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BEYOND SEEING:
SIGHT, MIND, AND POWER IN EARLY-MEDIEVAL
ENGLAND

BY

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BA, English, Brigham Young University, 2010
MA, English, University of New Mexico, 2013

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, Stacie and Henry, my parents, Chandra and Scott, my grandparents, Carol and Ted, Melba and Lloyd, and my great-grandmother, Vivian.

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ABSTRACT

Before the development of optical science, sight was largely understood to function extramissively, with rays emitted from the eyes effectuating sight as they came into contact with the physical world. In early-medieval England in particular, a very strong correlation between extramissive sight and an extracorporeal mind is evident, based in part on a potential source for this model that has yet to be identified in scholarship: *De opificio Dei*, by Lactantius. The connection between sight and the mind accounts for anxiety about the possibility of seeing God, manifest in some early-medieval English translators' careful revision of biblical texts. Sight also developed as a metaphor for power and control within the greater context of Germanic literature, as is especially demonstrated in *Beowulf* and other works of Old English poetry, but also evident in historical reactions to blinding, as with the 1036 blinding of Prince Alfred by the troubled King Harold Harefoot.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2015, a collaboration between biomedical researchers from the University of Nottingham and Texas Tech University, together with Christina Lee, the lone medievalist involved with the study, stunned the world when the team announced the results of their experiment: they discovered that an Old English recipe for an eye salve given in *Bald's Leechbook* produced a substance that not only demonstrated antimicrobial properties, but proved effective in combating methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly known as MRSA).[1] The result of this experiment was in direct contrast with a previous fruitless attempt to prove the efficacy of Bald's eye salve, and thus came as a surprise to both the fields of medieval and medical studies.[2] The team of researchers asserted that the experiment's findings proved the sophistication of medical knowledge (and methods of acquiring it) in early-medieval England:[3]

> However, our finding that the combination of ingredients used is crucial for bactericidal activity supports the hypothesis that this "ancientbiotic" was systematically constructed based on empirical knowledge. The fact that Anglo-Saxon recipes do not state detailed amounts of each component requires the practitioners to have had some knowledge about how much of each ingredient to

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[1] Freya Harrison, Aled E. L. Roberts, Rebecca Gabrilska, Kendra P. Rumbaugh, Christina Lee, and Stephen P. Digglea, "A 1,000-Year-Old Antimicrobial Remedy with Antistaphylococcal Activity," *mBio* 6.4 (2015): 1–7.

[2] Barbara Brennessel, Michael D. C. Drout, and Robyn Gravel, "A Reassessment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine," *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005):183–95.

[3] A note on language: in this dissertation, I will use the noun phrase "early-medieval England" and adjective phrase "early-medieval English" in reference to the land, language, literature, history, and culture of English-speaking peoples of Great Britain from the time of their migration from the European Continent in the fifth century through the eleventh century.

use. It is also notable that numerous "alternative" recipes are often given for a condition—indicating that a trained physician could adapt treatments when necessary. If medieval physicians really did use observation and experience to design effective antimicrobial medicines, then this predates the generally accepted date for the adoption of a rational scientific method (the formation of the Royal Society in the mid-17th century) and the modern age of antibacterial medicine (Lister's use of carbolic acid in the late 19th century) by several hundred years.[4]

This is perhaps an optimistic assessment of the level of sophistication of early-medieval English medicine, though such optimism is certainly warranted by the results of the experiment. In this case, early-medieval English physicians demonstrated the ability to diagnose a "*wen*" (the researchers identify this as a sty "caused by bacterial infection"[5]), and then to produce a complex antibacterial medicine seemingly designed for maximum effectiveness against the eye infection (the experiment demonstrates that any deviation from the *Leechbook* instructions produced less- or ineffective medicines[6]). Though Lee's above claim that this alone indicates adoption of evidence-based medical science among English physicians at a date centuries earlier than previously believed is perhaps too bold an assertion after the discovery of a single successful early-medieval English medicine, the results of the experiment do indeed point toward a highly sophisticated understanding of how to treat ocular infections.

Nevertheless, it may be safely asserted that no matter how sophisticated

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[4] Harrison et al., "A 1,000-Year-Old Antimicrobial Remedy," 5.

[5] Harrison et al., "A 1,000-Year-Old Antimicrobial Remedy," 1.

[6] Harrison et al., "A 1,000-Year-Old Antimicrobial Remedy," 2–4.

individual elements of early-medieval English medical science related to eyesight may have been, no early-medieval English physician possessed anything resembling a scientifically accurate understanding of the mechanics of eyesight. This should come as no surprise, given that optical science was not developed until the mid-eleventh century by Islamic Golden Age scientist Hasan Ibn al-Haytham in Cairo.[7] Early-medieval English physicians and writers were limited to classical knowledge transmitted to them in Latin, and to the extent that this might have been different, native English ideas concerning the way sight and other senses worked.

Unfortunately, no single, extensive treatise on eyesight exists from the early-medieval English period, either in Latin or in Old English. Instead, references to sight are scattered throughout early-medieval English writing. From these, it will be possible to construct a model for how sight was believed to function in early-medieval England. This, and the impact such a model had on literature through its connection to the mind, on how it colored the concept of seeing God, on metaphors for power involving sight, and on thoughts concerning blindness, shall be the subject of this dissertation.

Chapter One, "The Classical Tradition: Latin Models for Sight in Early-Medieval England," will provide an overview on scholarship pertaining to sight in early-medieval England. The chapter's main objective is to present competing models for how sight was imagined to function in the Classical world, with particular emphasis on such theories contained in texts that were available to early-medieval English readers and authors. This ultimately creates a synthesized Classical model of extramission, the overwhelmingly dominant theory regarding how sight functions, as it may have been understood in early-

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[7] Charles G. Gross, "The Fire that Comes from the Eye," *Neuroscientist* 5 (1999): 58–64, at 59–60.

medieval England.

Building on the foundation of Latin models for sight, Chapter Two, "The Vernacular Tradition: Sight and the Mind in Old English Literature," looks at treatments of the sense of sight in Old English verse and prose, in order to develop a model for how sight was understood to function in early-medieval England. This model, it will be shown, is partially at odds with scholarship on early-medieval English understanding concerning the mind. In particular, the chapter demonstrates ways that sight was conceptualized as mental activity performed by a mind seated in the head and expanding out through the eyes—a model closely resembling Lactantius's explanation of sight outlined in Chapter One.

In Chapter Three, "'*Creft ealra crefta*': Seeing God in Early-Medieval English Biblical Interpretation," the dissertation's attention is focused on theophany: the phenomenon of seeing God. In analyzing treatments of biblical theophany episodes in early-medieval English writing, especially in the translation of the text of the Vulgate Heptateuch into Old English, a pattern emerges: many of the text's translators, informed by their understanding of the nature of sight, exhibit discomfort with the notion of seeing God. Metaphors utilizing the senses, especially sight and hearing, are also discussed in this chapter, with particular emphasis on understanding their role in early-medieval English thoughts concerning theophany.

Chapter Four, "The King's Watchful Care: Sight and Power in *Beowulf*," continues to examine how early-medieval English metaphors related to sight impact the interpretation of Old English literature. The chapter focuses largely on *Beowulf*, and opens by analyzing an oft-discussed issue within the poem: the identity and role of

Hrothgar's daughter Freawaru, whose name, it has long been argued, is an invention of

the poet. With the understanding that sight was a frequent metaphor for power in early-

medieval English writing, the chapter presents a new picture of Freawaru's function in

Hrothgar's peacemaking efforts, encapsulated in the very meaning of the name the poet

has bestowed upon her: *Freawaru* may be translated as "the king's watchful care." From

there, the chapter turns to the rest of the poem to demonstrate how sight, understood as a

metaphor for power, is central to *Beowulf*'s narrative themes.

       Finally, Chapter Five, "'Against this wickedness': Attitudes about Blindness in

Early-Medieval England," examines the issue of blindness and blinding from an early-

medieval English perspective. Building on previous chapters' discussions of the

importance of sight, its connection to the mind, and the metaphors associated with it in

early-medieval English thought, the chapter uses contemporary reaction to a politically

motivated blinding—that of Prince Alfred in the year 1036—as a case-study for

understanding early-medieval English attitudes regarding sight and its absence. Alfred's

blinding is contextualized against the backdrop of other depictions of blindness and

blinding in Old English literature, the understanding of sight as a metaphor for power,

and the use of blindness as a metaphor for spiritual weakness or ineptitude across

centuries of early-medieval English writing.

Chapter 1

The Classical Tradition: Latin Models of Sight in Early-Medieval England

Scholarship on Representations of Sight in Early-Medieval England

Scholarship related to sight tends to focus not on early-medieval English conceptualizations of how eyesight functioned, but on five key areas: the etymology of words related to vision, historical and legal cases involving the blind, the relationship between vision and the other senses, art, and literature. The first and only study attempting to comprehensively define Old English verbs for sight was completed by Erkki Penttilä in 1956.[1] Penttilä's primary objective was to trace the semantic development of each Old English verb for sight. An impressive product of its time, Penttilä's work analyzed all the verbs for sight available to him in edited Old English texts. Penttilä seems to have modeled his study on Bertil Weman's 1933 dissertation outlining the semantic development of Old English verbs for locomotion.[2] Unfortunately, Penttilä was disappointed that unlike Weman's study, which discovered specific meanings for each of the verbs he examined, his own research was unable to deduce any specialized meaning for any of the Old English verbs for vision. Nevertheless, Penttilä did reach some fascinating and important conclusions. First, there is only one verb in Old English, *ongietan*, that is never used for the act of intentionally trying to see something, but is instead used exclusively for "perceptional seeing."[3] By contrast, *gehawian* and

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[1] Erkki Penttilä, *The Old English Verbs of Vision: A Semantic Study* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1956).

[2] Quoted in Penttilä, *Old English Verbs of Vision*, 14–15.

[3] Penttilä, *Old English Verbs of Vision*, 175.

gestarian are exclusive to the act of intentionally looking.[4] All other verbs for sight may be used for both, with *behealdan*, in addition to *sceawian* and its compounds, favored for (but not limited to) intentional sight, and *seon* and its compounds favored for perceptional sight.[5]

But while Penttilä suggested that "the number of [Old English] verbs denoting a specific manner of seeing or looking is extremely small, nor are there any verbs of vision to denote a particular feeling,"[6] his study of Old English verbs may have been too focused on the language as whole, rather than the language used in particular Old English texts. Accordingly, this dissertation addresses the way that some Old English verbs for sight could be employed in individual texts in order to convey specific meanings.

Perhaps due to Penttilä's own lack of enthusiasm about his results, his study made little impact, and no similar attempt to examine sight and the language used to describe it in Old English has been attempted. Still, single verbs have occasionally attracted interest. Manfred Scheler went to great lengths to explore the change in the meaning of *sceawian* (to see) in Old English to the causative *shewen* (cause to be seen) in Middle English (the direct precursor to "show" in Present-Day English). He was entirely unable to identify a direct cause for the evolution of the verb's meaning, stating that the change occurred "through a spontaneous falling leap from the non-causative 'see' to the causative 'show' in the 12th Century."[7] Scheler found precedent for the causative meaning "show" in the

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[4] Penttilä, *Old English Verbs of Vision*, 175.

[5] Penttilä, *Old English Verbs of Vision*, 86, 175.

[6] Penttilä, *Old English Verbs of Vision*, 15.

[7] Manfred Scheler, "Zum Bedeutungswandel des englischen *to show* ('schauen > zeigen')," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 209 (1972): 357–60, at 359.

early Old English poems *Deor* and *Genesis A*. However, he wisely expressed a reluctance to accept this specialized use of the verb (one of nine total meanings for *sceawian* he discovered in Old English texts) on three grounds: the construction's scarcity and limitation to the object *ar* (grace), the distance between the construction's meaning (show grace) and the original meaning of *sceawian*, and the early date of *Deor* and *Genesis A*.[8]

Some attempt to connect the etymology of English verbs for vision to metaphors for vision was made by Eve E. Sweetser, who identified three groups of sources for the verbs for vision from both Latin and Germanic roots: physical sight, metaphors for vision, and what Sweetser referred to as "Basic Indo-European vision roots," which had not significantly changed meaning through their recorded history. Sweetser divided the English metaphors for vision into two groups: sight as a form of touch or physical manipulation, and sight as a form of control.[9]

Recent studies on sight and other senses have attempted to recreate a hierarchy of their importance to daily life among the early-medieval English. For instance, Eric Lacey, in order to bolster his argument that Old English bird names prioritize the sounds a bird makes instead of its appearance, began his essay by attempting to explain several instances in which hearing was at least as important, if not more important, than seeing. Lacey's best example of this is the importance of hearing to learning in the Middle Ages: "Deafness was a greater impediment to the wellbeing of individuals because it precluded them from hearing—and therefore understanding—the word of God. In the chiefly oral society of the Anglo-Saxons, wherein speaking and hearing were the main means of

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[8] Scheler, "Zum Bedeutungswandel," 359.

[9] Eve E. Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32–33.

exchange between individuals, aurality would have been the primary means of receiving and imparting knowledge."[10] Though Lacey raised a good point here, he nevertheless overlooked instances in which Christian ritual favors the sense of sight over that of hearing. For instance, Edward Wheatley noted "the privileging of sight in the practice of the elevation of the Host."[11] Unfortunately, eager to elevate the status of hearing to at least as great as, if not greater than, that of sight, Lacey relied on similarly weak or at least incomplete evidence in an attempt to dismantle what Lacey refers to as "a bias towards the visual in scholarship."[12] He quoted Proverbs 20:12 as exemplary of the special relationship between the two senses of sight and hearing in the Bible as the senses "which grant or allow access to knowledge," and provided an additional twenty references from the Old and New Testaments. Unusually, though, Lacey referenced the King James Version, which reads, "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them" (King James Version; Prov. 20:12). This caused Lacey to contemplate two varying interpretations of the passage: "The King James Bible's rendition of Proverbs 20:12 can be read variously, depending on whether 'even' is read adjectivally (i.e. they are made equal) or adverbially (i.e. the Lord made them indeed)."[13] Again, Lacey's aim here was to elevate the importance of hearing in a hierarchized understanding of the senses to be equal to sight. But while Lacey's adjectival reading of

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[10] Eric Lacey, "Birds and Words: Aurality, Semantics, and Species in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Sensory Perception and the Medieval West*, ed. Simon C. Thomson and Michael D. J. Bintley (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 75–98, at 76.

[11] Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 23.

[12] Lacey, "Birds and Words," 76.

[13] Lacey, "Birds and Words," 75.

"even" would give biblical authorization to the equal value of the two senses, the Vulgate version of this verse contains no room for such an interpretation: "Aurem audientem, et oculum videntem: Dominus fecit utrumque" (Vulgate; Prov. 20:12). The verse as it would have been read in early-medieval England simply does not imply the equality of the importance of hearing and seeing as Lacey would have it, but simply and clearly states that the Lord made each of those senses.

Still, a hierarchical relationship in which some senses are privileged as more important than others probably did exist in early-medieval English thought concerning the senses, and others who have attempted to define it have placed sight ahead of hearing. Patricia Skinner found evidence for this in early-medieval England and other contemporary cultures by parsing their legal codes for injury retribution laws. Admitting that hearing was incredibly important to communication and therefore daily life, Skinner nevertheless argued that "by far the most important sense was that of sight."[14] Some of the evidence Skinner provided for this assertion came from legal codes in which penalties for blinding a one-eyed man are almost as severe as the wergild would be for causing that man's death.[15] In addition, Skinner raised the argument that full-sightedness was essential to performative masculinity, especially with respect to martial ability, which may have also contributed to the importance of this sense over others.[16]

Leaving no stone unturned, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe relied on a broader variety of texts than Skinner or Lacey to outline a more detailed evaluation of the

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[14] Patricia Skinner, "Taking Out the Eye of a One-Eyed Man and Other Hypothetical Moments of Sensory Impairments in Early Medieval Law," in Thomson and Bintley, *Sensory Perception and the Medieval West*, 181–94, at 185.

[15] Skinner, "Taking out the Eye," 187.

[16] Skinner, "Taking out the Eye," 191.

importance of each sense in early-medieval English literature.[17] She began with an

Anglo-Latin text, Tatwine's *Enigma 26*, and noted the influence of Augustine's

interpretation of Genesis on early-medieval English thought about the senses.[18] Her

exploration of early-medieval English laws, specifically the way in which Æthelberht's

law code and Alfred's later *Domboc* assigned penalties for damaging a victim's sensory

organs, confirms Skinner's conclusion that sight was the sense most highly recompensed

for its loss, and therefore the most important of the senses.[19] But other writings and later

law codes suggest that the preeminence of the sense of sight in early-medieval English

culture derives not from Augustine, who argued simply that "the soul, or more properly

reason, governs the senses,"[20] but ultimately from Gregory the Great's construction of the

senses as conduits between the physical and spiritual world. In other words, Gregory

places more importance on the senses, and the agency of those using them, as spiritual as

well as corporeal tools, than Augustine. O'Brien O'Keeffe concluded that this

relationship between the soul and the senses, especially sight, in early-medieval English

literature is derived from Gregory the Great, noting the ways in which "Gregory's

reliance on sight as a liminal process in contact between the material and the spiritual"

were treated in Wærferth's and Ælfric's separate readings of Gregory.[21] The writings of

these two, separated by more than a century, represent "striking illustrations of the

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[17] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes, Sight and Touch: Appraising the Senses in Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 45 (2016): 105–40.

[18] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 110.

[19] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 116.

[20] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 117.

[21] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 125.

complexities in the ways sight mediated at a distance between the world and the soul."[22]

The influence of Gregory continued to manifest in early-medieval English law, and

O'Brien O'Keeffe noted Gregorian themes as motivation for Archbishop Wulfstan's

treatment of the senses in law codes drafted for Æthelred and Cnut as well as in his

Institutes of Polity and homilies.[23]

At its heart, O'Brien O'Keeffe's argument—that Gregory's conceptualization of

the senses as a conduit between physical and spiritual realities was a predecessor to Old

English ideas about sight and other senses—is a natural extension of observations made

by Rosa Maria Fera. In an article outlining four different groups of metaphors for the

senses present in Old English prose, Fera discovered two important contributions by

Gregory the Great that influenced the way that Old English literature treated the senses.

First, Fera identified Gregory's *Moralia in Job* as the source for Ælfric's association of

good eyesight with the eagle.[24] And second, Fera noted that it was Gregory's ordering of

the senses, and especially the lower senses, that most influenced Ælfric. More

specifically, Fera argued that by "listing taste earlier than smell," as Gregory had done in

his *Homilies on the Gospels* and *Homilies on the Prophet Ezekiel*, Ælfric was following

Gregory's ranking of the senses.[25] This is indeed the greatest consistency between the

three lists of the senses provided by Gregory in these texts, apart from sight always

coming first. In *Homilies on the Gospels*, Gregory wrote, "For there are five senses of the

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[22] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 128.

[23] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 135–40.

[24] Rosa Maria Fera, "Metaphors for the Five Senses in Old English Prose," *Review of English Studies* 63, no. 262 (2011): 709–32, at 721.

[25] Fera, "Metaphors for the Five Senses," 724–25. Though Fera provided references for Gregory's ordering of the senses in which he named taste before smell, she did not quote any of them directly.

body, namely sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch."[26] But in his *Homilies on the*

Prophet Ezekiel, Gregory presented them twice, each time in a different order. First, he

stated, "for we are provided with five senses of the flesh, namely sight, taste, smell,

hearing and touch."[27] But he reordered them slightly at another point in the same text:

"But all good works which are done bodily are tendered through the five senses of the

body, namely through sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell."[28] It would be difficult to argue

for a single hierarchical relationship between the senses with these three disparate lists as

evidence, but they do follow some kind of pattern: sight is named first, followed by some

order of the other four, with hearing always coming before touch, and taste always

coming before smell. Ælfric, though, was much more consistent in his ordering of the

senses. Fera provided four examples from the *Catholic Homilies* in which Ælfric listed

the senses, all of them in the order of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch,[29] the exact

order Gregory used in the *Homilies on the Gospel*.

Although Edward Wheatley's study on treatments of blindness as a disability in

the Middle Ages examines the difference between late-medieval French and English

treatments of blindness, Wheatley broached pre-Conquest English texts that touch upon

sight and the lack thereof. He also analyzed both literary passages and historical texts in

his discussion. For example, Wheatley identified Bede as having authored "one of the

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[26] Gregory, *Homiliarum in Evangelia*, *PL* 76:1106: "Quinque etenim sunt corporis sensus, videlicet visus, auditus, gustus, odoratus et tactus."

[27] Gregory, *Homiliarum in Ezechielem Prophetam*, *PL* 76:987: "Quinque enim carnis sensibus praediti sumus, videlicet visu, gustu, olfactu, auditu atque tactu."

[28] Gregory, *Homiliarum in Ezechielem Prophetam*, *PL* 76:1015: "Cuncta autem bona opera quae corporaliter fiunt, per quinque corporis sensus exhibentur, videlicet per visum, auditum, tactum, gustum, odoratum."

[29] Fera, "Metaphors for the Five Senses," 716–17, 723.

most interesting conjunctions of blindness and Judaism in patristic interpretation" in his

biblical commentary *On Tobit*. Providing a more nuanced reading than George Hardin

Brown's simple summary of the commentary as a "presentation of Tobit as the ideal

pious Jew . . . augmented by [Bede's] allegorical interpretation of the text as a moral for

Christian living,"[30] Wheatley outlined the way in which Bede used Tobit's blinding

within the biblical text as a foreshadowing of "the bad Jew who is blind to Jesus's

divinity during the Christian era," and Tobit's later healing as "the cure of a faith

'disabled' through sinfulness."[31] Bede's allegorical reading of blindness as representative

of a spiritual malady would influence a broad audience both through its direct inclusion

in the *Glossa ordinaria* and as a source of a later widely circulated Latin poem, Matthew

of Vendôme's *Tobias*.[32]

 Treating blinding as a form of political punishment, which is limited to a small

handful of instances in historical texts, various scholars have arrived at the opinion that,

among the early-medieval English, this was an especially brutal form of violence, limited

in its execution to offenders against the king or his inner circle. Wheatley, especially

interested in determining the limited degree to which any punitive blindings were carried

out in pre-Conquest England, downplayed Cnut's laws calling for the blinding or other

mutilation of recidivist criminals: "For the purposes of my argument it is significant that

this law was enacted not under a native English king, but under a foreigner: Cnut was

Danish. I have seen no documentation suggesting that this punishment was ever actually

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[30] George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 12 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2009), 59.

[31] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, 68–69.

[32] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, 69.

enacted."[33] While Wheatley was correct to acknowledge that punitive blinding was

applied to a much wider variety of crimes in post-Conquest England, his argument that

Cnut's status as a non-English king was the most important element in this legislation

raises three natural objections. First, by emphasizing Cnut's alienness as a factor in this

unique law, Wheatley overlooked or downplayed Archbishop Wulfstan's role in drafting

Cnut's legislation. Second, the argument that the lack of documentation affirming the

law's execution might imply it was never carried out might be a stronger one for studying

later English and continental law, but in the case of early-medieval English law, there are

very few court records documenting the execution of any king's law from pre-Conquest

England.[34] And third, such an argument ignores evidence put forward by both Dorothy

Whitelock and Simon Keynes that blinding and other punitive mutilations had already

been in practice since the time of Edgar, at least 40 years before II Cnut.[35] This was

indeed the legislation referenced by Wheatley, who did not quote from it all. In its

entirety, the relevant section, II Cnut 30.5, reads, "Ond gif he þonne gyt mare wurc

geworht hæbbe, þonne do man ut his eagan, ond ceorfan of his nosu, ond his earan ond þa

uferan lippan oððon hine hættian, swa hwylc þyssa swa man þonne geræde, ða þe ðærto

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[33] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, 32.

[34] Patricia Skinner, "Taking Out the Eye," 182, notes the lack of "early medieval court cases to set alongside the early medieval laws to determine what might have happened in practice." Additionally, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 209–32, at 229, asserts that "one cannot infer from the law codes or from canon law any confident estimate of the percentage of prosecutions that resulted in conviction." Indeed, confirming a law's execution through documentary evidence in early-medieval England is practically futile, and stating that a lack of evidence a law was ever carried out equates to evidence of the law's insignificance might lessen the importance of the majority of early-medieval English law. For a list of early-medieval English legal cases, see Patrick Wormald, "A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits," *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 247–81.

[35] Quoted in O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law," 225–26.

rædan sceolon: swa man mæg styran ond eac þære sawle beorgan"[36] (And if he then

should have done more deeds yet, then let one cause his eyes to be put out, and his nose

and ears and upper lip cut off, or that he be scalped, whichever of these is counseled by

those who must counsel on the matter: so one is able to punish, and also save the soul).

The severe punishment of this law was intended to curb recidivism, and was applied

specifically to third-time offenders who had already had their hands or feet (or possibly

both) removed upon their second offense. Concerning this particular legislation,

Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe argued that the law calling for the mutilation of the organs

associated with all five senses located in the head is based on the notion that it is through

the senses that the body sins.[37]

There are two depictions of sight in early-medieval English art that are important

to address here: the Fuller Brooch,[38] and the Alfred Jewel,[39] both of which belong to the

late ninth century. The depiction of sight in both artifacts, it has been argued, suggests

that sight was esteemed as the most important of the five senses in early-medieval

English thought. Analyzing the iconography of the Fuller Brooch, R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford

suggested that the central location of the figure representing sight, relative to the other

senses, was suggestive of its importance over hearing, taste, smell, and touch: "The wide-

eyed staring figure which dominates the centre, whose eyes are very differently treated

from those of the other full-face figures, would represent SIGHT, the prime sense by

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[36] Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, vol. 1 (Halle, Germany: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 332–34.

[37] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 138.

[38] The British Museum has published images of the Fuller Brooch online, which may be seen here: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1952-0404-1.

[39] The Ashmolean Museum has published images of the Alfred Jewel online, which may be seen here: https://www.ashmolean.org/alfred-jewel.

which the outer world is comprehended."[40] David Pratt has elaborated on the central

importance the brooch affords to the sense of sight: "Sight, given extra importance by his

central position, the small cross on his vestments, and the plant stems in his hands, stares

out with exaggerated circular eyes. Any explanation of the brooch's iconography,

therefore, would need to take account of the primacy of Sight among the Five Senses."[41]

As a potential source of such a hierarchy favoring sight over the other senses, Pratt

provided Isidore's *Etymologiae*, but then suggested a different interpretation: "Given the

small cross on Sight's vestments, however, the significance of Sight in the case of the

brooch would seem more likely to have been philosophical or theological, rather than

simply physical."[42] The Fuller Brooch, then, suggests a two-fold favoring of sight over

the other senses in early-medieval England, both in a physical sense as well as a

metaphorical one, with physical sight favored as the means of experiencing the physical

world, and sight standing as a metaphor for acquiring spiritual knowledge.

    A similar conclusion has been reached regarding the Alfred Jewel. Egil Bakka

first proposed that the figure on the Alfred Jewel, previously identified as Christ, might

instead be "a symbolic representation of sight."[43] Such an interpretation, Bakka argued,

affirmed the theory that the Alfred Jewel was used as part of the *æstel* (pointer) Alfred

announced he had sent to his bishops together with his translation of *Pastoral Care*: "A

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[40] R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, "The Fuller Brooch," *British Museum Quarterly* 17 (1952): 75–76, at 75.

[41] David Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention at the Court of King Alfred the Great," in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. Catherine Cubitt, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 189–221, at 209.

[42] Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention," 212. Here, Pratt quoted his own translation of the relevant portion of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, XI.I.18–25, which I quote here: "Sight (*visus*) is so called, because it is livelier (*vivacior*) than the other senses [. . .]. So it is that when we talk about things which pertain to the other senses, we say 'see'; as when we say 'see how it sounds', 'see how it tastes', and so on."

[43] Egil Bakka, "The Alfred Jewel and Sight," *Antiquaries Journal* 46 (1966): 277–82, at 282.

pointer has the the evident purpose of directing the eye, and what could be a more

suitable ornamental theme for a costly pointer than a symbolic representation of sight?"[44]

Charles D. Wright suggested that this interpretation affirms sight as the most important of

the senses in early-medieval England: "Implicit in this identification of the iconography

of the Alfred Jewel is an essentially positive interpretation of the faculty and organs of

sight as the physical means whereby human beings access and acquire wisdom through

reading."[45] Taken together, these two artifacts affirm that sight was the most highly

regarded of the senses in early-medieval England.

At an earlier time, it was believed that the Fuller Brooch's representation of all

five of the senses was anomalous. Bruce-Mitford believed that "the subject of the Five

Senses is not otherwise known in art before the seventeenth century,"[46] but discovery and

scholarship since suggests an earlier depiction of the five senses may have existed. Anna

Gannon found that a particular group of Series K silver *sceattas* or pennies dating to the

first half of the eighth century might depict the five senses on their obverse sides:

> When one considers them together . . . the coins appear to represent the Five
>
> Senses: Touch (the cross), Taste (the cup), Smell (the sprig), Hearing (the bird),
>
> and Sight (frontal gaze). If this is the case—and the fact that they are all
>
> associated by interlaced wreath-ties and comparable drapery seems to bracket

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[44] Bakka, "The Alfred Jewel and Sight," 282.

[45] Charles D. Wright, "Why Sight Holds Flowers: An Apocryphal Source for the Iconography of the Alfred Jewel and Fuller Brooch," in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 18 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 169–86, at 183.

[46] Bruce-Mitford, "The Fuller Brooch," 76.

them as a group—the coins would be a remarkable precursor of the iconography

of the Fuller Brooch.[47]

Though it is unclear who was responsible for having these coins depicting the five senses

minted, Gannon suggested that the church, rather than the crown, was the most probable

issuer of these particular coins.[48] Elsewhere, Gannon argued that unlike the Fuller

Brooch, which attributes a hierarchical order to the senses, the Series K coins suggest that

the five senses should all be subordinate to wisdom or reason, represented by a sixth coin

in the series depicting speech.[49] It would seem, then, that the priority afforded to sight in

the iconography of the Fuller Brooch and the Alfred Jewel represents a departure among

Alfred's intellectual circle from an earlier tradition devaluing the senses, or at the very

least, a recasting of the utility and importance of the five senses to the acquisition of

wisdom.

Turning now to more scholarship on Old English literature, very few studies have

focused solely on scenes and conceptualizations of vision within the Old English literary

canon. Recently, Richard North published an article that, while largely centered upon the

framework of early-medieval English models of cognitive capacity, made an interesting

argument about sight. Analyzing the Old English elegy *The Seafarer*, North compared

hyge (translated by North as "inclination") from line 58 and *modsefa* (translated by North

as "mood-sense") from line 59 with the *anflaga* (translated by North as "lone flier") of

line 62, presenting this bird and its flight as the poet's metaphor for early-medieval

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[47] Anna Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 187–88.

[48] Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage*, 189.

[49] Anna Gannon, "The Five Senses and Anglo-Saxon Coinage," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 13 (2005): 97–104, at 100–101.

English conceptualizations of the way in which cognitive function moves within and without the body. This model, of a cognitive capacity that extends beyond the body to occupy the space of everything the mind senses, is a marked departure from previous thought about the ways the mind was conceptualized in early-medieval English writing, and merits more exploration.[50] In support of this theory, North gave evidence that sight was envisioned according to a similar model elsewhere in Old English literature. In the Old English *Life of Saint Giles*, North noted, "when St Giles stands praying on the shore, and '*þā geseah hē ān scip ūt on þǣre sǣ*' ('then he saw a ship out on the sea'), we have *ūt*, not *ūte*: an adverb of motion, not of place." North then provided an example of a similar construction from the Old Icelandic *Eyrbyggja saga*, in which "a man sends out his seeing and hearing to acquire impressions: respectively these sensory excursions require *inn* and *þangat*, not *inni* and *þar*."[51] Continuing to develop this cognitive model, North gave instances in which courage and memory also use adverbs of motion rather than of location.[52] Finally, North reached the conclusion that, based on the similarity to Old Norse poetry, such a model was Germanic in character and independent of Christian influence: "Certainly [the poet] has used Christian doctrines: [. . .] Lactantius, along with an array of other mostly biblical sources. At the same time, however, the licence with

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[50] Two earlier studies immediately come to mind. Britt Mize, "The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry," *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006): 57–90, presents a seemingly opposing model: that of the mind not as a growing and expanding, extracorporeal entity, but as an enclosed space securely containing thought and emotion within the body itself. Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), expands on this image, presenting thought and emotion as fluids contained within the mind as the dominant model of early-medieval English thought concerning the physiology of the mind.

[51] Richard North, "Heaven Ahoy! Sensory Perception in *The Seafarer*," in Thomson and Bintley, *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, 7–26, at 22.

[52] North, "Heaven Ahoy," 22–24.

which he builds his *ānfloga* comes closer to heathen folklore. In its language of sensory perception, *The Seafarer* may be among the oldest English poems that we have."[53]

Yet, North's model is wanting. It hints at an early-medieval English conceptualization of sight as a form of extramission, in which invisible rays are emitted from the eyes of the viewer, enabling sight, without explaining how this model arose or its implications. I am certain that combining some of the approaches taken by past scholars will unveil new insights about the origin of the extramissive model in England, and that a more complete understanding of this will offer new insights into old literature.

Classical Sources for Models of Sight in Early-Medieval England

Early-medieval English attitudes about the nature of sight did not develop independently of classical thought on the matter. Classical thought itself regarding the mechanics of vision was, of course, not a unified theory, but rather comprised a variety of opinions oscillating between extramission and intromission. Neither theory closely resembled the present-day understanding of sight: extramissionists argued that sight was effected by rays emitted by the eyes, causing sight when they strike objects; intromissionists, on the other hand, believed that visible objects emitted streams of copies of themselves, which entered the eyes. In the Greek-speaking classical world, debate which would be repeated, redefined, and continued in later Latin texts was first expressed. Firm in the camp of extramission, at various times, were Alcmaeon of Croton (fifth century BCE), Plato (428-348 BCE), Ptolemy (ca. 100-ca. 170 CE), Euclid (mid-fourth to mid-third century BCE) and Galen of Pergamon (129-ca. 210 CE). Atomist

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[53] North, "Heaven Ahoy," 26.

intromission, on the other hand, was espoused by Democritus (ca. 460-ca. 370 BCE) and Epicurus (341-270 BCE). Aristotle (384-322 BCE) rejected both models on logical grounds. Intromission seemed impossible to Aristotle because it would require the various copies emitted by different objects to occupy a single space simultaneously, and extramission seemed impossible because of the vast distances involved when seeing celestial objects.[54]

While it can safely be asserted that these Greek texts were unknown in the original Greek in early-medieval England, the ideas of both extramission and intromission were transmitted in a number of later Latin texts, both pre-Christian and Christian, that were available to early-medieval English readers and writers at various times and places. Some such texts have already been identified. Miranda Wilcox, for example, has observed three texts containing theories about sight that were used by Alfred in his *Soliloquies* translation: Augustine's *Soliloquiae*, Isidore's *Etymologiae*, and Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*.[55] Fera outlined Augustine's use of the extramissive model in two additional texts: *De trinitate*, and one of his *Sermones*.[56] Most of the rest of this chapter will be devoted to identifying additional Latin works which may have transmitted ideas about the mechanics of sight to early-medieval English readers and writers. This includes texts by Lucretius (99–55 BCE), Lactantius (250–325 CE), Ambrose (340–397 CE), and Augustine (354–430 CE), all evidently available to

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[54] This paragraph is a synthesis of a more detailed overview of Greek models for sight by Charles G. Gross, "The Fire that Comes from the Eye," *Neuroscientist* 5 (1999): 58–64, at 58–59.

[55] Miranda Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors: *eagan modes* and *scip modes*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006): 179–217, at 205n102.

[56] Rosa Maria Fera, "Seeing the Light: Understanding Vision in Old English Prose" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2009), 90, 130–31.

some extent in early-medieval England. For the most part, three different kinds of evidence all affirm some level of knowledge of these texts in England: quotations from early-medieval English authors, the texts' inclusion in medieval book lists, and surviving manuscripts of early-medieval English origin. For this information, four sources are highly useful: Michael Lapidge's *The Anglo-Saxon Library*,[57] Helmut Gneuss's and Michael Lapidge's *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*,[58] *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*,[59] and *Sources of Old English and Anglo-Latin Literary Culture*.[60]

Lucretius: *De rerum natura*

The lengthy poem *De rerum natura* by Titus Lucretius (ca. 99-54 BCE) is doubly unique among the Latin texts concerning sight that were known to early-medieval English writers: it is the only intromissionist work of the group, as well as the only pre-Christian (and even distinctly pagan) text. *De rerum natura* represented Lucretius's translation of the ideas of Epicurus from Greek prose into Latin verse. As such, the poem was firmly grounded in the intromissive model for vision espoused by Epicurus. As

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[57] Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[58] Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series 15 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

[59] *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* is a searchable database, the product of a collaborative effort which "aims to identify all written sources which were incorporated, quoted, translated or adapted anywhere in English or Latin texts which were written, or are likely to have been written, in Anglo-Saxon England, including those by foreign authors. It also identifies the written sources used by authors of texts written abroad if those authors are certainly or arguably Anglo-Saxons, and by foreigners who were drawing mainly on materials which they had obtained, or are likely to have obtained, in Anglo-Saxon England." It is currently hosted by the University of St Andrews: https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/fontes/about#aims.

[60] Known as *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* before 2020, *Sources of Old English and Anglo-Latin Literary Culture* describes itself as "a collaborative project that aims to produce a reference work summarizing current scholarship concerning the knowledge and use of literary sources in Anglo-Saxon England." It has published entries in print and online since 1990: https://soeallc.hcommons.org/about-soeallc/history-of-the-project/.

presented by Lucretius, the most convincing aspect of the intromissive model for sight was that it was functionally comparable to the way humans observably experience the other senses. Just as with smell or sound, sight is effected by something leaving the object being sensed and then entering the appropriate organ, in this case, the eye:

> Therefore, it is necessary that you acknowledge that bodies (particles) are emitted again and again which hit the eyes and provoke sight. And odors constantly flow from certain things; as cold from rivers, heat from the sun, spray from waves of the sea, eater of walls around the shore. Nor do various sounds cease to flutter through the air. Finally into the mouth often comes the moisture of salty taste, when we move about near the sea, and on the other hand, when we observe wormwood being mixed with water, the bitterness touches us. Always something is borne in a flowing manner from all things, and is sent forth into all parts in every direction, neither is any delay nor rest of the flux given, since we perceive without interruption, and we are always granted to see and to smell all things, and to hear them make noise.[61]

Logically, Lucretius argued, because it is easily observed that taste, smell, touch, and hearing are all caused by something making contact with a mouth, a nose, the skin, or an ear, sight must be caused in the same way, with something entering an eye. It is a difficult theory to explain, because in contrast with the examples he gives for the other senses, the

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[61] Lucretius, *T. Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex*, ed. William Ellery Leonard and Stanley Barney Smith (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1942), IV. 216–29: "Quare etiam atque etiam mitti fateare necessest / corpora quae feriant oculos uisumque lacessant. / Perpetuoque fluunt certis ab rebus odores, / frigus ut a fluuiis, calor ab sole, aestus ab undis / aequoris, exesor moerorum litora circum; / nec uariae cessant uoces uolitare per aureis. / Denique in os salsi uenit umor saepe saporis, / cum mare uersamur propter, dilutaque contra / cum tuimur misceri absinthia, tangit amaror. / Usque adeo omnibus ab rebus res quaeque fluenter / fertur et in cunctas dimittitur undique partis, / nec mora nec requies interdatur ulla fluendi, / perpetuo quoniam sentimus, et omnia semper / cernere odorari licet et sentire sonare."

objects entering the eye are otherwise imperceptible. The "bodies" described by Lucretius are invisible until they stream into the eye.

Lucretius described these *corpora* (bodies) as *effigies* (likenesses), copied images of all visible things which stream from them until they are seen. In order to make logical sense of how this is possible, Lucretius turned again to the natural world, comparing these *corpora* and *effigies* to smoke and the cast-off skins of snakes and insects:

> Therefore I say that the copies and fine likenesses of things are sent forth by them from their outermost husk. Even one who is dull in mind can understand this from the following. But since I have shown the beginnings of all things, of what kind they are, and how, differing in their various forms, they flutter about by their own free will, stirred by eternal motion, and in what manner each thing may be created from these, let me now begin to explain to you what pertains powerfully to these things: that there are what we call 'the likenesses of things,' to be termed 'films' or 'husk,' because the image, having been given off to wander about, takes a similar appearance and form to whatever body it takes its name from. Because, to begin with, many visible things cast off bodies, sometimes spread out loosely—as oaks give off smoke and fires, heat—and sometimes more compacted and solidified—as when cicadas put off smooth tunics during summer, and when calves cast off membranes from the outermost body at birth, and likewise when the slippery serpent puts off its garment among thorns—for often we see the thorn-bushes augmented with their fluttering spoils:—seeing that these things

happen, so too ought a fine image to be sent off of things, from their outermost

body.[62]

Here, Lucretius revealed the rustic charm of his argument: there are natural, easily

observable analogies for his atomic intromissive model for sight. Lucretius displayed less

interest in developing intellectually satisfying answers to explain *how* all objects are able

to cast off likenesses and images from their surface which then stream into the body, but

he nevertheless used this model to explain how distant objects appear smaller, why some

objects reflect the images of others while others do not, and how sight confirms other

senses, especially touch.

Despite these apparent strengths, early-medieval English writers did not adopt

Lucretius's atomic model, though not for lack of the text's availability. Evidence suggests

that three writers in early-medieval England engaged with *De rerum natura*, albeit in a

limited capacity. *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* found that Aldhelm borrowed from Lucretius in

his *Carmen de uirginitate* and his *Enigma 78*, though both borrowings are limited to pairs

of words from Books One and Two, respectively, of *De rerum natura*.[63] Neither

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[62] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, IV. 42–64: "Dico igitur rerum effigias tenuisque figuras / mittier ab rebus, summo de cortice eorum. / Id licet hinc quamuis hebeti cognoscere corde. / Sed quoniam docui cunctarum exordia rerum / qualia sint et quam uariis distantia formis / sponte sua uolitent aeterno percita motu / quoque modo possit res ex his quaequae creari, / nunc agere incipiam tibi (quod uehementer ad has res / attinet) esse ea quae 'rerum simulacra' uocamus, / quae quasi 'membranae' uel 'cortex' nominitandast, / quod speciem ac formam similem gerit eius imago, / cuiuscumque cluet de corpore fusa uagari. / Principio quoniam mittunt in rebus apertis / corpora res multae, partim diffusa solute— / robora ceu fumum mittunt ignesque uaporem— / et partim contexta magis condensaque— ut olim / cum teretes ponunt tunicas aestate cicadae, / et uituli cum membranas de corpore summo / nascentes mittunt, et item cum lubrica serpens / exuit in spinis uestem—nam saepe uidemus / illorum spoliis uepres olitantibus auctas:— / quae quoniam fiunt, tenuis quoque debet imago / ab rebus mitti, summo de corpore rerum."

[63] For both entries, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* cites Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 18 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1994), 130. Here, Orchard acknowledged the possibility of an intermediary, but also suggested that "Tantalizing traces that Aldhelm may have been influenced by Lucretius in his verse do, however, present themselves, although they are not particularly impressive. Aldhelm's citation of verses by Lucretius . . . most likely reflects the wealth of as yet undetermined secondary sources and derivative material which he had at his disposal."

pertained to Lucretius's intromissive model for sight. Michael Lapidge acknowledged

only the first of these, and found that Aldhelm also borrowed from Lucretius elsewhere in

Carmen de uirginitate, in *Enigma 14*, and in *De pedum regulis*.[64] These too were not

extensive quotations, nor were they from Lucretius's discussion on sight. Lapidge also

found that Bede and Lantfred cited the text. Of the four borrowings from Lucretius in

Bede's *De temporum ratione*, *De natura rerum*, and *In Genesim*, only one of these, from

De temporum ratione, pertains to Book Four of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, though not

from the discussion of sight within this book.[65] Finally, Lapidge also found a parallel to

Lucretius in Lantfred's *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*.[66] Though Lantfred was

Frankish, he wrote this text in England as a monk at the Old Minster at Winchester by the

year 975.[67] The possible borrowing from Lucretius, though, is not related to the nature of

sight, but is instead imagery involving a golden rope.[68]

While all of these parallels between Latin writings from early-medieval England

and *De rerum natura* might suggest that knowledge of Lucretius comprised part of the

cultural milieu at various centers of learning and across a broad span of time, there is no

evidence that any early-medieval English author accepted or even engaged with

Lucretius's intromissive model for sight. Lapidge even acknowledged that "knowledge of

Lucretius in Anglo-Saxon England is doubtful."[69] Indeed, there is no physical evidence of

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[64] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 183.

[65] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 219.

[66] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 241.

[67] Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, Winchester Studies 4.ii (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), 237.

[68] Lapidge, Cult of St Swithun, 282–83n150.

[69] Lapidge, Cult of St Swithun, 283n150.

De rerum natura in early-medieval England, either in the form of its inclusion on a booklist or its survival in a manuscript. Granted, manuscript evidence is incomplete, and it is impossible to speculate the reason a text does not survive or may not have been copied in early-medieval England. Whether an author's ideas were not accepted because his text was not available, or a text was not made widely available because its ideas were not accepted, is unknowable. Nevertheless, frigid reception of *De rerum natura* by earlier Christian writers might play a role in either the rejection or unavailability of Lucretius's intromissionist ideas by early-medieval English writers. For instance, in his *Diuinae institutiones*, Lactantius, a convert to Christianity, wrote of his purpose to dismantle false beliefs originating in Roman paganism, "It is pleasing . . . to refute the ancient belief more fully, so that men may at last be ashamed and repent of their errors. This is a great work, worthy of a man. 'I proceed to free minds from the knots of religions,' as Lucretius said, who indeed was unable to accomplish this, because he produced nothing factual."[70] Lactantius, nevertheless, relied on Lucretius's criticism of Roman paganism, as well as that of Cicero, in order to dismiss false religions. Although he praised these writers for this wisdom, Lactantius lamented that both were ignorant of true religion, as both men died before the development of Christianity, and that their criticism of the religion of their time therefore led them to atheism rather than to the truth Lactantius had found in Christianity: "False religions were therefore assailed by the more wise, because thye perceived them to be false, but true religion was not introduced, because they did not

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[70] Lactantius, *Diuinae institutiones*, 61.11–17: "Libet . . . redarguere plenius inueteratam persuasionem, ut tandem homines suorum pudeat ac paeniteat errorum. Magnum hoc opus et homine dignum, 'religionum animos nodis exsoluere pergo,' ut ait Lucretius, qui quidem hoc efficere non poterat, quia nihil ueri adferebat." In *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti opera omnia, pars I: Divinae institutiones et Epitome diuinarum institutionum*, ed. Samuel Brandt, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 19 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1890), 1–672.

know of what sort or where it might be."[71] Elsewhere in the *Diuinae institutiones*,

Lactantius criticized Lucretius for attributing the origination of wisdom to man rather

than to God. Lactantius argued strongly against such a belief, though he did tell his

readers to show mercy on Lucretius for this misguided notion, writing, "truly he may be

forgiven as a poet."[72] Jerome, too, found reason to criticize Lucretius, though unlike

Lactantius, Jerome did not directly address Lucretius's writing. According to an entry

Jerome added to Eusebius's chronicle, Lucretius composed *De rerum natura* "through

intervals of insanity" before he "killed himself by his own hand at 44 years of age."[73]

Lactantius: *De opificio Dei*

The remaining Latin sources available to early-medieval English authors were all

Christian texts, and most of them explicitly so. The faith-centered arguments of these

texts may have contributed to their influence on thought about the function of sight, and

while it may be worth noting that Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, the latest and

most popular of these Latin authors, is not an explicitly Christian text, it was certainly

received and read as though it were.

The earliest of these Christian authors is Lactantius, a Christian convert whose

writings emerged in an environment in which Christianity was granted tolerance by the

Roman state. As a convert from paganism during a transitional time, Lactantius

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[71] Lactantius, *Diuinae institutiones*, 105.20–22: "inpugnatae sunt ergo prudentioribus falsae religiones, quia sentiebant esse falsas, sed non est inducta uera, quia qualis aut ubi esset ignorabant."

[72] Lactantius, *Diuinae institutiones*, 217.7–8: "uerum potest ut poetae dari uenia."

[73] D. B. Gaine, "The Life and Death of Lucretius," *Latomus* 28 (1969), 545–53, at 545. Gaine quotes in Latin Jerome, *Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones*, 231: "Titus Lucretius poeta nascitur, qui postea amatorio poculo in furorem uersus, cum aliquot libros per interualla insaniae conscripsisset quos postea Cicero emendauit, propria se manu interfecit anno aetatis XLIIII." The translation is my own.

frequently wrote in favor of Christianity over the religion of his ancestors, in an elevated Latin style—it is thus easy to imagine why his writing would have resonated in early-medieval England. His explanation of the mechanics of sight is located in *De opificio Dei*, a top-to-bottom survey of human anatomy with a twofold thesis: one, that the body ought to be submissive to a heaven-oriented soul, and two, that the Christian God was humankind's creator, and the body is evidence of his divine wisdom.

When discussing the mechanism of sight, which in his own understanding demonstrated a critical connection between the eyes and the mind, Lactantius expressed contempt for the Epicurean view held by Lucretius: "I cannot in this place be restrained from again refuting the stupidity of Epicurus: for his are all the things which Lucretius madly speaks."[74] Lactantius then claimed that the atomic intromissive model argued by Lucretius and Epicurus was at odds with Christian doctrine on the creation: "Clearly, in order to make a place for his atoms, he prefered to exclude divine providence."[75] With Christianity thus absent from Epicurean thought, a model that permits or even attests to the divinity of the creator of Genesis is necessary to replace Lucretius's description of the mechanism of sight. Yet extramission is not Lactantius's solution to the question. Rather, in Lactantius's model for sight, the eyes are connected to the mind, which is situated within the head. Lactantius argues that "the nearly divine mind of man, because it has been alotted dominion not only over the living things which are on the earth, but also

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[74] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 22.1–3: "Non possum hoc loco teneri quominus Epicurus stultitiam rursum coarguam: illius enim sunt omnia quae delirat Lucretius." In *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti opera omnia, pars II, fasciculus I: Libri De opificio Dei et De ira Dei, Carmina fragmenta, Vetera de Lactantio testimonia*, ed. Samuel Brandt, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 27/1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1893), 1–64.

[75] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 22.9–10: "Uidelicet ut atomis suis locum faceret, diuinam prouidentiam uoluit excludere."

over his own body, having been set high in the head as if in an elevated stronghold, looks out and beholds all things."[76]And although Lactantius found firm evidence for the mind's location in the head in the nerves that pass from the sensory organs of the head to the brain, he nevertheless did not hold the position that the mind is permanently and entirely fixed within the brain, but rather believed that while its primary location is within the head, the mind is able to extend itself and travel within the body, at times to the breast, throughout the limbs, and possibly even beyond the confines of the body itself during dreams. Again, this is all working toward proving Lactantius's twofold thesis of submission to the soul and the divine plan of the creation.

As to the exact mechanism of sight, Lactantius took the position that it is from the brain that the mind uses the eyes almost as windows (and yet with an important distinction), stating that "the sight of the eyes constitutes the attention of the mind."[77] To Lactantius, this meant that it was the mind itself, and not extramissive sight rays, that stretched out from the eyes in order to cause sight. After describing the eyes, Lactantius outlined the process by which the mind used them to see, denying other models of sight (including extramission) in the process:

> Through these tissues, therefore, that sense which is called the mind looks onto
> those things which are without, lest perchance we may suppose either that we see
> by means of an onrush of likenesses, as the philosophers argue—for the office of
> sight ought to be in that which sees, not in that which is seen—or by the

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[76] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 28.1–4: "Eius prope diuina mens quia non tantum animantium quae sunt in terra, sed etiam sui corporis est sortita dominatum, in summo capite conlocata tamquam in arce sublimi speculatur omnia et contuetur."

[77] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 31.24: "Uisus oculorum intentione animi constat."

intensification of the air with the glance, or by the outpouring of rays, because if it were so, we would see later than when we turn our eyes, at the point when the air, intensified by the glance, or the outpoored rays, should arrive at that which is to be seen.[78]

This clarifies what Lactantius may have meant when he stated that the model for sight presented by Epicurus and Lucretius did not allow for divine providence. In their model, there can be no agency for the viewer, for the eyes would be passively beset by the constant stream of likenesses entering them. In Lactantius's understanding of divinely-designed sight, though, with the mind controlling sight through the eyes, God has given humanity power to control what they may see. Thus, Lactantius aligned his model for sight according to Jesus's injunction in his Sermon on the Mount to absolutely master one's own sight (Matt. 5:27–9).

Lactantius's rejection of other models for sight was based on the instantaneity of the sense. He could not logically reckon how extramission would account for sight, as it should require time for the rays to reach that which they see. And while Lactantius asserted that sight was instead caused by the *intentione animi* (the attention of the mind), he did not explain how this better accounted for the sense of sight than extramission did. Instead, he elaborated on the relationship between the mind and the eyes according to his model. The eyes do not function merely as windows through which the mind may see:

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[78] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 29.18–30.7: "Per eas igitur membranas sensus ille qui dicitur mens, ea quae sunt foris transpicit, ne forte existimes aut imaginum incursione nos cernere, ut philosophi disserunt, quoniam uidendi officium in eo debet esse quod videt, non in eo quod uidetur, aut intentione aeris cum acie aut effusione radiorum, quoniam si ita esset, tardius quam oculos aduertimus uideremus, donec intentus aer cum acie aut effusi radii ad id quod uidendum esset peruenirent."

"How little indeed we would be able to see, if from the innermost recesses of the head the mind directed its attention through the tiny chinks of hollows. So that should anyone wish to look through a reed pipe, assuredly he would see no more than the capacity of the pipe may catch hold of."[79] Because we do not experience sight in this way, with darkness around the edges as if we were seeing through holes or windows from a dark room or a cave, or through a pipe, there must be a different relationship between the mind and the eyes. Lactantius drew from his understanding of anatomy to explain this relationship:

> But [God] wished the orbs themselves to be full of a pure and flowing humor, in the middle part of which might be held the enclosed sparks of light which we call pupils, in which, pure and delicate, the sense as well as the faculty of seeing is contained. Therefore, through these orbs the mind extends itself in order that it may see, and in a marvelous system the vision of both eyes is mixed and conjoined in one.[80]

Finally, Lactantius's complete model for sight may be understood. It requires a mobile mind, which may direct itself through the eyes in order to see.

Lactantius was evidently known to some early-medieval English writers, though no manuscripts of *De opificio Dei* survive from early-medieval England.[81] But while *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* cites influence on both Anglo-Latin and vernacular writing from

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[79] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 31.3–6: "Quantulum enim uidere possemus, si mens ab intimis penetralibus capitis per exiguas cauernarum rimulas attenderet! Ut si quis uelit transpicere per cicutam, non plus profecto cernat quam cicutae ipsius capacitas conprehendat."

[80] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 31.12–18: "Orbes autem ipsos umoris puri ac liquidi plenos esse uoluit, in quorum media parte scintillae luminum conclusae tenerentur, quas pupillas nuncupamus, in quibus puris atque subtilibus cernendi sensus ac ratio continetur. Per eos igitur orbes se ipsam mens intendit ut uideat miraque ratione in unum miscetur et coniungitur amborum luminum uisus."

[81] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 319.

three other texts by Lactantius—his *De aue phoenice*,[82] *De ira Dei*, and *Divinae institutionum*— Lapidge has noted that *De opificio Dei* may have been silently referenced by Aldhelm of Malmesbury and Lantfred of Winchester.[83] Nevertheless, the strong connection between an expanding mind and the sense of sight modeled by Lactantius is nearly ubiquitous in early-medieval English descriptions of, and references to, the sense of sight, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two of this dissertation, suggesting that Lactantius may have had more influence on early-medieval English writing than currently believed.

