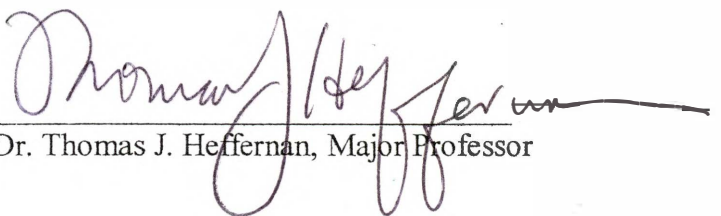


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Scott Hutcheson MacKenzie entitled "The Anglo-Saxons and their Struggle with Chaos: 'When a Man is Unable to Change his Fate then he Must Endure it Well.'" I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.



Dr. Thomas J. Heffernan, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

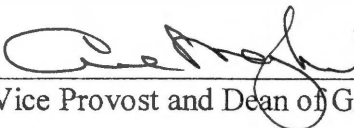


Dr. Joseph B. Trahern, Jr.



Dr. Laura L. Howes

Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

**THE ANGLO-SAXONS AND THEIR STRUGGLE WITH CHAOS:
“WHEN A MAN IS UNABLE TO CHANGE HIS FATE THEN HE MUST
ENDURE IT WELL”**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Scott Hutcheson MacKenzie
December 2002**

DEDICATION

Thesis
2002
m3

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my wife Rebecca. Without her unfailing support in my endeavors this project would never have been undertaken, much less completed. I also wish to dedicate this to my family, Aengus, Loryn, Jennifer, and Lora. Each, in their own way, inspired me to pursue my goals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank all of those who helped me in completing the Master of Arts in English. I thank Dr. Thomas Heffernan who gave me an opportunity to realize my goals in medieval studies and whose guidance and advice have been invaluable. I thank Dr. Joseph Trahern for his advice and his patient instruction of me in the language of the Anglo-Saxons. I thank Dr. Laura Howes for her insights, comments, and support, all of which compelled me to produce a better work.

I thank all my friends, whose proofreading, encouragement and suggestions made timely completion of this work possible.

ABSTRACT

Anglo-Saxons believed that human existence was brief and brutal. Belief in the inevitable decay of the world into chaos was strong in pagan tradition and fit well with the precepts of the Christian apocalypse. To their eyes all creation was wending its way toward destruction. During the eighth century, as Christianity blended with pagan beliefs, two genres of poetry, the epic and the elegy, convey two different responses of the Anglo-Saxons to chaos.

Courage in the face of death was the hope of each Anglo-Saxon warrior and the dominant ideal in the epic. He wished only to serve his lord and to earn immortality in the memory of men. Even if all were lost to chaos, at least his memory would remain forever in song and legend. If he was unable to defeat the chaos of the universe, at least through a glorious death he could defy it.

For the poets of the elegy nothing was able to escape fate. Heroes might do battle with the chaotic forces that were unleashed in ever increasing number but in the end it would have no effect. The world that man had constructed for himself was eroding and would certainly collapse. The penitent of *Resignation* sums up well the attitude of the genre: *Giet biþ þæt selast, þonne mon him sylf ne mæg wyrd onwendan, þæt he þonne wel þolige* (Yet this is best, when man is unable to change fate, then he must endure it well.)

Christianity found an ally in the poet of the elegy. Instead of opposing fate with the sword, the elegiac poet mournfully embraced it. The worldview espoused by

the Anglo-Saxon poet meshed with that of the Christian. Through this alliance the conversion of England was facilitated and completed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	page
Introduction	1
I. Opposition to Fate: The Epic Heroes.....	7
II. Acceptance of Fate: The Elegies.....	27
Conclusion: Anglo-Saxon Fatalism: <i>Wyrd bið ful aræd!</i>	47
Bibliography	58
Appendix	65
Vita	67

Introduction

The Venerable Bede, in the *History of the English Church and People*, describes a conversation between the Northumbrian king Edwin (616-632) and one of his thanes. Speaking in response to the efforts of conversion by the Italian missionary Paulinus, an unnamed counselor suggests to the king why they should consider adopting the new faith. The earl compares human existence to the flight of a sparrow through the king's mead-hall on a winter's evening. When the sparrow is inside, he is safe and warm, but this lasts only a moment for when he flies out, he is absorbed once again by chaos. What follows or indeed what went before we know not at all. So too, the thane observed, is the fate of man.¹ Uncertainty and chaos² enveloped Europeans of the early Middle Ages. The world of the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh and eighth centuries was no less hostile or insecure. Their country was sparsely populated and alternately covered with a mix of thick forest and wasteland.³ Human settlements

¹ Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993), 127. Some authors see the hall only as analogous to the life of man, James W. Earl, "Transformation of Chaos: Immanence and Transcendence in *Beowulf* and other Old English Poetry," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10:3, 167. I believe that it also is representative of the temporary microcosm that humans create for themselves to keep at bay the forces of chaos

² Chaos represents all things that are either external to human culture or disruptive of the same. This includes, but is not limited to, erosion and decay of the works of man, transience of human life, disease, old age, warfare, and social discord. Chaos is the untamed and untamable world that surrounds human society. It always threatens to fracture the order (unnatural though it may be) that we try to impose on nature.

³ David Hill, *The Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 16-17. Though generally believed, due to the influence of medieval romances, to be heavily forested from shore to shore, forest cover was, at least in the eleventh century, islands of medium to large forests, separated by waste and open land. Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 3, 8.

were widely scattered, especially to the north, and what settlements did exist were usually hostile to strangers.

Within two generations of King Edwin's conversion, all of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England had accepted Christianity. However, the conversion process was not an easy one. The seventh century had seen warrior kings baptized only to have them become apostate. Some leaders were never able to fully support the new faith. King Rædwald of East Anglia (died *ca.* 624), the supposed inhabitant of Sutton Hoo ship burial,⁴ was converted to Christianity yet kept an altar to pagan gods in his church just off to the side. During the same period the Roman Catholic Church struggled, debated, and finally won dominance over the Irish Church at the Synod of Whitby, 664. England was awash in intellectual and cultural upheaval. The end of the seventh century witnessed the conversion of the last pagan king of Sussex (681) but not a completion of the syncretism between the new faith with its attendant culture and the Anglo-Saxon warrior culture. As the eighth century dawned England's religion was Christian, but its culture was in turmoil.

In the eighth century the cultures of Christianity⁵ and the Anglo-Saxon, the latter of which revolved around the warrior elite, began their first tentative steps toward blending and forming a unique society. The Christian faith, because of the relatively rapid rate of conversion, did not have an opportunity to allow a gradual

⁴ Martin Carver, Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings? (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 23.

⁵ According to anthropological theory, religion is not just an experience but also a social system. Thomas A. DuBois, Nordic Religions in the Viking Age (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 31-32.

mixing of cultural elements such as occurred in the Mediterranean region. Signs of disjunction existed in all aspects of Anglo-Saxon society. Examination of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of the seventh and eighth centuries reveals a mixture of Christian and pagan practices existing side by side. Often blending of the two traditions could be identified within the same grave. Christian burial practices included inhumation, an east-west orientation of the body, and lack of grave goods. For example, the Updown, Eastry site in Kent, a seventh and eighth century cemetery, shows a mix of Christian and pagan burial practices. The graves contain uncremated bodies that are oriented along an east-west axis. Some also include a fair degree of wealth in grave goods.⁶ It should be noted that burial practices are a cultural feature particularly resistant to change. What is surprising, however, is that we may assume that the priest in the district sanctioned these burial practices. It is not unexpected therefore that in a transitional period, there would be a mixing of traditions. The ambiguous attitude that most Anglo-Saxons had toward their new religion was also expressed in their artwork. The Franks casket, dating from the eighth century, has in addition to the runic inscription a mix of Christian iconography and pagan motifs (see further discussion below). The Ruthwell cross, also from the eighth century,⁷ though certainly a Christian work of devotion, has some elements, such as its zoomorphic patterns and runic inscriptions, that at least recall the pagan past. Within poetry,

⁶ Sam Lucy, The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 151.

⁷ Douglas Mac Lean, "The Dating of the Ruthwell Cross," in The Ruthwell Cross ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 69.

specifically the genres of epic and elegy, there also appears to be evidence for an incomplete mixing of the two cultures. In this essay I plan to examine the different methods that the Anglo-Saxons employed in coping with chaos and how this was reflected within the two genre of poetry. After this analysis I shall discuss how the one genre, elegy, is more compatible with Christian ideology and how the elegiac tradition may have facilitated the conversion process to the new faith.

Religion, both pagan and Christian, is an attempt by the Anglo-Saxons to impose order on a world that they perceived as wild and uncontrollable. The capricious forces of chaos, the transience of the world, and fate (*wyrð*) all were factors which these people sought to understand. As scholars seeking to understand these people we can examine their laws and histories to determine what methods they used to establish order. However, such an approach is barren. It provides a stark view of what they did, but does not allow us to fully understand the motivations and the attitudes of the Anglo-Saxons. Through the medium of poetry, particularly the genres of epic and elegy, I believe that we can reach a deeper understanding of their myriad responses to chaos and the transient nature of their world.

The epic best represents the cultural milieu of the warrior elite. When chaos impinges on their society, epic heroes must do all that is in their power to drive it back, to rescue their culture and forestall collapse of order. Though we know little of pagan Germanic religion, what we do know informs us that it was deeply eschatological, awaiting the imminent demise of their world. The last battle of Ragnarok in which the gods and men would fight against the forces of chaos (giants)

was swiftly approaching. They also believed that ultimately the stability and order constructed by both gods and man would be overthrown. Defeat was not the deepest concern of an Anglo-Saxon warrior. He was more concerned with his reputation among his *folc*. If he died well and bravely in battle he would be remembered. For them this type of immortality was best. Even in the elegiac tradition, the speaker of *The Seafarer*, says, “*Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam æftercweþendra lof lifgendra lastworda betst,*” (Therefore for each man the best thing of those speaking afterwards, is a reputation left behind, praise of the living, *The Seafarer*, 72-74)

In the elegy, instead of opposing chaos in the world, the speakers eventually accept their fate and offer no resistance. The speaker and presumably the poet have seen much sorrow in their lives. After years of suffering and watching the futile struggle against chaos, they seek wisdom and acceptance. They may look back at the loss of joy that they formerly had, but they also look forward to what is to come with a passivity that seems very much out of character for the Anglo-Saxons.

As the above passage between Edwin and his counselor implies, Christianity offered something new and hopeful to the Anglo-Saxons. Both cultures had an eschatology and both believed that the world was near the end of its existence. The fertile ground upon which a syncretism of the two cultures could take root, I believe, lies in the philosophy espoused by the poets of the elegies. The forward looking nature of the elegy (at least at the end of the poems) combined with the acceptance of fate meshed well with Christian belief in providence. Christians believed that it was wrong to question God’s will and impossible to oppose it and thus developed a

somewhat passive acceptance of fate and tolerance for the adversity of the world. Following the path blazed by the elegist, Anglo-Saxons, as I will argue, meshed Christian ideals with pre-Christian Germanic ethos, producing a hybrid that would allow them to endure the suffering of this world and hope for a change of fortune in the eternal realm of heaven.

I

Opposition to Fate: The Epic Heroes

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers:
 For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
 This day shall gentle his condition:
 And gentlemen in England, now a-bed,
 Shall think themselves accurs'd, they were not here
 And hold their manhoods cheap, whiles any speaks
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day. (*King Henry V*, 4.3)

Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? ("What has Ingeld to do with Christ?"). Alcuin (c. 735-804) asked this question in a letter to the Bishop of Lindisfarne (AD 797). He was alarmed at the practice of monks listening to heroic tales rather than recitation of psalms or other Biblical works. We can certainly understand, especially considering the reform minded author, a desire to keep the monasteries focused on Christ. However, Alcuin may also have been responding to a philosophical tension in Anglo-Saxon society. Characters in the epic tradition, such as Beowulf and Ingeld, opposed *wyrd*. They struggled with it even though they knew that chaos would eventually overwhelm them. Clerics, however, had to accept the chaos of the world and seek to understand it as an aspect of God's will. Opposition was not the path of the contemplative monk. The Anglo-Saxons of the epic described here would seem to further split the pagan and Christian. However, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, Anglo-Saxon warrior society and Roman Catholicism would ultimately find common ground in the elegy.

