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Goodall, James Lane

**THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES: A STUDY OF STRUCTURE, CULTURAL
CONTEXT, AND GENRE**

The University of Oklahoma

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES:

A STUDY OF STRUCTURE, CULTURAL CONTEXT, AND GENRE

A DISSERTATION

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THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES:
A STUDY OF STRUCTURE, CULTURAL CONTEXT, AND GENRE

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THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES:
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AND GENRE

INTRODUCTION

In 1974 John C. Pope retracted an article he had written nine years earlier in which he reintroduced the possibility of dramatic voices in The Wanderer and The Seafarer. In the case of The Wanderer, Pope's retraction meant that he went back to what is called the "prevailing view" of the poem, that is, that there are not two different speakers in the poem, and that the eardstapa and the snottor on mode are the same person who has undergone a process by which his powers of reason and presumably his sensibilities have been enlarged. This is essentially the same view of The Wanderer proposed in 1869 by Max Rieger. Such reversals are not unheard of in scholarship, but when they occur they seem to demand a fresh attempt to reassess the approaches applied to the works considered, to see whether various scholars mean the same thing in their use of terminology, and to determine the precise nature of the expectations they bring to a work.

The group of Old English poems commonly referred to as

the elegies is one of the best-known categories in all of medieval literature. But the elegy is far from a tidy genre because early in the critical history of Old English literature "elegy" was used more as a convenient term of reference for poems that shared certain characteristics of tone and content than as a strict statement of taxonomy. At one time or another, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, Resignation, The Rimeing Room, Wulf and Eadwacer, Deor, and The Ruin have all been classified as elegies. As scholars examined them more and more closely, they were forced to define their conception of "elegy"--and then some tended to exclude from the genre certain of the poems listed above. But they all chose different poems to exclude--and thus probably the only thing everyone will agree on is that all of the poems listed above are in The Exeter Book.

My own attempts to define the limits of the Old English elegy point up the following working definition. The elegy is a dramatic monologue ranging in length from fifty lines to just over a hundred. Characterized by lamentation in varying degrees of intensity, it contains a rich description of a vanished past which causes the speaker to reflect on the effects of the passage of time. I decided to exclude from my own study Wulf and Eadwacer, Deor, and The Ruin. Wulf and Eadwacer, though I grant it is a dramatic monologue, is so short and so obscure that very little is to be gained

from comparing and contrasting it with the poems I have included. Though it contains a kind of love lament which reminds one of The Wife's Lament, the lack of development of the circumstances surrounding it precludes any further comparison.

Deor, though it is certainly full of lament, is as much catalogue as it is dramatic monologue. The quality of grief is so superficial and automatic that this poem, too, would be unprofitable as a subject of comparison.

In my treatment, The Ruin is conspicuous by its absence. It is surely one of the greatest of all Old English poems; it surely contains a rich expression of lament for a lost way of life, an ingredient that virtually everyone will agree is elegiac. The quality of lament is quite close to that of The Wanderer, particularly because of the way a scene of ruin evokes reflection on the transience of human life and achievements. What it lacks and what I require based on my own feeling for genre is the existence of a first-person voice, an identifiable persona. I realize that it is customary to assume a persona even in third-person narration, but in the poems that I have chosen there is an ic-figure present for analysis.

The bulk of the criticism devoted to the elegies falls into three categories: studies of structure, cultural context, and genre. In what follows I have set aside a chapter for each.

The structural studies show a trend away from the earlier suspicions that poems like The Wanderer and The Seafarer are rough and unwieldy mixtures of pagan and Christian elements. It would be extreme to claim that opinions based on the assumption of interpolation are no longer extant. Still, scholars are now more willing to accept each poem as the product of a single poet with an integrated view of the materials he worked with. That is not to say that the poets' view of unity is the same as ours, but rather that the poet is given credit for more sophistication than the theories of interpolation are likely to allow him. Other issues of structural importance are the debates over the existence of speakers in the poems as well as the precise limits of their utterances. There are the coherence, or lack of it, in temporal relationships and the authors' conceptions of mass, proportion, stress, and emphasis appropriate to the ideas they sought to convey.

The attempt to establish a cultural context for the poems has intensified greatly in the last thirty years or so. The connection between literacy and the church together with the advanced state of learning in the ages of Bede and Aelfric sent many scholars to examine the religious works available at the time the elegies were written. As we shall see, almost all the elegies contain Christian resonances of one kind or another, and therefore it is natural to turn to Christian sources to see if there is any material for

comparison. Another side of the search for cultural context concerns itself with the study of topics like the state of exile and its literary uses throughout Old English literature.

Finally, inquiries into genre struggle with what is probably the most difficult problem of all. I have already made known my choices for membership in the class of elegy and the qualifications they show in order to be included. The chapter on genre gives a summary of the views of those who have come at the poems from that direction. As we shall see, inquiry has not confined itself to the definition of elegy as it exists in the body of Old English literature. Continuing on from the realization that there is no pure elegy, some scholars believe that other genres in Old English literature influenced the poems I have included. The riddle, for instance, opens up a wide range of possible meanings. One of the central issues in the analysis of any lyric poem is the identification of the first-person voice. The riddle, of course, customarily gives the power of speech to inanimate objects, and it is structured to give clues which ultimately result in revealing the identity of the speaker. If the riddle tradition is strong then the reader of an obscure poem containing a first-person utterance must consider at least the possibility that the speaker may not be a real person. Therefore it is likely that there could have been a blurring of genres which share the common features of a first-person voice. We shall see also how forms like the

penitential psalm may have exerted influence. This is another kind of blurring, of course, since it is conscious borrowing of a different kind.

The collection and synthesizing of the criticism surrounding the poems has not led me to any revolutionary approach to these elegies. What emerges is the importance of viewing them as the products of Christian poets who struggled to adapt secular and heroic themes for more or less religious purposes. In some cases the heroic world is dealt with fondly as being noble but flawed; in others it is less revered. But in any case, the heroic world furnishes the poets examples of the transitory world as opposed to the permanence of Heaven. The principle that informs my own view is as follows. One must respect the Christian culture behind the poems without applying it slavishly as an index of meaning. Some scholars treat the elegies as though they were religious tracts. They search patristic commentaries and stretch the poems to parallel them. Other scholars ignore the religious milieu altogether. I have tried to mediate between these two extremes.

CHAPTER 1

A STUDY OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES

Opinion on the structure of the Old English elegies is staggering in its variety. In some of the poems we shall encounter, there is the possibility of more than one speaker. In some cases the same speaker may exist in two different states of awareness. Another source of confusion is the difficulty of separating the poet in his own person from a persona he creates to give voice to his views. Therefore the reader must be alert not only to the grouping and arrangement of important ideas and themes but also to the identity of the speaker. The appearance of what may be called stage directions in these poems often does more to obscure than to clarify the points of doubt. In what follows I try to group the major attempts to come at the problem of structure in the elegies, and to make rather conservative observations of my own. Though I deal with the poems individually, I pause from time to time to comment on structural units which seem to me to have counterparts in other poems both within and without the scope of my study.

The Wanderer presents special problems in any treatment of structure because of the multiplicity of voices. The poet provides names for two of them besides himself: the eardstapa ("earth-stepper") and the snottor on mode ("wise in spirit"). By identifying his speakers, the poet would seem to have done his reader a favor, but in the absence of clear stage directions the latter cannot always be sure which voice he hears. Even when there are indications in the text of a change of speaker, the precise limits of the utterances must remain in doubt. In the opening lines of the poem, however, two things are sure: 1) Lines 6-7 are spoken by the poet in his own person; 2) Line 8, because of the commencement of a first-person speaker, marks the beginning of the speech attributable to the eardstapa. It is the first five lines of the poem about which there has been so much disagreement. Lines 1-5 are either an introductory generalization by the poet in his own person or by the eardstapa himself. Since The Exeter Book scribe did not have, or chose not to use, marks of punctuation to make clear when voices took up or ended, we have to resort to other evidence. The appearance of swa in l. 6, for instance, forces us to consider several choices. R. M. Lumiansky, assuming that the word swa logically refers to material which has preceded it, accepted the first five lines as part of the eardstapa speech which is interrupted by the poet's expository comment 6-7 and then

continues from line 8.¹ John C. Pope agreed on the subject of swa as did R. L. Leslie in his influential edition of the poem.² Other scholars, however, like Bruce Mitchell, have collected examples in Old English poetry which illustrate that swa sometimes referred to material which followed it in sequence.³ Therefore, it is quite possible that the first five lines are a generalized introduction by the poet so that the eardstapa speech commences at l. 8. Following Mitchell, Roger Fowler and others have taken this view,⁴ and it is significant also that Krapp and Dobbie in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records use quotation marks for the first time at l. 8.⁵ There is a note on cwaep (6) in ASPR which cites Mackie as believing that the past tense of cwaep is an

¹R. M. Lumiansky, "The Dramatic Structure of the Old English Wanderer," Neophilologus, 34 (1950), 105.

²John C. Pope, "Dramatic Voices in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," in Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr., ed. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr., and Robert P. Creed (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965), p. 168.

R. F. Leslie, "The Wanderer: Theme and Structure," in Old English Literature: Twenty-Two Analytical Essays, ed. Martin Stevens and Jerome Mandel (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp. 140-141.

³Bruce Mitchell, "Some Syntactical Problems in The Wanderer," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 69 (1968), 175-78.

⁴Roger Fowler, "A Theme in The Wanderer," Medium Aevum, 36 (1967), 4-6.

⁵The Exeter Book, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1936), p. 134.

indication that the first five lines are to be considered spoken by the eardstapa.⁶

Since we must resort to informed likelihood in this matter, there is another avenue open to us. If the first five lines are of an introductory nature, then it is legitimate to inquire what they can logically introduce. The tenor of the passage develops out of the tension between the travail of exile and the mildness of God. In the part of the speech that clearly is that of the eardstapa (8ff.) there is nothing of the mildness of God, and therefore it is less likely that 1-5 may be properly said to introduce it. For metudes miltse one has to wait until the epilogue of the poem at 111-115, and it is here that we find material in common with the introduction. It is more likely, then, that lines 1-5 are by the poet in his own person and designed for the purpose of introducing the whole poem.

Probably everyone agrees that the eardstapa's speech takes up at l. 8, but doubt about where it ends has produced a large bibliography comprised of arguments I will consider in their proper places. For now, let us assume that the eardstapa's speech runs to 57^b and that it contains a submerged lament (29^b-57^b) which the eardstapa ascribes to some fictional character. I hope to show that assigning this limit to the speech makes clear the following principle of

⁶Krapp and Dobbie, p. 288

organization, In the parts of the poem spoken by the eardstapa and by the poet in his own person there are parallels involving generalization, the creation of actual scenes, and submerged lament. The speech as a whole is several things; it is a pastiche of the correct behavior of earls, it is testimony of the pain resulting from exile, it is lament for the loss of an old order. But if there is any consistency in this section, it resides in the constant appearance of entrapment imagery which occurs supported by both psychological and physical examples. In the case of the former, entrapment refers to that state of mind in which one keeps one's own counsel:

paet he his ferdlocan faeste binde⁷ (13).

[that he will bind his feelings fast.]

in hyra breostcofan bindað faeste;
swa ic modsefan minne sceolde,
oft earmcearig, eðle bidaeled,
freomaegum feor feterum saelan (18-21).

[In their breast-coffers bind fast;
so I my inmost thoughts must,
often miserably sad separated from
native land, far from kinsmen fasten
in fetters.]

The physical manifestations range from specific references of enclosure (wabema gebind, 1.24) to a kind of enclosure which is largely implied, like the burial of the eardstapa's gold-friend (22-23).

⁷All quotations of Old English Verse are from Krapp and Dobbie unless otherwise specified.

It is tempting to say that the two kinds of entrapment reinforce each other but difficulties arise. First, there is the paradox in the sense that the eardstapa by speaking out on the subject of his misery is violating one of the very qualities that the heroic world extolls: that of reticence. Lines 11^b-14 suggest on the surface at least that the heroic reticence is positive in nature. However, if the occurrences of physical entrapment are negative, as they surely are, then the two kinds of entrapment can hardly complement each other. It is far more likely that the poet is beginning to develop the idea that the heroic is deficient because it lacks the power to promote comfort; however, the full impact will not be felt until later in the poem. The poet will eventually drive home as his major theme the superiority of heavenly permanence compared to the transitory nature of life on earth. By choosing his examples of impermanence from the heroic world he has already commenced to discredit it and to show the foolishness of placing too much stress on earthly things.

The subsection which begins with 29^b and continues through 57^b is an example of the submerged lament which is found in varying forms in Old English literature (see Day of Judgment, 171ff.). The eardstapa creates distance and detachment by reporting the miseries of exile from the viewpoint of another person, a se-pe figure whose experiences either parallel those of the eardstapa or are identical to

them. It is impossible to know whether the author has assigned his own woes to a fictional character or is in fact reporting those of another. The significance is that the poet uses the submerged lament to supplement material given in 8-29^a though the emphasis is different. We have seen how the first speech began with generalization about the proper behavior of earls and concluded with a description of the burial of the lost lord. Here the terms in which the lament for the past is cast are more concrete:

þinced̃ him on mode þaet he his mondryhten
 clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge
 honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum aer
 in geardagum giefstolas breac (41-44).

[It seems to him in his spirit that his
 liege lord he embraces and kisses and on
 knee lays hands and head as he at times
 before in bygone days enjoyed the gift-
 giving ceremony.]

The poet by using more concrete language constructs a scene which is graphic and complete, containing as it does both characters and motion which describe the process of swearing fealty. (It is ironic that this description, which is so complete compared with that of the first part of the speech, occurs in a dream.) Paired with this scene from the dream is one from real experience:

Ðonne onwaecned̃ eft wineleas guma,
 gisiþ̃ him biforan fealwe wegas,
 bapian brimfuglas, braedan feþra
 hreosan hrim ond snaw hagle gemenged (45-48).

[Then the friendless man awakens
again, sees before him fallow waves;
the sea birds bathe, spread their
feathers; the frost and snow fall
mixed with hail.]

It is interesting that when the lamenter awakens, the feeling of exile is intensified by the fact that no human being is mentioned as being present; there are only the birds, the hail, and the frost. Then the daydream of memory calls forward images of people once known, and these, too, vanish. Therefore, in each of the psychological states, dream and day-dream, the lamenter is jolted back to the real world. The submerged lament ends with a generalized observation on the grief which attends those who must travel in exile.

Though the emphases are quite different, there are similarities between the speeches because the imagery of entrapment is brought forward. Not as many examples of it occur in the first speech as the second, but they are forceful and structurally prominent. When the poet tells us that: "ðonne sorg ond slaep somod aetgaedre / earmne anhogan oft gebindað" (39-40) [when sorrow and sleep joined together often bind the wretched solitary. . .], he is looking both forward and backward. The theme of entrapment which is so prominent in the first part of the poem is called to mind as the negative aspects of binding are being hammered at again and again. Too, with the mention of the gathering together (itself a kind of binding) of sleep and sorrow, the

poet looks forward to the two scenes from dream and day-dream which in a simple way will dramatize the horrors of exile. It is all part of the figurative binding from which all sorrow comes. This section of the poem concludes with another "wapema gebind" (57).

The entrapment imagery is striking enough by virtue of its phrasing and location in the poem; however, it is also part of a deep and very subtle contrast. In one sense it would be hard to imagine a physical condition less congruous with the concept of binding than exile because for the exile there are no boundaries, no containment, nothing to belong to. Shut off from human society he is forced to wander from place to place: Complete freedom is complete tyranny because the concept of the hall is so strong that anyone outside it has no privileges at all. Still, the pain deriving from the exile is repeatedly expressed in terms of binding and entrapment. We must remember that in the images of the hall-joys, confinement connotes security and stability because the hall is a fortress against the hostile forces on the outside. It is of particular importance then that the poet goes to great lengths to develop the concept of confinement with a negative charge because he will finally show that confinement even in the sense of hall-joys must be ephemeral.

Line 58 is one of those loci in The Wanderer where many scholars believe something momentous takes place, but few agree as to what. At one time, John C. Pope, in his

influential article on the possible existence of voices in the poem, saw line 58 as the point at which the wise warrior begins to speak.⁸ R. M. Lumiansky had said that 8-110 made up one extended monologue within which 8-62^a give an account of the eardstapa's past and 62^b-110 set out the eardstapa's definition of wisdom.⁹ Bernard Huppé saw 62^b-87^b as a "bridge passage" between two pagan monologues,¹⁰ and though Pope disagreed on the precise limits for voices in the poem, he approved of Huppé's effort to separate the two characters. Proceeding from Huppé's view that there are two speakers, Pope first attacked the break at 62^a on the grounds that 57^b is a more natural place at which to divide because 8-57^b contains the sentiments of a man who is bound to his own harsh experience and is inclined to report sensuously rather than to reflect philosophically.¹¹ The other voice commences at 58^a and, including the imaginary lament 92-110, proceeds to 110 and is characterized by an ability to philosophize in a detached way, to survey the physical remains, and extract from them, among other things, a catalog of proper behavior in a fickle world. Huppé had apparently thought that the first-

⁸Pope, pp. 166.

⁹Lumiansky, pp. 106-107.

¹⁰Bernard F. Huppé, "The Wanderer: Theme and Structure," JEGP, 42 (1943), 527.

¹¹Pope, pp. 166-67.

person pronoun ic changed to third in 30-57, and when it reappeared in 58 the eardstapa was still speaking. Pope countered that because of the way the two speakers are defined, one a reporter and the other a philosopher, it would be critically disagreeable to attribute 58-62^a to the former since the passage contains a "broad consideration of human life"¹² which may be more properly thought of as belonging to the snottor on mode. Pope insisted on dividing the poem so as to keep the eardstapa and snottor on mode distinct according to their respective abilities to reflect and philosophize.

Pope, like many scholars both before and after him, was troubled by lines 58-59 because if the eardstapa is still speaking, then it is odd that after chronicling gloom and suffering for more than 50 lines he should find it necessary to say to himself: "Forþon ic gepencan ne maeg geond þas woruld / for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce" (58-59 [Indeed I cannot determine through this world why my inmost thoughts do not grow dark]. Pope's solution was to attribute 1-57 to the eardstapa, 58-110 to the snottor on mode. The likelihood of a break is strengthened by the alliterative stress on "min": "I cannot determine . . . why my inmost thoughts do not grow dark."¹³ Too, to Pope's

¹²Pope, p. 166.

¹³Pope, p. 168.

way of thinking, dividing the poem in this way allows the critic to replace "one vaguely inclusive character with two firmly defined ones."¹⁴

Stanley B. Greenfield disagreed vigorously on the subject of the pronoun. He found in Beowulf an example of a case where a pronoun bears an alliterative stress, and yet it is impossible that there can be any change of person.¹⁵ There is a problem, however, with Greenfield's example. Either he could not find, or if he could he did not use, a case where the pronoun in question begins a half-line. The half-line he singles out ("Ic minne can") is not really fair evidence because even though it contains a pronoun bearing the stress, it has a different syntactic pattern. At any rate John C. Pope retracted his article and returned to what he calls the prevailing view.¹⁶

If, however, the reader is unable to hear the voices Pope heard, there is another possibility open to him. It does no violence to the poem to assume that there are two consciousnesses through which ideas and events are seen; one does not have to go outside the text as we have it to establish that there is a poet who speaks in his own person

¹⁴Pope, p. 167.

¹⁵Stanley B. Greenfield, "Min, Sylf, and Dramatic Voices in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," JEGP, 68 (1969), 216.

¹⁶John C. Pope, "Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of The Seafarer," Anglo-Saxon England, 3 (1974), 75-86.

and an eardstapa. Emily Doris Grubl saw line 58 as the point at which the poet begins again to speak in his own person.¹⁷ It is an attractive idea especially in light of the significance it bears for the structure of the poem. Pope saw that there was a difference of tone in 8-57 and 58-110, the first passage being reportorial and the second contemplative:

But the wanderer as a typically loyal retainer, belongs to the conservative aristocratic world in both life and poetry; the thinker, though he recognizes a native tradition of wisdom, has moved into the sphere of Biblical and patristic learning, with some flavor of classical philosophy.¹⁸

The qualities that Pope sees in his "thinker" are even more appropriate if they are assigned to the poet, who, we may assume, has been raised in the Christian tradition and who by the end of the poem will have developed a characteristically Christian message. In addition to the element of the contemplative is the element of hope which will allow the poet to describe heaven as the place "þær us eal seo faestnung stondeð: (115) [where all permanence stands for us].

After setting up a condemnation of the material world by using examples taken from the condition of exile, the

¹⁷ Emily Doris Grubl, Studien zu den Angelsächsischen Elegien (Marburg: Elwert-Grafe und Unzer, 1948), pp. 16-17.

¹⁸ Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 171.

poet pretends to be caught up in the image he has evoked:

"Forþon ic gepencan ne maeg geond þas woruld /forþ hwan
modsefa min ne gesweorce" (58-59) [Indeed I cannot determine
through this world why my inmost thoughts do not grow dark.]
The fact is that his Christian faith is optimistic, yet
momentarily he lets it seem as though he is caught up in the
spirit of pessimism. The structural ramifications are that
a kind of parallelism among the parts of The Wanderer arises
from the fact that the movement in the eardstapa speech from
generalization to actual scene to submerged lament occurs
again. A schematic of The Wanderer as I see it will be use-
ful at this point:

Poet's Prologue (1-7)

Eardstapa		Poet in own person
8-21	Generalization	58-72
22-29 ^a	Actual Scene	73-87 ^b
29 ^b -57	Submerged Lament	88-110

Poet's Epilogue (111-115)

I have shown how the eardstapa speech began with general-
ized observations on the qualities proper to a warrior and
then went to an actual scene followed by a submerged lament.
If it is the poet who resumes in 58 then the sequence is
repeated. Lines 58-72 parallel 8-21 because they contain a
generalized statement of what the warrior is supposed to be.
Of course, I have already cited Pope's observations on the
predominance of wisdom in this part of the poem, and it will

be necessary only to remark that in a number of cases where the poet considers kinds of advice, the advice is addressed not to men in general but to wise men. In the first part of the eardstapa's speech, the emphasis is on heroic reticence, and its parallel in the section ascribed to the poet in his own person contains this reticence, also: "Wita sceal gebyldig, / ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hraedwyrde" (65-66) [A wise man shall be patient, he shall not be too hot-tempered or hasty of speech]. Furthermore, the catalogue of worthy behavior is expanded to include polar opposites "ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig" (67) [not too weak in battle nor too reckless] and random and sundry features of behavior some of which are vague to the point of being almost meaningless--"ne to faegen" (68) [nor too cheerful].

Starting with l. 73 the poet still in his own person turns from abstract rules of conduct to an actual scene just as the eardstapa does. The eardstapa speaks of the death of his lord and his subsequent wandering. The poet in 73-87^b is himself concerned with death, but here the description of destruction is not a lament for personal loss so much as it is an explanation of the failure of the heroic way of life.

Having given a catalog of what the wise man will think, the poet has the wise man interpret an actual scene. In the earlier parts of the poem when the mechanics of despair was described, it was set in a framework where there was no necessity to seek a reason for it. Exile and the pain it

brings were conditions to be endured, and inquiry into its causes was evidently pointless. Joy came to an end and that was that. But in the present section it is evidently not enough to say that the wine-hall is in ruins, that the lord and his retainers are dead, and that the bodies have been either pillaged by birds and wolves or put in an earth-pit. But now we learn that the Creator of the Ages is responsible for the destruction and that therefore what has transpired is part of the divine plan. Of course, one of the liveliest areas of dispute in Old English literary criticism is the extent to which Christian material could have intruded on pagan material; and more to the point, exactly how much use a Christian poet would have made of pagan matter. The issue is of such large proportions that it is beyond the scope of a study of this sort. Suffice it to say that the heroic world provides the ammunition with which the material world is attacked, and that the poem is the work of a Christian poet who evidently feels that there is some advantage in choosing his details from the heroic world. To have the Creator of Ages lay waste to the heroic region is certainly to discredit it, and one is compelled to think of other instances in Old English literature in which treasure, the very essence of the heroic code, is ineffectual. Beowulf, of course, gives the most familiar example, and there have been some extremists who see in the inefficacy of treasure not only a discrediting of the heroic way but indeed a tract

against avarice. Still, one need not pursue the avarice theory in order to see the heroic represented at something of a disadvantage.

Turning to the submerged lament, (88-110), we find that unlike the se-be figure in the eardstapa, the poet's frod on ferbe figure actually speaks. However, this need not disturb our sense of parallelism because in each case the observations have been placed in the consciousness of another person. I have already commented on the se-be speech and how it uses more physical details in representing a scene than does the eardstapa speech. In the frod on ferbe speech the same sort of progression is present though the particulars vary. Introducing the evocation of the scene is the famous ubi sunt sequence which is followed by the presentation of the ruins. An important part of the parallelism here is that the se-be figure expressed his sadness by communicating a dream which occurred in two stages. In the frod on ferbe speech the theme of decay and ruin is developed by a description of visible remains of the heroic way of life, visible remains that exist in the real world. An added touch in this second submerged lament is the blurring of verb tense between the destruction that took place far in the past and that which operates in the present. The result is an air of the progressiveness of decay.

