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## **The Healing Word: Performative Speech in Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts**

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**The Healing Word:  
Performative Speech in Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
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Honor Nicole Lundt  
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## Abstract

Among the major Anglo-Saxon medical texts, the *Lacnunga* is unique. All of these documents display influences as diverse as traditional Christian authorities and the Mediterranean medical experts. However, while its contemporaries often contain tables of contents and display signs of careful editing, the *Lacnunga* lacks any recognizable structure. This disorganization has lead Cameron to compare the work to a "commonplace" book, one where its scribes could record whatever scraps of medical information passed through their hands. The "potpourri" nature of the text could suggest that it more closely resembles the practice of actual contemporary healers than its better-organized relatives.

Also unique is the *Lacnunga's* concentration of spoken language. Approximately twenty-five percent of its remedies require performative speech acts. Its closest competitor, the third volume of *Bald's Leechbook*, includes only ten percent. These remedies are prescribed in a variety of languages, including Latin (the prestige language), Old English (the common language), and a kind of nonsense speech that at times resembles both Latin and Irish. And though the *Lacnunga* does not often describe the necessary speaker of its remedies, these people range from men of the cloth to married women. This variety in its potential usership, like its disorganization, could also suggest that the *Lacnunga* is better reflective of actual Anglo-Saxon medical practice than its contemporaries.

Taken together, the disorganization and heavy inclusion of performative speech in the *Lacnunga* may better reflect the day-to-day healing practices of its particular place and time. And as such, it may illustrate a uniquely Anglo-Saxon cultural preference for "saying something" during the healing process.

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## I. Introduction

Though modern practitioners of "alternative medicine" tend to lionize the healing traditions of East Asian societies, contemporary Western culture has chosen to overlook its own healing traditions, possibly to its detriment. Though some authors have noted how "under-researched" the Anglo-Saxon canon has been in particular,<sup>1</sup> a sea change may be on the horizon. In 2015, a study was published which found a sty remedy from *Bald's Leechbook* to be effective against MRSA in a laboratory setting<sup>2</sup> (even though a different team had failed an attempt to replicate the same remedy in 2005<sup>3</sup>). This discovery made waves, even appearing in popular news sources, and it may lead to an increase in attention paid to Anglo-Saxon healing texts.<sup>4</sup>

For those whose interest in Anglo-Saxon healing texts is primarily historical or cultural, this body of work poses a particular problem in that there is little evidence of a "standard canon" where scholars might focus their energies.<sup>5</sup> A handful of major texts, including the aforementioned *Bald's Leechbook*, the *Lacnunga*, and the *Old English Herbarium*, take up much

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Watkins, Barbara Pendry, Olivia Corcoran, and Alberto Sanchez-Medina, "Anglo-Saxon Pharmacopoeia Revisited: A Potential Treasure in Drug Discovery," *Drug Discovery Today* 16, no. 23/24 (2011): 1069.

<sup>2</sup> Freya Harrison, Aled E. L. Roberts, Rebecca Gabrielska, Kendra P. Rumbaugh, Christina Lee, and Stephen P. Diggle, "A 1,000-Year-Old Antimicrobial Remedy with Antistaphylococcal Activity," *American Society for Microbiology* 6, no. 4 (2015): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Brennessel, Michael D. C. Drout, and Robyn Gravel, "A Reassessment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine," *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005):185.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Voth, "Remedies Against the Devil and Dementia: The Medical Advice in *Bald's Leechbook* Outlasted the Language in Which it was Written," *History Today* 67, no. 10 (2017): 18.

<sup>5</sup> R. M. Liuzza, "In Measure, and Number, and Weight: Writing Science," in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2013), 491.



of the scholarly attention, seemingly due in large part to their relative lengths (as opposed to stray remedies scrawled in the margins of other manuscripts). These texts all display a wide variety of root sources, including both continental and native influences, as well as both Christian and Germanic pagan understandings of disease and health.

One facet of these works which might seem out of place or irrelevant to the modern reader would be their "magical" elements, such as spoken charms, which occur in a notably high concentration in the *Lacnunga*.<sup>6</sup> Based upon the translation by Stephen Pollington, this researcher found no fewer than forty-nine instances of remedies requiring at least one speech act.<sup>7</sup> These acts could range from specific, named prayers, such as repetitions of the *Pater Noster*,<sup>8</sup> to prescribed nonsense utterances which mix Latin-inspired and native phonemes.<sup>9</sup> Other utterances reflect no clear Christian cultural practices, such as a count-down from nine to none,<sup>10</sup> and many remedies mix speech acts. According to Audrey Meaney, in terms of the ordering and inclusion of its source-remedies, the *Lacnunga* is "the most disorganized and least selective" of its contemporary healing-compilation texts,<sup>11</sup> and M. L. Cameron suggests that this disorganization is indicative of a source which would "keep alive a folk medicine which would

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<sup>6</sup> Audrey Meaney, "The Practice of Medicine in England About the Year 1000," *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 13, no. 2 (2000): 233.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plantlore, and Healing* (Cambridgeshire: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2011), 179-243.

<sup>8</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 215.

<sup>9</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 235.

<sup>10</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 231.

<sup>11</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 229.

otherwise have disappeared."<sup>12</sup> Though the *Lacnunga* is notable in its use of a wide variety of sources for its remedies, Anglo-Saxon healing practices (even in more formal sources such as the *Leechbooks*) demonstrate a wide variety of cultural influences. By comparing the *Lacnunga* to its better-organized and more formal contemporaries, such as the three volumes of *Bald's Leechbook*, the *Old English Herbarium*, and the *Peri Didaxeon*, a scholar is able to perceive a marked difference in the treatment of spoken language. The inclusion and prevalence of spoken language as an efficacious portion of the remedies in the *Lacnunga* is reflective of a vernacular Anglo-Saxon reliance on the power of the spoken word as well as the vestiges of contemporary cultural paganism.

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<sup>12</sup> M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 35.

## II. The *Lacnunga*

The *Lacnunga* exists in a single manuscript (London, British Library, MS Harley 585).<sup>13</sup> Estimated dates of writing range from the late tenth to early eleventh centuries A.D.<sup>14</sup> The manuscript, which originally had no title, was given the name *Lacnunga* by T. O. Cockayne in the 1860s; though most modern authors translate the title to mean "Remedies",<sup>15</sup> Cockayne himself translates the word as "Recipes."<sup>16</sup> He published the first modern edition of the work in the third volume of his *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*. This series also includes all three volumes of *Bald's Leechbook*, the *Old English Herbarium*, and the *Peri Didaxeon*. In 1952, Grattan and Singer published an edition of the *Lacnunga* in *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, which Meaney calls "equally unsatisfactory in different ways" to Cockayne's edition (due largely to linguistic issues).<sup>17</sup> There are also two modern editions, one by Edward Pettit in 1996, and one by Stephen Pollington in 2011. The precise number of remedies varies from edition to edition. Cockayne, for instance, numbers the remedies from one to one hundred and eighteen,<sup>18</sup> whereas Pollington counts one hundred and ninety-four.<sup>19</sup> This

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<sup>13</sup> László Sándor Chardonens., "An Arithmetical Crux in the Woden Passage in the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm*," *Neophilologus* 93 (2009): 691.

<sup>14</sup> R. A. Buck, "Woman's Milk in Anglo-Saxon and Later Medieval Medical Texts," *Neophilologus* 96 (2012): 468.

<sup>15</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 229.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never Before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country Before the Norman Conquest III* (London: Longman, 1864-1866): 3.

<sup>17</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 229.

<sup>18</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms III*, 77.

discrepancy is due to inconsistent formatting and unclear divisions between some remedies. In the original manuscript, early remedies begin with a large, colored letter,<sup>20</sup> while later remedies start with a large, black leading letter or no special letter at all.<sup>21</sup> Other differences are due solely to editorial preference. Pollington's edition will be drawn on in this work for translation, and his numbering of individual remedies will be used throughout.

According to Pollington, "at least two hands have been detected in the writing" of the *Lacnunga*.<sup>22</sup> Cameron notes that the "first two-thirds are in a single hand, a second hand taking over in the middle of a page."<sup>23</sup> This second scribe was both more likely to make mistakes than the first, and also more likely to render originally Latin remedies in Latin, as opposed to translating them into English (e.g., remedies 191-194). Considering Cameron's attribution of the work to "non-medical" compilers,<sup>24</sup> the number of remedies requiring the intervention of clergymen (e.g., remedies 29, 63, and 145) through the singing of mass or prayer, and the ready access of clergymen to writing materials, it is possible that the scribes of the *Lacnunga* may have been both the writers of the work and among the intended practitioners of the remedies found therein.

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<sup>19</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 243.

<sup>20</sup> "Harley MS 585," *British Library*, accessed June 25, 2019, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley\\_ms\\_585\\_f130r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_585_f130r), 130r-130v.

<sup>21</sup> "Harley MS 585," 160r-163v.

<sup>22</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 70.

<sup>23</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 34.

The *Lacnunga* has two primary features that distinguish it from other Anglo-Saxon medical texts: its notable lack of organization, and its inclusion of Germanic vernacular "folk" materials. It is these two cardinal features which will serve as the foundation for the examination of the spoken-word elements found within the *Lacnunga* and its contemporaries.

### A. (Dis)organization

The dozens of remedies found within the *Lacnunga* are collected with little discernible regard for topical order or other organizational practice. While a lack of organization could be characterized as a somewhat subjective trait, the scholarly consensus would seem to be that the *Lacnunga* is a "messier" text than its contemporaries. For instance, Buck describes the *Lacnunga* as "lack[ing] any organizational design or master plan for the entire text."<sup>25</sup> Talbot calls the work a "rambling collection"<sup>26</sup> and a "not so much a treatise on medicine as a commonplace-book."<sup>27</sup> Cameron points out that the text eschews the "traditional arrangement of head-to-foot order" of its remedies after approximately the first twenty entries (in a work of nearly two hundred entries).<sup>28</sup> For example, remedies for "cough" ("*hwostan*") can be found both at the beginning of the text<sup>29</sup> and near the very end,<sup>30</sup> with no regard for their respective contexts. In even sharper contrast, two of the remedies for toothache are presented in starkly different

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<sup>25</sup> R. A. Buck, "Women's Milk," 468.

<sup>26</sup> C. H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London: Oldbourne, 1967): 23.

<sup>27</sup> Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 182-183.

<sup>30</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 238-239.

ways in the text; the first appears near the beginning and is meant to treat "*toðece*,"<sup>31</sup> while the latter appears shortly before the end and is meant to treat "*dolorem dentium*."<sup>32</sup> These examples would seem to indicate a certain lack of planning in its composition.

By contrast, other contemporary healing texts display extensive planning on the part of their compilers. Both of the first two volumes of *Bald's Leechbook* feature detailed tables of contents which list the remedies found therein by which malady each remedy is meant to address.<sup>33</sup> In many instances, the compiler even goes so far as to tell the number of different remedy options the text will provide for the listed malady (e.g. "Leechdoms for heart wark. Five receipts").<sup>34</sup> *Bald's Leechbook III* also includes a table of contents, but it does not provide as much detail about the number of remedies found therein. Rather, it exists as a fairly solid block of text which lists the maladies a healer might be able to treat using the volume.<sup>35</sup> The *Old English Herbarium* includes a highly-detailed table of contents. Its organizing principle reflects its primary focus on plants; unlike the three volumes of *Bald's Leechbook*, the *Herbarium* orders its remedies by plant, and then secondarily lists the uses of each.<sup>36</sup> Finally, while the *Peri Didaxeon* does not include a table of contents, it does loosely follow what Cameron calls the

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<sup>31</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 186-187.

<sup>32</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never Before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country Before the Norman Conquest II* (London: Longman, 1864-1866): 1-17, 158-175.

<sup>34</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 300-305.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies: The Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 119-138.

"traditional. . .head-to-foot order."<sup>37</sup> Many of the early remedies deal with maladies of the head, and as the work progresses, it deals with issues of lower body parts, such as the throat and, later still, the chest cavity.<sup>38</sup>

Though these works exhibit evidence of differing logic in their organizing principles, all show signs of thoughtful planning. In a time when all books had to be painstakingly handwritten on sheets of bound vellum, it would have been somewhat difficult to "add in" a table of contents after the manuscript was finished, and quite difficult to reorder entries after they had been recorded. As a result, the compiler(s) (especially those who were not directly translating from another whole work) would have to carefully choose and arrange the remedies they wished to include, which would leave much room for potential scrutiny and oversight. After all, if an authority figure would find material he did not wish to be included, those artifacts would be easy to remove before they were ever copied.

