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LYRIC AND GNOME IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1985

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LYRIC AND GNOME IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

by

SEALY ANN GILLES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1985

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

LYRIC AND GNOME IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

by

Sealy Ann Gilles

Adviser: Profesor Robert O. Payne

Six Old English poems, previously designated elegies, are here called gnomic lyrics and shown to constitute a sub-genre of the lyric kind. This category embraces The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament, Resignation 70-118, The Riming Poem, and Deor. The appellation depends upon a number of shared formal and thematic characteristics, chief among which is a strong and specific connection to the gnomic tradition. This tradition is most cogently represented in Old English by the collections Maxims I and II.

Maxims I and II share concerns and strategies with other sapiential collections, such as The Book of Proverbs and the Norse Hávamál. They mix ethical dicta, pragmatic advice and pagan relics. Christianity is most dramatically embodied in Maxims IA, which I see as a fragment of a dialogue between a pagan and a Christian seer.

In the lyrics, the voice of the exile tests precepts from the sapiential tradition against isolation, grief and physical hardship. The gnomes are, in some instances, found

wanting. They form no bulwark against the extremities of the exilic condition. However, they do play a crucial role in the distancing of lament.

Each lyric is shown to develop from limited emotive response into gnomic generalization. Language becomes less descriptive and more reflective. Individual story gives way to exilic type. And the suffering which gave rise to lament is transmuted into anguished meditation on the fates of eorls and the disintegration of a beloved society.

The dissertation rests on two procedures. A close analysis of Celtic, Germanic, Latin and homiletic sources helps elucidate obscurities, especially in The Wife's Lament, and lends support for secular interpretations of passages hitherto considered essential to a Christian subtext. Secondly, close textual analysis, especially of thematic and clausal poetic variation, identifies techniques crucial to the passage from lament into wisdom.

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Preface

793 Her wæron reðe forebenca cumene ofer
Norðanhymbra land & þe folc earmlic bregdon;
þe wæron ormete lig ræscas, & wæron ge seowene
fyrene dracan on þam lyfte fleogende þam tacnum sona
fyligde mycel hunger & litel æfter þam þæs ilcan
geares on vi idus Ianr earmlice heðenra manna hergung
adiligode Godes cyrican in Lindisfarena þurh reaflac &
man sleht.

(793 In this year cruel signs were seen over the land
of Northumbria and terrified the wretched people;
there were great flashes of lightning and fiery dragons
were seen flying in the skies. A great hunger soon
followed these signs and a little time later in the
same year, on June 8, an invasion of heathen men
miserably destroyed God's church in Lindisfarne through
plundering and slaughter.)¹

Anglo-Saxon England, as portrayed in its great vernacular chronicles, was a land beset by invasion and internal strife. Its people battled famine and hostile foes. Kings were sent into exile, ealdormen burnt. Great centers of learning and Christianity, such as Lindisfarne and Jarrow, thrived only to be beset by plundering Norsemen. Comets, those "long-haired stars," streaked over fields, eclipses darkened the moon, and the sea, ever-changing, provided a hazardous path for invaders and exiles alike. Much of the secular literature which survives this turbulence immortalizes heroes and saints, dragons and semi-human monsters, pivotal moments of incredible bravery or low cowardice. But

¹ Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, ed. Charles Plummer, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1892-1899) 55-57. I have relied for the adjustment of dates on Dorothy Whitelock, ed. and trans., The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1961) 36. Old English translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

there are also dispassionate passages in Old English, passages which examine and maintain the ethics of human society and human intercourse, which preserve fragments of the ancient Northern faiths, and which lend significance to natural realities. Although such tasks are briefly addressed in many Old English poems, they are the core of the sapiential collections, poetic catalogues of wise sayings, sometimes concentrated under one topic, as in The Fortunes of Men, and sometimes markedly eclectic, as in Maxims I. These primarily secular poems, unlike the great sermons of the tenth and eleventh centuries, do not specifically address the problems or transgressions of their audience. They do, however, supply a compendium of aphoristic advice and commentary, much of which spoke directly, if in a general fashion, to English men and women seeking to educate their youth, hold to their traditions, and survive their times with dignity and grace.

The maxim, or gnome, which forms the backbone of the Old English wisdom collections is a curiously detached instrument. Its detachment is emphasized by its brevity. The paucity of descriptive or narrative amplification ensures that the good woman, the exile, the sailor and other subjects of gnomic commentary remain faceless types, ahistorical and impersonal. All of this, however, severely limits the philosophical effectiveness of the collections. They are, of necessity, handing on accepted wisdom, ratifying and preserving by repetition and connection rules of

conduct and belief already extant in the culture.

Old English exile lyrics, such as The Wanderer and The Seafarer, struggle to reconcile the received wisdom of these collections with individual lives, lives deprived of society, allegiance, even sustenance. In these works the ahistorical maxim meets catastrophic history writ small as the exile type is described, his story told or alluded to, and his predicament scrutinized. Their poets used both descriptio and narratio to amplify the sapiential vignettes of exile found in Maxims I and II. Moreover, they rendered the lyrics in the exile's own voice. Thus irony, elegy and doubt overlay the sure cool realism of the gnome. Out of this complex of gnome, story and lyric complaint comes a poetry in which judgment and emotion are combined in contemplation of a failing world and a tenaciously prolonged life.

To understand the resulting lyrics fully one must first understand how in them personal history is mated to timeless sapience and, further, how this match can be repeated in poem after poem through the use of generic conventions developed partly from the gnome and partly from the lament. The consistency of these conventions and the impact of the gnome upon the affected lyrics have led me to characterize most of the Old English "elegies" as "gnomic lyrics," a sub-genre of the lyric kind and one greatly dependent upon the poetry of those unknown sages who were, themselves, dependent upon a far-flung and amorphous wisdom tradition.

Chapter One

Gnomic verse survives in Old English in various forms. If we ignore, for the moment, the imbedded gnomes found in long narrative poems and the gnomic "halves" of some lyrics, there is still a wide variety of wisdom verse. Poems such as Vainglory, Fates of Men and Gifts of Men comprise clusters of maxims concerning particular broad topics. Precepts lists moral aphorisms in the guise of a father's advice to his son. In Solomon and Saturn I and II, the two wise men conduct a rather one-sided dialogue which gives Solomon opportunities to display his wisdom. The Rune Poem combines gnome with mnemonic charm. And in Maxims I and II many various and disparate sayings are joined rather loosely together without obvious cohering principles or identifiable personae.

Of all these sapiential works, Maxims I and II seem the strangest to most of us. We are still struggling with their eclectic structures, their bald assertions, and with obvious lines which suddenly turn obscure upon closer examination. Lacking internal closure and a consistent voice, the gnomic collections bear little resemblance to poetry as we know it. And yet, both in form and spirit, these works are undeniably poetic. Their authors strive in the accentual rhythms of Germanic poetic prosody to create a compendium of image, aphorism and advice. Verses on various subjects are joined through alliteration in bistichic lines and, conversely, monochromatic units enjamb across line

boundaries. The voices of pagan and Christian, moralist and cultural archivist join in recounting the truths of their world. Moreover, the gnomes and gnomie style found in these collections have left an indelible mark on many Old English lyrics and perhaps on English poetry as a whole.

In this chapter, I shall examine the conception of wisdom as formulated in Maxims I and II. We shall look at the poems first in the context of an international tradition of wisdom collections. The second part of the chapter will consist of an internal analysis of each poem and an attempt to define its contribution to the Anglo-Saxon idea of wisdom. If my discussion seems at times to range too far afield, it may help to remember that the Old English gnomes, themselves, take all of human behavior and the natural world for their province.

The International Tradition

Any examination of the wisdom tradition, native or international, must attempt a definition of the gnome. Although in the literature discussed in the following pages authors often mixed gnome and proverb, the distinction between the two is important. A collection becomes deliberately instructive and artful, rather than miscellaneous and popular, to the extent that it uses the gnome.

A gnome is a short, sententious generalization. It may have as its subject natural phenomena or facts, the behavior of humans, or their duties. It is often found in a single

sentence, although it may be expanded into a tiny essay and it may also appear as a phrase or subordinate clause. In 1914, Blanche Colton Williams, in her still important Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon, defined gnomic as "synonymous with 'sententious.'" She continues: "The adjective is applied to a generalization of any nature whatsoever. Such generalization may or may not be proverbial; it may express a physical truth, announce a moral law, or uphold an ethical ideal. The language may be literal or figurative."¹ This sweeping description can be narrowed substantially if we choose to distinguish gnome and proverb, a distinction Williams did not want to make.

A proverb is usually understood to contain folk wisdom. Archer Taylor called it "a saying current among the folk."² It may include common sense admonitions, the stored knowledge of society's elders, or lessons drawn from historical events or well-known fables. Compression and specific cultural references no longer relevant may make a proverb obscure but it is not intended to be hard to understand.

Gnomes carry greater authority than proverbs. They reflect the moral climate and the religious presences of the society which produced them. But they are not, strictly speaking, the property of the folk. They are the comments

¹ Blanche Colton Williams, Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon (NY: Columbia U P, 1914) 8.

² Archer Taylor, The Proverb: and an Index to the Proverb, repr. (Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Assoc., 1962) 3.

of an individual, even when that person is faceless, and are often directed to a particular audience. They are wise but not clever. Often a gnome is more judgmental than a comparable proverb and more deliberate.³ The difference can be seen in an excerpt from the Chinese Shih Ching:

A (repressed, restricted) dignified demeanor is the counterpart of the (inner) virtue; people have a saying: "There is no wise man who has no folly;" the folly of the common people is simply a natural fault; but the folly of the wise man is a (deliberate) offence.⁴

In this ode, containing as it does a proverb ("There is no wise man who has no folly") within a gnome, it is possible to see the reflective, even interpretive, nature of the latter. To the common people there is only one "folly," and it is found in sage and peasant alike. But the author finds greater fault in the folly of the wise than in that of the common folk. He glosses the proverb and, in the process, judges those paradoxically foolish wise men. These skills of judgment and interpretation are combined in later gnomonic literatures, such as the Old English and Norse, with other elements missing in proverbs, a sense of religious mystery and awe and an awareness of the limits of man's abilities.

"Meotud ana wat/ hwær se cwealm cymep, þe heonan of

³ T. A. Shippey calls the proverb "particular but metaphorical," whereas the maxim is "general and literal." Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English (Cambridge, England: D.S. Brewer, 1976) 12. See also Nigel Barley, "A Structural Approach to the Proverb and Maxim," Proverbium 20 (1972): 737-50.

⁴ The Book of Odes, ed. and trans. Bernhard Karlgren (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950) no. 256.1, p. 217.

cybbe gewiteþ" (The Lord alone knows where pestilence comes, [and] who hence departs from known lands) (Maxims IA 29b-30).⁵

Medieval gnomes such as this one stand near the end of a tradition of wisdom literature which had its beginnings in ancient Chinese, Babylonian and Egyptian works. "Tradition" is here used very loosely indeed, for only intermittently can we trace influences or even affinities between the works of wise men separated by many hundreds of years and thousands of miles. China a thousand years before Christ and the Israel of the Old Testament, sixth century India and the Egypt of the New and Middle Kingdoms, eleventh century Iceland and the Greece of the Golden Age, all contributed to a tradition which embraced a wide variety of genre. No respecter of formal distinctions, wisdom is found in proverb and gnome, poetry and prose, brief sayings and fables. Nevertheless, there is a cohesiveness to this international amalgam and a perceptible logic in its chronology. Its members are all collections, however diverse. Themes and topics are repeated, often in startlingly similar phrases or contexts, as evidenced by the following quotations from Icelandic and Hindu:

⁵ All quotations from Old English poetry, with the exception of Beowulf, are taken from The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia UP, 1931-42). Maxims I is on page 156 of the Exeter Book, ASPR III (1936).

A friend may be known in adversity, a hero in battle, an honest man in a loan, a wife when riches are spent, and a relation in trouble.

(Hitopadesa)⁶

At eve praise the day, when burned down, a torch,
a wife when wedded, a weapon when tried,
ice when over it, ale when 'tis drunk.

(Hávamál st. 81)⁷

Sequences such as these may have arisen out of a common store of folk knowledge, but there is also evidence that the authors of some sapiential literature had read their predecessors with interest and profit. D. C. Simpson traced the connections between the Egyptian Instruction of Amen-en-ope and the Biblical Book of Proverbs⁸ and H. Ranston has done the same for the Greek gnomic poet Theognis and Qoheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes.⁹ Critics have also identified possible debts to Ecclesiasticus and the Book of Proverbs in the Old English gnomes¹⁰ and, as we shall see, all the collections had topics and attitudes in common.

⁶ Hitopadesa, trans. Charles Wilkins (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1886) 54.

⁷ The Poetic Edda, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin, Texas: U of Texas P, 1962) 26. All quotations from Hávamál will come from this translation.

⁸ D. C. Simpson, "The Hebrew Book of Proverbs and the Teaching of Amenophis," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 12 (Oct. 1926): 232-9.

⁹ H. Ranston, "Ecclesiastes and Theognis," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 34.2 (Jan. 1918): 99-122.

¹⁰ R. MacGregor Dawson, "The Structure of the Old English Gnomic Poems," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 61 (1962): 15. Dawson compares the maxims with Proverbs of Solomon 1-6 and Ecclesiastes 8.8. Also Thomas D. Hill, "Notes on the Old English Maxims I and II," Notes and Queries ns 17 (1970): 445-7.

Twentieth century concepts of wisdom, both popular and philosophical, emphasize good judgment and the correct use of knowledge. Wisdom tends to be seen as a disinterested quality, not necessarily learned, often the result of natural talents, intelligence and a long life. Ancient proponents of wisdom had more specific, more concrete attributes in mind.

The Egyptian sages Amen-em-ope of the Eighteenth Dynasty and Ptah-Hotep of the Fifth also stressed good judgment and the sagacious use of knowledge, but they applied these qualities to a much narrower and more pragmatic sphere. Their teachings were directed at young men in the service of the powerful, ambitious civil servants looking for material success and high status. Ptah-Hotep was himself a high official and hoped that his son would succeed him.¹¹ Amen-em-ope wrote in the interest of an expanding bureaucracy which needed reliable and consistent service from its employees. Both sages counselled their young men on the correct behavior for subordinates:

If thou art one of those who are sitting at table with a man who is greater than thyself, accept what he gives thee, what is set before thy nose. Look not at that which he has before him, but set thy gaze upon that which is before thee. Cast not a multitude of prying glances upon him, for this behavior will cause him discomfort. Keep thy face turned downwards until he addresses thee, and speak only when he speaks to thee. Laugh thou when he laughs. That will be exceedingly

¹¹ The Teaching of Amen-em-apt, son of Kanekht, trans. Sir E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1924) 7-8. All quotations from Amen-em-ope will be taken from this translation.

pleasing to his mind, and what thou dost will be very good behavior.

If thou are in the position of a man who is treated with confidence, whom one nobleman sends to another on business, when he sends thee on a mission conduct the business in a right and fitting manner. Perform the mission according to what he says to thee. Let not thy heart eat (i.e. hide) anything of what is said to thee, and guard thyself carefully against forgetting any part of it. Guard thyself also against making harsh the words which one nobleman may speak about another contemptuously by using the utterances of folk in general. Whether it be a nobleman or a man of no account, it is disgrace to the Ka.

(Ptah-Hotep, sections 7 & 8)¹²

Amen-em-ope, although he was less materialistic and pragmatic than many of his predecessors,¹³ had similar advice for his pupils:

Be thou a creature of nought in the presence of thy chief (i.e. superior officer).
Thou shalt acclaim him humbly in thy speech (i.e. conversation).
Thy adulatory remarks, they shall meet and turn aside his cursings.
Thy homage when smelling the earth [shall disarm his] violence.

(Amen-em-ope, ch. 11, 265-8)

Study to make to increase (or, flourish) the possessions of the lords of wealth
Though at the same time seeking for thy self the means of subsistence.

(Amen-em-ope, ch. 20, 421-2)¹⁴

Advice on personal conduct often recommended restraint of speech and spirit, a theme which was to appear in later

¹² Ptah-Hotep in The Teaching of Amen-em-apt, 54-55.

¹³ The Teaching of Amen-em-apt xii-xiii.

¹⁴ The Teaching of Amen-em-apt 160 and 170.

collections and in Old English:

Be weighty in thy mind, consolidate thy heart,
Accustom not thy self to shape thy course by thy tongue
[only.]

(Amen-em-ope, ch. 18, 385-6)

Do not empty thy belly when the people are round about
thee,
For if thou dost thou wilt destroy their respect for thy
dignity.

(Amen-em-ope, ch. 21, 436-7)

Similarly, the Old Testament's Book of Proverbs advises
discretion and self-control:

He who guards his mouth preserves his life;
He who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

(Proverbs 13.3)

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

(Proverbs 16.32)¹⁵

Like the Instructions of Amen-em-ope, much in the Book
of Proverbs emphasizes public conduct in a work-a-day world.
In the first seven chapters a father advises his son to
avoid an adulterous woman. He cites loss of dignity and
property as the penalties for misbehavior:

For the lips of a loose woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil;

¹⁵ Book of Proverbs. I am taking all biblical quotations from the New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version (NY: Oxford UP, 1977).

but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.

(Proverbs 5.3,4)

Keep your way far from her,
and do not go near the door of her house;
lest you give your honor to others
and your years to the merciless;
lest strangers take their fill of your strength,
and your labors go to the house of an alien;

(Proverbs 5.8,9,10)

Better a prostitute than an adulteress, the father later advises his son, because the practical costs are less severe (Proverbs 6.26).

Both Egyptian and Hebrew teachers emphasized the pragmatic benefits of good behavior. But the Hebrew sayings have even more specific points in common with the Egyptian Instructions. Proverbs 22.17-24.22 or "Words of the Wise" has been shown to be dependent on Amen-em-ope. In both works the author emphasizes the number of sayings (thirty) and many of the Old Testament proverbs are paraphrases or adaptations of the Egyptian maxims.¹⁶

"Words of the Wise" is part of the "collection of collections," that is the Book of Proverbs, and is, on the whole, less homogeneous and less thoroughly structured than Amen-em-ope's material. The entire book includes instructions to youth, poetic allegory, brief admonitions and poems, lists of maxims, exhortations and instructions. Its appendices include a dialogue between a sceptic and a be-

¹⁶ Robert H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1941) 648.

liever (30.1-10), numerical proverbs (30.15-30.31) and the portrait of an ideal wife (31.10-31.31). Nevertheless, its tone and direction show it to be a unified work, addressing a particular audience. Like Egyptian and Babylonian sages, the secular teachers in the Book of Proverbs and the authors of the earliest parts of the Old Testament saw wisdom as "native intelligence, shrewdness . . ." or even professional skill (22.29).¹⁷ Both secular and religious teachers combined proverbs, ethical dicta and practical advice, compatible elements in a philosophy which avers that the righteous are rewarded in this world.

Long life is in (wisdom's) right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.

(Proverbs 3.16)

A slothful man will not catch his prey,
but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

(Proverbs 12.27)

He who loves pleasure will be a poor man;
he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

(Proverbs 21.17)

Proverbs give advice on the use of bribes (21.14, 17.8, 15.27); the value of good counsel (20.18); the avoidance of debts (22.26-27), drink and adulterous women; and behavior in the company of the mighty.

¹⁷ Pfeiffer 650. He cites Judg. 5.29; II Sam. 13.3; 14.2,20; 20.16-22 and, in the P code, Ex. 28.3; 31.3,6; 35.26,31, etc. For wisdom as professional skill in Proverbs see verses 6.6; 20.18; 21.22; 24.3-6; 30.24-28.

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
 or stand in the place of the great;
 for it is better to be told, "Come up here,"
 than to be put lower in the presence of the prince.

(Proverbs 25.6-7)

Diligence, sobriety, shrewdness, and good manners are the mainstays of this wisdom literature. Even in the religious proverbs the emphasis is on experience, not revelations, on this world, not the next. And yet, there is an element in the Proverbs which is missing in Amen-em-ope. There is a sense of the limits of wisdom, and, since wisdom is one of the highest of human attributes, of the limits of men. This sense of limitation has been attributed to the Jewish innovation of combining morality with religion. It has also been called the contribution of monotheism to a worldly code.¹⁸

No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel,
 can avail against the Lord.

(Proverbs 21.30)

Indeed, humility and awe are seen as prerequisites to wisdom:

The fear of the Lord is the
 beginning of wisdom,
 and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

(Proverbs 9.10)

¹⁸ H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1946) 237, 252-4.

The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom,
and humility goes before honor.

(Proverbs 15.33)

We shall find this idea, fleshed out with the specifics of a heroic culture, in the Old English wisdom poetry.

Another Old Testament book displays a more complex, less optimistic attitude toward wisdom, although it, too, relies upon the international wisdom tradition. Ecclesiastes, the book of the teacher Qoheleth, has been shown to be in debt to the third century Greek rationalist, Theognis.¹⁹ Thus, Qoheleth advises: "Be not quick to anger, / for anger lodges in the bosom of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7.9) and Theognis: "Be patient, my heart, in troubles, even though your sufferings are intolerable; the hearts of base men are too hasty" (Theognis 592 ff.). The Greek moralist continues: "neither in misfortunes be overmuch vexed nor in good fortune be suddenly delighted, until you have seen the extreme end" (Theognis 592-4).²⁰ This sequence is reversed by Qoheleth, who also added rhetorical flourishes: "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; / and the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit" (Ecclesiastes 7.8).

Qoheleth, like Theognis, has been embittered by a harsh life. His troubles have convinced him that there is no earthly reward for the virtuous and that most men are fools

¹⁹ H. Ranston. But see Brand Blanshard, "Wisdom" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 8 (NY: MacMillan Publ. and The Free Press, 1967) 322.

²⁰ Ranston 115. I have used Ranston's translations of Theognis, found in the article cited in note 9 above.

or worse.

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heeded.

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

(Ecclesiastes 9.13-18)

The image of the wise man as an unacknowledged bulwark may well have come from a similar complaint by Theognis: "Although he be citadel and tower to an empty-minded people a good man gets little share of honour" (Theognis 233-34).²¹

In Ecclesiastes the concept of an elite following the arduous ways of wisdom through a hostile and foolish world becomes a major theme. The sage's alienation from his society and sometimes from his god and the keen tension between his own ideals and his realistic assessment of the corruption around him produce an embittered and cynical tone. Though the doubts and introversions of Ecclesiastes seem to stray from the robust wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, its alienation can be seen as developing naturally from the pragmatism of earlier wisdom collections. Qoheleth, too, was a teacher of youth.

In this brief survey we have seen that ancient and

²¹ Ranston 111.

biblical gnomes mix pragmatic advice to ambitious young men with ethical maxims on personal conduct. Recommendations of diligence and moderation are complemented by the distrust of sudden wealth and disapproval of licentious behavior. Finally, the biblical sages added the ingredients of humility and awe and, in Ecclesiastes, a touch of cynicism to a tradition which, as a whole, tended to cultivate a pragmatic elite capable of managing society's affairs.

Despite the cataclysmic changes of the early Christian era, the tradition of gnomonic collections survived into the early Middle Ages. Its influence can be heard in Celtic, Norse, and Anglo-Saxon gnomes. For example, many of the warnings and instructions of Irish wisdom literature were similar to the ancient maxims of Amen-em-ope and the Book of Proverbs.

Senbriathra Fithail and the Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt are both tecosca, or training manuals in the practice and ethics of kingship. They have both been dated in the ninth century and are both presented as products of the court of King Cormac, who ruled in the third century A.D.²² The maxims of Senbriathra Fithail are thought to be largely of pagan origin.²³ Many of them resemble gnomes found elsewhere in the wisdom tradition. Thus,

²² Kuno Meyer, The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt, Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1909) vi and xi.

²³ Roland M. Smith, "The Senbriathra Fithail and Related Texts," Revue Celtique 45.1 (1928): 2-3.

The beginning of wisdom is docility.

(Senbriathra Fithail 6)

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

(Proverbs 9.10)

And, reaching forward in time,

Death is better than an everlasting blemish.

(Senbriathra Fithail 4.43)²⁴

Cattle die and kinsmen die,
 thyself eke soon wilt die;
 One thing, I wot, will wither never:
 the doom over each one dead.

(Hávamál st. 77)

Deað bið sella
 eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!

(Death is better
 for every eorl than a life of disgrace!)

(Beowulf 2890b-91)²⁵

The Instructions of King Cormac contain a long series of answers to repeated questions, the first of which is "What is best for a king?" To this Cormac responds:

Best for him
 firmness without anger
 Patience without strife
 Affability without haughtiness.

(Tecosca Cormaic 2-5)²⁶

This response repeats the traditional sapiential insistence

²⁴ Smith 5 and 27.

²⁵ All quotations from Beowulf are taken from Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1950).

²⁶ Meyer 3.

on self-control and the restraint of arrogance. As in the other collections, the well-being of society is seen as dependent on the behavior of its rulers and thus the character of a prince is of the greatest importance.

The Old Norse Hávamál, or Sayings of Hár the High One, has even greater affinities with the hard-headed, sometimes cynical, advice earlier sages offered to young men bent on personal survival and success. Hávamál is part of the Elder or Poetic Edda. The manuscript, codex Regius no. 2365 of the Royal Library of Denmark, has been attributed to the thirteenth century, but some of the individual sayings are traceable to the tenth century, the era of the Old English Exeter Book.²⁷ There are five sections to the Hávamál and they include advice on the treatment and behavior of guests, maxims on decency and moderation, a collection of sayings against women, miscellaneous words on love and perfect friendship, an obscure rune poem and, finally, eighteen magical charms.

Hár, the High One, like the Egyptian sages, saw wisdom as the art of righteous success and survival. The first section, on guests, discusses everyday situations and advises circumspection as well as decency. The second section is decidedly cynical and misogynistic:

A wench's words let no wise man trust,
nor trust the troth of a woman;

27

Poetic Edda xiv.

for on whirling wheel their hearts are shaped
and fickle and fitful their minds.

(Hávamál st. 84)

The third section is kindlier and the last two deliberately obscure and magical. Many of the sayings repeat themes heard in more ancient gnomes:

Much at random oft rambles he
whose tongue does ever tattle;
a talker's tongue, unless tamed it be,
will often work him woe.

(Hávamál st. 29)

Amen-em-ope (ch. 18, 385 f.) and Proverbs 13.3 also warn against ill-considered speech (see page 12 above).

A full-stocked farm had some farmer's sons.
Now they stoop at the beggar's staff;
in a twinkling fleeth trothless wealth,
it is the ficklest of friends.

(Hávamál st. 78)

We find similar cautions in Proverbs 23.4-5:

Do not toil to acquire wealth;
be wise enough to desist.
When your eyes light upon it, it is gone;
for suddenly it takes to itself wings
flying like an eagle toward heaven.

And, finally, Hár advises Loddfáfnir:

be most wary of ale and of other man's wife,
and eke, thirdly, lest thieves outwit thee.

(Hávamál st. 131)

Just so Amen-em-ope instructs his pupils:

Covet not (or, be not greedy for) the precious metals.
 Hate (i.e. avoid or reject) the beautiful singing woman.
 What is it like? A fetter, a tie.

(Amen-em-ope, ch. 16, 344-6)

Make no undue haste to sing the praises (or, to follow
 the cult) of the wine cup,
 It will increase (or, double) the heart (i.e., courage)
 of thine adversaries.

(Amen-em-ope, ch. 28, 523-4)

Although Hár's first three sections hold few surprises for those familiar with sapiential literature, the last two are a departure from the rational and secular concerns we have come to expect. These sections introduce magical symbols and sayings into a collection which had previously been restricted to the precincts of everyday human behavior. Given the disparate nature of texts surviving from the early Middle Ages, it is tempting to discount these runic passages as inconsistent with the wisdom tradition. However, the existence of independent runic alphabet poems whose contents are also compatible with the literature of the sages leads me to characterize runic passages as a northern contribution to, rather than a departure from, the tradition. Therefore, a brief discussion of runes and their significance seems appropriate here, before we launch into an analysis of the Old English gnomic collections.

Runes were both powerful magical symbols and the first alphabet of the northern peoples. Indeed, their potency may well have been derived from the fact that they were the first comprehensive method of abstract visual signification

for the Germanic tribes. Accustomed to literacy, we can only guess at the power such signs would have for a people among whom writing was unknown. Access to runes meant control over the objects they represented, as attested by Bede's story of Imma, the prisoner whose bonds were miraculously loosened whenever his brother said mass for him. This was, in fact, a Christian mystery, but his captor, a retainer of Ethelred, attributed it to "litteras solutorias," or written charms.²⁸ An analogous passage occurs in Hávamál, stanza 149:

That fourth I know, if foeman have
fettered me hand and foot:
I chant a charm the chains to break,
so the fetters will fly off my feet,
and off my hands the halter.

More explicit advice is contained in the Sigrdrífumál. Sigrdrífa explains to Sigurðr the proper use of sigrúnar, or "victory runes:"

Learn victory runes if thou victory wantest,
and have them on thy sword's hilt--
on thy sword's hilt some, on thy sword's guard some,
and call twice upon Týr.

(Sigrdrífumál st. 7)

Learn sea runes eke if save thou wilt
the sail-steeds on the sea:
on the bow scratch them, and on rudder blade,
and etch them with fire in the oars:

²⁸ Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1971) vol. II, Bk. 4, ch. 22, 119-25.

howe'er beetling the billows and black the deep,
yet comest thou safe from the sea.

(Sigrdrífumál st. 11)²⁹

Centuries into the Christian era, when the Latin alphabet had entirely replaced the runic as a tool for written communication, runes retained their potency, although the agency once behind that power, their unique ability to symbolize concrete things, had been usurped by the more efficient and more developed system of the Romans.

In Hávamál's runic passages, Hár teaches the use of runes just as, in the previous sections, he had schooled his listeners in the arts of survival and social behavior. The poem's fourth section, as distinguished by Hollander,³⁰ tells of the supernatural origin of the runes. They were acquired by Oðin after a nine-day ordeal on the Yggdrasil, the World-Ash.

Then began I to grow and gain in insight,
to wax eke in wisdom:
one verse led on to another verse,
one poem led on to the other poem.

(Hávamál st. 141)


In the fifth and final part of the Hávamál Oðin lists eighteen charms which, together with the appropriate runes, can heal the sick, dull an enemy's weapons, loosen fetters, extinguish fires, settle quarrels, seduce women and more.

²⁹ Sigrdrífumál, trans. Lee M. Hollander, Poetic Edda 233-40.

³⁰ Poetic Edda 14.

These are intended for practical use in all of life's arenas.

Runes have survived in other forms as well; they are embedded in long narrative poems in Old English, and they form the backbone of their own mnemonic lists, the runic alphabet poems, in several languages. The latter are relevant here for two reasons. They can give us a sense of the crosscurrents which flowed among early medieval literatures in the north and they contain in brief stanzas various characteristics of the gnome. Unlike the strophes of Sigrdrífumál or Hávamál, the runic poems do not instruct listeners in the use of runes. Instead they concentrate on one or two essential properties in each rune's key-word, perhaps to aid memory but also to provide glimpses of the wonders, both good and evil, of the natural world and the world of men. For it is the qualities of the key-word which introduce us to the powers of the rune.

The runic poems, then, are lists of gnomes in couplets or stanzas, each of which begins with a word which stands for a rune. Each key-word has a rune as its first letter. Thus the rune  is represented in Old Norse by the word nauðr and the accompanying couplet reads:

Nauðr gerer næppa koste;
noktan kælir í froste.

(Constraint gives scant choice;
a naked man is chilled by the frost.)

(The Norwegian Runic Poem st. 8)³¹

³¹ Bruce Dickins, Runic and Heroic Poems of the Old

The same rune in Icelandic yields this stanza:

Nauð er þýjar þrá
ok þungr kostur
ok vássamlig verk.
opera niflungur.

(Constraint = grief of the bond-maid
and state of oppression
and toilsome work.)

(The Icelandic Runic Poem st. 8)³²

and in Old English:

† (nyd) byþ nearu on breostan; weorþeþ hi ðeah oft
niþa bearnum
to helpe and to hæle gehwæþre, gif hi his
hlystaþ æror.

(Necessity is oppressive to the heart; yet it often
becomes to the sons of men
a help and a salvation nevertheless, if they heed it
early (or, before it becomes necessity).)

(The Rune Poem 27-28)³³

In the Norwegian poem the gnome uses litotes to achieve a slightly ironic effect which is enhanced by an obvious metaphor taken from the natural world. In Old Icelandic, the brief lines are more specific, giving the general con-

Teutonic Peoples (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1915). I have used Dickins' translation and edition for the Norwegian and Icelandic poems. The Old English Rune Poem, which he also translated in this volume, will be taken from the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records.

³² Maureen Halsall calls the last line here "a sort of scholarly apparatus . . . first a Latin synonym of the rune name described is provided, then this is supplemented by an Icelandic poetic term for 'king' or 'prince' whose initial sound alliterates with the absent rune name, thus furnishing a second learned clue to the solution of the runic riddle." The Old English Rune Poem: a critical edition (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981) 37.

³³ ASPR VI 28.

cept a quick, lyrical reality. In Old English, the gnome is more complex and less fatalistic. Here the poet develops the concept of constraint or necessity into a recommendation: if heeded early enough, indeed if heeded before it becomes a constraint, nyd can be a man's salvation. The sage thus develops two aspects of the rune, its negative and its positive sides. This kind of intellectual deepening of proverbial commonplaces can be seen elsewhere in the Old English poem. It is especially evident if we compare the Old English stanzas to the equivalent Icelandic and Norwegian gnomes:

Fé vældr frænda róge;
fððesk ulfr í skóge.

(Wealth is a source of discord among kinsmen;
the wolf lives in the forest.)

(The Norwegian Runic Poem st. 1)

Fé er frænda róg
ok flæðar viti
ok grafseiðs gata
aurum fylkir.

(Wealth = source of discord among kinsmen
and fire of the sea
and path of the serpent.)

(The Icelandic Runic Poem st. 1)

ƿ(feo) byþ frofur fira gehwylcum.
Sceal ðeah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dælan
gif he wile for drihtne domes hleotan.

(Wealth is a comfort to all men.
Yet each man must share it freely
if he wishes to gain glory before the Lord.)

(The Old English Rune Poem 1-3)

It is evident from even these brief examples that runes, as well as being of great esoteric significance, were also used to teach the more humdrum and worldly principles favored by gnomists in Mediterranean literatures. Stanzas on constraint and on wealth coexist with stanzas on natural phenomena and on mythical figures. The use of nature in these three runic poems has parallels in the Old English gnomic collections and may shed light on some of the more difficult passages there.³⁴

Before we move on to Maxims I and II, however, there is one final issue to be considered here, an issue raised by the use of runes, magical spells and supernatural beings in the final sections of Hávamál. These other-worldly presences have given rise to theories of cosmological correspondences for the rest of the poem. Loren Gruber, for example, sees the ostensibly plodding aphorisms of the first section as revealing "a living correspondence between the worlds of men and northern gods." Indeed, Gruber believes that the Anglo-Saxon as well as the Norse gnomists were busy making connections between things of this world and an "other" world.³⁵ I cannot see other-worldly significance in the stanzas on guests which begin the collection. I prefer to

³⁴ For further discussion of runes see the following studies: Dickins, Runic and Heroic Poems; R. W. V. Elliott, Runes: an Introduction (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1959); Halsall, The Old English Rune Poem; G. Storms, Anglo-Saxon Magic (The Hague, 1948).

³⁵ Loren Gruber, "Hávamál, Stanzas 1-5," Scandinavian Studies 49 (1977): 330.

attribute their occasionally obscure syntax to problems of transmission and to our ignorance of cultural mores in tenth century Norway. I prefer to see the juxtaposition of earthly and spiritual, or magical, which occurs in these poems as co-existence, not allegory. The combination is often a happy one and not alien to the wisdom tradition as a whole, although it is most prevalent in Old Norse. The Book of Proverbs, for example, follows advice on living a righteous life in an unjust world with a dialogue between a sceptic and a believer. The subject of the dialogue is not the snares and pitfalls of this world but the supernatural powers of God:

The man says to Ithi-el,
to Ithi-el and Ucal:
Surely I am too stupid to be a man.
I have not the understanding of a man.
I have not learned wisdom,
nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.
Who has ascended to heaven and come down?
Who has gathered the wind in his fists?
Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name, and what is his son's name?
Surely you know!

(Proverbs 30.1-6)

This appendix is followed by a series of numerical folk proverbs in which the mysteries of soaring eagles and human loves are juxtaposed to commonplaces on the arrogance of the maid become mistress and the wisdom of rock dwelling badgers. These sayings are not the scattered harvest of undisciplined minds. Nor are they attempts to allegorize the mundane realities of our world. They are, instead, tools

for teaching young men who will one day have influence over many different aspects of their society, who may have to set examples by their personal conduct, govern humanely and effectively, and yet retain a sensitivity to the mysteries of life and to their own limitations.

In conclusion then, the collections quoted and discussed in this brief survey, the Instructions of Amen-em-ope and Ptah-Hotep, the Book of Proverbs, Hitopadesa, Senbriathra Fithail, Instructions of King Cormac and Hávamál, have much in common. They are heterogeneous collections, not imbedded sayings, lyrics or structured essays. They mix sub-genre, tone, and theme. They share many topics, among them: the values and dangers of wealth; the value of sobriety and diligence; discretion or the need to restrain oneself in speech and behavior; the danger of associating with angry men; respect for property; compassion for the poor and helpless; correct behavior in the company of the powerful; and the value of humility. Despite their diversity of theme and style, they can be seen as deliberate attempts at education rather than aimless anthologies of one-liners. Indeed, they are usually introduced as pedagogical efforts. When appropriate, their sagacious speakers expand a theme into a small essay or use variation and repetition to drive home particularly important points. These teachers tend to be both elitist and realistic, often cynical and righteous by turns, as befits instructors in the art of living successfully. And they all seem to favor the

gnome over the proverb.³⁶

Maxims I and II

The Old English works Maxims I and II share most of these characteristics. Like the Egyptian and Biblical analogues discussed above, Maxims I and II are collections of gnomes, unmixed with lyric or narrative and not evincing consistent structure when judged by modern standards. Their authors and origins are unknown. J. J. Conybeare was perhaps the first to recognize the gnomonic character of Maxims I. He describes it as "thrown together with little or no connexion in the manner of the gnomonic poetry of the Greeks; or, to use a more familiar illustration, resembling the most miscellaneous chapters of the Book of Proverbs."³⁷ Indeed, not only the style but many of the topics and attitudes evident in the earlier literature can be found in the Old English works. And the Anglo-Saxon authors, too, try to combine a realistic assessment of their world with a strong statement of the values which ought to hold true in that world. By examining the tactics and the themes of Maxims I and II we can secure for them a place in the international tradition and begin to understand their significance for English literature.

³⁶ I have defined gnome and proverb for the purposes of this paper on pages 6-8.

³⁷ John L. Conybeare, ed. William Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London: Harding and Lepard, 1826) 205.

I want to begin my discussion of each collection with a description of its manuscript. A brief look at the codices which house these poems reveals that they held a secure place in the Old English poetic corpus. Like the individual gnomes found in Beowulf and the elegies, Maxims I and II seem to fit easily into larger, non-proverbial environments. Their contexts, however, are not single poems but books, each of which is, like the Book of Proverbs, the work of a compiler.

Maxims I is contained in the Exeter Book, that "mycel englisc boc be gehwiltcum pingum on leodwisan geworht" given to the Exeter Cathedral library by Leofric, first bishop of Exeter.³⁸ The bishop died in 1072 and this book is thought to have been written in the previous century.³⁹ Its script has been praised as "the noblest of Anglo-Saxon hands"⁴⁰ and its contents often seem the work of the noblest of Anglo-Saxon minds. Among the overwhelmingly religious and didactic works of Leofric's library, the Exeter Book stands out as a true anthology, in which biblical narratives, prayer, homily and saints' lives are interspersed with meditative verse, riddles and bestiary pieces. It is a remarkably heterogeneous collection. The choice of styles and formal

³⁸ R. W. Chambers, Max Förster and Robin Flower, ed., The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry, facs. (London: Percy, Lund, Humphries & Co., 1933). See folios 1a-2b of the facsimile for a list of Leofric's donations to the Cathedral library and page 10 of the introductory chapters.

³⁹ Max Förster, The Exeter Book facs. 10; Robin Flower, The Exeter Book facs. 83.

⁴⁰ Robin Flower, "The Script of the Exeter Book," The Exeter Book facs. 83.

modes is also wide-ranging, evidence of an eclectic and knowledgeable taste. It contains, for example, the only two extant Old English poems which use strophes and refrains, Deor and Wulf and Eadwacer. In this manuscript are also preserved the only fully rhymed poem in Old English, a large number of riddles and most of the lyrics which have until now been characterized as elegies. The book's heterogeneity, in style and substance, bears witness, it seems to me, to the talents and the originality of its anthologist.

It is difficult, however, to discern any comprehensive principle of organization in the Exeter Book. Although most of the poems show the influence of Christianity, a few seem, despite mention of the Christian god, to stem from pre-Christian England. Maxims I is one of these. In some spots the book's organization seems utterly random. In others one can imagine that the Christian narratives are deliberately grouped together or that homiletic pieces on the fortunes of men are pointedly juxtaposed to more secular and personal poems on the same topic. Thus, folios 8a to 76a contain Christ, Guthlac, Azarias, The Phoenix and Juliana; excepting the allegorical Phoenix all of these are narratives containing significant elements of prayer and song. Folios 76b-88b, on the other hand, contain shorter poems, such as The Wanderer, in which narrative is used to provide exempla for homiletic or gnomic lessons. The order of these works in the manuscript implies a deliberate intercalation of

older lyric gnomic material among Christian homilies. Thus, the elegiac and gnomic The Wanderer is followed by the homiletic Gifts of Men, then Precepts (a father-to-son sapiential poem), The Seafarer (elegy and gnome), Vainglory (homily), Widsith (pagan auto-narrative), and The Fortunes of Men (a homily very much like The Gifts of Men). Maxims I (folios 88b-92b) may be the start of a sequence of poems on the natural order of things. It is followed by The Order of the World, The Riming Poem and an Old English physiologus. However, the knowledge that there are missing folios and the erratic nature of whatever organization does exist make suggestions along these lines tenuous indeed.

Unlike the early Middle Ages, our era is not one of great anthologies and we prefer the study of a single poem to the interplay of traditions and talents that a collection such as Exeter Book offers. Thus, many critics have spilled much ink searching for unifying structures in Maxims I. The simplest, least ambitious efforts have seemed to me the most useful, perhaps only because they settle for less. Some critics, for example, have contented themselves with descriptive analyses which divide the individual gnomes into types. The Chadwicks in volume I of The Growth of Literature establish two major categories of gnome and apply them to all gnomic literatures. Type I, as they define it, has to do with human actions and the use of choice or judgment; Type II concerns human activities which do not call for choice or judgment (IIa), as well as fate, death and the

gods (IIb) and characteristics of nature and nonhuman beings (IIc).⁴¹ The Chadwicks apply these categories to Greek, Norse, Celtic and Old English literature with some useful conclusions. For Norse and Old English gnomes, for example, they hypothesize a common origin followed by radically different developments.⁴²

Other critics, concentrating on the Old English gnomes, have used syntax to classify the sayings. Thus, Charles W. Kennedy in The Earliest English Poetry divides gnomes into those using sceal, byð, a or oft sceal, a or oft mæg, swa sceal and sum. In his analysis, sceal asserts "a necessity inherent in the nature and attributes of the object described," byð announces the sure qualities of physical objects or phenomena or makes "authoritative report of social rite," and sum, when used in a list, lays out the variety of men's powers and fortunes.⁴³ These syntactical markers will later help us to identify gnomes or gnomic statements imbedded in the lyrics.

P. B. Taylor, in "Heroic Ritual in the Old English Maxims," goes further than Kennedy. He sees a bipartite "pervading structural principle" with two objectives: first, to define and describe the world and, secondly, to establish how the world should be in the future. The first

⁴¹ H. Munro and Nora Chadwick, The Ancient Literatures of Europe, vol. I of The Growth of Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1932) 375-8.

⁴² Chadwick 399-400.

⁴³ Charles W. Kennedy, The Earliest English Poetry (NY: Oxford UP, 1943) 151-2.

objective is incarnate in passages marked by bið and the second in those which use sceal. Taylor proposes a distinct division between God's sphere and man's. Like the Chadwicks he sorts gnomes into categories: those which "reveal the order and rituals of nature," those which "describe the requisites of the warrior-life," and "maxims which imply the relationship between the rule of God and the rule of kings."⁴⁴

The creation of categories allows us to penetrate what is, for the modern reader, an often opaque diffusion of gnomes. Similarly, linguistic analyses of individual verses hint at orchestrated movements, in sequences which at first seem completely random:

An sceal inbindan
forstes fetre felamehtig god;
winter sceal geweorpan, weder eft cuman,
sumor swegle hat, sund unstillle.
Deop deada wæg dyrne bið lengest;
holen sceal inæled, yrfe gedæled
deades monnes. Dom biþ selast.

(One shall loosen
the fetters of frost, many times mighty God;
winter must pass; fine weather come again;
summer hot with sun, a troubled sea.
The awful way of the dead is hidden longest;
holly must be kindled, the property of a dead man
divided. Judgment is best.)

(Maxims IB 74b-80)⁴⁵

Here the kinetic, cyclical realities of seasonal change

⁴⁴ P. B. Taylor, "Heroic Ritual in the Old English Maxims," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 70 (1969): 387-93.

⁴⁵ Verses 78a-80a have occasioned some dispute. See my discussion and note on pages 68-9 of this chapter.

(sceal) are stilled by dread mortality (bið). Sceal returns to commemorate human rituals upon a death and then bið asserts the eternal, abstract value of dom. Passages dominated by sceal tend to carry a sense of forcefulness, of impetus, while a bið sequence provides a rest, a moment of things falling into place.

Some of the most sensible efforts in the analysis of the Old English gnomic collections have looked for movement or flow, a series of connections rather than an elaborate super-structure. Nigel Barley, an anthropologist, warns us that our ideas of structure may be too culturally determined and finds a "basic unity" in Maxims II, a unity which relies on a belief in the orderliness of the world. The poem's "basic technique," according to Barley, "is the use of the rich paradigmatic associations of words and ideas to link disparate fields of experience."⁴⁶ Barley relied for some of his ideas on an unpublished thesis by R. MacGregor Dawson. Dawson has since published some of his material in an article. He sees the Exeter gnomes as an exercise in "stream of consciousness," "mnemonic arrangements in sequences built up by multiple association of ideas, either through meaning or through sound." The association is achieved either when the end of one gnome suggests the beginning of another, as in lines 25b-29a in Maxims IA, or when one central theme covers several dependent gnomes, as

⁴⁶ Nigel F. Barley, "Structure in the Cotton Gnomes," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 78 (1977): 245.

in lines 3-12 of Maxims II. Sometimes unity is achieved through a combination of these techniques.⁴⁷

Although I find Dawson's perception of a loose unity attractive, he is mistaken to posit a "stream of consciousness" for works which participate in a tradition of purposive didactic collections. If we think of these poems as teaching vehicles, as didactic discourses which found their way onto parchment, their disunity and their erratic structures seem much less puzzling. The search for structure may then be replaced by a study of themes and rhetorical tactics, of what is being taught and how, and we can cease worrying about every untied end. After all, many of today's classroom presentations display less formal organization than do these poems and cover narrower fields. The diversity of subject matter and style in Maxims I and II can thus be attributed to challenges similar to those faced by the teacher of a large and unruly seminar. He changes the subject often and responds to spontaneous and perhaps irrelevant comments and questions which go unrecorded in the text. I believe that in Maxims IA he even stages a contest between himself and another sage in order to hold his audience and explore issues crucial to his time.

In the following analyses the three sections of Maxims I are treated as three separate poems. There is justification for this division both in the manuscript's form and in

⁴⁷ Dawson, 15 ff.

the poetic content. Krapp and Dobbie acknowledge that "So far as the indications in the manuscript go . . . it is impossible to tell with any certainty whether the three sectional divisions indicated in the manuscript were intended by the scribe to be taken as three parts of a single poem, or as three separate poems."⁴⁸ Each poem begins with a large capital letter then smaller capitals for the rest of the first word. There are no spaces between poems, or at the beginning or end of the group. The substantive support for treating the poems separately will be made clear in the following pages. We shall see that each of the three units has a characteristic emphasis. Though not unified in the modern sense, each poem is clearly an individual work with a distinctive subject matter and tone and its own formal opening and closure. I shall discuss Maxims IA, which I believe to be a dialogue poem, first, then Maxims IC and finally Maxims IB, which raises special problems.

Maxims IA

Dialogue has long been a favorite pedagogical tool. It has usually taken the form of brief questions which set the stage for answers which could easily have stood by themselves. In this way King Cormac Mac Airt organized his Instructions and the sage in the Book of Proverbs 30:1-9 answered a sceptic. Several references in Old English literature indicate that the exchanges which took place in

⁴⁸ ASPR III xlvi.

Anglo-Saxon halls were as much contest as dialogue, as much entertainment as pedagogy:

þonne monige beoð mæpelhegendra,
 wlonce wigsmiþas winburgum in,
 sittap æt symble, soðgied wrecað,
 wordum wrixlað, witan fundiaþ
 hwylc æcstede inne in ræcede
 mid werum wunige, þonne win hweteð
 beornes breostsefan. Breahtem stigeð,
 cirm on corþre, cwide scralletap
 missenlice.