As in the se-be speech, the description of the weather

sets up the conclusion to the frod on ferbe. In the former the friendless man comes out of his reverie, and as he returns to the real world, the contrast he finds in nature (birds, hail, misery) to the warmth and safety in the hallucinatory vision sharpens his sense of discomfort. In the latter there is no happiness with which to form any contrast; rather there is an intensification of the sense of gloom:

ond pas stanhleopu stormas cnyssað,
 hrið hreosende hrusan bindað,
 wintres woma, þonne won cymað,
 nipeð nihtscua, norþan onsended
 hreo haeglfare haelepum on andan (101-105).

[And the storms beat against the rocky slopes, the snow storm falling binds the earth, winter's tumult, then the darkness comes; the night shadow grows dark, sends on from the north the rough hail storm to men in spite.]

Finally, just as concrete description gives way to generalization in the se-pe section: "Cearo bið geniwað / þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe / ofer waþema gebind werigne sefan" (55^b-57) [Sorrow is renewed for him who must very frequently send his weary spirit over the waves' binding]. So in the conclusion to the frod on ferbe speech:

"Her bið feoh laene, her bið freond laene,
 her bið mon laene, her bið maeg laene,
 eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð!" (108-110).

[Here wealth is transitory, here friends are transient, here man is transient, here woman is transient, all this earthly resting place becomes idle.]

John C. Pope calls the last five lines of The Wanderer an epilogue.¹⁹ The fact that they are hypermetric is a large part of his argument, and in addition their content gives a sense of conclusion since after all the examples of transience which the poet has presented, the one source of permanence that man can know is in heaven. It is interesting that the editors of the third edition of Bright's Old English Reader punctuate the last five lines so that only l. 111 is spoken by the poet; 112-115 are spoken by the snottor on mode.²⁰

The search for unity has not been confined to defining the limits of dramatic voices. F. N. M. Diekstra regards The Wanderer as composed of parts governed by the cardinal virtues:²¹

1-57	Patience
58-72	Patience and Fortitude
73-111	Prudence
112-115	Constancy and Patience

James F. Doubleday followed the division of Lumiansky who saw 8-62^a as the eardstapa's definition of wisdom. Doubleday, however, saw unity in a discernible progress of the

¹⁹Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 167.

²⁰Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader, Third Edition, ed. Frederic G. Cassidy and Richard N. Ringler (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 329.

²¹F. N. M. Diekstra, "Seafarer 58-66^a: The Flight of the Exiled Soul to its Fatherland," Neophilologus, 53 (1969), 189-94.

whether first-person utterances are direct address by the poet or speeches put in the mouth of a persona.) In The Seafarer it is probably less a question of where the voices take up and leave off than it is whether they exist at all, because The Seafarer stays in the first person. In fact, the search for structure in The Seafarer involves less a search for dramatic voices and more a study of forces outside the construct of speech acts; namely, variations on the exile topos.

When scholars argue for the existence of speakers, they do so usually because certain passages seem to present different attitudes, particularly towards the sea, which do not make sense if the same speaker is responsible for them all. Max Rieger, for instance, saw the change in attitude toward the sea at 33^b and concluded that the first 33 lines are the bitter sentiments of an old man, and from 33^b on there is a dialogue between the old seaman and a younger one.²⁴ (It will be convenient here to give O. S. Anderson's designation of parts since it is so widely used: A1 = 1-33^a, A2 = 33^b-64^a, B = 64^b-124.) Too, Rieger saw a series of exchanges between the two speakers. Kluge accepted the dialogue theory, but he was not willing to accept the exchanges as explained by Rieger.²⁵ He limited the younger man's

²⁴Max Rieger, "Der Seefahrer als Dialog hergesteht," ZfdP, 1 (1869), 334-39.

²⁵Friedrich Kluge, "Zu altenglischen Dictungen, I, Der

speech to 33^b-64^a and did not bother to try to reconcile the rest of the poem to the first 64 lines since, in Pope's words, he considered the latter part of the poem to be a "bungling addition to the rest of the poem."²⁶ If the passage really belongs, Kluge felt, then the likelihood of allegory must be considered, and internal evidence makes allegory inappropriate.

Ehrismann argued for an allegorical reading.²⁷ The poem, he said, is a rather loose monologue. A1 and A2 should be seen not as dramatic but as comprised of two groups of symbols. The first group represents ascetic rigor in terms of the trials of a seafarer, and the second represents worldly success in terms of hall life. Then in B, the earthly pleasures are denounced as being fleeting and temporary. O. S. Anderson proposed the view that the poem is consistent and coherent allegory, and in doing so denied the existence of voices.²⁸ The Seafarer is not a

Seefahrer," Englische Studien, 6 (1883), 322-27.

²⁶Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 174.

²⁷Gustav Ehrismann, "Religionsgeschichtliche Beiträge zum germanischen Frühchristentum, II, Das Gedicht vom Seefahrer," Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 35 (1909), 213-218.

²⁸O. S. Anderson, "The Seafarer: An Interpretation," Lund, 1937, pp. 1-49. Because of the difficulty of obtaining a copy of this important article, I have had to resort to a summary by E. Blackman, MLR, 34 (1939), 254f.

heroic elegy but rather a religious allegory of the life of a man conceived as a sea voyage. A1 is based on earthly suffering, A2 is made up of yearning for external joys, and B treats the transience of life. John C. Pope was suspicious of Anderson's view:

A1, he maintained, was a presentation of the speaker's past life under the figure of voyaging along a dangerous coast in the winter. A2, then, presented the same speaker's longing to set out on a long summer's voyage across the deep sea to a far distant country; that is, to take leave of this world altogether and make for the heavenly home.²⁹

Pope was troubled by the shift in meaning which Anderson assigned to the symbolic quality of the sea. In A1 the sea represents the trials of worldly experience, in A2 the passage to the hereafter. The shift is from one figurative meaning to another, and Pope argued convincingly that if the shift were from, say, literal to figurative then consistency would not be endangered. To vary the figurative meanings, however, seems to me to put too much strain on such a view. Too, there is no reason to suppose that the narrator of A1 means any more than he says.

One of the most influential articles ever to appear on The Seafarer is that of Dorothy Whitelock, which treats the poem as spoken by a religious zealot (peregrinus) who is contemplating penitential exile.³⁰ In this context, the

²⁹Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 175.

³⁰Dorothy Whitelock, "The Interpretation of The

division of the poem could illustrate a person with direct knowledge of the sea (A1) who would have reason to go on another voyage for religious reasons and, further, who would have a tendency to philosophize and instruct. Whitelock's literal reading avoids any allegory: "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."³¹ She does not recognize 64^b as the beginning of a new section, but sees it as the culmination of what the poet has developed earlier in the poem. By her adherence to a literal reading Whitelock provides an approach which circumvents any temptation to consider the religious matter as the work of an interpolator.

But John C. Pope was troubled by problems which he felt Whitelock's approach did little to solve. The absence in B of sea imagery, for instance, is a violation of what Pope calls "dramatic probability,"³² for though the peregrinus might certainly have the general thought of B, a "poetically conceived" speaker would be more likely to continue the use

Seafarer," in The Early Cultures of North-West Europe: H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies, ed. Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 261-72.

³¹ Whitelock, p. 263.

³² Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 176.

of sea imagery. E. G. Stanley added to the possibilities which reside in the speaker theory by saying that there are in fact two speakers in the first person but that the speaker of A1 is being quoted in the first person by the speaker of A2, the reason being that that is the most vivid way of rendering A1.³³ Pope, of course, disagreed with Stanley on the matter of quoting because he himself was developing his own argument for resurrecting the old dialogue theory. However, he did find attractive one observation in particular, and that is the very useful idea that the relationship between the speakers is not that of an ordinary dialogue:

The second speech is not so much a reply to the first as a major declaration of purpose and belief for which the first speech has given the stimulus. There are elements of contrast suggesting rejoinder as the second speech opens, but its main effect is to add another dimension to the imagery and transfer the discussion to another realm.³⁴

John C. Pope in reviving the old dialogue theory saw A1 as spoken by a seasoned seaman who knows about the torment facing one who goes to sea, and 33^b-102 as spoken by a landman who, ignorant of the sea, is caught up in the thirst for

³³E. G. Stanley, "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Penitent's Prayer," *Anglia*, 73 (1955), 454-55.

³⁴Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 178.

adventure and yearns to go abroad. 103-124 is an epilogue by the poet as master of ceremonies. The feature of The Seafarer which led Pope to this view is the disparity in the attitude towards the sea in A1 and A2. Another point in support of speakers is sylf at line 35. Since it is a stressed syllable, Pope felt that the extra force the word receives is an indication of a change to a speaker who has not been to sea before. (We might recall that min in The Wanderer was used by Pope for the same purpose and by the same line of reasoning.) Pointing to The Wanderer for analogous parts and the use of similar techniques for marking shifts of voice, Pope developed the view that B does not continue the arguments of A2 and further that the hypermetric opening of B marks it as the poet's pious exhortation. The lack of stage directions in both The Wanderer and The Seafarer is explained by Pope as being the result of a "mechanical failure in the written presentation of the poems."³⁵

Stanley B. Greenfield rejected Pope's interpretation on theoretical grounds.³⁶ The critic should not propose a complicated answer if a simple one will do as well. If sylf can have a meaning other than myself, and if that meaning fits the context of the poem, then it makes good sense to use it and avoid the overcomplication resulting from listening

³⁵Pope, "Dramatic Voices," p. 187.

³⁶Greenfield, pp. 212-220.

for voices. The Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary gives examples, for instance, of the word in contexts which suggest the meaning: "of (one's) own accord." Such a meaning applies perfectly in the present case, Greenfield feels, because the speaker has been talking about involuntary exile in the world, and he will soon get around to the voluntary exile he wishes to take for the purposes of salvation:

if sylf in 35^b can mean "of my own accord," we are not confronted with the "implication that the speaker has not been to sea before," but rather have exactly the right dictional pivot for the change in figural stance from the enduring of involuntary exile in lines 1-33^a to the eagerness of voluntary exile in what follows.³⁷

In footnote 28 of the article, Greenfield raises the possibility that the involuntary exile of 1-33^a (leading to sterility and death) is a type of the voluntary exile which leads to eternal life. One wishes that he had elaborated further. When he says, "Such a typological interpretation would support literalness of the voyages in a way that purely allegorical analyses do not," one wonders how the allegorical analyses can support literalness at all. At any rate, John C. Pope graciously retracted his opinion on the subject of voices in The Seafarer and now sees sylf in 35^b as meaning "alone" rather than "of (one's) own accord."³⁸

³⁷Greenfield, p. 219

³⁸Greenfield, p. 220.

Of course, not everyone has divided The Seafarer precisely according to the breaks designated as A1, A2 and B. W. A. Davenport will accept what is called A1 as a unit, but rather than seeing its significance as a distinguishable voice he believes its significance derives from its treatment of the past.³⁹ The second division (33^b-66^a) is organized around the theme of man's weakness, and the third (66^b-124) contains a treatment of God's strength. To Davenport, then, the poem is not a sum of dramatic parts, but rather a progression of ideas built on past and present, man's meekness and God's strength.

But it will be useful to go beyond defining the limits of major dramatic units and thematic units to other loci in the poem which continue to interest critics involved in structural studies. I have explained above how in support of his argument for the existence of voices, Pope described the irreconcilable attitudes towards the sea. The word forþon in 33^b has drawn an enormous bibliography because in Old English it is used in several ways and because the passage it introduces (A2) shows such a striking departure in tone. Scholars have translated it as a causative ("therefore"), as an adversative ("despite"), or as a loose connective ("and so"). John C. Pope in his edition Seven Old

³⁹W. A. Davenport, "The Modern Reader and the Old English Seafarer," Papers on Language and Literature, 10 (1974), 227-40.

English Poems in which The Seafarer appears, glosses forþon for line 33 of the poem as "but yet?" and "as for that?"⁴⁰ (The question marks are Pope's.) He acknowledges the debate surrounding the word and says that he offers the two meanings without having much conviction about them. The former meaning conforms to the adversative example given above, and the latter is a kind of loose connective. The third edition of Bright's Old English Reader edited by Cassidy and Ringler glosses the word as "indeed, assuredly."⁴¹ When Dorothy Whitelock has occasion to translate the word, she chooses the meaning "therefore," though in a footnote she provides extra explanation: "I think it is possible that forþon here is correlative with forþon of 1.39 and redundant in a modern rendering. . . ."⁴² She goes on to say that the word is "often rendered 'assuredly' or some other vague word." Forþon it is probably useless to continue the debate. Those who try to force the meaning "therefore" do so probably because it is the most common meaning. Those who choose other meanings like the adversative try to avoid illogical translation. In either case the choice is a matter of preference guided by probability and should be left at that.

⁴⁰ John C. Pope, Seven Old English Poems (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 165.

⁴¹ Ringler and Cassidy, p. 422.

⁴² Whitelock, p. 264.

Another passage which puzzles the reader who is concerned about structure is ll. 48-52:

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig faegriað,
wongas wlitigiað, woruld onetted;
ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenced
on flodwegas feor gewitan (48-52).

[The groves take on blossoms, the manor
is made beautiful, the fields brighten;
all this exhorts the eager of spirit,
the spirit to a journey, to him who intends
on the ocean paths to go far away.]

It seems that the burgeoning of nature on land is what incites the speaker to set out in spite of the bleakness of life at sea as described in the previous section of the poem. Nature represented in such an attractive way seems hardly to qualify as a force for driving one from land. Rosemary Woolf has observed that while the attitude towards life on the sea has changed, the attitude towards life on the land remains pretty consistent; namely, the speaker is flatly contemptuous of it.⁴³ Each time the formula "he does not know who. . ." appears, there is an undertone of chiding. Woolf is supported by scholars who have dredged out of the Church Fathers the concept that the beauty of the natural world was yet another manifestation of the world, and as such, was not to be allowed to divert man from his proper

⁴³ Rosemary Woolf, "The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and the Genre of Planctus," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, ed. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Frese (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 203.

duty: the care of his soul. To us moderns, the products of a post-romantic world, it seems an odd and perhaps foolish inconsistency to represent a response to natural beauty in this way. But we must remember that if the impulse to go on a journey has its origin in piety, then such an impulse could easily control the response to even the effects of natural beauty.

Having examined the broader idea of structure and the specific areas which command attention in The Seafarer, I propose my own view which, as I said at the outset, depends on an examination not of speech acts, but of the variations on the exile topos. There are three levels: 1-33^a, 33^b-58, and 59-124.

The first, which conforms in length to A1 as treated in the summary of criticism above, is the literal level of the exile topos. It is an intense and bitter treatment of the rigors of exile, complete with topographical and animal imagery. No spirit of hope is allowed to intrude on this first level. It is interrupted twice with the remark that the land-dweller has no way of understanding the bitterness of exile, and, indeed, is insensitive to it. It is interesting that the se-be figure, which is so important in The Wanderer also, in The Seafarer speaks in negative terms: "se mon ne wat" (12) [the man does not know] and "Forþon him gelyfed lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn / gebiden in burgum" (27-28) [Therefore it is little admitted to by him who has

experienced life's joy in towns].

The unrelieved gloom of the first section, (and we can compare it in this sense to the eardstapa speech in The Wanderer) which finds no mitigation in Christian comfort as it does in succeeding parts of the poem, raises an important question about structure. If Christian optimism occurs in some passages and not in others, then it is not difficult to see the reason for the old arguments about Christian interpolations. One recalls Kluge's refusal to admit that B is a part of The Seafarer. One recalls also that W. W. Lawrence was almost apologetic in claiming that The Wanderer and The Seafarer are probably in the form that the poet left them and that the mixture of pagan and Christian elements is not a blemish.⁴⁴ At any rate, any treatment of structure must eventually grapple with the fact that since no Christian references occur in this first part of the poem, Christianity and the hope related to it are conspicuous by their absence.

In his refutation of Pope's theory of dramatic voices, Stanley B. Greenfield referred to the barrenness of involuntary exile which appears in A1.⁴⁵ What he missed, I believe, is the possibility that A1 might be spoken by a literal involuntary exile--that is, one sent into penitential exile

⁴⁴W. W. Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer," JGP, 4 (1902), 460-61.

⁴⁵Greenfield, p. 219.

for the purpose of atoning for sin. In 1-33^a no comfort of the divine comes through to him because the experience is forced upon him; he does not go willingly as a way of seeking salvation. One advantage of approaching the action in this way is that it provides a reason for the absence of Christian elements.

But the most important reason for seeing A2 as the speech of an involuntary exile, or at least as an utterance from the point of view of one, is the ease with which A2 can be aligned with the rest of the poem. I have summarized above the change in attitude toward the sea found in A2 and the attempts scholars have made to justify its place in the poem. Since A1 and 33^b-58 are both direct address, we can choose between two possibilities. We can say with Pope that the "I's" are different and leave ourselves with a built-in explanation of the inconsistency of tone, or we can say with Greenfield they must be the same and that it does not matter that the change of tone is so drastic. To review the change of tone briefly, we cannot fail to notice its abruptness. The verb cunnige ("must experience") in l. 35 is rather pale compared with verbs chosen from A1 like browade (3), bigeat (6), and gebrungen (8). It is true, of course, that gecunnod appears in line 5, but there the effect of intense pain comes from the attached formula bitre breost-ceare; by contrast, cunnige, though it is in the proximity of sealt yda gelac, soon loses any threatening connotation

when in the next few lines the spirit is described as encouraging the setting forth. The topos of exile has been lifted out of that species which we identify with the heroic world of the first section, and it has been placed in one of mystery and even hope.

Despite the fact that the convenient way of arguing for voices is to say that there was a "mechanical failure in the written presentation of the poems," it makes sense to avoid the assumption if we can. The existence of "swa cwaep eardstapa" in The Wanderer indicates that poets of the time were familiar with the technique of quotation (indeed, it would be hard to find a heroic poem that does not use it.) Therefore, we can reasonably expect to find stage directions in the text itself. Certainly, there could have been problems with the transmission of the text, but even if we cannot assume that what we have was intended to stand as a complete and unified poem, it is more fruitful to deal with it as we have it than to conjecture what must have been left out of it.

The question of tense is helpful because if sceolde in line 30 is past tense, then A1 refers to events which took place in the past, and 33^b-58 to events yet to take place. The change in attitude towards the sea, then, is less disturbing if the attitudes can be separated by time; that is, we can say that the speaker of the two passages felt different ways at different times. In the first part of the poem, the

person is an involuntary exile who, because his penance is forced upon him, has as his concern only a description of the bitterness of exile. But in 33^b-58, as the exile topos takes on symbolic importance as a means of salvation through penance, the attitude of the speaker changes because of some increased awareness on his part. It is dangerous for the twentieth-century critic to attempt to reconstruct an alleged increase of awareness in the eighth century, but the kind of conversion from involuntary to voluntary exile is not, I think, outrageous seen in terms of medieval and religious psychology. To read the poem this way is to avoid the voices theory which Pope himself rejected, and Greenfield's restatement of the "prevailing view" which does so little to ease the problems of the contrast of tone between A1 and 33^b-58.

The desire of the speaker to travel takes its force from the realization that exile as an exercise of penance has symbolic importance and is therefore lifted out of the merely painful. This second section of The Wanderer has as its core a passage in two parts (39-43, 44-47) each of which is presented in negative terms. In 39-43 the poet presents a list of kinds of people whose dependence on God's direction is phrased in a distinctive way.

Forþon nis þaes modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,
ne his gifena þaes god, ne in geogube to þaes hwaet,
ne in his daedum to þaes deor, ne him his dryhten
to þaes hold,

paet he a his saefore sorge naebbe,
to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille (39-43).

[For indeed there is no proud-spirited
man over the earth to that extent
generously gifted, to that extent active
in youth, nor in deeds to that extent
valiant, nor lord that gracious, that
he does not have his sea-voyage in
anxiety, to what end God will bring him.]

The implication is that even these kinds of people must
take heed of God's power, and since the list is a paradigm
of the heroic, the poet is making a special attempt to show
that the heroic must bend to God. The second list (44-47)
is not of kinds of people but of well-known features asso-
ciated with the heroic ethos:

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 (44-47).

[There are no thoughts to him of the harp,
nor to ring-receiving, nor delight in wife
or worldly expectation, nor about anything
else but the rolling of the waves, but he
always has longing, he who sets out on the
wave.]

The negativity continues: these details are not on the mind
of the traveler, and so they have lost their significance
compared to the seriousness of the journey. The use of the
heavy negatives recalls the "se þe ne wat" formula from A1
(and by contrast the "se þe wat" from The Wanderer) so that
in The Seafarer the elements of sympathy (that is, of one
character being constructed to share and, in an oblique way,
to sympathize) do not appear as they do in The Wanderer.

This second section ends with yet another negative utterance which is syntactically as well as semantically parallel with the example given above: "þaet se beorn ne wat, / esteadig secg, hwaet þa sume dreogað / þe þa wraeclastas widost lecgað" (55^b-57) [That the man does not know, the comfort-blessed man, what some people endure, those who travel the exile tracks farthest].

The third division of the poem builds up to a conclusion which alludes to a third level of the exile topos: that we on earth are in exile from Heaven. Therefore, we have moved from the literal journey, to a journey with symbolic possibilities deriving from the benefits of a penitential voyage, to the actual anagogical sense, anagogical in that in a world of impermanence we seek a way to get back Home. This third section falls naturally into four subsections the first of which (58-64^b) explains the flight of the soul as it passes beyond the breast. As it travels it "hweted on hwaeweg hreþer unwearnum / ofer holma gelagu" (63-64) [whets on the whaleway the heart irresistibly over the sea's expanse]. Since the soul ranges about exhorting the heart of the exile, his voyage is analogous to the flight of the man on earth struggling to get home.

The second subdivision is 64^b-80^a, the theme of which is the disclaiming of material wealth and material objects. Starting with the mention of the Lord's joys, the transience of the material world, the poet finally states succinctly the

sum of the process: "adl oppe yldo oppe ecghete / faegum fromweardum feorh oðþringed" (70-71) [disease or old age or swordhate will wrest away the life of him fated to pass away]. Swordhate, of course, is the sole property of the heroic ethos, and one notices in both The Wanderer and The Seafarer that the means used to denounce the material is often the heroic. One should remember also that the heroic, in this passage at least, is slightly transformed so that it is more agreeable with what a Christianized version would seem to demand. The praise of the living, the emphasis on reputation are, of course, heroic but the Christianization of the customarily heroic comes with the stipulation that these good and valiant deeds are expected to be directed against the devil with the result: "þaet hine aelda bearn aefter hergen / and his lof sippan lifge mid englum" (77-78) [that the children of men may afterward praise him, and afterward may his praise live with the angels]. Of course, one of the concerns in the poet's mind is life in the Hereafter. Here the echo of the heroic is given to the voice of Christianity because the renown that a warrior created for himself is the renown of eternal life among the heavenly hosts.

With 80^b commences what we might call the most typically elegiac utterance in The Seafarer because the heroic is used in unusual ways. In The Wanderer the ruin is the work of the Creator of the Ages; in this subsection of The Seafarer

(80^b-102) the collapse of the duġub is not explicitly said to be due to the work of any agent, though it is implied since the poem is the work of a Christian poet who, it may be assumed, would have considered the process as part of God's plan.

Another matter of importance is the negative charge given the concept of treasure. In The Wanderer the poet only hints at the inefficacy of treasure, while in The Seafarer it is spelled out: "ne maeg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful / gold to geoce for godes egsan, / þonne he hit aer hydeð þenden he her leofað" (100-102) [to the soul that is full of sins gold may be no help in the presence of God when he hoards it beforehand, while he still lives here]. One recalls another famous example of the same idea in Beowulf. Since the hoard is buried as being useless, and since the correlations are much the same as they are here, it is hard to resist the idea that the heroic is being discredited in favor of the spiritual. After all, the most powerful denunciation of material wealth and the temporal world uses for its examples objects and ideas associated with the heroic ethos. It has always been a matter of vigorous debate as to how far the Christian goes in making use of the pagan in Old English poetry, and no clear answer seems forthcoming. However, in The Wanderer and The Seafarer the point seems to be that the Old Order no longer works. The theory and practice of bestowing riches as reward for meritorious

behavior are the heart of the heroic ethos, and if they are shown not to work, then that ethos is ineffectual and flawed.

From 102 to the end is a celebration of the power of God which culminates in the everlasting happiness in Heaven. The journey leading to heaven is the last level of the exile topos, and in lines 117-18 is what the poet has been aiming at all along:

Uton we hycgan hwaer we ham agen,
ond þonne gepencan hu we þider cumen (117-18).

[Let us be intent on where we have a
home and then think how we can come there.]

It is common in the literature of the Church Fathers to regard the condition of life on earth as exile from heaven.

(G. V. Smithers has exhaustive apparatus on this issue.)

It is unfortunate that the manuscript is damaged where the heroic seems to be discussed because it would be interesting to compare its treatment at the end of the poem with the ideas discussed above. At any rate, the real message is the permanence and security of life in the heavens "þaer is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes."

Though the study of the structure of The Husband's Message involves some controversy over the possible existence of speakers, the problem is by no means as complex as it is with the two previous poems. Still, there is the same problem of ethopoeia and prosopopoeia, and there is a wide divergence of opinion. I should acknowledge here that there

is a significant amount of criticism extant on the relationship of The Husband's Message and Riddle 60, the piece that immediately precedes it in The Exeter Book. However, I shall wait to get to that issue until a later chapter better suited to treat the kind of arguments usually used to support the view that the two are one poem. My present concern is merely to review the opinions on the structure of what is usually called The Husband's Message.

