceivably only the lines on the Ruthwell Cross, for the borrowed phrases occur among those as well. Such evidence confirms wide knowledge of the poem in whatever form among the Anglo-Saxons.

For the poet of *The Dream of the Rood*, as we have seen, Christ's destructive raid on Satan's kingdom – his 'harrowing of hell' – was a climactic moment in the salvation story. It was one of the most popular themes in medieval art and drama, though references to it in the Bible are few and allusive (see, for instance, Matthew XXVII.52–3 and 1 Peter III.18–20). Most theologians accept that it refers to a visit made by Christ to a realm which, though known as 'hell', is really a sort of limbo where the souls of

pre-Christian people (such as Adam and Eve and the Old Testament patri-archs) wait for the Gospel message; this was a good way to explain how good people born before the coming of Christ could nevertheless benefit from the salvation he brought. Hell is often represented in art and literature as a ravenous beast. A full-page drawing in the 'Tiberius Psalter' (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius C. vi), a book of psalms in Latin copied in the mid-eleventh century and glossed in Old English, shows a tall, athletic Christ stooping down to raise Adam and Eve and other souls from the wide-open mouth of a huge creature. The Old English allegorical poem *The Whale*, in the Exeter Book, features a 'whale' (in fact a fictitious sea-creature) which cruises with its jaws agape, emitting a fragrance to entice fish in and then snapping shut those jaws. Just so, the poet tells us, unwary people are tricked by sweet fragrances and vain desires, and become stained with sin. After their death, they are drawn into Satan's open jaws, 'the prison-gates of hell', which are them slammed shut, and there is no escape.

The harrowing episode is featured or alluded to in many Old English poems, including the Exeter Book's *The Descent into Hell*, which takes an unusual approach by prefacing the main event with the visit of the two grieving Marys to Christ's sepulchre. This scene was popular in its own right in the medieval period, frequently the subject of illustrations, and it featured in dramatized form in the Easter Day liturgy – in a ritual which was the precursor of medieval drama. Looking for the corpse of Christ, the women instead find the sepulchre empty, this being the first intimation of Christ's Resurrection:

> wendan þæt he on þam beorge    bidan sceolde
> ana in þære easterniht.    Huru þæs oþer þing
> wiston þa wifmenn    þa hy on weg cyrdon.          (14–16)

They had thought that he would have to wait in the tomb alone that Easter eve. But those women would know something very different from this when they turned on their way.

There is no confrontation with Satan in this account of the harrowing. He is nowhere to be seen as hell's locks and bars give way at the approach of Christ, who needs no armed warriors to help him. A pivotal role is taken by John the Baptist, who prepares hell's inhabitants to receive Christ and welcomes him with an extended address of praise and supplication, liturgical in form, in which he retraces the events of the incarnation and nativity and ends with a reference to baptism in the river Jordan. In another poem, *Christ and Satan*, which follows *Genesis* (*A* and *B*), *Exodus* and *Daniel* in the Junius Codex, the harrowing episode occupies the central section of the poem. This is preceded by the fall of over-proud Satan and followed by the Resurrection, the meeting

of Christ with his disciples in Galilee and the Ascension. The poem ends inevitably with the day of judgement, when the good will be welcomed into heaven as guests and the wicked will be damned to eternal punishment. God's words to the latter are crushing: 'I do not know you now' (*nu ic eow ne con*, 627). In the poem's final scene (which starts imperfectly, owing to the loss of a folio), Satan's ultimate defeat is confirmed. He tempts Christ on a mountain-top, as related in Matthew IV, but Christ resolutely rejects him and he falls miserably into the abyss, with even one of his own minions cursing him.

The source for the various Old English treatments of the harrowing of hell is the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, an account of Christ's trial before Pilate and his descent into hell, derived from early Greek and Latin sources and supposed to have been written by one of those who had taken his body for burial. An Old English version survives in two incomplete copies, one of them included in a manuscript of the four canonical Gospels, and extracts are used in several Old English homilies. The story of the harrowing (part two of the narrative) is told by two witnesses who were themselves among Satan's captives. The coming of Christ, signalled by a dazzling light and preceded by the arrival of John the Baptist, prompts a competitive dialogue between Satan and a personified hell. Satan boasts that his own clever scheming has brought Christ here, but hell is wary and warns Satan not to let Christ steal its captives. It is too late, however: there is a clap of thunder and a heavenly voice cries out the words of an Old Testament psalm, 'Take away these gates!' (Psalm XXIII.7). Christ seizes Satan and throws him into the clutches of hell, who is happy enough about this, until Christ assures the pair that both are condemned in eternity. Christ now receives the joyful captives he has freed, Adam among them, and there also is the thief who had been crucified alongside Christ and whose last-minute acknowledgement of him earned the promise of salvation.

As we have seen, for the Anglo-Saxon Christian all roads lead ultimately to Judgement Day or Doomsday (Old English *domesdæg*).[7] The idea of such a day at the end of time, when God will judge all the nations, derives from Jewish Scriptures but in the New Testament the focus is almost exclusively on the individual, and the judge is defined not as God himself but as Christ, who will return to sit at God's right hand on the throne of judgement. This will be Christ's 'second coming' and will complete the train of events started by his first coming, that is, his incarnation in Bethlehem. Key passages in the New Testament include Matthew XXV, esp. 31–46, where the contrast between those destined to be consigned to everlasting punishment and those (the 'just') who will enjoy life everlasting is spelled out; other references (such as those in Mark XIII, Romans II.5 and 1 Corinthians III.13) cumulatively build the image of a 'day of wrath' and of trial by fire, preluded

by cataclysmic events, before the final establishment of God's kingdom. It is to be soon, but no one knows exactly when, and so everyone must be prepared (Mark XIII.33).

In addition to *Judgement* (*Christ III*), the Exeter Book includes a 119-line homiletic poem known as *Judgement Day I*, which opens with an apocalyptic vision of flood and fire together bringing the world to an end. All Creation will tremble 'on that greatest day' (*on þam mæstan dæge*, 6). Everything will be transparent and the examination of the past conduct of each soul will be merciless; there can be no reprieve for those who fail the test. Another poem, known as *The Judgement Day II* (306 lines) and found in an eleventh-century manuscript of devotional and regulatory texts (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201), offers a very different treatment. It is a direct translation, with creative modifications, of a Latin poem by Bede, *Versus de die iudicii* ('Lines on the day of judgement'). At the start, the narrator sits apart from the world, absorbed in a pastoral idyll of forest glades and murmuring streams, until suddenly the sky is disturbed by a fierce wind and his spirits fall as he remembers his sins. He addresses his audience:

> Ic bidde, man, þæt þu gemune    hu micel bið se broga
> beforan domsetle    drihtnes þænne.                    (123–4)

I beg you, man, that you remember how great the terror will be then before the judgement seat of the Lord.

The secrets of all hearts will be laid bare, all shameful acts revealed. The skies will be filled with avenging fire and there will be mercy for none, king or commoner, rich or poor. No words can express how dreadful the torture of hell will be, and there will be no consolation, no escape. The only sounds will be of weeping and wailing. How blessed will be those who avoid all this, he declares. Heaven is presented as a place of blissful absences: no sorrow or pain, no old age or decay, no hunger or thirst, no despair or grief, no storm or lightning. In the vision with which the poet ends, a mighty host of the blessed is led by the Virgin Mary.

Bede is associated also with what is the shortest and simplest of the Old English poems on Judgement Day. As he lay dying at Jarrow in 735, according to a letter written by Cuthbert, one of his followers, Bede recited various devotional texts in Latin and also a poem in English (his native language). Cuthbert gives us the text of this, and we know it now as *Bede's Death Song*.[8] On the question of whether Bede actually composed poems in the vernacular, and thus probably this one, or was simply familiar with those composed by others, Cuthbert's letter is ambiguous. Whatever the case, the *Death Song* is one of the earliest known Old English poems, roughly contemporary with

*Cædmon's Hymn* and, like the latter, it is in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English in its earliest manuscript version. Here we give it in West Saxon.

> For ðam nedfere    næni wyrðeð
> ðancsnotera    ðonne him ðearf sy
> to gehicgenne,    ær his heonengange,
> hwæt his gaste    godes oððe yfeles
> æfter deaðdæge    demed weorðe.

> Faced by the unavoidable journey, no one can be wiser of mind than they need to be than to consider, before their leaving here, what, after their death, will be judged against their soul in respect of good or evil.

Although the poem is charged with the themes of judgement that we have been describing – the awful nakedness of the soul before God, the terrors of hell waiting for those found wanting in their earthly life – they are left unstated. For this is a reflection made at the point when it is too late for remedies and, as Cuthbert puts it, 'the soul's dread departure from the body' is about to occur. The poem's rhetorical force comes from its syntactical inevitability. A single sentence proceeds from that 'unavoidable journey' to 'will be judged' in a slide to judgement which is relentless and admits of no stay. Yet it is delivered with a certain diffidence, expressed in the understatement of the negative pronoun, 'no one', and the periphrasis of the suggestion (which verges on irony) that to think about one's conduct is by no means too clever a thing to do. The underlying message is all the more brutal: everyone who does *not* to think about their conduct, before time runs out, is culpably stupid. And that 'no one / everyone' of course includes Bede himself. In the merciless levelling process of the last day, even the devout Christian teacher and peerless biblical scholar cannot escape a reckoning. Much of Cuthbert's description of Bede's death is hagiographical in tone, but such details as this sombre utterance in his mother tongue are surely authentic, and the great man's humility is both touching and instructive.

## NOTES

1. See R. M. Liuzza, 'Prayers and/or Charms Addressed to the Cross', in *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies in Honor of George Hardin Brown*, ed. K. L. Jolly, C. E. Karkov and S. L. Keefer (Morgantown, WV, 2008), pp. 276–320.
2. They are edited in *The Old English Version of the Gospels*, ed. R. M. Liuzza, 2 vols., EETS 304 and 314 (Oxford, 1994–2000); see also his 'Who Read the Gospels in Old English?', in *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honour of Fred C. Robinson*, ed. P. S. Baker and N. Howe (Toronto, 1998), pp. 3–24.

3. For the text of this homily and others on New Testament themes, see *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series, Text*, ed. M. R. Godden, EETS ss 5 (London, 1979). The homilies may be read in translation in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: the First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. B. Thorpe, 2 vols. (London, 1844–6).

4. For a wide selection of essays relating to these poems, see *A Companion to the Exeter Christ Poems*, ed. C. Esser and B. D. Gilchrist (Exeter, forthcoming).

5. For discussion of this and other 'cross' riddles, and alternative solutions, see J. Frederick, 'At Cross Purposes: Six Riddles in the Exeter Book', in *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Jolly, Karkov and Keefer, pp. 49–76.

6. On the cult of the cross, see the introduction to *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. M. Swanton (Manchester and New York, 1970), and S. McEntire, 'The Devotional Context of the Cross before A.D. 1000', in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven, CT and London, 2002). On the pervasive influence of the poem on Anglo-Saxon culture, see A. Orchard, '*The Dream of the Rood*: Cross-References', in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. S. Zacher and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2009), pp. 225–53.

7. See G. D. Caie, *The Judgement Day Theme in Old English Poetry* (Copenhagen, 1976).

8. For Cuthbert's letter, see *HE*, pp. 580–7; on the poem, *Three Northumbrian Poems: Cædmon's Hymn, Bede's Death Song and the Leiden Riddle*, ed. A. H. Smith, rev. edn (Exeter, 1978), and E. G. Stanley, 'The Oldest English Poetry Now Extant', in his *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature* (Toronto, 1987), pp. 115–38.

# 14

MICHAEL LAPIDGE

# The saintly life in Anglo-Saxon England

If a modern English traveller could suddenly be transported back a thousand years into an Anglo-Saxon church, he would be astonished at the differences between that and the churches with which he is familiar today: here, the atmosphere inside most churches is one of calm and beatific silence; there, the prevailing atmosphere would be one of tumult and squalor, the church packed day and night with crowds of diseased and penitent persons seeking release from their sufferings through the intercession of the saint whose shrine they were besieging. A memorable picture of such tumult is given by Lantfred, a foreign monk at Winchester in the 970s, who, describing the miracles performed through the agency of St Swithun – then recently discovered and recently translated – shows us the inside of the Old Minster crammed with persons afflicted with appalling physical deformities, festering wounds, blind, paralytic, deaf, dumb, mutilated indescribably by the just process of the law or by self-imposed penitential torture, all clustered around the shrine of St Swithun, lying there day and night moaning in pain and praying aloud for deliverance from their suffering. On occasion, Lantfred reports, the church's precincts were so plugged with diseased persons that they had periodically to be cleared to make way for the clergy. Whereas today such appalling sights of disease, deformity and suffering are hidden from sight in sanitized hospitals, a thousand years ago they were on full view, every day of the year, in every church which had a saint deemed to be capable of performing a miraculous cure.[1]

The focus of the people's attention in an Anglo-Saxon church, therefore, was the shrine of the saint who could intercede with God on behalf of the petitioning sufferer or sinner. We should not imagine that the saints were conceived abstractly as disembodied spirits. Theirs was a physical and palpable presence: that is to say, the saint was physically present in each shrine insofar as that shrine contained a relic of his/her body – a bone, a fingernail, a lock of hair, whatever.[2] And contact with the saint's miraculous power could be established by touching that relic. Accordingly, reliquaries were

constructed so that the petitioner could have physical access to the saint – by reaching in and touching the relic, or at least by seeing it. Saints' relics were highly prized by their ecclesiastical owners, not only for their efficacy in curing illnesses, but also for their economic benefits, for it goes without saying that, if a rich man were to be cured by the saint, he would properly show gratitude by making a donation to the church which housed that saint's relics. Given this economic dimension, it is hardly surprising that trade in relics was big business. The market for relics was a lucrative one, with both royal and ecclesiastical collectors competing for the prizes. We know from Bede, for example, that Bishop Acca of Hexham acquired relics of apostles and martyrs from diverse sources, built altars to house them, and then assembled a vast collection of hagiographical books to explain their lives and passions (*HE* v.20); he possibly used this vast collection to compile what served as the Latin exemplar of the *Old English Martyrology* (on which see below).[3] On the other hand, a famous royal collector was King Æthelstan (d. 939), who is known to have amassed a huge collection of relics, and then distributed them to various churches. Exeter, for example, claimed to possess a long list of relics, the 'greatest part of which' was allegedly donated by Æthelstan. These include the usual relics of Christ (parts of His manger, cross, sepulchre, soil from the Mount of Olives, etc.), of the apostles (bits of the hair and beard of St Peter), and of the martyrs (a stone that killed St Stephen, a coal that fried St Laurence), especially their bones. Indeed Exeter boasted relics of all the best-known martyrs: Quirinus, Crisantus and Daria, Sebastian, Vitalis, Apollinaris, Quintinus, Cornelius, Marcellus, Vitus, Nicasius, Tiburtius, Ciriacus, Heresius, and so on and on (these are just the martyrs, by the way: Exeter possessed an even longer list of relics of confessors and virgins, but I omit them). From a relic-collector's point of view, it might be said that Exeter had, with King Æthelstan's help, acquired a complete set. The same was true of Glastonbury; and no doubt of many other English houses at that time. Given the market for relics, it is not surprising that unusual measures were sometimes adopted to meet the demand. Simple theft, for example, was a frequent resort of those seeking to acquire relics.[4] Thus during the course of King Eadred's assault on the (Danish) kingdom of York in 948 the church at Ripon was burned, and the archbishop of Canterbury – Oda, who had accompanied the king on this expedition – took the opportunity of stealing the relics of St Wilfrid and taking them back to Canterbury, thereby sparking off a dispute which raged for centuries. Later in the tenth century a cleric of St Neots in Cornwall stole the relics of his patron saint and headed east; once the theft was discovered he was hotly pursued by the rest of the clergy, but the thief threw himself on the protection of a powerful landowner in Huntingdonshire and, with the king's intervention as well, the stolen relics

were allowed to remain in what became St Neots, Huntingdonshire. These are cases of theft of indubitable relics; but the hungry market and the prevalence of theft inevitably gave rise to fraudulent practices and to phoney, itinerant relic-peddlars. The Church was obliged to devise strict tests to verify the authenticity of relics offered for sale. Such a case occurred early in King Edgar's reign (959–75). Four relic salesmen from France came to the king claiming that they possessed the relics of St Audoenus (St Ouen). The king sent for his archbishop, Oda (he who had not balked at stealing the relics of St Wilfrid at Ripon!), who tested the relics by sending for a leper. When the archbishop, using the relics, made the sign of the cross over the leper, he was miraculously cured, and the relics were deemed authentic. How many fake relics failed to pass this or similar tests, the record does not allow us to say.[5]

The situation was aggravated by the fact that in the Anglo-Saxon period there were no controls on the process of canonization of a saint. It was not until the thirteenth century that canon law (in the 'Decretals' of Pope Gregory IX) stipulated a judicial process to assess the claims to sanctity of any alleged saint. Such control was the response of the Church's central authority to local abuses. In our period, however, there were no such controls. The essential criterion for the creation of a new saint was the efficacy of his relics. If a man or woman were known to have lived a holy life (or better perhaps: not to have lived an evil life), and, after death, to have accomplished miraculous cures through his or her relics, the saint could be received straightway into the liturgical observance of the local church which first recognized the efficacy. There was frequently intense competition, especially in the late Anglo-Saxon period, between local churches to advance the claims of the saints whose relics they possessed; and this competition encouraged the creation of new saints. We can see the process at work in the case of St Swithun, the discovery of whose relics was narrated by Lantfred. Swithun was an utterly obscure ninth-century bishop of Winchester whose only claim to attention was that he was buried in a conspicuous tomb facing the west door of the Old Minster. In 969, Swithun appeared in a dream to a certain crippled smith, instructing him to go to his [Swithun's] tomb if he wished to receive his cure, and to report the dream vision to a local cleric, who in turn was requested to report the matter to Æthelwold, the bishop of Winchester: he did as instructed and was duly cured. In the same year a wretched, hunch-backed cleric was also visited in dreams by two angelic youths who instructed him to go to Swithun's tomb and pray there for his cure; he spent a night in prayer at the tomb and was overcome with sleep; when he awoke, he was miraculously cured of his deformity. After discussion with the monks it was determined that Swithun was indeed responsible for these miracles; accordingly, on 15 July 971, Bishop Æthelwold exhumed the remains of St Swithun and translated the

relics to a shrine within the Old Minster. Miraculous cures followed in swift succession, and as the report of these cures spread, people came from further and further away: three blind women from the Isle of Wight, a blind woman from Bedfordshire, a paralytic from London, then sixteen blind people from London, then twenty-five people from all over England cured in one day, then thirty-six in the space of three days, then 124 in the space of a fortnight. Within a year or so, St Swithun's reputation as miracle-worker was firmly established, and Lantfred was set to work to record the translation (that is, the relocation and consecration of relics) and the miracles it had produced.[6] By this point, we may surmise, money was rolling into Winchester coffers in gratitude for all the cures. In any event, the translation of St Swithun in 971 established the pattern for future translations. Accordingly, twenty-five years later, in 996, when Bishop Æthelwold himself had been dead for twelve years, *he* appeared in a dream to a certain citizen of Wallingford, instructing the man to go to Winchester and report the vision. The man did so; Æthelwold's tomb was opened (by now, presumably, the flesh had decayed from the bones) and his relics translated; miracles followed; a local monk – Wulfstan, the precentor of the Old Minster – wrote them down; and so the pattern was repeated.[7] Thus were SS Swithun and Æthelwold installed as patron saints in Winchester. Once installed, their feast days would have been commemorated annually with masses and, on the vigil of these feasts, with prayers and readings during the Night Office, all suitably composed for the purpose. This is what the process of canonization entailed in Anglo-Saxon England; and we may surmise that the same process occurred at other English churches which claimed to possess the relics of a patron saint. That there were numerous such churches is clear from a document called 'Information concerning God's Saints who Rest in England' ('Secgan be þam Godes sanctum þe on Engla lande ærost reston'), which lists some fifty churches each of which possessed one or more English patron saints.[8]

As saints, Swithun and Æthelwold are relatively well known, above all because they found hagiographers to record their miracles. But there were numerous lesser-known Anglo-Saxon saints whose translations were not recorded, and who are often little more than names to us.[9] Furthermore, local (English) saints formed only a tiny proportion of the saints who were venerated at any one church. The total number of saints in question is not easily calculable. For the universal (Western/Latin) Church, the number must have run to thousands. For England it is possible to form a rough estimate of the numbers involved by looking at surviving litanies of the saints.[10] A litany is a particular form of prayer which consists of invocations to Christ the Lord ('Kyrie eleison'), asking him to pray for us, followed by invocations of individual saints, naming them and asking them in turn to pray for us. The

number of saints named depended on the function for which the litany was intended: since they were chanted during processions (at, say, the dedication of a church), they might need to be extended indefinitely, and the extension was accomplished by inserting more names. Thus some fairly long litanies have come down to us. Usually the saints invoked are subdivided into patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins, and the longest Anglo-Saxon litany (London, British Library, Harley 863, from Exeter) includes some 125 martyrs, 100 confessors and 70 virgins. From these figures – and bearing in mind that different litanies named different saints, even if they usually have a certain core in common – we may suppose that some 300 saints (not counting patriarchs and apostles) were culted in Anglo-Saxon England.

Who were all these saints? Who *were* Crispinus and Crispinianus, Vitus and Vitalis, Tiburtius and Tranquillinus, Narcissus and Nicasius, Eufemia and Eugenia, Potentiana and Emerentiana, and all the rest? Who indeed were the less strange-sounding martyrs with which most litanies begin – Linus, Cletus and Clement? One may suspect that, of the countless Anglo-Saxons who recited the litany as an act of private devotion, few if any will have known the identity of all the saints whose aid was being implored. Nevertheless, it was the Church's responsibility to control all these saints – to know when their feast days fell and how they achieved martyrdom or sanctity, for only with such knowledge could they be petitioned effectively for help. We gain direct insight into the religious observance of the Anglo-Saxon Church by looking at the books pertaining to the cult of saints.[11]

The most simple and straightforward way of recording the feast days of individual saints was that of entering their names in a liturgical calendar. The calendar was set out according to the Julian year (i.e. beginning in January), with a separate manuscript page devoted to each month, and a separate line for each day of the month, in Roman reckoning (i.e. counting from ides, nones and kalends), with the days entered in the left-hand column. The name of the individual saint was then entered against his 'birthday' or *dies natalis* (not the day on which he was born into this world, but that on which he was 'born' into eternal life, i.e. died). So a typical entry consisted merely of date plus name (in the genitive). By consulting a calendar, one could see at a glance what saints' feast days fell in any particular month, and so organize liturgical celebrations accordingly. Some twenty-seven calendars survive from Anglo-Saxon England.[12] The earliest is of eighth-century date (the famous 'Calendar of St Willibrord'), but most date from the eleventh century. The 'Calendar of St Willibrord' is evidently a book that was used for the personal devotions of Willibrord (the Yorkshire saint who converted the Frisians, established the metropolitan see of Utrecht, founded the monastery of Echternach in present-day Luxembourg and died in 739) insofar as it records the feast days of

colleagues and friends alongside those of saints of the universal Church; but the eleventh-century calendars are mostly institutional rather than personal, and reflect the practices of the individual churches to which they belonged. No two are alike in every detail, and from them we can get a clear notion of the diversity which obtained with respect to the cult of saints in late Anglo-Saxon England: while there was an agreed common core of the best-known saints, each church had its own patron saint and its own preferred commemorations. Only in comparatively recent times has the central authority of the Church stipulated a universal practice in these matters.

In the early period the number of saints culted by any one church was considerably smaller, and hence more manageable, than was to be the case in the tenth and eleventh centuries. One could conceivably have committed the calendar of one's local church to memory, for ease of reference if for no other reason. However, a liturgical calendar will have been a fairly intractable object to memorize, and it is not surprising that someone should have hit upon the idea of reducing a church's calendar to the memorizable confines of a poem.[13] At York, sometime in the late eighth century, an anonymous poet attempted to versify his church's calendar in Latin hexameters. The resulting poem, called the 'Metrical Calendar of York', consisted of eighty-two lines; normally there is a line devoted to each saint, and each line contains both the saint's name and the date (in Roman reckoning) of his feast. Here, for example, are the lines for November:

> At its beginning November shines with a multi-faceted jewel:
> It gleams with the praise of All Saints.
> Martin of Tours ascends the stars on the ides.
> Thecla finished her life on the fifteenth kalends.
> But Cecilia worthily died with glory on the tenth kalends.
> On the ninth kalends we joyfully venerate the feast of Clement.
> On the eighth kalends Chrysogonus rejoices with his vital weaponry.
> Andrew is rightly venerated by the world on the day before the kalends.

As poetry, this is pretty turgid stuff; but its utility was obvious, and the York poem enjoyed enormously wide circulation on the Continent, where – with suitable additions and deletions – it was tailored to the needs of many churches. It also exercised considerable influence at home: in the early years of the tenth century an anonymous poet, using the 'Metrical Calendar of York' as his model, expanded the frame so that each of the 365 days of the year has a commemoration (often of saints so obscure as to defy identification); and a century later a poet at Ramsey used this and the York poem to produce a metrical calendar that is a valuable index of his monastery's observance in the eleventh century. Nor is it surprising that the idea of

composing a metrical calendar should have occurred to a vernacular poet. There survives an Old English metrical calendar of 231 lines' length, copied in one of the manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The Old English Metrical Calendar records twenty-eight liturgical feasts, mostly those of the universal Church (it also includes some non-liturgical dates, such as the beginning of summer and winter). The dates are set out serially, with an indication of the length of intervals, rather than by Roman reckoning. Here again is an example taken from November:

> Þæs ymb feower niht
> þætte Martinus   mære geleorde,
> wer womma leas   wealdend sohte,
> upengla weard.   Þænne embe eahta niht
> and feowerum   þætte fan gode
> besenctun on sægrund   sigefæstne wer,
> on brime haran,   þe iu beorna fela
> Clementes oft   clypiað to þearfe.          (207–14)

It was four nights on that glorious Martin died, the blameless man, sought the Almighty Ruler, the Lord of angels; and eight nights later, and four besides, that enemies of God drowned on the sea-floor, in the deep, the victorious white-haired man, the good Clement, to whom many people pray in times of need.

The seven feasts recorded for November in the 'Metrical Calendar of York' have been reduced to four in the Old English Metrical Calendar (in addition to the feasts of Martin and Clement it includes All Saints and St Andrew); moreover, the Old English poet has included a detail about St Clement's martyrdom – his drowning – from a source other than a calendar (we shall soon see what this source may have been). But the most striking aspect of the Old English poem is that the author has strictly excluded any feasts of purely local observance: it is as if he were trying to provide a list of the most important feasts that were observed nationally (thus St Augustine, apostle of the English is included, as is Pope Gregory the Great who sent him: but no other English saint). The fact that the poem is composed in English may indicate that it was intended for a layman; and the reference to the king in the final lines may suggest further that the layman in question was the king:

> Nu ge findan magon
> haligra tiida   þe man healdan sceal,
> swa bebugeð gebod   geond Brytenricu
> Sexna kyninges   on þas sylfan tiid.          (228–31)

Now you can find the feast days which should be observed, insofar as the stipulation of the Saxon king extends, at the present time, throughout Britain.

It would be a matter of great excitement if we could identify the king who concerned himself in this way with the liturgical calendar; but unfortunately no such identification is possible in the present state of our knowledge.

Calendars, then, provide the name of the saint and his feast day, but usually nothing more. Somewhat more information could be found in the martyrology.[14] In essence the martyrology was a reference book set out according to the calendar year: for each day it gave the date (in Roman reckoning) and the place of martyrdom (or in the case of confessors, the place where the tomb was located), and then the name of the saint, normally in the genitive. The martyrology had a specific liturgical function, at least in the later Anglo-Saxon period: as a result of the liturgical reforms of Carolingian churchmen (which were subsequently adopted by the tenth-century English Benedictine reformers), the martyrology was read daily when monks or canons assembled at chapter each morning, after Prime or morrow mass, in order to make clear what the daily devotions were to be. It goes almost without saying that the martyrology was therefore a text subject to continual revision designed to bring it into line with the observances of any particular monastic house or cathedral chapter; and therefore that no two martyrologies are the same. Nevertheless, the martyrology from which all later martyrologies ultimately descend is the 'Hieronymian' or 'Jeromian' Martyrology, so called because it was falsely ascribed to St Jerome, but was in fact a work compiled first in Italy in the fifth century and then redacted in Gaul in the sixth century. The earliest surviving manuscript was written, probably at Echternach, under the direction of St Willibrord, and is now bound up with the 'Calendar of St Willibrord' which I mentioned earlier. The 'Jeromian' Martyrology has entries for every day of the year, beginning on 25 December. Its nature will be clear from one entry (I give that for 23 November, the feast of St Clement, which we have seen to be commemorated in the Old English Metrical Calendar):

> The ninth kalends of November (= 23 November): at Rome, Clement the bishop; and in the cemetery (at Rome), Maximus (and) Felicity; and in Cappadocia, Niceanus, Chrysogonus (and) St Mark the bishop; in Caesarea in Cappadocia, Verocianus (and) Eutyches; at Alexandria, Peter the bishop; in Etruria, St Muscola … etc.

The information conveyed here is skeletal, telegraphic; and one can imagine that the need was soon felt for a somewhat more expansive treatment of the saints mentioned against each day. The scholar who first responded to this need was Bede who, by consulting various historical sources, was able to amplify many of the entries in the 'Jeromian' Martyrology, and thereby to create the first 'historical' or 'narrative' martyrology. Bede's Martyrology

contained 114 entries, and began with 1 January (rather than with 25 December); its nature can be seen from the entry for 23 November:

> 23 November, at Rome, the feast of St Clement, the bishop who, at the Emperor Trajan's request, was sent into exile in the Pontus (= the Black Sea). While there, because he converted many to the faith through his miracles and teaching, he was cast into the sea with an anchor tied to his neck. But as his disciples prayed the sea receded three miles, and they found his body in a stone coffin within a marble oratory, and the anchor lying nearby.