The *Beowulf* poet composed a work that is steeped in the Germanic eschatological traditions of the dominance of fate, the transience of life and the world, and the inevitability of chaos. Such is the mythic world constructed by the *scop*. Within the text, the small islands of stability and safety that the Danes, Geats, Frisians, and Swedes have carved out of the wilderness for themselves are repeatedly threatened by dangerous forces, natural, manmade and preternatural. Arguably, the threats that the *scop* invented for the fifth century setting of the poem, both real and imagined, would have been very similar to those that he and his *folc* experienced during the eighth century. In this chapter I will examine how the genre of the epic reflects how eighth century Anglo-Saxon warrior society opposed the forces of chaos during the period of conversion to and assimilation of Christianity.

The dating of *Beowulf* has been and still is a rather contentious issue.⁸ Few critics would dispute that the text contained in the Cotton Vitellius A. xv manuscript represents the transcription of a tenth century scribe. Differences of opinion are most often related to the date of composition of the poem relative to the production of the manuscript. Proposed composition dates range from as early as 340 to as late as 1025. Scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth century proposed that the poem was composed and circulated prior to the fifth century. This opinion is now widely discarded. Within the last two decades, scholarly opinion has been divided predominantly between two schools of thought. One group whose writings are

⁸ For an excellent review see Robert E. Bjork and Anita Obermeier "Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences," in *A Beowulf Handbook* ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 13-34.

gathered from a 1980 conference held in Toronto place the composition of *Beowulf* later than most scholars, typically between the late ninth to early eleventh centuries.⁹ Most prominent and extreme among these adherents is Kevin Kiernan who proposed that the Cotton manuscript and poem were essentially one and the same effort, written during the reign of King Cnut.¹⁰ However, not all members of the Toronto group assign *Beowulf* a late date of composition. A notable exception is Peter Clemoes,¹¹ who, after a thorough examination of word order, vocabulary, imagery and metaphor, argues for a date of late eighth to early ninth century. Other like-minded critics, based on orthographic, lexical and phonological data from the poem, have proposed dates between the late seventh through the eighth century as a more likely date for the poem's genesis.¹² I find the evidence for a mid to late eighth most compelling and shall assume for the purpose of this essay that *Beowulf* is from this time.

Implicit in the hypothesis that *Beowulf* was composed at some temporal distance from the existing manuscript is the question of transmission. It is likely that the poem derived from an oral source some time in the eighth century. The

⁹ Colin Chase, The Dating of Beowulf (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), vii.

¹⁰ Kevin Kiernan, Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 19-22, 278.

¹¹ Peter Clemoes, "Style as the Criterion for Dating the Composition of *Beowulf*," in The Dating of Beowulf ed. Colin Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 175-176, 184-185.

¹² Craig R. Davis, Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 172. Roy Michael Liuzza, "On the Dating of *Beowulf*," in Beowulf: Basic Readings, ed. Peter S. Baker (New York, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 281-282. For an early seventh century date see H. Munro Chadwick, "The Heroic Age, An Excerpt," in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 32. Sam Newton, The Origins of Beowulf and the pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 132.

manuscript was recopied perhaps during a revival of the Anglo-Saxon past.¹³ If the one manuscript represents a copy, it is a faithful one. Robert Stevick suggests that “most features of the extant text have been preserved through earlier copying without substantial change: tests with spellings, syntax, formulas, and phonological and morphological facts provide the verification.”¹⁴ As a result, we have a view of the eighth century and a representative text that allows us to witness a culture that is in the early stages of assimilating and accepting a culturally foreign Christian religion. Many of the references to God are inconsistent and do not represent the more complete understanding of Christianity that was present in the tenth and eleventh centuries. If redactors were to have made corrections to “improve” the Christian elements I believe that we would have a clumsy, uneven poem. Clearly this is not the case. Instead of a long manuscript tradition, the poem shows many of the characteristics of an orally composed work.

Numerous authors have argued that the poem has a clear formulaic nature. It possesses units and diction that support an oral composition and method of transference.¹⁵ It is most likely that the poem was composed orally before the eighth

¹³ Peter Clemoes, “Style as the Criterion for Dating the Composition of *Beowulf*,” in *The Dating of Beowulf* ed. Colin Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 185.

¹⁴ Robert D. Stevick “Christian Elements and the Genesis of *Beowulf*,” *Modern Philology* 61(2) (Nov 1963), 80.

¹⁵ Francis P. Magoun, Jr., “The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry,” *Speculum* 28 (1953): 446-457; reprint in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 195, 204-205. Robert D. Stevick “Christian Elements and the Genesis of *Beowulf*,” *Modern Philology* 61(2) (Nov 1963): 81, 88-89. Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 67. Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 198-200. John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley:

century and circulated in this form for many years before our unnamed scribes copied it down. We have then an eighth century composition retelling tales that, from the perspective of the teller, happened long ago and in a place far away. As is the case with most medieval poets, the tale may be about the past, even the distant past, but the setting would be one that is familiar to the audience, that is their present. Poets, according to Wentersdorf, present the social idiom of their day; certainly the *Beowulf* poet could be no different.¹⁶ In opposition to medieval writers' tendency for anachronisms, Fred Robinson suggests that the poet and the audience of *Beowulf* would have seen the poem as taking place in another time and another world. Not simply in the past, but rather in a world that was fundamentally different from the one in which they lived. The poet and the audience, claims Robinson had "a firm historical sense." They would have enjoyed the apposition of pre- and post-Cædmonian meanings of words;¹⁷ that is they would somehow have had knowledge of the pre-Christian and post-Christian meanings of the text and in a sense get a historical view of the world. I do not believe such a premise, *i.e.* the historical sense of the poet and his audience, given the strong presentist tendency of the medieval

University of California Press, 1990), 238-239, 357-358. For opposing views see Arthur G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959) Chapter 2 69-70; Larry D. Benson "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry," *PMLA* 81 (1966): 334-341. H.L. Rogers, "Beowulf's Three Great Fights" *Review of English Studies* 6 (1955): 339-355 reprinted in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 238, 256. Geoffrey R. Russom, "Artful Avoidance of the Useful Phrase in *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Fates of the Apostles*," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 371-390.

¹⁶ Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Beowulf: The Paganism of Hrothgar's Danes," *Studies in Philology* 78:5 (1981): 91-92.

¹⁷ Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 29-32.

mind. In other words, a tenth century poet would not be able to create a representation of a fifth century world that did not look like the tenth century.

The propensity of medieval writers to stage events from the past in their present is, I believe, a benefit to the researcher examining the work. We are often given a clear picture of the time when the work was composed because the author is telling a tale about the past. We know from chronicles, annals, and archaeology that the natural world of the Germanic people (Anglo-Saxons included) in the late classical and early Middle Ages could be brutal and unforgiving. They lived in a land with a harsh climate where there was almost perpetual warfare¹⁸ among the many warlords that inhabited the region around the North Sea. A chieftain, in order to maintain his status and retainers, had to subdue his neighbors and distribute the plunder among the warriors.¹⁹ In the beginning of *Beowulf* the *scop* confirms this observation of Tacitus by presenting a definition of a good king embodied in Scyld Scefing.

Oft Scyld Scefing sceaðena þreatum,
 monegum mægðum meodosetla ofteah,
 egsode eorl[as], syððan ærest wearð
 easceaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad,
 weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þah,
 oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra
 ofer hronrade hyran scolde,

¹⁸ For example five of six East Anglian kings in a forty-year period during the late sixth and early seventh centuries died in battle. The manner of death for the sixth king, Rædwald (d. 625), is unknown. James Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 56. The three-year reign of the West Saxon king Cædwalla (685-688) was marked by incessant warfare. Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 69-70.

¹⁹ Caius Cornelius Tacitus *The Germania and Agricola* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1856), 22-23.

gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning! (*Beowulf* 4-11)²⁰

Protecting the people from other tribes was the most important duty of the king. Scyld was a strong war leader and thus had the admiration of his people. The first twenty-five lines of *Beowulf* are strictly within heroic pagan tradition. With the death of Scyld the first Christian reference is made juxtaposed with the ship burial. Thus, the ambiguous nature of the poem with regard to Anglo-Saxon culture and Christian culture is present from the beginning.

The epic *Beowulf* reflects an early medieval Germanic warrior society that was in the initial stages of assimilating Christianity. The creator of *Beowulf* throughout the poem conveys the religious and moral ethos of his time, which was evolving into a unique mix of pagan and Christian elements.²¹ Germanic and Anglo-Saxon fatalism is well known. After they arrived in the British Isles, the Anglo-Saxons observed the collapse and decay of the works of the Romans. The poet of *The Ruin*, though writing about three centuries after the migration, mourns the inevitable return of the works of man to the earth most poignantly:

Wrætlic is ðes wealstan wyrde gebræcon
burgstede burston; brosnað enta geweorc.
Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,
hrungeat berofen hrim on lime,
scaerde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene

²⁰ Often Scyld Scefing from enemy troops in many nations took away mead-benches; he terrified warriors, even though he was first found destitute he experienced consolation, he grew under the sky, prospered in honors until each of the surrounding people over the whole road must obey him, to pay tribute; that was a good king! Text of *Beowulf* is from Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1950) translation is my own.

²¹ C. Tidmarsh Major, "A Christian *wyrd*: Syncretism in *Beowulf*," *English Language Notes* 32 (March 1995): 7. Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Beowulf: The Paganism of Hrothgar's Danes," *Studies in Philology* 78:5 (1981): 91-92.

ældo undereotone. (*The Ruin*, 1-6) ²²

What little is known of the religion of these people emphasized the struggle of the gods against the forces of decay and destruction. These forces would eventually overwhelm the fragile stability that humans and gods had created and the world would be destroyed.²³ Chaos, followed by a period of stability, which returned to chaos, leading to inevitable destruction, was a dominant theme in Germanic heroic literature. The warrior class was locked in perpetual conflict against the inexorable forces of chaos. They knew that despite valiant opposition, their best efforts would provide only temporary relief from the press of disorder that was lurking at the fringe of their civilization. Moreover, as I shall discuss below, the actors were keenly aware of their ironic role in aiding and perpetuating disorder. One of their methods for halting chaos, warfare,²⁴ was also a root cause leading to the disintegration of their society. The cycle of war, vengeance, and blood feud kept the threat of battle ever present.

²² Wondrous is the wall, fate broke it, the fortress burst; crumbled is the work of giants. Roofs are fallen towers in ruin the gate-bar despoiled frost in the mortar, roof shards cleaved and fallen, undermined by old-age. Text of *the Ruin* is from The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry Vol.1 ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 360. Translation is my own.

²³ The sources for Germanic religion are at best thin. From contemporary ancient sources we have the accounts from Julius Caesar (first century BC) and Tacitus writing his *Agricola* in AD 81 and *De Origine et situ Germanorum* (commonly known as *Germania*) in 98. The reliability of the latter source has often been considered suspect. Exactly how much it reflects Germanic culture of the first century AD and how much of it was a tool to prod what Tacitus felt was a morally bankrupt and weak Roman public is still a matter of debate. M.J. Toswell, "Tacitus, Old English heroic Poetry, and Ethnographic Preconceptions," in Studies in English Language and Literature 'Doubt Wisely' Papers in Honor of E.G. Stanley, ed. M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), 493, 497-501. There is also a collection of Icelandic sagas by Snorri Sturluson. However, this latter work was written ca. 1320, at least 500 years after the period under examination.

²⁴ Warfare was both for defense of the community and for material gains. The latter was to enrich the warriors cementing their loyalties to the chief.