The structure is bound up in the identity of the speaker in the following ways. R. F. Leslie takes the entire poem to be spoken by a human messenger. Arguing against one approach which would identify the speaker as a personified rune-stave, Leslie makes the following points:⁴⁶ In line 6 we are told that the speaker is accustomed to making frequent journeys, an activity not appropriate for a rune-stave. Furthermore, since the speaker refers to the person "se þisne beam agrof," the implication is that the speaker and the rune-stave are not one and the same entity. Third, the speaker uses names like mondryhten min to refer to his master, a practice which evokes a lord-retainer relationship which is not really applicable to a rune-stave. Leslie's last objection is that the verb saegde in line 31 is "more appropriate to a human messenger than to a rune-stave whose function is essentially the conveyance of a written

⁴⁶R. F. Leslie, Three Old English Elegies (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 13-14.

message."⁴⁷

Earl R. Anderson prefers to divide the poem into two parts: Lines 1-12 are attributed to a human messenger, lines 13-54 to a rune-stave.⁴⁸ If Anderson divides the poem thus, then he must answer to only the last three of Leslie's objections to prosopopoeia cited above. Anderson argues that it is not at all unlikely that the speaker would refer to himself, since there are examples (Riddle 35, for example) where the speaker does exactly this. Two of Leslie's three objections about the lord-retainer relationship occur in the first twelve lines, which Anderson, too, attributes to a human messenger so they pose no threat to the latter's argument. And the third (min wine, l. 39b) is not really damning since no lasting relationship is implied. Leslie's last argument involves the propriety of the verb saegde. Anderson cites examples, again from the riddles, of the paradox of the act of speaking without a mouth.

I should explain that part of Anderson's inclination to defend 13-54 as spoken by the stave derives from an emendation made by Kaske several years after Leslie's edition appeared.⁴⁹ In line 50^a, Leslie used the standard reading gehyre ("hear").

⁴⁷Leslie, p. 14.

⁴⁸Earl R. Anderson, "Voices in The Husband's Message," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 74 (1973), 239.

⁴⁹R. E. Kaske, "The Reading 'genyre' in The Husband's Message--Line 49," Medium Aevum, 33 (1964), 204-06.

In 1964, Kaske with the aid of ultra-violet light proposed the reading gecyre ("constrain"). The latter, of course, is more appropriate to a rune-stave.

Margaret E. Goldsmith is among those who take Riddle 60 and The Husband's Message as one poem, but she still has an opinion on the structure of the latter. Lines 1-12 serve as the preamble, 13-25 as the summons, and 26-55 as the promise. It is very odd that Goldsmith does not cite Earl R. Anderson, but in any case she gets around the human messenger/rune-stave dispute by the identification of the speaker as the Pen which writes the word of God.⁵⁰

My own view of the divisions differs only slightly from Goldsmith's. I prefer to think of the first twelve lines as the announcement. Her other two divisions I am quite in agreement with. But before I explain the significance of labelling the first twelve lines as announcement, I emphasize that the problem of meaning in The Husband's Message is particularly difficult, and the difficulty goes beyond the matter of structure. As we shall see in the chapter on genre, the arguments (particularly those by Kaske and Goldsmith) have become prodigiously complex. When I read these articles, I wish they could be true because the literary artifact would become even more satisfying intellectually

⁵⁰ Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Enigma of The Husband's Message," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Delores Frese (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 248.

as a result of the ingenuity found in it.

But my own inclination is to be rather conservative and literal. In the twelve-line segment which launches the poem, fully half of the lines are damaged. It is hard to have faith in an interpretation which imposes on the poem any construct which is even faintly artificial. A high possibility of error results from the condition of the manuscript. On the subject of speakers, Anderson's argument is indeed compelling. In the first section, the speaker as an entity who is accustomed to make frequent voyages is best defined as human. I am mindful also that since "ic" does not occur again after line 11, the poet suggests perhaps more than faintly that the speaker has changed. It is not that the rune-stave could not refer to himself as "I"; the popularity of the riddle makes such a frame of reference entirely possible. My point is that there is a simpler way. I believe that the beam is a signal of identification to assure the legitimacy and identity of the messenger. Lines 13-54 are spoken by the messenger, but he does not intrude on his message. The rest of the poem is a kind of impersonal utterance. The messenger has memorized the material to be relayed and is duplicating the sender's message.

Unlike the other poems treated thus far, The Wife's Lament has not, to my knowledge, been suspected of being delivered by different speakers. The matter of structure, then divides simply along the lines of what critics of the

poem see as the major groupings of ideas. As we shall see, structure also involves the question of time. Lee Ann Johnson regards the poem as made up of two parts. The first (1-26) is narrative; the second (27-53) is descriptive in nature.⁵¹ She argues for a carefully constructed scheme: in part the speaker relates each incident and gives her reaction to it. The treatment of time is important, too, because there is an introduction in which past and present are woven together, and in the last line the speaker returns from former events to the present.

Johnson's plea for complex artistry continues with the view that the second part parallels the first by the repetition of events. The departure of the lord (6-7^a) is returned to in 32^b-33. Likewise, the process of exile in 15-17^a is repeated in lines 26-27. The time returns to the present at the conclusion of the poem. Citing an understanding by the poet of the effects of repetition and the use of different levels of time, Lee argues for a rather sophisticated scheme of structure.

A. N. Doane, in what has been called "an idiosyncratic allegorical interpretation of the poem"⁵² believes The Wife's Lament is best seen as tripartite: The first five lines

⁵¹Lee Ann Johnson, "The Narrative Structure of The Wife's Lament," English Studies, 52 (1971), 497-501.

⁵²Douglas D. Short, "The Old English Wife's Lament," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 71 (1970), 586.

provide a statement of purpose and theme, lines 6-41 give a description of the speaker's condition, and the last part (42-53) is a gnomic passage. He explains:

Although these arbitrary divisions which no doubt could be juggled and revised endlessly indicate neither points in our action nor progression in narration, they do serve to indicate changes of essential topics.⁵³

Doane warns against reading any kind of time sequence into the poem. It is crucial to his view to take the second part as "the description of a static state of being, and not as narration, as the establishment of a mood rather than the telling of a story."⁵⁴ It becomes a mood-piece, a center-piece which along with the introduction and the gnome, make up a formal curse. For a more detailed assessment of Doane's opinion see the chapter on cultural context.

Douglas D. Short agrees to the distinctiveness of the first five lines as a unit which sets the tone and intensifies the emotion of the poem. He sees in turn three other units. Lines 6-28 contain, in contrast to what Doane feels, a swiftly moving narrative in which is found "a strong sense of chronological progression."⁵⁵ Words like aerest, ða, and

⁵³A. N. Doane, "Heathen Form and Christian Function in 'The Wife's Lament,'" Medieval Studies, 28 (1966), 78.

⁵⁴Doane, p. 79.

⁵⁵Short, p. 588.

others demand that we perceive a time sequence. Lines 29-41 explain the present conditions of the speaker, and lines 42-53 are of a gnomic nature. This last part, according to Short, illustrates the progression which is so common in Old English poetry: "The movement from immediate circumstances to universal truths is a characteristic feature of Old English poetry which occurs time and again in Beowulf as well as in other elegies."⁵⁶

J. A. Ward prefers a six-part division of the poem. Lines 1-5 establish the tone and theme, 6-14 present the events which caused the separation of the husband and the wife, 15-26 develop the contrast between the happy past and the wretched present, 27-41 describe the wife's unpleasant circumstances, 42-47^a curse the person responsible for the present unhappiness, 47^b-53 describe the exile's physical and spiritual torments.⁵⁷ As for chronology, Ward, like Doane, denies the kind of consistency of passing time perceived by Short: "The intense emotion of the wife and the rather unsystematic organization of the poem in general indicate that the wife's hasty summary of the antecedent action may be confused and unchronological."⁵⁸ And Ward adds another view to the reference to the "geong man" whom he takes to be the

⁵⁶Short, p. 600.

⁵⁷J. A. Ward, "The Wife's Lament: An Interpretation," JEGP, 59 (1960), 26.

⁵⁸Ward, p. 27.

person who is responsible for the wife's state of exile. R. F. Leslie in his edition of The Wife's Lament takes the appellation in a general sense:

The geong man is an impersonal figure; he does not represent the woman's husband as has been recently suggested, but the woman herself, for the generalized man could be used of women as well as men (see Bosworth-Toller, s.v. mann I)."⁵⁹

Ward, however, believes the curse to be exactly that rather than a statement of grief by the person affected. Greenfield takes the geong man to mean the husband.⁶⁰

Thomas M. Davis divides the poem similarly except that the section 6-41 is broken down into three parts, 6-10, 11-26, and 27-41. Divided in this way, each unit begins with a statement of the source of grief and ends with a first-person expression of sorrow.⁶¹

Robert D. Stevick perceives the unity of The Wife's Lament as reinforced by the repetition of moods and ideas. Repetition of derivatives and compounds of geomor, to choose one example, occurs throughout and imparts "formal poetic organization."⁶² Furthermore, three of the four major

⁵⁹Leslie, p. 8.

⁶⁰Stanley B. Greenfield, "The Old English Elegies," in Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature, ed. E. G. Stanley (London: Thomas Nelson, 1966), p. 168.

⁶¹Thomas M. Davis, "Another View of The Wife's Lament," Papers in English Language and Literature, 1 (1965), 291-306.

⁶²Robert D. Stevick, "Formal Aspects of The Wife's

divisions of the poem (Stevick gives the line numbers of the beginnings of sections in a footnote: 1, 15, 27, 42) are closed off with statements of wanting and desire.

My own view of the structure of The Wife's Lament borrows somewhat from the foregoing accounts. The first five lines certainly establish a tone as those critics cited above maintain. It contains the introduction of the ic-figure, the lyric voice, which has exile as the root cause of its depression. Though Ward is quite right to treat carefully the contrast in the poem between the wife's happy past and wretched present, the past has not been consistently happy. The tenor of the wife's entire life is precisely stated by: "Ic þaet secgan maeg, / hwaet ic yrmþa gebad, sibþan ic up weox" (2-3) [I may say that which I experienced of miseries since I grew up]. It is interesting that the poet seems to undermine at the outset the standard elegiac contrast between the happy past and the wretched present.

The second part (6-26) is a description of events rather than a chronology. So much is left out that Short's perception of the specifically temporal force of aerest, þa, etc. is not very compelling. His argument against the translation of ongunnon in line 11 as a pluperfect is convincing, however (see Greenfield, for instance).⁶³ But even so, I

Lament," JEGP, 59 (1960), 21.

⁶³Greenfield, "Elegies," p. 162.

think there are four facts of importance in this section:

1. The departure of the lord
2. The plotting of the lord's kinsmen
3. The lord's order that the wife take her present residence
4. The possible establishment of a motive for the lord's exile. The mention of morpbor hycgendne (20) sounds enough like conspiracy to suggest the reason for his absence.

I make no case for ignoring the establishment of a time frame altogether, but I do think that we err in having modern expectations of the representation of passing time in Old English poetry. Douglas Short, himself, says:

With its sophisticated system of verbal phrases, Modern English can accomodate elaborate inversions of chronology without confusing a listener, but Old English had to function with a far simpler system and therefore was not nearly so flexible a language in indicating time relationships.⁶⁴

But Short is troubled (as I am not) by the following inconsistency. If the husband had already left and the wife went elsewhere, why would the kinsmen have cause to separate two already separated people?⁶⁵ The answer, I believe, is that the Old English poet was not as concerned with the precise

⁶⁴Short, p. 588.

⁶⁵Short, p. 588.

representation of chronology. It is plausible that the wife interrupts her account in the past tense at l. 11 and goes back further in time to clarify the reason for her exile. It would seem necessary to consider ongunnon pluperfect if one expected to find a precise temporal order. However, it seems better to see events divided into past actions and present ones without any strictly charted schedule.

The last two sections of The Wife's Lament are lines 27-41 and 42-53. The former is a description of location; the latter is a summary of the generalized wisdom which comes from the experiences related throughout the poem.

Resignation and The Riming Poem are both excluded from Greenfield's discussion of the elegies on the ground that they are "qualitatively inferior"⁶⁶ to the other poems generally placed in the category. I put aside such a value judgment here because Resignation and The Riming Poem have many themes and techniques in common with the poems I have so far treated. Both present very different problems. The former, for instance, displays a somewhat disturbing conflict of tone because at line 76^b (or thereabouts) the speaker begins to introduce feelings and conditions which have no logical connection with those in the first segment of the poem. As I shall show, a kind of severity pervades the second movement.

In the first section (1-76^a), I have determined the

⁶⁶Greenfield, "Elegies," p. 143.

subdivisions rather arbitrarily, because with the similarity of themes and techniques there is the possibility of almost endless juggling of parts. Lines 1-9 are a statement of dedication in which the speaker expresses the desire that God will aid him, and he commends his soul into God's keeping:

Ic þe, maere god,
mine sawle bebeode ond mines sylfes lic,
ond min word ond min weorc, witig dryhten,
and eal min leohþo, leohtes hyrde,
and þa manigfealdan mine gepohtas (5-9).

[I commend to you, lord, my soul and the body
of myself, and my word and my work, wise lord,
and all my poetry, guardian of light, and
my manifold thoughts.]

It is interesting in light of all the discussion about the degree to which a Christian poet would have adapted secular material that the poet speaks of dedicating his poetry to God. He is consciously putting the verse patterns of secular poetry to Christian purpose, and the tone of the passage does not suggest that he is doing something new and unorthodox. Of course, the same sort of dedication is implied in The Wanderer and The Seafarer. Here, however it is most overt.

Lines 10-21 contain the first of a series of pleas on the part of the speaker to be shown the best way to salvation. The continuation of the plea for forgiveness is followed by the introduction of a theme which will be intensified

throughout the rest of the poem: "Forgif me to lisse, lif-gende god, / bitre bealodaede." (19-20) [Forgive me in mercy, living God, for my bitter baled deed]. This reference to offenses against God is vague and probably refers to the general kind of sinning any devout person would consider himself guilty of. But as I hope to show, the speaker, with one lapse of continuity, gives added force to his culpability as the poem progresses.

Lines 22-64^a continue the penitential imperatives and the admission of sin:

Nu þu const on mec
firendaeda fela, feorma mec hwaepre,
meotud, for þinre miltse, þeah þe ic ma fremede
grimra gylta þonne me god lyfde (25-28).

[Now you know that there are in me many evil
deeds, feed me anyway, Lord, for your mildness,
though I have done more grim wrongs than God
allowed me.]

Just as the regnþeof ("archthief") is mentioned in the second section, so fear of the devil is expressed again.

Lines 64^b-76^a open with a statement that the speaker's mind is "synnum fah" ("stained with sins"). Now the idea of a journey is introduced:

hwaepre ic me ealles þaes ellen wylle
habban ond hlyhhan ond me hyhtan to,
fraetwian mec on ferdweg ond fundian
sylf to þam siþe þe ic asettan sceal,
gaest gearwian, ond me þaet eal for gode þolian
bliþe mode, nu ic gebundan eom
faeste in minum ferþe (70-76).

[Whether (yet, nevertheless) I will have
for myself all this fortitude, and laugh
and look forward with hope. I will pre-
pare myself for the soul-way and hasten
myself to the journey I will appoint, pre-
pare my spirit and submit myself to all that
for God with a happy spirit, now that I am
bound fast in my soul.]

As the first major division concludes, the speaker discusses what appears to be a kind of voluntary exile which can be compared to the voluntary exile of The Seafarer.

Though in each of the preceding subsections the speaker seems to intensify his culpability, there is nothing which prepares us for the change of tone. So abrupt is this change that Bliss and Frantzen challenge the integrity of Resignation in the manuscript.⁶⁷ Examination of the gatherings of The Exeter Book which contain the poem show that there may be a page missing after folio 118 (this page ends with line 69 of the poem). Further substantiation for the idea comes from metrical and dialectal evidence. Bliss and Frantzen shift their attention to the content of the poem and find two kinds of discrepancies, those of attitude and those of theme. The speaker praises God's mercy in 1-68 and laments his wrath in 76^b-78. Resignation A, which as they divide the poem is 1-69, is the literature of repentance, and in Resignation B (70-118) the responsibility is only grudgingly acknowledged.

⁶⁷ Alan Bliss and Allen J. Frantzen, "The Integrity of Resignation," Review of English Studies, 27 (1976), 385-402.

Thomas H. Bestul, who sees the second part as beginning at 75^a, calls this portion the elegiac portion of the poem. The shift introduces an "extended metaphor for the life of the penitent, linked to the first section by the iteration of the word sib (77^b) which here has symbolic meaning as well as literary meaning."⁶⁸ The shift does involve a sharp conflict, but there is a way to come at a reason for the collocation of such different attitudes.

Consider the following passage:

Gode ic haebbe
abolgen, brego moncynnes; forþon ic þus bittre
gewitnad for þisse worulde, swa min gewyrhto
micle fore monnum, þaet ic martirdom
deopne adreoge (78-82).
waeron

[I have angered God, leader of mankind; therefore I am thus bitterly punished in this world as my deeds were great before men that I endure awful martyrdom.]

Of course it is hard to reconcile the speaker of this passage with that of the first movement of the poem because even though the latter contains an admission of guilt for sins committed, and an acknowledgment of having a stained soul, there is nothing serious enough to indicate martyrdom.

Even allowing for the kind of hyperbole typical of a religious zealot, we must find a clash in the respective

⁶⁸ Thomas H. Bestul, "The Old English Resignation and the Benedictine Reform," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 78 (1977), 23.

tones of the two movements. I think a clue lies in the significance of tense. In my structural treatment of The Seafarer I noted how a disparity of content, namely the differing attitudes toward exile, led Pope and others to see two different speakers. One was a veteran seaman who from long experience dreaded the rigors of life on the sea; the other was a young seaman who was naively drawn to it. I argued that there are not two different speakers, but rather one speaker with two different attitudes towards exile. The first part of The Seafarer is in the past tense and describes the painful, negative aspects of exile, and the rest is in the present tense and explains the more positive aspects. Therefore the speaker's attitude toward exile changed as his awareness grew of what literal exile could become seen as the figurative exile of the peregrinus figure who struggles to reach his heavenly home. A similar argument may be of use here because, as I pointed out above, much of the first movement of Resignation, which is relatively happy in tone, is in the present tense with a significant number of allusions to events yet to take place. This preparatory attitude perhaps refers to the exile which is described in the second movement. There the trial has commenced. The strife is immediate, and the pain of exile asserts itself in rather stern terms. Lines 76^b-88^a convey these ideas convincingly. It is as though the first segment of the poem is told from the point of view of one who is caught up in the importance

of exile before the fact, the second from the point of view of the same person when the harshness of the conditions has worn away the charm of the venture. The first part is the theory of exile; the second is the practice. Now there is the mention of martyrdom and the state of being impelled from one's native land.

Lines 88^b-108^a present the mechanics of exile. The lacuna at line 99 prevents the reader from forming a clear idea of the process, since it is not clear whether the speaker has been able to acquire a boat. He is displaced, to be sure, but we are not quite certain how. The intensification of grief continues in this passage by means of the revelation that the speaker can love no man. When this is followed by "eorl in eple" (108) [earl in native land] it is reminiscent of the yearning for the lost lord in The Wanderer. It ranks almost as an afterthought since the real issue is the speaker's feeling that he is unfit to love anyone.

The last part (108^b-118) is both similar and dissimilar to the conclusions of the other poems surveyed above. (See Stanley for the view that the poem breaks down into penitential prayer, the theme of exile, and a message of resignation.⁶⁹ Though he does not specify the limits of the last, I expect that he would accept its dimensions as I set them

⁶⁹E. G. Stanley, "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Penitent's Prayer," Anglia, 73 (1955), 456-57.

out.) It is similar to the conclusions of The Wanderer and The Seafarer in that the speaker concludes with appreciation of the rewards coming after life. But by any standards the last two lines are rather odd for a Christian conclusion: "Giet biþ þæt selast, þonne mon him sylf ne maeg / wyrd onwendan, þæt he þonne wel þolige" (117-118) [Yet be that best, since a man may not himself change fate, that he endure well]. It may be a clumsy attempt to close with a synthesis of heroic and Christian ideas.

The Riming Poem provides its own peculiar problems which are in part the result of its almost overwhelming obscurity. Since it is heavily rhymed, not only at the ends of lines but internally at the ends of half-lines, many scholars propose the view that the poet in search of rhyming pairs of words was forced to cloud his meaning. G. V. Smithers offers the following structural scheme:⁷⁰

1. Lines 3-42: The pleasures of youth and prosperity
2. Lines 43-54: The speaker's present condition of misery
3. Lines 55-69: The perishable nature of happiness, life, the world
4. Lines 71-79: The grave
5. Lines 80-87: The need to focus one's thoughts on the joy and permanence of heaven

⁷⁰G. V. Smithers, "The Meaning of The Seafarer and The Wanderer (continued)," Medium Aevum, 28 (1957), 8.

O. D. Macrae-Gibson is inclined to give the poet credit for more than simply the creation of a difficult poem.⁷¹ If the opening "he" is understood as referring to God, then The Riming Poem is structurally similar (on both ends, at least) to The Wanderer: the beginning and the end both deal with God and the joy of heaven. Furthermore, in the first section of the poem which describes the conditions of the happy past, there is at work an undertone of the transitory nature of the sources of the pleasure. The imagery of spring (and here Macrae-Gibson gives a cross-reference to Smithers) in church literature often underscored the theme that all things shall pass. Macrae-Gibson's point is that the transition from happiness to sadness at line 43 is not as abrupt as commonly held.

Further support is found in what Macrae-Gibson refers to as "semantic fields" or the study of meanings of words which may be shaded in some way. For example, "beofode" in line 30 may mean "resound" with a connotation of fear so that there is a "submerged implication that the terrible power of God is awakening to strike down the human magnificence here described."⁷² With reference to a broader context of meaning, Macrae-Gibson cites the common idea that the first part deals

⁷¹O. D. Macrae-Gibson, "The Literary Structure of The Riming Poem," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 74 (1973), 62-84.

⁷²Macrae-Gibson, p. 69.

with the narrator personally, the latter with humanity and the world in general. It is interesting, he feels, that immediately following the break at line 43, the poet shifts from first-person to third-person. Then follows the use of third-person singular and third-person plural pronouns and then finally the scope is widened to include the whole world.

On the whole, Smithers' view is much more plausible than Macrae-Gibson's. The latter's explanation of semantic fields is provocative but strained. While we do the author of the poem an injustice to maintain that his work is merely obscure and to write it off as a labored experiment in metrics, we do ourselves one to comb the Bosworth-Toller for meanings we find agreeable. The Riming Poem is a difficult poem with touches of haunting brilliance, but its parts do not fit together smoothly. For all of the discussion about the dimensions of the various segments of The Wanderer, for instance, there is no doubt about the reason for the fall of the Old Order. In The Riming Poem that reason is not specified. The word brondhord ("burning treasure") in line 46, which by some has been taken as cancer in the physical sense, may refer to treasure which in the process of the fall of the heroic became tainted.⁷³ One recalls The Seafarer, lines 97-102:

beah þe graef wille golde stregan
broþor his geborenum, byrgan be daedum,

⁷³W. S. Mackie, "The Old English Rhymed Poem," JEGP, 21 (1922), 507-509.

mapmum mislicum þaet hine mid wille,
 ne maeg þaere sawle þe biþ synna ful
 gold to geoce for godes eg-san,
 þonne he hit aer hydeð þenden he her leofað
 (97-102).

[Though brother will strew with gold the grave
 for his brother born, bury him beside the dead,
 with various treasure, that goes not with him;
 to the soul that is full of sins, gold may be
 no help in the presence of God, when he hoards
 it beforehand, while he still lives here.]

Beowulf, too, provides a parallel since the treasure was
 buried useless to man. But in the case of The Riming Poem
 the obscurity is such that it makes the leap of faith diffi-
 cult to take.

With regard to structure, I have nothing to add to
 Smithers' view; it is comprehensive, and I can propose nothing
 better.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES

While interest in investigating the alleged dramatic units in the elegies continues, in recent years there has been an increase in the activity directed at reconstructing the background or cultural context in which Old English poetry was created. We have always known that the quality of learning in the Age of Bede was very high and that the libraries in some of the ecclesiastical establishments in England were startlingly rich in the learning of the church. Among others, J. D. A. Ogilvy has compiled sources of allusions to church literature found in the Latin works of the time, and has tried to reconstruct the authors known directly or indirectly in Anglo-Saxon England.¹ Concentrating on Jarrow, M. L. W. Laistner has prepared a list of the works which must have been available to anyone working there.²

¹J. D. A. Ogilvy, Books Known to Anglo-Latin Writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin (670-804) (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1936).

²M. L. W. Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," in Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 237-66.