Bede presumably started with the skeletal entry in the 'Jeromian Martyrology', which was available to him in a version very closely related to that in the Willibrord manuscript; but he amplified it by recourse to a *Passio S. Clementis*, which contained the anecdote concerning Clement's death and the discovery of his body. The result is that, through the addition of these anecdotal details, the feast of St Clement is made slightly more memorable (we have seen that the author of the Old English Metrical Calendar added an oblique allusion to the same anecdote in his entry for St Clement: perhaps he got it from Bede, or directly from the *passio*). It is not surprising, therefore, that Bede's Martyrology enjoyed enormously wide circulation. However, because he had provided entries for less than a third of the calendar year, it attracted so many additions and interpolations that – in the absence of a manuscript in Bede's own handwriting – it is never possible to be sure that an entry was actually written by Bede in the form in which it has come down to us. Nevertheless Bede's Martyrology stands at the head of all later 'narrative' martyrologies, and as such has influenced the form of the martyrology used by the present-day Roman Catholic Church.

Another narrative martyrology, which for its range of learning bears comparison with Bede's, is the so-called *Old English Martyrology*.[15] This work has every appearance of being a vernacular translation of a (lost) Latin martyrology which, in turn, was very possibly compiled by Bede's contemporary and ecclesiastical superior Acca, bishop of Hexham, during the years 731–40 (see above, p. 252). The *Old English Martyrology* consists of 238 entries, some of them fairly extensive. Unlike Bede, but like the 'Jeromian' Martyrology, the Old English martyrologist begins his work on 25 December; but in other respects it is clear that he was aware of Bede's work, even if he did not follow it in detail. The author of the *Old English Martyrology* – or of its hypothetical Latin antecedent – was evidently a scholar with an independent cast of mind, for it would seem that he often used an entry in Bede as a point of departure, but consulted his sources afresh and was thereby able to construct a much more informative entry even than that found in Bede. Compare his entry for St Clement:

On the twenty-third day of the month is the feast of the pope, St Clement; St Peter himself consecrated him as pope and gave him the same power that Christ had given him, so that he had the key of the realms of heaven and power over hell. By his prayer this Clement caused water to come up from the earth where formerly no fountain had been. The Emperor Trajan sent his general, Aufidianus by name; he urged this Clement to forswear Christ, but was unable to turn his mind. Then he commanded an anchor to be fastened to his neck and to throw him into the sea. Christians stood weeping on the shore, and then the sea dried up over [three] miles. Then the Christians went into the sea, and there they found a stone house prepared by the Lord, where the body of Clement was placed in a stone coffin, and the anchor with which he had been thrown into the sea was put near it. Every year since, the sea offered a dry path for seven days to the people coming to his church. The church is in the sea three miles from the land, and it is to the east of the country of Italy. There a woman once forgot her child sleeping in the church, and the sea flowed around the church. When after the space of a year the people came there again on St Clement's day, they found the child alive and sleeping in the church; and it departed with its mother.

This entry is woven together from several sources. The notice that Clement was consecrated by St Peter is drawn from the *Liber pontificalis* (an annalistic history of the papacy), to which a biblical reference (from Matthew XVI.19) was added. The account of Clement's martyrdom was taken from the anonymous *Passio S. Clementis*, which Bede had previously used. The miracle of the sleeping child (not found in Bede) derives originally from Gregory of Tours's *Liber miraculorum*, but may have been taken by the martyrologist from an intermediate source. In some respects the Old English account is less detailed than Bede (the detail of Clement's exile in the Pontus is omitted, so that it is not clear where the miracle of the fountain occurred; and the vague reference to the land 'east of the country of Italy' is an imprecision which Bede would not have tolerated); but overall it allows a clearer picture of why St Clement was worthy of veneration. For this reason, and in the absence of its lost Latin exemplar, the *Old English Martyrology* may be regarded as one of the most original contributions to Anglo-Saxon hagiography.

By virtue of its extent, the Old English martyrologist's entry for St Clement verges on another genre of hagiography, namely the saint's Life.[16] There are two broad categories of saint's Life: the *passio* ('passion') and the *vita* ('life'). The *passio* was the literary form appropriate for a saint who had been martyred for his/her faith, whereas the *vita* properly pertained to a confessor (that is, a saint whose impeccable service to God constituted a metaphorical, not a real, martyrdom). By *passio* is meant an account in which the saint, usually of noble birth, adopts Christianity in days when the state government is pagan; the saint is brought before a local magistrate or governor and asked

to recant his/her Christianity by sacrificing to the gods; the saint refuses to do so, even on the pain of innumerable tortures (normally described in excruciating detail), and is eventually killed, usually by beheading.[17] By *vita* is understood a work which takes the following form: the saint is born of noble stock; his birth is accompanied by miraculous portents; as a youth he excels at learning and reveals that he is destined for saintly activity; he turns from secular to holy life (often forsaking his family) and so proceeds through the various ecclesiastical grades; he reveals his sanctity while still on earth by performing various miracles; eventually he sees his death approaching and, after instructing his disciples or followers, dies calmly; after his death many miracles occur at his tomb. Of course any number of variants is possible within these basic frameworks; but the framework itself is invariable. Accordingly, if a particular saint were deemed to be worthy of particular veneration, a *passio* or *vita* in the accepted form would be required so that it could be read out on the appropriate feast day, either in refectory while the monks or clerics dined in silence, or else during the Night Office on the vigil of the saint's day, when the *passio* or *vita* would be distributed in separate lections, each lection being punctuated by prayer and psalmody.

These are the institutional uses of saints' *vitae*; they could of course be read any time as an act of private devotion. We have seen that in the early Middle Ages the universal Church culted an enormous number of saints, perhaps thousands, and it is not surprising that there should survive a substantial number of saints' Lives from this period: C. W. Jones once estimated that some 600 survive from the period before 900. How many of these were known in England at any one time or place is difficult to say: Aldhelm used perhaps as many as thirty individual texts; Bede, perhaps a similar, or smaller, number; the Old English martyrologist (or his Latin predecessor) somewhat more, perhaps as many as eighty *passiones*, many of which could have been contained in a single legendary. Some of the texts were of course more widely read than others: important above all were Sulpicius Severus's *vita* of St Martin, a *vita* of St Anthony by Athanasius, and Jerome's three *vitae* of Malchus, Hilarion and the hermit Paul of Thebes. These works in particular were to prove immensely influential when, as soon happened, Anglo-Saxon authors began to compose *vitae* to commemorate their own native saints. In the early eighth century a number of English saints were thought of sufficient importance to merit Latin *vitae* of their own: Cuthbert, Guthlac, Ceolfrith and Wilfrid. English saints of the continental mission were similarly commemorated: one Willibald wrote a *vita* of Boniface, the Englishman known as the 'apostle' of Germany who was martyred by the Frisians in 754; an English nun at Heidenheim named Hygeburg wrote a *vita* of two brothers from Waltham who were active in the Bonifatian mission in

Germany; and Alcuin (d. 804) commemorated his ancestor Willibrord (who, as we saw, was instrumental in converting the Frisians) with a *vita*. Then in the tenth century, as cults of local English saints began to grow, a number of *vitae* were composed: we have already mentioned Lantfred's account of St Swithun and Wulfstan's of St Æthelwold. At the same time an Anglo-Saxon who had lived much of his life abroad wrote a Life of Archbishop Dunstan (d. 988), and the foreign scholar Abbo, living at Ramsey between 985 and 987, composed a *passio* of King Edmund of East Anglia who was martyred by the Danes in 869; in turn, Abbo's English pupil Byrhtferth composed *vitae* of Bishop Oswald of Worcester and York (d. 992) and St Ecgwine, an early eighth-century bishop of Worcester who was founder of Evesham Abbey. By the mid-eleventh century various anonymous *vitae* of other English saints were in existence (Neot, Rumwold, Birinus, Kenelm, Indract and Swithun yet again). Finally, the later eleventh century is characterized by the activities of professional hagiographers such as Goscelin and Folcard, both Flemish monks from Saint-Bertin, who went around England composing saints' Lives on commission for various religious houses; a very substantial number of works by these two authors survives, but they have not yet been properly catalogued or edited.

It was the overall intention of any hagiographer to demonstrate that his saintly subject belonged indisputably to the universal community of saints, and this entailed modelling each *vita* closely on those of earlier authors, especially Sulpicius Severus, Athanasius and Jerome. Thus, for example, the anonymous Lindisfarne author derives his description of St Cuthbert verbatim from Sulpicius's *vita* of St Martin; many episodes in Felix's Life of St Guthlac are based on the *vita* of Anthony and on Jerome's *vita* of Paul the hermit; in the tenth century Wulfstan bases many episodes of his *vita* of St Æthelwold on Sulpicius's Life of Martin. The list of examples could be protracted indefinitely. But there are very good reasons for the dependence, sometimes verbatim, on earlier models. It is not so much a matter of plagiarism as of ensuring that the local saint is seen clearly to possess the attributes of, and to belong undoubtedly to, the universal community of saints.

In the first instance the saint's *vita* would have existed as a separate book or *libellus*. Often collections of material pertaining to one saint were gathered together to form such a book: a collection pertaining to St Martin, for example, was known as a *martinellus*, and such collections were very common. An early ninth-century *libellus* devoted to St Guthlac has come down to us as Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 307, and we have the fragmentary remains of another Guthlac *libellus* (London, British Library, Royal 4.A.XIV). A beautifully written manuscript devoted entirely to *vitae* of

St Cuthbert was given by King Æthelstan to St Cuthbert's community in the early tenth century (now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 183). From the late tenth century an equally lavish book survives which is devoted entirely to *vitae* of St Swithun (London, British Library, Royal 15.C.VII). No doubt there were once more. However, from the eighth century onwards it became increasingly common to gather individual saints' Lives into large collections, at first arranged randomly – as in the earliest known English example of such a collection, an early ninth-century manuscript now in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 10861) – but later arranged according to the Church year. Such a collection is called either a 'legendary' (implying that its contents were meant to be read, either institutionally or privately) or a 'passional' (originally implying a collection of *passiones* of martyrs, but later extended to include any sort of saint's *vita*).[18] The impulse to collect together saints' *vitae* into anthologies will no doubt have been initiated by the example of three immensely influential compilations: Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* – which at King Alfred's suggestion was translated into English by Werferth, bishop of Worcester, in the 890s – provides an anthology of miracle stories of local Italian saints, of whom the most important is St Benedict (whose life and works form the subject of Book II of the *Dialogi*); Gregory of Tours in his *Libri miraculorum* provides brief digests of the life and miracles of a large number of Gaulish saints (one book is devoted to martyrs, one to confessors, and four to the life and miracles of St Martin); and Aldhelm, who in his massive prose *De uirginitate* provided an anthology of nearly fifty saintly Lives, some of them biblical, but many drawn from *passiones* of the martyrs and from early saints' *vitae*. There is good evidence that all these three works were widely studied in Anglo-Saxon England, even though they appear to have had little impact on the liturgy. By this I mean: excepting St Benedict, none of the Italian saints discussed in Gregory's *Dialogi* ever figures in an Anglo-Saxon calendar; very few of Gregory of Tours's Gaulish saints were actively venerated in England; and many of the saints treated by Aldhelm – such as Narcissus of Jerusalem or Ammon of Nitria – appear in no Anglo-Saxon calendar. In other words, these three works were extra-liturgical, intended as anthologies of edifying stories of sanctity.

However, unlike anthologies such as these, the impulse to compile a legendary or passional was primarily liturgical, in that the readings were normally set out according to the Church year, so that they could be used in combination with a calendar or martyrology for any particular feast. The legendary which was to have the greatest influence on Anglo-Saxon observance was the so-called 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary', an enormous collection of some 165 saints' *vitae* arranged in order of the calendar year beginning on 1 January. The 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary' was apparently compiled in

Northern France or Flanders in the late ninth century; but it is preserved uniquely in English manuscripts, and this is an indication of its importance for Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Above all, it was drawn on extensively by Ælfric, who is the most important hagiographer of the late Anglo-Saxon period.[19]

Before discussing Ælfric's hagiography, however, a few observations are necessary by way of clarification. The Church year was made up of two great cycles of feasts, the *temporale* and the *sanctorale*. The *temporale* consists of the movable feasts, most of them keyed to Easter (which falls on a different Sunday every year), including Ascension, Pentecost (Whitsun), and so on. The *sanctorale* consists of the fixed feasts, celebrated on the very same date each year (no matter what the day of the week), including Christmas and all the saints' days. The two cycles were interleaved, as it were, but – given the mobility of Easter – the interleaving was different each year. As a matter of convenience, therefore, the *temporale* was usually kept separate from the *sanctorale* in sacramentaries and missals of the later Anglo-Saxon period. It will be clear from this that the legendary or passional belonged exclusively to the *sanctorale*. Now Ælfric composed three extensive collections of reading material for the Church year: two series of *Catholic Homilies* (*sermones catholici*) and one series of so-called *Lives of Saints*. In spite of the names, all three collections contain both homilies (that is, extended explications of the *pericope*, or Gospel lesson, for any feast) and saints' Lives (in the sense I have defined them earlier). (Confusingly, some of the items, especially in the *Catholic Homilies*, consist of a homily followed by a saint's Life, or vice versa.) Furthermore, all three collections contain material intended both for the *temporale* and for the *sanctorale* (those intended for the fixed feasts of the *sanctorale* are always prefixed with a Roman date reckoning): thus in *CH* I, eighteen of forty items are intended for the *sanctorale;* in *CH* II, sixteen of forty; and in the *Lives of Saints*, all except five are for the *sanctorale*. If we also include the one stray saint's Life (St Vincent), we have sixty-two items intended by Ælfric for the *sanctorale*. Some items are duplicated (St Stephen; St Martin) and Christmas Day is triplicated, inasmuch as it stands at the head of each of the three collections. If we subtract these, the resulting fifty-six feasts are distributed evenly through the year, and it is possible to reconstruct the liturgical calendar which Ælfric must have been using; it would also be possible, in theory, to combine Ælfric's various Lives so as to constitute a single passional. Although Ælfric himself apparently never did this, it is interesting to note that two later manuscript passionals (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius D. xvii, of the mid-eleventh century, and Cambridge, University Library, Ii.1.33, of the twelfth) contain such combinations of Ælfrician saints' Lives. In any event our reconstructed calendar permits several deductions about how Ælfric conceived the cult of saints. In

the first place, the majority of the feasts commemorated by Ælfric are those of the universal Church (in this respect, Ælfric resembles the poet of the Old English Metrical Calendar): there are no local or eccentric saints in Ælfric's *sanctorale*. Ælfric does include Lives of six English saints (Cuthbert, Alban, King Oswald, King Edmund, Æthelthryth and Swithun); but by the time he was writing – in the last decade of the tenth century – all these were culted throughout England. Interestingly, Ælfric omits various French and Flemish saints who were evidently culted actively in tenth-century England (for example, Vedastus, Quintinus, Bertinus, Amandus and others), an omission which is curious in light of the prominence which these saints are accorded in the liturgical books associated with Bishop Æthelwold, Ælfric's mentor. He also omits Breton saints such as Iudoc and Machutus, who were culted at Winchester in his time. It would seem that Ælfric did not wish to venerate any saint in writing if there was the slightest doubt about that saint's universality. Minor and local saints had no place in Ælfric's *sanctorale*: he was concerned with the observance of the Catholic Church, as he conceived it.

Nevertheless, there are certain features of his *sanctorale* which strike one as peculiarities, especially if seen in the context of late Anglo-Saxon liturgical calendars.[20] To take one example: Ælfric provides a Life for St Eugenia, whose feast day he gives as 25 December; but there is no surviving Anglo-Saxon calendar with an entry for St Eugenia on that day. Why did Ælfric choose 25 December – of all days – for St Eugenia? The answer is that the Latin legendary which Ælfric was using as his source has a *vita* of St Eugenia on that day. The legendary in question was clearly the 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary', but in a form earlier than that which has come down to us in manuscript. In a very important study Patrick Zettel has shown that, both in the general question of Ælfric's choice of saints, and in the particular case of individual textual variants, Ælfric was following the 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary' in a form most closely related to that in a (now incomplete) twelfth-century manuscript in Hereford Cathedral Library (P.7.VI).[21] One text which Ælfric derived from this legendary is his Life of St Clement, which is included in the First Series of his *Catholic Homilies*. The *vita* included in the legendary for 23 November is the anonymous *Passio S. Clementis* which, as we have seen, was earlier used by the Old English martyrologist. It is therefore interesting to compare Ælfric's treatment of Clement with that of the martyrologist. Ælfric describes how Peter chose Clement as his successor; how (after increasing the Christian flock) he was denounced to the Emperor Trajan and exiled to labour in a stone quarry; how when he came to the quarry he miraculously discovered a fountain for the Christians imprisoned there; how through envy the pagans accused him and how Trajan sent one Aufidianus to punish him; how he was martyred by being cast into the sea

with an anchor on his neck; how subsequently the sea retreated so his disciples could reach the place of martyrdom, where miraculously they found the martyr's body in a stone coffin; and finally, how once a child was miraculously preserved inside this coffin for a full year, after the sea had come in and caught the worshippers unawares. Ælfric ends his Life of St Clement with a homiletic passage, explaining (by resort to Old and New Testament examples) why God should wish to kill his saints.

Ælfric's treatment is fuller and more coherent than that of the martyrologist. His account of the miracle of the fountain becomes comprehensible (in contrast to the martyrologist's telegraphic report), even though – like the martyrologist – he does not explain where Clement's exile was taking place. He follows the Latin text of the *passio* as he found it in the 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary', only departing from it on one occasion to add a cross-reference to a mention of Clement in another *vita* in the same legendary, namely in the *Passio S. Dionysii* (which Ælfric subsequently translated in his *Lives of Saints*). In the Life of Clement, as in all his English writings, Ælfric shows himself as a meticulous and accurate translator, unprepared to embellish his source in any way. His intention was simply to provide for lay readers an abbreviated legendary containing readings for those saints' days which he judged to be most universal.[22]

After Ælfric there was not much left for other Old English hagiographers to do. Although Ælfric had composed two Lives of St Martin (one of them extensive), an anonymous hagiographer produced yet another. An extensive version of the Seven Sleepers legend was also produced anonymously, even though Ælfric had treated this legend in his Second Series of *Catholic Homilies*. Lives were also composed for feasts in the *sanctorale* which Ælfric had treated: St Andrew, St Michael, SS Peter and Paul. Another translator, perhaps working in collaboration with Ælfric, produced a Life of St Eustace drawn on the *passio* of that saint in the 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary'. Certain saints who were culted on the Continent, but who had been omitted by Ælfric, also found hagiographers, such as St Pantaleon and St Quintin (of whose Old English Life a charred fragment survives). So, too, did several English saints omitted by Ælfric, such as Guthlac and Mildred, and the originally Breton saint, Machutus. In the very late eleventh century various saints, whose cults had only developed in England long after Ælfric's death, were commemorated with English Lives (St Giles, St Nicholas). In all, there are some twenty Old English Lives of saints in addition to those by Ælfric; but in sum they pale in contrast with Ælfric's achievement.

Thus far I have been speaking solely of Lives of saints in prose. But there is also a substantial corpus of verse hagiography, in both Latin and English, from the Anglo-Saxon period. Among the Latin verse Lives, Bede composed a metrical Life of Cuthbert (based on the anonymous Lindisfarne Life) in

addition to his prose Life, and Alcuin wrote a metrical Life of Willibrord to go alongside his prose Life. The later tenth century witnessed a burgeoning of metrical Latin saints' Lives: Frithegod of Canterbury produced a metrical version of Stephen's earlier Life of Wilfrid, and Wulfstan of Winchester did the same with Lantfred's account of the miracles of Swithun; we also have anonymous metrical Lives of Iudoc and Eustace from this period. One might well wonder why it was thought necessary to produce metrical Lives in addition to prose Lives. The answer is given by Alcuin in the preface to his *vita* of St Willibrord (which consisted of corresponding parts in prose and verse), where he explains that the prose is intended to be read out publicly to the members of an ecclesiastical community, but the verse is to be meditated upon in private by individual members of that community. It is clear that certain of the metrical Lives in Latin – especially Bede's Life of Cuthbert and Frithegod's Life of Wilfrid – were written with this end in view, since the difficulty of their diction makes them unapproachable except through long, careful and meditative study.

A number of saints' Lives in Old English verse has also come down to us, and it is interesting to ask whether these, too, might have been intended for private meditation by individual readers. But first it is necessary briefly to outline the corpus of Old English verse hagiography. Six poems are in question, of which three are by the enigmatic (and unidentifiable) poet who signs his poems with the runic signature 'Cyn(e)wulf' and who may have been writing in ninth-century Mercia: namely the poems called *Elene, Juliana* and *Fates of the Apostles*. Of the three remaining hagiographical poems, two are concerned with St Guthlac (*Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*) and one with the apostles Matthew and Andrew (*Andreas*). Of these six, however, only one – namely Cynewulf's *Juliana* – could properly be described as a saint's Life in the sense I have defined it. Of the others, *Elene* is an account of the search for and finding of the true cross in Jerusalem by Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine (who in a vision had seen the cross as a sign of forthcoming victory), and the conversion to Christianity of Judas, the Jew who eventually helped Helena to find the cross and who took the name Cyriacus in religion. Cynewulf's poem, which is based on the Latin *Acts* of St Cyriacus, might arguably have been intended as a meditation on the feast of the 'Finding of the True Cross' (*Inuentio crucis*) which was celebrated universally on 3 May and which is commemorated in all Anglo-Saxon liturgical calendars and in the Old English Metrical Calendar; but it is only a saint's Life insofar as it records the conversion of Judas/Cyriacus. Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles* is not properly speaking a saint's Life either; it is an English version of a Latin text which circulated widely in the Middle Ages called the *Breuiarium apostolorum*, which gave a brief digest of where each of the twelve apostles

conducted his apostolate, and how he died. Nor could the two anonymous Guthlac poems be described as saints' Lives. *Guthlac A* is a lengthy meditation on Guthlac's saintly virtue, his victory over demons and his reception by angels; but it has no narrative content and is in no sense a *vita*. It appears unrelated to Felix's Latin Life of Guthlac, except perhaps for the notice that Guthlac was a saint who was aided by the apostle Bartholomew. To judge from certain passages in the poem (412–20, 488–90), its intended audience was young monks who were in danger of being enticed by the pleasures of the world. *Guthlac B* is more closely based on Felix's Life of Guthlac, but it, too, could not be described as a saint's Life: it concerns itself solely with Guthlac's death and his anticipation of it during his last days, not with his life. But it could be read as a meditation – in the sense intended by Alcuin – on Guthlac's sanctity, appropriate for his feast on 11 April. The same cannot be said for *Andreas*, however. This lengthy poem, based on the apocryphal (that is, pseudo-biblical, but rejected by the Church as spurious) *Acts of Andrew and Matthew*, tells the story of the apostle Matthew's capture by hideous cannibals in the land of the Mermedonians, Andrew's divinely guided expedition to rescue Matthew, and his eventual conversion of the Mermedonians. As a story it has its merits, but it is non-liturgical (there is no feast for SS Matthew and Andrew) and non-hagiographical, insofar as it does not follow the conventional form of a saint's Life; it is precisely the sort of text which would have been rejected by Ælfric as heretical.

We are left, then, with only one Old English verse saint's Life which properly belongs to the genre, namely Cynewulf's *Juliana*. The poem concerns St Juliana, who was martyred under the emperor Maximianus (286–308). The story of her martyrdom is a conventional one: a wicked governor, one Heliseus, lusts after the virgin Juliana and seeks her in marriage; she, being devoted to Christ, spurns the marriage; she is compelled through various tortures (including being hung up by her hair) to make offerings to the gods, and is eventually executed. Although Juliana is not included either by Aldhelm in his *On Virginity* or by Ælfric, she was widely commemorated in Anglo-Saxon calendars on 16 February. Cynewulf's poem is closely based on the Latin *Passio S. Iulianae*, which is preserved in the aforementioned Latin passional written at Canterbury in the early ninth century and now preserved in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 10861),[23] as well as in the 'Cotton-Corpus Legendary'. Why Cynewulf should have chosen St Juliana as the subject for his poem is not immediately clear: possibly she was especially venerated by the church which he served. In any case we may suppose that the poem was intended for meditation – again, in Alcuin's sense of the word – on her feast day.

In the preceding discussion I have been concerned principally with the function of hagiography in general, rather than with the literary merits of individual saints' Lives. I would not wish to deny that individual Lives may have such merits: certainly Ælfric was the master of a terse and direct narrative style which, in his later saints' Lives at least, often approached poetry in his use of alliteration and rhythm. But if we assume that, because of these literary features, Ælfric's or Cynewulf's saints' Lives can be treated and enjoyed in isolation as we would enjoy, say, a Life from Dr Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, then we do great violation to their hagiographical intentions. Certainly Ælfric regarded himself as the apologist of the universal Church: and it would have been no compliment to tell him that his hagiography imparted individual characteristics to individual saints. On the contrary, Ælfric would wish his saints to be seen merely as vessels of God's divine design on earth, indistinguishable as such one from the other, all worthy of our veneration and all able to intercede for us with the unapproachable deity. The saint's power of intercession was the hagiographer's uppermost concern: and hence it did not matter whether the saint was tall or short, fair or bald, fat or thin, blonde or brunette. In a sense, it probably did not matter whether he was named Cletus or Clement, Narcissus or Nicasius. The saints were distinguished – if at all – by the glory of their martyrdoms (a visible token of their acceptance to God) and by their efficacy in dealing with various human suffering. Saints were therefore a much more prominent aspect of Anglo-Saxon spirituality than they could conceivably be in a modern, mechanized society. The cumbersome apparatus for knowing them and appealing to them – calendars, martyrologies and saints' Lives – was an urgent necessity in an age when other kinds of spiritual comfort were few. If we would understand the spiritual universe of the Anglo-Saxons, therefore, we must learn to understand that apparatus.

## NOTES

1. There is no comprehensive study of the cult of saints in Anglo-Saxon England; for a study of one aspect of the subject, see S. J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: a Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988), as well as the valuable collection of essays in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1996). Bibliographical orientation in medieval hagiography in general is available in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. S. Wilson (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 309–417, and in the more recent bibliographical supplement by R. Godding to R. Aigrain, *L'hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire*, Subsidia hagiographica 80 (Brussels, 2000), 393–490. On the nature of English shrines in the post-Conquest period (which is better documented than the pre-Conquest), see R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977). On Lantfred, see below, n. 6.

2. See D. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989); on the Exeter list, see pp. 159–60, and on Æthelstan as a relic collector, pp. 160–3. There is still much of use in the earlier study by M. Förster, *Zur Geschichte des Reliquienkultus in Altengland* (Munich, 1943).

3. See M. Lapidge, 'Acca of Hexham and the Origin of the *Old English Martyrology*', *Analecta Bollandiana* 123 (2005), 29–78.

4. See P. J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. edn (Princeton, NJ, 1990), esp. pp. 59–63 on Anglo-Saxon England (which, however, omits any mention of the cases of Wilfrid, Neot and Audoenus discussed here).

5. There is (to my knowledge) no study of the authentication of relics in Anglo-Saxon England; for bibliography on Anglo-Saxon relic cults, see C. A. Jones, 'Old English Words for Relics of the Saints', *Florilegium* 26 (2009), 85–129, esp. 86–90.

6. Lantfred's *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni* (from which the preceding details are drawn) is ed. M. Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, Winchester Studies 4.2 (Oxford, 2003), 217–333.

7. See *Wulfstan of Winchester: the Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991). For bibliographical details concerning the various Anglo-Latin *vitae* referred to throughout the present article, see M. Lapidge and R. C. Love, 'The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales (600–1550)', in *Hagiographies*, ed. G. Philippart, 5 vols. (Turnhout, 1994–2010), III, pp. 203–325; for hagiography in Old English, see J. Cross and E. G. Whatley, ibid. II, pp. 413–500.

8. See D. Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 7 (1978), 61–93.

9. Some guidance is given by D. H. Farmer, *The Oxford Book of Saints* (Oxford, 1978), though it omits many of the saints named in Anglo-Saxon litanies, among them some of those which I quote here by way of example. Still useful is F. G. Holweck, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints* (London, 1924).

10. See M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*, Henry Bradshaw Society 106 (London, 1991).

11. There is no reliable or comprehensive study in English of the liturgical books used in the cult of saints; see instead the excellent guide by R. Grégoire, *Manuale di agiologia: introduzione alla letteratura agiografica*, Bibliotheca Montisfani 12 (Fabriano, 1987), and Aigrain, *L'hagiographie* (cited above, n. 1), pp. 11–192. For detailed discussion of how one English church – Christ Church, Canterbury – assembled the necessary liturgical texts to promote the cult of St Dunstan, see *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2012), pp. cxxxv–cl. Latin hagiographical texts are controlled by means of the Bollandists' great *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1899–1901), with *Supplementum* by H. Fros (Brussels, 1986).

12. *The Calendar of St Willibrord*, ed. H. A. Wilson, Henry Bradshaw Society 55 (London, 1918); *English Kalendars before A.D. 1100*, ed. F. Wormald, Henry Bradshaw Society 72 (London, 1934; repr. 1988). A synoptic edition of all surviving Anglo-Saxon liturgical calendars is given by R. Rushforth, *Saints in English Kalendars before A.D. 1100*, Henry Bradshaw Society 117 (London, 2008).

13. On Latin metrical calendars from Anglo-Saxon England, see A. Wilmart, 'Un témoin anglo-saxon du calendrier métrique d'York', *Revue Bénédictine* 46 (1934), 41–69; M. Lapidge, 'A Tenth-Century Metrical Calendar from Ramsey',

*Revue Bénédictine* 94 (1984), 326–69; P. McGurk, 'The Metrical Calendar of Hampson', *Analecta Bollandiana* 104 (1986), 79–125; and M. Lapidge, 'The Metrical Calendar in the "Pembroke Psalter-Hours"', *Analecta Bollandiana* 129 (2011), 325–87, esp. 344–7. The Old English Metrical Calendar is printed in ASPR 6, pp. 49–55 (note that this poem normally passes under the utterly inappropriate title 'Menologium': a *menologium* is a Greek liturgical book containing Lives of saints, corresponding to the Western Church's *martyrologium* or martyrology, on which see below); it is trans. K. Malone, in *Studies in Language, Literature and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later*, ed. E. B. Atwood and A. A. Hill (Austin, TX, 1969), pp. 193–9.

