

Writing Fire and the
Sword:
The Perception and
Representation of Violence
in Viking Age England

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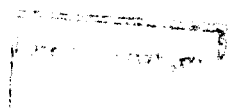


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ABSTRACT

This thesis expounds an alternative approach to the debate over Viking violence. I argue that, rather than seeking to quantify violence, it is more fruitful to explore how contemporaries shaped and interpreted their experience of Viking raiding. Representations of violence relate to empirical violence in various ways: reproducing conflict through vilification of the enemy, evaluating conduct in battle, conferring order on chaotic events, confronting or suppressing horror, or turning violence to the service of some other argument. Texts do not merely reflect violent events but are means of perceiving them. According to William Ian Miller, 'violence is perspectival'; representations of violence are shaped by the perspectives of their makers (as victims, aggressors or witnesses and according to more precise political positionings) but they also manipulate perspectives. Historical events can be matched to literary models, as the historical battle of Maldon is matched to the conventions of battle poetry in *The Battle of Maldon*; selection of detail colours events with authorial priorities. This thesis analyses the approaches to violence taken in texts (Old English, Latin and Old Norse) produced in ninth- to eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England.

The thesis is organized chronologically and by topic. Beginning with a chapter centred on the first part of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (MS A, to 891), it goes on to cover battle poetry (*Maldon* and *Brunanburh*), the ecclesiastical perspectives of Wulfstan and Ælfric, and finally alternative views of the Danish conquest of England. These texts show how the representation of Viking violence is shaped by particular agendas and intersects with other discourses. For example, in Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* we see how the discourse of invasion crosses those of penitence and spiritual struggle in a call to repentance that is also a call to arms. The thesis stresses the plurality of representations of violence, but it also shows a continuity in pre-conquest uses of the image of Viking invaders that is disrupted when invaders become rulers.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Ælfric, Lives of Saints* *Ælfric. Ælfric's Lives of Saints.* Ed. W. W. Skeat. 2 vols in 4 parts. EETS OS 76, 82, 94 and 114. 1881-1900.
- Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts and Nelson. Roberts, J. and J. L. Nelson with M. Godden, eds. *Alfred the Wise: Studies in honour of Janet Bately on the occasion of her sixty-fifth birthday.* Woodbridge, 1997.
- ASC* *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* This abbreviation is used in footnotes where annals are referenced without quotation. Where the *Chronicle* is discussed at more length editions are specified.
- ASE* *Anglo-Saxon England*
- Battle of Maldon*, ed. Cooper. Cooper, J., ed. *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact.* London and Rio Grande, 1993.
- Bede, EH* Bede. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* Ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors. Oxford, 1969.
- Beowulf* *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg.* Ed. F. Klaeber, 3rd edn. Boston, MA, 1950.
- Cleasby Vigfusson Gudbrand Vigfusson. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary Based on the MS Collections of the Late Richard Cleasby.* Oxford, 1874.
- DOE* A. diPaolo Healey, ed. *Dictionary of Old English.* Toronto, 1986- [So far fascicles A-F have been published.]
- EETS Early English Text Society
OS Original Series
SS Supplementary Series
- EHR* *English Historical Review*
- EME* *Early Medieval Europe*
- JEGP* *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
- JEH* *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
- Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning* F. Jónsson, ed. *Den Norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning.* 2 vols. Copenhagen, 1912-15.
- Latham, *Dictionary* R. E. Latham et al.. *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources.* vol. 1. Oxford, 1975-1997.

- Lewis and Short C. T. Lewis and C. Short. *A Latin Dictionary founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary*. Oxford, 1896.
- Liebermann, *Gesetze* F. Liebermann. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. 3 vols in 2. Halle, 1903-1916.
- Maldon AD 991*, ed. Scragg, D. G., ed. *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*. Oxford, 1991.
- Masculinity*, ed. Hadley, D. M., ed. *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*. London and New York, 1999.
- NM* *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
- OE Corpus* Ed. A. di Paolo Healey, ed. *The Complete Corpus of Old English in Electronic Form*.
<<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/o/oec/>>
- OED* J. Simpson et al., eds. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edn. Oxford, 1989. Accessed through *OED Online*
<<http://www.oed.com/>>
- PL* *Patrologia latina cursus completus*. Ed. J. P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844-65.
- PL Database* *Patrologia Latina: The Full Text Database*
<<http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk>>
- Plummer, *Chronicles* *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*. Ed. C. Plummer on the basis of an edition by J. Earle. 2 vols. Oxford, 1892-99.
- Shay, *Achilles* J. Shay. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York, 1994.
- TRHS* *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

NOTE ON REFERENCING AND TRANSLATIONS

References to the Bible

All references to the Bible are to *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatum versionem*, ed. R. Weber and others, 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1994). Abbreviations for the books of the bible are those used in Weber's edition. All bible translations are from the Douay Rheims Bible, rev. R. Challoner (1749-1752).

References to Old English Poetry

References to *Beowulf* are to Klaeber's edition: *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. F. Klaeber, 3rd edn. (Boston, MA, 1950). References to other poems, save where specified, are to the texts in *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie (for which full details of relevant volumes are given in the bibliography, listed under the names of the editors).

Translations

Translations from the Old English are my own unless stated otherwise. For Latin and Old Norse, I have quoted published translations: details of both text and translation used are given under the first reference to each text.

Introduction

Texts and Violence: Representing the Vikings

This is a study of late ninth- to early eleventh-century texts that narrate or otherwise comment upon Viking raiding in England. From the end of the eighth century, ship-borne bands of Scandinavians began to raid Western Europe. The parties who descended on Francia and on southern and eastern England – and who, indeed, extended their range to Spain and the Mediterranean – were mostly from Denmark; Norwegians directed their attentions further north, towards Northumbria, the Western Isles of Scotland and Ireland. Following Peter Sawyer, we can identify a first and second Viking Age in England.¹ The first, beginning at the end of the eighth century, culminated in the settlement of Scandinavian populations in the east and north (the scale and nature of the settlement has, however, been fiercely contested).² In the period 860-880 the invaders unseated the Anglo-Saxon rulers of Mercia, East Anglia and southern Northumbria, ironically paving the way for West Saxon expansion into these areas.³ The second Viking Age began in the 970s with small-scale raiding, escalated with the exaction of ever-heavier tributes (though payment of tribute had also been a feature of the first Viking Age) and culminated in the conquest of England by the Danish kings Swegn and Cnut.⁴ The texts examined in the present study cluster about these two periods of attack, plunder and conquest. Through analysis of poetry, chronicle, biography and sermon I will seek to investigate how contemporaries perceived, interpreted and shaped the experience of Viking violence in England.

¹ P. Sawyer et al., 'The Two Viking Ages in Britain: A Discussion', *Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (1969), 163-207.

² Important contributions to the settlement controversy include P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* 1st edn (London, 1962), pp. 145-67; K. Cameron, *Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs* (Nottingham, 1966); G. Fellows Jensen, 'The Vikings in England: A Review', *ASE* 4 (1975), 181-206; N. Lund, 'The Settlers: Where Do We Get Them From – And Do We Need Them?', *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress, Århus 24-31 August 1977*, ed. H. Bekker-Nielsen et al., *Medieval Scandinavia Supplements* 2 (1981), pp. 147-71; more recently, see D. M. Hadley, "'And They Proceeded to Plough and Support Themselves': The Scandinavian Settlement of England", *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1997), 69-96.

³ On the continuing power of native rulers in Bernicia, see N. J. Higham, *The Kingdom of Northumbria AD 350-1100* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 181-3 and 188.

⁴ On tribute-payments in the ninth-century, see R. Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London and New York, 1998), pp. 140-43; A. P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 24, 40-43, 90-92 and 142-5.

The background to my study is the long-standing historical debate over how to approach and, in particular, how to quantify the violence of the Vikings. The debate was ignited by the revisionist accounts of Viking activity advanced by Peter Sawyer and others from the 1960s. Sawyer questioned what he saw as the dominant image of early medieval Scandinavians as ‘brutal and ruthless men who killed and destroyed with a barbarian ferocity’.⁵ This image, he argued, derived from written records overwhelmingly produced by the Vikings’ victims and thus luridly coloured by fear and prejudice. Sawyer argued that Viking destructiveness was much less, and much less unusual, than the written sources implied: that, in the famous phrase, ‘the raids can be seen [...] as an extension of normal Dark Age activity made possible and profitable by special circumstances’.⁶ Sawyer and his followers urged that raiding activity should not be seen in isolation either from other aspects of Scandinavian culture, such as trade and agriculture, or from wider patterns in European history. They also valuably destabilized monocausal accounts of political, social and economic change in Western Europe that failed to look beyond Viking devastation. Though Sawyer acknowledged and continues to acknowledge that Vikings did loot, capture and kill, the revisionist approach he pioneered has tended to prioritize the benign aspects of Scandinavian culture.⁷ Foote and Wilson in their classic volume *The Viking Achievement* leave the section on warfare to chapter eight. It opens, in a provocative inversion of traditional priorities, ‘the Vikings were warriors as well as farmers and traders’.⁸

By the early 1980s, some scholars were reacting against the ‘Viking home-maker’.⁹ They redirected attention to the disruption of ecclesiastical life that attended the ninth-century raids and the fear that Vikings inspired in their contemporaries, and they argued that Viking predatoriness, Viking paganism, the size of their warbands and the impact of their depredations on Western Europe

⁵ Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, p. 117.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁷ Sawyer’s more recent comments on Viking raiding include *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1100* (London and New York, 1982), pp. 78-97 (see especially p. 94); *Scandinavians and the English in the Viking Age*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture 5 (1995); ‘The Age of the Vikings and Before’, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (Oxford and New York, 1997), pp. 1-18.

⁸ P. Foote and D. M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970), p. 263.

should not be underestimated. These scholars turned back to the written sources with a renewed confidence. As Patrick Wormald acerbically remarked in a seminal 1982 article, 'I am dubious of the historian's right to reject his evidence, unless it is provably wrong, even in favour of common sense, let alone of archaeology'.¹⁰ One particularly notorious issue to arise from the re-examination of Scandinavian literature was the reality or otherwise of the rite of the 'blood-eagle'. Supposedly a gruesome form of pagan sacrifice in which the victim's lungs were drawn out and spread like wings on his back, the 'blood-eagle' proved hotly controversial.¹¹ The argument centred on the way skaldic verse should be interpreted and the extent to which the Old Norse literary sources are valuable as history, but, as Wormald observed, it also exposed the sensitivities of the academic establishment: 'the Vikings *could not* have perpetrated anything so ghastly'.¹²

The attitude of revisionist scholars to the issue of Viking violence, including possible atrocity, was and is motivated by something more complex than a determination to see the Vikings as a 'Good Thing'. The revisionists are often consciously trying to avoid what Wormald calls the 'award of red and black marks'.¹³ The topic of violence is a highly emotive one and much of the vocabulary of violence is implicitly evaluative. Janet Nelson and Simon Coupland draw attention to the problem in the course of an argument for a moderate assessment of the Viking impact on Western Europe:

the Vikings have continued to be regarded as fundamentally other - more violent, more barbaric, more 'primitive' - than those with whom they came into contact on both sides of the Channel.¹⁴

⁹A. Service, 'Popular Vikings: Constructions of Viking Identity in Twentieth-Century Britain' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 1998), p. 7.

¹⁰P. Wormald, 'Viking Studies: Whence and Whither?' in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London and Chichester, 1982), pp. 128-153, (p. 148).

¹¹A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850-880* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 189-92; R. Frank, 'Viking Atrocity and Skaldic Verse: The Rite of the Blood-Eagle', *English Historical Review* 99 (1984), 332-343; 'The Blood-Eagle Again', *Saga-Book* 22:5 (1988), 287-9; 'Ornithology and the Interpretation of Skaldic Verse', *Saga-Book* 23:2 (1990), 81-83; B. Einarsson, 'De Normannorum Atrocitate, Or On the Execution of Royalty By the Aquiline Method', *Saga-Book* 22: 1(1986), 79-82; 'Blóðörn: An Observation on the Ornithological Aspect', *Saga-Book* 23: 2 (1990), 80-81.

¹²Wormald, 'Viking Studies', p. 140.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁴S. Coupland and J. Nelson, 'The Vikings on the Continent', *History Today* (Dec. 1988), pp. 12-19 (p. 12).

‘Violent’ collocates with ‘barbaric’ and ‘primitive’, adjectives that condemn their referents as culturally and (particularly in the case of ‘barbaric’) morally inferior. The terms ‘violence’ and ‘violent’ carry, in modern English usage, an implicit censure.¹⁵ Indeed, the legitimized use of physical force by the state has sometimes been excluded from discussions of violence.¹⁶ Violence thus becomes the mark of the excluded and irrational: an irreducible, all-too-rarely-examined badge of difference. The cautious approach of revisionist scholars to violence is motivated by an ideal of objective study of the Vikings for their own sake, not as the shadow and nemesis of the Franks or Anglo-Saxons (‘foils for English virtues or pointers to French failings’, as Nelson and Coupland have it).¹⁷ Yet the interpretations of Scandinavian culture produced by the revisionists, generally emphasising the Vikings’ links, similarities and positive contributions to Western Europe, are not thereby made dispassionate or value-free. Sameness too is emotive. Sawyer’s designation of the Viking raids as ‘normal Dark Age activity’ implies not only that they were not exceptional but that they were not exceptionable. The normal shades irresistibly into the normative.

The complex investments of modern enthusiasts in the sameness and difference of past peoples have been illuminated in recent years by a burgeoning interest in medievalism.¹⁸ With regard to the Vikings, Andrew Wawn has detailed the increasing interest in Scandinavian antiquity in nineteenth-century England. Not a few were eager to identify with Viking ancestors whom they held to represent ideals of honour, justice and political freedom.¹⁹ In a sadly unpublished study of twentieth-century popular images of Vikings, Alex Service takes a more psychoanalytic approach. Looking at novels and films in which Vikings appear as

¹⁵ See C. Sumner, ‘Introduction: The Violence of Censure and the Censure of Violence’, in *Violence, Culture and Censure*, ed. C. Sumner (London, 1997), pp. 1-6; D. Riches, ‘The Phenomenon of Violence’, in *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 1-27 (p. 1).

¹⁶ See D. Archer and R. Gartner, ‘Legal Homicide and its Consequences’ in *Violence: Perspectives on Murder and Aggression*, ed. I. L. Kutash et al. (San Francisco, Washington and London, 1978), pp. 219-232 (pp. 219-23).

¹⁷ Coupland and Nelson, ‘The Vikings on the Continent’, p. 12.

¹⁸ The first issue of the journal *Studies in Medievalism* came out in Spring 1979; initially privately published, it is now published by Boydell and Brewer.

¹⁹ See A. Wawn, ‘Hereward, the Danelaw and the Victorians’, in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. J. Graham-Campbell, R. Hall, J. Jesch and D. N. Parsons (Oxford, 2001), pp. 357-68; *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2000): see especially the chapter on Laing, pp. 91-116.

exotic lovers, terrifying enemies or maverick adventurers, Service suggests that they can represent an escape from civilized restraints and an outlet for suppressed transgressive or destructive impulses.²⁰ Service's work brings out the glamour and attraction of violence which are in continuing tension with the modern assumption that violent equals illegitimate, yet are perhaps also fuelled by that assumption.²¹

The 'linguistic turn' in history has taught us that not only popular but scholarly responses to the past cannot entirely transcend their own cultural contexts, which shape their strategies for finding meaning in the sources. Scholars can offer no more than 'descriptions and analyses of another culture that in part reflect and derive from our own', though they can strive to make such analyses rigorous and sensitive.²² Violence presents particular problems for an ideal of objective study. As has already been argued, it is a profoundly emotive topic, highly morally contentious and bound up with deep-seated fears and desires. Moreover, the contentiousness of violence is not simply a feature of modern western approaches but is part of its basic structure. Violence is a 'relational concept' and the kind of relationship it involves is precisely one in which people's interests and values conflict.²³ Cross-culturally, David Riches finds that 'the performance of violence is inherently liable to be contested on the question of legitimacy'.²⁴ Both Riches and William Ian Miller stress that the evaluation and interpretation of violent acts is dependent on the role of the person doing the interpreting. The meanings and experience of violence are generated through the contrasting perspectives of performers, victims and (variously implicated) witnesses. In Miller's pithy phrase, 'violence is perspectival'.²⁵

²⁰ Service, 'Popular Vikings', pp. 148-9 and 158-9.

²¹ See also W. I. Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', in *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca and London, 1993), pp. 53-92 (pp. 53-4); R. Mangham and J. Howlett, 'Introduction', in *The violent muse: Violence and the artistic imagination in Europe, 1910-1939*, ed. J. Howlett and R. Mengham (Manchester and New York, 1994), pp. 1-4 (the volume as a whole offers multiple reflections on the fascination of violence). For an analysis, drawing on Lacan and Žižek, of the attraction of violence in a late medieval context, see S. Kay, 'The Sublime Body of the Martyr: Violence in Early Romance Saints' Lives', in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. R. W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 3-20.

²² M. Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 10 (1996), p. 2. On the linguistic turn, see G. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore and London, 1997), pp. 3-9 and 29-43.

²³ Quotation: P. Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The 'Song of Roland' and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993), p. 3.

²⁴ Riches, 'Phenomenon of Violence', p. 11.

²⁵ Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', p. 55.

In the last decade or so scholars have sought ways to re-assess the impact of Viking raiding in the light of the perspectival nature of violence. In a thought-provoking article, Sarah Foot revisits the question of whether the Vikings were exceptional in their depredations against the Church. Instead of looking only for a balance of bias or accuracy in the sources, she examines what their language reveals about the subjective aspect of violence. The nature of Scandinavian paganism has been much debated: were the Vikings militant pagans, deliberately defiling Christian places? According to Foot, while the Vikings themselves may not have had any particular religious motives, for their enemies the conflict may have been genuinely a religious one. The English really were afraid for the survival of their faith and its institutions. The Vikings may not have been attacking Christianity, but the English nonetheless were defending it.²⁶

Another aspect of the perspectival nature of violence is that both violent behaviour and interpretations of violence are affected by differences of social competence or cultural expectation. Violence is characteristically a rule-bounded activity, appearing in such precisely defined and carefully organised forms as the Albanian feud or the late medieval tournament.²⁷ Techniques, aims and even ways of identifying success vary between cultures. During the Greek War of Independence, for example, the Philhellenes were infuriated and disgusted by Greek tactics. The latter would provoke the enemy to close and then run away; they lived to fight another day but wholly failed to seek the sort of decisive victory considered by northern Europeans to be the aim of war.²⁸ Guy Halsall has suggested that a cultural difference between Scandinavian and west European methods of warfare underlay the horror with which westerners viewed their assailants. Violence can be a form of communication, with a grammar of conventional behaviour patterns and shared norms that form a basis for assessing victory and for conducting negotiations. Halsall argues that the Vikings and their opponents did not speak the same language

²⁶S. Foot, 'Violence Against Christians? The Vikings and the Church in Ninth-Century England', *Medieval History* 1: 3 (1991), 3-16.

²⁷ See M. Hasluck, 'The Albanian Blood Feud', in *Law and Warfare: Studies in the Anthropology of Conflict*, ed. P. Bohannon (New York, 1967), pp. 381-408; S. Anderson, 'The Curse of Blood and Vengeance', *New York Times Magazine*, 26 December 1999; M. Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London, 1984) pp. 83-101 and 200-218; J. Vale, 'Violence and the Tournament', in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. R. W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 143-58.

²⁸J. Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, 1993), pp. 10-11.

of violence. The Vikings seemed to break all the rules and it was this that made them so terrifying and so hard to cope with.²⁹ Like Foot, Halsall points away from finding some external way of quantifying violence to siting the scale of violence in the experience of those involved. His arguments do, however, resurrect the idea that Scandinavian violence was in important ways different from the violence of England, Ireland or Francia; this proposition is not necessarily wrong but can be strongly contested.³⁰

The present study re-routes the debate over Viking violence towards precisely the contentiousness of violence, its place in people's fears and desires and the different meanings it has for differently positioned participants and witnesses. I will look at the way contemporaries interpreted and evaluated Viking attacks and seek to trace the discourses with which, for them, violence intersected. The bulk of surviving eighth- to eleventh-century texts comes, as Sawyer stressed, from the recipients of the Vikings' attentions in Britain and on the continent. Thus, concentrating on English evidence, I will examine the way Anglo-Saxons constructed the otherness of their attackers. My hope is to recapture something of how the Anglo-Saxons experienced Viking attack. Acknowledging, however, that verbal texts have particular capacities and limitations within a culture's total repertoire of behaviours, concepts and representational strategies, I go on in the next section of this introduction to consider in more detail what texts can do with violence.

Reading violence

An inquiry into the relationship between texts and violence raises, in the first place, the question of what violence actually is, or at least how the term is being used. Though the word appears in the titles of not a few recent books on the earlier and later middle ages, it is arguably problematic for a student of Anglo-Saxon

²⁹G. Halsall, 'Playing By Whose Rules? A Further Look at Viking Atrocity in the Ninth Century', *Medieval History* 2: 2 (1992), 2-12.

³⁰ See for example T. Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *TRHS* 5th series 35 (1985), 75-94.

England.³¹ ‘Violence’ is first attested in English (according to the *OED*) in the *South English Legendary* of around 1290. There is no single equivalent of the modern English word in Old English, Old Norse, Latin or even French.³² In modern usage, ‘violence’ encompasses a wide range of concepts, from the injurious use of physical force (as in a murder or fist-fight) to a quality of vehemence, energy or disruptiveness in such things as emotions, weather or language:

Two vessels [...] drifted through the violence of a storm on to the toe of a breakwater.³³

‘I am rocked from side to side by the violence of my emotion.’³⁴

[At the Labour Party Conference] much violence was done to the word violence, which it appears can be applied to almost anything you do not care for.³⁵

In the idiom of post-structuralist literary criticism and cultural studies, ‘violence’ has come to be applied to the linguistic processes by which norms and identities are created and imposed.³⁶ This usage is influenced by French and can seem strained to English speakers.³⁷ However, often deployed polemically to talk about a deeply embedded discrimination against (for example) women or the colonized, it picks up the connotations of illegitimacy that we have already noted.³⁸ Furthermore, it answers to the association of violence as a concept with ideas of power, force and domination.

³¹ Recent examples include *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Halsall (Woodbridge, 1998); “A Great Effusion of Blood?” *Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. M. D. Meyerson, D. Thiery and O. Falk (Toronto, 2003) (I have not yet been able to obtain this); J. Enders, *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1999); already cited: *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Kaeuper; Haidu, *Subject of Violence*.

³² Miller, ‘Getting a Fix on Violence’, pp. 90-91; Haidu, *Subject of Violence*, p. 3.

³³ *Law Times Report* 73 (1865), p. 156, quoted in *OED*.

³⁴ V. Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford, 1992), p. 33.

³⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1984, p. 20, quoted in *OED*.

³⁶ See N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse, ‘Introduction’, in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence*, ed. N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse (London and New York, 1989), pp. 1-26 (pp. 3-9); J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak, 2nd edn (Baltimore, 1998), pp. 110-112.

³⁷ Miller, ‘Getting a Fix on Violence’, p. 91.

³⁸ See J. Butler, ‘Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism”’, in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. J. Butler and J. W. Scott (New York, 1992), pp. 3-21 (pp. 7 and 17-19), and, for comment on Butler, J. McGowan, ‘Thinking About Violence: Feminism, Cultural Politics and Norms’, *Centennial Review* 37: 3 (1993), 445-69 (pp. 445-53).

In the present study my choice of texts starts from a fairly narrow definition of violence: I look at sources that describe or discuss ‘the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property’.³⁹ In practice, because of my focus on the Vikings, most of my instances of violence are of inter-group raiding and warfare. They thus belong to a sub-set of violence which is the domain of the warrior classes and (at least in defence) of the state. As Timothy Reuter has observed, the label ‘violence’ is perhaps misleading when it brings together acknowledged aristocratic business such as raiding and civil defence with acts like rape or infanticide.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the texts examined in this thesis provide instances in which the Viking wars are associated with other types of violence such as murder, rapine and martyrdom. My use of the term reflects such imaginative translations between categories. It also enables me to link properties of events to properties of texts. Here I want to distinguish and discuss two concepts of the ‘violence of language’. The first is the one that makes it into the *OED*: the sense in which language can be shocking, disruptive or in other ways mimic the style of physical violence. The second is the idea that discourses, like blows, have to do with the ways subjects are constituted and controlled; it prompts an inquiry into the relationships between texts, violence and power.

William Ian Miller points out that the more bloody, noisy and sudden an act, the more violent we feel it to be. Violence is about disruption, breaking and bursting; moreover, violence increases with immediacy and the killer close to seems more violent than the killer far off.⁴¹ Texts do not (of themselves) shed blood, but language can be sudden, immediate and boundary-breaking and it can reproduce something of the emotional effects of violence. For Jean-Jacques Lecercle, ‘incoherence is the aptest expression of violence’; as an example, he points to the dislocation of registers and juxtaposition of dialectal and literary vocabularies in Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Lecercle finds violence in stylistic and grammatical disruption and in the ‘remainder’, the ‘dark side’ of language where it escapes the control of the speaker/writer to produce disorderly and subversive

³⁹ *OED* sense (1a).

⁴⁰ T. Reuter, Review: ‘*Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*. Edited by Guy Halsall’, *EME* 11: 1 (2002), 95-6.

⁴¹ Miller, ‘Getting a Fix on Violence’, pp. 65-71.

meanings.⁴² In fact – *Tess* is an exception – many of the examples Lecercle discusses descend towards nonsense; the most vivid and shocking representations of violence are achieved when the text holds back from such complete disintegration. Dislocation can be a tool. So can choice of vocabulary. The employment of the term ‘murder’ by anti-abortion campaigners is a familiar instance: they insist on the violence of what others regard as a medical procedure.⁴³ Two further obvious but crucial factors in the representation of violence are the selection of material and degree of detail. The more extensive and explicit the account, the more violent it seems. In particular, the more it dwells on the body and the ruin of flesh, the more it horrifies; this is the literary equivalent of Miller’s observation that the closer and bloodier, the more violent.

Clearly, some accounts of violence avoid awakening emotional or evaluative reactions to the events and behaviour they describe. In contrast with the abortion example, official propaganda has been highly productive of euphemistic vocabulary for war; war is discussed in a way that avoids its bloodiness and immediacy.⁴⁴ We can contrast a violent mode of representation with a non-violent mode. To the violent mode belong stylistic disjunction and jagged juxtaposition, explicit detail, morally loaded vocabulary and other techniques for heightening the rhetorical temperature. To the non-violent mode belong euphemism, flatness and generality. The two modes represent alternative ways of dealing with violence; neither is necessarily innocent of persuasive shaping (as will be explored further in chapter one). It is convenient to think of them as poles, but they are different ends of a continuum. Texts operate on a sliding scale between violent and non-violent representation, and this scale is contingent upon current literary conventions and generic constraints.

Texts thus can engage with the immediacy, shock and messiness of violence, emphasizing or suppressing it. Another quality of violence which importantly finds a counterpart in texts is its perspectival nature. In Miller’s categorization – victims, victimizers, witnesses – the narrator or describer of violence by virtue of the task

⁴² J. Lecercle, *The Violence of Language* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 1-25 and 243-6.

⁴³ For example on the website by Thomas P. A. Fitch, <<http://abortionismurder.org/>>, accessed 4 March 2004.

assumes the position of witness. However, as Miller observes, the three roles can be complexly involved in each other;⁴⁵ a text can be produced by an observer but take on the voice of a victim or aggressor or aspects of both. The construction and manipulation of viewpoint is part of the palette of verbal representations of violence. Miller's model of the roles within violence needs to be complicated with reference to Teresa de Lauretis's contrast between violence with a male and violence with a female object (where the sexing of the object is a matter of its functional gender rather than its actual biological sex). The male-female pattern is that in which the object of violence is conceived as passive, a victim to be dominated. The male-male pattern is one of rivalry and reciprocity, where both participants are presented as active.⁴⁶ The claiming and attribution of active and passive roles is another immensely important element in the representation of violence and it will be a recurrent topic in this thesis. Chapter three in particular addresses the way that claiming an active role is central to the maintenance of honour in a warrior culture.

The issue of activity and passivity leads naturally to the question of how both violence and texts play a part in the achievement, maintenance and display of power. Power, however, is an even more slippery concept than violence and much more extensively theorized.⁴⁷ Here I want to take a broad view of power as a plural phenomenon encompassing multiple modes and strategies by which agents act and effects are produced.⁴⁸ It includes, for example, the kind of 'pre-emptive' action that David Riches sees as the 'core purpose' of violence: injuring someone so they cannot prevent one having one's will.⁴⁹ (Riches is surely wrong to generalize this

⁴⁴ See G. Hughes, *A History of English Words* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 336-7 and 381.

⁴⁵ Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', p. 56.

⁴⁶ T. de Lauretis, 'The violence of rhetoric: Considerations on representation and gender', in *Violence of Representation*, ed. Armstrong and Tennenhouse, pp. 239-58 (pp. 249-50).

⁴⁷ See, for example, M. Weber, 'Power', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, revised edn (London, 1991), pp. 159-264; G. Balandier, 'Political Power and Necessity', in *Political Anthropology*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1970), pp. 34-41; S. Lukes, 'Power and Authority', in *A History of Sociological Analysis*, ed. T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet (London, 1979), pp. 633-76; H. Arendt, *On Violence* (New York and London, 1970), pp. 35-56; M. Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rainbow (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 51-75; M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp. 25-30 and passim.

⁴⁸ For broad understandings of power, see M. Erler and M. Kowaleski, 'Introduction', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Erler and M. Kowaleski (Athens and London, 1988), pp. 1-17 (pp. 1-2); P. Stafford, 'Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century', in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe. Proceedings of a conference held at King's College London, April 1995*, ed. A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 3-23 (pp. 10-12).

⁴⁹ Riches, 'Phenomenon of Violence', pp. 5-7.

core purpose; but the example stands.) It also includes the writing or patronage of texts in order to intervene in a culture's discourses. Texts and violence can be complementary strategies for power: they can augment or modify each other. On the other hand, they can pull apart as violence resists or even destroys language.

In a study of literary representations of rape, Laura Tanner writes:

empirical violence hovers in the background of its representational counterpart to qualify the reader's response to a literary text. At the same time, literary representations perpetuate, revise, or transform the reader's attitude to empirical violence, often in ways of which the reader is not aware.⁵⁰

Texts (and other kinds of representations such as visual art) do not merely report or reflect violence but provide a way of defining and modifying its effects. A panegyric following a victory is a way of confirming the victory's meaning and expressing the glory of a king or emperor to his subjects. It magnifies the power achieved and demonstrated through victory.⁵¹ Celebration is one way in which texts can act on the meanings of violent events. Another, crucial given the contestable nature of violence, is evaluation. The continuing debate over the legitimacy of the war in Iraq and its possible effects on the power of the present British prime minister, Tony Blair, is a current example. The representation of the war in Iraq is playing a part in British politics not only through explicit evaluative comment (for example in newspaper articles by Robin Cook and Clare Short) but through the images and stories of violence that are selected and transmitted by the media.⁵² Representations of violence can not only shape perceptions of violence that has already happened but change expectations and evaluative frameworks for future violence. They can also, notoriously, reproduce conflict. President Bush's January 2002 State of the Union address looked back on the destruction of the World Trade Centre and the subsequent campaign in Afghanistan in a manner that clearly prepared for the war in Iraq. His portrayal of Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an 'axis of evil' which

⁵⁰ L. E. Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994), p. 7.

⁵¹ See S. G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage I* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1981), pp. 1-13 and 181-2.

harboured and nurtured terrorists was a highly moralized account of past violence and an act of belligerence in itself; it was greeted with understandable anger by the states in question.⁵³ Most of my examples of ways texts can affect the meanings of violent events are drawn from modern political life with its immense proliferation of competing (visual, written and spoken) representations. One of the purposes of this thesis will be to look at to what extent the possibilities I have enumerated are realised in the very different textual culture of early medieval England.

Over and above their engagement with individual wars, killings, raids and so forth, texts interact with violence in a broader way, in the multiple practices and discourses that constitute subjects and social formations. This has been best studied with regard to gender. Feminist scholars have discussed how domestic violence and rape proceed from and reinforce the cultural script that writes women as subordinate and passive but also potentially errant. Narratives of past violence form a threat of future violence: tales of rape and battery warn women not to 'ask for it' and provide rapists and batterers with scripts for punishing 'bad girls'.⁵⁴ Empirical violence and the discourse of violence form a circuit within the total elaboration and enforcement of womanhood. Manhood too is intimately bound up with the practice and discourse of violence. The training of soldiers is the construction of a particular kind of masculinity.⁵⁵ Joshua S. Goldstein argues that the 'war system' and gender are mutually dependent and that, indeed, the ever-present possibility of war is a 'cause of gender'; 'small, innate biological differences' between boys and girls are immensely augmented by the toughening of men into potential warriors.⁵⁶ Goldstein

⁵² See for example C. Short, 'Was Attorney General leant on to sanction war?', *The Independent*, 28 February 2004, pp. 1-2; R. Cook, 'A sound judgment but it sidesteps the central issue', *The Independent* (special issue on the Hutton Report), 29 January 2004, p. 5.

⁵³ G. W. Bush, State of the Union Address, delivered at the United States Capitol, 29 January 2002, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>>; 'Iran accuses Bush of war-mongering', BBC website 30 January 2002, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1792767.stm>>; 'Bush's "evil axis" comment stirs critics', BBC website 2 February 2002, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1796034.stm>> – all accessed 7 March 2004.

⁵⁴ See S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 309-46; J. Zipes, 'Prologue: Framing Little Red Riding Hood', in *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, ed. J. Zipes (New York and London, 1993), pp. 1-15 (pp. 7-14); Butler, 'Contingent Foundations', pp. 17-19; McGowan, 'Thinking About Violence', pp. 454-7; de Lauretis, 'The Violence of Rhetoric', pp. 240-42.

⁵⁵ See T. Xavier Karner, 'Engendering Violent Men: Oral Histories of Military Masculinity', in *Masculinities and Violence*, ed. L. H. Bowker (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998), pp. 197-232.

⁵⁶ G. S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge and New York, 2001), quotations pp. 406 and 410; for another view of the interaction of

demonstrates the remarkable cross-cultural and trans-historical stability of gendered war roles.⁵⁷ In early medieval European culture too practices and representations of violence are very much bound up with gender. For example, in the pre-Christian period, weapons in Anglo-Saxon graves seem to have functioned as markers of the male life-cycle, with different choices of weapon associated with children, youths, men of mature fighting age and the old. These weapons are complex symbols; they have meanings not only for gender but for social status and, according to Heinrich Härke, ethnic origin.⁵⁸ Gender is only one example of how the practice, symbols, images and narratives of violence are entangled with other forces that drive culture and that can be reflected, modified and transmitted through texts.

Violence and texts can interact to produce power, augmenting and modifying each other both as the instruments of agents and the forces that produce and constrain subjects. It is unwise, however, to push too far the concept of the ‘violence of representation’. Physical violence needs to be taken seriously as something very different from the flux of words; to borrow Miller’s somewhat cutting phrase, we are wrong to suppose ‘that authors and literary critics live lives of danger by reading critically’.⁵⁹ For Foucault, extreme torture and prison regimentation are different modes by which power knows and produces its object.⁶⁰ As Foucault’s critics observe, his accounts of shifting ‘technologies’ of sexuality, punishment or the body retreat from judging morally between different sexual and/or violent behaviours; but violence, a continuing element in suffering, injustice and oppression, surely demands that we find bases for moral judgement.⁶¹ I do not mean to address the question of whether the Vikings (or the Anglo-Saxons) were morally bad. But it is

biological and cultural factors in masculine violence, see L. H. Bowker, ‘On the Difficulty of Eradicating Masculine Violence: Multisystem Overdetermination’, in *Masculinities and Violence*, ed. Bowker, pp. 1-14.

⁵⁷ Goldstein, *War and Gender*, pp. 10-22.

⁵⁸ H. Härke, ‘Changing Symbols in a Changing Society: The Anglo-Saxon Weapon Burial Rite in the Seventh Century’, in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. M. O. H. Carver (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 149-65. See also D. M. Hadley and J. M. Moore, ‘“Death Makes the Man”? Burial Rite and the Construction of Masculinities in the Early Middle Ages’, in *Masculinity*, ed. Hadley (London and New York, 1999), pp. 21-38.

⁵⁹ Miller, ‘Getting a Fix on Violence’, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

⁶¹ Critiques of Foucault: K. Soper, ‘Productive contradictions’, in *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. C. Ramazanoglu (London and New York, 1993), pp. 29-50 (pp. 42-47); de Lauretis, ‘Violence of Rhetoric’, pp. 240-46. For further comments on the need to escape post-modern relativism and find a basis for ethical norms, see McGowan, ‘Thinking About Violence’; T. Eagleton, *After Theory* (London, 2003), pp. 72-3, 101-2 and 103-39.

both politically necessary and, for a historian or literary critic, pragmatically advisable to acknowledge the gulf between represented and empirical violence. This gulf points to further things that texts can, but also cannot, do with violence.

Elaine Scarry's morally weighty book *The Body in Pain* provides a model that encompasses both the interaction and the gulf between language and violence in the production of power. Scarry starts from the 'world-destroying' nature of pain. Pain cuts sufferers off from the world, reducing them to the compass of their own racked body; it resists expression in language and reduces speech to moans and screams. In analyses of torture and war, Scarry emphasises the language- and meaning-destroying nature of violence and shows how power flows, as it were, into the gaps produced by violence. The torture victim's pain is 'denied as pain and read as power' (p. 45): reducing the victim to a body with no voice, the oppressive regime fills the silence with the message of its mastery. Pain and violence contact the overwhelming reality of bodies; bodies are manipulated to confer their reality on political ideas. The corpses of the war dead are invested retrospectively with the meanings of defeat and victory. Scarry insists that violence is destructive, language constructive. Language is one of the means by which we 'make the world'.⁶²

Scarry's rich discussion has multiple implications for how texts relate to violence. In the first place, it prompts one to consider how the constructive power of language can work against destruction and injury. The retrieval of language and representation can play a part in recovering from trauma. This idea is elaborated and explored in chapter two. The writing of history, too, can be viewed as a way of filling up violence's gaps. Sarah Foot suggests that the histories produced in Alfred's reign reconstituted a past that had been lost through the destruction of records, disruption of religious houses and deaths of individuals over the previous decades. Alfred 'envisaged a past sufficient to fill the void left by the erasure of memory across the Viking wars'.⁶³ In both chapter one and chapter four I will

⁶² E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford, 1985), pp. 3-11 (the inexpressibility of pain), pp. 21-3 (on 'making the world'), pp. 27-59 (torture) and pp. 60-157 (war).

⁶³ S. Foot, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age', *TRHS* 6th series 9 (1999), 185-200 (p. 198).

consider the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as, among other things, a means of conferring order on the violent past.

In the second place, however, Scarry points to the level at which the experience of violence cannot be expressed in words.⁶⁴ There are things about violence that the texts examined in this thesis simply do not and cannot say. Moreover, the early medieval period is in some ways a reticent one with regard to representing violence in detail, despite the preoccupation with war and fighting in the literature and the visibility of violence in everyday life (it was expected that free men would bear arms, for example). Daniel Baraz argues that the period largely lacked a discourse of cruelty.⁶⁵ In Anglo-Saxon literature, the text that arguably dwells on violence at greatest length, *Beowulf*, is one in which that violence is displaced from the everyday world to a heroic past distant in both space and time. None of the texts examined in this thesis are especially graphic in comparison with, say, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* or *A Clockwork Orange*; this comparative mildness needs to be borne in mind when applying the concepts of 'violent' and 'non-violent' modes of representation set out earlier.⁶⁶ Foxe and Burgess themselves cannot show in words the viscerality, colour and horror of violence quite as film can (early editions of Foxe were usually augmented with pictures).⁶⁷ Yet, almost because they cannot fully express it, violence or the idea of violence is a powerful resource for the producers of texts: reference to violence gives a whiff of something beyond the verbal, something to be reckoned with, the solid reality of bodies.

In the third place, the contrast between destructive violence and constructive language prompts an observation regarding the way that texts themselves generate power. Violence has multiple meanings that can be contested and elaborated and gradually refined. But violence has an aspect that is absolute and incontestable, which is why – despite the cultural contingency of forms of war – it is a language

⁶⁴ This point, referencing Scarry, is made by J. W. Earl, 'Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's "Passion of St Edmund"', *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999), 125-49 (p. 127).

⁶⁵ D. Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca and London, 2003), pp. 17-19 and 47-74.

⁶⁶ J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of Matters most Special and Memorable Happening in the Church [...]*, 9th edn, 3 vols (London, 1684) – an illustrated edition; A. Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (London, 1962).

⁶⁷ On violence in film, see for example *Screening Violence*, ed. S. Prince (London, 2000); *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. J. D. Slocum (New York and London, 2001).

that can be spoken between cultures as widely separated as British and Zulu. Once killed a person is dead; and death brooks no argument. An author, however, cannot fully control the meanings of the text; even the most skilful shaper of propaganda can find their words misinterpreted or perverted by the reader. (The hostile quotations and recontextualisations of President Bush's 'axis of evil' speech are legion.) In order for there to be communication, a speaker or writer must be able to intend a meaning that the hearer or reader understands. The shapes and terms of a text can create moods, persuade, mislead or inform. But while violence is something that produces absences and closures, texts allow for multiple competing presences. I read many of the sources in this thesis as works that produce particular effects; however, I do not suppose they are the only effects these pieces can achieve.⁶⁸

The shape of the thesis

To summarize, in the present study I aim to trace by contextualized literary analysis the ways texts from Viking Age England evaluate, reproduce, heal, suppress, order, complicate and revise armed conflict between English and Scandinavians. The thesis is organised roughly chronologically by date of texts; each chapter also addresses particular aspects of the discourse of violence in its intersection with other discourses. The thesis begins with a chapter on texts from Alfred's reign, in particular the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of Alfred*; it sets these works and their representation of the Viking wars in the context of Alfred's translation programme and reflections on kingship. Chapter two deals with battle poetry, specifically *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which deals not with Viking raiders direct from Scandinavia but with Norsemen settled in Dublin and the expansion of Wessex into the Danelaw territories. In this chapter I explore how the representation of violence contributes to the construction of community and negotiates with the fearsome and horrifying side of violence, the threat of death and loss. Chapter three is divided between the two foremost ecclesiastical writers of late Anglo-Saxon England, Archbishop Wulfstan of York

⁶⁸ There is an extensive literature on how texts generate meaning: see for example S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1980); J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London and Henley, 1975); J. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London, 1983), pp. 31-83; H. R. Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Brighton, 1982).

and Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham. In readings of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and selected case-studies from the *Lives of Saints*, I discuss the meeting between Christian concepts of sin and spiritual struggle and secular ideas about honour and the shame of being a victim. Finally, chapter four addresses the Danish conquest of 1016 through the medium of three texts that give sharply contrasted perspectives on the events of that year and the identities bound up in violence.

Chapter One

Warfare and Wisdom: Writing Violence in the Reign of Alfred

[M]e com swiðe oft on gemynd, hwelce wiotan iu wæron giond Angelcynn, ægðer ge godcundra hada ge woruldcundra; & hu gesæliglica tida ða wæron giond Angelcynn; & hu ða kyningas ðe ðone onwald hæfdon ðæs folces [on ðam dagum] Gode ond his ærendwrecum hersumedon; & hie ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siodo ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehioldon, & eac ut hiora eðel rymdon; & hu him ða speow ægðer ge mid wige ge mid wisdom

It has come very often into my memory what wise men there were formerly throughout the English people, in both the divine orders and the secular; and how there were blessed times then throughout the English people; and how the kings who had rule over the people in those days obeyed God and his messengers; and they preserved their peace and their morality and their power at home, and also extended their territory outside; and how they succeeded in both warfare and wisdom¹

Thus wrote Alfred in the prose preface to his translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. Like the idealized predecessors he portrayed, Alfred was a king notable for both warfare and wisdom. His reign began in the darkest days of the struggle against the Vikings; fought almost to defeat, he yet managed to win back against the invaders and resecure, against the odds, his kingdom: a military achievement that should not be underestimated.² He was the only English king to remain independent. He went on to extend his sway beyond the bounds of Wessex into its now kingless neighbour, Mercia, and to reform the civil defence system of his new, larger territory. He was, in short, a successful warleader and quick to take advantage of the power vacuum left by war.³ At the same time, however, he was a Christian scholar, a man who pondered deeply questions such as the ability of the soul to know God.⁴ He is the only early medieval monarch to have left a substantial body of his own writings. Later generations have called him the 'father of English prose', not only 'Alfred the Great' but also 'Alfred the Wise'.⁵

¹ Alfred, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. H. Sweet, 2 vols, EETS OS 45 and 50 (1871), I, 3, ll. 2-9. All translations from the OE are my own.

² N. Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century: the Crucible of Defeat', *TRHS* 5th series 29 (1979), 1-20.

³ R. Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London and New York, 1998), pp. 162-4 and 169.

⁴ See *King Alfred's Version of St Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. T. A. Carnicelli (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

⁵ For the label 'father of English prose', see for example, F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), p. 270; R. W. Chambers, *On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to*

The main focus of the present chapter is the first section (to 890) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, our chief source for both Alfred's martial career and Viking activity in England. The *Chronicle* was compiled as part of a flurry of literary production in late ninth century Wessex which has been regarded as the birth of the English vernacular prose tradition.⁶ At the heart of this literary flowering are translations, some made by Alfred and some at his behest, of canonical Latin works of philosophy, theology and history. The surviving corpus consists of Alfred's own Old English versions of Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*, Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, Augustine's *Soliloquies* and the first fifty psalms, Wærferth's translation of Gregory's *Dialogues* and the anonymous translations of the histories of Bede and Orosius.⁷ A further important composition of the period, this time in Latin, is Asser's *Res Gestae Alfredi (Life of King Alfred)*.⁸ The *Life*'s authenticity has been questioned, most recently and vigorously by Alfred Smyth,⁹ but the balance of probability remains that it was written in about 893 by the Asser referred to in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*.¹⁰ Alfred also issued a compendious vernacular

More and his School, EETS OS 191a (1932), p. lvi. *Alfred the Wise* is the title of Janet Bately's festschrift, ed. Roberts and Nelson. See Allen J. Frantzen's comments on epithets for Alfred, 'Alfred's Alfred: The Cultural Meaning of Alfred P. Smyth's *King Alfred the Great*', given as a paper in the MLA Old English Division, 28 December 1997,

<<http://www.homepages.luc.edu/~afrantz/alfredc.html>>, accessed 15 April 2003.

⁶ See, for example, S. B. Greenfield and D. G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York and London, 1986), pp. 38-39.

⁷ For the Alfredian canon see especially J. Bately, 'Those Books that are most Necessary for all Men to Know'; the Classics and Late Ninth-Century England, a Reappraisal', in *The Classics in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. S. Bernardo and S. Levin (Binghamton, NY, 1990), pp. 45-78; see also G. Waite, *Old English Prose Translations of King Alfred's Reign*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature VI (2000), pp. 1 and 17-18. Editions: *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius 'De consolatione philosophiae'*, ed. W. J. Sedgefield (Oxford, 1899); *Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet (cited above, n. 1); *Soliloquies*, ed. Carnicelli (cited above, n. 4); *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, ed. P. O'Neill, Medieval Academy Books 104 (2001); *Bischof Wærferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. H. Hecht, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 5 (1900-7); *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. T. Miller, 4 vols in 2, EETS OS 95, 96, 110 and 111 (1890-8); *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, EETS SS 6 (1980).

⁸ *Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser*, ed. W. H. Stevenson, new impression with an article by Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford, 1959), pp. 1-96, cited henceforth as Asser, *Life*; translated in S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 65-110.

⁹ A. P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 150-367.

¹⁰ Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, I, 9, l. 2; S. Keynes, 'On the Authenticity of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*', *JEH* 47 (1996), 529-551; J. L. Nelson, Review article: 'Waiting for Alfred: *King Alfred the Great*. By Alfred P. Smyth', *EME* 7: 1 (1998), 115-24; but see also the comments of A. J. Frantzen on the strong points in Smyth's case and the inertia of scholarly orthodoxy, 'Alfred's Alfred'. For an earlier round of argument over the genuineness of Asser, see V. H. Galbraith, 'Who Wrote Asser's *Life of*

lawcode framed by references to Mosaic law and incorporating the statutes of his forebear Ine.¹¹

All these texts can be called Alfredian, a term that Allen Frantzen criticizes as too vague but that expresses the way in which they are all more and less loosely connected to each other and to King Alfred.¹² The Alfredian corpus can be imagined occupying a series of concentric circles with Alfred's personal works at the centre, the products of known helpers such as Wærferth a little further out and less securely assigned documents such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* further out still (though I will argue that the *Chronicle* should be given a sure place in the Alfredian canon). The image, however, is too static: Alfred had helpers in his studies and not only was his court peripatetic but his personnel rotated, as Asser tells us.¹³ Of the named helpers we know that Asser was appointed to the see of Sherborne and John the Old Saxon was made abbot of Athelney: they at least must have spent some of their time in these places.¹⁴ It is probable that the king's clerics also rotated between the court and the various ecclesiastical centres, the monasteries and the households of bishops.¹⁵ We must envisage the Alfredian texts being produced in the midst of constant interchange of people and ideas between different religious houses and the royal court. The translations, laws, *Life* and *Chronicle* represent different aspects of an effort to rethink and re-order political and religious life in the wake of a narrow escape from Scandinavian conquest.¹⁶ They exhibit recurring concerns and themes:

Alfred?' in *An Introduction to the Study of History* (London, 1964), pp. 88-128, and D. Whitelock, *The Genuine Asser*, The Stenton Lecture 1967 (1968).

¹¹ For the text of Alfred's and Ine's laws, see Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I, 15-123; for discussion, see P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume One: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 265-85 and 416-29.

¹² A. J. Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston, MA, 1986), p. 9.

¹³ Asser, *Life*, ch. 100; on the movements of the court, see H. R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500-1087* (London, 1984), pp. 67, 95-6 and 100; on the input of Alfred's helpers, see R. W. Clement, 'The Production of the *Pastoral Care*: King Alfred and his Helpers', in *Studies in Earlier English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1986) pp. 129-52.

¹⁴ Asser, *Life*, ch. 94; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁵ A. Lawrence, 'Alfred, His Heirs and the Traditions of Manuscript Production in 10th Century England', *Reading Medieval Studies* 13 (1987), 35-56 (p. 38). For further comments on the movements of Alfred's court, the changing makeup of his group of helpers and the effects of these factors on his literary productions, see Clement, 'Production of the *Pastoral Care*', p. 139.

¹⁶ Pauline Stafford comments that the writing of history in Alfred's reign was 'stimulated by Viking attacks and the desire to explain or cope with them', *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), p. 6; C. Insley comments on the correlation between the composition of royal biographies and times of political

kingship, the duties and nature of worldly power, its place in divine order and, above all, the need for wisdom.

The present chapter will discuss the *Chronicle*'s portrayal of the Viking wars in its broader Alfredian literary context. 'Warfare and wisdom' provides a (happily Alfredian) catch-phrase for talking about the issues that underlie the representation of violence within a more wide-ranging interrogation of kingship and power. In particular, I use it to highlight questions about the relationships between a king's worldly and spiritual concerns and between political power and strategies for representing violence. I shall argue that the *Chronicle* is a record produced under the sign of royal power: it recounts a past useful to Alfred and is thus itself a vehicle of power. The distinctive qualities – especially the distinctive omissions – of the *Chronicle*'s account are illuminated by comparison with Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and the Old English *Orosius*. These two texts also provide their own insights into how Alfred's circle encountered the relationships of power, holiness, war and Viking attack. The *Orosius* deserves more scholarly attention than it has received hitherto.¹⁷

Warfare and wisdom: the theoretical framework

The translations produced by Alfred and his helpers do not deal directly with the topic of the Viking invasions, but they suggest how war and violence might be placed in a wider framework of political thought. Three of Alfred's own translations are of texts that have much to say about the duties and experience of rulers. The *Cura Pastoralis* had long been read as a source of advice for kings as well as bishops; in Alcuin's hands the *De consolacione Philosophiae* too became a mirror for princes.¹⁸ The Psalms were attributed to David and Alfred's exegetical

upheaval, 'Where Did All the Charters Go? Anglo-Saxon Charters and the New Politics of the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 24 (2002), 109-27 (p. 123).

¹⁷ For bibliography on the Old English *Orosius*, showing the disproportionate concentration of discussion on the geographical opening, see Waite, *Old English Prose Translations*, pp. 40-2.

¹⁸ On the importance of the *Cura Pastoralis* for kings and kingship, see M. Kempshall, 'No Bishop, No King: The Ministerial Ideology of Kingship and Asser's *Res Gestae Aelfredi*', in *Belief and Culture in the Early Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. R. Gameson and H. Leyser (Oxford, 2001), pp. 106-27; Frantzen, *King Alfred*, pp. 24-6. On Alcuin's use of the *De consolacione Philosophiae* as a mirror for princes, see W. F. Bolton, 'How Boethian is Alfred's *Boethius*?' in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 153-68 (pp. 161-3).

introductions consistently place them in a Davidic context.¹⁹ Alfred's translation of Augustine's *Soliloquia* interpolates illuminating comments on both the principles and practicalities of kingship.²⁰ The translations show us 'Alfred the Wise': by translating works of philosophy and theology Alfred sought to be a wise and learned king. Moreover, the texts that he chose stress the overwhelming value of wisdom, for rulers and for all men. However, Alfred's approach to kingship reflects a tradition of theoretical thinking that acknowledged the importance of both warfare and wisdom. It is this tradition that underlies the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, Alfred's most direct statement on the Viking invasions, and enables Alfred to draw connections between Viking attack and a programme of education.

Early medieval thinking on kingship was not static but was refined and developed by a series of major (and minor) writers working in a range of genres; Bede, Alcuin, Einhard and Hincmar of Rheims are some important names, history, mirrors for princes and royal biography important genres.²¹ Conceptions of kingship were adapted to changing historical circumstances; thus Hincmar, for example, re-emphasised the legal limits of kingship in response to the changing relationship between church and state in the reign of Charles the Bald.²² However, constant themes do emerge, and among these are, on the one hand, an expectation that the king will be a military leader, protecting his people, conquering pagans and upholding the law with force, and, on the other hand, a stress on the king's need for wisdom and for personal piety. Old Testament models for kingship were David, warrior but also poet and prophet, and Solomon, pre-eminent for wisdom.²³ A more recent model was Charlemagne, Christian emperor and patron of Alcuin.²⁴ The *De*

¹⁹ P. P. O'Neill, 'Introduction', in *King Alfred's Psalms*, ed. O'Neill, pp. 1-96 (pp. 23-6).

²⁰ The selection from the text translated by Keynes and Lapidge highlights this theme: *Alfred the Great*, pp. 138-52 (see especially pp. 143-4, 146, 149 and 151-2).

²¹ See the seminal work of J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), especially pp. 124-51, and 'The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age', in *Trends in Medieval Political Thought*, ed. B. Smalley (Oxford, 1965), pp. 22-41.

²² J. L. Nelson, 'Hincmar of Rheims: Kingship, Law and Liturgy', in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 133-72.

²³ See H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit*, *Bonner historische Forschungen* 32 (1968), pp. 419-36.

²⁴ On Charlemagne's Christian imperialism, see Einhard on the conquest of the Saxons, Éginhard, *Vie de Charlemagne*, ed. and trans. L. Halphen, 5th edn (Paris, 1981), ch. 7, pp. 22-6; for discussion of the imperial ideology developed for Charlemagne, see F. L. Ganshof, 'The imperial coronation of Charlemagne: theories and facts', in *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History*, trans. J. Sondheimer (London, 1971), pp. 41-54, and L. Halphen, *Charlemagne*

rectoribus Christianis of Sedulius Scottus is one work, probably known at Alfred's court, that urges the importance of wisdom for kings:²⁵

Omnis autem regia potestas, quae ad utilitatem rei publicae divinitus est constituta, non tam caducis opibus ac terrestri fortitudine, quam sapientia cultuque divino est exornanda, quoniam procul dubio tunc populus providi arte consilii gubernabitur, adversarii Domino propitante profligabuntur, provinciae regnumque conservabitur, si regia sublimitas religione et sapientia perornetur.

All royal power, which has been divinely established for the benefit of the state, should be embellished not so much with vain powers and earthly might as with wisdom and the veneration of God. For, if the eminence of the king is adorned by religion and wisdom, then, without a doubt, the people will be governed by the art of prudent counsel, enemies will be cast down by a merciful Lord and both the provinces and the kingdom will be preserved.²⁶

Sedulius states clearly that *sapientia* is to be preferred to *fortitudo*; kings should strive for wisdom and God will reward them with victory over their enemies. This passage conveys, however, an awareness that this argument is counter-intuitive: a tension between normal expectations and the counsel of perfection is embedded in the co-relative construction marked by *tam* and *quam*. Sedulius has to argue hard to prioritise wisdom over 'earthly might' and he has to reassure his reader that the penalty of piety will not be defeat.

Wisdom is a means of power, enabling rulers to govern *arte consilii*, but it is first and foremost a way of finding favour with God. It is a form of religious merit, bound up with piety and personal moral virtue. Before ruling others a king must rule himself, and wisdom is an aspect of this self-rule:

oportet [...] nec solum iuste hominibus, sed sui corporis et animae passionibus dominari [...] Sit ergo consilio prudentissimus [...] victor libidinis, victor superbiae atque vesanae ferocitatis, amicus bonorum,

and the Carolingian Empire, trans. G. de Nie, Europe in the Middle Ages: selected studies 3 (1977), pp. 85-9.

²⁵ Anton Sharer argues for Asser's use of Sedulius, 'The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court', *EME* 5: 2 (1996), 177-206 (pp. 198-203).

²⁶ Sedulius Scottus, *Liber de rectoribus Christianis*, ed. S. Hellman, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 1 (1906), pp. 19-91 (Ch. IV, p. 30, ll. 25-30). Translation: Sedulius Scottus, *On Christian Rulers and the Poems*, trans. E. G. Doyle, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 17 (1983), pp. 51-61, reprinted in *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, ed. P. E. Dutton (Ontario, 1993), pp. 402-11 (p. 408).

inimicus tyrannorum, hostis criminum, hostis viciorum, in bello cautissimus, in pace constantissimus

It is fitting that he [...] not only rule justly over men, but also over the passions of his body and mind [...] Let him be most prudent in counsel [...] a conqueror of sensuality, a victor over pride and savage ferocity, a friend of good men, an enemy of tyrants, an enemy of criminals and their crimes, most prudent in war, most steadfast in peace [...] (*De rectoribus Christianis*, ch. II, p. 26, ll. 5, 7-8 and 12-14).²⁷

This passage exemplifies the way the personal morality of the ruler flows seamlessly into his public role. The language of conquest is used for the king's avoidance of sin; at the same time, his spiritual success is displayed in his political behaviour towards his subjects and towards other rulers. Wisdom and piety are fundamental to all the king's activities. Warfare is just one of those activities.

Sedulius explicitly details the conception of wise and warlike kingship that conditions Alfred's interpretation of and response to Viking attack in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*. Like Sedulius, Alfred puts wisdom first. The preface is a letter addressed to Alfred's bishops, exhorting them to assist in the king's educational scheme and explaining the centrality of learning to the well-being of the kingdom.²⁸ The close link between wisdom and piety is evident in that learning is envisaged as service to God.²⁹ Alfred explains Viking attack as a punishment for having neglected wisdom and thus earned God's anger. In a much-quoted passage, he draws a connection between the failure of recent generations to seek wisdom and the loss of books and other wealth through harrying and fire:

Swelce hie cwæden: Ure ieldran, ða ðe ðas stowa ær hioldon, hie lufodon wisdom & ðurh ðone hie begeaton welan & us læfdon. Her mon mæg giet gesion hiora swæð, ac we him ne cunnon æfter spyrigean. Forðæm we habbað nu ægðer forlætan ge ðone welan ge ðone wisdom, forðæmðe we noldon to ðæm spore mid ure mode onlutan.

²⁷ Here I have adapted the published translation (which breaks up the long sentences of the Latin text). *Carolingian Civilization*, ed. Dutton, p. 405.

²⁸ See J. Morrish, 'King Alfred's Letter as a Source on Learning in England', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 87-107; P. E. Szarmach, 'The Meaning of Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care*', *Mediaevalia* 6 (1982 for 1980), 57-86.

²⁹ J. Bately, *The literary Prose of King Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (London, 1980), pp. 7-9.

It is as if they said: 'Our forebears, who held these places formerly, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and left it to us. Here one can still see their footprints, but we cannot follow after them.' For that reason we have lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we would not bend down to the track with our minds. (*Pastoral Care*, I, 5, ll. 13-18)³⁰

The idea that foreign attacks were a manifestation of God's justice was widespread. It goes back ultimately to the Old Testament, in which, for example, the Israelites are led into captivity in Babylon after ignoring the warnings of the prophets to repent (II Par 36. 15-18). In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede (following Gildas) interprets the attacks of the Anglo-Saxons against the British as a punishment for the sins of the latter³¹ and Carolingian clerics explained Viking incursions in a similar way.³² As Alfred uses it, the motif of divine punishment is incorporated into a sense that the military fortunes of kings, both good and bad, are dependent on their relationship with God and specifically on their success in pursuing and promoting learning. Viking attack thus becomes part of a wider pattern of success and failure in kingship, divine favour and divine wrath. If Viking depredations punish the neglect of religious learning, by the same token Alfred's educational programme can be expected to result in peace and material prosperity.³³ Moreover, in the passage from the preface to *Pastoral Care* quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Alfred makes it clear that, just as misfortune in war is connected to sin, so virtue can bring successful conquests. Godly kings are able to 'extend their territory outside' (*ut hiora eðel rym[an]* p. 3, ll. 7-8), the external counterpart of their maintenance of order and good custom at home (*hie ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siodo ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehioldon* 'they preserved their peace and their morality and their power at home', p. 3, ll. 6-7). Conquests are the mark of the successful king and the most obvious expression of his power.

Reading the preface to the *Pastoral Care* in the light of Sedulius, we find a vision of kingly power in which success or failure in warfare is tied to the pursuit of

³⁰ I have repunctuated the passage according to the arguments of T. A. Shippey, 'Wealth and Wisdom in King Alfred's Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*', *EHR* 94 (1979), 346-55 (pp. 347-8).

³¹ Bede, *EH*, I.14 and 15, pp. 46-53. See also the *Old English Bede*, ed. Miller, I.xi-xii, pp. 48-54.

³² See S. Coupland, 'The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of the Viking Invasions', *JEH* 42: 4 (1991), pp. 535-54.

³³ J. L. Nelson, 'Wealth and Wisdom: The Politics of Alfred the Great', in *Kings and Kingship*, ed. J. Rosenthal, *Acta* 11 (1986 for 1984), pp. 31-52 (pp. 35-6); Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 25-6; Abels, *Alfred the Great*, p. 8.

wisdom. Wisdom is conceived in terms of religious scholarship. The business of kings is both to serve God, promoting piety and learning, and to exercise a worldly power conceived very much in terms of military strength. The fortunes and powers of kings are under the higher power of God, who bestows favour or punishment. The Viking wars are incorporated into this scheme: they are the most recent manifestation of divine displeasure and a goad to the renewal of learning. As Janet Nelson remarks, Alfred ‘reads as a king’.³⁴ His interpretation of Scandinavian incursions and his use of the common equation of foreign attacks with God’s anger are focused on the questions of kingly power and his own course of action.

Alfred’s understanding of the relationship of wisdom and warfare and the place of violence within kingship is illuminated further elsewhere in his translations. The *locus classicus* for Alfred’s conception of kingship is the passage on the tools of kingship in the *Boethius*. Here, in a passage with no equivalent in the Latin, the character Mod is made to say that his desire for worldly goods is limited to those things that he needs in order ‘that I might fitly and properly guide and wield the power which was entrusted to me’ (*þæt ic unfracodlice 7 gerisenlice mihte steoran 7 reccan þone anwald þe me befæst wæs*, xvii, p. 40, ll. 10-14). He goes on to outline an ideal of the properly functioning society in which prayer and fighting, and the material resources that support both, are equally integral.

þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc 7 his tol mid to ricsianne, þæt he hæbbe his lond fullmonnad; he sceal habben gebedmen 7 fyrdmen 7 weorcmen [...] þæt is þonne heora biwist: land to bugianne, 7 gifta, 7 wæpnu, 7 mete, 7 ealo, 7 clapas, 7 gehwæt þæs ðe þa þre geferscipes behofiað.³⁵

This, then, is the tools and materials for a king to reign with, that he have his kingdom fully manned; he must have praying men and fighting men and labouring men [...] This, then, is their sustenance: land to dwell on, and gifts, and weapons, and food, and ale, and clothes, and whatever is necessary for the three classes. (*Boethius*, xvii, p. 40, ll. 15-18 and 21-3)

Alfred’s version of the tripartite division of society is one of the earliest extant. A distinctive feature not shared with the Frankish parallels is the fact that the three orders are not hierarchically graded but have parity under the over-arching authority

³⁴ J. L. Nelson, ‘The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex’, in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. J. Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 125-58 (p. 144).

of the king.³⁶ Characteristically, Alfred's conception of society is focused on royal power. As in Sedulius's analysis, this power is founded in personal moral life; for Alfred, the practice of kingship is the fulfilment of a duty. *Boethius* xvii complements the preface to the *Pastoral Care* in offering another insight into how personal spirituality, public power, military might and pious wisdom interpenetrate in Alfred's ideal of kingship.

The preface to the *Pastoral Care* and *Boethius* xvii are visions of order, suggesting how warfare fits into successful kingship, right government under the guiding hand of God. The two passages are responses to Viking violence in that they describe the kind of society that needs to be built and the kind of kingship that needs to be practised in the wake of destruction and misfortune. Although some debate has been conducted over whether Alfred's preface gives an exaggerated picture of Viking depredations, the phrase 'before it was all ravaged and burnt' does not constitute a very extensive description of Viking activities. For much in the way of descriptive or narrative as opposed to simply theoretical approaches to violence in the Alfredian corpus we need to turn to texts not attributed to Alfred himself, the accounts of history and its upheavals contained in the Old English *Bede* and, especially, the *Orosius*. The latter is worth some examination for the patterns it exhibits in the portrayal of violence and its relationship to power.

Before looking at the *Orosius*, however, it is worth noting that Alfred's translations do offer reflections on what can happen to disrupt the ideal economy of kingly warfare and wisdom. The *Boethius* has much to say about the perils and troubles that face rulers. More dangerous than external attackers is the constant threat of internal dissension and treachery:

Anwaldes ðu wilnast? Ac þu hine næfre orsorgne ne begitst for ælðeodegum
7 git ma for ðinum agnum monnum 7 mægum.

³⁵ For the sake of clarity, I expand abbreviations left unexpanded in Sedgefield's edition.

³⁶ T. E. Powell, 'The "Three Orders" of Society in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 23 (1994), 103-32 (pp. 103-9); on the three orders more generally, see G. Duby, *Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. A. Goldhammer (London and Chicago, 1980).

Do you want power? But you will never obtain it free from care on account of foreigners and still more on account of your own men and kinsmen. (*Boethius*, xxxii.1, p. 71, ll. 25-7).

The psalms are a document of King David's moments of powerlessness and suffering as well as his triumphs. Personal and passionate in tone, they provide words for the pain and confusion of the victim of treachery:

1. (2) Drihten, ne þrea þu me, ne ne þrafa on þinum yrre, ne on þinre hatheortnesse ne witna ðu me,
2. (3) for þam þine flana synt afæstned on me (þæt synt, þa earfoðu þe ic nu þolie), and þu gestrangodes þine handa ofer me
[...]
5. (6) Mina wunda rotedan and fuledon for minum dysige
[...]
10. (12) Mine frynd and mine magas and mine neahgeburas synt nu gemengde wið mine fynd, and standað nu mid him ongean me³⁷

Lord, do not reprove me, and do not rebuke me in your anger, nor punish me in your fury,

because your arrows are fixed in me (that is, the troubles that I now suffer) and you have strengthened your hand upon me [...]

my wounds have rotted and grown foul for my folly [...]

my friends and my kinsmen and my neighbours are now joined with my enemies, and stand with them against me [...] (Psalm 37, p. 145)

For early medieval theorists of the just war (the only Old English formulation is Ælfric's, following Isidore's *Etymologia*), civil war and war between kin were the worst kinds of conflict.³⁸ Alfred introduced new legislation against treachery and vigorously affirmed the obligation of loyalty to one's lord.³⁹ A strong defence against foreign attackers was only possible if the king could rely on his people – his

³⁷ O'Neill's edition provides two numbering systems, one for the divisions in the manuscript and one (in round brackets) for the verse numbers in the Vulgate psalter. See P. P. O'Neill, 'The Text', in *King Alfred's Psalms*, ed. O'Neill, pp. 97-9 (p. 97).

³⁸ Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, II, 112-4, ll. 705-14; Isidore, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum siue originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911), XVIII.1. For discussion, see J. E. Cross, 'The Ethic of War in Old English', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 269-82 (p. 272).

³⁹ For discussion, see Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 283; Frantzen, *King Alfred*, pp. 20-21.

praying men, fighting men and labouring men. In his translations, Alfred expresses an extremely confident sense of what kingship should entail, how society should work and what people owe their rulers. The dark side of this is an awareness of the vulnerability of lords to treachery.

Violence in the Old English *Orosius*

Alfred's own translations do not offer much description of violence. The Old English *Orosius*, however, is filled with extensive recitals of violence of all kinds: warfare above all, but also murder, civil insurrection, torture and even self-mutilation (it recounts how the Amazons are wont to sear off their right breasts: I.x, 29/32-4). The *Orosius* indicates the capacity of Old English prose (following a Latin original) to present violence in a vivid and dramatic fashion. The basic attraction of Paulus Orosius's *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII* must have been, as both Dorothy Whitelock and Janet Bately have pointed out, its provision of a Christian framework for human history. In the Old English text we have an Alfredian reading (a reading by an associate or associates of Alfred) of Orosius's account of how the states, rulers and wars of the past fitted into an over-arching divine scheme.⁴⁰ The Old English *Orosius* thus contains an account of the relationship between human and divine power in history, one that gives far more consideration to violence than do Alfred's own translations. However, the role of brute force in the power of rulers turns out to be decidedly problematic; its troubling character is reflected in the way more and less extensive descriptions of bloodshed are distributed through the text.