But the argument which has been conducted with such heat concerns whether any of this erudition can be used to interpret literature which is predominately secular. For instance, Laistner in his Thought and Culture in Western Europe has a separate chapter in which he gives a summary of the significant works of Anglo-Saxon literature. Though he is evidently hesitant to assume any direct influence of the great learning of the time on the Old English corpus, he does make the following statement:

But if we bear in mind that the Christian elements in Beowulf are not merely incidental, but that the poem in the form it has come down to us is essentially a Christian poem with some pagan elements, and that its language and structure are the work of a cultivated man, writing a literary epic on traditional themes for an aristocratic audience, we shall be disposed to picture him as a well-educated denizen of some English monastery rather than as a minstrel at the court of an English prince.³

Realizing that any treatment of thought and culture in Western Europe must mention Anglo-Saxon poetry, Laistner still keeps the vernacular to itself and admits only that a Christian atmosphere would have had some broad effect on even the author of a vernacular piece. This distinction will become more important when we examine the rather specific use patristic commentary is put to by some scholars.

For now it will be helpful to examine how scholars

³M. L. W. Laistner, Thought and Culture in Western Europe (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1957), p. 370.

built a case for reading Old English poetry in the light of church learning. In his seminal article "Historical Criticism,"⁴ D. W. Robertson, Jr. made the following claim. Since medieval literature was written in a world intellectually dominated by the Christian church, we can reasonably turn to the teachings of the church as a guide to the criticism of medieval texts. Robertson began with Old English literature and gave a brief treatment of The Wanderer. After explaining how the conventional view of the poem treats it as an incoherent mixture of pagan and Christian elements, he comments on the figure of the exile: "However, the picture of the exile suggests at once one of the commonest of all Christian figures, the exile in the world who wanders in search of Christ his Lord in Jerusalem."⁵ As we shall see later, it is a view capable of almost endless refinement. It is a convincing idea. If I am right that The Seafarer is built on three levels of the exile topos, the third of which refers to the eternal home where security awaits the chosen, then my view of the structure of the poem corroborates the likelihood that the exile and the peregrinus work well together. It is worth pointing out, too, that there are a number of stories of estrangement in the Bible which must

⁴D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Historical Criticism," in English Institute Essays: 1950, ed. Alan S. Downer (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 3-31.

⁵Robertson, p. 18.

have appealed strongly to an Anglo-Saxon audience and which contain characters much like exiles. In the Old English Daniel, for example, the period of time between Nebuchadnezzar's fall from power and his redemption is described in terms of exile and wandering.

Bernard F. Huppé expanded and extended the approach of Robertson in a much longer study of the influence of St. Augustine's attitudes toward literature. Developing a theory of Christian Latin poetry as practiced by the Christian fathers, Huppé made the leap to studying Latin poetry in connection with vernacular. His argument is worth quoting at some length:

The vernacular, whatever the acclaim accorded its success, was the language of ephemera. Its transcription was probably in those early days a matter of the chance interest of bishop or abbot; certainly its survival has been a matter of chance. Since there are no early theoretical writings on vernacular composition, but only on composition in Latin, and since the survival of vernacular literature is largely the result of the interest of men who were trained in Latin rhetoric and Latin poetry, we must of necessity study English poetry in the light of the practice of Latin poetry.⁶

Robertson and Huppé proceed according to what I shall call the appeal of informed likelihood. Before I summarize the objections some scholars have to their views, I should clear away some other details that bear on what the status

⁶ Bernard F. Huppé, Doctrine and Poetry (New York: State Univ. of New York, 1959).

of vernacular poetry must have been at the time. For instance, Huppé and others cite the fact that Bede is known to have been fond of Old English poetry and even to have composed it himself.⁷ Cuthbert, a brother in Bede's monastic house, preserved a poem which has been called Bede's Death Song because Bede himself is said to have composed it. If one of Bede's eminence (the only Englishman Dante placed in Heaven) enjoyed vernacular poetry, the argument goes, then the church must have had esteem for it. Too, the great preacher Aldhelm, who was trained by Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury, was accustomed, according to William of Malmesbury, to compose poems in order to gain the attention of his listeners and gradually build an audience for his serious teachings.⁸ Huppé calls attention again and again to Aldhelm's adherence to Augustinian tradition.⁹

But on the other side, scholars who reject the efficacy of Latin poetry as a measure of vernacular verse, cite Alcuin's famous letter to Higeald in 737 in which he asks "Quod Hiniieldus cum Christo?" and in which he blasts the Lindisfarne monks for listening to the recitation of secular poetry in the refectory. If poetry were used for the high

⁷Huppé, pp. 78ff.

⁸Stanley B. Greenfield, A Critical History of Old English Literature (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965), p. 1.

⁹Huppé, pp. 69-77.

purpose that Robertson and Huppé claim for it, such scholars say, Alcuin would have had no reason to discourage the reading of it. (It is amusing that Alcuin is used as support by G. V. Smithers for his allegorical view of the exile figure in The Wanderer and The Seafarer.¹⁰)

Turning to the theoretical objections that many scholars have raised against historical criticism in the Robertsonian sense, I should explain that at times I shall stray from criticism which relates directly to The Wanderer and The Seafarer. The reason is that much important work which will help in my evaluation of this species of criticism is not on Old English. However, since the methodology is much to the point, I have included some extra items which are illuminating.

Stanley B. Greenfield, in his recent book, The Interpretation of Old English Poems, provides a summary of approaches to Old English Literature.¹¹ Even his choice of a title contains an indication of his stance since he explains in his introduction why he chose to say Old English poems rather than poetry. He protests that much modern criticism tends to rob poems of their individuality:

¹⁰G. V. Smithers, "The Meaning of The Wanderer and The Seafarer," Medium Aevum, 26 (1957), 148. Alcuin wrote Latin poems in one of which he mentions the soul's attempt to get back to its ancestral home in heaven as a process of exile.

¹¹Stanley B. Greenfield, The Interpretation of Old English Poems (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

This is not to deny a poem's participation in the community and commonality of its Anglo-Saxon poetical and cultural heritage, but rather to draw attention, in crucial matters of interpretation, small and large, to the convergence of various kinds of poetic and extra-poetic elements in the immediate text, and to make that text speak to us across the years with the dignity and self-assurance of its individuality.¹²

The first approach Greenfield analyzes is the historical, and he sees what he feels are three weaknesses in it. First, the reader "cannot entirely escape from his present"¹³ into a time which he tries to reconstruct accurately enough to enter, and which he tries to approach on its own terms. Greenfield goes on to underscore how necessary it is that the reader relate his own experiences to a work because that is the way it touches him most closely. He quotes from Alain Renoir who is convinced that if we cannot appreciate Old English poetry "from the point of view of our own time,"¹⁴ then we would do well to hand it over to the linguists and antiquarians.

The second weakness Greenfield attributes to the historical school is that it tends to be reductive:

. . . by a failure at times to distinguish between the specific thought in an individual poem and the general current of ideas in the cultural and intellectual climate of the time

¹²Greenfield, "Interpretation," p. ix.

¹³Greenfield, "Interpretation," p. 6.

¹⁴Greenfield, "Interpretation," p. 7.

an insensitive historicism downgrades the literary quality of the best pieces. . . .¹⁵

Of course, Robertson and Huppé are unabashed offenders if criticism is to be seen this way because the bulk of their energies is directed to understanding the ideas of the time.

The third weakness is the strongest point in Greenfield's attack on historical criticism:

A third, and perhaps the most troublesome, feature of the historical approach, one related to its tendency toward reductiveness, is that its practitioners employ what may be called the "fallacy of homogeneity." They assume a representativeness or orthodoxy of opinion and thought in the intellectual milieu of the age.¹⁶

This fallacy is probably the most widely criticized feature of the way Robertson and Huppé read medieval literature.

One of the most thoughtful and effective attacks on Robertson in particular is an essay by R. S. Crane in which the following distinction is made. If a scholar calls himself a textual critic or a literary historian, then his approach is defined and limited by the kinds of problems he chooses to address himself to. On the other hand, the Freudian critic, the Marxist social critic, or the archetypal critic has an approach which is guided not by a "preferred

¹⁵Greenfield, "Interpretation," p. 8.

¹⁶Greenfield, "Interpretation," p. 9.

set of problems but by a preferred principle of explanation."¹⁷ Greenfield's "fallacy of homogeneity" has much in common with Crane's "fallacy of the privileged hypothesis."

The problems of historical criticism, as Greenfield presents them, admit of no easy solutions. The first, since it is present in such absolute terms, is above argument. To escape "entirely" one's own present is psychologically and physiologically impossible. Yet one wonders if the impossibility of an undertaking is any reason for its being abandoned. It is equally impossible that a modern critic who evaluates a modern literary work will arrive at a final assessment to which nothing can be added. And yet he is not deterred from making what contributions he can. Too, when the critic says that a literary work almost necessarily means something to later readers that it cannot have meant to its first audience, he is certainly right. But that does not diminish the value of trying to establish what would have been of interest to that first audience. The points above should be recognized, and then one's purpose to study the work historically must be reconfirmed with a view to examining cautiously the literary milieu in which it appeared. John V. Fleming's introduction of his approach to Le Roman de la Rose is very much to the point here. He divides criticism into two schools, the accretive and the historical. The

¹⁷R. S. Crane, The Idea of the Humanities (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), II, 248.

former presumes that the meaning of a literary work cannot be defined in terms of its meaning for the author and his contemporaries: "It is the process of accretion, the history of its criticism of many readers in many ages."¹⁸ Fleming's reaction is that to approach literature in this way is to view it as a Rorschach test to be interpreted differently by each new generation of patients.

With regard to the danger of failing to distinguish between the content of a particular poem and the cultural climate of the time, I admit the tendency to overlook examples of individual brilliance. However, when exploring a time in which conscious imitation of images, motifs, and entire works accounted for such a high percentage of the creative activity, the critic must view the author in connection with his contemporaries. Indeed, far from "downgrading the literary quality of the best pieces,"¹⁹ oftentimes we put the genius of the author in sharper relief when we look closely at what he did to the traditions he inherited.

The third danger, the complaint against reductiveness, is the most real. Certainly no one in good faith would address a critical question after having armed himself in advance with the answer. Still, special conditions which

¹⁸ John V. Fleming, The Roman de la Rose: A Study of Allegory and Iconography (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 4.

¹⁹ Greenfield, "Interpretation," p. 8.

existed in the Middle Ages make the danger of criticizing from a standpoint of a "preferred principle of explanation" less serious. Robertson's observations on dealing with a literary climate so thoroughly dominated by the Roman Catholic church should make us hesitant not to bring to a literary work certain assumptions attuned to Church beliefs and practices. A time like our own in which creativity of all kinds is characterized by a process of continuous experimentation might well make a critic approach a work with fewer assumptions. The authors of the Middle Ages, however, had stricter norms. In any case, I see nothing overly narrow about insisting that a work, for purposes of a study, be kept in its own time. It is fashionable nowadays to maintain that we owe it to the artist to identify with him any way we can, and so some apply current views of psychology and of other social sciences. In a sense, the literary work becomes a vehicle by which the reader gets in touch with his feelings. But it is one thing to understand a work of art and quite another to understand oneself. The former is the work of the scholar; the latter is something he does on his own time.

The examples given above of how a reconstruction of cultural context can be used to interpret Old English poetry do not rely on a precise relationship between the text and the material of possible influence. But some scholars tend to interpret more narrowly. James F. Doubleday sees a

contrast between the speaker in The Wanderer at the outset (5^b, 8-9^a) and the speaker at the end (114^b-115).²⁰ In the first passage he is in a state of "bemoaning his grief and blaming fate for his troubles"; in the second he is able to speak rather comfortably of "heofonum, þær us eal seo faestnung stondeð." Doubleday concludes that in the course of the poem the speaker's change of attitude can be traced according to medieval views of the progress of the soul: memory, reason, and will. In the poem, the speaker remembers past joys and hardships, he reflects on the condition of the world and how the wise man may deal with it, and he explains what man must do to be saved from his grief. Doubleday argues that the three-part division of the soul came down from St. Augustine by way of St. Bonaventura. Doubleday cites as being of possible influence Gregory's Liber regula pastoralis as well as a host of other sources scattered through the footnotes. I repeat from the chapter above on structure a summary of Doubleday's divisions: (1-5) Frame of speaker's condition; Memoria (6-62^a); Intelligentia, reflection on the world's condition (62^b-110); and Voluntas (111-115), what one must do to be saved from grief. In a footnote Doubleday praises Lumiansky's article on the dramatic structure of the poem, and in the major particulars, the divisions of the two critics are the same. It is interesting

²⁰James F. Doubleday, "The Three Faculties of the Soul in The Wanderer," Neophilologus, 53 (1969), 189-94.

that Lumiansky's view, which has a dramatic focus, gives rise quite naturally to an approach which when fortified with a few facts puts an entirely different face on the poem.

Doubleday has followed much modern methodology by regarding his task as complete once he cites as proof of his opinions works presumed known to the Anglo-Saxons. Another reading of The Wanderer based on the assumption that the poet knew something of the Church Fathers is F. N. M. Diekstra's division of the poem according to the appearance of the cardinal virtues: Patience (1-57), Patience and Fortitude (58-72), Prudence (73-111), Constance and Patience (112-115).²¹ It is an interesting approach not only because Diekstra's piece is more heavily fortified with scholarly apparatus, but also because, unlike Doubleday, he pauses to develop some theoretical rules for the application of his methodology. He claims that:

The poet gives a condensed account of orthodox Christian teaching without any restrictive notions of heathen military ethics, and that this teaching can be accounted for by reference to generally known and conventional treatments of moral doctrine in moralistic writers of the church with whose works Old English poets might be assumed to have had some acquaintance.²²

²¹F. N. M. Diekstra, "The Wanderer 65^b-72: The Passions of the Mind and the Cardinal Virtues," Neophilologus, 55 (1971), 73-88.

²²Diekstra, p. 74.

While Doubleday believes his argument has sufficient force if he can point with certainty to books that the Anglo-Saxons knew, Doubleday goes further by maintaining that the greater part of Old English poetry was "religious-propagandistic." He cites Timmer's research into the meaning of wyrd, his own research of Christian forces like Ambrose and Augustine, and supporting material found in Cicero. Though his premise is roughly the same as Doubleday's, he does try to give a fuller account of the cultural context within which the Old English poet worked. By virtue of the "religious-propagandistic" bias he perceives, he claims that "the stress on patience is better explained as the Christian virtue than as the stiff upper lip of the heroic warrior."²³ I should mention here that Karen Mullen dissents,²⁴ not on the subject of Doubleday's major premise but on the strictness of its application. She is willing to admit the progress of the soul, but she is unwilling to admit that the idea will fit into three such tidy compartments.

Summing up the implications of these articles which deal with what we can call the non-dramatic divisions of the poems, one observes that Doubleday's is the most stringent because it assumes not only the existence of certain features but of a precise order as well, since the progress

²³Diekstra, p. 86.

²⁴Karen A. Mullen, "The Wanderer: Considered Again," Neophilologus, 58 (1974), 74-81.

of the soul involves movement from a remembrance, to a judgment, to a redirection of will as the soul determines a proper course of action. Diekstra's approach does not demand that his unifying principle follow any sort of order, only that it is present in the poem. But each approach underscores the great division of opinion on the elegies, because even though it is clear that their authors may have been exposed to the concept of the progress of the soul in a theological framework and been aware of cardinal values, we cannot know enough about the methods of the Anglo-Saxon poets to say with any assurance that theological material would have been used in this way. There are other problems of methodology in the case of the cardinal virtues, which as opposed to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, come down from classical antiquity. Certainly I do not suggest that classical antiquity is the source of these virtues in Old English literature, though some have argued for the influence of Virgil and others. I wish only to show that these virtues are not the sole property of Christianity and that admiration for prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude in one form or another is certainly a part of the heroic ethos. One recalls R. E. Kaske's attempt to prove that the sapientia et fortitudo theme in Beowulf is the point of fusion between the pagan and the Christian,²⁵ and

²⁵R. E. Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling

though he offers prodigious support one cannot leave far behind the possibility that Beowulf was a courtesy-book for young warriors. If it was, then it would not be surprising to find in it characters who exemplify sapientia and fortitudo. But Kaske, at least, tries to develop the process by which the Christian matter was joined to the pagan, while Diekstra and particularly Doubleday are less concerned about the actual circumstances of how the two streams were merged. It is one thing to say that Christian values underlie a particular work and quite another to say that specific tenets of Christian values are given such obtrusive shapes in the fabric of the work. Surely the right way is to mediate between the two extremes. Diekstra himself makes the point that we cannot accept the extreme view that I. F. Gordon takes on the likelihood that poets of the elegies would have adopted Church thought for their own poetry. Her observation is that the author of The Wanderer and The Seafarer would not have "ranged so far afield to get what he could have found at home."²⁶ Diekstra implies, and I agree, that even a poet who enjoys the great richness of a native tradition will still make use of matter outside it if it is available to him. The

Theme of Beowulf," Studies in Philology, 55 (1958), 423-57.

²⁶ I. L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," Review of English Studies, 5 (1954), 1-13.

sensible approach is to admit the possibility of Christian influence and yet avoid interpreting too narrowly.

As we saw in the chapter on structure, to some scholars, the learning of the time suggests that an Old English poet could have approached his material allegorically. G. V. Smithers in two enormously influential articles in 1957 and 1959 saw the conditions of decline in The Wanderer as an indication that the poet is referring to Judgment Day. Smithers thought it odd that all the world was in a state of decline, and he suggested that the reason for it might well be a reference to the sixth age of history during which all the world is in ruins and decay.

Further, the emendation of waelweg in the manuscript to hwaelweg (Seafarer 63), proposed by Benjamin Thorpe in 1842 and followed by most editors of the poem since, is disallowed by Smithers. The manuscript reading waelweg which he glosses as "road taken by the dead" or "road to the abode of the dead" is parallel to similar words in other poems like neosip in Vainglory 55. The figures of the exile and wanderer:

. . . . symbolize man as an exile from Paradise,
and the process of these wanderings stands for
his peregrination on earth (with a reference to
his ancestral home in heaven).²⁷

Smithers has assembled other kinds of support which include

²⁷Smithers, p. 148.

a similarity of parts of The Wanderer and The Seafarer to the "urgent prose of the Anglo-Saxon homilists."²⁸ And in Alcuin's "De rerum humanarum vicissitudine et clade Lindisfarninsis monasterii" Smithers finds the use of the word "exile" to apply to fallen Adam and his descendants.

Much of the unwillingness of other scholars to accept Smithers' concept of allegory is due to the absence of any real evidence in the text. Dorothy Whitelock has denied the existence of allegory on such grounds. I. F. Gordon in her edition of the poem employs a similar argument to which she adds: "the tone of lament and the general poetic pattern suggest elegy rather than allegory, especially in an age when the personal elegiac lament was a popular genre."²⁹

J. E. Cross can find no objection to allegory in The Seafarer, but he believes that in the case of The Wanderer the content of lines 22-23, 25 removes any possibility of it. It is the treatment of the dead lord that troubles Cross because

. . . if The Wanderer is to be interpreted as an allegory, we might reasonably assume that the dead lord was also a type, and that the other lord, so desperately sought should also have an allegorical application. . . . a Christian's lord is Christ whose death is not the cause of a Christian's exile in the world, and what Christian would seek another lord if his lord Christ were dead?³⁰

²⁸Smithers, p. 140.

²⁹I. F. Gordon, The Seafarer (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 6.

³⁰J. E. Cross, "On the Genre of The Wanderer," Neophilo-

Another example of the historical method is Vivian Salmon's attempt to explain fleotendra in The Wanderer 54.³¹ After looking into the three backgrounds which formed Anglo-Saxon culture (native Germanic, Christian Latin, and Old Irish) she concludes that all three give some credence to the possibility that the human soul is capable of crossing the boundary of the breast, ranging about, and returning to its owner. Therefore, fleotendra of Wanderer 54 refers to the bird souls of others which are summoned up. In connection with this same word, Peter Clemoes, quoting Ambrose's Hexameron, is struck by the likelihood that this religious treatise is of central importance in understanding the poem because it gives a detailed explanation of the mental processes of thinking about people who are far away to compensate for their absence.³² (A dissenting view by W. B. J. Owen denies the possibility of revenants. Instead, fleotendra is to be taken literally. The speaker, Owen claims, is at a seaport in his country of exile, and the secga geseldan are the sailors visiting the port.)³³ In The Seafarer Salmon

logus, 45 (1961), 72.

³¹Vivian Salmon, " The Wanderer and The Seafarer and the Old English Conception of the Soul," MLR, 55 (1960), 1-10.

³²Peter Clemoes, "Mens absentia cogitans in The Seafarer and The Wanderer," in Medieval Literature and Civilization, ed. D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London: Athlone Press, 1969), pp. 62-77.

³³W. B. J. Owen, "The Wanderer, lines 50-57," MLN, 65

reads hyge literally as the soul traveling the earth, screaming like a bird as it flies, and returning unsatisfied to the poet.³⁴ On the subject of the mind's ability to range beyond the confines of the body, Clemoes cites Alcuin's De Animal ratione liber as a possible source.³⁵ That the soul takes the form of a bird can be explained by the dove (Holy Spirit) at the baptism, and by St. John's eagle. Therefore the reader of The Wanderer and The Seafarer must decide how likely it is that religious texts like the Hexameron and De Animal ratione liber would have exerted direct influence on these poems. Salmon's statement is more convincing than those of Clemoes because it makes only a general application of the phenomenon of the ranging of the soul. Clemoes' use of the figures of the dove and St. John's eagle assumes influence more direct than the text of the poems will allow. Thus far we have attempts to explain the poems in several fields of investigation: theology, history of church practices, and a study of the three backgrounds that merged to form the Anglo-Saxon mind.

Of these three one in particular, the Irish, should be treated at some length because of the attention its theology

(1950), 161-65.

³⁴Salmon, pp. 5-6.

³⁵Clemones, pp. 65-67.

has received and because it bears directly on the compatibility of pagan and Christian subject matter. (I have mentioned above Alcuin's admonition to the monks at Lindisfarne.) In 1949, Charles Donahue wrote: "The older dualism of pagan authors has been turned into a struggle within the poet."³⁶ Of crucial importance here is the question of how eighth-century ecclesiastics would have looked back on pre-Christian ancestors. The Irish brand of Catholicism, Donahue maintained, would have been more lenient in the use of pre-Christian material because of the non-Augustinian theological positions which are thought to have been current in early Ireland. The national past was not thought of "in terms of election and reprobation, Christianity and paganism, but in terms of a gentler contrast between a natural order which though incomplete, could be good, and a Christian order."³⁷ (One recalls Kemp Malone's description of Beowulf as a "virtuous pagan.")³⁸ Further, Irish theologians liked to think of their ancestors not as pagans but as patriarchal figures. Therefore, Irish Catholicism provided the conditions necessary for the use of the native tradition within the Christian tradition.

In 1965, Donahue brought out a refinement of his earlier

³⁶ Charles Donahue, "Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good," Traditio, 7 (1949), 263.

³⁷ Donahue, p. 267.

³⁸ Kemp Malone, "Beowulf," English Studies, 29 (1948), 162.

piece.³⁹ He felt that his previous article was misguided to the extent that it approached the issue as though it came under the category of the history of ideas. He explained that his new approach was a study of symbolic theology and must deal with the meanings of images rather than abstract conceptions. Donahue's study reveals a kind of theology, different from Augustinian theology, which he calls the "Insular Mode," a term coined from the Irish insular hand. This Insular Mode differs from the Roman Catholic brand of Catholicism in that "Ireland had developed by the end of the sixth century a mode of Christianity that, in tone and attitude perhaps more than in doctrine, stood in marked contrast to the contemporary mode."⁴⁰ The difference in tone and attitude was such that it could foster a tolerant attitude toward the pagan past. Therefore, the monks at Lindisfarne, which was founded by the Irish, may have been following a tradition which they inherited, and in which they saw no harm. Alcuin, of course, did not agree. At any rate, Donahue's review of the tendency of Irish Catholicism to revere the pagan past and to give it the status of naturale bonum supports the approach that I have taken throughout these pages. The authors of these poems respected their pagan past and thought

³⁹ Charles Donahue, "Beowulf and Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration from a Celtic Stance," Traditio, 21 (1965), 55-116.

⁴⁰ Donahue, "Christian Tradition," p. 71

it entirely appropriate to adapt it to religious purposes.

I come now to another approach which has its roots in historical criticism and which follows a specialized inquiry into what have been called the idea-complexes central to Anglo-Saxon thought. It seems to me that this method takes two major forms, both of which explore the attitudes of the Anglo-Saxons to abstract conceptions. The first set of attitudes is extracted from the sources of the time; the second set is derived from the literature and from it alone.

The first approach uses a methodology related to that of the criticism summarized above since it rests on an extra-literary body of material. P. J. Frankis finds eight occurrences of the phrase enta geweorc (Wanderer 87) in the corpus of Old English poetry.⁴¹ Its occurrence in The Wanderer, however, is unique in that the "work of the giants" is overthrown by the Creator of the Ages. Frankis' conclusion is that the poet's Christian education caused him to see the Roman ruins around him as the supreme exemplum of mutability. The idea-complex, that is, the associations that the notion of the city held for the Anglo-Saxons, is something that the critic can arrive at by the study of the literature available to the poet. It is different from the kind of criticism we have dealt with above because here the method

⁴¹P. J. Frankis, "The Thematic Significance of 'enta geweorc' and Related Imagery in The Wanderer," Anglo-Saxon England, 2 (1973), 253-69.

is not designed to identify the influence of specific works but rather to trace cultural assumptions. One other elegy, The Ruin, has been the subject of studies which are pertinent here because it, too, deals with a response to what may have been an actual scene. (In the chapter on genre, I shall give fuller information.) Accepting the importance of the study of patristic sources, Hugh T. Keenan finds in Augustine's City of God attitudes which support the view of the ruins as a type of Babylon.⁴² James Doubleday, who derives his own view from Augustine as well as from Orosius and Gildas, believes that the Anglo-Saxons would have deemed the city a profound good unless, of course, it were beset by cupidity.⁴³ Anne Thompson Lee sees The Ruin as an example of the encomium urbis, an example which contains echoes of Fortunatus' De Excidio Thuringiae and Alcuin's lament on the destruction of Lindisfarne.