Ambrose: *Hexameron*

Of the texts describing sight evidently available in early-medieval English libraries, none seems to have been as influential as the *Hexameron* of Ambrose (ca. 340–397), bishop of Milan. Like Lactantius, Ambrose wrote with an expressly Christian exegetical purpose, though his argument took a different shape. The *Hexameron* is a six-book treatise devoting one book to each of the six days of creation described in Genesis. Though there are some discrepancies in the order in which certain things were created between the two accounts given in Genesis, chapters one and two, both accounts culminate with God's creation of humankind. Thus, Ambrose devoted much of book six of the *Hexameron* to a literal and allegorical interpretation of human anatomy and physiology, and it is here that Ambrose declared his purpose to his reader. Comparing

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[82] For more on the relationship between Lactantius's *De aue phoenice* and the Old English verse adaptation *The Phoenix*, see Janie Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series 18 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 35–70.

[83] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 182, 241, and 319.

himself to a civic tour guide, Ambrose stated that the overarching argument of the

Hexameron is to prove humankind's favorable position as God's crowning creation:

> Indeed if he who spies out the arrival of newcomers, while conducting them all
>
> around the city, pointing out all the notable features, hires himself out for no mean
>
> recompense, how much the more ought you to accept without distaste, that
>
> through this fellowship, with the guiding hand of speech, as it were, I lead you in
>
> our native land, and reveal the genus and species of things one by one, wishing to
>
> infer from all this how much richer is the favor the creator of all things has given
>
> to you, than to all [other] things.[84]

The metaphor of a tour guide is a rather vivid one to anyone who has traveled to a new

place. For example, any visitor could recognize the statue of Sir Winston Churchill in

Westminster's Parliament Square Garden without any difficulty, but only a tour guide

can interpret the monument's full meaning by asserting to the tourist that although Sir

Winston's gaze may appear to be fixed on the Houses of Parliament, he is actually

depicted looking wistfully in the direction of a nearby pub. Such is the purpose Ambrose

established for himself in his *Hexameron*: to guide his reader through the Genesis

account of the creation, pointing out interesting and noteworthy things to observe while

explaining their unseen purpose and meaning. With such a goal in mind, Ambrose set

about extrapolating the allegorical lessons that could be learned from plants and animals,

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[84] Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 204.22–205.6: "Etenim si is qui explorat nouorum aduentus hospitum, dum toto eos circumducit urbis ambitu, praestantiora quaeque opera demonstrans, non mediocrem locat gratiam, quanto magis sine fastidio accipere debetis quod uelut quadam sermonis manu per hanc communionem uos circumduco in patria et singularum rerum species et genera demonstro ex omnibus colligere cupiens, quanto u.obis creator uniuersorum gratiam uberiorem quam uniuersis donauerit." In *S. Ambrosii opera, pars I: Exameron, De paradiso, De Cain et Abel, De Noe, De Abraham, De Isaac, De bono mortis*, ed. Karl Schenkl, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 32/1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1896), 1–261.

as well as the various ways in which the rest of creation is for the benefit of humankind,

and eventually discussed the spiritual value of the various functions of the human body,

the last of God's creations.

Of all human abilities, sight played a central role in Ambrose's argument.

Although Ambrose did not provide his readers with a detailed description of the

mechanism of sight, his description of the sense was certainly extramissive:

> The entire body is a prison, shuddering at its dark situation, unless it is
>
> illuminated by the vision of the eyes. Therefore, what the sun and moon are in the
>
> sky, this too are the eyes in man. The sun and moon are the two lights of the
>
> world, while the eyes are stars in the head which shine from above and illuminate
>
> lower things with clear light, nor do they allow us to be enveloped in any darkness
>
> of night. They are our scouts which keep watch by day and by night. For they are
>
> both aroused from deep sleep more quickly than the other members, and being
>
> awake they look about at all things; for they are nearer to the brain, whence all
>
> skill of seeing flows.[85]

This brief description outlined Ambrose's beliefs about the mechanics and importance of

sight. It is a clearly extramissive model, with God having granted illuminating power to

the eyes in their *aspectus*, a word that can be taken to mean either the gaze of the eyes or

the sense of sight as a whole. Ambrose's elaboration on the way in which the *aspectus*

illuminates the otherwise dark situation of the body confirms that his belief was that the

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[85] Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 247.8–16: "Carcer est totum corpus tenebroso horrens situ, nisi oculorum luminetur aspectu. Quod igitur sol et luna in caelo, hoc sunt oculi in homine. Sol et luna duo mundi lumina, oculi autem quaedam in capite sidera fulgent desuper et inferiora claro inlustrant lumine nec patiuntur noctis quibusdam nos tenebris inplicari. Speculatores quidam nostri die ac nocte excubant. Nam et e sopore membris ceteris citius excitantur et uigilantes circumspectant omnia; uiciniores enim sunt cerebro, unde omnis manat usus uidendi."

eyes functioned extramissively. The comparison between the eyes and the sun, moon, and stars created on the fourth day—the eyes, in Ambrose's simile, are "quaedam sidera . . . [quae] fulgent desuper" (stars which shine from above)—clarified that sight does not illuminate the body the way a window would allow light to enter a dark space, but rather, the eyes themselves are the sources of this light, shining on things below and thereby enabling sight. In fact, Ambrose's relating of the eyes to the sun and moon is an inversion of his earlier metaphor describing the sun: "Indeed it is the eye of the world, the charm of day, the beauty of the sky, the grace of nature, the excellence of creation."[86] Both comparisons, the sun as the eye of the world, and the eyes as the sun and moon of the head, indicate a firm belief in the extramissive model for sight.

Ambrose's second description of the sense of sight in the above passage confirmed this: the brain is discussed as the seat "unde omnis manat usus uidendi" (whence all skill of seeing flows). In Ambrose's understanding of sight, then, the rays emanating from the eyes do not have their origin there, but instead, begin in the brain, flowing (he used the verb *manare* to describe this action) through the eyes and outside the body in order to enable sight. Additionally, due to their proximity to the brain, the eyes are more capable of ascertaining information about the surrounding world than the other sensory organs, perhaps indicating that Ambrose considered sight superior to the other senses.

Ambrose's *Hexameron* doubtlessly exerted a great deal of influence on early-medieval English literature. Indeed, the *Hexameron* is well-attested in early-medieval

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[86] Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 111.21–22: "Oculus est enim mundi, iocunditas diei, coeli pulchritudo, naturae gratia, praestantia creaturae."

England, with four manuscripts surviving to this day.[87] These are: Arras, Biblothèque

Municipale, MS 346 (867), a tenth-/eleventh-century manuscript from Abingdon;[88]

Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk. 1. 23, an eleventh-/twelfth-century manuscript

from Christ Church, Canterbury;[89] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 193, a ninth-

century northern French manuscript with English provenance from the eleventh

century;[90] and Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O. 3. 35, an eleventh-/twelfth-century

manuscript with provenance at Chichester.[91] In addition, London, Lambeth Palace

Library, MS 414, a manuscript which is now comprised of two separate volumes,

contains fragments of Ambrose's *Hexameron* on pages 9, 20b, 24, 32b, 36, and 38, in its

tenth-century portion, which had originated in France and had found its way to the

monastery of Saint Augustine at Canterbury.[92] The manuscript appears to be a handbook

for studying the six days of creation and is a collectaneum of quotations from Ambrose,

Augustine, John Cassian, Epiphanius, Faustus of Riez, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome,

Hilary, and Victorinus.[93]

      Direct citations of the *Hexameron* in early-medieval English writing span

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[87] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 279–80.

[88] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 778.

[89] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 20.

[90] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 61.5. Dabney Anderson Bankert, Jessica Wegmann, and Charles D. Wright, *Ambrose in Anglo-Saxon England with Pseudo-Ambrose and Ambrosiaster*, Old English Newsletter Subsidia 25 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1997), 18, exclude this manuscript from their list of early-medieval English *Hexameron* manuscripts.

[91] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 194.

[92] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 516.

[93] "Database of Manuscripts and Archives," Lambeth Palace Library, accessed April 14, 2021, https://archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MSS%2f 414&pos=1.

centuries: Bede, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth quoted from it.[94] As noted by Bankert, Wegmann, and Wright, though, the quotations of Ambrose in the works of Byrhtferth and Ælfric were derived from Isidore of Seville's quotations of Ambrose's *Hexameron* in his own *De natura rerum*.[95] Additionally, there is an abundance of evidence pointing toward an even wider readership of the *Hexameron* than is already suggested by the number of surviving manuscripts and citations. Ambrose's fingerprints have been observed in vernacular poetry and homilies, and in Latin literature of the early-medieval English period, Ambrose's *Hexameron* has been suggested as a source for a substantial amount of Bede's exegesis, as well as two of the riddles of Aldhelm.[96]

Augustine: *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* and *De Genesi ad litteram*

Like Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) authored commentary on the creation story of Genesis, and Augustine's treatment of Genesis likewise inspired discussion of sight. In total, Augustine composed five commentaries on the creation. In chronological order, these are: *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, *Confessiones* (in books 11–13), *De Genesi ad litteram*, and *De civitate Dei* (in book 11).[97] Each of these sought to understand and explain the nature of God, whereas Ambrose's commentary had focused more on mankind's relationship to God.

In many cases in Augustine's creation commentaries, the nature of sight was

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[94] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 194, 252 and 267.

[95] Bankert, Wegmann, and Wright, *Ambrose in Anglo-Saxon England*, 20.

[96] Bankert, Wegmann, and Wright, *Ambrose in Anglo-Saxon England*, 19–22.

[97] Roland J. Teske, *Saint Augustine on Genesis: 'Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees' and 'On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book'*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation 84 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 3.

ancillary to his argument, so he often spoke of it in general terms without providing

specific detail about the extramissive model. For instance, when Augustine spoke of

things "which are not removed from our senses, whether interior or even exterior"[98] in *De*

civitate Dei, he referred to sight only generally with all five of the bodily senses,

comparing these "external" senses with "internal" ones (i.e., intuition and "common

sense"), and he gave no further description about the sense of sight in this text. Some

references to sight elsewhere in Augustine's Genesis commentaries rely on extramissive

descriptions of the sense, again without describing specific details about how the sense

functions. Thus, it seems to be with the extramissive model in mind that Augustine asked

God to reveal to him that which his bodily senses had failed to discern—the correct

interpretation of Genesis 1:1—saying, "My God, light of my eyes in that which is

hidden."[99]

Two of Augustine's commentaries on the Genesis creation story, though,

provided more elaborate models for how Augustine understood the sense of sight to

operate. In *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, God's creation of light in Genesis 1:3

inspired Augustine to define what might be literally meant (as the name of the book

implies) by that light. Here, Augustine briefly discussed sight in a way similar to the

model set forth by Lactantius, identifying the soul as responsible for sight, though

Augustine's model, with its mention of the eyes' light, seems more extramissive than

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[98] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 432: "quae remota non sunt a sensibus nostris sive interioribus sive etiam exterioribus." In Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. David S. Wiesen, Loeb Classical Library 413 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). Translation is my own.

[99] Augustine, *Sancti Aureli Augustini Confessionum libri tredecim*, ed. Pius Knöll, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 33 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1896), 328.1: "Deus meus, lumen oculorum meorum in occulto."

Lactantius's in its nature: "For the light which is sensed by the eyes is one thing, and that which is conducted through the eyes, so that it may be sensed, is another. For the former is in the body, the latter, although it receives those things that it senses through the body, is nevertheless in the soul."[100] While Lactantius had argued that the mind extends its own attention through the eyes in order to effectuate sight, in Augustine's understanding of the sense, the soul is responsible for emitting rays of light through the eyes, causing a person to see. This apparently reconciled Lactantius's model for sight with extramission, which Augustine argued for elsewhere. Augustine reaffirmed the responsibility of the soul in *Confessiones*, when he discussed "the soul perceiving by means of the body."[101]

In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine more clearly revealed his understanding of the nature of sight. In another argument about epistemology, Augustine drew attention to the limitations of the senses, arguing that the senses are often misinterpreted, as when we see the refracted image of an oar in water and believe the oar to be bent. At other times, we may need to rely on another sense in order to correctly interpret an experience, as when one believes they have heard thunder, but upon seeing a carriage passing by, understands the sound to have been wheels noisily passing over the stony street. Discussing one of the ways the sense of sight might interpreted incorrectly, Augustine made clear reference to extramission, naming the eyes' rays: "and when the rays of the

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[100]Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, 473.22–25: "Alia est enim lux quae sentitur oculis aliudque per oculos agitur, ut sentiatur. Illa enim in corpore, haec autem quamuis per corpus ea quae sentit accipiat in anima tamen est." In *S. Aureli Augustini De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim, eiusdem libri capituli, De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber, Locutionum in Heptateuchum libri septem*, ed. Joseph Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 28/1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894), 457–503.

[101] Augustine, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, 162.14: "sentientem per corpus animam.".

eyes are spread asunder [i.e., are unfocused], two images of a lamp appear."[102] In this

same chapter, Augustine reaffirmed his belief that the *anima* (soul) is responsible for the

interpretation of sensory experience.[103] As noted by Bruce S. Bubacz, the epistemological

argument put forward here is not that the senses are unreliable. Rather, Augustine

suggests that the fault lies in the soul's interpretation of sensory experience. In

Augustine's example of the refracted oar,

> what the bodily sight reports to the animal vision is a bent-oar appearance. It
>
> reports a bent-oar appearance when the oar is bent or (obviously) when the oar
>
> only seems to be bent. Animal vision is required to generate an image. However,
>
> all the animal vision has to work with *vis a vis* the *content* of the image it
>
> generates is what the bodily sight reports. So, when the bodily sight reports a
>
> bent-oar appearance, a bent-oar image is produced.[104]

Of course, Augustine is more concerned with weightier subjects such as determining

absolute truth than he is with the actual mechanics of the senses. Augustine's larger

argument is that, just as our souls are fallible when interpreting when interpreting sensory

experiences, so too is there fault with our *intellectual vision* when evaluating abstract

concepts: "Incorrigibility for *visio intellectus* would seem to be ruled out by the

recognition that intellectual vision is the source of errors in judging the corporeal world

and by the recognition that we can be mistaken in what we take to be justice, beauty and

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[102] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 417.28–418.1: "et diuaricatis radiis oculorum duae lucernae species adparere." In *S. Aureli Augustini De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim, eiusdem libri capituli, De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber, Locutionum in Heptateuchum libri septem*, ed. Joseph Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 28/1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894), 1–456.

[103] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 417.22.

[104] Bruce S. Bubacz, "Augustine's *Visio Intellectus* and Perceptual Error," Augustiniana 27 (1997): 133–38, at 135. Bubacz's use of "animal vision" does not refer to vision characteristic of or pertaining to animals, but rather, pertaining to the *anima* (soul).

so on. These sorts of knowledge claims are independent of experience in the material world."[105] Nevertheless, Augustine did not condemn the senses, even if they could be misinterpreted. Janet Martin Soskice has argued that while it would be easy to misread Augustine's privileging of intellectual vision over that of the physical body as "antiocularist," or opposed to sight and the other senses, he should be thought of instead as "a well-rounded sensualist in his spiritual imagery," utilizing the five senses, no matter their limitations, as a means of desiring God in other works such as *Confessions*.[106]

Elsewhere in *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine developed a more complete model of sight as he understood it. Many of the more intricate details of the extramissive model are given attention as Augustine used sight as illustrative examples to explain elements of the creation story in Genesis. In one case, in order to describe how night should not be thought of as a contraction of light, but rather as times when the sun shines on the far side of the world, Augustine contrasted the diurnal cycle with sight, which he did understand to function via a contractible source of light emitted by the eyes:

> For the emission of rays from our eyes is indeed the emission of a certain light
> and it can be drawn back, when we look at the air which is near our eyes, and
> emitted, when we pay attention to those things which are positioned far off in the
> same straight line. Nor indeed, when it is drawn back, does it stop seeing
> altogether those things which are far off, but indeed more obscurely than when the
> gaze is emitted onto them. Nevertheless, that light in the sense of the one who

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[105] Bubacz, "Augustine's *Visio Intellectus*," 137.

[106] Janet Martin Soskice, "Sight and Vision in Medieval Christian Thought," in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York: Routledge, 1996), 29–43, at 36.

sees is shown to be so scant that unless it is helped by external light, we are able

to see nothing; and because it cannot be discerned from that, it is difficult to find,

as I said, by what example the emission of light during the day and the

withdrawing of light during the night can be demonstrated.[107]

Here, Augustine used the extramissve model to explain how sight may be focused on near or far objects through the contraction or emission of rays depending on the distance of the object being viewed. Augustine thus argued that unlike these rays of the eyes, contracting or expanding along a single straight line in order to focus the sense of sight, the light of day does not contract at night, but rather is shining on another part of the world, as can be seen by the movement of the sun across the sky.

Later in *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine again used sight in order to illustrate another aspect of the creation. This time, Augustine sought to explain to his reader why Genesis gave an ordered account of the creation, divided into a step-by-step and day-by-day process, when Augustine would argue that the entire creation occurred instantaneously. In order to show how quickly the creation could have happened, Augustine drew from the extramissive model for sight, pointing out to his readers how the rays of the eyes seem to cover vast distances instantaneously:

When we look at the rising sun, it is certainly evident that our gaze would not be

able to reach it unless it crossed all the space of the air and sky that is between us

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[107] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 23.9–19: "Iactus enim radiorum ex oculis nostris cuiusdam quidem lucis est iactus et contrahi potest, cum aerem, qui est oculis nostris proximus, intuemur, et emitti, cum ad eandem rectitudinem quae sunt longe posita adtendimus. Nec sane, cum contrahitur, omnino cernere, quae longe sunt, desinit, sed certe obscurius, quam cum in ea obtutus emittitur. Sed tamen ea lux, quae in sensu uidentis est, tam exigua docetur, ut, nisi adiuuetur extranea luce, nihil uidere possimus; et quia discerni ab ea non potest, quo exemplo demonstrari possit emissio in diem et contractio lucis in noctem, sicut dixi, reperire difficile est."

and it. But who may be capable of reckoning this distance? Nor, assuredly, would the same gaze or ray of our eyes prevail at crossing the air that is above the sea unless it has first crossed that which is above the land, in whatever inland place we may be, from that place where we are to the shore of the sea. Then if lands still lie beyond the sea along the same line of our gaze, it cannot cross that air that is above those lands across the sea unless it has first traversed the space of that air that is above the sea, which occurs first. Let us now suppose that beyond those lands across the sea, nothing but the ocean remains. Surely our gaze cannot cross the air that is diffused above the ocean unless it has first crossed whatsoever air is above the land on this side of the ocean? Moreover, the magnitude of the ocean is said to be beyond compare; but however great it may be, it is necessary that the rays of our eyes first cross the air that is above it, and afterwards whatever is beyond, then finally arrive at the sun, which we see.[108]

Augustine's description is a rather lengthy way of explaining logic, but he has essentially asked his reader to consider the vast distances required for sight-effectuating rays to travel in order to view a sunrise: if point A in Augustine's diagram is a viewer's eyes, and point B is the sun out on the horizon, the linear distance between the two is at least a few

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[108] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 134.17–135.8: "cum solem intuemur orientem, certe manifestum est, quod ad eum acies nostra peruenire non posset, nisi transiret totum aeris caelique spatium, quod inter nos et ipsum est. Hoc autem cuius longinquitatis sit, quis aestimare sufficiat? Nec utique perueniret eadem acies uel radius oculorum nostrorum ad transeundum aerem, qui est super mare, nisi prius transisset eum, qui est super terram, in qualibet mediterranea regione simus, ab eo loco, ubi sumus, usque ad litus maris. Deinde, si ad eandem lineam contuitus nostri adhuc post mare terrae adiacent, eum quoque aerem, qui super illas transmarinas terras est, transire acies nostra non potest, nisi prius peracto spatio aeris illius, qui super mare, quod primum occurrit, extenditur. Faciamus iam post illas transmarinas terras nonnisi oceanum remanere. Numquid et aerem, qui super oceanum diffunditur, potest transire acies nostra, nisi prius transierit quidquid aeris citra oceanum supra terram est? Oceani autem magnitudo inconparabilis perhibetur; sed quantacumque sit, prius oportet aerem, qui supra est, transeant radii nostrorum oculorum et postea quidquid ultra est tum demum ad solem perueniant, quem uidemus."

miles (though Augustine may have understood this to be even greater). The eyes' rays must travel this entire distance in order to strike the sun, causing the viewer to see the sunrise. Nevertheless, Augustine observed, no time seems to have passed in order for the rays to cover these great linear distances. The rays travel through the air between the viewer and the shore, and then from the shore out past any islands, all the way to the rising sun on the horizon, seemingly instantaneously the moment the viewer's eyes have been opened or directed. Augustine thus concluded:

> Therefore, because we have here said 'before' and 'after' so many times, does our gaze not at once cross all things in a single beat? For if, with our eyes closed, we place our face looking toward the sun, will we not think, as soon as we have opened them, that we have found our gaze there, rather than that we have led it there, in such a way that no sooner do our eyes seem to have been opened than it [i.e., our gaze] has reached those things to which it had turned its attention? And certainly this is the ray of bodily light, springing forth from our eyes and reaching things positioned far away with such great speed that it cannot be reckoned or compared. Assuredly, here it is on the one hand clear that all those spaces so wide and immeasurable are simultaneously traversed in a single beat, and on the other hand, it is no less certain what is traversed first and what afterwards.[109]

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[109] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 135.9–19: "Num igitur quia totiens hic diximus 'prius' et 'postea,' ideo non simul omnia uno ictu transit noster obtutus? Si enim clausis oculis faciem contra uisuri solem ponamus, nonne mox, ut eos aperuerimus, ibi potius aciem nostram nos inuenisse, quam illuc eam perduxisse putabimus, ita ut nec ipsi oculi prius aperti fuisse uideantur quam illa quo intenderat peruenisse? Et certe iste corporeae lucis est radius, emicans ex oculis nostris et tam longe posita tanta celeritate contingens, ut aestimari conpararique non possit. Nempe hic et illa omnia tam ampla inmensaque spatia simul uno ictu transiri manifestum est et, quid prius posteriusque transeatur, nihilo minus certum est."

Augustine might have marveled to learn that he was indeed describing the speed of light, so fast as to be imperceptible at even the distances he had considered to be vast, even if he attributed the eye, rather than the sun, as the source of this *corporeae lucis radius* (ray of bodily light) due to his extramissive understanding of sight. But Augustine's analogy worked very well, according to this model for sight, to explain his belief that the creation was instantaneous, and that the six days outlined in Genesis represent the Bible's attempt to apply logical order and understanding to it: the rising sun may be seen immediately upon opening our eyes, even though the "rays" effectuating sight must travel a vast distance and therefore must logically arrive at more proximal objects within our sight before arriving at the more distant sun; likewise the creation, which Augustine would argue occurred just as instantaneously, was given detailed, logical order in the Genesis account.

In each instance of using sight as an illustrative example, Augustine has taken for granted that his reader understands sight according to the extramissive model. He seems to have been writing to an audience with a very different understanding of sight than Lactantius had in his *De opificio Dei*. Whereas Lactantius sought to disprove the atomic intromissive model set forth by Lucretius and Epicurus, Augustine saw no need to argue for his own extramissive model or against a competing model. This may suggest that by Augustine's time, extramission was common knowledge, compared with either Lucretius's atomic intromissive model or Lactantius's model of a soul rather than rays of light extending from the eyes in order to effectuate sight—models which either had fallen out of favor or had failed to take root among Augustine's readers.

Early-medieval English manuscript evidence for Augustine's writing concerning sight is late, or in the case of *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, non-existent. Lapidge identified three early-medieval English manuscripts of *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine's fourth Genesis commentary (and his text with his most detailed explanation of the extramissive model of sight, as outlined above).[110] These are all post-Conquest, dating from the late eleventh century: Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 13 (A. i. 26);[111] Salisbury, Cathedral Library, 114, fos. 6–122;[112] and a fragment in Salisbury, Cathedral Library, MS 128, fos. 1–4.[113] To these three cited in Lapidge's *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, a fourth, later fragmentary example may be added: Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A. IV. 16, fols. 66–109.[114] There are also six passages of Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* in the manuscript London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 414.[115]

Despite their either late or nonexistent physical evidence, both texts were known to Bede. Though *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* has no records for *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, Lapidge identified nine instances in *In Genesim* in which Bede was dependent on it.[116] *De Genesi ad litteram* was much more widely used in early-medieval England. Lapidge recorded the text's influence on four of Bede's works,[117] Ælfric's

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[110] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 285.

[111] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 271.

[112] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 720.

[113] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 728.

[114] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 222.8.

[115] "Database of Manuscripts and Archives," Lambeth Palace Library, accessed April 14, 2021, https://archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MSS%2f 414&pos=1; Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 516.

[116] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 199–200.

[117] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 199.

Catholic Homilies,[118] and Byrhtferth's *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*.[119] *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*

noted two additional vernacular texts that drew from *De Genesi ad Litteram*: three

passages of *Genesis A*, and one explanatory phrase in the *Old English Heptateuch*.

Bede knew the text well, and drew from it in four of his own works: *Collectio ex*

opusculis beati Augustini in epistulas Pauli apostoli, *In Genesim*, *De natura rerum*, and

Expositio Actuum Apostolorum.[120] Bede's most direct engagement with Augustine's

extramissive ideas may be found in his *In Genesim*, though he did not explicitly explain

the extramissive model in this text. One Augustinian idea espoused by Bede that is

dependent upon or related to this model, though, is the understanding that the brain

houses the mind's cognitive power. Bede expressed this in his explanation of why God is

said to have "breathed into [Adam's] face the breath of life" (Douay Version; Gen. 2:7).

Regarding this passage, Bede wrote: "Indeed, God is rightly said to have breathed into

the face of man in order that he be made into a living soul, because certainly the spirit

grafted into him contemplates those things which are outside, seeing that 'the foremost

part of the brain whence all senses are distributed is positioned at the forehead.'"[121] For

the notion that the Bible stated that God inserted man's spirit through his face due to its

proximity to the brain, where man's spirit contemplates what is perceived by the senses,

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[118] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 252.

[119] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 268.

[120] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 199.

[121] Bede, *In Genesim*, I. 1403–6: "Bene autem in faciem inspirasse Deus homini dicitur ut fieret in animam uiuentem, quia nimirum insitus ei spiritus ea quae foris sunt contemplatur, utpote qui 'pars cerebri anterior unde sensus omnes distribuuntur ad frontem conlocata est.'" In *Bedae venerabilis opera, pars II.1: Opera exegetica 1. Libri quattuor in principium Genesis usque ad natiuitatem Isaac et eiectionem Ismahelis adnotationum*, ed. Charles W. Jones, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 118A (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1967). Cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 214.15–17: "Proinde, quoniam pars cerebri anterior, unde sensus omnes distribuuntur, ad fontem conlocata est."

Bede was drawing directly from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*. Bede continued to

quote Augustine's illustration of this principle, which used the sense of touch as an

example: "For even 'the sense of touch, which is diffused throughout the whole body, is

itself said to have its path from the same anterior part of the brain—a path which is led

back down again through the head and neck to the marrow of the spine.'"[122] Sensory

organs associated with each of the senses are located in the human head, and Bede,

quoting Augustine, demonstrated how the nervous system, with its branches radiating

from the brain, is evidence that the brain is indeed the location where sensory information

is processed. Charles W. Jones found that two *In Genesim* manuscripts discussed more

than just the sense of touch in this passage, and paraphrased more of Augustine's *De

Genesi ad litteram* in this discussion, adding "because without a doubt, all of the body's

senses (namely sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), through which the spirit grafted

into it contemplates those things which are without, flourish more in the face as being the

[anterior] part."[123] Whether or not this passage is original to Bede's text, the particular

argument that all five senses have corresponding organs located within the head would

have been known to Bede, as it was contained in the same chapter of Augustine's text he

drew from in order to explain that the soul operates the senses from the head. Though this

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[122] Bede, *In Genesim*, I. 1406–10: "Nam et 'tangendi sensus qui per totum corpus diffunditur etiam ipse ab eadem anteriore parte cerebri ostenditur habere uiam suam, quae retrorsus per uerticem atque ceruicem ad medullam spinae deducitur.'" Cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 214.17–21: "excepto tangendi sensu, qui per totum corpus diffunditur; qui tamen etiam ipse ab eadem anteriore parte cerebri ostenditur habere uiam suam, quae retrorsus per uerticem atque ceruicem ad medullam spinae, de qua loquebamur ante, deducitur."

[123] Jones, *Bedae venerabilis opera*, 44nn1405–6: "quia nimirum sensus omnes corporis per quos insitus ei spiritus ea quae foris sunt contemplatur magis in facie uigent uisus uidelicet auditus olfatus gustus et tactus utpote quia pars." Cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 214.21–24: "unde habet utique sensum in tangendo et facies, sicut totum corpus, exceptis sensibus uidendi, audiendi, olfaciendi, gustandi, qui in sola facie praelocati sunt."

is a step removed from the full extramissive theory for vision, as there is no mention of rays effectuating sight, this passage does show that Bede was familiar with Augustine's theories regarding the senses, as well as with the text that contained Augustine's most detailed explanation of the extramissive model.

Although there are no early-medieval English manuscripts of Bede's *In Genesim*, the commentary, as reported by George Hardin Brown and Frederick M. Biggs,[124] was very influential on early-medieval English vernacular and Latin writing. Brown and Biggs discussed 41 borrowings from Bede's commentary from 11 Latin and Old English texts produced in early-medieval England.[125] It is possible, then, that Bede's *In Genesim* acted as an intermediary for some of Augustine's thoughts concerning sight.

Boethius: *De consolatione philosophiae*

Another Latin source of a model for sight that was certainly transmitted to early-medieval England is Boethius. Though much of my focus thus far has been such sources that have hitherto not been identified, and *De consolatione philosophiae* has long been recognized as a vehicle for the transmission of classical ideas concerning sight,[126] the text is far too influential to overlook here. *De consolatione philosiphiae* was unquestionably one of the most popular texts during (and beyond) the early-medieval English period. Patrick Wormald noted that the number of manuscripts for *De consolatione philosophiae* in early-medieval England ranks second only to Ælfric's *Homilies* among texts other than

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[124] George Hardin Brown and Frederick M. Biggs, *Bede: Part 2, Fascicles 1–4*, Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

[125] Brown and Biggs, *Bede: Part 2*, 42–49.

[126] Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors," 205n102.

the Bible.[127] Like Augustine in *De Genesi ad litteram*, in *De consolatione philosophiae*,

Boethius turned to sight in order to provide a simile for an argument about epistemology.

Here, Boethius compared sight to another sense, touch, as a means of ascertaining the

roundness of a ball: "For in order that this may be made clear by a brief example, sight

and touch discern the same roundness of a body, but differently; the former, remaining at

a distance, observes the whole at once by casting its rays, but the latter, attaching itself to

the orb, and joined to it, moving around the very circumference, grasps the roundness

part by part."[128] Boethius here argued that the intelligibility of a concept is not dependent

upon any qualities inherent to the concept itself, as is commonly believed, but upon the

capability of the person studying it. "The cause of this error is that all things which

anyone knows, he reckons them to be known from their essence and nature alone. All this

is wrong; for each thing that is known is grasped not according to its own essence, but

rather according to the faculty of those who know."[129] The senses, then, provide evidence

that there are different means of comprehending qualities inherent in an object, and that

without sight or touch, an observer would be ignorant of the essential nature of a ball.

Likewise, Boethius argued, just as sight and touch enable the observer to understand the

same object differently, so too do different faculties of the mind allow for different planes

[127] Patrick Wormald, *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 218.

[128] Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, Corpus Chrianorum Series Latina 94 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1984), V, 4. 26: "Nam ut hoc breui liqueat exemplo, eandem corporis rotunditatem aliter uisus aliter tactus agnoscit; ille eminus manens totum simul iactis radiis intuetur, hic uero cohaerens orbi atque coniunctus circa ipsum motus ambitum rotunditatem partibus comprehendit."

[129] Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, V, 4. 24–25: "Cuius erroris causa est quo omnia quae quisque nouit ex ipsorum tantum ui atque natura cognosci aestimat quae sciuntur. Quod totum contra est; omne enim quod cognoscitur non secundum sui uim sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem."

of understanding philosophical concepts. Boethius then identified these as *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *ratio*, and *intelligentia*, explaining their relationship hierarchically in that ascending order.[130] Of course, the important part here is Boethius's brief description of the mechanics of sight: "the former [i. e. the sense of sight], remaining at a distance, observes the whole at once by casting its rays."[131] Like Augustine, Boethius took for granted his reader's agreement that sight functions extramissively, with the eyes emitting rays that effect sight by touching remote objects.

As mentioned above, *De consolatione philosophiae* was immensely popular. There is an overabundance of evidence suggesting a wide circulation of the text: the *Sources of Old English and Anglo-Latin Literary Culture* project has identified sixteen manuscripts of early-medieval English origin or provenance, ranging from the ninth through the eleventh centuries.[132] Compared with the manuscripts of other texts examined in this chapter, they are early: "The fifteen surviving MSS of the *Consolatio* written in Anglo-Saxon England amply demonstrate knowledge of the text in the later tenth and eleventh centuries: two are from the second half of the tenth century, nine from around the turn of the eleventh century, and four from the eleventh century."[133] The sixteenth,[134] which originated on the continent, was also in England at an early date: "One of the

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[130] Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, V, 4. 27–34.

[131] Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, V, 4. 26: "ille eminus manens totum simul iactis radiis intuetur."

[132] Frederick M. Biggs, Thomas D. Hill, and Paul E. Szarmach, eds., *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: A Trial Version* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990), 77–78. These correspond to Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, nos. 12, 23, 68, 193, 408, 533, 671, 678, 766, 823, 829, 886, 887, 899, 901, and 908. Cf. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 293.

[133] Biggs, Hill, and Szarmach, *Trial Version*, 79.

[134] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 908.

earliest MS copies of the *Consolatio* now extant did make its way to Anglo-Saxon England and may have been there by Alfred's time. . . . The manuscript was almost certainly in southern England by the mid tenth century along with other copies of the *Consolatio*," and was evidently used by Archbishop Dunstan.[135] Diane K. Bolton has commented on the high quality of the early-medieval English manuscripts of *De consolatione philosophiae* as indicative of the text's high status among its readers: "A group of exceptionally fine 10th- and 11th-century manuscripts of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* bears witness to the unique position occupied by the text in late Anglo-Saxon England. The high quality of the parchment, the clarity of the script of text and glosses and beauty of the illuminated initials probably helped preserve these manuscripts."[136] Bolton also identified monastic centers of the tenth-century Benedictine reform as the nexus of readership of *De consolatione philosophiae*: "What is known of the provenance of the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts suggests that Boethius studies were concentrated in the monasteries especially associated with the reforms of Dunstan, Ethelwold and Oswald."[137]

Additionally, translations into Old English—completed as part of King Alfred's translation project of the ninth century—are contained in two surviving manuscripts from the early-medieval English period: a version in prose and verse in London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho A. vi, dating to the tenth century, and a version entirely in prose

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[135] Biggs, Hill, and Szarmach, *Trial Version*, 78.

[136] Diane K. Bolton, "The Study of the *Consolation of Philosophy* in Anglo-Saxon England," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 44 (1977): 33–78, at 33.

[137] Bolton, "The Study of the *Consolation of Philosophy*," 50.

in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 180 (2079), dating to the twelfth century.[138]

There is yet more evidence of wider distribution of Alfred's translation of *De consolatione philosophiae*: a now-missing single leaf containing the Old English text of the work affirms the existence of an additional manuscript, and Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine argued that the text of the Old English Boethius utilized by Ælfric in his *Lives of Saints* must have come from a manuscript that no longer exists.[139] There are also references to an Old English version in two book lists from the time period.[140] Another Old English version, consisting of "interlinear lexical glosses in late West Saxon,"[141] is found in one of the early-medieval manuscripts of *De consolatione philosophiae*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 214.[142]

Lapidge identified three authors who drew from *De consolatione philosophiae*. Lantfred's *Translatio et miracula Sancti Swithuni* quoted the text four times.[143] Abbo relied on *De consolatione philosophiae* twice in his *Explanatio in calculo Victorini*.[144] Although Abbo wrote this treatise in Fleury before his appointment to Ramsey, Lapidge has argued that it is evidence for the kinds of books Abbo would have brought with him to the young English monastery in order "to communicate to his English students his own

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[138] Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, eds., *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1:9 and 1:18.

[139] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:48–49.

[140] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:42–43.

[141] Biggs, Hill, and Szarmach, *Trial Version*, 78.

[142] Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 68.

[143] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 240.

[144] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 243.

scientific and scholarly interests."[145] Byrhtferth quoted the text regularly in his *Historia regum* and in his hagiographical works, *Vita Sancti Ecgwini* and *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*.[146]

This is, though, an incomplete picture of the influence of Boethius on early-medieval English writing. *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* identified four Latin charters from early-medieval England that borrowed language from *De consolatione philosophiae*, as well as a passage from one of the Old English *Vercelli Homilies*, and two works of hagiography by Goscelin (a monk from the continent whose residency in England spanned the Conquest). Furthermore, the list of texts containing language resembling *De consolatione philosophiae* provided by *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* reveals an important pattern: Boethius's text was highly influential on the writing produced by Alfred's translation project within his circle at Winchester. Not only was Boethius translated into Old English prose and verse, but the Latin text also influenced the language of two other translations associated with Alfred's project: *Soliloquies* and *Orosius*.

Another Old English poem, *Deor*, stands as a testament of the influence of *De consolatione philosophiae* in early-medieval England. W. F. Bolton's analysis of the poem's relationship to the Latin text concluded that the poem was "wholly and orthodoxly Boethian."[147] Bolton noted the many ways in which *Deor* drew from Boethius:

It is a tiny analogue of the greater work that makes no attempt to encompass the whole of its source. It selects, and the principle of selection is literary at the same

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[145] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 242.

[146] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 269.

[147] W. F. Bolton, "Boethius, Alfred, and *Deor* Again," *Modern Philology* 69/3 (1972): 222–27, at 227.

time that the impulse for selection is philosophical. Not all of the *Consolation* can

be traced in the brief lyric, to be sure, but all the chief constituents of *Deor* can be

traced in Boethius's work: the overall fiction of the unfortunate poet, the fivefold

view of human ambition, the viewpoint and language of the refrain, the

implementation of literary tradition for exemplary ends, perhaps even the

symbolic name of the narrator's *persona*.[148]

Unclear, though, is whether *Deor* was influenced by the Latin original, or the Alfredian

translation. Although Murray F. Markland argued that Alfred was the intermediary that

allowed the *Deor* poet to adapt Boethian philosophy into Old English,[149] Bolton

suggested that such an intermediary was perhaps unnecessary, and the *Deor* poet could

have drawn directly from knowledge of the Latin text.[150]

The translation of *De consolatione philosophiae* into Old English in the ninth

century provides additional insight into early-medieval English reading and

understanding of this passage and its explanation of the mechanics of sight.[151] Like many

so-called "translations" of the early-medieval English period (including, but not limited

to, those associated with King Alfred), "adaptation" more accurately describes the

relationship between the Old English text and its original Latin source, and this is no

exception, as the translator makes significant changes to the Latin version. In this

instance, the Old English reads:

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[148] Bolton, "Boethius, Alfred, and *Deor* Again," 227.

[149] Murray F. Markland, "Boethius, Alfred, and *Deor*," *Modern Philology* 66/1 (1968): 1–4.

[150] Bolton, "Boethius, Alfred, and *Deor* Again," 223.

[151] As the Old English Boethius is one of the translations explicitly attributed to King Alfred, I will here refer to the translator as "Alfred," without commenting on the historicity of the claim that Alfred himself translated the text.

Ðu wast þæt gesihð and gehernes and gefrednes ongitað þone lichoman þæs monnes and þeah ne ongitaþ hi hine no gelicne. Þa earan ongitað þæt hi gehiorað, and ne ongitað hi þeah þone lichoman eallunga swylcne swylce he bið. Seo gefrednes hine mæg gegrapian and gefredan þæt hit lichoma bið, ac hio ne mæg gefredan hwæþer he bið ðe blac þe hwit, ðe fæger þe unfæger. Ac sio gesihð æt fruman cerre swa þa eagan on besioð, hi ongitað ealle þone andwlitan þæs lichoman. Ac ic wolde get reccan sume race þæt ðu wisstest hwæs þu wundredest. Þa cwæð ic. Hwæt is þæt? Þa cwæð he. Hit is þæt se an monn angitt þæt þæt he on oðrum ongit synderlice. He hine ongit þurh þa eagan, synderlice þurh þa earan, synderlice þurh his rædelsan, synderlice þurh gesceadwisnesse, synderlice þurh gewis andgit.[152]

(You are aware that seeing and hearing and feeling know the body of a man and yet they do not know it similarly. The ears know what they hear, and they do not know the body entirely just as it is. Feeling is able to grope it and feel that it is a body, but it is unable to feel whether it is black or white, beautiful or ugly. But seeing, at the first time that the eyes look on, wholly knows the appearance of the body. But I would yet give another reason whereby you may be shown what you wonder at. Then I said, what is that? Then he said, it is that a man knows that which he knows in various separate ways. He knows it through the eyes, separately through the ears, separately through his conjecture, separately through reason, separately through wise intellect.)

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[152] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:378.

The most obvious differences between the Old English and Latin versions include

Alfred's addition of *gehernes* (hearing) to the examples of the differing kinds of sensory

experiences, and the translator's interpretation of Boethius's *corpus* (body) which the

senses of sight and touch experience differently as *lichoman þæs monnes* (a human

body), despite Boethius's clarification that it is some kind of *orbis* (sphere). But more

important to the present discussion is the translator's omission of Boethius's explanation

of the extramissive model of sight. There could be any number of reasons for this

particular omission, including (and of course not limited to) the possibilities that Alfred

may not have understood or agreed with the extramissive model, that he may have lacked

the appropriate language to describe it, or that he may have found it irrelevant to the

matter at hand.

    None of these can be wholly discounted, but I would argue that the third

possibility is the strongest influencing factor in leaving the extramissive model out of the

Old English version(s) of this portion of *De consolatione philosophiae*. First, there is the

question of whether or not Alfred understood what Boethius was describing when he

discussed the mechanisms of sight functioning *iactis radiis* (by casting its rays). His

aforementioned interpretation of Boethius's *corpus* (body) as a *lichoman þæs monnes*

(human body) rather than an *orbis* (ball or sphere), as Boethius described, demonstrates

that the Old English version is not a direct translation. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe

identified this interpretation as a mistaken translation, adding that "by misunderstanding

'corpus' as a human body (rather than a geometrical body), [the translator] has to omit

any consideration of its rotundity."[153] Yet O'Brien O'Keeffe took for granted that this

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[153] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 119.

was a "misunderstanding" on the part of the translator, and the point Boethius is making with this example, that sight and touch sense the same object differently, is true whether that object is a ball or a human body. If it was indeed a mistake, it had no negative impact on the meaning of this passage in translation, so it can hardly justify interpreting the translator's omission of the description of the mechanics of sight as another "misunderstanding." Furthermore, given the quantity of other Latin texts describing the extramissive model of sight that may have been available at the time, I find it unlikely that Alfred, or any other translator educated enough to adapt *De consolatione philosophiae* into Old English, would have been sufficiently unfamiliar with extramission to misunderstand it. It seems, then, that rather than representing a misreading of Boethius's Latin on the part of the translator, the interpretation of *corpus* as a human body reveals the care the translator took to remain faithful to the original text while adapting it for a new purpose. O'Brien O'Keeffe pointed out that the addition of hearing in the Old English version is representative of "telling alterations that combine both the learned tradition of commentary on sight and touch and the vernacular grouping of sight with hearing." [154] Whether or not the addition of hearing to the discussion of the differing senses is indeed for that purpose, it is clearly a deliberate departure from the text, and it should then be obvious that it necessitates a reinterpretation of *corpus* as a human body, because the inanimate ball or globe described by Boethius produces no sound, while a human body, in the absence of sight or touch, might be identified by the sound of its breathing, or its movement, or its voice. This is no case of misunderstood Latin, and nothing is lost in translation; rather, the translator has astutely made appropriate changes

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[154] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 118.

to the text necessitated by his own argument.

With that in mind, it is easier to make sense of Alfred's omission of Boethius's description of the extramissive model of sight. The shift in comparing two senses to three mitigates the original differences between sight and touch as described by Boethius. O'Brien O'Keeffe properly identified the primary difference, as explained by Boethius, as the relative proximity to the object being sensed: "The Latin stays with the abstraction of the senses (*uisus* and *tactus*) and their functions and makes no mention of their respective organs. Rather it points to the mechanism of their processes: sight operates at a distance by extramitted rays; touch requires immediate proximity for its humbler process of perception. The question of distance dominates."[155] The introduction of hearing made this distance less essential to the argument, thus explaining the exclusion of the extramissive model from the Old English translation.

Indeed, the Old English version of *De consolatione philosophiae* is in its core argument a very different text from that of Boethius in this passage. As explained above, Boethius used the differences between sight and touch as a metaphor for different levels of human understanding. While some of these levels are also described in Old English— defined as *rædelsan* (conjecture), *gesceadwisnesse* (reason), and *gewis andgit* (wise intellect)—the more important differing levels of understanding within the Old English translation are not necessarily between different people, but between humanity and the angels with respect to their knowledge of the divine: "Þa men þonne habbað eall þæt we ær ymb spræcon and eac toeacan þam micle gife gesceadwisnesse. Englas þonne habbað

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[155] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes," 119.

gewiss andgit"[156] (Men, then, have all that we previously spoke about, in addition to the

great gift of reason. Angels, then, have wise intellect). The difference between the senses

and their perception of a human body served as an example of the difference between the

doubt-riddled level of human understanding and the unwavering totality of angelic

understanding: "Ac gif we nu hæfdon ænigne dæl untwiogendes andgites swa swa englas

habbað þonne mihte we ongiton þæt þæt andget bið micle betere þonne ure

gesceadwisnes se. Þeah we fela smean we habbað litellne gearowitan buton tweon. Ac

þam englum nis nan tweo nanes þæra þinga þe hi witon. Forþi is hiora gearowito swa

micle betra þonne ure gesceadwisnes se"[157] (But if we now had any portion of

undoubting intellect, just as the angels have, then might we understand that that intellect

is much better than our reason. Although we fully ponder, we have little understanding

without doubt. But for the angels there is no doubt whatsoever of the things they know.

Consequently, their understanding is so much better than our reason). But Alfred's

translation argued that man should not be content with his own *gesceadwisnes* (reason),

especially when it is plagued by uncertainty. The aim of man should be to arrive at higher

planes of understanding in order to know God in the same way the angels do, to the

extent that is possible: "Ac uton nu habban ure mod up swa swa we yfemest mægen wið

þæs hean hrofes þæs hehstan andgites, þæt ðu mæge hrædlicost cumon ond eðelicost to

þinre agenre cyððe þonan þe ðu ær come. Þær mæg þin mod and þin gesceadwisnes

geseon openlice þæt þæt hit nu ymb tweoð ælces þinges"[158] (But now we ought to hold

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[156] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:379.

[157] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:379.

[158] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:379.

our mind outward, up as highest as we are able, against the high roof of the highest

intellect, that you may most quickly and easily come to your own native home, whence

you previously came. There will your mind and your reason be able to openly see that

which it now doubts concerning each thing). Alfred has taken great care not to conflate

this elevated form of understanding with that of the angels, as he still used the word

gesceadwisnes (reason), always associated in this chapter with human rather than angelic

understanding, which is identified throughout with the word *andgit* (intellect).

Furthermore, the effort to elevate human understanding is described in terms central to

the extramissive model of sight: *mod* (mind) and *gesceadwisnes* (reason) are able to

geseon (see) when the *mod* is sent *uton* (outward), and in this case, *up* (upward) as well.

 Other sections of Alfred's translation reveal that he approved of Boethius's

extramissive model for sight. One such portion of Alfred's translation is his treatment of

Boethius's extramissive description of God from book five of *De consolatione*

philosophiae. Here, Boethius extolled God as omnivident, comparing him to the sun:

> Homer of the honey-flowing mouth sings of Phoebus, bright with pure light; yet
>
> he [Phoebus] is not able to break through the innermost entrails of the earth or sea
>
> with the weak light of [his] rays. The creator of this great sphere is not at all so.
>
> To him, beholding all things from on high, no mass of the earth stands in the way,
>
> nor does night with its black clouds obstruct; with one stroke of his mind he
>
> discerns that which is, that which was, and that which is yet to come; him alone,
>
> because he looks on all things, you may call the true sun.[159]

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[159] Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, V, M. II.2–14: "Puro clarum lumine Phoebum / melliflui canit oris
Homerus; / qui tamen intima uiscera terrae / non ualet aut pelagi radiorum / infirma perrumpere luce. /
Haud sic magni conditor orbis: / huic ex alto cuncta tuenti / nulla terrae mole resistunt, / non nox atris

In Boethius's comparison, the sun shines on all things with its rays of light, but God does so more effectively with sight. Whereas sunlight may not penetrate deep into the earth or sea, there is nothing that God is not able to see. The metaphor is dependent on an extramissive understanding of sight, and is comparable to Ambrose's aforementioned comparison between the eyes and the sun. The overall extramissive character of Boethius's metaphor, in which God is the true sun because he looks on all things, was retained by Alfred in his rendering of the passage:

> Þeah Omerus on his leoðum swiðe herede þære sunnan gecynd and hire cræftas and hire biorhto, ne mæg heo þeah ealle gesceafta gescinan, ne þa gesceafta þe heo gescinan mæg ne mæg hio ealle endemest gescinan, ne ealle innan geondscinan. Ac nis þam ælmihtigan Gode swa, þe is scyppend eallra gesceafta. He geseohð and þurhseohð ealle his gesceafta ændemest. Þone mon mæg hatan buton lease soþe sunne.[160]
>
> (Though Homer, in his songs, greatly praised the nature of the sun, and her powers and her brightness, she is nevertheless unable to shine on all creatures, nor may she shine on all the creatures she is able to equally, nor shine on them all inwardly. But it is not so to the almighty God, who is the shaper of all creatures. He sees, and sees through, all his creatures equally. One may not falsely call him the true sun.)

When the prose translation was then adapted with Old English poetry interspersed, the verse version also retained this extramissive metaphor:

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nubibus obstat; / quae sint, quae fuerint ueniantque / uno mentis cernit in ictu; / quem quia respicit omnia solus / uerum possis dicere solem."

[160] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:374.

Omerus wæs   east mid Crecum

on ðæm leodscipe   leoða cræftgast,

Firgilies   freond and lareow,

þæm mæran sceope   magistra betst.

Hwæt, se Omerus   oft and gelome

þære sunnan wlite   swiðe herede,

æðelo cræftas   oft and gelome

leoðum and spellum   leodum reahte.

Ne mæg hio þeah gescinan,   þeah hio sie scir and beorht,

ahwærgen neah   ealla gesceafta,

ne furðum þa gesceafta   ðe hio gescinan mæg

endemes ne mæg   ealla geondlihtan

innan and utan.   Ac se ælmihtega

waldend and wyrhta   weorulde gesceafta

his agen weorc   eall geondwliteð,

endemes þurhsyhð   ealla gesceafta.

Ðæt is sio soðe   sunne mid rihte,

be ðæm we magon singan   swylc butan lease.[161]

(East among the Greeks, Homer was the craftiest with song in the nation, the friend and teacher of Virgil, the best of masters to that famous poet. Behold, Homer often and frequently greatly praised the appearance of the sun, often and frequently showed people its noble crafts in songs and stories. But although it be

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[161] Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:533–34.

clear and bright, it does not have the power to shine everywhere near all all

creatures, nor indeed does it have the power to thoroughly light the inside and

outside of the creatures on which it has the power to shine. But the almighty ruler

and creator of all worldly creatures looks over all his own work, in a like manner

sees through all creatures. Justly that is the true sun about which we have the

power to so sing without falseness.)

Here, the all-seeing nature of God is described in unmistakably extramissive terms as

Alfred compares God to the sun. Just as the sun shines on everything, so too does God

see everything, albeit in better ways, Alfred added.

So, it seems that while the exact language Boethius used to describe the

extramissive model of sight has been removed from the Old English translation, Alfred's

version still carries extramissive qualities, applied in different places. The Old English

version is as founded in an extramissive understanding of sight as the original Latin. This

agrees with what Katherine Hindley has found of another Old English translation,

Soliloquies (a text which shall receive treatment in the following chapters). Hindley

argued that even if that text was not as explicit about the extramissive model for sight as

its Latin original, the Old English discussions of seeing within the *Soliloquies*, as in

Boethius as I have pointed out, are sufficient evidence "that the Anglo-Saxon conception

of sight was similar to that presented in the Latin texts."[162]

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[162] Katherine Hindley, "Sight and Understanding: Visual Imagery as Metaphor in the Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*," in *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early-Modern England*, ed. Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer, Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 44 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 21–35, at 27.

Conclusions

These Latin texts, *De rerum natura*, *De opificio Dei*, *Hexameron*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, and *De consolatione philosophiae*, represent a diversity of opinions regarding the nature of sight. Given the doubtful nature of the evidence of knowledge of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in early-medieval England, it may be said that the extramissive model, presented in some form in the other texts listed above, was the only theory explaining the mechanics of the sense of sight available to early-medieval English readers and writers. Still, these texts represent a partial picture. For instance, Lapidge found instances where Lantfred and Abbo relied on another Latin text that discussed the extramissive model of sight: Calcidius's fourth-century translation of a portion of Plato's *Timaeus*.[163] As both monks were educated on the continent, I have elected to leave Calcidius out of my analysis of extramissive texts circulated in early-medieval England. I mention it here, though, to demonstrate the ubiquity of the extramissive model of sight.

Nevertheless, the extramissive model presented by these Latin writers is not a wholly unified theory. All agreed that sight was effectuated by some kind of light emitted from the eye, though there was disagreement on the exact nature of that light. Ambrose compared the eyes to light-emitting celestial objects, both Augustine and Boethius spoke of rays of light coming from the eyes, but Lactantius described an expansion of the mind through the eyes. All beliefs, though, provided for a connection between the brain and the eyes: both Augustine and Lactantius argued that the *anima* (soul), seated in the head,

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[163] Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 240 and 244.

used the eyes to bring about vision, and Ambrose identified the brain as responsible for sensory interpretation.

Of all the Latin texts examined in this chapter, evidence suggests that Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* had the greatest influence on early-medieval English culture and thought. It was certainly an important text within Alfred's circle at Winchester, and sight, as evidenced not only by its discussion in the translations of both Boethius and *Soliloquies*, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, but also by its depiction in the Fuller Brooch and the Alfred Jewel, was important to the intellectual activity at Alfred's court. An analysis of early-medieval English representations of sight, the subject of the next chapter, will reveal the extent to which the extramissive model for sight presented in each of these Latin texts was in full effect in early-medieval England.

Chapter 2

The Vernacular Tradition: Sight and the Mind in Old English Literature

'Holy Gems of the Head': Extramissive Imagery in Old English Verse

Since its discovery in the summer of 1939, the Sutton Hoo helmet has become a widespread emblem of the earlier centuries of the early-medieval English period. Its image, or that of the reproduction hanging next to it in the British Library, graces the cover of many works of scholarship on the time period's history, culture and literature.[1] It is difficult to think of a single artifact more easily associated with early-medieval England.[2] In recent years, a paper co-authored by Neil Price and Paul Mortimer has reported their observations about the workmanship of the Sutton Hoo helmet.[3] Specifically, their argument relates to the garnets in the winged creature covering the face of the helmet. As Price and Mortimer noted, the craftsman skillfully employed a technique to maximize the brilliance of the gems:

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[1] A quick and admittedly unscientific glance through some of my own books reveals the helmet on the front cover of a book of history, a book of literary criticism, and three different editions and translations of *Beowulf*. The image also appears alongside other Sutton Hoo artifacts and a steam-punk computer on the landing page of heorot.dk, a digital edition of *Beowulf*. And the helmet's ubiquity extends far beyond scholarship. In the first series of *Detectorists* (BBC Four, 2014), a reproduction of the Sutton Hoo helmet is seen underground in a depiction of the elusive imagined burial hoard of King Sexred of the East Saxons, a pagan ruler of the early seventh century.

[2] Difficult may be the wrong word: two ninth-century artifacts, the Alfred Jewel and the Fuller Brooch, easily come to mind, and both have been known in modern times longer than the Sutton Hoo helmet. Their images also cover many books on the time period and occasionally stray into pop culture as well: the climax of the second series of *Detectorists* (BBC Four, 2015) is the discovery of a fictional artifact that is identical to the Alfred Jewel. Both the Fuller Brooch and the Alfred Jewel, as noted in Chapter One, depict sight.

[3] Neil Price and Paul Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo," *European Journal of Archaeology* 17 (2014): 517–38.