14. On martyrologies, see H. Quentin, *Les Martyrologes historiques du moyen âge* (Paris, 1908), and J. Dubois, *Les Martyrologes du moyen âge latin*, Typologie des sources du moyen age occidental 26 (Turnhout, 1978). The 'Hieronymian' or 'Jeromian' Martyrology is ed. G. B. de Rossi and L. Duchesne in *Acta Sanctorum, Novembr.* 2.1 (Brussels, 1894), with commentary by H. Quentin and H. Delehaye, *Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, in *Acta Sanctorum, Novembr.* 2.2 (Brussels, 1931). There is as yet no reliable edition of Bede's Martyrology; for the present, one uses J. Dubois and G. Renaud, *Édition pratique des martyrologes de Bède, de l'Anonyme lyonnais et de Florus* (Paris, 1976); the entry for St Clement is on p. 212.

15. *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. G. Kotzor, Abhandlungen der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse 88 (Munich, 1981); a more accessible – but less complete and accurate – edition with accompanying translation is by G. Herzfeld, *An Old English Martyrology*, EETS os 116 (London, 1900). On the sources of the entry for St Clement, see J. E. Cross, 'Popes of Rome in the Old English Martyrology', *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar Second Volume*, ARCA 3 (Liverpool, 1979), 191–211.

16. The best account of the literary forms of hagiography is W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter*, 4 vols. in 5 (Stuttgart, 1986–2001); there is nothing comparable in English. On *passiones* in particular, see H. Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels, 1921). The older study by C. W. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Ithaca, NY, 1947), contains much of value.

17. See M. Lapidge, 'Roman Martyrs and their Miracles in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Germanic and Latin Literature*, ed. K. E. Olsen, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, MA, 2004), pp. 95–120.

18. On legendaries, see G. Philippart, *Les légendiers latins et autres manuscrits hagiographiques*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 24–5 (Turnhout, 1977).

19. The Cotton-Corpus Legendary is so named because it is preserved in its fullest (and earliest surviving) form in a manuscript written at Worcester in the third quarter of the eleventh century, now broken up and preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Nero E. i and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 9; see P. Jackson and M. Lapidge, 'The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary', in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 131–46.

20. M. Lapidge, 'Ælfric's *Sanctorale*', in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 115–29.

21. P. H. Zettel, 'Saints' Lives in Old English: Latin Manuscripts and Vernacular Accounts: Ælfric', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 17–37.

22. On Ælfric as hagiographer, see the essays in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 235–365 (essays by J. Hill, M. R. Godden, F. M. Biggs, H. Magennis, R. Waterhouse and P. E. Szarmach), and discussion throughout *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. H. Magennis and M. Swan (Leiden and Boston, 2009), as well as the important study by M. Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 34 (Cambridge, 2005).

23. See M. Lapidge, 'Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*', in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr*, ed. M. C. Amodio and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Toronto, 2003), pp. 147–71.

# 15

MECHTHILD GRETSCH

# Literacy and the uses of the vernacular

Around the first millennium, a literate man or woman from the South of England or the Midlands, if asked after their country's name, in most cases would have answered 'Engla land' or (with the people's name being used for the territory) 'Angelcynn'. It is possible, however, that regional terms like 'Wessex' or 'the land of the Mercians' would have come as a first response; in the case of Northumbrians this much is almost certain. And probably the regional identification would have been the first and arguably the single answer if the same question had been posed during the reigns of the West Saxon king Alfred (871–99) or the Mercian king Offa (757–96), let alone at the time Bede finished his *Historia ecclesiastica* in 731. Consequently, the question of when precisely in Anglo-Saxon England a pan-English feeling of national identity arose is a vexed one, and has been answered variously by historians.

There is no doubt, however, that if one had asked what language was spoken by the descendants of the Germanic tribes that had invaded England in the fifth century, the answer would invariably have been 'Englisc', at whatever time the question might have been asked. Of course, the literate native speakers of that language (and many of the illiterate ones as well) will have been aware of the various regional forms in which English was spoken and written, as is clear, for example, from the substantial number of texts that were copied out in a dialect different from that of their exemplars. But all these regional forms were included in the term 'English'. Thus, the presumed answers of our imaginary Anglo-Saxons to our two simple questions point to the importance of a vernacular language in creating a common identity for its speakers – an identity that need not be accompanied by a common national identity in a political sense. This apparent truism has occasionally been overlooked by historians intent on dating the origin of the Anglo-Saxon 'nation-state' well before the tenth century.

Literate Anglo-Saxons might have found an authority for this truism in that great repository of late antique learning, Bishop Isidore of Seville's (d. 636) *Etymologiae*, a work which in England as elsewhere in medieval Europe

circulated in a large number of copies, and was drawn on by innumerable authors. Isidore begins his ninth book with a chapter in which he reflects on various languages before and after the erection and destruction of the Tower of Babel; and then proceeds to an overview of a great number of nations (*gentes*) and their names. That this arrangement was deliberate is seen from his concluding remarks: 'We have treated languages first, and then nations, because nations arose from languages, and not languages from nations.' Isidore's résumé unmistakably suggests two separate identities, that of language and that of nation, but it also implies that both may coalesce. In Anglo-Saxon England such coalescence becomes manifest in the later tenth century (see below, p. 291). By then, English already had a long tradition as a literary language, a tradition that was recognized and respected by Anglo-Saxon authors.[1]

For the earliest surviving testimonies to literacy applied to the vernacular, and views on the vernacular, we have to go back to the late seventh and early eighth centuries, to Bede and to the early glosses and glossaries.

## Bede and Cædmon

In a famous chapter in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (IV.22), Bede tells the story of the illiterate cowherd Cædmon, who was miraculously turned into the first English poet to compose religious verse in the vernacular. One night, divinely inspired, he produced a poem of nine lines in praise of the Creator, which is now known as Cædmon's *Hymn*. Bede gives a Latin paraphrase of the poem, and proceeds to relate how Hild (a renowned abbess, in whose Northumbrian monastery at Whitby Cædmon lived as a lay brother) had a circle of learned men investigate the case. These expounded to Cædmon a certain passage from the Bible and asked him to turn this into a vernacular poem; and Cædmon duly produced a second piece of perfect English verse. The miracle of Cædmon's divine inspiration thus being confirmed, his teachers provided him with a broad range of biblical material (of which Bede gives an overview), all of which in due course he turned into harmonious English verse, to the great delight of his learned audience, as Bede assures us.

For our subject – the interaction between literacy and the vernacular – two points are of interest in Bede's account. Bede, who was arguably the most brilliant Latin scholar of his age, speaks in terms of the highest praise of the vernacular poetry that was orally composed by an illiterate cowherd. He stresses that he has paraphrased in Latin only the sense but not the precise words of Cædmon's song, because poetry cannot be translated literally from one language into another without losing some of its beauty and dignity ('sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis', *HE* IV.22). In other words, Bede is

contending here that the poetry of a language with scarcely any literate tradition cannot be adequately rendered into Latin, the most refined and prestigious language of the medieval West. Bede's esteem for his vernacular language can also be glimpsed in the report that his student Cuthbert gave of his master's last days. Here we see him working on a translation of the Gospel of St John into English (which has not survived), and expressing his fears for his soul after death in five moving lines of English poetry, arguably composed by himself.[2]

The second point which demands our attention concerns the transmission of the earliest English poetry. It is agreed among Anglo-Saxonists – not least on the testimony of Bede's Cædmon episode – that Old English poetry was composed orally, at least to some extent. To what extent precisely, and how it was transmitted, orally or in written form, and whether there was a difference between the composition and transmission of secular and that of religious poetry – all of these are, however, moot points (see above, pp. 50–3). From Bede's account it is clear that Cædmon composed all his poetry orally, and then recited it to his teachers, whom, by the harmonious sweetness of his poems, he turned into his audience ('suauiusque resonando doctores suos uicissim auditores sui faciebat', *HE* IV.22). Even though Bede is not explicit here, we may surmise that the scholars who had previously expounded to Cædmon the material for each of his compositions, and were now his attentive listeners, did not content themselves with Cædmon's ephemeral recitations but preserved his poems in written form. And indeed, the anonymous scholar who translated the *Historia ecclesiastica* into Old English about a century and a half later took such a procedure for granted when he rendered Bede's phrasing as follows: 'And his songs and poems were so beautiful to hear that his teachers themselves wrote them down and studied them as he recited them' (see *The Old English Bede*, ed. Miller, I.2, p. 346). So here we have clear evidence that a translator of King Alfred's time and perhaps from his court circle (see below, pp. 281–7) took it for granted that the earliest biblical poetry in English was written down by distinguished Latin scholars on its very first recital.

With the exception of the hymn, none of Cædmon's poetry has survived. The substantial verse renderings of parts of the Old Testament, *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Daniel*, preserved in a manuscript now in Oxford (Bodleian Library, Junius 11, of the second half of the tenth century), were long regarded as belonging to the Cædmonian corpus, a view which, for various reasons, is no longer upheld. Interestingly (for our purpose), *Exodus* and *Daniel* have been shown to be based, not on the Old Testament narrative, but on liturgical readings: that is, they were demonstrably composed in a clerical, Latinate context.[3] Cædmon's *Hymn* is preserved in no fewer than seventeen manuscripts: in four manuscripts in the early Northumbrian dialect in which

it must have been composed, and in thirteen further manuscripts with later linguistic forms, often with a predominance of West Saxon dialect features. This unusually wide dissemination of the little poem is explained by the circumstance that all its copies travelled with texts of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, either in Bede's original version (twelve copies) or its Old English translation (five copies). The earliest Northumbrian version (quoted below) was entered in 737 (that is, two years after Bede's death) into the earliest surviving manuscript of the *Historia ecclesiastica* (Cambridge, University Library, Kk. 5. 16, the so-called 'Moore Bede'):

> Nu scylun hergan    hefaenricaes uard,
> metudæs maecti    end his modgidanc,
> uerc uuldurfadur,    sue he uundra gihuaes,
> eci dryctin,    or astelidæ
> He aerist scop    aelda barnum
> heben til hrofe,    haleg scepen;
> tha middungeard    moncynnæs uard,
> eci dryctin,    æfter tiadæ
> firum foldu,    frea allmectig.          (ASPR VI, p. 105)

Now we must praise the Guardian of heaven, the power of the Creator and His thoughtful mind; the work of the glorious Father, how He for all the wondrous Creation, the eternal Lord, established the beginning. First He created for the children of men the sky as a roof, the holy Creator. Afterwards, the Guardian of mankind adorned the earth, the eternal Lord; the earth for men, the Lord Almighty.

Cædmon composed his hymn during Hild's abbacy of Whitby (657–80); the poem had therefore been in existence for more than fifty years before Bede produced his Latin paraphrase of it in about 731. Apparently, his autograph copy of the *Historia ecclesiastica* did not include the vernacular version, so we cannot be certain that he had knowledge of the poem (and of Cædmon's other poetry) in a written form. Nevertheless, the Cædmonian episode and the hymn provide clear evidence of the esteem in which the vernacular was held by learned men and women (recall that it was Abbess Hild who initiated Cædmon's promotion) soon after the new Latin learning had become established in the British Isles. Cædmon's story further reveals that already at a very early stage the English language was deemed a suitable medium in which to emulate Christian Latin poets such as Iuvencus, Sedulius, Avitus and Arator, whose biblical epics formed the staple of Anglo-Saxon school curricula over the centuries.[4] Such early confidence in the intellectual and poetic potential of the vernacular is certainly impressive, and during the following centuries it would prove to be wholly justified. And yet, in some respects it

seems precocious, as can be seen even from the few lines in which Cædmon's poem was written down. Most obvious here is the absence of the special characters commonly used in Old English texts to represent sounds for which the Latin alphabet had no letters (see above, p. 23). As in other early texts, makeshifts are used, as in *tha* (7) for *þa*, *modgidanc* (2) for *modgiðanc*, and *uard* (1) for *ƿard*; the digraph *ae* occurs alongside *æ* as in *hefaenricaes* (1) and *metudæs* (2); 'heaven' (common OE *heofon*) occurs as *hefaen* (1) and as *heben* (6). In order to compete successfully with Latin, English clearly needed further scholarly attention.

## Glosses and glossaries

Glosses and glossaries are important early witnesses to literacy in the vernacular.[5] Glosses are interlinear or marginal clarifications of individual Latin words (called lemmata) in a text, providing either one or two (occasionally more) roughly synonymous words or brief explanatory phrases. The intensity of glossing ranges from glosses that are few and far between to complete interlinear versions where almost every Latin word or lemma bears a gloss. Glosses to a lemma may be Latin or English or both. This close interaction between the two languages is found already in the work of the earliest glossators. For the compilation of a glossary, the Latin lemmata and their glosses are (usually) extracted from several texts and are listed either in the order in which they occur in the text, or are rearranged according to their initial (first, or first and second) letters.

The first Anglo-Saxon scholars who occupied themselves with the glossing of texts and the compilation of glossaries were the students of Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury (668–90) and his colleague Hadrian (d. 710), abbot of the monastery of St Augustine's in Canterbury. These students were therefore younger contemporaries of the poet Cædmon. At Canterbury, Theodore and Hadrian, who both came from the Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire, had established a school on whose intellectual horizon and training Bede, writing in the next generation, lavished the utmost praise (*HE* iv.2). The glosses and glossaries emanating from the Canterbury school let us glimpse the interpretations of a large number of texts by the two Mediterranean masters, as they were noted down by their students. The glossed texts comprise inter alia most of the books of the Bible, works of secular, ecclesiastical and natural history, of grammar and rhetoric, compilations of ecclesiastical legislation, saints' Lives and monastic rules. Teaching seems to have been conducted in Latin, as might be expected, given the non-native origin of the two masters, and as is attested by the preponderance of Latin glosses and by the Latin commentaries which accompany the glosses to

some of the biblical books. The Latin glosses, in combination with the broad range of glossed texts and the high quality of glossing, were decisive for the wide dissemination of the Canterbury glosses on the Continent (mostly in the form of glossaries) beginning with the Anglo-Saxon mission there, in the eighth century, and ending only in the fourteenth century.

However, the earliest manuscripts of the Canterbury glosses also contained a substantial number of Old English glosses, and these, too, were transmitted to the Continent, as is attested by the Leiden Glossary (Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Voss. lat. Q. 69), written *c*. 800 at St Gallen, which contains some 250 Old English glosses. The number of vernacular glosses is even more impressive in the second early glossary, which has survived in two manuscripts, one English and one continental (the English manuscript, now Épinal, Bibliothèque municipale 72 (2), was written *c*. 700; the continental manuscript, now Erfurt, Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek, Amplonianus 2° 42, was written *c*. 820, probably at Cologne).[6] Approximately one-third of the *c*. 3,200 glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary are Old English. These Old English glosses will have been provided (not only noted down) by the students themselves, rather than by their non-native teachers. One of the reasons for these glosses will therefore have been that the students were looking for an English equivalent of a Latin term – an occupation they shared with English students of all ages. But from the difficulties of many of the texts they studied and glossed, and from the greater number of Latin glosses and commentaries in these texts, it is clear that the Canterbury students were not beginners in Latin.

We have knowledge of the names and careers of five of these students (in most cases from the pages of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*); in due course, they all became important ecclesiastical leaders. One of the Canterbury students was Aldhelm (d. 709/10), who became abbot of Malmesbury and latterly bishop of Sherborne, and who was also one of the most influential Anglo-Saxon authors. He very possibly contributed to the glosses that went into the Leiden Glossary; and the original of the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary is thought to have been compiled in his scriptorium at Malmesbury. Aldhelm's Latin works were studied intensely in Anglo-Saxon schools, as can be seen from innumerable verbal echoes in later Anglo-Saxon authors, and from the huge number of glosses (in Latin and English) which they attracted from the early tenth century onwards, especially his principal work *De uirginitate*. Aldhelm excelled in an extremely difficult Latin style: its sentences are often long and convoluted, but the hallmark of this style is a rich and varied vocabulary, abounding in difficult and rare, sometimes poetic, words, often neologisms or archaisms and grecisms which were frequently extracted from Latin–Greek glossaries. From the tenth century onwards, Anglo-Saxon authors were so fascinated with this so-called 'hermeneutic' style that it became pervasive in

Anglo-Latin texts up to the Norman Conquest; it also seems to have exercised an influence on the vernacular (see below).

Interestingly, at the end of the ninth century, the progenitor of this eccentric Latin style, Aldhelm, was acclaimed by King Alfred as the greatest poet in the vernacular. Unfortunately, not a single line of English poetry by Aldhelm has survived (or has yet been identified); his Latin verse, however, has been shown to be heavily indebted to the metrical rules of Old English poetry.[7] The parallel with Bede will be obvious: at the turn of the seventh century, when England was in the vanguard of European learning, we meet, within two generations, two brilliant and widely influential Latin scholars who were actively interested in the vernacular and the literature that might be produced in it, regardless of the fact that English had as yet no literary tradition.

In Aldhelm's case, his (and perhaps his colleagues') penchant for the vernacular, combined with a flair for recherché Latin words, may be reflected in some striking glosses among the Canterbury material; these glosses are exceedingly rare words with a distinctly archaic or poetic flair. Two examples would be: *cynewiððe* (compounded of *cyne-* 'royal' and *wiððe* 'cord, band') for Latin *redimiculum* 'a precious headband'; or *gimrodor* for Latin *dracontia* 'precious stone' (compounded of *gim* 'gem' and probably *rodor* 'sky, heaven'; here a semantic component of *rodor*, 'brightness' or 'exquisiteness', will have been drawn on for the gloss to mean 'bright or exquisite gem').

The glossing activities of the Canterbury students inaugurated a scholarly tradition which led to the production of vast Latin and English gloss corpora during the following centuries. Later glossators often drew on the work of their predecessors, which resulted in intricate textual relationships among the individual gloss corpora and glossaries. With regard to these later glosses, three questions remain to be addressed briefly: What were the texts that were glossed densely or provided with interlinear versions? What were the glossators' principal aims? And can specific glossing activities be assigned to individual centres? Outstanding among the densely and frequently glossed texts is Aldhelm's *De uirginitate*. Thirteen manuscripts with Latin and English glosses have survived; all these glosses are interrelated in varying degrees, and many of them have been excerpted for the compilation of glossaries. The most densely glossed manuscript (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale 1650, written in the first half of the eleventh century) contains more than 6,000 Old English glosses; the core of this huge corpus seems to have been devised at Glastonbury during the 940s.[8] Apart from Glastonbury, Abingdon and Canterbury were probably centres with an emphasis on Aldhelm glossing. Full interlinear versions are found principally in religious, liturgical and ecclesiastical texts in a wider sense, as, for example, the Gospels, the psalter,

liturgical hymns, prayers, the *Rule of St Benedict* or the *Regularis concordia* (a text intended to supplement the Benedictine Rule in standardizing numerous details of daily life and liturgical observance in the monasteries all over England). Here, interlinear versions, providing word-for-word translations above the Latin, served the dual purpose of language acquisition and elementary instruction in the principal texts for young clerics and monks. It is with this purpose in mind that the glossators also provide (usually but not invariably) translations of basic Latin words such as *pater*, *nomen* or *liberare*; that they signal the function of the Latin ablative case by English prepositions (such as *of* or *with*); insert personal pronouns before finite verbs; or, occasionally, insert a gloss in the place where it would be required by English syntax, instead of, or in addition to, placing it directly above its lemma.

But with most interlinear versions or densely glossed texts the work of the glossators did not stop here. After the advent of Christianity, a religion of the book, there had to be created an English terminology for the tenets and the institutions of the new religion and for the concepts and the vocabulary of the new learning that travelled with it: late antique and Christian philosophy, historiography, rhetoric and grammar, medicine and natural science. This immense task fell to the glossators and, from the late ninth century onwards, to the authors of the prose translations of Latin texts. They met the challenge by creating a vast number of new words, mainly by introducing (and experimenting with) loan-words, semantic loans and loan-formation (for these technical terms, see ch. 2, pp. 38–40). In addition to giving English a voice for Christianity and its learning, the loan renditions provided information on the structure of a Latin word by reproducing all or at least one of its components (cf. *hǣlend* 'healer' for *saluator* 'saviour' or *leorningcniht* 'learning + boy' for *discipulus* 'disciple'). Such information will have been useful in itself to advanced students, but the cumulative evidence of the loan renditions points to a much grander purpose. They demonstrated that Latin patterns of word-formation could be successfully imitated, with the implication that Latin and English had similar grammatical structures. This implication was the springboard for generations of Anglo-Saxon scholars aiming to forge the vernacular into a medium that would be as flexible as Latin for all kinds of theological, scholarly and literary discourse.

The glossators, apparently, saw no problem in combining elementary instruction and ambitious scholarly aims, occasionally even poetic aspirations. This is demonstrated most impressively by the psalter glosses. The 150 psalms of the Old Testament are difficult poetic texts; and they are the most important texts in the liturgy of the Christian Church. The Benedictine Rule, for example, requires the recitation of the entire psalter once a week; by the time of the Benedictine Reform in the second half of the tenth century, this

requirement had increased dramatically, and large portions of the psalter had to be sung several times a week, for example for the benefactors of the monastery or the church. This importance of the psalms explains why, regardless of their textual difficulties, they were used as elementary texts for teaching Latin to young students. Vernacular glosses to the psalter were therefore an urgent desideratum; and, indeed, ten manuscripts with full inter-linear glossing are still extant. Interestingly, they represent three distinct versions, presumably compiled in the mid-ninth, mid-tenth and early eleventh century, at Canterbury, Glastonbury and Winchester respectively. The glos-sators of the two later versions had recourse to the work of their predecessors. Clearly, all versions cater for the needs of beginners, but it is equally clear that each version was also undertaken as a scholarly enterprise. For their glosses all three versions draw – if in varying degree – on psalm commentaries. The most recent version has more than 1,400 double glosses and some sixty triple glosses, which makes this version a virtual thesaurus of Old English syno-nyms. It is, however, the middle version which reveals the greatest ambition.[9] In addition to basing many of its English glosses on the renowned psalm commentary by the sixth-century Italian author Cassiodorus, the margins of the best manuscript of this version (London, British Library, Royal 2. B. v) are crammed with Latin excerpts from the same commentary. Furthermore, the glossators aim to emulate the stylistic register of the psalms by their frequent use of poetic, rare or freshly coined words. The version in Royal 2. B. v appears to have been a book for seminars on psalter exegesis, in which English and Latin had an equal share in expounding this important text. The glossing in the Royal Psalter seems to have originated in the 940s at Glastonbury, where Æthelwold and Dunstan, the future bishop of Winchester and archbishop of Canterbury respectively, had assembled a circle of young colleagues, the 'new Benedictines', who were bent on reform-ing the English Church, invigorating English learning, and making an impact on English society. The psalter glosses in Royal 2. B. v and the core of the Aldhelm glosses in Brussels 1650 (see above, p. 279) are early testimonies to these aspirations. But there is also an element of retrospection here: the recherché glosses are palpably reminiscent of the occasional poetic glosses devised by the students of the Canterbury school of Theodore and Hadrian.

## Educating the laity: the Alfredian programme

Literacy in Latin and the vernacular had always been a prerequisite for the clergy. From the ninth century onwards, literacy in English begins to gain in importance among the laity – at least among those in the higher echelons of society. It is not possible to ascertain how widespread and how ambitious in its

scope lay literacy was, and whether it enjoyed an ever-rising trajectory during the tenth and eleventh centuries, but the surviving evidence suggests that royal government and administrators of the law, as well as individuals in their various transactions, depended on the written word to an ever-increasing degree. And the written word, for the purposes under discussion here, increasingly meant the vernacular. Thus, the numerous law-codes which were issued – with only a few exceptions – by all Anglo-Saxon kings after Alfred, were invariably composed in English; and while the royal charters (grants of land or privileges to individuals or a religious house) were predominantly in Latin in their argumentative parts, all land charters contain a section in English (the so-called charter bounds) which precisely and meticulously identifies the boundaries of the estate in question by referring to rivers, hills, forests, hedges, farmhouses or other landmarks in the countryside. The boundary clauses, of which more than one thousand survive, are an important tool for place-name studies, as the landmarks they refer to can often still be traced in the English countryside. Apart from their boundary clauses, tenth-century charters especially were frequently cast in an ambitious Latin style seeking to impress posterity. They were increasingly complemented by the more homely and businesslike writs: short texts, written in English and typically recording addresses of the king to the shire courts, notifying them of changes in the ownership of land, appointments of high officials, administrative business and the like. Tenancy arrangements between religious houses and laypersons survive in more than one hundred leases from ecclesiastical archives. These documents were issued by individual religious houses, and their language may be Latin or English or a combination of both. Other types of document, such as memoranda concerning the exchange of land, texts recording disputes over property, or wills, are predominantly in English. Thus, of the fifty-eight surviving wills, fifty-three are in English; the five remaining wills in Latin are probably translations or forgeries. When assessing the evidence of these texts for the spread of literacy, we have to bear in mind that, except for the law-codes and perhaps the charters, they were ephemeral. That they have nevertheless survived in quantities, signals the importance which Anglo-Saxon society attached to the written documentation of their major and minor transactions.[10]

The increase in pragmatic literacy (i.e. literacy serving a practical purpose) indicated by such interest in documentation has traditionally been associated with the educational programme of King Alfred the Great (871–99); and this association seems to be justified to some extent. It is, however, important to note that laypersons must have availed themselves of written documentation on numerous occasions already in pre-Alfredian times. The earliest surviving will can be dated 832×40; our earliest lease (in Latin) was produced in the second half of the eighth century, while the earliest such document in English

dates from a century later (852). In the 880s, after his decisive victory over the Vikings at Edington in 878, King Alfred appears to have taken measures to ensure a widespread literacy at least in English among the younger generation. We have knowledge of Alfred's educational programme principally from two sources: a Latin biography of the king by Asser (sometime bishop of St David's and Sherborne), writing in 893, and also acting as supervisor to the king's own scholarly pursuits; and a letter sent by Alfred to all the ten bishops in his kingdom, which accompanied complimentary copies of the English translation of Pope Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*.[11] On the testimony of these two sources, all freeborn children (including, it would appear, those from the lower ranks of society) were to be taught to read and write English; literacy in Latin being a requirement for the future clergy, but apparently an option also for all able students. How far young girls were admitted to this programme is not clear: in Alfred's words, *sio gioguð* should be taught to be literate; the term can refer to 'young people' as well as to 'young men'. We know, however, that Alfred's daughter Ælfthryth received tuition together with his first-born son and successor Edward (Asser, ch. 75). Alfred further insisted that – on pain of losing their position – those in high office such as ealdormen or reeves, even if of advanced age, should acquire literacy in English, so that they could read law books and written communications (Asser, ch. 106). We know from Asser that for his entourage Alfred installed a kind of palace school, but we have no knowledge how his programme was implemented in the localities. However, judging by the grammaticality and orthography of many of the above-mentioned documents, its implementation must have been quite effective. By way of illustration I quote a brief passage from the so-called 'Fonthill Letter'. This is a letter (preserved as the original single-sheet document), which Ordlaf, ealdorman of Wiltshire from 897 onwards, sent to King Edward (899–924), Alfred's son and successor. It was intended to be used in a lawsuit concerning the Fonthill estate (in Wiltshire) and the ealdorman's right to dispose of that estate at his discretion, in accordance with a judgement passed by King Alfred. In the passage Ordlaf recalls the day when, in a previous lawsuit, his godson Helmstan had sworn on oath before the shire court – with permission from King Alfred himself – that Fonthill was his, Helmstan's, rightful property (Fonthill had subsequently passed into Ordlaf's possession). Addressing King Edward directly, Ordlaf gives vent to his annoyance with the present (second) lawsuit concerning the estate:

> ⁊ we ridan ða to ðon andagan; ic ⁊ Wihtbord rad mid me ⁊ Byrhthelm rad ðider mid Æðelme. ⁊ we gehyrdan ealle ðæt he ðone að be fulan ageaf. Ða we cwædan ealle ðæt hit wære geendodu spæc ða se dom wæs gefylled. ⁊ leof, hwonne bið

engu spæc geendedu gif mon ne mæg nowðer ne mid feo ne mid aða geendigan? Oðððe gif mon ælcne dom wile onwendan ðe Ælfred cing gesette, hwonne habbe we ðonne gemotad?

And then we rode on that appointed day, I – and Wihtbord rode with me, and Brihthelm rode there with Æthelhelm; and we all heard that he [i.e. Helmstan] gave the oath in full. Then we all said that it was a closed suit when the judgement had been carried out. And, Sir, when will any suit be closed if one can end it neither with money nor with an oath? And if one wishes to change every judgement which King Alfred gave, when shall we have finished disputing?

The letter was very probably composed and written down by Ealdorman Ordlaf himself. Its orthography is remarkably consistent, aiming to mirror the speech sounds of the Early West Saxon dialect. Ordlaf drives home his point by a skilful combination of paratactic and clearly constructed hypotactic sentences, direct and indirect speech, and rhetorical questions; he adroitly employs the formal, legal, colloquial and emotional registers of language. The ealdorman certainly knew 'how to do things with words': the claimant eventually withdrew from the suit.[12]

There was more, however, to Alfred's educational programme than raising the standards of pragmatic literacy in his kingdom. As Asser attests (chs. 23–5, 76), the king was driven by a lifelong desire to acquire learning and wisdom, and to impart them to his subjects. In his letter to the bishops Alfred recalls with sadness the golden age of Bede when learning and the knowledge of foreign languages had flourished among the English, and when wisdom, combined with due respect for the Christian religion, had brought them wealth and political power. The ensuing decay of learning, which Alfred says he had witnessed in his youth and which, in his view, had precipitated the Viking invasions as a divine punishment, had, by the time of his accession (871), led to a situation where knowledge of Latin had become almost extinct, even among the clergy. By c. 890, when the letter was written, the situation seems to have improved somewhat, though Alfred does not say how precisely and why; but he makes it quite clear that with the help of his learned bishops ('who are now nearly everywhere') and by a concentration on the vernacular ('the language that we can all understand') he intends to restore learning (and prosperity) among the English. Instruction in literacy was one pillar of this undertaking; the translation of a number of Latin books 'which are most necessary for all men to know' was the other.