Other scholars have been less enthusiastic about such applications of the works of Augustine and the others. Most notably, Kathryn Hume in her study of the so-called "Ruin-motif" in Old English poetry finds no examples in The Wanderer and The Seafarer which suggest Babylon or Babel because the tone is not one of contempt or rejection but rather of

⁴²Hugh T. Keenan, "The Ruin as Babylon," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 11 (1960), 109-17.

⁴³James F. Doubleday, "The Ruin: Structure and Theme," JEGP, 71 (1972), 369-81.

appreciation of the noble spirit.⁴⁴ She is willing to admit that De Excidio Thuringiae may have some bearing on the elegiac, but she is also quick to point out that no Old English monologue is spoken by a historical figure. Similarly, Alcuin's lament should not be used as a basis for interpretation since it is the statement of an ecclesiastic on the plundering of cultural centers. Michael Hunter rejects the Babylon and Babel connotations on the grounds that Cuthbert was known to have praised Roman ruins.⁴⁵ Another idea of much importance here is Hunter's very sensible observation that Roman sites were often used for the early monasteries partly out of respect and probably also because the Roman buildings were "a ready mode of defense or of ritual demarcation, and structure within them a source of building material."⁴⁶ It is worth noting here that early Christians in the process of converting pagans tended not to be squeamish about the use of pagan structures for Christian purposes. William Chaney cites Gregory's letter to Mellitus to the effect that it makes sense to turn a pagan temple into a Christian church because it is where the people

⁴⁴Kathryn Hume, "The 'Ruin-Motif' in Old English Poetry," Anglia, 94 (1976), 339-60.

⁴⁵Michael Hunter, "Germanic and Roman Antiquity and the Sense of the Past in Anglo-Saxon England," Anglo-Saxon England, 3 (1974), 29-50.

⁴⁶Hunter, p. 36.

are used to coming to worship.⁴⁷

The process of analyzing the second kind of idea-complex and a justification of its use are most fully explained by Kathryn Hume in her treatment of the hall-concept in Old English poetry:

Since the intellectual milieu is so uncertain a basis for interpreting controversial poems, other approaches are needed. One that suggests itself is the explanation of idea-complexes. When a theme or situation recurs in a number of poems, in widely differing contexts, patterns of associations can be isolated and analysed. The theme of exile, for example, is a centre of a cluster of ideas. Another is the concept of the hall: what is looked to for safety and what is feared as a threat to that security make apt points of departure for a study of a culture's major assumptions.⁴⁸

The difference, of course, between this idea-complex and the first is that the former is derived from the literature itself rather than from the documents a poet might have had access to. The search for cultural assumptions, then works from the inside out and remains intra-literary.

The hall, as Hume observes, is not just a building but the social system that goes along with it. The distribution of gifts is the heart of the idea-complex which is attended also by generosity and loyalty. Hume goes on to say that

⁴⁷William A. Chaney, "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England," Harvard Theological Review, 53 (1960), 197.

⁴⁸Kathryn Hume, "The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry," Anglo-Saxon England, 3 (1974), 63.

"in a world picture where the hall signifies order, social pleasure and security, that which is outside will naturally be an opposite."⁴⁹ Thus she describes what she calls an anti-hall characterized by darkness on both literal and figurative levels. Both concepts, hall and anti-hall, were put to use in symbolic representations of reality. Christian teaching which sought to underscore the fragility of the material world naturally turned to the anti-hall image as a means of demonstrating what time ultimately does to the hall. Hume summarizes current opinion on just how much Christian teaching we can expect to find in Old English poetry. The opinion divides roughly along the lines shown in the summary of the first idea-complex: "Are the remains in The Ruin merely marvelled at, lamented in their passing, or are they Babylon and viewed as remnants of deserved destruction?"⁵⁰ She concludes by dismissing the kind of allegory seen by Smithers and instead arguing for a "tension between the outlook inculcated and the emotions felt."⁵¹

I assume she means that the outlook inculcated is the observation of the Christian that the material world is perishable and not to be trusted. I assume also that the emotion felt is the sadness of the poet that all must pass, sadness

⁴⁹Hume, "Concept," p. 66.

⁵⁰Hume, "Concept," p. 72.

⁵¹Hume, "Concept," p. 73.

that comes from a respect and a fondness for the values associated with the heroic ethos even though it is flawed. As I have shown above, Hume finds in The Wanderer positive sentiments toward the hall and the heroic. Following her, I agree that if the connotation were Babylon or Babel, then the poet's tone would be one of self-righteous smugness, not nostalgic regret. Therefore, the strictly didactic is not really in evidence. I have explained what I see as the process of discrediting the heroic ethos by the emphasis on the Creator of the Ages as the destructive force, and of course, some condemnation is implicit because the decay is all part of the divine plan. To call the purpose of The Wanderer and The Seafarer "religious-propagandistic" as Diekstra does is to assume that the skill of the poet is almost totally absorbed into that of the ecclesiastic. Such a view is probably too strong. Furthermore, the views of Salmon and Smithers assume a very sophisticated poet capable of adapting his learning to creative pursuits. Certainly, as Huppé says, there was a vast tradition of Latin poetry, but he and some of his followers probably assume too direct a correlation between the literature of the church and the secular poems. Though the church was most certainly primarily responsible for the promotion of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England, it is not advisable to use patristic commentary as an interpretive gloss.

Another treatment of the pagan / Christian issue follows

an approach quite different from those summarized above. In the earlier critical history of Old English literature, theories of interpolation were the response to the seemingly immiscible streams of the pagan and the Christian. In 1960, Jackson J. Campbell devised an ingenious method of vocabulary study which seemed to point up a Christian poet working over pagan material but which supposed a degree of unity which was not possible if the poems were seen as the product of interpolation and no more.⁵² After identifying the formulae that appear elsewhere in Old English poetry as well as hapax legomena and poetic words that do not occur in Old English prose, Campbell found that there is a higher incidence of formulaic hemistichs in the first 39 lines of The Seafarer than in the remainder of the poem. Therefore, the author reworked an older traditional poem and reshaped it to a new purpose. Campbell, though he is troubled by Anderson's inconsistency of having the sea voyage symbolize life and death both, is receptive to his allegorical approach insofar as the poem was written by a "Christian poet who put the poem together in its present form and who probably intended some such total meaning."⁵³ Campbell makes no claim that his method can bear very directly on the specific places at which The Wanderer and The Seafarer can be divided (see the chapter on

⁵²Jackson J. Campbell, "Oral Poetry in The Seafarer," Speculum, 35 (1960), 87-96.

⁵³Campbell, p. 91.

structure above) because the adaptation was gracefully done:

It is therefore possible only in rather general blocks or sections to see the differences in style which give evidence of two strata in the poem. The poet who put it in final form clearly worked it over fairly well. If there is an older stratum in the early lines of the poem, as I believe, he shaped it smoothly for his pious ends.⁵⁴

Alvin Lee's Guest-Hall of Eden in places seems to be similar in method to Kathryn Hume's work on the idea-complex. However, his reading concerns all of Old English poetry so that any chance of comparing his approach and Hume's is difficult because of the relative differences in scope. At times Lee's (as he calls it) mythic approach develops points that would not be out of keeping with what we have found in Smithers and Robertson on the subject of allegory. What we find, then, is some familiar material in an unfamiliar framework, unfamiliar in the sense that it is difficult to categorize. For instance, when Hume says that she will use a study of cultural assumptions to come at Old English poetry, it is imminently clear from what direction she gathers her evidence. Similarly, if Augustinian thought is believed to add to the understanding of the elegies, whether we agree or not we can go to the sources and see for ourselves what has caught the critic's eye. With Lee it is not so easy.

In his attempt to explore the use of myth in Old English

⁵⁴Campbell, p. 95.

poetry, Lee organizes his material in what he calls "four interlocking essays."⁵⁵ It is the third which evaluates the lyric poetry, but some ideas from the first are necessary for understanding the way myth is to be applied. There are three kinds of myth: the first is "imaginative fictions in which the main actions are the activities of divine beings, sometimes with direct consequences for the world of men but sometimes also restricted to the confines of heaven or hell." The second is myth as a "classical, biblical, or northern story with an early or authoritative place in our culture." Such myth is relevant to Old English poetry though the pagan materials are submerged and subordinated to the Christian ones. The third is myth as

symbolic metaphor or the living design of poems whereby certain writers, often visionary or apocalyptic ones, manage to suggest that the linear narrative of their composition, if it exists at all, is less important than the sense of a single simultaneous pattern by which the reader is meant to be aware of past, present, and future all converging in one moment of appreciation.⁵⁶

Of the three, the first is clear, since it is common in those poems of overtly Christian content to find subject matter dealing with divine beings who are above the laws of nature. The second is the most amenable to the historical critic

⁵⁵Alvin A. Lee, The Guest-Hall of Eden (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), p. 1.

⁵⁶Lee, p. 10.

since sources, by definition, are traceable. However, the biblical myths are different because they are important both in an archetypal as well as a historical sense. Lee maintains that the classical and northern myths leave only occasional historical traces. This is all very well except that the extra distinction which the label "archetypal" involves is not made clear with respect to what it will do for the criticism of the various poems. The third species of myth is the most troublesome of all because it makes the most stringent demands on the reader's trust. The implication is that linear narrative must be considered less important to some authors than the creation of a system of related ideas that unite concepts drawn from all three areas of time. The example Lee gives is taken from the Exodus where Israel's crossing of the Red Sea is described with reference to Noah, Abraham, and Solomon. Lee's point is that all these events, the deluge, the covenant, and the building of the temple have an identity of meaning. Lee goes further to suggest the applicability of the Old Testament concept of the life of man as a spiritual pilgrimage to heaven to the Christian theme of salvation. Of course, this last is reminiscent of G. V. Smithers' thoughts on the meaning of The Wanderer and The Seafarer.

Keeping in mind Kathryn Hume's work on the concept of hall and anti-hall, we see that Lee's approach has much in common with it. He finds in Old English poetry four levels

of imagery based on the dryht image. The first is the place of the presence of God, the second is the level of paradise on earth, the third is the Babylonian level of confusion and ruin, the fourth is the perverted dryht of hell. The second and third conform most closely to the limits of hall and anti-hall as Hume describes them except that she would not consider the hall as paradise on earth. Though she describes the hall as a place of warmth and safety and good will, it is very much in the real world. The other two levels are necessarily outside Hume's ken.

The levels of imagery are important in the case of The Wanderer and The Seafarer because of the way they (the levels) are varied for different effects. The world of The Wanderer is beneath the heavens. There is nothing of the flowing streams of The Phoenix or radiant sunlight in Juliana or baptismal water of Andreas. Lee points out that "night, winter, and chaotic waters are the symbols of the Wanderer's unredeemed or spiritually lost condition."⁵⁷ Further, Adam is the archetype of the eardstapa since he is outside the heavenly dryht, and he provides the same poetic model for the other exiles in Old English poetry. The reminder of potential salvation is kept before the reader by the opening and conclusion, though the exile can have no release from his condition as long as he is in bondage to the past. Lee

⁵⁷ Lee, p. 137.

is careful to say that though the Wanderer has a mythical bond with the dryht of hell, that does not mean that he is damned. Rather it means that he like all men on earth is in exile from paradise. According to Lee, The Wanderer is a "poetic amplification, somewhat 'displaced,' of Adam's lament in Genesis,"⁵⁸ and Lee uses as support the fact that in Old English poetry references to Adam are cast in terms of a retainer and his lord. As the Wanderer looks on the ruins, he is an example of man reflecting on lost paradise. The poet's suggestion is that one must seek the fastness of heaven.

Lee sees The Seafarer as a sequel to The Wanderer because the man in the latter who looked sorrowfully back on a vanished dryht has become, in the former, one who is a voluntary exile for the sake of grace. The Seafarer himself has a spiritual outlook which is found only in the opening and concluding five lines of The Wanderer. The Seafarer shows no idealism or nostalgia; instead, he shows a harsher, more rigid attitude: "The elegiac figure takes a position of lamentation in relation to the doomed structure of the world, but the more homiletic Seafarer turns aside potential elegy by saying that the object of desire is unworthy."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Lee, p. 143.

⁵⁹ Lee, p. 146.

Much of the activity in the area of reconstructing a cultural context is related in some way to the incongruities of the pagan (secular)-religious mixture. In the early days of the criticism of the poems, it seemed logical to conclude that Christian poets had inherited non-religious matter which they admired and to which they added Christian references with a view to legitimizing the pagan elements. In such a way, in case there were any dour Alcuins about, the poets could avoid censure. Now that it is fashionable to accept unity in the elegies as they have come down to us, it is almost amusing to read W. W. Lawrence's seminal article of nearly eighty years ago in which he was almost apologetic for assuming that The Wanderer and The Seafarer are essentially in the form in which the poets left them. But it is important to realize that the current view of assuming the unity of the poems was a long time coming.

Jackson J. Campbell has shown us that study of the process of creation does not break down simply into interpolation and unified work. His study indicates that an adaption can involve such careful and aesthetic reworking that rather than creating a situation in which pagan and Christian elements are awkwardly combined, the poet is recasting the two sets of material in a framework that allows them to coexist aesthetically and doctrinally. Therefore, Campbell suggests a process halfway between that of the old interpolation theories and that of the theory which implies

that one poet was solely and independently responsible for each poem.

I have summarized the attempts made at seeing the progress of the soul in The Wanderer, and the other attempts which use church commentary in a similarly narrow way. It seems to me that any such assumptions create critical equations where certain values are thought to be equal to other values. It is easy to solve for "x" if one assumes one knows what "x" is. In contrast, approaches like that of G. V. Smithers are more workable because they demand less faith on the part of the critic. Corroboration appears, of course, in the sources which Smithers quotes on the subject of the topic of exile. But it is interesting to note that corroboration also appears in the work of scholars working by different methods. To wit, Alvin Lee reinforces Smithers by observing that Adam's expulsion from Paradise is constantly described in Old English literature in terms of estrangement from the dryht. Smithers' method, then, results in an approach that is less an equation of values than an assumption of broad influence, an assumption, it seems to me, which is much more feasible than that of Diekstra on the progress of the soul.

The concept of the idea-complex and the research into cultural assumptions, Hume's approach, is appealing because it is essentially inductive. By analyzing the ideas surrounding the concepts of the hall and anti-hall, her work

gathers much information from a broad range of Old English literature which throws various themes in sharper relief. Alvin Lee's so-called mythological approach appears to be the idea-complex method writ large. Actually, to call Lee a mythological critic is to let one small area of his interests name him because in treating the biblical variety of myth he borrows from the methodology of the historical critic as well.

Avoiding the extremes, then, one should keep close to the poems themselves, while not neglecting any known strong influence that may have touched them. It is an obvious method, to be sure, but the recent critical history of the elegies compels one to state it. Too often, scholars are caught up in the excitement of discoveries in patristic commentary, for instance, and are too quick to assume that the poet had at his elbow the very volume that they are engaged with. It is equally ill-advised to treat the patristic tradition as though it never exerted general influence on the culture under whose auspices the Old English poems were written. It is possible to read the poems as being bound to a cultural context and still not to be guilty of the reductiveness against which Greenfield has so wisely warned us.

Even though The Wanderer and The Seafarer are treated as unified works of art, scholarship has neglected one major possibility. In addition to being designed to convey feeling, these poems could have been designed to persuade, as well.

The Wanderer, which with reference to rhetorical complexion is the more suasive of the two, contains the voice of the poet who conjures up the eardstapa and the snottor on mode (who may be but need not necessarily be the same person in different states of awareness). The poet has a point to make about his religion, a point that emanates from the eardstapa's description of the barrenness of the life of the exile. The eardstapa has been conditioned to heroic reticence so that the "indryhten þeaw" is somewhat ironic (though not bitterly so) because the examples chosen of the heroic world develop nothing but its desolation, and we have already seen how the contrast is developed throughout the poem between it and the fastness of the heavenly kingdom.

If I am right that the poet continues in his own person at line 58, then to take note of the suasory mode is especially appropriate. As I suggested in the chapter on structure, the poet pretends to be caught up in his evocation of the gloom of the heroic world and then tries to steer himself and the reader toward what exists in contrast (that is, the heavenly permanence). In setting up the appearance of the snottor on mode, the poet begins to explain the thought processes that a wise man should employ in order to deal with the shortcomings of the temporal world (64-72). As we read this summary of ways one can act, we try to detect any transfer of favorable connotation from the heroic to the Christian. Such a transfer is what we might expect, given the probability

that the poet is beginning to set up the heroic as a conceptual strawman by the destruction of which he will point up the superiority of and the advantages offered by the Christian ethos. After all, the Creator of the Ages is about to be named as the destroyer of the duqud, the very embodiment of the heroic. But we search in vain, I believe. All that can be said is that the wise man will behave in moderation, avoiding ruthlessness and weakness, recklessness and timidity.

But as part of the persuasion that the old heroic values are insufficient, the poet begins to develop the wise man (gleaw haele) as one who can reflect on the ruins of a bygone age and think beyond them to the only fastness that is possible, the heavenly kingdom. The poet then has the wise man speak the famous ubi sunt passage (92-110) in which the heroic catalog is provided along with its accompanying weather. The end has the heavy repetition of "Her . . . bip. . . . Her . . . bip. . . . Her . . . bip. . . . Her . . . bip" which accentuates the transitoriness of the sub-lunary world. Too, the ruins which trigger the reflection have been generalized into "þis eorðan gesteall."

The poet's conclusion (111-115) contains more advisory formulas which recall the same kind of utterances following line 58. And in 114 the mention of grace recalls the reader to the first line. Whether the meaning of gebided in line 1 must be glossed as "experiences" or "awaits" is of little

importance in light of the tone at the conclusion. In 114-115 it is clear that if one seeks grace he can expect matters to turn out well for him.

I have approached The Wanderer hoping to avoid the rigidity of Diekstra's "religious-propagandistic" and yet still to respect the Christian atmosphere in which the poems must have been written. If it seems misleading to argue - that a Christian poet is discrediting the heroic, it is perhaps because one finds it difficult to accept the possibility that at this point in time the poem would have had a conversion-like purpose. It is, however, likely that a Christian poet looked back on a secular pagan past with fondness and with the realization that many of his contemporaries shared that fondness. In order to reach them he had to show some respect for the values which, since they were associated with the temporal world, were invalid though attractive. The ruins, though of the material world, were not essentially evil, nor were they to be understood as manifestations of Babel or Babylon. Kathryn Hume's observation on tone is entirely appropriate since the poet laments rather than condemns the visible remains of the past age. The poem is not the work of a dry proselytizer, nor is it the work of a clumsy amateur.

On the question of allegory, the possibility of the Wanderer as an exile trying to return to his ancestral home in heaven, as a type of all of us in the material world, the

bibliography in opposition to the idea is vast. Dorothy Whitelock's misgiving on the subject is the simplest and most widely felt of all these charges: There is no indication in the text which points to an allegorical reading.⁶⁰ On the other hand, G. V. Smithers' opinion is buttressed by Alvin Lee who points to the references to Adam as an exile and to references which describe him in terms of the dryht. The implication is that the association of ideas was so common that no obtrusive clue is necessary.

Though The Wanderer and The Seafarer are often referred to as companion pieces, there are significant differences between them. Alvin Lee, for instance, makes the very useful observation that the latter may be seen as a kind of sequel to the former. The Seafarer is in his exile voluntarily, and no sentimentality comes through in the description of the heroic. The Wanderer as the poet creates him seems to be an involuntary exile who describes the ruins and the values associated with them with great feeling.

In the previous chapter, I tried to establish that The Seafarer is based on three different appearances of the exile topos. I shall explain each with reference to the comments on cultural context summarized above. The first level, the literal, shows the Seafarer as a man involuntarily

⁶⁰ Dorothy Whitelock, "The Interpretation of The Seafarer," in The Early Cultures of North-West Europe: H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies, ed. Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950), p. 263.

on his journey. (Lee, I am sure, was referring to the attitude of the Seafarer in the succeeding parts of the poem.) All of the description is directed towards a lively representation of winter as a harsh adversary. Though the imagery of nature is presented in somewhat greater detail than it is in The Wanderer, there are the common points of general misery and the absence of kin or comforts. Too, the Seafarer laments the absence of the warmth of the dryht by explaining what he has as a substitute for it such as the gannet's sound. The Wanderer, by contrast, recreates a scene from the heroic past.

But the shift to another use of the exile topos in 33^b brings with it as I observed above in my comments on structure, a different attitude toward life on the sea. The Seafarer is now quite anxious to go on a journey; indeed his spirit urges him to, because now the idea of exile takes on the symbolic values of penitential exile. (I do not mean that the journey takes on the allegorical value of the soul in exile, but that the real voyage of exile represents penitence and so has meaning outside the literal.) I have remarked that there is no sentimental look at the heroic. Now the heroic is made completely subservient to the Christian:

Forþon nis þaes modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,
ne his gifena þaes god, ne in geogube to þaes
 hwaet,
ne in his daedum to þaes deor, ne him his dryhten
 to þaes hold,

þaet he a his saefore sorge naebbe,
 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 yþa gewealc,
 ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað (39-47).

[For indeed there is no proud-spirited man over
 the earth to that extent generously gifted, to
 that extent active in youth, nor in deeds to that
 extent valiant, nor lord that gracious that he
 does not have his sea-voyage in anxiety to what
 end God will bring him. There are no thoughts
 to him of the harp nor to ring-receiving nor
 delight in wife or worldly expectation, nor about
 anything else but the rolling of the waves. But
 he always has longing, he who sets out on the
 waves.]

This is the great difference in spirit between The Wanderer and The Seafarer. It is well to keep in mind Alvin Lee's view of The Seafarer as a sequel to The Wanderer. One might say that the quotation above can be attributed to a snottor on mode who has become more snottor. Now the tone is business-like and serious, and no time is lost on nostalgic reconstruction of the past. Even the burgeoning of spring inspires one to journey forth. I have shown the various opinions on this scene as a reminder that even the world of natural beauty is part of the material world, and as such, in the eyes of the church, is transitory.

It is important to note that the heroic details are often set up for derogatory comparison with the permanence of the eternal joys. We recall the same vein in The Wanderer, and here it is even more concentrated and pointed because the nostalgia is lacking. In the quotation above, the poet

uses words like "modwlanc," "deor," "dryhten" (lower case), and "hearpan" which signal the heroic ethos. We recall from the first part of the poem that the heroic keys are mentioned in terms of what replaced them, or more properly, what exists in their absence:

Hwylum ylfete song
dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor
ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
maew singende fore medodrinced (19-22).

[At times the wild-swan's song, the gannet's sound I made serve as entertainment, and the song of the curlew, in place of men's laughter, the singing seagull in place of the mead.]

In the passage 39-42, however, the unimportance of the heroic compared to the voyage is underscored by a series of negatives: "There is no one so proud or active or valiant that he does not have to worry about his saefore," which has begun, by the shift in the meaning of the exile topos, to take on symbolic significance.

Too, the poet uses the technique of punning on upper-case and lower-case dryhten. In The Seafarer an example of each occurs in such proximity that we cannot fail to notice its importance. As the poet is setting up the examples of the heroic, he writes: "ne him his dryhten to paes hold" (41) [nor his lord to that extent gracious]. The "lord" must be concerned about their voyage. Then when the importance of the saefore is revealed, we find: "to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille" (43) [to what end God will bring him]. The

sense of dryhten is surely upper-case in the sense of God. The punning is another way the poet has of intensifying the derogatory comparison of the secular to the Christian.

Another example of word-study is the apparent shift in meaning from poem to poem of a word like wlonc. It seems to me that the wlonc in wlonc be wealle (Wanderer 80) is quite different from the same word in a half line from The Seafarer: wlonc ond wingal (29). The context of the former, "proud by the wall," surely gives it a positive charge, while that of the latter is surely unfavorable since it is paired with wingal ("gay with wine," carries also the connotation of "wanton"⁶¹) and since it refers to the landsmen. At the risk of oversimplifying, I suggest that at some point the heroic virtue (and the propriety of bragging about it) became the Christian sin of pride. The point of all this is that one need not depend totally on those sources alleged to have been known to the literate in the Old English poet's day. Within the poems themselves there is enough evidence of the power the Christian ethos exerted on their creation so that the critic need not resort to a strict application of patristic commentary to understand and appreciate the powers of a Christian poet.

With the movement into the third topos level, the treatment of the heroic becomes more and more intense. Whatever

⁶¹John C. Pope, Seven Old English Poems (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 205.

the sources of the soul's capability to leave the body, the flight of the soul is a journey which is parallel to the physical flight of the exile himself. When the poet comes to the Lord's joys, he finds it convenient, rather than to cast a nostalgic look at the heroic past, to mix it with the idea of the church-militant because the two share the common features of fortitude and combat:

fremum on foldan wið feonda nip,
 deorum daedum deofle togeanes,
 þæt hine aelda bearn æfter hergen,
 ond his lof sippan lifge mid englum
 awa to ealdre, ecan lifes blaed,
 dream mid dugeþum (75-80^a).