Although garnets can be quite bright, especially if cut thinly, when placed in this

way against a solid background their lustre is substantially dimmed. Early

medieval jewel-smiths solved this problem by inserting wafer-thin foils of gold,

or occasionally silver, at the base of the cells into which the garnets were set.

Stamped with a cross-hatched pattern, the foils reflected light back through the

stone to produce the gorgeous red glow for which the Sutton Hoo regalia is

known. The use of gold foils in this way is virtually universal in Anglo-Saxon and

Merovingian cloisonné garnet jewellery, and Sutton Hoo is no exception.[4]

Yet Price and Mortimer pointed out an exception to this technique, one that they argued

had been carefully planned by the helmet's craftsman: "In the entire Sutton Hoo find,

there is one exception to the use of gold foils with cloisonné garnets: the helmet. The 23

garnets of the proper right eyebrow are all backed with foils, but the 25 garnets of the left

eyebrow are not."[5] Price and Mortimer disagreed with previous descriptions of this

apparent mishap in their assertion that the garnets in the helmet's left eye were left

unbacked by foil deliberately, in order to assure that they would shine less brilliantly than

the garnets over the right eye. Through a meticulous reproduction of the Sutton Hoo

helmet and the conditions of an early-medieval English hall, Price and Mortimer

discovered the effect produced by the missing foil:

We can picture the scene: a great hall full of warriors, retainers, and servants,

some sitting, others moving about the benches and tables. It is very dark, the air

filled with heavy layers of smoke from the fire, lit erratically by its shifting

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[4] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin," 520.

[5] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin," 520.

flames. Perhaps someone is reciting poetry, perhaps there is a lyre; people are talking, listening, and singing. At the head of the company, in the high seat, sits the lord of the hall himself—his helmet shining silver, its surface covered in writhing little figures as the raised images on its surface seem to move in the firelight, the gilt-covered animal heads and facial features glowing. His eyes are in shadow and cannot be seen, appearing as blank and empty holes in the mask, but one nonetheless stands out with its eyebrow a glittering red line, bright against the blackness. The effect is replicated on the face of the animal above his brows. When seen indoors by the flickering light of the fire, the wearer of the Sutton Hoo helmet was one-eyed.[6]

This romantic recreation provides evocative imagery. When taken with Price and Mortimer's conclusion about the purpose of depicting the helmet-wearer with only one eye, that it was meant to represent Odin, it is easy to imagine an early-medieval (and possibly, though not necessarily, pre-Christian) English ruler wearing the helmet as a symbol of his divine right to kingship through Odinic descent.

It may be by accident that this depiction of sight and blindness corresponds so well to the extramissive theory of sight, as the seeing eye of the helmet's wearer flashes brilliantly in contrast with the lackluster blinded eye. But it does provide an interesting parallel with a kenning for eyes found in Old English verse. Four times in Old English poetry, eyes are referred to as some form of *heafodgimmas* "head-gems." One example is found in *Andreas*, in the Vercelli Book. Here, the poet described the Mermedonian custom of blinding foreign prisoners before eating them:

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[6] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin," 522.

Swylc wæs þæs folces   freoðoleas tacen,

unlædra eafoð,   þæt hie eagena gesihð,

hettend heorogrimme,   heafodgimmas

agetton gealgmode   gara ordum.[7]

(Such was the peaceless token of this people, the violence of the wicked ones, the

very fierce enemy, that they furiously destroyed the sight of the eyes, the head-

gems, with the tips of spears.)

Three similar examples are found in the Exeter Book. One is in the poem *Maxims I*,

where the poet has described the healing of a blind man: "Waldend him þæt wite teode,

se him mæg wyrpe syllan, / hælo of heafodgimme, gif he wat heortan clæne"[8] (The ruler

has established this misery for him, he has the power to grant him a remedy: the healing

of the head-gems, if he knows the heart to be pure). The metaphor also appears, though

not as a kenning, in *Guthlac B*, describing the saint's eyes as he looks up to the heavens

at the time of his death:

Ahof þa his honda,   husle gereorded,

eaðmod þy æþelan gyfle,   swylce he his eagan ontynde,

halge heafdes gimmas,   biseah þa to heofona rice,

glædmod to geofona leanum,   ond þa his gæst onsende

weorcum wlitigne   in wuldres dream.[9]

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[7] *Andreas*, 29–32. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 3–51.

[8] *Maxims I*, 43–44. Text is according to George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 156–63.

[9] *Guthlac B*, 1300–1304. Text is according to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, 49–88.

(Then he lifted up his hand, humble and sustained by means of that noble food,

the eucharist, likewise he opened his eyes, the holy gems of the head, then looked,

glad of mind, upon the kingdom of the heavens, the gifts of gifts, and then sent his

spirit on, beautiful in works, into the happiness of glory.)

Eyes are also described as "head-gems" in *Christ III*, where they are contrasted with *heortan eagum* (the eyes of the heart):

Nu we sceolon georne   gleawlice þurhseon

usse hreþercofan   heortan eagum,

innan uncyste.   We mid þam oðrum ne magun,

heafodgimmum,   hygeþonces ferð

eagum þurhwlitan   ænge þinga,

hwæþer him yfel þe god   under wunige,

þæt he on þa grimman tid   gode licie,

þonne he ofer weoruda gehwylc   wuldre scineð

of his heahsetle   hlutran lege.[10]

(Now we must carefully and wisely see into our breast-chambers with the eyes of

the heart, our inner fault. We may not see into the heart of the mind's thought

with the other eyes, the head-gems, by any means, whether good or evil resides

thereunder, that he may delight God in that grievous day, when he gloriously

shines with a bright flame from his his high-seat above all the hosts.)

Here, the eyes are presented as inadequate for inward self-reflection. Depicted as head-gems, they shine outwardly, but are powerless to see into the soul. This is in contrast with

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[10] *Christ III*, 1327–35. Text is according to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, 3–49.

God, who *wuldre scineð* (gloriously shines) in judgment, piercingly seeing the good and evil within each human being. The notion that external sight differs from God's internal judgment is rooted in scripture, expressed in God's instructions to Samuel for selecting a king to replace the disfavored Saul: "And the Lord said to Samuel: Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature: because I have rejected him, nor do I judge according to the look of man: for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart" (Douay Version; 1 Sam. 16:7). The poet of *Christ III* accordingly utilized the metaphorical *heortan eagum* (eyes of the heart) to represent self-reflection, seeing into one's own soul to detect wickedness in anticipation of God's own viewing of the heart.

The comparison of the eyes to precious gems could be in reference to the eyes' beauty, or their value. In light of the Sutton Hoo helmet, though, with the brightly flashing garnets representing the seeing eye of Odin, contrasted with the deliberately dimmed garnets representing his blinded eye, the poetic use of *heafodgimmas* might originate from the extramissive understanding of sight, with the eyes emitting imperceptible, sight-effecting rays similar to the bright light emitted by finely-cut jewels. The *Andreas* poet used another metaphor for eyes that suggests extramission when the Mermedonains captured Saint Matthew: "Hie þam halgan þær handa gebundon / ond fæstnodon feondes cræfte, / hæleð hellfuse, ond his heafdes segl / abreoton mid billes ecge"[11] (There they bound the hands of the saint, and fastened him with the craft of the enemy, the hell-bound heroes, and broke the suns of his head with the edge of a sword).

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[11] *Andreas*, 48–51a.

Each metaphor related to light-emitting objects, either of jewels or of suns located in the

head, encapsulates the extramissive model for sight.

There are parallels between these Old English metaphors for eyes and some of the

Latin texts explored in Chapter One. The *heafdes segl* (suns of the head) of *Andreas* are

reminiscent of Ambrose's metaphor describing the eyes: "Therefore, what the sun and

moon are in the sky, this too are the eyes in man. The sun and moon are the two lights of

the world, while the eyes are stars in the head which shine from above and illuminate

lower things with clear light, nor do they allow us to be enveloped in any darkness of

night."[12] The description of the eyes as jewels, found in *Andreas*, *Maxims I*, *Guthlac B*,

and *Christ III*, is analogous to a passage from Lactantius's *De opificio Dei*: "Because

[God] covered their orbs, displaying the similitude of gems from that part which should

see, with translucent membranes."[13] The similarities between these Old English verse

metaphors for sight and descriptions of the eyes in Latin texts available in early-medieval

England is thus far overlooked: neither *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* nor *Sources of Old*

English and Anglo-Latin Literary Culture have established a relationship between these

passages of Old English and Latin. The similarity in language, though, suggests that these

Latin texts, and the extramissive ideas they espouse, might indeed have influenced early-

medieval English thought concerning the sense of sight.

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[12] Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 247.9–13: "Quod igitur sol et luna in caelo, hoc sunt oculi in homine. Sol et luna duo mundi lumina, oculi autem quaedam in capite sidera fulgent desuper et inferiora claro inlustrant lumine nec patiuntur noctis quibusdam nos tenebris inplicari." Text, page numbers, and line numbers are from Samuel Brandt, ed., *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, vol.1, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 35 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1896), 1–261.

[13] Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, 29.13–16: "Quia eorum orbes gemmarum similitudinem praeferentes ab ea parte qua uidendum fuit membranis perlucentibus texit." Text, page numbers, and line numbers are from Samuel Brandt, ed., *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti: Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 27 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1893), 1–64.

'Where is a Man's Mind?' The Connection between Sight and the Mind in Old English Verse and Prose

As shown in Chapter One, an important feature of the extramissive model is the connection between vision and the mind, with the proximity of the eyes to the brain providing evidence for the brain as the seat of the mind: Lactantius, Ambrose, and Augustine subscribed to this belief. The most succinct example in Old English of the location of the mind in the head occurs in the Old English dialogue *Adrian and Ritheus*, a series of fifty-nine questions and answers on a number of topics, most of which have analogs in a number of Latin dialogues. In the twenty-third of these questions, Adrian says, "Saga me hwær byð mannes mod." The response by Ritheus immediately follows: "Ic þe secge, on þam heafde *and* gæð ut þurh þon*e* muð"[14] (Say to me, where is a man's mind? I say to you, in the head, and it goes out through the mind). Although James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill have uncovered analogs in the *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae* and the *Disputatio Pippini cum Albino*, there is not exactly a one-to-one correspondence between them and this Old English version specifically locating the mind in the head. Rather, these two Latin dialogues locate memory within the brain. Of the two, *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae* pertains more to a discussion of sight, as it identifies sense as the intermediary between memory and the brain: "Where is memory? In the sense. Where is the sense? In the brain. To whomsoever sense is not given, a brain is also not given."[15] For the notion in *Adrian and Ritheus* that the mind can exit the head through the mouth,

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[14] James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill, eds., *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 38.

[15] Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge, eds. *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 14 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998), 112–13: "Ubi est memoria? In sensu. Ubi est sensus? In cerebro. Cui non datur sensus, non datur et cerebrum." Cf. Cross and Hill, *Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, 147.

Cross and Hill provided no analog, but the metonymic reference to mental ideas being expressed through speech is not distant from teachings expressed in the Bible, such as Jesus's teaching that wickedness does not enter a person through the consumption of unclean foods, but rather exits a person from the heart (Mark 7:17–23), or James's teaching on the necessity of taming the tongue, which through its speech may defile the body, depending on what is emitted through the mouth (James 3:5–12).

That is not to say that the *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae* provides evidence for a particularly early-medieval English view on the seat of the mind, but rather, that the text existed in a cultural milieu, of which early-medieval England constituted one part, in which the belief that the mind was located in the brain was a valid belief. Indeed, much is unknowable about the *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae*. No medieval manuscript has survived to the present; rather, the text was printed in Johann Herwagen's 1563 publication of Bede's works, where it was attributed to Bede. The passage describing memory, sense, and the brain makes up entry numbers 111-113 of the *Collectanea*, and is part of a larger section of the *Collectanea* that may be the work or compilation of one medieval author. This section draws from Hiberno-Latin and Old Irish sources, Latin texts from early-medieval England ranging as far as from Canterbury to Whitby, and continental writings. Michael Lapidge has proposed two hypotheses for the composition of this section of the *Collectanea*, which he argues "are not, perhaps, mutually exclusive": the text either came about when "at some point early in the eighth century, an Irish scholar began collecting dicta of various sorts, mostly concerned with biblical wisdom, and recording them, in no particular order, in some kind of personal notebook" as he traveled from Ireland, through England, and eventually to the continent, or it was composed "from the resources of a

well-stocked library among one of the Irish communities in Austria or Bavaria: Salzburg, say, or Regensburg."[16] Although the *Collectanea* therefore represents an amalgamation of Hibernian, early-medieval English, and continental sources, numbers 111–113 find analogs only in the Hiberno-Latin *Ioca monachorum*.[17] So while the *Collectanea* is an amalgamation of sources from a variety of places, when read with Adrian and Ritheus it provides additional affirmation of the notion that the early-medieval English could have believed the mind to be located in the head.

Cross and Hill did provide an Old English analog for the placement of the mind in the head, helping to strengthen the evidence that this isn't an anomalous belief located only in a single early, northern text: the belief was also expressed inÆlfric's *Catholic Homilies*.[18] In his homily for "The Second Sunday in the Lord's Advent," Ælfric wrote that "on halgum gewrite bið gelomlice heafod gesett for þæs mannes mode: for þan ðe þæt heafod gewissað þam oþrum leomum swa swa ðæt mod gediht þa geþohtas"[19] (in holy scripture, 'head' is often written for 'a man's mind': because the head commands the other limbs just as the mind directs the thoughts). This reveals not only that Ælfric saw no problem with the placement of the mind in the head, but also that he believed it to be a logically-driven argument: given that the head controls the body's limbs, and the mind controls thoughts, it makes sense to seat the mind in the head. Its frequent

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[16] Michael Lapidge, "The Origin of the *Collectanea*," in Bayless and Lapidge, *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, 1–12, at 6–8.

[17] Neil Wright, "The Sources of the *Collectanea*," in Bayless and Lapidge, *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, 25–34, at 29.

[18] Cross and Hill, *Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, 147.

[19] Peter Clemoes, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 527.

attestation in holy scripture only strengthens the model.

Still, none of these descriptions of the mind-in-head model connects the mind to sight. For this, a model for early-medieval English understanding of cognitive capacity proposed by Richard North, discussed in Chapter One, provides a useful starting point. North centered his argument on an interpretation of the Old English poem *The Seafarer*, connecting "hyge" from line 58 and "modsefa" from line 59 with the "anflaga" of line 62, presenting this bird and its flight as the poet's metaphor for early-medieval English conceptualizations of the way cognitive function moves within and without the body.[20] Here, North's argument resembles the earlier scholarship by Antonina Harbus, who described the notion of extracorporeal cognition as particular to the early-medieval English. Harbus wrote, "Old English poetry articulates these complexities through the combination of the universal mind-as-container metaphor with the more particularly vernacular idea of the mind as an entity wandering in a maritime context. Such metaphoric clustering achieves a conceptual blend that expresses the paradox of a metaphysical mind within a physical body."[21] In addition to Harbus, Peter Clemoes has analyzed this image, and his argument, which traced the idea of an extracorporeal mind in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* to Alcuin's *De animae ratione liber*, also treated the image as a metaphor for the imaginative power of the mind, as Alcuin had.[22] What makes

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[20] Richard North, "Heaven Ahoy! Sensory Perception in *The Seafarer*," in *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 34, ed. Simon C. Thomson and Michael D. J. Bintley (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 7–26, at 18–20.

[21] Antonina Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 18 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 43.

[22] Peter Clemoes, "*Mens Absentia Cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*," in *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway*, ed. D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London: Athlone, 1969), 62–77. Clemoes also argued that Alcuin was influenced by Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and Ambrose's *Hexameron* for his own conceptualization of the mind's imaginative power.

North's argument particularly relevant to the matter of this chapter is that, as discussed in Chapter One, he drew from an early-medieval English description of sight that appears to be extramissive from elsewhere in early-medieval English literature in order to demonstrate that the idea of extracorporeal cognition was to be found outside *The Seafarer*. North's example regarding sight was from the Old English *Life of Saint Giles*: "This is firstly clear in the [Old English] language itself, in which senses move out to find impressions. So, for example, when St Giles stands praying on the shore, and '*þa geseah he an scip ut on þære sæ*' . . . we have *ut*, not *ute*: an adverb of motion, not of place."[23] Adverbs, though one degree removed from the verbs themselves, offer insight into attitudes about the meanings and actions embedded in a language's verbs. But North's observation of a single example from just one work of literature is hardly an overwhelming amount of evidence that extramission was a widely-accepted model for sight among the early-medieval English. This doesn't weaken North's argument, since sight, especially as it is described in another text, is secondary to an extracorporeal mind or cognitive process in his interpretation of *The Seafarer*. But it does provide an opportunity for further investigation of the use of the adverb *ut* when describing sight.

Unfortunately, *ut* is used very infrequently with Old English verbs describing the act of seeing. Though there are some instances worth examining, North may not have identified unimpeachable linguistic evidence of the extramissive model for sight. His example, from the *Life of Saint Giles* in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, is one of twelve instances of the adverb in that particular hagiographical work. The adverb modifies *faran* (to travel) most frequently (four times), *gan* or *gegan* (to go) three times, and *yrnan* (to

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[23] North, "Heaven Ahoy," 22.

run), *gewitan* (to depart), *gewendan* (to turn), *gehangian* (to hang), and *geseon* (to see),

one time each. This alone places *geseon* in the class of verbs that imply some kind of

motion, and would therefore be modified by the adverb *ut* when that motion is outward.

Because extramission involves the outward travel of rays in order to bring about sight,

this could indeed explain Ælfric's use of *ut* here.

However, comparing the use of *ut* across the broader corpus of Old English

literature introduces a complication to North's interpretation of the adverb. The adverb

frequently appears in Old English phrases describing both a verb's subject and its object

when it is out on the sea, whether it is in motion or not. In other words, when used in

reference to the sea, *ut* functions as an adverb of motion as well as an adverb of place, in

both verse and prose. Thus, in the *Meters of Boethius*, for example, *ut* is used both to

describe the location of islands out in the sea,[24] as well as the act of seeking out in the

sea.[25] It would seem, then, that North's example from the *Life of Saint Giles* does not

convincingly make the case that it was an extramissive understanding of sight that

dictated Ælfric's choice of adverb.

There is another instance of *ut* being used to describe the act of looking in explicit

terms, and this too is associated with Ælfric: the Old English translation of Genesis.

When describing the actions Noah took after the flood, Ælfric's translation reads, "Ða

geopenode Noe þæs arces hrof and beheold ut and geseah þæt þære eorðan bradnis wæs

adruwod"[26] (Then Noah opened the roof of the ark, and beheld outward and saw that the

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[24] *Meters of Boethius*, 16.8b–15. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Paris Psalter and The Meters of Boethius*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 5, 153–203.

[25] *Meters of Boethius*, 19.17b–19.

[26] Richard Marsden, ed., *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, Early English Text Society 330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

breadth of the earth was dried up). Here, *ut* seems to apply to two Old English verbs describing the act of looking: *behealdan*, which it directly modifies, and *geseon*, which immediately follows it. This may imply motion, rather than place, in Noah's gaze on the post-diluvian world. Yet comparing the Old English to the Vulgate shows that this adverb in Old English is more likely an attempt to capture the Latin description of Noah's actions, which states that Noah "aspexit viditque" (Vulgate; Gen. 8:13). The *ut* does in fact imply motion, the way the *a-* prefix indicates motion toward in Latin, though a correspondence to the original text removes the possibility of reading this translation as evidence of a particularly early-medieval English interpretation of the way sight functions. There is indeed other evidence of the association of motion with sight in the Old English language. For instance, a cognate of the Latin verb video (to see), gewitan occurs in early-medieval English texts not only signifying "to see" and other associated terms for sight, but also "to go" or "to depart," and even "to die."[27]

There are indeed many examples of extramission in early-medieval English literature, as will be shown in this chapter. And these examples demonstrate a connection between extramissive sight and a potentially extracorporeal mind as described by North. It is important to reconcile this interpretation of the mind's location and the inherent relationship between mind and sight found within the extramissive model with the "hydraulic model" as developed by Leslie Lockett, because the two models are in fact contradictory in some fundamental ways. Lockett made a very convincing case for the

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[27] Samuel Kroesch, "The Semasiological Development of Words for 'Perceive, Understand, Think, Know,' in the Older Germanic Dialects," *Modern Philology* 8/4 (1911): 461–510, at 476–77, traces the development of this verb's cognates through Germanic languages, finding motion to be present in Old English and Old Saxon.

importance of this model to interpreting early-medieval English depictions of the mind. It

may be defined by the following key points:

1. The "hydraulic model" is cardiocentric: It defines the heart as the locus of

the mind. Such descriptions may be found in both early-medieval English poetry

and prose. Thus, "the sheer variety of the diction and syntax in [Old English]

verse depictions of the mind's residence in the breast is remarkable," and in prose,

"most collocations of *heorte* with *mod* and its synonyms, in fact, give the

impression that they are functionally identical, especially by juxtaposing heart and

mind in parallel constructions and doublets."[28]

2. Some, but not all, activities of the cardiocentric mind are associated with

heat: "Heat generates or is generated by distress (most often anger and grief) and

sometimes by the experience of strong positive yearnings (intense love, longing

for God, desire for wisdom or learning). Yet some intense mental states are never

associated with cardiocentric heat, such as fear, relief, joy, and contentment."[29]

3. The cooling of the cardiocentric mind can be either positive or negative:

Drawing from examples found in *Beowulf* and *Guthlac A*, Lockett concluded that

the cooling of the mind could either represent a positive (as with Hrothgar) or a

negative (as with Ingeld in *Beowulf* or humankind in *Guthlac A*) state of mind.[30]

4. Heat causes seething of the mind and boiling within the heart: This element

of the "hydraulic model" provides it with its name. "The seething of the mind and

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[28] Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series 8 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 89.

[29] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 57.

[30] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 68.

of its contents occurs in the region of the heart; this localization is made even more plain when the heart and breast themselves boil and seethe."[31]

5. A spacious mind is preferable to a constricted one: Lockett used an everyday simile to illustrate this, which operates on the principle of the inverse relationship between a gas's pressure and the volume of its container, comparing a cooling kettle to early-medieval English conceptualization of the mind's container:

> Picture a tea kettle full of boiling water, whistling as hot air presses out through the spout. Remove the kettle from the heat, and the whistling stops promptly because the air inside, beginning to cool, exerts less pressure on the walls of the kettle. In the same manner, when the heat energy of intense mental states dissipates, the swollen and pressured mind-in-the-breast becomes 'roomy,' regaining plenty of space to function comfortably within the chest cavity, and no longer suffering from an excess of pressure.[32]

It seems that in this model, though, the mind's container itself does not expand; rather, the cooling of the mind results in its contraction, providing it with "roominess."

6. This model is understood to be literal, not figurative: One of Lockett's best pieces of evidence for this is that not only are intense emotions and desires located within the breast, but "mundane mental activity" is also described as occurring cardiocentrically, suggesting that the placement of any mental activity

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[31] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 61.

[32] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 70.

within the chest is not intended, as is the case in modern English, "to call attention

to its intensity," but rather is meant literally in early-medieval English.[33]

These six principles encapsulate Lockett's hydraulic model, which literally places a fluid

mind, subject to heat and cooling, within the chest in the early-medieval English

conceptualization of the mind. Lockett provided an overwhelming abundance of evidence

for this model, hinting at the overarching omnipresence of the hydraulic model in every

description of the mind from early-medieval English literature. But many of the

principles of the hydraulic model are at evident odds with key features of the

extramissive model of sight, which places the mind in the head, in close proximity to the

eyes due to the special relationship between sight and mind.

An analysis of a passage from *Genesis B* that received a great deal of attention

from Lockett as evidence of the hydraulic model illustrates the extent to which both the

hydraulic and the extramissive models may have been in play, perhaps even

simultaneously, at any given time or in any given text dealing with the mind and sight in

the early-medieval English period. The serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve lies at the

heart of *Genesis B*. Lockett has identified one of the serpent's promises to Adam as

evidence for one of the key aspects of her hydraulic model, roominess of the chest cavity:

"nim þe þis ofæt on hand, / bit his and byrige. Þe weorð on þinum breostum rum, /

wæstm þy wlitegra"[34] (Take thee this fruit in hand, bite it and taste. It will become roomy

within your breasts, the fruit the more beautiful). It is important to note here that this

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[33] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 55.

[34] *Genesis B*, 518b–20a. Text is from A. N. Doane, ed., *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

temptation scene is extra-biblical: in the Genesis account, the serpent tempts only Eve, so the promise that "in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened" (Gen. 3:5) may not be in effect in the serpent's words to Adam in *Genesis B*. But if they are, it would explain another portion of the serpent's promises to Adam when he first tempts him. Announcing himself as a messenger from God, the serpent tells Adam,

> Þa he het me on þysne sið faran,
>
> het þæt þu þisses ofætes æte,   cwæþ þæt þin abal and cræft
>
> and þin mod-sefa   mara wurde,
>
> and þin lic-homa   leohtra micle,
>
> þin gesceapu scenran,   cwæð þæt þe æniges sceates ðearf
>
> ne wurde on worulde.[35]
>
> (Then he sent me on this journey, commanded that you should eat of this fruit, said that mental ability and physical strength, and your mind, would become greater, and your body much more bright, your shape more shining, said that you would not become needful of any wealth in the world.)

The serpent does not tempt Adam with enhanced vision in *Genesis B*, but the promised result of eating the fruit uses language associated with the extramissive model and its connection of the mind to sight in the head. At the point in the narrative where the reader would expect the serpent to tell Adam his eyes will be opened, he instead promises Adam the augmentation of his *abal* (physical strength) and *cræft* (mental ability), in conjunction

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[35] *Genesis B*, 499b–504a.

with the expansion of his very *modsefa* (mind): each of these three is to become *mara* (greater). This particular enlargement of the mind contains no reference to the chest, which Adam is also told will grow as he eats the fruit, but is instead doubly associated with an increase in light radiating from the body. Adam is told that "þin lic-homa leohtra micel" (your body will become much brighter) and "þin gesceapu scenran" (your shape more scining). The association of corporeal shining and sight-effecting rays emitted through the eyes is apparent, and will only become stronger as the poem continues. But already here, the promise of light radiating from him as his mind is expanded, at the moment where his eyes are to be opened, affirms an early-medieval English understanding of sight as a product of rays emitting from the eyes, as well as the connection between sight and these rays, and an expanding mind.

The promise from Genesis of enhanced vision, or of knowledge expressed metaphorically as vision, that "your eyes shall be opened," is in fact reiterated in *Genesis B*, as the serpent tells Eve the benefits of eating the fruit: "þonne wurðað þin eagan swa leoht / þæt þu meaht swa wide ofer woruld ealle / geseon siððan, and selfes stol / herran þines, and habban his hyldo forð"[36] (Then your eyes will become so bright that thereafter you will be able to see so widely, entirely across the world, and the seat of your Lord, and have his protection thereafter). Here, vision is again described as a light emanating from the eyes, in clearly extramissive terms as that light expands throughout the world as Eve's eyes are opened, allowing her to see across the earth and into the heavens. Lockett connected this to the Serpent's earlier promise to Adam of roominess within the breast,

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[36] *Genesis B*, 564b–67.

calling Eve's enhanced vision the "mental benefits of cardiocentric roominess."[37]

However, the text makes no explicit connection between roomy breasts and enhanced

vision—rather, the two seem more to be separate benefits of eating the fruit, without a

cause-and-effect relationship between them.

Indeed, once Eve ingests the fruit at the serpent's instigation, roominess of breast

is not mentioned again. Instead, light and vision are connected in a description of

enhanced mental capacity, linking sight to the mind: "Heo þa þæs ofætes æt, alwaldan

bræc / word and willan. þa meahte heo wide geseon"[38] (Then she ate of that fruit, broke

the word and will of the ruler of all. Then she was able to see widely). The immediate

effect of the fruit is expanded vision, through some contrivance of the serpent, for it was

he "þe hire ær þa siene onlah, / þæt heo swa wide wlitan meahte / ofer heofon-rice"[39]

(who loaned her the sight, so that she was able to gaze so widely over the kingdom of

heaven). Describing her new gifts to her, the serpent tells Eve:

> Þu meaht nu þe self geseon,   swa ic hit þe secgan ne þearf,
>
> Eue seo gode,   þæt þe is ungelic
>
> wlite and wæstmas,   siððan þu minum wordum getruwodest,
>
> læstes mine lare.   Nu scineð þe leoht fore
>
> glædlic ongean   þæt ic from Gode brohte

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[37] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 71.

[38] *Genesis B*, 599–601.

[39] *Genesis B*, 607b–9a.

hwit of heofonum;   nu þu his hrinan meaht.

Sæge Adame   hwilce þu gesihðe hæfst

þurh minne cime cræfta.   Gif giet þurh cuscne siodo

læst mina lara,   þonne gife ic hime þæs leohtes genog

þæs ic þe swa godes   gegired hæbbe.[40]

(You are now able to see for yourself, so I have no need to say it to you, Eve the good, that beauty and fruits are not the same to you, after you trusted in my words, attended to my teaching. Now the light shines because of and happily against you, which I brought from God, white out of the heavens; now you are able to touch this. Tell Adam what capacity for sight you have through my coming, If yet he will attend to my teaching through pure conduct, then I will give him an abundance of that light which I have given to you in such goodness.)

If eating the fruit has endowed Eve with the promised roominess in her chest, the serpent makes no mention of it. Instead, the promise of opened eyes is his focus, and he describes it to her according to the extramissive model of sight. As she becomes able to see for herself, light shines from her and against her; the light is given to her by the serpent, but it is light that brings about her newfound power of sight nonetheless. That same good light is promised to Adam in abundance if he will follow Eve's example and listen to the serpent's advice.

Eve's recounting to Adam of the fruit's effects lists sensory enhancement, again

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[40] *Genesis B*, 611–20.

without any mention of roominess in her breast. Instead, the focus is almost entirely on

sight, with further extramissive language:

> Ic mæg heonon geseon
>
> hwær he sylf siteð   —þæt is suð and east—
>
> welan bewunden,   se ðas woruld gesceop;
>
> geseo ic him his englas   ymbe hweorfan
>
> mid feðer-haman,   ealra folca mæst,
>
> wereda wynsumast.   Hwa meahte me swelc gewit gifan,
>
> gif hit gegnunga   God ne onsende,
>
> heofones waldend?   Gehyran mæg ic rume
>
> and swa wide geseon   on woruld ealle
>
> ofer þas sidan gesceaft,   ic mæg swegles gamen
>
> gehyran on heofnum.   Wearð me on hige leohte
>
> utan and innan   siðþan ic þæs ofætes onbat.[41]
>
> (From here I am able to see where he himself sits—that is south and east
>
> enwrapped in riches, he who shaped the world; I see his angels moving around
>
> him, with feather coverings, the greatest of all peoples, the most winsome of
>
> hosts. Who would be able to give me such knowledge, if God, the ruler of heaven,

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[41] *Genesis B*, 666b–77.

> certainly hadn't sent it? I am able to hear far and wide, and see so widely into all
> the world across the broad creation, I am able to hear celestial mirth in the
> heavens. In my mind it became shining, outwardly and inwardly, since I bit into
> the fruit.)

Upon eating the fruit, Eve has been granted an extraordinary vision of God enthroned, surrounded by angels, and her sight extends across the entire world. Yet again, the proximity of a description of an expanded mind to the discussion of enhanced sight suggests a special correlation between the sense of sight and the mind. Furthermore, Eve's mind expands much in the same way extramissive rays enable sight: through light shining outwardly from her mind. That light also shines inwardly might be explained by the other sensory enhancement Eve experiences. Not only is she able to see across the earth and into the heavens, she is now granted the ability "swegles gamen / gehyran on heofnum" (to hear celestial mirth in the heavens). In the description of her mind, then, Eve's heightened, far-reaching vision is represented by the light which shines *utan* (outwardly) from her mind, and the sounds of heavenly mirth entering her ears is represented by the light shining *innan* (inwardly) in her mind. While hearing was brought about by stimuli entering the head through the ears, sight, in accordance with the extramissive model, was effectuated by rays exiting the head through the eyes, and then coming into contact with the objects they see. Eve makes it especially clear that she herself didn't move—she is able to see God *heonon* (from here)—rather, her extramissive rays traveled "on woruld ealle / ofer þas sidan gesceaft" (into all the world across the broad creation), affording her the extraordinary vision of God as her mind shone outwardly.

As mentioned earlier, the connection between knowledge and sight is original to the poem's primary source (Gen. 3:5). Beyond that, the poem's repeated linking of sight and an expanding mind, based on an extramissive understanding of vision and the apparent location of the mind in the head, behind the eyes, in the extramissive model, cannot be attributed to this passage of Genesis alone. Indeed, the vision afforded to Eve in *Genesis B* after she eats the fruit is nowhere to be found in Genesis. Instead, in Genesis, Eve and Adam have their eyes open, the immediate result of which is their perception of their own nakedness. While the insertion of this vision seems to be the poet's own innovation, the imagery described by Eve as she relates to Adam what her new capabilities allow her to see is steeped in traditional visionary literature. John F. Vickrey identified the specific type of vision experienced by Eve according to some of the language of the poem.[42] Vickrey identified three important motifs in Eve's description that were typical of the iconography associated with judgment scenes: "the mere mention of God sitting surrounded by His angels in the southeast would permit an informed audience to recognize the meaning. At this point, then, there is full disclosure by the poet and recognition, gradual if not immediate, by the audience: Eve's vision is a vision of Judgment."[43] Thus, while three of the elements Eve claims to have seen may be essential parts identifying the precise nature of Eve's visionary experience, the language describing the relationship between Eve's enhanced sense of sight and her expanded mind is the product of the poet each time it appears, and indicates that the extramissive model of sight posited a correlation between sight and mind.

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[42] John F. Vickrey, "The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*," *Speculum* 44 (1969): 86–92.

[43] Vickrey, "The Vision of Eve," 87.

This passage from *Genesis B* demonstrates the apparent coexistence of these two models. Though they are contradictory, both Lockett's hydraulic model, with a fluid mind located within the chest, and the notion of a cephalocentric mind which may expand extracorporeally, associated closely with the extramissive model of sight, seem to be in play here. This complicates the interpretation of the early-medieval English understanding of the nature of the mind, because at times evidence suggests the mind was viewed cardiocentrically, but at other times, and indeed, sometimes even at the same time, the mind was described cephalocentrically, especially in conjunction with the sense of sight. The apparent simultaneous dual nature of the mind and the way it is conceptualized in early-medieval English literature may be due to the fact that neither model existed in a fully articulated form. No early-medieval English text, whether in Old English or in Latin, extensively or exclusively discusses extramissive vision or the nature of the mind and its location either in the heart or the head. Instead, there are pieces of evidence scattered throughout the literary corpus, which enable the reconstruction of such models.

One such example of evidence for the connection between an expanding mind and the act of vision is found at a critical moment in the action of *Beowulf*, as the monster Grendel advances on Heorot hall:

Com on wanre niht

scriðan sceadugenga.   Sceotend swæfon,

þa þæt hornreced   healdan scoldon,

ealle buton anum.   Þæt wæs yldum cuþ,

> þæt hie ne moste, þa Metod nolde,
>
> se scynscaþa under sceadu bregdan;
>
> ac he wæccende wraþum on andan
>
> bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges.[44]
>
> (In the dark night came the shadow-walker wandering. The shooters slept, who were obliged to guard the horned house, all but one. It was widely known that the criminal was not able to drag them under the shadow when the Measurer did not wish; but watching for the wrathful one in hatred, he awaited, bulging in mind, the result of battle.)

The one waiting for the arrival of Grendel and the ensuing battle is, of course, Beowulf. Here, at the first time in the poem Beowulf's ability as a warrior is depicted in present-tense narration, the hero is described as *bolgenmod* (bulging in mind), but there is no mention of where in his body that swelling is located. According to Leslie Lockett's hydraulic model, though, the absence of specification does not rule out the chest as the location, as it is the far more common place whenever mental activity is specifically located in early-medieval English texts. In fact, so commonplace is the cardiocentric location of the mind, that it is quite nearly the only place ever described as the mind's location: "The head is conspicuously absent from the OE portrayals of the mind; it is excluded from nearly all Anglo-Saxon representations of mental activity, be they literal

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[44] *Beowulf*, 702b–9. All quotations from *Beowulf* are taken from Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. with 1st and 2nd supplements (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1950).

or metaphorical, verse or prose, vernacular or Latin."[45] So abundant, then, are the references to a cardiocentric mind in early-medieval English literature whenever the mind is embodied, that there would be no need for the poet to locate the swelling of the mind within the breasts. Lockett further argued that, at least within Old English prose, the mind and heart are essentially even synonymous with one another: "Most collocations of *heorte* with *mod* and its synonyms, in fact, give the impression that they are functionally identical, especially by juxtaposing heart and mind in parallel constructions and doublets."[46] Perhaps, because *Beowulf* is not prose, there is some room for interpretation. The swelling, or growing, or expansion of the mind, occurs in tandem with Beowulf's actions: he is waiting, but more importantly, he is *wæccende* (watching). His mind expands through the act of seeing. With the growing mind thus connected to vision, it is as if the mind, when expanding, exits the head through the eyes parallel to the way rays are emitted from the eyes in order to bring about sight.

The disembodied mind is no extraordinary phenomenon in early-medieval English conceptualizations of the mind. Whether located within the chest, as per Lockett's model, or in the head, as evident here and elsewhere, the mind is not strictly embodied in Old English conceptualizations. Antonina Harbus expressed this in her analysis of conceptual metaphors related to cognition in early-medieval English texts: "The mind itself is constructed as a secret enclosure to be controlled, but also as a travelling entity, able to move both metaphysically and metaphorically: it seems able to travel outside the body somehow, and also to leave the present via remembrance, dreams,

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[45] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 79.

[46] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 89.

imagination and reverie."[47] Often, this extracorporeal travelling, represented by an expanding mind, is associated with sight, as here in *Beowulf*, and earlier in *Genesis B*. This suggests a special connection between sight and the mind, locating the embodied mind in some conceptualizations within the head, closer to the eyes

There is another example of extramission from the Grendel episode—another that possibly links the mind to sight. As Grendel breaks into Heorot, the poet describes his search for men to eat: "him of eagum stod / ligge gelicost leoht unfæger"[48] (a horrible light, most like a flame, issued from his eyes). Up to this point in the narrative, and indeed after, the poem associates Grendel with darkness rather than light. The contrast between light and darkness and its association with Grendel is especially clear as the poet describes Hrothgar retiring to bed after entrusting Heorot to Beowulf: Hrothgar had anticipated a nocturnal battle at Heorot "siððan hie sunnan leoht geseon meahton, / oþ ðe nipende niht ofer ealle, / scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman / wan under wolcnum"[49] (from the time they were able to see the light of sun, until night was growing over all, the shapes of the covers of darkness came gliding, dark beneath the clouds). Hrothgar seems unable to even enjoy the safety brought about by daylight, for as it recedes with the anticipated fall of night, the darkness is to bring the attacks of Grendel. Indeed, in the aforementioned passage describing Grendel's advance on Heorot, Grendel "com on wanre niht" (came in the dark night) and is identified as a *sceadugenga* (shadow walker). An earlier description of his attacks describes Grendel as a "deorc deaþscua" (dark death

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[47] Harbus, *Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry*, 40.

[48] *Beowulf*, 726b–27.

[49] *Beowulf*, 648–51a.

shadow) who "sinnihte heold" (ruled the eternal night).[50] And finding himself trapped in Beowulf's grasp, Grendel has no greater desire than to retreat to the safety of Heorot's dark exterior: "Hyge was him hinfus, wolde on heolster fleon"[51] (His mind was ready to depart, he wished to flee into darkness).

This light, then, streaming from Grendel's eyes as he forces entry into the hall, contrasts with the several descriptions of Grendel identifying him as a creature of darkness. Perhaps it is because of this stark contrast that this particular image has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. One explanation of these eyes was offered by Alain Renoir, who, emphasizing the performative nature of *Beowulf*, noted two important ways in which this image evoked fear in the listeners of the poem. This was first accomplished through a shift in perspective and focus in which "Grendel is seen at much closer range than ever before. Again in cinematographic terms, we may say that he has been made with each successive picture to occupy a greater portion of the screen: whereas he was at first only an uncertain entity lost in the vastness of the night, the entire screen is now occupied by his eyes alone."[52] The second way in which this particular image was frightening, Renoir observed, was in the contrast between dark and light, which was never greater than at this point in the poem: "Outside, the night we have been asked to imagine is obviously light enough for us to distinguish Grendel and for him to distinguish Heorot; but inside, the pitch-blackness is momentarily so dense that only the

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[50] *Beowulf*, 160a, 161b.

[51] *Beowulf*, 755.

[52] Alain Renoir, "Point of View and Design for Terror in Beowulf," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 63 (1962): 154–67, at 164.

burning eyes are visible to tell us where destruction stands."[53] The ultimate effect of this image earned highest praise from Renoir: "The last image evoked here - two dots of fire against a veil of blackness - is probably the simplest in English literature; it is also one of the very most effective. That the monster's onslaught should take place in utter darkness makes it more terrifying because more mysterious." Not content to only analyze the passage's power as a horrific image, Renoir identified similar images from Old Norse literature: "Furthermore, the eyes of humanlike monsters in early Germanic times were more often than not endowed with weird and evil powers. One remembers how, in the Old-Icelandic *Grettis Saga*, the troll Glàmr was able to bring about Grettir's eventual undoing with a single glance."[54] Thus, to Renoir, the single description of Grendel's gleaming eyes not only was independently a masterful piece of poetry (Renoir remarked that the passage revealed "the poet's genius"[55]), but also drew from parallel traditions in other Germanic literature in order to encapsulate Grendel's monstrous terror.

It is no wonder, then, that scholarship on this image has focused so closely on identifying parallels to monsters in traditional depictions found in literature circulating and produced in early-medieval England, or, as in the case of Old Norse literature, in cultures with at least linguistic ties to *Beowulf*. David Williams found analogues to other monstrous traditions in the description of Grendel's eyes. "This characteristic," Williams argued, "unlike his strength, size, and physical appearance, which have immediate force in and of themselves, is fully meaningful only in relation to an iconographic system, and

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[53] Renoir, "Point of View," 164.

[54] Renoir, "Point of View," 165.

[55] Renoir, "Point of View," 164.

such is found in the medieval monster tradition."[56] However, from this "iconographic

system," Williams only offered one analog: "The *Liber Monstrorum* . . . contains one

example of monsters with shiny eyes: 'There is said to be a certain island in the eastern

part of the world where men are born of rational appearance, except that from their eyes

there shines a light.'"[57] This is the entirety of the description, which seems more

wondrous than necessarily monstrous in a dangerous sense. In truth, these men "of

rational appearance," as Williams interpreted them, or "homines rationabili statura"[58]

(men reasonable in height) as the Latin reads, have very little in common with Grendel.

Still, another analog to Grendel's shining eyes, Williams contended, is to be found in

descriptions of Cain. Indeed, the connection to Cain is emphasized not only by Grendel's

lineage, but also by much of the poet's description of the monster's appearance and

behavior. For instance, Williams found that the description of Grendel as "an 'unhappy

creature' and a 'walker in shadows'" corresponds with patristic writing concerning Cain:

"Saint Cyprian's description of Cain as 'a walker in shadows,' borrowed from the epistle

of Saint John, is the Latin equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon description of Grendel as

'sceadugenga' and is reminiscent of Saint Ambrose's description of Cain as hating light

and desiring darkness: 'he hates the light and seeks out the shadows.'"[59] The connection

to Cain found in the description of Grendel's eyes, however, is a more tenuous argument.

According to Williams, "The origin of the tradition and its significance lie probably in

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[56] David Williams, *Cain and Beowulf: A Study in Secular Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 47.

[57] Williams, *Cain and Beowulf*, 47.

[58] *Liber monstrorum* I. 36. Text is from Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*, revised ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 254–320, at 278.

[59] Williams, *Cain and Beowulf*, 44.

the Cain tradition, which posited wild, gleaming eyes as the sign received by the first

fratricide. Such is the idea to which Migne refers in his note to Peter Comestor's

discussion of Cain."[60] *Beowulf*, though, predates Peter Comestor's writing, so it may be

that Grendel's shining eyes were unrelated to the tradition that would develop around the

mark of Cain.

In this same vein of scholarship, Andy Orchard offered an additional parallel to

this passage, from *Wonders of the East*, another Old English text contained in the same

manuscript as *Beowulf*. "*Wonders* also supplies an analogue . . . both in its account of an

unnamed island, the eyes of whose inhabitants 'shine as brightly as if one had lit a great

lantern on a dark night' (section 3: *scinaþ swa leohte swa man micel blacern onæle*

þeostre nihte) and in its description of a two-headed serpent the eyes of which 'shine at

night as brightly as lanterns' (section 5: *scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blæcern*)."[61] It is

perhaps in this tradition that Robin Waugh interpreted the description of Grendel's eyes

in part as "a sign of Grendel's unusual ability to see in the dark."[62] But Orchard's interest

in literary parallels was less rooted in interpretation of this particular image, and more in

thematic connections between *Beowulf* and the other texts contained in the Nowell

Codex. To Orchard, *Beowulf* and *Wonders of the East* resemble one another in the

relationship depicted in each work between humankind and monsters: "monster-slaying

in response to man-killing is man's natural reaction in both" of these texts.[63] By linking

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[60] Williams, *Cain and Beowulf*, 47.

[61] Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 25.

[62] Robin Waugh, "*Ongitan* and the Possibility of Oral Seeing in *Beowulf*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53/3 (2011): 338–51, at 340.

[63] Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, 25.

this image from *Beowulf* specifically to two additional Old English passages, Orchard was the first to establish fiery eyes as a monstrous feature in vernacular early-medieval English literature.

Yet such an obvious connection between a description of a monster in *Beowulf* and *Wonders of the East* appears to be an outlier. In an earlier estimation of the link between monsters in the poem and the monsters of works including *Liber Monstrorum* and *Wonders of the East*, Margaret Goldsmith found that the descriptions differed highly between *Beowulf* and what she grouped together as "literature of the *Mirabilia* type."[64] Rather than being typically similar, as a general rule, there is a distinct difference characterized in the descriptions of monsters in each. Goldsmith noted that works in the "*Mirabilia* type" were far more descriptive in their depictions of the monsters: "these works have the fascination of the grotesque . . . they depend upon their fantastic physical details for their appeal. In complete contrast, the adversaries in *Beowulf* are never fully visualized."[65] The similarities later observed by Williams and Orchard should be recognized as exceptional; as Goldsmith wrote, "there is only one point in which the learned and the native monster-descriptions coincide, and that is in the ugly light which shines from Grendel's eyes."[66] Because this is such an exceptionally specific description of a monster in a poem that relies more heavily on nonspecific detail for its monsters, Goldsmith believed the image of Grendel's flashing eyes was "not . . . enough to establish a connection" between the poem and the descriptions found in either *Liber*

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[64] Margaret Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf* (London: Athlone, 1980), 99.

[65] Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, 99.

[66] Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, 99.

Monstrorum or *Wonders of the East*.[67] Instead, like Renoir, Goldsmith looked to *Grettissaga* for a parallel description of light-emitting eyes, which she identified as "the closest analogue we have to the scene of the wrestling in Heorot."[68] While such a similarity led Goldsmith to argue that "*Grettissaga* and *Beowulf* are partially based on the same folk-tale,"[69] she did admit that "we have no means of knowing at what stage in the transmission of the story the detail of frightening eyes appeared; it is quite conceivable that it had become a commonplace of horrifying tales."[70] Thus, whether or not this passage is evidence of a direct relationship between *Beowulf* and *Grettissaga*, the connection is enough to make it clear that Grendel's shining eyes would have been understood as evidence of his frightening monstrosity.

Fred C. Robinson also argued that the emphasis here should be on the monstrous, albeit from another vernacular literary tradition. Attempting to resolve the question of whether there was anything Christian in the portrayal of pagan characters such as Hrothgar, Robinson relied on the notion that there were strict, non-overlapping boundaries delineating Christian and pagan faiths: "A Christian Anglo-Saxon, whether in the age of Bede or the age of Ælfric, was not casual or vague-minded about whether a person was Christian or heathen. And the *Beowulf* poet carefully reminds us throughout his poem that the events he is narrating took place in another age and another world."[71] Thus, Robinson held that while the poem contains Christian and pagan points of view,

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[67] Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, 100.

[68] Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, 100.

[69] Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, 100n2.

[70] Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, 100.

[71] Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 29.

these make up a "double perspective" representing separately operating paradigms, one

belonging to the Christian poet and audience, the other, the pagan world of the poem's

setting: "We strongly sense that we are experiencing the narrative simultaneously from

the point of view of the pre-Christian characters and from the point of view of the

Christian poet, and [as a result] either of two senses of ambiguous words seems to be

operative, depending on which perspective we adopt."[72] While much of Robinson's

reading depended upon his own interpretation of early-medieval English's poetic

"vocabulary in which many words had double meanings—pre-Cædmonian and post-

Cædmonian," the discussion extended beyond only words, analyzing the appositive

nature of images with dual meanings as well.[73] This was especially evident in the

monsters of the poem, which, while described with "terms from pagan Germanic

demonology" by the pagan characters in the poem, to the Christian audience, the

monsters were "monstrous descendants of Cain, whose progeny was banished by God

and punished with the Flood," as well as "the *gigantas* of the Vulgate, who remain in

conflict with the Lord of Heaven."[74] The identification of both pagan and Christian

elements in the descriptive depictions of the poem's monsters therefore plays an

important role in Robinson's interpretation of the fiery light shining from Grendel's eyes.

Robinson discovered analogs in both other Germanic literatures as well as in early-

medieval English hagiography in order to demonstrate the appositive levels on which

Grendel was understood. To the characters in the poem, the light shining from the eyes

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[72] Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, 31.

[73] Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, 30.

[74] Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, 31.

"mark[s] Grendel as purely an ogre of Germanic legend, such as the *haugbúi* and other gleaming-eyed monsters of Icelandic saga."[75] Yet the poem's audience would have presumably interpreted the image of light emitting from the eyes as denoting a diabolical association, for "the English life of St. Margaret tells that when the Devil in dragon's form assaults the saint 'of his toþan leome ofstod . . . and of his eagan swilces fyres lyg.'"[76] Thus, while the description of Grendel's eyes may have parallels in Germanic descriptions of monsters, the vernacular connection discussed by Robinson is not to the monsters of folktale, but to the Devil and his demonic associates as described in Christian terms. The ultimate effect of this, Robinson argued, is that there are layered interpretations of the monsters differing between the world of the poem itself and the poem's audience: "To the characters in the poem *Beowulf*, the monsters have meaning only in terms of the pagan's dark mythology of evil; to the Christian Anglo-Saxons attending the poem this meaning is equally apparent, but they see other meanings as well, because they understand the true nature of evil and its connections with Cain and the Devil."[77] To Robinson, these separate understandings remain separate throughout the poem. The monsters, the heroes, indeed the world of the poem, all are interpreted through the lens of Christianity without having that worldview thrust onto them by the poet.

What is important to this discussion, though, is Robinson's identification of the light emitting from Grendel's eyes as an indicator of monstrousness, operating both within the tradition of Germanic mythical monsters as well as depictions of the Christian

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[75] Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, 32.

[76] Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, 32.

[77] Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, 32.

devil. Christian parallels to this particular description of Grendel's eyes were also explored by Daniel Anlezark, who identified a similar description of "unknown beasts" found in the biblical Book of Wisdom: "For thy almighty hand, which made the world of matter without form, was not unable to send upon them a multitude of bears or fierce lions or unknown beasts of a new kind, full of rage, either breathing out a fiery vapour or sending forth a stinking smoke or shooting horrible sparks out of their eyes" (Wisd. 11:18–19).[78] Anlezark argued that this parallel was the closest match to the passage of *Beowulf* yet discussed in scholarship. The two most important commonalities between the two texts are the nature of the light emitted from the eyes, and the unknown or unidentified nature of the monsters themselves.[79] Anlezark believed this parallel was not just literary coincidence, but that it provided an important point of analysis for the poem, as the Book of Wisdom posits that monsters were created by God in order to punish idol worshippers. Therefore, the description of Grendel's light-emitting eyes, Anlezark argued, "does not present a random borrowing, but is a concrete detail pointing to the influence of the extended discussion of idolatry in the Book of Wisdom on the presentation of the predicament of the pagan Danes in *Beowulf*."[80]

Thus, the common thread between the source-hunting scholarship of Renoir, Williams, Orchard, Goldsmith, Robinson, and Anlezark, is the identification of the description of Grendel's eyes in this passage of *Beowulf* as quintessentially monstrous. Additional interpretation, not of this specific scene but of flashing eyes in the Germanic

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[78] Daniel Anlezark, "Grendel and the Book of Wisdom," *Notes and Queries* 53 (2006): 262–69, at 263.

[79] Anlezark, "Grendel and the Book of Wisdom," 263–64.

[80] Anlezark, "Grendel and the Book of Wisdom," 268.

tradition, offers another layer of meaning to this image. Edith Marold identified two

features common to descriptions of kings in Germanic literature: (1) a shining, fearsome

gaze that (2) is often compared to that of a snake.[81] The fear-inducing brilliance of the

ruler's eyes is most relevant to the description of Grendel, which lacks any explicitly or

exclusively serpentine vocabulary. One important aspect of Marold's analysis is that it

removes the fiery-eyed imagery from the sole realm of supernatural fiction and

recontextualizes such descriptions in true-to-life situations. She first observed this in an

example from the poet Egil Skallagrimsson, who found himself perilously at odds with

the Viking king of York, Eric Bloodaxe, in the tenth century. Egil repaired the damage to

his relationship with Eric by composing and personally presenting to the king a skaldic

drápa, or praise poem. No longer faced with the very real threat of death from Eric, Egil

then turned his poetic skill to composing a thank-you poem for his mediator in the

conflict, Arinbjorn Thorisson. The fourth and fifth stanzas of this poem portray the

menacing gaze of King Eric:

> There in the helmet of horror
>
> Sat the heroic one.
>
> Not safe to stand
>
> And stare at him;
>
> I saw his eye shine

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[81] Edith Marold, "Die Augen des Herrschers," in *Beretning fra syttende tværfaglige vikingesymposium*, ed. Dietrich Meier (Moesgård, Denmark: Hikuin, 1998), 7–29, at 8.

Like a serpent's by moonlight,

I saw the broad brow

Beam like the moonlight,

On the fearsome forehead

A radiant frown.[82]

Using this text as a foundation for a discussion on the depiction of rulers' eyes in Old

Norse literature, Marold noted that Egil "build[s] upon two traditional motifs for the

depiction of rulers: first, upon the depiction of the king's power in the shine of the eyes—

expressed through similes and metaphors from the cosmic realm such as the sun and the

moon; second, on a tradition that associates the threatening power of the kingly gaze with

a serpent."[83] Though much of Marold's analysis focused on the snake-like descriptions of

kingly eyes in the Old Norse tradition, she recognized the shining eyes as an important

element of depicting not only a king's authority but his "threatening power." According

to Marold, "The eyes of a ruler, and of his lineage, clearly characterize his nature as a

ruler, and indeed serve as a demonstration of power, as willingness for attack, as a

threatening gesture, not only as an individual, but as a legacy passed on in his race."[84]

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[82] *Egil's Saga*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (London: Penguin, 1976), 211. Cf. Marold, "Die Augen des Herrschers," 7–8.

[83] Marold, "Die Augen des Herrschers," 8: "Er scheint vielmehr auf zwei Motivtraditionen der Herrscherdarstellung aufzubauen. 1. auf der Darstellung der Königsmacht im Glanz der Augen – ausgedrückt durch Vergleiche und Metaphern aus dem kosmischen Bereich wie Sonne und Mond, 2. auf einer Tradition, die die drohende Macht des königlichen Blickes mit einer Schlange assoziiert."

[84] Marold, "Die Augen des Herrschers," 10: "Die Augen des Herrschers und seines Geschlechts charakterisieren offenbar sein Wesen als Herrscher, und zwar als Machtdemonstration, als Bereitschaft zum Angriff, als Drohgebärde, und zwar nicht nur individuell, sondern als ein in seinem Geschlecht weitergegebenes Erbe."