The *Lacnunga*, on the other hand, lacks both a table of contents and any kind of clear organizing principle. Pollington and others have used this lack of organizational cohesion to argue that the *Lacnunga* is essentially a "commonplace book, a kind of compendium of scraps of information" and that it may have been intended to be no "more than a private collection of jottings of various recipes and cures, as they came to hand, in one location."<sup>39</sup> Meaney argues that it "is probably best considered as a fair copy of all the medical material gathered in a

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<sup>37</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms III*, 83-145.

<sup>39</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 72.

scriptorium, where it was written down without any discarding or sorting."<sup>40</sup> Cameron describes its contents as "showing no evidence of arrangement or of informed choice, what we may call folk medicine at its lowest level,"<sup>41</sup> and it records what Meaney refers to as "folkloric material, which would otherwise be lost"<sup>42</sup> alongside material from sources as high as traditional Christian authorities. Furthermore, Rubin argues that the *Lacnunga* is an "inferior medical work . . . rich in heathen rites and folklore practices. . . it also contains sections which will show Christian influences and traditions, but these are of a superficial kind and do not suggest any significant, long-standing or deeply held religious beliefs."<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note that scholars such as Rubin seem to conflate a lack of organization and "heathen" influences with an inherent lack of quality in comparison to other Anglo-Saxon healing texts. Taken collectively, these authors suggest that the disorganization and variety of remedies found within the work would suggest that it was a kind of catch-all text or commonplace book, which would allow it to serve as a depository of materials both sanctioned and unsanctioned by the church.

The mixed nature of its materials is curious and would seem almost contradictory, considering its likely venue of origin. The number of remedies requiring the involvement of clergymen (such as those requiring mass), as well as the unique availability of certain plants in "monastic herb gardens," could indicate that remedies were meant to be used in a religious

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<sup>40</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 231.

<sup>41</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 231.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine* (London: David & Charles, 1974), 62.



environment.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, remedies 169-171, all of which require a married woman to speak on her own behalf, would suggest that lay people were another possible target audience. Though the book was almost certainly produced in a monastic scriptorium, the density of "folk" material in the *Lacnunga* would also indicate that it was created with relatively little oversight from those who might censor its more pagan-inspired contents. It is also possible that those who might choose to censor such content would be those removed from the day-to-day experiences and practices of actual healers, including those found within religious institutions, making their concerns of little consequence. The variety and density of such material, combined with the rambling nature of the work overall, would seem to label the *Lacnunga* as a collection of "folk" or "vernacular" medicine, particularly in comparison to more formal sources; as such, it may represent more closely the ways in which contemporary healers actually practiced medicine.

## **B. Vernacular Folk Medicine**

The second primary distinctive feature of the *Lacnunga* is its unusual concentration of Germanic, vernacular folk material. These artifacts—those which most likely sprang from native Anglo-Saxon sources and which would be passed down orally before being recorded—are here distinguished from those sources, written or spoken, which would not be native to the Anglo-Saxons. Non-native sources would not necessarily be more erudite than vernacular sources or even in agreement with one another. Those remedies might have roots as divergent as the literary traditions of the classical medical experts (e.g., Galen and Hippocrates) and common religious practices (e.g., those which require mass or appeals to Christ). It is also possible that some foreign remedies might have sources in the folk traditions of those places. The goal here is to

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<sup>44</sup> Linda E. Voigts, "Anglo-Saxon Plant Remedies and the Anglo-Saxons," *Isis* 70, no. 2 (1979): 264.

identify what is specifically-vernacular "folk medicine" by isolating that which cannot be: namely, those remedies drawn from continental sources.

### 1. Influence of Christianity

The first type of non-vernacular healing practice can be found in appeals to Christianity. One of the strongest supporters of the non-vernacular is Ælfric of Eynsham, a widely-read contemporary homilist whose primary interest was in "eliminat[ing] anything 'heathen' from contemporary life."<sup>45</sup> In his "The Passion of St. Bartholomew the Apostle," he says:

The wise Augustine said, that it is not perilous, though any one eat a medicinal herb; but he reprehends it as an unallowed charm, if any one bind those herbs on himself, unless he lay them on a sore. Nevertheless we should not set our hope in medicinal herbs, but in the Almighty Creator, who has given that virtue to those herbs. No man shall enchant a herb with magic, but with God's words shall bless it, and so eat it.

*(Se wisa Augustinus cwæð, þæt unpleolic sy þeah hwá læce-wyrte ðicge; ac þæt hé tæld to unalyfedlicere wíglunge, gif hwá ða wyrta on him becnitte, buton he hí to ðam dolge gelecge. Þeah-hwæðere ne sceole we urne hiht on læce-wyrtum besettan, ac on ðone Ælmihtigan Scyppend, þe ðam wyrtum ðone cræft forgeaf. Ne sceal nan man mid galdre wyrte besingan, ac mid Godes wordum hí gebletsian, and swa ðicgan.)<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Audrey L. Meaney, "Extra-Medical Elements in Anglo-Saxon Medicine," *Social History of Medicine* 24, no. 1 (2011): 41.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric. In the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version, Volume I*, (London: Richard and John E. Taylor, 1844), 476-477.

Here Ælfric allows for the consumption of herbal remedies (so long as the users recognize that the plants come from God), but he forbids binding herbs on the skin, except in the case of skin conditions, such as sores. This prohibition would discount many remedies throughout the *Lacnunga*, such as number 21, which prescribes binding herbs to the skin of patients who have a sweating disease. Ælfric also allows for (and encourages) the blessing of herbs with prayer, but forbids "enchant[ing an] herb with magic," as one must do in the first portion of the Nine Herbs Charm (number 79) by calling on mugwort and other herbs as entities unto themselves.

Ælfric's prohibition against binding herbs or appeals to powers other than the Christian God would obviously not agree with either certain remedies from classical sources or a fair number of remedies found within the *Lacnunga* and other contemporary texts. However, because Ælfric was so widely read ("more than 50 manuscripts containing parts of his works survive"<sup>47</sup>), it would seem likely that the local ecclesiastical authorities would be familiar with such prohibitions. At the very least, those in charge of the monasteries where works such as the *Lacnunga* were gathered and recorded would have been familiar with and respectful of Augustine's opinions, which Ælfric cites. However, the presence of materials which would seemingly disregard Ælfric's teachings may suggest that those who practiced medicine, ecclesiastical or not, chose not to follow such prohibitions.

Many remedies in the *Lacnunga* do follow the rules Ælfric describes.<sup>48</sup> Even so, many others involve: the direct topical application of various mixtures for non-skin conditions;<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Meaney, "Extra-Medical Elements in Anglo-Saxon Medicine," 42.

<sup>48</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 218-219, 242-243.

appeals to entities other than God;<sup>50</sup> and recitations that can best be described as "charms," as in the case of the woman who attempts to pass her ill-luck along with the wool she used to cover the grave of her dead child.<sup>51</sup> Essentially, much of the text of the *Lacnunga* flies in the face of religious authority figures like Ælfric. If Meaney's assertion that his intention was to eliminate the "heathen" practices found among his contemporaries,<sup>52</sup> it would seem that those practices which run afoul of his prohibitions would have been considered artifacts of their former, "heathen" ways. Because the *Lacnunga* features remedies both approved and disapproved by those in Ælfric's camp, it likely represents a more complete portrayal of contemporary medical thought and the ways healers, both ecclesiastical and lay, actually practiced medicine, as compared to better-organized (and, presumably, better-controlled) healing texts.

## 2. Influence of Classical Sources

Less prevalent than references to Christianity in the *Lacnunga* are artifacts of classical healing. As with other contemporary sources, the remedies included exhibit what Liuzza calls a "deference to textual authority" which is "enhanced by antiquity."<sup>53</sup> This assertion is referencing the tendency of medieval authors to assign utmost importance the opinions of well-known and respected authors (as compared to the modern value placed on confirming scientific knowledge through repetitive testing, which was obviously not a concept in place in contemporary

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<sup>49</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 184-185, 222-223.

<sup>50</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>51</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>52</sup> Meaney, "Extra-Medical," 41.

<sup>53</sup> Liuzza, "In Measure, and Number, and Weight: Writing Science," 476.

discourse). The *Lacnunga* is less reliant on such respected authors (usually classical writers) than other contemporary healing texts, such as the *Old English Herbarium*, which makes frequent, direct classical references.<sup>54</sup> Rather, the text reflects the Anglo-Saxon tendency to adapt those remedies and concepts which native healers found useful, and ignoring those other writings which they did not value. For example, Cameron asserts in reference to the *Lacnunga* and *Bald's Leechbook I-III*, "the Anglo-Saxon physician did not take over in its entirety from his Mediterranean sources the theory of the imbalance of the four humours as a cause of illness, but rather assumed that 'harmful humours' . . . were at times causative factors in illness."<sup>55</sup> Essentially, Anglo-Saxon healers were somewhat beholden to the opinions of the continental medical authorities. However, these practitioners did not accept all such ideas as whole cloth, instead picking and choosing what seemed good to them and combining such ideas with local wisdom. The examples of continental medical practice in the *Lacnunga* reflect this tension between respect for the original sources and the decision to only adopt that which seems useful.

Mediterranean medicine appears in several remedies throughout the *Lacnunga*. The clearest example of the transfer of classical medical philosophy can be found in remedy 180. This remedy, meant to address a cough ("*hwostan*"), explains the origin of the malady by saying, "The cough has a manifold arrival, as the sweats are of various kinds; sometimes it comes from excessive heat, sometimes from excessive cold, sometimes from excessive wetness, sometimes from excessive dryness" ("*Se hwosta hæfð mænigfealdne tocyne, swa ða swat beoð missenlicu, hwilum he cymð of ungemætfæstre hæto, hwilum of ungemetfæstum cyle, hwilum of ungemætlicre*

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<sup>54</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 160, 166, 186.

<sup>55</sup> M. L. Cameron, "Bald's *Leechbook* and Cultural Interactions in Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990): 12.

*wætan, hwilum of ungemætlicre drignesse*").<sup>56</sup> This explanation, founded in the balance of heat and cold, wet and dry, is one of the most foundational logics of an understanding of health centered around the "humours."<sup>57</sup>

Though such a direct, humours-based explanation does not appear again in the *Lacnunga*, the logic of that style of medicine does appear in other places. In remedy 189, for instance, instructions are given against bloodletting ("*for nanre neode ne mannes ne neates blod sy to wanienne*")—a traditional method of balancing the aforementioned humours—on certain "dangerous days" ("*plihlice dagas*").<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that the *Lacnunga* does not spend time considering the philosophies behind bloodletting-based remedies; rather, the fingerprints of humours-based medicine are present without including explicit examinations of the thought processes behind such remedies. Even so, Remedies 180 and 189 both show clear continental influences.

Though both of these remedies reference and build on continental concepts, neither of them are purely founded in that framework. While the scribe found the cause of cough important enough to include in the text of remedy 180,<sup>59</sup> that same malady was addressed in remedy 11 without any explanation of its causes.<sup>60</sup> The scribes did not find the continental explanation for

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<sup>56</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 238-239.

<sup>57</sup> *Women's Writing in Middle English*, ed. Alexandra Barratt (London: Routledge, 2010), 27.

<sup>58</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 240-241.

<sup>59</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 238-239.

<sup>60</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 182-183.

the cough important enough to seek out to include it in the first remedy that addresses this problem, but they found that information important enough to keep once it appeared in the source text for remedy 180. In the instance of remedy 189, the concept of bloodletting is accepted as a proper curative technique without context or explanation. However, that belief is combined with the concept that if bloodletting occurs on improper days (or if one is born or eats gooseflesh), the result will be death ("*his lif geænðað*").<sup>61</sup> Both of these examples accept concepts from Mediterranean medicine (i.e., the efficacy of bloodletting, or the concept of the imbalance of heat/cold/wet/dry). However, those concepts are wedded with ideas from outside of that logic system, as was evidently the preference of contemporary healing practitioners.