The Old English *Orosius* has a darkness and pessimism of tone that it transmits from the Latin. As Wallace-Hadrill comments, 'Orosius taught, as no other historian, that the past was horrible'.⁴¹ The Latin *Historiae*, written around the time of the sack of Rome by the Goths, is devoted to showing that Christianity is not to blame for the current misfortunes of Rome and that, on the contrary, history was far

⁴⁰ Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem*, ed. C. Zangemeister (Vienna, 1889); translated R. J. Deferrari, *The Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, The Fathers of the Church 50 (1964). D. Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 67-103 (p.90); Bately, *Translation or Transformation?*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, p. 145.

darker and more painful before the advent of Christ.⁴² Critics are agreed, however, that the Old English version changes the emphasis of the text, moderating the extreme gloom of Paulus Orosius's account. Janet Bately shows that the climax of the *Orosius*, as opposed to the *Historiae*, is not the sack of Rome but the birth of Christ and the age of mercy that it ushers in.⁴³ William Kretzschmar offers an analysis of the translator's modifications of the Latin that makes central the interest of Alfred's circle in worldly power and authority and their place in God's design. According to Kretzschmar, the translator seized upon Orosius's division of history into the rule of four great empires. In the Old English version, the doctrine of the succession of empires is set out at structurally significant points, the opening of book two (II.i) and the beginning of book six (VI.i). This doctrine asserts that God is the granter and source of all earthly power:

Nu we witon þæt ealle onwealdas from him sindon, we witon eac þæt ealle ricu sint from him, for þon ealle onwealdas of rice sindon. Nu he þara læssena rica reccend is, hu micle swiþor wene we þæt he ofer þa maran sie, þe on swa unmetlican onwealdun ricsedon!

Now we know that all powers are from him, we know that all realms are from him, because all powers are from realms. Now he is ruler of the lesser realms, how much more may we know that he is over the greater, he who reigns in such immeasurable power! (*Orosius*, II.i, 36/7-14)

The key term here is *anweald*, which Kretzschmar defines as 'God-given authority to rule'; it is distinguished from *rice*, the kingdom or realm itself. The Old English text traces the passage of *anweald* not only through the four great empires of the world but between individual rulers and peoples. *Anweald* is thus something that continues to be passed on after the fall of Rome, which in the Latin text marks the culmination of the providential scheme. Taken with the Old English *Bede* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Orosius* can be seen as the first part of a historical narrative that moves from ancient Babylon through the Roman empire to the settlement and conversion of the English peoples and finally the victories of Alfred.

⁴² Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', p.90; Bately, '“Those Books Most Necessary”', pp. 46-7.

⁴³ J. Bately, 'Introduction', *Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. xxiii-cxix (pp. xciii-xcv).

English history, and Alfred's place in it, are thus presented as part of the divine plan.⁴⁴

The *Orosius* tells us that history and its upheavals are shaped by providential design, but it also shows this design becoming more and more apparent as time proceeds. It is a text that insists on the interpretability of history; events are constantly interrogated for their moral lessons and for the insights they give into God's purposes. Passages of moral comment are often heralded with the words *cwæð Orosius* ('Orosius said')⁴⁵ – ironically, they often depart markedly from the Latin text.⁴⁶ In the distant past, however, God's guiding hand is hard to discern. The first book of the *Orosius* provides not a continuous narrative but a series of *exempla*, largely of depravity. The episodes of this early history have meaning in that they teach moral lessons, but the age of the Babylonian empire appears as a time of convulsive disorder. After the geographical introduction in I.i, the history proper begins with King Ninus who spends fifty years campaigning against neighbouring and distant peoples. Ninus's campaigns are continued by his wife, Semiramis, also noted for her immoderate and eventually incestuous sexual lusts. Following chapters go on to describe the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, a war of mutual destruction between the Telchines and the Caryatii, the escape of the Israelites from Egypt, the conquests of the Amazons and various other mostly bloody episodes. The lessons that are drawn vary. The enslavement of the Israelites by the Egyptians, who had previously been saved from famine by Joseph, is held up as an example of the weakness and ingratitude of human nature:

Swa eac is gyt on ealre þysse worulde: þeah God langre tide wille hwam hys willan to forlætan, 7 he þonne þæs eft lytelre tide þolige, þæt he sona forgyt þæt god þæt he ær hæfde 7 geðencð þæt yfel þæt he þonne hæfð.

It is still like this in the whole of this world: if God for a long time grants someone his wish, and he then afterwards suffers for a short time, he immediately forgets the good he had before and thinks about the evil he has then. (I.v, 24/24-28)

⁴⁴ W. A. Kretzschmar, 'Adaptation and *Amweald* in the Old English *Orosius*', *ASE* 16 (1987), 127-45 (pp. 136-43).

⁴⁵ For example, I.viii, 27/22; II.i, 35/28; II.vi, 50/23; II.viii, 52/6; III.iii, 57/5; III.vii, 65/25.

⁴⁶ Bately, 'Introduction', p. xciii; D. Whitelock, 'Prose of Alfred's Reign', p. 93.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is an awful warning of God's vengeance for sin (*Godes wraco*, I.iii, 23/5); the Amazons show how miserable was the pre-Christian era when even 'such wretched and foreign women' (*swa earme wif 7 swa elðeode*, I.x, 30/25) could wreak such havoc. What all these events have in common is that they show the sinfulness and suffering of the past. God's purpose is manifested in the very chaos of this history. Humankind in general is punished for Adam's fall:

God þone ærestan monn ryhtne 7 godne gesceop [...] Ond for þon þe he þæt god forlet þe him geseald wæs 7 wyrse geceas, hit God sibþan longsumlice wreccende wæs [...] mid monigfealdum brocum 7 gewinnum

God made the first man right and good [...] And because he abandoned the good that was given him and chose worse, God afterwards avenged it for a long time [...] with many afflictions and wars (II.i, 35/29-36/3)

This statement occurs in the same chapter as the explanation of the succession of empires quoted above. On the one hand, the *Orosius* describes an orderly unfolding of political history, confirmed by geographical and numerical patterns (an empire for each region of the world, east, north, south and west; both Babylon and Rome, the first and last empires, lasted one thousand and sixty-four years from foundation to sack – II.ii, 36/12-14, 37/24-38/2). On the other hand, it portrays a world abandoned by God to the forces of greed and bloodshed. Providential design is seen in the long-term pattern, but in the shorter span events speak of the sinfulness of men, not the goodness of God. A king like Ninus may ultimately be part of the divine plan, but his pursuit of *anweald* is not so much the exercise of divinely-bestowed authority as a dangerous, destructive and excessive quest for dominance:

Ær ðæm ðe Romeburh getimbred wære þrim hund wintra 7 þusend wintra, Ninus, Asyria kyning, ongan manna ærest ricsian on ðysum middangeard. 7 mid ungemætlicre gewilnunge anwaldes he wæs heriende 7 feohtende fiftig wintra

One thousand one hundred years before Rome was built, Ninus, king of Assyria, began, first among men, to rule in this world, and with an excessive desire for power he went on harrying and fighting for fifty years (I.ii, 21/23-6.)

Whereas the preface to the *Pastoral Care* rests on a concept of kingship and providence in which a king's success or failure in war is indexed to his relationship with God, Ninus's success in war is one of the horrors of his age, a mark of God's general displeasure with mankind rather than specific favour towards Ninus. The power of the ruler may finally derive from God, but the violence of that power signals the gulf between the king and his creator.

Power and violence are constantly associated in the *Orosius*, but the portrayal of violence is the chief way in which the text expresses the horror and disorder of the past. Returning to Ninus, the previously peaceful Scythians are corrupted when they become the victims of his campaigning:

hy ða, under ðæm þe he him on winnende wæs, wurdon gerade wigcræfta,
 þeah hi ær hyra lif bylwetlice alyfden [...] 7 him ða wearð emleof on hyra
 mode þæt hi gesawon mannes blod agoten swa him wæs þara nytena meolc
 þe hi mæst bi libbað.

then they, while he was warring against them, became expert in the arts of war, though previously they had lived their lives with simplicity [...] and then the sight of man's blood being shed became as dear to them in their hearts as was the beast's milk on which they chiefly lived. (I.ii, 21/31-22/4)

This passage introduces an image that recurs through the text, the confusion of blood and food. Violence is linked to the perversion of appetite and the disruption of nature; its horror is conveyed by invoking widespread taboos against cannibalism and food-pollution.⁴⁷ Cruel and warlike rulers at several points in the *Orosius* are said to be 'always thirsting for man's blood' (*synþyrstende mannes blodas*, *ðyrstende on symbel mannes blodas*), a vice attributed to Queen Semiramis (I.ii, 22/20-21), Cyrus of the Persians (II.iv, 45/8-9) and Alexander the Great (III.viii, 71/25 and 74/8). In Semiramis's case her bloodlust accompanies an equally disordered appetite for sex. Cyrus's thirst is both dramatized and punished when his severed head is cast into a vat of blood after his defeat; the vat of blood echoes the jars of wine with which he had previously treacherously entrapped an opposing army. Elsewhere catastrophic wars are heralded by prodigies in the realms of food-

⁴⁷ The classic work on pollution and taboo is M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966, reprinted with a new introduction 2002).

production and fertility. The earth wells blood and the sky rains milk (IV.iii, 87/10-11); ears of ripening corn are found to be covered in blood (IV.viii, 100/33-5).

The *Orosius* contains accounts of violence that are emotionally stirring, immediate and vivid. Its main resources in creating such effects, besides emotive images of pollution, are evaluative comment and cumulative effect. Lists of violent events gain an oppressive weight; one's intended response is cued by exclamations on how dreadful things were. Individual battles, campaigns, murders or similar blend into each other to create an impression of continual, convulsive violence. Little attention is paid to the aims, gains or causes of violence. Its apparent lack of cause is part of its horror. The cumulative technique can be illustrated from the chapter on Alexander, who is depicted in hostile terms that go back to the moral anecdotes of the Stoics and Peripatetics.⁴⁸

Athene budon gefeoht Alexandre, ac he hie sona forslog 7 gefliemde, þæt hie sippan ungemetlicne ege from him hæfdon, 7 Thebana fæsten abræc 7 mid ealle towearp, þætte ær wæs Creca heafodstol, 7 sippan þæt folc eall on ellþeodge him wið feo gesealde; 7 ealle þa oðre þeoda þe an Crecum wæron he to gafolgiældum gedyde [...] 7 sippan he gegaderode fird wið Perse, 7 þa hwile þe he hie gaderade, he ofslog ealle his mægias þe he geræcan mehte.

The Athenians offered battle to Alexander, but he immediately wreaked slaughter on them and put them to flight, and they afterwards had immeasurable fear of him, and he stormed the fortress of Thebes, that previously was the capital of the Greeks, and wholly cast it down, and afterwards sold all the people into exile for money; and all the other peoples in Greece he made to pay tribute [...] and afterwards he gathered an army against the Persians, and while he was gathering it, he killed all his kinsmen that he could capture. (III.viii, 67/28-68/3 and 68/5-7)

The insistent paratactic progression of this passage reinforces its emphasis on speed (*sona*) and completeness of destruction (*mid ealle towearp, þæt folc eall [...] gesealde, ealle his mægias*). Verbs of violence have intensifying prefixes (*forslog, towearp*) and come in pairs to make doubly sure (*forslog 7 gefliemde, abræc 7 [...] towearp*). Attention is drawn to the psychological dimension of warfare by reference to the fear Alexander provokes; a glance back at the former greatness of Thebes makes its overthrow seem the more catastrophic. The casual and unexplained

⁴⁸ See G. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 16-17 and 80-82.

reference to Alexander's murder of his kin is typical of the way this text associates different kinds of violence with each other. State warfare is not treated as a different kind of activity from obviously reprehensible acts like murder. In Alfred's day warfare was the legitimate task of the warrior classes and the laws distinguished between open and secret killing, but the *Orosius* subsumes all such activities in its portrayal of the cruelty of the past.⁴⁹

In the earlier part of the *Orosius*, violence is the screen behind which God's purpose is hidden: it is the hideous face of worldly power and it proclaims how that power departs from the divine will. As history progresses, God's power becomes more visible in the particular woes and joys of rulers and states. The turning point is the birth of Christ, occurring in the reign of the emperor Augustus. Augustus himself is a blessed ruler who brings peace to the world, shutting the doors of Janus that stood open when Rome was at war (V.xv, 132/12-13). The emperor's actions are closely woven into God's design and have detailed meanings for the coming of Christianity: for example, the command that all should submit to one peace and pay one tax is a token that all should have one faith and render up good works (V.xiii, 131/12-14). God is at Augustus's shoulder to favour him when he acts rightly and to punish him when he goes wrong. When Augustus supports Gaius's refusal to worship God, he is punished with a famine in Rome and the re-opening of the doors of Janus (VI.i, 133/29-134/10). The *Orosius* thus describes a convergence of divine and human rulership, from the distant past, when the conquests of a Ninus or an Alexander were symptoms of sinfulness paradoxically incorporated into God's long-term plan, to the Christian age, when rulers might rule according to detailed providential design. This convergence is characterized by the diminution of violence. The Christian age is an age of mercy. Even its barbarians are less barbarous: compared to the Amazons, the Goths are nothing much to worry about:

Hu ungemetlice ge Romware bemurciað [...] for þon þa Gotan eow hwon oferhergedon 7 iowre burg abræcon 7 iower feawe ofslogon [...] Hu wene ge

⁴⁹ On legal distinctions between open and secret violence, see G. Halsall, 'Violence and society: an introductory survey', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Halsall (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 15-16; on the separation of different kinds of violence in early medieval thought, see T. Reuter, Review: '*Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*. Edited by Guy Halsall', *EME* 11: 1 (2002), 95-6 (p. 96).

hwelce sibbe þa weras hæfden ær þæm cristendome, þonne heora wif swa monigfeald yfel donde wæron on þiosan middangearde?

How excessively you Romans complain [...] because the Goths ravaged you a little and sacked your city and killed a few of you [...] What sort of peace do you think men had before Christianity, when their women did such manifold evil in this world? (I.x, 31/2-5, 19-21)

As it happens, book six, which deals with the Christian age, continues to list numerous wars and other violent events (for example, the poisoning of Claudius in VI.iii, the wars of the year of four emperors in VI.vi and persecutions of Christians in VI.ix, VI.x and elsewhere). It gives a far less shocking impression than previous books, however, because it is much flatter and briefer in style.⁵⁰ In book six the source text is abbreviated heavily, some chapters reduced to only ten lines or fewer, and as a result the skeleton of the account shows through, the succession of emperors and of years that structures the transition from chapter to chapter. For example:

Æfter þæm þe Romeburg getimbred wæs dcccc wintra 7 lxii, feng his sunu to rice Antoninus, 7 hit hæfde vii ger. He hæfde twa geswostor him to wifum. He hæfde folc gegaderad 7 wolde winnan on Parthe, ac he wearð ofslagen on þæm færelte from his agnum monnum.

Æfter þæm þe Romeburg getimbred wæs dcccc wintra 7 lxx, feng Marcus Aurelius to Romana onwalde 7 hiene hæfde iiii ger. Hiene ofslogon eac his agene men 7 his modor mid.

Nine hundred and sixty-two years after Rome was built, his son, Antoninus, succeeded to the empire and held it seven years. He had two sisters as his wives. He had an army gathered and intended to make war against the Parthians, but he was killed by his own men during the expedition.

Nine hundred and seventy years after Rome was built, Marcus Aurelius succeeded to the rule of the Romans and held it four years. His own men also slew him, and his mother with him. (VI.xvi and xvii, 142/15-22)

These are two of the shortest chapters and represent the extreme of the laconic style of this portion of the *Orosius*, but few of the surrounding chapters are much more elaborate. The vocabulary is restricted and there is a lack of adverbs or other descriptive colouring. Though these particular annals record the betrayal and murder

of emperors, the formulaic phrases that record the date, the succession and the length of time in power, prominently placed at the head of the chapter, give an impression of order.

The change in style from earlier parts of the text may be partly the result of a change of translators; whether or not the *Orosius* had multiple authors is a matter of debate.⁵¹ Other possibilities suggested by Janet Bately are ‘waning of interest on the part of the translator, lack of time for revision, or merely absence of the opportunity for grammatical complexity’.⁵² It is my argument, however, that the retreat to a simpler style makes way for the message that the coming of Christ has ushered in an age of mercy, substituting a divinely regulated political order for the chaotic violence of the past. Paulus Orosius’s account in the *Historiae* of the years leading up to the Gothic sack of Rome continues to be dominated by sinful and distressing doings such as the persecutions of the Christians.⁵³ The translator into Old English minimizes the turbulence and darkness in his material.

Turning once more to the question of how the Old English *Orosius* contributes to the re-examination of power and kingship by Alfred and his circle, Kretschmar’s argument that it provides a model of the transmission of authority or *anweald* can be reinforced with the observation that, as history progresses, kingly power is ever more closely linked to divine purpose. However, this is not a text that finds an easy place for warfare in kingship. Paulus Orosius himself wrote at a time when the adoption of Christianity as a state religion was a comparatively recent phenomenon. His contemporary Augustine was a central figure in the development of an ideology that could reconcile state violence with the other-worldly and sacrificial values of Christianity; indeed it was Augustine who prompted Orosius to

⁵⁰ For comments on the style of book VI see E. Liggins, ‘The Authorship of the Old English Orosius’, *Anglia* 88 (1970), 289-322 (p. 322) and Bately, ‘Introduction’, p. lxxix.

⁵¹ See Liggins, ‘Authorship’; Bately, ‘Introduction’, pp. lxxiii-xxxix; S. Louhivaara, ‘Multiple Authorship of the Old English Orosius’, in *English Historical Linguistics 1992. Papers from the 7th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics, Valencia, 22-26 September 1992*, ed. F. Fernández, M. Fuster and J. J. Calvo (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 343-352.

⁵² Bately, ‘Introduction’, p. lxxix.

⁵³ See Orosius, *Historiae*, VII.22 and 26-7 for discussion of the persecutions and the calamities consequent upon them.

write his *Historiae*.⁵⁴ Whitelock and Bately both comment on episodes where one may detect a positive interest in military matters or in warrior virtues on the part of the translator.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, something of an early Christian's suspicion of worldly power and its brutality is transmitted through the *Historiae* to the ninth-century text. There is a dissonance between the pessimistic portrait of the relationship of power, violence and disorder in the Old English *Orosius* and the theory of mighty but pious kingship that underlies the preface to the *Pastoral Care* and the exposition of the three orders of society in the *Boethius*.

The *Orosius* also shows how different styles in the representation of violence can be used persuasively to drive home an argument. The contrast between a vivid and shocking presentation of violence in the earlier part of the text and a much more detached technique towards the end conveys emotionally the stated difference between pre-Christian disorder and Christian order. The association of a violent presentation of violence with disorder, sin and suffering and a sparse presentation with order is a pattern that can also be tentatively detected in Alfred's personal translations. Where Alfred theorizes kingship he refers to violence but does not describe it: violence, specifically warfare, is treated as an aspect of kingly power and it is kept under textual control, not permitted to be dramatic or disruptive. A more visceral sense of violence emerges in connection with the failure, corruption or loss of power. In psalm 37 (quoted above, p. 29), the psalmist's sense of powerlessness is expressed in the powerful image of his own body wounded and rotting (v. 5 (6)). In the *Boethius*, perhaps the most horrifying image of violence is the story of Liberius, refusing to betray his friends, biting out his own tongue and spitting it before the tyrant's face. This self-directed violence expresses both the cruelty and the futility of the tyrant's power, who cannot by his tortures make the good man turn traitor (*Boethius*, xvi.2, p. 36, ll. 14-24).

⁵⁴ On the birth of Christian theories of the state, see J. Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 1-43; essays in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought c. 350-c.1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge, 1988), especially H. Chadwick, 'Christian Doctrine', pp. 11-20, R. A. Markus, 'Introduction: The West', pp. 83-91 and R. A. Markus, 'The Latin Fathers', pp. 92-122, with remarks on Augustine pp. 103-116; also on Augustine, see R. A. Markus, 'Saint Augustine's Views on the "Just War"', *Studies in Church History* 20 (1983), 1-13. For the relationship between Orosius and Augustine, see R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 1-4, 54 and 161-2.

⁵⁵ Whitelock, 'Prose of Alfred's Reign', pp. 92-3; Bately, 'Introduction', pp. xcvi-xcix.

The Alfredian translations constitute an investigation of themes of power, rulership, wisdom and godliness. On the one hand they show us that Alfred had a conception of kingship in which worldly and spiritual concerns, warfare and wisdom, interpenetrated; furthermore, history could be seen in terms of the interaction of divine and human power. On the other hand, the *Orosius* in particular indicates an undercurrent of moral doubt over violence, while the *Boethius* teaches the limitation of worldly power, manifested most troublingly in the threat of treachery. The priority expressed in these texts is, above all, the service of God and (inextricable from it) the pursuit of wisdom. Where war and other kinds of violence are discussed, they are placed in religious frameworks and quarried for lessons about moral action and the relationship between the human and the divine.

The interaction of wisdom and power has three faces in the Alfredian translations. First, the chosen texts preach the centrality of wisdom. Second, by studying them Alfred sought wisdom and the favour of God. But also, third, these were books intended for dissemination and through them Alfred presented himself to his people, starting with his bishops, as a wise and pious king.⁵⁶ He shored up his kingdom against dissent by sharing a vision of religious regeneration centred on his own Christian scholarship.

The Alfredian Chronicle

If the translations made by Alfred and his circle show us Alfred performing and theorizing the role of the wise king, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is dominated by the warlike face of power. Its major theme is the Viking wars.⁵⁷ It begins with the attempt of Julius Caesar to conquer Britain, notes a few important events in the next four centuries, traces the doings of the early Anglo-Saxon kings from Hengest and Horsa on, becomes gradually fuller as the years grow later, but really gets into its stride with the advent of the Vikings. Especially from the 850s, the annals increase markedly in length. Apart from several years which are left blank, no entry between

⁵⁶ On arrangements for the dissemination of the *Pastoral Care*, see the classic article by K. Sisam, 'The Publication of Alfred's *Pastoral Care*', *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 140-147.

839 and 888 fails to mention the Vikings (and I imagine the slaughter mentioned in 839 is in fact inflicted by Vikings). The *Chronicle* recounts the slow eating away of the English kingdoms until Alfred finally gains the victory at Edington. The annals for the next few years tell how the Vikings continue to trouble Francia while Alfred sends alms and emmissaries to Rome and his old adversary Guthrum dies in the faith of Christ in East Anglia (s.a. 890).

The oldest surviving text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is that of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173, known as MS A or the Parker Chronicle.⁵⁸ The Parker text is already one or more removes from the archetype, but it is arguably closer to the original compilation than the other surviving vernacular versions of the *Chronicle*. Moreover, its first part may well have been itself written and available during Alfred's reign.⁵⁹ There is considerable disagreement as to the date of the compilation of the *Chronicle* and thus as to what belongs to its first or original Alfredian portion. The first hand of MS A breaks off part way through the annal for 891. Cecily Clark detects a change in style from this point on which, in her view, confirms that the annals for the rest of the 890s were composed separately from the earlier *Chronicle*.⁶⁰ Janet Bately argues from linguistic evidence that the break may in fact occur at the end of the annal for 890.⁶¹ Alfred Smyth, however, pointing to the Chronicler's interest in the continental movements of the Vikings, suggests that the *Chronicle* was compiled in the context of Alfred's later Viking wars and originally extended to 896.⁶² Smyth is right that the detailed (though somewhat

⁵⁷ See P. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London, 1962), pp. 18-20; A. P. Smyth, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Questioning Old English History and Historians', *Historian* no. 49 (Spring 1996), 2-7 (p. 4).

⁵⁸ *MS A*, ed. J. Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* 3 (1986).

⁵⁹ M. B. Parkes, 'The Parker Manuscript of the *Chronicle*, laws and Sedulius, and historiography at Winchester in the late ninth and tenth Centuries', *ASE* 5 (1976), 149-171 (pp. 149, 153-4 and 156); M. B. Parkes, 'A fragment of an early-tenth-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript and its significance', *ASE* 12 (1984), 129-140 (p. 132); J. Bately, 'Introduction', in *MS A*, ed. Bately, pp. xiii-clxvii (pp. xxiv-v and xxxiii-iv). But see also D. Dumville, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Origins of Square Minuscule Script', in *Wessex and England From Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural and Ecclesiastical Revival*, *Studies in Anglo-Saxon History* 3 (1992), pp. 55-139 (pp. 90-98).

⁶⁰ C. Clark, 'The Narrative Mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Before the Conquest', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 215-35 (pp. 215 and 221).

⁶¹ J. Bately, 'The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as Evidence', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 64 (1978), 93-129 (p. 96); 'The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Once More', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s.16 (1985), 7-26.

⁶² Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*, pp. 498-508; 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', pp. 2-7.

inaccurate) account of Viking doings in the 880s demands some sort of explanation. However, the changes of hand, style and syntax around the annals for 890 and 891 in the Parker manuscript strongly imply that the initial compilation of the common stock (material shared between all versions of the *Chronicle*) took place in the early 890s and essentially consisted of the body of annals designated by Janet Bately the ‘890 Chronicle’.⁶³ The present analysis therefore concentrates on the annals of the Parker manuscript to 890, which constitute the best available witness to what I shall call the *Alfredian Chronicle*. This label contrasts with the *Æthelredian Chronicle* (to be discussed in chapter four) and reflects the association of the *Chronicle* with Alfred’s literary initiatives.

The idea that the *Chronicle* was produced under the direction of (or even partly by the hand of) King Alfred was advanced in the 19th century by Charles Plummer and is popular to this day.⁶⁴ Internal evidence to that effect is provided by the *Chronicle*’s flattering portrayal of Alfred’s own career. The *Chronicle* concentrates notably on Alfred, most remarkably in recounting his consecration when still a small child by the Pope (s.a. 853, *he hine to cyninge gehalgode*, ‘he consecrated him as king’). No other entry accords such prominence to a child, least of all one who was then only the youngest son of a king; the annal clearly projects Alfred’s later importance into the past and maybe also reflects Alfred’s own reinterpretation of what happened.⁶⁵ Alfred shares the credit for the achievements of his brother Æthelred, as is evident in the annal for 871 where four different battles are initiated by ‘King Æthelred and his brother Alfred’.⁶⁶ R. H. C. Davis convincingly shows how the annal for 878 makes Alfred’s victory that year seem the greater by implying that the odds against him were heavier than they were.⁶⁷ Looking beyond the annals that deal directly with Alfred, the *Chronicle* as a whole shows an interest in legitimacy and kingship. Anton Scharer traces the *Chronicle*’s concern with genealogy, arguing that it stresses the legitimacy of Alfred’s descent and rule; Scharer’s analysis is extended and powerfully reinforced by Thomas

⁶³ Bately, ‘The Compilation’, p. 96.

⁶⁴ Plummer, *Chronicles*, II, civ.

⁶⁵ Smyth, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’, p. 4; Abels, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 57-61; J. L. Nelson, ‘The Problem of King Alfred’s Royal Anointing’, *JEH* 18 (1967), 145-163.

⁶⁶ R. H. C. Davis, ‘Alfred the Great: propaganda and truth’, *History* 56 (1971), 176. See also s.a. 868.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-173.

Bredehoft.⁶⁸ Scharer also, most intriguingly, suggests that the early ninth century king Ecgbryht is portrayed as an ‘anticipated Alfred’.⁶⁹ No explicit typological connection is drawn between Ecgbryht and Alfred, but the deeds of the ancestor reflect well on the descendent and establish a precedent for a king of Wessex holding authority over other Anglo-Saxon peoples.⁷⁰ Other internal indications that connect the *Chronicle* with Alfredian literature are the use of the term *angelcynn* for the English, a term which, Sarah Foot argues, was promoted by Alfred in this and other texts,⁷¹ and the employment of the vernacular.⁷²

External circumstances also accord with the supposition that the *Chronicle* emanates from Alfred’s circle. Bredehoft makes the very valuable observation that the *Chronicle* is transmitted alongside Alfredian texts in several of the manuscripts, suggesting that ‘the Anglo-Saxons felt the *Chronicle* to be an Alfredian production’.⁷³ Davis links the *Chronicle* to Alfred’s educational programme and suggests that it was designed for dissemination alongside the *Pastoral Care* and Alfred’s other translations.⁷⁴ The Frankish priest Grimbald is one figure who might connect the compilation of annals with Alfred’s better attested literary activities. Grimbald assisted Alfred in his studies and would also have been acquainted with the Frankish annal tradition: a copy of the Royal Frankish Annals was kept at his former monastery of St Bertin.⁷⁵ Another such figure is, of course, Asser. Alfred Smyth associates the ‘orthodox’ camp who consider Asser authentic with opposition to the idea that the *Chronicle* is an Alfredian production. However, if we accept that Asser was working at court and to the king’s agenda, Asser’s incorporation of

⁶⁸ Scharer, ‘Writing of history’, pp. 178-182; T. A. Bredehoft, *Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001), pp. 14-38.

⁶⁹ Scharer, ‘Writing of History’, p. 181.

⁷⁰ See s.a. 823 and 827.

⁷¹ S. Foot, ‘The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest’, *TRHS* 6th ser. 6 (1996), 25-49 (pp. 25-41). But see s.a. 597, in which King Ceolwulf of Wessex fights against *Angelcyn* [*sic*]: the term here is clearly not inclusive.

⁷² Scharer, ‘The Writing of History’, p. 185.

⁷³ Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, pp. 14-38 (on the genealogies) and p. 6 (quotation).

⁷⁴ Davis, ‘Propaganda and truth’, pp. 180-181.

⁷⁵ Parkes, ‘The Parker Manuscript of the *Chronicle*’, pp. 164-6. On Grimbald, P. Grierson, ‘Grimbald of St Bertin’s’, *EHR* 55 (1940), 529-561; J. L. Nelson, ‘“...sicut olim gens Francorum...nunc gens Anglorum”’: Fulk’s Letter to Alfred Revisited’, in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts and Nelson, pp. 140-142.

Chronicle material into the *Life of King Alfred* reinforces the impression that the *Chronicle* is associated with the court and the king.⁷⁶

Various objections to this view have been advanced. One set of objections centres on the assertion of an origin for the *Chronicle* in the royal city of Winchester. David Dumville, for example, builds on Sir Frank Stenton's arguments that the *Chronicle* shows south-western interests.⁷⁷ He also points to Janet Bately's argument that the *Chronicle* and the *Orosius* must come from different centres because they use different sources; most strikingly, they draw on two different Latin versions of Eusebius which would scarcely have been held together in the same book-collection.⁷⁸ As it happens, Aldhelm and Bede both seem to have had access to both Rufinus-Eusebius and Jerome-Eusebius.⁷⁹ If we envisage the Alfredian texts being produced by people who moved between the royal court and other religious centres, as was suggested above, the use of different sources and the admixture of regional with royal interests is not an insuperable difficulty.

A second issue, more theoretically pressing, is the question of how we can imagine a ninth-century king deliberately trying to enhance his influence by creating a politically slanted history. For Helmut Gneuss, in view of the problems of copying and disseminating texts, 'propaganda' is an anachronistic concept.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, it seems clear that early medieval writers of history both in England and on the continent wrote with political agendas at heart, forging powerful pasts for peoples and rulers.⁸¹ In Alfred's *Boethius*, the figure of Wisdom sharply condemns the lazy

⁷⁶ Smyth, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', p. 2-3, 5; D. P. Kirby, 'Asser and his Life of King Alfred', *Studia Celtica* 6 (1971): 23-7.

⁷⁷ Dumville, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', p. 71; F. M. Stenton, 'The South-Western Element in the Old English Chronicle' in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Thomas Frederick Trout*, ed. A. G. Little and F. M. Powicke (Manchester, 1925), pp. 15-24.

⁷⁸ Dumville, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', p. 72; J. Bately, 'World History in the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle*: its Sources and its Separateness from the Old English *Orosius*', *ASE* 8 (1979), 177-194 (pp. 188-92); on the parlous state of libraries in Alfred's reign, see H. Gneuss, 'King Alfred and the History of Anglo-Saxon Libraries', in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature. Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. P. Rugg Brown, G. Ronan Crampton and F. C. Robinson (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1986), pp. 29-49.

⁷⁹ J. D. A. Ogilvy, *Books Known to the English, 597-1066* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 172 and 236.

⁸⁰ Gneuss, 'Anglo-Saxon Libraries', pp. 37 and 40.

⁸¹ See the essays in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Y. Hen and M. Innes (Cambridge, 2000); on a chronicle with a political message, see R. McKitterick, 'Constructing the Past in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of the Royal Frankish Annals', *TRHS* 6th series 7 (1997), 101-29.

writers who fail in their duty to preserve the *lof* ('fame, praise, reputation') of good men and record 'the manners and deeds of those men who in their days were most distinguished and most eager for honour' (*þara monna ðeawas 7 hiora dæda, þe on hiora dagum foremæroste 7 weorðgeornoste wæron*, xviii.3, p. 44, ll. 3-4). The obligation to preserve *lof* is doubtless how Alfred and his circle would have conceptualised the writing of recent history. With regard to dissemination, there is late, unreliable but nonetheless intriguing evidence that the *Chronicle* may have been made available for public consultation. A post-conquest Norman-French poem, Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engleis*, tells us that Alfred had a great chronicle kept chained at Winchester, where those who wished could come to read it.⁸² Furthermore, this was a culture at once literate and oral. Texts and the ideas within them were disseminated not merely through the physical movement of manuscripts but through reading aloud, remembering and subsequent discussion.⁸³ A final factor to bear in mind is that the political class of the day was numerically small. All in all, there is much to support the idea that the *Alfredian Chronicle* was compiled by a member or members of Alfred's circle and that it is a piece of political image-making, celebrating the achievements and asserting the legitimacy of Alfred's rule. An examination of the representation of violence in the *Chronicle* reinforces this view.

Having said this, the *Chronicle* is not an openly partisan record. It lacks the persuasive tone of the preface to *Pastoral Care* or the emotional impact of the *Orosius*. Cecily Clark calls the *Chronicle* 'unclouded by subjective impressions': 'this unadorned, unqualified record,' she says, 'is as near absolute fact as history can get'.⁸⁴ Certainly the style is extremely plain and direct. There are almost no adjectives or adverbs, a minimum of grammatical subordination, a restricted vocabulary and very little explanatory or evaluative comment.⁸⁵ The annal for 871, here quoted *in extenso*, gives an impression of how the *Alfredian Chronicle* conveys

⁸² Geffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, ed. A. Bell, Anglo-Norman Text Society 14-16 (1960), pp. 74-5, ll. 2327-36. See the comments of J. Campbell, 'What is Not Known About the Reign of Edward the Elder', in *Edward the Elder 899-924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London and New York, 2001), pp. 12-24 (pp. 15-16).

⁸³ The dissemination of texts through talk is discussed by E. M. Tyler with reference to the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* in an article so far unpublished, 'Fictions of Family: The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and Vergil's *Aeneid*'.

⁸⁴ Clark, 'Narrative Mode', p. 220.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-221.

incidents of violence.⁸⁶ I have inserted paragraph divisions to mark the breaks between the different fights.

AN..dcccclxxi. Her cuom se here to Readingum on Westseaxe, 7 þæs ymb .iii. niht ridon .ii. eorlas up. Þa gemette hie Eþelwulf aldorman on Englafelda 7 him þær wiþ gefeaht 7 sige nam.

Þæs ymb .iii. niht Eþered cyning 7 Eþfred his broþur þær micle fierd to Readingum geleddon 7 wiþ þone here gefuhton, 7 þær wæs micel wēl geslægen on gehwēpre hond, 7 Eþelwulf aldorman wearþ ofslægen, 7 þa Deniscan ahton wēlstowe gewald.

7 þæs ymb .iiii. niht gefeaht Eþered cyning 7 Eþfred his broþur wiþ alne þone here on Æscedune, 7 hie wærun on twæm gefylcum; on oprum wæs Bachsecg 7 Helfdene þa heþnan cyningas, 7 on oprum wæron þa eorlas; 7 þa gefeaht se cyning Eþered wiþ þara cyninga getruman, 7 þær wearþ se cyning Bagecge ofslægen, 7 Eþfred his broþur wiþ þara eorla getruman, 7 þær wearþ Sidroc earl ofslægen se alda 7 Sidroc eorl se gioncga 7 Osbearn eorl 7 Fræna eorl 7 Hareld eorl, 7 þa hergas begen gefliemde 7 fela þusenda ofslægenra, 7 onfehtende wæron oþ niht.

7 þæs ymb .xiii. niht gefeaht Eþered cyning 7 Eþfred his broþur wiþ þone here æt Basengum, 7 þær þa Deniscan sige namon.

7 þæs ymb .ii. monaþ gefeaht Eþered cyning 7 Eþfred his broþur wiþ þone here æt Meretune, 7 hie wærun on tuæm gefylcium, 7 hie butu gefliemdon 7 longe on dæg sige ahton, 7 þær wearþ micel wēslieht on gehwēpere hond, 7 þa Deniscan ahton wēlstowe gewald, 7 þær wearþ Heahmund bisceþ ofslægen 7 fela godra monna.

7 æfter þissum gefeohte cuom micel sumorlida. 7 þæs ofer Eastron gefor Eþered cyning, 7 he ricsode .v. gear, 7 his lic liþ æt Winburnan. Þa feng Eþfred Eþelwulfing his broþur to Wesseaxna rice, 7 þæs ymb anne monaþ gefeaht Eþfred cyning wiþ alne þone here lytle werede æt Wiltune 7 hine longe on dæg gefliemde, 7 þa Deniscan ahton wēlstowe gewald.

7 þæs geares wurdon .viii. folcgefoht gefohten wiþ þone here on þy cynerice be suþan Temese, 7 butan þam þe him Eþfred þæs cyninges broþur 7 anlipig aldorman 7 cyninges þegnas oft rade on ridon þe mon ne ne rimde, 7 þæs geares wærun ofslægene .viii. eorlas 7 an cyning: 7 þy geare namon Westseaxe friþ wiþ þone here.⁸⁷

Year 871. In this year the *here* came to Reading in Wessex, and three nights later two earls rode up-country. Then ealdorman Æþelwulf encountered them at Englefield and fought with them there and took the victory.

Four nights after that, King Æþelred and his brother Alfred led a great *fierd* to Reading and fought against the *here*, and there were many dead killed on each side, and aldorman Æþelwulf was killed, and the Danes had control of the battlefield.

And four nights later King Æþelred and his brother Alfred fought against the whole *here* at Ashdown, and they [the *here*] were in two hosts; in one were King Bagecge and Halfdan the heathen kings, and in the other were

⁸⁶ I use the year numbers given in Batley's edition.

⁸⁷ Batley, *MS A*, pp. 48-9.

the earls; and then King Æthelred fought against the troop of the kings, and King Bagsecg was killed there, and his brother Alfred fought against the troop of the earls, and there Earl Sidroc the Elder was killed, and Earl Sidroc the Younger and Earl Osbern and Earl Fræna and Earl Harald, and both the *hergas* were put to flight and many thousand killed, and they were fighting until nightfall.

And fourteen nights after that King Æthelred and his brother Alfred fought against the *here* at Basing, and there the Danes took the victory. And two months after that King Æthelred and his brother Alfred fought against the *here* at *Meretun*, and they were in two hosts, and they put both to flight and far into the day had the victory, and there were many dead killed on each side, and the Danes had control of the battlefield, and there Bishop Heahmund was killed and many good men.

And after this battle there came a great summer fleet. And after that, after Easter, King Æthelred died, and he reigned for five years, and his body lies at Wimborne. Then his brother Alfred son of Æpelwulf became king, and a month after that King Alfred fought against the whole *here* with a small force at Wilton and far into the day put it to flight, and the Danes had control of the battlefield.

And in that year nine general engagements were fought against the *here* in the kingdom south of the Thames, and in addition Alfred the king's brother and a single ealdorman and king's thegns often rode on uncounted raids, and in that year were killed nine earls and one king; and in that year the West Saxons made a truce⁸⁸ with the *here*.⁸⁹

In the first place, the annal accords with Clark's impression of restricted subject matter and vocabulary. The annal is around 375 words long, but it includes only one event, the death of King Æthelred and accession of Alfred, which is not directly part of the conflict with the Vikings. This conflict frames the annal, which begins with the arrival of the *here* and ends as Wessex concludes peace with it. From *Pa gemette*, part-way through the second line, five battles are described in succession, separated only by a note of the time intervals between them; the arrival of the *sumorlida* and death of Æthelred intervene between the fifth and sixth battles, and the final paragraph summarizes the year's events, indicating that yet further battles and skirmishes have not been fully described. Moreover, the vocabulary is highly formulaic; several phrases recur within this one annal and others can be matched in numerous other parts of the *Chronicle*.⁹⁰ The formulae of the *Chronicle* do not fully meet Milman Parry's classic definition because, the *Chronicle* not being

⁸⁸ See C.E.Fell, 'Unfrið: an Approach to a Definition', *Saga-Book* 21:1-2 (1982-3), 85-100 for the likely technical sense of *frið* in the context of the Viking invasions.

⁸⁹ Translations are mine; I have made use of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. G. N. Garmonsway, 2nd edn (London, 1972).

poetry, they are not ‘regularly employed under the same metrical conditions’; however, they are ‘group[s] of words [...] regularly employed [...] to express a given essential idea’.⁹¹

The battle descriptions of the *Chronicle* show a conjunction of formulaic vocabulary and structural repetition. Each conforms to a flexible but recurring pattern, selecting from a small range of predictable ingredients of which the chief are: the protagonist(s) (here usually ‘King Æthelred and his brother Alfred’); *gefeohtan wiþ* ‘to fight against’; the enemy, in this annal always the *here*, who are sometimes referred to by the pronoun *hie*; the place of the battle; and a statement of who won, expressed in one of two phrases, *sige namon* ‘they took the victory’ and *ahton wēlstowe gewald*, literally ‘they had control of the place of slaughter’. The first and fourth battles of 871 are described using these elements alone. A further common element is the statement that there was *micel wēl geslægen*, which appears in the account of the battle at Reading (the same idea is expressed in the closely related phrase *micel wēlsliht* with regard to the fifth battle). All these elements, which recur so prominently in this one long annal, are also characteristic of battle descriptions throughout the early *Chronicle*; all are used, for example, s.a. 823, 833, 845 and 851, and various combinations appear s.a. 571, 584, 675, 750, 777 and elsewhere. To them may be added comments on the sizes of the forces deployed, their position, the length of the battle, prominent dead and whether anybody was ‘put to flight’. Alternatively, the structure can be pared to the minimum, as in the annals for 652 and 753:

AN. .dclii. Her Cenwalh gefeaht æt Bradanforda be Afne.

Year 652. In this year Cenwalh fought at Bradford on Avon.

AN. .dccliii. Her Cūþred feaht wiþ Walas.

Year 753. In this year Cuthred fought against the Welsh.

⁹⁰ Thomas Bredehoft identifies the formulaic phrases used within the annal for 871: *Textual Histories*, p. 50.

⁹¹ M. Parry, ‘Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making: I. Homer and Homeric Style’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41 (1930), 73-147, reprinted in *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford, 1971), 266-324 (p. 272). See also Bredehoft’s comments, *Textual Histories*, p. 186, n. 23.

We can identify the existence of a battle *theme* in the *Alfredian Chronicle*, a theme in a sense close to that developed by Parry and Lord in their studies of Homer and Albanian oral poetry. The theme is defined as a ‘group[] of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style’; two examples given by Lord of themes in Albanian epic are the themes of the gathering of heroes and the writing of a letter. The theme has characteristic elements and regularly incorporates the same formulaic phrases, but it can be realised at greater or lesser length according to the demands of context or the appetite of the audience.⁹²

The repetitious structures of the *Chronicle* reinforce the restricted nature of its vocabulary and create the impression of impartiality and sparse factuality remarked on by Cecily Clark. The *Chronicle* does not share the languages of violence we have seen in the Alfredian translations. It lacks the dimensions of vividness, emotional colour and variety of incident characteristic of the *Orosius*. It is closer to the sparseness of *Orosius* book VI, but it signally lacks the insistence on moral and religious meanings that the *Orosius* shares with the more theoretical considerations of warfare and kingship in Alfred’s personal works. The elements that the *Chronicle* excludes are highlighted further by examination of how Asser modifies *Chronicle* material incorporated into the *Life of Alfred*.

Asser’s version of the annal for 871 runs to nine chapters and just over seven pages in Stevenson’s edition (even though it misses out the battle of *Meretun*), so it is not possible to quote it in full. Here as a sample is his rendering of the battle at Reading, the second battle of the year:

His ibi ita gestis, post quatuor dies Æthered, rex et Ælfred, frater eius, adunatis viribus congregatoque exercitu, Rædigum adierunt. Cumque usque ad portam arcis pervenisset, caedendo et prosternendo quoscunque de paganis extra arcem invenissent, pagani non segnus certabant, lupino more, totis portis erumpentes, totis viribus bellum perquirent. Ibi diu et atrociter ex utraque parte dimicatum est, pro dolor! Christianis demum terga vertentibus, pagani, victoriam accipientes, loco funeris dominati sunt, ibique Æthelwulfus praefatus comes inter ceteros occubuit.

Four days after these things had happened there, King Æthelred and his brother Alfred combined forces, assembled an army, and went to Reading.

⁹² A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 68-9 and 81-86.

When they had reached the gate of the stronghold by hacking and cutting down all the pagans whom they had found outside, the pagans fought no less keenly; like wolves they burst out of the gate and joined battle with all their might. Both sides fought there for a long time, and fought fiercely, but alas, the Christians eventually turned their backs, and the pagans won the victory and were masters of the battlefield; and the Ealdorman Æthelwulf mentioned above fell there, among others.⁹³

In parts this is a close translation. The recurrent phrases *Ebered cyning 7 Elfred his broþur* and *ahton wēlstowe gewald* have been rendered literally; the compound *wēlstowe* has been separated into its constituent parts, *stowe* ‘place’ becoming *locus* and *wēl* (standardized as *wæl*) ‘slaughter, dead bodies’ becoming *funus* ‘corpse, violent death’. In fact *loco funeris dominati sunt* for *ahton wēlstowe gewald* and *victoriam accipientes* or *capientes* for *sige namon* are used quite consistently in Asser’s account of 871, though Asser tends to employ both together and in the *Chronicle* they are alternatives.⁹⁴ Asser’s language thus to some extent reflects the formulaic vocabulary of his source. But he is not limited by the structure of the battle theme. Asser places more emphasis than the *Chronicle* on the movement to Reading, and the battle has no clear beginning: the fighting escalates as the West Saxons hack their way along the defended approach to the fortress and then encounter the bulk of the Viking force. The *Life* has previously described the construction of a rampart to the south of the estate. Asser has an additional source and gives more information than the *Chronicle* about specifics of terrain and geography. He thus makes it clear that the battle of Reading is a different kind of battle from, say the battle of Ashdown: the former is an attack on a defended place, whereas the latter takes place on open ground and the armies clash around a ‘rather small and solitary thorn tree’.⁹⁵

To greater differentiation between episodes Asser adds a greater range of vocabulary. He has three different expressions for ‘fight’ in four lines,⁹⁶ *certabant*, *bellum perquirent* and *dimicatum est*, and pairs near synonyms, *caedando et prosternando*, to describe how the West Saxons cut their swathe to the gate. Further,

⁹³ Asser, *Life*, ch. 36. Keynes and Lapidge translate *pagani* as ‘Vikings’; I have altered their translation in this respect.

⁹⁴ Asser, *Life*, ch. 35 ll. 14-15, ch. 36 ll. 10-11, ch. 40 ll. 7-8, ch. 42 ll. 27-8.

⁹⁵ *unica spinosa arbor, brevis admodum*, Asser, *Life*, ch. 39 ll. 5-6.

⁹⁶ Four lines in Stevenson’s edition, but only three in my transcript.

he tries to express the energy and turbulence of battle. The anaphora of *totis portis [...] totis viribus* is not conveyed by Keynes and Lapidge's translation: the Vikings come from *all* the gates and fight with *all* their strength; moreover, they *burst* out (*erumpentes*). Battle is a matter of suddenness, of extremes, of verbal as well as physical force. It unleashes animal energies: the Vikings are fierce *lupino more*. Elsewhere we are told Alfred is courageous *apriuo more* ('like a wild boar', ch. 38, l. 12). Asser emphasizes that Alfred was a keen huntsman;⁹⁷ hunting and battle were linked in the lives and thought of early medieval aristocrats, for both brought contact with death and the wild.⁹⁸ But if the boar is a sign of Alfred's courage and determination, the wolf is a sign of the evil of the Vikings. In Old English poetry, the wolf is one of the Beasts of Battle, a carrion eater, the sinister companion of the outcast in *Maxims I*.⁹⁹ Asser makes the relative moral standing of the combatants at Reading very clear: they are the *Christiani* and the *pagani*. His emotional involvement too is clear; *proh dolor!* he exclaims when the Christians 'turn their backs' – presumably a euphemistic way of saying that they took to what he calls, when the Vikings adopt it, *opprobriosam fugam* ('ignominious flight', ch. 39, l. 14).

Variation and fullness of vocabulary are aesthetic goals for Asser. He has been seen as part of a tradition of Latinity, the so-called 'hermeneutic' tradition, which was marked by its fondness for hunting out obscure vocabulary.¹⁰⁰ Hermeneutic vocabulary is often seen as a vehicle more for the display of learning than for producing literary effects. Asser's Latin has been criticized for its obscurity and clumsiness.¹⁰¹ His style is in fact inconsistent. The passages based on the *Chronicle* tend to be freer of difficult words and involved syntax than the passages original to Asser; the *Chronicle*'s sparse style seems to exert an influence on Asser's

⁹⁷ Asser, *Life*, ch. 22 ll. 15-19, ch. 74 ll. 18-19, ch. 76 l. 4.

⁹⁸ For discussion of the role of hunting in the education of warriors, see H. Ellis Davidson, 'The Training of Warriors', in *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. S. Chadwick Hawkes, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 21 (1989), 11-23.

⁹⁹ *Maxims I* ll. 146-7. On the beasts of battle, see F. P. Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *NM* 56 (1955), 81-90; M. S. Griffith, 'Convention and originality in the Old English "beasts of battle" typescene', *ASE* 22 (1993), 179-99.

¹⁰⁰ M. Lapidge, 'The hermeneutic style in tenth-century Anglo-Latin literature', *ASE* 4 (1975): 67-111.

¹⁰¹ Smyth, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 271-300; C. N. L. Brooke, 'Historical Writing in England Between 850 and 1150', *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 17 (1970), 223-247 (p. 232); Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p.54; W. H. Stevenson, 'Introduction', in Asser, *Life*, pp. xi-cxxxi (pp. lxxxix-xci).

prose. Nonetheless, Asser transforms the Chronicle account into something verbally richer and more openly rhetorical.

Asser's presentation of conflict aims at immediacy and involvement. He attempts to convey something of the experience of battle (an experience which he may well not have had): in his account of the battle of Ashdown, for instance, he draws attention to its noisiness, describing how the two sides clash *cum ingenti omnium clamore* ('With loud shouting from all', ch. 39, l. 8). Further, Asser reproduces the conflict he describes with verbal attacks upon the Vikings. Not only are they wolves and pagans, they are *exosae memoriae* ('of hateful memory', ch. 35, ll. 2-3). They are habitually treacherous (*solita fallacia utens*, 'practising their usual treachery', ch. 49, ll. 17-18). Their fierce fighting is, where possible, attributed to desperation rather than to valour (*dolore et necessitate compulsi*, 'driven on by grief and necessity', ch. 27, ll. 21-22) and when they weaken it is *divino iudicio* ('by divine judgement', ch. 39, l. 12). Even their masculinity is impugned: they flee from Winchester in 860 *muliebriter* ('like women', ch. 18, l. 14). Their opponents, in direct contrast, have fought *viriliter* (ch. 18, ll. 11-12).¹⁰² But then the West Saxons have God on their side: at Ashdown Alfred is *divino fretus consilio et adiutorio fultus* ('supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help', ch. 38 ll. 14-15).

Beside Asser's committed and polemical account, the *Alfredian Chronicle* seems even more spare and plain. Asser is interested in motivation, in moral character and in the role of God. He adds to the *Chronicle* the explicit evaluative and religious dimension it largely excludes; specifically, he portrays conflict with the Danes as a struggle of Christianity against paganism. The moral differences between Danes and English are elaborated by reference to factors such as fear, compulsion and courage, further matters that the *Chronicle* does not mention. Comparison with Asser confirms the impression that, rhetorically, the *Chronicle* is conspicuously non-violent.

¹⁰² *Viriliter* is the adverb from *virilis*, 'manly, virile': Lewis and Short, p. 1996.

How are we to explain the fact that Asser narrates the Viking wars violently while the *Alfredian Chronicle* does not? In the first place, there are obvious generic differences between the two texts; the *Life of Alfred* and the *Chronicle* look to different literary models. Various models and influences have been identified for Asser, including Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, the lives of Louis the Pious by Thegan and the 'Astronomer' (both of which incorporate annalistic material) and mirrors for princes, in particular the *Liber de rectoribus Christianis* of Sedulius Scottus.¹⁰³ Matthew Kempshall observes that these possible influences may work together with each other and with older sources of political ideology to shape the *Life of Alfred*; he argues for the particular importance of Gregory the Great's *Cura Pastoralis*.¹⁰⁴ All these different models have a strong element of religious interpretation and of rhetorical elaboration. Einhard presents his subject as an exemplary Christian ruler whose career has been shaped by God; Sedulius seeks to teach, to persuade and to draw sharp moral contrasts between good and bad rulership.

The antecedents of the *Chronicle* are terser and plainer texts. Chronicle-writing is generally held to have originated in the keeping of notes in Easter tables, as a way of marking and remembering the years.¹⁰⁵ The seventh and later centuries saw the production of fuller chronicles such as Bede's *Chronica Maiora*, the Royal Frankish Annals and the Annals of St Bertin; Bede had a considerable influence on continental historiography and the compilation of the *Alfredian Chronicle* was doubtless stimulated by both Bede's example and that of the continental annalists.¹⁰⁶ These literary forebears, though much more expansive than the Easter tables, remain limited by the year-by-year structure that is also (in its clarity and focus on dates) their strength. Such a structure militates against continuous narrative; breaking the

¹⁰³ See generally Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 55-6 and p. 222, n. 115. On Einhard as a model, see M. Schütt, 'The Literary Form of Asser's *Vita Alfredi*', *EHR* 62 (1957), 209-20; on Thegan and the 'Astronomer', see J. Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', in *The Inheritance of Historiography 350-900*, ed. C. Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman, Exeter Studies in History 12 (1986), 115-35 (pp. 115-119); Scharer, 'Writing of History', pp. 192-205, argues for Einhard's debt to Sedulius Scottus.

¹⁰⁴ Kempshall, 'No Bishop, No King', pp. 106-7.

¹⁰⁵ A. Gransden, 'The chronicles of medieval England and Scotland: Part I', *Journal of Medieval History* 16: 2 (1990), p. 130; G. N. Garmonsway, 'Introduction', in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Garmonsway, pp. xiii-xliii (pp. xviii-xxi and plate pp. xxii-xxiii); Clark, 'Narrative Mode', p. 218.

past into yearly chunks places the emphasis on individual events rather than the connections between them and the wider patterns in which they partake.¹⁰⁷ It is true that Bede and the chroniclers of the Franks are more ready than the Alfredian chronicler(s) to offer evaluative and interpretative comment. Here is a passage from the *Annals of St Bertin* (s.a. 845) that employs the familiar language of attack-as-punishment:

Nortmanni [...] cuncta mari loca finitima diripiunt [...] peccatis nostris diuinae bonitatis aequitatis nimium offensa taliter christianorum terras et regna attriuerit

The Northmen [...] devastated all the coastal regions [...] God in his goodness and justice, so much offended by our sins, had thus worn down the lands of the Christians¹⁰⁸

Asser in adapting material from the *Chronicle* increased its resemblance to continental annals such as this. We can be fairly sure that the *Chronicle* incorporates earlier English annals that do not survive independently, and thus we can see it as representing in some ways an earlier stage in the development of the chronicle form.¹⁰⁹ However, to view the *Chronicle* simply as undeveloped or lacking is to miss the extent to which it is, in fact, a powerful text – a text that exerts an effect upon an audience and that enshrines and reinforces a particular ideology.

It is helpful here to shift the terms of the inquiry and to ask not so much what the *Chronicle* does not do as what it does do. Here we may pick up once more the parallel between the language of the *Chronicle* and that of *Orosius* book VI. We have noted that a plain style in the representation of violence is associated with an emphasis on order and the marriage of kingly and divine power both in the *Orosius* and, to some extent, in other Alfredian translations. As I hope to have suggested by the identification of a battle theme in the text, the highly restricted representative

¹⁰⁶ See J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Franks and the English in the Ninth Century: Some Common Historical Interests', in *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 201-16 (pp. 202-3 and 209-10).

¹⁰⁷ See J. Thormann, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Poems and the Making of the English Nation', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and J. D. Niles (Gainesville, FL, 1997), pp. 60-85 (pp. 61-2).

¹⁰⁸ *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, ed. F. Grat, J. Vielliard and S. Clémencet, Société de l'Histoire de France 470 (1964), p. 50; trans. J. Nelson, *The Annals of St Bertin. Tenth Century Histories Volume I*, Manchester Medieval Sources series (1991), pp. 61-2.

strategies of the *Chronicle* are at the same time highly patterned. I shall go on to argue that the brevity and omissions of the *Chronicle*'s account of history are part of a careful control of content in order to convey a political message.

One aspect in which a contrast with Asser is again instructive is the issue of political unity. A prominent concern of Asser's is the duty owed by peoples to their king. He offers several awful examples of failure in this duty. Two are the rebellion of Alfred's brother Æthelbald against his father King Æthelwulf, which only by the great forbearance of the latter fails to turn into civil war, and the dangerous laziness and disobedience of the West Saxons in implementing Alfred's military reforms.¹¹⁰ The common good, in Asser's account, is something which the king has to work for by 'despising popular stupidity and stubbornness'.¹¹¹ The ethic of loyalty is also a concern in the *Chronicle*; it is, for example, the governing motif of the much-discussed Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode.¹¹² But the *Chronicle* suppresses all mention of disunity in Wessex; Æthelbald's rebellion is never mentioned. This silence has been regarded as an indication that the *Chronicle* originated in the same area as the rebellion, where it was felt to be a sensitive subject.¹¹³ However, it is rather a telling example of the difference between Asser and the *Chronicle*. Asser highlights the problem of disloyalty and stridently condemns the disloyal. In contrast, by giving an impression of internal political stability the *Chronicle* builds up, or rather allows one to assume, the existence of a single West Saxon viewpoint. Looking again at the *Alfredian Chronicle*, we find in general a consistent and ← unquestioned identification of the interests of leaders and people. Battles can be waged by a leader (as s.a.675, 796) or a group (as s.a.823) or both at once (as s.a.800). In the annal for 871 all the battles are waged by named leaders, but peace is concluded by the West Saxons. Conflict between peoples and their kings is the sort

¹⁰⁹ On the incorporation of earlier annals, see A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), pp. 36-7; Garmonsway, 'Introduction', pp. xl-xlii.

¹¹⁰ Asser, *Life*, ch. 12 and ch. 91 ll. 45-72.

¹¹¹ [*Vulgarem stultitiam et pertinaciam...abominando*, *ibid.*, ch. 91 ll. 42-3.

¹¹² See for example R. Waterhouse, 'The Theme and Structure of 755 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', *NM* 70 (1969), 630-40; S. D. White, 'Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: The Story of Sigeberht, Cynewulf and Cyneheard', *Viator* 20 (1989), 1-18 (p. 4); J. M. Hill, *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic: Reconstructing Lordship in Early English Literature* (Gainesville, FL, 2000), p. 115.

¹¹³ F. M. Stenton, 'South-Western Element' pp. 22-3.

of thing that happens in Northumbria (s.a.867).¹¹⁴ The *Chronicle* assumes its readers' identification with a dominant West-Saxon viewpoint in which both king and people are subsumed. This identification is further reinforced by the recurrent patterns of violence built up in the *Chronicle*, especially by means of the battle theme.]

The battle theme from the beginning is associated with kings and their power, and in particular with the kings of Wessex. I have noted that the battle theme can be stripped down to a bare minimum, giving as examples the annals for 652 and 753 (quoted on page 48 above). Both of these annals consist of a subject, the verb (*ge*)*feohtan*, and one other detail, for 652 the place and for 753 the opponent. Neither entry gives any result for the battle: it seems to be enough that there was one. War is just what kings do. We have seen that Alfred's writings present war as part of the business of kings, intertwined with their duty to God and their other activities such as dispensing wealth and justice. In the *Chronicle*, fighting is the chief and almost the only business of kings; for the most part, kings are mentioned when they succeed, when they fight and when they die. In the genealogical preface to the *Chronicle* preserved in the Parker manuscript, conquest and paternal descent are the twin foundations of kingship. The arrival of Cerdic and his son Cynric in five ships and their conquest of Wessex (*geodon West Seaxna rice, 7 þæt wærun þa ærestan cyningas þe West Seaxna lond on Wealum geodon*, 'they overran the kingdom of the West Saxons, and they were the first kings who overran the land of the West Saxons against the Welsh') is interleaved with their genealogy back to Woden and the tale of their descendents down to Alfred. Other commentators have discussed the way the genealogies in the *Chronicle* stress royal descent, focus on the line of Cerdic and present Alfred as the culmination of a glorious story, the inheritor of Cerdic's conquest.¹¹⁵ I want to stress that the genealogical preface illustrates particularly clearly the centrality of warfare to the presentation of kingship in the *Chronicle*. A complementary relationship of warfare with piety and wisdom is not so much integrated into the doings of kings as signalled by the *Chronicle*'s parallel record of the succession of bishops (see for example s.a. 660, 668, 678, 690, 736,

¹¹⁴ See D.P. Kirby 'Northumbria in the Ninth Century', in D.M. Metcalf (ed.), *Coinage in Ninth-Century Northumbria: The Tenth Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History*, BAR British Series 180 (1987), pp. 11-27 (pp. 11-12 and 18-19).

745, 763). Fighting is the mark of kingship-in-action; it is how kings enter the historical record and how they display their power.¹¹⁶

The power and legitimacy of the fighting king, Alfred, and the identification between king and people are further reinforced by opposition to a collective enemy, the Vikings. In view of the currency of fighting and conquest as signs of power in the *Chronicle*, we may observe a striking contrast between the violence of the Vikings as it is presented in the *Chronicle* and the violence of the West Saxons and their king. If we look at the Battle of Ashdown in the annal for 871, we find there are nine verbs (I ignore those elided) and of these two have West Saxon subjects, six have Viking subjects, and one is performed by both (*onfeohtende wæron*). However, the three West Saxon verbs all denote positive action and achievement (*gefeahrt*, *gefeahrt*, *gefliemde*) whereas three of the Viking verbs are forms of the verb ‘to be’, describing the disposition of the two hosts, and the others are passive constructions with *wearþ*:

gefeahrt Eþered cyning 7 Eþfred his broþur wiþ alne þone here [...] þa
gefeahrt se cyning Eþered wiþ þara cyninga getruman 7 Eþfred his broþur wiþ
þara eorla getruman

King Æthelred and Alfred his brother fought against the whole *here* [...] then King Æthelred fought against the troop of the kings and Alfred his brother against the troop of the earls

as against:

hie wærun on twæm gefylcum; on oþrum wæs Bagsecg 7 Helfdene [...] on
oþrum wæron þa eorlas [...] **wearþ** se cyning Bagsecg **ofslægen** [...] **wearþ**
Sidroc eorl **ofslægen** [...] 7 þa hergas begen [wurdon] **gefliemde**

they were in two hosts; in one was King Bagsecg and Halfdan [...] in the other were the earls...King Bagsecg was killed...earl Sidroc was killed [...] the hosts were both put to flight

¹¹⁵ See Scharer, ‘The Writing of History’, pp. 178-82 and Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, pp. 14-38.

¹¹⁶ The centrality of warfare in the display of power is discussed with the respect to the classical and post-classical tradition by M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge and Paris, 1986), pp. 2-8.

The Vikings are observed and acted upon; the West Saxons act. The Vikings win four out of six battles in this annal and are thus four times the subject of *ahton wēlstowe gewald/sige namon*, but they are never the subject of *gefeohtan*; in fact, throughout the *Chronicle* the Vikings are never the subject of *gefeohtan*.¹¹⁷ Every battle begins with the West Saxons.

The distinction between the Viking and West Saxon roles is reinforced by what I would call the *norms of violence* as they operate in this text. Guy Halsall has argued that the Vikings aroused such horror in Western Europe partly because of their failure to adhere to the conventions of Western warfare. He points to the status of violence as communication and suggests that regularly used routes, agreed battle-sites, predictable patterns of reciprocal attack and shared religion guaranteeing oaths helped to make warfare manageable and meaningful for the Anglo-Saxons.¹¹⁸ I would argue that Halsall's ideas point also to norms that are embedded in the *Chronicle* text and reinforced by literary means. Whereas Asser offers explicit evaluative comment, the *Alfredian Chronicle* shapes expected behavioural patterns through omission, repetition and restriction of subject matter. Here again the battle theme has an important part to play, through its implicit prioritisation of a particular kind of fighting, the pitched battle.

It does so most notably by its use of the verb *gefeohtan*. In the annal for 871, each instance of *gefeohtan* clearly introduces a pitched battle, unified in place and limited in time (battles that go on till nightfall are worthy of comment). Comparison with Asser shows that these fights may in fact have varied somewhat in their circumstances,¹¹⁹ but the narrative pattern used for all of them makes them seem almost uniform. The noun for 'battle' is *gefeoht*, a form related to *gefeohtan*. *Gefeoht* appears as part of a compound in the summary of the events of 871: *wurdon .viii. folcgefeoht gefohten*, 'nine folk-fights (i.e. general engagements) were fought'. Where more than a couple of the basic elements of battle narrative are found,

¹¹⁷ *OE Corpus*.

¹¹⁸ G. Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society: the Ritual War in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Weapons and Warfare*, ed. Chadwick Hawkes, pp. 155-77; 'Playing by Whose Rules? A Further Look at Viking Atrocity in the Ninth Century', *Medieval History* 2:2 (1992), 2-12.

¹¹⁹ See p. 56 above.

gefeohtan does seem to mean ‘fought a battle’, and even in the very brief annal for 652, quoted above, the fact that the fighting occurs in a single, designated place implies a pitched battle. S.a. 835 a distinction is made between *gefeohtan* and *winnan*:

hie [...] wiþ Ecgbryht Westseaxna cyning winnende wæron. þa he þæt hierde 7 mid fierde ferde 7 him wiþ feaht æt Hengestdune

they [...] were fighting against Ecgbryht the king of the West Saxons. Then he heard about it and came with levies and fought against them at Hengestdown

Winnan is a process, an ongoing activity. It is even, in this instance, something you can do against someone without that someone knowing about it; it seems to imply general campaigning, harassing the locals, perhaps skirmishes and raiding. *Gefeohtan* (here *feohtan*) is, in contrast, a face-to-face matter at a designated place.

As has been mentioned, in some annals the battle theme is pared to the minimum, and this can mean that *gefeohtan* itself is the only indication of what kind of fighting occurred. For example, s.a. 607 we read:

Her Ceolwulf gefeaht wiþ Supleaxe.

In this year Ceolwulf fought against the South Saxons.

It is enough for the *Chronicle* to say that Ceolwulf fought – that he did what kings do – and ‘fought’, with its broad application to different kinds of violence, seems the best translation. However, the association of *(ge)feohtan* with the scenario of pitched battle and the distinction between *winnan* and *(ge)feohtan* prompt us to imagine Ceolwulf’s fighting as fighting in battle. Battle comes to stand metonymically for the whole process of campaigning, possibly raiding, negotiation and victory or stalemate that must have attended this conflict of neighbouring peoples.

The *Orosius* has more instances of *winnan* and *gewinn* than of *(ge)feohtan* and *gefeoht*, though it too distinguishes between *winnan* as ongoing struggle or war and *(ge)feohtan* as the fighting of individual battles:

Ymb xiiii gear þæs þe Ueriatu8 wið Romana winnan ongan, he wearð from his agnum monnum ofslagen, 7 swa oft swa hiene Romane mid gefeohte gesohton, he hie simle gefliemde.

14 years after Veriatu8 began to contend against the Romans he was killed by his own men, and as often as the Romans looked for him for a fight he always put them to flight. (*Orosius*, V.ii, 115/23-26)

Here *winnan* is used for Veriatu8' long-term struggle against the Romans and *gefeoht* for direct confrontations in the course of that struggle, face-to-face trials of force in which the Romans come off worst. The preference of the *Orosius* for *winnan* reflects its concentration on process, on the long-term trends of history, in contrast to the *Chronicle*'s focus on events. But the prioritization of the event of battle is not something accidentally produced by the annalistic form but something foregrounded by that form. It is in battle, not guerrilla warfare, that Veriatu8's achievement as a commander can be clearly seen. The *Orosius* conveys a sense that face-to-face battle is the proper way to fight. The form of the *Chronicle* and the vocabulary of its battle theme reinforce a cultural preference for pitched battle not peculiar to the *Chronicle*. Again, the phrase *ahton wēlstowe gewald* is suggestive: victory involves gaining control (*gewald*) over a small, representative patch of land, the place of slaughter. The variant *ungemetlic wæl geslægen* has been taken as one of the signs of common authorship of the *Chronicle* and the *Orosius*.¹²⁰ It has been shown that both linguistic and source evidence make common authorship unlikely.¹²¹ Rather, both texts draw on a conventional vocabulary that encodes common cultural assumptions about how warfare works. In the *Chronicle*, *gefeoht* is used metonymically for war because it was seen as the key event of war.

The Vikings disrupt this pattern. *Gefeohtan* has not, admittedly, been the only verb of violence in Anglo-Saxon England before their appearance: the early settlers and kings do plenty of conquering and capturing, and there have been a number of murders, a notable burning, and at least one siege.¹²² But the *Chronicle* shows Vikings habitually harrying, overrunning and occupying rather than fighting

¹²⁰ Plummer, *Chronicles Parallel*, II, cvi-cviii; K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953), 287-346 (pp. 335-6 and notes).

¹²¹ J. Batley, 'World History', 177-94; Batley, *Orosius*, pp. lxxxiii-lxxxvi.

