australian early medieval association

PUBLICATIONS

JOURNAL | *BETWEEN INTRUSIONS* PUBLICATION | NEWSLETTER | NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS AND STYLE GUIDE

INVITATION FOR ONLINE PUBLICATION FOR ARTICLES FROM VOLUME 4 OF THE JOURNAL

As for Volumes 1, 2 and 3, we now invite authors of articles published in Volume 4 of the *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association to* have their papers published online on the Association's web site. See the examples from Volumes 1 and 2. If you are interested, please contact the editor, Pamela O'Neill, at pamaladh@gmail.com for full details.

JOURNAL

The Association publishes a refereed journal: the *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association* (ISSN 1449-9320).

Volume 4 is now in print and papers include those from the Conversion and Cultural Transformation Conference held in September 2007, together with notes and reviews.

The abstracts of the papers in **Volume 4** are available here, together with **full text online** for selected articles.

The abstracts of the papers in **Volume 3** are available here, together with **full text online** for selected articles.

The abstracts of the papers in **Volume 2** are available here, together with **full text online** for selected articles.

The abstracts of the papers in **Volume 1** are available here, together with **full text online** for selected articles.

Referees

The panel of expert referees includes the following - more will be added in the future.

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The Journal is annual and it is anticipated that the major part will comprise papers from the annual conferences.

Membership of the Association includes the Journal - see the Membership page for details.

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Notes

The Journal also has a 'Notes' section containing short articles of 800-1,500 words which are not subject to the refereeing process, but are included at the discretion of the Editor and committee. All members are invited to submit short notes on any topic of interest. Examples of appropriate sorts of material for Notes can be found in the Notes section of such journals as *Medieval Archaeology*. Please send your contribution to Pamela O'Neill at pamaladh@gmail.com.

Items for Review

The Association has arranged to receive copies of recent books to be reviewed for the journal: we will list titles as they become available to us. Members are invited to choose titles from the list that they are interested in reviewing in exchange for a free copy. If you have other specific books or publishers you would like us to contact for review copies, please contact Kathleen Neal at kbneal@unimelb.edu.au. Unsolicited reviews cannot be accepted. Reviews are accepted from any interested member - it is not necessary to be a specialist. For an example of the type of review sought, see any recent copy of *Parergon*. Reviews may be edited for style and length: please refer to the style guide.

The following item is available for review for the Association's Journal; please email Kathleen Neal kbneal@unimelb.edu.au if you would like to review this item.

Katherine Simms, *Medieval Gaelic Sources* (Dublin, 2009).

In an effort to broaden the reviews section of *JAEMA* we are currently seeking reviewers for foreign language publications. Members who are competent to review books in modern languages other than English are asked to contact the reviews editor, Kathleen Neal kbneal@unimelb.edu.au, and nominate the language(s) that they are able to read. These reviewers will be contacted when books in their nominated language(s) become available.

PUBLISHED PAPERS FROM THE 'BETWEEN INTRUSIONS' CONFERENCE

The papers from the successful BETWEEN INTRUSIONS Conference held at The University of Melbourne in September 2003 have been published by the Celtic Studies Foundation, University of Sydney:

P O'Neill (ed), *Between Intrusions: Britain and Ireland Between the Romans and the Normans* (Sydney, 2004).

Copies are available for purchase for $25 and will be available for sale at the AEMA Conference in September. Alternatively, they may be obtained direct from the Celtic Studies Foundation web site.

NEWSLETTER

A newsletter is circulated to Association members by email. Recent editions are available here:

July 2009

June 2009

May 2009

australian early medieval association

JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALIAN EARLY MEDIEVAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 4 - ABSTRACTS

Volume 1 Abstracts | Volume 2 Abstracts | Volume 3 Abstracts

Penelope's Odyssey to ninth-century Ireland
R Natasha Amendola

Penelope was the wife of Odysseus, or Ulysses as he is now more familiarly known. While he fought at Troy and struggled to find his way home, an absence of 20 years, Penelope stayed at home, raising their son, weaving a shroud for her father-in-law and maintaining her chastity in the most trying of circumstances. If she ever did leave her home at Ithaca, it was to return to her father's household in the Peleponnese. She was a thoroughly Hellenic woman. However, her name and reputation were maintained in Latin texts and her fame spread beyond the continent. In the ninth century, about two millennia after she is supposed to have lived, her name appears in two Irish manuscripts: the Lorsch Commentary and Sedulius Scottus's *Ars Maior.* Both of these are commentaries on a work of Donatus, also called *Ars Maior,* but this work does not include any mention of Penelope. This paper will trace how Penelope's fame travelled from classical Latin texts into the changed environment of early medieval Europe, where she appears as a grammatical *exemplum.*

'No use crying over spilt milk': the challenge of preaching God's justice in fifth- and sixth-century Gaul
Lisa Bailey

It was not enough to convert the peoples of Gaul to Christianity. The church needed also to effect a cultural transformation: to penetrate their ways of thinking about and understanding the world. Part of this involved altering expectations of divine justice: when it would come and what form it would take. This proved a challenge for the Christian clergy. In the Eusebius Gallicanus sermon collection it is possible to trace some of the efforts at

explanation which pastors made in the fifth and sixth centuries. Against a background of high-level theological debate over issues of grace and free will, they attempted ground-level explanations of how God could be just despite allowing sinners to flourish, allowing the virtuous to suffer and condemning some to damnation. Preachers sought to make complex arguments accessible and understandable to the urban laity, but also, at the same time, to control and guide interpretation along 'suitable' paths. To do so they employed established rhetorical and argumentative techniques, but adapted these to the specific local challenges they faced. The result was a subtle but coercive assertion of power over the ways Gallic Christians understood their world and their place within it.

Fate, virtue and the metaphysical winter in the poetry of Wessex
Chris Bishop

West-Saxon poetry occasionally describes a world of beauty and delight - the blossoming woods and verdant fields of *The Seafarer*, the comforting love of the Frisian wife in the *Exeter Gnomics*, the treasure allegory of *The Nature Song* - but these images are rare. More commonly the poet's praise is reserved for the constancy and companionship of the ring-sworn brethren, and the images favoured are of the hardships within which these brethren operate: the deep, dead waves; the storm-swept cliffs; the fierce snows of the long northern winter. These winters, however, are more than just a season to the West Saxons. In the poetry of these people, winter becomes a complex metaphor for the ephemeracy of joy and light and life itself. The warmth of summer will come to unlock the promise of life gripped tight by frost, but, all too quickly, the brief joys of the abundant field will pass back under the winter snows. These cycles of nature also inspired the West Saxons to count their years by the passage of seasons, a common enough phenomenon, but where other early peoples lived in anticipation of the summer or of spring, the West Saxons measured their lives by the number of winters endured. There is a significant covert dialogue in operation here as West-Saxon poetry indicates that this choice of seasons was not just a matter of expediency. The vernacular poetry of Wessex evinces an intense engagement with the concept of *wyrd* [Fate], and it was this powerful belief in fatalism that coloured West-Saxon expressions of the bleakness of nature and found a voice in the dialogue of Insular visual art - and it did so not just because of its intersection with West-Saxons' beliefs about living and dying, but because of its inextricable links to their very language, the process by which they spoke themselves into being. This paper explores this reality of the West-Saxon psyche that shaped so much of their ontology and subsequent poetic discourse, and it will look at the complex relationship of fatalism and Christianity and the ways in which this relationship found expression. Moreover, this paper will propose that the West-Saxon mind perceived the machinations of *wyrd* as neither benevolent nor ambivalent, but as an arbitrary and inhuman force that pulled all things inexorably towards destruction. More than just fatalism, the poetry of Wessex embraced a vision of predestination that was all-pervading, inescapable and entropic.

Imagery as exegesis in the Book of Kells
Denise Doyle RSM

The luxuriously decorated gospel manuscript known as the Book of Kells is enriched by an

unusually large number of full-page images. The inclusion in this manuscript of four full-page illustrations of the evangelist symbols and the ambiguity of the author portrait of Matthew are unique among early medieval manuscripts. It can be expected that, consistent with the scholarship of the time, the Kells scribe-artists created this iconography as a tool for exegesis. In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine of Hippo indicated two essential elements in the treatment of all scriptures: the seeking to understand and the communicating of what has been understood. He suggested that the greatest problem would be to cut off the potential of further meaning by the refusal to attempt to pierce the opacity of a sign. This paper seeks further understanding of the vibrant full-page images of the evangelist symbols in the Book of Kells.

Innocent I and the Illyrian churches on the question of heretical ordination
Geoffrey D Dunn

The Illyrian bishop Bonosus not only created theological problems for the church with his denial of Mary's perpetual virginity, but created administrative problems through the schism he created in the late fourth century. The difficulty concerned differing opinions and practices with regard to those who were clerics in Bonosus's schismatic community and who wanted to rejoin the church: should they be taken back as clerics or as lay people or reordained as clerics? The procedure employed by some Illyrian bishops in the early fifth century was at variance with that endorsed by the church of Rome. This paper examines *Epistula* 17 of Innocent I, bishop of Rome from 402 to 417, in which he considered one part of the problem: those who had been ordained by Bonosus after his condemnation (*Epistula* 16 had considered the question of what to do with those ordained by Bonosus before his condemnation and who had joined him in schism). Innocent set out to transform the Illyrian practice and this paper considers the method by which he attempted to achieve that. It will be argued that Innocent sought to use the influence and prestige of the Roman church together with rational argument to persuade the Illyrians to adopt Roman practice rather than any directive that imposed the papal will or expressed jurisdictional superiority over the Illyrians. This evidence is relevant to questions of the development of papal primacy in the early medieval period.

'Beowulf and Sutton Hoo syndrome': integrating text and material culture in the study of the past
Verity Fisher

It has been traditional to regard the archaeological evidence from periods for which there is also written documentation as providing the 'illustration' to the documentary 'explanation'. Such use of material culture is not particularly illuminating for our understanding of the past; it tends to gloss over and downplay difference in favour of similarity. Both texts and material objects are the product of human cultural activity and consequently the written evidence should not be privileged over the material. Artefacts are just as capable of being interpreted in multiple ways as texts are, particularly when gender is taken as a category of analysis: it will be shown that stereotypical assumptions have tended to colour the classification of objects as 'male' or 'female'. This paper will explore some of the ways in which the archaeological and textual sources have been used in the history of the Anglo-

Saxon period of 600-800 CE, and also raise new questions about the way that gender is used as a means for interpreting the archaeological evidence from this period.

Columban Christian influence in Northumbria, before and after Whitby
Martin Grimmer

Full text available online

The Synod of Whitby of 664 has traditionally been regarded as the great 'set-piece' debate between the so-called 'Celtic' and Roman churches in Britain, and as the turning-point for Irish - and more specifically Columban - ecclesiastical domination in Northumbria. In his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, the principle source for the Synod, Bede declared that after Whitby, 'all present ... gave up their imperfect rules'. But to what extent could Columban influence be completely eradicated in seventh-century Northumbria? This paper examines the role that Columban clergy from Iona played during the formative period of the Christian church in Northumbria, and then considers the Synod of Whitby. It is shown that Northumbria and the Irish Christian world, including Columban Iona, were not cut off from one another after 664. Irish and Columban influences continued to reach Northumbria in the late seventh and eighth centuries, if less directly, and Northumbrian literate culture was still characterised by its substantial Columban/Irish flavour developed prior to the events at Whitby.