### 3. Cultural Paganism

The text of the *Lacnunga* begs the question: if learned scholars would be more likely to respect the prohibitions of Augustine and the sage advice of classical healers, why does this particular text include so many remedies that deviate from both of these standards? The simple answer would seem to be that actual contemporary healers did not limit themselves to the artificial categories imposed by this study. As previously stated, there is a general belief among contemporary scholars that the *Lacnunga* functioned as a kind of "commonplace-book"<sup>62</sup> and that the text reflects whatever scraps of paper or stray remedies passed through the scribes' hands.<sup>63</sup> Anglo-Saxon healers were using and sharing remedies that combined what (to their view) was the best of all that was available to them, whether or not those methods would be

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<sup>61</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 240-241.

<sup>62</sup> Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 231.

approved-of by learned locals, and it would seem that the contemporary clergy, even if they did not approve, would at least turn a blind eye. As Kieckhefer argues, "early medieval clerics [those from the ninth to eleventh centuries] approved magic for largely pragmatic reasons. . . [magic is] an expression of desire that has psychological efficacy. . . it serves as an emotional outlet and means of emotional support for the practitioner, the client, or both."<sup>64</sup> Though this researcher would like to use the term "magic" advisedly, she would argue that this pragmatic bleed-over of vernacular, Germanic Pre-Christian practices created a profound impact on the remedies preserved in the *Lacnunga*. These fragments of non-continental remedies are those which are here referred to as artifacts of specifically-Germanic "vernacular medicine."

The remedies in the *Lacnunga* reflect the combination of sources which the contemporary Anglo-Saxons chose to draw upon, and those choices reflect what Thomas D. Hill refers to as "cultural paganism."<sup>65</sup> This concept describes the desire of Christian people to seek comfort and solve problems through following the letter of Christian law when possible, while simultaneously addressing these issues using pre-Christian thinking. Hill talks extensively about the blending of Germanic folk culture and Christian culture in his article, "The Rod of Protection and the Witches' Ride: Christian and Germanic Syncretism in Two Old English Metrical Charms." In discussing the position of paganism in Anglo-Saxon life, Hill says, "[If] by 'paganism' one simply means those aspects of the culture and literature of the Anglo-Saxon peoples which were to one degree or another significantly influenced by pre-Christian religious

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (1994): 825.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas D. Hill, "The Rod of Protection and the Witches' Ride: Christian and Germanic Syncretism in Two Old English Metrical Charms," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111, no. 2 (2012): 146.



tradition and practice, then the scope of what we may define as Anglo-Saxon paganism is much broader" than that which strictly reflect specific pre-Christian religious practices.<sup>66</sup> It is this broad definition of "paganism" which is in use in this particular discussion of that which is "not-Christian" in Germanic folk culture, and this broad concept of "paganism" is what the researcher intends to examine in the discussion of Germanic folk culture.

To an even greater degree than any of its contemporary healing texts, the *Lacnunga* bears the signs of a usership heavily influenced by the pre-Christian thought processes once prevalent and accepted among the Anglo-Saxons. As the creators of a commonplace book, the scribes of the *Lacnunga* were able to include whatever remedies felt "correct" or "helpful." In doing so, they took a snapshot of the mindset of contemporary healers, as seen through the methods those same healers chose to use. Nowhere is this cross-pollination of the Christian and the Germanic pagan clearer than in the *Lacnunga's* surprising abundance of instances of performative speech.

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<sup>66</sup> Hill, "The Rod of Protection," 146.

### III. The Contents of the *Lacnunga*

The remedies recorded in the *Lacnunga* address a wide variety of maladies and every-day concerns. Meaney asserts that, "had [this book] been sorted into a user-friendly order, [it] would have been quite a reasonable collection of symptoms and diseases, and may well have reflected average living conditions."<sup>67</sup> Unlike other contemporary texts, this manuscript forgoes "the traditional arrangement of head-to-foot order."<sup>68</sup> Instead, remedies are ordered in seemingly-haphazard clumps or out of any clear grouping-order at all, and the scribes failed to provide the user with a table of contents (such as the one included in *Bald's Leechbooks*). For the purpose of this paper, these varied remedies will be organized into the following categories: remedies for general human maladies; remedies for female-specific maladies; remedies for the ailments of animals; remedies for "supernatural" threats to both humans and animals; recipes for helpful substances and generic blessings, sometimes without explicit healing-application instructions; and charms for use in explicitly non-medical situations, such as theft. Absent from this catalog are remedies for serious wounds, such as those taken in battle, congenital issues, or instructions for surgical techniques.<sup>69</sup> Because of the original text's lack of clear organizing principle, examples from each category will be drawn from various places throughout the text. The examples given will not represent an exhaustive list of all the remedies presented in the manuscript, but they are meant to represent the scope of the maladies addressed. Additionally, all

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<sup>67</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 229.

<sup>68</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 229.

numbered entries of the *Lacnunga* will henceforth be referred to as "remedies," though not all entries deal explicitly with medical treatment.

### **A. Remedies for General Human Maladies**

The first category, remedies for general human maladies, is by far the largest and contains the widest variety of recipes. The majority of these deal with internal complaints. Many recipes address common aches and pains, such as headache ("*heafodwraece*") (1-3), toothache ("*toðece*") (22), and pain in the knee ("*cneowærce*") (36), as well as remedies for body-pains and inflammation ("*wið heafordwærce 7 wið liðwyrce 7 wið eahwyrce 7 wið wenne 7 wið ðeore*") (49).<sup>70</sup> Though dealing with similar problems, these remedies call for a variety of different responses ranging from singing a song in nonsense near-Latin to cure a toothache (22) to the creation of a salve to be rubbed onto the sufferer's body (49). Two remedies, for a cough (150) and indigestion (156), respectively, require the practitioner to sprinkle a powder onto a liquid to be consumed by the patient. Four consecutive remedies for diarrhea (38-41) all call for the consumption of mixed and heated herbs with food and drink bases (i.e., honey, hen's eggs, flour, and/or milk). One cure (121) also calls for a period of fasting followed by drinking plant-material boiled in milk as a treatment for asthma. For insomnia ("*wip þæt man ne mæge slapan*"), the text prescribes applying a paste to the head (157). While many remedies in this category require either speech or the application or consumption of medicines, some remedies, such as one for internal swelling ("*Gif se mon sy innan forswollen*"), involve both a speech act (in this case, into the patient's mouth) and also the consumption of a remedy (67).

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<sup>70</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 194-195.

Along with the internal and invisible maladies addressed by the *Lacnunga* are a range of external issues. One issue for which the text gives multiple remedies is "eruptions and blains" ("*omum 7 blegnum*") (95-106). As with the internal issues, these remedies take several forms: Latin prayer (95); the application of mixtures of foodstuffs, herbs, and/or animal products (the least pleasant of which is arguably cattle dung) (96-105); and washing (106). Another external malady, lice, could be treated either internally through the ingestion of a remedy (131, 137-139) or externally by a salve (130, 136). Topical remedies are also recommended for eye issues such as a "*poc*" (32, 37), while remedies for rashes (in one case, for both horses and humans) prescribe sung prayer in both genuine and nonsense Latin (176-177). In general, there does not seem to be a clear correlation between the type of malady addressed (whether internal, external, visible, or invisible) and the type of remedy prescribed (spoken, ingested, and/or applied topically).

## **B. Remedies for Female-Specific Maladies**

Several remedies are for specifically feminine medical issues. One of the first is meant to treat sudden muteness in a woman ("*wið ðon ðe wif færunga adumbige*") (152) by winding up herbs in wool and "lay[ing] it under the woman" ("*alege under þæt wif*").<sup>71</sup> By contrast, the most directly analogous masculine (or possibly gender-neutral) remedy is "for a man's voice" ("*to monnes stæmne*"), which is treated through the blending of various herbs in ale, paired with eating a paste of butter, white meal, and salt.<sup>72</sup> In some cases, such as "a good morning drink against all infirmities which stir up -a man's body, within and without" ("*godne morgendrænc*

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<sup>71</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 228-229.

<sup>72</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 220-221.

*wið eallum untrumnessum þe mannes lichoman iondstyriað innan oððe utan*") (178), a single recipe is given, but the remedy calls for different specific treatments for males and females. In this case, different colors of mugwort are prescribed for each gender: red for a man, and green for a woman.<sup>73</sup>

Other remedies deal with child bearing and child rearing. Remedy 169 advises a woman who cannot bear a child: to step over a grave three times while repeating an incantation in Old English; to say another to her husband in their bed after she is pregnant; and finally, once she "feels that the child is alive" ("*gefele þæt þæt bearn si cwic*"), to go to a church and say a short phrase in Latin. The next remedy (170), which is also for a woman who cannot bear a child ("*se wifmon se hyre beran [sic.] afedan ne mæge*"), advises the woman to cover her own child's grave in black wool, to sell the wool, and then to recite a short sentence in Old English. The third remedy for this same problem ("*se wifman se ne mæge bearn afedan*") requires the woman to hold in her mouth the milk of "a cow of one colour", to spit that milk into a body of running water, and then to swallow some of that water.<sup>74</sup> She is then to recite an utterance in Old English, go to a different house than the one she went out of, and eat. It should be noted that these three remedies are somewhat unique among those included in the *Lacnunga*, as they all specify that the person who is meant to speak is a woman who is attempting to heal herself. Often, the speaker is unspecified, or, if specified, is male (as in Remedy 162). In Remedies 169-171, female patients are granted unusual agency in their own reproductive health, which would suggest that the *Lacnunga* was likely not intended for a solely ecclesiastical usership.

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<sup>73</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 236-237.

<sup>74</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 234-235.

### **C. Remedies for Maladies of Animals**

Another portion of the remedies are meant to treat different kinds of livestock. A number of these remedies are grouped together. Three remedies for cattle (140-142) prescribe, respectively: plants mixed with healing water and poured into the cattle's mouths; plants and herbs pounded together and mixed with holy water, to be fed to the cattle, combined with the smoke of burned herbs; and an extended blessing ceremony followed by tithing the cattle's monetary value. The next two remedies (143-144) are for the treatment of sheep, both of which require the administration of pounded plants and holy water, and the subsequent remedy is meant to treat a "sudden murrain of pigs" ("*wið swina færsteorfan*") (145). After a number of human-specific remedies, the *Lacnunga* turns back to those for livestock, including three for horses (161, 163-164), all of which involve spoken language, either in Latin or nonsense near-Latin, with the exclusion of any ingested medication. Additionally, the horse version of remedy 176 (which also includes instructions for human application) requires singing into the animal's left ear ("*on þæt wynstre eare*"). Other than their brief designations as animal-specific remedies, these entries are included without any significant comment or separation from human treatments, and they seem to be treated with the same importance.

### **D. Remedies for "Supernatural" Threats**

Though most of the remedies of the *Lacnunga* deal with issues that modern readers consider "medical" concerns, others address issues which would seem to stem from more "supernatural" threats. Among the first of these is remedy 29, which is prescribed "against [influence or enchantment by elves] and all temptations of the devil" ("*wið ælfsidene 7 wið*

*eallum feondes costungum*").<sup>75</sup> The solution to this particular problem is to write scripture on a "husldisce" ("paten"), wash off said writing with stream-water mixed with herbs, pour wine into the dish, bless the wine, and then use the remedy on the patient.<sup>76</sup> Others deal with "flying poison" ("*fleogendum attre*"),<sup>77</sup> which appears in several entries, including remedies 18, 81, and 133. Remedy 135 gives instructions to deal with those who have been affected by "gods' shot . . . elves' shot. . . or. . . witches' shot" ("*esa gescot. . . ylfa gescot. . . oððe. . . hægtessan gescot*"), and another describes how to heal a horse or other animal that has be "shot" ("*gescoten*").<sup>78</sup> Similarly, three remedies (87-88, 93) deal with preventing harm caused by a dwarf ("*wip dweorh*"). All three of these measures involve writing, either on the arms of the person who is in need of protection ("*writ. . . ondlang ða earmas*"),<sup>79</sup> or on "seven small sacramental wafers" ("*vii lytle oflætan*").<sup>80</sup> One also includes singing a "charm" ("*galdor*") into both of the patient's ears and also above his head.<sup>81</sup>

Remedy 63 instructs users in the creation of a "holy salve" ("*haligre sealfe*"), which involves mixing dozens of plants with butter and water, writing the names of the gospels into the butter, and then blessing the mixture in both Latin and a language that some scholars argue is a

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<sup>75</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 188-189.

<sup>76</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 188-189.

<sup>77</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 184-185.

<sup>78</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 220-221.

<sup>79</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 214-215.