[Good deeds on earth against the evil of enemies with valiant deeds against the devil the children of men may afterward praise him and after his praise to live with the angels forever and ever, renown of eternal life, joy among heavenly hosts.]

In addition to stressing the importance of combatting evil in the person of the devil, the poet develops the common heroic idea of renown living after the warrior. The reward is in two parts, memory on earth and joy in heaven. Therefore, the poet has neatly subjugated the heroic to the religious.

In 90^bff. the poet returns to the heroic which, unlike its occurrence in 72^a-80^a, is not alloyed with the Christian. It is quite similar in content to the kind of look into the past done by the Wanderer except that it is quite free of nostalgia. The concept of treasure-giving is prominent, and one recalls Goldsmith's opinions on the subject in her

Mode and Meaning in Beowulf: the background of the time suggests that the subject of this segment of the poem is avarice. Whatever one's reaction to this line, since treasure-giving is emblematic of the heroic ethos, its inefficacy has to point up its shortcomings. Of course, in The Wanderer the Creator of the Ages is the destructive agent, but in The Seafarer everything is merely gedroren (come to an end).

The final movement of the poem is 103-end. As in The Wanderer there is a beatitude-like section providing a catalog of the fortunate. Also, there is an appeal to moderation, but while in The Wanderer its appearance with reference to Christianity is largely implicit, here it is unmistakably aligned with it. 117-end is a Christian conclusion, a final celebration of the non-material world.

I have tried to show that there are words and features within the text of the poems which take particular force from the fact that they were conceived within a Christian milieu. The more narrow applications of the Christian traditions I have avoided, since, as the current joke goes, it is unlikely that any poet had the two-hundred-odd volumes of the Patrologia Latina completely indexed before him as he wrote. Too, I have tried to explore the rhetorical clues which point to the possibility that the poems were designed to persuade. I have remarked on the view of unity, but somehow just to acknowledge unity is not the same thing as to identify the purpose of a work and the means used to achieve

that purpose. The celebration of the divine at the expense of the secular is one of the most prominent of these techniques, though it exists in two rather divergent forms in The Wanderer and The Seafarer. I hope it is clear that I do not pursue the system of techniques to the point of arguing for the "religious-propagandistic." All of my points come from the text itself, with but little reliance on extraliterary concerns.

CHAPTER THREE

GENRE AND THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES

Stanley B. Greenfield's pronouncement on the study of genre in Old English poetry boils down to one important idea: In the end we moderns have to examine and classify generically according to our "feel" for a poem as an example of one class or another. In my introduction I listed all the poems from The Exeter Book which have been treated at one time or another as elegies. I then discarded Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, and The Ruin on the grounds that they do not satisfy my "feel" for the genre of elegy. There is no need to repeat here my reasons, though I should clarify further my own conception of the genre. The elegy is best described as a short reflective poem which has an identifiable ic-figure and which is not overtly didactic. To say "overtly" is to make a very nice distinction and one which is hard to defend since I have already stressed so heavily the importance of regarding The Wanderer and The Seafarer as didactic poems. The difference is shown by a poem like Vainglory which is certainly a short reflective poem with an identifiable ic-figure. It, however, is conceived as a tract,

almost as a polemic against the sin of pride. It is not concerned with the contrast of past and present, or the other familiar themes in poems like The Wanderer and The Seafarer. It is overtly didactic. What follows is an overview of scholarship which furnishes a context for my approach to the elegies. It will be clear by whom I have been influenced.

The question of genre in the study of the elegies of Old English literature is a murky one, not least because scholars have not always made clear the methodology they employed in their various approaches. Some have used the term "elegy" to apply rather loosely to a group of poems which share the common characteristics of lament for a lost and attractive past and the passing of specific personages which were a part of that past. These same scholars have then turned to fields of major interest such as the establishment of unity, patterns of imagery, and the like because their interests were not connected to an exploration of genre in the strict sense. Then when interest in the question of genre grew, the term "elegy" became confused, partly because none of us is free from the assumptions we make as a result of what the elegy has become in the later history of English literature. I believe, too, that the debate which has continued on the subject of voices and the difficulty of determining the precise limits of various speeches have drawn attention away from clarifying the relationship between the poet and his text. And it is not just

the elegy which deserves our attention. There seems to have been a blurring of genre involving the riddle and other forms which must be studied as well. A short summary of approaches to genre is appropriate here so that we can understand the obscurity that must be cleared away.

In the early critical history of The Wanderer and The Seafarer the term "elegy" was used as a loose category for ease of reference. To establish a context for these poems, scholars compared them to portions of Beowulf which seemed to share a common tone. "The Lay of the Last Survivor" and "The Old Man's Lament," for instance, were often mentioned in connection with The Wanderer and The Seafarer for the purpose of showing the range and depth of lament in Old English literature. In 1942 B. J. Timmer expressed concern over the use of the term "elegy" and made it his task to determine whether the Old English elegy could be considered a separate genre of poetry.¹ Beginning with a summary of what the elegy was in classical antiquity (alternating lines of dactylic hexameter and the so-called dactylic pentameter), Timmer used as his base a definition from the Encyclopaedia Britannica: "a short poem of lamentation or regret, called forth by the decease of a beloved or revered person, or by a general sense of the pathos of mortality."² He observed

¹B. J. Timmer, "The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry," English Studies, 24 (1942), 33-44.

²Timmer, p. 33.

that this definition will do for the major characteristics of the Old English poems classified as elegies. I should point out, however, that Timmer did not rely exclusively on the definition quoted above. He also summarized characteristics which seem to be unique to these poems as a class and examined the varying intensity in which they occur. Part of his purpose as well was to consider the elegies in light of the transition from heathenism to Christianity, and thus he arrived at a valuable distinction. The Wanderer and The Seafarer start out as elegies, but they cannot be considered pure representatives of the genre because they develop a religious-propagandistic purpose. In short, the Christian poet borrowed the pagan form to introduce the idea of desolation and loss, but he then offered Christian hope as the solution to the problem. I should point out in passing that of the poems Timmer examined--Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament, Deor, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Ruin, The Riming Poem, and The Exile's Prayer (Resignation)--he considered only the first two pure elegies.

Though Timmer's method is primarily an examination of the term "elegy," his recognition of the Christian context of the poems shows an interest in the contemporary forces that might have shaped them. Other scholars have since pursued the study of genre in another way. J. E. Cross, who considered the literary background of the elegies no less important than did Timmer, rather than examining the poems as

a group, explored the effect that another genre could have had on them.³ Using the strongly Christian consolation at the end of The Wanderer as a starting point, Cross argued for the possibility that any Christian writer educated in the normal way would have been familiar with the consolatio. He provided a list of authors of the consolatio who would have been known to people of the Old English period: Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome. A very significant part of his argument, Cross felt, was that consideration of The Wanderer as a consolatio helped to remove doubts about the unity of the poem. Many readers have been troubled by the part beginning with line 33 because the general moralizing it contains seems to lack connection with the content of the first part of the poem. Cross argued that it helps to remember that the strategy of the consolatio was to intensify the lament by giving details and then to soften it by generalization. In The Wanderer, complete consolation comes with reflection on the afterlife. In such a way does Cross offer a different method of using the study of genre to bear on The Wanderer. He follows Timmer in his interest in the Christian background though he tends to make less of the conscious borrowing and adaptation of pagan subject matter by the poet. As we shall see, the study of the genres contemporary with Old English literature goes far beyond the

³J. E. Cross, "On the Genre of The Wanderer," Neophilologus, 45 (1961), 63-75.

possible influence of the consolatio.

For instance, P. L. Henry's The Early English and Celtic Lyric is a very carefully worked out study of the possible influence of the Irish literary tradition on poetry of the Anglo-Saxon era. Henry explains his methodology as follows:

The literary genre today is rarely more than a ready-made portmanteau term like lyric, elegy, novel serving for greater convenience in description. As such its functional value is strictly limited. On the other hand the genre may be an object of investigation, an end-product ascertained by empiric examination of related individual poems. Each of these taken separately is thoroughly and comprehensively investigated on the basis of criteria extracted from itself.⁴

Pursuing the idea that the term "elegy" is of limited use because of its vagueness, Henry criticizes Timmer and others for studying the "elegiac" poems in isolation. As an alternative procedure, Henry advises establishing a new Old English genre of poetry called penitential poetry with The Penitent's Prayer and The Seafarer as its major examples. Since such poems have a corresponding genre in Early Irish and Welsh literature, Henry feels that it makes much more sense to study the Old English poems in the light of these contemporary traditions than to study them by themselves. He explains also that the penitential lyric is part of a group of poems which is much wider in context, "outcast poetry,"

⁴P. L. Henry, The Early English and Celtic Lyric (London: Unwyn and Allen, 1966), p. 20.

and which contains nameless and wandering figures. The exilic themes of this class are closely analogous to those found in so many Old English poems.

One of Henry's most striking examples comes from the Old Welsh poem called Kintevin (800-1100) which contains a passage relevant to one of the cruces of The Seafarer. In my summary of the approaches to structure, I included some commentary on the question of why the speaker is so anxious to go to sea when the beauty of the land has just been so convincingly described. In Kintevin since the idea of pilgrimage is forcefully developed, the reader recognizes quickly the similarities it bears to The Seafarer. However, it seems to me that these similarities exist in different relationships in the two poems. As Henry emphasizes, in each case the cuckoo's song is what urges the exile forth on his journey. But in The Seafarer it is not the cuckoo's song alone which provides the impulse to travel; the wood's blossoming and the fairness of the cities, and the brightening of the fields "gemoniāþ modes fusne / sefan to siþe" (50-51) [exhorts the eager of spirit, the soul to the journey]. In Kintevin (I rely here on Henry's translation) the first stanza which is so similar in content to The Seafarer 48-49 serves only as an introduction to the poem and as a method of establishing a setting. There is no development of the land as a motive force in the exile's setting forth. Another example undermines any assumption of a close connection

between the two poems. In the Old Irish lyric we find:
 "There is no refuge from the White Christ." To use the word
 "refuge" is to imply that the exile is not entirely voluntary.
 These two examples should dampen the enthusiasm of anyone who tries to use one poem to illuminate the other. It is true that Henry does not claim more than that there is an identical tone between them. Furthermore, he is concerned merely to show the common tendency of the Old English and Old Irish poetry to mix the sententious with the personal or emotion: "The treatment of detail in the two passages is, naturally, not always the same, but though divergent in the narrow view it will be found to harmonize in the broad."⁵
 For my part, though I recognize the value of Henry's comparison I would hesitate to assign more than a loose relationship between Kintevin and The Seafarer, a relationship somewhere between coincidence and analogy in the literary sense.

P. L. Henry gives valuable commentary on another issue which requires extra explanation before I can explain his relationship with other scholars. So far, I have summarized approaches to genre along the lines of elegy: however, elegy is really merely a subspecies of lyric and the lyric is by no means as simply defined in Old English literature as it is in modern. A well-known handbook gives the following popular definition: "The conception of the lyric as the

⁵Henry, p. 69.

individual and personal emotion of the poet still holds and is, perhaps, the chief basis for discriminating between the lyric and other poetic forms."⁶ The part which concerns us most closely is "the individual and personal emotion of the poet" because it is not always a certainty in our poems whether we can identify it or him. My summary of the differing opinions on the existence of speakers in The Wanderer and The Seafarer is proof of how differently the ic- figure can be interpreted. In The Wanderer we find mention of the poet in his own person⁷ and the poet as master of ceremonies⁸ because within the poem there are stage directions like "swa cwaep" [so spoke] which make it quite a matter of course to acknowledge the presence of speakers. The distinction between the poet and the eardstapa is quite clear, and though many have said that the snottor on mode and the eardstapa are the same, the former being the latter in a heightened state of awareness, there is still no doubt about the crucial distinction between the poet and his text. Furthermore, we may quarrel about whether the poet in his own person returns at line 58, for instance, but still the

⁶C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature 3rd. ed. (New York: Odyssey Press, 1972), pp. 298-99.

⁷R. M. Lumiansky, "The Dramatic Structure of the Old English Wanderer," Neophilologus, 34 (1950), 107.

⁸John C. Pope, "Dramatic Voices in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," in Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr., ed. Jess B. Bessinger and Robert P. Creed (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965).

speakers' identities are clearly defined even if the precise limits of their utterances are not.

In The Seafarer, however, the reader has less to go on because it opens with a first-person utterance which, one assumes, continues throughout. There are no stage directions to indicate whether J. C. Pope's theory about the young seafarer and the old seafarer is correct. (Even though Pope retracted this view,⁹ it could still be right.) Bernard Huppé labeled the appearance of speakers in The Wanderer as *ethopoeia*: the device of creating a fictional speaker. But in The Seafarer where the first-person singular is sustained throughout, do we assume that the *ic*-figure is the poet in his own person or the poet as master of ceremonies? Or can *ic* be a fictional person that the poet has created for didactic purposes? In the modern lyric, we can come closer to identifying "the individual and personal emotion of the poet" because we have a contemporary's grasp of the rules of the game. But in the sphere of Old English poetry, we have not this sureness. Rosemary Woolf makes an important point:

Nowadays, when we read these poems on the printed page, we may be inclined to think of ourselves as overhearing an interior soliloquy; but in a period when poetry was read aloud it is much more likely that poets who wrote complaints thought of the audience as being the recipients.¹⁰

⁹John C. Pope, "Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of The Seafarer," Anglo-Saxon England, 3 (1974), 75-86.

¹⁰Rosemary Woolf, "The Wanderer, The Seafarer and the

Her observation brings us to the question of audience, and a crucial question it is since audience will be decisive in determining the lyricness of a poem. I wonder if there may not be another way of looking at the audience of the poet(s) of The Wanderer and The Seafarer. Woolf in naming recipients may mean those physically in the room when the poem was read. But if most people agree that the poet was trained in the learning of the church, and if the religious portions of the poem are in tone what readers have called "religious-propagandistic," then they might well have been intended to take their place in the body of knowledge pertaining to the church. As I have shown in the chapter on cultural context, it was common to use poetry for didactic and pedagogical purposes.

Returning to Henry, then, we have a point of entry for examining the lyric process and comparing his methods to those of E. G. Stanley and Rosemary Woolf. We recall that the former in his treatment of poetic diction set out the view that we should consider that for the Old English poet the event described was always subordinate to the underlying theme he sought to communicate:

Genre of Planctus," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, ed. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Frese (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 193.

Few will deny that with the old poets the processes of nature may be symbols of their moods, but it is not the flower that gives the thought; with the OE. poets it is the thought that gives the flower. And the flower that is born of the mood may take on sufficient concreteness to appear capable of existence without and outside the mood.¹¹

Henry develops a similar idea by saying that the first section of The Seafarer is introspective, and he stresses particularly that "we are not being told so much about external phenomena as about their effect on the subject."¹² As Stanley would doubtless agree, the poet is not including the description of the sea and the torment of the cold because he is representing natural forces which have caused him great pain. Rather, he is tormented spiritually and a description of physical pain is the most effective means he has of relating that spiritual pain to his audience. Henry believes that the poem is "impersonal, abstract, reflective-gnomic, and homiletic,"¹³ and its importance on the part of the religious poet is that:

. . . one of the manifestations of this common to most of the so-called "lyric-elegiac" poems is the replacing of forthright personal communication and commitment by generalization (gnomic, reflective, homiletic), and by the adoption of a

¹¹E. G. Stanley, "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Penitent's Prayer," Anglia, 73 (1955), p. 427.

¹²Henry, p. 153.

¹³Henry, p. 156.

"medium" or exemplar (third person, impersonal, nameless, abstract).¹⁴

The views of Henry and Stanley as I have summarized them perhaps seem closer than they really are because both stress the importance of the penitential discipline. But when Henry turns to The Wanderer he makes it quite clear that his and Stanley's convictions are quite dissimilar. Of The Wanderer Henry says that the bitter memories of which we are told "are presented in the guise of reported monologues by the wise and self-reliant man who can keep his own counsel and who is clearly the subject's exemplar or better self."¹⁵ However, this is not quite the same as saying, as Stanley does, that we cannot look for realism. The lyric quality is hard to pin down because the lyric voice is often submerged in the consciousness of a posited person, and this technique is what one might call the lyric convention once removed. That same convention twice removed is the kind of poem that emerges in Stanley's way of looking at it because if he denies that these "lyric-elegiac" poems can be treated as exercises of realism then one must assume that they are not lyric utterances at all in the strict sense of the term. Instead they turn out to be poems in which the personal sorrow of the first person is the method of presenting the

¹⁴Henry, p. 157.

¹⁵Henry, p. 162.

author's feelings and not their origin. Henry is troubled by Stanley's approach because the latter "sees in the Seafarer and the Wanderer merely figurae employed ethopoeically to mediate the rich linguistic resources of OE available for the theme of exile (as a penitential discipline)."¹⁶

This distinction will be of great importance when we come to Rosemary Woolf's treatment of The Wanderer and The Seafarer as examples of the planctus, because she too denies the existence of the personal lament of a real person. But there is still no way to know for sure if this seemingly subtle but in truth major distinction can be drawn at all, and the old view present in Pope's reference to "the poet in his own person" and Lumiansky's to an "expository comment by the poet" is hard to break away from. Much of the strength of Stanley's approach to the poems derives from the opinion current at this point in the critical history of the poems that the poets were not only trained within the church but also that they were theologically sophisticated and interested in the promotion of caritas. To assume such an environment is to make greater the possibility that the poets were working from the abstract end of their material. Stanley's case for the poet's use of the exile and travail imagery as the best choice for a vocabulary with which to convey his idea is very strong indeed.

¹⁶Henry, p. 164.

P. L. Henry's demurrals on this point derive from the fallacy he sees not only in the approach of Stanley, but also in that of J. E. Cross: the approaches are "preconceived" to the extent that the former applies "general considerations of linguistic resources to the particular problems of the individual poem;"¹⁷ the latter brings in a model from outside and in so doing makes use of a critical assumption so "remote, abstract, and general" that though it is impossible to refute it as a critical judgment, it is impossible to support it. Cross, as I stated above, was drawn by the Christian consolation at the end of The Wanderer and by the appearance of rhetorical figures to suggest that the poem was written to be a consolatio. In his analytical summary of the poem, Cross maintains that after line 60 when the personal lament is over, there is an unsatisfactory attempt to dilute the grief by a turn to generalization. The passage of time (62-63) and the wisdom of age (64-65) are comforts of a kind, but they are by themselves insufficient. The full effect of the generalization of grief comes only with the recognition of the power of Christian consolation, the only real consolation we can know.

Henry is perturbed about the use of an imported model as a means of interpreting the poem. Yet, as we have seen, both Henry and Cross perceive a particular importance residing

¹⁷Henry, p. 164.

in the generalization of grief, since the former names it as one of the foremost characteristics of the penitential lyric. The difference is, of course, related to Henry's concept of the empirical: he is assembling his examples from contemporaneous works. Too, Henry is opposed to any criticism which undermines the realism of these poems. When he uses the word "subject" (see footnote 15 above) it seems almost as though he, too, has a conception of the speakers as figurae, but in actual fact what he is developing in connection with The Wanderer is a system of different aspects of the anhaga, himself. Henry will not accept Huppé's concept of ethopoeia because "it tends to reduce the content of monologues in the first person to the role of rhetorical fictions serving philosophic notions found in the poems."¹⁸ He objects to seeing fictitious human characters which are invented solely for a didactic purpose.

It will be useful to summarize the statements presented on genre thus far before continuing. The great division of opinion is on the subject of whether there is an actual person who is relating an actual experience. It is natural that an "allegorist" like Bernard F. Huppé would find non-realistic elements in a poem. If one's critical stance is based on the assumption that the mind of the medieval poet was heavily dominated by the Roman Catholic church, then one is

¹⁸Henry, p. 168.

quite logically led to the conclusion that the realistic details must be subordinate to the didactic intentions of a Christian author. E. G. Stanley has another way of attacking the same problem. He admits that it is entirely subjective to take a passage from an elegy, say Wanderer 73-87, and attempt to determine which came first, the sight of the ruin or the feeling of gloom that the glory of worldly institutions must perish? Stanley's answer is worth quoting in full:

Only a subjective answer can be given; in the case of The Ruin it may well be that the sight of decay came before the mood; in The Wanderer however, the description of the ruin seems only one strand in the composite of concret instances of mutability. As in The Ruin, the treatment of the buildings leads to the treatment of its erstwhile inhabitants. In The Wanderer the transition from the ruin to the inhabitants is made by way of a catalog of the fates of men.¹⁹

Though some scholars have rejected out of hand the validity of genre association like Cross's view of The Wanderer as a consolatio, the charge that the empirical method is lacking has not deterred others from exploring related areas. Rosemary Woolf sees The Wanderer and The Seafarer as examples of the planctus.²⁰ She begins by setting forth what she feels are the two

¹⁹ Stanley, p. 446.

²⁰ Woolf, pp. 192-207.

major characteristics of the form: 1.) The speaker is fictional; and 2.) In addition to death the subject can be a feeling of loss to an intense degree. In justifying The Wanderer as a planctus, Woolf pauses to refute the voice-theory as developed by John C. Pope. If the fictional (italics mine) speaker delivers the lament of a typical figure then the search for voices is quite unnecessary:

For any argument for two speakers presupposes that the poet is displaying the idiosyncracies of an individual consciousness, so that the reader may properly feel that one individual person could not make the psychological progress towards wisdom that the poem is concerned with.²¹

Woolf goes on to support further her conception of the planctus and in so doing confirms one of the points made by Stanley. After describing how the poet's purpose is to create distance and detachment by stating how one would feel in a certain situation, Woolf continues: "The intention of the poet must be to distance and generalize, and it is achieved at the deliberate expense of naturalism, for real people do not think in such a stylized way."²² Of course, the context is somewhat different, but Woolf's observation is close to Stanley's protest against realism.

The Seafarer is not a true planctus, Woolf maintains,

²¹Woolf, p. 119.

²²Woolf, p. 200.

if it is compared closely to The Wanderer. She sees the values of their comparison in this way:

As planctus they are markedly distinct. The Wanderer is a genuine planctus. Ignoring the modern title we may say that the speaker is a typical figure, that of an exile, and that what he laments is equally clear: in the past the loss of his lord and the miseries of homelessness, and the ever-spreading desolation around him.²³

On the differences manifest in The Seafarer, Woolf continues:

By contrast The Seafarer is a poem that exploits the genre of planctus. Whilst the poem may imply to begin with, that the speaker is again the typical figure of exile, it gradually becomes clear that he is exemplary rather than typical, a subordinate feature of planctus thus becoming dominating and exclusive.²⁴

It is the distinction that Miss Woolf makes between "exemplary" and "typical" that is not clear. The choice of the word "exemplary" may indicate that the tone is more didactic than it would be if "typical" were used. As such the point of focus is on the person behind the poem rather than the person in the poem (author rather than figure). Woolf makes mention also of the fact that though there is much in The Seafarer which could be found in a planctus: "Such laments are given a different tone by the fact that the speaker has deliberately chosen a life of earthly deprivation. There is

²³Woolf, p. 206.

²⁴Woolf, p. 207.

thus no clear way of characterizing the speaker and no clear sense of loss."²⁵ Woolf cites Peter Dronke for support of her view of planctus since in his study of poetic individuality he includes The Wanderer and The Seafarer in his survey of the great range of planctus in the Middle Ages.²⁶

Though Henry, Cross, and Woolf disagree in fine on how the poems should be read, they do hold in common the view that The Wanderer and The Seafarer should be studied in the context of their time. Henry criticizes Cross for the use of an imported model (and we must assume that he would criticize Woolf on the same grounds). However, Henry himself uses an imported model as well, though his comes from nearer home. But despite that nearness I cannot believe that Christian culture would have exerted any less influence on the poems than Irish culture. If The Wanderer were more secular and if the Christian elements were less pronounced than they are, then I would agree that the balance must tip in Henry's direction. But the poems as they stand are by no means ambiguous with regard to a Christian bias.

In any case, however, though the critical opinions of virtually all students of the poems mentioned thus far depend upon investigation of the influences of the time of their creation, some feel that we must not neglect using our

²⁵Woolf, p. 207.

²⁶Peter Dronke, Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 28.

own present. Stanley Greenfield's book on methodology has in its introduction the refutation of the historical school as summarized above. Part of his point is that we cannot escape from our present. Later on, in the section on generic expectations, he articulates a problem that many readers of Old English poetry have felt:

The concept of genre as noted in Chapter 1 reflects on an author's attempt to write a poem of a certain kind, one having affinities with others in such aspects as mood, scope, subject matter, and techniques. Usually one thinks of genre as a formal category. In this respect, our analysis of Old English poetic genius is hampered by the limited number of poems thus capable of being accurately categorized, and by an absence of contemporary discussions of them.²⁷

The lack of contemporary discussion is especially troublesome because even though we can read that it was permissible to find Christian truth in pagan letters and that Aldhelm wrote secular poetry for didactic purposes, the tradition does not tell us specifically that poems like The Wanderer and The Seafarer must have been designed to satisfy the claims that, say, Huppe has made for them. I have shown elsewhere that certain features of historical criticism are smiled on by Greenfield, and it is easy to see why he is suspicious of any wide-ranging use of its extreme forms.