(Then there are many counselors,
 proud warsmiths in the chief towns;
 they sit at feasting, make true lays,
 trade in words. They strive to know
 which battleplace inside the hall
 may remain among men when wine excites
 the mind of a nobleman. A tumult rises,
 an uproar in the company; they shout
 variously in discourse.)

(Vainglory 13-21a)⁴⁹

Maxims IA begins with an invitation to such a contest, a challenge to an exchange of works:

Frige mec frodum wordum! Ne læt þinne ferð
 onhælna,
 degol þæt þu deopost cunne! Nelle ic þe min dyrne
 gesecgan,
 gif þu me þinne hygecræft hylest ond þine heortan
 gepohtas.
 Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan.

(Question me with wise words. Do not let your mind be
 hidden,
 the mystery that you know most profoundly. I will not
 tell you my secret,
 if you conceal from me your wisdom and your heart's
 thoughts.
 Skillful men must exchange lays.)

(Maxims IA 1-4a)

⁴⁹ ASPR III 147.

The tacit assumption has been that this debate, or word-exchange, never took place, or that, if it did, it was lost to us and the challenge merely incorporated into a collection of wise sayings. However, for each of the topics broached in the first two-thirds of Maxims IA there are two responses, one of which can be characterized as Christian, the other as pagan, or at least determinedly secular. Internal evidence, formal and thematic, suggests that this poem is more than a heterogeneous collection of gnomes. I believe that it is, instead, the remnant of a dialogue between a pagan sage, working in the venerable sapiential tradition of Hávamál and the Book of Proverbs, and a Christian, aware of the conventions of that tradition but committed to the glorification of his god and the conversion of his audience.

Let us imagine, then, that the Christian guest begins the dialogue by announcing himself as ready for questioning: "Frige mec / frodum wordum." In lb the sage urges him to reveal the mystery, "degol," that he knows so profoundly. The sage states clearly the obligation of wise and adroit men to exchange articulated wisdom publicly: "Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan." The Christian response, although it echoes the gnomic structure of the a-verse, comes as a gentle rebuke: "God sceal mon ærest hergan" (One must first praise God) (4b). Line 4, as a whole, epitomizes the dialogue between the wisdom of skilled men and the reverent praise of God: "Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan. God sceal mon ærest hergan."

This first rule of Christian utterance is justified in the passage that follows. In verses 4a-18a, the Christian sets out the divine properties which command our reverence. The emphasis, as elsewhere in Old English literature, is on God's role as creator and on his indestructibility, his immunity from age, disease, trouble, the various human destinies.⁵⁰ The Christian speaker also attaches great importance to the creation of intangibles, the thought, spirit and language of man:

He us geþonc syleð,
missenlicu mod, monge reorde.

(He gives us thought,
our various spirits, many languages.)

(Maxims IA 12b-13)

The pagan response begins in verse 18b. The sage does not directly contradict his opponent. Rather, in the elliptical style of much gnomic literature, he uses a previously developed theme as a starting point and moves out in a tangent. Thus the Christian's description of the variety of human life, of peoples and customs, prompts a series of secular maxims regarding the peaceful government of these diverse societies and the relevant duties of wise and good men to prevent and repair the ravages of war.

Þing sceal gehegan
frod wiþ frodne; biþ hyra ferð gelic,

⁵⁰ See, for example, Cædmon's Hymn and the creation song in Beowulf 92 ff..

hi a sace semap, sibbe gelærað.
 þa ær wonsælge awegen habbað.

(They must meet,
 the wise with the wise; their mind is alike
 they ever settle disputes, teach peace,
 which before the wretched have carried away.)

(Maxims IA 18b-21)

The obligations and the achievements set forth by the sage in lines 18b-23a are all human in scale. Indeed, the role of wise men as keepers of a worldly peace is a venerable one:

When a land transgresses
 it has many rulers;
 But with men of understanding and knowledge
 its stability will long continue.

(Proverbs 28.2)

Perhaps prompted by memories of war, the sage concludes this section with a discourse on generation and mortality (lines 23b-29a). In a juxtaposition similar to those we have seen in the Norse runic poems he follows the human sequence of mating and childbirth with the vegetative cycle. The latter is portrayed through a tree which mourns the annual loss of its leaves.⁵¹ The next two lines stand out as a remarkable combination of fatalism and irony, elements which are also important to Old English exile lyrics:

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In each of the runic poems I studied the stanza on nyd (constraint or affliction) is followed by one on ice, the stanza on man by one on water.

Fus sceal feran, fæge sweltan
 ond dogra gewham ymb gedal sacan
 middangeardes.

(Ready for death, he must travel, the fated perish,
 and each day contend their departure
 from earth.)

(Maxims IA 27-29a)

Those most eager for death must journey in search of it.
 Those fated to die contend with their destiny. So the
 worldly sage would be content to leave it, the irony of the
 issue being enough, but his guest must fit man's mortality
 into divine plan.

Meotud ana wat
 hwær se cwealm cymep, þe heonan of cyppe gewitep.

(God alone knows
 where pestilence comes, [and] who hence departs from
 known lands.)

(Maxims IA 29b-30)⁵²

In this response, the Christian guest takes the position that God is responsible for the processes of birth and death. In this way He limits the earth's population. The contention is that a rational process lies behind what the pagan sees as blind fate. Foolish is the person who knows

⁵² Compare the following translations:

"The Creator alone knows whence the malady comes which hence from the country goes." Williams, note, p. 132.

"The Creator alone knows the man who will die, (in the places) where disease will come." P. D. Haworth, review of Williams in Modern Language Review 11 (1916): 89.

"Only the Ruler knows where plague comes to, when it goes away from our country." Shippey, Poems of Wisdom and Learning 65.

not his lord and is therefore unready for death. Wiser men prepare for death and protect their souls (35-36).

The sage begins again in line 37. He matches the solemn admonition to preserve one's soul with several worldly beatitudes. Prosperity and friendship are blessedness, as is innocence. The inconstancy of friends and loss of goods brings misery, as does blindness:

Blind sceal his eagna þolian,
oftigen biþ him torhtre gesihþe. Ne magon hi tunglu
bewitian,
swegltorht sunnan ne monan; þæt him biþ sar in his
mode,
onge þonne he hit ana wat, ne weneð þæt him þæs
edhwyrft cyme.

(The blind man must suffer the loss
of his eyes,
withdrawn is clear sight from him. Nor may they behold
the stars,
the sky-bright sun, or the moon; that is painful to him
in his mind,
vexed when he alone feels it, nor does he expect that
sight may come back to him.)

(Maxims IA 39b-42)

The sage holds out no hope for such a one. But the Christian response is unequivocal. The guardian granted the afflicted one that torment and may heal him if he keeps a pure heart (lines 43-44).

Lines 45-68 of Maxims IA seem to belong exclusively to the secular sapiential tradition. But before we explore their links to other collections, two points must be made concerning the dialogue theory broached here for lines 1-44.

The first has to do with the syntax of Maxims IA 1-44.

Two of the consistent signs of the gnomic tradition in Old English are the use of certain hortatory verbal auxiliaries, chiefly sceal and mæg, and an authoritative use of the copulative, bið. For example: "Ðing sceal gehegan / frod wiþ frodne" (18b-19a); "Fus sceal feran" (27a); and "Eadig bið se þe in his eðle geþihð" (37a).

Analysis of the incidence of these verbs in lines 1-44 yields the following results. In the 48 half-lines which I have designated as Christian there are 31 verbs or elided verbs. Of these, five, or 16%, may be called gnomic. In the 40 verses belonging to the secular voice there are 30 verbs. Of these 20, or 66%, are gnomic.⁵³ As a result of these syntactical choices the two alternating voices of Maxims IA have very different sounds. Listen, for example, to verses 12b-18a:

	He us geþonc syleð,
missenlicu mod,	monge reorde.
Feorhcynna fela	fæþmeþ wide
eglond monig.	Eardas rume
meotud arærde	for moncynne,
ælmihhtig god,	efenfela bega
þeoda ond þeawa.	

([God] gives us thought,
[our] various spirits, many languages.
Many an island embraces widely
many kinds of life. Dwellings far and wide
the ruler reared for mankind,
the almighty God, an even number of both
peoples and customs.)

⁵³ In compiling these figures I have counted a sequence such as "Fus sceal feran, fæge sweltan" as containing two verbs, with one of the auxiliary verbs being understood.

The Christian here recounts the accomplishments and attributes of his god in almost a narrative fashion. The verbs are engaging, active: "wendað," "drecep," "syleð," "arærde." The manner is expansive.

The pagan response, on the other hand, begins in 18b with a specific exhortation to wise men, on whom peace depends, and continues with a strong series of congruities:

Ding sceal gehegan
 frod wip frodne; bip hyra ferð gelic,
 hi a sace semap, sibbe gelærað,
 þa ær wonsælge awegen habbað.
 Ræd sceal mid snyttro, ryht mid wisum,
 til sceal mid tilum.

(A meeting they must hold,
 the wise with the wise; their mind is alike,
 they ever settle disputes, teach peace,
 which before the wretched have carried away.
 Counsel must be with the learned, justice with the wise,
 kindness with good men.)

The paratactic sequence of phrases governed by sceal, the closed balance of the half-lines, one against the other, derives from an older, received wisdom, beyond history, unsusceptible of explanation.

The second point in support of a dialogue structure for Maxims IA involves an unequivocally dialogic poem in Old English, Solomon and Saturn II.

Solomon and Saturn II is a dialogue of conversion which takes place between the Old Testament wise man Solomon, who here defends Christianity, and Saturn, a pagan sage. R. J. Menner has said of the poem:

The gnostic tradition and the riddle tradition are
 integral parts of the second dialogue [of Solomon and

Saturn]. The condensed wisdom of the gnostic verses raises the poet's didacticism above the commonplace and the dark questions and mysterious allusions lend a dignity even to the lore that is merely curious.⁵⁴

A look at the "condensed wisdom" of Solomon and Saturn II makes the method of Maxims IA seem a little less strange:

Saturnus cwæð:
 "Nieht bið wedera ðiestrost, ned bið wyrða
 heardost,
 sorg bið swarost byrðen, slæp bið deaðe
 gelicost."

Salomon cwæð:
 "Lytle hwile leaf beoð grene;
 ðonne hie eft fealewiað, feallað on eorðan
 and forweorniað, weorðað to duste.
 Swa ðonne gefeallað ða ðe fyrena ær
 lange læstað, lifiað him in mane,
 hyðað heahgestreon, healdað georne
 on fæstenne feondum to willan,
 and wenað wanhogan ðæt hie wille wuldorcining,
 ælmihtig god, ece gehiran."

(Saturn spoke:
 "Night is the darkest weather, necessity is the harshest
 fate,
 sorrow is the heaviest burden, sleep is most like death."

Solomon spoke:
 "For a little while leaves are green;
 Then they turn yellow again, fall to the ground
 and wither away, turn into dust.
 Thus, then, fall those who earlier crimes
 for a long while have been committing; they live in sin,
 hide treasures, holding them carefully
 in safety to the fiend's delight;
 and they expect, the foolish ones, that the King of
 Glory,
 almighty God, will listen to them forever.")

(Solomon and Saturn II 312-22)⁵⁵

Here, as in Maxims IA 25b-29a, death is first seen as fated,

⁵⁴ R. J. Manner, ed., The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn (London: Oxford UP, 1941) 66.

⁵⁵ ASPR VI 42.

unalterable, inexplicable, and then is given a deistic rationale by the Christian speaker. In each poem human mortality is likened to the loss of leaves in the fall. Also, Saturn, like the pagan sage of the Exeter Book, uses the terse repetitive syntax of the gnomic tradition and is answered with explanation and hypotactic narrative.

In both poems the dialogue takes an oblique turn. In Solomon and Saturn II (lines 154 ff.), Saturn questions Solomon directly, but when the poet slips into gnomic syntax he has his antagonists address common issues rather than respond to direct queries. This is not to say that the wise men are in agreement, but rather that their contest grows more subtle and more complex in these passages. They refuse to limit themselves to the preceding question or challenge or statement. Thus, in the excerpt cited above, rather than using the challenging question or the contradiction against his opponent, Solomon skillfully turns Saturn's gnomic, closed observations into a moral lesson on the foolishness of those who wait to mend their lives. This kind of oblique opposition is, I contend, also the dialogic style of Maxims IA. There, too, ancient truths stand skillfully propounded. There, too, the Christian response is explained, adapted, and embellished. Both poems give us the interplay of two wisdoms, an ancient secular knowledge of man's obligations and limitations and a new and potent religion illuminated in every part by the belief in a powerful creator.

One fancies line 45a of Maxims IA as a brusque response to the vaunted healing powers of that creator: "Lef mon læces behofað" (A weak man has need of a leech.). Certainly lines 45 ff. return to earthly concerns and natural realities, straying far from the realm of the church. Like earlier pagan sages, the poet of Maxims IA 45-68 concerns himself with the education of youth (45b-50a) and the importance of self-control, of restraint. He offers a model of education designed to give a young man an inner strength and depth of understanding which pupils of Amen-em-ope would do well to emulate:

Læran sceal mon geongne monnan,
 trymman ond tyhtan þæt he teala cunne, oppæt hine
 mon atemedne hæbbe,
 sylle him wist ond wædo, oppæt hine mon on
 gewitte alæde.
 Ne sceal hine mon cildgeongne forcweþan, ær he hine
 acyþan mote;
 þy sceal on þeode geþeon, þæt he wese
 þriþhygende

(one must teach a young man,
 strengthen and encourage him so that he understands
 correctly, until one has trained him,
 give him sustenance and clothing, until one brings him
 to understanding.
 Nor must one revile him, the young child, before he can
 prove himself;
 In this way he must thrive among his people; thus he
 may be resolute.)

(Maxims IA 45b-49)

We can hear in these lines the teacher's sensitivity to the vulnerability of youth. A young man's spirit is truly nurtured, trained not broken, given time to mature with encouragement and guidance. All this so that he may be

"þriſthycgende," a compound denoting inner strength, boldness and courageous intelligence.

Like Amen-em-ope and the wise men of Proverbs 16.32, this Anglo-Saxon poet believed that the strength of a vigorous spirit carefully nurtured depends upon its regulation. Like a stormy sea, man's nature must be hemmed in by the cliffs of self-control (ll. 50-53).

The sage has a similar lesson to impart concerning relations between nations and he uses the marine metaphor as a bridge between the two. Just as the sea is calm when undisturbed by wind, so nations under treaty are peaceful, yet powerful (54-58a). The next three verses epitomize kingship and again we hear echoes of the Book of Proverbs:

Cyning biþ anwealdes georn;
lað se þe londes monað, leof se þe mare beodeð.

(A king is eager for power,
hated (is) he who claims land, beloved he who grants
him more.)

(Maxims IA 58a-59)

In a multitude of people is the glory of a king,
but without people a prince is ruined.

(Proverbs 14.28)

As in the Old Testament, the wandering woman is condemned and, in a venerable metaphor, the shamed man is compared with the pure:

Sceomiande man sceal in sceade hweorfan, scir in
leohte geriseð.

(A shamed man must walk in shadow, a pure man belongs in the light.)

(Maxims IA 66)

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know over what they stumble.

(Proverbs 4.18-19)

These traditional gnomes are interrupted in lines 60-63a and 67-68 by sayings of a more narrow, Germanic provenance. The proud and the brave gain glory in eager battle. The nobleman on horseback, the infantryman with his fellows must stand firm (60-63a). In a society in which most men are warriors, the wisdom of warfare must mingle with that of government and ethics. Lines 67-68 follow the comments on loose women and the comparison of the good man with the bad. They seem to refer to a ceremony also mentioned in The Wanderer, lines 41-44.

Hond sceal heofod inwyrcan, hord in streonum bidan,
gifstol gegierwed stondan, hwonne hine guman
gedælen.

(Hand must lie upon head, the treasure wait in its
hoard,
the gift-throne stand prepared, until men share it.)

(Maxims IA 67-68)

There is a quality of suspension about these lines; the waiting treasure and the readied chair imply promise and expectations. They seem to await a good, resolute and generous ruler. Although, to the modern reader, these lines and the battle gnomes hold a resonance of archaic wisdom

when juxtaposed to the more familiar maxims on personal behavior, the sage's audience must have heard familiar exhortations to noble action.

But what of the last two lines? Line 70 in particular sounds like a traditional, formulaic close, and yet the b-verse of each line is ambiguous. I have translated the couplet as follows:

Gifre biþ se þam golde onfehð, guma þæs on
 heahsetl geneah;
 lean sceal, gif we leogan nellað, þam þe us þas lisse
 geteode.

(Eager is he who takes the gold, for the man on the
 high seat enough of this;
 Reward must, if we do not wish to be false, (go) to him
 who granted us this favor.)

I believe that these lines represent the return of the Christian guest, his last word. He responds to the sage's assertion of the importance of treasure (67b-68) by saying that the human lord has had enough of wealth; it is time to give the divine ruler, from whom all good fortune flows, his due. This interpretation is supported by the use, in lines 5 and 6, of geteode and lean. In these early lines there is no doubt that God, "fæder userne," is the benefactor. He has granted ("geteode") us life and frail will and reminds us of that reward ("leana"). It is of course always possible that these lines were added by a monkish scribe. I prefer to believe that they were a stern admonition by a Christian guest to a partially converted audience.

No precise summation is possible for a work as diverse

as Maxims IA. As T. A. Shippey says of Solomon and Saturn II: "the wise men chorus rather than debate."⁵⁶ It will help us to understand such open-ended, oblique exchanges if we remember that the contest between Christian and pagan wisdom was extended over a span of one hundred years in England.⁵⁷ Poems such as Maxims IA and Solomon and Saturn II are merely the later chapters in a struggle between two philosophies which were not always diametrically opposed. The tolerant tactics of the Gregorian missionaries and the nature of the early northern religions often made conversion a matter of compromise and adaptation rather than sharp struggle. The gradual ascendancy of the Christian religion is reflected in the pace and in the resolutions of both Solomon and Saturn and Maxims IA.

The context of performance must also have contributed to the sometimes disjointed, sometimes rambling nature of these dialogues between the old wisdom and the new. The environment described in Vainglory (see page 40 above) would hardly have been conducive to tidy debates or neat resolutions. Even attentive audiences may become restless and a performer must always be sensitive to the reactions of his patron and his countrymen. It is also impossible to know whether we have here a record of one debate or several. In any case, the wise men had to worry about capturing and

⁵⁶ Shippey, Poems of Wisdom and Learning 25.

⁵⁷ See William Chaney's discussion of the persistence of pagan attitudes and customs in "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England," Harvard Theological Review 53 (1960): 197-217.

holding the attention of their audience as well as expounding their lore.

Like the earlier teachers, Old English sages shifted topics often and quickly in order to keep the interest of their audiences. They also would take advantage of a chance to elaborate on a subject which for a few moments held the wandering attention of students or banqueters. Certain topics seem to have been found worthy of amplification in many different cultures. The authors of *Book of Proverbs* 31.10-31 and of *Maxims IB* both found the good and wise woman to be a useful drawing card. Perhaps comments, jeers or even a moment of rapt attention from the audience prompted such an expansion. Other topics were advanced only to be immediately abandoned. Thus, the poetry moves by expansion and retreat, by association and variation, rather than by carefully worked out logical sequences. In a literate society, abandoned topics and redundancies might have been excised from the text. If we accept *Maxims I* as at least a partial record of an oral event, or events, we must also accept subjects mentioned and left undeveloped, or never integrated into the body of the work. A descriptive analysis of *Maxims IC* can give us an idea of how the process of strategic amplification and abandonment might have worked.

Maxims IC begins with an introductory formula similar to the invitation used in *IA* in that it states the obligation of men to speak out in appropriate forms.

Ræd sceal mon secgan, rune writan,
 leoþ gesingan, lofes gearnian,
 dom areccan, dæges onettan.

(Man must speak counsel, write rune,
 sing lay, earn praise,
 explain judgment, by day keep busy.)

(Maxims IC 138-140)

This is followed by a casting about for topics of interest. First the poet celebrates the value of a good horse. But soon he abandons that for a vignette of the friendless wanderer and his hostile companion, the grey wolf. This topic, then, proving popular and well within the scop's abilities, occupies sixteen verses and gives the singer space for irony:

Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;
 gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men;
 hungre heofeð, nales þæt heafe bewindeð,

(Full often his companion rends him,
 there must be horror of the grey ones, a grave for dead
 men;
 for hunger he (the wolf) laments, not at all does he
 circle that (grave) wailing.)

(Maxims IC 147b-149)

The beast circles his prey's grave howling with hunger, in a terrible parody of mourners circling in a dirge.⁵⁸

Lines 152-165 comprise a helter-skelter list of uncon-

⁵⁸ Patrizia Lendinara, "Maxims I, 146-151: A Hint of Funeral Lamentation," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 74 (1973): 214-16. Lendinara sees these lines as a negative "veiled reference to a hired mourner, whose grief is not felt but feigned" 216.

nected gnomes. The scop seems particularly interested in two issues here: the transience of possessions (154b-157) and the difference between good people, who grow in their faith in God, and evil men, who care not for their creator and like fallen trees "læsest groweð." In line 165, as if in apology for the scattered nature of his recitation, the sage begins a seven-line passage on the diversity of men's thoughts and understandings and the happiness that skill with the harp and a multitude of songs has brought to him. By line 172 he has returned to the theme which occupied him earlier in the poem:

Earm biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan,
wineleas wunian hafap him wyrd geteod;

(Wretched is he who must live alone
to dwell friendless, fate has granted it to him.)

(Maxims IC 172)

We are reminded of the "wineleas, wonsælig mon" in line 146 and of his fate. The amplificatio then begins with the addition of the concept of brotherhood. We hear of noble brothers who thought, fought and played side by side. Companions in the hunt of the wild boar and the bear, they are a strong contrast to the "wonsælig mon" who has only the wolf as a fellow traveller and to the brother who did not honor the bonds of his kinship (lines 62b-63a). It is important to note that the scop's portrait is conditional, one of "would's" and "if's":

betre him wære þæt he broþor ahte, begen hi anes
 monnes,
 eorles eaforan wæran, gif hi sceoldan eofor
 onginnan

(Better it would be for him if he had a brother; if they
 were both from one man,
 sons of an eorl, if they had to go against a boar)

(Maxims IC 174-5)

It is easy to imagine him addressing a pair of estranged brothers or cousins who should have been close. Indeed, the passage brings to mind the lines in Beowulf which foreshadow the treachery of Hrothulf. P. B. Taylor compares them to the description of the ideal brothers Æthelstan and Eadmund in The Battle of Brunanburh.⁵⁹ There and in Maxims IC the passage is followed by the mention of Cain.

In Maxims IC the poet blames the murder of Abel for evils familiar to his Germanic audience: deceit at dice (187-8), imprudent speech (189-91) and the struggles of armed men (198-9).

Wearð fæhþo fyra cynne, sibpan furþum swealg
 eorðe Abeles blode. Næs þæt andæge nið,
 of þam wrohtdropan wide gesprungon,
 micel mon ældum, monegum þeodum
 bealoblonden niþ.

(The hostility among men began when first the earth
 swallowed Abel's blood. That was not a one-day evil;
 from that crime-laden drop sprang up widely
 much evil for men, for many peoples,
 evil mixed with war.)

(Maxims IC 192-196a)

Thus, three passages on friendship and brotherhood are loose-

⁵⁹ P. B. Taylor 403-4.

ly connected by a common theme and by contrast. The passage on the absence of friendship precedes an amplified portrait of an ideal friendship between brothers which is turned on its head by the description of Cain's fratricide. The whole is given a sense of immediacy by the veiled accusation in line 179:

A scyle þa rincas gerædan lædan
 ond him ætsomne swefan;
 næfre hy mon tomælde,
 ær hy deað todæle.

(Ever should these warriors give counsel, lead
 (?) and sleep together.
 Never should they be separated by tale-bearing
 before death parts them)

(Maxims IC 177-80)

We can well imagine Wealhtheow's scop singing such a song to the cousins raised as brothers and destined to end as enemies.

The tendency to amplify certain topics and pass quickly over others, and to juxtapose passages which advance different sides of an issue without making explicit transitions between them, is true to the sapiential tradition. The method in Hávamál is a little less diffuse than that of the Anglo-Saxon sages, for the High One's use of stanzas and occasional refrains contributes to a sense of consistency. His material, however, is just as heterogeneous as that of the Old English poets and he, too, expands on topics which may well have popular appeal, or specific relevance, to his

audience. Thus, the Hávamál spends four stanzas (st. 1-4) on the obligations and rightful expectations of guest and host and moves from that to general behavior in a hall and the effects of strong drink. Praise of a home of one's own (st. 36-7) provides a counterpoint to the discussion of journeying, and a long list of things untrustworthy introduces an attack on women (st. 81 ff.). There are few explicit transitions and many repetitions.

Like Hár, the teacher of Proverbs 22.17-24.23, chapters indebted to Amen-em-ope, uses sections approximately equal in length. But he is not above expanding a topic of particular relevance to his audience:

Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
 Who has strife? Who has complaining?
 Who has wounds without cause?
 Who has redness of eyes?
 Those who tarry long over wine,
 Those who go to try mixed wine.

(Proverbs 23.29-30)

and so forth for five more verses, followed by a brief warning against evil company, then an extolling of the strength, honor and wealth belonging to wise men.

Perhaps the most appealing piece of amplification in the Book of Proverbs is the portrait of the good wife which concludes the work. The physical activities and duties of this Old Testament woman differ considerably from those described in a comparable Old English passage, but the two women share several qualities of character:

ond wif (sceal) geþeon
 leof mid hyre leodum, leohtmod wesan,
 rune healdan, runheort beon
 mearum ond maþmum, meodorædenne

(and the woman must thrive,
 beloved among her people, be light in spirit,
 keep secrets, be of generous heart,
 liberal with horses and treasure, with the stock of
 liquor.)

(Maxims IB 84b-87)

Strength and dignity are her clothing,
 and she laughs at the time to come.
 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
 and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

(Proverbs 31.25-26)

Each of the women is portrayed as generous with her people,
 worthy of her husband's confidence and capable in the busi-
 ness of her household.

When seen as teaching tools, the methods of these
 various pieces of wisdom literature seem a little less
 mad, the possibility of pervasive textual corruption and
 interpolation less likely. Especially in Old English, what
 structure there is must be considered a responsive one,
 employed by a sage who used a repertoire of formulae, ampli-
 fication and contrast. He built on topics which proved of
 interest to his audience and did not hesitate to abandon
 unsuccessful sallies. This is not to say that the singer
 was incapable of subtlety or that he pandered indiscrimi-
 nately to the tastes of his audience. We have already seen
 that he was capable of vivid irony in his description of the
 wolf-companion and he could also render stern indictment:

Lot sceal mid lyswe, list mid gedefum;
 þy weorpeð se stan forstolen
 Oft hy wordum toweorpað
 ær hy bacum tobreden;
 geara is hwær aræd.

(Deceit must (go) with evil, skill with decency.
 By this it happens that the (playing) stone is stolen.
 Often they overthrow with words
 before they turn their backs;
 where is the prudence of former times?)

(Maxims IC 187-91)

It is this quality of judgment and evaluation, of comparing the harsh or corrupt reality of the present to the ideal of a decent, noble and humane society, that above all else characterizes the Old English maxims as wisdom literature. Like the sages of a thousand, or two thousand, years before, like Amen-em-ope and Qoheleth, the Anglo-Saxon wise men wished to inculcate youths, warriors, and kings with the values which would make a physically difficult and morally challenging life purposeful and honorable. This side of their teachings is prominent in Maxims IA and Maxims IC.

The middle poem of the Exeter collection has a different emphasis. Maxims IB begins with a passage which seems, at first, not to be intended as an introduction. Lines 71-77 are a series of gnomes which state, with little or no explanation or interpretation, well-known, general and easily observed facts of nature. They seem at first hearing bald and singularly unpoetic. I am calling these and others like them in Maxims II and the Rune Poem elemental gnomes. They are found only in Old English and possibly in a segment of the early Icelandic constitution. Although they occa-

sionally indulge in metaphor, they are more often without rhetorical ornament. Many are unconnected to discussions of human attributes or situations. And, as we shall see, they make a surprisingly appropriate introduction.

Forst sceal freosan, fyr wudu meltan,
 eorþe growan, is brycgian,
 wæter helm wegan, wundrum lucan
 eorþan cipas.

(Frost must freeze, fire melt wood,
 earth give forth, ice form a bridge,
 (ice) the armor water bears, (must) wonderfully lock up
 the earth's green sprouts.)

(Maxims IB 71-74a)

The simplicity of the first line here gives way to a metaphorical picture of ice as water's armor and a sense of wonder at the suspension of life it brings to earth. The effect of the whole is of a restrained and chant-like recitation of seasonal facts too general, too self-evident to be part of any lessons in agriculture or botany and too self-contained to point a moral on human behavior.

It is not surprising that these lines, and others like them, have been criticized on the grounds that they seem to have no reason for being uttered at all and certainly no immediately evident justification in a poetic collection. They give no advice, make no analysis, celebrate no cultural mores, and, indeed, are anomalies in a poem which performs these very tasks. Nevertheless, they may represent wisdom of the most venerable sort, a wisdom known only to a once-powerful elite and, like the runes of Oðinn, passed down in

obscure mnemonic form to the heirs of the old culture.

I believe it is possible that the elemental gnomes in Maxims IB are remnants of annual rituals of the sort described by Mircea Eliade and other students of the history of religions. Eliade in The Sacred and the Profane and in The Myth of the Eternal Return has stressed the importance of the cosmogony in the cultures of primitive man. He has found that concepts of space and time are closely linked to a society's myths concerning the illud tempus, the sacred time of origins, and the acts of creation performed then. In rituals marking the end of one year and the beginning of another, religious people everywhere reenact the destruction of chaos and the creation of an orderly, fruitful world. Eliade contends that these rituals and ceremonies are not merely commemorations of the primordial creation but are attempts at recreation, repetitions which make continued life possible.⁶⁰

We know very little of Anglo-Saxon religions before the coming of Christianity. However, we can say that the attribute of the Christian God which most impressed the English converts was his power as the creator. Thus the scop in Heorot sings:

⁶⁰ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959) 77-80. See also Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (NY: Harper & Row, 1959) 66.

Sægde se þe cuþe
 frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,
 cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te),
 wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð,
 gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan
 leoman to leohte landbuendum,
 ond gefrætwaðe foldan sceatas
 leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop
 cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.

(He spoke, he who could
 relate the origin of men from long ago.
 He said that the almighty made the earth,
 the brilliant plain encircled by water,
 set triumphant the radiance of
 the sun and moon as light for the landdwellers,
 and adorned the surfaces of the earth
 with branches and leaves. Life also he created
 for each of the kinds which moves, living.)

(Beowulf 90b-98)

The Beowulf poet hymned the beauty of the creator's work,
 the fair plain of earth and heaven's brilliant lights.

Cædmon celebrated God's power, the might of the ruler:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,
 meotodes meahte and his modgeþanc,

(Now must we praise the guardian of the heavenly kingdom,
 the might of the lord and his thought.)

(Cædmon's Hymn 1-2)⁶¹

These songs support Eliade's comments on the attraction of
 the time of beginnings:

It is easy to understand why the memory of that
 marvellous time haunted religious man, why he
 periodically sought to return to it. In illo tempore
 the gods had displayed their greatest powers. The
cosmogony is the supreme divine manifestation, the
paradigmatic act of strength, superabundance, and

⁶¹ ASPR VI 106.

creativity.⁶²

Eliade goes on to say that the rites which reenacted the creation ensured the continuation of time, of the seasonal cycle, and restored vital powers to their participants. More specifically, the festivals and their attendant charms and songs were used in many cultures to cure barrenness or illness, to prepare for war, to mourn the dead and, in Polynesia, to inspire poetry.⁶³ They reestablished order and aided creation. The settlement of new land or the construction of an important new building, such as Heorot must have been, was also seen as reenacting the initial drama of creation. Eliade finds examples for this in pre-Christian Roman, Scandinavian and Germanic cultures as well as among North and South American Indians.⁶⁴

If we return to the gnomes from Maxims IB, we can see similarities with the rituals cited by Eliade. The first lines establish the essential properties of ice and fire.⁶⁵ Verses 72a-75b celebrate the unlocking of the earth's productive powers and attribute this renewal to "manytimes almighty God." Finally lines 76-77 assert the essential passage from winter into summer:

winter sceal geweorpan, weder eft cuman,
sumor swegle hat, sund unstillle.

⁶² Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane 80. The emphasis is the author's.

⁶³ Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane 80-85. Also The Myth of the Eternal Return 82.

⁶⁴ Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane 45-47.

⁶⁵ For the importance of fire in ceremonies renewing the year see The Myth of the Eternal Return 67-68.

(Winter must pass, fine weather come again,
summer hot with sun, a troubled sea.)

(Maxims IB 76-7)

There is, of course, no hard evidence linking these lines to religious rituals. But some of them are echoed in later northern manuscripts of a more clearly magical sort. The runic alphabet poems of Iceland and Norway each refer to the ice as a bridge or a roof over water:

Iss er anborker
ok unnan þak
ok feigra manna fag
glacies jo furr.

(Ice = bark of rivers
and roof of the wave
and destruction of the doomed.)

(The Icelandic Runic Poem st. 9)

Is kollum bru bræiða
blindan þarf at læiða.

(Ice we call the broad bridge
the blind man must be led.)

(The Norwegian Runic Poem st. 9)⁶⁶

It seems that the description of ice as a perilous bridge, roof, or bark over water had its origins in the pre-Roman alphabet, an alphabet which served as a code for the potent realities of life in the north and perhaps as a compendium for the magic needed to engage these realities.

The placement of lines 71-77 also suggests that they may have originated in ceremonies of the sort described by

⁶⁶ Dickins.

Eliade. They serve as an introduction to Maxims IB and, in that function, are parallel to lines 1-4b of IA and 138-140 of IC. The first of these is a challenge clearly intended to initiate an exchange. The second, discussed on page 56, also seems designed as an introductory gambit:

Ræd sceal mon secgan, rune writan,
 leoþ gesingan, lofes gearnian
 dom areccan, dæges onettan.

(Man must speak counsel, write rune,
 sing lay, earn praise,
 explain judgment, by day keep busy.)

(Maxims IC 138-40)

Here the scop in measured formulae establishes proper and obligatory modes of expression for men and thus gives credence to his own song.

The elemental gnomes in lines 71-77 of IB may also be a traditional introduction. By invoking the ultimate creative act of his god, the scop calls forth the creative, ordering power in himself. His creativity, seen as participating in that awesome power which generated the world, is given potency and credibility.

Finally it should be noted that the sequence of elemental gnomes in Maxims IB is followed by a cryptic comment on the dead:

Deop deada wæg dyrne bið lengest;
 holen sceal inæled, yrfe gedæled
 deades monnes.

(The awful way of the dead is hidden longest;
holly must be kindled, the property of a dead man
divided.)

(Maxims IB 78-80a)

These lines hark back to a religion in which the nature of the after-life was not clearly established and perhaps to a ceremony in which holly was burnt as a funeral offering.⁶⁷ All that can be done, the poet seems to say, is to observe the rites and divide the inheritance justly. The rest is darkness.⁶⁸

Just as the sage of Maxims IC concerns himself with kinship and friendship, so the author of IB, once his preliminaries are completed, concentrates on women, of both decent and shameful character. I have already compared the portrait of a queen with the good woman in the Book of

⁶⁷ On "deop dæda wæg" see Carleton Brown, "Poculum Mortis in Old English," Speculum 15 (1940): 389-99. Brown cites Hávamál 76-77 as parallel. On "Holen sceal inæled" see Tacitus, Germania 27, vol. I of Tacitus, trans. M. Hutton and rev. by E. H. Warmington (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1970) 170-1. Here he mentions cremation "certis lignis" (with certain woods). Kemp Malone, however, finds "holly" an inadmissible translation, choosing "prince" instead. "Notes on Gnostic Poem B of the Exeter Book," Medium Ævum 12 (1943): 65-7. See also Dawson, "The Structure of the OE Gnostic Poems," 17. He sees either of two references as possible: the cremation of a prince in a ship or the "annual purification of a house through the burning of holly." For the uses of "holly" Dawson cites H. Bachtold-Staubli, Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens (Berlin, 1927-42) VIII, 362-3. See also ASPR III 306 n.

⁶⁸ Lynn L. Remly in "The Anglo-Saxon Gnomes as Sacred Poetry," Folklore 82 (1971): 147-59, urges us to see the gnostic collections as sacred poetry. However, she concentrates on gnomes such as Maxims IA 23b-29a, lines on birth and death in the human and natural worlds. These maxims have antecedents in the secular wisdom tradition. There is indeed sacred poetry here but it is surely to be found in lines without secular pedigrees.

Proverbs (pp. 60-1 above). She is generous, light of heart and trustworthy, a wise counsellor. The Old English poet adds to this a description of her less powerful sister, the Frisian wife of a sailor:

leof wilcuma
 Frysan wife, þonne flota stondeð;
 biþ his ceol cumen ond hyre ceorl to ham,
 agen ætgeofa, ond heo hine in laðap,
 wæsceð his warig hrægl ond him syleþ wæde
 niwe,
 lip him on londe þæs his lufu bædeð.

(beloved is the welcome one
 to the Frisian woman, when the ship docks;
 his ship is come and her man home,
 her own provider, and she invites him in,
 washes his sea-stained garment and gives him fresh
 clothes,
 gentle to him on land, she whom his love constrains.)

(Maxims IB 94b-99)

The grim realities of the sea find their lyrical opposites here. The harsh sibilants in line 93 give way to the liquid "leoht linden bord, leof wilcuma" of 94. The ship and the man are yet seen as one: the ship, ceol, and the man, ceorl, both come home. There is dignity in the description of this Frisian woman. She invites him in, cares for his physical needs and, in a graceful litotes, is gentle to him as his love requires her to be.

There are two themes in this passage: the nature of a good woman and the joy of a sailor come home. In lines 100-106 the poet provides a gnomic foil for his domestic hymn. Women are often mendacious and unfaithful. Sailors must endure the dangers of a capricious sea and the interminable

delays of a long journey. The practical responsibilities of a rich merchant newly arrived in a port occupy the next seven lines (107-114a) and then we have what seems to be a return to the earlier mention of death and funeral rites in lines 78-80.

morþor under eorþan befeolan,
hinder under hrusan, þe hit forhelan þenceð;
ne biþ þæt gedefe deap, þonne hit gedyrned
weorpeð.

(Maxims IB 114b-116)

I believe that these lines refer to a practice mentioned by Tacitus in Germania 12:

Licet apud concilium accusare quoque et discrimen capitis intendere. distinctio poenarum ex delicto. proditores et transfugas arboribus suspendunt, ignavos et imbelles et corpore infames caeno ac palude, iniecta insuper crate, mergunt. diversitas supplicii illuc respicit, tamquam scelera ostendi oporteat, dum puniuntur, flagitia abscondi.

The Loeb translation reads:

At this assembly (of priests, kings, and warriors) it is also permissible to lay accusations and to bring capital charges. The nature of the death penalty differs according to the offence: traitors and deserters are hung from trees; cowards and poor fighters and sexual perverts are plunged in the mud of marshes with a hurdle on their heads: the difference of punishment has regard to the principle that crime should be blazoned abroad by its retribution, but abomination hidden.⁶⁹

Bosworth and Toller list as a second meaning for "morþor"

⁶⁹ Tacitus, Germania 148-51.

"mortal sin, great wickedness" and cite instances in which the word means "adultery" (see morbore II). If the pronoun "þe" in line 115b refers to the perpetrator of this evil, then the lines may be translated as follows:

(one must) commit great wickedness to the earth
(and) deep under the ground him who thinks to conceal it.
Nor is that a seemly death, when it is kept hidden.

It is, of course, risky to use Germania as an explanation for poetry written hundreds of years later and in a different land. Nevertheless, the early medieval traditions of Germany and Scandinavia have in many instances survived in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons, if not in their culture. Moreover, this reference for lines 114b-116 explains the emphasis on what sounds like a kind of double burial. The horrible punishment has its justification in the abominable nature of the crime. By burying the offender alive, "hinder under hrusan," one also buries, "befeolan," the crime, hiding it forever.

Lines 117 to 131 contain a list of gnomes worthy of the sapiential tradition. We hear of the worthlessness of evil and the strength of goodness. The poet advises restraining the heart and controlling the hand. He asserts again the importance of sustenance and, in lines 125-129, embarks on a gnomic series which has parallels in the endings of the other two poems.

We have seen in Maxims I three different introductory

formulae: a challenge to debate, a list of obligations and an invocation of creative power. The poems end in more similar modes. Each poet, as part of his close, recites a series of gnomes which depart from the ethical and practical themes he has previously explored.

Thus, lines 60-63a in Maxims IA, 125-9 in IB and 201-3 in IC are composed entirely of heroic gnomes:

Drym sceal mid wlenco, þriste mid cenum,
 sceolun bu recene beadwe fremman.
 Eorl sceal on eos boge, eorod sceal getrume ridan,
 fæste feþa stondan.

(Glory must go with the proud, the bold with the brave,
 both must join battle quickly.
 An eorl must on his horse's curved shoulder, a troop in
 company ride,
 a band of infantry stand firm.)

(Maxims IA 60-63a)

Gold geriseþ on guman sweorde,
 sellic sigesceorp, sinc on cwene,
 god scop gumum, garniþ werum,
 wig towiþre wicfreoþa healdan.
 Scyld sceal cempa, sceaft reafere,

(Gold belongs on a man's sword,
 wonderfully triumphant apparel, treasure (belongs) on a
 queen,
 a good scop to the people, a spear-battle to warriors;
 (it belongs to them) to defend the peace of their homes
 against war.
 A shield must go to the champion, a shaft to the
 looter,)

(Maxims IB 125-9)

Gearo sceal guðbord, gar on sceaft,
 ecg on sweorde ond ord spere
 hyge heardum men. Helm sceal cenum,

(The battle-board must be ready, the arrow on its
 shaft,

the edge on the sword, and point on spear,
spirit to brave men. Armor must to the bold,)

(Maxims IC 201-3)

Here the sage adds to the wisdom tradition as we have seen it the values of a heroic society in which men go eagerly into battle, where the sword's edge meets the ready shield, where treasure and glory go to the victor. The brisk movement, parallelism and abbreviated syntax of these lines as well as their placement near the end of each poem indicate a formulaic winding down, a familiar bone tossed to the audience as the scop prepares to make last references to gold and the powerful patron who dispenses it.

Following these heroic gnomes, the final lines of each poem also contain parallels. They have been read as obeisances to a Christian god. IB 134-7 is clearly just that. I have translated IA 69-70 as a stern insistence that God be given his due (see page 53 above). In IC line 204 may be read as begging for greater rewards to the singer of the poem. Armor goes to the bold, he says in 203b, but this humble spirit always receives the least treasure.⁷⁰

The "humble spirits" of Maxims IA participate fully in the tradition built by their forerunners in wisdom. They explore, in the eclectic fashion common to wisdom collections of other eras and other continents, themes not usually associated with the early cultures of northern Europe and

⁷⁰ But compare P. B. Taylor's translation: "a mean mind is the least of treasures" 397.

Britain. The people are most secure in times of peace, and to this end wise men labor, counseling kings, meeting with their equals, forming alliances. Indeed, it is within the context of a laboriously constructed peace that the Exeter gnomes seem to have been composed, for we hear of sailors more than warriors, of women at their embroidery and men at the hunt and the dice game. The value of a careful education, respectful of the individual, is maintained, and cowardly, treacherous acts are denounced. As in the earlier collections, the qualities of good and bad women are enumerated and men are warned to avoid the latter. Nevertheless, when war comes all these must give way to the terrible simplicity of spear and shield, of enemy and ally. Thus, the sage, though he is a builder of peace, recognizes the necessity of war and also teaches readiness for battle. The world of weapons and armor, horses and foes is not, however, his world, and he hurries through it in terse formulaic half-lines, leaving a full exposition of its values to the panegyric and the heroic lay. Finally, his audience is called upon to accept the protection of the Christian god, to reject the idols of Woden and to reward their scop.

Maxims II

The Cotton manuscript, Cotton Tiberius B.i, is, like the Exeter Book, the work of a compiler and, like the Exeter Book, its contents are not entirely gnostic. The manuscript's second entry, Menologium, lists the festivals of

the Church year.⁷¹ Maxims II follows and then the beginning of the C version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Krapp and Dobbie saw no connection among the three⁷² but other commentators have differed with them. Menologium celebrates the consistent and cyclical nature of the religious calendar. Maxims II records physical and social realities.⁷³ In contrast, the Chronicle records the impermanence of mortal history, the quicksand of events. The manuscript can thus be seen as a parchment microcosm of Anglo-Saxon society in which a Roman religion meets the natural and social realities of Germanic life and together they shape a turbulent national history.

When compared to the Exeter gnomes, the Cotton maxims seem once removed from the international wisdom tradition. Instead of the responsive structure we saw in Maxims I, we have here a list or catalogue. Moreover, the items seem not to have been arranged under any governing logic. The poem treats with equal weight the topics of treasure, weapons, wild animals, brave and wise men, seafaring lore and dragons. Indeed, it seems a repository rather than a vehicle for wisdom. It fits, much more closely than do the Exeter

⁷¹ The first entry is the Alfredian Orosius. That work, however, is in a different hand and therefore not included in the sequence as it is discussed here. The three other entries are also linked by the scribe's use of decorative initials and capitals.

⁷² ASPR VI lxi. The text of The Menologium is on page 49; Maxims II is on page 55.

⁷³ J. K. Bollard, "The Cotton Maxims," Neophilologus 57 (1973): 179-81. See also John Earle's preface to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, ed. by John Earle and C. Plummer (Oxford, 1865).

gnomes, a definition of the "catalogue" articulated by
Nicholas Howe:

The catalogue, whether in prose or poetry, is a practical means for presenting a great deal of information in discrete sections. Thus each item is noted and described individually rather than related by strict logic to the surrounding items. The relation follows instead from the subject of the catalogue, be it rhetorical tropes, plants or nations. Thus the catalogue is at once accretive and discontinuous.⁷⁴

In spite of the "accretive and discontinuous" nature of Maxims II, several critics have tried to unearth logical sequences in it. J. K. Bollard divided the poem into three sections: the byð maxims (1b-13), which give us a sense of time and place, the sceal maxims (14-57a), which render necessary "aspects of the world and of society," and lines 57b-66, which are not maxims at all.⁷⁵ However, these groups are not logical developments one from the other. For example, lines 1b-13 can only be characterized as giving a sense of time and place if we mean all times and many places. Stanley Greenfield and Richard Evert believe that the poem "subtly develops the idea that true wisdom ultimately reveals the limitations of human knowledge" and that it moves from the visible things experienced here on earth to the invisible things of heaven.⁷⁶ Certainly the poet is

⁷⁴ Nicholas Phillis Howe, "The Latin Encyclopedia Tradition and Old English Poetry," diss., Yale U, 1978, 26.

⁷⁵ Bollard 179.

⁷⁶ Stanley Greenfield and Richard Evert, "Maxims II: Gnome and Poem" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Frese, ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1975) 340.

concerned with the limitations of human knowledge, but the development from visible to nonvisible suggested by these critics implies that Christ's powers (l. 4) are "visible." A more serious objection is that the obeisance to God in lines 57b-66 is essential to the proposed structure of the particular poem, but we have seen similar closings in at least two of the three sections of Maxims I. Must we therefore assume that they too move from the visible to the invisible? Or has a formula been mistaken for a coda? These critics have found groups and formal cohesion but not the kind of logical development that led the poet of Maxims IC from the lone wanderer and his wolf-companion to inseparable brothers and thence to Cain's dark deed.

Maxims II is, I believe, random, rather than responsive or architectonic, in structure. At its center there is a true list, in which the units are nearly all equal in length and poetic weight. From line 16b to 40a every gnome is two verses long, enjambed and marked by sceal:

ecg sceal weð hellme
 hilde gebidan. Hafuc sceal on glofe
 wilde gewunian, wulf sceal on bearowe,
 earm anhaga, eofor sceal on holte,
 toðmægenes trum. Til sceal on eðle
 domes wyrcean. Daroð sceal on handa,
 gar golde fah. Gim sceal on hringe
 standan steap and geap. Stream sceal on yðum
 mencgan mereflode.

(The edge must against the helmet
 strive in war. Hawk must on the glove,
 untamed, stay, a wolf must in a forest,
 wretched lone one, a boar must in a wood
 strong in the strength of his tusks. The good man must
 in his native land

perform judgment. A javelin must be in the hand, the spear decorated with gold. A gem must on the ring stand high and broad. The river current must in the sea mix with the ocean's flood.)

(Maxims II 16b-24a)⁷⁷

and so on. From line 14 to 49 the poet changes the subject at least every four verses and usually, as above, every two verses. This catalogue does, however, have an introduction in which the bið constructions come into play. The poet speaks of ancient cities, the work of giants, and then:

Wind byð on lyfte swiftust,
þunar byð þragum hludast. Drymmas syndan Cristes
myccle,
wyrð byð swiðost. Winter byð cealdost,
lencten hrimigost (he byð lengest ceald),
sumor sunwlitegost (swegel byð hatost),
hærfest hreðeægost, hæleðum bringeð
geres wæstmas, þa þe him god sendeð.