The perpetual cycle of creation followed by ruin, renewal and ultimate destruction of stability permeates *Beowulf* and is played out at several levels. Flowing through the whole of the poem is the concept of the sea and water as a place of chaos, one which must be tamed even if for only a short time. Magennis sees the ocean as a route of communication, a highway to travel and also a symbol of the unknown.²⁵ It is into the sea that Breca and Beowulf challenge each other's courage by battling the unknown (532b-581a). Beowulf, as a true hero, defeats the chaotic forces of the ocean and returns victorious. Water again figures prominently when Beowulf dives into Grendel's mere to fight and defeat his mother. The mere is described in haunting otherworldly terms denoting the association with the forces of chaos.

hie dygel lond
 warigeað wulfhleoþu windi(ge) næssas
 frecne fengelad ðær fyrgenstream
 under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð
 flod under foldan nis þæt feor heonon
 milgemeances þæt se mere stan{d}eð
 ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas
 wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað
 þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon
 fyr on flode no þæs frod leofað
 gumena bearna þæt þone grund wite
 ðeah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced
 heorot hornum trum holtwudu sece
 feorran geflymed ær he feorh seleð
 aldor on ofre ær he in wille
 hafelan{hydan}; nis þæt heoru stow. (*Beowulf* 1357b-1372)²⁶

²⁵ Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 124-127.

²⁶ They occupy a secret land with wolf-ridden slopes, windy headlands, and dread fen-path. There mountain streams under the cliffs' darkness goes downwards, a torrent under the earth. It is not far hence of measure by mile that lake stands overhung with frosted groves, fast in wood roots overshadows the water. There each night may be seen the horrible wonder, fire in the water so no wise

Chaotic forces surround the Danes and press in towards them. Their great king and war leader was powerless to stop it. The hero Beowulf was, for a time, able to save the Danes from disaster.

At the poem's broadest level, the audience witnessed the slow descent of the Geats from a position of power and stability into chaos and oblivion. Underlying the major theme are several shorter-term cycles of creation and destruction. The opening lines of the poem describe a chaotic situation that is solved by the mysterious arrival of Scyld. Nothing was more dangerous for a Germanic tribe than to be leaderless. The poet says that the people are happy at the birth of Beow because earlier "þæt hie ær drugon aldor(le)ase lange hwile (that formerly for a long while they lead a life leaderless, *Beowulf* 15-16a.). A strong lord protects his people and they thrive under him. After the king the most stabilizing factor in a Germanic tribal group was the mead-hall. Its importance in the community is highlighted by its prominent position in the beginning of *Beowulf*. For a people surrounded by the uncontrollable forces of nature and in constant strife with neighboring tribes, it is not surprising to see the hall as a major stabilizing factor in their community. It was the center of power and the gathering place of warriors who were responsible for maintaining stability in the world. The construction of the hall is also symbolic of the divine ordering of the cosmos. Pairing the construction of Hrothgar's hall (68-78a) with the scop's song about Genesis (90b-98) reveals that this idea could not have been very far from the

children of men know the bottom. Though the heath-stalker, pressed by hounds, strong hart with antlers seek the woods pursued from afar, he will first give up life on the other bank before he will [in the water] head and hide. It is not a pleasant place.

mind of the poet.²⁷ Moreover, the destruction of a hall can be seen as symbolic of cosmic destruction.²⁸ We are reminded three times that Heorot will be destroyed (81b-83b, 1014b-1019, 1163-1165) and with it the power of the Danes. Likewise the burning of Beowulf's mead-hall by the dragon presages the ultimate demise of the Geats. King Beowulf who dies with the dragon has ultimately failed to keep the forces of chaos away from his people. Even the treasure won by his Pyrrhic victory is misused and as a result the Geats disappear from the world. They are absorbed into the void as surely as the sparrow that flew from King Edwin's hall.

Grendel is a chaotic figure representative of two different forms of chaos. Grendel is first an outlaw, and as such possesses a status and aspect similar to that of the wolf. He preys on warriors and opposes social order. His outlawry is underlined by his inability to touch the throne of Hroðgar, the literal seat of social order. Though his appearance is not quite human it is also not quite animal. The physical nature of Grendel may be a metaphoric embodiment of the Anglo-Saxon idea of chaos and what it is capable of generating. As a chimera he represents the lapse of order and the abandonment of God's protection. These were two things the Anglo-Saxons strove so hard to prevent. He and his mother are the antithesis of human culture, but they wear a human face. When the Anglo-Saxons gaze upon them they see the bestial side of man, the side they try so hard to deny. Grendel, as man yet not man, introduces the

²⁷ Martin Green, "Man, Time and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*," In *Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, (New York: Garland, 1994): 289-290.

²⁸ *ibid.* 290.

idea of battle, blood feud and revenge into the poem, a cycle of chaos that is the most devastating.

Thus a new cycle of stability, violence, peace and revenge is played out in the conflict between the Danes, Grendel, his mother and Beowulf. Grendel's assault on Hroþgar's mead-hall, the center of the Danish community exposes the perpetual strife between warrior and chaos. The Danes have been unable to stop Grendel's attacks and have instead abandoned the hall. Hroðgar's inability to maintain stability, despite the fact that he is repeatedly termed 'a good king', points out that the Danes are in decline. Beowulf, through individual combat, defeats Grendel and restores order to Hroþgar's kingdom. With stability returned to the aging king and the Danes, there is a celebration in Beowulf's honor. During the feasting and drinking, the *scop* sings a lay about the fight at Finnsburg. The juxtaposition of this song with Beowulf's victory appears problematic and strange to modern readers. If viewed in the light of the cycle of chaos and stability, however, the verses are an appropriate digression.

The lay recounts the enmity between the Frisians and the Half-Danes. Hildeburh, the sister of Hnæf, was given to Finn in marriage by all accounts to settle an old feud. Hildeburh, in her role as *freoðuwebbe* (peace-weaver), was unable to prevent the attack on the Danes by Finn's people while the Danes were their guests. The fight in which Hnæf is killed results in a draw and the Frisians sue for peace since the Danes will be forced to remain at Finnsburg for the winter. With the coming of spring, the Danes, now led by Hengest, attack the Frisians as revenge for their treachery. The story ends with Hildeburh being carried back to Dane-land, the

Frisians thoroughly defeated, and order reestablished. This lay, with its alternations of chaos and stability fits well with the overarching theme of the poem. It also foreshadows the vengeance (chaos) that is about to be unleashed in Heorot by Grendel's mother, a point that I shall discuss in more detail below.

The Finn episode is a short digression that supports the general theme of alternating chaos and stability. In this case it occurs in the cycle of warfare, truce established through arranged marriage, and then revenge. Throughout the early medieval period in Germanic culture, the practice of exchanging women for alliance or peace was a common practice. Such aristocratic women given in marriage, either to cement a bond of peace between potential allies or to settle a feud, were called *freoðuwebbe*, peace-weaver, or more commonly *frīðusibb*, peace-pledge.²⁹ Several writers have speculated that the poet and his audience would identify the women at the center of these events as passive victims.³⁰ It is true that women were, for the most part, powerless to prevent the cycle of killing and revenge. However, as we shall see they had no more or less control regarding the success of a marriage as peace treaty than did the males. The helplessness that Hildeburh portrays is not related to her gender or her social status. Rather she stands as a metaphor for the helplessness of

²⁹ Jane Chance, Woman as Hero in Old English Literature (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 1. L. John Sklute, "Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry" in New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 207-208.

³⁰ Martin Camargo, "The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in *Beowulf*," *Studies in Philology* 78 (1981): 127. Fred C. Robinson, Beowulf and the Appositive Style (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1985), 26. Jane Chance, Woman as Hero in Old English Literature (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 100-101. Hugh Magennis, Images of Community in Old English Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109-110.

the culture itself in its resistance to the encroaching tendrils of chaos. In the culture of the Germanic heroic era aristocratic women (*ides*) enjoyed considerable rights that were protected by law.³¹ Though the patriarchs arranged the marriages, the women had the right to be consulted on the prospective marriage and the right to object.³² Her dowry or bride price was hers and she could take it with her in the event that the marriage dissolved. Once in the marriage she would be a counselor for the hall-thanes in her own right without detracting from the prestige of her husband. She could and did circulate freely through the hall unlike her counterparts in Classical Greece and Rome; she was not confined to 'a woman's place,' implying that she was instead a real factor and presence in the hall.

In theory, by establishing her as peace-weaver within her husband's hall and through childbirth she should be able to stand at the midpoint between the two tribes, serving as an unbiased arbiter in times of tension. Ironically it was the high degree of freedom and prestige that the woman held that usually lead to the unraveling of the alliances. Hildeburh, though grief stricken by the loss of son, brother, and husband, did not protest when Hengest and the Danes returned her to their kingdom. Her status as independent from her husband probably would lead to the perception that her

³¹ Under the laws of Æthelberht of Kent, women had many rights. Thus a woman's *wergild* (man-price) was equal to that of a man of similar status (74); she could leave a marriage and take her children along with half the property (79); or if the husband kept the children she received a share of property equal to that of the child's (80). F. L. Attenborough, "The Kentish Laws of Æthelberht" chap. in *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), 14-15.

³² Joel T. Rosenthal, "Marriage and the Blood Feud in 'Heroic' Europe," *The British Journal of Sociology* 16 (1966): 138. Mary P. Richards and B. Jane Stanfield, "Concepts of Anglo-Saxon Women in the Laws," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 90, 92-93.

allegiance was to her original kin group. This belief was likely not too far from the truth. Additionally her presence at her husband's court would serve as a constant reminder of the enmity between the two tribes. Her husband's retainers would be reminded of the old feud, the loss of comrades, and as a result the marriage as peace bond would usually fail.³³ Beowulf, reflecting on the upcoming marriage of Freawaru, opines:

Mæg þeas þonne ofþyncan ðeodne Heaðo-Beardna
 ond þegna gehwam þara leoda,
 þonne he mid fæmnan on flett gæð: (2032-2034)³⁴

þonne cwið æt beore se ðe beah gesyhð
 eald æscwiga, se ðe eall geman
 garcwealm gumena him bið grim sefa
 onginneð geomormod geongum cēpan
 þurh hreðra gehygd higes cunnian,
 wigbealu weccēan, (2041-2046a)³⁵

Beowulf realizes that people are locked into the cycles of fate from which they cannot break free. He places little stock in the stabilizing effects of arranged marriages disparaging them saying "*Oft seldan hwær æfter leodhryre lytle hwile bongar bugeð, þeah seo bryd duge!*" (Seldom for little while, anywhere, after the fall of a lord rests the spear, though the bride be good! 2029b-2031). Although Anglo-Saxon warrior

³³ Joel T. Rosenthal, "Marriage and the blood feud in 'heroic' Europe," The British Journal of Sociology 16 (1966): 139-140.

³⁴ It may then offend the prince of the Heathobards and everythane of those people when he with the lady goes on the floor. Text of *Beowulf* is from Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1950)

³⁵ Then [he] speaks at beer, he who sees the ring, old ash-warrior remembers all men's death by spear, to him is a grim heart, begins sad in mind to the young champion through thoughts of heart to test the spirit, awaken war-bale.

society was aware of the chaos that resulted from war and feuds, by making marriages for peace, they attempted to thwart chaos by other means than the sword. Unfortunately, they seem to have met with little success.

Now let us return to Grendel's mother. The second attack of the mead-hall points out the tenuous nature of stability that is constructed by men. Although Beowulf had purged Heorot of Grendel, the agent of chaos, it had emerged once again in the person of Grendel's mother. Beowulf defeats Grendel's mother and joy (stability) is once again restored to the Dane's universe. Even this triumph of man over chaos endures for but a short while. The responsibility of the warrior to maintain order and to stave off chaos never ended. Even when they attain success it is only temporary. The audience knew of the ultimate doom of Heorot at the hands of the Heaðo-bards. At the beginning of the tale we are told by the poet that: "*Sele hlifade heah ond horngeap; heaðowylma bad, laðan liges ne wæs hit lenge ða gen, þæt se ecghefe aðumsweoran æfter wælniðe wæcnan scolde.*" (The hall towered high and horn-gabled; it awaited the hostile surge of hateful flame, it was not near at hand yet that sword-hatred of oath-swearers after mortal enmity must arise. 81b-85).