Narrative sociotemporality and complementary gender roles in Anglo-Saxon society: the relevance of *wifmann* and *wæpnedmann* to a plot summary of the Old English poem *Beowulf*
Rosemary Huisman

A traditional short plot summary of the Old English poem known as *Beowulf* might read:

> The hero Beowulf, from a people called the Geats, when a young man visits the Danish court of King Hrothgar and kills in turn two monsters who have savaged the Danish people: first a monster called Grendel, then Grendel's mother. Fifty years later, as an old man and now king of the Geats, Beowulf kills a dragon which is threatening his own people, but in the process is himself killed.

That chronological summary of the plot gives little indication of the complexity of the narrative. In particular, it makes scant reference (the words 'hero', 'king') to the central importance of social roles. *Beowulf* is a story of social roles as much as (even more than?) a story of physical actions. In this paper I first describe the Old English lexical sets signifying 'male' and 'female', and, with some archaeological support, the gendered domains of social action with their complementary roles for maintaining the social group. The paper then discusses the interpretative relevance of these domains to male and female characters in *Beowulf*, both as their actions display the socially internal or external perspectives of each gendered domain, successfully or unsuccessfully, and as their actions are attributed positive or negative value within the appropriate domain.

Fate and malediction in early Celtic tradition
Bernard Mees

One of the most notable features of early medieval Celtic hagiography is the ready and widespread use of curses by insular saints. The cursing practices of ancient times are also represented in many linguistically Celtic texts from Britain and Gaul, not that these have always been contextualised properly by Celticists in the past. Considered in light of such epigraphic evidence for a pre-Christian Celtic cursing tradition, the development of a new form of imprecation can be discerned amongst the insular Celts. A close textual and linguistic study of medieval insular sources reveals little reflection of ancient Celtic cursing in the new tradition of saintly imprecation. This Christian insular tradition seems largely to have remained separate from inherited notions of fateful stipulation, of geases and 'swearing' destinies, but its development helps explain some of the otherwise rather perplexing features of Celtic supernatural injunction nonetheless.

St Vigeans no 1 and no 1a: a reconsideration
Pamela O'Neill

Full text available online

The monument known as St Vigeans No 1, or the Drosten Stone, is located in St Vigeans Museum, near Arbroath in Angus, Scotland. It is a Pictish cross-slab of approximately 9th-century date and bears both Pictish symbols and a cross. It stands 1740 mm tall, is about 550 mm wide, and roughly 180 mm thick. In its present form, it consists of two pieces of sandstone, St Vigeans No 1 and St Vigeans No 1a (as catalogued in *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*), together with various modern substances employed in the joining and presentation of the monument. This paper contends that St Vigeans No 1 and St Vigeans No 1a are not parts of a single early medieval monument, as is generally accepted, but rather originated as parts of two separate monuments, although the two original monuments may have been products of the same school, possibly the same sculptor, and of similar date. This contention arises from the author's observations of the monument during a visit to St Vigeans in July 1999.

It's all Alamannic to me! Ethnicity as an interpretative tool for cultural transformation
Timothy Scott

Cultural transformation in late antique and early medieval Europe has been explored through the concept of ethnicity. Ethnicity is a distinctly modern term that first emerged in the 1960s and can be defined as a self-identification process whereby individuals perceive themselves in relation to others. The extent to which it is legitimate to argue that this term can be used as an analytical tool for cultural transformation is at the crux of this paper. Commencing with an exploration of the term ethnicity, this paper will show that due to its modern and contested nature, ethnicity is a problematic framework for discussion about cultural transformation in late antique and early medieval Europe. This paper will also suggest a possible solution to this problem in the form of Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Applied to the concept of ethnicity in 1987, habitus sits unaffected by fault lines inherent in

the more conventional theoretical perspectives. If cultural transformation as it appears in late antique and early medieval Europe is to be interpreted along ethnic lines, then it might be through such an environmental framework that a reconciliation between cultural transformation and ethnicity in late antique and early medieval Europe can be found. Ammianus's account of Constantius's peace with the Alamanni is used extensively in this article as an example.

Cultural incorporation: religious conversion in the Old French *chanson de geste*
Kay Smith

The stories used as a basis for this article are taken from several *chansons de geste* from the Cycle of Charlemagne, a group of epic poems which contains many stories of conflict between Christian and non-Christian peoples, and which consequently abounds in stories of conversion and baptism of conquered people. As the singers of the *chansons* were dependent on their audiences for their livelihood, it was advantageous to them not to alienate their audiences. Therefore the attitudes they expressed towards conversion of non-Christians could be assumed to be common to both poets and audiences of the era. In these poems, the bulk of baptisms are forced on massed populations or individuals, and these and more detailed descriptions of change of religion highlight the social and cultural nature of the event. The French identify their society with the religion it espouses, so that people are influenced to change their religion by the qualities they perceive in that society, and they succumb to offers of riches, land, powerful alliances, and belonging to what is portrayed as a more powerful and materially and morally superior society. This paper will examine these aspects of change of religion.

Óláfr's raven coin: Old Norse myth in circulation?
Leon Wild

This paper will discuss the career of Óláfr Gothfrithsson, king of Dublin (934-941 CE) and additionally king of York for two years (939-941), his raven coin and its possible associations with the legendary raven banner of Icelandic saga literature. The early medieval coinage of York, England, under the rulership of the Scandinavians presents a variety of symbols of their presence, which may have some associations with Old Norse myth. A striking example is from the mint of Óláfr Gothfrithsson. His pennies from York bore a vivid figure of a raven. This 'bird of battle' is an aggressive symbol of Óláfr's reign and has resonance with the ideas of an Old Norse 'raven banner'. When used on coinage it also symbolised the independence of the Scandinavians in England from the nearby Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

FATE, VIRTUE AND THE METAPHYSICAL WINTER IN THE POETRY OF WESSEX

[CHRIS BISHOP, ANU]

INTRODUCTION

West-Saxon poetry occasionally describes a world of beauty and delight—the blossoming woods and verdant fields of *The Seafarer*, the comforting love of the Frisian wife in the *Exeter Gnomics*, the treasure allegory of *The Nature Song*—but these images are rare.[1] More commonly the poet's praise is reserved for the constancy and companionship of the ring-sworn brethren and the images favoured are of the hardships within which these brethren operate: the deep, dead waves; the storm swept cliffs; the fierce snows of the long northern winter. These winters, however, are more than just a season to the West Saxons.

In the poetry of these people, winter becomes a complex metaphor for the ephemeracy of joy and light and life itself. The warmth of summer will come to unlock the promise of life gripped tight by frost, but, all too quickly, the brief joys of the abundant field will pass back under the winter snows. These cycles of nature also inspired the West Saxons to count their years by the passage of seasons, a common enough phenomenon, but where other early peoples lived in anticipation of the summer or of spring, the West Saxons measured their lives by the number of winters endured. There is a significant covert dialogue in operation here as West-Saxon poetry indicates that this choice of seasons was not just a matter of expediency. The vernacular poetry of Wessex evinces an intense engagement with the concept of *wyrd* [Fate], and it was this powerful belief in fatalism that coloured West-Saxon expressions of the bleakness of nature and found a voice in the dialogue of Insular visual art—and it did so not just because of its intersection with West-Saxon beliefs about living and dying, but because of its inextricable links to their very language, the process by which they spoke themselves into being.

This paper will explore this reality of the West-Saxon psyche that shaped so much of their ontology and subsequent poetic discourse, and it will look at the complex relationship of fatalism and Christianity and the ways in which this relationship found expression.

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1 C.R. Dodwell briefly juxtaposes the menace and foreboding of Anglo-Saxon poetry with the pleasure of nature expressed by Virgil and Ovid on page 26 of his *Anglo Saxon Art*, Manchester University Press, 1982.

Moreover, this paper will propose that the West-Saxon mind perceived the machinations of *wyrd* as neither benevolent nor ambivalent, but as an arbitrary and inhuman force that pulled all things inexorably towards destruction. More than just fatalism, the poetry of Wessex embraced a vision of predestination that was all-pervading, inescapable and entropic.

FATE AND THE ABSENCE OF A FUTURE TENSE

Unlike all other Indo-European tongues, the Germanic languages developed a binary system of verb tenses—a distinction between past and non-past only.[2] Subsequently, Standard Late West Saxon evidences no conjugations beyond the present and the preterite.[3] Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson are representative of modern scholarship in asserting that the present tense was also used by the Anglo-Saxons to represent the future,[4] although this received wisdom would seem more problematic upon closer scrutiny.

To illustrate their point, Mitchell and Robinson have cited examples such as *þas flotmenn cumaþ* [these seaman will come] and *gif hwa gefeohte on cyninges huse, sie he scyldig ealles his ierfes* [if anyone fight (shall have fought) in the king's house, let him forfeit (he shall forfeit) all his property]. It may well be that phrases such as these do imply some sort of future tense, but it is important also to acknowledge that any such implications are, for the most part, engineered retrospectively and are determined often by the expectations of the modern reader. *Þas flotmenn cumaþ* would more correctly be translated as 'the seamen come' and *gif hwa gefeohte on cyninges huse, sie he scyldig ealles his ierfes* as 'if anyone fights in the king's house, he forfeits all his property'.

Literate Insular clerics, schooled in Latin, must have been cognisant of the limitations of a language construed using only two tenses, and yet there is no evidence to suggest that any linguistic changes occurred in relation to these matters in five-hundred years of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Indeed, Latin texts were continually translated into Late West Saxon throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries and even the most cursory investigation of this process reveals Latin future tenses routinely transformed into the West-Saxon present. Thus, for example, *surgam et ibo ad patrem meum et dicam illi pater...* [Luke 15.18: I will rise and I

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2 Paul C. Bauschatz, *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1982, p. xiii.
3 See, for example, A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, §§ 726–68.
4 Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983 (originally published in 1964), § 200.

will go to my father and I will say to that father...] became *ic arise and ic fare to minum fæder and ic secge him*[5] [I arise and I go to my father and I say to him...].

Malcolm Godden has contested that the *bið/beoð* forms of the verb *to be* 'tend to be used for the timeless present and the future while the *is/sind* forms are used for current time.[6] Although this would seem to be possible, especially in the context of the article in which this argument was advanced, it will be shown later in this paper that such an interpretation would lead to an unresolvable dilemma if applied to other texts, among them the *Cotton Gnomics*. Godden has also argued that temporal phrases such as *þonne* [then, when] and *on ðam timan* might likewise indicate future tense in some contexts, although it must be acknowledged that both phrases are also used to indicate the past as well—throughout the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* for example. Carol Braun Pasternack, on the other hand, has argued that the present tense in Anglo-Saxon may well signify something quite different to the present tense in languages such as Latin because Latin distinguishes present and future inflections while Anglo-Saxon does not.[7]

There is no room in a paper of this size to fully explore the linguistic relationship of the tenses expressed in Standard Late West Saxon with the temporal ontologies of those people. It is sufficient to say, however, that we cannot understand completely how the Anglo-Saxon mind envisioned time because of the underlying alterity of their forms of expressing such concepts and our own. Even so, a few points must be iterated in regards to the argument at hand.

In the poetry of Wessex, all actions take place either in a dramatic 'now' or in an historic 'then'. This does not mean that the West-Saxon artistry of verse was unsubtle, nor does it mean that their dialogue is sequential or immutably bi-temporal. In fact, this poetry, when translated verbatim, can evidence an astonishing modernity.