(Wind is in the sky the swiftest,
thunder is in its season the loudest. The powers of
Christ are great.
Wyrð is strongest, winter is coldest,
spring frostiest, it is cold the longest,
summer most beautiful with sunshine, its sun is the
hottest,
autumn is most triumphant, it brings to men
the year's fruits, which God sends them.)

(Maxims II 3b-9)

Here, it seems to me, we have another sequence of elemental gnomes. As in lines 71-77 in Maxims IB the poet first celebrates natural elements, in this case wind and thunder, then asserts the recurrence of seasons. The sequence is less varied in syntax than that of Maxims I and lacks the

⁷⁷ ASPR VI 55.

latter's powerful metaphors. However, in both poems the emphasis is on the end of winter, the beginnings of the growing season and the powers of God.⁷⁸ Both passages, too, can be seen as introductory lines invoking regenerative and creative energies far beyond those the poet himself commands.

There is also in Maxims II a later sequence honoring God the creator. Lines 45b-49 speak of the surging waters, the fertility of cattle and the brilliance of stars. They attribute these wonders to the lord's command:

Brim sceal sealte weallan,
lyfthelm and lagufloed ymb ealra landa gehwylc,
flowan firgenstreamas. Feoh sceal on eorðan
tydran and tyman. Tungol sceal on heofenum
beorhte scinan, swa him bebead meotud.

(The sea must surge with salt,
the covering air and ocean current around every land,
mountain streams must flow. Cattle must on earth
multiply and breed. The star must in the heavens
shine brightly, as the ruler bade it.)

(Maxims II 45b-49)

The distinction between the kinds of water, the mention of cattle and of stars, and above all the emphasis on creation by commandment must have Genesis as their source. It is as if the poem has moved forward in the history of cosmogony. The sacred, timeless primacy of the elements and the life-giving cycle of seasons gives way to a single historic act

⁷⁸ If we follow Greenfield and Evert's excellent suggestion, wyrd is declared to be the greatest of all Christ's powers, ranking above wind and thunder. "Maxims II: Gnome and Poem," 341-2.

by one god, who divides the waters, populates the earth and lights the heavens.

These lines and the lack of discursiveness in Maxims II lead me to agree with Loren Gruber when he contends that the poem contains verses originating in pagan cosmology but partially "reformed" to fit a different perspective.⁷⁹ Although I would stop short of Gruber's claim for an agnostic world-view for the Cotton gnomes, I agree that the significance of the animals and natural properties described in the poem has been lost, leaving "a 'modern' empirical catalogue of actual animals, which is neither homologous nor analogous with any occult reality."⁸⁰

There are also lines in Maxims II which appear to be explanations of practices or experiences no longer prevalent in the world of the poet and his audience. There is both distance and wonder in this description:

Ceastra beoð feorran gesyne,
orðanc enta geweorc, þa þe on þysse eorðan syndon,
wrætlic weallstana geweorc.

(Cities are seen from afar
skillful work of giants, those which on this earth
remain,
curiously wrought masonry.)

(Maxims II 1b-3a)

Similarly, lines 43b-45a explain why an ides, a noble woman, would use forbidden "dyrne cræft" to find a lover:

⁷⁹ Loren C. Gruber, "The Agnostic Anglo-Saxon Gnomes: Maxims I and II, Germania, and the Boundaries of Northern Wisdom," Poetica (Tokyo) 6 (Autumn, 1976): 37.

⁸⁰ Gruber 39.

Ides sceal dyrne cræfte,
 fæmne hire freond gesecean, gif heo nelle on folce
 geþeon
 þæt hi man beagum gebicge.

Audrey L. Meaney has shown us that an ides might be a good or bad woman, but she was always of significance and often, like Wealhtheow, held power. Her need for magic, then, must stem from a desire not to be married in the conventional sense, that is, not to be bought with rings. I would choose the second of Meaney's translations (she sees the gnome as ambiguous):

A lady, a young woman, must seek out for herself a lover by secret means, if she does not wish to bring it about among the people that she should be married.

"Secret means," or "dyrne cræft," might include love potions, amulets, witchcraft.⁸¹ It is worth noting that nowhere in Maxims I is magic directly mentioned, although women are a favorite topic.

After the passage on creation quoted above, lines 50 to 54b begin the poem's conclusion with a series of opposites:

God sceal wið yfele, geogoð sceal wið ylðo,
 lif sceal wið deape, leoht sceal wið þystrum,
 fyrð wið fyrde, feond wið oðrum,
 lað wið
 lape ymb land sacan,
 synne stælan.

(Good must (strive) against evil, youth against age,
 life against death, light against darkness,
 army against army, one foe against another,

⁸¹ Audrey L. Meaney, "The Ides of the Cotton Gnostic Poem," Medium Ævum 48 (1978): 31.

hatred against hate, over the land contend,
to avenge crimes.)

(Maxims II 50-54b)

Thomas D. Hill has called these lines a paraphrase of
Ecclesiasticus xxxiii.15.

Good is the opposite of evil,
and life the opposite of death;
so the sinner is the opposite of the godly.
Look upon all the works of the Most High;
they likewise are in pairs, one the opposite of the
other.

(Ecclesiasticus 33.14-15)⁸²

This attribution becomes even more cogent when we read
verses 33.8-9 in the context of the Cotton manuscript:

By the Lord's decision they (the days) were
distinguished,
and he appointed the different seasons and feasts;
some of them he exalted and hallowed,
and some of them he made ordinary days.

Thus might the scribe have introduced the Menologium, prede-
cessor of Maxims II.

Hill believes that, given this biblical source for
lines 50-54b, the observations made in Maxims II are not
random but a "playful juxtaposition of a whole variety of
themes and images which the poet concludes by paraphrasing
Ecclesiasticus on necessary conflict in a disordered
world."⁸³ Thus, lines 1-45 are a deliberate preamble to
lines 50-57. However, the gnomes in lines 1-45 are by no

⁸² Hill 445-7.

⁸³ Hill 446.

means evidence of disorder. Rather the verses, in true gnomic style, put everything in its appropriate, if unremarkable, place: the wolf in the forest, the mast on the ship, the sailyard hung from the mast and the dragon in his barrow. The gnomes succeed individually. Collectively they remain a mere list, or, as Howe would have it, a successful catalogue.⁸⁴

We have seen in Maxims IA, IB and IC, as well as in Maxims II, most of the elements which characterize international wisdom literature. Their poet-sages believed in the importance of an elite to govern and to counsel kings. Man alone was vulnerable; man ungoverned dangerous to himself, his companions and succeeding generations. Women held an obscure power, stemming from their capacity to strengthen or deceive, to fulfill or corrupt, their men. The exigencies of battle demanded the utmost in courage, in artistry and in skill. The natural world threatened man where it did not sustain him. Its cycles and boundless variety bore dramatic witness to the power of God the creator.

These truths, couched in the confident grammar of sceal and bið, were soon to give way to the shadowy world of men without fellows, of wanderers who by choice or by necessity faced a fate defined by sagacious literature as beyond the

⁸⁴ Howe 136-41. See also Fred Robinson on listing as an "acknowledged and accepted . . . structural principle" in Old English. "Old English Literature in Its Most Immediate Context," Old English Literature in Context, ed. John D. Niles (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980) 27.

pale of society and of government. The poetry contemplating such destinies deals in dreams and illusions, in alienation and the paradoxical lure of deprivation. Yet it also engages fully the gnostic tradition we have examined here. The meeting of the two, elegiac lyric and gnome, is the subject of my next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

The Old English lyric voice is joined to the gnomic tradition in poems which, at first reading, seem alien to the methods and themes of the sapiential collections. For the lyrics eschew the eclecticism and impersonal stance of the gnomes in favor of a strong central voice which is intimately engaged and unabashedly passionate. This is the poetry of the anhaga, the lone, thoughtful one, and it bears the mark of his or her experience.

In Maxims I and II, the anhaga is a peripheral figure. Nothing is said of his history or of the justice of his condition. He is quite simply an exemplum of a fate to be avoided. He bears witness to the importance of membership in a cohesive society. For, without the protecting power of kin and peers, the individual is lost:

Wel mon sceal wine healdan on wega gehwylcum;
oft mon fereð feor bi tune, þær him wat freond
 unwiotodne.
Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to
 geferan,
felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;

(A man must be certain to keep a friend on every road;
often one travels far around towns, where it is
 uncertain that he knows a friend.
The friendless, wretched one takes wolves as companions,
very treacherous beasts. Full often his companion rends
 him;)

(Maxims IC 144-7)

Earm biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan,
wineleas wunian hafap him wyrd geteod;
betre him wære þæt he broþor ahte,

(Wretched is he who must live alone;
to dwell friendless fate has granted to him.
Better it would be for him if he had a brother,)

(Maxims IC 172-174a)

These are the passages in which the outcast is described most fully in the Maxims and, in each case, he is not even the primary focus of the passage. He serves, rather, as an example of the dangers of travelling alone, in the first quotation, and of the importance of brotherhood, in the second. He is the negative example, the exception which proves the necessity for the rule. He has no existence beyond exemplum.

This lone figure, so sketchily described in the gnomic collections, is the central actor in most of the Old English lyrics, generally known as elegies. It is his or her voice we hear, not the detached impersonal tones of an unknown sage. The poems, although often obscure, allude to the personal histories of their speakers. These allusions to situations provide occasions for lament and for gnomic reflection in The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Resignation, The Wife's Lament, The Riming Poem and Deor. In this sense the lyrics may be seen as amplifications of the pithy conclusions found in Maxims IC. The necessity for brotherhood or friendship is not only proven but dramatized by the highly descriptive narratives. However, in the process of giving the gnomic exemplum his or her own voice, the poet also had that voice speak gnomes. Thus, having added narratio and descriptio to the original gnomic kernel, he moves on to add

gnomes, on new but related subjects, to that narratio and descriptio. In this chapter I shall examine the structures which contain these layers of narration, description and gnome. We shall see then how the poet is carried beyond the traditional wisdom of those gnomonic kernels into a new perception of what it means to be a woman or man alone.

It is first necessary, however, to arrive at a common vocabulary for discussing the poems in question. Definitions of lyric and gnome are particularly important. A related task is the determination of which poems belong to the group under examination and what that group is to be called.

First, the problem of the lyric. It has been, it seems, much easier for theorists and critics to assign poems to the lyric category than to define that mode precisely. For some, if a poem is not epic or tragic it must be lyrical.¹ For others only a clear musical derivation will justify the definition.² The case for the shorter Old English poems has been complicated by the clearly song-like character of the early Middle English lyrics. Of the ninety-one thirteenth century lyrics included in Carleton

¹ e.g. Robert Petsch, Deutsche Literaturwissenschaft (Berlin: E. Ebering, 1940) 151 ff. See Brother James L. Kinneavy's discussion and critique of Petsch and others holding this view in A Study of Three Contemporary Theories of Lyric Poetry (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic UP, 1956) 79 ff., but especially 95-96.

² James William Johnson, "Lyric," Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1974) 460-2.

Brown's English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century fourteen appear in the manuscripts with musical notations,³ and many more refer to themselves as songs or contain a less explicit but no less real melodic lilt.

Sumer is icumen in
 Lhude sing cuccu!
 Groweþ sed and bloweþ med
 and springþ þe wde nu.
 Sing cuccu!

Awe bleteþ after lomb,
 lhouþ after calue cu,
 Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ.
 Murie sing cuccu!
 Cuccu, cuccu,
 Wel singes þu cuccu.
 ne swik þu nauer nu!
 Sing cuccu nu, Sing cuccu
 Sing cuccu, Sing cuccu nu!⁴

When juxtaposed with such clear sweet music Old English literature seems to contain very few true lyrics. Indeed Albert C. Baugh began his chapter on the lyric with this paragraph:

It is a commonplace of literary history that there is little or no lyric in the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons. Such dramatic pieces as the Seafarer, the Husband's Message, or the Wife's Lament or such elegiac reflections as the Ruin are lyrical rather than lyrics. Caedmon's Hymn, Eadwacer, and Deor, the last so fine in its simple unity and directness, come closest perhaps to the lyric in expressing the personal emotion of the poet. But it is evident that Old English poetry found its most natural expression in the epic and in other types of narrative verse.⁵

³ Carleton Brown, ed., English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1932) xli-xlii.

⁴ Brown 13.

⁵ Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England (NY: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1948) 208.

But the simplicity and musicality of the early English love lyrics were not long preeminent. By the fifteenth century, and even late in the fourteenth century, these characteristics had been compromised by more literary concerns. Brown comments:

In the thirteenth century much more than in the fourteenth lyrics were composed to be sung. The fourteenth century . . . is the age of the literary lyric, and it is not until the rise of the carol that one meets again with an appreciable number of English songs provided with musical score.⁶

The lyrics of the late middle ages are longer than their predecessors, often exceeding one hundred lines, and they contain conceits and complexities rare in the earlier era. By the time of Wyatt "lyric" could no longer be understood as synonymous with simple song. Thus, if we do not try to define the Old English poems from their historical proximity to the songs of the thirteenth century, poems from which they were three centuries removed, after all, they may seem much more akin to the lyric than was once thought. But how is one to define these a-musical verses?

In the case of later lyrics it is perhaps easier to say what they are not rather than what they are. And yet they still have in common an abiding sense of personal emotion communicated through a music-like form. Lyrics are expected to be relatively brief and to have a strongly integrated

⁶ Brown xlii.

single voice. Description and narrative may provide allusion, mood and epiphany but are not themselves the focus of the poem. To put this more succinctly, the lyric may be defined as poetry in which a single, integrated voice speaks of personal experiences and/or feelings and which does not have as its main purpose narrative or physical description. That is, the persona may tell of events, but only in order to justify a response to those events. He may describe his lover, but again it is to evoke sympathy for his love or anguish. The form of the lyric varies but we do expect it to be brief in comparison to other poetry of its time and to employ formal devices which lend it a song-like character.

The combination of passionate emotion and a sense of song found in the Old English "elegies" led Charles W. Kennedy to say:

They are, in our literature, a first welling up of that clear lyric strain which through the centuries has continued to pour its melody and passion into the full stream of English verse.⁷

It remains, however, for us to determine just what are the emotions so fully expressed. Are they temporal or transcendent? Is their expression literal or allegorical? Also, and more problematical, what constitutes "song-like" in the Old English lyrics? Are there melodies? How are they created?

⁷ C. W. Kennedy, The Earliest English Poetry (NY: Oxford UP, 1943) 130.

For answers to the formal questions we must of course turn to Germanic prosody and poetic device. But for an analysis of the poems' expressive content the most illuminating analogues are the Latin rhetorical tradition, vernacular sermons and the sapiential tradition surveyed in Chapter One above. This last is of central importance. For, although the Old English lyrics are to a large extent cris de coeur, they neither reject nor neglect the public, disinterested wisdom of the gnomic collections. They are, rather, carefully forged alloys of lament and gnome. Indeed, a tracing of gnomes and gnomic ideas throughout the lyrics will reveal that the poets of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Riming Poem, The Wife's Lament, and Resignation took relevant specifics from the sapiential tradition and created out of them an ethical response to the anhaga's situation. To facilitate such a study I have expanded on Chapter One's definition of the gnome.⁸

I have said that the gnome is a brief sentence which states a significant natural fact, establishes a universal truth, or comments on the behavior of humans, on their duties, or on their fates. It is often a more critical, more deliberate saying than the proverb and bears the marks of an individual's judgment, even though that individual is never named.⁹

⁸ It should be noted here that many of the following characteristics are also to be found in Celtic and Norse gnomes.

⁹ See pages 6 and 7 of Chapter One above.

The form of the Old English gnome may be described in some detail by referring to Maxims I and II. In general, it fulfills the following conditions:

1. It is in the third person: "Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan" (Bold men must exchange sayings.) (Maxims IA 4a). The introduction to Maxims IA is in the second person singular but it is not a gnome, but rather a challenge introducing an exchange of gnomes.
2. It is in the present tense. This more characteristic tense may be called a universal present. That is, the gnomist avoids progressive verbs and specifically temporal adverbs. He chooses instead to place his wisdom in non-specific time. It is as if "always" governed each clause.¹⁰

The preterite is occasionally used in the collections and its purpose seems to be to give a certain gnome a historical justification. This use of the preterite occurs in the following Christian gnomes:

Blind sceal his eagna polian,
oftigen biþ him torhtre gesihþe . . .
Waldend him þæt wite teode, se him mæg wyrpe
syllan,
hælo of heofodgimme, gif he wat heortan clæne.

(The blind man must suffer the loss of his eyes,
withdrawn is clear sight from him . . .)

¹⁰ For an insightful study of the "universal present" in lyric poetry, see George Wright, "The Lyric Present: Simple Present Verbs in English Poems," Publications of the Modern Language Association 89 (May 1974): 563-79.

The guardian granted him that torment, who can give him
recovery,
health for the head's gems, if he keeps a pure heart.)

(Maxims IA 39b-40a, 43-44)

Tungol sceal on heofenum
beorhte scinan, swa him bebead meotud.

(The star must in the heavens
shine brightly, as the ruler bade it.)

(Maxims II 48b-49)

In addition to these two grammatical conditions, certain verbal and adverbial markers indicate gnomic quality in a verse. Analyses of these markers may be found in several critical articles and books¹¹ but a summary will be useful here:

1. Sceal or mæg with an infinitive or a series of infinitives:

Ræd sceal mon secgan, rune writan,
leop gesingan, lofes gearnian,
dom areccan, dæges onettan.

(Man must speak counsel, write rune,
sing lay, earn praise,
explain judgment, by day keep busy.)

(Maxims IC 138-40)

2. Sceal with an elided infinitive. Usually the verb "to be" or "to belong" is understood. Often a locative phrase denotes a proper or customary location for the subject:

¹¹ Kennedy, Earliest English Poetry 151-2. Blanche Colton Williams, Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon (NY: Columbia UP, 1914) 41.

Sweord sceal on bearme,
drihtlic isern. Draca sceal on hlæwe,
frod, frætwum wlanc.

(A sword must rest in a lap,
lordly iron. A dragon must in his barrow,
old, exulting in treasures.)

(Maxims II 25b-27)

3. Bið:

Lida bið longe on siþe;

(The sailor is long on his journey;)

(Maxims IB 103a)

4. Superlative adjective, usually with bið:

Wind byð on lyfte swiftust,
þunar byð þragum hludast. Drymmas syndan Cristas
myccle,
wyrd byð swðost. Winter byð cealdost,
lencten hrimigost

(Wind is in the sky the swiftest,
thunder is in its season the loudest. The powers of
Christ are great;
wyrd is strongest, winter is coldest,
spring frostiest,)

(Maxims II 3b-6a)

5. Adverbs indicating a constant or repeated action or
condition:

A sceal snotor hycgean
ymb þysse worulde gewinn,

(Ever must the wise man think on
the strife of this world,)

(Maxims II 54b-55a)

Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to
geferan,
felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;

(The friendless, wretched one takes wolves as companions, very treacherous beasts. Full often his companion rends him;)

(Maxims IC 146-7)

6. Næfre, nales or other negatives used in an absolute sense:

Til mon tiles ond tomes meares,
cupes ond gecostes ond calcrondes;
næniq fira to fela gestryneð.

(A good man is careful of a good and tame horse, known and proven and round of hoof; no man acquires too many.)

(Maxims IC 141-3)

7. ". . . ana wat . . .":

Meotud ana wat
hwær se cwealm cymeþ, þe heonan of cyppe gewiteþ.

(The lord alone knows where death comes, (and) who hence departs from known lands)

(Maxims IA 29b-30)

The subject is usually God, but there is one important exception. This clause describes a blind man:

þæt him sar in his mode,
onge þonne he hit ana wat,

(that is painful to him in his mind,
vexed when he alone knows it,)

(Maxims IA 41b-42a)

8. ". . . biþ se þe . . ." This venerable formula is used both for verses which are analogous to the beatitudes and

for the most mundane truths:

Seoc se biþ þe to seldan ieteð;

(Sick is he who eats too seldom)

(Maxims IB 111a)

Of course, not all Old English verses using these phrases and verbs are gnomic. And not all gnomic verses use these markers. Nevertheless, they are far more common in the gnomic collections than elsewhere. Moreover, the ethical impetus of sceal and the static absoluteness of bið retain their force in non-sapiential works. They can, therefore, be of great help in identifying embedded gnomes, gnomic passages and sayings that may have descended from gnomes.

But how do we identify the gnome that is simply a declarative sentence with no markers to distinguish it from syntactically identical but non-gnomic statements? Here we must rely on the more nebulous signals in context and tone.

As regards context: a declarative sentence which advances narration, amplifies description of a specific place or time, or clearly represents the opinion or feelings of a historical or fictional character is not likely to be sapiential. It lacks universality and absoluteness. A syntactically identical sentence which either summarizes action in a detached, judgmental way, describes natural elements as universal truths, or makes a judgment divorced from individual prejudice or emotion may well be gnomic. In a narra-

tive or descriptive context, the gnome will appear to be set apart.

Gnomic tone is less easy to describe but just as important. A gnome sounds definitive: it formulates the standard by which conduct is measured, it states the natural fact which will remain forever unchanged, or it proclaims the ideals to which women and men aspire. It is an anonymous voice addressing a wide audience on a variety of topics and thus its tone is public, detached and authoritative.

In The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament and Resignation, this cool, sure voice meets the anguished song of the exile. How can the poetry resulting from such an encounter be described? Enough examples survive to justify a sub-genre and at first their laments for earlier, happier times encouraged critics to call them "elegies." They acquired this title perhaps more in deference to their appeal to modern readers than in appreciation of the entire range of their emotion and wisdom.

Indeed the earliest English editors and critics of the shorter Old English poems saw little of the elegiac in them. William Conybeare adds The Wife's Lament, which he calls The Exile's Complaint, to his brother's Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry because of "the extreme scarcity of compositions of an elegiac character . . . in the Saxon language."¹² It is not clear whether or not he read The

¹² John Josias Conybeare, ed. William Daniel Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London: Harding and Lepard, 1826) 244.

Wanderer or The Seafarer. They are not included in the volume.

Benjamin Thorpe emphasized the narrative aspects of the lyrics. He sees The Wanderer as a piece of "historic and legendary lore" and wishes it were accompanied by some explanation.¹³ Of Deor, The Exile's Complaint, A Fragment (The Husband's Message) and The Ruin he says "we can only deplore our profound ignorance of the circumstances under which they were written, and of the persons, the places, and the events, to which they allude."¹⁴ Similarly, Henry Sweet described The Ruin, The Wanderer, The Seafarer and The Wife's Lament as the "chief representatives that remain" of "lyric poetry in its earliest stage, in which the narrative and descriptive element still predominates over the purely lyric."¹⁵ In his notes on The Seafarer he calls the lyrics "exile-poems."¹⁶ Clearly, for these critics, the mood which earned the poems their designation as elegies was less important than the narrative puzzles they presented.

Although the German critics of the late nineteenth century noted elegiac elements in The Seafarer and The Wanderer, they were primarily concerned with questions of structure and origin. Rieger, Kluge and Wülker, for exam-

¹³ Benjamin Thorpe, Codex Exoniensis: A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London: published for the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1842) vii.

¹⁴ Thorpe ix-x.

¹⁵ Henry Sweet, An Anglo-Saxon Reader, 7th edition (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1894) 159.

¹⁶ Sweet 222n.

ple, attempted individually to prove one or the other poem to be a dialogue.¹⁷ Boer, and later Imelmann, tried to trace them to older heroic cycles.¹⁸ But, as time went on, the lack of specific historical data bothered critics less and less, and "elegy" became more and more widely accepted as an adequately descriptive label. By 1902 the American critic W. W. Lawrence was referring to The Seafarer and The Wanderer as "elegies" while defending their structural integrity,¹⁹ and in 1915 Ernst Sieper named his book-length study of the lyrics Die Altenglische Elegie.²⁰ Andreas Heusler devoted a small section to the "Gattung der selbständigen Elegie" in his survey of Germanic poetry,²¹ and Brandl considered Old English lyrics "elegies" and elegy itself a

¹⁷ Friedrich Kluge, "Zu Altenglischen Dichtungen (1) Der Seefahrer," Englische Studien 6 (1883): 322-7.

-----, "Zu Altenglischen Dichtungen (2) Nochmals der Seefahrer," Englische Studien 8 (1885): 472-9.

M. Rieger, "Der Seefahrer, als Dialog hergestellt," Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 1 (1869): 334-9.

Richard P. Wülker, Grundriss zur Geschichte der angelsächsischen Litteratur (Leipzig: Veit, 1885) 210 f.

J. C. Pope revived the dialogue theory for The Seafarer in 1965, only to retract it nine years later. "Dramatic Voices in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis Peabody Magoun Jr., ed. Jess B. Bessinger and Robert Creed (NY: 1965) 164-93; "Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of The Seafarer," Anglo-Saxon England 3 (1974): 75-86.

¹⁸ R. C. Boer, "Wanderer und Seefahrer," Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 35 (1903): 1-28.

Rudolf Imelmann, Forschungen zur altenglischen Poesie (Berlin: Weidmann, 1920) 39-72.

¹⁹ W. W. Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 4 (1902): 460-80.

²⁰ Ernst Sieper, Die Altenglische Elegie (Strässburg: Karl Trübner, 1915).

²¹ Andreas Heusler, Die Altgermanische Dichtung (Wildpark-Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1926) 144.

"blühende Gattung."²²

Subsequently, "elegy" has been widely used to describe most of the Old English lyrics. At one time or another The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, Resignation, Widsið, Deor, The Riming Poem, The Ruin and Wulf and Eadwacer have all been so labelled. Edith Wardale writes "almost all Old English lyrical poems are elegiac in character" and deal with "the darker aspects of life, with its hardships and sorrows."²³ Nevertheless, the designation remains problematic and the label has had its detractors. Even Lawrence was not entirely satisfied by the description. He calls The Seafarer "the lyric utterance of one man"²⁴ and refers to the lyrics as "so-called elegiac poems."²⁵ Nora Kershaw points out that the poems' alliterative stressed meter bears no resemblance to classical elegiac forms and that they lack strophes and stanzas. Neither are there any developed pastoral scenes, although The Seafarer contains a brief reference to spring's blossoming forth.²⁶ Seeking a common definition for The Seafarer, The Wanderer, The Wife's Lament, Husband's Message and The Ruin, as well as Beowulf 2233-70 and 2444-59 and Bi Manna Wyrðum 33-42, Kershaw calls them, rather awkwardly, "studies of

²² A. Brandl, "Englische Literatur," in Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, ed. Hermann Paul, 2nd. ed., vol. 2 (Strässburg: K. Trübner, 1900-9): 975.

²³ Edith Wardale, Chapters on Old English Literature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) 29.

²⁴ Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer" 462.

²⁵ Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer" 479.

²⁶ The Seafarer, ASPR III, 143 ff., ll. 48-9.

situation or emotion applied to imaginary and nameless persons who are detached from any definite associations of time or place."²⁷

Later critics objected to the term "elegy" even as they used it. Kennedy says that the poems "differ markedly in mood and pattern from the personal elegy. They do not bewail the death, or eulogize the life, of an individual."²⁸ T. A. Shippey says in Old English Verse that it is "a term vague enough to be inoffensive if unhelpful."²⁹ He consistently puts "elegy" and "elegiac" in quotation marks and finally comments:

There is some justification for treating much Old English poetry, and especially the 'elegiac' group, as 'wisdom literature,' nowadays an unfamiliar literary category, but in its day a large and successful one.³⁰

In an earlier article, B. J. Timmer expressed dissatisfaction with "elegy" as a genre on more specific grounds. He eliminates the poems from the genre one by one: The Ruin has a fragmentary nature and lacks personal relationships; Deor does not complain directly of personal loss and is not exiled; The Husband's Message is full of joyous anticipation, not at all a mood characteristic of elegies in any language. He finds a "similarity in sequence of thought" in

²⁷ Nora Kershaw, ed. and trans., Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922) 6.

²⁸ Kennedy, Earliest English Poetry 103-4.

²⁹ T. A. Shippey, Old English Verse (London: Hutchinson, 1972) 53.

³⁰ Shippey, Old English Verse 67.

The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Riming Poem and The Exile's Prayer, or Resignation. Their "main purpose" is "religious propaganda" and they use "elegiac features" to further that purpose.³¹ Only in The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer does Timmer find that the "characteristic elegiac elements" predominate. He lists these elements as "lament over misery, separation from the lord and banishment, change of luck, comparison with former happiness . . . and longing for love expressed in a lamenting tone." Moreover the poem must be free of any religious-didactic purpose.³² The two frauenlieder alone are elegies "pure and simple."³³ However, if we take the end of The Wife's Lament to be gnomic and not a curse, then it, too, may be seen as didactic as well as, or instead of, elegiac (see Chapter Three below).

Timmer finds a strong elegiac mood throughout the Old English lyrics, but argues that it is used differently than in a traditional elegy. Although I like his discriminating reduction of the genre in Old English, I differ in my understanding of the purposes the elegiac serves in each poem and in the grouping of the poems. I do agree, however, that, with the possible exception of Wulf and Eadwacer, the pri-

³¹ B. J. Timmer, "The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry," English Studies 24 (1942): 38.

See also Timmer, "Heathen and Christian Elements in Old English Poetry," Neophilologus 29 (1944): 180-5.

³² Timmer, "Elegiac Mood" 35-6.

³³ Kemp Malone also studies The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer as a pair. He finds in them survivals of Old German folksongs. "Two English Frauenlieds," Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur, ed. Stanley B. Greenfield (Oregon: U of Oregon P, 1963): 106-17.

mary function of these works is not lamentation, either from a sense of personal loss or from a melancholy view of the state of the world. Indeed the poets are insistent that their personae move beyond sorrow, that they learn from and rise above the confining melancholy so eloquently delineated in the first section of each lyric. The label "elegy" unfortunately encourages the reader to rest before the poem's resolution, to accept the defeat which the persona himself overcomes in the end.

Timmer's reduction of the genre to two poems, however, is very unsatisfying, for many of these lyrics have important and specific characteristics in common. They read as if they belong together. One after another the Old English lyrics set a scene of exile and hardship and then follow it with gnomic and, in the more fully developed poems, rhetorically sophisticated passages. This move from lyric narrative to gnomic wisdom is so clear that many efforts have been made to bifurcate the poems by proving the latter parts to be interpolations.³⁴ Such dissections, effectively answered by W. W. Lawrence and others,³⁵ have largely gone out of fashion but the gnomic "halves" of these poems remain neglected in the criticism, poor step-sisters to the more

³⁴ See, for example, Kluge (1885). More recently, A. A. Prins postulated that the Exeter scribe had mixed parts of The Wanderer and Resignation. "The Wanderer (and The Seafarer)," Neophilologus 48 (1964): 237-51.

³⁵ Lawrence 471 ff. Lawrence does however see lines 103-24 of The Seafarer as inconsistent with the rest of the poem (471).

Karen A. Muller, "The Wanderer: Considered Again," Neophilologus 58 (1974): 74-81.

appealing lyrical passages. To call the poems "elegies" only perpetuates this neglect. A more accurate title for the group, a title which truly describes the poet's response to hardship, would be "gnomic lyrics."

This label reflects the characteristic structure of lyric lament followed by gnomic commentary. Of course, if the group is to be thus described, certain poems, previously called elegies, must be eliminated. On the one hand, The Husband's Message and Widsið neither lament nor contemplate. On the other, The Ruin may be considered a true elegy, for its eloquence mourns the lost grandeur of an earlier time, and it is unadulterated by precept. The works that remain are The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament, Resignation, The Riming Poem, Wulf and Eadwacer and Deor. In this group it is possible to identify and describe many shared characteristics. Two of the poems contain all of the following elements; the rest conform to the genre to a greater or lesser extent. For one or two the identification is tenuous.

Let us begin with general characteristics. Except for Wulf and Eadwacer, each of the poems has as its persona an outcast, either self-exiled or dispossessed by circumstance or enemies. Wulf and Eadwacer is addressed to such a person. This central character is described in very similar ways in the different poems:

The Wanderer is an "anhaga" (1a), an "eardstapa" (6a), an "earmne anhogan" (40a), and a "wineleas guma" (45b). He

is forced to "wadan wræclastas" (5a).

The Seafarer is "merewerges" (12a) and travels "wræccan lastum" (15b). He is a "feasceaftig ferð" (26a) but finds himself "modes fusne" (50b), of an eager spirit, impelled toward the sea journey.

The woman in The Wife's Lament says "A ic wite wonn minra wræcsipa" (5) and calls herself a "wineleas wræcca" (10).

The penitent of Resignation is also impelled on his journey:

forþon ic afysed eom
 earm of minum eþle. Ne mæg þæs anhoga,
 leodwynna leas, leng drohtian,
 wineleas wræcca

(therefore I am impelled,
 destitute, from my homeland. Nor may the anhaga
 without the joy of his people, live long in that way,
 a friendless exile)

(Resignation 88b-91a)

The Riming Poem says "[w]erig winneð widsið onginneð" (the weary one struggles, a far journey begins) (51). The speaker anticipates his death "seo me eðles ofonn ond mec her eardes onconn" (that deprives me of homeland and sentences me to a dwelling here) (74).

In Wulf and Eadwacer, the name, Wulf, implies exile. The persona warns Eadwacer: "Uncerne earne hwelp / bireð wulf to wuda" (Our wretched whelp, Wulf bears to the wood) (16b-17). And a brief refrain bespeaks alienation: "Ungelic is us" (It is different with us) (3 and 8).

Deor, too, has been displaced and "siteð sorgcearig, sælum bidæled" (sits oppressed with sorrow, deprived of happiness) (28), but his sorrow is more regretful than piercing.

The most consistent appellation, also appearing in compounds, is "wræcca." The continuing refrains are those of deprivation ("wineleas," "sælum bidæled"), weariness, and wretchedness. Against these motifs there sounds the occasional note of eagerness or inner compulsion ("fusne modes," "afysed eom"). In 1955 Stanley Greenfield identified a number of formulas centered in the idea of exile in Old English. He listed "four aspects or concomitants of the exile state," all of which are present, to a greater or lesser extent, in our poems. The first is "status" (e.g. "wineleas"); the second "deprivation" (e.g. "sælum bidæled"); the third "state of mind" (e.g. "werig"); and the fourth "movement in or into exile" (e.g. "wadan wræclastas").³⁶ Although the examples from lyrics cited above are not limited to proven formulaic configurations they do use the traditional constellation of phrases and themes identified by Greenfield. But these linguistic and thematic groups exist in saints' lives, Old Testament epics and Beowulf as well as in the lyrics. What then sets the shorter poems apart from the passage describing Grendel as "dreamum bedæled" (Beowulf 721a and

³⁶ Stanley Greenfield, "The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of 'Exile' in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Speculum 30 (1955): 200-1.

1275a)? Or from descriptions of Adam and Eve as exiles from Eden (Genesis 1018b ff.)?

One of the most fundamental generic distinctions originates in the complex relationship between the poet and his persona. Whereas no one expects Grendel to speak verse or Adam to compose his own skillful elegy, the lyric voice in the shorter poems is, at first, insistently claimed by the outcast him-, or her-, self. The formulaic announcement "Ic mæg secgan" appears again and again in the gnomic lyrics.³⁷ Through this and similar phrases the poets firmly proclaim the intimate connection between persona and song:

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
sipas secgan

(I can concerning myself utter a true song,
speak of journeys)

(The Seafarer 1-2a)

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,
minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,

(I this lay make concerning myself full sad,
(concerning) my own lot. I can speak of this)

(The Wife's Lament 1-2)

Þæt ic bi me sylfum secgan wille,

(That I, concerning my self, will tell . . .)

(Deor 35)

³⁷ The formula has also been noted by Wardale (31) and Shippey, Old English Verse 53-4.

In The Wanderer and Resignation similar introductory phrases are used:³⁸

Oft ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce
mine ceare cwipān.

(Often I alone, every night before daybreak,
had to speak my sorrow.)

(The Wanderer 8-9a)

secge þis sarspel Ic bi me tylgust
ond ymb siþ spraece,

(I chiefly concerning myself
make this lament and about the journey speak,)

(Resignation 96b-97)

Two elements are discernable in most of these passages. The first is the assertion that the singer made the song: "Ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan." The second concerns the matter of the song, "minre sylfre sið." The journey, hardship or exile is separate from and mentioned subsequent to the making of the lyric whenever the two are paired: "I by myself, or concerning myself, make this song and tell of a journey." The fictional persona is first established as a song-maker and then chooses his own suffering as material for his lyric.

If this certifying of a first person and his subject lends immediacy and poignancy to the lyric, another device used by most of the poets under consideration distances that same lyric. In The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Resignation and

³⁸ See also Fates of the Apostles, ASPR II 51, ll. 1-2.

The Riming Poem there is a shift from first to third person after approximately the first third or half of the poem. The lament is maintained, as is the focus on a single man, an anhaga. But the poet has broadened his sketch of a single, historical figure into a portrait of exile:

(ic) sohte sele dreorig since bryttan,
 hwær ic feor oppe neah findan mehte
 þone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
 oppe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
 weman mid wynnum. Wat se þe cunnað,
 hu slīpen bið sorg to geferan,
 þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena.
 Warað hine wræclast, nales wunden gold,
 ferðloca freorig, nalæs foldan blæd.

((I) sought the glorious hall, bright treasure,
 wherever, far or near, I might find
 him who in the meadhall would feel affection for me,
 or would comfort me in my friendlessness,
 entice me with pleasures. Wise is he who knows
 how dire is the sorrow of a comrade
 who has to himself few beloved protectors.
 He owns the exile's track, not at all the twisted gold,
 the desolate soul's casket, not at all the earth's
 reward.)

(The Wanderer 25-33)

monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
 ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
 elþeodigra eard gesece.
Forþon nis þæs modwlanc mon ofer eorþan,
 ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geogube to þæs
 hwæt,
 ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten
 to þæs hold,
 þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe,
 to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille.

(Each time my heart's desire urges on
 the companion-soul so that I, far from here,
 might seek the land of strangers.
 For none is so proud of spirit, (no man over the earth),
 nor are his gifts so good, nor (is he) in youth so bold
 nor in his deeds so daring, nor in his lord so favored,

that he in his sea journey has no anxiety
concerning what the Lord God will bestow upon him.)

(The Seafarer 36-43)

forþon ic afyſed eom
earn of minum eple. Ne mæg þæs anhoga,
leodwynna leas, leng drohtian,
wineleas wræcca, (is him wrað meotud),

(therefore I am impelled,
destitute from my homeland. Nor may the anhaga
without the joy of his people, live long in that way,
friendless exile, (to him belongs the wrath of the
ruler),)

(Resignation 88b-91)

Nu min hreþer is hreoh heofsiþum sceoh,
nydbysgum neah; gewiteð nihtes in fleah
se ær in dæge wæs dyre.

(Now my heart is troubled, fearful of times of
affliction,
near distress; there will depart at night in flight
he who earlier, by day, was fierce.)

(The Riming Poem 43-45a)

I have quoted at length here because the thematic similarities between the passages are quite startling. In each poem the shift from ic to he (which occurs in verses underlined above) is preceded by an explanation of the persona's need to travel alone, without friends and without secure destination. The Wanderer seeks the comfort of a new lord and a new hall. The Seafarer is driven by some less concrete need, the "modes lust." The anhaga of Resignation suffered poverty, fear and isolation and has been exiled from his home. And the changed man of The Riming Poem has lost what was once great wealth and power and is forced out into the

night.³⁹ In each poem personal allusion is then followed by a characterization of the anhaga as a type. The topic is still the hardships and exigencies of exile but the tone has changed markedly, becoming detached, almost gnomic, in its use of se þe, bið, mæg and ne. The Wanderer and The Seafarer are the most skillfully developed works in the group and this greater proficiency is evident here. In these poems the field of reference is immediately and deliberately broadened by phrases which reach out to all listeners: "mon ofer eorþan" and "'wat se þe cunnað." The syntax, too, in these poems, grows more formal, less intimate. The lines which use the third person to describe the typical wræcca are more highly structured and more gnomic in syntax than those that preceded them. The Seafarer uses two anaphoric sequences of negatives. The Wanderer's passage is less tightly organized but still uses parallelisms to an extent not found in the first person narrative. In both poems the syntax returns after ten or eleven lines to a less rhetorical, more discursive style which, however, retains the third person. Then they enter a new stage in which the persona returns, but this time with a deeper, broader view of the world and his part in it:

³⁹ See ll. 51-4 of The Riming Poem. The Wife's Lament and Deor also contain shifts in person but the changes are handled differently. The Wife's Lament moves into the third person at the end of the poem and for different reasons than those I have cited for The Wanderer, The Seafarer, etc.; Deor changes from third to first person in the last stanza. See the individual discussions of these poems in the next chapter.

Cearo bið geniwad
 þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe
 ofer wapema gebind werigne sefan.
Forþan ic gebencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
 for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce,
 þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence,
 hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,
 modge maguþegnas.

(Care is renewed
 for him who must send so very often
 a weary spirit over the frozen waves.
 Thus I can not think concerning this world
 why my spirit does not darken
 when I think on all the life of eorls--
 how they with grace relinquished the hall,
 noble retainers)

(The Wanderer 55b-62a)

Ðæt se beorn ne wat,
 esteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
 þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.
Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
 min modsefa mid mereflode . . .

Forþon me hatran sind
 dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
 læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
 þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.

(Thus the man knows not,
 the fortunate man, what some men suffer
 for whom the tracks of exile lie most widely.
 Wherefore my heart now turns over in my breast,
 my mind among the seafoods . . .

Wherefore dearer to me are
 the joys of the lord than this dead life,
 brief on land. I do not believe
 that the earth's wealth stands eternal.)

(The Seafarer 55b-59, 64b-67a)

We shall consider these passages in greater detail later
 (pages 138-9, 204 and 214 ff.). There has been, of course,
 much discussion of the possible religious connotations in
The Seafarer passage, but for now it suffices to point out
 that in both poems the return to the first person begins

with the ambiguous connective forþon and concerns the solitary mind's contemplation of the world, represented abstractly or metaphorically.

We have seen that the gnomic lyrics share a persona as outcast, an announced identification of singer with song and a shift from first to third person with a concomitant broadening of focus. All these aid in our understanding of the poems as lyrics. But the most significant shared element of this group is the body of gnomic wisdom found in each lyric, usually in its second "half." Gnomes are by no means absent from the more narrative and descriptive parts of the poems but it is not until the persona has turned away from personal memories and complaints that they begin to influence substantially what the poem has to say to us.

In The Wanderer, The Seafarer and The Wife's Lament, the gnomic passages are fully, sometimes brilliantly developed. In The Riming Poem they are perfunctory. In Deor the procedure is compressed, almost allusive, but still clearly discernable. In Resignation the gnomic reflections are incomplete and constantly interrupted by the persistent complaint of the outcast. Despite these differences in presentation and development, gnomic passages play a major role in each of the poems. And in each poem the wisdom they represent is achieved through and colored by the sufferings of which the lyric speaks.

The strong gnomic bent of the Old English lyrics has not gone unnoticed. Indeed, in 1903 this quality was used

by R. C. Boer to support his theories of interpolation in The Wanderer⁴⁰ and it has had to be explained away by every subsequent advocate of unity in the lyrics. W. W. Lawrence notes "the pronounced fondness of the Saxons for moralizing, and for gnomic material in general. . . . It was characteristic of Anglo-Saxon thought to connect the particular and the general, to make a man's experiences point a moral as well as adorn a tale. . . . The reflective mood which leads to moralizing is closely akin to the elegiac spirit."⁴¹ He argues convincingly that moralizing was consistent with Old English lyric and Blanche Colton Williams strengthens his argument considerably by reviewing gnomes in Old English literature as a whole. She demonstrates the pervasiveness of the gnomic mode in Old English poetry.⁴²

More recently, I. L. Gordon and T. A. Shippey have commented on the gnomes in the Old English lyric but here the commentary becomes less, rather than more, precise. Shippey points out certain concerns which the gnomic and lyric poetry have in common, such as a belief in the need for self-control. He also characterizes the Exeter Book as an anthology of "wise men's reflections" on drink, boasting, endurance, devils and God, man's ignorance, experience and poetry, a list too diverse to be helpful.⁴³ Gordon goes

⁴⁰ Boer 11-14.

⁴¹ Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer" 477.

⁴² Williams 29-70.

⁴³ Shippey, Old English Verse 68.

further and makes the connection between elegy and gnostic poem a little more explicit:

It is in the limited range of the ideas expressed or implied, and in the sequence of thought, that the dependence of these poems on the older world of gnostic wisdom is clearest. For instance, the wanderer realizes that understanding comes through experience and suffering . . . and concludes therefore that 'a man cannot become wise until he has had many winters on earth.'⁴⁴

Gordon is intrigued by the relationship between "dramatic themes" and the "Christian moralizing" in the second "halves" of The Wanderer and The Seafarer.⁴⁵ She finds that in "Christian elegy" "it seems to have been part of the poetic method to present themes familiar in secular poetry and then to expand them into a Christian significance."⁴⁶ She leans heavily on heroic poetry as a source for her traditional themes and therefore finds the "power of fate and the transience of life" to be the central pagan inheritance. These themes "receive new impetus from similar themes popular in Christian homily -- the omnipotence of God and the mutability of the things of this world."⁴⁷

By tracing the influence of the sapiential tradition in the lyric, I believe we can identify a deeper pagan inheritance than has hitherto been suspected. The power of wyrd and the transience of life are crucial to the lyric insofar

⁴⁴ I. L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," Review of English Studies ns 5 (1954) 6.

⁴⁵ I. L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes" 2.

⁴⁶ I. L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes" 9.

⁴⁷ I. L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes" 12.

as they affect the condition of the human spirit. But the gnomic lyrics are not, after all, heroic poetry. Their action takes place in the mind and the soul, not in the press of battle or the warmth of the mead hall. An examination of the lyrics' debt to the wisdom tradition will reveal that the central issues for these poets are an individual's conduct in isolated adversity and the rewards for meeting such hardship nobly. Their questions are forged by the conditions of a tumultuous century and their answers differ considerably from those of the heroic tradition and the gnomic.

The poems ask: how must one respond when pushed to the extreme frontier of hardship and loneliness? What is it possible to do or say? In both The Seafarer and The Wanderer a special sapience is claimed for the denizen of that frontier. The other poems, although less adroit and less profound, also address these issues of conduct and wisdom. Together, their answers forge a response to the severe conditions of the ninth and tenth centuries in England, a response which is partially directed by, but not dominated by, the Christian faith.

The Wanderer

I shall begin my study of individual poems with a reading of The Wanderer. The Wanderer makes a good starting point for several reasons. It is one of the two most fully developed gnomic lyrics and therefore may be expected to contain most of the features of the genre. Secondly, it

presents fewer problems of interpretation and has a less stormy critical history than does its companion piece, The Seafarer.

The poem has, of course, not been immune from controversies of interpretation. It has been variously described as allegory,⁴⁸ planctus⁴⁹ and consolation.⁵⁰ The first of these is inconsistent with the unmistakable reference to the death and burial of a mortal lord in lines 22-25 and the resulting journey in search of

þone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
 oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
 weman mid wynnum.

(him who in the meadhall would feel affection for me
 or would comfort me in my friendlessness,
 entice me with pleasures.)

(The Wanderer 27-29a)

Such an actual, physical journey, prompted by the need to find an earthly protector and an earthly home, seems inconsistent with the allegorical voyage of the soul in exile suggested by G. V. Smithers.⁵¹ I shall have more to say on allegorical interpretations in my analysis of The Seafarer.

⁴⁸ G. V. Smithers, "The Meaning of The Seafarer and The Wanderer," Medium Aevum 26 (1957): 137-53 and 28 (1959): 1-22.

⁴⁹ Rosemary Woolf, "The Wanderer, The Seafarer and the Genre of Planctus," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: essays in appreciation, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores W. Frese (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1975) 192-207.

⁵⁰ J. E. Cross, "On the Genre of The Wanderer," Neophilologus 45 (1961): 63-75.

⁵¹ See Cross for more on this point, "On the Genre" 72.

Rosemary Woolf's proposal that The Wanderer and The Seafarer be considered planctus or lament has more merit to it. She describes the genre as a lament by an individual or representative speaker who is always fictional. The occasion for lament need not be death; any sort of serious loss will do.⁵² Thus, laments for dead heroes, for loss of youth, the lament of the last survivor and complaints on the transience of life may all be included here. However, Woolf's conclusions require that she ignore the mention of God's "are" or mercy in the beginning and end of The Wanderer. The sure enjoyment of divine mercy must transmute any complaint into the memory of sorrow only.⁵³ Woolf sees the passages in which these references are made (lines 1-5 and 111-15) as "blocked off" from the main body of the poem by "swa cwæþ" constructions. They are relevant but only as a frame for the planctus.⁵⁴ Two objections to this approach may be entered here. The first is to the dislocation of two structurally vital passages from the body of the poem. If a generic designation requires such surgery then the diagnosis must be considered suspect. The second is that, in this poem, the first ten verses can be shown to be fully integrated into the body of the work. Indeed they represent the lyric and gnomic attributes of the poem in microcosm and participate fully in the work's final affect

⁵² Woolf 192.

⁵³ Compare the speech of the last survivor in Beowulf 2247-70a. No divine mercy consoles this desolate man. He has no hope and his is a true lament.

⁵⁴ Woolf 197.

(see pages 124-7 below). Thus, whatever exists in these passages to mitigate lament and to eliminate planctus also exists in the body of the poem.