She then traced the imagery through a number of sources, both within and without the scope of Old Norse literature, providing examples from Eddic and skaldic verse such as Sigvatr's depiction of Saint Olaf, the description of *jarls* in *Rígsþula*, imagery frequently used to describe the hero Helgi in various poems, as well as descriptions of Charlemagne by Pseudo-Turpin and Notker Balbulus. Outside of snake-like, the gazes of these rulers are described as fearsome, shining, and at times even penetrating. The pervasiveness of this imagery caused Marold to conclude that "The fright-inducing gaze of the ruler could possibly be a common topos spread beyond the north. . . . The motif that the sharpness of the eyes stands as a characteristic of a king can be found in various accounts of migrant Germanic tribes by ancient authors."[85] Thus, the depiction of rulers as possessing shining eyes as a symbol of their power should be seen as a Germanic motif.

Applied to *Beowulf*, Marold's analysis of shining eyes adds a layer of nuance to the poem's depiction of Grendel's eyes not yet seen in the straightforwardly monstrous description presented by scholarship devoted specifically to the passage. Grendel's fierce, burning eyes shine in the darkness not only as a clear mark of his monstrosity, but as a symbol of his rulership. Grendel's attacks against Heorot are characterized by the poet as a kind of rulership, one held not by divine assent, as the line of Danish rulers descending from Scyld is depicted in the poem's opening, but, in a manner similar to the historical rulers Erik Bloodaxe, Saint Olaf, and even Charlemagne, by violent sway: "Swa rixode, ond wið rihte wan, / ana wið eallum, oð þæt idel stod / husa selest" (So he ruled, and

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[85] Marold, "Die Augen des Herrschers," 10–11: "Der Furcht einflößende Blick des Herrschers als Charakterisierung könnte möglicherweise ein über den Norden hinaus verbreiteter Topos sein. . . . Das Motiv, daß die Schärfe der Augen als Charakteristikum eines Königs gilt, findet sich in verschiedenen Berichten antiker Autoren über Völkerwanderungsstämme."

contended against right, alone against all, until the greatest of houses stood empty).[86] And

while the poem announces its subject as "þeodcyninga þrym"[87] (the glory of kings of

people), the verb *ricsian*, used here to ironically encapsulate the power Grendel asserts

over Heorot, is never applied to the actions of human leaders, good or bad. Its only other

appearance in the poem is when the dragon is awakened and its "rule" is compared to

Beowulf's kingship: "he geheold tela / fiftig wintra —wæs ða frod cyning, / eald

eþelweard—, oð ðæt an ongan / deorcum nihtum draca ricsian"[88] (he ruled properly for

fifty winters—he was a wise king, the old guardian of the homeland—until one dragon

began to rule in the dark nights). Such is the mastery over language of this poem, that a

single word connects the actions of two of Beowulf's adversaries across more than fifty

years and two thousand lines of poetry. And this is a poem of contrasts too. The heat and

rage of the dragon's "rule" is contrasted against Beowulf's cool, kingly wisdom. But

returning to the description of Grendel's eyes in *Beowulf*, 726b–7: given Marold's

examples of Germanic literary depictions of kings' fiercely shining eyes, the fire-like

gleam emanating from Grendel's eyes not only represents his monstrosity, but also

encapsulates the menacing character of his "rule" over Heorot.

 With that in mind, the extramissive, sight-effecting nature of the light shining

from Grendel's eyes as he prowls through the darkness of Heorot must not be

overlooked. The immediate result of this action is seeing: "Geseah he in recede rinca

manige, / swefan sibbegedriht samod ætgædere, / magorinca heap"[89] (In the hall he saw

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[86] *Beowulf*, 144–46a.

[87] *Beowulf*, 2.

[88] *Beowulf*, 2208b–11.

[89] *Beowulf*, 727–30b.

many men, a sleeping company of kinsmen gathered together, a band of warriors). This strange, fire-like light emanating from Grendel's eyes, then, is connected or even synonymous with the rays sent from the eyes, causing the viewer to see whatever they contact, according to the extramissive model. There is, of course, room to interpret this particular manifestation of extramissive rays as monstrous: typically, these rays are imperceptible to an observer; that Grendel's may be seen is wondrous indeed, and, as outlined above, inseparably connects him to monsters and demons of Icelandic, Old English, Latin, and various Christian traditions. But perhaps just as important is the way that the scene compares Grendel and Beowulf. That both Grendel's offensive and Beowulf's defensive strategies begin with looking characterizes sight as powerful, aggressive, and potentially even violent. These are the first belligerent actions of bellicose adversaries.

Yet there is another similarity tying the fiery gleam of Grendel's eyes to the extramissive theory of vision. The light from Grendel's eyes is equivalent to extramissive rays in more than just its sight-causing power. It is also connected to the mind, albeit less directly than in *Genesis B*. Beowulf has been keeping watch, his mind expanding as he looks in wait for Grendel. Now Grendel has broken into Heorot, his eyes flashing their sight rays as he searches for his customary food. When those rays strike their intended target, the poet informs the reader of Grendel's state of mind: "Þa his mod ahlog"[90] (then his mind laughed). It is as if Grendel's mind is connected to this act of sight, or is directing his extramissive rays from the brain, behind the eyes. Though there is no overt connection between an expanding mind and seeing here, the poet has also revealed that

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[90] *Beowulf*, 730b.

Grendel approached Heorot "ða he gebolgen wæs"[91] (when he was angry), utilizing the

same participle from *belgan* (quite literally "to bulge") used earlier to describe Beowulf's

expanding mind as he watched in wait for Grendel's approach: "ac he wæccende wraþum

on andan / bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges"[92] (but watching for the wrathful one in

hatred, he awaited, bulging in mind, the result of battle). Reading these passages as

evidence for the early-medieval English understanding of sight as extramissive, and its

connection to a cephalocentric mind that travels with the sight rays, unveils the extent to

which the actions of Beowulf and Grendel in the scene leading up to their violent, hall-

shaking confrontation create an image of parallel behavior which invites the audience to

compare and contrast the hero and his adversary.

The use of sight as a way of contrasting a hero and his adversary is not limited to

Beowulf. The connection between sight and mind is used to great effect in *Andreas* as

well. Early in the poem, Saint Matthew has been taken captive in Mermedonia, where he

is being held in a prison holding the victims of an impending cannibalistic meal. Three

days before the ritual is to take place, Mermedonian warriors arrive to inspect the

prisoners:

> Oft hira mod onwod
>
> under dimscuan   deofles larum,
>
> þonne hie unlædra   eafeðum gelyfdon.
>
> Hie ða gemetton   modes glawne,

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[91] *Beowulf*, 723b.

[92] *Beowulf*, 708–9.

haligne hæle   under heolstorlocan.[93]

> (Often their mind made its way under dim shadows at the instruction of the devil,
>
> when they believed in the strength of the wretched. Then they met the holy hero,
>
> glowing of mind, under the dark enclosure.)

Two important features stand out in this passage. First is the disembodied nature of the mind, described here as traveling beneath the shadows, presumably to hell, at the instigation of the devil. The journey of the mind seems to act here as a metaphor for thought itself, founded on the understanding of the mind as a disembodied, wandering entity rather than a blank slate: the Mermedonians don't have hell on their minds, but their minds travel to hell. The metaphor for thought presupposes a mind that travels outside the body.

Second, the description of the "holy hero," the captive Saint Matthew, betrays the ubiquity of the extramissive model of sight in early-medieval English literature. Matthew is *modes glawne* (glowing of mind), and the adjective *gleaw* carries connotations of wisdom and skillfulness, as well as clear-sightedness. That Matthew is found to be *modes glawne*, or to possess any clear-sightedness at all, is miraculous proof of his holiness as the saint has already had his eyes put out by the Mermedonians, who "his heafdes sigel / abreoton mid billes ecge" (destroyed the suns of his head with the edge of a sword).[94] The extramissive imagery associated with *his heafdes sigel* has already been discussed. Additionally, however the audience was meant to interpret *modes glawne*, whether glowing of mind or sharp-sighted of mind, Matthew's lack of eyes would have made this

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[93] *Andreas*, 140b–44.

[94] *Andreas*, 50b–51a.

description surprising, especially given the connection between the eyes and the mind so frequently seen in Old English poetry. But with their minds traveling toward hell, the Mermedonians overlook Matthew's glowing mind when they greedily look over their prisoners in anticipation of their impending anthropophagous feast. Thus, with the Mermedonians able to see but directing their mind in the wrong direction, and the blinded Saint Matthew boldly awaiting deliverance, clear-sighted in his mind, the contrast between the adversaries and the hero could not be greater.

It must not be thought that the connection between sight and mind belongs solely to the realm of Old English verse. Far from poetic construction, this connection appears in early-medieval English prose texts as well. The most extensive connection between the mind and the sense of sight is found in Alfred's *Soliloquies*, a translation of Augustine's *Soliloquia* that can be described as the most original and creative of any of the works associated with King Alfred's translation program. In one of his additions to his source material found in Book One, Alfred introduced a metaphor where, like Augustine, he sought to understand how it is one may come to know God. Reason asks, just as in Augustine's version, "Hweðer geleornodest þu þe myd þam eagum, þe mid þam ingeþance"[95] (How did you learn, with your eyes, or with your inner mind)? And Alfred, again following Augustine, provides the response: "Mid ægðrum ic hyt geleorned: ærest myd ðam eagum, and syðþan myd þam ingeþance. ða eagan me gebrodton on þam angytte. Ac siðþan ic hyt þa ongyten hæfde, þa forlæt ic þa sceawunga mid þam eagum

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[95] Thomas A. Carnicelli, ed., *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 61.11–12. Cf. two earlier editions: Wilhelm Endter, ed., *König Alfreds des Grossen Bearbeitung der Soliloquien des Augustinus* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964); Henry Lee Hargrove, ed., *King Alfred's Old English Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, Yale Studies in English 13 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1902).

and þohte"[96] (I learned it with both: first with the eyes, then with the mind. The eyes brought me to perception, but after I had perceived it, I left off looking with the eyes, and I thought). Alfred then departed from *Soliloquia* to provide a simile outlining the relationship between the sense of sight and his contemplative mind: "Forði me þuhte þæt ic his mæate micle mare geþencan ðonne ic his mahte geseon, siððan þa eagan hyt ætfæstnodon minum ingeþance. swa swa scyp brincð man ofer sæ: syððan he þonne to lande cymð, þonne forlæt he þæt scyp standan, forþam him þincð syððan þæt he mæge æð butan faran þonne mid"[97] (For it seemed to me that I could contemplate much more of it than I could see, after the eyes had fixed it in my mind. Just so a ship brings one over the sea; when he comes ashore, he lets the ship stand, for it seems to him that he can travel more easily without it than with it). This simile is deeply rooted in the early-medieval English model for the understanding of how sight worked: that the eyes, with their extramissive rays, provided a vehicle of travel through which the mind might arrive at that which it sees. Alfred's simile prompts Reason to respond with an even longer simile, another Alfredian addition to the original text, to describe how it is that one might see God:

> For ðam þingum is ðearf ðæt þu rihte hawie mid modes ægum to gode, swa rihte swa swa scipes ancerstreng byð aþenæd on gerihte fram þam scype to þam ancræ; and gefastna þa eagan þines modes on gode swa se ancer byð gefastnoð on ðære eorðan. þeah þæt scyp si ute on ðære sæ on þam ydum, hyt byð gesund and

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[96] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 61.13–16.

[97] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 61.16–20.

untoslegen, gyf se streng aþolað, forðam hys byd se oðer ende fast on þære eorðan and se oðer on ðam scype.[98]

(Therefore you must look directly to God with the eyes of the mind, just as the ship's anchor cable is stretched directly from the ship to the anchor, and fasten the eyes of the mind on God, just as the anchor is fastened to the earth. Though the ship be out on the sea in the waves, it will remain sound and unbroken if the cable holds, since one end of it is fast to the earth and the other to the ship.)

While this is a metaphor for directing one's thoughts toward God, it functions in a similar way to the earlier simile of a ship propelling the mind toward understanding, here using sight to draw a fixed line between the mind and the object that it sees. Because this is a metaphor, the eyes, or anchors, are given further meaning, explained as representing "wysdom, and eadmeto, and wærscype, and gemetgung, rihtwisnes and mildheortnes, gesceadwisnes, gestadþines and welwilnes, clennes and forheafdnes"[99] (wisdom, and humility, and moderation, and temperance, righteousness and mild-heartedness, reason, steadfastness and goodwill, cleanness and self-restraint). To these virtues given by Alfred, three more are retained from Augustine's version in order to complete the eyes of the soul and fix them on God: "Do nu lufe ðriddan to-eacan þam geleafan and þam tohopan; forðam nanre sawle eagan ne beoð full hale, ge hyre god myd to geseonne, buton þisum þriom. Seo gesyhð þonne is angyt"[100] (Now perform love third, in addition to belief and to hope; because no eyes of the soul will be fully whole, especially for seeing God with, without these three. Sight then is understanding). In total, then, Alfred

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[98] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 61.23–62.3.

[99] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 62.7–9.

[100] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 66.5–7.

provides fourteen metaphorical "eyes" with which understanding of God might be achieved in the absence of physical sight. Once again, all of this resembles the early-medieval model for the understanding of sight: it can be described as extramissive, in which vision is brought about by the eye emitting some kind of imperceptible ray, which causes the mind, seated in the head, to perceive whatever these rays touch.

In an outline of Alfred's epistemological program, Miranda Wilcox referred to these similes in the *Soliloquies* as "self-generated" by Alfred, and further identified them as having been inspired by Alfred's experience with translating Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*.[101] Wilcox also connected these nautical images to the extramissive model for sight, which she referred to as "the visual-ray theory of vision."[102] Wilcox then listed Augustine, Boethius, and Isidore as potential sources for Alfred's understanding of extramission.[103] I acknowledge these sources, to which I would add the other Latin writings outlined in my first chapter. But I would not overlook the consistency that Alfred's similes in *Soliloquies* share with descriptions of sight and its connection to the mind found throughout early-medieval English poetry. Extramission is evident in the anchor cables affixed to the object of sight. The link between sight and the mind is made clear in Alfred's equivocation of the mind with the ship from which these cables originate. And that link is further strengthened by Alfred's description of sight as a vehicle which delivers the mind to understanding. When read in the context of extramissive descriptions of vision throughout Old English poetry, it becomes evident

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[101] Miranda Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors: *eagan modes* and *scip modes*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006): 179–217, at 201.

[102] Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors," 204–5.

[103] Wilcox, "Alfred's Epistemological Metaphors," 205.

that the connection between the mind and the sense of sight was deeply entrenched in early-medieval English thought.

Though this reading is in many ways similar to Katherine Hindley's work on the *Soliloquies*, which also found evidence for early-medieval English belief in the extramissive theory of sight, it differs in one critical way. Hindley described this metaphor as Alfred's attempt to "make [the] essential similarity with the process of vision concrete . . . in the *Soliloquies*, where knowledge is itself represented by a physical object, the anchor cable."[104] As I have demonstrated, though, the fourteen cables do not represent knowledge of God. Rather, they represent the means of acquiring such knowledge. Because the vision of God will prove to be impossible to Alfred, as I shall discuss in Chapter Three, the metaphorical cables which stand in for the extramissive rays of the eyes do not signify the knowledge typically gained through physical sight, but instead, standing in for fourteen virtues which may draw one to such a knowledge, they denote the eyes which grant knowledge rather than knowledge itself. It is a slight refinement, but one I hope clarifies Alfred's argument relating seeing God to understanding him. I especially want to emphasize that, given the examples given throughout this chapter of sight being connected not only to the mind, as apparent in *Beowulf*, but also therefore to the acquisition of knowledge (especially evident in *Genesis B*), when Alfred carried Augustine's assertion into Old English that "seo gesyhð þonne is angyt"[105] (sight, then, is understanding), it would not have been an unfamiliar concept to

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[104] Katherine Hindley, "Sight and Understanding: Visual Imagery as Metaphor in the Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*," in *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early-Modern England*, ed. Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer, Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 44 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 21–35, at 28.

[105] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 66.7.

him. Even given, as Hindley noted, that the metaphor associating sight with understanding was not unique to early-medieval England,[106] I would argue that the extraordinarily close association between sight and the extracorporeal mind according to the early-medieval English understanding of extramission, as put forward in this chapter, was cause enough for Alfred's expanded symbolic imagery.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that extramissive language and imagery in Old English arose independently of the Latin models presented in Chapter One of this dissertation. Rosa Maria Fera wrote that "Although I have found no passages which would provide us with a formal exposition of the visual-ray theory in the vernacular, a linguistic feature of Old English literature suggests that the faculty of sight was in fact, probably independently, conceptualized as light."[107] She further suggested that extramission "does not seem to have been understood or received by Anglo-Saxon scholars."[108] I would argue, though, that even if the early-medieval English model for sight developed separately from the model in the Latin-speaking world, the abundance of similarities between the Latin and Old English descriptions of sight is suggestive of some degree of influence. It may be that the early-medieval English extramissive model differed enough from Augustine's to conceal any connection between vernacular descriptions of sight and the extramissive model presented in Latin texts. Given, though, the strong similarities between the Old English examples examined in this chapter and the model for sight presented by Lactantius in *De opificio Dei*—a model that, with its connection between the mind or soul and the eyes as the empowering force behind

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[106] Hindley, "Sight and Understanding," 23.
[107] Rosa Maria Fera, "Seeing the Light: Understanding Vision in Old English Prose" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2009), 135.
[108] Fera, "Seeing the Light," 137.

seeing, presented a slightly different extramissive model for sight than Augustine later would—as well as the possibility that Lactantius's description of the eyes as gems might have provided a source for the image in Old English verse, there must be some connection between early-medieval English and Latin understanding of how sight functioned.

Chapter 3

'*Creft ealra crefta*': Seeing God in Early-Medieval English Biblical Interpretation

When King Alfred dealt with the topic of sight in his treatment of Augustine´s *Soliloquies*, most of that discussion revolved around a desire to see and understand God. Alfred, inserting in the voice of *Gesceadwisness* (Reason) his own evaluation of what it would mean to see God, wrote, "Ðe is creft ealra crefta, þæt is, þæt man spurige æfter gode and hys hawie and hine geseo"[1] (This is the craft of all crafts, that is, that one seek to know about God and look at him and see him). This so-called "craft" was interpreted by Susan Hitch as Alfred's statement about the functions of professions within a Christian society: "A man's moral being consists in the performance of his proper function. The practice of this function is his *cræft*. A man is equipped by the grace of God with the personal qualities necessary for the performance of his function, but he nonetheless needs to learn it, and tools, animate—helpers, teachers, servants—and inanimate are also necessary to help him."[2] This is a just summary of the role that *cræft* plays in this text according to its most common usage in Old English (as well as the word's continued usage into present-day English), though the moralization of a work ethic doesn't seem to be present in Alfred's text. Nevertheless, Hitch continued: "A properly ordered society is precisely one in which every man performs his proper function. It is a Christian view of man and society, both hierarchical, in that a man's

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[1] Thomas A. Carnicelli, ed., *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 69.9–11.

[2] Susan Hitch, "Alfred's *Cræft*: Imagery in Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquies*," *Journal of the Department of English, University of Calcutta* 22 (1986–7): 130–47, at 144.

place in society is given, is unalterable, and egalitarian in that all men have the same worth before God."[3] Again, this reading doesn't necessarily seem to be implied by Alfred in this text. The context in which Alfred named seeing God the *creft ealra crefta* is an argument about men being unable to perform good works without the help of God. Reason or *Gesceadwisness* has assured Augustinus, "and huru he wyrcð myd us swa swa myd sumum gewealdnum tolum, swa swa hyt awriten ys þæt ælcum wel wyrcendum god myd beo mydwyrhta. We witon þæt nam man mæg nawyht goodes wyrcan buton hym god myd wyrce; and þeah ne scal nam man beo ydel þæt he hwæthwugu ne onginne be ðam myhtum þe hym god gife"[4] (And in any case he may work with us just as if with certain powerful tools, as it is written, that with each of those working well, God is a co-worker. We know that no man may in any way work good except that God work with him; and nevertheless no man shall be so idle that he not begin something by the strength which God gives him.) Still, even if Alfred's actual argument differs from Hitch's assessment of it, the notion that *cræft* might here apply in the context of social roles may well be justified, given Alfred's concern with a well-ordered tripartite society upholding a Christian kingdom expressed elsewhere in the Alfredian corpus. Hitch's assessment of Alfred's use of *cræft* appears to be in line with Alfred's use of the word in his Boethius translation:

> Hwæt þu wast þæt nan mon ne mæg nænne cræft cyþan ne nænne anweald reccan stioran butan tolum and andweorce. Þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc and his tol mid to ricsianne þæt he hæbbe his land fulmannod. He sceal habban gebedmen

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[3] Hitch, "Alfred's *Cræft*," 144.

[4] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 68.15–69.4.

and fyrdmen and weorcmen. Hwæt þu wast þætte butan þisum tolum nan cyning his cræft ne mæg cyðan. Þæt is eac his aandweorc þæt he habban sceal to þam tolum þam þrim geferscipum bewiste.[5]

(Behold, you know that no man is able to perform any craft, nor wield any authority, nor govern, without tools and material. Therefore the material of the king, and his tool with which to rule, will be that he have his land fully populated. He must have praying men, and fighting men, and working men. Behold, you know that without these tools no king will be able to perform his craft. That is also his material, that he must have sustenance for these tools, these three brotherhoods.)

Hitch then completed her analysis of what Alfred called *creft ealra crefta*:

Alfred's formulation, though, lays particular stress on both place in society and moral worth being realised in the performance of a function, in a man's *cræft*, so that not only are all men of equal moral worth before God, but they are in the most important sense, the sense in which they fulfill their relationship with God, doing the same thing here and now. The practice of writing, of kingship, of service, of navigation, of house-building, of medicine or geometry may equally be a man's *cræft*, or part of it. The greatest is to know God.[6]

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[5] Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, eds., *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1:277.

[6] Hitch, "Alfred's *Cræft*," 144–45.

But *cræft* is a highly multifaceted word in Old English, as noted by Nicole Guenther

Discenza, who analyzed Alfred's use of the word in his Boethius translation.[7] In the case

of this use of *cræft* in *Soliloquies*, Alfred may have meant something different than

Hitch's interpretation of the word as "the performance of [a man's] proper function."[8]

Alfred frequently utilized the word *cræft* in an unusual way compared with the rest of the

corpus of Old English writing. For instance, in Alfred´s Boethius translation, the word

cræft appears 67 times, of which, Discenza noted, "by far the most frequent usage . . .

involves a shift from [the] accepted .meanings [of *cræft*]. Alfred not only uses it in the

sense of spiritual or mental excellence more often than any other extant writer, he uses it

specifically to mean virtue," a definition that was "unprecedented."[9] This meaning in

particular, equivalent to the Latin *virtus* or virtue encountered by Alfred in the original

text, is not only without precedent in the Old English writing predating Alfred, but it was

also unique to Alfred both during his time and in the centuries of vernacular writing that

would follow him. Discenza observed that Alfred's use of *cræft* to translate *virtus*

represented a departure from the typical translation of the Latin word in texts associated

with Alfred's court at Winchester but not attributed to him: "*Mægen* occurs with great

frequency in the *Bede* and the *Dialogues*, suggesting that this was the usual translation in

Alfred's circle. This makes his choice of the word *cræft* all the more striking. Alfred

defamiliarizes both *cræft* and *virtus* by equating the two terms, though they were not

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[7] Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 105–22.

[8] Hitch, "Alfred's *Cræft*," 144.

[9] Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Power, Skill and Virtue in the Old English 'Boethius'," *Anglo-Saxon England* 26 (1997): 81–108, at 89–90.

normally associated."[10] The *Dialogues* translation, in fact, "is the only other work of that era that was not done by the king himself to use *cræft* in any spiritual sense."[11] In the centuries following Alfred's writing, more writers would adopt Alfred's usage of *cræft*, albeit in a limited capacity: "The various spiritual senses [of *cræft*] are clear in Alfredian and later texts such as Ælfric's works and the Benedictine Rule . . . Alfred may have popularized the usage of the word *cræft* for spiritual abilities, but it never became established as a translation for *virtus*."[12] This distinctively Alfredian usage remained unique to his writing in the following centuries, as Discenza asserted: "the word *cræft* is not often used by other Anglo-Saxon writers for spiritual merit, and it does not occur in extant work by others for *virtus*."[13]

Whether Alfred had virtue in mind when he wrote that seeing God is "*creft ealra crefta*" is unknowable: this passage is an Alfredian addition to the original Augustinian text without corresponding Latin material. But it is certainly possible that Alfred intended to define seeing God as the pinnacle not only of *cræft* in the sense of a professional skill or ability, but of spiritual capability as well. Discenza noted that there were a "half dozen" uses of *cræft* meaning "various mental or spiritual achievements" in Alfred's *Soliloquies*.[14] But no matter whether Alfred's use of *cræft* falls in line with Hitch's interpretation of Alfred's vision of a man's role within an idealized Christian society, or if Alfred intended for *cræft* to mean a spiritual strength or even a virtue, it is clear that

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[10] Discenza, "Power, Skill and Virtue," 94.

[11] Discenza, *The King's English*, 108.

[12] Discenza, *The King's English*, 108.

[13] Discenza, "Power, Skill and Virtue," 93.

[14] Discenza, "Power, Skill and Virtue," 88.

Alfred privileged the act of seeing God at least as a method of obtaining a knowledge of God, and indeed above any other *cræft* a man may perform. The high status Alfred ascribed to seeing God reveals a great deal about early-medieval English attitudes about what it meant to see God. These attitudes, and the way they were informed by the early-medieval English understanding of sight according to the extramissive model, will be the subject of this chapter.

Seeing God: The Old Testament Genre of Theophany

The Hebrew Bible is filled with vivid descriptions of God's appearance, from personal visitations in the primeval and patriarchal ages and the guidance on the Exodus, through the prophets' celestial visions of a God intent on restoring social justice to a corrupt world. An excellent reference point for the study of biblical theophany is George Savran's book, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative*, which analyzed theophanies as a generic type-scene in the Bible. Savran was writing in response to scholarship on prophetic calls in the Old Testament; much of the importance of Savran's work lies in his recasting of the call narrative as a subset of the broader theophany narrative. Of hundreds of biblical theophanies, Savran identified a group of characteristics common to a genre that he referred to as "theophany narratives": "theophany narratives exhibit a set of recurrent motifs around which the story is based: the setting of the scene, the appearance and speech of YHWH, human response to the presence of the divine, the expression of doubt or anxiety, and externalization of the experience."[15] These characteristics separate Savran's "theophany narratives" from the

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[15] George Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in the Biblical Narrative*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 420 (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 13.

broader category of all biblical theophany, which in its most general sense includes all moments "which involve an encounter between the two spheres" of humanity and divinity, but in its more literal, narrowest sense, "in keeping with the Greek, φαινειν, 'to appear,' it implies the presence of a visual component in addition to verbal interaction."[16] The subcategory of "theophany narratives" includes biblical theophanies that contain the five "recurrent motifs" identified by Savran.

The first of these motifs, which Savran called "the setting of the scene," typically involved two features relative to the location of the theophany. The first of these is the narrative tendency to physically separate the person who views God from those nearby. Savran noted that theophany was "in most cases a solitary experience" requiring distance between the viewer and the rest of humanity.[17] There is a reason for this: Savran argued that the "focus on the solitary aspect of the theophany highlights the unusual nature of divine-human encounters, suggesting that there is something about the appearance of the divine that is antithetical to human company."[18] Even in the exceptional case of public theophany, the notion of separation is still present in theophany narratives. This is evident in "Israel's departure from Egypt and movement towards Sinai" in the theophany narrative recorded in Exodus 19-20, when God, shrouded by a thundercloud, descended upon Mount Sinai and issued the Decalogue before all the Israelite camp.[19] The separation in this particular theophany seems to imply a move from worldliness toward holiness in the departure from Egypt toward the promised Canaan.

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[16] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 6.

[17] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 14.

[18] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 14.

[19] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 32.

The second feature of the "setting of the scene" is the theophany's physical setting itself. The significance of the setting vacillates between stories which "[seek] to establish a liminal space in which a meeting of the divine and the human can take place," and those occurring "at a variety of unexceptional sites" and seem to emphasize that "sacred space owes its sanctity exclusively to the Deity, and his appearance at a given site reflects the autonomy of the Deity, not the inherent sanctity of the place."[20] The principal difference between these two settings is that in the first case, these settings go on to become associated with ongoing sites of worship. In both types of setting, though, the theophany may be used as an aetiological explanation for the etymology of a location's name.[21]

One of the most important keys to parsing theophany narratives in the Bible lies in the second motif identified by Savran, "the appearance and speech of YHWH."[22] Narrative theophany texts are never as simply straightforward as "God appeared to Abraham"; rather, God appears in some other form within the story, as in the theophany witnessed by Abraham at Mamre in Genesis 18, where God adopts the appearance of three men. Savran categorized the descriptions of God in all Old Testament theophanies (including the conventional poetic and visionary descriptions outside of the more narrow category of narrative theophanies), noting that "the most common terms used to represent the divine presence are the *malakh*, the *kavod*, and the *panim* of YHWH."[23] These Hebrew words are not present in every visual description of theophanies, though many

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[20] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 32.

[21] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 32.

[22] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 13.

[23] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 50.

theophany narratives use one or another of these words in describing what is or is not

seen by the people viewing God. Each word is difficult to define in precise terms, but

rather conveys a range of semantic meaning. *Malakh*, the word most commonly used in

theophany narratives, "can be a messenger, representative, advance party, or in one case,

a term for a fiery manifestation of the divine (Exodus 3.2)."[24] The most common

theophany vocabulary used in Old Testament theophany narratives, *malakh* is used in six

of the nineteen theophany narratives identified by Savran.[25] By comparison, *kavod* makes

an appearance in just two of the theophany narratives, and *panim* in only one.[26] *Kavod* "is

the term used for the figure on the chariot which Ezekiel sees in Ezek. 1.28," and it also

is used to "refer to a publicly discernible presence which is visible to all Israel at certain

moments."[27] *Panim*, unique to theophany narratives in its appearance in Exodus 33,

"implies something like 'presence,' but this can vary from a metonymic term for the

'entire' deity, a description of divine attentiveness, a source of blessing, or a cultic

meaning, perhaps connected with pilgrimage."[28] To summarize thus far, theophany

narratives at times, though certainly not always, rely on conventional Biblical theophany

vocabulary in their use of the words *malakh*, *kavod*, or *panim*. But no matter the word

used to describe or define what the viewer has seen when experiencing a theophany, the

effect is the same: "all three expressions play a role in averting the attention of the reader

from the precise depiction of the divine, and in exchanging a more precise description for

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[24] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 51.

[25] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 52.

[26] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 52.

[27] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 51.

[28] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 51.

a conventional one."[29] The tendency, then, in theophany narratives as well as the broader category of Old Testament theophanies, is to describe God in nonspecific terminology.

So nonspecific is the description of the divine that viewers in theophany narratives often (especially in initial theophanies) do not at first recognize what they are seeing as God. Hagar's experience at the well between Kadesh and Bered, recorded in Genesis 16, exemplifies this. In this theophany, the angel of the Lord (*malakh* in the Hebrew) meets Hagar as she flees from ill treatment at the hands of the jealous Sarai. But the initial interaction between Hagar and the angel of the Lord suggests that she did not recognize the *malakh* as anything more than an unknown man. Recognition of the *malakh* as the divine is not evident until after he had spoken for a third time in response to Hagar's assertion that she is fleeing Sarai's abuse. After the *malakh* reveals to Hagar the sex of the fetus she carries and announces that the boy's name will be Ishmael, Hagar recognizes that she has seen God, proclaiming "verily here have I seen the hinder parts of him that seeth me" (Gen. 16:13).[30] Savran noted that the phenomenon of delayed recognition of the divine in theophany narratives exemplified here is an essential feature of the genre, stating that in "each of the cases where a *malakh* appears the pattern is the same – the visitor is visually unexceptional, and the recognition process is triggered by something in the words of the *malakh*."[31] Recognizing this pattern of delayed recognition is critical to correctly identifying an Old Testament story as a theophany: the uninitiated reader might wonder why an experience qualifies as a theophany when what is seen is

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[29] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 51.

[30] All English-language Bible citations are according to the Douay Version.

[31] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 97.

described throughout nearly the entirety of the narrative in language that does not specifically identify God, but might instead be described before the moment of recognition as a man or an angel.

The remaining motifs common to theophany narratives are less critical to the identification of a particular episode as a theophany, but they nonetheless make up important parts of the genre. The third, "human response to the presence of the divine," involves "two fundamentally different types of responses."[32] Savran referred to the first of these by a Latin name, "an expression of *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* in the presence of the divine," which he called "a pair of complementary reactions in which the protagonist is drawn closer to the numinous, while at the same time is struck with fear and inadequacy in the presence of the divine."[33] The second kind of response is centered around the doubts expressed by the person viewing God, and takes two basic forms. The first of these types of doubts is self-doubt, where "in the midst of the theophanic experience, the protagonist reveals a sense of inadequacy about the task to be performed."[34] The second form of doubt-response to theophany is similar, but occurs in reverse order: "the protagonist, not fully aware of the presence of the numinous, expresses some degree of doubt directly or indirectly, and the theophany comes to correct this misperception."[35] In both cases, though, whether the theophany precedes or is a response to the appearance of God, the theophany is meant to overturn the viewer's self-doubt.

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[32] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 90.

[33] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 90.

[34] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 91.

[35] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 92.

The final generic feature of theophany narratives, "externalization," has the effect of "mov[ing] beyond personal experience to address a larger issue."[36] These externalizations tend to result in public experience or evidence of the theophany and often take the form of "the appointment of the prophet, the birth of a child, the establishment of a sacred place, or the origin of a ritual act."[37] The externalization of a theophanic experience "carries within it a remnant or a residue of the transient experience of the divine. For the community to which the protagonist returns the externalization is evidence of the reality of the theophanic experience, and in most cases, the closest they will come to actual contact with the divine."[38] This externalization then makes logical sense as a conclusion to theophany narratives, which begin with the viewer's separation from human company, and end with an externalization of the experience, sharing the theophanic vision with the human company to which the viewer returns. The externalization of the theophanic experience, then, has a unifying effect on the community.

Theophanies in Early-Medieval English Literature

The Book of Exodus recounts the greatest miracle of the Old Testament: the liberation of Israel after centuries of captivity in Egypt. In the preservation of Moses's life in infancy, his call to lead Israel, the ten plagues slowly chipping away at the pharaoh's tyrannical grasp on the Israelite slaves, and the climactic crossing of the Red Sea on dry land, providing a narrow escape for Israel as the Egyptian forces were

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[36] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 148.

[37] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 148.

[38] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 148.

destroyed, the hand of God is not only manifest, but constant and emphasized in the narrative. So central was the Exodus to the Hebrew Bible as a whole that, more than one hundred years after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria, and in the midst of the conquest of the Kingdom of Judah by Babylon, Jeramiah asserted that it could only be eclipsed by one miracle, the regathering of Israel: "Therefore behold the days come, saith the Lord, when it shall be said no more: the Lord liveth, that brought for the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt: But, the Lord liveth, that brought the children of Israel out of the north, and out of all the lands to which I cast them out: and I will bring them again into their land, which I gave to their fathers" (Jer. 16: 14–15). The implications of Jeremiah's prophecy are clear: the miracles of the Exodus were fundamental to the shared foundational myths of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

At Etham, the location of the third camp of Israel after their departure from Egypt, the Book of Exodus records for the first time the appearance of a divine guide that would continue to accompany the Israelites on their journey: a pillar guiding the way in the form of fire at night, and cloud at daytime: "And the Lord went before them to shew the way by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire that he might be the guide of their journey at both times" (Exod. 13:21–22). Here, at Etham, Israel witnessed a theophany: a visual appearance of God. Neither cloud nor fire is unique among biblical theophanies; among the narrative theophanies identified by Savran, a cloud appears as the visual element representing the divine in Numbers 12:1–16, and fire is seen in theophanies recorded in Exodus 3:1–6, Exodus, chapters 19–20 and 24, Leviticus 9:23–10:4, and 1 Kings 19:1–18.[39] And though the Exodus 13:21–22 theophany, hereafter

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[39] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 30.

referred to by its location as the Etham theophany, does not fully qualify as one of Savran's narrative theophany episodes due to its lack of the generic features of message and response, it nevertheless relates a visual appearance of God. The account of the Etham theophany in the Old English poem *Exodus* provides something unique in early-medieval English writing concerning theophany: a rather substantial poetic expansion of a theophany's visual element:

> Þær halig God
> wið fær-bryne   gescylde—
> bælce oferbrædde   byrnendne heofon,
> halgan nette   hat-wendne lyft.
> Hæfde weder-wolcen   widum fæðmum
> eorðan and up-rodor   efne gedæled,
> lædde leod-werod,   lig-fyr adranc,
> hate heofon-torht.   Hæleð wafedon,
> drihta gedrymost.   Dæg-scealdes hleo
> wand ofer wolcnum;   hæfde witig God
> sunnan sið-fæt   segle ofertolden,
> swa þa mæst-rapas   men ne cuðon,
> ne se segl-rode   geseon meahton,
> eorð-buende   ealle cræfte,
> hu afæstnod wæs   feld-husa mæst,
> siððan he mid wuldre   geweorðode
> þeoden-holde.   Þa wæs þridda wic

folce to frofre.　　Fyrd eall geseah

hu þær hlifedon　　halige seglas,

lyft-wundor leoht;　　leode ongeton,

dugoð Israhela,　　þæt þær Drihten cwom

weroda Drihten　　wic-steal metan.

Him beforan foran　　fyr and wolcen

in beorht-rodor,　　beamas twegen,

þara æghwæðder　　efn-gedælde

heah-þegnunga　　haliges gastes,

deor-modra sið　　dagum and nihtum.[40]

(There holy God shielded the people against the terrible heat—he pulled a covering over the burning heaven, a holy net over the fiery air. A storm-cloud had evenly divided the earth and the sky with a wide embrace, led the troop of people, drowned out the fiery flame, the burning hot heaven. The heroes looked on in amazement, the most joyous of armies. The shelter of the day-shield turned above the clouds; wise God had covered the journey of the sun with a sail, so men could not perceive the mast-ropes, nor were the earth-dwellers able to see the sail-rod by any power, how the greatest of tents was fastened, after he honored those loyal to the Lord with glory. That was the third camp as a comfort to the people. All the army saw how holy sails towered there, the light of the wonder of the air; the people understood, the troops of Israel, that the Lord came there, the Lord of hosts

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[40] *Exodus*, 71b–97. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 89–107.

to measure the camp. Fire and cloud went before them in the bright sky, two

beams, each of those high servants of the holy ghost evenly divided the journey of

the bold-minded ones by day and night.)

Not only has the poet expanded the description of the cloud and fire, introducing new

metaphors representing the visual aspects of the theophany, but the poet has also

introduced an element that, while not present in the biblical account of the Etham

theophany, is an important generic feature of theophany narratives according to Savran's

model: the recognition on the part of the viewer that God has been seen. This occurs in

the above passage, as the Israelites, presented as a marching army, perceive that the fire

and cloud represent God's presence, and is reiterated a few lines later. In expanding the

Etham theophany to more closely match other biblical theophanies, the Exodus poet

reveals a deep familiarity with the biblical genre.

This familiarity with theophanies accounts for the poet's choice of words when

attributing a theophanic experience to Abraham and Isaac on Mount Zion. In what is best

described as a lengthy digressive episode (comprising at least 91 lines[41]), the poet turned

from recounting the crossing of the Red Sea to tell of covenants God made in Genesis,

first with Noah, and then with Abraham, in order to explain the origins of the Israelite

people. Specifically, the *Exodus* poet summarized the flood account of Genesis, chapters

6–9 (*Exodus* 356–74a), with special emphasis on God's covenant with Noah, who "hæfde

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[41] Daniel Anlezark has noted that between what exists of the Genesis digression and the resumption of the Exodus narrative, "we find two blank pages in the manuscript and an obvious lacuna in the text. The numbering of the fitts shows that at least a whole numbered section (XLVIII) is missing." It is therefore unknowable whether the poet continued the digression, or if it is complete as it now exists. Daniel Anlezark, ed., *Old Testament Narratives*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 329.

him on hreðre halige treowa"[42] (had the holy covenant in his chest), and then introduced Abraham as Noah's descendant before retelling the story of Abraham's temptation to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis, chapter 22 (*Exodus* 374b–446). Here, the poet's version differs significantly from the biblical account. Genesis tells that God provided not theophanic but rather auditory intervention in the attempted sacrifice of Isaac, as the angel of the Lord called out from heaven twice (Gen. 22:11–12, 15–18). The *Exodus* poet, though, tells a different story. God himself steps in to physically prevent Abraham from killing his son: "Ne wolde him beorht Fæder bearn æt niman, / halig tiber, ac mid handa befeng"[43] (The bright Father did not desire to take away his son, a holy sacrifice, but grabbed him with his hands). Not only was God's physical presence felt by Abraham, but the text also describes that God was seen by Abraham and his son at this moment: "Wære hie þær fundon, wuldor gesawon, / halige heah-treowe, swa hæleð gefrunon" (They found a covenant there, saw glory, a holy high-pledge, as heroes have heard).[44] Though at first the object of their sight, *wuldor* or glory, may not seem significant, it is language used elsewhere in the Old Testament to indicate a high theophanic experience. In Exodus, chapter 33, Moses asks God, "Shew me thy glory" (Exod. 33:18). God denies this request, and in doing so, apparently clarifies what Moses meant by "glory": "Thou canst not see my face, for man shall not see me and live. . . . Behold, there is a place with me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock. And when my glory shall pass, I will set thee in a hole of the rock and protect thee with my right hand till I pass. And I will take away my

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[42] *Exodus*, 366.

[43] *Exodus*, 415–16.

[44] *Exodus*, 387–88.

hand, and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face thou canst not see" (Exod. 33:20–23). Moses asks to see God's glory, but is denied by God, who tells Moses that though he will show him his hand and back, God will not allow him to see his face. In the translation of this passage in the Old English Heptateuch, Moses requests of God, "Ætyw me þin wuldor"[45] (Show me your glory). The *Exodus* poet, then, in describing the theophany he attributed to Abraham and Isaac on Mount Zion, used language directly connected to other Old Testament theophanies: as with Moses, Abraham and Isaac saw God when they *wuldor gesawon* (saw glory). Furthermore, the final verbs used in these two lines create the effect of a couplet in enantiosis, with the visual reality of the two patriarchs' theophany, *wuldor gesawon* (they saw glory), contrasted with the auditory nature of the oral transmission of the story, whether through the recitation of poetry or the reading aloud of scripture, *swa hæleð gefrunon* (as heroes have heard), thereby emphasizing the distinctiveness of theophanic experience.

It seems clear, therefore, in the language describing an invented theophany viewed by Abraham and Isaac, as well as in the expansion of the Etham theophany to include the element of recognition in order to align it more fully with other Old Testament theophanies, that the *Exodus* poet has a deep familiarity with the biblical genre of theophany. But it is the poem's expansive descriptions of the visual elements of the Etham theophany that provide a theological interpretation of the theophany. Peter J. Lucas interpreted the *beamas twegen* as evocative of Christ's cross:

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[45] Richard Marsden, ed., *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, Early English Text Society, Original Series 330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 126.

The range of meaning carried by the word *beam* is well illustrated by *Riddle 30*.

Here, as well as meaning 'pillars', *beamas* must imply the notion 'Cross' (esp. its

transverse bar), which is a metaphor for the pillar. This inference is later

confirmed by the description of the pillar as *wuldres beam* (568), a phrase used of

the Cross in *Rood* 97 and *Elene* 217. . . . The metaphoric association of the pillar

and the Cross is the literary descendant of the typological identification of the

exodus with the redemption; the pillar signifies not only itself but also the Cross

(esp. its transverse bar), while the Cross is the fulfilment of the pillar as a symbol

of salvation.[46]

The reference to Christ's cross is repeated later in the poem when the pillar is referred to

as "beama beorhtost"[47] (brightest of beams), a phrase Lucas noted was also used to

describe Christ's cross in *The Dream of the Rood*.[48] Lucas additionally argued that

nautical imagery, another visual aspect introduced by the *Exodus* poet to the Etham

theophany, was also Christological in nature. The *Exodus* poet seemed to imply, then, in

describing the pillars seen by the Israelites in Exodus 14 in terms visually associated with

Christ, that the pillars of cloud and fire represented not only the presence of God in the

Israelite camp, but Christ as the manifestation of a visible God.

A long history of Christian interpretation of Old Testament theophanies preceded

and without a doubt influenced early-medieval English interpretations of these episodes.

This revolved around trying to resolve the tension created by the superimposition of a

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[46] Peter J. Lucas, ed., *Exodus*, revised ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 91.

[47] *Exodus*, 249a.

[48] Lucas, *Exodus*, 110.

triune God onto a monotheistic set of texts. The earliest Christian readings of theophanies

therefore sought to answer the question of which member of the Christian Trinity (i.e.,

the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost) was the object of sight in Old Testament

theophany episodes. These interpretations grew and evolved with the development of the

Christian faith. Kari Kloos wrote that many of the earliest interpretations were polemic in

nature: apologists sought to distinguish their interpretation as authoritative by separating

it from views espoused by opposing groups, especially Jews, pagans, and Christian

writers deemed to be heretics.[49] Early Christian interpretations of theophanies therefore

sought to firmly establish Christ as the person of the Trinity present in Old Testament

theophany narratives, in contrast to heretical or non-Christian interpretations: "The

theophanies provide the perfect occasion for distinguishing contrasting beliefs: how God

enters the world and yet remains unchanged, how the Son is both like and distinct from

the Father, and how God's revelation to Israel continues and changes with God's

revelation in Jesus. In short, in polemical writings the themes of establishing identity

through marking out distinctions take central focus."[50] Early Christian apologists, such as

Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, thus interpreted Old Testament theophanies

Christologically, proclaiming Christ to have been the subject of these appearances of

God, and separating (and thereby defining) Christian doctrine from other interpretations.

Centuries later, and in a different polemical context, Augustine, though he had initially

adopted this literal Christological interpretation identifying Christ as the God made

manifest in Old Testament theophanies, would eventually conclude in *De Trinitate* that

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[49] Kari Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God: Augustine's Transformation of Early Christian Theophany Interpretation*, The Bible in Ancient Christianity 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 16.

[50] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 17.

Christ cannot have literally been present in the theophanies, interpreting them instead as symbols meant to teach the reader about the trinitarian nature of God, rather than a literal appearance of the Son to the Patriarchs and other witnesses of Old Testament theophanies.[51]

The distinction between these interpretations is best illustrated in the differences between Justin's and Augustine's analyses of the same theophany episode: the appearance of three messengers to Abraham in the valley of Mamre in Genesis, chapter 18. The episode begins with an assertion that the Lord appeared to Abraham one hot day in the valley of Mamre, when three men arrived at the door of Abraham's tent. Abraham offers them adoration and gives them food and rest. They deliver two messages to Abraham. The first, that Abraham's wife Sarah will conceive and give birth to a son, is met with laughter by Sarah, who is advanced in years. The second message is that they intend to walk to Sodom and Gomorrah in order to investigate the rumors of the cities' sinfulness. Abraham then bargains with the men to spare the cities if ten righteous people may be found there.

The difference between Justin's and Augustine's interpretations of this theophany narrative demonstrate an evolution in Christian thought regarding the nature and classification of this experience. Justin identified the Lord as Christ, who was accompanied by two angels. Kloos summarized Justin's thinking thusly: "In sum, he argues that Christ the Son of God is the God and angel who was sent by the Father to the patriarchs. Thus in the theophanies the patriarchs did not see the invisible, ineffable

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[51] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 144.

Father, but God's Son."[52] Essentially, because Christian doctrine held that God the Father is unseeable, and that Christ the Son was the visible manifestation of God in the flesh, Justin back-identified visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament as premortal appearances of Jesus Christ. The result is an explanation not intended to explain the finer details of the theophanic vision, but rather, to identify its subject: "Justin's question is not how God could be seen but who this God is."[53] To Justin, the answer to that question was assuredly Christ.

Augustine, on the other hand, interpreted this same theophany narrative differently. Though his earlier work concerning Old Testament theophanies appears to largely agree with the Christological interpretation identifying Christ as the subject of Old Testament theophanies, in *De Trinitate*, Augustine "question[ed] the standard patristic view that Christ appeared to the patriarchs in the theophanies."[54] The reason for this is, as was the case with Justin, polemical, but in this case, Augustine is fighting an anti-trinitarian belief, held by those known as Homoians, who argued that the Son was subordinate to and therefore not co-equal with the Father, a belief in direct opposition to the trinitarian position dogmatized at the Nicene Council.[55] Much Homoian argument centered around the Old Testament theophanies themselves.[56] In order to combat this argument, Augustine adopted a different view of the theophanies than the earlier identification of their subject as Christ as had been held since Justin's writing:

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[52] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 25.

[53] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 27.

[54] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 130.

[55] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 133.

[56] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 135.

Augustine resists identifying the theophanies with appearances of Christ alone, instead pointing to the trinitarian character of revelation and to the narratives' description of 'God,' not the Son, as the one revealed to Abraham, Moses, and others. His conclusion that the Father, Son, or Spirit all could be represented symbolically in the theophanies dramatically departs from the assumptions of his precedessors [*sic*].[57]

Augustine thus departed from Justin's strictly Christological reading, instead interpreting the Mamre theophany not literally as Christ accompanied by two angels, but rather as a symbolic event meant to instruct readers about the nature of the Trinity.

Early-medieval English writing provides five interpretations of Abraham's Mamre theophany. The earliest of these, Bede's exegetical work on Genesis, adhered closely to Augustine's reading of the episode. Bede interpreted the appearance of the three messengers as evidence for the triune nature of God: "That three men appeared to him is a mystery of the Holy Trinity; and then when he had seen three, he worshiped one, and prayed unto the Lord, because although the Trinity is in persons, within the divinity there is nevertheless an equality of sovereignty which is one and ought to be co-worshipped."[58] In following Augustine, Bede perpetuated the notion that the actual mechanics of how the theophany occurred were less important than the lessons about the nature of God gleaned from the episode. *How* Abraham apparently saw God is described

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[57] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 141–42.

[58] Bede, *In Genesim*, IV. 614–18: "Quod *tres uiri ei apparuerunt* mysterium est sanctae Trinitatis. Denique cum tres uidisset, unum adorauit et precatus est Dominum, quia etsi in personis est Trinitas, in diuinitate est tamen una et coadoranda dominantis aequalitas." In *Bedae venerabilis opera, pars II.1: Opera exegetica 1. Libri quattuor in principium Genesis usque ad natiuitatem Isaac et eiectionem Ismahelis adnotationum*, ed. Charles W. Jones, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 118A (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1967).

as a *mysterium* (mystery); the more important aspect of this theophany to Bede is what

the episode symbolically reveals about the nature of God: the "equality of sovereignty"

hallmarking the relationship between the three members of the Trinity.

After Bede, the next early-medieval English writer to comment on the Mamre

theophany was Alcuin, in his *Quaestiones in Genesim*, dated to around the year 796.[59]

Alcuin's *Quaestiones* are a series of 281 questions and answers intended to assist

Sigewulf, a priest who had accompanied Alcuin to Aachen from York, in his study of

Genesis. Alcuin described his questions and answers as low-hanging fruit when it comes

to interpreting Genesis, writing that he made no attempt to answer the "very many and

most difficult questions" posed by Genesis, and instead focused on those questions which

were "content with a simple response."[60] This may account for Alcuin's different

approach to the Mamre theophany, in which Alcuin attempted to explain the physical

mechanics of the theophany rather than attribute it to a "mystery of the Trinity" as Bede

had. Perhaps in the interest of providing a simple response, Alcuin skirted the question of

why there were three angels altogether, instead explaining why it was necessary for God

to use angels in the theophany:

> Question 178: It is asked why, when there were three men who appeared to
>
> Abraham, he singularly called them Lord, saying: Lord, if I have found grace
>
> before you?

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[59] Michael Fox, "Ælfric's 'Interrogationes Sigewulfi'," in *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Fox and Manish Sharma (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 25–63, at 26.

[60] Alcuin, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, *PL* 100:516–17: "Sunt in eodem libro difficillimae quaestiones plurimae, quas ad praesens tangere non libuit, vel etiam non licuit; vel quod de illis me non interrogasti. Hae etiam maxime historicae sunt et simplici responsione contentae: illae vero majoris inquisitionis, longiorisque tractatus indigent et longiorem habere indigent tractatum."

Answer: Perceiving therefore the Lord in the angels, he elected to speak to the Lord, rather than to the angels. Amd indeed sometimes God speaks through angels, with likenesses temporarily taken from the air, and before the bodily eyes, just as now Abraham was able not only to see the three men, but also to receive them in his earthly home, and also to provide food for their enjoyment. For unless angels, when they announce certain things to us on earth, might at times assume a body from the air, they assuredly would not appear to our outward gazes. Nor might they consume food with Abraham, unless on account of us they bore something solid out of the heavenly element. Nor is it extraordinary that they themselves who were received, are at one moment called angels, at another the Lord; because they are represented by the designation of angels when ministering outwardly, and by the name "Lord" who is shown in command within them: so that the role of the one presiding might be clear through the one designation, and the service of the ministers through the other.[61]

Here, Alcuin departed from the symbolic interpretation of Bede, who argued not only that the number of angels is representative of the Trinity, but that feeding the angels prefigured the incarnation of Christ in Abraham's line of descendants: "He refreshed them with foods served, because he understood that from his seed He would be born,

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[61] Alcuin, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, PL 100:540: "*Inter.* 178. Quaeritur, cum tres viri essent, qui Abrahae apparuerunt, quomodo singulariter Dominum appellat dicens: *Domine, si inveni gratiam ante te*? *Resp.* Igitur in angelis Dominum sentiens, Domino potius, quam angelis loqui elegit. Et quidem aliquando imaginibus, et ante corporeos oculos, ad tempus ex aere assumptis per angelos loquitur Deus, sicut nunc Abraham non solum tres viros videre potuit, sed etiam terreno habitaculo recipere et eorum usibus etiam cibos adhibere. Nisi enim angeli, cum quaedam nobis in terra nuntiant, ad tempus ex aere corpus assumerent, exterioribus profecto nostris obtutibus non apparerent. Nec cibos cum Abraham sumerent, nisi propter nos solidum aliquid ex coelesti elemento gestarent. Nec mirum quod illi ipsi qui suscepti sunt, modo angeli, modo Dominus vocantur; quia angelorum vocabulo exprimuntur, qui exterius ministrabant, et appellatione Domini ostenditur, qui eis interius praeerat: ut per hoc praesidentis imperium, et per illud claresceret officium ministrantium."

Who while He may be God before the ages, consubstantial with the Father, and a true

man at the end of the ages, truly would appear to dwell among men."[62] Rather than read

the theophany as prefiguring Christ or teaching a lesson about the Trinity, Alcuin only

explained the discrepancy of the plural number of angels being addressed singularly as

the Lord insofar as it pertained to identifying the reason angels were present in the

theophany. According to Alcuin's explanation, the angels were needed as a physical

mediator in order that God might be seen by Abraham. The mechanics of sight

necessitate that God assume the physical form of angels: if the angels did not "assume a

body from the air," Alcuin argued, "surely they would not appear to our outward gazes."

Alcuin's "simple response" introduced no deeper spiritual or typological meaning to the

theophany. Where Bede found a typological reading for Christ in the angels' eating of

Abraham's food, Alcuin found affirmative evidence for the necessity of God taking the

physical form he did at Mamre.

Centuries later, Ælfric translated Alcuin's *Quaestiones in Genesim* into Old

English. This translation, known as *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*, made Ælfric, according to

Michael Fox, "the first author to translate a work of Latin exegesis into any vernacular

language."[63] But like most Old English translations, Ælfric's *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*

was adaptive, and Ælfric both expanded and abridged Alcuin's commentary wherever he

saw fit. Ælfric ended his translation midway through Alcuin's text, in a place Michael

Fox has identified as possibly significant: "Ælfric's last question is Int. 201, on the

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[62] Bede, *In Genesim*, IV. 670–73: "Refecit eos epulis appositis, quia intellexit eum de suo semine nasciturum, qui cum sit Deus ante secula, patri consubstantialis, homo in fine seculorum uerus, ueraciter inter homines conuersaturus appareret."