<sup>80</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 216-217.

<sup>81</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 216-217.

corruption of Irish.<sup>82</sup> This salve is meant to protect the user's body "so that the devil may have no power over him" ("*ut non habeat potestatem diabolus*").<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, one remedy (189) warns against administering certain remedies, including bloodletting for a person or an animal, on three particular days annually "which we call *egyptiaci* (which is, in our language, 'dangerous days')" ("*þe we egyptiaci hatað, þæt is on ure geþeode plihtlice dagas*"), because to do so would be to risk that individual's life.<sup>84</sup> Though the text does not describe the effects of elf-shot or attack by a dwarf, but it is clear that the Anglo-Saxons who created the remedies believed the threats to be genuine and in need of address.

Remedy 80, a part of what is traditionally referred to as the "Nine Herbs Charm" or the "Pagan Lay of the Nine Herbs," is somewhat unique among the "supernatural" remedies, in that it directly addresses explicitly Germanic pagan figures and concepts.<sup>85</sup> This entry tells the story of the "nine poisons" ("*nygon attrum*"), which the remedy says came into being when a "*wyrm*" killed a man, and "then Woden took up nine glory-rods,/ struck the adder then so it flew apart into nine" ("*ða genam woden viiii wuldortanas/ sloh ða þa næddran þæt heo on viiii toflea*").<sup>86</sup> Woden then creates "these nine plants. . .against nine powerful diseases/ against nine poisons and against nine infections" ("*þas viiii wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum / wið viiii attrum 7 wið nygon onflygnum*"), which he sends "into the seven worlds" ("*on vii worolde*").<sup>87</sup> As with the

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<sup>82</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 198-199.

<sup>83</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 198-199.

<sup>84</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 240-241.

<sup>85</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 211.

<sup>86</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 212-213.

<sup>87</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 212-213.



other "supernatural" threats, the precise nature of the threat posed by the seven poisons is not expounded upon. This remedy is unique in a work where a large number of remedies involve prayers or the recitation of mass and appeals to the Christian God. Though this remedy does reference Christ, it also—without comment or critique—presents Woden as both an actor who has the ability to affect the human world and a source of medicinal plants. It goes so far as to refer to the pagan god as the "wise lord" ("*witig drihten*") and "holy in the heavens" ("*halig on heofenum*").<sup>88</sup> In essence, while several "supernatural" remedies seem to support not-explicitly-Christian concepts such as the threat of dwarves, remedy 80 would seem to ratify the concept of the power of Germanic pagan entities.

#### **E. Helpful Substances and Generic Blessings**

In addition to remedies for specific maladies, the *Lacnunga* also records a number of recipes not meant to treat any particular malady. For example, one remedy (155) is meant to be used "against every evil" ("*wið ælcum yfele*"), and is meant to be given in combination with bleeding ("*blod lætan*") and bathing ("*beþa þe þonne þa hwile*"). Other recipes include a "green salve" ("*grene sealf*"), which gives a long list of ingredients without any clear instructions for ministrations, and a mixture of milk and leaves that is good "against illness" ("*wið adle*").<sup>89</sup> So, even if the collected artifacts found within the *Lacnunga* did not provide a remedy for the specific malady a user might need, he or she would be given a handful of generic options that at least make an attempt at treatment.

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<sup>88</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 212-213.

<sup>89</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 184-185.

In addition to the generically helpful recipes of the *Lacnunga* are prayers not meant to heal any singular illness. Two of these are blessings of plants ("*BENEDICTIO HERBARVM*") which ask God "now with your blessing stoop to hallow and bless the herbs and other fruits so that to their consumers they may give health of mind and body" ("*nunc benedictione holera aliosque fructus sanctificare ac benedicere digneris ut sumentibus ex eis sanitatem conferant mentis 7 corporis*") (191) and "to bless and sanctify" ("*benedicere 7 sanctificare*") "these vegetables" ("*hec holera*") (192).<sup>90</sup> Two other blessings for ointments ("*BENEDICTIO VNGVENTVM*") appeal to God, asking that the substances "may produce health and cure against all the bodies' diseases or of its parts" ("*ut perficiat ad salutem et ad perfectionem contra omnes egritudines corporum vel omnium membrorum*") (193) and "that all faithful ones with the touch of this ointment shall be hallowed and blessed by your holy word" ("*ut sanctificentur tuo verbo sancto 7 benedicantur omnes fideles cum gustu huius unguenti*") (194).<sup>91</sup> All four of these prayers are direct appeals to the Christian God to intervene in the healing process by granting special properties to the tools of healing. Though many other remedies require similar appeals, these are somewhat unique in that they are not meant to deal with a singular medical issue. Rather, they may serve as a kind of "catch-all" for remedies that lack similar appeals for those who might wish to compile the virtues of prescribed healing practices with their faith or the power of the spoken word.

On the other hand, Remedy 79 (a part of the "Nine-Herbs Charm," which includes the mention of Woden) contains an appeal to a number of plants themselves, as opposed to an outside, divine entity. Seven plants are addressed, including: "mugwort" ("*mucgwyrt*"),

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<sup>90</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 242-243.

<sup>91</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 242-243.

"waybread" ("*wegbrade*"), "cress" ("*stune*"), "nettle" ("*stiðe*"), "atterlothe" ("*attorlape*"), "maythe" ("*mægðe*"), and "crab apple" ("*wergulu*").<sup>92</sup> In each instance, the remedy appeals to the plant's unique properties and/or cultural significance. For example, "waybread" is referred to as the "mother of plants" ("*wyrta modor*") and is asked to "withstand poison and infection" ("*wiðstonde attre 7 onflyge*"). "Nettle" is described as "the plant that fought against the serpent" ("*þis is seo wyrt seo wið wrym gefeah*") and is asked to protect users "against poison," "against infection," and "against the evil that travels around the land" ("*wið attre. . .wið onflyge. . .wið ða lapan ðe geond long ferap*").<sup>93</sup> "Maythe" is asked to "be mindful. . .of what you made known,/ of what you finished at *alorford* / so that he [the patient] never should give up his life for disease" ("*gemyne þu. . . hwæt þu ameldodest,/ hwæt ðu geændodest æt alorforda / þæt næfre foe gefloge feorh ne gesealde*").<sup>94</sup> According to Pollington, the reference to "*alorford*," which literally translates to "alder-tree ford," is one that cannot be adequately explained by surviving manuscripts.<sup>95</sup> Appeals to plants themselves do appear in other healing manuscripts (such as the *Old English Herbarium*)<sup>96</sup>, though, as with the *Lacnunga*, they are less common than appeals to members of the Trinity. Also, it should be noted that the modern translations for these plant names throughout this work are chosen by Pollington, and some do not have agreed-upon referents; the Bosworth-Toller, for instance, notes that "*stune*" has been translated at both "water-

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<sup>92</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>93</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>94</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>95</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>96</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 157.

cross" and "nettle".<sup>97</sup> However, it is not within the purview of this study to attempt to puzzle out or make uniform translations of these terms.

## F. Non-Medical Remedies

The last category of remedies are those which address explicitly non-medical issues. One of these, found between a remedy from insomnia and another for eye pain, is an entry that recommends the recitation of prayers for "when. . .your cattle are lost" ("*þonne. . .þin ceap sy losod*") (158). This charm requires the use of five unique prayers; the first is meant to be said once in Old English, and the other four are meant to be recited in Latin three times facing each of the four cardinal directions, in turn. It is possible that this particular entry was meant to be memorized ahead of time, as the first prayer is meant to be recited immediately after the owner of the cattle is told of the theft, "before you say anything else" ("*þonne cweð þu ærest ær þu elles hwæt cwepe*").<sup>98</sup> Another of these entries (146) appears within the context of several remedies for cattle, sheep, and pigs, and so it may be supposed that it is another charm against the theft of such livestock. Unlike some other remedies which include nonsense utterances, this particular entry does not feature any instructions beyond the nonsense text itself. In any case, these two entries are prime examples of non-medical speech acts which the scribes of the *Lacnunga* evidently found relevant enough to include in their text which is otherwise interested in human and animal ailments. It is possible that the inclusion of these entries among the more explicitly-medical entries is an indication of the value, both monetary and personal, of the animals. Or,

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<sup>97</sup> "Stíme," *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, accessed February 11, 2019. <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/029000>.

<sup>98</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 228-229.

perhaps, it indicates that what a modern reader would consider an indication of a person's "financial health" might have been considered more closely equivalent to his bodily health.

As previously stated, this section is not meant to be an exhaustive survey of the contents of the *Lacnunga*. Numerous generic health issues, in particular, have been excluded for the sake of brevity. A large number of these generic remedies, which take up the majority of the manuscript, contain many entries which do not require performative speech. However, by virtue of the divisions the researcher chose to illustrate the variety of types of remedies included, some of these categories, such as female-specific remedies, do include a preponderance of remedies including speech-acts. The speech-heavy aspects of these segments are not strictly reflective of the text of the *Lacnunga* as a whole (approximately 25% of all remedies include speech), but these sections are accurate within their own contexts. The purpose of this overview is to provide a window into the scope of the concerns of the scribes of the text and the variety of methods prescribed to deal with said issues.

## IV. Performative Speech

Now that the disorganization and contents of the *Lacnunga* have been thoroughly explored, the focus will shift toward what is arguably the work's most remarkable feature—the pervasive presence of performative speech. As previously stated, approximately forty-nine of Pollington's one hundred and ninety-four remedies require performative speech of some stripe. These remedies occupy approximately 25% of the text.

By examining these artifacts, several patterns begin to emerge. Because the speech acts within the *Lacnunga* are meant to have a direct effect on their environment, each one must call upon to one or more actors. The Christian God is both the most common and the one most readily acceptable to those who might heed the advice of Ælfric. Other common actors—ones which would be forbidden by those trying to reject the "heathen"—are nature and the individual (often the self). After all, to appeal to God in a time of trouble would be unremarkable (even if the simultaneous usage of herbs might be considered irregular), but to call upon a plant or an individual for the same needs could be seen as unacceptable in some circles. All three of these classes of actors are found throughout the text, occasionally in concert with one another, as the Anglo-Saxon healers seemed to use any means available to bring their patients (or themselves) relief.

Using the lens of these three actors, it becomes clear that in spite of the strong presence of cultural Christianity, other factors are at play in the choices of Anglo-Saxon healers.

### A. Comparison Texts

Before examining the performative speech of the *Lacnunga* itself, it is important to establish a "baseline" of how such speech acts were treated in similar Anglo-Saxon healing texts.

So, immediately below is provided an exploration of the uses and frequencies of performative speech in four other major healing texts: *Bald's Leechbook I-II*; *Bald's Leechbook III*; the *Old English Herbarium*; and the *Peri Didaxeon*. The first three are approximately contemporary to the *Lacnunga*, while the latter is believed to be a bit later. These texts, though similar in their general purposes, highlight the unique qualities of the *Lacnunga* in such a way that the analysis of that manuscript will be much more meaningful

The first major text, *Bald's Leechbook* (BL, Royal 12. D. xvii), contains three numbered volumes and was written around 950.<sup>99</sup> As such, it is considered the oldest of the major Anglo-Saxon medical texts. All three volumes contain highly detailed tables of contents.<sup>100</sup> Traditionally, Books I and II have been treated "as a unit, with Book III as the outsider" because the first two volumes "are apparently two halves of a single project to compile medical knowledge, whereas Book III is a later addition."<sup>101</sup> As such, Books I and II are here treated as a single entity (and their performative speech acts tabulated together), while Book III is dealt with separately.

Books I and II of *Bald's Leechbook* contain a combined total of twelve remedies requiring performative speech (ten in the first volume, and two in the second). The vast majority of these feature the Christian God as actor. Of the twelve instances of performative speech, seven

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<sup>99</sup>R. A. Buck, "Women's Milk," 467-8.

<sup>100</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 1-17, 158-175, 300-305.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Scott Nokes, "The Several Compilers of Bald's *Leechbook*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 33 (2004): 56, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.lib.utk.edu/stable/44510919>.

include specific instructions for prayer,<sup>102</sup> and three appeal to the power of God through multiple iterations of mass.<sup>103</sup> One of these (section xlv, remedy 5) is somewhat complicated by a nonsense charm which the table of contents describes as "*scyttisc*" ("Scottish").<sup>104</sup>

In the case of the remaining two remedies, the healer calls on the power of natural entities. In one (section xxxii, remedy 2), the healer takes blood which has been let and commits it to a river, saying, "*hafa þu þas unhæle/ 7 gewit aweg*" ("Have thou this unheal, and depart away with it").<sup>105</sup> In the other (section lxxxvi, number 1), a traveler who does not want to grow tired on his journey must address himself to a sprig of mugwort before plucking it.<sup>106</sup> Though the traveler must appeal to nature in this instance, the potential impression of paganism is somewhat softened by the remedy's instructions to make the sign of the cross before plucking it.