The anhaga in The Wanderer does not merely broaden his plaint. He goes beyond lament to discover why all is not lost in a brutal, unstable world. This meditation has encouraged James Cross to label the poem a consolatio. He bases his designation on the very passage that Rosemary Woolf later tried to "block off" from the body of the lyric: lines 111-115, which offer an "undoubted and accepted Christian consolation," according to Cross. He also cites the use of interrogatio and repetitio as evidence that the poet was familiar with the classical rhetorical tradition in which consolatio is based.⁵⁵ Cross provides his usual impressive array of classical and ecclesiastical precedents in support of his label and certainly The Wanderer has many themes in common with the authors of consolationes, although the works cited are generally letters and sermons, not poetry. But, unlike its supposed forerunners and analogues in the genre, The Wanderer does not console. The attempts at consolation are unsuccessful partly because the occasion, the need, is not specific enough. The Wanderer laments not only because he lost a lord (about whom we hear first in line 22) or kin or land but because of the desolation of his general condition and the condition of the world around him.

⁵⁵ Cross, "On the Genre" 63.

This underlying need is too great for so specific a genre.

Stanley Greenfield, with whom Cross concurs for the most part, finds a "negative de consolatione" in The Wanderer.⁵⁶ In this view one topos after another is taken up and then rejected until the supreme Christian answer is arrived at. Or, in Cross's words:

To my mind the progress of the poem is best explained in terms of a consolatio where topics of the genre are used first to intensify the lament, then to attempt some measure of secular consolation by generalisation which is yet unsatisfactory, in order to emphasise the supreme consolation of security in the next life.⁵⁷

But such a series of fruitless comforts is not typical of consolationes. Indeed the Christian masters of the genre used a selection of topoi to build bulwarks against grief, not to undercut proffered solace. Thus, Theodoret in a letter of consolation to Cyrus Magistriannus on the death of his wife and son acknowledges the extent of his friend's grief by extolling the virtues of the dead. But he follows this, as in other letters, with a list of Christian consolations: suffering is a common fate, we all are doomed to die, we must bear this hardship bravely. He adds, moreover, that the dead shall live again, for death is but a long sleep, and that God has our good in mind and all those who

⁵⁶ Stanley Greenfield, "The Wanderer: a Reconsideration of Theme and Structure," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 50 (1951): 462.

⁵⁷ Cross, "On the Genre" 71.

submit to him shall earn everlasting life.⁵⁸

St. Basil's letter to Elpidius, Bishop of Constantinople, on the death of his grandchild (also cited by Cross) allows even less indulgence in mourning. The Bishop is told that, because of his "degree of goodness," he must show himself as "lifted above sorrows."⁵⁹

These are letters, not poems, and therefore do not serve us well as precedents. The elements The Wanderer does share with them are not knit together in the poem in a consistent attempt to either offer comfort or deny it. The anhaga's kinsmen are gone, self-control fails him, and his memories only increase his grief. The poem and its persona turn to a general contemplation of the world but here, again, there is no direct attempt at consolation. As Cross admits, the ubi sunt passage in lines 92-96 genuinely mourns past glories; it does not renounce them. The anhaga, now become wise through suffering, has loved his world. He finds no solace in its passing. Many of the loci communes in The Wanderer can indeed be found in consolationes, but they are also used elsewhere, in elegy and sermon for example. They carry no distinct signals that their purpose is to console. Not once in the description of a wise man, for example, are we told that he must not mourn excessively. Nowhere is his individual plight specifically compared to

⁵⁸ Theodoret of Cyrus, Epistles, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers III (Oxford: 1892) 256, col. 2.

⁵⁹ Epistle CCVI, St. Basil: The Letters, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, vol. 3 (NY: G. P. Putnam, 1930) 177-9.

that of his declining society. On the contrary, it becomes subsumed by the larger grief he must feel for the passing of an entire world bright with armor and proffered cups, loud with music and banquets. There is no consolation to put against this loss; in its face he can only assert the necessity for wisdom.

Finally, in answer to Cross's arguments, it should be said that the consolatio is usually addressed to the aggrieved one or, less commonly, is couched in the first person as a plea for consolation. In The Wanderer we would have the awkward situation of the grief-stricken persona offering fruitless consolations to himself followed by his unnamed creator's triumphant production of the ultimate comfort.

Professors Cross and Greenfield rest their case on the last three verses, while Professor Woolf's analysis depends on excluding these lines. The passage in question reads:

Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo
fæstnung stondeð.

(Well is it for him who seeks grace,
solace from the father in heaven, where all our
conviction stands.)

(The Wanderer 114b-115)

Certainly, the belief expressed here is comforting. But the reference to a heavenly home and a loving and powerful Father is also found in the end of The Dream of the Rood (147-148a and 151b), The Seafarer (117-122a), The Riming

Poem (83b-87) and Maxims IB (133b-137). Surely each of these very different poems is not a consolatio. I believe that this closing theme represents a general convention rather than a genre determinant. It seems to be the Christian seal on what is otherwise a rather mixed poetic.

If The Wanderer is not structured as a consolatio, either positive or negative, how do we characterize the persona's response to the tragedies which threaten to engulf him? How does he engage his grief? And what is the structure which attempts resolution of his plight?

I have said that the introductory lines of the poem represent, in microcosm, the integration of lyric and gnome.⁶⁰ This passage (lines 1-5) also introduces the central problem of the poem: How can the human spirit survive extreme adversity?

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
 metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig
 geond lagulade longe sceolde
 hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,
 wadan wræclastas. Wyrð bið ful aræd!

The notes sounded in these verses will resonate throughout the poem: God's mercy or grace, the condition of exile, the implacability of fate. But readings of the motifs thus begun differ significantly.

To begin with, critics and translators have been perplexed by the verb "gebideð" here, and by the connective

⁶⁰ Jerome Mandel, "Contrast in Old English Poetry," Chaucer Review 6 (1971): 8-9.

"peah þe." Robert Gordon translates "are gebideð" as "prays for favor" and "peah þe" as the adversative "though."⁶¹ He is supported in the latter by Kennedy in An Anthology of Old English Poetry⁶² and by Nora Kershaw in Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems.⁶³

Richard Hamer ignores the pronoun "him" and chooses a juxtaposition which, at first glance, makes better sense: "Often the solitary man enjoys / The grace and mercy. . . ." Hamer's note explains his choice of "enjoys" over "waits for, prays for:"

Editors and translators have variously stated or implied that this form is part of gebīdan or gebiddan. . . . The peah þe clause makes it clear that the sentence is a paradox, so we can dismiss those interpretations which give "waits for, prays for, seeks for" etc., as no Christian would be surprised that one should wait, pray or seek for God's grace when surrounded by hardship . . .⁶⁴

Another consideration argues against the translation "expects" and that is that this meaning commonly takes an object in the genitive case.⁶⁵

It seems unwise, however, to ignore the pronoun here

⁶¹ Robert Gordon, trans., Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London: Dent, 1970) 73.

⁶² C. W. Kennedy, ed. and trans., An Anthology of Old English Poetry (NY: Oxford UP, 1960) 5.

⁶³ Kershaw, Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems 9. Kershaw translates "gebideð" as "looking for."

⁶⁴ Richard Hamer, ed. and trans., A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) 174n and 175.

⁶⁵ Bosworth and Toller list several examples under gebīdan, among them: "Oðres ne gymep / to gebidanne . . . yrfeweardes" (Beowulf 2451b-53a).

and the verb "enjoys" perhaps forces the passage into a juxtaposition more paradoxical than is necessary. A translation of "him . . . are gebīdeð" as "awaits favor for himself" yields a sense less pat but more consonant with the body of the poem:

Often the solitary one awaits favor for himself,
the Ruler's mercy, though he, anxious at heart,
through the sea waves, for a long time, had
to stir with his hand the frost chilled sea,
follow the steps of an exile. Wyrd is entirely
determined.

We know from Maxims IC and from Bede that those pagans who stepped out into the darkness of exile or death expected little from their faith.⁶⁶ The significance of The Wanderer 1-5 is that, in spite of exile, in spite of the loss of kin, land, and lord, all that defined a man, the anhaga still retained spiritual strength. This may be seen as a triumph of the new Roman faith but it is also more than that. For he does not, within the narrative context of the lyric "enjoy the Lord's grace." As the poem's closing lines make clear, that comfort is attainable only in the next life. The poem is not a Christian consolation for hardships endured, but rather the triumph of a mortal over those hardships, a triumph secured in spite of the impossibility of adequate earthly consolation.

Lines 1-5 contain three threads which run throughout

⁶⁶ Maxims IC 146-9; Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, Opera Historica, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1971) vol. II, Bk. 2, ch. 13, pp. 282-5. This is the much cited advice of Edwin's counselor.

the poem. The first is a couching of Christian faith in gnomic syntax (lines 1-2a). The universal present tense in "gebideð" helps to establish the anhaga as a type whose expectation represents the desperate hope of each exile, of every outcast who believes in the Christian god. The second element is the lyric history of a single individual -- a history which, in its hopelessness, is sharply juxtaposed to the Christian message (lines 2b-5a). The last half-line announces with gnomic finality the code of a heathen order. It is the achievement of The Wanderer that all three strands are fully engaged, although the first, the Christian message of hope, is less developed than the others.

Lines 6 and 7 introduce the body of the poem and fully establish the lyric identity of its persona, a wanderer without kin. Lines 8 and 9a are also part of the gnomic lyric convention:

Oft ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce
mine ceare cwipan.

(Often I alone, every night before daybreak,
had to speak my sorrow.)

(The Wanderer 8-9a)

This is the compulsion to sing, or speak, that we noted in The Seafarer 1-2a, The Wife's Lament 1-2a, Deor 35, and Resignation 96b-97. As in The Wife's Lament, dawn is the time favored for lamentation.

However clear these generic signals in The Wanderer, they pale next to the strong presence of familiar precepts.

ries-old insistences on self-control:

Be weighty in thy mind, consolidate thy heart
Accustom not thyself to shape thy course by thy tongue
(only).

(Amen-em-ope ch. 18, 385-6)

He who guards his mouth preserves his life;
He who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

(Proverbs 13.3)

Be patient my heart, in troubles, even though your
sufferings are intolerable; the hearts of base men are
too hasty.

(Theognis 592 ff.)⁶⁷

And finally:

Hyge sceal gehealden, hond gewealden,
seo sceal in eagen, snyttro in breostum,
þær bið þæs monnes modgeþoncas

(The heart must be restrained, the hand controlled,
a pupil must be in the eye, wisdom in the breast,
where man's heart-thoughts are.)

(Maxims IB 121-3)

Styran sceal strongum mode.

(One must restrain strong minds.)

(Maxims IA 50a)

The lyric poet takes this a step farther than did his predecessors, however. He first adds to and justifies the precept in a two-part gnome: "Ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan, / ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman." Then he

⁶⁷ See pp. 11-12 of Chapter One for fuller discussion of these gnomes and their sources.

repeats the idea of lines 12-14:

Forðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
in hyra breostcofan bindað fæste;

(Since the virtuous, often sad,
bind fast sadness in their heart's chamber)

(The Wanderer 17-18)

and finally brings the truth home to his own history:

swa ic modsefan minne sceolde,
oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
freomægum feor feterum sælan,

(so I my spirit,
often wretchedly sorrowful, deprived of homeland,
far from kinsmen, had to confine in fetters,)

(The Wanderer 19-21)

These three passages, lines 12-14, 17-18, and 19-21, also exemplify a larger formal characteristic of the gnomic lyrics. In them, the poet uses a sophisticated sort of clausal variation, as that technique is described by Arthur Brodeur in The Art of Beowulf. Brodeur defined variation as "a double or multiple statement of the same concept or idea in different words, with a more or less perceptible shift in stress."⁶⁸ The components of the variation are often grammatically parallel.⁶⁹ Brodeur cites instances in Beowulf in

⁶⁸ Arthur Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf (Berkeley: U of California P, 1959) 40.

⁶⁹ Walther Paetzel and early analysts of variation felt grammatical parallelism was essential for variation. "Die Variationem in der altgermanischen allitterationspoe-sie," Palaestra 48 (1913): 3-4. He is cited by Brodeur on pages 39-40.

Stanley Greenfield quite sensibly says "some kind of parallelism is necessary for effective recognition" of

which the variation of a substantive is enclosed in a clausal variation⁷⁰ and this is what we have in The Wanderer.

In the following discussion a referent is an idea or thing repeatedly referred to in varying ways and a variants is one reference to a referent. A variation is a sequence or group of variants forming a whole unit, clausal or thematic. The various components in The Wanderer can be identified as follows:

*The first referent is the exile or exiles:

eorle (12)
domgeorne (17)
ic (19)

*The second referent is the self or the heart:

ferðlocan (13) and hordcofan (14)
breostcofan (18)
modsefan (19)

*The third referent is the verbal idea "must bind" or "confine:"

þæt biþ . . . indryhten þeaw, /
þæt he . . . fæste binde (12-13)
bindað fæste (18)
sceolde, / . . . feterum sælan (19 and 21)

The grammatical structure of these variants is not, of course, parallel but neither is it disjointed. An underlying pattern is discernible: "(A) noble man/men must bind/bind(s) his/their heart(s)."

Brodeur saw a "shift in stress" in Old English poetic

variation but that it does not have to be grammatical. The Interpretation of Old English Poems (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 64.

⁷⁰ Beowulf 1677-86 and 180b-183.

variation and such a movement is certainly perceptible here. The first sentence is cast in the impersonal, generalized style of the gnome. The use of a single unspecified "eorl" as a subject and the unsympathetic sweep of "hycge swa he wille" leave little room for empathy. The second variation softens to sound more like a statement of unfortunate fact than a stern moral injunction. Here the eorl has become "those eager for praise" and "hycge swa he will" is made more specific in "dreorigne."⁷¹ Finally, the precept is applied to the persona and the poem, with the help of swa, moves seamlessly from gnome to lyric narrative (19-21).

At first, it seems as if variation is all that happens here. To be sure, the gnome is amplified as specifics are added. The hapless eorl, eager for praise, becomes "I . . . often wretchedly sorrowful, deprived of homeland, far from kinsmen." The binding of the heart's chamber becomes "confine my spirit in fetters." However, a significant shift in mode is also taking place. The passage begins to move out of the gnomic with the use of the preterite in sceolde and in line 22 it becomes narrative:

sippan geara iu goldwinne mine
hrusan heolstre biwrah, and ic hean þonan

⁷¹ Federic Cassidy and Richard Ringley believe "dreorigne" modifies "hyge" in line 16, although the two statements seem quite distinct. Hamer treats it as a substantive, as does Robert Gordon. This last seems the most sensible solution since the preposition "in" eliminates "hyra breostcofan" as an object of "bindað." See Cassidy and Ringley, ed., Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader, 3rd ed. (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971) 325 n.

wod wintercearig ofer wapema gebind,
sohte sele dreorig

(when long ago my gold friend
with concealing earth I covered, and I, humbled then,
mad with wintersorrow, over a flood-binding,
sought the glorious hall)

(The Wanderer 22-25a)

In a sense this may be understood as narrative amplification of that gnomic kernel in lines 12-14. The sorrow and deprivation are being given a history and a name. But on another level the story of burial and exile violates the concerns of the preceding sequence. The gnome has insisted on stoicism; the narrative creates lament.

The anhaga's avoidance of this contradiction carries interesting implications for the remainder of the poem. He implies that he did indeed obey the strictures of the old Germanic ethic in the midst of his misfortunes: "Ic modsefan minne sceolde. / feterum sælan." It is only now, in some unspecified but nearer past, that he breaks the silence with complaint. Of course, his adherence to silence then and his violation of it now are both in a sense irrelevant. For there was and is "no living man . . . to whom I dare speak clearly my heart."

Here it is that the wisdom of Maxims I and II is shown to be inadequate. How can such precepts, designed as they are for social men, aid him who has lost all that is social, all that makes a man a citizen, one among his fellows?

In lines 29b ff. the gnomic lyric begins to move beyond the sapiential tradition, tentatively to challenge inherited

search is interrupted several times by accounts of wistful reveries but, nevertheless, the speaker achieves a distance from his sorrow. This distance is expressed through concurrent changes of person and tense.

In lines 8-29a of The Wanderer the poetic line is in the first person. Lines 1-29a, except for the gnomic interjections, are in the past tense. The descriptions of the real conditions of exile and the reveries which accompany deprivation begin in 29a. They are consistently couched in the third person and the present tense. Whereas earlier passages had given us a personal history and a personal response, these lines, like lines 1-2a, create a universal type: the "wineleas guma." The type is, of course, inspired by the preceding narrative but it is created in full by the poem's second powerful poetic variation, which requires consideration here.

The brush strokes in lines 29b-57 are broader than in the poem's initial series of gnomic passages. Whereas we were able to call that beginning series "clausal variation," the technique here can only be considered a thematic variation. It may seem that a theme is too vague an entity to submit to such specific formal repetition, but actually quite specific thematic components are discernible in lines 29a-37. These lines introduce the following elements (I have appended paraphrases):

1. An intimation of special knowledge:

Wat se þe cunnað,
 hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan,
 þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena.

(Only he who has experienced desolation can know how cruel a companion sorrow can be.)

2. The delineation of deprivation:

Warað hine wræclast, nales wunden gold,
 ferðloca freorig, nalæs foldan blæd.

(The exile has no gold or welcoming homeland, only cold paths of exile and rejection.)

3. revery:

Gemon he selesecgas ond sincþege,
 hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
 wenede to wiste.

(He calls to mind a past replete with the bestowal of gifts, with comradeship and the love of a generous lord.)

4. gnostic summation:

Wyn eal gedreas!

(All joy is gone.)

This sequence begins again, with variations, in line 37:

Lines 37-39a set out the condition for special knowledge, in this case the lack of a lord. The verb witan is used again with a se þe clause.

Lines 39b-40 describe the bereaved thane's desolation. Again sorrow is cast as a companion but this time it accompanies sleep.

And in 41-45a the anhaga slips into reverie once more: he imagines himself at home with his lord, performing the ceremonial obeisance of laying hand and head on his liege's knee.⁷²

The dream is interrupted by the awakening of the "wineleas guma" to a wintery reality:

Donne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwað,

(Then is the heart by this heavier with wounds,
sore after the vision. Sorrow is renewed,)

(The Wanderer 49-50)

Once again the gnome remorselessly insists on the inescapable nature of sorrow. Reverie only enhanced pain.

As in the three-fold variation identified earlier (page 131-2), this sequence of two moves from the general, almost emblematic, example to the specific narrative. Unlike the earlier passages, however, here the poet adheres to the third person and the present tense throughout. The cause for sorrow in line 31 is the lack of protectors, in lines 37-39a we hear once more of the death of a lord and the loss of his guiding precepts. In 34-36b a familiar scene of patronage and feasting is depicted. In 41-44 the deluded exile imagines himself before his lord performing the very obeisance he had done so many times before in the hall. The bitterness of awakening, the replacement of the warm hall

⁷² cf. Maxims IA 67, which also alludes to the ceremonial placing of the lord's hand upon the thane's head.

and giefstolas with snow and hail bring to mind the earlier series of substitutions in which paths of exile replace twisted gold, and a chill loneliness the familiar homeland (lines 32-33). In both variations a bitter irony underlies the grief. The anhaga gains wisdom through the loss of his teacher, who once was his source of ethical wisdom. His new knowledge replaces accepted precepts with a wisdom gained only through experience, a knowledge peculiar to the sufferer, the mourner.

The delineation of grief is amplified by lines 50b-57. This passage has two components, variations on the theme of revery described above. Whereas the previous reveries had ended with the renewal of sorrow, each of these parts begins with the formula "x bið geniwad" in the b-verse. Each tells of repeated daydreams in which the exhausted spirit is sent over frozen waves after ghostly illusions.⁷³ Each of the dreams ends in bitter awakening. Rather than sustaining the anhaga's nostalgia for friends dead and ceremonies made obsolete, they reduce him to a spirit without hope, an imagination constantly deluded to no purpose. This type is appropriately summed up in the gnomic lines:

	Cearo bið geniwad
þam þe sendan sceal	swipe geneahhe
ofer wapema gebind	werigne sefan.

⁷³ See discussion of "fleotendra" in Vivian Salmon, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer and the Old English Conception of the Soul," Modern Language Review 55 (1960): 7-10.

(Care is renewed
for him who must send so very often
a weary spirit over the frozen waves.)

(The Wanderer 55b-57)

Note here the use of bið, þam þe and sceal, also the sense of repeated action.

The anhaga, forced to recognize the futility of his dreams, turns, in a passage crucial to the understanding of his poem, to puzzled contemplation of life as it is, not as it was or could have been:

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
for hwan modsefa him ne gesweorce,
þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence,
hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,
modge maguþegnas.

(Thus I cannot think concerning this world
why my spirit does not darken
when I think on all the life of eorls --
how they with grace relinquished the hall,
noble retainers)

(The Wanderer 58-62)⁷⁴

Several elements should be noted here. The poet has returned temporarily to the first person, but it is a contemplative, not a narrative, "I." The syntax is far more hypotactic than in preceding passages and the individual revery on the misfortunes of one man has been broadened to embrace the fate of all eorls, a generalization foreshadowed by the creation of a "type" in the preceding passages.

But the central fact of this passage is its query "for

⁷⁴ For other readings see Hamer, 178-9, and Gordon, "Traditional Themes" 6.

hwan modsefa min ne gesweorc. . . ." How is the spirit able to receive the terrible knowledge of human fate and not descend forever into darkness? The poet's persona does not question wyrd. He wonders at the ability of the human spirit to see the worst clearly and still not despair. Cross would have him find the answer in the Christian assurance of everlasting life. But it seems to me that the anhaga depends on no single philosophical or religious formula to answer his heart-rending query, but rather relies heavily on a diverse body of inherited wisdom, some of it drawn from Instructions to Princes, some from heroic codes and formulas and some, certainly, from the relatively new Christian faith. His search takes him out of the world of personal revery and lament which dominated the poem's first half. The stoic's code of conduct which has so hindered his voice has been discarded. His quest for sympathetic friendship and a new dependence is replaced by a confident and remarkably open-ended search for wisdom.

The passages crucial to the persona's arrival at wisdom have been identified with the homiletic tradition. Friederick Kluge used the similarities between lines 62 ff. and homilies by Wulfstan and the Blickling homilists to support his claim that the passages were interpolations.⁷⁵ F. Klaeber noted similarities but drew no conclusions.⁷⁶ James E. Cross has used his knowledge of the Latin tradition

⁷⁵ Kluge (1885), 472-3.

⁷⁶ F. Klaeber, "Notes on Old English Poems," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 12 (1913): 259.

to make a firm claim that, in regard to lines 92-96, "no direct source could be offered . . . but knowledge obtained about the origin and use of the ubi sunt theme [in the homilies] allowed a reasonable assumption that this poet drew the main idea from the same general sources as the homilies did, and that no thoughts within the poetic passage were distinctively Germanic."⁷⁷ Nora Kershaw in Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems is equally emphatic in the opposite direction. She notes the parallels in homiletic passages which "are no doubt derived in part from Latin originals" but:

On the other hand it is to be observed that the formula hwær cwom is not of Latin origin, and further that rhetorical questions in general do not appear to have been unusual in the early Teutonic languages. They are of fairly frequent occurrence in Norse poetry. . . . Again the question "where are?" with reference to the departed . . . is of frequent occurrence in the early poetic literature of several languages . . . which cannot be suspected of Latin influence. . . . The case as regards The Wanderer must therefore be regarded as at least doubtful. The only point in favour of the Latin derivation is that this formula is unusual in Anglo-Saxon poetry. On the other hand the whole tenor of the passage from l. 92-105 is as alien as it could well be from the homiletic passages cited above.⁷⁸

I believe that, once lines 63 ff. are examined in the light of comparable secular passages, as well as Christian sermons, it will appear that The Wanderer poet also depended heavily upon the ancient sapiential tradition. Moreover,

⁷⁷ J. E. Cross, Latin Themes in Old English Poetry (Lund: U of Lund, 1962) 4.

⁷⁸ Kershaw, Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems 166.

his use of that tradition amounted to a critical reinterpretation of ancient proverbs and a testing of social codes against the conditions of a chaotic age. In places the poet shares topoi and rhetorical tools with the homilists but he employs them very differently. And at least one passage descends from Celtic secular literature, not from the Latin sermons to which it has previously been attributed.

The first topos in question is found in lines 62b-65a. The world, it is said, grows older and weaker every day. So, too, man ages as he lives his share of winters. The theme was a favorite of late classical and early Christian authors, as James Cross points out in his article "Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature."⁷⁹ It was used by Lucretius and Philo Judaeus to explain the earth's declining fertility and by Christian authors such as St. Cyprian, Isidore, Gregory, Wulfstan and Aelfric. Augustine objected to the implication that the Christian age was a weaker, degenerate time⁸⁰ but nevertheless the belief that man's physical and moral deterioration ran parallel to, and may have resulted from, the earth's degeneration persisted through the fourteenth century.⁸¹ However, in his brief reference to the world's aging, The Wanderer poet adds a contradictory twist which is not discernably of pagan or Christian origin. Indeed, as it is punctuated by Krapp and

⁷⁹ Comparative Literature 14 (1962): 1-22.

⁸⁰ De Civitate Dei (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966) vol. IV, i and ii.

⁸¹ G. R. Coffman, "Old Age from Horace to Chaucer," Speculum 9 (1934): 249-77.

Dobbie, it is simply a failure of logic. For, as the passage starts in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, the decline of the earth is likened, not to man's disintegration through age but to man's increase in wisdom.

Swa þes middangeard
ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ,
forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer, ær he age
wintra dæl in woruldrice.

(As this earth
each and every day perishes and falls,
so a man can not become wise before he lives
his share of winters in the world.)

(The Wanderer 62b-65a)

This is clearly not a simple equation between earth's old age and man's. Nor is it a picture of man's decline. It seems to be rather a superficial and illogical link. As the world each day declines and fails, so man may not become wise until he has lived his share of winters in the world. An alternative is to end the sentence at line 63. The aging of the world would then be linked to the preceding description of the driving of eorls from their homes (61-62a) and "forþon" in line 64 would begin, as it so often does, a new but roughly connected thought.⁸² Thus, lines 61 to 65 would read:

how (the eorls) with grace relinquished the hall,
noble retainers, as this earth
each and every day perishes and falls.
Wherefore a man may not become wise before he lives

⁸² Hamer punctuates the line in this way, also (17°).

his share of winters in the world. The wise man must be patient

(The Wanderer 61-65)

One effect of this repunctuating of Krapp and Dobbie's edition is of course to dilute the passage's affinity with the apocalyptic tradition. The poet used the phrasing of the idea but did not understand, or did not wish to employ, fully half the figure. Indeed he disagrees with Aelfric, for, in one sense at least, men gain through aging. Experience in living is a prerequisite for wisdom. This concept, which will be seen as essential to the poem, is prominent in early secular wisdom collections. In Hávamál, for example, Loddfafnir is told:

at hoary sage sneer thou never
there is sense oft in old men's saws;
oft wisdom cometh out of withered bag
that hangs 'mongst the hides,
and dangles 'mongst the skin's drying
under roof, with the rennet.

(Hávamál st. 134)

and in the Cotton gnomes we are told:

and gomol (bið) snoterost,
fyrngearum frod, se þe ær fela gebideð.

(the aged man (is) the wisest,
prudent with bygone years, who before endures many
things.)

(Maxims II 11b-12)

Age is not a guarantee, however. In a formal series reminiscent of homiletic prose, lines 65b-69 of The Wanderer add other requirements for wisdom. Kluge, Klæber and

Cross have all noted the passage's distinctive rhetoric.⁸³ For here the poet employs a negative and an intensifying adverb in a repetitio very much like that which was used in later sermons by Wulfstan, pseudo-Wulfstan and the Blickling homilist:

Wita sceal geþyldig,
ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hrædwyrde,
ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig,
ne to forht ne to fægen, ne to feohgifre
ne næfre gielpes to georn, ær he geare cunne.

(The wise man must be patient,
he must not be too passionate, nor too hasty in speech,
nor too weak a warrior, nor too reckless,
nor too frightened or too elate, nor too greedy,
nor ever too eager for praise, before he knows (himself)
entirely.)

(The Wanderer 65b-69)

Dorothy Bethurum points out that "scarcely any homily is without" this use of "too." She sees it as "an idiom somewhat like litotes," "a subtle kind of irony." Wulfstan, she says, is ironically calling for partial control of behavior when he means complete elimination of vice.⁸⁴ If it is irony it is surely plied with a heavy hand. Not only does the adverb appear thus in most of Wulfstan's homilies, but it also figures in long anaphoric sequences. I believe another explanation is possible and to this end I shall compare several homiletic passages using "ne too . . ."

⁸³ Cross, "On the Genre" 68; Klaeber, "Notes" 259-60; Kluge (1885) 471-2.

⁸⁴ Dorothy Bethurum, The Homilies of Wulfstan (Oxford: The Clarendon P, 1957) 92.

sequences with The Wanderer lines quoted above. We could dip into many Old English sermons and find relevant series. I have chosen what I believe to be a fair sampling. The first example is taken from Wulfstan's warning of the approach of the Final Judgment.

. . . and eac ic lære georne manna gehwylcne, þæt ænig ne afyle mid fulan forligere æfre hine sylfne. ne ænig ne healde yrre on his heortan ealles to lange. ne ænig þurh worldhoge forsgie to swyðe, ac hihte on his drihtan. ne æfre ænig man idelnesse lufige ealles too gelome. ne æfre ænig man unnyt lof and idel gylp lufige to swyðe. ne æfre ænig man ofermetta lufje, ac æfre hy ascunie; and scylde man eac wið mansliht æfre swyð georne. and scylde man wið galnysse and wið æwbryce georn. . . .

(. . . and also I earnestly teach each of you men, so that no one ever defiles himself with foul fornication. Nor may any man hold anger in his heart too long, nor may any through worldly care sorrow too greatly but he must trust in his Lord. nor may any man love idleness entirely too often. nor may any man ever love frivolity and idle boasting too greatly. nor may any man ever love food in excess or ever shun it; and a man may also guard always against manslaughter most zealously and against lust and zealously against adultery.)

(Wulfstan, Disses Middangeardes ende neah is.)⁸⁵

The second belongs to the best known of the Blickling

Homilies:

Ne beo nænig man her on worldrice on his geþohte to modig, ne on his lichoman to strang, ne niþa to georn,

⁸⁵ Wulfstan, Sammlung der ihm Zugeschriebenem Homilien I: Text und Varianten, ed. Arthur S. Napier (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883) X, 69-70. Unless stated otherwise, quotations from Wulfstan and pseudo-Wulfstan will be taken from this edition.

ne bealwes to beald, ne bregda to full, ne inwit to leof, ne wrohtas to webgenne, ne searo to renigenne.

(Let no man here in the earthly realm be in his thought too proud, nor in his body too strong, nor too eager for strife, nor too bold in evil, nor too full of fears, nor too fond of deceit, nor (given) to the weaving of slanders, nor to the laying of snares.)

(Blickling Homily X)⁸⁶

The construction is also found in a sermon on baptism and baptismal vows:

40.3 Leofan men, beorgað eow georne wið deofles lara. ne beon ge naðor ne to swicole ne to ficole, ne lease ne luðerfulle ne ful ne fracode ne on ænige wisan to lehterfulle . . . (prohibitions against murder and other crimes follow, also sorcery)

40.16 ne beon ge ofermode ne to weamode ne to niðfulle ne to flitgeorne ne to felawyrde ne ealles to hlagole, ne eft to asolcene ne to unrote. And ne beon ge to rance ne to gylpgeorne ne færinge to fægene ne eft to ormode, & ne beon ge to slapole ne ealles to sleace, ac scyldað eow eorne wið deofles dare.

(Beloved men, fortify yourselves well against the devil's teaching. nor be you either too deceitful nor too crafty nor false nor dissolute, nor corrupt nor vile nor in any way too disgraceful . . . Nor be you proud nor too angry nor too malicious nor too quarrelsome nor too talkative nor apt to laugh at all things nor too eager to boast nor suddenly too elate nor again too despairing. Nor be you too somnolent nor else too lazy, but guard yourself entirely against the devil's harm.)

(Sermo de baptisate)⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century, Early English Text Society os 58, 63, 73, ed. R. Morris (London: Trübner, 1874-80) 109.

⁸⁷ Napier V 40; Bethurum VIIIC 183-4. I have followed Bethurum's edition here.

and finally in a rapid sequence from a sermon inaccurately attributed to Wulfstan:

. . . and utan we þa drihtenlican wæra simble
gehealden and þa siblican lufan godes and manna. ne syn
we to gifre ne to frece ne to firenlustgeorne ne to
æfestige ne to inwitfulle ne to tælende ne to
twigspræce ne morþor to begangenne ne aðas to
swerjanne ne niðas to fremmanne ne leasunga to
særganne ne þeofenda to begangenne; ne werignessa we
ne fyljan ne heafodlice leahtres ne lufian ne
scyncræftas onhyrgan ne galdorsangas ne unriht lyblac
onginnen ne to yðbelige ne syn ne to langsum yrre
hæbben ne in oferhydo we ne sculon gewitan . . .

(. . . and let us always hold to this godly covenant and
this peaceful love between God and men. nor may we be
too greedy nor too avaricious nor too eager for luxury
nor too envious nor too malicious nor too censorious nor
too flattering nor given to committing crime nor to
swearing oaths nor to doing evil deeds nor to lying nor
to performing thievery; nor may we rot in weariness nor
love deadly sins nor emulate the art of sorcery nor
songs of enchantment or wrongful magic begin nor too
easily angered be nor angry for too long nor shall we go
in pride . . .)

(Pseudo Wulfstan, Napier XLIX)⁸⁸

There are indeed striking similarities among these passages. They all combine the negative with an intensifying "tō;" they use brief, anaphoric phrasing varying the adjective or verb but maintaining parallelism. Finally they all strive to eliminate, by fiat as it were, certain sins of character. Nevertheless, when content and form are closely examined, the poet's version of this topos seems quite different from that of the homilists. Let us look at formal differences first.

⁸⁸ Napier XLIX 253.4 ff.

The homilists, perhaps in order to vary their lengthy lists and to build rhetorical power, move from brief adjectives to inflected infinitives or simply finite verbs, thereby creating a kind of anacolouthon. Thus "ne beo . . . inwit to leof, ne wrohtas to webgenne" and "ne syn ne to æfestige ne to inwitfulle ne to tælende ne to twigspræce ne morþor to begangenne ne aðas to swerjanne." The "tō" here begins as the adverb "too," indicating excess, and ends as the indicator of an inflected infinitive. No such migration occurs in The Wanderer. The brevity of the poem's series and its less ambitious rhetoric may of course be explained away by the different exigencies of verse. The differences in substance seem more significant when one is discussing attribution.

To begin with, the substantive contexts of poem and sermon differ radically. In every one of the homilies the salvation of the auditor's soul is at stake; these are tracts on the topics of baptism into the church and the Judgment Day. In The Wanderer, however one may describe the rest of the poem, it is clear that in lines 65b-69 the poet is defining a wise man. This particular passage refers not at all to the soul or its final destination.

Then there are the specific forbidden qualities and actions to consider. The Blickling homilist directed his brief passage to the powerful and unscrupulous. He enjoined them to avoid pride, deceit and the misuse of their strength. Wulfstan and pseudo-Wulfstan, on the other hand,

canvas a wide range of transgressions. Their injunctions comprise various versions of the vows of baptism.⁸⁹ They denounce eight cardinal sins: gluttony, fornication, avarice, weariness or dejection, anger, vainglory, pride and envy. In addition, as in the baptismal vows, men are required to renounce murder, sorcery, perjury and thievery. These are the devil's snares. In relation to most of the above faults the use of tō seems not just ironic but incongruous. Why not prohibit such vice unequivocally, without degree?

The answer may lie in the other forbidden qualities listed in the homilies, qualities far less crucial to the salvation of souls and far more amenable to modification by "tō." Men are advised to refrain from excessive laughter, for example, or from sudden timidity; vain boasts and ready quarrels are discouraged, as is foolish boldness.⁹⁰ Here the adverbial tō makes more sense -- some boldness is commendable and some caution and some laughter, but none of these serves one well in excess. No irony need be implied. These characteristics are the very ones which are not part of the baptismal vows. They are also closer to the admonitions of The Wanderer poet. He too advises against excessive timidity ("ne to fægen"), and boastfulness ("gielpes to georn"). Two of The Wanderer's forbidden qualities are prominent in secular codes but also resemble sins denounced

⁸⁹ The specific vows of Baptism and an account of their importance can be found in Gregory the Great.

⁹⁰ Napier V 40.18-40.20.

by the homilists: "to hatheort" anticipates the sin of pride and "to feohgifre" that of greed. Perhaps homilists and poet share a source for these catalogues, a source more concerned with transgressions of degree than with cardinal sin.

The mixture of religious prohibition and secular advice in the homilies and the lack of any treatment of sin in The Wanderer lead one to look outside the avowedly Christian tradition for such a source or an analogue. Four instances have come to my notice, two in Old English and two in Old Irish. The first appears in the tenth and last lesson of Precepts, a poem admittedly more religious than The Wanderer but still full of homey advice on behavior in the secular world. Lines 90 f. read: "Ne beo þu no to tælende, ne to tweospræce, / ne þe on mode læt men to fracope" (Nor be you too slanderous, nor too flattering, / nor let thyself think too shamefully of men.)⁹¹ The second instance is Durham Proverb 23. It reads "Ne sceal man to ær forht ne to ær fægen," a line almost identical to Wanderer 68a and also found in Wulfstan.⁹²

The third occurrence of the ne . . . tō construction is more substantial. In the Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt, the early ninth century Irish tecosca, Carbre asks:

⁹¹ ASPR III 143. The faults of censoriousness and flattery appear also in the homilies (Napier XLIX 253.4 ff.).

⁹² The Durham Proverbs, ed. O. S. Arngart. (Lund: Lund Universitets Arsskriff, 1956) Bd. 52; Napier V 40.20.

"I desire to know how I shall behave among the wise and the foolish, among friends and strangers, among the old and the young, among the innocent and the wicked."

"Not hard to tell," said Cormac
 Be not too wise, be not too foolish,
 be not too conceited, be not too diffident,
 be not too haughty, be not too humble,
 be not too talkative, be not too silent,
 be not too harsh, be not too feeble.
 If you be too wise, one will expect (too much) of you.
 If you be too foolish, you will be deceived . . ." ⁹³

Legend has it that Cormac was a Christian convert before Patrick and some of the Tecosca Cormaic reveals a Christian hand. But the work has an earlier source entitled Senbriathra Fithail (also discussed in Chapter One above). The earlier collection is supposed to be by a pagan judge of Ireland. Indeed, Fithail responds to the question "How shall I behave?" with a series almost identical to that of Cormac. ⁹⁴

When one compares the Irish texts with The Wanderer, one finds coincidence of form (the anaphoric list using the negative with the intensifying adverb), purpose (definition

⁹³ The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer, Todd Lecture Series 15, Royal Irish Academy (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1909) 44-5. The series looks like this in Old Irish:

Ní ba rozáeth, ní ba robáeth
 ní ba rouallach, ní ba dimbrígach,
 etc.

See Chapter One, p. 18-19 for a discussion of tecosca.

⁹⁴ Senbriathra Fithail sec. 7, 40-44. Roland Smith, ed. and trans., "The Senbriathra Fithail and Related Texts," Revue Celtique 45 (1928). Smith views the story of Cormac's conversion as a "fantastic legend." He believes a Christian added the "moralizing" in lines 28-30 of Tecosca Cormac, ch. 31, pp. 51-52.

of desirable behavior), and, to some extent, content. It is impossible to tell what the specific source of the Old English lyric may have been but it seems that the topos originated, not in the Christian homilies or the Latin tradition, but in the secular, perhaps pagan, wisdom collections. The irony which Bethurum perceived in Wulfstan may be merely the result of a disjunction in which a rhetorical ploy suited to secular admonitions has been applied to the prohibition of vice characteristic of a religious code. Rigid prohibitions in general are rare in the sapiential tradition. Its works are treatises on social and political survival and these goals dilute even the strongest ethical precepts. It is in this pragmatic spirit that The Wanderer poet continues his consideration of a wise man's attributes:

Beorn sceal gebidan, þonne he beot spricedð,
 oppæt collenferð cunne gearwe
 hwider hrepra gehygd hweorfan wille.

(The child of man must wait to make a boast
 until, bold in spirit, he fully knows
 where the thoughts of his bosom will turn.)

(The Wanderer 70-72)

In this variation of line 69, we are told that a wise man must not boast "ær he gearwe cunne." "Vain boasting," "idel gylpe," is mentioned briefly in the homilies as an attribute of the devil but is not expanded upon in this way.⁹⁵ The implication in the lyric is that a boast, or promise, or challenge, is acceptable if one is fully pre-

⁹⁵ Blickling Homilies 31.

pared to carry it out. It is a step for a mature man who knows himself entirely, knows where his mind will turn. Again a parallel can be found in the sapiential tradition:

(Sigrdrífa said)
 "This counsel I first: of kinsmen thine
 at no time fall thou foul:
 curb they revenge, though cause there be:
 'twill boot thy dying day.

"This other I counsel, that oath thou swear not
 but thou tell the truth;
 for baleful doom follows breach of truce;
 ill fares the breaker of oaths."

(Sigrdrífumál st. 25)⁹⁶

The Old English poet expands this limited truism into a call to meditation. For him achievement of the wisdom and self-knowledge essential for the making of vows depends upon a fearless and perceptive contemplation of the fate of the world he has known and loved. Stripped of comfort and illusion, he now considers his beloved world bereft of its joys. The opening verb tells us this is no mere essay in lament and nostalgia but an essential part of the passage into wisdom:

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
 swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
 winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,
 hrime bihrorene,

(The skilled brave man must perceive how awesome it
 will be
 when all of this world's wealth stands wasted,

⁹⁶ Sigrdrífumál, The Poetic Edda, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin, Texas: U of Texas P, 1962) 238.

as now, variously, throughout this earth,
 walls stand shaken by wind,
 encrusted with frost,)

(The Wanderer 73-77a)

The apocalyptic vision of the world's wealth laid waste promises a move from the secular ethic treating individual behavior, and an individual's fate, into the Christian one of total, cataclysmic truth. The skilled brave man must understand how awesome it will be when all the world's wealth is destroyed, presumably at the Doomsday. But the break with the secular ethic is never wholly achieved, for the actual vehicle, this perception of apocalypse introduced by "swa nu" in line 75a, inevitably evokes the ruin of the hæle's own secular, heroic community. It is as if the details of that destruction distract him into eulogy for what he has lost:

Woriað þa winsalo, waldend licgað
 dreame bidrorene, duguþ eal gecrong,
 wlonc bi wealle.

(Winehalls then totter, the masters lie
 bereft of joy, the band is entirely dispersed,
 laid low beside the walls.)

(The Wanderer 78-80a)

For his portrayal of loss the poet draws on a catalogue which appears in various forms elsewhere in Old English literature and, in so doing, he invokes Christian, gnomic and heroic attitudes toward death. At the same time, he insists on memorializing his personal grief.

Sume wig fornom,
 ferede in forðwege, sumne fugel oþbær
 ofer heanne holm, sumne se hara wulf
 deaðe gedælde, sumne dreorighleor
 in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde.

(One the battle destroyed,
 bore on his journey hence, one the bird carried
 over the deep sea, to one the grey wolf
 doled out death, one a man of mournful face
 hid in an earthen grave.)

(The Wanderer 80b-84)

As in lines 62 ff. there are two elements to consider here. The formal element is the sum catalogue in which the indefinite pronoun as direct object leads each clause. In The Wanderer it also begins the b-verses. The thematic element consists of the ways of death -- here listed as war, birds of prey, beasts of prey and burial. Form and content come out of two distinct strong cataloguic traditions. A consideration of these traditions can reveal how The Wanderer poet used religious precept and secular gnome to forge a lament both larger in meditative scope and more particular in emotional detail than its analogues from either tradition.

The longest sequences of sum phrases or clauses appear in The Fates of Men and The Gifts of Men. Sententious poems like these may well have served as resources for the composition of narratives and reflective works. Although the Lord is invoked in the beginning, end and middle of The Fates of Men, the deaths described therein bear more resemblance to the secular Germanic code than to Christian expectations. The wolf, storms, battle, and enmity at the mead-bench are named in syntax dominated by sceal and bið:

Sumum þæt gegongeð on geoguðfeore
 þæt se endestæf earfeðmæcgum
 wealic weorpeð. Sceal hine wulf etan
 har hæðstapa; hinsip þonne
 modor bimurneð. Ne bið swylc monnes geweald!
 Sumne sceal hungor aþiþan, sumne sceal hreoh
 fordrifan,
 sumne sceal gar agetan, sumne guð abreotan.

(To some it happens in youthful life
 that the end comes miserably
 to the unfortunate ones. The wolf must eat one,
 grey heath-stepper; his journey hence then
 his mother mourns. Nor is such a thing in man's power.
 Hunger must destroy one; one a storm must drive away;
 one a spear shall take; one a battle destroy.)

(The Fates of Men 10-16)

It should be noted here that The Fates of Men also contains
 a description of the exile:

Sum sceal of feþe on feorwegas
 nyde gongan ond his nest beran,
 tredan uriglast elþeodigra,
 frecne foldan; ah he feormendra
 lyt lifgendra, lað biþ æghwær
 fore his wonsceaftum wineleas hæle.

(One must by necessity go on foot
 in far-off paths and carry provisions,
 tread the dewy tracks of strangers,
 perilous earth; he has few folk living
 to cherish him; hated he is everywhere
 for his misfortunes, a friendless man.)

(The Fates of Men 27-32)

Yet another passage recalls Hávamál, stanza 131.

Sumum meces ecg on meodubence
 yrrum ealowosan ealdor oppringed,
 were winsadum; bið ær his worda to hræd.

(From one the blade's edge forces life,
the enraged ale-drinker at the mead-bench,
a man sated with wine; he is too ready with words.)

(The Fates of Men 48-50)

In The Fates of Men, as in The Wanderer, the catalogic form has been joined with the individual fates to give a sweeping but particularized view of the society.

The sum series is used twice by Cynewulf. The less memorable instance (Elene 131-7) is nevertheless noteworthy for its use of "sum wig fornom . . . ," also the initial formula of The Wanderer's sequence.

Wurdon hearingas
wide towrecene. Sum wig fornam.
Sume unsofte aldor generedon
on þam hereside. Sume healfcwice
flugon on fæsten ond feore burgon
æfter stanclifum, stede weardedon
ymb Danubie. Sume drenc fornam
on lagostreame lifes æt ende.

(The warriors were
widely scattered. Some war seized,
some barely preserved their lives
in that expedition. Some, half alive,
fled into the fastness and saved their lives
among the rocky cliffs; they settled on land
around the Danube. Some drowning seized
in the river's current at life's end.)

(Elene 130b-137)

In Juliana the rhetorical catalogue is used in the long confession the heroine forces out of her adversary the devil:

Oft ic syne ofteah,
ablende bealoþoncum beorna unrim
monna cynnes, misthelme forbrægd
þurh attres ord eagna leoman

sweartum scurum, ond ic sumra fet
 forbræc bealosearwum, sume in bryne sende
 in liges locan, þæt him lasta wearð
 sipast gesyne. Eac ic sume gedyde
 þæt him banlocan blode spiowedan,
 þæt hi færinga feorh aleton
 þurh ædra wylm. Sume on yðfare
 wurdon on wege wætrum bisencte,
 on mereflode, minum cræftum
 under reone stream. Sume ic rode bifealh,
 þæt hi hyra dreorge on hean galgan
 lif aletan. Sume ic larum geteah,
 to geflite fremede, þæt hy færinga
 ealde æfþoncan edniwedan,
 beore druncne. Ic him byrlade
 wroht of wege, þæt hi in winsele
 þurh sweordgripe sawle forletan
 of flæschoman fæge scyndan,
 sarum gesohte.

(Often have I taken sight away,
 blinded with baleful thoughts countless sons
 of mankind, covered with a veil of mist
 through poison's weapon the light of their eyes
 in dark showers; and I with evil snares
 have broken the feet of some; some I have sent to burn
 in the fire's embrace, so that their tracks were
 the last (of them) to be seen. Also I caused some
 to spew out the bone house's blood,
 to suddenly let life out through their veins' flood.
 Some on the wave's course
 were in their travelling swamped by waters,
 in the sea-flood, through my skills,
 under the gloomy stream. Some I gave to the rood,
 so that they relinquished life miserably
 on the high gallows. Some I instructed with lessons,
 brought them to strife, so that, suddenly,
 drunk with beer, they renewed
 old quarrels. I poured out
 calumny for them from the cup, so that they in the wine
 hall
 through sword-stroke gave up their souls
 to hasten, doomed, from their bodies,
 afflicted by torments.)