¹²² E.g., s.a. 530 capture of Isle of Wight; 661 Wulfhere harries up to Ashdown; 687 burning of Mul; 721 Ine kills Cynewulf; 491 siege of Anderida.

battles;¹²³ their targets are towns and regions rather than kings and armies. In fact much of the *Chronicle* account of Alfred's reign is a record of the incessant movements of the Danes.¹²⁴ Richard Abels argues that the Vikings deliberately employed a strategy of avoiding battle, preferring plundering rich and defenceless targets to facing an armed enemy in an open place.¹²⁵ In the terms of the *Alfredian Chronicle*, however, the Vikings go against the long-established tradition of Anglo-Saxon royalty and nobility by apparently avoiding proper battles. As we have seen, they are never presented as initiating the battles in which they are involved. Further, they employ stealth (*bestelan*).¹²⁶ This is quite the opposite of the open and honest achievement of a Cynegils and Cuichelm thrashing the Welsh.¹²⁷ If we return once more to the annal for 871, we find that at Wilton the Danes are *gefliemde* for much of the day; they take to shameful flight even in a battle they win. (Simon Keynes comments on this interesting point as a symptom of how the *Chronicle* makes Alfred and the West Saxons look as good as possible, even when they lose).¹²⁸ A search for occurrences of *gefliemde* and *gefliemdon* in the *Chronicle* yields 16 matches; of these nine denote flight by the Danes and five flight by other enemies of the West Saxons, the British and Welsh. The other two instances are Pope Leo being expelled by the Romans s.a. 797 and the defeat of Beorhtwulf of Mercia in 851.¹²⁹ In this, admittedly partial sample (it does not include data for other verbs of flight), the West Saxons are never put to flight, and the Vikings only put enemies to flight once, even though the annals for the ninth century record many Danish victories.

Sparse vocabulary and predictable structures give the *Alfredian Chronicle* an impersonal tone. However, the *Chronicle*'s representation of violence, in particular of the Viking wars, is highly favourable to Alfred and reinforces strong arguments

¹²³ E.g., s.a. 870, 832, 879, 880, etc

¹²⁴ E.g. the annals for 868, 869, 872, 873 and 875 all begin *Her for se here*.

¹²⁵ R. Abels, 'English Logistics and Military Administration, 871-1066: the Impact of the Viking Wars', in *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in European Perspective, AD 1-1300. Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish Museum, Copenhagen, 2-4 May 1996*, ed. A. N. Jørgensen & B. L. Clausen (Copenhagen, 1997), pp. 257-265 (pp. 258-9); for similar comments on Viking tactics see also A. P. Smyth, 'The Vikings in Britain', in *The Making of Britain: The Dark Ages*, ed. L. M. Smith (Basingstoke & London, 1984), pp. 105-116 (pp. 107-8), and P. Griffith, *The Viking Art of War* (London, 1995), p. 117.

¹²⁶ S.a. 876 twice, 878.

¹²⁷ S.a. 614.

¹²⁸ S. Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *TRHS* 5th series 36 (1986), 195-217 (p. 199).

¹²⁹ *OE Corpus*.

for associating the text with king and court. The compiler(s) made a virtue of the atomised annalistic form, using its small units of information to set up significant patterns of repetition and prioritization. The *Chronicle* retreads over and over the message of the power of Alfred's dynasty, signalled by their fighting. Inseparable from this message of power is the representation of the most immediate threat to that power, the Danes. The closing annals of the *Alfredian Chronicle* vigilantly record the movements of the Danes on the continent; in 892 they returned to England, as the continuator records. The structure and vocabulary of the battle theme in the *Chronicle* encode a sense of the norms of violence that undergirds the legitimacy of the Cerdicings and contrasts them and their people with the Vikings. The latter are associated with movement (flight, harrying) and with passivity, the West Saxons with activity and with standing firm. The contrast reinforces a sense of unity between and among the West Saxon leaders and people. At the same time, crucially, the *Chronicle* in its undramatic style records the depredations of the invaders but does not allow them to seem too horrifying. As in *Orosius* book VI, an unadorned or non-violent presentation of violence goes hand in hand with a stress on order. The *Chronicle* records the succession and success of legitimate kings; it also contains and orders the violence of their foreign enemies.]

The parallel with the *Orosius* highlights the fact that many of the *Chronicle's* effects are achieved by omission. The most notable omission is the overt evaluative and religious dimension that the *Orosius*, the preface to *Pastoral Care* and Asser all bring to issues of both violence and kingship. The *Chronicle* concentrates on warfare at the expense of wisdom. To conclude this chapter, let us now turn again to Asser's *Life of King Alfred*. Asser's expansion of the *Chronicle*, it is now apparent, makes explicit the value judgements implicit in the vernacular text: the praise of West Saxon bravery and aggression and the condemnation of the Vikings. The explicitly religious character that Asser gives to Alfred's wars against the Danes is part of Asser's portrayal of Alfred as a king pre-eminent in both warfare and wisdom, in accordance with the ideal of kingship we find in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*. However, Asser's *Life* is a text that many critics have found problematic. The place of the annalistic sections and the depiction of warfare in the *Life* are one source of the text's uneasy quality.

Warfare and wisdom in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*

Discussion has focused on two main critical problems in Asser's *Life*: the incorporation of a detailed but rather confusing account of Alfred's illnesses in chapter 74 and the apparent infelicities of structure that make the text seem awkward and sometimes incoherent. The illnesses have been the main focus of recent interpretations, just as they are the linchpin of Alfred Smyth's argument that the *Life* portrays a sickly, saintly Alfred who could not have been an acceptable leader in a warrior culture.¹³⁰ It has been observed that, if Alfred was prone to illness, this was something Asser as a panegyrist had to address and explain in order to defend the king's fitness to rule.¹³¹ Some commentators pursue the idea that Asser uses Alfred's illnesses in order to preach a message, a message either directed at subjects or potential allies, telling them about the king's holiness, or directed at the king himself, reminding him of the necessity of humility.¹³² The question of chapter 74 intersects with the problem of the text's structure, since explanations of chapter 74 generally hinge on a conception of the overriding purpose of the work and since the problematic character of this chapter is underlined by contrast with the warrior king portrayed in other chapters. D. P. Kirby found the structure so uneven as to point to composition in several imperfectly integrated stages.¹³³ C. N. L. Brooke engagingly characterizes the structure of the *Life* as 'a sandwich, or a pile of sandwiches', in which annalistic and descriptive passages alternate.¹³⁴ James Campbell identifies six sections and notes that the portions derived from the *Chronicle* deal with military matters, the other sections with Alfred's life and character.¹³⁵ Within the terms of the present discussion, we can assign the two modes of discourse in the *Life* to the themes of warfare and wisdom. The division of a royal life into campaigns on the

¹³⁰ Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*, pp. 151-2.

¹³¹ See P. Kershaw, 'Illness, power and prayer in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*', *EME* 10: 2 (2001), 201-224 (p. 209-10); Brooke, 'Historical Writing in England', p. 233.

¹³² For the former argument, see Scharer, 'Writing of history', pp. 190-191, and Nelson, 'Waiting for Alfred' p. 123; for the latter, see Kempshall, 'No Bishop, No King', pp. 119-21.

¹³³ Kirby, 'Asser', pp. 13-15; Frantzen, 'Alfred's Alfred', sees the *Life* as a composite work with a ninth-century core and later accretions.

¹³⁴ Brooke, 'Historical Writing', p. 232.

¹³⁵ Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', p. 115.

one hand and mores on the other is something Asser would have found in Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*; Einhard derived it from Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars*.¹³⁶

The non-annalistic descriptions of the *Life of Alfred* incorporate a number of other elements (such as Asser's autobiographical narrative in chapter 79 and the anecdote about criminal monks in chapters 96 and 97), but their main import is the depiction of Alfred as a pious and wise king.¹³⁷ The first conspicuous departure from the year-by-year structure (though not, in fact, the first departure from the *Chronicle*) comes with the description of Alfred's childhood, in which we are told that he was motivated *ab incunabilis* ('from the cradle') by *sapientiae desiderium* ('the desire for wisdom', ch. 22, ll. 7 and 8-9). Alfred's childhood is dominated by his zeal for learning and for prayer (chapters 23 and 24). Later chapters continue the topic of education directly (chapters 75 to 78 and 87 to 89) or show Alfred applying his wisdom, for example by inventing a clock (chapters 103 and 104) and by overseeing the administration of justice (chapters 105 and 106). These portions of the *Life* show Alfred acting as a king, governing his people, but their starting point is Alfred's personal religious life. As Matthew Kempshall notes, the external depredations of the Vikings are bracketed with the internal troubles of Alfred's body.¹³⁸ Both are *infestationes* (ch. 91, ll. 5 and 10) and difficulties in the way of his guidance of a kingdom and his efforts to study and pray. Asser talks about the cares of a king in a manner paralleled in the prefaces to the *Pastoral Care* and the *Boethius*, with their references to the worldly cares that impede study:¹³⁹

quando uero et aetate erat prouector et incessabilius die noctuque, immo omnibus istius insulae medicis incognitis infirmitatibus, internisque atque externis regiae potestatis sollicitudinibus, necnon et paganorum terra marique infestationibus occupatus, immo etiam perturbatus, magistros et scriptores aliquantula ex parte habebat, legere ut non poterat.

¹³⁶ On Einhard's structural debt to Suetonius, see P. E. Dutton, 'An Introduction to Einhard', in *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard*, ed. and trans. P. E. Dutton, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 3 (1998), pp. xi-xli (p. xxi); see also F. L. Ganshof, 'Einhard, biographer of Charlemagne', in *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History*, trans. J. Sondheimer (London, 1971), pp. 1-16.

¹³⁷ Wisdom is a central theme of the *Life* for Scharer, 'Writing of History' and Kempshall, 'No Bishop, No King'; Kirby argues that Asser set out to present Alfred as a scholarly king and later developed this idea, 'Asser and his Life', pp. 20 and 23.

¹³⁸ Kempshall, 'No Bishop, No King', p. 119.

¹³⁹ *Pastoral Care*, Preface, p. 7, ll. 17-18; *Boethius*, Proem, p. 1, ll. 2-8.

For when he was older, and more incessantly preoccupied by day and night with – or rather harassed by – all kinds of illnesses unknown to the physicians of this island, as well as by the cares (both domestic and foreign) of the royal office, and also by the incursions of the Vikings by land and sea, he had the teachers and scribes to some small extent, but he was unable to study. (Ch. 25, ll. 6-12)¹⁴⁰

In the non-annalistic portions of the *Life* the Vikings appear as one of the obstacles that Alfred must overcome as he strives to be a holy king. Alfred's spiritual struggle is presented at times in intimate and even shocking detail; chapter 74's portrait of internal turmoil (both physical and spiritual) has certainly retained its power.

The portions of the *Life* derived from the *Chronicle* complement the 'wisdom' sections by presented Alfred's other side, as a military commander, and by placing him in the passage of power between members of his family, contested by internal rebellion and external attack. By insisting on a conflict of pagans and Christians in his adaptation of *Chronicle* material Asser builds links between the 'warfare' and 'wisdom' sections of the *Life*. The Viking wars come to appear as an armed equivalent of Alfred's battle for holiness and wisdom in his own life and in the life of his people. The greater immediacy and drama of Asser's battle descriptions are congruous with the intimate quality of the account of Alfred's anxieties, sufferings and labours. The *Alfredian Chronicle* praises Alfred as the representative of a long line of kings who are identified with their people and characterized by their victories. Asser has more of an interest in Alfred as an individual and in his sometimes conflictual relationship with his people, though the *Life* equally emphasizes Alfred's victories.

There remains, however, a sense of awkwardness in the structure of the *Life of Alfred*; there are inelegant duplications of material (such as the descriptions of Alfred's marriage in chapters 24 and 74) and apparent contradictions (notably over when Alfred learns to read). One source of awkwardness in the text, I would suggest, is the relationship between the 'warfare' and 'wisdom' sections. In chapter 21 Asser draws strident attention to the tension between these aspects of his work:

¹⁴⁰ Trans. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 76.

Sed, ut more navigantium loquar, ne diutius navim undis et velamentis concedentes, et a terra longius enavigantes longum circumferamur inter tantas bellorum clades et annorum enumerationes, ad id, quod nos maxime ad hoc opus incitavit, nobis redeundum esse censeo, scilicet aliquantulum, quantum meae cognitioni innotuit, de infantilibus et puerilibus domini mei venerabilis Ælfredi, Angulsaxonum regis, moribus hoc in loco breviter inserendum esse existimo.

But (to speak in nautical terms) so that I should no longer veer off course – having entrusted the ship to waves and sails, and having sailed quite far away from the land – among such terrible wars and in year-by-year reckoning, I think I should return to that which particularly inspired me to this work: in other words, I consider that some small account (as much as has come to my knowledge) of the infancy and boyhood of my esteemed lord Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, should be briefly inserted at this point. (ch. 21, ll. 9-18)¹⁴¹

This transition is polished and literary in its use of the nautical metaphor for composition, which provides a link with the nautical simile elsewhere used for government (ch. 91, ll. 28-35).¹⁴² It does not suggest a work imperfectly revised. However, chapter 21 presents the previous chapters, largely derived from the *Chronicle* and concerned with the Viking wars, as a digression from the main topic, Alfred's life. War (*tantas bellorum clades*) is compared to the open sea, a dangerous place into which Asser has found himself drawn willy-nilly. A few clauses later, reversing the hierarchy, Alfred's childhood is presented as an interlude 'briefly inserted' into the year-by-year account. We have a sense of two incompatible strands, each irrelevant or undermining to the other: the tale of war and victory on the one hand and Alfred's piety and love of learning on the other (it is in the chapter immediately following that we are introduced to his *sapientiae desiderium*).

Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, following the blueprint of Christian kingship that Alfred's circle derived from an authoritative tradition including such figures as Sedulius Scottus and Alcuin, portrays Alfred as pre-eminent in both warfare and wisdom. Yet there is a dissonance between warfare and wisdom that we can connect to the darker picture of worldly power in the *Orosius*, where warfare is associated with horror, suffering and godlessness. Asser colours in the *Chronicle* account of

¹⁴¹ Trans. *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴² On the nautical metaphor for composition, see Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 239, n. 45. S. Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln, NB, and London, 1991), pp. 61-96 explores the relationship between composition and government in Asser and in the Preface to *Pastoral Care* (see especially pp. 64 and 85).

Alfred's wars. The restrained, subtly patterned style of the *Chronicle* and the more dramatic and overtly polemical style used by Asser are alternative ways of harnessing the power of represented violence for argument. I have suggested that *Orosius* book VI and the *Alfredian Chronicle* display a correlation between a restricted treatment of violence and an emphasis on order and control. In the *Life*, violence is constantly interpreted and yet its meanings are less tightly controlled than in the *Chronicle*: the *Life of King Alfred* admits a note of moral unease over violence that competes with the stated lesson about Alfred's martial strength and Christian virtue.

We do not need to see the plurality of the meaning of violence in the *Life* as a failure on Asser's part. Rather, it is characteristic of Asser's confrontation of issues – such as Alfred's illnesses or the possibilities of dissent and rebellion – that the *Chronicle* suppresses. Janet Nelson argues that Asser's *Life* shows us an Alfred who is anxious about reconciling the demands of aristocratic masculinity with the current ideal of Christian purity, epitomised in the celibate, peaceful monk.¹⁴³ The *Life of King Alfred* presents a highly flattering image of Alfred to his subjects, but it also has a private and personal aspect; the *Chronicle* is very much a public record, an example of Anglo-Saxon official-speak. Just as translations such as the *Pastoral Care* face both inwards and outwards, inwards as part of Alfred's Christian quest, outwards in order to present him as a wise king, the *Life* is touched by the difficulties as well as the conclusions that must have characterised Alfred's re-examination of Christian kingship. The shadow of a debate over kingly violence can also be detected in the way the confident formulation of wise and warlike kingship in the preface to the *Pastoral Care* is counterpointed by the darkness of the *Orosius*. This was a time when penitentials continued to list penances for killing even in defensive war.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ J. M. Nelson, 'Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900', in *Masculinity*, ed. Hadley (London and New York, 1999), pp. 121-42 (on Alfred, pp.135-8).

¹⁴⁴ See G. I. A. D. Draper, 'Penitential Discipline and Public Wars in the Middle Ages', *International Review of the Red Cross* 1 (1961), 4-18; S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance 900-1050* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 190-6.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, this chapter has placed the *Alfredian Chronicle*, the principle record of the Viking wars to 890, in the wider context of literary production by Alfred and his associates. The main theme of the Alfredian corpus is a re-examination of Christian kingship and power in response to the political upheaval inflicted by the Vikings. For Alfred, a king must flourish in both warfare and wisdom and the two spheres interpenetrate and interact. The philosophical and historical translations executed by the king and his helpers show us Alfred's pursuit of wisdom, including an inquiry into the relationship between kingly power and divine order. The *Chronicle* concentrates on warfare, recording the succession of vigorous and martial kings of the West Saxons and contrasting the West Saxon way of war with that of the Vikings. Asser's *Life of Alfred* relates war against the Vikings to study and holiness by stressing that the Danes are religious enemies. However, the Old English *Orosius* and Asser indicate an undercurrent of moral unease over the involvement of kingly power in bloodshed.

The texts discussed in this chapter allow us to begin to explore relationships between the representation of violence and political power. All are part of the construction of an image of Alfred, the *Orosius* more indirectly in its development of the idea of *amweald*, the *Chronicle* and the *Life* more obviously in that they give flattering impressions of the king. The texts, especially the *Chronicle* in its norm-building, also display an attempt to examine and regulate the meanings of violence. They are in some ways a literary counterpart of the attempt we see in the laws to bring practices such as vengeance more firmly under royal control.¹⁴⁵

We find two different general approaches to the use of represented violence as a way of influencing an audience. These can be labelled violent and non-violent – though it must be noted that the spectrum from violent to non-violent is not very wide; it will be apparent as this thesis continues that Anglo-Saxon writers do not venture far into the lurid, grotesque or disgusting aspects of violence. The violent style, seen in the *Life* and in the earlier part of the *Orosius*, uses the shocking

dimension of violence to reinforce its arguments. The non-violent style gives an initial impression of impartiality and flatness of mood, but as seen in the *Chronicle* it is coupled with a careful selection of material and the incorporation of powerful, because silent, assumptions about viewpoint. Both the violent *Life of King Alfred* and the non-violent *Chronicle* reproduce the conflict they represent through their hostile portrayal of the Vikings. Though Alfred's victories were celebrated and he was finding the time and the material resources for a scholarly revival, Scandinavian raiders were a continuing danger; they returned to England from the continent in 892. The sparseness of the *Chronicle's* style is a careful control of register and it contains (indeed excludes) the potentially disruptive issue of moral unease over violence. It also, still more significantly, contains the violence of the Vikings. They are not allowed to be too intimidating a threat.

The present chapter has highlighted the importance of small details in Anglo-Saxon representations of violence, stressing elements such as selection of information, repetition and the attribution of active and passive roles. The foregoing discussion has also introduced issues that will be examined in more detail in future chapters. The question of the moral implications of violence and of the relationship between the demands of Christianity and those of the warrior ethic will resurface in chapter three, which deals with approaches to the Vikings in the writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan. Chapter two will address another source of unease in representations of violence, the threat of trauma and bereavement. I have argued that the *Alfredian Chronicle* promotes a common viewpoint for the West Saxons and their king; in chapter two I will also look in more depth at the way the representation of violence can be used construct community.

¹⁴⁵ See Halsall, 'Violence and Society', pp. 7-9, on kings trying to control definitions of legitimate and illegitimate violence.

Chapter Two

Violence and Community: *The Battle of Maldon and The Battle of Brunanburh*

The Battle of Maldon and *The Battle of Brunanburh* are important to a study of approaches to the violence of the Viking Age because they are the chief poetic texts in English to recount conflict with the Vikings.¹ *Brunanburh*, preserved as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 937 (MSS A, B, C and D), recounts the victory of King Æthelstan of Wessex and his brother Edmund over a coalition of Scots and Dublin Norse. It begins by announcing Æthelstan's triumph, offers an allusive portrayal of the battle, dwells on the departure of the humiliated invaders and concludes by comparing the battle to the Anglo-Saxon conquest: not since the Angles and Saxons defeated the Britons has there been such bloodshed. *Maldon*, in contrast, tells of the defeat of an English force by Scandinavian invaders at Maldon, Essex, in 991. The poem survives in fragmentary form (the beginning and end are missing) in an eighteenth-century transcript; the manuscript, in which the poem was already mutilated, was destroyed in the Cotton fire.² As it stands, *Maldon* begins with Byrhtnoth, ealdorman of Essex, preparing his troops to face a contingent of Vikings, who are camped on an island separated from the mainland by a narrow channel bridged at low tide by a causeway. There is a parley between Byrhtnoth and the Vikings' spokesman; the causeway is defended until the Vikings request, and are granted, passage; there is then a pitched battle. Byrhtnoth is killed, some of his followers flee, and the fragment breaks off as the remaining warriors swear to avenge their lord and plunge into the fray to their deaths.

The precise value of these poems to modern historians is a matter of debate. *Brunanburh* describes an event of immense political significance as much to the kingdom of the Scots as to Wessex.³ Further, it is a source for relations between the English kingdoms – rapidly being absorbed by an expanding Wessex – and the

¹ *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. E. V. Gordon, with a supplement by D. G. Scragg (Manchester, 1976); *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1938). Quotations of *Brunanburh* are from the critical text, pp. 93-5.

² MS BL Cotton Otho A.xii; discussed by D. Scragg, 'The Battle of Maldon', in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 15-17.

³ M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History*, revised edn (London, 1992), p. 45.

settled Scandinavians of the British Isles, who in this poem take their place alongside other neighbouring, rival peoples. It is the only text treated in the present thesis to emanate from this distinctive phase of English-Viking relations, in between the two main periods of raiding and invasion. However, although *Brunanburh* is incorporated in the *Chronicle*, and although the other sources for the battle are for the most part considerably later, the poem is remarkably unspecific and lacks historical detail.⁴ *Maldon*, in contrast, is a highly circumstantial account offering detailed topographical information that tallies with what can be reconstructed of the Blackwater estuary in the tenth-century.⁵ Some critics have viewed the poem as a historically exact report.⁶ However, there are several accounts of this battle and they differ significantly from each other. Alternative assessments of the poem range from seeing it as an imaginative reconstruction or a reinterpretation of the battle in the light of ongoing political concerns to treating it as a largely fictional account in which only Byrhtnoth's name and death and the proximity of the settlement of Maldon need have a factual basis.⁷

Though *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* have an uncertain standing as sources for the events of the Viking Age, they are important evidence for the history of identities and the way the Anglo-Saxons thought about themselves and their past. *Brunanburh*, in particular, has been related to English ethnogenesis: Janet Thormann argues that the chronicle poems begin to articulate a concept of national destiny under the providence of God, while Edward B. Irving Jr. calls *Brunanburh* 'one of the earliest documents in English to show any real sense of nationalism or patriotism'.⁸ In dealing directly with English characters and political events

⁴ The best discussion of the historical battle and the various sources is still Campbell, *Brunanburh*, pp. 43-80; relevant extracts are printed on pp. 147-60.

⁵ G. and S. Petty, 'A Geological Reconstruction of the Site of the Battle of Maldon', in *Battle of Maldon*, ed. Cooper, pp. 159-69.

⁶ E. B. Irving, Jr., 'The Heroic Style in *The Battle of Maldon*', *Studies in Philology* 58 (1961), 457-67; O. D. Macrae-Gibson, 'How Historical is *The Battle of Maldon*?' *Medium Ævum* 39: 2 (1970), 89-107.

⁷ For the last view, E. I. Condren, 'From Politics to Poetry: Ambivalent Ethics in *The Battle of Maldon*', *Mediævalia* 17 (1994 for 1991), 53-66; for various more moderate positions, G. Clark, 'Maldon: History, Poetry, Truth', in *De gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir*, ed. J. M. Foley, The Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition 11 (1992), pp. 66-84; A. Williams, 'The Battle of Maldon and "The Battle of Maldon": History, Poetry and Propaganda', *Medieval History* 2:2 (1992), 35-44; P. Dean, 'History Versus Poetry: *The Battle of Maldon*', *NM* 93 (1992), 99-108.

⁸ J. Thormann, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Poems and the Making of the English Nation', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and J. D. Niles (Gainesville, FL,

Brunanburh and *Maldon* stand apart from heroic poems such as *Beowulf*, *Waldere* and *Widsith*, but an interest, if not in nationhood, then in community recurs through the Old English poetic corpus.⁹ The present chapter will look at *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* as poems in which issues of belonging and group identity are developed in conjunction with the explicit portrayal of violence.

While *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* are poems of community, they are also poems about death. This is more obviously true with regard to *Maldon*, which commemorates a defeat and memorializes battle-dead; yet *Brunanburh* also arises from a recent experience of bloodshed and stresses that battle entails deaths. Indeed, both poems do more than record death: they dwell on it, they describe it. In the sense developed in my introduction, these are violent texts – texts more descriptive and verbally elaborate than the prose texts considered in the previous chapter and thus with the potential to be more emotionally disturbing in their depiction of violence. The present chapter will explore the emotional dimensions of *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* as well as considering how they construct community. Starting from a theoretical discussion of community, it will go on to analyse the poems in terms of tensions of wholeness and fragmentation: the wholeness of the unified community, the healthy body and the coherent text versus the fragmentation of disunity, wounding and textual disruption.

Community versus violence?

Community implies unity, togetherness, harmony and belonging; violence is about disruption, destruction, difference and conflict. The marriage of community and violence in *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* seems contradictory. At the same time, it is entirely familiar: after all the great poems of community, national epics such as the

1997), pp. 60-85; E. B. Irving, Jr., 'The charge of the Saxon brigade: Tennyson's *Battle of Brunanburh*', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Scragg and C. Weinberg, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 29 (2000), pp. 174-93 (p. 183).

⁹ On the lack of 'national sentiment' in heroic poetry, see H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 34; on community in Old English poetry, see H. Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 18 (1996).

Iliad and the *Kalevala*, are generally poems of fighting and killing.¹⁰ In order to delve further into its relationship with violence, one must begin by asking what exactly is meant by community.

Community is a notoriously elusive and polyvalent term.¹¹ To begin with, it is necessary to distinguish community as an abstract concept or ideal from *the* community, the social milieu in which people live, and particular *communities*, such as the villages or towns which might be the object of a historical or sociological 'community study'. The distinction is the more necessary since these usages of 'community' tend to infect each other. For example, the policy of accommodating mental patients in their own homes rather than in hospitals is labelled 'care in the community'. In this phrase 'community' means the arena of day-to-day as opposed to institutional life, but it is also used for its positive connotations of integration and personal contact (though given the extensive media criticism of the policy these connotations appear ironic to many).¹² Historical work on community and communities has been affected by the projection of an ideal of community onto the social patterns of the past. The pre-modern community has often been regarded as a close-knit, intimate, thoroughly integrated grouping from which modern forms of impersonal, unequal and irregular social interaction have developed or, rather, deteriorated.¹³ This view of community can be linked to the pioneering studies of nineteenth-century, and especially nineteenth-century German, historians and political theorists, among whom one may single out Otto Gierke and Ferdinand

¹⁰ The *Kalevala* was compiled from shorter poems in the nineteenth century, with the example of the *Iliad* (and current scholarly theory on the origins of the *Iliad*) in mind. An excellent compendium of information on the *Kalevala* including a full Finnish text and an account of its importance to Finnish identity and culture is available online: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, *Kalevala*, (updated 2000), <<http://www.finlit.fi/kalevala/indexeng.html>>, accessed 30 September 2002. See also F. J. Oinas, 'The Balto-Finnish Epics', in *Heroic Epic and Saga: An Introduction to the World's Folk Epics*, ed. F. J. Oinas (Bloomington and Indiana, 1978), pp. 286-309.

¹¹ A. Shepard and P. Withington, 'Introduction: communities in early modern England', in *Communities in early modern England: Networks, places, rhetoric*, ed. A. Shepard and P. Withington (Manchester, 2000), pp. 1-15 (pp. 1-3); A. Macfarlane, 'History, anthropology and the study of communities', *Social History* 5 (May 1977), 631-52 (p. 633).

¹² See J. Carrier and I. Kendall, 'Evolution of Policy', in *Care in the Community: Illusion or Reality?* ed. J. Leff (Chichester, 1997), pp. 3-20, for changing policy in mental health care in the 20th century; see also G. Wolff, 'Attitudes of the Media and the Public', same volume, pp. 145-63, for popular caveats.

¹³ Shepard and Withington, 'Introduction', pp. 3-5.

Tönnies as contributors of particular importance.¹⁴ Gierke discussed the history of social and political groupings as a dialectic of vertical organization or rule by lords (*Herrschaft*) with horizontal organization or fellowship (*Genossenschaft*); Tönnies contrasted affective bonds and a common way of life (*Gemeinschaft*) with 'rational-instrumental' relationships conducted according to contract and self-interest (*Gesellschaft*). Following and to some extent simplifying the arguments of Gierke and Tönnies, these concepts have tended to be regarded as characterizations of different historical stages in social life, so that *Genossenschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* were projected into the past and denied to the present. Translation into English further muddled the issue: both *Gemeinschaft* and *Genossenschaft* are commonly rendered 'community'. Thus an idea of community as an abstract principle has tended to be identified with actual communities, specifically medieval communities. Recent scholars have worked against this tendency, insisting that medieval communities in practice encompassed conflict, coercion and plurality.

Further, as Susan Reynolds shows, the ideal as well as the reality of community needs to be historicized. In particular, the association of community with equality is a modern development, a legacy of the political theorizing and political upheavals of nineteenth-century Europe. Gierke's concept of *Genossenschaft* was invested with his own belief that the recognition of group personalities was essential to liberty and a necessary counter to the ideology of absolutism.¹⁵ The medieval ideal of community, however, envisaged a 'just and harmonious hierarchy'¹⁶ and it was accepted that great men would both represent and rule their communities: 'all communities seem to have tended, if not towards monarchy, then to a respect for the kind of authority that looks to us undemocratic'.¹⁷

¹⁴ O. Gierke, *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, 4 vols (Berlin, 1868-1913); F. Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig, 1887). Discussed by S. Reynolds, 'Introduction to the Second Edition, 1997', in *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1997), pp. xi-lxxv. Reynolds concentrates on Gierke; Shepard and Withington, 'Introduction', pp. 3-5, give greater prominence to Tönnies. See also A. Black, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Community in Historical Perspective: A translation of selections from 'Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht (The German Law of Fellowship)' by Otto von Gierke*, trans. M. Fischer, ed. A. Black (Cambridge, 1990), pp. xiv-xxx.

¹⁵ Black, 'Editor's Introduction', p. xvii.

¹⁶ Reynolds, 'Introduction', p. lxiii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. li.

Though historians such as Reynolds to this day feel the need to disentangle themselves from the ideal of community as harmonious, egalitarian fellowship, since at least the 1960s scholars of various disciplines have offered alternative models of community. One extreme approach, from the field of biological anthropology, is that of Lionel Tiger. According to Tiger, the structure of human societies develops from the dynamics of the primate group, in which male bonding and male sexual competition are the elements that produce both social cohesion and social hierarchy.¹⁸ Tiger places violence or the potential for violence at the heart of community, arguing that male aggression and male bonding are part of the same process. Bonds within the group, and in particular the position of its dominant individuals, are reinforced in times of conflict with other groups: 'the real or symbolic existence of an enemy or out-group strengthens the existing dominance hierarchy'.¹⁹ Tiger's biological determinism and essentialist approach to gender do not commend themselves to me.²⁰ Nonetheless, certain aspects of his work are very useful. One is the idea that competition and hierarchy can be closely bound up with affective bonds and a sense of common identity. This clearly complements Susan Reynolds' point about the medieval ideal of 'harmonious hierarchy'. A second highly important idea is that bonds within a group are strengthened by conflict with other groups. Thus violence can actually reinforce community.

Another school of enquiry that has given violence a central place in community is the historical investigation of ethnogenesis, especially with regard to the emergence of the barbarian peoples of Western Europe. E. A. Thompson, drawing on Caesar and Tacitus, presents the army, the assembly of warriors, as a chief organ of government for the German tribes, and he traces the development of kingship from the early practice of temporary election of war-leaders.²¹ According to this analysis, in the earliest period it is only in war and in readiness for war that a

¹⁸ L. Tiger, *Men in Groups* (London, 1969), p. 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁰ For a feminist critique of biological determinism, see Lynne Segal, 'Genes and Gender: The Return to Darwin', in *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology and Politics* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 78-115. Tiger's stress on hunting over other early human subsistence activities can be seen to reflect a masculinist origin myth: see U. K. Le Guin, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York, 1989), pp. 165-70. For further criticisms of Tiger, see J. S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 195.

²¹ E. A. Thompson, *The Early Germans* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 32-41.

Germanic people constitutes itself as such; otherwise it breaks down into many independent units. Herwig Wolfram in his magisterial study of the Goths explicitly demonstrates that it is only through war and fighting that the idea of a Gothic people emerges. Further, in the sources the people and the army are equated: the Gothic *gens* is not united by common descent, but is created by the gathering of disparate groups into one fighting force.²² Wolfram and Thompson point not only to the role of violence as a catalyst for the formation of communities, but also to the extent to which a description of the actions of a community refers often to the actions only of selected members, usually males of fighting age. Again, this can be related to the principle of representation and hierarchy stated by Reynolds: the dominant members of the group represent it and their actions are conceived as the actions of all. Particularly in Wolfram's work, however, it also becomes apparent to how great an extent the community to be studied exists as a powerful organizing *idea*. This is to say, the coherence of a disparate group such as the Goths depends on a selective image in the minds of historians and of the group's members themselves. The histories select the community's wars as the community's history, excluding other activities and other people (one hears nothing of, for example, the cloth-making and weavers of the Goths, if any): 'only the warrior, the hero, matters'.²³ Similarly, the internal cohesion of the *gens* depends, according to Wolfram, on the preservation of a tradition centred on notable leaders, presumably a tradition of warlike deeds.²⁴

Wolfram's argument about tradition as the focus of a people is illuminated by the famous insight of Benedict Anderson that the nation is an 'imagined community':

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.²⁵

²² H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. T. J. Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1988), pp. 5-7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁵ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 15.

A community such as the Goths may be disparate, fluid, partial and too vast ever to appear in one place: it exists as a community, and is able to act as a community, by virtue of the ideas in its members' (and its neighbours') heads. A. P. Cohen provides an elaboration of the concept of the imagined community while reemphasizing the relationship between community and conflict. He stresses both internal discordance and external violence, the designation of out-groups. What the members of a community hold in common is that which differentiates them from other communities; the essential feature of community is the boundaries dividing the excluded and the included. These boundaries are elaborated in a range of symbolic practices, which can include literary and verbal practices such as naming or history writing but also a vast range of other things, such as initiation rituals, football strips, clothing or totems. Cohen argues that what is shared is the symbols themselves and not necessarily their meanings: individuals may interpret experiences, behaviours and objects differently, but they are contained within the same overarching structure of inside and outside, similarity and difference. The community itself is a symbol, a sign shared between its members but differently understood, a marker that enables them to imagine their life in common.²⁶

Tiger shows us the community as a tight-knit group pursuing sex and food in a process of male competition and bonding; Wolfram examines the factors that make a *gens* from a partial sample of many different groups; Cohen offers a structuralist analysis of the tension of cohesion and difference in any community. What emerges from these diverse scholarly approaches is the interpenetration of the ideal and the reality of community. The pragmatic functioning of a human group, which may be discordant, conflictive and coercive, is intimately bound up with its notion of what makes it a community, including concepts of loyalty, common purpose and common enemies. The material needs chiefly stressed by Tiger intertwine with the semiotic work investigated by Cohen. In violence between communities, competition for resources, geographical boundaries and physical force interchange with the symbolic definition of in-group and out-group and the mapping of mental territories. Violence itself is a ritual of difference, in which people spatially arrange themselves into

²⁶ A. P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester, London and New York, 1985), pp. 11-19.

opposing sides and attempt to demonstrate their physical superiority over each other. However, it is not merely the confirmation of previously agreed borders. Of its nature, violence opens the possibility of change. Thus violence is a means of defining boundaries (the physical boundaries of territories, the symbolic boundaries of communities) but it is also a process in which boundaries are contested, unstable, apt to disappear. One community may invade the space of another; one community may have its sense of its distinctiveness irreparably altered.

Cohen presents the construction of community as a labour to contain variety so ‘that its inherent discordance does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries’;²⁷ similarly David Carr sees the community emerging from ‘resolution of the conflict between its independent-minded members’.²⁸ Violence can emerge within communities as well as between them. Violence between groups, and the representation of such violence, may partially function as a way of suppressing potential discord within the group. *The Battle of Brunanburh*, for example, recounts a two-sided conflict between defenders and invaders, but it carries the trace of struggle and conquest within the defending side, the West Saxon expansion which has made Æthelstan leader of a force including Mercians. The threat of dissolution within the community is diverted by a threat from outside. The physical and representational assaults that are directed against an enemy, however, are also an image of what might happen to one’s own group. Thus the marriage of violence and community in *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* is a paradox after all. Violence is a force for cohesion but also for disintegration and collapse.

Poetry and community

The Battle of Maldon and *The Battle of Brunanburh* give access to the tensions of violence and community in a particular mode: the representation of recent historical violence through a literary form, alliterative poetry. These poems therefore prompt consideration of the relationships between community, poetry and

²⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁸ D. Carr, ‘Narrative and the Real World: An argument for continuity’, in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. G. Roberts (London and New York, 2001), pp. 143-56, at p. 153 (originally published in *History and Theory* 25 (1986), 117-31).

the past. Both poetry and the past prove powerful resources for the imagination of community. *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* also raise questions about the uses of extended representations of violence: they are explicit and detailed in their descriptions of fighting and death, not only by virtue of the greater verbal variety and density of Old English poetry in general compared with the kinds of prose considered in chapter one, but as a distinctive feature of these particular poems.

Numerous commentators have stressed the importance to community of telling stories about the past. Indeed, story-telling by itself is a means of the construction of community. Stories help to shape a world of shared images, points of reference and values. They also, crucially, organize a shared sense of time: narrative, according to Paul Ricoeur, is a way of conferring order on the experience of time,²⁹ and the ordering of time is a basic need for the prosecution of communal activities, whether in the identification of seasons that govern the agricultural routine or in the marking of liturgical hours by bells. As Chris Humphrey remarks, ‘time can be a way of building social relationships [...] Ask ‘What is time?’, and one has a way of exploring something of what binds communities of faith, status and common purpose together’.³⁰ In *Maldon* and *Brunanburh*, different approaches to the organization of time reflect different agendas in the construction of community. The time the two poems order is, moreover, a time of special significance: the past of the communities within which they were composed and circulated. A sense of group identity is commonly founded on the elaboration of a shared past.

David Carr argues that communities are constituted by the narratives they make about themselves; the construction and articulation of a story, generally about the group’s origins, gives that group a sense of common identity and destiny. Especially striking is Carr’s insight that the story about the past translates into a story about the present and future: the community’s story is intimately bound up in its sense of common purpose, its ways of interpreting what is happening now in the

²⁹ P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago and London, 1984), p. xi.

³⁰ C. Humphrey, ‘Introduction’, in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. C. Humphrey and M. Ormrod (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 1-4, (p. 4).

light of what has happened before and its formation of plans for the future.³¹ This idea accords with what we know of typological and exemplary uses of history in the early middle ages, for example the polemical deployment of the notion that the Frankish people and especially their kings were re-enacting and fulfilling the Old Testament history of the Israelites.³² Closer to home, scholars point to the role of origin myths and histories and the dynastic ambitions or religious aims they express in the gradual birth of an English nation.³³ Without being strictly classifiable as histories, *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* are poems that found present communal identities in the past. They represent an emotional investment in the past, celebrating past triumphs and mourning past failures; they evince a sense of connection between the past and the present.

Maldon and *Brunanburh* contribute to the imagining of the community by articulating a shared past. They also participate in a shared poetic tradition. In various ways, Old English poetry in general seems strongly imbued with a spirit of community. As has already been remarked, community and its symbols (the hall, gift-giving, loyalty to a lord) are thematically prominent in the corpus.³⁴ However, before content is considered at all, the performance of poetry is in itself a confirmation of community. Clearly Anglo-Saxon England cannot be thought a purely oral culture: some of the poetry bears signs of literate composition, and some must have been read from books rather than recited; but even clearly 'literate' works appeal to ideas of speech and memorial transmission (and on many occasions

³¹ Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World', pp. 152-3. I would not go so far as to maintain Carr's position that human experience is essentially narrative in quality.

³² See T. F. X. Noble, 'Tradition and Learning in Search of Ideology: The *Libri Carolini*', in *"The Gentle Voices of Teachers": Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age*, ed. R. E. Sullivan (Columbus, OH, 1995), pp. 227-60; M. Garrison, 'The Franks as the new Israel? Education for an identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Y. Hen and M. Innes (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 114-161; M. De Jong, 'The empire as *ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and biblical *historia* for rulers', in *ibid.*, pp. 191-226.

³³ For various aspects of this large topic, see N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989); P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas*, and the Origin of the *Gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald with D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99-129, and 'Engla lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7:1 (1994), 1-24; N. Brooks, *Bede and the English*, Jarrow Lecture 1999 (1999); S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS* 6th series, 6 (1996), 25-49, and 'Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age', *TRHS* 6th ser. 9 (1999), 185-200.

³⁴ See above, p. 78 and note 9.

reading may have meant reading to an audience).³⁵ The milieu that Old English poetry imagines for itself is that of oral performance at social gatherings, especially feasts. Old English poetry is thus closely bound up with notions of communal activity and bonding. The poem is itself an instrument of social exchange, like food and gifts. In phrases like *ic gefrægn* 'I have heard', the narrators of Old English poetry portray their subject matter as something circulated between many different poets in repeated tellings and listenings.³⁶ *Brunanburh* specifically refers to written transmission, and yet reading is imaged as listening and books are the mouthpieces of their writers: *þæs þe us secgað bec, / ealde uðwitan*, 'of which books speak to us, old learned men' (ll. 68b-9a).

If the performance of Old English poetry is associated with the coming together of the community, the contents transmit a communal wisdom.³⁷ Poetry, like history (a quarry of good and bad examples, according to Bede),³⁸ is a vehicle for teaching. Some of this is doctrinal and moral instruction: much of the surviving corpus consists of religious texts on topics such as sin, judgement and the downfall of the wicked (examples include *Soul and Body*, *Judgement Day I and II* and sacred narratives such as *Judith* and *Elene*). Some teaching is in the form of maxims and gnomic sayings, collected together or scattered through narrative poems; these deal with topics such as the properties of the natural world and the roles of different sorts and conditions of men.³⁹ For the aristocratic classes at least, poetry was a means of education into their social position: Hilda Ellis Davidson persuasively suggests that one of the purposes of heroic poetry was to inspire future warriors with ideals of

³⁵ There is an enormous bibliography on orality in Old English literature. For a survey of debates and publications to the mid 1980s see A. Hennessey Olsen, 'Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: I', *Oral Tradition* 1: 3 (1986), 548-606 and 'Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II', *Oral Tradition* 3: 1-2 (1988), 138-90. For more recent discussion of the interaction of orality and literacy in Old English poetry, see K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 4 (1990); A. Orchard, 'Oral Tradition' in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge, 1997), 101-12. For some intriguing side-lights on performance, see K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'The Performing Body on the Oral-Literate Continuum: Old English Poetry', in *Teaching Oral Traditions*, ed. J. M. Foley (New York, 1998), pp. 46-58.

³⁶ W. Parks, 'The Traditional Narrator in *Beowulf* and Homer', in *De gustibus*, ed. Foley, pp. 456-79, (pp. 458-64).

³⁷ P. Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 12 (1995), p. 68.

³⁸ Bede, *EH*, Preface, p. 2.

³⁹ On wisdom poetry, see C. Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnostic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford, 1993).

courage, endurance and physical skill.⁴⁰ The poetic voice is a voice of authority delivering instruction for the ordering of society; here we see borne out Shepard and Withington's formulation of the medieval community as 'a set of precepts and practices that sought the promotion of co-operation towards certain ends'.⁴¹ Old English poetry is social in orientation and function: it transmits collective wisdom, reinforces the hierarchies and roles that structure society and provides an imagery of community, while being closely associated with the affirmation of social bonds through feasting and shared entertainment.

Old English poetry is also social in style. The poems share a formulaic diction; the same words, phrases, images and themes recur through many texts. The voice of poetic authority is a communal voice, with different tones, but without the startling soloist.⁴² Pauline Head argues that, so far from celebrating poetic originality and individuality, Old English poems reflect a pre-individualist society in which even the experience of loneliness and isolation is presented as a shared experience. In an analysis of *The Wanderer*, Head finds a 'unified and unique consciousness' lacking in that poem; instead, the understanding of exile is articulated by a chorus of variously unlocalized voices.⁴³

Poetic effect depends on a collaboration of poet and audience. To some extent this is true of all literary texts. According to Jonathan Culler, the reception of a text involves the employment of a 'literary competence', a knowledge of the patterns, possibilities and underlying rules that enable the transmission of meaning within a particular literary culture. This is a helpful model because it allows for varying degrees of competence – some may have more skill and experience than others to bring to the interpretation of a text – and it strikes a balance between the

⁴⁰ H. Ellis Davidson, 'The Training of Warriors', in *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. S. Chadwick Hawkes, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 21 (1989), pp. 11-23 (p. 22); see also E. B. Irving, Jr., 'Heroic Role-Models: Beowulf and Others', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, ed. H. Damico and J. Leyerle, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 32 (1993), pp. 347-72, (p. 347).

⁴¹ Shepard and Withington, 'Introduction', p. 6.

⁴² The musical image is borrowed from the title of an article by C. Pasternack, 'Anonymous polyphony and "The Wanderer's" textuality', *ASE* 20 (1991), 99-122.

⁴³ P. Head, *Representation and Design: Tracing a Hermeneutics of Old English Poetry*, (Albany, NY, 1997), pp. 28-35. It is interesting that both Pasternack and Head base their arguments on *The Wanderer*; it evidently lends itself particularly well to the idea of a polyphonous or communal voice. The issue of the 'birth of the individual' will be dealt with further in chapter three.

creative input of author and audience, since both may be drawing on a similar repertoire of literary knowledge.⁴⁴ The text is at once the product of the deliberate craft of an author and of the perception and processing of a reader or hearer. One aspect of the audience's processing is illuminated by schema theory, a schema being 'an arrangement of knowledge *already possessed* by a perceiver that is used to predict and classify new data'.⁴⁵ The reader of a written text, or the viewer of a film or hearer of a poem, matches information already received to a pre-known framework; he or she forms hypotheses about the overall import and future direction of the text, using these hypotheses, which are elaborated or modified as necessary, to select and interpret further data. The schema shapes the way the text is initially comprehended and also the way it is remembered.⁴⁶ Schemas encompass general cultural as well as literary knowledge. Thus, for example, when we read in *Brunanburh* that Æthelstan and Edmund *bordweal clufon* ('clove the shield-wall', l. 5), we not only need to recognize a familiar, emerging pattern of battle-description, but also a type of military formation. Æthelstan and his brother are not, of course, breaking up a literal wall made of shields: they are directing their forces against a mass of men protected by holding their shields side by side. This knowledge is so basic we do not notice the process by which the schema is activated and an alternative interpretation eliminated.

The processes of perception and interpretation will be discussed further later in the chapter with reference to *The Battle of Maldon*. Here I wish rather to emphasise the obvious applicability of ideas about literary competence and schemas to a well-established body of scholarship on Old English poetry. This is the approach that searches out topoi, type-scenes, themes and other elements of a traditional poetic art. The effects of Old English poetry are often explained in terms of the audience's recognition of traditional motifs and the poet's ability to play on

⁴⁴ J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London and Henley, 1975), pp. 113-30.

⁴⁵ E. Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London and New York, 1992), p. 13.

⁴⁶ For a brief discussion with extensive references, see M. Crawford and R. Chaffin, 'The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. E. A. Flynn and P. P. Schweickart (Baltimore and London, 1986), pp. 3-30, (pp. 4-13).

that recognition, delaying expected ingredients or subtly changing emphases.⁴⁷ Understood in this way, the art of Old English poetry is one that relies particularly heavily and openly on the predictive activity of the audience and their ability to deploy a literary competence shared with the poet. The audience of oral poetry cannot re-read, any more than the poet can re-write: both need to be caught up in familiar patterns that they can navigate quickly.⁴⁸ As has been mentioned, Old English poetry is not purely an oral art but remains orientated towards performance and aural reception. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe argues, moreover, that the manuscript layout of Old English poetry, contrasted with Latin poetry, implies a reliance on the ability of the reader to predict the shape and content of the text.⁴⁹

These points about the comprehension of literature in general and the comprehension of Old English poetry in particular have intriguing implications for the relationship of poetry and community. Old English poetry is a literature of consensus and consent. It may aim to warn or teach (for example in the poem *Judgement Day*) but not to disturb or disrupt. As the audience and the poet draw on traditional language and shared knowledge to compose and interpret the text, the creative power of the audience reinforces that of the poet and a common sense of literary propriety, linguistic order and social values is reaffirmed. The meaning of the text is produced in common by audience and poet. The possibility of the resistant reader remains, but broadly this is a poetic that envisages poets and audiences who will interpret along similar lines and whose act of interpretation will be a performance of community – an 'interpretive community', to appropriate Stanley Fish's phrase.⁵⁰

Both poetry and history promote cohesion by creating a sense of what is agreed, orderly and coherent. They subject language and time to formal ordering and seek to constitute a shared artistic and temporal experience. The circulation,

⁴⁷ See e.g. S. B. Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 200-6, (p. 205); D. K. Fry, 'Themes and Type-Scenes in *Elene* 1-113', *Speculum* 44 (1969), 35-45, (p. 41).

⁴⁸ A. B. Lord, 'Words Heard and Words Seen', in *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, (Ithaca, NY, 1991), pp. 15-37, (p. 18); A. C. Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry* (London, 1964), p. 20.

⁴⁹ O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 1-6 and 21.

⁵⁰ S. Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), p. 14.

interiorization and reproduction of historical and poetic texts, especially through oral performance or reading aloud, work to resolve differences within the community. Differences will always exist. Nonetheless, in Cohen's terms, the production of history and poetry, including poetry about the past, is a powerful way of keeping community 'alive through the manipulation of its symbols'.⁵¹

The wholeness and coherence of the artistic work helps to reinforce the cohesion of the community. Poems have a social use. They also have a psychological use.⁵² *Maldon* and *Brunanburh*, as poems about violence, address matters that threaten psychological cohesion: the fear of death, the horror of battle and bereavement. In drawing on ideas from modern psychology and psychiatry there may be some danger of anachronism. It is clear that practices surrounding death, burial and mourning are highly culture-specific.⁵³ It is less clear whether the underlying psychological processes are human universals or not. It has been argued that the terms in which modern concepts of grieving have developed grew from a specifically modernist cultural climate;⁵⁴ similarly, the discourse of psychological trauma has been powerfully shaped by the use of hypnotism by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century psychiatrists.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, one may be encouraged by the work of Jonathan Shay, which successfully brings together combat trauma in Vietnam veterans with representations of grief and rage in the *Iliad*, allowing them to illuminate each other.⁵⁶ While acknowledging that *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* develop their own, pre-modern stories of death and violence, I wish to use modern ideas about trauma, grieving and psychological compulsion to reinvest these poems as texts that do psychological work.

Two related issues emerge as especially relevant to the psychological and

⁵¹ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction*, p. 15.

⁵² Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension*, p. 2.

⁵³ This point emerges most amusingly in J. Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York, 1963). For cultural diversity in present-day approaches to death and mourning, with a particular stress on differing religious beliefs, see C. M. Parkes, P. Laungani and B. Young (ed.), *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures* (London, 1997); on medieval England, D. M. Hadley, *Death in Medieval England* (Stroud, 2001) and V. J. Thompson, 'The Understanding of Death in England From c.850 to c.1100', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York (2000).

⁵⁴ N. Small, 'Theories of grief: a critical review', in *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, ed. J. Hockey, J. Katz and N. Small, (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 19-48, (pp. 20-24).

⁵⁵ R. Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London, 2000), pp. 8-9.

⁵⁶ Shay, *Achilles*.

emotional dimensions of the two poems: confronting the fact of death and dealing with traumatic experience, of which a prominent aspect in *Maldon* is bereavement. Work on the functions of horror in film, photography and other visual art has stressed the desire for a cathartic encounter with what we fear. In visual representations, but also in poems, death and the fragmentation of the body are made available for contemplation. At the same time they are safely displaced onto the other: looking at death enables us to address the fear of our own death and yet simultaneously assures us that we are alive, in the position of spectator.⁵⁷ John Taylor makes the important point, of relevance to both my texts, that representations of death, decay and mutilation become more acceptable the less we identify with the bodies in question: he notes that British newspapers are far more prepared to print pictures of foreign (especially third-world) corpses than British corpses.⁵⁸ The more thoroughly death is displaced onto the other, the more clearly it is depicted. Confrontation and displacement are in tension: the less identification there is with the scene of death, the less the fear of death is truly addressed, and yet the impulse towards displacement and reassurance is powerful.

The representation and contemplation of death is a kind of mastery of death; the fear of annihilation that threatens the sense of self is externalized and subjected to artistic ordering. One current of thought about psychological disorders arising from traumatic experience stresses the helpless absorption of the subject in the traumatic scene (for example, the scene of battle), which is constantly acted out and replayed in dreams, flashbacks and compulsive behaviour. The subject is shattered and ceases to distinguish properly between inside and outside, being overwhelmed by the event which it constantly recreates. When the event is narrated, however, it is both confronted and externalized. To represent a scene of horror is to (attempt to) restore the boundaries of the self, to reassert the subject's integrity. It is this idea that underlies the stress on talking-through and revisiting traumatic experience in psychiatric treatment.⁵⁹ I do not wish to suggest that either *Maldon* or *Brunanburh* is the product of a post-traumatic stress disorder. However, I do note that both are

⁵⁷ J. Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, catastrophe and war* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 29-30; E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester, 1992), p. xi.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Body Horror*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Leys, *Trauma*, pp. 9, 29, 37-9 and 89.

responses to recent experiences of battle, if not on the part of the poet then on the part of members of the poet's community. Further, representations of battle may operate pre-emptively on trauma. They provide a script for the management of violence and death when they must be witnessed, an ideology and a set of images by which to master potentially chaotic and traumatic experiences. One function of the circulation of battle-poems is perhaps a sort of long-term communal therapy, by which battle is subjected to ordering and interpretation for the benefit both of those who have fought and those who will fight.

As has already been noted, *Maldon* can be read as part of a specific therapeutic process, the process of 'griefwork' following the deaths of a leader and of many others in battle. Shay gives bereavement a prominent place in his analysis of battle-trauma, stressing the need to narrate loss and 'communalize' grief.⁶⁰ The management of grieving is an area in which it is possible to relate the individual encounter with violence back to the construction of community. Grief threatens to isolate the individual from the community and to strand the bereaved in the moment of loss. To heal the individual is also to heal the community: grief needs to be shared to be overcome, thus reintegrating the bereaved into society and into time, the progression from the past to the future. Victoria Thompson stresses the communal identities at stake in practices of mourning and commemoration: 'the community of the living continually reconstitutes itself relative to the community of the dead'.⁶¹ At issue in *Maldon* is not only the loss of particular dead but the implications for communal identity of a crushing defeat and the death of a leader.

Before turning to explicit consideration of my two texts, I wish to mention three further dimensions to the psychological project of representing violence and death. The first is an extension of the idea of the displacement of death. It is the notion that death, violence and other horrors can be *aestheticized*, that what in life would provoke a reaction of pain, distress or disgust can be transmuted in art into something beautiful, or at least into something that provokes an aesthetic more than an emotional response. When art represents something it always changes it,

⁶⁰ Shay, *Achilles*, pp. 55-68.

⁶¹ Thompson, 'The Understanding of Death', p. 133.

sometimes drastically. Further, it is important to remember that the reaction to a representation is not the reaction to the thing itself, though it may retroactively modify one's idea of the thing itself.

The second notion, however, is that artistic and other strategies to expel horror are ultimately doomed to fail. Here I draw on the concept of the abject expounded by Julia Kristeva and redeployed by Judith Butler. The abject is not something clearly named or imagined but that which is expelled by the subject in order to allow it to be a subject, in Butler's terms the subject's 'founding repudiation'.⁶² Kristeva explains the abject in terms of visceral expulsions of vomit, pus or shit – formless waste substances which are at once of the body and necessarily rejected from the body, provoking feelings of horror and disgust.⁶³ The concept of the abject links to Cohen's stress on boundaries and borders: abjection sets up a border that protects the integrity of the subject. However, the abject is a border that threatens to dissolve, to return, as in psychological trauma collapsing the distinction between inside and outside. Kristeva sees the horror of the corpse as the horror of the loss of identity, the eclipse of the subject by the abject: the corpse is 'a border that has encroached upon everything'.⁶⁴ In its formlessness and in its connection to one's own self and body, the abject threatens structures of meaning: '[it] draws me towards the place where meaning collapses [...] the abject does not cease challenging its master'.⁶⁵ Thus the concept of the abject elaborates the idea that the horror of death and wounding lies in a threat to identity, but it also suggests that the abject can never be fully expelled but may emerge to disturb dreams, guts and texts.

Although the present chapter concentrates on poetic depictions of battle as strategies for coping with fear, loss and horror, the ideas of the aestheticization of death and the insistent return of the abject point to the strange attraction that can lie in (represented) death and violence. In this connection, with relevance to battle-

⁶² J. Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York, 1982), pp. 1-2; J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London, 1993), p. 3

⁶³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

poetry, I advance my third notion: that the mystique of the warrior has to do with the mystery and awe of death. I do not wish to go too far into this enormous topic. Nonetheless, we may note that Beowulf, in his boasting speech before the encounter with Grendel, graphically imagines his own possible demise: *byreð blodig wæl, byrgean þenceð* ('he will carry off my bloody corpse, intend to taste it', l. 448). In this scene I read Beowulf not only advertising his courage but deliberately horrifying his audience, marking off for himself that space of blood in which warrior deeds are achieved. The power of the warrior is closely connected with his privileged encounter with death, an encounter both shunned and desired.⁶⁶

The Battle of Brunanburh and *The Battle of Maldon* are poems in which the representation of violence contributes to the construction of community. At the same time, they bear witness to the fragility of identity. They depict past battles in order to create a sense of common purpose, interest and achievement and to reinforce ideals of loyalty and unity, but also to overcome trauma, avert the dissolution of identity and work through pain. They are thus poems shaped by tensions of wholeness and fragmentation, attraction and horror; they are poems in which wounding, bleeding and killing are subjected to artistic ordering and converted to a paradoxical beauty. This is strikingly true of *Brunanburh*, a poem both brutal and full of self-conscious verbal elaboration.

The Battle of Brunanburh: celebrating violence?

Brunanburh is at once simple and complicated. Its message is confident and clearly expressed. It sets up contrasts both unambiguous and conventional between shame and glory, defeat and success, and praises the victors. It makes extensive use of variation, but it is not obscure, apart from the odd textual crux (of which the phrase *feld dennade / dunnade / dynede* has occasioned the most discussion).⁶⁷ According to Edward B. Irving Jr., it is 'a rich mass of clichés', and as such can be

⁶⁶ For further thoughts on warriors and death, see J. Harris, 'Love and Death in the *Männerbund*: An Essay with Special Reference to the *Bjarkamál* and *The Battle of Maldon*', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period*, ed. Damico and Leyerle, pp. 77-114 (pp. 92-3).

⁶⁷ W. F. Bolton, '“Variation” in *The Battle of Brunanburh*', *Review of English Studies* n.s. 19 (1968), 363-72; C. T. Berkhout, '*Feld Dennade* – Again', *Modern Language Notes* 11 (1974), 161-2.

used to prepare undergraduates for more knotty works.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, *Brunanburh* raises critical anxieties that give rise to diverse interpretations.

In the terms of the present chapter, critical disagreements over *Brunanburh* centre on the questions of the kind of community that it celebrates and the emotional response that its violence should provoke. Is the poem's audience intended to identify absolutely with the victors to the exclusion of any sympathy for the losers' pain? John Niles characterizes *Brunanburh* as 'a quintessential poem of boasting and scorn'; this poet gloats over the plight of the defeated.⁶⁹ Dolores Warwick Frese, on the other hand, stresses the poignancy of the depiction of the aged Constantine and his allies, arguing that the poem ultimately springs, not from English parochialism, but from a sense of the all-embracing community of Christianity. Winners and losers alike are 'equal and almost interchangeable human presences' and the poem enjoins 'the fundamental Christian imperative to love your enemy'.⁷⁰ Frances Lipp attempts to reconcile scorn and poignancy by arguing that the poem expresses two perspectives, which she labels 'Germanic' and 'historical'. The 'Germanic' perspective accounts for the painful immediacy of the losers' plight and the sense of common human suffering it evokes. According to the 'historical' perspective, however, it is Æthelstan's decisive victory that emerges as the supreme fact of the battle; and it is this perspective that has the final word.⁷¹ Thus for Lipp the poem appeals to both the interests of a particular political group and a sense of common humanity; it responds to violence with distress but not regret.

Like Lipp's, my reading of *Brunanburh* attempts to account both for its overt triumphalism and the contradictory impulse towards sympathy for the losers. However, I do not see this in terms of the deliberate co-ordination of two perspectives. The 'brusque indifference to carnage' that Niles finds in the poem seems to him to align it with skaldic verse as against most other Old English

⁶⁸ Irving, 'The charge of the Saxon brigade', p. 183.

⁶⁹ J. D. Niles, 'Skaldic Technique in *Brunanburh*', *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (1987), 356-66 (p. 358).

⁷⁰ D. Warwick Frese, 'Poetic Prowess in *Brunanburh* and Maldon: Winning, Losing and Literary Outcome', in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. P. R. Brown, G. R. Crampton and F. C. Robinson (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1986), pp. 83-99 (pp. 84 and 89).

⁷¹ F. R. Lipp, 'Contrast and Point of View in *The Battle of Brunanburh*', *Philological Quarterly* 48 (1969), 166-77.

poetry.⁷² A convincing case can be made that *The Battle of Brunanburh* and other Chronicle poems represent the (re)birth in English of the genre of praise-poetry, partly under the influence of skaldic practice.⁷³ Following the model provided by descriptions of the performance of skaldic praise-poetry, we may imagine *Brunanburh* being composed in the first place for an audience of Æthelstan himself and his court, and later being incorporated into the ‘common stock’ of the *Chronicle*, which emanated from Wessex. The aim of the poem is to glory in the triumph of the king and his brother. The graphic depiction of carnage is intended to express the absolute nature of their victory. However, the fear of death, the half-suppressed knowledge that all must succumb, returns in the vividness with which the misery of the losers is communicated. It is as though, having displaced all horror and death wholly onto the enemy, the poet of *Brunanburh* cannot help to some extent identifying with the enemy, though such identification is overtly resisted. *Brunanburh* harnesses the representation of violence to the construction of community through strategies of difference and exclusion, but it also betrays an anxiety over the ways in which violence and its consequences threaten identity. My discussion begins by considering the issue of community in *Brunanburh* before looking in more detail at the emergence of disruption and anxiety into the poem.

As a praise-poem, the first purpose of *Brunanburh* is to record the names of the king and ætheling, Æthelstan and Edmund, and associate those names with an event, their victory in battle. The stability of identities in the poem is dependent on a particular version of the past. The way that the poem presents the past, as something comprehended, single and coherent, supports and shapes its vision of stable political authority over clearly defined groups. Before looking explicitly at the issue of identity and community in *Brunanburh*, it behoves to examine the poem’s approach to narrative and time.

As Matthew Townend observes, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, like other praise-poems, is ‘not much concerned with the sequences and specificities of narrative’.⁷⁴

⁷² Niles, ‘Skaldic Technique’, p. 358.

⁷³ M. Townend, ‘Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England’, *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 51 (2000), 349-70.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

The battle is not presented as a sequentially unfolding process but as an event already complete. The poem opens with three complementary summaries of what has happened. Æthelstan and Edmund have won unending glory (ll. 1-5); they cut through the shield wall (ll. 5-7); they defended their land as befitted their ancestry (ll. 7-10).⁷⁵ All these summaries state in different ways that a battle has been fought and won. The first stresses what has been gained, glory; the second offers a conventional image of fighting as a glimpse of weapons and things breaking; the third concentrates on the purpose of the battle, defence, and alleges that what has happened is part of a natural order, something enjoined on Æthelstan and Edmund by inherited disposition, duty and authority. The opening ten lines of the poem present the fact of the battle along with its interpretation. Thus from the beginning the battle appears as an event whose significance is already known, an event whole and closed to change. *The Battle of Brunanburh* begins where we might expect a narrative to end, with closure. As the poem goes on, more details of what happened are supplied, though not in sequential order: the initial advance (ll. 26-28), the rout and pursuit (ll. 20-24), the deaths of many combatants (ll. 10-12, 17-20) and the departure of those remaining (ll. 32ff). Neil Isaacs gives an insightful account of the poem as a movement in time and space back and forth from the central fixed point of the battlefield.⁷⁶ His analysis well conveys the way the poem moves and yet remains static, introducing the elements of a possible sequential narrative without actually constructing such a narrative. The situation described at the beginning of the poem does not evolve but is rather filled in. The opening ten lines draw a circle, the totality of the event, into which further details are placed.

This strategy of closure and enclosure is evident in the poem's vocabulary and imagery of time. The most obvious illustration of what I mean here is the famous description of the rising and setting sun, making its arch over the day, the battlefield and the event:⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Here I am following the editorial punctuation of Campbell; the manuscript pointing divides half-lines rather than defining larger units, and it is thus not possible to be certain whether *sweorda ecgum ymbe Brunanburh* is intended to qualify *geslogon æt sæcce* or *heowon heapolinde*. In either case, the division of lines 1-10 into three main ideas seems justified.

⁷⁶ N. Isaacs, 'Battlefield Tour: *Brunanburg*', *NM* 63 (1962), 236-44.

⁷⁷ See discussions by, for example, N. D. Isaacs, '*The Battle of Brunanburh*, 13b-17a', *Notes and Queries* 10 (1963), 247-8; Bolton, ' "Variation" ', p. 371; Lipp, 'Contrast and Point of View', p. 172; Warwick Frese, 'Poetic Prowess', pp. 85-6.

Feld dunnade

secga swate, siðþan sunne up
 on morgentid, mære tungol,
 glad ofer grundas, Godes condel beorht,
 eces Drihtnes, oð sio æpele gesceaft
 sah to setle.

The field grew dark with the blood of men, after the sun in the morning, glorious star, glided up over the lands, the bright candle of God, of the eternal Lord, until the noble creation sank to its place. (ll. 12-17)

My translation does not do justice to the effect produced by the separation of *up* from the nearest verb it could modify, *glad*; these lines trace the motion of the sun up into the sky, along *ofer grundas* and down in the evening. The sun's movement physically encircles the scene, just as it marks its temporal boundaries, the beginning and end of the day. Other references to time in the poem similarly stress balance, completion and – for want of a better term – wholeness. The West Saxons pursue the enemy for *ondlongne dæg*, 'the whole day' (l. 21) and this phrase verbally echoes the *ealdorlangne tir* 'age-long / eternal glory' (l. 3) won by Æthelstan and Edmund. Both phrases convey the persistence of actions and qualities through time: time passes, but the determination and glory of the West Saxons and their leaders remain unchanged. Thus the wholeness of time (the whole day, eternity) is associated with the stability of the poem's characters and their deeds. The battle is enclosed in layered rings of time. It is framed by the day, by the symmetry of present and past conflicts (Janet Thormann illuminates the way the closing lines present Brunanburh as a repetition and confirmation of the Anglo-Saxon conquest)⁷⁸ and ultimately by eternity itself. The poem's organization of material and its presentation of time work together to produce an impression of the battle and the identities that are entwined with it as things fixed, known and secure.

The identities shored up by this stress on fixity are those of the leaders praised by the praise-poem and the political community they rule and represent. *Brunanburh* depicts and is designed to reinforce a hierarchical community in which leaders represent their people. The victory and the actions that lead to it are

attributed first and foremost to Æthelstan and Edmund. The praise of leaders is itself a way of building community: *Brunanburh* enhances the authority of the princes it celebrates by presenting them in a glorious light not only to themselves but their followers. Moreover, the poem represents the identity of leaders as dependent on their position in a community. Leadership is a social activity.

The position of Æthelstan as the king of a community is highlighted at the start when he is called *eorla dryhten, / beorna beahgifa*, 'lord of men, ring-giver of warriors' (ll. 1-2). As Neil Isaacs observes, this is an image at once of Æthelstan in his peace-time role dispensing treasure, the quintessential activity of kings, and of the king in war: *beorn* and *eorl* are poetic words for 'man' that also imply 'warrior'.⁷⁹ The poem appeals to the conventional image of the king who lives surrounded by his band of retainers, and who rewards their fighting with treasure and feasting. This image may in practice be outdated in the tenth century, with gifts of land taking over from gifts of treasure and the hall no longer the place where king and retainers all live together, but the cliché retains its hold on the poetic imagination.⁸⁰ The bond of king and men is still conceived as a cycle of fighting and reward. Thus, not only is the king the king by virtue of a mutual recognition of worth between himself and his followers, but the constitution of a political community is explicitly dependent on violence.

The depiction of battle in the poem conveys in a number of ways the close connection between violence on the field and treasure and feasting in the hall. The battlefield is a place where plunder and prestige are obtained, and the poem plays with the idea of fighting as an exchange of commodities. In lines 24-28 the enemy are presented as seeking something that the Mercians are willing to supply:

Myrce ne wyrndon
 heardes hondplegan hæleþa nanum
 þæra þe mid Anlafe ofer eargebland

⁷⁸ J. Thormann, 'The Battle of Brunanburh and the Matter of History', *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994 for 1991), 5-13 (pp. 10-12).

⁷⁹ Isaacs, 'Battlefield Tour', p. 238.

⁸⁰ D. A. Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours and Fellow-Drinkers: Aspects of Community and Conflict in the Early Medieval West*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 1 (1990), pp. 17-21; Bolton, "Variation", pp. 370-1.

on lides bosme land gesohtun
fæge to gefeohte.

The Mercians did not withhold fierce hand-play from any of the heroes who with Anlaf, over the sea-blending, in the ship's bosom, sought the land, doomed men, for battle.

In lines 50-51, three kennings for battle evoke social gatherings and exchange: battle is a *garmitting*, a *gumena gemot*, a *wæpengewrixl* ('spear-meeting', 'meeting of men', 'exchange of weapons').⁸¹ In all these allusions to acquisition and social interaction, there is at once a reference to the bonds that are being forged within the victorious force and a heavily ironic comment on the relationship between the opposed sides.

To pursue first the non-ironic aspect to *gumena gemot* and its like, for those who fight on the same side, the battlefield is a place of comradeship. This is important in the poem because it depicts Mercians and West Saxons fighting as part of the same force. The last king of Mercia had died around 879 and the area had come under direct West Saxon rule in 919. By naming Mercians and West Saxons as separate groups, *Brunanburh* records a continuing sense of regional difference while affirming the leadership of Æthelstan and Edmund over an inclusive Anglo-Saxon realm.⁸² In lines 20-28 the Mercians and West Saxons are each associated with one half or framing image of the battle, the Mercians with the advance to the fight, the West Saxons with the enemy's retreat. This pair of images schematically depicts the Mercians and West Saxons as partners in victory: they are marked as a community by a common achievement.