[63] Fox, "Ælfric's *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*," 26.

contradiction between Genesis 22:1 and James 1:13. Genesis 22:1, of course, would have

seemed to Ælfric a natural place to conclude because the model of Bede's *In Genesim*

before him, his own translation of Genesis, and even the poetic *Genesis A* all conclude at

roughly the same point in the narrative."[64] Yet while Ælfric translated questions beyond

the Mamre episode of Genesis 18, he left Alcuin's treatment of the episode out of

Interrogationes Sigewulfi, jumping from a defense of Abraham's apparent adultery in his

relationship with Hagar in Genesis 16, to a question about the sinfulness of Sodom as

expressed by God at the end of the Mamre episode in Genesis 18, leaping over seven of

Alcuin's questions, including number 178.[65]

Evidently, Alcuin's practical interpretation explaining the mechanics of the

Mamre theophany appealed little to Ælfric, who elsewhere writing of the same

theophany—in a letter prefacing his own partial translation of Genesis addressed to

Æthelweard, who had requested the translation—preferred a symbolic interpretation.

Although Ælfric was deeply familiar with Alcuin's commentary, Ælfric's own

commentary of the Mamre episode appears to be rooted firmly in the same vein as Bede's

reading of the theophany. Indeed, so strong is Ælfric's apparent reliance on Bede, that

Brandon W. Hawk has suggested that Ælfric limited his Genesis translation only to the

portions of Genesis commented upon by Bede (ending earlier than the section of the *Old

English Heptateuch* translation typically attributed to him).[66] Echoing Bede, Ælfric wrote

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[64] Fox, "Ælfric's *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*," 33.

[65] Ælfric, *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*, questions 45–46. In George Edwin MacLean, "Ælfric's Version of 'Alcuini Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesin'," *Anglia* 7 (1884): 1–59, at 46.

[66] Brandon W. Hawk, "Ælfric's *Genesis* and Bede's *Commentarius in Genesim*," *Medium Ævum* 85/1 (2016): 208–16, at 212.

of Genesis, "Oft ys seo halige þrinnys geswutelod on þisre bec"[67] (Often the holy Trinity

is manifest in this book), and then provided two grammatical examples, the second of

which was the Mamre theophany:

> Swa swa ys on þam worde þe God cwæþ: 'Uton wircean mannan to ure
>
> anlicnesse.' Mid þam þe he cwæð 'uton wircean' ys seo þrinnis gebicnod. Mid
>
> þam þe he cwæð 'to ure anlicnisse' ys seo soðe annis geswutelod. He ne cwæð na
>
> menifealdlice, 'to urum anlicnissum', ac andfealdlice, 'to ure anlicnisse'. Eft
>
> comon þri englas to Abrahame and he spræc to him eallon þrim swa swa to
>
> anum.[68]
>
> (Just as it is in the word which God said: 'Let us make man according to our
>
> likeness.' Through that which he said, 'let us make,' is the Trinity represented.
>
> Through that which he said, 'according to our likeness,' is the true unity manifest.
>
> He did not speak plurally, 'according to our likenesses,' but singly, 'according to
>
> our likeness.' Then came three angels to Abraham and he spoke to all three of
>
> them as if to one.)

Ælfric's argument about the Trinity manifest in the creation of mankind closely

resembles Bede's own interpretation of Genesis 1:26: "And when it is said, *Let us make*

man in our image and likeness, the unity of the holy Trinity is clearly proclaimed. . . . For

the expression, *Let us make*, connotes one action of three persons; but the following

phrase, *in our image and likeness*, indicates the one and equal substance of the same holy

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[67] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 5.

[68] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 5–6.

Trinity."[69] Ælfric's *þrinnis* and *annis*, derived from God's use of both the singular and

plural in this verse, seems to draw directly from Bede. And though Ælfric did not provide

further detail explaining his terse reference to Abraham's theophany at Mamre, by

pointing at this instance, Ælfric is directing Æthelweard to the same conclusion reached

by Bede about this theophany, that it conveys "a mystery of the holy Trinity."[70] This

contributes to Ælfric's larger argument that "Be þisum litlum, man mæg understandan hu

deop seo boc ys on gastlicum andgite, þeah þe heo mid leohtlicum wordum awriten sig"[71]

(By these little things, one is able to understand how deep the book is in spiritual

knowledge, though it be written with subtle words). Ælfric expressed concern that the

subtlety of Genesis and the entire Bible risks being lost in translation: "Nu is seo forsæde

boc on manegum stowum swiþe nærolice gesett, and þeah swiðe deoplice on þam

gastlicum andgite. And heo is swa geendebyrd swa swa God silf hig gedihte þam writere

Moise, and we ne durron na mare awritan on Englisc þonne þæt Liden hæfþ"[72] (Now the

aforementioned book is very specifically worded in many places, and yet very deep in its

spiritual knowledge. And it is so arranged just as God himself spoke to the writer Moses,

and we dare not write more in English than the Latin has). Ælfric's interpretation of the

Mamre theophany is therefore limited to a short reference because it is illustrative of his

discomfort with biblical translation. Ælfric worried that by translating the biblical text

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[69] Bede, *In Genesim*, I. 736–38, 746–49: "Cum autem dicitur *faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram,* unitas sanctae Trinitatis aperte commendatur. . . . In eo enim quod dicitur. *Faciamus,* una ostenditur trium personarum operatio; in eo vero quod sequitur, *ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram,* una et aequalis substantia ejusdem sanctae Trinitatis indicatur."

[70] Bede, *In Genesim*, IV. 615: "mysterium est sanctae Trinitatis."

[71] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch,* 6.

[72] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 6–7.

from Latin into English, the intended and correct spiritual interpretation of the Bible may be lost to the reader. This too may account for Ælfric's preference for Bede's interpretation of the Mamre theophany over Alcuin's. Bede's interpretation aligns more closely with the *gastlicum andgite* (spiritual knowledge) Ælfric hoped his readers would discover in Genesis than did Alcuin's attempt at explaining the physical mechanics of the theophany.

It cannot be overlooked that between these three writers, there is in addition to centuries of time between them a rather large discrepancy of language (Latin or Old English) and target audience. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe noted:

> Ælfric's decision to write in English sets him apart from his predecessors, Bede and Alcuin. A wide cultural and intellectual gap separates the intended audiences of these men. Bede and Alcuin could assume literacy in Latin of their monastic audience. Bede aimed at a double audience of *rudis* and *eruditus*, and so structured his commentary around a rich mixture of exegetical methods. Alcuin wrote his *Interrogationes* for the *eruditus*, for the monk whose memory needed refreshing. Both of their commentaries were designed to be read. Ælfric's audience was not one, but many: simple laymen, educated laymen, simple educated priests, more educated monks. His homilies were designed to be preached, although the treatises and letters were to be read. The wide differences in audiences and in genres required Ælfric to aim his treatments of Genesis at different levels.[73]

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[73] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Three English Writers on Genesis: Some Observations on Ælfric's Theological Legacy," *Ball State University Forum* 19/3 (1978): 69–78, at 77–78.

What Ælfric aimed to accomplish with his reference to the Mamre theophany in his preface, then, was to train these various kinds of readers how to derive the "spiritual knowledge" present in the Genesis text for themselves.

A fourth interpretative representation of this episode occurs in the Old English Heptateuch translation project. Translation, insofar as the translator adapts "sense for sense" rather than "word for word," to borrow a well-known expression, provides insights into the translator's interpretation of the original text. In the case of the Mamre theophany, the *Old English Heptateuch* text, in a portion translated by Ælfric, more or less consists of a word-for-word translation of most of the Vulgate episode, including the visual element of three men, into Old English. This is not unusual in the Heptateuch translation, but as will be shown later, there are occasionally exceptions to translating "word for word" when it comes to theophany episodes in the biblical text. Even here, though, in Ælfric's largely faithful translation, a slight revision of the Vulgate text occurs in Sarah's response to the theophany in the Old English version. The Vulgate records that Sarah laughed upon hearing the message delivered through the theophany episode, that she would conceive a son long past her childbearing years. When the Lord then asked Abraham why Sarah laughed at the message, Sarah denied having done so: "Negavit Sarra, dicens, 'Non risi,' timore perterrita" (Gen. 18:15).[74] Ælfric's translation presents the same information, that Sarah was afraid, but not in the voice of the narrator, as in the Vulgate. Ælfric has Sarah proclaim her own feelings: "Þa ætsoc Sarra: 'Ne hloh ic nah, ac ic weæs afirht'"[75] (Then Sarah denied: "I did not laugh, but I was afraid"). Jonathan

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[74] All Latin-language Bible citations are according to the Vulgate.

[75] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 40.

Wilcox has noted that patristic exegesis may have informed Ælfric's translation: "Ælfric embodies in Sara the contrasting human emotions of fear and wonder implied by the patristic commentators, even as he takes away the biblical narrator's defense of her and makes her laughter more clearly an act of derision."[76] These writers who were critical of Sarah's laughter include Augustine, Jerome, and Isidore, in addition to Bede and Alcuin.[77]

Finally, a fifth early-medieval English interpretation of the Mamre episode occurs in the poetic adaptation of this story in *Genesis A*. Sadly, a complete analysis of the *Genesis A* interpretation of this event is muddled by an unfortunate feature of the manuscript: the extant text picks up the story not with the appearance of the Lord in the form of three messengers at the doors of Abraham's tent, but rather, with Sarah's response to their message:

> Þa þæt wif ahloh   wereda drihtnes
>
> nalles glædlice,   ac heo gearum frod
>
> þone hleoðorcwyde   husce belegde
>
> on sefan swiðe.   Soð ne gelyfde,
>
> þæt þære spræce   sped folgode.[78]
>
> (Then the woman laughed, not at all happily, at the Lord of Hosts, but old with years she scornfully laid aside the words forcefully in her heart. She did not believe the truth that the outcome would follow the speech.)

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[76] Jonathan Wilcox, "The First Laugh: Laughter in Genesis and the Old English Tradition," in *The Old English Hexateuch: Aspects and Approaches*, ed. Rebecca Barnhouse and Benjamin C. Withers (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 239–69, at 257–58.

[77] Wilcox, "The First Laugh," 245–51.

[78] *Genesis A*, 2382–86. Text Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript*, 3–87.

The adaptation provides some interpretation of the biblical text, describing the nature of Sarah's laughter not as joyous but scornful, in line with, but more explicit than, Ælfric's interpretation in his own translation of Genesis, chapter 18. Comparing these two Old English versions, Jonathan Wilcox wrote that despite the addition of interpretive language to the biblical account, "[The *Genesis A*-poet] creates a version that is in some ways more true to the spirit of the biblical narrative than any of the subsequent commentators. He uncomplicatedly sees Sara's laughter as derisive and takes pains to prohibit the possibility of seeing this as joyous laughter."[79] However, the rest of the poet's treatment of this theophany episode is missing, and this is complicated by the manuscript itself: one page has been cut from the manuscript immediately before Sarah's laughter, and another page has been cut following God's revelation to Abraham that he intends to destroy Sodom. The first of these missing pages, following page 108 in the manuscript, would have contained text corresponding to the appearance of the three men and the delivery of their first message, that Sarah would conceive and bear a son, and the second page, following page 110, would have contained Abraham's bargaining with the Lord to spare Sodom. Sadly, absolute certainty about the poet's interpretation of the three messengers and the nature of their theophanic appearance to Abraham can never be ascertained. Regarding these two missing pages, A. N. Doane wrote, "I am inclined to believe that both these leaves were cut out by some early scholar as examples of Anglo-Saxon, especially as the later passage would have had the Old English for 50, 45, 30, 20 and 10."[80] All the more frustrating for the purpose of studying theophanies in early-

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[79] Wilcox, "The First Laugh," 259.

[80] A. N. Doane, ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 10–11.

medieval English is that these two leaves, completing the Mamre theophany, were the only ones removed from the manuscript that contained a substantial amount of text. Regarding the other leaves cut from the *Genesis A* manuscript, Doane noted that "after p. 94 one leaf has been cut out, but no material appears to be missing and we must assume that the leaf contained illustrations, or blanks for them."[81] Three additional missing leaves reveal a similar pattern of methodical removal of pages without text: "the leaves cut out after pp. 116, 122, 134 contained very little text, presumably the excisions being for the sake of the fair parchment."[82] What has happened to the two missing leaves completing the Mamre theophany, who removed them and for what purpose, has yet to be discovered, and Doane's hypothesis, that the leaves were excised by someone studying the Old English language, is plausible. Sadly, there is no room for speculation as to how the poet might have treated the rest of the theophany narrative.

There are, however, many other examples of theophanies in early-medieval English writing to draw from. The translation of the first seven books of the Bible into Old English provides a great deal of information about early-medieval English attitudes and understanding about theophanies. George Savran identified fourteen narrative theophany episodes, or theophanies that occur within the context of a narrative story rather than as a vision without narrative context, in the first seven books of the Bible.[83] Notably, differences between the biblical text and the Old English version reveal a certain pattern of discomfort with the possibility of seeing God. This is not universal across the

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[81] Doane, *Genesis A*, 10.

[82] Doane, *Genesis A*, 10.

[83] Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 30.

Old English Heptateuch, and not every single difference between the Old English and Latin texts needs to be addressed here. For example, Genesis, chapter 21 tells of a theophany experienced by Hagar, the second that she has witnessed (the first occurred in Genesis, chapter 16). Ælfric, the translator of this portion, rendered "Et fuit cum eo"(Gen. 21:22), "And heo wunede mid him"[84] (And she remained with him). The language of the Vulgate is ambiguous, and seems to suggest that God remained with Ishmael. But by providing a pronoun subject for the verb, Ælfric has interpreted for his reader that it was Hagar, not God, who was with Ishmael. This choice in translation may suggest discomfort with the notion that God would continue to be with Ishmael after Abraham had cast him out. The Genesis, chapter 21 theophany itself, however, is presented in the Old English version essentially in the same way as it occurs in the Vulgate. I will discuss below only the changes made in the Old English version of these theophany episodes that reveal the most about early-medieval English attitudes about theophanies.

The most substantive change to the biblical text of theophany narratives in the Old English translation of the Heptateuch occurs in Exodus, chapter 33. The differences between the Old English version and the Latin original reveal the translator's methodology to overcome apparent discomfort with the biblical narrative. In the Vulgate, the theophany episode begins:

> Cumque egrederetur Moyses ad tabernaculum, surgebat universa plebs, et stabat unusquisque in ostio papilionis sui, aspiciebantque tergum Moysi, donec ingrederetur tentorium. Ingresso autem illo tabernaculum foederis, descendebat columna nubis, et stabat ad ostium, loquebaturque cum Moyse, cernentibus

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[84] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 46.

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universis quod columna nubis staret ad ostium tabernaculi. Stabantque ipsi, et

adorabant per fores tabernaculorum suorum. Loquebatur autem Dominus ad

Moysen facie ad faciem, sicut solet loqui homo ad amicum suum. Cumque ille

reverteretur in castra, minister ejus Josue filius Nun, puer, non recedebat de

tabernaculo (Exod. 33:8–11).

Here, two or three theophanies occur simultaneously: the first of these is public, as the

Israelite camp sees the pillar of the cloud concealing the Lord, the second, private, as

Moses speaks with the Lord face to face. It is unclear whether Joshua was a witness to

this private conversation, or if he numbered among the Israelites who saw only the pillar

in the public theophany. The Old English translation reproduces the essential structure of

this episode, with a few critical differences:

Þonne Moises ut eode to þam getelde, eall þæt folc aras and stodon on hira

[getelda] durum and beheoldon Moises oð he inn eode to þam getelde. Þonne he

inn eode, þonne com genip and stod æt þære dura and God spræc wið Moises, and

hig ealle gesawon þæt þæt genip stod æt þæs geteldes dura and hig stodun and

gebædun hig æt hira getelda durum. Drihten spræc wið Moises swa man spricð

wiþ his freond, and þa he cirde to þære wicstowe, þa gebad Iosue, Nunes sunu, on

þam getelde.[85]

(When Moses went out to the tabernacle, all the people arose and stood in the

doors of their tents and beheld Moses until he went into the tabernacle. When he

went in, then came the pillar and stood at the door and God spoke with Moses,

and they all saw that the pillar stood at the door of the tabernacle and they stood

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[85] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 125–26.

and they waited at the doors of their tents.[86] The Lord spoke with Moses as a man speaks with his friend, and then he returned to the camp, while Joshua, the son of Nun, remained in the tabernacle.)

Here, as in the Vulgate, Moses enters the tabernacle to converse with God while the Israelites view the pillar. Moses then speaks familiarly with God, and at last returns to the camp, as Joshua remains in the tabernacle. But a key difference between the Latin and Old English versions occurs as the translator separates God from the pillar. In the Vulgate, it is the *columna nubis* (the pillar of the cloud) which is the subject of the verbs *descendebat* (came down), *stabat* (stood), and *loquebatur* (spoke) in Exodus 33:9. This same pillar is the one seen by the Israelites (Exod. 33:10) and identified as God (Exod. 33:11). The Old English translation, however, separates the *genip* (pillar), which is the subject of the verbs *com* (came) and *stod* (stood), from God, who is the subject of the verb *spræc* (spoke). Thus, whereas the Latin indicates that the same pillar seen by the Israelites and identified as the God who spoke with Moses descended, stood, and spoke in verse 9, the English separates the pillar seen by the Israelites from the God who spoke with Moses. The Old English version of this episode, then, entirely drops the public theophany from the narrative. The pillar, mysterious or miraculous as it may have been, cannot be interpreted as a theophany in the Old English translation. Whereas the biblical text suggests that the Israelites saw God, the Old English translation reduces the object of their sight to wondrous signs that are separate from God himself.

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[86] The Vulgate uses *tabernaculum* and *tentorium*, with both words signifying the portable place of worship, the tabernacle of the covenant (as in Exodus 33:8, where *tabernaculum* and *tentorium* are both used for the tabernacle), and with *tabernaculum* also being used to describe tents used as dwelling places by the Israelites (as in Exodus 33:10). Though the Old English translation uses *geteld* (tent) for both words, in order to avoid confusion, I distinguish between the tabernacle and common tents in my translation.

In addition to essentially erasing God's appearance to the Israelites from the narrative by separating the pillar from God in this Old English translation, the translator also minimized Moses's theophany experience. Though the Old English translation allows Moses to speak with God with a similar degree of familiarity—the Vulgate "sicut solet loqui homo ad amicum suum*"* (Exod. 33:11) is retained by the translator as "swa man spricð wiþ his freond" (as a man speaks with his friend)—the translator removes one important detail from the Latin. The Vulgate here records that Moses spoke to God "facie ad faciem" (Exod. 33:11), but the translator has elected to remove the "face to face" element of Moses's theophanic experience from the Old English translation. The reason the translator may have changed these important details in his translation is worth exploring. It may be, at the very least, that the translator was editing out literal anthropomorphic descriptions of God. That such descriptions are not removed from the remainder of the text presents no problem, as there is evidence that the descriptions of God relating to body parts may be read metaphorically where the translator includes them. As the Vulgate continues, God is described as having body parts resembling a man's. Exodus 33:13 reads, "Si ergo inveni gratiam in conspectu tuo, ostende mihi faciem tuam, ut sciam te, et inveniam gratiam ante oculos tuos: respice populum tuum gentem hanc." The translator has rendered this, "Gif ic ænige gife hæbbe beforan þe, ætyw me þine annsine, þæt ic cunne þe and hæbbe gife beforan þinum eagum. Sceawa þis folc"[87] (If I have any grace before you, show me your face, that I may know you and have grace before your eyes. Look upon this people). There are no essential differences between the original Latin and the Old English versions. In both, Moses asks God to

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[87] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 126.

show him his face, and refers to God's eyes, before asking that the Lord look favorably

upon the Israelite people. It may be thought that the Old English translator was merely

trying to make temporal sense of the narrative: if Moses had just seen God's face, as the

Latin stated, asking to see it immediately afterward is strange.

But there is more to the translator's removal of *facie ad faciem* than trying to

make temporal sense of the narrative. Continuing the narrative, the translator again

includes references from the Latin to another of God's body parts. The Vulgate reads, "et

protegam dextera mea, donec transeam: Tollamque manum meam, et videbis posteriora

mea" (Exod. 33:22–23). The translator has rendered these verses into Old English as, "Ic

gescilde þe mid minre swyðran handan . . . and ic do mine hand aweg and þu gesihst me

æfterwarde"[88] (I will shield you with my right hand . . . and I will take my hand away and

you will see me from behind). Here, as in the Vulgate, God is assigned a *swyðran handan*

(right hand). God's *posteriora mea* (my back regions) from the Vulgate, however, have

been replaced by a single Old English pronoun, *me*, followed by the adverb, *æfterwarde*

(from behind). The difference, here, is crucial to the understanding of the translator's

interpretation of theophany. That the body parts the translator allows to be assigned to

God remain hidden from Moses indicates that the Exodus translator read them as

metaphors. The body part visible to Moses in verse 23 is impossible to the translator, who

implies that Moses simply saw God from behind, and not God's literal backside, in his

translation. To the translator, then, the face and eyes assigned to God in verse 13 are

respective metaphors for God's presence and his omniscience, and his hand in verse 22 is

a metaphor for his omnipotence. To this translator, it is evidently acceptable to speak of

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[88] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 126.

God possessing body parts only when they cannot be mistaken for literal body parts. Moses may ultimately see God, but he cannot see God's literal face or back, because God does not possess a literal body.

In allowing for metaphorical references to God's body parts while simultaneously removing any description of God's body that could be interpreted literally, the translator seems to be following an interpretation of the incorporeality of God espoused by Bede. In his Genesis exegesis, Bede expressed concern that the description of the creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7 might be misunderstood to mean that God possesses a physical body: "Clearly, in this sentence the poverty of the carnal sense must be avoided, lest perchance we should believe either that God formed the body of man from the slime with corporeal hands, or with mouth or lips breathed into the face of the created man, in order that he might live and have the breath of life."[89] For support of this reading, which warns the reader that a literal understanding of a corporeal God in this passage would be a *paupertas* (poverty), Bede turned to Psalms 118:73: "For when the prophet also said, 'Your hands have made me and formed me,' he spoke with more metaphorical than literal diction, that is, in accordance with the habit by which men are accustomed to operate. For God is a spirit, nor is his single substance believed to be made up of the features of corporeal members, except by the uneducated."[90] Bede thus envisioned two orders of understanding the nature of God: the ignorant might interpret references to

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[89] Bede, *In Genesim*, I. 1387–91: "In qua uidelicet sententia uitanda est paupertas sensus carnalis, ne forte putemus Deum uel manibus corporeis de limo formasse corpus hominis uel faucibus labiisue inspirasse in faciem formati ut uiuere posset et spiraculum uitae habere."

[90] Bede, *In Genesim*, I. 1391–96: "Nam et propheta cum ait, *Manus tuae fecerunt me et plasmauerunt me*, tropica hoc locutione magis quam propria, id est iuxta consuetudinem qua solent homines operari, locutus est. Spiritus enim est Deus nec simplex eius substantia liniamentis membrorum corporalium esse composita nisi ab ineruditis creditur."

God's body parts literally, but the reader who is educated about the true nature of God will understand that these are all metaphors, for God is not embodied. Two elements of this argument stand out as significant. First, though Bede referenced Jesus's declaration of John 4:24 that "God is a spirit," he did so indirectly, focusing his argument instead on another Old Testament reference to God possessing a body part in an act of creation, with the assertion that it too should be read metaphorically. Second, and related, Bede cited no patristic authority either for the notion that God's substance is immaterial, or for the idea that there is a divide in understanding between unlearned and learned readers. The entirety of the argument, then—that reading these passages referencing hands and breath literally, as though it meant that God possesses a physical body, would be a mistake only the uneducated could make—is presented as Bede's own.

Returning to the treatment of the Exodus, chapter 33 theophany in the Old English translation, there is yet another reason for this translator's careful revision of Moses's theophany. Though the Vulgate states that Moses saw the face of God, it goes on to say that it is impossible to see God's face and live. God ultimately forbids Moses from seeing his face. This admonition against viewing God reads, "Rursumque ait: Non poteris videre faciem meam: non enim videbit me homo et vivet . . . faciem autem meam videre non poteris" (Exod. 33:20–23). The translator has reproduced the essential meaning of this warning: "And eft he cwæð: Ne miht þu me geseon. Ne gesihþ me nan lybbende mann . . . Ne miht þu mine ansine geseon"[91] (And again he said: You may not see me. No living man may see me . . . You may not see my face). Though the translator at first attempts to reconcile God telling Moses it is impossible to see him and live by replacing the Latin

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[91] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 126.

faciem meam (my face) with the pronoun *me*, he ultimately has to acknowledge that

Moses did experience some form of literal theophany in which he saw God. He does this

by allowing Moses to see God in general terms, while removing any reference to Moses

literally seeing a body part, whether a face or a back, of God. In the translated version of

this theophany episode, the translator makes adjustments to the challenging text in order

to help it make chronological sense (Moses would not ask to see God's face immediately

after viewing it), logical sense (Moses could not speak face-to-face with God if God had

forbidden Moses from seeing his face), and doctrinal sense (God does not possess a

physical body). This careful editing is his method to make sense of the paradoxical

narrative. As Kari Kloos said that "this paradox between the impossibility of the vision of

God and its expression in theophany narratives drives patristic interpretation,"[92] so does

attempting to resolve this paradox command the Old English translator's own

interpretation of this passage.

Avoidance of this paradox is not ubiquitous to the entirety of the Old English

translation of the Heptateuch. As might be expected in a work produced by more than one

translator, there is no unified translation method for rendering theophanies across this

vast text.[93] Elsewhere, accounts of seeing God in the Vulgate, even face to face, are fully

rendered into Old English. For instance, after Jacob's wrestling with God in Genesis,

chapter 32, the Old English text reads "And Iacob nemde þære stowe naman Phanuel and

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[92] Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 2.

[93] Richard Marsden, "Translation by Committee? The 'Anonymous' Text of the Old English Hexateuch," in Barnhouse and Withers, *The Old English Hexateuch*, 41–89, pointed out stylistic differences within the portion of the *Old English Hexateuch* containing biblical text not translated by Ælfric, and concluded that these sections of the text were not the work of a single anonymous translator, but rather a team of monks working collaboratively to complete a translation of this portion of the Bible.

cwæð: 'Ic geseah Drihten of ansine to ansine and ic wæs hal'"[94] (And Jacob named the place Phanuel and said: "I saw the Lord face to face and I was whole"). The words relevant to the theophanic experience are all retained from the Latin. Whatever qualms the Exodus, chapter 33 translator had about Moses' face-to-face conversation with God were absent from the mind of the Genesis, chapter 32 translator.

Nevertheless, similar omissions from other Old Testament theophany narratives translated into Old English reveal that the Exodus, chapter 33 translator was not unique in lessening the theophany experience in the English rendering. Two such examples stand out in the Old English version of Judges, which survives in two manuscripts. The first of these, the call of Gideon to lead the army to lead the Israelites to victory against the Midianites in Judges, chapter 6, is highly abbreviated in the Old English translation. In its entirety, the scene reads, "And he him foresceawode sumne heretogan, Gedeon gehaten, heora agenes cynnes. Þam bebead God sylf þæt he sceolde faran and his folc ahreddan fram heora yrmðe, and cwæð him wordum þus to: 'Wite þu þæt ic ðe asende'"[95] (And he provided a certain prophet for them, called Gideon, of their own nation. God himself commanded him that he must journey and liberate his people from their distress, and spoke to him thusly with words: "Know thou that I send thee"). This translator has removed any reference to a visual theophanic experience from Gideon's calling— unfortunately in the process removing the Angel of the Lord's ironic (and rather humorous) epithetic greeting of Gideon as the "most valiant of men" (Judg. 6:12) as Gideon threshed his wheat behind the winepress in order to hide from the Midianites. The

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[94] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 61.

[95] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 193.

calling in the Old English version is replaced by an entirely auditory experience. The

Angel of the Lord's assurance to Gideon, "Scito quod miserim te" (Judg. 6:14), is

retained, but his appearances to Gideon, and the subsequent affirmation that Gideon had

seen God, indeed the climax of the theophany episode, have been excised from the

translation. The Vulgate records, "Vidensque Gedeon quod esset angelus Domini ait,

'Heu, mi Domine Deus, quia vidi angelum Domini facie ad faciem.' Dixitque ei

Dominus, 'Pax tecum. Ne timeas; non morieris'" (Judg. 6:22–23). There can be no doubt

that this was a visual, theophanic experience, yet, like the Exodus, chapter 33 translator,

the Judges, chapter 6 translator has completely removed the notion of a "face to face"

viewing of God from the episode. This particular translator went so far as to remove the

appearance of God and the Angel of the Lord from the narrative altogether.

A similar abbreviation occurs later in Judges, when the Angel of the Lord

announces to Manoah and his wife the impending conception and birth of their son

Samson in Judges, chapter 13. Though the Vulgate story is more complex than the Old

English version, which compresses separate visitations to each of Samson's parents into a

single appearance, "Him com þa angende to Godes engel and cwæð ðæt hi sceoldon

habban sunu him gemæne"[96] (Then the angel of God traveling alone came to them, and

said that they would have a son between them), the most important omission in the Old

English translation is Manoah's fearful assertion identifying the experience as a

theophany. The Vulgate reads, "Et ultra non eis apparuit angelus Domini, statimque

intellexit Manue angelum esse Domini, et dixit ad uxorem suam, 'Morte moriemur, quia

vidimus Deum'" (Judg. 13:21–22). Lacking this identification of the Angel of the Lord as

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[96] Marsden, *Old English Heptateuch*, 195.

God himself, the abbreviated Old English version of this story leaves the theophany open to interpretation.

Sight Metaphors and Connotative Meaning

Resolving the paradox of the reality of a visible God manifest in Old Testament theophanies with the supposed impossibility of such a vision may be grounds enough for the revisions of Old Testament theophany episodes by early-medieval English writers. Nevertheless, in light of earlier discussion of the nature of sight as imagined in early-medieval England, the role of the extramissive model in early-medieval English interpretation cannot be overlooked. In Chapters One and Two, I discussed classical and patristic sources available to early-medieval English readers, as well as Old English texts, that point towards a relationship between the sense of sight, understood to be extramissive, and the mind, which is seated in the brain according to this model. I contend that this connection between the sense of sight and the human mind informed the apparent discomfort surrounding theophanies in early-medieval English treatment of these episodes. More evidence for such a connection may be found in the development of sensory-based metaphors for different types of cognition in the English language. These metaphors, particularly those for the senses of sight and hearing, were outlined in detail by Eve Sweetser. Concerning vision, her argument is two-fold: first, that the language surrounding vision developed from certain "semantic sources" with three basic areas of meaning, and second, that these verbs were then mapped onto "abstract senses of mental activity."[97] The three areas of meaning identified by Sweetser as sources for sight-related

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[97] Eve Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 32–33.

language in English are "the physical nature of sight (light, the eyes, facial movement, etc.)," "metaphors of vision" including the metaphor of "physical touching" and "manipulation" as well as the metaphor of "visual monitoring" and "control," and finally, "basic Indo-European vision roots."[98] Of the three, "metaphors of vision," especially that of "physical touching" and "manipulation," is the least relevant to the study of early-medieval English. Most of Sweetser's examples of sight-related language originating in this metaphor are Latin-based English words (perceive, scrutinize, examine, discern) that entered the lexicon later. The two examples descended from Old English, behold (from *behealdan*) and see (from *seon*), seem at first to fit the paradigm established by Sweetser, who described the development of such language thusly: "Its probable basis is the channeling and focusing ability connected with our visual sense; vision, far more than the other senses, can pick out ('seize on') and attend to one stimulus amid a multitude of input stimuli."[99] This is easily seen in each of the verbs that entered English from the Latin language. For example, Sweetser posited that "scrutinize" came from the Latin verb "*scrutari*," meaning "pick through trash," and that "examine" descended from Latin "*ex + agmen-*," meaning "pull out from a row."[100]

I would argue, though, for a slight readjustment to Sweetser's grouping of verbs for sight. Specifically, I contend that the English verbs with roots in Old English, "behold" and "see," which Sweetser argued came to be associated with sight because they were metaphors for seeing, should instead be regrouped under Sweetser's first area

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[98] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 33–34.

[99] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 33.

[100] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 33.

of sources for sight-related verbs, "the physical nature of sight." My reason for this is twofold: first, these words have more in common with the words in the category of words descending from an understanding of "the physical nature of sight" than they do the other words having metaphors for sight as their origin, and second, the extramissive model for sight must be accounted for when describing the way in which "the physical nature of sight" was understood. Sweetser's original grouping of these two categories is as follows:

Verbs descended from an understanding of the physical nature of sight:	Verbs descended from metaphors for sight, originally associated with physical touching and manipulation:
to eye	to behold
to ogle	to see
to gape, to gawp	to scrutinize
to stare	to examine
to light	to discern
	to perceive

"To behold" and "to see" are etymological outliers in Sweetser's second group. The words belonging to the first category have proto-Indo-European or Germanic sources as their origin in English: "eye," "light" (both as verbs), "ogle," "gape," and "stare" all belong to this realm of semantic origin, according to Sweetser.[101] Many of these verbs are attested in Old English: *iewan*, *gapian* (seen in the compound *ofergapian*, "to neglect, to overlook"), and *starian*. Meanwhile, apart from "to behold" and "to see," the words in Sweetser's second category are not attested in Old English, but rather developed outside of the English language as Latin metaphors for sight, and were adopted into the English language at a later date, having already developed vision-related meanings. Thus, "to behold" and "to see" would better fit with the first group, on the grounds of etymology.

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[101] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 33.

Furthermore, the extramissive model demonstrates how the Old English verbs *behealdan* and *seon* would have descended from an understanding of the physical nature of sight rather than a metaphor adopted from touch. *Seon*, for example, has as its root the proto-Indo-European root *sek^w*, with the meaning "to follow." Sweetser noted that this root and its meaning is more clearly seen in the Latin verb *sequor*.[102] But rather than having developed from a metaphorical sense of following that was applied to vision, the verb could have formed from an understanding of the nature of sight itself: the viewer "follows" the object of sight with rays emitted from the eyes. Likewise, *behealdan* might not have derived from a metaphor of "seizing" or "catching sight" of something, but rather, from the notion that objects that are seen are physically touched by the viewer's sight rays. I suggest, therefore, based on etymological evidence and an understanding of the extramissive model of sight, the following reorganization of Sweetser's grouping of the verbs for sight:

Verbs descended from an understanding of the physical nature of sight:	Verbs descended from metaphors for sight, originally associated with physical touching and manipulation:
to eye	to scrutinize
to ogle	to examine
to gape, to gawp	to discern
to stare	to perceive
to light	
*to behold	
*to see	

This readjustment illuminates the process by which verbs for vision acquired secondary connotations in the English language. Sweetser outlined these secondary, metaphorical meanings acquired in English by four of the five senses in great detail, dividing them into

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[102] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 32.

three categories: "objective and intellectual," belonging to sight; "interpersonal communication," belonging to hearing; and finally, "subjective and emotional," belonging to both touch and taste.[103] Of these, hearing provides the most relevant contrast to sight in the connotations each sensory experience acquired. The "objective and intellectual" metaphorical meaning adopted by sight and the "interpersonal communication" metaphorical meaning adopted by hearing are as follows: sight came to be synonymous with "knowledge and "intellection," while hearing came to signify "receptivity" as well as "obedience."[104] Though Sweetser did not mention this, as most of her argument looked at present-day English, the obedience connotation for the sense of hearing is especially clear in the Old English verb *hyran*, which meant both "to hear, to hear of" and "to listen to, follow, serve, obey, be subject to, belong to."[105]

Regarding sight, Sweetser's theories about why this particular sense followed this particular path of metaphorical meaning are threefold: sight is a more controllable, focusable sense than the others, psychological evidence indicates that sight is primary to the other senses as a method of gathering information, and sight is considered universal.[106] Obviously the first of these is most clearly related to the mechanics of sight, but considering the extramissive model of vision, with its close connection between the

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[103] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 38.

[104] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 33, 38.

[105] Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1882), 582–83. The much more detailed entry for *hyran* in Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey, et al., eds., *The Dictionary of Old English: A to I Online* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), affirms these meanings in greater detail, with approximately 600 occurrences. Of eight connotations of the verb, three (well attested in the Old English corpus) fall under the "interpersonal" category described by Sweetser, with the other five more closely related to audial sensation. https://www.doe.utoronto.ca.

[106] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 38–39.

sense of sight and the mind, the understanding of the physical processes effectuating sight

quite likely contributed in a deeper way to the development of this metaphorical meaning.

Given the association between sight and the mind in this model, the development of

seeing coming to mean understanding and knowing was inevitable.

This metaphorical meaning for sight, as with hearing, was in full effect in Old

English. This should not at all be surprising, given my discussion of Alfred's *Soliloquies*

in Chapter Two, in which Alfred, drawing from Augustine, wrote of seeing God that

"Seo gesyhð þonne is angyt"[107] (Sight, then, is understanding). Katherine Hindley, as also

discussed in the previous chapter, has examined both the Old English *Soliloquies* and

Boethius, each of which belongs to the Alfredian translation project, as manifestations of

the metaphor of sight as understanding in early-medieval England.[108] My argument here

introduces the notion that this is only a partial metaphor, and a fuller understanding of

metaphors pertaining to both sight and hearing, those of understanding as well as

obedience, better accounts for Alfred's discomfort with the notion of seeing God in his

Soliloquies translation. This is abundantly clear as Alfred explores the possibility of

attaining a perfect knowledge of God through theophanic experience. In the previous

chapter I discussed the way this text demonstrated the extent to which the mind and sight

were related in the extramissive model of sight. Here, I wish to explore in greater detail

the way in which sight is connected to knowledge, as seeing God is equated with

understanding God throughout Alfred's text. In one Alfredian insertion to the

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[107] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 66.7.

[108] Katherine Hindley, "Sight and Understanding: Visual Imagery as Metaphor in the Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*," in *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early-Modern England*, ed. Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer, Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 44 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 21–35.

Augustinian dialogue, *Gesceadwisness* asks Augustine about his desire to see God:

"Hweðer þu nu wilnige þæt þu hine geseo and swytole ongyte?" (Do you now desire to

see him and plainly understand them?) Augustine responds affirmatively, to which

Gesceadwisness answers, "Heald þonne hys bebodu" [109] (Then keep his commandments).

This exchange illuminates the way in which these metaphorical meanings for the senses

are in play when it comes to seeing God in the early-medieval English mindset. Seeing

God would be to know him, but the appointed method by which mankind may know God

is not through seeing, but through obeying, which is tied not to sight but to hearing.

The difference between these two senses as possible or impossible means of

knowing God is especially evident in *The Order of the World*, a poem from the Exeter

Book written in praise of God's creation of the world. The poem's conclusion outlines

the difference between the saints and angels, who dwell with God in heaven, and

humanity, separated from God on earth:

> Beoð þonne eadge   þa þær in wuniað,
>
> hyhtlic is þæt heorðwerud.   Þæt is herga mæst,
>
> eadigra unrim,   engla þreatas.
>
> Hy geseoð symle   hyra sylfra cyning,
>
> eagum on wlitað,   habbað æghwæs genoh.
>
> Nis him wihte won,   þam þe wuldres cyning
>
> geseoþ in swegle;   him is symbel ond dream
>
> ece unhwylen   eadgum to frofre.
>
> Forþon scyle mon gehycgan   þæt he meotude hyre;

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[109] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 63.25–28.

> æghwylc ælda bearna   forlæte idle lustas,
>
> læne lifes wynne,   fundige him to lissa blisse,
>
> forlæte heteniþa   gehwone sigan
>
> mid synna fyrnum,   fere him to þam sella rice.[110]

(Blessed then are those who dwell therein, joyous is that hearth-troop. That is the greatest of armies, the innumerable blessed, troops of angels. They always see their own king, look on with their eyes, have enough in every respect. There is no lack to them, those who see the king of glory in heaven; an eternal banquet and endless joy is theirs, as a comfort to the blessed. Therefore one must be mindful that he obey the measurer; let each of the children of men forsake idle lusts, the temporary pleasures of life, let him strive for the happiness of grace, let him forsake descending into each wickedness with the transgressions of sins, let him journey to the better kingdom.)

Here, the difference between knowing God and obeying God is stated as the difference between seeing God, one of the blessings of the angels and the blessed who have lived their lives worthy of heaven, and hearing God, through obedience. Sight is emphasized three times as a reward of the righteous. Those in heaven "geseoð symle hyra sylfra cyning" (always see their own king), they "eagum on wlitað" (look on with their eyes) as they view God, and they "wuldres cyning / geseoþ in swegle" (see the king of glory in heaven). Conversely, the duty of those who wish to obtain this reward and see God is to "meotude hyre" (obey the measurer). Hearing God through obedience, the specifics of

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[110] *The Order of the World*, 90–102. Text is according to George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 163–66.

which are then outlined by the poem, is a necessary step, therefore, toward knowing and understanding God by seeing him.

That the sight of God is the reward for the righteous at the end of their faithful lives is also evident in *Guthlac B*, in a passage (already discussed as evidence of early-medieval English belief in extramission in the previous chapter) in which Guthlac is afforded a heavenly vision upon his death:

> Ahof þa his honda,   husle gereorded,
>
> eaðmod þy æþelan gyfle,   swylce he his eagan ontynde,
>
> halge heafdes gimmas,   biseah þa to heofona rice,
>
> glædmod to geofona leanum,   ond þa his gæst onsende
>
> weorcum wlitigne   in wuldres dream.[111]
>
> (Then he lifted up his hand, humble and sustained by means of that noble food,
>
> the eucharist, likewise he opened his eyes, the holy gems of the head, then looked,
>
> glad of mind, upon the kingdom of the heavens, the reward of gifts, and then sent
>
> his spirit on, beautiful in works, into the happiness of glory.)

The timing of this vision—Guthlac is still living, but the vision is immediately followed by his death—makes his experience a miracle befitting a hagiographic narrative. The reward promised to the righteous, living with God in the afterlife and seeing him as the angels do, is granted to the saint in his last living moments, both as recompense for his faithfulness and as evidence of his holiness.

Alfred's *Soliloquies* makes it very clear that seeing God in mortality is unnecessary, even if it is the greatest desire of the human soul. Continuing the

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[111] *Guthlac B*, 1300–1304. Text is according to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, 49–88.

equivocation between sight and knowledge, *Gesceadwisness*, in another Alfredian

insertion not present in Augustine's version, says of theophanic experience (in that

passage discussed in this chapter's opening), "Ðe is creft ealra crefta, þæt is, þæt man

spurige æfter gode and hys hawie and hine geseo"[112] (This is the craft of all crafts, that is,

that one seek to know about God and look at him and see him). Here again, the

connection is clearly made between the sense of sight and the acquisition of knowledge.

Alfred's response suggests that he wishes to learn this "craft of all crafts" and acquire

certain knowledge of God through viewing him, though he is careful to couch the

theophanic experience in mental, rather than physical, terms: "Þu me behete þæt þu me

woldest getecan þæt ic mihte god geseon myd mynes modes ægan swa sweotele swa ic

nu geseo þa sunnan myd mines lichaman ægan"[113] (You promised me that you would

teach me how I might see God with my mind's eyes as clearly as I now see the sun with

my body's eyes). Here, Alfred has expanded a metaphor used by Augustine as an

epistemological touchstone for what can and cannot be ascertained by the senses. Alfred,

in comparing seeing God to seeing the sun, has introduced a new argument: just as the

sun cannot be directly viewed, neither can God. This is indirectly argued by

Gesceadwisness: "Geþence nu þæt þu myhst geseon myd þines lycuman æagan þreo þing

on ðære sunnan. An is þæt heo is. Oðer, þæt heo scynð. Ðridde, þæt heo feala þinga

onlyht myd hyre sciman. . . . *Eall þis þu myht geþencan be gode, and eac micle mare*"[114]

(Consider now that you are able to see three things about the sun with your body's eyes:

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[112] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 69.9–11.

[113] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 69.13–15.

[114] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 69.16–24. Here, italics indicate text introduced by Alfred.

one is that it exists; another, that it shines; a third, that it lights up all things with its rays. . . . *All this you might consider concerning God and also much more*). The comparison to seeing the sun is a clever change from the way the desire to see God was expressed earlier (corresponding to Augustine's version), comparing theophany to seeing the moon: "Ic wolde það he me were cuðre. Ðonne monnan ic geseo þurh mine eaga"[115] (I would that he were more known to me than the moon [which] I see through my eyes). Alfred thus eventually moved on from Augustine's comparison of seeing the moon, which is easily and harmlessly observable by the eyes, to seeing the sun, which is observable only indirectly without damage to the eyes. The argument inherent to Alfred's version, therefore, is that "the craft of all crafts," seeing God, is just as impossible (even through the "eyes of the mind" in Alfred's construction) as staring at the sun. God, like the sun, must be known through indirect evidence.[116] Once again expressing the semantic connection between sight and knowledge observed by Sweetser, Alfred has added, in the same speech by *Gesceadwisness*:

> Ic wene þæt nan man ne si to þam dysig þæt he forði unrotsige þeah he ne mage þas sunnan, þe we lichamlicum eagum onlociað, eallunga geseon and ongytan swilce swilce heo is. Ac ælc fagnað þæs þe læste he ongytan mæg be hys andgytes mæðe. Wel se deð þe wilnað þa ecan sunnan and ælmyhtian to ongytænne. Ac he deð swiðe disilice, gyf he wilnað þæt he hi ealunga ongyte þa hwile þe he in þisse worlde byð.[117]

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[115] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 58.21–22.

[116] Alfred and Augustine each make this argument more explicitly much later in their respective texts, but Alfred has moved the comparison between the impossibility of directly seeing the sun and of seeing God forward to this point in *Soliloquies*.

[117] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 69.28–70.5.

(I suppose that no one would be so unwise as to grieve that he may not see and understand how [God] is, just as we look at the sun with bodily eyes. But each will rejoice that he at least may understand according to the ability of his understanding. Well he does who desires to understand the eternal sun and the Almighty. But he does very unwisely, if he should desire that he understand all while he is in this world.)

Here, the entirety of Alfred's argument concerning the impossibility of theophanies is finally made clear. Though the desire to see and thereby understand God is good, because understanding is so tied to the sense of sight, and wholly understanding God is impossible, seeing him is likewise impossible.

In fact, Alfred was very deliberate in his expression of its impossibility. Hindley observed that despite using sight as a metaphor for understanding, Alfred nevertheless sought not to conflate the two:

In the *Soliloquies*, sight and understanding are kept clearly separated on a metaphorical level, with each element of the process of sight being explicitly equated with an element of the process of understanding. Similarly, sight is understood as functioning as a distinct and separate process from that of understanding, although the two processes are analogous. The author frequently repeats his assertions that God cannot be seen with the bodily senses, and that the body prevents the soul from seeing God during this life. He is adamant that the soul will see God after death, but this is an entirely spiritual form of sight in which the body plays no part.[118]

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[118] Hindley, "Sight and Understanding," 33.

Informed therefore in no small part by an extramissive understanding of sight that, given its close association with the mind, connected seeing with knowledge and understanding, as well as by an understanding of another sense, that of hearing, as representing obedience, Alfred—like many of the Old English translators and adaptors of the Old Testament who either revised or removed theophany episodes—carefully denied the possibility of a corporeal vision of God. This, it must be noted, separates Alfred from his source. Augustine's understanding of the extramissive model for sight, as argued by Margaret Miles, "permits [him]" (in texts other than the *Soliloquies*) "to maintain the possibility of the vision of God, the ultimate goal of spiritual vision, in the present, while still postponing the permanent fulfillment of the vision beyond the limits of the present life."[119] No such possibility exists for Alfred, whose own understanding of sight, similar as it was to Augustine's, did not allow for the possibility of seeing God. Though it would be the *creft ealra crefta*, a theophany was nevertheless impossible during mortality.

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[119] Margaret Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Augustine's *De trinitate* and *Confessions*," *The Journal of Religion* 63/2 (1983): 125–42, at 136.

Chapter 4

The King's Watchful Care: Sight and Power in *Beowulf*

The Identity and Role of Hrothgar's Daughter

Upon his homecoming after defending Hrothgar's court at Heorot, Beowulf presents an account of his heroic deeds to his uncle, the Geatish king Hygelac. Interspersed among the retelling of his fights with Grendel and Grendel's mother is a description of Hrothgar's daughter and her role not only at Heorot but within the broader scope of Hrothgar's *Realpolitik*:

> Hwilum for duguðe   dohtor Hroðgares
>
> eorlum on ende   ealuwæge bær,
>
> þa ic Freaware   fletsittende
>
> nemnan hyrde,   þær hio nægled sinc
>
> hæleðum sealde.   Sio gehaten is,
>
> geong goldhroden,   gladum suna Frodan;
>
> hafað þæs geworden   wine Scyldinga,
>
> rices hyrde,   ond þæt ræd talað,
>
> þæt he mid ðy wife   wælfæhða dæl,
>
> sæcca gesette.   Oft seldan hwær
>
> æfter leodhryre   lytle hwile

bongar bugeð,   þeah seo bryd duge.[1]

(At times, the daughter of Hrothgar bore the alecup before the troop, without

pause, to the warriors. I heard the court residents call her Freawaru as she gave

the studded vessel to the heroes. She, the young gold-adorned one, is promised to

the glorious son of Froda; the friend of the Scyldings, the shepherd of the

kingdom, has brought this about, and reckons it advantageous, that he may settle a

portion of the battles of deadly feuds by means of the woman. Often, there is

seldom a place where the deadly spear rests even a little while after a people's

decay, though the bride be good.)

Before returning to the story of his own exploits, Beowulf follows his description of

Freawaru with an account of the circumstances that ended her brief marriage to Ingeld.

This report, not given in the past tense in Old English but in the present/future tense, may

be summarized thusly: Freawaru is accompanied by Danish retainers when she goes to

Ingeld's hall. Apparently, these Danes arrive at Ingeld's court armed with Heathobard

heirlooms, the spoils of the very war Hrothgar sought to end by linking the two peoples

through royal marriage. An older Heathobard warrior recognizes the sword hanging from

the belt of a Dane as having once belonged to a fallen comrade. He finds the son of his

dead friend and provokes him to take revenge against the son of his father's killer. Finally

the young Heathobard kills Freawaru's retainer and escapes into the country. Violent

passion is stirred in Ingeld, cooling his love for Freawaru. The peace Hrothgar sought

through the marriage of his daughter was thus short-lived, undone by the reminder of

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[1] *Beowulf*, 2020–31. All quotations from *Beowulf* are taken from Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. with 1st and 2nd supplements (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1950).

generational violence between the two peoples. A state of war between the Danes and

Heathobards is renewed. Beowulf concludes his analysis of the temporary, tenuous peace,

stating "Þy ic Heaðo-Beardna hyldo ne telge, / dryhtsibbe dæl Denum unfæcne, /

freondscipe fæstne"[2] (Thus I do not consider the loyalty of the Heathobards to be a

measure of peace with the Danes without deceit, a firm friendship), and then moves on to

tell Hygelac of his fight with Grendel.

Freawaru, embodying Hrothgar's peacemaking effort, occupies a complex space

in the political world of Heorot. Both her role and her identity in these scenes are

important to this dissertation, because a careful analysis will show Freawaru to represent

an early-medieval English metaphor equating sight to power and control. Much else has

been written regarding the name and historical identity of Freawaru, as well as her role

within the narrative of the poem. In fact, there is no consensus on whether the events

surrounding Freawaru's falling out with her husband had already occurred, or if Beowulf

was making a prediction to Hygelac based upon his observations of the state of affairs at

Heorot. Kemp Malone has noted that "both interpretations are grammatically possible,

but each is open to grave objections."[3] To this, Malone added that his own view was that

"Beowulf here was not indulging in prophecy but was telling Hygelac about things that

had already happened."[4] This was a view shared at least by Axel Olrik, who gave no

account of the grammatical tense of Beowulf's telling of the story, but stated at least three

times that Freawaru's wedding to Ingeld occurred before the hero's arrival in Denmark.

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[2] *Beowulf*, 2067–69b.

[3] Kemp Malone, "Ingeld." *Modern Philology* 27/3 (1930): 257–76, at 258–59.

[4] Malone, "Ingeld," 259.

First, speaking of Beowulf's account of the Freawaru and Ingeld episode, Olrik claimed

that "only once does the poet take a look at the struggles that *precede* this happiness and

this well-being"[5] (i.e., the peace brought about by Beowulf's victory over the

Grendelkin), thereby implying that Beowulf was reporting past events to Hygelac when

he recounted the story. Later, using known and conjectured historical dates in an attempt

to date Beowulf's time at Heorot, Olrik reaffirmed this chronology: "If one assumes

Hygelac's year of death, one must attribute the scene of the poem in the Danish royal hall

to about 500 or a few years later. The battle of hatred then falls from about 450 to 510 or

520, Ingeld's wedding to Freawaru around 500."[6] In a later volume, Olrik wrote more

clearly that he interpreted the entirety of Beowulf's account as a report, saying: "that

[Freawaru] has been displaced or even returned home is evident from the fact that in the

poem, she goes to the Danish hall as unmarried and pours for the warriors."[7] Making it

clear that it was at this point, after her marriage had failed, that Freawaru served Beowulf

at Heorot, Olrik asserted, "I must warn against the very common but rather meaningless

claim that what Beowulf here narrates concerning the Danish royal court must be not an

announcement of what happened, but a prediction of future events."[8] He did not elaborate

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[5] Axel Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning: En Oldtidsstudie*, vol. 1, *Rolf Krake og den Ældre Skjoldungrække* (Copenhagen: H. H. Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1903), 13: "Kun en gang kaster digteren et blik på de kampe, der er *gåede forud* for denne lykke og dette velvære."

[6] Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, 1:18–19: "Går man ud fra Hugeleiks dødsår, må man henføre kvadets optrin i den danske kongehal till o. 500 eller få år senere. Hadbardekampen falder da fra o. 450 til 510 eller 520, Ingelds bryllup med Frøvar o. 500."

[7] Axel Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning: En Oldtidsstudie*, vol. 2, *Starkad den Gamle og den Yngre Skjoldungrække* (Copenhagen: H. H. Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1910), 38: "at hun er bleven forskudt eller selv er vendt hjem, fremgår deraf, at hun i digtet går i den danske kongehal som ugift og skænker for kæmperne."

[8] Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, 2:38n1: "Jeg må advare mod den meget gængse, men ret meningslese påstand, at hvad Beovulf her beretter i den danske kongsgård skal være ikke en meddelelse om det skete, men en spådom om fremtidige begivenheder."

further, but given the whole of Olrik's treatment of the Ingeld episode, his reason for

rejecting Beowulf's report as a prophecy is quite likely based on his interpretation of the

chronology of the poem's events. This seems to be the chief of Malone's unnamed "grave

objections" to the interpretation of the Freawaru digression as a prophecy of Beowulf's.[9]

Malone was dedicated to this idea, that despite the grammar of this part of the

poem, Beowulf was speaking of past events when he told Hrothgar about Freawaru's

failed marriage to Ingeld, probably because that interpretation is necessary in order to

support his belief that it was "highly probable that Beowulf actually participated in the

struggle with the Bards."[10] This reading requires such a specific reliance upon circular

logic in order to change not only the apparent tense the poem uses, but also the evident

setting (Malone transferred the breakout of violence to Heorot),[11] that it is no wonder that

scholars since have favored this digressive episode as Beowulf's prediction of future

events, with some even postulating as to why the poet would have Beowulf deliver this

report as a prophecy rather than as a telling of past events. For instance, Kenneth Sisam

suggested that "Beowulf's prediction, which the audience knew to be accurate, was

intended to show his wisdom and foresight."[12] George Clark reached a similar conclusion

(the same year as Sisam), describing Beowulf's report as "prophecy for Hygelac, history

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[9] Malone, "Ingeld," 259.

[10] Malone, *The Literary History of Hamlet: The Early Tradition* (1923; repr., New York: Haskell House, 1964), 84.

[11] For instance, Malone, "Ingeld," 260: "The usual interpretation, according to which the [*fæmnanþegn*] was an attendant of the princess, seems improbable, for why should the princess, in her father's hall, have male attendants? We are further told that the slayer of the maiden-thane succeeded in escaping, since he knew the country well. Evidently it was Denmark, the enemy's country, that he knew well. Had he been at home he would not have needed to escape at all, of course."