(Juliana 468b-90)

In this instance the catalogue elaborates on a much pithier Latin source.⁹⁷ Cynewulf's additions indicate an interest

⁹⁷ The Latin source is quoted below:

in the kinds of misdemeanors and foolishness condemned by the sages of the wisdom tradition; he devotes fourteen verses, for example, to drunken quarreling in the hall. The plight of the blind and the lame, of course, also figure in the gnostic collections.⁹⁸

Cynewulf used the catalogue of fates to address a wide range of deaths resulting both from sin and from evil chance. But the Wanderer poet restricted himself to a narrower field. He was primarily concerned with the Germanic hero's earthly enemies, not demons but war, wolf and bird of prey. For these presences, too, there are secular and Christian analogues. In Elene, for example, shortly before the passage quoted above, the terror of war is described:

Byman sungon
hlude for hergum. Hrefn weorces gefeah,
urigfeðra, earn sið beheold,
wælhreowra wig. Wulf sang ahof,
holtes gehleða. Hildegesa stod.
Dær wæs borda gebrec . . .

Quator hominum oculos extinxi. aliorum pedes confregi. altius in ignem misi. alios autem adpendi. alios sanguinem vomere feci. Alios autem laqueo vitam fi nire feci. Alios suo uomere manibus suis interfeci. Et ut breviter dicam. omnia mala que in mundo sunt facta. ego ipse feci. Et alios quos inueni non habentes signaculum christi decepi. Et cum omnia talia fecissem peccata. nemo tamen ausus fuit me tangere. De liflade ant te passiuon of seinte Iulienne, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne, Early English Text Society os 248 (London: Oxford UP, 1961) 42.

⁹⁸ On drunken enmity see Hávamál st. 11-14, Proverbs 23.29-30, and Amen-em-ope, ch. 28, 523. On the blind man see Maxims IA 39b-44.

(The trumpets sang out loudly before the hosts. The raven rejoiced in the work, the dewy feathered eagle beheld the advance, the conflict, the battle of fierce men. The wolf raised its song, the forest's companion. War-terror rose up. There was the crash of shields . . .)

(Elene 109b-14a)

And in The Battle of Brunanburh:

Letan him behindan hræw bryttian
saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,
hyrnednebban, and þane hasewanpadan,
earn æftan hwit, æses brucan,
grædigne guðhafoc and þæt græge deor,
wulf on wealde.

(They left behind them to enjoy the corpse the dark-coated one, the black raven, horny-beaked, and the grey-coated eagle, white-tailed, to consume the carrion, the greedy war-hawk and that grey beast, the wolf in the wood.)

(The Battle of Brunanburh 60-65a)⁹⁹

At least two Old English homilies invoke the raven, the eagle and the wolf in descriptions of Doomsday. The catalogues here are in phrases, without the clausal anaphora which is used to such powerful effect in The Wanderer:

& þone hateþ Sanctus Michalel se heahengl blawan þa feower beman æt þissum feower endum middangeardes, & awecceap ealle þa lichoman of deaþe, þeah þe hie ær eorþe bewrigen hæfde, oþþe on wætere adruncan, oþþe wildeor abiton, oþþe fuglas tobæron, oþþe fixas toslitan oþþe on ænige wisan of þisse worlde gewiton . . .

(and then Saint Michael the archangel will command the four trumpets to blow at the four ends of earth, and awake all the bodies from death, even though they

⁹⁹ ASPR VI 19-20.

earlier had been buried in earth, or drowned in water, or eaten by wild beasts, or borne off by birds, or rent by fishes, or in any wise departed from this world . . .)

(Blickling Homily VII)¹⁰⁰

In Napier XL, a Wulfstanian sermon on Judgment Day, the fates of men are reduced to a rapid list:

and in þam dæge singað þa byman of þam feower sceatum middaneardes, and þonne ealle men arisað of deaðe; and, swa hwæt mancynnes swa eorðe ær forsweahl oððe fyr forbærnde and sæ besencte and wilde deor fræton and fugelas tobæron, eall þy dæge ariseð.

(and on that day sing the trumpets from the four corners of earth and then all men arise from death and whomsoever of mankind the earth once swallowed or fire consumed or sea submerged or wild beast ate or the birds bore off -- all will rise on that day.)

(Napier XL 10-15)¹⁰¹

Francis P. Magoun identified twelve instances of this theme in nine poems.¹⁰² To this we can now add at least two homiletic passages. Of all these passages, the lines in The Wanderer are the only ones to combine the "beasts of battle" theme with the sum forms used to enumerate more general, but no less dire, fates.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Blickling Homilies 95.12.

¹⁰¹ Napier XL 183.10 ff.

¹⁰² Francis P. Magoun Jr., "The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 56 (1955): 84-90.

¹⁰³ In The Fates of Men there is a series of sum clauses in which the wolf and raven are mentioned (see verse 12b quoted above, page 156). However these beasts are not central to the series but rather they are elaborations of two traditional fates often found in sum series: death in

What do all of these analogues, some of them many verses longer than The Wanderer 80b-84, tell us? It seems likely that The Wanderer poet was here combining two quite distinct traditions: one the anaphoric listing of deaths popular with Christian homilists and with Cynewulf, that great hagiographic biographer, and the other a Germanic theme which formed part of the heroic repertoire of battle lore. But the merger was more than an invocation of two traditions. For the poet uses the sum series to introduce a specific, historical reference:

sumne dreorighleor
in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde.

(. . . one a man of mournful face
hid in an earthen grave.)

(The Wanderer 83b-84)¹⁰⁴

These verses hark back to lines 22-23a in which the anhaga buries his dead lord. By thus citing an event already established as personal history, he brings all that brave troop, dead by the wall (79b-80a), out of the impersonal obscurity of tradition and gives them the faces of comrades. We recall the lost lord and teacher of precepts, and, with

youth and death on the gallows. Magoun felt that these instances did not qualify as themes.

¹⁰⁴ A Norse verse also combines types of death and burial. This however seems to be a ritualistic imperative, not a personal duty:

That counsel I ninth, that corpses thou bury
Wherso e'er on earth thou find them --
Whether sickness slew them, or in the sea they
drowned,
or whether they fell in flight.

Sigrdrífumál, Poetic Edda st. 35, 240.

him, the comrades, floating as in dreams. In neither the Christian nor the heroic analogues is such a thing done and, I believe, it would not have been possible without the influence of both traditions.

Whereas the homilists used recitation of the fates of men to look forward to the Apocalypse, to anticipate graphically that last great event, the poet looks back, mourning the individual dead lord of his past.¹⁰⁵ In the lines which follow there is no triumph, no resurrection, foreshadowed, as he contemplates the creator's destruction of "þisne eardgeard":

Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend
 oppæt burgwara breahtra lease
 eald enta geweorc idlu stodon.

(The creator of men thus laid waste this world
 until the vain tumult of dwellers in cities,
 ancient work of giants, stood idle.)

(The Wanderer 85-7)

The anhaga meditates deeply on "þis deorce lif." He contemplates the ruins standing before him and, in verses reminiscent of lines 6-7, relives his own memories of murder and pillage. Then, in lines 92-96, the poem is launched into an intensity of feeling it has not reached before:

Hwær cwom mearg? hwær cwom mago? hwær cwom
 mappumgyfa?
 Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon
 seledreamas?
 Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!

¹⁰⁵ Woolf 200. Woolf believes that the ubi sunt theme expresses nostalgia rather than contemptus mundi.

Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære.

(Where has the steed gone? Where the rider? Where the
bounteous lord?
Where have the banquet seats gone? Where are the hall-
joys?
Alas the shining cup! Alas the armored warrior!
Alas the glory of the prince! How this time is
departed,
overwhelmed under cover of night, as if it never was.)

(The Wanderer 92-6)

An ignorant, bewildered man's grief and fear have here
become transformed into a powerful and knowing lament for an
entire world destroyed. Here, the Wanderer poet clearly and
unambiguously relies on the Latin rhetoricians for his for-
mal construct.

Indeed, this interrogatio, unlike the ne to construc-
tion of lines 65b-69 and the sum sequence in lines 80b-84,
seems an unadulterated descendant of the Latin tradition.
Isidore of Seville provided a central source in his

Synonyma:

Brevis est hujus mundi felicitas, modica est hujus
saeculi gloria, caduca est et fragilis temporalis
potentia. Dic ubi sunt reges? ubi principes? ubi
imperatores? ubi locupletes rerum? ubi potentes
saeculi? ubi divites mundi? quasi umbra transierunt,
velut somnium evanuerunt. Quaeruntur, et non sunt;
divitiae usque ad periculum ducunt, divitiae usque ad
exitium pertrahunt, multi propter opes periclitaverunt.
Multi propter divitias in discrimen venerunt; multis
exitiabiles fuerunt divitiae, multis mortem generaverunt
opes.

(Brief is the happiness of this world, limited is the
glory of this age, it is a fleeting and temporary power,
destined to fall. Say where are the kings? Where the
leaders? Where the emperors? Where are those rich in
possessions? Where are the powers of the age? Where

the wealth of this world? Like shadows they have passed. Like dreams they have vanished. They are sought, and they are not. At every point riches lead into danger; at every point riches entice to ruin; many have been put at risk for the sake of wealth. Many have come into danger for the sake of riches. To many riches were deadly; to many wealth begat death.)

(Isidore of Seville, Synonymorum III, 865.91)¹⁰⁶

The sequence was also tracked down by James Cross in Pseudo-Augustine's Sermo LXIII ad Fratres ad Eremo and in a variant of this, Pseudo-Isidorian Sermo III, as well as Caesarius of Arle's sermon De Elymosines.¹⁰⁷

In Old English the interrogatio is given powerful expression by Wulfstan and the Blickling homilists. The details in both English and Latin prose admonitions are quite consistent. The mortality of various potentates and the ephemeral nature of their possessions figure again and again. Isidore mentions worldly happiness, glory and power, kings, princes, emperors, locu pletes and wealth. Wulfstan lists rich emperors, kings, and ealdormen, the proud and powerful, their judgment seats (domstowa) and "riceterre," "prass" and "orgol." Scholars are condemned unless they seek heavenly glory. Where goes the world's wealth, he asks, and all the earth's fairness?¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ St. Isidore of Seville, Synonyma, Patrologiae cursus completus, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1850) vol. 83, col. 865.

¹⁰⁷ Pseudo-Isidore, Migne vol. 83, appendix 12, Sermo 3, col. 1224. Cited by James E. Cross, "Ubi Sunt Passages in Old English -- Sources and relationships," Vetenskaps-Societens i Lund Arsbok (1956): 33. Cross also identifies it in Cambridge University Library MS II and MS Bodley 343, Homily 12. Cross, "Ubi Sunt Passages" 30 and note.

¹⁰⁸ Napier XXX 148-9 and XLIX 263. "Prass" is in

In Blickling Homily X the emphasis is on personal possessions and the worldly pleasures of a wealthy individual:

Hwær beoþ þonne his welan & his wista? hwær beoð þonne his wlencea & his anmedlan? hwær beoþ þonne his idlan gescyrplan? hwær beoþ ðonne þa glengeas & mycclan gegyrelan þe he þone lichoman ær mid þa frætwoðe? hwær cumað þonne his willan & his fyrenlustas ðe he her on worlde beeode?

(Where then will be his wealth and his feasting? Where then will be his pride and his arrogance? Where then will be his vain garments? Where then will be the ornaments and the great robes with which once he adorned his body? Where then will come his riches and his luxuries which he here in this world followed?)

(Blickling Homily X)¹⁰⁹

Blickling Homily VIII likewise has to do with rich men, their pleasures and their followers: "oppe hwær cwom . . . seo wlitignes heora ræsta & setla, oppe seo manigfealde licetung heora freonda, & se myccle menigo heora peowa."¹¹⁰

Clearly the Wanderer poet depends for his form on the same tradition which gave rise to these stern warnings of mortality. And yet he also makes a substantial departure from it. His is a lament, not an admonition, and his details are taken from a warrior's life, not the distant glory of great rulers and wealthy nobles. We hear of the horse and its rider, the generous lord, the bright cup and the

Napier thus. See Bosworth and Toller: "pomp, array, parade"

¹⁰⁹ Blickling Homilies 111-13.

¹¹⁰ Blickling Homilies 98.

banquet seat. These are not details found in Latin sources or their Old English translations. There is, however, a Germanic analogue. In its content, The Wanderer 92-96 bears a close resemblance to Beowulf 2260b ff.

Ne mæg byrnan hring
 æfter wigfruman wide feran,
 hæleðum be healfe. Næs hearpan wyn,
 gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc
 geond sæl swingeð, ne se swifta mearh
 burhstede beateð. Bealocwealm hafað
 fela feorhcynna forð onsended!

(Nor may the ring-mail
 travel widely with the battle chief,
 beside his men. There is no joy of the harp,
 mirth of the gleewood, nor does the good hawk
 swing through the hall, nor does the swift horse
 stamp in the castle court. Baleful death has
 sent forth many of the race of men!)

(Beowulf 2260b-2266)

Here, too, the speaker is a last survivor mourning the total loss of his people. Unlike the Wanderer, however, this mourner never moves beyond his grief:

Swa giomormod gιοhðo mænde
 an æfre eallum, unbliðe hwearf
 dægес ond nihtes, oð ðæt deaðes wylm
 hran æt heortan.

(So mournful in spirit he related his sorrow,
 alone of them all, unhappy, he moved
 by day and night, until death's flood
 reached his heart.)

(Beowulf 2267-2270a)¹¹¹

Nowhere, in either Beowulf or The Wanderer, are the trap-

¹¹¹ See page 297-9 for further discussion of this passage.

pings of the comitatus condemned. In no way is their beauty or their desirableness denied. Rather, as these epitomes of the heroic life succumb, the world entirely blackens and, by wyrd's decree, all grows savage and obscure (The Wanderer 99-107).

The anhaga, grown wise through unflinching contemplation of this devastation, has finally a tripartite lesson to impart. The first segment of the lesson is that the external props which once defined a man are no longer to be relied upon:

Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,
eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorpeð!

(Here is property brief, here is friendship brief,
here is man brief, here is kinship brief,
all the frame of this earth becomes idle.)

(The Wanderer 108-110)

These lines resemble those in Hávamál which celebrate the endurance of reputation:

Cattle die and kinsmen die
thyself eke soon will die
but fair fame will fade never
I ween for him who wins it.

(Hávamál st. 76)¹¹²

¹¹² I. L. Gordon also sees these passages as analogous. She points out that "there is an essential difference between the poetic view of transience, which sees it as a tragic fact, a part of the woes of men, and the Christian view, which sees it as proof of the vanity of worldly things." "Traditional Themes" 8.

and those in Beowulf in which Hroðgar praises the young hero:

Du þe self hafast
dædem gefremed, þæt þin (dom) lyfað
awa to aldre.

(You yourself have
performed deeds so that your fame may live
for ever and ever.)

(Beowulf 953b-955a)

Only reputation survives and that fact contributes to the preeminence of honor:

Death is better than an everlasting blemish.

(Senbriathra Fithail 4.43)

Deað bið sella
eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!

(Death is better
for every eorl than a life of disgrace.)

(Beowulf 2890b-2899)

In his lesson's second half, the exile grown wise reaffirms the personal stoicism advocated by secular sages. Even as lines 108-110 describe the transience of the worldly mainstays around which the poem's narrative is built, lines 112-114a specifically recall the gnomes of 11b-21.

Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ, ne sceal næfre
his torn to rycene
beorn of his breostum acyþan, nemþe he ær þa bote
cunne,
eorl mid elne gefremman.

(Blessed is he who keeps his truth, never must the eorl
make known

his grief, child of his heart, too quickly, unless he
 first can the remedy
 with zeal perform.)

(The Wanderer 112-14a)

Finally, the poet returns at long last to lines 1-2a. The conventional closure asserts man's only reason for hope, although, even here, gnomic markers intrude:

Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
 frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo
 fæstnung stondeð.

(Well is it for him who seeks grace,
 solace from the father in heaven, where all our
 conviction stands.)

(The Wanderer 114b-15)

To a modern ear such a conclusion murmurs failure. The anhaga fails to renounce the temporal world which is lost to him; instead he grieves for it. He continues to rely on the mandated behavior of that world. And his faith in a Christian god is briefly and conventionally put. However, the poet's use of secular and Christian traditions and the poem's progress through variation disclose that a substantial, if subtle, alteration has taken place in the psyche which lies at the heart of the lyric. The anhaga has abandoned the false and teasing illusions in which he once indulged and he has not shirked the full perception of his losses. He has acknowledged the awesome power of God and yet he continues to practice the traditional virtues he knows to be most efficacious for survival. His attainment to wisdom comes, not from religious mysteries, but from

having seen the worst and understood it. The intelligence of Maxims I and II has failed him, for its codes of propriety, friendship and heroism must die with the inexorable destruction of their culture. Nevertheless, out of those parts of the tradition which taught individual courses of conduct and which spoke of the acquisition of wisdom has come the naked and absolute knowledge that the self, integral in this world, may grow wise through suffering and the knowing acceptance of suffering.

The Seafarer

The Seafarer has been much more perplexing to modern readers than its companion piece, The Wanderer. It lacks the convenient introductory tag "swa cwæð" which demarcates the speeches and dilutes the intensity of the other poem. The text is seriously damaged towards the end and there is a break in tone and content after verse 64a. It is not surprising, therefore, that The Seafarer's critical history consists of periodic attempts to wrench the poem into a structural coherence more familiar to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than to the ninth or tenth.

M. Rieger's response to the poem's inconsistencies was to divide the lines into the parts of a dialogue in which an old mariner apprises an eager young man of the realities of life at sea.¹¹³ R. C. Boer supported Rieger¹¹⁴ but W. W.

¹¹³ Rieger 334-9.

¹¹⁴ Boer 14-26.

Lawrence in 1902 argued convincingly that the ambivalence expressed in lines 1-64a was consistent with one speaker. He failed to incorporate the poem's second half, however, and dismissed it as a homiletic addition.¹¹⁵ Friedrich Kluge also believed lines 64b ff. to be by a different poet and we are indebted to him for his discovery of a number of resemblances to homiletic literature in these lines.¹¹⁶

These critics were succeeded by a number of readers who believed the poem to be united, neither a dialogue, nor a pastiche. Many of them still had difficulty with the break in line 64, however. Their response was to identify the first half of the poem as a symbolic description which is interpreted in the less poetical second half, thereby forming an allegorical whole. Dissections of the perceived allegory were varied: G. Ehrismann believed that the poet was contrasting monasticism, characterized by a winter voyage, and materialism, or the sea in summer;¹¹⁷ Levin Schücking, and later O. S. Anderson, translated the Seafarer's voyage as the difficult but righteous life which is also the road to death and eternity.¹¹⁸ Anderson describes the poet as "longing to leave the cliffs and rocks of time and set out for the distant glories of eternity."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer" 460-80.

¹¹⁶ Kluge (1883) 325 ff. See the 1885 article also.

¹¹⁷ G. Ehrismann, "Religionsgeschichtliche Beiträge zum germanischen Frühchristentum: II. Das Gedicht vom Seefahrer," Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 35 (1909): 213-8.

¹¹⁸ Levin Schücking, review of Die Altenglische Elegie, by E. Sieper, Englische Studien 51 (1917): 107.

¹¹⁹ O. S. Arngart, "The Seafarer: An Interpretation,"

More recently, G. V. Smithers has found in the poem the symbolic expulsion of man from Eden and his subsequent seeking of heaven. He uses Old English homilies, Gregory's dialogues, Cyprian's sermons De mortalite and Ad Demetrianum and Caesarius of Arles' Sermo CLI and CXLIX to construct his case for the last parts of The Seafarer and The Wanderer being "essentially eschatological" and for their sources being in the "ecclesiastical and possibly homiletic tradition."¹²⁰ Smithers' analysis is worth a closer look here as it is a competent and relatively recent representative of the tendency to allegorize these poems. Moreover, also, his citations from homiletic literature are thorough and extensive.

According to Smithers, the lyrics are accounts of "man's spiritual history." We move through a "chain of associated notions." First, "Adam the exile from Paradise," (portrayed in the first half of each poem); then, the "beginning of the seven ages of the world with Adam," "the last age of the world" (portrayed by lines 88-90 in The Seafarer and 75-80, 85-7 of The Wanderer) and "the Day of Judgement." Finally, man reaches his "hereditary home in Heaven."¹²¹ The sea in the poems' first halves is said by Smithers to represent human life on earth, as it does in many ecclesiastical writings, and exile is man's exile from

K. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundets i Lund. Arsberättelse I (1937): 1-50.

¹²⁰ Smithers (1957) 141 and 144.

¹²¹ Smithers (1957) 149.

Eden. The destruction of the works of giants and the ubi sunt passages are symbolic of the last age, or Doomsday, and the closing truisms represent the homecoming to Heaven.

This schema appears, in a general way, to work out. It yields a satisfying "translation" of some of the lyrics' more perplexing passages -- or rather it supplies connectives between them. For, in most instances, it is not the particular passage which is obscure but rather its relationship to preceding and subsequent lines. (Thus, the attractiveness of allegorical theories may lie in their linking of disparate parts as much as in their interpretations of those parts.) Smithers gives each poem a logical development. However, a closer look at his sources puts much of his reading in doubt.

To begin with, he makes a strong connection between the lyrics' gnomic themes and the homiletic tradition. He finds the guidelines for conduct, ubi sunt passages, and descriptions of the ruin of the world in Blickling Homily X, Napier XX, Napier XLIX and Vercelli Homilies II and XII. He says: "All [these similarities] indicate that The Seafarer 64 ff. and The Wanderer 58 ff. are essentially eschatological."¹²² But in the analysis of The Wanderer immediately preceding this discussion I found that many of the things that poem had in common with the homilies were also to be found in the older secular or pagan wisdom tradition. And Smithers has himself linked The Seafarer to pagan literature in his

¹²² Smithers (1957) 141.

discussion of "wælweg," which he translates most convincingly as "way of the dead" or "road of the dead."¹²³ Moreover, occasional indebtedness to the sermon tradition does not necessitate an allegorical reading.

More important to Smithers' arguments is the notion that the persona's exile is a metaphor for man's exile from Eden and from Heaven. For this he has turned to a sequence of sources, and we could add many more, which successfully establish exile as a Christian metaphor. Nevertheless, Smithers, and Anderson before him, fail to complete the link between the Christian symbol and the Old English lyric.

For example, Smithers cites Alcuin's De Clade Lindisfarnensis monasterii saying that "our interpretation of the 'exile' and the 'peregrinus' in the two Old English poems . . . is supported by an actual example of a Latin poem of the same type."¹²⁴ Even a cursory reading of De Clade Lindisfarnensis Monasterii reveals that it is not at all of "the same type" as the Old English lyrics. It laments the transience of this bright world and mourns the great cities which have fallen: Chaldea, Rome, Jerusalem. Alcuin sees in the onrush of heathen barbarians the aging of the world and he accepts, and urges his readers to accept, the comparable aging of man's own body and mind. He then speaks in consolation to the "soboles sanctorum," the monks who sur-

¹²³ Smithers (1957) 138. He traces the use of the concept into the homiletic tradition; however, I do not find it in Blickling Homily X, which he cites.

¹²⁴ Smithers (1957) 148-9.

vived the raid on Lindisfarne. He reminds them of the healing power and mercy of Christ and consoles their abbot with the thought of "praemia magna" after earth's battle.¹²⁵

This is a historical poem which makes sweeping statements about the world and its tendency to ruin. The fall of Lindisfarne is the occasion for such generalizations and Alcuin's address to the surviving monks is formal and conventional. His grief is real but his scope is much larger and less personal than that of the gnomic lyrics. No personal disaster prompts his lament. In the paean for lost cities and overrun civilizations the poem bears more resemblance to The Ruin than to any other Old English lyric.

Much has been made of Alcuin's discussion of aging (101-116) and of the description of man as exile which opens the poem. The first bears more resemblance to Llywarch Hen of the Welsh tradition than to The Seafarer. The latter's passage has a very specific focus on the loss of friends and the waning of the senses. De Clade Lindisfarnensis monasterii gives us an inventory of the debilities of age that is typical of the Latin tradition.¹²⁶ Finally, only the first lines of the Latin poem refer to exile, that central topos of the gnomic lyrics, and these lines exhibit none of the sympathy and sense of guiltlessness found in The

¹²⁵ Alcuin, "On the Killing at Lindisfarne," trans. Helen Waddell, More Latin Lyrics from Virgil to Milton, ed. Dame Felicitas Corrigan (London: Victor Gollancz, 1976) 161-175.

¹²⁶

See Coffman for other examples.

Wanderer and The Seafarer.

Postquam primus homo paradisi liquerat hortos,
 Et miseras terras exul adibat inops,
 Exilioque gravi poenas cum prole luebat,
 Perfidiae quoniam furta maligna gerit:

(Since man went out from the fields of paradise,
 A beggared alien walking beggar lands,
 He hath paid with bitter pangs, he and his sons,
 His stealth, his broken faith.)¹²⁷

Several of Smithers' examples are closer to home. He cites Blickling Homily II which is primarily concerned with Luke's parable of a blind man. However, it does contain this aside:

Forþon we habbaþ nedþearfe þæt we ongyton þa
 blindnesse ure ælþeodignesse; we send on þisse world
 ælþeodigenesse; we synd on þisse world ælþeodige
 & swa wæron sibbon se æresta ealdor þisses
 menniscan cynnes Godes bebodu abræc; & forþon gylte
 we wæron on þysne wræc-sipe sende, & nu eft
 sceolon oþerne eþel secan, swa wite, swa wuldor, swe we
 nu gearnian willaþ.

(Therefore it is necessary for us that we perceive the
 blindness of our pilgrimage; we go into this world as
 pilgrims and thus we were since the earliest ancestor of
 this race of men broke God's commandment; and for that
 sin we were into this exile sent and now again must seek
 another home, either torment or glory, as we now wish to
 earn.)

(Blickling Homily II)¹²⁸

Note again that the first crime in Paradise is seen as the
 origin of man's exile.

Aelfric, in his homily on Shrove Sunday, emphasizes

¹²⁷ Waddell's translation, More Latin Lyrics 161.

¹²⁸ Blickling Homilies 23.

Christ's rejection of the world's honors and riches and his choice of poverty, homelessness and suffering:

Ne teah Christ him na to on þisum life land ne welan, swa swa he be him sylfum cwæp, "Deor habbaþ hola, and fugelas habbaþ nest, hwær hi restaþ, and ic næbbe hwider ic ahyld e min heafod." Swa micel he hæfde swa he rohte, and leofode be oþra manna æhtum, se þe ealle þing ah.

We rædaþ on Cristes bec þæt þæt folc rædde be him, þæt hi woldon hine gelæccan, and aheban to cyninge, þæt he wære heora heafod for worulde, swa swa he wæs godcundlice. Ða þa Crist ongeat þæs folces willan, þa fleah he anstandende to anre dune, and he geferan gewendon to sæ, and se Hælend wæs up on lande. Ða on niht eode se Hælend up on þam wætere mid drium fotum, oþ þæt he com to his leorningcnihtum, þær þær hi wæron on rewute. He forfleah þone woruldlican wurpmynt, þa þa he wæs to cyninge gecoren; ac he ne forfleah na þæt edwit and þone hosp, þa þa þa Judeiscan hine woldon on rode ahon. He nolde his heafod befon mid gyldenum cynehelme, ac mid þyrnenum, swa swa hit gedon wæs on his þrowunge. He nolde on þisum life rixian hwilwendlice, se þe ecelice rixaþ on heofonum. Nis þeos woruld ne ura eþel, ac is ure wræcsip; for þi ne sceole we na besettan urne hiht on þisum swicelum life, ac sceolon eþstan mid godum gearnungum to urum eþele, þær we to gesceapene wæron, þæt is to heofonan rice.

(Nor did Christ at all bring them to land or wealth in this life, just as he concerning himself said, "Wild creatures have holes and birds have nests, where they rest, and I have nowhere to lay my head." He had as much as he cared to, and lived by other men's possessions, he who owned all things.

We read in Christ's book that the folk decided concerning him that they wished to hold him and raise him up as king so that he would be their worldly head, just as he was in divinity. When Christ perceived the wishes of the people, then he fled as a hermit to a certain mountain and his companions turned to the sea. And the Saviour was on land. Then, in the night, the Saviour walked upon the water with dry feet until he came to his disciples, where they were rowing. He escaped the worldly honor, when he was chosen as a king, but he did not escape at all the scorn and the contempt when the Jews would raise him aloft on the rood. He did not wish to encircle his head with a golden crown, but

with thorns, just as was done in his agony. He wished not to govern in this transient life, he who eternally reigns in heaven. Nor is this world at all our home, but it is our exile; therefore we must not set our hope on this treacherous life, but must hasten with good deserts to our homeland where we were made, that is, to the heavenly kingdom.)

(Aelfric, On Shrove Sunday)¹²⁹

Heaven, not earth, is our true homeland.

If we move from the general condition of exile to travel by sea, we find that pelagic metaphors are so frequent as to be commonplaces of the age:

Tamquam spumosi maris vortices verrunt et vellunt undarum cumulos conlisos saxis, quando ventorum violentia et procellarum tempestates sevissime inormem euripum impellunt et cymbarum carine sursum inmutate et malus navis deorsum duratur, haut secus animarum nostrarum naviculae magnis miseriarum machinis et multifaria calamitatum quantitate quatiantur, . . .

(As when the might of the foam-laden sea sweeps and rends the mountainous billows broken on the rocks, and the raging winds and tempests drive in headlong wrath through the long channel and the boat keels are up-turned, and the ship's mast is bent under, so the vessels of our souls are shaken by a great coil of woes and the burden of many calamities.)¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Aelfric, "Homily on Shrove Sunday," ed. Henry Sweet, Selected Homilies of Aelfric (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1885) 39-40.

¹³⁰ Abbess Eangyth to Boniface, Letter 14, S. Bonifatii et Lullii Epistolae, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Selectae I, ed. M. Tangl (Berlin: Weidmann, 1916) 22. Translation by Edward Kylie, The English Correspondence of Saint Boniface (NY: Cooper Square Pub., 1966) 62. This letter is cited by Dorothy Whitelock, "The Interpretation of the Seafarer," in The Early Cultures of Northwest Europe, ed. Sir Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1950).

It should be noted that, although life is compared sometimes to stormy seas and sometimes to a long exile from a beloved fatherland, it is not common in the sermon tradition to put the two images together. Indeed, for the purposes of the homilists, that seems an overly developed image. Blindness, exile, stormy seas were metaphoric tools for the preachers of the early Middle Ages, not allegorical constructs. They could make use of the parables extant in the Bible by comparing the morally blind man to the physically afflicted one, but they showed little inclination to make of this the kind of relatively elaborate flight required by sustained allegory.

Moreover, even the brief metaphors used by the homilists are clearly marked "symbolic." Thus it is not enough for the homilist to say "we send on ælpeodige." The phrase "on þisse world" must be added to warn a lay audience that no ordinary, temporal exile is intended here. The metaphor is quickly followed by the history of human exile. Since Adam, "æresta ealdor þisses menniscan cynnes," violated God's commandment we have all been "on þysne wræc-siþe sende." No such tags exist in The Seafarer. Similarly, in the quotation from Aelfric, words like "eþel" and "wræcsipe" must be redefined in the terms of the lesson. This world "nis . . . na ure eþel, ac is ure wræcsipe." And even the Abbess Eangyth, in a personal letter, specifies the "vessels of our souls" ("animarum nostrarum naviculae").

Smithers does eventually cite a passage which makes some connection between the exile and a hostile sea. It is in Cyprian's peroration De Mortalitate and it does indeed refer to the sea, and shipwreck:

XXV . . . Si in habitaculo tuo parietes vetustate nutarent, tecta desuper tremarent, domus jam fatigata, jam lassa, ædificiis senectute labentibus, ruinam proximam minaretur, nonne omni celeritate migrares? Si navigante te turbida et procellosa tempestas fluctibus violentius excitatis prænuntiaret futura naufragia, nonne portum velociter peteres? Mundus ecce nutat et labitur, et ruinam sui non jam senectute rerum, sed fine testatur; et tu non Deo gratias agis, non tibi gratularis quod, exitu maturiore subtractus, ruinis et naufragiis et plagis imminentibus exuaris?

(If the walls of your house were tottering from decay, if the roof above were shaking, if the house now worn out, now weary, were threatening imminent ruin with its framework collapsing through age, would you not leave with all speed? If, while you were sailing, a wind and furious storm with waves violently agitated were presaging future shipwreck, would you not more quickly seek port? Behold the world is tottering and collapsing and is bearing witness to its ruin, not now through age, but through the end of things; and you are not thanking God, you are not congratulating yourself that, rescued by an earlier departure, you are being freed from ruin and shipwrecks and threatening disasters.)¹³¹

Here, however, shipwreck is merely one of several emblems of disaster. The emphasis is on chaos and ruin of various sorts and the sweet release death brings, not sustained exile endured in a hostile world. The emblem is subservient to the motif, one of two examples, not, as in The Seafarer,

¹³¹ Cyprianus, Liber De Mortalitate, Patrologiæ Cursus Completus series latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844) vol. 4, cap. 25, col. 600. Translation by Roy J. Deferrari, in St Cyprian: Treatises, vol. 36 of The Fathers of the Church (NY: Fathers of the Church, 1958) 219.

the overwhelming reality. Here, too, Smithers overstates the passage's relevance to the study of gnostic lyrics.

It seems appropriate here to point out that the sea must have been a powerful and often threatening force for coastal peoples and inhabitants of insular nations. We know from the letters of Boniface and others, from the Icelandic Eddas and from the Greeks¹³² that it presented great difficulties and uncertainties to travellers. It is no wonder that it appears again and again in secular and religious works as a symbol of instability and chaos.

On the basis of the preceding analysis of proposed sources and analogues, I find I must question Smithers' identification of the Old English lyric persona with an Adamic exile. First, we have noted that most of the Chris-

¹³² e.g. this response from the Athenian Secundus the Silent:

Question: "What is a boat?"

Secundus: "A sea-tossed affair, a house without a foundation, a ready-made tomb, a three dimensional timber, transportation by the winds, a prison in winged flight, fate bound up in a package, the plaything of the winds, a floating death, a bird made of wood, a seagoing horse, an open weasel trap, uncertain safety, death in prospect, a traveler amid the waves."

Similarly, the sailor is described as "a fellow traveler with the winds, a stranger to the inhabited world, a deserter of the land, the opponent of the storm, . . . one who is unsure of his safety, a neighbor to death, a lover of the sea."

Man is described as "a temporary dwelling-place, . . . an exile from life, a deserter of the light, something that earth will reclaim, a corpse forever."

Ben Edwin Perry, trans., Secundus the Silent Philosopher, Philological Monograph 22 published by the American Philological Association (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1964) 83, 87-89.

tian passages employed such signals as "on þisse world" or "hortos paradisi." In none of them is the reader or listener expected to provide the reference himself. It is always made abundantly clear that the exile is not a literal one. Now, it is true that The Seafarer is poetry and in the vernacular. It may be helpful, therefore, to look at Old English poetic allegories such as The Whale or The Phoenix. One finds that in these vernacular poems the explanations and laborious interpretations are at least as thorough as in the homiletic prose of the period.

Thus, the poet of The Whale first describes his monster in graphic detail, then dissects that description to make clear his allegory:

þonne semninga on sealtne wæg
 mid þa noþe niþer gewiteþ
 garsegges gæst, grund geseceð,
 ond þonne in deaðsele drence bifæsteð
 scipu mid scealcum. Swa bið scinna þeaw,
 deofla wise, þæt hi drohtende
 þurh dyrne meahht duguðe beswicað

(Then suddenly in the salty wave
 he goes below with that adventurous band;
 the ocean's guest seeks the bottom
 and then into death's hall by drowning delivers
 the ships with their crews. Thus is the evil ones'
 custom,
 the way of the devils, that they by their conversing
 through secret power deceive the virtuous)

(The Whale 27-33)¹³³

Similarly, when the Old English Phoenix is compared to its Latin source, De Ave Phoenix by Lactantius, it appears

¹³³ ASPR III 172.

to have been developed so as to make the Christian allegory virtually inescapable. The poem continues past Lactantius' version to make the bird a symbol of Christian life in this world and, indeed, of Christ himself:

Ðonne soðfæstum sawlum scineð
 heah ofer hrofas hælende Crist.
 Him folgiað fuglas scyne,
 beorhte gebredade, blissum hremige,
 in þam gladan ham, gæstas gecorene,
 ece to ealdre. Ðær him yfle ne mæg
 fah feond gemah facne sceppan,
 ac þær lifgað a leohte werede,
 swa se fugel fenix, in freoðu dryhtnes,
 wlitige in wuldre.

(Then the saviour Christ shall shine on
 faithful souls high over the summits.
 Beautiful birds shall follow him,
 brightly restored, in bliss rejoicing
 in that joyous home, spirits chosen
 for eternal life. There the false impious fiend
 cannot evilly injure them with malice,
 for there they will live, clothed in light,
 just as the Phoenix bird (lives) in the Lord's
 protection,
 splendid in glory.)

(The Phoenix 589-98a)¹³⁴

These allegorical poems are not immediate kin to The Seafarer, either in method or in content. And yet, the lyric is not an isolated poem, not a hapax legomenon writ large. It has two close fellows at least in The Wanderer and The Wife's Lament. But nowhere in any of these three works do we find the sort of clear symbolic abstraction which is evident in the works cited above. Therefore, our second objection to the theories of the allegorists is this:

¹³⁴ ASPR III 110.

to allegorize The Seafarer would be to isolate it. The evidence is strong that the gnomic lyrics formed a distinct group, sharing the kind of formal and thematic conventions expected of a sub-genre.¹³⁵ The Seafarer interpreted as allegory would lose its place in that group. One must concur then with Dorothy Whitelock when she says: "The strongest argument brought forward against the dialogue theory, namely the absence of any indication in the text, seems to apply with equal force to the theory of allegorical interpretation."¹³⁶

Whitelock's response to the failure of allegorical interpretations was to take the poem literally and yet introduce a powerful religious sub-text. Her solution to the poem's puzzles is also a markedly Christian one. She believes that the "I" of The Seafarer is a peregrinus, a Christian wanderer, and that he is speaking of his pilgrimages when he says he shall "elpeodigra eard gesecan." She cites many contemporary references to peregrini in order to show that the Seafarer "has given poetic expression to the impulse that sent numbers of his countrymen to the schools of Ireland, to the mission fields of Germany, and to the shrines of distant saints."¹³⁷

However, when we examine the literature of the peregrinatus and the relevant phrases in The Seafarer it

¹³⁵ See pages 105-115 above. Also Gordon, "Traditional Themes" 13.

¹³⁶ Whitelock 263.

¹³⁷ Whitelock 272.

appears that this theory suffers from much the same handicap as the allegorizing of Anderson, Schücking, Smithers and others. That is, there are no key words identifying the nature of the voyage. Moreover, all the descriptions of, or references to, peregrinace which Whitelock cites do bear such words and phrases. For example, Bede says of Ecgbert:

ipse peregrinus pro Domino usque ad finem vitae
permansit

(that one remained a pilgrim for God's sake until the
end of his life)¹³⁸

and

. . . (Ecgbert) quem in Hibernia insula peregrinam
ducere vitam pro adipiscenda in caelis patria retulimus.

(. . . Egbert, whom we have said lived the life of a
pilgrim in the island of Ireland in order to obtain a
homeland in heaven)¹³⁹

The Old English translations of these references are just as explicit:

se Ecbryht þær on elpeodinesse fore Godes naman
awunede oð his lifes ende.

(this Ecgbert in pilgrimage for God's name dwelt there
until his life's end)¹⁴⁰

he in Hibernia þam ealonde in elpeodignesse lifde for
þæm ecean eole in heofenum to begytenne

138 Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica, II, Bk. 4, ch. 3, p.
26. The emphasis in these quotations is mine.
139 Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica II, Bk. 5, ch. 9, p.
234.
140 Alfred, König Alfreds Übersetzung von Bedas
Kirchengeschichte, Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa,
ed. C Grein (Leipzig: Wigand, 1899) IV: 363-4.

(he in the island of Ireland lived in pilgrimage in order to obtain that eternal homeland in heaven)¹⁴¹

Here also is Alcuin's admiring commentary on Willibord:

. . . patriam, cognationem et amicos, fervente fide, pro amore Dei dereliquit; terrena contempsit, ut caelestia acquireret. Idcirco magnum laboris sui fructum invenit et multas populorum turbas ad Christum convertit et plurimos paganorum ab erroris iniquitate avertit. . . . Vitam invenit aeternam, qui temporalem reliquit, nobis ablatu, angelis sociatus.

(. . . homeland, kin and friends, with fiery faith, for the love of God, he deserted; he despised things of this world in order to win those of heaven. For what purpose? He found the great fruit of his labor and converted great crowds of people for Christ and turned a great many pagans from iniquitous error. . . . He earned eternity, who abandoned temporal life, he who was borne from us, the companion of angels.)¹⁴²

This passage makes explicit the two concepts which are inseparable from the idea of the peregrinatus. First, he or she abandons kin and homeland for the love of, or in the name of, God or Christ and, second, this is done in order to earn an eternal home in heaven. Nowhere are these concepts left to the imagination or perspicacity of the reader. This may be because neither the Latin peregrinus nor the Old English ellbeodig had as its sole meaning "religious pilgrim." J. M. Charles-Edwards points out that Columba called an Irish slave whose release he obtained a "peregrina captiva" with no apparent religious connotations. Charles-

¹⁴¹ Alfred 589.

¹⁴² Alcuin, Vita Willibordi, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1919) VII: 140.

Edwards speculates that, in Ireland, peregrinus may have meant an exile or alien "even though the exile is not a fulfillment of an ascetic ideal."¹⁴³

Whitelock sees two passages as identifying the Seafarer as a peregrinus. They are lines 33b-47 and 58-67. I shall quote the central part of each passage:

Forþon cnyssað nu
 heortan geþohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,
 sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige;
 monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
 ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
 elpeodigra eard gesece.

(Wherefore now press
 the heart's thoughts, that I the deep currents,
 the play of salt waves, should know for myself;
 the heart's desire exhorts the companion-soul
 on each occasion, that I, far from here
 might seek the land of strangers.)

(The Seafarer 33b-38)

Forþon me hatran sind
 dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
 læne on londe.

(Wherefore dearer to me are
 the joys of the Lord than this dead life,
 brief on land.)

(The Seafarer 64b-66a)

Because of their significance to the proposed religious interpretations of the lyrics, these passages are worth considering in some detail. In lines 33-35 the Seafarer is eager to depart, urged on by his heart's thought. There are

¹⁴³T. M. Charles-Edwards, "The Social Background to Irish Peregrinatio," Celtica 11 (1976): 43-59.
 The quotation from Columba is from Vita Columba II, 33.

of course secular urgings which can create wanderlust: love of a woman, the lure of a sea-faring life, impatience with the soft life on land, the insistent desire to experience for oneself the extremities of adversity. I shall soon argue that this last element is present in both The Wanderer and The Seafarer, but for now it suffices to point out that no mention is made in this crucial passage of the motivating love of God or the need for penance.

Whitelock places great importance on verses 37b-38; she points out that "elpeodig" is part of the vocabulary of peregrinus.¹⁴⁴ However, the word is used often in Old English poetry and it seems to have no specific religious connotations when it stands by itself. In Genesis A, for example, Abraham is "ellpeodig" in the land of the Egyptians. But his role is that of a wily survivor rather than a martyr, missionary, or penitent. Thus, Abimeleh accuses him of laying snares by presenting Sarah as his sister and a desirable wife for his host:

Du ellpeodig usic woldest
 on þisse folcsceare facne besyrwan,
 synnum besmitan, sægdest wordum
 þæt Sarra þin sweostor wære, . . .

(You, a stranger, would deceive
 us in this nation,
 defile us with sins; you told in words
 that Sarah was your sister . . .)

(Genesis A 2680-83)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Whitelock 263-4.

¹⁴⁵ The Vulgate does not use "peregrinus" for the comparable passage (Genesis 20.8-10).

The author of Andreas used "ellþeodig" frequently, sometimes to refer to Andrew, but more often as a description of cannibals, strange lands or aliens in general. Indeed the translation "alien" is perhaps more apt than "foreign" for these lines. Within the poem's first hundred lines "ellþeodig" or "ellþeodigra" is used to refer indirectly to Matthew, to strangers in general who were in danger from cannibals, and to the Mermedonians themselves, "hostile men wielding chains of malice:"

Dam halig god hlyt geteode
 ut on þæt igland þær ænig þa git
 ellþeodigra eðles ne mihte
 blædes brucan.

(Holy God assigned Matthew his lot
 out on that island where as yet no
 stranger could enjoy the prosperity
 of home.)

(Andreas 14-17a)

Swelc wæs þeaw hira
 þæt hie æghwylcne ellðeodigra
 dydan him to mose meteþearfendum,
 þara þe þæt ealand utan sohte.

(Such was their custom
 that when they lacked meat, they
 made food of each stranger
 who sought that island from afar.)

(Andreas 25b-28)

Hu me elþeodige inwitwrasne
 searonet seowað!

(How they, the alien ones, weave for me a chain of
 malice,
 a net of guile.)

(Andreas 63-64a)

Despite the unequivocally devout nature of both Genesis and Andreas, in neither poem is this particular word loaded with religious significance, as it is when amplified by "fore Godes naman" in the Old English Bede. Finally, one should note that gesecan in line 38 of The Seafarer need not mean "seek," a cognate which fits into religious interpretations quite nicely. The verb actually has a much wider range of meanings, including "go to, approach," "visit, come to" and even "persecute, afflict, invade."¹⁴⁶

Verses 64b-66a are more definitely Christian in content and tone. Their purport, indeed, reminds us of Edwin's noble counselor and his description of the attractions of Christian belief. Our life, he said, is like the flight of a sparrow through a warm, bright hall. It passes from tempestuous darkness into a sheltered interval, only to return to the winter storm again.

Unde si haec nova doctrina certius aliquid attulit,
merito esse sequenda videtur.

(Wherefore if this new learning hath brought us any
better surety, methink it is worthy to be followed.)¹⁴⁷

Both The Seafarer passage and Bede's quotation convey a strong perception of the fragility and brevity of life's celebration. And each speaker chooses to seek out the Christian faith in hope of finding permanence therein. But one metaphor or, in The Seafarer, one abstraction, does

¹⁴⁶ Bosworth and Toller, gesecan II and III.

¹⁴⁷ Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica I, ch. 13, 284-5. The translation is by J. E. King.

neither an allegory nor a pilgrim make. The gnomic passages which follow lines 64b-66a indicate that the poet's interest lies in reconciling two traditions rather than in establishing the ascendancy of one over the other. Thus, even as he chooses the joys of the Lord promised him by the Christian faith, he accepts mortality as everyman's fate, as it is described in the secular traditions, heroic and gnomic.

Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð:
 adl oþþe ylðo oþþe ecghete
 fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.

(Always one of three things
 before one's time passes turns all to doubt:
 illness or age or swordhate
 forces life from the fated, from those about to depart.)

(The Seafarer 68-71)

These lines invoke the "ways of death" theme found both in Old English poetry and homily. They remain secular, however, for no mention is made of Doomsday, the usual homiletic context for such a list, and the lines end with a typical gnomic variation: "fægum fromweardum."¹⁴⁸

In lines 72-80, there is an awkward grafting of another secular gnome onto a piece of Christian cosmology. Here the poet's notion of heavenly rewards is not a little confused with the pagan idea that man's only immortality is in his reputation. The acts of glory which earn a hero lasting fame are amplified into acts against the devil. The com-

¹⁴⁸ See my discussion of the "ways of death" theme, pages 155-162 above.

munity which grants that fame becomes the panoply of angels in heaven. Throughout the passage, however, the secular gnome stands intact within the Christian amplification.

Surely, if the Seafarer were an ascetic peregrinus, trials and achievements among heathen folk in foreign lands would be more likely to earn him glory than some unnamed acts against the devil. Although The Seafarer does not lack explicit Christian reference, it never defines the journey itself as religiously motivated. Given the clear declarations of intent in contemporary descriptions of peregrinatus, such a definition of motivation or purpose must be considered crucial to a designation of the persona as peregrinus.

A rejection of the peregrinus label does not imply that the alienation and homelessness of the Seafarer are without cultural precedent, however. The condition of homelessness, voluntary or involuntary, was both familiar and intriguing to Germanic and Celtic islanders. The early literatures of England, Ireland and Iceland return again and again to the outlaw and the alien. He has his champion in Grettir, his religious counterpart in Patrick, and his fiendish embodiment in Grendel.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion of outlawry in general, and Grendel in particular, see Stanley Greenfield, "The Formulaic Expression" 200-206. Also Winfred Lehmann, "On Reflections of Germanic Legal Terminology and Situations in the Edda," Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin, Texas: U of Texas P, 1969) 227-43.

Exile may follow misfortune or result from the outlaw's own crimes. In the Old Norse Heimskringla, Ganger-Hrólf is outlawed by Harald Hairfair because of his banditry in eastern Norway. Harald had forbidden robbery and when Hrólf, a man so big no horse could carry him, broke this edict, he was sent into exile. He travelled to the Hebrides, then to France where, according to English and French chronicles, he settled Normandy. Even after finding a new home, however, he returned periodically to sea-raiding and warring.¹⁵⁰

Similarly, it is said that King Eirik of Norway

made Egil an outlaw from one end of Norway to the other, and every man's prey. Arinbjörn went campaigning with the king, but before he left home Egil set his ship to the open sea . . .

When he learned he had been outlawed, Egil sang:

Lawbreaker not lawmaker
On long ways bids me languish;
Bride-murmurer, brother's murderer,
Makes me outlaw (Hear me, Land-Elf!)¹⁵¹

The extremity of a sentence of outlawry may be sensed in this indictment from Njal's saga:

I give notice of suit for assault, punishable under the law, against Gunnar Hámundarson for his assault, punishable under the law, against Thorgeir Otkelsson, in which he inflicted on him an internal wound which became

¹⁵⁰ Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin, Texas: U of Texas P, 1964) 78-9.