On the other hand, *Brunanburh* depicts battle as a sharp contrast between the successful military action of the victors and the flight and failure of their opponents. The contrast is reinforced by the irony that is undoubtedly present in the imagery of battle as peaceable association. This *gumena gemot* may be an expression of accord between Mercians and West Saxons, but it is emphatically the reverse between West

⁸¹ Discussed by Niles, 'Skaldic Technique', pp. 360-1.

⁸² On the end of Mercia as an independent kingdom, see M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 127-8, 141 and 145; S. Keynes, 'Mercia and Wessex in the Ninth

Saxons and Norsemen, and to call the conflict by a gentle name is to underscore hostility and division. The poem's construction of a political community is in fact served by its stress on division. The association of the Mercians and the West Saxons is cemented by their opposition to an enemy group, a hostile 'other' against which they can be constructed as the 'same'. Other commentators have remarked on the symmetry between the opposed forces, each composed of two ethnic or regional groups (West Saxons and Mercians, Norse and Scots) under two named leaders (Æthelstan and Edmund, Anlaf and Constantine); this symmetry is achieved by omitting a third enemy group, Strathclyde Welsh under Owen, whose presence is attested in other sources.⁸³ The functional unity of the enemy, collected under one noun as *hettend* ('haters, adversaries', l. 10), reflects unity onto the force gathered under Æthelstan and Edmund. More fundamentally, however, this is an instance of community being constructed through difference and exclusion. By identifying a 'them' the poem implies an 'us'.

The exclusion of the out-group and the difference between 'us' and 'them' is underscored by the poem's interest in geographical territories and boundaries. The sons of Edward are said to be defending *land* [...] / *hord and hamas* ('land, treasure and homes', ll. 9-10). The significance of territory is most apparent in the second half of the poem, which describes the departure of the combatants to their respective lands, Norse to Ireland, Scots to Scotland and Æthelstan and Edmund to *Weasseaxena land*, 'the land of the West Saxons' (l. 59). What emerges powerfully is a sense of wide separation between the two sides, marked by the barrier of the sea which the Northmen and Scots must cross:

cread cneor on flot, cyning ut gewat
 on fealene flod [...]
 Gewitan him þa Norþmen nægledcnearrum
 [...] ofer deop wæter Difelan secan

The ship pressed onto the sea, the king went out on the brown sea [...] The Northmen went to their nailed ships [...] to seek Dublin over the deep water (ll. 35-6, 53 and 55).

Century', in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. Brown and C. A. Farr (London and New York, 2001), pp. 310-28.

The enemy belong somewhere outside, elsewhere, beyond the empty, threatening space of ‘deep water’. The poem expels them from the sphere of its action, sending them away from the places where the power of Æthelstan and Edmund obtains. The disparate force of the victors is again implicitly unified as the group on the near side of the sea. It is significant, however, that in this section the only homeland mentioned for the winning side is the land of the West Saxons. The elision of the Mercians is a reminder that the political community envisaged in the poem is itself the product of a struggle for dominance; the poem celebrates the ascendancy of specifically West Saxon leaders. The poem’s stress on fixity and its resistance of temporal progression erases recent political changes in the English side: the victorious state, with Æthelstan at its head, is projected into both past and future as a matter of ‘eternal glory’.

Just as the defeated are condemned to physical separation and exclusion, they are associated with grammatical passivity and negation.⁸⁴ For example:

hreman ne þorfte
 mecga gemanan [...]
 [...] Gelpan ne þorfte
 beorn blandenfeax bilgeslihtes,
 eald inwidda, ne Anlaf þy ma;
 mid heora herelafum hlehhan ne þorftun,
 þæt heo beaduweorca beteran wurdun
 on campstede

he need not exult in his fellowship of men.... The grey-streaked warrior need not boast of that sword-clash, the old wretch, nor Anlaf any more; they need not laugh with their remaining troops that they came out better from the war-works on the battlefield (ll. 39-40, 44-9).

The repeated detailing of the outcome Constantine and Anlaf ‘need not boast’ of heavily underscores their failure.⁸⁵ ‘Need not’ is a scornful understatement. Anlaf and Constantine *cannot* boast or exult, humiliated and shorn of support as they are; the passage emphasizes their impotence, envisaging their future action only in terms

⁸³ Warwick Frese, ‘Poetic Prowess’, pp. 87-8; Campbell, *Brunanburh*, pp. 54-5.

⁸⁴ See J. Carroll, ‘Words and Weapons: *The Battle of Brunanburh*’, *Nottingham Linguistic Circular* 15 (2000), 35-53.

⁸⁵ Various critics discuss this point; it is, for example, one of the features Niles adduces as evidence for the gloating tone of the poem, ‘Skaldic Technique’, p. 358.

of what they cannot do. Just as Constantine's lineage has been broken with the death of his son, his power to act and show power in action has ended. Further, Anlaf and Constantine are silenced, unable to laugh or boast. The story of battle that they will not be telling is in fact Æthelstan and Edmund's story. The latter *can* rejoice, and they do: *cybbe sohton / [...] wiges hremge* ('they sought their native land, [...] exulting in war', ll. 58-59). This passage re-enacts the strategy of the opening ten lines, the drawing of a circle around the event, though here the circle is defined by what is outside it. If the opening lines and the poem's treatment of time seek to establish the fixity of the event and its meaning by positive statement, lines 39-49 do the same by negative statement, by setting up an alternative state of affairs and destroying it. An enemy victory is imagined, but not as a possibility; from the beginning of the poem it has already been ruled out.

The destruction of enemy hopes is most inescapable and concrete in the destruction of enemy bodies. Elaine Scarry's remarks on war are clearly applicable here: in war, a concept of political power is inscribed in the bodies of the injured and dead, which lend to the outcome their 'radical substance, [their] compelling and heartsickening reality'.⁸⁶ The poem is punctuated with references to the dead and increasingly vivid images of dead and wounded bodies. The first image of fighting masks bodies behind weapons and armour:

bordweal clufon,
heowan heapolinde hamora lafan
afaran Eadweardes

they clove the shield-wall, the descendants of Edward hacked at the shields
with the leavings of hammers (ll. 5-7).

Descriptions of battle in Old English poetry commonly give great prominence to weapons, as symbols of violence and war in themselves. The metaphoric identification of men and weapons expresses the dedication of the warrior to his function as well as, perhaps, the role of the warrior as a human weapon for his lord.⁸⁷ From here, however, the dying body – always the enemy body – is revealed

⁸⁶ E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), pp. 60-157, quoted from p. 138.

⁸⁷ Bolton, '“Variation”', pp. 370-1; Isaacs, 'Battlefield Tour', p.

more and more fully. From the simple statement that *fæge feollon* ('doomed men fell dead', l. 12), we progress through the reckoning of numbers dead in lines 28-32 to the somewhat gruesome image of Constantine's son *wundun forgrunden* 'ground down / consumed by wounds' and finally to the corpses torn by carrion beasts. Bodies in this poem do not merely die but bleed and fragment: the field is stained *secga swate* ('with the blood of men', l. 13) and the remnant of the Norse army is *dreorig* ('mournful', but possibly also 'bloodied', l. 54).⁸⁸

The power and cohesion of the West Saxon state is guaranteed by the graphically imagined disintegration of enemy bodies. This becomes most clear in the image of the beasts of battle, which is developed at some length (ll. 60-65). The feeding of the beasts appears as a grotesque parody of the feasting of the hall, with the raven, left to *hræ bryttian*, 'distribute the carrion' (60b), cruelly echoing the lord's role as *sinces brytta*, 'giver of treasure'.⁸⁹ In this feast the bodies of the Scots and Vikings are transferred from the position of consumers to that of consumed. Instead of confirming their communal bonds and group identity, the feast casts them as the material of exchange for others; the defeated themselves lose their identity as social beings and are eaten.

In sum, *The Battle of Brunanburh* builds a sense of a political community that finds its form in companionship in arms under the command of Æthelstan and Edmund. The group so constituted is contrasted with the enemy group - structurally its mirror image - in the very fact of hostility, in the division between inside and outside and, most fundamentally, in the contrasts of success and failure, life and death, bodily wholeness and bodily disintegration. These binary oppositions and the glory of the West Saxon leaders are seen to be manifested in a past that is not a process of change but the fixed record of how things are.

The message of *Brunanburh* is one of immense confidence. Yet it is a poem full of loss, of departures, absences and empty spaces. We hear repeatedly of remnants or leavings. Æthelstan and Edmund cleave shields with *hamora lafan*

⁸⁸ K. P. Wentersdorf, 'On the Meaning of OE *Dreorig* in *Brunanburh* 54', *NM* 74 (1973), 232-7, reviews the possible meanings of *dreorig*, favouring the translation 'ill-fated' for this passage.

⁸⁹ See e.g. *Elene*, l. 194; *The Wanderer*, l. 25; *Beowulf*, ll. 607, 1170, 2071.

(‘the leavings of hammers’, l. 6, presumably meaning swords. *Lafan* is the MS A spelling; MSS B, C and D have *lafum*).⁹⁰ Constantine and Anlaf flee with their *herelafum* (l. 47). *Herelaf* is here to be translated as ‘remnant of an army’ but it can also mean ‘booty’: it thus evokes a double loss, referring directly to the decimation of the troop and ironically gesturing towards the booty that has not been acquired. A few lines later the Norsemen are *daraða laf* (‘the leavings of spears’, l. 54), again conveying the heavy loss of life they have suffered. All these phrases describe things that are present in terms of things that are absent and processes that have ceased. The work of the forge, the strength of the north and the battle itself are all over.

Herelaf and *daraða laf* both contribute to an extended portrayal of the woeful state of the defeated Norsemen and Scots. Particularly prominent is the lonely bereavement of Constantine:

he wæs his mæga sceard,
 freonda befyllend on folcstede,
 beslagen æt sæcce, and his sunu forlet
 on wælstowe wundun forgrunden,
 giungne æt guðe.

he was shorn of his kinsmen, bereaved of friends on the battlefield, deprived in the strife, and left his son on the battlefield consumed by wounds, a young man at war. (ll. 40-44)

This passage reiterates Constantine’s loss four times and includes three different terms for ‘deprived’. The language of emotional loss is close to that of physical injury. *Sceard* especially has implications of something being cut off: in Æthelberht’s lawcode it is used of severed ears and noses.⁹¹ The physical mangling of Constantine’s son is an image for the psychological pain of the father. Further, the suggestion that the father also is wounded relates to his helplessness to avenge his loss. Here we may find a parallel with the suffering of the bereaved father whose son has been hanged, imagined by Beowulf as he prepares to face the dragon:

Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle

⁹⁰ Campbell, *Brunanburh*, p. 83.

⁹¹ Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I, 5, §§ 42 and 48.

to gebidanne þæt his byre ride
 giong on galgan [...]
 [...] he him helpe ne mæg,
 eald ond infrod, ænige gefremman

So is it woeful for an old man to endure that his son should ride young on the gallows [...] He cannot help him, old and wise in years, he cannot achieve anything (*Beowulf*, ll. 2444-6, 2448-49)

Constantine's sorrow and humiliation, like that of the criminal's father, is rendered more poignant by the contrast of youth and age, the death of the young and vigorous when the old live on: Constantine's age and grey hair are repeatedly stressed (ll. 39, 45 and 46).

The sea in this section of the poem is, as I have argued, a symbol of the territorial separation of the two sides in the battle, but it is also the space of loneliness and loss.⁹² Here one may suggest a parallel with *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. These are poems which associate the sea with the severing of social ties and the loss of companions; something similar seems to be happening in *Brunanburh* with the juxtaposition of the sea voyage and the exploration of Constantine's bereavement and failure. Although Constantine is sailing home, the poem stresses what he has left behind: his son, most of his men and his ambitions. His homecoming is a kind of exile.

The poem is certainly scornful towards Constantine and his allies. The old king is an *eald inwidda* ('old wretch', l. 46), and there is surely something undignified in the haste with which Anlaf secures his own safety (*cread cneor on flot, cyning [...] feorh generede*, 'the ship pressed onto the sea, the king saved his life', ll. 35-6). Yet, although the poet overtly discourages sympathy with the losers, the poem is a more effective portrayal of defeat than of victory. Though the latter is

⁹² Compare *The Wanderer*, ll. 37-48, and *The Seafarer*, ll. 12-26; on the sea in Old English poetry, see F. S. Holton, 'Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982), 208-17; on European literature more broadly, see U. and P. Dronke,

strongly asserted, the former is vividly felt. It is this vividness that needs to be accounted for.

It is a paradox of the kind of contrastive construction of identity undertaken in *The Battle of Brunanburh* that it must include what it excludes. The poem recreates the warriors' aggression against the Norse and Scots, sending them out once more onto the lonely sea, but in order to do so it must recall them, as it were, to the frame of vision; it must bring them back into England in order to send them away. More significantly, it must bring back what they represent. In order to imagine strength, wholeness and victory, the poem imagines weakness, fragmentation and defeat.

To return to lines 39-49, the scenario of enemy victory is invoked only to be negated, and yet to be negated it has to be invoked. The very strategy that excludes and ridicules an alternative outcome to the glorious triumph of Æthelstan and Edmund in fact supplies an image of such an outcome. At the end of the poem the importance of the battle is asserted by comparing it to the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain:

Ne wearð wæl mære
on þis eighlande æfre gieta
folces gefylled beforan þissum
sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec,
ealde uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider
Engle and Seaxe up becoman,
ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan

A greater slaughter of people in this island was never yet inflicted with the sword's edges before this, as books tell us, old learned men, since the Angles and the Saxons came here from the east, sought Britain over the broad sea (ll. 65-71).

Brunanburh is, in Janet Thormann's phrase, a 'repetition as reversal' of this originary conflict:⁹³ the land the English conquered they now defend, confirming the claim to inhabit and rule the land made originally through conquest. But the reversal

Growth of Literature: The Sea and the God of the Sea, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 8 (1997) (for the motif of the treacherous deep, see pp. 3-13).

⁹³ Thormann, 'The Battle of Brunanburh', p. 12.

of roles that makes conquerors into defenders also re-opens the possibility that those formerly successful might now be defeated, that the English might take on the failure of the British as well as their territory. Constantine and Anlaf really might have had cause to boast.

The labels of loser and winner are unstable, just as *folc* is a vague term for those who suffer slaughter: it can cover Scots, Norse and British, and it could cover Angles and Saxons too. The battlefield is a place where identities are in dispute. It is itself a liminal space ambiguously placed in the homelands that help to define communities and leaders. The location of the battle is a vexed question, though Bromborough in the Wirral is a likely candidate.⁹⁴ If we accept the case for Bromborough, then the battle took place in an area of mixed Norse and Irish settlement. The settlement took place with the permission of the Mercian rulers but the settlers later attempted to annex better land to the south and were repulsed.⁹⁵ Brunanburh may thus have taken place in a debated border region between Norse and English (specifically Mercian) influence, its inhabitants uneasily and intermittently incorporated into the political order. The liminality of the battlefield represents a meeting point of historical practice, the defence of the border area, and poetic and psychological symbolism. The battlefield is a space in which dominance, self-conceptions and the constitution of political communities are in debate and subject to change. Given the poem's attempt to present identities and victories as absolute and fixed, it is significant that the battlefield itself is so vaguely imagined. It is a place that both winners and losers leave behind. The poem retreats from this place of instability.

Battle entails the possibility of death, mutilation and the dissolution of identity: the fragmentation of the community, the psyche and the body. In *Brunanburh* this is projected entirely onto the enemy. While the English forces meld into one force united with its West Saxon leaders, the Scots and Norse are shown dispersing, the leaders accompanied by tiny groups, the community broken up. As

⁹⁴ J. McN. Dodgson, 'The Background of Brunanburh', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 14: 4 (1956-7), 303-16.

has already been noted, the most concrete image of the enemy's defeat and collapse is the depiction of the bleeding, death and consumption of their bodies. This fragmentation of bodies is realised gradually. The poem carries its audience towards an increasingly vivid confrontation with death, while displacing death onto a despised other. However, as Kristeva comments, the corpse is 'a border that encroaches on everything'. These bodies are meant to mark the absolute difference between inside and outside, victors and defeated, and yet they are in fact the only bodies available. The victors appear as physical presences only indirectly, in their ability to hack and hew: in this poem, bodies only become visible as bodies when they are wounded or dead. Thus, while *Brunanburh* arrogantly contrasts the living English and their dead enemies, it supplies a reminder that to have a body at all is to have a body that can be broken.

Brunanburh is a poem in which violence is deployed to support the construction of community. Community here is a question of the political and imaginative bonds being forged between different Anglo-Saxon groups by allegiance to particular leaders (poetically conceived in terms of service and gift-giving between lord and warrior), comradeship in arms, participation in a striking victory and, most importantly, shared enmity. The brutal imagery of the poem re-enacts violence against the chosen out-groups, Vikings and Scots, and contrasts their physical and social dissolution with the unity of their opponents. Despite, however, the overt triumphalism of the poem, it also conveys a powerful impression of lack, bereavement and the collapse of identity, which I read as the re-emergence of an abjected fear of death. Thus the tension of community and violence, wholeness and fragmentation, operates in the poem at two levels. On the one hand, the wholeness of the victors and the fragmentation of the defeated is deliberately contrasted. On the other hand, the poem's wholeness, its insistence on a single message and on the fixity of identities, is disrupted and fragmented by a half-buried consciousness of fragility, contingency and change, and the impulse towards identification with the losers.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-6 and 312; on the Norse presence in the Wirral, see P. Cavill, S. E. Harding and J. Jesch (eds), *Wirral and its Viking Heritage* (Nottingham, 2000), in which Dodgson's essay is reprinted.

The Battle of Maldon: working through loss

The Battle of Maldon offers an instructive contrast to *The Battle of Brunanburh* in a number of ways. Like *Brunanburh*, it addresses the relationship of communities and leaders, the glory and horror of battle, the vulnerability of the body and defence against invaders. As in *Brunanburh*, the poem's manner of narration and approach to time are closely integrated with its message, and its construction of community is founded on a depiction of the past. However, while *Brunanburh* stresses the fixity of the past and presents its battle from the beginning as a completed, comprehended event, *Maldon* shows battle as a process unfolding. In my analysis of *Maldon* I wish to emphasize the way the poem develops as a narrative and the way this can be read as a means of psychological work, specifically the work of coming to terms with bereavement and the humiliation of defeat. If the tension of wholeness and fragmentation in *Brunanburh* is developed in a series of static contrasts, between victory and defeat, death and life, textual coherence and textual disruption, in *Maldon* such contrasts are part of the movement of the poem: patterns are built up and broken down, death is suffered and re-interpreted, identities and communities lost and reconstituted. In this process of construction and reconstruction, the audience and their literary competence take a central place. Patterns emerge from the predictive ability of the audience. Whereas *Brunanburh* attempts to be a closed poem with a foregone conclusion, *Maldon* does not declare its end at its beginning, and thus it is inclusive of different possibilities and conjectures. *Maldon* allows its audience to imagine alternative outcomes to the battle, to fantasize victory and to explore the changes and contingencies through which the battle is lost. It is appropriate to begin by relating the poem to its probable audience.

Maldon can plausibly be read as having been composed for the aristocratic community of Essex and neighbouring regions in the decade or so following the battle. With James Campbell, we may imagine the poem being performed at a monastic *convivium*, perhaps at Ely where Byrhtnoth's body lay, with the monks and nobles of East Anglia gathered together to eat, drink and remember.⁹⁶ The care taken

⁹⁶ J. Campbell, 'England, c. 991', in *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. Cooper, pp. 1-18 (pp. 1-2 and 15).

to name many of Byrhtnoth's companions and in some cases to indicate their origins or lineage suggests that the poem should be linked to the commemoration of the battle-dead by their families.⁹⁷ Mark Griffith's insight that the proper names in the poem are part of the poetic texture does not mean they cannot also be, as Margaret Locherbie-Cameron convincingly argues, the names of real people.⁹⁸ In particular, the poem clearly takes its place in the multiple commemoration of Byrhtnoth, alongside monastic chronicles and calendars at Ramsey and Ely, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries that record his death and the great tapestry (*cortina*), now lost, that his widow donated to Ely as a record of his deeds.⁹⁹

In its creativity and emotional charge *Maldon* is probably closest to the tapestry, of all the memorials of Byrhtnoth; indeed, it has been suggested that the poem derives from the tapestry.¹⁰⁰ The latter, according to the *Liber Eliensis*, was donated at the time (*eo tempore*) of Byrhtnoth's death and burial.¹⁰¹ Granted that this must be a loose dating, as some time must be allowed for the labour of sewing, it still seems reasonable to associate both the tapestry and the poem with the process of mourning and adjustment in the years immediately following the battle. Without wishing to refine too much on the issue of date, which can only be a matter of conjecture, Cecily Clark has shown that the linguistic features of the poem are not incompatible with an early date and an East Anglian origin.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ See U. Schwab, 'The Battle of Maldon: A Memorial Poem', in *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. Cooper, pp. 63-85 (pp. 83-5); G. Morgan, 'Spectamur agendo: The Universality of the Battle of Maldon', in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer*, ed. H. Conrad O'Briain, A. M. D'Arcy and J. Scattergood (Dublin, 1999), pp. 182-205 (pp. 185 and 196).

⁹⁸ M. S. Griffith, 'Alliterative Licence and the Rhetorical Use of Proper Names in *The Battle of Maldon*', in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Heatt*, ed. M. J. Toswell (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1995), pp. 60-79; M. Locherbie-Cameron, 'The Men Named in the Poem', in *Maldon AD 991*, ed. Scragg, pp. 238-49.

⁹⁹ ASC A 993, C, D, E and F 991; B. Dickins, 'The Day of Byrhtnoth's Death and Other Obits from a Twelfth-Century Ely Kalendar', *Leeds Studies in English and Kindred Languages* 6 (1937), 14-24; J. M. Bately, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *Maldon AD 991*, ed. Scragg, pp. 37-50; A. Kennedy, 'Byrhtnoth's Obits and Twelfth-Century Accounts of the Battle of Maldon', in *ibid.*, pp. 59-78; M. Budny, 'The Byrhtnoth Tapestry or Embroidery', in *ibid.*, pp. 263-78.

¹⁰⁰ D. Warwick Frese, '“Worda ond worca”: *The Battle of Maldon* and the Lost Text of Ælflæd's Tapestry', *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994 for 1991), 27-51.

¹⁰¹ E. O. Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, Camden Society Third Series 92 (1962), bk. II, c. 63, p. 136.

¹⁰² C. Clark, 'On Dating *The Battle of Maldon*: Certain Evidence Revisited', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 27 (1983), 1-22. Clark responds to arguments for a late date advanced by J. McKinnell, 'On the Date of *The Battle of Maldon*', *Medium Ævum* 44 (1975), 121-36.

The concern of the monastic sources to record property bequests and grants from Byrhtnoth and his kin is a reminder of the political and economic aspects of commemoration as well as the emotional work of mourning. Cyril Hart persuasively conjectures that the battle of Maldon may have had a significant effect on the political map of Essex. With Byrhtnoth's death, the ealdorðom held by his family for more than fifty years fell vacant. Hart suggests that the establishment of Colchester as a borough in its own right, Maldon's acquisition of a half-hundred and the setting up of mints at Maldon and Colchester may all belong to the period following the battle. Byrhtnoth's family held considerable estates around Colchester and Maldon and perhaps had resisted the elevation of these centres as an erosion of their own influence.¹⁰³ Hart indicates the importance of the battle for the local community as a catalyst of change: change in landholding, in administrative districts and in the distribution of power. These were matters that closely affected aristocratic social networks, bound up as they were in the possession and transfer of land. Social networks must also have been transformed by the deaths of heirs and heads of households in the battle. Thus, although the battle is usually considered to have been comparatively unimportant in the long term struggle against the Danes, it may have had a very considerable impact on the local aristocracy.

The Battle of Maldon is thus a poem that answers the needs of a particular community, the wealthy families of Essex. It represents a response to the threat of discontinuity. It reclaims the recent past, praises the dead and reaffirms aristocratic values of loyalty, courage and warrior prowess in the face of death, change and failure. In fact, the poem remakes an aristocratic self-image that has been wounded by defeat. More than one critic has stressed that, while the warrior ethos of the poem is framed in terms of traditional images such as the boasts of the mead-bench, the sacrificial ardour of Byrhtnoth's followers is something new.¹⁰⁴ It is the poet's achievement to make this innovative feature of the poem seem the affirmation of continuity, as the warriors justify their suicidal vengeance by appealing to tradition,

¹⁰³ C. Hart, 'Essex in the Late Tenth Century', in *Battle of Maldon*, ed. Cooper, pp. 171-204 (pp. 198-200).

¹⁰⁴ R. Frank, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in *The Battle of Maldon*: Anachronism or *Nouvelle Vague*', in *People and Places in Northern Europe 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Sawyer*, ed. I. Wood and N. Lund (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 95-106; J. M. Hill, *The Anglo-Saxon*

to ancient ideals of lordship, loyalty and companionship in arms. The task of the *Maldon* poet is to *adapt* the past for new needs; s/he enshrines the past as a source of stability and inspiration while remaking it. In order to transform the potential humiliation and real loss of Maldon into a matter of common pride, the poet reworks the established conventions of loyalty and vengeance. Byrhtnoth's followers are pursuing traditional goals to a new extreme, showing loyalty to a lord who is already dead and avenging him at the price of their own lives.¹⁰⁵ Thus the poem at once founds actions and identities in a warrior tradition and significantly modifies that tradition. For the fighting classes of Essex, the poem reinstates a sense of continuing aristocratic values and achievements, rooted in the past and continuing into the present. The defeat of Maldon, instead of being a failure and an unravelling, is now woven into the social texture. The poem gives back to the community its story.

The discussion that follows is based on the theory that *The Battle of Maldon* is a creative re-interpretation of a historical event, relatively soon after that event (perhaps within the next decade), and directed in the first place towards the social and psychological needs of the local community, though resonant beyond that community. The poem not only explores the bonds of community at a thematic level but is itself a means of building community. If it was performed in the context of a feast then it functioned as part of the reinforcement of social bonds on such occasions. Moreover, the poem creates an implied community that includes its audience. It also, in some highly detailed descriptions of combat and wounding, confronts the death and defeat that make the battle potentially disruptive of aristocratic self-conceptions as well as painful to the bereaved. My discussion begins by considering the process of constructing community in the poem before going on to look at the ways in which the poem might have helped its first audience to work through the traumas of bereavement and military failure.

If *Maldon* is a poem that affirms community in its audience by providing a shared story about the past, it also depicts community in action, the co-operation of a

Warrior Ethic: Reconstructing Lordship in Early English Literature (Gainesville, FL, 2000), pp. 111-28.

¹⁰⁵ Hill, *Warrior Ethic*, pp. 114-5, stresses the contrast with concepts of loyalty in *Beowulf* and even in the Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (s.a. 755).

fighting force, in terms of the sharing of a story. The characters in the poem labour to construct accounts of what is happening and to assume appropriate roles; for example, and most notably, the warriors who remain after Byrhtnoth's fall insistently tell each other what has just happened and what they must now do, tracing connections between past, present and future to form for themselves a common narrative. The poem does not merely narrate but foregrounds, as fundamental to the workings of community, the way narratives are constructed. This is, first and foremost, a question of perception. Tom Shippey remarks of *Beowulf* that it is a poem full of looking. Characters are shown beholding the visual signs of events or character (the bright armour that declares the distinguished warrior, the bloody arm betokening the conquest of Grendel) and through them the audience too find out what is evident or *ypgesene*.¹⁰⁶ Similarly in *Maldon*, especially at the beginning and in the series of speeches after the death of Byrhtnoth, the action is frequently presented through the things seen and heard and the conclusions drawn by the characters.

Perception is a question not only of looking and listening but of understanding, intention, conjecture and will. In a discussion of narrative in film, Edward Branigan argues that narrative is crucially dependent on audience perception. He analyses perception in terms of two kinds of mental processing, 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'. 'Bottom-up' processing is the reception of immediate sensory impressions and minimal units of data – the images on the cinema screen, or the individual words of the poet, seen or heard in succession. 'Top-down' processing is the organisation of the information received into patterns, according to expectation, knowledge of schemas and selection of details considered to be salient. The recognition of type-scenes or themes in Old English poetry, including elements that may have been manipulated or omitted, is an example of this latter kind of processing. 'Top-down' processing involves forming hypotheses about how the narrative is likely to progress as well as having a sense of what has happened so far.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ T. A. Shippey, *Beowulf*, *Studies in English Literature* 70 (1978), p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension*, pp. 37-8.

In *Maldon* we can trace the operation of perception both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’. The characters are shown observing what is happening around them but also interpreting it, judging the behaviour of others and the likely direction of events. Perception is found to be closely bound up with mental disposition, especially with courage and will. The prosecution of the battle is made possible by the building up of a common perception that becomes a common purpose, a desired story for future events which the warriors endeavour to perform in their fighting. At the death of Byrhtnoth, the turning point of the poem, the common vision is fragmented. The deserters and the loyal thegns are differently affected by the sight of the dead leader and, as Offa later reveals, some join the retreat because their eyes deceive them: they see Godric fleeing and think he is Byrhtnoth. The speeches of the remaining warriors in the latter part of the poem are an effort to recover unity through a new narrative, purpose and will, the desire for revenge.

The audience of the poem cannot share in the action but they can share in the perceptions and desires that underlie it. They ‘see’ the events and actions beheld by the characters, and, like them, they form hypotheses and hopes for the direction of the narrative. The audience’s experience of the narrative, however (as also the audience’s impression of the characters’ experiences), is shaped by the selective activity of the poet: what the audience sees is what they are allowed to see. Branigan’s analysis of the perception of film narrative is especially useful because the art of *Maldon* in some ways resembles that of film. Many critical accounts of the poem have drawn, consciously or casually, on cinematic metaphors – scenes, sequences, close-ups, wide shots, slow-motion.¹⁰⁸ The diction of *Maldon* is sparse, with minimal use of variation and compounding. As A. C. Spearing argues for early Middle English romances, the effects of the poem are a question less of linguistic exuberance than of the choice of significant details. Spearing characterizes this seemingly artless art as one based on synecdoche (part for whole) rather than

¹⁰⁸ E.g. G. C. Britton, ‘The Characterization of the Vikings in *The Battle of Maldon*’, *Notes and Queries* 210, n.s. 12 (1965), 85-7 (p. 86); Dean, ‘History Versus Poetry’, p. 103; H. Phillips, ‘The Order of Words and Patterns of Opposition in the *Battle of Maldon*’, *Neophilologus* 81 (1997), 117-28 (pp. 120-1).

metaphor.¹⁰⁹ The construction of community in *Maldon* is a matter of shared but also highly selective perception.

The fragment opens with Byrhtnoth instructing his troops and the reactions of two individual warriors, Offa's kinsman and Eadric.

þa þæt Offan mæg ærest onfunde,
 þæt se eorl nolde yrhðo geþolian,
 he let him þa of handon leofne fleogan
 hafoc wið holtes, and to þære hilde stop;
 be þam man mihte oncnawan þæt se cniht nolde
 wacian æt þam wige, þe he to wæpnum feng.
 Eac him wolde Eadric his ealdre gelæstan,
 frean to gefeohte, ongan þa forð beran
 gar to guþe.

When the kinsman of Offa first discovered that the earl did not want to suffer cowardice, he made his dear hawk fly from his hands to the wood, and advanced to the fray; by that a man could recognize that the youth did not mean to weaken at war when he took up weapons. Eadric also wanted to support his prince, his lord in the fight, he began then to carry forward his spear to the struggle. (ll. 5-13)

This passage exemplifies the intertwining of perception, desire and action. It begins with Offa's kinsman *perceiving*, on the evidence of what Byrhtnoth has just said and done, what Byrhtnoth *wants* (or, rather, does not want) from his men. Perception here is a matter of both receiving sensory data and understanding the behaviour of others. By seeing and hearing Byrhtnoth's actions the kinsman of Offa comes to realise what the ealdorman intends. He responds with physical actions (releasing the hawk, stepping into line) that are themselves to be objects of perception (*oncnawan*) giving insight into his will. The repeated structure of a verb of perception introducing a subordinate clause with *nolde* conveys the way the young man's intentions and expectations are brought into line with Byrhtnoth's: both are now thinking forward to battle and to the bravery that must be displayed there. Eadric too is brought into the pattern, though with variation. His desire is grammatically positive: he *wolde*. Verbal repetition describes a process of imitation and inclusion, the building of unity between leader and men as all begin to think the same thoughts

¹⁰⁹ A. C. Spearing, 'Early Medieval Narrative Style', chapter 2 of *Readings in Medieval Poetry*

and assume the same position of readiness for combat. Inclusion is also exclusion: the hawk must be abandoned and cowards are rejected. The opening of *Maldon* is a micro-study in community as something dependent on the elaboration of shared symbols. The warriors watch and hear each other and prepare to be watched and heard, recognising and displaying symbolic behaviours. The passage introduces a key assumption of the poem, that bodily behaviours can be scrutinized as an index of inner states.¹¹⁰

Who is applying the scrutiny? As Rosemary Huisman remarks with regard to Beowulf's fight against Grendel's mother, the narrative point of view does not remain constant: in line five the external narrator is temporarily silenced and we 'see' through the eyes of Offa's kinsman.¹¹¹ This flitting between an external and internal view does not seek to contrast objective and subjective understandings of events. There is no doubt that what Offa's kinsman perceives is really the case. What emerges is a vision mediated through the characters but endorsed by the narrator. Just as Eadric, the nameless kinsman of Offa and Byrhtnoth all come to share an awareness that battle approaches and a desire for valiant conduct, the poem builds up a community of perception between characters, narrator and audience. The audience is drawn into the community by the assumption of shared values and principles for interpreting action. The unspecific *man of man mihte oncnawan* implicitly includes the audience: they are invited to see and understand along the same lines as narrator and characters.

In Byrhtnoth's confrontation with the Viking messenger, the division between enemies is revealed in differences of perception and will. The Viking's speech offers an appreciation of what is happening and what will happen that is also an expression of the interests of the Scandinavian force. Two possible futures are indicated: payment of tribute or a mutually damaging battle:

(Cambridge, 1987), pp. 24-55 (pp. 24-43).

¹¹⁰ See the very useful remarks on characterization in *Beowulf* in P. Clemoes, 'Action in *Beowulf* and our Perception of it', in *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style*, ed. D. G. Calder (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1979), pp. 147-68 (pp. 156-62).

¹¹¹ R. Huisman, 'The Three Tellings of Beowulf's Fight with Grendel's Mother', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 20 (1989), 217-48 (pp. 218-9).

eow betere is
 þæt ge þisne garræs mid gafole forgyldon
 þonne we swa hearde hilde dælon.

It is better for you that you buy off this spear-storm with tribute than we share such hard battle. (ll. 31-3).

This assessment is phrased as a statement of fact (it *is* better for you) but it is clearly dependent on desire, specifically a desire for cash: *we willaþ mid þam sceattum us to scype gangan* ('we want to take to our ships with the money', l. 40). The verb *willan* appears three times in this thirteen-line speech, twice attached to the Vikings and once to Byrhtnoth. The messenger tells the ealdorman that the decision is his whether to pay up:

Gyf þu þat gerædest, þe her ricost eart,
 þæt þu þine leoda lysan wille

If you decide, you who are the most powerful person here, that you want to ransom your people (ll. 36-7)

The messenger depicts Byrhtnoth's power and will as the determining factors. The Vikings, apparently, are motivated by no hostility and are prepared to accommodate Byrhtnoth's choice, though their preferred option is peace (*we willað [...] grið fæstnian*, 'we want [...] to secure a peace', l. 35). Nonetheless, this subtle speech clearly veils a threat. From the very beginning, Byrhtnoth's situation is presented as one of compulsion (*þu most*, 'you must', l. 30) in the face of a formidable enemy, the *sæmen snelle*, ('bold seamen', l. 29). According to the Viking version of events, the ealdorman must accede to their demands.

Byrhtnoth offers an alternative narrative, both to the messenger and to his own listening men. He makes explicit the violence lurking beneath the deceptively mild phrases of the Viking spokesman: for the vague and generalized *heard hild* ('fierce battle', l. 33) he substitutes the concrete, visual imagery of weapons (*ættrynne ord and ealde swurd*, 'venomed point and ancient sword', l. 47). Byrhtnoth's powers of perception enable him to *see through* the subtleties of the messenger. Furthermore, he asserts that the Viking assessment of the situation is

wrong: their opponents are not the sort to capitulate, but are united in determined resistance:

[...] her stynt unforcuð eorl mid his werode,
þe wile gealgean eþel þysne

here stands with undamaged reputē an earl with his troop, who wants to defend this country (ll. 51-2)

He proposes a third possible future, a successful English defence, with the Vikings receiving spears, and implicitly death, for tribute (*to gafole garas*, ‘spears as tribute’, l. 46). Again, perception and expectation are closely associated with desire: the English people *want* (*willað*, l. 46) to fight. However, Byrhtnoth also exposes the link between perception and values. The Viking has argued that it would be ‘better’ for the English to pay. Presumably the comparative rests on a ‘good’ of expediency. Byrhtnoth appeals to a stricter code:

To heanlic me þinceð
þæt ge mid urum sceattum to scype gangon
unbefohtene

It seems to me too shameful that you should go to your ships with our money unfought (ll. 55-7)

For Byrhtnoth, the imperatives of shame and honour are as much a part of the situation to be assessed as the possible material benefits and disadvantages.

The modesty of *me þinceð* is nicely calculated. Byrhtnoth stresses his personal moral perspective and thereby highlights the Vikings’ failure to share it. Although the ealdorman depicts himself making an ethical decision in the first person singular, that decision proceeds from a general obligation and necessity:

Feallan sceolon
hæþene æt hilde [...] Ne sceole ge swa softe sinc gegangan

The heathen must fall in battle [...] You must not so easily obtain treasure (ll. 54-5, 59).

Byrhtnoth speaks for how things *ought* to be. He stresses the moral gulf between the Vikings, identified as heathens, and their Christian opponents. The pronouncement that *feallan sceolon / hæþene æt hilde* has gnomic overtones: it is fitting and right that the enemies of God should die in battle (with which they conveniently alliterate). Byrhtnoth's reply to the messenger is a pattern of rhetorical skill, turning the Viking's subtleties and frequently his very words back on him and deftly assuming the moral high ground.¹¹²

A number of points need to be made about the implications of the parley for the construction of community and the development of the narrative (issues which are, as I argue, closely linked). In this exchange, the first appearance of the Vikings in the poem, we move from community as inclusion to community as exclusion: the sharp division between enemies, physically marked by the line of the River Blackwater. Communities are defined against each other, Christians versus heathens, proud warriors versus seekers of easy gain. It is very clear where the sympathies of the audience are expected to lie. Indeed, it is the community of the English warriors who are the focus of attention throughout the poem, the Vikings remaining largely uncharacterized, blurred figures of menace.¹¹³ Given the audience I imagine for the poem at its composition, their prior inclinations must have supported and indeed shaped the poem's English focus.

Less obviously, the parley confirms a sense of the dynamics of the community under construction. Byrhtnoth is firmly established as the voice of the English force. One of the themes of the poem is solidarity between followers and leaders. As George Clark observes, the messenger has attempted to split Byrhtnoth off from the group, addressing him in the singular as *þu* and emphasising his power, as the *ricost* man there, to make a decision individually. Byrhtnoth counters this strategy in his opening line: *gehyrst þu, sælida, hwæt þis folc segeð?* ('Do you

¹¹² There are a number of critical discussions of the exchange with the messenger: see e.g. Irving, 'Heroic Style', pp. 460-1; T. A. Shippey, 'Boar and Badger: An Old English Heroic Antithesis?', in *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 16 (1985), 220-39 (pp. 228-9); M. Nelson, 'The Battle of Maldon and Juliana: The language of confrontation', in *Modes of Interpretation*, ed. Rugg Brown et al., pp. 137-50 (pp. 138-40); Clark, 'Maldon: History, Poetry, Truth', p. 76.

¹¹³ P. E. Szarmach, 'The (Sub-)Genre of *The Battle of Maldon*', in *Battle of Maldon*, ed. Cooper, pp. 43-61 (pp. 60-1); but see Britton, 'The Characterization of the Vikings', for a contrary view.

hear, seaman, what this people says?' l. 45).¹¹⁴ Now the situation is reversed and it is the messenger who, as an individual (*bu*), faces the will of a whole people. Byrhtnoth asserts his unity with his men, but he also assumes the right to speak for them. The kind of community celebrated in *Maldon* is firmly based on the aristocratic principle: the ealdorman speaks for the thegns, and he himself is present as a servant of the king, desiring to *gealgean* [...] *Æþelredes eard, ealdres mines* ('to defend [...] the land of Æthelred, of my prince', ll. 52-3). The Vikings, interestingly, seem to have no leader (though if MS A of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is correct they were commanded by no less a person than Olaf Tryggvason). The representation of groups by individuals is both a poetic technique and a social principle in *The Battle of Maldon*. In the description of the battle itself, the camera stays on Byrhtnoth and the series of combats in which he engages up to his death. This is at once a synecdochic portrayal of battle, indicating the total scene by concentrating on one part of it, and a manifestation of the importance of the leader's actions and fate to the course of the day.

Byrhtnoth's speech to the messenger completes the impression of the English gradually ranging themselves into a single viewpoint and purpose. It also hardens an already strong sense of the direction of the narrative, the crescendo towards battle. Other directions have been gestured at – a hawking party, flight, payment of tribute and the making of a treaty. Now, however, it is clear that both sides mean to fight. Though the parley highlights the opposition between the perspectives and ideologies of the two sides, it also constitutes an agreement to join battle, so that in a sense the Vikings too are brought into the community of perception shared by the narrator, the audience, Byrhtnoth and his men. Now both sides share the same view of the delaying tide:

To lang hit him þuhte
hwænne hi togædere garas beron.

It seemed too long to them until they might bear spears together. (ll. 66-7)

¹¹⁴ G. Clark, 'The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem', *Speculum* 43 (1968), 52-71, (pp. 64-5).

But this desire for battle proceeds from Byrhtnoth. His orders and his will shape the narrative. It is he who teaches the English how to stand and hold their weapons, and the pronouncement that *feallan sceolon hæþene æt hilde* is an expression of his determination, the resolve of an *anræd* earl ('resolute, single-minded', l. 44). Thus the hardening shape of the battle-narrative, which has begun its conventional pattern with the preparation of the troops and the issue of a challenge, proceeds from Byrhtnoth's authority within his community. The audience's recognition of the approach of battle is intertwined with the construction of a community whose values and will are personified in Byrhtnoth.

The opening of *The Battle of Maldon* gives insight into the development of feelings of inclusion, some of which embrace the audience of the poem as well as its characters. Inclusion is rooted in allegiance to a leader; mutual listening, watching and display; imitation (whose literary counterpart is repetition); a sense of common values; the identification of an enemy (exclusion); and commitment to a common story, which entails the pursuit or, for the audience, at least the desire of a particular end. At the death of Byrhtnoth the keystone of this structure is lost. Immediately we are shown the fragmentation of the English group. We find that it was not, in fact, united in desire after all: those who 'did not want to be there' (*bær beon noldon*, l. 185) flee, so that the community is physically broken up. The sons of Odda and their companions make for the symbolic outside space of the wood (l. 193), the same place to which Offa's kinsman's hawk was banished at the start of the fragment (l. 8). The remaining warriors seek to rebuild the community. In the absence of a leader to issue orders, they rely more heavily on display, imitation and the elaboration of a story. However, while the story that Byrhtnoth offered was very much a story about the future, a story of glorious victory against a heathen enemy, the thegns' story is as much about their past relationship with the ealdorman as about the new purpose they espouse, revenge.

According to Byrhtnoth's script for the battle, set out in his speech to the messenger, violence concerns two main relationships: that between the defenders and the enemy, and that between the local defenders and their king. In the second part of the poem, however, the continued prosecution of violence becomes an expression of loyalty to Byrhtnoth himself. This section of the poem is filled with

images of the past interaction between ealdorman and men; it extends the scope of the narrative backwards from the encounter with the Vikings at the Blackwater to previous gift-giving and oath-making. It is in fact the voice of the narrator that first alludes to this wider context for the battle:

flugon on þæt fæsten and hyra feore burgon,
 and manna ma þonne hit ænig mæð wære,
 gyf hi þa geearnunga ealle gemundon
 þe he him to duguþe gedon hæfde.
 Swa him Offa on dæg ær asæde
 on þam meþelstede, þa he gemot hæfde,
 þæt þær modelice manega spræcon
 þe eft æt þearfe þolian noldon.

they [the sons of Odda] fled into the stronghold and saved their lives, and many more than was at all fitting, if they had called to mind all the favours that he had done for the retainers. Thus Offa had told him earlier in the day in the assembly-place, when he held muster, that many there spoke boldly who later at need would not endure. (ll. 194-201)

This passage evokes the obligations that bind followers to leaders and expresses a strong moral stance in favour of staying and fighting. The resolution of the remaining warriors is approved before they express it. The narrator affirms a principle of social cohesion but also acknowledges the fragility of that cohesion: men's words are not necessarily to be relied upon. The passage introduces themes to be elaborated in what follows, the fulfilment of vows, the memory of previous favours and the paramountcy of loyalty. It also, while reasserting the centrality of the lord, introduces the more co-operative style of the second part of the battle. The preparation for the fight has involved more than Byrhtnoth issuing instruction; it has also encompassed consultation with leading thegns such as Offa and a meeting at which many voices were heard.

After the drastic divisions that greet Byrhtnoth's death, the reaffirmation of unity in the remaining force is again a matter of shared perception, action and will. The warriors behold the death of their lord, advance to the fight and desire revenge at all costs:

ealle gesawon
 heorðgeneatas þæt hyra heorra læg.

Pa ðær wendon forð wlanca þegenas
 [...]
 hi woldon þa ealle oðer twega,
 lif forlætan oððe leofne gewrecan.

all the hearth-retainers saw that their lord lay dead. Then the proud thegns went forward there [...] they all wanted one of two things, to lose their life or avenge the dear man. (ll. 203-5, 207-8)

This passage summarizes the effortful process anatomized in the many succeeding speeches and descriptions. The manner in which the warriors by turns deliver their speeches and plunge into the fray is clearly non-naturalistic. Nonetheless, there is powerful psychological insight in *Maldon's* portrayal of the thegns each renegotiating their individual places in the common story, encouraging and imitating each other.

The speeches of the thegns are both repetitive and incremental; each builds on each. The core of most is a declaration of the individual's determination to fight. This determination is often expressly linked to a sense of obligation which in itself is dependent on memory.¹¹⁵ As Ælfwine, son of Ælfric, declares:

Gemunu þe mæla þe we oft æt meodu spræcon,
 þonne we on bence beot ahofon,
 hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewinn
 [...]
 Ne sceolon me on þære þeode þegenas ætwitan
 þæt ic of ðisse fyrde feras wille

I remember the words that we often spoke at the mead, when we vaunted boasts on the bench about fierce war, heroes in the hall [...] Thegns must not reproach me among the people that I wish to leave this army (ll. 212-14 and 220-1)

Here Ælfwine traces his place in a narrative that starts with vows in the hall and must culminate with honour on the battle-field, not with retreat and shame. Similarly Leofsunu expresses his intention to control the ending of his own tale: he will not be reproached, but will die gloriously and violently in the pursuit of revenge (*ne þurfon me embe Sturmere stedefæste hæleð / wordum ætwitan* 'the steadfast heroes

¹¹⁵ See Hill, *Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*, p. 122 on the warriors' invocation of 'every personal social tie and obligation'.

around Sturmer need not reproach me in words', ll. 249-50). Offa elaborates the past that has led up to this moment, providing further details of the flight of the deserters which has deceived many into following. He endorses Ælfwine's encouragement of his companions, contrasting Ælfwine's resolve with the actions of Godric, the *earh Oddan bearn* ('cowardly son of Odda', l. 238). The humble Dunnere summarizes the obligations and the future of those who are not cowards: *Ne mæg na wandian se þe wreccan þenceð / frean on folce* ('he who intends to avenge his lord among the people may never draw back', ll. 258-9). In this way Byrhtnoth's followers build up between them a portrayal of what has led up to this moment and what is to come, a story entirely bound up with their declarations of personal resolution and their judgements of others. The story they outline concerns the making, breaking and fulfilling of vows, and it envisages shame and reproach for the oath-breakers, glory and death for the loyal.

The thegns confront the fragmentation of community. Offa depicts in concrete terms the schism that has issued in the breaking up of military formations and, implicitly, the breaking of human bodies: *weard her on felda folc totwæmed, / scyldburch tobrocen* ('the people has been divided here on the field, the shield-wall shattered', ll. 241-2). In response, he and others assert the integrity of their own identities as the reaffirmation of the communities and networks that produced them. Ælfwine, proclaiming his noble lineage and his grandfather the ealdorman (ll. 216-19), both vaunts his individual reputation and expresses a sense that identity is grounded in kinship. Earlier in the poem we have been told that Wulfstan, one of the defenders of the causeway, is *cafne mid his cynne* (l. 76), 'valiant by virtue of his family'.¹¹⁶ There is perhaps an implication here that courage is linked to high birth, though Dunnere the ceorl is clearly a counter-example; in any case, the virtues of the individual are seen as rooted in the family. In references to their kin and to those who will judge their performance according to ideas of shame and honour, the warriors re-imagine their wider community as well as reinforcing the bonds among themselves. Watching, hearing and admonishing each other, they themselves embody a part of this community. The audience, again, is implicitly included. They are, through the medium of the poem, the witnesses of the thegns' acts; they are

¹¹⁶ This translation is taken from S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982), p. 521.

(perhaps even literally) the thegns around Sturmer who will applaud and not reproach. Faced with the loss of Byrhtnoth, the failure of his story of victory and the dividing of the army, the new story the warriors construct asserts the endurance of their values, their identities and their social networks.

The new story of loyalty and revenge becomes the final message of the poem. It is not merely that the characters find an acceptable way of understanding their plight: this is the interpretation that the poem offers to its audience. Dolores Warwick Frese observes that speeches constitute a chief means of narration in *Maldon*.¹¹⁷ Offa's speech at lines 231-43, for instance, offers crucial information about the mass flight not available elsewhere in the text. As we have seen for the beginning of the poem, the narrative viewpoint moves in and out of the subjectivity of the characters, not contrasting subjectivity with objectivity but allowing them to reinforce each other. However, whereas in the first part of the poem the resolution that emerged from shared perception was frustrated at Byrhtnoth's death, in the second part of the poem resolution is carried through and the story reaches its intended conclusion. A most important point, again made by Frese, is that the speeches of the warriors anticipate, define and are confirmed by their actions: they perform their own heroic deaths with self-conscious eloquence.¹¹⁸ The thegns' sense of their past and their purpose meshes seamlessly with the course of events as presented by the poet. The poem as it stands is incomplete. Nonetheless, it is possible to contrast the second half with the first in that the latter, though full of death, builds to success, fulfilment and completion.

Raðe wearð æt hilde Offa forheawen;
he hæfde ðeah geforþod þæt he his frean gehet

Quickly Offa was cut down in the battle; yet he had fulfilled what he promised to his lord (ll. 286-7)

The first part of the poem presents the construction of community in allegiance to Byrhtnoth and in commitment to a story of glorious English defence against the Vikings; the hinge of the poem, the death of the ealdorman, brings the

¹¹⁷ Warwick Frese, 'Poetic Prowess', p. 93.

¹¹⁸ Ibid; see also Warwick Frese, '“Worda ond worca”', pp. 27-8.

dividing of the army and the collapse of the story; in the concluding part the warriors remake the story as one of vengeance for their lost lord, rebuilding their community on a foundation of loyalty and honour. The structure of *Maldon* is one of temporal progression but it is also one of building up and breaking down, an effortful working through and working over of difficulty and distress. The faithful warriors are not only reconstructing their sense of purpose but repeatedly confronting their loss: the second part of the poem returns again and again to the image of the dead lord.¹¹⁹ Ælfwine expresses his grief:

nu min ealdor ligeð
forheawen æt hilde. Me is þæt hearma mæst;
he wæs ægðer min mæg and min hlaford.

Now my prince lies cut down in battle. To me that is the greatest of griefs; he was both my kinsman and my lord. (ll. 222-4)

Having considered the way feelings of commitment and inclusion are developed in the poem, I turn now to the question of how it provides a channel for emotions, allowing its audience to confront defeat in battle, bereavement and the fear of death.

I have argued that the opening of the poem unites characters and audience in the expectation of battle and that Byrhtnoth projects a glorious victory and the death of the heathen. Byrhtnoth is careful to acknowledge the limits of his vision and his inability to determine the future:

God ana wat
hwa þære wealstowe wealdan mote.

God alone knows who will be able to control the battlefield. (ll. 94-5)

However, his determination that *feallan sceolon / hæþene æt hilde* exerts a strong influence over the mood of the earlier part of the poem. Although there can rarely have been an audience for *Maldon* who were not aware that the battle ended in defeat, and least of all such a local audience as the one I imagine, the opening of the poem sets up what might still be called an expectation of victory. Byrhtnoth's appeal

¹¹⁹ Harris, 'Love and Death in the *Männerbund*', p. 99; Irving, 'Heroic Style', pp. 464-5.

to the knowledge of God reinforces this, if anything: in a conflict of heathens and Christians, Providence must surely favour the latter. The religious language of Byrhtnoth's speech, its concern with obligations and its authoritative tone, certainly convey a sense that the English *ought* to win.

The expectation of victory would be strengthened for an audience by the employment of its literary competence, its recognition of familiar patterns and significant details. The conflict of heathens and Christians (or Old Testament followers of God) usually, in Old English poetry, culminates in victory for the right side: the paired battles in *Genesis A* lines 1982-2095, Constantine's encounter with the Goths in *Elene*, the rout of the Assyrians by the Bethulians in *Judith* and the abortive battle in *Exodus* all conform to this pattern. Similarly heroes generally win: Beowulf wins all three of his great monster-fights, even though he dies after the last. Within *The Battle of Maldon*, devices of anticipation and repetition point towards an approaching victory. The conflict of Vikings and English is played out three times in the poem, twice on a smaller scale and then in the battle proper. Both the verbal sparring of the parley and the defence of the causeway are unambiguously English victories and they display the strength and ability of the English warriors. At the causeway, the Viking viewpoint is enlisted to confirm the formidable prowess of Wulfstan, Ælfere and Maccus:

[...] hi þæt ongeaton and georne gesawon
þæt hi þær bricgweardas bitere fundon

they perceived and readily saw that they found fierce bridge-guards there (ll. 84-5).

At this point, a darker note is sounded with the granting of *landes to fela* ('too much ground', l. 90) to the attacking force. The debate on *ofermod* ('excessive pride'? 'great courage'?) is now old and tired, but the balance of probability does seem to be that it is a negative quality and these lines mark something going wrong for the English.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, it should be noted that the crossing of the

¹²⁰ *Ofermod* was identified as Byrhtnoth's 'fatal flaw' most influentially by J. R. R. Tolkien, 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Son of Beorhthelm', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* n.s. 6 (1953), 1-18; on the personal and rhetorical nature of Tolkien's argument, see Shippey, 'Boar and Badger', p. 233; see also N. J. Engberg, 'Mod – mægen Balance in *Elene*, *The*

Blackwater is *not* the turning point of the battle, but only its slightly inauspicious start. If the Vikings ‘use guile’ (one popular interpretation of the *hapax legomenon lytegian*, l. 86), this is as much a further moral black mark against them as a sign of possible gullibility in their opponents. In the battle that follows we are shown English warriors successfully attacking and killing Vikings, and one Viking who advances on Byrhtnoth is contemptuously described as a *ceorl* confronting an *eorl* (l. 132). Not specifically heralding victory, but contributing to a sense of things proceeding rightly, is the employment of conventional patterns and motifs in the battle description. These include the beasts of battle (ll. 106-7), here only briefly evoked and not carrying quite the horror they bring in *Brunanburh*, the preliminary exchange of missiles (ll. 108-10), the references to noise (ll. 106 and 107) and the forecast of *tir æt getohte* (‘glory in battle’, l. 104 – and this, although deeply conventional, perhaps does reinforce the expectation of victory).¹²¹ *The Battle of Maldon* comes as close as possible to depicting the English triumph that failed to happen. It allows the audience to fantasize that triumph and relive the progression from hope to disappointment to a new perspective. The positive signals of the early part of the poem encourage immersion in the course of events as it develops, so that Byrhtnoth’s death is greeted with shock and protest: the spear passes *to forð* (‘too far’, l. 150) through the ealdorman’s body and the Viking wounds his arm *to raðe* (‘too quickly’, l. 164). Viking success is excess, an outrage. In the latter part of the poem the thegns, successfully displaying their courage and fulfilling their vows, enable defeat to be read, after all, as a kind of victory.

The transformation of the perspective on victory is already under way in the battle description that leads up to Byrhtnoth’s death. *Maldon*’s depiction of battle is unusually focused on the individual and on the minutiae of combat. As I have already argued, this is in part to do with the ideological prominence of Byrhtnoth in

Battle of Maldon and The Wanderer, *NM* 85 (1985), 212-26. Arguments for a positive interpretation of *ofermod* are advanced by, for instance, G. Clark, ‘*The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem*’, *Speculum* 43 (1968), 52-71 (pp. 57 and 69), elaborated in his ‘*The Hero of Maldon: Vir pius et strenuus*’, *Speculum* 54 (1979), 257-82 (pp. 274-80); but see the review of evidence by H. Gneuss, ‘*The Battle of Maldon 89: Byrhtnoth’s “ofermod” once again*’, *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), 117-37. For a sensible recent comment, see P. E. Szarmach, ‘*The (Sub-)Genre*’, p. 59.

¹²¹ See D. K. Fry, ‘*Themes and Type-Scenes in Elene 1-113*’, *Speculum* 44 (1969), 35-45 (p. 36); G. Clark, ‘*The Battle in The Battle of Maldon*’, *NM* 69 (1968), 374-9 (p. 376). *Tir æt getohte*: compare *tir æt tohtan* in *Judith* l. 197. For references to noise, compare *Elene* ll. 50-1 and 109-10, *Judith* ll. 204-5 and 223, *Fight at Finnsburh* ll. 6-7, *Genesis A* ll. 1990-1 and 2061-2.

the poem. It is also, however, a symptom of the poem's particular functions and message. The close-up portrayal of violence allows a scrutiny of the meanings of violence that goes beyond the dichotomy of defeat and victory. It also constitutes a confrontation with the facts of wounding and death.

The battle proper opens with generalized descriptions of fighting in which particular people and incidents are lost in a broad impression of struggle:

bogan wæron bysige, bord ord onfeng.
 Biter wæs se beadoræs, beornas feollon
 on gehwæðere hand, hyssas lægon.

bows were busy, shield took point. Fierce was the onslaught, men fell on either side, warriors lay dead. (ll. 110-12)

The image of bows, shields and spears is strongly visual. To return to the cinematic metaphor, it functions as an establishing shot: weapons *mean* battle, they belong to battle, as wisdom poetry declares: *ecg sceal wið hellme / hilde gebidan* ('edge must experience battle against helm', *Maxims II*, ll. 16-17). As has already been remarked with regard to *Brunanburh*, weapons imagery is a conventional part of Old English battle poetry. Here the weapons seem almost to be fighting by themselves: there is a sense of their purpose being inexorably fulfilled, of a kind of terrible, impersonal rightness in battle. Battle is at once something overwhelming, fierce (*biter*) and full of death and something that unfolds with a dreadful propriety. From the wide shot the poem now narrows into a close-up, detailed account that confirms this sense of underlying order, depicting the fighting not in terms of chaos or confusion but of deliberate action and precise mental and physical control.

The first incident we are shown is a death followed by vengeance:

Wund wearð Wulfmær, wælræste geceas,
 Byrhtnoðes mæg; he mid billum wearð,
 his swustersunu, swiðe forheawen.
 þær wearð wicingum wiperlean agyfen.
 Gehyrde ic þæt Eadweard anne sloge
 swiðe mid his swurde, swenges ne wyrnde,
 þæt him æt fotum feoll fæge cempa;
 þæs him his ðeoden þanc gesæde

Wulfnær was wounded, Byrhtnoth's kinsman, he chose death in battle; he, Byrhtnoth's sister-son, was fiercely cut down with swords. That was quickly paid back to the Vikings. I have heard that Edward struck one fiercely with his sword, did not withhold the blow, so that the doomed warrior fell at his feet; his prince thanked him for that (ll. 113-20)

The themes that I wish to stress in this passage are ones that other scholars, especially Helen Phillips,¹²² have already dealt with, but they are themes central to the poem and thus worth rehearsing. In the first place we must note the presentation of combat as exchange: death is balanced by death, with the repetition of *swiðe* and the alliteration on *sw* underlining the parallelism. Thus there is a logic and order to killing. It is something calculated and considered; Byrhtnoth thanks Edward for his deed, showing that the act has been watched and assessed. In the second place – and this is the heart of the poem – the warrior's deeds are always a matter of choice. Edward's vengeance, in a manner that becomes characteristic of the poem and is also found in *Beowulf*, is presented alongside its alternative: the striking of the blow is the result of a choice not to withhold it.¹²³ The cerebral and deliberate quality of the killing is brought out by the extended, analytical presentation: an act that in 'real time' must have taken less than seconds is separated into three separate clauses, two in apposition describing the blow ('he struck [...], [he] did not withhold the blow') and a subordinate clause describing the result, the death. Edward's violence here manifests his power to intend and achieve a particular outcome: his control over his muscles is also a conscious control of events. Wulfnær too, though physically passive, is presented as being in control of his fate: he is said to *choose* his death. Moreover, he is the subject of all the verbs in lines 113-5; his opponents, the agents of his death, do not appear at all (though the instruments, the swords, are mentioned) until they become the objects of Edward's action. The stress on choice is the key to the thegns' achievement of victory in defeat in the second part of the poem. Their deaths do not show their weakness but rather their strength: they control the manner and the meanings of their fall, they display their power even as they are broken down.¹²⁴

¹²² Phillips, 'Order of Words', briefly but eloquently deals with the issues of exchange and reciprocity, choice, control of minds and hands and steadfastness in the poem.

¹²³ See Huisman on heroic choice, 'The Three Tellings', p. 220.

¹²⁴ Warwick Frese, 'Poetic Prowess', p. 91.

The free choosing of one's own death and the successful causation of death in others are, of course, somewhat different things. Where they meet is in the poem's stress on mental or moral as well as physical power.¹²⁵ The close-up depiction of battle in *Maldon* searches out the inner dispositions and intentions that lie behind violence. This is most evident in the poem's most minutely interrogated moment of violence, Byrhtnoth's retaliation against the Viking who first wounds him:

Gegremod wearð se guðrinc; he mid gare stang
 wlancne wicing, þe him þa wund forgeaf.
 Frod wæs se fyrdrinc; he let his francan wadan
 þurh ðæs hysses hals, hand wisode
 þæt he on þam færsecaðan feorh geræhte.

The battle-warrior became enraged; with a spear he stabbed the proud Viking who gave him a wound then. The army-warrior was wise; he made his spear pass through the fighter's neck, his hand guided it so that it reached the life in the sudden attacker. (ll. 138-42)

In these lines the temporal progression of the narrative is arrested: the same act of violence is viewed twice over, as it were from different angles, so that its every significance may be caught. The two descriptions begin with parallel accounts of Byrhtnoth's inner state, each in the form [adjective/participle] + [verb] + [compound of *rinc*]. The first deals with Byrhtnoth's emotional reaction to being wounded, anger. This is a righteous anger, as is confirmed by the designation of the Viking as *wlanc* ('proud') and the reminder that Byrhtnoth has been wounded: Byrhtnoth rises up against his opponent's presumption and justly avenges his injury. The movement of lines 138-9 is swift and direct. The blow is accomplished in two half lines, and the grammatical relationship between Byrhtnoth and his opponent is the direct one of subject and object. These characteristics of the first description of the blow are thrown into relief by contrast with the second description. Whereas lines 138-9 begin with an emotional reaction that comes swiftly into being (*gegremod wearð*, 'became angry'), lines 140-2 start from Byrhtnoth's lasting virtue of wisdom (*frod wæs*, 'was wise'). It is perhaps only a reflection of the requirements of alliteration,

¹²⁵ These themes are stressed by Engberg, 'Mod – mægen Balance', pp. 212-26.

but it is interesting that Byrhtnoth's wisdom is linked to his social position within a *fyrð*, an army, evoking the connection between correct behaviour on the battle-field and absorption of communal values and lore.¹²⁶ Considered as a manifestation of wisdom rather than anger, the violence becomes a matter of careful calculation and the chain of cause and effect. Byrhtnoth is not now shown acting directly on the Viking, but on his spear; he is separated from the verbs of killing, which are in any case less forceful than those in the previous description (*wadan* and *geræhte* as opposed to *stang*). Instead, Byrhtnoth acts to produce a result: he controls or guides (*let*, *wisode*) and the death follows in a consecutive clause. As in Edward's revenge, grammatical subordination foregrounds deliberation, cool thought and conscious planning. Thus two descriptions of one killing reveal violence as at once the upsurge of a (virtuous) passion and the precise, calculated application of wisdom. Physical action is married to emotion and thought; strikingly, attention to inner disposition affects the very pace and character of the action as it appears in the poetic narrative.

Continuing from the prominence of watching, listening and interpreting in the opening of the poem, the battle as a whole is as full of mental as of physical activity. The warriors think about how best to fight, comparing themselves with each other (*hogodon georne / hwa þær mid orde ærost mihte / [...] feorh gewinnan*, 'they eagerly considered who there could first win a life with the point', ll. 123-5); we are told of Byrhtnoth and a Viking opponent that *ægþer hyra oðrum yfeles hogode* ('each intended evil to the other', l. 133); at the very start of the poem, Byrhtnoth's orders make clear the link between mental and physical control (*Het þa hyssa hwæne [...] hicgan to handum and to hige godum*, 'he ordered each warrior [...] to think to his hands and to good courage', ll. 2 and 4).¹²⁷ Statements about the intentions and mood of warriors are in fact a typical part of Old English battle description and are listed by Donald Fry as one of the standard elements of the 'approach to battle' type-scene.¹²⁸ Peter Clemoes argues that the attention paid to mental states in *Beowulf* proceeds from an attitude in which character is defined and revealed in action; action manifests inner characteristics and so is narrated in terms

¹²⁶ See the comments of Shippey, *Beowulf*, p.48 on the dangers of over-analysing Old English poetic language.

¹²⁷ Phillips, 'Order of Words', p. 121, identifies the pairing of *hige* and *handum* in line 4 as one of great importance for the poem.

of those characteristics.¹²⁹ Indeed, as Malcolm Godden shows, emotion is itself conceived as action in Old English.¹³⁰ *Maldon* thus exploits a trend already present in the poetry in celebrating mental alongside physical power. The famous dictum that

Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað

mind must be sterner, heart braver, courage greater, by as much as our strength grows less (ll. 312-3)

takes the trend to its extreme. The immense attention paid to the inner dispositions of Byrhtnoth and his warriors in the earlier part of the poem paves the way for the heroism of the loyal thegns in the second, for whom loyalty and courage become goals more important than material victory. The innovation of the *Maldon* poet consists not in outright invention but in pressuring traditional motifs and concerns to the point of metamorphosis.

Moral and mental power can win through when bodies fail; it is this idea that has prompted comparisons (in other respects tenuous) between *Maldon* and hagiography.¹³¹ However, it must be stressed that the poem does celebrate physical power and success in war. To return to lines 138-42, the poem dwells on Byrhtnoth's retaliation not only to analyse the complexity of his motivation but to wring from his act every drop of power, physical, mental and literary. The scene is sudden: it has the power of shock, the power of impact, the power of emotional heat. At the same time it is drawn-out and analytical. Cinema again offers a useful parallel in the use of slow-motion photography in fight sequences by directors such as Akira Kurosawa, Sam Peckinpah and subsequent imitators. In such scenes temporal distortion and a perverse lyricism, combined with attention to the visual details of

¹²⁸ Fry, 'Theme and type-Scenes', p. 36.

¹²⁹ Clemons, 'Action in *Beowulf*', pp. 163-6.

¹³⁰ M. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemons on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 271-98 (pp. 286).

¹³¹ See J. E. Cross, 'Oswald and Byrhtnoth: a Christian saint and a hero who is Christian', *English Studies* 46 (1965), 93-109.

killing, render violence all the more shocking.¹³² I do not suggest that horror is the intended response in *Maldon*, rather that, despite the emphasis on mental processes, lines 138–42 remain a very detailed description of a killing. Minds are vividly present, but so are bodies. The use of *wisode* and *let* separates Byrhtnoth from the verbs of violence, but also specifically invokes the idea of power and control; and this is a physical as well as a mental control, control of a weapon exercised through his hand (*hand wisode*). The drawn-out description means that the Viking emerges particularly strongly as a physical presence; first he is visualised as a whole man, the *wlanc wicing*, but then the focus moves to a body part, the neck. In the image of the spear ‘reaching the life’, life itself implicitly becomes a part of the body that can be physically located. *Wadan* and *geræhte* may not convey the bloodiness or the suddenness of violence in the way *stang* does, but they do provide an image of the penetration and invasion of the body. They are a verbal link to the vocabulary of territorial invasion and conquest, which is frequently one of movement: *gefaran*, *gegan*.¹³³ Just as the individual combat is a synecdochic representation of the whole battle, the killing of one man is a victory in little. The depiction of violence in the first part of the poem prepares for a reinterpretation of victory in the second; however, it also brings the English as close as possible to a conventional victory. It enables the audience to celebrate their community as exhibiting a moral and physical potency in war that was only foiled, on this occasion, by a cruel twist of fate.

The close-up battle description leading up to Byrhtnoth’s death thus feeds the emotional development of the poem in more than one way: it is part of the fantasy of victory that is indulged and relinquished in the first half, and it also prepares for the renewed pride with which the poem ends. However, it is not only Byrhtnoth’s deeds of prowess that are presented in great detail but also his wounding and death. *Maldon* is a vehicle of catharsis, confronting its audience with dying and loss. Nevertheless, it is a carefully controlled confrontation. Death must be faced, but in a tactful light.

¹³² For discussion, see S. Prince, ‘The Aesthetic of Slow-Motion Violence in the Films of Sam Pekinpah’, in *Screening Violence*, ed. S. Prince (London, 2000), pp. 175–201.

¹³³ See e.g. *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, EETS SS 6 (1980), I.x, 29/15 and 30/3.

Here a comparison with *Brunanburh* is especially instructive. In *Brunanburh* only the death of the enemy is visualised; in *Maldon* the death of characters with whom the audience identify is in question. Consequently, *Maldon* has a different approach from the earlier poem to the horror of killing. As in *Brunanburh*, there is a gradual revelation of the body, a slow approach to the physicality of wounding. Earlier on, the body is often masked behind the weapons that channel its violence (for example in *bogan wæron bysige*, ‘bows were busy’, l. 110). Gradually, more and more body parts are mentioned: hands achieve an early prominence, being the parts that wield weapons (ll. 3, 7, 21, 108), and later we hear of feet, neck, breast, heart and arm (ll. 119, 141, 144, 145 and 165). Notably, however, most of these body parts, and almost all of the body parts that are shown being wounded, belong to Vikings (the exception is Byrhtnoth’s arm); and, in marked contrast with *Brunanburh*, there is no mention of blood. This is not a field of gore but a place where noble warriors lie down to their rest: *licgan* is a favourite verb for dying (ll. 112, 157, 183, 204, 222, 227, 232, 276, 279, 300 and 314).