Despite their best efforts, their warrior code of ethics and the use of peace-weavers, all actors in these cycles are powerless to break out of them. They are bound by fate and acknowledge the role that it plays in their lives. Of course, this raises the issue of why they did not passively accept the dictates of this world and live with them. Why battle against the inexorable tide of fate? The answer lies not in a philosophical conundrum but in the sociology of the Germanic society. What was

important to the Germanic warrior was not the outcome of the event, since this was known; rather it was how that destruction would be faced. The warrior's concern was not whether or not he would meet death, for that was already preordained, but how that death would be met. He was able to choose freely to die bravely or to flee. If he chose the former, he might gain immortality in song and legend. If he died poorly he would quickly fade from memory.³⁶ It was through memory of the kin group that one was saved from oblivion. The idea of free will within the boundaries of predetermined fate was clearly a notion with which the Anglo-Saxons were familiar.

This was a sound foundation upon which both the pagan morality and Christian philosophy could meet and grow. Christian teaching always maintained the idea of free will. King Alfred (871-899) defined the word fate as *wyrd* in his translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. He certainly believed that *wyrd* operated under the control of God.³⁷ Even Boethius has Lady Philosophy remark that fate is God's providence realized through the unfolding of events.³⁸ Such a philosophy, one that allowed for man to make his own destiny, must have had a powerful appeal to the Germanic people and likely facilitated the conversion process.

³⁶ Susanne Weil, "Grace under pressure: 'Hand-words,' Wyrd and Free Will in Beowulf," *Pacific Coast Philology* 24 (1989): 96.

³⁷ Joseph B. Trahern, Jr., "Fatalism and the Millennium," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 165.

³⁸ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), 91-92.

Hroþgar, at the end of his speech to Beowulf regarding pride, warns him and the audience of the fleeting nature of youth and strength, and by analogy man's inability to withstand chaotic forces. Hroþgar says to Beowulf, "*Nu is þines mægnes blæd ane hwile; eft sona bið þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð*" (now is the flower of your strength for a while; afterwards it will be that either illness or sword edge deprives you of strength: 1761b-1763).

For Anglo-Saxon warriors and the actors of *Beowulf*, the pall of death was ever present. This sentiment is extended from men to tribes in the lament of the last survivor. In his mournful speech of loss, the treasure stands as a metaphor for the cycle of chaos, stability and return to chaos. All his kin have died and he is the last survivor. As he buries the wealth of his people he says: "*Heald þu nu hruse, nu hæleð ne mostan, eorla æhte! Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe gode begeaton;*" (Hold now you earth, now that heroes may not, the possessions of warriors! Indeed good [men] got it from you earlier: 2247-2249a). The act of burying the treasure in the earth reflects the return of human created stability to the unknown. The hoard is soon discovered by a dragon (a chaotic figure) and is guarded by him for three hundred years. When the thief disturbs the dragon, he destroys king Beowulf's mead-hall (2325), symbolizing the destruction of the Geat kingdom. The fall of the mead-hall followed by the death of the good king seals the doom of the Geats. Wiglaf says "*Nu ys leodum wen orleghwile, syððan under [ne] Froncum and Frysum fyll cyninges wide weorðeð*" (Now is the expectation of the nation for a time of war when the death of the king becomes widely manifest to the Franks and Frisians: 2910-2913a). The annihilation

of the Geatish people completes the cycle of chaos from stability to chaos and ends the poem.

The transitory nature of the life of men and of their creations is a governing theme of *Beowulf*. I believe that the poem reflects the gradual syncretism that was taking place in England between the pagan beliefs and Christianity. Eighth century Europe experienced excessive amounts of warfare during this time. Lives were short and hard. The monuments that were ascribed to the ancients were seen to be in a state of decay. All things were fleeting in the eyes of the northern Europeans. This belief in the inevitable decay of the world into chaos was strong in pagan tradition. The new faith that offered redemption in the face of that inevitable destruction was very appealing.

Heroic poetry portrays warriors struggling against overwhelming odds. Victory certainly was the goal of each warrior, but he was also prepared to die in the effort. In the next chapter I shall discuss the surrender to chaos that is common in what are loosely termed the elegies. It is fitting therefore that *Beowulf* and other heroes of this and other battle poems stand between their people and the encroaching chaos which they knew would inevitably defeat them. This ethic was still strong in England until at least the tenth century, as is clearly seen in *The Battle of Brunanburh* (937) and *The Battle of Maldon* (991). Loyalty to one's lord and courage in battle were all that a warrior could hope for. In *The Battle of Maldon* such virtues are extolled by Byrhtwold in discussing his lord Byrhtnoð:

Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lylað.

Her lið ure ealdor eall forheawen,
 god on greote. A mæg gnornian
 se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan wendan þenceð.
 Ic eom frod feores: fram ic ne wille,
 ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,
 be swa leofan menn, licgan þence. (Battle of Maldon, 312-319) ³⁹

Courage in the face of death was the hope of the Anglo-Saxon warrior. He wished only to serve his lord and to earn immortality in the memory of men. For most of them they knew that chaos would eventually overwhelm their defenses. They were content if they could hold it off for that day.

The Anglo-Saxons believed that the end time was coming and that they should meet their end in a heroic manner. Even if the person or tribes were gone, at least their memory would remain forever in song and legend. Wiglaf admonishes the cowardly warriors by telling them, “*Deað bið sella eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!*” (Death is better to each warrior than a life of disgrace! 2890b-2891). If they were unable to defeat the chaos of the universe, at least through a glorious death they could defy it.

³⁹ Courage the braver, heart the bolder, mind the stronger as our strength lessens. Here lies our lord all hacked up, a good [man] on the earth. A kinsman should be sad who think to go from this battle-play. I am old of life, I will not leave but by the side of my lord, by so beloved a man I think to lie. *The Battle of Maldon* in John C. Pope, Seven Old English Poems (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966) 27.

II

Acceptance of Fate: The Elegies

Men learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.
 In visions of the night, like dropping rain,
 Descend the many memories of pain
 Before the spirit's sight: through tears and dole
 Comes wisdom o'er the unwilling soul-
 A boon, I wot, of all Divinity,
 (Agamemnon: Aeschylus - translated by Robert Potter)

The Anglo-Saxon warrior of the early Middle Ages, like the epic hero, stood in opposition to the dangerous and destructive forces of chaos. To maintain order and stability they had to contend with the forces of nature whose ruinous power of wind, rain, snow, and ice were eroding the foundations of their towns and fortresses, homes and hearths. They were also charged with the responsibility of defending the kin group and tribe from adversaries in battle, *garnið werum, wig towipre wicfreopa healdan* (spear-strife for warriors, to guard [as] a protection of dwellings against battle. *Maxims I* (B) 57b-58).⁴⁰ They met these obligations almost joyfully, for it was an opportunity to die valiantly and earn everlasting fame in the memories of men. A warrior's fate was decided; he merely chose how he was to meet it. This was the warrior ethic. Anglo-Saxons knew of the transient nature of life and the capricious temperament of *wyrd*, but chose a path of resistance to hold inevitable chaos at bay at least for a while. However, not all men chose to journey on this path. Some who trod

⁴⁰ Text of elegies and Maxims are from The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry Vol.1 ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 256. Translations are my own.

it in youth may have begun to feel the grip of old age and disease. Others grew weary in heart, sad at the mournful loss of kin and comrades fallen in unending battle. Still others saw that decay of the world was far advanced and believed that the end-times were upon them. For them the path of resistance no longer held meaning. Acceptance of the end and preparation for the world to come were the guiding principles. To give life to these sentiments certain individuals expressed in poetry the pain and suffering that they felt on this transient earth. The result is what contemporary critics term elegy. The elegiac genre is concerned less with opposing the collapse of order and the inexorable intrusion of chaos into the world than it is with a mournful recognition of the transience of life, the erosion of civilization by decay, and the inevitable death of the world.

To begin, since the nineteenth century critics generally agree that nine poems from the *Exeter Book* fit the definition of elegy. They are *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Resignation* (also called *Contrition*), *The Ruin*, and *The Husband's Message*.⁴¹ As a group these poems "strike a responsive chord to our modern ears."⁴² However we cannot be certain if they represent an actual literary school or if their production was a coincidence of theme composed by writers living within a certain worldview. There is no direct evidence to support the proposition that Anglo-Saxons, at least in the

⁴¹ Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 27, 197-199

⁴² S. B. Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (London: University of London Press, 1966), 218.

compilation of the *Exeter Book*, considered elegies as discrete entities worthy of separate categorization. The nine elegies are not bound in the *Exeter Book* as a group, though there is evidence that the scribe or compiler ordered all of the works in a thematic, not generic, manner. The presence of some apparent errors such as grouping *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin* with riddles, based on their form, suggests such a goal.⁴³ If the poems were closely grouped temporally and spatially, it might imply some type of literary school and therefore the designation of elegy might have held some meaning to Anglo-Saxons. Current evidence ascribing a rough dating for the poems and dialectical origins for several of them indicates that the same poet could not have written the poems nor could they represent a distinct school. Dialectical analyses done by Klinck suggest a provenance of Northumbria for some of the poems such as *The Riming Poem* and *The Wanderer*. She hypothesizes a Mercian origin for *The Ruin* and perhaps *The Seafarer* and *Resignation*.⁴⁴ Though the manuscript itself has been dated to between 965 and 975,⁴⁵ dates for the various elegies are uncertain but may range from as early as the mid-eighth century to the time of compilation. The earliest of the group is probably *The Ruin* based on the assumption that the poet was writing about the Roman City of Bath. If we accept this

⁴³ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* Vol.1 ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994) 23-24. Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 25-26

⁴⁴ Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 15-20.

⁴⁵ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* Vol.1 ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 1.

proposal then the poem must have been written around the mid-eighth century. Archaeological data shows that the baths were filled in with silt by the mid-tenth century. The poet describes the “*burnsele monige*”, (many bathhouses *the Ruin*, 21) or “*þær þa baðu wæron hat in hreþre*” (where the bathes were, hot in the center, *The Ruin*, 40b-41a). In order for the description that the poet gives to have been accurate, he needed to have seen them about two hundred years before they were filled in with silt.⁴⁶ As for the other elegies, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife’s Lament* and *The Husband’s Message* are assigned to the mid-ninth century; *Deor*, *The Wanderer* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* to the later ninth; and *The Riming poem* and *Resignation* to the early to mid-tenth century.⁴⁷ As critics observing the poems from the vantage point of twelve centuries, it is easy to see these works as a distinct group. However, the poems’ distribution across several centuries and widely separated locales should dispel the notion that Anglo-Saxons considered them as such.

Given the lack of support for the idea that Anglo-Saxons recognized elegies as a distinct genre, do elegies exist as a separate genre and if so how do we define them?⁴⁸ María Mora, in her insightful article, argues that the idea of the Germanic elegy is a construct of romanticization by nineteenth century Germanic scholars,

⁴⁶ Roy F. Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies: The Wife’s Lament, The Husband’s Message and The Ruin*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 26-27.

⁴⁷ Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 20.