It should be noted that one instance of prescribed language was left out of the total; in Book II, a remedy recommends that a patient be encouraged to yell or sing in order to reduce mouth swelling.<sup>107</sup> This remedy was excluded because neither the healer nor the patient is given instructions on what is to be said, or if actual words must be said at all. Rather than performative speech, this remedy encourages mere vocalizing for whatever benefit the vibrations or vigorously moving air might provide. All told, twelve of the three hundred and ten remedies from *Bald's Leechbook I and II* contain performative speech, or about 4%.

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<sup>102</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 113, 117, 137, 139, 201, 295.

<sup>103</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 139, 141, 157.

<sup>104</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 10-11, 112-113.

<sup>105</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 76-77.

<sup>106</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 154-155.

<sup>107</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 183-185.



*Bald's Leechbook III* contains fewer, though often lengthier, remedies. As with the first two volumes, seven of the nine instances of performative speech call on God as actor through traditional means such as prayer and mass.<sup>108</sup> The remaining two speech acts call on more material sources. In one instance (section lxiii), if a man is "in the water elf disease" ("*on wæter ælfadle*"), the healer is meant to declare the intentions of his actions over the patient (i.e., that the wound should not fester), and then say "but him himself may hold in a way to health. Let it ache thee no more, than ear in earth ache[s]" ("*ac him self healde hale wæge / ne ace þe þon ma þe eorþan on eare ace*").<sup>109</sup> The healer is then also meant to call on the earth itself repeatedly, saying, "May earth bear on thee with all her might and main" ("*eorþe þe on bere eallum hire mihtum 7 mægenum*").<sup>110</sup> As with the mugwort charm from the early volumes of *Bald's Leechbook*, while not explicitly calling on the Christian God, this charm does gesture toward that power through the inclusion of holy water (rather than the sign of the cross). However, the focus of the performative speech, and arguably the power at play, centers on the first-person speaker, the patient, and the earth itself.

The other remedy which requires performative speech (section xviii) is a treatment for stomach pain which instructs the healer to say three times, "*Remedium facio ad ventris dolorem*" ("I make a remedy [for] the pain of the stomach") while shaking a captured beetle in between the practitioner's (presumably closed) hands.<sup>111</sup> The healer then tosses the beetle away, being careful not to look at it. This process is meant to grant the speaker the ability to heal stomach

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<sup>108</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 323, 335, 345-351, 353, 355, 359.

<sup>109</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 352-353.

<sup>110</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 352-353.

<sup>111</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 318-319.

ache by touch for the next year.<sup>112</sup> Aside from the religious implications of using the Latin language, the power in this charm is focused on the first-person speaker and his declaration that he is making a remedy; the beetle is, after all, discarded, and the power lingers in the speaker's hands. Of the remedies in all three volumes of *Bald's Leechbook*, this one most directly flies in the face of Ælfric's prohibitions for healing. Not only does the speaker not thank or acknowledge God for healing, he is (if he understands Latin) deliberately creating an ability for himself which is both secular and miraculous. Though *Bald's Leechbook III* has only nine instances of performative speech in its pages, the total number of remedies is approximately 78, making the concentration of such remedies significantly higher than in Book I and Book II, at around 10%. Even so, Book III has less than half the concentration of such remedies as in the *Lacnunga*, which hovers around 25%.

The *Old English Herbarium* (Cotton Vitellius C. iii; Hatton 76; Harley 585; and Harley 6258B)<sup>113</sup> dates from approximately 1000, and it is a "translation of a fifth-century Latin work" combined with a number of changes made by the compilers.<sup>114</sup> For example, the compilers provide commentary about some of the continental terms and ideas for the sake of their English-speaking users.<sup>115</sup> This work is carefully arranged by plant, with the uses of each listed beneath the names of the herbs.<sup>116</sup> This work contains only three examples of prescribed performative speech. One is a prayer in Latin, meant to be said while picking the castor oil plant in order to

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<sup>112</sup> Cockayne, *Leechdoms II*, 320-321.

<sup>113</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 101.

<sup>114</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, xiii.

<sup>115</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 165.

<sup>116</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 119.

avert storms.<sup>117</sup> Another is a direct address to the periwinkle plant, in Latin, "that you [the plant] gladly come to me with your powers blooming, that you make me so that I will be protected and always happy."<sup>118</sup> Aside from the mere presence of performative speech in this remedy, it is remarkable because the text includes both the Latin charm and its English translation, which would serve to ensure understanding by the healer. And finally, a third remedy advises the practitioner to tell the knotgrass which they plan to pick of their intention three days ahead of time; no script or specific instructions for what to say are included.<sup>119</sup> In each instance, the speaker is calling on the power of nature in order to have the desired effect. Of the approximately five hundred and fifty-seven remedies in this work, the three remedies which require performative speech make up only approximately 0.05% of the total remedies.

The *Peri Didaxeon* (MS Harley 6258 B),<sup>120</sup> is a translation of a classical healing text; some scholars believe that it is largely based on the Latin *Practica*.<sup>121</sup> The manuscript was likely created between 1175-1225.<sup>122</sup> As previously stated, the *Peri Didaxeon* is lacking the careful table of contents found in the other, better-organized Anglo-Saxon medical texts, but it does maintain the traditional "head-to-foot" order.<sup>123</sup> This source is remarkable because it contains no instances of performative speech at all, which is obviously 0% of all its remedies. It is interesting

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<sup>117</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 225.

<sup>118</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 227.

<sup>119</sup> Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 157.

<sup>120</sup> Sanborn, Linda, "An Edition of the British Library MS. Harley 6258 B: *Peri Didaxeon*" (doctoral thesis, University of Ottawa, 1983), 2.

<sup>121</sup> Sanborn, "An Edition," 41.

<sup>122</sup> Sanborn, "An Edition," 9.

<sup>123</sup> Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 45.

to note that this text falls outside of the time frame—the ninth to eleventh centuries—when Kieckhefer argues that, "early medieval clerics approved magic for largely pragmatic reasons. . . [as] it serves as an emotional outlet and means of emotional support for the practitioner, the client, or both."<sup>124</sup> Perhaps by the time of the translation of the *Peri Didaxeon*, the practice of performative speech in medicine was viewed as less acceptable to those in the scriptoriums (i.e., perhaps they had chosen to follow the advice of those like Ælfric more closely), or perhaps the greater distance in time between the contemporary Anglo-Saxons and their pagan ancestors made such practices less desirable.

## **B. God as Actor in the *Lacnunga***

By contrast to the other works, the *Lacnunga* contains both a large number and wide variety of performative speech acts which call upon all three actors—the Christian God, nature, and the individual. The first and most numerous of these is the Christian God, who appears as an actor in thirty-eight of the forty-nine remedies, although not always as the sole actor. Among those speech acts which do call on the Christian God, the majority involve various forms of prayer. For instance, named prayers, such as the *Pater Noster* (26, 83, 183), the "*magnificað* [sic.]" (31), and the "*benedicite*" (162), are featured throughout. The text assumes that the user will know or have access to those prayers, as none of these speech acts are written out in their entirety. The text for other, untitled prayers is included within the *Lacnunga* in a number of instances, including in remedies 63, 67, and 95, among others. On other occasions, the remedies demand that mass be performed over a person or object, as in remedies 18, 72, 118, and 145. Though the majority of these speech acts are meant to be performed in Latin (29, 133, 173),

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<sup>124</sup> Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality," 825.

others are scripted in Old English (135, 169, 171) or in some variety of nonsense-speech (176). Collected together from contemporary Anglo-Saxon healing practice, these remedies illustrate the local desire to include performative speech in such practices, well above and beyond its contemporary texts.

### 1. Formalized Latin Appeals

The majority of appeals to the Christian God are meant to be performed in Latin, the lingua franca and language of worship of the church. The first subcategory of these speech acts involve a priest performing mass over a potential cure or victim in order to treat an ordinary ailment. Remedy 72 requires the healer to create a mixture of plants soaked in ale "and sing three masses over it" ("*7 gesinge iii mæssan ofer*") in order to treat inflammation.<sup>125</sup> Remedy 145, on the other hand, prescribes that a person trying to heal their pigs of "murrain" ("*færsteorfan*") by dosing the animals with various plant materials in their food, followed by "sing[ing] four masses over [them]" ("*sing ofer feorwer mæssan*").<sup>126</sup> Though Ælfric would likely approve of this particular remedy thus far, this recipe ends with the more questionable healing method of hanging burning herbs and incense around the pigs' pen and letting the animals run through the smoke. In any case, these two remedies for mundane diseases require not only call on God to provide the power for healing, but also require the intervention of a clergyman.

The second category of remedies is those which call for formalized prayers in treating illness. By "formalized prayer," the researcher is referring to those for which the manuscript does not include a script; instead, the practitioner is meant to know the prayer or have access to

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<sup>125</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 206-207.

<sup>126</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 226-227.

someone else who does. In the treatment of a sore ("sy þæt sar þær sy"), remedy 31 gives a long series of instructions for the creation of a salve, which involves the use of holy water, and ends with the healer singing the following: "*Benedictus dominus deus meus*," "*benedictus dominus deus israel*," "*magnificað* [sic.]," and "*credo in unum*."<sup>127</sup> With the singing done, the healer is then meant to pray "*matheus, marcus, lucas, iohannes*."<sup>128</sup> Similarly, remedy 83 prescribes nine repetitions of the *Pater Noster* over several unearthed "celadine roots" followed by one "*libera nos a malo*" for the treatment of hemorrhoid.<sup>129</sup> To treat lung illness in cattle, remedy 142 requires "*Benedicium dominum in omni tempore usque in finem, 7 benedicite, 7 letanias 7 pater noster*" followed by tithing the worth of the cattle.<sup>130</sup> Though these remedies require the use of formalized prayers, they would seem to lack some of the formality of those which expressly would require the presence of a masspriest. The healer only needs to be educated enough to read the remedy and perform the necessary prayers without further instructions. The lack of a script might give advantage to those of the cloth, but lay people could perform these as well.

One curious case involving formalized Latin prayer is remedy 183. This case requires the intervention and intercession of a "*mæden*," or a young, virgin woman, who must gather water from a stream running to the east and recite several prayers over the water, including "*credan*" and "*pater noster*."<sup>131</sup> In this particular case, the language of the church is used to give

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<sup>127</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 190-191.

<sup>128</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 190-191.

<sup>129</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 214-215.

<sup>130</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 226-227.

<sup>131</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 238-239.

the water special properties, but a member of the clergy is not needed to perform the blessing, as he would have been needed for remedies such as 31 and 143, both of which require actual "holy water" ("*halig wæter*"). While other remedies featuring formalized Latin prayer are more ambiguous in their need for clerical intervention, this one would seem to not require any clergyman in order to call upon God as an actor.

A similar category of remedies requires the use of both formalized Latin prayers and non-Latin nonsense utterances together. Remedies 25 and 26 both involve repetitions of "*pater noster*".<sup>132</sup> In the midst of a spoken portion of remedy 25, which is largely in Latin, is one section that can only be read as untranslatable nonsense: "*calicet aclu cluel sedes adclocles acre earcre arnem nonabiud ær ærnem niðren arcum cunað arcum arctua fligara uglen binchi cutern nicuparam raf afð egal uflen arta arta arta trauncula trauncula trauncula.*"<sup>133</sup> This speech is dropped in the middle of several lines of Latin without explanation, break, or comment. Meroney notes traces of Old Irish in a number of Old English healing charms, including some within the *Lacnunga*,<sup>134</sup> and Pollington argues that this untranslatable charm exhibits evidence of both those Old Irish and Latin influences.<sup>135</sup> Other remedies also feature Latin-inspired nonsense-charms, including remedy 26, which features a charm running, "*Gonomil orgomil marbumil marbsai ramum tofeð tengo docuillo. . .*,"<sup>136</sup> and remedy 172, which requires the healer to say, "*in domo*

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<sup>132</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 186-187.