The bluntness of the West-Saxon parataxis sits well with the modern ear, but it was this same parataxis, ironically, that initially repulsed the English academics who first sought to make of Anglo-Saxon literature a national heritage. Cultured in the complex phraseology and periodic structure of Latin and Greek, and in the imitations these Classics spawned, early

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5 Roy M. Liuzza (Ed.), *The Old English Version of the Gospels*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 135.
6 Malcolm Godden, 'The Millennium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons' in Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (Eds.), *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 155–80, p. 159.
7 Carol Braun Pasternack, 'Post-Structuralist theories: the subject and the text' in Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Ed.), *Reading Old English Texts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 171.

scholars were at first dismissive of and then apologetic about Anglo-Saxon poetry. Hints of this Classical bias are still discernible in Michael Alexander's forty page introduction to his 1973 translation of *Beowulf*, in which he seems to argue for recognition of the poem as an epic on par with the works of Homer.[8] The modern reader, however, suffers no such anxiety upon hearing West-Saxon poetry. Nor is the modern reader deterred by the temporal modalities of West-Saxon verse which demonstrate a remarkably modern ability to move simultaneously between time frames—a quality also present in Anglo-Saxon visual art.

VISUAL ART AND POETRY—THE ANGLO-SAXON NEXUS

An example of this quality may be demonstrated by the engravings on the Franks Casket.[9] Carved from whale ivory no later than the end of the eighth century, but possibly much earlier, the Franks casket is inscribed in runic Anglo-Saxon and inlaid with scenes from Classical history, from the Christian Gospels and from Germanic mythology—thus representing visually the same intertextuality we encounter in Anglo-Saxon literature. In common with other examples of early Germanic art, the casket also illustrates a disregard for temporal sensibilities.

On one panel, Weland the smith is shown working at his forge casting the 700 *annuli* that will bring about his downfall. Over the casting of these rings he is handed back one from the princess Beaduhild, whom later he will rape and whose brothers he will kill. At his feet we see the headless corpse of one of these unfortunate young men while in the background another man, presumably Weland's brother Egill, is shown strangling geese. The feathers from these geese will be made into wings with which Weland will effect an escape, but not before forging the legendary weapons and armour for his unborn son shown at the top of the scene.

The Weland legend was a popular Germanic cycle. It is referenced in the West-Saxon poem *Deor*, and two versions, the somewhat contradictory *Vølundarkviða* and *Đîðriks Saga*, survive in Old Norse.[10] It may be that the story was not displayed sequentially on the Franks casket because the artist wanted, or was directed, to depict all the major events of the legend in a limited space and felt that such a depiction of so famous a story could lead to little

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8 Michael Alexander (Trans.), *Beowulf*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 9–49. Note that in the introduction to his revised edition of the poem, first published by Penguin in 2001, all such apologies have disappeared.
9 Carol L. Neuman De Vegvar, *The Northumbrian Renaissance*, Associated University Presses, London, 1987, pages 259–73.
10 A synopsis of the extant records pertaining to this legend can be taken from R.M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, Methuen, London, 1970, pages 11–14.

confusion, but it may be also that the Anglo-Saxon mind, described by a language that did not work in any but a present or preterite tense, did not need to work sequentially. For the Anglo-Saxon poet, and perhaps the Anglo-Saxon mind, everything existed within a dramatic present that was inextricably interwoven with an historical past. The two could not be separated any more than memory could be separated from action.

The individual's memory of everything that has happened in their life and of everything they have learned exists only in the present action of remembering it. Indeed, action in the present is virtually impossible without the function of memory, even if this function is utilised at nothing more than a subconscious level. More importantly, in the consideration of art and its representation of the human experience, when an individual remembers their past, that memory is both instant and total, although often imperfect. In order to relate that memory of the past to another person, the memory must be assembled into some sort of culturally determined sequence that explains its significance. This sequence must then be translated into a transferable medium.

Anglo-Saxon visual art was manipulated deliberately to represent this correlation of action and memory and needed no external dialogue—the inscriptions on the Franks casket, for example, do not relate to the pictures of Weland. Another panel on the casket, sometimes called the 'Heroic Death Panel', evidences identical execution to that of the Weland panel and is similarly uninscribed. Nor is the Franks casket alone in this method of presentation. The Wirksworth Grave slab, although thematically Christian, portrays the Crucifixion, the washing of Christ's feet by Mary Magdalene, the death of the Virgin, the Presentation of Christ at the Temple, the Descent into Hell, the Ascension, the Annunciation and possibly the Advent of Pentecost as simultaneous events.[11]

This quality in Insular Germanic art deteriorated as the Anglo-Saxons came under the influence of continental Europe. As art forms became more closely tied to the written word, and that word became both Christian and Latin, Anglo-Saxon artists began to imitate continental trends and their tastes, in turn, became more Romanised in subject, depiction and design.[12] It is no coincidence that the Wirksworth slab bears no writing upon it and that the Franks casket displays considerable primitivism in relation to both the script used and to the magical significance attributed to that script. Although the casket is inscribed for the most

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11 David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1984, p. 95, plate 84 and notes on page 85 where Wilson comments briefly on the similarities of the slab and the casket.

12 This change in style may also be a result of the replacement of native artists by continental imports, as Bernard Muir has suggested—see Bernard Muir, 'Anthologists, poets and scribes in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association*, 1, 2005, pp. 99–118.

part in runes, the artist or artists who created the work manifestly knew how to inscribe in Latin and with Latinate script, for a small portion appears on the back of the piece. No words appear in runic that might bring bad luck, the artist used synonyms instead, and in the one instance where such synonyms cannot be use—the description of the sack of Jerusalem—the artist changed the script to Latin. All this signifies the considerable age of the artefact and an operation of pagan sensibilities during its execution, as others have argued previously.[13]

Anglo-Saxon visual art then, transcending the limitations of language, did not need to concern itself with systematic or sequential analysis, and this same temporal transcendence is exhibited in West-Saxon poetry, where the *scóp* plays with temporal relationships. West-Saxon poems evince considerable dexterity in presenting an historical past and a dramatic present through the ongoing performance in the actual present. The narrator of *Beowulf*, for example, begins his performance by addressing an audience clearly in the present and reminds them of that very fact, that they have heard of the Spear-Dane's might in days of old and that they are hearing of it now. Then, for the rest of the performance, the *scóp* dances between a range of temporal modalities.

The actions of the poem's eponymous hero take place in a dramatic present which, for the audience, is an actual past. This dramatic present is, in turn, built upon an ancient past, but constant allusion is made also to a dramatic future which, once again for the audience, is an actual past—a past in which events unspoken of by the poet but known to the audience will take place. All this is done in no particular order and with no discernible sequence. Thus an image of inextricable events is wrought by the poet using the interaction of performance and memory through the agency of time. This is done not to confuse or even necessarily to delight the audience. It is done because that is how the *scóp* and the intended audience viewed their world. This is exactly the interaction of *wyrd* and time that Paul Bauschatz argued was fundamental to pagan Germanic thought. That *Beowulf*, a poem composed no earlier than the tenth-century, should still evidence such an ontology argues persuasively for the continuation of this way of thinking well past the Anglo-Saxon conversions.

The poet of *Deor* evidences this mastery of technique in just the same way but within the discipline of a much shorter lay. *Deor* wends its way briefly through a six verse song where the theme of time is refrained in a single repetitive chorus, an uncharacteristic device in

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13 This is discussed further in Neuman De Vegvar, *The Northumbrian Renaissance*, pp. 259–73 and Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, pp. 85–6.

extant Anglo-Saxon poetry, *þæs ofereode þisses swa mæg*[14] [that passed away, so must this]. *Deor* purports to tell us about historical incidents and deliberately leaves each story unresolved. The original audience would have known full well the implications of this device, although at least some of the irony is wasted on modern readers because some of the stories have long since been lost.

Each of the six verses in *Deor* alludes to a tale that was probably well known to the West-Saxon audience and deals with the hardships faced by named heroes or heroines. Having introduced the characters, Deor leaves each tableau unfinished, drawing the attention of the listener, or reader, to the point of the poem by resinging each time—'that passed away, so must this'. From what we do know of the stories outlined in *Deor*, the situations did indeed change—but each change was for the worse. Take, for example, verse five:

> *we geascodan eormanrices*
> *wylfenne geþoht ahte wide folc*
> *gotena rices þæt wæs grim cyning*
> *sæt secg monig sorgum gebunden*
> *wean on wenan wyscte geneahe*
> *þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære*

> [We have heard how Eormanric, wolf-like in his thoughts, held the wide lands of the Gothic tribes—that was a cruel king ! Many a warrior sat, sorrow-bound, expecting calamity, and wished that this king might be cast down.]

Eormanric *was* cast down eventually, by Attila the Hun, whose ferocity eclipsed his predecessor and earned him the epithet 'Scourge of God'. No doubt the circumstances of the Gothic king's defeat did little to please those subjects of his who had for so long wished it to happen.

Each of the other verses for which a story has survived tells a similar tale, a grim fate succeeded by an even grimmer one, reminding the audience that things can always get worse and, perhaps, that one may count on this happening. The very last story of the poem, that of the poet Deor himself, is narrated in the present tense and notes only that Heorrenda has succeeded Deor as court poet to the *Heodeningas* and that this too must change. We do not know if Deor was ever reinstated. What we do know is that Heorrenda, misusing his court

14 *Deor*, ll. 7, 13, 17, 20, 27 and 42. All Anglo-Saxon poetry quoted in this paper will be taken from George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1931–42. All translations throughout the paper—Old English, Old Norse and Latin—are my own.

position, was to be instrumental in the fall of the Heodening dynasty and the destruction of that clan. No doubt Deor's audience knew this fact only too well.

Throughout the poem, Deor is eulogising the Anglo-Saxon belief in an entropic fate while at the same time, like the *scóp* of *Beowulf*, he is also playing with time. In the dramatic present of the telling of Deor's poem there is a chance for change in circumstance, but that chance is, in actuality, a certainty—because in the memory of the audience the dramatic future of the poem is a collective past and, of course, the past can never change.

DHARMA, TEH AND *ÞUSNES*

The past can never change and for Anglo-Saxons who believed in *wyrd* the future did not exist, at least not as an endless stream of possibilities. Just like a poem, fully written before each new audience discovers it, the future was already determined. This pattern of predetermination had at its foundation a Germanic sense of *þusnes*. Carolyne Larrington began her monograph on wisdom poetry by writing that the 'beginning of knowledge is the observation of how things are; the beginning of law, the observation of how things ought to be'.[15] This philosophical pan from what is to what should be, from the nature of the world to our perception of how to act within it, finds expression in the literature of a great many cultures.

The monumental Sanskrit text *Mahabharata* delineates both the essential quality of the perceivable universe and the role of action within it. The first phenomenon is referred to as *dharma* [what is decreed, or what is customary] while the second is *karma* [deed or action]. The *kri* root of the word *karma* relates to deliberate action and surfaces in other Indo-European languages as well—the modern English 'create', for example, derives from the Latin *creare* [to bring into being] which, in turn, is descended from this same *kri* root. Such concepts, of course, were not limited to Indo-European cultures alone. By at least the beginning of the second century BCE, similar discourse was well established in classical Chinese thought. During the 1970s, excavations at Ma Wang Dui, Guodian, in central China, produced the earliest copy of the classic text *Tao Teh Ching*, although those scrolls also indicate that the text may have originally been entitled *Teh Tao Ching*. The primary focus of

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15 Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 1993, p. 1.

this work lies in the understanding of the essential nature of things [*teh*] and the way [*tao*] in which humans are to live according to that understanding.[16]

In the West, an engagement with a similar discourse dates back to at least the days of Hesiod whose *Theogony* and *Works and Days* reflect these same preoccupations. In *De Rerum Natura*, the philosopher-poet Lucretius wrote of the desire *naturam primum cognoscere rerum*[17] [above all to know the way things are]. Although the corpus of West-Saxon literature provides no equivalent term for *dharma* or *teh* or *naturam*, it is clear from the scope of that corpus that the poets and philosophers of Wessex were themselves fixated with the concept of the innate nature of things, a concept which we might, for the purpose of this discussion, render as *þusnes* [thusness]. West-Saxon poetry, and in particular the Gnomic Verses, occupy themselves frequently with descriptions of *þusnes*. From the verses in the *Exeter Book* we read:

71 *forst sceal freosan fyr wudu meltan*
eorþe growan is brycgian
wæter helm wegan wundrum lucan
eorþan ciþas an sceal inbindan
75 *forstes fetre...*

[Frost must freeze, fire consume wood, the land bring forth life, the ice form a bridge, water wear away at a helmet. One alone shall unbind frost's fetter—the wonder-lock of the earth's abundance]

The beginning of this discourse on *þusnes*, which begins a new theme in these particular verses, establishes its importance through the strength of its alliteration. In the lines quoted here, the alliteration of *forst sceal freosan fyr wudu meltan* is mirrored by the third line w*æter helm wegan wundrum lucan.* Each line is then followed by a repetitive phrase, *eorþe growan* or *eorþan ciþas,* whose meanings in translation become almost identical. Clearly this is an important chant and the use of *sceal*, denoting what must be, emphasises the didactic nature of the text. Death, also, is not far from the poet's thoughts, depicted here with the grisly image of water wearing away at a helmet [*wæter helm wegan*].