Admittedly, some of those English who *licgað* do so *on (þam) wæle*, ‘among the slain, in the slaughter’ (ll. 279 and 300). Direct confrontation of death is in tension with displacement and aestheticization: both are psychologically necessary, since death must be accepted and yet rendered acceptable. This trend is apparent in the description of Byrhtnoth’s demise. On the one hand, the poem devotes thirty-five lines (ll. 149-184) to Byrhtnoth’s death, from his second wound to the moment when he is finally killed and two companions fall with him. Within these lines, we are shown Byrhtnoth being invaded in similar fashion to the Viking he has killed in ll. 138-42: the spear *gewat / þurh þone æpelan Æþelredes þegn* (‘passed through the noble thegn of Æthelred’, ll. 150-1) and the Viking *geræhte* (‘reached’ l. 158) the ealdorman. The enemy who approaches hoping to plunder Byrhtnoth’s wounded body is an especially nasty detail, conveying the weakness and potential humiliation of the dying. Byrhtnoth’s death is a painfully extended process of steady weakening. His first wound he contemptuously brushes aside (ll. 134-7), but the next is clearly serious and renders him a target for despoiling; a Viking cuts at Byrhtnoth’s arm to prevent him defending himself (ll. 164-5); finally he is cut or hewn to death (*Ða hine heowon hæðene scealcas* ‘then the heathen warriors hewed him’, l. 181). This is a distressing catalogue. However, while we are shown the stripping away of

Byrhtnoth's warrior strength, we are also shown his impressive resilience. He is able to beat back the plunderer even when seriously wounded. As Dolores Warwick Frese stresses, Byrhtnoth's verbal skill survives to the very end.¹³⁴ His prayer juxtaposes the devils (*helsceaðan* 'hell-thieves', l. 180) who threaten the soul with the heathens who kill his body: this is a reminder of his moral superiority and ultimate victory and vindication as a Christian. Byrhtnoth looks back to the joys of his earthly life (*ealra þæra wynna þe ic on worulde gebad*, 'all the joys that I experienced in the world', l. 174) and forward to heaven, praying that he may journey *on þin geweald* ('into your power', l. 178). The prayer overlays the images of death on the battlefield with alternative scenes of earthly and heavenly bliss and of God's protecting power. The most striking instance of the aestheticization of death is the beautiful image of the golden sword falling from Byrhtnoth's grasp. This is a potent and moving symbol of the end of his endeavours, his relinquished power,¹³⁵ but it is also a displacement of the death of the body: we are shown the sword's fall instead of the man's.

Maldon is thus a poem that enables a confrontation and revisitation of grief and loss, but it also offers consolation by rendering death meaningful and by modifying its horror. There is no suggestion here, as in *Brunanburh*, that the slain will become food for ravens, their identity annihilated as they are literally eaten. Byrhtnoth's death and the death of his thegns are the very means of preservation of their identities: it is because of their deaths that they are celebrated in this poem. Thus death becomes the attainment of identity rather than its destruction. The thegns, repeatedly recalling the image of their dead lord, render it more and more concrete. The death of Byrhtnoth unites my themes of community and psychological work. It is the point at which the body and the community collapses, but it is also the point from which they are reconstructed: the death of Byrhtnoth is at the centre of the new story of *Maldon*, the story of moral power overcoming physical weakness and loyalty as the supreme value. I have argued that a gradual unity of perception is built up in the early part of the poem; that this early part of the poem involves the audience in a fantasy of victory; that unity of perception collapses when those who

¹³⁴ Warwick Frese, '“Worda ond worca”', p. 28.

¹³⁵ Shippey, 'Boar and Badger', p. 235.

'did not wish to be there' decide to flee at the leader's death; and that perception is reunited by the reiterative, imitative narration and action of the loyal thegns. If perception is at the heart of community, then violence is the central scene of this very visual poem. Contemplating violence, the poet anatomizes the physical and moral power of the warrior and provides a symbol of the power of the community: a power to fight and win but also to survive defeat.

Conclusion

In the present chapter I have offered readings of *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Battle of Maldon* that relate the construction of community to the representation of violence. In these poems, the representation of violence is designed to reinforce a sense of the bonds of community, through opposition to out-groups (the Vikings and the Scots), through allegiance to leaders and through a sense of comradeship in arms. *Brunanburh* is an expression of loyalty to Æthelstan and an exhortation to unity under his leadership. *Maldon* involves its audience emotionally in the fate of a dead leader and the re-constitution of a community and its self-image: its readers or hearers, as witnesses of its action and predictors of its emergent patterns, are implicated in the articulation of a narrative of community. Violence is a threat to such messages of unity and belonging as well as a fundamental part of them. In *Brunanburh*, the resurgent fear of death threatens the sharp division between inside and outside, the victors with whom the audience is intended to identify and the losers whose plight nonetheless invites a 'dreaded identification'.¹³⁶ *Maldon* depicts the fragmentation of the army at the death of its leader and faces the pain of loss and the details of wounding as an invasive rupture of the body. However, it also offers a means of containing and reinterpreting these traumas that is at the same time a process of re-integration; the community builds a common tale of wounding that is in itself a sign of healing.

In *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Battle of Brunanburh*, warriors pursue glory and victory within a Christian universe. 'God's bright candle' (*Godes condel beorht*, l. 15) shines down on the gore of Brunanburh. Byrhtnoth and his men are propelled

¹³⁶ The phrase is Judith Butler's: *Bodies that Matter*, p. 3.

to fight by their sense of honour and shame and their desire for a proud reputation, but they also know themselves to be Christians fighting heathens; the dying Byrhtnoth commits his soul to God. In the next chapter I will turn from battle poetry to sermon and saint's life. The writings of the great ecclesiastical authors Ælfric and Wulfstan provide an opportunity to explore some of the complications of the meeting between Christian teaching and warrior ethic. In particular, I shall highlight the concepts of honour, shame and guilt and, continuing the theme of community, the relationship of the individual to the group. *Maldon* is a poem that re-reads defeat as victory by stressing the active choice and continuing courage of the defeated thegns. In Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* we shall find further configurations of activity, passivity, paradoxical victory and humiliating defeat, here expressed through concepts of a spiritual fight that can be mapped upon, or contrasted with, the wars of this world.

Chapter Three

Sin, Sanctity and Being a Victim: Ælfric and Wulfstan on Fighting the Vikings

This chapter will approach Viking violence through the works of the two great exponents of Old English prose around the year 1000, Ælfric and Wulfstan. Both were writing in a period of escalating pressure from Scandinavian raiders and invaders; both were churchmen, seeking religious perspectives on contemporary anxieties. Simon Coupland, in what remains the key discussion of this issue, sets out the interpretative frameworks for Viking attack employed by Frankish ecclesiastics. They saw raiding in terms of moral patterns of sin, punishment and desert. The Vikings were the instruments of God's wrath against the nation; simultaneously, they were offenders against God, and it was the duty of the people to fight vigorously against them in the defence of the Church.¹ Two points emerge from Coupland's study that are also fundamental to an investigation of Ælfric and Wulfstan's understanding of the Vikings. Firstly, placing violent events in a religious framework raises particularly urgently the question of evaluation: talking about violence entails talking about sin. Secondly, the focus of Frankish responses to the Vikings was often on the moral state and duties of the Franks. Talk about Vikings was often also and sometimes paramourly talk about something else. Coupland mentions, for example, the explanation of the deaths of Robert of Anjou and Ramnulf of Poitou as punishment for their acceptance of lay abbacies: Robert and Ramnulf's battle against the Northmen acquired meaning through debates over ecclesiastical organization.² For Wulfstan in particular, as I will argue, the Vikings were the occasion for looking inward at the ills of the nation rather than outward to a detailed appreciation of the enemy. Ælfric offers little explicit comment on the invaders; nonetheless, many of his writings have implications for the moral position of the English under attack. In this chapter I will not be tracing direct representations of the Vikings so much as attitudes to practising and, especially, suffering violence within a broader context of ethical and doctrinal teaching.

¹ S. Coupland, 'The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of the Viking Invasions', *JEH* 42: 4 (1991), 535-554.

² *Ibid.*, p. 537.

To interpret violence in terms of sin is to interpret relations between people in terms of the relationship of the individual to God. In the writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan we can trace the interaction of different ways of evaluating behaviour according to, on the one hand, concepts of social standing and competition and, on the other, merit before God. A theoretical framework for this interaction is provided by the anthropological distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures. According to Ruth Benedict:

True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. [...] It requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. Guilt does not.³

Shame cultures are those which stress 'looking good' as the key to *being* good, guilt cultures those which stress an internal moral state that appearances may belie. The sense of shame entails great consciousness of how one's actions are or might be perceived by others. The notion of shame tends to go with that of honour. To be shamed is to lose honour, while a sense of shame – a sensitivity to the occasions which can bring shame and the proper strategies for avoiding it – brings honour. Honour is closely linked to social position and competition with others.⁴ W. I. Miller remarks of honour in the Icelandic sagas that 'honour was [...] acquired at someone else's expense. When yours went up, someone else's went down'.⁵ Honour and shame are thus a matter of social structures and interaction, while guilt is a matter for the single self. Guilt is something that no-one else need know about.

Shame and honour are at once familiar and highly slippery concepts, and it has been justly pointed out that the English words can mask quite large variations between non-English terms and cultures.⁶ The Mediterranean shame culture studied by Campbell, Peristiany and others, with its emphasis on the sexual behaviour of

³ R. Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (London, 1967).

⁴ J. Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour and Social Status', in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany (Chicago, 1966), pp. 19-77 (pp. 23-4).

⁵ W. I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago and London, 1990), p. 30.

⁶ M. Herzfeld, 'Honour and Shame: Problems in the Comparative Analysis of Moral Systems', *Man* 15 (1980), 339-52.

female family members as the key to male honour,⁷ differs from the shame culture of saga Iceland, with its comparatively independent women but obsessive calculation of the balance of status, insult and advantage between approximate social equals.⁸ Moreover, the distinction between guilt and shame can prove elusive; nor is it clear that there is any such thing as a pure guilt culture. Benedict contrasted the shame culture of Japan with twentieth-century western, specifically Christian and American, culture. However, as J. A. Burrow observes, the idea of God seeing one's sins involves, in Benedict's phrase, 'the fantasy of an audience'.⁹ The psychologist Francis Broucek stresses the continuing importance of shame in 'objective self-awareness' and indeed in enabling civilized life.¹⁰ Nonetheless, guilt, shame and honour offer a terminology for talking about worth and worthlessness as they proceed, on the one hand, from the perceptions of other people, from social interaction and social position, and on the other from a standard internalised by the individual and transcending the social. The warrior culture reflected in Old English poems such as *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* is a culture of honour and shame, and one in which both are closely linked to successful and correct performance of violence: the warrior who displays his boldness, strength and loyalty gains honour, the coward is shamed.¹¹ The terminology of guilt and shame suggests a route by which to explore the interaction of the warrior ethic with Ælfric and Wulfstan's Christian agenda.

A further theoretical issue that emerges from the opposition of guilt and shame is the status of the individual in relation to the community. There is an extensive scholarly literature on the 'birth' or 'discovery' of the individual, a

⁷ See essays in J. G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago, 1966), especially J. K. Campbell, 'Honour and the Devil', pp. 139-170, and Pitt-Rivers 'Honour and Social Status' part 2.

⁸ W. I. Miller, 'The Central Feud in *Njáls saga*', in *Sagas of the Icelanders: A Book of Essays*, ed. J. Tucker (New York, 1989), pp. 292-322 on the 'balance-sheet model' of feud; Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, on the manipulation of economic and social standing through feud and dispute over honour; V. Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narratives and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. A. Wawn (Reykjavík, 1998), pp. 65-83 and 166-79 discusses the centrality of honour and feud to the sagas. On the standing of women in the sagas, see C. J. Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Speculum* 68 (1993), 363-87.

⁹ J. A. Burrow, 'Honour and Shame in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in *Essays on Medieval Literature* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 117-131 (p. 125).

¹⁰ F. J. Broucek, *Shame and the Self* (New York and London, 1991), pp. 3-9 and 135-8.

¹¹ G. Clark, 'The Hero and the Theme', in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Exeter, 1997), pp. 175-192, discusses the centrality of fame and honour to *Beowulf*, with an account of earlier scholarship on the subject.

development that some attribute to the Renaissance and some to the twelfth century.¹² Much of the discussion has been centred on the issues of religious interiority, privacy of conscience and psychological self-examination, all of which have been associated with the emergence of differentiated, idiosyncratic selves. This chapter will touch repeatedly on the relationship between the exterior and interior person, even though its historical focus is the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. As Allen Frantzen points out, self-scrutiny and a concern for an inner state are evident in penitential literature well before the twelfth century.¹³ This is not to say that a modern kind of individuality should be assumed for the early middle ages. Caroline Walker Bynum points out that even twelfth-century individuality is in many ways different from modern individuality. An interest in the choices of the individual and the practice of moral self-examination is coupled to a strong concern for group identities, roles and types.¹⁴ Similarly in the Anglo-Saxon period the Church endeavoured to educate the wills of single moral subjects while discussing those subjects in terms of conventional types.¹⁵ In my discussion of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, the relevance of the saint to the English attacked by Vikings is as a role-model, a type of the holy victim; the identity of the saint is itself bound up with a type of sanctity.

A helpful approach to individuality is that of Louis Dumont.¹⁶ Dumont, rather than identifying a 'discovery' or 'birth' of individuality, distinguishes between different modes of individuality associated with different societies and historical periods. He contrasts modern individualism, in which the individual moral being is the 'paramount value', with traditional societies in which value 'lies in society as a whole'; in such societies, single human beings are seen in terms of their relationships, their families and class-networks. Taking India as his example,

¹² See, for example, W. Ullmann, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1966); C. Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (London, 1972); J. F. Benton, 'Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. G. Constable and R. L. Benson (Oxford, 1982), pp. 263-95.

¹³ A. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983), p. 204.

¹⁴ C. W. Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?', in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982), pp. 82-109.

¹⁵ See C. A. Lees and G. R. Overing, 'Before History, Before Difference: Bodies, Metaphor, and the Church in Anglo-Saxon England', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 11: 2 (1998), 315-34 (p. 317).

Dumont argues that individuality in a traditional society can appear only in the rejection of society, when people taking up a holy life renounce their previous social existence and its priorities. Such people are 'outworldly individuals'. For Dumont, Christianity sees human beings essentially in terms of their relationship to God and thus as outworldly individuals: individuals for whom value is understood to transcend society and its demands. However, historically, the rejection of the world by early Christians was gradually tempered, so that increasingly the outworldly (divine, transcendent) element of Christianity was applied to worldly (relative, temporal) issues such as justice, property ownership and political power. Dumont thus argues for a convergence between the outworldly and the worldly, leading to the creation of the 'individual-in-the-world'. The resulting form of individualism applies values seen as absolute and universal to social life, but also sees the ultimate moral meaning of that life as resting with the individual and not with the society as a whole.

As an account of history Dumont's model is over-schematic. However, it is an appropriate framework in which to place Ælfric and Wulfstan's approach to violence, since it speaks to the scriptural opposition of world and spirit that informs their thinking.¹⁷ The ideas of the worldly and the outworldly can also be related to the concepts of honour, guilt and shame. The worldly is the realm in which shame and honour operate; the opinion of the community controls behaviour and honour is linked to dominance. Guilt is predicated on 'outworldliness', on a sense of wrong independent of the community but looking directly to God. Physical violence is a matter of social relations, the public person and the struggle for dominance, but for Ælfric and Wulfstan it must be linked to the state of the soul. They discuss violence across the boundaries between the visible and invisible person, soul and body, shame and guilt, worldly and outworldly. Their attitudes to Vikings and violence partake in the development of a vision of a society subordinated to Christian teaching.

¹⁶ L. Dumont, 'Genesis, I: The Christian Beginnings: From the Outworldly Individual to the Individual-in-the-World', in *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago and London, 1986), pp. 23-59.

¹⁷ See Rm 8. 5-6 and 13. 14.

Part of Ælfric and Wulfstan's consideration of the Christian society had to do with their own place within it, as servants of God in the world. They were churchmen addressing a political crisis, but they did not come to political matters as cloistered strangers. Wulfstan in particular was a prominent political actor who drafted laws for Kings Æthelred and Cnut.¹⁸ As Archbishop of York, he was in a position of immense influence in the north of England, the area in which the power of the West Saxon kings remained weakest.¹⁹ Ælfric was less of a public figure; no surviving charter certainly bears his inscription.²⁰ However, Ælfric wrote pastoral letters on behalf of Wulfstan and of Bishop Wulfsig.²¹ His patrons, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, held the ealdormanship of the western shires; Æthelmær led the submission of the thegns of the west to Swegn in 1013.²² Through his patrons Ælfric was in contact with the court that deliberated policy towards the Vikings. He was also indirectly involved in the factional struggles of that court. Christopher Jones suggests that Æthelmær's retirement to Eynsham in 1005 was part of an upheaval in which several established men fell from favour and were replaced.²³

Ælfric and Wulfstan in different ways represent the meeting of church with state, and the relationship of church to state is one of the concerns that inform their writings. It is an issue central to the tenth-century reform movement of which they were both heirs and continuers. The *Regularis Concordia*, the key document of the reform in England, was produced at a council in Winchester presided over by King Edgar. It stresses the alliance of the monasteries with the king and identifies the dominance of aristocratic patrons as a source of corruption, even though powerful

¹⁸ D. Whitelock, 'Archbishop Wulfstan, Homilist and Statesman', *TRHS* 4th series 24 (1942), 25-45 (pp. 35-38), 'Wulfstan and the Laws of Cnut', *EHR* 63 (1948), 433-52, and 'Wulfstan's Authorship of Cnut's Laws', *EHR* 70 (1955), 72-85; D. Bethurum, 'Six Anonymous Old English Codes', *JEGP* 49 (1950), 449-63; P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume I; legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 27, 330-65 and 389-97.

¹⁹ D. Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', in *The Anglo-Saxons. Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959), pp. 70-88; R. Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2002), pp. 31-42.

²⁰ J. Wilcox, 'Introduction', in *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. J. Wilcox, *Durham Medieval Texts* 9 (1994), pp. 1-85 (p. 14).

²¹ *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, ed. B. Fehr, with a supplement to the introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt, 1966).

²² ASC MS E 1013. On the identification of this Æthelmær with the patron of Ælfric, see C. Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, *Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1998), p. 14.

²³ Jones, *Ælfric's Letter*, pp. 11-15.

lay patrons continued to play a central role in endowing and protecting monastic houses.²⁴ The leaders of the reform movement, Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald, were not only monks and bishops but courtiers and politicians whose careers spanned the reigns of several kings;²⁵ Wulfstan followed them in this respect. Pauline Stafford argues that in the later Anglo-Saxon period there was a close harmony between church and state, though it was to deteriorate in later centuries.²⁶ She writes that ‘the age utterly confused the religious and the secular’, citing Æthelred VII (presumed to have been drafted by Wulfstan) as evidence.²⁷ Rather than confusion, it is perhaps better to speak of synthesis, a synthesis that Ælfric and Wulfstan were both working to achieve.

In this chapter, therefore, I will be tracing the response of two churchmen to the Viking invasions as an attempt to find a Christian perspective on a crisis in secular power-structures. First I offer a reading of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* as an example of the synthesis of the worldly and the outworldly in Wulfstan’s writing, one achieved through the deployment of a considerable literary skill. The sermon and its imagery can be read in a context of penitential literature, but it succeeds in being both an exhortation to penitence and a political argument. Second, I will look at selected examples from Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*. The saints, especially the martyrs, are paradigmatic Christian victims of pagan aggression – examples to inspire fervour in those suffering Viking attack.²⁸ However, the saints also crystallize conflict between the worldly and the outworldly. I shall examine three saints’ lives that show different faces of the meeting between worldly violence and Christian holiness.

²⁴ *Regularis Concordia Anglica Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque / The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, ed. T. Symons (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 1-3 and 7.

²⁵ C. Cubitt, Review Article: ‘The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England’, *EME* 6 (1997), 77-94 (pp. 82-6).

²⁶ P. A. Stafford, ‘Church and Society in the Age of Ælfric’, in *The Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and B. F. Huppé (Albany, 1978), pp. 11-32 (pp. 30-32).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁸ M. Godden, ‘Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (Oxford, 1994), pp. 130-62

The wounds of sin in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*

The *Sermo Lupi* is the best known of Wulfstan's sermons and one of the most famous Old English texts to discuss the Vikings.²⁹ Three of the five manuscripts that transmit the sermon in its several forms contain rubrics labelling it as the product of a climactic moment in the war of conquest. The text of London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i, that on which my discussion focuses, is headed *Sermo lupi ad Anglos quando Dani maxime persecuti sunt eos quod fuit anno millesimo XIII ab incarnatione domini iesu cristi*, 'the sermon of the wolf to the English when the Danes were most oppressing them, that was in the year 1014 from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ'.³⁰ The date given varies between manuscripts and there is some scholarly disagreement over the sequence and dating of the different versions of the *Sermo Lupi*.³¹ The 1014 dating in Cotton Nero A.i has some authority since this text seems to have been checked by Wulfstan; it is glossed in his hand.³² The *Sermo Lupi* is the response of a particularly eloquent witness to the violence and suffering inflicted by the invaders. It is also, however, first and foremost a rebuke to the English for their sins. In the present discussion, I will follow Allen Frantzen's lead by placing the *Sermo Lupi* in a context of penitential literature.³³ I will look at the way the Vikings and their violence function as topic and imagery within the structure of a call to repentance, arguing that Wulfstan's treatment of the violence of Vikings against the English can be linked to a metaphor common in penitential texts, that of the wounds of sin. Central to Wulfstan's argument is his appeal to the sense of shame.

²⁹ Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. D. Whitelock, 3rd edn (1963). References are to this edition by line number. A version of my discussion of the *Sermo Lupi* appears in my forthcoming article, 'Byrstas and bysmeras: The Wounds of Sin in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, ed. M. Townend (Turnhout, forthcoming 2004), pp. 397-411.

³⁰ The manuscripts are London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.i, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 419 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343, of which the first three contain rubrics.

³¹ See variously D. Bethurum, 'Introduction', in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. D. Bethurum (Oxford, 1957), pp. 1-112 (pp. 22-4); Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion', pp. 143-6 and 150; S. Hollis, 'The thematic structure of the *Sermo Lupi*', *ASE* 6 (1977), 175-95; J. Wilcox, 'Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* as Political Performance: 16 February 1014 and Beyond', in *Wulfstan*, ed. Townend, pp. 375-96.

³² N. Ker, 'The Handwriting of Archbishop Wulfstan', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in primary sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 315-31 (p. 322); P. Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the Holiness of Society', in *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London and Rio Grande, 1999), pp. 226-251 (pp. 227-9).

³³ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, pp. 176-8.

The basic interpretation of the invasions advanced by Wulfstan conforms to the tradition explored by Simon Coupland: the Vikings are the instruments of divine punishment.³⁴ *Hy hergiað 7 hy bærnað, rypað 7 reafiað 7 to scipe lædað; 7 la, hwæt is ænig oðer on eallum þam gelimpum butan Godes yrre ofer þas þeode swutol 7 gesæne?* ('They ravage and they burn, plunder and rob and take to their ships; and lo, what among all these events is anything else except God's anger towards this nation clear and evident?' *Sermo Lupi*, ll. 129-32). This sequence describes in miniature the argument of the sermon, the movement from destruction, misfortune and the attacks of enemies to the consciousness of sin within the nation. The characteristic alliterative two-stress phrases that list the depredations of the Vikings crescendo into a question that looks past the Vikings to God.³⁵ The final message of the sermon is an exhortation to repent. In the concluding section, Wulfstan urges his audience *utan don swa us þearf is, gebugan to rihte, 7 be suman dæle unriht forlætan, 7 betan swyþe georne þæt we ær brecan* ('Let us do what is needful for us, turn to right, and in some part abandon wrong, and atone very eagerly for that in which we previously transgressed', ll. 199-201). The focus here is entirely on the damage the English have wrought and must repair. Their struggle with the Vikings is only a symptom of their relationship with God.

The Vikings in fact are not the main topic of the sermon. Their entry into it is delayed for a hundred lines, and even then they only provide a context for the treachery of an English thrall who runs away to be a Viking, later to kill his lord in battle:

Deh þræla hwylc hlaforde athleape 7 of cristendome to wicinge weorþe, 7 hit æfter þam eft geweorþe þæt wæpengewrixl weorðe gemæne þegene 7 þræle, gif þræl þæne þegen fullice afylle, licge ægyld ealre his mægðe; 7, gif se þegen þæne þræl þe he ær ahte fullice afylle, gylde þegengylde.

If a thrall runs away from his lord and leaves Christendom to be a Viking, and afterwards it comes to pass that there is an armed encounter between thegn and thrall, if the thrall kills the thegn outright, no wergild will be paid

³⁴ Coupland, 'Rod of God's Wrath', 535-554.

³⁵ On Wulfstan's style, see A. McIntosh, 'Wulfstan's Prose', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 35 (1949), 109-42.

to his kinsmen, and, if the thegn kills outright the thrall he previously owned. He will pay a thegn's wergild. (ll. 104-8)

The point here is the collapse of social order *within* the nation, the reversal of the hierarchy of lord and thrall which has the former die uncompensated, betrayed by the latter. The first explicit reference to fighting the Danes as a problem in itself comes a few lines later with the lament that the English are *eal sigelease*, 'wholly without victory', and the *flotmen* are granted extraordinary strength and success (ll. 113-6). The list of Viking outrages culminating in the lines quoted above (*hy hergiað 7 hy bærnað*) is the last explicit reference; indeed, all mention of the *sæmen* or *flotmen* is confined to a short section taking up only thirty lines in Whitelock's edition (ll. 102-32).

However, Wulfstan plays on the fears of the times. Read or heard in the consciousness of the overwhelming threat of invasion, the warning to repent is sharpened with the terror of war. The text constantly hints at the invasions; the topic lies under the water, always seemingly about to break the surface. At the opening Wulfstan warns that *hit is nu on worolde aa swa leng swa wyrse*, 'now in the world the more time passes, the worse it gets' (ll. 5-6). This has an obvious application to the worsening English political situation of the early eleventh century. Wulfstan goes on to talk specifically about sins prevailing *wide gynd þas þeode* ('widely throughout this nation,' l. 14). In consequence, he tells us, the English have suffered *fela byrsta 7 bysmara* ('many insults and injuries', l. 15). What could these injuries be but Danish attacks? But Wulfstan carries on discussing sin and its remedy:

mid miclan earnungan we geearnedan þa yrmða þa us onsittað [...] we witan ful georne þæt to miclan bryce sceal micel bot nyde, 7 to miclan bryne wæter unlytel [...] And micel is nydþearf manna gehwilcum þæt he Godes lage gyne

With great deserving we earned the miseries that now afflict us [...] we know full well that a great breach must have a great repair and a great burning no little water [...] there is a great necessity for each man that he observe God's law. (ll. 18-19 and 21-25)

The *bot*, the remedy of which Wulfstan talks repeatedly, is repentance and obedience to God; but the images of breach and fire evoke the assaults of the

Vikings, the destruction of town walls, the burning of property (burning is one of their activities listed in ll. 129-32, quoted above). The violence suffered by the English is not only a consequence of their sin but becomes an image of it. It is because of sin that the English suffer breaking and burning, and breaking and burning are Wulfstan's metaphors for the sins that must be repaired.

The *Sermo Lupi* is punctuated by great lists of ills, in which Wulfstan's insistent rhythms and his argument equally achieve a crushing weight. In such passages also external attack collapses into internal wrong:

Ne dohte hit nu lange inne ne ute, ac wæs here 7 hunger, bryne 7 blodgyte on gewelhwylcum ende oft 7 gelome; 7 us stalu 7 cwalu, stric 7 steorfa, orfcwealm 7 uncoþu, hol 7 hete 7 rypera reaflac derede swyþe þearle; 7 us ungylda swyþe gedrehtan, 7 us unwedera foroft weoldan unwæstma; forþam on þysan earde wæs, swa hit þincan mæg, nu fela geara unrihta fela 7 tealte getrywða æghwær mid mannum.

Nothing has prospered within or without now for a long time, but there have been in nearly every district *here* and hunger, burning and bloodshed often and frequently; and stealing and slaying, plague and pestilence, cattle-fever and disease, malice and hate and the rapine of robbers have harmed us very severely, and excessive taxes greatly afflicted us, and very often bad seasons have caused crop failure; because/therefore, as it may seem, in this land now for many years there have been many wrongs and everywhere loyalty tottering among men. (ll. 55-62)

Again, Wulfstan seems to be about to discuss the Vikings. The *here* could refer to the Viking army; in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *here* nearly always denotes the Vikings, though it can refer to any armed force.³⁶ *Here 7 hunger, bryne 7 blodgyte* suggest devastation inflicted by outsiders and the famine consequent on it. However, the Vikings are not mentioned explicitly, and the list as a whole portrays chaos and destruction arising as much internally as externally.

³⁶ See, for example, ASC MS E s.a. 992, 993, 994, 997, 998, 999, 1001, 1003, 1004. Wulfstan uses *here* later in the *Sermo Lupi* of the English invaders who overcame the Britons (l. 187), and in Bethurum VI he says that God allowed a *hæþenne here* to overcome the Israelites (*The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Bethurum, pp. 142-56, at ll. 115-7). In both these cases the *here* is a heathen force opposing disobedient servants of God. However, for the instance under discussion, 'devastation' is the gloss suggested in D. Whitelock (ed.), *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, 15th edn (Oxford, 1967), p. 344; 'devastation' is also Swanton's rendition in M. Swanton (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, rev. edn. (London, 1993), p. 180.

Many items could point to either Danish attack or English disorder. *Hol 7 hete* could express the fury of the foes, but they also chime with the kin-strife described in lines 62-4 and the failure of social bonds lamented throughout the sermon. *Stalu 7 cwalu* and *rypera reaflac* could equally refer to raiding and killing by foreigners or criminal activity by natives. Ælfric's Letter to Wulfgeat distinguishes *dyrnan stala*, 'secret theft', from *opene reaflac*, 'open robbery'.³⁷ In the annal for 793 in the D and E versions of the Chronicle, Lindisfarne suffers *reaflac* from the Vikings. Searching in the online Old English Corpus, I have not found any references to Vikings committing *stalu*.³⁸ *Reaflac* and *stalu* are two sides of the same crime, but *reaflac*, taking openly by force, points more towards violence from outside, while *stalu* points to crime within the community. Both *stalu* and *reaflac* can be internal problems, since both appear in lawcodes.³⁹ Moving on, *ungylða*, 'unfair taxes', can plausibly be interpreted as a hostile comment on the levying of tribute to pay off the invaders and thus as a reference to the ills brought by the Danes. However, in conjunction with failing loyalties, *ungylða* suggest a general breakdown in adequate government and social order. Moreover, are problems like unjust taxation to be regarded as punishments or sins? The list also encompasses natural disasters such as poor weather and cattle disease. The punishments visited on the English blend with the crimes committed by them; in some cases the two are impossible to distinguish. The passage is shot through with a sense of violence heightened by Wulfstan's incantatory style, but the killings, robbing and devastation are not only an implicit portrayal of war but an image of the horror of sin.

The use of an imagery of violence to talk about sin can be paralleled in the metaphor of sin as wound commonly found in penitential texts. This metaphor recurs through the penitential extracts reproduced in the complex of manuscripts which, thanks to Patrick Wormald, we can now see as reflecting a systematic collection of canonical and other regulatory material assembled by Wulfstan.⁴⁰ For

³⁷ 'Secret thefts', 'open robbery', Ælfric, 'Ælfrics Sendschreiben an Wulfgeat zu Ylmondun' in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. B. Assmann, reprinted with a supplementary introduction by Peter Clemons (Darmstadt, 1964), pp. 1-12 (p. 8, ll. 187-8).

³⁸ *OE Corpus* search.

³⁹ For example, *stalu* VI Æthelred, § 28.3, *reaflac* VIII Æthelred, § 4, Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I, 254 and 264.

⁴⁰ Wormald, 'Holiness of Society', pp. 231-240.

example, the idea appears in a developed form in the text reconstructed by Roger Fowler as the 'Old English Handbook for the Use of a Confessor'. The following passage occurs in six manuscripts, including CCC 265, the starting point for Mary Bateson's pioneering study:⁴¹

On wisum scryfte bið swiðe forðgelang forsyngodes mannes nydhelpe, ealswa on godan læce bið seoces mannes lacnung. [...] Se læca þe sceal sare wunda wel gehælan, he mot habban gode sealf to. Ne syndon nane swa yfele wunda swa sindon synwunda, forðam þurh þa forwyrð se man ecan deaðe buton he þurh andetnesse and þurh geswicenesse and þurh dædbote gehæled wurðe [...] Ðurh gode lare man sceal ærest hi lacnian, and mid þam gedon þæt man aspiwe þæt attor þæt him oninnan bið: þæt is þæt he geclænsige hine selfne ærost þurh andetnesse.

The help of a sinful man is very dependent on a wise confessor, just as the healing of a sick man is on a good doctor [...] The doctor who must properly heal serious wounds needs a good salve for the purpose. There are no wounds as evil as the wounds of sin, because through them a man sickens unto eternal death, unless he is healed through confession and repentance and penance [...] One must first heal them through good teaching, and with that cause [the sinner] to spew up the poison that is inside him: that is, he must first cleanse himself through confession.⁴²

The image of the wound is used to establish an analogy between the confessor and a doctor, the penitential process and the process of healing. Sin must be cured with *dædbot*, 'atonement'; similarly in the *Sermo Lupi* Wulfstan exhorts his audience to atone for or *betan* their sins. The image of the wound is closely associated with the ideas of sickness and pollution; confession is a process of cleansing and of purging away poison. The medical metaphor, as Allen Frantzen calls it,⁴³ opens up a complex of ideas about the mechanisms of sin and, as in the *Sermo Lupi*, there is slippage between external and internal agency. The wounded body is passive, incapacitated, the object of others' actions. The 'Handbook' and other extracts collected by Wulfstan are directed at ecclesiastical readers; stress is laid upon the confessor's responsibility for the souls of sinners, as the one who applies the salve of instruction. The wound indicates also the role of assaulting devils. The formula

⁴¹ M. Bateson, 'A Worcester Cathedral Book of Ecclesiastical Collections Made about 1000 A.D.', *EHR* 10 (1895), 712-31, described the relationship between the main Wulfstanian manuscripts without associating them with Wulfstan; see also D. Bethurum, 'Archbishop Wulfstan's Commonplace Book', *PMLA* 57 (1942), 916-29.

⁴² R. Fowler, 'A Late Old English Handbook for the Use of a Confessor', *Anglia* 83 (1965), 1-34 (pp. 26-7, ll. 305-7 and 317-25).

for confession incorporated into the 'Handbook' depicts sin as a product of demonic prompting: *Ic andette ælmihtigum Gode [...] ealle þa synna þe me æfre þurh awirgede gastas on besmitene wurdon* ('I confess to almighty God [...] all the sins that ever defiled me through fiendish spirits', 'Handbook', p. 17, ll. 35-6). Even as it points to external agents, however, the medical metaphor powerfully teaches that sin is grounded in the self, that it is a corruption *oninnan*, 'within'. Sin marks and changes the soul as sickness or wounding alters the body. In a manner that again instructively parallels the *Sermo Lupi*, the distinction between active and passive is brought into question.

The idea of the moral life as a struggle against supernatural powers is a commonplace of medieval Christianity, rooted in the letters of Paul and particularly popular with writers of hagiography, who depict saints such as Martin of Tours and Guthlac as *militēs Christi*, 'soldiers of Christ'.⁴⁴ Though these saints may bow meekly under physical violence, they display their virtue in vigorous resistance to demonic tempters. The wounded sinner in succumbing to attack has failed to show similar virtue; passivity itself figures for sinfulness. The role of the confessor is to lead the penitent back to activity, the performance of *dædbot*.

In the 'Handbook' the passive and wounded body is an image of the sinful soul. In the lawcodes that Wulfstan produced for Æthelred and Cnut we find provision for the realisation of this image in physical bodies. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe argues that the late tenth and early eleventh centuries saw an increase in the use of mutilation as a punishment for crime. Mutilations – scalping, blinding, and the severing of body parts – inscribed the crime on the body of the criminal. Wulfstan promotes such penalties as an alternative to death and a means of saving the souls of miscreants by allowing them to expiate their sins with suffering; the loss of eyes, ears or other parts is also prescribed as a severe form of penance in the 'Handbook'.⁴⁵ As Victoria Thompson observes, it is perhaps more appropriate to view this penitential interpretation of mutilation punishment as characteristic of

⁴³ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 159 (for example).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Eph 6. 11-12; Sulpicius Severus [Sulpice Sévère], *Vie de Saint Martin*, ed. J. Fontaine, 3 vols, Sources Chrétiennes 133-5 (1967-9), I, 260; Felix, *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), c. 27.

Wulfstan than to argue, as does O'Brien O'Keeffe, for a wider cultural shift extending the purview of the law to the criminal's soul: O'Brien O'Keeffe's evidence is striking but concentrated in only a few sources.⁴⁶ We may therefore see Wulfstan's approach to judicial violence as an instance of the way his reading of penitential literature informed his activities as a statesman; he applies to the physical body the ideas about sin, wounding and agency that we find in the 'Handbook for the Use of a Confessor'. If mutilation as penance 'makes the criminal a partner in his own punishment',⁴⁷ then Wulfstan's lawcodes destabilize the distinction between the passive and the active, the wounded and the wounding just as does the medical metaphor.

The collapse of crimes into punishments in the *Sermo Lupi* by which the violence of the invading Vikings becomes an image for the destructiveness of sin can thus be linked to Wulfstan's collection of penitential and canonical materials and his distinctive contribution to Anglo-Saxon law. It should be noted that, both in the laws and in the *Sermo Lupi*, Wulfstan's focus is on the public sphere and on the community. For him the moral life of the individual is structured by the scrutiny and interventions (including violent interventions) of others. Sin can be tackled at the level of the community, through shared law and shared repentance. The English sin and are punished as a group; Wulfstan repeatedly uses the first person plural: *we* sin, God's anger is shown towards *us* (ll. 101-2, 133-35, 180-83 and elsewhere). The wounded body of the *Sermo Lupi* is a collective body – the body of the nation. As Patrick Wormald has it, Wulfstan's desire was to build a 'Holy Society'.⁴⁸

I now turn to explore further the relationship of sin and society in the *Sermo Lupi* as it is expressed through the concept of shame. The vocabulary of shame, in particular *sceamu* (here normally spelt *scamu*), *bysmor* and their compounds, recurs through the text; interestingly, the *Sermo Lupi* in its several versions is almost the

⁴⁵ Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and law in late Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 27 (1998), 209-32 (pp. 215-18); 'Handbook', p. 28-29, ll. 341-54.

⁴⁶ V. J. Thompson, *Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, forthcoming 2004), chapter six; I am grateful to Dr Thompson for discussing this point with me and for making available her unpublished work.

⁴⁷ O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Body and Law', p. 230.

⁴⁸ Wormald, 'Holiness of Society', pp. 244-6.

only one of Wulfstan's sermons to employ this vocabulary.⁴⁹ The use of Viking violence as an imagery for sin and the collapse of the offences of the English into their punishment are means by which Wulfstan impresses his audience with the consciousness of sin. By appealing to shame he exhorts them to an active response.

The punishment visited on the English is summarized as *fela byrsta 7 bysmara*, 'many injuries and insults' (l. 15). Definition one of *bysmor* in the *Toronto Dictionary of Old English* is 'shame, disgrace, humiliation'; definition three covers actions that bring shame on the recipient, 'insult, mockery, contempt'.⁵⁰ Injuries (*byrstas*) go with shaming (*bysmor*) and shaming is a form of injury. Moreover, to be injured is to be shamed. For Wulfstan, the essential feature of the Viking invasions is that they shame the English. After listing the hurts that the English suffer at the hands of the Danes, slaughter in battle, rape and enslavement, Wulfstan exclaims *ac ealne þæne bysmor þe we oft þoliað we gylðað mid weorðscipe þam þe us scendað* ('but all the shame that we often suffer we repay with honour to those who humiliate us', ll. 127-9). The opposition of *bysmor* to *weorðscipe* establishes a link between how one is treated and what one is worth. If respect is not given, it has to be claimed. By repaying insults with honour, the English confirm their own humiliation. There is no suggestion of turning the other cheek; insults need to be neutralised and one's worth reasserted.

The mechanism of shame and its implications for both social standing and the workings of violence are illustrated by Wulfstan's description of Vikings committing gang-rape against the womenfolk of an English thegn.

7 oft tyne oððe twelfe, ælc æfter oþrum, scendað to bysmore þæs þegenes cwenan, 7 hwilum his dohtor oððe nydmagan, þær he onlocað, þe læt hine sylfne rancne 7 ricne 7 genoh godne ær þæt gewurde.

And often ten or twelve, one after another, disgracefully insult the thegn's wife, and sometimes his daughter or close kinswoman, while he looks on –

⁴⁹ The only other Wulfstan homilies in which I have found *sc(e)amu* or its compounds are Bethurum XXI l. 18 and VIIIc l. 147. *Bysmor* (*bismor*, *bismor*) and *sc(e)andlic* are apparently confined to the *Sermo Lupi*. Search on *OE Corpus*.

⁵⁰ *DOE*, pp. 2659-61; see also the account of senses of shame vocabulary in I. Lohmander, *Old and Middle English Words for 'Disgrace' and 'Dishonour'*, *Gothenburg Studies in English* 49 (1981), pp. 41-55.

he who considered himself proud and powerful and sufficiently good before it happened. (ll. 116-20)

Although the object of *scendað to bysmore* is the wife, the focus of this passage is on the injury to the thegn. The *Sermo Lupi* recalls early Anglo-Saxon laws in presenting rape chiefly as an affront to the woman's husband or male kin.⁵¹ This husband is passive, looking on while the outrage is committed and unable to prevent it, and his passivity exposes his degradation. The language of social status (*ric*) mingles with that of self-esteem (*ranc*) and that of inherent worth (*god*).⁵² The attack on the thegn's family deprives him of the claim to worth he made previously (*ær þæt*). As in the 'Handbook for the Use of a Confessor', the passive, wounded body is a devalued body. However, whereas in penitential literature the passive body is a metaphor for one who has done something wrong, the thegn is not in a position to do anything: one man against 'ten or twelve', he presumably has no chance of protecting his kinswomen and his rights. He is reduced not in the first place by his own action but by the insulting valuation placed on him by others, which is marked on the bodies of his womenfolk. His failure to retaliate confirms that valuation. In passages such as the one just discussed, Wulfstan powerfully stresses the sheer humiliation of enduring Viking attack.

The impotent body of the thegn and the abused bodies of his womenfolk figure the wounded body of the nation as a whole, the English who are addressed in the sermon. This is a highly visible body: shame is to do with exposure to the judging gaze of others. Parts of the *Sermo Lupi* read almost like a goading scene from the Icelandic sagas, in which a dependent, typically a woman, taunts a man with the outrages he has suffered, imparting a painful sense of how he appears to critics both inside and outside his household.⁵³ Wulfstan refers repeatedly to the shame inflicted on the English, emphasizing visibility and exposure. The anger of God against the English is *swutol 7 gesæne*, 'clear and evident' (l. 132), and it

⁵¹ J. Coleman, 'Rape in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Halsall (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 193-204.

⁵² On the changing implications of *ric*, see M. R. Godden, 'Money, power and morality in late Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 19 (1990), 41-65.

⁵³ See, for example, Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, pp. 210-15; J. Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 189-91.

generates *woroldscame*, ‘world-shame’, ‘public shame’ (l. 122). The world beholds the degradation of the English.

Wulfstan goads the English with their passivity before violence. The action he specifically advocates, however, is not vengeance but repentance; he appeals to shame, the loss of social worth, but uses it to address the problem of guilt for sin. The *Sermo Lupi* moves in a transitional space between guilt and shame.

Shame is the punishment received by the English, but it is also part of the problem.

is nu geworden wide 7 side to ful yfelan gewunan þæt men swyþor scamað nu for goddædan þonne for misdædan, forþam to oft man mid hocere goddæda hyrweð [...] swa þæt hy ne scamað na, þeh hy syngian swyðe 7 wið God sylfne forwyrcean hy mid ealle, ac for idelan onscytan hy scamað þæt hy betan heora misdæda swa swa bec tæcan, gelice þam dwæsan þe for heora prytan lewe nellað beorgan

And now there have arisen far and wide customs too exceedingly evil, so that men are now more ashamed about good deeds than misdeeds, because too often men mock good deeds with derision [...] so that they are not ashamed though they sin greatly and offend even against God himself; but because of idle attacks they are ashamed to atone for their misdeeds as the books teach, like the foolish who because of their pride will not seek a cure for their infirmities. (ll. 152-5 and 161-5)

Again the imagery of attack, in this case verbal attack, joins that of sickness. The opinions of others, when corrupted, corrupt the moral behaviour of the individual. Men are deterred from right deeds and from penance for wrong deeds by social pressures, by ‘what people will say’. Allen Frantzen analyses shame in the *Sermo Lupi* as a purely negative force working against the call to penance;⁵⁴ the humiliation of penance is a deterrent. Mary Mansfield, in her work on thirteenth-century France, discusses the possibilities for gossip and speculation attending confession and penance; the clergy continued to fear that shame would deter people from disclosing their sins even to a priest.⁵⁵ However, they also saw the shame of confession as part of the necessary punishment, and, like Wulfstan, they used the

⁵⁴ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 178.

⁵⁵ M. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France*, (Ithaca, NY, 1995), pp. 78-91.

dread of still greater shame – exposure to the whole of creation at Doomsday – as an incentive to confess.⁵⁶ Wulfstan does not show that shame *is* wrong but that it has *gone* wrong. Shame among the English has become disordered; it regulates behaviour in precisely the opposite way to how it should do, censuring good deeds instead of bad ones. But Wulfstan clearly implies that shame should and could reinforce virtuous behaviour. Shame should be yoked to a sense of what it is to sin against God. What Wulfstan calls *scamu* or *bysmor* refers both to humiliation in the social sphere and the awareness of sin. The theme of shame in the *Sermo Lupi* illuminates Wulfstan's understanding of the Holy Society: sin cannot be divorced from the social context that can both produce it (many of the sins of the *Sermo Lupi* are the sins of groups – gang-rape, for example) and regulate it, through laws and through the pressure of opinion.

To summarize, in the *Sermo Lupi*, the violence of the Vikings operates both as an image of the sins of the English and as a punishment for those sins. The English are effectively self-wounding, bringing their own humiliation down on their heads. Wulfstan, as Jonathan Wilcox has shown, saw it is as the duty of an Archbishop to make wrongs known, to 'cry out' and not 'mumble with his jaw'.⁵⁷ He proclaims the shame of the English, goading them to the action of penitence. However, this is not all he is goading them to: the *Sermo Lupi* also implicitly delivers a more martial message.

As has already been argued, the Vikings are not the main topic of the sermon. Their role is functional: they provide a way of talking about the sinfulness of the English. Regarded as a punishment sent by God, the Danes are not so much a focus of interest in themselves as a signal to look inwards at the ills of the nation. Certainly in the *Sermo Lupi* the Vikings are what lies outside and opposed to the Christian society. As in the episode of the runaway slave, mentioned earlier, the Danes stand for the disruption of proper hierarchy and order. They enslave, kill and

⁵⁶ Mansfield, *Humiliation*, pp. 52-4; Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 176; Burrow, 'Honour and Shame', p. 125.

⁵⁷ In the *Sermo Lupi* Wulfstan castigates the bishops of the Britons who *clumedon mid ceafstum þær hy scoldan chypian*, 'mumbled with their jaws where they should cry out', l. 192; for a discussion of this recurrent concern in Wulfstan's writings, see J. Wilcox, 'The Wolf on Shepherds: Wulfstan, bishops, and the Context of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*', in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and D. A. Oosterhouse (New York, 2000), pp. 395-418.

destroy. Stephanie Hollis has argued that the threatened Danish conquest is equated with the rule of Antichrist prophesied in the opening lines of the sermon.⁵⁸ Given the parallels that can be detected between the imagery of the wounds of sin and the violence of the *Sermo Lupi*, which represents at once the sins and the sufferings of the English, it is tempting to equate the Vikings with the devils who assail sinners with temptation and wound them in the spiritual fight. However, the relationship between the English and the Danes in the sermon seems to me to be more complex than that of human and devil.

The Vikings, I would suggest, act as a kind of dark *alter ego* for the English. The threat that the English will lose their political autonomy to the Vikings is anticipated by a sense that they are already losing their distinct identity; the moral boundaries that divide English from Dane are beginning to break down. The ambiguity between the description of attack and the description of crime in the lists of the nation's ills entails a lack of any clear distinction between the activities of Vikings and those of the English. The episode of the rape of the thegn's womenfolk has been discussed above as an exemplary Viking outrage (ll. 116-20, quoted above pp. 150-51). It is closely paralleled in an earlier passage in which Wulfstan describes and condemns the sinful custom by which English men band together to buy, abuse and sell a woman:

7 scandlic is to specanne þæt geworden is to wide, 7 egeslic is to witanne þæt oft doð to manege, þe dreogað þa yrmðe, þæt sceotað togædere 7 ane cwenan gemænum ceape biggað gemæne, 7 wið þa ane fylpe adreogað, an æfter anum, 7 ælc æfter oðrum, hundum geliccast, þe for fylpe ne scrifað, 7 syððan wið weorðe syllað of lande feondum to gewearde Godes gesceafte 7 his agenne ceap, þe he deore gebohte.

And it is shameful to recount what comes to pass too widely, and awful to know what too many often do, who commit that crime that they club together and together buy one woman as a common purchase, and against that one commit filth, one after another and each in turn, most like dogs who don't care about filth, and afterwards for money they sell God's creature, his own purchase whom he bought dearly, out of the land into the power of enemies. (ll. 87-93)

⁵⁸ Hollis, 'Thematic structure', pp. 184-6.

A verbal echo arises from the emphasis in both cases on repetition of the sexual act, the men taking turns *ælc æfter oþrum* (ll. 90 and 116-7). Both episodes are also presented in terms of shame, the shame that the Vikings inflict on their victims and the shame that makes the buying of a woman in common *scandlic...to specanne*, 'shameful to tell'. In both cases, the shame is born by the English: to speak of their crimes as of their humiliations is to show how they have lost the proper integrity of Christian people. It is also noteworthy that the purchasers of the woman are in collusion with the Danes in that the latter are presumably the enemies to whom she is sold; the insistence that the woman is Christ's purchase implies that she is being delivered up to pagans, imperilling her soul. Another passage in which the Vikings and the English are implicitly compared is the reference to Gildas:

An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum, Gildas hatte, se awrat be heora misdædum, hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swiþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinnan 7 Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle.

There was a learned man called Gildas in the time of the Britons, who wrote about their misdeeds, how they so excessively greatly angered God with their sins that at last he allowed the army of the English to conquer their land and wholly destroy the British host. (ll. 184-8)

While the contemporary English face the same awful fate as the Britons, the Vikings undertake the avenging role that was formerly played by the *Engla here*.

The sense that the same people can take on different roles in the drama of invaders and defenders, and the assertion that the seamen are made strong by God, opens up the possibility that the Danes might rightfully succeed the English as the English did the Britons. This goes some way to explaining how Wulfstan felt able to have the *Sermo Lupi* recopied during the reign of Cnut, a question raised by Malcolm Godden.⁵⁹ The patterns and roles it describes are not essentially attached to these particular peoples but can have a more general application. This is one way of reading the text in its manuscript context. However, if we place the *Sermo Lupi* in its context of composition, prior to the Danish conquest, it can be read as conveying a strong if not absolutely explicit message of resistance.

⁵⁹ Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion', pp. 158-9.

For Wulfstan, builder of the Holy Society, the religious was political and the political religious. The exhortation to penitence was itself a serious response to the threat of invasion. Indeed, the document printed by Liebermann as Æthelred's seventh lawcode imposes a national day of fasting and prayer in order that *us God ælmihtig gemiltsige 7 us geunne, þæt we ure fynd ofercuman motan* ('God almighty may have mercy on us and grant us that we overcome our enemies').⁶⁰ Those who failed to join in were to be fined.

The implication of the statement that the English are *sigeleas* through God's anger is that, anger once appeased, they will gain victory. Wulfstan does expect a practical defence to accompany spiritual purifying. Just as the language of sin points both to internal and external violence, the language of repentance is a language of defence against both hellfire and Viking burning.

utan don swa us neod is, beorgan us sylfum swa we geornost magan, þe læs we ætgædere ealle forweorðan

Let us do as is necessary for us, protect ourselves as well as we may, lest we all perish together. (ll. 181-3)

Such passages can be read, and should be read, as an instruction to repent and thereby avoid defeat, but they are also warnings against complacency or false pride in both moral and military matters. The scorn of passivity expressed in the sermon applies as much to physical passivity as the failure to repent. Here we may look again at the humiliated thane, incapable of defending his women against violence, the scorn evinced towards 'repaying insults with honour' and the implicit hostility to the payment of tribute. Wulfstan expects the English to fight the Vikings with weapons of iron, not only the weapons of the spirit.

Perspectives on violence in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*

In the *Sermo Lupi*, religious and secular perspectives, prayer and politics, guilt and shame, are resolved into a literary whole. Wulfstan's message speaks to a

⁶⁰ Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I, 262, § 8.

time when action, both penitential and military, was urgently needed; it is the message of a great churchman who was also a great political leader. With *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* we move back some years, to the 990s, a time when the Scandinavian threat was not yet so overwhelming.⁶¹ In this collection of discrete texts, we do not find a single clear message about the Viking invasions but rather stories that reflect in different ways on matters such as violence, victimhood and the relationship between worldly and spiritual status and values. *Ælfric's* saints' lives offer useful comparanda to the *Sermo Lupi* because they further illuminate its themes. The idea of the saint as a 'soldier of Christ' (*miles Christi*) engaged in spiritual warfare is closely related to the notion of spiritual struggle and wounding conveyed through the medical metaphor. Martyrdom narratives in particular address ideas about the shame of victimhood; they juggle with concepts of passivity and activity. However, while Wulfstan equates the guilty, damaged soul with the shamed and suffering body, the *Lives of Saints* complicate the relationship between internal and external wounds.

Malcolm Godden has discussed *Ælfric's* evolving approach to the Scandinavian incursions.⁶² In the *Catholic Homilies* there is no direct comment on the Viking threat, and what implicit attitudes can be traced have nothing to say to the specifics of the issue. Viking attacks are either to be seen as symptomatic of the general strife that heralds the apocalypse or to be met with a reassurance that God protects his own. By the time of the 'Letter to Sigeward' (also known as 'On the Old and New Testament'), dated by Clemoes 1005-6, *Ælfric* has moved to an explicit endorsement of military action against the Vikings; Old Testament figures such as David and Judith become lessons in righteous warfare against the heathen.⁶³ In his treatment of the problem of Scandinavian raiding *Ælfric* can be seen to progress from a generalising and implicit engagement with the problem to a more direct, explicit one, and from a largely devotional response – renewed trust in God and repentance for sin – to an active policy of military resistance. The *Lives of*

⁶¹ P. Clemoes, 'The Chronology of *Ælfric's* Works', *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959), pp. 212-47, reprinted in *Old English Prose*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 29-72 (pp. 39 and 56).

⁶² Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion', pp. 131-142.

⁶³ Clemoes, 'Chronology', p. 57; *Ælfric*, 'On the Old and New Testament', in *The Old English Version of The Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford, EETS OS 160 (1922), pp. 15-75 (pp. 5 and 48).

Saints are positioned somewhere near the mid-point of the journey, both ideologically and chronologically. As Godden argues, texts such as the 'Life of St Edmund' present a 'hagiographic model' for Viking attack, one in which the invaders become persecutors of God's faithful.⁶⁴ This is, however, not the only model on offer in the *Lives of Saints*, just as saints' lives are not the only literary form: the sermon 'De oratione Moysi', for instance, offers a reading of heathen attack as punishment for sin.⁶⁵ Further, the hagiographic model itself is complex in its implications.

of
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The message of the *Lives of Saints* is generally, and rightly, interpreted in relation to its audience. Unlike the *Catholic Homilies*, which seem to have been produced for public preaching and subsequently widely disseminated, the *Lives of Saints* have a small manuscript distribution and are stated to have been written at the request of the noblemen Æthelweard and Æthelmær.⁶⁶ A number of commentators have stressed the relevance of the *Lives of Saints* to Æthelweard and Æthelmær in their political role, noting the prominence of royal and military saints and the comparative plenitude of material relating to warfare.⁶⁷ The 'Life of St Edmund' has received particular attention; not only is it the most familiar and accessible of Ælfric's saints' lives, being available in two popular editions, but it deals with an English king killed by the Vikings.⁶⁸ In a brilliant and provocative reading of the 'Life', James W. Earl argues that Ælfric makes Edmund into a paragon of 'Christian

⁶⁴ Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion', pp. 138-9.

⁶⁵ Ælfric, 'De oratione Moysi', in *Lives of Saints*, I, 282-306.

⁶⁶ *Lives of Saints*, I, 4, ll. 35-41. On the manuscripts of the *Lives of Saints* see J. Hill, 'The Dissemination of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*: A Preliminary Survey', in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1996), pp. 235-59. On the preaching context of the *Catholic Homilies* see K. Sisam, 'MSS Bodley 340 and 342: Ælfric's Catholic Homilies', in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 148-98 (p. 175); M. M. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto and Buffalo, 1977), pp. 48-53 and p. 120; for a recent overview, commenting on both the *Catholic Homilies* and the *Lives of Saints*, see R. J. Kelly, 'Introduction' in *The Blickling Homilies: Edition and Translation*, ed. R. J. Kelly (London and New York, 2003), pp. xv-li (pp. xxciv-xxix).

⁶⁷ See in particular E. G. Whatley, 'Pearls before Swine: Ælfric, Vernacular Hagiography and the Lay Reader', in *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross*, ed. T. N. Hall with T. D. Hill and C. D. Wright (Morgantown, 2002), pp. 158-84 (pp. 173-4 and 182); M. R. Godden, 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 16 (1985), 83-100 (pp. 95-6).

⁶⁸ B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 5th edn (Oxford, 1992), pp. 195-203; *Ælfric: Three Saints' Lives*, ed. G. I. Needham (London, 1966), pp. 43-59. I have myself worked previously on Edmund: 'Danes and Devils: The Vikings as hagiographical villains in Abbo's *Passio*

non-violence', an example aimed at the king and the Church; Earl suggests that, through his patrons, Ælfric may have influenced King Æthelred's policy towards the Vikings.⁶⁹ Earl's arguments chime with those of John Edward Damon. Using evidence chiefly from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Damon suggests that Ealdorman Æthelweard was among a group at Æthelred's court who advocated the payment of tribute to buy time for conversion and assimilation, seeing this as a better way of dealing with the Danes than fighting.⁷⁰ Joyce Hill provides further evidence of Ælfric's hostility towards violence, showing that scenes of torture in the 'Life of St George' are very much toned down from the source.⁷¹

My reading of the *Lives of Saints* confirms a sense of Ælfric's profound moral distaste for violence. What I wish to do, however, by looking at three lives from the collection, is to explore some of the ways the relationship between violence and sanctity can vary. The earliest saints were the martyrs. As the church was reconciled to the state opportunities for martyrdom became scarce; subsequent centuries canonized hermits, monks and even, especially in Anglo-Saxon England, royalty.⁷² In the *Lives of Saints* these different kinds of saints appear side by side. If we read synchronically rather than diachronically – comparing Ælfric's saints' lives to each other rather than to their sources – we can see that the model presented to Æthelweard, Æthelmær and other potential aristocratic readers subtly shifts.⁷³

While martyrs valorize victimhood, they are problematic models for political leaders trying to defend property, territory and polity. The typical martyr (here

Sancti Eadmundi and Ælfric's Life of St Edmund (unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 1999).

⁶⁹ J. W. Earl, 'Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's "Passion of St Edmund"', *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999), 125-49 (quotation from p. 133).

⁷⁰ J. E. Damon, 'Advisors for Peace in the Reign of Æthelred Unræd', in *Peace and Negotiation: Strategies for Coexistence in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 4 (2000), pp. 57-78 (p. 58).

⁷¹ J. Hill, 'Ælfric, Gelasius and St George', *Mediaevalia* 11 (1985), 1-17 (pp. 7-9).

⁷² See A. Vauchez, 'The Saint', in *The Medieval World*, ed. J. Le Goff, trans. L. G. Cochrane (London, 1990), pp. 313-45 (pp. 313-24); M. Lapidge, 'The saintly life in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 243-63 (pp. 247-54); T. F. X. Noble and T. Head, 'Introduction', in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. T. F. X. Noble and T. Head (Pennsylvania, 1995), pp. viv-xliv; S. J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England. A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁷³ See J. Wilcox, 'Famous Last Words: Ælfric's Saints Facing Death', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 10 (1993), 1-13 (pp. 2-3) for the distinction between synchronic and diachronic readings.

Edmund is an exception) is an individual pitted *against* the polity in which s/he lives; the violence s/he experiences tends to be in a judicial context rather than in war or raiding between communities. Later saints are much less likely to be involved in physical violence. Indeed, hagiography tends not to speak directly to the issues of raiding or war. It does, however, make extensive use of metaphors of warfare. The idea of the spiritual fight and of the saint as a soldier of Christ, a *miles Christi*, is one of the elements that binds different kinds of saint together.

Employed by such influential authors as Cyprian, Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine and Gregory the Great, the image of the *miles Christi* is widespread in patristic literature and early hagiography.⁷⁴ It derives from several passages in the New Testament, in particular Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians to put on the 'armour of God':

induite vos arma Dei
 ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli
 quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem
 sed adversus principes et potestates
 adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum
 contra spiritualia nequitiae in caelestibus

Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. (Eph 6. 11-12)⁷⁵

This passage depicts the servant of God as engaged in an active struggle which is presented in metaphors of physical combat but is also explicitly contrasted with it. The opposition of fleshly and spiritual enemies in Ephesians relates to the stark antithesis of flesh and spirit found elsewhere in the New Testament.⁷⁶ The motif of spiritual combat tends to highlight the gulf between the saint and the world. As

⁷⁴ A search for forms of *miles Christi* in the *PL Database* found 818 hits. Examples include Cyprian, *Epistola ad Fortunatam de exhortatione martyrii*, in *PL* 4, cols. 641-676B (col. 653B); Ambrose, *Epistola XXII*, *PL* 16, cols. 1019-1026A (col. 1022B); Hilary, *Sancti Hilarii epistola seu libellus*, *PL* 10, cols. 733-750D (col. 745C, D); Augustine, *Sermo CCLXXVI: In festo martyris Vincentii*, *PL* 38, cols. 1255-7 (col. 1256); Gregory the Great, *Liber Responsalis*, *PL* 78, cols. 723-850A (cols. 797A, C and 817A, B). All the examples cited apply the term *miles Christi* to martyrs.

⁷⁵ See also 1 Cor 9. 24-7; 2 Tim 2. 3-7 and 4. 7.

⁷⁶ For example, Mc 14. 38; Io 6. 64; Rm 8. 4-10; Gal 5. 16-17 and 6. 8.

applied to martyrs, it expresses the reversal of worldly ideas about violence, power and passivity: the martyr achieves victory through passivity and suffering.

Occurrences of the *miles Christi* motif in Old English have been examined in illuminating studies by Joyce Hill and Stephen Morrison.⁷⁷ Both show that the spiritual fight has a vocabulary distinct from that used in heroic contexts. The noun generally used to denote Christ's soldiers, *cempa*, can be used for an ordinary soldier, but it is not one of the poetic words favoured for warriors. Hill argues that *cempa* and the related verb *campian* undergo a semantic shift under the influence of the *miles Christi* tradition and are effectively leached of martial connotations.⁷⁸ Morrison makes a bolder claim for the verb *oferswiðan*, 'to overcome', used characteristically of the victory of the saint over the forces of temptation, persecution and the devil:

Oferswiðan [...] has the ability to subvert, of itself, any martial associations which may be present.⁷⁹

Certainly Morrison gives a convincing and detailed account of the vocabulary favoured for prose expressions of the *miles Christi* idea, showing the preference for a well-defined range of words which do not have heroic overtones.⁸⁰ Morrison notes that the saint's battle is presented purely in terms of defence and steadfast endurance.⁸¹ The New Testament imagery similarly focuses on protective armour rather than offensive weapons. This is in sharp contrast to *The Battle of Brunanburh*, where, as Jayne Carroll demonstrates, the victors are associated with swords, the

⁷⁷ J. Hill, 'The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s.12 (1981 for 1980-1981), 57-80; 'On the Semantics of Old English *cempa* and *campian*', *Neophilologus* 67:2 (1983), 273-6; S. J. Morrison, 'Continuity and Innovation in Early English Homilies: Studies on the Vocabulary of Spiritual Warfare in Old English Writings and in the *Ormulum*', 2 vols, (unpublished DPhil dissertation, University of York, 1980).

⁷⁸ Hill, 'On the Semantics'; 'Soldier of Christ', pp. 58-9. Hill compares the changing senses of *cempa*, *campian* to the erosion of connotations of fighting of *militare*, *militia* in the Rule of St Benedict, discussed by E. Manning, 'La signification de <<militare – militia – miles>> dans la Règle de Saint Benoît', *Revue Bénédictine* 72 (1962), 135-8.

⁷⁹ Morrison, 'Continuity and Innovation', I, 228.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 244-434.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 251.

losers with shields;⁸² it is also in contrast to *The Battle of Maldon*, where the loyal thegns charge to their deaths.

The opposition between the fleshly and the spiritual fight is important to Ælfric's treatment of social structures and particularly to his very prominent concern with the status and role of monks. The idea of the monastic life as spiritual warfare can be traced back to Cassian and occurs, for example, in the writings of Alcuin and in the *Rule of St Benedict*.⁸³ The metaphor of warfare becomes for Ælfric a way of exploring the relationship between the secular ruling class and monks. In the short piece entitled 'Qui sunt oratores, laboratores, bellatores', this relationship is expressed in the framework of the Three Estates; it is noteworthy that the *oratores* are explicitly monks, with no mention made of the secular clergy:

Nu swincð se yrðling embe urne bigleofan .
 and se woruld-cempa sceall winnan wið ure fynd
 and se godes þeowa sceall symle for us gebiddan .
 and feohtan gastlice . wið þa ungesewenlican fynd .
 Is nu forþy mare þæra muneca gewinn [...]
 þonne sy þæra woruld-manna [...]

Now the farmer works to produce our food, and the worldly-warrior must fight against our enemies and the servants of God must always pray for us and fight spiritually against the invisible enemies. Therefore now the combat of the monks is greater than may be that of the worldly men. (*Lives of Saints* II, 122, ll. 819-825)

Warriors and monks take verbally parallel roles in the defence of society (Ælfric presents secular warfare as being ideally defensive), the former fighting *fynd*, the latter *ungesewenlican fynd*, but the fight of the monks is presented as being the harder and more crucial. The Three Estates structure points to the interdependence of society and the necessity of all three roles, but in Ælfric's version the functions are mutually exclusive and not of equal merit. Monks should not be tempted away from their superior calling;

⁸² J. Carroll, 'Words and Weapons: *The Battle of Brunanburh*', *Nottingham Linguistic Circular* 15 (2000), 35-53.

⁸³ John Cassian, *De coenobiorum institutis libri duodecim*, PL 49, cols. 56-477 (e.g. at col. 60B); Alcuin, *Epistolae*, PL 100, cols. 135-514: *Epistola CCXXVI*, for example, develops the idea of the

forðan þe him fremað swiðor þæt þa ungesewenlican fynd
 beon oferswiðde þonne ða gesewenlican .
 and hit bið swyðe derigendlic þæt hi drihtnes þeowdom forlætan .
 and to woruld-gewinne bugan . þe him naht to ne gebyriað .

Because it benefits them more that the invisible enemies are overcome than the visible, and it is very hurtful if they abandon the service of the Lord and stoop to worldly combat which does not in any way befit them. (II, 122, ll. 829-32)

The passage goes on to adduce the pacific behaviour of the saints as an example to monks. The comparison between monks and martyrs is a well-established one: monasticism had long been conceived as a 'white martyrdom'.⁸⁴ Ælfric warns that the servants of God should not 'defile' (*afylan*) themselves with fighting or kill even a bird (II, 124, 857-62). Bloodshed, though necessary to society, is polluting.

Ælfric's use of the Three Estates idea to condemn clerical arms-bearing reflects his general concern to promote rigorous standards of holiness and discipline in the Church.⁸⁵ This concern is conveyed, for example, in the rather ambitious prescriptions for priestly book-owning set out in the pastoral letters written for bishops Wulfsige and Wulfstan.⁸⁶ Ælfric is also particularly committed to privileging the monastic estate. One of the foremost policies of the tenth-century reformers was to replace communities of secular clergy with monks and to promote the appointment of monks as bishops.⁸⁷ Consequent upon the succession crisis that followed the death of Edgar and after the death in 984 of the reforming archbishop Æthelwold, factional struggles led to the appropriation of monastic lands by the king and others.⁸⁸ It is to these events that Ælfric is referring in 'De oratione Moysi'

monk as soldier; *RB* 1980. *The Rule of St Benedict In Latin and English with Notes* ed. T. Fry (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1981), e.g. pp. 156, 164, 168, 266 and 274.

⁸⁴ See C. Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21-46.

⁸⁵ T. E. Powell, 'The "Three Orders" of Society in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 23 (1994), 103-132 (p. 121).

⁸⁶ *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, ed. Fehr; J. Hill, 'Monastic Reform and the Secular Church: Ælfric's Pastoral Letters in Context', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. Hicks (Stamford, 1992), pp. 103-117 (pp. 110-111).

⁸⁷ Cubitt, 'Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform', pp. 85 and 93.