²⁷ Stanley B. Greenfield, The Interpretation of Old English Poems (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 135.

Therefore, when he turns to generic expectations with regard to the elegies, he has the following to say: "If the elegies are a genre in Old English, they are so by force of our present rather than determinate historical perspective; that is, by our 'feel' for them as a group possessing certain features in common."²⁸ Therefore we are back where we started from with reference to the assumptions which the reader can bring to the poems. Timmer started with a working definition derived partly from a conception based on what the popular notion of "elegy" seemed to be and partly from those works commonly called "elegies" in the corpus of Old English literature. He, too, therefore seemed to operate on the basis of a "feel" for them as a group. In many ways Timmer's work remains one of the most valuable attempts at illuminating the elegies not only because he made some rather hard decisions (such as saying that only Wulf and Eadwacer and The Wife's Lament are true elegies) but also because of his contention that The Wanderer and The Seafarer are not pure elegies. He was careful to distinguish the pure elegy from the religious-propagandistic poem which uses elegiac elements for didactic effect, and he took into consideration a historical background without slavishly applying it as a guide to interpretation. Timmer seems to mediate best between the search for historical principles and the need to consider

²⁸Greenfield, p. 135.

one's own present.

In the case of some poems generally discussed along with The Wanderer and The Seafarer, generic questions will not be answered simply by discussing the qualities and limits of the elegy. Manuscript features and the obscurity which seems built into poems like The Husband's Message and The Riming Poem make them particularly hard to deal with generically. The former, which I shall discuss first, has a special problem of a textual nature associated with it because in The Exeter Book it is immediately preceded by Riddle 60. Because of their proximity and because of compelling features which seem to link them, some scholars have considered them together as one poem. The two most important modern attempts (the idea itself dates back at least as far as 1900) are predicated on extratextual evidence drawn from the learning of the church. Before summarizing each of these approaches, I include text and translation of Riddle 60:

Ic waes be sonde, saewealle neah,
 aet merefarope, minum gewunade
 frumstapole faest; fea aenig waes
 monna cynnes, þaet minne þaer
 on anaede eard beheolde,
 ac mec uhtna gehwam yð sio brune
 lagufædme beleolc. Lyt ic wende
 þaet ic aer oppe sið aefre sceolde
 ofer meodubence mudleas spreca,
 wordum wrixlan. þaet is wundres dæl,
 on sefan searolic þam þe swylc ne conn,
 hu mec seaxes ord ond seo swiþre hond,
 eorles ingeþonc ond ord somod,
 þingum gepydan, þaet ic wiþ þe sceold

for unc anum twam aerendspraece
 abeodan bealdlice, swa hit beorna ma
 uncre wordcwidas widdor ne maenden.

[I was on the bank near the sea-wall; at the bank I remained fast in my original state. Hardly any was there of the race of men that looked on my solitude, dwelling place, but each morning the brown wave played around me with watery embrace. Little did I think that I before or after ever should over the mead-bench speak mouthless, speak with words. That is a portion of wonder in ingenious mind for one who knows not such how the knife point and the right hand, thought of earl and point together for this purpose pressed on me that I should with you for us two alone the message announce boldly, so that more people might not more widely know our words.]

Craig Williamson observes that the scribe has punctuated the riddle and the three main sections of The Husband's Message (lines 1-12, 13-25, and 26-53 in the Krapp and Dobbie edition) alike "with a large beginning capital and elaborate end-punctuation, so it is difficult to know whether he at least took the four verse sections to be four different poems, parts of the same poem, or parts of different poems."²⁹ But even so, in his edition of the riddles, Williamson insists on the integrity of Riddle 60. First, whether its speaker is a reed pen or a rune staff makes little difference because in either case it is an inanimate object while the speaker of The Husband's Message is clearly human. Williamson quotes Leslie's reasons against taking the

²⁹Craig Williamson, The Old English Riddles of The Exeter Book (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 315.

speaker of HM as a personified beam and in favor of taking him as a human messenger: 1.) The speaker is in the habit of making frequent voyages; 2.) When the speaker refers to se bisne beam agrof, the implication is that the speaker and the rune-stave are not the same entity; 3.) The terms mandryhten min and mines frean suggest a lord-retainer relationship which could not apply to a rune-stave; 4.) The word saegde in line 31 is more likely to apply to a human messenger than to a rune-stave.³⁰ Williamson continues as follows:

The relationship between the personified speaker of the riddle and the intended reader is an impersonal and general one--the reference to unc and be facilitate the riddlic game. The ic and be of The Husband's Message both have past histories, present personalities, and contemplated future actions (all bound up with the lord)--they seem to have a psychological reality that the personae of the riddle do not.³¹

Margaret Goldsmith evidently for a long time rejected the possibility that Riddle 60 and The Husband's Message could be treated as a single poem.³² However, citing The Dream of the Rood as an example, she observed that the riddle tradition could help produce a poem which is far more

³⁰ R. L. Leslie, Three Old English Elegies (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 13-14.

³¹ Williamson, pp. 316-317.

³² Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Enigma of The Husband's Message," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation, ed. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Frese (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 242-63.

than a curiosity. That is, the rhetorical device of prosopoeia could be used for more than the creation of a clever guessing game concerning the identity of an inanimate object. She concludes that Riddle 60 actually introduces The Husband's Message and "is the finest part of the total work which becomes more and more cerebral as it proceeds."³³

She develops what she feels are the two major objections to joining the two poems. First, the two statements about the speaker's origins and early life (R60 1-7 and HM 2-9) are inconsistent if the same speaker is responsible for both. Second, if the speaker is, as many scholars have said, a rune staff, then "ac mec uhtna gehwam yð sio brune / lagu-fædme beleolc" [but each morning the brown wave / played around me with a watery embrace] presents a problem because it does not agree with the growing of a tree. The first obstacle Goldsmith clears by saying that HM 2-9 "is not about origins but about the new life"³⁴ which the speaker led after being cut from its place of origin. The second obstacle is explained by pointing out that the speaker is not a wooden object but rather is telling about one.

Goldsmith follows Leslie in saying that the speaker is a reed-pen. There is nothing controversial in this, of course. It is the implications that it holds for The

³³Goldsmith, p. 244.

³⁴Goldsmith, p. 244.

Husband's Message that diverge from current opinions, because to Goldsmith the speaker throughout is the Reed symbolizing Holy Writ, the Word of God. Some of the problems cited by Leslie above can be explained if the speaker is considered in this light since he goes on frequent voyages figuratively when the words of his master are disseminated across the world. The engraved beam is taken not as the Cross or as a figure of the Cross (as Kaske does). Instead, Goldsmith believes the reader is being led to imagine the rod of Ezechiel which was made according to God's directions from two sticks, the joining of which symbolized that God's people would eventually be gathered into one nation.

Goldsmith follows Kaske in saying that "nacan ut aprong" [he pushed out the boat] is a metaphor for the Passion, but the end result of her analysis is different from his. Quoting Bede's commentary on Matthew, she explains how the former equated the boat that Jesus entered (Matt. 8:23) with the Cross. Kaske is vindicated on this point, but in the end his major argument must collapse. Goldsmith argues that The Husband's Message is only partially a poem of the Cross because if one "identifies the messenger with the cross . . . the messenger cannot also be the boat."³⁵ She continues by claiming that the germinal text for R60-HM

³⁵Goldsmith, p. 258.

is Psalm 44:1 which contains the phrase "Lingua mea calamus scribae . . ." [My tongue is the pen of the writer]. The reed becomes the pen, or more properly, Pen which records and reveals Holy Writ.

R. E. Kaske does not immediately defend his consideration of the two poems as one; rather he explicates The Husband's Message portion first.³⁶ He begins with the runes, and as a result of his examination of the manuscript with the aid of ultraviolet light he proposes to emend the generally accepted gecyre in 66^a to genyre. Explaining its meaning as "I constrain" he turns to the runes and glosses them as "sigelrod (heaven), earwyn (a delightful or joyful earth) and mann (man or mankind)."³⁷

This glossing of genyre put with the meaning of the runes leads directly to the vast commentary available on the Cross as a principle which unifies all of creation: heaven, earth, and mankind. The Husband's Message, then, can be understood as spoken by the beam. Kaske feels that the existence of a poem like The Dream of the Rood strengthens his conception of the Cross as the speaker of the poem. Further, the mention of a pledge between the lovers, tirfaeste treowe (29), wordbeotunga (32), gebeot (65), etc.:

³⁶ R. E. Kaske, "A Poem of the Cross in The Exeter Book: 'Riddle 60' and The Husband's Message," Traditio, 23 (1967), 41-71.

³⁷ Kaske, pp. 45-46.

find a counterpart in the literature of the Cross, where the Cross itself is often seen as the instrument of a pledge or treaty between God and man or Christ and the Church, sometimes accompanied by the familiar bridal imagery of Canticles.³⁸

Other points of interest include the likelihood that "Hine faepo adraf / of sigepeode" (36^b-37^a) refers to God's alienation from man during the time between the Fall and the Atonement. There is the motif of the references to ships and sea voyages, and of course the images of the church as a ship which transports the Christian over the sea of life is a very familiar one in the literature of the church. The account of how the lover launched his ship and ventured out seems to Kaske to represent "the ministry and death of Christ."³⁹

It is the "nacan ut aprong" which causes difficulty in explaining the relationship between Kaske and Goldsmith because it is the point at which the latter believes the former's argument breaks down. There is a very subtle distinction to be made here. Goldsmith recognizes that the voyage of the boat can refer to the Passion of Christ and the literal setting out on the water mentioned in Matthew 8:23, but her complaint is that if the speaker is the Cross it cannot be the boat at the same time. Since we are talking

³⁸Kaske, p. 52.

³⁹Kaske, p. 55.

about symbolism and the levels upon which the meanings exist, the dilemma consists of whether to pursue the various threads as far as possible in the interests of thoroughness or to dare to cut them off and avoid unnecessary complication. But Goldsmith's complaint should be checked by the following two points: 1.) The Cross has already referred to itself in an impersonal and indirect way by calling itself "pisne beam" so even though there is no demonstrative with "nacan," the messenger could still refer to itself; 2.) Even though the Cross and the boat can have symbolic identity and function as figures of one another, there is no reason why the Cross cannot refer to the boat on a literal level and as an entity separate from itself.

Kaske turns to Riddle 60 now and remarks that there are passages elsewhere in Old English literature which show that there was interest in the earliest history of the cross, that is, as a living tree. He cites Alfric and especially The Dream of the Rood 28-31^a. Kaske's line of reasoning goes as follows. If there was interest in the Cross's previous history as a tree, and if The Husband's Message is a poem of the cross, then it is inherently probable that Riddle 60 is the beginning of that poem. The location of the tree near a body of water calls to mind the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life which are both described in Genesis as being near a stream. We should recall Williamson's observation above that the two poems (if they are two poems)

are not separated in the manuscript, and though the scribe's practice may or may not indicate unity as we are accustomed to speak of it, it is worthy of mention.

The articles by Kaske and Goldsmith underscore the necessity of considering more than the concept of elegy if the question of genre is to be looked into. The flexibility of the first person in Old English literature, a flexibility that allowed that person to be used by inanimate beings as well as animate ones, adds another set of possibilities of meaning. The riddles, as ingenious and entertaining as they are, would be considered by few as art on the level of The Dream of the Rood. Yet, as Margaret Goldsmith explains, the latter must have emerged from the riddlic tradition.⁴⁰ Though they are little more than clever literary games which by the presentation of clues are designed to encourage the reader to guess the identity of the speaker, the riddles do share with poems like The Dream of the Rood the rhetorical device of having an inanimate object speak. An it is entirely likely that an Old English author would have realized that such a device could be used for much more serious purposes.

Study of the riddle influences the critical fortunes of The Riming Poem, as well, and the problems here are particularly knotty. The following description of the poem by

⁴⁰Goldsmith, p. 244.

W. S. Mackie represents, it seems to me, the prevailing view:

It is an elegy placed in the mouth of a man who from former happy prosperity has fallen into helpless misery. The change is due to old age, disease, and the fear of death.⁴¹

Of course, much of the elegiac furniture is present:

Scealcas waeron scearpe, scyl waes hearpe,
hlude hlynede, hleoþor dynede,
sweglrad swinsade, swipe ne minsade.
Burgsele beofode, beorht hlifade,
ellen eacnade, ead beacnade,
freaum frodade, fromum godade (27-32).

[The servants were active, the harp was resonant, it roared loudly, the song rang out, the music made melody, did not lessen greatly, the hall trembled, it towered bright, courage increased, riches beckoned.]

Though, as we shall see, there are differences in the way the heroic past is presented, the flavor here is one that we recognize. In the past tense is a summary of the hall-joys, the music for the warriors, the dispensing of treasure, the strong lord giving stability to his domain by means of the loyalty of his retainers. All this has vanished, however, and though its fall is foreshadowed in line 37 "sinc searwade, sib nearwade" [treasure acted treacherously, bond of friendship narrowed], the first half (1-42) of the poem is uniformly happy in tone, while the second half (43-87) is uniformly sad.

⁴¹W. S. Mackie, "The Old English Rhymed Poem," JEGP, 21 (1922), 507.

The second half gives extensive treatment of the ruin of the once noble way of life, and though the reason for its fall is never told in any but the most general of terms, we recognize the flavor:

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 hented, haeleþe scyndeð.
 Wercyn gewited, waelgar slited (55-61).

[So here joys perish, lordships fall, here men lose life, often choose sins; true season is too evil, that feebly declined, it goes badly with the highseat, and every hour declines. So now the world changes, sends wyrd, and pursues hate, ruins men. The race of men dies, slaughter-spear rends.]

The reader will perhaps recall The Wanderer (73-91) though the passage from The Riming Poem is less visual. The spirit of decay, however, is certainly very similar in both poems, and the intensity of the misery which exists in the place of the hall-joys described in the first part of the poem is stressed so heavily that there is no difficulty in understanding why scholars have classified it among poems like The Wanderer and The Seafarer. (I have not mentioned The Seafarer in the comparison because of the different uses it makes of its heroic elements.)

But as in the case of Riddle 60 and The Husband's Message the matter of genre in The Riming Poem is by no means as simple as examining the elegiac elements. The

riddle, too, is important, and there are several characteristics which make it so. The Riming Poem, which is famous for its obscurity, seems to have been copied by a scribe who felt obliged to change certain forms to his own dialect. Therefore, scribal error which is always a problem does extra mischief here. Too, many readers of the poem feel that the poet in facing the difficulty of writing rimed verse had to grope for the necessary sounds and so sacrifice clarity. Those who have edited the poem have been faced with the dilemma of either emending rather freely or going to great lengths to justify a conservative text. (I note in passing that one's concept of genre influences the process of emendation, because in the choice of an alternate reading, an editor is almost sure to be influenced in favor of a choice that is congruous with elements in other poems which are similar to the one he is engaged with. In a poem of especial obscurity, the likelihood of producing a flawed text is increased. And it is also true that while obscurity may be eased by heavy emendation in the sense that an editor makes his text more clear to the understanding, when it comes to emendation to err on the side of good sense is still to err.)

In addition to the problems of the text is the problem that there may have been a blurring of the limits of genre in Old English poetry. The riddle, one of the most popular forms available to the Anglo-Saxon poet, was a kind of literary game in the process of which clues were fed to a

reader or listener who finally came to understand the identity of the thing described. Some of the riddles contain a marker in the text ("Saga hwaet ic hatte"⁴² [Say what I am called]) which reveals their generic identity, and some do not. Therefore, the author did not always see fit to state explicitly that what he was presenting was in fact a riddle. At any rate, obscurity is built in because of the nature of the form, and the reader or listener, because of generic expectations, anticipated a game and prepared himself to play it.

Furthermore, any literary work containing the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia is more likely to use the already revealed identity of the speaker to enhance the literary effect. In The Dream of the Rood, for example, the energies of the audience are not expended on guessing the identity of the speaker but on appreciating the dramatic presentation of the closest witness of the crucifixion. Despite this difference, however, we recall that a major part of Kaske's argument about the unity of Riddle 60 and The Husband's Message depends on the existence of the kind of poem that is The Dream of the Rood.

So, then, granted the obscurity of The Riming Poem and the popularity and versatility of the riddle, we find another way to get at the poem. When Ruth Lehmann says that The

⁴²Krapp and Dobbie, III, 192.

Riming Poem is "as much riddle as elegy"⁴³ she is in effect suggesting that its obscurity has its natural origin in genre. Her approach is much bolder than that of Kaske because he took a poem that was already recognizable as a riddle and built a case for its function as an introduction to and a part of a larger whole. Therefore half his work was done for him simply by the collocation of Riddle 60 and The Husband's Message. Lehmann's path has more obstacles. The qualities that turn her away from considering The Riming Poem as an elegy are as follows. It is so impersonal and its sentiments are so generalized that comparison with the other elegies is strained: ". . . where The Wanderer and The Seafarer tell of landscapes, events, friends, lords, voyages that have reality, The Riming Poem expresses vague joys, followed by general calamities."⁴⁴ The very opening of the poem seems to Lehmann much different from those of the other elegies in the sense that it "presents a very unusual persona, granted life by the Lord of Creation, almost by His fiat lux."⁴⁵ According to her, then, the following question must be asked: "Can it be that the persona is not a man at all but something general, perhaps the will of God?"⁴⁶ Since the purpose of her article is to give a

⁴³ Ruth P. M. Lehmann, "The Old English Riming Poem: Interpretation, Text, and Translation," JEGP, 69 (1970), 440.

⁴⁴ Lehmann, p. 439.

⁴⁵ Lehmann, p. 440.

⁴⁶ Lehmann, p. 440.

text and translation as well as to provide an interpretation, she does not go into much detail on the question of genre. She does, however, cite Huppé's investigations into medieval thought and exegesis as being of value and says that the answer to the problem must be in the teaching and commentary of the day.

The Riming Poem is different, as Lehmann observes, and it is proper here to look closely at her findings and add further considerations along the way. Her point that the ideas on which the poem is built are generalized and impersonal is well taken. I mentioned above that the quotation 55-61, though it contains the spirit of decay typical of the elegies, is much less visual. Though details like "high-seat" and "slaughter-spear" are concrete, there is no conception of a complete scene as there is in The Wanderer. Then from line 62 there follows a catalog of abstract forces like evil, old age, grief, anger, and devilship, and these, too, contribute to the spirit of impersonality which Lehmann finds so striking.

Another difference which Lehmann does not mention is the way in which the phenomenal world is used by the poet. The following couplet in The Riming Poem presents a facet of nature of a kind not found in The Wanderer and The Seafarer:

"Pa waes waestmum aweaht, world onspreht / under roderum
areaht, raedmaegne oferpeaht" (9-10) [The the world was awakened with harvests, enlivened, adorned under the heavens,

overspread with beneficial force]. What we would call a favorable representation of the phenomenal world finds, in The Wanderer, expression in the description of the joy of the hall. The references to nature itself are used to demonstrate the intense pain felt by the exile:

Donne onwaecneð eft wineleas guma,
 gesihte him biforan fealwe wegas,
 bapian brimfuglas, braedan feþra,
 hreosan hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged (45-48).

[There wakes again the friendless exile, he
 sees before him the fallow waves, the seafowl
 bathe, spread their feathers, the frost and
 snow falls, mixed with hail.]

Obviously, there is no fertility here at all. All is designed to give intensity to the representation of the pain of exile. In The Seafarer the much-disputed passage 48-49 is important because of the quality of its description: "Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig faegriað, / wongas wlitigiað, woruld onetted" [The groves take on blossoms, the manor is made beautiful, the fields brighten, world hastens]. Though the emphasis here is on natural beauty, not on fertility, the passage is similar enough to the excerpt from The Riming Poem to be mentioned in passing. I hesitate to press any comparison too far, however, because of the controversy surrounding the passage. Many consider it to be out of place because natural beauty seems to be the motive force behind going into exile. Others who prefer a strictly doctrinal reading see natural beauty as just another example of the deceptive

transience of material things, and if their approach is applied to The Riming Poem, then matters become even more confused. I think all that can be said here is that because of the existence of fertility imagery and the different use to which natural description is put, one should avoid relying too much on The Wanderer and The Seafarer for comparative study.

Another difference between The Riming Poem and the other elegies is the proportionately large part of the poem which is happy in tone. Almost half, part of which I quoted above, describes the hall-joys, and while such description is not dissonant with the other elegies, what is striking is the matter of mass. In these other poems, especially in The Wanderer whose author was more sympathetic to the heroic world than The Seafarer poet, the strategy seems to have been to give flashes of the happy past but to keep the reader's attention more forcefully directed on the wretched present. Of course, the wretched present is given full sway in the second half of the poem. What is different is the organization and proportion.

The opening of The Riming Poem as Lehmann observes, is highly unusual and obscure. As the reader tries to find a subject for the verbs "grant" and "reveal" in the first line, he begins to find her argument for the speaker's being the will of God hard to resist: "The opening suggests light, the creative force of earth, all acting by God's will."⁴⁷ Her

suggestion is a daring one, and though I believe it breaks down, there is much appeal in it. I have already argued for the likelihood that a Christian poet would have found it convenient to adapt heroic features to his purpose. If Lehmann could be right about the speaker's being a riddlic representation of God's will, then certain points I have made about The Wanderer and The Seafarer must be reexamined.

In the first forty-two lines of The Riming Poem the description of happy times is, as I have had occasion to say, rooted firmly in the heroic furniture. Despite the obscurity, it is clear that the speaker enjoyed prominence in his hall and that his hall-joys were abundant:

þenden waes me maegen,
horsce mec heredon, hilde.generatedon,
faegre feredon, feondon biweredon.
Swa mec hyhtgiefu heold, hygedryht befeold,
stapolaehtum steold, stepegongum weold
swylce eorþe ol, ahte ic ealdorstol,
galdorwordum gol (18-24).

[Then there was power for me, the valiant praised
me, from battle saved me, proudly marched, from
foes defended me. So that the joy-gift held me,
the household retainers surrounded me, I possessed
estates, controlled step-going such as the earth
brought forth, I possessed the lord's seat.]

If the speaker is the will of God then the Christian ethos has been totally absorbed into that of the heroic. The description is that of a literal church-militant, which

⁴⁷Lehmann, p. 440.

flourishes, in this happy part of the poem, under the auspices of divine power. In order for Lehmann to be right, the heroic would have to be harmonious with the Christian, and while it is theoretically possible, there are no Christian references in this first half. As I tried to show in The Wanderer and The Seafarer, the heroic references are left outside the vitalizing force of Christianity, and they are kept separate in order to underscore the transience of the material world as opposed to the permanence of heaven. In The Wanderer the Creator of the Ages is instrumental in destroying the heroic order; in The Seafarer the three levels of the exile topos explain the importance of seeking the permanence of the heavenly home. There is no harmony between the two worlds, and while the lack of it does not prove Lehmann wrong, the absence of Christian references makes her approach very unlikely. Even if we attribute that absence and the obscurity in the poem to the attempt to create an extended riddle, one assumes that more clues would appear in the text. As I read the poem, I do not get the feeling that I am being led to any kind of elevated state of awareness.

Turning to the second and gloomy part of the poem, we find that the obscurity and generalization combine to make precise interpretation impossible. If the speaker is the will of God, then he is very cryptic about his lack of efficacy.. I suppose the reader could build a case for the

speaker as the will of God complaining that man has ceased to obey Him, and asserting that his failure to do so has fostered sin in the world. But it takes a great deal of stretching to read the poem this way. There are vague references to sin and to evil, but they are so abstract that they offer little we can work with. The burning treasure which Mackie reads literally as a cancer of some sort may refer to some moral flaw which produced ruin, but there is nothing in the surrounding passages which reinforces such an interpretation.

Another problem with Lehmann's identification of the speaker is that arising from the description of the grave: "Me þæt wyrd gewaef, ond gewyrht forgeaf, / þæt ic grofe graef, ond þæt grimme graef / flean flaesce ne maeg" (70-72) [Fate wove it for me, gave me my deserts that I dig a grave, and that grim cavern the flesh may not flee]. It is hard to imagine any force dictating to the will of God. Of course, the reference to destruction could be to a grave for everyone, for mortals in general, but the eschatology is very bare indeed. Lehmann pauses only to say:

When we read "I dug a grave" we are reminded of other elegies in which the speaker may have buried his lord or a kinsman, yet digging a grave for oneself is not usual. Dr. Grubl understands this as everyman--but only at this point. It is surely the grave that comes to all at last. "Then the night approaches that begrudged me a home and accused me of a dwelling here."⁴⁸

I admit that the treatment of the grave has an aura of the universal about it. I have already pointed to the nature of the abstractions which prepare the way for this description. It is perhaps possible that the will of God being in disfavor has dug the grave for Man as punishment for being ignored, but we need not assume that the speaker has dug the grave for himself. Another fact that undermines Lehmann's identification of the speaker is the appearance of "uton" in line 83:

Uton nu halgum gelice
 scyldum biscyrede scyndan generede,
 wommum biwerede, wuldre generede (83-85).

[Let us now like the saints separated from sins
 hurry saved, defended from vices, gloriously
 saved.]

If the speaker is the will of God, it would be strange that it included itself in such an exhortation. It would be far more likely to say: "You must . . ." rather than "Let us. . . ."