16 For a recent edition of the *Tao Teh Ching* incorporating the Ma Wang Dui finds see Robert G. Henriks (Ed. and Trans.), *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000.
17 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III, 1072 in E. J. Kenney (Ed.), *De Rerum Natura III*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971.

The point of these verses is made succinctly by the author who then moved on to other themes, but the examples of *þusnes* in the other surviving Gnomic verses, those of the Cotton manuscript, are made more compelling by their considerable repetition. Where the *Exeter Gnomics* sums up *þusnes* in the five lines quoted above, the *Cotton Gnomics* enumerate more than one hundred examples and dedicate almost their entire text to these repetitive formulae. The result is incantatory, a chanted meditation on *þusnes* that signifies this concept's place in the philosophy of the Anglo-Saxons.

Þusnes is an important philosophic tool. It contextualises struggle and serves as a basis for the prioritisation of action. It is vital in the establishment of what can be changed and what has to be endured—and whereas Seneca depicted his 'thusness' of fortune as a dog being dragged behind a chariot, the West Saxons, a seafaring people, used an analogy equally as tangible: *werig sceal se wiþ winde roweþ*[18] [weary must he be who rows against the wind]. An understanding of *þusnes* left the West Saxons free to focus not so much on the battles that could be won but rather on the dignity inherent in any battle.

FATE IN ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

There is, of course, a demonstrable engagement with Christian orthodoxy in the literature of tenth-century Wessex and this engagement extends to at least some of the vernacular poetic corpus. There was a clear understanding in the mind of homilists such as Ælfric, for example, that the divine will was reflected in the order of the cosmos[19] and we can intuit similar beliefs underlying the *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* attributed to Wulfstan. The West-Saxon redaction of the *Philosophiae Consolationis* replaced Boethius's universe, held together by the *foedus perpetuum* [eternal alliance] of *amor* [love] and overseen by classical deities such as Phoebus, Phoebe and Hesperus,[20] with *God ælmihtig* [God almighty] who is the *an sceppend is buton ælcum tweon 7 se is eac wealdend heofones 7 eorðan 7 ealra gesceafta geswenlicra 7 eac ungeswenlicra*[21] [one creator beyond all doubt, and he is also the ruler of heaven and earth and all creation, the seen and also the unseen]. The West-Saxon *Consolatio* was also explicit about the relationship of *wyrd* to God, stating that:

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18 *Gnomic Verses (Exeter Book)*, l. 185.
19 See the quote from Ælfric cited in J.E. Cross, 'Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature', *Comparative Literature* XIV.1, 1962, pp. 1–22, at p. 20.
20 Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolationis*, II met. 8, in H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand and S.J. Tester (Eds. and Trans.), *Boethius*, William Heinemann, London, 1973.
21 Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, XXI.

Sumu þing þonne on þisse weorulde sint underðied þære wyrde sume hire nanwuht underðied ne sint ac sio wyrd 7 eall ða þing þe hire underðied sint sint underðied ðæm godcundan foreþonce.[22]

[Some things in this world are subject to *wyrd*, some are not in any way subject to it; but *wyrd* and all the things that are subject to it are subject to divine consideration.]

This view of the world is also reflected in West-Saxon poems such as *The Order of the World* and *Vainglory*, which appear in the *Exeter Book*, and the fragmentary *Waldhere*. Each of these works evinces an orthodox Christianity with God acting as the arbiter of human fate. The hero Waldhere states his reliance on God alone to protect the just and to bring victory,[23] while *Vainglory* serves as a homily on the impotence of human endeavour before the will of the *sigora waldend*[24] [the Lord of Victories]. But God's sway over *wyrd* is less sure in *Beowulf*.

Kevin Wanner has argued that God is the dominant force in the early sections of *Beowulf*, but that this situation would seem to be reversed in the final third of the poem.[25] A close reading of the epic would seem to confound this argument. In his first formal speech before Hrothgar, Beowulf declares his lineage and his intentions in Denmark—to win fame or to die. This speech finishes with the caveat *gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*[26] [*wyrd* goes always as it must]. Here Beowulf speaks with the resignation of a man who knows that nothing he can do will alter the hour of his death, a point made again a few lines later when he reiterates that *wyrd oft nereð unfægne eorl þonne his ellen deah*[27] [*wyrd* often saves the undoomed man when his courage serves]. Hrothgar, on the other hand, asserts God's dominion over *wyrd*,[28] as does the poem's narrator.[29] Wanner correctly pointed out that Beowulf's later speeches[30] continue to avow the power of *wyrd*,[31] but the voice of Christian orthodoxy is still to be heard in the final section of the poem with the narrator again contesting:

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22 Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, XXXIX.
23 *Waldhere*, Frag. B., ll. 25–31.
24 *Vainglory*, l. 84.
25 See Kevin J. Wanner, 'Warriors, *Wyrms*, and *Wyrd*: The Paradoxical Fate of the Germanic Hero/King in *Beowulf*', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 16, 1999, pp. 1–15.
26 *Beowulf*, l. 455.
27 *Beowulf*, ll. 572–3.
28 *Beowulf*, ll. 477–9.
29 *Beowulf*, ll. 1054–8.
30 *Beowulf*, ll. 2526–7, 2574 and 2814–6.
31 Wanner, 'Warriors, *Wyrms*, and *Wyrd*', p. 5.

2291 *swa mæg unfæge eaðe gedigan*
wean ond wræcsið se ðe waldenes
2293 *hyldo gehealdeþ*

[Thus can the man not fated to die—he whom the Ruler's favour holds—easily endure grief and exile.]

In reality, the individual voices in *Beowulf* show consistency throughout the poem and it is the listener, or reader, who is left to decide who they must believe—the pagan hero or the Christian narrator. Other West-Saxon poetry also left this dilemma unresolved.

In the Gnomic verses of the Cotton Manuscript, for example, God and *wyrd* are left to contest their roles within the same line: *þrymmas syndan Cristes myccle wyrd byð swiðost*[32] [the powers of Christ are great—*wyrd* is strongest]. If Malcolm Godden's contention—discussed above—is correct[33] and the use of *byð* here implies future tense, then we are left with the even more perplexing assertion that, although Christ's powers *are* great, *wyrd will be* strongest. This apparent confusion was not only restricted to the relationship of God to *wyrd,* though, for God's role as divine judge was also represented in an unorthodox manner in some verses of the West-Saxon corpus.

Both *Deor* and *The Fates of Men* position God in the role of arbiter, but in these poems we find God's judgement tending towards the whimsical. The narrative voice in *Deor* tells us that:

33 *eorle monegum are gesceawað*
34 *wislicne blæd sumum weana dæl*

[to many a man Grace grants abundant joys, to some a great many woes]

while the poet of *The Fates* concurs that:

64 *... meahtig dryhten*
geond eorþan sceat eallum dæleð
scyreþ ond scrifeð ond gesceapo healdeð
67 *sumum eadwelan sumum earfeþa dæl*

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32 *Cotton Gnomics*, ll. 4–5.
33 Godden, 'The Millennium, Time, and History', p. 159.

[... the mighty Lord apportions to all throughout the wide earth, determines and ordains and maintains their futures, (granting) riches to some and to others hardships]

Both poems represent God as arbitrary and unfair, with no reasons postulated for the apportioning of reward or punishment. Beowulf himself dies childless, and in his death-speech rues the lack of issue from his flesh to pass his weapons on to.[34] His actions in slaying the dragon and securing its treasure expose his people to threats from outside their borders, but his own impending death coupled with his failure to produce an heir leaves the Geats undefended. He dies knowing that his people will soon cease to exist. The *scóp* of Beowulf's epic likened this horror to that of a father forced to witness the execution of his son. Reduced in the knowledge that all future effort must now be in vain, the old man is tormented daily by the vision of a land about him that his son can never possess.[35] This mood finds echo in several passages from *The Fates of Men* where, again, parents are witness to the death of their children and the agony that must accompany that action.[36] In the *Exeter Gnomics*, also, the poet lamented the senseless death of the very young:

29 *... meotud ana wat*
hwær se cwealm cyme þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ
31 *umbor yceð þa æradl nimeð*

[God alone knows from whence this death comes and to where it departs. The children flourish and then sickness takes them off.]

Other West-Saxon poems go even further in attributing to God a decidedly unchristian malice. *The Cotton Gnomics*, *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* all depict civilisations destroyed by God for apparently no reason. The people of these poems were not akin to those of Sodom or Gomorrah, no charges of wantonness or vice were laid against them, no crimes enumerated. Nevertheless, their destruction was absolute. As *The Wanderer* states:

85 *yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend*
oþþæt burgwara breahtma lease
87 *eald enta geweorc idlu stodon*

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34 *Beowulf*, ll. 2729–32.
35 *Beowulf*, ll. 2444–62.
36 *Fates of Men*, ll. 46–7.

[The Creator of Men destroyed this city thus, until its citizens were stripped of joy—the ancient work of giants stands idle.]

The tensions evident in compositions such as *The Wanderer* have fuelled the debates as to the Christian or pagan nature of many such poems.[37] All extant Anglo-Saxon writing is Christian in as much as it was written, copied, collated and compiled within clerical institutions. How Christian these institutions were, however, or what form Christianity took within them, is open to debate, especially in light of comments from sources such as Alcuin and Bede.[38] Given all this, it is hardly surprising that many of the West-Saxon works seem inconsistent or that references to fate and God seem to intertwine.

An orthodox Christianity necessarily obviates any engagement with fatalism. The Christian God benevolently grants absolute freedom of will and humans are obliged, but not forced, to follow the divine laws as revealed in the Bible. Fatalism is antithetical to this belief, but if this orthodoxy was universally understood, then why were clerics throughout the tenth century still urging the faithful to abandon their belief in *wyrd*? If *wyrd* had become merely a dead epithet by this time, as scholars such as Joseph Trahern[39] have argued it had, then why did Ælfric continue to preach against fatalism in his homilies using such strenuous terms as *forðan ðe gewyrd nis nan ðing buton leas wena ne nan ðing soðlice be gewyrde ne gewyrð ac ealle ðing þurh Godes dom beoð geendebyrde*[40] [... for *wyrd* is nothing but lying fancy—nothing truly happens through *wyrd*, but all things are ordered according to the will of God]. It seems hard to imagine that Ælfric saw it necessary to deploy double and triple negatives to denounce an idea that had no currency.[41]

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37 See, for example B.F. Huppé, '*The Wanderer*: Theme and Structure', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42, 1943, pp. 516–38; S.B. Greenfield, '*The Wanderer*: A Reconsideration of Theme and Structure', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 1, 1951, 451–65; and S.I. Tucker, 'Return To *The Wanderer*', *Essays in Criticism* 8, 1958, 229–37.