⁸⁸ P. Wormald, 'Æthelwold and His Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 13-42 (p. 23); S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978-1016: A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3rd series 13 (1980), pp. 176-

when he links the incursions of the heathen army to the fact that the nation has *towearp munuc-lif*.⁸⁹ The Vikings are here explained as a punishment for abuse of the monks. Though, as has already been remarked, the equation of war with punishment is something Ælfric was moving away from as he wrote the *Lives of Saints*, the privileging of monks and their task is a constant of Ælfric's writing. In the *Colloquy* (written in the 880s) he has the novice declare that the monastic life is first among crafts (*mihi videtur seruitium Dei inter istas artes primatum tenere*).⁹⁰ In the 'Letter to Sigeweard' (1005-6) he repeatedly stresses the superiority of works to words and is clearly promoting military action; nonetheless, he is careful to point out that religious teaching counts as a work and not empty words:

Nu miht þu wel witan, þæt weorc sprecað swiþor þonne þa nacodan word, þe nabbað nane fremminge. Is swa god weorc on þan godan wordum, þonne man oþerne lærð 7 to geleafan getrimð

Now you can well know that works speak more than bare words that are not performed. However there is good work in good words, when one man teaches another and strengthens him in faith. (p. 74)

The customary that Ælfric produced for the monks of Eynsham, also around 1005, departs from *Regularis Concordia* in giving a less prominent role to the king as patron of monks and implies a jealous regard for monastic independence.⁹¹ In 'Qui sunt oratores' and in these other writings Ælfric takes care to present the monastic life as a worthy and indeed pre-eminent work and one that should be carried on free of secular pressures.

The metaphor of warfare is used to valorize the monastic calling not only through a contrast between the worldly battle and the superior, purer spiritual one, but through the parallel between them which enables the sedentary, unglamorous life of the cloister to be equated with the active, aristocratic pursuit of fighting. John Ruffing in a somewhat Marxist reading of the *Colloquy* shows how monastic figures in that text 'constitute' and 'manipulate' the language of work to present monks as

80; Cubitt, 'Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform', pp. 83-4; D. J. V. Fisher, 'The Anti-Monastic Reaction in the Reign of Edward the Martyr', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10 (1950-2), 254-70.

⁸⁹ 'Cast off the monastic life,' *De oratione Moysi*, p. 294, l. 152.

⁹⁰ 'It seems to me that the service of God [i.e. the monastic life] holds the first place among these crafts', *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway, 2nd edn (London, 1947), p. 39.

⁹¹ Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, pp. 42-7; discussion of dating, pp. 5-12.

productive workers entitled to dominate other workers. The monastic life is differentiated from other callings as superior, but at the same time the structure of the text places it among the crafts; the *Colloquy* silences a troubling suggestion that monks might not be truly useful.⁹² Similarly in 'Qui sunt oratores' monks (and saints) are differentiated from warriors and yet placed among them: the differentiation is one of degree rather than kind (*is nu mare þæra muneca gewinn*). A positive evaluation of victory and conquest is inherent in the strategy of presenting saint and monk as conqueror and victor. The *oratores* can only be presented as superior to the *bellatores* by being at some level assimilated to them.

The *miles Christi* image presents the monk, and the saint, as active in passivity: passivity is valuable because *it is not really passive*. A metaphoric tension is created between physical and spiritual warfare in which the two concepts attract as well as repel each other.⁹³ The worldly values of bodily strength and success in combat are contrasted with but also shape understanding of spiritual life. To return specifically to Ælfric, but making a point that applies more widely, the language of value employed in Ælfric's writings blurs the distinction between worldly and Christian worth. This blurring may be observed particularly in the vocabulary of shame. In the passage from 'De oratione Moysi' about the abuse of the monks, mentioned above, precisely the same phrase is used (*habban to bysm(o)re*) for the neglect or contempt of God's service by the English and the injuries they suffer at the hands of the Vikings:

Hu wæs hit ða siððan ða þa man towearp munuc-lif .
and godes biggengas to bysmore hæfde .
buton þæt us com to cwealm and hunger .
and siððan hæðen here us hæfde to bysmre .

How was it then afterwards when men cast off the monastic life and had the worship of God in reproach, but that famine and disease came to us and afterwards the heathen army had us in reproach? (*Lives of Saints*, I, 294, ll. 152-5)

⁹² J. Ruffing, 'The Labor Structure of Ælfric's Colloquy', in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat (Glasgow, 1994), pp. 55-70.

⁹³ Morrison, 'Continuity and Innovation', I, 332-33.

Shame inflicted becomes shame received: the verbal repetition expresses the structure of punishment. It is interesting to see that in the *De oratione Moysi* Ælfric, like Wulfstan in the *Sermo Lupi*, characterizes Viking incursion as principally a matter of shame – of the public humiliation of suffering attack and coming off worse. This public shame proceeds from the immoral behaviour of mistreating the monks. Ælfric is careful to present the so-called ‘anti-monastic reaction’ as an attack not on monks but on monasticism, *munuc-lif*, and on the proper service of God. The shame given out by the English is thus something slightly different from the shame they suffer. When they *gode biggengas to bysmore h[abbap]* they exhibit a moral change in themselves, a collapse of Christian principles manifested in a contemptuous attitude towards holy things. Thus *bysmor* expresses the degradation of the nation twice, first in terms of Christian morality and practice (the spiritual), second in terms of public standing and strength (the worldly). There is further blurring between the two fields in that the spiritual shaming covers a humiliation in worldly terms directed towards monks: the alienation of their estates and legal privileges. A striking feature of Ælfric’s use of shame vocabulary is that *bysmorful* and *bysmorlic* are among his favourite adjectives for heathenism and its gods.⁹⁴ Heathenism is sinful; it also involves the worship of unworthy objects, devils and wicked men, and is thus demeaning. Abuse of the monks is a degrading apostasy.

The idea that defeat is shaming, present in ‘De oratione Moysi’, points to a possible infection of the *miles Christi* image with notions of honour and military achievement belonging to the worldly fight. The traffic of ideas flows both ways: the metaphor can also imply a spiritualised notion of war. In Ælfric’s *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, a customary based on the *Regularis Concordia*, we find exhortations to prepare for the battle of self-denial that is Lent:

Ergo officia ipsa in Setuagesima monent nos preperare nosmetipsos ad bellum spiritale [sic], cum dicitur in ipsa oratione misse ‘ut qui iuste pro peccatis nostris affligimur’, et in introita ‘Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis’, et in epistola ‘Omnis enim qui in agone contendit ab omnibus se abstinet.’

⁹⁴ E.g. *Lives of Saints* I, 386, 416; II, 80, 160, 182, 424. *DOE*, pp. 2663–4, gives the following definitions of *bysmorful*: ‘1. shameful, disgraceful [...] 1.a. of heathen gods and idolatrous practices [...] 2. insulting, derisive, mocking’. All five examples listed under 1.a. are from texts by Ælfric. This is a peculiarly Ælfrician usage.

The liturgy itself of Septuagesima therefore admonishes us to prepare ourselves for spiritual warfare, when it is said in the mass collect, 'that we who are justly afflicted for our sins', and in the introit, 'the groans of death have surrounded me', and in the epistle, 'everyone that striveth for mastery refraineth himself from all things'.⁹⁵

War, standing for penitential discipline, implicitly takes on a penitential character: it is a matter of affliction and suffering that must be met with self-denial (*ab omnibus se abstinet*). The discipline and self-control of the soldier are fertile ideas for the writer of hagiography or indeed monastic customaries.

The idea of the saint as *miles Christi* alerts us to an interpenetration of activity and passivity, warrior and saint, aggressor and victim which is of the essence of the martyr's story – the story of the victim who is yet a victor – but can also reflect back in complex ways on worldly wars and warriors. In the case studies that follow I shall look at the way these tensions surface in selected saints' lives by Ælfric, those of the Forty Soldiers, St Martin and St Oswald. This small group, comprising martyrs to the pagan state, an ascetic monk-bishop and an Anglo-Saxon king, is selected to reflect the range of dates and kinds of saints. They exemplify the shifting relationship of sainthood and worldly warfare.

The Forty Soldiers⁹⁶

The passion of the Forty Soldiers is a relatively short piece dealing with the martyrdom of forty Cappadocian soldiers in Armenia under the emperor Licinius (308-324). The soldiers are commanded to sacrifice to the gods, refuse and are apprehended. They are initially interrogated by the local judge, Agricola, who later hands over to a prefect, an *ealdorman* or *heretoga* in Ælfric's translation. Flattery and threats fail to persuade the soldiers to capitulate; they are imprisoned, exhort each other to courage and are tortured by being beaten with flints and later by being made to stand naked in a freezing lake. One of the soldiers is unable to endure the cold, accepts the tempting offer of warm water and promptly dies. He is replaced by

⁹⁵ Text and translation: Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, pp. 120 (Latin) and 121 (English).

⁹⁶ Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, I, 238-260.

one of the guards, converted by the saints' example. The thirty-nine soldiers and one guard are finally killed by having their legs broken, after which their bodies are burnt and their bones thrown into a river. The bones, miraculously undispersed, are retrieved by a bishop. Ælfric concludes by drawing lessons from the death of the inconstant soldier and his replacement by the guard: those who abandon God will perish, but God brings good out of evil; persecutors are evil-doers and will be punished, but from persecution comes the sanctity of the martyrs.

The sufferings of these military martyrs reflect interestingly on the relationship between martial honour and Christian worth. Agricola appeals to notions of soldierly merit in his initial attempt to make the soldiers sacrifice:

cwæð mid olecunge . þæt hi æþele cempan wæron .
 and on ælcum gefeohte fæst-ræde him betwynan .
 and symle sige-fæste on swiþlicum gewinne .
 æt-eowiað nu forði eowre anrædnysse .
 and eow sylfe under-þeodað þæra cyninga gesetnyssum .
 and geoffriað þam godum ærþam þe gebeon getintregode .
 [...] Þa cwæð se dema þæt hi oþer dydon .
 swa hi þam godum geoffrodon and arwurðnysse hæfdon .
 swa hi ða offrunge forsawon and gescynde wurdon .

He said with flattery that they were noble soldiers and constant to each other in every battle and always victorious in severe struggle. 'Therefore show now your steadfastness and subject yourselves to the decrees of the king, and sacrifice to the gods before you are tortured.' [...] Then the judge said that they should do one or the other, either sacrifice to the gods and have honour or reject the sacrifice and be shamed. (I, 240, ll. 20-25 and 32-34)

The threat of torture is balanced by an offer of reward. Agricola represents himself as in a position to bestow honour and shame. Shame is clearly intended to come with the degradation of torture; honour, as becomes explicit later in the text, is associated with gifts (*ge sceolan habban æt me . wurðmyntas and sceattas . gif ge urum godum offrian wyllað*, 'You shall have honours and riches from me if you will sacrifice to our gods,' I, 244, ll. 92-3). The honour the judge offers is also contextually associated with the glory of battle and thus may conjure up a notion of the victory parade or of spoils, or, for an Anglo-Saxon audience, the king dealing rings to his warriors. Here we encounter the dichotomy described by Julian Pitt-Rivers between honours that can be handed out by a ruler and honour as a standard

of conduct to be pursued quixotically ('all is lost save honour').⁹⁷ As becomes apparent, honour is more truly to be found in resisting the judge than in obeying him. Persecution turns *to wuldre and to ecum wyrðmynte* for the martyrs ('to glory and to eternal honour,' I, 258, l. 326); the devil appears in the form of a man and exclaims *ic eom gebysmorod* ('I am put to shame', I, 252, l. 225). Compounds and derivatives of *weorþ* denote the value that is found in and proceeds from God. The guard prays, as he strips off his clothes and plunges into the mere, *do me þæs wyrðne þæt ic wælhreowe tintrega for þe þrowige* ('make me worthy to suffer cruel torments for you', I, 250, ll. 216-217). At the close of the homily Ælfric exhorts us all to *wurðian* God ('honour, worship', I, 260, l. 363).

It is striking, however, that the flattery of the judge puts forward a model of the good soldier that anticipates the virtues we are led to admire in the martyrs. He praises the forty soldiers for being steadfast: they stand firm and are of single mind (*anræd*). Steadfastness is associated both with success in battle and with loyalty to the king: standing firm in the fight links to firmness of mind links to fidelity. The soldiers are victorious in war just as they are victorious over the devil; throughout the *passio*, it is emphasized that the forty are brave and effective fighters.

The judge's persuasions may be compared to the speech of the soldier Quirio, encouraging his fellows as they languish in prison:

swa oft swa we clypodon to criste on gefeohte
 we wurdon sige-fæste sona þurh his fultum .
 and we eac ofer-swiðdon þone onsigendan here .
 Hwilon we wæron on micclum gewinne .
 and eall ure folc mid fleame æt-wand
 buton we feowertig þe on ðam feohte stodon .
 biddende georne ures drihtnes fultum .
 and sume we aflagdon sume feollan ætforan us .
 [...] Nu is ure wiðer-winna þes wæl-hreowa heretoga .
 oðer is se dema . and se deofol þrida .
 þas ðry syrwiað hu hi us beswicon .
 ac uton nu clypian crist us to gefylstan .

As often as we called on Christ in battle we were immediately victorious through his help, and we likewise overcame the approaching army. Once we

⁹⁷ Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour and Social Status', pp. 22-3.

were in a great strife and all our people ran away except for we forty who stood firm in battle, praying earnestly for the help of our Lord; and we put some to flight and some fell before us [...] Now our adversary is this cruel prefect, the second is the judge, and the third is the devil: these three plot how they may deceive us, but let us call on Christ to aid us. (I, 242, ll. 69-76 and 78-81).

Quirio recalls a spectacular success, a victory achieved by the forty soldiers alone against an enemy army. We gain from the speech a somewhat startling impression of the martyrs' pre-eminence in combat. Their feat is presented in terms of steadfastness, of literally staying on the spot when everyone else flees: bravery of Wiglaf's sort, but with Christ and no earthly king identified as their Lord. However, Quirio is emphatic that this kind of mental and physical strength proceeds from Christ. He is the source of their worldly victory as he will be the source of their spiritual one. The speech clearly identifies the soldiers as *milites Christi*, drawing an explicit comparison between their literal and metaphorical fighting. In both kinds of fighting the soldiers are depicted as adopting a purely defensive stance. Movement and aggression are the part of the enemy: the soldiers win by standing still. Some sort of violent action is implied in putting the foes to flight, but those who *feollon ætforan us* do so without apparent contact; perhaps they fall over their own feet. It is through a careful manipulation of language that the judge's version of battle works to reinforce Quirio's in stressing firmness of mind and body rather than aggressive action as the key to a glorious victory. Quirio modifies what the judge has to say only in identifying the true object of the soldiers' fidelity.

We thus have in the *passio* of the Forty Soldiers an endorsement of the idea that Christ will help the faithful to fight earthly foes, but also a version of honourable battlefield behaviour that seems remarkably passive. The soldiers are portrayed as paragons of action and yet immobile. In the mere, it is the man who moves who dies. What the soldiers do constantly, however, is talk, or rather preach, pray and sing. Quirio's speech approximates to a sermon and it points Ælfric's reader or auditor to a correct interpretation of the torture and death that follows. The martyrs' psalms and prayers punctuate and interpret the narrative, and as a proportion of the text they outweigh scenes of torture and violence. Of the scene in which the martyrs' legs are broken, about thirteen lines as laid out by Skeat, six lines are taken up with the singing of a psalm, and the martyrs die when they have said

Amen. Their death is structured by the completion of a prayer, not the completion of a process of killing. Words, powerful, biblical words, overcome violent deeds. The soldiers may not be physically active in the course of their persecution but they are verbally active, and it is largely through their speech that the meaning of the action is created. In this respect the *passio* of the Forty Soldiers is like that of other, non-military martyrs such as Juliana: a worldly power expressed through violence is overcome by a spiritual power controlling the meanings of violence through words.

Although the soldiers, as soldiers, are successful practitioners of violence, the violence in the text is overwhelmingly attributed to the persecutors, and the violence of language widens the gulf between heathens and Christians. The soldiers' exploits in battle seem curiously non-violent. Moreover, they are displaced into the speeches of the characters and are not part of the main narrative. In contrast, although Ælfric is not one to dwell on lurid details of torture, the violence directed against the soldiers is vividly conceived. The icy mere is an indirect form of violence, not involving force or weapons, but the cruelty of the torture is expressed in the anthropomorphic behaviour of the weather:

se winterlica wind wan mid þam forste .
 [...] þæt is befencg þa foresædan martyras .
 swa þæt heora flæsc for ðam forste tobærst .

The wintry wind raged with the frost [...] the ice seized the aforesaid martyrs so that their flesh burst apart for the frost. (I, 246, l. 144 and 248, ll. 153-4)

The beating of the martyrs' faces with flints is described briefly and plainly, but the simple, direct language of the passage leaves us no protective padding of verbiage against a stomach-churning torture. The scene exploits the expressive potential of what Elaine Scarry calls 'the verbal sign of the weapon or...the language of "agency"'.⁹⁸ The flint as weapon, heavy, dark, blunt, is an ominous symbol of pain. A sparing application of detail and alliteration completes the effect. The prefect orders *heora neb beatan mid blacan flintum* ('Their faces to be beaten with black flints', I, 244, ll. 99) – the alliteration of 'beat' with 'black' suggests the dark contusions that would result. Miraculously, the flints spring back on the torturers

⁹⁸ E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, 1985), p. 13.

and the stone cast by the prefect breaks open his own head. The 'immoderate anger' with which he orders the torture (*mid ormætum gramam*, I, 244, l. 98) issues in turbulent movement, flying flints that turn back in their paths, and in the rupture of his own body. The battles of the soldiers are presented in terms of movement only and are orderly and lacking in immediacy: the enemy approaches, the soldiers stand, the enemy flees. The tortures of martyrdom, however, are directed at bodies and the breaking of bodies. The flints hit faces and heads and the ice grips flesh.

The anger of the persecutors adds emotional energy to their violence and confirms its wrongness. Anger is one of the cardinal sins, discussed by Ælfric in the sermon 'De Memoria Sanctorum':

seo deð þæt se man nah his modes geweald .
and macað manslihtas . and mycele yfelu .

It makes a man to have no control over his mind/heart, and it causes murders and many evils . (*Lives of Saints*, I, 356, ll. 287-88).⁹⁹

It is linked both to killing and to the loss of reason. Some, though not all, medieval thinkers argued for the possibility of just anger, the righteous anger of God or of a Christian ruler, but the anger of persecutors of saints serves only to underline their lack of true justice and rightful authority.¹⁰⁰ The judge becomes bestial in his rage: *þa grimetede se wælhreowa swa swa grædig leo* ('then the savage one raged like a greedy lion', I, 242, l. 62); the simile images the persecutor as a wild animal driven by appetite. The anger of the prefect ordaining the flint torture is *ormæte*, 'without measure, excessive'. Excess, loss of control, loss of humanity: these characterize the violence of the heathen authorities in the *passio* as something disruptive, shocking and degraded, something quite different from the disciplined, off-stage fighting of their victims. Although both the Christians and their enemies practice violence in the core sense of exerting physical force to inflict injury, the judge and the prefect

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the tradition of the cardinal (or deadly) sins and Ælfric's position within it, see M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan, 1952), especially pp. 69-74 and 111-114.

¹⁰⁰ For the moral ambiguities of anger, see B. H. Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1998), especially B. H. Rosenwein, 'Introduction', pp. 1-6; L. K. Little, 'Anger in Monastic Curses', pp. 10-35; G. Althoff, 'Ira Regis: Prolegomena to History of Royal Anger', pp. 59-74.

appear more violent in the extended senses of the word.¹⁰¹ The violence of the heathens has a more extensive and concrete presence in the text and is more graphically conveyed as a matter of bodies, weapons and rupture. This violence is unambiguously sinful and cruel. The persecutors are repeatedly described as *wælhreow* ('savage, cruel, bloodthirsty') or *arleas* ('wicked, impious, merciless'), both standard epithets for persecutors in the *Lives of Saints*.¹⁰² The judge is designated *se cwellere*, the killer.¹⁰³ Killing is bound up in the identity of the heathen foe of the saints and 'killer' is directed at the judge as a term of abuse from the author, one of Ælfric's signalling devices that this man's actions and words are to be despised.

The passion of the Forty Soldiers offers useful insights into the application of the 'hagiographic model' to the Viking incursions. A comment at the end of the text clearly relates its lessons to the contemporary crisis:

Ac þa hæðenan hynað and hergiað þa cristenan
and mid wælhreowum dædum urne drihten gremiað .
ac hi habbað þæs edlean on þam ecum witum .

But the heathen oppress and harry the Christians and anger our Lord with savage deeds, but they will have retribution for it in the eternal torments . (I, 258, l. 353 to 260, l. 355)

f

The modern heathens are *wælhreow* like the Roman persecutors, the religious divide is presented in absolute terms, and the emphasis is on the activities of the attackers and not on any defensive response from their targets. It is God who will punish the Vikings in the fires of Hell. The passion of the Forty Soldiers offers a model of holy men who are successful fighters and praises military virtues of bravery and loyalty, but explores the aggressive, destructive, bodily side of violence only in connection with persecutors and heathens. The saints' life offers a way of relating martial and spiritual values in the prospect of an honour (*wurðmynte*, *arwurðnyss*) that can be found on the battlefield but proceeds from fidelity to God. However, the martyrs' death preaches that killing and violence are the futile resorts of the wicked. As

¹⁰¹ Discussed in the introduction.

¹⁰² In 'Forty Soldiers', *wælhreow*: p. 238, l. 9; p. 242, l. 62, l. 78; p. 252, l. 238; *arleas*: p. 238, l. 12; p. 252, l. 235, l. 245.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 240, l. 26, l. 36, l. 38.

passivity is paradoxically revisioned as activity, a more obvious mode of activity, fighting, remains blurred and ambiguous.

St Martin¹⁰⁴

Ælfric's 'Life of St Martin' is largely based on the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Sulpicius Severus.¹⁰⁵ A shorter life of Martin appears in the second series of *Catholic Homilies*.¹⁰⁶ In the longer version discussed here, Ælfric combines the *Vita* with material from Sulpicius Severus' other Martinian writings and Gregory of Tours' *De virtutibus Sancti Martini* to produce an integrated narrative of the saint's life and death.¹⁰⁷ The first part of the text (rather under a quarter) details Martin's career from his early life in the army to his rejection of arms, his tutelage by Hilary, his consecration to the see of Tours and the establishment of his monastery. The bulk of the work is given over to miracles of healing, contests with devils and the casting down of heathen temples. The last section deals with Martin's death and the disposal of his relics.

Martin is a pre-eminent example of the *miles Christi*, both as saint and as monk. The *Vita Sancti Martini* was immensely influential on subsequent hagiography, not least as one of the pioneering attempts to write the life of a saint who was not a martyr. It reflects the influence of the *passio* form in places but also looks to classical biography and historiography;¹⁰⁸ Martin represents, historically and literarily, a point of transition between the martyr and the confessor, a shift in the basis of the 'hagiographic model'. The configurations of violence, power-struggle and passivity in the 'Life of St Martin' show both resemblances and differences to those in 'The Forty Soldiers'.

¹⁰⁴ *Lives of Saints* II, 218-312.

¹⁰⁵ Sulpicius, *Vie de Saint Martin*, I, 248-345.

¹⁰⁶ Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series*, ed. M. Godden, EETS SS 5 (1979), XXXIV, pp. 288-98.

¹⁰⁷ J. Gaites, 'Ælfric's Longer *Life of St Martin* and its Latin Sources: A Study in Narrative Technique', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 13 (1982), 23-41 (pp. 23 and 28-31).

¹⁰⁸ C. Stancliffe, *St Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus*, Oxford Historical Monographs (1983), pp. 86-102; Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, pp. 1-3.

Martin's story reflects on issues of violence and defence but, first and foremost, it speaks to Ælfric's concerns as a monk of the reform. Martin is the leader of a monastic community of exemplary devotion and strictness:

Þa wæron gebysgode þa yldran ge-broðra
 on singalum gebedum . and seo iuguð wrat .
 [...] Hi wines ne gymdon buton wan-halum mannum .
 and manega þær hæfdon hæran to lice .

The older brothers there were occupied in constant prayers, and the young wrote [...] they did not take heed of wine except for the infirm men, and many there wore hair-shirts. (II, 240, ll. 328-29 and 332-33)

The most recent editors of the *Rule of St Benedict* argue that Sulpicius Severus presented Martin as a 'monk-hero' and sought in the *vita* to 'propagate monasticism in the West [...] and show that its fruits were in no way inferior to those of the East'.¹⁰⁹ Unlike the Eastern holy men who preceded him, Martin is not a desert solitary but shares the ascetic life with companions; moreover, as a bishop he wields power and keeps watch over the secular community. Ælfric lays stress on Martin's episcopal role, beginning the life proper with the words *Martinus se mara bisceop* and ending it with a reminder that Martin's body lies in the city where he was bishop.¹¹⁰ He is a forerunner of the reformer Dunstan, imposing rigour on the Church and rebuking errant kings.¹¹¹ For example, one may turn to his rather disdainful treatment of the emperor Maximus: reluctantly present at the emperor's feast, Martin passes the cup to a priest in preference to Maximus and then warns him against renewing war against Valentinian.¹¹² Martin rejects worldly hierarchy even as he participates in it, seated among the mighty but serving only God.

Martin's rejection of worldly values in order to pursue a transcendent good is dramatized in the famous episode in which he defies the emperor Julian and leaves the army. This is neither the scene of his initial conversion nor the

¹⁰⁹ *RB 1980*, ed. Fry et al., pp. 51-2.

¹¹⁰ II, 220, l. 10 and 312, ll. 1485-92.

¹¹¹ B, *Vita sancti Dunstani*, in *Memorials of St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series 63 (1874), pp. 3-52 (see especially Dunstan rebuking King Eadwig, pp. 32-3); N. Brooks, 'The Career of St Dunstan', in *St Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. N. Ramsay, M. Sparks and T. Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 1-23.

culmination of his Christian witness, but it is a focal point in the ‘Life’, and it sets up a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the worldly fight.

He cwæð þa to þam arleasan . oð þis ic campode þe .
ge-þafa nu þæt ic gode campige heonon-forð .
and under-fo þine gife . se þe feohte mid ðe
ic eom godes cempa ne mot ic na feohtan .

He said to the cruel one, “Until now I have soldiered for you: allow me now to soldier for God, and let him who will fight for you receive your gift. I am God’s soldier: I must never fight.” (II, 226, ll. 103-6)

This is the classic statement of the *miles Christi* metaphor and, as discussed earlier, it both compares and opposes the religious life to that of the soldier. It stresses the values of obedience and service to a lord but makes it clear that behaviour necessary to the service of the emperor is inimical to the service of God. The *miles Christi* must not fight.

Although the confrontation with Julian does not culminate in Martin’s death it is structured according to the familiar scenario of the *passio*, the passive saint confronting a wicked aggressor. The episode is very similar to, though probably not derived from, the passion of the African soldier-saint Tymasius.¹¹³ Julian is a typical persecutor, *arleas* and possessed by rage.¹¹⁴ Like the Forty Soldiers, Martin shapes his own (intended) death with his words, going so far as to suggest its form by offering to walk unarmed through the battlefield. He is active in passivity – for he proposes to be, physically, utterly passive, refusing to defend himself in any way. The issue of passivity, or, rather, pacifism, lies at the heart of the almost-martyrdom of Martin. The occasion of Martin’s persecution is not a refusal to sacrifice but a refusal to fight. Battle is presented as polluting even for non-combatant witnesses:

[God] abræd þæt gefeoht . þæt furðon nære gewemmede
martines gesihþa on oðra manna deaðe .

[God] prevented the battle so that even Martin’s sight might not be stained by the death of other men . (II, 228, ll. 126-27)

¹¹² II, 258-60, ll. 610-649.

¹¹³ Stancliffe, *St Martin and His Hagiographer*, pp. 144-7.

¹¹⁴ *Ða gebealh hine se casere*, ‘then the emperor grew angry’, II, 226, l. 107; the emperor is described as *arleas* at p. 220, l. 19 and p. 226, l. 103, l. 116.

Clare Stancliffe argues that the episode was framed by Sulpicius Severus expressly so as to answer criticism of Martin for his military background. In the late fourth century the concept of just war was making some headway but many Christians still felt 'in their gut' that all bloodshed was wrong. Sulpicius apparently suppresses a battle, that of Brumath, in which Martin must almost certainly have taken part.¹¹⁵

As with the sufferings of martyrs, the use of the military metaphor reinterprets the saint's physical passivity as active and a route to victory (a literal victory over the barbarians as well as a spiritual one over the emperor). Accused of cowardice, Martin shows himself *unforht*, 'fearless, unafraid'. Like the Forty Soldiers, Martin displays military virtue in un-military behaviour; unlike the Forty Soldiers, he expressly condemns physical fighting as incompatible with his faith.

The 'Life' includes other episodes that echo martyrdom and in which again Martin submits to violence or the threat of violence. For example, he is attacked by robbers, he is flogged by Arians and he is beaten half to death by soldiers with road-rage.¹¹⁶ In all these episodes the saint refuses to defend himself physically; Martin's example accords very precisely with Ælfric's hostility towards *oratores* bearing arms. Other passages, less close to the *passio* model, offer further insights into the image of the *miles Christi* as it applies to monks and into the relationships between violence, passivity, power-struggle and aggression.

As a first example we may look at a passage in which the image of the soldier is used to reinforce monastic discipline. One of Martin's monks, an ex-soldier, wishes to keep his wife with him. Martin appeals to the man's experience of military life to dissuade him:

Martinus þa cwæð to þam munuce eft .
 Ge-sawe þu ænig wif þa ðu wære on gefeohte
 feohtan forð mid eow atogenum swurde?
 Þa scamode þam munuce . and he swiðe þancode
 þæt he mid ge-sceade ofer-swyðed wæs .

¹¹⁵ Stancliffe, *St Martin and his Hagiographer*, pp. 136-143.

¹¹⁶ *Lives of Saints*, II, 228-30, II. 150-169; II, 230-232, II. 184-7; II, 278-80, II. 965-983.

and þæt he his ge-dwyldre ne moste . for martyne folgian .
 Se halga wer þa cwæð . wif ne sceal na faran
 to wera fyrd-wicum ac wunian æt ham .
 for-sewenlic biþ þæt werod þæt wif-menn feohtað .
 [...] heo hæfð hire wuldor gif heo hylt hire clænnysse
 [...] Þæt biþ hire [...] sige

Then Martin said to the monk again, 'When you were in battle, did you see any woman fighting beside you with drawn sword?' Then the monk was ashamed, and he gave much thanks that he had been overcome by argument and because of Martin he could not continue in his error. The holy man then said, 'A woman must never go to the camps of men but stay at home: the troop in which women fight is despicable [...] she will have her glory if she keeps her chastity [...] that will be her [...] victory' (II, 286, ll. 1089-97)

The metaphor of the spiritual fight operates at two levels in this passage. In the first place, it is deployed by Martin in order to present the monastic life as an arena of peculiarly masculine achievement. Women cannot fight and should not be included in armies; *forsewenlic* can mean 'wretched': the troop containing women is implicitly both weak and dishonourable. Similarly women are not suited to the rigours of the spiritual fight. Martin's argument stresses the masculinity of the monk, a continuing locus of conflict in the medieval period.¹¹⁷ The monk lays aside weapons, the symbols of manhood; Martin metaphorically reclaims them, asserting that spiritual like literal warfare is a matter for real men. The vocabulary of honour and shame (*scamode*, *forsewenlic*), as in 'The Forty Soldiers', forms a link between secular and sacred value systems.

Martin's exhortation is a particularly skilful manipulation of military imagery in that it succeeds in asserting masculinity as an ideal precisely where it seems most under threat. The point of keeping the monk away from his wife is to safeguard his chastity. If his wife joins him, he is in danger of falling into *his earrum leahtrum* ('his former sins', II, 286, l. 1082) – that is, the sins that he indulged in when he was a soldier and a married man. (Chastity is not characteristic of soldiers: Martin is remarkable in his ability to remain *ungewemmed* [...] *fram woroldlicre besmitennysse*, 'unspotted from worldly defilement', while in the army, II, 222, l. 42). The monk is not only to lay down arms but to abandon another battlefield on

¹¹⁷ See J. Nelson, 'Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity c.900', in *Masculinity*, ed. Hadley, pp. 121-142; R. N. Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation' in *ibid.*, pp. 160-177.

which masculinity is conventionally displayed, that of sex. Gender distinctions threaten to collapse. The husband must, like the wife, preserve his *clænnysse*, and the wife has become a *mynece*n (a nun, but the word is a feminized form of *munuc* 'monk'): implicitly, women *can* engage in the struggle of the religious life. The language of battle, however, re-introduces a gender contrast even while it is used to argue against the gender role the monk previously played. The man's spiritual fight is characterised as essentially active, going forth to battle, while the woman's is more static and passive, guarding her treasure and keeping the home fires burning. Jo Ann McNamara argues that the struggle of male saints and monks for chastity came in the early Middle Ages to be represented as a successful subordination of (the thought of) women; women in this model are no longer true participants in the struggle but only desirable objects to be resisted.¹¹⁸ The contrast between the fighting monk and the nun guarding herself approaches McNamara's paradigm. In Martin's speech the military metaphor is used to recast abstention and prayer as virile action.

The military metaphor also applies, however, to the episode as a whole. It is presented as a struggle between Martin and his follower in which Martin overcomes. The verb used is *oferswiðan*, the verb that, Morrison maintains, is sufficient in itself to evoke the *miles Christi* motif. The errant monk has previously refused to accept Martin's ruling regarding separation from his wife and has been guilty of *anwilnysse* ('obstinacy');¹¹⁹ Martin quenches this insubordination and restores a proper hierarchy. In Martin's confrontation with the emperor Julian military hierarchy is undermined and insubordination – towards the emperor, no less – made holy. In this later instance of conflict, however, Martin himself is the superior and upholds his own authority. In the earlier struggle, the leader of the army is the opponent of the ruling God; the worldly fight resembles the spiritual because it is its opposite, its reversed image. In the later episode, the worldly fight becomes an inferior *likeness* of the spiritual. The army offers a positive model of discipline, order and obedience

¹¹⁸ J. A. McNamara, 'An Unresolved Syllogism: The Search for a Christian Gender System', in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. J. Murray (New York and London, 1999), pp. 1-24 (p. 17). McNamara's assertion that early monasticism 'did [...] abandon gender or attempted to join males and females in an elite third gender' (p. 7) strikes me as less convincing than her account of later gender distinctions.

¹¹⁹ *Lives of Saints*, I, 286, ll. 1079 and 1083.

to the monastery. Similarly, the gender roles of secular life, including the fighting role of men, are valorized by being applied to religious devotion.

In the 'Life of St Martin', then, the saint acts the part of the *miles Christi* in more than one way. In the paradigm inherited from the martyr's *passio*, he achieves a paradoxical victory while being outwardly passive and submissive. In the paradigm exemplified by the episode of the uxorious monk, however, Martin's victory is metaphorical but it is not paradoxical. He does not physically fight, but he is on the attack; he prosecutes and wins an argument, thereby demonstrating his power over another person.

Although Martin is an avowedly non-violent saint, he is a decidedly aggressive one. He seeks out conflict and imposes order on the society around him, frequently becoming involved in the power-structures of the secular community as he does so. His dealings with the emperor Maximus have already been mentioned. In another striking anecdote, Martin sets out to combat a cruel nobleman (an *ealdorman*) called Avitianus who executes men unjustly (II, 290-2, ll. 1143-1197). Martin initially achieves the release of the prisoners simply by waiting at the ealdorman's gates; repeatedly wakened by an angel who demands he go to meet the saint, Avitianus is so terrified by this show of supernatural power that he flees the city. His crimes are only held in check, however, by his terror of Martin. They are not ended until Martin exorcizes a great devil who has been sitting on the man's back. The episode preaches a lesson about secular and spiritual power: Avitianus is forced to learn that he has been a vassal all along (*him micclum sceamode / þæs deofles man-rædenne þe he on wæs oþ þæt*, 'he was greatly ashamed of the devil's service in which he had been until then', II, 292, ll. 1196-97). The actions of secular lords are subject to the spiritual forces with which Martin is able to engage. The exercise of secular power should be subordinated to the ethical teachings of monks and bishops.

Further examples of the way Martin re-orders the community are provided by his campaigns of conversion. In one of several similar episodes, Martin destroys a temple and wants to cut down a nearby sacred tree. The local pagans, roused to ire, challenge him to prove his God by standing in the path of the tree as it falls.

þa wæron his munecas wundorlice afyrhte .
 and nan oðer ne wendon buton he wurde ðær of-hroren .
 and se beam þa feallende beah to martine .
 Martinus þa unforht ongean þæt feallende treow
 worhte rode-tacn . and hit wende þa ongean .
 swilce hit sum færlíc þoden þydde under-bæc .
 swa þæt hit of-feol for-nean þæs folces
 micelne dæl . þe þær orsorge stodon .
 þa hrymdon þa hæþenan mid healicre wundrunge .
 [...] and eall se leodscipe to geleafan þa beah.

Then his monks were wondrously afraid and thought nothing but that he would be overwhelmed there, and the tree then falling swayed towards Martin. Then Martin, fearless, made the sign of the cross towards the falling tree, and it went back again as though a sudden wind pushed it backwards, so that it very nearly fell on the greater part of the people, who stood there unconcerned. Then the heathen cried out with great wonder [...] and all the people then converted to the faith. (II, 244-6, ll. 411-19 and 422)

One may note, firstly, that although Martin does not fight people he is immensely destructive of property, when that property is consecrated to idols; he overthrows (*toweorpan*) idols and their temples, burns one temple and has the altar of a false martyr removed (*awæg don*), as well cutting down the tree.¹²⁰ In the second place, although nobody is actually killed in this episode, it is clearly a power-struggle with the threat of death as a weapon. The advantage apparently starts with the heathen; though Martin himself is fearless, his monks and the crowd expect that he will suffer death for his attack on the pagan holy places. Nonetheless, this is a scene initiated and carefully orchestrated by Martin, who consents to stand under the tree and exploits the suspense of the situation to the utmost. He waits to the very last minute before, with nothing but a slight motion of the hand, he turns back the tree. As the motion of the tree is reversed, so is the balance of power. Just as the monks before were *wundorlice afyrhte*, so now the heathen are filled with a *wundrung* that is surely also terror, of Martin and of the death they have narrowly avoided. The verb *bugan*, expressing their conversion, means also 'to bow' or 'bend'. Conversion is submission; the heathens fall with the same motion as their tree (*beah*, l. 413).

¹²⁰ Overthrowing: II, 244, ll. 388 and 395, p. 246, ll. 427 and 440, p. 248, ll. 457 and 465, p. 250, l. 475, p. 296, ll. 1244 and 1245; fire: p. 246, l. 428; altar destroyed: p. 242, l. 364.

In both his dealings with the heathens and his encounters with Avitianus, Martin's still and non-aggressive *posture* (standing at the gates, standing beneath the tree) serves a strategy that is in fact highly confrontational. The intention of violence is displaced onto his enemies. It is part of their characterisation as sinful, animalistic and disordered: for example, another group of pagans approach Martin to kill him, *swyðe wedende swa swa hi wæron hæþene* ('greatly raging, as was their nature as heathens', II, 248, l. 467). However, Martin initiates such conflicts, and his enemies are terrorized into submission, even humiliation, by his spiritual power.

Martin is a spiritual warrior who will not take up literal arms but who nonetheless wields power in and over secular communities and actively extends his influence, or, rather, that of his God. Although he rejects the worldly life of the warrior unequivocally, he brings outworldly values to bear on the world. I suggested earlier that Martin is most relevant to Ælfric as a model of a monk and bishop. This is true also in the context of Viking incursion, for, though Martin is a discouraging example to any who might lead armies against the invaders, he is notable for his subjugation of heathens by other means. The 'Life of St Martin' could be read as support for a policy of converting rather than fighting a heathen enemy: it portrays conversion as an aggressive process in which honour and power lie with the missionary. The 'Life', like the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, also stresses the political efficacy of spiritual weapons such as prayer. The sign of the cross can move falling trees; the holiness of a saint can stop battles and reform potentates. Martin is an example to monks of the way prayer can be an instrument of social power and social change; it is a means of victory over visible as well as invisible foes.¹²¹

An intriguing footnote: in perhaps the same year that Ælfric wrote his 'Life of St Martin', the canons of St Martin's at Tours suffered outrage from Count Fulk Nerra of Anjou and Touraine, who entered their cloister and damaged the house of

¹²¹ For aggressive uses and conceptions of monastic liturgy, see B. H. Rosenwein, 'Feudal War and Monastic Peace: Cluniac Liturgy as Ritual Aggression', *Viator* 2 (1971), 129-57; 'Perennial Prayer at Agaune', in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts; Religion in Medieval Society. Essays in Honour of Lester K. Little*, ed. S. Farmer and B. H. Rosenwein (Ithaca and London, 2000), pp. 37-56; L. K. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions: Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1993).

their treasurer.¹²² In response, they ritually humiliated all their relics and holy objects, placing movable objects upon the floor and surrounding Martin's tomb with thorns, and they made complaint to God. Their action, designed to coerce both the community (denied access to the saints) and the saints themselves, got results: the count repented. In the 990s, Martin was still an active saint who protected his community from the violence of secular powers.

St Oswald¹²³

The 'Life of St Oswald' presents a saint who is not only English but a king, a war-leader and finally a casualty of battle. The text offers a model of sanctity that is compatible with bloodshed. Oswald is menaced by pagan invaders and his situation is readily comparable to that of the English in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Oswald thus exemplifies the hagiographic model at its most applicable to secular leaders. Nonetheless, the 'Life' is very far from being a celebration of the warrior ethic. Ælfric, following his source, Bede, is careful to place Oswald in an appropriate moral and Biblical framework.

The 'Life' opens with Oswald's campaign against Cadwalla. Cadwalla has overrun the Northumbrians, killing King Edwin and two successors, and *sloh and to sceame tuode þa norðhymbran leode* ('killed and shamefully abused the Northumbrian people', II, 126, l. 11). One notes, once again, the association of defeat with shame; it is a shame that, as for the English denuding the monks, reflects back on the abuser as well as the abused. Cadwalla is *reðe* and *wælhreow* ('cruel', 'savage', II, 126, l. 23 and 128, l. 42); we are told little else about him but he is clearly a persecutor figure. The conflict of Oswald and Cadwalla pits the Christian with his *lytlum werode* ('small force') against the proud king and his *micclan werode* ('great force'), the virtuous weak against the wicked strong (II, 126, ll. 15 and 28). Oswald is like a martyr facing the judge, but more like David facing

¹²² The events in Tours took place in 996 or 997; see P. Geary, 'Humiliation of Saints', in *Saints and their Cults; Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. S. Wilson (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 213-40 (pp. 130-2). Peter Clemoes places the 'Life of St Martin' late in the composition period of the *Lives of Saints*, which he gives as 992-1002 at the widest estimate: Clemoes, 'Chronology', p. 56.

¹²³ Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, II, 124-142.

Goliath. The parallel with David is accentuated by the echo of the psalms in Oswald's prayer before battle:

Uton [...] þone ælmihtigan biddan þæt he us ahredde
wið þone modigan feond þe us afillan wile .
god sylf wat þæt we winnað rihtlice
wið þysne reðan cyning . to ahredenne ure leode .

Let us [...] pray to the Almighty that he save us from the proud enemy who wants to destroy us. God he knows well that we fight justly against this cruel king, to save our people. (II, 126, ll. 19-23)

No one psalm is quoted here but the prayer for deliverance from powerful oppressors is common to many.¹²⁴ Although in tactical terms Oswald opens the battle, moving on Cadwalla who is established in Northumbria, the saint, appealing to God for protection, is presented as a victim.

Oswald's wars conform to the model of the just war which Ælfric is the only Old English writer to spell out.¹²⁵ His account, based on Isidore of Seville, occurs towards the end of his lengthy passion of the Maccabees:

Secgað swa-þeah lareowas þæt synd feower cynna gefeoht .
iustum . þæt is rihtlic . *iniustum* . unrihtlic .
ciuile . betwux ceaster-gewarum . *Plusquam ciuile* . betwux siblingum .
Iustum bellum . is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn .
oppe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon .

However, teachers say that there are four kinds of war: *iustum*, that is just, *iniustum*, unjust, *ciuile*, between citizens, *plusquam ciuile*, between kinsmen. *Iustum bellum* is just war against the cruel seamen or against other peoples that want to destroy the land. (*Lives of Saints*, II, 112-14, ll. 705-14)

Ælfric's term for just war (*rihtlic* war) is also applied by Oswald to his fight against Cadwalla (*we winnað rihtlice*). War, like Oswald's and like that against the Danes, should be defensive: thus the emphasis on Oswald as victim. It should be against foreigners and not within the polity: Oswald is presented as an *æðele cyning* ('noble king', II, 124, l. 2), the rightful ruler of the Northumbrians who avenges his kin

¹²⁴ See Ps 3, 7, 10, 12, 59 and others.

against an invader from another nation. The status of the British as possibly the indigenous rulers of the region is not addressed by Bede or Ælfric. The enemy is both the aggressor and wholly in the wrong. We are not actually told that Cadwalla is a pagan, though this is implied in his opposition to Edwin, who *on crist ge-lyfed*. However, Penda, the ally of Cadwalla who opposes Oswald in his last battle, is said to know nothing of Christ, and his followers are called heathens (II, 134, l. 157); Penda too is the aggressor in his conflict with Oswald. Oswald is the champion of God and his people against pagan oppressors. With Oswald, the *Lives of Saints* moves towards the Old Testament model of God defending his chosen people which is advanced in the 'Letter to Sigeward' and, indeed, in 'The Maccabees'. Oswald is helped to kill by Christ: *his geleafa hine getrymde . / and crist him gefylste to his feonda slege* ('his faith strengthened him, and Christ helped him in the killing of his enemies', II, 126, ll. 15-16).

However, there is no bloodthirstiness in the 'Life'. The presentation of violence is not dramatic and confines itself largely to prosaic statements of movement,¹²⁶ general conflict¹²⁷ and victory.¹²⁸ It is a functional mode of description for which battle is an event with an outcome rather than a process to be dwelt on. The violence of Oswald's enemies is described more emotively and at more length than that of Oswald himself, but neither is overwhelming. In Oswald's conflict with Cadwalla, the prayer beforehand occupies more space than the battle itself.

The narrative of Oswald's life is framed by battles, but the essence of his sanctity is his whole conduct as a Christian king and not primarily his death in battle. Although the rubric in Cotton Julius E.7 describes Oswald as *rex et martyr*, Oswald is not called a martyr by either Bede or Ælfric and his death is not described

¹²⁵ J. E. Cross, 'The Ethic of War in Old English', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 269-82 (pp. 272-3).

¹²⁶ *Pa hæðenan nealæhton, hi eodon to þam gefeohte*, 'the heathens approached', II, 134, l. 157; *hi eodon to þam gefeohte*, 'they advanced to battle', II, 126, l. 25.

¹²⁷ *Him wann on penda*, 'Penda assailed him', II, 134, l. 150; *fengon togædere*, 'they engaged together', II, 134, l. 156.

¹²⁸ *Gewunnon þær sige*, 'they won there victory', II, 126, l. 26.

in the detail one would expect for a martyr's death.¹²⁹ The idea of martyrdom in battle was to develop only gradually during the eleventh century and the early Crusades.¹³⁰ The part of the 'Life of St Oswald' that deals with the saint's lifetime is given over largely to his works of charity and his efforts at converting his people. Ælfric appeals to Bede's authority in connecting Oswald's sanctity to his liberality:

Nu cwæð se halga beda þe ðas boc gedihte .
 þæt hit nan wundor nys . þæt se halga cynincg
 untrumnyse gehæle nu he on heofonum leofað .
 for ðan þe he wolde gehelpan þa þa he her on life wæs .
 þearfum ond wannhalum . and him bigwiste syllan .
 Nu hæfð he þone wurðmynt on þære ecan worulde .
 mid þam ælmihtigan gode for his godnyse .

Now the holy Bede, who wrote this book, says that it is no wonder that the holy king heals infirmity now he lives in the heavens, because when he was alive he wanted to help the needy and sick and give them sustenance. Now he has honour in the eternal world with Almighty God for his goodness. (II, 142, ll. 272-78)

Oswald's posthumous miracles of healing echo his care for the weak, hungry bodies of the poor and sick in his lifetime. It is striking that the incorruption of part of the saint's own body after death is linked, not as with Edmund to chastity (*Lives of Saints*, II, 328, ll. 186-88), but to charity (II, 130-32, ll. 87-103). Oswald's heavenly *wurðmynt* derives from a Christian extension of the traditional role of the king in Anglo-Saxon culture, the giver of gifts. Christian worth converges with secular honour.

The other prominent feature of Oswald's kingship is his project of conversion. His alliance with Aidan constitutes a model relationship between church and state. The king's sense of responsibility for his people's spiritual as well as material welfare is evidenced by his sending to Ireland for help. When Aidan arrives, Oswald acts as his translator: the king becomes a mediator for the teachings

¹²⁹ V. A. Gunn, 'Bede and the Martyrdom of St Oswald', *Studies in Church History* 30 (1993), 57-66; though see also the comments of A. Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta: the Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge (Stamford, 1995), pp. 97-127 (p. 125).

¹³⁰ C. Morris, 'Martyrs on the Field of Battle Before and During the First Crusade', *Studies in Church History* 30 (1993), 93-104. Morris does, however, regard Oswald as a rare early example of one martyred in battle.

of the church while remaining submissive to them. Conversion in the 'Life of St Oswald' is not the dramatic and confrontational process found in the 'Life of St Martin'. However, it does have political implications. The conversion of the West Saxons by Birinus initiates co-operation between Oswald and the West Saxon king, Cynegils (II, 132-4, ll. 119-40). Oswald stands sponsor at Cynegils' baptism, as Alfred did at Guthrum's, implying an element of clientage as well as alliance between the two kings. As a reward for his holiness Oswald becomes ruler of the Picts, Britons and Scots as well as the Angles (II, 132, ll. 104-8). This may be the result of conquest, but Oswald is not presented as a king who prosecutes offensive wars; instead, political power is shown to be in the gift of God. Either way, Christianity is an instrument of political unity and helps Oswald to extend his influence.¹³¹

Oswald's holy kingship is presented more as a matter of charity and evangelism than war against pagans. However, many of the miracles described in the *Life* are associated with the king's battles and death. The cross erected before Heavenfield, the place where Oswald fell and the stake on which his severed head was placed all have miraculous properties.¹³² Katy Cubitt places Oswald as one of a group of murdered or martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saints, arguing that devotion to royal persons killed by violence is a feature of 'popular' as opposed to élite religion in Anglo-Saxon England.¹³³ She distinguishes two aspects to Oswald's cult: the devotion of humble laity centred on the battlefields and a cult sponsored by Oswald's royal kin and centred on the churches and monastic communities who guarded the relics.¹³⁴ In the 'Life', these aspects meet. On the one hand, the 'Life' and its Latin original are both written from a monastic perspective and in consciousness of literary models: thus the stress on the nature of Christian kingship

¹³¹ For evaluation of the historical Oswald's role as Christian king and overking, see C. Stancliffe, 'Oswald, "Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians"', in *Oswald*, ed. Stancliffe and Cambridge, pp. 33-83 (for remarks on the baptism of Cynegils, see pp. 44 and 52). More generally on the political implications of conversion, see R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe from Paganism to Christianity, 371-1386 AD* (London: Harper Collins, 1997); P. Urbańczyk, 'The Politics of Conversion in North Central Europe', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 15-27.

¹³² See pp. 138-40, ll. 200-238 for miracles associated with the place of Oswald's death; pp. 142-4, ll. 242-68 for the stake; pp. 126-8, ll. 31-39 for the cross.

¹³³ C. Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity: revisiting the cult of murdered and martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saints', *EME* 9: 1 (2000), 53-83.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-3.

and its relation to the authority of the church and the project of conversion. On the other hand, the miracles re-introduce an interest in the violent crises of Oswald's career. The incorruption of Oswald's arm resembles in symbolic structure the metaphor of the wounds of sin, discussed in relation to the *Sermo Lupi*. Bodily wounds or sickness signify sin, and the failure of a body part to decay after death correspondingly signifies virtue, both in the sense of personal goodness and in the sense of power to heal others. When Oswald's healing sanctity is linked to his achievements and death by violence, however, the nexus of violence, sickness and sin is reconfigured.

The symbolic richness of bodies and healing is illustrated by the cure of a dying Irish reprobate. The sinner has lived his life in carelessness and is struck with fear as his death approaches; he is given water containing shavings of the stake on which Oswald's head was displayed and recovers to live a better life (II, 140-42, ll. 242-68). The miracle connects bodily to spiritual healing: the Irish man is restored not only to health but to Christian living. If Oswald's charity in life is reflected in posthumous cures, the conversion of his people is reproduced in the turning of the sinner back to God. Paradoxically, the Irish man is made whole because the saint has been dismembered. With the shameful treatment of Oswald's body we return to the reversal of power and weakness at the heart of the martyrdom paradigm, the idea that the victory of the *miles Christi* lies precisely in enduring physical defeat and disgrace.

There is a tension in Oswald's story between bodily wholeness as a symbol of virtue (thus the preserved arm) and the breaking of the body as the mark of the glorious sufferings of saints. A similar tension arises in 'The Forty Soldiers': on the one hand, the flints cannot touch them, but on the other hand their legs are broken and they die. Although Oswald dies in battle, he is not shown valiantly resisting the foe when he realises he is about to be killed: he calls on God for mercy and then *het se hæþen cyning his heafod of-slean* ('the heathen king ordered his head to be struck off', II, 136, l. 162). Oswald's death, though narrated very briefly, reflects the influence of patient martyrdom. Nonetheless, it occurs at the end of a battle that has been hard fought - his troops have already fallen - and Heavenfield, another source of miracles, is a battle Oswald fights and wins. Oswald's miracles of healing are

associated not only with violence against him but with his own violence. The violence of a God-assisted king begins to seem itself a form of healing. The campaign against Cadwalla is presented as a purifying process: Oswald *adwæscte his yfelnysse* ('extinguished his evil', II, 126, l. 13). Evil is eliminated and the body politic has its head – its rightful king - restored. The progress from victory over Cadwalla to miracles at the cross takes two lines in Skeat's edition. In the association between violence and healing we have an image of the doctrine that the right aim of war is peace.

Oswald, then, is not presented primarily as either a warrior king or a martyr, but his death by violence and his engagement in violence are both important elements in his sanctity. Like Martin's, his 'Life' is concerned with conversion and the relationship of secular to religious authorities; Oswald is an example of a king who is properly respectful towards the church, but his Christian zeal is also closely connected to the extension of his realm. Ælfric stops well short of an idea of holy war and is reluctant to dwell on battles, but he does espouse an ideal of just war which, according the sermon on the Maccabees, is applicable to defence against the Danes as well as to Oswald's campaigns. Although Oswald's holiness is displayed in prayer and humility in life and saintly resignation at death, he represents a secular man whose fulfilment of a secular role brings honour to God as well as to himself.

Oswold cyning his cynedom geheold
hlisfullice for worulde and micclum geleafan .
and on eallum dædum his drihten arwurðode .

King Oswald held his kingdom with glorious worldly repute and with great faith, and in all his deeds he honoured his Lord. (II, 134, ll. 144-46)

The diversity of sanctity

Oswald, Martin and the Forty Soldiers are all examples of what Godden calls the hagiographic model, in which the victim of violence is justified and vindicated by God and the aggressor is God's enemy. Their differences, however, need to be stressed. The Forty Soldiers are notionally successful fighters, but they are presented chiefly as victors in passivity; it would be hard to read their passion as a manifesto for defence against the Danes. Martin is a more emphatically pacifist saint and yet a

far more active and aggressive one, more engaged in the political and social world around him. It is possible to read the 'Life of St Martin' in the context of a policy of conversion and cultural assimilation. The 'Life of St Oswald' similarly emphasizes conversion as project for kings and churchmen together, but Oswald is also a model for the pious secular leader whose piety is partly expressed by defending his people with arms. Ælfric does not use these saints' lives to make a policy statement about the Vikings; the texts point in different directions. They reflect three different historical periods, the early persecutions of Christianity, the establishment of an official church and the monastic life in the fourth to fifth centuries and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons (or rather, the construction of a Christian origin-myth for the Anglo-Saxons some time after the conversion). Dumont's paradigm, of a convergence of 'worldly' and 'outworldly', describes the progression well, from the world-rejecting Forty Soldiers through the superior yet involved Martin (the individual talking to the world) to the secular ruler, Oswald. They also represent a geographical movement from the near East to England itself. Certainly Oswald must have seemed the most familiar and relevant saint to an Anglo-Saxon audience; his relics were housed in their own land and his life part of their own history.

Despite the variations between these three texts, we can detect in them some common implications with regard to the Vikings and the experience of being attacked by them. First, they all emphasize the potency of the holy individual, both to retain personal integrity and to effect change in the physical and political spheres. The centrality of the individual is a function of the hagiographic form, which is built around the differentiation of the saint from the rest of society. It teaches trust in the saints to protect their communities: as Ælfric writes in the 'Life of St Edmund', *nis Angelcynn bedæled drihtnes halgena* ('the English nation is not deprived of the saints of the lord', II, 332, l. 259). It also means that, unlike Wulfstan in the *Sermo Lupi*, Ælfric focuses on personal sin and merit and not a collective burden of guilt. He raises more hope for the charismatic leader, such as Oswald or Martin, who can transform the situation as it were from above. Perhaps Wulfstan himself in the *Sermo Lupi* takes on the voice of such a leader.

Second, the three saints' lives examined here confirm the argument that Ælfric felt deep unease at the practice of violence. He is prepared to construct

scenarios in which fighting is justified, and defence against invaders is one of them, but he does not see war as in any way glorious. This is manifested in his lack of interest in describing it; the brevity of Ælfric's battle and torture scenes are not only a product of his spare, elegant style, since he is able to expand Martin's arguments with devils (for instance) to considerable lengths. Where violence is given prominence, it is part of the characterization of the evil persecutors of saints. Even Oswald's justified fighting is presented more as a moral than a physical victory. A more whole-hearted endorsement of war was to come in later writings, with the movement from saints to Old Testament figures as models. However, Ælfric never approaches the flourish and relish of Wulfstan's catalogues of destruction in the *Sermo Lupi*. Wulfstan, though using violence as an imagery of sin, betrays no moral unease at all about fighting back.

Ælfric's unease about fighting is coupled to a much more positive conception of suffering. The hagiographic model places the blame on the aggressor and glorifies the victim. Although Ælfric uses the vocabulary of shame and guilt and exploits the potential of victimization to be shaming, his perspective is eventually more 'outworldly' than Wulfstan's: the point about the martyr is that what should shame in fact does not. The tension of honour before God and among men is maintained as part of the lesson of holiness taught by the saints. Honour among men is not utterly rejected but it is always secondary. Thus Oswald is rewarded with worldly dominion because he has first served God. As Dumont puts it, worldly values are 'relativized'.¹³⁵ The image of the *miles Christi* works on the assumption that victory in the physical fight is desirable, but that defeat in it is not ultimate defeat: the humiliated and the wounded can still be morally victorious.

Conclusion: fighting with prayer

Both the *Sermo Lupi* and the *Lives of Saints* are written against a background of prevalent concepts of honour and shame. Successful fighting brings honour, a sense of self-worth confirmed by the opinion of the community, while to suffer injury is shaming and lowers status. Wulfstan and Ælfric use these ideas to promote

¹³⁵ Dumont, 'Genesis, I', p. 27.

repentance, religious purity and devotion. Though Wulfstan took a far more active political role than Ælfric, both laboured to build a holy society through their preaching, writing and personal influence; both indeed made use of the same theorization of the structure of a Christian society, the scheme of the Three Orders.¹³⁶ In their response to attacks from Scandinavia, they bring together their sense of the victimhood of the nation with their concern for the salvation of individual Christian souls.

This meeting of topics finds powerful expression in the biblical topic of the spiritual fight, a motif through which the struggle of the Christian against sin is mapped onto the practice of literal warfare but also contrasted with it. In the *Sermo Lupi*, in a manner redolent of the metaphor of sin as wound found in the penitentials, Wulfstan equates the shame and injury inflicted by the Vikings with the internal damage of sin. Wulfstan treats sin as a social problem, a matter for communities as much as for individuals. His famous sermon is an argument for a common defence, both through penitence and, implicitly, by military means.

The spiritual fight of the saint, the *miles Christi*, is one that at root contrasts the saint with the worldly warrior and glorifies a victorious passivity. If saints provide a rather difficult model for a late-tenth-century ealdorman to follow, this is partly a reflection of long-standing ideas about sanctity and its separation from ordinary life. However, it also seems clear that Ælfric was deeply suspicious even of the violence of those he classified as a military class; he gives clearer expression to the undercurrent of moral unease about warfare I traced in the Alfredian corpus in chapter one. While Wulfstan's focus in the *Sermo Lupi* is on society as a whole, the *Lives of Saints* highlight the virtue of those who stand apart from the world. The collection teaches that those who seek God's favour will have to modify their concepts of honour and merit. However, my case-studies have shown that the degree of modification varies and that the gap between worldly honour and heavenly virtue widens and narrows. Moreover, in time of attack, the *Lives of Saints* hold out the hope that saints can intervene to protect the faithful, and even that it is possible to wage war and be holy.

¹³⁶ For Wulfstan's treatment of this idea, see *Die <<Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical>>*,

Both Wulfstan and Ælfric, in the last analysis, stress the moral state of the nation as of greater importance than its material sufferings at the hands of invaders. They offer ways of re-interpreting the invasion in terms of other concerns that outlast the loss of goods and autonomy, even of chastity or limbs. In their reflections on the Viking threat, they travel by rather different routes to the same conclusion: the power of prayer and repentance as a weapon, and the essential role of spiritual things in material war.

Chapter Four
Representing the Danish Conquest:
The *Æthelredian Chronicle*, *Liðsmannaflokkr*, The *Encomium*
Emmae

Scandinavian raiding on England escalated through the 990s and the first decade of the eleventh century. In 1013, moving from south to north, King Swegn of Denmark received, region by region, the submission of all England. Æthelred II fled to Normandy; he returned after Swegn's death in 1014, only to spend the last two years of his life troubled by internal strife in his court and family and the continued attacks of Swegn's son, Cnut. Æthelred died in April 1016. He was succeeded by his son, Edmund ('Ironside'); Edmund continued to resist the Danish armies but after the battle of Ashingdon he was forced to divide the country with Cnut. By the end of the year Edmund too was dead and Cnut was sole king of England. Taking as his queen Emma, the daughter of Richard I of Normandy who had married Æthelred in 1002, Cnut ruled England until his death in 1035.¹

The present chapter will examine three texts that offer contrasting perspectives upon the Danish conquest. I shall begin with an Old English prose text. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* annals for 983-1016, manuscripts CDE, provide the fullest near-contemporary account of the later years of Æthelred's reign and the instalment of the Danish dynasty.² I shall refer to this body of annals as the *Æthelredian Chronicle*. My second text is an Old Norse poem, *Liðsmannaflokkr*, most probably produced by a Scandinavian poet working in England in the immediate aftermath of the conquest. It represents the 1016 siege of London and other scenes of campaigning from the perspective of the members of Cnut's army.³

¹ The classic account of the Danish conquest is F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), pp. 364-93; for general accounts reflecting more recent scholarship, see P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), pp. 59-72; M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), pp. 9-48; E. John, 'The Return of the Vikings', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. J. Campbell (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 192-213 (pp. 193-99), and *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 139-55.

² *MS C*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 5* (2001); *MS D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 6* (1996); Plummer, *Chronicles*, (for *MS E*). Quotations are referenced by year number and are from Cubbin's edition. Cubbin argues ('Introduction', pp. ix-cliii (pp. xxxix-xlvi)) that D is a more conservative text than C or E.

³ Text and translation R. Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016', *Speculum* 62 (1987), 265-98, (pp. 281-3), repeated in R. Poole, *Viking Poems on*

My third and most substantial text is the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, a Latin biography written for Queen Emma in 1041-2, during the reign of her son by Cnut, Harthacnut.⁴

We noted in the Introduction William Ian Miller's insistence that 'violence is perspectival' and that its basic structure involves 'a play of three perspectives: those of victim, victimizer and observer'.⁵ The texts examined so far in this thesis have approached the Viking invasions from a number of different angles. The Alfredian texts discussed in Chapter One are dominated by questions about power and kingship. *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Battle of Brunanburh* share a vocabulary of aristocratic warrior values; the former, as I have argued, can be associated with the local elite of Essex, the latter with the court of Æthelstan. Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* offer reflections on violence shaped by their authors' preoccupations as churchmen as well as by the generic characteristics of sermon and saint's life: these texts speak about Danish incursions in terms of sin, repentance, holy suffering and divine help. In poetry, *Chronicle*, hagiography and homily we have seen how the roles of victim and victimizer can be manipulated, assumed, reassigned and reinterpreted. In the *Lives of Saints*, the martyr provides a model of the victim as holy sufferer and paradoxical victor. On the other hand, in the *Alfredian Chronicle*, emphasis is placed on the aggression and attacking courage of the West Saxons: in their numerous defeats they are still the reverse of the passive victim. However, despite this variety, all the compositions discussed so far are written from the Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, by people on the receiving end of Viking attack.

War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative, Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations 8 (1991), pp. 86-89. For dating and place of composition, see M. Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut', *ASE* 30 (2001), 145-79, (p. 151); Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp. 90-9 and 108; Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History', p. 284.

⁴ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell, with a supplementary introduction by S. Keynes, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (1998). References to the *Encomium* are by book, chapter and line, as in Campbell's edition; translations are Campbell's with occasional slight adaptations. I have imported the English spellings of Scandinavian names throughout, for the sake of consistency. For dating, Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [xi]-[xc] (p. [xxxix]), Campbell, 'Introduction', pp. [xciii]-[cli / xi-lxix] (p. [ciii] / xxi) (roman page numbers in square brackets are those of the 1998 edition, which also records, not in square brackets, the page numbers of the original 1949 edition).

⁵ W. I. Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', in *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca and London, 1993), pp. 53-92 (p. 55).

In the present chapter, the *Encomium Emmae* and *Liðsmannaflokkr* are voices from outside the Anglo-Saxon tradition that has so far dominated this thesis. The texts here discussed represent all three of Miller's perspectives, victim (the *Æthelredian Chronicle*), victimizer (*Liðsmannaflokkr*) and witness (the *Encomium*). In fact, they continue to show how these perspectives in practice are complicated, both necessarily, as all literary or historical accounts of violence are by the very act of representation pushed into the witness position, and as part of the art or argument of individual works. *Liðsmannaflokkr* invokes the witness's viewpoint through its incorporation of female figures who watch men's fighting and listen to their tales. The *Encomium* suppresses Emma's first marriage, to Æthelred, and evades the question of her dual attachment to both the victims and the victors of the Danish conquest; she is made to enter the conflict from outside, as a peace-maker. Nevertheless, what is particularly striking about the literature of the Danish conquest is the way it allows us to compare English with Scandinavian perspectives.

Though there are a few earlier Norse compositions associated with England (including, intriguingly, a praise-poem for Æthelred by the skald Gunnlaugr ormstunga), it is only with Cnut that we have a substantial body of contemporary Norse literature to set alongside Anglo-Saxon records of the same people and events.⁶ Partly this is a reflection of Cnut's generosity as a patron of skalds, partly of his importance to the history of both Norway and Denmark, which must have helped ensure the preservation of poetry associated with him.⁷ Another factor, however, is the capacity of violence to stimulate the production of texts. Charles Insley points

⁶ For the corpus of extant skaldic verse from England, see J. Jesch, 'Skaldic verse in Scandinavian England', in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. J. Graham-Campbell, R. Hall, J. Jesch and D. N. Parsons (Oxford, 2001), pp. 313-25 (pp. 317-8); M. Townend, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 51, no. 203 (2000), 349-70 (pp. 350-1); for a list of poems for Cnut, see Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 145-6. The *Aðalráðsdrápa* of Gunnlaugr ormstunga is edited in Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning*, 1B, 184. For the problems of relating skaldic verse to English history, see A. Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies 1970 (1971); Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History'.

⁷ On Cnut's pre-eminence as a patron of skalds, see R. Frank, 'King Cnut in the Verse of his Skalds', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. R. Rumble (Leicester, 1994), pp. 106-24 (p. 107); Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', p. 145. Þórarinn loftunga boasted that Cnut had given him the very generous reward of fifty marks for a poem: *Tegdrápa*, in Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning*, 1B, 298-99, stanza 1. On the reasons skaldic poems were remembered and forgotten, see M. Townend, 'Whatever Happened to York Viking Poetry? Memory, Tradition and the Transmission of Skaldic Verse', *Saga-Book* 27 (2003), 48-90.

out the link between times of crisis and the writing of royal biographies: there is no surviving royal biography in between Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and the two produced in 1016-66, the *Encomium* and the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*.⁸ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sketchy at best for most of the tenth century, springs into life with the resumption of Viking attacks: as Keynes and others have shown, the account of this period in manuscripts C, D and E was compiled after the Danish victory.⁹ Repeatedly in this thesis I have appealed to the idea that texts can provide a means of ordering and explaining violence. The immense changes brought by conquest, both for English and Danes, are reflected in the cluster of literary representations around 1016.

The conquest brought change, moreover, to the terms in which Anglo-Danish conflict had previously been represented and in particular to the way those identities could be constructed against each other. The differentiation of English 'us' and Danish 'them' has been another recurrent theme in my study, part of a vocabulary of binary oppositions dramatized in represented violence: pagan and Christian, treacherous and loyal, passive and aggressive, inside and outside. The Danish conquest disrupted these categories. Over the second half of Æthelred's reign the previously tight-knit nobility was increasingly fragmented by in-fighting, the rise of new men and the death toll of repeated battles. Soon after Cnut's accession there was a purge, the most notable victim being Eadric Streona; within a few years, Scandinavian earls were appointed not only in the Danelaw but in Mercia.¹⁰ At the same time, Cnut claimed a continuity with the previous reign which was itself a source of transformation. Cnut's lawcodes were presented as a confirmation of the law of Edgar; in content they did indeed recycle earlier Anglo-Saxon law and, until his death in 1023, Archbishop Wulfstan continued to play a

⁸ C. Insley, 'Where Did All the Charters Go? Anglo-Saxon Charters and the New Politics of the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 24 (2002), 109-27 (p. 123).

⁹ See further below.

¹⁰ See K. Mack, 'Changing Thegns: Cnut's Conquest and the English Aristocracy', *Albion* 16 (1984), 375-87; R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 4th series 15 (1991), pp. 22-53; S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, pp. 42-88 (pp. 82-7); on 'palace revolution' in Æthelred's reign, see S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready': A Study in their use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 3rd series 13 (1980), pp. 209-14. M. Strickland offers another angle on the large numbers of prominent men killed in 991-1016: 'Slaughter, Slavery or Ransom: the Impact of the Conquest on Conduct in Warfare', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the*

major role in drafting them.¹¹ In his two letters to the English people and by lavish patronage of religious houses Cnut presented himself as a thoroughly Christian king.¹² The translation of St Ælfheah to Canterbury showed him not only removing a potential focus of rebellion from hostile London but tackling head-on the image of the pagan, brutal Viking.¹³ This point emerges memorably in Osbern's account, in which Cnut's achievement of the English throne is ascribed to his success in appeasing Ælfheah.¹⁴ The three works examined below all confront the shifting of political, symbolic and ideological oppositions.