Although in his letter Alfred apparently invites all the bishops to join his translation programme, we know from the same source and from Asser (chs. 77–9) that in the early to mid-880s he assembled at his court a small circle of learned clerics, coming from the kingdom of the Mercians, from Wales

(Asser), from Flanders and from continental Saxony. It was the task of these men to read out, translate and explain Latin books to the king (Asser, chs. 76–7, 81, 88), until in about 887 Alfred mastered Latin to an extent which enabled him, with some assistance, to translate Latin texts into English. A sizeable corpus of Old English prose translations is still extant, commonly labelled 'Alfredian texts', and thought to represent the result of the king's translation programme. The corpus comprises the following texts:

1 The *Regula pastoralis* (in English usually called the *Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet) by Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604). Gregory enjoyed an especial veneration throughout Anglo-Saxon England as he was (rightly) seen as the driving force behind the mission of Augustine and his companions who, in 597, had brought Christianity to England. The *Regula* was an immensely popular book all over medieval Europe; it is a manual for those who have undertaken the care of souls (*Hierdeboc*, 'Shepherd's Book', Alfred calls it), explaining, for example, the intellectual and spiritual qualifications which those in ecclesiastical office need to have, and how they should deal wisely and charitably with the various types of human being in their flock. Although primarily intended for the spiritual guidance of the secular clergy, many of the book's observations are pertinent also to those in high secular office, and this will have enhanced its attractiveness to King Alfred. It is to copies of this translation that Alfred prefixed his letter to the bishops; here he also claims to have translated the text himself, with the assistance of four of his learned helpers. The translation adheres closely to the Latin original.

2 The *De consolatione Philosophiae* (*The Old English Boethius*, ed. Godden and Irvine) by Boethius, a high-ranking Roman official, who was executed by the Ostrogoth king Theodoric in 525. While in prison, Boethius composed his *Consolation of Philosophy*, a wide-ranging dialogue between himself and Lady Philosophy (between 'Mind' and 'Wisdom' in English), centring on the role of fate and divine providence in the life of the individual and in the universe. Again, this was a widely influential book, but only from the ninth century onwards; therefore its inclusion in the Alfredian programme would point to somewhat 'modernist' principles of selection. The translation is rather free, with numerous additions to the text, and making extensive use of the Latin glosses that accompany the text in many manuscripts.

3 The *Soliloquia* by the Church Father St Augustine of Hippo (354–430). The *Soliloquies* (ed. Carnicelli) are also cast in the form of a dialogue, this time between St Augustine and Reason (*ratio*). The text is rendered even more freely than the Boethius, drawing on a variety of patristic and other

sources, and expressing the translator's own reflections on the soul's immortality and the possibility of knowing God after death.

4 A (rather literal) prose translation of the first fifty psalms (ed. O'Neill), in which King David's songs of lamentation in the face of the oppression by his enemies are especially prominent.

5 The *Dialogi* by Pope Gregory. The *Dialogues* (ed. Hecht) feature the important genre of saints' miracles but also reflect on the soul's afterlife. Most importantly, the book contains the fullest medieval Life of St Benedict of Nursia (d. *c.* 550), the founder of Western monasticism, written (in 593) with the benefit of living memory.

6 The *Historiae aduersus paganos* by the early fifth-century Spanish author Paulus Orosius. 'The Histories against the Pagans' (*The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately) is the most famous medieval world history and a comprehensive repository of encyclopaedic knowledge about peoples and places.

7 The *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* by Bede (see above, p. 275; *The Old English Bede*, ed. Miller). The *Historia*, a book of highest renown, was studied throughout Europe until the sixteenth century. Besides being a unique storehouse of facts, carefully selected from many sources and commented on by one of the greatest scholars of medieval Europe, it would remind the English of their common past.

On an intellectually more modest level, the same purpose was also served by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (ed. as a multi-volume 'Collaborative Edition'). This is not a translation but an original English compilation, the first part of which was published in about 892. In spite of the chroniclers' emphasis on the rise of Wessex and on West Saxon affairs, they nevertheless succeeded in their annals (spanning the fifth century to the ninth) in conveying a sense of a people coming together.

Is there a connection between the two pillars of Alfred's educational programme, the translations and the comprehensive instruction in literacy? From the wording in the letter to the bishops it would appear that the translations were to be read by the students ('Therefore it seems better to me ... that we too should translate some books ... and achieve ... that all young people ... may be set to learning ... until the time that they can read English writings properly'; Sweet I, 6). In view of the intellectual demands of the Alfredian translations, such an aim would have been ambitious indeed. Certainly not all the students will have mastered these texts, but there is no difficulty in imagining, for example, Ealdorman Ordlaf turning the pages of the Old English Bede after he had dispatched his Fonthill Letter to King Edward.

Alfred's personal involvement in translating these texts has been a vexed question for centuries. Apart from Gregory's *Dialogues*, assigned by Asser (ch. 77) and by the translation itself to Wærferth, bishop of Worcester (*c.* 872 to *c.* 915), all 'Alfredian texts' have, in varying combinations, been ascribed to Alfred at one point or another. Until recently, the *Pastoral Care*, the *Boethius*, the *Soliloquies* and the *Psalter* were agreed to form the canon of 'genuine Alfred texts', established on grounds of ascriptions in the texts and/or philological studies of language and style, and especially of vocabulary. The remaining texts are commonly assigned to Alfred's entourage. It is, however, entirely appropriate – in the study of language and literature as in other disciplines – that established tenets should come under fresh scrutiny from time to time. Such a fresh and unbiased look at the texts assigned to Alfred raises many questions. Is it plausible, for example, to assume the king's authorship of the current canon during a period when an enormous amount of his time and energy will have gone into building up the military defence of a kingdom under constant threat of renewed Viking attack; a threat that materialized in 892 and kept the English busy throughout the 890s? Is it plausible (to mention just one further query) to expect that the king, who in about 890 arguably had coped with the comparatively easy Latin of the *Regula pastoralis* in a straightforward translation – with the assistance of no fewer than four scholars – should, only a couple of years later, produce the masterfully free renderings of the Boethius and the *Soliloquies*, drawing on a wide range of sources for the latter text and on scholarly commentary for the Boethius? There are, moreover, remarkable differences in the word usage of the works attributed to Alfred; and for an ascription based on lexical studies one always has to bear in mind that it is difficult to distinguish between the usage of an individual and that of a closely knit group.[13]

We may, therefore, never be in a position to pronounce with confidence on Alfred's authorship. What matters for our purposes, however, is that only a generation or two later, the king was believed to have translated a considerable number of Latin books, and that these translations were mentioned with respect and looked upon as an incentive for continuing the newly founded tradition of Old English prose with a prolific output of vernacular texts on a great variety of subjects.

### Transmitting the past, strengthening the faith, perfecting the language

The later tenth and early eleventh centuries witnessed an astounding burgeoning of vernacular literature – astounding even if measured by the remarkable corpus of English writings that was already in existence in the early tenth century. After the Norman Conquest (which heralded the language change that gradually led to the Middle English period, from *c.* 1100 onwards), it

took about two hundred and fifty years before texts in English were composed again in comparable quantity and quality. It sits squarely with this situation that Old English texts continued to be copied throughout the twelfth century, usually with some adaptation to the linguistic changes which meanwhile had occurred.

Characteristically, in spite of the wealth of new texts produced in late Anglo-Saxon England, recollection of the achievements of earlier scholars (or of their failures, in some cases) is palpable everywhere. The approving references to Alfredian texts mentioned above would belong here, as would Ælfric of Eynsham's (*c.* 950 to *c.* 1010) shattering remarks on the orthodoxy of homiletic texts that precede his own collections (*Catholic Homilies* I, 174). In the same category would belong Alfred's law-code being referred to as a model in the codes of tenth- and eleventh-century kings (*seo domboc*, 'the book of judgements', it is simply called). Intertextuality is another aspect of such recollection. On several occasions Ælfric adopts brief passages from an Alfredian book into his own text; or Byrhtferth of Ramsey (*c.* 970 to *c.* 1020), for his *Enchiridion* (a school text, partly in English, partly in Latin, on computus, grammar and rhetoric), seems to have searched glossed manuscripts for rare and flamboyant English glosses, which he adopted into his own text. A further manifestation of the link-up with past achievements is represented by the continuation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in various centres and in different redactions, and, in one case, until the mid-twelfth century. Finally it is important to note that, with the exception of two manuscripts of the *Pastoral Care*, all surviving manuscripts of Alfredian texts date from the tenth century onwards. The manuscripts which were written in the late tenth and eleventh centuries usually have an admixture at least of the then prevalent English spelling, 'Standard Old English' (see below). In the case of a manuscript of Wærferth's translation of Gregory's *Dialogues* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 76) an extensive modernization of vocabulary has taken place so as to bring the text into some agreement with recent Winchester usage (see below). Similarly, the mid-ninth-century psalter gloss in British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. i was copied around the millennium into a manuscript (now Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 1. 23, ed. Wildhagen) in a scriptorium closely affiliated with the Benedictine Reform, in spite of at least one fresh English interlinear version to the psalter being extant by that time, which also had originated in a Benedictine ambience (see above, p. 281). For poetry as well as for glosses and prose texts scholars must have felt a need for stocktaking and preservation for posterity: the four great codices in which almost all earlier poetry is preserved date from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.[14]

In spite of this interest in and sense of obligation to the literature of the past, the texts composed from *c.* 950 onwards are characteristically distinctive – a

distinctiveness which is owed to their production under the influence of the Benedictine Reform. This movement aimed at a comprehensive spiritual and intellectual renewal of the English Church and society. Inspired by similar continental (French and Lotharingian) monastic reforms, the English Benedictine Reform, nevertheless, differed from its continental counterparts in important aspects, among them an esteem for approved traditions in the English Church and a pronounced interest in the vernacular.

In the glossing of texts there is now a strong tendency to provide full interlinear versions instead of intermittent glossing, a technique which implies that the different syntactic structures of Latin and English become more obvious. At the same time, scholarly and stylistic aspects become more prominent, especially in psalter glossing (see above, p. 281). The range of texts which are provided with interlinear versions is considerably broadened; all are important religious or ecclesiastical texts (for a survey, see above, pp. 279–80). As to the prose texts, it is impossible to give an adequate survey here. It must be sufficient to point out that the two most prolific and rightly acclaimed authors of Old English prose were active in the period: Ælfric (*c.* 950 to *c.* 1010), latterly abbot of Eynsham in Oxfordshire, and Wulfstan, archbishop of York (d. 1023).[15] Both developed their own distinctive prose style, embracing a characteristic sentence rhythm and word usage, a patterned use of alliteration and frequent sound play. Both composed a great number of sermons and homilies (for a discussion of these, see ch. 9), which they often can be shown to have revised over a considerable time, paying close attention to linguistic and stylistic detail, and which are rarely straightforward translations of only one Latin exemplar; rather they combine passages drawn from various sources (especially from the Church Fathers and renowned Carolingian writers) with the authors' own reflections.

While Wulfstan was also a statesman, drafting a number of law-codes for kings Æthelred and Cnut, and author of the *Institutes of Polity*, a work examining the roles of secular and ecclesiastical authorities, Ælfric's aim was to provide vast and systematic corpora of homilies and saints' Lives for the entire Church year. Interestingly, for these texts he envisaged readers as well as listeners (see *Catholic Homilies* I, 173 and *Lives of Saints* I, 2), and we know that among those who read his texts were men from the higher and middle ranks of society. Two of these, Ealdorman Æthelweard and his son, expressly commissioned his cycle of saints' Lives. Both Ælfric and Wulfstan were also competent Latin authors; their choice of the vernacular as their principal medium was therefore deliberate. Especially in the case of Ælfric it can be shown that his choice of English was closely connected with the Benedictine reformers' zeal for mediating their ideals to society at large. Ælfric was a student of the leading intellectual of the Reform, Æthelwold,

bishop of Winchester (963–84), as he himself proudly declares on numerous occasions. The Old Minster school at Winchester was arguably the most renowned school in Anglo-Saxon England, and the study of language played an important role in the curriculum of this school, with English apparently being assigned not much less importance than Latin. (Ælfric's fellow student, Wulfstan, the precentor of Winchester, became one of the foremost Anglo-Latin authors.) The parallel interest in these two languages entailed a systematic refinement of English after the model of Latin. The most conspicuous and spectacular results of such refinement are known by the names of Winchester vocabulary and Standard Old English.[16]

The terms 'Winchester vocabulary' or 'Winchester usage' describe the preferential employment of certain words (for which synonyms would have been available) in a clearly defined group of texts. Winchester words are all correlated to specific Latin terms, regardless of whether they are used in glosses, prose translations or original prose. For example, for Latin *ecclesia* in the sense 'the Catholic Church', OE *gelaðung* (lit. 'invitation') was used, a loan-formation, coined to translate the meaning of *ecclesia* in the original Greek. For the church as a building the common loan-word *cyrce* 'church' was used, which writers outside Winchester usage also employed in the transferred sense (as, in fact, was usual for *ecclesia* in Latin, too). For Latin *corona* in a metaphorical sense, 'crown of martyrdom, virginity etc.', a poetic compound was coined: *wuldorbeag* (from *wuldor* 'glory, splendour' and *beag* 'ring'). Synonyms for 'crown', such as *beag* or *(cyne)helm*, which other writers used also in a metaphorical sense, were restricted to material crowns in Winchester usage. Again, the Winchester terminology is more precise than even the Latin. A final example: *modigness* is the Winchester word for the capital sin of pride (corresponding to Latin *superbia*), not *ofermod* or *oferhygd* as in other texts. Interestingly here, *modigness* originally meant 'boldness, courage' with entirely positive connotations. Its use in Winchester texts to express the notion of sinful pride presupposes a daring reassessment of heroic values in Winchester circles. As is suggested by these three examples, Winchester words were designed to express key terms of the Christian religion. They are not dialect words; rather, they appear to reveal the influence of the then prevalent Anglo-Latin style, and the fascination of its practitioners with unusual and recherché words. Winchester terminology is not a universal Late Old English phenomenon; as is indicated by its name, it occurs in a restricted, if sizeable, number of texts (Ælfric's works being most prominent among these) which have some connection with reformed Winchester. On inspection of the evidence it would appear that the concept behind this terminology originated in Æthelwold's intellectual circle, some time before he became bishop of Winchester in 963.

By way of contrast, the other linguistic phenomenon which has been associated with Æthelwold, Standard Old English, is widely documented in late tenth- and eleventh-century texts originating all over England. The term refers exclusively to written, not to spoken, language, and describes the universal use of an orthography for inflexional morphology and stressed vowels, standardized on the basis of the Late West Saxon dialect. This orthography masked, for example, the levelling of inflexional vowels in the declension of nouns and the conjugation of verbs, which was already in progress by the late tenth century. It thus preserves distinctions of case, tense or mood that depended solely on the respective endings, while such distinctions were no longer possible in spoken language. There are reasons to think that the principles of Standard Old English were developed at Æthelwold's Old Minster school in the early 970s. It was during this period that the unification of England under West Saxon rule, the 'Kingdom of the English', which had been achieved more than a decade previously, became a mental and emotional reality within leading circles. This emerging perception of a unified England elicited a number of standardizing activities, ranging from the monetary system to ecclesiastical and intellectual domains. A standardized spelling system of the vernacular would therefore sit squarely with the mentality of the early 970s.[17]

Standard Old English was unparalleled in any other European vernacular for many centuries to come, but was itself doomed to perish in the century after the Norman Conquest. Nevertheless, Standard Old English and the Winchester vocabulary, complemented by a Latin grammar written in English by Ælfric, which, in his own words, could serve as an introduction 'to both languages, Latin and English',[18] are enduring landmarks, signalling the respect, the attention and the confidence which the vernacular as a literary language had enjoyed throughout Anglo-Saxon England, beginning with Bede's admiration for Cædmon's *Hymn*.

## NOTES

1. For an excellent survey of lexical, grammatical and stylistic aspects of literary Old English, see M. R. Godden, 'Literary Language', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, gen. ed. R. M. Hogg, I, *The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Hogg, pp. 490–535. The quotation from Isidore (*Etymologiae* IX.i.14) is translated in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. S. A. Barney *et al.* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 192.
2. An early version of 'Bede's Death Song' is transmitted, together with Cuthbert's report, in a number of continental manuscripts; both are printed and translated (inter alia) in *HE*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 579–87.
3. See P. G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus and Daniel*, CSASE 16 (Cambridge, 1996).

4. For Christian Latin poets in the Anglo-Saxon curriculum and the influence they may have exerted on Old English poets, see M. Lapidge, 'Versifying the Bible in the Middle Ages', in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors, and Readers*, ed. J. Mann and B. Nolan (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), pp. 11–40. For Bede's (lost) autograph of *HE*, without the vernacular version of Cædmon's poem, see *Beda: Storia degli Inglesi*, ed. M. Lapidge, trans. P. Chiesa, 2 vols. (Milan, 2008–10), II, 634–5.

5. For an overview of various glossing activities in Anglo-Saxon England, see M. Lapidge, 'The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England, I: the Evidence of Latin Glosses' (repr. in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 455–98), and R. I. Page, 'The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England, II: the Evidence of English Glosses', both in *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. N. Brooks (Leicester, 1982), pp. 99–140, 141–65; and *Anglo-Saxon Glossography*, ed. R. Derolez (Brussels, 1992).

6. For a comprehensive discussion of the careers of Theodore and Hadrian, their activities in England, the subjects taught at their Canterbury school and the glossing done by their students, together with an edition of the Latin commentaries to various books of the Bible, see *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, ed. B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, CSASE 10 (Cambridge, 1994). The Leiden Glossary is edited by J. H. Hessels, *A Late Eighth-Century Latin–Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University* (Cambridge, 1906). The English glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary are edited by J. D. Pheifer, *Old English Glosses in the Epinal-Erfurt Glossary* (Oxford, 1974).

7. For Aldhelm as one of the contributors to the Leiden Glossary and as the mastermind behind the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary, see M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *ASE* 36 (2007), 15–69, at 31–52. King Alfred's judgement on Aldhelm's vernacular poetry is reported by the early twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, I. *Text and Translation*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 2007), p. 506 [v.190]. On the debt of Aldhelm's Latin verse to Old English poetry, see M. Lapidge, 'Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 247–69, originally published in *Comparative Literature* 31 (1979), 209–31.

8. The Brussels glosses are edited, and their textual affiliations discussed, by L. Goossens, *The Old English Glosses of MS Brussels, Royal Library, 1650* (Brussels, 1974).

9. The editions of the three versions of psalter glosses are (in chronological sequence): *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, MI, 1965); *Der altenglische Regius-Psalter*, ed. F. Roeder, Studien zur englischen Philologie 18 (Halle, 1904); and *Der Lambeth-Psalter*, ed. U. Lindelöf, 2 vols., Acta Societatis scientiarum Fennicae 35.1 and 43.3 (Helsingfors, 1909–14). For the linguistic, historical and intellectual evidence which associates the Royal Psalter gloss with the core of the Aldhelm glosses in Brussels 1650, see M. Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, CSASE 25 (Cambridge, 1999), esp. pp. 185–225, 322–83.

10. Laws issued by the seventh-century Kentish kings Æthelberht and Wihtred have only been preserved in a manuscript from the first half of the twelfth century. It is therefore difficult to pronounce on the form of English in which they may

originally have been cast. The still definitive edition of all Anglo-Saxon laws is F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*; many of the laws are translated in Whitelock, *EHD*. For charters, wills and other records, see P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (London, 1968), and the revised and updated 'Electronic Sawyer', accessible via the 'Anglo-Saxon Charters Website' at www.kemble.asnc.cam.ac.uk. For discussion of various aspects of lay literacy, see S. Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 36–62; S. Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 226–57; and S. Keynes, 'The Power of the Written Word: Alfredian England 871–899', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 175–97.

11. For a complete translation of Asser's biography, translations of extracts from a number of works from the Alfredian context, introductions to these translations, and a historical survey of the period, see S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983). For Alfred's letter to the bishops, see *Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet, I, 2–8.

12. For an edition and translation of the Fonthill Letter, with a comprehensive historical commentary, see S. Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer *et al.* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53–97 (the quotation is at p. 76); for a philological commentary, see M. Gretsch, 'The Language of the Fonthill Letter', *ASE* 23 (1994), 57–102.

13. For the established canon of Alfred's works, see e.g. J. Bately, *The Literary Prose of Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (London, 1980), and 'Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of King Alfred', *ASE* 17 (1988), 93–138. For a reassessment of the evidence for Alfred's authorship, see e.g. M. R. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23, with (critical) response by J. M. Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 190–215. For later Anglo-Saxon references to Alfred's works, see M. R. Godden, 'Ælfric and the Alfredian Precedents', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. H. Magennis and M. Swan (Leiden and Boston, 2009), pp. 139–63; and *The Old English Boethius*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), pp. 207–12.

14. For tenth- and eleventh-century references to Alfred's law-code, see Keynes, 'Royal Government', pp. 232–3; for Ælfric's use of Alfredian texts, see Godden, and Godden and Irvine (as in n. 13); for Byrhtferth's search for rare glosswords, see *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, ed. P. S. Baker and M. Lapidge, EETS ss 15 (Oxford, 1995), pp. cvi–cxiv; for the continuations of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, see S. Keynes, in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge *et al.* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 35–6, and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 7: MS E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004), pp. xc–ci; for the date and provenance of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, see H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe, AZ, 2001).

15. Three recent publications may serve as an introduction to Ælfric and Wulfstan studies: H. Gneuss, *Ælfric of Eynsham: His Life, Times and Writings*, Old English

Newsletter Subsidia 34 (Kalamazoo, MI, 2009); *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Magennis and Swan; and *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. M. Townend (Turnhout, 2004).

16. For Winchester vocabulary and Standard Old English, see H. Gneuss, 'The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School at Winchester', in his *Language and History in Early England* (Aldershot, 1996), originally published in *ASE* 1 (1972), 63–83; and M. Gretsch, 'Winchester Vocabulary and Standard Old English: the Vernacular in Late Anglo-Saxon England', The Toller Memorial Lecture, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 83 (2001), 41–87.

17. For the new political awareness in the 970s, see S. Keynes, 'England, 900–1016', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, III, *c. 900 – c. 1024*, ed. T. Reuter (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 456–84, at 481; for the 'Kingdom of the English', see *ibid*., pp. 469–82.

18. See *Ælfrics Grammatik* ed. J. Zupitza, 3rd edn, rev. H. Gneuss (Berlin, 2001), pp. 1 and 3; for Ælfric's sustained equation of Latin and English grammatical categories in his *Grammar*, see M. Gretsch, 'Ælfric, Language and Winchester', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Magennis and Swan, pp. 109–37, esp. 117–22.

# 16

PATRIZIA LENDINARA

# The world of Anglo-Saxon learning

The distance between England and the rest of Europe, whence the Anglo-Saxons came, was not, indeed, as great as Bede pretended it to be when he opened his *Ecclesiastical History* by saying, 'Britain, once called Albion, is an island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them' (*HE* I.I). A uninterrupted thread of relationships, moving in both directions, tied our 'island' to the Continent during the Anglo-Saxon age. Throughout this period, English schools benefited from the instruction of foreign masters: the Roman monks who came with the Gregorian mission; Aidan and his fellow Irishmen who established a school at Lindisfarne in the mid-seventh century; Archbishop Theodore (d. 690) and Abbot Hadrian who taught at Canterbury in the late seventh century; at roughly the same time, John the Archchanter from St Peter's in Rome taught at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. In the late ninth century, King Alfred invited Grimbald of Saint-Bertin, John the Old Saxon and Asser of St David's in Wales to assist him in (re-)establishing English learning. In the later tenth century men such as Lantfred and Abbo, both from Fleury, spent brief periods at the schools of Winchester and Ramsey respectively; and finally, in the later eleventh century, two renowned scholars from Saint-Bertin, Goscelin and Folcard, are known to have resided in England. On the other hand, from English schools came the great masters whose writings instructed generations, centuries even, of Insular and continental students alike: one has only to think of the works of Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin, which were copied and studied intensively up to the twelfth century and beyond. This achievement is all the more remarkable when one considers that the Anglo-Saxons were among the first peoples in Europe who had to learn Latin as a foreign language if Christianity – a religion of the book par excellence – was to flourish. But although Anglo-Saxon schools were indebted to foreign masters, and Anglo-Saxon literature itself owed a large debt to classical literature in Latin, a native Anglo-Saxon aptitude for learning is evident – as in the cases of Aldhelm and

Bede. In the eighth century England led the civilized world in intellectual pursuits, and the emerging 'national' identity is evident in all the aspects of culture. Anglo-Saxon writers were conversant with both Latin and Germanic traditions, and their literary output is of a very high standard. It is not possible in the compass of a short essay to survey all the achievements of Anglo-Saxons in the domain of learning; rather, I shall try to point out what characterizes their achievement.

A principal source of our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon learning is the manuscripts which the Anglo-Saxons wrote and which have come down to us, the earliest ones dating to the second half of the seventh century.[1] Many of them are still preserved in English libraries (principally the British Library in London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford and Corpus Christi College in Cambridge); others migrated to the Continent at various times in various circumstances (for example, the famous Codex Amiatinus, a lavish manuscript of the Bible which was written at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in the early eighth century and taken to Rome as a gift for the pope, or the later Vercelli Book, which somehow ended up in the cathedral library of Vercelli, perhaps taken there by an English pilgrim on the way to Rome). Furthermore, the 1,400 or so manuscripts which have survived whole or in fragments must represent but a small proportion of the books which once existed, since so many books have been destroyed in the course of centuries by men, fire and neglect. We can begin our investigation of Anglo-Saxon learning by considering the writing in these manuscripts and the scribes who wrote them.

The Anglo-Saxons had two types of alphabet: the Roman alphabet, learned from the earliest missionaries, and the runic alphabet, which was shared with other Germanic peoples and no doubt brought to England at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. These two types of alphabet were entirely discrete, and had differing functions and significance, though they experienced some mutual influence (for runic letters borrowed into the Roman alphabet to represent English sounds, see ch. 2, p. 23). Runic letters were designed to be engraved on stone, wood, metal or bone (they mostly consist, therefore, of intersecting straight lines) and are not entirely suitable for writing in manuscripts. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Saxons treasured the runic alphabet more than did other Germanic peoples, and continued to copy the runic alphabet into manuscripts – through a sort of antiquarian interest – during the entire Anglo-Saxon period.[2] Rune-masters must be credited with a certain degree of learning. For example, the Franks Casket, a rectangular whale-bone box of eighth-century date and Northumbrian origin, is engraved with inscriptions in both runic and Roman script. The craftsman who made the Franks Casket is probably to be credited with designing its entire layout and with transcribing and engraving the inscriptions. In this respect it is noteworthy that the

panels on the Casket reproduce scenes from the Gospels, such as the Adoration of the Magi, alongside a scene from the story of Weland, the legendary Germanic smith. In the same way the craftsmen who engraved the numerous stone crosses which are found in many parts of England often drew on Germanic legends and Christian symbols and could use the runic alphabet alongside the Roman: a splendid example here is the Ruthwell Cross, where both alphabets are used. Such craftsmen enjoyed a high reputation in Anglo-Saxon society, and their skills were sung in poems such as *The Gifts of Men*, where the individual 'talents' allotted to men are listed (similar lists are found in *Christ* 659–95 and *The Fortunes of Men* 64–98). The learning of these craftsmen is not properly 'book-learning', but is remarkable for the clearly learned content and the integration of text and images which is comparable to that found in manuscripts.

The Roman alphabet was introduced by the Roman missionaries who came with Augustine in 597. These early missionaries also brought books, as Bede tells us, and the books served in turn as models for English scribes once they had been taught how to write. From about 700 onwards, we have manuscripts written in both Latin and English, in a wide variety of scripts, ranging from the very formal uncial and half-uncial scripts used principally for biblical and liturgical books, to the informal minuscule scripts used for scholarly books and documents. It is not possible here to survey the varieties of Anglo-Saxon script; but suffice it to say that during the Anglo-Saxon period books written in England were as elegant and accomplished as any written anywhere in Europe.[3]

Manuscripts were produced by highly trained scribes in ecclesiastical scriptoria ('writing offices'), normally housed either in monasteries or in cathedral churches. However, in addition to ecclesiastical scriptoria, we now know that Anglo-Saxon kings from Æthelstan (d. 939) onwards maintained a body of professional scribes – what later would be called a chancery – for royal business such as the drafting and copying of charters.[4] In any case the skill of a professional scribe had to be acquired through long training. One Old English poem, *The Gifts of Men*, characterizes the scribe as *listhendig* (95: 'deft of hand') and contrasts him with the scholar, who is said to be *larum leoþufæst* (95: 'limber in learning'). From this contrast it is clear that the scribe was not regarded as the possessor of learning, but only as its transmitter; like the rune-master, the scribe was a kind of craftsman whose skill was highly prized.