[12] Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 48–49.

for the poem's audience."[13] Clark's interpretation focused on the role of the sword in the outbreak of violence, which he identified as simultaneously "treasure, heirloom, trophy, taunt, weapon," but his belief about the prophecy's effect on the audience was essentially the same as Sisam's: "Beowulf's prophetic understanding of that polysemous sword, given heightened impact by the audience's confirmation of the hero's insight, makes it a symbol for the heroic experience."[14]

Such a reading has been carried forward into more recent scholarship as well. Eugene Green interpreted Beowulf's report concerning Freawaru as prophecy, noting that "Beowulf's foreseeing the bloodshed that awaits her men at her husband Ingeld's court has its place in literary tradition," with parallels then outlined between *Beowulf* and *Volsunga Saga*.[15] Green went on to echo the arguments of Sisam and Clark: "That [Beowulf] speaks of the future, moreover, as if traditional texts on the enmities between Heaðo-Bards and Danes were not yet extant, establishes him for the audience as uncommonly prescient. Such discernment in the young Beowulf, a quality of mind for the Anglo-Saxon audience to perceive as remarkable, accords to his words a full measure of respect."[16]

Another interpretation of Beowulf's report as a prediction, albeit for a different narrative purpose, was proposed by John M. Hill. Observing that analysis of the Freawaru scene, such as that proposed by George Clark and Eugene Green, tended to interpret

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[13] George Clark, "Beowulf's Armor," *English Literary History* 32 (1965): 409–41, at 410.

[14] Clark, "Beowulf's Armor," 411.

[15] Eugene Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics 44 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 108.

[16] Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, 112.

Beowulf's "rendition of what is likely to occur . . . as evidence of his maturing sense of the world,"[17] Hill envisioned the Freawaru digression instead as a way for Beowulf to politically distance himself from Hrothgar now that he has returned to the service of Hygelac. Instead of telling Hygelac all the diplomatic details of what the narrator reported happened when Beowulf first arrived at Heorot, culminating in Hrothgar giving Beowulf unprecedented authority to keep watch over his hall, Hill observed that "Beowulf places his story about the diplomacy between peoples, the Freawaru and Ingeld match, just there where one would expect at least passing attention to how he was allowed night-time possession of the hall, in effect, of Hrothgar's '*mund*,'" with the result that he "completely deflects attention to exactly how his service for Hrothgar became established."[18]

The entire Freawaru episode, then, has the effect of *apoplanesis*, a way for Beowulf to reframe his heroism not as the result of loyalty to Hrothgar, which Beowulf glosses over in order to foretell the outcome of Freawaru's marriage, but instead, as Hill concluded, "largely as reprisal for Hondscio's fate, rather than doing the will of the Danes, and serio-comically as resistance on his part to being devilishly wronged, shamed, and thus ignominiously treated."[19] The prediction is not, therefore, in Hill's estimation, made merely in order to enhance the audience's (and at the same time Hygelac's) perception of Beowulf's wisdom, but in order that Beowulf might deliberately draw attention away from details that might be troublesome to his king.

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[17] John M. Hill, *The Narrative Pulse of Beowulf: Arrivals and Departures*, Toronto Old English Series 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 71.

[18] Hill, *The Narrative Pulse of Beowulf*, 72.

[19] Hill, *The Narrative Pulse of Beowulf*, 72.

Much scholarship has also identified Beowulf's commentary on Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld as a prophecy, but without providing any reason the poet would attribute such a gift to Beowulf in this scene. For example, Tom Shippey wrote that "the case of Freawaru is predicted apparently correctly to be a failure."[20] Richard North described Beowulf's telling as "a fully formed vision of Freawaru's wedding plans" and "a prediction about Hrothgar's daughter."[21] Mary Garrison, analyzing Ingeld's role rather than Freawaru's, noted that "it is Beowulf himself who explains Ingeld's story as a prophecy."[22] Peter S. Baker twice labeled Beowulf's report a "prediction."[23] And similarly, Maryjane Osborn has written that in Beowulf's report to Hygelac, the poem's hero "foretells a part of [Freawaru's] story to come, as he envisions it."[24] Thus, even in light of Axel Olrik's attempt at chronologizing the poem's events using historical touchstones, or Malone's placement of Beowulf at the outbreak of violence reported to Hygelac, both of which arguments require the Freawaru/Ingeld episode to have happened in the narrative's past, the more common reading tends to be a face-value interpretation of the tense of the Freawaru passage as indication that it is a prediction, with some scholars interpreting this to mean that, because the audience was familiar with the outcome of Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld, the result would be the audience's recognition

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[20] Tom Shippey, "Wicked Queens and Cousin Strategies in Beowulf and Elsewhere," *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001): http://www.heroicage.org/issues/5/Shippey1.html (accessed 8 October 2021).

[21] Richard North, *The Origins of Beowulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110.

[22] Mary Garrison, "'Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?'," in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, vol. 1, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 237–59, at 243.

[23] Peter S. Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 20 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 19, 63.

[24] Marijane Osborn, "Princess Freawaru and Hamlet's Other Uncle," *Medium Ævum* 89/2 (2020): 356–72, at 359.

of Beowulf's wisdom and foresight.

Perhaps nothing in this digressive episode has drawn more attention than the role and identity of Hrothgar's daughter Freawaru. An early analysis of her role in this scene, and in the politics of Heorot, is seen in Richard Burton's essay, "Woman in Old English Poetry." The title betrays Burton's purpose, which was to paint from an analysis of all female characters in Old English poetry a singular archetype of the early-medieval English woman. Burton's reading of Freawaru had her "like her mother . . . playing Ganymede to the revellers at Stag Horn,"[25] suggesting thereby that the two women's role in distributing drinks at Heorot amounted to little more than servitude. Burton did, though, identify Freawaru's role in Hrothgar's politicking: "In her person the poet once more exemplifies the function of the sex in allaying bad blood and uniting warring tribes."[26] Much of Burton's analysis is indeed puzzling, even outside the context of scholarly biases of the late-nineteenth century. For instance, rather than attribute the failure of Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld to the renewal of generational violence, as is very clear in the poem, Burton blamed the husband's tendency toward "inconstancy," thereby minimizing the role played by the renewal of violence in the marriage's end: "As not seldom happens, the intertribal trouble thus appeased by the union of Freaware and Ingild was renewed, when, after a season (alas! the inconstancy of human nature) the husband's wife-love had cooled down in the face of overwhelming cares."[27] Additionally,

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[25] Richard Burton, "Woman in Old English Poetry," *The Sewanee Review* 4 (1895): 1–14, at 7.

[26] Burton, "Woman in Old English Poetry," 7.

[27] Burton, "Woman in Old English Poetry," 7–8. Burton used the spelling "Freaware," as the only appearance of the name in the poem is written thusly in the accusative case.

Burton's description of Freawaru as "the winsome daughter of Hrothgar,"[28] has little

basis in the poem. Beowulf accords two adjectives to Freawaru: *geong*, or young, and

goldhroden, or gold-adorned.[29] Winsome, or *wynsum* in Old English, is a word employed

by the poet twice, but never to describe Freawaru or any other woman in the poem: it

describes the convivial conversation of the men feasting at Heorot (*word wæron

wynsume*),[30] and a ship moored on a beach (*wudu wynsuman*).[31] Nevertheless, Burton's

identification of Freawaru's role as "uniting warring tribes" in marriage is indisputable,

and even affirmed in the description of her as *goldhroden*. Of this, and the same adjective

used to describe Modthrytho, Helen Damico wrote, "it alludes to the ceremonial

adornment with which the bride might be arrayed. At the moment both maidens are given

over to their respective young champions, they are *goldhroden*, at once exhibiting

tangible personal wealth and standing as a metaphor for the treasure itself."[32] Such is

Freawaru's role, then. Central to her father's attempt to make peace with the

Heathobards, the Danish princess finds herself a symbolic treasure promised to an enemy

people.

This is a precarious predicament. The poem gives another example of a failed

peace-weaving marriage in Hildeburh, who, caught up in a different blood feud,

illustrates the plight of Freawaru. Of Hildeburh, Jane Chance wrote, "the peace pledge

must accept a passive role precisely because the ties she knots bind *her*—she *is* the knot,

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[28] Burton, "Woman in Old English Poetry," 7.

[29] *Beowulf*, 2025a.

[30] *Beowulf*, 612a.

[31] *Beowulf*, 1919a.

[32] Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 74.

the pledge of peace . . . thus Hildeburh appropriately mourns the loss of her symbolic tie at the pyre, the failure of her self as peace pledge, the loss of her identity."[33] Though the poet attributes no such mourning to Freawaru, her situation is ultimately the same, and Beowulf's account to Hygelac, whether report or prophecy, carries a mournful tone as he describes a failed peace pledge, a once-queen and princess without purpose, a knot that has become undone—not a peace weaver, as it were, but an unraveled peace weaving, an object rather than an agent.

Some scholars have argued that Freawaru's function as peace-weaving wife is complicated by the presence of Beowulf at the Danish court. Eugene Green observed that "had the poet brought her into the scenes at Heorot, her availability as a bride would have possibly qualified Hroðgar and Wealhþeow's different stances on [Beowulf's] eligibility for the kingship. Extraordinary bravery wins a king's stalwart a royal bride. . . .Yet why the poet eschews alluding to Freawaru while Beowulf is among the Danes has to be speculative."[34] Green thereby seemed to suggest that Freawaru's presence in the poem here, in the form of a retelling and then speculative prediction, rather than where the events first unfolded, was the result of the poet's need to distance Beowulf, a potential rival heir to Hrothgar's throne, from Freawaru, the most obviously available path to it. That distance is both spatial, with her entering the scene at Hrothgar's court only after Beowulf has returned to Hygelac's court, as well as temporal, with Beowulf narrating her into events set in the past and future, but never in the present.

The need for such distance, argued Richard North, might have been a result of the

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[33] Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 100.

[34] Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, 108.

poet's integration of the fictional Beowulf and his fights with the Grendelkin into the historical story of Hrothgar and Heorot hall. Beowulf cannot be married to Freawaru, because "the tradition, as we have seen it, does not . . . allow their marriage to take place."[35] North's interpretation of the Freawaru scene was a more fully developed path to the aforementioned argument posited by Green that Hrothgar and Wealhtheow had differences of opinion on the suitability of Beowulf as a match for Freawaru. North's close reading of the poem highlighted these differences of opinion wherever they appeared in both the poem's initial telling and Beowulf's later retelling of the happenings at Heorot. The poem implies that the greatest point of contention between the king and queen, argued North, was that while Hrothgar wishes to name Beowulf his heir and marry the Geatish hero to his daughter, as evidenced by his promise of a "niwe sibbe"[36] (new familial bond) between himself and Beowulf,[37] Wealhtheow remains committed to forging peace with the Heathobards as "the prime mover of Freawaru's betrothal to Ingeld."[38]

Whoever the driving force behind the peace-seeking marriage, Beowulf makes it clear in his own account that it was (or would be) a failed effort, exculpating Freawaru, of course, by stating that this should have been a foreseeable outcome no matter how well-suited Freawaru might have been to the task: "Oft seldan hwær / æfter leodhryre lytle hwile / bongar bugeð, / þeah seo bryd duge"[39] (Often, there is seldom a place where the

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[35] North, *The Origins of Beowulf*, 123.

[36] *Beowulf*, 949a.

[37] North, *The Origins of Beowulf*, 103.

[38] North, *The Origins of Beowulf*, 105.

[39] *Beowulf*, 2029b–31.

deadly spear rests even a little while after a people's decay, though the bride be good).

From some of the earliest scholarship on the poem, this failure has been taken to be a

criticism of Hrothgar's leadership as king. Ludvig Schrøder thus wrote of this scene,

"What I would like to emphasize is that the fragility of King Hrothgar's hall takes on a

new expression in that he wanted to give his daughter Freawaru to the son of a hostile

Viking in order to buy himself peace," and then compared the marriage to other

shortcomings at Heorot, such as the attacks of Grendel and the consequential

embarrassment of a retinue of soldiers who make feast in the magnificent hall by day, but

do not possess the courage to defend it by night.[40] It is easy to see how this scene could

be interpreted as critical of Hrothgar, with the stakes so high and the outcome so

disastrous. The Freawaru episode is in fact the second of the poet's allusions to the

disastrous end awaiting Heorot hall. When recounting Hrothgar's construction of the hall

very early in the poem, the poet foretells its burning at the hands of Ingeld: "Sele hlifade /

heah ond horngeap; heaðowylma bad, / laðan liges — ne wæs hit lenge þa gen / þæt se

ecghete aþumsweoran / æfter wælniðe wæcnan scolde"[41] (The hall towered, high and

horn-gabled; it awaited hostile flames, hateful fire — it was not yet long that sword-

hatred should arise between the oath-swearers as a consequence of battle-slaughter). In

the feud, neither of the oath-swearers is presented as blameless; Ingeld renewed the

violence, but Hrothgar's attempt to permanently end the bloodshed through marriage was

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[40] Ludvig Schrøder, *Om Bjovulfs-Drapen: Efter en række foredrag paa folkehöskjolen i Askov i august 1875* (Copenhagen: Karl Schønberg, 1875), 60–61: "Hvad jeg vilde lægge vægt på, er dette, at skrøbeligheden i kong Hrodgars borg får et nyt udtryk deri, at han har villet give sin datter Freyvor til sønnen af en fjendtlig viking for derved at tilkjöbe sig selv fred." Schrøder's reference to the Heathobards as "Vikings" is best understood in light of the account of the feud in *Widsith*, which likewise refers to them as "*wicinga cynn*" (47b).

[41] *Beowulf*, 82b–85.

in fact the impetus for its renewal.

Peter S. Baker, however, disagreed with Schrøder that the marriage of Freawaru to Ingeld was a sign of desperation on the part of Hrothgar. In Baker's estimation, the marriage was doomed to fail, not because it was arranged from a position of weakness, but quite the opposite. Key to understanding Baker's conclusion is his assertion that "marriage must be understood as gift, functioning like other gifts in an early medieval economy that was still dominated more by gift than by trade."[42] This means that brides such as Freawaru occupied an economic space like a gift, one that "is not defined by whether one pays for it . . . but rather by whether it creates a relationship between those who exchange it."[43] That relationship between the Scyldings and Heathobards was not one of equals. "With the gift of a queen, a king both acquires and confers honour, but more significantly, he imposes obligation and defines his relationship with the recipient as that of an overlord."[44] Thus, the peace-seeking marriage arranged by Hrothgar was not meant to end the generational violence through the forging of familial bonds between the two feuding peoples, but rather, by coercing the Heathobards into subjection to Hrothgar. Freawaru, then, was given to Ingeld "to be an ambassador of Danish power and a foreign intervention in the Heathobard court, a material reminder of obligations owed primarily by Ingeld to Hrothgar and not the other way around."[45] And Hrothgar did not send Freawaru unaccompanied. "The armed Danish retinue that accompanies her into the

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[42] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 160.

[43] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 162.

[44] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 163.

[45] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 165.

hall . . . is a projection of the power that she represents."[46] Thus, with Freawaru's very

presence at Ingeld's court "calculated" by Hrothgar "to remind a king of his humiliation,"

it is no wonder the marriage did not succeed at ending the violence, but rather, as a very

visible symbol of the Heathobards' ancestral losses to the Scyldings, and an actual agent

of Hrothgar's subjugation of their kingdom, Freawaru became a provocation to renew the

feud.

Still, whether arranged from a position of weakness or strength, the marriage was

both brought about and considered a wise strategy by Hrothgar. The blame for its failure

to quell the bloodfeud can only be laid at his feet. Hence, R. E. Kaske renewed the

reading of this passage as a criticism of Hrothgar, observing that Hrothgar's failures in

the poem arise as a product of age: "With the waning of his own *fortitudo*, violence no

longer compels his attention as a force to be foreseen, guarded against where possible,

and sometimes fought directly. He now relies chiefly on counsel, kingly munificence,

diplomacy, and wise endurance—all valuable means in themselves, but indifferent

substitutes for *fortitudo* as a defense against the forces of naked violence."[47] Instead of

relying on a balanced interplay between the two heroic qualities of wisdom and strength,

Hrothgar is overly dependent upon wisdom, and thus problems requiring violent

resolution go unsolved under his leadership. These problems, "such mistakes as the

marriage of Freawaru to Ingeld,"[48] in Kaske's estimation, like Schrøder's, are all

interconnected, all signs of Hrothgar's failure to rule effectively. These evidences of

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[46] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 165.

[47] R. E. Kaske, "*Sapientia et Fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf," *Studies in Philology* 55/3 (1958): 423–56, at 436.

[48] Kaske, "*Sapientia et Fortitudo*," 435.

Hrothgar's shortcomings include, according to Kaske, "his failure to foresee the likelihood of vengeance for Grendel, though he had known there were a pair of monsters . . . the dramatically aimless and ineffectual—though richly poetic—quality of his speech after the fresh violence . . . and just possibly his leadership of the *witan* who form the mistaken judgment about the violent action beneath the mere."[49] To Kaske, then, as to Schrøder, the marriage of Freawaru was another in a long list of symptoms plaguing the Scyldings, the aetiology of which may be traced to the failed leadership of Hrothgar.

Tom Shippey also detected criticism of Hrothgar in the Freawaru episode. Shippey identified the primary duty of queens Wealhtheow, Freawaru, and Hildeburh in *Beowulf* as "what one might call the queen's 'international' aspect, that of 'weaving peace' between hostile societies," noting that among these three, only Wealhtheow seems to have succeeded at this role.[50] Comparing the marriage of Freawaru and Ingeld to historic early-medieval English royal marriages, Shippey determined that "the successful strategy for Hrothgar might have been not to waste Freawaru on a foreign and less immediate threat, by having her marry a stranger, but to have her defuse a closer threat by marrying her first cousin Hrothulf."[51] But this criticism might be unfair, even given the benefit of knowing the outcome of Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld. Though Hrothulf, Hrothgar's nephew, is depicted in *Beowulf* as a snake in the grass, lying in wait for the opportunity to treacherously strike at his cousins and seize the Scylding throne (this seems to be an anxiety at Heorot that Wealhtheow attempts to assuage in a public speech

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[49] Kaske, "*Sapientia et Fortitudo*," 436.

[50] Shippey, "Wicked Queens."

[51] Shippey, "Wicked Queens."

addressed to Hrothgar),[52] the poem stops short of indicating whether this treachery ever did in fact take place. Thus, although it is easy to weigh the benefits of a hypothetical alternative marriage scenario for Freawaru, it is hard to argue that the poet is criticizing Hrothgar for failing to seek peace by arranging a marriage to Hrothulf that the poem never suggests was even a possibility.

Yet other scholars have noticed that, because this portion of the poem is spoken by Beowulf, it appears that not only is the poem critical of Hrothgar and his role in Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld, but so too is Beowulf. Thus, Peter Clemoes noted of Beowulf's narration of the story to Hygelac that "exploration of the issue through narrative led him to an opinion different from Hrothgar's own."[53] While a differing opinion alone does not constitute criticism, Clemoes added that the way in which the poem presents Beowulf delivering this story suggests that he was right and Hrothgar, by extension, was wrong in this instance: "Two ingredients coalesce in this incitement: psychological drama, directly and intimately portrayed, and an ancient historical process of transmitting social passion from generation to generation. The narrative is at once specific and symbolic. The combination irresistibly urges the rightness of Beowulf's opinion."[54] Similarly, Eugene Green argued that, although Beowulf is generally depicted as genuinely praising Hrothgar, this scene "portrays Beowulf as a critic of Hroðgar's leadership, a frankness unwarranted in Heorot but welcome to Hygelac."[55] Green did

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[52] *Beowulf*, 1169–87.

[53] Peter Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 193.

[54] Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language*, 195.

[55] Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, 110.

observe, though, that Beowulf's criticism of Hrothgar did not rise above "a skeptical account of marriage as a dependable surety" which pointed out "an insightful gap between aspirations for peace and probable actualities."[56] That gap was insurmountable, and the poet attributes blame to Hrothgar, delivered through the voice of Beowulf. Thus, North too concluded that "this is a speech above all critical of Hrothgar's wisdom."[57] These are essentially the same conclusions to the extent that leadership and wisdom are inseparable. Here, even Hrothgar's greatest ally cannot help but criticize the state of affairs at Heorot.

Much has been said not only of the political role of Freawaru at both the Danish and Heathobard courts, but also concerning her historical identity. Kemp Malone was, among scholars publishing in English, an early devotee of the idea that Freawaru was not the true name of the historical daughter of Hrothgar. Instead, Malone argued, the character in *Beowulf* is analogous to the historical person of Hrút (Latin Ruta) found in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*.[58] Malone provided extensive evidence for the change of name in *Beowulf*. First, he posited, "Hrút rather than Freawaru is probably the historical form, since it alliterates with the names of the other Scyldings."[59] Then, citing Axel Olrik, who had earlier suggested a connection between *Beowulf*'s Freawaru and Saxo's Hrút, Malone noted that Hrút "actually occurs as a woman's name in the Scandian monuments . . . whereas no such name as Freyvör (Freawaru) has ever been found."[60] As

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[56] Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, 113.

[57] North, *The Origins of Beowulf*, 110.

[58] Malone, *Literary History of Hamlet*, 84–85.

[59] Malone, *Literary History of Hamlet*, 85.

[60] Malone, *Literary History of Hamlet*, 85.

to why the poet would see the need to change her name in the poem, Malone saw two potential reasons. First, though, he demonstrated that alliteration must not have been a concern, as *fletsittende* in the b-verse, alliterating with *Freawaru*, could have been replaced with *healsittende* to alliterate with Hrút without any discrepancy in meaning or in rhythm.[61] The reasons, then, might have been that "the word itself, which means 'she-goat,' must have been felt as singularly inappropriate for a king's daughter, who by virtue of her high station deserved a high-sounding name," and that in Old English, "the verb *hrutan* 'snore' might be associated with it."[62] Over time, Malone's theories about Freawaru and Hrút evolved. He repeated these potential objections of the poet to the name Hrút, and added a third (albeit the one that he found to be the least likely): "There seems to have existed in OE an adjective *hrut* 'dark-colored,' but that is a rare word and can hardly have influenced our poet."[63] Here, Malone expressed that in addition to these objections to the name Hrút, it was possible that the poet "did not remember the name of Hroðgar's daughter."[64] He then elaborated on the significance of the historical name of Hrút, which would have been especially important to Hrothgar: "The interesting thing to note about the etymology is the fact that the two names *Heorot* and *Hrút* stand in ablaut to each other. Has it any significance that Hroðgar named his hall *Heorot* and his daughter *Hrút*? Certainly *Heorot*, with its initial *h*, is characteristic for the Scylding dynasty, and one cannot dismiss the possibility that *Hrút* goes back to a noun, not

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[61] Malone, *Literary History of Hamlet*, 86.

[62] Malone, *Literary History of Hamlet*, 86.

[63] Kemp Malone, "The Daughter of Healfdene," in *Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber*, ed. Kemp Malone and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), 135–58, at 151.

[64] Malone, "The Daughter of Healfdene," 151.

preserved to us, which meant 'doe.'"[65] Eventually, Malone would go on to speculate on

the meaning of the name Freawaru as well. At one point, he espoused the view that

Freawaru wasn't intended by the poet to be understood to be the princess's proper name

at all: "It seems clearly better, then, to explain *freawaru* as a title or epithet. The word

means 'lordly (or gracious) awareness,' and is an example of litotes: the princess was

more than aware of her guests; she was attentive to them. To be compared is the modern

'Royal Highness,' although *freawaru* has a particular appropriateness in the passage

where it occurs."[66] Eventually, though, Malone would move on from the idea that

freawaru was a title for royalty rather than a name assigned to her by the poet. Noting

that other Old English names beginning with *Frea-*, namely *Frealaf* and *Freawine*,

referred to mythical characters rather than historical people,[67] Malone eventually adopted

the idea that "the name *Freawaru* served to give the Ingeld episode a legendary flavor,

and it may well be that such was the poet's intention when he coined the name. Certainly

he had no hesitation in blending legendary with historical matter; indeed, this blending is

a characteristic feature of the poem."[68] Though Malone oscillated on whether Freawaru

was the intended name of the character or just a royal title, it is clear that over a period of

seventeen years, he remained dedicated to the idea that Freawaru was a substitute for the

historical name of Hrút.

   This idea, though, was not universally accepted. Frederick Klaeber was especially

resistant to the notion that Freawaru's actual name was Hrút, writing dismissively that

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[65] Malone, "The Daughter of Healfdene," 152.

[66] Malone, "Ingeld," 258.

[67] Kemp Malone, "Freawaru," *English Literary History* 7 (1940): 39–44, at 40.

[68] Malone, "Freawaru," 42.

"Malone's skepticism as to the authenticity of the name Freawaru . . . need not be shared."[69] That skepticism has been carried into *Klaeber's Beowulf: Fourth Edition*, whose editors noted simply that there was not "sufficient reason to doubt the authenticity of the name."[70] Klaeber's objection seems to have been rooted in his treatment of another woman's name in *Beowulf*. Line 62 of the poem is metrically deficient (though undamaged in the manuscript); evidently the name of Healf-Dene's daughter, who in addition to being sister to Hrothgar was married to the Swedish king Onela, was omitted, along with the first part of her husband's name, by the scribe. Since his earliest edition of the poem, Klaeber had argued that "the name of the daughter (which need not alliterate with the names of her brothers and father, cp. Freawaru) apparently began with a vowel," in order to fit metrically and alliteratively within the reconstructed line.[71] Thus, it seems that Klaeber was resistant to Freawaru's true identity being Hrút because he found evidence elsewhere in the poem that alliterative names weren't necessary among daughters in the Scylding dynasty.

Nevertheless, other scholars found support for Malone's argument. Noting the dearth of named father/daughter pairs in Old English poetry,[72] Henry Bosley Woolf turned to historical records naming members of dynastic families from the various early-

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[69] Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. with 1st and 2nd supplements (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1950), 201n2022.

[70] R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 229n2022.

[71] Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 1st ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1922), 127n62.

[72] Henry Bosley Woolf, "The Naming of Women in Old English Times," *Modern Philology* 36/2 (1938): 113–20, at 115. Outside of *Beowulf*, Woolf identified *Widsith* as the only example of Old English poetry containing any named Germanic father/daughter pairs, and only one at that. Deliciously, the names of Eadwine and his daughter Ealhhild alliterate.

medieval English kingdoms in order to test Klaeber's assertion that Freawaru's name need not be questioned on the basis of its lack of alliteration with the Scylding rulers, and ultimately found that a clear majority, "forty-nine out of sixty father-daughter pairs in the Old English royal families are marked by alliteration."[73] The difficulty with women's names in *Beowulf*, Woolf noted, is caused by "the absence of women's names from the genealogies of the Geats and Swedes, and the failure of these two Danish women's names [i. e., the daughters of Healfdene and Hrothgar] to alliterate," and Woolf provided examples of alliterative women's names from the poem in Hildeburh (the daughter of Hoc) and Hygd (the daughter of Hæreth).[74] Woolf thus found sufficient evidence from within the poem, and from Old English naming practices, to agree with Malone that "Freawaru is to be looked upon as a complimentary title used by the English poet instead of Hrut, the true name of Hrothgar's daughter which shows the expected alliteration."[75] It seems, then, that Klaeber's objection to Malone's calling into question the historical authenticity of the name Freawaru was not made with the strongest evidence.

Recent scholarship agrees. Marijane Osborn has also rejected the name Freawaru as the historical name of Hrothgar's daughter, though she reached a different conclusion regarding Freawaru's actual identity than did Malone. Like Malone, Osborn posited that the name Freawaru "may reflect her position in Heorot (much as the name 'Widsith' reflects his role in the poem with that title), perhaps indicating the traditional occupation of a young princess."[76] But Osborn rejected Hrút as the original form of the name

[73] Woolf, "The Naming of Women," 120.

[74] Woolf, "The Naming of Women," 115.

[75] Woolf, "The Naming of Women," 115.

[76] Osborn, "Princess Freawaru," 361.

Latinized as Ruta by Saxo on the grounds that "*hrút* is an Icelandic word meaning 'ram'

(male sheep), so it is clearly inappropriate as a woman's name."[77] Thus objecting to the

name along similar lines that Malone had proposed for the *Beowulf* poet's rejection of it,

Osborn sought a different solution: "Saxo's Latin name Ruta could well be a calque on

the *-rutha* element of the more familiar Scandinavian name 'Gerutha'. . . . The Scylding

princess called (or designated) Freawaru in *Beowulf*, who occupies a place in the feud

similar to Saxo's Ruta, may be perceived as analogous to Hamlet's mother Gerutha

whom we know as Shakespeare's Gertrude."[78] Although this creates a problem that

Malone had sought to resolve in the first place, namely that Freawaru's name did not

alliterate with her father's, Osborn's argument raises the possibility of intriguing

coincidence between these two great masterpieces of English literature, separated by at

least six hundred years.

The meaning of the name Freawaru, as it does indeed appear to be an invention of

the poet rather than a historical name, is critical to interpreting this scene. Several

scholars have broken the compound name into its component parts for analysis. Frederick

Klaeber, for instance, from his earliest edition of the poem, noted that the second half of

the name means "watchful care."[79] Maria Boehler provided definitions for each part of

the name. The first, *frea*, means "lord, master, king, *dominus*."[80] The second, *waru*,

means "protection, or a feminine inflection of the adjective *wær*, 'alert, aware'; both

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[77] Osborn, "Princess Freawaru," 361.

[78] Osborn, "Princess Freawaru," 361.

[79] Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 1st ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1922), 405.

[80] Maria Boehler, *Die altenglischen Frauennamen*, Germanische Studien 98 (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1930), 240: "Herr, Gebieter, König, *dominus*."

belong to the same root."[81] The same year, Kemp Malone, as noted above, combined the meanings of each compound into an interpretation of the entire name: "The word means 'Lordly (or gracious) awareness.'"[82] Malone would later provide another interpretation of the name's meaning: "The element *-waru* means 'protection,' and, by personalization, 'protector.' Since *freawaru* is a feminine noun it is to be translated 'lady and protectress' rather than 'lord and protector.'"[83] Here, Malone revisited his earlier argument that Freawaru might have been a general early-medieval English royal title, rather than a proper name: "One may reasonably presume (though not, of course, with certainty) that it served as an epithet, applicable to queens and princesses, before the *Beowulf* poet took it and made of it a royal name. The other possibility is that the poet simply invented the name."[84] Malone's transference of the meaning of the second name "by personalization" from noun to agent is in line with Henning Kaufmann's analysis of the component parts of Germanic names. Kaufmann wrote that "As the ending of a personal name, our stem is a *nomen agentis*: male *$-w\breve{a}raz$*, 'the protector;" female *$w\breve{a}r\bar{o}$*."[85]

The importance of vision to this second element of the name Freawaru was most evident in Samuel Kroesch's analysis of the word's use in Germanic languages. Kroesch suggested the meaning "protect, guard, watch, care for, pay attention to, perceive."[86] He

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[81] Boehler, *Die altenglischen Fraunnamen*, 241: "Schutz, oder weibliche Flexionsform des Adj. 'wær = klug, gewahr'; beide gehören zur gleichen Wurzel."

[82] Malone, "Ingeld," 258.

[83] Kemp Malone, "Royal Names in Old English Poetry," *Names* 1 (1953): 153–62, at 159.

[84] Malone, "Royal Names," 159.

[85] Henning Kaufmann, *Ergänzungsband zu Ernst Förstemann, Altdeutsche Personennamen* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968), 386: "Als PN-Endglied ist unser Stamm nomen agentis: männl. *-wăraz - 'der Wahrer'; weibl. *wărō."

[86] Samuel Kroesch, "The Semasiological Development of Words for 'Perceive, Understand, Think, Know,' in the Older Germanic Dialects," *Modern Philology* 8/4 (1911): 461–510, at 486.

also found that seeing was especially present in cognates in Middle Danish and Middle Swedish, and that compounds utilizing the word in Old High German, Middle High German, Middle Low German, and Middle Dutch, "all have the meaning 'perceive'."[87]

Synthesizing these interpretations of Freawaru's name, it can be said that the name means "king-like watchful protector." I wish to emphasize the watchfulness hit upon by Klaeber and emphasized by Kroesch, as it encapsulates an important duty ascribed to kingship. In Chapter Two, I noted the depictions of kings in Germanic literature and art which contained descriptions of shining eyes, with particular attention to the extramissive nature of these depictions. Here, I would add that sight in these instances functions as a symbol of the king's power and dominion. The name Freawaru, then, draws attention to Hrothgar's responsibility to be a watchful protector of his people. But, applied to someone other than Hrothgar, the name can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, the name may highlight Freawaru's function as an agent and representative of Ingeld's submission to Hrothgar's dominion. This aligns well with Peter S. Baker's aforementioned interpretation of Freawaru's role in the poem, which was "to be an ambassador of Danish power and a foreign intervention in the Heathobard court, a material reminder of obligations owed primarily by Ingeld to Hrothgar and not the other way around."[88] The name given to her by the poet, with the meaning of "kingly watchful protector," encapsulates this role: Freawaru is an extension of Hrothgar's watchfulness, her presence at Ingeld's court an extension of Hrothgar's eyes asserting Scylding power and dominance over the Heathobards. A study by Javier E. Díaz-Vera demonstrates this.

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[87] Kroesch, "The Semasiological Development of Words," 486.

[88] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 165.

Díaz-Vera argued that "Old English establishes a strong connection between the lexical domains of 'vision/touching' and 'control/possession', so that a perceiver can control an external object, place or event with the eyes in the same fashion as they can handle it with the hands."[89] Sight, in such a conceptualization, essentially grants a viewer the same power as physical possession: "A direct consequence of visual perception . . . is that the perceiver produces an effect on the object of perception under his/her control (protecting it, guiding it or changing its trajectory)."[90] Thus, the marriage of Freawaru to Ingeld represents far more than Hrothgar's attempt to secure peace merely by intermingling the Scylding and Heathobard ruling families. The introduction of a Scylding watcher in the person of Freawaru to the Heathobard court acts as an extension of Hrothgar's powerful and controlling gaze. Protection and even guidance are intended in the meaning of the name Freawaru, but Díaz-Vera's other "effect" of sight, that of "changing [the] trajectory" of what is being viewed, is certainly understood by the Heathobards who are watched by Hrothgar's daughter. Beowulf's prediction of Hrothgar's failure to end the feud, which the poem assures will happen, may be rooted in his disapproval of Hrothgar's wisdom- and counsel-based approach to governance. Beowulf's own differing approach will become more apparent as he casts his own powerful gaze later in life in contrast to Hrothgar's.

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[89] Javier E. Díaz-Vera, "Coming to Past Senses: Vision, Touch and their Metaphors in Anglo-Saxon Language and Culture," in *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early-Modern England*, ed. Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer, Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 44 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 36–66, at 43.

[90] Díaz-Vera, "Coming to Past Senses," 43.

Sight as Power in *Beowulf* and Beyond

Manifestations of sight as a representation of power abound in *Beowulf*. One such example is Grendel stalking Heorot, scenes which also received discussion in Chapter Two of this dissertation. When Grendel is first introduced in the narrative, the narrator asserts the monster's power in the Scylding great hall: "Swa rixode, / ond wið rihte wan, / ana wið eallum, / oð þæt idel stod / husa selest"[91] (So he ruled, and contended against right, alone against all, until the greatest of houses stood empty). Though he *rixode* (ruled) through bloodshed and murder, sight features prominently as Grendel invades Heorot, where Beowulf lies in watchful anticipation of battle:

> him of eagum stod
>
> ligge gelicost   leoht unfæger.
>
> Geseah he in recede   rinca manige,
>
> swefan sibbegedriht   samod ætgædere,
>
> magorinca heap.[92]
>
> (a horrible light, most like a flame, issued from his eyes. In the hall he saw many men, a sleeping company of kinsmen gathered together, a band of warriors.)

Here, as noted in Chapter Two, the poet is participating in a greater Germanic tradition of representing a ruler's power through a menacing, shining gaze. Edith Marold noted that this "motif, that the sharpness of the eyes stands as a characteristic of a king, can be found in various accounts of migrant Germanic tribes by ancient authors."[93] In Chapter

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[91] *Beowulf*, 144–46a.

[92] *Beowulf*, 726b–30a.

[93] Edith Marold, "Die Augen des Herrschers," in *Beretning fra syttende tværfaglige vikingesymposium*, ed. Dietrich Meier (Moesgård, Denmark: Hikuin, 1998), 7–29, at 11: "Das Motiv, daß die Schärfe der Augen

Two, I drew attention to the extramissive nature of the imagery of such depictions of a ruler's gaze; here, I wish to emphasize the connection between Grendel looking over Heorot and the men he is about to attack as a manifestation of Grendel's status as the self-appointed, and, until this very moment, uncontested ruler of Heorot. The light streaming from the monster's eyes stands as a visual representation of his power, emphatically demonstrating Grendel's dominion.

And Grendel's assertive gaze is met with Beowulf's own challenging look. As the rest of the Geatish warriors sleep in Heorot, Beowulf lies awake: "ac he wæccende wraþum on andan / bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges"[94] (but watching for the wrathful one in hatred, he awaited, bulging in mind, the result of battle). Having been granted control of Heorot by Hrothgar, an evidently unprecedented transfer of power at the Scylding court, Beowulf asserts this control through his own watchful gaze. Here, Beowulf obeys Hrothgar's charge that he "Hafa nu ond geheald husa selest, / gemyne mærþo, mægen-ellen cyð, /waca wið wraþum!"[95] (Have now and keep the best of houses, bear honor in mind, show strong courage, watch for the enemy!) Here, watchful sight is not only a symbol of a ruler's power, as with the depiction of Grendel, but is also explicitly stated as a responsibility of the ruler. It seems that the emphatic depictions of kings' shining gazes noted by Marold may have evolved from such an understanding of the duties of a leader. Beowulf fulfills this responsibility as he watches Grendel's approach of Heorot. That the two adversaries are depicted gazing over the same space

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als Charakteristikum eines Königs gilt, findet sich in verschiedenen Berichten antiker Autoren über Völkerwanderungsstämme."

[94] *Beowulf*, 708–9.

[95] *Beowulf*, 657–60a.

they both claim to control dramatically foreshadows the ensuing violent struggle for Heorot.

Such tension between two parties vying for sight and thereby control of the same space is highlighted elsewhere in the poem as well, albeit with a less violent conclusion once the intentions of each party are made clear. As Beowulf and his Geatish shipmates approach Denmark, the poem depicts them looking over the land before they reach the shore:

> Gewat þa ofer wægholm   winde gefysed
>
> flota famiheals   fugle gelicost,
>
> oð þæt ymb antid   oþres dogores
>
> wundenstefna   gewaden hæfde,
>
> þæt ða liðende   land gesawon,
>
> brimclifu blican,   beorgas steape,
>
> side sænæssas.[96]
>
> (Then the foamy-necked ship traveled over the seawave, propelled by the wind, most like a bird, until around the duetime of the next day, the curving-prowed ship had advanced until the seafarers saw land, glimmering sea-cliffs, steep hillsides, broad headlands.)

Though the intent of their gaze is different from that of Grendel, it is nevertheless perceived as threatening once they are seen by Hrothgar's coastguard, from a vantage point on the same hills they had just viewed:

> Þa of wealle geseah   weard Scildinga,

---

[96] *Beowulf*, 217–23a.

se þe holmclifu   healdan scolde,

beran ofer bolcan   beorhte randas,

fyrdsearu fuslicu;   hine fyrwyt bræc

modgehygdum,   hwæt þa men wæron.

Gewat him þa to waroðe   wicge ridan

þegn Hroðgares,   þrymmum cwehte

mægenwudu mundum,   meþelwordum frægn:

'Hwæt syndon ge   searohæbbendra,

byrnum werede,   þe þus brontne ceol

ofer lagustræte   lædan cwomon,

hider ofer holmas?   Hwæt, ic hwile wæs

endesæta,   ægwearde heold,

þe on land Dena   laðra nænig

mid scipherge   sceðþan ne meahte.

No her cuðlicor   cuman ongunnon

lindehæbbende,   ne ge leafnesword

guðfremmendra   gearwe ne wisson,

maga gemedu.   Næfre ic maran geseah

eorla ofer eorþan,   ðonne is eower sum,

secg on searwum;   nis þæt seldguma,

wæpnum geweorðad,   næfne him his elite leoge,

ænlic ansyn.   Nu ic eower sceal

frumcyn witan,   ær ge fyr heonan

leassceaweras   on land Dena

furþur feran.'[97]

(Then from the wall, the guardian of the Scyldings, he who was obliged to keep

the sea-cliffs, saw bright shields being borne over the gangplanks, armor at the

ready; anxiety pressed him in his thoughts, over who those men were. Then he

traveled, the thegn of Hrothgar riding a horse to the shore, powerfully brandished

an imposing spear in his hands, asked with formal words: "are you, bedecked in

the mail coats of armor-bearers, who thus came bringing a high ship over the sea-

road, hither over the waters? Behold, for a long time have I been stationed on this

border, I held the coastguard, by which no enemies might make a raid with a ship

army in the land of the Danes. Never have shield-bearers undertaken to come here

more openly, nor did you know whether word of leave, the kinsmen's consent,

would be granted by the warriors. Never have I seen a larger man upon the earth,

than that one of you, the man in the war-gear; that is no hall-retainer, ennobled by

weapons, his countenance has not misrepresented him, his peerless face. Now I

must know your lineage, before you deceitful spies journey farther from here into

the land of the Danes.")

While it is easy to imagine anxiety at the sight of a shipload of unknown armor-wearing

men unloading on the beach resonating with an early-medieval English audience from

any seaside or riverway monastery, village, or city, from the end of the eighth century

onward, the specific reason that the coastguard objects to the Geats' unauthorized

viewing of the Danish shore is less immediately obvious. It is rooted in the same

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[97] *Beowulf*, 229–54a.

dynamics present when Grendel and Beowulf both viewed Heorot: sight is metaphorically linked with power, and only one party could control the space both had laid their eyes on. The coastguard's focus on the Geats' armor (he notes the manner of their dress, *byrnum werede*, "bedecked in mail coats"; he calls them *lindehæbbende*, "shield-bearers"; he identifies Beowulf as the large *secg on searwum*, "man in war-gear," and comments that although Beowulf bears *wæpnum*, "weapons," these are secondary to size and countenance as Beowulf's distinguishing features), and his explanation of his post (he tells the Geats, *ic hwile wæs endesæta, ægwearde heold, þe on land Dena laðra nænig mid scipherge sceðþan ne meahte*, "for a long time have I been stationed on this border, I held the coastguard, by which no enemies might make a raid with a ship army in the land of the Danes"), reveal that his concerns are centered on the potential violent intent of the strangers on the beach; the coastguard punctuates these concerns with an accusation linking this violent intent with the act of looking: he calls the Geats *leassceawaras* (deceitful spies). Though this particular compound, *leas-sceawaras*, combining the adjective *leas* (deceitful, deceptive, lying) and the noun *sceawaras* (an agent noun derived from *sceawian*, a verb for sight), is a *hapax legomenon* employed by the poet for alliterative purposes, the use of *sceawian* and its agent-noun form to indicate a deceitful and potentially violent intent behind the act of looking is evident elsewhere in the corpus of Old English literature.

An excellent example illustrating ill-intended viewing expressed by the verb *sceawian* appears in the poem *Genesis A*. Here, a portion of the poem corresponding to the account of Abraham's travel from his birthplace, Ur of the Chaldeans (in present-day Iraq), to Egypt, in Genesis 12, Abraham stops in Shechem to cast his gaze upon the land

of Canaan: "Him þa gyt gewat / Abraham eastan eagum wlitan / on lande cyst"[98] (Once again Abraham undertook to look from the east upon the chosen land with his eyes). This is no orienting glance; Abraham is casting his eyes over land that has been promised to him by the Lord, land which he will eventually go on to occupy through conquest. It seems to be no accident that the lustful gaze of the Egyptians, who cast their eyes upon Sarah, is categorized in similar terms:

> Siððan Egypte   eagum moton
>
> on þinne wlite wlitan   wlance monige,
>
> þonne æðelinga   eorlas wenað,
>
> mæg ælfscieno,   þæt þu min sie
>
> beorht gebedda,   þe wile beorna sum
>
> him geagnian.   Ic me onegan mæg
>
> þæt me wraðra sum   wæpnes ecge
>
> for freondmynde   feore beneote.[99]
>
> (After many bold men in Egypt might look upon your countenance with their eyes, the men of the princes will suppose, elf-beautiful woman, that you be my bright bedfellow, who one of the men desires to possess for himself. I may fear that one of the enemies will deprive me of life with the edge of a weapon, on account of his lascivious mind.)

The intended result of the Egyptians' gaze, casting their eyes upon Sarah's appearance, is clearly stated: the gaze signifies willingness to rape Sarah and to possess her by

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[98] *Genesis A*, 1793b–95a. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 3–87.

[99] *Genesis A*, 1824–31.

murdering Abraham. These two instances of *wlitan* (looking) combined with *eagum* (with eyes), as part of the same scene of Abraham's journey to Egypt, are meant to parallel one another. In each case, the object is different, but the violent intent is the same. The intention of Abraham's gaze over Canaan is clarified by the similarly-expressed gaze of the Egyptians over Sarah. Thus, as Abraham here casts his eyes upon the land he wishes to possess from his high altar in Shechem, he reiterates his intention to eventually conquer and possess the land, made manifest in an earlier gaze:

> Him þa feran gewat,   fæder ælmihtiges
>
> lare gemyndig   land sceawian
>
> geond þa folcsceare   be frean hæse,
>
> Abraham wide,   oðþæt ellenrof
>
> to Sicem com   siðe spedig,
>
> cynne Cananeis.[100]
>
> (Then Abraham undertook to journey, mindful of the teaching of the Almighty
>
> Father, looking widely over the land throughout the folkshare by command of the
>
> Lord, until the brave one came to Shechem, prosperous in his journey, in the
>
> nation of Canaan.)

The poet here uses *sceawian* to identify Abraham's gaze, depicting Abraham looking out over the land with the intent of controlling it. In both Genesis and *Genesis A*, Abraham has already been told he would have the land as an inheritance for his seed (though he is seventy-five years old and childless), but neither the biblical account nor the poetic retelling contains a command from God to specifically visually examine Canaan at this

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[100] *Genesis A*, 1779–84a.

point in the narrative (though Abraham will later be commanded to look upon the lands promised him in Genesis 13), and the Bible does not refer to Abraham looking at the land in any way as he first travels through it. His laying eyes on Canaan is an invention of the poet, meant to express Abraham's desire to rule over the land through warfare. The assertion that he examines Canaan *be frean hæse* (by command of the Lord) authorizes Abraham's gaze.

Abraham's conquering kinsman, his nephew Lot, is similarly portrayed in the poem. After separating from Abraham so that both may expand their territory without having to compete for grazing lands, Lot looks over his new homeland: "Him þa Loth gewat land sceawigan / be Iordane, grene eorðan"[101] (Then Lot undertook to look upon the land along the Jordan, the green earth). Unlike the earlier example of Abraham gazing over Canaan, Lot's viewing of this land is depicted in the Genesis account. There can be no doubt about the result of the gaze of either man. The poem (as its biblical source) makes it clear that Canaan was not purchased by Abraham with gold, but conquered through violence. After Lot is captured in battle, Abraham rescues him and conquers the armies standing in his way as he takes possession of his promised land: "Abraham sealde / wig to wedde, nalles wunden gold, / for his suhtrigan, sloh and fylde / feond on fitte"[102] (Abraham gave war, not twisted gold, as ransom for his brother's son, he slew and felled the enemy in conflict). Here, Abraham fulfills the intent of the gaze over Canaan, and Lot too his over the land along the Jordan. Total war ensues, and when the day is theirs, the two kinsmen stand victorious, gazing at the aftermath of the battle:

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[101] *Genesis A*, 1920–21.

[102] *Genesis A*, 2069b–72a.

> Wide gesawon
>
> freora feorhbanan   fuglas slitan
>
> on ecgwale.   Abraham ferede
>
> suðmonna eft   sinc and bryda,
>
> æðelinga bearn,   oðle nior,
>
> mægeð heora magum.[103]
>
> (They saw birds far and wide tearing at the life-destroyers in the sword slaughter.
>
> Abraham carried back the treasure and brides of the men of the south, the children
>
> of princes nearer to the homeland, the women to their kinsmen.)

The act of viewing both initiates and terminates Abraham's conquest of Canaan. The first gazes of Abraham and Lot signal their intention to control the territory by means of war; this last look, the object of which is a well-attested motif involving the beasts of battle, affirms the fulfillment of their first look, as the men take possession of the land, its wealth, and its peoples through bloodshed.

Another Old English text, this one prose, uses similar language in telling of the reconquest of Canaan under Moses and Joshua. Seventeen times, the Heptatuech translation uses the word *sceawere* to identify either the spies sent by Israel to gather information about Canaan or others accused of spying.[104] It seems, then, from the gazes of Abraham and Lot upon the lands they desire to conquer in *Genesis A*, expressed through the verb *sceawian*, as well as the use of the agent-noun form to describe invasive spies, both in the Heptateuch as well as here in *Beowulf*, that the word *sceawian* often

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[103] *Genesis A*, 2087b–92a.

[104] Antonette diPaolo Healey, John Price Wilkin, and Xin Xiang, eds., *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), https://www.doe.utoronto.ca.

denotes some kind of hostile intent associated with the act of looking, perhaps in connection with that fearsome gaze associated with rulership as identified above by Edith Marold.

Thus, Hrothgar's coastguard in *Beowulf*, having seen the Geats looking at the Danish countryside as they approach the beach, naturally interprets the intention of this look to be hostile. Asserting his own power and control over the confrontation, the coastguard then calls attention to his own gaze over the Geats, announcing that Beowulf is now the object of his view: he tells them, "Næfre ic maran geseah / eorla ofer eorþan, ðonne is eower sum, / secg on searwum"[105] (Never have I seen a larger man upon the earth, than that one of you, the man in the war-gear). This pronouncement has a dual purpose. First, it reiterates for the audience, for the first time in a voice other than the narrator's, the size and strength of the poem's hero. But second, within the context of the narrative itself, it serves as the coastguard's challenge to the gaze of the Geats, matching it with his own visual examination of the strangers. Though the scene plays out differently—in a clear subversion of audience expectations, in what is the only instance in all of early-medieval English literature of a seafaring band of warriors arriving unannounced and bringing help rather than hostility, the intent of the Geats' view of the shore was misinterpreted by the coastguard—the use of sight as a precursor to hostility and a metaphor for power and control is clearly at play in this scene.

Action and Wisdom: Sight and Contrasting Kingship in *Beowulf*

Although these examples of sight from *Beowulf* and elsewhere contain the threatening menace associated with Marold's analysis of a king's eyes in Germanic

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[105] *Beowulf*, 247b–49a.

literature, not one of these gazes—apart from Grendel, described as having "rixode"[106] (ruled) at Heorot, and of whom it is said that "of eagum stod / ligge gelicost leoht unfægeras"[107] (from his eyes issued a horrible light, most like a flame), who thus seems to represent an ironic, terrifying inversion of a kinglike figure—belongs to a king. But the poem provides glimpses of kings performing the duty of looking. In parallel scenes, Hrothgar and Beowulf are depicted examining, or not examining, treasure. After Beowulf has slain Grendel's mother, he brings the hilt of his enemy's ancient weapon, the blade of which melted after contact with the monster's blood, to Hrothgar.

> Hroðgar maðelode;   hylt sceawode,
>
> ealde lafe.   On ðæm wæs or writen
>
> fyrngewinnes;   syðþan flod ofsloh,
>
> gifen geotende   giganta cyn,
>
> frecne geferdon;   þæt wæs fremde þeod
>
> ecean dryhtne;   him þæs endelean
>
> þurh wæteres wylm   waldend sealde.
>
> Swa wæs on ðæm scennum   scinan goldes
>
> þurh runstafas   rihte gemearcod,
>
> geseted ond gesæd,   hwam þæt sweord geworht,
>
> irena cyst   ærest wære,
>
> wreoþenhilt ond wyrmfah.[108]

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[106] *Beowulf*, 144a.

[107] *Beowulf*, 726b–27.

[108] *Beowulf*, 1687–98a.

(Hrothgar spoke; he examined the hilt, the old relic. Thereon was written the origin of the ancient war; when the flood, the coursing sea, slew the race of giants who behaved savagely; that tribe was estranged from the eternal lord; the ruler granted them a final reward through the surge of water. Also on those plates of shining gold was fittingly marked in rune-staves, set down and said for whom the sword, the choicest of irons, was first made, the wire-wrapped and snake-adorned hilt.)

There is no indication Hrothgar doesn't understand what he sees (the verb *sceawian* is used here) as he pores over the hilt, in the poem's only depiction of literacy. His speaking here appears to portray him in the act of reading aloud what he sees *writen* (written or carved), on the adorned weapon, as after the poem reports the contents of the writing on the hilt, Hrothgar again speaks, and this time, his court at Heorot attends his words: "Ða se wisa spræc / sunu Healfdenes; swigedone ealle"[109] (Then the wise son of Healfdane spoke; all were silent). This subsequent speech, though, makes no reference to what he has read on the hilt, but is rather an 85-line sermon which meanders from praising Beowulf for his deeds, to contrasting Beowulf with the wicked King Heremod, and thence on to advice for the young hero to guard against pride. Thus disconnected from the earlier instance in which "Hroðgar maðelode" (Hrothgar spoke), it is apparent that the first speech here is unrelated to the second. The poem thus depicts Hrothgar, seated at a banquet in Heorot, publicly reading aloud that which he sees. The public setting, at his hall and in the presence of his retainers, dramatizes his examination of the hilt as performative kingship.

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[109] *Beowulf*, 1698b–99.

What Hrothgar sees, the information he gains by examining the hilt from his throne at Heorot, is pertinent to his duties and responsibilities as king. As with any other passage in this poem, there is scholarly debate as to which myth the poem refers to when it says that written in gold runes upon the hilt was *fyrngewinnes* (the origin of the ancient war), in which unruly giants are made to perish in a flood. Indeed, the poem's description of the hilt's runic inscription is vague enough that multiple interpretations—two Christian, the third, pagan—have been proposed. The editors of *Klaeber's Beowulf, Fourth Edition*, suggested that *fyrngewinnes* (the origin of the ancient war) "is so imprecise, it is not inconceivable that even the rebellion of Lucifer and his band of angels could be encompassed by the notion of the origin of ancient strife."[110] Clemoes proposed a synthesis of two Genesis myths, both connected to Grendel's origin: *fyrngewinnes* referred to the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis, chapter 4, and the subsequent description of the giants perishing in the flood referred to the deluge of Genesis, chapters 6–9, connecting the two myths as an explanation for the origin of Grendel and his mother.[111] This reading was subsequently explored in greater detail by Dennis Cronan.[112]

Of these three myths, the two Christian stories are most pertinent to the challenges Hrothgar faces as king. Already in the poem, the fiery fate of Heorot has been revealed to the audience when, upon describing the construction of the illustrious hall, the poet reports that Heorot "heaðowylma bad, / laðan liges; ne wæs hit lenge þa gen, / þæt se

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[110] Fulk et al., eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 212n1688.

[111] Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language*, 26–29.

[112] Dennis Cronan, "The Origin of Ancient Strife in *Beowulf*," *North-Western European Language Evolution* 31–32 (1997): 57–68, at 58.

ecghete aþumsweoran æfter wælniðe wæcnan scolde"[113] (awaited battle-flames; it was

not then longer yet, that sword-hatred between oath-swearers should awaken after

slaughterous enmity). This allusion, to a battle between Hrothgar and his son-in-law

Ingeld resulting in the destruction of Heorot and the end of the dynasty occupying it, was

again repeated in greater detail in Beowulf's report to Hygelac. The hilt provides

Hrothgar with a blueprint for dealing with insubordination and rebellion, offering the

possibility of resolving the Heathobard problem. As interpreted by Clemoes, "this hilt

was an emblem of a divine restoration of power. . . . It was a Germanic-type symbol

which, by virtue of being placed in a perspective of defeated Old Testament *gigantas*,

became a solemn token to a warrior kingship of the greater authority of God."[114]

But Hrothgar's is a kingdom in decline. Hrothgar sits in power and performs his

duties as ruler as he examines the hilt, but when afforded the opportunity to foresee an

answer to his problems, he fails to recognize it. Rather than follow the pattern spelled out

for him on the hilt, in which rebellion was answered by God with swift and violent

retribution, Hrothgar follows his own course, sending his daughter as his agent to temper

through marriage the threat posed by Ingeld and the Heathobards.

Very early, the poem provides a pattern for looking with the intent of foreseeing.

As Beowulf prepares to travel to Denmark and face Grendel, Geatish court advisors seem

to foresee his success and advise him accordingly: "Ðone siðfæt him snotore ceorlas /

lythwon logon, þeah he him leof wære; / hwetton higerofne, hæl sceawedon"[115] (The

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[113] *Beowulf*, 82b–85.