38 Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, IV.27 in J.E. King (Ed. and Trans.), *Baedae Opera Historical*, William Heinemann, London, 1954.

39 Joseph B. Trahern, Jr., 'Fatalism and the millennium', in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 160–71. Traherne draws support from a number of eminent scholars—see Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1952; B.J. Timmer, 'Wyrd in Anglo-Saxon Prose and Poetry', *Neophilologus* 26, 1940–1, pp. 24–33 and 'Heathen and Christian Elements in Old English Poetry', *Neophilologus* 29, 1944, pp. 180–5; Ida L. Gordon, 'Traditional Themes in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*', *Review of English Studies* 5, 1954, pp. 1–13; and Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Patristics and Old English Literature: Notes on Some Poems', in Stanley B. Greenfield (Ed.), *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, University of Oregon Books, Eugene, 1963.

40 Ælfric, *Epiphania Domini*, in Benjamin Thorpe (Ed. and Trans.), *Sermones Catholici*, Ælfric Society, London, 1844, at page 114.

OÞÞÆT PASSAGES

This fatalism of the West Saxons did not compel them to embrace apathy. Clearly these people believed in the value of action, but only up to a certain point. In the poetry of Wessex this idea as to the value of action 'up to a certain point' becomes a common device that highlights both the power of *wyrd* and its entropic nature. Typically this device takes the form of temporal comparisons separated by the word *oþþæt* [until, up to the point when]. The preliminary circumstance is invariably utopian with images of success, joy and attainment abounding. The *oþþæt* clause is used to introduce the agent of change, and the transformation is always towards decay.

In *The Ruin*, we are introduced to an architectural triumph, a city of bright buildings, bathing halls, tall towers and banqueting halls full of revelry—*oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe*[42] [until *wyrd* the mighty changed everything]. Now the city lies desolate, the towers fallen, the walls crumbled, the people dead in their multitudes. Similarly, the poet Deor tells his audience that he enjoyed an excellent life *oþþæt... nú*[43] [until now]. Formerly the court poet to an Heodening king, Deor informs his audience that his possessions have been stripped from him and passed over to another poet—Heorrenda. It is not entirely clear why this has happened, although the syntax of the poem [*oþþæt heorrenda nú*] may be crafted to implicate Deor's successor as the author of these woes. Nevertheless, the text still evidences a thematic movement from joy towards despair.

One of the most prolonged and poetic of these *oþþæt* verses, however, comes from *Beowulf*. In Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf on the limits of power, the old king tells a parable of a man who has everything. Given dominion over a noble clan, the man:

1735 *wunað he on wiste no hine wiht dweleð*
adl ne yldo ne him inwitsorh
on sefan sweorceð ne gesacu ohwær
ecghete eoweð ac him eal worold
wendeð on willan he þæt wyrse ne con
1740 *oþþæt him on innan oferhygda dæl*
weaxeð ond wridað þonne se weard swefeð

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41 *nis nan thing* [lit. 'not nothing'] and *ne nan thing sothlice be gewyrde ne gewyrth* [lit. 'not nothing truly by *wyrd* does not happen']—such patterns are utilised in Late West Saxon to indicate the absolute negation of a concept. Double negatives do not cancel themselves out as in modern English.
42 *Ruin*, l. 24.
43 *Deor*, l. 39.

FATE, VIRTUE AND THE METAPHYSICAL WINTER IN THE POETRY OF WESSEX

[CHRIS BISHOP, ANU]

INTRODUCTION

West-Saxon poetry occasionally describes a world of beauty and delight—the blossoming woods and verdant fields of *The Seafarer*, the comforting love of the Frisian wife in the *Exeter Gnomics*, the treasure allegory of *The Nature Song*—but these images are rare.[1] More commonly the poet's praise is reserved for the constancy and companionship of the ring-sworn brethren and the images favoured are of the hardships within which these brethren operate: the deep, dead waves; the storm swept cliffs; the fierce snows of the long northern winter. These winters, however, are more than just a season to the West Saxons.

In the poetry of these people, winter becomes a complex metaphor for the ephemeracy of joy and light and life itself. The warmth of summer will come to unlock the promise of life gripped tight by frost, but, all too quickly, the brief joys of the abundant field will pass back under the winter snows. These cycles of nature also inspired the West Saxons to count their years by the passage of seasons, a common enough phenomenon, but where other early peoples lived in anticipation of the summer or of spring, the West Saxons measured their lives by the number of winters endured. There is a significant covert dialogue in operation here as West-Saxon poetry indicates that this choice of seasons was not just a matter of expediency. The vernacular poetry of Wessex evinces an intense engagement with the concept of *wyrd* [Fate], and it was this powerful belief in fatalism that coloured West-Saxon expressions of the bleakness of nature and found a voice in the dialogue of Insular visual art—and it did so not just because of its intersection with West-Saxon beliefs about living and dying, but because of its inextricable links to their very language, the process by which they spoke themselves into being.

This paper will explore this reality of the West-Saxon psyche that shaped so much of their ontology and subsequent poetic discourse, and it will look at the complex relationship of fatalism and Christianity and the ways in which this relationship found expression.

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1 C.R. Dodwell briefly juxtaposes the menace and foreboding of Anglo-Saxon poetry with the pleasure of nature expressed by Virgil and Ovid on page 26 of his *Anglo Saxon Art*, Manchester University Press, 1982.

Moreover, this paper will propose that the West-Saxon mind perceived the machinations of *wyrd* as neither benevolent nor ambivalent, but as an arbitrary and inhuman force that pulled all things inexorably towards destruction. More than just fatalism, the poetry of Wessex embraced a vision of predestination that was all-pervading, inescapable and entropic.

FATE AND THE ABSENCE OF A FUTURE TENSE

Unlike all other Indo-European tongues, the Germanic languages developed a binary system of verb tenses—a distinction between past and non-past only.[2] Subsequently, Standard Late West Saxon evidences no conjugations beyond the present and the preterite.[3] Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson are representative of modern scholarship in asserting that the present tense was also used by the Anglo-Saxons to represent the future,[4] although this received wisdom would seem more problematic upon closer scrutiny.

To illustrate their point, Mitchell and Robinson have cited examples such as *þas flotmenn cumaþ* [these seaman will come] and *gif hwa gefeohte on cyninges huse, sie he scyldig ealles his ierfes* [if anyone fight (shall have fought) in the king's house, let him forfeit (he shall forfeit) all his property]. It may well be that phrases such as these do imply some sort of future tense, but it is important also to acknowledge that any such implications are, for the most part, engineered retrospectively and are determined often by the expectations of the modern reader. *Þas flotmenn cumaþ* would more correctly be translated as 'the seamen come' and *gif hwa gefeohte on cyninges huse, sie he scyldig ealles his ierfes* as 'if anyone fights in the king's house, he forfeits all his property'.

Literate Insular clerics, schooled in Latin, must have been cognisant of the limitations of a language construed using only two tenses, and yet there is no evidence to suggest that any linguistic changes occurred in relation to these matters in five-hundred years of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Indeed, Latin texts were continually translated into Late West Saxon throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries and even the most cursory investigation of this process reveals Latin future tenses routinely transformed into the West-Saxon present. Thus, for example, *surgam et ibo ad patrem meum et dicam illi pater...* [Luke 15.18: I will rise and I

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2 Paul C. Bauschatz, *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1982, p. xiii.
3 See, for example, A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, §§ 726–68.
4 Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983 (originally published in 1964), § 200.

will go to my father and I will say to that father...] became *ic arise and ic fare to minum fæder and ic secge him*[5] [I arise and I go to my father and I say to him...].

Malcolm Godden has contested that the *bið/beoð* forms of the verb *to be* 'tend to be used for the timeless present and the future while the *is/sind* forms are used for current time.[6] Although this would seem to be possible, especially in the context of the article in which this argument was advanced, it will be shown later in this paper that such an interpretation would lead to an unresolvable dilemma if applied to other texts, among them the *Cotton Gnomics*. Godden has also argued that temporal phrases such as *þonne* [then, when] and *on ðam timan* might likewise indicate future tense in some contexts, although it must be acknowledged that both phrases are also used to indicate the past as well—throughout the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* for example. Carol Braun Pasternack, on the other hand, has argued that the present tense in Anglo-Saxon may well signify something quite different to the present tense in languages such as Latin because Latin distinguishes present and future inflections while Anglo-Saxon does not.[7]

There is no room in a paper of this size to fully explore the linguistic relationship of the tenses expressed in Standard Late West Saxon with the temporal ontologies of those people. It is sufficient to say, however, that we cannot understand completely how the Anglo-Saxon mind envisioned time because of the underlying alterity of their forms of expressing such concepts and our own. Even so, a few points must be iterated in regards to the argument at hand.

In the poetry of Wessex, all actions take place either in a dramatic 'now' or in an historic 'then'. This does not mean that the West-Saxon artistry of verse was unsubtle, nor does it mean that their dialogue is sequential or immutably bi-temporal. In fact, this poetry, when translated verbatim, can evidence an astonishing modernity.

The bluntness of the West-Saxon parataxis sits well with the modern ear, but it was this same parataxis, ironically, that initially repulsed the English academics who first sought to make of Anglo-Saxon literature a national heritage. Cultured in the complex phraseology and periodic structure of Latin and Greek, and in the imitations these Classics spawned, early

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5 Roy M. Liuzza (Ed.), *The Old English Version of the Gospels*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 135.
6 Malcolm Godden, 'The Millennium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons' in Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (Eds.), *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 155–80, p. 159.
7 Carol Braun Pasternack, 'Post-Structuralist theories: the subject and the text' in Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Ed.), *Reading Old English Texts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 171.

scholars were at first dismissive of and then apologetic about Anglo-Saxon poetry. Hints of this Classical bias are still discernible in Michael Alexander's forty page introduction to his 1973 translation of *Beowulf*, in which he seems to argue for recognition of the poem as an epic on par with the works of Homer.[8] The modern reader, however, suffers no such anxiety upon hearing West-Saxon poetry. Nor is the modern reader deterred by the temporal modalities of West-Saxon verse which demonstrate a remarkably modern ability to move simultaneously between time frames—a quality also present in Anglo-Saxon visual art.

VISUAL ART AND POETRY—THE ANGLO-SAXON NEXUS

An example of this quality may be demonstrated by the engravings on the Franks Casket.[9] Carved from whale ivory no later than the end of the eighth century, but possibly much earlier, the Franks casket is inscribed in runic Anglo-Saxon and inlaid with scenes from Classical history, from the Christian Gospels and from Germanic mythology—thus representing visually the same intertextuality we encounter in Anglo-Saxon literature. In common with other examples of early Germanic art, the casket also illustrates a disregard for temporal sensibilities.

On one panel, Weland the smith is shown working at his forge casting the 700 *annuli* that will bring about his downfall. Over the casting of these rings he is handed back one from the princess Beaduhild, whom later he will rape and whose brothers he will kill. At his feet we see the headless corpse of one of these unfortunate young men while in the background another man, presumably Weland's brother Egill, is shown strangling geese. The feathers from these geese will be made into wings with which Weland will effect an escape, but not before forging the legendary weapons and armour for his unborn son shown at the top of the scene.