¹⁵¹ Egil's Saga, trans. Gwyn Jones (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1960) 146-7.

a mortal wound, as a result of which Thorgeir died. I herewith declare that he should be punished by outlawry, and I insist that he should not be fed or forwarded nor given any help or assistance whatsoever. I declare that his goods and possessions should be forfeited, half to me and half to the men of that Quarter who according to the law are entitled to the confiscated goods and possessions of an outlaw. I give notice of this suit in that Quarter Court to which this charge should be referred according to the law. I give notice according to the law; I give notice so that all men at the Law-Mount may hear me; I give notice of a suit of complete outlawry against Gunnar Hámundarson.¹⁵²

Outlaws need not be criminals, however. Harald's long struggle to unify Norway sent many men over the seas:

There was a great exodus to the Shetlands, and many of the nobility fled King Harald as outlaws and went on Viking expeditions to the west.¹⁵³

Iceland was founded by such as these.

Another northern hero, Grettir, is not of criminal bent but finds himself outlawed after a quarrel in which he kills another man. He is banished for three years by decision of the Thing. In the narration of his adventures Grettir is revealed as an extraordinarily strong young man, "headstrong and quarrelsome," possessed by a volatile temper and yet capable of unpredictable generosity. He is not of great intelligence but can be very cunning. He bravely endures all manner of hardships, yet is fearful of the dark. Above all, through many travels, he is perpetually isolated, alienating family and friends even as he endears himself to

¹⁵² Njal's Saga, trans Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (NY: New York UP, 1955) 153.

¹⁵³ Heimskrinela 76.

his audience.¹⁵⁴

The voyages of Norse heroes were seldom, it seems, undertaken alone. The rival kings and jarls who fled Harald's dominion took their retinues with them. Even Grettir, that often unpopular, sarcastic and anti-social hero, set sail with a substantial crew. In the Western Islands, on the other hand, peregrini of both religious and secular nature often travelled alone, or in very small groups. Moreover, in the English and Celtic traditions, the identification of an exile is derived not so much from narrative as from description, monologue and formula. Indeed, as in the case of The Seafarer, the events surrounding the persona's condition are often extremely murky. The seventh century Welsh Llywarch Hen has a story behind him but it must be pieced together from eighteenth century chronicles. The legend says that he was a Celt from Cumberland, that he fought with his cousin Urien, prince of Rheged, against the Saxons, until defeat forced him into exile. He and his few surviving sons were welcomed by Cynddylan, a prince of Powys. They lived there and fought for their protectors. Llywarch "the Old" survived to be 150 years old but was never reconciled to his condition:

I am old, I am alone, I am disfigured and cold;
After an honorable family, I am wretched, I am terribly bent.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ The Saga of Grettir the Strong, trans. G. A. Hight (NY: Dutton, 1965). See, for example, 37 ff.

¹⁵⁵ Patrick K. Ford, trans. and ed., The Poetry of

As we have seen, in England, lyric and gnome bear witness to the plight of the "wineleas mon:"

Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to
 geferan,
 felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;
 gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men;
 hungre heofeð, nales þæt heafe bewindeð,
 ne huru wæl wepeð wulf se græga,
 morþorcwealm mægga, ac hit a mare wille.

(The friendless, wretched one takes wolves as companions, very treacherous beasts. Full often his companion rends him;
 there must be horror of the grey ones, a grave for dead men;
 for hunger (the wolf) laments, not at all does he circle the (grave) wailing,
 Indeed the wolf, the grey one, does not weep for the dead,
 the murderous slaughter of kinsmen, but ever wants more.)

(Maxims IC 146-51)

In Old English literature, exile is often the result of the loss of a beloved lord's protection and thus fear is sharpened by grief:

A ic wite wonn minra wræcsipa.
 Ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
 ofer ypa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
 hwær min leodfruma londes wære.
 Ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,
 wineleas wræcca for minre weapearfe.
 Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan
 þurh dyrne geþoht, þæt hy todælden unc,
 þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice
 lifdon laðlicost, and mec longade.

(Ever have I suffered the hardship of my exile.
 First my lord set off hence from the people
 over the tossing of waves; I had dawn-sorrow
 (wondering) where my prince of the land was.

Llywarch Hen (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974) 81, st. 49.

Then I departed to travel to seek service myself,
 a friendless outcast, out of my dire need.
 The kin of the man began to hope
 through hidden thought, that they might separate us,
 so that we two farthest apart in the world's realm
 lived most hostilely; and how I yearned.)

(The Wife's Lament 5-14)

The vulnerability of a person travelling alone may be further seen in this English edict:

If a traveller from afar or a foreigner leave the road,
 and he then neither shouts nor blows a horn, he is to be regarded as a thief, to be either killed or ransomed.

(The Laws of Wihtræd 695 A. D.)¹⁵⁶

Secular exile, then, could result from political or economic necessity (Egil), from defeat in war (Llywarch Hen), or criminal conviction (Hrólf). It also descended, a capricious fate, upon those who lost kin and protectors (The Wife's Lament).

In the secular literature of exile we can also find examples of an attitude which has prompted critics to see strong religious motivation in The Seafarer. This is the contempt for the luxurious life on land and the deliberate preference for the hardships at sea (see The Seafarer 26-30, 44-47, 64b-67). Far from being a purely religious sentiment, this has secular precedents in several literatures.

The Norse hero Kormak, for example, although never an outlaw, makes many voyages, some in winter seas. In the midst of a ferocious storm he sings out his contempt for the

¹⁵⁶ Anglo-Saxon Prose, ed. Michael Swanton (NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975) 4.

husband of his beloved:

Unlike to Tin-rods rascal
 Breaking a muck-sledge runner--
 Wet ways the milk-sop shunneth,
 Would shudder from this welter--
 Is this story of stout fellows,
 The raisers of the spear-rain,
 Amid the Sound of Solund
 Their sea-steed's yard a-splicing.¹⁵⁷

And in Welsh gnostic poetry:

The furze is sharp, and the exile is an outcast;
 the fatuous is apt to laugh;
 the moor is bare; the leek is pungent.¹⁵⁸

There is a less judgmental, more ambiguous, comparison in In Praise of Tenby:

And whenever the ocean booms its boast,
 Bards are wont to carouse over mead cups.
 Swiftly the wave surges towards it:
 They leave the grey-green sea to the Picts.¹⁵⁹

Many men must have acquired the habit of wandering, and with it this contempt for those wedded to the pleasures of life on shore. The rare introspective spirit may have added to this a compulsion to search for the final self, stripped of illusion and self-indulgence, at last able to be wise.

Venerable secular traditions, of course, had an impact

¹⁵⁷ The Story of Kormak, the Son of Ogmund, trans. Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris (London: William Morris Society, 1970) 116.

¹⁵⁸ K. Jackson, ed., Studies in Early Celtic Nature Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1935) 72, st. 14.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph P. Clancy, trans. and ed., The Earliest Welsh Poetry (NY: St Martin's P, 1970) 90.

on new religious practices. The Christian tradition of peregrinatus was most enthusiastically taken up in Ireland and England, countries in which exile, out of punishment or necessity, was already woven into the fabric of legend and law. The Christian peregrinus outlawed himself in penance for his own sins, just as the vargr of Iceland or the ailithir of Ireland was exiled for violations of secular codes. A combination of judgments by self and by society can be seen in Patrick's verdict on Macc-Cuill, a bandit and murderer. The missionary sent the villain to sea in "a coracle of one hide." Macc-Cuill complied. After a difficult voyage he reached the Island of Mann and found two priests there. With them he studied the "divine rule" and was bishop after them.¹⁶⁰

Examined in the context of these various traditions, the Seafarer's complex attitude toward his voyaging seems to need no elaborate explanation. Rather it is the proposed religious sub-text which bears the burden of proof. The poet, although he mentions God's power and the joys of the Lord, does not once characterize his journey as being for the love of God, or Christ, or for the earning of heavenly rewards. In turning away from the easier, earth-bound life he may, like Kormak, be motivated by a contempt for the vices of luxurious living and by pride in his ability to

¹⁶⁰ Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., The Tripartite Life of Patrick, Great Britain Public Records Office, Chronicles and Memorials of Grt. Brit. and Ireland #89 (London: Rolls Series, 1887) 2: 286-9.

confront and withstand hardship. He may certainly find himself feeling closer to God in the long wintry nights at sea. But nowhere are we given any hint that he is a monk, or a religious figure of any kind; nowhere are we told of a compulsion greater than that of a thoughtful Christian fallen upon hard times. Finally, the ascetic peregrini tell us time and again that they are voluntarily leaving friends, family and native land as a means of winning salvation. The Seafarer also wishes to win eternal bliss but he shows great uncertainty as to how to go about this and makes no mention of his ordeal as a conduit to heaven:

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
 ond þonne gepencan hu we þider cumen.

(Let us think on where our home is,
 and then consider how we might come thither.)

(The Seafarer 117-18)

I propose that we continue to confront the difficulties of this poem without the aid of religious sub-texts or allegorical superstructures. Its persona, his opening verses and the ruminations of 64b ff. qualify The Seafarer for the designation "gnomic lyric," and I believe a close look at the poem will reveal a set of concerns, a structure and a use of variation very similar to that of The Wanderer.

Like The Wanderer, The Seafarer begins with an account of a wintry sea journey (1-12a). He announces his song, "Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan," (I can concerning myself utter a true song,) (1) and establishes himself

as an outcast: "bitre breostceare (ic) gebiden hæbbe, / gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela" (bitter heart-sorrow I have experienced, I have known by ship many sorrowful places) (4-5). Unlike The Wanderer, however, the poem refrains from introducing gnomes or Christian statements of faith for thirty-nine lines. Its first third, therefore, forms an eloquent and lyric narrative uncomplicated by problems of ethics or belief. The promise of the first three lines, that he will tell a true tale of his own hardships, is fulfilled. We hear of the cold and of ice storms, external darkness and bitter desolation within. No mention is made here of penance or pilgrimage, but he does say that he dwelt for a winter "wræccan lastum / winemægum bidroren" (in the paths of an exile, / deprived of loving kinsmen) (15b-16). "Bidroren" here seems to imply involuntary deprivation, imposed by circumstances or authority.

Despite the deferment of gnostic passages, lines 1-38 reveal the poem's kinship with The Wanderer in several other ways. Both poems' descriptions of winter voyaging use images of binding (8b-10a, 31-33a in The Seafarer), and sounds of desolation (18-19). In both poems, the voices of sea birds are substituted for the merriment of boon companions (The Seafarer 19b-25a). Finally, in The Seafarer, as in The Wanderer, a broadly drawn variation is used to contrast the ignorance of the fortunate man with the cruel wisdom acquired by the exile:

Dæt se mon ne wat
 þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
 hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
 winter wunade

(That the man knows not
 he to whom on earth the fairest things belong,
 how I unhappy on the ice-cold sea
 dwelled for a winter)

(The Seafarer 12b-15a)

Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
 gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,
 wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft
 in brimlade bidan sceolde.

(For he little understands, he who ever the pleasure of
 life
 enjoys in towns, with few misfortunes,
 proud and wanton with wine, how I often weary
 in these paths had to endure.)

(The Seafarer 27-30)

The referents behind these variations can be described
 as follows:

- *The ignorant man:
 se mon ne wat (12b)
 him gelyfeð lyt (27a)
- *His good fortune:
 him on foldan fægrost limpeð (13)
 se þe ah lifes wyn / gebiden in burgum (27b-28a)
- *the persona:
 ic earmcearig (14a)
 ic werig (29b)
- *the persona's plight, at sea in winter:
 iscealdne sæ / winter wunade (14a-15b)
 in brimlade bidan sceolde (30)

The poet juxtaposes the ignorance of the fortunate and the
 special knowledge gained through experience of hardship.
 The third variation is less personal, more gnomic, and
 occurs later in the poem:

Ðæt se beorn ne wat
 esteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
 þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.

(Thus the man knows not,
 the fortunate man, what some men suffer
 from whom the tracks of exile lie most widely.)

(The Seafarer 55b-57)

In each variant the poet uses as his subject the man who knows not, amplifies this man with a descriptive phrase or clause and then introduces as the object of his ignorance the anhaga's experience in deprivation. The sequence is not as rich in amplification as those of The Wanderer, but, as in the other poem, its variants reflect the moods of their respective sections. Thus, verses 55b-57 take on a gnomic coloring as the poem itself moves into a more detached, meditative mood. The "beorn ne wat," the use of "sum" and the abandonment of the first person all tell the reader or listener that these verses apply to all exiles, not just the persona.

The poem's transition into a gnomic mode is performed through the passage which lies at the heart of peregrinatus theories.

Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,
 hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
 corna caldast. Forþon cnyssað nu
 heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
 sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige;
 monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
 ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
 elþeodigra eard gesece.

(The shades of night grew dark, from the north it
 snowed,
 hoarfrost bound the earth, hail fell on the ground,

coldest of corns. Wherefore now press
 the heart's thoughts, that I the deep currents,
 the play of salt waves, should know for myself.
 The desire of the heart exhorts on each occasion
 the companion-soul that I far from here
 might seek the land of strangers.)

(The Seafarer 31-8)

The poet has expressed his disdain for the ignorance and weakness of townspeople. Having once been forced out to sea, he now chooses the hardship of a sea voyage as a means of transcending the ephemeral pleasures of land dwellers. Once again the theme is emphasized and amplified through variation. Lines 33b-35 comprise one variation. The other follows immediately in lines 36-38. The referents can be identified as follows:

- *His impulse
 heortan gēpohtas (34a)
 modes lust (36a)
- *urges him on
 cnyssað nu (33b)
 monað . . . mæla gehwylce (36)
- *to search
 þæt ic . . . / sylf cunnige (34b & 35b)
 þæt ic feor heonan / . . . gesece (37b & 38b)
- *in strange places
 hean streamas, / sealtyþa gelac (34b-35a)
 elpeodigra eard (38)

These two passages describe the onset of a second voyage. The first was perhaps one of necessity; a sentence of exile or threatening enemies drove the Seafarer onto the winter's sea. The second journey originates in some more nebulous impulse, a rejection of the soft, cloying life ashore, perhaps, and a fierce desire to be abroad again.

As the persona recognizes within himself an impulse, a longing, greater than the simple necessity which first divided him from land and kin, his world expands and the poem's gnomic scope broadens. In lines 39-47 the poet employs a ne to construction somewhat differently than does the author of The Wanderer 65b-69. As in The Wanderer, the poet uses ne to to characterize the limitations of humans. The syntax is more pointed, however, as the intensifier þæs is added and the passage lacks the gnomic force of The Wanderer's definition of a wise man. Instead, it depicts a condition of emotional vulnerability from which no one is safe:

Forþon nis þæs modwlanc mon ofer eorþan,
 ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geogupe to þæs
 hwæt,
 ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten
 to þæs hold
 þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe,
 to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille.
 Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege,
 ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht,
 ne ymbe owiht elles, nefne ymb yða gewealc,
 ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað.

(For no man over the earth is so proud of spirit,
 nor are his gifts so good, nor (is he) in youth so bold,
 nor in his deeds so daring, nor in his lord so favored,
 that he in his sea journey has no anxiety
 concerning what the lord will bestow upon him.
 Nor does he have a mind for the harp, nor for the ring
 giving,
 nor for the pleasure of women, nor for worldly hope,
 nor concerning ought else, except the rolling of the
 waters,
 for ever has he longing, he who on the sea dwells.)

(The Seafarer 39-47)

As in The Wanderer, this series is divided into two stages.

Lines 39-43 proclaim that there is no one, no matter how fortunate, who in a sea journey is free of the apprehension of God's power. Lines 44-47 use the negative and a different meaning of tō to describe the overwhelming reality of the sea and the longunge which overtakes those who dwell upon it. None of the land's pleasures can compete with the stark actuality of the waters.

I believe that these lines are one of our literature's most powerful evocations of wanderlust. The pleasures most emblematic of Anglo-Saxon fellowship are summoned and dismissed, a condemnation of worldliness is made in one verse, then, in lines 46-47, the sea's mastery is acknowledged.

The ne to sequence in The Wanderer strove for a traditional secular definition of wisdom. The Seafarer poet, although also fond of admonition, uses the construction to define the vulnerability of the cushioned life on land. At sea awaits "sorge" and yet the anhaga yearns for the austerity of an ocean voyage. Exile has taken complacency from him as well as security. When the poem is read in this way there can be no difficulty about lines 47 ff. Spring has come; the cuckoo, summer's harbinger, sounds; and the sailor is unable to enjoy the soft weather and bustling town, for to him it means only that the sea is passable once more. He who thinks thus, "þe swa þenceð," is fully divided from those more fortunate men who have homes, countries in which they are welcome (lines 55b-57).

Like The Wanderer, The Seafarer moves in its first half

from first person lyric narration and description gradually into the more gnomic present tense, the meditative he and man. Unlike the anhaga of The Wanderer, the Seafarer is not assailed by doubts concerning his own conduct. The terrible gap between his experience and that of more fortunate men has taught him what the Wanderer still seeks to know: that the only certainties are the transience of his society, with its pleasures and its false values, the passing of the heroic age and the distant hope of heaven. We learn in lines 1-64a how he came to this realization. In 64b ff. his understanding of that transience is remorselessly laid before us.

But what of lines 58-64a? Beginning with what is perhaps the most discussed "forþon" in Old English, this extraordinary passage describes the mind, flying, it seems, out of the body and then returning to urge on the heart or spirit.

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
 min modsefa mid mereflode
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
 eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
 gifre ond grædig, gielleð anfloga,
 hweteð on wælweg hreþer unwearnum
 ofer holma gelagu.¹⁶¹

(Wherefore now my heart turns over in my breast,
 my mind among the sea-floods
 over the whale's home ranges far
 over the surface of the earth; it comes again to me
 eager and greedy; the lone-flier cries,

¹⁶¹ I have reinstated here the manuscript's "wælweg," which was emended to "hwælweg" by Krapp and Dobbie.

urges the heart over the way of the dead without
hindrance,
over the sea's swell.)

(The Seafarer 58-64a)

Several critics have begun articles with discussions of this passage. The manuscript's "wælweg" has been emended and reinterpreted, "anfloga" dissected and "forþon" redefined. However, once a difficult distinction between religious and spiritual is made, the passage becomes clearer and lexical manipulations unnecessary. We know that the Seafarer is seized by a nameless, bodiless hunger, a yearning. Sorrow seethes hot about his heart; hunger tears at his spirit (10b-12a). The heart's thoughts press him on (33a-35). The spirit's desire exhorts the soul to travel (36-38). Ever has he longing (47). The very plenitude of the earth prompts him to depart, to abandon its blessings (48-52).

The ardent nature of this restlessness has convinced many readers of its religious nature, but such irrational, spiritual yearnings have never been solely the province of the doctrinally religious. Vivian Salmon, in "an attempt to demonstrate the meaning and association in some contexts of certain words indicating 'soul' or 'spirit' at the time when The Seafarer was composed," cites many instances of spirits taking flight.¹⁶² She points out that many primitive peoples believed that a shaman's soul could leave its body and

¹⁶² Salmon 1.

travel.¹⁶³ In Vatnsdaela Saga, for example, three Lapps travel to Iceland, leaving their bodies in Norway.¹⁶⁴ The soul is represented as a bird in Christian and pre-Christian mythology and art. Bird costumes, especially cloaks, play a large role in shamanism in Scandanavia.¹⁶⁵

In Ireland, the Suibne Geilt legend connects madness, exile and bird-like forms. Suibne becomes a madman and flies naked and homeless throughout the world. He believes himself to be a bird. When Suibne visits Eorann, once his wife, and berates her for her disloyalty, she protests:

I wish we could be together, in order that
feathers might come over our bodies and that I might
roam through light and dark with you every day and
every night.¹⁶⁶

Despite The Seafarer poet's use of the first person and the present tense in the flight passage, Salmon believes "hyge hweorfeð" refers to the soul's departure after death. Other critics find the passage to be deeply indebted to Christian conceptions of the soul. F. N. M. Diekstra says that this passage "strengthens and unifies the Christian idealism of the poem," and that it represents the "flight of the soul." According to Diekstra the imagery reflects a Christian metaphor in which the soul is pilgrim in the

¹⁶³ Salmon 3.

¹⁶⁴ Gwyn Jones, trans., The Vatnsdalers' Saga (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1944) ch. 12, p. 45.

¹⁶⁵ Mircea Eliade, Shamanism, trans. William Trask (NY: Bollingen Foundation, 1964) 156-8, 477-82.

¹⁶⁶ Gerard Murphy, ed. and trans., Early Irish Lyrics (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970) 121, st. 12.

world. And the soul strives to leave the body, its uncongenial home:

Just as the exile feels the persistent urge to travel back to his homeland, the soul, constantly mindful of its origin, attempts to escape from the prison of the body and fly to Heaven.¹⁶⁷

According to this reading, the soul is "anfloga;" it glimpses heaven and cries out, "gielleð," in desire as it returns to its corporeal host. The conclusion of Diekstra's article is surprisingly tentative, given the battery of patristic sources he brings to bear on the problem and the extremity of his suggestions within the article. He merely claims to have shown "the general currency of the flight of the soul in a context of thought which shows striking affinities with the spiritual theme of The Seafarer."¹⁶⁸

Diekstra does deal with a critical problem in this passage -- the fact that the soul leaves the body and returns before death. But his analysis suffers from the same lack of clear indications on the part of the poet which hampers allegorical theories in general. First, nothing is said in The Seafarer of glimpses of heaven or of God. The Seafarer's "modsefa," to put it simply, did not go there. The flight cannot be considered a commitment to the contemplative or mystical life unless it represents ascension towards heaven. In Book VI of Moralia in Job Gregory de-

¹⁶⁷ F. N. M. Diekstra, "The Seafarer 58-66a: The Flight of the Exiled Soul to its Fatherland," Neophilologus 55 (1971): 435.

¹⁶⁸ Diekstra 443.

scribes the "contemplation of the Saints by which they soar aloft, and quitting earthly scenes, poise themselves in the regions of heaven."¹⁶⁹ The Christian flight of desire or love that Diekstra wishes to link to The Seafarer is a dramatic and emotionally cataclysmic phenomenon: the mind "being lifted on high, beholds the higher depths of the secrets of heaven" and its human strength trembles. But it only sees these things in a "hasty glance," "and when it tastes that inward sweetness, it is on fire with love, it longs to mount above itself, yet it falls but in broken state to the darkness of its frailty."¹⁷⁰

The Seafarer's mind ranges rather than ascends. Indeed the verb is "hweorfeð wide eorpan sceatas" or "roams widely over the earth's surface." No mention is made of a goal, a glimpse of a heavenly home, or of God. No depression follows. This is an impatient spirit but not one contemptuous of a corrupt body. Rather it seems kin to the description of the soul in Lactantius, also cited by Diekstra:

Can any fail to admire that that living and heavenly faculty which is called the mind or soul, is of such volubility that it does not rest even then when it is asleep; of such rapidity that it surveys the whole heaven at one moment of time; and if it wills, flies over seas, traverses land and cities, -- in short places in its own sight all things which it pleases, however far and widely they are removed?¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Gregory the Great, Morals on the Book of Job, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844) Vol. I, Bk. 6, xxxvii, 61, 361.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory, Vol. I, Bk. 5, xxxii-xxxiii, 285-6.

¹⁷¹ Lactantius, Fathers of the Third and Fourth

Lactantius is here describing the human mind, not in a climactic moment in its history, but in its everyday being. I believe that the Anglo-Saxon poet six centuries later also wished to teach of the mind's capabilities in the fullness of worldly life, not in moments of transcendence.

It is possible, of course, that The Seafarer poet was drawing on a pagan tradition in which shamanistic figures sent their spirits out like birds to roam this world and the next. Oðinn is supposed to have been capable of this.¹⁷² But the same passage that describes the god's bird-like powers extols his ability to become a fish or worm or beast. The Seafarer is not protean but instead single-minded, mortal, eagerly alive, yet full of the terrible knowledge of the world's impermanence and his own.

In lines 62b-64a "anfloga" has been called "soul" or "bird-soul."¹⁷³ I prefer to see the return of the cuckoo and, with it, a variation of lines 53-55a. The verses "geac monað geomran reorde," "singeð sumeres weard," and "gielleð anfloga" set up their own refrain of urgency and foreboding. And thus the poem is moved into the realm of gnomic hermeneutics as the poet strives for an understanding of the degeneration and chaos of the mortal world.

In lines 64b-66a lies perhaps the strongest evidence

Century, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 7, trans. by Rev. William Fletcher (NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885/1925)

296. Cited by Diekstra 434.

¹⁷² Ynglinga Saga, Heimskringla, 10-11.

¹⁷³ Salmon 2; Diekstra 443.

for the Seafarer as a peregrinus. These verses begin the persona's attempt to explain why he feels impelled to leave once more the comforts of land for the perils of a sea journey. Such justification was not necessary for the Wanderer, the center of whose lyric is one involuntary journey. But the Seafarer makes clear in lines 33b-36 that, like several Icelandic heroes, he is driven a second time to seek hardship and danger.¹⁷⁴ He has expressed his disgust and unease at the softness of life on land; now he explains his aversion. Lines 64b-66a comprise a sort of topic sentence for this explanation.

Forþon me hatran sind
dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
læne on londe.

"Hat" is an odd adjective to find here. Bosworth and Toller define it as "hot, fervent, fervid, fierce," then, in the supplement, Toller adds "V: that excites strong feelings (1) . . . of affection, dear to a person." The Seafarer's lines are the only example for this meaning. I propose "keener" as a better translation for this verse than "dearer." The passage would then read:

(Thus for me
the joys of the Lord are keener than this dead life,
brief on land.)

The Seafarer is not looking for affection but for the clean,

¹⁷⁴ e.g. Hrólfr-Ganger, Heimskringla 79; Kormak, Morris 116 ff.; Ólaf Tryggvason, Heimskringla 161 ff.

sharp taste of heroic struggle, the excitement and glory that once belonged to the eorls of his people as a matter of course, and which now have given way to sweet wines and luxurious living. A similar comparison of the heroic life of the past and the degeneracy of the present is evident in The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare, a mythical, centuries-old Irish woman:

I am Bui, the Old Woman of Beare; I used to wear a smock that was ever-renewed; today it has befallen me, by reason of my mean estate, that I could not have even a cast-off smock to wear.

It is riches you love, and not people; as for us, when we lived, it was people we loved.

Beloved were the people whose plains we ride over; well did we fare among them, and they boasted little thereafter.

Today indeed you are good at claiming, and you are not lavish in granting the claim; though it is little you bestow, greatly do you boast.¹⁷⁵

The Seafarer may see in the relatively new Christian faith a return to those fierce joys his people once knew and a promise of something more permanent than the transient pleasures of the hall and town. But the passage lacks the thorough links to theology and the explicit statements of faith that we have found in the stories of avowed Christian peregrini. Instead, it is followed in lines 66b-71 by an assertion of negative faith, the same recognition of a void seen in the advice of Edwin's counselor. And in this

¹⁷⁵ "The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare," Early Irish Lyrics 75.

avowal, as in much of The Wanderer, we can identify a strong gnomic influence.

Ic gelyfe no
 þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.
 Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær him tid aga, to tweon weorpeð;
 adl oppe ylðo oppe ecghete
 fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.

(I do not believe
 that the earth's wealth stands eternal.
 Always one of three things
 before one's time passes turns all to doubt:
 illness or age or swordhate
 forces life from the fated, those about to depart.)

First, "læne on land" is amplified in a decidedly secular sense. The earth's wealth is not eternal; for each man one of three things turns all to doubt, forces life from those fated to die. This use of three has antecedents in the wisdom tradition: the number proverbs of the Bible (Proverbs 30.10-33), for example, and The Triads of Ireland.¹⁷⁶ The passage also, of course, has analogues in the "fates of men" theme which is discussed in some detail on pages 156-164 above.

Given that all men must die, it is best to die in such a way that one earns "lof lifgendra." The extended passage expounding this reveals a complex attempt to link this ancient Germanic belief to Christian cosmology. The initial gnomic statement is very like Hávamál, stanza 76, and Beowulf, line 1384b-1389:

¹⁷⁶ Kuno Meyer, trans., The Triads of Ireland, Todd Lecture Series 13, Royal Irish Academy (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1906).

Cattle die, kinsmen die,
 one day you die yourself;
 but the words of praise will not perish
 when a man wins fair fame.

(Hávamál, st. 76)

Selre bið æghwæm,
 þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.
 Ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan
 worolde lifes; wyrce se þe mote
 domes ær deape; þæt bið drihtguman
 unlifgendum æfter selest.

(It is better for every man
 that he avenge his friend, than mourn much.
 Each of us must await the end
 of mortal life; let him who can gain
 glory before death; that is best for the warrior
 after he ceases living.)

(Beowulf 1384b-1389)¹⁷⁷

But The Seafarer introduces a new cast into the traditional
 Germanic situation and the characters are none other than
 the supernatural inhabitants of heaven and hell:

Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam æftercweþendra
 lof lifgendra lastworda betst,
 þæt he gewyrce, ær he on weg scyle
 fremum on foldan wið feonda niþ,
 deorum dædum deofle togeanes,
 þæt hine ælda bearn æfter hergen,
 ond his lof sibban lifge mid englum

(So for every noble, among those speaking afterwards,
 the praise of the living is the best remembrance.
 He must earn it, before he is on his way,
 by deeds on earth, against the malice of foes,
 noble acts against the devil,
 so that the sons of men afterwards might praise him
 and his glory live among the angels)

(The Seafarer 72-8)

A second level has here been added to the original gnome.

¹⁷⁷ See Williams' discussion of this gnome, 38-40.

Without relinquishing glory among mortals, won by noble earthly deeds, the Seafarer wishes for glory among angels, won by corresponding cosmic victories against the devil. The contempt for worldly values favored by the true peregrinus pro amore Dei is missing here. Instead, heroic gnome is amplified into ethical lesson, the warrior's narrow field expanded to include moral as well as physical battles.

Moreover, in the lines that follow, The Seafarer poet uses the ubi sunt theme to lament the passing of a worldly, materialistic society which the Christian aesthete could only condemn. The Wanderer's loving use of detail is not matched here but there is a similar sense of desolation, of irrevocable loss. The Seafarer, however, unlike the Wanderer, knows precisely to what his loss can be attributed. Like Lywarch Hen and the Old Woman of Beare, he believes that the best have been diminished through old age and death, and that there is no one to replace them.

Lines 88b-96 blame age both for the humbling of the earth's splendor and the destruction of the individual. The lines are strongly gnomic, beginning with "Blæd is gehnæged" and continuing with simple present tenses, the third person and the comparison with "swa" in line 90. In 94-96 a series of negatives creates a strong anaphoric conclusion to the lament:

Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma, þonne him þæt
feorg losað,
ne swete forswelgan ne sar gefelan,
ne hond onhreran ne mid hyge þencan.

(Nor may his body then, when he loses that spirit,
taste sweets or feel pain,
nor may the hand move, nor with the mind think.)

(The Seafarer 94-6)

In my discussion of The Wanderer (p. 142 above), I cited the belief in the degeneration of man and his world which was popular among classical and early Christian encyclopediasts and historians. The conviction that man and nature were in a decline, were growing corrupt and impotent in comparison to earlier ages, was used by Christian authors to foster contemptus mundi, to encourage repudiation of the world and desire for a heavenly home. However, the nostalgia for the times of heroism, for the "splendor of all the earth's wealth" which we find in The Wanderer and The Seafarer fits badly with the austerity and disdain for worldly power and wealth seen in the Christian tradition. As with other sapiential passages in the lyrics, the Seafarer's lament may be seen as having roots in two traditions. The homilies and tracts of the church fathers may certainly have lent sanction to such belief but secular Celtic and Germanic wisdom comes much closer to the mood and phrasing of the poem itself.

The Old Woman of Beare, for example, bewails her own senility:

1. Ebb-tide has come to me as to the sea; old age makes me yellow; though I may grieve thereat, it approaches its food joyfully.

25. I see on my cloak the stains of age; my reason has begun to deceive me; grey is the hair which grows

through my skin; the decay of an ancient tree is like this.

26. My right eye has been taken from me to be sold for a land that will be for ever mine; the left eye has been taken also to make my claim to that land more secure.¹⁷⁸

This catalogue is interspersed with the comparison of the present and the past which I discussed above.

In "Description of Winter" from the Finn Cycle's Colloquy of Ancient Men, Cailte says, on a cold winter's night, "Today I am old and aged; few men do I recognize." In two other poems, Oisín marks the passing of youth by the look of his hands and the loss of his golden hair. Oisín accepts age, "My springtide course is ended," and faces its humiliations:

The little heap of fragments you break for this wretched fasting wretch: a morsel of it is on a stone, a morsel on a bone, a morsel on this withered hand.¹⁷⁹

In Saxo Grammaticus, Starkad the Old Spearsman delineates senility thus:

Old age smites alike the eyes and the steps of men, robs the warrior of his speech and soul, tarnishes his fame by slow degrees, and wipes out his deeds of honour. It seizes his failing limbs, chokes his panting utterance, and numbs his nimble wit. . . . Old age crushes noble arts, brings down the memorials of men of old, and scorches ancient glories up; shatters wealth, hungrily gnaws away the worth and good of virtue, turns athwart

¹⁷⁸ Early Irish Lyrics 75 and 81.

¹⁷⁹ Early Irish Lyrics, "The Description of Winter and Memory of the Past" 155, "These Hands have been Withered" 167, and "Once I was Yellow Haired" 169.

and disorders all things.

I myself have felt the hurtful power of injurious age, I, dim-sighted, and hoarse in my tones and in my chest.¹⁸⁰

Whether or not personal deterioration through age is specifically seen as a microcosm of the degeneration of the nation or the world, all of these old people compare the present age unfavorably with the glorious past of their youth. The Seafarer, perhaps, has not yet grown old. But his peers and "all the splendor of the earth's wealth" (81) which they had at their command have gone. In lines 97-102 he describes what is, perhaps, the most powerful emblem of its passing.

Here the heathen practice of burying the dead with gold and gifts is seen as ineffective, although it is not condemned outright. Riches and generosity with riches once assured easy passage into the next life, but now they have no force against a righteous God. There is no haven from his judgment and the grave may not be softened, nor the way of the dead eased.

The Christian faith provided the Anglo-Saxons with an intelligible vision of the after-life. It illuminated the unknown for those of the faith. But it also cracked the insularity of the heroic ethic by introducing the concept of

¹⁸⁰ Gwynn Jones, "The Angry Old Men," Scandinavian Studies, Essays presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach, ed. Carl Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis (Seattle, Wash.: U of Washington P, 1965) 61. The translation is Oliver Elton's, The Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus, vol. II (London: Norroena Society, 1907), 490-1.

accountability after death. The gold, the honor among men, the bravery in battle and stoicism in affliction upon which the secular ethic was based had to yield to, or be transmuted into, a code which called for the humble individual's relinquishment of earthly values in the hope of salvation after death. Lines 103 ff., although mutilated and often obscure, show the poet's attempt to reconcile the old gnostic code and the new faith.

The last twenty-one lines of The Seafarer have been variously attributed to interpolation or to another poem begun in a lost folio of The Exeter Book. Line 103 is the first line of folio 83a, which is in turn the first page of a quire. However, John C. Pope points out in "Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries" that the possibility of a lost folio is unlikely. Since line 102 ends one intact quire and line 103 begins another, an entire quire of the manuscript would have to be missing in order to justify lines 103 ff. belonging to another poem. There is no evidence that this is so.¹⁸¹

Moreover, 103-124, despite occasional obscurities and significant mutilation, show clear and consistent links to the poem to which they are attached, to the gnostic lyric in general, and to the sapiential tradition. In 103, for example, the dread or awe of God is attributed, at least in

¹⁸¹ John C. Pope, "Palaeography and Poetry: some solved and unsolved problems of the Exeter Book," Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays presented to N. R. Ker, ed. M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar Press, 1978) 32-4.

part, to his power as creator:

Micel biþ se meotudes egsa, forþon hi seo molde
 oncyrræð;
 se gestapelade stiþe grundas,
 eorþan sceatas ond uprodor.

(Great is the dread of the Ruler, by whom the earth
 turns;
 he established the firm foundations,
 the earth's surface and the heavens.)

(The Seafarer 103-4)

The formidable and mysterious act of universal creation is
 seen as cogent proof of divine power in other Old English
 poems:

God sceal mon ærest hergan
 fægre, fæder userne, forþon þe he us æt
 frymþe geteode
 lif ond lænne willan . . .

He us geþonc syleð,
 missenlicu mod, monge reorde.
 Feorhcynna fela fæpmeþ wide
 eglond monig. Eardas rume
 meotud arærde for moncynne,
 ælmihtig god, efenfela bega
 þeoda ond þeawa.

(One must first praise God
 beautifully, our father, since he at the creation
 granted us
 life and frail will . . .)

He gives us thought,
 (our) various spirits, many languages.
 Many an island embraces widely
 many kinds of life. Dwellings far and wide
 the ruler reared for mankind,
 the almighty god, an even number of both
 peoples and customs.)

(Maxims IA, 4b-6a and 12b-18a)

Links to the gnostic collections become more specific in the lines which follow, 103-105. Yet these lines also remain closely connected to themes found earlier in the lyric. As in The Wanderer the sapiential tradition is called upon to supplement belief in a Christian god with ethical guidance of secular relevance. Again, elemental and heroic gnomes are for the most part absent. The gnomes of conduct predominate here and the debt to the Maxims collections is quite specific.

1. Dol biþ se þe him his dryhten ne ondrædeþ; cymeð
him se deað unþinged.

(Foolish is he who does not fear his lord; death comes to him uninvited.)

(The Seafarer 106)

Dol biþ se þe his dryhten nat, to þæs oft cymeð
deað unþinged.

(Foolish is he who knows not his lord, to him often death comes uninvited.)

(Maxims IA 35)

2. Stieran mon sceal strongum mode, ond þæt on stapelum
healdan,
on gewis werum, wisum clæne,
scyle monna gehwylc mid gemete healdan
wiþ leofne ond wið laþne

(A man must rule his spirit firmly, and hold it on course,
(and be), in dealing with men, pure in his ways,
each man must with moderation treat
with friend and with foe)

(The Seafarer 109-12)

Styran sceal mon strongum mode.

These are not, however, merely ready-made aphorisms, dropped intact into a closing catalogue. The emphases throughout are consistent with the poem's earlier tone and its details. In line 106, The Seafarer poet uses dread of God, not the knowledge called for in Maxims IA, as preparation for death (cf. 100-3 and 39-43). In 109 he continues the discussion of proper conduct of the individual which is a keystone of The Wanderer (see pages 128-133 above).¹⁸² The analogous Maxims IA passage deals with the education of youth. Finally The Seafarer 115b-116 asserts the ascendancy of wyrd and of God over "monnes gehygd." The mind or spirit of man has been throughout the central, ranging force of the lyric. Here, as the persona humbles himself, he grants the might of the omnipotent powers over the individual's spirit.

The conventional closing lines of The Seafarer are an amplified version of The Wanderer's last verses. The homiletic "uton" urges us to think on a heavenly home and how we might reach it and to labor for "ecan eadignesse" "in lufan Dryhtnes." Thanks is offered to God for man's salvation.

Conclusions

The Wanderer and The Seafarer chart the acquisition of wisdom through deprivation. The deprivation suffered involves personal isolation, grief and extreme physical hardship. Against these conditions the personae test the re-

¹⁸² For discussion of readiness for death, see pages 43-44 of Chapter One; for self-control, see pp. 11-12 and 51, also in Chapter One.

ceived wisdom which survives for us in the gnostic collections. From the outer reaches of exile they look with mixed nostalgia and disgust upon a heroic society gone weak and corrupt. And, as ancient values are tested and reforged, the more recent faith of Roman missionaries and Celtic peregrini is invoked.

Do they arrive at wisdom? And if so, how can their sapience be described? The crucial abandonment of illusion which is found in The Wanderer lines 36 ff., 41 ff., and 51 ff. and The Seafarer lines 44-46 results in the anhaga's unflinching contemplation of the ruins of a beloved society, its feasting and its battles, its comradeship and the beauty of its gold. This meditation in turn yields the inevitable conclusion that all men and their wealth must pass, that nothing of this world will survive. But the eschatological thrust of his knowledge is tempered by the exile's true affection for all this that vanishes. He does not, as the Christian fathers would have him do, repudiate the temporal pleasures of that imperfect secular sphere in which he once prospered. Rather, he remains true to the gnostic insistence on stoicism while hoping for a compensatory home in heaven.

The exile's arrival at wisdom is achieved in each poem through the increasingly gnostic character of the verses. This is particularly evident in the variations cited for each lyric. As variants are repeated they become less descriptive and more reflective, less concerned with the individual's story and more involved with the exile type.

Similarly, the lyrics' language as a whole develops distance, detachment and general applicability as the poems progress. These poems are laments which transmute grief into gnore, but they are also lessons which never cease to grieve.

Chapter Three

Nowhere in Old English poetry is lyric as successfully informed by gnome as in The Wanderer and The Seafarer. Nevertheless, few Anglo-Saxon lyrics are without a gnomic strain. Although several of the Exeter Book's laments fail to meet all the criteria of the gnomic lyric (see Chapter Two, pages 104-113), in all but one of them complaint and grief are tempered by the inherited wisdom of the sapiential collections. In all but one, the poet has attempted to amplify an interior monologue through fragments of public ethic and belief.¹ Of the poems discussed below The Wife's Lament and The Riming Poem will be defined as gnomic lyrics. I believe the second half of Resignation to be part of a gnomic lyric and Deor has subsumed enough of the markers which identify the genre to qualify as an experiment in the form.

The Wife's Lament

The Wife's Lament is the only lyric apart from The Wanderer which is not compromised by mutilation of the manuscript or extreme formal experimentation. It lacks the subtle transitions and sophisticated development of the two exile lyrics, but its voice is honest, direct and moving, its use of gnomes clear and consistent. Moreover, an examination of the poem as gnomic lyric rather than as elegy

¹ The exception is Wulf and Eadwacer which seems to me to be a lyric cry unmediated by gnome.

will, I believe, help us to understand the role of lines 42 ff., which have been a puzzle, and often an irritant, to critics and readers alike.

The Wife's Lament is found on folios 115a and 115b of The Exeter Book and presents no major paleographical problems. Attempts have been made to link the poem with The Husband's Message on folios 123a and 123b but, other than the modern English titles given to the two works, they seem to have little in common.² Instead, in substance and form, this brooding monologue can claim a close kinship with the male complaints studied in Chapter Two.

The generic resemblance of The Wife's Lament to The Wanderer and The Seafarer is striking. As in The Seafarer the singer announces her song and declares it to be about her own experiences, the source of her sorrows: "Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre, / minre sylfre sið" (I this lay make, concerning myself, full sad, [concerning] my own lot.). She identifies herself as an outcast (5). She too, like the Wanderer, has lost a lord and grieves at dawn (6-7). She is bereft of friends (16). Like her male counterparts, she sees before her ruined towns, empty halls, and she compares her lot with that of those more fortunate than

² For theories on the connection between them see Moritz Trautmann, "Die auflösungen der altenglischen rätsel," Anglia (Beiblatt) 5 (1894): 46-51. Also Rudolf Imelmann, "Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtungen," Forschungen zur altenglischen Poesie (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1907). For a summary of arguments against these theories see Krapp and Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III lvii.

she (33b-36).³

Finally, The Wife's Lament fulfills the requirements of the genre through a distinctly gnomic passage in its last twelve lines. The markers "a scyle," "sceal," and "x pam þe" as well as the content of these lines establish a kinship with the wisdom collections and complete the poem's identification as a gnomic lyric.

Unlike the two major lyrics studied above, however, The Wife's Lament closes in a spasm of personal grief. The gnomes here fail to force transcendence of the persona's plight; indeed they are seen by many readers as irrelevant to her difficulties. They are perhaps, a concession to genre, an acknowledgement of what such a lyric ought to contain, rather than evidence of the slow struggle into wisdom seen in The Seafarer and The Wanderer. Nevertheless, considered in the context of the sapiential tradition, these lines can be shown to relate directly to the poem's theme. This poem, like other more accomplished gnomic lyrics, combines the lyric lament, self-announced, of an exile with the traditional wisdom of her society.

Although I feel that, as in the two poems studied in Chapter Two, the elegiac element in The Wife's Lament is not

³ Matti Rissanen also surveys the similarities between The Wife's Lament, The Seafarer and The Wanderer. She notes the dawn-sorrow, solitude, lament, the loss of kin and friendship, the search for a new service and the memories of happier days. Rissanen concludes: "It is evident that The Wife's Lament is essentially a sample of the traditional treatment of the exile theme in Old English elegiac poetry." Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 70 (1969): 102.

dominant enough to warrant labelling it "elegy," nevertheless I regret having to quarrel with the rare point of agreement among critics of the poem. For, although the poem has long been considered elegiac, there have been perennial disagreements about who is lamenting what. The focus for much of the discord lies in the speaker herself. In the last 158 years everything from her sex to her humanity has come into question and these issues seem never to be resolved but rather to spring up again and again, like the heads of Hydra. The following paragraphs attempt a review of the various positions and some commentary on their usefulness.

Much of the quarreling concerning The Wife's Lament arises from two particular problems: first, the unwillingness on the part of some readers to accept a female persona for an Old English poem and, second, genuine perplexity concerning what has happened to the persona, when and why.

The first of these issues was confidently settled for the first time by two early editors of the poem. J. J. Conybeare and Benjamin Thorpe believed the poem to be about a male retainer and his lord, estranged from each other. The feminine inflections in "geomorre" (1b) and "minre sylfre" (2a) were, in Thorpe's opinion, scribal errors.⁴

⁴ John Josias Conybeare, ed. William Daniel Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London: Harding and Lepard, 1826) 245; Benjamin Thorpe, Codex Exoniensis: A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London, published for the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1842) 441-4.

Ettmüller disagreed, however, and entitled the poem "Vreccan vifes ged." He advocated no emendations.⁵ L. L. Schücking at first believed that the persona was a male retainer who had lost his first lord through murder, found another and then was banished for aiding the murderer.⁶ Nine years later, in 1917, Schücking abandoned this position and accepted a woman as a persona.⁷ The issue is not yet dead, however; Martin Stevens raised it again in 1968. He finds "husband" an unlikely translation for the references to a lost lord and suggests renaming the poem The Exile's Lament. He places it in a group with Deor and The Wanderer instead of with The Husband's Message.⁸

It is certainly sensible to exclude The Husband's Message from this group but it does not then follow that the wife must be male. Indeed, the femaleness of the persona may explain her more sedentary fate.

Stevens' theory requires the emendation of "sið" (2a) and "geomorre" (1b), as do other defenses of a male protagonist. He points out that "[t]he hypothesis that a woman is the speaker is based entirely on the occurrence of the three feminine forms geomorre, minre and sylfre in the

⁵ Ludwig Ettmüller, Engla and Seaxna Scopas and Boceras (Quedlinburg and Leipzig, 1850) 214-15.

⁶ L. L. Schücking, "Das Angelsächsische Gedicht von der Klage der Frau," Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur 48 (1906): 436-49.

⁷ Schücking, review of Ernst Sieper, Die altenglische Elegie in Englische Studien 51 (1917): 106.

⁸ Martin Stevens, "The Narrator of The Wife's Lament," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 69 (1968): 72-90.

opening lines of the poem."⁹ He sets out to prove that these forms do not necessarily result from a female persona. First he finds that "minre sylfre" could be feminine by either natural or grammatical agreement. "Sið," normally read as an accusative masculine noun, is emended by Stevens to siðe, feminine dative. He feels that this reading makes better syntactical sense. It also frees "minre sylfre" from agreement with the gender of the persona -- the "self" referred to could be male or female.¹⁰

The case against these emendations and against arguments for a male persona in general is ably made by Bruce Mitchell in a 1972 article.¹¹ Stevens complains about the use of sið as a direct object of the verb wrecan, saying that the accusative case here yields a "wrenched construction."¹² However, the problem is more likely one of translation than grammar. For, as Mitchell points out, the criticism fails to take into account similar usages of "secgan" and "sið" in The Seafarer (2a) and "wrecan" and "guman" in Order of the World (12b).¹³ Verbs of linguistic creation, like wrecan, seem to embrace a wider range of meaning than the common translations "utter, recite," would suggest. "Recreate in song" would better express the sense of the phrase in The Seafarer. Indeed, the use of song and

⁹ Stevens 73.

¹⁰ Stevens 75-80.

¹¹ Bruce Mitchell, "The Narrator of the Wife's Lament," Neophilologische Mitteilungen 73 (1972): 222-34.

¹² Stevens 77-78.