Skills such as engraving and writing existed alongside, but independently of, literacy in Latin. Among laymen literacy in Latin was rare, and was restricted to the court and to a few noblemen such as Ælfric's patron, the ealdorman Æthelweard. Yet many laymen must have possessed many kinds of specialized learning. For example, medical treatises reveal that Anglo-Saxon 'leeches' (or

physicians: OE *læce*) practised medicine to a standard as high as any in Europe, and evidently drew their knowledge not only from books but from first-hand experience with the dozens and dozens of plants mentioned in Old English charms and recipes.[5] The story told by Bede (*HE* v.2) of the dumb and leprous boy cured by John of Hexham shows that there was a clear-cut distinction between fields of specialized knowledge, for John dealt simply with the boy's speech problems, leaving the dermatological problems to a physician. Observation of the natural world accounted for another sort of specialized knowledge: *The Seafarer* displays some considerable knowledge of ornithology, and knowledge of falconry is implied by various passages in the poetry (*The Gifts of Men*, 80–1; *Beowulf* 2263–4; *Maldon* 7–8). No Anglo-Saxon manual of falconry has come down to us, but such manuals no doubt once existed (King Harold, for example, is known to have owned or written a book on hunting, which presumably included falconry). Music was another skill possessed by laymen, and *The Gifts of Men* specifies that the harper required training in music as well as in verse-craft (49–50; cf. *Beowulf* 2105–10). Skill in warfare was another traditional field where training and experience were necessary, and although no manual of warfare survives, it is worth noting that *The Gifts of Men* once again distinguishes between those who have skill in combat (39–40) and those who are suitable to command (76–7). Estate management also required skill and experience, and the treatise entitled *Gerefa* ('The Reeve') explains how the competent reeve must know what is to be done in each season, what tools are necessary for each job, and so on. One could easily point to many more fields where traditional knowledge was acquired and transmitted by the Anglo-Saxon laity but, because such knowledge was not the concern of the learned classes who knew Latin and wrote books, it was seldom recorded and has rarely come down to us.

Nevertheless, it is at times possible to glimpse something of what was embodied in traditional knowledge by considering the various kinds of wisdom poetry – gnomes, riddles, charms, catalogue poems – which have been preserved.[6] Let us consider, for example, the collection of riddles preserved in the Exeter Book. None of these riddles can be treated as a folk-riddle, yet many of them contain what are obviously popular elements. I quote no. 42:

> Ic seah wyhte    wrætlice twa
> undearnunga    ute plegan
> hæmedlaces;    hwitloc anfeng
> wlanc under wædum,    gif þæs weorces speow,
> fæmne fyllo.    Ic on flette mæg
> þurh runstafas    rincum secgan,
> þam þe bec witan,    bega ætsomne
> naman þara wihta.    Þær sceal Nyd wesan

twega oþer  ond se torhta Æsc
an an linan,  Acas twegen,
Hægelas swa some.  Hwylc þæs hordgates
cægan cræfte  þa clamme onleac
þe þa rædellan  wið rynemenn
hygefæste heold  heortan bewrigene
orþoncbendum?  Nu is undyrne
werum æt wine  hu þa wihte mid us,
heanmode twa,  hatne sindon.

> I saw two wondrous creatures openly enjoy sexual intercourse, out of doors; if the deed was successful, the fair-haired, haughty woman received fulfilment beneath her clothes. By means of runic letters upon the floor I can tell the names of those creatures to the men who know books. There shall be Need (*N*), two of these, and the bright Ash (*Æ*), only one on the line, two Oaks (*A*), and Hail (*H*) in the same quantity. Who has unlocked, with the craft of a key, the fetters of the treasure-door, that held against men skilled in mysteries the riddle, fast in mind, its heart wrapped up by bonds of cunning? Now it is clear to people at their wine how those two low-minded creatures are called among us.

The solution of a riddle required mental exercise, insofar as each descriptive element could be applied to many subjects, but in their totality could apply to only one: in this case, 'Cock and Hen'. No Latin source has ever been found for Riddle 42 and, because the cock is a typical character in the popular riddles of many countries, we may have here some vestige of a folk-riddle. Nevertheless, the riddle has been recast for a bookish audience, as is clear from the use of runes to indicate the solution (the runes must be rearranged and spelled out to yield their secret): the words which contain two *N*'s, one *Æ*, two *A*'s and two *H*'s are *hana* ('cock') and *hæn* ('hen'). The example of Riddle 42 may serve to make the general point that, although there may be popular (or even pagan) elements in surviving Old English literature, we must never forget that it has all been transmitted to us through the filter of literate (which means, in effect, Latinate) Christianity.

That some vestiges of popular learning are still visible, however, is suggested by the fact that many features of Old English literature, especially the wisdom literature, have close counterparts in other Germanic literatures (especially Old Norse),[7] which may indicate a Germanic origin earlier than the advent of Christianity and book-learning in Anglo-Saxon England. One traditional way of transmitting ancient lore concerning the legendary past, for example, was by means of genealogical catalogues. Such catalogues apparently provided the substance of the Old English poem *Widsith*. Another type of mnemonic verse which has Icelandic and Norwegian analogues is found in *The Rune Poem*, in which each stanza is devoted to a single rune and was

intended to help in the memorization of their names. Thus the poem's first line says, 'Feoh biþ frofur fira gehwylcum' – 'Feoh ('wealth', but also a rune-name) is a comfort to every man' – so expressing in a sententious way a piece of commonplace wisdom, no doubt a popular expression. Other expressions of traditional knowledge are found in poems such *Maxims I* and *II*, which consist of strings of commonplaces. Thus in *Maxims I* we find statements such as 'Cyning sceal mid ceape cwene gebicgan, / bunum ond beagum' (81–2a: 'A king shall acquire a queen by purchase, with goblets and rings'), or again, 'Forst sceal freosan, fyr wudu meltan' (71: 'Frost shall freeze, fire destroy wood'). Gnomic statements such as these are found elsewhere in Old English verse (e.g. *Seafarer* 106 = *Maxims I* 35), and are occasionally quoted by Ælfric in his homilies. Indeed, some gnomic statements of obviously popular origin have even been interpolated into the *Dicts of Cato*, an Old English prose translation of the Latin *Disticha Catonis*, a famous collection of Latin proverbs which was used as a school text in Anglo-Saxon England (see below, p. 307). Another kind of wisdom literature which is apparently didactic in function but which may also preserve elements of traditional lore is the 'flyting' or 'contest', which takes the form of a dialogue between two contestants each trying to outdo the other in knowledge. The best-known examples are *Solomon and Saturn* (both the prose and poetic versions) and *Adrian and Ritheus*, all clerical productions but which contain traditional proverbs alongside scriptural lore.[8] Most of their questions can be paralleled in Latin (especially Hiberno-Latin) sources, but a few are arguably of native, popular origin, such as those on the reasons for the redness of the rising and setting sun (prose *Solomon and Saturn* 55–6; *Adrian and Ritheus* 7–8).

Various evidence, therefore, can give us a glimpse – it is no more than that – of popular learning in Anglo-Saxon England. But it was in the domain of Latin learning that Anglo-Saxon schools achieved their great reputation in the early Middle Ages, and to them we must now turn. When Augustine and the Roman missionaries arrived in England in 597, there were no schools and no trace of the educational system which had flourished under the Roman Empire. In order to assure the spread of Latin Christianity among the English, the missionaries' first task will have been the establishment of schools for the training of native clergy. Latin was the language of the Church, and had to be learned by priests and monks in order for them to perform their ecclesiastical duties. Knowledge of Latin was indispensable for understanding the Scriptures, but also for reading most kinds of text, for Latin was the first language of Anglo-Saxon scholarship: in Latin were written poetry, formal and private letters, pedagogical treatises on matters such as metrics and grammar, legislation, scriptural commentary and much else. And because such works were written in Latin, they stood a much better chance of survival

than works composed in the vernacular: note, for example, that virtually all the Latin writings of Aldhelm and Bede have come down to us, whereas their (often mentioned) compositions in Old English have been lost. Above all, Latin was the language of instruction. Thus the students in Ælfric's *Colloquy* will implore their master: 'We beseech you, master, to teach us how to speak "latinately" (i.e. in Latin: *latialiter*), for we are idiots and can only speak corruptly.'

The earliest schools will have been set up on the pattern of the ones in Gaul, and their aim will have been the severely functional one of teaching the future clergy how to read and understand the Bible and how to perform the liturgy. Such schools were evidently successful, for we learn from Bede (*HE* iii.18) that by about 630 the schools in Kent could supply teachers for a new school founded in East Anglia by King Sigeberht. Within a generation or two these schools supplied the first native bishop (one Ithamar of Rochester, consecrated in 644) and, shortly thereafter, the first native archbishop of Canterbury (Deusdedit, consecrated in 655).

Augustine and his Roman colleagues were monks, and the establishment of monasticism in England also dates from the period of their mission. Throughout the entire Anglo-Saxon period, it was monastic schools which were the principal seats of learning; and it was these schools which transmitted ancient learning to the Middle Ages. However, it is important not to exaggerate the monks' interest in this ancient learning. Their principal concern was not with classical literature, nor with educating laymen: their sole work was God's work, the *opus Dei*, that is, the performance of the Divine Office at regular intervals during each day; and in order to understand the Office, Latin was essential. At those times when a monk was not performing the Office, he could most profitably be engaged in reading, as the *Rule of St Benedict* tells us (ch. 48), or, during meal-times, in listening to others read edifying works aloud (ch. 38). In other words, the concern of monasteries was not with Latin learning as an end in itself, but as a means of serving God. For this purpose, most Anglo-Saxon monasteries (at least those of any substantial size) will have had a school, the principal function of which will have been the instruction of the oblates and novices in their care. By the same token cathedral clergy will have needed to train future ministers, and will in many cases have done so by establishing schools.

In respect of schooling, women seem to have had the same opportunities as men. From the earliest period of Anglo-Saxon Christianity we have evidence of 'double houses' or monasteries for both men and women; and it is clear that many of these double houses were under the rule of an abbess (a well-known example is Whitby, which for many years in the seventh century was ruled by the Abbess Hild who figures so prominently in Bede's *Ecclesiastical*

*History*: *HE* IV.23). Only in the later Anglo-Saxon period do we find nun-
neries proper. In any event, nuns apparently followed the same curriculum as
monks. The parity of the sexes in this regard is reflected in the pair of Old
English words *rædere* and *rædistre* ('male reader' and 'female reader', respec-
tively). Women composed letters and verse in Latin, as we learn from the
example of Boniface's female correspondents Eadburg and Leobgyth, as well
as from the writings of Burginda (writing perhaps at Bath Abbey, *c*. 700) or
Hygeburg, an English nun at Heidenheim in Germany who in the late eighth
century commemorated the saintly lives of her two brothers (Wynnebald and
Willibald) in a long saint's *vita* (see above, p. 261). That women were
proficient in Latin is clear too from Aldhelm's massive treatise *De uirginitate*,
which was dedicated to Abbess Hildelith and her nuns at Barking Abbey,
Essex. Women may also have been the dedicatees of Latin writings such as
Boniface's *Enigmata*, which is concerned in part with the subject of virginity.
Recall, too, that it was under the patronage of Abbess Hild of Whitby (d. 680)
that the poet Cædmon composed his religious verse. No Anglo-Saxon woman
achieved the scholarly status of an Aldhelm or a Bede, but in this respect
England was no different from the rest of Europe.

　Unfortunately, it is not possible to form a comprehensive impression of
how Anglo-Saxon schools functioned and what subjects were taught. We
have a small number of witnesses who throw some light on the subject. For
example, Bede tells us (*HE* IV.2) that Theodore and Hadrian in their school at
Canterbury 'gave their hearers instruction not only in the books of holy
Scripture but also in the art of metre, astronomy and ecclesiastical computa-
tion'. In one of his letters Aldhelm, who had been a student of Theodore and
Hadrian, mentions the difficulty of these same subjects (and adds the infor-
mation that Roman law was studied there as well). In this, as well as in other
periods, English schools were among the finest in Europe.[9] In his long poem
on the saints of York, Alcuin lists the subjects taught at York by his master
Ælberht:[10]

> There he [Ælberht] watered parched hearts with diverse streams
> of learning and the varied dew of knowledge:
> skilfully training some in the arts and rules of grammar
> and pouring upon others a flood of rhetorical eloquence.
> Some he polished with the whetstone of true speech,
> teaching others to sing in Aonian strain,
> training some to blow on the Castalian pipe,
> and run with lyric step over the peaks of Parnassus.
> To others this master taught the harmony of the spheres,
> the labours of the sun and the moon,
> the five zones of heaven, the seven planets,

the regular motions of the stars, their rising and setting,
the movements of the air, the tremors of earth and sea,
the natures of men and cattle, of birds and wild beasts,
the diverse forms and shapes of numbers.
He regulated the time for Easter's celebration,
revealing the great mysteries of holy Scripture.

Here, apparently, we have a thorough account of the curriculum in one influential English school: grammar, rhetoric, metre, astronomy, geography, arithmetic (or numerology?) and computus. Yet it is not possible to corroborate each of Alcuin's statements by means of external evidence, and for some at least of the subjects he lists (astronomy, for example: see below, p. 310) there are grounds for doubt about the profundity of Ælberht's teaching. In other words, we must at every point attempt to corroborate the evidence of witnesses such as Bede, Aldhelm and Alcuin with that of indirect witnesses of various kinds (letters from disciples to former masters, hints in hagiographies) to reconstruct the ways in which teaching was conducted. The atmosphere of the schoolroom can often be glimpsed from the so-called scholastic colloquies, cast as dialogues between master and pupils and apparently composed by the masters as exercises in speaking Latin.[11] Although the sentences in these colloquies are marked by some degree of artificiality, the descriptions of daily affairs – particularly in the colloquies composed in the early eleventh century by Ælfric Bata (a former student of the better-known Ælfric) – give us a glimpse of classroom life. In Ælfric Bata's colloquies students of varying degrees of ability are portrayed reading, writing, chanting or learning by heart the set-texts which were assigned daily.

One of the first tasks of the young oblates was to commit to memory certain daily prayers (the Lord's Prayer and the Creed), followed by the entire psalter – the psalter formed the basis of the Divine Office, and was recited in its entirety once every week at the various Offices – and the series of hymns which formed part of the Office. The stress throughout was on memorization: Latin texts needed to be learned by heart, because parchment was expensive and books were in short supply (a monastery would be lucky to have one copy of the most important texts). Instead students were required to copy the day's given passage of set-text from dictation onto a wax tablet; when the text had been memorized, the tablet could be erased, ready to receive the following day's passage. The passages were explained word by word (perhaps even syllable by syllable) by the master. In the case of the more difficult poetic texts, a prose version was supplied. Thus we have prose versions of the Office hymns and of the Monastic Canticles, as well as of a poem which was one of the hardest set-texts studied in Anglo-Saxon schools, namely the third book of the *Bella Parisiacae urbis* by Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.[12]

The prose versions were designed to elucidate the (often complex) syntax of the verse; thus an elliptic line of Abbo such as 'Burra, probum fateor buteonem, qui arua bidentat' (III.96) was clarified by the prose version provided by an Anglo-Saxon master: 'Fateor probum buteonem, qui bidentat burra arua' ('I aknowledge that he is a good lad who digs the red fields'). This pedagogical technique of rendering Latin verse as prose and vice versa may well lie behind the Anglo-Saxon fondness for what Bede called *opera geminata* or 'twinned works', which consisted of a verse text and a corresponding prose counterpart. The best-known examples are the prose and verse *De uirginitate* by Aldhelm and the two *Lives of St Cuthbert* by Bede; but there are other less well-known examples of the form from later Anglo-Saxon England (e.g Frithegod's *Breviloquium vitae Wilfredi*), a fact which suggests the continued popularity of the technique of paraphrase.

Another index to the way set-texts were studied in Anglo-Saxon schools is provided by glosses in surviving manuscripts.[13] Quite frequently difficult or somehow relevant words of a Latin text are accompanied by explanations (which may vary in length from a one-word synonym to a two- or three-sentence exposition). These glosses apparently represent the responses of masters to difficulties in the set-texts; they may be copied above the words they explain (interlinear glosses) or be added in the margins of the manuscript (marginal glosses); they may be written in ink or be scratched on the parchment with the stylus (drypoint glosses); they may be in Latin or Old English; and they may vary in frequency from scattered or isolated glosses to the word-for-word gloss. Some manuscripts of Aldhelm's prose *De uirginitate* preserve the annotations of different generations of masters.[14] Study of glossed manuscripts, therefore, can help us to understand the ways that texts were understood and interpreted and this information, in turn, is a useful index to the quality of Anglo-Saxon learning.

The process of interpreting texts by means of glosses was taken a step further in the compilation of one kind of glossary. In this genre of glossary, the words of a text which had been provided with glosses (called *lemmata*) and their accompanying interpretations (*interpretamenta*) were copied out in the order in which they occur in the text; the glosses collected together in this way are referred to as *glossae collectae*. A list of *glossae collectae* could be used as an aid to the interpretation of the text in question, but would be cumbersome for searching the meaning of an individual word. Accordingly, the lemmata with their glosses were often rearranged in alphabetical order. Three types of glossary were in circulation in Anglo-Saxon England: those consisting of one or more sections of *glossae collectae*, alphabetical glossaries and class-glossaries. In all types a Latin lemma was followed by one or more *interpretamenta* in Latin or Old English. At the same time classical, late

classical and medieval Latin works (including Anglo-Latin ones) were provided with glosses, which could either be excerpted and gathered as *glossae collectae* or make their way in alphabetical glossaries.

Alphabetical glossaries were to become the most common type of glossary in England. These compilations were indebted to former monolingual (that is, all-Latin) glossaries circulating in Italy, France and Spain. In such glossaries entries could either occur in the nominative form, as in class-glossaries, or could retain the same grammatical case which they had in the original text, as in the case of *glossae collectae*, which were one of the sources of alphabetical glossaries. It is often possible to identify the origin of a gloss (if, for example, the lemma occurs in an inflected form), but in general sources of alphabetical glossaries are difficult to determine. At first the entries were alphabetized in *A*-order, that is, they were arranged according to the first letter of the lemma, as in the Épinal and First Erfurt glossaries. In a more advanced stage of alphabetization, lemmata were listed according to the first two initial letters (*AB*-order), as in the Second Corpus Glossary. Alphabetical glossaries underwent progressive refinement, finally reaching an *ABC*-stage with the Harley Glossary (written around the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries). In this glossary there are even attempts to arrive at an *ABCD*-order, e.g. 'Blandus . lenis . placidus . iocundus . suavis . *liþe*' (B 456), ... 'Blasphemia . vituperatio . *tæl*' (B 466), 'Blatis . *bitelum*' (B 467), ... 'Blavum . color est vestis . *bleo*' (B 474).

Sometimes, indeed, batches of *glossae collectae* are supplied with rubrics indicating the source of the lemmata. This is the case with one of the most important Anglo-Saxon glossaries, the so-called Leiden Glossary, a manuscript which was copied at St Gallen *c.* 800 from a collection of English materials. This same collection of English materials was copied elsewhere on the Continent as well, with the result that a number of continental glossaries related to the Leiden Glossary have been preserved. It is clear from many of the explanations in these glossaries that they originated in the school of Theodore and Hadrian in late seventh-century Canterbury.[15] They are thus a precious testimony to the school which Bede praised (*HE* IV.2) in such glowing terms. Since both Theodore and Hadrian were Greeks of Mediterranean origin (Theodore from Tarsus in Asia Minor, Hadrian from Africa), it is not surprising that the explanations which they gave for difficult words reflect on occasion their reading in Greek sources and their Mediterranean background. For example, in explaining the list of impure birds in Leviticus (XI.13–19), they explained what the ibis was by noting that it 'mittit aquam de ore suo in culum suum ut possit degerere; indeque medici ipsam artem dedicerunt' ('it sends water from its beak up its anus so that it can digest its food; and from this physicians learned the same technique'). The ibis is an Egyptian bird, and its alleged medical practice is referred to in various

Greek medical sources such as Galen. Theodore – whose interest in medicine is mentioned by Bede – was simply trying to convey some notion of a very peculiar bird to an audience who had never seen an ibis; but it is hard to imagine what the Anglo-Saxon students made of Theodore's explanation. Throughout the glosses of the Canterbury school there is an acute awareness of the difference between the Mediterranean and Anglo-Saxon worlds; and perhaps at certain points a sense of longing for a distant land. Thus in the explanation of the *porphyrio* or purple gallinule, an African bird said by the glossator to have beautiful plumage and be kept in cages by Libyan kings, we find the added comment: 'porphirio non fit in brittania' ('there is no purple gallinule in Britain'). Certainly no such bird was to be found in the English marshes and fens, nor in the royal halls of Kent.

Glossaries, then, are one kind of scholarly tool which could be used by Anglo-Saxon masters and which can throw some light on the Anglo-Saxon classroom. It is unlikely, however, that glossaries were used in the classroom itself for teaching purposes; they are rather a sort of reference work, to be consulted at points of difficulty. But there is one type of glossary which could be employed more easily for didactic purposes, namely the class-glossary, where entries are arranged according to subject and consist of lists of names of birds, trees, plants, fish, animals, household implements and so on. An example of a class-glossary of this sort is Ælfric's *Glossary*. The lemmata of these glossaries never occur in inflected form (see, for example, 'Rex *kyning*, sceptrum *cynegyrd*, regina *cwen*': Ælfric's *Glossary*). The lists of words in such glossaries could easily be memorized; recall that, in Benedictine monasteries at least, the monks were expected to communicate in Latin, and they accordingly will have needed to know the Latin vocabulary for everyday objects. To aid memorization, the same vocabulary lists could be employed in scholastic colloquies, which were designed to give students practice in speaking Latin. The close relationship between colloquy and class-glossary may be seen in the expanded version of Ælfric's *Colloquy* made by his student, Ælfric Bata; here the hunter, for example, is asked to describe his daily prey: 'Capio utique ceruos et ceruas et uulpes et uulpiculos et muricipes et lupos et ursos et simias et fibros et lutrios et feruncos, taxones et lepores atque erinacios et aliquando apros et dammas et capreos et aliquando lepores' ('I catch stags and deer and foxes and dog-foxes and wildcats and wolves and bears and apes and beavers and otters and ferrets (?) and badgers and hares and hedgehogs and sometimes boars and antelope and wild goats and sometimes hares'). The words in this list were evidently taken in a batch from a class-glossary, and are not in any sense an accurate record of what an Anglo-Saxon hunter might have been able to catch in a day's outing.

Once students had acquired an elementary knowledge of Latin – from learning the psalter and other prayers by heart, from memorizing word-lists and scholastic colloquies – they were able to proceed to the study of the school texts themselves. The texts studied in Anglo-Saxon schools were more or less those which were studied in continental schools, as can be seen from surviving manuscripts. One manuscript in particular, which seems to be a compendium of Anglo-Saxon school texts, gives us an impression of what works were being studied at the time it was copied: Cambridge, University Library, Gg. 5.35, a manuscript written at St Augustine's, Canterbury, in the mid-eleventh century.[16] The first (and easiest) part of this book includes various Christian Latin poems such as the *Evangelia* of Iuvencus, the *Carmen paschale* of Caelius Sedulius, the *Historia apostolica* of Arator, the *Epigrammata* of Prosper of Aquitaine, the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, the *De ave phoenice* attributed to Lactantius (the Old English poem *The Phoenix* is based on this); these are followed by the *De consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius, a text which was added to the Anglo-Saxon curriculum some centuries after the other texts had been well established (the earliest English use of this text dates from the period of King Alfred's educational reform: see above, p. 281). The second part of Gg. 5.35 comprises texts of much greater difficulty, such as Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate* and the third book of the *Bella Parisiacae urbis* by Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, as well as various Carolingian Latin poets. The third part contains texts less difficult than the second; most of the texts in this part are concerned with wisdom and the acquisition of wisdom, such as the *Disticha Catonis* and the various riddle collections of Symposius, Aldhelm, Tatwine, Eusebius and Boniface.

Of these various texts, those in the first part of the manuscript were commonly studied in schools all over Europe in the early Middle Ages. Those in the second and third parts, however, were unique to the Anglo-Saxon curriculum, and gave Anglo-Saxon learning – in Latin as well as in the vernacular – an individual and characteristic stamp. The difficult texts such as Aldhelm and Abbo were studied intensively for the arcane vocabulary which they contained: archaisms, neologisms, grecisms. Concern with the display of this arcane vocabulary (which is often referred to as 'hermeneutic' because much of it derived originally from Greek–Latin word-lists included in the so-called *Hermeneumata pseudo-Dositheana*) is found in nearly all Anglo-Latin literature of the tenth and eleventh centuries,[17] but it is also reflected in various works in English. An example in verse is the brief Old English poem known as *Aldhelm*, where words of Greek and Latin origin are carefully but ostentatiously woven into the fabric of the poem's alliteration. Among prose writers, it is clear that Byrhtferth in his *Enchiridion* embellished his prose style by the use of obscure English words as well as by the use of Latin expressions

(see above, p. 288). Nor is it surprising that Byrhtferth's Old English prose should take this form: the Latin prose of his saints' Lives (*Vita S. Ecgwini* and *Vita S. Oswaldi*) and chronicle (*Historia regum*) abounds in hermeneutic vocabulary.

Also characteristically Anglo-Saxon is the use of riddles or *enigmata* for teaching purposes (as is also testified by the glosses). Aldhelm's collection of one hundred *enigmata* is intended (as he states) to exemplify the metrical features he had discussed in his metrical treatises (see below, p. 309).[18] The forty *enigmata* composed by Tatwine are similarly didactic in intent (the subject of one of them, no. XVI, is 'Prepositions governing two cases'). The *enigmata* of Eusebius, which were added to Tatwine's forty in order to make up the canonical number of 100, show a pervasive interest in grammar (nos. IX, XIX, XXXIX and XIII) and chronology (nos. XXVI and XXIX). Boniface composed twenty *enigmata* on the virtues and vices, and a small collection of Latin riddles is attributed to Bede as well (preserved as *Aenigmata Bedae* in the aforementioned manuscript Cambridge Gg. 5.35). Alcuin, too, in his *Disputatio regalis iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico* paraphrases the riddles of Symposius for elementary didactic purposes. The nature of these Anglo-Latin *enigmata*, however, is quite different from that of the vernacular riddles. Consider, for example, one of Aldhelm's *enigmata* (no. XXXV):

> My nature appropriately reproduces my name in two aspects, for the 'shadows' have part of me, and the 'birds' the other part. Only rarely does anyone see me in the clear light, particularly since at night-time I frequent hiding-places beneath the stars. It is my custom to chatter in mid-air in a harsh voice. I am recorded in Romulean books, although my name is Greek, while I inhabit nocturnal shadows through my name.

This riddle is not designed to puzzle the reader, merely to impress him. The reader of the Exeter Book riddles was obliged to guess the solution (see above, p. 299) – a difficult, and sometimes impossible, task; here, however, the solution is given at the outset – *nycticorax* – and the problem is simply the etymological one of explaining the word given as the title.[19] The riddle plays on the two parts of the name: *nyks/nyktos* ('night') and *korax* ('raven'); the name of the creature is thus 'night-raven', apparently a kind of owl. The riddling exercise has become an exercise in etymology.

Reflection on the alphabet is pervasive in the Anglo-Latin *enigmata*: Tatwine, for example, composed a riddle entitled 'Versus de nominibus litterarum' ('Verses on the names of the letters'). The same concern may lie behind the Anglo-Saxon penchant for acrostics (used by Aldhelm, Tatwine and Boniface) and for cryptography, where vowels are replaced either by

punctuation marks or by other letters so as to constitute a sort of secret script; and it would appear that it was Boniface who introduced cryptography to the Continent.

In the study of these and other texts, it is evident that the emphasis throughout is linguistic, what was understood by the term 'grammar' in the early Middle Ages. As far as the sources permit us to tell, Anglo-Saxon schools did not pursue the full range of subjects defined – by late antique authorities such as Cassiodorus and Martianus Capella – as the *trivium* (that is, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) and *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and harmony). In the early Middle Ages, study of these various *artes* was regarded as preparatory to the study of the Scriptures; and for understanding the Bible, the most necessary discipline was grammar (only at a later time, from the ninth century onwards, did the subjects of the *quadrivium* began to receive some attention). As I have said, grammar was understood in the wider sense, not only of understanding Latin, but of interpreting literary texts, above all the Bible.[20] For this purpose, rhetoric and dialectic were less essential, though it should be mentioned that Bede was sympathetic to the techniques of classical rhetoric (he composed a treatise on the rhetorical devices used in Scripture) and Alcuin composed a treatise on rhetoric and dialectic. It will not be until the first decades of the eleventh century that Byrhtferth will include passages on metrics and rhetoric in his *Enchiridion*, a work otherwise mainly dedicated to computus.

Perhaps because they were not native speakers of Latin, the Anglo-Saxons devoted particular attention to aspects of Latin which were taken for granted by the grammarians of late antiquity, such as the declension of nouns and conjugation of verbs. Grammatical treatises were written by Boniface, Tatwine, Alcuin, Ælfric and various anonymous authors. Abbo of Fleury, after he had returned to the Continent, composed a treatise entitled *Quaestiones grammaticales* which he dedicated and sent to his former students at Ramsey. Among the earliest treatises written by Anglo-Saxons were works on metre, since knowledge of Latin verse was considered essential. Bede wrote on metrics, composing a *De arte metrica*, and Aldhelm's massive *Epistola ad Acircium* contains two distinct treatises on metre (*De metris* and *De pedum regulis*).[21] Boniface too is responsible for a short treatise on metre, the *Caesurae versuum*.

In the domains of grammar and metre the Anglo-Saxons were the undisputed schoolmasters of medieval Europe, and some of their treatises, especially those of Bede, survive in hundreds of copies and were used as textbooks up to the time of the Renaissance. In other respects, however, English schools lagged behind those on the Continent. This is particularly so in the case of the scientific subjects which made up the ancient *quadrivium*. At the school of

Theodore in Canterbury, astronomy was not studied for its own sake, but because of the practical interest in computus as an instrument for calculating Church feast days and festivals.[22] In the eighth century, Bede strove to initiate his readers into the 'nature of things', the earth, the sky and the whole universe, but only in order to celebrate the Creation. However, his *De natura rerum*, written about 701, also provides a scientific description of the universe. Chs. XII–XVI, in particular, are devoted to the planets and their course. In his *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione* Bede tackled questions such as the calendrical and canonical reckoning of time.[23] These scientific works were praised by later writers and, by the ninth century, formed an essential part of clerical education. Abbo of Fleury taught computus during his stay at Ramsey, and his teaching is reflected in Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*. But computus was a practical discipline, and had little to do with the complex mathematics which constituted the study of arithmetic, astronomy and harmony as it was pursued in continental schools from the ninth century onwards. Only at the turn of the tenth century do the textbooks of the *quadrivium* (Macrobius, Hyginus), which had been the staple of the scientific curriculum in continental schools, appear in English libraries, preceded by a century by Martianus Capella. No Anglo-Saxon author shows more than a superficial familiarity with such scientific texts: Byrhtferth, for example, who certainly had studied Macrobius, seems to have used him more as a stylistic model and a source of Greek words than as a source of scientific information.