[114] Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language*, 29.

[115] *Beowulf*, 202–4.

wise men censured him or that journey very little, though he were dear to them; they urged the valiant man, they examined the omen). Here, evidently, the Geatish *snotore ceorlas* (wise men) foresee Beowulf's success through their examination (expressed, as Hrothgar's examination of the hilt, through the verb *sceawian*) of some kind of ritualistic *hæl* (omen). The notion of reading the future through sight is expressed with the verb *sceawian* elsewhere in Old English as well, in words such as *foresceawere* (foreseer), or even in the astrology-related words *tidsceawere* (tide-watcher), *steorsceawere* (star-watcher), and *dægmælsceawere* (clock-watcher).[116] The verb *sceawian*, then, when used to describe Hrothgar's act of reading the writing on the hilt, seems to carry two meanings. First, as already stated, it implies that this act is performed as an expression of his power as king. But second, it indicates that he has the opportunity to read this hilt in the same way the Geatish wise men had foretold the future by their visual inspection of the omen.

This scene, of a king examining a relic, and nevertheless thereby failing to foresee a solution to the impending ruin of his kingdom, plays out once again at the end of the poem, this time with Beowulf in the role of the old king. Already vulnerable to attacks from neighboring peoples, Beowulf's kingdom faces a new challenge: the fiery attacks of the dragon. This is a challenge made known to Beowulf only through the sense of hearing up until this point in the poem. First, the aftermath of the dragon's initial attack is reported to Beowulf during his absence from his own hall: "Þa wæs Biowulfe broga gecyðed / snude to soðe, þæt his sylfes ham, / bolda selest brynewylmum mealt, gifstol Geata"[117] (Then the terror was made known to Beowulf swiftly as truth, that his own

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[116] Healey, Wilkin, and Xiang, *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*.

[117] *Beowulf*, 2324–27a.

home, the gift-seat of the Geats, the best of buildings, melted in the burning flames). And

when Beowulf decides to go into battle against the dragon, it is because he "hæfde þa

gefrunen, hwanan sio fæhð aras, / bealonið biorna"[118] (had heard by then how the feud

arose, dire affliction of men). It is here that, in a scene containing imagery mirroring

Hrothgar's inspection of the sword hilt, Beowulf is presented with the cup that has been

stolen from the dragon's hoard.

> Gewat þa twelfa sum   torne gebolgen
>
> dryhten Geata   dracan sceawian;
>
> hæfde þa gefrunen,   hwanan sio fæhð aras,
>
> bealonið biorna;   him to bearme cwom
>
> maðþumfæt mære   þurh ðæs meldan hond.[119]
>
> (Then, one of thirteen, the lord of the Geats, grievously enraged, departed to look
>
> at the dragon; by then he had heard how the feud arose, dire affliction of men; to
>
> his lap had come the famous treasure-cup through the hand of the informer.)

Like Hrothgar, who was given the hilt taken from the mere—the poem reports "Ða wæs

gylden hilt gamelum rince, / harum hildfruman ond hand gyfen, / enta ærgeweorc"[120]

(Then the golden hilt, the ancient work of giants, was placed in the hand of the greying

warmaker, the aged man)—Beowulf has been given the treasure which was taken from

the dragon's hoard: "him to bearme cwom / maðþumfæt mære þurh ðæs meldan hond"[121]

(to his lap had come the famous treasure-cup through the hand of the informer). But

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[118] *Beowulf*, 2403–4b.

[119] *Beowulf*, 2401–5.

[120] *Beowulf*, 1677–79b.

[121] *Beowulf*, 2404b–5.

unlike Hrothgar, who is depicted poring over the hilt in careful examination, noting not only its craftsmanship but reading its runic inscriptions, Beowulf is not shown looking at the cup at all. Instead, Beowulf turns his eyes to action, directing his gaze toward the dragon itself, as he "Gewat þa . . . dracan sceawian"[122] (Departed then . . . to look at the dragon). This is indicative of Beowulf's tendency toward violent strength rather than wisdom as a means of rulership. As with his battle against Grendel, which begins with Beowulf lying in watchful wait for his enemy, "wæccende wraþum on andan / bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges"[123] (watching for the wrathful one in hatred, he awaited, bulging in mind, the result of battle), Beowulf, again *gebolgen* (bulging), begins his onslaught against the dragon through the act of looking.

The two different behaviors reflect the differing approaches to leadership of the two kings. On the one hand, there is Hrothgar, seeking wisdom through his eyes, seated on his throne examining the hilt of the sword. And on the other, there is Beowulf, seeking battle through his eyes, departing in haste to face the dragon without examining the cup that was taken from its hoard. Both approaches are failures; Hrothgar, over-reliant on wisdom over strength, fails to foresee a proper solution to the threat of Ingeld when presented with a pattern for dealing with rebellion, and Beowulf's death, a result of his hasty tendency toward battle, has left his people vulnerable to attack. Beowulf explains his eagerness for battle to his retainers:

> Ic geneðde fela
>
> guða on geogoðe;   gyt ic wylle,

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[122] *Beowulf*, 2401–2.

[123] *Beowulf*, 708–9.

frod folces weard   fæhðe secan,

mærðu fremman,   gif mec se mansceaða

of eorðsele   ut geseceð.[124]

(I dared many battles in youth; yet do I desire, the old guardian of the people, to

seek hostility, to accomplish a glorious deed, if the evil ravager seeks me out from

his earthen hall.)

Beowulf remains unchanged by age; perhaps persuaded by his own foresight of the

failure of Hrothgar's attempt at solving the threat of attack by Ingeld through marriage

rather than warfare, even in old age, Beowulf, unlike Hrothgar, is firmly committed to a

strength-based approach to resolving the threat of the dragon. Yet, after Beowulf has

been killed as a result of this approach, his kinsman and successor Wiglaf expresses

regret toward Beowulf's reluctance to heed the wisdom of his counselors:

Oft sceall eorl monig   anes willan

wræc adreogan,   swa us geworden is.

Ne meahton we gelæran   leofne þeoden,

rices hyrde   ræd ænigne,

þæt he ne grette   goldweard þone,

lete hyne licgean,   þær he longe wæs,

wicum wunian   oð woruldende.

Heold on heahgesceap;   hord ys gesceawod,

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[124] *Beowulf*, 2511b–14.

grimme gegongen.[125]

(Often, many a man is obliged to endure misery on account of the will of one; so will become of us. We were unable to advise the beloved prince, the shepherd of the kingdom, through any counsel, that he not engage the gold guardian, that he allow him to lie where he had been for a long time, abiding in his home until the end of the world. He held to his destiny; the hoard is seen, terribly obtained.)

That *anes willan* (will of one), which Wiglaf predicts will result in the suffering of his people, was expressed by Beowulf earlier, when he explained to his retainers (rather than hear their counsel) that "gyt ic wylle, / frod folces weard fæhðe secan, / mærðu fremman"[126] (yet do I desire, the old guardian of the people, to seek hostility, to accomplish a glorious deed). Just as he would not look to the cup seeking wisdom, and instead directed his sight toward battle, he did not turn to his counselors for advice, choosing instead to face the dragon in haste. The result of this apparent aversion to wisdom is disastrous; as predicted by Wiglaf, the Geats are left to "wræc adreogan" (endure misery) in Beowulf's absence. This is explained to the people by a messenger sent by Wiglaf to announce Beowulf's death. The messenger explains what will be the fate of the Geats after the poem's end: "Nu ys leodum wen / orleghwile, syððan underne / Froncum ond Frysum fyll cyninges / wide weorðeð"[127] (Now a time of war is likely for the people, after the fall of the king becomes widely apparent among the Franks and

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[125] *Beowulf*, 3077–85a.

[126] *Beowulf*, 2512b–14a.

[127] *Beowulf*, 2910b–13a.

Frisians). Then, after a lengthy explanation of the origin of the state of hostility between
the Geats and their neighboring peoples, the messenger again foretells their doom:

> Þæt is sio fæhðo   ond se feondscipe,
>
> wælnið wera,   ðæs ðe ic wen hafo,
>
> þe us seceað to   Sweona leoda,
>
> syððan hie gefricgeað   frean userne
>
> ealdorleasne.[128]

> (That is the feud and the enmity, the slaughter-hatred of men, for which I expect
>
> that the Swedish people will seek us out, after they hear of our lord's loss of life.)

Thus, the result of Beowoulf's reliance on strength is the same as Hrothgar's reliance on
wisdom: both kingdoms fall. If the poem is making any argument here, it is that balance
between the two approaches to leadership must be struck if a king is to rule successfully.

The dragon is not the last thing Beowulf hastens to control by laying his eyes on
it. Beowulf, mortally wounded by the dragon he has slain, sits gazing over the barrow in
which the dragon dwelled: "seah on enta geweorc, / hu ða stanbogan stapulum fæste / ece
eorðreced innan healde"[129] (he looked on the work of giants, how the stone arches held
the inside of the earthen construction, continuously fixed by supports). Perhaps prompted
by his contemplation of the ancient construction, it is here, in one of his last kingly acts
of looking, that Beowulf orders Wiglaf to speedily lay eyes on the treasure acquired
through the battle: "Nu ðu lingerie geong / heord sceawian under harne stan, / Wiglaf

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[128] *Beowulf*, 2999–3003a.

[129] *Beowulf*, 2717b–19.

leofa, nu se wyrm ligeð, / swefeð sare wund, since bereafod"[130] (Now quickly go

examine the hoard under the grey stone, beloved Wiglaf, now that the serpent lies dead,

sleeps sorely wounded, bereaved of treasure). Beowulf (and the poem's audience) does

not know whether he will live long enough to lay his own eyes on the treasure he has won

by slaying the dragon; he sends Wiglaf to see the treasure in his stead, with the hope that

he himself will last long enough to see it as well. He continues his instructions to Wiglaf:

> Bio nu on ofoste,   þæt ic ærwelan,
>
> goldæht ongite,   gearo sceawige
>
> swegle searogimmas,   þæt ic ðy seft mæge
>
> æfter maððumwelan   min alætan
>
> lif ond leodscipe,   þone ic longe heold.[131]
>
> (Be now in haste, that I may see the ancient wealth, the treasures of gold, readily
>
> look upon the brilliant skillfully wrought gems, that on account of the wealth of
>
> treasures I may all the more softly leave my life and nation, which I have long
>
> held.)

Here, Beowulf twice expresses his desire to see the treasure, using the verbs for sight

ongitan and *sceawian*. The use of *ongitan* is especially important here, for, as argued by

Robin Waugh, "the term retains, at least in *Beowulf*, some connotations of physical

experience from its associations with the act of grasping."[132] It would seem therefore that

Beowulf's desire to view the treasure here, described using *ongitan*, represents more than

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[130] *Beowulf*, 2743b–46. This is the only occurrence in the entire poem of the verb *sceawian* in the a-line, underscoring Beowulf's sense of urgency to take control of the hoard.

[131] *Beowulf*, 2747–51.

[132] Robin Waugh, "*Ongitan* and the Possibility of Oral Seeing in *Beowulf*," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 53/3 (2011): 338–51, at 344.

mere seeing: it is indicative that he now has the treasure under his physical control. He

hopes that seeing the treasure will give him comfort as he leaves behind his people. The

exact nature of that comfort is not explicitly stated, but he will later reiterate the peace

that seeing the treasure brings him in death. First, though, Wiglaf, perhaps practicing

what will become his duty as king of expressing power through seeing, is depicted

looking upon the treasure four times. The first two descriptions of Wiglaf looking at the

treasure use the verb *geseon*, as Wiglaf "geseah" (saw) both the treasure in splendid

description and the dragon's den, and then "Swylce he sioman geseah segn eallgylden /

heah ofer horde, hondwundra mæst, / gelocen leoðocræftum"[133] (He also saw an entirely

gilded standard hanging high above the hoard, the greatest of wonders contrived by hand,

skillfully woven). A final depiction uses the sight verbs *ongitan* and *wlitan*, when Wiglaf,

his sight illuminated by the light emanating from the golden standard, "þone grundwong

ongitan meahte, / wræte giondwlitan"[134] (was able to see the surface of the floor, to look

over the ornaments). The prefix applied to the verb *wilitan*, making it *giondwlitan*, seems

to highlight the thoroughness of Wiglaf's inspection of the hoard, suggesting that the

entirety of the treasure is now in his possession.

Wiglaf then collects the contents of the hoard and brings them to Beowulf.

Reminiscent of Díaz-Vera's assertion that "the perceiver produces an effect on the object

of perception under his/her control,"[135] Beowulf expresses gratitude for being able to see

and therefore possess the treasure, hinting at the hope such a sight brings him in his

death:

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[133] *Beowulf*, 2767–69a.

[134] *Beowulf*, 2770–71a.

[135] Díaz-Vera, "Coming to Past Senses," 43.

     Biorncyning spræc

gomel on giohðe   —gold sceawode—:

'Ic ðara frætwa   Frean ealles ðanc,

Wuldurcyninge   wordum secge,

ecum Dryhtne,   þe ic her on starie,

þæs ðe ic moste   minum leodum

ær swyltdæge   swylc gestrynan.[136]

(The warrior king spoke, aged in sorrow—he looked at the gold—: "I say thanks with words to the Lord of all, to the king of wonders, the eternal Lord, for the treasures which I here look upon, because I was able to acquire the likes of such for my people before the day of my death.")

This is Beowulf's final act of looking, the final expression of his power and control as king through the verb *sceawian*. With the dragon's hoard at last in his control, Beowulf hints at his intention for the treasure, that it be for the benefit of his people, in an oral will spoken to Wiglaf. Beowulf seems to understand that his death will leave the Geats unprotected against the attacks of hostile neighboring tribes, attacks that, while Beowulf was alive, could be prevented by his reputation for strength and violence. The greatest good for his people that could be accomplished with such a treasure is purchasing peace, and Beowulf dies believing that the treasure will be the protection to his people that will be necessary in his absence. The verb employed by Beowulf to describe his own view of the treasure, *starian*, is the same verb used by Hrothgar when he similarly expresses

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[136] *Beowulf*, 2792b–98.

thanks to God that he has lived to see a respite from the violence threatening the Scyldings as he lays his eyes on Grendel's severed head: "Þæs sig Metode þanc, / ecean Dryhtne, ðæs ðe ic on aldre gebad, / þæt ic on þone hafelan heorodreorigne / ofer eald gewin eagum starige!"[137] (For this, thanks be to the measurer, the eternal Lord, because I remained in life, that I may look with my eyes upon the blood-stained head after the longstanding struggle!)

Both kings misinterpret what they see. The death of the Grendelkin does not signal an end to the violence threatening Heorot, and the dragon's hoard will not buy peace for the Geats. Beowulf's control of the treasure ends with his death. It is perhaps no accident that the poet does not use the verb *ongitan*, the verb previously used by Beowulf to express his desire to treasure. The lack of this verb, which, again in the words of Waugh, carries "some connotations of physical experience from its associations with the act of grasping,"[138] signals that Beowulf's grasp of the treasure is tenuous: he sees it only for a brief moment before it slips from his control. Eric Jager has observed that Beowulf's faculty for speech in this scene, expressed especially through the compound *breosthord*[139] (breast-hoard) through which this speech must break, also highlights this loss of control, arguing that because Beowulf "is looking at plunder from the hoard as he pronounces his last speech, *breosthord* is a particularly resonant term here. As a metaphor (technically, a kenning), the term coalesces the word-hoard with the treasure hoard just at the point when the dying hero is losing control over both of these

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[137] *Beowulf*, 1778b–81.

[138] Waugh, "*Ongitan* and the Possibility of Oral Seeing," 344.

[139] *Beowulf*, 2792a.

repositories or resources."[140] It seems especially fitting, though, given the importance of

sight as a metaphor for power throughout the poem, that the extent of Beowulf's power

and sovereignty comes to an end as the light fades from his eyes and he can no longer

see. Hrothgar had sententiously warned Beowulf that such a day would inevitably arrive

in one form or another:

> Nu is þines mægnes blæd
>
> ane hwile;   eft sona bið,
>
> þæt þec adl oððe ecg   eafoþes getwæfeð,
>
> oððe fyres feng,   oððe flodes wylm,
>
> oððe gripe meces,   oððe gares fliht,
>
> oððe atol yldo;   oððe eagena bearhtm
>
> forsiteð ond forsworceð;   semninga bið,
>
> þæt ðec, dryhtguma,   dead oferswyðeð.[141]
>
> (Now the renown of your strength will continue for a while; soon afterward it will
>
> be, that either illness or blade will deprive you of life, or the clutch of fire, or the
>
> surging of a flood, or the grip of a sword, or the flight of a spear, or wretched age;
>
> or the brightness of your eyes diminishes and becomes dark; suddenly it will be,
>
> that death will prove stronger than you, warrior.)

The culmination of all these potential threats a warrior such as Beowulf might face is the

same: whether it is violence, illness, or age that is responsible, the light in Beowulf eyes

will be extinguished, and death will vanquish him. The extramissive nature of sight is

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[140] Eric Jager, "Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?" *Speculum* 65/4 (1990): 845–59, at 851.

[141] *Beowulf*, 1761b–68.

apparent in this passage, and with the strong connection between sight and mind central to this model, sight becomes a natural metaphor for a king's power. Just as "eagena bearhtm forsiteð ond forsworceð" (the brightness of the eyes is diminished and darkened) as a hero's *mægn* (physical strength) is brought to an end with death, so too is a king's power and control, exemplified in a piercing gaze, rendered null by his death, no matter how strong or powerful he was in life.

So it is, then, that Beowulf's dying wish is unfulfilled. His gaze over the treasure is broken when the light of his eyes no longer reaches it, and thus his control over it, affirmed by his final viewing of it, also ends. As if to highlight how powerless Beowulf is in death, the poem now depicts the dead king as an object of view, in stark contrast to the controlling gaze he had cast in life. The Geats are urged by the messenger announcing Beowulf's death to go view their fallen king's body: "Nu is ofost betost, / þæt we þeodcyning þær sceawian, / ond þone gebringan, þe us beagas geaf, / on adfære"[142] (Now haste is best, that we may see our people-king there, and thence bring him, who gave us rings, onto the funeral pyre). Beowulf is now the object, rather than the subject, of the verb *sceawian*. This is repeated once more as the Geats heed the messenger's exhortation: "Weorod eall aras; / eodon unbliðe under Earnanæs, / wollenteare wundur sceawian"[143] (The troop all arose; the joyless ones went with welling tears under Eagles' Bluff to look upon the wonder). The *wundur* (wonder) that the Geats *sceawian* (see) includes Beowulf's lifeless body, the dragon he has slain, and the treasure won thereby.[144] But

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[142] *Beowulf*, 3007b–10a.

[143] *Beowulf*, 3030a–32.

[144] Recalling Beowulf's fight with Grendel, the half-line of 3032b, *wundur sceawian* (to look upon the wonder) was also used by the poet in 840b to describe another time when people traveled in order to *wundor sceawian* (look upon the wonder), but that time the wonder was Grendel's severed limb and bloody

rather than serve as Beowulf had intended, as a benefit *minum leodum* (for my people), the treasure, once in the sight of the Geats, is burned with Beowulf's body.

So it is that the poem elegizes fallen kingdoms through kings who failed to save their people with their controlling gaze. Each king's gaze, while it represents power and control, manifests a different approach to such power. In the first half of *Beowulf*, Hrothgar turns his eyes to the hilt, but fails to foresee the solution to the Heathobard problem that is written upon its gilded surface, patterned for him in God's treatment of the rebellious giants through utter destruction. His misguided attempt to solve the problem through marriage instead is a misapplication of his watchful care as king, embodied in his daughter, the appropriately-named Freawaru. Likewise, Beowulf fails to save the Geats from a similar violent fate in the poem's second half. Instead of seeking wisdom like Hrothgar, Beowulf hastily casts his gaze toward the dragon, attempting to control the threat to his people with violence. But Beowulf's belligerence is as equally ineffective as Hrothgar's peacemaking. Understanding that his death will leave his people vulnerable, he makes one last attempt at saving his people, asserting his short-lived control over the treasure he hopes will buy them peace through one final gaze. As Wiglaf attested, that gaze came with a cost greater than the life of Beowulf alone, for though the "hord ys gesceawod"[145] (the hoard is seen), it is equally "grimme gegongen"[146] (terribly obtained), and the Geats are left defenseless as a result of Beowulf's misplaced and ultimately powerless sight.

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tracks. These two gazes, expressed in the same terms, become hallmarks of Beowulf's first victory and his final defeat.

[145] *Beowulf*, 3084b.

[146] *Beowulf*, 3085a.

Chapter 5

'Against this wickedness': Attitudes about Blindness in Early-Medieval England

'*Ne wearð dreorlice dæd gedon on þison earde*': The Blinding of Alfred in 1036

When King Cnut died in November 1035, a brief struggle ensued for the throne he left vacant. Timothy Bolton has attributed this to a lack of preparation: "Cnut's sudden death left no clear plan of succession, and two heirs by different mothers, both of whom had spent considerably more time in Denmark than in England."[1] These two sons, the primary candidates to succeed Cnut, were Harold Harefoot, the eldest surviving son of Cnut and Ælfgifu of Northampton, and Harthacnut, the son of Cnut and Emma of Normandy. Though the succession crisis extended across Cnut's northern empire, in England the matter was especially complicated by the existence of possible claimants to the throne from the House of Wessex, especially the sons of Æthelred the Unready by Emma, Edward the Confessor and Alfred, themselves half-brothers of Harthacnut. M. K. Lawson argued that when Cnut first assumed the English throne, he very skillfully put an end to the political threat posed by the sons of the late king and their powerful Norman relatives by marrying their mother, Æthelred's widow: "The prime motive behind Cnut's desire for the union was almost certainly to prevent her sons from gaining Norman military assistance. . . ."[2] The plan worked, insofar as Cnut lived, but the peace brought about during his reign did not outlive him. The period of seven years between the death

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[1] Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 196.

[2] M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London: Longman, 1993), 86.

of Cnut and the accession of Edward the Confessor in 1042 was fraught with propaganda, betrayal, and at times, violence. The long reign of Edward the Confessor would once again put a pause to the intrigue and bloodshed, but the years of contention preceding his accession to the throne, seeming to foreshadow the battles to be fought at Stamford Bridge and Hastings in the autumn of 1066, revealed a political system susceptible to violent overthrow.

The sons of Cnut, Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut, would each take their turn ruling, though the reign of each was doomed to be short. Harold died in 1040, and Harthacnut died in 1042. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded treacherous deeds performed by both kings. Upon receiving the full support of the English as their king in 1027, Harold had Emma banished. The *Chronicle* suggested that in doing so, Harold had acted "butan ealcere mildheortnesse"[3] (without any compassion) when he drove his father's widow out of the country "ongean þone weallendan winter"[4] (against the raging winter). Perhaps related to this, Harthacnut had little love for the brother he succeeded; the *Chronicle* reported that he "let dragan up þæne deadan Harald 7 hine on fen sceotan"[5] (caused the dead Harold to be dragged up and cast into the fen). Harthacnut was characterized as a despot whose burdensome taxes quickly caused him to lose public support: he "astealde þa swiðe strang gyld þæt man hit uneaðe acom . . . 7 him wæs þa unhold eall þæt his ær gyrnde, 7 he ne gefremede ec naht cynelices þa hwile ðe he

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[3] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *MS C*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, 5 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 106.

[4] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 106.

[5] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 107.

ricxode"[6] (then established a very severe tribute that was borne grievously . . . and all who previously desired him were then hostile towards him, and he accomplished nothing of kingliness while he reigned). Harthacnut's severe tax led to violence, which begat violent retribution: in 1041 "let Harðacnut hergian eall Wihracestrescire for his twegra huscarla þingon, ðe þæt strange gyld budon. Þa sloh þæt folc hi binnan port innan ðam mynstre"[7] (Harthacnut caused all of Worcestershire to be harried to settle for two of his household troops, who exacted that severe tribute. Then that people slew them inside the minster within the town). The entry for that same year also stated that "swac Harðacnut Eadulf eorl under his griðe, 7 he wæs þa wedloga" (Harthacnut betrayed Earl Eadulf, who was under his protection, and he was thus an oathbreaker). Harthacnut's actions were characteristic of a tyrannical and treacherous ruler, and indeed the *Chronicle*'s report of another noteworthy event of 1041 speaks to just how unpopular Harthacnut had made himself: "7 þæs geres sona com Eadward his broðor on medren fram begeondan sæ Æþelrædes sunu cinges, ðe wæs ær for fela gearon of his earde adrifen, 7 ðeh wæs to cinge gesworen, 7 he wunode þa swa on his broðor hirede þa hwile ðe he leofode"[8] (and at once in that year his maternal half-brother Edward (the son of King Æthelred), who for many years had been driven from his country, came from across the sea, and was then sworn to be king, and he dwelled thus in the household of his brother as long as he lived). That would prove to not be a very long time, and although Harthacnut was an unpopular ruler, there is no reason to suspect foul play in his sudden death the following year. As noted by Bolton, Cnut's father died young and unexpectedly, as did Cnut, and now

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[6] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 107.

[7] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 107.

[8] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 107.

Harthacnut was Cnut's third son to face a similar end: "Contemporaries may have thought this was God's judgement on the members of this dynasty, but with the knowledge provided by modern science we should perhaps speculate instead that the men in this line shared a congenital defect, perhaps resulting in strokes or cerebral aneurysms."[9]

The death of Harthacnut ended Cnut's dynastic line, and with the question of succession already having been answered during his brief and unpopular reign, brought about a period of relative peace while Edward ruled. Harthacnut's violence and treachery was only matched by that of his paternal half-brother and predecessor as king, Harold Harefoot. The political strife following Cnut's death had reached its violent climax in 1036, when Alfred, the younger of the two sons of Æthelred and Emma, visited England for unclear reasons. Cnut's death signaled to Alfred an end to "what must have looked like permanent exile in the Norman court,"[10] where he had lived with his brother and sister since their mother Emma married Cnut. Whatever his motive for returning to England, Alfred and his retinue of Norman soldiers found themselves unwelcome: they were quickly captured, and Alfred was subsequently blinded and ultimately killed by political opponents who favored Harold to replace Cnut as king. Four early texts more or less independently record this assassination: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, the *Gesta Guillelmi*, and the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. Each of these texts attests to a slightly different version of events, but all four express horror at the violence endured by Alfred. In particular, their terrified reactions to the blinding of

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[9] Bolton, *Cnut the Great*, 195.

[10] Lawson, *Cnut*, 87.

Alfred reveal early medieval English attitudes toward not only blinding, but the primacy of sight among the senses as well.

The earliest of these texts, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, memorializes the betrayal and death of Alfred and his Norman soldiers in the entry for the year 1036 in its C- and D-manuscripts. There are some differences between the two versions, as will be discussed. The older of the two versions of this entry, the C-text, reads as follows:

Her com Ælfred se unsceððiga æþeling Æþelrædes sunu cinges, hider inn 7 wolde

to his meder þe on Wincestre sæt, ac hit him ne geþafode Godwine eorl ne ec oþre

men þe mycel mihton wealdan, forðan hit hleoðrode þa swiðe toward Haraldes,

þeh hit unriht wære.

Ac Godwine hine þa gelette   7 hine on hæft sette

7 his geferan he todraf   7 sume mislice ofsloh.

Sume hi man wið feo sealde,   sume hreowlice acwealde,

sume hi man bende,   sume hi man blende,

sume hamelode,   sume hættode.

Ne wearð dreorlice dæd   gedon on þison earde

syððan Dene comon   7 her frið namon.

Nu is to gelyfenne   to ðan leofan Gode

þæt hi blission   bliðe mid Criste

þe wæron butan scylde   swa earmlice acwealde.

Se æþeling lyfode þa gyte;   ælc yfel man him gehet,

oð þæt man gerædde   þæt man hine lædde

to Eligbyrig   swa gebundenne.

Sona swa he lende   on scype man hine blende

7 hine swa blindne   brohte to ðam munecon,

7 he þar wunode   ða hwile þe he lyfode.

Syððan hine man byrigde   swa him wel gebyrede,

ful wurðlice,   swa he wyrðe wæs,

æt þam westende   þam styple ful gehende,

on þam suðportice;   seo saul is mid Criste.[11]

(In this year, Alfred the innocent prince, son of King Æthelred, came into this place and desired to go to his mother who dwelled in Winchester, but Earl Godwine did not allow him, and neither did the other men who held great power, because at that time Harold was overwhelmingly favored, although it were wrong. But Godwine then stopped him and placed him in custody and separated his traveling companions and killed some in various ways. Some of them they sold for a price, some they cruelly murdered, some of them they bound, some of them they blinded, some they mutilated, some they scalped. No bloodier deed was done in this land since the Danes came and kept peace here. Now it is to be trusted to the beloved God that they rejoice merrily with Christ, who without blame were so miserably killed. The prince still lived then; they threatened him with every evil, until they decided that they would take him to the city of Ely thus bound. As soon as he landed they blinded him on the ship and brought him thus blinded to the monks, and he stayed there as long as he lived. Afterward they buried him as well

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[11] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 105–6.

befitted him, very honorably, as he was honorable, at the west end of the south porch, very near the steeple; his soul is with Christ.)

The chronicler has made no attempt to hide his biases, casting aspersions on Godwine and the other powerful men of England for their *unriht* (wrong) support of the kingship of Harold Harefoot. So anti-Harold is this chronicler, in fact, that he discounts Harold's claim to the throne as Cnut's son with Ælfgifu of Northampton as a fabrication, asserting that Harold "sæde þæt he Cnutes sunu wære 7 þære oðre Ælfgyfe, þe hit na soð nære"[12] (said that he was the son of Cnut and the other Ælfgifu, which was not true). The D-text of the *Chronicle* also manifests bias, in this case by removing Godwine's name from the entry that is otherwise largely identical to the C-text—C's "ac hit him ne geþafode Godwine eorl ne ec oþre men þe mycel mihton wealdan"[13] (but Earl Godwine did not allow him, and neither did the other men who held great power) is rendered "ac þæt ne geþafodon þa þe micel weoldon on þisan land"[14] (but those who held great [power] did not allow that) in D, and C's "Ac Godwine hine þa gelette 7 hine on hæft sette"[15] (But Godwine then stopped him and placed him in custody) is revised in D to read "Ða let he hine on hæft settan"[16] (Then he stopped him and they placed him in custody)—thereby distancing the earl from both the wrong support of King Harold as well as the horrifying violence against Alfred and his retinue. There can be no doubt that C's "partisan position

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[12] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 105.

[13] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 106.

[14] G. P. Cubbin, ed., *MS D*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 6 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 65.

[15] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 106.

[16] Cubbin, *MS D*, 65.

in assigning blame to Earl Godwine"[17] is the older version of the two texts. As Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has observed, the "metrically faulty half-line" in the second instance of D's removal of Godwine's name is among the examples of the D-text's "handling of the verse" that indicate that the text of "C precedes that of D in time and authority."[18] The other differences between C's and D's accounts of 1036 are far less significant (outside of the bungled meter betraying D as the younger of the two versions), and both versions of the poem affirm the horror of this violent betrayal.

A second text, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, confirms that the murder of Prince Alfred was received with shocked horror. Equally as anti-Harold in its bias as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Encomium* provides much more detail about the events surrounding Alfred's betrayal. It alleges that Alfred was lured to England from Normandy under the pretense of a forged letter, purporting to be from his mother Queen Emma, but in fact sent as a trap by Harold Harefoot in an attempt to rid himself of competition for the English throne from both of Emma's sons by King Æthelred (though the *Encomuium* identified Edward and Alfred only as the sons of Queen Emma, making no mention of the identity of their father). Alfred left the continent with a smaller retinue than offered him by Count Baldwin of Flanders, and upon arriving in England at the date and time he had announced, found an opposing army awaiting him. Alfred then changed course, landing at another port, and believing he had thereby evaded the dangerous trap laid for him, attempted to visit his mother. He was intercepted by Earl Godwine, who provided him with food, lodging, and a small company of soldiers in Guildford. But when Godwine left

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[17] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C,* lxix.

[18] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C,* lxix.

Alfred, the prince and his company were attacked by supporters of Harold Harefoot.

Alfred's defenseless soldiers were tortured and either slain or enslaved. As for Alfred, the

Encomium reports:

> And so, the royal youth, having been seized secretly in his lodging, and having
>
> been led out to the island called Ely, was at first ridiculed by a most wicked
>
> soldier. Thereafter more contemptible men were chosen, that by their madness,
>
> the to-be-mourned youth might be judged. These appointed judges ordered that
>
> first each one of his eyes should be plucked out, in contempt of him. After that,
>
> they prepared to accomplish this; two were placed on his arms to hold them in the
>
> meanwhile, and one was placed over his chest and one over his legs, so that in this
>
> way the punishment might more easily be inflicted on him. . . . For he was held by
>
> the wicked men, and with his eyes having been gouged out, was most wickedly
>
> killed.[19]

The *Encomium*, an explicitly pro-Emma text, assured, as Elizabeth M. Tyler noted, that

"Emma is exonerated for any role in Alfred's murder."[20] In order to do so, like the D-text

of the *Chronicle*, the *Encomium* took pains to exculpate Godwine of any responsibility

for the betrayal and death of Alfred. Unlike the *Chronicle*, however, the ultimate blame

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[19] Alistair Campbell, ed., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1949; repr., with a supplementary introduction by Simon Keynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), III. 6.6–17: "Captus est igitur regius iuuenis clam suo in hospicio, eductusque in insula Heli dicta a milite primum inrisus est iniquissimo. Deinde contemptibiliores eliguntur, ut horum ab insania flendus iuuenis diiudicetur. Qui iudices constituti decreuerunt, illi debere oculi utrique ad contemptum primum erui. Quod postquam parant perficere, duo illi super brachia ponuntur, qui interim tenerent illa, et unus super pectus unusque super crura, ut sic facilius illi inferretur paena. . . . Namque est ab inpiis tentus, effossis etiam luminibus inpiissime est occisus."

[20] Elizabeth M. Tyler, "Talking about History in Eleventh-Century England: The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and the Court of Harthacnut," *Early Medieval Europe* 13/4 (2005): 359–83, at 361.

for the slaughter of the prince and his retinue did not lie with the English supporters of Harold, but with Harold himself.

A third testament to this event is found in the *Gesta Guillelmi* by William of Poitiers, a text written within the first decade following the Battle of Hastings with the purpose of recording and justifying the Norman conquest of England. The narrative tells of an aborted attempt by Alfred's older brother, Edward (who would go on to reign from 1042 until 1066), to succeed Cnut in 1035. Outnumbered, Edward returned to Normandy upon meeting armed resistance in favor of Harold Harefoot at Southampton. Alfred, for whatever reason capable of gathering a greater force than his older brother, then decided to take a turn. William attributed a different motive to Alfred's journey to England than the previous texts (which both had stated that his purpose had been to visit mother Emma): "He himself sought the paternal scepter."[21] It may be noted that the adjective *paternum* (paternal) may indicate that the scepter, metonymically representing the kingship, is rightfully Alfred's not only because his father was king, but because his father's ancestral line was of the dynastic House of Wessex, a point expressed more directly at a later point in the *Gesta Guillelmi*. Unlike in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Alfred was not lured from Normandy by political intrigue; instead, he sailed to England in order to seat himself upon the throne that had belonged to his father Æthelred and his ancestors through that line. There is probably some truth to this claim. Lawson noted that the short space of time between Cnut's death and Alfred's suggests that Alfred had been planning to claim the throne for some time: "The *Chronicle* C text for 1036 also records

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[21] William of Poitiers, *The "Gesta Guillelmi" of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), I. 2: "Sceptrum ipse paternum requirebat." Translations are my own.

his arrival and death, which an *obit* in an Ely calendar shows occurred on 5 February. As

Cnut himself only died on 12 November 1035, it looks as though Alfred, and doubtless

Edward too, were poised to act."[22] Having thus established a motive for Alfred's journey

to England, the *Gesta Guillelmi* then followed the *Chronicle* in restoring blame to

Godwine for Alfred's betrayal:

> Earl Godwine, receiving Alfred with nefarious deceit as he approached the
>
> interior, betrayed him by a most wicked plot. For indeed Godwine ran up to meet
>
> him as if to honor him, and kindly promised his service, giving him kisses as
>
> assurance, as well as his right hand. Moreover, he shared his table and his
>
> counsels with Alfred on friendly terms. But in the middle of the following night,
>
> he tied the hands of the unarmed Alfred, who was heavy with sleep, behind his
>
> back. Godwine sent Alfred, conquered by such great charm, to King Harold in
>
> London, and a few of his company similarly bound: of the remainder, a part he
>
> condemned to prisons, wretchedly drawing them asunder and separating them
>
> from one another, and another part, after horribly disemboweling them, he cruelly
>
> slew.[23]

Here, Godwine's blame is elevated from that of the C-text of the *Chronicle*, where he

was only associated with the English lords supporting Harold and the plot against Alfred.

In the *Gesta Guillelmi*, Godwine plays a much more personal role in the betrayal,

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[22] Lawson, *Cnut*, 112.

[23] William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, I. 3: "Quem adeuntem interiora Godwinus comes nefario dolo suscipiens factione iniquissima tradidit. Etenim ultro occurrit ei ueluti ad honorem, officium suum benigne promisit, oscula dans ad fidem ac dextram. Mensam praeterea cum eo familiariter communicauit atque consilia. Noctis autem insecutae medio manus inermis ex somno languidi post tergum restrinxit. Tali expugnatum suauitate Lundoniam regi transmisit Heraldo, et de comitatu aliquot similiter uinctos: reliquos partim in ergastula deputauit separatos ab inuicem distractione miseranda, partim diro fine necauit horribiliter euisceratos."

depicted as giving the prince a Judas kiss and then personally tying the youth's hands. William of Poitiers deliberately depicted Godwine so villainously, using the crimes of Godwine as justification for Duke William of Normandy's invasion. Addressing the deceased Godwine in a lengthy apostrophe, William wrote:

> Alfred's most undeserved afflictions bring happiness to you, the most shameless, but tears to the honorable. Indeed, such things are grievous to say. Surely William, the most glorious duke, whose acts, relying on divine assistance, we will show to the age to come, will strike the neck of Harold, your offspring entirely similar in cruelty and treachery, with the sword of vengeance. By your betrayal you shed the undeserving blood of Normans: in equal turn, the blood of yours will be shed by the iron of Normans![24]

Here, allegiances attributed to Godwine in the earliest version of accounts of Alfred's betrayal have the fullness of their unintended consequences played out a generation later. Alfred is depicted not only, as in the earlier accounts, as a blameless victim of politicking, but also specifically as a Norman victim of English corruption, and William began his account of the Conquest with Alfred's death thirty years prior to suggest that wresting the throne from Godwine's son Harold II was righting a grave injustice.

Harold Harefoot, too, is depicted in the *Gesta Guillelmi* as more personally involved in Alfred's betrayal and death than in earlier accounts:

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[24] William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, I. 4: "Alueradi indignissimae aerumnae tibi improbissimo gaudium, honestis pariunt lacrimas. Dictu equidem talia sunt lugubria. Guillelmus uero, gloriosissimus dux, cuius acta uenturam aetatem diuina opitulatione freti docebimus, uindice gladio feriet iugulum Heraldi, tuae sobolis crudelitate perfidiaque consimillimae. Fundis traditione tua immeritum sanguinem Normannorum: fundetur sanguis tuorum pari uice ferro Normannorum!"

> Rejoicing at the sight of Alfred in chains, Harold ordered that the best of his attendants be decapitated in his presence, and that Alfred himself be deprived of his eyes, and then escorted to the waters, disgraced and naked on horseback (with his feet tied beneath the horse), so that he might be tormented by exile and poverty on the island of Ely. A life of his enemy more burdensome than death delighted Harold. At the same time he intended to altogether deter Edward with the misfortunes of his brother. Thus perished the most beautiful youth, most lauded for his goodness, the offspring of a king and the descendant of kings, for he was unable to survive for long: while his eyes were being dug out with a dagger, the point injured his brain.[25]

A different motivation is ascribed to the blinding of Alfred than in previous texts: here, Harold Harefoot orders it as a message to Edward that any attempt at his throne will be met with violent retribution. This is consistent with the association between a ruler's eyes and his power, attested elsewhere in early-medieval English writing, and discussed at length in the previous chapter. It appears to be no accident that the only text explicitly attributing the motive of claiming the throne to Alfred's journey is the only text attributing a motive to the particular form of his torment. William emphasized Alfred's royal lineage, inextricably tying his sense of sight with his right to rule. Alfred's blinding is thus calculated and symbolic, stripping him of the sense of sight and thereby metonymically robbing him of any power to claim kingship. Though it is impossible to

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[25] William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, I. 3: "Gauisus Heraldus in uinculis conspecto Aluerado, satellites eius quam optimos coram eo iussit decapitari, ipsum orbari luminibus, dein equestrem nuditate turpatum ad mare deduci sub equo pedibus colligatis, ut in Elga insula exilio cruciaretur et egestate. Delectabat ipsum uita inimici grauior morte. Simul Edwardum omnino absterrere intendebat germani calamitatibus. Ita deperiit formosissimus iuuenis, laudatissimus bonitate, regis proles et regum nepos, nec superuiuere potuit diu: cui dum oculi effoderentur cultro, cerebrum uiolauit mucro."

claim that Harold's message to Edward was the only thing keeping Edward from attempting an invasion, the message was nonetheless effectively clear: there was only room for one kingly gaze in England. Edward would not take the throne until 1042, after there were no remaining sons of Cnut to challenge him.

The second early Norman source discussing these events, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* by William of Jumièges, is more or less contemporary with the *Gesta Guillelmi*. It has been observed that the two texts "are in very close agreement in their accounts of the murder, and it is disputed whether one of them is derived from the other, or whether they have a common source."[26] Indeed, the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* do not contradict one another, but the differences between them are complementary. Like the *Gesta Guillelmi*, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* ascribed personal culpability for the betrayal and murder of Alfred to Godwine and Harold. It too records that Alfred's movements to England followed those of his older brother (though it is not directly stated that Alfred was attempting an invasion):

> Meanwhile his brother Alfred, having assembled no small number of soldiers, seeking the port of Wissant, and crossing from there, came to Dover. Thence indeed penetrating the interior of the kingdom, he met Earl Godwine on the way. Receiving him in his trust, the earl fulfilled the role of Judas the traitor against him that same night. For after offering a kiss of peace, and sharing a meal with him, in the dead of night, with Alfred's hands having been bound behind his back, Godwine sent him and several of his men to King Harold in London. But he forcibly dispersed some of his soldiers throughout the kingdom of the English,

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[26] Campbell, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, lxvn1.

while some he viciously killed. When Harold saw him [i.e., Alfred], he immediately ordered that his companions be stripped of their heads, and indeed ordered Alfred himself to be led to Ely and deprived of his eyes in that place. And so too died Alfred, the most noble and the best man, having been killed unjustly.[27]

These Norman sources share a particular aversion to Godwine. But while William of Poitiers merely alluded to Judas in Godwine's kissing of Alfred as a false sign of friendship and trust, William of Jumièges equated Godwine to Christ's betrayer directly. And while the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* attributes no motive to Harold's order to behead Alfred's companions and have the prince blinded, the text does go on to discuss this event, as did the *Gesta Guillelmi*, as the impetus for the Norman Conquest. Naming the October 14th date of the Battle of Hastings, William wrote:

Thus almighty God on the day before the ides of October punished innumerable sinners of each host in diverse ways. For by the raving fury of the Normans he punished many thousands of English on that Saturday, because long before they had unjustly killed the innocent Alfred, and on the previous Saturday they mercilessly slaughtered King Harald [Hardrada] and Earl Tostig and many others.[28]

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[27] William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum ducum*. In *The "Gesta Normannorum Ducum" of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. C. Van Houts, 2 vols., Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992–95), 2:VII. 6(9): "Interea frater ejus Aluredus, militibus non parui numeri assumptis, portum petens Widsanti, et hac transfretans, Doroberniam uenit. Inde siquidem interiora penetrans regni, Goduinum comitem obuium habuit. Quem idem comes in sua fide suscipiens Iude proditoris uicem impleuit in illo nocte sub eadem. Nam libato pacis osculo, et cum eo percepto cibo, medio intempeste noctis, manibus post tergum ligatis, illum Heroldo regi apud Londoniam cum suorum nonnullis destinauit. Milites autem suos partim per Anglorum regnum distraxit, partim cum dedecore peremit. Quem Heroldus ut uidit, statim eius socios truncari capitibus jussit, ipsum namque ad Heli duci ibique oculis priuari. Sic quoque nobilissimus et optimus uir Aluredus occubuit iniuste perhemptus."

[28] William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 2:VII. 15(36): "Sic omnipotens Deus pridie idus Octobris innumeros peccatores utriusque phalangis puniit diuersis modis. Nam uesania seuiente Normannorum, in die sabbati multauit multa milia Anglorum, qui longe ante innocentem Aluredum, iniuste

This assertion, though, raises the stakes compared with the *Gesta Guillelmi*, which had suggested that the Norman Conquest was personal retribution for the crimes of Godwine. Here, the *Gesta Normanorum Ducum* asserted that Hastings represented divine retribution against the sins of the English people. These sins, evidently, amounted to regicide with the killing not only of Alfred thirty years prior, but the killing of Harald Hardrada and Tostig at Stamford Bridge the week before Hastings. Of course, the *Gesta Guillelmi* and this portion of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* were written after the Conquest had been accomplished, and their accounts of the events of 1036 could just as easily be interpreted as *post hoc* justification for the killing of King Harold Godwineson (rather than as motivation for the invasion).

Given the differences between all of these sources, a perfect concordance synthesizing the events of Alfred's blinding and death is not possible, but a general sketch combining elements of all four is nevertheless worthwhile. Such a summary, using the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*, or *ASC-C* and *ASC-D* if the two diverge), the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (*EER*), the *Gesta Guillelmi* (*GG*), and the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (*GND*), is as follows: Under the pretense of visiting his mother Emma (*ASC*, *EER*), but possibly with the intention of wresting the throne from Harold Harefoot (*GG*), Alfred travels with an armed retinue from Normandy to England (*ASC*, *EER*, *GG*, *GND*). In the interior, Alfred meets Earl Godwine, who pledges Alfred his loyalty (*EER*, *GG*, *GND*) and supplies him with men (*EER*) or at least food and lodging (*EER*, *GG*, *GND*), but is secretly aligned with Harold Harefoot and uses this opportunity

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necauerunt, ac precedenti sabbato Heraldum regem et Tostium comitem aliosque multos absque pietate trucidauerunt."

to capture Alfred and his Norman companions (*ASC-C*, *GG*, *GND*). Some sources
exculpate Godwine and instead attribute Alfred's capture to other unnamed English
supporters of Harold Harefoot (*ASC-D*, *EER*). Alfred's soldiers suffer mutilation (*ASC*),
murder and enslavement (*ASC*, *EER*, *GG*, *GND*). Alfred himself is blinded (*ASC*, *EER*,
GG, *GND*), possibly at the personal order of Harold Harefoot (*GG*, *GND*), either at Ely
(*ASC*, *EER*, *GND*), or at the court of Harold Harefoot in London (*GG*). A political
motivation for the blinding is given, either a sign of contempt for the prince (*EER*), or a
sign of Harold's savagery and a message to Alfred's brother Edward (*GG*). Alfred died
shortly thereafter in Ely (*ASC*, *GG*, *GND*) or was deliberately slain there (*EER*), and was
honorably buried by the monks (*ASC*, *EER*). Miracles were reported at his tomb (*EER*).
The event was considered the most violent in England in at least a generation (*ASC*), and
the violence was considered unmerited and horrific (*ASC*, *EER*, *GG*, *GND*). The
Normans viewed their 1066 invasion of England as vengeance (*GG*, *GND*), sanctioned by
God (*GND*), for Alfred's assassination.

      All of these accounts are in agreement that the violence against Alfred was both
undeserved and shocking, but none expresses that shock quite as poignantly as the
Chronicle. The chronicler, who has memorialized the event with a poem, thereby
combining the literary with the historical, contextualizes the event superlatively: "Ne
wearð dreorlice dæd gedon on þison earde / syððan Dene comon 7 her frið namon" (No
bloodier deed was done in this land since the Danes came and kept peace here).[29]
Although such a hyperbolic superlative is a formulaic means of framing the significance
of historical events, this does not mean that the exaggeration is void of any truth. Thomas

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[29] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 106.

A. Bredehoft has observed that this particular type of formulaic construction, in which a historical event such as a battle is contextualized in such a superlative manner in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, arose as the *Chronicle* turned to the conventions of early-medieval English poetry in order to develop a vernacular language for historiography from the earliest iteration of the *Chronicle*. Bredehoft pointed to an entry for the year 851, and thus part of the *Chronicle*'s so-called "Common Stock" of material before various divergent versions were created, as the earliest example of "historical comparison" that would become the *Chronicle*'s standard method of contextualizing the significance of historical events.[30] This entry, recording Athelwulf's victory over the invading Danish army, established a pattern of superlative comparison that Bredehoft identified in entries for 937, 979, 1009, 1036, 1045, 1049, 1066, 1077, and as late as 1137 across manuscripts of the *Chronicle*.[31] While the chronicler's description of the mutilation and murder of Alfred and his companions is indeed superlative, it is nonetheless true: by early-medieval English estimation, it was the most shocking and wicked act of violence perpetrated since the accession of Cnut twenty years earlier had put an end to Viking invasions.

O'Brien O'Keeffe argued that it is not the act of mutilation alone that would have caused this particular horrified shock at the events of 1036. Indeed, she wrote, bodies so disfigured were not unknown or unseen at the time, but may have been "commonplace in daily life," taking the various forms of "the twisted limbs and gaping, festering sores

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[30] Thomas A. Bredehoft, "History and Memory in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 109–21, at 115.

[31] Bredehoft, "History and Memory," 115–19.

presented for healing at holy places" as well as "the casual acts of violence which were the hallmarks of victorious marauders" and even "the excruciating forensic exactments in compensation for rapes, thefts, adulteries and other crimes outlined variously in the law codes."[32] The existence of mutilation, codified into the law codes of the tenth and eleventh centuries, serves as the touchpoint for O'Brien O'Keeffe's interpretation of the *Chronicle*'s report of the torment endured by Alfred and his companions. Against the backdrop of the omnipresence of such visible evidence of violence, with reminders of bodily violation so commonplace and even authorized as legal punishment, "it is not merely the cruel treatment of these men which inspires the passion of the entry. It is the significance of that treatment which evokes its anger and protest."[33] O'Brien O'Keeffe argued that it was the stark contrast between the innocence of Alfred and his retinue and the legal significance of implied guilt in bodies so mutilated that caused the shock of the chronicler of 1036.

Such shock may indeed have served a rhetorical purpose. Though Renée Trilling analyzed this *Chronicle* poem mostly from the angle of its poetic form, she did offer an interpretation of its cultural significance, suggesting that it exhibits "Anglo-Saxon nationalism underlying the extensive emotional treatment of Alfred's death."[34] Contextualizing the 1036 poem with surrounding *Chronicle* entries, Trilling argued that "this portion of the Chronicle evokes the tragedy of a nation drifting irrevocably both

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[32] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 209–32, at 212–13.

[33] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law," 214.

[34] Renée Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 245.

from God's law and from its own heroic vision of itself."[35] That the same events could be used a generation later by William of Poitiers and William of Jumièges, who were much more directly propagandizing from their pro-Norman stance than the chronicler seemed to be from a pro-English stance, speaks to the enduring power of the shocking nature of this political violence, as well as the malleable identification of Alfred and his older brother as either English or Norman as befits the narrative (a malleability that could also be applied to Harold Harefoot, with his English mother and Danish father). Still, the *Chronicle* poem places no emphasis on Alfred's Englishness (or Harold's Danishness for that matter), and the comparison to Danes within the poem is meant to characterize the atrocities committed by the English as equaled only by the violence of a generation earlier.[36] Indeed, as Bredehoft suggested, the focus of the poem is English, not Danish, atrocities: the villains are English rulers, and in the case of the C-text, the English Earl of Wessex himself, whereas "the Danes . . . in this poem, are the peacemakers."[37]

One aspect of early-medieval English culture that cannot be overlooked when analyzing the reactions of the *Chronicle* and later writers to the blinding of Prince Alfred is the hierarchical ordering of the senses. A great amount of scholarship about vision in early-medieval England has identified the sense of sight as the most important and

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[35] Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 245.

[36] The pages of the C-manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* preceding the 1036 entry are replete with violent acts committed by both sides of the conflict between the English and the Danes, even before Swein's first mention in 994. Such atrocities include the slaughter of Danes by the English in the Saint Brice's Day massacre (1002; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 89), the sacking and burning of English towns by the Danes (ten such instances are summarized in 1011; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 95), and the martyrdom of Archbishop Ælfheah (1012; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 96–97). The instance of brutality during this period of conflict that was most equivalent to the Alfred episode occurred in 1014, when Cnut took possession of his father Swein's English captives "7 cearf of hiora handa 7 earan 7 nosa" (and cut off their hands and ears and noses; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 99). Notably, not even during this violent invasion were Cnut's prisoners blinded the way Alfred and members of his retinue would be in 1036.

[37] Bredehoft, "History and Memory," 117.

highly-regarded of the five senses. As an overview of this scholarship is given in Chapter

One of this dissertation, a brief summary of scholarship affirming the supremacy of sight

over the other senses is sufficient here. Two artistic representations of sight in ninth-

century artifacts, the Fuller Brooch and the Alfred Jewel, are suggestive of the

importance afforded to sight over the other senses in early-medieval English thought.

This is affirmed in the scholarship of R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and David Pratt on the

iconography of the Fuller Brooch, and of Egil Bakka and Charles D. Wright on the

Alfred Jewel.[38] Edward Wheatley has found that church ceremony surrounding the visual

presentation of the Eucharist is evidence of the privileged status of sight.[39] Patricia

Skinner and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe have found sight to be the most valued of the

senses in early-medieval English law codes.[40] Rosa Maria Fera has identified Gregory the

Great as an important source of the ordering of the senses (with sight as the highest in

importance) in early-medieval English prose and art.[41] Considered together, there is an

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[38] R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, "The Fuller Brooch," *British Museum Quarterly* 17 (1952): 75–76; David Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention at the Court of King Alfred the Great," in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. Catherine Cubitt, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 189–221; Egil Bakka, "The Alfred Jewel and Sight," *Antiquaries Journal* 46 (1966): 277–82; Charles D. Wright, "Why Sight Holds Flowers: An Apocryphal Source for the Iconography of the Alfred Jewel and Fuller Brooch," in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 18 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 169–86.

[39] Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 23.

[40] Patricia Skinner, "Taking Out the Eye of a One-Eyed Man and Other Hypothetical Moments of Sensory Impairments in Early Medieval Law," in *Sensory Perception and the Medieval West*, ed. Simon C. Thomson and Michael D. J. Bintley (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 181–94; Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Hands and Eyes, Sight and Touch: Appraising the Senses in Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 45 (2016): 105–40.

[41] Rosa Maria Fera, "Metaphors for the Five Senses in Old English Prose," *Review of English Studies* 63, no. 262 (2011): 709–32, at 728.

abundance of evidence from a variety of testimonies of early-medieval English culture suggesting that sight was considered the most important and valuable of the five senses.

'*Leoma leas*': Depictions of Blindness and Blinding in Old English Poetry

Not every description of blindness in Old English literature describes it with such horror as the *Chronicle* did at Alfred's blinding, but even the most straightforward and unembellished descriptions may nevertheless reveal early-medieval English attitudes regarding the importance of sight. For instance, in the poem *The Fortunes of Men*, blindness is counted among the potential conditions bringing either hardship or premature death to a person:[42] "Sum sceal leomena leas lifes neotan, / folmum ætfeohtan" (One must live a life devoid of lights, groping with hands).[43] While this description of blindness as "leomena leas lifes" (a life devoid of lights) may be an appropriate description of the darkness experienced by the blind, it may indeed also describe the sense of sight in extramissive terms, if the *leoma* or light can be equated to extramissive rays emitted by the eyes. If so, then the further description of the blind man "folmum ætfeohtan" (groping with hands) is especially poignant: his hands must replace the sight-effecting lights which he is forced to live without, reaching out and striking at objects which the eyes' rays normally would. The verb *ætfeohtan*, with *feohtan* (to fight) at its root, suggests that the hands are a poor substitute for sight, and the action is a struggle.