¹³ Mitchell 232-3.

journey as objects of the same verb may demonstrate how closely knit art and experience were for the Anglo-Saxon poet. In any case, the "conventional interpretation" is no longer "implausible" and that argument for emending "sið" fails.¹⁴

Next Stevens turns to "bi me ful geomorre." "Geomorre" here is usually parsed as feminine dative modifying "me." He argues that first and second person pronouns in Old English lack specific gender and therefore "words referring to them must stand in the common gender." He concedes, however, that there are instances of gender identification among pronouns and "constructions depending on natural gender concurrence" among these modifiers. Nevertheless, Stevens believes "[i]t is quite possible that ful geomorre was meant to be an adverb phrase signifying 'very sadly' or 'in great sadness.'" He would explain the doubled r as a late spelling variant.¹⁵

Bruce Mitchell concedes that geomorre can be read as an adverb but finds Stevens' analysis of "minre selfre sið" as a possessive adjective plus adjective agreeing with a feminine dative noun untenable. He points out that in such a construction the adjective is normally declined weak, and that self normally agrees with pronouns, not adjectives. Furthermore, the instances of a possessive adjective and self agreeing with a noun were found primarily in transla-

¹⁴ Stevens 77.

¹⁵ Stevens 81-2.

tions from Latin prose. Mitchell prefers to look to Christ 339, "þinre sylfre sunu," as justification for The Wife's Lament 2a.¹⁶

Behind the grammatical challenges to the Wife's femaleness lies a strong feeling, on the part of Stevens and others, that a female persona is at best not indicated by the tone and, at worst, is a flagrant distortion of the poem. Stevens finds that "there is not a single word in the entire poem which has purely feminine connotations" and he feels that a male persona would enhance the interpretation of "gemæcne monnan" (18), "folgað secan" (9), and "fæhðu" (26b). These phrases are much easier to understand if a man's relationship with his lord lies at the center of the poem.¹⁷

It is worth considering here, however, what tools were available to a poet who wished to compose a woman's complaint. In a highly traditional poetic, rooted in a heroic society, the vocabulary of domestic bliss and marital dissension may simply have been inadmissible. I believe that a close reading of the poem will show that the use of terms and concepts based in the lord-thane relationship adds dignity to the woman's plight and legitimizes her predicament. The issue of loyalty, the condition of friendlessness, the pressure of desire are common to the Wife and the Wanderer. It is natural that they share a vocabulary too.

¹⁶ Mitchell 230-1.

¹⁷ Stevens 83 ff.

We might consider here the description of a woman in Maxims IB. Here the woman's virtues and her role closely resemble those of a favored thane. Moreover, in the catalogue, she is cited next to the valorous eorl, full of battle:

Guð sceal in eorle,
 wig geweaxan, ond wif geþeon
 leof mid hyre leodum, leohtmod wesan,
 rune healdan, rumheort beon
 mearum ond maþmum. meodorædenne
 for gesiðmægen symle æghwær
 eodor æþelinga ærest gegretan,
 forman fulle to frean hond
 ricene geræcan, ond him ræd witan
 boldagendum bæm ætsomne.

(Fight must be in the hero,
 his valor must grow, and the woman shall thrive
 beloved among her people, be light in spirit,
 keep secrets, be of generous heart,
 liberal with horses and treasure, with the stock of
 liquor.)

Before the numerous company, at each feast
 the prince of nobles (she must) greet first,
 in the beginning, to the lord's hand,
 present the full cup, and keep counsel with him,
 possessing the house, both together.)

(Maxims IB 83-92)

These lines celebrate those qualities a noble woman might have in common with valued male retainers. Indeed the liberality of this wif would put her on a high social plane, closer to eorl than þegn. In any case the poet does not hesitate to credit a woman with the virtues of generosity and good counsel.

We can also learn from what lies unsaid in The Wife's Lament, for there is a sphere of activities denied most Anglo-Saxon women and, as Angela Lucas points out, it is

unrepresented in this poem.¹⁸ The poem lacks reference to the many accoutrements of male companionship in Anglo-Saxon England, such as merriment in the hall, armor, giving of valuable gifts, or hard-won battles. Such lacunae strongly suggest that the persona is not a bereft warrior, but another sort of intimate companion -- that is, a wife, ex-wife, or lover.

Professor Stevens' readings are the most cogent in this persona's long history of sex changes. However, it can be seen from the above review of the evidence that they are simply not compelling enough to warrant emending the manuscript. Nevertheless, he is not alone in finding a female persona incredible. Besides other adherents to a male speaker,¹⁹ we have M. J. Swanton's theory that the poem "is an exploration of the relationship between Christ and the Church,"²⁰ A. N. Doane's "literary curse" by a neglected pagan deity,²¹ and Elinor Lench's "poem of the living dead."²² It seems appropriate here, therefore, to review other instances of female soliloquists in Old English and in

¹⁸ Angela Lucas, "The Narrator of The Wife's Lament Reconsidered," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 70 (1969): 282-85 and 289-93.

¹⁹ Rudolph Bambah, "Another View of the Old English Wife's Lament," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 62 (1963): 303-9. But see Jane Curry's rebuttal in "Approaches to a Translation of the Anglo-Saxon The Wife's Lament," Medium Aevum 35 (1966): 187-98.

²⁰ M. J. Swanton, "The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message: A Reconsideration," Anglia 82 (1964): 289.

²¹ A. N. Doane, "Heathen Form and Christian Function in The Wife's Lament," Medieval Studies 28 (1966): 77-91.

²² Elinor Lench, "The Wife's Lament: A Poem of the Living Dead," Comitatus 1 (1970): 3-23.

Germanic literature in general, if only to lend our lyric persona an element of credibility. The following list is by no means comprehensive but it will serve to place the Old English wif in goodly company.

A woman is the chief protagonist for each of three Old English poems, Judith, Juliana and Elena. All three contain prominent speeches by women.²³ In The Advent Lyrics, Mary is cast as an instructor in mystery; she is called upon first to give a general explanation (Christ I 87b-103), then, in 195 ff., she reassures her husband, who is made distraught by rumor, that her pregnancy was miraculous and not adulterous.²⁴ Wulf and Eadwacer consists solely of a lament by a woman, who, like the Wife, is alone and beset with anxieties concerning her beloved.²⁵

In Icelandic literature, women speak both as seers and as heroines. In Sigrdrífumál, for example, Sigrdrífa has been made to sleep for many years by Óðinn in revenge for her slaying of Hjalmgunnar. The valkyrie will never fight again but must be married. Sigurth frees her from her sleep and in return she teaches him knowledge of all the worlds. Her teaching includes runes for victory, courage, seafaring, birth, medicine and wisdom, and ethical advice on truth-

²³ See especially Juliana's dialogue with her father, ll. 105 ff., and her last words, ll. 641 ff.. ASPR III 116 and 131; also, Elene's address to the Jews, ll. 288 ff., ASPR II 74-5; and, more briefly, Judith's prayer, ll. 83-94a, ASPR IV 101.

²⁴ Christ I, ASPR III 4.

²⁵ ASPR III 179.

saying, feuding, drinking, women, and so forth. Sigrdrífa's authoritative injunctions, delivered in the midst of great personal hardship, lend credence to the Wife's gnomic comments in 42-46.²⁶

Lament and wisdom figure prominently, together or apart, in many women's speeches. In Beowulf, the scop sings of Hildeburh, sister of Hnæf, the Danish king, and wife and mother of Jutes. Her son and brother die in fighting between the two peoples and Hildeburh is described as having reason to mourn the "decrees of destiny." "Nalles holinga Hoces dohtor / meotodsceaft bemearn" (Not at all without cause did Hoc's daughter bewail fate's decree.) (1076-77a). She who had once enjoyed "the greatest of the world's happiness" sees a royal brother and princely son committed to the flames of the funeral pyre. "Ides gnornode, / geomrode gidsum" (The woman mourned, sorrowed in songs.) (1117b-1118a).²⁷

Elsewhere in Beowulf, Wealhtheow, Hroðgar's queen, holds center stage. She is an accepted and accomplished public speaker. She begins by enjoining her husband, "freodrihten min," "goldwine gumena," to do his duty by the Geats and by his own people. She speaks of Hrothulf, Hroðgar's nephew, and reminds him of his obligations to his cousins (1169-87).

²⁶ Lee M. Hollander, trans., The Poetic Edda (Austin, Texas; U of Texas P, 1962) 233-40.

²⁷ Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1950) 40 and 42.

Gifts are presented to Beowulf; there is feasting and song. Then Wealhtheow speaks again. She commemorates the gifts: the neck-ring which once was Hygelac's, the rich robe. She eulogizes Beowulf and asks for his protection for her sons. She speaks eloquently and with authority:

Her is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe,
 modes milde, mandrihtne hold,
 þegnas syndon geþwære, þeod ealgearo,
 druncne dryhtguman doð swa ic bidde.

(Here each eorl is true to the other,
 of a kind spirit, loyal to his lord,
 the thanes are united, the people willing,
 the warriors, having drunk, will do as I ask.)

(1228-31)

Wealhtheow's part in the ceremonies of Heorot and Hildeburh's story as recounted by the scop bear witness to the range of roles played by women in Old English poetry. They are peace-weavers, mourners and wise folk; patrons, moral standard bearers and mistresses of ceremony. In Juliana and Elene they also take warlike action. Given these analogues, nothing in The Wife's Lament precludes identification of the persona as a woman.

However, none of the tales referred to here sheds light on the obscurity of the Wife's situation. Where is she and why? The lack of ready answers to these questions has given rise to several bizarre theories. Elinor Lench, for example, identifies the persona as an "earth-bound spirit, the victim of an unavenged murder." Her theory is intended to

explain the "bizarre" residence of the Wife.²⁸ Lench suggests that the crime referred to in line 20 is the murder of the Wife by her husband, that the dead woman reproaches and curses her husband from the grave or earth-cave.²⁹ In this view, references to exile are references to death and the persona is compared to barrow-wights, dead people haunting burial mounds.³⁰

It is not only the dead that are found in earth houses, however. Celtic and Icelandic sources contain frequent mention of caves or underground rooms for the living. These dwellings served a variety of purposes; they were sometimes constructed as hiding places, often connected by tunnels to a farmhouse. Such a room might protect an outlaw from pursuers, or householders from attack. In the Gisla Saga, the hero, outlawed for manslaughter, hides underground on several occasions. He first takes shelter with a woman named Vadil who often took in outlaws and had an underground room for this purpose. One exit opened into her kitchen and another led to the river.³¹

In later sagas underground chambers are used as protection for women against an invading foe. Bjorn of Denmark kept the young women of Aarhus in such a hideout after the

²⁸ Lench 12.

²⁹ Lench 15.

³⁰ Lench 17.

³¹ George Johnston, trans., The Saga of Gisli (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1963), ch. 23, 35. See also the Laxdoela Saga, M. Magnusson and H. Pálsson, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1975), ch. 49, 176.

death of their protector.³² When Gunnar the Swede raided Norway, Ragnald, the Northmen's elderly king, hid his daughter Drota in a cave lavishly equipped with supplies and attendants. Ragnald died in battle and Gunnar discovered Drota and forced her into marriage.³³

Other earth-houses served as residences for trolls or princesses with magical powers;³⁴ still others were prisons. In Hálfðánar saga Brönufostra and Fljótsdoela hin meiri, young women are found imprisoned in caves by trolls or giants.³⁵ In Thattr of Nornagest, the Guest tells the story of Byrnhild, who kills herself upon Sigurth's death. Her corpse, challenged by an ogress, tells its story. Byrnhild was Atle's daughter but was "assigned a home 'neath the shade of the oak."³⁶

In Celtic literature, references are briefer and less frequent:

My legs at full length
in an house of earth,

³² Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., Göngu-Hrólfs Saga (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1980), ch. 34, 114.

³³ Saxo Grammaticus, The Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus, trans. Oliver Elton (London: Norroena Society, 1907) Bk. 7, 445-9.

³⁴ Orvar Odd's Saga, in vol. II of Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda, ed. C. C. Rafn (Kaupmannahöfn, 1829). Pages 198 and 528 contain two versions of the saga's chapter 22. The word earth-house is used here. "i Jarðhusinu" are the women who live under ground.

³⁵ Margaret Schlauch summarized both of these sagas in Romance in Iceland (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1934) 14-15.

³⁶ Nora Kershaw, trans., Stories and Ballads of the Far Past (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1921) 31-3.

A chain of iron
About both ankles.

(The Gododdin st. 48)³⁷

The Celts also used the hollowed-out trunk of a large tree as a cave. In the Book of Lismore (c. 1411 A.D.), we hear that Saint Cellach is imprisoned in a hollow tree trunk before being murdered.³⁸ And in Suibne and Eorann, Eorann protests:

Though the king's son should lead me to carefree
banqueting halls, I should prefer to pass the night in
the narrow hollow of a tree with you, O husband, were it
in my power.³⁹

None of these tales is clearly analogous to The Wife's Lament. However, the prevalence of "earthhouses" in the sagas and the Celtic lyrics lends some credibility to the residence of the Anglo-Saxon Wife and encourages us to interpret the poem without recourse to "animated corpses"⁴⁰ or jealous pagan goddesses.⁴¹

Of course, the discovery of analogous details in other Germanic works does not eliminate a major obstacle for the reader of The Wife's Lament -- the poem's narrative obscurity. The inaccessibility of the woman's story renders it

³⁷ Joseph P. Clancy, trans., The Earliest Welsh Poetry (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1970) 48.

³⁸ 1000 Years of Irish Poetry, ed. Kathleen Hoagland (Old Greenwich, Ct.: The Devin-Adair Co., 1947) 109.

³⁹ Gerald Murphy, ed., Early Irish Lyrics (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970) 120-1.

⁴⁰ Lench 17.

⁴¹ Doane 88-89.

vulnerable to wide variety of distortions. The lyric is strewn with tantalizing specifics which do little to assuage our curiosity and which provide theorists with springboards for elaborate interpretations. It may well be that The Wife's Lament was composed as part of the Offa story, as Rickert and others have suggested.⁴² However, the poem yields too little evidence to support any definitive judgment along those lines.

In comparison with the Wanderer and the Seafarer, however, the Wife is garrulous, generous with details. We know of the Wanderer only that he buried his lord, lives at sea and dreams of lost comrades. The Seafarer tells us even less. Indeed, the problem of unexplained references is endemic in the poems we are studying. One might almost call narrative obscurity a characteristic of Old English gnomic lyrics. The Wife's story will probably never be fully exposed but a close look at the method of her lyric may clear some of the mist from its substance.

Like the poets of The Wanderer and The Seafarer, the author of The Wife's Lament weaves a narrative by repeating with variation. He does not play upon his motifs with the subtlety, precision and complexity of the other lyricists but a pattern is nevertheless discernible. Two sequences are involved and, if these are presented as poetic variations of one basic narrative line, then the poem's events

⁴² Edith Rickert, "The Old English Offa Saga," Modern Philology 2 (1905): 321-56.

and characters may become more intelligible.

The first sequence begins in line 6 and introduces the Wife's story;

My lord departed over the sea. (6-7a)
 I had dawn sorrow. Where was my prince? (7b-8)
 I travelled, seeking service, an exile. (9-10)⁴³

We hear then of hostile kin, of emotional separation as well as physical. Then comes the terrible command and its consequences:

Het mec hlaford min herheard niman,
 ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede,
 holdra freonda. Forþon is min hyge geomor,

(My lord commanded me to take up my abode here.
 I had few loved ones in this country,
 few kind friends. Wherefore is my spirit sorrowful.)

(The Wife's Lament 15-17)

These two elements, the lord's departure and the command, with their results, will soon be reiterated. But first a third item is inserted: the description of a "ful

⁴³ I have chosen to paraphrase these lines in order to elucidate the narrative thread. The actual lines, with my translation, read:

Ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
 ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
 hwær min leodfruma londes wære
 Ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,
 wineleas wræcca, for minre weapearfe.

(First my lord set off hence from the people
 over the tossing of waves; I had dawn-sorrow
 (wondering) where my prince of the land was.
 Then I departed to travel myself to seek service,
 a friendless outcast, for my dire need.)

(The Wife's Lament 6-10)

gemæcne monnan," the equal man who, like our narrator, is unfortunate, solemn, stoical and mindful of crime ("morþor hycgendne").⁴⁴ This companion can only be the lord whose departure created such sorrow. For the two vowed, often and with "bliþe gebæro," that death alone would part them, but that vow and their friendship have become null, as if they never were (21-5).⁴⁵ The Wife's description of this man, a match for her in spirit and misfortune, forms the third basis for variation.

The first repetition with variation harks back to the second element I have isolated, the command. Lines 27-32a repeat the lord's command to the Wife. The initial complaint, that she had few friends in "this country" is expanded into a full description of her place of exile.

Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,
 under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.
 Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad,

(He commanded me to live in the wood's grove,
 under an oak tree in this earth cave.
 Old is this earthhall, I am entirely worn out with
 longing,)

(The Wife's Lament 27-9)

The first line and the last half line repeat the substance of lines 15 and 17b, quoted on the previous page. The description of locus amplifies and makes concrete the emo-

⁴⁴ Morþor does not necessarily mean murder. See Bosworth and Toller "morþor" II and III.

⁴⁵ This interpretation agrees for the most part with W. W. Lawrence, "The Banished Wife's Lament," Modern Philology 5 (1908): 388-9.

tional deprivation alluded to in 16-17a. Then the poem moves on to a familiar topos, a description of ruined cities reclaimed by nature, of dwellings without joy (30-32a).⁴⁶

Lines 32b-41 return to the first element, the narrative of departure. "Ful oft mec her wraþe begeat / fromsip frean" (Full often grievously it seizes me here / my lord's departure.). Again the narrative fact is elaborated, loaded with emotional freight. He departs while other lovers lie together; she walks alone, at dawn, in her place of exile, beset with desire (35-41). In this more detailed portrayal of the Wife's plight the crucial distinction between a man's fate and a woman's is made immediate and personal. Her absent lord travels. He suffers hardship and loneliness but he has the world in which to seek relief. He has some influence over his fate. He can leave. The Wife, on the other hand, "sittan mot sumorlangne dæg." For her there is no relief to be found at sea, or in distant lands. She has been commanded to live, and stay she must, among hostile people, in a dreary dwelling. Her sex denies her the release which comes from travelling.

Finally, the poems' third element, a description of the equal man, is repeated. Here, in line 42, as in The Wanderer and The Seafarer, the poet moves from the specific and personal to the general and gnomic. Critics have worried over the abruptness of the transition into this passage

⁴⁶ See, for example, The Wanderer 73-80a, 85-7.

and over its lack of specific reference to the preceding lyric. These are both characteristics of the gnomic lyric, however, and not, in my view, sufficient reasons for doubting the integrity of the poem. Moreover, a glance at the passage alongside its variant reveals several links not hitherto noted.⁴⁷

In lines 18-20 the "ful gemæcne monnan" is "heardsæligne, hygegeomorne" (unfortunate, sorrowful in spirit). In lines 42-45, she recommends that he be of "geomormod, / heard heorhtan geþoht" (sorrowing mind, / stern heart's thought). In line 20, a tightly constructed pair of rhymed verses, she sees him "mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne" (concealing his mind, contemplating crime). In the variant he must have a blithe bearing despite his "breostceare, / sinsorgna gedreag" (heart's sorrow, / the constant trouble he suffers) (44b-45a).

This concealing of grief and anxiety behind a cheerful demeanor is a frequent admonition in wisdom literature, as we have seen.⁴⁸ In both of these passages, line 20 and lines 44b-45a, the lover or lord is described as being in some sort of trouble. However, line 20 is substantially complicated for the modern reader by the use of "morþor." Although the cognate "murder" is the first cited meaning for

⁴⁷ Lawrence also believed that these lines were connected to lines 17-35, although he does not call it variation. "The Banished Wife's Lament" 389-90.

⁴⁸ I have reviewed the relevant aphorism in connection with a similar piece of advice in The Wanderer. See page 128-9 of Chapter 2.

the noun in Bosworth and Toller, several other interpretations are possible. Definition II is "mortal sin, great wickedness" and III is "torment, deadly injury, great misery." There is no evidence in the rest of the poem to indict the man as a criminal and lines 44b ff. indicate that he may well be a victim, contemplating the deadly injury done to himself by others.

eac þon breostceare,
 sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong
 eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
 feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð
 under stanhlife storme behrimed,
 wine werigmod, wætre befloweren
 on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
 micle modceare; he gemon to oft
 wynlicran wic.

(The Wife's Lament 44b-52a)

Most translations of these lines have read the subjunctive "sy" as an injunction: "May all his worldly joy be from his very self, may he be outlawed full widely in far lands." This has led to the belief on the part of Stanley Greenfield and others that the Wife is cursing her lord, or his enemy.⁴⁹ Problems with this interpretation arise when

⁴⁹ Stanley Greenfield, "The Wife's Lament Reconsidered," Publications of the Modern Language Association 68 (1953): 911-12. But in Continuations and Beginnings, Greenfield changes his mind and translates the first "sy" as "even if" and the second as "if" so that the passage reads, in his paraphrase:

the young man (her husband) will in the nature of things ever have a sorrowing mind, etc., beneath a happy exterior, even if (sy) all of his worldly joy depends on himself alone (i.e. he, being fortunate, calls the turn) . . . if it be (sy), on the other hand, that her freond (husband) is an exile, like herself, on dreorsele . . .

we consider the gnomic definition which precedes 44b. Here the necessary attributes for a young man undergoing hardship are set out in true sapiential fashion. Another subjunctive, scyle, governs this list:

A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
 heard heortan gepoht, swylce habban sceal
 bliþe gebæro, eac þon breostceare,
 sinsorgna gedreag,

(The Wife's Lament 42-4a)

I believe a different translation of these subjunctive verbs must be considered. In this version the Wife creates a possible situation, an imagined predicament:

Ever a young man might have to be of sorrowing mind,
 stern heart's thought, such a one must have
 a blithe bearing, despite the heart's sorrow
 and the constant trouble he suffers, if all his
 lifetime's joy be
 from his very self, if he be outlawed full widely
 in far lands. That friend of mine remains
 under stone cliff, iced in storm,
 a friend weary in mind, overflowed with water
 in the dreary hall. He suffers, my friend,
 great mind-sorrow; he remembers too often
 the pleasant dwelling.

(The Wife's Lament 42-52a)⁵⁰

se min wine will endure great anguish of spirit; he
 will then remember a happier dwelling: wynlicran wic.

Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966) 168.

⁵⁰ In support of this translation see the following definitions in Bosworth and Toller: weorold VII: "a person's lifetime;" eom, subj. = si, sy: "if I," "if thou," "if he be;" se I(2)b: "a demonstrative adjective preceded by a pronoun." Examples used are "Ða mine sælþa" and "se mine weorðscipe" from King Alfred's Boethius.

In this reading the poet asserts the gnomic truths by which the exile must govern his behavior. He must keep a gay countenance even if he is suffering the rigors of outlawry with only himself to look to for joy. "Morþor" could be either the crime which brought with it a sentence of exile or the crimes of others against him. In either case, the imagining of his predicament brings memories flooding in and the Wife sees him clearly, strangely hemmed in by cliff, ice and flowing water.

Here, again, as in the description of the "eorðscræfe," there is a conjunction of physical details which is unlike any other scene in Old English. Here, again, we may turn to Old Norse for elucidation. In Icelandic literature, several heroes find themselves crouching in dark caves behind waterfalls. In Grettissaga, Grettir, who is, like the Wife's friend, an outlaw, dives into a waterfall in order to hunt for the remains of men destroyed by a she-troll. He is accompanied by a priest sceptical of his plans:

(Grettir) got ready for the descent: he wore few clothes, and girded himself with a short sword, but had no other weapon. Then he plunged down from the cliff and into the waterfall. The priest glimpsed the soles of his feet, but had no idea what happened to him after that. Grettir dived under the waterfall; this was a difficult thing to do, because the eddy was so strong that he had to dive down to the riverbed before he could get behind the waterfall. Inside, there was a ledge, and he climbed up on it. Above it, and behind the waterfall, there was a huge cave under the cliff edge where the river came crashing down.

Inside the cave, Grettir found "an immensely huge giant of terrifying appearance;" they fight and the giant is slain. Grettir recovers the bones of two men and leaves them on the church porch with the following verse inscribed in runes:

Alone, I made my way
 into the gloomy gorge.
 The rock-splitting cascade
 gave me a cold wet greeting.
 The rushing water-fall
 embraced me forcibly.
 In this ogre-infested place,
 The eddy slapped my shoulder.⁵¹

In Gull-póris saga, the hero, Doris, sets out to seize the gold hoarded by a family of dragons. The lair is in a cave hidden behind a waterfall.⁵²

In Gullbrá og Skeggi, Skeggi does terrible battle with a witch in her cave which is, again, under a waterfall. As in many of these stories, these falls are very high and drop into a deep pool, with a whirlpool.⁵³ In Grettissaga and Gullbrá og Skeggi, a companion promises to wait at the top of the falls with a rope but then runs away either out of fear or out of the belief that the hero has died in his struggle with a supernatural foe.

Once again, none of these tales is precisely analogous to The Wife's Lament. Nevertheless, it seems likely that

⁵¹ Grettir's Saga, trans. Denton Fox and Hermann Pálsson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974) ch. 66, 139-40.

⁵² For Gull-póris saga and Gullbrá og Skeggi I have relied on Jacqueline Simpson's translations in Beowulf and Its Analogues, ed. G. N. Garmonsway (NY: E. P. Dutton, 1971).

⁵³ Gullbrá og Skeggi is on page 328. Simpson 324-7.

the exiled lover or husband in the Old English poem has found himself in a situation not dissimilar to that of Grettir.

The persona of The Wife's Lament never achieves the transcendence of personal misfortune reached by the Wanderer and the Seafarer. With the exception of the last three verses, the poem's gnomic content is restricted to the description of the man and behavior appropriate to him. The Wife herself succumbs utterly to grief, to her mind's sorrow, and her consuming desire for her beloved. She does not strive to surmount her emotions.

Nevertheless, despite the restricted and compartmentalized use of gnomes, the poem cannot do without them. They return us to the Wife's wandering lover. They demand that the bold countenance, the blithe bearing which had once signified the bravado of love now be maintained in the absence of the beloved, in the chill reality of exile. Then, as in the two major lyrics, the single voice, the isolated persona, emerges through gnome as representative of a wider condition: "We bið þam þe sceal / of langope leofes abidan" (Woe is to the one who must / await the loved one in longing.) (52b-53).

Despite the Wife's attempts to make sense of her plight, in the end wisdom serves experience. The transmutation of suffering into sapience achieved by the Wanderer and the Seafarer is aborted. In those poems experience is subsumed into the gnomic expression of larger issues. In

The Wife's Lament, the gnome is used as an expression of the experience. It becomes a sign, a validating sign, of her bereft condition. The last three verses maintain that her sorrow is justified because woe rightfully belongs, is natural to, those who await absent loved ones.

Resignation

A similar failure to transcend is evident in the second part of Resignation, which we shall call Resignation B. Here, however, unlike the Wife, the persona is reduced to self-justification, to proclaiming himself "bitterly wronged" (110b). Nevertheless, Resignation B, which includes lines 70 to 118, follows the gnomic lyric pattern closely enough to warrant inclusion in our group.

For many years the work beginning on folio 117b and ending on 119b of The Exeter Book was either read as a garbled amalgam of prayer and lament or identified as one to the exclusion of the other. Sieper and Schücking saw the poem as a lament: "Klage eines Vertriebenen;"⁵⁴ Mackie calls it The Exile's Prayer;⁵⁵ Wülker and later Chambers label it simply as a Prayer;⁵⁶ Krapp and Dobbie believe that the journey referred to in lines 98b-101a is not an

⁵⁴ Ernst Sieper, Die altenglische Elegie (Strässburg: Karl Trübner, 1915); L. L. Schücking, Kleines angelsächsisches Dichterbuch (Cothen, 1919) 22.

⁵⁵ W. S. Mackie, The Exeter Book, part II, Early English Text Society no 194 (London: Oxford UP, 1934) 164.

⁵⁶ Richard P. Wülker, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie (Leipzig, 1894); R. W. Chambers, ed., The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry, facs., also edited by Max Förster and Robin Flower (London: Percy Lund, Humphries, 1933) 42.

actual voyage of exile but a symbolic portrayal of spiritual deprivation.⁵⁷ The problem throughout these interpretations is the severe disjunction of the poem's two halves. We do not have in Resignation a lyrical beginning informed by a gnomic conclusion. Rather the disjointed, conventional prayer of lines 1-69 is followed by an autobiographical lament in 70-118. The syntax and tone of the first sixty-nine lines differ radically from those of the last forty-eight. The prayer of the former proceeds through a series of imperatives: "deliver me . . . instruct me . . . give me . . . raise my spirits . . . sustain me . . ." and so on. The supplicant praises the Lord (2b-9) and asks for favor (10-15a). He confesses to nameless evil deeds (19-21; 25a-28) and begs for sustenance and protection against the "arch thief" (15b-16b) and "arrogant (fallen) angels" (52b-60a). Finally he offers thanks for favors granted him in spite of his sins (64b-69).

Beginning with line 70 the poem ceases its direct address to God and begins a disjointed monologue which revolves around personal hardship and exile, apparently resulting from sins committed inadvertently (76b-78a). Unlike lines 1-69, the complaint contains several gnomic moments, although here, as in The Wife's Lament, lament overwhelms wisdom.

If disjunction were the only problem facing readers of Resignation, we would not be justified in bifurcating the

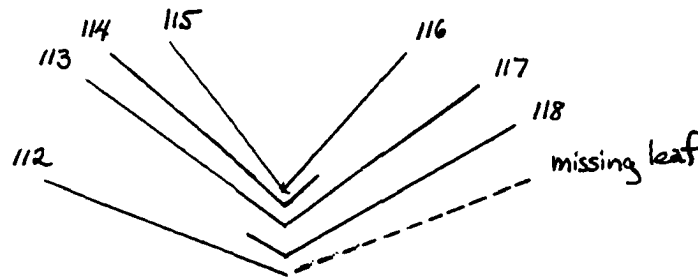
⁵⁷ ASPR III lx.

poem.⁵⁸ In 1976, however, Alan Bliss and Allen Frantzen discerned stronger additional evidence which implies that the poem is indeed two discrete fragments. They hypothesize that Gathering XV, which ends with Resignation line 69 (folio 118b), is incomplete. Unlike most gatherings in The Exeter Book, XV has seven leaves, not eight. Folio 112 is a single leaf, 113 a double (with 117), 114 a single, 115 and 116 a double, 117 a double (with 113), and 118 a single. Single leaves are common enough in the manuscript but with the exception of folios 118 and 112 they never occur on the outside of a gathering and they always have a parchment stub which anchors them through the binding. It can be seen from the sketch on the next page that folio 112 violates both of these norms.

Bliss and Frantzen contend that a leaf is missing from the end of Gathering XV, a leaf which would have completed the outer quarto. Resignation begins on folio 117 and continues into Gathering XVI (folios 119-125). If indeed a leaf is missing, then Resignation 1-69 may be the beginning of one poem and 70-118 the end of another. Bliss and Frantzen flesh out their detective work with an analysis of the text. They find that:

1. "mid," the last word on folio 118 verso, does not fit the sense or the metre of line 69;

⁵⁸ ASPR III lx-lxi.



Gathering XV

2. lines 1-69 use the imperative and the optative and address God in the second person whereas lines 70-118 contain no imperatives, no optatives and no direct address; and

3. lines 1-69 use sawol and gæst whereas lines 70-118, like The Wanderer and The Seafarer, use ferþ and mod to refer to the soul or spirit.

The two segments are clearly distinguishable in syntax and theme.⁵⁹

Finally, I have noticed another piece of physical evidence which lends support to the theory of a gap between folios 118 and 119. The burn which defaces the last thirteen folios of The Exeter Book fades much more rapidly between these two leaves than between folios 119 and 120, 120 and 121 and so on to 130. Folio 119 has a two-inch long hole in the middle of the page as well as two holes in the side margins. Folio 118 has only a smudge in the middle of the page and two quite smaller holes in the margins. It seems likely therefore that when the book was damaged another leaf stood between the two folios.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Alan Bliss and Allen Frantzen, "The Integrity of Resignation," Review of English Studies ns 27 (1976): 385-392.

⁶⁰ This is my observation, made after studying the facsimile of The Exeter Book, ed. Chambers, Förster and

Having established the existence of two separate poems, Bliss and Frantzen go on to analyze the fragments, now called Resignation A and B. They reject the designation of peregrinatus for Resignation B because the persona shows no contrition. Rather, they see the poem not as a religious piece but as "a psychological study of a mind:"

Freed from its spurious association with the second-rate piety of Resignation A, Resignation B emerges as something quite unlike anything else in Old English: it is a dramatic monologue by the kind of man who never succeeds in any of his enterprises, and who blames everyone but himself for his failure.⁶¹

Moreover, Bliss and Frantzen find that Resignation B is completely unrelated to The Wanderer or The Seafarer, or to any other Old English poem.⁶²

The evidence presented above for a lacuna in the manuscript is convincing. However, Bliss and Frantzen's reading of Resignation B as a portrait in self-pity and failure deprives the fragment of a context in which it rightfully belongs. As will be seen in the following analysis, the poem has a number of things in common with the gnomic lyrics studied above.

When read as a fragment, unencumbered by Resignation A, Resignation B bears a strong resemblance to the other gnomic lyrics. Although the poem has not the masterful use of variation nor the mounting intricacy of image found in The

Flower,

⁶¹ Bliss and Frantzen 397.

⁶² Bliss and Frantzen 400-1.

Wanderer or The Seafarer, it does convey the anguish of the lone man trapped in a web of circumstance. The exile of Resignation B finds himself unwillingly pitted against the laws of God and the laws of man, without the resources to survive the penalties he has incurred (101b-104). He faces terrible punishment for an action he did not know was criminal:

Huru me frea witeð
 sume þara synna þe ic me sylf ne conn
 ongietan gleawlice. Gode ic hæbbe
 abolgen, brego moncynnes; forþon ic þus bittre wearð
 gewitnad for þisse worulde, swa min gewyrhto wæron
 micle fore monnum, þæt ic martirdom
 deopne adreoge.

(However, the lord blames me
 for one of those sins which I myself could not
 perceive clearly. I have offended God,
 ruler of mankind; therefore I thus bitterly come
 to be punished before this world, just as my deeds were
 greatly before men, so I martyrdom
 suffer deeply.)

(Resignation B 76b-82a)

The structure of Resignation B is far more haphazard than that of the major lyrics but the characteristic markers are there, nevertheless. Like The Seafarer and The Wife's Lament, there is an announcement of the self-song: "Ic bi me tylgust / secge þis sarspel ond ymb sip spræce" (I chiefly concerning myself / make this lament and about a journey speak) (96b-97). Line 99 seems to be incomplete but may have once introduced a passage like The Seafarer's lines

12b ff. and 55b ff.⁶³ The persona is described as an exile: "forþon ic afyсед eom / earm of minum eþle" (therefore I am impelled / destitute from my homeland) (88b-89a). He is deprived of material possessions and friends: "nah ic fela goldes / ne huru þæs freondes" (I have not many things of gold, / nor yet many friends) (101b-102a).

In lines 89b ff., the requisite gnomic passage encapsules the exile's plight:

Ne mæg þæs anhoga,
leodwynna leas, leng drohtian,
wineleas wræcca, (is him wrað meotud),
gnornað on his geoguþe,
ond him ælce mæle men fullestað,
ycað his yrmpu, ond he þæt eal þolað,
sarcwide secga, ond him bið a sefa geomor,
moð morgenseoc.

(Nor may the anhaga
without the joy of his people, live long in that way,
a friendless exile, (to him belongs the wrath of the
lord).
He mourns in his youth,
and each time men aid him
they increase his miseries and he suffers all that,
the reproaches of man and to him belongs entirely a
sorrowing soul,
a spirit sick at dawn.)

(Resignation B 89b-96a)

As in the other gnomic lyrics, the first person here gives way to the third. The exile is characterized as a type, deprived of compatriots, spurned by men, full of dawn-sorrow. Verses 91b and 95b are particularly gnomic, using the copulative plus an indirect object to signify the right and

⁶³ See Krapp and Dobbie's notes on line 99. ASPR III 355.

proper appropriation of intangibles -- in this case the wrath of God and a sorrowful mind.⁶⁴ And of course the passage quoted above contains several of the genre's lexical touchstones: "anhoga," "wineleas wræcca," "sefa geomor," "mod morgenseoc."

Gnomes and traditional sapiential ideas are used throughout Resignation B. Its initial lines, which may have once been at the midpoint of the whole poem, recall the centuries-old insistence on stoicism and self-control:

hwæpre ic me ealles þæs ellen wylle
 habban ond hlyhhan ond me hyhtan to,
 frætwian mec on ferðweg ond fundian
 sylf to þam siþe þe ic asettan sceal,
 gæst gearwian, ond me þæt eal for gode þolian
 blipe mode, nu ic gebunden eom
 fæste in minum ferþe.

(yet I will in all this
 have courage and laugh and look forward with hope,
 (I will) prepare myself to be on the soul's way and
 hasten
 myself to that journey which I must make,
 ready my spirit, and myself so that entirely for God I
 must
 suffer with a blithe spirit, now I am bound
 fast in my soul.)

(Resignation B 70-76a)

Since the preceding lines are lost to us, the meaning of this passage will never be entirely clear. But the speaker seems to be resolved on a countenance which disguises pain under a carefree demeanor, an approach recommended by the Wife also.⁶⁵ To do this he must bind himself fast "in minum

⁶⁴ See Chapter One, p. 35, for a discussion of this gnomic construction.

⁶⁵ See The Wife's Lament 43b-45a.

ferpe," as the Wanderer knows an eorl must do (The Wanderer 11b-14).⁶⁶

As in the other gnomic lyrics, sapiential advice and resolutions concerning individual behavior are joined to gnomes of a more elemental or cosmic sort. Thus:

Wudu mot him weaxan, wyrde bidan,
tanum lædan; ic for tæle ne mæg
ænigne moncynnes mode gelufian
eorl on eple.

(Wood might itself grow, wyrd abide,
lead with spreading branches; I for evil speaking may
not
any of the mind of mankind trust,
any eorl in the homeland.)

(Resignation B 105-108a)

This pairing of the inevitable and necessary growth of the tree and the maliciousness of man is also found in Maxims IC:

Licgende beam læsest groweð.
Treo sceolon brædan ond treow weaxan,
sio geond bilwitra breost ariseð.
Wærleas mon ond wonhydig,
ætrenmod ond ungetreow,
þæs ne gymeð god.

(A fallen tree grows the least,
a tree must stretch out and faith grow,
that rises everywhere in the breasts of good people.
A false man and reckless,
venom-minded and untrue,
that one God does not care for.)

(Maxims IC 158-63)

⁶⁶ The Wanderer 11b-14.

Like the Wife, the exile in Resignation B is not transformed by hardship. He ends his plaint with a Germanic commonplace: "Giet biþ þæt selast, þonne mon him sylf ne mæg / wyrd onwendan, þæt he þonne wel þolige" (Yet that is best, when a man himself may not / change fate, that he may then endure it well.) (117-18).

Analysis of Resignation B will always be crippled by the loss of the poem's first part. However, the fragment yields evidence of both the lyric and the gnomic, of the exile's predicament and of his attempt to use his sapiential inheritance to respond to that predicament. There is enough here to warrant a characterization of Resignation B as another gnomic lyric.

THE RIMING POEM

The Riming Poem, on folios 94a-95b of The Exeter Book, does not suffer from incompleteness. However, it brings with it a handicap of a different sort. For the author of The Riming Poem is engaged in a formal experiment so extreme that grammar and lexicon have to be twisted to fit prosodic demands. To the Germanic exigencies of alliteration and stress this poet has added the terminal tyranny of rhyme. He rhymes every half line with another and in some instances carries a single rhyme for as many as seventeen verses (see lines 29-37). I find the rhyming detrimental. The chop-piness and fragmentation which result from constant terminal stops compromise variation and make meditation next to impossible. Surprisingly, neither is excessive rhyming

well-suited to the brevity of gnomic expression. As we shall see, the repetitive endings in The Riming Poem undermine the insular character of the gnomes.

Despite the strong, and alien, presence of rhymes, The Riming Poem does closely resemble the gnomic lyrics we have studied so far. It lacks some of the genre's minor markers but conforms to the general shape of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament and Resignation B. Moreover, the poem has a surprisingly complex and unconventional approach to some of the truisms it uses from the sapiential tradition.

The Riming Poem begins, as do the other complete poems studied, with a personal history. The poet does not interlace the unhappy present with a fortunate past as do the authors of The Wanderer and The Seafarer, but delivers a more straightforward and chronologically consistent précis of a life blessed with wealth, friends, and power. In their use of the first person as direct object and in a certain ambiguity of description, these lines sound very like the Old English riddles:

Me lifes onlah se þis leoht onwrah,
 ond þæt torhte geteoh, tillice onwrah.
 Glæd wæs ic gliwum, glenged hiwum,
 blissa bleoum, blostma hiwum.
 Secgas mec segon, symbel ne alegon,
 feohgiefte gefegon; frætweð wægon
 wicg ofer wongum wennan gongum,
 lisse mid longum leoma gehongum.

(He granted me life who this light revealed
 and that splendor bestowed graciously revealed.
 Glad was I in minstrelsy, adorned in colors,

with hues of happiness, in the colors of blossoms.
 Men saw me, the feasts were not lacking,
 they rejoiced in the gift of life. Decorated ones
 carried (me),
 steeds over the fields, joyfully in journeys,
 delightedly with long strides of their limbs.)

(The Riming Poem 1-8)

If the poet has entered the realm of riddling here, the solution may well be "princeling," or "new-born princeling." In any case, the poem continues unshadowed by premonition. The personal good fortune of its noble persona is intertwined with the common weal:

 Gomen sibbe ne ofoll,
 ac wæs gefest gear, gellende sner,
 wuniendo wær wilbec bescær.

(The joy of peace did not decrease,
 for it was a year of gifts, of resounding harp string,
 a lasting peace, a stream of misery cut off.)

(The Riming Poem 24b-26)⁶⁷

The traditional virtues of a heroic chieftain are cited, together with those of a heroic age:

freaum frodade, fromum godade,
 mod mægnade, mine fægnade,
 treow telgade, tir welgade,
 blæd blissade,
 gold gearwade, gim hwearfade,
 sinc searwade, sib nearwade.

(to chieftains (I was) wise, to the bold (I was) good;
 the spirit strengthened, the heart rejoiced,
 faith flourished, glory was in abundance,

⁶⁷ I am following Grein here in my translation of line 24b. C. W. M. Grein, "Kleine Mittheilungen," Germania X (1865): 305-10. Translation cited by Krapp and Dobbie in their note on the line (ASPR III 312). Grein renders it in Latin: "laetitia pacis non decrescebat" 306.

prosperity gladdened,
 gold (I) prepared, gems (I) passed around,
 treasure (I) made skillfully, peace was brought
 closer.)

(The Riming Poem 32-7)⁶⁸

In line 43, however, this golden age dissolves, forced to yield to the uncertain years presaging "times of affliction." The world has not yet failed our persona, but evil omens abound and he knows that he approaches desolation. Out of this alteration emerges that central element of the gnomic lyric, the objectification of suffering. The first person yields to the third, personal narrative to a description of type, and in this case good fortune and a blameless life to suffering and culpability.

Nu min hreþer is hreoh, heofsipum sceoh,
 nydbysgum neah; gewitedð nihtes in fleah
 se ær in dæge wæs dyre. Scribeð nu deop in
 feore
 brondhord geblowen, breostum in forgrowen,
 flyhtum toflowen.

(Now my heart is troubled, fearful of times of
 affliction,
 near distress; there will depart at night in flight
 he who earlier, by day, was fierce. He wanders now,
 deep in the soul
 the ardent treasure (which) flourished, grew up in
 hearts,
 is dispersed in flights.)

(The Riming Poem 43-47a)

The other gnomic lyrics begin with an account of exile haunted by memories of happier times. They then develop

⁶⁸ I am indebted for help in this translation to W. S. Mackie's version in The Exeter Book 59 and to Bosworth and Toller's entry on "frodian."

this into a more detached commentary on the condition of exile in general and its role in the making of a wise man or woman. The Riming Poem, however, begins with an exclusive, unshadowed portrayal of the good life and then introduces exile close on the heels of the first mention of altered personal fortunes (44b-47a).⁶⁹

The syntax of lines 45b ff. makes definitive interpretation difficult, but several comments can be made when the passage is read in the context of the gnomic tradition. One notices the juxtaposition of opposites in 44b and 45a -- "gewiteð nihtes in fleah / se ær in dæge wæs dyre" (There will depart at night in flight / he who earlier by day was fierce.). This, and the impersonal syntax, lacking a specific subject, resemble traditional sapiential items. Lines 47b ff., however, seem to criticize a prominent gnome of conduct:

Flah is geblowen
miclum in gemynde; modes gecynde
greteð ungrynde grorn efenpynde,
bealofus byrneð, bittre toyrneð.

(The deceitful thing is grown
greatly in memory; the spirit's nature
laments the unfathomable grief, too much closed in;
eager for evil it burns, bitterly runs to and fro.)⁷⁰

This unusual passage may refer to a crime ("flah") which the protagonist cannot forget, or even keep in perspective. It

⁶⁹ Compare this account with Beowulf 1724-57.

⁷⁰ See Krapp and Dobbie's notes on these lines, ASPR III 314.

may be this unspecified grievance that has altered his life forever. In any case the poet seems to comment here on the gnomic injunction to keep one's sorrow to oneself. Whereas in The Wanderer the gnome stands compromised implicitly by the emotional outpouring of the poem,⁷¹ in The Riming Poem an explicit criticism is made. A spirit can be too stoical -- such a one embraces grief, seals it within himself, and is poisoned by it.

Lines 51-54 give a conventional description of the "weary one" and the deprivations he suffers. Lines 55a-69 turn to the deterioration of the world, ending with heavily gnomic lines, at least one of which is found elsewhere in Latin-English proverbs: "searchwit solap, sumurhat colað" (the crafted white is soiled, summer heat grows cool). It should be noted that the analogue to this line is in an eleventh century manuscript, in a brief entry of Latin proverbs and their Old English translations. There, too, rhyme is used: "Hat acolað, hwit asolað."⁷²

In the decadent age, positive qualities are negated or diminished and evil things flourish. The paradoxical and ironic nature of this is prolonged in the poet's pairing of reward and grave in 70-71. Here the poem returns to the first person. These lines also return to the deprivation of the exile, as seen earlier in 51-54, although they lack the specific structural echoes typical of variation. The rather

⁷¹ See Chapter Two pages 132-133.

⁷² Latin-English Proverbs, ASPR VI 109. These proverbs have also been referred to as Maxims III.

conventional evocation of the grave and its worms is followed by another commentary on a traditional truism. Although it is clear that the poet addresses the importance of fame, the obscurity of 79b-82a makes definitive translation difficult.

Ne biþ se hlisa adroren.
 Ær þæt eadig geþenceð, he hine þe oftor
 swenceð,
 byrgeð him þa bitran synne, hogap to þære betran
 wynne,
 gemon morþa lisse,

(Nor is fame forever perished(?)
 The sooner the fortunate one thinks that, the more often
 it afflicts him;
 he then tastes bitter sin, he thinks on the better joy,
 remembers the mercy in death.)

(The Riming Poem 79b-82a)

"Adroren" is the first problem here. The past participle of dreosan (to rush, fall, perish) is droren and "perish" seems a reasonable translation in this case. I would detach "a" and translate "forever." Thus, the verse would follow the contention in 78-79 that, after the body is consigned to the grave and its worms, little is left except "the lot of necessity" or "se neda tan." But there is also reputation, for neither "is fame forever perished."

Once again, in these lines, the poet probes the gnome, demands of it more than the traditional summation of virtue. The earlier one abandons reputation, believes it dead, the more it will return to chasten one. In this way, careless of fame, men are led to taste the bitterness of sins and to

long for death. The positive and simple assertion that reputation alone endures is here turned into a hypothetical negative: what happens to those who do not believe in its permanence?

The spirit of inquiry is short-lived, however, and the poet soon launches into his homiletic close:

Uton nu halgum gelice
 scyldum biscyrede scyndan genereðe;
 wommum biwerede, wuldre genereðe,
 þær moncyn mot for meotude rot
 soðne god geseon, ond aa in sibbe gefean.

(Let us now like the holy saints
 having renounced sins hasten saved,
 protected from vices, saved in wonder,
 where mankind might happy before the ruler
 see the true god, and forever rejoice in peace.)

(The Riming Poem 83b-87)

As in The Seafarer, the exile recognizes that his proper home lies with God, insulated from evil, alive with wonder and gratitude, rejoicing in peace. Heaven is the fourth home cited by this poet and the least vividly portrayed. We have heard of the land of fruitful plains, feasting and friendship, of the joyous hall. That is past. The persona then tells us of a degenerating world, full of enmity, treachery and grief. That is the present. The future holds only the extreme deprivation of the grave, death's night. Man's final home, wherein lies mercy, is a distant and abstract hope.

The Riming Poem lacks some of the smaller signs of the gnomic lyric. There is no announcement of a self-song, no

mourning at dawn, and only an abbreviated description of the persona as exile. But there is a persona who speaks clearly of an extreme change in fortune and who attempts to draw some increase in wisdom from his suffering. More importantly, in terms of generic identification, the poem marks the loss of wealth, peace and virtue by a shift into the third person, with the concomitant objectifying of the exile. The analogy between the individual's turn for the worse and the degeneration of the world which comprises the bulk of the third person section is also found in other lyrics.⁷³ In line 70, the poet reinstates the first person, and, as in other gnomic lyrics, the returning persona is sober and gloomily meditative.