⁴⁸ It is of course possible that the Anglo-Saxon compiler did recognize the elegies as distinct group but that within his paradigm such awareness was not cause for partitioning the poems within *The Exeter Book*.

especially Brooke (1892) and Ehrismann (1915). These two men, along with others of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries selected poems that had sad, pathetic tones and used them to construct the genre.⁴⁹ Though her analysis reveals the selection and subsequent romanticization of the poems was somewhat artificial and had its roots in a nationalistic agenda, her proposition that there is no quantifiably discrete set of poems that possess shared characteristics, which may be defined as elegiac, seems extreme. It is obvious that any classification of a literary genre is at best artificial, a construction of both the critic and the prevailing intellectual climate. Accepting such artificiality of human derived classification schemes I do not believe that we should simply do away with them. Such systems of categorization are necessary in all fields of inquiry. Because of them scholars are able to examine a vast array of information and make it meaningful to us and amenable to critical examination. To exclude them because a certain bias has been detected seems unwarranted. A more productive approach might be to recognize the limitations of these systems and determine what biases and agendas are in place during their construction. Armed with this information a more objective, though I fear no less arbitrary, classification of genre could be constructed. Such a belief must be widespread because the definition of elegy has been debated and refined by many critics for last the 60 years. Though there does not appear to have been, accepting the paucity of the sources, what could be described as an elegiac school in Anglo-Saxon

⁴⁹ María José Mora, "The Invention of the Old English Elegy," *English Studies* 76:2 (1995): 139.

England, this should not restrict contemporary critics from constructing and using an agreed upon definition of the genre.

B.J. Timmer was the first critic to re-examine the definition of the elegiac genre in Old English. For him, and a number of later scholars, the Anglo-Saxon elegy was primarily a lament of loss. The loss may be of happiness, youth or may be associated with the transience of the world.⁵⁰ Though Timmer excluded *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* from his definition of elegy, believing that they represented religious didactic lyric, he also maintained that elegy had an allegorical nature.⁵¹ Like most scholars who believed that the elegies were allegorical, they attach their arguments to the defining characteristic of elegy, the exile. In all the elegies (except *The Ruin*) the speaker suffers under an enforced exile that separates him or her from home, security or loved ones.⁵² Scholars (though I am not certain that Anglo-Saxons) saw within this motif a basis for Christian allegory. Exile is seen as allegory for man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, his wandering on earth, and finally his search for a heavenly home.⁵³ Some scholars, notably among them

⁵⁰ B.J. Timmer, "The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry," *English Studies* 24 (1942): 33. I.L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 5 (1954): 2-3. Gwendolyn Morgan, "Essential Loss: Christianity and Alienation in Anglo-Saxon Elegies," *In Geardagum: Essays on Old and Middle English* 11 (1990): 17.

⁵¹ B.J. Timmer, "The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry," *English Studies* 24 (1942): 38.

⁵² Stanley B Greenfield, "The Old English Elegies," *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 143. Gwendolyn Morgan, "Essential Loss: Christianity and Alienation in Anglo-Saxon Elegies," *In Geardagum: Essays on Old and Middle English* 11 (1990): 17.

⁵³ B.J. Timmer, "The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry," *English Studies* 24 (1942): 38. G.V. Smithers, "The Meaning of *the Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*," *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957): 138, 150. G.V. Smithers, "The Meaning of *the Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* (continued)," *Medium Ævum* 28

Dorothy Whitelock, did not believe that Anglo-Saxon elegies were allegorical. Her paper instead launched a movement in critical thought that agreed that *The Seafarer* recounted a literal journey of a voluntary exile. Whereas the scholars of half a century earlier view the poem as a dialogue between a younger and an older seafarer, with a homiletic ending, Whitelock contends that it is the unified monologue of a *peregrinus pro amore Dei*.⁵⁴ Gordon, agreeing with Whitelock, says that to read *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as allegory requires “an ominously tortuous explanation.”⁵⁵ I agree with Whitelock and Gordon that these poems are not subtle allegory. Too much emphasis has been placed on the theological sophistication of both the poet and reader/listener *pace* Robinson. During the late seventh and eighth centuries few men, conversant only in the vernacular, had the erudition to grasp the subtle allusions, which have been suggested, and fewer still to compose them. This is not to say that the poet or his audience was brutish. I agree with critics who see the tradition of wisdom literature in the poems.⁵⁶ Through the course of the poem the speaker must

(1959): 5-7. James Cross, “On the Allegory in the Seafarer-Illustrative Notes,” *Medium Ævum* 28 (1959): 104.

⁵⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, “The Interpretation of The Seafarer,” in *Early Cultures of Northwest Europe. H.M. Chadwick Memorial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950): 263.

⁵⁵ I.L. Gordon, “Traditional Themes in “*The Wanderer and The Seafarer*,” *Review of English Studies* n.s. 5 (1954): 2-3

⁵⁶ T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1972), 61, 67. Paul de Lacy, “Thematic and Structural Affinities: *The Wanderer* and *Ecclesiastes*,” *Neophilologus* 82 (1998): 125. Sealy Ann Gilles, “‘Ne ... to’ Sequences in Old English and Old Irish, with Special Attention to *the Wanderer*,” in *Voices in Translation: The Authority of ‘Olde Bookes’ in Medieval Literature* ed. D. M. Sinnreich-Levi, Gayle Sigal and Allen Mandelbaum. (New York: AMS, 1992), 53-54.

be reflective on life and must seek to reach a consolation.⁵⁷ This consolation usually comes in the form of wisdom, and the elegy contains wisdom passages or may even be a form of wisdom literature. Structurally such poems are usually a monologue with a conventional introduction, a gnomic conclusion and repeated key words, phrases and/or lines.⁵⁸ I define the genre of Anglo-Saxon elegy as a meditative lament of a solitary exile, who through present suffering and reflection on his or her past life is brought to a state of understanding, consolation, and acceptance of fate.

The elegiac genre focuses principally on the lament of warriors, presumably at the end of their life. Death in battle, loss of kinsmen and the collapse of the *comitatus* are common topoi. Because a warrior is the usual speaker in elegy the two genres (the epic and elegy) are interwoven. Although epic and elegy are poetic expressions of the Anglo-Saxon warrior culture, they represent fundamentally different ways of dealing with the chaos of existence and the transience of life. Within *Beowulf* it has been argued that there are two elegies, the lay of the last survivor (2247-2266) and the elegy of the bereaved father (2435-2471).⁵⁹ Though I believe that the first represents an elegy, the so-called elegy of the bereaved father does not. It is recounted by *Beowulf* and therefore is in third person. Anglo-Saxon elegy, as described above, is

⁵⁷ Stanley B Greenfield, "The Old English Elegies." Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature, ed. E. G. Stanley. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 143

⁵⁸ Anne L. Klinck, The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 223-225.

⁵⁹ Rosemary Woolf, "The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and the genre of *Planctus*," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 194-195.

an individual expression of grief or of loss and must be a first person account. The first, the lay of the last survivor, is a lament, in which there are similarities of content shared with *The Wanderer*. In the lay a warrior reminisces about the loss of his comrades with whom he shared hall-joys in the past:

“Heald þu nu hruse nu hæleð ne m{o}stan
 eorla æhte hwæt hyt ær on ðe
 gode begeaton guðdeað fornam.
 feorhbeale frecne fyrena gehwylcne.
 leoda minra þa {me}ðe þis [lif] ofgeaf
 gesawon. seledream. Nah hwa sweord wege
 oððe fe(o)r(mie) fæted wæge.
 dryncfæt deore dug(uð) ellor s[c]eoc.” (*Beowulf* 2247-2254)⁶⁰

Similarly, the *eardstapa* in *The Wanderer* recalls past joys now gone:

... Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maðdumgyfa?
 Hwær cwom symbla gestu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
 Eala beorhte bune. Eala byrnwiga.
 Eala þeodnes þrym. Hu seo þrag gewat,
 genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære. (*The Wanderer* 92-96)⁶¹

Both men are solitary survivors of their war-band. Each remembers the lost joy of the hall that they shared before their brothers in arms were killed in battle. The sword is gone; they have no more battles to fight. The loss of the gold-plated cup lamented by each speaker symbolizes the loss of unity that was had in the war-band. All would

⁶⁰ Hold now earth, now that men are not able, the possessions of warriors! Indeed good [men] got it from you earlier; Death in battle, terrible life destroyer carried off everyone of the men of my people, of who forsook this life saw the hall-joy; I have not anyone who carries the sword or bears the plated cup, precious drinking vessel, the company of warriors have departed elsewhere.

⁶¹ Where is the warrior? Where is the giver of treasure? Where are the seats at the feast? Where is the hall-joy? Alas bright cup! Alas mailed warriors! Alas glory of the prince! How the time went by, vanished under cover of night as if it never had been. Text of *the Wanderer* and all following elegies are from *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* Vol.1 ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 360.

drink from the same cup, each in his turn thus, cementing the social bonds between warriors. Now they lay idle, ruined, much as the warriors who once used them.

There is, however, another candidate for elegy in *Beowulf*. It is known as Hroðgar's Sermon and has some attributes in common with elegy. In the speech Hroðgar orates to Beowulf concerning the fleeting nature of fame, power, youth and health. Beowulf has just returned from the chaotic realm of the mere victorious over Grendel's mother. We can imagine Beowulf flushed with pride at his abilities to defeat and hold at bay the forces of chaos. Hroðgar, older and wiser, wishes to temper Beowulf's battle prowess with wisdom. He delivers a speech that can be thought of as an elegy by proxy. Wise Hroðgar speaks:

wunað he on wiste no hine wiht dweleð
adlne ylðo ne him inwitsorh
on sefa(n) sweorceð ne gesacu ohwær
ecghete eoweð ac him eal worold
wendeð on w(il)lan he þæt wyrse ne con. (*Beowulf*, 1735-1739)⁶²

Hroðgar's observations bear a striking similarity to those of the prince in *The Riming Poem*. He knew joy, wealth and power and had not a care in the world in his youth. As old age approached, he was struck with disease, old age and fear of the eternal unknown. Many of the themes found in epic tradition were also present in the elegy; the emphasis and the way in which chaos and transience were dealt differed. Elegiac poetry in Anglo-Saxon England was contemporaneous with the epic tradition. Certainly the people of the early Middle Ages were not monotypic in their worldview.

⁶² He dwells in plenty, illness and old age do not hinder him in any way, nor to him does an evil care darken his mind, nor any other enmity show sword-hatred but for him all the world goes according to his wish. He knows not worse.

For some the sorrow of the temporary nature of earthly joys, the works of man and life rang from within with poignancy so strong that it could not be ignored. From such sorrow and alienation sprang the elegies.

All Anglo-Saxon elegies express a very personal sorrow for loss. These losses are related to three different aspects of chaos that presented itself to this culture. The first was the loss of security, which was the result of the separation from or the death of kin, comrades or lord. A man without the protection of kin or lord was an outcast, even an outlaw, who had to avoid the company of men because of the potential threat they offered. Such advice was given strongly in the wisdom literature:

Wel mon sceal wine healdan on wega gehwylcum;
oft mon fereð feor bi tune, þær him wat freond unwirotodne.
Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to geferan,
felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð. (*Maxims I (C)*: 7-10)⁶³

Outlaws in Anglo-Saxon society were regarded as little better than animals. That such a man should have as company wolves is appropriate because the wolf was considered to exist outside the law, an enemy of man and an agent of chaos. In fact, if an individual were deemed to be outside the law, he could be killed and there would be no threat of retribution to the killer.

The second loss was the loss of youth and vigor. Old age and disease were bitter enemies to a people who prided and defined themselves on their martial abilities. Though the latter was more common than the former, both infirmities

⁶³ Well should a man hold friends on each roadway. Often a man will journey far by a town where he knows uncertain friends. The friendless, unhappy man takes to himself wolves as comrades, a very fierce beast. Very often the companion slits him.

presage the ultimate, death of self. The seafarer observes this lamentable fate of men when he says:

Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð;
 adl oþþe ylðo oþþe ecghete
 fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð. (*The Seafarer*, 68-71)⁶⁴

The last is a lament for the impending demise of the world as manifested in the decay of the works of men. Here the speaker of *The Wanderer* describes the decline of the world and the unrelenting force of chaos:

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
 swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
 winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,
 hrime bihrorene; (*the Wanderer*, 73-78a)⁶⁵

After the period of initial conversion all of these eschatological issues form a nexus where dying pagan beliefs and expanding Christian beliefs create a unique syncretism that is Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Anglo-Saxons, both pagan and Christian, believed that human existence on earth was transitory, not only in terms of the life of an individual but also with regard to the works of humanity. For them all creation was wending its way to destruction. Elegies such as *The Wanderer*, *The*

⁶⁴ Always one of three things, each before his final hour becomes an occasion for uncertainty: disease or old age or sword-hatred will wrest away a spirit fated to die.