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[42] The full list of hardships and deaths outlined in the poem is as follows: being eaten by a wolf, famine, spear-point, war, blindness, lameness, falling from a high tree, forced exile, hanging, fire, stabbing during a drunken fight, and suicide. Though the first two-thirds of this poem is negative, the latter third discusses good fortune, skills, and blessings.

[43] *The Fortunes of Men*, 17–18a. Text is according to George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 154–6.

The man appears to be combating his condition. And while this description of blindness, though it is revealing about early-medieval English understanding of sight, does little to illuminate our understanding of early-medieval English attitudes toward the act of blinding, that blindness is the only disability involving the loss of one of the senses listed in the poem highlights the importance assigned to sight over the other senses.

There is a second depiction of loss of sight within the poem, however, that approaches the similar shocking treatment the blinding of Alfred was afforded in the *Chronicle*. In this instance, a man condemned to death by hanging is also afflicted with blinding:

> Sum sceal on geapum   galgan ridan,
>
> seomian æt swylte,   oþþæt sawlhord,
>
> bancofa blodig,   abrocen weorþeð.
>
> Þær him hrefn nimeþ   heafodsyne,
>
> sliteð salwigpad   sawelleasne;
>
> noþer he þy facne mæg   folmum biwergan,
>
> laþum lyftsceaþan,   biþ his lif scæcen,
>
> ond he feleleas,   feores orwena,
>
> blac on beame   bideð wyrde,
>
> bewegen wælmiste.   Bið him werig noma!
>
> (One must ride the lofty gallows, hang at death, until the soul-hoard, the bloody bone-chamber, becomes broken. There the dark-cloaked raven robs his head-sight, rips him soulless; neither will he be able to defend against wickedness with his hands, the loathsome sky-ravager, his life will be shaken off, and devoid of

feeling, despairing of life, pallid upon the tree he awaits fate, surrounded by the

mist of carnage. His name will be deplorable!)[44]

This is a violent description of an execution, and unlike the *Chronicle*'s depiction of

Alfred, there is neither presumption nor assertion of the innocence of the man put to

death. The violation of his body, nevertheless, is on par with the detailed description the

Chronicle gives of the torment undergone by Alfred and his retinue. The poet emphasizes

the violence against the execution victim's body, bones, and blood. The greater

indignation, though, is the victim's blinding. Hanging from the gallows, he has his eyes

plucked out by a raven: "Þær him hrefn nimeð heafodsyne, / sliteð salwigpad

sawelleasne"[45] (There the dark-cloaked raven robs his head-sight, rips him soulless). That

the raven deprives the victim of both eyes and soul is suggestive of some kind of

connection between the two, similar to the connectedness of the sense of sight with the

mind as explored in Chapter Two of this dissertation. The contrast between this blinded

execution victim and the blind man described previously in this poem is especially great

in the depiction of the two men's hands. Whereas the blind man makes use of his hands,

attempting to replace the missing sight-effecting rays from his eyes, the criminal has his

hands bound and is defenseless against the raven's sight-robbing attack: "noþer he þy

facne mæg folmum biwergan, / laþum lyftsceaþan" (neither will he be able to defend

against wickedness with his hands, the loathsome sky-ravager).[46] And again, while there

is neither presumption nor affirmation of the innocence of the executed, the blinding of

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[44] *The Fortunes of Men*, 33–42.

[45] *The Fortunes of Men*, 36–7.

[46] *The Fortunes of Men*, 38–9a.

the criminal is nevertheless viewed as *facne* (wickedness), against which he is
defenseless. This suggests, then, that the innocence of Alfred and his retinue, stressed not
only in the *Chronicle* but in each of the other early accounts of his death, may not solely
account for the shock with which his blinding is treated in the *Chronicle* poem, as the
blinding of a condemned criminal was viewed with equal horror.

If the act of blinding, even when performed through the natural processes of a
scavenger bird against a man doomed to be executed, is viewed as a destructive
wickedness as it is in *The Fortunes of Men*, then blinding itself must be an inherently
wicked act regardless of the innocence or guilt of the blinded. Another example of this is
seen in the poem *Judith*, in which removing the ability of others to see, not through actual
blinding but through cunning artifice, is inextricably bound with wickedness. Early in
what survives in the sole manuscript of the poem (the Nowell Codex), which picks up the
action towards the end of the Vulgate Book of Judith, the invading Assyrian leader
Holofernes has ordered Judith, the poem's hero, to be brought to his tent:

> Hie hraðe fremedon,
>
> anbyhtscealcas,   swa him heora ealdor bebead,
>
> byrnwigena brego,   bearhtme stopon
>
> to ðam gysterne,   þær hie Iudithðe
>
> fundon ferhðgleawe,   ond ða fromlice
>
> lindwiggende   lædan ongunnon
>
> þa torhtan mægð   to træfe þam hean,
>
> þær se rica hyne   reste on symbel
>
> nihtes inne,   nergende lað,

Holofernus.   Þær wæs eallgylden

fleohnet fæger   ymbe þæs folctogan

bed ahongen,   þæt se bealofulla

mihte wlitan þurh,   wigena baldor,

on æghwylcne   þe ðær inne com

hæleða bearna,   ond on hyne nænig

monna cynnes,   nymðe se modiga hwæne

niðe rofra   him þe near hete

rinca to rune gegangan.[47]

(Quickly the servants accomplished what their lord, chief of the mail-clad

warriors, commanded them: with a clamor they stepped to the guest place, where

they found Judith, her mind glowing, and then the shield-warriors forcefully set

about leading the radiant maiden to the high tent, wherein the ruler, loathsome to

the Savior, Holofernes, always rested at night. There was an entirely golden, fair

fly-net hung about the bed of the commander, so that the baleful prince of

warriors would be able to look through, upon each of the heroes of men who came

there within, and none of mankind could look upon him, except for when the

proud man ordered one of the men bold in wickedness to go nearer to him for

counsel.)

Though there is no language directly linking sight to the descriptions of Judith in this

passage, the two adjectives used to describe her, *ferhðgleawe* (glowing in mind) and

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[47] *Judith*, 37b–54a. Text is according to Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, The Anglo-Saxon
Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 99–109.

torhtan (radiant), recall the extramissive descriptions of sight given elsewhere in early-medieval English literature. Indeed, the passage is suggestive of Beowulf's watchful preparation for his imminent battle with Grendel, previously discussed in Chapter Two. There, Beowulf is described as watching and bulging in mind in tandem: "ac he wæccende wraþum on andan / bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges" (but watching for the wrathful one in hatred, he awaited, bulging in mind, the result of battle).[48] The description of Judith as being *ferhðgleawe* (glowing in mind) might indeed be a parallel to Beowulf's sight-induced expanding mind, for she too is preparing for her own physical battle against Holofernes: she approaches his tent with the intent of killing him. *Ferhðgleawe* (glowing in mind) and *torhtan* (radiant) are not the only such descriptions, associated with light, of Judith in the poem. Earlier, the poet adorns Judith with similar attributes, such as being *gleawe on geðonce* (glowing in thought),[49] as well as *ælfscinu* (literally "shining like an elf," but always with the connotation of "beautiful").[50] While neither is directly associated with the act of seeing, both are suggestive of the extramissive model of sight, especially the notion of being glowing in thought, with the inner intent of the mind radiating from her like light.

By contrast, Holofernes, though described in heroic terms appropriate for a military commander, is depicted as wicked to the core. The epithets describing him in the above passage depict him as mighty: he is an *ealdor* (lord) and a *byrnwigena brego* (chief of mail-clad warriors), he is a *rica* (commander) and a *wigena baldor* (prince of

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[48] *Beowulf*, 708–9. Text is according to Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. with 1st and 2nd supplements (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1950).

[49] *Judith*, 13b.

[50] *Judith*, 14a.

warriors), terminology befitting a powerful general. But Holofernes wields his power

tyrannically: he is *bealofulla* (baleful) and *modiga* (proud), and most damningly, he is

nergende lað (loathsome to the Savior). In order to illustrate the extent of Holofernes's

wickedness, the poet invents a device with which Holofernes may look out on those

surrounding him, but which renders him invisible to others. The blinding in this case is

only figurative, rather than literal, but the effect is similar: Holofernes augments his own

power by limiting the power of those around him. Chapter Four of this dissertation

discussed other figures of Old English literature who used sight as a means of expressing

power: Abraham, Beowulf, Hrothgar, and even Grendel are depicted in such a way. Not

even Grendel is so wicked, though, as to wield power by limiting the sight of those

around him. Holofernes' figurative use of blinding as a means of establishing absolute

despotic control, the wondrously wrought *eallgylden fleohnet fæger* (all-golden, fair

flynet) hanging about the inner chamber of his tent, is not a feature of the Vulgate text of

the story, but seems to have been imagined by the poet as a demonstration of the villain's

wickedness. As such, it is the product of early-medieval English thought concerning

sight: namely, that it symbolizes and characterizes power, that its connection to the mind

makes it primary among the senses, and that limiting another's sight is especially wicked.

A useful approach to understanding the power structure inherent in Holofernes's

mysterious surveillance device is Michel Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon, a model

for prison design conceptualized in the late eighteenth century by Jeremy Bentham: a

centralized, one-way observation tower from which a prison guard is able to constantly

observe inmates while remaining unseen himself. Foucault's description of the

Panopticon bears a strong resemblance to Holofernes's tent in *Judith*: "The Panopticon is

a machine for disassociating the seeing/being seen dyad: in the peripheral ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen."[51] Such is Holofernes's goal and the effect of his cunning device, that he is able to observe everything and everyone surrounding him, while his own behavior and presence is shrouded in invisible secrecy. The immediate effect of this is power, as recognized by Foucault: "The Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory of power. Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men's behaviour; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised."[52] The result of this, Foucault asserted, is a dynamic which "multiplies the asymmetry of power."[53] This would have been especially evident to an early-medieval English audience reading or hearing *Judith*, as sight, as I argued in Chapter Four, functioned as a metaphor for political power—a metaphor which at times extended beyond political power to represent the physical power of violence. Limiting the sight of others, as Holofernes did with his tent, effectively blinding his warriors, increased his own power as it diminished that of everyone surrounding him. As to the character of this power, Foucault argued that it is mental rather than physical: "In each of its applications, [the Panopticon] makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. . . . Because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of

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[51] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 200–1.

[52] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 204.

[53] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 223.

mind over mind'."[54] This would especially be true given the connection between sight

and mind in the early-medieval English model for understanding sight, as outlined in

Chapter Two. The audience of *Judith* would recognize the psychological power inherent

in Holofernes's tent: the wicked general both wields and displays his omnipotence

through the specific power of omnivision granted to him by this cunning device.

There is something naturally sinister about this kind of psychological power,

beyond its asymmetry. Foucault noted that the Panopticon endows its user with "a power

that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied."[55] This is immediately apparent

in *Judith*, which characterizes Holofernes as *bealofulla* (baleful), a menacing, power-

craving ruler staring out from his own Panopticon. The objectification is especially true

in the case of the poem's hero, transferring from Holofernes's gaze to the narrative of the

poem itself, with the hyperfocus on Judith's radiant appearance and beauty as described

by the narrator reflecting the menacing and objectifying gaze extending from the dark

center of Holofernes's tent.

The modern Panopticon of Bentham and Foucault differs from that of Holofernes

in one critical way. Foucault suggested that "the arrangement of this machine is such that

its enclosed nature does not preclude a permanent presence from the outside . . . there is

no risk, therefore, that the increase in power created by the panoptic machine may

degenerate into tyranny."[56] Whereas Foucault and Bentham had accounted for public

observation of the Panopticon, enabling a type of accountability founded in the

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[54] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 206.

[55] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 220.

[56] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 207.

Juvenalian concern with oversight of overseers, Holofernes, in his paranoid need for
absolutism, wields the power of his Panopticon singularly and therefore despotically. In
this portrayal, the early-medieval English poet has thus heightened the tyrannical nature
of the commander of the invading heathen army above that of the biblical depiction of
Holofernes.

This characterization of Holofernes offers an intriguing parallel to the blinding of
Alfred in 1036. The *Chronicle* uniquely extends the blinding not only to Alfred but to his
retinue as well—the later accounts shift their focus solely to the torment endured by
Alfred. At this point of time, it must be remembered, Harold's position as king over
England was not unchallenged, but his power was tenuous, potentially opposed by his
half-brother by Cnut, as well as by Emma's sons by Æthelred. This led either his
supporters (led by Godwine, as the C-text of the *Chronicle* asserts) or Harold himself to
consolidate power in a way similar to Holofernes: by limiting the vision, albeit in a
physically permanent rather than technologically artificial way, of those who opposed his
kingship. This was evidently a winning strategy, if the goal was absolute authority. The
entry for the following year begins, "Her man geceas Harald ofer eall to cinge" (In this
year Harold was chosen over all as king).[57] Effective as it may have been, the depiction
of Holofernes and the treatment of the blinding of Alfred and his retinue in the *Chronicle*
itself, with its affirmation that "Ne wearð dreorlice dæd gedon on þison earde" (no
bloodier deed was done in this land) since Cnut had made peace in England a generation
earlier, shows this to be the action of a despicable tyrant. The permanence of the blinding,
as opposed to Holofernes's Panopticon-like net, makes Harold all the more wicked a

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[57] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 106.

ruler. It is no wonder, then, that the D-text of the *Chronicle* and the *Encomium* each

strove to distance Godwine from the despotic act of terror, and that more than thirty years

later the Norman accounts of 1036, eager to delegitimize the right to rule of Godwine's

deposed son King Harold, would restore culpability to the English earl, tying him

inextricably to the seizure of power through wicked means.

Early-medieval English literature produced a poem with blinding central to its

action, and as such, this poem is an excellent touchstone against which to compare the

treatment of Alfred's blinding in the *Chronicle*. *Andreas* is a verse adaptation of an

apocryphal romance dating as far back as the second century, telling of Saint Andrew's

rescue of Saint Matthew from a tribe of cannibals in Mermedonia. The poem survives

only in the Vercelli Book, though prose versions of the story also exist in an Old English

homily found fragmentarily within the manuscript containing the *Blickling Homilies*

(Princeton, Scheide Library, MS 71) and more completely in Cambridge, Corpus Christi

College, MS 198. The verse version, *Andreas*, provides more colorful language regarding

the blindings carried out by the Mermedonians as part of the preparation of their victims

for consumption than the more straightforward homily, which matter-of-factly reports

that "and æghwylc man þe on þære ceastre com ælþeodisc, secgð þæt hie hine sona

genamon and his eagan ut astungan, and hie him sealdon attor drincan þæt mid myclen

lybcræfte wæs geblanden: and mid þy þe hie þone drenc druncon, hraþe heora heorta

wæs tolesed and heora mod onwended"[58] (and each foreign person who came into the

city, it is said that they at once took him and thrust out his eyes, and they gave him poison

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[58] *The Acts of Matthew and Andrew in the City of Cannibals*, 6–9. Text and line numbers are according to Frederic G. Cassidy and Richard Ringler, eds., *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 203–19.

that was blended with great witchcraft to drink: and when they had drunk the drink,

quickly their heart was dissolved and their mind transformed). By contrast, the *Andreas*

poet used a kenning to describe the blinding:

> Swylc wæs þæs folces   freoðoleas tacen,
>
> unlædra eafoð,   þæt hie eagena gesihð,
>
> hettend heorogrimme,   heafodgimmas
>
> agetton gealgmode   gara ordum.[59]
>
> (Such was the peaceless token of this people, the violence of the wicked ones, the
>
> very fierce enemy, that they furiously destroyed the sight of the eyes, the head-
>
> gems, with the tips of spears.)

The poet, more free to improvise in the verse retelling of this story than the author of the

Old English homiletic version, who evidently followed a Latin original, has placed much

more emphasis on the perceived savagery of the Mermedonians. In the homily, the

Mermedonians are not described with adjectives, but in the poem *Andreas*, they are

unlædra (wicked) and a *hettend heorogrimme* (very fierce enemy), and blinding, a

freoðoleas (peaceless) action, is presented as evidence of their wickedness and ferocity.

The kenning used for eyes, *heafodgimmas* (head-gems), is potentially multifaceted in its

interpretation that has already received attention in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Gems might be a natural substitute for the eyes because their size, shape, and beauty can

be similar to the eyes. Gems might also be selected as a metaphor due to their radiance,

shining in a way that the eyes are understood to operate under the extramissive model for

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[59] *Andreas*, 29–32. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, The Anglo-Saxon
Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 3–51.

sight. But gems could also have been used for eyes due to their value: all of the senses might be located within the head, but it is sight that is most readily associated with objects representing material wealth. The Mermedonians' destruction of their victims' eyesight, then, is an affront on the most valuable of the senses, and therefore an especially cruel act.

In sum, these three poems reveal a cultural attitude surrounding blinding that contextualizes the 1036 blinding of Alfred as a superlatively heinous act of violence. Whether an act of nature against a convicted criminal, as in *The Fortunes of Men*, or a punishment inflicted on a captive saint, as in *Andreas*, blinding receives similar treatment. Blinding is viewed as a *facne* (wickedness) and a *freoðoleas* (peaceless) act, perpetrated by those who are *laþum* (loathsome), *unlædra* (wicked), or a *hettend heorogrimme* (very fierce enemy). Furthermore, *Judith* attests that when carried out for political purposes, blinding is the act of a tyrannical leader, one who is *bealofulla* (baleful) and *modiga* (proud), and even *nergende lað* (loathsome to the Savior). In this context, it is no wonder that the *Chronicle*, particularly vested in delegitimizing Harold's unjust claim to the throne, reacted with such shock to the blinding of the blameless Alfred and his companions, asserting that such a violent act had been unknown in England for a generation.

'*Modes blindnyssa wiðinnan*': Blindness as a Metaphor for Spiritual Deficiency

Another understanding of blindness, metaphorical rather than literal, may also be at play in the *Chronicle* and later works' reaction to the blinding of Alfred. Wheatley traced the use of blindness as a metaphor for ignorance of the true nature of God through

patristic Christian writing, noting its origin in Old Testament scripture such as Isaiah and the Psalms, which was then adopted by Paul in Romans, chapter 11.[60] According to Wheatley, "the biblically inscribed metaphor of blindness proliferated in anti-Semitic writings of the Middle Ages, especially among patristic writers such as Augustine."[61] In addition to Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, Wheatley provided Bede's allegorical interpretation of the apocryphal Book of Tobit as an example of such patristic use of the metaphor of spiritual blindness with anti-Semitic application.[62] This is indeed a small sample: Wheatley asserted that there are more than 600 instances of blindness used to describe Judaism in the *Patrologia Latina*.[63]

The much later use of the metaphor by Ælfric of Eynsham was a departure from this anti-Semitic patristic tradition. Ælfric applied the metaphor far more broadly, using it to describe anyone ignorant of God, or spiritually deficient in some other way. In the *Catholic Homilies*, in the homily *Dominica III post Epiphania Domini* (The Third Sunday after the Lord's Epiphany), Ælfric employed this metaphor in order to explain what Jesus meant in Matthew 8:12 when he said that those who were not to inherit the kingdom of heaven would be cast into *tenebras exteriores* (outer darkness): "Ða yttran þeostru sind þæs lichaman blindnyssa wiðutan: þa inran þeostru sind þæs modes blindnyssa wiðinnan; Se þe on þisum andweardum life is wiðinnan ablend swa þæt he næfð nan andgit ne hoge ymbe godes beboda: he bið ðonne eft wiðutan ablend. and ælces

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[60] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, 67.

[61] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, 67.

[62] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, 67–69.

[63] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, 69–70.

leohtes bedæled. for þan ðe he ær his lif aspende. buton godes gemynde"[64] (The outer

darkness is the blindness of the body without. The inner darkness is the blindness of the

mind within. He who in this present life is blind within, so that he does not have any

understanding nor mindfulness concerning the commandments of God, he will then again

be blind without, and deprived of every light; because previously he spent his life without

bearing God in mind). Here, Ælfric has asserted that the *tenebras exteriores* (outer

darkness) described by Jesus represents a literal and physical eternal punishment for a

corresponding metaphorical condition. The spiritually blind, those who are unable to see

the true ways of God and keep his commandments, will be resurrected into a state of

literal blindness of their bodies as punishment for the blindness of their minds. Ælfric

then clarified that *tenebras exteriores* (outer darkness) is not a place that is dark, but

rather, the effect of blinding as a torment of the resurrected: "þær beoð þonne geferlæhte

on anre susle: þa ðe on life on mandædum geþeodde wæron: swa þæt ða manslagan

togædere ecelice on tintregum cwylmiað: and [. . .] on þam bradum fyre butan ælcere

geendunge forwurðað; ðær bið wop and toða gebit: for þan ðe þa eagan tyrað on þam

micclum bryne: and þa teð cwaciað eft on swiþlicum cyle"[65] (There will then be

associated in one torment, those who were joined in wicked deeds in life, so that the

murderers will suffer eternally together in afflictions; and [. . .] in the broad fire, without

ending, will perish. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, because the eyes will

run with tears in that great burning, and the teeth will shake in the intense cold). Ælfric

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[64] Peter Clemoes, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), VIII. 181–6.

[65] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, VIII. 190–6. The ellipses omit Ælfric's continuation of the inhabitants of Hell being organized according to like sins and punished together.

thus reconciled an apparent paradox whereby, in this moment within the Bible, Jesus describes the place of eternal torment as a place of darkness, even though elsewhere it is a place of burning that should therefore be illuminated. The two opposing descriptions can be brought into harmony by Ælfric's explanation: though the fires of hell should be bright, the sight-effecting extramissive rays of the resurrected eyes of the tormented are impeded by the teariness induced by the fires of Hell, thereby causing it to be a place of *yttran þeostru* (outer darkness), equivalent to *þæs lichaman blindnyssa wiðutan* (blindness of the body without). This punishment—a literal blinding— is reserved for those who were metaphorically blind to spiritual matters in life: those who experienced *modes blindnyssa wiðinnan* (blindness of the mind within).

 Dominica in Quinquagessima (Shrove Sunday), another of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*, also explores the theme of spiritual blindness. In this homily, Ælfric compared the spiritually blind to the story from the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus healing a blind man near Jericho, found in Mark 10:46–52, with analogs in Matthew 9:27–31 and 20:29–34, and Luke 18:35–43. First, Ælfric presented Christ's incarnation as a remedy for spiritual blindness: "þa ða crist com to ure deadlicnysse and ure menniscnysse underfeng: þa wearð mancyn onliht. and gesihðe underfeng"[66] (when Christ came to our mortality, and received our humanity, then mankind was enlightened, and received sight). Before elaborating on how Christ's humanity, as part of his dual human-divine nature, gave sight to humankind, Ælfric, seeming to recognize what Dennis Hamm has identified as a central theme of Luke and Acts (which share an author)—that sight is equated with

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[66] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 57–9.

recognition of the divine identity of Jesus[67]—implored his audience to practice self-reflection and turn to Christ for healing if they themselves were spiritually blind, the way the blind man of Jericho turned to Christ to heal his physical blindness:

> Se man þe nan ðing ne cann þæs ecan leohtes: He is blind; Ac gif he gelyfð on þone hælend: þonne sit he wið þone weig; Gif he nele biddan þæs ecan leohtes: he sit þonne blind be ðam wege unbiddende; Se ðe rihtlice gelyfð on crist, and geornlice bit his saule onlihtinge; he sitt be ðam wege biddende; Swa hwa swa oncnæwð þa blindnysse his modes clipige he mid inweardre heortan: swa swa se blinda cleopode: Hælend dauides bearn, gemiltsa min;[68]

> (The man who does not know a thing concerning the eternal light, he is blind; but if he believes in the Savior, then he will sit along the way. If he does not wish to pray for the eternal light, he sits blind along the way, not praying. He who rightly believes in Christ, and earnestly prays for enlightenment for his soul, he sits along the way praying. Whosoever recognizes the blindness of his mind, let him call inwardly with his heart, just as the blind man called out, "Savior, son of David, have mercy on me.")

This description of spiritual blindness provides more detail about the nature of the spiritual blindness metaphor. The condition itself is described in very similar language,

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[67] Dennis Hamm, "Sight to the Blind: Vision as Metaphor in Luke," *Biblica* 67/4 (1986): 457–77. At 475–76, Hamm elaborated on how Luke's treatment of the healing of the blind man at Jericho was central to this theme: "Luke's version of the healing of the blind beggar outside Jericho is key. The beggar's very anonymity allows the story to become the story of every Christian. More alert than the crowd to the identity of Jesus, the blind man 'sees' the Son of David in Jesus the Nazorean. Called by Jesus personally, he is enabled to know him as *Kyrie*. With that, Jesus gives the man the full vision which allows him to follow— praising God and prompting others to do the same." Ælfric's interpretation of the miracle, and his application of the notion of spiritual blindness to anyone who might be deficient of spiritual knowledge, thus seems to follow Luke's intent in his own presentation of the story.

[68] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 60–7.

with *blindnysse his modes* (blindness of his mind) echoing *modes blindnyssa wiðinnan* (blindness of the mind within) from the homily *The Third Sunday after the Lord's Epiphany*. But in *Shrove Sunday*, Ælfric has identified the darkness inherent to this connection as a lack of *ecan leohtes* (eternal light), and promised his reader that Christ will provide the spiritually blind who turn to him *sawle onlihtinge* (enlightenment for the soul), thereby expelling the internal darkness with his eternal light.

Thus, Ælfric synthesized his conceptualization of spiritual blindness. It is the state of being metaphorically blind to godliness, and it is cured by turning to Christ. Barring this remedy, literal blindness is the eternal destiny of the spiritually blind, as the torments of hell will destroy their ability to see, leaving them in a condition of *yttran þeostru* (outer darkness). Ælfric then explained how the dual nature of Christ is central to this idea. First, he explained that Christ "ferde þurh his menniscnysse"[69] (journeyed through his humanity), and "stent þurh þa godcundnysse"[70] (stood through divinity), metaphors identifying a tension between the temporal mortality of Christ's humanity, a period of temporary journeying, and the enduring perpetuity of Christ's divinity, standing eternally as the omnipresent God. Ælfric continued, "þa ða he ferde þa gehyrde he þæs blindan clypunge: and þa ða he stod þa forgeaf he him gesyhðe. for ðan þurh ða menniscnysse he besargað ures modes blindnysse and þurh ða godcundnysse he forgifð us leoht. and ure blindnysse onliht"[71] (when he journeyed, he heard the crying of the blind man; and when he stood, he gave him his sight; because through the humanity he sorrows for the

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[69] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 88–9.

[70] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 91.

[71] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 93–7.

blindness of our minds, and through the divinity he gives us light, and enlightens our blindness). In Ælfric's metaphor of spiritual blindness, the spiritual and metaphorical seem to be intertwined with the literal and physical: just as Christ took pity and healed the blind man on the way to Jericho, so too does he illuminate the minds of the spiritually blind, and it is his humanity that enables his compassion toward both the physically and spiritually blind, and his divinity that allows him to heal both.

The value accorded to the sense of sight in early-medieval English thought plays a role in Ælfric's spiritual blindness metaphor. Ælfric wrote, "Ne bæd se blinda. naðor ne goldes ne seolfres: ne nane woruldlice þing: ac bæd his gesihðe; For nahte he tealde ænig þincg to biddenne buton gesihþe: for ðan þeah se blinda sum þinc hæbbe: he ne mæg buton leohte geseon þæt he hæfð"[72] (The blind man did not pray for gold nor silver, nor any worldly thing, but prayed for his sight. For he considered it nought to pray for anything but sight; because although the blind man might have something, without light he may not see that which he has). Ælfric took it for granted that his audience would value sight more greatly than gold or silver, and this allows him to complete his metaphor, with the assertion that spiritual sight should be valued more greatly than all:

> Uton for ði geefenlæcan þisum men: þe wæs gehæled fram criste: æigðer ge on lichaman ge on saule: ne bidde we na lease welan: ne gewitendlice wurðmyntas. ac uton biddan leoht æt urum drihtne; Na þæt leoht þe bið geendod: þe bið mid þære nihte todræfed þæt þe is gemæne. us and nytenum ac uton biddan þæs leohtes þe we magon mid englum anum geseon. þæt ðe næfre ne bið geendad;[73]

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[72] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 105–9.

[73] Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, X. 109–14.

(Let us therefore imitate this man, who was healed by Christ, both in body and in soul: let us not pray for temporary riches, nor for transitory honors; but let us pray for light from our Lord: not the light which will be ended, which is driven away by the night, that which is universal to us and the beasts; but let us pray for the light by which we may see as one with the angels, that which will never be ended.)

Thus, just as his audience would value sight above the other senses or even material wealth, so too does Ælfric argue that his audience should value spiritual enlightenment above even physical sight, for even physical sight may be ended in the resurrection through the torment of the damned, but spiritual sight will allow continuation of physical sight for eternity.

The reaction of the early texts reporting Alfred's blinding may therefore be more fully understood through the lens of this spiritual blindness metaphor. Though Ælfric made no connection between literal physical blindness and metaphorical spiritual blindness (at least in life—the two are only connected in the afterlife in Ælfric's construction), the concern that physical blindness might be reflective of one's state of spiritual deficiency might account for the shocked response to Alfred's betrayal and punishment. Similar thoughts were expressed in the Bible, in another of Jesus's miracle healings of the blind. Different from the synoptic story of the healing of the blind man near Jericho discussed by Ælfric, a miracle recorded in the Gospel of John reflects such a concern conflating the physical with the metaphorical: "And Jesus passing by, saw a man, who was blind from his birth: And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (Douay Version; John 9:1–2.)

Though Jesus rejected the notion that the man's blindness was evidence of moral

shortcoming, the story illustrates a natural tendency toward conflating the two.

In an environment in which blindness was used as a metaphor for rejection of the

godly, that tendency may have been strong indeed. One description of blindness from Old

English poetry, in *Maxims I*, reflects thought concerning blindness that connects the

physical state to the spiritual. Though the poem does not explicitly claim that blindness

was a physical punishment for a moral shortcoming, it does claim that the condition was

ordained of God, and that the correct spiritual state might cure one's blindness:

>   Blind sceal his eagna þolian,
>
> oftigen biþ him torhtre gesihþe.   Ne magon hi tunglu bewitian,
>
> swegltorht sunnan ne monnan;   þæt him biþ sar in his mode,
>
> onge þonne he hit ana wat,   ne weneð þæt him þæs edhwyrft cyme.
>
> Waldend him þæt wite teode,   se him mæg wyrpe syllan,
>
> hælo of heofodgimme,   gif he wat heortan clæne.[74]
>
> (The blind must suffer a loss of his eyes; brighter vision is held back from them.
>
> They may not look upon the stars, the sky-bright sun or moon; that is sore to him
>
> in his mind, oppressive when alone he is aware of it, nor does he suppose that a
>
> reversal of this may come to him. The ruler has established this misery for him, he
>
> has the power to grant him a remedy: the healing of the head-gems, if he knows
>
> the heart to be pure.)

More than any poem yet discussed, *Maxims I* reveals early-medieval English attitudes

concerning not only the physical condition of blindness, but its psychological effects as

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[74] *Maxims I*, 39b–44. Text is according to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, 156–63.

well. The inability of the blind to behold the natural beauty of the sky is viewed as a great loss, resulting in pain and loneliness. The mind, instead of stretching out to see the celestial wonders, is confined entirely within the head, thereby plaguing the mind with *sar* (a multi-valent word at once capturing feelings of pain, suffering, soreness, grief, sorrow, trouble).

The adjective used to describe the resultant mental state of blindness, *ange*, is used in Old English not only to describe a condition of sorrow, but also to describe constricting physical conditions.[75] As *The Dictionary of Old English* reports, this might refer to a particularly treacherous or difficult to traverse part of the natural landscape, as in *Beowulf*, when Hrothgar is said to have ridden across "steap stanhliðo, stige nearwe, / enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad, / neowle næssas, nicorhusa fela"[76] (steep stone-cliffs, a narrow descent, confined single-track paths, an unknown road, precipitous headlands, the homes of many water monsters) in pursuit of Grendel's mother, or in *Exodus*, described with much of the same language, when Moses and the troops of Israel traversed "land and leodweard laðra manna, enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad"[77] (the lands and countries of enemy peoples, confined single-track paths, an unknown road) in their hurried flight from Egypt. Additionally, *ange*/*enge* might describe the confinement of a prison cell, as in Cynewulf's *Juliana*, when the saint was released "of þam engan hofe"[78] (from the narrow enclosure), or as in *Elene*, when Cynewulf used the same language to say that Judas was

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[75] Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al., eds., *The Dictionary of Old English: A to I Online* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), entries for *ange* and *enge*.

[76] *Beowulf*, 1409–11.

[77] *Exodus*, 57–58. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 89–107.

[78] *Juliana*, 532a. Text is according to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, 113–33.

released "of nearwe ond of nydcleofan, / fram þam engan hofe"[79] (from confinement and

prison, from the narrow enclosure) where he had been imprisoned in a dried well shaft for

refusing to reveal the location of the True Cross. Cynewulf's description of Judas's

prison, and Judas's reaction to his confinement, further elucidate the conditions that

might be described as *ange*. Cynewulf wrote that Helena ordered that Judas be cast "in

dreygne seað, þær he duguða leas / siomode in sorgum VII nihta fyrst / under hearmlocan

hungre geþreatod, / clommum beclungen"[80] (into a dry well shaft, where without

companions he hung low in sorrow for the space of seven nights, oppressed by hunger

beneath the harm-locker, constrained by fetters). An entire week of such conditions was

sufficient to break Judas's obstinate resistance to Helena. Judas said to her that "Is þes

hæft to ðæs strang, / þreanyd þæs þearl ond þes þroht to ðæs heard / dogorrimum" (This

bondage is so severe, the punishment so excessive and the affliction so harsh as the days

add up), and as a result, he was ready to tell her where to find the True Cross.

As recorded in *The Dictionary of Old English*, the adjective *ange* or *enge* is also

used to describe Hell. An example from *Genesis B* illustrates the confinement of hell by

contrasting it with the spacious heavenly kingdom, as Satan laments his fall: "Is þæs

ænga styde ungelic swiðe / þam oðrum ham þe we ær cuðon, / hean on heofonrice, þe me

min hearra onlag"[81] (This narrow place is very unlike that other home that we knew

before, high in the kingdom of heaven, which my Lord gave to me). Another example of

the adjective applied to Hell reveals the psychological conditions endured by the damned.

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[79] *Elene*, 711–12a. Text is according to Krapp, *The Vercelli Book*, 66–102.

[80] *Elene*, 693–96a.

[81] *Genesis B*, 356–58. Text is according to Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript*, 3–87.

In *Elene*, Cynewulf depicted a devil lamenting the constricted space allotted to him in Hell: "Hwæt, se hælend me / in þam engan ham oft getynde, / geomrum to sorge"[82] (Lo, the Savior has often shut me up in that narrow home, as an affliction to the sorrowful).

Perhaps also related to the psychological conditions described by *ange/enge* is the adjective's use in *The Phoenix*. Here, the poet asserted that "yldu ne yrmðu ne se enga deað, ne lifes lyre"[83] (neither old age nor misery nor oppressive death, nor destruction of life) were present in the phoenix's unspecified, paradisiacal home somewhere "feor heonan / eastdælum on"[84] (far from here in the East).[85]

Taken together, these examples paint a fuller picture of the adjective's use to describe blindness in *Maxims I*. When the poet described blindness "þæt him biþ sar in his mode, / onge þonne he hit ana wat" (that is sore to him in his mind, oppressive when alone he is aware of it), he intended it to be understood as a condition bearing each of the associated connotations of the word *ange/enge*. The extramissive model of sight provides

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[82] *Elene*, 919b–21a.

[83] *The Phoenix*, 52–53a. Text is according to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, 3:94–113.

[84] *The Phoenix*, 1b–2a.

[85] The lack of harm, aging, and death are part of a larger theme of the perpetual unchangingness of the phoenix's idyllic home. The poem's fuller description of this paradise contains many examples of its stable state, including the assertion that "Ne feallað þær on foldan fealwe blostman" (fallow blossoms will never fall upon the earth there; *The Phoenix*, 74). The phoenix's paradise remains in eternal Spring: "þæt onwended ne bið / æfre to ealdre, ærþon endige / frod fyrngeweorc se hit on frymþe gescop" (that shall forever and ever be unchanged, before that he who at the beginning created it should end that venerable ancient work; *The Phoenix*, 82b–84). By some strange irony, the notion of an unchanging place being paradise—no doubt a comforting image in a Christian, early-medieval English context—would itself not endure into modernity. Contrast *The Phoenix* with Louise Bogan's 1926 poem, "A Tale," which reacts to an immutable landscape (a barren desert in place of a fertile paradise) with abject horror: "This youth too long has heard the break / Of waters in a land of change. / He goes to see what suns can make / From soil more indurate and strange. / He cuts what holds his days together / And shuts him in, as lock on lock: / The arrowed vane announcing weather, / The tripping racket of a clock; / Seeking, I think, a light that waits / Still as a lamp upon a shelf, — / A land with hills like rocky gates / Where no sea leaps upon itself. / But he will find that nothing dares / To be enduring, save where, south / Of hidden deserts, torn fire glares / On beauty with a rusted mouth, — / Where something dreadful and another / Look quietly upon each other." Louise Bogan, *Body of this Death* (New York: Robert McBride, 1923), 1.

context for how this could be. The mind, unable to expand beyond the dark recesses of the head due to the blindness of the eyes, is constricted as it were in a narrow strait or a prison cell. The mind experiences *ange/enge* conditions similar to those experienced by Judas in *Elene*, which were described as a "hæft to ðæs strang" (bondage so severe), a "þreanyd þæs þear" (punishment so excessive), and a "þroht to ðæs heard" (affliction so harsh). The imprisoned mind is thus in a solitary and hellish state, feeling *sar* similar to the *sorge* felt by the demon confined to Hell in *Elene*. Blindness afflicts the mind as severely as death, described by the same adjective in *The Phoenix*.

The mind of the blind man in *Maxims I* is thus left in a state of desperation, and "ne weneð þæt him þæs edhwyrft cyme" (he does not suppose that a reversal of this will come to him). The poem ties the possibility of the healing of the blind man to his spiritual state, asserting that "Waldend him þæt wite teode, se him mæg wyrpe syllan, / hælo of heofodgimme, gif he wat heortan clæne" (the ruler has established this misery for him, he has the power to grant him a remedy: the healing of the head-gems, if he knows the heart to be pure), thereby inextricably joining the condition of physical blindness to the associated metaphorical spiritual blindness. Though the poem makes no promise that every pure-hearted blind person will be healed, it implies that the self-healing of spiritual blindness is a prerequisite for qualifying to be healed by God of physical blindness.

Read in the context of blindness as described in *Maxims I*, the *Chronicle* reaction to the blinding of Alfred in 1036 may be more fully understood. O'Brien O'Keeffe noted that "At four points in the entry the text asserts the innocence of the captives,"[86] though a more accurate count might limit this to two instead of four. Alfred is introduced to the

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[86] O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England," 214.

text as "Ælfred se unsceððiga æþeling" (Alfred the blameless prince), and the *Chronicle*

poem asserts that his companions "wæron butan scylde swa earmlice acwealde" (were

without blame so miserably killed).[87] Twice more, the *Chronicle* assuaged its readers'

anxiety concerning the state of the souls of Alfred and his retinue. First, the poem offered

reassurance that "Nu is to gelyfenne to ðan leofan Gode / þæt hi blission bliðe mid

Criste" (Now it is to be trusted to the beloved God that they rejoice merrily with Christ).

It ended with a similar reassurance about Alfred himself: "seo saul is mid Criste" (his

soul is with Christ). Especially in Alfred's treatment, the *Chronicle* tended towards

hagiography. As noted by Wheatley, "the precision with which the chronicler locates

Alfred's burial place within the cathedral . . . all but recommends it as a worthy

pilgrimage site."[88] The description of his burial place, with very precise detail of its

location—"æt þam westende þam styple ful gehende, / on þam suðportice" (at the west

end of the south porch, very near the steeple)—very nearly indeed seems to exhort

readers to make a pilgrimage to his tomb.

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[87] O'Brien O'Keeffe's other two examples from the 1036 annal might indeed speak to the innocence of Alfred and his companions, albeit less directly than the two explicit declarations of their innocence I list. O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England," 214, implied that the *Chronicle*'s assertion that the support of Harold Harefoot's claim to the throne by the men who held power in England was *unriht* (wrong), though this speaks nothing to Alfred's own innocence in the matter. Here, O'Brien O'Keeffe also noted that the *Chronicle*'s affirmation that Alfred and his companions went to heaven after their murders is another declaration of their innocence. This may indeed be, but to the extent that political crimes can be separated from spiritual sin, such an affirmation seems to imply not that Alfr.ed and his companions were innocent when it came to the motivation bringing them to England (recall that Lawson, *Cnut*, 112, suggested that the brief space of about three months between Cnut's death and Alfred's suggests that the claims made in the other sources discussed in this chapter, that Alfred had traveled to England prepared to wrest the crown from Harold, were probably true), but that the circumstances of their deaths are not indicative of the state of their souls.

[88] Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, 32.

This tendency towards hagiography would be fully expressed in the *Encomium*, which gave an account of miracles performed at Alfred's burial place. As with the *Chronicle*, the *Enconium* also asserted Alfred's innocence:

> But in the place of his sepulcher many miracles occur, as certain people say, who also say that they have seen these most frequently. And deservedly: for he was innocently martyred, therefore it is appropriate that through him the power of the Innocents be displayed. Let Queen Emma therefore rejoice on account of so great an intercessor, because the son she formerly had on earth, she now has as a protector in heaven.[89]

Here, Alfred's death is given the treatment that a saint's death might be accorded in a *passio*. Whereas Alfred and his companions had been unjustly killed according to the *Chronicle*, the *Encomium* dressed the assassination in hagiographical language, reporting that Alfred "fuit martyrizatus" (was martyred). Accordingly, his martyrdom gave him saintly powers, complete not only with miracles reported at the tomb that received attention in the *Chronicle*, but with Alfred himself identified as a heavenly *intercessor* (intercessor) and *patronus* (protector) defending his mother. Though the later Norman sources would ignore the spiritual aspects of Alfred's death in favor of focusing on the justification of Alfred's claim to the throne that brought him to England, the *Chronicle* addressed concern that the circumstances of Alfred's death were reflective of his spiritual state. *Maxims I* expressed the belief that if God "wat heortan clæne" (knows the heart [of the blind] to be clean), he "him mæg wyrpe syllan, / hælo of heofodgimme" (has the

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[89] Campbell, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, III. 6.18–23: "In loco autem sepulcri eius multa fiunt miracula, ut quidam aiunt, qui etiam se haec uidisse saepissime dicunt. Et merito: innocenter enim fuit martyrizatus, ideoque dignum est per eum innocencium exerceatur uirtus. Gaudeat igitur Emma regina de tanto intercessore, quia quem quondam in terris habuit filium nunc habet in caelis patronum."

power to grant him a remedy, the healing of the head-gems). Alfred received no such

remedy, but died in the miserable, lonely, *ange/enge* state of blindness outlined in

Maxims I. And whereas that poem affirmed that "Waldend him þæt wite teode" (The

ruler has established this misery for [the blind]), the *Chronicle* clarified that this was not

the case. Alfred's torment blinded and ultimately killed him, but this was not to be

interpreted as permanent, spiritual blindness as Ælfric had described in the *Catholic*

Homilies.

It would seem that a number of factors in early-medieval English culture and

belief concerning blindness would have influenced the *Chronicle* to report the blinding of

Alfred with the superlative affirmation that "Ne wearð dreorlice dæd gedon on þison

earde / syððan Dene comon 7 her frið namon" (No bloodier deed was done in this land

since the Danes came and kept peace here). Blindness, whether inflicted as punishment,

as in *Andreas*, or natural, as in *The Fortunes of Men* or *Maxims I*, is consistently

portrayed as a cruel affliction. This may be accounted for by the value given to sight,

expressed not only in some of these poems' and others' descriptions of the eyes as gems,

but also evident in the order the senses are presented in Old English prose, law codes

privileging the sense of sight, and artifacts portraying vision. Furthermore, the disparity

between the assertion of Alfred's innocence and the heavenly home of his soul and the

belief that the manner of his death might be indicative of some kind of uncleanness of

heart, conflating physical with spiritual blindness, made his torment and assassination all

the more shocking.

However, a blinding carried out by Alfred's father was recorded in the *Chronicle*

without any commentary at all. In 993, "het sy cyning ablendan Ælfgar Ælfrices sunu

ealdormannes" (the king ordered Ælfgar, son of Ealdorman Ælfric, to be blinded).[90] No reason was provided, though the previous year's entry records Ealdorman Ælfric's disgraceful handling of an attempt to capture a Viking fleet. Though blinding was depicted elsewhere as the act of a tyrant when carried out for political purposes, as in *Judith*, the *Chronicle* made no effort to do so with Æthelred in 993. The silence might suggest that Ælfgar's blinding, as cruel a punishment as it might have been, was viewed as justifiable, but it complicates the later treatment of the 1036 blinding of Alfred and his companions. Perhaps the chronicler's superlative reaction to the blinding was less a reflection of the cultural attitudes surrounding the act in general, and more a manipulation of them, intended to further delegitimize Harold's *unriht* (wrong) claim and ultimate succession to the throne. It seems likely, then, that decades before Norman propagandists would politicize the blinded body of Alfred in order to invalidate Harold Godwineson's kingship on account of his father's crimes, the chronicler took advantage of attitudes surrounding blindness in order to sway opinion against Harold Harefoot, who until that point had popular support to succeed his father.

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[90] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 87. The entry for 1006 records the blinding of two more men, noting that "Wulfeah 7 Ufegeat wæron ablende" (Wulfeah and Ufegeat were blinded; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 91), though no further detail is provided.

Conclusion

Early-medieval England works as an excellent starting point for examining the way that thought about sight is reflected in the English language: the model for sight envisioning it as the extension of the mind and a manifestation of power was the cradle in which English language and literature developed. The early-medieval English period, though, is not the terminus of this model. England was transformed politically, linguistically, and culturally in the wake of the Norman Conquest, but an extramissive model for sight persisted. Edward Wheatley observed that it was the Oxford-based Roger Bacon who in the thirteenth century first introduced Alhazen's theories of sight in a European context when he "strategically synthesized a number of previously existing classical and medieval theories of vision with Alhazen's, positing that vision occurred through the combination of intromission and extramission."[1] While Bacon's synthesis, found in his *Opus majus*, accepted the intromissionist views of Lucretius, with likenesses streaming from objects, as well as the extramissionist views current in his time, he added to these "Alhazen's theory of rays striking the cornea to complete sight as well as his belief that if the glacial humor is destroyed, blindness results." Eventually, the full adoption of optical science would replace the extramissive model that had for so long been the foundation for the understanding of sight.

Nevertheless, while extramission eventually gave way to a more scientifically verifiable model for sight, the influence of the extramissive model is still felt. Charles G. Gross found four ways in which the belief continued to be held culturally centuries after

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[1] Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 188.

it was no longer accepted by the scientific community: "Extramission views may be found in four main arenas. The first is the widespread belief in the 'evil eye.' The second is in a long tradition in love poetry. Third and most surprisingly, strong extramission beliefs have been found in a high proportion of children and college students in the United States. Finally, most people believe they can feel someone staring at them."[2] Gross provided a very brief sketch of the use of extramissive imagery in love poetry, beginning with Dante and Petrarch, but extending to French poetry in Olivier de Magny, and (more relevant to this discussion) the English-language poetic tradition in the works of John Donne, Andrew Marvell, William Shakespeare, Richard Crashaw, John Milton, Alexander Pope, Thomas Moore, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Robert Louis Stevenson.[3] This list spans several centuries of poetry, and while it is representative of many centuries, it is hardly comprehensive. Take, for instance, an example from the sonnets of Henry Constable (1562–1613): "The living heate which her eyebeams do make / Warmeth the ground, and quickeneth the seede."[4] Such an image would not be out of place in early-medieval England, where a literal extramissive model was understood as the manner in which sight functioned. The popularity of traditional tropes might account for the continuance of extramission in poetry, but the persistence of the belief well into the twentieth century, as attested by Gross, speaks to the tenacity of the extramissive model.

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[2] Charles G. Gross, "The Fire that Comes from the Eye," *Neuroscientist* 5 (1999): 58–64, at 61.

[3] Gross, "The Fire that Comes from the Eye," 62–63.

[4] William Carew Hazlitt, ed., *Diana: The Sonnets and Other Poems of Henry Constable* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1859), 7.

The impact this extramissive model had on early-medieval English ideas about the mind and power has been the subject of this dissertation. Upon converting to Christianity, early-medieval England gained access to an abundance of Latin writing on the nature of sight, potentially representing a diversity of opinions concerning the mechanics of sight, though most were extramissive. Many particularly influential Latin texts were examined in Chapter One: Lactantius's *De opificio Dei*, Ambrose's *Hexameron*, Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* and *De Genesi ad litteram*, and Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, with their presentations of extramissive models for sight, all might have contributed to the acceptance of the belief in early-medieval England. In the context of such a Latin foundation, the extramissive model was expressed in Old English writing. For instance, Grendel's eyes shone with a monstrous light as he approached Heorot: "him of eagum stod / ligge gelicost leoht unfæger"[5] (a horrible light, most like a flame, issued from his eyes). In the same scene, Beowulf's mind expanded as he sat in watch for Grendel: "ac he wæccende wraþum on andan / bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges"[6] (but watching for the wrathful one in hatred, he awaited, bulging in mind, the result of battle). The serpent promised Eve in *Genesis B* that, in conjunction with the opening of her eyes when she partook of the fruit, "þin lic-homa leohtra micle"[7] (your body [will become] much brighter), and "þonne wurðað þin eagan swa leoht / þæt þu meaht swa wide ofer woruld ealle / geseon siððan, and selfes

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[5] *Beowulf*, 726b–27. All quotations from *Beowulf* are taken from Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. with 1st and 2nd supplements (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1950).

[6] *Beowulf*, 708–9.

[7] *Genesis B*, 502. Text is according to George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 3–87.

stol / herran þines, and habban his hyldo forð"[8] (Then your eyes will become so bright

that thereafter you will be able to see so widely, entirely across the world, and the seat of

your Lord, and have his protection thereafter). And after Eve ate the fruit, extramissive

imagery once again is used as the serpent told her "Þu meaht nu þe self geseon"[9] (You

are now able to see for yourself) and "Nu scineð þe leoht fore / glædlic ongean þæt ic

from Gode brohte / hwit of heofonum"[10] (Now the light shines because of and happily

against you, which I brought from God, white out of the heavens), and promised to

deliver the same sight-enabling light to Adam if Eve could get him to eat the fruit as well:

> Sæge Adame   hwilce þu gesihðe hæfst
>
> þurh minne cime cræfta.   Gif giet þurh cuscne siodo
>
> læst mina lara,   þonne gife ic hime þæs leohhtes genog
>
> þæs ic þe swa godes   gegired hæbbe.[11]
>
> (Tell Adam what capacity for sight you have through my coming. If yet he will
>
> attend to my teaching through pure conduct, then I will give him an abundance of
>
> that light which I have given to you in such goodness.)

King Alfred, too, described sight with extramissive terms in his *Soliloquies*, with ropes

standing in for rays as the eyes of the mind are fixed upon God: "For ðam þingum is

ðearf ðæt þu rihte hawie mid modes ægum to gode, swa rihte swa swa scipes ancerstreng

byð aþenæd on gerihte fram þam scype to þam ancræ; and gefastna þa eagan þines modes

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[8] *Genesis B*, 564b–67.

[9] *Genesis B*, 611a.

[10] *Genesis B*, 614b–16a.

[11] *Genesis B*, 617–20.

on gode swa se ancer byð gefastnoð on ðære eorðan"[12] (Therefore you must look directly

to God with the eyes of the mind, just as the ship's anchor cable is stretched directly from

the ship to the anchor, and fasten the eyes of the mind on God, just as the anchor is

fastened to the earth).

Seeing God, though, was a complicated issue in early-medieval English thought.

Alfred referred to it as "creft ealra crefta"[13] (the craft of all crafts) due to the importance

afforded to sight and the use of the sense as a metaphor for developing understanding. A

different sensory metaphor, of hearing, was used in Old English to describe man's

obligation to obey God in life with the promise that such hearing would lead to seeing

God upon death. Early-medieval English treatments of biblical theophany, in which the

paradox of seeing an invisible God is played out in a series of generic episodes in the Old

Testament, provide an especially rich subject for examination of the practical

implications of thought concerning what it meant to see something. Occasionally, this

meant revising or even removing these episodes from translations and adaptations of the

biblical text into Old English.

Perhaps everywhere sight is mentioned in early-medieval English literature, some

kind of power dynamic is in play. This was especially abundant in *Beowulf*. The Danish

coast guard observed the Geats staring out over the headlands as their ship approached

his shore, and interpreted their gaze as threatening. Accordingly, he reciprocated the act,

telling the newcomers that he had seen them.[14] As the fight between Beowulf and

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[12] Thomas A. Carnicelli, ed., *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 61.23–62.1.

[13] Carnicelli, *Soliloquies*, 69.9–10.

[14] *Beowulf*, 217–23a, 229–54a.

Grendel approached its climax, both are depicted in the act of seeing.[15] When Hrothgar

married his daughter to Ingeld in order to end the bloodshed between the Scyldings and

the Heathobards, an act which the Heathobards rejected as an oppressive assertion of

Hrothgar's dominance over his subjugated enemies, the poet invented the name

Freawaru in order to capture how her presence was indeed a manifestation of Hrothgar's

power through his watchful care.[16] Beowulf, looking upon the dragon's hoard now under

his control, expressed his wishes for its use—wishes which were not carried out after his

death put out the light in his eyes.[17] Examples outside of *Beowulf* may also be found.

Genesis A portrayed Abraham and Lot gazing upon the lands they wished to conquer in

battle.[18] *Judith* depicted the wicked Holofernes consolidating power by limiting the sight

of all but himself.[19] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reported King Æthelred blinding the son

of a disgraced earl,[20] and reacted with horror when Godwine would order the blinding of

Æthelred's son, Alfred,[21] a blinding which a later Norman source would suggest was a

response to Alfred challenging the political power of Harold Harefoot.[22]

      The particular focus of this dissertation has thus been physical and political

power. But so strong was the association between the extramissive understanding of sight

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[15] *Beowulf*, 708–9, 726b–27.

[16] *Beowulf*, 2020–31.

[17] *Beowulf*, 2792b–98.

[18] *Genesis A*, 1779–84a, 1793b–95a, 1920–21. Text is according to Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript*, 3–87.

[19] *Judith*, 37b–54a. Text is according to Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 99–109.

[20] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *MS C*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 5 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 87.

[21] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *MS C*, 105–6.

[22] William of Poitiers, *The "Gesta Guillelmi" of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), I. 2–4.

and the notion of power in early-medieval England that other kinds of power were also described using sight. Ælfric, for instance, wrote of the ecclesiastical authority of bishops in his *Catholic Homilies*: "Biscop sceal læran. his leoda symble. mid boclicere lare. and him bysnian wel. ðreagan ða ðwyran. and ða ðeawfæstan lufian. beon heora hyrde. hold under criste. ealle ofersceawigende. swa swa his nama swegð. and yfel ne forsuwige. ne unriht ne geðafige"[23] (A bishop is obliged to teach his people always with bookly teaching, and to set an example for them well, to reprove those who are wrong, and to love those who are virtuous, to be their shepherd, devout under Christ, overseeing all, just as his name signifies; and let him not tolerate evil, nor assent to any wrong). As noted by Charles D. Wright, Ælfric borrowed the etymological argument from Isidore, who had proposed the Latin word *speculatores* (generally used in a military sense to mean "spies") as an appropriate equivalent for the Greek *episcopi* (bishops).[24] It is no wonder, in a cultural context that associated sight with power and depicted rulers with menacing gazes emblematic of their authority, that Ælfric would choose to depict church leaders as *ofersceawigende* (overseeing) in the context of their duties. It may even be that Ælfric used such imagery in order to assert that a bishop's authority was, or ideally would be, every bit as political as it was ecclesiastical. To establish this, the use of sight, given the argument of this dissertation, was the perfect choice to demonstrate that authority.

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[23] Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series; Text*, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), XIX. 100–104.

[24] Charles D. Wright, "Why Sight Holds Flowers: An Apocryphal Source for the Iconography of the Alfred Jewel and Fuller Brooch," in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 18 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 169–86, at 184–85.

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