Taken together, the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, *Liðsmannaflokkr* and the *Encomium Emmae* offer a sense of how the members of the new Anglo-Danish kingdom sought to define the relationships among themselves in the wake of conquest. Yet all, over and above the national allegiances they profess, evince a certain detachment, a sense of an individual or individuals finding their path through the maze of the times.

The *Æthelredian Chronicle*

The perspective on the conquest offered in the *Æthelredian Chronicle* is that of an English commentator, presumably a religious, looking back in bitterness at the process by which the English had been defeated. The retrospective character of the account was demonstrated by Simon Keynes in a 1978 article. Keynes argued that the annals for 983-1016 were written as a unit, probably in 1016x17 and certainly within the period 1016x23, and he showed that the *Chronicle* interpretation of Æthelred's reign is coloured by the knowledge of eventual failure. The *terminus ad*

1990 *Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. Hicks (Stamford, 1992), pp. 41-59 (pp. 45-47). Evidence for the purge: *ASC* CDE 1017; *Encomium* II.15.

¹¹ On Cnut's laws, see P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume 1: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 345-66.

¹² See T. A. Heslop, 'The production of *de luxe* manuscripts and the patronage of King Cnut and Queen Emma', *ASE* 19 (1990), 151-95; J. Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut: the Liturgical Commemoration of a Conqueror', in *England in the Eleventh Century*, ed. Hicks, pp. 219-38; Lawson, *Cnut*, pp. 117-60.

¹³ On Cnut, London and Ælfheah, see Lawson, *Cnut*, pp. 140-42; D. Hill, 'An Urban Policy for Cnut?' in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, pp. 101-5 (p. 103); Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 167-8.

¹⁴ 'Textual Appendix: *Translatio Sancti Ælfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martiris* (BHL 2519): Osbern's account of the translation of St Ælfheah's relics from London to Canterbury, 8-11 June 1023', ed. A. R. Rumble, in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, pp. 283-315 (pp. 298-301).

quem is provided by the statement s.a. 1012 that St Ælfheah's bones lie in London; as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* itself records, they were translated to Canterbury in 1023.¹⁵ Keynes was not the first to note that the annals for this period form a block. As Keynes acknowledged, Sten Körner had already observed many of the same pieces of dating evidence and argued that the annals for 1002-16 were produced in 1017x23;¹⁶ Cecily Clark's article on the style of the *Chronicle* analysed the stylistic and thematic unity of the annals between, roughly, 991 and 1016.¹⁷ As these examples show, there is room for disagreement as to where the block of annals begins; it is also debatable where precisely it ends, as manuscripts C and E continue to have a common text to 1022, with D, which here has replacement leaves, sometimes agreeing and sometimes not.¹⁸

An alternative view is that of Cyril Hart, who contends that both the *Æthelredian Chronicle* and the corresponding portion of the Latin *Chronicle* attributed to John of Worcester are based on annals compiled year by year at Ramsey Abbey. The *Æthelredian Chronicle* represents a 'restyling', undertaken in 1018x23, of earlier annals; moreover, Hart suggests the precursor may have been in Latin.¹⁹ Hart's argument rests on an extended chain of deduction and links a remarkably high proportion of known and supposed historical writing around the year 1000 to Ramsey Abbey.²⁰ The latter, though surprising, is not in itself sufficient reason for rejecting Hart's thesis: a parallel is provided, for example, by the concentration of *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* texts in Canterbury a century later.²¹

¹⁵ S. Keynes, 'The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready', in *Æthelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. Hill, British Archaeological Reports, British series 59 (1978), 227-53 (on dates, see p. 231 and p. 245, n. 19); see also S. Keynes, 'A Tale of two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *TRHS* 5th series 36 (1986), 195-217 (pp. 201-3).

¹⁶ S. Körner, *The Battle of Hastings, England, and Europe 1035-1066*, Bibliotheca historica Lundensis 14 (1964), pp. 7-10.

¹⁷ C. Clark, 'The narrative mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 215-35 (pp. 224-30).

¹⁸ Cubbin, 'Introduction', pp. xxxix and xlvi.

¹⁹ C. Hart, 'The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*', *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 251-315 (pp. 300-1); on Latin antecedents, see C. Hart, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle at Ramsey', in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts and Nelson, pp. 65-88 (pp. 69 and 76); Review article: 'Some Recent Editions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Medium Ævum* 66 (1997), 293-301 (p. 299).

²⁰ See also C. Hart, 'The East Anglian chronicle', *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 249-82; 'Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle', *EHR* 97 (1982), 558-82; 'The B-text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Journal of Medieval History* 8 (1982), 241-99.

²¹ See D. N. Dumville, 'Some Aspects of Annalistic Writing at Canterbury in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 2 (1983), 23-57.

However, Keynes's view accounts convincingly for the internal features of the text and has been widely accepted.²² Keynes's analysis of the *Chronicle* forms the basis of the present discussion. We may note nonetheless that both Keynes and Hart envisage the compilation of the *Chronicle* as it stands in the same period: early in the reign of Cnut.

I wish to consider the *Æthelredian Chronicle* as a document of the opening years of Cnut's reign: specifically, as a protest against Danish domination and an attempt to explain English defeat. An emotive and dramatic portrayal of violence to reaffirms the opposition of 'us' and 'them'. Danes are attackers and outsiders, not rulers. Hostility to the Danes is accompanied by bitter criticism of the English leadership. In chapter two I argued that *Maldon* is a text that does psychological work, rebuilding community in the wake of traumatic violence. The *Æthelredian Chronicle* can similarly be seen as a text aimed at redressing, at bringing order out of violence, but rather than rebuilding community it traces the unravelling of community. The stance of the Chronicler (or Chroniclers) symptomizes this unravelling; the perspective of the *Chronicle* is profoundly alienated from the English leadership and from the defence effort in general. The *Æthelredian Chronicle* is a record of disaffection both from the Danish regime under which it was produced and the English regime that suffered defeat.

Danish attacks and the travails of the defenders dominate the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, largely crowding out other events. The earliest annals in the block are very brief and lacking in interpretative comment. They resemble the most laconic entries of earlier centuries of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and employ a similarly restricted phraseology. For example, *Her wæs Goda se Defensica þegen ofslagen 7 mycel wæl mid him* (988) combines two of the favourite formulae of the common stock, *beon ofslagen/geslagen*, and *micel wæl slean* (compare, *inter alia*, MS A 642, 651, 784, 822, 838, 871; 823, 833, 837, 845, 851, 867, 871). Through the 990s and 1000s the annals become steadily longer and more ample of expression. This may

²² Keynes's views on the *Chronicle* are relayed by, for example, J. Wilcox, 'The Battle of Maldon and The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 979-1016: A Winning Combination', *Proceedings of the Medieval Association of the Midwest* 3 (1996 for 1995), 31-50 (p. 32 and p. 48, n. 11); John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 141-2.

reflect the greater detail of more recent memories or the availability of fuller records, but it also enacts a crescendo of interest and incident towards the year 1016.

The core of the prose of the *Chronicle* consists of simple, reiterated expressions, but these produce a powerful impression of the terror of the Danish attacks and the ineffectuality of the resistance. On the one hand we observe the recurrence of words for fleeing and flight (*fleam, fleah, flugon*), on the other a 'constant refrain' of harrying, burning and slaying (*slogon, (for)bærndon, (for)hergodon* and related nouns).²³ Frequently the Chronicler combines these keywords in pairs, forming two-stress phrases, or in threes: *bærndon 7 slogon* 997, *fordydon 7 forhergodon* 999, *slogon 7 bærndon* 1001, *gehergodon 7 forbærndon* 1003, *gehergode 7 forbærnde* 1004, *hergodon 7 forbærndon* 1004, *hergodon 7 bærndon 7 slogon* 1006 (many further instances could be given). Explicit attention is drawn to repetition by reference to ideas of custom and the use of adverbs such as *a* and *æfre* ('always'). The Chronicler is much given to generalization, to regarding the particular events he records as symptoms of a broader and continuing state of affairs. The constant return of *slogon, bærndon, hergodon* and their relatives both justifies and is foregrounded by remarks such as *dydon eal swa hi bewuna wæron, slogon 7 bærndon*, ('they [the Vikings] did as they were accustomed, killed and burned' 1001) and *a hi læton heora feonda wæred weaxan*, ('always they [the English] allowed the strength of the enemies to increase' 998). The Chronicler communicates a world of superlatives, antitheses and extremes, a world in which the weak flee immediately (*sona* 1001), the strong do 'the most harm that ever any army could do' (*þa mæstan yfel þe æfre ænig here don meahte* 994, 1013) and things go wrong everywhere and in every way (*þa ne dohte naþær þisse leode ne suðan ne norðan*, 'then nothing availed this nation either in the south or the north', 1013). In contrast to the *Alfredian Chronicle*, the *Æthelredian Chronicle* depicts violence violently.

One aspect of the emotive power of the *Æthelredian Chronicle* is the sense it creates of the steady, relentless pounding of violence; the Chronicler achieves this through repetition of basic vocabulary and through generalization. Another aspect,

²³ Clark, 'Narrative Mode', p. 229.

which needs to be illustrated by an extended quotation, is the Chronicler's sensitivity to the emotional consequences of violence, in particular to shame and terror. The following passage also makes extended use of another set of keywords, verbs of movement (*eodon*, *ferdon*, *comon*, *wendon*, *ridon*). The catalogue of Danish movements describes a great swathe of devastation; it is also a sign of the humiliation they inflict by being so easily confident of their power to range in English territory:

to þam middanwintran eodon him to heora gearwan feorme ut þurh Hamtunscire into Bearruhscire to Readingon, 7 hi dydon hiora ealdan gewuna, ateondon hiora herebeacna swa swa hi ferdon. Wendon hi þa to Wealingæforda 7 þæt eall forswælldon, 7 wæron him ða ane niht æt Ceolsehe, 7 wendon him ða andlang Æscesdune to Cwichelmeshlæwe, 7 þær onbidedon beotra gylpa, for þan oft man cwæð, gif hi Cwichelmeshlæwe gesohton, þæt he næfre to sæ gangen ne sceoldon; wendon him ða oðres weges hamweard. Ða wæs þær fyrd gesomnod æt Cynestan, 7 hi ðær togædere fengon, 7 sona þæt wærod on fleame gebrohton, 7 syððan heora herehyðe to sæ feredon. Ðær mihton geseon Winceasterleode rancne here 7 unearhne, þa hi be heora gate to sæ eodon, 7 mete 7 madmas .i. mila him fram sæ fetton.

At midwinter they went to their prepared entertainment through Hampshire into Berkshire to Reading, and they carried on their established custom, lighting their army-beacons wherever they went. Then they went to Wallingford and completely burnt it, and stayed one night at Cholsey, and then they went along the Berkshire Downs to Cuckamsley Barrow, and there awaited boasted deeds, because it had often been said that if they reached Cuckamsley Barrow they would never go [back] to the sea; then they went homewards by another route. Then levies were gathered there at Kennet, and they joined battle there, and immediately the troop was put to flight, and afterwards they [the Danes] carried their booty to the sea. Then the people of Winchester could see the army proud and unafraid, as they travelled past their gate to the sea, and fetched food and treasure from fifty miles inland. (1006)

This passage exemplifies both the essential simplicity of the Chronicler's style, with its basic vocabulary and largely paratactic syntax, and the way it conveys a subjective sense of the social meanings of actions and the feelings they provoke. Like Wulfstan in the *Sermo Lupi*, the Chronicler places the experience of the Vikings' victims in the framework of honour and shame. In taking possession of Cuckamsley Barrow the army offers a challenge to the English to fulfil their *beotra gylpa*: this is the language of the warrior's vow, and thus also of the warrior's loss

of honour when he fails in his promise.²⁴ Jonathan Wilcox comments that the Chronicler credits the Vikings with an understanding of the symbolic importance of Cuckamsley Barrow; the army ‘cocks a snook at a prophecy of their doom’.²⁵ The Danes are shown deliberately humiliating the English in a conscious act of enmity. Shame is associated with visibility and exposure. The visibility of Viking activity, and so also of English failure to stop it, is central to this passage, most tellingly in the final vignette where the army, passing treasure-laden to the sea, is framed by the gaze of the citizens of Winchester. The fires the Vikings light are *herebeacna*, army-beacons, signals of their presence.

Visibility points not only to shame but to threat and fear. As Wilcox observes, the burning of Wallingford shows that ‘this is not the innocent kindling of illuminated markers’.²⁶ The compound *herebeacna*, a momentary touch of a more poetic register and a deceptively attractive image, turns out to be an ironic understatement; the reality emerges in brutally bald terms in the next sentence. The movement from *herebeacna* to *eal forswællodon* expresses the terror of violence on two levels. On one level, it administers a small shock: the plunge from the metaphorical to the literal. On another level, the idea of the beacon indicates how burning acts as a terror-tactic; its visibility is not only a humiliating flaunting of the enemy’s presence but a threat of their approach and the devastation they bring. Burning in fact is very prominent in the *Æthelredian Chronicle* (*bærndon* and relatives are among the keywords commented on above); this is a feature it shares not with the *Alfredian Chronicle* but with continental Chronicles such as the *Annals of St Vaast*, which talk repeatedly of the Vikings bringing ‘fire and the sword’.²⁷ The *Alfredian Chronicle*, of course, is concerned not to stress the terror of the Vikings but to present the West Saxons as bold and active defenders.²⁸

²⁴ On *beot* and *gylp* see B. Nolan and M. W. Bloomfield, ‘*Beotword*, *Gilpcwidas* and the *Gilphlæden Scop* of *Beowulf*’, *JEGP* 79 (1980), 499-516; A. Renou, ‘The Heroic Oath in *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Nibelungenlied*’, in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. S. B. Greenfield (Eugene, 1963), pp. 237-66.

²⁵ Wilcox, ‘A Winning Combination’, p. 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁷ *Les annales de Saint-Bertin et de Saint-Vaast suivies des fragments d’une chronique inédite*, ed. C. Deshaisnes, Société de l’histoire de France 158 (1871), for example pp. 300, 305, 319, 327-8 and 335.

The *Æthelredian Chronicle*, then, is a text dominated by the depiction of Danish violence. By the use of repetition and generalization it makes this violence seem the constant and overwhelming feature of Æthelred's reign from 991 onwards; it also conveys the fear and humiliation occasioned by Viking attacks. Its language has a formulaic core but is capable of considerable expressiveness and flexibility. Read as a product of the beginning of Cnut's reign, the *Æthelredian Chronicle* is an eloquent protest against the imposition of Danish rule. The Chronicler laments Danish successes (sometimes with interjections: *wala wa!* 'alas' 999) and credits God or the Virgin with their failures (994, 1009). His vivid portrayal of violence is a reminder of the enmity between English and Danes.

The contrast set up between 'us' and 'them' is not flattering to the English, who emerge as weak and incompetent, but the division is nonetheless sharp. Particularly interesting in view of the time of composition is the Chronicler's hostile account of Danish power. The Vikings are arrogant in their success, but their power feeds on English weakness; in the Chronicler's protests against the leaders who break and flee or the levies who are always marshalled in the wrong place there is an underlying assumption that the English would defeat the Vikings if only they could get themselves organised. English failure allows the Danes to do *swa swa hi sylf woldon* (1001), another of the refrains of the text.²⁹ Danish power is about rampant will; it is predatory and destructive. The Chronicler's views on right government and legitimate rule are implicit especially in the annal for 1014:

þa ræddon þa witan ealle, gehadode 7 læwede, þæt man æfter þam cyninge
 Æþelrede sende, 7 cwædon þæt him nan hlaford leofra nære þonne hyra
 gecynda hlaford, gif he rihtlicor healdan wolde þonne he ær dyde.

Then all the councillors, churchmen and laymen, determined to send after
 King Æthelred, and they said that no lord would be dearer to them than their
 rightful lord, if he would rule more rightly than he did before. (1014)

Here the Chronicler attributes to the *witan* a concept of kingship that embraces a sense both of the king's right to rule (by virtue of the oaths that have been sworn to him, his suitable descent and so forth) and his duty to rule well. Leaders should

²⁸ S. Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *TRHS* 5th ser. 36 (1986), 195-217 (pp. 198-9); see discussion in Chapter One.

protect those they rule: thus the Chronicler's complaint s.a. 1006 that the native levies are as harmful to the people as the Vikings (*him naðær ne dohte ne inhere ne uthere*, 'neither the home army nor the invading army did them any good'). A Danish king is neither a rightful lord (Æthelred is invited home in preference to Cnut) nor a protector, since when Danes follow their will they kill and plunder. The process of government is pictured in the *Æthelredian Chronicle* as a matter of consultation and decision-making shared between the king and his bishops, ealdormen and thegns. This idea is signalled in another phrase that recurs in a number of variants: *Pa rædde se cyning and ealle his witan* ('then the king and all his councillors decided', 992; compare 994, 999, 1002, 1006; in 1004 Ulfketel similarly deliberates with the *witan* of East Anglia). Apart from the episode in 1014 when the fleet choose Cnut as king, the only reference to a similar institution of counsel among the Vikings is the *husting*, the assembly, at which Archbishop Ælfheah is messily martyred in 1012. His killers are drunk and, like typical persecutors of martyrs, unbalanced by rage.³⁰ Viking violence is an expression of Viking power, but it is power in an unacceptable form, a power not suited to government and not complemented by self-control.

The theme of counsel and government contrasts Viking destructiveness with English deliberation, but it also contributes to the Chronicler's excoriating criticism of the English leadership. The plans formed by king and *witan* are frequently frustrated by delay (as in 999) or treachery (as in 992). Thus the motif of decision-making (the recurrence of *gerædde*) becomes a sign both of the gap between intention and action and of the danger presented by powerful but disloyal councillors. The other side of the Chronicler's protest against Danish rule is an attempt to explain how such a misfortune could have occurred, and his answer is to blame those responsible for the defence, and in particular to accuse individuals of treachery or cowardice.³¹ The Chronicler resembles Ælfric, Wulfstan and ecclesiastical commentators more generally in looking to the faults of the nation for

²⁹ Clark, 'Narrative Mode', p. 229 gives six further instances of variants of this phrase.

³⁰ The rage of the persecutor is a familiar motif of hagiography: see D. Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the early Modern Period* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), pp. 39 and 41.

³¹ See the comments of Wilcox, 'A Winning Combination', pp. 36-40, and Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings', p. 203.

an explanation of their misfortunes.³² The theme of treachery is one that the Chronicler shares with *The Battle of Maldon* and with Wulfstan (Wulfstan bemoans *ungetrywþa micle*, 'great treacheries', *Sermo Lupi* l. 72; see also ll. 61, 75-80, 99, 142 and 144). The focus on treachery is a symptom of the way the *Æthelredian Chronicle* finds continuity while lamenting change. On the one hand, the Chronicler resorts to discourses of loyalty and community well-established in Anglo-Saxon thought. On the other hand, treachery provides a means of talking about the fissures that have appeared within *Angelcynn* while continuing to assume that an object of loyalty exists, that there is a united cause, and that moral duties are clear. English failure and Danish conquest do not change the reality of 'us' and 'them' but result from the betrayal of that reality. To return to the elements of repetition and generalization in the style of the *Chronicle*, the sweeping assertions of English incompetence, defections and flight are part of the same impulse as the stress on Viking alterity and savagery. Faced with political instability the Chronicler reaches for stability of representation, however depressing: a stable opposition between the people and their enemy, and a consistent explanation for English failure. Both elements rest on the way the Chronicler depicts violence, through recurrent elements of harrying, killing, burning and flight.

The rhetoric of treachery provides a somewhat one-dimensional mode of explanation; it fails to take account of other elements in the English defeat, such as simple bad luck or logistical difficulties.³³ However, the black-and-white morality of the accusations against Eadric Streona, Ælfric and others is only the surface of a more complex and troubling impression of the collapse of English unity. I speak of an impression rather than a portrayal because it is hard to find the border between deliberately created effects and unintended intrusions of disquiet: the *Chronicle* enables us to trace the unravelling of community from the starting point of treachery to a point where it is no longer clear what the object of loyalty might be.

It has been noted that treachery is a theme the *Chronicle* shares with *Maldon*. The comparison is instructive. In *Maldon*, treachery is explicitly treachery to a lord, and the lord embodies the will and purpose of the community. In the

³² See chapter three, p. 135.

Chronicle, with its sense of the duty of kings to their people, ealdormen and high-ranking thegns are treacherous and the focus of loyalty is the nation itself. It is the English people as a whole that is disappointed by the failure to use the fleet in 1009 after the undignified episode of Brihtric's defection and Wulfnoth's failed pursuit; the repetition of *leohtlice*, which has implications of carelessness and irresponsibility, focuses attention on the duty of leaders:

Ða þis cuð wæs to þam oðrum scypum, þær se cyng wæs, hu ða oðre geferdon, wæs þa swilc hit eall rædleas wære, 7 ferde se cyning him ham, 7 þa ealdormenn, 7 þa heahwitan, 7 forlæton þa scypo þus leohtlice, 7 þæt folc þa þæt on þæm scypon wæron fercodon þa scypo eft to Lundenne, 7 læton ealles þeodscypes geswinc þus leohtlice forwurðan, 7 næs se sige na betera þe eall Angelcynn to hopode.³⁴

When it was made known to the part of the fleet where the king was how the other part had done, then it was as if all were confusion, and the king, the ealdormen and the chief councillors took themselves home, and abandoned the ships thus lightly, and the people who were in the ships took the ships back to London, and they allowed the labour of the whole nation thus lightly to come to nothing, and the victory that all England had looked for was no nearer. (1009)

This passage problematizes what is taken for granted in the *Alfredian Chronicle* and in *Maldon*, the way the warrior class stands synecdochically for the nation as a whole. It invokes the concept of the nation as a unity, but it distinguishes between the nation and those who defend it. The *Chronicle* evinces an awareness that the nation is made up of different groups who may fail to serve each others' interests. Warriors may fail to protect non-combatants, and leaders may cause suffering to the rank-and-file. I have already referred to the comment in the annal for 1006 that the English levies (the *inhere*) were as harmful to the local people (*þam landleode*) as the Vikings (the *uthere* – paranomasia sharpens the comparison); s.a. 999, we are told that the delay in use of the ship-levy *swæncte þæt earme folc þæt on þam scypon læg* ('afflicted the unhappy people who manned the ships'). Increasingly as the narrative progresses the Chronicler draws attention to the division of the people into regional groups who will not co-operate with one another (*ne furþon nan scir nolde oþre geleastan æt nextan*, 'in the end no shire would help another', 1010).

³³ Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings', p. 203.

³⁴ The reading *ealles þeodscypes* is from CE; D has the obvious error *ealle þa scypas*. *MS D*, ed. Cubbin, p. 54 n. 4.

In the annal for 1016 the Chronicler depicts in a psychologically convincing fashion the way such disastrous disunity proceeds from the prevalence of treachery or, perhaps more importantly, the expectation of treachery. Prince Edmund gathers levies, who demand to be joined by the king and by the citizens of London. When Æthelred and the London contingent arrive, however, the king is told that a plot is being hatched against him, so he abandons the army and it disperses. This is a telling picture of a defensive effort crippled by mutual distrust between and among leaders and followers. The annal has a tone of contempt towards both levies and princes. The levies' demand is a piece of time-consuming stropiness (*ne onhagode hy þærto buton þæt wære þæt se cyng mid wære*, 'nothing pleased them but that the king should be with them') and the king's retreat is the final touch of futility (*þa ne beheold nan þinc þe ma ðe hit ofter ær dyde*, 'then it did no more good than it often had in the past'). The Chronicler's own viewpoint is that of a non-combatant – an armchair-critic, or rather a misericord-critic – alienated from the figures whose deeds he recounts.

The Chronicler's alienation becomes especially clear in relation to his occasional use of the first person. In one instance this is an authorial and scholarly 'we':

Her on þissum gearre wurdon þa scyπο gearwe þe we ær ymbe spræcon, 7 hyra wæs swa fela swa næfre ær, þæs þe us bec secgað, on Angelcynne wurdon

In this year the ships we spoke about previously were ready, and there were more of them, according to what books tell us, than there had ever been in England before (1009)

Here the use of 'we' distances the Chronicler from his subject-matter; his role is to order a narrative and to place events in a wider context. Elsewhere, in contrast, the use of 'we' expresses his emotional investment in the course of the conflict:

Ac we gyt næfdon þa gesælða ne þone wurðscipe þæt seo scyпferd nyt wære þissum earde, þe ma þe heo ofter ær wæs.

But we still did not have the benefits or the honour of the ship-levy being of use to the land, any more than often in the past. (1009)

Þonne hi to scipon ferdon, þonne scolde fyrd ut æft ongean þæt hi up woldan; þonne ferde seo fyrd ham. 7 þonne hi wæron beeastan, þonne heold man fyrd bewestan, 7 þonne hi wæron besuðan, þonne wæs ure fyrd benorðan.

When they went to the ships, then the levies should have been out in case they made inland; then the levies went home. And when they were in the east, then the levies were kept in the west, and when they were in the south, then our levies were in the north. (1010)

Ealle þa ungesælþa us gelumpon þurh unrædas, þæt man nolde a timan gafol beodan

All these misfortunes befell us through bad counsel, through unwillingness to offer tribute in time (1011)

These passages contain a tension between the impersonal subject of the actions (*man*) and the personal subjects of suffering and misfortune (*us*), between identification with the need for defensive action and fierce criticism of how it is conducted. Perhaps the annal for 1010 particularly conveys how problematic the notion of 'us' becomes, when 'our levies' are marshalled in a way the Chronicler cannot control and (retrospectively) vehemently disapproves.

To summarize, violence, vividly represented, enacts a stark opposition between English and Danes. The English failure to fight off the Danes is explained as, above all, the result of treachery: acts of betrayal, especially by the arch-villains Eadric Streona and Ælfric, undermine English unity. However, the Chronicler also shows us a more extensive loss of unity, the splintering of the English into different groups and the erosion of trust between leaders and followers. The Chronicler himself is implicated in this loss of unity. His use of the first person indicates both his identification with an English 'us' and the way that 'us' seems to recede: it is never quite 'we' but always some treacherous commander or anonymous incompetent who is responsible for failure. 'We' may be shamed on the battlefield, but 'we' are always somewhere else. The Chronicler reaches for the stability of binary categories and consistent explanations, but there is an undercurrent of disquiet. This disquiet emerges also in episodes and details that escape the explanatory net and stand in provocative isolation. Maybe the Chronicler feels that

no comment is necessary on such matters as the blinding of Wulfheah and Wulfgeat (1006), but his determination to evaluate and explain other matters highlights the way this violence remains unaddressed, not incorporated into the text's structures of meaning.

The *Æthelredian Chronicle*, as a product of Cnut's reign, is a resort to a well-established Anglo-Saxon literary tradition (chronicle writing in the vernacular) and a favourite Anglo-Saxon theme (loyalty and treachery) in an attempt to explain the current political situation and to protest against it. The Chronicler refuses all concessions to political change but reflects the pressures it places on community, both in his conscious exploration of disunity and in his passionate but compromised identification with an English interest. The *Chronicle* is in a sense a backward looking text; unlike *Liðsmannaflokkur* and the *Encomium* it represents an attempt to cope without adapting. This said, it is important to note that, as Hart's studies of interlinked Latin and vernacular writings show, the *Æthelredian Chronicle* is part of a wider network of texts and belongs to the mainstream of representation of the Viking Age. It is on this foundation that later writers such as John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon build their accounts of Anglo-Saxon history.³⁵

Liðsmannaflokkur

With *Liðsmannaflokkur* we move from the viewpoint of a non-combatant to that of a warrior and from that of the defeated English to the victorious Scandinavians. *Knýtlinga saga*, one of three prose texts to transmit versions of the poem, places the poem in the mouths of Cnut's *liðsmenn*; this seems to accord better with the character of the piece than the alternative attribution to St Olaf (in *Flateyjarbók* and the *Legendary saga*).³⁶ The poem consists of an allusive running

³⁵ See R. I. Page, 'A Most Vile People': *Early English Historians on the Vikings*, The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies 1986 (1987).

³⁶ *Ólafs saga hins helga. Die 'Legendarische Saga' über Olaf den Heiligen*, ed. and trans. A. Heinrichs et al. (Heidelberg, 1982), pp. 48-53; *Flateyjarbók*, ed. G. Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, 3 vols, Det Norske Historiske Kildeskriftes Skriftes 4 (1860-68), III, 237-9; 'Knýtlinga saga', in *Danakonunga sögur: Skjöldunga saga, Knýtlinga saga, Ágrip af sögu Danakonunga*, ed. B. Guðnason, Íslensk fornrit 35 (1982), pp. 91-321 (p. 116). For discussion see Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp. 90-99. On the *liðsmenn*, see J. Campbell, 'Some Agents and Agencies of the Late-Anglo-Saxon State', in *Doomsday Studies: Papers Read at the Novocentenary Conference of*

commentary portraying scenes of campaigning in England; it seems to refer to the battle of Ringmere Heath (v. 4) and to the siege of London, which is also depicted as a battle or a series of battles (vv. 7-10: *vá herr við diki*, ‘the army fought alongside the moat’, v. 7; *dynr á brezkum brynjum / blóðíss*, ‘the sword rings against British mailcoats’, v. 8). (Russell Poole argues that the poem refers to Ringmere Heath, to the siege of London and to an otherwise unrecorded battle by the Thames. My reading is that the poet depicts the siege in terms of battle rather than depicting a battle as well as the siege.)³⁷ At the end the speaker declares his intention to settle down in ‘beautiful London’ (*fögrum [...] Lundínum*, v. 10).

Skaldic verse is notoriously a bloodthirsty genre, and *Liðsmannaflokkur* celebrates the violence of the Scandinavian conquest. In some respects it depicts the conquest in similar terms to the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, but from the perspective of the victors rather than the defeated. For example, in the first stanza the Vikings attack with the advantage of surprise, pre-empting the English defence and sending vast numbers into precipitate flight:

Göngum upp, áðr Engla
ættlönd farin röndu
morðs ok miklar ferðir
málmregns stafar fregni:
verum hugrakkir Hlakkar,
hristum spjót ok skjótum,
leggr fyr órum eggjum
Engla gnótt á flóttu.
(v. 1)

Let us go ashore, before warriors and
large militias learn that the English home-
lands are being traversed with shields: let
us be brave in battle, brandish spears and
hurl them; great numbers of the English
flee before our swords.

For the poet, unlike the Chronicler, the contrast between fleeing English and pursuing Danes is expressly flattering to the latter, who demonstrate their bravery by fighting. As in the *Chronicle*, repeated motifs stress the bloodiness of the slaughter: references to the beasts of battle (vv. 2, 5 and 9) and to swords and shields being stained red (vv. 3, 9 and 10). The choice of details in fact links *Liðsmannaflokkur* more to *Maldon*, *Brunanburh* and similar poems than to the *Chronicle*. The beasts of

the Royal Historical Society and the Institute of British geographers, Winchester, 1986, ed. J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 201-18, reprinted in *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings*, ed. D. E. Pelteret (New York and London, 2000), pp. 225-49 (p. 228); N. Hooper, ‘Military Developments in the Reign of Cnut’, in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, pp. 89-100 (pp. 97-9).

³⁷ Poole, ‘Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History’, pp. 286-90.

battle are common to the Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetic traditions, as are features of battle-description such as the brandishing of weapons (a favourite gesture in *Maldon*), showers of missiles (v. 4), glittering or flashing lights (v. 8), noise (vv. 4 and 6) and the general prominence of weapons and armour as the signs of warriorhood and war.³⁸ However, despite its vigorous portrayal of the violence of conquest, the Norse poem is not animated by a spirit of enmity. *Liðsmannaflokkur* progresses from invasion to settling down in England, and it is appropriate that its poetic imagery for violence has much in common with that of Old English literature: this is a poem of adaptation, of finding a place in a new country.

Liðsmannaflokkur relates violence to personal and political change, and it is itself full of change. Its narrative perspective, for example, is highly fluid. It veers between the third and first persons and the present and past tenses; it is now a voice from the thick of the action (*göngum upp*, 'let us go ashore', v. 1) and now retrospective and detached (*Knútr réð ok bað biða / [...] Dani alla*, 'Cnut decided and commanded the Danes all to wait', v. 7).³⁹ Rather than using the representation of violence to reinforce the opposition between Danes and English, the poem sets up the contrast of bold attackers and fleeing defenders as only one of numerous other contrasts and tensions which are eventually resolved. The tone is forward-looking and optimistic. Violence emerges as an opportunity for a warrior to win fame and make good in a new land. Contrasts between different leaders and different groups of warriors express the way violence is the setting for male rivalry and forms part of political life; contrasts between male and female and between different modes of nurturing lead us to the links between sex and violence and the place of violence as a part of the male life-cycle.

Liðsmannaflokkur is listed among the *Knútsdrápur* and incorporates praise of Cnut, but it stands at an angle, as it were, to the tradition of praise-poetry.⁴⁰ It is shaped by a consciousness that the making of poetry is a public and political act, but it directs our attention not so much to the glory of a particular ruler or lord as to the

³⁸ These features of battle description are also discussed in chapter two, p. 124.

³⁹ On the complexity of viewpoint in *Liðsmannaflokkur*, see R. Poole, 'Skaldic Poetry as a Marginal Form', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Atti del 12 congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo; Seventh International Saga Conference*, ed. T. Parolá (Spoleto, 1990), pp. 169-85 (pp. 177 and 181-4).

care of lesser men finding their path through a complex political landscape. Russell Poole shows how the poem falls into two parts, the first part dominated by the figure of Thorkell, the second by that of Cnut. Poole suggests this reflects the political situation of the time: a far more experienced military commander than the young king and with a strong power base in Scandinavia, Thorkell was perhaps effectively Cnut's co-ruler at the beginning of the reign.⁴¹ The transition from Thorkell to Cnut comes in stanza five:

Hár þykki mér, hlýra,
hinn jarl, es brá snarla –
mær spyrr vitr ef væri
valköstr – ara föstu:
en þekkjöndum þykkir
þunnblás meginásar
hörð, sú's hilmir gerði
hríð, á Tempsar síðu.
(v. 5)

This earl, who briskly broke the ravens'
fast, seems to me outstanding – my clever
girl asks if there was carnage – but the
battle the king waged, on the bank of the
Thames, seems a hard one to the
bowmen.

The earl, the first person form of *þykkja* and the feeding of the ravens in the first *helmingr* are balanced against the king, the third person form of *þykkja* and the battle by the Thames in the second. The structure of the stanza suggests a contrast between the two leaders; such comparisons, praising one man at the expense of another, are common skaldic currency.⁴² However, the poet in fact commends both Cnut and Thorkell. The contrast dissolves even as it appears. Instead, we are left with a contrast between the perspective of the speaker, weighing up the earl's merits in conversation with a woman, and the perspective of the bowmen, absorbed in their immediate experience of battle. (It is necessary to observe a distinction between the speaker and the poet: the speaker, the poem's 'me' and 'I', praises Thorkell, but the poet shows us the merits of Cnut as well.)⁴³ This stanza is an example of how the poem conveys the different ways people might relate to or take part in violence. It also, however, portrays different stages in the growth of fame: behaviour is first witnessed in battle, later analysed and reported to others.

⁴⁰ See Jesch, 'Skaldic verse in Scandinavian England', p. 317.

⁴¹ Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp. 99-107; on Thorkell's career and his pre-eminence early in Cnut's reign, see Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp. 54-7 and 82-4.

⁴² Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History', p. 280.

⁴³ Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, p. 108, points out that the speaker and the poet are not necessarily the same.

The theme of fame and the vocabulary of assessing behaviour and appearances portray battle as the setting for rivalry between warriors as well as between leaders. In stanza four it is the reputation of Thorkell's men that is at stake; the speaker attests their boldness: *þóttut mér, es ek þátta / Þorkels liðar dvelja / [...] í folk at ganga* ('Thorkell's men did not seem to me, as I saw it, to lose time in joining battle' v. 4). As the poem stands, this stanza follows and contrasts with one depicting a warrior who signally fails to rush into the fray:

Þollr mun glaums of grímu
gjarn síðarla árna
randar skóð at rjóða
ræðinn, sá's mey fœðir:
berr eigi sá sveigir
sára lauks í ári
reiðr til Rínar glóða
rönd upp á Englandi.
(v. 3)

The garrulous reveller who brings the girl
up will be eager to make no undue haste
to redden his sword at night: the warrior
does not carry a shield ashore into
English territory at this early hour,
enraged, in quest of gold.

This reluctant warrior appears again in stanza nine to offset the achievements of the speaker and his companions at London, *sveit þar's sóttuim* ('where we engaged the enemy forces', v. 7):

Hvern morgin sér horna
Hlökk á Tempsar bakka –
skalat hanga má hungra –
hjalmskóð roðin blóði:
rýðr eigi sá sveigir
sára lauk í ári,
hinn's Grjótvarar gætir,
gunnborðs, fyrir Stað norðan.
(v. 9)

Each morning, on the bank of the
Thames, the lady sees swords stained
with blood; the raven must not go
hungry: the warrior who watches over
Steinvör, north of Staðr, does not redden
his sword at this early hour.

In stanza two another contrast is set up, between the warriors who don the 'ugly old shirt' (*illan oddsennu*) and the poet in his mailcoat; this is an expression of superiority either over berserkers or over men who superstitiously wear their birth-caul for luck in battle.⁴⁴

These contrasts between warriors intersect with further contrasts between home and away and between the sexes. The warriors wearing the *illan oddsennu* are

⁴⁴ Poole, 'Skaldic Poetry as a Marginal Form', pp. 175-6.

‘where we were born and bred’ (*þar’s fæddir órum / ok bornir*, v. 2) and Steinvör’s father is ‘north of Staðr’; the speaker and the deeds of strength are in England. Steinvör’s father is identified in relation to a woman, presumably a daughter, whom he is raising. The homeland is associated with the feminine, with birth and nurturing and with the soft life: the father is a *þollr glaums*, a ‘tree of merriment’, and he apparently has trouble getting up in the morning. (Early rising is clearly one of the tough tests a warrior must undergo; it is mentioned again in stanza ten: *ár þar’s úti vörum / [...] í för með hilmi*, ‘where we were out early on our expedition with the king’).

The female figures in the poem have a complex and important role in the representation of violence and its resolution. It is not certain how many women there are and there could be as many as six: Steinvör in vv. 3 and 9, the *mær vitr* of v. 5, Syn in v. 7, the chaste widow in v. 8, the watching lady in v. 9 and Ilmr in v. 10.⁴⁵ I am inclined, however, to see two women in the poem: the chaste widow appears in vv. 8 and 9, and all other references are to Steinvör, the girl back home, who is also imagined as the audience of parts of the narrative. As Roberta Frank argues, watching women are depicted and addressed in skaldic verse in their role as the assessors and guardians of male honour; they play the same role when, in the sagas, they goad their menfolk to vengeance.⁴⁶ The figures of the women draw attention to the masculinity of the speaker; their presence articulates a conventional dichotomy between male action and female passivity and watching.⁴⁷ In *Liðsmannaflokkr* violence is framed more explicitly as sexual display, presented to and elicited by women (in stanza five the girl prompts the speaker: *mær spyrr vitr ef væri / valköstr* ‘my clever girl asks if there was carnage’). We have seen that Steinvör’s father is a laughable foil to the military vigour of the speaker. Implicitly, the speaker competes with her father for the attention of the woman. Similarly, the watching widow is arguably to be identified with Queen Emma, and her presence in the poem, admiring Cnut, implies an awareness that she was shortly to marry him.⁴⁸ Emma, like Steinvör, is a woman witnessing Viking prowess while under the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

⁴⁶ R. Frank, ‘Why skalds address women’, in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Atti del 12 congresso internazionale di studi sull’alto medioevo; Seventh International Saga Conference*, ed. T. Paroli (Spoleto, 1990), pp. 67-83; discussion of *Liðsmannaflokkr* pp. 70-71.

⁴⁷ According to Frank, the skaldic address to a woman is a ‘mnemonic of masculinity’: *ibid.*, p. 69.

guardianship of another man or men. She is inside the stone walls of the city whose citizens Cnut fights; dwelling ‘in stone’ (*í steini*) connects her also to the only English leader named in the poem, Ulfcetel (who is *byggs...skeggja / brunns*, ‘inhabitant of the barley of the spring’ = dweller in stone, v. 6).⁴⁹ Stone is a further link between Emma and Steinvör. The girl back home is in fact referred to as Grjótvör (v. 9), a variation of the common woman’s name Steinvör by *ofljóst* or synonym-substitution;⁵⁰ substituting *grjót* for *steinn* (‘stone’) draws attention to the meaning of this name-element and to its place in the poem’s imagery. For both women, violence is a competition between men – attacker and defender or lover and father – issuing in marriage to the winner. The last *helmingr* of the poem contains an invitation to Steinvör to join her lover in England:

kneigum vér, síz vígum
varð nýlokit hörðum,
fyllar dags, í fögrum,
fit, Lundúnum sitja.
(v. 10)

now that these hard battles have been
recently concluded, we can settle down,
lady, in beautiful London.

The resolution of violence in the coming together of the sexes is also the resolution of other contrasts and tensions in the poem. As has been argued, it resolves the rivalry between father and lover and between the attacking Cnut and the English defence through the victory of one party. Given that Steinvör is associated with the Scandinavian homeland and Emma with the besieged city, marriage and victory resolve tensions between home and abroad by collapsing them into one: the city is entered and becomes home, and the girl from ‘north of Staðr’ comes to England. The intertwining of the contrasts between male and female, rival males and home and abroad is illuminated by tracing another tension in the poem, between different modes of nurturing; the motif of feeding and nourishment leads us to consider how violence forms part of the male life-cycle.

I have already mentioned that the homeland is a space of nurturing and that this contributes to the feminization of Steinvör’s father. He is in the place ‘where we were brought up’ (*þar’s fæddir órum*, v. 2), and is designated as ‘he who brings the

⁴⁸ Poole, ‘Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History’, p. 290.

⁴⁹ The kenning is interpreted thus by Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, p. 113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

girl up' (*sá's mey fæðir*, v. 3). In contrast, the Vikings in England are feeding the raven: *enn á enskra manna / ölum gjóð Hnikars blóði* ('once more let us nourish the raven on the blood of English men', v. 2); *hlýra, / hinn jarl, es brá snarla / [...] ara föstu* ('this earl who briskly broke the ravens' fast', v. 5); *skalat hanga má hungra* ('the raven must not go hungry', v. 9). *Fæða*, the verb used for child-rearing, also means 'to feed', while *ala*, the verb for feeding the raven in stanza two, similarly can mean both 'to bring up' and 'to give food to'.⁵¹ The poem thus contrasts the homeland, women and inadequate men and feeding children against England, manly men and fighting. In an imaginative and wide-ranging article, Nancy Huston explores the structural equivalence of motherhood and fighting across many cultures. She draws attention to the complex of ideas that connect male sexuality and male violence: violence demonstrates virility, but contact with women can dissipate male power, as in the Sampson story; she also points to the way rites of passages for the sexes focus on fighting and motherhood.⁵² In *Liðsmannaflokkur*, the end of fighting brings renewed contact between the sexes (the man who has stayed at home with his daughter is an inadequate man). Further, fighting has been a rite of passage for the warrior, who has proved himself in battle, as the poem takes pains to show. The resolution of violence in marriage opens the way for a reconciliation of the two modes of nurturing: by feeding the raven the warrior wins the right to settle down and perhaps raise children. The winning of the woman is closely associated with the winning of land. In the final *helmingr* of the poem the kenning for 'lady' (*fyllar dags fit*) is intercalated with 'fair London' (*fögrum Lundinum*) (the *helmingr* is quoted above); moreover, the base word of the kenning depicts the woman as a piece of land: she is the 'meadow of the day of the sea' (= land of gold).⁵³ Thus we can extract from the poem a sketch of the warrior career: birth and upbringing in Scandinavia, testing in battle abroad, and finally settling down with a secure reputation, a piece of land and a wife.

Liðsmannaflokkur offers an optimistic account of violence as something harsh and testing (all those early mornings) but finally productive – nourishing to fame and family. It conveys a sense of the rank-and-file warrior adapting himself to the

⁵¹ Cleasby Vigfusson, pp. 11 and 184.

⁵² N. Huston, 'The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes', in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. S. Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, MA, 1986), pp. 119-136.

circumstances produced by war, balancing the claims of different leaders, approaching battle as an opportunity and embracing the attractions of a new land. This is appealing, but it is very much the perspective of someone on the winning side. To return once more to the women in the poem, their association with land and in particular Emma's association with the defended citadel makes women the direct as well as the indirect objects of conquest. Women are asked to witness and approve male violence, but they are themselves the prize.⁵⁴ The figure of the watching woman is a symbol of the demands being made on the warrior; he acts and she judges. However, such women are constructed to confirm male values. Even as the speaker's female interlocutor asks for evidence of his valour, we are shown that her question does not challenge him to live up to her standards but proves her absorption of his: he congratulates her on her choice of question, calling her a *mær vitr* (a 'clever girl', or, perhaps less patronizingly, a 'wise maiden', v. 5). There is in fact no room in this poem for a genuinely independent female perspective on violence, just as there is no voice for its victims.⁵⁵ *Liðsmannaflokkr* presents a vision of the Danish conquest as a union, the resolution of tensions between Scandinavia and England, male and female, feeding children and feeding the raven. However, it is a resolution achieved by appropriating the voices, the bodies and the land of the women and the English.

If the stubborn refusal to accommodate to the new regime in the *Æthelredian Chronicle* needs to be read against the willingness to embrace change and adaptation in *Liðsmannaflokkr*, the translation of violence into marriage in *Liðsmannaflokkr* needs to be read against the voice of embittered passivity in the *Chronicle*. Taken together, these texts reflect interestingly on the question of 'were the Vikings violent?'. The Chronicler stresses the horrors of Viking attack in a spirit of adamant hostility, but the Norse poet celebrates bloodstained swords and glutted carrion birds in the belief that they bring glory to the warriors. To put it crudely, successful violence is an outrage in one's enemies, admirable in one's friends. The

⁵³ My thanks are due to Matthew Townend for explaining this kenning to me.

⁵⁴ Compare Frank, 'Cnut and his skalds', p. 122, on the portrayal of conquest as forced marriage in the *Knútsdrápa* of Hallvarðr háreksblei.

⁵⁵ See the comments of Poole, 'Skaldic Poetry as a Marginal Form', p. 175, and Frank, 'Why skalds address women', p. 78.

two texts show two faces of the violence of representation.⁵⁶ The *Chronicler's* representation of violence reproduces the hostility between the two sides. The poet of *Liðsmannaflokkr*, on the other hand, has no quarrel with admirable defeated men such as Ulfcetel; rather, this representation is more insidiously violent, in its suppression of the voices of dissent.

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*

The *Æthelredian Chronicle* and *Liðsmannaflokkr* are, respectively, the voice of a victim and the voice of a victor in the Danish conquest of England, though both are also the record of the ordinary person (the warrior or non-combatant as opposed to the leaders) finding a way through the political maze. The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is intriguingly different from either, written for someone much closer to the centre of power but not exclusively identified with either Danes or English. Moreover, the *Encomium* was written over two decades after the poem and the *Chronicle*. On the evidence of the text itself, the *Encomium* was composed at the behest of Queen Emma, by a Flemish monk or canon working probably in England.⁵⁷ The probable date of composition is 1041-2: the Encomiast ends by stating that Emma, Harthacnut and Edward rule together, which places the work between Edward's return to England in 1041 and Harthacnut's death in 1042.⁵⁸ By this time, the memory of the Danish conquest was filtered through the long and relatively stable years of Cnut's reign, but also through the succession disputes that followed it.

The Encomiast's account of the conquest is part of a longer narrative that also includes the accession of Harold Harefoot, the murder of Alfred Ætheling in

⁵⁶ Discussed in the introduction, pp. 11-14.

⁵⁷ On the author of the *Encomium* see Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [xxxix]-[xli]. For the argument that the *Encomium* was composed at Harthacnut's court, see A. Orchard, 'The Literary Background to the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 11 (2001), 157-84 (p. 158). The Encomiast says that he is writing at Emma's command (Prol. 23-6) and identifies himself as a servant (*uermula*) of St Omer and St Bertin (II.21.14) who witnessed Cnut's visit to St Omer (II.20.8-11).

⁵⁸ ASC MS C s.a. 1041, 1042; MS E dates the same events a year early: ASC MS E, s.a. 1040, 1041. The dating 1041-2 is the scholarly consensus: Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', p. [xxxix]; Campbell, 'Introduction', p. [ciii] / xxi; P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 28-9. For an alternative view, see

1036, and the eventual return of Harthacnut. The work is by itself an intriguing case-study in the effects of different perspectives on the representation of violence and in particular on the drawing of sharp moral contrasts. The *Encomium* recounts two different episodes, and two different kinds, of violence, the conquest of England in books one and two and the murder of Alfred in book three. The conquest is treated in a manner that contrasts with previous accounts of Viking violence in the British Isles: although the focus is more on the Danes, the *Encomium* allows dignity and moral worth to the English. It does not condemn the enemy, like the *Chronicle*; nor does it silence them, like *Liðsmannaflokkr*. This is a text that acknowledges the point of view of both sides in the conflict. Such an even-handed approach is a reflection of the plural identity of the Encomiast's patroness in relation to the conquest, as the wife of both the defeated English king (Æthelred) and his Danish conqueror (Cnut). With the murder of Alfred, however, the Encomiast returns to drastic moral polarization. Alfred is martyred and his enemies are evil persecutors led by a tyrant, Harold. Emma is the wronged and mourning mother of a fledgling saint. The adoption of a hagiographical framework in book three can again be related to Emma's role in events: the unambiguous enmity between Emma and Harold, the son of her rival, Ælfgifu of Northampton, and the highly ambiguous circumstances of Alfred's death, in which there was a danger Emma might be blamed.⁵⁹ The plural modes of representation of violence in the *Encomium*, and in particular the non-polarized representation of Danes and English in books one and two, issue in a distinctively rich and multifaceted portrayal of conflict and bloodshed. The complexity of this portrayal is conditioned by Emma's particular needs. It is also, more generally, a product of the troubled politics of time and of the text's position at a crossroads of literary traditions.

The *Encomium* situates itself in the calm after the storm, looking back on war and murder from a safe distance (Harthacnut has 'arranged all his affairs in the calm of peace', *omnibus suis in pacis tranquillitate compositis*, III.13.6). In fact, it was written in a period of continued suspicion and turbulence. Harthacnut was not universally beloved; the C-text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that 'he never did

F. Lifshitz, 'The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*: A 'Political Pamphlet' of the Eleventh Century?', *Haskins Society Journal* 1 (1989), 39-50 (pp. 45-7).

anything kingly while he reigned' (*he ne gefremede ec naht cynelices þa hwile þa he rixode*, s.a. 1040: this is a far harsher judgement than that passed on Æthelred, s.a. 1016).⁶⁰ Moreover, the co-rule of Harthacnut and Edward must have been an uneasy arrangement. Edward had lived most of his life in an exile imposed by Harthacnut's father and had learnt to resent and distrust his mother: in 1043 he was to confiscate her property, accusing her of not having done enough for his interests.⁶¹ Edward and his brother Alfred had been rivals to Harthacnut in the succession dispute of 1035; it seems that Edward was accorded the title of king during his Norman exile, and that Duke Robert assembled an invasion fleet to attack England on his behalf in 1033/4.⁶² To augment all these sources of tension within Harthacnut's regime, further possible claimants to the throne lurked in Norway and Denmark (Magnus of Norway, Swegn Estrithsson).⁶³ As has been indicated, Emma's own position within this troubled polity presented distinctive problems. Her marriage to Cnut opened her to charges of treachery and opportunism, her support of Harthacnut in 1035 to accusations of neglect of her older sons; Alfred had allegedly been brought to England to his death by a letter from his mother that may or may not have been a fake.⁶⁴ The situation was further complicated by the behaviour of Emma's brother, Duke Richard II of Normandy, who provided a market for Danish booty but then supported her English sons against her Danish husband.⁶⁵

The *Encomium* is stamped by the complexity of contemporary politics. It is also shaped by the influence of intersecting literary traditions which themselves

⁵⁹ On Emma and Ælfgifu of Northampton, see M. W. Campbell, 'Queen Emma and Ælfgifu of Northampton', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 4 (1971), 66-79.

⁶⁰ Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [xxxvii]-[xxxviii].

⁶¹ ASC MS D, s.a. 1043; see F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, 3rd edn (New Haven and London, 1997), pp. 37-8, 50 and 76-8; Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, pp. 64-73, paints a more colourful picture of distrust and hostility between Harthacnut and Edward. According to Goscelin, the confiscation of Emma's property in 1043 was a response to allegations that she was encouraging Magnus of Norway to invade England: F. Barlow, 'Two Notes: Cnut's Second Pilgrimage and Queen Emma's Disgrace in 1043', *EHR* 73 (1958), 649-56 (pp. 653-4). As Barlow comments, the charge is an unlikely one.

⁶² S. Keynes, 'The Æthelings in Normandy', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 13 (1991), 173-205 (pp. 193-4).

⁶³ For the claims of Magnus Olafson and Swegn Estrithson, see M. W. Campbell, 'The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*: Personal Panegyric or Political Propaganda?' *Annuaire Mediaevale* 19 (1979), 27-45 (pp. 34-6).

⁶⁴ The *Encomiast* insists it was a fake. Eric John argues it was probably genuine: *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 164; Keynes considers different possible positions and concludes the whole story is a 'glorious fabrication': 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [xxxiii]-[xxxiv].

⁶⁵ *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. E. M. C. van Houts, 2 vols (Oxford, 1992-5), II, 18-20; Keynes, 'The Æthelings in Normandy', pp. 193-5 and 199-200.

reflect the international and polyglot character of Harthacnut's court.⁶⁶ Elements such as the raven banner carried at the battle of Ashingdon and the ornamentation of Cnut's ships offer parallels with Old Norse sources.⁶⁷ The presentation of Cnut as both a pious and a triumphant king can be connected to the Christ-like and yet imperial ruler-imagery particularly characteristic of late Anglo-Saxon art in dialogue with Ottonian example.⁶⁸ As Elizabeth Tyler's work has shown, another very rich seam of meaning in the text is provided by its echoes of classical sources, in particular of Virgil.⁶⁹ The *Encomiast* may well have worked in England, but his training was in Flanders. Though it is doubtful whether he knew their work directly, the *Encomiast* follows continental historians of the late tenth and early eleventh century, Dudo of St Quentin, Richer of Rheims, Aimoin of Fleury and Widukind, who sought to elevate their style by use of Virgil, Sallust, Lucan and other Latin authors.⁷⁰ The classical phrases place the *Encomium's* presentation of violence in a double context: the continental Latin historiography of Viking invasion, more verbose and elaborate than the insular tradition, and classical literature itself, with its wealth of reflection on dilemma, suffering and the contradictions of human action. The relationship of the *Encomium* to its Latin quarries can be considered in narrower and broader terms. First, we may ask how individual borrowings work in their contexts, whether they are merely powerful phrases, or whether parallels or contradictions between the *Encomium* and the source text complicate the meaning of the former. Such intertextuality potentially works at many subtly graded points on a

⁶⁶ This aspect of the context of the *Encomium* is stressed by Elizabeth Tyler in a yet unpublished article, 'Fictions of Family: The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and Vergil's *Aeneid*'.

⁶⁷ Orchard, 'Literary Background', pp. 164-6 and 169-70; on the importance of ships to Scandinavian images of kingship, see E. Tyler, "'The eyes of the beholders were dazzled": treasure and artifice in *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', *EME* 8: 2 (1999), 247-70 (pp. 259-60); C. Westerdahl, 'Society and Sail: On Symbols as Specific Social Values and Ships as Catalysts of Social Units' in *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. O. Crumlin-Pedersen and B. M. Thye, Publications from the National Museum, Studies in Archaeology and History 1 (1995), pp. 41-50 (pp. 44 and 47-8).

⁶⁸ An eloquent argument connecting the *Encomiast's* presentation of Cnut's kingship with an 'Anglo-Ottonian' tradition is presented by E. Brogan, 'Representations of Kingship in the *Knútsdrápur* and the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 2002), pp. 30-47.

⁶⁹ Tyler, "'The eyes of the beholders'", 'Fictions of Family'. Campbell, 'Introduction', pp. [cx]-[cxviii] / xxviii-xxxvi lists the *Encomiast's* main borrowings from classical and medieval authors and from the Vulgate.

⁷⁰ Hart, '*Worcester chronicle*', pp. 303-4, notes that Richer, Widukind and the *Encomiast* all borrow from Sallust; for the stylistic pretensions of Dudo, Richer and Aimoin, see E. Christiansen, 'Introduction', in Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, translated with an introduction by E. Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. ix-xxxvii (pp. xx-xxi). Campbell, 'Introduction', pp. [cxvi]-[cxvii] / xxxiv-xxxv, suggests that the *Encomiast* knew Dudo's work, but Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', p. xl, is unconvinced.

scale between deliberate, sometimes overt allusion to a specific context and the sharing of a common literary vocabulary with its store of common wisdom.⁷¹ Second, there is the more general question of to what extent the *Encomiast* borrows more than a verbal sophistication from these sources, to what extent he incorporates their psychological and moral insights. I will argue that the *Encomium* is unusual in that it does convey a sense of the moral and psychological paradoxes of violence.⁷²

The place of violence in the *Encomium*: Emma and violence

It is generally agreed that the *Encomium* was written to further Emma's political purposes, but the precise nature of those purposes is disputed. Various arguments have been put forward interpreting the text as a promotion of one candidate for the throne against another, the most powerful being that it attacks Edward in favour of Harthacnut.⁷³ Pauline Stafford, who has returned to the *Encomium* repeatedly in successive studies of Emma and of Anglo-Saxon queenship, commands conviction with her interpretation: this is not a text directed against anyone but designed to praise Emma through praise of her family and to promote an image of mother and sons ruling in a 'trinity of power'.⁷⁴ The image is a defensive one, a vision of harmony advanced against dissent and discontent. For Stafford, the *Encomiast* contends with the problems of representing female political action. The attempt to portray Emma as a loyal mother to her rival sons leads the *Encomiast* away from the black and white terms of treachery and loyalty towards the

⁷¹ There is an extensive critical literature on allusion and intertextuality in Latin poetry: see, for example, G. B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca and London, 1986); S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998) discusses the gulf between schools of criticism that privilege deliberate allusion and schools that stress the constant, multifaceted interaction of texts rather than authors: he argues for a rapprochement between these approaches (see especially pp. 17-51). For the idea of a common (poetic) vocabulary as a store of society's wisdom, see P. Clemons, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 12 (1995), p. 68.

⁷² See R. W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 1. The Classical Tradition from Einhard to Geoffrey of Monmouth', *TRHS* 5th ser. 20 (1970), 173-96, on the use of Latin literature by medieval historians largely as an aesthetic resource.

⁷³ For this argument, see Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, pp. 52-3 and 61-4; Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, 3rd edn, p. 47; for a summary of different interpretations of the *Encomium*'s political drift, see Keynes, 'The Æthelings in Normandy', p. 183, n. 54.

⁷⁴ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, p. 29; 'Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century', in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe. Proceedings of a Conference held at King's College, London, April 1995*, ed. A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 3-23 (p. 5); see also Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [lxvii]-[lxxx].

beginnings of a new, subtler language of politics.⁷⁵ In a text where political action is so frequently violent action, this new language of politics is accompanied by a new language of violence. However, violence is the material of the narrative rather than the topic under consideration. The complexity of the *Encomiast's* treatment is a function of the attempt (negatively) to avoid unflattering reflections on Emma and (positively) to present her as a powerful queen ruling benignly with her sons.

The structure and the allusive texture of the *Encomium* foreground the topics of kingship and royal power. The divisions between books follow the transitions between reigns: book one deals with Swegn, book two with Cnut, and book three with Harold and Harthacnut. The echoes of classical authors are not evenly distributed through the text (though echoes of the Vulgate are): the *Encomium* is punctuated by peaks of intertextuality, concentrations of verbal borrowings that mark certain passages as places where the *Encomiast* apparently made a special effort. These passages are for the most part tableaux of royal power. The set-piece description of Swegn's ships is one (I.4). Multiple allusions to two loci in the *Aeneid* set up a parallel between Swegn and Aeneas as pioneers, founders of dynasties and victorious ancestors.⁷⁶ The passage also borrows phrases from Sallust. The numerous verbal borrowings in this passage work both to deepen the meaning of the text and to heighten and elaborate its style, as a wealth of resounding phrases to match the panoply of ornament being described. Another, though less extensive, concentration of borrowings from Virgil marks Cnut's voyage to England (II.5), immediately following another set-piece ship description (II.4); Campbell finds four Virgilian echoes in only eleven lines of printed text.⁷⁷ Harthacnut's voyage and vision (III.9) contain phrases borrowed from Sallust and Lucan as well as Virgil. This is a scene which links Harthacnut to the heroic seafaring and military achievement of his forbears but which also marks him as a recipient of divine favour: it encapsulates the *Encomiast's* message about Harthacnut and his kingship. Other peaks of intertextuality are Cnut's visit to St Omer (II.21), the murder of Alfred (III.5), Emma's decision to go to Flanders (III.7), her departure from Flanders (III.12) and

⁷⁵ P. Stafford, 'The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries', in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. J. C. Parsons (Stroud, 1994), pp. 143-67 (pp. 161 and 164).

⁷⁶ See Tyler, 'The eyes of the beholders', pp. 257-63 and 268-70.

⁷⁷ Campbell, 'Introduction', p. [cxiii] / xxxi. Three of the four are among those Campbell lists as echoes showing 'modified phraseology'.

the final tableau of mother and sons ruling together. These last two passages do not contain multiple echoes but single, highly conspicuous borrowings, in both cases from Lucan. Most of the passages I have listed contribute to the Encomiast's portrayal of royal power, and particularly to a sense of the pageantry and public performance of kingship; Cnut's visit to St Omer, for example, constitutes a display of Cnut's kingly piety, as he bestows gifts and weeps appropriately. Most of the passages also link predominantly if not exclusively to Virgilian contexts. Two exceptions are III.7 and III.12, which refer respectively to multiple loci in Sallust and to one extended passage in Lucan, and which do not contribute in such an obvious way to the theme of royal power (their place will be considered further below).

The pattern of these passages illustrates the relative importance of violence among the themes of the *Encomium*. The three ship-descriptions, made even more prominent because of the way they link the three books and the three kings together, depict conquest and force of arms as central elements in kingship. The ships are themselves weapons and they promise destruction.⁷⁸ However, we may note that I.4, II.4-5 and III.9 are not scenes of actual fighting; indeed, Harthacnut's voyage, planned as a conquest, is pre-empted by the action of Providence in removing Harold. Campaigns and battles belong to the transitions between such visions of power. The battle scenes in the *Encomium* are written with vigour but they are not at the centre of attention; moreover, they tend to be rather bare of literary allusions which might make specific links between the Encomiast's presentation of violence and that of classical authors. Violence provides much of the stuff of the narrative, and violence, specifically war and the capacity for war, is also an important part of the imagery of power. However, violence is not in itself a governing theme of the work. The central thrust of the text is the depiction of the glorious kingship of the line of Swegn, which culminates in the co-rule of Emma with her sons. However, in the wake of this movement ripple out different ways of understanding violence, different layers of psychological and moral interpretation. The starting point for the complexity of the Encomiast's portrayal of violence is the need to place Emma

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Tyler remarks on the importance of the fleet to the depiction of Cnut as 'no wimp', 'The eyes of the beholders"', p. 260.

within the workings of royal power, given the association of kingship with military might and the gendering of war as a quintessentially male activity.

The contradictory relationships between power, Emma and war are set out in the sequence (II.16-17) in which Emma first appears in the text, at the culmination of Cnut's conquest of England. The Encomiast wholly omits any role Emma might have played in the years of Danish attack, for example her possible presence in London during the siege of 1016 (and we may note that while early medieval queens are rarely found on the battlefield, they more frequently have a part to play in defending cities and forts).⁷⁹ Indeed he fails to mention her marriage to Æthelred, though the latter has a ghostly presence in the statement that Emma is already a *regina famosa*, a 'famous queen' (II.16.7-8). Emma has no part in the war: instead, her arrival heralds peace, a new beginning and an end to the misery and horror of fighting:

Hoc erat quod utrobique uehementer iam dudum desiderauerat exercitus, scilicet ut tanta tanto, digna etiam digno, maritali conuinculata iugo, bellicose sedaret motus. Quid enim maius ac desiderabilius esse posset in uotis quam dampnosos ingratosque labores belli placida finiri tranquillitate pacis, cum pares paribus ui corporis uirtuteque animi concurrerent, cumque nunc hi nunc uero illi alternanti casu bello non sine magno detrimento sui uincerent?

This was what the army had long eagerly desired on both sides, that is to say that so great a lady, bound by a matrimonial link to so great a man, worthy of her husband as he was worthy of her, should lay the disturbances of war to rest. What greater or more desirable thing could be wished than that the accursed and loathsome troubles of war should be ended by the gentle calm of peace, when equals were clashing with equals in might of body and boldness of heart, and when now the one side and now the other was victorious, though at great loss to itself, by the changing fortunes of war? (II.16.21-27)

Emma here is a bringer of stability and forger of bonds; marriage reconciles hostile groups.⁸⁰ On the other hand, Emma is identified with Cnut's success as a conqueror.

⁷⁹ P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Consort in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), pp. 117-19.

⁸⁰ See, for example, L. J. Sklute, 'Freodwebbe in Old English Poetry', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. H. Damico and A. Hennessey Olsen (Indiana, 1990), pp. 204-10 on the queen as 'peaceweaver', and M. J. Enright, *The Lady with the Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1996),

It is only at this point in the text that the language of empire makes its appearance: Emma, an *imperialis sponsa* ('imperial bride', II.16.5) is to be Cnut's partner in rule (*imperii sui consortem*, II.16.3).⁸¹ Herself 'born of a victorious nation' (*oriunda ex uictrici gente*, II.16.9), she confirms Cnut's victory over England.⁸² Emma at once stands in opposition to war and shares in, even confers, the triumph of conquest.

As in *Liðsmannaflokk*, the relationship between male and female is symbolically intertwined with the relationship of victim and aggressor, though the manner of intertwining is rather different. Whereas in *Liðsmannaflokk* Emma is the widow who is wooed and subdued along with her city, in the *Encomium* she is emphatically an equal partner in the marriage, and similarly the war has been a strife of equals.⁸³ However, there is a tension between reconciliation and conquest in the way the motif of the peaceweaving marriage is deployed here. The war and the settlement do not quite match up: the conflict has been between English and Dane, but the marriage unites Dane and Norman:

Inuenta est uero haec imperialis sponsa in confinitate Galliae et praecipue in Normandensi regione [...] Letatur Gallia, letatur etiam Anglorum patria, dum tantum decus transuehitur per aequora

This imperial bride was, in fact, found within the bounds of Gaul, and to be precise in the Norman area [...] Gaul rejoiced, the land of the English rejoiced, when so great an ornament was conveyed over seas (II.16.5-6 and 18-19)

Does the *Encomiast*, then, align the union of man and woman with the union of an attacking nation with a nation under attack that is nevertheless, like Emma, proud and glorious in its own right? Or does he elide the English, rendering the defeated invisible behind a celebration of two groups of successful Scandinavian invaders?⁸⁴

pp. 9-22, on the queen's ritual functions and her importance in suppressing conflict within the warband.

⁸¹ This point is made by Brogan, 'Representations of Kingship', pp. 40-41. *Imperium* in medieval texts can mean the sphere of power of a king rather than that of an empire, but *imperialis* has more consistently imperial connotations: Latham, *Dictionary*, pp. 1248-50.

⁸² See E. Searle, 'Emma the Conqueror', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. J. Holdsworth and J. L. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 281-88 (pp. 287-8).

⁸³ See Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p. 34.

⁸⁴ Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, pp. 61-2, argues that the *Encomiast* implicitly invents a strife between Danes and Normans that is settled with Emma's marriage. Rather than pursue the difficulties of the passage to this logical if surprising conclusion, I think it more useful to focus on the tensions underlying the confident and celebratory tone.

The marriage of Emma and Cnut signals a transition in the narrative from the masculine sphere of war to the feminine sphere of nurture and the family. In II.18 the Encomiast describes the birth and character of Harthacnut and also mentions 'other legitimate sons' (*alios liberales filios*, II.18.5) who are sent to Normandy to be brought up. Nevertheless, though war ceases to be a prominent element in the text from this point forward, the end of the Anglo-Danish wars is not the end of Cnut's fighting. Emma brings to Cnut both her fertility as a mother and a new, fertile violence to replace the sterile, debilitating clash of equals:

Gaudebat enim rex, nobilissimis insperato se usum thalamis; haec autem hinc praestissima uirtute coniugis, hinc etiam spe gratulabunda accendebatur futurae prolis. Hinc ineffabiliter quoque uterque gaudebat exercitus opes suas communibus sperans augendas uiribus, ut rei postmodum porbavit exitus. Quam plures enim populi domiti bello, gentesque complures longe distantes uita, moribus, etiam et lingua, aeternaliter regi regiaeque posteritati annua compulsi sunt soluere uectigalia!

For the king rejoiced that he had unexpectedly entered upon a most noble marriage; the lady, on the other hand, was inspired both by the excellence of her husband, and by the delightful hope of future offspring. Both armies also rejoiced indescribably, looking forward to increasing their possessions by joining forces, which was how events afterwards turned out. For very many peoples were subdued in war, and very many nations extremely diverse in habits, customs and speech were permanently compelled to pay annual tribute to the king and to his royal issue. (II.17.3-9)

The increase of the family and the increase of power and wealth through conquest are here part of the same process of establishing Cnut's dynasty. Emma's female role of motherhood is complementary to the male task of violence. The account of Cnut's marriage to Emma incorporates alternative ways of thinking about Emma (ender of violence, bringer of victory, mother, Norman, English), the conquest (clash of equals, subjection of the English) and war in general (horrifying and destructive, productive of wealth and honour). Emma's womanhood sets her apart from war and she thus represents peace and the family in opposition to suffering and conflict. At the same time, it can be argued that the Encomiast appropriates the military glory of Swegn and Cnut for Emma; after all, their deeds are the substance of her story. Certainly Emma is made to share a power that is founded on the force of arms.

The *Encomium's* account of recent history is shaped by the perspective of its patroness. The account reflects, in the first place, the uncertainty of contemporary politics and especially the problems of Emma's position, and, in the second place, the influence of a plurality of literary and cultural traditions. Violence is not the main theme of the text, though it is a prominent part of the story and an important aspect of the ideology of kingship. As we have seen, the place of violence in the *Encomium* is complicated by issues of gender. There is a push-pull relationship between Emma's womanhood and a martial ideal of kingship, prompting the Encomiast to appropriate the victories of Swegn and Cnut for Emma yet also to concentrate more on the display of force than on actual fighting and to reach for pacific images such as the fecund mother and the loyal wife. There are thus numerous and sometimes contradictory impulses informing a portrayal of violence whose complexity is a side-effect of the difficulties of telling Emma's story.