Finally, the poem's second half is rich with gnomic material. Some gnomes, like lines 66-67, seem to be lifted right out of the sapiential tradition. Other verses simply sound gnomic, because they conform to the paratactic, present indicative, impersonal character of sapiential verse. Moreover, despite the choppiness and the obscurities resulting from the heavy use of rhyme, the poet does manage to consider "the lot of necessity" and the persistence of fame in a thoughtful way.

This poem leaves one with the impression that the

⁷³ See The Wanderer 62b-65a, The Seafarer 86-96. The seminal analysis of the topos is by James Cross, "Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature," Comparative Literature 14 (1962): 1-22. The article is reprinted in Studies in Old English Literature in honour of Arthur E. Brodeur, ed. Stanley Greenfield (Eugene, Oregon: 1963).

gnomic lyric was merely a vehicle for an experiment in rhyme. Moreover, there may have been some initial confusion in the poet's mind over whether a riddle or a lyric best suited his prosodic purposes. Nevertheless, once settled on a form he manages its gnomic content with some skill and sensitivity.

DEOR

The strophic poem Deor has attracted a great deal of critical attention since Conybeare's first edition in 1826.⁷⁴ The highly unusual (for Old English poetry) use of strophe and refrain, the combination of the heroic and the personal, and the obscurity of lines 14-17 have proved irresistible to generations of critics. Deor, the persona, has been hailed as an Anglo-Saxon Boethius,⁷⁵ dubbed a beggar⁷⁶ and proved to be a chronological impossibility.

Deor stands, essentially un mutilated, between Soul and Body II and Wulf and Eadwacer in the Exeter Book. It has six sections, each begun by a large capital and closed by the refrain: "Dæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg." Strophes 1 through 5 allude to heroic or historical figures (St. 3 may be an exception to this.). Each is from three to seven lines long. Strophe 6, lines 28-42, is longer, more

⁷⁴ Conybeare 240-3.

⁷⁵ W. W. Lawrence, "The Song of Deor," Modern Philology 9 (1911-12): 23; Kevin Kiernan, "Deor: the Consolations of an Anglo-Saxon Boethius." Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 79 (1978): 333-40.

⁷⁶ Norman Eliason, "Two Old English Scop Poems," Publications of the Modern Language Association 81 (1966): 185-92.

diffuse and more personal than the rest. Indeed, lines 28-34 have been called an interpolation by Brandl and other early readers of the poem.⁷⁷ It is in this sixth section that the poet uses the motifs and the strategies of the gnomic lyric.

Significant critical activity concerning Deor began in 1911 with W. W. Lawrence's article, "The Song of Deor."⁷⁸ Since then two issues have absorbed much of the criticism written on the poem. Lawrence himself addresses both concerns. He first calls Deor "a veritable Consolatio Philosophiae of minstrelsy,"⁷⁹ thus beginning decades of speculation about the poet's knowledge and use of Boethius, in particular, and about the nature of the refrain's message, in general. One also finds in Lawrence's article an attempt to elucidate the very obscure third strophe, containing the Geat and Mæðhild allusion.⁸⁰ The concurrence of these two very different problems, the poem's tone and message and the source for the third strophe, leads one to understand the poem's tremendous appeal for a modern audience. Deor refers to heroic and legendary material, the stuff of Beowulf or Waldere, in the context of a highly personal

⁷⁷ A. Brandl, "Englische Literatur," in Grundriss der germanischen Philologie II, ed. Hermann Paul (Strässburg: K. Trübner, 1900-9) 975. See Krapp and Dobbie's discussion, ASPR III liv.

⁷⁸ Note 75 above.

⁷⁹ Lawrence, "The Song of Deor," 23.

⁸⁰ Lawrence, "The Song of Deor," 29-40. However, Svet Stefanović explores this stanza first: "Zu Deor V. 14-17," Anglia 33 (1910): 397-402.

message. One can see the refrain as an emanation of the poem's last section, as a wrestling with older material to make it significant for a new dilemma.

Deor's first five strophes each allude to a legendary or historical misfortune. Strophes 1 and 2 refer to the Volandarkviða story of Weland the Smith who was captured and probably mutilated by King Nithhad.⁸¹ In revenge Weland kills the king's sons and rapes his daughter Beadohild (Boðvildr in the Edda). The murders and the rape provide the material for strophe 2 of Deor. Strophe 3 contains a very problematical reference to a Hild or Mæðhild and a Geat, generally assumed to be her lover. Strophes 4 and 5 tell of the reigns of Theodoric, either the Ostrogoth or the Frankish king, and of Eormanric, tyrant over the Goths. Each strophe closes with the refrain quoted above.

So far the poem bears little resemblance to the gnomic lyrics which are the subjects of this study. However, beginning in line 28, the poet changes his tack and a number of generic markers begin to appear. Unlike The Riming Poem which conforms to the lyric's general structural and thematic expectations, Deor uses gnomic lyric detailing but seems at first not to participate in the genre's sweeping moves from personal, exilic history to generalization and thence to meditative understanding. However, I believe that a close look at the substance of the allusions in strophes 1 through 5 together with an analysis of the sixth section in

⁸¹ The Poetic Edda 159-67.

the context of the gnomic lyric will justify the inclusion of Deor in our genre, even though it enters as a maverick.

The first strophe of Deor indicates that, in some measure, this poem is concerned with exile. The Weland story is a complex one and many different elements in it could be emphasized. This poet chose to characterize Weland as an exiled warrior and he uses language familiar to us from The Wanderer and The Seafarer. Weland "wræces cunnade" (experienced exile), "earfopa dreag" (suffered hardships) (1b and 2b). As in The Wanderer, line 3, human companionship is usurped by sorrow and longing. Weland's exile is "wintercealde;" he is bound by necessity, represented by his enemy Niðhad:

wean oft onfond,
sippan hine Niðhad on nede legde,
swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.

(often he met with miseries,
since Niðhad in necessity, laid on him
supple sinew-bonds on the better man.)

(Deor 4b-6)

At least one element crucial to the Eddic tale, Weland's occupation, is not mentioned here. Instead, the poet urges on his audience the smith's experience in exile, which is, like the Wanderer's and the Seafarer's, full of hardship, deprivation of company, winter weather and the force of inalterable necessity.

Beadohild's story, the subject of the second strophe, does not directly concern exile. Only in Adam

Oehlenschlager's nineteenth century version of the legend is Beadohild shoved out to sea by Weland.⁸² This, it seems, was concocted by the Danish poet as a discreet, if inaccurate, substitute for rape. In the Eddic version, Beadohild's attacker becomes her lover, and the murderer of her brothers. He escapes but she must remain in her father's court to bear his child. Despite the absence of exilic motifs, the story resembles The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer in certain respects. In each of the three lyrics a woman is isolated among hostile, or potentially hostile folk, probably her kin or her husband's kin. She loves, or owes allegiance to, an absent lord and the emphasis in her lament is on herself, her own plight. This last is important for it distinguishes these lyric cries from the considered speech of such a one as Wealhtheow, who acts as an agent for social stability even as she pleads for her sons' future. The Deor strophe makes it clear that Beadohild finds her own pregnancy a source of greater agony than her brothers' murders:

Beadohilde ne wæs hyre broþra deap
 on sefan swa sar swa hyre sylfre þing,
 þæt heo gearolice ongieten hæfde
 þæt heo eacen wæs;

(In Beadohild's mind her brothers' death
 was not so grievous as her own affair

⁸² For a translation of Oehlenschlager's Vaulundurs Saga, see Georg B. Depping and Francisque Michel, Wayland Smith. A Dissertation on a Tradition of the Middle Ages (London: Wm. Pickering, 1847). The translation of Oehlenschlager is by Elizabeth Kinnear.

in that she clearly had perceived that she was with child.)

(Deor 8-11a)

She has been placed outside the pale, in a situation of such conflicting loyalties that no action seems possible, no hatred possible, no revenge possible. This impotence, for women, echoes the loss of connection and power felt by male exiles.

The source for strophe 3 of Deor has yet to be proved. Indeed, the allusion may never be clear. Kemp Malone has proposed in several articles that two Scandinavian ballads contain modern versions of the strophe's referent.⁸³ The strongest evidence in support of his theory is the concurrence of names -- in some versions of the ballads Gaute and Magnild are the hero and heroine. However, there are other Geats in Scandinavian lore and Mæðhild is an emendation. She may be simply Hild, preceded by an obscure mæð. Also, it is hard to reconcile Malone's ballads, one of which ends happily and the other in a bittersweet fashion, with the "sorglufu" of line 16, or with the instances of misery represented in strophes 1, 2, 4, and 5. The troubles cited by Deor may have been overcome eventually, but within the

⁸³ Kemp Malone, "Mæðhild," Journal of English Literary History 3 (1936): 253-6; "The Tale of Geat and Mæðhild," Englische Studien 19 (1937): 193-9; "On Deor 14-17," Modern Philology 40 (1942): 1-18. For another view, see F. Norman, "Deor and Modern Scandinavian Ballads," London Medieval Studies I (1938): 175-6. And in support of Malone: Kevin Kiernan, "A Solution to the Mæðhild-Geat Crux in Deor," English Studies 56 (1975): 97-9.

context of the poem they remain overwhelming.

I believe that in strophe 3 we can only speculate that Geat's (or the geat's) bottomless passion, "grundlease Geates frige," for the woman in line 14 led to a predicament cited in line 16: "þæt hi seo sorglufu slæp ealle binom." This loss of sleep, emphasized by the strong "ealle," may be representative of the misery Mæðhild or Hild suffered as a result of Geat's passion.⁸⁴ It reminds one of the dawn-sorrow and the fitful dreaming endemic to other lyrics such as The Wife's Lament (7) and The Wanderer (8-9).

Strophe 4 is brief and would be fairly straightforward if critics could agree on which ðeodric had the Mærings' city for thirty winters. The bulk of critical opinion, with the important exception of Kemp Malone, seems to be with Theodoric the Great, Ostrogothic ruler of Italy for approximately thirty years.⁸⁵ Malone's candidate is Wolfdietrich, or Theodoric the Frank.⁸⁶ Both figures appear elsewhere in northern literatures, as subjects of their own sagas and as allusions in other works.⁸⁷ Without an identification of

⁸⁴ Norman Eliason, following Stefanović, believes the relationship was an incestuous one, thus causing great misery and sleeplessness. "The Story of Geat and Mæðhild in Deor," North Carolina University Studies in Philology 62 (1965): 495-509.

⁸⁵ Sophus Bugge, K. Vitterhets Historie och Antiquitets Akademiens Handlingar, Norsk folkekulture XI (1888): 3.

⁸⁶ Kemp Malone, ed., Deor (London: Methuen's Old English Library, 1933) 40. Also, "The Theodoric of the Rök Inscription," Acta Philologica Scandinavica 9 (1934): 76-84.

⁸⁷ For Theodoric the Ostrogoth, Dietrich von Bern, or Diðreks Saga. For Theodoric the Frank, Wolfdietrich.

the "Mærings" whose city was occupied by Theodoric we cannot describe with any accuracy the misfortune of Strophe 4. However, we can say that, despite much discussion of exile in the criticism surrounding the stanza, the allusion itself does not necessarily involve an individual's disinheritance. Theodoric is in possession of the "burg" and presumably this thirty-year mastery is what had to be overcome. It seems sensible therefore to assume that the Mærings were the sufferers, not Theodoric. This point raises new problems, however, for neither Theodoric seems an evil ruler by the standards of his time. The last few years of Theodoric the Ostrogoth's reign may be relevant here. It was then that Boethius was imprisoned and executed and Symmachus was treacherously killed. The old king had grown nervous and had returned to the ruthlessness which characterized his early years. But still we lack a clear identification of "Mæring".

The central figure of Strophe 5 is less ambiguous, for only one Eormanric, or Ermanaric, won prominence in the early Middle Ages. He was the Goth's first imperial ruler, governing a large part of Crimea from c. 350-370 A.D. Eormanric has a mixed reputation; he is said to be a great king, or a monstrous tyrant. Even within the limited Old English poetic corpus he is described in very different terms. In Widsið he is "wraþes wærlogan" (the fierce faithless one) but also a generous king, who knows how to reward a scop. He is "burgwarena fruma" (chief of the

citizens or city-dwellers).⁸⁸ In Deor, he is of "wylfenne gepoht" (22); "þæt wæs grim cyning" (23). Warriors, probably from his own retinue, sit immobile, waiting, hoping for his overthrow:

Sæt secg monig sorgum gebunden,
wean on wenan, wyscte geneahhe
þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære.

(Many a man sat bound by sorrows,
in expectation of evil; he frequently wished
that the kingdom would be overcome.)

(Deor 24-6)

One sees here, in a king's court, the spiritual paralysis, the sense of constraint, the dearth of hope which the Wanderer experienced, alone, on the "hrimcealde sæ." In its reference to the king's defeat the poet invokes history's judgment, for Eormanric, faced with defeat at the hands of the Huns, is said to have killed himself.

As we read Deor's first five strophes, endings, or rather unarticulated conclusions, become very important. In each of the three stories which are known to us (strophes 1, 2, and 5) misfortune and defeat are turned to triumph. Weland has his revenge; Beadohild gives birth to Widia, a hero who will eventually be worthy of his father's sword, and Eormanric is overcome. The refrain is dependent on these conclusions. This string of just results, however, is entirely exterior to the text and recognition of its cumulative rightfulness depends upon the audience's mnemonic

⁸⁸ Widsið, ASPR III 149.

"library."⁸⁹

In their predicaments, within the context of the poem, Weland, Beadohild and the men of Eormanric's court partake of the alienation which also haunts the personae of the gnomic lyrics. These are the outsiders, the lone ones, the exiled and hopeless unable to act in a wilderness of despair. In a society which values courage and generosity they give and receive nothing and are prevented from striking out. Yet, to them and to their despair speaks the refrain: "Ðæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg" (It is over with that, so can it be with this.).⁹⁰

Deor's refrain is typically, for Old English, understated. There is no sense of triumph over adversity, no celebration, in its impersonal, laconic phrasing. It is merely an assertion of survival, and of the intent to survive. In this way it makes a generic assertion. In the world of the disinherited, the alien, and the impotent, no clear victories are possible. One struggles to understand and accept.

⁸⁹ It is possible that the stories referred to in the first five strophes were specifically connected in the contemporary literary consciousness. In the fragment Waldere II, ll. 1-10, Theodoric is said to have sent a sword and treasure to Widia, son of Weland and, it is presumed, Beadohild. Widia, the allusion implies, freed Theodoric from captivity. ASPR VI 5-6.

⁹⁰ Morton Bloomfield also translates "mæg" as "can." However he uses the translation to prove his theory that Deor is a charm. The evidence seems slim to me. "The Form of Deor," Publications of the Modern Language Association 79 (1964): 534-41. See Burton Raffel's reply: "Scholars, Scholarship, and the Old English Deor," Notre Dame English Journal 8 (1972): 3-10.

Like the other lyrics, Deor has begun with the individual history of adversity. However, rather than expound his persona's case at length, the poet lists five legendary or historical instances of alienation. His use of legend and history illuminates the poem with the reflected glory of heroic verse. However, no battles are fought here, no enemies overthrown, no victories celebrated. Instead, at line 27, slightly past the half-way point, the poem takes up a meditation on the fate of the ahistorical, nameless sufferer. In this section we can recognize the exilic type which is developed so fully in The Wanderer and The Seafarer, as well as the contemplative groping which marks the exile's search for wisdom. Whereas other lyrics move from first to third person, Deor abandons the named individual for the anonymous type.

Siteð sorgcearig, sælum bidæled,
 on sefan sweorceð, sylfum þinceð
 þæt sy endeleas earfoða dæl.
 Mæg þonne geþencan, þæt geond þas woruld
 witig dryhten wendeþ geneahhe,
 eorle monegum are gesceawað,
 wislicne blæd, sumum weana dæl.

(He sits oppressed with sorrow, deprived of happiness;
 in his mind he grows dark, he thinks to himself
 that it is an endless portion of hardships.
 He may then consider, that around this world
 the wise lord changes a great deal;
 to many an eorl he grants honor,
 certain prosperity, to others a portion of troubles.)

(Deor 28-34)

Line 28 here calls to mind line 20 of The Wanderer in which the persona is described as "oft earmcearig, eðle

bidæled" (often wretchedly worrowful, deprived of homeland). Similarly, the darkening of the spirit in Deor 29 and the generalizing of his meditation in line 31 must recall The Wanderer 58-60:

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce,
þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence

(Thus I can not think concerning this world
why my spirit does not darken
when I think on all the life of eorls)

The mysterious allotment of prosperity and hardship has long been a staple of gnomic collections⁹¹ and follows easily upon the erratic fortunes of Weland, Beadohild, Geat and Mæðild, the Mærings and Eormanric's folk. The broadening of exilic concerns into a general dissertation on deprivation also conforms to the sapiential pattern. In its last lines, however, Deor breaks the generic sequence to turn abruptly to the announcement of the self-song:

Dæt ic bi me sylfum secgan wille,
þæt ic hwile wæs Heodeninga scop,
dryhtne dyre. Me wæs Deor noma.
Ahte ic fela wintra folgað tilne,
holdne hlaford, oppæt Heorrenda nu,
leoðcræftig monn londryht geþah,
þæt me eorla hleo ær gesealde.

(Thus I concerning myself will tell,
that I once was Heodening's scop,
beloved of my lord. Deor was my name.
I had for many winters a good service,
a gracious lord, until now Heorrenda,

⁹¹ See Maxims IA 27-9, Vainglory and The Fates of Men, all in ASPR III.

a man skilled in song, has received the landright
which the refuge of eorls before gave me.)

(Deor 35-41)

These lines, according to my plotting of the gnomic lyric, ought to be introductory. As in The Wife's Lament 1-5, The Seafarer 1 ff., and The Wanderer 8-9, the persona declares the verse to be about himself. He then speaks of a past prosperity and a present disinheritance, of a beloved lord lost. And so, with the refrain, his song ends where others began. There is no textual evidence of misplacement here and I prefer to believe that the experimentation with strophe and refrain mandated a transposition of introductory lyric formulas. The specificity of the refrain, as I read it, requires at least one referent for "þæs" before the elaboration of "þisses." Moreover, the referents had to be situations which had been resolved, conditions or incidents for which the perfect tense is appropriate. To this string of references to completed narratives then, Deor adds his own unhappy predicament. As in the cases of Weland, Beadohild, and the others, we are not told of a solution. But, whereas for these legendary figures the answers lie in the collective historical consciousness of a contemporary audience, the stories of Deor and his lyric counterparts remain unfinished business.

CONCLUSION

The poems presented in this chapter are a very diverse group. Two are marked by unusual, for Old English, formal

constraints. One is missing its first part and another is a woman's monologue. Nevertheless, they all speak to the plight of the exile, who may be seen as a type of lone survivor. In each of these four lyrics one can find the syntax, the formulas and the structures which also mark The Wanderer and The Seafarer. The language of deprivation and isolation is repeated, more or less skillfully, in each lyric. In each poem the persona turns to consider, with some detachment, the condition of the disinherited individual. And this consideration leads to a more generalized meditation on the condition of humankind as he or she knows it. Although these poets fail to utilize the gnomic tradition as broadly or as deeply as the lyricists who created The Wanderer and The Seafarer, nevertheless the Wife, Deor, the fallen prince in The Riming Poem, and the exile in Resignation B all attempt, however artificially, to answer self-absorbed complaint with relevant bits of wisdom. They all try to give personal anguish broader scope through gnomic generalization.

Thus, The Wife's Lament uses sapiential precepts to emphasize the pain of youth in exile, to depict for a listening audience the loved one and his sorrow. In Deor the refrain, although it does not contain what I have identified as gnomic markers, performs the function of a sapiential passage in that it links the specific to the general, the individual's history to the fate of eorls. The exile of Resignation B uses gnomes to give the anhaga a greater than

individual stature (89b-96a) and to bolster his own precarious stoicism (117-18). And The Riming Poem relies heavily on gnomic diction for a powerful account of the internal struggles attendant upon violent changes in fortune:

gewiteð nihtes in fleah
 se ær in dæge wæs dyre. Scribeð nu deop in
 feore
 brondhord geblowen, breostum in forgrowen,
 flyhtum toflowen. Flah is geblowen
 miclum in gemynde; modes gecynde
 greteð ungrynde grorn efenpynde,
 bealofus byrneð,

(there will depart at night in flight
 he who earlier, by day, was fierce. He wanders now, deep
 in the soul
 the ardent treasure having flourished, grown up in
 hearts,
 in flights dispersed. The deceitful one is grown
 greatly in memory; the kind of spirit
 too much closed in greets the unfathomable grief;
 eager for evil it burns,)

(The Riming Poem 44b-50a)

The success of these works in sapiential, we might almost say pedagogical, terms may be determined by how thoroughly the persona can use traditional wisdom to interpret, and rise above, his or her own sorrows. However, the lyric also asserts that the exile's sojourn on the margins of survival enables him or her to contemplate the surrounding cataclysm, the fate of eorls, with a clearer eye, a more penetrating vision.

Chapter Four

There are lyrics, and lyric passages, in Old English which do not use the gnome. And there are those in which use of the gnome is so truncated or compartmentalized that they cannot be considered gnomonic lyrics. In this chapter, I shall briefly examine Wulf and Eadwacer and two passages in Beowulf as examples of lament unbridled by stoical restraint and uncomplicated by any vision past the grief at hand. Then, we shall look at Dream of the Rood, in which the dynamic of solitude, suffering and wisdom is curiously reversed.

Wulf and Eadwacer is an obvious candidate for consideration here because, although it does not have a strong gnomonic presence, it does have points in common with several gnomonic lyrics. Like the Wife of The Wife's Lament, the persona in Wulf and Eadwacer is a woman alone, unable to act, in the midst of enemies, possibly her own hostile kin. Like Deor, the poem has a refrain which attempts to set the tone or mood for the whole. The lyric is in the first person and takes place in a context of hardship, isolation and danger. The persona recounts first her present situation, then obscure details of her personal history, a history entwined with the lives of two men and a child. Her present predicament and that of her beloved Wulf are capsulated in the refrain:

willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
Ungelic is us.

(Do they intend to receive him if he comes in a throng?
It is different with us.)

(Wulf and Eadwacer 2-3 and 7-8)¹

Like the authors of the gnomic lyrics, the poet of Wulf and Eadwacer never fully explains the narrative setting for the poem. My guess concerning this cri de coeur is that the woman sits powerless, knowing that a trap has been set, or a search begun, for her Wulf, who is hemmed in on another island (4-5). She asks, with bitter irony, would the unnamed enemy, presumably retainers of Eadwacer, possibly her own kin, be so eager to meet Wulf if he were not alone? And she recognizes, in an ambiguous but sorrowful half line, that their fate is not to have a company about them but to meet their enemies alone.²

The ironical interpretation of lines 2 and 7 is supported by the Anglo-Saxon fondness for litotes on the sub-

¹ ASPR III 179-180. For a similar use of "ungelic" see Vainglory, ASPR III 147. Lines 67 f. read "Ðonne biþ þam oþrum ungelice / se þe her on eorþan eaðmod leofað" (Then there is for the other man a different fate / for him who lives humbly here on earth.).

² The critical tradition seeing the poem as a soliloquy or a dramatic soliloquy dates from 1888 and includes the following articles: Henry Bradley, review of Morley, English Writers, Academy 33 (1888): 198; Israel Gollancz, "The Sigurd Cycle and Britain." Athenæum II (1902): 551-2; Kemp Malone, "Two English Frauenlieder," Comparative Literature 14 (1962): 106-17; Terrence Kleough, "The Tension of Separation in Wulf and Eadwacer," Neophilologische Mitteilungen 77 (1976): 552-60; Clifford Davidson, "Erotic 'Women's Songs' in Anglo-Saxon England," Neophilologus 59 (1975): 451-62; James B. Spamer, "The Marriage Concept in Wulf and Eadwacer," Neophilologus 62 (1978): 143-4; Emily Jensen, "Narrative Voice in the Old English Wulf," Chaucer Review 13 (1979): 373-83. Peter Baker, "The Ambiguity of Wulf and Eadwacer," Studies in Philology 78 (1981): 39-51.

ject of loneliness, especially unprotected or vulnerable
loneliness:

þa hie woldon eft siðian,
ðær meðe fram þam mæran þeodne. Reste he ðær mæte
weorode.

(then they (the mourners) wished to leave again,
weary, (to depart) from the splendid prince; he rests
there with a little band (i.e. alone))

(Dream of the Rood 68b-69)³

Wat se þe cunnað,
hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan,
þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena.

(Wise is he who knows
how dire is the sorrow of a comrade
who has to himself few beloved protectors.)

(The Wanderer 29b-31)

Wergendra to lyt
þrong ymbe þeoden, þa hyne sio þrag becwom.

(There was too small
a company of defenders around the prince when the
hardship came upon him.)

(Beowulf 2882b-83)

"Dreat" in Wulf and Eadwacer can mean "violence" or
"compulsion" as well as "throng" and the persona uses it
here to intensify the irony.⁴ Would that her Wulf could
come with the force of numbers; but such is not to be their
fate:

Wulf is on iege, ic on operre

³ ASPR II 61-5.

⁴ Bosworth and Toller, "þreat" II.

(Wulf is on one island, I on another)

(Wulf and Eadwacer 4)

Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode;

(I suffered in thoughts my Wulf's wide wanderings)

(Wulf and Eadwacer 9)

She and Wulf stand friendless against the world but, even worse, they may not stand together. Like the Wife in The Wife's Lament, lines 47b-52a, she suffers, immobilized, imagining her beloved's exile.

Lines 10-12 in Wulf and Eadwacer allude to the history of this lovers' triangle. Lines 13-15 are an apostrophe to the absent Wulf. And 16-17 address Eadwacer in passionate warning. The last three verses give voice to the lovers' hopelessness and their story's pathos:

Dæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad
wæs,
uncer giedd geador.

(They easily tear that asunder which was never
together,
our song together.)

(Wulf and Eadwacer 18-19a)⁵

Wulf and Eadwacer is perhaps the most lyrical of the shorter Old English poems. It is so immediate in its appeal and so obscure in its references that many critics have believed it to be a cry of pain and fury lifted from a

⁵ Verses 18-19a may be read as an inversion of Matthew 19:6, "Quod ergo Deus coniunxit, homo non separet;" see Kleough.

longer narrative.⁶ Its provenance is a question which cannot be resolved here but we can say that the same impression of immediacy and of incompleteness which prompts the hunt for story lines behind the poem signals its non-gnomic quality. There is no sense here of a protagonist who is able to sit back and sum up her world; there is no meditative distance. The use of proper names, direct address and a narrative present tense all plunge us willy-nilly into the midst of incident, leaving little room for contemplation.

The subjectiveness of the lyric is not the only criterion for restricting its genre. Clearly, other indicia which would point to a developed gnomic lyric are missing as well. Nowhere is the poem self-consciously identified as a song of self. We hear of no heartsickness at dawn, no criticism of contemporary decadence, no lament for a lost society. But most important is the fact that the lyric's persona never turns from the immediate to the long-range, from the local to the global, from her personal fate to that of all men and women. The poem lacks the expansive deepening that has earned other poems a place in the sub-genre

⁶ W. H. Schofield, "Signy's Lament," Publications of the Modern Language Association 17 (1902): 262-95. Schofield linked the poem to the Volsungasaga's story of Sigmund and Signy. L. L. Schücking, Kleines angelsächsisches Dichterbuch (Cothen, 1919). The Wolfdietrich B story from Middle High German is advanced here. See Krapp and Dobbie's introduction to the poem for commentary on these theories. ASPR III lvi-lvii. Rudolf Imelmann, Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung (Berlin, 1907). Imelmann finds a place for Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message in the Odoaker story. A. C. Bouman, "Leodum is minum: Beaduhild's Complaint," Neophilologus 33 (1949): 103-13.

of gnomic lyric.

To be sure, Wulf and Eadwacer is not entirely without gnomic influence. "Ungelic is us" has the timeless quality, the finality and the sense of compression often found in aphoristic generalizations. Lines 18-19, with the impersonal mon, the riddle-like postponement of the subject, and the ironic juxtaposition of "eaþe tosliteð," "næfre gesomnad," and "geador" have a sapiential ring to them, though clear formal markers are lacking.

But the persona of Wulf and Eadwacer never turns to examine, and to invite us to contemplate, the world or the society in which she lives. She sees no evidence of a lost paradise in her predicament, merely excruciating individual loss and the bitter tug of conflicting loyalties. She gains no new knowledge with which to judge or understand the world. And she never becomes a representative figure through which an audience contemplates the mortal condition. Lament here is completely circumscribed by love and despair.

Wulf and Eadwacer is perhaps too passionate a response to admit the distance gnomic contemplation seems to require. Nor does it fall within the narrower rubric of "elegy." For the persona's angst is occasioned by a dangerous present, not the loss of an idyllic past. Thus her song is dominated by anxiety, anger and fear of a great loss to come. She has not yet crossed the threshold of acceptance and resignation because events are not yet final for her, despite her understanding that such finality will bring nothing but despair.

If it is the unresolved nature of Wulf's predicament which precludes gnomic distancing in Wulf and Eadwacer, two other laments in Old English are circumscribed by the very conclusiveness of the situations on which they are based. Both of these speeches occur in Beowulf and have been used by critics to characterize the last third of the poem, and in one case the poem as a whole, as "elegiac" and as concerned primarily with the state of the social network.⁷ A careful reading of these monologues may provide insights into the distinction between gnomic lyric and elegy in Old English.

The first of the Beowulf elegies is "The Lament of the Last Survivor," lines 2247-2271a. It is part of the poet's account of the history of the dragon's hoard, how the last living member of a noble people, "eormenlaf aeðelan cynnes," closed up his nation's treasure in a stone fortress, a cave dug into the seacliff. In an apostrophe to the earth the last survivor commits the material remains of his people to the ground.

"Heald þu nu, hruse, nu hæleð ne mostan,
 eorla æhte! Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe
 gode begeaton; guðdeað fornam,
 feorhbealo frecne fyra gehwylcne
 leoda minra þara ðe þis (lif) ofgeaf,

⁷ John D. Niles, Beowulf: the Poem and Its Tradition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1983). Also see Adrien Bonjour, The Digressions in Beowulf (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1950) 68-9; M. A. O'Neill, Elegiac Elements in Beowulf (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America, 1932); Robert Milgram, Light Against Dark: The Presentation of Heroic Life in Four Medieval English Alliterative Poems, diss., City University of New York, 1979, 17 ff.

gesawon seledream. Nah, hwa sweord wege
 oððe feormie fæted wæge,
 dryncfæt deore; duguð ellor sceoc.
 Sceal se hearda helm hyrstedgolde,
 fætum befeallen; feormynd swefað,
 þa ðe beadogriman bywan sceoldon;
 ge swylce seo herepad, sio æt hilde gebad
 ofer borda gebræc bite irena,
 broснаð æfter beorne. Ne mæg byrnan hring
 æfter wigfruman wide feran,
 hæledum be healfe. Næs hearpan wyn,
 gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc
 geond sæl swingeð, ne se swifta mearh
 burhstede beateð. Bealocwealm hafað
 fela feorhcynna forð onsended!"
 Swa giomormod gihōo mænde
 an æfter eallum, unbliðe hwearf
 dægес ond nihtes, oð ðæt deaðes wylm
 hran æt heortan.

("Hold now, thou earth, now that man might not,
 what eorls possessed. Lo, first from thee
 good men got it; war death, the cruel life destroyer
 has seized every one of
 my people; each of them gave up this life;
 they beheld hall joy. I have no one who may carry the
 sword
 or polish the gold-plated cup,
 precious drinking vessel. The band of warriors has
 hastened elsewhere.
 The hard helmet adorned with gold must be
 stripped of its inlay; the polishers sleep,
 those who ought to prepare the war mask.
 Just so the coat of mail, which in battle endured,
 over shield's crashing, the iron's bite,
 decays after the fashion of men. Nor may the ring mail
 travel widely with the battle chief,
 beside his men. There is no joy of the harp,
 mirth of the gleewood, nor does the good hawk
 swing through the hall, nor does the swift horse
 stamp in the castle court. Baleful death has
 sent forth many of the race of men."
 So, mournful in spirit he related his sorrow;
 alone of them all, unhappy, he moved
 by day and night, until death's flood
 reached his heart.)

(Beowulf 2247-71a)

Once past the apostrophe (2247-2249a), this moving tri-
 bute to a vanished tribe contains many of the characteris-

tics of the gnomic lyrics studied in the last two chapters. The death of a people is related in the first person; the persona announces his singleness: "Nah, hwa sweord wege / oððe feormie fæted wæge" (2252b-2253). The heart of the lament is a sequence of mournful images which evokes the beloved society in which heroism was possible. As the tangible tokens of that heroism are committed to the ground, the last survivor links each to the men already gone. Thus, the sword and the helmet conjure up those who bear weapons and care for them. The coat of mail brings its warrior owner to the mind's eye, and the ring mail reminds us of the war-chief, riding alongside his men. Harp music, the tamed hawk swooping through the hall, and the eager, restless horse are seen as outer signs of a society now silenced and stilled by "baleful death." Nobility in man and beast, comradeship and harp-song, all are destroyed. A gnome closes the richly detailed ubi sunt sequence and, finally, seven verses in the third person paint the survivor in the dark colors of exile. His spirit mourns; he tells his sorrow (this is the closest the passage comes to an announcement of a self-song); and he travels perpetually, until claimed by death's flood, an image which evokes the sea travel of other personae.

But "ðeaðes wylm" (2269b) truncates lament as well as life. For it is thus that the wider contemplation of loss is forestalled. Like the Wanderer, the Last Survivor has lost lord, comrades and patria. Like the Wanderer, he has

no resting place and, like the Wanderer, he "relates his sorrow." One cannot but think that, had he survived to endure for a time the living death of exile, elegiac lament would have grown into gnomic meditation, the ancient ethics of stoical forbearance would have once again suffered examination, and inquiry would have been made into the fate of eorls. As the lament stands, however, death silences the lyric voice before elegy ripens into meditation.

The second excerpt from Beowulf which is relevant here is the "Bereaved Father's Lament." This passage is less closely integrated into the poem's narrative line in that it is a digression within a digression. King Hrethel's grief at his son's unavengable death is compared to the heartache of an unnamed father when his son is hanged. This second father makes a lay, a "sarine sang."

Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle
to gebidanne, þæt his byre ride
giong on galgan; þonne he gyd wrece,
sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
hrefne to hroðre, ond he him helpe ne mæg
eald ond infrod ænige gefremman.
Symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce
eaforan ellorsið; oðres ne gymeð
to gebidanne burgum in innan
yrfewardas, þonne se an hafað
þurh deaðes nyd dæda gefondað.
Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure
winsele westne, windge reste
reote berofene, -- ridend swefað,
hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg,
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron.
Gewiteð þonne on sealman, sorhleod gæleð
an æfter anum; þuhte him eall to rum,
wongas and wicstede.

(So it is sad for an old man
to suffer that his son should ride
young on the gallows. Then he a song makes,

a mournful lay, when his son hangs
 for the raven's pleasure and he cannot help him,
 old and very wise, (he can) do nothing.
 Always it is brought to mind each morning,
 the son's journey out; he cares not
 to wait for another heir
 in his hall, when that one has
 through mortal necessity come to the end of his deeds.
 Sorrowful he sees in his son's chamber
 the deserted wine hall, windswept haven
 deprived of joy -- horsemen sleep,
 warriors in graves; nor is there the harp's song,
 joy in the hall, such as there was once.
 He goes then to his couch, he sounds a sorrowing lay,
 the one for the other; he thought them all too wide,
 the fields and the homestead.)

(Beowulf 2444-62a)

This story seems almost a second-hand report of a lyric song of anguish similar to the gnomic lyrics. And in that report survive some elements of a self-made song: morning sorrow, death of a loved one, and the irrevocable changes in the cultural milieu which a significant death brings about -- the loss of warriors and harp-song, the emptying of the hall. In this momentary generalizing from individual anguish to a greater sense of general loss we can see a pattern similar to that of the gnomic lyric. However, once again the passage fails to unfold into a meditation on the transcendence of worldly values or the nature of human wisdom. In the ubi sunt sequence, the old man briefly contemplates the broader implications of his son's death but then immediately retreats to his couch. The distancing and objectification which are so crucial to The Wanderer's and The Seafarer's second halves do not take place here. The old man, as far as we can know, treads the narrow and cyclical

round of a parent's grief without ever reaching for the greater, if more distant, sorrow of human mortality.

In the "Bereaved Father's Lament," as in the "Lament of the Last Survivor" and Wulf and Eadwacer, the end of incident is accepted as a vanishing point, not just for the material accoutrements of a culture but for the mind and spirit of the survivor. The persona survives the event only to tell of it and its consequences. He or she makes no further contribution to an understanding of the human condition as a whole. Significant meditation in a larger context is neither expected nor attempted. It is this, finally, which keeps these passages in the sphere of elegy or lyric and which precludes gnomic lyric as a generic description for them.

One important corollary to the gnomic lyric remains to be considered. The Dream of the Rood is an early English dream vision in which the dynamic of wisdom won through suffering and grief is brilliantly adapted for eschatological purposes. Here the extremities of physical and emotional deprivation are not suffered directly by the persona but rather are undergone by Christ, already the incarnation of wisdom itself. The dreamer acquires authority from the cross through a strange, vicarious struggle/agonny. The cross, which like the dreamer begins as an unexceptional individual, first takes on the power of wisdom through the crucifixion and then passes it to the dreamer through his vision.

The poem begins as the dreamer announces himself and his song: "Hwæt! Ic swefna cyst, secgan wylle." Through this best of dreams he undergoes a two-fold experience: the rood is hewn down, erected as gallows and driven through with nails; Christ is crucified. Two agonies become one as the cross takes on the Lord's suffering, becoming the best of trees, "wudu selesta," the "beacen," alternately suffused with blood and radiant with gems. The rood's suffering has invested it with eschatological authority:

On me bearn godes
 þrowode hwile. Forþan ic þrymfæst nu
 hlifig under heofenum, ond ic hælæn mæg
 æghwylcne anra, þara þe him bið egesa to me.

(On me the son of God
 suffered for a while; for which I, glorious,
 tower under the heavens, and I may save
 any one of those who humbles himself before me.)

(Dream of the Rood 83b-86)

If the cross assumes its authority through suffering once removed, the dreamer is even more of a surrogate. Nevertheless, having been invested, through a vision, with the power to preach, he begins late in the poem to take on the attributes of an exile grown wise:

Gebæd ic me þa to þan beame bliðe mode,
 elne mycle, þær ic ana wæs
 mæte werede. Wæs modsefa
 afysed on forðwege, feala ealra gebad
 langunghwila.

(I prayed then to that tree with a joyous spirit
 in great zeal, where I was alone
 with a small band; my mind was

impelled on its way forward; I endured much
of all the times of longing.)

(Dream of the Rood 122-26b)

Recognizable here is the singleness of the persona, emphasized through litotes, as in The Wanderer, 29b-31, and Beowulf, 2882b-2883.⁸

His mind is driven forth and he undergoes a great
longing:

ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað.

(for ever has he longing he who on the sea dwells.)

ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
on flodwegas feor gewitan.

(All these prompt the eager spirit
to the journey, (prompt) him who thinks thus
to depart far over the flood's ways.)

(The Seafarer 47 and 50-2)

forþon ic afysed eom,
earn of minum eple

(therefore I am impelled,
destitute from my homeland)

(Resignation 88b-89a)

Finally, in a mildly elegiac strain, the dreamer turns to
the cross because: "Nah ic ricra feala / freonda on foldan"
(I have not many noble friends on earth) (131b-132a). They
have gone forth, left the world's joys to join the "wuldres
cyning" and dwell in glory.

An odd reversal takes place here. The Wanderer, the

⁸ See also Resignation 101-2 and The Seafarer 16a.

Seafarer and others of their ilk must undergo the privations of loneliness, irresolvable longing and difficult journeying as the price of wisdom; in a sense they are thus empowered to be wise. The dreamer in the Dream of the Rood experiences little hardship directly. He seems to recognize his loneliness only as a result of wisdom being imparted to him. It is the knowledge and the responsibility which isolate him -- not isolation which forces knowledge and responsibility upon him.

The dreamer neither laments an idyllic past, nor quails before the fate of eorls. He has not seen his people decimated; he is not dispossessed. His emphasis is on a secure and blessed future, rather than a distant hope of heaven following cataclysmic reality. His wisdom, like that of the sages, is received, not acquired through experience. Its parameters are predetermined. He is its vessel, not its shaper.

The poet of the Dream of the Rood seems to borrow the anhaga type in order to create a recognizable persona, one who moves from ordinariness to authority through an extreme, overwhelming experience. His dreamer's schooling, however, may seem overly orchestrated to us, overly contrived, for his angst is received and resolved. The anhaga of the gnomic lyric, on the other hand, is himself the experiencer of hardship and his privations will never be resolved.

CONCLUSION

The tenth century gnomic lyric laments and pontificates in a voice unlike any other in Old English literature. Its authors forged a curious amalgam of distraught self-pity and detached meditation. And yet through this unlikely alloy rings a voice which speaks cogently and compassionately to the plight of the exile and which addresses without illusion the problems of a beloved society disordered. The fictive force behind these lyrics is the persona of the anhaga, alone, homeless, and destitute. It has been my contention that two elements combine to generate the distinctive and powerful voice through which he speaks.

The first is the gnome. Emerging from a complex and widespread web of sapiential traditions, the Old English gnomes, as they survive in the collections Maxims I and II, established standards of personal behavior; asserted the power of God and wyrd; invoked elemental truths of nature; and sketched the shape of society, its customs, relationships, and codes. Of all these, the gnomes of ethical behavior, often judgments dressed as facts, were most enthusiastically appropriated by the lyricist, for his inquiries revolved around the exile, a person detached from society and cast out beyond its sanctions. Thus, the imperatives of social behavior gained an ironic dimension unknown in the gnomic collections.

The second crucial element in the gnomic lyric is, of course, the lament. It has been suggested that the Old

English lyrics are descended from death-songs or funeral laments.¹ They record imprisonment, betrayal, and the demise of lords. They commemorate disaffection with society, and the loss of power, friends, and wealth. They are dominated by personal history. And, although speakers are not named, none is detached, not one pretends not to care. While the cool voices of the maxims collections speak with the privileged understanding of a trained elite, the lyrics' personae blurt out perceptions gained painfully and unwillingly. The Anglo-Saxon poet forces his persona to gaze into the abyss and then tell of it. When this happens, gnomic is brought to bear on lament, the wisdom tradition is tested against the raw experience of isolation and loss, and a society's inherited code must answer the challenge of one cast out by that society. At their most complex, the gnomic lyrics test and remake the sapience they inherited. In the best of these poems, the dialogue between grief and wisdom leaves both changed utterly. The persona loses his narrowly referential agon in a passion for understanding the incomprehensible, the fate of men and women. And the occasion for grieving is used to test, criticize and complicate traditional gnomic responses to exilic troubles.

¹ Nora Chadwick, "Norse Ghosts," Folklore 57 (1946): 50-65 and 106-27; Joseph Harris, "Elegy in Old English and Old Norse: A Problem in Literary History," The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research, ed. Martin Green (NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1983); Raymond P. Tripp Jr., "Odin's Powers and the Old English Elegies," Old English Elegies.

(Thus the man knows not,
the fortunate man, what some men suffer
for whom the tracks of exile lie most widely.)

(The Seafarer 55b-57)²

Elsewhere in Old English "se mon ne wat þe . . . ," or its positive counterpart, introduces the sorts of issues which only God can answer:

Meotud ana wat
hwær se cwealm cymeþ, þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ.

(The Lord alone knows
where pestilence comes, [and] who departs hence from
known lands.)

(Maxims IA 29b-30)

In the gnomic lyric the phrase claims for its persona a privileged knowledge, gained involuntarily. Through this knowledge the anhaga may claim membership in an epistemological elite. His knowing depends upon the very condition which has isolated him from his fellows, for it is inaccessible to the fortunate ordinary men. His distinction rests in adverse experience, not schooling or vision. His lecturers are the gulls and his lessons the slap of the salt waves. His text is founded in loss, in the inadequacy of memory, in horror at his own vulnerability.

Ne eom ic dema gleaw,
wis fore weorude; forþon ic þas word spræce
fus on ferþe, swa me on frymðe gelomp
yrmþu ofer eorþan, þæt ic a þolade

² See also Resignation 99 (mutilated) and The Seafarer 27-30.

(I am not a sagacious judge
 wise before the people; therefore I speak these words,
 eager to depart, (tell) how it happened to me in the
 beginning,
 miseries on earth, so that I was ever deprived,)

(Resignation 82b-85)

Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes
 leofes larcwidum longe forþolian,
 ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
 earmne anhogan oft gebindað.

(Indeed he is wise, he who must long be deprived of
 the precepts of his beloved lord-friend.
 Then sorrow and sleep together
 often bind the wretched solitary one.)

(The Wanderer 37-40)³

In the midst of this despair the anhaga sets himself a hermeneutic task, a task which invokes the sapiential tradition, but which calls upon it to do more than ratify a status quo. The exile begins with the interpretation of his own predicament, which necessarily calls for some self-definition. Having once lost the accoutrements of identity endorsed by society -- lord and comrades, a seat in the hall, armor and kin -- the persona must reestablish himself as an individual of significance. The only thing left to him is his particular understanding of his own condition. But, because he has suffered and survived, he also has access to the suffering of others. He trades on his own ruin and even on the sapiential definition of himself as a non-person.

³ The gnomic lyrics are replete with self-referential passages like these. For example: The Riming Poem 51-4, The Wanderer 29b, Resignation 89b-96a and Deor 35-7.

Werig winneð, widsið onginneð,
 sar ne sinnið, sorgum cinnið,
 blæd his blinnið, blisse linnið,
 listum linneð, lustum ne tinneð.

(The weary one struggles, a far journey begins
 suffering (he) heeds not, (it) breeds sorrows,
 for him prosperity ceases, from bliss he parts,
 from delights he desists, in pleasures he does not
 last.)

(The Riming Poem 51-4)

The gnomic lyrics, unlike the lyric laments, are marked by the urge to move beyond the narrow precincts of this exilic type. The defining of self in traditional terms is paired with a claim to special sapience. And this claim, while isolating the exile further from his fellows, also serves to rob his isolation of its stigma. It is, after all, the absolute nature of his state which enables him to speak perceptively of the plight of others -- and of their bleak future. He extrapolates to the general plight of mankind, the fate of eorls:

Dreamas swa her gedreosað, dryhtscype gehreosað,
 lif her men forleosað, leahtras oft geceosað;
 treowþrag is to trag, seo untrume genag,
 steapum eatole misþah, ond eal stund genag.
 Swa nu world wendeþ, wyrde sendeþ,
 ond hetes henteð, hæleþe scyndeð.

(Thus joys here fail, lordships fall away,
 here men let life go, they often choose crimes;
 the season of trust is too slack, it approaches weakly,
 in the high seat it went badly and every hour grew
 worse,
 Thus now the world turns, brings wyrd
 and pursues enmity, incites the warrior.)

(The Riming Poem 55-60)

This is the wider contemplation of loss and societal disin-

tegration which most sharply distinguishes gnomic lyric from lyric laments. And it is the gnome which makes this expansion possible. As anhaga becomes snottor, the personal grief which proved both catalyst and sine qua non for his transmutation yields to a larger sorrow. This alteration in perspective calls for the objectifying vocabulary, the detached syntax and the impersonal tone of the maxims. First person turns into third, the narrative tense to a universal present, and hesitation and longing dissolve under newly acquired authority.

Forþon me hatran sind
 dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
 læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
 þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.
 Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð;
 adl oppe ylde oppe ecghete
 fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.
 Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam æftercwependra
 lof lifgendra lastworda betst,

(Wherefore keener to me are
 the joys of the lord than this dead life,
 brief on land. I do not believe
 that the earth's wealth stands eternal.
 Always one of three things
 before one's time passes turns all to doubt:
 illness or age or swordhate
 forces life from the fated, those about to depart.
 So for every noble among those speaking afterwards
 the praise of the living is the best remembrance)

(The Seafarer 64b-73)

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
 for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce,
 þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence,
 hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,
 modge maguþegnas. Swa þes middangeard
 ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð and fealleþ,
 forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer, ær he age
 wintra dæl in woruldrice. Wita sceal geþyldig,

ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hrædwyrde,
 ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig
 Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,

(Thus I can not think concerning this world
 why my spirit does not darken
 when I think on all the life of eorls --
 how they with grace relinquished the hall,
 noble retainers, as this earth
 each and every day perishes and falls.
 Wherefore a man may not become wise before he lives
 his share of winters in the world. The wise man must be
 patient,
 he must not be too passionate, nor too hasty in speech,
 nor too weak a warrior, nor too reckless
 The skilled brave man must understand how awesome it
 will be
 when all of this world's wealth stands wasted,)

(The Wanderer 58-67, 73-4)

In these lyrics, the expression of personal agony is pushed beyond limited individual history through the use of gnomic generalizations. The gnome of behavior, in its turn, is compromised and complicated by the context of lament as the persona tests its stoical recommendations against the extremities of experience. These are liminal works, teetering on the edge of human understanding, caught between the outcast and the society he has lost. In their refusal to limit themselves to lament and in their eagerness to approach and reshape wisdom, they push poetry beyond the limits set by sage or lyricist. The hermeneutic powers of the anhaga are derived from the raw experience of exile, a familiarity with and respect for inherited wisdom, and the courage to go beyond both.

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