<sup>133</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 186-187.

<sup>134</sup> Meroney, Howard. "Irish in the Old English Charms." *Speculum* 20, no.2 (1945): 180.

<sup>135</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 187.

<sup>136</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 187.

*mamosin inchorna meoti otimimeoti quoddealde otuuotiua et marethin.*"<sup>137</sup> Both of these charms feature recognizably Latin-inspired portions, including remedy 26's "*tengo*" and remedy 172's "*in domo*." They both also prescribe genuine Latin utterances ("*pater noster*" and "*crux mihi uita et tibi mors inimice*," respectively) immediately after the untranslatable portions.<sup>138</sup>

In all three of these charms, the combination of false-Latin and genuine Latin would suggest that the speaker would have to have some familiarity with Latin (e.g., they would need to know how to perform the *Pater Noster*). However, it seems unlikely that the speaker would have a comprehensive knowledge of the language, as use of the remedies would demand that the user accept near-Latin nonsense as speech carrying equal weight as the formalized prayers which these remedies also require. This situation could suggest that either the intended speaker is a person with a clerical background who has limited education in Latin, or perhaps someone without any clerical background at all. In either case, the scribes, who were familiar enough with Latin to translate portions of it for the text, believed the nonsense portions to be important enough to maintain in the manuscript. This inclusion would suggest that even though the scribes would have been able to recognize these speech acts as false-Latin (or perhaps they believed they were in another language that was unknown to them), the speech acts themselves were considered a sufficiently important part of the remedy to justify its recording, regardless of the intended actor of the untranslatable speech.

The next category includes formal appeals (i.e., repetitions of mass and formalized prayers) to God which are meant to treat problems believed to have been caused by more

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<sup>137</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 235.

<sup>138</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 187; 235.



"supernatural" threats. These threats are opposed to the more mundane problems, such as those found in the preceding remedies. Both remedy 18, meant to treat "flying venom" ("*fleogendum attrē*"), and remedy 118, meant to treat elf-shot in livestock ("*gif hors gescoten sy oððe oþer neat*"), require that mass be sung over the ingredients of their respective remedies.<sup>139</sup> In both of these cases, the power of Christ is set against the power of pre-Christian threats, and the form of the remedy would seem to posit that the Christian appeals will deal with that threat appropriately. Remedy 29, meant to treat "elf-siden and all temptations of the devil" ("*wið ælfsidene 7 wið eallum feondes costungum*"), requires the use of "blessed wine" ("*gehalgodes wines*"), and the singing of mass over said wine, along with the performance of a minimum of ten different prayers in Latin.<sup>140</sup> In this case, the combined threat of elves and the Christian devil illustrates the cultural recombination of traditional, vernacular elements along with newer continental elements. It is important to note that while both the old and new are represented in the threat which the remedy addresses, the Christian elements are those which are featured in the resolution of the danger, perhaps replacing whatever pre-Christian methods would have otherwise dealt with such threats.

## 2. Non-Formalized Latin Appeals

Another set of remedies in the *Lacnunga* feature non-formalized appeals to the Christian God. These speech acts are those for which the scribes provide a script; the healer is not expected to know what to say independent of the text. For example, remedy 63, a recipe for a "holy salve"

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<sup>139</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 184-185; 220-221.

<sup>140</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 188-189.

("haligre sealfe"), features both formalized and non-formalized appeals.<sup>141</sup> The formalized portion is included after the long list of ingredients and instructions for the salve itself. The healer is required to "sing these psalms over it, 'Immaculate saints'—each three times over—and 'Glory to God in the highest' and 'I believe in God the father' and recite the litanies over it" ("*ðu sing ofer ðas sealmas, Beati immaculati, ælcne ðriwa ofer, 7 gloria in excelsis deo, 7 Credo in deum patrem, 7 letanias arime ofer*").<sup>142</sup> The non-formalized prayer is featured in the latter half of remedy 63, and it begins, "Holy Lord, Almighty Father, everlasting God, by the laying on of my hands may the hostile devil flee from the hairs, from the head, from the eyes. . . from the entire frame of his body so that the devil may have no power over him. . ." ("*Domine sancte, pater omnipotens, eterne deus, per inpositionem manum mearum refugiat inimicus diabolus a capiliis, a capite, ab oculis. . . ab uniuersis compaginibus memrorum eis, ut non habeat potestatem diabolus. . .*").<sup>143</sup> Unlike the prayers from the beginning of the remedy, the healer is not meant to have the prayer memorized, and so its text is presented in its entirety.

Remedy 63 is one of the few that explicitly prescribes the use of a "masspriest" ("*mæssepreost*") to hallow the ingredients. This priest, however, is not the primary speaker in this remedy. While he is responsible for consecrating the mixture with the prayer at the end of the recipe, the person making the salve is addressed separately, being instructed to "sing this [preceding charm] nine times and put your spittle in and blow on it" ("*sing ðis nygon siðan 7 do*

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<sup>141</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 196-197.

<sup>142</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 198-199.

<sup>143</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 198-199.

*ðin spatl on 7 blaw on*").<sup>144</sup> Though this distinction would not necessarily preclude the possibility of the salve creator as a member of the clergy, it would seem strange that the remedy's creator would feel the need to specify who needed to speak the prayers into the mixture (this salve requires the speaker to sing directly into the fluid<sup>145</sup>) if the healer were able to perform the blessing himself.

Other examples of non-formalized Latin prayers do not specify who is meant to perform the blessing. Remedies 159, 160, and 165 all require the healer to recite scripted Latin prayers.<sup>146</sup> These remedies require the user to not only be able to read or recite the Latin by rote, but also to understand what they are reading, as the labels and instructions for the remedies are also in Latin. For example, 165 introduces itself with the description, "*ad articulorum dolorem constantem maglignantem medicina*."<sup>147</sup> Remedies 191 and 192 are both all-Latin appeals to God for the blessing of plants ("*BENEDICTIO HERBARVM*"), and remedies 193 and 194 are appeals for the blessing of ointments ("*BENEDICTIO VNGVENTVM*").<sup>148</sup> Remedy 67 has some traits which distinguish it from the aforementioned recipes; this recipe introduces itself in Old English ("*gif se mon sy innan forswollen . . .*") and the prayer itself is in Latin.<sup>149</sup> However, after the text of the initial prayer ends, the remedy gives the healer further instructions in Latin, beginning, "*et cum*

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<sup>144</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 198-199.

<sup>145</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 200-201.

<sup>146</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 230-231.

<sup>147</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 230-231.

<sup>148</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 242-243.

<sup>149</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 202-203.

*hoc dixisset totum semetipsum armavit crucis signo. . .*," followed by yet another prayer in Latin.<sup>150</sup> The healer who wanted to use any of these remedies must either be sufficiently educated in order to be able to read the Latin, or have access to another person who is educated enough to read the Latin. This would not necessarily confine the pool of potential users to clergy, but its potential audience would be somewhat restricted.

One last example of the non-formalized Latin prayers, meant to treat toothache, is focused largely on a narrative about Christ curing Peter of similar pain (166).<sup>151</sup> This remedy is remarkable primarily because, while the whole entry is in Latin and would appear to be meant to be read in its entirety, it does not appear to become a "prayer" as such until its end ("*rex pax nax in christo filio amen; pater noster*").<sup>152</sup> The researcher would also like to note that this remedy had some staying power, as a simplified version of this remedy was collected as a piece of oral culture in Ballyknock, Ireland between 1937-1938.<sup>153</sup> Essentially, when a healer of the time period, whether clergy or lay, chose to call on the Christian God as a source of help in dealing with mundane afflictions, Latin was often the language of choice.

Non-formalized Latin appeals could also be used to counteract supernatural threats which originate outside of mundane medical issues or Christian theology. Two such remedies, 133 and 164, deal with "flying poison" ("*fleogendan attre*")<sup>154</sup> and "shot" ("*gif hors bið gesceoten*")<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 202-203.

<sup>151</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>152</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>153</sup> Bridie M. Roarke, "A Prayer for Curing Toothache," The Schools' Collection, An Gleann, Graiguenamanagh, [www.duchas.ie](http://www.duchas.ie), National Folklore Collection, 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 224-225.

(presumably referring to elf-shot), respectively. In both instances, instructions on the use of the remedy are in Old English, while the charms meant to call on God as actor and treat the ailments in question are in Latin. This split in the language would make the information useful to a wider readership (the healer would not necessarily need to understand the Latin in order to read it aloud), while still giving the reader access the prestige or power associated with the Latin in appealing to God. No matter the cause of the malady, whether mundane or supernatural, most appeals to God throughout the *Lacnunga* are meant to be performed in Latin.

### 3. Appeals in Old English

While the vast majority of verbal appeals to the Christian God appear in Latin, the language of the church, there are a few remedies which require the user to call on God in Old English. The most notable example of such an appeal for a mundane bodily issue can be found in remedy 169. Written entirely in Old English, this entry is for "a woman [who] cannot bear a child" ("*wif ne mæg bearn beran*").<sup>156</sup> This remedy includes three primary steps, the first two of which feature performative speech acts in English and which are secular in nature. After she has recited the proper words while stepping over the grave of a dead man, she is then meant to recite a charm to her husband while they are in their bed, declaring, "Up I go, step over you/ with a living child not a dying [one]. . ." ("*up ic gonge, ofer þe stæppe mid cwican cilde, nalæs mid cwellendum . . .*").<sup>157</sup> In this instance, it is only after the mother feels a child living within her ("*þonne seo modor gefele þæt þæt bearn si cwic*") that she is to go into a church and say, "To

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<sup>155</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 230-231.

<sup>156</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>157</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

Christ I said, declared this" ("*criste ic sæde þis acyþed*").<sup>158</sup> While most appeals to Christ are entreaties for help, the Christian speech act in this remedy is, at its most supplicatory, an expression of thanks, and at its least supplicatory, an affirmation of a woman's own declaration of will before God.

This particular remedy is unusual in several ways. For one, the female speaker in this remedy seems to position herself as an actor in her own healing. God is not excluded in this remedy; there is still a clear appeal toward the religious authorities. However, there are a limited number of remedies which feature an individual as an actor, and for the actor to be a woman in charge of her own healing is notable. It is also important to note that by making the practitioner a woman speaking on her own behalf in her own language, the remedy would be more immediately accessible for those patients that might need it. Because the child is already alive within the woman before she appeals to the Christian God, one could even read this remedy as one which focuses on the individual as its primary actor. However, because the other two remedies (170 and 171) which feature women making appeals to the individual in their own language do not feature any gestures toward the Christian God at all, remedy 169 was included among the other explicitly Christian appeals to highlight this unique feature.

Other appeals to God in Old English can be used for less mundane (and sometimes, less medical) reasons. For instance, remedy 158 does not address a bodily issue of any kind; rather, it deals with the loss of cattle.<sup>159</sup> This remedy prescribes that as soon as one discovers he has lost his cattle, "before you say anything else" ("*þonne cweð þu ærest ær þu elles hwæt cweþe*"), he is

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<sup>158</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>159</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 228-229.

meant to recite the following: "Bethlehem was that city called in which Christ was born/ it is renowned throughout all middle-earth / so may this deed become known to all men / through the holy cross of Christ. Amen" ("*Bæðleem hatte seo buruh þe crist on acænned wæs, seo is gemærsad geond ealne middangeard, swa þyos dæd for monnum mære gewurþe þurh þa haligan cristes rode, amen*").<sup>160</sup> After reciting this establishing charm, the person who has lost his cattle is meant to face each of the cardinal direction and "pray three times" followed by three repetitions of a direction-appropriate variant on "May Christ's cross bring back from the east" ("*crux cristi ab oriente reducat*"),<sup>161</sup> thereby returning to the *Lacnunga*'s general tendency to appeal to God in Latin.

It is unclear why the speaker who has lost his cattle would want to transition languages between his initial reaction and his recitations facing the various cardinal directions. The researcher speculates that the first prayer, which is in the Old English and which asks that the "deed [may] become known to all men" may be for the benefit of the person bringing the news of the lost cattle to the speaker.<sup>162</sup> Just as the messenger has told the owner of the cattle about the loss, the victim expressing his desire for the news to continue to spread in the vernacular would serve the dual purpose of appealing immediately for the help of Christ and encouraging the listener to continue to pass the message along. The prayers meant for recitation in the four directions, on the other hand, express a desire for the cattle to be returned to the speaker, not for the news to spread. While the messenger may have the ability pass along the story of the lost

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<sup>160</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 228-229.