Looking further at the texture of violence in the *Encomium*, we are led to consider the change in modes of representation between books one and two and book three. It is in books one and two that an unusually nuanced and many-layered understanding of violence is particularly in evidence. Such an understanding is enabled by the lack of moral polarization between English and Danes. The Encomiast allows a voice to the defeated group (as *Liðsmannaflokkr* finally does not), reflecting the plural national identity of Emma through her two marriages and also her active/passive relationship to war. Emma is given no direct role in the war. However, there are plenty of precedents, for example in hagiography, for a woman's involvement in murder, and this prompts a return to stark moral contrasts for the tale of Alfred's death in book three. Book three thus gives a much simpler account of the moral and psychological dimensions of violence, but it continues other themes that place violence within a wider sense of the workings of politics. Of particular interest, since it brings together both the problem of great but potentially treacherous men and the issue of the queen's role, is the theme that relates violence to counsel.

The Danish conquest

The Encomiast's purpose is to praise Emma and to persuade the powerful men of the day, including her sons, that the joint rule of Emma, Edward and

Harthacnut is the ideal resolution of the upheavals of the past decades. This purpose would not have been served by demonizing or despising either the English or the Danes; therefore the Danish conquest – or conquests: conquest by Swegn and reconquest by Cnut – is presented in an even-handed way. Both sides show ‘might of body and boldness of heart’ (*ui corporis uirtuteque animi*, II.16.25). More praise is lavished on Swegn and Cnut than on the English and their leaders; Cnut is depicted as an exemplary Christian king, generous in giving to the church and the needy (II.19-22), while Swegn’s virtue is more connected to his martial qualities, his popularity with his soldiers and his success in war (I.1). However, we should note that Edmund Ironside is depicted as a valiant prince who inspires his ‘noble followers’ (*nobiles [...] suos*, II.9.25) by his speech and example. He is bitterly mourned at his death, and the Encomiast offers a brief prayer for his soul (*cui Deus omne gaudium tribuat in celesti solio*, ‘to him may God grant every joy in the heavenly kingdom’, II.14.7-8). Verbal parallelisms underscore the parity of the combatants: the English are as eager to oppose Cnut (*feruentissime [...] ardentis*, ‘burning most fiercely’ II.5.9) as he is to fight them (*feruentissimum*, ‘very eager’ II.6.3).

Thus far the *Encomium* parallels *Liðsmannaflokkr* in its generosity to the English who are defeated by the Danes; as in the poem, a noble adversary (Ulfcetel, Edmund) reflects well on the eventual victor.⁸⁵ However, whereas *Liðsmannaflokkr*’s contrasts in fact all serve the perspective of the successful Scandinavian warrior, the *Encomium* truly incorporates contradictory views of the same events: it conveys the contrasting perspectives of the opposed peoples. Emma Brogan shows how book two traces the changing English perception of Cnut, from mere youth (*iuuenis*, I.1.3) to ‘prince of the Danes’ (*Danorum principem*, II.8.4) to one they themselves address formally as king (*o rex*, II.13.8).⁸⁶ Swegn’s conquest is assessed from both Danish and English standpoints. Swegn’s reign is described as glorious (*pauco superuixit tempore, sed tamen [...] gloriose*, ‘he survived for a period that was short, though it was glorious’, I.5.4-5) and he dies as a Christian

⁸⁵ See *Liðsmannaflokkr* stanza 6.

⁸⁶ Brogan, ‘Perceptions of Kingship’, pp. 39-40. One may question to what extent *princeps* and *rex* are hierarchically differentiated in medieval Latin, but the *Encomium* certainly conveys a rising English respect for Cnut; in II.8 they declare Edmund a bold/strong man (*uirum fortem* II.8.4) and

king. Nonetheless, he is aware that he is hated as an invader. The invasion is presented as both just and unjust. Earlier in book one we have seen Swegn's men exhorting him to attack England as a lord rightly subduing a rebellious subject and his allies:

Non tam graue dominus noster patiatur dispendium, sed abiens cupientem ducat exercitum, et illi Turchil contumacem adquiremus cum satellitibus, eis quoque federatos Anglos cum omnibus eorum possessionibus.

Let not our lord suffer so great a loss, but go forth leading his willing army, and we will subdue for him the contumacious Thorkell together with his companions, and also the English who are leagued with them, and all their possessions. (I.2.10-13)

The invasion seems right and necessary to the Danes, but the English who decide to expel Cnut after Swegn's death do so 'mindful that his father had unjustly invaded their country' (*memores quod pater eius iniuste suos inuasisset fines*, II.1.2-3). Here the *Encomiast* makes us see the rationality of the English view; memory held a central place in medieval thinking about intellect, and the decision to fight is presented as a product of sober moral judgement.⁸⁷ To Cnut, however, English resistance is 'the unforeseen audacity of barbarian fury' (*inprouisam temeritatem barbarici furoris*, II.2.14). It is especially striking that the *Encomiast* has the Dane speak of the English in terms of raging, irrational barbarity, the very stereotype that was so often applied to the Vikings by the chroniclers of the age.⁸⁸ The *Encomiast* does not comment on the disjunction between English and Danish perspectives, but the toleration of such disjunction in the text is unsettling; the *Encomium* conveys an emergent sense of the instability and relativity of the ways in which people seek to justify violence and to label their enemies.

This hint at the relativity of how people justify violence can be linked to the *Encomiast's* ambivalent approach to the glory of war and, more specifically, to the

preferable to the *Danorum principem*, but in II.11 they acknowledge their enemy is stronger (*fortiori hoste* II.12.10) and send messengers who address Cnut as *rex*.

⁸⁷ See M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 10 (1990), especially pp. 1-15. St Augustine on memory: *Confessions*, ed. J. O'Donnell, 3 vols (Oxford, 1992), X.8 (12)-26 (37) (vol. I, pp. 123-34); *Sancti Aurelii Augustini de trinitate libri XV*, ed. W. J. Mountain, 2 vols, Corpus christianorum series latina 50 and 50a (1968), X.xi (vol. I, pp. 123-34).

beginnings of an awareness that violent acts can be morally contradictory. I have already mentioned in relation to the contradictory relationship of Emma to violence that the *Encomiast* both celebrates military might and depicts Emma ending the 'accursed and loathsome troubles of war' (*dampnosos ingratosque labores belli*, II.16.24-5). This point can be amplified. For example, Eiríkr, *uir [...] omni honorificentia dignus* ('a man worthy of all honour' II.7.6) is shown lustily looting and destroying. Eiríkr's activities are described with energy and relish; a series of parallel clauses culminates in a crescendo:

partem terrae aggressus spolia diripuit, uicos inuadendo destruxit, occurrentes sibi hostes domuit, et multos ex eis captiuauit, tandemque uictoriosus ad socios cum spoliis redit.

he fell upon a part of the country, seized booty, attacked and destroyed villages, overcame the enemies who met him, captured many of them, and at length returned to his comrades victorious with the spoil. (II.7.7-9)

On the other hand, elsewhere we are made aware of the gruesome and painful side of victory. After Ashingdon the Danes 'passed the remainder of the night among the bodies of the dead' (*pernoctant quod supererat inter mutuorum cadauera* II.11.1-2). Still more unpleasant is the aftermath of the first battle of Cnut's campaign:

Tandem ergo potiti optata uictoria suorum quae reperire poterant tumulabant membra.

Accordingly they ultimately gained the victory which they desired, and buried such of the remains of their comrades as they could find. (II.6.20-21)

The nastiness of this image is shown to be relatively mild, however, by an allusion to Lucan immediately following (*Encomium* II.7.1, *Pharsalia* III.761-2). The context of Lucan's line is a sea-battle that ends hideously with the families of the losing army contesting to claim corpses mutilated beyond recognition.

The dual vision of war as simultaneously glorious and ghastly is something the *Encomium* shares with both its classical and vernacular (Norse and Old English) antecedents. In Old English poetry the glory of battle is frequently invoked (*tir æt*

⁸⁸ See, for example, Æthelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (Edinburgh, 1962),

getohte in *Maldon*, l. 104) but so are the corpses of the slain and the carrion who feed on them; similar motifs recur in skaldic verse.⁸⁹ In classical poetry, especially in Virgil, there is a sense not only that glory and horror run side by side but that the same acts of violence can be interpreted in different ways morally and psychologically. For example, at the end of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas, aflame to avenge Pallas, kills Turnus without heeding his pleas for mercy; this act can be seen as an expression of *pietas*, obedience to the obligations of loyalty, or as an upsurge of cruel rage.⁹⁰ (We may note how a moral judgement of Aeneas hinges on an assessment of his motivation.) R. J. Tarrant reads this episode as symptomatic of the ambivalence of the *Aeneid* towards war and empire, using ambivalent in the sense of containing ‘a powerful and continuing tension between opposites’.⁹¹ In the *Encomium* the tension of opposites is not powerful or continuing, but it is apparent from time to time in a way that sets the text apart from other comparable accounts. In the battle descriptions conventional elements shared with Old English battle poetry or previous historical records of Viking attack are part of a richer texture in which the *Encomiast* begins to reach after the insights into morality and motivation available in his classical sources. This blend of familiar and less familiar elements can be illustrated by looking more closely at one particular battle-sequence, the first battle of Cnut’s invasion in book two, chapter six.

The *Encomium* does not provide detailed tactical descriptions of battle; like other texts of the time, and like its classical models, it concentrates in a general way on motions towards victory on the one hand, defeat and flight on the other, enlivened by the speeches and heroic or cowardly deeds of leaders.⁹² The battle of II.6 is preceded by the portrait of Cnut’s fleet, shining with gold ornaments, in II.4, and by an account of the advance to the battlefield in II.5. Parallels between the *Encomiast*’s technique of battle-description and that of Old English poetry include

pp. 42, 43 and 45.

⁸⁹ On the beasts of battle, see M. S. Griffith, ‘Convention and originality in the Old English “beasts of battle” typescene’, *ASE* 22 (1993), 179-199.

⁹⁰ *Aeneid* XII.919-52. Text in *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).

⁹¹ R. J. Tarrant, ‘Poetry and Power: Virgil’s poetry in contemporary context’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. C. Martindale (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 169-87; quotation from p. 180, discussion of the killing of Turnus p. 181.

⁹² The Penguin translator of Sallust comments on his lack of interest in the details of military operations: S. A. Handford, ‘The Life and Writings of Sallust’, in Sallust, *The Jugurthine War / The Conspiracy of Catiline*, trans. S. A. Handford (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp. 7-33 (pp. 9-10).

the visual imagery of shining weapons (II.4.7-8) - an element of the 'approach to battle' theme detailed by Fry⁹³ - a concern for honour and shame, and the prominence of boasts and exhortations.⁹⁴ In this last matter the *Encomium* displays also the influence of speech-making in classical historiography; Sallust provides numerous examples, and in II.9 Edmund's speech before Ashingdon owes a verbal debt to Catiline's speech before his last stand near Pistoia.⁹⁵ Thorkell's speech before the battle is a boast that he can win it for his king, but his assessment of his chances has a flavour of the reasoned persuasions Roman historians put into the mouths of generals:

"Ego", inquit, "hoc certamen domino meo accurabo cum meis euincere, nec regem meum ad bellandum, utpote iuuenem, feruentissimum huic misceri patiar pugnae. Nam, si uictor fuero, regi ipsi triumphabo; si autem cecidero siue tergum dedero, non Anglis gloriae erit adea, quia rex supererit, qui et prelium restaurabit et fortasse uictor meas iniurias uindicabit."

[Thorkell] said, "I will undertake to win this fight for my lord with my troops, and will not permit my king to be involved in this battle, very eager to fight as he is, inasmuch as he is a youth. For if I be victorious, I will win on the king's own behalf; but if I fall or turn my back, it will not be to the glory of the English, for the reason that the king will be left, and he will give battle again, and perhaps as a victor will avenge my injuries." (II.6.2-6)

We may note that Thorkell makes a tactical proposal here, that the king should hold his forces in reserve while Thorkell makes the initial assault, but the proposal is presented in terms of glory and vengeance, the need to preserve the honour of the king through victory and to retaliate against wrongs.

Another respect in which the *Encomium* builds on a theme already prominent in Old English literature but explored in different ways by classical authors is the way the description of the battle is focused on the mental states and motivations of the fighters.⁹⁶ We have already noted the way the Encomiast stresses the eagerness

⁹³ D. K. Fry, 'Themes and Type-Scenes in *Elene* 1-113', *Speculum* 44 (1969), 35-45.

⁹⁴ For the *gylp*, see footnote 24 above.

⁹⁵ *Encomium* II.9.23: *Pugnate ergo pro libertate et patria*, 'therefore, fight for your liberty and your country'; *Catiline* lviii.11: *nos pro patria, pro libertate, pro vita certamus*, 'We are battling for country, for freedom, for life'. Text and translation of Sallust in *Sallust*, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (London and New York, 1920).

⁹⁶ On the importance of psychological states in *Beowulf*, see for example R. N. Ringler, 'Him seo wen geleaf: The Design for Irony in Grendel's Last Visit to Heorot', *Speculum* 41 (1966), 49-67.

of both Cnut and the English for the fight. The language of mental readiness blends with that of display and again with that of violence itself. The English are *feruentissime rebellare ardentēs* ('burning most fiercely to renew the war', II.5.9). *Ardeo* belongs to the Encomiast's preferred vocabulary for the fervour of warriors; other examples occur at II.7.3, II.10.8 and III.8.11-12. The last reference is to Harthacnut burning to avenge Alfred. Campbell identifies the phrase used, *animo ardebat*, as a borrowing from *Jugurtha* xxxix.5 where Albinus burns to atone for his brother's failure by pursuing Jugurtha. Thus the use of *ardeo* in III.8 brings together an implication of warrior eagerness with the compulsion of family honour and obligation. *Ardeo* is also used for the shining of the ornaments and weapons in Cnut's ships (*ardebat aurum in rostris*, 'gold shone on the prows', II.4.8; *dracones obrizo ardentēs*, 'dragons burning with pure gold', II.4.13). The magnificence of Cnut's ships is in itself a threat, a sign of power.⁹⁷ Indeed the imagery of shining and light is also an imagery of fire and, in conjunction with weapons, recalls the terror of harrying and burning that runs through the *Æthelredian Chronicle*:

Tantus quoque decor inerat pupibus, ut [...] flammæ magis quam lignæ uiderentur [...] hinc resplenduit fulgur armorum, illinc uero flamma dependentium clipeorum.

So great, also, was the ornamentation of the ships, that [...] they seemed of flame rather than of wood [...] the flashing of arms shone in one place, in another the flame of suspended shields. (II.4.5-8)

Ardeo leads us from inner readiness, to display and threat, to active violence. To close the circle, *fortis* links physical to mental strength. We are told that, in the battle, *Angli uero in primis fortiores dira cede Danos obruncarunt* ('the English, indeed, were the bolder at first, and cut down the Danes with terrible slaughter', II.6.13). *Fortiores*, translated as 'bolder' by Campbell, can also mean 'stronger'. It is both their fighting spirit and their physical power that enables the English to kill Danes. Mental disposition, however, is the determining factor. Thorkell relies 'on courage rather than numbers' (*magis [...] uirtute quam multitudine*, II.6.10-11). The Danish rally that enables them to win the battle is presented as a reassessment of the situation, bringing mental and emotional change:

⁹⁷ E. M. Tyler, ' "The eyes of the beholders were dazzled"', p.260.

Danos [...] ducis alloquio retenti memoresque uirtutis fugam erubescerent. Namque memorabat ille abesse diffugium, in terra scilicet hostes, et a litore longe remotas pupes, ideoque, si non uincerent, quod pariter occumbere deberent. Unde illi animosiores effecti in prelio ilico manifestant, quam periculosa sit desperatio. Enimuero de refugio fugae desperati tanta in hostes debachati sunt insania, ut non tantum mortuorum aspiceres corpora cadentia, uerum etiam uiuorum ictus declinantia.

The Danes [...] held back by their leader's words and being mindful of their own bravery [...] regarded flight with shame. For he mentioned that there was no place to which they might flee, that they were, of course, foes in the land, and that their ships were far from the shore, and that accordingly, if they should not conquer, they would necessarily fall together. After they had been rendered of better courage by this, they forthwith showed in battle how dangerous a thing is desperation. For despairing of a refuge to which to flee, they raged on against the enemy with such madness, that you would have seen not only the bodies of the dead falling, but also of the living, as they avoided the blows. (II.6.13-20)

I have quoted this passage at some length because it shows where the interest of the *Encomiast* in courage and motivation departs from that of, for instance, the *Maldon*-poet. Like the heroes of *Maldon*, the Danes are spurred on by their sense of shame and by mutual exhortation: they seek to be brave and win honour. But the *Encomiast* also shows how intimately courage is interwoven with fear. The alternative to success is death. The Danish effort is at an exertion of mental control, a conscious performance of courage; the collocation *memores uirtutis*, found here, is one Sallust uses more than once to express the self-control of Roman soldiers facing sudden attack or strong opposition (*Jugurtha* xcvi.5, *Catiline* lx.3). At the same time, the Danes suffer loss of control: they are *unable* to flee and surrender to a frenzy of despair. This is not a heroic scene; the clear implication is that the warriors would flee if they could. Indeed, the *insania* of the Danes links them to the murderers of Alfred (who condemn him *ab insania*, 'in their madness', III.6.9). Yet the battle is proceeding according to a plan offered *cum sanae mentis* by Thorkell ('out of sound reasoning', II.6.6). Rationality and madness, despair and courage, terror and honour fuel each other.

Again, the *Encomiast's* Latin sources offer parallels. For example, Sallust shows generals spurring their men on by warning them of the dangers of flight and failure (*Catiline*, lviii.1-3 and 13-17, *Jugurtha* li.4); more dramatically, Aeneas and his companions succumb to despairing frenzy during the sack of Troy (*Aeneid*,

ii.347-69). Thorkell's fighting provides a specific point of contact with a moment in the *Aeneid* where *pietas* and cruelty march together. The statement that Thorkell *queque obuia metebat* ('mowed down all that came in his way' II.6.12) echoes Aeneas's rage immediately after the death of Pallas (*proxima quaeque metit*, 'everything near he harvested' x.513); Aeneas kills a man who pleads for mercy, just as later he kills Turnus, and he seizes the sons of Sulmo to be human sacrifices at Pallas's pyre (x.517-36). The Encomiast's reading of Virgil is largely for his vocabulary of imperial splendour, as we see in the concentration of Virgilian borrowings round the description of Swegn's fleet and in the Encomiast's declaration that Virgil wrote in praise of Octavian (Arg.7-9). Here, however, the *Encomium* resonates with the darker, more conflicted side of Virgil's vision. The implication of moral ambivalence in the verbal borrowing from Virgil and the moral ambivalence that can be detected more widely in the battle-description are mutually reinforcing.

The avoidance of a sharp polarization between heroic/saintly Danes and cowardly/evil English (or vice versa) in the depiction of the Danish conquest enables an exploration of the moral and psychological complexities of violence. The portrayal of battle remains stylized and extreme: the image of the living falling alongside the dead in their fear, for example, is an inspired stroke of artistic licence. Nonetheless, especially in matters of motivation, the Encomiast acknowledges plurality and recognizes potentially discreditable elements alongside more honourable or Christian ones. In book three, however, the Encomiast returns to a more black-and-white approach.

Hagiographical violence: the martyrdom of Alfred Ætheling

The black-and-white demarcations of the description of Alfred's murder are a response to the most urgently debated act of violence narrated in the text: it is precisely because the death of Alfred is cloudy and ambiguous that it is presented as clear-cut. The hagiographical structure may well reflect the early flourishing of a cult;⁹⁸ it is also calculated to distance Emma from any suggestion of complicity in

⁹⁸ Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity', p. 78.

her son's death and to associate her with the wronged, passive saint. Emma is presented as distanced from violence in that she is both passive towards Harold and protected against him: he attacks her sons because he dare not attack her directly (III.2.1-3). In Harthacnut's reign (and indeed in Edward's), the murder of Emma's and Æthelred's younger son was still a matter for recrimination and suspicion, and the Encomiast was clearly concerned to exonerate Emma of all possible blame for the killing.⁹⁹

Accordingly, Harold Harefoot is made responsible for every detail of Alfred's downfall, including the letter that brings him to England. Harold is presented as an all-round villain; as details accumulate he becomes more and more a typical persecutor of martyrs. He is not called a king but a *tyrannus*, 'tyrant' (III.4.1), or indeed an *infandissim[us] tyrann[us]*, 'abominable tyrant' (III.5.2).¹⁰⁰ He and his companions are *Dei inimic[i]*, 'foes of God' (III.4.5-6). Harold's rift with the church when the Archbishop refuses to recognise him as king makes him an enemy of Christianity (*uerum etiam uniuersam fugeret Christianitatis religionem*, 'indeed he even turned from the whole Christian religion', III.1.25-6). This hostility is at first manifested in a tendency to go hunting rather than attend mass; a few chapters later Harold is referred to as 'the persecutor of the Christian religion and faith' (*persecutor Christianae religionis fideique*, III.7.10). Clearly there is some progression between neglect of mass and active persecution of the faith: the Encomiast presents his characters in increasingly extreme terms as the outline of the *passio* hardens around them.

This is particularly true of the dead Alfred. At first the contrast of evil tyranny and saintly virtue is focused on Emma herself; it is she who prays for God's help while the usurper lays his plots (III.2), and his attack on her sons is an indirect attack on her. The 'noble youths' (*iuuen[es] nobilissim[i]*, III.4.6) are implicitly criticised for their gullibility:

⁹⁹ Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [xxix]-[xxxviii].

¹⁰⁰ Abbo calls Hinguar, who presides over the martyrdom of St Edmund, a *tyrannus*: Abbo, 'Life of St Edmund', in *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. M. Winterbottom, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts (1972), pp. 67-87 (5/40, 10/4).

Legunt dolos eius nescii, et proh dolor nimis falsitati creduli inconsulte remandant generici, unum eorum ad eam esse uenturum

They read its [the letter's] wiles in their innocence, and alas too trustful of the fabrication, they unwisely replied to their parent that one of them would come to her (III.4.3-4)

The word Campbell translates as 'in their innocence', *nescii*, would perhaps be better rendered 'unknowing' or 'ignorant', which are the translations offered by Lewis and Short.¹⁰¹ Alfred is presented very much as a martyred innocent, a popular category of saint in Anglo-Saxon devotion,¹⁰² but in this passage the emphasis is rather on the failure of the brothers to understand the situation or to take proper advice (*inconsulte*). They show up badly beside Cnut, who is repeatedly called wise and shown taking counsel with his associates (he is *sapiens* in refusing single combat to Edmund Ironside, II.8.8; when he receives Edmund's offer to divide the kingdom he 'did not answer rashly, but...sought advice from his companions', *non temere respondit, sed [...] consilium a suis quaesivit*, II.13.14-5). It is not until they are attacked that Alfred and his men (Edward, of course, being in Normandy) are called 'innocent' in the moral sense, *innocent[es]*, *insontes* (III.5.3 and 5).¹⁰³

From this point on, however, Alfred is elevated into a martyr after the typical pattern. His death is structured on the model of the early Christian martyrs and the supreme example of Christ himself: mockery, torture and a parody of a trial (men are 'set up as judges', *iudices constituti*, III.6.10) leading to execution. Like Ælfric in the saints' lives examined in chapter three, the Encomiast makes use of the paradox of humiliation that turns to glory, defeat that turns to power. Alfred is blinded 'as a sign of contempt' (*ad contemptum*, III.6.11), though at the command of men themselves 'more contemptible' (*contemptibiliores*, III.6.9); in the text's most intimate description of an act of violence, we are shown the brutal indignity of the blinding, men standing on Alfred's limbs and chest to hold him still for the torture (III.6.11-13). Yet the ætheling is buried 'honourably' (*honorifice*, III.6.18) by the monks of Ely, and subsequently reveals his power, his *uirtus*, in miracles (III.6.18-

¹⁰¹ Lewis and Short, p. 1204.

¹⁰² C. Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity: revisiting the cult of murdered and martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saints', *EME* 9 (2000), 53-83 (pp. 77-8).

¹⁰³ See Lewis and Short, pp. 957-8 and 967, and Latham, *Dictionary*, pp. 1388 and 1407.

21). The Encomiast comments that for Emma he who was a son has become a heavenly patron (*in caelis patronum*, III.6.23).

The description of Alfred's betrayal and death is an artistic set-piece, shaped for maximum emotional impact. In a direct address to Emma, the only place in the text save for the prologue where she appears in the second rather than the third person, the Encomiast dwells elaborately on her maternal suffering. A rhetorical question (a favourite device) introduces a vivid picture of his own horror:

Quod hoc in dolore detineor? Mihi ipsi scribenti tremit calamus, dum horreo quae iuuenis passus est beatissimus.

Why do I linger over this sorrow? As I write my pen trembles, and I am horror-stricken at what that most blessed youth suffered. (III.6.13-14)

The martyrdom is presented with a sense of strong personal, emotional engagement: passionate rage against the killers, passionate sorrow for the slain. The sense of an absolute opposition between right and wrong, saints and persecutors, us and them is reinforced by the Encomiast's insistently evaluative language, constant superlatives and elaborate use of antithesis (comparing the slaughter of Alfred's men to the decimation of the Theban legion):

Ille enim rex paganissimus Christianorum nouem pepercit, occiso decimo; at hi profanissimi falsissimique Christiani bonorum Christianorum nouem peremerunt, decimo dimisso. Ille, licet paganus Christianos trucidaret, patulo tamen in campo eos nexibus non in retitos decollari iussit, ut gloriosos miles. At isti, licet nomine Christiani, actu tamen paganissimi, lanceolarum suarum ictibus non merentes heroas catenatos mactabant ut sues.

For that utterly pagan ruler spared nine of the Christians and killed the tenth, but these most profane and false Christians killed nine of the good Christians and let the tenth go. That pagan, though he massacred Christians, nevertheless ordered that they should be beheaded on an open plain unfettered by bonds, like glorious soldiers. But these, though they were in name Christians, were nevertheless in their actions totally pagan, and butchered the innocent heroes with blows from their spears bound as they were, like swine. (III.5.10-15).

The Encomiast reveals a talent for invective, not only in his obsessive, savage return to the ideal and reality of 'Christian' and 'pagan' but in his command

of animal imagery. If the victims are killed 'like swine', their killers are 'worse than dogs' (*canibus deteriores*, III.5.16).

It is not hard to tell whose side we should be on. Emma is identified wholly with her martyred son, whose death she laments and perhaps might have shared (*si persecutor [...] adesset, non uitae discrimen subire fugeret*, 'if the persecutor [...] had been present, she would not have shrunk from encountering mortal danger', III.7.10-11). Through Alfred she has a kind of vicarious sanctity. The absolute oppositions, the strongly religious and evaluative language and the stereotyped roles of wicked aggressor and innocent victim in this part of the *Encomium* contrast instructively with the ambiguities of the earlier part. Interestingly, though III.5, like other high points in the text, contains a cluster of Virgilian phrases, they are culled from contexts that do not particularly deepen the meaning of the narrative: the capture of Sinon, the Cyclops episode and an inquiry into natural processes in the *Georgics*.¹⁰⁴ Virgil here is only a stylistic resource; violence is framed and interpreted along starker and simpler lines than Virgil provides.

Nonetheless, book three is not without its puzzles. Notably, the role of Godwine has been debated: is he cleared of all blame for the murder (he was, after all, a dangerous man to offend), or is he implicitly accused?¹⁰⁵ The theme of the loyalty or treachery of great men runs throughout the *Encomium* and produces loose ends even in this, the most stridently interpreted episode of violence in the text. Emma's own part also weaves the martyrdom of Alfred back into a more many-stranded understanding of violence. In my discussion of Emma and Cnut's marriage I argued that Emma's relationship to war is both active and passive: she is wholly excluded from the war of conquest and yet a bringer of victory, a powerful queen and yet a woman in a state based on male military force. In the narrative of Alfred's death Emma, according to Pauline Stafford, retreats into passivity: her best defence

¹⁰⁴ *Encomium* III.5.6: *uinctisque post tergum manibus*, *Aeneid* ii.57: *manus...post terga reuinctam*; *Encomium* III.5.20-21: *tanto discrimine*, *Aeneid* ii.629: *discrimine tanto*; *Encomium* III.5.22: *ruptis...obicibus*, *Georgics* ii.480: *obicibus ruptis*.

¹⁰⁵ This is a matter where Keynes and Campbell differ in their interpretations, Keynes emphasizing the Encomiast's circumspection in refraining from an accusation of Godwine, Campbell the ease of reading between the lines to detect Godwine's guilt: Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 reprint', pp. [lxiii]-[lxv], Campbell, 'Introduction', pp. [cv] and [cxlvii] / xxiii and lrv. See also M. W. Campbell, 'The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', p. 29, n. 13 and p. 36; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, p. 36.

against accusers is to be represented as a victim along with her son.¹⁰⁶ However, the aftermath of Alfred's death sees her propelled into action, first consulting with her allies and making the decision to go into exile, then summoning her remaining sons to plan an invasion of England. Emma's role here is initially reactive, but she is also a maker of decisions and a giver of counsel. Counsel and violence are repeatedly associated in the *Encomium*, and the relationship of violence and counsel provides a way of talking about the positions not only of Emma but of men like Godwine, Thorkell and Eadric in the workings of power.

Violence and counsel

Along with the display and distribution of treasure, violence and counsel are bound together as sources and expressions of the power of the king. The role of the king as treasure-giver is a commonplace; moreover, the different aspects of treasure in the *Encomium* have been acutely analysed by Elizabeth Tyler.¹⁰⁷ Here it suffices to note that the interrelationship of treasure and violence is many-faceted. Swegn's power is based on his ability to command the loyalty of his troops, who have supported him against his father; these troops are motivated to fight by treasure: 'he had rendered them submissive and faithful to himself by manifold and generous munificence' (*quos multa liberali munificentia sibi fecerat obnoxios et fideles*, I.1.21-2). It is not merely that the king's ability to wield the violence of others is based on his capacity to offer rewards and plunder. Swegn's army risk incurring 'the king's anger' (*iram regis*, I.3.12) if they fail to muster and are implicitly bound to him by fear of violence (the violence of the housecarls?) as well as promise of treasure. I have discussed above the way that the display of treasure in Cnut's ships acts as a sign of violence and an advertisement of strength. Treasure is acquired by violence, rewards violence and threatens violence; violence is a quest for power by coercion, treasure-giving for power by inducement.

The pairing of violence and counsel is equally central to the Encomiast's portrayal of power. The Latin term *consilium* marries the senses of wisdom, advice, consultation, a decision, a plan and (because of widespread confusion with

¹⁰⁶ Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p. 36.

concilium) a council or assembly.¹⁰⁸ Wisdom is seemingly the active sense when, in the Argument, Swegn is described as ‘mighty alike in courage and arms and also in counsel’ (*uirtute armis quoque pollens et consilio*, Arg. 19). Repeatedly in the *Encomium*, admired figures are described as having complementary virtues of action and reflection; the Encomiast employs the topos of *sapientia et fortitudo* which forms a standard part of literary examinations of heroism and kingship from Virgil to *Beowulf* and later.¹⁰⁹ Of Swegn, again, the Encomiast exclaims ‘How truly actively and wisely he conducted his worldly affairs’ (*Quam strenue uero prudenterque [...] deposuerit negotia*, I.1.14-15); Archbishop Æthelnoth is ‘a man gifted with high courage and wisdom’ (*uirum omni uirtute et sapientia preeditum*, III.1.13); Cnut is ‘that active man’ (*uir strenuus*, II.15.1) and also ‘master of indescribable wisdom’ (*indicibili prudentia pollens*, II.15.3-4).

As was indicated earlier, Cnut’s wisdom is particularly stressed; the emphasis reinforces the presentation of Cnut as a pious and holy king, a patron of churches and monasteries and a benefactor of the poor (II.20-22). Wisdom and piety are two sides of the same coin for King Alfred, as we have seen in chapter one. In the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care*, Alfred indicates his belief that the wise king will be rewarded by God with the defeat of his enemies. The *Encomium* shows debts to this vein of thinking: the turning points of both the war of conquest and Harthacnut’s rivalry with Harold are attributed to divine intervention, which causes the deaths of Æthelred, Edmund and Harold (II.7.15-19, II.14.2-6 and III.9.14-18). Cnut’s wisdom, however, is also a matter of military canniness. In refusing single combat with Edmund he shows an ability both to weigh up his own chances and to judge the proper time for campaigning:

rex sapiens dicitur sic respondisse: “Ego tempus luctae prestolabor congruae, dum non casum suspectus certus fuero uictoriae; tu uero, qui aues duellum in hieme, caue ne deficias etiam aptiori tempore.”

¹⁰⁷ Tyler, ‘“The eyes of the beholders”’.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis and Short, pp. 232-3, and Latham, *Dictionary*, p. 452.

¹⁰⁹ On *sapientia et fortitudo* as a Virgilian theme made into a medieval topos, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Bollingen Series 36 (1953), pp. 173-6; the classic essay on *sapientia et fortitudo* in *Beowulf* is R. E. Kaske, ‘*Sapientia et fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme in *Beowulf*’, *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958), 423-57.

the king, being a wise man, is said to have answered thus: "I will await a time, when contest will be fitting, and when anticipating no misfortune, I shall be sure of victory; but as for you, who desire combat in the winter, beware lest you fail to appear even when the time is more appropriate." (II.8.8-10)

Cnut's heroic style, in Tom Shippey's terms, is that of the prudent badger rather than the hot-headed boar – fighting doggedly, but refusing to be drawn into a bad position.¹¹⁰ His wisdom governs his violence and makes it more effective. Wisdom and courage, or wisdom and might, are qualities that can be contrasted (as for example in *Aeneid* XII.19-21 where Latinus contrasts his own cautious pondering with Turnus's hot-headed valour). In the *Encomium*, they are interdependent, and wisdom is often displayed as it is applied to war.

The *Encomium* is full of counsel scenes, planning and consultation. Most of this planning is devoted to problems of violence: whether and how to attack, how to maintain face, how to respond to danger. Although little attention is paid to the detailed manoeuvres of campaigns, the *fact* of strategy is very prominent. Thus we are shown Thorkell proposing a plan for the first battle of Cnut's invasion (II.6.1-8), Cnut's friends finding a 'plan to save his honour' (*sui honoris consili[um]*) when faced with overwhelming English opposition (II.1.4-7), Eadric counselling a division of the kingdom (II.12-13), Harold Harefoot plotting against Alfred and Edward (III.2) and Emma consulting Edward about attacking Harold (III.8.1-7); still more examples could be given. Planning is a necessary adjunct to battle. After Ashingdon, both Danes and English are shown retiring to seek 'wiser counsels' (*saniora [...] consilia*, II.11.7-8). The application of *sanus* ('sane, healthy') to *consilium* suggests the way counsel tempers the frenzy of war; it is particularly striking in context, for Ashingdon ends in macabre fashion with the Danes spending the night 'among the bodies of the dead' (*inter mortuorum cadauera*, II.11.2).

The prominence of wisdom, planning and consultation in the *Encomium* is one of the ways in which Emma is integrated into the workings of power. A major part of the role of the early medieval queen was to give counsel, and wisdom was

¹¹⁰ T. A. Shippey, 'Boar and Badger: An Old English Heroic Antithesis?', in *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 16 (1985), 220-39.

considered a necessary virtue of queens.¹¹¹ Sedulius Scottus envisages the queen wisely admonishing her husband in the ways of God ('by the counsel of a prudent wife many benefits are produced that are pleasing to the Almighty'),¹¹² royal wives in Dudo's history are regularly described as beautiful and prudent.¹¹³ For Anglo-Saxonists, the most familiar image of the counselling queen is Wealhtheow, dispensing treasure and advice together in Heorot; the biblical pattern is Queen Esther, who intercedes with her husband on behalf of the Jews.¹¹⁴ Such women exercise a constrained power, limited by the female role of mother and wife, geared to the female life-cycle.¹¹⁵ Wealhtheow's resources are words and gifts, and the kinds of gifts she gives mark out the female as opposed to the male sphere: ornaments and textiles rather than weaponry.¹¹⁶ Esther is able to persuade her husband but elaborately displays her subordination to him; she is an example of wifely obedience, in contrast to the previous queen, Vashti.¹¹⁷ Emma is introduced into the text as 'the most distinguished of women [...] for her beauty and her wisdom' (*pulcritudinis et prudentiae [...] mulierum praestantissima*, II.16.6-7), a suitable counsellor for Cnut as well as an ornament to his court and his bed. However, her wisdom comes into its own when she is shown planning for herself, not offering advice to her husband but taking it from those who owe her allegiance:

Igitur pro re atque tempore quam plurimos potest sibi fidos optimates congregat. His presentibus secreta cordis sui enucleat. A quibus etiam intio dominae probato consilio, commeatus classicum eorum apparatur exilio.

¹¹¹ On the centrality of counsel to the role of the queen, see Stafford, 'Portrayal of Royal Women', p. 145; *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 25, 100 and 120.

¹¹² *Prudentis uxoris consilio multa proveniunt utilia quae sunt Omnipotenti beneplacita*: Sedulius Scottus, *Liber de rectoribus Christianis*, ed. S. Hellman, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 1 (1906), pp. 19-91 (Ch. V, p. 35, ll. 19-20). Translation: Sedulius Scottus, *On Christian Rulers and the Poems*, trans. E. G. Doyle, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 17 (1983), pp. 51-61, reprinted in *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, ed. P. E. Dutton (Ontario, 1993), pp. 402-11 (p. 410).

¹¹³ For example, Dudo of St Quentin, *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum auctore Dudone Sancti Quintini*, ed. J. Lair, Extrait des Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie 23 (1865), II.26, p. 166, and III.42, p. 186; translation: Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, trans. with introduction by E. Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 47 and 63.

¹¹⁴ For an intriguing sidelight on Emma and counsel, see M. Clayton, 'Ælfric's *Esther*: A *Speculum Reginae*?' in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature Presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer*, ed. H. Conrad-O'Briain, A. M. D'Arcy and J. Scattergood (Dublin and Portland, OR, 1999), pp. 89-101, who argues that *Ælfric's Esther* is intended as a prompt to the young Emma to influence Æthelred II for the good in the matter of English-Danish relations.

¹¹⁵ Stafford, 'Powers of the Queen'.

¹¹⁶ V. J. Thompson, 'Women, Power and Protection in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', in *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. N. J. Menuge (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 1-17 (pp. 10-13).

¹¹⁷ Est 1, on Vashti's disobedience; *Esther's self-abasement before Ahasuerus*, Est 8.1-6.

And so she assembled as many nobles who were faithful to herself as she could, in view of the circumstances of the time. When these were present, she told them her inmost thoughts. When they had proceeded to approve the plan put in train by their lady, their ships' supplies were prepared for exile. (III.7.17, 20-23)

Emma's decision to go into exile marks the lowest point of her political fortunes in the text, but the *Encomiast* shows her as a ruler holding court, overlaying the moment of her powerlessness with a reminder of her destiny and identity as a queen. According to the *Argument*, Emma's wisdom is the foundation of Harthacnut's kingship: he is 'obedient in all things to the counsels of his mother', (*maternis per omnia parens consiliis*, l.30). In many ways it is Emma who takes on Cnut's mantle after his death. It is she who, after Cnut, is most associated with wisdom, and she who imitates his charitable giving (III.11.4-6). We have seen the subtle ways in which Emma is associated and not associated with violence; however, it is a helpful simplification to say that in the joint rule with her sons they supply the brawn and Emma the brains.

Violence and counsel are personal resources of the king which make him an effective ruler. They are also bound up in his relationship to his nobles, his counsellors.¹¹⁸ In I.3 we see how counsel (*consilium*), in the sense of advice, is a service offered by great men to kings and essential to the defence of the land. Swegn leaves his younger son, Harold, as regent in Denmark:

minorem prefecit uniuersi regni dominatui, adiuncta ei copia militari paucisque primatum, qui puerulum sagaciter instituerent, et qui huic consiliis armisque pro muro essent .

the younger son he placed at the head of the government of the whole kingdom, attaching to him a military force and a few of his chief men, to instruct the boy wisely, and be a wall to him by their counsel and arms. (I.3.21-4)

The counsel of the chief men is a means of transmitting wisdom to Harold, enabling him to govern well and use his troops effectively; the resources of good advice and

¹¹⁸ See G. Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy in Middle English Romance* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. x-xi, on counsel as the basis of the relationship between king and nobles.

force interact in the maintenance of power. Royal power rests on the circulation of violence, counsel and treasure between king and subjects. Counsel is both part of the service that great men offer their lords and part of the reward, a means of exercising influence. As such, however, it points to the danger that great men may present to the king, through treacherous or wrong advice and through their command of force.

Eadric Streona and Thorkell are the two main figures through whom the *Encomiast* investigates the theme of the trustworthiness of powerful men.¹¹⁹ Eadric is described as 'skilful in counsel but treacherous in guile' (*consiliis pollens sed tamen dolositate uersipellis*, II.8.5-6). His advice is respected and taken, but his cunning is purely self-serving; he flees at Ashingdon and talks his way out afterwards (II.9.15-21, II.12). Eadric's counsel only damages the position of his king, Edmund, since he uses his eloquence to persuade others to join him in flight and then advises partition of the kingdom (contrary to God's teaching, as is pointed out in II.14.2-4).¹²⁰ Cnut wisely has him beheaded. Thorkell provides the immediate provocation for Swegn's invasion of England. The *Encomiast's* decision to explain the invasion in terms of a quarrel between Danes is noteworthy. The reason offered by William of Jumièges, vengeance for the atrocity of St Brice's Day, would not have accorded with the *Encomiast's* promotion of unity between English and Danes.¹²¹ The justification outlined in the *Encomium* (I.2.10-13, quoted above) has a somewhat artificial air, but it does convey an idea of the dynamics of the difficult relationship between king and mighty subject. In the light of Thomas Lindqvist's argument that the growth of Scandinavian kingship was secured by the king's increasing appropriation of the means and rights of violence, it is significant that Swegn feels the need to curb violent activity undertaken without his blessing and to claim the credit and the profits.¹²² The counsellor must not gain treasure by violence save on behalf of the king.

¹¹⁹ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, pp. 30 and 32.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-3, on the *Encomiast's* hostility to the division of kingdoms.

¹²¹ *Gesta Normannorum*, II, 14-16, and 16, n.2.

¹²² T. Lindqvist, 'The Politics of Violence and the Transition from Viking Age to Medieval Scandinavia', in *Crudelitas: The Politics of Cruelty in the Ancient and Medieval World. Proceedings of the International Conference, Turku (Finland), May 1991*, ed. T. Viljamaa, A. Timonen and C. Krötzi (Krems, 1992), pp. 139-47; see also G. Halsall, 'Violence and society in the early medieval west: An introductory survey', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Halsall (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1-45 (pp. 7-11).

Violence and the anxiety of interpretation

The portrayal of violence in the *Encomium* is complex on several levels, reflecting the complex perspective of its patroness, as woman and English/Danish/Norman queen in a time of recrimination and uncertainty. Her own relationship to war is ambivalent. With regard to war in general, Emma is the bringer of peace and reconciliation, a force against war in the text, but she is also the representative of a victorious nation and the enabler of new conquests. With regard to the particular war portrayed in books one and two, Emma has a stake in both sides of the conflict, and this issues in a narrative that is unusual in a number of respects. Its approach is non-partisan, refusing to divide the opposing sides into right and wrong, active and passive or speaking and silent; it enables an appreciation of the moral and psychological contradictions that can underlie violent actions; and it shows a debt in this respect to the thought-worlds, not merely the vocabulary, of classical sources. The murder of book three is a different kind of violence and one in which Emma played a very different, and more debated, role. Therefore the *Encomiast* resorts to the morally polarized language of hagiography, a form of representation weighted with cultural authority. However, in book three as elsewhere in the text, we encounter the themes of counsel and the relationship of the king with great men, themes that place violence, both war and more treacherous and secret acts, among other, interlinked sources of power. Counsel and wisdom also provide a terminology for Emma's power; thus the impulse to contextualize violence as part of wider political mechanisms reflects, once more, Emma's perspective on events.

I have tried, by discussing (for example) the different ways of reading the *Encomiast's* allusion to Lucan in II.7, to show how the *Encomium* sometimes offers contradictory signals or alternative possibilities to a reader. As a corrective to the tendency of analyses such as the present one to smooth and streamline the difficulties of a text in the interests of a clear exposition, it is useful to conclude by considering the problematic tone of the *Encomium*. The *Encomiast's* authorial voice is frequently defensive; elsewhere it is hard to be sure what exactly the reader is intended to believe. In his treatment of the treacherous counsels of Eadric and the blandishments of Harold the *Encomiast* touches on one of the great themes of the

age, the relationship of words and deeds.¹²³ Deeds, and especially deeds of war, provide a guarantee of truth where words can deceive, and this is why Thorkell asks to undertake battle in order to 'demonstrate his fidelity to his lord' (*fidelitatem suam domino suo [...] patefacere*, II.6.1-2).¹²⁴ However, the *Encomium* evinces a sense that it is hard to be sure what exactly has happened in the past, and hard in turn to interpret actions and find what impulse of prudence or courage or cowardice has shaped them. The *Encomium* is a celebration of power, but it is also a disrupted text. Its inconsistencies and intrusive anxieties make very apparent the difficulty of writing a history of war and other political violence in a time of continuing rivalries and conflicts.

From the very beginning the *Encomium* is troubled with the anxiety of interpretation. In the Prologue and the Argument the Encomiast expresses the fear that his work will be criticised. This is partly a conventional modesty topos; the Encomiast apologises for his style but, in so doing, claims the virtue of strict veracity (Prologue, 21-6). However, he also fears that the whole purport of the work will be misunderstood; he defends laboriously his decision to include the deeds of Swegn in a book devoted to the praise of Emma (Argument, 1-18). Again, he advances a somewhat confusing argument against those who may accuse him of lying about the devotion of Swegn's army (I.1.25-31). The Encomiast's defensiveness about his own words extends to the deeds of his heroine. Some 'spiteful and odious' person (*liuidum onerosumque*, III.7.7) may criticize her for failing to share her son Alfred's death. This initially puzzling passage in fact cuts to the heart of the problem the Encomiast must overcome in praising Emma: the charge, reproduced by some modern historians, that she is essentially self-serving and lacking in maternal feeling.¹²⁵ By casting the charge in terms of a failure to be martyred the Encomiast is able to rebut it in a manner that flatters Emma, arguing that it was beneath her to die for the sake of worldly power (III.7.11-13). The

¹²³ See, for example, Ælfric, 'On the Old and New Testament', in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford, EETS OS 160 (1922), pp. 15-75 (pp. 15-16, 57-8 and 74); *Beowulf*, ll. 287-9; *Maldon* ll. 198-201.

¹²⁴ Relevant here is Elaine Scarry's thinking on the use of the body, and especially the injury of the body, to confer reality on ideas and beliefs: *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 124-33.

¹²⁵ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, pp. 36-7. For modern criticisms of Emma, see Barlow, *Edward*, pp. 36 and 44; Keynes, 'The Æthelings in Normandy', p. 177.

chapter contains a notable concentration of borrowings from Sallust, the two most extensive borrowings being from contexts where characters attempt to justify their actions; the *Encomiast* takes from Sallust a vocabulary of political persuasion under pressure, betraying the extent to which the argument for Emma is here made under pressure.¹²⁶ In instances such as these the *Encomiast* displays an acute awareness that neither words nor deeds are necessarily transparent.

Where Emma is concerned the *Encomiast* is careful to supply the correct interpretation, but in other cases we are left to find our own way. How, for example, are we to interpret Cnut's retreat from England? We are twice told that this is a course taken from wisdom, not fear:

rex clam per fideles amicos reperto honoris sui consilio classim sibi preparari iubet, non quod asperos euentus belli metuendo fugeret, sed ut fratrem suum Haroldum, regem scilicet Danorum, super tali negotio consuleret.

the king, whose faithful friends had found a plan to preserve his honour, ordered a fleet to be got ready for him, not because he was fleeing afraid of the harsh outcome of war, but in order to consult his brother Harold, the king of the Danes, about so weighty a matter. (II.1.4-7)

“Adueni, frater [...] non tamen metuens bellorum, quae meae repetam gloriae, sed ut tuo consultu edoctus presidioque suffultus redeam certus uictoriae.”

“I have come, oh brother [...] not however because I feared war, which to my glory I will seek again, but in order that instructed by a pronouncement from you and supported by your protection I may go back certain of victory.” (II.2.13-16)

In view of the stress laid on Cnut's wisdom later in the text and on the relationship between wisdom and the taking of advice, we should perhaps take this at face value. Nonetheless, we should note both the defensive tone – clearly Cnut's retreat *looks* like cowardice – and the fact that neither explanation is unambiguously the *Encomiast's* own: the first passage can be read as free indirect speech, the rationalization of Cnut's departure constructed by his friends, while the second

¹²⁶ *Encomium* III.7.12-13 echoes Adherbal justifying his flight before the senate, *Iugurtha* xiv.24; III.7.16-17 echoes the letter, supposedly from Catiline, justifying his resort to force, *Catiline* xxxv.4.

passage is the opening of a speech by Cnut. Andy Orchard, though not citing this particular episode, comments that Cnut appears 'less than heroic'.¹²⁷

Again, the *Encomiast* several times reports hearsay. *Ut quidam aiunt* ('according to some', II.1.12) Thorkell remains in England after Cnut's retreat in order to serve his interests; also *ut quidam aiunt* (II.9.19) Eadric's flight at Ashingdon is motivated by cunning rather than fear, possibly reflecting a secret deal with the Danes; the scurrilous story that Harold Harefoot was a servant's child smuggled into the concubine's bed is *plurimorum [...] assertio* ('the assertion of many people', III.1.10). Eric John's view is that the *Encomiast* probably did not believe the assertions he reports in this way.¹²⁸ My impression is that, in the last case at least, the *Encomiast* intends his readers to believe them, whatever his private feelings about the matter. He alleges that the story of the servant and her baby 'can be believed as the more truthful account' (*ueriatius credi potest*, III.1.12). However, by presenting such details of background and motivation as hearsay he draws attention to the possibility of multiple interpretations and conflicting accounts. In Thorkell's case, the favourable gloss on his actions provided by rumour is set against Cnut's statement that Thorkell has 'desert[ed] us as he did our father' (*nos relinquendo, ut patrem*, II.2.22).

The truth of violence, then, is compromised by the obscurity of motivation and the uncertainties of rumour. To risk one's neck in battle may be a final and reliable test of loyalty: Thorkell does not fail Cnut at the last. But the lower slopes that lead to that stark eminence of danger are hung with clouds. The past is subject to disagreement. The *Encomiast* aims to provide answers, but he provokes questions: if a man avoids battle, is it a sign of cowardice or prudence? If another man wins wars without the blessing of his king, is it a mark of rebellion? If a woman survives when her son is murdered, is it a result of saintliness, self-interest or even complicity? The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* may be shaped by the perspective of a powerful queen, but it finally leaves the perspective of its readers in doubt.

¹²⁷ Orchard, 'Literary Background', p. 158.

Conclusion

This is a chapter for which it is hard to write a unifying conclusion, because its purpose has been to illustrate diversity by exploring different perspectives on the same conquest. The texts examined also reflect how conquest shifts perspectives by shifting identities, creating a new state with new relationships between its component groups. Violence, starkly performing difference, lends itself to interpretation through binary oppositions: the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, *Liðsmannaflokkr* and the *Encomium* deal in various ways with oppositions between victim and victimizer, in-group and out-group, male and female, English and Dane.

The *Æthelredian Chronicle*, to whatever extent it reflects the inconsistencies of the year-by-year records from which it must have been compiled, offers a bitter retrospective account of the process of conquest. Its stress on the terror and outrages of the Danes is both a rejection of Danish rule and a mark of alienation from the English leadership. The *Æthelredian Chronicle* reaches for the contrast of 'us' and 'them' while betraying how problematic the notion of 'us' has become.

Liðsmannaflokkr, in contrast, juggles playfully with a range of oppositions that are resolved as the Norse raider becomes a settler. Its viewpoint is that of the career soldier who celebrates the conquest as a route to personal wealth and status. The tensions between enemies, between home and abroad, between rival warriors and between the sexes are the framework for the achievement of a hegemonic male identity. The poem also exemplifies the appropriation of the voices of the conquered by the conqueror: alternative viewpoints in the poem are suggested only to be incorporated into the main message.

The *Encomium* is the longest and also very much the most complicated text addressed in this chapter. It looks back on the Danish conquest from the midst of later political tensions; its version of events is shaped by the need to assert the coherence of an Anglo-Danish state and to defend the position of Queen Emma. The *Encomium* exhibits more than one approach to the representation of violence. While

¹²⁸ John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 154.

the death of Alfred ætheling is cast in the black-and-white mould of hagiography, the conquest is treated in an even-handed manner, reflecting Emma's position in both the English and the Danish royal families. The avoidance of moral polarization and the Encomiast's debt to classical literature allow a new sense of the psychological and moral complexity of violence to emerge. I have suggested for other texts, notably Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, that they betray moral doubt over warfare. The *Encomium* does something different. It celebrates a conspicuously martial form of kingship, but it allows us to see, for example, the interpenetration of courage and fear. It also conveys vividly the difficulty of making judgements and the way that interpretations of violence can be contested.

In the *Encomium*, *Liðsmannaflokkr* and the *Chronicle* we gain an impression of the particularity of experiences of the Viking wars. The conquest presented different opportunities and problems to the English, probably ecclesiastic, non-combatant, the Scandinavian adventurer and the twice-married queen. While the accounts of Viking attack studied in previous chapters have approached it from different angles, they have had a centripetal quality. The *Alfredian Chronicle*, the *Battle of Maldon* and the *Sermo Lupi* are all as it were establishment voices, promoting the bonds between leaders and followers, enjoining shared duties and (as I explored for the *Battle of Maldon* in particular) resolving different perspectives into one. They are closely linked to the centres of power, kings, ealdormen and leading churchmen. The works examined in the present chapter emanate from more precarious positions, from people hanging on to power (Emma), treading a path between different military commanders (*Liðsmannaflokkr*) or powerless save through words (the *Æthelredian Chronicle*). They give a sense of what might have filled the frustrating silences in our records of the earlier Viking Age. For example, the transition from violence to settlement described in *Liðsmannaflokkr* had had its counterpart in the ninth-century settlements, but we have no poems from the armies of the 860s and 870s. Yet the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, *Liðsmannaflokkr* and the *Encomium* also show us something new: the splintering of the old languages of violence with the splintering and remaking of England's social fabric. The establishment of an Anglo-Danish state, not merely an English state incorporating Danes, brought into question the figure of the marauding Danish other. One of the fascinating issues in medieval history is how that figure reasserted itself in the work

of twelfth-century historians such as William of Malmesbury and in the sagas produced by the Scandinavians to celebrate their own thrilling past. But that is another thesis.

Concluding Thoughts

Were the Vikings violent?

Yes: the texts examined in this thesis are texts stimulated by violence. They are witnesses to the pressure that prompted people to order and explain events, to recall struggles against the invaders in a spirit of celebration (the *Alfredian Chronicle*, *Brunanburh*) or bitterness (the *Æthelredian Chronicle*), to trace parallels with the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain (as in the *Sermo Lupi*), to rewrite defeat as victory (*Maldon*) or to find models of active and justified victimhood (Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*). In *Liðsmannaflokkr* we hear a Norse voice retailing the Danish conquest in pride at the strength, endurance and success of Scandinavian warriors.

No: equally if not more important than Viking violence, in many of my sources, is Anglo-Saxon violence. The *Alfredian Chronicle* minimizes the effectiveness of the Danes in battle and characterizes the kings of the line of Cerdic by their vigorous campaigns. Asser takes things a step further to present Alfred as a king who fights *aprimo more* ('in the manner of a boar') while the Danes flee *muliebriter* ('like women').¹ As this gender-inflected jibe indicates, a courageous and aggressive use of violence was part of secular masculine identity and bound up with ideals of honour. In *Maldon*, Ælfwine continues to attack after the death of his lord and the fragmentation of the army, because he does not wish to be shamed (ll. 220-1). In the *Sermo Lupi*, the image of the thegn who has to watch the violation of his womenfolk shows us Wulfstan exploiting expectations about both gender roles and honour to argue the need for repentance. Ælfric's insistence that monks should imitate the purity of the saints by not fighting needs to be set against evidence that ecclesiastics including abbots fought and died in battle against the Danes.² *Brunanburh* not only celebrates Æthelstan's victory but exults in the corpses of the

¹ Asser, 'De rebus gestis Ælfredi', in *Asser's Life of King Alfred together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser*, ed. W. H. Stevenson, new impression with an article by Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford, 1959), pp. 1-96 (ch. 38, l. 12 and ch. 18, l. 14).

² ASC MSS CDEF record the death of Abbot Wulfsige at Ashington, s.a. 1016.

fallen enemy. As Jayne Carroll shows, *Brunanburh* like the *Alfredian Chronicle* gives the English an active role in violence, their enemies a passive one.³

The question needs to be rephrased. Rather than seeking a yardstick by which to measure violence, this thesis has highlighted the plurality and specificity of the approaches to violence that we find in Viking Age sources. The texts display different agendas and use different conventional paradigms through which they perceive and represent raiding, battle and conquest.

In chapter one, I looked at historical writings associated with the court of King Alfred, principally the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to 891 and Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, to a lesser extent also the Old English *Orosius*. All three, and the Alfredian corpus more widely, are anchored in the concerns of Alfred's court with Christian kingship and the relationship of warfare and wisdom. The atomised year-by-year structure and vast chronological reach of the *Chronicle* become tools with which norms and patterns of violence are established: West Saxon and Cerdicing readiness to prosecute battle is contrasted with Viking elusiveness and treachery. The *Orosius* is a darker lens on violence; though it affords a view of God's providence in (political) history, it is coloured by the Latin author's association of war with the chaos and sin of the pre-Christian past. Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, more focused on Alfred himself than the *Chronicle*, shows us the conjunction of warfare and wisdom in the conjunction of chronicle and biography. The join is awkward; Asser expands and heightens the battles of the *Chronicle*, stressing the religious significance of Alfred's victories over pagans, but he also betrays a lurking unease about the morality of warfare. In this chapter I explored something of what the contrast between 'violent' and 'non-violent' modes of representation, set out in the introduction, might mean in Anglo-Saxon practice. The 'non-violent', that is sparse and restrained, styles of the last portion of the *Orosius* and the *Chronicle* correlate with an emphasis on order and power – God's ordering power in history and the power of West Saxon kings. The sense of dissonance in Asser's *Life* is fuelled by a more 'violent' – vivid, explicitly evaluative – mode of representing violence.

³ J. Carroll, 'Words and Weapons: *The Battle of Brunanburh*', *Nottingham Linguistic Circular* 15

In chapter two, I argued that *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Battle of Maldon* are poems that construct community but also address the traumatic aspect of battle experience, death, mutilation and bereavement. The two topics are interconnected: trauma divorces people from their communities and death reconfigures the relationships of the living. *Brunanburh* celebrates victory over the Scots and Dublin Norse; it depicts Mercians and West Saxons fighting side by side and promotes Anglo-Saxon unity under the leadership of Æthelstan and Edmund. *Brunanburh* is another example of a 'violent' representation of violence. It is the goriest text in this thesis: the bloodied corpses of the enemy, prey to carrion birds, represent the glory of the victors and the absolute exclusion of the out-group against which their people is constructed. As in Asser, violent representation produces disruptive meanings that run counter to the main argument of the text. In *Brunanburh*'s case, these are to do with the fear of death and mutilation, projected onto the bodies of the defeated but returning in the unexpectedly moving portrayal of the sorrowful, bereaved Scottish king. *The Battle of Maldon* shows us the climactic achievement, death and reconstitution in memory of Byrhtnoth on the one hand and, on the other hand, the construction, collapse and reconstruction of community in the same textual rhythm. It is very much a case of using literary convention as a way of perceiving an episode of violence. The template of heroic battle poetry is placed over the real-life defeat of *Maldon*. The first half of the poem exploits an audience's competence in poetic conventions by setting up patterns that point to an English victory; in the second half the conventions of loyalty and revenge are pushed towards transformation so that the deaths of Byrhtnoth's thegns can be read as a victory in defeat.

Chapter three moved towards very different agendas and paradigms. Both Wulfstan and Ælfric sought, as their first goals, the promotion of true religion and a society centred on Christianity and the Church. As prisms through which to view violence, Wulfstan's exhortation to penitence and Ælfric's translated saints' lives highlight questions of sin, the relationship of the individual to society and to God, and the symbolism of the wounded body. In my discussion of the *Sermo Lupi*, I showed how Wulfstan fuses the metaphor of the soul wounded by its own sins with

the external reality, as he saw it, of a people wounded by the attacks of the Danes and their own violent crimes. Wulfstan goads the English people to recognise their shame and remedy it through penitence and, implicitly, a military defence. In contrast with Wulfstan's trumpet call for action, Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* does not constitute or even contain a single, authoritative statement on the Vikings. It is informed by multiple agendas. Military and royal saints are prominent in the collection, but another theme is the need for monks to preserve their purity by abstaining from bloodshed; this is coupled by a distaste for violence and a reluctance to represent it in detail. Saints' lives, while they valorize the position of the victim, tend to praise steadfast suffering over active defence. However, different saints show different degrees of convergence between heavenly virtue and worldly honour; a few (such as Oswald) do suggest that it is possible to fight and be holy, more provide examples of strong leadership and defiance of pagans, and all are channels of God's intervention in the world.

Chapter four concentrated specifically on contrasts of perspective. It dealt with examples of three genres (chronicle, poetry and biography) in three languages (Old English, Old Norse and Latin). The three works in question produce very different versions of the same events. For the compiler(s) of the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, the Danish conquest is the end result of Viking outrages and English incompetence. As in the *Alfredian Chronicle*, repetition is the basic strategy suitable within the annalistic structure; in this case the recurrent elements are Viking burning, harrying and insulting boldness, English flight, disunity and failure. It is an account stubbornly hostile to the new Danish rulers of England. *Liðsmannaflokkr*, in contrast, is a witty and celebratory poem, though its division of praise between two leaders, Thorkell and Cnut, is a note of political carefulness. The allusive, complex texture of skaldic verse is here the vehicle for an optimistic account of conquest as the opportunity for a warrior to prove himself and make good in a new country. The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is shaped by the need to present Emma herself in a positive light. She is praised partly by association with a trio of victorious kings, Swegn, Cnut and Harthacnut, but the climax of the Danish conquest in this version is her own entry as reconciler of English and Danes. The presentation of the conquest, in which moral polarization of the two sides is avoided, looks forward to the Anglo-Danish state over which Emma and her sons presided at the time of the

text's composition. The three texts examined in chapter four give us a sense of individuals resisting or exploiting drastic changes brought by war.

Thus the present study has explored contemporary narratives and comments on Viking invasion in which we find different strategies for making sense, making capital or even making light of violence. Though some magnify and some minimize the violence of the Vikings, they do not provide us with ways of measuring destructiveness or cruelty. Rather, they show how violence is accompanied both by pain and disruption and by the proliferation of new meanings, new powers and messages that crowd into the gaps. Given that there are comparatively few written sources from the Viking Age and that far more representations must have circulated than survive – lost manuscripts, oral poems, conversations, the sermons of men less prominent than Wulfstan and Ælfric – we can imagine that the range of interpretation must have been greater than we can know. My own study, while taking in as broad a range as possible, has still been of necessity selective; it has ignored, for example, the rest of the corpus of skaldic verse for Cnut, Æthelweard's *Chronicon* and the tenth-century material arguably preserved in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*.⁴ However, there are some characteristic conceptions and themes that pull all this diversity together. In conclusion, I would like to pick out a couple of strands that run through all the texts examined in this study.

The first is the issue of the rules of violence. As was stressed in the introduction, violence is in practice a rule-bounded activity: people need rules in order to decide how to use violence and determine (short of absolute destruction) who has won. One aspect of the rules is the question of whether violence is permissible at all in the light of Christ's gospel of peace. While the Alfredian texts articulate an ideal of kingship at once martial and pious, they also betray the association of violence, including state warfare, with sin. The sense of moral unease over violence that I detected in Asser's *Life* is a matter not so much of express intellectual doubt as of aesthetic dissonance, a clash of registers. Moral unease is more explicit in Ælfric's writings, a century later. Ælfric allows defensive warfare

⁴ For other skaldic poems for Cnut, see chapter four, p. 196, n. 6; Æthelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (Edinburgh, 1962); *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of the*

as the business of the aristocratic class, but he makes it clear that the life of arms is an impure second best to that of the cloister. It is worth noting that Ælfric had read or was aware of the writings of Alfred.⁵ We can trace here a debate that continued and developed over the years. It emerges, however, not so much in express intellectual positions as in the clash and interaction of different images of violence, images that stressed elements such as power and courage on the one hand, disorder and pollution on the other.

Poems like *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* evince no sense at all that there might be anything wrong with fighting. They do, however, strongly reinforce rules about how one should fight: with courage, not fleeing, preferably in face-to-face battle, in loyalty to a lord. Both the *Alfredian Chronicle* and the *Æthelredian Chronicle* express similar ideals; the treachery of the Vikings is asserted in the earlier text, the treachery of the English lamented in the later. The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* shows a sophistication of these ideas in contact with classical literature on the one hand and political expediency on the other. Courage and loyalty are still celebrated; Eadric Streona deserves to die. But fear and courage fuel each other in the frenzy of battle and victories are not necessarily final. *Liðsmannaflokkur*, allusive and elusive as it is, suggests that Vikings themselves shared some of these rules of violence. This poem too glorifies courage and seems to prioritize battle or at least active skirmishing: the siege of London in this poem looks more like a battle. On the other hand, a sudden dawn raid is also an honourable achievement.

A second strand that runs through my texts is the issue of identity politics and of group identification. The use of the contrast of Vikings and English, an opposition made starkly physical in violence, to construct a sense of community was touched on in chapter one and explored in detail in chapter two. Chapter three showed both Ælfric and Wulfstan looking at the question of individual sin within a context of societal pressures and structures (the force of shame, the three orders of society) and opposition to pagan/evil others (Viking attackers, persecutors of saints).

Saint and a Record of his Patrimony, ed. T. Johnson South (Cambridge, 2002); on tenth-century material, see E. Craster, 'The Patrimony of St Cuthbert', *EHR* 69 (1954), 177-99.

⁵ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS SS 17 (1997), Praefatio p. 174, ll. 54-55; *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. M. Godden, EETS SS 5 (1979), IX, p. 72, ll. 7-8.

Chapter four explicitly raised the issue of how the representation of violence can set up stark oppositions and how those oppositions break down when conflict brings not merely raiding but conquest. My texts reveal a steady change in the kind of high-level community being articulated, from the *Alfredian Chronicle*, centred on Wessex, through *Brunanburh* with its West Saxon homeland but part-Mercian army, to Wulfstan's address to the English as a whole and the Encomiast's vision of political unity (though not identity) between English and Danes. This change correlates with the political process of West Saxon expansion into the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. But my texts also show how violence could continue to awake 'small-group dynamics' and narrower identifications. While the characters in *Maldon* fight for 'Æthelred's land' (l. 53) their pride is also informed by their regional origins in, for example, Mercia (l. 217). In all these contrasts and complexities, the figure of the Viking remains quite simple, at least until the conquest. Only *Brunanburh* really gives a sense of the different groups involved; it is here explicit that the Norse attackers are from Dublin. Settled Danes are all but invisible. It seems that Vikings are visible when they are violent; the violent Viking is good to think with, a real danger but also a symbol that allows Anglo-Saxons to express ideas about honour, kingship, repentance or national identity.

This strand of the construction of identity is connected to that of the rules of violence, since, as Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton write, 'violation of rules and dirty tricks are always the prerogative of the enemy'.⁶ The identity that Anglo-Saxons construct through the representation of violence is a moralized one, contrasted with the outrages, treachery and paganism of the Vikings. The moralization of identity may also, however, be a point of difference between English and Scandinavians. Skaldic poems like *Liðsmannaflokkr* contemplate the gory deaths of the enemy with satisfaction, but do not express moral condemnation: *Liðsmannaflokkr* indeed expresses some respect for Ulfcetel of East Anglia (stanza 6).⁷ Jonathan Shay argues that the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in contrast to the religion of the Homeric poems, teaches the dehumanization of the enemy, who are

⁶ 'Identifying War: Conflict and Self-Definition in Western Europe', in *War: Identities in Conflict 1300-2000*, ed. B. Taithe and T. Thornton (Stroud, 1998), pp. 1-18 (p. 4).

⁷ Compare Þórður Kolbeinsson's *Elriksdrápa*, in Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, 203-6, stanza 11.

typed as those who defy God.⁸ Shay's position is disturbingly un-nuanced and monolithic in its assessment of Christianity. However, it is clear that the strict demands made by Christianity that war should be morally justified exerted pressure toward the identification of the enemy with rebellion against God. The Scandinavian peoples at this date (the early eleventh century) were only recently and, one might argue, shallowly Christianized.⁹ This takes us back by another route to Sarah Foot's argument, discussed in the introduction (p. 6), that the Vikings exerted 'violence against Christians' from a Christian perspective if not from their own.

There is more that could be said: the meanings of violence, not to mention represented violence, proliferate. To end, I wish to reiterate that there are things texts cannot tell us about violence. Furthermore, these texts were not written for us (one reason they tend to lack circumstantial detail).¹⁰ Their often plain words must have been invested with emotion by the experiences of their audience. It is this that I have tried to imagine.

⁸ Shay, *Achilles*, pp. 111-15.

⁹ On the conversion of Scandinavia see *The Christianization of Scandinavia. Report of A Symposium held at Kungälv, Sweden, 4-9 August 1985*, ed. B. Sawyer, P. Sawyer and I. Wood (Alingsås, Sweden, 1987); B. and P. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500*, The Nordic Series 17 (1993), pp. 100-28; E. Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth, 1998), pp. 158-67.

¹⁰ M. Garrison, 'The emergence of Carolingian Latin literature and the court of Charlemagne (780-814)', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 111-40 (p. 132).

Bibliography

Notes on the Organization of the Bibliography

Primary sources: in a number of instances in the thesis more than one primary source has been cited from the same edited volume (for example, several skaldic poems are cited from Jónsson's *Skjaldedigting*). For the sake of brevity, they are not listed separately in the bibliography.

Where editions of primary sources have also provided secondary sources in the form of introductory material, they are nevertheless listed in the bibliography only once, under primary sources. Where editions have been used solely for their introductory material, they are listed under secondary sources.

In the case of edited volumes from which more than one article is cited, the volume details are given in full under the name of the editor and in abbreviated form in the entries for individual articles.

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