The Weland legend was a popular Germanic cycle. It is referenced in the West-Saxon poem *Deor*, and two versions, the somewhat contradictory *Vølundarkviða* and *Đîðriks Saga*, survive in Old Norse.[10] It may be that the story was not displayed sequentially on the Franks casket because the artist wanted, or was directed, to depict all the major events of the legend in a limited space and felt that such a depiction of so famous a story could lead to little

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8 Michael Alexander (Trans.), *Beowulf*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 9–49. Note that in the introduction to his revised edition of the poem, first published by Penguin in 2001, all such apologies have disappeared.
9 Carol L. Neuman De Vegvar, *The Northumbrian Renaissance*, Associated University Presses, London, 1987, pages 259–73.
10 A synopsis of the extant records pertaining to this legend can be taken from R.M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, Methuen, London, 1970, pages 11–14.

confusion, but it may be also that the Anglo-Saxon mind, described by a language that did not work in any but a present or preterite tense, did not need to work sequentially. For the Anglo-Saxon poet, and perhaps the Anglo-Saxon mind, everything existed within a dramatic present that was inextricably interwoven with an historical past. The two could not be separated any more than memory could be separated from action.

The individual's memory of everything that has happened in their life and of everything they have learned exists only in the present action of remembering it. Indeed, action in the present is virtually impossible without the function of memory, even if this function is utilised at nothing more than a subconscious level. More importantly, in the consideration of art and its representation of the human experience, when an individual remembers their past, that memory is both instant and total, although often imperfect. In order to relate that memory of the past to another person, the memory must be assembled into some sort of culturally determined sequence that explains its significance. This sequence must then be translated into a transferable medium.

Anglo-Saxon visual art was manipulated deliberately to represent this correlation of action and memory and needed no external dialogue—the inscriptions on the Franks casket, for example, do not relate to the pictures of Weland. Another panel on the casket, sometimes called the 'Heroic Death Panel', evidences identical execution to that of the Weland panel and is similarly uninscribed. Nor is the Franks casket alone in this method of presentation. The Wirksworth Grave slab, although thematically Christian, portrays the Crucifixion, the washing of Christ's feet by Mary Magdalene, the death of the Virgin, the Presentation of Christ at the Temple, the Descent into Hell, the Ascension, the Annunciation and possibly the Advent of Pentecost as simultaneous events.[11]

This quality in Insular Germanic art deteriorated as the Anglo-Saxons came under the influence of continental Europe. As art forms became more closely tied to the written word, and that word became both Christian and Latin, Anglo-Saxon artists began to imitate continental trends and their tastes, in turn, became more Romanised in subject, depiction and design.[12] It is no coincidence that the Wirksworth slab bears no writing upon it and that the Franks casket displays considerable primitivism in relation to both the script used and to the magical significance attributed to that script. Although the casket is inscribed for the most

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11 David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1984, p. 95, plate 84 and notes on page 85 where Wilson comments briefly on the similarities of the slab and the casket.

12 This change in style may also be a result of the replacement of native artists by continental imports, as Bernard Muir has suggested—see Bernard Muir, 'Anthologists, poets and scribes in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association*, 1, 2005, pp. 99–118.

part in runes, the artist or artists who created the work manifestly knew how to inscribe in Latin and with Latinate script, for a small portion appears on the back of the piece. No words appear in runic that might bring bad luck, the artist used synonyms instead, and in the one instance where such synonyms cannot be use—the description of the sack of Jerusalem—the artist changed the script to Latin. All this signifies the considerable age of the artefact and an operation of pagan sensibilities during its execution, as others have argued previously.[13]

Anglo-Saxon visual art then, transcending the limitations of language, did not need to concern itself with systematic or sequential analysis, and this same temporal transcendence is exhibited in West-Saxon poetry, where the *scóp* plays with temporal relationships. West-Saxon poems evince considerable dexterity in presenting an historical past and a dramatic present through the ongoing performance in the actual present. The narrator of *Beowulf*, for example, begins his performance by addressing an audience clearly in the present and reminds them of that very fact, that they have heard of the Spear-Dane's might in days of old and that they are hearing of it now. Then, for the rest of the performance, the *scóp* dances between a range of temporal modalities.

The actions of the poem's eponymous hero take place in a dramatic present which, for the audience, is an actual past. This dramatic present is, in turn, built upon an ancient past, but constant allusion is made also to a dramatic future which, once again for the audience, is an actual past—a past in which events unspoken of by the poet but known to the audience will take place. All this is done in no particular order and with no discernible sequence. Thus an image of inextricable events is wrought by the poet using the interaction of performance and memory through the agency of time. This is done not to confuse or even necessarily to delight the audience. It is done because that is how the *scóp* and the intended audience viewed their world. This is exactly the interaction of *wyrd* and time that Paul Bauschatz argued was fundamental to pagan Germanic thought. That *Beowulf*, a poem composed no earlier than the tenth-century, should still evidence such an ontology argues persuasively for the continuation of this way of thinking well past the Anglo-Saxon conversions.

The poet of *Deor* evidences this mastery of technique in just the same way but within the discipline of a much shorter lay. *Deor* wends its way briefly through a six verse song where the theme of time is refrained in a single repetitive chorus, an uncharacteristic device in

13 This is discussed further in Neuman De Vegvar, *The Northumbrian Renaissance*, pp. 259–73 and Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, pp. 85–6.

extant Anglo-Saxon poetry, *þæs ofereode þisses swa mæg*[14] [that passed away, so must this]. *Deor* purports to tell us about historical incidents and deliberately leaves each story unresolved. The original audience would have known full well the implications of this device, although at least some of the irony is wasted on modern readers because some of the stories have long since been lost.

Each of the six verses in *Deor* alludes to a tale that was probably well known to the West-Saxon audience and deals with the hardships faced by named heroes or heroines. Having introduced the characters, Deor leaves each tableau unfinished, drawing the attention of the listener, or reader, to the point of the poem by resinging each time—'that passed away, so must this'. From what we do know of the stories outlined in *Deor*, the situations did indeed change—but each change was for the worse. Take, for example, verse five:

> *we geascodan eormanrices*
> *wylfenne geþoht ahte wide folc*
> *gotena rices þæt wæs grim cyning*
> *sæt secg monig sorgum gebunden*
> *wean on wenan wyscte geneahe*
> *þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære*

> [We have heard how Eormanric, wolf-like in his thoughts, held the wide lands of the Gothic tribes—that was a cruel king ! Many a warrior sat, sorrow-bound, expecting calamity, and wished that this king might be cast down.]

Eormanric *was* cast down eventually, by Attila the Hun, whose ferocity eclipsed his predecessor and earned him the epithet 'Scourge of God'. No doubt the circumstances of the Gothic king's defeat did little to please those subjects of his who had for so long wished it to happen.

Each of the other verses for which a story has survived tells a similar tale, a grim fate succeeded by an even grimmer one, reminding the audience that things can always get worse and, perhaps, that one may count on this happening. The very last story of the poem, that of the poet Deor himself, is narrated in the present tense and notes only that Heorrenda has succeeded Deor as court poet to the *Heodeningas* and that this too must change. We do not know if Deor was ever reinstated. What we do know is that Heorrenda, misusing his court

14 *Deor*, ll. 7, 13, 17, 20, 27 and 42. All Anglo-Saxon poetry quoted in this paper will be taken from George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1931–42. All translations throughout the paper—Old English, Old Norse and Latin—are my own.

position, was to be instrumental in the fall of the Heodening dynasty and the destruction of that clan. No doubt Deor's audience knew this fact only too well.

Throughout the poem, Deor is eulogising the Anglo-Saxon belief in an entropic fate while at the same time, like the *scóp* of *Beowulf*, he is also playing with time. In the dramatic present of the telling of Deor's poem there is a chance for change in circumstance, but that chance is, in actuality, a certainty—because in the memory of the audience the dramatic future of the poem is a collective past and, of course, the past can never change.

DHARMA, TEH AND *ÞUSNES*

The past can never change and for Anglo-Saxons who believed in *wyrd* the future did not exist, at least not as an endless stream of possibilities. Just like a poem, fully written before each new audience discovers it, the future was already determined. This pattern of predetermination had at its foundation a Germanic sense of *þusnes*. Carolyne Larrington began her monograph on wisdom poetry by writing that the 'beginning of knowledge is the observation of how things are; the beginning of law, the observation of how things ought to be'.[15] This philosophical pan from what is to what should be, from the nature of the world to our perception of how to act within it, finds expression in the literature of a great many cultures.

The monumental Sanskrit text *Mahabharata* delineates both the essential quality of the perceivable universe and the role of action within it. The first phenomenon is referred to as *dharma* [what is decreed, or what is customary] while the second is *karma* [deed or action]. The *kri* root of the word *karma* relates to deliberate action and surfaces in other Indo-European languages as well—the modern English 'create', for example, derives from the Latin *creare* [to bring into being] which, in turn, is descended from this same *kri* root. Such concepts, of course, were not limited to Indo-European cultures alone. By at least the beginning of the second century BCE, similar discourse was well established in classical Chinese thought. During the 1970s, excavations at Ma Wang Dui, Guodian, in central China, produced the earliest copy of the classic text *Tao Teh Ching*, although those scrolls also indicate that the text may have originally been entitled *Teh Tao Ching*. The primary focus of

15 Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 1993, p. 1.

this work lies in the understanding of the essential nature of things [*teh*] and the way [*tao*] in which humans are to live according to that understanding.[16]

In the West, an engagement with a similar discourse dates back to at least the days of Hesiod whose *Theogony* and *Works and Days* reflect these same preoccupations. In *De Rerum Natura*, the philosopher-poet Lucretius wrote of the desire *naturam primum cognoscere rerum*[17] [above all to know the way things are]. Although the corpus of West-Saxon literature provides no equivalent term for *dharma* or *teh* or *naturam*, it is clear from the scope of that corpus that the poets and philosophers of Wessex were themselves fixated with the concept of the innate nature of things, a concept which we might, for the purpose of this discussion, render as *þusnes* [thusness]. West-Saxon poetry, and in particular the Gnomic Verses, occupy themselves frequently with descriptions of *þusnes*. From the verses in the *Exeter Book* we read:

71 *forst sceal freosan fyr wudu meltan*
eorþe growan is brycgian
wæter helm wegan wundrum lucan
eorþan ciþas an sceal inbindan
75 *forstes fetre...*

[Frost must freeze, fire consume wood, the land bring forth life, the ice form a bridge, water wear away at a helmet. One alone shall unbind frost's fetter—the wonder-lock of the earth's abundance]

The beginning of this discourse on *þusnes*, which begins a new theme in these particular verses, establishes its importance through the strength of its alliteration. In the lines quoted here, the alliteration of *forst sceal freosan fyr wudu meltan* is mirrored by the third line *wæter helm wegan wundrum lucan.* Each line is then followed by a repetitive phrase, *eorþe growan* or *eorþan ciþas,* whose meanings in translation become almost identical. Clearly this is an important chant and the use of *sceal*, denoting what must be, emphasises the didactic nature of the text. Death, also, is not far from the poet's thoughts, depicted here with the grisly image of water wearing away at a helmet [*wæter helm wegan*].

16 For a recent edition of the *Tao Teh Ching* incorporating the Ma Wang Dui finds see Robert G. Henriks (Ed. and Trans.), *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000.
17 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III, 1072 in E. J. Kenney (Ed.), *De Rerum Natura III*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971.

The point of these verses is made succinctly by the author who then moved on to other themes, but the examples of *þusnes* in the other surviving Gnomic verses, those of the Cotton manuscript, are made more compelling by their considerable repetition. Where the *Exeter Gnomics* sums up *þusnes* in the five lines quoted above, the *Cotton Gnomics* enumerate more than one hundred examples and dedicate almost their entire text to these repetitive formulae. The result is incantatory, a chanted meditation on *þusnes* that signifies this concept's place in the philosophy of the Anglo-Saxons.