<sup>161</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 228-229.

<sup>162</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 228-229.

cattle, he does not have God's ability to bring the cattle back to the speaker, so the speaker is better off addressing God in the language of the church. This shift in focus renders the messenger's ability to understand somewhat moot, and so Latin, wielded with such apparent efficacy by the clergy, is the most appropriate tool for the job.

The third remedy which includes an appeal to the Christian God in English is number 68. By Pollington's numeration, it is the longest of the remedies,<sup>163</sup> and it is also arguably the most completely bilingual. While other remedies will feature prayers in Latin, or an introduction in English and the body in Latin, or perhaps appear in Latin altogether, remedy 68 is translated phrase by phrase in its entirety. The manuscript clearly shows that the original language of the remedy was Latin, as the Latin text is written in a larger hand, while the Old English gloss appears phrase-by-phrase in smaller print above it.<sup>164</sup> The remedy does not specify which language is meant to be performed, or if one or the other is preferable. It would seem likely that the English is provided so that a person literate in the vernacular but not Latin could read and understand the text of the Latin prayer, as glossing Latin texts in the vernacular was common throughout medieval manuscripts. However, this remedy remains something of a curiosity, as the majority of other entries which feature Latin prayers, whether formalized or non-formalized, do not include translations for the reader's use.

Remedy 68 is a charm meant to protect its speaker in his entirety. As Pollington points out, its enumeration of the parts of the body gives the modern reader a window into the Anglo-

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<sup>163</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 202-207.

<sup>164</sup> "Harley MS 585," 152r-157r.



Saxon understanding of anatomy and medicine.<sup>165</sup> Among the many dangers that this remedy asks the user to be protected from is that "the dark devils shall not hurl arrows into my sides, as the shooters usually do" ("þætte nalæs ða sweartan deoblu [sic.] in mine sidan / *ut non tetri demones in latera* / leligen swaswa gewuniað scytas flanas / *mea librent ut soleant iacula*"), which is most likely a reference to the aforementioned elf-shot.<sup>166</sup> Because of the linguistic situation of this remedy, it is unclear if this remedy would suggest if, in this instance, an appeal to God in English would be a sufficient substitute for a similar appeal in Latin, thereby affording protection against such supernatural threats. In any case, this prayer asks for the most thorough protection of any within the *Lacnunga*, asking after a nearly exhaustive list of body parts:

. . .shield hair and other bodily parts such as maybe I passed over or missed the name; shield me all with my five senses and their ten finely wrought doors so that from the heels to the head's height by none of my bodily parts, outward nor inward, may I be infirm, lest from my body life be thrust out by disease, fever, lasting sickness, the body's wounds before I grow properly old, God so granting. . .

. . .gescyld hær 7 þa oþre leomu / *tege pilos adque membra reliqua* / þæra swæ wen is ic beferde uel forleort noman / *quorum forte præteribi nomina* / gescyld alne mic mid fif ondgeotum / *tege totum me cum quinque sensibus* / 7 mid ten smicre geworhtum durum / *et cum x fanbrefactis foribus* / þætte fram þæm hælum oð ðæs heafde heannesse / *ut a plantis usque ad uerticem* / nængum lime minum utan innan ic geuntrumige / *nullo membro foris intus egrotem* / þylæs of minum mæge lif ascufan / *ne de meo possit vitam*

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<sup>165</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 203.

<sup>166</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 204-205.

*trudere / wolnes fefor ece adl sar lichoman / pestis febris languor dolor corpore / ærðon  
soðlice gode syllendum ic gealdige / donec iam deo dante seneam. . .*<sup>167</sup>

After asking for bodily health, the speaker then continues on to his soul, asking that his good deeds might cover his sins.

Based upon the significant length of the charm, only a fraction of which is featured here, it would seem significant that the scribe found the text important enough to warrant the substantial cost in time and materials which it would take to include it. In light of the scribe's ability to exclude either of the languages from the *Lacnunga* version of the remedy, the choice to include both Latin and English would also suggest that the scribe valued the user's ability to understand the charm that he was casting on himself. The theoretical caster, who is spoken of in the first person, though likely male due to several listed male-specific anatomical features, such as a "beard" ("bearde. . . *barbe*"<sup>168</sup>), at least is able to say the prayer on his own behalf without the aid of a clergyman. The speaker is still able to access the power afforded to Latin-based appeals to the Christian God regardless of his Latin literacy.

#### 4. Language and the Intended Healer(s)

As is evident, the majority of remedies featured in the *Lacnunga* which include performative language have at least one appeal to some part of the Christian belief system. These appeals are not consistently formalized. While many of these speech acts involve clear elements of Christian worship, such as repetitions of mass or specific, named prayers such as the "*Pater*

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<sup>167</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 206-207.

<sup>168</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 204-205.

*Noster*," others are more tailored for their specific contexts and include a clear script for the healer to read or memorize. The vast majority of these appeals to the Christian God are also prescribed in Latin, which lends the speaker some of the gravity and power of the aforementioned elements of Christian worship, though a few examples also allow prayer in English. This widespread use of Latin throughout the remedies could also serve as an obstacle for potential healers; while some remedies tell what malady they are meant to treat and give instructions for mixing herbs and the like in English, others expect the potential healer to not only be able to read the Latin phonetically, but also be able to interpret the language.

This language barrier could suggest that the scribe is attempting to tailor the text's use for better-educated or clerical practitioners, though the presence of English translations of traditionally Latin texts would complicate that reading. Other potentially-confounding artifacts would include remedy 169, which requires a woman to speak on her own behalf on three separate occasions, the final time in English before the altar of a church.<sup>169</sup> Essentially, Meaney's assertion that the *Lacnunga* is "a fair copy of all the medical material gathered in a scriptorium, where it was written down without any discarding or sorting" would seem thus far to be justifiable.<sup>170</sup> If the material of the manuscript had been gathered and organized with more care, or perhaps with a more clear user in mind, artifacts such as remedy 169 would not be found alongside remedy 63, which requires the involvement of a mass priest.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>170</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 231.

<sup>171</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

Regardless of the text's intended user, what is clear is that the Anglo-Saxon scribes who created the text found these one hundred and ninety-four remedies important enough to copy for posterity, forty-nine of which required the use of performative speech. Of these forty-nine, the majority make explicit appeals to the Christian God, and those which do so tend to do so in Latin, the language the average Anglo-Saxon would have had most reason to associate with God. With God on the side of the healer, it would seem that the would-be healer has done what he or she can to augment or potentially replace entirely other methods which might strike authority figures who would subscribe to the writings of Ælfric and those like him as unholy or unsavory. And these healers (and the scribes who have empowered them through the compilation of the text) would seem to place great emphasis on the power of the spoken word.

#### 5. Remedies with Secondary Appeals to God as Actor

While many remedies which include prescribed performative speech focus primarily on appeals to the Christian God, another set of remedies feature nonsensical or non-Christian speech acts which are then hastily followed-up with a brief Christian appeal. In such instances, the appeal to God as actor appears almost as an afterthought, particularly compared to other remedies which feature such appeals more prominently. The nearest example which has been examined so far is remedy 169, which does not require an appeal to the Christian God until after the woman's child has stirred in her womb. It was not included among these remedies because the appeal to God takes up approximately the same space and time as each of the two secular speech acts, and to declare such a speech act to be necessarily less important would seem disingenuous.

There are, however, a number of remedies which clearly do fall into this category. Remedy 162 is meant to treat a "swelling" ("wið cyrnel"), and it begins by telling the healer to recite "Nine were the sister of noðþ" ("*neogone wæron noðþæs sweostor*"), and then count down from nine to none.<sup>172</sup> After the repetitions are written out for the healer, the remedy says "this shall be the treatment of a swelling. . .and of every evil" ("*þis þe lib beo cyrneles . . . 7 æghwylces yfeles*"), followed by instructions to sing nine repetitions of the "*benedicite*".<sup>173</sup> Remedy 93 features an extensive English portion which is meant to protect "against a dwarf" ("wið dweorh"); the charm itself tells a short, somewhat meandering story that begins: "in came a spider creature / he had his mantle in his hand, said that you were his steed / laid his thong on your neck, and they began to travel out of the land. . ." ("*her com ingangan inwriðen with, hæfde him his haman on handa, cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære, legde þe his teage on sweoran, on gunnan him of þæm lande liþan . . .*").<sup>174</sup> It then features a hasty gesture toward the Christian God at the end of its performative speech act by ending in, "*amen, fiat*".<sup>175</sup>

Similarly, remedy 22 ends with "lilumenne—it aches over all when it lies, it cools when it burns hottest on earth, *finit, amen*" ("*lilumenne æceð þæt ofer eall þonne alið, colað þonne hit on eorðan hatost byrneð, finit, amen*").<sup>176</sup> As with remedy 162, this entry ends with a recognizable gesture toward the structure of typical Christian prayer, even though the English portion of the

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<sup>172</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 230-231.

<sup>173</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 230-231.

<sup>174</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 216-217.

<sup>175</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 216-217.

<sup>176</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 186-187.

remedy itself is not explicitly religious. However, the general tenor of this entry is more in line with more Christianity-centric additions. As Pollington argues of the nonsense charm that begins the remedy ("*caio laio quaque uoaque ofer sæloficia*"), it "is clearly some Latin formula which has become garbled through repeated transmission."<sup>177</sup> Remedy 168 also features an extensive nonsense charm which contains scattered pieces of real Latin (e.g., "*sanguinis. . .mei deus deus*") and ends in "*Amen Alleluia Alleluia.*"<sup>178</sup> By bookending the non-Latin charm with gestures toward Latin prayer, the originator of the remedy was likely attempting to give these other speech acts a kind of gravitas or power similar to those charms which rely primarily on Christian prayer as their "driving force." At least in this instance, it would seem that the originator (or possibly scribe) tries to give the charm more power by combining the English and/or language meant to resemble Latin with the typical ending to a prayer.

Finally, it should be noted that there are several examples of Latin-inspired nonsense speech with no direct Christian references or specific instructions for usage. In both of the primary cases—remedies 146 and 163—a few words describing the purpose of the remedy are provided (e.g., "*wið þeofentum*"), and the rest of the remedy is the charm. Because the text of both charms is comprised of untranslatable nonsense, it is impossible to pin down a specific intended actor with certainty. One might argue the actor is intended to be the self, if only because the practitioner is taking the initiative to speak in the first place. However, the researcher chose to include these remedies among those appealing to the Christian God because of the aforementioned religious importance of the Latin language—which these remedies often ape phonetically—and the common practice of wedding such nonsense appeals with Christian

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<sup>177</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 186-187.

<sup>178</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

appeals (e.g., "*amen, fiat*"). In any case, as with all instances of prescribed performative language within the *Lacnunga*, it communicates an Anglo-Saxon desire to "say something" while healing, which its contemporaries—being more dependent upon their continental source texts—cannot match.

### C. Nature as Actor in the *Lacnunga*

Though the majority of performative speech acts in the *Lacnunga* call on the Christian God as an actor, it also features a few remedies which call on various aspects of the natural world to act in favor of the patient or healer. Interestingly, while not all Christianity-oriented speech acts use Latin as a vehicle, all remedies which prescribe spoken Latin do call on the Christian God. Non-religious speech acts (or those which fail to be explicitly religious) are meant to be performed in English. As with the explicitly Christian appeals, these examples of performative speech are meant to treat a variety of ailments, both mundane and supernatural, and they are not necessarily meant to be performed by potential healers from a single demographic.

The primary example of nature as actor in the *Lacnunga* is remedy 79. This remedy is part of an artifact known as the "Nine Herbs Charm,"<sup>179</sup> and it is "one of the most extensively researched Old English metrical charms."<sup>180</sup> It is also the most prominent example of a speaker calling on the power of a nonhuman, natural entity. Rather than appealing to God or some other person, remedy 79 calls on seven different herbs: "mugwort" ("*mucgwyrt*"), "waybread" ("*wegbrade*"), "cress" ("*stune*"), "nettle" ("*stiðe*"), "atterlothe" ("*attorlape*"), "maythe"

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<sup>179</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 211.

<sup>180</sup> Chardonnens, "An Arithmetical Crux in the Woden Passage," 691.