It is true that the last eight lines of The Riming Poem which comprise the homiletic conclusion find counterparts in The Seafarer 117-24 and The Wanderer 114^b-15. Otherwise there is very little resemblance except for the general moods of prosperity and decay that permeate respectively the

⁴⁸Lehmann, p. 441

first and second movements of The Riming Poem. There is none of the didacticism which has taken elements of the heroic ethos and adapted them to a Christian purpose. What, then, is it? I do not consider it a riddle since for my part there is no sense of being led to a heightened state of awareness. Neither is it, as Isaacs argues,⁴⁹ a self-indulgent statement by a poet about his craft. If the poet was Christian, and the conclusion suggests that he was, then the poem is the work of a poet who was more antiquarian than ecclesiastic. Unlike the poets of The Wanderer and The Seafarer he was less than successful at grafting the heroic onto the Christian. Returning to Campbell's idea of quasi-interpolation, I suggest that the poet was not able fully to adapt his heroic inheritance either because he was charmed by it and hesitated to show its inferiority compared to the Christian view, or because he hadn't the skill to. At any rate, the seam between the heroic and the Christian is plainly visible.

The Wife's Lament has also been treated in connection with the riddles. A. N. Doane, whose approach to the poem is rather bold, sees the narrator as

. . . one of those innumerable female spirits which came to be called in Norse tradition the disir. She is lamenting the recent conversion of some priest-chief whom she considered her

⁴⁹Neil D. Isaacs, "The Exercise of Art, Part I: The Riming Poem," in Structural Principles in Old English Poetry (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1968), pp. 56-70.

special "man" (e.g., as Hrafnkell was "Freysgodí").⁵⁰

Furthermore, the "geong man" is Christ who won away the "godí."⁵¹ Doane uses the obscurity of the poem to support his consideration of it as a riddle. It is worth repeating in some detail what he considers support since it helps to flesh out some of the ideas above in Lehmann's theory about The Riming Poem. First, The Wife's Lament occurs in The Exeter Book at the end of a large group of riddles. Second, the work "giedd" sometimes means "riddle." Third, the poem is "linked to the riddles in that it is a variation upon the usual role of a riddle: for insofar as a riddle is serious at all, it is an attempt to define the essence of a thing exclusive of its all-powerful name."⁵² Fourth, The Wife's Lament is one of only four poems which have the common riddle feature of beginning with ic. Fifth, the introduction contains phrases "which have a riddling look about them" ("Ic þaet secgan maeg," "siþþan ic up wæox," and "niwes oþþe ealdes no ma þonne nu"). Sixth, many words in the poem are words that "occur with disproportionate frequency in the riddles (e.g. 'hlaford,' 'leof,' 'wudu,' 'bearo,' 'dim')."⁵³

⁵⁰ A. N. Doane, "Heathen Form and Christian Function in 'The Wife's Lament,'" Medieval Studies, 28 (1966), 88-89.

⁵¹ Doane, p. 89.

⁵² Doane, p. 86.

⁵³ Doane, p. 86.

These reasons probably give us more insight into Doane as a critic than into the riddle as genre. Surely, his first three reasons are compelling if not decisive. The location of a poem within The Exeter Book is worthy of attention; Kaske's opinion on Riddle 60-Husband's Message gives adequate support of this kind of practice. The meaning of giedd, too, is worthy as evidence. But one can be forgiven for losing all patience with the second set of reasons because of their vagueness. To give Doane his due, the "riddling look" he perceives is almost convincing because the problem involves data which defy any kind of precision. However, he does not provide any particulars about the phrases he isolates, and the fifth reason is doomed to impotence. The sixth does not take into consideration the number of times hlaforð, to choose one example, occurs in non-riddle contexts. The entries in the Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records show many examples from Beowulf, Maldon, and other works,⁵⁴ and it is difficult to see how Doane's phrase "disproportionate frequency" can apply.

Of the poems so far considered, Resignation is unique in that it appears to be a combination of two forms, the penitential psalm and the elegy. Thomas Bestul stresses the importance of the Benedictine reform in his attempt to

⁵⁴ A Concordance to The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. J. B. Bessinger, Jr. and Philip H. Smith, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978).

show the influence of the penitential psalm on the first movement of the poem (1-75^a). He cites the Regularis Concordia which shows that the penitential psalms (6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142) were central to the daily devotions of monks in the time Resignation must have been written. Since there was much interest in the private confessional prayer both in Latin and the vernacular, Bestul concludes:

The specific devotional and liturgical climate, along with the general quickening of intellectual and ecclesiastical enterprise, might have inspired the poet of Resignation to try his hand at combining in the English language a personal confessional prayer and the native tradition of elegiac poetry.⁵⁵

It would be fortunate if we could trace some direct influence of the penitential psalms on the Old English poem, but there is none that I can see. There is, however, general influence of several kinds. At frequent intervals in Resignation there are familiar penitential imperatives that one encounters in the psalms:

Age mec se aelmihta god,
helpe min se halga dryhten! (1-2).
Forgif þu me, min frea, fierst ond ondgiæt
ond geþyld ond gemynd þinga gehwylces
þara þu me, soþfaest cyning, sendan wylle
to cunnunge. (22-25).

[Hold me, almighty God, help me holy Lord.]
[Give me, my lord, time and understanding,
patience and memory of each of the things

⁵⁵ Thomas H. Bestul, "The Old English Resignation and the Benedictine Reform," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 78 (1977), 22-23.

that you, truth-king, will send to knowing.]

There are also pleas for instruction and the admission of wickedness on the part of the speaker. All of this is quite similar in content to the attitude of the psalmist.

In Resignation, however, there is little specific account of the suffering of the speaker. One of the characteristic features of the penitential psalms is the revelation of spiritual torment by means of a description of physical pain:

Laboravi ingemitu meo
 lavabo per singulas noctes lectum meum
 lacrimis meis stratum meum rigabo.
 Turbatus est a furore oculus meus
 inveteravi inter omnes inimicos meos⁵⁶
 (Ps. 6:7-8)

putruerunt et corruptae sunt
 cicatrices meae a facie insipientiae meae⁵⁷
 (Ps. 36:6)

[I have become weary with my weeping, every night I will wash my bed with my tears, I shall stiffen my bed-covering. My eye is troubled by a fury, I have become weak among all my enemies.]

[My wounds grow foul and rot because of my foolishness.]

It is worth noting at this point that as far as the psalmist was concerned, illness was God's punishment for sin. But in Resignation the discomfort of the speaker is represented

⁵⁶ Biblorum Sacrorum Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, ed. Aloisius Gramatica (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1939).

⁵⁷ Biblorum Sacrorum.

largely in terms of the mind; suffering is developed in such an abstract way that we are not quite able to grasp what its exact effect can be:

þonne is gromra to fela
 aefestum eaden, haebbe ic þonne
 aet frean frofre, þeah þe ic aer on fyrste lyt
 earnode arna (46-49).

[When there is too much trouble granted by enmities, have I then comfort from the Lord, though before for a time I merited few honors.]

Indeed, much of the strife the speaker dreads is not only mental or spiritual; it has not even taken place:

Forstond þu mec ond gestyr him, þonne storm cyme
 minum gaeste ongegn; geoca þonne,
 mihtig dryhten, minre sawle,
 gefreopa hyre ond gefeorma hy, faeder moncynnes,
 haedre gehogode, hael, ece god,
 meotod meatum swiþ (59-64).

[Stand up for me and correct them when the storm comes towards my spirit. Then preserve, mighty Lord, my soul, protect and nourish it, oppressed by anxious thoughts, everlasting God, shaper, strong with might.]

Much of the speaker's activity is preventive maintenance, then, and there is neither the immediacy nor the physicality of suffering that goes through so many of the psalms. Though I believe there is much in what Bestul says of the influence of the Benedictine revival, there is one matter related to the psalm question which is conspicuous by its absence. As I have stressed above, the complexion of the first movement of Resignation is rather abstract. If the

poet had been strongly influenced by the psalms, then it is highly likely that he would have found it convenient to develop the area of physical suffering because the vocabulary of Old English poetry is so rich in it. Poems like The Wanderer and The Seafarer contain much imagery based on the pain of cold weather and exile, and it seems such a theme from the psalms would have found a natural counterpart in Old English verse. I do not minimize the very valuable study Bestul has made of the importance of the Benedictine reform; the penitential imperatives, the pleas for instruction, and the overall tone strongly suggest general influence. I seek only to furnish a check on the temptation to assume too close a relationship between the psalms and Resignation.

The shift to what Bestul calls the elegiac part of the poem occurs at 75^a. It introduces, he feels, "an extended metaphor for the life of the penitent, linked to the first section by the iteration of the word sib (97^b) which here has symbolic as well as literal meaning."⁵⁸ It is true that sib has literal and symbolic meaning, and the literary possibilities of the relationships between the two must have been well-known since they are so important in The Seafarer. Bestul is also right to say that the sib of the second movement concerns the penitent's earthly existence. However, to

⁵⁸ Bestul, p. 23.

examine the elegiac nature of this second movement it is necessary to look back at the first and see the process by which the journey motif is developed. There, in a series of penitential requests for instruction and for the strength to persevere on the right path once it has been shown to him, the speaker asks: "ne laet þu mec naefre deofol seþeah / þin lim laedan on laðne sið" (52-53) [nor never let the devil lead me, though, thy limb, on the hated journey]. It is interesting that damnation is expressed in terms of exile, because in other poems we have found only examples of the literal journey and the journey to the heavenly home. In such a way does the Resignation-poet introduce an added dimension to the figure.

I repeat that Bestul is right in assigning a symbolic quality to sib in 97^b, but it is helpful to look closely at the close of the first section to see how the way is cleared. At the end of a long address to God (59-75) in which the speaker prays for divine protection, he declares that he will "fraetwian mec on ferdweg ond fundian / sylf to þam sipe þe ic asettan sceal" (72-73) [prepare myself on the forth-way (soul-way) and hasten to the journey that I will appoint]. If sib appeared by itself and if we confined ourselves to a strictly literal reading we might think it refers to a literal journey and only that. However, occurring as it does in a passage where the speaker is concerned about the well-being of his soul, sib is very likely to have a meaning

beyond the literal. (Dorothy Whitelock and Kathleen Hughes show convincingly the significance of pilgrimage.⁵⁹) Further support of a symbolic reading comes from the appearance of ferðweg. There is some doubt about its precise meaning since it could be a form of either forðweg or ferhþweg. The former usually means "departure" while the latter means "soulway." The "Addenda" to the Toller and Campbell Supplement has ferhþweg with a citation to Resignation, line 72, but then in parentheses the entry reads "(? or read forðweg)" with the meaning "way to eternal life." Therefore, we can draw nothing decisive from the BTS. But the symbolic nature of ferðweg, even if it is a form of forðweg, is still supported by the fact that the latter in Old English poetry is used to mean "departure" in a specialized sense, the way taken after death. For example, in Beowulf:

geaf him ða mid Geatum guðgewaeda,
aeghwaes unrim, þa he of ealdre gewat
frod on forðweg (2623-25).⁶⁰

[. . . gave him then among the Geats, a
countless number of all kinds of war-weeds
when he departed from life, old on the forth-
way.]

⁵⁹ Dorothy Whitelock, "The Interpretation of The Seafarer," in The Early Cultures of North-West Europe: H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies, ed. Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickens (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 261-72.

Kathleen Hughes, "The Changing Theory and Practise of Irish Pilgrimage," Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 11 (1960), 143-51.

⁶⁰ Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3rd. ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1950).

I am aware that W. S. Mackie in his Early English Text Society edition of The Exeter Book translates ferþweg as "pilgrimage."⁶¹ I still argue for the specialized meaning "the way traveled after death" because of the meanings of ferþweg and fordweg, and the certainty that the latter, too, had an eschatological connotation. And the use of the word in such proximity to sip gives it a symbolic shade of meaning.

Two matters concerning the second movement as elegy remain to be discussed. The first concerns a well-known crux in the poem; the second is a rhetorical figure somewhat similar to those found in other poems like The Wanderer. Both occur in the following:

forþon ic afysed eom
 earm of minum eþle. Ne maeg þaes anhoga,
 leodwynna leas, leng drohtian,
 wineleas wraecca, (is him wrað meotud),
 gnornað on his geogupe,
 onð him aelce maele men fullestað,
 ycað his yrmpu, onð he þaet eal þolað,
 sarcwide secga, onð him bið a sefa geomor,
 mod morgenseoc. Ic bi me tylgust
 secge þis sarspel onð ymb sip spraece,
 longunge fus, onð on lagu þence,
 nat min * * *
 hwy ic gebycge bat in saewe,
 fleot on farode (88-101).

[Therefore I am impelled wretched from my native land. Nor may this recluse, without people-joys tarry long, friendless exile,--God is angry with him--he grieves over his youth, and men help him every time, his troubles increase and he endures all that, sorrow-speech of men, and always to him is a sad spirit, morning-sick spirit. I provide

⁶¹W. S. Mackie, The Exeter Book: Part II (London: Early English Text Society, 1934), p. 169.

for myself, say this sorrow-speech and think on
the sea. I know not * * * why I buy a boat on
the sea, float on the billows.]

There are several obscure passages in Resignation but none more troublesome than that in the vicinity of 99^b. I have followed Krapp and Dobbie in using asterisks for the apparently missing half-line, but as they indicate,⁶² there is no damage to the manuscript nor even any evidence of a loss in the manuscript. Mackie quotes Grein as having supplied the rest of the line as follows: "nat min [sefa sarum geswenced]" with the meaning "my sorely troubled mind does not know." Mackie prefers "nat min [sefa sarum gebysgad]" with the same meaning; his justification is that it is metrically more suitable.⁶³ Krapp and Dobbie are right, of course, when they say that so large a gap is quite beyond reconstruction. It is unfortunate, however, that the obscurity occurs here because it clouds what we can deduce about the speaker's relationship to his voyage. Though it is clear from 88^b-89^a that the speaker is indeed in exile, we are frustrated in any attempt to define any more precisely what the journey amounts to. Immediately following the apparent hiatus in 99^b we find "hwy ic gebycge bat on saewe." The hiatus makes the translation of "hwy"

⁶²Krapp and Dobbie, III, 355.

⁶³Mackie, The Exeter Book, p. 245.

especially difficult. Mackie translates it "with what";⁶⁴ it is of course the instrumental form of the interrogative pronoun. But it is unwise to discount "why" as a meaning because of the doubt surrounding the whole area as a result of the preceding line. Even if there is no manuscript damage or indication that a loss occurred, it still does not rule out the possibility of scribal error. Since it is possible that something was left out which would legitimize "why," it is best not to make any choice at all and further to label the passage as obscure and leave it at that.

The second matter, the rhetorical figure that recalls the reader to poems like The Wanderer, occurs in lines 89-96 in the passage quoted above. These lines are conspicuous because even though it is not uncommon in Old English for pronoun reference to shift from person to person, the referents are usually clear in their contexts. Here the abruptness leads one to choose between two possibilities. Either the speaker is referring to himself in the third person or he is transferring the motion of the situation to an imaginary person. The latter choice is a strong possibility since it is rather similar to the technique involving the se-be figure in The Wanderer: "Wat se þe cunnað / hu slipen bið sorg to geferan" (29-30) [He knows who experiences it, how cruel sorrow is as a companion]. The difference

⁶⁴Mackie, The Exeter Book, p. 171.

is that the passage in Resignation, unlike the example from The Wanderer, has no clear marker (se-be) at its beginning to indicate a change of person. At its end we find "Ic bi me tylgust / secge þis sarspel . (I about me [for my sake] relate, tell this sorrow-speech.) E. G. Stanley has glossed bi as "for my sake"⁶⁵ and as such the passage immediately preceding its occurrence could be alluded to as designed to give a parallel expression of the speaker's sorrow. On the other hand, if bi is glossed as "about" (see The Wife's Lament, line 1) then it is likely that the speaker has just told a story about himself in the third person.

It is a difficult question, and it is hard to argue either way with total conviction. But if forced to decide, I would favor Stanley's glossing of bi. If the anhoga is the speaker himself, the shift from person to person is too clumsy to be believable. If, on the other hand, he is transferring emotion to a fictional person, the rhythm of the passage resembles that of expressions like "he knows who experiences. . . ." Bi glossed as "for my sake" gives a smoother rendering of the passage.

I have compiled what I consider a fair summary of the voluminous criticism of these poems and a conservative

⁶⁵ Stanley, pp. 458-59.

assessment of it. Timmer took the term "elegy" in its general sense, sharpened its limits by including qualities found in Old English poems, then dismissed from the genre those poems which violated his construct of definition. Henry, Cross, and Woolf chose genres which must have had influence on Old English literature and used them to provide more detailed study of the various lyrics.

To my knowledge, Henry is the only one of these critics to use the term "empirical" to describe the advantages his approach has over the others. His concept of the term deserves scrutiny here. Its simplest definition is the scientific one which names a process of investigation based on experiment or observation. Translated into literary matters, "empirical" seems to mean an examination of the artifacts before us with carefully controlled communication with outside ideas. I should be careful to say that I do not mean New Criticism, which is concerned with the work itself exclusive of a cultural context. Henry believes that the early Celtic lyric of the penitential variety can be used to get at Old English lyrics. He singles out Cross as a violator of the empirical method because his importation of the consolatio imposes an outside force on the poems he treats. Henry stresses the importance of studying the Celtic lyric, because even though it too is technically an outside force, its influence is more likely because of geographical and cultural proximity. I have expressed above my

misgivings about the value of Kintevin as a subject of comparison. Since the currency of the Latin literary tradition as substantiated by Cross is entirely convincing, it seems to me such traditions are actually closer to Old English poetry than Henry's Celtic examples. In handling literature about which the conditions of creation are obscure to start with, we must be content with an impure form of the empirical. It is empirical to the extent that we can observe that certain ideas were available in a kind of cultural gene-pool and that under the right conditions certain conceptions were hatched out. I am guilty of a frightful mixing of metaphors, but the analogy is sound.

Another body of criticism handled above takes as its subject the blurring of genres. It is not just the elegy as a subspecies of lyric that concerns us. If there were in The Exeter Book a poem (say, The Wanderer) which we could enshrine in a kind of literary Bureau of Standards and use as a base for comparison, our procedure would be simple. But as Timmer observed, in Old English there is no pure elegy available to us. The religious-propagandistic is to some extent present in all of our poems, and though we may quibble about its precise proportions, it cannot be discounted. The riddle and the psalm, too, have played their parts as we have seen in the opinions of Kaske, Lehmann, and Bestul.

In my assessment of the critical fortunes of the poems,

I have arrived at my own kind of empirical process. The lyrics of The Exeter Book have been treated as a class unto themselves. Rather than trying to establish degrees of the elegiac, I have instead treated common themes as they appear in slightly differing forms, always keeping in mind a Christian poet adapting the traditions at hand.

CONCLUSION

These elegies of The Exeter Book have been the subject of spirited literary discussion for well over a hundred years and they still intrigue scholars and reward their study. I have summarized the most important issues surrounding them and have added what I could. But something needs to be said in the way of suggestions for further study. There are several tasks to be performed which run beyond the normal scope of a dissertation.

All along I have urged the consideration of the Exeter elegies as a group unto themselves. However, as I grew more curious about the issue of a Christian poet's adaptation of heroic material to religious and didactic purposes, it became clear that a wider study of semantics in Old English literature could increase our understanding in the following way. A word like wlonc occurs in contexts which show it to be ameliorated in some instances and pejorated in others. In The Wanderer it occurs once:

Woriað þa winsalo, waldend licgað
dreame bidrorene, dugup eal gecrong,
wlonc bi wealle (78-80).

[The wine-hall goes to ruin, lords lie dead
bereft of joy, the host all perished by the wall.]

Though the description is of an institution that the Creator of the Ages destroyed, the word wlonc has no pejorative connotation in and of itself. This instance can be compared to the use of the same word in The Seafarer:

Forþon him gelyfed^ð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
gebiden in burgym, bealosipa hwon,
wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft
in brimlade bidan sceolde (27-30).

[Therefore he little admits, he who has joy
of life, has experienced few grievous journeys,
proud and wanton, how I weary should remain on
the sea-passage.]

Here wlonc carries a different charge altogether because we have already seen how the poet looks at those who do not take part in a journey like his own but remain safe on shore. It would be satisfying indeed if wlonc in any given poem could reveal the attitude of the author toward heroic and secular ideas. That is, if wlonc were used in a way that suggested a pejorative taint in meaning, one could assume that the author was using its secular connotations to condemn the heroic. Then we could establish a more precise meaning of the term "religious-propagandistic," and perhaps even establish some kind of progression from a fond though mournful look back at the past to a more essentially religious view. For instance, arguing from another direction, Stanley B. Greenfield proposes the following:

The Ruin, The Wanderer, and The Seafarer can thus be viewed as offering one kind of elegiac experience.

If read in that order, they present a progression from relative clarity and simplicity to obscurity and complexity, from secular lament to eschatological reflection and religious didactic exhortation, from a consolation in the very act of poetic re-creation to a security attained only in the heavenly sight.

This is essentially the kind of progression I have in mind. Considering The Wanderer with its gentle treatment of the heroic and The Seafarer's use of the topos of exile not as a representation of the heroic ethos but rather as an idea to be reshaped into the peregrinus figure exiled from heaven, it becomes attractive to try to extend Greenfield's grouping to include, for instance, a poem like Vainglory, which has nothing at all positive to say about the heroic:

1 þaet maeg aeghwylc mon eape gepencan,
 se þe hine ne laeted on þas laenan tid
 amyrran his gemyndum modes gaelsan
 ond on his daegrime druncen to rice,
 þonne monige beoð maepelhegendra,
 wlonce wigsmipas winburgum in,
 sittap aet symble, soðgied wrecað,
 wordum wrixlað, witan fundiaþ
 hwylc aescstede inne in raecede
 mid werum wunige, þonne win hweted
 beornes breostsefan. Breahtem stiged,
 cirm on corpre, cwide scralletap
 missenlice. Swa beoþ modsefan
 dalum gedaeled, sindon dryhtguman
 ungelice. Sum on oferhygdo
 bymme þringed, þrinted him in innan
 ungedemad mod; sindan to monige þaet:
 Bið þaet aefþonca eal gefylled
 feondes fligepilum, facensearwum;
 breodað he ond baelced, boð his sylfes
 swiþor micle þonne se sella mon,
 þenced þaet his wise welhwam þince
 eal unforcup. Biþ þaes ofer swice,
 þonne he þaes facnes fintan sceawað (9-32).

[That may each man easily think, he who does not let, in the transitory time, luxury of spirit hinder his mind and during his days, too strong drunkenness, when there be many attending assembly proud warsmiths in the cities, they sit at feast and tell the truth-tale, exchange with words and strive to know what place of battle is in that hall among men when wine excites the heart of man. Tumult arises, uproar in the troop. They clamor in speech in various ways. So are dispositions distributed by parts; men are unlike. One in arrogance crowds violently. Disagreeable pride swells within h/m. Too many are that way. That is envy all filled with the fiend's flying darts, treacherous wiles; he prostrates himself and cries out, boasts of himself much more than the better man, thinks that his manner will seem to everyone all good. There will be another outcome when he sees the sequel to his crime.]

Evidently the heroic commonplace of drinking becomes gluttony, that of boasting becomes the sin of pride. The poet continues with a comparison of such a gathering to the gathering of fallen angels whose act of rebellion was founded on pride and arrogance. This poet shows clearly the denunciation of the heroic carried to a logical extreme. Therefore, in The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and Vainglory, respectively, the heroic world passes from a provider of examples of the material world, to a source of a peregrinus figure, to a subject of polemic.

I had hoped that the study of wlonc and its meanings (and a wider study of Old English poetry might turn up other touch-words) in other poems might suggest a chronological pattern, but none has emerged. In Beowulf, for instance, the adjective wlonc occurs five times, referring to Hrothgar's coast-guard, Beowulf, Grendel's dam, the dragon, and Hygelac.

Obviously, but for the omission of Grendel himself, the scope of respectability/reprehensibility could hardly be wider. The noun wlenco occurs three times, twice of Beowulf, though one is pejorative used by Unferth to refer to the Breca episode. The third reference is Hygelac and it seems uncomplimentary referring to the attitude he displayed in going on the journey that resulted in his death. It follows that these noun and adjective forms were used pretty much with equal enthusiasm to apply to positive and negative cases. If it were possible to prove that wlone in the pejorative sense occurs only in the religious-didactic poems then it might be possible to trace the shift in meaning.

However, the examination of a poem like Judith is not encouraging. Though there is little agreement on its date, odds are that it is considerably later than Beowulf. We find that wlone occurs twice in Judith. Once it refers to Holofernes, and once it refers to the victorious Jewish tribe. In the first instance we would expect the heroic in the person of Holofernes to be maligned so the tone is no surprise. At any rate, wlone carries the same double meaning.

Even though no pattern arises from the random choices of Beowulf and Judith, it would still be worthwhile to do a wider study. Though nothing important is likely to arise in matters of dating, it would help to see the uses to which the heroic is put in a larger context of Old English poetry.

Of course, in addition to words like wlong, its compounds must be considered as well. Twomey, in his Index of Compounds in the Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records provides us with five: felawlanc, goldwlanc, hygewlong, modwlanc, and ymbelwlanc.

It has taken years for Old English criticism to break away from the conception of the elegies as clumsy amalgams of secular-heroic and religious material. With the kind of word-study I propose, we may yet approach fuller understanding of the process by which Christian poets took inherited secular themes and fused them into artistically integrated works of art.

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