⁶⁵ The wise man should perceive how ghostly it will be when all this world's wealth stands a waste as now it does in various places over this world, walls stand beaten by the wind, covered by frost by snow covered dwellings. Wine-halls go to ruin;

Seafarer, *The Ruin* and *The Riming Poem* are dominated by themes of the chaos eroding the foundation of human works leading to mankind's ultimate destruction.

Loneliness and vulnerability pervade the elegies and represent the first sorrow that the speaker addresses. The *anhaga*, the solitary one of *the Wanderer*, the woman of the *Wife's Lament*, Deor, the seafarer, and the penitent of *Resignation* each faces the world alone, an outcast from society. The *eardstapa* of *The Wanderer* reflects on the demise of friends when he grieves:

Forðon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
for hwan modsefa min ne geweorce
þonne ic eorla lif eal geondðence,
hu hie færllice flet ofgeafon,
modge maguþegnas. (*The Wanderer*, 58-62a)⁶⁶

Isolated from the *comitatus*, the wanderer lacks the protection of his lord and brothers in arms as well as the friendship that such men offered. The penitent of *Resignation* has not lost kin and comrades through battle; rather, he has been forced into exile. He laments,

forþon ic afysed eom
earm of minum eþle. Ne mæg þæs anhoga,
leodwynna leas, leng drohtian,
wineleas wræcca, -is him wrað meotud-
gnornað on his geoguþe, (*Resignation*, 88b-92a.)⁶⁷

Exile, whether voluntary as in *The Seafarer*, because of death of one's *comitatus* or by expulsion from a community perhaps for a crime, places the individual in a

⁶⁶ Indeed I may not consider over this world why my heart is not gloomy when I consider all the lives of men, how they suddenly leave the floor, the bold retainers.

⁶⁷ Indeed I am sent in haste, wretched from my home. Nor may this solitary devoid of communal joy live long, a friendless exile. God is cruel to him; [the exile] laments in his sorrow.

dangerous position, assigning him the status of outlaw. The *anhaga*, now powerless and alone in a dangerous world, is filled with grief and bitterness.

Involuntary separation from family or *comitatus* could be as painful as if the separation were due to death. In many ways women were more vulnerable to this form of despair. Germanic culture was strongly patrilinear and patrilocal. A woman, when she married, would leave her family's land and go to live with her husband's kin group in his territory. His absence, especially if forced, could have a strong isolating effect on her. The woman of *The Wife's Lament* expressed her sorrow over her isolation:

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,
 minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,
 hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up aweox,
 niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.
 a ic wite wonn minra wræcsiþa.
 Ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
 ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare (*The Wife's Lament*, 1-7)⁶⁸

As I mentioned above, women did have autonomy and rights within the marriage. This woman, however, is separated from her husband and seems to have no way of returning to her kin group. Her isolation is not the result of exile but loss of status because her husband is banished from his land and she is apart from him. Her in-laws do not owe her the obligation that was incumbent upon her husband.

Isolation and exile could also be self-imposed. The speaker of *The Seafarer* seeks his isolating journey of his own accord perhaps seeking spiritual solace in his

⁶⁸ I [sing] this song of misery full sad for me about my journey [of life]. I may say that since I grew up what misery I have endured [either] recent or old is no more than now. Ever have I endured

lonely journey. Following the argument put forth by Stanley Greenfield that *sylf* means “of my own accord” in line 35b⁶⁹ the seafarer describes his exile:

Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,
hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
corna caldast. Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan gepohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,
sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige; (*The Seafarer*, 31-35.)⁷⁰

Reading that the exile as voluntary is very much in line with what Dorothy Whitelock proposed when she suggested that the speaker is a *peregrinus*.⁷¹ Spiritual journeys such as this were common among Irish monastics of the sixth through tenth centuries. However, by the end of the period, primarily due to monastic reforms such as those found in the *Regularis Concordia*, this practice was discouraged. *The Seafarer*, with a proposed mid-ninth century date and Mercian origin, may have been influenced by this practice. These pilgrimages were not directed toward any place on earth, rather, they were journeys to gain a closer union with God. The life of the pilgrim was renowned for its hardships. It is small wonder that the speaker of this passage would reflect on the comforts that he has surrendered. Even when separation from friends and family was volitional, wandering through the world was risky and fraught with

want in my exile. Ever since my lord departed from [his] people here, over the tumult of waves have I had sorrow at dawn.

⁶⁹ Stanley B. Greenfield, “*Sylf*, Seasons, Structure and Genre in *The Seafarer*” in *Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings* ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 231. Originally in *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁷⁰ The shadow of night grew dark, from the north it snowed, hoarfrost bound the earth hail fell to the ground, the coldest kernel. Therefore now my thoughts beat against my heart that I experience the high seas, salt sea wave on my own accord.

⁷¹ Dorothy Whitelock, “The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*,” in *Early Cultures of Northwest Europe*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 263.

suffering. Exile, when one is healthy and strong, though difficult, could be bearable; one could always hope for a change in situation. If exile were accompanied with old age or disease, the suffering could be overwhelming.

Physical hardship, disease and death were capricious companions of the Anglo-Saxons in the early Middle Ages. Aging and the decline that was associated with it often led to fear and mourning for the vigor and health that was lost. However, contemplation of what was to come after this life was also common. The speaker of *The Riming Poem* was by all accounts a powerful prince with a loyal band of thanes. He held the ancestral seat, had unlimited wealth and his hall was filled with mead and song. The first half of the poem discusses his power and the earthly delights of his mead-hall, while the second part is about his decline and death.

Me þæt wyrd gewæf, ond gewyrht forgeaf,
 þæt ic grofe græf, ond þæt grimme græf
 flean flæsce ne mæg, þonne flanhred dæg
 nydgrapum nimeþ, þonne seo neaht becymeð
 seo me eðles ofonn ond mec her eardes onconn.
 þonne lichoma ligeð, lima wurm friteþ,
 ac him wenne gewigeð ond þa wist geþygeð,
 oþþæt beoþ þa ban - an,
 ond æt nyhstan nan. (*The Riming Poem*, 70-77a.)⁷²

All men, no matter how powerful, will die. This prince lived a long, carefree life until he felt “*brondhord geblowen breostum in forgrowen*” (a burning anxiety grown perversely in my breast, *The Riming Poem*, 46.) Concerns about death do not seem to arise in the Anglo-Saxons until it is near. However, the certainty of death, which the

⁷² Fate weaves for me and the cycle of time ordains that I dig the grave and from that grim grave flesh may not escape when the arrow-swift day seizes with coercive grip. When the night arrives

hero of the epic embraced, is not looked upon with as much ardor in the elegies. The seafarer laments its inescapable hand:

Ic geliefe na
 þæt him eorþ-welan ece standað
 Simble þreora sum þegna gehwelcun
 ær his tid-dæge to tweon weorðeþ:
 adl oþþe ieldu oþþe ecg-hete
 frægum framweardum feorh oþ-þringeþ. (*The Seafarer*, 66b-71)⁷³

Fate was inescapable. All people die. What was important to the poets of the elegies was the attainment of wisdom. Fate, if it could not be opposed, must be accepted.

Age, decay and death were not, for the Anglo-Saxons, the exclusive misfortunes of life. A careful examination of the world around them and the creations of man convinced them that the end of time was swiftly approaching. Both the pagan religion and the rapidly spreading Christian faith deeply held eschatological beliefs. Indeed, how the end was to come and what was to happen after the end were quite different for both cultures; nonetheless, the feeling that the end drew near was palpable. So strong was their belief in the approaching end that it was the most common theme found in the elegies. Decay of the world and the transience of life are prominent features of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem* and *The Ruin*. The chaotic forces that swirled around the people of early medieval England were manifest in the destruction of the works of the ancients, *enta geweorc*. A common

and deprives me of home, and attacks me here in my land, when my body is dead, a worm gnaws my limbs but proceeds with joy and eats the feast until the bone is *****an and at last nothing remains.

⁷³ I do not believe that earthly-wealth stands forever, always one of three things each before his final hour becomes an occasion for uncertainty disease or old age or sword hatred will wrest away a spirit fated to die, passing away.

belief in the Middle Ages was that the golden age was in the past. All that was present now was merely a shadow of former greatness. Great buildings such as those built by the ancients were no longer made. Great kings and leaders no longer lived. The seafarer observes,

Blæd is gehnæged,
 eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,
 swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.
 Ylðo him on fareð, onsyn blacað,
 gomelfeax gnornað, wat his iuwine,
 æþelinga bearn, eorþan forgiefene. (*The Seafarer*, 88b-93.)⁷⁴

Evidence of decay was all around the poets and they made clear their belief that the end of the world was approaching. The *eardstapa* observes the decay and inevitable destruction of the world when he laments:

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic biþ
 þonne eall þisse weorolde wela weste standeþ
 swa nu missenlice geond þisne middan-geard
 winde bewawne weallas standeþ,
 hrime behrorene, hriðge þa eodoras. (*The Wanderer*, 73-77)⁷⁵

The forces of natural chaos inexorably erode the works of man. The Anglo-Saxons observed that snow, hail, wind and frost are the destructive agents of chaos that undermine even the works of the mighty ancients. Destruction from the north was a common belief in the mythology of Germanic pagan culture. They believed that the

⁷⁴ Glory is humbled, the earth's nobility grows old and withers, as now each man through out middle earth. Old age overtakes them, appearance grows pale, gray-headed mourns, he knows his friend of former days, son of a prince, gave up the earth.

⁷⁵ The wise man should perceive how ghostly [it] will be when all of the world's wealth stands a waste as now in various places over this world beaten by the wind walls stand covered by frost by snow covered dwellings.

entrance to hell, from which harsh winter elements issued, was a source of chaotic forces.

The Ruin is perhaps the most explicit regarding the destructive power of the forces of chaos on the world. The unidentified speaker marvels at the work of giants and how they have survived for so long. The speaker, while observing the ruins at Roman Bath, laments:

op hund cnea
werþeoda gewitan. Oft þæs wag gebad
ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum,
ofstonden under stormum; steap gear gedreas. (*The Ruin*, 8b-11)⁷⁶

heah horngestreon, heresweg micel,
meodoheall monig mondreama full,
oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe.
Crungon walo wide, cwoman woldagas,
swylt eall fornom secgrofra wera;
wurdon hyra wigsteal westen stapolas,
brosnade burgsteall. Betend crungon
hergas to hrusan. Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,
ond þæs teaforgeapa tigelum sceadeð
hrostbeages hrof. Hryre wong gecrong
gebrocen to beorgum, (*The Ruin*, 22-32)⁷⁷

For all the power that the buildings possessed and the skill with which they were wrought, they aged and were eventually destroyed by *wyrd* the mighty. Nothing was able to escape fate. The world was coming to an end -- resistance was futile.

⁷⁶ ...until a hundred generations of people departed. Often the wall, red and gray with lichens survived [one] kingdom after another, stood under the storms; [until it] high, broad fell.

⁷⁷ The high gables the great martial sound, the many meadhalls full of human pleasure, until *wyrd* the mighty changed that. They fell in battle by the wide wall, departed the days of pestilence, death slaughtered all the brave men; destroyed the ramparts, laid waste to the foundations, the city decayed. The restorers died, the armies fell to the earth. Thus these halls are empty and the red tiles scattered, the woodwork of the roof. The place of decay fell shattered to the mound.