Þusnes is an important philosophic tool. It contextualises struggle and serves as a basis for the prioritisation of action. It is vital in the establishment of what can be changed and what has to be endured—and whereas Seneca depicted his 'thusness' of fortune as a dog being dragged behind a chariot, the West Saxons, a seafaring people, used an analogy equally as tangible: *werig sceal se wiþ winde roweþ*[18] [weary must he be who rows against the wind]. An understanding of *þusnes* left the West Saxons free to focus not so much on the battles that could be won but rather on the dignity inherent in any battle.

FATE IN ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

There is, of course, a demonstrable engagement with Christian orthodoxy in the literature of tenth-century Wessex and this engagement extends to at least some of the vernacular poetic corpus. There was a clear understanding in the mind of homilists such as Ælfric, for example, that the divine will was reflected in the order of the cosmos[19] and we can intuit similar beliefs underlying the *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* attributed to Wulfstan. The West-Saxon redaction of the *Philosophiae Consolationis* replaced Boethius's universe, held together by the *foedus perpetuum* [eternal alliance] of *amor* [love] and overseen by classical deities such as Phoebus, Phoebe and Hesperus,[20] with *God ælmihtig* [God almighty] who is the *an sceppend is buton ælcum tweon 7 se is eac wealdend heofones 7 eorðan 7 ealra gesceafta geswenlicra 7 eac ungeswenlicra*[21] [one creator beyond all doubt, and he is also the ruler of heaven and earth and all creation, the seen and also the unseen]. The West-Saxon *Consolatio* was also explicit about the relationship of *wyrd* to God, stating that:

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18 *Gnomic Verses (Exeter Book)*, l. 185.
19 See the quote from Ælfric cited in J.E. Cross, 'Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature', *Comparative Literature* XIV.1, 1962, pp. 1–22, at p. 20.
20 Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolationis*, II met. 8, in H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand and S.J. Tester (Eds. and Trans.), *Boethius*, William Heinemann, London, 1973.
21 Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, XXI.

Sumu þing þonne on þisse weorulde sint underðied þære wyrde sume hire nanwuht underðied ne sint ac sio wyrd 7 eall ða þing þe hire underðied sint sint underðied ðæm godcundan foreþonce.[22]

[Some things in this world are subject to *wyrd*, some are not in any way subject to it; but *wyrd* and all the things that are subject to it are subject to divine consideration.]

This view of the world is also reflected in West-Saxon poems such as *The Order of the World* and *Vainglory*, which appear in the *Exeter Book*, and the fragmentary *Waldhere*. Each of these works evinces an orthodox Christianity with God acting as the arbiter of human fate. The hero Waldhere states his reliance on God alone to protect the just and to bring victory,[23] while *Vainglory* serves as a homily on the impotence of human endeavour before the will of the *sigora waldend*[24] [the Lord of Victories]. But God's sway over *wyrd* is less sure in *Beowulf*.

Kevin Wanner has argued that God is the dominant force in the early sections of *Beowulf*, but that this situation would seem to be reversed in the final third of the poem.[25] A close reading of the epic would seem to confound this argument. In his first formal speech before Hrothgar, Beowulf declares his lineage and his intentions in Denmark—to win fame or to die. This speech finishes with the caveat *gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*[26] [*wyrd* goes always as it must]. Here Beowulf speaks with the resignation of a man who knows that nothing he can do will alter the hour of his death, a point made again a few lines later when he reiterates that *wyrd oft nereð unfægne eorl þonne his ellen deah*[27] [*wyrd* often saves the undoomed man when his courage serves]. Hrothgar, on the other hand, asserts God's dominion over *wyrd*,[28] as does the poem's narrator.[29] Wanner correctly pointed out that Beowulf's later speeches[30] continue to avow the power of *wyrd*,[31] but the voice of Christian orthodoxy is still to be heard in the final section of the poem with the narrator again contesting:

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22 Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, XXXIX.
23 *Waldhere*, Frag. B., ll. 25–31.
24 *Vainglory*, l. 84.
25 See Kevin J. Wanner, 'Warriors, *Wyrms*, and *Wyrd*: The Paradoxical Fate of the Germanic Hero/King in *Beowulf*', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 16, 1999, pp. 1–15.
26 *Beowulf*, l. 455.
27 *Beowulf*, ll. 572–3.
28 *Beowulf*, ll. 477–9.
29 *Beowulf*, ll. 1054–8.
30 *Beowulf*, ll. 2526–7, 2574 and 2814–6.
31 Wanner, 'Warriors, *Wyrms*, and *Wyrd*', p. 5.

2291 *swa mæg unfæge eaðe gedigan*
wean ond wræcsið se ðe waldenes
2293 *hyldo gehealdeþ*

[Thus can the man not fated to die—he whom the Ruler's favour holds—easily endure grief and exile.]

In reality, the individual voices in *Beowulf* show consistency throughout the poem and it is the listener, or reader, who is left to decide who they must believe—the pagan hero or the Christian narrator. Other West-Saxon poetry also left this dilemma unresolved.

In the Gnomic verses of the Cotton Manuscript, for example, God and *wyrd* are left to contest their roles within the same line: *þrymmas syndan Cristes myccle wyrd byð swiðost*[32] [the powers of Christ are great—*wyrd* is strongest]. If Malcolm Godden's contention—discussed above—is correct[33] and the use of *byð* here implies future tense, then we are left with the even more perplexing assertion that, although Christ's powers *are* great, *wyrd will be* strongest. This apparent confusion was not only restricted to the relationship of God to *wyrd,* though, for God's role as divine judge was also represented in an unorthodox manner in some verses of the West-Saxon corpus.

Both *Deor* and *The Fates of Men* position God in the role of arbiter, but in these poems we find God's judgement tending towards the whimsical. The narrative voice in *Deor* tells us that:

33 *eorle monegum are gesceawað*
34 *wislicne blæd sumum weana dæl*

[to many a man Grace grants abundant joys, to some a great many woes]

while the poet of *The Fates* concurs that:

64 *... meahtig dryhten*
geond eorþan sceat eallum dæleð
scyreþ ond scrifeð ond gesceapo healdeð
67 *sumum eadwelan sumum earfeþa dæl*

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32 *Cotton Gnomics*, ll. 4–5.
33 Godden, 'The Millennium, Time, and History', p. 159.

[... the mighty Lord apportions to all throughout the wide earth, determines and ordains and maintains their futures, (granting) riches to some and to others hardships]

Both poems represent God as arbitrary and unfair, with no reasons postulated for the apportioning of reward or punishment. Beowulf himself dies childless, and in his death-speech rues the lack of issue from his flesh to pass his weapons on to.[34] His actions in slaying the dragon and securing its treasure expose his people to threats from outside their borders, but his own impending death coupled with his failure to produce an heir leaves the Geats undefended. He dies knowing that his people will soon cease to exist. The *scóp* of Beowulf's epic likened this horror to that of a father forced to witness the execution of his son. Reduced in the knowledge that all future effort must now be in vain, the old man is tormented daily by the vision of a land about him that his son can never possess.[35] This mood finds echo in several passages from *The Fates of Men* where, again, parents are witness to the death of their children and the agony that must accompany that action.[36] In the *Exeter Gnomics*, also, the poet lamented the senseless death of the very young:

29 *... meotud ana wat*
hwær se cwealm cyme þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ
31 *umbor yceð þa æradl nimeð*

[God alone knows from whence this death comes and to where it departs. The children flourish and then sickness takes them off.]

Other West-Saxon poems go even further in attributing to God a decidedly unchristian malice. *The Cotton Gnomics*, *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* all depict civilisations destroyed by God for apparently no reason. The people of these poems were not akin to those of Sodom or Gomorrah, no charges of wantonness or vice were laid against them, no crimes enumerated. Nevertheless, their destruction was absolute. As *The Wanderer* states:

85 *yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend*
oþþæt burgwara breahtma lease
87 *eald enta geweorc idlu stodon*

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34 *Beowulf*, ll. 2729–32.
35 *Beowulf*, ll. 2444–62.
36 *Fates of Men*, ll. 46–7.

[The Creator of Men destroyed this city thus, until its citizens were stripped of joy—the ancient work of giants stands idle.]

The tensions evident in compositions such as *The Wanderer* have fuelled the debates as to the Christian or pagan nature of many such poems.[37] All extant Anglo-Saxon writing is Christian in as much as it was written, copied, collated and compiled within clerical institutions. How Christian these institutions were, however, or what form Christianity took within them, is open to debate, especially in light of comments from sources such as Alcuin and Bede.[38] Given all this, it is hardly surprising that many of the West-Saxon works seem inconsistent or that references to fate and God seem to intertwine.

An orthodox Christianity necessarily obviates any engagement with fatalism. The Christian God benevolently grants absolute freedom of will and humans are obliged, but not forced, to follow the divine laws as revealed in the Bible. Fatalism is antithetical to this belief, but if this orthodoxy was universally understood, then why were clerics throughout the tenth century still urging the faithful to abandon their belief in *wyrd*? If *wyrd* had become merely a dead epithet by this time, as scholars such as Joseph Trahern[39] have argued it had, then why did Ælfric continue to preach against fatalism in his homilies using such strenuous terms as *forðan ðe gewyrd nis nan ðing buton leas wena ne nan ðing soðlice be gewyrde ne gewyrð ac ealle ðing þurh Godes dom beoð geendebyrde*[40] [... for *wyrd* is nothing but lying fancy—nothing truly happens through *wyrd*, but all things are ordered according to the will of God]. It seems hard to imagine that Ælfric saw it necessary to deploy double and triple negatives to denounce an idea that had no currency.[41]

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37 See, for example B.F. Huppé, '*The Wanderer*: Theme and Structure', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42, 1943, pp. 516–38; S.B. Greenfield, '*The Wanderer*: A Reconsideration of Theme and Structure', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* l, 1951, 451–65; and S.I. Tucker, 'Return To *The Wanderer*', *Essays in Criticism* 8, 1958, 229–37.

38 Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, IV.27 in J.E. King (Ed. and Trans.), *Baedae Opera Historical*, William Heinemann, London, 1954.

39 Joseph B. Trahern, Jr., 'Fatalism and the millennium', in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 160–71. Traherne draws support from a number of eminent scholars—see Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1952; B.J. Timmer, 'Wyrd in Anglo-Saxon Prose and Poetry', *Neophilologus* 26, 1940–1, pp. 24–33 and 'Heathen and Christian Elements in Old English Poetry', *Neophilologus* 29, 1944, pp. 180–5; Ida L. Gordon, 'Traditional Themes in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*', *Review of English Studies* 5, 1954, pp. 1–13; and Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Patristics and Old English Literature: Notes on Some Poems', in Stanley B. Greenfield (Ed.), *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, University of Oregon Books, Eugene, 1963.

40 Ælfric, *Epiphania Domini*, in Benjamin Thorpe (Ed. and Trans.), *Sermones Catholici*, Ælfric Society, London, 1844, at page 114.

Oþþæt Passages

This fatalism of the West Saxons did not compel them to embrace apathy. Clearly these people believed in the value of action, but only up to a certain point. In the poetry of Wessex this idea as to the value of action 'up to a certain point' becomes a common device that highlights both the power of *wyrd* and its entropic nature. Typically this device takes the form of temporal comparisons separated by the word *oþþæt* [until, up to the point when]. The preliminary circumstance is invariably utopian with images of success, joy and attainment abounding. The *oþþæt* clause is used to introduce the agent of change, and the transformation is always towards decay.