Anglo-Saxon learning presents a curious paradox, therefore. Anglo-Saxons were in the vanguard of European learning, in particular in the field of grammar and related disciplines – but it was not so in other fields. One of the most characteristic features of their learning is the continuous fascination with linguistic details, which is reflected in countless ways: in the use of runic and cryptographic alphabets in manuscripts, in the pursuit of obscure vocabulary, in the use of etymology as a pedagogical device, in the pervasive fondness for riddles and riddling, to name only a few. This very fascination still speaks to us when we study the literature of Anglo-Saxon England.

## NOTES

1. H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe, AZ, 2001); M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006).
2. R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1999); for the Franks Casket, see pp. 174–82, and for the Ruthwell Cross, pp. 148–53. For runes in manuscripts, see R. Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta* (Bruges, 1954).
3. The script found in English (and other) manuscripts up to 800 is studied by means of E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 11 vols. and suppl. (Oxford, 1934–71); see

also his *English Uncial* (Oxford, 1960). For the later period see T. A. M. Bishop, *English Caroline Minuscule* (Oxford, 1971), and for manuscripts containing Old English, N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957).

4. S. D. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 134–53.

5. M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, CSASE 7 (Cambridge, 1993); A. Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies: the Old English 'Herbarium' and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (New York, 2002); M. D. C. Drout, B. Brennessel and R. Gravel, 'A Re-Assessment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine', *ASE* 34 (2005), 183–95.

6. T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1976); N. Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems*, Anglistica 23 (Copenhagen, 1985); and D. Anlezark, *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, AST 7 (Cambridge, 2009).

7. See P. Lendinara, 'The Germanic Background', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. E. Treharne and P. Pulsiano (Oxford, 2001), pp. 121–34.

8. *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, ed. J. E. Cross and T. D. Hill (Toronto, 1982).

9. No overall study of Anglo-Saxon schools has been written yet. See the relevant entries in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge *et al.* (Oxford, 1999), esp. 'Libraries' and 'Schools'; and the essays in *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the Light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence*, ed. P. Lendinara *et al.*, *Fédération internationale des instituts d'études médiévales, textes et études du moyen âge 39* (Turnhout, 2007). An important contribution to the understanding of literacy in the medieval West is that of A. Grotans, *Reading in Medieval St Gall* (Cambridge, 2006). As general background (with some discussion of England), see P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, Sixth through Eighth Centuries*, trans. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1976), and *Les Écoles et l'enseignement dans l'Occident chrétien de la fin du Ve siècle au milieu du XIe siècle* (Paris, 1979).

10. *Alcuin: the Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. P. Godman (Oxford, 1982), pp. 112–15.

11. *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: the Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, ed. S. Gwara, trans. D. Porter (Woodbridge, 1997); *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway (repr. Exeter, 1991).

12. P. Lendinara, 'The Third Book of the *Bella Parisiacae urbis* by Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and its Old English Gloss', *ASE* 15 (1986), 73–89, repr. in her *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 622 (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 157–75.

13. See Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries*; M. Lapidge, 'The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England, I: the Evidence of Latin Glosses' (repr. in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 455–98), and R. I. Page, 'The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England, II: the Evidence of English Glosses', both in *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. N. Brooks (Leicester, 1982), pp. 99–140, 141–65.

14. *Aldhelmi opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores antiquissimi 15 (Berlin, 1913–19).

15. M. Lapidge, 'The School of Theodore and Hadrian', *ASE* 15 (1986), 45–72. The 'Leiden Glossary' is ed. J. H. Hessels, *A Late Eighth-Century Latin–Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University* (Cambridge, 1906); see J. D. Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Glossaries and the School of Canterbury', *ASE* 16 (1987), 17–44; and *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, ed. B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, CSASE 10 (Cambridge, 1994).

16. A. G. Rigg and G. R. Wieland, 'A Canterbury Classbook of the Mid-Eleventh Century (the "Cambridge Songs" Manuscript)', *ASE* 4 (1975), 113–30; see also Lapidge, 'Study of Latin Texts', and G. R. Wieland, 'The Glossed Manuscript: Classbook or Library Book?', *ASE* 14 (1985), 153–73.

17. M. Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature', *ASE* 4 (1975), 67–111, repr. in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066* (London, 1993), pp. 105–49, with addenda at 474–9.

18. *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works*, trans. M. Lapidge and J. L. Rosier (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 61–9; the translation of the 'Night-Raven' riddle is taken from p. 77.

19. N. Howe, 'Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology', *ASE* 14 (1985), 37–59.

20. M. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 19 (Cambridge, 1994); V. Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians* (Woodbridge, 1982).

21. On Aldhelm's mathematical approach to metre, see C. Ruff, 'The Place of Metrics in Anglo-Saxon Latin Education: Aldhelm and Bede', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104 (2005), 149–70, at 154–65.

22. Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School*, pp. 263–6.

23. See F. Wallis, *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, Translated Texts for Historians 29 (Liverpool, 1999) and C. B. Kendall and F. Wallis, *Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times*, Translated Texts for Historians 56 (Liverpool, 2010).

# 17

CHRIS JONES

# Old English after 1066

> I can't accept that there is any continuity between the traditions of Anglo-
> Saxon poetry and those established in English poetry by the time of, say,
> Shakespeare . . . It is somebody else's poetry.
> (James Fenton)

> I consider *Beowulf* to be part of my voice-right.
> (Seamus Heaney)[1]

Whether Old English from the Anglo-Saxon period has any continuity with subsequent mainstream English literary tradition has been an extremely contentious issue over recent decades. It is undeniable that the alliterative, two-verse line, which is the formal building block of the poems studied in this *Companion*, gradually died out of use (exactly when is arguable). As a result of the gradual changes that affected English over several centuries, even the language in which those poems and the masterpieces of Anglo-Saxon prose were written eventually became unintelligible without applied study on the part of the reader. What right then does Old English have to be seen as part of the living stream of English literature? Fenton is not the only critic to have argued that Old English is so alien as to be, in effect, a foreign language. Oxford professor Valentine Cunningham has made similar arguments about the lack of connection between Old and subsequent English literature, and, as consequence, the relevance of 'Anglo-Saxon' (a more distancing term than 'Old English') to students in university 'Eng. Lit.' departments.

But the issue of whether Old English has a 'use' to writers after the Anglo-Saxon period is, in a sense, more important and more pressing than its place within the British higher education system. A narrative about English literary history such as Fenton's seeks to place Old English beyond the reach of modern writers and their compositional practices. It emphasizes tropes of rupture and discontinuity in order to make a break between 'us' and Old English, and it portrays 'Anglo-Saxon' as a culture fallen into disuse. This might accord with the popular notion of the year 1066 as a historical rupture of some magnitude, but it is in no way a narrative the telling of which is inevitable. It is salutary to read the influential Victorian critic Stopford Brooke write of the history of English literature that 'the story is a long one. It begins about the year 670, and it is still going on in the year 1875.'[2] How

can both these views on the position of Old English within (or without) English literary history be right, except as products of their own historical contingencies, and not as bare facts? In truth Brooke finds a use for Old English in his version of literary history just as much as Fenton does. The question remains, then, what kind of story do we wish to tell about Old English after it ceases to be a 'living' language? And how might this affect the 'work' that Old English can continue to do in our culture?

There are shifts in literary theory that make such a question timely. During the 1980s and 1990s, the dominant mode of thinking about literature was historicist, albeit a 'new' historicism that aimed to be more attentive to the politics and economics of literary production than had previously been the case. This naturally positioned Old English firmly within the Anglo-Saxon period, where it could be, and continues to be, studied historically with great profit. More recently a shift of emphasis towards 'presentism' has begun to place greater importance on the value, meaning and use that is conferred on literary texts, not during their period of production and immediate reception, but to later readers. Temporally, this situates Old English as an object of interest as much within the Renaissance, the Victorian period, or the twenty-first century, as it does before 1066. Happily one does not need to choose between a historicized Old English or a presentist Old English; they are both valid subjects for the Anglo-Saxonist. But as that part of English Literature with the longest history of reception, whether modelled around tropes of continuity, or tropes of decay and recovery, Old English is in a unique position to offer English Studies a presentist case study of the longest *durée*.

According to recent critical tradition, this chapter ought to be called something like 'Afterlives of Old English'. But to talk of a literature's 'afterlife' is to invoke the metaphor of its death, even if one also believes in its resurrection. This chapter will instead attempt to argue for the use of Old English after the Anglo-Saxon period without resorting to tropes of rupture and recovery. It aims to tell a more continuous narrative than is usually the case, although, for reasons of space, it will have to view this narrative in snapshot moments across the millennium or so since the end of the 'Anglo-Saxon period of Old English'.

## Old English in the later Middle Ages

A substantial proportion of our surviving evidence for Old English, especially for the great prose tradition that was born out of the Benedictine revival, dates from after the Norman Conquest.[3] That so many manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon texts are made well into the twelfth century, often accurately and without need of heavy glossing, suggests that Old English was still understood

for around a century after the Conquest and that, initially, no strong sense of break was felt with the literature of the pre-Conquest period. Elaine Treharne has argued persuasively that we should see the vernacular texts produced during this period as the continued expression of Old English as a literary medium with a living currency, and on a continuum with canonical texts such as the Exeter Book poems and Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*.[4] Indeed, the continuation until AD 1154 of one of the manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* at Peterborough Abbey is often rightly cited as evidence in support of such a view of 'long Old English'. Towards the end of the twelfth century, and around the beginning of the thirteenth, however, a change can be detected in the type of evidence that survives. Manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon texts start being produced with a greater degree of rewriting into more contemporary forms of English. This indicates that, while Old English was still being used, it was less transparently understood than before, and needed either to be 'modernized' or, to some degree, studied; pre-Conquest English was gradually becoming 'Old' English.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the work of a scribe active in the early thirteenth century at Worcester Cathedral, and known to scholars as 'The Tremulous Hand of Worcester'. This picturesque nickname is due to an idiosyncratic, left-sloping shakiness in his handwriting, which is easily identifiable in at least twenty manuscripts known to have been at Worcester in the Middle Ages, and which gets progressively worse over the course of his career, possibly due to a congenital tremor. Only one manuscript produced entirely by the Tremulous Hand survives today, Worcester, Cathedral Library, F. 174, which contains a copy of Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary* and seems to have been produced early in his career (the tremor is less pronounced).[5] This early choice of text is telling, for Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary* gives any reader familiar with Latin a key to unlock the study of Old English: a reversal of the pedagogical purpose for which Ælfric intended it, in fact. However, the Tremulous Hand did not merely copy out his Ælfric, he also updated its English wholesale.[6] That he found it desirable or necessary to do so indicates a different relationship to Old English from that of scribes a few decades earlier. Although this is the only surviving manuscript the Tremulous Hand produced himself, he subsequently annotated dozens of other Old English manuscripts, at first glossing difficult words with Middle English equivalents, but later giving up on this programme of modernization, and providing instead Latin glosses for Old English. Christine Franzen has demonstrated that the Tremulous Hand improved his understanding of Old English over time, gradually becoming more accurate in his glossing. In his increasingly shaky script we see, for the first time in detail, someone having to practise at reading Old English fluently.

Immediately following the text of Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary* in Worcester F. 174 are four folios of extremely damaged verse.[7] These are collectively known as *The Worcester Fragments* and are usually treated as two separate poems, sometimes called *The First Worcester Fragment* and *The Soul's Address to the Body*.[8] Most scholars assume that the Tremulous Hand copied these verses from a now lost exemplar, and that their composition predates the production of MS F. 174, although it has also been suggested that the Tremulous Hand could be the author of *The First Worcester Fragment*. Critics have often related the prosodic form of these verses to that of the Old English poetry, claiming that these lines self-consciously and belatedly attempt to imitate that tradition, but fail to do so, and therefore underscore the decay and collapse of Old English poetic making. A more sympathetic reading of these poems might note that just as the Tremulous Hand is concerned to modernize and make new the Old English past within an early thirteenth-century present in his treatment of Ælfric, so these verses seek to remake the forms of the past within a contemporary setting. The poem explicitly contrasts a time when Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Bede and Ælfric translated texts important to the instruction of their people into English, and when English bishops gave spiritual guidance in English, with a present tense in which the indigenous people of England are deprived of teaching and leadership in their own tongue:

> Nu is þeo leore forleten, and þet folc is forloren;
> nu beoð oþre leoden þeo læreð ure folc,
> and feole of þen lorþeines losiæð and þet folc forð mid.　　(18–20)

Now that teaching is neglected, and the folk abandoned. Now it is another people that teaches our folk, and many of the teachers perish and the folk with them.

One could criticize these lines for failing to follow the prosody of 'classical' Old English poetry: syntactically weaker words are sometimes made to carry stress and alliteration; alliteration sometimes falls on the fourth stressed syllable in the line; few of the verses exactly follow Sievers's 'five types'. Yet this misses the point that natural linguistic change over the course of more than a century will inevitably involve metrical change; the levelling of the inflexional system means a greater reliance on particles, which will introduce more unstressed syllables into the verse, for example.

Rather, the Tremulous Hand, either through 'original' composition or purposeful scribal rewriting, has made something new based on patterns which derive from the Old English literature he studied. The result is a complex pattern of repetition and parallelism in alliterative envelope structures that extend across several verses and evoke the texture of Old English

poetry, while innovating on its traditions. These devices, and some use of rhyme, ensure that the verse (or 'half-line') is still felt as a unit with its own structural integrity, while being woven into a larger interlace pattern. Old English poems pair, parallel and overlap verses according to different mechanisms, but the complex relationship between verse unit and verse paragraph in *The First Worcester Fragment* is not merely a failed imitation of Old English in this respect. Indeed, in its adaptation of tradition, *The First Fragment* often displays a prosodic intelligence: the long run of identical alliteration over several lines, which would be regarded as an abnormality in Old English verse, here signals the extent of a rhetorically coherent unit. In this verse paragraph the dense play of /f/, /l/ and /f*l/ combinations is used to juxtapose lore with loss; the indigenous English people or nation (*folc*) with another, foreign people (*leode*) and present tense conditions in the a-verses with their causal effects on the *folc* in the b-verses. Lexically the poem might seem at some remove from the *wordhord* of Old English poetry; there are no examples of the synonym-rich, special register of the earlier poetry, for example, and elsewhere the poem uses French loan-words, like 'questiuns' (4). However, *lorþein* ('lore-thegn', or 'teacher') is apparently a *hapax legomenon*, and so may represent the poet's deliberate coining of a new poetic compound on Old English *þegn*, inspired by the compounds and kennings of the earlier tradition.[9] *Losiæð*, moreover, is here intransitive ('perishes'): a usage of Old English *losian* rare in Middle English.[10] In certain details then, this poem appears to conjure deliberately with the vocabulary of Old English, even if it is clearly not written in that vocabulary.

That *The First Worcester Fragment* invokes the texture and diction of Old English literature while lamenting the loss of that vernacular tradition and the scholars who were involved in its production, is a fine irony, and part of the point and power of this short, moving lyric. Where Old English poetry memorialized legendary figures from an imagined heroic past, so *The First Worcester Fragment* catalogues the deeds and achievements of its scholar-heroes from a vanished time similarly imagined as a golden age. Seth Lerer is certainly right to read this poem politically as a response to the beleaguered position of English as a 'conquered' language in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but it is not merely backward-looking or antiquarian in making that response.[11] The act of composition in this experimental mixed style, drawing on the traditions of the past and giving them a contemporary twist, is itself a small act of cultural resistance, and a call to arms (albeit one with limited effect) to begin a renewed tradition of vernacular literary making. *The First Worcester Fragment* begins by recording that St Bede wisely translated books. Through its very act of self-articulation, however, the poem also manages to translate, in the broader sense of that term, something of Old

English literature into a new, post-Conquest cultural milieu. It is, possibly, the earliest case of deliberate poetic Anglo-Saxonism that we have.

*The Worcester Fragments* are by no means an isolated phenomenon. Other post-Conquest medieval poems which arguably draw from Old English traditions include *The Grave* and Laʒamon's *Brut*, as well as a number of smaller lyrics and fragments. If we were to widen our field of interest to include texts which make use of Anglo-Saxon subject matter, then the range of material under consideration would become considerable indeed. However, to tell the longer narrative of the continuing use of Old English it is necessary to fast-forward in time, past this body of medieval Anglo-Saxonism, to the Renaissance.

### Renaissance and early modern Old English

Early modern Anglo-Saxonism has benefited from a sizeable body of scholarship over recent decades and is relatively well understood. Indeed, the discipline of Anglo-Saxon studies is usually traced to beginnings in the sixteenth century, although a much longer narrative could be imagined, one that would extend back to include the work of anonymous scholars such as the Tremulous Hand. All the same, a clear change took place after the Dissolution of the monasteries in the latter half of the 1530s. Scholars of the English Reformation began the removal of medieval manuscripts from the cathedral libraries, and to amass private collections that would later find their way into the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, or form the early core holdings of the British Library in London. This increased concentration of manuscript materials allowed a correspondingly more detailed comparative study of sources to be made. This in turn gave a fresh impetus to the production and dissemination of editions and lexicographical tools, facilitating wider access to Old English.

Among the most well known of these men are Laurence Nowell, who owned and wrote his name on the *Beowulf* manuscript, William Lambarde, who continued work on several of Nowell's projects, publishing the first printed texts of Old English, and Archbishop Matthew Parker, who consolidated the largest post-Dissolution collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and who facilitated the printing of many more Old English texts, including John Foxe's 1571 edition of the Old English Gospels. It is important to understand, however, that these scholars and their associates did not pursue Old English in a disinterested manner. Rather, they hoped to find evidence that the early Anglo-Saxon Church had exhibited certain kinds of independence from the authority of Rome in order to give historical legitimization to the recent divorce of the English state from Roman Catholicism. As it was a conviction of the English reformers that lay people should have direct access

to the Word of God through the availability of vernacular texts, they were particularly attracted by the fact that a surprisingly large number of spiritually and morally important texts had been translated into English during the Anglo-Saxon period, first as part of the Alfredian, and then the tenth-century Benedictine, programmes of vernacularization.[12] A number of texts were edited for the first time in the second half of the sixteenth century, although as Allen Frantzen has detailed, they were often also 'restored', and to some degree rewritten during this process of dissemination in order to bring them closer into alignment with the project of fashioning a new history of the English Church.[13] This editorial work was continued into the seventeenth century by scholars such as Robert Cotton, Abraham Wheelock and William Somner. It is not the purpose of this chapter to provide a history of Anglo-Saxon scholarship, but suffice it to say that the research these men carried out enabled a different kind of use to be made of Old English. Poems could now be composed, for example, directly into a revived form of Old English. A good example of this can be found in a celebratory anthology of poetry dedicated to Charles I by scholars of Cambridge University in 1641.

Charles had spent three months on a diplomatic mission in Scotland, trying to secure the loyalty of his subjects north of the border on the eve of the outbreak of the British Civil War. His return was feted at the London Guildhall on 25 November, when he was presented with a copy of *Irenodia Cantabrigiensis*.[14] As was typical of such presentation volumes, the book contained eulogies to Charles written in a variety of languages including Greek, Latin, Hebrew and English; indeed, the scholars of Oxford made a similar gift on the same occasion, the *Eucharistica Oxoniensia*. But the Cambridge gift trumped that of Oxford in that it contained poetry written in yet another language of ancient pedigree: Old English.

Abraham Wheelock, who was then working on a dual-text Latin and Old English edition of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (published in 1643, together with the first edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in an appendix), offered his twenty-line praise poem in both Hebrew and Old English versions. Not that Wheelock called the latter an 'Old English' poem, but wrote rather that it is written '*Anglo- & Scoto-Saxonicé*', in 'Anglo- and Scoto-Saxon'. The unprecedented term 'Scoto-Saxon' seems to be a coining of Wheelock's invention, but it reminds us that the language of the Anglo-Saxons has simultaneously evolved in two separate states in the British archipelago; Old English is as native to Scotland as it is to England. The choice of Old English as a medium for Wheelock's poem therefore confers a strength to its political purpose that even the more prestigious languages of Latin, Greek and Hebrew would not; it is the shared linguistic heritage of both the nations

which Charles, like Wheelock, is seeking to draw together as one. It is slightly ironic that Wheelock is forced to use 'Saxon' as the base term for the northern language; in fact the Old English spoken in what is now southern Scotland was of the Anglian variety, but 'Scoto-Anglian' does not give the exact parallel he is seeking to draw. Although in one sense anachronistic, in another Wheelock's coining is analogous with the original use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' itself, which did not refer to an admixture of Anglian and Saxon, but meant the Saxon language which is Anglo-, or spoken in England, to distinguish it from the Saxon language spoken on the Continent in Old Saxony. Even in the name Wheelock gives to his medium in the title then, he is at pains to emphasize the shared history and experience of the neighbouring kingdoms as part of his programme of support for Charles's diplomacy.

This theme continues throughout the poem, which emphasizes not only the peaceful Union of the two kingdoms almost four decades earlier, but also the fact that Scotland was then the leading actor:

> Scotland buton feohte
> Onȝel lond ȝeswiþ'ðe.
> Jacobus ȝryp'd hire ho's
> Ond æfter his Carlos.                    (1–4)

Without fight Scotland conquered England. James seized its heel, and afterwards, his Charles [did].

Flattering the Scots as the original agents of a combined state that now requires renewed commitment is, of course, in complete accord with Charles's political ambitions. Moreover, the poem even manages to emphasize the Union as a marriage of two equals, not the annexation of one state by another, in its choice of pronouns:

> Uncer Dauid eart þu
> Ban ond flesc we beoþ
> Þine. on þe we ðeoþ
> We ðine ðeod trywan
> Unc ðin saul on ȝyman.                    (16–20)

You are our [two nations'] David; bone and flesh we are yours. In you we flourish, we, your true people. By us [two] your soul [be] cared for.

'Uncer' is the dual pronoun meaning not 'we several', or 'we many', but rather 'we two'. Assuming that Wheelock understands the differences between 'unc' and 'us', then (and it is a relatively elementary difference: he correctly uses 'ure' to refer to the Scots from the perspective of an English plural as 'our friends' elsewhere in the poem), he here uses the Old English pronominal system to invoke the idea of 'we two nations'. That Wheelock does not use the

dual pronoun 'wit' in the nominative when he refers to *þeod* in the same passages, but reverts to 'we', indicates that he understands, or even intends, *þeod* in the sense of 'people', rather than 'nation'. Thus Wheelock grammatically inscribes the Union as two-that-are-also-one through a distinction that Modern English is unable to make, except by more expansive means, in order to achieve a political effect.

Wheelock's poem, like that of his presumed student William Retchford, who also contributed an Old English composition to this volume, is not in alliterative, stress-based metres, but in rhyming couplets; Wheelock uses a shorter six-syllable (or trimeter) line, and Retchford an eight-syllable (tetrameter) line. One could censure Wheelock and Retchford for using verse structures alien to 'authentic' Old English, just as one could complain about grammatical inaccuracies. Yet these are evidently not 'authentic' Old English poems, if by that we mean poems written before the twelfth century. Rather they witness the recovery of Old English as a literary medium, the status and function of which is quite different from Old English as a medium for composition before the Norman Conquest. Wheelock and Retchford make new types of poetic structures from the medium of Old English, shaped by their own culture of verse-making and the expectations and understandings they had of grammatical correctness. That Wheelock's and Retchford's compositions take their place among poems written in several high-status languages implies that the long history of Old English itself was, at this point, thought to carry sufficient prestige for composition for the king. Through the geopolitical implications of a shared 'Anglo- & Scoto-Saxon' language these two poems participate in an argument about national unity on the eve of the Civil War in a particularly charged way. With more space their conservatism might be juxtaposed with the radical uses found for the Anglo-Saxon past by various groups dissatisfied with the monarchy during this period of history, a phenomenon which has been well documented by scholars such as Christopher Hill.[15] In any case, what is clear is that Old English continued to be used in very politicized ways.

It is important to remember that during this period very little Old English poetry appears to have been read and understood as poetry. In 1655 Dutch scholar Francis Junius produced an edition of the 'Caedmonian' biblical poems from the codex that now bears his name (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11), but most other poetic material was largely unexamined. The most commonly read poems were those embedded in prose works, such as Caedmon's *Hymn* in Bede's *History* and the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. But the nature of that poetry, or sometimes even that these texts were poetic at all, was not necessarily appreciated. Milton summarized the content of *The Battle of Brunanburh* in his *History of Britain* (begun 1649,

published 1670), but was very impatient with the style of 'the Saxon Annalist', criticizing the entry in the *Chronicle* for its sudden run into 'such extravagant fansies and metaphors'.[16] It is clearly the kennings and other types of periphrasis typical of Old English poetry that provoke Milton's negative response. Yet it is equally clear that he does not understand (nor could he be expected to) that the shift he rightly detects away from the usual 'sober and succinct' delivery of the *Chronicle* is because of the move into verse for this entry. In general up until this time prose texts were much more important to the long history of Old English, even though they sometimes gave licence to poetic forms of Anglo-Saxonism.

## Romantic and Victorian Old English

During the course of the eighteenth century, however, more attention began to be paid to the nature of Old English poetry, even if this often remained speculative. The first published note of *Beowulf* was made in 1705 by librarian and scholar Humphry Wanley, who also recognized it was a poem: not a small achievement given that, like all other Old English poems, it is not set out in verse lines in the manuscript, but continuously across the page. Wanley's note occurs in his catalogue of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in the second volume of George Hickes's monumental work of scholarship on medieval Germanic languages, the *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus*.[17] Subsequently antiquaries began making generalizations about the nature of Old English poetry with increasing frequency, even if they did not always have much evidence at their disposal to support these generalizations. Thus Thomas Percy, in the prefatory essay to his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), romanticized the role and status of the Old English poet largely on the basis of comparison with the Old Norse poetry with which he was much more familiar (although he was aware that both poetries were based on an alliterative measure). In his *History of English Poetry* (1775), Thomas Warton actually argued that Scandinavian poetry, with its 'barbarous theology', had been the formative influence on the verse-making culture of the Anglo-Saxons, although his footnotes reveal a new level of familiarity with a number of Old English poems, often citing Hickes and Wanley as his sources. Increasingly, the idea of Old English poetry as primitive, oral and intimately bound up with the collective memory of the tribe or race appealed to Romantic nationalist sentiment and could be harnessed to the drive, common then throughout Europe, to find origins for national identity in the early Middle Ages.

Probably the most important breakthrough in dissemination of knowledge of Old English literature in this period, however, came with Sharon Turner's

*History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799–1805), a popular and much reprinted work which contained an extensive account of the Old English language, and of its prose and verse literature, quoting passages from a number of poems, including *Beowulf*, sometimes for the first time. This meant that by the early nineteenth century a writer could invent a fictional Old English poem, not only on the basis of a number of convictions that were fairly widely held about Old English poetry and its conventions, but also with the expectation that those conventions would be recognized as being 'authentically' Old English. This is precisely what Walter Scott did in his novel *Ivanhoe* (1819), in which he has the Saxon crone Ulrica 'yelling a war-song' of her ancient Saxon ancestors as she dramatically plunges to her death from the top of castle battlements. Ulrica's song consists of four stanzas of irregular length (it was often claimed that Old English poetry had originally been strophic), of which the second reads:

> The black cloud is low over the thane's castle;
> The eagle screams – he rides on their bosom.
> Scream not, grey rider of the sable cloud,
> Thy banquet is prepared!
> The maidens of Valhalla look forth,
> The race of Hengist will send them guests.
> Shake your black tresses, maidens of Valhalla!
> And strike your loud timbrels for joy!
> Many a haughty step bends to your halls,
> Many a helmed head.[18]

Few now would be convinced by the 'maidens of Valhalla' (although Scandinavian poetry was often elided with Old English, as already noted), and even 'the race of Hengist' looks suspiciously aetiological; Bede's *History* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* both record Hengist as the leader of the original troop of migrating Angles and Saxons that arrived in Britain in the mid-fifth century, but to name the whole Anglo-Saxon 'race' for him is a manoeuvre that smacks of a retrospective and overly deterministic viewpoint. Nevertheless, the eagle is one of the traditional characters from the genuine Old English type-scene 'the beasts of battle', and in the previous stanza its companion the raven makes an appearance. 'Grey rider of the sable cloud' is a conceivable kenning for 'eagle', and in the following stanza appear 'destroyer of forests' and 'the bright consumer of palaces': not implausible as Anglo-Saxon metaphoric periphrases for 'fire'. The whole poem is characterized by short, declarative phrases and exclamations that often restate and rephrase existing phrases to produce an effect not unlike that of the patterns of apposition and variation we see in Old English poetry. The lack of coordination between clauses, and the heavy use of apostrophe, accord entirely with

the view frequently expressed by Turner and other antiquarian scholars that Old English poetry was marked by abrupt and violent transitions, no doubt a view formed in response to the device of variation. The last two lines of this stanza even seem to mark a deliberate attempt to contrive a strongly alliterative couplet.