Heroes might do battle with the chaotic forces that were unleashed in ever increasing number but in the end it would have no effect. The relatively safe world that man had constructed for himself was eroding and would certainly collapse. The penitent of *Resignation* in the last two lines of his elegy sums up the attitude of the genre rather well. Giet biþ þæt selast, þonne mon him sylf ne mæg wyrd onwenden, þæt he þonne wel þolige (Yet this is best, when man is unable to change fate, then he must endure it well.)

Conclusion

Anglo-Saxon Fatalism: *Wyrð bið ful aræd!*

In 1014 bishop Wulfstan in his apocalyptic sermon admonished the faithful, “know that the truth is that this world is in haste and is approaching the end.”⁷⁸ His sentiments were not unique or new. To the Anglo-Saxon observer, signs that the earth was aging and its death imminent were clear. The two genres of poetry, epic and elegy, examined in this essay reflect distinctly different responses to the incursions of chaos and the transitory nature that threatened to destroy their lives and society. Moreover, two divergent cultural traditions, the tribal pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean based Roman Catholicism, were in the process of blending together.⁷⁹ They would eventually produce a form of Christianity that was not first influenced by the culture of the classical world. Their syncretism influenced both the Anglo-Saxon epic and elegy.

Thomas Hobbes believed the chief motivating factor for human group formation was fear and the need for mutual protection. For the Germanic people of the early Middle Ages such a belief is not wholly unwarranted. In order to provide protection for their people, the Anglo-Saxons, as was the case for most tribal societies of Northern Europe, developed a professional warrior class. These men provided defense of the group from

⁷⁸ Dorothy Whitelock, ed. *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos Quando Dani Maxime Persecuti Sunt Eos, Quod Fuit Anno Millesimo XIII Ab Incarnatione Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*, (London: Methuen, 1963), 47.

⁷⁹ Irish monasticism was also very influential in the development of Christianity in England, particularly in Northumbria. Monastic houses such as Iona and Lindisfarne shaped the intellectual and religious environment of the north in the seventh century and to a lesser extent the eighth century. Since a discussion of the effects of the Celtic Church and its conflict with the Roman Church are beyond the scope of this essay, I add this only to make the reader aware of the potent effect that the Irish had on the ultimate shape of the English church.

wildlife and natural disasters, but more often their role was to protect the hall and its dependent population against other, neighboring tribes. The epic tradition clearly outlines what qualities were expected in a war leader. In *Beowulf*, Scyld was considered a good king because he was able to pacify, most likely with his sword, all of his neighbors.

oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning! (*Beowulf*, 9-11)⁸⁰

Scyld's success in battle was dependent in part upon his generosity to his thanes. His son Beow used this behavior to firmly tie his men to him.

Swa sceal g(eong g)uma gode gewyrcean
fromum feohgiftum on fæder (bea)rme
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
wilgesipas þonne wig cume. (*Beowulf*, 20-23)⁸¹

The interdependence of each warrior was based on reciprocal obligation and honor. Ties of loyalty also existed between each of the warriors. If one of the war-band was killed the other men were under obligation to avenge his death. Not to do so would incur shame because boasts that were made would be unfulfilled. The cycle of killing followed by revenge and counter vengeance has already been discussed. The salient point is that Germanic warriors lived in a culture that was based on honor and shame as primary motivating factors.⁸² On the one hand this system produced a cohesive warrior-band that

⁸⁰ Until each of the surrounding people over the whale road must obey him, to pay tribute; that was a good king!

⁸¹ So should a young man accomplish good things with splendid rich gifts [while] in his father's house so that afterwards in old age the dear companions remain with him when war comes.

⁸² Christine Fell, "Perceptions of Transience," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 176.

because of obligation and honor would fight to defend the king, tribe and each other because their whole self-identity was tied to their meeting this obligation. Unfortunately this same unit of social organization, which Shakespeare's Henry V would later term 'a band of brothers', guaranteed that they would be involved in almost perpetual warfare unless their adversaries were wholly eliminated. The cruel irony was that the social system that protected the stability of the tribal unit was the cause of the chaos that eroded the society as a whole.

As discussed above the cycle of vengeance that was so disruptive to the characters in *Beowulf* and in *The Fight at Finnsburg* was mirrored in the lives of the Anglo-Saxons. The structure of the *comitatus* wherein, as Tacitus described, the warriors fight for their chief and the chief fights for victory, describes a society governed by honor and shame. Thanes could not leave their lord's or comrade's death unavenged. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes an incident that typifies the self-destructive nature of the warrior's ethic. In 755 [757] Cynewulf, king of Wessex, stopped to visit with his mistress. To this tryst he brought only a small number of retainers as bodyguards. A certain Cyneheard, hearing that the king was exposed, took the opportunity to attack him while vulnerable. Though the king fought bravely, the attackers eventually overwhelmed him. His thanes, who were unaware of the attack until they heard the screams of the woman, came upon Cyneheard's large band and were offered money and life if they left quietly. The thanes refused because they were compelled by honor to avenge their king. They fought the superior force and were all killed save one. When the main body of the king's army heard

of the ambush they rushed to the battle site and Cyneheard made them the same offer. Again it was refused. Cyneheard informed them that among his company were relatives of theirs. In response the leader of the Cynewulf's warriors said that no relative was dearer to him than the king. Cyneheard and his band were then killed.⁸³

Allegiance to one's lord and everlasting fame for valor in battle were the goals of the Anglo-Saxon warrior elite. They had no interest in passively allowing chaotic forces to overwhelm them or their society. Yet time and again the hero of the epic and the Anglo-Saxon warrior were defeated by chaos. Hroþgar warns Beowulf that:

nu is þines mægnes blæd
 ane hwile eft sona bið
 þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð
 oððe fyres feng oððe flodes wylm
 oððe gripe mecес oððe gares fliht
 oððe atol ylдо oððe eagena bearhtm
 forsitedð ond forsworcedð semninga bið.
 þæt ðec dryhtguma deað oferswyðeð (*Beowulf*, 1761b-1768)⁸⁴

His speech has many of the same elements found in *The Wanderer*. The repetition of *oððe* with its rhythmic tone drives home the point of the transience of life to the reader. It is very reminiscent of the section of *The Wanderer* where the *eardstapa* employing repetition of the comparative laments:

Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
 her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,

⁸³ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. and ed. Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 47-49.

⁸⁴ Now is the flower of your strength for awhile; afterwards it will be as soon that either illness or sword edge deprives you of strength or fire's grasp or surge of flood or bite of sword or flight of spear or dire age or the brightness of your eyes will fail and dim. Soon will death overpower you, noble warrior.

eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð! (*The Wanderer*, 108-110)⁸⁵

The Seafarer shares much of the same sentiment. When the speaker describes the transience of life he frames it in much the same way as the *Beowulf* poet:

Ic gelyfe no
 þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.
 Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð;
 adl oþþe ylðo oþþe ecghete
 fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.
 Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam æftercweþendra
 lof lifgendra lastworda betst, (*The Seafarer*, 66b-73)⁸⁶

Disease, old age or sword-hatred, no matter how strong or successful a warrior might be, death was his only certainty. Hroðgar had seen much in his life. He believed, after his long defense of the Danes, one hundred half-winters by his count, that all efforts to thwart the destruction of the world were futile. His reminiscences of past joys and present sorrows give Hroðgar some of the characteristics of an elegiac character. His lost strength and youth are a cause for his sorrow. Though *Beowulf* has restored his hall and we assume attendant joys, the audience knows that this will not last. The poet early in *Beowulf* has forewarned the audience of the sword-hatred, the betrayal that will result in the burning of Heorot. Hroðgar is a type of pre-elegiac figure. He has yet to lose everything, though the audience has been forewarned of the destruction of

⁸⁵ Here joy is transitory, here friend is transitory, here man is transitory, here strength is transitory; all this earth's foundation becomes worthless.

⁸⁶ I do not believe that earthly wealth stands forever. Always one of three things each before the final hour becomes an occasion for uncertainty: disease or old age or sword-hatred will wrest away a spirit fated to die, passing away. Therefore for each man the best thing is the praise of the living those speaking afterwards, a reputation left behind.

Heorot and his betrayal by kin. We see the how process of chaos can erode the foundation of a man's life spiraling him downward into total despair.

By the mid-eighth century, the epic tradition was in decline, if not over. I suspect that the poets of the time realized this as well. *Beowulf* has often been described as the last of the epic tradition in England. The second half of *Beowulf* makes one wonder about the attitude of the Anglo-Saxons toward the unending struggle with chaos. This section of the poem is not a celebration of the heroic ideal wherein the hero against all odds is victorious over his foe and saves his people from danger. Instead, the dragon (a chaotic figure) kills the aging, actually rather old Beowulf and the Geats vanish from the earth. Chaos is not defeated; it triumphs. Likewise in the *Battle of Maldon*, the Vikings defeat the old earl Byrhtnoð and his army.⁸⁷ What is conspicuous about both of these episodes is that old men appear to do the bulk of the fighting. Beowulf, who must have been past seventy, fought the dragon with only Wiglaf at his side. The other retainers who accompanied him to the lair, probably young men, did not assist in the battle. Byrhtwold, a thane at Maldon, was an old man but refused to leave the battlefield after his lord had fallen. His new task was to rally the troops who, like the two young men who fled the field earlier, were losing heart. Old warriors at the forefront of the battle calls to mind the elegiac lament of the aging of the world and the decline of the kings:

⁸⁷ I am aware that the battle of Maldon is a record of an actual event. However it was dramatized and as such represents more than just a report of a lost battle.

Blæd is gehnæged,
 eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,
 swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.
 Ylde him on fareð, onsyn blacað,
 gomelfeax gnornað, wat his iuwine,
 æþelunga bearn, eorþan forgiefene. (*The Seafarer*, 88b-93)⁸⁸

The flower of earth's nobility is dying. If we couple this loss with the unrelenting destruction of man's works, it is evident that for the Anglo-Saxons the end of the world was nigh.

The decline of the epic tradition and the warrior culture are in part the result of the conversion of England to Christianity. The culture of honor and shame, the foundation of the warrior culture, were in conflict with the emergent and now well-accepted Christian culture of guilt.⁸⁹ Christian culture is based on the responsibility of the individual and is quite comfortable with solitary existence. Pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture, however, found the idea of isolation abhorrent. The individual's self-identity was based on the opinions of others. A man's worth depended on his heroism in battle, his ability to fulfill boasts and as a member of his *comitatus*.⁹⁰ Yet within the genre of elegy as with epic, there is a certain ambiguity toward the Christian faith. The Anglo-Saxons of the eighth century were in a period of transition. The new Christian faith and its attendant cultural changes were blending with the old pagan

⁸⁸ Glory is humbled, the earth's nobility grows old and withers, as now each man through out middle-earth. Old age overtakes him appearance grows pale, gray-headed mourns, he knows his friend of former days, the son of a prince, gave up the earth.

⁸⁹ Gwendolyn Morgan, "Essential Loss: Christianity and Alienation in Anglo-Saxon Elegies," *In Geardagum: Essays on Old and Middle English* 11 (1990): 17-18.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 16.

ways, but complete syncretism had not yet occurred. As such there were still odd mixings of traditions. One need only look at the random references to God and Biblical events in *Beowulf* to ascertain that there were inconsistencies in belief. For example, Hroðgar, an otherwise virtuous pagan, speaks of the Christian God at times.

Thus when he views the hand of Grendel, Hroðgar exclaims:

ðisse ansyne alwealdan þanc
lungre gelimpe fela ic laþes gebad
grynna æt grendle. A mæg God wyrcean
wunder æfter wundre wuldres hyrde. (*Beowulf*, 928-931)⁹¹

Moreover, these disparities were not restricted to secular poetry of the period.