("mægðe"), and "crab apple" ("wergulu").<sup>181</sup> It should be noted that two of the traditional nine herbs, chervil and fennel, are absent from this particular segment.<sup>182</sup> As with many of the explicitly Christian remedies, the intended speaker of this piece is not named. Regardless of the practitioner, the charm treats these plants as anthropomorphic entities with some stripe of independent will, asking one of them to "be mindful now. . . of what you made known" ("Gemyne þu . . . hwæt þu ameldodest").<sup>183</sup> Though this kind of appeal to plants directly is not unique in Anglo-Saxon medical texts (e.g., similar appeals to plants in the *Old English Herbarium*), it is unique in this particular collection.

It should be noted that though the "Nine Herbs Charm" is not explicitly religious, it is adjacent to and, as Pollington argues, "clearly forms a part of" remedy 80, which Grattan and Singer called the "Lay of the Nine Twigs of Woden."<sup>184</sup> This entry is the only one in the manuscript to directly name-drop a specific, Germanic pagan god, Woden. It would be somewhat disingenuous to claim that remedy 80 "appeals to" Woden, at least in the same way that many of the more prayerful remedies appeal to Christ. However, the charm does recount the story of a triumph of the god against an enemy and the his subsequent creation of several plants which the remedy describes as efficacious "against nine powerful diseases / against nine poisons and against nine infections" ("wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum / wið viiii attrum 7 wið nygon

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<sup>181</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>182</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 211.

<sup>183</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 210-211.

<sup>184</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 213.



*onflygnum*").<sup>185</sup> The text does not question or attempt to undermine the clearly pagan narrative. So, while the scribes include many remedies featuring speech acts that appeal directly to Christian authority and teachings, the hodge-podge nature of the *Lacnunga* also allows for a healer's desire to call on plants themselves (79) and seems to acknowledge (or at least, fails to contest) the power of a Germanic pagan deity (80).

#### **D. Individual as Actor in the *Lacnunga***

Curiously, in spite of the high concentration of speech acts found within the *Lacnunga*, appeals to the forces of nature are not especially prevalent. Instead, the speaker will more often call on an individual person to act in the healing process, often the self. Like appealing to natural forces, calling on an individual other than the Christian God for aid in healing would fly in the face of traditional authorities like Ælfric. In many instances, rather than asking for help from an outside source, these remedies serve as expressions of the healer's own will delivered through the medium of performative speech. These appeals are perhaps among the most telling when it comes to the Anglo-Saxons' cultural desire to utilize performative speech as part of the healing process.

One example of this kind of performative speech is Remedy 135. Meant to counteract "gods' shot. . .elves' shot. . .or. . .witches' shot" ("*esa gescot. . . ylfa gescot. . . oððe. . . hægtessan gescot*") through the enchantment of a blade, this remedy is entirely in Old English and uses first person pronouns and phrases such as "Back to them I wish to send another/ a flying dart in opposition" ("*ic him oðerne eft wille sændan/ fleogende flanæ forane togeanes*") throughout the

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<sup>185</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 212-213.

performative portion.<sup>186</sup> Tellingly, this remedy features the phrase "*nu ic wille ðin helpan*" ("now I will help you") toward its end, placing the power of healing directly in the practitioner's hands. This remedy, which runs twenty-six lines long, does also include an appeal to the Christian God, but like remedy 22, it does not do so until the very end. While the first twenty-five lines rely on the agency of the speaker, the remedy is capped off with "whole be you now, may the Lord help you" ("*hal westu nu, helpe ðin drihten*").<sup>187</sup> Clearly, the remedy focuses on the agency of the speaker over the agency of God.

Interestingly, three remedies focused on the maladies of women—169, 170, and 171—contain some of the clearest examples of the subjects of remedies speaking their own healing into existence. Weston sees evidence of a uniquely "female oral culture existing alongside of and in dialogue with the dominant male traditions—shamanic, priestly, and scientific" in the Anglo-Saxon healing tradition.<sup>188</sup> This oral culture comes to light within these artifacts, which prescribe spoken language by women (in both secular charms and prayers) who are attempting to heal themselves.<sup>189</sup> Though women could join the power structure of the church through taking the veil, the women who would be performing such charms, which are meant to help a woman conceive or nourish a child, would necessarily not be of the cloth. Rather, she is an secular woman with a "husband" ("*hlaforde*") other than Christ.<sup>190</sup> By examining these speech acts

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<sup>186</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 224-225.

<sup>187</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 224-225.

<sup>188</sup> L. M. C. Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic: The Old English Metrical Childbirth Charms," *Modern Philology* 92, no. 3 (1995), 283.

<sup>189</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-235.

<sup>190</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

focused on and performed by those who are outsiders to the power structure Ælfric would have recognized, a reader can gain a clearer perspective on the vernacular culture of Anglo-Saxon healing.

The first of these is remedy 169, which has already been discussed at length. This remedy include two declarative, performative statements in both Old English and the first person. These utterances are completely devoid of appeals to outside powers. It is only once she senses that her child lives that the speaker goes to stand before the altar and functionally tell Christ "I told you so" ("*criste ic sæde þis acyþed*").<sup>191</sup> Even so, this declaration is the closest these three remedies come to placing the center of agency in another's hands. Whether the woman in question might have been engaging in the kind of mixed "shamanic, priestly, and scientific" culture of her contemporaries or merely making a personal expression of Christian faith through this appeal is somewhat irrelevant. In either case, she is keeping the majority of the power over her wellness in her own hands, harnessed by her own words and will.

Even more notable is remedy 170, which requires a woman who is struggling to feed her children to speak on her own behalf in her own language, without the intervention of God. She is meant to heal herself. In order to use this remedy, the woman is meant to take dirt from a previous child's grave, cover it in wool, and then sell the wool while saying, "*ic hit bebiċge, ge hit bebiċgan þas swearten wulle 7 þysse sorċe com*" ("I sell it, you buy it / this black wool and seeds of this sorrow").<sup>192</sup> Only in buying the wool is another other living person involved in the woman's healing process. By following this ritual, which to modern readers would seem to have

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<sup>191</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

<sup>192</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 232-233.

no medicinal value, the woman speaks her own wellness into existence by sending her past sorrow away. Though she requires an interaction with a trader in order to transfer the wool, her healing is realized without a call for intervention from any outside authority. This stance is in direct defiance of Ælfric's admonition that one seeking healing should "set [her] hope" in the Christian God.<sup>193</sup> Her hope is instead placed in her own will and the remnants of a pre-Christian oral tradition.

Equally remarkable among the remedies of the *Lacnunga* is Pollington's 171. In this charm, a woman who is not giving a sufficient amount of breast milk is meant to hold the milk of "a cow of one colour" in her mouth, spit it into "running water," drink some of the water, and then say, "*gehwer ferede ic me þone mæran magabihtan mid þysse mæran metebihtan þone ic me wille habban 7 ham gan*" ("Everywhere I have carried the splendid stomach-strong/ with this splendid well-fed [one]/ which I wish to have for myself and go home").<sup>194</sup> For a third time, this charm is meant to be performed in Old English instead of in Latin, and it serves as another example of a woman who is attempting to "take responsibility for her own healing; she speaks words no one else [including a clergyman] can speak for her."<sup>195</sup> In this remedy, the female speaker enacts her own healing without the intervention of God or man.

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<sup>193</sup> Thorpe, "Homilies," 476.

<sup>194</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 234-235.

<sup>195</sup> Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," 291.

## V. Conclusion

Taken altogether, the remedies of the *Lacnunga*—particularly those which require performative speech—paint a picture of Anglo-Saxon healing practice which is distinct from its contemporaries. Other Old English healing texts, including the three volumes of *Bald's Leechbook*, the *Old English Herbarium*, and the *Peri Didaxeon*, feature significantly higher degrees of organization, and presumably higher degrees of scrutiny from the Christian authorities in their respective scriptoriums. Though actual Anglo-Saxon healing practitioners may or may not have held the advice of Ælfric in high regard, it would seem likely that the authorities overseeing said scriptoriums would have been familiar with his thoughts—as evidenced by the widespread nature of the extant manuscripts of his work—or at the very least, they would have respected the opinions of Augustine, whom he cites. These sources share clear non-vernacular roots from sources as diverse as traditional Christian authorities and classical healing masters. These manuscripts do include a number of performative speech acts among them, at times appealing to each of the three primary actors, namely, God, nature, and the individual. However, these speech acts are relatively few in number in all of these manuscripts. Even including appeals to the Christian God, the most speech-dense of these works only contains performative utterances of any kind in approximately ten percent of all its remedies. The *Peri Didaxeon*, a slightly later text, contains no performative speech acts at all, which might suggest that the desire to use such performative speech was on the decline by the time of its transcription.

On the other hand, approximately twenty-five percent of the remedies in the *Lacnunga* contain prescribed performative speech acts. As with the other four sources, the majority of these are appeals to the Christian God, and the remedies found therein are drawn from a variety of

native and foreign sources. However, based on the *Lacnunga*'s distinct lack of organization and likely lack of oversight, the scholarly consensus seems to be that the manuscript is a collection of local "folkloric"<sup>196</sup> remedies or a "commonplace book."<sup>197</sup> This status could suggest that the text is more closely reflective of actual healing practices in the area where it was first recorded than its contemporaries.

If it is true that the *Lacnunga* serves as a more complete "snapshot" of the way actual Anglo-Saxons practiced medicine than other, more formal healing texts, then one must pay special attention to those artifacts which would be considered "irregular," of which the text contains many examples. Though many of its spoken appeals to the Christian God would have met with the approval of clerical authorities like Ælfric, even these can contain "improper" uses of herbs and declarations of individual will, as in remedy 169. In addition, the case of remedies 169, 170, and 171, in which Anglo-Saxon women to speak for themselves and to themselves as an efficacious part of their own healing, would seem to make a strong argument for its vernacular status. The audacity necessary for these women to take control of their own health cannot be overstated, nor can the importance of the scribes' decision to include such work within the manuscript. Also important are examples of nonsense charms, in the vein of remedy 63. While these often ape the sounds of Latin and perhaps appeal in a superficial way to the power associated with that language, these can be complicated by nonsense that reflects the sounds of the Irish language and the fact that while the translators clearly understood both Old English and Latin, they found these remedies of value and worthy of preservation. The text also contains a number of "catch-all" charms (e.g., remedies 191-194) which are meant to treat no specific

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<sup>196</sup> Meaney, "Practice of Medicine," 231.

<sup>197</sup> Pollington, *Leechcraft*, 72.

malady. These charms give the healer the option to augment otherwise-speechless remedies with the performative speech they seemingly valued. Importantly, all of the spoken remedies—including those which call on the Christian God as actor—give the user the culturally-important ability to just "say something" as a part of the healing practice. Again, the scribes' decision to include all of these remedies cannot be overstated, particularly in light of the cost in time and materials these artifacts represent. If spoken language were not considered a vital portion of the healing process, these remedies would be easier to simply leave out.

Considering the preponderance of those artifacts which show vernacular influences, the *Lacnunga* can be read as something of a time capsule of the Anglo-Saxon practitioner's desires in how they wish to address their own health. Those speech acts—meant to grant the speaker a kind of "magical" efficacy, even without the intervention of the Christian God—reflect what Hill calls "cultural paganism."<sup>198</sup> In the times of fear or distress which frequently accompany illness, these people reached for those same methods that comforted their ancestors. Even in a time after the Anglo-Saxons had accepted Christianity and the cultural trappings which accompany it, these people still desired to directly express their own agency in their healing through the power of spoken language.

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<sup>198</sup> Hill, "Rod," 146.

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## **Vita**

Honor Lundt was born in Knoxville, TN to Niles and Michelle Lundt. She has one younger brother, Brady. After graduating from Bearden High School in Knoxville, TN in 2012, she enrolled at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she was a finalist for the Haslam Scholars Program. While there, she completed an honors thesis on gender and violence in Anglo-Saxon literature under the guidance of Dr. Scott MacKenzie. In 2016, she earned both a Bachelor of Arts degree in linguistics and a Bachelor of Science degree in special education, concentrating on communication disorders. The following year, Lundt worked as a technical writer and editor. In the fall of 2017, she accepted a graduate teaching assistantship from the English department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. After the completion of a thesis on performative speech in Anglo-Saxon medical texts under the guidance of Dr. R. M. Liuzza, she graduated with a Master of Arts degree in English literature in December of 2019. She is continuing her education by pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at the Ohio State University in Columbus, OH.