Given the relative lack of materials and accurate study tools available at the time, it is striking how close Scott's poem comes to resembling Old English poetry in some of its details, for all its obvious incongruities. In its own time, however, and according to the model built by antiquarian scholars, Ulrica's song would have been easily identifiable as an 'Old English' poem (*Ivanhoe*'s framing conceit is that the whole novel has been translated into Modern English from a twelfth-century manuscript). That one of the most popular, best-selling novels of the nineteenth century could rely on a paradigm of Old English poetry as primitivist and syntactically violent is an indicator of how widespread and culturally productive the *idea* of Old English literature was during this period. Moreover, here we again see this idea being put to explicitly political work. *Ivanhoe*'s theme is the forging of a unified English identity from the disparate ethnic groups of its 'Merrie England', most apparently the mutually antipathetic Saxons and Normans. Ulrica is a Saxon who has been imprisoned by the Normans in her forefathers' ancestral castle for an indeterminately long period of time. Approximately two-thirds of the way through the novel she comes into contact with some free Saxons, less implicated in the old ways, after which she reverts to the pagan cultural practices of her most distant ancestors, before killing herself and destroying the castle that is both her birthright and her cage. Ulrica represents, therefore, the deep Saxon past, an atavistic ur-Englishness, as well as the age-old enmity between Saxon and Norman, which has to be killed off and erased before the novel can continue with its programme of reconciliation and harmonization. For Scott, this narrative is an allegorical working out of his hopes for the Union of Scotland and England after the long shadow of Jacobitism had diminished. In this respect it somewhat curiously echoes the use Wheelock and Retchford made of Old English around one hundred and eighty years earlier. Ironically then, Scott fashions and conjures up the voice of an Old English tradition, only to silence it deliberately in the pursuit of a contemporary political agenda.

It was during the course of the nineteenth century that great strides were made in the discipline of Anglo-Saxon studies as we now understand the subject, due largely to the more rigorous methods of scholars of 'The New Philology', a movement whose roots were in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The production of increasingly reliable lexicographical tools and editions of texts is well documented in several histories

of the discipline. These in turn allowed access to Old English literature not only to more scholars but also to more writers. Major poets, although not formally trained to read Old English, began to try their hand at translating canonical texts. In 1876 Tennyson rendered *The Battle of Brunanburh* into a stanzaic, often alliterative, short-line verse form with an emphatically dactylic rhythm which approximates well enough the downward-falling beat of Sievers's A-type, the most commonly occurring verse in Old English prosody. In 1895 William Morris, in collaboration with the scholar A. J. Wyatt, produced a full translation of *Beowulf* that was not only in stress-based rhythm, but which relied almost entirely on vocabulary that was derived from Old English. This policy of only using 'native' English words often produced strange effects:

> Good men did get to them; now war-death hath gotten,
> Life-bale the fearful, each man and every
> Of my folk; e'en of them who forwent the life:
> The hall-joy had they seen.[19] (2249–54)

Nevertheless, the preference for a poetic vocabulary derived primarily from Old English roots, not only in translations, but even in original work, was held by a number of writers in the nineteenth century, sometimes with almost ideological fervour, as in the case of Dorsetshire poet William Barnes. It can be detected too in the mature style of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who liked to introduce etymological puns based on Anglo-Saxon roots into his later poems, after self-studying Old English in 1882–3 and declaring to Robert Bridges that the language was 'a vastly superior thing to what we have now'.[20] It is even possible to see the influence of this nineteenth-century 'nativist' programme on the diction of Thomas Hardy's poetry, and thus into all those twentieth-century poets who follow him in their preference for plain, direct speech. By this account, even Philip Larkin, who famously called Old English 'ape's bum-fodder', is something of a closet Anglo-Saxonist in self-denial.

### The twentieth century and beyond

There was another, more direct route, however, through which Old English entered modern literature. In 1911 the American poet Ezra Pound published his extremely radical reinterpretation of *The Seafarer* in the journal *The New Age*, where he argued that it is one of the essential texts of European literature from which one can learn the elements of literary style. In 1915 Pound republished the work in the middle of *Cathay*, a volume of translations from Chinese, as he believed that 'apart from the Seafarer [*sic*] I know no

other European poems of the period you can hang up with the "Exile's Letter" of Li Po, displaying the West on a par with the Orient'.[21] Pound's interest in *The Seafarer* is partly as an example of technique; his translation, therefore, seeks to capture the aural effects of Old English verse, not by slavish adherence to prosodic rules, but by appropriation of what he hears as the most important features of the Old English auditory soundscape: strongly falling accentual rhythms (akin to Sievers's A-type); the possibility of allowing strongly stressed syllables to fall consecutively and without having to be separated by unstressed syllables (as in C-type verses, and by the introduction of secondary stresses in D- and E-types); and the licence of varying one rhythmic pattern against another instead of being locked into a single metrical expectation for the duration of the poem:

> Cuckoo calleth with gloomy crying,
> He singeth summerward, bodeth sorrow,
> The bitter heart's blood. Burgher knows not –
> He the prosperous man – what some perform
> Where wandering them widest draweth.
> So that but now my heart burst from my breastlock,
> My mood 'mid the mere-flood,
> Over the whale's acre would wander wide.[22]

In effect, this is a translation of the musical effect of the Old English, as much as it is of the meaning of the words. Pound presents a model for writing verse which is demonstrably English, but which does not adhere to the dominant iambic pentameter (which he and other modernists felt had become constraining), and which also avoids the risk that comes with free verse of complete lack of structure. What is more, Pound manages to create from the Old English elegy an almost textbook modernist persona of the anti-bourgeois artist-in-exile, a subject who sets himself against the uncomprehending 'burghers' of an homogeneous, conformist society.

Although the translation used to be criticized for the 'mistakes' it makes, such as rendering *byrig* (48: 'stronghold/town') as 'berries', Fred Robinson long since demonstrated that Pound was usually following the scholarly tools available to him in the more surprising choices he makes (dictionaries record two separate words spelled *byrig*, for example: one means 'mulberry trees'). Regardless of the arguments over its accuracy, the translation had an enormous effect on the fortunes of Old English in the twentieth century. Pound himself developed his 'Saxonist' mode for subsequent composition; the first two cantos of his long epic *The Cantos* owe a great deal to his *Seafarer* experiment. Pound's 'Seafarer' can justifiably be seen as the portal through which Old English comes into contact with a host of other poets, to the point

where, a century later, Old English influence is now almost a mainstream aspect of contemporary poetry.

After Pound the next significant poet to make extensive use of Old English was Auden, who studied English at Oxford from 1926 to 1928. This fact also illustrates a new development in the continuing use of Old English; Auden was the first major poet to study the subject as an integral part of his undergraduate education (Pound spent a postgraduate year studying Old English). From this point on writers frequently have direct access to Old English as part of the university syllabus. In his earliest works Auden often made use of this part of his education by obscurely alluding to poems he studied at Oxford. For example, in the 1930 poem which he eventually called 'The Wanderer' (not a translation of the Old English poem of that name) he made extensive use of Old English to construct a narrative of anxiety, guilt and hope about the experience of being a gay man not yet out of the closet. Later Auden would abandon the abstruse nature of these riddling allusions, but his long Second World War poem *The Age of Anxiety* uses an alliterative metre based on his reading of Old and Middle English literature.

Through the 'Further reading' suggestions one can trace the extensive reach of Old English in the work of authors including, but not limited to, J. R. R. Tolkien, David Jones, Jorge Luis Borges, W. S. Graham, Edwin Morgan, Richard Wilbur, Geoffrey Hill, John Haynes, John Gardner, Michael Crichton, Peter Reading and Paul Muldoon. Naturally the Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney deserves special mention in any such catalogue of writers. His translation of *Beowulf*, published at the eve of the new millennium, further revived interest in, and widened access to, Old English as a resource for contemporary composition. Heaney famously 'Irished' some aspects of the poem, rendering *burgum* (140: 'buildings') with 'bothies', and *fengelad* (1359: 'fen-path') as 'keshes', for example. In Heaney's *Beowulf* one can read the poem's preoccupation with maintaining the rather brittle state of peace that temporarily exists between the several tribes that populate its heroic history as a reflection of the fragile political situation in Northern Ireland during the last decade of the twentieth century. Arguably Heaney's *Beowulf* is not even his most accomplished use of Old English, a literary resource he has drawn on throughout his long career. In particular, the absorption and integration of technical devices from Old English into the style of *North* (1975), his first volume to address the political situation in Northern Ireland overtly, is deep, and as provocative as it is brilliant. In the 2006 collection *District and Circle*, Heaney turned again to Old English, to *The Battle of Maldon*, and to Hrothgar's gift to Beowulf of a helmet, in order to articulate a response to the events of 11 September 2001. In 'Helmet' Heaney meditates on a fireman's helmet he had been gifted on a visit to a

Boston fire station, and which Heaney has described as 'gathering dumbly in silence' on his shelf for twenty years until that moment.

The dumb silence that must be broken reminds us of Caedmon, and so brings us back to Bede, who tells the story of the cowherd-poet's coming into articulation, and who was at the start of our tour of 'New Old English'; the Tremulous Hand's fragmentary poem lamented that the Old English literary tradition, emblematized there by Bede, had fallen into disuse. The range of writers and materials that have been discussed ought to demonstrate that any simplistic narrative of decay and disuse is easily countered. But as yet this survey has not included any women. In her poem 'Caedmon', Denise Levertov, a British-born American poet, took, not the *Hymn* itself, but rather Bede's anecdote of the tongue-tied 'clodhopper I, with clumsy feet' and uses it to compose a poem about the raid on the inarticulate that every poet must perform, creating a modern-day, secular origin myth for the creation of the poem out of Bede's own origin myth, and by doing so, she breaks her own silence, becomes her own Caedmon:

> I
>> was at home and lonely,
>> both in good measure. Until
>> the sudden angel affrighted me – light effacing
>> my feeble beam,
>> a forest of torches, feathers of flame, sparks upflying:
>> but the cows as before
>> were calm, and nothing was burning,
>>> nothing but I, as that hand of fire
>> touched my lip and scorched my tongue
>> and pulled my voice
>>>> into the ring of the dance.[23]

### Conclusions

This chapter has tried to attend to the *use* that Old English has had for a range of post-1066 writers. This enquiry into what we might call 'New Old English' is in accord with the almost anthropological bent of certain research trends within Old English studies. Jack Niles, for example, has recently asked not, what did a text like *Beowulf* mean to its audience, but what work did it perform within its social milieu – what function did the poem have?[24] The shift of emphasis between these questions is subtle, but can prompt significant differences in the way we think about literary texts. We might start to ask what work Old English, *as a tradition*, not just as a set of texts, has done since 1066: what function that tradition has had for later writers. Texts that fail to find a function for reading and writing communities might truly be said to

atrophy; 'dead' is perhaps not an inappropriate metaphor for such work. What this chapter hopes to have demonstrated is that Old English has in fact continued to be useful, if not continually, then at least regularly, since the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, and with increasing intensity over the last century. In that sense it is far from being dead, and therefore far from having an 'afterlife'; it is still enjoying a very healthy and use-ful longevity.

## NOTES

1. J. Fenton, *An Introduction to English Poetry* (London, 2002), p. 1; *Beowulf*, trans. S. Heaney (London, 1999), p. xxiii.

2. S. A. Brooke, *English Literature from A. D. 670 to A. D. 1832*, 2nd rev. edn (London, 1876), p. 7.

3. N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), lists twenty-seven manuscripts written after 1100, almost half of which may have been worked on in the second half of the twelfth century (pp. xviii–xix).

4. E. M. Treharne, 'Reading from the Margins: the Uses of Old English Homiletic Manuscripts in the Post-Conquest Period', in *Beatus Vir: Studies in Early English and Norse Manuscripts in Memory of Phillip Pulsiano*, ed. A. N. Doane and K. Wolf (Tempe, AZ, 2006), pp. 329–58.

5. C. Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand of Worcester: a Study of Old English in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 26–7.

6. Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 466, and Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand*, pp. 81, 88–91.

7. Worcester, Cathedral Library, F. 174, 63$^r$ (beginning fourteen lines down) to 66$^v$.

8. Franzen refers to the first poem as the *St Bede Lament*. It has also been called *The Disuse of English*. This chapter will quote the text from *Old and Middle English c. 890 – c. 1450*, ed. E. Treharne, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2010), pp. 363–5.

9. *Selections from Early Middle English 1130–1250*, ed. J. Hall, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1920), II, 228.

10. J. P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English: a Survey of the Traditions* (Manchester, 1935), p. 170.

11. S. Lerer, 'Old English and its Afterlife', in *Medieval English Literature*, ed. D. Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 7–34.

12. A. J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990), pp. 36–43.

13. Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand*, pp. 45–50.

14. *Irenodia Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge, 1641), n. p.

15. C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1986; originally published 1958), pp. 58–125.

16. J. Milton, *A History of Britain* (London, 1670), p. 225.

17. G. Hickes, *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archæologicus*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1705), II, 218–19.

18. [W. Scott], *Ivanhoe: a Romance*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1820), III, 29–30.

19. W. Morris, 'The Tale of Beowulf', in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. M. Morris, 24 vols. (London, 1910–15), X, 246–7.

20. *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. C. C. Abbot, 2nd edn (London, 1955), p. 163.
21. E. Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London, 1951), p. 51.
22. E. Pound, *Translations* (London, 1953), p. 208.
23. D. Levertov, 'Caedmon', in *Breathing the Water* (New York, 1987), p. 65.
24. J. D. Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems and the Social Life of Texts* (Turnhout, 2007).

# FURTHER READING

The reading list which follows is intended to provide simple and swift bibliographical orientation for the uninitiated reader in any of the specified areas of interest. It will be realized that, in many fields of Old English scholarship, the bibliography is practically inexhaustible. With respect to individual texts, therefore, we have simply attempted to cite some of the classic interpretative studies (with no attempt at comprehensiveness), in the hope that the enterprising student will derive from such studies a preliminary orientation, and will thereafter be able to pursue particular interests by consulting the more comprehensive works of reference listed throughout.

## Bibliography

A complete list of all surviving Old English texts is given in *A Plan for the Dictionary of Old English*, ed. R. Frank and A. Cameron (Toronto, 1973). For secondary literature on the subject up to 1972 there is the truly comprehensive work by S. B. Greenfield and F. C. Robinson, *A Bibliography of Publications on Old English Literature to the End of 1972* (Toronto and Manchester, 1980). More recent work is listed in the annual bibliographies in *ASE* (from 1972 on) and in the *Old English Newsletter* (from 1967 on). Annotated bibliographies on specific areas include: *Old English Prose of Secular Learning*, ed. S. Hollis and M. Wright (Cambridge, 1993); *Old English Wisdom Poetry*, ed. R. Poole (Cambridge, 1998); *Old English Prose Translations of King Alfred's Reign*, ed. G. Waite (Cambridge, 2000).

## Historical and cultural background

There is valuable orientation in all aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. D. Keynes and D. G. Scragg (Oxford, 1999). An excellent bibliographical guide is S. D. Keynes, *Anglo-Saxon History: a Select Bibliography*, issued at frequent intervals by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in Cambridge (the most recent edition, the 11th, was issued in 2006); see also J. T. Rosenthal, *Anglo-Saxon History: an Annotated Bibliography 450–1066* (New York, 1985). General studies include: F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971); D. Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth, 1952); P. Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1977); H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (London, 1990); D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981); J. Campbell, E. John and P. Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1982), a book which is richly

illustrated; and C. E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984; repr. Oxford, 1986).

An invaluable compendium of historical sources in translation is *EHD*, to be supplemented by various translations, including: M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979); M. Lapidge and J. L. Rosier, *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works* (Cambridge, 1985); *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, trans. E. Emerton (New York, 1940); *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); *Alcuin: the Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. P. Godman (Oxford, 1982); S. Allott, *Alcuin of York* (York, 1974), a collection of Alcuin's letters in translation; and S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983). A collection of some relevant Norse poems, which provide significant background to Anglo-Saxon culture, is *The Poetic Edda*, ed. U. Dronke, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1969–2011).

A survey of Anglo-Latin literature is given by M. Lapidge in *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 1–35. The most authoritative studies of (aspects of) Anglo-Latin culture are W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946); P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800*, CSASE 3 (Cambridge, 1990). For Anglo-Saxon books and libraries, see now M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006). The Latin sources of Anglo-Saxon literature (in both Latin and Old English) are identified by the collaborative project *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* (see below, under 'Electronic resources'), as well as in the on-going series of 'Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture' (SASLC): *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: a Trial Version*, ed. F. M. Biggs *et al.* (Binghamton, NY, 1990); *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture, I. Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Acta Sanctorum*, ed. F. M. Biggs *et al.* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001); *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: the Apocrypha*, ed. F. M. Biggs (Kalamazoo, MI, 2007). There is also much of relevance to our understanding of the cultural background of Old English literature in various collaborative volumes: *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971); *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985); *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer *et al.* (Cambridge, 1992); *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto, 2005).

## *Manuscripts*

The indispensable guide for students of Old English literature wishing to explore the manuscript context of the literature they study is N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), with supplement in *ASE* 5 (1976), 121–31. All manuscripts – Latin and Old English – which survive are listed helpfully by H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe, AZ, 2001). For an authoritative study of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, script and libraries, see *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume I, c. 400–1100*, ed.

R. Gameson (Cambridge, 2012). The best general introduction to the palaeography of medieval manuscripts is B. Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. D. Ó Cróinín and D. Ganz (Cambridge, 1990). A useful collection of plates illustrating the development of script (including various kinds of Anglo-Saxon script) is found in M. P. Brown, *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600* (London, 1990); some vernacular manuscripts are usefully illustrated and discussed in R. L. Collins, *Anglo-Saxon Vernacular Manuscripts in America* (New York, 1976). For English manuscripts of the earlier period (up to 800), see the relevant entries in E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 11 vols. and suppl. (Oxford, 1934–71; 2nd edn of vol. II, 1972) and *English Uncial* (Oxford, 1960). For manuscripts of the later period, see T. A. M. Bishop, *English Caroline Minuscule* (Oxford, 1971) and D. N. Dumville, 'English Square Minuscule Script: the Background and Earliest Phases', *ASE* 16 (1987), 147–79, 'English Square Minuscule Script: the Mid-Century Phases', *ASE* 23 (1994), 133–64, and *English Caroline Script and Monastic History: Studies in Benedictinism, A.D. 950–1030* (Woodbridge, 1993). There is a brilliant demonstration of how knowledge of the manuscripts in which Old English poetry has been preserved is fundamental to any attempt at interpretation, by J. C. Pope, 'Palaeography and Poetry: Some Solved and Unsolved Problems of the Exeter Book', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes and A. G. Watson (London, 1978), pp. 25–65; also essential for study of the biblical verse preserved in the Junius manuscript are B. C. Raw, 'The Construction of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11', *ASE* 13 (1984), 187–207, and L. Lockett, 'An Integrated Re-Examination of the Dating of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11', *ASE* 31 (2002), 141–73.

Many of the best-known surviving manuscripts of Old English literature are available in facsimile editions in the series Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 28 vols. (Copenhagen, 1951–2001), as well as in the on-going series of *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in Microfiche Facsimile*, ed. A. N. Doane *et al.* (Binghamton, NY and Tempe, AZ, 1994–). More recently, many of the major literary manuscripts have been made available in digital form, either on the web or in disc-format. Kevin Kiernan's *Electronic Beowulf* (London, 2004) contains Kiernan's book on *Beowulf* and a digital version of the *Beowulf* manuscript and the Thorkelin transcripts and other material, on two CD-ROMs. Bernard Muir's *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2nd edn (Exeter, 2000), contains both a print edition of the text and a digital edition of the manuscript and other materials on DVD. Muir's *A Digital Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Junius 11* (Oxford, 2004) provides a digital edition of the Junius manuscript and related materials on CD-ROM. Daniel O'Donnell's *Cædmon's Hymn: a Multimedia Study, Archive and Edition* (Cambridge, 2005) contains a book-form study of the poem and a CD-ROM containing digital images of all the copies of the poem. Digital copies of all the medieval manuscripts in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, including copies of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the works of Wulfstan and other poetry, are now available on the web (by subscription) at *Parker Library on the Web* (http://parkerweb.stanford.edu). For details of the many twelfth-century manuscripts containing Old English texts, see *The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060 to 1220*, ed. O. Da Rold, T. Kato, M. Swan and E. Treharne (Leicester, 2010), at www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/index.html, which contains selected images.

For an introductory study of English runes, see R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn (Woodbridge, 1999).

### Old English language

#### General and prehistory

For the history of the English language (including Old English), see the standard works listed above in ch. 2 (p. 48, n. 2). From among the innumerable publications on English and its history, the lively and well-illustrated *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, by D. Crystal (Cambridge, 1995), should be mentioned. For the prehistory of Old English, see the excellent and comprehensive coverage by B. W. Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture* (Oxford, 2004), and O. W. Robinson, *Old English and its Closest Relatives: a Survey of the Earliest Germanic Languages* (London, 1992). H. Gneuss, *English Language Scholarship: a Survey and Bibliography from the Beginnings to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Tempe, AZ, 1996), includes a concise treatment of the history of the study of Old English.

#### Dictionaries

The fullest dictionary currently available is J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898), with *Supplement* by T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1921), and *Revised and Enlarged Addenda* by A. Campbell (Oxford, 1972). A convenient single-volume dictionary is J. R. Clark Hall and H. Meritt, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th edn (Cambridge, 1969). These dictionaries will eventually be superseded by the *Dictionary of Old English*, ed. A. Cameron, A. C. Amos, A. di P. Healey *et al.* (Toronto, 1986 –; currently published to the end of G), intially published on microfiche, then from 2004 on CD-ROM (letters A–G, 2011), and now available by subscription on the internet at www.doe.utoronto.ca.

#### Concordances and thesaurus

Three works are now indispensable for any serious study of the Old English lexicon: A. di P. Healey and R. L. Venezky, *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English* (Toronto, 1980), now largely superseded by the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* by A. di P. Healey with J. Wilin and Xin Xiang, at www.doe.utoronto.ca/pages/pub/web-corpus.html (and on CD-ROM); and J. Roberts, C. Kay and L. Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 2 vols., King's College London Medieval Studies 11 (London, 1995), a pioneering work: the complete vocabulary of Old English, conceptually arranged.

#### Grammars

For phonology and inflexional morphology, the standard work remains A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959). Also important is *A Grammar of Old English*, I. *Phonology*, by R. M. Hogg, and II. *Morphology*, by R. M. Hogg and R. D. Fulk (Oxford, 1992–2011). More comprehensive than these, but available only in German, is K. Brunner, *Altenglische Grammatik*, 3rd edn (Tübingen, 1965). For syntax we have the monumental work by B. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), whose extensive indices should be consulted on any point of interpretation. Of the more concise grammars included in the numerous introductions to Old English, that in

B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 7th edn (Oxford, 2007), widely used, is to be recommended.

## Names

E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), is still valuable. More recent handbooks are A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford, 2003) and – with critical reviews – V. Watts, J. Insley and M. Gelling, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Place-Names* (Cambridge, 2004). For individual names of places, fields, rivers, etc., the on-going publications of the English Place-Name Society (including one or more volumes for each county) should always be consulted, where they happen to exist. For personal names, W. G. Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* (Cambridge, 1897), though dated and in need of revision, remains useful.

## Literary history

Because most Old English poetry cannot be dated, it is not possible to write a chronological account of Old English literature – on the problems involved in dating, see the excellent study by A. C. Amos, *Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts* (Cambridge, MA, 1980) – though there is a commendable attempt to treat the subject chronologically by R. D. Fulk and C. M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 2003). Old English literary history is normally organized in terms of particular themes or genres. The fullest coverage is given by S. B. Greenfield and D. G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York and London, 1986), but there are many interesting perspectives in M. McC. Gatch, *Loyalties and Traditions: Man and the World in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York, 1971). Immensely valuable, above all for its treatment of the manuscript bases of the literature, is K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953). On the growth of our conception of Old English literary history, there are the interesting studies by E. G. Stanley – *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past* (Woodbridge, 2000) and 'The Scholarly Recovery of the Significance of Anglo-Saxon Records in Prose and Verse: a New Bibliography', *ASE* 9 (1981), 223–62 – as well as *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. T. Graham (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000). Finally, the literary historian should always bear in mind what has been lost to us: see esp. R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, 2nd edn (London, 1970).

## General literary criticism

Various volumes of collected essays provide a general introduction to Old English literature, both prose and verse. One such volume (now inevitably outdated in some respects) is *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966). Useful, too, are *Old English Literature in Context*, ed. J. D. Niles (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1980), *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge, 1997), and *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M Liuzza (New Haven, CT and London, 2002). A recent book which throws important new light on many aspects of Old English literature is L. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011). Issues in editing

Old English literature are discussed in: *The Editing of Old English*, ed. D. G. Scragg and P. E. Szarmach (Cambridge, 1994); F. C. Robinson, *The Editing of Old English* (Oxford, 1994); and S. L. Keefer and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *New Approaches to Editing Old English Verse* (Cambridge, 1998).

## Poetry

### Editions

The standard collected edition is still the six-volume Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (ASPR) series, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. K. Dobbie (New York, 1931–42). More recent collections are Bernard Muir's edition of *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2nd edn (Exeter, 2000); *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and 'The Fight at Finnsburg'*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Cambridge, MA and London, 2010); and Daniel Anlezark's edition of biblical poetry, *Old Testament Narratives* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2011), the latter two with facing-page translation.

### Sources and analogues

M. J. B. Allen and D. G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: the Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1976); D. G. Calder *et al.*, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry, II: the Major Germanic and Celtic Texts in Translation* (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1983).

### General

*Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and S. J. Kahrl (Hamden, CT, 1968); S. B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London and Boston, 1972); T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London, 1972); *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation*, ed. L. E. Nicholson and D. W. Frese (Notre Dame, IN, 1975); B. Raw, *The Art and Background of Old English Poetry* (London, 1978); *Old English Poetry: Essays in Style*, ed. D. G. Calder (Berkeley, CA, 1979); K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, CSASE 4 (Cambridge, 1990); *The Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (New York and London, 1994); *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. H. Aertsen and R. Bremmer (Amsterdam, 1994); P. Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, CSASE 12 (Cambridge, 1995). On rhetorical devices in Old English poetry, see now J. Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: the Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008), and for onomastic wordplay in Old English there are fundamental articles by F. C. Robinson, 'The Significance of Names in Old English Literature', *Anglia* 86 (1968), 14–58, and R. Frank, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse', *Speculum* 47 (1972), 207–26. There are valuable studies of aspects of the language of Old English poetry by D. Donoghue, *Style in Old English Poetry: the Test of the Auxiliary* (New Haven, CT, 1987), and by M. S. Griffiths, 'Poetic Language and the Paris Psalter: the Decay of the Old English Tradition', *ASE* 20 (1991), 167–86.

### Oral formulaic theory

The article which initiated the pursuit of oral-formulaic diction in Old English poetry was F. P. Magoun, 'The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry',

*Speculum* 28 (1953), 446–67, with the valuable caveat by L. D. Benson, 'The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry', *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 81 (1966), 334–41; see also A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York, 1960); J. Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry* (New Haven, CT, 1980); and numerous studies by J. M. Foley: 'The Oral Theory in Context', in *Oral Traditional Literature: a Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*, ed. J. M. Foley (Columbus, OH, 1981), pp. 27–122, 'Literary Art and Oral Tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry', *ASE* 12 (1983), 183–214, and *Traditional Oral Epic: the 'Odyssey', 'Beowulf' and the Serbo-Croatian Return* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990); as well as J. D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: the Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia, PA, 1999), and K. Reichl, *Singing the Past: Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY and London, 2000). It must be said, however, that in recent years interest in the alleged 'oral-formulaic' aspects of Old English verse has begun to wane.

## Metre

The classic study of Old English metre is that by E. Sievers, 'Old Germanic and Old English Metrics', trans. G. D. Luster, in *Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and S. J. Kahrl (Hamden, CT, 1968), pp. 267–88; the most important modern study is that of R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, PA, 1992). Other useful studies include: J. C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf* (New Haven, CT, 1942); A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of 'Beowulf'* (Oxford, 1958), and *An Introduction to Old English Metre* (Oxford, 1962); T. Cable, *The Metre and Melody of 'Beowulf'* (Urbana, IL, 1974); C. B. Kendall, *The Metrical Grammar of 'Beowulf'*, CSASE 5 (Cambridge, 1991); G. Russom, *'Beowulf' and Old Germanic Metre*, CSASE 23 (Cambridge, 1998); T. A. Bredehoft, *Early English Metre* (Toronto, 2005).

## Collected editions and translations

The standard collected edition is ASPR (cited above, under 'Editions'), though this is hardly suitable for beginners. Various introductory guides (such as that by Mitchell and Robinson, listed above) contain editions of the most popular Old English poems; and an excellent introduction and edition of some of these is J. C. Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 3rd edn, rev. R. D. Fulk (New York and London, 2001). There is a useful and fairly complete collection of Old English poetry in translation by S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982). R. F. Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London, 1960) contains texts with facing-page translations.

## Individual poems

*Beowulf*   The standard scholarly edition (which includes a vast assemblage of notes and ancillary material) is *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, rev. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008). Useful student editions include *Beowulf: a Student Edition*, ed. G. Jack (Oxford, 1997), and *Beowulf: an Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts*, ed. B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson (including 'Archaeology and Beowulf' by L. Webster) (Oxford, 1998). A convenient edition of all the texts in the Vitellius manuscript, including *Beowulf* itself, with facing-page translation, is *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and 'The Fight at Finnsburg'*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Cambridge, MA and London, 2010). G. N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson, *Beowulf and its Analogues* (London, 1968), provides translations of the major historical and

legendary texts relevant to the poem; as does R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction to the Study of the Poem*, 3rd edn, rev. C. L. Wrenn (Cambridge, 1959), though much of its discussion, particularly that on archaeology and genealogy, is now thoroughly out of date and must be used with caution. For valuable guidance to the many ways in which *Beowulf* has been interpreted, see *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Lincoln, NE, 1997), and, for an anthology of early criticism of the poem, *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage*, ed. T. A. Shippey and A. Haarder (London and New York, 1998). There are useful anthologies of essays on *Beowulf* edited by R. D. Fulk, *Interpretations of Beowulf: a Critical Anthology* (Bloomington, IN, 1991) and by P. S. Baker, *Beowulf: Basic Readings* (New York and London, 1995). Of the legion book-length studies on *Beowulf*, the following deserve mention: D. Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1951); A. G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley, CA, 1959); K. Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1965); E. B. Irving, *A Reading of Beowulf* (New Haven, CT, 1968), and *Rereading Beowulf* (Philadelphia, PA, 1989); J. D. Niles, *Beowulf: the Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1983); F. C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, TN, 1985); S. Newton, *The Origins of 'Beowulf' and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 1993); J. M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto, 1995); A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), and esp. *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003). On the question of the date of *Beowulf*, which remains a subject of vigorous debate, see *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981; repr. with an extra chapter, 1997), and, more recently, M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41.