Obvious Biblical works such as *Exodus* cast the Jews as seafarers and warriors who fight their way out of Egypt.⁹² For example,

æfter þære fyrde flota modgade,
Rubenes sunu. Randas bæron
sæwicingas ofer sealtne mersc,
manna menio; micel angetrum
eode unforht. (*Exodus*, 331-335a)⁹³

Likewise, Judith is portrayed like an epic warrior when she displays an almost savage satisfaction after she slays Holofernes and rallies her troops to battle.

Hæfde ða gefohten foremærne blæd
Iudith æt guðe, swa hyre god uðe,

⁹¹ For this sight come forth straightaway, thank the Ruler of All! I experienced much hateful grief from Grendel; ever is God able to work wonder after glory, the Shepherd of the world.

⁹² Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Myth Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 76-77.

⁹³ After that army, the sailors, Ruben's sea-vikings, bore shields over the salt sea, a multitude of men, a mighty host went fearless; Text is from George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931).

swegles ealdor, (*Judith*, 122-124a)⁹⁴

Similar inconsistencies are found in the elegy, specifically *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Resignation* and *The Riming Poem*. These poems reference God and have as their goal a journey to him, but never are fully able to shed their love of the world and community. I believe that the mix of epic with elegiac genre tills the ground, as it were, for the on going mix of Christian tradition with the pagan Anglo-Saxon culture. By the mid-eighth century the unification of the traditions was well advanced but had yet to reach the sophisticated theological maturity that it would have by the tenth and eleventh centuries as manifest in such writers as Ælfric and Wulfstan.

The incomplete syncretism of pagan and Christian culture is represented pictorially on the Franks Casket. Crafted in Northumbria, it has been dated to the early eighth century. Pictured on the front panel are two scenes that illustrate the ambivalence of belief at that time. On the left is the episode of Weland's revenge. The evil King Nithad had captured the minor god, and during his imprisonment had the smith hamstrung to prevent his escape. As revenge Weland kills the two sons of his captor and makes goblets from their skulls. He then serves a drink to the dead boys' father in one of the skull cups. This scene is juxtaposed with the adoration of the Magi (see appendix 1). The casket scene may express an incomplete acceptance of Christianity by the Anglo-Saxons or it may represent a sign that the old faith is being replaced by the new. On the left, Weland gives a cruel, ironic gift to the king.

⁹⁴ Then had Judith gained by fighting illustrious glory in battle, as God granted to her, the King of heaven. Text is from B.J. Timmer, *Judith*, (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1966).

On the adjacent panel, the *magi* give gifts to the new redeemer God. Jesus, the loving God, replaces the savage, vengeful god of pagan myth. Typologically it may also represent the Savior replacing the harsh Old Testament God.

It is in the elegiac tradition that the pre-Christian and Christian worlds are able to find some common ground. A key feature of the elegy is that it looks for some consolation in a world that has, for the speaker, become filled with grief. A purely Christian tradition would have the speaker of the poem, after lamenting his lost earthly joys, look forward to the future and to discard as meaningless the past, transitory world. This, however, is not the case for most of the elegies.⁹⁵ Neither the wife nor the husband seeks anything more than a return to the joyful conditions that they had before their separation happened. The speaker of *Deor* misses what has been taken away and simply expects that fate will change and he may have what was lost restored. There is no hint of salvation or desire to leave this world in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. The *eardstapa* of *The Wanderer* knows that all is transitory on earth yet he misses all that is gone. There is no concern for salvation of the soul or forgiveness of sins. All of the elegies lament the transitory nature of the world and look back at lost joys. Yet most expect Fortune's wheel to swing around again and return to them, if not to what was lost, then a happier set of conditions. Fate was inexorable. The Anglo-Saxons who wrote the elegies simply learned to accept what *wyrð* had given to them and to endure it.

⁹⁵ The speaker in *Resignation* has little fondness for the transitory world.

Christianity offered to the elegiac an alternate resolution to their poetry. For the pagan, life is a series of cycles whether it is the seasons, or the fortunes of man or the resurgence of chaos into the world. One must endure in this life what fate has given to each man. Christians conceived of time and the history of the world as linear. All things are wending their way to a conclusion, which for Christians is the last judgment and the prospect of heaven. The suffering exile on earth can look forward to salvation in the afterlife if he follows the Christian faith. To resurrect King Edwin's bird once again, Christianity offered to the Anglo-Saxon's philosophy something that was lacking, an answer to what reward would come after bravely enduring the chaos of the world.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bede. A History of the English Church and People. Translated by Leo Sherley-Price. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993.

Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy. Translated by Richard Green. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962.

Klaeber, Fr. Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1950.

Krapp, George Philip. The Junius Manuscript. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931.

Muir, Bernard J. The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry. Vol.1 Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994

Pope, John C. Seven Old English Poems. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966.

Timmer, B.J. Judith. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1966.

Whitelock, Dorothy, ed. Sermo Lupi ad Anglos Quando Dani Maxime Persecuti Sunt Eos. Quod Fuit Anno Millesimo XIII Ab Incarnatione Domini Nostri Iesu Christi. London: Methuen, 1963.

Literature Cited

Attenborough, F. L. The Laws of the Earliest English Kings. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963.

Benson, Larry D. "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 81 (1966): 334-341.

Bjork Robert E., and Anita Obermeier. "Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences." In A Beowulf Handbook, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, 13-34. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Brodeur, Arthur G. The Art of Beowulf. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.

Camargo, Martin. "The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in *Beowulf*." *Studies in Philology* 78 (1981): 120-134.

Campbell, James The Anglo-Saxons. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Carver, Martin. Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings? Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Chance, Jane. Woman as Hero in Old English Literature. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986.

Chadwick, H. Munro. "The Heroic Age, An Excerpt." In An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson, 23-34. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980.

Cross, James "On the Allegory in the Seafarer-Illustrative Notes." *Medium Ævum* 28 (1959): 104-106.

Davis, Craig R. Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

de Lacy, Paul "Thematic and Structural Affinities: *The Wanderer* and *Ecclesiastes*." *Neophilologus* 82 (1998): 125-137.

Douglas, Mary. Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

DuBois, Thomas A. Nordic Religions in the Viking Age. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Earl, James W. "Transformation of Chaos: Immanence and Transcendence in *Beowulf* and other Old English Poetry." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10:3 (Sept 1987): 164-185.

Fell, Christine. "Perceptions of Transience," in The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, 172-189. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991

Foley, John Miles. Traditional Oral Epic: The *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Gilles, Sealy Ann "Ne ... to' Sequences in Old English and Old Irish, with Special Attention to *the Wanderer*." In Voices in Translation: The Authority of 'Olde Bookes' in Medieval Literature, ed. D. M. Sinnreich-Levi, Gayle Sigal and Allen Mandelbaum, 53-68. New York: AMS, 1992.

Gordon, I.L. "Traditional Themes in "*The Wanderer and The Seafarer*." *Review of English Studies* n.s. 5 (1954): 1-13.

Green, Martin "Man, Time and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*." In Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 281-302. New York: Garland, 1994.

Greenfield, Stanley B. A Critical History of Old English Literature. London: University of London Press, 1966.

Greenfield, Stanley B. "The Old English Elegies," In Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature, ed. E. G. Stanley, 142-175. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966.

Greenfield, Stanley B. "Sylf, Seasons, Structure and Genre in *The Seafarer*." In Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 231-249. New York: Garland Publishing, 1994.

Hill, David. The Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Howe, Nicholas. Migration and Myth Making in Anglo-Saxon England New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Kiernan, Kevin. Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981.

Klinck, Anne L. The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.

Leslie, Roy F. Three Old English Elegies: The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message and The Ruin. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966.

Liuzzi, Roy Michael. "On the Dating of *Beowulf*." In Beowulf: Basic Readings, ed. Peter S. Baker, 281-302. New York, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995.

Lord, Albert B. The Singer of Tales. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Lucy, Sam. The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England. Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 2000.

Magennis, Hugh. Images of Community in Old English Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Magoun, Francis P. Jr. "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry." *Speculum* 28 (1953) 446-457; reprint, An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism ed. Lewis E. Nicholson, 189-222. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980.

Major, C. Tidmarsh. "A Christian *wyrd*: Syncretism in *Beowulf*." *English Language Notes* 32 (March 1995): 1-10.

Mac Lean, Douglas "The Dating of the Ruthwell Cross." In The Ruthwell Cross, ed. Brendan Cassidy, 49-70. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Mora, María José "The Invention of the Old English Elegy." *English Studies* 76:2 (1995): 129-139.

Morgan, Gwendolyn "Essential Loss: Christianity and Alienation in Anglo-Saxon Elegies," In Geardagum: Essays on Old and Middle English 11 (1990): 15-33.

Newton, Sam. The Origins of Beowulf and the pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993.

Richards, Mary P. and B. Jane Stanfield, "Concepts of Anglo-Saxon Women in the Laws." In New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, ed. Helen

Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, 89-99. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Robinson, Fred C. Beowulf and the Appositive Style. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985.

Rogers, H.L. "Beowulf's Three Great Fights." *Review of English Studies* 6 (1955) 339-355; reprinted An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson, 233-256. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980.

Rosenthal, Joel T. "Marriage and the blood feud in 'heroic' Europe." *The British Journal of Sociology* 16 (1966): 133-144.

Russom, Geoffrey R. "Artful Avoidance of the Useful Phrase in *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Fates of the Apostles*." *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978) 371-390.

Saunders, Corinne J. The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993)

Shippey, T. A. Old English Verse. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1972.

Sisam, Kenneth. The Structure of Beowulf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Sklute, L. John. "Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry." In New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, 204-210. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Smithers, G.V. "The Meaning of *the Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*." *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957): 137-153

Smithers, G.V. "The Meaning of *the Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* (continued)." *Medium Ævum* 28 (1959): 1-22.

Stenton, Frank Anglo-Saxon England. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Stevick, Robert D. "Christian Elements and the Genesis of *Beowulf*." *Modern Philology* 61(2) (Nov 1963): 79-89.

Tacitus, Caius Cornelius The Germania and Agricola. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1856.

Timmers, B.J. "The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry." *English Studies* 24 (1942): 33-44.

Toswell, M.J. "Tacitus, Old English heroic Poetry, and Ethnographic Preconceptions." In Studies in English Language and Literature 'Doubt Wisely' Papers in Honor of E.G. Stanley, ed. M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler, 493-507. London: Routledge, 1996.

Trahern, Joseph B. Jr. "Fatalism and the Millennium," in The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, 160-171. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991

Weil, Susanne "Grace under pressure: 'Hand-words,' Wyrd and Free Will in Beowulf," Pacific Coast Philology 24 (1989): 94-104.

Wentersdorf, Karl P. "*Beowulf*: The Paganism of Hrothgar's Danes," *Studies in Philology* 78:5 (1981) 91-119.

Whitelock, Dorothy "The Interpretation of The Seafarer," in Early Cultures of Northwest Europe. H.M. Chadwick Memorial Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950): 261-272.

Woolf, Rosemary. "*The Wander, The Seafarer, and the genre of Planctus*." In Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Freese, 192-207. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. Front panel of Franks Casket depicting the revenge of Weland the Smith and the adoration of the Magi.

VITA

Scott Hutcheson MacKenzie was born at Mt. Pleasant, New York on 22 January 1958. He lived in Harrison, New York until June of 1974 when his family moved to Silver Spring, Maryland. There he attended John F. Kennedy High School in Wheaton, Maryland, and received his high school diploma in 1977. Beginning at the University of Maryland in the history department he shifted his major and graduated in 1982 with a Bachelor of Science in Zoology. Upon graduation Mr. MacKenzie was employed as a molecular biologist at the National Institutes of Health, in the National Cancer Institute. In the fall of 1985 he accepted a teaching assistantship at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and began his study toward a Master of Science in Zoology. The degree was conferred in 1988.

After much reflection Mr. MacKenzie returned to the study of the Middle Ages, his intended field when a history major. He began study toward a Master of Arts in English in 2000. This degree was awarded in August 2002.

Mr. MacKenzie is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree in the department of English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.