In *The Ruin*, we are introduced to an architectural triumph, a city of bright buildings, bathing halls, tall towers and banqueting halls full of revelry—*oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe*[42] [until *wyrd* the mighty changed everything]. Now the city lies desolate, the towers fallen, the walls crumbled, the people dead in their multitudes. Similarly, the poet Deor tells his audience that he enjoyed an excellent life *oþþæt... nú*[43] [until now]. Formerly the court poet to an Heodening king, Deor informs his audience that his possessions have been stripped from him and passed over to another poet—Heorrenda. It is not entirely clear why this has happened, although the syntax of the poem [*oþþæt heorrenda nú*] may be crafted to implicate Deor's successor as the author of these woes. Nevertheless, the text still evidences a thematic movement from joy towards despair.

One of the most prolonged and poetic of these *oþþæt* verses, however, comes from *Beowulf*. In Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf on the limits of power, the old king tells a parable of a man who has everything. Given dominion over a noble clan, the man:

1735 *wunað he on wiste no hine wiht dweleð*
adl ne yldo ne him inwitsorh
on sefan sweorceð ne gesacu ohwær
ecghete eoweð ac him eal worold
wendeð on willan he þæt wyrse ne con
1740 *oþþæt him on innan oferhygda dæl*
weaxeð ond wridað þonne se weard swefeð

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41 *nis nan thing* [lit. 'not nothing'] and *ne nan thing sothlice be gewyrde ne gewyrth* [lit. 'not nothing truly by *wyrd* does not happen']—such patterns are utilised in Late West Saxon to indicate the absolute negation of a concept. Double negatives do not cancel themselves out as in modern English.
42 *Ruin*, l. 24.
43 *Deor*, l. 39.

sawele hyrde bið se slæp to fæst
bisgum gebunden bona swiðe neah
1744 *se þe of flanbogan fyrenum sceoteð*

[... dwells in abundance, nothing hinders him, he suffers neither sickness nor infirmity. Neither struggle nor displays of edge-hate burden his mind, but all the world bends to his will. He knows nothing of sorrow *oþþæt* the weight of arrogance festers and grows within him...]

The weight of this arrogance brings with it the poison of greed. The chieftain ceases to be generous, covets the possessions of others and abandons custom. This does nothing to hasten his death, of course, he is not to be punished in this way for his transgressions, but there will be punishment enough. The chieftain has forgotten the chain of life—the endless cycle of giving and of getting. He hoards his wealth forgetting that even his body was lent to him, and with all this petty grasping he lets joy slip through his fingers. His punishment is to live without this joy. When finally he dies, his hoard is taken from him, to be distributed by a new and open-handed warlord.

These few examples of *oþþæt* passages offer a series of insights into the West-Saxon psyche. The formula itself relies on the premise of fatalism, which tells us something about the power of *wyrd* in the life of these clans, and the formulaic movement from attainment towards decay reveals that this fatalism was entropic. But in the desire to extrapolate wisdom from the acceptance of this fatalism, and to embrace action in the face of unavoidable calamity, we glimpse the tenacity and lust for life of the Anglo-Saxon people.

WINTER AS SIGN IN WEST-SAXON POETRY

When Beowulf boasts of serving his people for fifty winters[44] he is referring not just to the passage of time, not just to his age, but also to the ordeals he has had to face and the challenges he has overcome. Beowulf weathers the winter storms during his contest with Breca.[45] He triumphs through the long winter of the mere-beasts wrath.[46] He endures the winter of his master's death and the death of Hygelac's sons at the hands of the Swedes.[47] Finally, he succumbs to the winter of the dragon which ushers in the great death of the

44 *Beowulf*, l. 2733.
45 *Beowulf*, ll. 535–79.
46 *Beowulf*, ll. 736–824 and 1538–90.
47 *Beowulf*, ll. 2199–2206.

Geatish people.[48] Each of these ordeals presents the hero with significant moments of personal growth and so, with each passing winter, the wisdom of the individual grows, *forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer ær he age wintra dæl in woruldrice*[49] [for a man may not be truly wise until he has endured his share of winters in the world].

Note here the significance of the poet's phrase *wintra dæl*. It is not just the number of winters endured that makes for wisdom but rather the tacit endurance of the winters apportioned, meted out, to each individual—it may be that the covert dialogue of the line is that no-one can count themselves truly wise until they have weathered their last winter, a concept familiar to readers of the *Hávamál*:

81 *at qveldi scal dag leyfa*
kono er brend er
mæki er reyndr er
mey er gefin er
ís er yfir kømr
öl er druccit er[50]

[At evening shall the day be praised, a wife when she's burnt, a sword when proven, a maiden when given, ice once crossed, ale when drunk]

These sentiments also find echo in the words of *The Seafarer* where winter is used as an extended metaphor for the vehicle of spiritual transcendence. Here the ascetic assures us that the worldly man [*on foldan fægrost*] cannot hope to understand *hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ winter wunade wræccan lastum*[51] [how I, wretched, suffered the ice-cold sea, weathered the winters on the paths of exile.] The winters of this poet's journey are psychic ones in which a spiritual hunger calls him to abjure the world and seek places of solitude, and in this we can see a further evolution of the winter metaphor. The wisdom gained through the endurance of these hardships may be of a conventional variety, a knowledge gained through hard fought battles, or it may be more arcane by nature.

In the more abstruse passages of poems like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, winter becomes not just another season, it becomes another world and West-Saxon poetry,

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48 *Beowulf*, ll. 3150–5.
49 *The Wanderer*, ll. 64–5.
50 *Hávamál*, 81 in Hans Kuhn, *Edda : die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmalern*, Carl Winter, Heidelberg, 1962-68.
51 *The Seafarer*, ll. 14–5.

profoundly sensuous by nature, describes vividly the sensations of that winter world. Blanketed by hoar frost into a great white stillness, vision obscured by dense snowfalls, an absence of horizon, a sameness of sky and sea and land, the aural landscape is one of deafening storms pierced occasionally by the distant cries of solitary birds. The emotional instability of the characters in the poems is reinforced by the waves' surge, their anguish represented by the storm-swept cliffs. Everything is either desolate, sodden or frozen. The feeling is one of intense, almost claustrophobic, introspection and emotional isolation as the senses turn in on themselves.

In this icebound realm where the seas freeze solid and the land becomes a morass of untraversable drifts, the wayfarer sends forth a fetch, or is visited by the fetches of others, and a barely discernible conversation, frustrating and onerous, is attempted. Or perhaps the wayfarer is conversing with birds, or perhaps the traveller is becoming a bird, or perhaps it is only the haunting of memories. The discourse is deliberately obscure and magical.[52] There is no doubt, however, that it is a discourse taking place within the crushing tempest and blinding snows of winter.

Occasionally these snows take on a more desperate meaning when they are transformed into some kind of metaphysical winter, an inescapable conclusion to which all stories run, as in *The Wanderer*:

> *hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð*
> *wintres woma þonne won cymeð*
> *nipeð nihtscua norþan onsendeð*
> *hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan*
> *eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice*
>
> [Snow falls—binds the earth in winter's terror. Then comes the darkness, the night shadows deepen, and from out of the north fierce hailstorms rain their malice down on mankind. All is hardship in the earthly realm.]

In the elegance of these lines is espoused the entropic fatalism of the West Saxons. Here winter is transformed from a season into a state of mind, a state of terror. Nature, as agent of

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52 For a more comprehensive evaluation of these themes see Huppé, '*The Wanderer*: Theme and Structure'; Greenfield, '*The Wanderer*: A Reconsideration'; Gordon, 'Traditional Themes in the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*'; G. V. Smithers, 'The Meaning of the *Seafarer* and the *Wanderer*' in *Medium Ævum*, 26, 1957, pp. 137–53, and 28, 1959, pp. 1–22; J. E. Cross, 'On the Genre of *The Wanderer*' *Neophilologus*, 45, 1961, pp. 63–75; and Tucker, 'Return To *The Wanderer*'.

wyrd, is neither nurturing nor indifferent, it is spiteful, vindictive and destructive. It sends the storms down from the north *on andan* [in malice] and the earthly realms become *earfoðlic* [full of hardships and deep distress].

The fatalism of the type encountered in these five lines is found elsewhere in West-Saxon poetry. Just as the northern storms of *The Wanderer* are sent down in malice, so too the storms sent against Beowulf during his fight with Breca are sent from the north and *in heaðogrim*[53] [in warspite]. When Beowulf presents Hrothgar with the very symbols of his triumph over the Grendel-kin, the old king, citing his passage of winters as the validation of his word, goes to some lengths to tell Beowulf that eventually strength will fail even him and that death will conquer the young hero yet.[54]

The metaphysical winter is also present in *The Seafarer* where it is depicted in possibly its most anthropomorphic state. Here the winter calls to the Seafarer, like the mournful song of the cuckoo[55] or the piercing cry of a predatory eagle.[56] It calls to him while he finds himself at rest in the world, briefly seduced by the ephemeral beauty of it.[57] It calls to him and then suddenly, almost inexplicably, the Seafarer must turn his back on the land once more and journey out into the relentless seas and the isolation of winter:

34 *... þæt ic hean streamas*
sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige
monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
ferð to feran þæt ic feor heonan
38 *elþeodigra eard gesece*

[... such that I the abject streams of salt waves tumult myself made trial of, the desire of the mind exhorts that I far hence at every season send forth my spirit to seek out alien lands...]

By line 38, however, the metaphysical winter has become so overpowering that it turns *mæla gehwylce* [every season] sour.

By convention the phrase *monað modes lust* [the desire of the mind exhorts] would relate to the preceding phrase *sylf cunnige* [myself made trial of] to give the sense of an exploration

53 *Beowulf*, l. 548.
54 *Beowulf*, ll. 1761–3.
55 *The Seafarer*, l. 53.
56 *The Seafarer*, l. 24.
57 *The Seafarer*, ll. 48–9.

undertaken in order to satisfy some emotional need: 'mindful of the mind's desire, I made trial of the abject sea'. Similarly, *mæla gehwylce* [every season] is linked with *ferð to feran* [send forth my spirit] to create a sense of constant longing, of the Seafarer compelled to send forth this spirit constantly: 'I far hence at every season send forth my spirit'. This is clearly the meaning by West-Saxon convention, but the great subtlety of this poem lies in the strength of its construction.

Each of the component phrases in these two lines is crafted in such a way as to facilitate their easy translation without reference to surrounding phrases, so the poet simultaneously creates for the audience a second interpretation that both modifies and enhances our understanding of the mental state of the poem's hero. Not only does this hero undertake an exploration mindful of emotional needs, sending forth this spirit constantly but also, and at the same time we are led to understand that *monað modes lust mæla gehwylce*—the hero is mindful of the mind's desire at every season, at all times cognisant of the longing for spiritual fulfilment and, no doubt, of the ever-present winter. The first meaning is conveyed by the convention of the half-line, the second by the convention of structure and both serve to deepen the image of the metaphysical winter.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the concept of an inescapable fate was culturally attractive to the poets of Wessex because it provided them with some sort of order amid the chaos of war, feud and pestilence. Perhaps it served socially to excuse failure or to reduce hubris. But whatever the reason, the West-Saxon psyche, for the most part, was as shaped by their concept of *wyrd* as their poetry was by the discipline of alliterative verse and formulaic composition. Thematic variations were blended and layers of meaning brought into relief as *scópas* raided the word-hoards of their ancestors for old ways of telling new stories. Stories of monarchs, or warriors, or clerics, or saints merge in composition or mirror each other in style—and through all, the vein of *wyrd* runs strong. It is this concept of an entropic fate combined with a mastery of poetic technique that invigorates the craft of the *scóp*, a craft that traces its roots back to the pre-Christian dawn of the Anglo-Saxon clans, encapsulating a world where the rigourous mind of the itinerant poet did not seek to salve the wounds of existence with a balm of

reassuring deism or comforting superstition. It was a world of naked and unrelenting aggression, of death, fate and inevitable winter.