*Other heroic poetry* There is a useful collection of the heroic poems by J. Hill, *Old English Minor Poems* (Durham, 1983). Individual editions include *Deor*, ed. K. Malone (London, 1933); *Finnsburh: Fragment and Episode*, ed. D. K. Fry (London, 1974); *Waldere*, ed. A. Zettersten (Manchester and New York, 1979); *Widsith*, ed. K. Malone, Anglistica 13 (Copenhagen, 1962); and see also the (still valuable) study by R. W. Chambers, *Widsith: a Study of Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge, 1912), as well as *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1938).

*The Battle of Maldon* A valuable text, with full apparatus of scholarship by many hands, is *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford, 1991). There is again a host of articles on the poem, among which the following are perhaps most stimulating: M. J. Swanton, 'The *Battle of Maldon*: a Literary Caveat', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67 (1968), 441–50; J. E. Cross, 'Oswald and Byrhtnoth: a Christian Saint and a Hero who is a Christian', *English Studies* 46 (1965), 93–109; H. Gneuss, *Die 'Battle of Maldon' als historisches und literarisches Zeugnis* (Munich, 1976), and '*The Battle of Maldon* 89: Byrhtnoth's *ofermod* Once Again', *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), 117–37; R. Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in the *Germania* and in the *Battle of Maldon*', *ASE* 5 (1976), 63–81; F. C. Robinson, 'God, Death and Loyalty in *The Battle of Maldon*', in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Scholar and Storyteller*, ed. M. Salu and R. T. Farrell (Ithaca, NY and London, 1979), pp. 76–98; and the essays collected in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. J. Cooper (London, 1993).

*Elegies* There is a collected edition of the elegies by A. L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: a Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal, London and Buffalo, NY,

1992); and there are many editions of individual poems: *The Wanderer*, ed. R. F. Leslie (Manchester, 1966), and ed. T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss (London, 1969); *The Seafarer*, ed. I. L. Gordon (London, 1960); *The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message and The Ruin*, in *Three Old English Elegies*, ed. R. F. Leslie (Manchester, 1961). For studies of the individual elegies, and of the genre as a whole, see the essays collected in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. M. Green (London and Toronto, 1983), as well as D. Whitelock, 'The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*', in *The Early Cultures of Northwest Europe*, ed. B. Dickins and C. Fox (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 259–72; S. B. Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of Exile in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 200–6; E. G. Stanley, 'Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer, The Seafarer* and *The Penitent's Prayer*', *Anglia* 73 (1955), 413–66; G. V. Smithers, The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*', *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957), 137–53, and 28 (1959), 1–22 and 99–104; J. E. Cross, 'On the Genre of the *Wanderer*', *Neophilologus* 45 (1961), 63–75; P. A. M. Clemoes, 'Mens absentia cogitans in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*', in *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway*, ed. D. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London, 1969), pp. 62–77; P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London, 1966); K. P. Wentersdorf, 'The Situation of the Narrator's Lord in *The Wife's Lament*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970), 604–10; and J. C. Pope, 'Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*', *ASE* 3 (1974), 75–86. Although it is not in English, mention should be made of the exhaustive study of *The Seafarer* by C. Cucina, *Il 'Seafarer': la navigatio cristiana di un poeta anglosassone* (Rome, 2008).

*Biblical poetry* There are separate editions of *Genesis A* by A. N. Doane (Madison, WI, 1978); of *Genesis B* by B. J. Timmer, *The Later Genesis* (Oxford, 1948), and by A. N. Doane, *The Saxon Genesis: an Edition of the West Saxon 'Genesis B' and the Old Saxon Vatican 'Genesis'* (Madison, WI, 1991); of *Exodus* by P. J. Lucas (London, 1977) and by E. B. Irving (New Haven, CT, 1953); of *Daniel and Azarias* by R. T. Farrell (London, 1974); of *Judith* by M. Griffith (Exeter, 1997); and of *Christ I* as *The Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book*, ed. J. J. Campbell (Princeton, NJ, 1959). On scriptural poetry in general, see P. G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus and Daniel*, CSASE 16 (Cambridge, 1996). For individual poems, see the collection of essays edited by R. M. Liuzza, *The Poems of MS Junius 11: Basic Readings* (London, 2002), and also F. C. Robinson, 'Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', *Anglia* 80 (1962), 373–8; R. Woolf, 'The Fall of Man in *Genesis B* and the *Mystère d'Adam*', in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. S. B. Greenfield (Eugene, OR, 1963), pp. 187–99; J. W. Earl, 'Christian Traditions in the Old English Exodus', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970), 541–70; J. F. Vickrey, '*Exodus* and the Battle in the Sea', *Traditio* 28 (1972), 119–40; R. T. Farrell, 'The Unity of the Old English *Daniel*', *Review of English Studies* 18 (1967), 117–35 and 'The Structure of Old English *Daniel*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 69 (1968), 533–59; A. W. Astell, 'Holofernes's Head: *tacen* and Teaching in the Old English *Judith*', *ASE* 18 (1989), 117–33; R. B. Burlin, *The Old English Advent: a Typological Commentary* (New Haven, CT, 1968); J. R. Hall, 'The Old English Epic of Redemption: the Theological Unity of Junius 11', *Traditio* 32 (1976), 185–208. A recent collaborative volume includes several important essays on Old English biblical verse as well as an extensive bibliography: *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, ed. M. Fox and M. Sharma (Toronto, 2012).

*The Dream of the Rood*   There is a useful edition by M. Swanton (Manchester and New York, 1970). Individual studies include: R. Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences on *The Dream of the Rood*', *Medium Ævum* 27 (1958), 137–53; J. A. Burrow, 'An Approach to *The Dream of the Rood*', *Neophilologus* 43 (1959), 122–33; M. Swanton, 'Ambiguity and Anticipation in *The Dream of the Rood*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969), 407–25; E. Ó Carragáin, 'Crucifixion as Annunciation and the Relation of *The Dream of the Rood* to the Liturgy Reconsidered', *English Studies* 63 (1982), 487–505; C. B. Pasternack, 'Stylistic Disjunction in the *Dream of the Rood*', *ASE* 13 (1984), 167–86; E. B. Irving, 'Crucifixion Witnessed in *The Dream of the Rood*', in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. P. R. Brown, G. R. Crampton and F. C. Robinson (Toronto, 1986), pp. 101–13; and A. Orchard, '*The Dream of the Rood*: Cross-References', in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. S. Zacher and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2009), pp. 225–53.

*Cædmon*   C. L. Wrenn, 'The Poetry of Cædmon', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 32 (1946), 277–95; G. Shepherd, 'The Prophetic Cædmon', *Review of English Studies* 5 (1954), 113–22; K. Malone, 'Cædmon and English Poetry', *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961), 193–5; F. P. Magoun, 'Bede's Story of Cædmon: the Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 49–63; and esp. D. O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn: a Multimedia Study, Archive and Edition* (Cambridge, 2005).

*Cynewulf*   Editions include A. S. Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf* (Boston, 1909); *Juliana*, ed. R. Woolf (London, 1965); *Elene*, ed. P. O. E. Gradon (London, 1958); and *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. K. R. Brooks (Oxford, 1961). For studies of the poet, see *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. R. E. Bjork (New York and London, 1996), and *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. R. E. Bjork (New York and London, 2001), as well as earlier studies by D. G. Calder, *Cynewulf* (Boston, 1981), and E. Anderson, *Cynewulf: Structure, Style and Theme in his Poetry* (Rutherford, NJ and Toronto, 1983).

*Wisdom poetry*   Old English wisdom poetry is helpfully collected by T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge and Totowa, NJ, 1976); see also discussion by N. Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems*, Anglistica 23 (Copenhagen, 1985); E. T. Hansen, *The Solomon Complex: Reading Wisdom in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 1988); and P. Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999). For the 'Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn', see R. J. Menner, *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (New York, 1941), and D. Anlezark, *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, AST 7 (Cambridge, 2009). For the so-called 'Rune Poem', see M. Halsall, *The Old English Rune Poem: a Critical Edition* (Toronto, Buffalo, NY and London, 1981), and discussion by M. Clunies Ross, 'The Anglo-Saxon and Norse *Rune Poems*: a Comparative Study', *ASE* 19 (1990) 23–39.

*Riddles*   The best edition is that by C. Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1977). There are countless articles, too numerous to list here, proposing solutions to individual riddles; for general studies of the riddles, see J. D. Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout, 2006); A. Orchard, 'Enigma Variations: the Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto, 2005), I, 284–304; and

D. Bitterle, *Say What I Am Called: the Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto, 2009).

<center>*Prose*</center>

A few standard pieces of Old English prose will appear in most introductory guides, but otherwise the student is obliged to consult standard scholarly editions, and it is to these that reference is made here. A brief but useful selection of Old English prose in translation is M. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (London, 1975). Some parts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are translated in *EHD*, and extracts from a number of Alfred's writings are translated in S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983). For bibliography, see K. J. and K. P. Quinn, *A Manual of Old English Prose* (New York and London, 1990).

<center>Alfredian and other ninth-century prose</center>

*King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. H. Sweet, EETS os 45 and 50 (London, 1871), to be supplemented by C. Schreiber, *King Alfred's Old English Translation of Pope Gregory the Great's 'Regula pastoralis' and its Cultural Context: a Study and Partial Edition according to all Surviving Manuscripts based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 12* (New York, 2003); *The Old English Boethius*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009); *King Alfred's Version of St Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. T. A. Carnicelli (Cambridge, MA, 1969); *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, ed. P. P. O'Neill (Cambridge, MA, 2001); *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. H. Hecht, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 5 (Leipzig, 1900); *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. T. Miller, 2 vols. in 4 parts, EETS os 95 and 96 (London, 1890–1); *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, EETS ss 6 (London, 1980); G. Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 2 vols., Abhandlungen der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse 88 (Munich, 1981), also partly available with facing-page translation in *An Old English Martyrology*, ed. G. Herzfeld, EETS os 116 (London, 1900). Studies include: J. M. Bately, *The Literary Prose of Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (London, 1980), and 'Lexical Evidence for the Authorship of the Prose Psalms in the Paris Psalter', *ASE* 10 (1982), 69–95; J. S. Wittig, 'King Alfred's Boethius and its Latin Sources', *ASE* 11 (1983), 157–98; A. J. Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston, 1986); *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1986); J. M. Bately, 'Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of King Alfred', *ASE* 17 (1988), 93–138; E. G. Stanley, 'King Alfred's Prefaces', *Review of English Studies* 39 (1988), 349–64; *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately*, ed. J. Roberts, J. L. Nelson and M. Godden (Cambridge, 1997); *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003); M. R. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23. For bibliography, see *Old English Prose Translations of King Alfred's Reign*, ed. G. Waite (Cambridge, 2000), and also N. G. Discenza, 'Alfred the Great: a Bibliography with Special Reference to Literature', in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (New York and London, 2000), pp. 463–502.

### The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

The most widely quoted text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is C. Plummer and J. Earle, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–9). This edition is being replaced by the multi-volume edition *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition*, ed. D. Dumville and S. Keynes (Cambridge), of which the following volumes of individual recensions are available: *MS. A* (ed. J. Bately, 1986), *MS. B* (ed. S. Taylor, 1983), *MS. C* (ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 2001), *MS. D* (ed. G. P. Cubbin, 1996), *MS. E* (ed. S. Irvine, 2004) and *MS. F* (ed. P. S. Baker, 2000). There is an excellent (synoptic) translation by D. Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation* (London, 1961), and a facsimile edition of MS A by R. Flower and H. Smith, *The Parker Chronicle and Laws*, EETS os 208 (London, 1941). For studies of the prose of the Chronicle, see C. Clark, 'The Narrative Mode of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 215–35; S. D. White, 'Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: the Story of Sigeberht, Cynewulf and Cyneheard', *Viator* 20 (1980), 1–18; and T. A. Bredehoft, *Textual Histories: Readings in the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'* (Toronto, 2001).

### Ælfric

There is a useful bibliography on Ælfric by L. M. Reimsma, *Ælfric: an Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London, 1987), supplemented by A. Kleist, 'An Annotated Bibliography of Ælfrician Studies, 1983–96', in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (New York and London, 2000), pp. 503–47. For editions of Ælfric's homilies, see *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the First Series, Text*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS ss 17 (Oxford, 1997); *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series, Text*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 5 (London, 1979); and M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000). (The nineteenth-century edition by B. Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: the First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, 2 vols. (London, 1844–6), includes a facing-page translation.) See also *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, EETS os 259 and 260 (London, 1967–8). Ælfric's 'Lives of Saints' must still be read in the nineteenth-century edition by W. W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, EETS os 76, 82, 94 and 114 (London, 1881–1900; repr. as two vols. 1966), with facing-page translation, although there are a few valuable modern editions of individual 'Lives', notably *Ælfric's Life of Saint Basil the Great: Background and Context*, ed. G. Corona, AST 5 (Cambridge, 2006). The Old English translation of the Heptateuch, which is partly by Ælfric and partly anonymous, is ed. R. Marsden, *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, EETS os 330 (Oxford, 2008). Other important editions of writings by Ælfric include: *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. J. Wilcox, Durham Medieval Texts 9 (Durham, 1994), which includes a very useful account of Ælfric's life and background; *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, ed. C. A. Jones, CSASE 24 (Cambridge, 1998); *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, ed. J. Zupitza, 3rd edn, rev. H. Gneuss (Berlin, 2001), and *Ælfric's De temporibus anni*, ed. M. Blake, AST 6 (Cambridge, 2009). The best brief introduction to Ælfric is H. Gneuss, *Ælfric of Eynsham: his Life, Times and Writings*, Old English Newsletter Subsidia 34 (Kalamazoo, MI, 2009), and there is now a useful handbook ed. by H. Magennis and M. Swan, *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden and Boston, 2009); an important earlier

study is P. A. M. Clemoes, 'Ælfric', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 176–209. On the form and sources of Ælfric's homily collections, see C. L. Smetana, 'Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary', *Traditio* 15 (1959), 163–204, and 'Ælfric and the Homiliary of Haymo of Halberstadt', *Traditio* 17 (1961), 457–69; as well as M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977); *The Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, ed. P. Szarmach and B. Huppé (Albany, NY, 1978); and *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. A. J. Kleist (Turnhout, 2007). On Ælfric's saints' Lives, see D. Bethurum, 'The Form of Ælfric's Lives of Saints', *Studies in Philology* 29 (1932), 515–33; M. R. Godden, 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles', *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985), 83–100; *Ælfric's Lives of Canonised Popes*, ed. D. G. Scragg, Old English Newsletter Subsidia 30 (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001); and M. Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 34 (Cambridge, 2005).

## Byrhtferth

See the edition (with facing-page translation) of P. S. Baker and M. Lapidge, *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, EETS ss 15 (Oxford, 1995), as well as P. S. Baker, 'The OE Canon of Byrhtferth of Ramsey', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 22–37, and 'Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* and the Computus in Oxford, St John's College 17', *ASE* 10 (1982), 123–42; and M. Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the *Glossae Bridferti in Bedam*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 17 (2007), 384–400.

## Wulfstan

The standard edition is *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. D. Bethurum (Oxford, 1957), still to be supplemented by A. S. Napier, *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin, 1883); the best known of Wulfstan's homilies is edited separately by D. Whitelock as *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (London, 1939). His eschatological homilies are available in an online edition by Joyce Lionarons at http://webpages.ursinus.edu/jlionarons/wulfstan/wulfstan.html. On Wulfstan, see D. Whitelock, 'Archbishop Wulfstan, Homilist and Statesman', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24 (1942), 24–45; D. Bethurum, 'Wulfstan', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 210–46; A. McIntosh, 'Wulfstan's Prose', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 35 (1949), 109–42; O. Funke, 'Some Remarks on Wulfstan's Prose Rhythm', *English Studies* 43 (1962), 311–18; M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), esp. pp. 105–28; J. Lionarons, *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan* (Cambridge, 2010); and the useful collection of essays in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. M. Townend (Turnhout, 2004).

## Anonymous prose

There is a substantial body of anonymous Old English prose, much of it homiletic in nature; see in general D. G. Scragg, 'The Corpus of Vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints' Lives before Ælfric', *ASE* 8 (1979), 223–77, and *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. A. J. Kleist (Turnhout, 2007). For the

Vercelli Book homilies, see the edition of D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS os 300 (Oxford, 1992), with the following studies: D. G. Scragg, 'The Compilation of the Vercelli Book', *ASE* 2 (1973), 189–207; S. Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: the Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009); and *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. S. Zacher and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2009), including discussion of the poems in the Vercelli Book, and a comprehensive bibliography of scholarship on the manuscript by P. G. Remley, at pp. 318–415. For the Blickling Homilies, see the edition of R. Morris, *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century* (3 vols., London, 1874–80, repr. as one vol., 1967), with discussion by D. G. Scragg, 'The Homilies of the Blickling Manuscript', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 299–316. For the collection of abbreviated saints' Lives assembled in the *Old English Martyrology*, see the excellent website by Christine Rauer at www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cr30/martyrology. On saints' Lives, see esp. the studies in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1996). The anonymous late Old English translation of the Latin romance *Apollonius* is ed. P. Goolden, *The Old English Apollonius of Tyre* (Oxford, 1958).

## Old English after 1066

There is little point in trying to assemble an exhaustive reading list of primary sources that use Old English after the end of the Anglo-Saxon period; there are simply too many. In most cases these can be located through the secondary material that follows. Several important publications in this field contain material that overlaps two or more of the period and category distinctions made below. The following are essential to an enquiry into the post-Conquest life of Old English in any period: A. J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990); F. C. Robinson, 'The Afterlife of Old English: a Brief History of Composition in Old English after the Close of the Anglo-Saxon Period', in his *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays on Old English* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 275–303; *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and J. D. Niles (Gainesville, 1997); *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Scragg and C. Weinberg, CSASE 29 (Cambridge, 2000).

### History of the discipline and the scholarly recovery of Old English

E. N. Adams, *Old English Scholarship in England from 1566–1800* (New Haven, CT, 1917); D. Douglas, *English Scholars 1660–1730* (London, 1951); D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (London, 1965); H. Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (Princeton, NJ, 1967); *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: the First Three Centuries*, ed. C. T. Berkhout and M. McC. Gatch (Boston, 1982); A. Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs, II: Images, Problems, Standpoints, Forecasts* (Brighton, 1985), pp. 215–33; J. R. Hall, 'The Conybeare "Cædmon": a Turning Point in the History of Old English Scholarship', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 33 (1985), 378–403; T. A. Shippey and A. Haarder, *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage* (London, 1998); T. Graham, 'Anglo-Saxon Studies: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', J. R. Hall, 'Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Nineteenth

Century: England, Denmark, America', and H. Sauer, 'Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Nineteenth Century: Germany, Austria, Switzerland', all in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. E. Treharne and P. Pulsiano (Oxford, 2001), pp. 415–33, 434–44, and 455–71, respectively.

### Political context and historical background to Anglo-Saxonism

C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1986; originally published 1958); H. Reginald, 'Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain Before 1850', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976), 387–410; R. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: the Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981); H. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal, 1982); S. R. Hauer, 'Thomas Jefferson and the Anglo-Saxon Language', *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 98 (1983), 879–98; C. A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990); J. Parker, *'England's Darling': the Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great* (Manchester, 2007).

### The later Middle Ages

A good port of entry is E. Treharne, 'English in the Post-Conquest Period', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. E. Treharne and P. Pulsiano (Oxford, 2001), pp. 403–14. See also C. Sisam, 'The Scribal Tradition of the *Lambeth Homilies*', *Review of English Studies* ns 2 (1951), 105–13; A. F. Cameron, 'Middle English in Old English Manuscripts', in *Chaucer and Middle English: Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. B. Rowland (London, 1974), pp. 218–29; C. Clark, 'People and Languages in post-Conquest Canterbury', *Journal of Medieval History* 2 (1976), 1–33; S. K. Brehe, 'Reassembling the First Worcester Fragment', *Speculum* 65 (1990), 521–36; C. Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand of Worcester: a Study of Old English in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1991); S. Lerer, 'Old English and its Afterlife', in *Medieval English Literature*, ed. D. Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 7–34; *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century*, ed. M. Swan and E. Treharne (Cambridge, 2000); R. A. Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, 2005); E. Treharne, 'Reading from the Margins: the Uses of Old English Homiletic Manuscripts in the post-Conquest Period', in *Beatus Vir: Studies in Early English and Norse Manuscripts in Memory of Phillip Pulsiano*, ed. A. N. Doane and K. Wolf (Tempe, AZ, 2006), pp. 329–58, and 'Making their Presence Felt: Readers of Ælfric c. 1050–1350', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. H. Magennis and M. Swan (Leiden, 2009), pp. 399–422; Treharne's forthcoming book, *Living through Conquest: the Politics of English 1020–1220* (Oxford, 2012) will synthesize and sum up more than a decade's research which she has carried out in this field.

### Renaissance and early modern Old English

Much of Frantzen's *Desire for Origins* deals with this period. See also F. L. Utley, 'Two Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Saxon Poems', *Modern Language Quarterly* 3 (1943), 243–61; several of the contributors to C. T. Berkhout and M. McC. Gatch, *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: the First Three Centuries* (Boston, 1982), including S. A. Glass, 'The Saxonist Influence on Seventeenth-Century English Literature', pp. 91–105; the

several contributors to *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. T. Graham (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000); L. Scragg, 'Saxons Versus Danes: the Anonymous *Edmund Ironside*', and J. Briggs, 'New Times and Old Stories: Middleton's *Hengist*', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Scragg and Weinberg, pp. 93–106 and 107–21 respectively; S. van Romburgh, 'Why Francis Junius (1591–1677) Became an Anglo-Saxonist, or, the Study of Old English for the Elevation of Dutch', *Studies in Medievalism* 11 (2001), 5–36.

### Romantic and Victorian Old English

H. B. Woolf, 'Longfellow's Interest in Old English', in *Philologica: the Malone Anniversary Studies*, ed. T. A. Kirby and H. B. Woolf (Baltimore, MD, 1949), pp. 281–9; W. A. Quinn, 'Hopkins' Anglo-Saxon', *Hopkins Quarterly* 8 (1981), 25–32; P. M. Tilling, 'William Morris's Translation of *Beowulf*: Studies in his Vocabulary', in *Studies in English Language and Literature in Honour of Paul Christophersen*, ed. P. M. Tilling (Coleraine, 1981), pp. 163–75; R. C. Payne, 'The Rediscovery of Old English Poetry in the English Literary Tradition', in *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: the First Three Centuries*, ed. C. T. Berkhout and M. McC. Gatch (Boston, 1982), pp. 149–66; M. Alexander, 'Tennyson's "Battle of Brunanburh"', *Tennyson Research Bulletin* 4 (1985), 151–61; E. G. Stanley, 'Translation from Old English: "The Garbaging War-Hawk", or the Literal Materials from which the Reader can Re-create the Poem', in his *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature* (Toronto, 1987), pp. 83–114; C. H. Plotkin, *The Tenth Muse: Victorian Philology and the Genesis of the Poetic Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Carbondale, IL, 1989); C. A. Simmons, '"Iron-Worded Proof": Victorian Identity and the Old English Language', *Studies in Medievalism* 4 (1992), 202–18; R. Boenig, 'The Importance of Morris's *Beowulf*', *Journal of the William Morris Society* 12 (1997), 7–13; D. Pratt, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes? Alfred the Great and the Romantic National Epic', A. Sanders, '"Utter Indifference"?: the Anglo-Saxons in the Nineteenth-Century Novel', E. B. Irving, Jr, 'The Charge of the Saxon Brigade: Tennyson's *Battle of Brunanburh*', and T. Shippey, 'The Undeveloped Image: Anglo-Saxon in Popular Consciousness from Turner to Tolkien', all in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Scragg and Weinberg, pp. 138–56, 157–73, 174–93 and 215–36 respectively; M. C. Davidson, 'Remembering our Saxon Forefathers: Linguistic Nationalism in *Ivanhoe*', *Studies in Medievalism* 15 (2006), 41–54; C. Jones, 'The Reception of William Morris's *Beowulf*', in *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*, ed. D. Latham (Toronto, 2007), pp. 197–208, 'Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry', *Literature Compass* 7 (2010), 358–69, and '"Birthplace for the Poetry for the Sea-Ruling Nation": Stopford Brooke and Old English', in *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. S. I. Sobecki (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 179–94.

### Twentieth- and twenty-first-century Old English

J. Milosh, 'John Gardener's *Grendel*: Sources and Analogues', *Contemporary Literature* 19 (1978), 48–57; F. C. Robinson, '"The Might of the North": Pound's Anglo-Saxon Studies and "The Seafarer"', *Yale Review* 71 (1982), 199–224; M. Dodsworth, 'Offa, Charlemagne and Geoffrey Hill', in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on*

*his Work*, ed. P. Robinson (Milton Keynes, 1985), pp. 49–61; H. Magennis, 'Some Modern Writers and their *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*', *Old English Newsletter* 24 (1991), 14–18; F. C. Robinson, 'Ezra Pound and the Old English Translational Tradition', in his *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays on Old English* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 259–74; M. J. Toswell, 'Auden and Anglo-Saxon', *Medieval English Studies Newsletter* 37 (1997), 21–8; N. Howe, 'Praise and Lament: the Afterlife of Old English Poetry in Auden, Hill and Gunn', in *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honour of Fred C. Robinson*, ed. P. S. Baker and N. Howe (Toronto, 1998), pp. 293–310; P. E. Szarmach, '"Anthem": Auden's Caedmon's *Hymn*', in *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie J. Workman*, ed. R. Utz and T. Shippey (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 329–40; D. Donoghue, 'The Philologer Poet: Seamus Heaney and the Translation of *Beowulf*', *Harvard Review* 19 (2000), 12–21; C. Jones, '"One a Bird Bore Off": Anglo-Saxon and the Elegiac in *The Cantos*', *Paideuma* 30 (2001), 91–8; H. Magennis, 'Michael Crichton, Ibn Fadlan, Fantasy Cinema: *Beowulf* at the Movies', *Old English Newsletter* 35 (2001), 34–8; C. McCarthy, 'Language and History in Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*', *English* 50 (2001), 149–58; H. Phillips, 'Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*', in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. T. Curtis (Bridgend, 2001), pp. 263–85; L. C. Gruber, '"So." So What? It's a Culture War. That's Hwæt! Seamus Heaney's Verse Translation of *Beowulf*, Bilingual and Critical Editions', *In Geardagum: Essays on Old and Middle English Language and Literature* 23 (2002), 67–84; C. Jones, 'W. H. Auden and "The 'Barbaric' Poetry of the North": Unchaining One's Daimon', *Review of English Studies* 53 (2002), 167–85, and '"One Can Emend a Mutilated Text": Auden's *The Orators* and the Old English *Exeter Book*', *TEXT* 15 (2002), 261–75; C. Phelpstead, 'Auden and the Inklings: an Alliterative Revival', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 103 (2004), 433–57; M. J. Toswell, 'Earle Birney as Anglo-Saxon *Scop*: a Canadian "Shaper" of Poetry?', *Canadian Poetry* 54 (2004), 11–36; C. Jones, *Strange Likeness: the Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford, 2006); T. McGuire, 'Violence and Vernacular in Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*', *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 10 (2006), 79–99; R. Hampson, 'Bill Griffiths and the Old English Lyric', in *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths*, ed. W. Rowe (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 72–87; C. McCarthy, *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 86–126; C. Jones, '"Where Now the Harp?" Listening for the Sounds of Old English Verse from *Beowulf* to the Twentieth Century', *Oral Tradition* 24 (2009), 485–502; H. O'Donoghue, 'Heaney, *Beowulf*, and the Medieval Literature of the North', in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. B. O'Donoghue (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 192–205; the several contributors to *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination*, ed. D. Clark and N. Perkins (Cambridge, 2010); C. Jones, 'New Old English: the Place of Old English in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Poetry', *Literature Compass* 11 (2010), 1009–19; H. Magennis, *Translating 'Beowulf': Modern Versions in English Verse* (Cambridge, 2011).

### Electronic resources

Since the publication of the first edition of this *Companion* (1991), there has been an explosion in the provision of material relevant to the study of Old English available in electronic form, either on CD-ROM or via the internet. Particularly important are

digital images of manuscripts (cited above under 'Manuscripts') and dictionaries, corpora and concordances (cited above under 'Language'). Most of the journals noted above and some of the books are now available online in addition to their print form. A rich site for medieval resources in general is *The Labyrinth: Resources for Medieval Studies*, at http://labyrinth.georgetown.edu, and there is further relevant material in the online bibliography of Jack Lynch (Rutgers), http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Lit/medieval.html.

Some important tools not already mentioned are listed below.

*Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: a Register of Written Sources Used by Anglo-Saxon Authors* (CD-ROM Version 1.1), developed by Rohini Jayatilaka, Malcolm Godden and David Miles (Oxford: Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, English Faculty, Oxford University, 2002); also online at http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk. Detailed citations of source passages for Anglo-Saxon texts, in Old English and Latin.

*Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, www.pase.ac.uk/index.html. Gives summary details and references for all the recorded inhabitants of Anglo-Saxon England from the late sixth to the late eleventh century.

*The Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: a Cultural Database*, by Allen Frantzen, www.anglo-saxon.net/penance. Editions and images of the main penitential texts in Old English.

*An Inventory of Script and Spellings in Eleventh-Century English*, by D. G. Scragg *et al*., www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/mancass/c11database. A record of the ways in which sounds were actually spelt and written in manuscripts of the eleventh century.

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com (by subscription). Includes biographies of many Anglo-Saxon writers and figures of historical importance.

*Kemble: the Website of the British Academy / Royal Historical Society Joint Committee on Anglo-Saxon Charters*, www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww. Contains texts and references for all Anglo-Saxon charters.

# INDEX

[Note that bold type is used to distinguish the principal discussions of individual Old English texts.]